vol. (1)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (1)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (1)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (1)

إلى روح والدي،

الشيخ زايد بن سلطان آل نهيان

- رحمه الله تعالى -

وإلى روح شقيقي،

الشيخ أحمد بن زايد بن سلطان آل نهيان

- رحمه الله تعالى -

أهدي

ترجمة خواطر

الشعراوي

إلى اللغة الإنجليزية بمجلداته الكاملة ونسخه الإلكترونيّة؛
لإثراء المكتبة الإسلاميّة ولإتاحة الفرصة للناطقين بغير العربيّة ليزدادوا علمًا بمعاني
القرآن الكريم التي شُرِحت باستفاضةٍ في خواطر الشيخ الشعراوي. سائلة الله تعالى
أن يكون هذا العمل صَدَقَة جارية في ميزان حسنات والدي وشقيقي،
وأن يتغمدهما البارئ عز وجلّ بالرحمة والرضوان.

عفراء بنت زايد بن سلطان آل نهيان

To my late father,

His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan

-may God rest his soul in peace-

To my late brother,

His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Bin Zayed
Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan

-may God rest his soul in peace-

I dedicate

“Translations of EL Sha’rawy Reflections”

into the English language in all its complete volumes together with an electronic version, with the aim of enriching the Islamic Library and to provide an opportunity to non-Arabic speaking nations to expand their knowledge of the meaning of the Noble Quran which was comprehensively explained in EL Sha’rawy Reflections. May God accept this contribution as an ongoing charity to augment the good deeds of my father and my brother and may God envelope them in His mercy and contentment.

Afra Bint Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan

In the Name of God, The Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

Preface

Praise be to God, who praised himself in the Book, and Who opened it with praise. He says, ‘Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds’ and made praise as a completion to giving thanks to His Grace, the last of which is the supplication of His chosen servants on the Day of Judgment, of whom he mentioned that ‘their last supplication is: praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.’ God’s Prayers and blessings be on our master Prophet Muhammad, the best of the human beings and the last guidance of heaven to earth, the owner of sacred lights, and divine blessings, whom God sent to eliminate the darkness of polytheism, and to establish firmly the lights of truth.

Further, we read in the sayings of our ancient scholars that knowledge is not in the abundance of narration; rather, it is a light from God that is cast into the hearts of those whom He chooses from among his worshippers. Imam Al-Ghazali *may God have mercy on him* narrated that "he who works according to what he was taught, God would give him knowledge of what he does not know", and He would open doors for him that would not have been opened in any other way. Perhaps it is agreed upon, and is believed true, that there is no science or knowledge more honorable than the knowledge of the Book of *God the Almighty,* the comprehension of its verses, and the knowledge of its rulings because "the people of the Quran are the special people of God." [Narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Majah]

The Holy Quran won the attention of previous and later scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims alike; great studies were written about it, and many interpretations of its verses were written, but none of them was widely spread and circulated like the interpretation of Imam Muhammad Metwalli EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* which is a grace God bestows on whom He wants. God harnessed for him a lot of audio, visual and readable media tools of our time, which made his interpretation heard widely by the children of the Islamic nation, and this interpretation is still broadcast in the east and west of the earth to all those who like to benefit from the divine flow that the Lord Almighty has thrown into the heart of this Honorable Sheikh.

Perhaps the reason that many of the people of Islam find in these interpretations what satisfies their hunger, and quenches their thirst for further information on Islam is the abundance of knowledge God bestowed on Sheikh EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him,* and thanks to this knowledge that he was able to infiltrate into the hearts of all people so that all the righteous people of our time unanimously considered him the Imam of his era.

Perhaps these interpretations have acquired their specificity from being the first oral interpretation, since Sheikh EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* intentionally chose the easiest terms and the closest and most understandable meanings of the Arabic language, mixing between the eloquent Arabic and the correct colloquial so that his audiences could easily understand his thoughts free from any feelings of boredom or aversion. No strange terms or ideas are used that would hamper the continuity of understanding what is said.

Add to that what these interpretations contain of the jewels and treasures of the Arab heritage, which were represented in their inclusion of the famous Arab poetry writings, and the sayings of the righteous predecessors, and what was mentioned in these sayings which summarized many heritage books such as wisdom Arab proverbs, and prose heritage stories, and brought them close to the audience by using accurate phrases, easy and tender words, and tightly-knit sayings, all with attractive and sweet style, which made the words of EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* familiar, easy to understand, in which the educated people find eloquence ,and the types of rhetoric and the desired arts they wish to hear, and the illiterate persons enjoy knowing the required provisions of their religion.

Therefore, there was consensus among people on the importance and usefulness of this great interpretation, and these noble Reflections. Rather, everyone says: The man has done well and benefited us, and whoever wanted more from the virtue of his knowledge finds what fulfils his wish. He *may God have mercy on him* had a new vision regarding the interpretation of the verses of God Almighty without falsely creating or following immorality, but adhering to the linguistic concepts of the old, and he did not go beyond the boundaries of the contents of the correct *Sunnah*; he was an example to be followed in moderation, and a model of intellectual renewal which everyone wished for; so all people desired to hear his words.

What gave his interpretation the blessing of publicity and spreading is that people received it through hearing, so his admirers got what they wanted to hear directly from his tongue to their ears, and they could sense his sincerity and his pure and loving heart. It was said in the past that "listening" is the blessing of knowledge, and this was a blessing with which God distinguished Sheikh EL Sha'rawy to add to his virtue. As a result of all this, God enabled the Sheikh *may God have mercy on him* to take many people back to the Book of God, to recite its verses, to study its rulings, and to understand their meanings.

The importance of this interpretation also comes from the fact that it contained many of the heritage sources announced by Sheikh EL Sha'rawy in the folds of his interpretation, and he cited the names of its authors within context; as well, it is an honest mirror of the incidents of our time, and a beneficial treatment for the temptations of our days, and a summary of experiences lived by Sheikh EL Sha'rawy *may God have mercy on him* between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, America and Europe, where all these trips made it possible for the Sheikh to meet with many Muslim scholars and orientalists. So his testimony was drawn from the scholars of his time, and his diligence was focused on dismissing suspicions from about the Holy Quran; so there emerged from the features characteristics of his interpretation the decisive response on the doubts of atheists and the skeptics in the greatness of God’s Book and its miraculous aspect.

Sheikh EL Sha'rawy expressed in his interpretations his opinion on many social, political and religious issues in his era, relying on argument and proof, and adopting objective evidence, mental logic and the transmitted evidence;

so he revealed in the folds of his speech theses containing radical solutions to the problems faced by society.

And since the need in our time is urgent to publish everything that explains the rulings of our true religion which highlights the mercy it brought to the world, wise and educated people of prudence and eloquence saw that it is of great benefit that this interpretation be conveyed to non- Arabic speaking nations so that their benefit could spread and prevail and bear fruits on the widest range. To achieve this goal, the sponsor of the project, Her Highness (Afra' bint Zayed Al Nahyan) entrusted to a group of people of thought and specialization to work on implementing this project and go, with will and determination, by the will of God Almighty.

Accordingly, the righteous scholars who were chosen for this mission established a Scientific Center specialized in the translation of sciences, headed by (His Excellency, the late Dr. Hassan Abbas Zaki, Dr. Ali Juma'a and Dr. Muhammad Badawi), who in their turn entrusted as their working team to a team of the best scholars and professors of Egyptian and Arab universities, in addition to a group of translators whose mother-tongue is English, along with their mastery of the Arabic language. The institution provided them with everything they needed such as scientific references and technical devices. Thus, God willing, and thanks to the sincere efforts made by these people, this project came to light, and spread joy and pleasure among the scholars and intellectuals.

The sponsor of the project, may God bless her, intended to spread the benefit from this project to the people of foreign nations, along with the Islamic communities who live in these nations and who are not Arabic speakers.

This project, by the Grace of God, was completed in seven years, with the participation of a scientific and administrative team consisting of (Executive Director / Mr. Muhammad 'Abdul Latif and Consultant/ Dr. Muhammad Hosni, the supervising committee, advisor Dr. 'Abdulhamid 'Abdulhay - Mr. Tamer El Gharabawy - Mrs. Nourhan Noor - Dr. 'Abdul-Karim Al-Qaddoumi - Mr. Jihad Ibrahim - Mr. Ahmed Mustafa); they have become a scientific unit capable of producing this translation and other future translations, God willing, starting with the translation of interpretations of the Holy Quran, and expanding later to translate all what benefits Muslims and humanity to spread the teachings of Islam and the mercy and cooperation it advocated, and the progress and advancement it urged on among as many people and societies as possible.

In fact, this is the first translation of this blessed interpretation of the chapters of the Quran, as no other organization or institution has ever done it before. In our translation, we have adopted this written copy of interpretation (quoted from the oral text) which was issued by Dar Akhbar Al-Youm in Egypt, and published in twenty-seven volumes; we added to this edition the thirtieth part of the Sheikh's interpretation issued by Dar Ar-Raya, and we verified the differences between the two editions.

After the translation and review were completed, and the committee was satisfied with its latest version, it was sent to (Printing Group - Beirut), where it was reviewed and edited by the editor and translator Mahmoud said, and then it was supervised by Mr. Nasser Assi, Mr. Ali Assi and Mrs. Randa Kurdi in matters of layout, design and printing supervision. The translation came in twenty-seven volumes in a unique edition, in the best form and in a well-adorned printing style, comforting the eyes of the viewers, and delighting the readers' hearts.

May God have mercy on His Excellency Dr. / Hassan Abbas Zaki, and may He bless him for what he contributed in order to have this great work published, and may God put this good work in the scale of his good deeds on the Day of Resurrection, as he is the owner of the credit for the formation of a team of scholars and specialized researchers who carried out this work, and for forming a committee to oversee the accomplishment of the project and its quality control; this committee has achieved consistency and standardization in the terms and concepts prevalent in the translation such that their implications do not differ from one location to another; the language drafting has been reviewed until harmony between the efforts of the work team has been achieved. The committee has made strenuous efforts in checking every small and large detail in this translation, and they were all shouldered with sincere will and determination. May God give them all the best reward.

Praise be to God in this world and in the hereafter.

Ali Gomaa
The Council of Senior Religious Scholars of Al-Azhar

In the Name of God, The Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

Praise be to God, and prayers and peace and blessings be upon our master, Messenger of God, his family, Companions, and followers.

God Almighty has blessed me to be the son of the Imam of this era regarding the interpretations and honored me to be his disciple, and Glory be to him who enabled me to serve the largest interpretation in our modern era, which is visible and heard all over the world, reaching the hearts of the masses of Muslims and moving their conscience, and with its words Allah enlightened their insights and made doors wide open before them to understand the world and religion. Muslims felt that both the written Book of God, which is the Holy Quran, and also His visible book, which is the surrounding universe around us, were created by a most capable God Who is Knowledgeable and does whatever He wants.

While the Quran is the realm of command, the universe is the realm of creation. God *the Most High said,* "except for Him creation and command, Blessed be God, Lord of the Worlds", and my father *may God Almighty rest his soul in peace* read in both the Quran and the universe in compliance with the Almighty`s Will Whose order was to read twice, as in His saying, “ Read! In the name of your Lord Who created: He created man from a clinging form. ” And then in His saying: "Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who taught by the pen".

And God has enabled me to edit that interpretation from its audible and visual image to what is suitable to be written and read, and that editing has been reviewed many times to make sure that the interpretation is identical to what was issued by my father- Imam *may God Almighty have mercy on him*; praise be to God, Who, by His grace, righteousness is done, and Who preserved for us the sound and image, along with the written production that I hope it would be accomplished in the best way. Then came this project of translating his great interpretation into the English language, being the most widespread language, so that it would be available for every one where ever they are to benefit from, and stand as a well-trusted reference that researchers can rely on, and intellectuals all over the world read through.

Thanks to the people of goodness who contributed to the completion of this project by spending generously on its management and on the teams of translation and revision. We think that it is a highly sophisticated translation that observed the meaning and did not stop at the literal translation that may disturb it. We ask God Almighty to make it useful as He made useful its origin; He is surely able to do so.

Sami Mutwalli EL Sha'rawy

EL Sha'rawy's Handwritten Introduction

Praise be to God as He taught us to praise Him; may God bless and give peace to His Mercy, the Seal of His Messengers, our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is the harvest of my scholarly life, and the fruit of my investigative labour. I am honoured to have lived in the shade of God's Book, and to have embraced and received God's blessed abundance. I hope I have done my very best, and fulfilled my debt of gratitude. I ask God the Glorified that these reflections of mine will be a key to open the reflections of those who come after me, for the wonders of God's Book will never cease until He takes back the earth and all who dwell upon it; and only then will we find out from God what He has in store for those whom He has guided.

And God is our sufficiency, and the best to rely on.

Mohammad Mutwalli EL Shaʿrawy

In the Name of God, The Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

Introduction

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings be upon our master Muhammad and upon all his Companions and his family.

My reflections on the Noble Quran do not constitute an exegesis of the Quran; they are only the felicitous notions that visit the believer's heart concerning a verse, or some verses of the Quran. If the Quran could be explained, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would have been the first person to explain it because it descended upon him, affected him, and he delivered it, knew it, acted according to it, and through him were its miracles brought forth. Yet the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sufficed himself with explaining to people as much as they required to worship, in the form of the verses of moral responsibility in the Quran which came in the form of commands and prohibitions, of 'Dos' and 'Do nots': the rulings that a person is rewarded for obeying, and punished for disobeying. These are the foundations of the worship of God *the Glorious and Exalted* which He revealed in the Noble Quran as a way of guidance for mankind's life on earth. As for the secrets of existence hidden in the Quran, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sufficed himself with mentioning what was known of them, for regarding the level of knowledge in those times, the intellects then, could not have accepted them; and mention of those issues would have caused such argumentation that would have corrupted the cause of religion, and made the people leave their understanding of God's guidance and worship for the sake of arguing about things that they could not hope to resolve.

The Quran did not come to teach us the secrets of the universe; it came with clear laws of moral responsibility; and the secrets of existence were hidden until civilisations advanced, and the understanding of the human intellect was able to deduce them. At this point, God *the Glorious and Exalted* revealed secrets of the universe that furthered our understanding of the secrets of existence that the Quran gave us. As time moved forward, and God revealed new secrets of the universe, the Quran's miraculous nature was further revealed because God *the Glorious and Exalted* had made indications of these universal signs in His glorious Book. The indication might be to one sign, or to several; but this sign, or these signs, show us a miraculous nature the precision of which science could never reach.

The Noble Quran manifested miracles at the time of its revelation, proving that it was truly sent from God *the Glorious and Exalted* and proving the truth of the message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. The first miracle was that the Quran was the speech of God, containing provisions from God which the human soul loves and inclines to.

It addresses subtle dispositions within the soul we ourselves may not be aware of, but which are known to God *the Glorious and Exalted,* the Creator of man Who knows him best. These dispositions respond when they hear the Quran, and so the heart softens, and faith enters it. Even the disbelievers were aware of the effect of the Noble Quran on the human soul – an effect that no one could explain yet it draws the soul to the way of faith, and plants mercy in the human heart.

For this reason, the thing that the leaders of the disbelievers feared most was that their followers might hear the Quran; and they tried to prevent this in any way they could, and attacking those who recited the Quran. If this Quran were not the speech of God, in which He placed secrets that addressed subtle dispositions within the human soul, the leaders of the disbelievers would not have cared whether anyone listened to the Quran or not. But their recognition of the effect of God’s speech made them not only attempt to prevent the Quran being listened to, but also led them to recommend to one another, as the Noble Quran relates to us, not to listen to the Quran, but rather to talk frivolously about it hoping that, by doing so, they might gain the upper hand over the believers (*Fussilat:* 26).

And so we see that even the people of disbelief would not only attempt to prevent the Quran being listened to, but they would also request their followers to speak over it so that they should obscure it with their voices. They could not have resorted to such actions except out of fear of how the Quran won over the human soul to faith. The mere reciting of it would draw even the disbelieving soul to God’s guidance.

Let us consider the example of the story of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* embracing Islam. He found out that his sister Fatima and her husband, his paternal cousin Sa‘id ibn Zayd, had embraced Islam. He rushed to scold them, and tried to kill Sa‘id ibn Zayd. When his wife Fatima tried to come between them to protect him, ’Umar *God be pleased with him* struck her, and made her bleed. When he saw the blood flowing from his sister Fatima’s face, ‘Umar’s heart softened, and instead of violence, he responded with mercy. Stubbornness left his heart, and purity filled it, and he asked his sister for the paper of the Quran from which they had been reading. He read the beginning of the chapter of *Ta Ha*, and said, ‘How beautiful and noble this speech is!’ He then, hastened to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and declared his embracing of Islam. And so if stubbornness and disbelief leave a person’s heart, and he listens to the Quran with purity, faith will enter his heart.

‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* had heard the Quran before this, yet he had not embraced Islam. But when he saw the blood flowing from his sister’s face, and the fierce emotion in his heart was replaced with that of mercy, he accepted the Quran with a pure soul, and his heart was filled with faith, and he hastened to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and declared his embracing of Islam.

For this reason, the disbelievers tried to stir up feelings of disbelief in people's hearts so that the Quran would not enter them; for in order to accept faith, you must first cleanse your heart of disbelief.

In this way, we see that because the Noble Quran is God's speech, it has a special effect on the human soul. Even the disbelievers(1) would furtively eavesdrop on the Quran behind each other's backs, and they would say that it had sweetness, and a beauty, that at its highest it was fruitful, that at its lowest it was bountiful, that it always rose above, and nothing ever rose above it. This was the first miracle of the Noble Quran because it was the speech of God *the Most High*.

The Companions and the believers who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, when the Quran was revealed, went as far as their intellects could manage in their understanding of the secrets of the universe, and the secrets of the Noble Quran. No Companion of the Prophet ever asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about the meaning of the signs of the universe in the Quran, or about the Quran's use of language. For example, no one ever asked about '*alif-lam-mim,*' or *'ain-sin-qaf,'* or '*ha-mim, '* (2) even though the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to encounter many people who believed in God's Book, and also many people who disbelieved in what God revealed. Those who disbelieved wanted to disprove the Quran and make an argument against the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and against the Noble Quran. Yet even though they were people of high eloquence and articulacy, for whom language was a natural disposition and a gift, not a mere artificial product of learning, we have not heard that any of the disbelievers ever said, 'What does this '*alif-lam-mim*', or this '*ha-mim,* ' or this '*ain-sin-qaf*' mean?

How could the disbeliever pass over these apparently meaningless chapter-openings and not find anything with which he could confront the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*? This was their chance to make an argument. There is no doubt that the fact that the disbelievers did not capitalise on these chapter-openings, is proof that they were moved by them even if they did not believe in them. They did not find anything in them that they could use to attack the Quran or put any doubt in it. If these letters used to open the chapters had served these people's purposes, they would have said so, and made it known openly.

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(1) Like Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira

(2) These are examples of separately pronounced letters at the openings of some Quranic chapters.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* upon whom the Quran was sent down, explained everything related to the responsibilities of faith, and left everything else to the coming generations. Time goes by, and God reveals to His servants whatever secrets of His signs on earth that He wills. The bestowal of the Quran comes commensurate with the level of the intellect. Why is this? It is because the messages that preceded Islam were bound to specific times and places whilst the Noble Quran will last until the Day of Resurrection. Because of this, it must offer a miracle to every generation so that the Quran remains a miracle in all times.

The revealed Quran challenged the Arabs linguistically and rhetorically, but as it is a religion for all people, it had also to challenge the non-Arabs with respect to their fields of distinction. Therefore, it was revealed as a challenge also to non-Arabs when it was sent down. For example, a war had taken place between the Persians and the Byzantines during the era of the Quran revelation, and the Persians and Byzantines could be considered comparable to the United States of America and the Soviet Union in modern times. They were the two mightiest and strongest nations- the super powers of that time. War broke out between them, and the Byzantines were defeated, and the Quran came down with God Almighty's words registering that the Byzantines had been defeated in the lands close-by, and stating that they, notwithstanding their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years, and with God rests all power of decision, first and last. And on that day the believers will have cause to rejoice (*ar-Rum:* 1-4). If this Quran were the invention of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, what would make him delve into such an issue? No one asked him to become involved in it. How could the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* have dared to announce, with speech that would be recited as a form of worship, remaining unchanged until the Day of Resurrection, what the result of a battle that would take place a few years hence would be? What would have happened to the entire religion if the war had taken place, but the Persians had triumphed again, or if the war had not taken place at all, but the two sides had made peace? The entire religion would have come to pieces. But it was God *the Most High* Who was speaking, and He was the Agent, and this verse became a miracle for the non-Arabs to ponder when the Quran was revealed: The war indeed took place, and the Byzantines triumphed, just as the Noble Quran had foretold.

The Quran was not revealed as a miracle for a limited period of time. Rather, it is a miracle that will last until the coming of the Hour (the end of time). The Quran is God’s speech, and the universe is God’s creation. For this reason, the Quran came to give miracles to every generation with respect to their field of distinction. If we consider the scientific discoveries of the 20th century (which have become scientific facts), we find that the Noble Quran miraculously and amazingly alluded to them in a way in which the expressions used did not conflict with the intellectual level of the time in which it was revealed, and nor did they contradict scientific findings after science developed, and God’s secrets were discovered on earth. No one is capable of such an astounding miracle except God *the Most High*. For example, read the words of the True Lord saying that He has spread the earth wide, and that He has set firm mountains upon it, and that He caused it to bring forth plants of all beauteous kinds (*Qaf:* 7).

The meaning of the Arabic word *madda* used in the verse above is ‘to spread’. When God *the Most High* said in the Quran that He has spread the earth wide, this presented no problem to the intellects at the time of its revelation because the people could see that the earth was spread out. But science then progressed, and people discovered that the earth was a sphere, and mankind ventured into outer space and saw the earth in its spherical form. Here, some people perceived that there is a conflict between the Noble Quran and science. To them, we say, Did God *the Most High* say which earth it was that was spread out? He did not; He said ‘the earth’ in its absolute sense, i.e. in every place on earth, you see the earth spread out before you. If you go to the North Pole, you will see it spread out. If you go to the South Pole, you will see it spread out, and on the equator, you will see it spread out. If you go from any point on earth, and keep travelling back towards this point, the earth in front of you will always be spread out. It is not possible for this to happen unless the earth is spherical. If the earth were a triangle, a square, a hexagon, or any other geometric shape, you would come to an edge beyond which is nothing. But in order for the earth to be spread out before you everywhere you go, it must be spherical.

This miraculous nature was in agreement with the intellectual capacity of the time in which the Noble Quran was revealed. When science develops, and it discovers a fact that people did not previously believe in, you find that the verses of the Quran are in an amazing agreement with this new scientific fact. No one but God *the Most High* could do this.

If the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had demonstrated these signs of the universe in a way that was not appropriate to people's intellectual capacity at the time the Quran was revealed, people might have abandoned the essentials of the religion for the sake of debating the secrets of the universe that the intellect cannot uncover or comprehend. However, the True Lord *the Most High* left things in the universe to awaken the intellect to scientific endeavour so that every time science progresses, a link is found between God's signs in the universe and His signs in the Noble Quran. If the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had explained the realities of the Quran when it was revealed, the Quran would have become fixed because none of us would be able to explain it after the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had explained it, and so the Quran's offerings would have been frozen in the time of the revelation. However, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* refrained from explaining everything, he left the opportunity for the Quran to keep on giving again and again until the rising of the Hour. In this way, withholding became absolute bestowal – and this is another of the Noble Quran's miracles.

When we hear the word 'Quran,' we understand that it is recited or read. The term Quran is the gerund form of the Arabic verb *qara'a,* 'to recite' or ‘to read,’ just as *ghufran* ‘forgiveness’ is the gerund of *ghafara* ‘to forgive’. But after the revelation of the Noble Quran, the word Quran became the proper name for the speech that was inspired by God *the Most High* to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with the purpose of giving a challenge. God *the Most High* also called it a Book. So it is the Quran if we consider it as recited and read, and it is the Book if we consider it as written. Recitation requires memorisation, whilst writing does not. When a person reads from a book, he does not need to memorise it. Therefore, the Quran has two means of being recited: It is memorised by heart, and written down. This means that you can recite or read from the Book at any time.

When the compilation of the Noble Quran was begun, no verse was written from it unless it was already recorded on a palm leaf, or a skin, or any other means of writing that existed at the time it was revealed. In addition to the verse being written down, there had to be at least two people from amongst the Companions of the Prophet who had memorised it. This applied to all verses with the exception of a single verse which was not written down in the presence of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* except by a single memoriser. Analogy and consistency would have dictated that this verse should be deleted and not written down. The verse in question states that among the believers are men who have been true to what they have vowed before God, and among them are such as have already redeemed their pledge by death, and such as yet await (its fulfilment) without having changed (their resolve) in the least (*al-Ahzab*: 23).

But look at the reflections of faith that the True Lord *the Most High* casts into the hearts of the believers in order that His way of guidance be completed: no one could be found who had memorised this verse save Khuzayma ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him*. When discussion arose as to whether or not to include it, mention was made of the statement of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Whomsoever Khuzayma testifies for, he is sufficient for him.’(1)

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(1) The reference here is to the story of Khuzayma ibn Thabit Al-Ansari *God be pleased with him* witnessing of a transaction of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him. The Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad, An-Nasa’i and At-Tirmidhi, who declared it to be rigorously authentic and sound.*

Zayd ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him* said, ‘When we compiled the text (of the Quran), a single verse of the chapter of *al-Ahzab* that I used to hear the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* recite was missing. I could not find it with anyone save Khuzayma ibn Thabit Al-Ansari *God be pleased with him*, whose testimony the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* made equal to that of two men.’ Then he mentioned the verse.

The Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* gave Khuzayma ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him* alone the distinction of having a testimony equal to that of two men. This is the story behind this honour: The Messenger of *God peace and blessings be upon him* bought a horse from a Bedouin, and then asked him to follow him so he could pay him for it. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* walked quickly, the Bedouin slowly.

Some other men approached the Bedouin and made offers for the horse, without knowing that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had already bought it. The Bedouin called out to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘If you would, buy this horse; otherwise I will sell it,’ i.e. ‘do you want to buy this horse, or should I sell it to someone else?’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Have I not already bought it from you?’ The Bedouin replied, ‘I never sold it to you.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Indeed, I already bought it from you.’ The Bedouin said, ‘Then produce a witness!’ Khuzayma ibn Thabit *God be pleased with him* came forward and said, ‘I testify that you sold it to him’. After the people had left, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* approached Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* and said, ‘On what grounds did you testify?’ For Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* had not been present when the sale took place. Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* replied, ‘On my trust in you, O Messenger of God.’ It is as if Khuzayma was saying, shall we trust you in the revelation that you relay to us from Heaven, and not trust you in this matter? So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* made Khuzayma’s testimony equal to that of two men. So his testimony was taken as that of two, and the verse was written down and was included in the Quranic text. Consequently, Khuzayma *God be pleased with him* was known as ‘he of the double testimony’ because the

Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* declared his testimony to be equal to two (1).

If we want to define the Quran, we must abandon human means of measurement. When people define things, they say that its size is such-and-such, and its shape is such-and-such, and so on. But in order for us to define the Noble Quran, we say that it is the Scripture beginning with God's words,

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy [1] Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds'[2] (The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 1-2)

and ending with the word of God *the Most High*:

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ ٱلنَّاسِ ﴿١﴾ مَلِكِ ٱلنَّاسِ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَٰهِ ٱلنَّاسِ ﴿٣﴾
مِن شَرِّ ٱلْوَسْوَاسِ ٱلْخَنَّاسِ ﴿٤﴾ ٱلَّذِى يُوَسْوِسُ فِى صُدُورِ ٱلنَّاسِ ﴿٥﴾
مِنَ ٱلْجِنَّةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ ﴿٦﴾

'Say, I seek refuge with the Lord of men [1] the King of men [2] the God of men [3] from the evil of the whispering, elusive tempter [4] who whispers in the hearts of men [5] from among all jinn (demons) and men'[6] (The Quran, *an-Nas*: 1- 6)

That is, it is from the start of the chapter of *al-Fatiha* until the end of the chapter of *an-Nas*. We first seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan before we recite any verse of the Quran, as the True Lord *the Most High* taught us to do when we read the Quran (*an-Nahl:* 98).

But the scholars wanted to make it easier for people when they defined the Noble Quran, so they said that it is God's speech which He sent down to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a challenge and a miracle to show the people God's guidance. The Quran is in agreement with the religions that came before it, but it added some things to them, and corrected what had been lost from them because it is inspiration from God. The Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms are from God, but they carry religious guidance only. As for the Quran, it is both guidance and the miracle that proves the veracity of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *The story is recounted in Siyar A'lam An-Nubala' ('Biographies of Noble People'), 2:486. Its chain of narration is rigorously authentic.*

The Torah represented the method of Moses *peace be upon him*; his miracle was the staff. The Gospel represented the method of Jesus *peace be upon him*; his miracle was healing the blind and the leper by God's leave. So, for the previous messengers, the miracle was one thing, and the religion or method was another. The Quran, however, is distinguished by being the religion and the miracle at the same time. This is because the messages that God sent to the previous messengers were sent with the intention that they would one day be changed.

The Noble Quran, however, was revealed with the intention that it would remain until the Day of Resurrection; and so the religion had to be supported by a miracle so that anyone who followed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could say, 'Muhammad is the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this is his miracle.' The miracles of the previous messengers, however, happened and then expired because they were physical miracles: whoever saw them believed in them, and whoever did not see them, was not intended by them because they happened to make the believers who followed that particular messenger firm. The miracle of Jesus *peace be upon him* cannot come back again now; and the staff of Moses *peace be upon him* that split the sea cannot be produced by the followers of Moses *peace be upon him* now in order that they can say 'This is his miracle.'

So each one of the messengers who came before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had a religion for guidance and a miracle to support the message, but each one of the two was separate from the other. A miracle that was the religious guidance itself is not the case in any of the messages, but in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, it is indeed the case, and it can be recognised at any time.

With just one look at what God *the Most High* said concerning the universal phenomena of life that the human intellect has come to be able to grasp in the twentieth century, we find that the Noble Quran did allude to them; this is because the life span of the Quranic message will last until the rising of the Hour. As long as this is the case, the Quran will remain a miracle until the rising of the Hour. This is why God *the Most High* says that He will show people His signs in the horizons and in themselves so that it will become obvious to them that this message (the Quran) is the truth (*Fussilat:* 53).

In other words, the Quran offers two kinds of miracles. The first kind is the signs in the horizons which are the signs of the universe. The second is the signs in themselves which are the signs connected to the secrets of the human body. Because of this, we can say that the signs of the universe will come in accordance with the signs of the Noble Quran, i.e. God *the Most High* placed within the Noble Quran indications about secrets of the universe and of the human body and its constitution that He might reveal to the believers or to the non-believers.

God *the Most High* revealed many signs of the universe to the believers, and great advances in science were made by the early Muslims, such as Jabir ibn Hayyan who laid the foundations of chemistry; Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who laid the foundations of medicine, astronomy and mathematics; Ibn an-Nafis who discovered the pulmonary (lesser) circulation of the blood, and described it scientifically with precision; Ibn Al-Haytham who made a great contribution to mathematics, biology and medicine and was the first to explain the makeup of the eye and how it functioned, and Abul-Qasim who excelled in surgery and other sciences.

Then, God *the Glorified* revealed some of the signs of the universe to non-believers which we see now demonstrated by the scientific advances in the western nations. This explains God’s words that it will become obvious to them that this (revelation) is indeed the truth (*Fussilat:* 53), i.e. the signs of the universe will make those who reject the Noble Quran admit that it is the truth; for the believer knows that the Quran is the truth, but God will reveal to those who deny Islam signs of a miraculous nature that will show them that this religion is true. Recently, it so happened that at a conference discussing the scientific miracles of the Noble Quran, several scientists announced that they had embraced Islam.

If we want to know something about the miracle of the Quran, consider what it said about the universe, and the earth's spherical shape, and it is rotating about itself, and what occurs in the depths of the ocean, and the other things that were only discovered in the 20th century. And if we want to know the miracle of the Quran in His statement 'within themselves' (*Fussilat:* 53), let us consider the stages of foetal development, the nerve centres in the human body, the constitution of the ears and the eyes, and the other miraculous things that no one could talk about in such detail except their Creator. This is what scientists who excelled in their fields attested to – while persisting in denying Islam and the Quran! The scientific facts that the Noble Quran alludes to, cannot be denied by anyone now because they have been confirmed to exist.

When the Quran lays down a challenge, it cannot bring a miracle that we creatures know nothing about. You do not challenge a disabled person to a race, or a weak old man to a weightlifting contest; if you lay down a challenge, you must challenge people in that in which they excel.

For this reason, we said that the Quran came to challenge the Arabs with its miraculous style and language; and this was a testimony to the Arabs that they excelled in the field of language. And when the Quran defeated them, and incapacitated them, this was the true challenge. When you want to challenge somebody, challenge him in what he excels in and has mastery over him. For this reason, the Arabs had to have had a natural mastery over language and sound and the distinctive use of language had to be well known to them in their poetry, prose, and oratory.

When the Noble Quran came to challenge the non-Arabs, it challenged them in relation to the signs of the universe and creation; and so we find, for example, the word of the True Lord *the Glorified* about the denizens of hell. God *the Glorified* warns those who are bent on denying the truth of His signs that He shall, in time, cause them to suffer fire, and that whenever their skins are burnt off, He shall replace them with new skins so that they may taste suffering. Verily, God is Almighty, Wise (*an-Nisa':* 56).

When this noble verse was revealed, it was understood to mean that every time the skin was burned away, it would be replaced. When modern science arrived at the discovery that the nerve centres are present directly beneath the skin such that if the skin is burned away, the sensation of pain is lost, this was a new miracle for the whole world in our times. Some people want to take up science as their god instead of God. So this is the constantly renewed miraculous nature that makes the Quran an eternal miracle, and this is another proof that the Quran is from God, and that it is God's speech.

After this, we come to another miracle: the choosing of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and getting him ready for receiving the message. If we follow the life of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, we find that God *the Most High* chose him as an unlettered man who neither read nor wrote. Despite this, He vouchsafed him many miracles that all spoke of the truth of his message. The first of them is that it was known that he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not have any outstanding ability in poetry or prose like Quss ibn Sa'ida or Aktham ibn Sayfi, for instance, and so his share of eloquence was ordinary, not outstanding.

Despite this, his message came challenging his people in the domain of rhetoric and language. If he *peace and blessings be upon him* were famous for poetry, prose, or oratory, they would have said that the Quran was a work of literary genius that arose from the talent that had been present in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since his youth. People's natural talents generally become clear before they are twenty years of age, or thirty if the talent is late in developing. Talents do not suddenly spring out from a person in their fortieth year of age; and no gift ever tarries until someone is forty. The people were surprised that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who never before had given a speech, or written anything, or composed any poetry, could bring up a Quran that the most eloquent of people and the most talented in the art of language could not match. Where from did he bring this miraculous speech with which he challenged all mankind and jinn, when he was this age?

Some people claim that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was gifted in language, and that he hid it from people until he was forty, then, he revealed it. We say that this claim makes no sense at all because we live in a world of vicissitudes where people die before they are twenty, or thirty, or forty. Who told Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he would not die before he was forty so that he could conceal this gift until that age? His own father died, whilst he was still in his mother's womb, and his mother died when he was a young child.

Such events occurring early in his life, could not have brought forth in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the notion that he could conceal his presumed gift from people until he reached that age; for his own parents died in his infancy.

Because of this, when the disbelievers came and asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to change the Quran, as the Noble Quran informs us, they demanded that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* bring them a discourse other than the Quran, or to make alterations in it. The Prophet was commanded to retort that it is not up to him to alter it of his own volition, and that he only follows what is revealed to him, and that he dreads, were he (thus) to disobey his Lord, the suffering (which would befall him) on the awesome Day (of Judgement) (*Yunus:* 15).

If the Quran was Muhammad's own work, he might have agreed to change it so that those who disbelieved would come to believe; but the True Lord *the Most High* told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to answer them with a decisive proof that, had God willed it (otherwise), he would not have conveyed this Scripture to them, and nor would he have brought it to their knowledge, and to add that indeed, he has dwelt amongst them a whole lifetime before this (revelation came to him); will they not, then, use their reason? (*Yunus:* 16)

God *the Most High* commands His Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to reply to the disbelievers saying that he had lived with them for forty years before the message came, and that he had not been known amongst them for oratory, poetry, or rhetoric. If they used their minds, they would know that the Quran was not his work, but rather, it was from God. And who would have perfection ascribed to him and reject it, saying 'It is not my doing'? People try to claim for themselves the good work of others, and there are many who see people pleased by an act whose doer is unknown and so claim it for themselves. Furthermore, some people fight one another to claim good praiseworthy actions for themselves. How often have we seen legal disputes involving different people all claiming to be responsible for some good action?

Then, there is still another matter worthy of our attention: Could the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who never read or wrote, have three different styles of language, each differing completely from the other? These three styles are: the style of the Quran, the style of the Qudsi(1) (Divine) Hadith, and the style of the Prophetic Hadith. No genius on earth, from the day it was created until our time, has had three different styles of speech each having its own nature, none of them resembling the other. How could the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* make a distinction, while speaking, between the Quran, the Qudsi Hadith, and the Prophetic Hadith, giving each of them its own distinct nature and style different from the others?

Everyone has his own distinct style and way of speaking. If you are well versed in language and literature, by simply reading something, you can identify who said it because we all have our own distinctive style. How could have the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* been able to divide his speech so that he could say, this is the Quran, and this is a Qudsi Hadith, and this is a Prophetic Hadith?

So the difference between the Quran, the Qudsi Hadith, and the Prophetic Hadith is the greatest evidence that the Quran and the Qudsi Hadith are not from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; everyone's personal style of speaking is distinctive. It is also not possible for a person to react to life's events and write every time in a completely different style from the last one, or to write in one style today, and in another tomorrow, and still in another the day after, and then, return to the first one. If we listen to someone reciting the Quran, we will instantly recognise it as Quran; and if he recites a Qudsi Hadith, we will recognise it as a Qudsi Hadith; and if he quotes a Prophetic Hadith, we will recognise it as a Prophetic Hadith. Every one of us has one personal way of speaking only, and if we try to change it, it will overcome us. The great stylistic differences between the Quran, the Qudsi

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(1) A Qudsi Hadith can be defined as a statement the meaning of which is inspired by God *the Most High* while its wording is by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Hadith, and the Prophetic Hadith constitute the greatest evidence of the veracity of Muhammad's message.

The disbelievers were at a loss what to do, finding no flaw that they could exploit; so what did they say? They said he was a sorcerer! The simple answer to this is that a bewitched person has no will against the sorcerer so that he can protect himself from the sorcery; the sorcerer bewitches him openly against his will. If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were a sorcerer, why did he not bewitch you, too, so that you would believe in him? How did you protect yourselves from his sorcery?

Your claim is self-defeating; it refutes itself simply because you are able to sit here and call him a sorcerer. This shows that he has not bewitched you; and if he were a real sorcerer, he would have bewitched you to follow him. They then, described him as insane. We say to them that madness is an undisciplined action having no logical order in it, meaning that you can never predict what an insane person will do next. He might sit and talk to you and the next minute strike you. You may find him crying, and the next moment he is laughing. God *the Most High* answers them swearing by the Pen and all that they write, confirming that His Messenger was not, by his Lord's grace, a madman! And that he will have a never-ending reward, for he does indeed keep to a sublime way of life (*al-Qalam:* 1-4).

God's testimony to the sublime way of life of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is something that was not in conflict with what the disbelievers themselves knew of him before the message. By their own admission, he was known for honesty, trustworthiness, and good character; and they used to call him 'the trustworthy'. They trusted him with their possessions, and with their valuables. In order to see how the disbelievers contradicted themselves, we ask of them, how could you trust an insane man with your possessions? Does this make sense? Does a person go and leave his most valuable possessions in the care of a madman? Of course, it is impossible that a madman can have an exalted character.

They also called him a poet, and a soothsayer. The Noble Quran answered this affirming that this (Quran) is indeed the (inspired) word of a noble messenger, and is not the word of a poet; and nor is it the word of a soothsayer (*al-Haqqa:* 40-42).

Their accusation that he was a poet is refuted by the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* never composed any poetry in his whole life. Talents do not come along suddenly; they must be refined by trial and error, just as is the case with driving a car. When a person begins driving, he must have someone with him who knows how to drive to teach him, and he will sometimes make mistakes, and sometimes will do it right until he can drive proficiently. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not gifted with the ability to produce poetry, and no one ever taught him to do so.

In answer to their accusation that he was a soothsayer, we say that people tend to forget as time goes by, and so it is said that if you want to be a liar, you should have a good memory. If we want to know the truthfulness of a certain statement by somebody, we ask this person again and again after some time has passed; if he is lying, he will give different versions of his story. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, unable to read or write. The revelation would descend upon him with verses, and he would recite them to his Companions. Then, the call to prayer would be given some hours later, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would recite in the prayer the same verses that had just been revealed to him, without changing a single letter in them. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* reminds the disbelievers that they remember but a little (*al-Haqqa:* 42) because if the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was inventing the Quran himself, he would have forgotten, altered, and mixed it up; this is because the mind cannot reproduce what it had said before down to the very letter. If you ask a person to talk about something and record what he says, and then ask him half an hour later to repeat what he said, he will not be able to produce exactly the same speech with exactly the same words in exactly the same order.

The True Lord sends His guidance to His messengers by inspiration, subtly, and His means of doing so is hidden from us because God is hidden from us. God *the Most High* affirms that it is not given to mortal man that God should speak to him except through inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills (to reveal); for, verily, He is Exalted, Wise (*ash-Shura:* 51).

This is because the human constitution, by its very nature, cannot receive information from God directly; inspiration is the giving of information in a subtle manner. As an illustration, and in order to make this nearer to understanding, we say that if, for example, you do not want to receive a burdensome guest, you work out a signal with your servant so that if he comes and tells you in front of others that so-and-so has come, you give him this signal so that he does not bring that person into the house. No one else from among those present will understand this agreed signal, or know what it means. This is what we mean by saying that inspiration is the giving of information subtly. No one is aware of it except the one who gives it and the one who receives it. As long as inspiration means to give information subtly, it requires someone to inspire, and someone to be inspired, and something with which to inspire him.

The Quran states that God *the Most High* gave inspiration to His messengers, and to others. He gave inspiration to the angels, and to humans like the mother of Moses *peace be upon him* and to the Disciples of Jesus *peace be upon him*, and to animals like the bee, and to the earth. There is also a kind of inspiration that Satan gives to his allies. This is 'inspiration' in its pure linguistic meaning; as for the definition of the term 'inspiration' in the Sacred Law, it means inspiration from God to His Messengers. God's means of inspiration to Moses *peace be upon him* was to speak to him from behind a veil; the True Lord's inspiration to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was to send the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him to him*. The angel came to him with inspiration, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would hear something like the tolling of a bell as a way of alerting him. The meeting would take place between Gabriel *peace be upon him* and the Messenger, and the chemical balance of the Messenger's body would change. It happened once that, when the revelation came to him, his noble knee touched the knee of a Companion of his who was sitting next to him, and it felt as heavy as a mountain. If the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was riding a camel (when inspiration came to him), it would lie down or fall to the ground, and be unable to move.

Another thing that God *the Most High* wants us to notice is that there is absolutely no contradiction between the Quran and science; if it happens that a scientific theory is put forward that is in contradiction with the Quran, we know that the Quran is the truth, and the theory must be incorrect. There are some universal truths that God *the Most High* has kept hidden from us, but this does not harm us in any way.

For example, everyone benefits from the sun, yet no one knows the exact reality of it; such is the case with other phenomena in the universe. Our ignorance of anything that God has concealed from us is not ignorance that does harm to us, and nor does it reduce the benefit we draw from the universe.

The Quran is God’s speech, and it cannot possibly be approached by falsehood from its front or its back. It has conveyed God’s guidance to mankind to protect their free movement in the universe. As long as a person sticks to the way of the Noble Quran in his life, he will enjoy the beauty of the universe; however, if he goes against its teachings, he will rush headlong to his own perdition. Sickness and disease arose in societies when mankind went against divine guidance; thus, the True Lord *the Most High* says that He sends down of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy (*al-Isra’:* 82).

Why did God mention cure before mercy? It is because mercy protects people from any evil that is to come; but there must first be healing. When the Quran was revealed, disease and sickness filled societies: tyranny, human rights violations, slavery, and other societal diseases. Islam came first to cure these diseases if its guidance was followed; and after this came mercy to prevent these sicknesses from returning. When God’s guidance is not heeded, sickness and disease spread; if you retusrn to the pharmacy of the Quran and take its medicine, you will be cured.

أَعُوذُ بِٱللَّهِ مِنَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ٱلرَّجِيمِ

‘I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan’

God *the Most High* commands every believer to seek refuge in Him from the accursed Satan before they start reading the Quran (*an-Nahl:* 98), and so this seeking of refuge is the first thing a believer does when he begins to read the Noble Quran.

It is clear that this noble verse requires us to seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan before we read the Quran. This is because when a creature turns to his Creator for protection and seeks His refuge, he becomes stronger despite his weakness, and becomes victorious despite his inability. This is because when God is with you, your strength and power is above and beyond any other strength or power because you have God *the Almighty* on your side. When we read the Quran, we must purify our means of reception so that we can receive God's speech in the best way. In this state, we do not achieve this by our own power or our own strength; we do so by seeking aid from God's power and might. Why so? That is because the things that hinder a believer from following God's guidance are nothing but the works of Satan.

Satan always comes through the door where he sees the guidance in the soul is weak. If he finds a person is firm in one area, he comes to him from another. If a believer is firm in his prayer, maintaining it and offering it in its correct times, Satan comes to him through his wealth, whispering to him that he should not pay the poor-due because it will lead him to poverty, and he whispers to him that he should usurp the rights of others assuring him that he will thus become rich and secure in his future – yet, this is falsehood.

The truth of this matter is what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told us when he said, 'No wealth is lost by (giving) charity.'(1) Charity increases wealth, and gives it blessing so that it multiplies and grows. Wealth belongs to God; it passes from hand to hand in this world, and then, one dies and leaves it behind. But Satan takes advantage of people's oblivion of this reality in order to urge them to amass unlawful wealth. If someone is upright when it comes to wealth, however, Satan comes to him through women, making a dissolute woman appear before him and allures him whispering to him until he commits adultery. If a person is strong in all of these areas, Satan makes wine tempting to him, or evil gatherings, or talebearing. The important crux of the matter is that Satan keeps searching for the weak points in a person to make him fall into sin.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra. The rest of the Hadith is: '...and God gives the servant who forgives increasing honour; and no one lowers themselves before God, but God will raise them.'*

For this reason, God *the Most High* makes seeking refuge with Him from the accursed Satan a means of strengthening your weak points so that Satan cannot approach you, whilst you read the Quran and place in your head misgivings that distract you from your reading. This is because God's Bestowal in the Noble Quran is equal for all creatures; the Quran's bestowal is equal, but every person takes it in a way commensurate with their faith. The Quran is recited, and people listen, but does everyone accept the Quran equally? The answer is: No; for God *the Most High* says that there are some people who would listen to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, but when they leave him, they will derisively ask those who have been granted knowledge about what he had said earlier. These scorners are those who follow their lusts and whose hearts God has sealed by their actions (*Muhammad:* 16).

That is, the Quran has not had any effect on them; rather, it affects the believers who listen to it attentively. This is the meaning of God's saying that if He had made the Quran in a foreign tongue, then the disbelievers would have asked why its verses had not been made plain and why it is in a foreign tongue, while it is sent to Arabs. God commands His Messenger to proclaim that the Quran is a guidance and a source of health for those who have faith, but as for those who do not have faith, they have a thickness in their ears, and to them it is a blindness; it is as if they are called upon from afar (*Fussilat:* 44).

So the Quran is for all, but the important factor here is the one who receives it, and the manner with which they receive it when it is recited to them. God *the Most High* wants us, when we read the Quran, to put a distance between Satan and ourselves before he diverts us from God's guidance and signs. We do not see Satan, but he sees us, and we do not know where he is, whilst he knows where we are, and God *the Most High* forewarns the children of Adam: they should not allow Satan to seduce them in the same way as he caused their ancestors to be driven out of the Garden and deprived them of their garment in order to make them aware of their nakedness. Indeed, he and his followers have sight of the children of Adam whence they cannot see them. Indeed, God has made the devils tutelars of those who do not have faith (*al-A'raf:* 27).

Therefore, we must seek the help of a power that has the ability to overcome Satan and destroy him. God *the Most High* requires us to seek His protection because He is the One able to protect us and purify our hearts and souls from demonic insinuations, thereby enhancing the way we receive the Quran; for if you purify your soul to receive the Quran, its noble verses will touch your heart and your soul, and they will be your guidance and light.

God *the Most High* rendered judgement over Satan's affair, and dismissed him from His mercy and made him accursed and exiled. Satan knows that he will end up in Hell, and he believes that Adam *peace be upon him* is the cause of his fall; the truth of the matter is that the beginning of sin was Satan's refusal to obey his Lord's command to lie prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*. The Noble Quran tells us that when God asked Satan what kept him from prostrating himself when He commanded him to do so, he answered that he was better than Adam as he was created from fire whereas Adam was created from clay (*al-A'raf:* 12).

Satan's sin was the apex of disobedience because he rejected the commandment of the Commander and said that he will not obey, and he will not prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him* because he is better than him: Adam is created from clay, and he is from fire. It was as though he was not satisfied by God's judgement, and wanted to change it; and this is the ultimate sinful disobedience which made God *the Glorified* dismiss Satan from His mercy, and describe him as 'accursed' so that we would know that he would end up in hell, and that God would not forgive him.

Then, Satan began his attempts to beguile Adam *peace be upon him*. Adam lived in a garden where he was provided with all his sustenance without any need for him to strive and work. This garden contained thousands of trees which produced all kinds of fruits which were permitted for Adam and Eve to eat from as they pleased – except for one tree which God forbade for them. This tree was the beginning of all human sins. Satan began to beguile Adam and Eve into sinning. How? He tried to convince them that not eating from this tree would deprive them of some great good. The Quran tells about Satan whispering to the couple in an attempt to make them conscious of their nakedness which had been hidden from them both; and he told them that their Lord has not forbidden them that tree but lest they become angels, or become immortals (*al-A'raf:* 20).

There was another instance of enticement: Satan whispered to Adam, promising to lead him to the tree of immortality, and to a kingdom that will never decay (*Ta Ha:* 120).

Thus, we know that Satan comes to mankind in more than one way. The first way was to insinuate that anyone who ate from this tree would become an angel, or an immortal; the second deception was to insinuate that this tree would give to whoever ate from it endless wealth as well as eternal life.

So, Satan insinuates to mankind that those things that God has made prohibited for them are good for them and that if they disobey, they will attain wealth and power. Adam and Eve ate from the tree, but they did not become immortals, and nor did they attain eternal wealth. Rather, their nakedness became apparent to them, and they realised that Satan was nothing but a liar and deceiver, and that God *the Most High*, with His Guidance, and by His Prohibitions, only wanted good for them.

But Satan comes along and embellishes the way of falsehood and makes it alluring to mankind. If Adam had judged with his intellect, he would have recognised that Satan's whisper was a lie. Satan claimed to have been showing Adam the tree of eternal life. If this tree really gave eternal life, Satan would not have asked God to keep him alive until the Day of Resurrection; rather, he would have eaten from the tree himself, and gained immortality.

But Satan took advantage of the forgetfulness of the human soul in order to misguide Adam *peace be upon him* to fall into sin – and he also takes advantage of the heedlessness of the sons of Adam. If the sons of Adam would only use their intellects, knowing that there is an ancient enmity between their father Adam and Satan, and that Satan asked God to keep him alive until the Day of Resurrection in order that he might exact revenge upon Adam and his sons by leading them into sin – if only they were aware of this, they would be on their guard; when Satan's whispering is revealed, he flees away.

Satan gained entrance into the realm of beguilement by swearing by God's might; and God is mighty; He has no need of His creatures, and those who disbelieve do not harm Him, and those who believe do not increase his dominion in anything. The verses of the Noble Quran tell us that Satan swore by God's might that he will most certainly beguile the children of Adam all into grievous error (*Sad:* 82).

But the True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He expelled Satan from His mercy, and named him the Accursed so that we would all know that he can never enter into God's mercy.

Satan began his enticement of the children of Adam by means of going around God's might over His creatures. If God had wanted all of His creatures to be guided, Satan would not have been able to get near any of them. God *the Most High* states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4).

God gave mankind the right to choose; had He willed, He would have forced them to obey like all other creatures instead of giving them free will. God also commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to people that the truth is from their Lord: Then, let him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it. For all offenders and wrongdoers God has made ready a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides; and if they beg for water, they will be given water (hot) like molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a place to rest (*al-Kahf*: 29).

So God *the Most High* shows us the way of guidance and the way of disobedience, and then leaves us to choose between obedience to God and thus attaining His mercy, or disobedience to God, and thus leading to His chastisement. The True Lord did not give us this choice except for a limited period of time which is our worldly lives. When a person comes to die, his human nature and entitlements expire, and he no longer has any free will. Furthermore, God *the Glorified* also did not give us free will in all worldly matters; rather, he gave it to us only with respect to accepting or rejecting His Guidance, and choosing whether to obey or disobey.

In order for us to guard against the influence of Satan in our lives, the noble Quran explains to us how Satan plans to beguile the children of Adam *peace be upon him*: having fallen from grace by his disobedience, he resolved to lie in ambush for the children of Adam along God's Straight Path (*al-A'raf:* 16).

In other words, Satan does not put any effort to deceive those who have already sold their souls in disobedience, going against everything with which God commands them. The soul that enjoins evil has its own devil, and does not need to be seduced or enticed because it presses its owner towards evil. Because of this, Satan does not stalk bars and brothels endeavouring to entice those who frequent them since everyone who goes to these places is already a human devil. Rather, Satan goes to places of obedience and worship, and tries his best, and uses all of his tricks, to dissuade the people there from worshipping God. For this reason, we must heed the fact that Satan did not say 'I will sit in wait for them on the crooked path;' as the crooked path follows Satan by its very nature. Satan wants to lure the people of virtue, so he can make sin seem tempting to them, and entice them with things like unlawful wealth.

The Noble Quran tells us how Satan, in his rebellion against God, gave the details of his plan to beguile the children of Adam: he will come upon them from their front, from their back, from their right, and from their left, and God will not find the greater part of them grateful (*al-A'raf:* 17).

These are, then, the directions through which Satan practises his allurement: the first is from the front, the second from behind, the third from the right, and the fourth from the left. We all know that there are six directions, not only four; so what are the two directions from which Satan does not come? They are above, and below; Satan fled from these two particular directions. He did not say 'I will come to them from above them and below them' because he knows that the higher direction represents divine loftiness and the lower direction represents human servitude when a person prostrates to God. For this reason, Satan completely avoided these two directions.

It is amazing that if you consider the calls of atheism that come out in every era, you will find that they come from the same directions as Satan does. They say 'progressive,' from the front; 'reactionary,' from behind; and 'right-wing,' on the right; and 'left-wing,' on the left. We say to them that we are not on any of these directions: we are not 'progressive,' calling for licentiousness and wickedness; nor are we reactionary, saying ‘This is what we found our forefathers doing,’ sticking to their way irrespective of whether it was right or wrong; nor are we left-wing, denying religion and supporting disbelief; nor are we right-wing, believing in capitalism and the exploitation of people. Rather, we are the lofty Muhammadan community, and we receive all our commands from God *the Most High*. As long as all our affairs are from God *the Most High*, we will not bend to the will of our equals; rather, we bend only to the Will of God, the Sublime, and All-Mighty. If you submit to one higher than yourself, this is never shameful; rather, it is a source of honour and sublimity, as God *the Most High* says that all honour and might rest with God, and His Messenger, and those who have faith; but the hypocrites do not understand (*al-Munafiqun:* 8).

We are the lofty Muhammadan community, and we proclaim our servitude and submission to God, and we follow divine guidance. For this reason, we are distinguished from all humanity because every person in this world who does not submit to God *the Most High* and take guidance from Him, and submits instead to some form of human guidance, given to him by a human being who is equal to him in terms of humanity. The human soul has caprices that it wishes to fulfil. For this reason, it concocts a system that will lead to its being distinguished above other people, and a system that it alone will benefit from. The system might be concocted by a group or class or people: we say that their systems are for their own benefit; but God *the Most High* establishes His system of guidance for your own good, not that He can benefit from you, as He is the source of all goodness, and is not in need of what you possess, nor of what all humanity possesses. So justice, goodness, and honour are embodied in the system of divine guidance, for God does not take from you, He gives to you; and He does not debase you, but rather, He honours you.

There is something here of which we must be aware. From this loftiness, God chose an unlettered community in which to make the final connection between heaven and earth, and He chose from this community an unlettered Messenger (that is, in the pristine state his mother bore him). He did not take education from someone equal to him; he was educated neither by East nor by West; he did not read anyone's works and hence was affected by them; and nor did he read any philosophy and so followed it. The One Who taught him was none but God *the Most High*. So, illiteracy was an honour for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* because it confirmed that everything he brought was from God *the Glorious and Exalted*. So everything that he brought was a miracle, as it was born of divine inspiration. Had the Quran been sent down to a civilised nation like the Persians or the Byzantines, or to a prophet who was not illiterate and who might have read the books of the philosophers and scholars of the East and West, it would have been said, 'The Quran was the product of the meeting of civilisations, intellectual gifts, and reformation movements, to guide people in their lives.' But no; it was an illiterate community, and an illiterate Messenger, confirming its connection to heaven; and the source of what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought had nothing to do with human beings, or education, or civilisation, and was not the product of human intellect; it was from the True Lord *the Most High* in order that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the Unlettered Messenger, would become a teacher for all humanity. In this way, we realise that Satan cannot come near to the place where prayers and good works rise upward to the sky, and nor from the place of submission and servitude to God.

Satan insisted on deceiving mankind so that he would not be the only sinner. Since he had sinned, and dismissed from God's mercy, why should he be the only sinner? Why not make everyone a sinner, too? Since Satan's sin was the refusal to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*, why not take the sons of Adam to hell with him, to take revenge on them, and on their father? Some people say, 'Satan sinned, and Adam sinned; and God *the Most High* dismissed Satan from His mercy, yet forgave Adam'. In answer to this we say that there was a difference between the two sins. The sin of Satan was at the height of sin: a point-blank rejection and refusal of a command. He said, 'No, I will not prostrate, and I will not obey because I am created of fire, whilst he is of clay'. It is as though he rejected the command of The Commander. On the other hand, Adam said, 'O Lord, Your command is the truth, and Your word is the truth, and Your guidance is the truth; but I am weak, and could not bring myself to obey; so, forgive my weakness, Lord!’ For this reason, God *the Glorious and Exalted* established repentance for him, and taught him words by means of which He would forgive him.

So there is a difference between the two sins: one sin in which you say, ‘I will not obey because I am better than him,’ and another sin in which the servant admits his mistake, and his weakness, and turns to God seeking forgiveness and mercy. It is a fact that God *the Most High* told us in the Noble Quran that Satan is an enemy to us and that we should take him as an enemy: he calls on his followers so that they may become inmates of Hellfire (*Fatir:* 6).

Despite this forewarning, it is observed that people do not often heed the warning and take proper precautions; this is why every time we read the Quran, God *the Most High* wants us to seek refuge in Him from the accursed Satan. This is because if Satan has touched us, or overcome us in some aspect of our lives, God *the Most High* will keep him away from us when we read the Quran so that our hearts become pure, and we are kept safe from Satan and all his attempts to insinuate to us and detract us from God’s guidance.

When we seek refuge with God from the accursed Satan, we should keep in mind that the One Whose protection we are seeking is God *the Glorious and Exalted*. Now, Satan is nothing but one of God’s creatures, and so are you. It is possible that one of God’s creatures could be in battle with another of God’s creatures, and in such a case, the one with greater strength will prevail. However, if one of them adheres to his Creator, the other will not be able to harm him. If you leave yourself to Satan, you will be fighting him alone with no help. For this reason, you seek refuge in God who created you, and created Satan, and He supports you against him. And so when you find a group of believers in rivalry with a group of disbelievers, the disbelievers will never be able to defeat them if the believers remained connected to their Lord.

If they leave aside God’s guidance, however, the disbelievers will defeat them because in that situation, it will be a battle between two groups who are distant from God. When creatures are left alone to their own means, the stronger side will win. But when creatures seek the protection of their Creator, no one will be able to harm them. Human beings are able to harm one another if both sides are distant from God. If both sides seek God's refuge, they will not fight one another to begin with.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants you, when you read the Quran, to purify your means of reception so that you can receive the Quran properly, by distancing yourself from Satan's insinuations; only then, can you receive the Quran with purity, and take everything that it can give you. If you seek God's protection from the accursed Satan, you are on God's side, and Satan can never have a way to you. The Quran tells us that on the Day of Resurrection, Satan will address those whom he had deceived telling them that God had promised them the truth, and that he had promised them, but he deceived them, and that he had no power over them except that he called upon them and they answered; therefore, they should not blame him but should blame themselves. He will also tell them that he will not be able to respond to their cries for help, nor will they be able to respond to his cries for help. Then, Satan will proclaim his rejection of what they had done before by joining him in divinity with God. A grievous suffering is in store for the unjust and wrongdoers (*Ibrahim:* 22).

Satan has no power over mankind to force them to do anything against their will, i.e. he has no power to compel. He has no power to persuade mankind to sin, which is called the 'power to convince'. Power is of two kinds: compelling people against their will, and convincing them to act willingly. Satan does not have the power to compel us to act against our will, or possesses the power to convince us to do what we do not want to do. All Satan does is whisper and insinuate, and our souls' desire causes us to follow him.

God *the Most High* wants to bar this whispering from reaching us when we read the Quran. Then, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* is the One Who created Satan, and gave him the ability to whisper to mankind – why? It is because if obedience existed without any resistance, the warmth of the enthusiasm of faith would not appear, and nor would the strength of accepting moral responsibility. When there is temptation, and enticement, yet you are firm in obedience to God, this is proof of strong faith; this is just as when you do not know the trustworthiness of an employee, for example, until you try him by tempting him to take a bribe. If he is never exposed to this temptation, we will never be able to test his trustworthiness. However, if he is not tempted, and holds fast to his honesty and integrity, this is true trustworthiness.

God *the Most High* gave us free will because He wants His creatures to obey Him, whilst they have the ability to do the contrary, and believe in Him whilst they are able not to because this proves the purity of their love for God. Those creatures that God has chosen to compel will come to Him out of compulsion, unable to disobey; this confirms God's overwhelming power and majesty. But the True Lord *the Most High* chose to give free will to other creatures so that they come to Him out of love. This love might be for the favours God bestows in the Hereafter and for His Paradise, and God does not begrudge His servants any of this. Or, on the other hand, this love might be for God Himself (divine love). In this regard, some of the people of purity of heart have something to say about the meaning of a noble verse in the Quran. The verse indicates that God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to all, that he is but a mortal man like all of them. It has been revealed to him that their God is the One and Only God. Hence, whoever looks forward (with hope and awe) to meeting his Lord (on Judgement Day), let him do righteous deeds, and let him not give any other creature a share in the worship of his Lord (*al-Kahf:* 110).

They say that Paradise is a creature, one of the creatures mentioned in the verse; so if you are working for the sake of God Himself, not for the bounties He bestows, you will be in God's company on the Day of Resurrection. Those who work for the sake of paradise will find it, and those who work for the sake of what is above paradise, will also find it.

If God Almighty had not created paradise or Hell, would He not still be worthy to be worshipped? Rabi‘a Al-‘Adawiyya(1) said, ‘O God, if You see that I worship you out of desire for Your Paradise, then deny me it; and if

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(1) Rabi‘a Al-Adawiyya (8th century CE) was a Muslim Sufi mystic and poet, known for her poems of divine love – Ed.

You see that I worship You out of fear of Your Hell, then cast me into it; I worship You because You deserve to be worshipped.’

The True Lord *the Most High* wants you, when you read the Quran, to purify your soul for Him alone. He has knowledge of the tricks that Satan uses to penetrate the human soul, and that he whispers to you things that spoil your pristine natural faithful disposition so that the Quran will come to a natural disposition that has been spoiled, and its bounties will not be received by the human soul. But if you seek refuge in God, you seek refuge in the Creator, and no created being will dare to approach you. For this reason, you should want your means of reception to be ready to receive the pure messages and listen to God’s speech – for God is the One Who is speaking, and the Quran is not the speech of the one who recites it, but is rather God’s speech; and for this reason, our master Ja‘far As-Sadiq *God be pleased with him*, who was the member of the descendants of the Messenger of God having most knowledge of the secrets of the Noble Quran, said about the distresses of life that afflict mankind, such as fear, worry, concern, harm, and the loss of blessings, ‘I am amazed by those who have fear, and do not take refuge in God’s words: Our sufficiency is God, and He is an excellent protector (*Al-‘Imran:* 173); for I heard God *the Most High* say after it that those who said it returned with God’s favour and bounty, without having been touched by harm. (*Al-‘Imran:* 174). And I am amazed by those who are afflicted with harm, and do not take refuge (in the supplication of Ayyub (Job) recounted in the Quran) in God’s saying: Harm has touched me; and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful ones (*al-Anbiya’*: 83); for I heard God *the Most High* say after it that He answered him, and removed the harm that had befallen him (*al-Anbiya’:* 84). And I am amazed by those who are afflicted with worry, and do not take refuge in (the supplication of Yunus (Jonah) recounted in the Quran) in God’s saying: There is no god but You! Limitless You are in Your glory! I have been one of the wrongdoers (*al-Anbiya’*: 87); because I heard God say after it that He responded to him and delivered him from (his) distress; and this is how He delivers all who have faith (*al-Anbiya’*: 88). And I am amazed at someone who is plotted against, and does not take refuge (in the supplication recounted in the Quran) in God’s words: I commit my case to God; for, verily, God sees all that is in His servants' (*Ghafir:* 44); for I heard God say after it that He preserved him from the evil of their scheming (*Ghafir:* 45). As long as you are in the company of your Creator, Satan will never dare approach you.

When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was in the cave of Thawr with Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *God be pleased with him* during the journey of departure from Mecca to Medina, and the disbelievers were at the entrance to the cave, carrying the weapons, what did Abu Bakr say? He said, 'If any of them looks beneath his feet, he will surely see us.' This is a situation that only the pure of faith could be unfazed by, and so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his companion: 'What do you think of two whose third is God?' This is what the noble verse alludes to in the Quran's narrative about the incident, in relating the Prophet's comforting words to his companion: 'Grieve not: verily, God is with us' (*at-Tawba:* 40).

So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* were together in the company of God. But was their being in the company of God the answer to Abu Bakr's concern, 'If any of them looks beneath his feet, he will surely see us'? Yes, in fact it is, because they were in God's company; and no eye can see God, and so no eye would be able to see the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* as long as they were with God.

The Chapter of

al-Fatiha

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ١

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy [1]
(The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 1)

From the moment it was sent down, the Noble Quran was connected with the Name of God *the Most High*. When we recite it, we start in the exact way that God *the Most High* wanted it, that is, to start with God's Name. The first words that were revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were: 'Read in the Name of your Lord Who has created' (*al-'Alaq:* 1).

This was how the revelation of the Noble Quran began to fulfil its task in the universe: with the Name of God. Now; when we read the Quran, we begin in the same way.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in the cave of Hira' when the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to him, and the first meeting between him, who was charged with carrying the revelation of the Quran, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* began with the word from the True Lord: 'Read.'

An instruction to read/recite necessitates that the person either have something memorised in his head, or that he has something written down in front of him that he can recite; but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had not memorised anything to read, and he had nothing in front of him to read from – and even if he had a book in front of him, he was unlettered, unable to read or write.

When Gabriel said, ‘Read,’ the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘I am not a reciter,’ for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was realistic about his abilities. The exchange was repeated three times: Gabriel *peace be upon him* would say to the Messenger, according to divine inspiration: ‘Read,’ and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would reply, ‘I am not a reciter.’ The enemies of Islam have used this event to try to throw doubt on the message by saying, ‘How could it be that God told His Messenger to recite, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘I am not a reciter’?

In answer, we say that God *the Most High* was speaking according to His omnipotent power by which He merely says to a thing, ‘Be!’ and it is; whilst the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was speaking according to his human nature: ‘I am unable to read a single word.’ But it was God’s power that would take up this Prophet who was unable to read and write, and turn him into a teacher for all humanity until the Day of Resurrection; for every human being is taught by another human being, but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be taught by God *the Most High* in order that he would be a teacher for the greatest scholars of the human race who would take from him knowledge and learning. For this reason, the answer came from God *the Most High:* ‘Read in the Name of your Lord Who has created’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 1).

In other words, God *the Most High* Who creates from nothing, will cause you to read to the people something the like of which the intellectuals of the whole world, and the civilisations of the whole world will be unable to produce. Furthermore, all that you recite whilst being the Unlettered Prophet will be a miracle not only for those who hear it directly from you but for the whole world, and not only in the time when it is revealed, but throughout the ages until the rising of the Hour. For this reason, God *the Glorious and Exalted* commanded Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to read – for his Lord is the Most Bountiful One Who has taught (man) the use of the pen (*al-‘Alaq:* 3-4).

In other words, O Muhammad, what you will recite will remain as a guide to all mankind until the end of the world. And because the teacher is

God *the Most High*, He describes Himself as ‘the Most Bountiful One,’ using the Arabic superlative adjectival *form (al-akram);* for there is ‘bountiful’ *(karim)*, and there is the ‘most bountiful’ (*al-akram).* When you learn from a human being, this is a sign of God’s generosity because He makes the learning easy for you by its being transmitted from a human being like you. But when God is the One Who teaches you, He is ‘Most Bountiful’ because your Lord has raised you to a high station by teaching you.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not recite the Quran because he had learned how to read; rather, he recited it by the Name of God. As long as it was by the Name of God, it does not matter whether the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* learned from a human being or he did not because the One Who taught him was God – and He taught him at a level far above that of all humanity.

We also begin reciting the Quran with the Name of God because God *the Most High* is the One Who sent it down to us and made it easy for us to know and recite. The whole matter is in the Hand of God when it comes to knowledge, power, and understanding. Let us look again at God’s Command to His Prophet to put the matter to the disbelievers that: had God willed it otherwise, he would not have conveyed this Scripture to them, and nor would He have brought it to their knowledge. Add to it that he has indeed dwelt amongst them a whole lifetime before this (revelation came to him); will they not, then, use their reason? (*Yunus:* 16)

For this reason, you read the Quran in the Name of God because He is the One Who made it easy for you in speech, revelation, and recitation. But are we required to begin only Quranic recitation with the Name of God? In fact, we are required to begin every action with the Name of God because we must respect God’s Bestowal to His creation. When we farm the land, for example, we must begin with the Name of God since we did not create the earth that we plough, or the seeds we sow, and nor did we bring down water from the sky to nourish the crops.

The farmer who takes up the hoe and plants the seeds might be the most ignorant of people with regard to the constituents of the earth, and the contents of the seeds, and what exactly the water does to the soil to make the crops grow. All a person does is use the mind God created in him and apply its findings on the material which God created using the power that God has placed within our bodies in order to undertake the farming.

Mankind has no power to force the earth into giving up its fruits. He has neither the power to create seeds that grow into trees, nor the power to bring down water from the sky. When he begins his work with the Name of God, he is beginning with the Name of the One Who subjected the earth for him, and subjected the seed, and subjected the water, all of which he had no power to do himself, and nor did any of it fall within his capabilities. It is as though he is announcing that he is undertaking all these things in the Name of the One Who facilitated it all for him.

God *the Most High* facilitated for us the entire universe and gave us signs to show this; so do not think that you have any power or intrinsic right over this universe, and do not think that the means and rules of this universe are intrinsic. Rather, they all work under the omnipotent power of their Creator Who sets them into motion when He wills and causes them to cease when He wills.

The large camel and the enormous elephant, when tamed, might be led by a small child, obeying him; but no man is able to tame even a small snake. If we achieve this solely by our own power, the taming of a snake or a serpent should be easier because of their diminutive size. But God wanted to make them an example so that we would know that by His omnipotent power, He subjected some things for us and not others, and this is by His will. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* draws the attention of mankind to the fact that He has created for them, among all the things which His Hands have made, the domestic animals of which they are (now) masters, and that He has subjected them to men’s will so that some of them they may use for riding, and of some they may eat (*Ya Sin:* 71-72).

Thus, we see that the submissiveness of these animals to us is the result of God’s subjugation of them, not of our own abilities.

God causes rain to fall plentifully on a certain land; scientists say that this occurs according to the laws of nature. God shows us the inaccuracy of this statement by bringing about periods of drought in which not a single drop of rainfalls so that we know that rain does not fall according to natural law, but rather by the Will of the Creator of the universe. If it is only natural law in motion, what has caused it to cease working? The Will of the Creator, however, is above any natural law: if He wills, He makes it work, and if not, it does not. So everything in the universe is by the Name of God, for it is He Who subdues and bestows, and it is He who gives and withholds. This is true even in those things in which mankind have some free will. God states that His alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He grants female offspring to whomever He wills, and male offspring to whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female (to whomever He wills), and causes to be childless whomever He wills; He is all-knowing and Infinite in His Power (*ash-Shura:* 48-49).

The origin of offspring is the coupling of a male and a female; this is the natural law. But natural laws do not work without God's leave, and so sometimes men and women marry, but produce no offspring. This is because it is not the natural law that creates; it is the will of the Creator of that law: if He wills, He lets it operate, and if He wills, He prevents it from operating. God *the Most High* is not ruled by any laws; He is the One Who rules them.

Just as God *the Glorified* is capable of either making natural laws work or not, He is also capable of breaking these laws. For example, consider the story of Zechariah *peace be upon him.* He took care of Mary *peace be upon her* and brought her everything she needed; and he would come to her and find that she had provisions that he had not brought for her. He asked her – and she was a devout holy woman who kept to her prayer-niche – where she got that from (*Al-'Imran:* 37).

The True Lord narrates this scene for our benefit – in spite of the fact that Mary *peace be upon her*, with her behaviour, and her devotion, and her piety, was beyond any suspicion – in order that we could know that it corrupts the universe to refrain from asking about the source of things that are not commensurate with the means of those who come to possess them. A mother might see her husband spending money in a way that is not commensurate with his salary, and might see her daughter wearing clothes that are much too expensive for her to afford. If she only asks her husband or daughter where they got this from, society will be preserved from corruption. Corruption comes, however, when we close our eyes and ignore unlawful wealth. So how did Mary *peace be upon her* respond? She told Zechariah that it was from God Who grants sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning (*Al-'Imran:* 37).

God's Omnipotent Power is not ruled by any law. Mary *peace be upon her* alerted Zechariah to God's omnipotence, and Zechariah *peace be upon him* prayed to his Lord for a matter that could only be helped by omnipotent power. He was an elderly man, and his wife was elderly and barren, yet he wanted a son. This matter is contrary to natural law because conception can only occur in youth. If a man and woman become old, they can no longer conceive children; so what if we add to this that the woman was also barren in the first place? She did not conceive even when she and her husband were young, so, how could she conceive when she was old, as was her husband? This issue is contrary to the laws that ordinarily govern human beings; but God alone is able to bring another law contrary to it. And so He willed to give Zechariah *peace be upon him* a son, and so it came about, and Zechariah was given his son John *peace be upon him*.

So, everything in this universe exists by the Name of God, and is brought into existence by the Name of God, and by God's leave. True, the universe is governed by means, but God's will is above all means. When you begin everything with God's Name, it is as though you are making God on your side to help you. By His Mercy, God *the Glorified* taught us to begin everything with His Name because 'God' is the Name that embodies all attributes of perfection. Most actions require several attributes in order that they be performed. When you begin an action, you need God's Power, His Strength, His Aid and His Mercy. If God *the Glorified* did not tell us the name that embodied all His attributes, we would have to specify the attributes that we needed, so we would have to say, 'In the Name of God, the Strong, and in the Name of God, the All-Sustainer, and in the Name of God, the Responsive, and in the Name of God, the Fully Capable, and in the Name of God, the Bestower of benefit,' and so on, referring to all the names and attributes that we needed the aid of. But God *the Most High* made us say, 'In the Name of God,' 'In the Name of God,' 'In the Name of God,' which embodies all these attributes.

We must take a moment here to consider those who do not begin their actions in the Name of God, those who seek only material benefits in life. A non-believing person, who does not begin his actions in the Name of God, and a believing person, who begins all his actions with God on his mind both take sustenance from this world because God is Lord to all, and He gives Lordly sustenance to every creature that He has brought into life. But this world is not a person's real life; the Hereafter is the real life. Those who have only this world on their minds take their share of God's sustenance and their share of God's Bestowal in this life. Those who have God on their minds take their share of God's Bestowal in both this life and the next, and so the True Lord *the Glorified* tells us that Praise be to Him, to Whom belong all that is in the heavens and in the earth; and to Him will be due all praise in the life to come; He is the All-Wise, All Knowing (*Saba':* 1). This is because the believer praises God for His favours in this life, and then praises Him again when He saves him from hell and suffering, and admits him into paradise in the Hereafter. Praise be to God in this life and the next!

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Every serious/important action not begun with "In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy" is curtailed'(1). The meaning of 'curtailed' is that it has part of it cut off, that is, it is incomplete and lacking something. This is because when you do not begin your action in the Name of God, you might be taken by self-conceit to believe that you are the one who has subdued things in the universe for your own service and benefit. When you do not begin an action with God's Name, you have no reward for it in the Hereafter because you have taken reward for it in this world, and cut off yourself from its reward in the Hereafter. If you want the reward of this world and the next, begin every action with the Name of God. Before you eat, say 'In the Name of God' because He is the One Who created this food for you and provided you with it; when you have a test in an exam, say 'In the Name of God,' and He will help you to succeed; when you enter your house, say 'In the Name of God' because He is the One Who provided you with this house; when you marry, say 'In the Name of God' because He is the One Who created this spouse and made them lawful for you. Every action you do, begin it with 'In the Name of God' because this action prevents you from doing something else that might incur the wrath of God *the Most High*. However, you cannot begin an action that would incur God's anger in God's Name; if you want to steal, drink wine, or do any action that incurs God's wrath, and then you remember God's Name, you will refrain from the action, and you will be ashamed to begin an action that angers God by mentioning God's Name; and in this, way all your actions will be things which God has permitted.

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(1) *Narrated by As-Siyuti in Al-Jami' As-Saghir, attributed to 'Abd Al-Qadir Ar-Rahawi in Al-'Arba'in, on the authority of Abu Hurayra, with a sound chain of narration. Also narrated, with a slightly different wording, by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir.*

When we begin our recitation of God's speech with his Name, we are reading this speech because it is from God, and God is the Only Entity deserving to be worshipped by all in His universe. The meaning of 'worshipped' is that He is obeyed in all that He commands, and we do not come near anything that He forbids. It is as though you are receiving the Noble Quran along with God's Bestowal by worshipping Him, and by obeying His Commandments and Prohibitions, and this is the reason why you begin your recitation of the Quran with the Name of God, in whom you believe as Lord and Divinity; and to Whom you have vowed to obey in all that He commands and prohibits; and He Who, on account of your worship of Him, you read His Book, to act in accordance with what it contains; and He Who has created, and made, and given life, and brought death; and He to Whom belong the affairs of this life and the next; and He before Whom you will stand on the Day of Resurrection, that He might judge whether you have done well, or poorly. So the beginning is from God, and the end is to God *the Glorified*.

Some people wonder: 'How can I begin with the Name of God, when I have sinned, and done wrong?' We say that you must not be too ashamed to recite the Quran, and begin with God's Name simply because you have sinned. For this reason, God *the Most High* gave us the method of beginning our recitation of the Quran, which is that we say 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy.' God *the Most High* does not forsake the sinner, but rather opens for him the door of repentance, encourages him to enter it, and asks him to repent and return to Him, that He might forgive for him his misdeed because God is Most Merciful and Compassionate. Do not say, ‘I am ashamed to begin with God’s Name because I have sinned,’ for God *the Most High* wants every sinner to return to the fold of faith, and He is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy. If you ask how you can say ‘In the Name of God,’ when you fell into sin only yesterday, we say to you, Say ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy;’ for God’s mercy encompasses all the sins of His creatures, and He *the Most High* forgives all sins.

The Arabic words *rahma* (mercy), *Rahman* (Most Merciful), and *Rahim* (Dispenser of Mercy) are all etymologically related in Arabic to the word *rahim*, meaning the womb in which a foetus dwells inside its mother. This is the place where provision comes without any effort or power from the embryo, which finds everything it needs to grow ready and waiting for it. Its provision is direct from God without any toil or cost. Look at the affection and tenderness a mother shows to her child, and how she overlooks his faults, and how happy she is when he comes back to her. For this reason, the True Lord says, in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘I am the Dispenser of Mercy; I created the womb, and derived for it a name from My name. Whosoever maintains its ties [of kinship], I maintain their ties; and whoever cuts himself off from it, I cut him off from Me.’(1)

God *the Most High* wants us to always remember that He cares for us, and sustains us, and opens for us the doors of repentance, one door after another. We sin, but He does not requite us for our sins, nor withhold from us His blessings, and He does not destroy us for what we have done. And so we begin the recitation of the Noble Quran with ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,’ so that we may always remember that the doors of mercy are open for us so that we raise our hands to the sky and say, ‘O Lord, have mercy! Forgive us our sins and ill deeds!’ In this way, the one who reads the Quran, remains connected to the doors of God’s mercy, and every time he strays from God’s guidance, he rushes back to it. As long as God is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy, the doors of mercy will never close.

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(1) *Narrated, by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawoud, and At-Tirmidhi*

The words ‘Most Merciful’ *(Rahman)* and ‘Dispenser of Mercy’ *(Rahim)* are in the Arabic grammatical intensive noun form *(sighat al-mubalagha).* Here, we have three words: *Rahim* (Merciful), *Rahman* (Most Merciful) and *Rahim* (Dispenser of Mercy). The word ‘merciful’ implies the attribute of mercy; the term ‘most merciful’ implies an intensive attribute of mercy, as does the term ‘Dispenser of mercy’. God *the Most High* is the Most Merciful in this world, and the Dispenser of Mercy in the Hereafter.

God’s attributes do not waver between strength and weakness; never imagine that God’s attributes sometimes apply to Him a little, and sometimes a lot. Rather, they are all attributes of absolute perfection; the thing that changes is the applications of these attributes in actual happenings. God the True Lord states that He does not wrong (anyone) by as much as an atom’s weight (*an-Nisa’:* 40).

This noble verse excludes any possibility that God *the Most High* could be unjust in any way. And we have another noble verse in which God *the Glorified* says that he never does the least wrong to His creatures (*Fussilat:* 46).

We notice here that the grammatical intensive noun form is used *Zhallam,* i.e. extremely unjust. Some might say that God’s statement here does not deny injustice; it only denies extreme injustice, denying that He would do even an atom’s weight of injustice. To those who say that, we say that you do not understand the real meaning. God does not wrong anyone: the first verse denies that God would do even the slightest injustice to any of His servants; the second verse deals not with one person, but with all His servants. Everyone is a creation of God, and if every one of them were to be afflicted with the slightest injustice, in their huge numbers, this would amount to a very gross injustice, even though individually it was small because the number afflicted would be so great. So the first verse denies that God *the Most High* would do any injustice, and the second verse also denies this, but the intensive noun form is used because of the large number of people to whom the verse applies.

After this, we come to ‘Most Merciful’ and ‘Dispenser of Mercy’. He is the Most Merciful in this world because of the great many people whom He encompasses with His mercy. God’s mercy in this world encompasses the believer, the sinner, and the disbeliever. God gives them their life's sustenance, and does not chastise them for their sins; He provides for both those who believe in Him and those who do not; and He forgives much. So those who are encompassed by His mercy in this world include all of His creatures, regardless of whether they believe or not.

In the Hereafter, however, God is merciful to the believers alone, and the disbelievers and idolaters are excluded from His mercy. So those who are encompassed by God's mercy in the Hereafter are fewer in number than those encompassed by His mercy in this life – so why is the intensive noun form used? It is used because of the intensity of the bestowal and the eternality of this intensiveness. God's blessing in the Hereafter is much greater than in this world, and so the intensive form here pertains to the abundance of the blessing, and its eternality. So it is as though the quality of exaggeration in this world is based on the all-encompassing nature of the bestowal, whereas in the Hereafter, it is based on the special bestowal for the believers, and the abundant blessing that lasts for all eternity.

There is a difference between many scholars on whether the phrase 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,' which is present in 113 chapters of the Noble Quran, is to be counted as one of the verses of the chapters. In other words, is the phrase counted as the first verse of every chapter, or is it only the first verse in the case of the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, after which it is considered to be a way of separating between chapters?

Scholars say that 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' is a verse from the Noble Quran only in *al-Fatiha*, but it is not a verse of every chapter. There is one chapter in the Quran that does not begin with 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,' which is the chapter of *at-Tawba*. The phrase 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' is repeated in the 30th verse of the chapter of *an-Naml*, at the beginning of Solomon's letter to the Queen of Sheba: It is from Solomon, and it says, 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' (*an-Naml:* 30).

ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾

Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds [2]
the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [3]
(The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 2-3)

The Opening of the Book is also known as the Mother of the Book, and a Muslim's prayer is not valid without it. In every *rak'a*(1) of your prayer, you can recite a different verse from the Noble Quran from the one you recited in the last *rak'a,* and from the one you recited in your other prayers, but if you do not recite *al-Fatiha*, your prayer is invalid. For this reason, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever prays a prayer in which he does not recite the Mother of the Quran, it is deficient,' and He *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated this three times, i.e. 'it is not complete, and not valid.'(2) So the chapter of *al-Fatiha* is the Mother of the Book without which the prayer is not valid. God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith,

I have divided the prayer into two halves between Myself and My servant; and My servant shall have what he asks for. When the servant says, 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds' (*al-Fatiha:* 2), God says, 'My servant has praised Me.' And when he says, 'the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' (*al-Fatiha:* 3), God says, 'My servant has extolled Me.' And when he says, 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' (*al-Fatiha:* 4), God says, 'My servant has glorified Me.' And when he says, 'You alone do we worship; and to You alone do we turn for aid' (*al-Fatiha:* 5), God says, 'This is between Me and My servant; and My servant shall have what he asks for.' And when he says, 'Guide us to the straight way' (*al-Fatiha:* 6) 'the way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings, not of those who have been condemned, nor of those who go astray' (*al-Fatiha:* 7), God says, 'This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for.'(3)

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(1) In Islamic prayer, *a rak'a* is a unit of prayer consisting of certain supplications, readings, and acts of devotion. The term *rak'a* originally means bowing or prostration. Islamic daily prayers comprise 2, 3, or 4 *rak'as* depending on the time of day of a specific prayer - Ed.

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih collection, on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

(3) *A Qudsi Hadith narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, Abu Dawoud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah and Ibn Hayyan on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

We need be aware when we read this Qudsi Hadith that God says, ‘I have divided the prayer into two halves between Myself and My servant;’ He did not say, ‘I have divided *al-Fatiha* between Myself and My servant.’ This implies that the Opening of the Book (*al-Fatiha*) is in fact the basis of prayer, and the Mother of the Book.

We also notice that there are three names for God repeated in the phrase ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ and in *al-Fatiha,* which are: Allah ‘God,’ *Rahman*, ‘the Most Merciful,’ and *Rahim*, ‘the Dispenser of Mercy.’ We say that there is no repetition in the Noble Quran and that if a word is repeated, its meaning is different in every separate occurrence because God *the Glorified* is the One Who is speaking, and so He puts every utterance in its right place, with its correct and appropriate meaning.

Our saying ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ is a way of seeking the aid of God’s omnipotent power when we begin doing anything. So, the divine name ‘God’ in this phrase means the seeking of aid from God’s Powers and attributes so that He will help us in what we are doing. But when we say ‘Praise be to God,’ this is a way of offering thanks to God for what He has done for us. We cannot offer thanks to God without using the divine name that embodies all the different attributes of God because we praise Him for all His attributes, and His mercy so that we do not have to say ‘In the Name of the All-Dominant,’ and ‘In the Name of the All-Giver,’ and ‘In the Name of the All-Generous,’ and ‘In the Name of the Most Merciful,’ and so on. We praise God for the perfection of His attributes, and this praise includes the perfection of all of these attributes.

There is a difference between the phrase ‘In the Name of God,’ by which we seek aid for that which we have no power to accomplish alone because God is the One Who subjugated for us everything in this universe and made it serve us, and the statement ‘Praise be to God.’ The divine name only comes here so that we can praise God for all that He has done for us. It is as though ‘In the Name of God’ is a way of seeking help from God with all His perfect attributes, and that ‘Praise be to God’ in *al-Fatiha* is a way of offering thanks to God with all His perfect attributes.

The meaning of the phrase ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ in the phrase ‘In the Name of God…’ is not the same as when the same phrase occurs in *al-Fatiha*. In the phrase ‘In the Name of God…,’ it reminds us of God’s mercy and forgiveness so that we are not ashamed or afraid to seek the aid of God’s Name, even if we have sinned. God *the Most High* wants us to seek aid always through His name in everything we do. If any of us falls into sin, and says, ‘How can I seek the aid of God’s Name, when I have disobeyed Him?’ We say to him, approach Him from the door of mercy, and He will forgive you; and seek His aid, and He will answer you. When you fall into sin, you seek refuge in God’s Mercy from His justice because God’s justice does not leave any sin great or small without counting it.

This is what we understand from the Quranic verse that explains that on the Day of Judgement, the record (of everyone’s deeds) will be laid open; and one will see the guilty filled with dread at what (they see) in it; and they will be bewailing the record which leaves out nothing, be it small or great, and takes count of everything. And they will find all that they had done facing them; your Lord does not wrong anyone (*al-Kahf:* 49).

Were it not that God’s mercy comes before His justice, no blessing would remain for people, and not a single one of them would remain alive on the face of the earth. God *the Glorified* says that if He were to take men (immediately) to task for all the evil that they do (on earth), He would not leave a single living creature upon its face. However, He grants them respite until a term set (by Him): but when the end of their term comes, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor hasten it (*an-Nahl:* 61).

Man was created weak, and prone to restlessness. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* once said to his companions, ‘None of you will enter Paradise by virtue of your works, unless God covers them with His mercy.’ They asked, ‘Not even you, o Messenger of God?’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Not even I.’

The sins of man in this world are numerous. If he judges, he might judge unjustly; if he guesses about someone, he might guess badly; if he talks, he might lie; if he testifies, he might perjure and not tell the truth; if he speaks, he might backbite.

We commit all these sins in different degrees, and none of us can ascribe perfection to himself even those who do their utmost to obey God do not reach perfection, for perfection is for God alone. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘All of the children of Adam do wrong: and the best of those who do wrong are the repentant.’(1)

In the Noble Quran, God *the Glorified* describes man’s response to the bounties God grants to mankind, stating that He has given them of all that they asked of Him; and should they try to count God’s blessings, they could never compute them. Surely, man is indeed unjust, ungrateful (*Ibrahim:* 34).

Because of this, the True Lord did not want sins to prevent us from beginning every action with mention of His name, and so he taught us to say, ‘In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ so that we would know that the door is open for seeking God’s aid, and that sins should not prevent us from seeking aid in God’s Name in everything we do. God is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy, and so He relieves your desolation for your sin by allowing you to seek aid in Him.

On the other hand, the phrase ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ in *al-Fatiha* (3) comes in the context of ‘Lord of the worlds’ (2), the Lord Who created you from nothing, and sustained you with blessings that cannot be enumerated or counted. You praise Him for these blessings which you took by means of His mercy in His Lordliness; for lordliness does not imply as much severity as it does mercy.

God *the Glorified* is the Lord of both the believer and the disbeliever, for He is the One Who called them all into being. Because of this, He grants them bounties by His mercy, not by what they deserve. The sun rises on the believer and the disbeliever; its rays are not veiled from the disbeliever and given to the believer alone; and rain falls on those who worship God, and on those who worship idols instead of God; and the air is breathed by those who say ‘There is no god but God,’ and by those who do not say it.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad, and by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Al-Hakim, on the authority of Anas God be pleased with him*

Every favour that God grants in this world, out of His lordly grace, is for all of His creatures – and this indeed is mercy. God is Lord of all, both those who obey Him and those who disobey Him – and this is indeed mercy. And God accepts repentance – and this is indeed mercy.

So, in *al-Fatiha,* the phrase ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ (3) refers to God’s Mercy in His Lordship over His creation: He reprieves the sinner, and opens the doors of repentance for all who seek refuge with Him.

God *the Glorified* gave His mercy precedence over His wrath, and this in itself is a mercy that merits gratitude. So, the meaning of ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ (3) in the phrase ‘In the Name of God...’ is different from its meaning in the text of *al-Fatiha*.

If we now move to the verse ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds’ (2), we see that God is praised for His Self, and praised for His attributes, and praised for His blessings, and praised for His Mercy, and praised for His Guidance, and praised for His Decree; and in fact God was praised (praiseworthy) before He even created anyone to praise Him. Out of His mercy, God *the Glorified* made the means to thank Him in a simple, (in Arabic) two-word phrase*: al-hamdu li-Lah* ‘Praise be to God’ (2).

It is amazing that when you thank a human being for his kindness, you spend hours and hours and use all kinds of words of thanks and praise, and you subtract and add and follow people’s opinions, even composing a poem or a speech full of praise and thanks; but God *the Glorified, the Almighty* Whose blessings cannot be counted or measured, taught us to thank Him using only a couple of words: ‘Praise be to God’ (2).

We might understand that exaggeration in thanking human beings is blameworthy because it can give rise to all sorts of delusions and hypocrisy and may make a sinful person more sinful. Therefore, we should be sparing in how much we thank and express praise to other human beings because we thank God for all of the great blessing He grants us with only two words: ‘Praise be to God’ (2). Out of His mercy on us, God *the Glorified* taught us the phrase that we should use to praise Him. Had He left us without specifying these two words, it would have been difficult for human beings to find the right way to praise God for this divine perfection. However much people were gifted with eloquence and fine expression, they would be unable to reach an expression of praise that would befit the majesty of the One Who bestowed on them all that. How can we praise God when the intellect is unable to even comprehend His power, or to measure His blessing, or to encompass His mercy? The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* demonstrated to us the human incapability of praising the divine perfection of God, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I cannot praise You as You have praised Yourself.’

Furthermore, by the phrase ‘Praise be to God’ (2), God *the Glorified* has made all mankind equal. Had He left the concept of praising Him without specific delimitation, the levels of praise that people offered would have differed in accordance with their differing rhetorical abilities. An illiterate person who cannot read or write would be unable to find the right words with which to praise God, whilst a scholarly person with good rhetorical ability would be able to come up with expressions of praise commensurate with his learning and eloquence. In this way, the degrees by which humanity praised God would differ in accordance with their status in the world.

But the True Lord willed that by His justice He would make His servants equal together with a single expression of praise, and so He taught them, with His first words in the Quran, to say ‘Praise be to God’ (2), giving an equal chance to all of His servants so that the educated and the uneducated, and the eloquent and the ineloquent would be equal in offering praise.

Therefore, we praise God *the Glorified* for teaching us how to praise Him so that a servant of God remains ever-offering praise, and God remains at all times praised. Before God created us, He created for us blessings which are reason for us to praise Him: He created for us the heavens and the earth, and made for us water and air, and placed upon the earth sustenance enough to all humanity until the end of time. This favour deserves praise because He made it before He even created the first human being so that when He created mankind, these blessings were already there. Moreover, before God *the Glorified* created Adam *peace be upon him*, the father of all humanity, he was preceded by the Paradise in which he would dwell, neither tiring nor toiling; and He created all that he would eat, and drink, and all he needed to live and derive enjoyment from was already present and ready for him before he was created. When Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* came down to earth, all these blessings were already there before them, and so they found things to eat and drink and nourish themselves with. If these blessings had not come before man, and had they been destined to be created after him, he would have perished while waiting for them to come.

Moreover, the divine bestowal upon mankind gives him a blessing simply by virtue of his having been created in his mother's womb, finding therein everything needed to receive him and feed him for as long as the pregnancy lasts. When he comes out into the world, God places in his mother's breast milk that flows when he is hungry, and stops when he is full, and stops for good when the breastfeeding term ends. He finds a mother and father who provide for him his life needs until he is able to support himself. All of this takes place before the person reaches the age of responsibility, and before he can even say the words: 'Praise be to God' (2).

So we see how the blessing always precedes the one who is favoured by it. When a person says 'Praise be to God' (2), he says so because the reasons for his offering praise – the blessing he has received – was present in existence even before he was.

God *the Glorified* created for us things in this universe that provide for mankind without any effort from him, and without being subjected to him. Man is unable to provide for himself the blessings that the True Lord gives him without any effort on man's part. The sun gives heat and life to the earth without any repayment, or any endeavour on the part of man. Rain falls from the sky without you doing anything, or having any power to bring it down. Air is present for you everywhere so you can breathe it without any effort or power. The earth gives you its fruits simply by your planting seeds and watering them. Crops grow by God's power. Night and day follow one another so you can rest and sleep, and then go about your life. You do not bring forth the light of day; and nor do you make the dark of night; yet you take repose at night, and work during the day, by means of God's power, without you having to do anything.

Man created none of these things; rather, he was created to find them present in the universe, providing for him without any payment or effort on his part. Is it not right then, that you say: ‘Praise be to God for the blessing of subduing the universe to serve mankind’? All of this makes praise a moral imperative.

God’s signs in His creation also merit praise: for the life that God has given us, and the signs that He has placed in His universe to show us that this universe has a Mighty Creator: the universe, with its sun, moon, stars, earth and everything in it, and all far beyond the powers of mankind, and no one can claim it as his own work. No one, however far his knowledge reaches, can claim that he created the sun, or made the stars, or the earth, or established natural law, or gave the earth its atmosphere, or created himself, or created anyone else.

These signs all prove the existence of a higher power which created and made everything. These signs are not static so that we might forget them; rather, they are always moving, to alert us to the Creator of this mighty universe.

The rising sun in the morning reminds us of the miracle of creation, and the setting sun in the evening reminds us of the might of the Creator. The succession of night and day happens before our eyes every day so that we can pay attention and wake up. Rain falls from the sky to remind us of the divinity of the One Who sent it down. Crops rise from the earth, nourished by the same kind of water, yet they grow diverse in colour, shape, taste, and scent, each developing in a different way from the other. The harvest comes, and the fruits and crops disappear; and then the crop season comes again, and they reappear.

Everything in this universe is moving to remind us if we happen to forget, and to show us that there is a Mighty Creator. We can continue like this without end because God’s blessings cannot be counted or measured. Every one of them guides us to the existence of the True Lord, and proves to us that this universe has a Splendid Creator, and that no one can claim to have created the universe or anything in it because the whole question is settled. Praise be to God because He has placed pristine natural faith in our souls, and then, supported it with intellectual faith with His signs in the universe.

Everything in this universe merits praise, yet men lavish praise on created things whilst forgetting the Creator! When you see a beautiful jewel, for example, or an amazing flower, or any of God’s creations, your soul is filled with its beauty, and you praise this creation, saying: ‘How beautiful this flower is!’ or this jewel, or whatever it may be. But the created thing that you praise did not give itself this beauty; the flower has no say in whether it is beautiful or not, and the jewel has no say in the magnificence of its creation. Nothing in this universe gave itself beauty; the One Who gave it beauty was God *the Most High* – so do not be confused, praising the creation, whilst forgetting the Creator. Rather, say: Praise be to God Who placed within the universe things that remind us of the might of the Creator, and the precision of His creation!

God's Way and Guidance also merit praise from us because God has sent us His Guidance to show us the way of good, and keep us from the way of evil. God's Guidance which He has sent down to His messengers, told us that God *the Most High* is the One Who created for us this universe, and created us, too. The precision and magnificence of creation show us that there is a Mighty Creator, but they cannot tell us who the Creator is, or what He wants from us. Because of this, God sent His messengers to tell us that it was God Who created this universe, and created us; and this merits praise.

God's Guidance made clear to us what the True Lord wants of us, and how we are to worship Him; and this merits praise. God's Guidance showed us the correct and optimum way to live. God does not discriminate between us as His creation, and does not favour one of us over another except by virtue of their piety. We are all equal creatures before God *the Glorified*.

So true legislation, true speech, and true judgement, are all from God. As for man-made legal systems, they are characterised by being deeply influenced by personal, group, or sectarian interests, whims, and discrimination. Such laws usually take the rights of some and give them to others; and so in every human legal system, we are bound to forms of find human injustice.

In communist countries, the members of the Party Central Committee are quite well-off, whilst their people are all living in poverty and hardship. This is because the lawmakers follow their own caprices, and put their own interests first. The same is true of capitalist countries. The people who own the capital take all the good. But when God *the Glorified* sent down His Guidance to us, He judged fairly among people, and gave everyone their rights, and taught us how to make life on earth upright, by keeping it far from human caprice and subservient to God's Justice – and this in itself merits praise.

The True Lord deserves praise from us because –unlike worldly lords– He does not take anything from us, but He only gives to us. In every age, human beings try to exploit fellow human beings because they covet the wealth and riches that they possess. God *the Glorified* does not need what we possess; He gives to us, and does not take from us, and He possesses the stores of everything, as He says that there is not a single thing but its storehouses are with Him, and He sends it down with a settled measure (*al-Hijr:* 21). So God *the Glorified* is always giving to His creatures, and the creature is always taking from God's blessings. Worshipping God only gives to you; it does not take anything from you – and this merits praise. Because of God's infinite bestowal, mankind must ask Him, supplicate to Him, and seek His aid. This merits praise because it spares us from humiliating ourselves in this world. If you ask for something from an influential person, he will set an appointment for you, and assign a limited time to speak with you; and he might become uncomfortable with you, and might stand up to end the meeting. But God's door is always open, and you can go before Him whenever you like, and raise your hands to the sky and pray whenever you like, asking God for whatever you like, and He will give you what you want if it is good for you, and withhold it from you if it proves bad for you.

God *the Glorified* asks you to pray to Him, and to ask of Him; He calls His servants to supplicate to Him, (and) He will respond to them. Those who are too proud to worship Him will enter hell, abased (*Ghafir:* 60).

And God *the Glorified* also commands His Messenger to proclaim that if His servants ask him (the Messenger) about Him (God) – He is near; He responds to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls to Him: let them, then, respond to Him, and believe in Him so that they might be guided to the right way (*al-Baqara:* 186).

God *the Most High* knows what is in your soul, and so He gives you even without your asking. Read the Qudsi Hadith, in which the Lord of Might says, 'Whoever is too occupied by My remembrance to ask of Me, I will give him better than I give to those who do ask.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Al-Bazzar, and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Ibn 'Umar*

God's Bestowal never runs out, and the stores of His favours are never empty, and whatever you ask Him, and however often you ask Him *the Exalted*, He has more; there is nothing difficult for God *the Most High*, if He wants to grant it to you. Read the poet's lines:

It is enough honour for me that I am a slave
Whose Lord will meet him without any appointment;
He occupies the station of utmost sanctity, but
I can meet with Him whenever and wherever I like.

So God's Bestowal merits praise, and His withholding of this bestowal also merits praise.

And the existence of God, the absolutely independent and self-sufficient Being,(1) merits praise. God deserves praise for His very being. Were it not for God's justice, people would have transgressed and done much injustice upon the earth; but when God's Hand closes upon an oppressor, it makes of him a cautionary tale and a lesson of warning to others so that people would fear and refrain from committing injustice. And everyone who escapes punishment in this world for their sins, injustice, and tyranny will meet God in the Hereafter so that they would be punished for the wrongs they had done – and this merits praise. The one who is wronged in this life knows that he will eventually receive his requital, and so his soul calms down, and is reassured in his heart that the day will come when he will see the one who oppressed him being punished in Hell. And so, he is rid of his sorrow, and he is able to bear the bitterness of injustice when he knows that God is in control of His creation, and that no one can escape His Justice.

When we say 'Praise be to God', we are expressing various different emotions, which together comprise worship, love, praise, thanks and gratitude. Many emotions fill the soul when we say ‘Praise be to God,’ all of them embodying praise that is incapable of expressing thanks for God’s perfection and largesse. These emotions come from the soul and settle in the heart, and then flow out of the body organs to the entire universe.

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(1) This phrase is used as the nearest equivalent of the Arabic term *wajib al-wujud*, which translates as aseity, a concept in Christian theology that denotes a being (God) Who is uncaused, the source of all causes, is absolutely independent and self-sufficient. The Islamic version of the term also stresses the idea that he is not in need of other beings, while all other beings need him for their existence and survival. Muslim philosophers also add that the *wajib al-wujud* is a being whose non-existence cannot be conceived as possible – Ed.

Praise is not mere utterances that I repeat by the tongue: it first passes as an idea through the mind, establishing the awareness of the meaning of God’s blessings in the mind; then, it settles as a sentiment in the heart which responds to it; then, it moves to the limbs, and I stand up and pray to God in heart-felt thanks, and my body trembles, and tears flow from my eyes – and all of these reactions spread to all those around me.

An illustration is in place here: let us suppose that I am facing a crisis or a hardship, or a difficult situation that may lead to disgrace; and then someone comes along and alleviates my affliction, by, for example, giving me money, or finding a way out of the crisis for me. The first thing I would do is recognise this kindness, and see that this person deserves to be thanked. Then, this notion would go to my heart which would become attached to the one who did this kindness to me. Then, my limbs would react, so I can translate this emotion into an action that would be to the satisfaction of the one who did me the kindness. Then, I would praise the person and tell people about his kindness and generosity, and they would seek recourse to him, and so the circle of praise would widen, and more favours would come to people, and they would experience the same thing I had experienced, and so the circle of gratitude and praise would widen further and further.

Offering praise to God brings us more of His blessings as He states that if people – as receivers of His favours – are grateful, He would increase His bestowals more and more; but if they are thankless, His Punishment is severe (*Ibrahim:* 7). Thus, we see that rendering praise and thanks to God’s favours will bring us more blessings; and we offer thanks for them, and this brings us more. In this way, praise remains permanent, and bestowal remains permanent. If we consider our entire lives, every moment of them merits praise: when we sleep, and God *the Most High* takes our souls, and then, returns them to us when we wake, this merits praise. God says that He causes all souls to die at the time of their death; and (causes to be as dead), during their sleep, those that have not yet died; He withholds (from life) those upon whom He has decreed death, and lets the others go free for a set term. In this, there are signs for people who reflect (*az-Zumar:* 42).

And so, our mere waking from sleep and the fact that God *the Most High* has returned our souls to us – merit praise. When we get out of bed, it is God Who gives us the power to move; were it not for His bestowal, we would not be able to rise – and this merits praise. When we eat our breakfast, God provides food for us from His favour: He has created it and made it grow, and He provides us with it – and this merits praise.

When we go out into the street, God facilitates and subjects for us the vehicles that transport us to our places of work. Whether we own cars or use public transport, Praise be to Him. When we converse with people, God *the Most High* is the One Who gives our tongues the ability to speak; if He so willed, He could make us mute, unable to speak. All of this merits praise. When we go to work, God facilitates for us jobs by which we earn our livelihood so that we can eat from our lawful earning. All of this merits praise. And when we return home, we go back to our spouses and children whom we have by the Grace of God – and this merits praise.

So every deed a man does in this worldly life merits praise to God, and so one of us must constantly offer praise. Even more, one must also praise God for every misfortune that afflicts one. This is because what might appear to one to be an adversity might actually be nothing but good. We have an illustration of this fact in the Quranic verse where God *the Most High* commands the men in the believing community to associate kindly with their wives, for if they dislike them, it may well be that they dislike something in which God puts abundant good (*an-Nisa':* 19).

So you praise God because He decrees what is good; whether you like what He decrees or not, you believe that it is good for you because you do not have full knowledge of things, whilst God does. And so, we must praise God for everything that happens in our lives. By doing this, we refer the matter back to God Who created us and Who knows what is best for us.

The opening chapter of the Book, i.e. *al-Fatiha* begins with the verse 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds' (2). A question worth asking here is:

Why did God *the Most High* say, '…Lord of all the worlds'?(1) We say that 'Praise be to God' means praise for divinity because the word 'God' implies 'truly deserving of worship.' Worship is a moral responsibility; and moral responsibilities come from God to His servants. It is as though praise is first and foremost due to God (the Sender of Laws), and then after that, praise is also due to God the Lord Who created us from nothing, and Who sustains us and keeps us from starvation with His provisions. This is because the One Who bestows blessings and favours, might be praised by all people; but the case might be different with praise to the Sender of Laws, as moral responsibility may be difficult for some people. If people knew the value of moral responsibility in life, they would hasten to praise God for His commands and prohibitions because by means of them He has guaranteed the prevention of conflict in people's lives, and allowed their lives to proceed with concordance and harmony. So the first blessing was that God *the Most High* showed us the way to worship Him, and the second blessing is that He is the Lord and Sustainer of all the worlds.

In this worldly life, there are people who obey God, and people who disobey, and there are believers, and non-believers. Those who enter under the bestowal of the divine are the believers; as for the provision of lordliness, all are encompassed by it. We praise God for the bestowal of His Divinity, and we praise Him for the provision of His Lordliness because He is the One Who created, and He is the Lord of the worlds. Nothing in the universe is out of His control, so let the people in this world be content that His favours will continue for them by means of the provision of lordliness. The sun cannot set and then, refuse to rise, and the stars cannot clash with one another in the universe, and the earth cannot refuse to grow crops, and the atmosphere cannot leave the earth and let everyone suffocate.

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(1) The discussion in this paragraph (and references to the topic would be made repeatedly in the book) involves a fine distinction between the concepts of godliness/divinity *(ulouhiyya* in Arabic) and lordliness *(ruboubiyya* in Arabic). These are two attributes of God that should be distinguished from each other. The first *(ulouhiyya)* relates to God as the Deity deserving of true worship and Who has the right to send down laws to govern man's life. On the other hand, *ruboubiyya* denotes the attribute of God as Creator and Sustainer of all the creation.

So God *the Most High* wants to reassure His servants that He is Lord to everything in the universe, and that no force that serves mankind is able to refrain from serving them because God is in control of His universe and all that He created. He is the Lord of the worlds – and this merits praise; for God *the Most High* has prepared for mankind things to serve them, and He furthermore has made man master of the universe. And so the believer should not fear tomorrow – how could he fear, when God is the Lord of the worlds? If he has no food, he is sure that God will provide for him because He is the Lord of all the worlds; and if a calamity befalls him, his heart is assured that God will relieve his distress, and remove his hardship because He is the Lord of the worlds. And if a blessing visits him, he remembers God, and thanks Him for it because He is the Lord of the worlds Who has granted him this blessing. The True Lord is praised because He is the Lord of the worlds, and nothing in His creation is beyond His will. As for the bestowal of divinity, its reward is in the Hereafter. This world is the abode of trial of one's faith, whilst the Hereafter is the abode of recompense. Some people do not worship God; they are equal to the believers with respect to the provision of lordliness in this world, but in the Hereafter, divine bestowal will be for the believers alone. God's blessings will be for the denizens of paradise, and His Bestowal will be for those who believe in Him. God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to put forward the repudiating question as to who has forbidden God's goodly raiment and healthful viands that He has provided for His servants. Then, He commands the Messenger to proclaim that these things are made lawful to the faithful in the life of this world – to be theirs alone on Resurrection Day. Thus, God makes clear His messages to people of knowledge (*al-A'raf:* 32).

Praise be to God not only in this world, but in the Hereafter as well. God is always praised: in this world, for the provision of His Lordliness to all of His creatures, and the divine bestowal to all those who believe in Him; and in the Hereafter for the provision He grants to His believing servants. God relates to us how His believing servants will, in the Hereafter, proclaim their praise to God Who has made good His promise to them, and Who has made the earth as their heritage so that they may dwell in paradise as they please. And how excellent a reward will it be for those who laboured in God's way (*az-Zumar:* 74). Their call in it is ‘Glory be to You, o God’; their greeting in it is ‘Peace!’ and the close of their call is ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds’ (*Yunus:* 10).

By moving to the phrase ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy’ (*al-Fatiha:* 3), we find that another thing that necessitates praise is that God *the Most High* is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy. He grants His bounties in this world to all His servants by the agency of lordliness which is for both the believer and the non-believer, and this is not cut off until death.

God does not veil His bounties from His servants in this world, and God’s blessings or bounties cannot be counted or measured. Despite all the advances in instruments of calculation and computers and so on, we do not find anyone who comes along and says that he will count God’s blessings. This is because one condition of counting is that you should be able to do it to begin with; you cannot count anything unless you have the capacity to enumerate it. As long as it is beyond your capability and your power, you cannot even approach it. For this reason, no one from now until the Day of Resurrection will be able to enumerate God’s blessings because no one can count them.

We also need to pay attention to the fact that the entire universe is perturbed by mankind, and that the subdued world that serves us by compulsion, becomes upset when it sees sinful people. This is because the subjected world goes straight by God’s Guidance by compulsion, and so when it sees mankind, whom it serves, disobeying God, it becomes weary.

Read the Qudsi Hadith if you wish to learn something about God’s mercy with His servants: There is no day upon which the sun rises except that the sky calls out, saying, ‘Lord, permit me to fall upon the son of Adam in smithereens, for he has eaten from Your goodness, and refused to thank You;’ and the seas say, ‘Lord, permit us to drown the son of Adam, for he has eaten from Your goodness, and refused to thank You;’ and the mountains say, ‘Lord, permit us to collapse upon the son of Adam, for he has eaten from Your goodness, and refused to thank You.’ God *the Most High* replies, ‘Leave them, leave them; had you created them, you would have had mercy on them! They are My servants: if they turn to Me in repentance, I am their Beloved; and if they do not turn to Me, I am their doctor.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad*

These are the manifestations of the names *ar-Rahman* ‘the Most Merciful’ and *ar-Rahim* ‘the Dispenser of Mercy,’ and how they have guaranteed for us the continuation of everything that serves us in this universe, despite mankind’s disobedience. They all serve us by means of the agency of lordliness, and they remain in our service by God’s subjugation of them because He is the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy.

Some people might wonder: Are the earth, the sky, and other inanimate objects, and plants and animals, able to talk? We say yes; they have a language of which we are not aware, known only to their Creator. The True Lord *the Most High* informs us that since the early stages of creation, each one of these creatures have had a language: God addressed the sky – and it was but smoke – and the Earth and ordered them to come – willingly or against their will – and they replied that they would come in obedience (*Fussilat:* 11).

So the earth and the sky both understood God, and they replied to Him that they would come willingly. Did God not teach Solomon *peace be upon him* the discourse of the birds, and the language of the ants? Did the mountains not extol God alongside David *peace be upon him*? So every creature of God has its own appropriate senses and even its own emotions. When God *the Most High* spoke about the people of Pharaoh, He said that they perished and left behind gardens, water-runnels, fields, and noble dwellings, and the life of ease in which they used to delight. And God made another people the heirs to what they had left; and neither sky nor earth shed tears over them, nor were they allowed a respite (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-29).

So the heavens and the earth have emotional reactions even to the point of weeping. They did not weep for Pharaoh and his people, but they weep in sorrow when they are parted from a believer who prays and follows God’s guidance. Ali ibn Abu Taleb *God be pleased with him* said: ‘When the believer dies, two places weep for him: one place on earth, and one place in the sky. As for the place on earth, it is the place he would set aside to pray in; as for the place in the sky, it is the place through which his good deeds would rise.’

مَٰلِكِ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾ إِيَّاكَ نَعۡبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسۡتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

Master of the Day of Judgement [4]
It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help [5]
(The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 4-5)

If all of God's blessings deserve praise, being the 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' deserves immense praise because if there were no day of reckoning, those who fill the world with evil, would get away with what they did, and those who remained steadfast to their moral obligations and worship, denying themselves many worldly pleasures to please God, would lose out in this worldly life. But because God *the Most High* is 'Owner of the Day of Judgement,' He established balance in the universe. God's ownership of the Day of Judgement protected the weak and the oppressed and preserved right in God's creation. The thing that prevents this world from becoming a jungle, where the strong prey on the weak, and the oppressors prey on the oppressed, is that, there will be an afterlife, and a reckoning, and that God *the Most High* is the One Who will pass judgement over His creatures.

The upright person benefits others because he fears God, and gives everyone their rights and pardons and forgives, and so everyone around him benefits from his noble character and his allegiance to truth and justice.

On the other hand, a sinful person does harm to the society because no one is safe from his evil, and everyone is affected by his iniquity. For this reason, the 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' provides the balance. You know that the Hereafter awaits those who corrupt the universe, and there, they will not escape no matter how great their power and influence; and so you are totally assured that God's justice will overtake every wrongdoer.

The fourth verse of *al-Fatiha* (which has been hitherto rendered as 'Owner of the Day of Judgement) can, in fact, be read in two different ways in Arabic, both of which are authentic and acceptable: the Arabic word *maalik* (with a long first vowel) is the equivalent for 'Owner;' however, it is alternatively read *malik* (with a short first vowel), which translates as 'King'. God *the Most High* describes Himself in the Noble Quran as being the 'Owner of the Day of Judgement'. The owner of a thing has sole control over it, and no one else has any say in the matter. I own my cloak, and I own my belongings, and I own my house, and I can do what I please with them.

The phrase ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’ then means that God *the Most High* will control the affairs of His servants directly on that day without recourse to any means, and that everything will come directly from God without anyone being able to interfere with it even on the face of matters.

In this world, God gives power to certain people as it may appear to the observer; but on the Day of Resurrection, there will be no appearances versus reality, and everything will come directly from God *the Most High*. For this reason, in addressing the non-believers, God tells them that they treat the Day of Judgement as a lie (*al-Infitar:* 9).

It is as if God *the Most High* created man in this world so that he could go on with his life; but in the Hereafter, there are no means for man to control. In the outward appearance of this world, God gives ownership and control to whomever He wills. Then, let us consider the verse where God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim in His prayers: ‘O God, Lord of all dominion! You grant dominion to whom You will, and take away dominion from whom You will; and You exalt whom You will, and abase whom You will. In Your Hand is all good. Verily, You have the power over everything’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26).

Perhaps the term ‘take away’ should alert us to the fact that no one in this world, would willingly give up dominion, but dominion must be taken from them by force; and it is God who takes dominion from whomever He wills.

Here, we wonder: Does all dominion not belong to God both in this life and the Hereafter? We say that it belongs to God at all times, but God *the Most High* gives vice- regency to some of His creatures, or places them in positions of dominion on earth. For this reason, we find that God *the Most High* relates to us in the Noble Quran the incident of the arrogant infidel who, proud of the kingship that God had granted him, argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord. Abraham said, ‘My Lord is the One Who grants life and deals death,’ and he replied, ‘I too grant life and deal death.’ Abraham then said, ‘God causes the sun to rise in the east, so you bring it up, then, in the west!’ Thereupon the infidel was dumbfounded; God does not give guidance to evildoers and the unjust (*al-Baqara:* 258).

The person who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord was a disbeliever, a denier of divinity. Despite this, he did not acquire dominion of his own accord; rather, it was God *the Glorified* Who gave him dominion. So, God *the Most High* is the One Who gives some of His creatures vice-regency and dominion on earth, and they only appear to have real control. This means that it is only outward dominion that people obtain. A human being might become a king, but dominion does not spring intrinsically from those who rule; rather, it springs from God's command. If it came inherently from those who rule, it would remain with them, and never be taken from them. Ostensible dominion/control is a test for people, and God will hold them accountable for it on the Day of Resurrection. How did they behave and what did they do with it? Ordinary people are also tested as to whether they remained silent under tyrannical rule, and favoured sin; or whether they stood up for justice and truth against tyranny. God *the Most High* does not test people so that He can tell the corrupt from the righteous; He tests them so they can be witnesses over themselves so that none of them can come on the Day of Resurrection and say, 'Lord, if You had given me dominion/control, I would have followed the way of truth and implemented Your guidance.'

Here, a question arises: if God *the Most High* knows everything, why does He have to test people? We say that we need to give an example to explain this delicate concept more clearly – and God has the highest example. All over the world, universities conduct examinations to their students. Are the teachers in these universities – who have taught the students – unaware of what the students know, and if they really need the exam to know the level of performance of the students? Of course not, but exams are conducted anyway so that if a student fails the exam, and complains against his grade, they can show him his paper, and so he will be speechless. If the exam were not held, every student would claim that he deserved the highest grade.

When we read the phrase 'Owner of the Day of Judgement,' we know it means that the One Who possesses this day can act therein however He wills. However, if we read it as 'King of the Day of Judgement' (the alternate reading), the implications of this meaning are greater because an owner *(maalik)* only has control over his own possessions, whilst a king *(malik)* has control not only over his own possessions, but also over the possessions of others because he can issue laws and decrees that allow him to seize or nationalise what other people possess.

Those who read it as ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’ affirm for God that He owns this day, and can act as He pleases with it, without anyone else having any say even in appearances. Those who read it as ‘King of the Day of Judgement’ say that on that day, God *the Glorified* will rule over His creation’s affairs even in the case of those to whom He gave dominion ostensibly in this world. We say that when the Day of Resurrection comes, there will be no owner and no king except God.

God *the Most High* wants to reassure His servants that if they have been subjected to tribulation because of any tyrannical owner or king in worldly life, on the Day of Judgement, there will be no owner or king except Him. When you say ‘Owner’ or ‘King’ of the Day of Judgement, you have two words: ‘day’ and ‘judgement’. A day in our reckoning lasts from sunrise to sunrise, which we call an astronomical day; a ‘day,’ moreover, is a period of time in which events take place. Interpreters of the Quran say that the phrase ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’ should be understood as ‘Owner of the affairs of the Day of Judgement’ because a period of time cannot be owned. We say that this is true according to the confines of human ownership; we cannot own time. We cannot bring back the past, or hasten forth the future. But God *the Most High* is the Creator of time, and He *the Glorified* is not constrained by time or place. Such is the case with His words: ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’: it is not constrained by time or place. In comforting and enlightening His Messenger, God *the Most High* tells him that the disbelievers challenge him to hasten the coming of (God’s) chastisement; but God never fails His promise – and in the sight of your Lord, a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning (*al-Hajj:* 47). God also tells us that the angels and the spirit ascend to Him in a day whose length is fifty thousand years (*al-Ma‘arij:* 4).

If we reflect on these two verses, we will see the meaning of a day with respect to God *the Glorified*. God created time, and so He can create a day that lasts an hour, or a day like the days of the earth, lasting twenty-four hours, or a day that lasts one thousand years, or a day that lasts fifty thousand years, or a day that lasts a million years. This is all subject to God’s will.

The Day of Judgement exists in God's knowledge (potentially), along with all that will take place in it, and Paradise and Hell, and all the creatures that will be brought to account on that day. When He wills that day to be (actually), and the knowledge of it will pass from God's knowledge to the knowledge of His creatures, whether angels, humans, or jinn, He will say to it, 'Be!' God alone is the Creator of this day, and He alone defines all its dimensions. We define a day superficially as being a period of twenty-four hours, divided into night and daytime; but the reality is that night and day are always present on earth, and when the earth moves, every movement spells the end of day in one place, and the beginning of day in another, and the beginning of night in one place, and the end of night in another. So in every moment, a day ends and another begins. If we consider the planet earth as a whole, day never ends upon it, and nor does night. So a day is relative to every place on earth, whilst in reality, it is always present on planet earth.

God *the Glorified* wants to reassure His servants that if they suffer injustice in this world, there will come a day in which there is no injustice. The affairs of this day will belong to God alone, directly and without any means. Anyone who escapes justice and recompense in this world will find it waiting for him in the next; and those who follow God's guidance, and limit their actions in life in accordance with God's teachings, God informs them that there will come a day when they take their reward. The magnificence of the Hereafter is that it will give you Paradise – a delight that will never be taken from you, nor you from it.

It is related that someone once went to a pious man and asked him, 'I want to know: am I one of the people of (attached to) this worldly life, or am I one of the people of the Hereafter?' The pious man said, 'God is so Merciful with His servants that He did not place power for judging them in the hands of others like them. The reckoning of every person is in his own hands. Why is this? It is because you can fool people, but you cannot fool yourself. Your reckoning is in your own hands, and you are the one to know whether you are one of the people of this worldly life or one of the people of the Hereafter.'

The man said, 'How can I do this?' The pious servant replied, 'If a person comes and gives you money, and another comes and takes charity from you, which one makes you happier?' The man was silent, and so the pious servant said, ‘If you are happier with the one who gives you money, you are one of the people of this world; if you are happier with the one who takes from you, you are of the people of the Hereafter.’ People rejoice when others give them what they love. The one who gives me money, gives me (something of) this world; the one who takes charity from me, gives me (something related to) the Hereafter. If you are from the people of the Hereafter, rejoice in the one who takes charity from you more than you rejoice in the one who gives you money. This is why when someone comes to people of virtue, asking them for charity, they would say, ‘Welcome to the one who comes to carry my good deeds to the Hereafter without any payment!’ And they would receive them with joy and a hearty welcome.

God’s words ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’ carry an immense doctrinal issue because they tell us that the beginning is from God, and the end is to God; and since we will all meet God, we must work for this day. For this reason, the believer should not do anything in his life without having God in mind, and thinking of the fact that He will hold him to account on the Day of Resurrection. The non-believer, however, does what he does without thinking of God. The True Lord *the Most High* likens the deeds of non-believers to a mirage in the desert which the thirsty supposes to be water, until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing; instead, he finds God with him, and He will pay him his account in full – for God is swift in reckoning (*an-Nur:* 39).

Such is the case of those who act without thinking of God: they will be surprised on the Day of Resurrection when they discover that God *the Most High*, Who was not in their minds, is actually there, and that He is the One Who will bring them to account.

Furthermore, the concept of ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’ is the foundation of the religion of Islam because those who do not believe in the Hereafter do as they please, and as long as they believe that there is no afterlife, and no account, what do they fear? And for the sake of whom will they limit their actions in life?

Religion in its entirety, with all its devotions, and its system of guidance, is based upon the fact that there will be a reckoning in the Hereafter, and that there will be a day when everyone will stand before God *the Most High*, that He might hold the sinner to account, and reward the acts of obedience. This is the wisdom behind all our acts of faith; if there was no day of reckoning, why would we pray? And why would we fast? And why would we give charity?

All the actions encouraged by the system of divine guidance, have their foundation in belief in that day from which no one will escape, and for which we must all prepare. God *the Most High* called this day, with respect to the believers, a day of great triumph, and this is what causes us to bear difficulties, and strive for martyrdom in God's Way, and spend our money to help the poor and the needy. The basis of all of this is that there will come a day when we stand before God, a day which God *the Most High* has called the Day of Judgement because it is a day when every person will be judged according to whether he worked by his religion or squandered it. Those who believed, and followed the religion, will be rewarded with eternal life in Paradise, and those who denied religion, and refused God's guidance, will be requited for eternity in Hell.

It is of God's Justice that there will be a day of reckoning because some people who act with tyranny and iniquity on earth, might escape the punishment of this world; but will those who have escaped punishment in this world, be able to escape from God's justice? They will never escape. Rather, they will be transferred from a limited punishment to an eternal one, fleeing from punishment by human worldly capacity straight to punishment by God's limitless power in the Hereafter. For this reason, there has to be a day when justice will be done, and where everyone who spread corruption in the land and escaped punishment will be requited. Indeed, it is by God's Will that a person might escape punishment in this world; but they should not think that it is good for them; it is bad for them because they have escaped a limited punishment for an unending one.

Great praise is due to God *the Most High* because He is 'Owner of the Day of Judgement,' and He alone will judge His creation; for God *the Glorious and Exalted* treats all His creatures equally. The basis of God-consciousness is the Day of Judgement.

Before we turn to the next verse in *al-Fatiha*, 'You alone do we worship; and to You alone do we turn for aid' (4), we need first to address an important issue. There are two kinds of vision: the vision of the eye, and the vision of faith, i.e. of the heart. They differ from each other. The vision of the eye requires that the thing be present before you so that you can look at it with your eyes; and this is not a matter of faith, and so you do not say, ‘I believe I see you before me’ because you actually do see me. As long as you see me, this is certainty. The vision of faith, however, is that you believe in something unseen as though you see it before you. This vision is of greater certainty than the vision of the eye because it is a vision of faith and insight – and this is a very important issue. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* relates:

One day, we were with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, when a man came to us wearing clothes of brilliant white, with jet black hair, upon whom were no traces of his having travelled, though none of us knew him. He came and sat right before the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and placed his knees against his, and placed his hand on his thigh, and said, ‘O Muhammad, tell me about Islam.’ The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘Islam (surrender to God) is that you testify that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; and that you perform prayer, and pay the poor-due, and fast Ramadan, and make pilgrimage to the House if you are able.’ He said, ‘You have spoken the truth.’ We were amazed that he asked him and then confirmed his answer. Then he said, ‘And tell me of faith.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘It is that you believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, and the Last Day.’ ‘You tell the truth,’ he said. ‘Now tell me of excellence.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘It is that you worship God as though you see Him; for if you do not see Him, He sees you.’ ‘Now tell me of the Hour,’ he said. He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘The one asked knows no more about it than the asker.’ ‘So tell me of its signs,’ he said. He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘That the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress, and that you will see barefoot, naked, destitute shepherds competing in the construction of tall buildings.’

Then he departed, and I waited a while in silence. Then, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to me, ‘O ‘Umar, do you know who the questioner was?’ I answered, ‘God and His Messenger know better’. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘It was Gabriel: he came to teach you your religion.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

The statement of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him,* 'It is that you worship God as though you see Him; for if you do not see Him, He sees you' is an illustration of the vision of faith in the believer's soul. When a person believes, he must approach all his affairs with a faithful vision so that when he reads a verse about paradise, it is as though he sees the residents of paradise in their enjoyment; and when he reads a verse about the denizens of hell, his body trembles, and it is as though he sees the inmates of hell being tormented.

One day, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saw one of his companions, whose name was Al-Harith *God be pleased with him*, and asked him, 'How are you, Al-Harith?' He replied, 'I have become a true believer.' The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Consider what you say, for every statement has a reality. What is the reality of your faith?' Al-Harith *God be pleased with him* answered: 'I have forsaken this world: I spent my nights awake (in worship), and my days thirsty (in fasting); and it is as though I am looking at the throne of my Lord here before me, and it is as though I see the residents of paradise visiting one another therein, and as though I see the inmates of hell bellowing therein.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O Al-Harith, you know: so be steadfast!'(1)

For this reason, we find that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says, addressing the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, with a rhetorical question: 'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1)

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Kabir and by Abu Na'im in Al-Hilya, and the like of it was narrated by Al-Bayhaqi, and Abu Hilal Al-'Askari in Al-Amthal, and Ibn An-Najjar in At-Tarikh. The Hadith has supporting narrations that lift it to the level of a sound Hadith. Al-Bayhaqi narrated in Az-Zuhd that Al-Harith ibn Malik God be pleased with him related: 'I went to God's Prophet peace and blessings be upon him, who had wrapped his cloak around his neck under his head. I greeted him, and he said to me: 'How are you, O Harith?' I said: 'I am a man of the believers.' He said: 'Consider what you say!' I said: 'Yes, a man of the believers, in truth!' He sat up peace and blessings be upon him, and then said, 'Everything has a reality; what is the reality of this?' I said: 'I abstained from this world: I spent my nights awake, and my days hungry; and it is as though I am looking at the throne of my Lord here before me, and it is as though I see the denizens of paradise visiting one another therein, and it is as though I hear the howling of the denizens of hell therein.' He said: 'You know so be steadfast, O servant whose heart God has enlightened with faith!'*

Some orientalists' lists use this verse in an attempt to find fault with the Noble Quran. God *the Most High* addresses His Messenger: 'Have you not seen…' though the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, so he could not have witnessed it, as he was only an infant–a few days or months old. If God used the expression, 'Do you not know…' we would say that it means that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* could have heard it from someone else because you either obtain knowledge yourself, or someone else gives it to you, i.e. another human being teaches you. But God *the Most High* did not say 'Do you not know…;' He rather, said, 'have you not seen….'

We say that this is a matter of faith. Whatever God *the Most High* says is to be treated like a true sighting for the believer. The Quran is speech whose recitation is an act of worship until the end of time. God's words 'Have you not seen…' means that this vision is continual for all believers who read this verse. As long as God says, 'Have you not seen…,' you see with your faith what you cannot see with your eye. This is the vision of faith which is truer than the vision of the eyes because the eye might deceive its owner, whilst the believing heart will never do this.

In Arabic grammar, the third person is called the 'absent pronoun'. If you say, 'Zayd is here,' this means he is right before you. But if you say 'I met Zayd,' this means that Zayd is absent when you make this statement; you met him, but he is not with you when you talk about him.

So in speech, we have someone present, someone absent, and a speaker. The 'absent' is the person who is not present, or, in other words, the one who we do not see when we are speaking, whilst the 'present' is with us when we speak, and the 'speaker' is the one who does the speaking. All matters of doctrine do not involve direct witnessing or physical seeing; faith in what is unseen gives us the vision of faith, which as we said, is stronger than the vision of the eyes.

In the verses of *al-Fatiha* we read: 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,' and God is unseen, and 'Lord of the worlds' is unseen, and 'the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' is unseen, and 'Owner of the Day of Judgement' is unseen. Judging by the linguistic context, it might seem to be more appropriate to use the discourse of the absent (third) person, and say ‘Him alone do we worship,’ but God *the Most High* altered the context, and changed it from third person to second person, saying, ‘You alone do we worship’. The third absent person has become the second person, directly addressed. Instead of ‘Him alone do we worship,’ we say, ‘You alone do we worship’, and so it became a vision of faithful certainty.

So you are in the presence of God *the Most High*, who showered you with blessings that you see, and that surround you because He is ‘Lord of the worlds;’ and He reassured you of His merciful ordainment, for He is ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy;’ so if you do not praise and worship Him because of His blessings which you feel and live in, then be forewarned of going against His guidance, for He is ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement’.

When the True Lord *the Most High* describes Himself with all these attributes which include the bounties of divinity and the blessings of lordliness, and the mercy that erases sins, and the awe of meeting Him on the Day of Resurrection, we have moved from attributes of the unseen to the station of witnessing. We evoke the majesty of God’s Divinity and the bounties of His Mercy, and His unending blessings, and His all-encompassing command on the Day of Resurrection.

When you read God Almighty’s words ‘You alone do we worship,’ the expression indicates exclusivity, meaning that if I say to a person, ‘I will meet you,’ I might meet him alone, or I might meet him with a group of people. But, if I say ‘You alone will I meet,’ this means it will be an exclusive private meeting.

When we read the verse ‘You alone do we worship,’ we know that God *the Glorious and Exalted* restricts worship to His own blessed Self. If the verse said, ‘We worship You alone,’ this does not give the same meaning because one might say, ‘We worship You alone, and such-and-such alongside you.’ But when you say ‘You alone do we worship,’ using grammatical inversion and placing the grammatical object ‘You alone’ first, you have decisively made it known that worship is for God alone because you cannot use a conjunction and add anything to it. Worship is submission to God *the Most High* under His guidance of commands and prohibitions. Because of this, prayer is the foundation of worship, and prostration is the ultimate act of submission to God because you take your face, the noblest part of you, and place it on the ground where the feet are usually placed. This is the ultimate act of submission to God, and this is done in prayer in public in front of everybody, to announce your submission to God in front of all humanity.

In worship, rich and poor, and old and young, are equal so that all of us cast arrogance and haughtiness from our hearts in front of everyone. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* makes all His servants equal in submission to him, and in announcing this submission.

Thus the verse ‘You alone do we worship’ invalidates worship to other than God and affirms worship to Him alone. That is, we do not worship anyone but God, and no one can ever be joined with Him. So ‘You alone do we worship’ gives exclusivity to the worship of God alone: there is no god but He; and no deity other than He deserves to be worshipped. Let us consider the verse that affirms that had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than God, both (those realms) would surely have fallen into ruin. But glory be to God, Lord of the Throne, above what they utter (*al-Anbiya’:* 22).

In this way, when we say ‘Praise be to God,’ we evoke the things that necessitate praise: God’s blessings, both apparent and hidden. And when we say ‘Lord of the worlds,’ we evoke the blessings of lordliness in His creation, and the subjection of His universe. And when we evoke ‘the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy,’ we evoke mercy and forgiveness, and the repayment of ill with good, and the opening of the door of repentance. And when we evoke the ‘Owner of the Day of Judgement,’ we evoke the Day of Reckoning, and how God *the Most High* will reward us for our deeds. And when we evoke all of this, we say ‘You alone do we worship,’ i.e. we worship God alone; so recognising what is required of us: worship.

Let us pause here for a moment, and discuss what in linguistics they call ‘cause and effect’. If your son wants to pass his exam, he must study. The cause of this act of study is success; it is as though success was born in my mind first, along with everything that it would bring, such as distinction, a certain future, and everything else for which I desire and work.

So the motive comes before action. You evoke success in your mind, and then afterwards you study so that you can achieve success. If you want to travel somewhere, for example, a car is a means by which you can achieve your end; and following the road is another means. The motive that made me leave the house and get in the car and follow the road, however, is that I want to go somewhere, Alexandria for example. The motive here is to arrive in Alexandria: this is what was in my mind first, and then I did what I had to do to achieve it.

God *the Exalted* created us and gave us life in order that we would worship Him, and this is the sole purpose of our existence as God tells us that He has not created the jinns and men but that they should worship Him (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56). So the cause of creation was worship, and creation was carried out in order for worship to become a reality. However, the principle of (cause and effect) does not apply to God's actions: we say that there is no cause that will bring benefit to God *the Exalted* because God has no need for the worlds. However, the cause brings benefit to the creation. God *the Most High* created us to worship Him, but not because this worship would bring Him benefit in any sense, or increase His dominion in the slightest. Our worship only brings us good, in this life and the next.

We should not try to find causes behind God's actions; in fact, those who are commanded to worship are the ones who will benefit from it.

But does 'worship' mean sitting in the mosque and chanting the glorification of God, or is it a system of guidance that applies to all life – in the home, at work, in all earthly endeavours? If God *the Most High* only wanted His servants to pray and chant terms of glorification to Him, He would not have created them with free will; rather, He would have created them compelled to worship Him, like everything else He created except humans and jinn's. God *the Most High* possesses the ability of compulsion, and so He has the ability to compel anything to worship Him, as He *the Exalted* comforts His Messenger saying that perhaps he was wearing himself away with grief because they (the Prophet's people) would not believe; God *the Most High* further states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4).

If God *the Most High* wanted to make us submissive to His Guidance by coercion, no one would be able to disobey Him. God *the Exalted* gave us signs to this reality by placing in our own bodies, and in the events of this world, many phenomena in which we are compelled. The body is under God's compulsion in many regards. The heart beats and stops according to God's will, not ours. The stomach digests, and we know nothing about it. And we have no say in the circulation of blood around our bodies. Many things in the human body are under God's compulsion, and we have no say in their actions. And in those events that befall me in this worldly life, I am under compulsion, and I cannot prevent them from happening. For example, I cannot prevent a car from hitting me, or a plane from burning with me on-board it, or any other of the mishaps that happen by God's ordainment in this world.

So the sphere of free will in my life is limited. I cannot choose the day on which I am born, or who my parents will be, or whether I will be tall or short, or handsome or ugly, and so on. The sphere of free will in my life applies only to matters related to God's Guidance (commands and prohibitions) and whether I will follow it or not. God *the Most High* has the ability, if He so willed, to coerce all His creatures to worship Him; but He wants loving worship from mankind and the jinn, and so He created us with free will and the choice of whether to come to Him or not, and whether to obey Him or not, and whether to believe in Him or not.

So, if you love God, you go to Him freely. You leave that which incurs His wrath out of love for Him, and you do what He requires from you out of love for Him, not compulsion. If your free will leads you to follow God's guidance, you have achieved the level of worship based on love for God, and you have become one of God's free-choosing servants *('ibad),* not only one of His servants/slaves *('abid).* In one way or another, we are all God's servants, and servants are equal in what they are compelled to do; but free-choosing servants are those who voluntarily give up their own free will and accept the responsibilities with which God (their Maker) charged them. For this reason, the True Lord *the Exalted*, in the Noble Quran, distinguishes between slaves and free-choosing servants. He addresses His Messenger saying that if His servants ask him (the Prophet) about Him (God); let them know that He is near; He responds to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls to Him; let them, then, respond to Him, and believe in Him so that they might be following the right way (*al-Baqara:* 186).

And God also describes His loving servants as those who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the ignorant address them, reply with (words of) peace, and who pass the night in the worship of their lord prostrate and standing, and who pray to their Lord to turn away from them the suffering of hell – for its torment is endless: it is indeed an ill abode and resting place (*al-Furqan:* 63-65).

So we see that God *the Most High* gave certain attributes to the believers, calling them ‘servants’ *(‘ibad),* but when He speaks about mankind as a whole, He says ‘slaves’ *(‘abid);* and this is the implied meaning of the term as we find it in the verse that asserts that God never does the least injustice to His creatures (*Al-‘Imran:* 182). (The word used for ‘creatures’ is *‘abid,* literally ‘slaves’).

But someone might argue that we find in the Quran the word *‘ibad* (ordinarily used for loving servants of God) sometimes used to speak of people who strayed from God’s guidance, like in the verse that describes the day when God will gather the heathens and the idols that they worshipped, and He will ask those who were worshipped if they were the ones who led those His servants (using the term *‘ibad)* astray, or did they by themselves stray from the right path (*al-Furqan:* 17).

This statement is about the sinners and the people who strayed, but God calls them *‘ibad* (loving servants). In answer to this, we say that the verse refers to an incident that is going to happen in the Hereafter; and in the Hereafter, we will have lost our free will and we will all be God’s servants because we will be compelled to obey God, the Sole Deity. Human free will comes to an end at the moment of death, and everyone becomes a servant to God, compelled to obey Him, having no choice in the matter.

God *the Most High* gave mankind freedom of choice in matters related to worship in this worldly life, and did not compel or coerce them to do anything, and He did not impose any moral responsibilities on those who do not believe in Him. In fact, it is the believer who imposes these responsibilities on himself, and commits himself voluntarily to God's system of guidance, thereby entering into a pact of faith with God *the Most High*. And so we find that when God delineates moral duties, He does not address all people; He addresses only those who believe in Him. In prescribing fasting, for example, God commands those who believe to perform fasting since it is ordained for them as it was ordained for those before them so that they may attain piety (*al-Baqara:* 183).

And again concerning prayer, God addresses believers instructing them to seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer; for God is with those who are patient in adversity (*al-Baqara:* 153). So God *the Most High* holds no one morally responsible but the believer who enters into a pact of faith with him.

When we place the Master of the Messengers, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the scale of worship, we find that he is at the very peak because He *peace and blessings be upon him* attained the quality of worship that God required from His creation, just as God *the Most High* wanted it. So, to those who say that the goal of all creation was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, we say that this is correct, but in the sense that he *peace and blessings be upon him* realised the ideal of worship required by God *the Exalted*, the worship for which mankind was created. In this way, we recognise the lofty status and rank accorded to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by his Creator.

God *the Most High* joined together the concept of worshipping Him alone and the concept of seeking help from Him alone, in the fifth verse of *al-Fatiha*: 'You alone do we worship; and to You alone do we turn for aid'. That is, we worship no one but You, and we seek aid from no one but You. Seeking aid from God *the Exalted* spares you the degradation of this world because when you seek aid from other than God, you are only seeking the aid of a human being, who, no matter what his influence and power might be, is limited by his human nature.

As we live in a changing world, a strong person might become weak, and an influential person might become, in a single moment, an outcast with no influence. Even if this does not occur, the one you seek the aid of might die, and you might not find anyone else to help you.

God *the Most High* wants to spare the believer this worldly degradation, and so He tells him to seek the aid of the Ever Living, who never dies, and the

Strong, who never becomes weak, and the All-Powerful, from whose control no one can escape. If you seek the aid of God *the Most High*, God will be on your side; and only He can turn your weakness into strength, and your humiliation into honour. The believer will always be facing a greater power than himself because those who wage war against God's guidance are people of power and influence, who love to enslave others. The believer will engage in a struggle with them, and so the True Lord assures His believing servants that He is with them in the struggle between truth and falsehood. And the supplication 'and to You alone do we turn for aid' is akin to the proclamation 'You alone do we worship,' i.e. 'we seek Your aid alone,' and this is a basic principle for life's actions; this is because seeking help from others means that one has made use of and exhausted the means available to him, and failed, and at this moment he must remember that he has a Lord, whom he worships exclusively, and who will not abandon him, and whose aid he must seek. When the personal means run out, there is still the Lord of the means, and He is always there. He never fails to notice anything, and never misses a single whisper in the universe. And so the believer must always turn to heaven, and God *the Most High* will be with him.

ٱهۡدِنَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمَ ٦
صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ غَيۡرِ ٱلۡمَغۡضُوبِ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ٧

Guide us to the straight path [6] the path of those
You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who
have not gone astray [7] (The Quran, *al-Fatiha*: 6 - 7)

After you attain faith in God *the Most High* as God and Lord, and after you have evoked His divine bestowal and His lordly blessings and the overwhelming mercy God shows to His creatures, and after you have declared that there is no deity but God, and after proclaiming 'You alone do we worship,' confirming that worship is for God alone, to whom we ascribe no partner, and aside from whom we worship no other, and after you have declared that you seek God's aid alone: 'and to You alone do we turn for aid;' and having done all this, you have become one of God's servants. God then, teaches you the supplication that all believers hope to achieve. As long as you are one of God's good servants, God *the Glorified* will answer your prayer as He promised: He told His Messenger that when His servants ask him about God, God is close, He answers the prayer of anyone who calls upon Him whenever He calls; so let them respond to Him and believe in Him, that they may be guided to the right way (*al-Baqara:* 186).

The perfect believer should never seek things of this world. Why should he not? It is because true life for man is in the Hereafter; therein is everlasting life, and delight that never leaves you, nor do you leave it. The believer does not ask God to give him a lot of wealth, for example, or that he own a building, for he knows that all of this is temporal, and will end one way or another. Rather, he asks for what saves him from Hell, and takes him to Paradise.

Out of His mercy upon us, God *the Most High* taught us what to ask for, and for this we really need to praise God. The first thing the believer asks for is guidance to the straight path: 'Guide us to the straight way.' Guidance is two kinds: guidance of direction, and guidance of aid. The first kind has been offered to all people; and the guidance of aid is given solely to the believers who accept God's religion. God *the Glorified* has provided the guidance of direction to all His creatures by showing them the way of goodness, and making it clear to them. Now, whoever wants to follow the way of goodness may do so; and whoever does not want to follow it, God will leave them to do as they like.

This general guidance is the basis of God's message. In his system of religious guidance, God *the Glorified* made clear for us, with His commands and prohibitions, what pleases Him and what displeases Him; and He showed us the way to follow if we wished to be guided, and the way that if we followed would make God angry with us and incur His wrath. But did everyone to whom God *the Most High* showed the way of guidance actually follow it? God tells us the story of the tribe of Thamud, to whom He offered guidance, but they preferred blindness to guidance: and so a thunderbolt of shameful suffering fell upon them by their doings (*Fussilat:* 17).

So, there are some people who do not choose the way of guidance, and they do this thanks to the free will that God has given them. If God *the Glorified* had wanted all of us to be guided, none of His creatures would have been able to go against His will. However, He created us with free will so that we would come to Him out of love and desire; He did not coerce us to obey Him. What happens to those who follow the way of guidance, and to those who do not follow it, those who go against God's rule in His universe?

God *the Most High* helps those who follow the way of guidance, makes faith and piety beloved to them and makes obedience to Him beloved to them. He tells us that as for those who have guidance, He will increase their guidance and will cause them to grow in God-consciousness (*Muhammad:* 17).

That is, if anyone chooses the way of guidance, God helps them to follow it and increases their piety and love for the religion. As for those who, when guidance is offered to them, they avoid God's guidance and go against it, God *the Glorified* lets them be, and leaves them to their misguidance: As for anyone who chooses to remain blind to the remembrance of God the Most Merciful, to him God will assign a devil to become his fast companion (*az-Zukhruf:* 36).

God *the Most High* made clear to us the kinds of people who are deprived of the guidance of aid in faith. As mentioned in the Quran, they are of three kinds: The Quran speaks about those who open their hearts to disbelief and who prefer the worldly life to the Hereafter; God does not guide the unbelievers (*an-Nahl:* 107). In another verse we read that people should be pious and God-fearing, for God does not bestow His guidance upon the impious (*al-Ma'ida:* 108).

Also, God *the Most High* relates to us in the Noble Quran the incident of the arrogant infidel who, proud of the kingship that God had granted him, argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord. Abraham said, 'My Lord is the One Who grants life and deals death,' and he replied, 'I too grant life and deal death.' Abraham then said, 'God causes the sun to rise in the east, so you bring it up, then, in the west!' Thereupon the infidel was dumbfounded; God does not guide the evildoers and the unjust (*al-Baqara:* 258). So those who are denied the guidance of aid in faith are the unbelievers, the impious, and the unjust.

Returning to the sixth verse of *al-Fatiha*: 'Guide us to the straight way,' what is a 'way'? It is a road that leads to a destination. Why does the text say that it is a ‘straight way’? Because God *the Glorified* has indicated for us, within His system of guidance, the straight path which is the shortest way to reaching the destination. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and so if you want to go somewhere, the shortest route you can take is the one that has no bends but is rather perfectly straight. Do not think that distancing oneself from the straight path occurs only with a large diversion; rather, the smallest of diversions can lead eventually to a great distance of separation.

It suffices to consider the case of railway tracks. When a train begins to take a course other than its current one, to begin with, it only changes direction by a few millimetres, i.e. the initial change is only very slight. As it goes further, the difference widens more and more, until by the end, the final course is tens or hundreds of kilometres away from the initial one. So any divergence, even if is very slight, will take you very far from the straight path. For this reason, the supplication ‘Guide us to the straightway’ means to the way that has not even the slightest divergence, even a few millimetres – the path that has no incongruity that might lead us away from God’s straight path.

So the believer asks God *the Glorified* to guide him to the shortest path leading to the goal. And what is the goal? It is paradise, and delight in the Hereafter. And so we say, ‘O Lord, guide us and help us to follow the straight path, the path of Your guidance which will take us to paradise without any deviation to distance us from it.’ In a Qudsi Hadith, God *the Most High* says, ‘When the servant says “Guide us the straightway”, God *the Glorified* says, “This is for My servant; and My servant shall have what he asks for.”’

The verse then explains the straightway. It is ‘The way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings.’ What does the expression ‘those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings’ mean? We get the answer in the noble verse that states that those who obey God and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the Prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth, and those who (with their lives) bore witness to the truth, and the righteous ones: and how goodly a company these are! (*an-Nisa’:* 69)

When you read this noble verse, you ask God *the Most High* that you will be with the Prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth, and those who (with their lives) bore witness to the truth, and the righteous ones. That is, you ask God *the Glorified* to make you follow the same path that they followed so that you will be with them in the Hereafter. It is as though you are asking for the highest level of paradise because all of those we have mentioned, have a high station in paradise, and so you ask God *the Most High* to allow you to follow the path in which there is no deviation, which will take you to the highest level of paradise in the quickest possible time.

When we see that God *the Most High* has said, ‘This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asked for,’ we realise that this answer gives you hope in the high life in the Hereafter, and offers you the delights promised by God – not according to human capabilities, as is the case in this world; but according to the omnipotent power of God *the Most High*. If the blessings of this world cannot be enumerated or measured, can the blessings of the Hereafter be enumerated and measured? God *the Most High* asserts that in that (paradise) they shall have whatever they may desire – and there is yet more with God (*Qaf:* 35). That is, you will find everything you ask for in front of you simply by you having desired it and thought of it; and whatever you ask for and whatever you hope for, God *the Glorious and Exalted* has more for you. And so He not only gives you everything you ask for, but also adds to this more of His blessings, blessings that you neither asked for nor even knew of. This is only an analogy to bring the image of these blessings closer to our minds; for within paradise, there are things no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and which have never occurred to any human heart.

Meanings must first exist in the mind before a word is found to express them. This is why there is no word in our languages for those things we are unaware of. For example, we did not have the word ‘television’ until the device was invented and given a fixed definition. The same is true of the airplane. Things come into existence first, and then they are given names. For this reason, the linguistic councils and authorities on language meet from time to time to come up with names for new things that have been invented, and whose purpose is well known.

This being the linguistic rule, there are no words in human language that can express the delights that the denizens of paradise will experience because no eye has seen them, and no ear has heard them, and they have never occurred to any human heart. And so everything we read in the Noble Quran only brings the image of blessings in paradise closer to our minds; it does not give us the reality of what exists therein. So we find that the Noble Quran gives only the 'likeness' of the paradise which the God-fearing are promised – a paradise wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk whose taste never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey cleansed of all impurity; in addition to that, they will have fruits of all kinds, and, on top of all, they will have forgiveness from their Lord. This image, moreover, is brought into contrast with the image of the inmates of hellfire wherein they will live for ever and where they will be given to drink boiling water which will tear their bowels asunder (*Muhammad:* 15).

The verse does not give the reality of paradise; it only gives an example that helps the intellect have a closer image of it; for there are no words in human language that can give us the reality of what paradise contains.

Returning now to the seventh verse of *al-Fatiha*, we have further explanation of the 'straight way.' It is 'not of those with whom you are angry,' that is not of 'Those who have incurred Your wrath, O Lord, by their disobedience, and from whom You withheld the guidance of aid' – those who knew what the religion required, but went against it, and did everything that God forbade, and so incurred His wrath.

The implication of the expression 'not of those with whom you are angry' is the supplication 'O Lord, do not facilitate for us the route that incurs Your wrath,' as it was incurred by those people who disobeyed and flouted God's system of guidance in order to attain temporal power in this worldly life, and to consume the wealth of others wrongfully.

The phrase 'not of those with whom you are angry' is mentioned elsewhere in the Noble Quran, where God *the Most High* speaks about those who deserve a yet worse retribution. They are those whom God has cursed and with whom He has been angry, and whom He has turned into apes and swine because they worshipped the powers of evil: these are yet worse in station and farther astray from the right path (*al-Ma'ida:* 60). This verse was revealed to speak about the condition of the Israelites.

The seventh verse of *al-Fatiha* gives further delineation of the 'straight way': 'nor of those who go astray.' Now, there are those who go astray, and there are those who lead others astray. Those who go astray are those who follow other than God's way, and walk in error, far from guidance and from God's religion. We say 'he has strayed from the path,' meaning that he is drifting aimlessly without knowing the way to get where he wants to go – that is, he has lost his way in the world, and become a follower of Satan, and has strayed far from God's straight path. These are 'those who go astray'. As for those who lead others astray, they are those who are not satisfied merely with straying from God's way and having no guidance in life; rather, they also try to drag other people into error. They tempt people to disbelieve, and to stop following God's Guidance, and to stray far from God's path. Every sinner will bear his sins on the Day of Resurrection, but those who take people astray will carry their own sins and, in addition, the sins of those they misguided. God *the Glorified* describes their case on Resurrection Day: they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray: theirs will be a heavy evil load indeed (*an-Nahl:* 25).

So when you read *al-Fatiha*, you seek refuge with God from being among those who go astray; but God *the Most High* did not mention here those who lead others astray. In explanation to this point, we say that in order to be one who takes others astray, you must first be astray yourself, and so taking refuge from misguidance includes both these conditions. As long as you seek refuge from being astray, you will never be one of those who lead others astray.

We still have to discuss the way we end the Opening of the Book, namely by our saying '*Amen*,' following the example of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who was taught by Gabriel *peace be upon him* to say *'Amen'* after reciting *al-Fatiha*. So, it is of the speech of Gabriel *peace be upon him* to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is not part of the Quran.

The word *'Amen'* means 'answer our prayer, o Lord,' and we say it after we have prayed 'Guide us to the straight way, the way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings.'

The supplication here is for something hoped to be attained, and *'Amen'* is a prayer for something hoped to be attained. The scholars have differed concerning the word *'Amen'* as to whether it is Arabic or not.

Here a question is raised: How could a non-Arabic word enter a Quran that God pronounced to be Arabic? We say that the presence of words whose origin is not Arabic in the Noble Quran does not mean that the Quran is not all Arabic; it means that if the Arabs were to be addressed with it, they would understand it. There were words that had entered the Arabic language before the Quran was revealed which came into general use and gained currency, and so became Arabic (arabicised) to which Arab ears grew accustomed.

The statement that the Quran is 'Arabic' does not mean that it is restricted to those words that are by origin in the Arabic language. Rather, the meaning is that the Quran was revealed in the language that was current and widely used by the Arabs. As long as a word is current for the tongues to utter and for the ears to hear, the generations that encounter it, do not differentiate between it and any other word of a purely Arabic origin. The new words had become Arabic by frequent usage, and when the Quran was sent down, the word was just as often used as any other Arabic word.

Language consists of words used for particular meanings by general agreement so that when the word is used, its meaning comes to mind. The language that we (Arabs) speak is composed solely of nouns, verbs, and particles; nouns are words, verbs are words, and particles are words. Each word has a meaning in itself; but the question is whether this meaning is independently understood or not. For example, if you say 'Muhammad,' we understand this to mean the person with this name, and so it has an independent meaning. If you say *kataba* (wrote), we understand this to mean that he gathered some letters together to be read as a form of writing. But if you say 'what,' which is a particle, there is no independent meaning; and if you say 'in,' this has a prepositional sense, but it does not give us an independent meaning – rather, we must say 'the water is in the glass,' or 'so-and-so is on the horse'. We call those things that have no independent meaning 'particles,' which do not have a clear meaning until something is added to them. Verbs need a particular time, but nouns do not.

Therefore, a noun is something that denotes an independent meaning, and is not contextualised by time, whilst a verb is something that denotes an independent meaning and is contextualised by time; and a particle denotes a non-independent meaning. The sign of an Arabic verb is that it can have the letter *ta'* annexed to it to indicate the doer of the action (subject; like in *katabtu,* I wrote), and this is not possible for a noun (you cannot say Muhammadtu for instance). If you see something that indicates a specific action in a specific time, but you cannot add this *(ta)* letter to it; this means it is a noun with a verbal meaning (*ism fi'* l).

'Amen' is an example of this. It is not a verb, but is rather a noun that has a verbal meaning, which is 'Answer our prayer.' When you hear the word oh, this is also a noun with a verbal meaning, in this case 'I feel pain/sorrow'. When you say *(ouff),* this is a noun with the verbal meaning 'I am displeased.' *'Amen'* is a noun with the verbal meaning 'Answer our prayer.' Sometimes you say it when you are the reader, and sometimes you say it when you are the listener. When you read *al-Fatiha*, you say '*Amen,*' i.e. you call on the Lord to answer your prayer because, due to your strong attachment to the guidance you have prayed for, you are not satisfied by simply praying 'guide us;' you emphasise your prayer by also asking God to answer it. If, on the other hand, you are praying in a group, and you hear the *Imam* (prayer leader) recite *al-Fatiha*, you also say *'Amen'* because the one being led in prayer is a partner in the prayer and is also supplicating. The *Imam* makes the supplication, and when you say 'Amen,' you share in it. For this reason, when Moses *peace be upon him* prayed to God to wipe out the wealth of Pharaoh's people, and destroy them, God *the Glorified* told Moses that their (using the dual pronoun in Arabic) prayer is accepted. Following this, God commanded the twain (referred to in the previous part of the verse) to continue, then both of them, steadfastly on the right way, and not to follow the path of those who have no knowledge (*Yunus:* 89).

The address here is from God *the Most High* to both Moses and Aaron peace be upon them; but Moses *peace be upon him* was the one who made the supplication. Aaron *peace be upon him* just said *'Amen'* to Moses' prayer, and so he was a partner and he shared in it.

The Chapter of

al-Baqara

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

After the chapter of *al-Fatiha* comes the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow) which follows the chapter of *al-Fatiha* in the Quranic text. If we look at the name of this chapter, we find that it certainly captures our attention. This is because the Quran was revealed to an Arab society, and at the time the Quran was revealed, cows were not very familiar to the Arabs, not being amongst the kinds of animals that they knew well at the time.

The name of this chapter is derived from an essential doctrine of this religion, namely the doctrine of resurrection. Belief in resurrection is the basis of this religion, and those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or the resurrection, or the reckoning, will do as they please in this world without fearing any account. As long as there is no resurrection, the world becomes like a jungle, and religion will have no meaning. The essence of worship is the affirmation that the true life is the life of the Hereafter, and that the life of this world is a test and a temporary abode, whilst the Hereafter is the abode of everlasting delight. In this world, delights will leave you or you will leave them; you leave them by dying, or they leave you by being taken from you. As for the life where delights do not leave you and you do not leave them, it is the Hereafter; and so whatever a believer does in this world, he seeks thereby the reward of the Hereafter.

God's system of guidance on earth will take you to Paradise if you apply it, and to Hell (God forbid!) if you contravene it. So faith as a whole is based on belief in the resurrection. The chapter of *al-Baqara* tells us of an experience of the Children of Israel and how they witnessed the resurrection whilst still in this world, when God raised a dead man to life so he could speak and give the name of his murderer, after which he died again.

The story goes that a man from the children of Israel was very wealthy, and had no male son to inherit him, and so his nephew lay in wait for him at night and killed him, and then dumped his body by a neighbouring village so that the inhabitants of this village would be suspected of the murder. In the morning, the body was found by their village, and his people accused them of the crime. They denied it, but the victim's relatives believed them to be guilty. The argument became fierce, and so they decided to take the matter to their prophet Moses *peace be upon him*. They told him of their argument, and asked him to ask God to reveal the murderer's identity. The story is told in the chapter of *al-Baqara.*

Moses said to his people that God bids them sacrifice a cow and they said, 'Are you making a jest of us?' He said, 'May God keep me from being one of the ignorant.' They said, 'Call on your Lord for us that He would make plain to us what she is.' He said, 'God says that she is a cow neither old nor young, but of the middle age between the two: so do therefore what you are bidden.' They said, 'Call on your Lord for us, that he would make plain to us what her colour is.' He said, 'God says that she is a fawn-coloured cow; her colour is very bright; she pleases the beholders.' They said, 'Call on thy Lord for us that He would make plain to us what cow it is – for to us all cows are alike – and verily, if God pleases, we shall be guided rightly.' He said, 'God says that she is a cow not worn by ploughing the earth or watering the field, sound, no blemish in her.' They said, 'Now you have come with the truth.' Then they sacrificed her; yet they had barely left it undone. And when they slew a man, and strove among themselves about him, God brought to light what they had hidden. For God ordered them to strike the corpse with part of it. So God gives life to the dead, and shows you his signs, that you may understand (*al-Baqara:* 67-73).

So we see that God commanded the children of Israel to slaughter a cow; and if only they had just taken any cow, and struck the dead man with it, he would have come back to life and given the name of his murderer. But instead of immediately obeying God's commandments, they first of all were incredulous, saying, ‘Are you making a jest of us?’ And so they kept making things harder for themselves by asking for more and more details of the cow until the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* gave them specifications for its age, colour and other things.

God brought this about for a wise reason, which serves to highlight another doctrinal matter. There was once a pious man of the children of Israel who would try his utmost to ensure that all his money was lawfully and righteously earned, and who always sought God’s favour in everything he did. When his death approached, all he owned was a calf, and his son was still an infant. The man did not know in whose charge he should leave the calf, which was all he had to leave behind for his son and his wife, and so he sought aid from God, supplicating, ‘Lord, I leave this calf in your trust; keep it safe for my son until he grows up.’ He could not find anyone in whose trust he could leave his son except God. Then he said to his wife, ‘I find no one more trustworthy than my Lord, and so I have entrusted this calf to Him.’ His wife asked him where the calf was, and he replied, ‘I let it go free in the pasture,’ and then he passed away.

The son grew up, and his mother told him what his father had done. He replied, ‘And how shall I find this cow to bring it back?’ His mother said, ‘Your father left the cow in the care of the Creator of the universe; say: ‘I trust in God,’ and go search for it.’ The son prayed, ‘O God, Lord of Abraham and Jacob, return to me that which my father left in Your trust.’ Then he went out to the fields, and there he found the cow. And this cow proved to be the one which had been described to the children of Israel who went to buy it. The son told them he would only sell it for the amount of gold that would fill its skin, and so this is what they paid him.

And so we see that if a father is pious, God will protect his children, watch over them and make things easy for them. God affirmed this fact in the chapter of *al-Kahf* when the righteous man (*Al-Khidr peace be upon him*) came and rebuilt the wall which protected the treasure belonging to the two orphan boys whose father had been a pious man (*al-Kahf:* 82).

And so in accordance with the same Divine wisdom, the pious man left all he had in God’s care and so God blessed his son, and when he grew to manhood he found great wealth waiting for him.

When they had slaughtered the cow, they struck the dead man with a part of it as God had commanded them to do, and the man came to life and uttered the name of the one who had killed him, and then returned to death again. And so the chapter became known as the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow) for its affirmation of an essential religious doctrine, namely the resurrection.

As for the fact that the Quran thus begins with a chapter revealed in Medina rather than in Mecca, this is out of the chronological order of the revelation, yet we say that we must first understand what it means for a chapter to be Meccan or Medinan. Mecca and Medina are two sacred places; the former bore witness to the beginning of the Message and the first revelations of the Quran to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the latter was the place to which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated. When we say that a chapter or a verse of the Noble Quran is Meccan or Medinan, we must be aware of several things the first of which is the circumstances which immediately preceded its revelation, secondly the place where it happened, and thirdly the time when it was revealed. Every action has its time and its place, and it involves the doer and the receiver of the action and the cause and the ability to perform the action.

With respect to the revelation of the Noble Quran, the active agent (doer of the action) was God and its passive agent (receiver of the action) was the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the place was either Mecca or Medina; and so the Noble Quran was revealed at specific times and places, and for specific circumstances. The Quran is the means of man’s guidance to God’s way, and God has placed in the Quran a Divine embodiment of all the messages God had sent to humanity, and so the revelation of the Quran completed the Divine Revelation, and spelled out the coming of the final religion which would remain as the complete guide for the whole world until the Day of Resurrection. The Noble Quran included the story of the creation of the heavens and of earth, the creation of mankind and the stories of the Prophets and Messengers who had come before the Noble Quran was revealed restoring what had been lost from their accounts and correcting what had been corrupted so that they again would be true to what the Messengers brought from God, abrogate everything in the previous messages that the hands of men had corrupted and correct all the human words that had been added to God’s guidance, and the falsifications and lies that had been ascribed to it, and restore all that had been concealed from people by the religious men of old, Jewish rabbis and Christian monks.

It exposed every corruption, concealment, alteration or addition made by human hands to God’s religion as revealed in the previous messages, and then added to this God’s system of guidance; so the Noble Quran became the complete source of guidance for the worship of God on earth including within it all the Divine Guidance from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection.

Scholars differed over some verses as to whether they are Meccan or Medinan. Those who consider time as the essential criterion consider that all the chapters of the Quran that were revealed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* after the emigration to Medina are Medinan even if they were revealed in Mecca. Those who consider place to be the essential criterion, however, consider that every chapter revealed in Mecca is Meccan, and every chapter revealed in Medina is Medinan, irrespective of whether the revelation took place before the emigration or after it. The cause for this difference is that some chapters were revealed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was in Mecca after the emigration.

We say that this does not constitute a serious rift between the Muslim scholars as some would like to imply; rather, each side has considered the matter in a different way, some of them considering it from the point of view of place and others from the point of view of time. The scholars have not differed over the actual chapters or verses of the Quran.

If we look at the chapter of *al-Baqara*, we find that it was one of the first chapters to be revealed in Medina, and that it has some characteristics of both the Meccan and Medinan Revelations. The main characteristic of the Meccan chapters of the Noble Quran is that they focus on matters of doctrine. This is because the Meccan chapters and verses were revealed, whilst the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was confronting idol-worshippers and pagans- people who did not believe in any kind of religion- and a number of the people of the Book whose link with their religion had become weak because they had neglected and altered what their messengers had said. The Quran had to address all of those people, and tell them that they were upon falsehood, and that they worshipped gods that could offer neither help nor harm, gods fashioned from the lowest level of existence on earth, that is from mere stones, when God had singled out mankind and made them His vicegerents on earth.

The Quran also had to tell those people that there was a life after death, and that Paradise and Hell existed and that true life is not that of this world but rather of the Hereafter. The Quran also had to warn them about God's punishment, and about the day they would meet Him, an awesome day from which none of them could hope to escape. It also had to alert them to the signs of God inherent in the universe which proved that He was the Maker and Creator. Also, it had to answer the questions posed by the Jewish scholars, which were posed as legitimate questions when in reality they were attempts to attack Islam.

Those Jews imagined that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might invent something on his own accord and so make a mistake and slip; and the Quran came to make all men equal so that rich men are neither better for their wealth, nor poor men will get a lesser reward because of their poverty, and that all would be equal before God like the teeth of a comb.

This was the essence of the Message in Mecca: Belief that there is no god but God *the Glorified* and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and strengthening the resolve of the believers at a time when they were few in numbers, weak and oppressed.

In order to make their faith firm, it was necessary to constantly remind them that God was with them, and that if they were destined to martyrdom, they would enter paradise without any reckoning, and that if they died as Muslims they would enter paradise, and that those who remained disbelievers would be punished in hell, and that every hardship undergone in God's cause will be rewarded in the afterlife so that they could bear the hardships and persecution with patience.

If we now consider the Medinan society, we see another situation with which Islam was confronted by disbelievers and idolaters, and by the Jews who had falsified the Torah; and by a new adversary in the form of the hypocrites. In Mecca the enemy had been uninformed; but in Medina, Islam faced an informed enemy, the hypocrites. There were no hypocrites in Mecca because no one would try to flatter the weak and downtrodden hoping to gain some advantage with them; and who in Mecca would have bothered to claim to be a believer whilst secretly remaining a disbeliever, thereby exposing himself to the persecution and abuse the believers had to face? Yet in Medina, when Islam became strong and had its own state, hypocrisy began to appear in the community. God tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that among the Arab Bedouins around them there are hypocrites; and that some of the people of Medina have become staunch in hypocrisy; the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* does not know them, but God knows them, and He will chastise them twice, and then they will be given over to great chastisement (*al-Tawba:* 101).

So, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* encountered a new kind of adversary in Medina when he entered into a struggle with the Jews and the hypocrites. Apart from the issues of the Oneness of God and the retort to the hypocrites and Jews, there was also the matter of the new Islamic society, and the need to educate this society so that it could pass on the Message. There was now a state, and there would be military campaigns, and there was a law composed of commandments and prohibitions.

None of this had existed in Mecca, and so the revelation in Mecca was mostly confined to matters of doctrine and eschatology, the reward awaiting the believers in the Hereafter and the punishments awaiting the disbelievers.

The verses revealed in Medina were thus concerned with laws, the affairs of the Muslim society, human interaction and how to handle the hypocrites; yet the Medinan revelation did not neglect doctrine, but rather emphasised it. And so when Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to review the Quranic text with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and arrange it in the order we know today, Islam had spread, and many people had embraced it, and so the first thing those Muslims needed to know was the rules of their religion and what they had to do and not to do.

God wanted to teach the Muslims who had accepted that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the rules of their religion. The doctrine had been established; what was left was for us to practice the religion, and keep to its guidance of commandments and prohibitions.

The chapter of *al-Baqara* included an expression of the strength of Islam, and the wisdom of the Quran and the teachings God imparted to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; it included the story of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*, the first man, the story of Abraham *peace be upon him* and his search for true faith, and the story of how he built the Holy *Ka'ba,* and it focused on the Jews in view of their being the fiercest opponents of Islam, as God tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will find out that the people most hostile to those who believe are the Jews and those who join other gods with God (*al-Ma'ida:* 82).

The chapter of *al-Baqara* also imparted many sacred laws, mentioning the rules on fasting, pilgrimage, wine, usury, embezzlement, marriage, divorce and child-suckling. It also defined the proper form of financial transactions in Islam. Islam did not need to present these rules in Mecca because there was not yet a Muslim society that was in need of them.

الٓمٓ ١

***Alif. Lam. Mim* [1] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 1)**

The chapter of *al-Baqara* begins with these three separately pronounced Arabic letters: *'Alif. Lam. Mim.'* These Arabic letters all stand alone, which mean they are all pronounced individually with their names, not sounds. Every letter has both a name and a sound, and when people speak they use the sounds of the letters, not their names. If you say 'write', you are pronouncing the sounds of the letters, whilst if you want to spell it out you say W-R-I-T-E. Only people who have learned to read and write can say the names of the letters, whilst those who have never studied will only be able to say the sounds of the letters, not their names. Perhaps this is the first thing that catches our attention here, since the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, unable to read and write, and so he could not have had any knowledge of the names of the letters. And so for him to come and speak the names of the letters is a miracle from God, and a sign that this Quran was Divinely revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had learned to read and write, it would have been a simple matter for him to utter the names of the letters; but go to any illiterate person who has never been educated; he will be able to utter the sounds of the letters, and say, ‘book’, and ‘cup’, and so on, but if you ask him to spell these words he will not be able to say that the word ‘book’ is made of the letters B, O, O, and K. These letters are therefore, proof that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly given a Message by his Lord, and that this Quran was a Divine Revelation from God.

We find that some of the cryptic letters which begin certain chapters of the Quran are read with their names and the very same letters form words in other chapters when they are read with their sounds. For example, if we read the letters *‘Alif. Lam. Mim’* which are at the start of the chapter of *al-Baqara* according to their sounds, we get the Arabic word alam (did/have… not?) which is the first word of the chapter of *ash-Sharh*, where God comforts His Messenger by saying, ‘Have we not opened up your heart for you’.

And again at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Fil*: ‘Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?’

What would have made the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* say the names of the letters *Alif. Lam. Mim* at the beginning of the Chapter of *al-Baqara*, and yet pronounce them with their sounds to make a word at the beginning of the chapters of *ash-Sharh* and *al-Fil*? The only explanation is that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* heard them from God in this way just as Gabriel *peace be upon him* conveyed them to him. So the basis of learning the Quran is that it must be heard from another; you cannot recite it until you have heard it, in order that you know to read these three letters by their names and so say *Alif. Lam. Mim,* and not by their sounds and so say alam even though they are written in Arabic in exactly the same way. And so you must receive the Quran by oral transmission from a scholar before you can recite it yourself. The thing that makes it difficult for people is that they did not bother to sit with a scholar or listen to a reciter, and then they want to read the Quran as though it is like any other book. We say no; the Quran is special, and is not like any other book you read; for sometimes a letter should be read by its name, and sometimes by its sound, and you cannot know which is which without listening to someone recite the Quran.

The foundation for reciting the Quran is that, in recitation, it is connected, not broken by intervals, and so when, for instance, you read the end of the chapter of *Yunus*, which reads *wa huwa khayr ul-hakimin* (for He is the best of all judges) (*Yunus:* 109), the word (*hakimin*) (judges) is not written with a sign for a pause, but rather, you read its full Arabic vowel ending which is connected in recitation to the beginning of the next chapter: *bismillahi 'r-rahmani 'r-rahim* (In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy). If it was to be read with a pause, there would be a *sukoon* (sign for a pause) on the last letter of the word *hakimin.*

So every verse in the Noble Quran is connected to the next- all except the chapter openings composed of individual letters which are supposed to be recited with pauses. At the start of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, you do not read *Alif. Lam. Mim,* with a *damma* vowel point on it (as a full word), but rather, you read it '*Alif*' with no vowel but with a pause sign, then *'Lam'* with no vowel but with a pasue sign, then *'Mim'* with no vowel but with a pause sign so that every letter stands separate from the other, even though pauses are not found anywhere else in the whole Noble Quran, even at the ends of the chapters.

There are chapters in the Noble Quran which begin with a single letter such as*: Sad; Wal Qur'an dhil-dhikr* (*Sad;* by the Quran full of remembrance) (*Sad:* 1)*; and Nun; wal qalami wa ma yasturoun* (*Nun*; by the pen, and all that they write with it) (*al-Qalam:* 1).

We notice that in these cases, the letter is not considered a separate verse in its own right, whilst *'Alif, Lam, Mim,'* in the chapter of *al-Baqara* is a verse in itself, as are '*Ha, Mim.' 'Ain, Sin, Qaf,*' (*ash-Shura:* 1-2) although they are all cryptic letters. There are chapters which begin with five letters, like '*Kaf, Ha, Ya, Ain, Sad,'* (*Maryam:* 1), and chapters which begin with four, like '*Alif, Lam, Mim, Sad'* (*al-A'raf:* 1) and chapters that begin with four letters which do not constitute a separate verse, like '*Alif, Lam, Mim, Ra'* (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) which are part of the same verse as the words which follow it, and are connected to them when recited. Yet there are also chapters that begin with only two letters which do constitute a separate verse, like *'Ya, Sin'* (*Ya Sin*: 1), and '*Ha, Mim'* at the beginning of the chapters of (*Ghafir:* 1) and (*Fussilat:* 1), and '*Ta, Sin'* (*an-Naml:* 1), all of which are individual verses in their own right, and are not recited connected to the verses that come after them. This shows that the cryptic letters which begin some chapters of the Quran are not all governed by a single rule.

'*Alif, Lam, Mim'* is a verse composed of three letters which is found at the beginnings of six chapters, namely *al-Baqara*, *Al-'Imran*, *al-'Ankabut*, *ar-Rum*, *as-Sajda* and *Luqman*. However, *'Alif, Lam, Ra'* are also three letters, but in none of their occurrences do they form a separate verse, but rather, they all are parts of the opening verses of four chapters, namely *Yunus*, *Yusuf*, *Hud* and *Ibrahim*. *'Alif, Lam, Mim, Sad'* are four letters, and they occur as a separate verse in the opening verse of the chapter of *al-A'raf*. On the other hand, '*Alif, Lam, Mim, Ra'* are also four letters, but they constitute a part- not all- of the first verse of the chapter of *ar-Ra'd*. So there is no general rule here, but rather, each instance of these letters has its own unique occurrence.

If you ask what these letters mean, we say that the question itself is not correct because the meaning of individual letters is only sought in Arabic linguistics if the letter is also a preposition or particle (together known as (*huruf al-ma'ani*) meaning'the letters which have meanings'). Letters in Arabic are of two kinds: alphabetical letters and particle letters. Alphabetical letters have no function except to indicate a sound, whilst particle letters have meanings such as fi (in), indicating spatiality; *min* (from), indicating start/ origin, *ila* (to) indicating end/destination; and *'ala* (on) indicating above-ness; these are all letters which have meanings.

If the letters that begin some chapters of the Quran are not governed by the general principle of connection, each one being pronounced by itself and followed by a pause, there must be a reason for this. First of all, let us consider the statement of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Whoever reads a single letter of the Quran earns a credit for a good deed; and good deeds are rewarded tenfold. I do not say that *'Alif, Lam, Mim'* is a letter; but rather, '*Alif*' is a letter, '*Lam*' is a letter, and '*Mim'* is a letter.'[1]

And so they are given in the Quran as separate letters so that we know when we worship God by reciting the Noble Quran, that we have a reward for every single letter. When we recite *bismillahi* '*r-rahmani*' *r-rahim* (In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy), we have a reward for the b and for the s and for the m in the first word alone which makes three good deed credits for a single word from the Noble Quran – and good deeds are rewarded tenfold. And so when we recite *'Alif, Lam, Mim'*, though we do not know their meaning, we know that the Quran gives us a reward for every letter we recite whether we know its meaning or not; and God may have placed in these letters which we do not understand, a great reward which is unknown to us, and He wants us to gain this great reward by reciting them.

The Noble Quran is not only miraculous and inimitable in its rhetorical style, but it also presents miracles in every sphere the human mind can envisage. Anyone who reflects and thinks deeply on God's Words will find miracles in the Noble Quran; those who study rhetoric will find rhetorical miracles; those who study medicine will find medical miracles; botanists will find miracles in the Noble Quran, and so will astronomers, and so on.

If any of us wishes to know the meaning of these letters, we should not consider them according to our own human nature, but rather should seek out what God intended by them. Our own abilities are disparate, and our understandings are limited. We all possess keys to understanding which function according to the breadth of our knowledge; some of us have a simple key which work with a single turn, while others may turn twice, and others three times; but the one who has knowledge possesses all the keys, or possesses a master key which unlocks every door.

It is not proper for us that we exhaust our minds to come to an understanding of what these letters mean. In our own human condition, we sometimes need to use letters which have no meaning at all for other people, although they represent essential things to us. This is exactly the case; for example, the secret

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in (Fada'il Al-Quran)*

codes the military use which to us are meaningless, whilst for those who use them they are a matter of life and death. So accept the words of God as you understand them, and accept the cryptic letters that you do not understand according to what God intends by them, for God decreed that their ultimate meaning remains with Him in the realm of the Unseen.

The Noble Quran is not completely uniform and monotonous, and this is in order for us to be alerted to things as we recite it, or write it down. For example, the phrase *bismaillahi 'r-rahmani 'r-rahim* (In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy) is written without the letter *alif* (ordinarily the first letter of the word *ism*, (name)) between the particle *bi* (in) and the of the word *ism* (name). Yet elsewhere, we find the word is written with the *alif*, as is the case in the verse: *Iqra' bismi rabbika lladhi khalaq* (Read in the Name of your Lord, Who has created) (*al-'Alaq:* 1).

And sometimes the word *tabarak* (blessed) is written with a plain *alif,* whilst other times it is not (although the pronunciation is the same). If the script of the Quran was supposed to be monotonous by nature, they would all be written in the same way; but they are written in this way in order that the Quran would be miraculous in both its written words and in its utterances.

To those who wonder about the wisdom of beginning certain chapters with these letters, we say that God has a wise reason for this whether we understand it or not. The Quran was revealed to an Arab people, amongst whom were both believers and disbelievers; yet we have never heard that any of them criticised the separate letters that begin certain chapters. This shows that they must have understood them with their pure Arabic sensibilities; if they had not understood them, they would have criticised them.

I advise those who recite the Noble Quran as an act of worship not to spend a lot of effort thinking about the meaning; as for those who read the Quran to reflect on it, they should stop and consider the meaning of each word. If you recite the Quran as an act of worship, read it by the secret God has placed therein. If you sit down and search for the meaning, you will end up restricting the meaning of the Noble Quran to your own limited knowledge, and you will take the meaning imperfectly because of the human imperfect nature. Rather, recite the Quran by the secret God has placed in it.

If we had to search for the true meaning of every word in the Noble Quran, we would thereby exclude the illiterate, and those who have not studied Arabic in depth, from reading it. Yet you can find illiterate people who cannot read a single word but have memorised the entire Quran. If you ask how this is possible, we say it is possible because of the secret God has placed therein.

Speech is a medium of conveying understanding between the speaker and the listener. The speaker is the one who begins, whilst the listener may be surprised by the speech because he did not know what the other would say. The listener might be preoccupied with something else, and so miss the first thing the speaker says. And so we use certain expressions to capture the listener's attention, expressions which serve no purpose other than to alert him that we will say something.

Since we do not understand the meaning of these cryptic letters, this shows that the meanings and miracles of the Noble Quran are unlimited. This is because the Quran is God's speech, and speech is an attribute of the speaker; therefore, no human understanding can reach the limits of the meanings of the Noble Quran, but can only come closer to them to a certain degree. God's speech is one of His attributes, an attribute whose perfection knows no bounds.

So if you claim that you understand everything in the Noble Quran, you will surely be restricting the meaning of God's speech to the limits of your own knowledge. And so these letters would come to astonish you, so that you know you can never limit the meanings of the Quran to the bounds of your own knowledge.

Just because a person does not understand something does not mean he cannot benefit from it. An unsophisticated country person can benefit from electricity and television and satellite broadcasts, though he knows nothing about how any of them works. Could it not be, then, that God has given us these letters in order that we benefit from their secrets, and gain the blessings that God has placed within them whether the believer knows what these letters mean or not?

The bestowal and wisdom of God are beyond the understanding of any human being. If one wanted to use his intellect to delve into the meaning of these letters, he would find something new every day. Scholars have spent a lot of time and effort investigating this matter, and every scholar has gained from these letters according to the purity of his soul. None of the scholars has ever claimed to have found the true meaning of these letters, but rather, each of them says, ‘God knows best what He meant.’ And so one scholar, for example, said that if you take the letters (from different chapters) *Alif, Lam, Ra, and Ha, Mim, Nuun*, you will find that they spell out the word *ar-Rahman* (The All-Merciful), one of the Names of God. To this, we say that this cannot possibly give us a general understanding of the letters that begin some Quranic chapters; but what makes you tire yourself in searching for the meaning of these letters in the first place?

If God, who revealed the Quran, wanted us to understand what these letters meant, He would have simply worded them in a way which gave a direct meaning, or would have explained their meaning to us elsewhere. For example, one of the scholars once said that ‘*Alif, Lam, Mim’* means ‘I am God, I hear and see.’ To this scholar, we say: If God wanted to say this; there was nothing to stop Him simply saying it directly with these words so that everyone would understand it. There must be a secret behind these letters, one of the secrets that God wants us to benefit from by reading them, without necessarily understanding their meaning.

We must be aware that just as sight has its limit, and hearing has its limit, and touch, taste and smell have their limits, so too the human mind has limits of how much knowledge it can attain, and that there are realms beyond the human mind, which it cannot attain.

When one reads the Quran and comes to the cryptic letters at the start of some chapters, one should say, ‘This is beyond the limits of my mind.’ This does not mean that the door to any further investigation has been closed; for if we ourselves do not know something, we must recognise the limits of our capabilities in the presence of the capabilities of our Creator which have no limits.

Some matters of faith can be understood, whilst others cannot. The prohibition of pork or alcohol is not something we postpone obeying until we understand the wisdom behind it; rather, we obey because of our belief that as long as God has forbidden them, they are forbidden to us. And so the

Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘If you understand something, act upon it; if you cannot comprehend it, have faith in it.’(1)

And God tells His Messenger that it was He Who has sent down to him ‘The Book.’ Some of its signs/verses are of themselves perspicuous; these are the basis of the Book, and others are allegorical. But they, in whose hearts is illness, follow its figures, craving discord, craving an interpretation; yet none knows its interpretation but God. And those stable in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it: It is all from our Lord.’ But none will bear this in mind, save men endowed with insight (*Al-‘Imran:* 7).

So our lack of understanding of allegorical verses does not preclude our benefiting from the secrets God placed in His Book; for we benefit from the secrets of God’s Book whether we understand them or not.

ذَٰلِكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبُ لَا رَيۡبَۛ فِيهِۛ هُدٗى لِّلۡمُتَّقِينَ ٢

This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt,
containing guidance for those who are mindful of God [2]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 2)

In the second verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God describes the Noble Quran as *al-kitab* (literally ‘the book’). The word ‘Quran’ means something which is read or recited, whilst *kitab* (from an Arabic root meaning writing) implies something which is not only memorised by heart but also written down on paper, and which will be preserved until the Day of Resurrection. Referring to the Quran as ‘the Book’ (*al-kitab*) with the definite article distinguishing it from all the books of this world, and from all the other Divine scriptures that were revealed before it. The Quran is the Book that encompasses all the laws of Heaven from the first Revelation until the Day of Resurrection, and this affirms the exalted status of the Quran, its uniqueness and its Divine nature, and it affirms the Oneness of the Creator, for since the dawn of history scriptures were revealed to the previous nations bearing guidance from above, yet each scripture and each message came for a particular time and place, and fulfilled its purpose for a limited period of time and a specific group of people.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Sa‘d in his (AT-Tabaqat Al-Kubra)*

The Message of Noah *peace be upon him* was for his people, as were those of Abraham, Lot, Jethro (Shu‘aib) and Saleh *peace be upon them*. Each of these messages had its own specific time in which to fulfil its purpose in life, up to the time of the coming of the Book, the Noble Quran, which embodied God’s guidance in its entirety. And so in the Divine scriptures that came before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it was foretold that a messenger would come bearing the final message for the world as a whole, and that all who believed in Divine guidance must follow him. God describes them as those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah and in the Gospel that are with them (*al-A‘raf:* 7).

The Quran is known as the ‘Book’ because it cannot be altered or corrupted. God entrusted the previous scriptures to mankind, but they forgot parts of them, and corrupted what they did not forget and added human speech to them and falsely ascribed it to God. The Noble Quran, however, is protected from alteration by Creator Himself Who asserts that it was He Who sent the ‘Warning’ and that He is its Guardian (*al-Hijr:* 9).

This means that no one should have any doubt in this Book because the guidance God placed in it has been protected from the moment it was revealed, and will be preserved until the coming of the Hour (the end of time) by the Power of God. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says that ‘…there is no doubt about it; it is guidance to the God-fearing’ (*al-Baqara:* 2).

The miraculous and inimitable nature of the Noble Quran lies in its rhetorical style, its facts, its signs/verses, the stories it tells of the prophets of old, the corrections it makes to the corrupted Torah and Gospel, and the knowledge it brings of things which mankind had no knowledge of then, and things mankind still has no knowledge of now. All of this makes the Quran something which cannot be doubted, for if the jinn and men worked together, they would not be able to reproduce a single verse of the Quran. And so when we contemplate the Quran’s style, we will find that it truly cannot be doubted, because no one could reproduce even a single verse, let alone the entire Quran.

So this ‘Book’ is exalted above all other books, and beyond the comprehension of mankind. It sheds light on the signs of the universe, and the signs of Divine Guidance; and in every age more of its miracles come to light. The word ‘Book’ with which God describes the Quran marks it out as distinct from all the other Divine scriptures, and alerts us to many notions which serve to outline for us some of the foundational principles of the Divine Guidance which this Book came to convey unto us. The first of these foundational principles is that the revelation of this Book necessitates that we praise God for it. We find in the chapter of *al-Kahf* that all praise is due to God Who has sent down this Book to His servant, and has not made it tortuous: a Book that is unerringly straight, meant to warn of a severe punishment from Him, and to give to the believers who do good works the glad tidings that they shall have a goodly reward (*al-Kahf:* 1-2).

God alerts His servants to the fact that the revelation of the Quran to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* merits praise from all mankind because it contains Divine guidance and mercy from God to His servants, glad tidings of paradise and the way to reach it, and warnings of hell and what leads to it. These warnings in themselves are a mercy from God to His creatures because if He does not forewarn His servants, they are likely to fall into things deserving chastisement, and so may end up being cast into endless torment. And so the Book that came to tell them what causes God’s displeasure – thus enabling them to avoid it – was a great mercy that merits praise because it showed us all the way to salvation and avoiding hell. If God *the Glorious and Exalted* had not revealed this Book containg Divine guidance, people would not have known the way to reach paradise, and none of them would have been deserving God’s favour and delight in the Hereafter.

We also find another affirmation in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, namely that it is not possible for anyone to make any alteration in God’s Book, as God *the Glorious and Exalted* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to convey whatever has been revealed to him of his Lord’s Book; there is nothing that could alter His words; and he can find no refuge other than with Him (*al-Kahf:* 27).

God also tells us that this Book came for the good of the people, and the good of His servants, and that God has no need for His creatures; He can force whomever He wills to obey Him, and none of His creatures can go against His Will in His universe. He *the Exalted* comforts His Messenger saying that the verses revealed to him are signs of the lucid Book; perhaps he was wearing himself away with grief because they (the Prophet's people) would not believe; God further states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara':* 2-4).

And God says that He does not need to take an oath to prove to us that every word of the Quran is from Him, exactly as Gabriel *peace be upon him* conveyed it to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: He does not need to swear by the positions of the stars, which is indeed a most solemn oath if people only knew it, that this is a truly Noble Quran, written in a well-guarded Book which none but the pure can/should touch: a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds (*al-Waqi'a:* 75-80).

The True Lord then affirms to us another truth about this Book that came as a guide for mankind on earth. He made it clear to us that there is no doubt that this Book was sent down from Him, and that it came to correct the previous scriptures, the Torah and the Gospel, which He had left in the care of mankind, but they changed and corrupted them, and in doing so they nullified their use as Divine guides, and so the Book, which could not be altered or corrupted, came to be a constant guide from God to man until the end of time. The first thing that all these scriptures contained was the pinnacle of faith, which is that there is no god but God, the One, and the Only. God affirms that there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsistent, Sustainer of all beings. In truth has He sent down to His Messenger 'the Book,' which confirms those scriptures which preceded it: For He had sent down the Torah and the Gospel before that, as guidance to man; and now He has sent down the *'Furqan'* (the Book that divides between truth and falsehood) (*Al-'Imran:* 2-3).

And so we know that the Book came to affirm for us that God is One, and has no partner, and that the Quran encompasses everything that the previous sacred laws of the Torah and Gospel contained, as well as all the other Divine Scriptures.

The Quran came to differentiate between the truth that these previous scriptures brought, and the falsehood that was added to them by those entrusted to keep them.

Then the True Lord tells us that our duty is to convey the Message of this Book to all people, as He addresses His Messenger saying that He has sent down the Book to him – and let there be no difficulty about it in his heart – in order that he may warn people thereby, and that it may be a monition to the faithful (*al-A'raf:* 2).

This is addressed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; and it should be understood that every time the Noble Quran addresses the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, it is also an address to his followers and entire community. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was charged to relay the Message of the Book to the people, and we are charged with following the same path, and conveying the Quran to the people so that the reckoning of the disbelievers will be just and justified: the Message of God had reached them, but then they disbelieved or ignored it. And so conveying the Book to all nations is one of the essential missions prescribed by God in the Quran.

The Book also contains responses to all the arguments and falsehoods of the disbelievers. God describes His verses as signs of the Wise Book and puts forth to the people the rhetorical question on whether it was a matter of wonderment that He sent the Revelation to a man from among them to carry warning to the people and to give those who believe the glad tidings that in their Lord's sight they have precedence merited by their sincerity, while the unbelievers say that he is but a manifest sorcerer (*Yunus*: 2). In this noble verse, God alerts us to two things: Firstly, the disbelievers took the human nature of the Messenger as an indication that this Book was not from God. The response to this is that all the other messengers who came before were human beings, so why should it be strange if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* too was a human messenger? Secondly, the Quran was written down with the very same letters God created for us to write with, and the Noble Quran was revealed using these letters, which all people know, in such an inimitable way that all of mankind and the jinn could not, even if they come together, to imitate a single chapter of it.

The True Lord then alerts us to something else, which is that the verses of the Book were established in wisdom, and were then set forth with clearness from God, the All-Wise, All-Informed to His servants so that they may worship none but God. Then God commands the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim that he has come to them from Him as a warner and a bearer of glad tidings (*Hud:* 1-2).

These are some of the verses in the Noble Quran in which God draws our attention to the meaning of the term 'Book': every single verse of it is from God, the Wise and Knowing; and every verse is inimitable and has a miraculous nature which challenges the nations of jinn and men; and the Message of the Book is to be conveyed to all people, warning them not to worship any partner with God, in order that the final reckoning in the Hereafter will be just; those who are warned and obey will enter paradise, and those who are warned and disobey will enter hell (with God we seek refuge from it).

Then God alerts us to the fact that this Book contains stories of the prophets of old starting with Adam *peace be upon him*. Speaking of the signs of the lucid Book, God makes it clear that He has sent down the Book as an Arabic Quran so that people will comprehend. Then God addresses His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that in revealing the Quran to him, He will be narrating to him the best stories, even though, prior to that, he has been unaware (*Yusuf:* 1-3).

And so we see that the Noble Quran relates to us the best stories of the prophets of old times, and the events of the past; and the Quran does not mention these stories for entertainment, but rather to impart wisdom and admonition; this is because we notice that the characters and events of the stories of the Quran are always being re-enacted in every age and in every place: Pharaoh is every ruler who rules with tyranny, and calls himself a god; and Korah (Qarun) is every person whom God blesses with wealth, who then claims these blessings were his own doing, and haughtily disobeys God; and the story of Joseph *peace be upon him* is the story of any brothers who are resentful of their brother, and plot against him; and the People of the Cave are all young people who have faith in God, and so He gives them His mercy in this world and the next. This is true for all except one story, that of Mary and Jesus *peace be upon them*, which was a miracle that will never be repeated, which is why God named the characters of the story by saying ‘Jesus, Son of Mary *peace be upon them*,’ and ‘Mary, Daughter of ‘Al-'Imran *peace be upon her*.’

The Book that God sent down is also full of indications of the signs of God in creation. God addresses His Messenger mentioning the signs of the Book saying that that which has been sent down to him from his Lord is the very truth, but the greater part of people will not believe. It is God who has raised the heavens without pillars that you can see, then established His throne, and made the sun and the moon subservient to His laws, each running its course for a set term. He orders all things; He makes His signs clear, that people may have firm faith in a meeting with their Lord (*ar-Ra‘d:* 1-2).

And so in the Book, He showed us His signs in the universe, and alerted us to them. The sky is held up without any visible means of support, and the sun and moon are bound in the service of man, and these are all signs that none of God’s creatures can claim for themselves or for anyone else, and so until the Day of Resurrection, no one can claim that he raised the sky with no means of support, or that he created the sun and moon and then subdued them to serve man. If people reflected on the signs of the universe, they would come to believe; but they are heedless of these signs. Then, the True Lord defines the purpose of this Book, and how it is a mercy to all people. He addresses His Messenger saying that He has sent down the Revelation to him in order that he might bring forth all mankind, by their Lord’s leave, out of the depths of darkness into the light: onto the way that leads to the Almighty, the One to whom all praise is due, to God, unto whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, belongs. But woe unto those who deny the truth: they will suffer severe punishment (*Ibrahim:* 1-2).

That is, the purpose of this Book is to take people out of the darkness of ignorance, disbelief and idolatry into the light of faith; for every disbelieving idolater is surrounded by darkness, seeing the signs of God but not perceiving them, knowing that there will be a reckoning and a Hereafter but denying them, only seeing the short life of this world which bears no guarantees of life, or provisions, or pleasure. If he were to ascend to the light of faith, he would see the Hereafter and the everlasting delights therein, and so would do his utmost to attain it, but while he is surrounded by darkness, he will not see. The way for him to see is to follow the guidance of this Book, the Noble Quran because it takes those who read it out of the darkness of ignorance and disbelief into the light of certitude and conviction. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* also affirms that those who consider the life of this world alone are like cattle, which simply eat and drink; and more, the cattle are better than them because cattle fulfil their purpose in life, whilst the disbelievers do not fulfil their purpose of worship, as the True Lord explains to us that the signs of revelation are verses of a Book, the Noble Quran, lucid in itself and clearly showing the truth. And it will come to pass that those who are bent on denying this truth will wish that they had surrendered themselves to God. Leave them alone; let them eat and enjoy themselves while the hope beguiles them: for in time they will come to know (*al-Hijr:* 1-3).

Here the True Lord informs us that knowledge and appreciation of the signs of His Book and His guidance cannot be attained simply by wishing, but that rather, they should be implemented in life. In their enjoyment of this world, the disbelievers do not rise above the level of cattle, and they cling on to the false hope that the enjoyment of this world is all that there is, whilst this is not the case, as they shall come to know.

And so after briefly examining some of the verses where the word 'Book' is mentioned, we see that it is a Book that makes us bear witness to the pinnacle of faith, which is that there is no god but God, that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God, that it takes people from the darkness into the light, alerts them to the signs of God in the universe, lets them know there is an afterlife of endless delight or endless torment, answers the arguments of the disbelievers and proves them wrong, that God's word 'Book' implies the complete supersession of the previous Divine Scriptures, and that it will remain until the end of time, and so the True Lord called it 'that Book' (*al-Baqara*: 2) as an indication of its perfection.

We must be aware that the word 'That' (*al-Baqara*: 2) in Arabic (*dhalika,* which literally means 'that', not 'this') is not actually one word, but rather is composed of three words, namely dha, which is a demonstrative pronoun, and li, which indicates distance and hence the exalted status of the Noble Quran, and ka, which shows that the word is addressed to the second person, meaning here that all mankind are being addressed and informed that the Noble Quran contains a comprehensive message that will last until the Day of Resurrection.

When we read the chapter of *al-Baqara* in Arabic, it is possible to read its second verse in two different ways which give slightly different meanings by our pausing in different places. The first way is to say*: 'dhalika l-Kitabu la rayba fihi'* ('This is the Book in which there is no doubt'), and then pause, and then say (*...hudan lilmuttaqin*) ('…a guidance for all the God-fearing'). The second way is to say, (*dhalika l-Kitabu la rayba...*) ('This is the Book – let there be no doubt about it…'), and then pause, and then say, (*...fihi hudan lilmuttaqin*) ('…in it is guidance for all the God-fearing'). Both of these readings explain to us the meaning of the words 'no doubt,' which is a negation of all doubt about its being a Wise Book revealed by Creator. In order to understand the basis from which we take our religious affairs, and the central constitution of our lives, we need to define what 'guidance' is, and who the 'God-fearing' are. Guidance means that which shows you the way to go where you need to go, so the road signs that show the traveller where to go are guidance for him, because they show him how to get where he wants to go. Guidance requires 1) a guide, and 2) the one guided, and 3) the intended destination. If there is no goal or final destination in mind, there can be no guidance since there is nothing to aim for, and you would not even seek anyone to guide you. So you must first have a goal before you search for someone to guide you to it.

Consider this: who is it that gives you your goal, and shows you the way to get to it? If we consider this according to human experience, if someone gives you a goal you must be sure that he is wise, and if someone shows you the way he must be knowledgeable enough to show you the shortest way to get to your destination.

If we look at people in this worldly life, we find that they set the goals of their lives, and set the ways they will attain them. If someone wants to build a house, for example, he brings in an architect to make a plan; but if the plan does not achieve what he wants, he will keep making adjustments, and then bring in another architect who has a higher level of skill to make him a new plan. So the goal is constantly changing, not fixed.

Then when construction starts, he may find that the material he needs is not available, and so he adjusts and uses a different one; and beyond this, a higher power might come and postpone the construction or prevent it from taking place. So people's goals change as the circumstances of their lives and their capabilities influence them, and the goals they seek are not realised because of the limited knowledge and potentials of man. So we all need someone with perfect knowledge and wisdom to plan for our lives, and someone who is capable of doing anything, and who is in possession of everything, and to whose will the entire universe is subservient so that we know for certain that he can fulfil our aims for us, and that the road we will follow will take us to our destination. God alerts us to this fact when He commands His Messenger to proclaim that God's guidance is the only true guidance (*al-Baqara*: 120).

God wants to tell His creatures that if they want to arrive at a firm goal that never changes, they should take it from Him; and if they want to follow the way that has no twists or turns, they should take their way from God *the Glorious and Exalted*. If you want something eternal, take it from the One Who is Eternal; and if you want something constant, take it from the One Who is Constant. And so the laws by which people in this world seek to define their goals and find the quickest way to realising them are imperfect, and based on some pieces of knowledge but not all, and so they keep changing from one age to the next.

This is because the ones who make these laws are human beings with their own goals to attain; but God *the Glorious and Exalted* has no caprice, and so if you want to attain happiness in your life, and live in peace and security, take your goals from God, and take the way to attain them from God. This will spare you the worries of a life that is constantly changing and being altered. God has ordained for His creatures and for everything in His universe, the shortest way to attain universal happiness; and those who do not follow this way make things hard for themselves, and for their whole communities, and so nothing gets done.

So God gives you your goal, and God shows you the way, and all you have to do is bring your life in line with what He wants for you.

Then, God describes His Book as '…guidance for all the God-fearing…,' but who are the God-fearing?(1) To be 'fearful' in Arabic (*ittaqa*) is derived from the word (*wiqaya*) which means a shield or barrier to keep one from harm. And in another verse, the True Lord forewarns those who have faith in Him to ward off from themselves and their families the Fire whose fuel is human beings and stones (*at-Tahrim*: 6).

That is, place a barrier between yourselves and the fire of hell, and take the utmost care not to fall into it. One of the curious things about this 'fear/shielding' is that you find that the True Lord in the Noble Quran – which is all the Word of God – sometimes warns the believers to 'fear God' and sometimes to 'fear the Fire.' But how can we behave the same way towards the True Lord as we do towards the fire in which the disbelievers will be tormented?

God *the Glorious and Exalted* orders us to 'fear the Fire,' that is, do not do those things which incur God's wrath lest you be tormented in the fire. And so you place a barrier between yourself and the fire by avoiding sin and by doing good deeds. And God *the Glorious and Exalted* also orders us to 'fear God,' but how can we try to protect ourselves from him and at the same time seek from Him all manners of blessings and goodness? How can this be? How can we seek to protect ourselves from the One we love?

We say that God has attributes of majesty and attributes of beauty; the attributes of majesty are manifested in the names the All-Dominant, and the All-Compelling, and the One Who Humiliates, and the Lord of Retribution, and the Inflictor of Harm. All these are manifestations of the attributes of majesty; even hell itself is a manifestation of this majesty.

As for the attributes of beauty, they are those such as the All-Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy, and all the attributes which imply the mercy and beneficence of God to His creatures. If you wish to protect yourself from hell, which is one of the manifestations of God's majesty, you must also protect yourself from all the other attributes of majesty, for amongst them might be those whose severity is greater even than the torment of hell. It is as though when the True Lord warns us to 'fear God' or to 'fear the Fire,' He means to warn us to 'fear God's wrath,' which in turn means that we should fear all of God's attributes of majesty, and place a barrier between us and them. And whoever is conscious and have fear of God's attributes of majesty will benefit from His attributes of beauty, and so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'On the last night of *Ramadan*, the All-Compelling manifests Himself through forgiveness.'(1)

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(1) The Arabic word *al-muttaqin,* used in the verse, derives from the verb *ittaqa,* which means to have fear of something and to take precautions to shield oneself against harm that might come from it.

Logically, it might have seemed more appropriate for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to have said 'The All-Merciful manifests Himself through forgiveness,' but as long as there are sins, this necessitates the presence of the attribute of the All-Compelling, who chastises His creatures for their sins. So it is as though the attribute of the All-Forgiving intercedes with the attribute of the All-Compelling. The attribute of the All-Compelling is manifested in the case of sinners, and so the attribute of the All-Forgiving comes to intercede with it on their behalf, and so God forgives them their sins. There is beauty in the contrast here when the All-Compelling, despite His immense power, is manifested through forgiveness. When you hear the word 'The All-Compelling', you are stricken by awe, dread, and terror, but then when you hear that 'The All-Compelling manifests Himself through forgiveness,' joy enters your heart because you know that the One Who could have punished you if He chose, has instead forgiven you. The fire of hell gives no commands, and has no independent action, but rather obeys the command of its Lord; therefore seek refuge from it with the One who commands, or with His attributes of beauty.

The True Lord says that the Book is '…a guidance for all the God-fearing.' We have already said that all guidance is God's guidance because He is the One Who has defined the purpose of creation, and has informed us of the way to reach it. The fact that God has told us what we must do, and how to do it, is the utmost blessing; for He did not leave us to define our own goals and the ways to achieve them, and so showed us mercy by saving us from the wretched situation of our success or failure being dependent on our own limited knowledge so that we have to go through constant trial and error, following roads and then finding that we have lost the way, and becoming more and more lost and wretched in each road we take.

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(1) Narrated in *Kanz Al-'Ummal. In another Hadith he says, 'On the last night of Ramadan, God forgives them all.' A man said, 'Is that the Night of Power?' He replied, 'No; do you not see that when labourers finish their work, they are given their wages?' Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi.*

In this way, we would surely stumble around blindly without ever getting to our goal. But God wanted to spare us all this trouble, and so He sent down the Noble Quran, a Book wherein there is guidance for man, and directions to the quickest route to escaping God's punishment and wrath.

When God describes His Book as 'a guidance for all the God-fearing,' this means that this Quran is a guidance for all, and so those who wish to be protected from God's punishment and wrath will find within it the way to achieve this. So the guidance came from the True Lord to all people, and then He gave those who believed in it a second guidance, namely assistance in doing good works.

So there is one kind of guidance which comes from God to all His creatures, which is that He shows them the straight path; this is the guidance of direction, by which God guides all His creatures to His obedience and His Paradise, as He tells that He offered the tribe of Thamud guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance.

So the True Lord directed them to the way of guidance, but they preferred the way of falsehood and sin and so followed it. This is the guidance of direction; as for the guidance of assistance, we find allusion to it in the statement that as to those who have the guidance, God will increase their guidance, and He will teach them what to fear (*Muhammad:* 17).

This is the guidance of assistance, which is only granted to those who believe in God and follow His way, and accept the guidance of direction and act in accordance with it. God does not give aid to those who reject the guidance of direction, but rather leaves them to their means where they will stray and meet wretchedness. When we read the Noble Quran, we find that God tells His Prophet and Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will not be able to guide aright everyone whom he loves; but it is God who guides him that has the will to be guided (*al-Qasas:* 56).

And so God negates that His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* could guide those whom he loved; yet the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* also tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse that verily he guides to the straight way (*ash-Shura:* 52).

How could this difference occur when it was God who said both? We say: when you hear these two verses, know that the perspectives are different; that is, what is negated in the first is not the same thing that is affirmed in the second. To illustrate this let us consider statements in the Quran concerning a similar situation. At the battle of Badr, for example, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* took a handful of pebbles and threw them at the army of Quraysh, and when the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* mentioned this in the Noble Quran, He told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that it was not he who cast when he did cast, but it was God who cast (*al-Anfal*: 17).

So there is a negation of an action and an affirmation of the same action in this one single verse. How could the Messenger of God have thrown when God says that it was not he who cast? The answer is that in this verse, the perspective differs. The one who actually threw was the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but the thing that made the pebbles reach the army of Quraysh and hit every last one of them in the face was God's omnipotent power. And so it was not possible that a single handful of pebbles thrown by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* could have struck every member of the idolaters' army, but the omnipotent power of God made it so.

And so when the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* said to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that verily He guides to the straight way (*ash-Shura:* 52), this was a reference to the guidance of direction, that is, that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, by delivering the Noble Quran and explaining God's guidance, directs all mankind to the straight path and shows them clearly what it was. And when He says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will not be able to guide aright everyone whom he loves; but it is God who guides him that has the will to be guided (*al-Qasas:* 56), this meant that he cannot make guidance enter their hearts because God is the One who guides hearts, and increases their guidance and faith. And so God affirms this as a basic principle of faith in stating that God's guidance is the only true guidance (*Al-'Imran:* 73). So the Noble Quran conveys the guidance of direction to those who desire to place a barrier between themselves and God's wrath and punishment.

ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَٰهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them [3] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 3)

After telling us that that this Book –the Noble Quran– is 'guidance for all the God-fearing' (*al-Baqara:* 2), i.e. it gives directions for those who wish to place a barrier between themselves and God's wrath, God teaches us the attributes of these God-fearing people, and let us know who they are. The first attribute He mentions was: '(those) who believe in the Unseen' (*al-Baqara:* 3).

What is this Unseen, with the belief in which God has attached the first position of guidance, and by means of which one is protected from hell and God's wrath? The unperceived or unseen refers to all that which cannot be perceived by the senses. Perceived things, which we see and touch, are not disputed by anyone, which is why they say, 'There is no need to ask 'where' when the eye beholds', i.e. you do not need evidence for the things you can see for yourself. But the unseen realm cannot be perceived by the senses, but must rather be perceived by other faculties.

An example of the precision needed to define things is that they say there are five main senses, namely hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste, but there are things which are perceived by other than these five senses.

Suppose we have before us two bags of equal size and design. Using your five main senses, could you determine which bag is heavier? Could the five senses tell you this? No, rather, you must pick them up to determine which is heavier. How did you perceive this weight? You did so by means of your muscles, since they were forced to work harder to lift one of the bags than they were for the other. And so you knew which one was heavier not by the sense of touch since if you had simply touched them both, you would not know which was heavier. So there is also the sense of muscles, by which things are weighed.

Suppose you go to a material shop, and see two kinds of the same cloth, one of which is thinner than the other. Simply by placing the cloths between your fingertips, you can determine which is thinner and which is thicker. Which sense allowed you to perceive this? Not touch, but rather the faculty of reason, which does not make mistakes.

When you feel hungry, what sense tells you that you are hungry? Not any of the five main senses. The same is true for the case of thirst: which sense tells you that you need water? And when you sleep, what sense is it that wakes you up? No one knows. So the person has certain faculties known as the five senses, and there are also other faculties representing senses unknown to all but their Creator. And so when the scientists try to give a definition for the human soul, we say to them: What do you know of this soul? You know nothing but the outer manifestations of this worldly life, but there are other things within the soul that you know nothing about. There are senses that no one knows anything about, and they are numerous and varied. And so it is a mistake to say that everything which cannot be sensed by the five human senses is part of the unseen realm since there are other faculties and means of perception which work without our knowledge.

If I give a student a geometry exercise and he solves it and gives me the answer, do we say that he has knowledge of the unseen because he solved an exercise which initially was unknown to him? No, because there were formulas and rules which led him to the answer. When the weather forecast tells us that tomorrow there will be a violent rainstorm, does this mean they knew the unseen? No, because they utilised their prior knowledge to arrive at a conclusion, and this is not part of the unseen.

If a deceptive fortune-teller comes and tells you that the thing that was stolen from you is in the possession of so-and-so, does this mean they know the unseen? No, because for something to be truly unseen it must be unknown to all your equals, yet the thing stolen from you is known to your equal, since the thief and the one who buys the stolen goods know exactly what happened;

and the police, by following the clues, and forensic evidence, and investigating the matter, can find the thief and the one who bought the stolen wares. And so if there comes to you a fortune-teller who has jinn to serve him – and it is well-known that jinn are concealed from us, and can move at great speed, as God says about Satan that he and his tribe are lying in wait for you where you cannot perceive them (*al-A'raf:* 27) – it might be that this jinn helper of theirs saw something, or went from one place to another, and so knew what you do not know. This is not knowledge of the Unseen because although you did not know it, others knew it by the natural means that God created in them. And as for the scientists who discover the secrets of the universe, can we say that they have gained knowledge of the Unseen? No, because these scientists only discovered something that already existed by using their prior knowledge to arrive at this conclusion and this is not knowledge of the Unseen.

In that case, what is the Unseen? The true Unseen is something which has no clues to lead to it, and which no created being, not even angels, can arrive to by means of their knowledge. We have a good example of this kind of situation in the story of Adam peace and blessings be upon him when God taught him the names of all things and then displayed them to the angels and told them to say the names of these things, if they had the knowledge. They replied praising Him and admitted that they had no knowledge except that which He has given them to know, and admitted that He alone is the all-Knowing, the Wise. He then told Adam to tell them the names of these things. And when Adam told them their names, God reiterated to the angels that He alone has knowledge of the hidden things of the heavens and the earth, and has knowledge of all that they bring into the open and all that they conceal (*al-Baqara:* 31-33).

The jinn too do not know the Unseen, and so when Solomon *peace be upon him* died, after God had placed the jinn under his control, the jinn only became aware of his death when the earthworm ate his staff, as God says that when He decreed the death of Solomon, nothing showed the jinn that he was dead except the earthworm that gnawed the staff which supported his corpse. And when it fell, the jinn perceived that if they had known the things unseen, they would not have continued in their disgraceful affliction in servitude (*Saba':* 14).

So the true Unseen is that which is known to none but God. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* asserts that He alone knows the Unseen, and to none does He disclose the mysteries of His knowledge except to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect; and then He sends forth guards before him and behind him to watch over him (*al-Jinn:* 26-27). So the Messengers do not know the Unseen, but rather, God informs them of that part of it which He wills, and this becomes a miracle for them and for their followers.

The pinnacle of the Unseen is faith in God, in His angels, in His scriptures, in His messengers and the Last Day. All of these are unseen matters; when God informs us of His angels, though we cannot see them, we say that as long as God has told us about them, we believe in their existence. And when He tells us of the Last Day, as long as it was God who told us of it, we believe in the Last Day. For the One who has told us of these things is God *the Glorious and Exalted*. We believe that He is the One God. We arrived at this belief using the rational proofs that convince us that this universe has a God and a Creator; and so whatever comes to us from God, we believe in it because it was God who said it.

We must be aware that the reality of the existence of something is completely different from the question of our perceiving it. You have a spirit in your body which gives you life, but have you seen this spirit? Have you heard it? Or tasted it? Or smelled it? Or touched it? No for sure. So, what faculty of perception is it which tells you that you have a spirit in your body? It is the effect it has on your body by giving it life.

Therefore, you know of the spirit’s existence because of its effects and the spirit is one of God’s creations. So if you cannot perceive the created being in your own body and your own being, the spirit except by its effects, then how can you hope to perceive God with your senses?

If we believe in the pinnacle of unseen matters, namely the existence of God *the Glorious and Exalted*, we must also believe in everything He tells us about, even if we have not seen it for ourselves. Out of His mercy, God wanted to make the matter of the unseen easier for us to understand, and so He gave us in this material world signs which indicate that the existence of a thing and a thing’s being perceived by us are two completely separate and distinct things.

For example, germs have existed in the universe, fulfilling their purpose, since the beginning of time. People used to see the symptoms of illness in their bodies, like increased temperature, fever, and so on, without knowing how they were caused. Then, when science developed, and God allowed His creatures to witness the existence of germs, He made minds capable of inventing the microscope, which enlarged images for them, since the eye was not able to perceive these tiny creatures. Once microscopes had been invented, we were able to see germs, and observe their life cycle and the way they multiply, and all the other things that God revealed to us as time progressed.

Our inability to see something does not mean that it does not exist, but only that the tool of perception – in this case the eye – is unable to see it because it is too small. When you use a microscope, it enlarges these microbes for you so that you eye can detect them. When we first saw germs and microbes, this did not mean that they were first created the moment we saw them; rather, they existed, and fulfilled their purpose, whether we could see them or not.

If we had told anyone about the germ and the microbe before we had seen them with our own eyes, would he have believed us? God makes it in a way so that some of His creatures are unable to see certain natural phenomena in their time, leaving mankind to progress to their discovery later. When these new things were discovered, mankind should have increased in faith, and they should have known, based on this clear material evidence, that there are unseen things that exist, even if we cannot see them.

God has given us signs in the universe that allow us to perceive that this universe has a Creator. The sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, man, animals, and minerals no one can claim to have created any one of them, and no one can claim that he created himself or anyone else, and this well-ordered universe cannot simply have sprung into existence accidentally because accidents are random and disorganised, and if this universe had come into existence accidentally, the sun, the moon, stars and earth would have collided, and night would have merged with day. But all the signs in the universe make us aware that there is a higher power which creates, innovates, and organises; and so if a messenger comes to us and tells us that God is the One Who created this universe, we need surely to believe him.

The True Lord then gives us further description of the believers as those ‘who observe prayer.’ Prayer is the constant sign of fealty to the worship of the True Lord, and a person is never exempted from performing it. A person should pray standing, and if he is unable to stand, he can pray seated, and if he is unable, he can pray lying down. No one is ever exempted from prayer the moment they become morally responsible until they die, and it is to be performed five times every day.

The True Lord then describes the believers as those ‘who out of what we have bestowed on them, expend for God.’ When we speak about Divine provision, many people think this means only money; but no, provision means everything you benefit from. Strength is provision, and knowledge is provision, and wisdom is provision, and humility is provision, and everything that helps one to live is a kind of provision. So if you do not have money to spend in charity, you have physical health by means of which you can work and earn money, and you can give from it as charity to those who are ill and infirm. And if you have patience, you can give it as charity by restraining the foolish person whose behaviour might harm the society around him, or harm you. If you have knowledge, you can give from it as charity by teaching the ignorant. And so we see that expending form what God has bestowed on one for God’s sake covers all the different aspects of life.

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَبِٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Those who believe in the revelation sent down to you [Muhammad], and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter [4] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 4)

In this noble verse, the True Lord gives us more of the believers’ attributes. After telling us that their attributes include belief in the Unseen, and constancy in prayer, and spending in charity from God’s provision, more of the attributes of the believers follow.

So these believers are those who ‘believe in what has been sent down to…’ the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* i.e. the Noble Quran which God revealed, and ‘what has been sent down before you.’ Such a thing is only attributed to the believers in the Noble Quran; for when Islam came, it had to address two kinds of people: firstly the disbelievers, who believed neither in God nor in any messenger sent by Him, and secondly the people of the Book who believed in God, and His messengers, and His Scriptures.

Islam addressed both these groups, since the people of the Book perhaps believed they have a connection to God, believing in Him and receiving His scripture and following His Messengers, and saw this as enough. But we say no, Islam came to be accepted by everybody, the disbelievers and the People of the Book so that God's religion would be one.

In the scriptures He sent before, God foretold the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and mentioned his name and his description, and instructed those people of the Book who would live to see Him coming to believe in him.

God *the Glorious and Exalted* gave the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to the people of the Book so that they knew him even as they knew their own children, and so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his time and his attributes were known to them with absolute certainty. The Jews of Medina used to say to the idolaters, 'The time is come for a messenger to appear, in whom we shall believe, and with whom we shall slay you all like (the tribes of) Ad and Iram were slain.' But once the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they were the first to fight him and deny his prophethood. The description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is present in the Torah and the Gospel, and so the people of the Book would warn the idolaters that they would believe in the new messenger and with him they would subjugate the Arabs. The True Lord tells us that when a Book had come to them from God, confirming that which they had received already –although they had before prayed for victory over those who disbelieved – yet when a message came to them, of which they had knowledge, they denied it. The curse of God falls on the infidels (*al-Baqara:* 89).

That is, the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not unexpected to the people of the Book, but rather, they had been expecting it and they had affirmed that they would believe in it as their own scriptures had instructed them. Yet when the time of the message came, they denied it and rejected it.

Then God gives further description of the believers: '… and who have full faith in the life to come.' Notice that the phrase 'the life to come' is used here. If you look at the Torah that the Jews have now, and read the Talmud, you will not find anything at all about the Last Day, for they only retained the material concerns of their scriptures. And so God stresses faith in the Hereafter here so that those who claim to be believers in God and His books and His messengers but are not concerned with the Last Day will know that they are not believers. If this attribute of the believers had not been mentioned in the Noble Quran, they might have said, 'Islam is in line with our own beliefs', but God *the Glorious and Exalted* wants to give us a picture of faith in its totality, in the belief in God as the starting point of faith, and belief in the Last Day as the ultimate end of faith. Those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or that they will meet God and be held to account, or that there exists a Paradise wherein the believers will delight, or a hell wherein the disbelievers will be punished, have incomplete faith, and they are close to the disbelievers who see this worldly life as their only goal.

The believer follows God's guidance in this world so as to earn God's Grace in the Hereafter. If there were no Hereafter, the disbeliever would have a better life than the believer, since he takes everything he wants from this world without restricting himself to any moral guidance, giving himself full rein to fulfil his desires; yet the believer restricts his actions to conform to God's guidance, and troubles himself in doing so. Then they both die, and there is nothing else. In that case, the disbeliever would gain the passionate delights of this world, and the believer would gain nothing. Such a thing is incompatible with faith, and so belief in God is the ultimate starting point of faith, and belief in the Hereafter is the ultimate end of faith.

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدٗى مِّن رَّبِّهِمۡۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ ٥

Such people are following their Lord's guidance and it is
they who will prosper [5] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 5)

The phrase 'They are the ones' is a reference to the ones who are endowed with all the attributes that God has defined in the two previous verses. So those who are endowed with all these attributes have attained guidance, i.e. the road that leads to faith, and they have attained success, which is the goal of faith.

And the verse 'They are the ones who are guided by their Lord, and they are the ones who…' will attain success applies to all of them. But why does God *the Glorious and Exalted* use the phrase 'They are the ones' twice? This is part of the rhetorical style of the Noble Quran. But why does it join the two predicates to each other in this way? It is so used to know that there are not two kinds of faith in Islam, but rather, one single faith which has one single reward; the means to it is faith, and its goal is success and happiness. If we consider the moral responsibilities that constitute the guidance that leads to the ultimate goal, we find that God has raised the guided above guidance so that we know that this guidance has not come simply to restrict our actions and humble us, but rather to raise us and ennoble us.

Superficial people think that guidance merely restricts one's actions in life and prevents one from attaining instant gratification. In reality, guidance raises a person and keeps him safe from harm and from God's wrath, and from the corruption of society which would otherwise cause him suffering; and so God says, 'They are the ones who are guided,' using the Arabic prepositional phrase 'ala huda', which means literally 'on guidance.'

The preposition 'on' implies that something is above something else. If you say someone is on their horse, this means that they are above the horse. So it is as though the one who follows guidance is not humbled by this, but rather he is raised by it, and the guidance carries him from one good thing to the next. This is the opposite of misguidance, which takes one lower and lower.

And so we find that God in another verse in the Noble Quran commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to the unbelievers that either we (the believers) or you (the infidels) have (literally: are on) guidance, or are in clear error (*Saba':* 24).

Notice that the preposition used in the case of guidance implies the notion of being raised and lifted (in Arabic literally: 'on guidance'), while the preposition used in the case of misguidance implies abasement and degradation (in Arabic: literally 'in misguidance'). The idea of being raised applies to guidance because religion restricts your sphere of activity in order to give you honour and raise your status, since you do not take your law from a human being, or from your own self, but rather, you are raised to the station where you take your orders from God, and this is a great elevation. When God mentioned misguidance, however, He said literally 'in misguidance' (*fi ḍalal*), and the preposition 'in' implies complete immersion, as God describes it in another verse saying that those who earn evil and are engulfed by their sinfulness are destined for the fire, therein to abide forever (*al-Baqara:* 81).

Sin engulfs him, that is, he cannot escape from it because he is immersed in misguidance. As long as he is engulfed by sin, he can find no way out because it controls him, and as long as it controls him he will never attain guidance. So when the True Lord says, 'They are the ones who are guided by their Lord, and they are the ones…' who will attain success, He uses an expression which has an ordinary and familiar worldly meaning in order to better illustrate the meaning to the listener.

What is 'success' (*falah*)*?* The usual meaning of this word in Arabic is success, and so the verse means 'it is they who shall be the successful.' The word '*muflihun'* (derived from *falah*) is used here because it is derived from and has a common root with the Arabic word meaning to till the earth to plant seeds, and this is where we get the word *fallah* (farmer), whose practice is to till the earth and plant seeds in it. The True Lord uses this word to refer to the Hereafter because He wants to show us something by allusion. There is a difference between something unknown to us that we cannot know and something unknown to us which we can deduce from what we can see.

So the religion restricts your actions in life by its commandments and prohibitions, and God's guidance came to tell you to do some things and not to do others. Many people think that this restricts the life of the believer, and bears heavily upon him, because it takes away his freedom.

When God tells you not to do something, superficial people see this as a way of constricting you from doing what you want to do; and when He tells you to do something, they think He has made it difficult for you by making you do something you do not want to do. For example, when He requires you to pay the poor-due, on face value this seems to mean you will lose money even though in reality it is a source of blessed increase and growth. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Charity decreases nothing from wealth, and God increases the honour of a forgiving servant, and no one humbles himself before God but that He raises them.’(1)

So when the True Lord restricts your actions in life, do not think that this oppresses you; rather, it is for your own good because He did not command you alone, but rather commanded all the people. So when He *the Glorious and Exalted* says, ‘Do not steal’, He said it to everyone, and so you are the one that benefits from this, because He restrained you as a single person from stealing from others, and restrained millions of people from stealing from you. So God does not oppress you, but rather protects your wealth from all people. He restrains you as a single person from stealing the wealth of others, and restrains millions of people from stealing your wealth. So who benefits? It is you of course. So God affirms that the believers are the ones ‘who will attain success,’ and the word *muflihun* (‘those who shall attain success’) is derived from the root *f-l-h*. If the land is hard, when you dig it and plant seeds in it, it will give a great yield; this has been passed down to us from our forefathers. When the earth is dug and planted, it gives a good yield; and if we took this knowledge from our forefathers, the inevitable question is who had taught our ultimate forefather Adam *peace be upon him* how to till the earth and plant and sow? We say that God taught him this, just as He taught him all the names, and taught him all he needed to know to fulfil his purpose on earth.

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* would not have left Adam *peace be upon him* to live on earth without teaching him what he needed to preserve his life and the lives of his offspring. At least, He taught him the essentials, and then these essentials were developed by means of the knowledge God revealed to His creatures, then centuries of advancement followed and we were able to use modern advanced machinery to plough and sow.

But the firm truth that has not changed since the beginning of time, and will never change until its end, is that the job of man is to plough the earth, and plant the seed, and water it. As for the growth of the seed itself, man has nothing to do with this, and the same is the case for the yield that it will produce. God made us aware of this truth, so that we would not be deluded by our actions and believe that we are the ones who make things grow. In the chapter of *al-Waqi'a*, God *the Glorious and Exalted* urges people to think of that which they sow and consider whether it is they who cause its upgrowth, or God Who causes it to spring forth. If He so pleases, He could make their harvest dry and brittle that they would ever marvel and lament that they have been ruined and deprived (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-67).

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

And so the duties of farming remain confined to ploughing, sowing and irrigating, and when the seed is cast into the soil God creates within it the nutrients it needs until it becomes able to take its sustenance from the soil. And so if you take a seed and soak it in water, you will find that it will grow the beginnings of a stem and roots. Where did this growth come from? It came from the seed's own components. God places in every seed enough nutrients to suffice it until it is able to derive sustenance from the soil, and the size of the seed varies in accordance with the amount of nutrients it requires. When you plant it in the earth, first it feeds itself, until the stem, root, and two leaves emerge with which it can breathe. All of these things take place without any input from us. Then, the seed begins to take its sustenance from the soil and the air, and grows into a full-grown tree, which produces fruit containing the very same kind of seeds.

And so the word *muflihun* is used so that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* may give us an example based on material things in order to help our limited minds understand the Unseen. He, so, compares responsibility and its reward in the Hereafter to sowing seeds and farming because when you cast a single seed into the earth, it will in turn give you many more seeds.

God gives the likeness of those who spend from their possessions for the sake of God as that of a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains: for God grants manifold increase to whom He wills; and God is Infinite, All Knowing (*al-Baqara:* 261).

If the earth, one of God's creations, gives you many multiples of what you give to it, so what is it about the Creator? How much will He multiply the reward of your obedience? This is why the True Lord says, '… they are the ones who will attain success,' using a word derived from the Arabic root word for 'farming', which is something that we can see and bear witness to every day.

Just as moral responsibility demands certain things from you so it can multiply them for you, likewise the earth takes from you a single seed and does not simply give you back what she took, but rather gives you back seven hundred seeds. And so we can use something familiar to us to explain something unknown to us.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

As for those who disbelieve, it makes no difference whether you warn them or not: they will not believe [6]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 6)

After speaking of the believers and their attributes, and their reward in the Hereafter and the great goodness that awaits them, the True Lord wanted to give us the contrasting image which is that of the disbelievers. He told us that faith came to govern all, and ensure for them goodness in this life and the next; and so there must exist some evil which faith has come to fight, for were it not for this evil, would there be a need for faith? The believer must defend himself, his family, his community and his whole world from the evils that disbelief entails.

Disbelievers are of two kinds. Some disbelieve in God initially, and then they hear God's word, accept it with their natural disposition, and so become believers. Others benefit from their disbelief, their tyranny, their wrongdoing, and from usurping the rights of others, and so on. These people know that faith will deprive them from their worldly power and prevent them from collecting the earnings they make from dishonesty and tyranny.

So those who stand in the way of faith are the ones who benefit from disbelief, but what about those who used to be disbelievers and later accepted God's religion in the right way?

These people's hearts may open, and so they embrace faith. The word for disbelief in Arabic is *kufr*, which is derived from a root meaning 'to cover' or ‘to conceal’. Therefore, to disbelieve in God means to attempt to cover over His existence. Yet if you want to cover something, the thing you cover must exist because only an existing thing can be covered. The natural state of all in the universe is to possess faith in God, yet the disbelievers came to try to cover up God’s existence. So it is as though the origin was faith, but then heedlessness and oblivion overcame people, and so they covered up God’s Existence in order to preserve their power, their authority or their exploitation and oppression of their fellow men.

So the very word ‘disbelief’ carries the implication that belief existed first, and then afterwards disbelief came. But how was that? God created the first man, Adam *peace be upon him*, with His own hands, and then breathed His Spirit into him; and bade the angels prostrate themselves before him and taught him the names of all things.

The prostration of the angels and the imparting of the names to Adam *peace be upon him* were matters which Adam *peace be upon him* witnessed for himself, and disbelief did not exist at that time. After descending to earth and settling there, Adam *peace be upon him* was supposed to teach his children how to worship God because he descended bearing the Sacred Law; and then Adam’s children were supposed to convey these teachings to their own children, and so on.

But with the passage of time, heedlessness came and people began to think that faith merely restricted their freedom to act, and everyone who wanted to run their lives according to their base desires began to follow the way of disbelief. When the intelligent person hears the word *kufr* (disbelief), he should be aware at once that the word means to cover the existence of the Necessary Being. How can a person disbelieve and participate in covering up something that exists? And so we find that the True Lord reproaches the disbelievers putting forth the rhetorical question as to how they can disbelieve in God, seeing that they were lifeless and He gave them life, and that He will cause them to die and then will bring them again to life, whereupon to Him they will be brought back. He it is who has created for them all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens and fashioned them into seven heavens; and He alone has full knowledge of everything (*al-Baqara:* 28-29).

And so this question comes up, but the disbeliever cannot answer it! It is God Who created him and brought him into being, and none of us can claim to have created himself or anyone else. Existence itself is a proof of faith, and so the True Lord asks them, how could you disbelieve in God and cover up the existence of the One Who created you?

Creation is undisputedly the work of God, and no one can claim it for himself. No one can claim to have created himself. The very fact that you exist entails that you believe in God, who brought you into being. It is a direct proof of God. If one looks around him, he will find that everything in the universe is at his service, and that everything obeys his will. And so with the passing of time, man came to imagine that he was in control of this universe, and so he lived with his mind fixed on the power of causality, making use of the means at his disposal and seeing how they obeyed him, never considering the Creator of the means, who gave them their rules and made them obey mankind. The True Lord indicated this in stating emphatically that man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

This is because a man farms the earth and it gives him fruits, and so he believes that he is the one who controlled the earth and made for it its laws so that it would give him whatever he wanted. He presses the light-switch and light fills the room and so he imagines he is the one who made this electricity! He boards a plane which takes him into the sky, and believes he is the one who made it fly, forgetting the special attributes God placed in the air to allow it to carry the plane. He turns on the television and sees events from around the world and so believes that this happened through his own power forgetting that God placed certain qualities in the air waves that make it carry sounds and pictures across the world in mere seconds. Man thinks he has intrinsic control over everything around him, whilst in reality it is God who subjected it for the service of mankind, and it was God who created the laws that govern it all. We say that if you knew the meaning of an intrinsic quality, you would not think in this way. An intrinsic quality is something that is yours alone, and cannot change or ever come to an end. Only those things which are not intrinsic are subject to change.

So if you consider these things which you suppose to be intrinsically yours, and which have deluded you and sent you astray, you would realise that the meaning of ‘intrinsic’ is that you do not need anyone else, but that you are completely self-sufficient. However, in your life, nothing is intrinsically yours, since everything around you changes without your will. At the beginning of your life you were an infant that needed its father, and then you grew up and became strong, and things began to go as you desired; yet you cannot make this period of your youth last forever, for time can only be held onto for a moment. Then, if you make it to old age, where you will need someone to help you and hold your hand, probably even for the most basic of your needs such as eating and drinking.

So you begin in infancy in need of others and you end up in old age in need of others. Even in your youth, you might fall ill and so be unable to go on with your normal life; yet if you truly possessed any intrinsic quality, you would be able to prevent this illness, and say ‘I will not fall ill.’ Yet you cannot.

God created these vicissitudes of time in order to end man’s self-delusion so that he would know he is only strong and capable because of the physical laws God has made for him, and that we are all in need of the All-Powerful, God, and that God is intrinsically free of need of any of His creatures. He causes change, but never changes; He brings death, but He is always living; He brings weakness after strength, but He is always strong. What people have is depleted, but what He has is never depleted. He is God, in the heavens and the earth.

You have no intrinsic quality that would allow you to claim to have subdued the universe by your own power because you do not have the ability to remain in the same state without ever changing; so how could you disbelieve in God, and cover up His existence, when everything in the universe and within your own self is a proof that He exists?

We said that the disbelievers are of two kinds. Some initially disbelieve in God, but then when guidance comes, they use their minds and recognise the truth and believe; and others who derive worldly benefits from disbelief, and so cling to it when the true faith is presented to them with its proofs, resisting it and sticking to disbelief. They do this because they want to maintain their worldly power and influence, which is based on their transgression and injustice, and they will not accept to have it taken from them, even by Him-the Truth. These are the ones about whom God says, ‘As to the infidels, alike is it to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe.’They do not disbelieve because they have not heard the Message from God, and are in need of a messenger or prophet to guide them to God’s way; rather, these people have taken disbelief as a vocation and a way of life, and they benefit from disbelief because it has made them leaders, and they are singled out from others because of the falsehood they follow, and because if religion came to make all men equal, and fight injustice, they would become ordinary people like anybody else.

So this disbeliever who has taken disbelief as a means to attain the vainglory and delights of this world, will not believe whether you warn him or not, for he only craves the worldly life in which he lives. And these are the ones who resist religion and fight those who embrace it because they know that this faith will take from them many of their distinctions. And so they do not lack faith because the message has not reached them, or because they have never noticed the signs of God in the world, but rather because their errant lives are completely founded and built on disbelief.

خَتَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ ۖ وَعَلَىٰٓ أَبْصَـٰرِهِمْ غِشَـٰوَةٌ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ٧

God has sealed their hearts and their ears, and
their eyes are covered. They will have great
torment [7] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 7)

Just as the True Lord gave us the attributes of the believers, so too, He gives us the attributes of the disbelievers. Some people might wonder: if this is God’s judgement of the disbelievers, then why did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* call them to faith, if God had sealed their hearts? The meaning of (their hearts being sealed) is that disbelief cannot leave their hearts, and faith cannot enter them.

We say that God is free of need for the entire universe, and so if some of His creatures reject faith and prefer disbelief, God will let them do so, and will not help them return to faith since the True Lord says in a Qudsi Hadith: I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself; if he remembers Me in a group, I remember him in a better group; if he draws nearer to Me by a hand-span, I draw nearer to him by an arm-span; if he draws nearer to Me by an arm-span, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.(1)

This Qudsi Hadith explains that God helps the believers to believe; and that just as He *the Glorious and Exalted* helps the believers to believe, it does not grieve Him whether His servant comes to faith or not. And so we find that the Quran affirms very clearly that those who disbelieve do so of their own free will, and that their choice of disbelief came first before God sealed their hearts. The sealing of their hearts came as a result of their disbelief, and not the other way round. The Creator *the Exalted* is most self-sufficient, and free of need of any partners, and so if anyone associates partners with Him, He has no need of them.

Those who disbelieve, i.e. cover up faith in God and His Messenger, have all their means of perception sealed by God: the heart, hearing and sight. The heart is an intangible means of perception, and God mentioned the heart before hearing and sight in this verse because He wants to teach us something about the means of perception.

Elsewhere in the Noble Quran, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* informs mankind that He has brought them out of their mothers' wombs devoid of all knowledge; but has given them hearing, and sight, and heart, that they might be grateful (*an-Nahl:* 78).

And so God teaches us that the human means of attaining knowledge are hearing, sight, and the heart. But in the noble verse we are currently examining, God mentions the heart first means before hearing and sight. God knows that they have chosen disbelief, and this choice was made before He sealed their hearts; and 'sealing their hearts' means preventing any new perception from entering, or any old perception from exiting. And so whatever the eye sees or the ear hears, it will do no good to them because the heart was sealed with God's seal, after its owner chose disbelief and insisted upon it. In light of this, the True Lord *the Exalted* describes them as being deaf, dumb and blind. Therefore, they shall not retrace their steps from error (*al-Baqara:* 18).

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih, section of 'Kitab Adh-dhikr Wad-do'a''*

But how did they lose all these means of perception? It is because a veil fell over their hearts, and made their eyes unable to discern God’s signs, and their ears unable to hear anything from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So what does He do with those who choose disbelief and insist on it, and deny God’s guidance despite His messages, His messengers and His Quran? He leaves them because He has no need for anything in the worlds, and so He makes the way they have chosen easy for them to follow, and helps them to follow it. God *the Glorious and Exalted* states that to anyone who chooses to remain blind to the remembrance of the Most Merciful, He assigns a devil who becomes his fast companion (*az-Zukhruf:* 36).

And He *the Glorious and Exalted* also says that devils descend upon every lying sinful person (*ash-Shu’ara’:* 221-222). One aspect of the might of God’s knowledge is that He knows the believer from the disbeliever without having interfered in their decision. When God sent Noah *peace be upon him* to his people, and he spent nine hundred and fifty years calling to God’s way, and before the flood, God knew that no more people would believe in Noah *peace be upon him* other than those who had already believed in him, and He *the Exalted* told Noah *peace be upon him* to build the Ark to save the believers from the flood. God *the Glorious and Exalted* tells us that it was revealed to Noah that none of his people will believe except those who have already believed, and let him not, then, be distressed by anything that they may do; rather, he was commanded to build the ark under God’s Eye and according to His inspiration; and not to appeal to God on behalf of the evildoers, as they are destined to be drowned (*Hud:* 36-37).

And so we see that in His all-encompassing Knowledge, God knows who will insist on disbelief, and who will die a disbeliever. Yet if this is the case, why then did God require His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver to them the Message and the Quran? It was so that they would bear witness against themselves on the Day of Resurrection so that they could not come on that awesome day and falsely argue that if only guidance had reached them, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had called them, they would have believed. But why did God *the Glorious and Exalted* seal their hearts? It was because the heart is the seat of all beliefs; a matter is at first considered by the mind, then if the person is convinced with it when consideration is done, it settles in the heart and never again returns to the mind, and hence becomes a firm belief. The True Lord explains to us that it is not the eyes that become blind; rather, it is the hearts that are in the breasts that become blind (*al-Hajj:* 46).

And if the heart is blind to faith, the eye will not see God's signs, and the ear will not hear God's word. And those who choose disbelief over faith will receive great suffering in the Hereafter. God sometimes describes this suffering as painful, sometimes as degrading, and sometimes as great. Painful suffering means that which gives great pain. As for degrading suffering, this is for those whom God raised in this world. Sometimes degradation can be more painful to the ego than physical pain; and so on the Day of Resurrection, God will bring those people who were the leaders of disbelief in this world in front of those who followed them, and then degrade them. As for the great suffering, it is that which is ascribed to the omnipotent power of God. The power of human beings is limited, whereas the power of God *the Glorious and Exalted* has no limits; for every action is commensurate with the power of its doer, and God's power is great in everything He does, and since this suffering comes from God *the Glorious and Exalted*, it will surely be great.

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَبِٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَمَا هُم بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ⑧

Some people say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day,'
when really they do not believe [8] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 8)

People in this world are in one of three states: believers, outright disbelievers and hypocrites. At the beginning of the Noble Quran, in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God wanted to give us a description of all humanity in respect to their relationship with His Divine guidance. According to this criterion, people are of three kinds. First the believers whose attributes were delineated to us by God in three verses: They are the ones who believe in the Unseen, who observe prayer, and out of what We have bestowed on them, expend for God (3) And who believe in what has been sent down to you, and in what has been sent down before you, and who have full faith in the life to come (4) They are the ones who are guided by their Lord, and they are the ones who will attain success (5) Secondly there are the disbelievers, whose attributes were explained to us by God in two verses: As to the infidels, alike is it to them whether you warn them or do not warn them – they will not believe (6) God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil; and for them a severe suffering (7).

Then there are the hypocrites, whose attributes God gives us in thirteen consecutive verses. Why is this? This is because of the danger they pose to the religion as they are the ones with the potential to destroy the religion; as for the disbelievers, we are well aware of them, and are cautious of them because they announce their disbelief. Yet the hypocrite acts like a believer in front of you whilst concealing disbelief and idolatry within his heart. You might think him to be a believer and so tell him your secrets, which he then uses as a weapon to extend harm to the religion. God created many faculties within the human being, and if one is to live in a state of inner peace, his faculties must all be in harmony, not in discord. The believer's faculties are in harmony because faith is firm in his heart, and he speaks what he believes; so there is no discord between his faculties.

It could also be said that the disbeliever lives with a kind of balance because he rejects faith with his heart and announces this with his tongue. But the one whose faculties are in imbalance is the hypocrite who has lost harmony with both his community and his inner self. He speaks what his heart does not agree with, projects an outward state that is contrary to his inner state, and says what he does not believe and worries that people will discover him and so lives in a state of profound fear and imagines that this is only a temporary state that will come to an end.

But this discord will remain with him until the last day of his life, and then will go with him to the Hereafter where it will be his undoing and lead him to hell. God tells us how when the disbelievers, on the Day of Judgement, come close to the fire, their hearing and their sight and their skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing on earth. And they will ask their skins why they bore witness against them, and these will reply that God, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to them as well, for it is He Who has created them in the first instance – and to Him they are now brought back (*Fussilat:* 20-21).

All their faculties will revolt against them in the Hereafter, and so the peace they had been hoping for will not be realised for them, neither in their worldly life nor in their afterlife. The hypocrite's tongue will testify against him, as will his hands, his feet and his skin; so what will remain for him?

There is discord between him and his Lord, between him and his soul, between him and his society, between him and his afterlife, and between him and the disbelievers. His tongue speaks what is not in his heart. How does the True Lord describe the hypocrites? He says, 'And there are some people who say, 'We do believe in God and the Last Day,' while they do not believe' (*al-Baqara*: 8).

This is the first attribute of the hypocrites mentioned in the Noble Quran: that they profess faith whilst disbelief is in their hearts. And so their faith is all a show: if they attend the prayer, they are not credited for it because they are only doing it as a show, not out of faith; and if they pay the poor-due, it is a loss for them because they pay it whilst hating to do so; as far as they are concerned, it is only a loss of money, and they will receive no reward for it in the Hereafter. And if any of them is killed in battle, they will find nothing but grief and sorrow because they have thrown away their lives having not gone out to fight for the sake of God. And so everything they do is a cause of misery for them.

When the believer prays, or pays the poor-due, or is martyred in God's Cause, he hopes for paradise; yet the hypocrites might do all of these things, but they hope for nothing. It is as though because of their hypocrisy God has made misery their lot in this world and the next; in this world they do not taste the joy of the believer in those things he does for God's sake, and in the Hereafter they do not share the reward the believer hopes for from God.

يُخَٰدِعُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلَّآ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ٩

They seek to deceive God and the believers but
they only deceive themselves, though they do not
realize it [9] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 9)

Here comes the second attribute of the hypocrites, which is their heedlessness and the foolishness of their reasoning; they believe that by their hypocrisy, they are fooling God; yet can any human being hope to fool the Lord of the Worlds?

God *the Glorious and Exalted* knows everything. He knows what we conceal, and what we reveal; He knows all secrets, and that which is more hidden even than secrets. Is there anything more hidden than secrets? Indeed there is, for a secret is something that you divulge to someone else. So there are two people who know it: you and the one to whom you divulge it. But the thing which is even more hidden than a secret is that which you keep to yourself without telling anyone at all; it remains in your heart without you divulging it to anyone else. God tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that (he does not need to raise his voice), and that if he says anything aloud, He hears it, as He knows the secret and what is yet more hidden (*Ta Ha:* 7).

So no created thing can have the ability to deceive its creator; yet in their heedlessness, they believed they can deceive God *the Glorious and Exalted*, and because of this attitude of theirs, there can be no peace between them and God, but rather only revulsion and wrath.

They also imagine that they are deceiving the believers by saying in their presence words which do not reflect their inner states. This deception brings them nothing but misery because they live in constant fear, and always worried and fearful that the believers will find them out, or hear what they say in their private meetings when they speak words of disbelief, and mock faith. And so when they speak, they must first make sure that none of the true believers can hear them, and then make sure that no believer comes upon them while they are speaking. Their hearts are also filled with fear when they are with the believers, constantly filled with fear lest they will let slip a word which would expose their hypocrisy and disbelief. And so they have no peace whilst they are amongst the believers, and in truth they are only deceiving themselves. God knows all about their hypocrisy; and there is a possibility that the believers also be aware of it. And even if they are not, God *the Exalted* could inform them of it, as He told His Messenger that if He had so willed, He could have shown them clearly to him so that he would know them for sure as by a visible mark, but he will most certainly recognize them by the strange tone of their voice. And God knows all that people do (*Muhammad:* 30).

It so happened that hypocrites did come to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to declare to him that he was God’s Messenger, but

God exposed them to him, and asserted that when the hypocrites come to him, they say that they bear witness that he is indeed God's Messenger. God knows that he is truly His Messenger; and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed false in their declaration of faith (*Al-Munafiqun:* 1).

The hypocrites came to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to testify to the truth of his Message, and God knew that this testimony was true and right because He *the Glorious and Exalted* knew the truthfulness of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; but at the same time we see that He asserts that the hypocrites were liars. How can this be? How could God's words be in agreement with what the hypocrites said, and then call them liars? We say: It is because the hypocrites uttered with their tongues that which was not in their hearts. They testified with their tongues alone that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Messenger of God, whilst their hearts denied that and gave the lie to it. And so even though what the hypocrites said was true, they were liars when they said it because they did not believe it in their hearts, and they said with their tongues that which was not in their hearts. Truthfulness is for speech to match what is in the heart, and so they lied because when they testified to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they did not express what lay in their hearts, but rather their hearts denied what they said.

There are numerous verses in the Noble Quran in which God exposes the hypocrites and alerts His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to what they have stored in their hearts. So even though their deception of the believers was from one human being to another, they were sometimes exposed by the slips of their own tongues, and if not, God Himself would expose them. The upshot of all this is that they deceived no one; for God knew their secret and open affairs, and so sometimes He would aid the believers by exposing them, and sometimes the hypocrites' tongues would slip so they would expose themselves.

So the hypocrite fools no one but himself by his actions, and he loses out in this world and the next. When he performs a religious action, God knows it is hypocritical; and when he tries to deceive the believers, he is exposed. So the fact of the matter is that they believe they have gained some benefit for themselves, whilst in reality they have gained nothing but manifest failure.

فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مَرَضًا ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْذِبُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

There is a disease in their hearts, to which God has added more: agonizing torment awaits them for their persistent lying [10] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 10)

So God compares that which lies within the hearts of the hypocrites to a disease. Disease first causes weakness; so it is as though their hearts do not possess the soundness of faith which gives life to the heart and makes it strong and vigorous. Rather, their hearts are sick; but why are they sick? They have been weakened by hypocrisy and the constant contradictions by which they are surrounded, and they are aware that they are leading lives filled with lies. This disturbance of their hearts has made them ill, and they can only be cured by God’s leave. The cure is real, true faith and this is what brings relief, as God says that He sends down the Quran which as a healing and mercy to the faithful: But it shall only add to the ruin of the wicked (*al-Isra’:* 82).

So faith and the Quran are a source of health for the heart, yet both are absent from the hearts of the hypocrites, and so it is as though the sickness increases in their hearts as time passes, and because of their hypocrisy and disbelief, God increases this sickness. This is the third attribute of the hypocrites, namely that they possess diseased, sick hearts, which the light of faith cannot enter, and so their hearts are weak and do not possess the necessary strength to recognise the truth. Their hearts are fearful of all around them, and constantly in a state of worry, caught up in the conflict between what lies in the heart and what is spoken on the tongue. A diseased person is not strong enough to do anything, and likewise these sick hearts are not strong enough to speak the truth, or to be honest, and they cannot see what goes on around them in a way that is consistent with the natural disposition of faith which God placed in every heart. And so if the hypocrites ever entered a battle in the ranks of the Muslims, the first thing they would look for is the chance to flee the battlefield and seek out a place to hide themselves, or a place where no one could see them; and God says that if they find a place of refuge, or caves, or a hiding place, they assuredly turn towards it and haste thereto (*at-Tawba:* 57). Why? It is because they have diseased hearts, too weak to do anything, and their disease makes them run from everything and hide if only things went no further than this; but in the Hereafter, a grievous punishment awaits them in addition to the suffering they endured because of their diseased hearts in this worldly life. Since they lied to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, a grievous suffering awaits them in the Hereafter, even worse than that which awaits the disbelievers, God *the Exalted* has ruled that verily the hypocrites shall be in the lowest abyss of the fire (*an-Nisa’:* 145).

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ ١١

When it is said to them, ‘Do not cause corruption in the land,’ they say, ‘We are only putting things right’ [11]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 11)

Corruption on earth means to deliberately spoil something that is sound. The least that is expected from you in this world is that you leave sound things alone and that you not interfere with them and so spoil them; and if you want to move up a level in your faith, you take something which is sound and make it even better. Yet if you spoil something sound, you have committed two acts of corruption; for God has made sound for you all your worldly life’s needs, yet you have not left them in the sound state in which they were created, which itself would have been a means of avoiding corruption, but rather you found it in the sound state in which God created it and then corrupted it yourself. You did not accept the blessing God gave you by leaving it to fulfil its purpose of existence, and you did not attempt to assist it to serve its purpose even better; but rather you corrupted its purpose. For example, if there is a well from which people drink, this is a blessing to provide them with one of life’s essentials. By the means which God has placed in His universe, you can make this well even better by building a wall around it so that sand cannot crumble into it, or you can bring a rope and bucket to help the people reach its water; but if you come along and block it up, you corrupt something which was previously sound.

Such is the case with the hypocrites: God revealed guidance to allow people to live good lives on earth, yet the hypocrites try their utmost to corrupt this guidance by plotting against it and then claiming to believe in it, in order that they can stab Islam and destroy it from within.

The enemies of Islam realised that this strong, true religion could not be harmed by the attacks of disbelief, but would rather confront them and defeat them; for there can be no battle between truth and falsehood except that truth will come out a winner. The enemies of Islam have spent so many years trying to wage war against it, but they were unable to harm it. Then they realised that this religion can only be attacked from within, and that the way of corruption followed by the hypocrites is the most useful way to divide the Muslims. And so they concentrated their efforts on those in the Muslim communities who were Muslims by name only, so that they could find ways of attacking Islam, and so groups and sects emerged such as what they call ‘secularism’ and ‘socialism’ and so on; the hypocrites did all of this to Islam, and then cloaked their doings with an Islamic appearance so that they could spread corruption in the land in the name of Islam and wage war against God’s guidance.

And if the believers chided these people for spreading corruption in the land, and demanded that they cease doing so, they would claim that they were not corrupters but rather reformers; yet what kind of ‘reform’ is there in the refusal to follow God’s guidance, and in leaving aside this guidance for any reason whatsoever?

أَلَآ إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَٰكِن لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ ١٢

But really they are causing corruption,
though they do not realize it [12]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 12)

So God gives us His judgement over them, which is that just as they deceive themselves unknowingly thinking that they are deceiving God, they also corrupt the land and claim to be reformers whilst in reality they are corrupters. Why is this? It is because their hearts are filled with disbelief and enmity towards God’s guidance, and so if they do anything that seems outwardly to be righteous, in actuality it is corruption, just in the same way as their tongues utter that which is not in their hearts.

The world cannot be put right by anything except God’s guidance, for God is the One Who created, and the One Who brought everything into existence, and He knows best what corrupts and what rectifies His creation because He is the One who created it, and no one knows better how to rectify something than the one who made it.

In our worldly affairs, if we want to fix something we take it to its manufacturers, because they are the ones who can show us the best way to fix it; and if the manufacturer is not in our home town, we take it to whoever the manufacturer has trained to repair their products, or we refer to the printed instructions which show us the way to repair it, and without this we cannot repair it but only make it worse. It is strange that we all follow this procedure in our worldly lives, yet when we consider man and the universe instead of turning to their Creator and Maker, He who knows best, to find out how to rectify them, we instead turn to God's creatures, who give us a way of acting which corrupts, whilst appearing outwardly to rectify, and which actually makes things worse. And it is strange that we call this 'success' and 'progress'. Yet why do we not turn to the Maker, or the Creator Who made everything in creation? He knows best what corrupts His creation, and what rectifies them.

As the True Lord has judged that the hypocrites are corrupters, this is a judgement of absolute certainty, and anyone who tries to change God's guidance or prevent its implementation on the grounds of supposed 'reform' is nothing more than a spreader of corruption, whether he perceives this or not. If they truly wanted to rectify things, they would turn to that which rectifies the world in its entirety, which is the Divine guidance which the Creator of this world revealed; and this guidance exists, and it has been passed on to mankind, and no one can claim that he is unaware of it.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا۟ كَمَآ ءَامَنَ ٱلنَّاسُ قَالُوٓا۟ أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَآ ءَامَنَ
ٱلسُّفَهَآءُ ۗ أَلَآ إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ ٱلسُّفَهَآءُ وَلَٰكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

When it is said to them, 'Believe, as the others believe,' they say, 'Should we believe as the fools do?' but they are the fools, though they do not know it [13] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 13)

By 'weak-minded,' the hypocrites meant the poor and disadvantaged people. The meaning of *safah* (from which comes *sufaha'* 'weak-minded') is recklessness, foolishness and slow-wittedness. But could the attribute of weak-mindedness be ascribed to the believers, who had embraced faith in God, or would it be more properly ascribed to those who do not believe in God? If you think that the believers are weak-minded, then why do you falsely claim to be believers yourselves, so that you too will be counted amongst the weak-minded?! There is no doubt that there was a great contradiction apparent in the behaviour of the hypocrites. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* called them to embrace faith, as did the Muslims; but they described those who believed as being *sufaha'* (weak-minded,) which, in their understanding meant underprivileged people, who possessed nothing. This was because the leaders of Quraysh did not believe. They also claimed that those who believed were foolish and reckless; but heedlessness was the disease which filled their hearts and prevented them from realising a crucial fact, that they were outwardly manifesting faith, and claiming to have faith, and then calling the believers 'weak-minded.' Yet if these people are weak-minded, as you claim, then why are you outwardly making a show of faith; so that you can be weak-minded like them?!

There is no logic in this, and this shows the feeble-mindedness of the hypocrites, in that they did not notice that when they called the believers weak-minded they also ascribed the same to themselves because the hypocrites claimed to be believers. And so every action of the hypocrites was characterised by contradiction, a contradiction of the intellect, and logic; and this contradiction sprang from the contradiction present in the faculties of the soul, each with the other. The tongue denied, but the heart believed, action gave the lie to beliefs and the outward manifestation of faith meant that they had to bear the hardships of faith without gaining any reward thereby. If they had possessed any straight mind, they would have been aware of all this; but as they were following this way, the way of hypocrisy, they were unaware, that they were the very embodiment of weak-mindedness and all that it implies of foolishness, contempt and lack of awareness of the truth and the thoughtlessness of their actions. When God described them as weak-minded, it was an accurate description of their state and their way of life.

وَإِذَا لَقُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ قَالُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا۟ إِلَىٰ شَيَـٰطِينِهِمْ
قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

When they meet the believers, they say, 'We believe,'
but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say,
'We're really with you; we were only mocking' [14]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 14)

And so the True Lord *the Exalted* shows us that the hypocrite has more than one life which he must take care of. In order for life to proceed properly and naturally, it must be one single harmonious life; but look at these people: with the believers they say, 'We believe,' and they follow a life of faith in appearance; that is, they act out a faithful life just like an actor on a stage plays a character completely unlike himself. Their lives are made up of affectation and contradiction. This is until they are apart from the believers, as the True Lord *the Exalted* says of them: 'but when they find themselves alone with their devils…'

Consider now the accuracy of the Quranic expression. The Quran uses the word *shayatin* (plural of *shaitan*, which means 'satan/devil'), implying a secret insinuator, as opposed to the truth, which is plain, evident and in the light. The ways of Satan and his plots and machinations take place in secret because they are based on falsehood, and the soul is never ashamed of revealing righteous truth, but it is always very fearful and careful to hide falsehood.

Let us give a simple example to illustrate this. A man sits with his wife in their house, when the doorbell rings. What happens? The man gets up calmly and opens the door to see who is there. If it is a friend or relative, he welcomes him and invites him in, and his wife gets up to prepare food or drinks for the guest. Yet what if the same thing were to happen if the man was with someone else's wife and someone knocked on the door? There would be embarrassment and a confused scene, and the man would frantically search for a place to hide the woman, or look for a secret door to send her out of, or try turning off all the lights and stay quiet so that the person would think that no one was at home and leave. And then, before the woman with whom he had committed this unlawful act left, he would open the door carefully and look left and right to make sure no one could see him, and when he has seen that there was no one he would quickly herd the woman out because she represented a sin from which he wanted to be rid, and when he walked her to the car he would walk far from her, and look around the street to make sure no one could see, and once they were in the car, they would drive off as fast as they could.

This is the difference between the way of faith and the way of Satan. The situation is the same, but what makes the difference is the matter of lawfulness or unlawfulness. Look at how people behave with lawful matters, with complete transparency and security, and then look how they behave with unlawful matters, in darkness and secrecy, careful that no one sees them. By considering this, we can see the accuracy of the language of the Quran when it says, ‘but when they find themselves alone with their devils…’

The way of Satan necessitates privacy, seclusion and a place where no one can see you, and no one can hear you because openly following the way of Satan would bring scandal. And so you see that iniquitous people try their best to cover up their iniquitous actions which is a clear testimony on their part to the vile and unlawful nature of these actions, and that no one should witness them. As long as they do not want anyone to see these actions means that they are aware that what they are doing is a satanic act, which God does not sanction or approve of.

We should be aware that moral values are fixed values, even for corrupt people. And when we consider God’s words: And when they meet the faithful they say, ‘We believe,’ it means that when they make a show of faith, they do so openly, even contriving ways to do so; and so it might be expected that on the contrary, when they were alone with their devils, they should say, ‘We do not believe.’

In Arabic there are verbal sentences and nominal sentences. Verbal sentences indicate movement and renewal, whereas nominal sentences indicate constancy. With the believers, the hypocrites would say ‘We believe’ (using a verbal clause) because their faith was not firm but was rather fickle; and when they met with the disbelievers and said, ‘We do not believe,’ this would suggest firmness; yet between their meeting with the believers and their meeting with the disbelievers, their disbelief was renewed, and so they said, ‘Verily we hold with you, and we are only mocking.’

ٱللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِى طُغْيَٰنِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ١٥

God is mocking them, and allowing them more
slack to wander blindly in their insolence [15]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 15)

The hypocrites are people who have no power or strength, but God is All-Powerful and Almighty, and so when He punishes them in kind for their mockery it will be a devastating requital. If the hypocrite displays with his speech that which is not in his heart, God will requite him with the same. And so since the hypocrite has two sides, an inner nature and an outer facet, God will treat him as a Muslim in this worldly life, and then in the Hereafter when all secrets are revealed, He will cast him into the lowest level of hell, even lower than that of the disbeliever, as the sin of the hypocrite is even graver.

'God shall mock at them.' Mockery (*istihza'*) means disparagement; so, on the Day of Resurrection, they will try and lay claim to their outward appearances as Muslims, but God will reveal their true inner states. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* promises woe to every slanderer, fault-finder (*al-Humaza:* 1). This means those who mock others even with gestures.

They, for example, see a person with a club foot walking with a limp, and so they imitate his gait in order to mock and deride him, either by gesture or by word. There is slander (*hamz*) and there is slanderer (*humaza*) meaning to mock someone in gestures. This is the meaning of (*hamz*)*:* to deride and mock people, and it is a sign of the absence of faith because we are all creatures of God, and so if you mock a person's disability, you should be aware that this person is not the cause of his disability and he has no power over it. People do not create themselves, and so the truth is that you are mocking God's creation; and only a fool could mock God's creation because he is thereby mocking what he perceives as a flaw in one of God's creatures, whilst forgetting the blessings that God has given him in not also giving him this flaw; and also he is mocking a flaw whilst forgetting that the True Lord *the Exalted* might have given that person other attributes and qualities which he himself lacks, and God commands the believers to refrain from deriding others; it may well be that those whom they deride are better than themselves (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

The sum total of any one person is equal to the sum total of any other person, and this is of the justice of God. If you are better than someone in one aspect, search for your own defects. If you mock a believer because of something, this mockery is not disassociated from God's creation; and so it makes complete sense that when they said '…we were only mocking', God would answer them by saying 'God shall mock at them, and shall keep them in their overweening arrogance, blindly wandering in perplexity (*al-Baqara*: 15), that is, He will increase this arrogance of theirs because the word (*madda*) means to extend something. But sometimes you increase a thing in itself, and sometimes you increase it by adding something else to it. You might take a piece of thread and stretch it out as far as it will go, or you might tie it to another piece of thread. In this case you have lengthened it with something else outside of it, and likewise God increases their arrogance.

Coming now to the word *ya'mahun* in the verse (rendered as 'blindly wandering in perplexity'), the word *'amah* is distinct from the word *'ama* (blindness) in that the final letter of the word is different. *'Ama* is the physical blindness of the eye, whilst 'amah is the blindness of the insight. And so they stumble about, because blindness leads to stumbling in movement, whether literally as with physical blindness, or metaphorically as with the stumbling in morality and way of life caused by blindness of the insight. God explains to us that it is not the eyes that become blind; rather, it is the hearts that are in the breasts that become blind (*al-Hajj:* 46). So, although they might not be physically blind, their insights are blind, and God tells us that on the Day of Judgement, the sinner will ask his Lord why He has assembled him blind whereas he was endowed with sight in worldly life. God will answer him that it is because God's signs came to him, but he was oblivious of them, and thus he will be forgotten on that day (*Ta Ha:* 125-126). So blindness of the insight in this world makes a person blind to the signs of God in His creation, and blinds him to faith in God's guidance:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱشۡتَرَوُاْ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةَ بِٱلۡهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَت تِّجَٰرَتُهُمۡ وَمَا كَانُواْ مُهۡتَدِينَ ١٦

They have bought error in exchange for guidance, so their trade reaps no profit, and they are not rightly guided [16]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 16)

Here the True Lord gives us another attribute of the hypocrites, namely that they have purchased error with guidance. As long as there is an exchange here, there must be a deal, which requires a buyer and a seller. In the past, goods would be purchased with other goods (i.e. bartered), whilst today we use money. But what did they purchase?

These hypocrites purchased error; and with what did they pay for it? They paid for it with guidance! The word ‘for’ here (in Arabic the particle *bi*) refers to the price paid when you buy something. And so all of these people forsook guidance and bought error; but did they even possess guidance when the transaction was being conducted? It would seem that they must have possessed guidance, as though they had followed guidance and then found that it did not give them all the worldly benefits they wanted, and so they forsook it and purchased error with it so that they could get what they wanted. The guidance they possessed might have been the guidance of natural disposition, as though they could have chosen guidance but instead opted for error.

God guides all mankind with the guidance of direction, and then increases the guidance of all those who follow it. He *the Exalted* tells us the story of the tribe of Thamud, to whom He offered guidance, but they preferred blindness to guidance (*Fussilat:* 17).

God affirms that ‘their bargain has not brought them gain.’ The word ‘bargain’ implies buying and selling, the buyer being the consumer and the seller being either the producer or an intermediary between the producer and the consumer. What does the seller get from the deal? He gets a profit, and if he makes a profit, it is said that his bargain has brought him gain; and if he makes neither profit nor loss, or if he makes a loss, this means his bargain has brought him no gain.

So God’s words that their bargain has not brought them gain, and that they are not guided at all indicate that they have lost everything, for they have found no gain, and so they have earned no benefit from their action, and have squandered guidance, and lost their profit and their capital. It might have been that they neither gained nor lost; but since they gave guidance as the price for error, they gained nothing and also lost guidance, which was their capital.

If you want to define the character of the hypocrite, you can say that he is a man without any dignity or any manliness with which to confront, and without any strength, and that is why he tries to plot in secret. So his character is contemptible in his own eyes; for even if he is able to hide his defects from others, it is enough to make him contemptible in his own eyes to know that he lies to himself, as the poet said:

If I stay clear of shameful deeds through fear
Of people, the people are more honourable than I am
It is shame enough for a person to see his own faults,
Even if he is hidden from all men and jinn.

So what is important is that you can see yourself, and the root of the inner conflict in the soul of the hypocrite is that he wants to conceal his faults from people.

مَثَلُهُمۡ كَمَثَلِ ٱلَّذِى ٱسۡتَوۡقَدَ نَارٗا فَلَمَّآ أَضَآءَتۡ مَا حَوۡلَهُۥ
ذَهَبَ ٱللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمۡ وَتَرَكَهُمۡ فِى ظُلُمَٰتٖ لَّا يُبۡصِرُونَ ١٧

They are like people who [labour to] kindle a fire: when it lights up everything around them, God takes away all their light, leaving them in utter darkness, unable to see [17]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 17)

The True Lord wants to make the inner conflict and the divided nature of the hypocrites easier for us to understand, and so He gives us parables, that are similes which impart to us meanings and sayings of wisdom; and the parable is one of the time-honoured and age-old means of expression in Arabic literature.

A parable/proverb normally originates when an event happens during the course of which an expression is used which is concise and expressive, after which people begin to use it to describe any similar situation.

Let us take an illustrative example. Once a king wanted to ask for the hand of a young Arab lady in marriage, and so he sent a lady named ‘Isam to carry his proposal. When she returned, he said to her, ‘What is behind you, ‘Isam’? She replied, ‘The churning has brought forth butter.’ To churn is to put milk into a vessel and shake it until butter separates from the milk. After this, both the question and the answer became idiomatic expressions, so that if someone comes to you from whom you wish to hear news, you say, (‘What is behind you, ‘Isam’?) even though their name is not Isam, and you did not send them as an envoy, but rather, you simply want to hear any news they might have.

And so if you want to use a parable or idiom to express the notion of hearts which are at odds with one another, and how once they become rivals they can never be reconciled, you might say as the poet said:

Hearts, when they are divided, are like glass:
Once broken in pieces, they cannot be mended.

When a glass smashes it cannot be mended; and so this is used to illustrate the idea to you because you cannot easily picture the battle that wages between hearts since this is a matter of the unseen, and so we use something tangible to illustrate the concept. The notion is made clearer by its being compared to something tangible which you can easily understand and observe.

God uses parables in the Noble Quran on numerous occasions in order to explain for us the unseen things of which we have neither knowledge nor direct experience. And so He gives us parables to illustrate the pinnacle of doctrines, namely the Oneness of God; and He gives us examples of His Light which we cannot see directly; and He gives us parables of the states of the disbelievers and hypocrites in order that we can understand their corrupt beliefs and be aware of them; and He gives us examples of what can be the result of ingratitude and the wicked transgression of rights among many other parables. God explains to us that He has indeed set out to people every kind of parable in this Quran, but most of them have refused everything except unbelief (*al-Isra’:* 89).

God *the Glorious and Exalted* has given us parables to illustrate this world and the next, the wonders of creation and the matters of faith; yet despite this many people are blind to the wisdom of these parables, and do not believe in what they reveal. The True Lord has given us these parables to help us understand, and has based them on the ordinary familiar things we see in our everyday lives; and these parables should have helped increase people's faith because they clarify to them those things which are unknown to them – yet instead, they persisted in disbelief !

Before we start discussing the noble verse: 'They are like one who kindles a fire, and when it has thrown its light on all around him, God takes away their light and leaves them in utter darkness, where they cannot see' (*al-Baqara*: 17), we must first discuss some of the parables which are given in the Noble Quran, in order to observe how God has spoken to us about unseen matters by use of the tangible things of this world.

God has given us a parable to illustrate the summit of faith, that there is no god but God, and how this is a mercy from God for which we should bow down and thank Him because it contains a protection for us from all misery. God wants mercy for His servants, yet some people want to make things hard for themselves by associating partners with God *the Glorious and Exalted*, and by taking, instead of the easy way of faith, the way of disbelief, hypocrisy and setting up partners with God Who possesses everything in this world and the next. To illustrate this specific point, God *the Glorious and Exalted* sets forth a parable: a man who has for his masters several partners, all of whom at variance with one another, and a man devoted wholly to one man: can these two be deemed equal as regards their condition? No, all praise is due to God, but most of them do not understand this (*az-Zumar:* 29).

By using this clear image which we can all envisage, and upon which there can be no disagreement, God wants to give us a clearer image of the one who serves God Alone and the one who associates other partners with God. He gives us the example of a slave owned by several masters – let us say a slave with ten masters – who are not in agreement with one another, but rather in constant disputation amongst one another, and another slave who has only one master. Which of them will be living in peace and grace? Of course the one with only one master will live with blessings and grace because he only has to obey a single command and a single prohibition, and he answers to a single lord, and seeks to please a single master. As for the one owned by partners and even if they were in agreement, each of them would have his own commands and prohibitions, and each of them would have his own demands; so what about if they disputed? One of the partners may say to the slave 'come here,' and the other says 'do not go;' one orders one thing, another orders the opposite; so which one of them should he please, and which should he anger? His life will be plagued by misery and contradiction.

God wants to make this image clearer to us- the image of the summit of doctrines which affirms that God is One. He wants us to understand this image by means of something tangible that we observe and witness, and to see God's abundant blessings and mercy to His servants.

In another parable, the True Lord urges us to reflect on another issue; take the example of two men, one of whom is dumb, unable to do anything, and is a sheer burden on his master: to whichever task the latter directs him, he comes back with no success. Can such a man be considered the equal of the one who enjoins what is just and himself follows a straight way? (*an-Nahl:* 76)

In this noble verse, the True Lord wants us to reflect on a parable which is clearly tangible to us. Which of them is better? Consider, first, the worship of the idol which the idolaters worship, and which never brings them any good, because it cannot even benefit itself, never mind anyone else, and indeed is a burden on those who worship it because they have to carry it from place to place if they want to change the place of worship or travel, and if it falls, it will break and need to be repaired. So apart from the fact that it brings them no good, it is also a source of hardship for them, and is also in need of constant care and protection from them.

Is it better to worship such an idol, or to worship God *the Exalted* from Whom comes all goodness and all blessings, and Who commands justice, favouring none of His servants over the other, and Who shows His servants the straight path to follow, a path with no twists or turns which leads to paradise in the Hereafter. By this parable, God illustrates the foolishness of the ideas of the idolaters who worship idols instead of God.

Therefore, these two parables give us an elucidation of the issue of Divinity and the Oneness of God. Then God gives us another parable to illustrate His Light, the Divine Light which illuminates this world and the Hereafter and illuminates the hearts of the believers. God gives us an example of this Light using something tangible to us: God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in glass – the glass, as it were, a radiant star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire had not touched it! It is a light upon light. God guides whom He wills to His light, and God sets forth parables to men, for God knows all things (*an-Nur:* 35).

It is as though God wants us to know, by means of a tangible example, that His Light is like that of a niche, meaning the opening in the wall like we have in our country houses in which we place lamps so that the lamp does not light the whole room, but rather, its light is focused on the niche so that it is stronger in this concentrated area. But then the lamp is enclosed in glass which protects it from wind and makes its light stronger and purer without any smoke; and the glass also serves to reflect the light and make it brighter.It is no ordinary glass, but rather, it is like a radiant star, i.e. it produces its own light like a star. And its fuel is from a blessed tree full of light, neither of the east nor of the west, i.e. light fills it from the centre and shines forth pure. And the oil itself gives off light almost without being touched by a flame, and so it is light upon light. Is there any part of this lamp that could be in darkness? Or will it all be full of bright light? And this is not the Light of God Who is beyond any comparison, but rather, it is a parable to bring it nearer to the mind. So it is as though God's Light illuminates every spot and every space, and leaves nothing in darkness; it is light upon light.

A poet(1) wanted to praise a caliph,(2) and it was usual to compare caliphs to people renowned for possessing fine attributes, so he said,

'Amr's bravery with Hatim's largess,
And Ahnaf's magnanimity with Iyas' cunning

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(1) It was Abu Tammam, a well-known poet from the Abbasid era.

(2) It was Ahmad ibn Al-Mu'tasim.

All of the people mentioned here were used by the poet as paradigms of these virtues: ʿAmr was known for his bravery, Hatim for his generosity, Ahnaf for his forbearance, and Iyas for his intelligence. Upon this, one of those present (1) stood up and said, ‘The caliph is greater than all of those whom you just mentioned!’ And so Abu Tammam extemporaneously replied:

Censure me not for comparing him to his lessers,
In such roving examples of valour and bounty;
For God used a lesser thing to symbolise His light:
A niche, wherein a lamp is shining.(2)

So Ahmad ibn Al-Mu‘tasim and the others present were amazed by his brilliance and quick wit, and he ordered his prize to be doubled.

God also gives us parables to illustrate what the believers will see in paradise, the paradise which the God-fearing are promised – a paradise wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk whose taste never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey cleansed of all impurity (*Muhammad:* 15).

This is not paradise; it is rather the likeness of it, a parable by which God helps us to picture it by use of things we see in our lives, for human minds cannot imagine anything above that. Paradise contains what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, or any human heart has conceived, and so there are no words in this life to express what paradise contains. In another verse God explains that no soul knows what joy of the eyes is reserved for the good in recompense of their works (*as-Sajda:* 17).

If the soul does not know of these things, then it will have no words with which to express what paradise contains. Once a parable becomes widely known, it becomes known as a maxim. If you see someone who is deluded by his strength, and you want to make him see that you are even stronger than him, you say, ‘If you are a wind, you are now face to face with a hurricane.’ Yet in reality there is neither a wind nor a hurricane, but what is intended is the deep-meaning, not the actual literal import of the words.

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(1) It was Ya’qub ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi.

(2) From (Diwan Abu Tammam) with the commentary of (Khatib Tabrizi)

Coming back to the discussion of the verse at hand, the True Lord wants to give us an image of what lies in the hearts of the hypocrites of nervousness, disturbance, and hesitation regarding the attitude to God's guidance.

Since what goes on in people's hearts is unknown to us, God wanted to help us understand this matter. He says, 'They are like one who kindles a fire...,' i.e. he tries to light a fire; and if someone wants to light a fire, he must have some purpose for doing it which might be to gain warmth, to cook, to produce light, or to do something else. What matters is that there must be some reason for lighting the fire.

Then the True Lord says: '…and when it has thrown its light on all around him, God takes away their light and leaves them in utter darkness, where they cannot see.' This is because of the bewilderment that fills their hearts. They (the tribesmen of ancient Arabia) had heard from the Jews that the time had come for a new prophet to emerge, and so they resolved to believe in him; but their faith was not based on a true desire to believe, but rather was a mere attempt to obtain worldly security because the Jews used to threaten them and say, 'The time has come for a prophet to come, in whom we shall believe, and with whom we shall slay you as 'Ad and Iram were slain.' So the hypocrites wanted to escape this fate with which the Jews threatened them, and they imagined that if they falsely announced their faith in this prophet, they would be saved.

The True Lord gives us this image of them as having kindled this fire to give them light to show them the way of faith; but when this light came, and instead of following the light of faith, they rejected it, and when this happened, God took away their light, so nothing of the light of faith remained in their hearts. So they first asked for the light of faith, and when God granted it to them they turned away from it, as though corruption is their natural state, and they were the ones to begin the corruption; and once they did, God took the light of faith from their hearts.

Notice the exactness of the Quranic style here in the expression '...God takes away their light...' using the Arabic word noor for light, not daw' (both words mean 'light'), although it says that they kindled the fire to obtain daw'. But what is the difference between daw' and nur? To understand the difference, let us look at the verse where the True Lord says that it is He Who has made the sun a *dia'* (a derivative of *daw'*), source of radiant light, and the moon a noor (reflected light) (*Yunus:* 5). So we see that *daw'* is stronger than noor, and *daw'* only comes from a light-producing body; thus the sun creates its own daw' (light), whilst the moon receives the daw' of the sun and reflects it back as noor.

Before the sun rises there is noor, but the daw' only comes after the sun has risen. If the True Lord used *daw'*, it would mean that He takes away the light which reflects itself as noor, but left them the noor itself. However, using the term noor means that no light of any kind was left for them, as though their hearts were completely filled with darkness, and so immediately after this God says, '...and leaves them in utter darkness, where they cannot see' so that we know that there is no trace of the light of faith of any kind in their hearts; and this was all a natural consequence to their wrongdoing and their rejection of God's light. We notice also that the True Lord did not say, 'and leaves them in darkness,' but rather said, '…and leaves them in utter darkness…,' i.e. in darkness upon darkness, from which there can never be any escape.

From where did this utter darkness come? It came because they sought this worldly life instead of the Hereafter, and when the light of faith came to them, they turned away from it, and so God turned their hearts away as well.

If we take for example the story of the leader of the hypocrites in Medina, Abdullah ibn Ubay, we see that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* entered Medina at a time when the Medinans were preparing to crown 'Abdullah ibn Ubay as their king. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived, the people turned away from 'Abdullah ibn Ubay to welcome the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and so the arrival of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* cost 'Abdullah ibn Ubay the crown. It was possible for him to accept faith, and seek light from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; and if he had believed then, he might have been given an everlasting kingdom in the Hereafter greater than any kingdom he could have expected in this world. But because his heart was fixed on worldly matters, not on religion, and because he wanted an elevated status in this life, not paradise in the Hereafter, hateful spite filled his heart and cast darkness into it, and envy filled his heart and cast darkness into it, and woe filled his heart and cast darkness into it, and hatred and malice filled his heart and cast darkness into it; and so darkness was manifold.

And so in the heart of every hypocrite lies manifold darkness: the darkness of spite for the believers, the darkness of hatred for them, the darkness of hoping to see the defeat of faith, the darkness of hoping to see the believers afflicted with evil, and the darkness of confusion and pain caused by the constant attempt to display faith outwardly, whilst having hearts filled with disbelief; all of these are kinds of darkness.

But do not try to understand this literally as your mind may first suggest; for the parable here is only to illustrate the true meaning. For example, consider the statement of the True Lord to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and to any believer that whenever they recite the Quran, God places an invisible (concealed) veil between them and those who do not believe in the Hereafter (*al-Isra':* 45).

But how could the veil be invisible, since it is a cover, and something which hides one thing from another? The True Lord wants us to understand that although a veil conceals one thing from another, it is itself also concealed, and it cannot be seen. Some scholars say that ‘concealed’ here is a passive participle being used in the sense of an active one, so it means here ‘concealing;’ but we say no. An expression about a similar situation in another verse can throw some light on the point. God affirms that for the believers there will be gardens of perpetual bliss which God the Most Merciful has promised to His servants in a realm which is beyond the reach of human perception; surely, His promise shall come to pass (literally: to be met) (*Maryam:* 61).

The word *ma’tiyya* (rendered here as ‘shall come to pass’) is the passive participle of the verb ‘to come’, and so some of them say that the passive participle is being used in place of the active. To this we say: No, you have misunderstood it: does God’s promise seek out the servant, or does the servant seek it out with his actions, as though he is going to it? The one who receives the promise is the one who benefits, not the promise itself.

Therefore, in its precise expression, the Noble Quran tells us that the one who receives the promise is the one who strives to attain it; it is not the promise that seeks to meet the person promised – which would be the case if the active participle were used here.

So when the True Lord says, '...and leaves them in utter darkness, wherein they cannot see,' He negates their possessing any light; and light is not connected with hearing, touch, or smell, but is rather related to sight.

Look at the precision of the Quranic expression here. If there is no light, there can be no sight; that is, the eye does not see by itself, but rather sees by means of light rays reflected from the object to the eye.

God states that He has established the night and the day as two signs; and then He effaced the sign of night and set up the light-giving sign of day (*al-Isra':* 12).

So it is as though the eye does not see by its own capability; rather, the thing which allows the eye to see is light, and if light is lost, vision is lost, so you cannot see things in the dark – and this is a Quranic miracle which science discovered long after the revelation of the Quran.

صُمٌّۢ بُكۡمٌ عُمۡيٞ فَهُمۡ لَا يَرۡجِعُونَ ١٨

Deaf, dumb, and blind: they will never return [18]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 18)

After informing us that because of the wrongdoing of these hypocrites, He took the light of faith from their hearts so that they were unable to see God's signs, the True Lord tells us that it was not only their sight which was taken, but that all of their senses were disabled. Their hearing was disabled and so they were deaf, their speech was disabled and so they were dumb, and their sight was disabled and so they were blind. These are the human being's senses of perception. God informs us that He has brought us forth from our mothers' wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed us with hearing, and sight, and minds so that we may have cause to be grateful' (*an-Nahl:* 78).

So their being in utter darkness, unable to see, means that their other tools of perception are also disabled; so their ears are deaf to the guidance of the True Lord, and their tongues are unable to express what is in their hearts, and their eyes cannot see God's signs in the universe. And so, their means of perceiving God's guidance are all disabled.

As for the expression '...and they cannot turn back,' this means that these means of perception will not return to them to allow them to see God's light in His creation. They have no perception, and so it cannot be hoped that they will ever return to the way of guidance. The doctrine has been corrupted in their hearts, and so they cannot distinguish between immediate temporary harm and the lasting goodness to come. The light of guidance would have caused them to see the way to God, so that they could follow a clear way with no confusion; but when the light came to them, they rejected it and turned away from it, turning away from all that would have led them to God's way.

In this noble verse, God gives us another attribute of the hypocrites, which is that the means of perception that God created for them have been disabled, and so to insist on trying to guide them and expending much effort on them will have no result because God, as a result of their hypocrisy and wrongdoing, has disabled the means of perceiving guidance that might have otherwise led them back to the way of truth.

أَوۡ كَصَيِّبٖ مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَٰتٞ وَرَعۡدٞ وَبَرۡقٞ يَجۡعَلُونَ أَصَٰبِعَهُمۡ
فِيٓ ءَاذَانِهِم مِّنَ ٱلصَّوَٰعِقِ حَذَرَ ٱلۡمَوۡتِۚ وَٱللَّهُ مُحِيطُۢ بِٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ١٩

Or [like people who, under] a cloudburst from the sky, with its darkness, thunder, and lightning, put their fingers into their ears to keep out the thunder- claps for fear of death – God surrounds the disbelievers [19] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 19)

The True Lord speaks of 'a violent cloudburst in the sky....' 'Cloudburst' means heavy rain. God sends down rain, by which life is sustained, as He *the Exalted* explains that He has made out of water every living thing (*al-Anbiya':* 30).

Of course we know that the sending down of rain is done by the power of God alone since the process of rain is a delicately precise creation, and every day it takes place by means of many delicate and subtle processes, involving many factors which none but God could bring into being. The earth was prepared for rain from the moment it was created. Three-fourths of the surface of the earth is water, and one-fourth is dry land. Why is this? It is God's wisdom that makes it this way, in order that the evaporation process would be able to occur with ease, since the greater the surface level of water, the faster it evaporates; and if the surface area is small, evaporation is more difficult. If we take a cup of water and place it in a closed room for a day, we will find that the amount of water will have decreased by one centimetre or less. Yet if we take the water in this cup and pour it onto the floor of the room, it will disappear in a short time. Why? That is because the surface area of the water is wider, and so evaporation occurs swiftly.

When God created the earth, out of His wisdom He decreed that the process of rain should take place by means of the fact that the surface area of water would be large in order that evaporation could take place easily; and He decreed that the rays of the sun would be the cause of this evaporation from the surface of the water. All of this took place with great precision so that the rain would neither drown the earth, nor leave it too dry. Then God subdued the wind to make the clouds go where He decreed rain should fall, and He made the peaks of mountains cold so that when clouds contacted them, they would release rain. All of this took place with great precision, as did all the other stages of the process of rain.

As long as water is the source of life on earth, God has given us a parable by its means, just as He did with fire and the light it brings. They are all parables based on physical, tangible things in order to help us understand what we cannot see. So water brings life.

But the hypocrites did not consider this blessing, which gave them water from the sky without any work or effort on their part; they rather busied themselves with secondary matters. They should have welcomed this blessing, for it was a source of great good for them. Before rain falls from the sky, there must be some darkness caused by the clouds which bear the rain, and block the rays of the sun by day and the light of the moon by night. This darkness is the precursor of the goodness of rain.

They did not consider the goodness with which God filled the earth, but rather considered only the darkness, and so fled from goodness. The same is the case for the sound of thunder and the brilliance of lightning. People receive thunder by means of the ear- the organ of hearing, whilst lighting is received by the eye. The sound of thunder is powerful, more powerful than the ear can bear, and so when a person hears it, he is startled, and tries to prevent his ears from hearing it by putting his fingertips in his ears.

These hypocrites did not just put their fingertips in their ears, but as God says, '...they thrust their fingers into their ears...' He did not say 'their fingertips,' and this is a kind of exaggeration to show the effect that the thunder had on them. It is as though out of their fear and terror, they all tried to put their whole fingers in their ears to protect them from this terrifying sound, as though they went to extremes in their fear of the thunder. Notice that the discourse here does not refer to a single individual, but rather to many, as God says, '...they thrust their fingers....' We say that a command issued to a group is really a command issued to every individual amongst this group. If the teacher says to the students, 'Get out your pens,' this means that every individual student should get out his/her pen. If the leader of a group says, 'Get in your cars,' this means that every individual in the group should get in his car. Similarly, the meaning of 'they thrust their fingers into their ears' is that every one of them puts his fingers in his ears. Why do they do this? They do it out of fear of death because thunder and lighting are sometimes accompanied by loud blasts, and so out of their extreme fear, each one of them imagines that one of these blasts will kill him.

So, it is as though they are receiving God's blessing in a way contrary to its true reality. They do not see the true blessing of the rain that comes to sustain life, but rather, they only consider the superficiality of the thunder and lightning. In the same way, not one of the hypocrites could restrain himself from indulging the passions of his lower self, wanting only immediate gratification instead of waiting for the true goodness that God has promised His servants in the Hereafter. He considers moral responsibilities as hardships and things which cause the soul difficulty, forgetting the true reward of these responsibilities in the Hereafter, and how they will give him everlasting delight, just as people look at rain and think it to be simply darkness, thunder, and lightning, forgetting that without this rain, it would be impossible for their lives to continue.

They think that these superficial things reflect the entirety of things, when really, they only come and go in a short period of time, short like the life of this world in chronological terms; but the way they view them is chronological and materialistic because they believe in nothing more than this worldly life, and are ignorant of the Hereafter. They were ignorant of the fact that this water will remain for a long time, and were only aware of these superficial temporary phenomena which came with the rain, and feared them; and their fear made them unaware of the goodness that this rain brought them. The hypocrites wanted to benefit from the good things Islam brought them without also fulfilling the requirements of the religion!

Then the True Lord alerts us to another important matter, which is that their fear of the loss of the benefits of this world will not avail them aught because God encompasses the disbelievers; and to encompass means to have complete control over something so that it has no way of escaping; and God encompasses both the disbelievers and anyone else. So their lack of awareness of the true benefit, namely God's guidance, did not give them any means of escaping from God's power in this life or the next.

يَكَادُ ٱلْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَٰرَهُمْۖ كُلَّمَآ أَضَآءَ لَهُم مَّشَوْاْ فِيهِ وَإِذَآ أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُواْۚ
وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَٰرِهِمْۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٖ قَدِيرٞ ٢٠

The lightning almost snatches away their sight: whenever it
flashes on them they walk on and when darkness falls
around them they stand still. If God so willed, He could take
away their hearing and sight: God has power over
everything [20] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 20)

God wants to alert us here to the fact that the lightning, which is only temporary and short-lived, is what has attracted their attention. If they had faith, the light of faith and Islam would have lit up the way for them, but their hearts were filled with the utter darkness of disbelief and so, they could not see the way of light. The lighting almost snatched away their sight, i.e. took it against their will, because the one who snatches does not wait for permission to take, and the one from whom something is snatched does not have the means to prevent it. Snatching is not the same thing as usurping, which means to take something by overwhelming its owner.

But what is the difference between taking, snatching, and usurping? Taking means to ask for something from someone and have him give it to you, or to ask his permission to take it, i.e. to take something with the permission of the owner. The word Snatching means to take something without the permission of the owner and without him being able to stop you. And the word Usurping means to take something against the will of the owner by using force or the like to make him unable to prevent you from taking the thing.

Let us give an example of this—and to God belongs the loftiest of similitudes. If a child goes and snatches a sweet from a sweet-shop, the owner cannot stop him because the action is beyond his power to prevent because he is far from the child and was not expecting it to happen; so he cannot prevent it. As for usurpation, it is when the shop keeper is alert, but does not have the power to stop what is happening, and even if he tries to resist, the one who is taking the thing is stronger than him; so the power of the usurper is more than that of the usurped.

So God says, ‘The lightning well-nigh snatches away their sight.’ We need to pay attention to the expression ‘well-nigh’, i.e. the lightning almost snatches away their sight. So the person does not have the power to prevent this lighting from arresting the attention of his sight. God then says, ‘whenever it gives them light, they advance therein,’ i.e. they walk in the worldly physical light which the lightning gives them, but there is no light in their hearts, and so when darkness falls around them, they stand still because they have no light.

God then says, ‘And if God so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight.’ Some of the orientalists say that this contradicts the previous noble verse which said ‘deaf, dumb, blind – and they cannot turn back’ because how can they be deaf, dumb and blind, meaning that their senses of perception do not work – and we are speaking about spiritual blindness – and then He says, ‘And if God so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight,’ even though they are already deaf, dumb, and blind? We say: The True Lord’s words ‘deaf, dumb, blind’ mean that they cannot see God’s signs and the certitude of faith, and they cannot hear the verses of the Quran and understand them; so their means of perception of spiritual realities are disabled. As for their means of perception of material things, they remain as they are. So the hypocrite who does not believe in the Day of Resurrection cannot see the suffering that awaits him in the Hereafter.

And so, if God wanted to take away their hearing and sight with respect to sensory matters, He could do so for He is able to do all things; yet He did not will this so that they would not come and argue in the Hereafter that if only they had possessed working vision, they would have seen God's signs, and that if they had been able to hearm they would have reflected on the Quran. And so God preserved for them their hearing and sight so that the argument would be against them that they possessed sight yet turned away from God's signs to those things which brought them immediate worldly gratification, even if it brought upon them the wrath of God; and they possessed hearing by which to hear all the plots against Islam and the attempts to discredit the faith; yet when God's verses were recited to them, they did not hear them. About this, God says that there are some people who would listen to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, but when they leave him, they will derisively ask those who have been granted knowledge about what he had said earlier (*Muhammad:* 16). That is, they listen but do not comprehend, and no light enters their hearts, as if they are deaf to God's verses and cannot hear them.

So the True Lord wants to give us a parable of the hypocrites to show us that they do not pay attention to the true values of life, but rather only consider superficial matters. They want immediate benefits, and the darkness in their hearts does not allow them to see the light of faith. They are dazzled by the lightning flash of this worldly life even though it is a passing thing, and so it snatches away their sight; and because there is no light in their hearts, once this worldly life leaves them they are surrounded by darkness on all sides because they do not believe in the Hereafter. And if God willed, He could take away their hearing and sight because they do not use them for the spiritual tasks required from them. Our means of perception should increase our faith, but these people see only the gratification of this worldly life, and listen only to the whispers of Satan, and so the spiritual purpose of their means of perception is neglected, as though they do not even exist.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱعۡبُدُواْ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُمۡ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him] [21]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 21)

After telling us about the attributes of the hypocrites in thirteen verses, giving us descriptions of their external characteristics and parables of the state of their hearts so that the believers would know them outwardly and inwardly and be cautious of them and not trust them, God then makes clear to us how the hypocrites not only rejected God as a deity and covered up His existence, but also denied Him as Lord. The Lord gives to all in abundance, whether believers or disbelievers, for it was He *the Exalted* who called them into existence and created them, and so He provides them with their sustenance and their livelihood.

God does not deny any of His creatures His Lordly bestowal in this world. The sun rises on the believer and the disbeliever, and rain falls on those who say ‘there is no god but God’ and those who deny His existence; those who pray regularly breathe the same air as those who never pray once in their whole life; those who love God eat, as do those who show ingratitude to God’s blessings. This is because God gives His Lordly bestowal to all His creatures in this world. But as for His Divine bestowal, it is exclusively for the believers in this life and the next. So, God is alerting His creatures to the fact that His Lordly bestowal is sufficient reason for them to believe in God and worship Him.

When the True Lord addresses people in the Noble Quran, the Book which cannot be approached by falsehood from any direction, this address must be applicable to every time and place from the moment the Quran was revealed until the Day of Resurrection. This address by God specifies a matter at the peak of all doctrinal issues, namely submission to the One God with no associates.

God’s words ‘...who has created you and those who lived before you...’ means that one of the things that necessitates worship is that God created all people; and as we said, there is no doubt about this creation since no one can claim to have created himself, or to have created this universe. Rather, the True Lord wants us to respect even the direct cause of our existence – our parents, for the parents are the cause of a person's existence, and so we find that He has ordained that people should worship none but Him, and do good to their parents. Should one of the parents or both attain old age in one's care, he should never be disrespectful to them or scold them, but should always speak to them with reverence (*al-Isra':* 23).

In this way we see that the True Lord shows respect to the causality of the direct maker, even though He is truly the Maker who created everything. Yet God respects the works of mankind although man is only a means. Wealth belongs to God, and He gives it to whom He pleases, yet we find that the True Lord encourages the giving of charity by making it a loan from the servant to the Lord by asking who would offer God a goodly loan? (*al-Baqara*: 245).

So it is as though God respects the work of man in earning money even though all wealth belongs to God, and so the Almighty Creator made charity a loan to him. So the mercy of the True Lord with His creation is manifested.

God then says, '...so that you might have fear…'; fear of what? It is fear of God's attributes of majesty for God has attributes of majesty and attributes of beauty: His names which manifest His attributes of majesty are the All-Compeller, the All-Dominant, the Sublime, the Powerful, the Fully Capable, the Omnipotent and the Inflictor of Harm; the others are attributes of mercy.

So God wants us to place a barrier between us and His attributes of majesty so that we do not incur God's wrath which would mean that He would treat us with His attributes of majesty; and He wants us to cling fast to His attributes of Divine beauty: the All-Merciful, the Loving, the All-Forgiving, the Most-Relenting; and if we do this successfully, we will find salvation from the Fire which is one of God's troops, and a manifestation of His majesty.

We must also be aware that when God says 'O mankind,' He is addressing all mankind. If the True Lord wishes to address the believers, He says 'O believers,' i.e. O you who have believed in God as your deity, and entered with him into a covenant of faith.

ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَرْضَ فِرَٰشًا وَٱلسَّمَآءَ بِنَآءً وَأَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِۦ مِنَ
ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ ۖ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا۟ لِلَّهِ أَندَادًا وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

Who spread out the earth for you and built the sky; who sent water down from it and with that water produced things for your sustenance. Do not, knowing this, set up rivals to God [22] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 22)

After telling us that His Lordly bestowal, which He gives to all His creatures, believers and disbelievers alike, was sufficient reason for all people to believe, the True Lord then began to elucidate for us some of the signs of His Lordly bestowal, and alert us to them so that perhaps those who do not believe, upon reading these verses, might find faith entering their hearts. And so the True Lord alerts us to the creation of the earth, saying: ‘who has made the earth a bed for you.’

The earth is the place where people live, and no one can claim to have created the earth or brought it into existence. It is a sign of Lordship which does not require from us any great mental effort to recognise it, but rather, incontestably, it belongs to God. The term ‘bed’ here indicates that He prepared the earth in a form which is comfortable for mankind just as you spread something onto the ground to sit or sleep on, so that it is a resting-place for you. And we pass the earth on to one another, generation after generation, and it is suitable for all of us to live upon. And from the time the earth was created until the Day of Resurrection, the earth will remain a bed and a resting-place for mankind.

Some people might object that when you sleep directly on the earth it is not comfortable because there are stones and suchlike which cause you discomfort. We say that the first man could sleep on it comfortably, and so it is possible to take one’s necessary sleep on the earth. But when civilisations advanced, and standards of living increased, the earth remained a resting-place because of the soft things which could be upon it. So it is as though God is saying that He made the earth in such a way that it suited every generation of men so that as each generation found a more comfortable standard of living because of the advances of civilisation, God revealed the knowledge that would allow man to gain mastery over the earth and make it a suitable resting-place for himself.

Notice that in another verse God likens the earth to a cradle for mankind (*az-Zukhruf:* 10). A cradle is an infant's bed, and it must be comfortable because if the baby finds anything in the bed which disturbs it, it is incapable of doing anything to remove the discomfort, and so the mother prepares the bed for her baby in a way that it can sleep with complete comfort. But the One Who prepares the earth for all of His creatures is God, who makes it a bed for His servants. In still another verse, God makes it clear to us that it is He Who has made the earth easy for us to live on so that we can go about in all its regions and eat of the sustenance which He provides (*al-Mulk:* 15). The meaning of this is that the True Lord *the Glorified* has made the earth compliant for mankind so that it gives him everything he needs.

Then the True Lord mentions the heaven: '…and the heaven a canopy.' The word used here, bina' (canopy, an ornamental roof-like structure) implies firmness and stability, i.e. we do not see that heaven, which lies above us, is held up by anything to prevent it from falling upon us, but rather, it is a firm, stable ceiling. This notion is emphasised in the statement that God holds the heaven so that it may not fall upon the earth unless by His leave (*al-Hajj:* 65). And in yet another verse God says that He has set up the sky as a canopy well-secured (*al-Anbiya':* 32).

The purpose of all these verses is to reassure us, as we live on the earth that the heaven will not fall down upon us because God preserves it.So one of the signs of the True Lord on earth is that He made it a bed and resting-place, i.e. a comfortable bed for mankind to live upon, and He preserved the heaven by His omnipotent power so that it remains firm in its place, and does not pose any threat or concern to the inhabitants of earth that it might fall upon them.

Then He mentions another of these signs: '… and has sent down water from heaven, and by it has brought forth fruits for your sustenance!' So the True Lord placed within the earth the means for the preservation of life, and did not leave mankind on earth without giving them the means to continue with their life. Rain falls from the heaven – and 'the heaven' means everything that is above you and hanging over you – and so plants and fruits grow, and this is a source of sustenance for us. People differ as to the meaning of the word (provision) mentioned here. Provision is everything you benefit from not everything you gain. You might earn a lot of money, but if you do not spend it and benefit from it, it is not considered your Divinely-granted provision, but rather the provision of someone else. You remain eager to keep it, and you do not spend a single cent of it until you pass it on to its rightful owner. Most people think that provision means only wealth. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* explains the fine distinction between the two notions: The Son of Adam says, 'My wealth is my wealth,' but, Son of Adam, do you retain any of your wealth except that which you consume and so exhaust, or that which you wear (as clothes) and so wear out, or that which you give in charity and so preserve?(1)

This is the provision of wealth which is one part of provision; but there is also the provision of health, the provision of children, the provision of food, and the provision of blessings; and every blessing that God gives us is provision – not just wealth.

So the True Lord wants with this noble verse to urge us to reflect a little on who created this universe to recognise that before He created mankind, He created the means for the preservation of his life; this preparation did not end with the physical life, but rather just as God prepared for us the material constituents of our lives, He also prepared for us the constituents of our spiritual lives, or the moral values of existence. In the chapter of *ar-Rahman,* God *the Exalted* states that He, the God of Mercy has taught the Quran, and has created man, and has taught him articulate speech (*ar-Rahman:* 1-4).

So we find that the Quran gives us the moral values of life, without which the whole world would have no value because the life of this world is only a test for the coming life in the Hereafter and so if you do not take it according to its purpose as the road which leads you to Paradise, you completely strip it of any value. And in this case, the life of this world will give you nothing but suffering in the Hereafter.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, at-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ahmad; this is the narration of Muslim on the authority of MuTayrif, who heard it from his father.*

In this verse, the True Lord links sustenance with the heaven: ‘and by it has brought forth fruits for your sustenance.’ He does this to show us that provision only comes from on high; and God uses the parable of water because it is a direct source of provision which is tangible to us, and because water comes to us from the heaven in its purest form in droplets. Everything which comes to us from the heaven is exalted, and it comes down to increase the value of life by means of a process which, if mankind were to try and duplicate it, they would not be able to do so because it would cost millions of pounds to produce enough water to satisfy even a single family. But God sends down water from the sky in its purest form to cause fruits to grow thereby; fruits which preserve the continuation of life in this world.

After we understand all these blessings, and the miracles they involve, and reflect on them, the True Lord *the Glorified* then commands: ‘Do not then set up peers to God while you know’.

The Arabic word *andad* (rendered here as ‘peers’) is the plural of *nidd*, which means a counterpart or equivalent. Any mind, with the slightest amount of reflection, would disassociate itself from ascribing such to God; so do not claim that God has any counterpart or equivalent since there is nothing like God. God is One in His power, One in His strength, One in His creation, One in His essence and One in His attributes.

There can be no comparison between the attributes of the True Lord and the attributes of His creatures. God created for each one of us a mind with which to think, and if this notion of comparison were presented to the mind it would reject it immediately because it agrees with neither intellect nor reason, which is why God then said: ‘while you know,’ i.e. you know this well with your intellects, for the natural inclination of the intellect rejects such a thing.

Who is there who could claim to have created you and those who came before you? Who could claim, even falsely, that he made the earth a bed and resting-place, and made the heaven a protected canopy, or sent down rain and caused plants to grow? No one could. So you know that the intellect belongs to God alone, and as long as there is no objection to this, and there can be no objection, then the verdict must go in the favour of the True Lord.

The True Lord says that there are people who take idols as rivals to God, loving them as only God should be loved; whereas those who have faith love God more than all else (*al-Baqara:* 165). Why did these people set up rivals to God? That is because they wanted a world with no religious guidance; they wanted to satisfy the instinctual tendency to believe that God created in them, whilst at the same time follow their base desires. When they thought about this, they saw that the best way to achieve this was to choose a god with no guidance, who would require nothing from them. And so you find that any corrupted claim attempts to make legal what God has forbidden, and free mankind from every religious responsibility, such as prayer, the poor-due, struggling in the way of God and so on.

As for those who believe, they know that God only gave them His guidance for the good of mankind for God does not gain any benefit whatsoever from our prayers, or our charity, or any aspect of our religion, but rather, we are the ones who benefit from God's mercy, and from God's blessings of paradise in the Hereafter.

And because the believers know this, they love God intensely; and those who disbelieve, despite all their claims, in moments of despair, they call out to God, knowing that He is the only one to call on and seek refuge in.

This is illustrated in God's statement that when affliction befalls man, he cries out to God, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing; but as soon as God has freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked God to save him from the affliction that befell him (*Yunus:* 12).

Why does he not call on those 'rivals'? It is because a man will not deceive himself at times of peril, and because these people know by their intellects that God could have no rivals. They use these rivals for worldly gains, but when danger comes they turn to God because they know that only He Alone can relieve their suffering. So the barber-surgeon treats people with false remedies, but when his own son falls ill he rushes to the doctor because although he might deceive the people, he cannot deceive himself.

Once, Al-Asma'i(1) was at the *Ka'ba* when he heard a Bedouin Arab pray saying, 'Lord, you know that I am disobedient to you, and it is your right to deny my prayer since I am disobedient; but I know that there is no god but You, so to whom should I turn?' Upon hearing this, Al-Asma'i said to him, 'May God forgive you by means of your beautiful supplication!'

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(1) Al-Asma'i was an Arab scholar and linguist of the Abbasid era.

وَإِن كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا۟ بِسُورَةٍ مِّن مِّثْلِهِۦ
وَٱدْعُوا۟ شُهَدَآءَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single sura like it – enlist whatever supporters you have other than God – if you truly [think you can] [23] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 23)

After explaining to us that those people who set up rivals against God do not base their actions on any logic or reason, but rather only base their on their worldly desire for immediate gratification, the True Lord then wanted to issue a challenge related to the Noble Quran – the eternal miracle vouchsafed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* – to show them that just as God made the universe a tangible miracle, the Noble Quran is a miraculous guide whose inimitability and miraculous nature is plain. God *the Exalted* says, 'And if you are in doubt…,' and this is addressed to every infidel and non-believing hypocrite because those who believe in God and His Messenger have no doubt in their hearts; rather, they believe that the Quran is a Revelation from God, sent down from heaven to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by Divine inspiration.

The Arabic word *rayb* (doubt) means uncertainty; so the phrase 'And if you are in doubt…' means 'and if you have any uncertainty.' But where does this doubt come from when the Quran and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* are steeped in a miraculous nature? What are the justifications of this doubt, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* could not read or write, and did not know the rhetoric and poetry of his people which would have allowed him to compose such miraculous inimitable discourse himself, of which even the greatest poets of the Arabs, who were well versed in rhetoric and language, could not match a single verse? This is one point; a second is that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* never lied, and it is not known that he ever lied before being given the Message; rather, they used to call Him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'the honest, truthful One'. And those who used to call Him *peace and blessings be upon him* these names were the very same ones who maintained that the Quran was not from God. But would the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* be truthful with the people and then lie against God? This is impossible.

The discourse that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* brought in the Quran could not be reproduced by any of the greatest rhetoricians of the Arabs, and the knowledge which the Noble Quran revealed was not known to anyone at that time. So how could the illiterate Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* bring forth this miraculous discourse and this knowledge which was not known to any human being? If he had sat with a teacher or read the books of the ancient civilisations, they would have said that he took it all from there; yet he never did that.

So where has doubt come to their hearts from? It obviously came through the door of falsehood; and falsehood has no valid argument. So they undoubtedly revealed their inner intentions when they declared that they did not really doubt the Quran, but rather they would have preferred it to have been sent to one of the nobles of Quraysh, as the True Lord states their complaining question as to why this Quran was not sent down on some great man of the two cities (*az-Zukhruf:* 31).

These doubters then found no argument to make against the Quran; so they said, 'He is a sorcerer!' Yet does the one who is bewitched have any power over the bewitcher? If he was a sorcerer, why did he not bewitch you also? And they said, 'He is mad.' Yet a madman acts with no logic, and laughs for no reason, and weeps for no reason, and strikes people for no reason, and so the True Lord answers them, swearing by the pen and all that they write, confirming that His Messenger was not, by his Lord's grace, a madman! And that he will have a never-ending reward, for he does indeed keep to a sublime way of life (*al-Qalam:* 1-4).

Could a madman have such an exalted character? So the causes or true justifications for doubt were non-existent, and there was not a single real reason to make them doubt that the Quran was from God; but rather, they themselves, as the Noble Quran tells us, made the stupid supplication to God: if this be indeed the truth from Him, then let Him rain down upon them stones from the skies, or inflict some other grievous suffering on them (*al-Anfal:* 32). So none of the causes of doubt existed; there existed the causes of certainty, but they still doubted.

As for God's words: '… of what We have sent down to Our servant,' the Noble Quran existed on the Preserved Tablet before mankind was created, and when the time came for it to play its part in the universe, it was sent down from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest heaven, above the earth, all at once, and then God sent in down to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in parts or instalments that suited the situations and the occurrence of daily events.

So the Arabic word *nazzalna* 'We sent down' means that which was sent down from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest heaven above the earth altogether in one piece, whereas *anzalna* 'sent down in instalments' describes the verses God sent to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in piecemeal form as the situation demanded it.

The True Lord then says, 'to Our servant,' and this needs some reflection. God *the Glorified* has slaves (*'abid*) and has servants (*'ibad*). Everyone in creation is a slave to God, and they cannot escape God's will and His power. These are the slaves; on the other hand, the servants are those whose wills came to be compatible with what God willed. They have set aside their worldly desires in order to become obedient to God by their free wills, i.e. they are equal to those beings that are under the complete control of God in that they have chosen God's Way, and rejected any alternatives to it.

These are the servants; and if you read the Noble Quran, you will find that God refers to the servants as being the righteous of humanity, and He *the Glorified* commands His Messenger to proclaim that if His servants ask him (the Messenger) about Him (God) – He is near; He responds to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls to Him: let them, then, respond to Him, and believe in Him so that they might be guided to the right way (*al-Baqara:* 186).

This does not apply to all of God's creatures, but rather solely to His servants who, when God tells them to do something they do it directly, and if God forbids them from doing something, they abstain from doing it. That is, by their own free will, they do not go against the guidance of God *the Glorious* *and Exalted*. So with respect to struggling in God's cause, the True Lord does not call the holy warriors slaves, but rather, in warning the children of Israel against punishment for their crimes, He tells them that when the menace of the first of their two periods of corruption came, He sent against them His servants endued with terrible prowess in war, and they wrought havoc throughout the land: and so the menace was accomplished (*al-Isra':* 5).

Some of the orientalists who tried to criticise the Noble Quran said that the term *'ibad* (servants) is also used to describe the non-believers in God's questioning of the leaders of disbelief who were worshipped and idolised in worldly life as to whether it was them who led His creatures (using the term *'ibad*) astray, or whether they by themselves strayed from the right path (*al-Furqan:* 17). To this, we say: You have failed to notice that this dialogue takes place at the time of Judgement in the Hereafter, and in the Hereafter we are all *'ibad* (servants) because we will all be completely controlled, and no one has free will in the Hereafter, but rather, human free will ends at the point of death, after which everyone becomes compelled.

So in the Hereafter we will all be servants, but the difference between slaves and servants only applies to the life of this world. Servanthood is the highest level of nearness to God, because you go to Him willingly, following His guidance by your own free will. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was given the choice between being a Prophet-King and a Prophet-Servant, and he chose to be a Prophet-Servant. If we want to know the meaning of servanthood, let us read the first verse of the chapter of *al-Isra'* where God asserts that limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship (in Mecca) to the Remote House of Worship (in Jerusalem) – the environs of which He had blessed (*al-Isra':* 1).

So this was the highest level of blessing that God bestowed upon His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the greatest miracle which had never happened to any other human being before Him *peace and blessings be upon him*, messenger or otherwise, and which would never happen to anyone else ever again; for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* ascended through the seven heavens in both spirit and body, and then returned to earth; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* passed by the station of Gabriel *peace be upon him*, and passed by the Lote-Tree of the Uttermost End, which marks the place where the knowledge of all God's creatures, both human and angel, comes to an end.

The human nature of the Messengers has given rise to great debate which started at the moment the Divine revelation first began and is still alive nowadays. God *the Glorified* gives us an example of this in the statement of the chiefs of the infidels in the time of Noah *peace be upon him* when they told him bluntly that they do not see in him anything but a mortal man just like themselves (*Hud:* 27). And we have another example in the attitude of the tribe of Thamud towards the call of their prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* when they wondered whether they were to follow one single mortal from among themselves. Then they would certainly be in error and folly (*al-Qamar:* 24).

The Quran also mentions that what prevented the infidels from accepting guidance whenever it comes to them from God through a prophet was but complaining, 'Has God sent a human being as His messenger?' (*al-Isra':* 94). And they would recommend one another that if they obeyed a mere human like themselves, they should surely be losers (*al-Mu'minun:* 34).

So the human nature of the Messengers has been used as an argument by those who do not wish to believe in messengers bringing revelation from God. Yet it is necessary that a messenger be of the same species as those to whom he is sent, and that he has lived among them for a time before the message came to him and has been known for his honesty and trustworthiness so that they do not give the lie to him. Moreover, he is a role-model, and so of course, he must be of the same species as those to whom he is sent because he will put the guidance he brings into practice for them to witness, and if he were from a different species they would say 'We cannot do what You have asked us, Lord, for this Messenger of God if created from a different substance than ours, and he is bound to obey You.'

So the human nature of the Messengers is absolutely necessary, and anyone who tries to give the Messengers nonhuman attributes is in reality only trying to decrease the perfection of God's messages for God is not incapable of turning human beings into angels; He reprimands the disbelievers saying that had He so willed, He could indeed have made them into angels succeeding one another on earth (*az-Zukhruf:* 60). So the human nature of the Messengers is one of the perfections of the message.

Then comes the challenge from God *the Glorious and Exalted* to the infidels to produce a *sura* (chapter) like the Quran (*al-Baqara*: 23). So the Arabs were asked to produce a chapter the like of that which the Noble Quran contained. And the ‘witnesses’ whose testimony God requests here are weak witnesses, human beings who cannot offer testimony akin to that which God possesses in the realm of the Unseen.

In this verse, God presents the majority of their doubts for us to examine so that by means of this investigation, we can arrive to the essence of the miracle of the Quran.

The True Lord issued His challenge to the disbelievers in degrees. First He asked them to produce the like of the Quran; then he asked them to bring the like of ten chapters, and then to come up with the like of a single chapter. The lowering of the bar from the entire Quran to ten chapters and then to one single chapter is a proof against those to whom the challenge was issued. They could not produce the like of the whole Quran, so He challenged them then to produce the like of ten chapters; they could not do this, and their position became more and more ridiculous, and so He challenged them to produce a single chapter. This was the ultimate humiliation to those whom God *the Glorious and Exalted* has issued the challenge, and a confirmation of the fact that they were unable to do anything to meet it.

The phrase ‘the like of it’ means that the True Lord asked for a likeness from them, not the Quranic text itself; and this shows even more clearly the inability of those people who do not believe in God and try to cast doubts on the Quran.

As for God’s challenge ‘and call upon your witnesses, besides God, if what you say is true,’ it means that God heightens the challenge by allowing them to bring their own witnesses to show them the verses they produced and have them judge whether it was akin to the Quran or not. This shows the absolute power of God *the Glorious and Exalted*; for He did not specify that the witnesses should be angels, or should be men known for their honesty and truthful testimony; rather, He left it for them to bring their own witnesses; and even these witnesses would be unable to testify that the discourse produced by these doubters was in any way akin to any chapter of the Quran.

God invited them to bring any witnesses even if they were biased in their favour, and gave them the choice of bringing any earthly beings to serve this purpose, saying ‘besides God, if what you say is true.’ But you cannot say that God testifies that what you have brought is akin to the Quran because by this you will have lied against God and claimed that He has said something He never did.

But what is the meaning of ‘…if what you say is true’? What is it that which is true? And what does ‘true’ mean? Truth is the opposite of falsehood, and both truth and falsehood are relative. We all know that some speech has no useful meaning, so that if you say ‘Muhammad’ and then stop speaking, those who hear will ask you, ‘What do you mean by saying Muhammad?’ This question shows that they understood nothing from what you said. But what if he had asked you first, ‘Who is with you?’ In this case, your answer ‘Muhammad’ would serve to tell him that Muhammad is with you. The word used in both cases is exactly the same, but in the second case you understand it based on what the questioner had asked; so you have not only said a single isolated word, but rather have uttered a complete coherent statement. So coherent speech is that which causes no confusion for the listener.

Before anyone speaks, he has a mental attribution of what he will say, and he then expresses this with speech, but there is another aspect which is independent of his words, namely the true reality of the matter. That is, if you say ‘Muhammad is hard-working,’ there must be a person named Muhammad, and he must actually be hard-working in order for the speech to correspond to the actual reality. If there is no one named Muhammad, or if there is someone named Muhammad but he is not hard-working, the speech contradicts reality. Truthfulness means speech that corresponds to reality, and lying means speech that does not correspond to reality. This notion is essential to understanding the meaning of this noble verse. So God’s words ‘…if what you say is true’ means: if the speech you utter corresponds to reality, you will be able to prove it; if not, you are liars. So God wants you to give some proof of your truthfulness.

فَإِن لَّمۡ تَفۡعَلُواْ وَلَن تَفۡعَلُواْ فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱلنَّارَ ٱلَّتِي وَقُودُهَا
ٱلنَّاسُ وَٱلۡحِجَارَةُۖ أُعِدَّتۡ لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

If you cannot do this – and you never will – then
beware of the Fire prepared for the disbelievers,
whose fuel is men and stones [24]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 24)

After speaking about the proofs offered by those who doubt the Quran, proofs which are based on neither reason nor logic, God *the Glorious and Exalted* challenged them to produce a chapter like those of the Quran, and to seek the help of anyone they liked besides God; for the Quran is the Word of God, and God is the One who speaks therein. And since they were trying to cast doubt on the Quran being the Word of God, and that it was revealed by God, let them seek the aid of anyone they like to produce a verse like it; for such a challenge could not even come close to being met without their seeking the aid of all forces except God *the Glorious and Exalted*. After this, the True Lord states what the result will be even before the challenge has been undertaken, since God knows that they will not and cannot do it.

So God’s words ‘And if you cannot do it – and you shall not do it’ means that He has judged that they would fail at the time the Quran was revealed and all times thereafter until the Day of Resurrection because nothing escapes God’s knowledge, and His knowledge encompasses all things. The phrase ‘if you cannot do it’ implies uncertainty because conditional sentences suggest uncertainty since the matter is determined by a condition. When you say, ‘If you study, you will succeed,’ this means that there is uncertainty about the matter. However, for a phrase like the statement of the True Lord *the Glorified*: ‘When there comes the help of God and the victory…,’ (*an-Nasr:* 1) it means that God’s help will come without doubt.

‘If’ is a conditional particle and ‘when’ is an adverb of time; and every action requires a time and place. If you use a conditional particle, this means that you are associating it with the means by which the action will take place. If you want to speak about something that will definitely take place, you say ‘when’, and if you want to express uncertainty about if you say ‘if’. Here, God says, ‘if you cannot do it;’ and since the action therefore might be deemed possible, He wanted to emphasise the impossibility of such a thing and so said ‘…and you shall not do it…;’ this is because it is a conceivable thing. If you speak about a conceivable matter and then immediately decide that it will not happen, this suggests that it is your power that will prevent the thing from happening. It cannot be said that you forced someone not to do it; rather, you knew he would not do it, and that all his efforts would not be enough to enable him doing it.

These matters are implicit in the Noble Quran when it conveys matters related to the Unseen, and so God tells us that when Moses *peace be upon him* came to the people of Pharaoh with God’s signs, they, in their souls, knew them to be true, but in their wickedness and self-exaltation, they rejected them (*an-Naml:* 14); this means that they believed, but their tongues would not admit as much. And when He says, ‘And if you cannot do it – and you shall not do it…’, this means that uncertainty is spurious and affected, in their souls; they do not want to believe, and so they come up with feigned reasons for not believing. Their minds are set on not believing; as long as this is your decision, you will have to keep looking for assumed reasons not to believe.

Then comes God’s admonition: ‘… then fear the fire whose fuel is human beings and stones, prepared for the infidels.’ The True Lord here wants to alert us to another image of the powerlessness of these disbelievers, who are searching for excuses to justify their lack of faith, and they claim to have doubts about the Noble Quran. We say to them: if you truly possess intrinsic power, then prevent yourselves from entering the fire on the Day of Resurrection, just as you prevented yourselves from believing in this life.

This is a warning from God. He gave them the power of free will in this world, and they were not forced to choose to scorn faith, but rather, they chose this freely with the free will God gave them. But there will come a time when there is no free will, namely the Hereafter: so they should try to avoid the torment of hell on the Day of Resurrection, but there will be no free will at that time; with respect to that day, God poses the rhetorical question as to who will possess absolute sovereignty on that Day, and gives the answer that it is God, the One, the Almighty (*Ghafir:* 16). And God *the Exalted* describes that Day as a day when one soul shall be powerless for another soul: All sovereignty on that day shall be with God (*al-Infitar:* 19).

So the free will of yours that prevented you from believing will not save you on that day from the torment of the fire. God *the Exalted* addresses the polytheists saying that verily, they and all that they worship instead of God are but the fuel of hell: They shall go down into it (*al-Anbiya':* 98).

Why will it be both, them and the ones they worship? It is because the worshipper seeks the benefit of the one he worships; and so when each of them sees the other being punished, the sorrow will be more severe. And so the stones and idols they worship will be with them in the fire on the Day of Resurrection; and this is not a punishment for the stones and idols since they were created to be under God's complete control and to praise Him; so these stones and idols will be pleased to burn the ones who disbelieved in God, and they will say, 'They worshipped us, but we ourselves worship God even more than those who seek forgiveness in the watches of the night.'

As for God's words that the fire is 'prepared for the infidels,' God is telling them – whilst they are still alive in this world – that the fire awaits the disbelievers; and the fact that God says that Hell awaits the disbelievers is a great reassurance to the believer, and a great source of terror for the disbeliever. The word 'prepared' means that it exists even now, although we cannot see it, and that it is already created, but veiled from us.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'Paradise was shown to me, and had I wanted, I could have brought to you some of its fruit.' This shows that it indeed does exist right now. When the believer learns that paradise already exists, and that faith will lead him to it, he feels joy, and yearns for it. The True Lord reassures the believers that it is they who shall be the inheritors, who will inherit the paradise; and therein shall they abide forever (*al-Mu'minun:* 10-11).

When you read this noble verse, you know that God will give you, in Paradise, those things which others used to have, because ‘inheritance’ means something that is passed to you from someone else. God had knowledge of all His creatures from the beginning, and before He created them, He prepared for each one of them a place in Paradise and a place in Hell, and so those who enter Hell for eternity, will leave their places in Paradise empty, and God will give them to the believers so they will inherit them in addition to their own places in paradise. The True Lord *the Exalted* says ‘prepared,’ which means it already exists now.

وَبَشِّرِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّـٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا
ٱلْأَنْهَـٰرُ ۖ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا۟ مِنْهَا مِن ثَمَرَةٍ رِّزْقًا ۙ قَالُوا۟ هَـٰذَا ٱلَّذِى رُزِقْنَا مِن قَبْلُ ۖ
وَأُتُوا۟ بِهِۦ مُتَشَـٰبِهًا ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَآ أَزْوَٰجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ ۖ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

[Prophet], give those who believe and do good the news that they will have Gardens graced with flowing streams. Whenever they are given sustenance from the fruits of these Gardens, they will say, ‘We have been given this before,’ because they were provided with something like it. They will have pure spouses and there they will stay [25]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 25)

After telling us what the end will be for the disbelievers who use doubt in the Quran as an excuse not to believe, it is as if God says to the disbelievers: If you have chosen not to believe by means of the free will I gave you in this life, then in the Hereafter you will not be able to avoid the Fire, and you will no longer have any free will.

Then the True Lord gives us the contrasting image. When the Noble Quran mentions paradise, God gives us after it the contrasting image, namely that of the suffering of Hell; and when hell and its suffering and its flames are mentioned, paradise is mentioned afterwards. This contrasting image serves to inspire faith in the soul. When someone reads a chapter which mentions the suffering of hell, and then directly after it comes mention of the delights of paradise, he knows that he has found triumph twice; for to be saved from hell and drawn away from it is a triumph and a blessing, and then to enter Paradise is still another blessing. In this respect God has decided that whoever is drawn away from the fire and admitted into paradise will indeed have won (*Al-'Imran*: 185).

He *the Exalted* did not simply say 'and he who enters paradise has won,' because simply to be saved from hell is a great triumph. In the Hereafter, after the reckoning, a bridge will be laid over hell which the believers and disbelievers will all have to cross. Each believer will cross the bridge according to his works; some will cross it as fast as lightning whilst others will cross it more slowly, and so on; but the disbelievers will fall into hell.

But why do the believers have to cross the bridge? God says that He has decreed that every one of us shall come within sight of hell; it is a decree that must be fulfilled. But He will save from it those who had in themselves the fear of God and will leave in it the evildoers on their knees (*Maryam:* 71-72).

For the believers to see hell is simply a great blessing because when they see the severe torment from which faith saved them, they will all feel the blessing God has given them by saving them from this suffering. The denizens of Hell and Paradise will see one another, and when the denizens of Paradise see the denizens of Hell, they will feel the great blessing God has granted them by saving them from it; and when the denizens of Hell see the denizens of Paradise, they will feel the great wrath of God towards them by withholding His blessings from them. This will serve to make the delight even greater for the denizens of Paradise, and the suffering even greater for the denizens of Hell.

God says, '…give the glad tidings…' Glad tidings is news of a pleasing thing which will occur but whose time has not yet come. If you give someone glad tidings, you tell him about a pleasing thing to come. Here, the glad tidings are mentioned after the warning issued to the disbelievers. On the other hand, a warning is news of something fearsome which will occur but whose time has not yet come.

However, the expression *bishara* ('glad tidings') is sometimes used in the Noble Quran, but it would be intended to be given to the disbelievers in an ironic manner, as when God announces woe unto every lying sinner, who hears God’s messages when they are conveyed to him, and yet, as though he had not heard them, persists in his haughty disdain. Hence, apprise (literally ‘give glad tidings to’) him of grievous suffering (*al-Jathiya:* 7-8).

Here, the word used for apprise is (*al-bishara*) which literally means ‘give glad tidings;’ the word is used ironically. The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to increase the suffering of the disbelievers, and so when they hear ‘…give them glad tidings…’ they might think that they will hear some pleasing news, and then right after that He mentions grievous suffering, in order to increase their woe.

The True Lord says, ‘But give the glad tidings to those who believe and do the things that are right’. The glad tidings here are news of goodness which will come to the believers; and faith determines one’s action because if someone believes in something, he will work for it. The student studies because he believes that by studying he will succeed. Every action must spring from a basis of belief. Faith means that outward action reflects what is in the heart in a way which is in agreement with God’s will. The system of life cannot function without faith, and so righteous action springs from faith. And so the Noble Quran asserts that man is bound to be a loser unless he is of those who believe and do good works (*al-‘Asr:* 1-3).

And in another verse we have the rhetorical question as to who would be better of speech than someone who calls to God, and does what is right, and proclaims that he is of those who have surrendered themselves to God (*Fussilat:* 33). But is it enough simply to state that I surrender myself to God? No. This statement must rather go hand in hand with action in accordance with God’s will.

The True Lord wants to alert us to the fact that our saying ‘There is no god but God and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God’ must be accompanied by action according to the teachings of Islam; for our pronouncing the Testimony of Faith does not increase God’s dominion in the slightest, and God *the Exalted* Himself has testified to His own Divine Oneness, and this is a testimony of one being to itself; then the angels gave an eye-witness testimony because they saw Him, and then the people of knowledge gave a testimony based on evidence by means of the knowledge God bestowed upon them, as the True Lord says that He Himself proffers evidence – and so do the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him, the Upholder of Equity: there is no deity save Him, the Almighty, the Truly Wise (*Al-'Imran*: 18).

But the True Lord wants the believers to follow His guidance. Why? So that people's movements in life will not be in conflict, but will rather be in harmony. As long as the motions of life are morally upright, life will become harmonious and strong. When Islam spread throughout the world, the goal was not simply for people to have faith for faith's sake, but rather for life to be in harmony with the teachings of Islam. If the motions of life stray far from these teachings, it will not serve the religion if people believe or do not believe. And so the religion had to determine faith and righteous action. 'But give the glad tidings to those who believe and do the things that are right…' A good work is something which is in line with God's teachings; the opposite of this is a corrupt act. When a person interacts with the world around him, the least good he can do is to leave good things as they are, or make them better.

The True Lord *the Exalted* gives to those who believe and do good works glad tidings of gardens through which running waters flow. The word 'gardens' in the plural is used because these gardens will be manifold and varied, and there are more degrees of difference between the gardens of paradise and those in this world, as God tells that He has bestowed in this worldly life more bounty on some of the people than on others, and the life to come will be far higher in degree and far greater in merit and bounty (*al-Isra':* 21).

The gardens in themselves will be varied: There are the gardens of paradise (*firdaws*), the Garden of Eden (*'adn*), and the Garden of Delight (*na'im*); and there is the Abode of Eternity, the Abode of Peace, and the Garden of Ultimate Refuge; and there is *'Illiyyun* which is the highest and the finest of all the gardens of paradise, and the greatest delight within it is having sight of the True Lord *the Exalted* which is a blessing far greater than any blessing of food and drink in this world.

Food and drink for the denizens of paradise will not be taken out of hunger and thirst, but rather for simple enjoyment and pleasure. In this verse, God *the Exalted* is promising an unseen matter; and so to make the meaning clearer for human minds, concrete and familiar terms have to be used, that is words which express something we are familiar with. God says that no human being can know what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await the believers in the life to come as a reward for all that they did (*as-Sajda:* 17).

So no human being in this world knows the things which paradise contains, and there are no words in language which can express them, and none of the known faculties such as hearing or seeing have ever beheld them. And so the True Lord used words which our minds and our faculties could cope with, and so said, '…gardens beneath which the rivers flow….'

There are other verses which say *'tajri tahtaha al-anhar'* (under which the rivers flow' (*at-Tawba:* 100), whilst this one says, *'tajri min tahtiha al-anhar'* with the additional preposition min (literally 'from'). What is the difference between the two? '*Tajri tahtaha al-anhar'* means that the rivers come from afar and flow through the garden, whilst '*tajri min tahtiha al-anhar'* means that water springs up from beneath the garden itself so that the person will not fear that this water which comes to him from afar will ever be cut off, or dry up. This is an additional reassurance to the believers that the delight of Paradise is eternal, without end.

As long as there is water, there is verdure and beautiful scenery, and there must also be fruits. God's words '…Whenever they are fed therefrom with fruit for sustenance, they will say, "This same was our sustenance of old;" and they shall have its like given to them….' is a reference to the fruits of paradise, which are different from the fruits of this world. In this world, you must go to the fruit and pick it, or have someone bring it for you, whilst in paradise the fruit will come to you, and simply by wanting it you will find it in your hand. You may think that there is a likeness between the fruits of this world and the fruits of paradise, but the fruits of heaven are not like the fruits of this world in their taste or their smell. The denizens of paradise will see its fruits, and say to one another, 'Perhaps this fruit is a mango, or a fig, like those we ate on earth;' but in reality they will be completely different. The form might be the same, but the taste and everything else are different.

In this world, every food produces waste which human beings must excrete, but in the Hereafter, food will produce no waste, but rather, everyone will eat what they like with no need to excrete any waste. This is because the fruits of this world have a different constituency from the fruits of the Hereafter. So in paradise the rivers are different, and the fruits are different; and in paradise the sustenance will come directly from God, who simply says ‘Be!’ and so it is; and no one will need to do any work. The True Lord then says, ‘…Therein shall they have mates of perfect purity, and therein shall they abide forever.’

Spouses are a source of delight in this world if they are righteous, and a source of distress if they are not. There are many hardships that a woman, for example, can bring to her husband’s life that would make him miserable, such as her being sharp-tongued, or quarrelsome, or neglectful to him, or trying to provoke him into suspecting her. But in the Hereafter, all of these embittering attributes will disappear by God’s decree. Spouses in the Hereafter will be purified from all those things which their husbands dislike in them, and all that they disliked in this world will vanish. In the Hereafter, the believers will be cleansed of their worldly flaws and woes, the foremost of which is envy and spite, as God *the Exalted* asserts that He will remove all rancour from the bosoms of the believers, and they shall rest as brethren facing one another in love upon couches (*al-Hijr:* 47).

So the standards of this world will disappear, and all that you dislike in this world will be absent from the Hereafter, and if anything made your life difficult in this world, it will vanish in the Hereafter. The True Lord based the parable on spouses because spouses are a source of joy in this world, and they are able to turn each other’s life into either delight or misery.

And then He says, ‘…and therein shall they abide for ever;’ which means that there is no death in the Hereafter, and there will never be any death in the Hereafter, but rather, life there is eternal, either in Paradise or in Hell.

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَسۡتَحۡيِۦٓ أَن يَضۡرِبَ مَثَلٗا مَّا بَعُوضَةٗ فَمَا فَوۡقَهَاۚ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ
فَيَعۡلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ ٱلۡحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّهِمۡۖ وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَآ أَرَادَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَٰذَا
مَثَلٗاۘ يُضِلُّ بِهِۦ كَثِيرٗا وَيَهۡدِي بِهِۦ كَثِيرٗاۚ وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِۦٓ إِلَّا ٱلۡفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

God does not shy from drawing comparisons even with
some- thing as small as a gnat, or larger: the believers know
it is the truth from their Lord, but the disbelievers say,
‘What does God mean by such a comparison?’ Through it
He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path.
But it is only the rebels He makes go astray [26]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 26)

After speaking about paradise, and giving us a parable to illustrate the immense delights which one shall be granted in paradise, the True Lord *the Exalted* wanted to clarify for us the spiritual teachings which every believer must follow; for God does not require disbelievers to worship Him, but rather, those who are pleased to believe in God *the Exalted* thereby enter into a covenant of faith with Him. As long as they have entered into this covenant, they must adhere to God’s teachings of commandments and prohibitions, and must implement these teachings without questioning the wisdom behind them. This is because faith means faith in the Unseen, and so if the thing itself is unseen to us, how can we hope to know the wisdom behind it?

The wisdom behind any religious responsibility is that it is from God, and as long as it is from God, it has not come from an equal of yours with whom you can argue about the matter, but has rather come from God whom you must obey because He is the God and you are His worshipper. It is enough that God has issued the command for us to act by it, and it is enough that God has issued the prohibition for us to avoid it.

The wisdom may be unknown to you, but the fact that the command came from God is wisdom itself, and is enough to require obedience. I pray because God made prayer obligatory; I do not pray as a kind of exercise. I perform the ablution (*wudu’*) because God commanded me to make ablutions before praying; I do not perform the ablution as a kind of hygienic action. I perform fasting because God commanded me to fast, not just so I can feel the hunger of the pauper. If prayer were only exercise, we would replace it with sport on playing fields; and if ablutions were only for hygiene, we would take a shower before every prayer; and if fasting were only to feel the hunger of the poor person, it would not be obligatory for the poor person to fast, since he already knows what hunger feels like.

So we obey all of God's commandments because God has ordained them, not for any other reason. Everything that comes to us from God in the Quran we receive as God's word, and we do not receive it in any other way. This is the faith that God wants us to have, and to be the basis of our lives' actions.

This preamble is necessary if we are to know the meaning of this noble verse. 'Surely God is not ashamed to set forth the parable of a gnat or of anything above that…' When God gave a parable based on a gnat, the disbelievers took this according to its worldly significance without being aware of its true meaning. They said, how can God draw a parable from a gnat, that insignificant creature, which if you strike with any object, or with your hand, will die? Why did God *the Glorified* not draw a parable from an elephant which is huge and strong, or from a lion which is mightier than a man, but instead gave us a parable of a gnat? So they said, 'What is it that God means by this parable?' They did not realise that the creation of this tiny gnat is a miracle because in this delicate body, God placed all the parts and systems needed to sustain its life; it has two eyes, and a snout which is very delicate, but yet can break a person's skin, and can break through the blood vessels under the skin to suck their blood.

And gnats have feet, and wings, and reproductive systems, and everything that their life needs, all of this enclosed in this tiny body; and the smaller things get, the more precise their creation must be.

In our own lives, we can see this. For example, consider the way mankind invented the clock. First clocks were very big, and needed a large space, and as civilisation advanced and mankind further developed their technology and culture, the size of clocks became smaller and smaller, and the technology behind clock-making became more precise until they could make clocks the size of rings or even smaller. And when radios were first invented, they were very large, yet now they are so small you can put them in your pocket, or even smaller than that. In all technologies, as they advance, the size of things becomes smaller because this requires skilful expertise and advanced science.

And so when God draws a parable from a gnat or something even smaller, He wants to alert us to the precision of His creation. As things become smaller, they require more precise creation; but the disbelievers did not understand this concept in this way, but rather only considered its simplistic worldly import which does not reflect reality.

When God draws this parable, the believers receive it as the Word of God, and receive it according to the principle of faith in God, and so they believe it whether they understand the wisdom behind it or not because the believer accepts everything that comes from God whether he knows the wisdom behind it or not. God says that He has brought people a Book which He has made clear with knowledge: guidance and mercy to people who believe. Then the Quran poses the question: What have they (the unbelievers) to wait for now but its interpretation (sequel, final meaning, the fulfilment of its promises and threats)? When its interpretation shall come, they, who were oblivious of it before, shall say, ‘The Prophets of our Lord did indeed bring the truth; shall we have any intercessor to intercede for us? Or could we not be sent back? Then would we act otherwise than we have acted?’ But they have lost their souls; and that which they forged has gone away from them (*al-A’raf:* 52-53).

Everyone who believes in the Quran does not seek out its interpretation or the wisdom behind its verses. And so the disbelievers said, ‘What is it that God means by this parable?’ and the answer comes from the True Lord: ‘Many will He mislead by such parables and many guide: but none will He mislead thereby except the wicked.’ But who are the wicked? They are those who break their covenant with God. The first step in wickedness is for the wicked one to break his covenant. The Arabic word *fisq,* meaning wickedness or iniquity, is derived from the verb used to describe a date breaking free of its shell. When the date is red, the shell sticks tightly to it so that you cannot break it off, and then when the date becomes soft the shell goes black and then slacks off the fruit so that you can remove it easily. This is like the wicked one who strays from God’s teachings: he can be peeled off easily because he does not hold firm to them. When you stray from God’s teachings, you do not hold to His commandments and prohibitions, so you do not pray, and you indulge in those things God has forbidden because you have broken free of His religion. The cause of wickedness is that mankind was created with free will, able to act or not to act; and with this free will mankind corrupted the order of the universe. Everything which man has no influence over fulfils its role with high precision like the sun, the stars, the moon and the earth. They all follow a precise order and never go against it because they are under compulsion. If mankind had not been created with free will, it would have been impossible for them to be wicked and to stray from God’s teachings and corrupt the earth; but this free will is the root of all corruption.

ٱلَّذِينَ يَنقُضُونَ عَهْدَ ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مِيثَـٰقِهِۦ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَآ أَمَرَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦٓ أَن
يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْخَـٰسِرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Those who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed, who sever the bonds that God has commanded to be joined, who spread corruption on the earth – these are the losers [27] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 27)

After explaining to us the meaning of faith which is that we receive what God commands and obey it even if we do not know the wisdom behind it; we accept everything that comes from God according to the principle of faith which is that it was God who said it not according to the principle of disbelief and doubt; so the wisdom of everything that comes from God is that it comes from the True Lord ; and after informing us that the wicked have strayed far from God’s teachings, the True Lord wanted to tell us some of the attributes of these wicked ones. He specified three attributes: the first is that they ‘…break their covenant with God after it has been established…;’ the second is that they ‘…cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined…’, and the third is that they ‘…spread corruption on earth….’ The True Lord then renders His verdict concerning them: ‘…These are they who are the losers.’ The loss that they have arrived to is a result of their actions because they abandoned the teachings of God and made their own laws according to their caprice. And so the True Lord *the Glorified* states that they are the ones who have purchased error at the price of guidance: but their bargain has not brought them gain, and they are not guided at all (*al-Baqara:* 16). So they are the ones, who chose, and they are the ones who purchased misguidance and paid for it with God's guidance; and so it is as if they made a losing deal because God's guidance leads us to eternal life and joy without end.

The True Lord gives us an image of this when He states that He has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return so that they fight in God's cause, and kill, and are killed: a promise which in truth He has willed upon Himself in the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Quran. And who could be more faithful to his covenant than God? They should rejoice, then, in the bargain which they have made with Him: for this, this is the triumph supreme (*at-Tawba:* 111).

So the believers pledged to God their possessions and their lives, and they were true to their covenant. As for the disbelievers and the hypocrites, they sold God's guidance and exchanged it for the error of this worldly life. So the True Lord tells us that the first attribute of the wicked is that they have no covenant, not only between them and the people, but also between them and God. Every time they made a covenant with God they broke it; and God loves the keeping of covenants, as He *the Glorified* commands the believers not to touch the substance of an orphan, save to improve it, until he comes of age. And to be true to every covenant – for, they will be held accountable for every covenant (*al-Isra':* 34). And God says that in most of the nonbelievers, He found no covenant and that He found most of them perverse indeed (*al-A'raf:* 102).

What covenant did God take from His servants which they then broke? It was the original pristine faith, the natural disposition of faith that lies within us all. God took a pledge from all humanity; some of them honoured it, and some broke it.

God mentioned to us in the Noble Quran that there is a firm covenant between Him and the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him*, reminding us of when He brought forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and called upon them to bear witness against themselves: 'Am I not your

Lord?' to which they answered, 'Yes, indeed, we do bear witness;' lest, on the Day of Resurrection, they say 'we were unaware of this' (*al-A'raf:* 172).

And so God *the Glorified* took a pledge from the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him* that they would believe in him, and He bade them testify that He was their Lord. Yet with the passage of time, heedlessness entered hearts, and so they broke the covenant and set up gods besides God. So the first attribute of the wicked is that they have broken their covenant with God. The True Lord does not accept that people break covenants even with other people, not even with the infidels and non-believers, as He *the Exalted* commands the believers to honour their treaties with polytheists with whom they have made a covenant and who thereafter have in no way failed to fulfil their obligations towards the believers, and neither have aided anyone against them; the believers should observe, then, their covenant with them until the end of the term agreed with them. Verily, God loves those who fear Him (*at-Tawba:* 4).

So we see that when the True Lord announced His disavowal and that of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and that of the believers from every idolatrous disbeliever in the highest matters of faith, and forbade that the disbelievers and hypocrites could come near His Sacred House in Mecca, He *the Exalted* still respected their covenants even those of the idolaters, and commanded the believers to honour those covenants. If this is the true faithful way to behave with every disbeliever and idolater – that if you have made a treaty with them you must honour it to its completion – what about the idolaters, who made a treaty with the Almighty Creator, and then broke this treaty? They betrayed God's teachings and broke His covenant; and if they have no covenant with God, could they have any covenant with His creatures?

So the first attribute of the wicked is that they have no covenant with their Creator, and with the people; and so we should never trust them.

Then the second attribute of the iniquitous is given, which is that they '…cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined….' That which God has bidden to be joined means the ties of kinship. God commanded us to maintain our family ties. We are all the sons of Adam *peace be upon him*, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said in his sermon in his Farewell Pilgrimage, 'You are all from Adam, and Adam is from dust.'

So we see that there are ties of humanity to which God is alerting us. These ties begin with the family, and then widen to include the village or the neighbourhood, and then widen to include the state and the society, and then widen to include the entirety of the believers, and then widen to include the entire population of the world. This is the brotherhood of man to which the True Lord wants to alert us.

But the concept here is not restricted to the level of human ties; it also affirms that what they have done is a sin, and an act of disobedience against God's command. God commanded us to maintain family ties, and then these people came and disobeyed what God had commanded, and broke these ties. So it is a matter of disobeying God's teachings, and sinning against God's commandments. Family ties engender a kind of social solidarity amongst people; and so if something bad happens to someone, his family will rush to assist him in his time of need, and each of them will try to make it easier for him. This tight family unity will give them strength to deal with whatever comes their way, and none of them will feel lost in this universe because he will hold firm to his family, and with his neighbourhood or village. In this way, malice and broken families will disappear from the society.

If we look at the Western societies which are plagued by broken families, we will find that each individual there has lost his way and gone astray because he feels lost. And so they turn to drugs, or alcohol, or adultery, or the other wicked things we see. A lost generation: but what has made them lost? It is failure to maintain family ties.

If we speak about the perversions that plague our youth today, we should not blame the youth, but rather, we should blame the parents who neglected their sons and daughters and ruined their family ties. A generation grew up plagued by psychological complexes without end. The child that loses its family atmosphere loses its life's balance. So God wants the believers to be close and compassionate, and free of the complexes which ruin life. And so the failure to maintain family ties causes whole generations to become lost.

After this comes the third attribute of the wicked, which is that, they '…spread corruption on earth….' We say that everything in the universe is created according to a certain order, since God *the Exalted* has determined the nature of everything, and thereupon guides it towards its fulfilment (*al-A'la:* 3), i.e. everything has a path which it must follow. But mankind, with their free will, corrupted the soundness of the universe.

Out of God's mercy, He made some of His creatures completely subjugated in order that the grand order of the cosmos would be fixed. The sun, and the stars, and the earth, and the whole of creation, except for mankind and the jinn, all follow a precise order. Why is this? It is because they exist with no free will. The True Lord has informed us that in order for our lives to be balanced, we must follow God's guidance, just as the compelled beings are all governed by God's guidance. The purpose of human free will is not that we stray from God's guidance; for God possesses the attribute of compulsion, and had He wanted, He could have created us as compelled beings; but He gave us free will so that we would come to him out of love, not compulsion. You love your desires, but you love God more, and so you restrict yourself to His guidance. Free will was not given to us in order that we could spread corruption in the earth, but rather, it was given to us so that we could go to God willingly, not out of compulsion.

And so each of us has the freedom to believe or not to believe, and this choice confirms the love for God in our hearts. But instead of using their free will to go to God out of love and to gain the greatest reward, mankind used their free will to spread corruption on earth. Corruption means playing fast and loose with God's commands and prohibitions, changing them so that the balance is lost; that is, if God says do something, you do not do it; and if He says do not do it, then you do it.

And so you will have disturbed the balance of your life. Why? It is because we are no longer governed by a single law to organise people's lives, but rather, each person makes his own laws, and no one does what he is supposed to do, and so life becomes disturbed. Every instance of corruption is a blemish on existence. Imagine you are walking along and you see a new apartment block from whose pipes the water is leaking. When you see this, you will be pained by it because it is a blemish on existence caused by the untrustworthiness of the labourer. So when a single labourer causes corruption because of his lack of honesty in his work, the world loses a blessing which God loves which is to see beautiful things. And so you sigh and say, 'O God…'!

So every dishonest worker spreads corruption in the world; and every dishonest person spreads corruption in the world, and threatens the rights and property of others, and this makes the world ugly so that no one trusts anyone with his honour or his belongings. The one who behaved in this way wanted to gain immediate benefit for himself, but by so doing, he created corruption in the world. The same is the case when a tradesman cheats people, and when people gain money by stealing and robbing; God gives them the most evil money that exists on earth, but they find woe by spreading corruption on the earth.

Corruption on earth means taking something beyond its natural limit, and indulging your desires and wants excessively, and punishing people severely, and seeking out what rightfully belongs to others. Corruption on earth is following any guidance other than that of God.

The absence of God's guidance means that we all become slaves to our whims; and when things are governed by people's whims, life becomes filled with misery and evil instead of happiness and security. The complaints that people have today are symptoms of this corruption. This is because the meaning of these complaints is that people are suffering and no one is doing anything about it. And so the affairs of the world cannot run smoothly; corruption cannot be done away with unless we implement the guidance of one who has no personal whims or interests – and the only One Who has no personal interest is the Creator of man, and the Maker of the balance of the universe.

The first manifestation of corruption is that authority is given to people who do not deserve it because if authority is given to people who do not deserve it, you should expect the Hour (Doomsday, the end of time) to come soon after, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If authority is given to those who do not deserve it, expect the Hour.'(1) Why is this? It is because in that case, society will be based on hypocrisy and contradiction, not on integrity and sincerity, and so the one who is good at being hypocritical will rise to high levels, and the one who does his work well with integrity, will get nowhere. The result will be that a group of ignorant hypocrites are the ones who control things without any proper knowledge. Corruption on earth is what squanders the truth and moral values, and so society becomes a jungle where everyone wants to achieve their own desires without giving any consideration to the rights of others, and the one who does his work well does not obtain his rights; and so he feels that there is no benefit in hard work, and the whole society becomes a community of unproductive people.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

Corruption on earth is for us to make our own minds the source of law so that we do not give consideration to the natural balance that God created; we rather, plan everything with our minds. And so, we cut down trees, and dump industrial waste into rivers and so ruin them, and we spray poisonous chemicals on our crops or waterways and rivers as is happening now, filling them with poison and then eating them, and then we find that pollution has filled the world, and the ozone layer has been obviously harmed in a way which exposes human life on earth to many dangers, and we spoil river water so that it is fit for neither drinking nor irrigation, and subsequently all the goodness in our world gradually disappears. Corruption on earth is for injustice to spread, and for life to become an unending cycle of misery. Corruption on earth is for security to be lost, so that human interaction is ruined, and rights are squandered.

These are but some of the types of corruption on earth. God has established a comprehensive law, His guidance by which all men should conduct their lives; but people have neglected it, and gone wandering in the darkness of ignorance. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Whoever gives authority to a man from a group, whilst in that group there is another more pleasing to God, has betrayed God, and His Messenger, and the believers.’(1)

This is the extent to which Islam cares for the soundness of people’s affairs. Then the True Lord gives His Judgement: ‘…these are they who are the losers.’ What will they lose? They will lose their worldly lives and their Hereafter, and they will lose their own souls; for a person has two lives, a short life in this world filled with woes, and an eternal life in the Hereafter.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim on the authority of Ibn ‘Abba*s *God be pleased with him*

Those who sell eternal life and its delights and its eternity in return for the life of this world in which nothing is certain, are the losers. A person's life might last a day, or a month, or a year; and however long it might last, the life of this world is short, and however much it gives, it gives only a little. Does the one who sells his Hereafter for the sake of this worldly life thereby win, or lose? Of course he loses because he has bought something which is definitely not equal to all of God's blessings.

If a person forgets God *the Glorified*, and forgets that he will meet Him soon, and on the Day of Resurrection he is brought forth to stand before Him, and receive from Him his account, will he be a winner, or a loser? Of course he will be a loser because he will have brought God's torment down upon himself, and will have brought God's punishment down upon himself.

God's words 'the losers' indicate that the deal will be over and everything will be lost because its end result was always bound to be loss, and this loss is not a temporary one which can be compensated for by another deal. Rather, it is an eternal loss, and the regret felt for it will be terrible as God tells us that He warns us of a chastisement close at hand, on a day when man shall see what his hands have sent ahead, and when the unbeliever shall say, 'Oh, would I were mere dust...' (*an-Naba':* 40).

Why will the disbeliever wish he were dust? It is because of the horror of the suffering he will see before him, and the horror of the loss he will have incurred. This shows the severity of the regret on the day when regret will be of no use. In this verse, God speaks of the losers, but in another verse He *the Exalted* tells us of the greatest losers, who have lost their labour most, whose aim in the present life has been mistaken, and who deem that what they do is right; they are those who do not believe in the signs of the Lord, or that they shall ever meet Him. Vain, therefore, are their works; and no weight shall He allow them on the day of Resurrection (*al-Kahf*: 103-105).

So there are losers, yet there are those who are even greater losers; the greatest loser is the one who denies God *the Glorified*, and the Day of Resurrection, and thinks that the life of this world is all there is, and God was not in his mind when he did anything; this world is all that concerned him, and then he was surprised by meeting the True Lord on the Day of Resurrection having not one single good deed in his account because all he intended by his good deeds was the life of this world, and so he will have no share in the Hereafter.

It is strange that you see people making all possible preparations for the life of this world, sending their children to language schools, and undertaking more than they can afford, and then sending them to universities, or to study abroad, preparing for a future which is only expected, not certain; for a person could die whilst in their youth, and so waste all that was spent on them, or they could squander their studies in the final stages and so end up with nothing; or all of these preparations could be completed, and then they commit a crime which means they will have to spend the rest of their lives in prison, and so waste their lives.

But what is certain and cannot be doubted is that we shall all meet God on the Day of Resurrection, and He will hold us to account for our deeds. Despite the fact that this is a certainty, many people are not heedful of it, and work for a doubtful future without even thinking of the certainty of the Hereafter. And so you find that few parents strive to make sure that their children perform prayers, and worship God, and are trustworthy people, and everything which brings them close to God. They forget the true blessing and focus all attention on that which will come to an end; and so the result for them is loss in the Hereafter.

كَيۡفَ تَكۡفُرُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَكُنتُمۡ أَمۡوَٰتٗا فَأَحۡيَٰكُمۡۖ
ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمۡ ثُمَّ يُحۡيِيكُمۡ ثُمَّ إِلَيۡهِ تُرۡجَعُونَ ٢٨

How can you ignore God when you were lifeless and He gave you life, when He will cause you to die, then resurrect you to be returned to Him? [28] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 28)

The word ‘how’ is a question about a state. The True Lord uses it in this verse rhetorically not in order to ask a question, but rather to seek an explanation for an abnormal thing, which should not have occurred. After everything that the True Lord has just mentioned in the foregoing verses by way of decisive proofs, such as the creation of the heavens and the earth and mankind, proofs which no one can deny or question, how after all these clear proofs could you disbelieve in God? Your disbelief is without argument or logic. Sometimes questions are used to reprimand, as when you say to someone, ‘How could you insult your own father?’ Or they can be used to express wonder at something someone has done which they should not have; and the two are linked, whether the question expresses rebuke or wonder, the intention is the same: ‘You should not have done that.’ Then the True Lord brings more proofs which no one can deny or give the lie to, saying ‘… and you were lifeless and He gave you life, and then He will cause you to die….’

And so the discourse turns to the origin of life and death. After demonstrating what the disbelievers, the wicked, and the hypocrites are guilty of spreading corruption on earth, and cutting that which God commanded be joined, the discourse goes up to the mention of life and death. God’s words ‘… and you were lifeless and He gave you life, and then He will cause you to die….’ cannot be disputed. Perhaps it might be possible for them to argue about not following the religion, or cutting that which God commanded be joined. But the matter of life and death is something no one can dispute. God created us from nothing, and no one else has ever claimed to have created mankind, or created himself. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came and told the people that God created them, none of them could deny this because we were all absent from this world, and then it was God who brought us into existence and gave us life.

And as for God’s words ‘…He will cause you to die…,’ no one doubts that they will die, for death is destined for all people. So creation from nothing is certain by evidence, and death is certain by experience and witnessing.

The matter of death is our way to deal with any atheist for if they say that the intellect is enough to run life and that there is no such thing as the Unseen, we say: The One Who determines existence in the universe is the same One Who determines death. The life of this world is a stage between two points, the first of which is that God creates us and brings us into being, and then the journey of life comes between the two points; and the thing in which our humanity comes to a close, and our lives end, is death. That is, we are on a journey of life from God and to Him. So, the life of this world begins with creation by God, and ends with death.

When they talk about test-tube babies which are a treatment for sterility more than anything else, they depict it in an ignorant way. All they do is taking an egg from the mother’s ovary because the fallopian tube is closed, or is not able to be impregnated normally, and fertilise it with the sperm of the husband, and then plant it in the womb of the mother.

Therefore, they take what God has created, namely the mother’s egg and the father’s sperm, and all they do is fertilisation, yet they call this a test-tube baby, as though it is possible for a test-tube to create a baby! The truth is otherwise, for the mother’s egg and the father’s sperm are creations of God, and they have not created anything. We say to them: if you control life and death, then prevent a single person from dying. Rather than spending thousands of pounds treating infertility with a procedure which may or may not succeed, keep a single person alive; yet they cannot.

Death is a tangible phenomenon which can be witnessed; and out of His mercy for the human mind and its conception of unseen matters, God makes them easier to understand by means of something which is clear to see. How? When a person looks at himself and how he is alive, he does not know how God created him, or gave him life. God told us about the unseen matter of creation in the Noble Quran by saying that He *the Exalted* created man from soil, clay, and mud, and then breathed into him from His Spirit.

God addresses people saying that if they are in doubt of Resurrection, then they should remember that He has created them from dust (*al-Hajj:* 5). And He *the Exalted* states that He has created man out of an extract of clay (*al-Mu’minun:* 12). And He also tells us that He has created people from firm clay (*as Saffat:* 11). And He states that He has created man out of sounding clay, out of dark mud fashioned in shape (*al-Hijr:* 26). And then He *the Exalted* informs us that He commanded the angels when He has formed Adam fully and breathed into him of His spirit, to fall down before him in prostration (*Sad:* 72).

The True Lord tells us of stages of creation which we did not witness; but death is something we can all see and since we can see it, the True Lord uses it as a proof of the stages of creation which we cannot see. Death means the undoing of life, and God has informed us all about the stages of the creation of life, though they are unseen to us. But the One Who created us tells us that He created us from dust, from mud and from clay like a potter's. When water is added to soil it becomes mud, and when we leave mud, its colour changes and it becomes clay, and then when it dries it becomes firm clay; and then God *the Glorified* fashioned it into human form and blew the Spirit into it, and so it became a human being. And then comes death, the undoing of life; and the undoing of everything occurs in an opposite order to how it was formed.

Buildings are built from bottom to top, and are destroyed from top to bottom. And so the final steps of any journey are the first steps of the journey back. If you travel to Alexandria, the first place you pass on the way back is the last place you passed on the way there.

The first thing to leave the body is the spirit which was the last thing to enter it. Then the body hardens and becomes like firm clay, and then rots and becomes like clay, and after that, all the water evaporates from it and it returns to dust. In this way, death is the opposite of the image of life, in agreement with the stages of which the True Lord has informed us.

God *the Glorified* then says, '…then you shall be brought back to Him…,' i.e. God will resurrect you to render your account. The disbelievers, atheists and materialists try to deny the concept of the Resurrection; and in this respect they have brought nothing new. Rather, they say the same words as the people of the first era of ignorance of old did, as God *the Glorified* tells us that they used to say that there is only their present life in this world; they die as they come to life, and nothing but time destroys them (*al-Jathiya:* 24).

It is the hope of the disbeliever who sins against himself that there will be no resurrection or account; and to those who find such thing as resurrection far-fetched, we say: God, who created you from nothing, can easily bring you back as you were, as He *the Exalted* says that it is He Who originates the creation in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew: and most easy is this for Him, since His is the essence of all that is most sublime in the heavens and on earth, and He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise (*ar-Rum:* 27).

So bringing into existence that which has already existed before is easier than creating something non-existent from nothing; and God answers the disbelievers by reporting the argument of the disbeliever who, forgetting how he was created in the first place, wonders who will give life back to bones that have become dust. God commands His messenger to answer that He Who had brought them into being in the first instance, will give them life once again, for He has full knowledge of every act of creation (*Ya Sin:* 78-79).

And so the act of bringing back to life will be easier for God than the first creation was, and God has everything written in a plain account, and that of the human body which the earth consumed will be returned once more on the Day of Resurrection.

Moreover, the creation of the heavens and the earth is a greater feat than the creation of mankind, as God *the Exalted* says that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of man; yet most people do not understand the significance of this (*Ghafir:* 57).

And God's statement '…you shall be brought back to Him' is also a reassurance to those who believe. As long as we have come from Him, and will return to Him, this means life's beginning is from God, and its end is to God; so let us make life itself for God also. We must be aware that God has made the time, place and means of our deaths unknown to us; and He did this not only to veil it, but also so that we would expect it to come at any moment. This is a plain announcement of death so that people will hasten to perform good deeds, and seek reward; for there is no guaranteed life in this world: The child is not certain of its life; the young man is not certain of his life; and the middle-aged man is not certain of his life. So we must all strive to do good in order that death does not surprise us and we die sinners.

Notice that God mentioned the story of life in a single verse, and the return to God- a certainty for the believers- makes them follow the religion and lead law-abiding lives; and keeping to this is what leads them to paradise and gives them peace of mind concerning their children once they have left this world.

This is because the deeds of a righteous man will be reflected in his children after him, as God forewarns those who fear for their weakly offspring after they have departed; let them fear God and say what is right (*an-Nisa':* 9).

So the one who keeps to the teachings of the religion is assured that he will meet his Lord, and is assured of his reward; and those who do not believe in the Hereafter takes life from God and wastes it in things which have no benefit, and then they find nothing but their reckoning, and Hell. God gives the parable of the deeds of those who disbelieve; they are like a mirage in a plain which the thirsty supposes to be water, but when he comes to it, he finds that it was nothing; instead, he finds God with him, and He will pay him his account in full, for God is swift in reckoning (*an-Nur:* 39).

That is, the disbeliever will be surprised in the Hereafter by the presence of God, having never considered that he would be held to account for his actions. God's statement '…then you shall be brought back to Him' can be read in Arabic in two different ways, either in the passive form *'turja'un'* ('you will be brought back') or the active form '*tarji'un'* ('you will return'). The first means that we will be compelled to return, and our return to God will not be of our own will; this applies to the disbelievers who will not wish to return to God. As for the second, active reading, this implies that there is an active will; this applies to the believers who will be willing to return to God.

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ لَكُم مَّا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰٓ إِلَى
ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَسَوَّىٰهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَٰوَٰتٍ ۚ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then turned to the sky and made the seven heavens; it is He who has knowledge of all things [29] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 29)

In this verse, God reminds us that He is the One who created everything on earth. This verse comes immediately after God's statement '…He gave you life, and then He will cause you to die, and will again bring you to life, then you shall be brought back to Him' in order to alert us to the fact that everything on earth belongs to Him *the Exalted*, that our ownership of things is only temporary, and that everything we own in this world will end up belonging to someone else, and so on.

When the True Lord created life, and said '…you were lifeless and He gave you life…,' it is as though the statement was implying that life requires constant sustenance from the Creator to the created if it is to continue; this means that in order for life to continue, this sustenance of favours must also continue. But these favours continue for the period of life, and then when death comes man loses his connection with the favours of this world. So man must be alerted to the fact that that the things of this world are subdued for his service and that no one was responsible for this subdual save God. Man knows nothing of how he was created, and what stages he went through, except what God has told us about, and He *the Exalted* asserts that He did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, and their own creation; and He does not take as helpers those that lead people astray (*al-Kahf*: 51).

As long as they have witnessed neither the creation of the heavens and the earth nor their own creations, we must accept what God tells us about the creation of the heavens and the earth, and our own creation, as a fact; and anything that comes to us from other than God is false and fabricated.

Nowadays, we find that there are many studies of how the heavens and the earth and mankind were created. Yet none of them will arrive at the truth; rather, they will only propose theories which cannot be proven. This is why God says that He does not take as helpers those who lead people astray; there is a clear indication here that there will come people who would lead men astray by saying 'this is how the heavens and earth were created, and this is how mankind was created,' but these deluders, who claim things which are known only to God, are only helping to confirm the way of faith; for if these deluders had not come, and had not said that the earth was created in this way, and the heavens in this way, we would have wondered about that, 'But God has informed us in His Glorious Book that someone would come and lead men astray about the creation of the heavens and the earth, so why did they not show up?' However, the fact that they came is proof of the veracity of the Quran in predicting their coming centuries before they came.

Being able to benefit from something does not require that you know its secrets. For instance, we all use electricity although we do not know what it really is. Likewise, we live on the earth and benefit from all its phenomena and all that God has subdued for us. The fact that we do not know the secret of its creation does not prevent us from enjoying these benefits. It is a kind of knowledge which brings no good, and a kind of ignorance which brings no harm. The world is compelled to serve mankind, and this compulsion means it is subdued, so that the phenomena of the universe do not rebel against mankind. If there are phenomena in the universe which do rebel by God's decree like floods, volcanoes, and natural disasters, we say that this happens in order that the True Lord can alert us to the fact that everything in the universe does not serve us by our own intrinsic worth, or by our control over it, but rather, it serves us by God's command. If all creatures serve you by your own intrinsic worth, then control them when they rebel against your service. Everything in the universe is under God's Omnipotent control; even causes and effects are under the command of the Divine Omnipotence, and no cause or effect in the universe is outside God's will.

And so if the element of water rebels with a flood, and the wind rebels with a hurricane, and the earth rebels with earthquakes and volcanoes, this is only to show mankind that he has no power to control the world in which he lives. God draws people's attention to the fact that He has created for them, from among other things His Hands have wrought, the domestic animals of which they are now masters, and that He has subjected them to men's will so that some of them they may use for riding and some they may eat (*Ya Sin:* 71-72).

Man is unable to tame any animal unless God subdues it for him. It is amazing that animals are able to sense things in the universe which man cannot sense: they sense earthquakes before they happen, and flee from the place the earthquake will take place, whilst man, despite his intelligence, cannot understand what is happening.

With the words 'He it is who has created for you all that is on earth…,' the True Lord includes every species on earth. And so man cannot produce anything except by using that which already exists. That is to say man can add nothing new to the universe. Take a seed of wheat as an example: where did you get it from? You got it from last year's harvest; and where did last year's harvest come from? It came from the harvest of the year before that. And so the cycle continues until it arrives at the very first seed of wheat: where did it come from? It came as a direct creation of God. The same is true for every fruit on earth; if you trace it back to the first fruit, it was the result of direct creation by God. And so if you want to trace back the origin of mankind, you will find with use of logic and reason that creation began with a male and female who were created directly by God; for you came from your father who came from your grandfather who came from his father, and so on until we arrive at the creation of the first man. And so we find that there must have been a direct creation by God; and what applies to man applies to all animals, vegetables, and minerals. If you return anything to its origin, you will find that it must have begun with direct creation by God.

Some people may wonder about technological progress and these new inventions in the new civilisation: Did mankind not create them? We say that these things were created from components which already existed, and God revealed to mankind the knowledge of how to use the materials He created in the earth to develop and produce many new things; but we have never heard of any human being creating material out of nothing.

God is the One Who created everything in this universe from nothing, and then the living creatures reproduced according to the natural laws that God set for them; but all of this development goes back to the fact that God created all creatures, and endowed them with the characteristic of mating and reproduction so that life can continue generation after generation. In every creature of God that you see in the universe now, God placed laws of causality which allowed their lives to continue from one generation to another until the universe comes to an end. So if someone says, ‘I farm by means of my intelligence and knowledge,’ say to him: You take the seed that God created, and place it in the earth that God created, and then God sends down rain from the sky to water it, and then it takes root by the power of God, who placed within it its sustenance and method of growth. So all that you do is plough the earth and throw in the seed. The True Lord poses a question to mankind concerning the seed which they cast in the soil. Is it they who cause it to grow – or is God the cause of its growth (*al-Waqi‘a*: 63-64).

It is true that people plough the earth and plant the seed, and perhaps assist the growth with care and irrigation; but there is no act of creation in anything they do. Rather, God is the Creator of everything, and if you farm by your own power, then bring a seed which God did not create, and an earth that God did not create, and water that God did not send from the sky – and of course you cannot. But what is the origin of the new innovations?

We say there is a difference between potential existence and actual existence. For example, when a palm-tree is still a seed, we say it exists potentially. It is a nucleus; and then it grows and becomes existent actually. You have nothing to do with either stage: you neither created the nucleus in the form of the seed, and nor actively made the seed grow to become a palm-tree. There are some things buried in the universe which God created at the beginning of time and then left hidden until the time comes when He would reveal them to those who search for the secrets of His universe.

Every discovery has its time. If we take for example what lies beneath the soil, or the treasures buried underground, they remain buried until God guides man to them, and teaches him how to extract them. For example, man did not invent or create petroleum or metal, but rather, they were buried in the universe until the time came for them to play their roles in life, and so the True Lord showed them to us. Just because something was unknown to us does not mean it did not exist, or that it came into existence the moment we discovered it. The things that are happening now, and the things that will happen in the years to come God created all their constituent parts, and placed them in the earth the moment of their creation. By means of what God reveals to him, man is able to assemble these constituents, but he cannot create them or bring them into being.

The True Lord then says, 'He it is Who has created for you all that is on earth, and has proceeded(1) to the heaven….' When God *the Exalted* says *'istawa'* (to rise, to move up, to settle above, direct oneself), we need to understand everything connected with God's person according to the principle that there is nothing whatsoever like unto Him. So God settles above (*istawa*), and kings settle onto their thrones, and you settle onto your chair; but because we are governed by the rule that there is nothing like unto Him (*ash-Shura:* 11), we must know that the ‘settling’ of God is not like any other settling. God is Alive, and you are alive; but is your life like His life? And God knows, and you know; but is your knowledge like His? And God has power, and you have power; but is your power like His? Of course, it is not. And so when we come to the word ‘*istawa,’* do not ever try to understand it according to the human understanding. God knows everything in the heavens and the earth, and He knows every atom of every place, and every atom of everything that exists in every place. You know only the outward of things, whilst God knows all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth until the Day of Resurrection, and after the Day of Resurrection. So there is nothing like unto Him *the Exalted*, and you cannot comprehend with your mind any action connected with the Being of God because your mind is too limited to conceive of it. So say, ‘Glory be to God, there is nothing like unto Him in any action connected to His Being.’ So, the phrase ‘…has proceeded to the heaven…’ is from the Speech of God, and God is the Speaker here.

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(1) The Arabic word *istawa* (rendered here as 'proceeded') has no direct English equivalent, and different translations of the Quran give different renderings of the term. In fact, having words that have no direct equivalent in other languages is one of the reasons that the translation of the Quran is considered as impossible and is judged as prohibited by many Muslim scholars. The discussion in the text above will tackle some of the problems involved in this instance - Ed.

Some people say, ‘We have received the Quran and kept it.’ We say to them: the one who keeps the Quran is God, and as long as He is the Keeper and Guardian of His Word, He *the Exalted* knows that nothing in existence can contradict the Noble Quran. And God preserved the Quran so that it could be a proof and a plea for Him to the people. As long as God *the Exalted* is the Creator, and the Speaker, nothing in the entire universe can contradict the Noble Quran. God asserts that it is He Who has revealed the Reminder (The Quran) and that He shall certainly be its Guardian (*al-Hijr*: 9).

It is of God’s Greatness that He has preserved His Word to be a plea for Him against the people. God’s attributes existed before their manifestations came to be seen; so He *the Exalted* created because He is the Creator, and the attribute of being the Creator was already in existence; if not, how could He have created the first of His creations, if He *the Exalted* were not already a Creator? In other words, God did not become a Creator because He created; rather, He created as He was already a Creator.

And God was a Provider before there was anyone to provide for; if not, how could He have provided for His first creatures?

And God created this universe with the complete perfection of all His attributes, and He testified that there was no god but He before any of His creatures testified that there is no god but God, as He *the Exalted* says that He bears witness that there is no god but He, and so do the angels and those who have knowledge – the upholder of equity; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise (*Al-'Imran*: 18).

So God testified that there was no god but He before there existed any of His creation to testify to the Divine Oneness. He testified that there was no god but He before He created the angels who testified to His Oneness with testimony of sight and before the creation of those endowed with knowledge, who gave the testimony of knowledge. So it is as though the testimony of the Self to the Self, in God's statement that He bears witness that there is no god but He, is the basis, and the strongest of all testimonies, for God has no need for His creatures to support His testimony.

So after mentioning the creation of the earth and the heavens and the settling of everything, God says that 'He has full knowledge of everything.' That is, not a single atom of His dominion escapes His knowledge, and He knows every atom on earth, and every atom of every person, and every atom in the universe, and nothing in creation does anything without His leave and His will, as He *the Exalted* states from Luqman's admonition to his son that *Luqman* advised his son that God will bring everything to light, though it were but the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, hidden in a rock or in the heavens or in the earth; for, God is Knower of subtleties, All-Aware (*Luqman:* 16).

وَإِذۡ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٞ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ خَلِيفَةٗۖ قَالُوٓاْ
أَتَجۡعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفۡسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسۡفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحۡنُ نُسَبِّحُ
بِحَمۡدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَۖ قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَعۡلَمُ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ٣٠

[Prophet], when your Lord told the angels, 'I am putting a successor on earth,' they said, 'How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?' but He said, 'I know things you do not' [30] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 30)

After telling us that He created everything in the universe, the True Lord wanted to tell us about the ones He created to populate this universe. And so the story which God chose to begin the stories of the Quran is the story of Adam *peace be upon him*, the first man. This story is mentioned several times in the Noble Quran to guide us to the reason why the True Lord wanted to inform us about it, and also to show us the truth of God's Message, as He tells His Messenger (and the believers) that He shall relate to him their story with truth (*al-Kahf*: 13).

The word 'truly' here indicates that there are some stories which are not true, and God wants to remove the stories He relates from those stories which people exchange, or the stories of history since they might not reflect the facts and hence not be true; and there are stories related throughout the world which have no basis in fact, but are rather legends.

The Arabic word *qissa* (story) is derived from the verb meaning to follow someone's tracks, i.e. to follow the tracks left in the desert sand until you find what you want when you get to the end of the tracks. Since we know that God tells true stories, we know that all the stories mentioned in the Noble Quran are true events that actually happened. Every story in the Quran imparts a lesson, or something important to which the True Lord wants to alert us. Sometimes the purpose of the story was to strengthen the resolve of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. God informs His Messenger that all He relates to him of the accounts of the messengers is to reinforce his heart (*Hud:* 120).

So every story was meant to fortify the hearts of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers at times when events worried them. The stories of the Quran are not just there to kill time, but rather, the lofty goal behind them is to strengthen and benefit the motions of the spiritual life. If we look at the stories of the Noble Quran, we find that they discuss things which happened in the past and became historical events; and history links events with the times in which they occurred. History might concern a person rather than an event; but a person himself is one of the world's events. If you read the chronicled history of any event, you will find that the account expresses the point of view of the narrator, and so every event in history was written according to the viewpoints of those who wrote it. Because of this, the narrations of a single event can differ according to the different narrators.

But the stories of the Noble Quran are the true stories. The lesson to be learned from the stories of the Noble Quran is that they convey to us historical events which repeated themselves as time went by. Pharaoh, for example, represents every ruler who wants people to worship him; and the People of the Cave, for example, is the story of every group of believers who ever fled from the tyranny of disbelief and withdrew to worship God; and the story of Joseph *peace be upon him* is the story of all brothers who were misled by Satan so that malice arises amongst them; and the story of Dhu Al-Qarnain is the story of every reforming ruler to whom God gives material means and support in this world, and so implements God's teachings and pleases Him; and the story of the tribe of Thamud and their prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* is the story of the people who seek a miracle from God and are granted it, but then still persist in disbelief; and the story of the people of Jethro (Shu'aib) *peace be upon him* is the story of the people who commit fraud in their trading.

And so all the stories in the Quran are stories which have been repeated throughout history; even in the time in which we now live, there is more than one Pharaoh, and more than one People of the Cave fleeing with their religion, and more than one Qarun (Korah) worshipping wealth and gold, and thinking that he has no need of God. And so the full names of the personalities of the stories in the Quran are not given, except in the case of one story, namely that of Jesus and his mother Mary daughter of 'Imran *peace be upon them*. Why is this? It is because this is a miracle which will never be repeated, and so God told us their names, 'Mary daughter of 'Imran' *peace be upon her* and 'Jesus son of Mary' *peace be upon him* so that things would not be ambiguous, and other women would not be able to claim to have conceived without a man as Mary *peace be upon her* did. We say: No, the story of Mary *peace be upon her* will not be repeated, and so God specified her by name, and said 'Jesus son of Mary' *peace be upon him,* and 'Mary daughter of 'Imran' *peace be upon her*. As for the rest of the stories in the Noble Quran, they are related without mentioning specific names; God did not tell us what the name of Moses' Pharaoh was, or who the People of the Cave were, or who Dhu Al-Qarnain was, or who the owner of the two gardens was, and so on because the point of these stories was not to highlight one particular person for whom this story was a unique event. Some people occupy themselves unnecessarily with trying to establish the identity of

Moses' Pharaoh, or Dhu Al-Qarnain, and so on. We say to them: You will not get anywhere because God related these stories to us without specifying these identities in order for us to know that it is not the specific person that matters, but rather, what matters is the wisdom of the story.

The stories of the Quran are not repeated in the same form; a part of a story might be related in some verses and another part in some other verses, but with a different aspect of the story. Each verse gives us new information, so that if you collect all the verses related to the story that are mentioned in the Noble Quran, you will find they make a complete story, with each verse adding something new.

The largest, most extensive, of the stories in the Noble Quran is that of Moses *peace be upon him*, and the Noble Quran often reminds us of it because its events include the story of the worst man group of people in history; and on different occasions, God reminds us of some aspect of the lives of these people. God relates that when Moses was born, He inspired his mother to suckle him for a time, and then, when she has cause to fear for him to cast him into the river and have no fear and no grief – for God shall restore him to her and shall make him one of the messengers (*al-Qasas:* 7).

And in another verse, the True Lord relates that He told Moses about when He inspired his mother with this inspiration: to put him in a chest and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore, and one who is an enemy to God and an enemy to Moses will take him up (*Ta Ha:* 38-39).

A superficial understanding of the verses would say that this is mere repetition, but we say this is not the case. Considering God's words in the first narrative: He inspired his mother to suckle him for a time, and then, when she has cause to fear for him to cast him into the river, we see that this part of the story shows that God was spiritually preparing Moses' mother for what would come to pass; but once it came to the event itself, the story changed to a quicker pace: to put him in a chest and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore; the discourse here is appropriate for the actual moment at which the event took place. So the former verse shows us that Moses' mother suckled him for a time before placing him in the chest, and that she was only to cast him into the river when danger came and she feared he would be killed. This was an assurance to her that she need not fear or mourn, for God would save him; and it comprised two instances of glad tidings, namely that God would return him to his mother, and that God had chosen him to be a messenger.

And so we come to the latter verse which completes this part of the story for us i. e to put him in a chest…; here we discover that Moses' mother will put him in the chest, which was not mentioned in the other verse; and then after this, we discover that God had commanded the river to bring the chest safe to the shore, and this also was not mentioned in the other verse. We also learn that the one who would take him in was none other than Pharaoh, and that there would come to be mutual enmity between them. And so, we see that the two verses relating the story complement one another, and there is no repetition. In the second verse, God wanted to confirm that there would be mutual enmity between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh, and also to affirm the enmity Pharaoh showed to God and to Moses *peace be upon him* with His words: an enemy to God and an enemy to Moses… But enmity cannot become firm unless it is mutual, and so a third verse comes to complete the picture: And Pharaoh's household took him up and he would be to them a foe and a sorrow (*al-Qasas:* 8).

And so the noble verse shows us how the enmity between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh would become firm until Pharaoh was destroyed. For if someone shows enmity towards you, and you meet their enmity with goodwill, the enmity will fade after a short while. And so these verses do not constitute repetition, but rather, they each complete the story, and give us a complete integrated picture.

But why is the story not of Moses *peace be upon him* given in full in one place, like the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*? This is because God wanted to strengthen the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with it, and give a part of it here and a part of it there in order to achieve this strengthening whilst leaving nothing out; for the verses together give us the full story. The same is the case with the story of Adam *peace be upon him*, which is told to us in several verses in separate instalments which together give us the complete story. At the same time, each individual verse has its own wisdom which was necessary for the time in which it was revealed. God related to us the story of the beginning of man; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘You are all the sons of Adam, and Adam was created from dust.’(1)

The True Lord wants to tell us how He began the creation of man, and the story of the enmity between Satan and Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny, and so God *the Exalted* spoke about the first man, and told us his name; which was Adam *peace be upon him*, and spoke about the material from which He shaped him, and about the teachings He imparted to him, and about the discussion that took place between the angels, and told us that Adam would be His vicegerent on earth, and that He taught him the names of everything so that his life would have direction, and He taught us the logic behind knowing things and their names, and He spoke about the dialogue that took place between Satan and his Lord when he refused to bow down in prostration, and He showed us the argument Satan used for refusing to prostrate, and the plan of Satan and his method of assailing the hearts of the believers with insinuations and whispers and so on.

So there are many facets to the story of Adam *peace be upon him*; and if a human being wanted to tell the story of Adam, they would not be able to come up with all of these pieces; but the True Lord made them come piece by piece as a way to strengthen the believers.

The verse that we are currently examining is not found in the chapters of *al-A‘raf*, *al-Hijr*, *al-Isra’*, *al-Kahf* or *Ta Ha*; and so we know there is no repetition. God told His angels that He would place on earth a vicegerent, and we must stop to consider this. Was Adam *peace be upon him* created as an individual alone, or did God create him with all of his progeny until the Day of Resurrection buried within him? If we read the Noble Quran, we find that God addresses mankind saying that He has created them, then fashioned them, and then He commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam (*al-A’raf:* 11).

This speech is addressed to a plurality, to Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny. So it is as though God is indicating that the primary origin of man is Adam *peace be upon him* within whom was concealed the attributes of all of mankind that would come from his loins until the coming of the Hour. That is, when Adam *peace be upon him* was created there were within him the atoms from which all mankind would grow, one from the other, until the coming of the Hour.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bazzar on the authority of Hudhayfa with a sound chain of narration*

I said that every one of us has within him an atom or a particle from Adam *peace be upon him*; so the children of Adam took it from him, and the generation that came after them took the living microbe that Adam passed on to his sons, and the ones who came after them also took that living particle which was originally created in Adam *peace be upon him*. And so it went on to those after them; and life must be a connected chain, each of us taking from the one before him and passing on to the one after him. If a single link is missing, life ends; such is the case when a man dies without marrying and so he leaves no descendants, and so the chain of life stops. The fact that the chain of life continues proves that this life is connected, and has not stopped, and so from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until now, life has been connected; and so in each one of us there must be an atom from Adam, the beginning and origin of humanity, after whom life spread out in chains which connected up until the present day, and will remain until the Day of Resurrection.

I am alive now because I was formed from a living microbe from my father who took his life from a living microbe from his father, and so on all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him*. So you are created from a living particle in which there exists life which has not ceased from Adam until the present day; and had it ever stopped, you would not have been here. So the life of those living now is connected to Adam, and has not been interrupted by death; and the lives of those who will be living when the Hour comes will also be connected to Adam, the first man. When the True Lord commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam, they prostrated to Adam and to his descendants until the coming of the Hour; the descendants of Adam were buried in his loins, and they witnessed the first creation. So the words of the True Lord that He created mankind, and then formed them, constitute a new element of the story of man.

God *the Exalted* says, ‘And when your Lord said to the angels…’, i.e. God instructs our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say that when Adam *peace be upon him* was created, he was created as a vicegerent on earth. This (God speaking to the angels) does not mean that God was seeking the opinion of anyone about His creation, since He said, ‘I am going to place…’ meaning that the decision has already been made. Rather, it was an announcement to the angels; and the reason God told the angels about it is because they had a role to play with Adam *peace be upon him*; for some of them would undertake the arrangement of God’s commands, and some of them would write the accounts and act as guardians, and there are other angels besides whom the True Lord would charge with many different tasks connected with the life of this new creature. So the reason for this announcement was that the angels would have work connected with this vicegerent.

Some people might say that the life of mankind on earth is subject to natural laws. To this we say: what makes you think that behind every natural law there is not an angel in charge of it? But whose place will this inheritor/vicegerent take? They might take one another’s places, in which case the meaning of this announcement from God is that every man will die and be followed by someone else who inherits his position; for if they were all to continue to live, they would not inherit from one another, or, it might be that mankind are following on from another species – but God negated the possibility that mankind could be the inheritors of another species; and this can be gathered from the verse where He *the Exalted* addresses mankind saying that if He so wills, He will make them pass away and bring forth a new creation; and this is not difficult for God (*Ibrahim:* 19-20).

So this ‘new creation’ would be of the same species as the one which God destroyed before it. And God tells us that mankind will follow on from one another until the Day of Resurrection; this is what can be gathered from the verse rebuking those who wasted prayers, speaking about righteous people of the past who were succeeded by people who came after them and wasted prayer and followed lusts; and these will meet with utter disillusion (*Maryam:* 59).

But in this verse the word *khalf* (‘people coming after’) is used, and not *khalifa* (‘inheritor’/’vicegerent’) to speak about this kind of people. The meaning of the word can be gathered from the following lines of a poem:

Those in whose care one could live are gone,
And I remained among *khalf* like mangy skin.

But God made the angels fall in prostration to Adam *peace be upon him* when He created him, and subdued the whole universe for him; and so it is as though he was God’s vicegerent on His earth, whom He aided with material means so that the universe was subjugated to him by God’s will, not by man’s will. God said in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘O Son of Adam, make time for My worship and I will fill your breast with riches, and relieve your poverty; and if you do not, I will fill your hand with toil, and not relieve your poverty.’(1) So the word vicegerent (*khalifa*) has several meanings.

What did the angels reply? ‘… They said, “Will You place on it one who will do ill therein and shed blood, and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness?” How did the angels know this? They must have had some prior knowledge on which to base this, or else they thought that Adam *peace be upon him* would be a tyrant on earth. But what about shedding blood – how could the angels know about that when it had not yet happened? It must be that they knew it from a previous life-form; and God informs us that He had created jinn before that from intensely hot fire (*al-Hijr:* 27).

So it is obvious that the jinns were created before mankind. And God’s words ‘Surely, I know what you do not know’ mean: ‘Your knowledge, O created beings, is commensurate with your created nature, whereas God’s knowledge is timeless and unlimited.’ But when God told them about the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*, did the angels say this out loud, or in private only to themselves? Whether they said it out loud or not, God knew it because He knows everything that is concealed and everything that is revealed and He knows what is secret and what is even more hidden. What is a secret, and what is more hidden than a secret? A secret is what you tell in confidence to someone. So what I tell to someone in confidence is a secret; whilst what I keep to myself, without anyone finding out about it, is even more hidden than a secret. So we do not say that we keep a secret unless we have divulged it to someone, whilst what we keep to ourselves is known to no one but God; and this is what is even more hidden than a secret.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, Al-Hakim and Ibn Majah on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

And when the True Lord said ‘Surely, I know what you do not know,’ He wanted to state things as they are. The Noble Quran tells us that the angels said ‘…and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness.’

To celebrate God’s praise means to declare God’s transcendence above all that does not befit Him, and to extol is to purify, derived from the Arabic word qadas, meaning the pail of water they used for washing. And so we say God is glorified and extolled; glorified means that He is free of anything which does not befit Him *the Exalted*, and extolled means purified. To glorify requires a glorifier and a glorified; and the angels said: ‘…All Glory be to You! We have no knowledge but that which You have imparted to us...’ (*al-Baqara:* 32).

This was a glorification and an extolling of God; and glorifying and extolling only befit a Being of absolute perfection, without any blemish; and absolute perfection belongs to God alone. And so God ruled out that the tongues of His creatures could ever say ‘All Glory be to You’ to none but Him, and so we never hear any human being saying this to another human being. Likewise, the tongues of men have been stopped from extolling the glory of any but God. The angles said ‘and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness’ as though this is a reference to our invocation ‘Glory be to God, and praised is He!’ This means that God is absolutely transcendent in His Self that there is nothing that resembles His Self, and in His Attributes that there is nothing that resembles His Attributes, and in His Actions, that there is nothing that resembles His actions. But what does ‘and praised is He’ mean? It means ‘We glorify You and praise You,’ i.e. ‘O Lord, our very glorifying You is a blessing from You, and so we praise You for giving us the strength to glorify You.’ To extol means to declare the purity of God from any change or defect; and because You, O Lord, are hallowed and pure, it is not fitting that anything should be offered to You which is not pure, and it is not fitting that he whom You have created with Your pure hands should do anything impure.

So He *the Exalted* made clear to us the meaning of ‘…we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness,’ and then God, out of His wisdom, wanted to respond to the angels, and so He said, 'Surely, I know what you do not know.' And He did not leave it at this, but rather brought forth an event which proved the truth of what He said.

وَعَلَّمَ ءَادَمَ ٱلۡأَسۡمَآءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمۡ عَلَى ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ
فَقَالَ أَنۢبِـُٔونِي بِأَسۡمَآءِ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

He taught Adam all the names [of things], then He showed them to the angels and said, 'Tell me the names of these if you truly'[think you can] [31] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 31)

So the True Lord responded to the angels in this noble verse by teaching Adam *peace be upon him* the names of everything; and the phrase 'all things' implies totality, i.e. knowledge of everything connected with these names.

A question arises here: Did God tell Adam *peace be upon him* the names of everything from the moment of creation until the coming of the Hour since He said 'all things;' and what about the names of the inventions which were to come many long centuries after the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*?

We say that when God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names, and singled him out above the angels, He gave that creature, who was made from a lower element, something which distinguished him from creatures which were made from a higher substance. Adam *peace be upon him* was created from clay, whilst the angels were created from light. Human beings are not capable of giving the lower more than they give to the higher, yet God alone can do so in order to remind us that what we obtain is not a result of our own power, but rather is the result of His power. And so we find that Solomon *peace be upon him*, who was a king and a prophet, and to whom God gave a kingdom that would not be given to any other after him, and distinguished him, yet the hoopoe bird came and said to Solomon *peace be upon him* that he has gained knowledge which he (Solomon) does not have, and that he has come to him form Sheba with sure information (*an-Naml:* 22).

How could the hoopoe, a weak, little bird know that which Solomon *peace be upon him*, the Prophet-King who ruled over men and jinn, did not know? It is because God hates for His creatures to be deluded with false pride, and so

He brings signs to mark the low above the high so that they all know that their powers are not intrinsically theirs, but are rather from God. And so Moses *peace be upon him*, the prophet and messenger, learns that which he did not have knowledge of from Al-Khidr *peace be upon him*, the righteous servant.

God created all named things, although we may not know of all of them, and made the angels learn the names of these things from Adam *peace be upon him*. Some people might enquire about how the Mighty Creator taught these names to Adam *peace be upon him*. The Creator's way of teaching is not the same as the creature's way of teaching; for the Creator teaches by inspiration, and so He cast into the heart of Adam *peace be upon him* the names of every created being in the universe.

So at the first meeting between Adam *peace be upon him* and the angels, all of these things had been created and their names had been imparted only to Adam *peace be upon him*, which is proven by the fact that the angels did not know the names of these things, whilst Adam did. We must pause for a moment here to consider something. Speech, in our human experience, comes as a result of hearing, and language comes from the surroundings. God taught the names of all things to Adam *peace be upon him*, and this knowledge could not have come without Adam *peace be upon him* hearing something from God, and then uttering it. If you take an Arab child and leave it in London, for example, it will learn to speak English with fluency and will not know a single word of Arabic; and vice versa: if you take an English child and raise it in an Arab environment, it will speak Arabic and will not know a word of English. Language is not a matter of inheritance, or race, or environment, but it is rather a matter of imitation where a person hears and repeats. If a person does not hear anything, and is deaf, he will never speak a word. And so if Adam *peace be upon him* uttered these names, he must have heard them from God.

It is amazing that the way in which God taught Adam *peace be upon him* is the same way in which human beings teach each other, right up to our time. You do not teach a child by beginning with verbs, but rather, his teaching must begin with nouns and names. So you tell him, 'This is a glass,' and 'this is a mountain,' and 'this is the sea,' and 'this is the sun,' and 'this is the moon;' and then after learning the names of things, he can come to know verbs, and his education can proceed from there.

And so we see the first development of speech; the omnipotent power of God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names of all things. Here we must stop to answer two questions. The first: When God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names of all things, did this include the names of all the new inventions that would emerge throughout the world? To this we say: Even if Adam *peace be upon him* learned the names of everything, he needed to live and fulfil life's requirements. When something new emerged, the sons of Adam *peace be upon him* would use words from among those they already knew. This is because when new words are made and enter the language, they do not spring from vacuum, but are formed from the elements of the language in which they are spoken and written.

The same is true for all things in existence. If they were returned to their source, you would see that they are all from God. If mankind were to be returned to their primary source, we would arrive to the True Lord, knowing that the first human was created by God. If knowledge were to be returned to its origin – and all knowledge requires a teacher – we ask: Who taught the first teacher? Is it not obvious that knowledge began with a teacher who was taught by God, and that in reality He is the first teacher? And so God taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names of all things, and Adam taught his children, and they taught their children… and so on.

The second question is: If God taught speech, why do languages differ around the world, and why do we find many different languages and tongues? To this we say: the different stages of history and the spread of human beings throughout the world have made every group of human beings band together and communicate with one language. Every existing language is derived from an older language. For example, French and Italian are derived from Latin, and Hebrew and Syriac are related to Arabic. Even the dialects that are found in the Arab world today, though they come from one language, are different so that the dialect of Algeria or Morocco differs from that of Egypt and Sudan. But if we speak standard Arabic, we understand each other, and the origin of all these dialects is the language of the Quran- Arabic. However, during the periods of historical weakness that have afflicted the Arabs, each Arab land has become isolated from the other lands, and each separate society has used language as a social expression, and so the different dialects have become mutually unintelligible.

And so, God imparted the names of all things to Adam *peace be upon him* and then brought them within the ken of the angels and said, ‘Tell me the names of these, if what you are saying is the truth.’ That is, God honoured Adam *peace be upon him* with knowledge, and granted him knowledge that he did not grant to the angels, and then had Adam *peace be upon him* teach the angels the names of the things that they did not know. This is evidence of the totality of God’s omnipotence; He does as He wills with His creation. As we said, the distinction that might be given to the lowly above the lofty cannot be given except by God’s doing.

We will illustrate this with an example: If a weak person wishes to carry a heavy load, he will not be able to do so. If a strong person wishes to help him, he cannot give him some of his strength so that he can carry the load; rather, he must carry it for him. But the One Who can make this weak person strong so that he can carry the load himself, is only God. A human being cannot give another human being his strength; but God alone is able to make the weak person strong, and the strong person weak.

In addressing the angels, God says, ‘…If what you say is true;’ but do the angels lie? Angels are beings of light, who praise God, and do His bidding. We say that the meaning of the term ‘true’ here should be understood with respect to what the angels based their analogy upon – whether that analogy is true or not; or it might mean that what they said was mere conjecture in attempting to have knowledge of the unseen.

In their suggestion, the angels might have been referring to another species that was on earth such as the jinns, who were created before the human beings, and drawing an analogy between that species and the new species. The True Lord tells the angels that they were incorrect in their analogy. Or (and this is another possible meaning of the verse), the angels might have been trying to foresee the future, reading into the Unseen and predicting that the new creature would spread corruption and shed blood on earth. But they may have forgotten that no one knows the Unseen except God, and God was making this point clear to them. So, in either case, their analogy was incorrect.

This is in no way a criticism of the angels; rather, it is a correction for them, and an indication for us that the angels do not know the Unseen. Therefore, when they attempted to draw an analogy based on their prior knowledge, or attempted to read into the unseen future, they were unsuccessful. This is because God Alone is completely cognizant of the Unseen. The impetus that drove the angels to say what they said was their intense love of God, and their dislike of corruption in His creation.

قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَـٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٢﴾

They said, ‘May You be glorified! We have knowledge only of what You have taught us. You are the All Knowing and All Wise’ [32] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 32)

This noble verse explains to us that God is the First Teacher in this universe; and if every field of knowledge has to have a teacher, the First Teacher must be God. If in our age we see many different sciences, these sciences are the product of the initiative of the intellectual process which God endowed mankind with, the materials which God placed in the universe, and the knowledge and logic which God taught to mankind.

Every invention and innovation came into being through premises and things which were already in existence before it. For example, water has always existed, as has the sun, which causes the water to evaporate and form clouds; and when mankind used heat to evaporate water and harness steam as a source of power, this spelled a leap in civilisation and science which we call the ‘steam age’, and was used to power trains, industrial machines, and other things.

This advance in science was a result of the presence of knowledge and power, added to the intellectual power the Creator gave to mankind and made him first think of using steam as a source of power. And when mankind noticed that fallen trees roll on the ground because they are cylindrical in shape, they used what they noticed in the way these trees moved to make the wheel, which was an important step forward in the history of science.

So the cylindrical tree-trunk is what gave mankind the idea for making the wheel; and when mankind developed the use of steam, and made trains which ran on steam power, this was a progression which was the child of the previous knowledge of the power created by evaporating water, and the means of making wheels. So all knowledge springs from prior knowledge, and it is all linked to the abilities which God gave to mankind. And so the concern Islam has with empirical or material science is that it alerts us to the signs of the Creator in the universe, and asks us to ponder these signs, and apply to them our intelligence and perception. The True Lord informs us that many are the signs in the heavens and on earth which they pass by, and turn aside from them (*Yusuf:* 105).

And so God *the Exalted* alerts us to His signs in the heavens and the earth in order that we apply our intelligence and perception to them, to derive from them inventions which advance our civilisation. The Quran requires of us that we continue to build upon the knowledge which God imparted to Adam *peace be upon him*; and if the history of science tells us stories of people who were not believers and yet were more advanced than us in science and invention, we believers must reflect on the signs of God in the earth. Newton, who discovered the earth's gravitational pull, watched an apple fall from a tree onto the ground, and this led him to the law of gravity.

If we wish to get a glimpse of the knowledge of God which He has imparted to us, it is enough that we consider the example of plant seeds or stones. Within each tiny palm stone, for example, there is an entire palm tree; and when you put the seed in the ground, the tree develops and comes into existence.

In order to clarify all this, we say that every science is based on theories; the first theory leads to the second, and the second leads to the third, and so on. But the beginning of all of these sciences did not start out with a theory, but rather started with what they call axioms or self-evident facts, i.e. those things which require no evidence. These are the things which God created in the universe, and upon these principles all theories were built, one after the other. So if you wanted to follow them back to their origin, you would get in the end to the fact that the first knowledge came from God ; so the first teacher was taught by God, and the first fruit was created by God, and all the discoveries made by man from the beginning of time to the coming of the Hour were all present in the form of their potentiality, just like a tree is present in a seed just waiting for man to reflect and act in order that they could become actual discoveries. God was the First Teacher, Who placed all this knowledge in the universe. I am reminded here of the lines from a poem by the poet Ahmad Shawqi:

All Glory be to You, God, the Best of Teachers!
You taught the first generations with the pen;
You sent Moses with the Torah as a guide,
And the Son of the Virgin with the Gospel,
And you unleashed the spring of teaching, Muhammad,
Who gave man to drink of the Hadith and the Revelation

What Shawqi was saying in these lines is that all knowledge comes from God alone. And so it becomes clear to us that the words of the angels, '…All Glory be to You! We have no knowledge but that which You have imparted to us; You are the All Knowing, the All-Wise' constituted an admission that all knowledge goes back to God, and that God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. The angels said, '…All Knowing, All-Wise'; All Knowing means that He knows everything, both the concealed and the open, and that all knowledge is from Him. As for wisdom, the word *hikma* (wisdom) in Arabic is derived originally from the word for bridle, a piece of metal placed in a horse's mouth to restrain it so that the rider can control it. This is because a horse is a stubborn wild animal which must be tamed, and the piece of metal in its mouth makes it more obedient to its rider. It is as though the attribute *Hakim* ('All-Wise') is ascribed to the Creator *the Exalted* because He controls all creatures so they cannot move without guidance or knowledge.

Wisdom means that there is a goal behind every action so that each is in harmony with the other actions, and so the universe is governed by the True Lord, Who cannot be assailed by falsehood from any direction. The All-Wise and All Knowing is He Who gives every creation its structure and limits. Wisdom is that everything does what it is supposed to do, and does it well. In jurisprudence, wisdom means that you arrive at a sound decision. In poetry, wisdom means that the words are in the proper meter. In medicine, wisdom means that you know the nature of the disease, and the medicine that will cure it. In architecture, wisdom means that you design a hospital to accommodate the needs of the patients and doctors, and the equipment, and the medicinal supplies, and so on, or that you design a house in such a way that it will be comfortable to live in. The wisdom required to build a house, for example, is not the same as that required to build a palace, or a workplace.

The whole universe was created by an All Knowing, All-Wise Creator, and this Creator *the Exalted* placed everything within it in the proper place to fulfil its purpose. God's attribute of wisdom necessitates that He also be All Knowing since it is His knowledge that makes Him create everything with wisdom. God gave to each one of His creatures as much knowledge as they needed; and so the angels by their nature did not know what this man whom God intended to make His vicegerent on earth would do; but they existed for another purpose. God distinguished mankind by giving them intelligence by which they could discover as much of the signs of God in the universe as they needed to survive. The True Lord *the Exalted* commands His Messenger (and all believers) to extol the glory of the Name of their Lord Who creates things and makes them complete and balanced, and Who makes things according to a measure, and then guides them towards their goals (*al-A'la:* 1-3).

So everything was created according to a measure, and every creature has its course facilitated for them towards that which God guides them to.

قَالَ يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ أَنۢبِئۡهُم بِأَسۡمَآئِهِمۡۖ فَلَمَّآ أَنۢبَأَهُم بِأَسۡمَآئِهِمۡ قَالَ أَلَمۡ أَقُل لَّكُمۡ إِنِّيٓ
أَعۡلَمُ غَيۡبَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَأَعۡلَمُ مَا تُبۡدُونَ وَمَا كُنتُمۡ تَكۡتُمُونَ ٣٣

Then He said, 'Adam, tell them the names of these.' When he told them their names, God said, 'Did I not tell you that I know what is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you reveal and what you conceal?' [33] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 33)

So the True Lord wanted to respond to the point the angels had made about the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and his vicegerency on earth, and to affirm that some of the wisdom of God was too subtle for them, and so they were not aware of this wisdom. Before God created Adam *peace be upon him* and made him a vicegerent on earth, He was well aware of everything that Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny would do until the coming of the Hour, and after the coming of the Hour. As for the angels, they had no knowledge of this because it was not their affair, and as we said, everything is enabled to do that for which it was created. And so the True Lord wanted to show the angels that they had passed judgement over Adam *peace be upon him*, either by analogy with another species which had lived on earth, or by trying to predict something that was in the Unseen. Both notions are incorrect; and so God gave distinction to Adam *peace be upon him* above the angels by teaching him the names of all things, and then asked the angels to tell Him these names, but they said: ‘Knowledge comes from God Alone’, and since God had not taught them these names, they did not know them. So God asked Adam *peace be upon him* to tell them these names, and so he did, but he did not tell them because of his own intrinsic power, or nature, or because of knowledge that he had learned by himself. Rather, he told them because God had taught them to him; and in this respect, God says that He raises the degrees of whomever He wills, but above everyone who is endowed with knowledge, there is one who knows all (*Yusuf:* 76).

So Adam’s knowledge of the names was due to the will of God, and this will alone is what made Adam *peace be upon him* know them at that time ,whilst the angels did not. And so the True Lord responded to what the angels said about Adam *peace be upon him* corrupting the earth, and said to them, ‘Did I not say to you that I know the hidden things of the Heavens and of the Earth…?’ That is, God alone knows the Unseen which here means the absolute Unseen; for there are things which are relatively unseen: My wallet might be stolen, for example, and I do not know who stole it; so he is unknown to me, but known to the one who stole it, and the one who helped him steal it by watching the street for him so he could steal it without anyone catching him. Or perhaps a very important decision concerning me might have been taken, like a promotion, or a dismissal, or an indictment, but news of it has not yet reached me, so I do not know of it, but the one who made the decision does know.

This unseen is not really unseen; the real unseen is that which has no clues to indicate what will happen; this is the unseen matter which takes you by surprise, and surprises everyone around you without warning. This is the unseen which is known to no one but God. God’s words ‘I know what you bring into the open, and what you hide’ makes us pause to ponder: Did the angels say to God ‘…Will You place on it one who will do ill therein and shed blood, and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness?' (*al-Baqara*: 30), out loud, or did they only think it to themselves, and not utter it? God's words '…and what you hide?' might indicate that perhaps the angels said it to themselves, and not out loud. In any case, whether they said it out loud or concealed it, God knew it because God *the Exalted* encompasses all things. We do not want this point to cause debate because either way, whether it was loud or silent, it is the same as far as God's knowledge is concerned; so there is no need to argue or debate the matter.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِءَادَمَ فَسَجَدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ
إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَٱسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

When We told the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they all bowed. But not Iblis, who refused and was arrogant: he was one of the disobedient [34] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 34)

God gave a command to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam *peace be upon him*, and this matter has given rise to much debate. Some people said, 'How could the angels prostrate before anyone but God? Prostration is for God alone.' Others said, 'Does the fact that the angels prostrated before Adam *peace be upon him* mean that they worshipped him?' Moreover, others said, 'Prostration to any but God is not permissible under any circumstances.' To these people, we say: You have not understood the meaning. After God singled out Adam *peace be upon him* above the angels by teaching him all the names, He instructed them to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*, and we must be aware that this prostration before Adam *peace be upon him* was an act of obedience to God, not an act of worship to Adam *peace be upon him*. God is the One Who commanded the angels to prostrate themselves to him; Adam *peace be upon him* did not command them to do this, and he had not the right to do so. The command (to prostrate) was given by God, and so anyone who obeyed Him thereby worshipped Him, and anyone who disobeyed Him was sinful, and anyone who rejected the command of the Commander became thereby a disbeliever.

In order to understand the meaning of worship, we say that worship means obeying God's commandments and refraining from what He has prohibited, and so if God tells me to do something, I do it; and if He tells me not to do something, I don’t do it. Worship is for the creature to obey his Creator in all that He commands and prohibits. And so when we go to the pilgrimage, we kiss the Black Stone in the *Ka‘ba*, and we pelt the stone that represents Satan at Mina. We kiss one stone and throw rocks at the other and this is what it means to worship God and follow His teachings just as He gave them. Nothing is sacred to us except God’s commandments and teachings. The angels did not prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*; they rather, prostrated to God’s commandment for them to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*. There is a great difference between prostrating to something and prostrating at God’s command. To prostrate at God’s command does not mean going against His teachings, since the basis of it all is obeying God. Did all the angels prostrate themselves before Adam *peace be upon him*? No; only the angels who had a role to play in relation to Adam *peace be upon him* prostrated to him, and God explained these roles to mankind saying that there are guardians over them, illustrious recorders and cognisant of their actions (*al-Infitar*: 10-12). In another verse we read that not even a word can man utter but there is a watcher with him, ever-present (*Qaf:* 18). In another verse also, we are informed that the angels conduct the affairs of the universe (*an-Nazi’at:* 5).

So there are angels who record the works of mankind and everything they say or do, and they make a written record of them; and there are those who protect them from demons; and there are those who carry out God’s decrees on earth. These all have a role to play with mankind. But the command to prostrate did not include those angels on high, who bear the Throne, and guard the heavens, and the other angels who have no role connected with mankind. And so, when Satan refused to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*, God asked him what has kept him from prostrating before that whom God created with His hands; was he too proud or was he one of those on high? (*Sad:* 75).

So when God asked Satan whether he was one of those high, this meant whether Satan thought he was one of the angels on high, for whom the command to prostrate did not apply. So the command to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* was akin to God’s command to us to prostrate to the *Qibla* (prayer-direction) when we pray. We do not prostrate to the *Qibla* itself, but rather, we prostrate to the command of God that we prostrate to the Qibla. So the angels, who were commanded to prostrate by God, prostrated themselves at God's command, but Satan refused to prostrate, and disobeyed his Lord's command.

Some people say that Satan was not one of those whom God commanded to prostrate because the commandment was issued to the angels alone, and Satan was not an angel, but rather was a jinn, as the Noble Quran tells us that the angels prostrated themselves except for Satan who was one of the jinns, and so he turned away from his Lord's command (*al-Kahf*: 50).

To this we say: It was the fact that Satan was a jinni which made him disobey God's command to prostrate. If Satan had been from amongst the angels who are compelled to obey God, he would have had no option but to obey God's command and prostrate himself to Adam peace and blessings be upon him. But since he was of the jinn, who have the free choice to obey or disobey, he was able to disobey the command to prostrate. And so to those who derive from the noble verse telling us that Satan was a jinn, the understanding that he was not included in the command to prostrate, we say: The True Lord told us of what species Satan was so that we would understand how he was able to disobey. He did so because of the free will that was given to jinn and mankind in the life of this world alone. If God had wanted to compel Satan to obey, he would not have been able to disobey. But his disobedience occurred because he was given free will, and this is something that we must understand. And so God answered anyone of those who might imagine that Satan was not included in the command to prostrate because he was a jinn by saying that He did ask Satan about what has kept him from prostrating himself when He commanded him (*al-A'raf*: 12).

So Satan's disbelief, and his being cast into Hell for all eternity, was caused by his rejecting the command of the Commander, by boasting that he would not prostrate himself before one whom God has created of clay (*al-Isra'*: 61).

The fact that Satan was in the company of those higher than him, namely the angels, made it even more right that he should have prostrated. If the command was given to the higher creatures to prostrate, it must also have applied to the lower. As has been narrated in traditions, Satan was known as the 'peacock' of the angels, and he had a proud position amongst them; and it was this pride and arrogance which led him to disobedience; because Satan was created with free will, he was proud of his choice to obey God before his delusion led him to disbelief and disobedience. And so the command from God to Satan to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* had hardly been issued before Satan proudly refused to obey. He could not bring himself to obey God, and so the disobedience of Satan was the gravest of sins because he rejected the command of the Commander, and imagined he was better than Adam *peace be upon him*, and did not adhere to the obedience of God; and his delusion led him from one sin to another, and therefore God expelled him from His mercy, and made him accursed; and when Satan saw that he had been expelled from God's mercy, he asked God to reprieve him until the Day of Judgement, and he swore by God's might that he would lead the sons of Adam *peace be upon him* astray; and he specified the ways in which he would come to misguide men, saying that he will surely come upon them from before, and from behind, and from their right hand, and from their left, and God will not find the greater part of them to be thankful (*al-A'raf:* 17).

Notice that the directions for a person are six: front, rear, left, right, above, and below; yet Satan here only mentioned four of these. As for the other two, namely above and below, Satan cannot approach them because below is the place where one prostrates and submits to God, and above is the place where prayers and supplications rise, and so Satan cannot approach these two directions.

And so we see that Satan did not only refuse to prostrate himself, but actually rejected the command entirely, which spelled the beginning of disbelief; and then after that, he sank deeper into his transgression and vowed to lead Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny away from the way of God.

وَقُلْنَا يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ ٱسْكُنْ أَنتَ وَزَوْجُكَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ
شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٣٥

We said, 'Adam, live with your wife in this garden. Both of you eat freely there as you will, but do not go near this tree, or you will both become wrongdoers' [35] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 35)

After God created Adam *peace be upon him* and commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before him, and the disbelief and disobedience of Satan came out, God *the Exalted* wanted Adam *peace be upon him* to start practising his intended task on earth. But before he went about this task, God gave him a practical experience of the teachings mankind would follow on earth, and the tempting to which Satan would subject them. Out of His mercy, God did not want Adam *peace be upon him* to begin his mission on earth with a merely theoretical basis because there is a difference between theory and practice.

Something might be said to which you agree with in theory, but when the practice comes you do nothing. So the time Adam *peace be upon him* spent living in paradise was a practical exercise in the ways of worship so that when he went to do his mission, he would not go with a theoretical basis. But rather with a practical experience based on commandments and prohibitions, where he would be exposed to the lawful and the unlawful, and to the temptations of Satan and sin. Then after that, he would have to learn, after committing a wrong deed, how to repent and seek forgiveness of God, and return to Him so that the children of Adam *peace be upon him* would know that God never closes His door to the sinner, but rather, opens for him the door of repentance. Thus God made Adam *peace be upon him* dwell in the Garden. Some people think that this means the garden of paradise which the believers will enter in the Hereafter and some of them say that if Adam *peace be upon him* had not disobeyed; we would have been living in paradise. We say to them: No, Paradise of the Hereafter is for the Hereafter alone, and no one can live there for a time and then be cast out; rather, it is, as God has told us, the Eternal Paradise, and all who enter it live in eternal bliss.

So which garden did Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* live in? They lived in the garden of experience, or the place in which the implementation of God’s teachings would be first experienced. When we read the Noble Quran, we find that the True Lord uses the word *janna* (which can mean both ‘paradise’ and ‘garden’) to describe the gardens of this earth. The Arabic word *janna* is derived from the word for a veil because it contains lush trees which cover those who live in them; so no one can see them, and they contain fruits which allow life to be preserved without one needing to leave them. We find that in the Noble Quran, the word *janna* is used in the narrative of the owners of a certain ‘garden,’ who were subjected to a test by God, when they vowed to collect the fruits of their garden on the morning assuredly, making no exceptions (*al-Qalam:* 17-18). This is the story of the brothers who owned a garden but refused to honour the rights of the poor, the needy, and the orphans, and so God did away with all the fruit of the garden, and burned down its trees. And in the chapter of *al-Kahf,* we find the same word used in the story of the owner of two 'gardens,' as God gives the example of the two men, no one of whom God had bestowed two gardens of grape vines, and surrounded both with palm trees, and placed corn fields between them (*al-Kahf:* 32). This is the story of a man to whom God gave two gardens, but instead of offering thanks to God for His blessings, he disbelieved and doubted the reality of the Resurrection and the Reckoning.

And in the chapter of *Saba'*, we see that the same word is used in the verses where God mentions the people of Sheba whom God guided and showed the straight path, yet they preferred disbelief. He *the Exalted* says that certainly there was a sign for Sheba in their abode: two gardens on the right and the left; and that He called on them to eat of what their Lord has provided for them and give thanks to Him for a good land and a Forgiving Lord. However, they turned aside and so God sent upon them an overwhelming flood, and, in place of their two gardens, God gave them two gardens yielding bitter fruit and tamarisks, and some few jujube trees; thus God requited them for their disbelief; and He does not punish except the ungrateful (*Saba':* 15-17).

And so we see that in the Noble Quran the True Lord uses the word *janna* to mean an earthly garden, not only the garden of paradise. And so when God said to Adam *peace be upon him*, 'O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden,' this does not mean the garden of paradise, but rather, the garden in which the first practical experience of following God's teachings would take place. And so we do not need to ask how Satan managed to enter paradise after he had disbelieved and disobeyed since it was not the garden of paradise at all. You must be well aware of this so that it cannot be said that it was Adam's disobedience that got mankind expelled from paradise because before God created Adam *peace be upon him*, He declared what his role would be saying to the angels, 'I am going to place on earth a *khalifa.'*

So Adam *peace be upon him* was created for vicegerency on earth, and those of his progeny who are upright will enter Eternal Paradise in the Hereafter; and those who enter Eternal Paradise will live forever in bliss.

The True Lord says, '…and eat plentifully therefrom wherever you may wish…;' so God supplied the garden in which Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* were to live with everything they needed to live, just as He created all the blessings which would preserve the continuation of the life of Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny on earth before human life on earth began. God gives with Lordly provision, for He is the Creator, and He is the One who brings things into being from naught, and so He has provided for His creatures that which will allow their life on earth to continue, such as water, air, food, and blessings which cannot be enumerated. And so it is as though God supplied the garden in which Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife would live with everything needed to preserve their lives, before they began to live there, just as He supplied the earth with all the means for human life before Adam *peace be upon him* came down to it. And so God said, 'O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the garden.'

This was a period of training for the implementation of God's teachings. A dwelling is a place where one can relax, and always return to. You might travel for periods of time, but each place you pass through during your journey is not considered to be your dwelling until you return home; and this is the meaning of a dwelling. A man works and toils in this life, and wherever he goes, he returns once more to the place where he dwells so he can find repose.

And God's instruction '…but do not come near this tree…' was a complement to His teachings, which are comprised of commandments and prohibitions, 'dos' and 'do nots': 'dwell you and your wife in the garden' is a command, and '…eat plentifully therefrom wherever you may wish' is a command, and '…but do not come near this tree' is a prohibition. And so these were the first teachings which taught mankind to obey God and refrain from what He forbids; and every Divine Message and teaching of God in this world are composed of commands and prohibitions, of 'dos' and 'do nots.'

And so the True Lord provided for Adam *peace be upon him* that which would sustain his life, and not only sustain his life, as He also said 'plentifully,' i.e. permissibly, with no effort required, and abundantly without any difficulty. We also notice that lawful things were many, and unlawful things few; all the food and drink in the garden were lawful for Adam *peace be upon him* with one exception: a single tree amongst the thousands of trees in the garden – only a single tree was forbidden.

If we consider the teachings sent from heaven to earth, we find that God made lawful innumerable blessings, and only prohibited very few things. In comparison with all the blessings on earth, the things which God has made unlawful for us are few indeed, just as in the garden where only a single tree was forbidden to Adam *peace be upon him*, whilst many things were allowed.

If we consider the specific wording of the verse, we find that when God said, 'And We said, "O Adam…,"' the pronoun 'We' is used here, which is a plural pronoun. Yet God is One and Unique; so this is called the 'plural of majesty' or the 'plural of magnificence.' And so the True Lord uses the plural of majesty and magnificence because a single action requires many different attributes to be completed. If you want to do something, it requires that you have power, knowledge, ability and wisdom; and many attributes are necessary to complete an action.

On the other hand, when the True Lord makes a declaration of His Oneness, He says, 'I am One', and not 'We are God;' this is because He *the Exalted* is speaking of His Oneness, and when the Oneness of God is invoked, the singular pronoun is used, for He is One and Unique. But where majestic actions are concerned, He uses the plural of majesty and magnificence. So when God speaks about the building and the expanding of the heaven, He uses the plural pronoun 'We' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47).

When God wanted to praise Abraham *peace be upon him*, He said that Abraham was a nation (*an-Nahl:* 120). What does 'nation' mean in this context? It means that he embodied all the attributes of goodness which ordinarily are not found in a single man, but only in a whole nation. All the attributes of goodness are found in a nation, so one man is especially honest, and another is especially brave, and another is especially forbearing. And so the True Lord wanted to say that Abraham *peace be upon him* was a nation, i.e. he embodied all the attributes of goodness that could be only in a nation or a large group of people.

Concerning God’s words ‘And We said: ‘O Adam…,’ Adam is the name of the first man created by God; ‘dwell,’ and dwelling require two components: peace and tranquillity. This is the meaning of dwelling. It is to attain peace and tranquillity, and the word sakan meaning ‘comfort,’ derived from the word maskan, meaning ‘dwelling-place,’ was used to mean ‘spouse.’ If the place where you live is bereft of one of these two components, namely peace and tranquillity, then it cannot be termed a dwelling-place. So spouses are called *sakan* (‘comfort’); and a derivative of this word is to be found in the verse where God states that it is among His signs that He has created for mankind mates out of their own kind so that they may dwell (find comfort) with them, and He has engendered love and tenderness between them…’ (*ar-Rum:* 21). This is because peace, compassion, and goodness are all attributes of a good spouse.

We find the same word used in God’s command to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray for the believers as his prayer is surely a *sakan* (relief and comfort) to them (*at-Tawba:* 103). It is a source of ease, tranquillity, and mercy. A person likes life in his house to be a source of relief for him from the hardships of work and the clamour of life. The True Lord commanded Adam: ‘…dwell you and your wife….’ He could have simply said, ‘dwell with your wife,’ because the pronoun is always implicit in an imperative verb; but He *the Exalted* said, ‘…dwell you and your wife….’ So do not think that the pronoun ‘you’ is the subject of the verb ‘dwell;’ rather, the pronoun comes to separate the word ‘dwell’ from the word ‘your wife’ so that the noun would not be conjoined to the verb.

We should keep in mind that the word *zawj* (‘spouse’) is used for an individual that is accompanied by his counterpart/equal, and so the word here in Arabic did not have a feminine ending (for ‘wife’); this is because as far as commandments from God are concerned, men and women are equal in accountability: God describes the people who will enter paradise as whoever does good, whether male or female (*Ghafir:* 40). So they are equal in this respect.

What did God provide for Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife in this garden? He *the Exalted* guaranteed for Adam that in it, he shall not suffer from hunger or nakedness; he shall also neither suffer from thirst nor from the heat of the sun (*Ta Ha:* 118-119).

These are the elements of life which God provided for Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife in the garden of the first experience of practical religious life. And so we see, by the attributes of this garden that God conveys to us, that it was not the garden of paradise because first of all there were religious responsibilities and accountability in it, as God commanded Adam: '…do not come near this tree…,' and there are no religious responsibilities or accountability in the garden of paradise. The True Lord allowed Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* to eat whatever they liked in the garden, and the garden contained many different kinds of food, and so He said, '…wherever you may wish….'

You cannot offer a person only one or two dishes and then say, 'Eat whatever you like,' because he only has a slender choice before him. Moreover, a limited number of choices in food makes the soul grow bored, and so there must have been many and varied choices in the garden.

Then came the prohibition with God's words '…but do not come near this tree…,' i.e. do not go near the place where it stands. But why did the True Lord not say, 'Do not eat from this tree'? It is because God, out of mercy for Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife did not want them to come close to the lure of sin. If He had said, 'Do not eat from this tree,' it would have been permissible for them to go near it, and for it to attract them with its beautiful appearance, and for them to draw near to its fruits, the sweet scent and attractive colour which would attract them, and so they would be very likely to succumb to temptation and stretch their hands out to the tree and eat its fruit.

But God knew that if something is made unlawful to the human soul, it will be easier for humans to avoid it if they are not allowed to go anywhere near it, so as to avoid its attraction. In the same vein, when God made wine unlawful, He did not merely forbid us from drinking it – whilst making it permissible for us to sit with those who drink it, or to trade in it, since these things are a temptation to drinking it; rather, He commanded the believers to stay away from intoxicants, as well as games of chance, idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future by drawing arrows, which are all but an abomination of Satan's work; so they should avoid them, that they may attain success (*al-Ma'ida*: 90).

This noble text requires that we stay clear of all places where wine is kept; we do not sit with those who are drinking it, and we do not trade in it so that we can keep away from sin. If you see a place where there is wine, steer well clear of it immediately, as avoiding seeing wine and those who drink it will save you from being tempted into drinking it yourself. So when the True Lord prohibits things, He uses the terms ‘do not come near,’ and ‘avoid’, i.e. do not go anywhere near it because if it is nowhere near you, it will not cross your mind to commit it. And so the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said: The lawful is clear, and the unlawful is clear; and between them are doubtful matters, unknown to many people. And so those who stay clear of doubtful matters thereby free themselves of suspicion regarding their religion and their reputation; and those who fall into doubtful matters fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture, and is on the brink of entering it. Every king has his reserved land, and the reserved land of God is all He has prohibited.(1)

Some people drink wine and say that there is no clear text which prohibits it because it is not found next to the term ‘made unlawful.’ To this, we say: The word ‘avoid’ is even stricter than a plain prohibition. When God commands us to avoid the uncleanness of idols and to avoid false words (*al-Hajj:* 30), this means ‘Do not even look at idols,’ and similarly the shunning of wine means that you should not even look at it.

People differ as to what kind of tree this was. Was it an apple tree, or a fig tree, or a grape vine, or something else? We say: This is not the point, but rather the point is that it was forbidden; for the teachings of God make some things lawful and other things unlawful.

Then, God says, ‘…lest you become of the wrongdoers.*’ Zhulm* (Wrongdoing) means to infringe upon and threaten the rights of others. A wrongdoer is someone who takes more than he has a right to take. Wrongdoing requires a wrongdoer, a person who is wronged, and the thing which is the object of the wrongdoing. Any right – whether material or moral – which a person infringes without the right to do so is an instance of wrongdoing. A person can even wrong himself, as God praises those who, when they have committed a shameful deed or committed wrong against themselves, remember God… (*Al-'Imran:* 135).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of An-Nu’man ibn Bashir*

How can someone wrong himself? A person might wrong someone else, but he will never willingly wrong himself because he wants to give himself all he desires. Yet this is in fact the very essence of wrongdoing because he gives himself an immediate pleasure in this worldly life which might last a few hours; but he denies himself eternal bliss in the Hereafter. So he has wronged himself by earning a severe torment in the Hereafter instead of a bliss which never ends. There are those who exchange their religion for their worldly life, but the most unjust of people are those who exchange their religion for the worldly lives of others: they give false testimony to please a superior, or win themselves a position, or commit a crime. And so God's words '…lest you become of the wrongdoers' are addressed to those who wrong themselves by disobeying God.

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ عَنۡهَا فَأَخۡرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِۖ وَقُلۡنَا ٱهۡبِطُواْ بَعۡضُكُمۡ
لِبَعۡضٍ عَدُوّٞۖ وَلَكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مُسۡتَقَرّٞ وَمَتَٰعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٖ ﴿٣٦﴾

But Satan made them slip, and removed them from the state they were in. We said, 'Get out, all of you! You are each other's enemy. On earth you will have a place to stay and livelihood for a time' [36] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 36)

After God made Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife to dwell in the garden, and told them what was lawful and what was unlawful, Satan began his own mission of intense hatred for Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny. The True Lord says: 'But Satan made them slip…', i.e. Satan went right about his mission and caused them to slip meaning to fall down. How could this have happened after God counselled Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife not to follow Satan, and told them that he was truly an enemy to them, so they should not let him drive them from the garden, and he (Adam) will become unhappy (*Ta Ha:* 117)?

This enmity had already been announced. Let us suppose that it had not been announced; did Adam *peace be upon him* not bear witness when Satan disobeyed God's commandment to prostrate himself? Did he not know how

Satan held himself above him when he said that he is better than Adam *peace be upon him* (*Sad:* 76), and he wondered whether he should prostrate himself before one whom God has created of clay (*al-Isra':* 61)? All of this should have made it clear to Adam *peace be upon him* that Satan would never bring him any kind of good.

And the True Lord did not deem sufficient the natural evidence that arose when Satan refused to prostrate, but rather, He told Adam *peace be upon him* outright that Satan was an enemy to him and his wife. The True Lord said, 'But Satan made them slip from it, and caused their banishment from the place in which they were.' What state did he take them out of? It was a life spent freely choosing from the bounties of the garden, and from the peace and tranquillity of having their provision come to them without any effort on their part. That was why the True Lord counselled Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife not to let Satan drive them from the garden, and he (Adam) will become unhappy (*Ta Ha:* 117).

We might ask here why He did not say that they (Adam and his wife) will both (in the dual form, referring to two people) become unhappy. This is an allusion from the True Lord to the roles of men and women in life. The role of the woman is to be a source of comfort for her husband when he comes home, and take away his tiredness and unhappiness. As for the role of the man, it is to work in order to provide food and shelter for his wife and their children; and work is all toil and action. And so the True Lord indicates to us that the role of the man is to toil and strive, and then return to his family and find comfort, peace, and tranquillity.

If this is the reality of things, why have people tried to change this natural order? We say that people are only making problems for themselves and for all involved. A woman's work outside her home is an extra burden for her because her role is in the home, and she has no time for anything else. And so if she works, she does so at the expense of her children, her home, and her husband; and this is what brings unhappiness to society. Children are neglected, and the husband retreats to a place where he finds a woman to give him the comfort he needs, and society becomes chaotic.

Adam *peace be upon him* should have been aware that Satan considered him to be the reason for his being expelled from God's Mercy, and so he should not have accepted any advice from him, or anything he said at all, and should have been careful. How did Satan cause Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife to slip? God has explained this to us, not here in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, but in another place of the Quran, where He tells that Satan whispered to them to show them their nakedness which had been hidden from them both. And he said to them that their Lord has forbidden them this tree merely to prevent them from becoming angels, or becoming immortals (*al-A'raf:* 20).

So Satan lied and said that anyone who ate from this tree would become an angel, and would live forever without dying. The whispers of Satan are only lies by which he makes sin seem alluring. Satan does not care what sin you commit; he only wants that you sin in any way. The soul, however, when it incites you to sin, wants something specific. This is the difference between the incitement of Satan and that of the soul. Satan wants you to sin no matter what kind of sin you commit, and so if you refuse to do one thing, he will try and make you do another. And so he proposed to Adam *peace be upon him* to lead him to the tree of eternal life, and to a kingdom that will never decay (*Ta Ha:* 120). When this trick did not work, he told Adam that that their Lord has forbidden them this tree merely to prevent them from becoming angels or becoming immortals (*al-A'raf:* 20). It escaped the attention of Adam *peace be upon him* that if this was indeed true, Satan himself would have eaten from the tree instead of asking the True Lord to give him reprieve until the Day of Judgement.

What was it that made Adam *peace be upon him* fall into disobedience? It was heedlessness or forgetfulnes as the True Lord tells us that He gave Adam a commandment before, but he forgot; and God found no firmness of purpose in him (*Ta Ha:* 115). But is forgetfulness to be considered disobedience? This is what can be gathered from the statement of God that Adam disobeyed his Lord, and thus he went astray (*Ta Ha:* 121). Yes, forgetfulness indeed was considered an act of disobedience for the past nations. This is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My community are excused for their mistakes, and forgetfulness, and for what they are coerced to do.'(1) And 'forgot' and 'disobeyed' meant the same thing.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani on the authority of Thawban*

Considering God’s order to Adam, his wife, and to Satan to go down to earth, where anyone of them will be an enemy to the other, and where they shall have their dwelling, and their provision for a time (*al-A’raf:* 24), we say that this going down was the beginning of mankind’s descent to earth in order to fulfil their role in the world. Since God has specified that on earth they shall have their dwelling, and their provision for a time, this means that man’s life would be limited in its time and its significance.

As for those who say there must be a ‘Saviour’ who sacrifices himself for the world by crucifixion or the like because of the sin Adam *peace be upon him had* committed, we say to them: You understand nothing of God because this story is about a mistake which was made and then atoned for, and there is a difference between a mistake and a sin. A mistake is corrected, whilst a sin is punished.

Adam *peace be upon him* made a mistake, and his Lord corrected it, and he received from his Lord words of guidance, and repented to Him. So there was no sin after God taught him to repent, and he repented to God; moreover, what did Adam *peace be upon him* do that would necessitate the whole world being redeemed from his sin? He ate from a tree. Do the sins of the whole world merely amount to eating? What about the one who first committed murder and spilt blood, and committed adultery, and rape, and backbiting, and tale-bearing?

If what they said were true, this would mean that there would be no more sins on earth after the Saviour had redeemed the world from its sin. But sin remains. And who said that sins are inherited, so that the whole world would inherit the sin of Adam *peace be upon him*? God affirms that no burdened soul should be made to bear the burden of another (*Fatir:* 18).

As for God’s words: ‘And we said, ‘Get you down, the one of you an enemy to the other,’ the enmity here is between Satan and mankind, and also between the human devils and the believers, an enmity which demands from us action and attention. The orientalists seek to attack Islam, but their attacks serve to spur us into research and study so that we can respond to them. And Satan’s hosts from among mankind oppose the believers, and their opposition gives us cause to be careful so that we do not slip down or drop our guard. As long as you have an enemy, you will try and gain the upper hand over him in any way you can.

Perhaps it is the case that human civilisation advances at no quicker pace than when it is at war. At wartime, each side attempts to outdo the other, and to amass the power needed to outclass the other scientifically. These inventions and innovations may be designed for destruction and slaughter, but once the war is over these same inventions serve in leading to the progress of mankind on earth.

The splitting of the atom was done in times of war, and the rockets which carried man to the moon were developed as a consequence of war activity. And the many scientific advances made by the USA and the Soviet Union were based on the conflict between the two camps.

As to God's words 'Get you down, the one of you an enemy to the other…': To go down might mean to go from a high place to a low place, or it might be used in a metaphorical sense, as when you say that someone has 'gone down in my estimation' since he did such-and-such; in this case, he did not literally go down from a high place to a lower one. Rather, he went down morally. Distances do not always imply physical nearness or farness. A person might sit to your side, but you are far away from him emotionally that you do not even notice him. Or, a person might be hundreds of miles away from you, but might be closer to your heart than the one sitting next to you. So, whether this going down was physical or metaphorical, it took place in order that Adam *peace be upon him* could fulfil his purpose on earth; and the enmity between faith and disbelief would be continuous.

And so, after Adam's act of disobedience, he and Eve *peace be upon them* went down from the garden to go about their lives on earth; and God's words 'Get you down, …' meant that Adam, Eve *peace be upon them*, and Satan went down to earth after the first experience of faith was completed.

God had given Adam *peace be upon him* a practical demonstration of how Satan was an enemy to him, and wanted no good to come to him, and that he lied in all that he promised to mankind. And God specified that the life of this world is a limited life: its possibilities are limited, and its delights are limited as He said that on earth, they shall have their dwelling and their provision for a time (*al-A'raf:* 24). That is, no one will remain on earth except for as long as God has destined him to live; and then he will die. In this way, God warned

Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny not to take life as their ultimate goal, since its delights are few and its time is short.

فَتَلَقَّىٰٓ ءَادَمُ مِن رَّبِّهِۦ كَلِمَٰتٖ فَتَابَ عَلَيۡهِۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ٣٧

Then Adam received some words from his Lord and He accepted his repentance: He is the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful [37] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 37)

Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* went down to earth in order to fulfil their mission in the universe; and before this mission could begin, God made them go through a practical experience of the implementation of His teachings and the temptation of Satan, and warned them that Satan was an enemy to them. After this disobedience occurred, it was necessary that God establish repentance as a mercy to His servants. This is because the stipulation of repentance (in the Shariʿa) is not only a mercy to the sinner, but is also a mercy for the whole society. If a person sinned, and then knew that there was no way for him to repent, and that he was certainly destined to spend eternity in Hell, he would continue with his sinful ways; as long as he has no hope of salvation from the suffering of the Hereafter, he will continue to sin because there is no hope of redemption or repentance.

Who will suffer from all this? It will be the community in which this sinner lives; and the believers will suffer the most because they are people of goodness and forbearance, and because God commanded them to be forgiving and relenting, as He admonishes those among the believers who have been graced with favour and abundance ever to vow against helping the erring ones amongst their kin, the needy, and those who have migrated in the Way of God; but let them pardon and forbear. Then God puts forth to them the question as to whether they do not desire that God should forgive them, and God is Forgiving, Merciful (*an-Nur:* 22).

And God also teaches the believers that to remit is closer to righteousness, and not to forget favours amongst themselves (*al-Baqara*: 237). There are many verses in the Noble Quran that exhort the believers to be forgiving; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘My Lord counselled me with nine things with which I now counsel you: He counselled me with sincerity in private and in public, and with thrift in richness and in poverty, and that I forgive those who wrong me, and give to those who deny me, and make up with those who break from me, and to fill my silence with meditation, and my speech with remembrance, and my observation with reflection.'(1)

If there were no possibility of repentance, the entire society would suffer, especially the believers, who have been commanded to repay enmity with pardon, and wrongdoing with forgiveness. And so God's establishment of repentance was a mercy for all mankind.

And God established repentance first of all; following this, the sinner repents; and then God either accepts or rejects his repentance according to His will, as He says that He turned in mercy to those who have erred so that they may repent; for, surely, God is the One to accept repentance, the Merciful (*at-Tawba:* 118).

So Adam *peace be upon him* received some words from his Lord, who then accepted his repentance. Was there any sin left after Adam *peace be upon him* has repented and God accepted his repentance? Some people say, 'Adam *peace be upon him* sinned, and God accepted his repentance; yet when Satan sinned, God put him in Hell forever. We say: You have not understood what Adam *peace be upon him* did. He ate from the forbidden tree, and when he realised his mistake, he did not persist in his disobedience, and he did not reject the command of The Commander, but rather, he said, 'O Lord, Your commands and Your teachings are the truth; but I could not help myself, so forgive me!'

So Adam *peace be upon him* confessed his guilt, and admitted his weakness, and acknowledged that the teachings of God were right, and sought from God the chance to repent. Satan, on the other hand, arrogantly rejected the command of the Commander, and said, that he was better than Adam as he was created from fire whereas Adam was created from clay (*al-A'raf*: 12), and boastfully announced that he would lie in ambush for them all along God's straight Path (*al-A'raf*: 16), and swore by God's might that he will most certainly beguile the children of Adam all into grievous error (*Sad:* 82), and vowed that he will destroy Adam's offspring except a few (*al-Isra':* 62). So Satan rejected the command of the Commander, and refused to admit his guilt, or say, 'Lord, my weakness overcame me, and You are the True Lord, and Your word is the Truth;' rather, he rejected the command of God, and stubbornly resisted, and said, 'I will do this, and I will do that;' and this amounts to disbelief in God.

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(1) *Narrated by Razin*

Beware of rejecting the command of God. If you do not perform prayers, do not say, 'What is the use of praying?' And if you do not pay the poor-due, do not say, 'The poor-due is nothing but an oppressive burden on those who pay it;' and if you do not implement God's Law, do not say, 'This law is no longer suitable for these modern times.' If you do this, you will be falling into disbelief (God forbid). Rather, say: 'O Lord, the obligation of prayer is right, and the obligation of the poor-due is right, and to follow the Sacred Law is right; but I cannot help myself, so forgive my weakness, O Lord of the worlds!' If you do this, you are only a sinner.

The difference between the sin of Adam *peace be upon him* and the sin of Satan is that Adam *peace be upon him* admitted his sin and his guilt, whilst Satan rejected the command of the Commander; so Adam *peace be upon him* was guilty of disobedience, whilst Satan was guilty of disbelief (we seek refuge in God from this).

The True Lord says: 'Then Adam received words from his Lord, so He turned to him in forgiveness….' Scholars have tried to establish what exactly those words were. Were they the words Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife uttered in praying to their Lord that they have sinned against themselves – and unless He grants them forgiveness and bestow His mercy upon them, they shall most certainly be lost (*al-A'raf:* 23)? This noble verse shows us that the sin of Adam *peace be upon him* was not a sin of arrogance, but rather was a sin caused by heedlessness. The sin of Satan, however, was caused by his arrogance in holding himself above the command of God. But when Adam *peace be upon him* sinned, he was contrite afterwards.

And he said, 'Lord, the command You gave me not to go near the tree was right, but I could not help myself.' So Adam *peace be upon him* acknowledged God's right to legislate, whilst Satan rejected it outright by boasting that he would not prostrate himself before one whom God has created of clay (*al-Isra':* 61).

The words which Adam *peace be upon him* received from his Lord might have been 'Our Lord! We have been unjust to ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we shall certainly be among the losers' (*al-A'raf:* 23); or it might have been, 'O God, there is no god but You! Glory be to You, and praise be to You! I have wronged myself greatly, so forgive me, O Best of Forgivers;' or it might have been, 'Accept my repentance O Best of those who forgive,' or it might have been, 'Glory be to God, praise be to God, there is no god but God.' The important thing is that God revealed some words to Adam *peace be upon him* by which he could draw near to Him, whether the words were those of this noble verse, or something else.

If we consider how God taught Adam *peace be upon him* these words with which to repent, we find a very important principle for the life of society. As we said, if God had not established repentance, and had not given us the glad tidings that He would accept it, everyone who committed a single sin would never stop sinning thereafter, and the whole world would suffer.

God created us with free will, and did not create us in a state of compulsion. Compulsion would have affirmed His attribute of omnipotence, but God wanted us to come to Him out of love, not under compulsion, and so He created us with free will, and gave us the power to either sin or obey. As long as there is free will, mankind has the choice to do either this, or that.

God did not create human beings who always choose what is good, and other human beings who always choose what is evil; there are good people who sometimes fall into evil, and there are evil people who sometimes do good. God's servants are not created in such a way that they will always choose what is good, or always choose what is evil. And so sometimes we forget ourselves, or slip up, or fall into sin; and since His servants are liable to falling into sin, God established repentance for them so that no one would despair of God's mercy, but rather, would repent and come back to God. There is an aphorism which goes: 'It may be that a sin which results in humility and contrition is better than a good deed which results in pride and arrogance.'

And so when Adam *peace be upon him* went down to begin his mission in life, he carried no sin on his shoulders; he made a mistake, and God taught him the words of repentance, and so he repented and God accepted his repentance.

As to God's words '…surely He is the One to forgive the repentant, the Merciful;' the word *Tawwab* ('Acceptor of Repentance') used in the verse implies that God will not punish His servants for a single sin; for even if God relented for a single sin from every one of His servants, He would be called *Tawwab.* Intensive adjectives in Arabic are used for two reasons: firstly, if an action is repeated several times by a small number of people or by one person; secondly, if the action is performed a single time by a large number of people.

If you call someone *'akul'* (one who eats a lot), for example, he might deserve this adjective because he eats a large amount of food in his meal; he does not eat more frequently, or have more meals, than people normally do, but rather, he eats a large amount of food, and so we call him *akul*: perhaps he eats ten slices of bread for breakfast, and the same for lunch, and the same for dinner. A person also might be *akul* if he keeps repeating the action: so he eats a normal amount of food, but eats fifteen times a day, for example. So God is *Tawwab* because His creatures are many; so if all of them were to sin just once, the number of sins that God would forgive for them would be gargantuan. And also, if one person sins many times a day, God would be *Tawwab* for him as well, if he repents and turns to Him. So sometimes an intensive adjective refers to an action where the one who performs it is a single person; and sometimes it is used for an action performed by many people.

So since Adam *peace be upon him* sinned a single time, this might seem to suggest that God would be *Ta'ib* ('acceptor of repentance' but without the intensive adjective) to him; yet the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him* who would come after him would be great in number, and so the intensive adjective refers to this number.

God says: '…surely He is the One to forgive the repentant, the Merciful.' Once a woman came to our master 'Umar *God be pleased with him* screaming and crying because her son had been caught stealing. 'My son only stole this one time,' she said to 'Umar *God be pleased with him*. He replied, 'God is too Merciful with His servant to allow him to be punished for a first offence; he must have stolen before.' And I challenge anyone to find a criminal who is truly caught out in the first time.

So the word *Tawwab* indicates that he will only be caught the third or fourth time because God conceals His servants once or twice, but if they go on, and increase or persist in their sins, God stops them at a certain point. This is the meaning of *Tawwab*.

So the True Lord is *Tawwab* out of His mercy because there are those who forgive you, and keep on reminding you of their forgiveness, until you say, ‘If only you would punish me, and stop reminding me of your forgiveness all the time!’ But the True Lord is the Acceptor of Repentance, and the Dispenser of Mercy; so He accepts the servant’s repentance, and has mercy on him, and erases his sin.

قُلْنَا ٱهْبِطُوا۟ مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا ۖ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُم مِّنِّى هُدًى فَمَن
تَبِعَ هُدَاىَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

We said, ‘Get out, all of you! But when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve [38] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 38)

In this verse, the True Lord says, ‘We said, ‘Get you down from it, all together...’ using the plural form, whilst in the chapter of *Ta Ha*, He *the Exalted* gives the command of going down to two parties, ordering them to go down altogether (*Ta Ha:* 123), using the dual form of the verb. When God addressed the plural, He was speaking to all the descendents of Adam *peace be upon him* who were concealed in his loins, and He commanded them all to go down, Adam, Eve *peace be upon them*, and their descendants. This is because all of us, until the end of time, have a part of Adam *peace be upon him* inside us, and so we must all heed the word of the True Lord when He told us that He had created us, then shaped us, and then commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam (*al-A’raf:* 11).

Notice here that God is addressing a plural; the True Lord did not address a single individual in this verse saying that He created him, and shaped him, and then commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam. It is as though the True Lord wanted to show us that at the moment of creation, all the descendants of Adam *peace be upon him* were stored in his loins, and that God created them all at once, and shaped them all at once, and then commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*. Were we all present at this time? Yes, we were present within Adam *peace be upon him*; and so the True Lord said, '…Get you down from it, all together…,' so that we would know that this was addressed to Adam *peace be upon him* and all his descendants until the Day of Resurrection.

When God addresses the command of going down to two, it is because this was the beginning of Adam's bearing responsibility; at this moment, the moment when Adam *peace be upon him* went down to earth, God's teachings would begin their function in life. As long as there are teachings, and an individual adherence to them, responsibility must also be individual, and so there is no place for plurality here.

When the True Lord issues the command of going down in the dual verb form, we know that it is addressed to two parties; however, the next word, *jami'an*, ('altogether'), refers to a number of more than two. We say that as long as this spelled the beginning of responsibility, there were two parties which would face one another, namely Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* on one side, and Satan on the other. So they were three in number, but in this battle of faith, they represented only two sides: Adam, Eve *peace be upon them* and their descendants on one side, and Satan on the other side. So it is as though God wanted to make us see that this descent was connected to the teachings of God and their implementation on earth; and in relation to these teachings, Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* were set on obedience whilst Satan was set on leading them into disobedience.

When God says, '…and surely there shall come to you guidance from me,…' we can observe that after Adam *peace be upon him* went through his initial experience and fell into sin, God taught him words of repentance, and instructed him that whenever he happens to be forgetful, he should afterwards repent, and God would accept his repentance.

So the True Lord wanted Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* to live on earth, and begin their mission in life; and God would guide them to what was good which is implicit in His words '…and surely there shall come to you guidance from me....' Guidance has two meanings: One kind of guidance is direction to what is good, or direction to the way that leads to goodness, and the other kind of guidance is the granting of assistance in faith and helping it to grow. God says that as for those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and grants them their piety and guarding against evil (*Muhammad:* 17).

In the noble verse we are currently examining, 'guidance' comes in the sense of direction to the way of goodness, and the True Lord then says, '…whoever shall follow my guidance, on them shall come no fear, neither shall they be grieved.' What is fear, and what is grief? Fear is to expect a coming evil which you have no way of repelling, and so you are frightened of it; grief is to lose something you love and yearn for. In this verse, the gist of what the True Lord is saying is: Whoever follows the way of faith I have guided them to and revealed in My teachings, need have no fear, and no good will be lost to them causing them to grieve. This is because all good is contained within God's teachings, and the one who follows these teachings need not fear that anything bad will ever happen.

This shows an important fact related to society. If someone has committed no crime, will he have any reason to fear? No. But as for the one who has committed a crime, you will find him always fearful, and scared that he will be found out, and that something bad will happen to him which he cannot repel.

An upright person does not live in fear because fear is of two kinds: They are either fear caused by a sin which I have committed – and the upright person does not do anything which he fears being discovered, or fear of something which I have no power over which my Creator sends to me. This must be for a good and wise reason which I might know, or might not know; yet I accept it. The one who follows God's guidance has no need to fear or grieve because he has not sinned, or broken the law, or cheated anyone, or concealed a crime, and so he fears nothing; and if an unexpected accident comes his way, his heart is in a tranquil state. Those who follow God do not fear, and they are not feared for.

And God's statement '…and neither shall they be grieved' signifies that the one who lives in obedience to God's teachings has nothing to make him grieve because his will is in submission to the will of his Creator, and so everything that comes to him from God is good even if on the surface, it appears not to be. His faculties are all in harmony, and he is at peace with the universe and with himself. All the universe hears from him is praise, obedience, and prayer; and all of this is mercy, and so he is at peace with himself, at peace with his Lord, and at peace with society.

Society is always pleased by the believer who spreads no corruption in the land, but rather, only does good. The believer is a breeze of beauty which blows through the world, and a blessing of goodness and contentment for all people. As long as a person is like this, he will never lack anything that makes him happy; and if God destines that accidents happen to him, he receives them with nothing but gratitude, even if he does not know the wisdom behind them; and be careful not to object to anything that God decrees. And so a believer says, 'I praise you, my Lord, for all your decrees, and all your predestinations, a praise of contentment with Your judgement, and belief in Your wisdom.'

A person reacts to the things that happen to him, but there is a difference between reacting to events alone, and reacting to events keeping in mind the wisdom of Him who caused them to happen. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this reality with great precision when he said, 'The eye weeps, and the heart grieves; but we say nothing save that which pleases our Lord. For your loss, O Ibrahim, we are saddened!'(1)

Look at this faith when dealing with events: The eye weeps, and the heart is not hard like a stone, but is rather filled with compassion; and the heart is humble before God and is appreciative of His wisdom and will.

God does not want us to meet accidents with grief alone, but rather with grief and faith together. God does not forbid you from grieving, but you must not separate the event from the One Who brought it about, and His wisdom for doing so. And so when you go to the orthopedist and he breaks one of your bones in order to heal it, is he doing something good to you or something bad? Of course he is doing something good, even if it hurts you.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad; this is the wording of A-Bukhari...* (The Hadith narrates the supplication of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* upon the death of his baby son Ibrahim – Ed.)

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَكَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِۖ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

Those who disbelieve and deny Our messages shall be
the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain' [39]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 39)

After telling us that when Adam *peace be upon him* went down to earth, he would find teachings from God to govern his life, and that whoever followed them, would free their lives from fear and grief and become secure in this world and the next; the True Lord *the Exalted* wanted to give us the opposite image. The previous verse gave the verdict for those who follow guidance, and this verse gives the verdict for those who disbelieve.

The True Lord says, 'But they who shall not believe, and treat Our signs as falsehoods…' As we have shown, disbelief is the attempt to cover the existence of God, the Necessary Being; yet the attempt to cover this existence is in itself a proof that God exists. You do not try to cover something up unless it exists in the first place.

Something which does not exist has no need to be covered up because it does not exist in our minds, and our minds cannot understand or conceive of something that does not exist. The mental image comes first, and then after this the name, or the vocal image, is made. And so if someone tells you about something which does not exist, you cannot understand him, and you cannot envisage it unless he compares it to something that does exist, by saying, 'Like this mountain,' or 'Like this lake,' or 'Like the disc of the sun,' or whatever until you can understand it. So you cannot understand a nonexistent being unless it is compared to an existent one.

Everything must first exist, and then after this, the lexicographers of the languages of the world look for a word to express this thing after portraying its mental image. For example, there was no name for a rocket before the rocket existed, or for a spaceship before it was invented, or for a laser-beam before it was discovered. So all of these things first existed, and then after that were given names. Those who disbelieve try to cover up God's existence; and the covering of the existence of God in itself proves that He exists because you do not cover up something that does not exist. And so, disbelief is itself, in an indirect way, a proof of faith.

Your mind cannot understand a name unless the meaning already exists in your mind. There is not a single language on earth which does not have a name for God *the Exaltd.* Though we cannot see Him, if the Name of God is uttered, it is understood by the young and the old, and the schooled and the unschooled, and those who have travelled the earth and those who have never left their own home. They all understand God, by the natural disposition to faith which He placed in all their hearts.

So those who disbelieve try to cover up the existence of God. God says, '…and treat Our signs as falsehoods….' An *aya* (message, sign/wondrous thing, or verse) is something extraordinary which catches the attention. There are many signs in the universe such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the mountains, the seas, and many more besides. These are all called signs, namely things which are beyond the abilities of mankind, created by God to be signs for His Power in His universe, and to serve mankind.

There are also signs which are miracles. When God sends a messenger or a prophet to his people, He breaks for him the usual laws of the universe in order to prove to the people that he is a prophet sent by God. These signs are meant for those who witness them because they come to provide support to the messengers and the believers at times when they are going through crises that leave them in need of support, and to prove the truth of the prophet to his people. The word signs (in the sense of verses) also applies to the verses of the Noble Quran, the miraculous Word of God in which He *the Exalted* included that which proves the truth of the Message until the Day of Judgement.

God speaks to us through His signs about how He created mankind, and about the laws that govern the heavens and the earth, among many other things.

Those who deny God's signs are the disbelievers, and the idolaters, and those who refuse to surrender to God, and oppose the religion; and God has specified for us what the end will be for all of them. But is denial the inability to understand? We say that sometimes denial can be deliberate, as was the case with the people of Pharaoh when God sent upon them plague, pestilence, and worldly suffering so that they would believe; but despite their certainty that these were signs from God, they did not acknowledge them, as God says that they, in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although in their souls they knew them to be true. (*an-Naml:* 14).

There are many signs in the universe, and if we only looked at them we would have faith. They do not require much thinking because out of His mercy, God has made them plain for everyone to see. But despite this, some people deny God's signs; they are the ones who want to follow the pervert inclinations of the self. The True Lord has decreed for the disbelievers and those who deny God's signs a common punishment: '…these shall be inmates of the fire….' The word sahib (rendered here 'inmates;' but literally meaning 'companion') means the one who keeps his friend company, and loves to sit with him and spend quality time with him. So it is as though the fact that God calls them 'the companions of the fire' indicates that the fire yearns for them, and will be happy to see them when they enter it, just as a person is happy to see his friend, and that he will not ever want to be parted from him. And so the True Lord says that on the Day of Judgement, He will ask hell if it is full, and it will answer with a question if there is more for it (*Qaf:* 30).

And so we see how the fire craves the company of the disbelievers. The fire will be their constant companion; and it is not an unpleasant company for the fire, but rather a company that it loves. When the fire burns every disbeliever, wrongdoer, and hypocrite, it will be happy because it is punishing those who disbelieved in God's teachings and denied His signs in their worldly lives. Similar to this is the case for paradise: it also loves the company of all those who believed in God and worshipped Him Alone and followed His teachings, as He *the Exalted* tells us that those who believed, and did the things that are right, and humbled them before their Lord, shall be the inmates of paradise; therein shall they abide forever (*Hud:* 23). That is, paradise will be the constant companion of the believers, and will love them, just as hell will be the constant companion of the disbelievers and deniers. And just as the fire will be happy as it burns the disbeliever, paradise will be happy as it pleases the believer. Then the True Lord says, '…in it shall they remain forever.' That is, the suffering therein will be constant without ever changing, or abating, or lightening, but rather, it will last forever. God says that those who have bought the life of this world at the price of the life to come, their suffering shall not be lightened, and shall not be succoured (*al-Baqara*: 86).

And so we see that God sent His teachings to earth with Adam *peace be upon him*, and that Adam came to earth in possession of guidance so that the first teachings of Heaven could be implemented on earth. It is as though God *peace be upon him* did not leave mankind on earth for one moment without giving them the teachings that would show them the way of guidance and the way of error; and along with these teachings, repentance was established, as was its acceptance, so that no man would despair, or feel that if he made a mistake or forgot he would be destined to go to hell, but would rather feel that the doors of Heaven are always open, and that God, who created him, is merciful with him, so that if he made a mistake, He would open the door of repentance to him and forgive his sins. And so, every person would feel that they are in the care of God whilst they are on earth, from the very first moment of life. The teachings are there for those who want to believe, and repentance is there for all those who sin.

And God forewarned Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny that those who obey and have faith will live good lives in this world and the Hereafter, whilst those who disbelieve and deny are destined for eternal suffering.

God told Adam *peace be upon him* all about his enemy Satan, and told him to beware of him. But what did the Sons of Adam *peace be upon him* do? Did they obey God’s guidance or disobey it? Did they hold fast to God’s teachings, or leave them behind their backs?

يَٰبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتِيَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَنۡعَمۡتُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَأَوۡفُواْ
بِعَهۡدِيٓ أُوفِ بِعَهۡدِكُمۡ وَإِيَّٰيَ فَٱرۡهَبُونِ ﴿٤٠﴾

Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you. Honour
your pledge to Me and I will honour My pledge to you: I am
the One you should fear [40] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 40)

After telling us the story of creation, and how it began with Adam *peace be upon him*, and of Satan’s enmity to Adam *peace be upon him* and its cause, God then tells us about the first experience of mankind with the teachings of God in one of the gardens (of paradise), and how Adam *peace be upon him* underwent this experience and was tempted by Satan into disobedience, and then went down to earth armed with God's teachings and protected from transgressing by repentance; and so the mission of Adam *peace be upon him* on earth began.

The True Lord wanted to present to us the succession of Divine Messages and how the Sons of Adam *peace be upon him* met God's teachings with disbelief and disobedience, and so He *the Exalted* chose the story of the children of Israel because their story has the most miracles, and the prophets of the children of Israel were the greatest in number among the prophets ever sent to a single people. This does not mean that they were a 'chosen people,' but rather, they were the nation who sinned and transgressed the most, and so they were sent the most prophets. Every time a miracle sent to them was accomplished, they went astray again, and so another miracle came to them, and they strayed again after it. And so God passed judgement on them because of their transgression, that they should be dispersed throughout the land, and then be united again in one place so that they could taste suffering and torment as a requital for their disobedience and disbelief. And so the story of the children of Israel takes up such a large portion of the Book of God, and in strengthening the resolve of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. Moses *peace be upon him*, whom God sent to the children of Israel, was one of the Messengers who were characterised by strength of resolve,(1) and so you find that the aim of the stories of the children of Israel narrated in the Quran was about education first and foremost, and education all through.

We must notice that the True Lord says, 'O Children of Israel!' When the True Lord wants to address all mankind, He says, 'O Children of Adam!' like, for example, when God admonishes the 'children of Adam' to wear their beautiful apparel for every act of worship (*al-A'raf:* 31), and He *the Exalted* forewarns the 'children of Adam' against allowing Satan to seduce them (*al-A'raf:* 27).

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(1) *Islamic tradition has it that five of the prophets mentioned in the Quran were given the title of ulu al-'azm (literally 'those of strong resolve'); scholars maintain that they are: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad peace and blessings be upon them all.*

Why does God address us as the children of Adam *peace be upon him*? It is because He wants to remind us of the favours with which He has blessed us since the beginning of creation, since these blessings were for Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny. God created Adam *peace be upon him* with His hands, and commanded the angels to prostrate before him, and prepared for him a universe filled with everything he needed to sustain his life, not only in terms of necessities, but also of luxuries. Then the True Lord prepared him for all the temptation he would face from Satan, and let him know that Satan was an enemy to him, and then taught him how to repent so that He would forgive him, and showered him with blessings beyond any reckoning.

So God wants us to remember all this so that we will be ashamed of committing any sin after all that mankind has been honoured with. If we remember the blessings God has given us, we will be ashamed to repay these blessings with sin.

And God gave us knowledge which marked us out from His angels, and so we should have remained thankful and worshipful for all our lives in this world.

But we notice that God begins this noble verse by saying ‘O Children of Israel!...’ Why is this? Who was Israel *peace be upon him*? Israel is derived from two words, ‘isr’ and ‘il’. Isr means a chosen or elected person, and il is the Hebrew word for God. So the meaning of the word is ‘the Chosen of God;’ and the ‘chosen’ here refers to Jacob *peace be upon him*, not all his descendants.

If we consider Israel who was named Jacob *peace be upon him*, and how he got this name, we find that he was given the name because he was sorely tested by God, and this meant he deserved to be chosen by God. When God called on the people of Moses *peace be upon him* by saying ‘O Children of Israel,’ He wanted to remind them of the rank of Israel with God, and the trials he faced, and all he went through in his life; so they should remember what he counselled them with before he passed, as God tells us that when Jacob was at the point of death, he asked his sons whom they will worship when he is gone, and they said that they will worship his God and the God of his fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, the one God, and to Him they will surrender themselves (*al-Baqara*: 133).

The Quran also mentions that Jacob *peace be upon him* had counselled his children that God has chosen for them the religion; so they should not die except as Muslims –surrendering themselves to God (*al-Baqara*: 132). This was the legacy Jacob *peace be upon him* passed to his sons, a legacy containing knowledge and a reminder: the knowledge that God is One, and has no partner, and that the true religion is surrendering to God (Islam); and a reminder that God chose their religion for them, and so they should cling to it until death. They received this legacy when death was approaching Jacob *peace be upon him*; and at the moment of death, a person is always true to himself, and to his Lord, and to his children. And so it is as though when God called them, 'O Children of Israel,' He wanted to remind them of Israel, who was Jacob *peace be upon him*, and how he bore his trials and remained patient, and of the legacy he gave them before he passed away.

So God reminds the children of the blessings He bestowed on their forebears, so that they will take heed, or be ashamed of committing sin. This is like when the children of a pious man go astray, and so it is said to them, 'Are you not ashamed? You are the sons of a righteous man, and it is not fitting that you do anything to incur God's wrath,' and so He says, 'O Children of Israel!' So Israel is Jacob, son of Isaac *peace be upon them*, and Isaac is the son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, and Abraham is father to Isaac and Ishmael *peace be upon them*. Our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is descended from Ishmael *peace be upon him*.

God says, 'O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you…;' but when God addresses the Muslims, He does not say, 'Remember the favours of God,' but rather says, 'Remember God.' This is because the children of Israel are materialistic, worldly oriented people. So it is as though the True Lord is saying to them, 'Since you are materialistic and worldly people, remember the material blessings God has given you.' But we Muslims are not a materialistic nation.

There is a difference for a person between being attached to a blessing and being attached to the One Who blesses. Materialistic people love the blessing, whilst non-materialistic people love the One Who blesses, and live in His Company. And so God addresses the Muslims by saying, 'Remember God,' because we love to be with the One Who blesses, whilst He *the Exalted* addresses the Children of Israel by saying ‘Remember the blessings of God.’

God says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘I am Worthy to be feared so that no god be set up beside Me; and so, he who fears to set up any god beside Me is worthy of My forgiveness.’(1) So God must necessarily be worshipped even if He had never created Paradise or Hell. And so, the believers are the ones whom God most subjects to trials. Why? It is because from Him, trials are a form of blessings. God expresses His pride to His angels about His servants, saying: ‘They worship Me for My own sake.’ The angels would say, ‘Rather they worship You because of the blessings You have granted them.’ So He *the Exalted* says, ‘Then I shall withhold them from them, and they will still love me. There are some servants of Mine whose supplications I love to hear, and so I test them so that they say, ‘O Lord!’ For God loves to hear their voices, and so when He tests a servant in his health, for example, and withholds from him the blessing of good health, you see that the ignorant person is discontented with this. Yet the deep-thinking person remembers what God said in the Qudsi Hadith: ‘God will say on the Day of Resurrection, “O Son of Adam, I fell ill, but you did not visit Me.” He will say, “Lord, how could I visit You when You are the Lord of the Worlds?” He will say, “Did you not know that my servant so-and-so was ill, yet you did not visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him, you would have found Me with him?”’(2)

So if the believer loses the blessing of good health, he does not despair, for God wants him to live with the One Who blesses, and throughout his illness he would be in the company of God. And so when the True Lord says: ‘O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you,…’ this means that ‘If you are not believers for My sake, at least be ashamed to sin because of the blessings I have granted you.’ Blessings are mentioned here because the Children of Israel worshipped God because of His blessings.

‘Remember My grace.’ To remember is to preserve something from oblivion because life’s quotidian routines make us likely to forget the Cause of all our blessings. The sun rises every day, but how many of us remember that it only rises by God's leave, and so thank Him for it? Rain falls from time to time, but who of us remembers that God sends down rain, and so thanks Him? So remembrance is in the heart and also on the tongue. God is Unseen, and hidden from us, and it is part of His greatness that He is hidden; but the blessings of God guide us to Him, and if we remember them, He will be on our minds always, and His blessings mean that we should always remember Him and give thanks to Him.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah on the authority of Al-Hubab; also narrated by An-Nasa’i.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

The True Lord *the Exalted* asked the Children of Israel to remember the blessings that He granted them only, and so they should have obeyed God and remembered the One Who blesses; for remembrance of God puts you on a firm basis, so that no unpleasantness or evil can reach you.

Remembrance of God, the One Who blesses, gives us the key to the right movement in all aspects of life. Remembrance of God creates humility in the heart, and so sins decrease, and all people benefit, and life's actions are harmonised. When the True Lord says, '…Remember My grace…,' it implicitly means 'Remember Me, even if only by the blessings I have granted you.' As for His words '…and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you…,' the covenant here is a pledge. God says that He gave Adam a commandment (made a covenant with him) before, but he forgot; and God found no firmness of purpose in him (*Ta Ha:* 115).

So a covenant is a promise/pledge between a servant and his Lord; but which pledge is it that God wants the children of Israel to fulfil so that He will fulfil His promise to them? We say: It means the covenant of the instinctual nature of man which means, as we said before, that we should believe in God and thank Him for His blessings; and as we mentioned earlier, if a person were to go to a place where there was no one else around, and then fall asleep, and wake up to find a table laden with fine foods before him, would he not ask himself, 'Who did all this?' If he thought even for a moment, he would see that there must have been someone who did this, especially if the creation were something beyond the abilities of mankind. And so if God sent a messenger who said that God is the One Who created and made everything, and there was no other claim to the contrary since these blessings are beyond human capability, the matter would be settled in God's favour.

So to remember God and give thanks to Him is a requirement of man's sound instinctual nature, and needs no complicated dogmatic discussion or philosophising. To fulfil our pledge to God by worshipping Him and giving Him thanks is the natural disposition of faith for the favours He has given us. We find that the True Lord says here, '…and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you;…' and in another verse, He commands the believers to remember Him, and He shall remember them (*al-Baqara*: 152). And in another verse, He makes it clear to the believers that if they support the Cause of God, He will support them and make firm their feet (*Muhammad:* 7).

What is this matter that the True Lord wants to convey to us with these noble verses? God wants us to know that He has placed the key to paradise in our hands, and so in the hand of every one of us is the key to the way which will lead him either to Paradise or to Hell. And so if you keep the pledge, God will keep the promise; and if you remember God, He will remember you; and if you succour God's cause, He will succour you. The Qudsi Hadith says, 'If (My servant) draws nearer to Me by a hand-span, I draw nearer to him by an arm-span; if he draws nearer to Me by an arm-span, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.'(1) And so the True Lord wants to tell us that the keys are in our own hands, and that if we start by obeying Him, God's blessings are without limit, and if we draw nearer to God, He draws nearer to us, and if we stray away from Him, He calls to us: this is the faith of man's instinctual natural disposition.

Is this, the promise meant by God when He said, '…and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you;…' or did He mean the pledge made to God by the prophets that they would tell their people that if a messenger came with a confirmation of what they had, they must believe in him and aid him? The True Lord took a promise from all the prophets concerning the Messenger of Islam, our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Or was it the promise that God took through Moses

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Kitab At-Tawhid, and by Muslim and At-Tirmidhi.*

peace be upon him from the scholars of the Israelites who received the Torah, and taught it, wrote it, and memorised it, that they would not conceal any of it? God says that He took a solemn pledge from those to whom the Scriptures had been given, and commanded them that they shall surely make it known to mankind and not hide it, but they cast it behind their backs, and sold it for a trifling price, and how evil their bargain was (*Al-'Imran*: 187).

The purpose of this pledge was that they would not conceal the foretelling of Islam in the Torah, and not hide the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* contained therein. God gave descriptions of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Torah and Gospel. God says that the Children of Israel (in Arabia in pre-Islamic times) used to pray for victory over the infidels, but when a Book came to them from God, confirming that which they already knew, they disbelieved in it; so God's curse is on the unbelievers (*al-Baqara*: 89).

And the Noble Quran came as a confirmation of what was in the Torah, and the Children of Israel themselves recognised the truth of what was in the Quran, but they disbelieved because the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not from their people. The people who had been granted the Torah and the Gospel knew that the mission of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the final Divine Message and that the followers of every prophet had to believe in it. So, does the covenant mentioned in the verse under discussion refer to this pledge which imposes all the nations to believe in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and support him if they lived to see him, and if they did not live to see him, then the responsibility fell to their children and grand children to support him and believe in him whenever he came? Whether it was the pledge of man's primal instinctual nature of having faith, or the pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, both senses can be supported by the context.

And God says, '…I will fulfil My covenant with you;…' that is by granting you blissful Paradise in the Hereafter. After the coming of Islam, God made His mercy exclusive to those who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and those who do not believe in this religion will have no covenant with God.

God says that when the tremor overcame Moses *peace be upon him* and his chosen companions, Moses *peace be upon him* asked God for mercy and prayed that God ordain for them what is good in this world as well as in the life to come, as to Him they have turned. God answered that with His chastisement He afflicts whom He wills, but His Mercy encompasses everything; and so He shall confer it on those who fear Him and spend in charity, and who believe in His messages, those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel, the Prophet who will enjoin upon them the doing of what is right and forbid them the doing of what is wrong, and make lawful to them the good things of life and forbid them the bad things, and lift from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them. Those, therefore, who shall believe in him, honour him, succour him and follow the light that has been bestowed from on high through him, it is they that shall be successful (*al-A'raf:* 156-157).

So the True Lord is reminding the Children of Israel, in this noble verse, of the pledge He took from them, and warning them that His mercy is for those who believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when his Message came.

And God says, ‘and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe,’ i.e. there is no power that can be really effective in the universe except the power of God, and so they should fear the day when they will meet God, and be held to account by Him; and He is All-Conquering, and All-Compelling, and there is no rescue from His punishment for those who do not believe in Him.

وَءَامِنُواْ بِمَآ أَنزَلۡتُ مُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا مَعَكُمۡ وَلَا تَكُونُوٓاْ أَوَّلَ
كَافِرِۭ بِهِۦۖ وَلَا تَشۡتَرُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِي ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلٗا وَإِيَّٰيَ فَٱتَّقُونِ ٤١

Believe in the message I have sent down confirming what you already possess. Do not be the first to disbelieve in it, and do not sell My messages for a small price: I am the One of whom you should be mindful [41] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 41)

After reminding the Children of Israel of the promise they had made not to change the Torah by either hiding parts of it or by adding to it, and reminding them of their pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, whom God described for them in the Torah, so that the Jewish rabbi, Ibn Salam *God be pleased with him*, used to say to his people in Medina: 'I recognised him when I saw him just as I recognise my own children; and indeed I recognise Muhammad even better,' that is, he would remind his people that the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was present in the Torah, and it is impossible for them to miss; the True Lord then said, 'And believe in what I have sent down confirming that which is with you,….' For the Quran is a confirmation of the Torah; but it means here the real Torah before they altered it. The Quran did not condone the changes and alterations they had made to the Torah, but rather, it came confirming the uncorrupted Torah.

Then the True Lord says, '…and do not be the first to disbelieve it….' We said that the Jews were not the first to disbelieve in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but rather it was Quraysh who were the first to disbelieve in Mecca. The meaning of this verse is that the Jews were the first of the People of the Book to reject the Message. Why? It was because Quraysh had no connection with the teachings of Heaven, and they knew nothing about the previous scriptures; on the other hand, the Jewish rabbis knew the truth of the Message, and they used to anticipate the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to the people of Medina, and say, 'The time has come for a new messenger, in whom we shall believe, and we shall slay you with him as 'Ad and Iram were slain.' But then, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, instead of hastening to believe in him, they were the first to disbelieve.

God did not surprise the people of the Book with the sending of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but rather informed them of it in the Torah and the Gospel, and so they should have been the first to believe in him, not the first to disbelieve because they knew well the one who came.

God then says, '…and do not "buy" a mean price in exchange for My signs….' When the True Lord speaks about a bargain of faith, He uses the words 'buy,' 'sell,' and 'trade.' In a Quranic verse, He *the Exalted* says that He has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, that they have

Paradise in return (*at-Tawba:* 111). And in another verse, He addresses the believers proposing to them a bargain that will save them from grievous suffering provided that they believe in God and His Messenger, and to strive hard in God's Cause with their possessions and their lives (*as-Saff:* 10-11).

The True Lord also uses the language of buying and selling and trading when He admonishes the believers when the call for prayer is made on Friday- the day of congregation- to hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave off all worldly commerce (*al-Jumu'a*: 9),

We know that trade is a relationship between the producer and the consumer; the producer wants to sell his product, and the consumer needs this product. Profit is something that rises and falls for periods of time according to the rate of supply and demand of the product. God uses trade as a metaphor to show us that it is the shortest route to benefit. Trade is done by people who buy and sell products; but where God is concerned, He will take from you some of your personal freedom and give you something more lasting and greater than it.

As we said, if we consider this world and its limited life – the single life-span of one of us, we can ask: for how long does it last? Fifty, sixty, seventy years? We find that however long the life of this world lasts, it will surely end. The wise person is the one who sacrifices this limited, temporary life in order to gain a share in the eternal life. In this way, such a deal will be profitable.

The enjoyment of this worldly life is commensurate with human abilities, whilst the enjoyment of the Hereafter is commensurate with the power of God. But people come and say: 'Why should I make it uncomfortable for myself in this world? Why should I not have enjoyment?' We say that you should not because the suffering and punishment you will get in the Hereafter is not equal to what you have gained in this world; so the deal is a loss. You have purchased a fleeting thing, and have paid for it dearly with eternal bliss.

God then says to the Jews, '…and do not "buy" a mean price in exchange for My signs,…' i.e. do not give up the signs of faith I have given you so that you can take in exchange for them a mean price. When a person gains less than he gives, this reverses the deal, and this always means loss.

It is as though the verse is saying: You are giving away the messages of God, which constitute His complete teachings in order to gain a trifle of this worldly life whose value is slight and whose time is limited; and this is a reversed and losing deal.

And so the language of the Quran reflected this reversal: In deals, prices are always paid, and goods taken. But in the situation which the verse discusses when He says '…and do not "buy" a mean price in exchange for My signs,…' it is the price (*thaman*, here meaning 'gain') which should ordinarily be paid, which is here purchased; and this is foolishness and error. God says, '…and do not take a mean price in exchange for My signs…', i.e. do not turn the deal around. The thing that you should be sacrificing should not be made your gain because in this case you will have turned the price into the product. As long as these messages have been exchanged for this trifling gain, you have made the messages of God the price you have paid for worldly gains; and so you did not even sell them for a high price, but rather, you sold them cheaply.

You broke your promise to God simply in order to preserve your wealth or your status! But if a person sacrifices something of this world in order to gain the joy of the eternal Hereafter, this is a profitable trade; for in this world a person's bliss is commensurate with his conception of bliss, whilst in the Hereafter he will find bliss commensurate with what God's offering of bliss.

Some of those who do not want to bring themselves to follow God's teachings try to hasten the gains of this deal foolishly. They want enjoyment, whether it is lawful or unlawful. To these people, we say: Whether you believe in the Hereafter or not, it is a losing deal because either way you will be punished in hell. It is as though you have exchanged your faith and your religion for a brief pleasure, and you have made disbelief and disobedience of God the price; and so you have turned the deal around, and sold the thing that you would have gained by following God's teachings, namely the bliss of the Hereafter. And what have you sold it for? A passing pleasure! When a person takes less than he gives, this is a reversed and losing deal.

It is as though the verse is saying: 'You have given the signs of God and the good they offer you in this life and the next as payment for a passing trifle of this world and a paltry gain. A profit is always a currency like gold or silver, not a commodity. Suppose you have a treasure of gold like that which Qarun (Korah) possessed, and you are in a deserted place, and hungry. Would you not give all this treasure to someone for a piece of bread so that you would not die of hunger? And so money should not be a goal, or a commodity, and if you make it a goal and amass much wealth, but do not buy anything with it because money is your goal, society will be ruined. Money makes a faithful slave, but a cruel master. It is your slave when you spend it, but when you hoard it greedily it wears you out and makes you miserable because you have become its servant.

This noble verse gives us an idea about the Jews because their lives and actions all revolve around money and gold. God prohibited usury because usury turns money into a commodity, so one hundred is sold for one hundred and fifty, for example, and this corrupts society because wealth should increase by labour, and if wealth increases without any increase in labour, the motions of life are corrupted, and the poor get poorer and the rich richer – and this is what we see in the world today.

The poor countries get poorer because they borrow money and the interest mounts up until the interest is more than the original debt. As time passes the interest increases, and so the debt multiplies, and it becomes impossible to pay it back. And the rich countries get richer because they give loans and take them back multiplied many times over.

When God says, ‘…and do not “buy” a mean price in exchange for My signs…’, we should not understand from this that it is possible to barter God’s messages for a higher price; no, because however high the price gets, it will still be trifling, and trifling indeed because it cannot be equal to God’s messages. God’s messages are priceless, and so the deal will make a loss no matter how much is paid.

God says, ‘and Me, Me alone should you fear,’ and in the previous verse, He said, ‘…and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe,’ which constitutes a warning, whilst ‘…and Me, Me alone should you fear,’ concerns a reality. His words ‘…and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe,’ are a warning and a caution of what shall come in the Hereafter, whilst ‘…and Me, Me alone should you fear’ means fear God’s attributes of majesty, and the attributes of majesty are those which are related to

God’s wrath and His punishment; these attributes include those such as the All-Compeller, the All-Dominant, the Sublime, the All-Powerful, the Lord of Retribution, the Humiliator, and the other attributes of majesty.

God commands us: ‘fear God’, and also ‘fear the Fire’. What does this mean? We say that God wants us to place a barrier of protection between us and the Fire, which is one of the hosts of God’s Wrath. He wants us to place a barrier between ourselves and the suffering of hell, and also a barrier between us and God’s attributes of majesty. So when He says, ‘…and Me, Me alone should you fear,’ this means place a barrier between yourselves and God’s attributes of Majesty so that you are not afflicted with grievous suffering. And how do we place a barrier between ourselves and God’s majesty? By making our actions in this world conform to the teachings of God. So God-fearing is required in this worldly life.

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا۟ ٱلْحَقَّ بِٱلْبَٰطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا۟ ٱلْحَقَّ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Do not mix truth with falsehood, or hide the truth when you know it [42] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 42)

After warning the Jews not to trade their religion for a trifling gain, namely money or worldly influence, the True Lord tells them, ‘And do not clothe the truth with falsehood, and do not knowingly hide the truth.’ The root of the word *talbisu* (clothe) is the word *libas,* which means the clothes we wear. To clothe here means to cover up, meaning that we conceal the truth instead of revealing it, just as clothing is a covering for the body that conceals it so its details are not revealed.

The truth is something firm and fixed which cannot change. Suppose that we witness something happen, and then we each relate what happened. If we are truthful, our statements will all conform to the reality of what happened, but if some of us try to change the reality, each one of us will have their own version. And so the truth is firm, and never changes.

In the Torah, there are verses which the Jews did not alter and verses which they did alter. All the verses related to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his description, and that he is the Final Prophet, were all altered by the Jews, whilst the verses which were not connected with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were left unaltered. So it is as though they mixed truth with falsehood. What made them insert this falsehood and attempt to conceal the truth? The principle benefit of this was to barter away God's messages for a trifling gain. Falsehood means something which has no basis in reality, and so the ways to falsehood are many and varied. Yet the way to truth is one. So God wants to inform us that the Jews inserted into the Torah falsehoods which God did not sanction, and they concealed the truth of the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. But did they do this by mistake, or out of forgetfulness? No, they rather did it knowingly.

For example, consider when the True Lord commanded the Jews to enter the gate humbly and pray for forgiveness and He shall forgive them their sins, and shall amply reward the doers of good (*al-Baqara*: 58). He commanded them to say 'hitta' which means 'remove our sins from us, Lord,' but the Jews changed God's phrase, and instead of saying 'hitta', they said 'hinta'. One might hear this word and not notice it, and think that they did as God commanded them, yet in reality they changed it. And so when they came to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they would say to him *'ra'ina'* (a term related to frivolity and recklessness), twisting their tongues with their speech, instead of saying *'ra'ayna'* (we have heard). God alerted those who believed in his Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not to speak as the Jews spoke, and instead of saying '*ra'ina'* which may also mean 'listen to us,' they should rather say, 'have patience with us' (*al-Baqara*: 104). That is, do not use this word at all, since it is a way to overlay the truth with falsehood. So the Jews clothed the truth with falsehood; and no one clothes the truth with falsehood unless he cannot face the truth. For the inability to face the truth is a weakness from which we flee to falsehood because the truth is difficult to follow, and some people cannot bring themselves to follow the truth.

And He says, '…and do not knowingly hide the truth,' and this implies that they did this deliberately, not inadvertently. Someone might conceal the truth without knowing that it is the truth; but if you do know it, this is the true calamity because you are concealing it deliberately and intentionally Or, alternatively, 'knowingly' might mean that the Jews – who are a people of the

Book – knew about the grievous suffering that would meet them in the Hereafter for their concealment of the truth, for they were not unaware of what will happen in the Hereafter. But they did what they did even knowing that it was wrong, and so this suffering will be deserved.

وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُوا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱرْكَعُوا۟ مَعَ ٱلرَّٰكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow
your heads [in worship] with those who bow theirs [43]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 43)

Performing prayer is known to us as that devotion which begins with the words *'Allahu Akbar'* (God is the Greatest) and ends with *taslim* (greeting of peace), and includes such essential actions as standing, bowing, and prostration. But the True Lord adds: '…and spend in charity, and bow down with those who bow.' He wants for them to join the universal community of faith, for their prayer did not originally include any bowing. So He wanted them to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* (as Islamic prayer included bowing), and not to imagine that their faith in Moses *peace be upon him* would exempt them from having to submit to what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with, saying, 'Our religion is enough, and Islam only came for those who have no religion of their own: the disbelievers and idolaters.' And so He said to them, '…and bow down with those who bow.'

The True Lord wants to alert them to the fact that their prayer will not be accepted from them unless it includes bowing; and the prayer of the Jews did not have any bowing, although it included prostration. Either way, the True Lord wanted to alert them to the necessity of believing in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

When the True Lord said '…and do not "buy" a mean price in exchange for My signs…', He wanted to tell them that the opposite of this is what was required from them, and that they should have acquired faith and chosen the profitable deal. This would not happen unless they believed in the Final Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and this is the sole way to earn the pleasure of God.

God wanted to put an end to their arrogant stance regarding the new religion, and so He commanded them to pray just as the Muslims prayed, and give the poor-due just as the Muslims did so that they would not think that their faith in Moses *peace be upon him* and the Torah would be accepted from them after the coming of the new Messenger in whom they were also commanded to believe. Rather, their faith in Moses *peace be upon him* and the Torah – if they truly believed in them – meant that they also had to have faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the Torah commanded them to do so. And so their lack of faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* itself constituted disbelief in the Torah and a contravention of its teachings.

As we said, prayer is an occasion for the servant to imagine the moment when he will stand before his Lord. And when a servant stands before God, all of the pride in his soul will certainly fall away, and be replaced by humility, contrition, and lowliness. The proud person is one who fails to see that he is standing before his Lord. So their failure to believe in this Prophet, and to stand before God in prayer as they should do, and as God ordained they should from above the seven heavens, was a refusal to submit to God’s Commandments.

And then comes the giving of the poor-due because the believing servant must direct his life to beneficial work which would be conducive to sufficiency for him and also for the needy in his community who are unable to earn their own living. When God tells us to work here on earth, He is not telling us only to do enough to suffice ourselves, but rather, He requires us to work for more than what we need in order that this work will be enough to provide for those who cannot work for themselves, so that the society as a whole has enough to suffice everyone, and is freed from jealousy and envy, and souls are purified.

أَتَأۡمُرُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ بِٱلۡبِرِّ وَتَنسَوۡنَ أَنفُسَكُمۡ وَأَنتُمۡ تَتۡلُونَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense? [44] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 44)

After alerting the Jews to the fact that their failure to believe in Islam amounts to disbelief in the Torah because the teachings of the Torah commanded them to believe in the new Messenger, and they were given the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his time of coming in the Torah, and were commanded to believe in him, God then puts the question to them: 'Will you enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves…?' The Jews used to gladly predict the coming of a new messenger, and announce that they would believe in him, but when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, and was not of their people, they disbelieved in him because they wanted the power to be in their hands by the new Messenger being one of them. Instead when he came from the Arabs, they realised that their power would disappear, and that their economic leadership would end, and so they denied the Messenger and his Message.

We should point out that although these verses were revealed in connection with the Jews, this does not mean that they apply to them alone. Rather, they apply to all the people of the Book and to the non-believers as well; for the moral is not derived from the specific circumstance, but rather from the general principle.

These words apply even to the Muslims who barter away God's verses for a trifling gain, namely the orators of discord whom the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* mentions having seen them during his night journey to heaven with their lips being cut with scissors of fire; and so he asked Gabriel *peace be upon him* who they were, and he answered, 'These are the orators of discord.' They are the ones who make every tyrant's tyranny seem fair to him, and put God's religion to the service of human caprices, whilst it is human caprices which should be subservient to God's religion. These are the ones who attempt – under the slogan of 'renewal' – to give the people excuses to disengage from God's teachings; they provide justification for all this, and do not reflect on the reckoning of the Hereafter.

It is not the job of the religious scholars who carry God's teachings to come up with excuses for the things that others do, and God's religion can never be subservient to human caprices. Those who do such things must repent and return to God, and try to put right what they have done because returning to the truth is better than continuing with falsehood.

The words of the True Lord: ‘Will you enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves?…’ give us another lesson concerning preachers; this is because the one who commands good and forbids evil and carries God’s teachings should aim to get the non-believer out of the falsehood to which he is accustomed; and taking the non-believer out of falsehood is difficult for him because it means to take him out of that to which he is accustomed and to remove him from his way of life, and for him to admit that he was following falsehood. And so he will fix his eyes closely on the one who shows him the way of faith to see whether he practises it himself or not. Does the one who is forbidding the evil practise what he preaches? If he does, he will know that he is true in what he preaches; and if he does not, this will be an excuse for him to return to the falsehood which had controlled his life.

Religion is composed of words which are spoken and actions which are performed; if the words are separated from the actions, preaching will have no effect. God admonishes the believers by putting forth to them the rhetorical question why they profess what they do not practise; it is extremely loathsome in the sight of God for someone to profess what he does not practise (*as-Saff:* 2-3). Why? That is because if someone sees you doing something which you forbid, he will know that you are a fake preacher and a fraud; and if you are not content to follow something yourself, you cannot preach it to others. And so we read in the Noble Quran that we surely have in the Messenger of God a good example for everyone who looks forward to God *the Exalted* and the Last Day, and remembers God unceasingly (*al-Ahzab:* 21).

The teachings of the religion alone are not enough without practice, and this was why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* never commanded his companions to do anything without being the first of them to do it, and so the Muslims take him as a model in their words and deeds. Whenever ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* wanted to issue a command connected with Islam, he would gather his family and relations and say to them, ‘It occurred to me to command such-and-such, and by God in Whose Hand is my soul, if any of you contravene it, I will make of them an example for the Muslims!’ In this way, ‘Umar ibn Al- Khattab *God be pleased with him* would close the door to discord because he knew well from whence it comes.

Where Islamic preaching is concerned, the scholars must be a model for the rectitude of the people. None of the sciences of this world requires a role model, except where religion is concerned. If someone tells you that a great chemist drinks wine, or does this or that, you would say, 'I do not care about his lifestyle; I study his contribution to chemistry because he is a great chemist. I care nothing about his lifestyle.' The same is the case for all the scholars on earth, except for scholars of religion. If there is a scholar who directs you to the straight path, and you take your religious knowledge from him, and then afterwards you find out that he drinks wine or steals, will you listen to him anymore? Never. He immediately goes down in your estimation, and you do not want to listen to him or sit in his gatherings, however much knowledge he has, and you will say to him: 'What a fraud you are!'

And so, a religious scholar must be a role-model, and must not forbid evil and then commit it himself, or command the good and fail to do it himself, and everyone watches closely what he does. Before spreading through its intellectual system, Islam spread through proposing its conduct as a role model, and the largest number of people embraced Islam by means of role models of conduct who guided them to it. The people who spread Islam in China were mostly tradesmen who had good Islamic manners, and so attracted many people to them who then embraced Islam. And so the True Lord puts forth the rhetorical question of who could be better of speech than he who calls to God, and does what is just and right, and says that he is of the Muslims (those who have surrendered themselves to God) (*Fussilat:* 33).

So the first element is to call to God, and the second element is righteous action, and saying 'I am of the Muslims (those who have surrendered themselves to God'), thus not ascribing this good to his own self but rather ascribing it to Islam. But tell me: what is the good of saying we are Muslims when we behave as though we are not? And so when God says, 'Will you enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves…', He *the Exalted* reminds us that the Jews said that which they did not do. If they truly believed in the Torah, they would have believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and Islam because this is what the Torah commanded them to do. Yet they forgot themselves, and were the first to disobey the Torah because they did not follow it; and all the while, they were reciting their Book which commanded them to embrace the new faith.

And although they were sure of the truth of the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they did not embrace the faith. If they had even an atom of reason, they would have believed in that which their own scripture, which they recited, commanded them to do, but they did not use their reason, but rather wanted only to have high positions on earth. And the verse, as we said, does not apply to the Jews alone; it rather, applies to all those who act in this way.

وَٱسۡتَعِينُواْ بِٱلصَّبۡرِ وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِۚ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱلۡخَٰشِعِينَ ٤٥

Seek help with steadfastness and prayer – though
this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble [45]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 45)

After affirming that faith requires having and giving a role model, and after alerting us to the fact that the Torah required the Jews to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, God *the Glorious and Exalted* then gives an order to seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer. The implication of seeking aid in steadfast patience is that difficult things will come to pass, and things will not be easy, but will require effort. Steadfast patience means to bring oneself to bear difficult things. After having become accustomed to bargaining away God’s signs for a trifling price, accepting this exchange and making God’s signs a price for the comforts of this world, and exchanging them for comforts and pleasures; after they had become accustomed to usury and other unlawful means of earning, the Jews would have to seek aid in steadfast patience if they were to go back to the way of faith.

As we said, it is not the specific circumstance which is significant in appreciating the verse, but rather, the general principle. So this command is addressed to everyone; and every believer who follows God’s teachings needs to seek aid in steadfast patience in order to bring himself to bear the difficult demands of these teachings, and to deny himself the fulfilment of desires which God *the Glorious and Exalted* has forbidden.

Some scholars say that the term ‘steadfast patience’ in this noble verse means fasting, as though God was commanding them to go hungry, and be steadfast in bearing the pains of hunger. And the difficulties of faith and prayer, as we said, and humility, contrition, and lowliness before God, would end their arrogant refusal to believe in a religion which was not revealed to a Jewish rabbi; and the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says, ‘…and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit.’

When the True Lord says, ‘And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer…,’ He teaches that help be sought in two things, steadfast patience and prayer. So the context of the verse might have caused us to expect that He would say ‘…and they, indeed…,’ using the plural, but the Quran uses a singular pronoun: ‘…and this, indeed….’ Does this mean that only one of the two things are intended, either prayer or patience?

We say: If there are two things which are so interrelated that something cannot exist without both of them being together, they are treated as one thing. We have another example of this linguistic practice in the noble verse where God says that the hypocrites swear to the believers by God in order to please them; while it is God and His Messenger whose pleasure they should seek above all else if indeed they are believers (*at-Tawba:* 62).

So, in spite of mentioning God and His Messenger in the verse, God uses the singular form of the verb *yurduhu* (‘seek his pleasure’), not the dual form *yurduhuma* (‘seek their pleasure’), and so the explanation of this is exactly the same: it is not that God has one due and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* has another, but rather God and His Messenger are owed the same due.

We have still another example in the verse where God speaks about some of those who used to attend the Prophet’s gatherings saying that when they see merchandise or a passing entertainment, they break up for it, and leave the prophet standing (*al-Jumu’a:* 11). It might be supposed that the verse should have said ‘to them,’ using the dual form of the pronoun, but trade and play are here considered a single matter, namely anything which distracts the believers from worship and remembrance.

The verse thus instructs: ‘And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer…’ because the help comes with patience and prayer together; and patience is difficult for the soul to bear, as is prayer, because they both take something from one's movement in life. Patience here is required in order that they abstain from the forbidden delights and charms of this worldly life, and prayer fights the pride of the soul. And so it is as though this nature of faith is not susceptible of division, so there can be no patience without prayer, and no prayer without patience.

Then God *the Exalted* gives the exception: '…but the humble in spirit.' What does 'humbleness' mean? Humbleness means to be deferential to the one whom you see as being above you without any doubt. People have different levels of values and talents, and everyone tries to take pride in his superiority and his gifts, saying, 'I am better than so-and-so,' or 'you are better than so-and-so.' So it is possible that a person could be proud of what he has; but a person will always be deferential to someone whom he needs for something because if he acts with pride towards them, they will make their life difficult. And so God spread talents and humbleness amongst the people communally: everyone needs someone, and this is communal humbleness; and everyone has something which others do not have, and this is communal talent. This is as far as human beings as concerned; as for God, our humbleness is to He Who created, and gave, and made everything.

Humbleness makes a person recall the greatness of the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* and recognise his own scant value before the True Lord, and the extent of his helplessness before the Creator of the universe. He knows that God could take everything that he has in an instant; for we live in a world of constant change, and so we should submit to the One Who never changes because everything a person acquires is from God, not from his own self. As for those who are deluded by the means they possess, we say to them: Worship and be humble before the One Who gave you all these means and created them because the means do not work of their own accord. God sends vicissitudes upon man by turn: A person is proud of his strength, and then someone even stronger comes and defeats him; a person is proud of his wealth, and then he loses it all in an instant. After the defeat in the battle of Uhud, God addresses the believers saying that if an affliction has touched them, a similar affliction has touched other people as well; and God brings these days to men by turns, and that God may know those who believe, and choose from among them such as bear witness to the truth with their lives; and God does not love the unjust (*Al-'Imran*: 140).

And so we must understand that for the person who is proud of his means will come a time when no means will avail him. If a person reaches the point where he sees himself, and the people see him, as perfect, he will become deluded. To him, we say: Do not be deluded by your own perfections because although you might have them now, they can only change tomorrow. Humbleness should not be for anyone but God. The True Lord says, '…and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit.' Who are the humble in spirit? They are those who obey God, and steer clear of what He forbids, and bear the turns of fate patiently, and know with absolute certainty of soul that everything belongs to God, and not to any other power; and so, they are humble before the One Who created them and created the universe for them.

ٱلَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُم مُّلَٰقُواْ رَبِّهِمۡ وَأَنَّهُمۡ إِلَيۡهِ رَٰجِعُونَ ٤٦

who know that they will meet their Lord and that it is to Him they will return [46] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 46)

After affirming to us that patience and prayer are difficult for all except those whose hearts are humble before God and so embrace them with love, faith, and willingness, the True Lord wants to tell us who these humble people are, and so He *the Exalted* defines them as those who know that they shall meet their Lord.

The word rendered here as 'know' is *yazhunnoun* (usually translated into English as 'think,' 'suppose,' 'conjecture'), with its noun form *zhann.* We need to pause here to reflect on the meaning and use of the word here.

What is zhann? We spoke before about intellectual proportions and relationships between notions, and said that there might be a notion which I am certain of and which is confirmed by reality. For example, if I say 'Muhammad is hard-working,' and if there is truly a person called Muhammad who is hard-working, I have affirmed the truth. So this is a given notion on condition that I can prove that what I say is true. If you are, in turn, certain that what I have said is true, this is called imitation. For example, your six-year-old son might say, 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of

God,' and his mind is not sufficiently developed to prove this; rather, he has blind faith in his father or his teachers and is imitating them.

If you are sure of something, but it does not actually conform to reality, this is ignorance, and the ignorant is worse than the uninformed because the ignorant believes in something which is not true, and he will defend it; whilst the uninformed simply does not know, and once he knows, he will believe. And so the ignorant person must first have the falsehood removed from his heart before the truth can enter it. If there is no decisive judgement on a certain point – whether it is true or untrue with equal proportions for its truth or falsity, this is called doubt; when one side is more likely than the other, this is called *zhann* (supposition).

In the verse under discussion, the True Lord says 'who know…' (Using the word *zhann* which ordinarily means 'to suppose'), and did not use the word tayaqqanu which ordinarily means 'to know with certainty.' Why did God not use the word *yaqin* ('being certain') but rather used the word *zhann* ('to suppose')? It is because to merely suppose that you will meet God is enough to make you follow His teachings, let alone being certain? To merely suppose is enough.

If we want to give an example of this (and to God belongs the loftiest of similitudes), let us say: Suppose you are travelling down a road when a person comes and tells you that this road is plagued by thieves and highwaymen. These words will be enough to make you not go down this road unless you are armed and have one or two companions with you. You do this just as a precaution. And so, mere supposition leads us to be cautious. God says, 'Who know that they shall meet their Lord…,' so the fact that this is likely, is enough to make them follow God's teachings; and this way one would save oneself from grave suffering. The poet Al-Ma'arri said towards the end of his life:

The soothsayer and the doctor both claim

That there is no Resurrection; to them I say:

If you are right, then I lose nothing;

If I am right, then you are the losers!

So everyone who denied the Hereafter is a loser, and the human soul must make precautions for the meeting with God, and acknowledge that there will be a Resurrection, and prepare for it.

The True Lord says, ‘Who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him.’ The return to God is a matter of certainty; as long as you came into this world as a creature of God, you will certainly return to Him. We must take precautions for this day- great precautions- and be well aware of it for it is a tremendous day as the True Lord addresses all mankind commanding them to fear their Lord; the earthquake of the Hour is surely a tremendous thing. On the Day when they behold it, every suckling woman shall forsake her sucking baby; and every woman that hath a burden in her womb shall cast her burden; and you will see people drunken, yet they are not drunken: But it is the mighty chastisement of God (*al-Hajj*: 1-2).

And He *the Exalted* puts forward to people the rhetorical question: How, if they do not believe, they will screen themselves from the day that shall turn children grey-haired (*al-Muzzammil:* 17).

If this will be our condition on the Day of Resurrection, should it not be enough to merely suppose it will come to happen, in order for us to adhere to God’s teachings? We take precautions for worldly matters which are nothing compared with the terrors of the Day of Resurrection. Merely supposing that we will meet God should be enough for us to think seriously of preparing for it.

يَٰبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتِيَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَنۡعَمۡتُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلۡتُكُمۡ عَلَى ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٤٧

Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you
and favoured you over other people [47]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 47)

Some people claim that there is repetition here of the seven previous verses which mentioned the children of Israel. We say: No, there is no repetition here of these verses, namely: ‘O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you, and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you; and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe (*al-Baqara:* 40) And believe in what I have sent down confirming that which is with you, and do not be the first to disbelieve it, and do not ‘buy’ a mean price in exchange for My signs; and Me, Me alone should you fear (*al-Baqara*: 41) And do not clothe the truth with falsehood, and do not knowingly hide the truth (*al-Baqara*: 42) And perform prayer and spend in charity, and bow down with those who bow (*al-Baqara*: 43) Will you: enjoin what is right upon others, and forget yourselves, and yet you read the Book? Do you have no sense? (*al-Baqara*: 44) And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer; and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit (*al-Baqara:* 45) Who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him’ (*al-Baqara*: 46)

All these seven verses remind the children of Israel of the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, whose attributes and time were mentioned in the Torah, and remind them that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was a blessing for them and for all mankind. If God favoured the Children of Israel by sending messengers to them, this did not mean that they could deny God’s blessing to them by sending them the Final Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

And since the attributes of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were mentioned in the Torah, and it commanded them to believe in him and give him succour, their lack of belief in him amounted to disbelief in the Torah. Likewise, the Gospel gave glad tidings of the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and required them to believe in him, and so their lack of belief in him constituted disbelief in the Gospel.

God says, ‘…Remember My favour with which I graced you,…’ and this means: remember that I placed within your scripture that which confirmed the truth of Muhammad’s prophethood, and remember how I blessed you by favouring you above all of your contemporaries at the time when the message of Moses *peace be upon him* was revealed, and how I raised prophets from amongst you.

Since the True Lord said, ‘…and that I favoured you above all other people,’ why does He mention this favour to them? We say that the reason for this is to make their chastisement more severe: because of their disobedience and disbelief, He made them as apes, and pigs, and worshippers of the powers of evil, as He *the Exalted* reminds them of those of them who transgressed on the Sabbath, and whom He changed into scornful apes (*al-Baqara*: 65).

And God also speaks about those who deserve a yet worse retribution. They are those whom God has cursed and with whom He has been angry, and whom He has turned into apes and swine because they worshipped the powers of evil: these are yet worse in station and farther astray from the right path (*al-Ma'ida:* 60). So God tells us of how the children of Israel disbelieved and slew their Prophets. Despite the immense good that God gave to them, they broke the covenant and therefore deserved suffering. They did not take the blessings God gave to them as a reason to be sincere and faithful to Him and His teachings and to trust in the Final Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* who was mentioned to them in the Torah. They should have believed in God and remembered the many blessings He granted to them.

The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to alert us to the fact that although He gave them these blessings, they should not think that they are not required to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They should have understood that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to correct their scriptures for them, and show them the right path; and they should have given him succour. Favours cannot keep on coming whilst they are being met with ingratitude; and it should not be thought that God was hard on them when he made them a broken community dispersed throughout the whole world. After that they will be gathered together in a single place only to be killed; God *the Exalted* says that after rescuing them from Pharaoh and his hosts, he told the Israelites to dwell in the earth/land(1) (*al-Isra':* 104).

Which earth was it that God told the children of Israel to dwell upon? Since the True Lord told them to dwell on the earth, this means the entire earth. Is the whole earth the homeland of the Jews? Of course not, but rather, the True Lord ordained for them that they should disperse throughout the earth; they could only have a state of their own when God decided to gather them together in a single place and then give His believing servants the upper hand on them. The True Lord tells that He has made it known to the Children of Israel in the Book that twice, indeed, will they spread corruption on earth and will indeed become grossly overbearing. Hence, when the prediction of the first of those two periods of iniquity came to pass, He sent against them some of His servants of terrible prowess in war, and they wrought havoc throughout the land; and so the prediction was fulfilled. And after a time, He allowed them to prevail against them once again, and aided them with wealth and offspring, and made them more numerous (*al-Isra':* 4-6)

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(1) The Arabic word *ard* is used to mean both 'land' and 'earth.'

This was the first time the Muslims triumphed over the Jews. The True Lord says that after a time He allowed them to prevail against them once again. When the True Lord said 'against them,' this meant against the Muslims because they were the ones who triumphed over the Jews in the first time. And the meaning of the statement that he aided them with wealth and offspring is that they were allowed to gain victory over the Muslims; and this is what is happening now, and what we are witnessing now and have been witnessing lately. That is, aid and power are coming to them from abroad, not from their own resources.

We now see that Israel subsists by bringing Jewish immigrants from other countries, and getting money and aid from other countries. That is, all the help they get is from the outside. Israel cannot exist without immigrants and foreign aid, and so all their help has to come from the outside. If a military leader seeks reinforcements in a battle, it means he wants additional men to come to him from outside the battlefield to add strength and support to his army. And God *the Exalted* tells them that he made them more numerous. The word nafir (rendered as 'numerous' in the cited verse) literally means a loud sound that attracts attention. We see now that Israel controls media and propaganda all over the world, and that her voice is loud, and is heard by all. The True Lord then explains that when the time of the second period of their iniquity comes to pass, God will raise an enemy against them, who would sadden their faces, and enter the Temple as they had entered it once before (*al-Isra':* 7). This means that the Aqsa mosque will be lost to the Muslims and be under the control of the Jews, and then the Muslims will come and fight them and enter the mosque as they had done before under the rule of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him*. And God addresses the Israelites saying that when the time of the Last Day shall come to pass, He will bring them forth as a motley crowd (*al-Isra':* 104). A motley crowd means a group which is not uniform, and has conflicts within itself and with those outside of it. Since God has ordained that fighting will take place between the Jews and the Muslims, in which the Muslims will regain the Aqsa mosque, this means He had to gather them together in a single place; for if they had remained dispersed throughout the nations of the earth and ostracised from the communities within which they lived, this would have meant that the Muslims would have to fight the entire world. But God decreed that He would bring them from every country to the place where Jerusalem stood so that the war between them and the Muslims could take place, and the Muslims could enter the mosque once again as they did before.

So the True Lord reminds the children of Israel of the favours He granted them, and of their sins and disbelief so that no one could say that God was hard on them – for they were the ones who disbelieved, and they were the ones who disobeyed and spread corruption in the earth, and so they deserved this punishment from God.

وَٱتَّقُوا۟ يَوْمًا لَّا تَجْزِى نَفْسٌ عَن نَّفْسٍ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا
شَفَٰعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

Guard yourselves against a Day when no soul will stand in place of another, no intercession will be accepted for it, nor any ransom; nor will they be helped [48] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 48)

God says ‘And be on your guard against a day…’ to remind them of this Day, the Day of Resurrection when nothing will benefit a person save his actions; and the True Lord asks them to place a barrier of protection between themselves and His attributes of majesty on that Day.

In another verse, God tells them to be on their guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all, neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it, nor shall they be helped (*al-Baqara*: 123).

So it seems that this verse is a repetition of the previously discussed verse in a slightly different form: the content is the same, but the first verse says, ‘…neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped,' whilst the second says: '…neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it, nor shall they be helped.' Is this repetition? We say that it is not, and this must be understood well. The two verses are alike in the way they begin, which is God's saying, 'And be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all….' In the first verse, however, intercession is mentioned first and it is said that it will not be accepted, and in the second verse intercession is mentioned second and it is said that it will not be of any use. In the first verse intercession comes first and then compensation, whilst in the second verse compensation comes first and then intercession. In the first verse it says that intercession will not be accepted, and in the second that it will not be of any use. The day warned against in the command 'And be on your guard against a day…' is the Day of Resurrection which God describes as a day when one soul shall be powerless for another soul: All sovereignty on that day shall be with God (*al-Infitar:* 19).

Then God says, '…when one soul shall not avail for another at all….' How many souls are being mentioned here? It is two, one availing the other. There is a first soul, and a second soul. What is the first soul? It is the one who will avail, and the second is the one who will be availed. Since they are two souls, and God then says, '…neither shall any intercession be accepted from it…' which one of them is intended by this, the first or the second?

Let us consider the meaning which is that a righteous person will come on the Day of Resurrection and say, 'Lord, I will avail so-and-so, or suffice so-and-so, or pay the due of so-and-so;' the first soul here is the one who will try to avail the second.

In order to illustrate this (and to God belongs the loftiest of similitudes), let us suppose that a ruler becomes angry with someone and decides to exact bitter revenge upon him, and this ruler's friend comes and tries to stand up for the one who has incurred this anger. Because this man has a high station with the ruler, he tries to intercede for the third party. In such a circumstance, the ruler will either accept the intercession or not. If he does not accept it, the friend will say to the ruler, 'I will pay a ransom for him;' it will only come to this (paying a ransom) if the intercession first fails.

And so if this takes place on the Day of Resurrection with God, and a righteous person comes to intercede with God on behalf of someone who has wronged themselves, the intercessor will have to be a righteous person in order that the True Lord *the Glorified* will accept his intercession, and He *the Exalted* asserts that no one would be able to intercede with Him except by His permission (*al-Baqara*: 255).

And God says that He knows what is before them and what is behind them; and no plea shall they offer except for whom He pleases; and they tremble for fear of Him (*al-Anbiya'*: 28). So here, the righteous man tries to intercede for the one who wronged himself, and his intercession is not accepted, and then no ransom is taken from him, and no other bargain is allowed for him; so he does not speak about a ransom until the intercession has been denied.

The pronoun here refers to the one who is trying to avail the other, i.e. the one who is trying to intercede with God, and so the True Lord says, '…neither shall any intercession be accepted from it…,' and so no other bargain will be accepted either, and so He then says, '…nor shall any compensation be taken from it,…' which is the natural order of events.

In the second verse, God is speaking about the one who is trying to be availed by the other: before he seeks any intercession from another and tries to make them intercede for him, he must first have exhausted his other schemes and have no other option, and so be forced to turn to another. This is an admission of his own incapability, and so he says, 'Lord, what can I do to erase my sins?' but it is not accepted from him, and so he goes to someone whose intercession might be accepted and seeks it from them, but it is not accepted.

If we want to give an example of this from the Noble Quran, we can find it in the description the True Lord gives of the case of the guilty on the Day of Judgement, when those who are lost in sin shall droop their heads before their Lord and cry to Him that they have seen and heard, and beg to be returned to their earthly life that they may do good deeds as now they have firm belief (*as-Sajda:* 12).

These are the ones who seek to bargain with God, asking that He return them to the world so that they can make up for their sins and do good deeds to save them from suffering, since good deeds efface the bad. How does the True Lord answer them? He *the Exalted* tells them to taste the recompense of their having neglected the meeting of this their Day; God has forsaken them; and they would taste, then, the abiding chastisement for what they did (*as-Sajda:* 14).

So they will offer to make up for their sins by returning to this world to do good deeds, but God will not accept this offer from them. He *the Exalted* puts forth the question on whether the unbelievers are waiting for anything, but the final interpretation of the Book that He had sent. He *the Exalted* asserts that on the day its final interpretation comes about, those who had neglected it before will concede that the Messengers of their Lord had come with the Truth, and they would wonder if there are any intercessors who would intercede on their behalf, or if they could be sent back so that they would do deeds different from those which they did. Then God gives the final judgement on them: they have lost their souls and that which they had forged has gone away from them (*al-A'raf:* 53).

They first asked for intercession and it was not accepted, and so they tried another approach which was to offer a ransom, but this too was not accepted, as God says, '…neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it….' So we see the difference between the two verses; and there is no repetition in the Noble Quran.

But the verse we are currently examining is concerned with the one who intercedes for the other, or seeks to intercede for the sinful one: '…neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it….' The other verse says that 'neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it…' (*al-Baqara*: 123); the pronoun refers back to the one seeking to be availed, and so he offers a ransom first: they beg to be returned to their earthly life that they may do good deeds (*as-Sajda:* 32), and this will not be accepted; so he will seek out someone to intercede for him, but will not find anyone, and no intercession will be of any use to him.

These verses which we have quoted from the Noble Quran are all concerned with the Day of Resurrection, yet there is another example of this case (where we have two seemingly similar verses but having different imports) in the

Quran. God wanted to abolish a social practice that was known in pre-Islamic times, of parents killing off their newborn children due to poverty; so He *the Exalted* commands the believers not to kill their children because of poverty as it is God Who provides livelihood for them as well as for their children (*al-An'am:* 151). In another verse, however, God commands the believers not to kill their children because of fear of poverty as it is God Who provides livelihood for their children as well as for them (*al-Isra':* 31).

Some people say that the fact that the first verse mentions the parents before the children whilst the second mentions the children first is merely a matter of stylistic concern. We say no; it has significance in terms of meaning. The first verse speaks of poverty that already exists; and when poverty already exists, people do not want more children which would make them even poorer. And so in this instance the True Lord mentioned the parents before the children, implying that the coming of more children will not make them poorer because they shall have their sustenance and the children shall have theirs, and the fact that the children will have sustenance will not mean that the parents' own sustenance will be decreased. The father shall have his sustenance, as will the child. The second verse, on the other hand, speaks not of existent poverty but of fear of poverty. So poverty is in this instance not yet present, but rather, the parent fears that if he is given children، they will make him poor. And so the True Lord mentions the children first in this case meaning that the children's own sustenance will come to them even before the parents' sustenance comes to them.

And so، when you see that the word of God '…be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all' is repeated in the two verses, do not think that this is repetitious because the first one goes on to say, 'neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it…' (*al-Baqara*: 48), whilst the second proceeds: 'neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession be of use to it…' (*al-Baqara*: 123). So the pronoun refers to different people in the two instances, one referring to the person who attempts to avail the other and so mentioning intercession before compensation, and the other referring to the one seeking to be availed and so mentioning compensation first and then intercession. The

True Lord commands all people to fear their Lord and dread the Day on which neither parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child will in the least avail his parent (*Luqman:* 33). That is, no person can avail any other no matter how close their relation: the child cannot avail his mother or father, and the parent cannot avail his children. God describes the Day of Judgement as a day when a person will fly from his brother، his mother,his father, and from his spouse and children; for every one of them on that day، his own concerns shall be enough (*'Abasa:* 34-37).

The True Lord says, ‘nor shall any compensation be taken from it…’ (*al-Baqara*: 48) and ‘neither shall any compensation be accepted from it,…’ (*al-Baqara*: 123). The Arabic word *‘adl* (rendered as ‘compensation’ here) means a repayment, as in the case of one who has wronged himself saying, ‘Lord, I did such-and-such, and wronged myself, so return me to the world so that I might do good deeds.’ Different vowels in the word change its meaning: *‘idl* means a repayment for something of the same type such as material for material or gold for gold, whilst *‘adl* means a repayment for something of a different kind. The word ‘adl also means truth and justice, and justice is only required when there are two rival parties; it also means equity and truth which is something that is firm and never changes, and that you do not have any bias towards one party at the expense of another. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, for example, sat with his Companions, he would look to each of them for the same duration of time so that it would not be said that he cared about any one of them more than another.

We must also know what the word *nafs* (here rendered as ‘soul’) means. When the word *nafs* is mentioned in the Noble Quran, know that is has a connection to the spirit. When the spirit comes into contact with the material body and gives it life, this gives existence to the *nafs* (soul). Before the spirit comes to it, the body is completely compelled and devoid of free will, and it glorifies God. So do not speak about the spiritual life and the material life, for both, the spirit and the material body glorify God. But when the spirit comes to the body and life begins، and desires are set in motion, this is when problems begin. Death is defined as the exit of the spirit from the body, and the spirit goes on to the world in which it is compelled, as does the body. This makes us understand the word of the True Lord when He mentions the Day when people’s own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by recalling what they did (*an-Nur:* 24). Why do they testify? That is because they are no longer under the control of the person, following his orders in doing good or bad deeds. Your senses are under your control in this worldly life by God’s leave, and they glorify and worship God. If they obey you in the performance of a sin, therefore, they curse you because you have made them sin, and on the Day of Resurrection, they will come and bear witness against you. God makes an oath by the human soul, and how it is made perfect and balanced, and how it is inspired to know its wickedness from its piety (*ash-Shams:* 7-8).

People commonly speak of the material life and the spiritual life because the spiritual life differs from the spirit which dwells within your body. The word *ruh* (‘spirit’) is also used for the angels, as God mentions that the trustworthy spirit has descended with it (the Quran) from on high (*ash-Shu‘ara’*: 193). Also He *the Exalted* addresses His Messenger saying that He has revealed to him a ruh, a life-giving message, coming at God’s behest…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52). This is a spirit of purity and innocence.

As for God’s words ‘…nor shall they be helped` (*al-Baqara*: 123), it means that if God decrees that they should suffer His chastisement, no one can succour them or stop their suffering; and this cannot happen because God has control over everything.

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَآءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَآءَكُمْ ۚ وَفِى ذَٰلِكُم بَلَآءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

Remember when We saved you from Pharaoh’s people, who subjected you to terrible torment, slaughtering your sons and sparing only your women – this was a great trial from your Lord [49] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 49)

After warning the children of Israel of a day in which no intercession shall be of any use, God wanted to remind them of the favour and blessing He extended to them. God’s word ‘when’ here is an adverb of time (Arabic *zharf*) referring to the time of an action. We have already said that Arabic adverbs are of two kinds because every event needs a time and a place in which to occur. If I say to you ‘Sit down where you are,’ the adverbial phrase ‘where you are' refers to place. When God addresses His servants by saying 'Remember when I did such-and-such,' this means 'Remember the time I did it,' and so this is an adverb of time. So the True Lord says, 'And when We rescued you…', i.e. remember the time when He rescued you from Pharaoh.

The incident mentioned in the verse which we are currently examining is related three times in the Noble Quran. God says, 'And when We rescued you from the people of Pharaoh, who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement: slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live; and in this was a great trial from your Lord.' (*al-Baqara*: 49). In the second verse, God reminds the Children of Israel of the time He saved them from the people of Pharaoh who had laid on them a cruel chastisement, killing their sons and letting their women live (*al-A'raf:* 141). In the third verse, God relates the admonition of Moses *peace be upon him* to his people to remember God's favour on them when He rescued them from the people of Pharaoh, who were inflicting severe suffering on them, and slaughtering their sons, and letting their women live (*Ibrahim:* 6).

There are delicate differences in expression between the first verse and the second: in the first, God says 'slaughtering your sons,' whilst in the second He says 'killing your sons,' and in the first He uses the term *najjayna,* whilst in the second, He uses the form *anjayna*. We need to pause and consider the difference between *najjayna* and *anjayna*. Also, in the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, where the term used is *najjayna,* the one speaking is God. But in the verse in the chapter of Ibrahim, it was Moses *peace be upon him* speaking. What is the difference between the speech of God and the speech of Moses *peace be upon him*?

The statement of Moses *peace be upon him* here quotes the words of God. When God reminds His servants of His blessings to them, He does so by mentioning the greatest of these blessings, not the smallest. When God reminded the children of Israel of His blessings, He said, '…We rescued you from the people of Pharaoh, who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement: slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live….' He did not mention the petty torments that the people of Moses *peace be upon him* had suffered at the hands of Pharaoh's people, and how they forced them to work in tilling the land, hewing rocks from the mountains, and serving in their households, and how they would force those who did not work to pay taxes. And so the Jews would be crafty and wear threadbare clothes so that Pharaoh would not bother collecting taxes from them, which is the meaning of the word of the True Lord when He said that ignominy and humiliation overshadowed them (*al-Baqara*: 61). That is, they made a display of penury so as to avoid paying any tax.

But the True Lord did not mention to them here how He blessed them by delivering them from all that suffering, but rather, He mentioned the greatest blessing, which is that He saved their sons from being slaughtered and their women from being left alone because this would humiliate both their women and their men, and leave their women without any men to look after them, and they would go astray as a result of this.

There is a big difference between the word *najja* (rescue) and the word *anja* (spare). The word *najja* means to save / rescuse someone whilst they are in the midst of their suffering, while the *word anja* means to save/spare someone before their suffering commences. The first means they were rescued from the midst of suffering, whilst the second means they were spared / delivered from Pharaoh’s torment altogether. So the blessing God bestowed on them took place in two stages: the first stage was that He saved them from a torment which was being inflicted on them, and the second stage was that He took them far away from Pharaoh’s people so that this torment could not continue.

God says, ‘…who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement….’ What is cruelty? It means here that their suffering was of many kinds, such as flogging, enslavement, and forced labour. What does the verb *yasum* (‘afflict’) mean? If someone afflicts their enemy, it means they humiliate and degrade them. The word is derived from the verb *sam* (meaning to leave cattle to graze, from which came the word for the ‘abandoned’ cattle). So if it is said that Pharaoh afflicted (*yasum*) the Israelites with cruel suffering, this means that their entire lives were filled with degradation and torment. And so, when God speaks about the Pharaonic rulers of Ancient Egypt, He mentions the Pharaohs who lived in the time of the tribes of ‘Ad and Thamud. He *the Exalted* takes an oath by the daybreak and the ten nights, by the even and the odd, and the night as it runs its course. Truly in all that there is an oath for someone endowed with reason. Then the True Lord puts forth a rhetorical question on how He dealt with the tribe of ‘Ad, the people of Iram of the many-pillared lofty buildings, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land, and with the tribe of Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley, and with Pharaoh of the many poles, who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein (*al-Fajr:* 1-12). That is, God mentioned the Pharaonic civilisation and the Ancient Egyptians after ‘Ad and Thamud, which is evidence that the civilisations of ‘Ad and Thamud were older. God described ‘Ad by saying that none like them were ever created in the land, i.e. that they had a more advanced civilisation than that of Ancient Egypt. Some people might ask how it could be that God would describe ‘Ad by saying that none like them were ever created in the land, even though today there are very advanced civilisations.

We say that God has exposed to us the Pharaonic civilisation and its vestiges, but has hidden from us the civilisation of ‘Ad; and we have found in the Pharaonic civilisation things that even until now we have not matched, such as their expertise in embalming and mummifying bodies, and their construction of the pyramids, among other things. And since the civilisation of ‘Ad was even more advanced than that of the Pharaohs, it must have attained to secrets which even now are hidden in this world, yet we know nothing about this because God has not shown us any of their traces.

The True Lord spoke about the Pharaonic civilisation as a whole using the name Pharaoh, and referred to those living in the time of Moses *peace be upon him* as Pharaoh’s people; but concerning the time between Joseph and Moses *peace be upon them* He did not refer to any of the rulers of Egypt as Pharaoh, but rather used the term ‘the king’ to refer to them and used the term ‘Al-‘Aziz’ to refer to the chief minister, who answered only to the king. In narrating the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*, the True Lord says that the King commanded that Joseph be brought before him (*Yusuf:* 50).

So the ruler at the time of Joseph *peace be upon him* was called king, not pharaoh, even though the rulers of Egypt before and after Joseph *peace be upon him* were called pharaohs. This is because before the time of Joseph *peace be upon him* Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos, a Semitic people who invaded Egypt and defeated the Pharaohs, and ruled Egypt for years before the Pharaohs rose up and expelled them.

It is amazing that this story was unknown until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone by the French and the subsequent deciphering of Hieroglyphic writing. The kings of the Hyksos were originally shepherds who came to rule Egypt for a time; and so we see that in the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*, God says that the King ordered Joseph to be brought before him, and so we see that the Noble Quran tells with precision the story of every ruler of his era, and calls the Pharaohs by their name of Pharaoh, and then when the Hyksos came there, was no pharaoh, but rather, there were kings, and then when Moses *peace be upon him* came, the Pharaohs had returned to power in Egypt. And so, although we knew nothing of this until the Rosetta Stone was found at the end of the eighteenth century, the Quran chronicled it correctly fourteen centuries ago, and this is a miracle which can be added to the manifold miracles of the Noble Quran where it mentioned something which was unknown at the time of its Revelation and which has become known to us now so that we find that the Quran chronicled it with complete accuracy.

After speaking of the difference between *najjayna* and *anjayna*, let us move on to the difference between ‘slaughtering your sons’ and ‘killing your sons’. Slaughtering is not the same as killing, as slaughtering involves the spilling of blood, and is usually performed by cutting the arteries in the neck. Slaying, on the other hand, might be achieved by slaughtering in this manner or by any other means, such as strangling or drowning. This is all considered killing, and it does not necessarily involve spilling of blood.

The True Lord wants to alert us to the fact that when Pharaoh wanted to take revenge on the Israelites, there were two things for which he wanted vengeance. The first was that they were the allies of the Hyksos, and they aided them in their occupation of Egypt. The king of the Hyksos took Joseph *peace be upon him* as his minister, and so it seems that the Hyksos were allies of the Israelites. So when the Pharaohs defeated them, they exacted revenge upon the Israelites in any way they could, killing them and burning down their houses.

As for the slaughtering mentioned in God’s words ‘slaughtering your sons,’ Pharaoh had a vision of fire rising from the direction of Jerusalem and burning all the Egyptians with only the Israelites surviving. When Pharaoh asked for an interpretation of the dream, the soothsayers told him that a boy from the descendants of Israel would come, at whose hands would be the end of his reign. And so Pharaoh commanded the midwives to slaughter every male child born to the Israelites. But the people of power among Pharaoh's subjects said, 'The Israelites are almost extinct, and we need them to serve us.' He therefore decreed that one year there would be a slaughter, and the next year the male children would be left to live. Aaron *peace be upon him* was born in the year of amnesty and so was safe, whilst Moses *peace be upon him* was born in the year of slaughter, and there followed what followed.

So the reason for slaughtering was Pharaoh's fear of losing his kingdom; that was why he commanded that the method used to be slaughtering in order to ensure the death of the boys. If they had used another way, like throwing them from a mountain or striking them with a heavy stone, or stabbing them with a sword or a spear, some boys might have survived; but by using slaughtering as the method of execution they could be sure that death would be instantaneous and that none would survive.

The True Lord says, '…who had afflicted you with a cruel chastisement: slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live….' The word 'son' means males, whilst the word 'child' means both males and females. So the slaughtering was for the boys only, whilst they left the females to live.

But why did the True Lord not say 'slaughtering your boys and sparing your girls,' instead of 'slaughtering your sons and letting only your women live…'? The True Lord wants to draw our attention to the fact that the purpose of this was to keep the females alive so that Pharaoh's people could have enjoyment of them, and so He did not use the word 'girls,' but rather 'women', i.e. they wanted them for their own pleasure, and the purpose of this was to torment the Israelites; for nothing kills a man's manliness like seeing his women subjected to vile acts.

The True Lord then says, '…and in this was a great trial from your Lord.' What is a trial (*bala'*)? Some people think that a trial means an ordeal or an evil thing, yet God, in another verse, addresses people saying that He tests them through the bad and the good things of life by way of trial; and to Him they all must return (*al-Anbiya':* 35).

So there are trials of good and trials of evil, and 'trial' in itself is not something that should be feared. What is to be feared, however, is the result of this trial because a trial is a test and an assessment: If you pass it and succeed in it, it is good for you; if you do not pass it, it is bad for you. The True Lord says that He subjected His 'Friend' Abraham *peace be upon him* to trial by His commands, and when Abraham fulfilled them, God said that He shall make him an Imam (a leader) of men (*al-Baqara*: 124).

So Abraham *peace be upon him* passed the test. Trials came to the Israelites from two directions: trials of evil in the form of their suffering and the slaughter of their sons, and trials of good in the form of their being saved from Pharaoh's people. The Israelites passed the first test, and bore their suffering and subjugation with steadfast patience though it was an awesome trial; but as for the second trial, they did things which we will mention presently.

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمُ ٱلْبَحْرَ فَأَنجَيْنَٰكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَآ ءَالَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنتُمْ تَنظُرُونَ ٥٠

And when We parted the sea for you, so saving you and drowning Pharaoh's people right before your eyes [50] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 50)

Here again we have the word 'when,' and the verse makes mention of their being saved and the means and manner of this salvation. Moses *peace be upon him* and his people made their escape, and they were six hundred thousand strong, as the narrations relate. Pharaoh learned of their departure and so followed them with an army numbering one million men. When Moses' people saw them, as the Noble Quran tells us, they complained to Moses that they had suffered hurt before he came to them and since he had come to them (*al-A'raf:* 129). And Moses *peace be upon him*, as the Quran tells us, replied that it may well be that their Lord will destroy their foe and make them inherit the earth, and then He will see how they will act (*al-A'raf:* 129).

When Pharaoh and his men, with their great strength and numbers, came to face Moses' people, and the two sides saw one another, the people of Moses *peace be upon him* cried out that they shall certainly be overtaken (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 61).

This is a logical concern, seeing that the sea was in front of them and Pharaoh and his forces were behind them; but when things are removed from the ordinary chain of causality and placed within the power of the Causer of all things, they do not come under natural causality, and so Moses *peace be upon him* said to them with confidence that indeed this is not the case: his Lord is with Him, and He will guide him (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62).

And with this, the matter departed from the chain of causality to be under the control of the Causer *the Exalted*. Ordinarily, of course, Pharaoh and his hordes would have overrun them; but God would intervene and make for them a way to be saved.

So God inspired Moses *peace be upon him* to strike the sea with his staff, and so it parted; thus were the laws of water, namely free flow and liquidity, contravened. The sea parted, each side rising like a mountain, the atoms of water clinging to one another to make two great mountains between which lay a dry strip for the Israelites to pass through. This is the meaning of God's words: 'And when we parted the sea for you,' for a parting means a separation between two things. If the sea did part, then where did the soft wet sands of the sea bed go? It is said that God sent a wind to dry it, which is the import of the statement of the True Lord about making out for them a dry path through the sea (*Ta Ha:* 77).

It is said that when Moses *peace be upon him* and his people were traversing the path through the sea, they asked about the rest of their people. Moses *peace be upon him* told them that they were passing through another path running parallel to their own. They said, 'We want to be sure about them.' So Moses *peace be upon him* raised his hand to the heaven and said, 'O God, help me deal with their rudeness!' So God inspired Moses *peace be upon him* to strike the walls with his staff, and so a gap opened between each passage so that they could all see each other.

When Moses *peace be upon him* saw Pharaoh and his army coming to the sea to chase them through it, he wanted to strike the water to make it flow again so that Pharaoh's people would not catch them. But God inspired him to leave the sea as it was since, verily, they are a host destined to be drowned (*ad-Dukhan:* 24). That is, leave the sea as it is so that Pharaoh's people will follow you, thinking that they too can pass through the dry strip safely. And then, when the first of them comes close to where you are at the far shore and the last of them had just left the other, I shall return the water to its liquid state, and will thereby have saved you and destroyed them by the same means. So the True Lord wants here to remind the Israelites of the fact that He saved them from suffering and destroyed their enemy; so the one blessing was in fact two blessings: a positive blessing in that He saved them and a negative blessing in that He destroyed their enemy.

God says, '…while you were looking on.' In this verse, the True Lord does not mention Pharaoh, but rather only mentions the drowning of Pharaoh's people. Why is this? It is because it was Pharaoh's people who aided him in his tyranny and his oppressive ways, and they were the tool by which he inflicted suffering upon the Israelites. God wanted the Israelites to see Pharaoh's people being drowned, and so they stopped to witness this. If you see your enemy meet his end, you feel the bitterness in your heart fade away. The words '…while you were looking on' could also have another meaning, which is that you looked at one another in amazement that you had been saved from this awesome trial, and yet at the same time you were relieved because you were witnessing it for yourselves; and they all drowned without any of them being spared so that no doubt would enter your hearts that perhaps some of them had survived and would return with another army to follow you.

وَإِذْ وَٰعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰٓ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ثُمَّ ٱتَّخَذْتُمُ ٱلْعِجْلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ وَأَنتُمْ ظَٰلِمُونَ (٥١)

**We appointed forty nights for Moses [on Mount Sinai]
and then, while he was away, you took to worshipping
the calf – a terrible wrong [51] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 51)**

The True Lord says 'And when We appointed for Moses a time of forty nights….' The purpose of this appointment was to reveal to Moses *peace be upon him* the teachings of the religion. When God spoke directly to Moses *peace be upon him* on the mountainside of at-Tur, this was in order to tell Moses that he was one of the Messengers of the Lord of the worlds, and that He had sent him to save the Israelites from the tyranny and torment of Pharaoh, and that He would aid him with signs and miracles so that Pharaoh and his people would be convinced that Moses *peace be upon him* was a Messenger of God. Moses *peace be upon him* was given this mission and sent to Pharaoh, and the incident with the sorcerers took place, and Moses and his people were saved by God parting the sea for them. All this took place at a time before the teachings of the religion were revealed; and so after saving Moses *peace be upon him* and his people and drowning Pharaoh, it was now time for God to complete the imparting of His teachings to Moses. The appointment took place over forty nights, which at first were set to be thirty, before the True Lord completed them with an additional ten nights, as explained by the statement of God that He appointed for Moses thirty nights and then He added to them ten, whereby the term of forty nights set by his Lord was fulfilled (*al-A'raf:* 142).

When time is mentioned in a religious context, it is always mentioned in terms of nights. This is because you cannot ascertain the date during the day; the sun rises, then sets, and then rises again. If you look at the disc of the sun, you cannot ascertain what time of the month we are in, whether the beginning, middle, or end. But when night falls, simply by glancing at the moon you can ascertain what date it is. If the moon is a crescent this means we are in the first days of the month and if it is full we are in the middle, and so on.

There are very specific phases of the moon which people use to measure time; any regular person is able to approximate the date for you by night, and a Bedouin in the desert can tell you the exact day of the month using the moon. So when a religious matter is concerned, we measure everything by night: on the first evening of *Ramadan* we perform the *Tarawih* prayers (special night prayers in *Ramadan*), whilst on the night before the feast (*Eid Al-fitr*) we do not pray it; and we speak of the middle night of the month of *Sha'ban*, and the night of the Night of Ascension (*Laylat al-Mi'raj*).

So, night is not considered an auxiliary to the day in any of our religious dates except for the Day of *'Arafa;* we do not say 'the night of *'Arafa'*, but rather, we call it the Day of *'Arafa.* So night is considered the beginning of a date in our religion, and God decreed that time would be measured by twelve lunar months which make up a full year. So the Christian year is different from the *Hijra* year, and the reason for this is that God has distributed His mercy throughout His creation. If our religious occasions were determined by the solar calendar, *Ramadan,* for example, would always come in the same solar month, never changing, and so people would have to fast every year in summer in certain places and in winter in other places, and this would never change. So *Ramadan* would always fall in the heat of summer for some people and in the cold of winter for others.

But as the *Hijra* year is determined by the movement of the moon, this means that all of God's times of blessing in His creation come at all the different times of year; *Ramadan* falls in both summer and winter, as does the Standing at '*Arafa*, as do all the other blessed religious occasions because the *Hijra* year is twelve days shorter than the Christian year, and there occurs a full year's difference every thirty-three years.

The True Lord says, '…then you took the calf [for a god] after him and you were unjust.' God wants to test the Israelites and to show us how they showed ingratitude for the blessings of God. God saved them from Pharaoh's hordes; and they had scarcely crossed the sea when they saw a people who worshipped idols, and, as the Noble Quran tells us, asked Moses to set up for them a god as they have gods (*al-A'raf:* 138). This happened right after they emerged from the sea unharmed. Moses *peace be upon him* took his chiefs and went to meet his Lord, leaving his brother Aaron *peace be upon him* with the Israelites. When the Israelites had been in Egypt in the service of the women of the Pharaoh and his people, some of them had stolen their jewellery and gold. Now, despite the fact that Pharaoh and his people were rebels against God, this does not mean that it is was correct to steal their women's jewellery; we do not repay those who sin against God in their dealings with us by sinning against God in our dealings with them, thereby becoming sinners like them. Rather, we repay those who sin against God in their dealings with us by obeying God in our dealings with them.

When Abu Ad-Darda' (a Companion of the Prophet) God *be pleased with him* heard that someone had spoken ill of him, he sent them a note saying, 'O brother, do not go on reviling us, and give reconciliation a chance; for we do not repay those who sin against God in their dealings with us with anything more than by obeying God in our dealings with them.' The Israelites stole some jewellery from the women of Pharaoh's people, and so God made this jewellery a means of their temptation, and Satan made it seem alluring to them to fashion a calf from this jewellery and then to worship it. Moses the Samaritan, who was raised by the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him*, made the calf for them, taking the golden jewellery and melting it to make it into the shape of a calf which made a lowing sound, and said to them, ‘This is your God and the God of Moses.’

Do you know why God subjected them to the trial of the calf? It is because the gold from which the calf was made was unlawfully earned, and nothing good can ever come from the unlawful. We must learn a lesson from this event, which is that ill-gotten earnings turn against the perpetrators and bring them evil and wickedness. If your food is unlawful it will enter into the fabric of your cells, and so your body will contain that which is unlawful; and once the unlawful enters your body, your actions will incline towards that which is unlawful. So the unlawful influences the body and leads it further towards the unlawful. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘God is good, and does not accept but what is good. And God has ordered the believers to do that which He had ordered the messengers to do. God the Exalted has ordered the Messengers to eat from that which is good and to do that which is good (*al-Mu’minun:* 51); and, likewise, He ordered the believers to eat from that which is good, which He has provided’ (*al-Baqara*: 172). [The Prophet then proceeded] to mention that a man, long travelled, dishevelled, and covered with dust, stretching his two hands to Heaven [praying and saying], ‘O Lord … o Lord,’ and his food [comes from what] is prohibited, and his drink [comes from what] is prohibited, and his clothing [comes from what] is prohibited, and he is nourished by what is prohibited; how is he to be granted his prayer?!(1)

The very same thing happened with the Israelites. They stole gold from Pharaoh’s people and so it was a source of evil for them, and God said of them, ‘…then you took the calf [for a god] after him and you were unjust.’

As scholars say, God’s appointment with Moses *peace be upon him* was for thirty nights, and after the thirty nights have been completed, He would give him what He promised; the word *wa‘d* (‘promise’) means to tell someone of a coming good, whilst the word *wa‘id* (‘threat’) means to tell someone of a coming evil. If you hear the word ‘promise’, you know that what comes next will be good, whereas if you hear the word 'threat' you know that what comes next will be bad; except for one verse in the Quran where God says that He has promised the fire to those who were unbelievers (*al-Hajj:* 72).

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi*

Is the promise here of a good thing, or is the meaning different? We say: if the fire is what is being promised, then it is bad; but if the fire is receiving the promise and it is the disbelievers who are being promised to it, then the disbelievers are good for the fire because the fire will rejoice in punishing the disbelievers of God's servants, and we know about this from God's words telling usthat on the Day of judgement, He will ask hell if it has had its fill, and it will answer with a question asking if there is still more (*Qaf:* 30).

No one asks for more of something unless they like it. The fire, like all subjugated creations in the universe, praises God and hates the sinners. But it is not commanded to burn them in this world, and so in the Hereafter it will rejoice while it burns the disbelievers and sinners.

ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Even then We forgave you, so that
you might be thankful [52]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 52)

God *the Most High* once again reminds the Israelites of His blessings upon them: although they committed the absolute peak of sin in worshipping other than God, still God pardoned them because He wanted the element of good to remain in His creation, and He wanted them to know that He is a Merciful Lord, who opens the door to repentance for one person after another in order to efface the traces of evil from the human soul.

When a person sins, he strays from the purpose of faith. If there were no establishment of repentance and forgiveness from God, people would sin more and more until they are submerged in sin because if there were no way to repent, and a single sin would lead to hell, people would feel certain of being punished, and so would continue in their sinfulness. God *the Most High* does not want this for His servants; and the Noble Hadith says, 'Verily, God is more pleased with His servant's repentance than one of you who has found his camel after he had lost it in wilderness.'(1) The meaning of this is that if a man has a camel which carries his possessions and his food and drink and all that he has, and then, he loses it in the middle of the barren desert and so searches for it, but he does not find it; he has lost it, and lost with it everything he needs to live; then he looks and sees it before him. How great will his joy be? Of course his joy will be limitless. This is the joy of God for the repentance of His believing servant; indeed His joy is even greater.

When God *the Most High* opens the door to repentance, He wants the movement of the world to proceed. Imagine if a person was heedless just once, or was tempted by his desires to sin just once, or Satan whispered to him as he whispered to Adam and Eve God *be pleased with them*; if there were no possibility of repentance and forgiveness, every one of these people would turn into a demon.

Moreover, great good deeds can come from those who wrong themselves because, pushed by their feelings of guilt, they go on to do many good deeds to make up for their mistakes, as God *the Most High* has decreed that good deeds take away evil deeds; this is a reminder to the mindful (*Hud:* 114).

And He *the Exalted* commands His Messenger to take alms from the properties of the believers that would cleanse them and purify them (*at-Tawba:* 103).

So God pardoned the Israelites after they committed the ultimate disbelief by worshipping the calf because He wanted the force of good to remain in His creation. The Israelites worshipped the calf before the teachings of the religion, namely the Torah, had been revealed to them. But after the Torah was revealed to them, did they repent and reform themselves, or did they persist in their disobedience and stubbornness?

وَإِذۡ ءَاتَيۡنَا مُوسَى ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡفُرۡقَانَ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَهۡتَدُونَ ٥٣

Remember when We gave Moses the Scripture, and the means to distinguish [right and wrong], so that you might be guided [53] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 53)

Here, the True Lord *the Most High* reminds the children of Israel that after He showed them so many miracles, and saved them from Pharaoh's people, and parted the sea for them, they should have had true faith which would not be caused to waver by anything; for they had seen and witnessed for themselves, and had witnessed with their own eyes, with complete certainty. But was this witnessing enough to remove the hypocrisy and disbelief from their hearts? No. They continued to be obstinate throughout their entire history, never accepting anything easily.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* warned his community not to be like the children of Israel, and not to be hard in accepting God's commands, which would entail rigour of God on them. This was the case with the story of the cow which they were commanded to slaughter in order to establish who had committed a murder which almost caused a civil war between them. They began to ask about the correct colour for the cow, and so on; we will get to this when we reach the noble verses concerning this story. Had they simply slaughtered any cow it, would have sufficed them because it would have been enough that when God *the Most High* said to them 'Slaughter a cow' that they simply slaughter any cow. The fact that this cow was not specified in detail made things easy for them, but they asked for specifics and kept asking, and so things became harder for them by specifying a certain cow. That is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave me (do not ask me questions) as long as I leave out (omit) giving you instructions. Those who came before you have but perished due to their excessive questioning and their differences with their prophets. When I instruct you to do something, do of it what you can; and when I forbid you something, keep away from it.'(1)

God *the Most High* says, 'And when We gave Moses the Book and the standard of distinction [between right and wrong]…' meaning that the fact that Moses *peace be upon him* was given the scripture and the standard, was a blessing which his people should remember, and that they should receive God's teachings as a blessing.

A person should not take the Divine commandments thinking that they are just something which restricts his freedom and does not give him anything in return. When God forbids you from stealing, for example, He forbids everyone else from stealing from you as well; so if your freedom to steal has been taken from you, the freedom for all others to steal from you has also been taken from them – and this is a great source of protection for you.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

What is the ‘Book’ and what is ‘the standard of distinction [between right and wrong]’? The Book is the Torah which delineated God’s teachings; and the standard is everything by which God clarifies the difference between truth and falsehood. So the phrase ‘the standard of distinction [between right and wrong]’ is used to mean the Torah because it distinguished between truth and falsehood, and also to mean everything by which truth can be distinguished from falsehood. And so the day of the Battle of Badr is called ‘the Day of the Standard of Distinction’ because on that day truth was distinguished from falsehood. So God’s teachings and His Book show us where the truth is and where falsehood is, and show us the difference between them.

وَإِذۡ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوۡمِهِۦ يَٰقَوۡمِ إِنَّكُمۡ ظَلَمۡتُمۡ أَنفُسَكُم بِٱتِّخَاذِكُمُ
ٱلۡعِجۡلَ فَتُوبُوٓاْ إِلَىٰ بَارِئِكُمۡ فَٱقۡتُلُوٓاْ أَنفُسَكُمۡ ذَٰلِكُمۡ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡ عِندَ
بَارِئِكُمۡ فَتَابَ عَلَيۡكُمۡۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ٥٤

Moses said to his people, ‘My people, you have wronged yourselves by worshipping the calf, so repent to your Maker and kill [the guilty among] you. That is the best you can do in the eyes of your Maker.’ He accepted your repentance: He is the Ever Relenting and the Most Merciful [54] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 54)

God *the Most High* reminds the Israelites here of the story of their worship of the calf, the story of a serious violation of God’s teachings and a violation of the pinnacle of faith, namely the worship of God Alone. What happened is that Moses *peace be upon him* went to his appointment with God, taking with him the chiefs of his people in order to receive the teachings and the Torah. God *the Most High* informed him that his people had gone astray and begun to worship other than God, and so Moses *peace be upon him* returned in a state of severe anger, and took hold of his brother Aaron *peace be upon him* and pulled him by the head and beard, saying to him ‘I left you in charge of them so that they would not go astray,’ and Aaron *peace be upon him* asked Moses (his half-brother, his mother’s son) not to seize him by his beard or by his head, and protested that he was afraid lest (on his return) Moses would accuse him of causing a split among the Children of Israel, and of not heeding his bidding (*Ta Ha:* 94).

The error of the worship of the calf was initiated by the Samaritan. His name was Musa (Moses) the Samaritan, and his mother gave birth to him in the desert and then died. So Gabriel *peace be upon him* adopted him and raised him. Gabriel *peace be upon him* would come to him on horseback bearing for him the food and drink he needed. Moses the Samaritan would see that whenever Gabriel's horse passed over the ground, soil would be thrown up by it, and the earth would give forth verdure after this soil had fallen onto it. He realised that there was some kind of secret in the horse's hoof, and so he took a handful of the soil left by the horse's trail and placed it into the golden calf, which then began to low as though it were alive.

Do not be surprised that a person who seeks to spread mischief might find aid from the means around him whereby he can beguile the people; for God *the Most High* tests His creatures, and He *the Exalted* provides special preparation to those who carry His message. Before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* moved to Medina, he and the Muslims were subjected to many trials. The event of the Night Ascension (*Laylat al-Mi'raj*) happened to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* after all his worldly means had been exhausted in Mecca and he had gone to At-Ta'if to call its people, and the slaves and imbeciles there met him with violence and pelted him with stones until his noble feet bled, and he raised his hands to the heaven and made the famous prayer: 'O God, to You I complain of my weakness, and my helplessness, and my lowliness before men…'

And not only the Messenger suffered this, but so too did all the believers. Mus'ab ibn 'Umair God *be pleased with him*, a pampered lad of Quraysh, who had such wealth, clothes and slaves as cannot be counted, ended up after his conversion to Islam having only a donkey's hide to wear. Such was the case so that the True Lord *the Most High* could test the love of faith in Mus'ab ibn 'Umair's heart: Did he love the things of this world more, or did he love God and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* more? And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would say to the Companions, 'Look at what faith has done to your friend.'

Those who would carry God’s message to the world have to be tested and examined; they have to be able to meet trials with steadfast patience and be strong before the enemies of this message, and be ready to bear struggle and pain; for this is the sign of true faith.

This is why you find that every false call brings benefit to the inner circle of those who make it: the call of communism, for instance, benefits the members of the central committee, whilst the large population wear cheap clothing and live in cramped houses. On the other hand, the leaders, who spend money beyond counting, are all members of the central committee. This is a false call. The opposite of this is the call to truth, wherein the one who delivers the message is the first to pay and the first to sacrifice, and he does not get any personal benefit from what he calls to, but rather on the contrary, he must sacrifice for the cause he is calling to. So falsehood brings benefit to those who call to it; and if you see any call bringing great benefit to those who make it, then know that it is a false calling. If it were not for the benefits it brings, no one would ever dream of following it.

The noble verse we are currently examining chronicles a reproach given by Moses *peace be upon him* to his people, whom God saved from Pharaoh’s people, and whose enemies He destroyed, and who then began worshipping the calf as a god. When did all this happen? It happened at the time when Moses *peace be upon him* had gone to his appointment with his Lord to receive His instructions. Those who took the calf as a god, did they wrong God *the Most High,* or did they wrong their own selves? They wronged themselves because they led themselves into ruin without benefitting anything. Wrongdoing is of different kinds. One person does wrong concerning the pinnacle of matters, whilst others do wrong concerning matters that are of auxiliary significance to this pinnacle. The one who does wrong concerning the pinnacle is the one who associates partners with God, as the noble verse asserts that setting up partners with God is a great injustice (*Luqman:* 13).

The connection between idolatry and injustice in this case is that you try and make one, who has neither created nor provided, and make it an associate with Him who did create and provide. And consider this thing which you have made into a god: How is it to be worshipped? Worship means for the worshipper to obey the worshipped, but what did this calf, which you worship instead of God, tell you to do? So you are wrongdoers against the pinnacle of all matters. The other kind of injustice is the wrong done against the commandments of this pinnacle, namely that you have taken the rights of others and allowed yourselves to steal them. In either case, it was not God *the Most High* who was wronged, but rather, you wronged yourself. Why? It is because whether you believe in God or not, God will remain the All-Powerful, the All-Capable, the Mighty. Your faith or lack of faith will not take anything from God's dominion, and then on the Day of Resurrection He will cause you to suffer. And so it is as though the wrongdoing or injustice you are committing is against yourself. And if you take the rights of other people, you might enjoy them for a few days, months, or years, and then you will die and leave them, and then endure your suffering. So it is as though you have wronged yourself, and not gained anything, and so the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* explains that the wrongdoers did no harm to Him; rather, they brought harm upon themselves (*al-Baqara*: 57).

So the wrongdoing of the unjust brings harm only to them because none of God's creatures can possibly wrong God *the Most High*. God *the Exalted* says: '…turn, then, in repentance to your Maker….' In a preceding verse, the True Lord *the Most High* tells the Children of Israel that He forgave them their sin (*al-Baqara*: 52), and in this verse He says '…turn, then, in repentance to your Maker.' This is because repentance is the basis of forgiveness: You repent from your sin and make a firm resolution never to do it again, and then God accepts your repentance and forgives you.

It is conceivable that God could have punished them for this sin and destroyed them as happened with previous nations. Yet for God to allow them to repent was a great blessing and act of forgiveness on His part. Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and mortify yourselves…' (Literally 'kill yourselves'.) Look at the precision of this command and the precision of its connection to its preamble: '…turn, then, in repentance to your Maker and mortify yourselves…' God *the Most High* was essentially saying to them: 'I did not vanquish a creator who created you, or take you from him; rather it was I who created you.' But the creator of something and the maker of it are two different things: To create means to bring something into existence out of nothing, whilst the maker is the one who shapes it into a sound form in the best way possible, and this is the import of the True Lord *the Most High* describing Himself as the One Who creates things and makes them complete and balanced, and Who makes things according to a measure, and then guides them towards their goals (*al-A'la:* 2-3). From this we know that creating is one thing and shaping the creation is another. The word 'maker' (*bari'*) is derived from the word for carving an arrow, which is a task that requires great delicacy and skill.

God *the Glorious and Exalted* said '…and mortify yourselves…' because you disbelieved in the One Who created you and formed you and worshipped something else, and so it is as though because of this you must return to Him the life He gave you. When this judgement of God *the Most High* was given, Moses *peace be upon him* made the Israelites stand in rows and said, 'Those who did not worship the calf must slay those who did.' But when they began to implement this command, they found their cousins and brothers and kinsfolk before them and so found it too difficult to go ahead with it. And so God had mercy on them and sent a mist to cover them so that they would not find any difficulty in obeying the command; and it is said that they executed seventy thousand of their own people. When this happened, Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* called upon their Lord and said to the people 'Weep!' so that perhaps God would pardon them. And so they stayed and wept by the Wailing Wall and so God had mercy on them. And He said to them '…mortify yourselves…' because it was these selves, with their desire and their disobedient nature, which had made them rebel against the religion.

The commandment of mortification here was an expiation for their sin, for those who worshipped the calf and set up a god besides God and then offered themselves up to be killed thereby, confessed that the calf they had worshipped was false, and so they thereby returned their souls, which had rebelled against God's teachings, to true worship. This is the harshest form of expiation, namely to kill oneself to prove one's belief that there is no god but God, and out of regret for what one has done, and to announce this openly. So it is as though this killing was proof that they had truly returned to faith.

God *the Most High* then says. '…this will be the best for you in your Maker's sight….' That is, this form of repentance is the most sincere form, and it is best because it will save you from the suffering of the Hereafter. And God *the Most High* says, '…And thereupon He accepted your repentance; for, He alone is the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Mercy.' The first evidence for His acceptance of your repentance is that He instituted expiation for your sin, and the second is that He accepted your repentance, and gave you an eternal pardon.

وَإِذۡ قُلۡتُمۡ يَٰمُوسَىٰ لَن نُّؤۡمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَى ٱللَّهَ جَهۡرَةٗ
فَأَخَذَتۡكُمُ ٱلصَّٰعِقَةُ وَأَنتُمۡ تَنظُرُونَ ٥٥

Remember when you said, 'Moses, we will not believe you until we see God face to face.' At that, thunderbolts struck you as you looked on [55] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 55)

After God pardoned Moses' people for worshipping the calf, they once again returned to their rebelliousness and their materialism. They wanted a material god, a god which they could see; but in His glory, God *the Most High* is Unseen and cannot be encompassed by vision, as He states that no human vision can encompass Him, and He encompasses all human vision, and He is the Knower of subtleties, the All-Aware (*al-An'am:* 103).

So the fact that God *the Most High* is beyond human perception is an aspect of His glory; but the Jews, who only believed in tangible, material things, could not comprehend with their minds or their hearts that God *the Most High* is beyond the material realm, and beyond human vision. This materialistic outlook is a foolish one. God *the Most High* has drawn our attention to the issue of seeing Him manifestly in this world when He addresses us saying that the signs for His existence are in our own selves, and urges us to reflect on them (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21). That is, God *the Glorious and Exalted* has placed the ultimate evidence of the existence of God, who cannot be encompassed by human vision, in the soul of every one of us, namely the spirit which resides in the body. Man was created from materials into which the spirit was breathed, whereupon he was quickened with life, movement and sensations. So the life in your body does not come from the materials which you can see, but rather from the spirit which you cannot perceive except by its effects – and once the spirit leaves, the life ends and the body becomes a corpse.

If you cannot perceive the spirit which dwells in your body and gives you life, even though it is there inside you, then how can you hope to perceive God *the Most High*? You should first ask God to allow you to see the spirit in your body; but God *the Most High* says that this spirit is one of His commands; when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the nature of the spirit, God commanded him to proclaim that the spirit is one of the commands of his Lord and that people were given but a little knowledge (*al-Isra':* 85).

If you cannot perceive the spirit-this creation of God-then how can you hope to perceive its Creator? Look at the precision of the Quranic discourse when God *the Glorious and Exalted* says, '…until we see God manifestly….' The word 'see' can be used to mean 'know,' and this usage is not uncommon in the Quran as in the question about having seen (known of) the one who has taken his desires as a god (*al-Furqan:* 43). In this verse, the verb 'see' means 'know.'

But in the verse we are discussing, the term 'manifestly' is added to show that the verb 'see' does not mean only knowledge here, but rather is a request for a clear vision which they could perceive with their physical senses. This is evidence that they are concerned with the material things upon which their lives were based. We say to such as them: Your request is marred by foolishness, for when you ask to see God face to face, this indicates that you already have some reason to believe in God's existence. And so you are asking to see Him in order to prove that which you already know to exist; but this would only be the case if you already knew whether God existed or not. The thing which encouraged them to say what they said is that Moses *peace be upon him* himself asked to see God *the Most High*, as we read in the Quran that Moses asked his Lord to show Himself to him, and God *the Most High* answered that he can never see Him. God, then, instructed him to watch the mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then Moses can see Him. And as soon as his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Moses fell down in a swoon… (*al-A'raf*: 143).

We must be aware that to see God *the Most High* in this world is not possible, and that there is no way for this to happen, whilst the spirit of a person still dwells in his body, because this body has certain laws concerning that which it can perceive. On the Day of Resurrection, however, we will be created with different constitutions: in this world the waste materials from our food must be expelled from our bodies, whilst in the Hereafter there will be no waste. This world is governed by time, whilst in the Hereafter there will be no time, and a person will remain young forever. So there will be a change.

The standards here are not the same as the standards of the Day of Resurrection. In this world, with your power and your body, you cannot see God; but in the Hereafter your power and your body will be sufficient that God *the Most High* will reveal Himself to you; and this is the ultimate blessing of the Hereafter. You live now under the effects of God's power, whilst in the Hereafter you will live as one who looks upon God *the Most High*; and the True Lord *the Most High* says that some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, looking up to their Lord (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23).

In this world, mankind has invented means of viewing objects which he cannot see with his naked eye. He can see minute things with a microscope, and distant things with a telescope. If the actions of mankind in this world have allowed him to see what he could not see before, what about the power of God in the Hereafter? If a person's eyesight fails, his doctor instructs him to wear glasses; whilst if he goes to a more skilled doctor, he will perform surgery on his eyes which will mean he can do without glasses and see well without them. So what about the preparations God has in store for His creatures by His omnipotent power, such that He can remake the eye so that it can enjoy the vision of His Noble Countenance?

God *the Most High* settled the matter with Moses *peace be upon him* by showing him human weakness; for the mountain, despite its enormity, could not bear the Light of God and so crumbled into dust. It is as though God wanted to make Moses *peace be upon him* understand that He *the Exalted* shielded him from His vision out of mercy for him because if this happened to the mountain then what might have happened to Moses *peace be upon him*? If Moses swooned just from seeing that to which God revealed Himself, what would have happened to him if he had seen God Himself?

If man is unable to perceive something in this world because he is created with certain limited capabilities, this inability to perceive is in itself a kind of awareness because the cause of this inability to perceive is part of God’s glory. When the people of Moses *peace be upon him* asked him that they be allowed to see God face to face, they were struck by a thunderbolt as they looked on. When they dared to speak of God, a thunderbolt struck them. Thunderbolt here means either fire or some other kind of punishment from God; what matters is that it was a calamity which blinded them – and it affected Moses *peace be upon him* too.

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَٰكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Then We revived you after your death,
so that you might be thankful [56]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 56)

So the True Lord *the Most High* here gives the next episode in the story of those who said ‘Show us God manifestly,’ and so the thunderbolt of punishment overtook them. Moses *peace be upon him* was also affected by the thunderbolt when he asked to see God, but there was a difference between the two situations. God *the Most High* tells us that Moses fell down in a swoon, but when he came to, he said, ‘Glory be to You, I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first of the believers’ (*al-A‘raf*: 143). But this was not the case with Moses’ people. In the case of Moses *peace be upon him*, he came to after falling in a swoon, and this implies that the thunderbolt made him unconscious in some way; however, as for Moses’ people, God *the Most High* says, ‘Then we raised you up after your death…’ implying that Moses’ people actually died from the thunderbolt. Moses *peace be upon him* woke up by himself, whilst those of his people who were affected by the thunderbolt died, and then God raised them up that they might give thanks.

وَظَلَّلۡنَا عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡغَمَامَ وَأَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡمَنَّ وَٱلسَّلۡوَىٰۖ كُلُواْ مِن
طَيِّبَٰتِ مَا رَزَقۡنَٰكُمۡۚ وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ يَظۡلِمُونَ ٥٧

We made the clouds cover you with shade, and sent manna and quails down to you, saying, 'Eat the good things We have provided for you.' It was not Us they wronged; they wronged themselves [57] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 57)

God *the Most High* wants to remind the children of Israel of His blessings and His miracles, and to show us that despite all these blessings the children of Israel continued to live in their obstinacy and their stubbornness. After the children of Israel asked to see God manifestly and the thunderbolt killed them all and then God *the Most High* brought them back to life so that they would give thanks, the True Lord *the Exalted* then tells us of another blessing which He gave to the Children of Israel, saying: Remember when you were in the desert and there was no shade under which you could shelter from the harsh rays of the sun, and there was no place to seek shade because there was no water or plants in the desert; and so God *the Most High* sent you clouds to shade you, i.e. clouds came to you as a mercy from God *the Most High* and then came the manna and the quails.

Manna is red lichen which gathers on the leaves of trees between dawn and sunrise, and it can still be found even now in Iraq. Early in the morning, people come with white sheets and lay them under the trees, and then shake them forcefully so that the buds on the leaves fall onto the sheets. They then gather them up, and use them to make one the most delicious sweets, with the taste of cream and the sweetness of honey. It is a tasty and nourishing dessert which is digested easily and quickly absorbed by the body. God *the Most High* made this manna the basic fuel for the lives of the children of Israel and a source of strength for them when they were in the desert. As for quails, it is a kind of bird which came to them in large numbers from an unidentified place, and stayed on the ground so that they could take them and slaughter them for food.

God *the Most High* gave them clouds to protect them from the sun's heat, and gave them these provisions of manna to give them strength to live, and quails to nourish them, and all of this came to them from the sky without any effort on their part. But because of their lack of faith in the Unseen, they wanted something material, and feared that the manna and quails would cease coming to them one day; and then what would they do? If they were true believers, they would have said, 'He who provided us with the manna and quails would not abandon us;' but the True Lord *the Exalted* sent them food daily from the heavens, and instead of meeting this blessing with gratitude, they met it with denial.

God *the Exalted* says, '…they did not do Us any harm; rather, they were harming themselves.' For the third time, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks here of the sinfulness and *injustice* (*zhulm*) of the people of Moses *peace be upon him*. The first time, He said, '…and you were unjust' (*al-Baqara*: 51), and the second time He said, '…Verily, you have sinned against yourselves…' (*al-Baqara*: 54), and in this verse He says, '…they did not do Us any harm; rather, they were harming themselves' (*al-Baqara*: 57).

I said before that no one can wrong God because God *the Most High* is eternally Powerful, Omnipotent, and Glorious, and it would not take anything away from Him if everyone in the world were to disbelieve in Him, and it would not add anything to Him if everyone in the world were to believe. God's power is eternal, and His decree is unassailable. Rather, when we disbelieve, we are the ones who wrong ourselves by leading ourselves into ruin and suffering from which there is no escape, without benefitting ourselves anything at all.

As we have said before, this world is a world of constant change, and the bounties you now enjoy are certain to leave you, either by you parting from them by dying or by them parting from you by ending. When you leave this world, you will carry with you nothing but your deeds alone. Everything will end, but your sins will remain for you to carry to the Hereafter. And so everyone who disobeys God and rebels against His religion thereby wrong themselves because they lead themselves into eternal suffering out of desire for influence or wealth which ceases to exist after a brief time and does not last long. And so it is as though they wrong their own selves by denying them eternal bliss and giving them a brief and temporary pleasure instead.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا ٱدْخُلُوا۟ هَٰذِهِ ٱلْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا۟ مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ رَغَدًا وَٱدْخُلُوا۟ ٱلْبَابَ
سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا۟ حِطَّةٌ نَّغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطَٰيَٰكُمْ ۚ وَسَنَزِيدُ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

Remember when We said, ‘Enter this town and eat freely there as you will, but enter its gate humbly and say, “Relieve us!” Then We shall forgive you your sins and increase the rewards of those who do good’ [58] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 58)

From this noble verse we see that the children of Israel refused their divinely-ordained provisions of manna and quails even though it was an exalted provision: exalted in its goodness, for it was a sweet, clean, delicious food which came to them directly from the heavens; and exalted in its abundance, for it came to them in great quantities which met their needs without any effort on their part, and indeed exceeded them. But they asked Moses *peace be upon him* for the food of the land which they farmed with their own hands and saw in front of them every day because they were afraid that they would wake up one day and find no manna or quails. The True Lord *the Most High* provides the missing part of the story in a coming verse where He reminds the Israelites of when they told Moses *peace be upon him* that they would not endure just one kind of food and asked him to pray to his Lord that He would bring forth for them of what the earth grows: of its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils, its onions. Moses asked them if they would exchange that which is worse for what is better; then they should go down to Egypt, and in it they can have what they are asking for (*al-Baqara*: 61).

God *the Most High* is still reminding the children of Israel of the blessings He granted them and how they met them with ingratitude. He reminded them of how He saved them from the torment of Pharaoh’s people; and He reminded them of how the sea parted in two for them so they could pass through it, and then the waters closed over Pharaoh’s people and drowned them; and He reminded them of how they then took to worshipping the calf after this. It was possible that God would have utterly destroyed them on account of their sins, just as He destroyed the previous nations; but He pardoned them. Then He reminded them of the grace He extended to them by giving them the scripture which distinguished between truth and falsehood; and He reminded them of how they asked to see God manifestly and so were struck down and died, and then He raised them back to life; and He reminded them of how He shaded them with clouds from the heat of the burning sun, and provided them with manna and quails; and then He reminded them that they sought the foods of the land and so He answered their request.

In the verse we are discussing presently, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and eat therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully…', whilst in a previously discussed verse, in addressing Adam and his wife, He *the Exalted* says, '…and eat therefrom plentifully wherever you may wish…' (*al-Baqara*: 35). The difference is that the expression 'therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully' suggests that there were many different kinds of food. In the case of 'therefrom plentifully wherever you may wish' the implication is that the people were hungry and so they were willing and prepared to eat only one kind of food. When the True Lord *the Most High* says 'eat plentifully', He is addressing one of two different kinds of people: For those who are not hungry, many different kinds of food are prepared for them to tempt them to eat, and so in this case the expression 'wherever you may wish' comes first, and so He says, '…and eat therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully' (*al-Baqara*: 58); whilst if a person is hungry he will accept any kind of food, and so it is said, '…and eat therefrom plentifully wherever you may wish' (*al-Baqara*: 35).

And so in the Noble Quran, it is not simply a matter of linguistic fronting and postponing (placing some words first and others second), but rather, the meaning is only properly expressed with this particular order.

God *the Most High* says, 'Enter this city,' and the city mentioned here is Jerusalem, or Palestine, or Jordan. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…and enter the gate with prostrations, and say, "Forgiveness", and We will pardon you your sins, and give an increase to the doers of good.'

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* shows us here that when He addressed them they were not in a state of severe hunger such that they would have been prepared to eat anything. He *the Exalted* said, '…and eat therefrom wherever you may wish plentifully…', i.e. you shall find there many different kinds of food which shall tempt you to eat, even if you are not hungry. And God *the Most High* says, '…enter the gate with prostrations…', i.e. enter it in the state of utmost humility, '…and enter the gate with prostrations, and say, "Forgiveness …', i.e. 'o Lord, forgive us our sins.' But they even contravened this commandment, and covered the truth with falsehood, which is one of their distinctive traits. And so, when they entered the gate, they did not prostrate themselves in humbleness, but rather crawled in on their backs, even though what God had commanded them to do was less difficult than what they actually did. So it seems that they did not disobey because God's commandments were difficult, but rather because of their desire to disobey the commandments of the Creator. And instead of saying *hitta* which means 'forgiveness of sins,' they said *hinta,* which means 'wheat,' solely in order that they could say the word the way they wanted to. It was not that they were unable to obey, but rather, they desired to disobey.

And although the True Lord *the Most High* had promised them forgiveness, mercy, and amplified reward for the doers of good, they still disobeyed. God *the Most High* says that He will '…give an increase to the doers of good,' and we find this meaning in another noble verse where He *the Exalted* says that for those who do good, there is goodness and more in reward (*Yunus:* 26).

That is, they will have a reward akin to what they have done, and more besides. And what is this amplified reward? It is that they will see God on the Day of Resurrection which is a reward that has no equivalent in this life.

فَبَدَّلَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ قَوْلًا غَيْرَ ٱلَّذِى قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَى
ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ رِجْزًا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

But the wrongdoers substituted a different word from the
one they had been given. So, because they persistently
disobeyed, We sent a plague down from the heavens upon
the wrongdoers [59] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 59)

In this noble verse, God *the Most High* explains to us that the Jews were a people prone to disobedience despite the favours God has granted them. If God *the Most High* had commanded them with something they were unable to fulfil because it was too difficult for them; then perhaps they might have had an excuse; but God *the Most High* does not command anything unless it is within man’s capabilities, as He *the Exalted* says that He does not burden any soul with more than it is within its ability; in its favour shall be whatever good it acquires, and against it whatever evil it acquires (*al-Baqara*: 286).

God *the Most High* only commanded the children of Israel to enter this land which is said to be Jerusalem, or a village in Palestine or Jordan because they themselves had asked for this. They were the ones who asked Moses *peace be upon him* to beseech God to send them to a valley wherein there was arable land so that they could eat the produce of the soil and be secure that they had a source of food; for they feared that a day would come when no manna or quails would be sent to them from above. And when God *the Most High* answered their prayer and told them to enter the gate humbly and seek forgiveness for their sins, the children of Israel changed the saying, and said *(hinta)* instead of *(hitta);* and they changed their way of entering the land, and so instead of entering it whilst prostrating themselves in humility, they entered it crawling on their backs; and this was nothing but wilful disobedience. And so God afflicted them with suffering from above because of all their iniquity, that is, their straying from His instructions and failing to implement them out of wilful disobedience and stubbornness.

وَإِذِ ٱسْتَسْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِۦ فَقُلْنَا ٱضْرِب بِّعَصَاكَ ٱلْحَجَرَ ۖ
فَٱنفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ ٱثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا ۖ قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرَبَهُمْ ۖ
كُلُوا۟ وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ مِن رِّزْقِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

Remember when Moses prayed for water for his people and We said to him, ‘Strike the rock with your staff’. Twelve springs gushed out, and each group knew its drinking place. ‘Eat and drink the sustenance God has provided and do not cause corruption in the land’ [60] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 60)

The first part of this verse means: ‘Remember the time when Moses *peace be upon him* prayed for water for his people.’ We find this kind of phrase used in several verses as we have explained, such as when God *the Most High* reminds the children of Israel of the time He saved them from the people of Pharaoh who had laid on them a cruel chastisement (*al-A’raf:* 141). And when He *the Exalted* reminds the Israelites of when He appointed for Moses a time of forty nights (*al-Baqara*: 51). And when He *the Exalted* reminds them of when they told Moses that they would not believe him until they see God manifestly (*al-Baqara*: 55).

We said that these are all favours which God bestowed upon the Children of Israel, and of which He *the Exalted* is here reminding them, either directly or on the lips of Moses *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to remind the Children of Israel that when they were wandering in the desert, He shaded them with clouds, and gave them water when they asked for it.

The water shortage of which the children of Israel suffered had reached the point where they lacked even water to drink. The first stage of drought is that a person does not find enough water to irrigate his crops, and then he does not find enough to give to his livestock to drink, and then he does not find enough to drink himself, and this is the peak of the drought.

Moses *peace be upon him* asked God *the Most High* for water; and we do not ask God for water unless our means are entirely exhausted, and the final drop of water has been used up. Water is a source of life which God sends down from the sky, and He sends it down clean and pure and safe to drink and to use for irrigating crops and watering livestock.

God *the Most High* made three quarters of the earth water, and one quarter dry land so that the surface area of the water would be wide enough to facilitate evaporation by the rays of the sun easily. If you leave a cup of water in a closed room for two or three days you will find that no more than a few centilitres of the water will have evaporated, whilst if you pour the water on the floor of the room it will dry almost immediately. Why is this? It is because the surface area of the water is large, and so it evaporates quickly.

This is the same principle which applies to the macrocosm of this world. God *the Most High* made the surface area of the water cover three quarters of the earth so that it would evaporate quickly and easily, and so that the clouds would send down rain from which we could take what we need, and the rest would form springs within the earth as God *the Most High* draws our attention to the fact that it is He Who sends down water from the sky and then causes it to travel through the earth in springs (*az-Zumar:* 21).

These springs which we call ‘wells’ or ‘groundwater’ flow to places where no rain falls so that the people there can drink it and give it to their livestock. If a drought occurs, all the people go out, men and women, young and old, and pray to God with humility so that He will send them rain. If we seek God’s aid by the intermediary of the suckling infants and the weaklings among us, He sends us rain.

Some people say that rain falls according to fixed natural laws: Vapour rises from the seas to form clouds in the high levels of the atmosphere, and then rain falls, and this is the fixed natural law which determines rainfall. And they say that a cloud must be at a certain height in order for rain to fall from it, a height of so many metres so that it will be at the right temperature for the rain to fall, and that the cloud must be seeded in order for the rain to fall from it. We say that this is all linked to changing variables: The wind blows or does not blow, and it carries the clouds to high, cold areas, or it does not, and so on.

So every fixed thing is based on changing variables. You might know what a fixed natural law states, but you cannot predict what those variable things subject to laws of change will do. And God *the Most High* says that if people keep firmly to the path, He shall certainly give them water abundantly (*al-Jinn:* 16).

The means by which rain falls are not subject to fixed laws, but rather, the variable is the decisive factor which lifts the clouds to the required cold and high areas. We must be aware that the universe runs according to both fixed laws and changeable laws, and that the changeable laws are the ones which effect change.

God’s words ‘And when Moses prayed for water for his people…’ indicate that there was someone prayed to, and someone who prayed for rain. The One prayed to was God *the Most High*, who sends down rain. This role is exclusively God’s, for in this situation there are no stores of water, and there is no water under the ground in the form of springs, rivers, or wells, and there is no one to turn to but God, and so the people have no choice but to seek a means to God *the Most High*.

Anas *God be pleased with him* relates that at times of drought, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him*, after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, would seek an intermediary to God through Al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib *God be pleased with him* saying: ‘O Allah, we used to seek an intermediary to You through our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and You would give us rain; so (now) we seek an intermediary to You through the uncle of our Prophet, so send us rain!' And they would be sent rain.(1)

Some people say that this is evidence that it is not allowed to seek intercession from a dead person because 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* did not seek the intercession of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as an intermediary after his passing away, but rather used his uncle as an intermediary. To this we say: Who did 'Umar *God be pleased with him* take as an intermediary? Did he take Al-Abbas as a person in himself, or did he take him as the uncle of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*? He definitely took the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as an intermediary, and so this is a proof for us that it is not only the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* who can be taken as an intermediary, but also his relatives.

The question arises here as to why there was a shift from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to his uncle. We say that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had passed away and so he no longer benefitted from water, whilst his uncle Al-'Abbas *God be pleased with him* was still alive, and would benefit from water, and so intercession was sought through the uncle of the Messenger of God *God be pleased with him*. It would not have made sense to seek the intercession of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was deceased and did not require water. So to those who say that it is not right to seek those of high spiritual rank as intermediaries, we say: The Hadith is against you, not for you because it confirms that it is permissible to seek the intercession as intermediaries of those who are related to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We must consider this: After the children of Israel received all these blessings with ingratitude and thanklessness, why would the True Lord *the Most High* have sent them water? We say that it was because of the Prophetic Mercy which was the means of grace after grace being sent to the children of Israel. Moses' desire for God's mercy was limitless, and so he would pray time and time again for his people, and God would answer his prayers.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

It might have been expected that to give the full meaning, the verse should have given a detailed account: ‘And when Moses prayed to his Lord for water for his people and said, “O Lord, give them water”….’ But this was not mentioned and was rather left unsaid, and the answer to the prayer came right after it: ‘And when Moses prayed for water for his people, We said, “Strike the rock with your staff”….’ So his words ‘O Lord, give my people water’ and the fact that God answered his prayer is left unsaid because it can be clearly inferred from the context. The Quran only mentions the essential points, and leaves the things which can be inferred to the intelligence of the reader. We have another example of this kind of omission – where things are left to be inferred by the reader – in the chapter of *an-Naml*. The hoopoe travelled and saw Queen Bilqis and her throne, and then went back to Solomon *peace be upon him* to tell him about it, and Solomon *peace be upon him* ordered the hoopoe to carry a letter to the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) and her people, to throw the letter to them and then withdraw from them and see what answer they would return. She said, ‘O you nobles! A truly distinguished letter has been thrown to me’ (*an-Naml:* 28-29).

So Solomon *peace be upon him* commanded the hoopoe to deliver the letter to Bilqis and her people, and the very next verse reports her speech to her nobles. All of the details have been left unsaid (the hoopoe taking the letter and flying to the palace of the Queen of Sheba and throwing the letter down before her throne, and Bilqis noticing the letter and reading it, and calling her people to assemble and beginning to tell them the story of the letter). All of this has been left unsaid because it is understood from the context.

So Moses *peace be upon him* said ‘O Lord, send my people water’, and God *the Most High* must have said to him something like: ‘If you want water for your people….’ All of this is left unsaid, and the noble verse proceeds with: ‘We said, “Strike the rock with your staff”….’

‘…Strike the rock with thy staff ....’. We need to pause to reflect on this. When a person prays to God for water, he asks Him to send down rain from the sky. The True Lord *the Most High* was perfectly able to send down rain from the sky upon the children of Israel, but God *the Most High* wanted to send a miracle, and so it is as if He was saying, 'I will give you water, but from something which ordinarily gives you no water, namely the stones beneath your feet; I shall not give you water from the sky.' God *the Most High* wanted to show the children of Israel the extent of His miracles, and so He gave them water from the stones beneath their feet.

But let us think about this further: What would ordinarily be harmed by this blow? Would it be the rock or the staff? The staff would be the one to be damaged, and would break, whilst the rock would be left unharmed. But God *the Most High* wanted the rock to be cleaved with a single blow from the staff. A poet said:

O you who mocks the turns of fate,
It is yourself, not fortune, which you berate:
O you who strikes a rock with a staff,
Is it the rock or the staff you strike?

The fact that water sprang forth when the staff struck the rock indicates that the staff only had to point to the rock and the water would flow. Even if the staff had been made of iron, would it ordinarily have been able to make water flow from the rock? So the True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us that it was possible for Him to send down rain from the sky, but He wanted to send a composite blessing so that they would see that He was able to draw water from a hard rock, and that the flowing of water is governed by His word 'Be!'

We must look again here at the obstinacy of the children of Israel. They said to Moses *peace be upon him*, 'Suppose we are in a place where there are no stones: where will the water spring from? We must take the stone with us so that if we become thirsty, we can strike it with the staff.' They forgot that some things are obtained by observable means, whilst others are obtained merely by God's word 'Be!' So you might find, for example, that experienced doctors are unable to cure a patient, and then a newly qualified young doctor comes along and cures him. Did this young doctor know more than the ones who taught him? Of course, he did not not.

The pupil is not more knowledgeable than the one who teaches him, and so the cure did not come because of the material means alone, but rather came by the decree of the Creator of all means. And so the decreed cure came at the hands of a newly qualified doctor; God *the Most High* revealed to him the illness, and inspired him with the proper treatment.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and from it there gushed twelve fountains….' Why were there twelve springs? It was because the Jews were living in self-contained groups, each group from amongst them called a 'tribe,' and each with its own leader. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…all people knew their drinking place,' that is, each tribe went to their own fountain to drink. The fountains gushed forth from the rock and reached out to each tribe in their own places, and once they had taken what they needed, Moses *peace be upon him* struck the rock again and it stopped flowing. And so we know that the rock gave them as much water as they needed. No water came from the top of the rock where the staff struck, or from the bottom of the rock where it touched the earth, but from each of the other four sides of it came three springs.

There is a phenomenon in language known as homograph, which means a single word which has several different meanings. Let us take the Arabic word '*ain* as an example. If you say 'the people watered their livestock at the '*ain*,' the word '*ain* here means spring or fountain. But if you say 'The King sent his *''uyoun* (plural of '*ain*) to the city,' the word 'ain is used here to mean 'agent.' The word 'ain can also mean 'gold,' and it also means 'eye,' so if you say 'he looked with his '*ain,*' it means with his sight. So the one Arabic word *'ain* means many different things; in this verse, it means a spring of running water.

God's saying '…all people knew their drinking place' means that every tribe knew its place so that none of them would lose out on any water. But when a person is in need, he does everything that God commands him to do properly; but when God relieves his distress and he becomes comfortable again, he goes back to his wickedness. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* commanded them: '…Eat and drink of what God has supplied, and do not behave wickedly in the land by corrupt deeds.' That is, do not give thanks for this blessing perversely by spreading corruption on the earth. We have another example of this kind of situation (receiving God's bounties with ingratitude and pervert behaviour) in the case of the people of Sheba. Indeed, in the luxuriant beauty of their homeland, the people of Sheba had an evidence of God's grace – two vast expanses of gardens, to the right and to the left; they were encouraged to eat of what their

Lord has provided for them and render thanks to Him: a land most goodly, and a Lord much-forgiving. But they turned away, and so God *the Most High* let loose upon them a flood that overwhelmed the dams, and changed their two expanses of luxuriant gardens into a couple of gardens yielding bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few wild lote-trees (*Saba':* 15-16).

So we see that God *the Most High* provided for the people of Sheba, but they refused to give thanks to Him. They were very proud of the dam which preserved rain water for them, and gave them all the water they needed all year round, and they began to boast of their scientific prowess, forgetting that it was God Who taught them. And so this dam was the cause of the catastrophe that destroyed their crops. Likewise was the case with the children of Israel: It was said to them, 'Eat and drink of what God has supplied, and do not behave wickedly in the land by corrupt deeds,' but they spread corruption on the earth and forgot the blessing of God, and they deservedly brought suffering on themselves.

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَٰمُوسَىٰ لَن نَّصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَٰحِدٍ فَٱدْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا مِمَّا تُنۢبِتُ ٱلْأَرْضُ
مِنۢ بَقْلِهَا وَقِثَّآئِهَا وَفُومِهَا وَعَدَسِهَا وَبَصَلِهَا ۖ قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ ٱلَّذِى هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ
بِٱلَّذِى هُوَ خَيْرٌ ۚ ٱهْبِطُوا۟ مِصْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُم مَّا سَأَلْتُمْ ۗ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلذِّلَّةُ
وَٱلْمَسْكَنَةُ وَبَآءُو بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ يَكْفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ
وَيَقْتُلُونَ ٱلنَّبِيِّۦنَ بِغَيْرِ ٱلْحَقِّ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوا۟ وَّكَانُوا۟ يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

Remember when you said, 'Moses, we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth's produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.' He said, 'Would you exchange better for worse? Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for.' They were struck with humiliation and wretchedness, and they incurred the wrath of God because they persistently rejected His messages and killed prophets contrary to all that is right. All this was because they disobeyed and were lawbreakers [61] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 61)

This noble verse is also one of the verses which mention how God *the Most High* gave favours to Moses *peace be upon him* and the children of Israel.

We spoke about the meaning of the phrase ‘one sort of food’ when we spoke of the manna and quails, and how the sending down of the manna and quails every day meant that they ate only one kind of food.

The word ‘one’ represents the first number, and if we add one of its kind to it, we get two, and if we add one more again, we get three. So the origin of all numbers is the number one. The concept of ‘one’ indicates singularity, but not indivisibility. When we say that God is One, this means that there is nothing like Him, but it does not mean that He is not made up of parts. You are not one; nor are you indivisible because you are made up of parts and there are also others like you. In our solar system the sun is one, but it is not indivisible because it is made up of parts which interact with one another. God is One (*Wahid*), for there is nothing like Him; and He is also Indivisible (*Ahad*), for He is not made up of parts. And so two of His Beautiful Names are the Wahid (‘One’) and the *Ahad* (‘Indivisible’); and there is no repetition in these names because one means He is unique, whilst the other means He is not made up of parts.

God *the Most High* relates what the Israelites said: ‘…We will not put up with one sort of food….’ Notice that the food here is called ‘one’ although it was made up of two constituents, namely manna and quails; but it was considered as one food because of its monotony. Food came to them from the sky, but their obstinacy with God meant that they could not endure this, and they said, ‘Perhaps one day it will not come, we want food that we can farm with our own hands so that it is always before our eyes.’ It was as though all of these miracles were not enough to make them trust in God’s continuing provision. They wanted to see for themselves; after all, did they not say to Moses *peace be upon him*, ‘Show us manifestly’? What did they ask for? They said, And when you said, ‘…pray, therefore, your Lord for us, that He would bring forth for us of that which the earth grows…’ i.e. ask of God. Since prayer is a kind of request, when you turn to God and ask Him to give to you, you pray with the humbleness of a beggar before the might of Him Who is asked. If a request is made from an inferior to a superior this is called a prayer; and if it is made from one equal to another it is called a request; and if it is made from a superior to an inferior it is called a command.

The children of Israel asked Moses *peace be upon him* to pray to God *the Most High* that He bring forth for them foods that grow from the earth, and they even specified the foods they wanted, saying, '…its herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions.' But all of these foods are of kinds which are eaten by slaves. It is known that Pharaoh's people enslaved the children of Israel; so it seems that the children of Israel loved to live as slaves, and enjoyed this.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to raise their rank and so He sent them the manna and quails, but they preferred the food of slaves. The word *baql* ('herbs') means not only a specific kind of herb, but rather any plant with no stem, such as lettuce, radishes, leeks, watercress; and the word *qitha'* means a kind of cucumber, and *foam* means either wheat or garlic; and '*adas* ('lentils') and *basal* ('onions') are well-known. Before answering them, God *the Most High* wanted to rebuke them, and so He said, 'Will you exchange that which is better for what is worse?'

When you hear the word 'exchange,' know that the word 'for' generally applies to the thing which is being given away. When you say, 'I bought the fabric for one *dirham*,' this means that you took the fabric and gave the *dirham* away.

God *the Most High* says, '…that which is better for what is worse…,' i.e. they gave away what was better, namely the manna and quails, and took what was lesser. 'Lesser' here does not mean 'worthless,' since the blessings of God which the earth produces could never be called worthless. Rather, God *the Most High* creates certain things by the use of conventional means, and He creates other things directly without any means; and that which God creates with a direct command by saying 'Be!' is better than that which He creates through means because you make no contribution to direct creations, but rather, they are pure gifts from God. As for creation by means, you might play some role in it, by ploughing the land or sowing the seeds.

That which comes straight from God without your means is closer to the provisions of the Hereafter which God will give without any means, but rather simply by saying 'Be!'

And so the True Lord *the Most High* orders us not to stretch our eyes after that which He has provided many others of them of the splendour of this world's life, that He may try them with it; and the sustenance given by the Lord is better and more enduring (*Ta Ha:* 131).

So God *the Most High* describes the provisions of this world as a test, and describes the provisions of the Hereafter as being better than it. All the provisions of this world, even the unlawful, come from God *the Most High*, for there is no Provider other than God; but the thing that makes some provision unlawful is that people hasten too quickly to get it and so get it in unlawful ways, whilst if they had just been patient it would have come to them in a lawful fashion. We say that God *the Most High* is the One Who provides, but He determined that some provision is a test whilst other provision is better than it; for provision that comes from God without any intermediary means is of a higher and better kind than provision that comes by means.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Will you exchange that which is better for what is worse?' This means: 'Would you take direct provision from God *the Most High*, the manna and quails – which come by God's command 'Be!' almost as the provisions of the Hereafter will come – and exchange it for that which is of a lower grade, namely provision that comes by the means of this world?' But the Israelites did not have any answer to this rebuke, and so the True Lord *the Most High* then said to them, '…Get you down into Egypt; for you shall have what you have asked…'; and this was only said to them because they insisted on their demand despite the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* had shown them that what He was sending down to them was better than that which they sought.

Notice here that the word *misran* (rendered in the translation as 'Egypt') carries the Arabic grammatical marking of *tanwin*,(1) despite the fact that generally when the word misr is mentioned in the Noble Quran it does not take this marking. The word misr has been honoured with several mentions in the Noble Quran, and whenever it meant the Nile Valley, it does not carry the grammatical mark of *tanwin.*

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(1) The Arabic word misr originally means city or country; when it is used in this sense, it carries *tanwin* (an /n/ sound at the end of the word) in certain grammatical cases. However, the word is also used as the proper noun used in Arabic for the country known as Egypt; when it is used in this sense, it cannot carry *tanwin* as Arabic grammatical rules normally prevent proper nouns from carrying *tanwin* – Ed.

We find an example of this in God's order to Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* to provide houses for their people in *Misr* (Egypt) (*Yunus:* 87). We find the same form of the word used in the proclamation made by Pharaoh to his people claiming that he is the one who possesses the kingdom of *Misr* (Egypt) with the rivers flowing under his feet (*az-Zukhruf:* 51). And in relating the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*, God *the Most High* says that the man from *Misr* (Egypt) who bought Joseph told his wife to treat him hospitably (*Yusuf:* 21). Also, when Joseph was reunited with his family after the long separation, he invited them to enter *Misr* (Egypt), if God wills, secure (*Yusuf:* 99).

In all of these four verses, the word *Misr* ('Egypt') has no marking of tanwin, whilst in the verse we are currently examining it says, '…Get you down into *misran*…' with *tanwin* attached to the word *misran.* So does the word *misran* here mean the same place as the word *Misr* in the verses mentioned above? We say that it does not since it carries *tanwin* and must thus be a common masculine noun signifying an unspecified place. On the other hand, when a word does not accept *tanwin,* it must be a feminine proper noun referring to a specific place name. However, there are exceptions in the Quran to this general rule when the noun is proper and carries importance; in such a case, we find the *tanwin* suffix added to it as we see in such names as *Nuhan* (Noah), *Lutan* (Lot), *Shu'aiban* (Shu'aib/Jethro), *Muhammadan* (Muhammad) and *Hudan* (Hood) *peace be upon them*.

All of these names might have been supposed to not accept *tanwin*, yet in the Noble Quran every one of them is mentioned with the *tanwin* suffix. So is it possible that the word misran in the verse 'Get you down into *misran* (Egypt); for you shall have what you have asked' is the same Egypt where they lived under the rule of Pharaoh? It could be that the word *misran* means just any city, since misr can mean 'city' in Arabic, and it is also possible that it means the Egypt of Pharaoh. The word misr can mean any place where there is a jurist, a ruler, and a judge, and is derived from a word meaning 'to interrupt' because a city interrupts the expanse of the countryside. But it is consistent in the Noble Quran that when the word *misr* has no *tanwin* suffix it refers to the country of Egypt in which we live, and when it does have the *tanwin* suffix it means any place where there is a permanent agricultural settlement.

God *the Most High* then says, '…Ignominy and humiliation were stamped upon them....' Ignominy here means hardships which lead to a broken spirit which you can remove from yourself by entering the protection of another who can give you dignity by telling you that you are under his protection. God *the Most High* describes the Israelites as being overshadowed by ignominy wherever they may be found except when they bind themselves again in a bond with God and a bond with men (*Al-'Imran*: 112).

A bond with God *the Most High* is like that which they made when they entered into a covenant with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina and lived under the protection of this covenant. So 'a bond with God' means a bond with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* or the believers, and 'a bond with men' means the protection of a powerful state like the United States of America; if it protects them, they are strong, and if it deserts them, they are humiliated.

As for the term 'stamped upon them,' the Arabic word here is *duribat*, a term usually used in minting coins which means to be branded and struck with a hard blow as when inscription is stamped onto a coin. And so it is said that they were branded in Egypt, i.e. they were struck with a powerful blow which humbled them and marked them in such a way that they could not remove its traces. As for humiliation, it means dishevelled mien.

The people of the Book used to be required to pay tax which was taken only from the wealthy, and so they would wear the clothes of paupers and occupy positions of degradation and filth so that they would not have to pay the tax.

God *the Most High* then says, 'and they returned with wrath from God', i.e. God was angry with them because of their sins and disobedience until His wrath at their continual disobedience became like one of their inherent characteristics. Why was this? 'This, for that they disbelieved the signs of God, and killed the prophets unjustly….' That is, they would show ingratitude to God's blessings and not give thanks, and they would disbelieve in His signs and exchange them for a paltry gain; and they did not stop there, but would actually kill the prophets of God without any right.

Prophets are not the same as messengers: prophets are role models of good conduct, but they do not bring new religious teachings, whilst messengers are also prophets inasmuch as they are role models of good conduct; they are messengers in addition because they bring new religious teachings. And so every messenger is a prophet, but not every prophet is a messenger. God *the Most High* protects His prophets and His messengers from falling into sin; He as well also protects His messengers from being killed, and prevents their enemies from reaching them. The coming of prophets is essential because they provide a model for the people to follow the teachings of the religion more easily. God sent many prophets for the Israelites to follow, but they killed them. Why did they do this? This was because the prophets exposed their deceit and their wrongdoing and their failure to follow the religion. It is observed that the disbeliever and the sinner and the non-religious harbour feelings of jealousy and hatred towards those who keep to God's teachings, and try to make them stray from this path, even by killing them. And so God's wrath came upon the Israelites due to their disobedience and how they harmed His prophets and committed so many sins.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُوا۟ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ وَٱلصَّٰبِـِٔينَ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ
وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ٦٢

The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve [62] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 62)

After speaking about the Israelites and how they denied His blessings, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us the reckoning of the nations that came before the nation of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* on the Day of Resurrection. A similar verse to this one is found in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* although with a slight change in word order; in the verse of *al-Mai'da*, God *the Most High* mentions the believers (in Islam) first, then those who follow the Jewish faith, then the Sabians, then the Christians (*al-Ma'ida*: 69).

So, the Sabians are mentioned before the Christians in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, and the Arabic grammatical case of the nouns is also different, as in the chapter of *al-Baqara,* the word 'Sabians' is in the accusative case, whilst in the chapter of *al-Mai'da*, it is in the nominative case. There is also a similar verse in the chapter of *al-Hajj* which states that the believers, and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, and those who worship partners with God, surely God shall decide between them on the day of Resurrection for God is witness of all things (*al-Hajj:* 17).

These three verses seem similar, but actually there are many differences between them. What is the reason for those parts of the verses that are repeated, and for the Sabians being mentioned in a different position, and for their changed grammatical case when they are mentioned first, and for the addition in the chapters of *al-Baqara* and *al-Ma'ida* of the phrase '…those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and fear shall not come upon them, nor shall they be grieved;' whilst in the chapter of *al-Hajj*, we have the addition of the Magians, and those who worship partners with God; and the predicate is also different, with God *the Most High* there saying that He will decide between them on Resurrection Day?

When God *the Most High* created Adam *peace be upon him* and sent him to live on earth, He sent guidance with him, as He stated that there shall come to man guidance from God; and he who follows God's guidance, will not go astray, and neither will he be unhappy (*Ta Ha:* 123).

So it seems that Adam *peace be upon him* delivered the message to his children, and they delivered it to theirs, and so on, but life distracted people and they were afflicted with heedlessness and worldly greed and avarice, and they followed their desires; out of God's mercy for His creation, He sent messengers to remind them, warn them, and give them glad tidings.

The noble verse says, 'Surely, those who believe…', and the belief mentioned here is the primordial faith which was sent to earth along with Adam *peace be upon him*. Later, there came religions and messages which people denied, and so these people were annihilated from the earth, like the peoples of Noah and Lot *peace be upon them*, and of Pharaoh, among others. And then, there came religions which still today have followers such as Judaism, Christianity and Sabianism; and God wanted to gather all the previous religions in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to purify and unify the religious message of the world.

So, those who believed first, whether with Adam *peace be upon him,* or with any of the other messengers who came after him to cure the diseases which had arisen, and were then given names such as Jews, Christians, and Sabians – God *the Most High* wants to tell them that this is all over, and that those who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are the ones who are safe from fear or grief. It is as though his message came to purify all the previous religions, and so everyone in the world is required to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Everyone has been called to believe in his message, and if anyone remains who held to the covenant of Adam, or Idris (Enoch), or Noah, or Abraham, or Hood *peace be upon them*, and those who are aligned to Judaism, and Christianity, and Sabianism are all now required to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accept the religion of Islam. Islam abrogated all the other faiths in the world, and made them all concentrated in a single religion, and for all those who believe in this religion: '…fear shall not come upon them, nor shall they be grieved' (*al-Baqara*: 62). On the other hand, all those who do not believe in it will experience fear and grief. This is a proclamation of the unity of the new religion which embraces all those on earth until the end of time. As for those who remain attached to their old religions, and refuse to accept the new religion, God will not judge between them until the Day of Resurrection. And so the verse which includes mention of the account and the reckoning of the Day of Resurrection mentioned all those who do not believe in the religion of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, including the Magians and idolaters.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to discredit the false notion that might be held by followers of a pre-Islamic religion and persist in holding to it after the coming of Islam, that such a religion will benefit them. To such a person we say that the True Lord *the Most High* completely removed this notion when He *the Exalted* stated categorically that anyone who seeks a religion other than Islam (total submission to God), it will never be accepted from him (*Al-'Imran*: 85). And He *the Exalted* said that the only true religion in the sight of God is Islam (surrendering oneself to God) (*Al-'Imran*: 19).

So the final purification of the succession of faith and Divine messages in this world has come, and those who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be safe from fear or grief on the Day of Resurrection, whilst of those who do not believe, God *the Most High* says that He will decide between them on the Day of Resurrection (*al-Hajj:* 17). Coming back to the verse at hand, '…those who believe…' means those who inherited their faith from the time of Adam *peace be upon him*; and '…those who are Jews…' means those who follow Moses *peace be upon him*, and their name Yahood comes from their saying *hudna ilayk* ('We return to You'); and 'the Christians,' and the name given to them in the verse *nasara* means the Nazarenes, the followers of Jesus *peace be upon him*, named after his birthplace – or it might be derived from the saying of the disciples of Jesus, '*nahnu ansar Allah'* ('We are helpers in the Way of God') as the Quran relates that when Jesus became aware of the unbelief on the part of the Israelites, he asked his disciples who will be his helpers in God's cause and they replied that they shall be his helpers in the Way of God. They proclaimed that they believed in God and asked Jesus to bear witness that they have surrendered themselves to Him (*Al-'Imran*: 52).

As for the 'Sabians,' scholars differ as to their identity. Some say they were the followers of Noah *peace be upon him*, but that after him, they went astray and worshipped certain natural phenomena such as the sun, the moon, and the stars instead of God. Or, the Sabians might mean all those who converted from the religion of their time to the new religion. Or it might mean a group of intellectuals who said 'The religion of our people is not logical: how can we worship these idols which we make and fix with our own hands?' And so they refused to worship the idols of the Arabs, and so it was said that they had left (*saba'u*) the religion of their forebears and followed the new religion instead. Whatever is meant by 'the Sabians,' they represent all those who leave one religion for another.

We notice here that in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God *the Most High* mentions the Sabians after the Christians, and that the word 'Sabians' is in the accusative case, whereas in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, He mentions them first and in the nominative case. This is a matter of the rules of Arabic grammar. The verse says, 'Surely, those who believe….' In Arabic, the word *inna* (rendered here as 'Surely') causes the noun that comes after it to be in the accusative case and the predicate to be in the nominative. So the word ‘those’ is in the accusative case here although it has no case ending because it is a pronoun, and ‘…those who are Jews…’ is also in the accusative case because it is coupled in conjunction to ‘those who believe’ by the coordinating conjunction ‘and,’ and the word ‘the Christians’ is also coupled to this, and the word ‘the Sabians’ (*as-sabi’in*) is also coupled to this and so is in the accusative case, and has the ending (in) which all regular plural forms take in the accusative case.

Then we come to God’s words ‘…whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good….’ So the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* is regular in its order and in its grammar. The Sabians come after the Christians because they are a smaller group, not a huge multitude like the Christians. But in the chapter of *al-Ma’ida*, the verse mentions the Sabians first and in the nominative case, saying *as-sabi’un* rather than *as-sabi’un*. God *the Most High* says, ‘Surely, those who believe, and those who are Jews….’ The phrase ‘those who believe’ is made accusative by the presence of the emphasising article ‘surely’ before it; and ‘those who are Jews’ is coupled with it. Following that we have ‘and the Sabians’ (*wa as-sabi’un*) in the nominative case. We would have expected it to be *as-sabi’in* in the accusative case as it is coupled to the previous two phrases; and then for ‘the Christians’ to be added on in the same way. But the word ‘the Sabians’ comes between the Jews and the Christians, and has an unexpected grammatical case ending. The Arabs had a sharp ear for language, and so when they heard the word ‘Sabians’ coming coupled to a word made accusative by the particle ‘Surely’ being given in the nominative form, they would immediately take note of this and wonder why it was so.

When Abu Ja‘far Al-Mansour was made Caliph, he stood on the pulpit and spoke, and made a grammatical mistake. There was a Bedouin sitting in the crowd, and this mistake offended his ear. Then Al-Mansur made a second mistake, and the Bedouin shook his head in amazement. When he made a mistake for the third time, the Bedouin stood up and said, ‘I testify that you only managed to get this office by sheer fate’, i.e. you do not deserve it. (For the Bedouin, making mistakes in speech is enough to disqualify even a ruler and make him undeserving of his office.) This is a grammatical mistake. If the Arab hears it, his ear will be disturbed. And so if a word is nominative when it would usually be accusative, this will let him know that God has wisdom and a reason for making it this way. So what is the reason? (1)

As for those who believe, the matter is clear, as is the case with the Jews and the Christians. However, concerning the Sabians, they did not follow a specific religion, but rather followed a different way. And so this verse came to alert us to the fact that this purification included the Sabians, too, and so it mentions them early and in the nominative case so that it will strike our ears powerfully and draw our attention to a point that we may easily overlook.

God *the Most High* then connects faith with works, always saying ‘believe’ and ‘do good works’ together because if faith is not accompanied by action, then it is of no use. God wants faith to fill all our life’s actions with good deeds, and so He commands every believer to do good works; and these are the ones who need not fear in this world, or grieve in the Hereafter.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَٰقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ ٱلطُّورَ خُذُوا۟ مَآ
ءَاتَيْنَٰكُم بِقُوَّةٍ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Remember when We took your pledge, and made the mountain tower high above you, and said, ‘Hold fast to what We have given you and bear its contents in mind, so that you may be conscious of God’ [63] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 63)

Once again, God *the Most High* reminds the Israelites of the blessings He granted them, and reminds them of their ingratitude. But we notice here that when the Noble Quran speaks about the Jews, it addresses them directly. Were those living at the time of the Revelation of the Quran the same as those from whom God *the Most High* took this pledge? Rather, they are addressed here as the descendants of those who lived at the time of Moses *peace be upon him*.

We say that it was the responsibility of every grandfather or father to pass on to their offspring the latest religious teachings that were passed on to them.

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(1) The underlying argument here – which the author and his audience take for granted, but which may seem strange for someone unfamiliar with Islamic/Arabic culture – is that, since the Quran is God’s word, written in the most sublime of styles, and is preserved from any distortion, it is inconceivable to have grammatical mistakes in it – Ed.

And so when God reminds them of how He blessed them by saving them and destroying the people of Pharaoh, He is telling them how He saved their forefathers from slaughter. If He had not saved them, the Jews of the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have existed because they were destined to be the descendents of their forefathers, and God saving them meant that the chain of life would continue. If a man dies before he has married and had children, the life of his potential progeny ends at the moment of his death. The same thing is the case when the True Lord *the Most High* reminds them of when Moses prayed for water for his people. This was a blessing for the Jews who lived at the time the Quran was revealed because if He *the Exalted* had not saved their forefathers from dying of thirst, they would have died, and left no progeny.

So every favour that was granted to the Jews of the time of Moses *peace be upon him* was also a favour for their descendents who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* took the ancient pledge from the Jews, and if it were not for this pledge, they would not have believed, nor would their progeny.

God *the Most High* says, '…and lifted the mountain over you…', that is, God *the Most High* reminds them that after they were saved and God drowned Pharaoh and his people, Moses *peace be upon him* went to meet his Lord and receive the Torah from Him, and the Israelites worshipped the calf in his absence. When Moses *peace be upon him* returned with the Torah and the Tablets, they found that its teachings were too difficult for them, and said, 'We cannot meet these demands,' and they considered refusing to follow them and rejecting them.

Commandments come from a commander, namely God *the Most High*. They claimed that God *the Most High* had commanded them with more than they could bear, even though God *the Exalted* does not burden a soul with more than it can bear, and this is a principle of faith which the True Lord *the Exalted* has established. He *the Exalted* states that He does not burden a soul with more than it can bear (*al-Baqara*: 286). However, some people think that this verse means that we can make our own judgements about God's commandments, and that if we think we are able to obey this commandment, we say 'it is from God,' but if we think we cannot obey it by our own judgement, we would say ‘God does not require us to do this because it is beyond our capability.’ But the true criterion is: Did God command you to do this, or not? If God has commanded you to do it, then He knows it is within your capabilities because God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear. Nowadays, we hear a lot of cries that the times are not the same, and that the circumstances of the modern world and the speed of movements and events is such that it is no longer possible for us to fulfil some of our religious responsibilities. They argue that perhaps it was possible to fulfil this responsibility in the past when life was simple and moved slowly and had limited problems.

We say to those who repeat this kind of statements: The One Who issued the commandment to you from eternity is God *the Most High*, and He knew that it was possible for you to fulfil the commandment when He issued it, and for thousands of years after He sent it, until the end of time. The proof of this is that there are people who fulfil all these commandments and offer more supererogatory acts besides them in order to reach true excellence in their faith. There are those who pray all the prescribed prayers which they are commanded to do, and there are those who pray the additional non-obligatory prayers which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to pray as well, and there are those who pray in the watches of the night, and keep on drawing closer to God *the Most High* with additional devotions of the same kind as those which He has commanded. There are those who fast the month of *Ramadan*, and those who perform additional fasts at the start of every Arabic month, or fast every Monday and Thursday all year round, or fast the whole of the months of *Rajab* and *Sha‘ban*. There are those who make the pilgrimage once in their lives, and those who make it several times. There are those who keep to the limits of the poor-due, and those who give extra charity as well.

So every commandment which God *the Most High* has given us is not only within the limits of our capabilities, but is decidedly below the limits of our capabilities. It cannot be said that times have changed because here we are living in these times, and despite all the changes that have taken place we are still able to fulfil all our responsibilities and to increase upon them without any difficulty.

God *the Most High* raised Mount Sinai above the Israelites as a mercy for them, just as a doctor uses a scalpel to remove pus that has developed in the body because the body cannot be healed in any other way.

And so when God *the Most High* wanted to grace the Israelites with His mercy and blessing despite themselves, He raised Mount Sinai above them and said, 'Accept the Commandments or I shall bring the mountain down upon you,' just as God *the Most High* had destroyed those before them who disbelieved and refused to have faith and opposed the messengers. Some might say that God *the Most High* in so doing, has forced the Israelites to obey, and this is contrary to His statement that there shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from the way of error (*al-Baqara*: 256). Also, He has given man free will and the option, saying that let, then, him who wills, believe, and let him who wills, disbelieve (*al-Kahf*: 29).

We say that God *the Most High* did not force anyone to obey His commandments, but rather out of His mercy, He gave them the choice between obeying and meeting with a chastisement that would have destroyed them, which was for the mountain to collapse upon them. So it was not a matter of compulsion, but rather one of choice. The people before them were given the choice between faith and ruin, but they did not believe until they were destroyed. When the Israelites saw the mountain above them, they were fearful and fell to the ground in prostration, and this prostration was a sign that they had accepted the commandments. But whilst they prostrated, they looked at the mountain above them, afraid it would fall upon them. And so we find that the prostration of the Jews, even until today, is still made on one side of the face, whilst the other side looks up. This was because they were afraid the mountain would fall on them. If you ask a Jew why he prostrates in this way, he will tell you that he is trembling because he carries the Torah, but we say that they trembled when God raised Mount Sinai above them, and so in every prayer they would do the same thing, and when their children and descendents saw this, they thought that it was a vital part of their way of prostrating. So their prostration became always performed on one side of the face, looking at something above which they fear. That is, they remain until this day in the same position they took when Mount Sinai was raised above them.

In this noble verse the True Lord *the Most High* says, '...and lifted the mountain over you....' In another verse, the Lord *the Most High* reminds them of the same event when He shook the mountain over them as if it were a covering overhead, and they thought that it was going to fall down upon them; He commanded them to take hold of what He has given them with firmness, and to be mindful of what is in it so that they may protect themselves (*al-A'raf:* 171).

In this verse God says that He shook the mountain over them, as though the mountain were a peg in the ground which God wanted to remove, moving it left and right so it would come out of the earth. This moving, shaking and pulling is the meaning of *natq* (to cause to quake). A mountain is just like a peg, and requires pulling and shaking back and forth so that it will come out of the ground. When this scene took place, they became fearful and fell down in prostration and accepted the commandments.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…hold fast what We have given you with firmness….' The word *akhadha* (rendered here as 'hold fast') literally means 'to take,' i.e. the opposite of 'to give.' You take something from the one who gives it. We take commandments from God in order to be given along with them that which makes the workings of our world straight. So every act of taking must come from an act of giving. You take from the generation that came before you and give to the generation that comes after you, but you do not give it just as it is; rather, you add to it, and this addition is what builds civilisations.

God *the Most High* says, '…with firmness…,' i.e. do not take the commandments with feebleness. People normally take things with all their strength if they give them benefit. And so the nature of God's teachings is that they should be taken with strength and conviction in order that they will give great good with strength and conviction. If you accept God's teachings with strength, you have peace of mind concerning them, and your heart expands with contentment, and you will want to take even more. And so we find that in the Noble Quran, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is often addressed: 'they ask you about such-and-such,' which shows that his companions cherished God's commandments and knew that they were good for them and so wanted even more.

And since the True Lord *the Exalted* says, '…hold fast what We have given you with firmness…,' this shows that they yearned for His commandments and no longer found them difficult to obey.

And He *the Exalted* says, '…and keep in mind what is in it so that you may shield yourselves.' That is, bear in mind all that is in God's teachings, and that it will solve all of life's problems, and recognise the import of this '…so that you may shield yourselves,' that is so that you will obey God and shield yourselves against His wrath and chastisement on the Day of Resurrection.

ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُۥ لَكُنتُم مِّنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ٦٤

Even after that you turned away. Had it not been for God's favour and mercy on you, you would certainly have been lost [64] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 64)

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us how He commanded the Jews to remember His teachings and not to forget them; and their mere remembrance of His teachings should have been enough to make them believe in Islam and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* since he was mentioned in their Torah and his attributes were accounted there. But what did the Jews do?

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And you turned away after that....' That is, you rejected God's teachings and forgot about them and paid no heed to them, '…And had it not been for God's favour upon you and His mercy, you would surely have been among the lost.' What is favour, and what is mercy? Favour means to be given more than you deserve. For example, someone may say to you, 'This is your due, and this is an extra favour from me,' i.e. an increase on your due.

'Aisha *God be pleased with her* relates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Aim well and go straight and have hope; and know that no one will enter paradise by own deeds.' He was asked, 'Not even you, o Messenger of God?' He answered, 'Not even me, unless God covers me with His Forgiveness and Mercy.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, Ibn Majah, and Ad-Darimi*

If you wonder how this could be, and how no one could enter paradise by their works, we say yes, this is so because all the good deeds you can do in this world cannot compare to a single one of the blessings *God the Most High* has given His creatures. You remembered your good deeds, but not His favour. Everyone who enters paradise does so by the favour of God *the Most High*, even the martyrs who give away their lives and everything they have in the world in the way of God. The True Lord *the Most High* says that they rejoice in what God has bestowed upon them out of His bounty; and they rejoice in hope for those of their brethren who were left behind and have not yet joined them, that no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve (*Al-'Imran*: 170).

So if the martyrs who dwell in the highest ranks of paradise, entered paradise solely by God's favour, then what about those who have a lesser reward than them? God's favours cover all of His servants, as He says that He is indeed limitless in His bounties to people, but most people are ungrateful (*al-Baqara*: 243).

As for mercy, it is the thing which opens the door to repentance and the forgiveness of sins. God *the Most High* wants to make it clear that had it not been for the favour He extended to the Israelites, and the fact that He opened the door of repentance and forgiveness for them so that they could return once again to their covenant and their religion, they would have been amongst the losers afflicted with a clear loss in this world and the next. But out of His mercy and favour to them, God *the Most High* guided them to the religion which He *the Exalted* protected with His omnipotent power from any corruption. He lifted from them the burden of having to preserve the Book, and all the hardship that would mean in this world, and He bestowed His grace upon them by sending them the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, whom He sent as a grace to all the worlds, as He *the Exalted* addresses His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him that He has not sent him but as a mercy to the worlds (*al-Anbiya':* 107).

And so He gave them the favour of this final religion which was the last word on all religious matters in this world. And alongside all this favour and all this grace, He sent them in the Torah descriptions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the time of his coming, opening for them a door to avoid being amongst the losers, yet they forsook this door just as they had turned their backs on their own religion before.

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱعْتَدَوْا۟ مِنكُمْ فِى ٱلسَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا۟ قِرَدَةً خَٰسِـِٔينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

You know about those of you who broke the Sabbath,
and so We said to them, ‘Be like apes! Be outcasts!’ [65]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 65)

After explaining how He opened the door of favour and grace to the Jews, and how they forsook it, God *the Most High* then shows us some of the ways in which they disobeyed God’s commandments and profaned them. Some of the commandments God *the Most High* issues are related to pure religion, while others are related to worldly affairs; and He does not want us to take lightly any of His commandments, whether religious or worldly in nature, or to prefer one commandment over another. And so we find in the chapter of *al-Jumu‘a,* for example, that the True Lord *the Most High* urges the believers to hasten to the remembrance of God when the call to prayer is sounded on Friday (the day of congregation) and to leave off trading; this, if they knew it, is best for them. And when the prayer is ended, they can disperse freely in the land and go in quest of the bounties of God (*al-Jumu’a:* 9-10).

These are two commandments, one religious and the other worldly in import. They are both part of God’s teachings. God *the Most High* does not want you to engage in trade or work at the time of the Friday prayer, and nor does He want you to leave your work for no reason and remain in the mosque after the prayer. When the call to prayer is made, go to the mosque; and once the prayer is ended, continue to earn your livelihood. There are two days in the Quran which God mentions by name, Friday and Saturday, although there are seven days in the week. Five of these days are not mentioned in the Quran by name, i.e. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Friday is the weekly feast day of the Muslims in which they are commanded to gather in the mosques to perform the communal prayer. Notice that the Arabic word for Friday (*jumu‘a*) is not derived from a number.

The Arabic names for the days of the week are all derived from numbers except for Friday and Saturday. *Ahad* (Sunday) comes from the number one (*wahid*)*, Ithnayn* (Monday) comes from the number two (*ithnayn*)*, Thulatha'* (Tuesday) comes from the number three (*thalatha*)*, Arbi'a'* (Wednesday) comes from the number four (*arba'a*) and *Khamis* (Thursday) comes from the number five (*khamsa*). It would make sense for the name for Friday to be derived from the number six, but this was not the case. Why was it not the case? Because it was the day when the order of the entire universe was gathered (Arabic*: jumi'a*), and so God *the Most High* named it *Jumu'a,* and made it a feast day for us. A feast day is one in which people come together, gathering to celebrate God's blessing of creating the universe and completing it on that day. Those who believe in God gather to celebrate God's creating the world for them. As for Saturday or the Sabbath (Arabic: *Sabt*), the letters *'b'* and *'t'* give the meaning 'to cut,' and we have the word (*sabata*) which means to stop work. Notice that the creation of the heavens and the earth was completed in six days, as God *the Most High* states that He is the One Who created the heavens and the earth in six days (periods) (*al-Hadid:* 4).

The day when creation was completed was Friday, and so on the seventh day, Saturday, everything had been settled and the process of the creation of the universe had come to an end. And so it was as though the universe was resting/ sleeping (*subat*)*,* and so this day was called *Sabt* because it was completely still after having just been created. And so when the Jews wanted to take a day of rest, God gave them the Sabbath. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to test them with this day. They were living by the sea, and their main work was fishing, and so the test for this day was for God to forbid them from working so that the fishes they used to catch would be abundant on that day so that their fins would be visible. The fishermen might have looked for the fish all week and not found any, whilst on the Sabbath they would come and be clearly visible in the water, coming to them to tempt them. God *the Most High* relates the story of this town that stood by the sea, when its inhabitants broke the Sabbath; when their fish came to them on their Sabbath day appearing openly, but did not come to them on the day when they kept no Sabbath. Thus He tried them, for their evil deeds (*al-A'raf:* 163).

And so the surface of the sea would teem with fish on the Sabbath, but once Sunday morning came, they would disappear out of reach. They wanted to make the Sabbath a special day for them when they would do no work of any kind, but at the same time they wanted to get those fish. And so, they made something called a ‘deep basin’ so that they could find a way around God’s Commandment to refrain from work on that day, and at the same time get the fish. The fish would enter the basin easily, but because it was deep they could not get out of it. And so they would leave it there at night and gather the fish the next morning. This was a way for them to get around God’s Commandment; and God *the Most High* does not love those who resort to tricks in getting around His Commandments.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And certainly you have known those among you who transgressed on the Sabbath, so We said to them, ‘Be (as) apes despicable.’ This story is famous amongst the Jews and widely known to them; grandparents teach it to their sons, who teach it to the grandchildren. It was not new to them even though the Jews being addressed were those who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. And so when we hear, ‘you have known,’ this means ‘you know,’ and this means that the story was already known to them, and it must have been one of the traditional stories they passed down.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…those among you who transgressed on the Sabbath….’ The action here was one and the same: by their trickery, they got around God’s Commandment to rest on the Sabbath. Truly they did not go fishing on the Sabbath, but rather they got around the prohibition by leaving traps for the fish. They were foolish to do so, for the prohibition was against them catching the fish in their nets on the Sabbath; so instead, they caught them in their nets by using tricks and traps. God *the Most High* says, ‘transgressed,’ and this means that they went beyond the limits God had set for them. Usually when God forbids something, He then warns after the prohibition that these are the bounds set by God; and we should not, then, come near them (*al-Baqara*: 187). This is because He wants to protect you from being tempted so that you do not fall into sin, and so He tells you not to even go near it. But the Israelites profaned God’s commandment, acting as though they were obeying when really they were disobeying. They thought that they could fool God into thinking they were obedient when really they were disobedient, and so God's judgement fell upon them: '…so We said to them, "Be (as) apes despicable."'

You do not normally command someone to do something unless he is able to do it. The command here was that they should become apes, but could they obey such an order and turn themselves into apes? This is something within the capabilities of God Alone, so how could He tell them to become apes? We say that the command alone was capable of turning them into apes, and this kind of command is called a 'command of subjugation.' He did not say to them 'Be (as) apes' so that they by their own power could become apes, but rather, simply by His saying 'Be as apes' they became such. This shows us how someone can yield to a command against their will, even if they do not want to do so. It was not necessary that they heard God's command, or even for Him to say it to them; if the intention was for them to undertake what they heard, they would have to have heard it; but simply by the command being issued before they even were aware of anything happening, they were apes.

Scholars differ as to how these Jews turned into apes, and how their metamorphosis took place. Some of them say that the transformation took place without their knowing, and when they found that they had been turned into creatures lower than men, they refused to eat or drink until they died. Some of the scholars say that if a human is transformed, he cannot reproduce, and so when they were transformed, they could not breed and so died out. Why could they not breed? It is because God *the Most High* has decided that no burdened soul shall bear another's burden (*al-An'am:* 164).

Had they bred, their children would have been forced to bear the sin of their parents, and God does not allow this. So out of God's mercy, they neither ate and drank, nor bred, and so they stayed alive for a while and then were wiped out by illness and disease; and that is what happened to them.

Some people wonder: 'If they were all turned into apes, where did the Jews living today come from?' We say to them that not all of the Jews were disobedient, but rather, it was only a minority who disobeyed and so they were turned into apes, and the majority remained human beings and their descendents are with us now.

Other scholars point to a verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* which commands the Messenger to proclaim who, in the sight of God, deserves a yet worse retribution than these. They are those whom God has rejected and whom He has condemned, and whom He has turned into apes and swine because they worshipped the powers of evil; these are yet worse in station, and farther astray from the right path (*al-Ma'ida*: 60).

So this is the account of a people who incurred God's wrath and so were turned into apes, swine, and idol worshippers. God *the Most High* tells us that some Jews were turned into apes, but He did not say that they were turned into swine. Were they turned into apes, and then God's wrath increased and so He turned them into swine? Did God turn their nature from that of humans into that of beasts with respect to their morals, wills, and characters?

We say that we must first consider the beastly nature to which God transferred them. We find that apes are the only animals which always expose their private parts, and whose private parts have a colour which marks them out from the rest of the body. And they cannot be tamed except by force. The Jews also refused to accept the religion until Mount Sinai was raised above them, so the state they are in then is not the result of a physical transformation, but rather, a behavioural one. Pigs do not jealously protect their females, and this is another characteristic of the Jews. As for the worshippers of evil forces, 'evil forces' mean all those people who transgress with tyranny and wantonness, and the worshippers of evil forces mean those who obey every tyrant and aid him in his tyranny; and this is what they do as well.

So this transformation, irrespective of how often it occurred and in what manner, is just a matter of formality; but God *the Most High* has given us, in the verse of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* mentioned above, the moral attributes of the Jews; and so it is as though they were transformed in their physical forms, as well as in their moral values.

فَجَعَلْنَٰهَا نَكَٰلًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا وَمَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

We made this an example to those people who were there at
the time and to those who came after them, and a lesson to
all who are mindful of God [66] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 66)

God *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that after He made the physical and moral transformation of the Jews, He '…made them a warning to those of their day…' i.e. to their contemporaries, '…and to those who came after them…' i.e. to those who came after them. A 'warning' means a severe chastisement and a chastisement can only come after a crime has first been committed. This is an Islamic principle and also a general judicial principle; lawmakers say that there can be no punishment without a crime, and there can be no crime without legislation. Before you punish, you must announce that this action is criminal, and its punishment is such-and-such. At this point, if anyone does this action, they deserve to be punished; and as long as this is the case, there must be legislation.

Legislation does not simply mean that God has ordained the punishment, but rather, it is an attempt to prevent the crime occurring by means of a deterrent so that no one will do it. If the crime has been committed, the punishment must be carried out because this is a warning to others and a deterrent against them repeating the crime. This is called a 'warning' (*nakal* or *nukul*), and from the word for revoking an oath is derived.

So when God *the Most High* says that He '…made them a warning…' this means that he made them a lesson so that none of the Israelites would repeat this kind of sin; '…a warning to those of their day,…' means a punishment that, whenever it was remembered by those who lived at that time, it would be enough to prevent them from going near such a sin ever again, and would be an admonition for them that they would not forget; '…and to those who came after them,…' that is: we made it so that the successive generations of the Israelites would pass it down to one another. As we said, every father told his son so that no one in the future would ever repeat such a thing because of the severity of the punishment; '…and a caution to the God-fearing,…' i.e. an admonition to all the people whom God *the Most High* would tell of what the Israelites did and how He punished them for it so that they would save themselves from the evil punishment of the Day of Resurrection which is much worse than this. And we must make it clear that there can be no punishment without a crime, and there can be no crime without legislation, and this is a Divine principle, as God *the Most High* asserts that He would never punish before He has sent a messenger (*al-Isra':* 15).

That is, first God’s messenger comes to prohibit these actions, and then if any person commits them, he would be deserving of punishment. And so all this talk of laws with retroactive force is contrary to the law and justice of God *the Most High*, and there is nothing in the Divine Law that can be called ‘retroactive force.’

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِۦٓ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَن تَذْبَحُوا۟ بَقَرَةًۖ قَالُوٓا۟
أَتَتَّخِذُنَا هُزُوًاۖ قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِٱللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْجَٰهِلِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

Remember when Moses said to his people, ‘God commands you to sacrifice a cow.’ They said, ‘Are you making fun of us?’ He answered, ‘God forbid that I should be so ignorant’ [67] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 67)

We alluded to this verse at the beginning of our reflections of the chapter of *al-Baqara* because the chapter was named after this passage. Notice that God *the Most High* uses the expression ‘And when’ which means here ‘remember when….’ ‘And when Moses said to his people, “Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow”….’ He does not say here why He commanded them to slaughter the cow, and so we must read the verses until the end of the story to establish what the reason was: A man was found murdered and groups of Israelites started casting the blame for the crime upon one another; and God will bring to light what they have been concealing. He ordered them to strike the deceased with a part of the cow. This would show them how God brings the dead back to life as a sign from God so that they would learn to use their minds (*al-Baqara*: 72-73).

The case with most commands is that the reason is mentioned first, and then comes the command. But this is the might of the Noble Quran because to ask for the reason to come first means that the command is coming from someone who is equal to you. If someone says to you, ‘Do this,’ you may ask him why before you obey him and do it. So if the order is from an equal, we question it; whilst if it is not from an equal, such as the command of a father to his son, or a doctor to his patient, or a general to his troops, you do not ask for a reason before obeying it because the one who gives the order is wiser than the one who takes it. If everyone whom God commands were to ask about the reason for the command before obeying it, he would only be obeying on account of this reason, not because of faith. And so it would be as though he obeyed solely because of the reason for the command – and at this point, there is no faith involved, and it makes no difference if a person is a believer or not, and the obedience will not be rewarded by God.

Faith makes the believer receive God’s commands with obedience whether he knows the reason for them or not. He obeys them because they come from God, and so every command of faith should be obeyed simply because they come from God. The sufficient reason for obeying any religious command is having faith in God, and so the True Lord *the Most High* begins every command by saying, ‘O you who believe,’ that is: ‘O you who believe in God as your Lord, God, and Creator, take His commands and obey them because you believe in the One who commanded you.’

In the verses we are now examining, God wants to explain this notion to us, and so He mentioned the command to sacrifice the cow first, and then mentions the reason in the subsequent verses. When you worship God, everything you do is in obedience to Him *the Exalted*, whether you know the reason for it or not. You pray because God *the Most High* told you to pray; and if you pray because it is exercise, or a way to wake up early, or as movements to keep limber, then your prayer has no value or reward. If you want to exercise, then go to the gym and let one of the trainers train you properly. If you want to have a limber body, there are a thousand ways to attain this. And if you want to worship God as He has commanded you, then pray because He has told you to pray. The same is true for all the other acts of worship.

Fasting is not merely a way to feel how a hungry person feels, or a way to diet, but rather, it is an act of worship. If you do not fast as a way of fulfilling God’s command for you to fast, then your fast will go unrewarded. If you fast for any reason other than worship, then God will not accept your fast. Indeed God is far more exalted than that anything should be associated with him, and whoever associates a partner with Him, God will leave all his actions to the one with whom he associated Him. This is true of all acts of worship.

This is the understanding of faith to which God *the Most High* wants to draw our attention to through the story of the Israelites and the cow. And so

He did not mention the reason at the outset, but rather told the story first, and then told us the reason right at the end. Whether God had told us the reason or not changes neither our belief in the Truth of what happened, nor that the story has wisdom behind it, even if it is too subtle for us to grasp.

The verse we are examining now says, '…Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow….' God *the Most High* gave the command first to test the strength of the Israelites' faith, and the extent to which they were prepared to obey His commands without any hesitancy or procrastination. But instead of doing this, they began to negotiate and defer.

'And when Moses said to his people….': The word 'people' (Arabic: *qawm*) literally means a group composed only of men, which is why the Noble Quran uses it to mean 'men' when it enjoins on the believers that no *qawm* (men) should ridicule other men; it may well be that those they deride are better than themselves; and no women should deride other women: it may well be that those they deride are better than themselves (*al-Hujurat:* 11). The distinction in the verse between *'qawm'* and 'women' makes it clear that the term *qawm* refers to men. So *qawm* means 'men,' derived from the word *qiyam,* meaning 'attend to' because they attend to the affairs of their families and womenfolk.

An Arab poet said:

> I do not know, indeed I am not even close to knowing
> If the family of Hosn are *qawm* (men) or women.

Thus, attending to the affairs of life is the job of men, whilst a woman's life is based on her staying protected in her house, while men attend to her needs. A woman is a source of tranquillity for her husband, household, and children, and because of this her role is more important than that of men.

The verse we are examining now says, '…Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow….' A bid is a request to do something; if the bidder is of a higher rank than the one bidden, it is called a command, whilst if they are equal it is a request, whilst if the bidder is of a lower rank, it is a supplication or an entreaty. So let us pause to have a closer look at the instance mentioned in the Noble

Quran about Zechariah. The Quran tells us that Zechariah prayed to his Lord, saying, ‘O my Lord! Bestow upon me out of Your grace, the gift of goodly offspring’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 38).

Was this a command from Zechariah *peace be upon him*? Of course it was not; it was a supplication, and a supplication is an entreaty from a lower suppliant to a higher source of favour. The verse we are examining now says, ‘…Surely, God bids you sacrifice a cow….’ When a person with even the slightest intellectual means is asked to sacrifice a cow, he would know what to do and would not need any clarification? If they had simply sacrificed a cow everything would had been sorted out without any effort. As long as God told them to sacrifice a cow, all they had to do was obey.

But look at the foolishness even of their questioning. They wanted to find anything that could relieve them of this responsibility; and so they said to Moses *peace be upon him*, their own Prophet, ‘You are mocking us.’ In other words they thought it far-fetched for God *the Most High* to command them to sacrifice just any cow without further specifications, and so they accused Moses *peace be upon him* of mocking them. It was as though they thought the problem was difficult for God *the Most High* to solve simply by the sacrificing of a cow. When Moses *peace be upon him* heard their words he was astounded. Could any Prophet play around with the commands of God *the Most High*? Would God’s Prophet convey unto them a command from God *the Exalted* as a joke?

Moses *peace be upon him* then realised that these Jews were an ignorant people, ignorant about their Lord, and their messenger, and ignorant about their Hereafter. They tried to judge everything according to their own standards, and not the standards of God *the Most High*, and so he turned to the heavens and sought refuge with God from those ignorant people who took an easy thing and made it difficult, and took a simple thing and made it complicated, and who were actually asking God to make things hard for them and to be hard on them, and to make everything in their lives a source of hardship and difficulty.

قَالُوا۟ ٱدْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّن لَّنَا مَا هِىَ ۚ قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَّا فَارِضٌ
وَلَا بِكْرٌ عَوَانٌۢ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ فَٱفْعَلُوا۟ مَا تُؤْمَرُونَ ٦٨

They said, 'Call on your Lord for us, to show us what sort of cow it should be.' He answered, 'God says it should be neither too old nor too young, but in between, so do as you are commanded' [68] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 68)

Their question revealed the weakness of their faith. They did not say 'Call on our Lord for us,' but rather, '…Call on your Lord for us…,' as though God were the Lord of Moses *peace be upon him* alone. The Israelites used this manner of speech several times, and, as the Noble Quran tells us, they even said to Moses to go forth, he and his Lord, both of them, and fight, while they remained in their place (*al-Ma'ida*: 24).

The dialogue between them and Moses *peace be upon him* went on for a long time; they kept putting questions to Moses *peace be upon him*, and then he would ask God, and then the answer would come from God *the Most High*, and instead of obeying and ending the matter, they would ask another question. And so Moses *peace be upon him* would ask his Lord again and the answer would come, and the answer would lead to another inappropriate question from them. And then God *the Most High* gave them no more room to argue by giving them a description of a cow that could apply to one cow in particular. And so it is as though they made things hard for themselves, and so God made things hard for them.

So now, we come to the questions of the Israelites. The verse we are examining reports their first question: '…Call on your Lord for us that He would make plain to us what she is.' This question is meaningless and inappropriate because God *the Most High* had already told them it was a cow, and had not said, for example, just 'an animal' without specifying it is kind; so there was no need for this question. And so the True Lord *the Most High* said to them, '…She is a cow neither old nor young….' The word farid means 'wide,' and here it signifies 'old', but what is the relationship between the age and width of a cow? Cows bear a lot of offspring, and they are principally used for milk and breeding. Since they bear offspring often, the place where milk is produced is always getting larger. That is, their bellies get larger every time they breed, and so when their bellies are very wide, this is a sign that they are old, and have borne many offspring, and have become wide.

The word *bikr*, on the other hand, may have several meanings, including that the cow has not been mated with a stud, or that it has only bred once, or that it has bred many times, but this does not show on it because it is still young.

Then God *the Most High* says, '…but of the middle age between the two…,' that is, between these two descriptions. The True Lord *the Most High* then urges them on, saying, '…do therefore what you are bidden.' That is, enough of your arguing; obey God's command and sacrifice the cow. But they were not yet satisfied because they wanted to continue the dialogue, and so they changed to another question.

قَالُوا۟ ٱدْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّن لَّنَا مَا لَوْنُهَا ۚ قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا
بَقَرَةٌ صَفْرَآءُ فَاقِعٌ لَّوْنُهَا تَسُرُّ ٱلنَّـٰظِرِينَ ٦٩

They said, 'Call on your Lord for us, to show us what colour it should be.' He answered, 'God says it should be a bright yellow cow, pleasing to the eye' [69] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 69)

They searched for another question: What colour should it be? It is as though when God *the Most High* mentioned its age to them, the door was opened for them to ask about its colour, even though God *the Most High* had said to them, '…do therefore what you are bidden' (*al-Baqara*: 68). But they did not do this, but rather asked about its colour. '…She is a fawn-coloured cow….' Yellow is just one of many colours. Then He *the Exalted* added: '…her colour is very bright….' That is, everyone who looks at it will be pleased by how bright, clean, beautiful and well-proportioned it is.

He described the cow as being yellow which is a common colour. A colour cannot be specified without being seen, and so colours can only be understood if they are already known, and only then can the desired colour be found. And so to say simply 'yellow' is not enough because you cannot specify it exactly as there are endless shades of yellow. Mixing colours gives you an infinite number of shades, and so those who work in painting and decorating cannot paint an apartment a certain colour without first mixing the paint properly so that the colour will be the same shade all over. But if you ask one of them to paint the apartment the same colour on condition that he does every room on separate days, he will not be able to do it. If you hear the word ‘yellow,’ the colour yellow comes to your mind; and if you hear ‘bright,’ every colour has a particularly appropriate description which gives us the exact colour required, and so ‘bright yellow’ means intense yellow.

I think that things should be clear now. It is a yellow cow whose colour is bright and pleases those who behold it. The Israelites should have been content with that, but they asked yet another question.

قَالُواْ ٱدۡعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّن لَّنَا مَا هِيَ إِنَّ ٱلۡبَقَرَ تَشَٰبَهَ
عَلَيۡنَا وَإِنَّآ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَمُهۡتَدُونَ ٧٠

They said, ‘Call on your Lord for us, to show us
[exactly] what it is: all cows are more or less alike
to us. With God’s will, we shall be guided’ [70]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 70)

Despite the fact that all that had been said to the Israelites about the cow was completely clear- its age, its shape, its colour, and its appearance, God *the Most High* wanted to teach them a lesson, and so He made them all look for the cow, each one saying ‘this is it’, whilst the other said ‘no, this one here,’ and a third said ‘no, that one there,’ …and so they went back to Moses *peace be upon him* to ask him to go back to his Lord so that He would make it clear because cows were all the same to them. Upon this, they remembered God after having forgotten Him, and having failed to obey His command from the moment He told them to sacrifice the cow, and then said to them, ‘…do therefore what you are bidden’ (*al-Baqara*: 68). And so they asked Him for guidance after they had gone astray and become lost because of their stubbornness and rebelliousness, and the answer came from God *the Most High*.

قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٞ لَّا ذَلُولٞ تُثِيرُ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ وَلَا تَسۡقِي ٱلۡحَرۡثَ مُسَلَّمَةٞ لَّا شِيَةَ فِيهَاۚ قَالُواْ ٱلۡـَٔـٰنَ جِئۡتَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۚ فَذَبَحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُواْ يَفۡعَلُونَ ٧١

He replied, ‘It is a perfect and unblemished cow, not trained to till the earth or water the fields.’ They said, ‘Now you have brought the truth,’ and so they slaughtered it, though they almost failed to do so [71] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 71)

‘…A cow not worn….’ A worn cow means a broken-in cow, a cow which has been tamed and trained to do its jobs without any resistance, just like a broken-in horse which does not resist its rider because it has been trained. Our master Ishmael *peace be upon him* was the first person ever to break-in horses and train them. So the first attribute God *the Most High* gave them for this cow is that it should be untrained so that no one has ever led it or put it to work. It should have been set free to roam where it pleases in the fields without anyone to herd it. The phrase ‘…by ploughing the earth…’ means it should not have been used for ploughing and farming; and ‘…or watering the field…’ means it should not have been used to manage irrigation tracks to water crops; and ‘…sound, no blemish in her…’ means it should have no defects: its ears should not be clipped, and it should not have any kind of the marks or brands by which people mark their cattle, and its legs should not be crooked, and it should have no colour on it except bright yellow.

If one reflects on the descriptions of the cow given in these verses one will see the difficulty and severity of its specified attributes. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to requite them for what they did. The Israelites found only one cow which fitted these specifications, and so they said, ‘…Now you have brought the truth,’ as though what Moses *peace be upon him* had said to them before was not the truth. Then they sacrificed the cow, but did so reluctantly, for they had not at all wanted to sacrifice it because of their tendency to disobey God’s teachings. They wanted to tarry with God *the Most High*; but God *the Most High* tells us that the mark of the believers is that they hasten to obey His commands, as He urges the believers to vie in haste for pardon from their Lord, and a Paradise, vast as the Heavens and the Earth, prepared for the God-fearing (*Al-‘Imran*: 133).

This haste of the believers to obey God's commands is proof of their love for these commands because you make haste to obey the request of the one you love. God *the Most High* then says, '…yet nearly had they done it not;' which shows us that they tried to procrastinate and put off obeying God's commands.

We should be aware that the procrastination of the Israelites in obeying the command itself served to highlight another matter of faith: the cow which God told them to sacrifice as a result of their failing to obey the command immediately was a rare and unique cow. The specifications which were finally given to them only applied to one single cow, which meant that its owner was able to charge the price he liked, and make a handsome sum.

The story is that there was a pious man amongst the Israelites who would always make sure that his income was lawful, and that his speech was honest, and that his faith in God was genuine. When he was about to die, he owned a female calf and had a wife and young son. What could he do when he owned nothing but this calf? He turned to God, and said: 'O God, I leave this calf in your care for my son,' and then he let the calf go free in the pastures. He did not will the calf to anyone, but rather left it in the care of God. He left it in the safe hand of God which can keep anything safe, and then said to his wife, 'I own nothing but this calf, and I trust no one with it but God, and I have set it free to roam in the pasture.'

When the son grew up, his mother said to him, 'Your father left you a trust with God, a calf.' He said, 'Mother, where can I find it?' she replied, 'Be like your father; he trusted in God and sent it out; so you trust in God and seek it out.' So the son said, 'O God, Lord of Abraham and Moses, return to me that which my father left with You.' Thereupon, the calf came back to him having grown into an adult cow, and so he took it to show his mother. Whilst he was going, the Israelites saw him and said, 'This is the cow which the Lord requires,' and so they went to him and offered to buy the cow for three dinars. He went to ask his mother her opinion, and they feared that she would refuse and so offered him six dinars. His mother said no; it was not for sale, and so the son said that he would not sell it for less that the amount of gold which would fill the cow's hide, and so they paid him what he asked. In this way we see that the piety of a father made God watch over his children and take care of them and make things easy for them.

وَإِذْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا فَادَّارَأْتُمْ فِيهَا ۖ وَاللَّهُ مُخْرِجٌ مَّا كُنتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

Then, when you [Israelites] killed someone and started to blame one another – although God was to bring what you had concealed to light [72] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 72)

The murdered victim referred to in the verse was a wealthy man from the Israelites who had no son to inherit him, and had several relatives, each of which wanted to get hold of the man's wealth; and wealth and gold were the life of the Israelites. So the nephew of this wealthy man plotted against him, and murdered him and took his wealth. But he wanted to clear himself of suspicion and so he took the body and placed it near the gate of a neighbouring village so that its inhabitants would be accused of the crime. In the morning, the villagers awoke to find the rich man's body in front of their village, and saw that he was not from the village and so asked around as to who he was. They eventually came to the man's nephew, whereupon the dead man's family gathered and accused them of the murder; and the one who was strongest in his accusation was the killer nephew himself.

God *the Most High* says, '…and strove among yourselves, each denying being the perpetrator….' The root word (*dar'*) means everyone comes and declares their innocence, and so each one of them wanted to cast the blame for the crime from himself and say that it was not him. It was not necessary that each of them had to accuse someone else; it was enough to declare his own innocence.

So the inhabitants of the two villages, that of the victim and that where the body was found, attempted to remove suspicion from themselves and perhaps place it on someone else, but there was no clear evidence to support any accusation. Rather, there was no evidence at all, and so it was impossible to accuse any particular person from either village.

The law at the time was that if a murdered body was found next to the gate of a village, and there was no evidence to point out the killer, the village and family of the victim could take fifty men from the leaders of the village where the body was found, who would have to swear that they had not killed him, and that they did not know who had. If the leaders numbered less than fifty, they would have to repeat the oath until it had been said fifty times. So they would swear that they had not killed him and did not know who had, and then the treasury would have to pay the blood indemnity for the victim.

But God *the Most High* willed something else to happen: He wanted this crime to show the doubters amongst the Israelites how the Day of Resurrection would be, and make the dead man rise and tell the name of his killer, and make them see the Resurrection whilst they still lived. And so He said, '…and God was to bring to light what you were hiding,' i.e. the Israelites, or those who committed the crime, had planned that it would remain concealed and that no one would know anything about it, and so the man came and killed his uncle without anyone seeing him and then took the body out secretly by night so that no one saw him, and then went to a nearby village and dumped the body there by the village gate, whilst the villagers slept, and then crept away.

He thought that all of this planning would make the crime impossible to solve, and that no one would learn the secret of it; but God *the Most High* had willed otherwise. He wanted to reveal the crime in a way that could not be argued with, and at the same time answer the Israelites' doubts about the Resurrection by showing them the Resurrection whilst they still lived.

فَقُلْنَا ٱضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُحْىِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ
وَيُرِيكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ (٧٣)

We said, 'Strike the [body] with a part of
[the cow]': thus God brings the dead to life and
shows His signs so that you may understand [73]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 73)

The quarrel raged among the Israelites, and almost led to huge strife; and so they decided to turn to Moses *peace be upon him* so that he could ask God *the Most High* to reveal to them the mystery of this crime and show them who the killer was. Thereupon, the command came from God *the Most High* that they should sacrifice a cow, and if they had simply sacrificed any cow the problem would have ended there, but they kept on asking about its colour, and shape, and so on as we have seen until they arrived to the point where the only cow that would do was the one which the pious man had left for his son in the care of God *the Most High* until his son grew. So they bought the cow and sacrificed it, and then God commanded them to '…Strike him with part of it…,' i.e. strike the dead man with a piece of the sacrificed cow after its blood had flowed and it died.

Look at the amazing nature of this story: A piece of a dead body struck another dead body and made it come back to life. So the True Lord *the Most High* made things happen in a way in which they could never have any doubt. If God had brought him to life without first having him struck by a piece of the cow, they might have said, 'He was not really dead; he was still alive and then he woke from his coma.' But God told them to sacrifice a cow so that it would die to give them a lesson about faith in the power of God, whilst they were materialistic people who believed in nothing but the material world, and so that they would take a piece of it, or some pieces from it and strike the dead man, who would then rise and speak the name of his killer before being returned once more to death by God.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…thus God brings the dead to life, and He shows you His signs so that you may understand,' so that the Israelites, whilst still alive, could see how God will raise the dead, and know that people do not stay alive simply because of the means of life, but rather because of the will of God who created the means of life by saying 'Be!' and it was.

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ فَهِيَ كَٱلْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً ۚ وَإِنَّ مِنَ ٱلْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا
يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ ۚ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَّقَّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ ٱلْمَآءُ ۚ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ
مِنْ خَشْيَةِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

Even after that, your hearts became as hard as rocks, or even harder, for there are rocks from which streams spring out, and some from which water comes when they split open, and others which fall down in awe of God: He is not unaware of what you do [74] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 74)

Why did the True Lord *the Most High* mention the heart here – rather than the soul – and why did He describe the heart as being capable of hardening? It is because the heart is the seat of kindness, mercy, and emotion, and if we expose the heart to the mention of God it becomes filled with mercy and love. The heart is the organ which solves the problems of life; if the heart is filled with certitude and faith, all the rest of the body will be filled with the essence of this faith.

In order for us to know the power, ability, and breadth of the heart for faith and all that comes with it, God *the Most High* explains this to us in His Noble Book by saying that God has sent from on high the best of all announcements, a Book fully consistent within itself, with repetitions; a Book whereat shiver the skins of all who stand in awe of their Lord; then their skins and their hearts soften at the remembrance of God. Such is God's guidance: He guides with it him whom He pleases – whereas he whom God lets go astray, no guide shall there be for him (*az-Zumar:* 23).

So, we see that the skin shivers with terror at the threat of hell, and the mere reading of what the Quran says about it; and then comes mercy, and at this time, not only the skin softens, but the heart must also soften because it is what gives the brightness of faith to the rest of the body.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Indeed, there lies in the body a morsel which, if it is sound, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Indeed, it is the heart.'(1)

So the heart is the source of certitude and the seat of faith, and just as faith lies in the heart, so too does hardness and disbelief. When the heart forgets to remember God, it hardens. Why is this? It is because it imagines that there is nothing but this worldly life and matter, and so it tries to gain as much of this as it can, and in any way it can; and so it ends up bringing nothing but injustice, wickedness, and the usurping of the rights of the weak, and then it will never desist because it will become the purpose of its life, with nothing else besides.

A person with such a hardened heart would find a person dying of hunger and not give him even a piece of bread; and when faith leaves the heart, mercy leaves with it, and the faith of all the body leaves too. The portion of faith that resides in the hand leaves so that the hand reaches out to steal and take what is unlawful; the portion of faith that resides in the eye leaves so that the eye looks to that which God has forbidden for it to see; the portion of faith that resides in the foot leaves so that the foot never walks to the mosque, but rather walks to the bar, or to steal. For, as we have said, the heart is where the faith of the whole body is stored.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The True Lord *the Most High* gives a simile for the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites, saying, '…your hearts hardened so that they were like rocks, or harder still….' A rock is a hard thing we can sense for ourselves, and which is very familiar to us, and of course was familiar to the Israelites as well because they had a long experience with rocks when they wandered in the desert, and when they were thirsty Moses *peace be upon him* would strike the rock with his staff for them to get water.

God *the Most High* is telling them that their hearts are supposed to be soft and gentle, even if they were only as hard as rocks; but their hearts were even harder than this, not only as hard and rigid as rocks, but even harder.How could their hearts be harder than rocks? Do not think of the material softness of the heart, but rather think of how it fulfils its function.

A mountain should be hard because this is its function, to be a firm and immoveable peg for the earth. But this hardness is not wanted from the heart, and is not its function. Yet the hearts of the Israelites were even harder than mountains. A heart should be soft, whilst a rock should be hard.

Every attribute is created for a certain being, and designed for a purpose. A hook, for example, is crooked, and this crookedness makes it perform its function correctly. So the crookedness of a hook means that it is properly fulfilling its function. When the heart is corrupted and fails to perform its function it becomes harder than a rock, and does the opposite of its proper function.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…for surely, from some rocks streams burst forth; others, surely, split asunder, and water issues from them….'

Here, God *the Most High* reminds them of the grace they saw lodged in a rock, when Moses *peace be upon him* struck the rock with his staff and the fountains flowed from it. This was a tangible example which they witnessed themselves. The True Lord *the Most High* is practically saying to them: Grace touches rocks and makes streams gush from them, and water issues from them. And then He *the Exalted* says,'…and others, surely, fall down in awe of God….'

So rocks are touched with softness and mercy so that water flows from them, but when your hearts hardened, they were never again touched with mercy and softness, and so they never softened or felt awe. God revealed to you the Torah, and gave to you much of His grace, and mercy, shelter, and forgiveness; and so your hearts should have softened with the remembrance of God.

But what is the difference between streams bursting forth from rocks and rocks splitting asunder so that water gushes forth from them? When a rock gushes forth, water bursts out of it. We go to places, where there is water, to take what we need, but if streams burst forth, this means that the water comes to us and we stay where we are. There is a difference between a blessing which you should go to, and a blessing which comes to you. As for the rocks falling down for awe of God *the Most High*, this happened when God *the Most High* revealed Himself to the mountain and so it crumbled, as He *the Exalted* says that when Moses' Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Moses fell down in a swoon (*al-A'raf*: 143).

The True Lord *the Most High* reminds them of how when He revealed Himself to the mountain, it fell down and crumbled for awe of God *the Most High.* And so He does not give them examples of what happened to other people, but rather He gives them examples of what happened to them.

God *the Most High* then says, '…And God is not unmindful of what you do' (*al-Baqara*: 74). That is, remember that nothing escapes God's notice, and that He knows everything that you know, and that you shall all meet Him on the Day of Resurrection, and that you all need His mercy and forgiveness; so do not let your hearts harden lest God *the Glorious* cast you out of His mercy, just as your hearts are empty of His remembrance.

أَفَتَطْمَعُونَ أَن يُؤْمِنُوا۟ لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلَـٰمَ
ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُۥ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

So can you [believers] hope that such people will believe you, when some of them used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist them, even when they understood them? [75] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 75)

The True Lord *the Most High* gives us a piece of wisdom here related to what He has told us about the Israelites and their story, for they would come to play a role in the life of the Muslims in Medina, and then in Jerusalem, and then in the Aqsa Mosque. So He tells us how they made their prophet weary, and disobeyed their Lord, and how they met blessings with ingratitude, and mercy with denial. If this is how they were, O Muhammad, with God *the Glorious* and with their prophet, do not expect that they will believe in you, or that they will enter Islam, even though they have with them the Torah which calls them to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

These verses were a source of supreme solace to the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, telling him not to grieve over the Jews' failure to believe in him; for all he had to do was deliver the Message. But the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was eager that everyone in the world might believe, whether Jews, Christians or non-believers, does not mean that he did not understand his task, but rather that he was conscious of the blissfulness of following his Lord's commands, and so he wanted all of God's creatures on earth to be guided. And so God comforted him effectively saying: Do not expect them to believe in you; and the fact that they do not believe in you does not mean that you are not truthful. Their denial of you should not affect you; so do not crave, o Muhammad that they will believe in you.

What is *tama‘*(rendered in this translation as craving)? It is when the soul has a strong desire for something which is not its right (this element in its meaning is not clear in the English word craving), although it loves it. And so an intelligent person should only hope for those things which are within his right. Sometimes people want to make their lives more comfortable and live in luxury, but without changing the way they seek their living. We say to them: If you want to improve your living standards, you must also increase your work because if you seek comfort by relying on the work of others, the balance of life on earth will be upset. That is, if you want to live a balanced life, you must live according to your work because if you do otherwise, you steal and commit bribery and corruption. So if you have a craving, it should be for something within your capabilities.

So the question 'Do you crave then…' here indicates that we should not have desire for anything unless it is within our capabilities. Are we capable of turning these Jews into believers? God *the Most High* effectively says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: This is something beyond that which I have commanded you with, because you only have to deliver the Message, even though it is something beloved to you. Their prior experiences with God would give you no hope that you will reach the result you desire.

Therefore, this verse was a consolation for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about that which he would find from the Jews, and it gave him the immunisation of faith that would help him meet their lack of faith with strength and resolve, for he would already expect it, and so he would not grieve or waste himself in sorrow because God *the Most High* had already shown him the likelihood of what they would do. And so when they indeed behaved as had been predicted, this would be something that his soul could bear.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And a party from among them used to hear the word of God….' Look at the honesty and precision of the expression here: 'a party from among them,' not all of them. This is the basis of what we know as a 'conservative statement,' which means to avoid generalisation of saying, 'they are all such-and-such.' We must allow for the possibility that at least one of them might believe, or go against the stream. There were a good many of the people of the Book who knew the attributes of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* from the Torah and the Gospel, and when he was sent, they believed in him; and these people did not pervert the word of God. If the Quran had generalised here, the disbelievers' view of Islam would have changed, and they would have said: 'This religion says that we have perverted the word of God, but we have not perverted it at all, and we are awaiting His Messenger.' So this verdict would not have been precise, and would have inevitably been wrong in some way because God, who revealed the Quran, misses nothing, and knows what is in all our hearts. But the noble verse said that '...a party from among them used to hear the word of God, and then, after they had understood it, knowingly perverted it.' This statement is not a generalisation, and is phrased in a precise way such that it can be applied to any situation. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and then, after they had understood it, knowingly perverted it.'

This is a composite sin; they heard the word of God, and understood it, and recognised the penalty for sinning, and then they perverted it. They read the Torah, and read the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* so that they knew him as well as they knew their own children; and then they knowingly perverted the word of God. The meaning of this perversion is that they changed the meaning of the words; they would say (*as-sam 'alaykum*) ('death upon you') instead of (*as-salam 'alaykum*) ('peace be upon you'), and they did not stop at perversion only, but rather, they went as far as to make speech of their own and then say that it was from the Torah.

وَإِذَا لَقُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ قَالُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَا بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ قَالُوٓا۟
أَتُحَدِّثُونَهُم بِمَا فَتَحَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لِيُحَآجُّوكُم بِهِۦ عِندَ رَبِّكُمْ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

When they meet the believers, they say, 'We too believe.' But when they are alone with each other they say, 'How could you tell them about God's revelation [to us]? They will be able to use it to argue against you before your Lord! Have you no sense?' [76] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 76)

This is an example of the hypocrisy of the Jews. There are three kinds of people: believers, disbelievers, and hypocrites. The believer is in harmony with himself, and with the world in which he lives; the disbeliever is in harmony with himself but not with the world, and the world curses him; the hypocrite is in harmony neither with himself nor with the world. This verse gives us an example of hypocrisy, and how the hypocrite is neither in harmony with himself nor with the world. He says what he does not believe, and in his inner soul, he believes what he does not say. And so the entire world curses him, and in the Hereafter, he will be in the lowest level of hell.

This verse is similar to another verse which we discussed earlier, namely God's words: When they meet the faithful they say, 'We believe;' but when they find themselves alone with their devils, they say, 'Verily we hold with you, and we are only mocking' (*al-Baqara*: 14).

In the first verse, the Jews had a role; for there were some non-Jewish hypocrites whose evil leaders were Jews. In this verse, however, the players are the Jews and the hypocrites from amongst themselves. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And when they meet with those who believe, they say "We believe,"….' Is faith a matter of mere speech? Faith is the certitude of the heart, not the speech of the tongue, and the proof of belief is action. There is no one who actually follows the ways of the believers in hypocrisy or ostentation; one might say 'I believe' in hypocrisy, but then his actions will not be those of the believers. And so it was their actions that exposed them, as God *the Most High* says, '…and when they are alone with one another, they say, 'Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you…'

In a verse in another chapter, the True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers that when the hypocrites meet them, they say that they believe, but when they are alone they bite their fingers' ends in their rage against the believers (*Al-'Imran*: 119).

And in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida,* He *the Exalted* tells the believers that when the hypocrites come to them, they claim that they believe, whereas, in fact, they come in with unbelief and go forth with it (*al-Ma'ida*: 61).

These are four images of the hypocrites. Each one of them contains the false profession of faith. In the first verse, God *the Most High* says, '…but when they find themselves alone with their devils, they say, 'Verily we hold with you….' And in the second verse, God *the Most High* tells us of how when the hypocrites meet with one another, they exchange blames for telling the believers of what God has disclosed to them. And in the third verse, He *the Exalted* describes to the believers how the hypocrites bite their finger ends in their anger against the believers. And in the fourth verse, He explains how the hypocrites harbour disbelief deep in their hearts when they come to meet the believers and the resolve to go forth with it.

Around the time of the start of the mission of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the Jews would say to the believers, ‘This Prophet of yours is mentioned in our Torah; his attributes are such-and-such.’ But then the Jewish rabbis stopped them from doing this, saying, ‘Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?’ So, it is as though they knew the description of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him,* but they wanted to conceal it. It is strange that they would say ‘what God has disclosed to you’. If it were really a disclosure from God, there would be no special distinction for them in it; and if God had wished them to find true disclosure, their hearts would have believed.

The words ‘…so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?…’ show that the Jewish hypocrites, the disbelievers, and all mankind know that they are the creatures of God, and that it was God who created them. Since they know this, why do they disbelieve in their Creator? The phrase ‘…so that they can dispute with you about it…’ means so that their argument against you, will be strong in God’s sight. But they did not say ‘God;’ rather, they said ‘your Lord’. To argue means that two sides have different points of view, and so they engage in a discussion in which each side gives their argument.

This is a debate much like the one that God *the Most High* described between Abraham and the king; the king argued with Abraham about his Lord simply because God had granted him kingship (*al-Baqara*: 258).

This was the debate that took place between Abraham *peace be upon him* and Nimrod, to whom God *the Most High* had given kingship. What did Abraham *peace be upon him* say? He said that it is his Lord Who grants life and deals death. This was Abraham’s argument in his call to God, and so Nimrod answered him with a spurious argument, saying that he too grants life and deals death. Then he brought forth one of his soldiers and ordered his guards to kill him, and then when they went to kill him, he said, ‘let him live,’ and then said to Abraham *peace be upon him* that he too grants life and deals death.

This was a weak argument because the one whose death Nimrod ordered was already alive with the life God gave him, and when Nimrod said ‘kill him’ he did not die, but rather Nimrod ordered him killed. There is a difference between someone dying and being killed: killing means to destroy the construction of the body so that the spirit exits from it because it can no longer remain there; on the other hand, death is for the spirit to exit the body whilst it is still sound and has not been destroyed. The one who deals death is God Alone, and so the True Lord *the Most High* asserts that Muhammad is only a messenger; all the other messengers have passed away before him. Then God puts forth to the believers the question that if, then, he dies or is killed, will they turn about on their heels (*Al-'Imran*: 144).

And if Nimrod had killed the man, he would not have been able to restore him to life. But Abraham *peace be upon him* did not want to go along with such hollow argumentation, where any argument can be answered with other arguments, even if they are feeble; and so he came up with an undefeatable argument which Nimrod could not possibly match: He challenged Nimrod saying that God causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west. Thereupon the infidel remained dumbfounded' for God does not guide people who are unjust (*al-Baqara*: 258).

This is the meaning of a debate; each side makes its point. As long as they are arguing with you in the presence of your Lord, believing that it would not simply pass without consequence, for God is Lord of all, and will judge fairly between the oppressed and the oppressor; if this is so, are you doing what is best for yourselves? The answer is no. If you knew better, you would not have made this mistake; so it was not a special disclosure. God *the Most High* then says, '…Do you not understand?' This is a logical ending to the verse because those who act as they acted and speak as they spoke cannot be in possession of any reason. When someone says, '…so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?…', he must believe that he has a Lord, and if he then does not acknowledge this God, and does not fear Him, he cannot be described as possessing reason.

أَوَلَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

Do they not know that God is well aware of what they conceal and what they reveal? [77]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 77)

God *the Most High* tells us here that He knows all about them and what they do. They thought that God *the Most High* was unaware when they found themselves alone in private and said to one another, '…Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?' (*al-Baqara*: 76). But God *the Most High* knew, and heard; and when the hypocrites used to meet the believers, they would say 'We believe,' but when they are alone they bite their fingers' ends in their rage against the believers (*Al-'Imran*: 119). This was a physical reaction which involved no speech, but was rather an event, yet it was no secret.

What does 'conceal' mean, and what does 'open' mean? An open matter is something that you do in front of someone who has ears to hear you, or eyes to see you; if it has no sound, the eye will see it, and if it has a sound, the ear will hear it; and these are the principle means of perception. God *the Most High* says that He knows all that they conceal and all that they bring into the open? Would it not make more sense for Him to have said that He knows all that they bring into the open and all that they conceal? If He knows what we conceal, isn't it clear that He knows what we bring into the open? Indeed He does know, but this is part of the precise rhetoric of the Quran, since the One speaking is God *the Most High*.

We know that God is Unseen, and the unseen means all that is not directly perceived by our senses. Since God is Unseen, He obviously knows all that is unseen and concealed; yet perhaps the realm of open matters operates according to different laws. For example, if there is someone in a house, and he says, 'I know everything that is in this house and everything that is outside it;' when he says 'I know everything that is in this house' we will say, 'You are in the house, so there is nothing strange in this; but you are hidden from what is outside the house, so how do you know of it?'

Since God *the Most High* is Unseen, His words '…all that they conceal…' are closer to His Unseen reality, whilst '…all that they bring into the open' is the part that gives us pause. Do not think that since God *the Most High* is Unseen, He only knows what is secret and concealed; no; He knows both the open and the hidden. So it makes sense since God is Unseen to our eyes, and we cannot directly perceive Him, that He would say '…all that they conceal…' first. What does '…all that they conceal…' mean? A secret is something that you do not divulge to someone else, since if you divulged it to someone else, it would no longer be secret. A secret is something you keep to yourself, and do not tell it to anyone. If a secret is something you keep to yourself, an open matter is something you say aloud to others and it is considered open as long as two people know it. So an open matter is known to others, whilst a secret is concealed. When God *the Most High* informs us that He is Unseen, this does not mean that He only knows what is unseen. He knows the hidden and the open, and indeed God *the Most High* says in the Noble Quran that He knows what is secret and even what is yet more hidden (*Ta Ha:* 7). If a 'secret' is what you keep to yourself, and what exists only inside you, 'what is yet more hidden' means that God knows what you will do before you even do it, and He knows what will happen to you before it happens.

وَمِنۡهُمۡ أُمِّيُّونَ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ إِلَّآ أَمَانِيَّ وَإِنۡ هُمۡ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

Some of them are uneducated, and know the Scripture only through wish ful thinking. They rely on guesswork [78]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 78)

God *the Most High* is still speaking about the people of the Book. After telling us about those who said to their coreligionists, 'Do you tell them of what God has disclosed to you so that they can dispute with you about it in the presence of your Lord?' (*al-Baqara*: 76), He *the Exalted* mentions another group, whom He calls here the 'illiterates.' The soundest opinion concerning the origin of the Arabic word *ummi* ('unlettered') is that it means one who is just as he was when his mother (*umm*) gave birth to him. That is, he knows nothing more of culture and education than he did the moment he was born. So the basic meaning of the illiterate person is the one who has gained nothing from the culture of the world around him; without it, it is necessarily being said that he is like he was when his mother bore him, since the norm in most societies is that the people of knowledge are the elite, not the commoners. In any case, all the definitions of the word *ummi* are close in meaning.

God *the Most High* says, 'And there are among them illiterates….' Notice that there were several camps from amongst the illiterate people who opposed Islam: the first camp were the idolaters of Mecca, and the second were the people of the Book in Medina. The name 'People of the Book' refers to the followers of Moses *peace be upon him* and the followers of Christ *peace be upon him*. But in the Arabian Peninsula, there were small scattered numbers of Christians, while the Jews were living in a community. The reference in God's statement 'And there are among them illiterates who do not know the Book…' is to the Jews who had their community in Medina. Since the True Lord *the Most High* says that 'there are among them illiterates…', this means that there must have been among them people who were lettered; and it is they who will shortly be referred to in the coming verse when God *the Most High* says, 'Woe, then, to those who write down the Book with their own hands…' (*al-Baqara*: 79).

So God *the Most High* here divides the Jews into sections: one section of them were unlettered, not knowing anything about the Scripture, and all they knew was whatever their rabbis said to them; had they known about the descriptions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Torah, they might have believed in him. The 'Book' referred to here is the Torah. God *the Most High* did not deny that they had any kind of knowledge, but rather, He denied their possessing a particular kind of knowledge because He said that they knew nothing but 'wild wishes.' So it is as though those wishes were the extent of their knowledge of the Scripture. But what are wild wishes (*amaniyy*)*?* Sometimes the word is given as *amani,* and other times as *amaniyy* with a doubled letter (*y*). The word *amani* is the plural of *umniya* ('wish / desire'), whilst the word *amaniyy* is the plural of the word *umniyya* with a doubled letter (y). The word *umniyya* is found in the Noble Quran in both the singular and in the plural forms. God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that it is not in accordance with their wishes or the wishes of the people of the Book; anyone who does evil will be requited for it (*an-Nisa':* 123). Here it is in the plural.

It also occurs in the singular when God *the Most High* addresses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that he had not sent a messenger or a prophet before him but when he desired or wished, Satan injected some wrong desire in his wish (*al-Hajj:* 52).

What does *umniyya* (wild wish) mean? It means something which a person wants to happen, but whose occurrence is impossible. So it will not happen, and it will never be; and so they say that one way of wishing is to imagine fanciful things. A poet once said:

> If only my youth would return one day,
> So that I could tell him what old age has done.

Could youth ever return? Of course, they could not. This is something that could never happen. Another poet said:

> If only the stars would come down to me, that I could arrange them
> As pearls of praise for you, as words are not enough!

Will the stars really fall from the sky and come to this poet so that he can weave them into lines of poetry for his beloved? So, one of the meanings of wild wishing (wishful thinking, daydreaming) is falsehood and fabrication. Some of the orientalists have a different interpretation of the above quoted verse saying that God had not sent a messenger or a prophet before Muhammad but when he desired or wished, Satan injected some wrong desire in his wish (*al-Hajj:* 52). They argue that the word *tamanna* (wished) here means 'reciting' and *umniya* (wish / desire) here means 'recitation;' and of course Satan would not cast anything into the recitation of the Messenger except lies, fabrications, and unbelief.

God *the Most High* made mention of the idols worshipped by the Arabs in pre-Islamic times when He addressed the idolaters urging them to think of their idols: al-Lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat, the third and other one. He then puts forth to them the question as to why they would attach male progeny to themselves while they attribute females to God; that is indeed an unfair division (*an-Najm:* 19-22).

Enemies of Islam argue that since the Quran mentioned the names of the *gharaniq*, the idols which the idolaters used to worship, among which were al-lat, al-'Uzza and Manat, this means that the intercession of these idols is to be hoped for in the Hereafter. This concept does not make any sense in the light of the monotheistic religion which calls to the worship of God Alone. The orientalists evaded this by saying that the religion truly does call to the worship of God Alone, and that therefore when Satan cast something into the words which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* recited, God *the Most High* then nullified this by replacing it with His own firm verses, saying that those were nothing but names which the idolaters and their forefathers had coined, for which God had sent down no warranty (*an-Najm:* 23).

By this, they mean to suggest that it is possible for Satan to cast some of his own notions into the words of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, only for God *the Most High* to then abrogate what Satan cast and replace it with his own verses.

God *the Most High* did not leave His Revelation for Satan to play with; and so we must consider this verse from a viewpoint completely different from all we have just related. We say that you should consider God's words that he had not sent a messenger or a prophet before Muhammad but when he desired or wished, Satan injected some wrong desire in his wish (*al-Hajj:* 52). Even if we allow that *tamanna* is used to mean 'reciting,' and then God *the Most High* abrogated what Satan cast and then replaced it with His own verses, this would mean that He *the Exalted* did not leave His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to err, and so we would still be assured that everything the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said was correct, and that everything that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered to us was finally approved by God; and so we could rest assured that there could be nothing that Satan could cast into the Messenger's recitation which could reach us without being abrogated first.

So if we say that God abrogates what Satan casts, then how could you possibly know what Satan has cast since the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* only delivers to us what has been approved by God? And what is a messenger? He is a man who has had revealed to him divine teachings, and has been commanded to convey them to others. And what is a prophet? He is a man who has had revealed to him divine teachings which he has not been commanded to convey to others. Since he has not been commanded to convey them to others, they are specifically addressed to him; and the prophet is a behavioural role-model because he implements the law revealed to the messenger who came before him, and brings nothing new.

The noble verse says '…a messenger or a prophet…' (*al-Hajj:* 52), and so if this meaning of *tamanna* as 'recitation' can apply to the case of a messenger, it cannot apply to the case of a prophet because prophets do not recite anything. So since prophets are also mentioned in this noble verse, it must be that *tamanna* here means something else other than 'recitation' because prophets do not bring new teachings which they recite to the people so that they would recite something approved by God with nothing cast into it by Satan.

The word *tamanna* does not mean the recitation of Satan. The ardent wish of every messenger and prophet is for their mission to succeed, the messenger as a conveyor of God's teachings and the Prophet as a behavioural role-model. The true meaning here is something different: the wish of the Messenger is to convey God's teachings, and Satan tries to prevent God's teachings from entering people's hearts. This is what it means. When God makes His verses clear, He succours the faith so that God's teachings come to govern the earth and regulate people's lives. This is what it means.

The word 'wish' in this noble verse means that the messenger or prophet hopes that his teachings will come to prevail in the earth, and then Satan casts obstacles in his path, and then God makes His verses clear and succours the truth. We must understand the verse in this way; and this completely negates what the orientalists say about how when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* recited what was revealed to him, Satan was able to interfere and place his own words into the Revelation; this is impossible.

God *the Most High* says, 'And there are among them illiterates who do not know the Book but wild wishes….' This means that people will come who know nothing about the Book except conjecture, and the unlettered people will believe them out of ignorance. It is as though God *the Most High* wants to warn us that many of the religious schools of thought on earth are the creations of those who call to them. There are people who trust others to tell them what the laws of the religion say; an unlettered or uneducated man asks a scholar about a ruling of the Sacred Law and then takes his answer and applies it unquestioningly because his knowledge only goes as far as asking for a ruling. The True Lord *the Most High* has decreed that no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear the burden of another (*al-An'am:* 164).

That is, no one will bear the sin of any other on the Day or Resurrection. And He *the Most High* says that on the day of resurrection, they shall bear their own burden entirely and some of the burdens of those whom they, in their ignorance, misled (*an-Nahl:* 25).

Some people imagine that there is a contradiction between these two verses, but we say no; whoever commits a sin will be held accountable for it, and whoever misguides someone else with an incorrect ruling which allows him to do what God has forbidden, will carry his own sins and also the sins of the one he misguided; he will have one sin for being astray himself, and another sin for leading others astray. Indeed more than that, for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Whoever calls to guidance will have reward equivalent to the reward of all who follow him without this decreasing anything from their rewards; and whoever calls to misguidance will bear sin equivalent to the sins of all who follow him without this decreasing anything from their sins.’(1)

We must stress the danger of giving religious verdicts or legal opinions without having proper knowledge. The worst an opinion on worldly affairs can do is causing you to lose out in a deal, whilst a religious opinion lasts a long, long time.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…and they do nothing but conjecture….’ As we said, conjecture means to hold something as likely but not certain. If the term ‘wild *wishes’* (*amaniyy*) here means ‘reciting,’ as it sometimes can, it would mean that these unlettered people know nothing of the Book except the recitation of the tongue with no understanding. And so God *the Most High* says that the parable of the Jews who were given the burden of the Torah, and thereafter failed to bear it, is that of an ass that carries a load of books (*al-Jumu’a:* 5).

And so we see that there are people who carry the Torah whilst knowing nothing about it, and God *the Most High* says that such are like donkeys; but they are lower than donkeys because it is the donkey’s job to carry heavy weights, whilst it is not the job of the human being to carry something which he knows nothing about. And so he must read the Book and know what it requires from him.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

فَوَيۡلٞ لِّلَّذِينَ يَكۡتُبُونَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِأَيۡدِيهِمۡ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَٰذَا مِنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ لِيَشۡتَرُواْ
بِهِۦ ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلٗاۖ فَوَيۡلٞ لَّهُم مِّمَّا كَتَبَتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَوَيۡلٞ لَّهُم مِّمَّا يَكۡسِبُونَ ٧٩

So woe to those who write something down with their own hands and then claim, ‘This is from God,’ in order to make some small gain. Woe to them for what their hands have written! Woe to them for all that they have earned! [79]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 79)

This noble verse refers to the second section of the Jews, namely those who are in contrast to the unlettered ones. They are either unlettered, having no knowledge of the Book, or they do know, but change it and write it with their own hands and say it is from God. So God *the Most High* warns them, with ‘Woe.’ The verse begins directly with a warning of punishment. The Arabic word *wayl* (‘woe’), along with other similar words like *wayh* and ways, mean perdition and suffering, and are also used to express regret for man’s heedlessness of the punishment of the next life. We find an example of this in the exclamation of the losers on the Day of Judgement when they cry, ‘Oh, woe to us!’ upon finding that the record of their deeds leaves nothing out, be it small or great (*al-Kahf*: 49).

And we have another example in the cry of the wicked ones when they come face to face with the punishment of the Hereafter: ‘Oh, woe to us! We were indeed heedless of this!’ (*al-Anbiya’*: 97).

These cries of woe express the distress felt upon seeing the suffering of the Hereafter. It is said that wayl is also the name of a valley in hell in which wicked people will languish for forty years (we seek God’s protection). The True Lord *the Most High* warns those who write the Book down falsely with their own hands that their punishment on the Day of Resurrection will be manifold because they will share in the sins of all who committed sins because of their corruption of the scripture, and will bear their punishments, on the Day of Resurrection, and so their suffering will be multiplied many times over.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Woe, then, to those who write the Book with their own hands….’ Would it not have been enough that the True Lord *the Most High* simply says, ‘Woe unto those who write down the divine writ,’ for the meaning to have been clear? What else would they write with but their hands? We say no, because an action can be achieved either by the issue of an order or by a direct action. A country's president, for example, calls one of his ministers and says, 'Did I not write you a message telling you to do this? So why did you not do it?' He did not write this message with his own hand, but rather someone wrote it under his instruction; it is rare for a head of state to write a letter with his own hand. God *the Most High* wants to show us here the extent of their deliberation in committing this sin. They were not satisfied by instructing someone else to write for them, but rather out of their concern to carry out the distortion and perversion of the Word of God *the Most High*, they did it with their own hands to make sure it was done exactly as they wanted it to be. So it was not a passing whim, but was rather something premeditated and calculated. Their aim was to acquire a trifling gain thereby, which was either wealth or what is called 'temporal power'; they would rule, and have influence and authority.

In the past, when the people of the Book differed about something, they would go to the priests and monks and others to have them judge between them. Why was this? It was because when people differ, they would like to have a cover that can preserve their dignity if they were proven to be wrong. That is: 'I will not be defeated in front of him, and he will not be defeated in front of me. Rather, we are both content to accept the judgement of so-and-so (a neutral judge).' If we take recourse in the judgement of the religion to decide between us, there will be no winners or losers; for when both you and I submit to God's judgement, we will both be content by the outcome of this judgement.

But the clergy amongst the Jews and Christians began to issue contradictory opinions, each of them ruling according to their benefit and caprices. And so rulings on similar matters were different because verdicts were no longer based on justice, but rather, each verdict was subject to caprice, benefit and human interest. And so when they wrote books with their own hands and said 'This is from God,' it was because they wanted to make what they wrote appear sacred so that people would accept it unquestioningly, and so they would be able to make laws in God's name and write whatever they wanted and record it in books of scripture. And when the commoners from among the people of the Book perceived the contradictions in the religious rulings because of the additions made by their priests and monks, they began to seek a way to free the Sacred Law from the power of the church.

But why would these people write things with their own hands and then say it was from God? The True Lord *the Most High* says it is '…that they may sell it for some mean price!' We said before that a person does not seek to buy a price, but rather, he pays a price to buy a product. But here, you are paying to acquire a *thaman*, ('price'). You pay with God's teachings and His rulings by altering them and exchanging them for a temporal gain. God *the Most High* would give you in abundance in the Hereafter, but you sell it for a little price; and whatever gain, no matter how big, which you take in exchange for God's teachings, can only be a trifling gain.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…Woe, then, to them for what their hands have written….' The noble verse began with God's words: 'Woe, then, to those who write the Book with their own hands…' and then God *the Most High* says, '…Woe, then, to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn.' So, at the moment of writing, there is woe and suffering, and at the moment the deal takes place, there is woe and suffering, and all that they gain from this is woe and suffering.

This matter became widespread in the form of the 'indulgences' for forgiveness of sins which were sold in churches to the highest bidders. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…woe to them for what they earn.' The word *kasb* (rendered here as 'earn') means that a bodily action of yours results in some kind of profit or benefit coming your way. The form of the verb *kasaba* normally means to earn something beneficial, and the form *iktasaba* to earn something harmful. But in this verse the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…woe to them for what they earn,' using the verb form *kasaba;* and also in another verse He uses the same form to speak about whosoever earns an evil deed (*al-Baqara*: 81).

So why is this form of the verb used here? We say that this is not a natural gain, but rather, it involves some kind of affectation in the deed, and so really it is *iktisab*, earning something harmful. We must understand that with respect to a person's organs, there is speech, action, and deed. Some people think there is only speech and deed, but we say no; speech is the work of the tongue whereas action is the work of the other limbs apart from the tongue, and deed is when speech and action correlate. And this is what we understand from God’s admonition to the believers as to why they say one thing and do another. Most loathsome is it in the sight of God for one to say what one does not do (*as-Saff:* 2-3). So we have speech, action, and deed. If a person uses his body in a sound way, he does what is good for him; and if he changes and does something which is not good for him and which incurs God’s wrath, his limbs do not act willingly, but rather, they react unnaturally with affectation, and their natural dispositions are in conflict. When a person opens his safe to take his own money, he feels calm and has no fear; but when he opens someone else’s safe, he feels nervous and all his actions are perturbed. When a man is with his wife, he is relaxed in a natural state; and this is in contrast with how he is when he is in an unnatural situation. It is a state of agitation. When someone gains something unlawful he is perturbed by this, and so in Arabic, it is said that he earned it with the verb *iktasaba,* the reflexive form of *kasaba.* The increase in the structure of the Arabic verb indicates abnormality in action, an action going against the pristine nature of man. However, when one becomes used to the unlawful so that the unlawful no longer bothers him, or becomes one of those we call ‘habitual criminals,’ he will do things without any agitation at all because such things become the norm for him (and his actions are expressed by the original verb *kasaba*, as they involve no affectation or psychological stress any more). These are the ones who have reached the point where they write down things with their own hands and then say it is from God. Sin no longer affects them, and so God warns them of His punishment twice in a single verse.

وَقَالُوا۟ لَن تَمَسَّنَا ٱلنَّارُ إِلَّآ أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَةً ۚ قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ
عَهْدًا فَلَن يُخْلِفَ ٱللَّهُ عَهْدَهُۥٓ ۖ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

They say, ‘The Fire will only touch us for a few days.’ Say to them, ‘Have you received a promise from God – for God never breaks His promise – or are you saying things about Him of which you have no real knowledge?’ [80] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 80)

Here, God *the Most High* reveals the way these people think. Satan made falsehood alluring to them, and made them think that they had truly gained and that they had taken wealth and worldly status and succeeded because of it, because they would only be punished very lightly in the Hereafter. And so God *the Most High* exposed what they would say to one another: 'And they say, "Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days."…'

The Arabic word *mass* ('touch') here means a light touch, or simply two things coming close to each other, whilst only feeling each other very slightly and inconsequentially. If you touch a person's hand with your fingertips, this is mass. But with this touch, you cannot feel the heat of his hand or the softness of his skin; to feel what we touch, we must touch it more firmly than this. 'And they say, "Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days."…' This means that they would receive only the tiniest amount of suffering for the shortest duration of time. The term 'few' signifies a limited number, something that can be counted easily. On the other hand, if something is unlimited, this means there is a great deal of it. And so when God *the Most High* speaks of His blessings, for example, He says that we cannot possibly enumerate them, even if we try (*an-Nahl:* 18).

So, to even begin to count something, indicates that it is countable, and if it is uncountable, then no one will even attempt to count it. No one has ever tried to count all the grains of sand or all the drops of water in the sea. God's manifest and hidden blessings cannot be counted, and so no one has ever tried to count them. So if you hear the phrase 'a few days,' this means that they are only a few days. And so we see that in the chapter of *Yusuf,* the True Lord *the Most High* says that the caravan people sold Joseph for a paltry price, a mere few coins (*Yusuf:* 20).

Their words 'Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days' show their foolishness because a touch like this only lasts for a moment. Rather, this was a wishful belief which Satan put in their heads, and to which God *the Most High* swiftly retorts: 'Say, "Have you received such a promise from God; for God will not break his promise"…' That is, if this is a promise from God, God will not break His promise. God *the Most High* commanded His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to them: You are not the ones who judge or decide what God *the Most High* will do with you, but rather, He *the Exalted* will decide. If He has made you a promise, then God will not break His promise.

Then God *the Most High* says, '…or, do you speak of God that which you do not know?' This is the great manners of prophethood and the magnificent character of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. Rather than saying to them, 'Are you fabricating lies against God?', or 'Are you ascribing things to God which He did not say?', he says, '…or, do you speak of God that which you do not know?' The one who fabricates something knows that he has made it up; he is the first one who knows that he is lying. He might have an argument by which he convinces those before him so they believe him, but he will still know that what he says is a lie even if they believe it. This is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* once said, 'I am but a human being. You come to me with arguments, and perhaps some of you present their side better than others do, and that I judge in their favour according to the story I hear; and so if I allot to someone the right of another Muslim, it is but a piece of fire: He may take it or leave it.'(1)

So the one who tells a lie, knows that it is a falsehood, and so these Jews were the first to know that their words '…Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days…' was a mere fabrication. But to whom did they tell this lie against God? They told it to the unlettered ones amongst them who had no knowledge of scripture.

بَلَىٰ مَن كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَٰطَتۡ بِهِۦ خَطِيٓـَٔتُهُۥ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ
أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِۖ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ٨١

Truly those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins
will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain [81]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 81)

God *the Most High* wanted to expose their falsehood, and so the Quran says *bala* ('Yea'), which is a particle used to answer, just like the word 'yes,' except that 'yea' is a negative answer, meaning that it negates that which came before it. They said, '…Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days…', and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them whether they had a promise from God saying this, or were they attributing to

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(1) *Narrated by Malik, Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, and Muslim*

God something which they did not know. Then, the Quran came and said, ‘Yea! Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed, these are the inmates of the Fire, therein to abide for ever.’ Beginning the answer with ‘Yea’ negates what was said before it because the Arabic word *bala* comes after a negative statement, whilst the word *na‘am* (‘yes’) is used after a positive statement, so if someone says to you ‘I do not owe you anything’ and you answer ‘*na‘am,*’ this means you are saying ‘That is right, you do not owe me anything,’ whilst if you say *‘bala,’* this means ‘No, you do owe me something.’ And so when they said, ‘…Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days…’, if the response had been *na‘am*, this would have meant that what they said was true; but the word *bala* (‘Yea’) negated what they said, and then there followed a further affirmation of this negation: ‘…Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed, these are the inmates of the Fire, therein to abide for ever.’ They said, ‘…Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days…,’ and He said, it will not only touch you, but you will abide therein for all eternity. His words *ashab an-nar* (‘inmates of the fire’) literally means ‘the companions of the fire.’ Companionship suggests a kind of mutual attraction between the two companions which means that there will be an attraction between them and the fire.

We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Yea! Whoever earns evil…,’ using the verb form *kasaba* (normally meaning ‘to earn something beneficial,’) whilst it might seem more appropriate to use the verb form *iktasaba* (‘to earn something harmful’). But they believe that they have earned something beneficial, as we explained in the previous verse. God’s words ‘…and by his sin is engulfed…’ means that they are engulfed so that there is no exit from which to escape from their sinfulness because it is all around them.

The most appropriate interpretation of the sin referred to in God’s statement ‘…Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed…’ is that it means worshipping partners with God because idolatry is the sin which engulfs a person so that there is no forgiveness for it. As God *the Most High* says that surely He does not forgive the worship of partners besides Him, although He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills (*an-Nisa’:* 48).

And so the people meant here are not only simple sinners, but rather are disbelievers and idolaters. The proof of this is that God *the Most High* says,

'…therein to abide for ever,' whilst the people who commit venial and mortal sins and then repent, will not remain in hell forever, but rather, those who associate partners with God and disbelieve in Him, are the ones who will remain in hell forever. Everyone who does not believe in our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a disbeliever because God *the Most High* says that whoever seeks a religion other than Islam (submitting to God), it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the lost (*Al-'Imran*: 85).

And so I said there is a difference between a person who commits a sin because he cannot help himself, and then regrets it and repents, and a person who is glad to commit sin. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says that surely repentance with God is only for those who do evil in ignorance, then repent soon (*an-Nisa':* 17).

There are some who regret their sins, and so repent; and there are some who are glad to sin, and so their sinfulness increases.

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ
أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلْجَنَّةِۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

while those who believe and do good deeds will be
the inhabitants of the Garden, there to remain [82]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 82)

As is the usual case in the Quran, when God *the Most High* mentions punishment and the fire of hell in the Noble Quran, He then mentions the opposite state, paradise and its delights. This is because this contrast shows us the difference between the two states, and makes the believer feel joy because not only has he been drawn away from the suffering of the Hereafter, but has also been granted to enter paradise where he will live forever in its delights. And so He *the Exalted* says that whoever is drawn away from the Fire and is admitted into Paradise will have attained success (*Al-'Imran*: 185).

So, success in the Hereafter is not of just one level, but rather of two; the first level of success is for a person to be spared the fire of hell, even only as far as the *A'raf*,(1) and this is a great success. It is enough to pass over the bridge above hell, and see all the kinds of suffering that exist therein, and then to be saved from all this horror; and this is enough of a great triumph because at that moment, the disbeliever will wish that he were dust rather than enter hell. The passing of the believer across the bridge and his vision of hell is a blessing because he senses how he has been saved from all this. And so once he passes over Hell and enters Paradise to dwell in its delights forever, this is a second triumph. And so God *the Most High* meant to show us both these stages; he did not say simply that whoever is drawn away from the fire will have attained success, but rather said that whoever is drawn away from the Fire and is admitted into Paradise will have attained success (*Al-'Imran*: 185). This noble verse is mentioned directly after verses describing the suffering of Hell in order to give us the contrasting state.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَٰقَ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ
وَٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينِ وَقُولُوا۟ لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُوا۟
ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنكُمْ وَأَنتُم مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

Remember when We took a pledge from the Children of Israel: 'Worship none but God; be good to your parents and kinsfolk, to orphans and the poor; speak good words to all people; keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms.' Then all but a few of you turned away and paid no heed [83]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 83)

God *the Most High* took a promise from the Israelites concerning eight things. The promise is the firm, trusted pledge of the pristine nature that was taken at the time of creation, as God *the Most High* says He brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their offspring and made them bear witness against themselves, asking them, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they answered that they do bear witness to that (*al-A‘raf*: 172).

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(1) In Islamic terminology, *al-A'raf* (akin to the concept of purgatory in Christian theology, and sometimes translated into English as 'Heights') is a place in an elevated location between paradise and hell where people who had equally mixed deeds (good and bad) and who are not qualified to be admitted to paradise and, at the same time, not deserving to be severely punished in hell, would be taken on the Day of Judgement, where they will stay until God judges that they had been purged of their sins, and they will be admitted to paradise – ED.

And there was another pledge which God took from all His messengers which is that that they would convey the glad tidings of the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and instruct their followers to believe in him upon his coming, or not to conceal or change what was in their scriptures. A pledge is everything which implies a command from God, meaning that you enter into a contract of faith with God *the Most High* stipulating that you will do what He commands you to do and refrain from what He forbids you. This is a *mithaq* (pledge/covenant). The same word (*mithaq*) is used in the Noble Quran in connection with the relationship between men and women and is described as *ghalizh* (strong, solemn, and strict) (*an-Nisa’:* 21).

We say yes it is a most solemn bond because this pledge will make lawful for the woman things that are unlawful to her without it, things that are unlawful with respect to her father, her brother, or any man except her husband. If a man sees his daughter with her leg uncovered, she will hasten to cover it, whilst if it was her husband who came in, she will do nothing of the sort. And so it is a solemn pledge because it concerns the private parts, and makes them lawful to the husband and wife; and so the True Lord *the Most High* says that a man and his wife are very much like a garment for each other (*al-Baqara*: 187).

They each cover and conceal the nakedness of the other. A father is not happy to see the protection of his daughter pass on to anyone, except that it passes to her husband, and so he feels worried if his daughter grows up without getting married.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And when We made a covenant with the children of Israel: ‘You shall not worship but God….’ This pledge comprises three conditions: ‘…You shall not worship but God….’ And this implies: a) You shall worship God Alone, and b) You shall believe in the Torah, and c) Believe in Moses *peace be upon him* as your prophet. Why is this so? It is so because the worship of God Alone is the pinnacle of faith, but you cannot decide for yourself the way in which you will worship God *the Glorified*, but rather, the One Who is worshipped will decide how He is to be worshipped, not the worshipper. So you must take the way which God has revealed, the Torah, and believe in it. And then, you must believe in Moses *peace be upon him* as your prophet because it was to him that the Torah was revealed, and he is the one who will show you the right way to worship. Without these three conditions, the worship of the Israelites could not be correct.

God *the Most High* then says, '…and you shall do good to your parents;' and this is because they are the direct cause of your existence, and they raised you when you were young, and looked after you. The meaning of God's word 'good' here is to do more than what is conventionally required. You might do something as much as it is required of you, such as the one who prays as much as is obligatory for him to pray; but the one who performs supererogatory prayers and observes the night prayers, has entered into the realm of excellence, i.e. offering more than what is required. God *the Most High* describes the state of the God-fearing in the Hereafter saying that they will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them, that is because they were doers of good in their worldly life; they would not sleep but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness for their misdeeds; and would assign in all their possessions a due share for the needy and the deprived (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19).

So, we see that excellence *(ihsan)* means to offer more than what is required of prayer, glorification, and charity. God *the Most High* wants you to give your parents more than what is required from you or is obligatory upon you.

God *the Most High* then says, '…and kindred….' Here, God tells us the second degree of excellence. God *the Glorified* tells us that we should be good to our parents and take care of our relatives; and if we all took care of this responsibility there would be no poor or needy people in society. God wants society to be free of poverty and jealousy, and this will only come from compassion and goodness to one's parents and relatives so that every needy person in society has someone to provide for them.

God *the Most High* then says, '…and to orphans….' An orphan is someone who has lost his father when still a child not yet reaching manhood. This is the case with human beings; as for animals, an orphan is one that has lost its mother because it is mothers who provide for their offspring where animals are concerned, and fathers are unknown in the animal world, whilst mothers are known. An orphan, who loses his father, loses the one who provides for him, and works for his sake, and defends him. God *the Most High* has made the mother the one who raises children and takes care of them, whilst the father works to provide for the needs of the family. But things have changed now, and so the poet Ahmad Shawqi *God rest his soul* says,

The orphan is not the one whose parents have been relieved
From the woes of this world, and left him weak and humble;

Rather, the orphan is the one who suffers from a mother who neglects him, or a father who is always busy. An orphan is in a terrible situation because he has lost his father and so has no one to protect him. And so when we see that in the Islamic society every orphan is treated with care, like every man is his father, this makes a father not fear that he will leave his son alone if he dies. And so the care of society first preserves the rights of the orphan because if he is orphaned but has money, everyone will want to get hold of it because he cannot safeguard his possessions; this is one thing, the second is that this care will remove jealous hatred from society and make every man reassured about his children.

God *the Most High* then says, '…and the needy….' In the past, people used to say that a needy person is one who owns nothing at all with which he can preserve his life, until the noble verse in the chapter of *al-Kahf* was revealed, in which we learn of the boat that was the property of some needy people who toiled upon the sea (*al-Kahf*: 79).

So, from this we know that needy people can have possessions, but they do not have enough to meet their needs. This is one kind of communal care which must exist in society so that everyone can be taken care of. If you are needy or poor, and a rich man gives you something to help you in your life, you will wish the best for him because of the good he has done you. But if this rich man gives you nothing, and gets richer while you get poorer, the result will be that you will hate him more and more.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…and you shall speak to people in a kindly way….' The word *husn* ('kindly') can mean the same as *hasan* ('good'). Good things are those which the Sacred Law declares to be good, and so the scholars differ as to whether goodness is only those things which the Sacred Law declares to be good, or whether it is those things which human reasoning deems good. We say: It is those things which the intellect deems good as long as there is no text of the Sacred Law which declares otherwise, since intellects might differ over a single matter, one thinking it to be good while the other deems it bad. God *the Most High* command His Messenger to invite to the way of his Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and to argue with people in a way that is best. Indeed, the Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is rightly guided (*an-Nahl:* 125).

This is the meaning of God's words '…and you shall speak to people in a kindly way….' And then He *the Exalted* says, '…and you shall perform prayer….' We spoke about the meaning of being constant in prayer, and about that which makes it acceptable to God. There is a difference between saying 'pray' and saying 'perform prayer.' To perform prayer means to pray, but to pray in the way that is required of you; and constancy in prayer, as we said, is an essential pillar of excellence which can never be left out.

Then the True Lord *the Glorified* says, '…and pay the poor due….' With respect to the poor-due; when God *the Most High* says, '…and kindred, and to orphans and the needy…' we notice that relatives, orphans and the needy have a right to the poor-due as long as they are poor so that we can all feel that we live in a balanced, mutually complementary environment of faith, in which each of us tries to help the other. In principle, the poor-due is given to the needy, whether they are orphans and relatives or not, and so every needy person has a right and must be taken care of. And so if there are poor people who are orphans, or our relatives, this means they have two rights, the right of a relative and the right of a needy person. And if they are orphans, they have the right of orphans and the right of the needy.

After mentioning these eight components of the pledge, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…Then you turned away….' That is, you rejected, or disobeyed, or refused to listen. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…except a few of you, and you backslide….' This is a historical fact about the Israelites; some of them turned away and refused to obey the pledge, whilst others did obey.

The Quran is not waging some kind of campaign against the Jews in general, but rather is waging a campaign against those of them who rebelled. And so it respects the truth, and says ‘except for a few.’ In human terms, this is called a ‘conservative statement.’

The True Lord *the Most High* speaks with the fairness of the Creator speaking to His creatures, and so He did not say, ‘And then you all turned away,’ but rather said, ‘…Then you turned away, except a few of you, and you backslide.’ We need to have a closer look at the wording of the verse to appreciate the precision of the expression. If we want to explain what the term *tawallaitum* (‘turn away,’ turn one’s back’) means, we would say it means to shun/avoid and refuse a command. But to be more precise, we find that the same term is used when the Quran speaks of the meeting of the believers and the disbelievers in battle: God *the Most High* says that whoever during fighting turns his back to the enemy – unless it be in a battle manoeuvre or in an endeavour to join another troop of the believers – shall indeed have incurred God’s wrath (*al-Anfal:* 16).

So, to turn away is to shun and avoid, but in this noble verse, the True Lord *the Most High* shows us that turning away can be done with a different intention in mind. In a battle, a warrior might turn away not intending to flee the battlefield, but rather to go and fight somewhere else or to aid his comrades if the enemy has fallen upon them. This turning around is not done with the intention of fleeing, but rather with the intention of fighting in a way which is more likely to bring victory.

Suppose that you see a person who owes you money coming in your direction in the road, and you turn away from him. You do not do this because you dislike him or because you want to humiliate him, but rather out of compassion for him because you do not want to embarrass him and hurt his feelings. So there are ways of turning away, but without the intention of disobedience or rejection. God *the Most High* wants to make it clear to us that those Jews turned away with the intention of being obstinate, not with any other intention. That is, they turned away intending to reject the pledge, not for any other reason.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَٰقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَآءَكُمْ وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ
أَنفُسَكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ ثُمَّ أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

We took a pledge from you, ‘Do not shed one another’s blood or drive one another from your homelands.’ You acknowledged it at the time, and you can testify to this [84]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 84)

We have already explained that when you hear the particle idh, it means ‘remember when.’ We also said that a covenant is a firm pledge. God *the Most High* says, ‘…that you should not shed your own blood….’ Before this, God *the Most High* told us that the pledge included promises to worship God Alone, and to be good to one’s parents, relatives, the orphans and the poor, and to speak to all people in a kindly way, and to be constant in prayer, and so on to the end of the noble verse. These are all commandments, i.e. they all say ‘do this;’ and to complete the pledge, here in this noble verse God tells us what they were forbidden to do. As we said, worship is to obey commandments and prohibitions. So what did the pledge forbid? ‘…You should not shed your own blood….’ This means that none of you would shed his brother’s blood, and you should not shed the blood of one another. But why did God *the Most High* say *dima’ukum* (literally ‘your own blood’)? It is because He then goes on to say, ‘…nor evict *anfusakum* (literally ‘yourselves,’ one another) from your homes….’ When a religious command is given to a religious community, it addresses them as though they are one entity, one body; which is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The likeness of the believers in their mutual love, care, and compassion is that of a single body: if one part of it ails, the rest of it shares in the sleeplessness and fever.’(1)

So it is as though the believing community is a single body; this is why we find God *the Most High* commanding the believers that when they enter any of their houses, they should offer greetings to themselves (to one another) with a blessed, goodly greeting, as enjoined by God (*an-Nur:* 61). But if I am the one who enters the house, how can I greet myself?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

In fact God addresses the believers as though they are a single entity, and on this basis He *the Exalted* ordered the Israelites saying, '…you should not shed your own blood…' that is, do not kill one another. 'Shed' means to spill blood, and the 'blood' is the liquid which flows in the body to preserve life. God's words '…nor evict one another from your homes…' mean you should not throw one another out of their homes. God then ties the believers from amongst the Israelites to this by saying, '…then you acknowledged this and you were witnesses to it.' '…You acknowledged…' means you accepted; and then He says, '…you were witnesses to it.' To bear witness is to testify about something you have seen. The judge questions witnesses because they witnessed the event and can tell what they saw. When you tell what you have witnessed, it is as though the event becomes for those who hear you, something which they too witnessed, and which happened before their eyes. On the other hand, a false witness or a perjurer alters the facts.

The True Lord *the Most High* here was addressing the Jews who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and reminding them of what their forefathers witnessed, and how they accepted the pledge when He raised Mount Sinai above them as is well-known. The Quran wants to say to them, 'You have changed, and broken the pledge, as you well know; if something agreed with your caprice you applied it, and if it did not, you rejected it.'

ثُمَّ أَنتُمْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِهِمْ تَظَٰهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِم
بِٱلْإِثْمِ وَٱلْعُدْوَٰنِ وَإِن يَأْتُوكُمْ أُسَٰرَىٰ تُفَٰدُوهُمْ وَهُوَ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ ۚ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ
بِبَعْضِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ ۚ فَمَا جَزَآءُ مَن يَفْعَلُ ذَٰلِكَ مِنكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْىٌ فِى
ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَيَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰٓ أَشَدِّ ٱلْعَذَابِ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

Yet here you are, killing one another and driving some of your own people from their homes, helping one another in sin and aggression against them. If they come to you as captives, you still pay to set them free, although you had no right to drive them out. So do you believe in some parts of the Scripture and not in others? The punishment for those of you who do this will be

nothing but disgrace in this life, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be condemned to the harshest torment: God is not unaware of what you do [85] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 85)

Here the True Lord *the Exalted* addresses the Jews to expose them for implementing only those parts of the Torah which suited their caprices, and not implementing what did not please them. He says to them, '…Do you, then, believe in part of the Book, and deny part?' He reminds them that they had agreed to the pledge and acknowledged it.

This verse was revealed when a Jewish woman committed adultery and the Jews did not want to subject her to their legal punishment of stoning, and so they thought of raising the issue to Muhammad, as the chief of state in Medina, thinking that he would exempt them from carrying out the punishment specified in their own scripture, or that he would not know what was in their scripture. But when they went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, he told them, 'You have this ruling in the Torah.' They said, 'The Torah tells us that we should pelt the face of the adulterer or adulteress with refuse, and expose them to all the people.' The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'No, you have the verse of stoning in the Torah.' So they went away. It seems that when they expected the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would lighten one of God's ordained punishments, they would go to him to seek his verdict.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Then you were the very persons who killed one another….' That is, after the pledge was taken from you that you would not do it, you slew one another, or the one who slew another would be executed; so it is as though he killed himself. Why did He use emphasis in saying 'you were the very persons…' in this way? It is to draw our attention so that we take good notice of this matter.

He then says, '…and you drove out a part of your own people from their homes…,' after having warned them by saying, '…nor evict one another from your homes…' (*al-Baqara*: 84), and this was part of their pledge.

What is it that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to draw our attention to here? We say that when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* migrated to Medina, he went from a place of idolatry to a place of faith, meaning that there were already believers there; some of the inhabitants of Medina were believers. Muslims had migrated to Abyssinia before this, but this was a migration to a place of security, not a place of faith. But when the Pledge of ‘Aqaba was stuck, and a group from Medina came and swore allegiance to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and believed in him, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* sent Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umair *God be pleased with him* back with them to teach them their religion. And so the migration of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was to a place where faith had already taken root. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, he spoiled the plan of the Jews there, who were represented by the tribes of Qainuqa‘, Nadir and Quraiza. The other two tribes in Medina were Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, who, even before the coming of Islam, had been engaged in a perpetual war. The Jews had divided themselves into two factions, one with the Aws and the other with the Khazraj so that they could perpetuate the conflict, and every time things died down, they would stir up one side against the other so that the fighting would begin again.

The tribes of Nadir and Qaynuqa‘were allied with Al-Khazraj, and the tribe of Qurayza were allied with the Aws. And so when Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj came to blows, there would be Jews on both sides. And when the battle ended, what would happen? Qurayza would assist Nadir and Qaynuqa‘in freeing those of them who had been captured, even though they were the ones who had caused them to be taken in the first place. And if Al-Aws won the battle and took prisoners from the Al-Khazraj and their Jewish allies, the Jews would come and free the Jewish prisoners because they had a text of scripture saying that if any Israelite is captured, he must be freed.

The True Lord *the Most High* is saying to them here that their actions in fighting one another and spilling one another’s blood are not consistent with the pledge which God took from them, but rather are merely being undertaken for worldly benefit. ‘…You were the very persons who killed one another…’, whilst God forbade you from doing so; ‘…and you drove out a part of your own people from their homes…’, whilst God *the Most High* forbade you from doing so; ‘…you collaborated against them in sin and aggression; but if they come captives to you, you redeem them; yet it was forbidden you to drive them out, in the first place.’ This was what happened in the wars between the Aws and Khazraj which took place in Medina, as we have explained. The word *usara* (‘captives’) is the plural of (*asir*), but not in the ordinary form for a plural of this kind, which would be *asra,* as is the case in another verse when God *the Most High* says that it is not proper for a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth (*al-Anfal:* 67).

But here the Quran uses the plural form *usara.* Sometimes an unusual linguistic form is used to alert us to a certain concept. The plural of *kaslan* (‘lazy’) is *kusala,* and *kaslan* means someone who does not move actively. This is also the case for a prisoner of war, since you have chained him and prevented him from moving. It is as though the plural of *asir* being given as *usara* is an indication of restricted movement. The Quran uses both plural forms *usara* and *asra,* but when it uses *usara* it wants to make us envisage restricted movement, just like the word *kusala.* The presence of captives means that there has been, and war implies battles and fighting, each side trying to slay its enemies.

The idea of taking prisoners is to calm down the heat of the battle. It is as though God wanted to protect people from their own ferocity at wartime and so told them, ‘Take them prisoners, and do not kill them unless you are forced to do so. Rather, take them prisoners so that you will gain benefit from them by holding them for ransom.’ This is a ruling of mercy because if taking prisoners was forbidden, then whenever two enemies met one would have to kill the other. And so it is said that you should take them prisoners unless their existence poses a danger to your own life.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…But if they come captives to you, you redeem them; yet it was forbidden you to drive them out, in the first place….’ Each faction of the Jews fought with their allies from either Al-Aws or Al-Khazraj, and the vanquished would be expelled from their homes, which would then be taken, and then after the war was ended, they would be ransomed, i.e. they would take ransoms from them in exchange for returning to them their homes and children. But why did the Jews divide themselves like this? It was not a religious division, but rather a worldly division; so why? It did not make sense for people of the Book to divide themselves between Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj so that there was enmity and hatred between them.

God *the Most High* says, '…You collaborated against them in sin and aggression….' That is, helping one another against them, whilst you are all members of a single religion, you are 'in sin', a sin is something vile which people are ashamed of; 'and aggression,' i.e. ferocious enmity. God *the Most High* then says, '…But if they come captives to you, you redeem them; yet it was forbidden you to drive them out, in the first place…', i.e. you expel them from their homes and then take ransoms from them in order to allow them to return.

Then God *the Most High* says, '…Do you, then, believe in part of the Book, and deny part?…' That is, you consider everything according to worldly benefit, and divide yourselves amongst Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj despite the fact that you believe in a common God, and prophet, and scripture. It is inconceivable that your religion or your prophet could have commanded you to do this.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…But what shall be the recompense of him among you who does this, but disgrace in this life?…' That is, you did this and went astray solely to gain worldly esteem, but you did not achieve this, but rather, God will afflict you with disgrace is this world. So the punishment will not be left until the Hereafter, and disgrace, i.e. shame and ignominy, will afflict you in this world. So what of the Hereafter? God *the Most High* says, '…And on the day of the Resurrection they shall be sent to the severest of punishment….' Ignominy in this world came to them at the hand of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers, who expelled the tribe of Qainuqa 'from their homes; and then the tribe of Quraiẓa were executed after they betrayed the pledge they had struck with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims. So God *the Most High* does not delay the punishment for some sins until the Hereafter, and the reward of tyranny in this world is not left until the Hereafter because the oppressed person must see the fall of his oppressors so that the justice of the universe is maintained, and so that people know that God exists and that He *the Exalted* awaits all oppressors. So these Jews were met with ignominy in this world swiftly, '…And on the day of the Resurrection they shall be sent to the severest of punishment….'

Someone might ask: Is the ignominy of this world not sufficient to exempt them from the suffering of the Hereafter? We say no, because the ignominy which met them in this world was not a religiously ordained punishment and was not a result of the legal punishments of God being implemented upon them. If a person meets with ignominy in the form of a legal punishment of God being carried out on him, this might exempt him from being punished in the Hereafter. If someone steals and has his hand amputated, or commits adultery and is stoned, they receive their divinely-ordained punishment and so they are not requited for it again in the Hereafter. As for tyrants, their case is different. And so we find that some of those people who commit sins in this world are eager for the punishment to be implemented on them so that they can escape from the suffering of the Hereafter, even though no one saw them, or knew what they did, or witnessed their action.

No one needs to come and say, ‘Why are the tyrants who are stricken with ignominy in this world not exempted from the suffering of the Hereafter?’ We say that though they are in a state of ignominy in this world, they have still not been requited for their crimes. Harm and suffering befalls them, but the greater suffering awaits them in the Hereafter. The suffering of this world, resting as it does on the power of human beings, is nothing compared to the suffering of the Hereafter which is by the power of God *the Most High*; moreover, in this world a person’s life ends with death, whilst in the Hereafter there is no death, but rather an eternity of suffering.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…For God is not unaware of what you do.’ That is, do not imagine that God *the Most High* is unaware of anything in His creation; for neither sleep nor slumber overtakes him, and He encompasses everything.

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱشۡتَرَوُاْ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۖ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنۡهُمُ ٱلۡعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمۡ يُنصَرُونَ ٨٦

These are the people who buy the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter: their torment will not be lightened, nor will they be helped [86] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 86)

God *the Most High* now tells us of the cause for these people’s loss, and their misguidance: They bought the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter. They made the Hereafter the price for their caprices and their worldly influence. They only considered this worldly life; yet when you compare the life of this world to the Hereafter, you begin to seek the reward of the Hereafter in everything you do. Your life in this world is limited; do not say that this world lasts a million years, or two million, or three million, for the life of this world as far as you are concerned is only as long as you stay in it, and once you leave the world, it is over for you. You leave this world by dying, and death has no fixed causes. And so Islam does not make this world a goal, because our continued life in it is only a point of conjecture. There are those who die whilst they are still in their mother's womb, and those who only live for an hour or a few hours, and those who live very long lives. So direct yourself to the Hereafter, for therein lies endless bliss, and life without death, and joy commensurate with God's powers. But the failure of these people is that they bought the life of this world for the price of the Hereafter, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says of them, '…the punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be aided.' Their punishment shall not be lightened, that is, they should not believe that the suffering of the Hereafter will be made lighter for them, or that its level will decrease, or that its time will shorten, or that it will come some days and not others. And He says, '…nor will they be aided.' Succour (*nusra*) can have two different meanings: it can mean that one is undefeatable, or it can mean that a power comes and gives one victory, i.e. succours one. As for their being undefeatable, God *the Most High* is in control of His affairs, and no one can bring himself any benefit or harm, but rather, it is God who possesses and dispenses all benefit and harm for all His creatures. He *the Exalted* has the ability to give some of His creatures power over whatever He pleases. God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim that it is not within his power to bring benefit to, or avert harm from, himself, except as God may please (*al-A'raf*: 188).

As for someone giving succour to them: Who could give anyone victory over God? God *the Most High* tells us that Noah *peace be upon him* proclaimed to his people: Who would help me against God? (*Hud:* 30).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…The punishment will not be lightened for them;…' and this is something which has not yet happened, but which will happen in the future; yet in Arabic, God *the Most High* speaks about this matter using the verb in the present tense. We say that all the events of the universe and what will happen therein have already happened in God’s sight, and He has already passed judgement upon them, and so we find that He says in the Noble Quran: God’s Command came (is bound to come); do not, therefore, seek to hasten it (*an-Nahl:* 1).

The noble verse uses a verb in the past tense, and then it says, ‘do not, therefore, seek to hasten it’, indicating that it is yet to come. Why is it that God *the Most High* says that His command came, and then says, ‘do not, therefore, seek to hasten it?’ It is a future event as far as we are concerned, yet in the sight of God *the Most High*, when He says that it ‘came,’ this means that it has already happened as no one can prevent the occurrence of anything that God has decreed. So the suffering will certainly befall them, and will not be lightened for them because there is no one who can lighten it.

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَقَفَّيْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ بِٱلرُّسُلِ ۖ وَءَاتَيْنَا
عِيسَى ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَأَيَّدْنَٰهُ بِرُوحِ ٱلْقُدُسِ ۗ أَفَكُلَّمَا جَآءَكُمْ رَسُولٌۢ
بِمَا لَا تَهْوَىٰٓ أَنفُسُكُمُ ٱسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ فَفَرِيقًا كَذَّبْتُمْ وَفَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

We gave Moses the Scripture and We sent messengers after him in succession. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. So how is it that, whenever a messenger brings you something you do not like, you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others? [87] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 87)

After telling us what the Jews did with their prophet Moses *peace be upon him*, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to tell us what the Israelites did after the time of their prophet Moses *peace be upon him*, and He wanted to show us their behaviour with a messenger who came to them from amongst themselves. Many messengers came to the Israelites because they contravened the teachings of God repeatedly. But the noble verse mentions Jesus *peace be upon him* because the two great religions which preceded Islam were Judaism and Christianity. However, we must know that before Jesus *peace be upon him* came, and between the time of Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them*, there were many other messengers, including David, Solomon, Zecharyah and John *peace be upon them*.

It is as though from time to time the Israelites would stray from the religion and contravene it, and disobedience would spread amongst them, and so God would send a messenger to straighten the balance of their lives. Yet after this, they would again return to their disobedience and iniquity, and so God would send a new messenger to remove falsehood and caprice from society and to implement God's Law. But after each new messenger they would return once more to disobedience and disbelief.

God *the Most High* says, 'And We gave Moses the Book….' The speaker here is God *the Most High*, and the Book is the Torah; God the Glorious says, '…and sent messengers after him.' God *the Most High* shows us how the Israelites behaved with Moses *peace be upon him*, and how they behaved with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers; but He does not show us how they behaved with The Messengers who came between Moses *peace be upon him* and Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon them*.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that He did not leave the Israelites after Moses *peace be upon him* to act by the Book he was sent with only, but rather He sent other messengers after this, the word used here being (*qaffaina*), i.e. we sent one after another, each one following the one who came before him. The verb (*qaffaina*) is derived from the word (*qafa*), which means 'to follow,' and you can use this verb to mean 'I walked right behind him.'

The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to be aware that the message of Moses *peace be upon him* did not end with Moses and his Book, but rather, He *the Exalted* sent other messengers and prophets to remind and alert. We have already mentioned that the fact that the Israelites were sent many prophets does not say something good about them, but rather says something bad about them. They are proud because they are the nation to whom were sent the most prophets, thinking that this is a special distinction for them, but they do not understand. The fact that many prophets were sent to them, shows that their nation was very corrupt because prophets are only sent to purify mankind from corruption and spiritual diseases, and save them from wretchedness. As more and more messengers and prophets were sent, this shows that the people went astray as soon as one messenger left them, and so they had to be sent a new messenger. This is just like when a person is extremely ill and so many doctors treat him without giving any benefit. And so God *the Most High* was not giving them the chance to argue on the Day of Resurrection, and He did not leave them unattended for a moment, but rather messengers would come to them one after another within a very short time.

If we consider Joshua, Samuel, Simon, David, Solomon, Jethro, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Zechariah, and John *peace be upon them*, we see a long succession which came after Moses *peace be upon him* so that at no time were they left without a prophet or messenger. In order to distinguish messengers from prophets, we say that both prophets and messengers are sent by God, but prophets do not come with a new Sacred Law, but rather are sent to follow the law of the Messenger who came before them. We find this distinction in the verse where God *the Most High* addresses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that He had not sent a messenger or a prophet before him… (*al-Hajj:* 52). So Prophets are also sent, but they are role-models of good conduct who implement the law of the Messenger who came before them.

Did God *the Most High* tell us the stories of all the messengers and prophets He sent? We have the answer to this question in the noble verse where God *the Most High* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he had sent before him messengers whose stories He had related to him and other messengers whose stories He did not relate to him, and that God had spoken to Moses with direct speech (*an-Nisa':* 164).

So there were messengers and prophets sent to the Israelites whose names we do not know because God did not tell us their stories; but the noble verse we are currently examining mentions only Jesus *peace be upon him*, as he has the most followers of almost any prophet. When God *the Most High* sent Jesus *peace be upon him*, He supported him with signs and wonders which proved that he was truly sent by God, and so He *the Exalted* says, '…And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit….' Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon them* came to respond to the materialism which had conquered the Israelites, and made them give importance to nothing but material, tangible things so that their hearts and minds were closed to the Unseen, and they even said to Moses *peace be upon him* 'Show us God manifestly,' and when the manna and quails came to them as provision from God they feared that it would be cut off from them because it was provision from the Unseen, and so they asked for the produce of the earth. And so a messenger must come, whose entire life and teachings were drawn from the Unseen: his birth was mysterious, and his death was mysterious, and his being raised up was mysterious, and his miracles were mysterious; and this was in order to take them from the tyranny of materialism into the purity of spirituality.

The very first thing about him was that his coming into existence was contrary to the usual way people are born, i.e. by means of a male and a female and fertilisation by sperm. God *the Most High* wanted to remove from the minds of the Israelites the notion that material means govern God, when rather, it is God who governs the means, and it was He Who created the means, and when He says ‘Be!’ to a thing, it is; and this is true despite the usual material ways of the universe. With regard to creation, God *the Most High* wanted minds to understand that His Will is the cause and the means, as He *the Exalted* says that that His is the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He grants female offspring to whomever He wills, and male offspring to whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female to whomever He wills, and causes to be barren whomever He wills: for, verily, He is All Knowing, infinite in His power (*ash-Shura:* 49-50).

So it is as though God *the Most High* made male and female the two principle means for reproduction, but He gave His own omnipotent Power control over these means; and so sometimes men and women marry but do not produce children, and so it is as though the means in themselves cannot do anything without the will of He Who created them.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit….’ Why did the True Lord *the Most High* say ‘…and supported him with the Holy Spirit’? Were the other prophets and messengers not also supported with the Holy Spirit?

We say that supporting Jesus *peace be upon him* with the Holy Spirit is mentioned here because the Holy Spirit was infused in all of his affairs, in his birth, his miracles, and his death. The ‘Holy Spirit,’ meaning Gabriel *peace be upon him*, never left him. Jesus *peace be upon him* came into being in a way which was contrary to ordinary human experience, which meant that he was always open to attack; and so it was necessary that Divine inspiration be with him always and never leave him, in order that he struck enough awe into the people that they could not respond to him. Scholars differed on the meaning of the statement of the Quran that Jesus *peace be upon him* was raised into the heavens: some said that he was alive when he was raised; others said that he had died and was then raised. We say: If we found out that he was raised whilst alive, or whilst dead, what would it change in our religion? It would change nothing. If it is said that it is an amazing thing for a person to be raised into the heavens and to remain there for a time before dying, we say that Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon him* did not escape death, and he will die just as all people die. But was his birth normal? No, and so why should you be surprised if his death was also not normal? He was created from a mother with no father, and so if it happened that he was taken up into the heavens whilst alive, and will one day return to earth, what is strange about this? Did our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not ascend into the heavens whilst alive, and then come back down to us on earth, while still alive? This happened to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and so the principle is there. So why should you find it far-fetched that Jesus *peace be upon him* went up and will return at the end of time? The difference between Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Jesus *peace be upon him* is that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not stay in the heavens for long, whilst Jesus *peace be upon him* remained there; and the difference in time spent does not alter the basic principle.

Ibn Al-Musayyabb *God be pleased with him* relates that he heard Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* say that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘By Him in whose hand is my soul, it is almost time for the son of Mary to descend amongst you as a just arbitrator, whereupon he will break the cross, slay the swine, and abolish the tax on non-Muslim citizens; and there will be so much money that no one will accept it.’(1) This Hadith can be found in the Sahih collection of Al-Bukhari.

And God *the Most High* made Jesus an example for the Israelites, as He says that Jesus was nothing but a servant whom God has favoured and whom

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Al-Mazhalim, and by Muslim in Al-Iman, and by Abu Dawud in Al-Malahim, and by At-Tirmidhi in Al-Fitan, and by Ibn Majah in Al-Fitan, and by Ahmad in Al-Musnad*

He made an example to the children of Israel (*az-Zukhruf:* 59). God *the Most High* says, '…And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs….' Clear proofs here means miracles, such as the healing of the purblind and the leprous, and the raising of the dead by God's leave, and other miracles, namely things which clearly showed the truth of his message.

But if we reflect on these miracles, we find that some of them are ascribed to the Power of God, such as the raising of the dead, which was followed with the words 'by God's leave,' whilst others were ascribed to his miracles as a messenger. It is clear that, as a messenger, he was aided by God with miracles which broke the ordinary laws of creation; but there is a difference between a miracle which gives a revelation to a messenger, and a miracle which must be directly performed by God every time. The Noble Quran says that Jesus was a messenger to the children of Israel coming to them with a sign from their Lord: Out of clay, he would create for them the shape of a bird, and then breathe into it, whereupon it will become a bird, by God's leave; and he will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God's leave; and he will inform them of what they eat and what they store up in their houses. Truly in all this there is a sign for them, if they are truly believers (*Al-'Imran:* 49).

So we see in this noble verse that whilst Jesus' declaration to the people about the secrets of what they ate and what they stored up in their houses was a revelation to him from God, whilst the raising of the dead was by God's leave every time, and was not a revelation or an intrinsic miracle on the part of Jesus *peace be upon him*. Every messenger was supported with the Holy Spirit, namely Gabriel *peace be upon him*, but God aided Jesus *peace be upon him* by keeping the Holy Spirit with him at all times, and this is the meaning of His words '…and supported him with the Holy Spirit,…' that is, We gave him the strength of holy inspiration at all times. The word rouh ('spirit' or 'inspiration') has two meanings: the first meaning is that which enters the body and so gives it life and movement; and there is another spirit, namely the spirit of values which render life's works beneficial and rightly-guided. And so the True Lord *the Most High* called the Quran rouh when He said to His Messenger that He has revealed to him a rouh (a life-giving message) by His command (*ash-Shura:* 52).

So the Quran is a spirit, and those who do not act in accordance with it thereby make their lives devoid of value. And so everything connected with the teachings of the religion is a spirit. As for the word *qudus* (holy), sometimes this word is in the form *quds* and other times it is in the form *qudus*. Both of these forms are correct, and give the meaning of purity and absolution from any flaw or blemish; something 'holy' is something which is free of all impurities.

God *the Most High* says, '…Is it, then, so that whenever a messenger came to you with what your souls do not like, you grew arrogant…' In this we have a conjunction and a question, and the meaning is: 'Yet did you not disbelieve, and every time a messenger came to you with something that was not to your liking, did you not glory in your arrogance?' That is, the Jews made themselves lawgivers besides God, wanting to lay down the law to their own messengers, and so when the messenger brought something which contradicted their caprices, they denied him or killed him.

As to God's words '…with what your souls do not like,…' the word used for 'like' in Arabic is *tahwa*, of which there are two forms, *hawa* and *hawiya*: *hawa* means 'to fall down,' whilst *hawiya* means 'to like' and 'to desire.' The two words are related, as the first verb means to fall, whilst the second means to indulge in vain desires which lead to a fall. And so when God *the Most High* ordains a law, He sometimes says 'Come!' using the word *ta'alaw*, which is derived from a word meaning 'to rise,' and so it means 'rise up from your fallen state!' So God's teachings are here to prevent us from falling; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to us this notion of how the religion prevents us from slipping and falling into hell by saying, 'The likeness of me and my community (followers) is that of a man who lights a fire, and creatures and moths begin to fall into it; I am grasping onto your belts whilst you hurl yourselves into it.'(1)

The meaning of 'grasping onto your belts' is grasping on to you, as though we are approaching the fire wanting to go into it because we follow our vain desires, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* tries to save us from it by means of God's teachings. Many a soul yearns for that which will destroy it. The True Lord *the Most High* then says '…You grew arrogant, and you disbelieved some of them and killed some others?'

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in (Az-Zuhd), and by Ibn Majah in (Az-Zuhd), and by Ahmad*

The meaning of '…you grew arrogant…' is: You ascribed to yourselves glory which you did not deserve, and you claimed to be great, whilst you were not great; but, was the Lawgiver an equal to you, that you could hold yourselves above His teachings? Of course, He was not. God *the Most High* says, '…and you disbelieved some of them….' A lie is a statement which contradicts reality; this means: You accused the Messengers of saying things which were contrary to reality because it was contrary to your own vain desires. He then says, '…and killed some others.' To give the lie to them was an evil thing, but to kill them was absolutely despicable. If you see a person ridding himself of his enemies by killing them, know that this action bears witness to his weakness before his enemies, and that his capability and his life cannot bear the existence of his rivals. If he were truly a man, he would not be disturbed by the existence of his rivals, but because he is weak in their presence, he kills them.

God *the Most High* says, '…and killed some others;' examples of this are God's prophet John and His Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon them*; and there are also narrations telling the story of Salome, who was a beautiful dancer who wanted to tempt John *peace be upon him*, but he refused to give in to her temptation, and so she announced that she would wed any who brought his head to her; and so they killed him, and brought his head to her on a silver platter.

وَقَالُوا۟ قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌۢ ۚ بَل لَّعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

They say, 'Our hearts are impenetrably wrapped [against whatever you say],' but God has rejected them for their disbelief: they have little faith [88]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 88)

God *the Most High* here tells us how the Israelites attempted to justify their lack of faith and their killing of the Prophets, and all the other wicked things they did. What did they say? They said, '…Our hearts are wrapped….' The word *ghulf* ('wrapped') is related to the words ghilaf and *taghlif* ('to cover' or 'wrap'). We have the words *ghulf* and *ghuluf,* following the same morphological pattern as the word *kutub* ('books'). '…Our hearts are wrapped…' i.e. they are closed, having enough knowledge already to suffice them, and more besides, as though they are saying, 'We do not need to listen to what the messengers have to say,' Or, 'Our hearts are wrapped' which means they are closed and sealed, that is, God has sealed their hearts so that no ray of guidance can penetrate them, and no trace of disbelief can exit from them.

If indeed God has done this, do you not see fit to ask yourselves why? What is the reason for this? The True Lord *the Most High* then answers them, saying, '…But God has cursed them for their disbelief, so little is it that they believe.'

The word 'But' emphasises to us that what they have said is not true. They do not have enough knowledge that they do not need the teachings of the Messengers, but rather, they have been rejected and cast out of God's mercy so that the rays of light and guidance do not penetrate their hearts. But this is not because God has sealed their hearts for no reason, but rather, it is a requital for them because light and guidance came to them, and they responded with disbelief, and so they became cast out of God's mercy; for those who meet guidance with disbelief, are cast out of God's mercy, and no light of faith can penetrate their hearts.

We must notice here that it was not God Who rejected them first. Some people who want to escape responsibility for their disbelief, hoping that it will save them from suffering on the Day of Resurrection, justify their disbelief by saying that God *the Most High* has said that He misleads whomever He wills and guides whomever He wills (*Fatir:* 8).

This is the argument of the disbelievers which they imagine will save them from suffering on the Day of Resurrection. They want to say: 'God sends astray whomever He wills, and as long as God has willed to send me astray, what is my sin? Can I repel God's will?' We say to them: If God modifies a general statement; we must pay attention to the modification.

God *the Most High* says that He does not guide those who refuse to believe in Him (*at-Tawba:* 37). And He *the Exalted* says that He does not guide those who are unjust (*at-Tawba*: 19). And He *the Exalted* says that He does not guide those who are impious (*at-Tawba:* 24).

So the True Lord *the Most High* informs us here that He withholds his aiding guidance to three kinds of people: the disbelievers, the wrongdoers, and the impious. But did He *the Exalted* withhold this aiding guidance from the start? Or were they the ones who committed such evil as made them unworthy of God’s guidance? A person responds to God with disbelief, and denies God, and refuses to pay heed to God’s signs and messengers, and refuses to reflect on God’s creation, and refuses to reflect on his own creation and the One who created him, and refuses to reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. He rejects all of this, and continues to fashion for himself a way of misguidance, choosing disbelief for himself because he did this first; he is the one who began with disbelief, even after God *the Most High* gave him enough signs in the universe and in his own self to make him believe in God, and yet, he refused to do so. He is the one who began with disbelief, and only after his persistence in disbelief did God seal his heart upon it.

A wicked person treats people with tyranny and has no fear of God. They remind him of God’s power and God’s omnipotence, but he is unmoved; and so God seals his heart. Likewise, the impious who leaves no wicked act without indulging in it, and no sin without committing it, and no act of disobedience without embracing it, God *the Glorious and Exalted* will not guide him. Would you prefer for such people to begin with disbelief, injustice, and impiety, and insist upon it, and then for God to guide them, to guide them with force and subdual, although God created us with free will? Of course, I would not; for this would mean the end of human free will, and mankind’s right to either obey or disobey.

The True Lord *the Most High* shows us how His omnipotent power acts in those matters over which we have no control, such as the organs of our bodies which perform their function by God’s control, not by our will, such as the heart, the lungs, the flow of blood, the stomach, the intestines, and the liver. All of these and more besides are controlled directly by God *the Most High* and we cannot tell them what to do and have them obey, or tell them to stop and have them stop. God *the Most High* also employs His omnipotent power in those external events which happen to us like falling ill, getting hit by a car, a stray rock falling on someone, falling over and being attacked by someone; all those things happen to you and are out of your control, and you have no power to repel. What remains are those things which you do intentionally, the most important of which is the implementation of God's teachings in the form of commandments and prohibitions – this is where you have freedom to choose.

God *the Most High* gave you this free will so that the Reckoning of the Hereafter would be just; and so if you choose disbelief, God will not force you to believe; and if you choose wickedness, God will not force you to be just; and if you choose impiety, God will not force you to be righteous. He respects your choice because it was He Who gave it to you in order that He could call you to account on the Day of Resurrection.

God *the Most High* also reserved for Himself the absolute power to guide whom He willed and send astray whom He willed, but He *the Exalted* stated that He does not guide the disbelievers, or the evildoers, or the impious. And so if anyone wishes to remove himself from God's guidance, let him disbelieve, or do evil, or act with iniquity; and so in this case, it will be he who has chosen this, and so will deserve God's requital. And so the disbelievers from amongst the Israelites stated themselves that God had sealed their hearts so that they would not believe, but they were the ones who chose this path and walked it; and so they chose not to be guided. This matter has sparked a great deal of debate amongst scholars, but in reality, this debate is redundant and does not deserve all that attention. God *the Most High* says, '…But, God has cursed them for their disbelief….' Cursing here means that they were cast out of God's Mercy, and this casting is done by God's Omnipotent Power because the extent to which someone is cast out depends on the power of the one who casts them.

For example, if your young son throws a stone in front of him, the strength of the throw will be commensurate with his age and strength, and as he gets older his throw will be stronger. So if the one who throws is God *the Most High*, there is no way for the human mind to envisage the strength of this throw and this rejection.

God *the Most High* says, '…But, God has cursed them for their disbelief….' This means that God cast them out because of their disbelief. God *the Most High* does not try to curry people's favour in order that they believe, and He does not want the messengers to wear themselves out trying to make people believe;

the job of the messenger is to deliver the message so that the Reckoning will be true and just. God *the Most High* comforts His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that perhaps he torments himself with grief because his people do not believe. God tells him that had He so willed, He could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain bowed in humility (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 3-4).

That is, they would not be able to stop themselves from believing if We desired to force them to believe; but We want them to believe of their own free will. When a servant believes, it is he who reaps the benefits of his faith; our faith adds nothing to God's dominion. Our saying 'there is no god but God' does not support God's throne; whether we say it or not, there is still no god but God. Rather, we say it so it will testify for us on the Day of Resurrection, and we say it so that it will save us from the horrors of the Day of Resurrection and the wrath of God.

God's words '…for their disbelief…' convey to us an important principle which is that God *the Most High* has no need whatsoever of partners, and so if anyone associates anything with Him in any act, that act goes to the one whom they associate. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having an associate. Thus if someone does an action for someone else's sake as well as Mine, I will leave it to his associate.'(1) God's testimony to His own Divinity is a testimony of a being to its own self, for He has said that He is the Witness that there is no god except Him (*Al-'Imran*: 18).

So before He created anything which could testify that there is no god but God, God *the Most High* testified to Himself of His own Divinity. The noble verse cited above gives more details on this matter: God bears witness – and so do the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity except Him, the Upholder of Justice (*Al-'Imran*: 18). So God *the Most High* testified to Himself, a testimony of an entity to itself; and then the angels made their own testimony of eye-witnesses, and then those endowed with knowledge testified based on evidence.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…so little is it that they believe.' If you say 'this happens but rarely,' you intend thereby to make a conservative statement which covers all the bases; for it is possible that one of them might return to his senses and believe, and so God *the Most High* keeps the door open for such as those who might come back to faith. And so we find that those who wronged themselves in their youth might come back towards the end of their lives and repent. On the outside, it seems that they have squandered their lives, but when they repent and confess their sins and return to the way of truth, God *the Glorious* accepts their faith. And so God *the Most High* says, '…so little is it that they believe' meaning that the majority remain in disbelief, whilst there are a minority who return to faith.

وَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمۡ كِتَٰبٞ مِّنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٞ لِّمَا مَعَهُمۡ وَكَانُواْ مِن قَبۡلُ يَسۡتَفۡتِحُونَ عَلَى
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُم مَّا عَرَفُواْ كَفَرُواْ بِهِۦۚ فَلَعۡنَةُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَى ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ٨٩

When a Scripture came to them from God confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it: God rejects those who disbelieve [89] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 89)

After telling us that the Israelites said that their hearts were wrapped so that no ray of guidance or faith could penetrate them, God *the Most High* wanted to give us another image of their disbelief in that He sent down a revelation which confirmed the truth already in their possession, and yet they disbelieved in it. If this revelation had been in conflict with that which they had in their possession, we could have said that things were different; but before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, and the Quran was revealed to him, they used to believe in the Messenger and the Revelation which were mentioned to them in the Torah, and they would say to the people of Medina: 'The time is nigh for the coming of a messenger in whom we will believe, and whom we will follow, and with him will slay you as 'Ad and Thamud were slain.'

The Jews lived in Medina alongside the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, and when conflicts erupted between them, they would threaten them with the coming Messenger; and then when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they disbelieved in him and in the Quran which was revealed to him.

Despite their disbelief, the Jews were one of the means through which victory was given to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* because when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, the Aws and Khazraj said, ‘This is the Prophet with whom the Jews used to threaten us,’ and so they rushed to pledge allegiance to him. It is as though God used the Jews to give victory to Islam without their even knowing it.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* would go to the people of Ta’if and wait for the tribes as they came to Mecca in the pilgrimage season, in order to present the message to them, and they would reject him and harass him. And when, by God’s Will, the time for the spread of the call of Islam came, a group of people came to Mecca, including tribesmen from the Aws and Khazraj, and it was they who went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, not he to them.

They announced that they would pledge allegiance to him and declared their faith in him, and vowed to spread his call, without Him having asked them to do so. And then they invited him to come and live with them in an abode of faith. All of this happened when God willed to support Islam by means of the migration to Medina, and to give it victory by means of those who followed it.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…although they had before prayed for victory over those who disbelieved….’ That is, before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they would pray for victory based on the fact that it was time for a messenger to come in whom they would believe, and whom they would follow; and then when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they disbelieved in him and in his message.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…over those who disbelieved…’ meaning the idolaters of Medina, the Aws and Khazraj, who had not yet embraced Islam because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had not come yet. The True Lord *the Exalted* then gives us the complete picture with His words:

'…yet when there came to them that which they knew, they disbelieved in it. The curse of God will be on the infidels.'

And so we see that the Israelites have in their nature a kind of compound obstinacy: The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* whom they had been waiting for, and of whom they had been given glad tidings, came to them – but they were overcome by arrogance even though they were sure that the new Messenger was coming, and his attributes were given to them in the Torah, and so they refused to believe in him and so by this, they earned God's curse, which as we said, means to be cast from God's mercy.

بِئْسَمَا ٱشْتَرَوْا۟ بِهِۦٓ أَنفُسَهُمْ أَن يَكْفُرُوا۟ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ بَغْيًا
أَن يُنَزِّلَ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ ۖ فَبَآءُو بِغَضَبٍ عَلَىٰ
غَضَبٍ ۚ وَلِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿٩٠﴾

Low indeed is the price for which they have sold their souls by denying the God sent truth, out of envy that God should send His bounty to any of His servants He pleases. The disbelievers have ended up with wrath upon wrath, and a humiliating torment awaits them [90] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 90)

When the Jews refused to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and God *the Most High* cast them out of His mercy, He explains to us that '…vile the price is for which they sold their souls….' We have spoken before about the word *ishtara* ('to buy' or 'to trade'), and said that usually we pay the price and take the commodity we want; but the disbelievers have turned this upside down, and have made the price into a commodity. We must also first speak about the difference between the Arabic verbs *shara* and *ishtara*. *Shara* means 'to sell,' and this is the word used in the noble verse relating the incident when the caravan people *sharaw* ('sold') Joseph in Egypt for a paltry price, a mere few coins; they did not value him highly (*Yusuf:* 20).

On the other hand, *ishtara* means 'to buy,' but it can also be used to mean 'to sell' because sometimes you might need a commodity and have some money with you, and so you go and buy the commodity with your money, and this is the usual way these things are done; but suppose you are in need of an essential commodity such as medicine, and you have no money, but you have another commodity such as a watch or a nice pen, and so you go to the pharmacy and give the man what you have, trading one commodity for another. In this case, the price you pay is also being bought; and so sometimes a product is bought, whilst at other times it is sold. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'How vile the price is for which they sold their souls….' It is as though He is rebuking them because they claim to be intelligent and sagacious, and they believe in materialism, at the root of which is buying and selling. If they were truly experts in this field, they would know that they had agreed to a losing deal.

The winning deal would have been for them to sell their souls in exchange for belief in what God *the Most High* has revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; but they sold themselves and bought disbelief, and so they lost out in the deal because they took nothing but ignominy in this world and suffering in the Hereafter. God *the Most High* placed part of their suffering in this world in order that the balance of things be maintained even for those who do not believe in the Hereafter, and so when those who do not believe in the Hereafter see worldly suffering afflict the tyrant, they too will fear to behave tyrannically and will shy from it so that they are not afflicted with suffering in this world on account of it, and they will know that in this world there are equalizers of reward and punishment. In order that the world is not overrun with the corruption of those who do not believe in God and the Hereafter, the True Lord *the Most High* has ordained in this world the laws of retribution, as He *the Exalted* addresses people of sound reasoning saying that in the law of just punishment there is security in life so that people will protect themselves from harm (*al-Baqara:* 179).

By His laws of retribution, God *the Most High* alerts both believers and non-believers to the punishments of this worldly life, and so He afflicts the one who deals in usury, sucking the blood of the people, with a disaster which leaves him with no money to spend. And so we pray, O Lord, some people have been deluded by Your forbearance, and have seen Your Hereafter as far-off, so take them for some of their sins as only the Almighty, Who determines all things, can so that the balance is restored in this life.

God *the Most High* has made the deaths of sinners, oppressors, and despots in this world an admonition to those who are not concerned with following His teachings. You might find a man who abandoned virtue and religious principles and immersed in the delights and pleasures of this worldly life, only to end up living out his days surviving on the charity of the righteous. And you might find a woman who is deluded by wealth and so gathers it from here and there, lawfully and unlawfully, and this world gives her much; yet in her final days, the world withdraws from her so that she cannot even afford the medicines she needs, and so she dies, and people come together to collect money to pay for her funeral. Stories such as these are admonitions to people, and they happen in full view of everyone, and many people know about them, either because they are published in newspapers, or because they are told around the neighbourhood. What is important is that they are well-known.

We find, for example, that the leaders of the Jews in Medina made a good trade out of war and weapons, yet in the end, they were expelled from their houses, and their wealth was plundered, and their women were taken captive. Was this not ignominy?

God *the Most High* says, '…by not believing what God has sent down, out of grudge….' The word baghy (rendered here as 'grudge') literally means to overstep the limit; God has placed limits for everything, and those who go beyond these limits are transgressors. The limits which God *the Most High* has established are His laws which constitute commandments and prohibitions. And so the True Lord *the Most High* describes His commandments as the bounds set by God and enjoins on people not to transgress them (*al-Baqara:* 229).

And about His prohibitions, He *the Exalted* says these are the bounds set by God and enjoins on people not to come near them (*al-Baqara:* 187). But why did the Jews overstep the limit? They transgressed out of grudge that the message should have been sent to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and that the Messenger should be of the Arabs, whilst they believed that because of all their many prophets, they were the sole claimants to God's messages on earth. When the Torah and the Gospel gave tidings of a coming messenger, they said 'He will be from amongst us, and revelation and prophethood shall never come to other than us, for we are God's chosen people.' And so they would announce that they would follow the coming prophet and give him aid, but they were astonished when he did not come from their own people. Upon this, they were filled with arrogance and envy, and they said, ‘Since he is not from amongst us, we shall not follow him, but rather, we shall fight him.’ The divine message was taken from them because they were not worthy of it, and God willed to requite them for their disbelief and disobedience, and to give His message to another nation, as God *the Most High* addresses all mankind saying that if He so wills, He can do away with them and bring forth a new creation in their stead; nor is this difficult for God (*Fatir:* 16-17).

God *the Most High* has tested the Israelites with numerous messages, but as we have read in the previous verses, they denied some of the Prophets, and those whom they did not deny, they killed, and so God willed to take these messages from them and give them to another nation, and make the Arab nation the bearers of the final message sent from Heaven to earth, and so they were filled with envy.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘…out of grudge that God should send down His grace upon whom He wills from among His servants….’ From this, we see that divine messages and the election of messengers is a favour from God which He bestows on whomever He wills. When God *the Most High* set us free and gave us mastery over the means, this did not mean that we are not out of the control of His Will, but rather, we remain subservient to it, and we know that there is nothing intrinsic in us in this universe. This is so that man should not become deluded about himself. The world champion in a certain sport has attained the peak of human perfection in this sport, but these perfections are not intrinsically his because it is possible that someone else could defeat him, and because he could be afflicted by an injury which prevents him from playing in the championship. In any case, his ascendancy will not last forever because it is not intrinsically his, and the One Who gave it to him, God, will give it to someone else whenever He chooses. And so mankind must be aware that human perfection changes, and does not stay with anyone forever, and that everyone who reaches the top will come down again because we are in a world of changes, and what goes up, must come down. Perfection is for God Alone, and God *the Most High* keeps His perfection to Himself.

So the Jews were envious of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and envious that the Quran should be revealed to the Arabs; and the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And they have brought on themselves wrath upon wrath. And for the unbelievers is a disgraceful chastisement.' God *the Most High* informs us here that He condemned them twice over.

The first condemnation was because they did not implement what the Torah instructed them to do, and so God condemned them for this. The second condemnation was because when the Messenger, mentioned in the Torah in whom they were supposed to believe, came to them, they disbelieved in him, whilst they should have believed in him so that God would *be pleased with them*. And so God condemned them a second time when they disbelieved in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

God *the Most High* says, '…And for the unbelievers is a disgraceful chastisement.' In the Noble Quran, chastisement is sometimes described as 'painful,' and sometimes as 'great' and sometimes as 'disgraceful.' 'Painful' means extremely grievous, inflicting severe pain on those who are chastised with it. But supposing that the person undergoing this suffering were to show endurance, trying not to display his pain so that the people would not think ill of him, then in this case, God brings forth a great suffering which no one can bear, and the awful nature of this suffering would be too much for him to tolerate. And if the person was one of those who proudly disbelieved in this world, and waged war on God's religion and commanded their people to do the same, God *the Most High* will send upon such as these a disgraceful suffering; and this is more painful to the soul than mere physical pain. It is as if you take the strongest man in the neighbourhood, whom everyone fears, and then beat him so he falls to the ground. At this moment you have shamed him in front of people, and after that, he will not be able to tyrannise or abuse anyone. This is more painful to the soul than the pain of the suffering itself. This is the kind of situation that the True Lord *the Most High* describes when He will take forth from each band of the disbelievers those of them who had been stoutest in rebellion against the God of Mercy; then He shall know who of them is most deserving of being burnt in hellfire (*Maryam:* 69-70).

God *the Exalted* tells of how the wicked will be dealt with in the Hereafter: while being subjected to the most severe torture, he will be derided by telling him to taste the suffering; on earth, he had considered himself so mighty, so noble (*ad-Dukhan:* 49). This is indeed disgraceful suffering.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا۟ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ قَالُوا۟ نُؤْمِنُ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا
وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَآءَهُۥ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ ۗ قُلْ فَلِمَ
تَقْتُلُونَ أَنۢبِيَآءَ ٱللَّهِ مِن قَبْلُ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

When it is said to them, ‘Believe in God’s revelations,’ they reply, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us,’ but they do not believe in what came afterwards, though it is the truth confirming what they already have. Say [Muhammad], ‘Why did you kill God’s prophets in the past if you were true believers?’ [91] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 91)

The True Lord *the Most High* shows us the attitude of the Jews and their refusal to believe in the message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, even though they were commanded to do so in the Torah. He *the Exalted* says, ‘Believe in what God has sent down,…’ that is, when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* invited them to believe in Islam and in the Quran, they refused, and ‘…they say, “We believe in what was sent down to us,…”’ that is, we believe in the Torah, and deny everything else that was revealed after it.

We know that the Arabic word kufr (rendered here as ‘disbelief’) originally means ‘covering.’ If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought something completely different from what they had in their possession, they might have been entitled to say, ‘He has come to destroy our religion, and so we disbelieve in him;’ but he, rather, brought the truth confirming what they had in their possession.

So when they disbelieve in the Quran, they disbelieve in the Torah at the same time because the Quran confirms what the Torah says. Here God *the Most High* establishes the plea against them in an unassailable argument: This disbelief of yours, and this way of behaving, is an act against every prophet who ever came to you. If you truly accept faith with open hearts, tell us: Why did you kill the prophets of God? And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…Then why did you kill the prophets of God before….' Is it in your Book, the Torah, to kill the righteous servants of God? It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* has drawn an argument from their own words: '"… We believe in what was sent down to us." And they disbelieve in what came after it,…'' If this is true, and you believe in what has been revealed to you, then show us where it says in that which was revealed to you, the Torah, that it is lawful for you to slay the Prophets – if you truly believe in the Torah. Of course they could not respond to this because, in truth, they disbelieved in that which was revealed to them, and they lied when they said, '…We believe in what was sent down to us' because what was revealed to them did not tell them to kill the Prophets, and so it is as though they disbelieved in that which was revealed to them, just as they disbelieved in that which was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Quran gives us the unassailable argument which stays the mouths of the infidels, and confirms that they are unable to provide any sound argument of their own. Here, we must consider God's words '…Then why did you kill the prophets of God before, if you are [indeed] believers?' His saying 'before' was a reassurance to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that their killing of the prophets had come to an end, and at the same time, it put paid to the hopes of the Jews that they might be able to kill Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. God wanted to remove the fear from the hearts of the believers for the safety of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by making it clear that what happened to the previous Prophets of the Israelites would not happen to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. And so the Quran frustrated the hopes of all those who wanted to bring harm to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* because this era had come to an end. Even if they conspired to kill Him *peace and blessings be upon him*, they would not be successful, and they would not attain their goal.

After this noble verse was revealed, the Jews did not abandon their plots. They tried to kill the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* more than once; one of these times was while he was walking through their neighbourhood and they dropped a stone onto him, but the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* warned him and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* moved out of the way before the stone fell; and another time they put poison in his food; and they tried several other times and always failed.

So the word ‘before’ implies that if you were thinking of getting rid of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by killing him as you killed your own prophets, we say to you: You shall not be able to kill him.

This verse should have been sufficient in itself to place despair in their souls so that they would stop their practice of killing prophets, but they continued in their efforts. At the same time, the verse was a source of strength for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers, and a reassurance that however much the Jews plotted, God would thwart their plots. God’s questioning words ‘…if you are [indeed] believers?’ mean that if you were truly believers in that which was revealed to you.

وَلَقَدۡ جَآءَكُم مُّوسَىٰ بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ ثُمَّ ٱتَّخَذۡتُمُ ٱلۡعِجۡلَ
مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦ وَأَنتُمۡ ظَٰلِمُونَ ٩٢

Moses brought you clear signs, but then, while he was away, you chose to worship the calf – you did wrong’ [92]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 92)

After showing us how they refused to believe in what He sent to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, under the pretence that they believed only in what was revealed to them, God *the Most High* then explains to us that this argument is false, and that it is their nature to disbelieve and deny God. He *the Exalted* says, ‘And Moses had certainly brought you clear proofs….’ That is, God supported Moses *peace be upon him* with many proofs and miracles which should have been enough to fill your hearts with faith and make you worship none but God; He caused the sea to part for you so that you could pass through it as you looked on, i.e. the miracle was not hidden from you, but rather took place before you so you could witness it. But the moment you crossed the sea and Moses *peace be upon him* went to meet his Lord, you took the calf as a god besides God, and worshipped it. How then can you claim that you believe in what was revealed to you. If you believed, you would not have taken the calf as a god.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to refute their argument in that they believed in what was revealed to them, and show us that they did not even believe in what was revealed to them. And so He tells us of how they killed prophets; if they truly believe in what was revealed to them, let them bring forth the text which makes it lawful for them to kill prophets; yet they were false in what they said. As for the second argument, it runs thus: If you believe in what was revealed to you, tell us how it could have been that- when Moses *peace be upon him* came to you with clear signs like his staff which turned into a serpent, and his hand which glowed pure and white, and the sea which was parted for you to escape from Pharaoh's people, and the dead man whom God restored to life before you when you struck him with part of the cow you sacrificed, i.e. so many signs, but- when Moses *peace be upon him* simply left you to go and meet his Lord, you worshipped the calf in his absence. So your claim to believe in what was revealed to you is false; you do not believe in what was revealed to you just as you do not believe in what was revealed after you; and the purpose of all these arguments is showing a complete absence of faith.

God *the Most High* says, '…Then you took the calf [in worship] after that, and you were wrongdoers.' The utilisation of a calf itself is not a sin, if you use it for ploughing or slaughter it to eat its meat; rather, the sin was to take the calf as an object of worship. God's words '…Then you took the calf [in worship]…' mean that it was a public display; you did not worship the calf secretly, but rather did so openly, and so it is not something which requires witnesses or testimony because it was something which happened in the open for everyone to see. The incident of the calf is mentioned here so that they can be aware of how they sinned against God; for a person can commit a sin, and then time goes by, and whenever we want him to feel the responsibility of what he committed, we would mention what he did. God *the Most High* then says, '…and you were wrongdoers,' i.e. your faith was tainted with wickedness, and you wickedly transgressed against God by disbelieving in Him.

وَإِذۡ أَخَذۡنَا مِيثَٰقَكُمۡ وَرَفَعۡنَا فَوۡقَكُمُ ٱلطُّورَ خُذُواْ مَآ ءَاتَيۡنَٰكُم بِقُوَّةٖ
وَٱسۡمَعُواْۖ قَالُواْ سَمِعۡنَا وَعَصَيۡنَا وَأُشۡرِبُواْ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ ٱلۡعِجۡلَ
بِكُفۡرِهِمۡۚ قُلۡ بِئۡسَمَا يَأۡمُرُكُم بِهِۦٓ إِيمَٰنُكُمۡ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

Remember when We took your pledge, making the mountain tower above you, and said, 'Hold on firmly to what We have given you, and listen to [what We say].' They said, 'We hear and we disobey,' and through their disbelief they were made to drink. Say, 'How evil are the things your belief commands you to do, if you really are believers!' [the love of] the calf deep into their hearts [93] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 93)

After reminding them of their act of disbelief in worshipping the calf which was a kind of severe reprimand reminding them of their sinfulness, God *the Most High* wanted to reproach them again and remind them that when they believed and obeyed, it was out of fear that Mount Sinai would collapse upon them. The mountain would not have fallen upon them because God does not compel anyone to believe; but merely by their seeing it above them, they believed and obeyed out of fear. They were like a child for whom the doctor prescribed a bitter medicine for a cure. And so when God *the Most High* raised the mount above them, it was to show them His Power so that they would accept the covenant and the commandments; and this does not mean that God forced them to believe. Rather, just like a parent or a doctor coercing a child to take bitter medicine, it was a coercion based on love: God does not want His creatures to live without Divine guidance. So when they saw God's overwhelming power and what it could do to them, they believed. It is as though they believed when they became aware of God's Power, just like the young child who opens his mouth to receive the bitter medicine, whilst he is reluctant to do so; but do you give him the medicine because you hate him or because you love him and care for him dearly?

God *the Most High* wanted to show them that He used all conceivable means with them to make them accept His teachings that would be their guidance in life. However, their deep-rooted pride and stubbornness prevented them from keeping their faith.

God *the Most High* says, '…your covenant….' Was the covenant theirs, or was it God's? Of course it was God's covenant, but God *the Most High* says it was theirs because by agreeing to it, they became one of the parties in the agreement, and as long as they were party to it, it was their covenant, too.

We need to believe that the raising of the mount above the Jews was not to compel them to accept the covenant, so it will not be said that they were forced to do so. They followed Moses *peace be upon him* even before the mountain was raised above them, and so it must be the case that they accepted his teachings of their own free will, and implemented them of their own free will; and God *the Most High* did not keep The mount above their heads wherever they went for their whole lives so that it could be said they had been compelled. Even if they can be said to be compelled at the moment the mount was raised above their heads, yet after the miracle passed, there was nothing to force them to implement God's teachings. Rather, the truth is that when God *the Most High* sees some inclination in His servants to stray, He might frighten them, and might send upon them a lesser punishment to bring them back to their faith; and God does this out of love for His servants, for He wants them to be believers for their own benefit.

But the Jews were a materialistic people, who only believed in concrete things, and so God *the Most High* wanted to show them a material sign so that their hearts would tremble and return to the remembrance of God. This was not a matter of compulsion because as we said, once the miracle was over, they could have returned to their sinful ways. Rather, it was a sign to push them towards faith. God *the Most High* then said, '…Take what We have given you with determination…' because that which is taken with strength, will give with strength, and to take something with strength shows the desire of the taker for that which is taken; and as long as the believer is eager for God's teachings, he will fulfil their requirements with strength. When a person takes something he dislikes, he always takes it with lassitude and petulance.

God *the Most High* then says, '…and listen.' The verse goes on to say that they said, 'We heard,' and '…disobeyed….' To have a clear understanding of this part of the verse, we need to have a closer look at its wording. We have to keep in mind that speech is the work of the tongue, and action is the work of all the other body organs other than the tongue. We need to distinguish between three things: speech, action, and work; speech is for you to pronounce with your tongue, action is for your limbs to move in response to your will, and work is for speech and action to be in accord. The verse mentions that they said, '"…We heard…"' and disobeyed….' They heard what God *the Most High* said to them, and disobeyed it. But we need to find out what the word 'disobeyed' is conjoined to and who its speaker is. In fact it is not conjoined to 'heard,' but rather to 'said.' They say 'we heard' with their speech, but their actions say 'we disobey.' This does not mean that they actually said 'we disobey' with their tongues. There might be confusion about this because 'we disobey' comes right after 'we have heard,' and so you might think that they actually said both these things. No, rather, they said 'we heard,' but they did not obey, and did not do as they were bid. God *the Most High* wants them to hear with obedience, not simply just to hear; but they heard and did nothing, and their inaction was an action of disobedience.

God *the Most High* says, '…And they were made to drink down the calf into their hearts…' The True Lord *the Most High* wants to illustrate their materialism for us. Love is an abstract thing, not a material thing: it is intangible. It might be expected that the phrase used would be '…And they were made to drink down the love of the calf into their hearts…' but the One speaking here is God, and He wants to give us the complete, clear image of how they were consumed by the calf itself, that is, the calf entered their hearts. But how could the calf enter into this small space, the heart. God *the Most High* wants to illustrate to us the concept of complete absorption by using the expression '…made to drink…' (*ushribu*), because it is derived from the verb *sharib* ('to drink'), just as water is absorbed by the whole body. This image expresses the way materialism completely penetrated and permeated the hearts of the Israelites; it was as though the calf entered their hearts and was absorbed there just as water enters the body, even though material things do not truly enter the heart.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And they were made to drink down the calf into their hearts by their disbelief.' It is as though it was disbelief which made them adopt the calf in the first place; they disbelieved and because of their disbelief, the calf entered their hearts and their hearts were sealed thereafter.

God *the Most High* then says, '…Say, "How wretched is that which your faith enjoins upon you, if you be indeed believers."' They had said, 'We believe in that which was revealed to us, and we believe in nothing else besides.' Say to them: 'Does your belief command you to do this?' This is a form of ironic expression used in the Noble Quran; and we have another example in God's words reporting the decision of the people of Lot to expel Lot and his household from their town, for indeed they are people who purify and cleanse themselves (*an-Naml:* 56). Are purity and cleanliness a reason for expelling someone from their town? Of course, they are not. Rather, this was a form of irony and reproach.

The truth was that the faith of the Israelites did not command them to do this; it rather commanded them to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this is what we find clearly stated in the supplication of Moses and his followers, and God's answer to their prayers. They asked God to write down for them what is good in this world, as well as in the world to come, for to Him they were guided. And He answered them that He will afflict with His chastisement whom He wills, and His Mercy embraces all things, and that He writes it down for those who shall fear Him, and spend in charity, and believe in His signs; they are those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described with them in the Torah and the Gospel. He will enjoin on them what is right and forbid them what is wrong, and will make lawful for them the good things and prohibit for them the evil, and will relieve them of their burden and of the shackles which were upon them; and those who shall believe in him, and support him, and help him, and follow the light which was sent down with him – it is those who will be the successful (*al-A'raf:* 156-157).

This is what their faith truly commanded them to do: to believe in the unlettered Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* and God *the Most High* knew what their belief commanded them to do, for it was from Him *the Exalted*. And so when they attempted to fool Him, God *the Most High* rebuked them with irony, saying, 'How wretched is that which your faith enjoins upon you, if you be indeed believers.'

God’s words ‘if you be indeed believers’ indicate that they were not truly believers, but rather that, their hearts were still attached to idolatry, or disbelief, or to the calf which they once worshipped.

قُلْ إِن كَانَتْ لَكُمُ ٱلدَّارُ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ خَالِصَةً مِّن
دُونِ ٱلنَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوُا۟ ٱلْمَوْتَ إِن كُنتُمْ صَـٰدِقِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

Say, ‘If the last home with God is to be for you alone
and no one else, then you should long for death, if
your claim is true’ [94] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 94)

God *the Most High* wants to expose the Jews, and show how their faith is unsound, and how they went astray and sold God’s signs for a paltry price. He *the Exalted* wants us to know that these Jews did not do this inadvertently or in ignorance, and they were not tricked; but rather, they knowingly and deliberately changed things. They were well aware that they had invented speech and then ascribed it to God *the Most High* falsely and deceitfully, and so He instructed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to expose them in front of all people and show their falsehood with a decisive proof. And so He *the Exalted* said, ‘Say, “If the home of the Hereafter with God is yours exclusively….”’ The word ‘Say’ here is addressed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, that is, ‘Say, O Muhammad….’ This issue could have been raised only because the Jews had claimed that theirs exclusively was ‘…the home of the Hereafter with God….’ If something is for someone ‘exclusively,’ this means it is for him alone, and for no other party. That is, it is something which belongs to you alone, and no one else can share it with you or take it from you. God *the Most High* says here to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: If the Hereafter with God was for them alone, to be shared with no one else, they should wish for death so that they can go on to this eternal bliss. As long as the Hereafter is theirs alone, and they are sure that they alone will enter Paradise, why do they stay in this world? Do they not long for death as the Muslims long for martyrdom so that they may enter paradise? This claim of the Jews is not the only false claim to be made about God *the Most High*, for He *the Exalted* also states their claim that no one shall ever enter paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian (*al-Baqara:* 111).

Who said this? The Jews said about themselves that no one would enter Paradise save the Jews, and the Christians said about themselves that no one would enter paradise save the Christians. They each said that paradise was reserved exclusively for them, and these statements of theirs present a doctrinal problem for us. Who will enter paradise alone, the Jews or the Christians? We say: God *the Most High* has provided the answer to this question when He *the Exalted* said that the Jews stated that the Christians have no valid ground for their beliefs, while the Christians stated that the Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs (*al-Baqara:* 113).

This is the truest thing the Jews and the Christians said of one another. The Jews truly have no grounds for their beliefs, and nor do the Christians; and so they are both correct in what they say about each other. In the noble verse we are currently examining, the Jews claim that the Hereafter is for them alone. Let us, for argument's sake, believe them, and say to them: 'Why, then, do you not long for death?' They should long for the Hereafter as long as it is for them alone, and so God *the Most High* says, '…then wish for death, if you are really truthful in what you say.' But these are nothing but false hopes cherished by the Jews and the Christians. God *the Most High* says that the Jews and the Christians say that they are God's children and His beloved ones. He commands His Messenger to ask them why, then, He causes them to suffer for their sins. Nay, they are but human beings of His creating. He forgives whom He wills, and He chastises whom He wills; for with God is the sovereignty of the Heavens and of the Earth, and of all that is between them, and unto Him shall all things return (*al-Ma'ida:* 18).

So they imagine that whatever they may commit of sins, God will not punish them on the Day of Resurrection; but God's justice does not allow this; how could some people be punished for their sins, but the Jews not be punished for theirs; and moreover enter paradise? And how could God *the Most High* reserve paradise in the Hereafter for the Jews alone, when He has decreed that His mercy will be given to the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believe in the message of Islam, and has informed the Jews and Christians of this in their scriptures? We have seen how God *the Most High* was asked by Moses and his followers to write down for them what is good in this world, as well as in the world to come, for to

Him they were guided. And He answered them that He will afflict with His chastisement whom He wills, and His Mercy embraces all things, and that He writes it down for those who shall fear Him, and spend in charity, and believe in His signs; they are those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described with them in the Torah and the Gospel (*al-A'raf:* 156-157). In this is the fact of what their scriptures contain, and the True Lord *the Most High* says that if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender to God, it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the lost (*Al-'Imran:* 85).

Then how can the Jews claim that the Hereafter will be granted to them alone on the Day of Resurrection? The True Lord *the Exalted* reveals their falsehood here and confirms to us that they are the first ones who know that what they say is false.

وَلَن يَتَمَنَّوۡهُ أَبَدَۢا بِمَا قَدَّمَتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمُۢ بِٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾

But they will never long for death, because of what
they have stored up with their own hands: God is fully
aware of the evildoers [95] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 95)

They will never wish for death, but rather, they fear it. When God *the Most High* sent down this verse, He placed the whole matter of faith in the hands of the Jews, so, if they wanted, they could have cast doubt on this religion. How? Was it not possible, when this verse was sent down, for some of the Jews to come forward and say, 'If only we could die; we long for death, O Muhammad, and so ask your Lord to make us die' – was it not possible for them to say this, even falsely or ostentatiously, in order to undermine this religion? But they did not even say this, and it never occurred to them to do so. Look at the miracle of the Quran inherent in God's words: '…they will never wish for it….' God *the Most High* pronounced a final judgement connected to a matter which was within the free will of those who showed enmity to Islam, and said that these enemies, the Jews, would never wish for death; and it was possible for them to wise up to this challenge, and say 'Indeed we do wish for death, and seek it from God;' but even this never occurred to them because when God *the Most High* pronounces judgement over a matter connected to free will, He removes from the enemies of the religion the notions which they might utilise to attack the religion. And so it never occurred to them, just as when God *the Most High* challenged the infidels before when the direction of prayer was changed; He said that the weak-minded among people will say, 'What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which they have observed up to now? (*al-Baqara:* 142). This noble verse was sent down before they said it, which is indicated by the use of the future tense 'will say;' and God *the Most High* described these people as being 'weak-minded', yet despite this they indeed did say it. If they had used their minds, they would have remained silent and not said a word, and this would have been a serious challenge to the Noble Quran.

They would have said, 'God said "The weak-minded among people will say…" but no one said anything, so who are these weak-minded people, and why did they not say anything?' This would have been a challenge to the Noble Quran concerning something which they had the free choice to influence, but because it was God who was speaking, and it was God who was acting, this never occurred to them, and they indeed said what He predicted they would say.

In the noble verse we are currently examining, the Quran challenged them to wish for death, yet they did not wish for it. It was logical, as long as the Hereafter was for them alone, and God challenged them to wish for death, that they should have wished for death if they were truthful so that , they could go on to eternal bliss. But the True Lord *the Most High* had already decreed that this would not be the case; why? Because they were lying, and they knew they were lying, and so they fled from death instead of wishing for it.

Consider, for example, the behaviour of the ten Companions of the Prophet, who were given tidings of paradise. At death, another revered companion of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, Bilal ibn Rabah *God be pleased with him said*, 'Now I shall meet the beloved ones, Muhammad and his Companions.' He was glad to meet death as he knew he would go to paradise and join Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. This is genuine trust in the reward and glad tidings of paradise. Also, 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha *God be pleased with him* recited as he was fighting:

How fine is paradise, and to draw near to it,
Sweet and cold is the draught therein!

And Imam 'Ali *God be pleased with him* entered the battle of Hunayn wearing a shirt without any chain-mail on it so that it would not repel arrows or the stab of a spear, and his son Al-Hasan *God be pleased with him* said to him, ‘O father, this is not the attire of war!’ 'Ali God *be pleased with him* replied, ‘O son, your father cares not whether he comes to death or death comes to him!’ Our master Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman recited as he lay dying: ‘A beloved one has come on a she-camel, may the one who regrets have no profit!’ And so those who are sure of their place in the Hereafter welcome death.

At the battle of Badr, one of the Companions said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘O Messenger of God, is it true that nothing stands between me and Paradise except that I should fight these men and be killed by them?’ The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* answered that this was indeed the case. This Companion had been carrying a handful of dates to eat, but he could not wait for paradise another moment, and so he flung the dates aside, entered the battle, and was martyred.

These are the ones who have faith and are sure of what God has in store for them in the Hereafter. But when the Noble Quran challenged the Jews by saying to them, ‘…then wish for death, if you are really truthful in what you say’ (*al-Baqara:* 94), they were silent, and did not answer. If they had truly wished for death, each one of them would have stopped their breath whilst swallowing his saliva, and they would all have died at once. Someone might say, ‘But is wishing only a matter of the speech of the tongue? They might have wished for it with their hearts.’ To this, we say: What does it mean to wish? To wish for something is for you to say of something you love, ‘If only it would happen.’ So it is a matter of speech. And supposing it is a matter of the heart, if they had wished for it in their hearts, God would have read their hearts and caused them to die at once. But since the True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘But they will never wish for it…’ they will never wish for it whether with the tongue or the heart. This is because their claim that to dwell paradise in God’s presence was for them alone, is similar to another claim of theirs, which God *the Most High* relates to us in the Quran: ‘And they say, “Hell fire shall not touch us, but for a few days.” Say, “Have you received such a promise from God; for God will not break his promise; or, do you speak of God that which you do not know?”’ (*al-Baqara:* 80).

God *the Most High* says, ‘…because of what their hands have put forth,…’ that is, their evil deeds make them fear death, whilst those who have lived good lives are happy to die. And so we hear that when some people die, their faces are as bright as the full moon because they have done good deeds. At the moment of death, a person knows with certainty that he will die. If someone falls ill, he hopes for a cure and does not think of death; but when the final death-rattle comes a person, knows he will die, and so his whole life flashes before him; if his works were good, his face brightens and he rejoices because he will find endless bliss in the Hereafter, for at the moment when the spirit leaves the body, a person knows what his end will be, either in Paradise or in Hell, and either the angels of mercy or the angels of suffering come to take him, and those who have obeyed God are joyful at the coming of the angels of mercy. As for him who has sinned and incurred the wrath of God, his life passes before him and he sees that it was filled with evil, and that he is about to meet God, and there is no longer the opportunity for repentance or for changing his ways. When he sees he will go to hell, his face contracts and his spirit is taken in this state, and so they say that he died whilst his face was darkened with frowning.

So those who do evil in this world never wish for death, whilst those who do good rejoice in the meeting with God. But the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade us from wishing for death, saying, ‘None of you should wish for death or pray for it before it comes to him, unless he is certain about his deeds.’(1) We say that the kind of wishing for death which is prohibited is the wishing which comes from despair or from an inability to accept the difficult turns of fate, that is, to long for death because one is incapable of bearing God’s decree that a misfortune should befall him, or who wishes for it in objection to the road God has decreed his life should take.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

This is the wishing for death which is prohibited; as for the one who does good deeds, it is acceptable for him to wish to meet God. God *the Most High*, at the end of the story of the prophet Joseph, reports Joseph's supplication: 'O my Lord! You have indeed bestowed upon me something of power, and have imparted to me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are near to me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself to You, and make me join the righteous' (*Yusuf:* 101).

So the words of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* mean do not wish for death out of despair at what God has decreed should befall you, but rather bear the decrees of God patiently. God *the Most High* then says, '…And God is Knowing of the wrongdoers,' because God knows all about their sinfulness and evildoing, which has made them fear death and not wish for it.

وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمۡ أَحۡرَصَ ٱلنَّاسِ عَلَىٰ حَيَوٰةٖ وَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَشۡرَكُواْۚ يَوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمۡ لَوۡ يُعَمَّرُ
أَلۡفَ سَنَةٖ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُزَحۡزِحِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلۡعَذَابِ أَن يُعَمَّرَۗ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرُۢ بِمَا يَعۡمَلُونَ ٩٦

[Prophet], you are sure to find them clinging to life more eagerly than any other people, even the polytheists. Any of them would wish to be given a life of a thousand years, though even such a long life would not save them from the torment: God sees everything they do [96] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 96)

The True Lord *the Most High* exposed their falseness in that they cannot wish for death because they are evildoers, and since they are evildoers, death must be fearsome to them. Rather, they cling to life more eagerly than any other people, even more eagerly than the idolaters. The idolater is eager to cling to life because he believes that this world is all there is, yet the Jews were even more eager to cling to life than the idolaters because they feared death as a result of the evil deeds they had done. And so the longer they lived, the further they thought themselves to be from the suffering of the Hereafter. Life meant that they did not have to face this suffering, and so they rejoiced in it.

The Jews did not care if they had to live in a state of ignominy or poverty, or any other kind of life; the important thing was that they lived. But why were they even more eager to cling to life than the idolaters? It is because the idolater thought there was no afterlife at all, and so the life of this world was all he cared about, and was his whole life. And so he hoped that his life would be long, no matter what kind of life it was because he thought that there would be nothing after it. But he did not have it in his mind that there might be suffering after this worldly life; that was why the Jews were even more eager to cling to life than the idolaters.

God *the Most High* says, '…One of them wishes that he could be granted life a thousand years….' They would love to live a thousand years or more; but suppose one of them lived a thousand years, or even more: would this save him from the eventual suffering? No, for long life does not change the final ending. As long as the final end is death in all cases, the one who lives only a few short years is equal to the one who lives for thousands of years.

The word God *the Most High* uses for 'to be granted a life' is *yu'ammar*, which in Arabic is a passive verb form ('to be allowed to live'); and it could not be an active form, for life is not in the hands of anyone but God, and it is God who gives life and brings it to an end. So since life is not in the hands of man, the passive verb form is used.

Life is the time a person spends between his birth and his death. The Arabic word for life (*'umr*) is derived from the word meaning 'inhabit/populate/construct,' because life resides in the body, and when it ends, the body becomes a deserted corpse. God *the Most High* says, '…a thousand years….' Why is the number one thousand mentioned? It is mentioned because it is the highest number with which the Arabs were familiar. And so the fighter who took the Persian king Chosroes' sister captive during the war asked for one thousand *dirhams* as her ransom. When his people asked him how much he got for her, he told them one thousand. 'Had you asked for more,' they said, 'they would have given it to you.' 'By God,' he replied, 'if I knew there was something more than a thousand, I would have asked for it!' So, one thousand was the limit to which the Arabs counted, and so they would say 'a thousand thousand' rather than 'one million.'

God *the Most High* then says, '…but it would not remove him in the least from the [coming] punishment….' This means that even if one of them were to live for a thousand years or more, he would not escape the suffering of the Hereafter. Then He *the Exalted* says, '…And God sees what they do.' That means He knows what they do, and He will punish them for it whether they live for one thousand years, or more than this, or less.

قُلْ مَن كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِّجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُۥ نَزَّلَهُۥ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ
مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

Say [Prophet], 'If anyone is an enemy of Gabriel – who by God's leave brought down the Quran to your heart confirming previous scriptures as a guide and good news for the faithful [97] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 97)

God *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the fact that the Jews not only killed the prophets, and distorted the Torah, and changed God's signs in seeking the glory of this worldly life, but they also declared themselves enemies to the angels; and what is more, they declared their enmity towards the closet of the angels to God who brought the Revelation of the Quran, namely Gabriel *peace be upon him*, and they said, 'Gabriel is an enemy to us.'

These words are addressed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is narrated that Ibn Jawriya, a Jewish rabbi, sat with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him, 'Who is it who brings down this Revelation to you?' The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* answered that it was Gabriel *peace be upon him*. And the Jew replied, 'Had it been any other than him, we would have believed in you; Gabriel is our enemy, because he always comes bearing punishment and suffering, whilst Michael comes bearing mercy, aid, and abundance.' He was also their enemy because they believed that Jerusalem would be destroyed by a man named Bukhtanasar (Nebuchadnezzar), and so the Jews sent a man to assassinate him. This man found a young boy who asked him what he wanted. He answered that he wanted to slay Bukhtanasar 'because the scriptures tell us that he will destroy

Jerusalem.’ The boy answered, ‘If this man is destined to destroy Jerusalem, you shall not be able to prevent him, for what has been destined will come to pass whether we like it or not; and if he is not destined to do so, then why kill him?’ That is, the child told him that if God had decreed that Bukhtanasar would destroy Jerusalem, nobody can hold back God’s decree, and so he would not be able to kill him and thus prevent him from destroying Jerusalem. And if it was not truly decreed, then why kill a human being for committing no crime? So the Jew went back home without killing Bukhtanasar, and when he got back to his people, they said, ‘It was Gabriel, in the form of this young boy, who convinced you not to kill that man.’

It is narrated that our master ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* possessed a piece of land in upper Medina, and whenever he went to it, he would pass by the schools of the Jews, and sit with them for a while. The Jews thought that the reason ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* was sitting with them was because he loved them, and so they said to him, ‘We love you, and respect you, and have hope in you.’ ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* understood what they meant, and so he replied, ‘By God, I do not sit with you because I love you, but rather, I want to get a better image of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and learn what your scriptures say about him.’ They said to him, ‘And who is it who tells Muhammad our histories, and our secrets?’ ‘Umar God *be pleased with him* replied, ‘It is Gabriel *peace be upon him*, who comes to him from heaven bearing your histories.’ They replied, ‘He is our enemy.’ Omar *God be pleased with him* said, ‘What is his position with God?’ They replied, ‘He sits on the right side of God, and Michael sits on the left.’ ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* said, ‘Since this is the case, neither could be the enemy of the other because they have equal positions with God; and so whoever is an enemy to either one of them is an enemy to God; and your enmity to Gabriel will avail you nothing, nor will your love for Michael, for they both have a high standing in the sight of God.’

Their enmity to Gabriel *peace be upon him* confirms their materialism: they view the issue in human terms, since the ones who sit to the right and left side of the ruler compete with one another for his regard – but this is the case in the human realm, and the angels have nothing to do with this. God has enough in His possession to grant high status to one without detracting from the status of the other. Moreover, God’s name is the Truth, and what Gabriel *peace be upon him* brings down is the truth just as what Michael *peace be upon him* brings down is the truth, and truth does not compete with truth. ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* then said to them, ‘Your disbelief is stronger than that of donkeys!’ Then he went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the moment the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him he said, ‘Your Lord agrees with you, ‘Umar!’ God’s words were then revealed: ‘Say, “Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel - for he it is who by God’s leave has brought the Quran down on your heart, confirming previous revelations, and guidance, and good tidings to the faithful.”’ ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* said, ‘O Messenger of God, after this, my faith is firmer than the very mountains!’

So their saying ‘Michael is our friend, and Gabriel is our foe’ is pure materialism, and God *the Most High* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: They see Gabriel *peace be upon him* as an enemy because he has brought this down to your heart by God’s leave, and as long as he has brought it from God to your heart, this means they have no part to play in it; and it confirms the truth of the Torah they possess, and it is a guidance and glad tidings for the believers. So what part of this makes you hate Gabriel? Your enmity to Gabriel *peace be upon him* is enmity to God Himself *the Most High*.

مَن كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِّلَّهِ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَجِبۡرِيلَ
وَمِيكَىٰلَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِّلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

if anyone is an enemy of God, His angels and His
messengers, of Gabriel and Michael, then God is
certainly the enemy of such disbelievers’ [98]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 98)

And so God *the Most High* gave His judgement on the matter, and said that any enmity towards the messengers and the angels, especially Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them*, is tantamount to enmity towards God Himself. The True Lord *the Most High* mentions the angels as a whole, and then mentions Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them* specifically by name.

It is not a matter of picking and choosing, but rather, it is all or nothing. If someone declares himself to be an enemy to the angels, and Gabriel and Michael, *peace be upon them*, and the messengers of God, he is first and foremost an enemy of God since there is no dividing between them, and they all revolve around the truth, and the truth is one, and never divided against itself. Enmity only arises when caprices and desires clash, and this happens only in the affairs of this world.

This noble verse confirms the essential unity of truth between God, His angels, His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them*. Whoever is an enemy to any one of these is an enemy to them all, and is an enemy to God *the Most High*. The Jews were enemies to God because they disbelieved in Him, and enemies to the messengers because they denied some and killed others.

And so the True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the unity of religious truth, the source of which is God *the Most High*; and His messenger from amongst the angels is Gabriel *peace be upon him*, and His message-bearers from amongst mankind are the messengers and prophets whom He sent, and Michael *peace be upon him* brings down abundance and fertility. Faith is the basis of life, and so whoever is an enemy to the angels and the messengers and Gabriel and Michael *peace be upon them* is a disbeliever. The verse does not say that enmity towards these beings is simple enmity, but rather, God declares that such people are disbelievers. God *the Most High* did not simply inform Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this, but He also commanded him to proclaim this so that all people would know it, and know that the Jews were infidels.

وَلَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ءَايَٰتٍۭ بَيِّنَٰتٍۖ وَمَا يَكْفُرُ بِهَآ إِلَّا ٱلْفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

For We have sent down clear messages to you and only
those who defy [God] would refuse to believe them [99]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 99)

God *the Most High* proceeds to affirm the truth of the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that its signs are clear so that any reasoning person who seeks faith, will believe in them, whilst those who desire wantonness and iniquity will not. What is the meaning of ‘clear signs’?

A sign is something amazing in its inimitability. Signs are miracles which come to a messenger to prove that he is truly sent by his Lord. The term is also used to refer to the verses of the Noble Quran. As for the attribute ‘clear,’ it means that they are plain things which cannot be a subject for disagreement, and which need no further clarification: ‘…and no one would deny them except the perverse.’ Perverseness (*fisq*) is to stray from obedience; the Arabic word is derived from a word describing the development of dates; at first, a new date is not soft because it cannot rid itself of its shell; but when it becomes soft, you find that the shell falls away from the fruit, and this is termed in Arabic *fisq*. And so the one who falls away from God’s teachings is called *fasiq* (‘perverse’). The meaning of this is that the signs by which God *the Most High* supported Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were plain for the disbelievers to see, and needed no further evidence. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who never read a single word in his life, brought forth this Quran inimitable in its utterances and its meanings, and this was a plain miracle which required no further evidence. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was never tempted by worldly things to abandon this religion, no matter what they offered him which is proof that he was a man of principles guided by a Divine message. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned, as inspired in the Quran, the outcome of a war which would not take place for another nine years, and told the disbelievers and hypocrites what lay in their hearts, and exposed them, and predicted events which would happen in the natural world, and all the other miracles which the Quran contains of all kinds, whether scientific, astronomical, natural, or otherwise. The Quran challenges the disbelievers with all these clear signs, all these plain signs which cannot be denied, except by those who wish to ignore God’s teachings and do whatever their souls desired.

The miracles of the universe, and the Quran, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, do not require anything but impartial reflection for us to realise that this Quran is from God, and is filled with miracles in its utterances and its content, and that it will remain a miracle for every successive generation, constantly yielding new wonders.

أَوَكُلَّمَا عَٰهَدُواْ عَهۡدٗا نَّبَذَهُۥ فَرِيقٞ مِّنۡهُمۚ
بَلۡ أَكۡثَرُهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

How is it that whenever they make a covenant
or a pledge, some of them throw it away? In
fact, most of them do not believe [100]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 100)

The True Lord *the Most High* affirmed before that the Islamic religion and its Book the Quran contain clear signs which mean that faith in them only requires a moment's thought which makes the enmity that the Jews showed to Islam contrary to all the pledges they made, and contrary to naturally disposed faith, and contrary to the fact that they promised God they would not conceal what the Torah said about the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and contrary to their pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and contrary to the instruction Moses *peace be upon him* gave them to believe in Islam when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came. We find this fact made clear in God's reminding the people of the Book that He had taken the covenant of the previous prophets, after He had given them the revelation and the wisdom, that when a messenger comes, confirming what is with them, they should believe in him and support him. Then God asked them whether they have acknowledged the covenant and taken His bond on it, and they said that they have acknowledged it; then He told them to bear witness for that, and He will be a witness also (*Al-'Imran:* 81).

And so we know that Moses *peace be upon him* from whom the pledge was taken, passed it on to the Israelites, and the Israelites knew all about this pledge when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and they had in their possession a detailed description of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. But they broke this pledge just as they broke many other pledges, including their pledge about not working on the Sabbath, and how they tried to get around God's Commandment by making traps to catch the fish, trying to circumvent God's Commandment.

And they also pledged to believe in God as the One Deity, and then worshipped the calf.

And after God *the Most High* commanded them to enter a valley filled with crops because they wanted to eat the produce of the earth instead of the manna and quails that came to them from the sky, they said to Moses *peace be upon him* to go forth, he and his Lord, both of them, and fight, while they remained in their place (*al-Ma'ida:* 24). And there were many other pledges related to war, and captives, and worship so that even after God *the Most High* raised the mount above them, and terror entered their hearts because they thought it would fall upon them – and this was only their imagination, and did not reflect reality, for God *the Most High* made it clear that they thought that it would fall upon them (*al-A'raf:* 171) – yet as soon as they were far enough from the mountain, they broke their pledge.

Then they broke the pledge and the oath they had sworn to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he migrated to Medina. This occurred at the battle of the Trench, when the Jews tried to open a path for the pagans to enter and attack the believers from the rear.

God *the Most High* says, '…some of them cast it away….' We said that this is called a 'conservative statement' because some of them did honour the pledge, and some of them were true to what they promised God, and there were some others who wanted to adopt the new religion and believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It was not all of them, and so it cannot be said that this refers to all of the Jews because there were amongst them those who did not break the covenant. God *the Most High* wants to open the door for those of them who wish to have faith so that they will not say, 'God has judged us with an unreserved judgement, whilst we wish to have faith and preserve the covenant.' But those who did keep the covenant were few in number, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…Nay, indeed: most of them do not believe.' That is, those of them who broke the covenant, and broke their faith, represented the majority of the Israelites.

وَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمۡ رَسُولٞ مِّنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٞ لِّمَا مَعَهُمۡ نَبَذَ فَرِيقٞ مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ
أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ كِتَٰبَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَآءَ ظُهُورِهِمۡ كَأَنَّهُمۡ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ١٠١

When God sent them a messenger confirming the Scriptures they already had, some of those who had received the Scripture before threw the Book of God over their shoulders as if they had no knowledge [101] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 101)

After speaking of the Jews who broke their pledge to believe in the Messenger of God *the Most High*, and broke it knowingly, God *the Most High* says, ‘And when a messenger from God came to them confirming that which was with them….’ That is, what the Quran brought, was a confirmation of what the Torah brought because the Quran was from God and the Torah was from God. But they corrupted the Torah, concealing some parts if it and changing others, concealing what they wanted to conceal; and so the Noble Quran came to bring what they concealed into the open, and confirm the truth of those parts they left alone.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘…some of those who had been given the Scripture threw the Book of God behind their backs…’ We said that the first scripture they corrupted was the Torah, and then when the Final Revelation, the Quran, came to them they cast it behind their backs. What does it mean to ‘throw’ something? It means to cast it far from one. So they threw the descriptions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in their books far from them, and the final thing they cast aside was the glad tidings of the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; for they used to predict their victory over the disbelievers, saying, ‘The time is nigh for the coming of a prophet, in whom we will believe, and with whom we will slay you as ‘Ad and Iram were slain.’

God *the Most High* says that ‘some’ of them threw it behind their backs, meaning that a group of them rejected the Revelation whilst another group did not; for Ibn Salam *God be pleased with him*, one of the Jewish rabbis, believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and followed him, and another one of the rabbis, Kaʿb Al-Ahbar Mukhairiq *God be pleased with him*, also embraced Islam. Had the Quran generalised here and not said ‘some of those…’ it would have been said that it was unfair to those of them who believed.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…behind their backs….’ You might throw something in front of you, and if it is in front of you this means you can always see it, and this might tempt you to accept it. But they threw it behind their backs, that is, they placed it behind them so that they would completely forget it and never consider it again.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘…as if they did not know….’ That is, they behaved as if they knew nothing of the glad tidings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his descriptions. God’s words ‘as if’ indicate that they actually did know this perfectly well because if they actually had not known, God *the Most High* would have said ‘…some of those who had been given the Scripture threw the Book of God behind their backs unknowingly.’ So they knew with certainty, but pretended not to know. We must be aware that if someone throws something aside, he may well accept to follow something else in its stead. They cast aside God’s Book, so what did they follow instead of it?

وَٱتَّبَعُواْ مَا تَتۡلُواْ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلۡكِ سُلَيۡمَٰنَۖ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيۡمَٰنُ وَلَٰكِنَّ
ٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ كَفَرُواْ يُعَلِّمُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ ٱلسِّحۡرَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَى ٱلۡمَلَكَيۡنِ
بِبَابِلَ هَٰرُوتَ وَمَٰرُوتَۚ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنۡ أَحَدٍ حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَآ إِنَّمَا نَحۡنُ فِتۡنَةٞ فَلَا
تَكۡفُرۡۖ فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنۡهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِۦ بَيۡنَ ٱلۡمَرۡءِ وَزَوۡجِهِۦۚ وَمَا هُم
بِضَآرِّينَ بِهِۦ مِنۡ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۚ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمۡ وَلَا يَنفَعُهُمۡۚ
وَلَقَدۡ عَلِمُواْ لَمَنِ ٱشۡتَرَىٰهُ مَا لَهُۥ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ مِنۡ خَلَٰقٖۚ وَلَبِئۡسَ مَا
شَرَوۡاْ بِهِۦٓ أَنفُسَهُمۡۚ لَوۡ كَانُواْ يَعۡلَمُونَ ١٠٢

And followed what the evil ones had fabricated about the Kingdom of Solomon instead. Not that Solomon himself was a disbeliever; it was the evil ones who were disbelievers. They taught people witchcraft and what was revealed in Babylon to the two angels Harut and Marut. Yet these two never taught anyone without first warning him, ‘We are sent only to tempt –

do not disbelieve.' From these two, they learned what can cause discord between man and wife, although they harm no one with it except by God's leave. They learned what harmed them, not what benefit them, knowing full well that whoever gained [this knowledge] would lose any share in the Hereafter. Evil indeed is the [price] for which they sold their souls, if only they knew [102] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 102)

The True Lord *the Most High* informs us here that the Jews threw aside God's Book and instead, they followed the practises of demons. Casting aside something is the opposite of following something else, and to follow something means to imitate its example. They chose to follow the guidance of what the demons practised at the time of Solomon's reign. The Arabic verb for 'recited' (*tatlu*) is given in the present tense in the Arabic text, whilst it might have been expected for it to be in the past tense since the time referred to is that of the reign of Solomon *peace be upon him*. But God *the Most High* wants us to understand that this following continued until the present day, as though they did not restrict its practice to any particular time.

Until this very moment, there are amongst the Jews those who follow what the devils recited during the reign of Solomon *peace be upon him*; and seeing that the contemporary Jews were pleased and inspired by the way their ancestors followed the demons; it is as though they did it as well.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And they followed what the devils had recited during the reign of Solomon….' But the devils practised it, and then they ceased to do so, whilst the way the Jews continued to evoke the practices of the evil ones, shows that they believed in it and accepted it. The word 'devils' means evil demons from amongst the jinn; amongst the jinn there are wicked ones as well as righteous believers, as God *the Most High* states the statement of a group of jinn that some from among them are righteous while others are below that, and that they have always followed widely divergent paths (*al-Jinn:* 11). They also make it clear that among them are those who have surrendered themselves to God, just as there are those who have taken to injustice and wrongdoing (*al-Jinn:* 14).

So the jinn are composed of both, believers and disbelievers, and amongst the believers of the jinn, there are the obedient and the disobedient. Demons or devils are the rebels from amongst the jinn who rebel against God’s teachings; we term everyone who rebels against God’s teachings a ‘devil,’ whether he is a jinn or a human being, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has made for every prophet an enemy - devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion (*al-An‘am:* 112).

So the devils are those who rebel against God’s teachings. God *the Most High* says, ‘And they followed what the devils had recited during the reign of Solomon….’ This means what the devils used to do during the days when Solomon *peace be upon him* reigned as king.

But what is the story of the reign of Solomon and the devils? Before the coming of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, God let the evil demons listen to the commands of Heaven as they descended to earth. They would listen as the commands were issued to the angels, and convey them to the leaders of the idolaters, adding to them lies and distortions so that some of them would remain on the side of truth whilst the majority would be false. This is why God *the Most High* tells the believers that the devils would whisper to their allies to aid them in arguing with them (*al-An‘am:* 121).

Before the Revelation of the Quran, the evil demons were able to listen to this, but when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with his mission, they were barred from doing so so that these demons would not insert their distortions into the teachings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* or into the Quran.

And the True Lord *the Most High* mentions that the jinn admitted that they used to take positions for hearing the commands of Heaven, but after the start of the mission of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, anyone who tries to listen in to the commands of Heaven would find a flaming dart in ambush waiting for him (*al-Jinn:* 9).

That is, the demons used to have places in the sky where they would stay and listen to the commands which were sent down from Heaven to earth; but when the Quran began to be revealed, God *the Most High* sent down darting flames, as shooting stars so that when the demons tried to listen to what was being sent down from above, burning flames were sent upon them to burn them. This is why when common folks see shooting stars burning in the sky, they are quick to say, 'God has shot down an enemy of the faith!' So it is as though this matter is part of the people's collective consciousness so that they say 'God has shot down an enemy of the faith,' meaning a devil.

The True Lord *the Most High* also mentions the jinn's statement that when they tried to reach out to Heaven, they found it filled with mighty guards and darting flames, and that they do not know whether evil fortune is intended for those who live on earth, or whether it is their Lord's Will to endow them with consciousness of what is right (*al-Jinn:* 8*,* 10).

That is, things are now uncertain for the demons because they can no longer reach the heavens, and so they do not know whether that which is being sent down from above is good or bad for those below. Look at the precision of the Quran's words when it mentions the jinn's words that tried to reach out to Heaven. It is as though they went up until they reached the sky so that it was so close they could almost touch it. At this juncture – namely the mention of how the Jews followed the teachings of the devils during the reign of Solomon, of their sorcery, incantations, and other things which neither help nor harm – God *the Most High* wanted to emphasise that Solomon *peace be upon him* was innocent of all this, and so He *the Exalted* said, '…It was not Solomon who disbelieved….' It might seem to be more logical for God *the Most High* to tell the story of the devils before declaring Solomon innocent of the unbelief they wanted to spread, but God wanted to remove any suspicion of disbelief from Solomon *peace be upon him*, and confirm it in the case of those who followed the devils, and so He *the Exalted* said, '…It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved….'

So, it was the devils who spread this unbelief, but how did these devils disbelieve, and how did they lure their followers to do so? God *the Most High* says, '…but the devils disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut. The two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, "We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever." And they learned from them that by which they caused separation between a man and his wife. But they do not harm anyone through it except by permission of God. And they learnt what harms them and does not benefit them. But they certainly knew that whoever purchased the sorcery would not have in the Hereafter any share….'

What is the story behind all this? The Jews broke God's covenant and followed what the devils recited and practised at the time of Solomon *peace be upon him*, and they wanted to show everything that happened at the time of Solomon *peace be upon him* as being sorcery and the work of demons; and in this way the Jews wanted to make people think that the way of Solomon *peace be upon him* was all based on sorcery and the work of demons. But the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to declare Solomon *peace be upon him* innocent of these lies; when Solomon *peace be upon him* was granted prophethood, he asked God *the Most High* to grant him a kingdom which would never be given to anyone after him, as the Quran mentions that he prayed to his Lord to forgive him his sins and bestow upon him the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after him, as certainly God alone is the Giver of gifts. And so God made subservient to him the wind so that it gently sped at his command wherever he willed, as well as the demons that He made to work for him – every kind of builder and diver – and others linked together in fetters (*Sad:* 35-38).

And so Solomon *peace be upon him* was given sovereignty above men and jinns, and over other creatures of God such as the winds, and the birds, and more besides. At the time when Solomon *peace be upon him* took charge of this kingdom, the devils were filling the earth with unbelief in the form of sorcery and its writings, and so Solomon *peace be upon him* confiscated all the books of sorcery, and it is said that he buried them under his throne. When Solomon *peace be upon him* died, and the devils found the cache of books of magic, they took them out and showed them to the people, and their allies from amongst the Jewish clergy said that these books of magic were the means by which Solomon *peace be upon him* had controlled men and jinn, and that they represented his teachings, and so they spread them amongst the people.

God *the Most High* wanted to affirm that Solomon was innocent of this accusation, and he was innocent of ruling by sorcery and spreading unbelief.

He *the Exalted* said that '…It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people sorcery….'

What is sorcery? The word in Arabic *sihr* is derived from the word *sahar* which means the latter hours of the night, just before daybreak, when light is mixed with darkness and things are difficult to see. Likewise, sorcery is something which seems to you to be real, whilst in fact it is not real. It is based on two things: the bewitching of the eye so that it sees something unreal which appears to be real; but it does not change the true nature of things, and so God *the Most High* says that Pharaoh's sorcerers cast a spell upon the people's eyes, and struck them with awe, and produced mighty sorcery (*al-A'raf:* 116).

So the sorcerer controls the eyes of his audience so that they see something that is not real, and not true, and so the eyes of the audience become subjugated to the sorcerer. So sorcery is all illusion, and it is not real; God *the Most High* relates what happened between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh's sorcerers: Moses told the sorcerers to cast first, and by the effect of their sorcery, their magic ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly (*Ta Ha:* 66).

Since God *the Most High* said that it seemed to him, this means that they did not really move. So sorcery is illusion; and what is the proof that sorcery is illusion? The proof is the confrontation that took place between Moses *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh's sorcerers. This is because the sorcerer might bewitch the eyes of the people, but no one can bewitch his (the sorcerer's) eyes; yet when Moses *peace be upon him* and the sorcerers came forward to the confrontation, God *the Most High* tells us that the sorcerers gave to Moses the option whether he would throw his staff first, or they would be the first to throw. He answered that they throw first. And by virtue of their sorcery, their magic ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly (*Ta Ha:* 65-66).

When the sorcerers threw down their ropes and staffs, it seemed to the onlookers that they had become serpents, moving rapidly; but did the sorcerers also think that they had become serpents? Of course, they did not because no one can bewitch the eye of a magician. And so what they had thrown down remained in their eyes mere ropes and staffs until Moses *peace be upon him* threw down his own staff, and God *the Most High* tells us that He commanded Moses to throw that staff which was in his right hand, it shall swallow up all that they have wrought for they have wrought only a sorcerer's artifice, and the sorcerer can never come to any good, whatever he may aim at. And so it happened, and down fell the sorcerers, prostrating themselves in adoration, and proclaimed that they have come to believe in the Lord of Moses and Aaron (*Ta Ha:* 69-70).

Here the truth about sorcery is revealed. Why did the sorcerers fall down in prostration? It is because their ropes and staffs remained to them mere ropes and staffs as no one had bewitched their eyes; but when Moses *peace be upon him* threw down his staff, and it truly became a serpent, they knew that this was not mere sorcery, but rather, it was a miracle from God *the Most High*. How did they know? Because sorcery does not change the true nature of anything, whilst they were certain that Moses' staff had really turned into a serpent, but their ropes and staffs remained as they were, even though it seemed to the people that they had turned into serpents.

So sorcery is illusion, and the sorcerer sees things as they really are, and so he does not fear them, whilst it seems to his audience of ordinary people that the thing has changed its nature. And so the sorcerers fell down in prostration because they recognised that the miracle Moses *peace be upon him* had performed was not mere sorcery, but was something beyond the power of any man.

Sorcery is illusion, and demons have the ability to take any form; we cannot envisage a demon in his true form, but if he takes a material form, we can see him. If he takes the form of a man, we see him as a man, and if he takes the form of a beast, we see him as a beast, and in this state, he is governed by his form; if he takes the form of a man and you shoot him with a bullet, he will die, and if he takes the form of a beast and you hit him with your car, he will die; this is because his form governs him. This is why demons never remain in their form except for a fleeting moment, and then disappear in a matter of seconds. Why? Because they fear that someone will see them in this form and then kill them, since this form governs them. And so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said of the time a demon took a human form before him: 'I thought of tying him to the pillar of the mosque so that the children of Medina could amuse themselves with him, but then I remembered what my brother Solomon supplicated to his Lord to forgive him his sins, and bestow upon him the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after him [(*Sad:* 35)] and I let him go.'[1]

Out of God's mercy for us, He made it so that any form a demon takes will govern him with the laws which apply to it; if not, they would have overcome us and made our lives hellish. God *the Most High* made the universe run in a balanced way so that no one can vanquish anyone else. This means that if we are all in a village and none of us possessed a weapon, there is balance; but if only one of us owns a weapon and claims that he has it to protect the inhabitants of the village, but then he uses his weapon to seize control of them and make them pay him racket ('protection') money and the like, the balance is disturbed – and this is what God does not accept.

Sorcery leads to an upsetting of the world's balance because the sorcerer makes use of forces more powerful than mankind, namely demons that are created from fire, and move extremely quickly, and can take many forms, and so on. When a man seeks to learn how to subdue the jinn, he claims he is doing this to spread goodness in the world, but this is not the truth because he is inevitably tempted to oppress. The thing which disturbs the security of the world is the lack of equality between people. Some people are able to oppress others, and if the whole society does not come together to prevent them, balance will be disturbed in that society. God *the Most High* wants people to have equal opportunities so that the safety and security of the world will be maintained, and so He tells us not to oppress, and not to seek the aid of demons in our oppression so that we will not spoil the security of the world.

But God *the Most High* in His wisdom decreed to place within the world that which prevented creatures from being deluded by their own powers, so they would not believe they had gained loftiness in the world by themselves. The sin of Satan was refusing to prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him*, saying that he is better than Adam as God has created him of fire whereas he created Adam of clay (*al-A'raf:* 12).

So the substance of his creation made him allow pride to enter his soul, and so he disobeyed. And so God *the Most High* wants to teach mankind certain

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad – Tr*

laws which would make these creatures of a higher substance, namely demons, submit to a creature of a lower substance, namely mankind so that every one of God's creatures would know that if God distinguished them by making them from a particular substance, this was not by their own will nor was it any mark of their distinction, but rather, it was by the will of God *the Most High*.

And so He sent to Babylon the two angels, Harut and Marut, to teach people the sorcery which would make the creature of a higher substance yield to that of a lower.

God *the Most High* says, '…It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut. But the two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, "We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever…."' So God *the Most High* sent the two angels Harut and Marut to teach people sorcery. Many stories have been related about these two angels, but as long as God *the Most High* sent two angels to teach people sorcery, this means that sorcery is a science with which man seeks the assistance of demons. There is a story concerning when the angels said about the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*, as the Noble Quran tells us, '…they said, "Will You place on it one who will do ill therein and shed blood, and we celebrate Your Praise and extol Your Holiness?"' (*al-Baqara:* 30).

It is said that upon this, the True Lord *the Most High* instructed the angels to choose two angels to go down to earth so the rest could see what they would do, so, they chose Harut and Marut, and when they came to earth, a woman charmed them, and so they committed grave sins. Despite the presence of this story in certain books of exegesis, it is not true, for the angels by their very nature cannot disobey God, and because it is part of the completion of faith that a creature obeys everything that God *the Most High* commands it to do. These two angels were commanded to teach people sorcery, and at the same time to warn that sorcery is an evil temptation which leads to unbelief; and they did as they were bid. A temptation is a test, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…But the two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, "We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever." And they learned from them that by which they caused separation between a man and his wife. But they do not harm anyone through it except by permission of God….' So, these two angels warned the people that the sorcery they taught them was but a temptation which would lead to unbelief, and that it brought nothing but evil, and separated men from their wives, and that it could have no harm except by God's leave; for there is no power in this universe outside the will of God *the Most High*.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And they learnt what harms them and does not benefit them. But they certainly knew that whoever purchased the sorcery would not have in the Hereafter any share. And wretched is that for which they sold themselves, if they only knew.'

God *the Most High* tells us that learning sorcery harms and does not benefit; it never brings any good, even for those who perform it. You find the one who practises sorcery depends on other people to make his living, and so they are better than him; and he spends all day looking for someone to delude into thinking he can do things for them, just so he can take their money. You find that his appearance is not normal, and his life is not stable, and his children are depraved. Everyone who works as a sorcerer dies poor, possessing nothing, and is afflicted by debilitating diseases, and becomes, at the end of his life, an admonition for others.

So, sorcery brings nothing but harm, poverty, and then God's curse at the end of the sorcerer's life. Those who do sorcery die as disbelievers, and find nothing in the Hereafter but hell. And so they have acquired for themselves the worst of all things, if only they knew it, for they have gained nothing but harm, and have done nothing but cause discord between people; and they cannot harm anyone save by God's leave.

If God *the Most High* has decreed in His wisdom that sorcery should be one of the temptations and trials of this worldly life, He *the Most High* has also decreed that all those who perform sorcery are disbelievers, and so no one should study sorcery or read into it because when they first begin to learn it, they will say, 'I will use it to do good,' and then they end by using it to do evil. Moreover, the demons upon whose aid the sorcerer calls usually turn against him to make him taste the fruits of his wicked actions, and so evil rebounds on him and on his children. God *the Most High* lets us know the statement of the jinns that men from among the humans sought the aid of men from the jinn, but they only increased their folly (*al-Jinn:* 6). That is, when someone seeks the aid of jinn, they turn against him and subject him to all kinds of suffering.

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱتَّقَوْا۟ لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ خَيْرٌ ۖ لَّوْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

If they had believed and been mindful of God, their reward
from Him would have been far better, if only they knew [103]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 103)

God *the Most High* opens to His servants the doors to repentance and mercy. He told them that sorcery was unbelief, and that those who indulge in it, will be raised as disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection, and will spend eternity in hell. And He *the Exalted* told them that if they abstained from using sorcery as a way of distinguishing themselves from others in the evil and harm they therefore did, it would be better for them in the sight of God *the Most High*; for He *the Exalted* said about the two angels who came down to teach sorcery, but '…the two angels did not teach anyone until after they had said, "We are but a trial, so do not be a disbeliever"' (*al-Baqara:* 102).

So the practice of sorcery amounts to unbelief, and so if they believed in this fact and recognised that they were indulging in unbelief, and were conscious of God, this would lead to a reward for them from God, and goodness in this life and the next. But what is 'reward'? It is recompense for a good deed, as opposed to punishment, which is requital for an evil deed. The Arabic word for reward (*mathuba*) is derived from the verb (*thab*), which means 'to return.' And so the one who repeats the *Imam's* (prayer leader) words in the prayer for the others to hear, is called the *muthawwib* because the *Imam* says '*Allahu akbar'* ('God is the Greatest') and then this man repeats the Imam's words with a loud voice so that the worshippers in the back rows who do not hear the Imam's voice can hear it. This practice is called *tathwib*, i.e. the repetition of the Imam's words so that those who did not hear him have another chance to hear. As we said, it is derived from the verb *thab* meaning 'to return' because when a person does a good deed, his good deed brings him a good return. Do not think that a good deed comes from you and then does not return; rather, it brings back goodness to you.

If we consider the precise words used by God in the Quran: '…the reward from God would have been far better…,' we find that the word 'reward' (*mathuba*) is derived from the same root as the word *thawb* (plural *thiyab*) which means 'garment'. In the past, people would use sheep's wool to make their clothes, and so a man would take the sheep he possessed and shear their wool, and then give it to someone else to spin it and knit it into clothes, and then give it back to him. The wool he sent away would return to him as clothes, and so they were called *mathuba* because the goodness returns to you so that you can derive great benefit from it. Likewise, the reward (*'thawab'*) for righteous deeds comes back to you with great benefit.

So, the word *thawab* ('reward') is derived from the word *thawb* ('garment'). God *the Most High* taught us that the purpose of clothes is to cover one's nakedness, and likewise righteous deeds cover the spiritual and psychological failures of a person, as the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has sent down to mankind raiment to hide their nakedness- and splendid garments; but the raiment of piety; this is the best (*al-A'raf:* 26).

So, it is as though there are two kinds of clothes, those which cover the bodily nakedness and those which protect a person from suffering; and the raiment of piety is better than the clothes which cover bodily nakedness. God *the Most High* says, '…the reward from God would have been far better….' Consider the reward which comes from God. If you get a garment from the one who made it, and find it to be beautiful and well-made, with attractive colours – if the one who made it for you is a human being, what about the reward given to you by God? It would be the pinnacle of beauty. God bestows rewards according to His own power, and so His rewards are the peak of magnificence so that the reward is multiplied again and again. We must also consider God's words 'And if they had believed and feared [God]….' We said before that God-fearing means to place a barrier between oneself and the Divine Attributes of Majesty. We said that some people wonder how God *the Most High* says 'fear God' and then say 'fear the Fire.' We say that the meaning of God-fearing is to place a barrier between oneself and God's Attributes of Majesty, and to fear the fire means to place a barrier between oneself and the fire of hell; for the fire of hell is one of the manifestations of God's Attributes of

Majesty. And so the expression ‘fear God’ is equivalent to ‘fear the Fire.’ When the True Lord *the Most High* says here simply ‘feared,’ He used the word in its most general sense, and dropped the object of the verb in order to indicate this open meaning. God *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that if the sorcerers had believed that the learning of sorcery was nothing but a temptation which lead to unbelief, and had been conscious of God and feared His punishment in the Hereafter, it would have been better for them; and so He *the Glorious and Exalted* says, ‘…the reward from God would have been far better….’

When you hear the word ‘good,’ the word ‘evil’ also comes to your mind because good is the opposite of evil. But in Arabic, sometimes the word *khair* (‘good’) is not the direct opposite of the word ‘evil,’ but rather, it is the opposite of ‘worse.’ This is because the word *‘khair’* is the only word in the Arabic language in which the noun/adjective form is the same as the comparative/superlative form. You say, ‘This is better (*fadil*), and this is worse (*mafdul*),’ whereas the word *‘khair’* is both a noun and a superlative, so you say ‘this is better (*khair*) than that,’ that is, one of them gives you more than the other does. If no opposing word is mentioned in contrast to the word ‘good’, i.e. you do not say ‘better than’, this means that its opposite is ‘bad/evil’. If you say ‘So-and-so is better than so-and-so,’ this means that they are both good, but one is better than the other. Goodness is what brings you benefit, but the definition of ‘benefit’ differs from one person to another. One person looks for the immediate, whilst others wait for the deferred benefit, whilst it appears that both of them desire what is good.

In order to illustrate this better, suppose there are two brothers, one of whom wakes up early to go to school, whilst the other sleeps until midmorning, and then goes out to sit in the café. The first loves what is good for him, as does the second; the difference lies in their definitions of what is good for them. The lazy person loves the immediate good, and so he gives himself all the sleep, comfort, and indolence he desires, whilst the hard-worker loves the deferred good for himself, and so he toils and strives all through his school year so that he can be comfortable after that, and gain for himself a notable future.

The farmer who goes out to his field to plant early in the morning, and irrigates his field and plants his seeds and toils, receives at the end of the year a large harvest and abundant goodness. The farmer who sits in the café all day, however, gives himself the goodness of relaxation, but when the harvest time comes he reaps nothing but regret.

So everyone loves what is good, but their points of view about it differ. Some of them want to enjoy sleep; others want to work for the enjoyment of tomorrow. When God *the Glorious and Exalted* commands us to do what is good, this good might be uncomfortable for the body and the soul, but the end result is the eternal delights of paradise. So, true goodness is that which the Sacred Law teaches. Why? That is because goodness is that which nothing bad comes after it. You are born, then you grow up, go to university, get a good job and you die, then you are resurrected, then you enter paradise, and after that, there is nothing but an eternal life of bliss.

God *the Most High* says, '…if they only knew.' Here, God denies that they have knowledge, whilst in the previous verse He has affirmed that they had knowledge: '…But they certainly knew that whoever purchased the sorcery would not have in the Hereafter any share….' We say that if a person's way of life does not go by what he knows, it is as though he knows nothing. This is because this knowledge will be a plea against its possessor on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be better if he did not know it at all. A poet said:

They were provided for, but not generosity,

It is as though they were provided for, and yet not provided for;

They were created, but not created for nobility:

It is as though they were created, and yet not created.

So, it is as though knowledge is not truly yours if you do not benefit from it; and God *the Most High* says that most people do not have knowledge (*ar-Rum:* 6). Then God *the Most High* makes this fine distinction saying that they know only the outer surface of this world's life (*ar-Rum:* 7). And so God denies that they have true knowledge, and affirms that they possess only superficial worldly knowledge. He *the Exalted* also gives the parable of those who were given the burden of the Torah, and thereafter failed to bear this burden; their likeness is that of an ass that carries a load of books [but cannot benefit from them]. Wretched is the parable of people who refuse God’s messages – for God does not bestow His guidance upon such evildoing folk (*al-Jumu’a:* 5).

That is, they bore the knowledge of the Torah, but did not bear it by following its guidance and acting in accordance with it. These sorcerers knew that those who practised sorcery were guilty of unbelief, but they did not act in accordance with what they knew.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَقُولُواْ رَٰعِنَا وَقُولُواْ ٱنظُرۡنَا
وَٱسۡمَعُواْۗ وَلِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ١٠٤

Believers, do not say [to the Prophet], ‘*Ra' ina,*’ but
say, ‘*Unzhurna,*’ and listen [to him]: an agonizing
torment awaits those who ignore [God’s words] [104]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 104)

This is a call to the believers because the noble verse begins with the words ‘O you who believe….’ When the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* calls the believers by saying ‘O you who believe,’ we know that here faith is the reason for religious responsibility. God does not issue commands to disbelievers and non-believers, but He only issues commands to those who believe in Him. When the servant attains to faith, he becomes responsible to his Lord for his actions in life, and so the guidance for his life is revealed to him. As for the disbeliever, God does not command him to do anything.

God’s call ‘O you who believe…’ is addressed to those who believe in God and accept Him as their Lord and Lawgiver. God *the Most High* says, ‘O you who believe,’ calling the believers, and then He says, ‘…do not say [to the Prophet], *‘Ra’ina’* (Look at us)…’ which is a prohibition. It seems that ‘*Ra’ina’* was a double-meaning word that the Jews used to say in addressing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, which God wished to forbid the believers from saying; and their faith compelled them to heed God’s prohibition.

What does *‘ra‘ina’* mean? In our own Egyptian dialect, we say ‘*ra‘ina,*’ meaning ‘look after us, and watch us, and take us by the hand,’ and all these words are derived from the root word *‘ri‘aya’* (‘care’), and from the word *ra‘i* (‘shepherd’). The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Each of you is a *ra’i* (shepherd/carer) and each of you is responsible for his *ra’iyya* (flock/subjects/people under one’s care.’(1)

The origin of the word is derived from the shepherd who looks after sheep because the shepherd must take them to the places where there is grass and water, that is, the places of grazing; and he must guard them so that none of them stray or wander off for the desert wolves to eat; and he must keep them comfortable so that they do not become exhausted or perish in the road. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘I used to tend sheep for a small amount of money for the people of Mecca.’(2)

But why did the True Lord *the Most High* command the believers to say, *‘Unzhurna’* (‘Regard us’), rather than ‘*Ra‘ina’* (‘Look at us’)? The Jews had in Hebrew and Aramaic the word *‘ra‘ina’*, which meant ‘recklessness.’ And so when they heard the companions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* say *‘ra‘ina’*, they took it as a way to insult the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* without the Muslims realising it. So God *the Most High* commanded the believers to stop using this word so that the Jews would not have a pretext to conceal their insults, and commanded them to say ‘U*nzhurna’* (‘Regard us’) instead.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…and listen [to him].’ Here, God alludes to the difference between the Jews and the believers. The Jews said ‘We hear and we disobey,’ whilst God tells the believers to listen with a mind to obeying and acting.

Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh God *be pleased with him* heard one of the Jews say to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* *‘ra‘ina’* and *Sa‘d* had been one of the Jewish rabbis and he knew their language, and so when he heard what the Jew said, he knew exactly what he meant. So he approached the Jew and said, ‘If I hear you say that again, I shall strike your neck.’ The Jew replied, ‘Do you not too say it to your Prophet? Is it unlawful for us and lawful for you?’ And so the noble verse was revealed, ‘…do not say [to the Prophet],

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, and At-Tirmidhi, on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

'Ra'ina' (Look at us); but say, '*Unzhurna'* (Regard us),…' If we reflect on the meaning of the word *ra'ina* and the word *'unzhurna,* we will find that they practically mean the same thing, but *unzhurna* gives this meaning without having the double entendre of a word in the language of the Jews, and which implies an insult to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. God *the Exalted* then says, '…and for the Infidels is a painful punishment.' That is, those who say *ra'ina* as a way to insult the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* will face a grievous suffering.

مَّا يَوَدُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَلَا ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ
أَن يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ
بِرَحْمَتِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلْفَضْلِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿١٠٥﴾

Neither those People of the Book who disbelieve nor the idolaters would like anything good to be sent down to you from your Lord, but God chooses for His grace whoever He will: His bounty has no limits [105] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 105)

Then the True Lord *the Most High* reveals to the believers the enmity felt towards them by the people of the Book, namely the Jews and the idolaters, those who disbelieved because they refused to have faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He tells them that the Jews and idolaters hate that any good should come to the believers, so the believers should doubt everything that they say and do, and should know that they do not want anything good for them. God *the Most High* says: 'Neither… wish…' i.e. they do not love, for wishing means the inclination of the heart towards that which it loves. To have affection for someone is different from doing a kindness for them. You might be kind to those whom you love and those whom you do not love, but you only truly have affection for those whom you love. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says that you will not find people who believe in God and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose God and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred (*al-Mujadala:* 22). And in another verse, the True Lord *the Most High* instructs believers about their parents that even if the parents endeavour to make their son associate with God that of which he has no knowledge, he should do not obey them but should accompany them in this world with appropriate kindness (*Luqman:* 15).

Some orientalists say that there is a contradiction between these two verses: How could God say 'Do not love those who declare war on God and His Messenger' and then say that if your parents try to make you associate partners with God, you should be kind to them in this life? Of course, any parents who try to force their child to associate partners with God, thereby declare war on God and His Messenger; so why is there such an assumed contradiction? We say to them: You have not understood the true meaning. A person can be kind to those he loves and those he does not love, as we said. You might find a person in dire straits and so give him some money to help him, without there being any connection at all between you and him. As for actually having affection for someone, this can only be with those whom you love.

So, the expression 'Neither … wish' refers to the affection of the heart; that is, the hearts of the Jews and idolaters do not love that you should have any good. They hate it when your Lord sends goodness down to you; in fact, they do not want anything which could be called 'good' to be sent down to you from your Lord. The term 'Good' here refers to Revelation from God, and His teachings, and the Prophethood of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

God *the Glorified* says 'any good,' which means anything which could be described as 'good.' When you go to someone and ask him for money, he says, 'I have no money,' that is, I possess no money. But he might actually have just one or two pounds, but this is not considered 'money' since it cannot meet the need you have. You go to another man with the same request, asking him for money, and he says, 'I do not have any money.' This means he does not have even a single penny, and he does not have any amount of money, even the smallest amount. God *the Most High* wants us to understand that the people of the Book and the disbelievers and the idolaters all share their hatred of the believers, to the extent that they would not like to see anything at all which could be called 'good' being sent to them from their Lord.

God's words 'from your Lord' indicate the source from which goodness comes. It is as though they do not like to see any kind of good come to the believers from God, meaning here God’s teachings and the Message. Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…but God selects for His mercy whom He wills….’ That is, goodness does not yield to the desires and wishes of the disbelievers, and God sends goodness to whomever He wills. God has divided amongst people the matters of their worldly lives; and so how can the disbelievers seek that God should allow His teachings to yield to their desires? God *the Most High* Speaks the disbelievers’ protest that the Quran should have been sent down to some great man from the two towns (Mecca and Medina). Then He *the Exalted* reprimands them for their arrogance putting forth the rhetorical question whether they are the distributors of the Lord’s Mercy; it is God that distributes their livelihood among them in this worldly life, and He raises some of them by grades above others that one of them may take others to serve him – but better is the Mercy of the Lord than all they may amass (*az-Zukhruf:* 31-32).

The disbelievers objected to the Quran being revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and said that the Quran should have been sent down to some great man from the two towns. And God *the Most High* answered them: It is not for you to distribute God’s grace, but rather, God distributes your means of livelihood among you in the life of this world.

In the verse we are currently examining, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…but God selects for His mercy whom He wills….’ When you read the term ‘selects,’ you understand that something is being specially marked out for something, that is, I have singled someone out for this thing. Moreover, the expression ‘…but God selects for His mercy whom He wills…’ means that He gives grace to whom He wills so that they can fulfil their purpose, or He sends down His grace to whom He wills. So these disbelievers do not have the right to interfere with God’s will, and their hatred and jealousy of the believers does not give them the right to control God’s grace. And so God wanted to respond to them by affirming that this religion would spread, and the believers in it would increase, and that God would cause it to enter many lands and nations, and that the people would embrace it in droves, and it would be ascendant over all religion.

If we consider the means by which any contender defeats their rivals, we find that they do so either by open, obvious means, or by cunning and deception, by one side acting as though he is friendly to the other, whilst secretly plotting against him until he has the chance to vanquish him. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated to Medina secretly. Why? He did so because God wanted to say to Quraysh: You cannot get to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* even with all your trickery and plotting. They planned to send young men to kill him, each clan sending one man so that his blood would be on all the clans. But He *peace and blessings be upon him* came out and threw dust onto the heads of the men. God wanted them to know that they would never be able to get to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, neither by plotting and scheming nor by an open assault.

God *the Glorified* says, '...and God is the possessor of great bounty.' Bounty *(fadl)* means that which is extraneous to your basic needs, and we find this meaning in the instruction of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to his companions during a journey: 'Whosoever has a spare mount, let him lend it to one who has no mount at all; and whosoever has more than enough provisions (for his journey), let him give them to one who has no provisions at all.'(1)

Spare (*fadl*) money means that money which is additional to what is needed; this is the meaning of 'bounty' with respect to human beings. As for God *the Most High*, everything that exists in God's creation now and in the Hereafter is bounty in God's sight because it is extraneous to Him. God *the Glorified* has no need for His creation, nor for all of the blessings which have come from Him, nor those which are yet to come. And so He says, '...and God is the possessor of great bounty,' that is, He is possessed of bounty over and above His needs. It may be that I have some bounty, but still I look after it because I may need it in the future. True bounty; however, is that which comes from God, for God *the Most High* is limitless in His great bounty because He has no need for any of His creatures or His creation. This is because God *the Most High* existed before there was anything, and He will still exist after there is nothing; and this can truly be called limitless bounty.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in Al-Luqata, by Abu Dawud in Az-Zakat, and by Ahmad in Al-Musnad*

مَا نَنسَخۡ مِنۡ ءَايَةٍ أَوۡ نُنسِهَا نَأۡتِ بِخَيۡرٖ مِّنۡهَآ أَوۡ
مِثۡلِهَآۗ أَلَمۡ تَعۡلَمۡ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾

Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace with something better or similar. Do you [Prophet] not know that God has power over everything? [106] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 106)

But what was the reason behind this? The reason was that the people of the Book and the idolaters did not want any good to come to the believers in the matter of their religion because they felt that what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought in his time was greater than that which Moses *peace be upon him* had brought and which had then remained until the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and greater than that which Jesus *peace be upon him* had brought in the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This does not mean that we are trying to detract from what the previous messengers brought, but rather, we are emphasising that the previous messengers brought to their own times the best thing that could possibly be at those times. Every Divine Message that came before the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came to a specific people at a specific time, and then a new prophet came after to abrogate what was in the previous Message for another people at another time. The Noble Quran tells us that when Jesus *peace be upon him* was sent to the Israelites, he told them that he had come to confirm the law that was before him, and to allow them some of the things that were forbidden them, and that he had come to them with a sign from their Lord – they should then fear God and obey him (*Al- 'Imran:* 50).

So, it seems that Jesus *peace be upon him* came to abrogate some of the rulings of the Torah, and make lawful to the Israelites some of the things which God had previously forbidden them. And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, as the Seal Messenger, was given all goodness, since his religion was for all the worlds, and would last until the Day of Resurrection.

And so we see that whenever a new messenger came, those who believed in the messengers would move from one good thing to another, and in those things which the messages agreed upon, they would move to an identical good. This applies to the sphere of doctrine; and they were given a greater good as far as the teachings of how to live are concerned. There are matters which are shared by all the Divine Messages, wherein there is no difference between one messenger and the other, namely the matter of faith in One Unified God possessed of absolute perfection, extolled in His Self, in His Attributes, and in His Actions. In these matters, all the Divine Messages are identical. But as life develops, things are found in it which were not found or encountered in the past. If we have said that the doctrinal principles of a Divine Message remain unchanged, no message could deal with all the issues of life which would come after it- all except for Islam, because it came as the final religion which cannot be changed or replaced until the Day of Resurrection. Yet we find some people who would cast doubt on God's statement to the believers that He has prescribed to them the faith which He had enjoined upon Noah, and which He has revealed to Muhammad, and which He had enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus: Observe this faith, and be not divided into sects in it. Hard for the idolaters is what you call them to. God draws nearer to Himself everyone who is willing, and guides to Himself everyone who turns to Him (*ash-Shura:* 13).

We say that this refers to one thing alone; it refers to the thing which is consistent in all the Divine Messages, the very peak of doctrinal matters that is monotheism- the belief in One God. As for the matters of worldly life, we find that the laws pertaining to this sphere differ according to circumstances, and so when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came, he was given things which dealt with matters that did not exist at the time of the previous messengers.

God *the Glorified* says, 'Whatever verse we cancel, or cause to be forgotten;…' the word 'abrogate/cancel' (*naskh*) means that a verse which existed, is removed and replaced with a new verse, and the same verb in Arabic (*naskh*) can be used to describe how sunlight removes a shadow. That is, the shadow existed, and then the sun came and removed it and took its place. The word can also be used to mean 'copy,' as in copying a book to make several copies of it, or to describe how old age replaces youth when a person grows old.

As for the word '…cause to be forgotten…*'* (*nunsiha*), it has several meanings. It might mean that God makes mankind forget it so that it disappears from his memory, or he leaves it for something else. The scholars differ about this matter, and this difference arose because one of them would make an observation, and another would make a different observation, whilst they would both have the truth in mind.

So now we come to the matter of cancellation/abrogation in the Noble Quran. There are some who say that there is no abrogation in the Quran at all. Why? This is because abrogation would mean that God *the Most High* was using 'trial and error' and that God would change His mind. What is trial and error? It is that we make a law, and then the implementation of this law shows that the law does not address the problem properly, and so we change the law; and such a thing is impossible to believe regarding God *the Most High*. To those who hold this opinion, we say: Of course this understanding is to be rejected, and it is impossible that it could apply to God *the Most High*; but we say that abrogation is not 'trial and error,' but rather, it is the removal of one law and replacing it with another; and we say to them that when God established the law the first time, He *the Exalted* knew that this law would have a limited time before it would end and be replaced with another law; but the circumstances required that things be dealt with in a gradual manner. This does not mean that God *the Most High* makes a law and then different circumstances show that this law is inadequate, and so God abandons it; this is incorrect.

Why? It is because when God *the Most High* decreed the law at first, He knew that the law had a limited time within which it would be applied, after which it would be annulled or replaced with another law. So the Lawgiver Who made this law, did so on the basis that it would end and be replaced with another law.

This is not like the case with human beings. Man-made laws and rules are subject to change because the reality of their application shows their inadequacy for solving the problems for which they were made. When men make these laws, they are aware of some things and ignorant of others, and so reality comes and highlights those things they were unaware of, and so the law has to be annulled or amended. But the case with the laws of God *the Most High* is not like this; God makes the law temporary when He establishes it to begin with.

For example, when the believers used to face Jerusalem as their direction (qibla) in prayer, did God think that the direction of prayer would remain towards Jerusalem as long as Islam existed, until the Day of Resurrection? And then, did it suddenly occur to Him *the Exalted* to bid the Muslims to turn and face the *Ka'ba*? No, this was not how it was. Rather, it was God's decree that the Muslims would at first face Jerusalem for a time, and then turn to face the *Ka'ba* until the end of time.

So the Lawgiver was not forced by the situation to change the prayer direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba*, but rather, it was in His knowledge from the beginning and His decree, that He would change the prayer direction to the *Ka'ba* after a time. The purpose of this may have been to teach the faithful that the reason for obeying a command is simply that it is from God; to face Jerusalem or face the *Ka'ba* does not require the believers to make any additional effort of faith, nor does it place any extra responsibilities upon them; the effort required to face the east is the same as the effort required to face the west. Yet the test of faith is that the only reason needed to obey the command is that it is from God; if God tells us to face Jerusalem, we face it, and if He tells us to face the *Ka'ba*, we face it. Nothing is sacred in itself, but rather, it is sacred because God makes it that way.

When God *the Glorified* commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam *peace be upon him*, they did not prostrate because of Adam himself, but rather, they prostrated because God *the Most High* commanded to them to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*. God *the Glorified* chose the noble *Ka'ba* as a house and mosque for Him on earth, and the *Ka'ba* took its exalted place for the Muslims not because it was a site in a place where Abraham *peace be upon him* and the Prophets had been, and where the people made pilgrimage, but rather, its stature comes from the fact that it is God's House by God's own choice. All of the mosques of earth are God's houses by the choice of God's creatures, but the only mosque which is God's House by God's own choice is the *Ka'ba*. And so it was necessary that all the mosques which were chosen by God's creatures should turn to face the one mosque which God chose for Himself. But the greatest justification in faith is that we believe that the very fact that a command is issued from God is sufficient reason for us to obey it without searching for worldly justifications.

If God *the Most High* tells us, for example, to pray five times a day , we do it without searching for the reason for this, or saying 'Why five times? Or saying

'Let us have less.' Without doing all this, we pray five times a day; and the reason is that God has told us to. The same is true of alms, and fasting, and pilgrimage. They are all done in obedience to God. Likewise, the prayer direction was changed as a test of faithful obedience to God. God is present everywhere, so, no one needs to come along and say, 'Why the *Ka'ba?* Is God only present in the *Ka'ba?*' We say no; He is present everywhere, but He has commanded us to face the *Ka'ba*. We do not face it because we believe that God *the Most High* is present in that place alone, but rather, we do so as an act of obedience to the command of God that our direction in prayer be the *Ka'ba* .

Perhaps the change of the prayer direction explains to us the notion of the abrogation of certain verses. Why? That is because there were no circumstances, or new events, or the appearance of anything that had been unknown, which might have made facing Jerusalem difficult, or problematic, or anything else; rather, the change of prayer direction came here because God *the Most High* willed that the Muslims face Jerusalem for a time, and then turn to face the *Ka'ba* thenceforth and till the end of time.

So, in the case of every verse which was abrogated, God *the Exalted* knew that it would be applied for a period of time, and then would be replaced. Everything like the ruling which would be abrogated, the length of time it would be applied, and the ruling which would replace it, were known to God *the Most High* and decreed by Him from pre-eternity, before the universe was created. Moreover, God wanted to alert us, by having us face Jerusalem at first, to the fact that Islam (surrendering to God) is a religion which encompasses every religion, and that Jerusalem would become one of the holy cities of Islam, and that no one could claim that the Muslims had nothing to do with Jerusalem, which is why God *the Most High* took His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca to Jerusalem in order to affirm that Jerusalem is sacred in Islam, and is one of God's holy places. So the Muslims prayed facing Jerusalem first, but later God replaced it with Muslims facing the *Ka'ba* while praying. The True Lord *the Glorified* says, 'Whatever verse we cancel, or cause to be forgotten, We bring forth one better than it or similar to it….' That is, abrogation is either for God *the Most High* to bring something better than this verse, or to bring a similar one. But the question arises: Was there something better than the first verse, yet God did not reveal it? We say no; the meaning is that the annulled verse was better for the time in which it existed, whilst the second ruling was better for the subsequent times. They were both good for their own times and in their own associated rulings. God *the Most High* commands the believers to fear Him as He should be feared and not to die except as Muslims – having surrendered themselves to Him (*Al-'Imran:* 102).

But who can fear God with all the consciousness that is due to Him? This was difficult for the believers, and so when this verse was revealed they said, 'None of us can fear God with all the consciousness that is due to Him!' and so the verse was revealed enjoining on the believers to fear God as best they can, and listen and obey, and spend in charity for the good of themselves; for those who are saved from their greed shall be successful (*at-Taghabun:* 16).

Is the one who fears God with all the consciousness that is due to Him better or the one who fears God as best he can? Of course God's due is far above the limits of one's ability, yet God *the Most High* said, '…We bring forth one better than it….' We say that you have not understood God *the Glorified* correctly. Regarding the two states of Fearing God as He should be feared (*Al-'Imran:* 102), and fearing God as best one can (*at-Taghabun:* 16) we can ask: Which of the two states is better? We say that the significance is in the outcome. If you want to value something, you must first look at what its result is.

In order to illustrate this better, we give this example (and God is beyond compare): Suppose there is a merchant who sells his wares for a fifty percent profit, and then another merchant comes along and sells the same goods for a profit of only fifteen percent. What will happen? Naturally, people will go to the one who sells his goods for the lower profit and buy everything they need from him. The one who sells his good with a profit of fifty percent, will get more profit from what he sells, but the one who sells his goods for a profit of fifteen percent will get less profit from each item, but will sell much more wares, and so in the end, he will make a bigger profit.

Those who apply the noble verse enjoining fear of God as He should be feared (*Al -'Imran:* 102) will gain a greater good from their works, but they will not be able to keep up this practice always. So the good gained here is greater in individual acts, but the works that will be done in accordance with the verse, will be fewer.

As for the verse enjoining fear of God to the extent of one's ability (*at-Taghabun:* 16), the fear specified here is within one's ability, and so the acceptable works will be plentiful, even if the reward for individual acts will be less.

When we consider the overall outcome, we find works to which the reward is greater individually although they are very few, and works to which the reward is individually lesser although they are abundant. Which of them is better? Of course the abundant works of lesser reward when taken collectively, they will outweigh the scant works of greater reward.

So, this verse was indeed abrogated by something better, although on the surface, this does not seem to be the case because to fear God with all the consciousness that is due to Him, is better than to fear God only as much as you can. But in the overall outcome, the greater good lies in the verse which specifies individual ability.

Now we come to God's words: '…or similar to it….' Here, some of the scholars have a problem; it might be understandable that God would replace a verse with one which is better than it, but what is the wisdom behind His replacing it with one which is equal to it? If the verse abrogated is equal to the one which replaces it, why is it abrogated?

We say that if we want to give an example of this, it is the example of the changing of the prayer direction. When God *the Most High* commanded the Muslims to face the *Ka'ba* instead of Jerusalem, He abrogated a verse with its equal because facing the *Ka'ba* did not make any additional demands on the believer, or increase his responsibility. One can face right, left, forwards or backwards, and the effort is the same for each, and as we said, God *the Most High* is present everywhere. Here emerges the obedience of faith which we discussed before, saying that there are some things we do simply because God told us to. This is the case with all acts of worship because worship is for the worshipper to obey the commands of the worshipped. God *the Most High* wants us to worship Him out of love and free choice, and that when He says 'Do this,' we do it, and when He says 'Do not do this,' we refrain from it, solely because we freely choose to make our free will in life subject to God's will. And so the replacing of a message with a similar message is not without wisdom, but rather is based on a sublime wisdom.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…or cause to be forgotten….' What does 'cause to be forgotten' mean? Some scholars say that cancellation and causing to be forgotten are the same thing; but when God ordained the first law, it was part of His Will and His knowledge to subsequently replace it with a different law after a time. When the first law came, the second law was kept in His Will until the time came for it to be revealed.

So when the first law came, the final law was deferred, yet it existed in God's knowledge, waiting for the time when the first law's term came to an end: 'Whatever verse we cancel;…' this is the abrogated message, or the one which will soon cease to be applied; '…or cause to be forgotten;…' that is, which God does not pass on to the Messenger and the believers by revelation, although it exists in His knowledge. We must be aware that abrogation does not occur in two things:

Firstly, matters of doctrine: No verse can abrogate any other verse where matters of doctrine are concerned. Doctrine is constant and unchanged from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection. God *the Most High* is One and Unique, unchanging and unalterable; the Unseen exists, and the Hereafter is coming, and the angels go about their tasks. Everything connected with matters of doctrine can never be abrogated.

Secondly, the narrations given to us by God *the Most High*: When He gives us a verse including a narrative, it can never be abrogated by another verse since a narrative is a relation of an actual event. What the True Lord *the Most High* tells us about what has taken place cannot be abrogated because it is a true relation from God. And so the story of the Elephant could not be related to us and then abrogated later and told to us with different details because it was a relation of a true event.

So there is no abrogation in matters of doctrine or narrations from God, but rather abrogation is a matter related to the Sacred Law, such as the words of the True Lord *the Most High* in commanding His Prophet to urge the believers to battle. If there are among them twenty who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among them one hundred who are steadfast, they will overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve because they are a people who do not understand (*al-Anfal:* 65).

When this verse was revealed, it seemed to mean that the standard was that a single believer could fight ten disbelievers in battle and defeat them all; but this was very difficult for the believers to manage, and so God *the Glorified* abrogated it to bring down the standard to the limits of our human abilities, and so the noble verse was revealed stating that God has lightened the hardship for the believers, and He knows that in them is weakness. So if there are from them one hundred who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among them a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by permission of God. And God is with the steadfast. (*al-Anfal:* 66).

The True Lord *the Most High* knew that there was weakness within the believers, and that some of them would not be able to fight ten men and defeat them, and so He changed it to a more manageable good, wherein one believer would be able to meet two disbelievers in battle and defeat them. This matter has nothing to do with doctrine, or historical narration.

Also, in the early stages of the revelation of the Quran, the law was that if a woman committed adultery and there were four witnesses to the fact, she was to be confined in her house and not allowed to leave until she died, we can, gather from God's ruling that those who commit unlawful sexual intercourse of your women - bring against them four witnesses from among you. And if they testify, confine the guilty women to houses until death takes them or God ordains for them another way (*an-Nisa':* 15).

After Islam had spread, and the souls of people were filled with faith, a new law was revealed, namely stoning or lashing. When the first law was revealed to confine them to their houses, the second law existed in God's knowledge. This is what we understand from God's words '…or God ordains for them another way.' God *the Exalted* also commands the believers to forgive and forbear, until God shall make manifest His will (*al-Baqara*: 109).

God’s words ‘until God shall make manifest His will’ gives us a hint that there was a ruling or a commandment in God’s knowledge which would one day come to replace this ruling. And so when God gave to us the first ruling, He also gave us an inkling that this ruling was not final, and that a new ruling would come, once people’s souls had become adjusted to God’s Will in the first ruling. Part of God’s grandeur is that His Will decreed that inheritance should be given to parents who have reached great old age, as He *the Exalted* says that it is ordained for the believers, when death approaches any of them and he is leaving behind much wealth, to make bequests in favour of his parents and others near of kin in accordance with what is fair: this is binding on all who fear God (*al-Baqara*: 180).

So, at first, He made it a bequest, and not an inheritance; why? Because at the time of death, a person is the closest link to his father; as for his children, they are another link. Once these rulings had settled in people’s souls, and they had accepted and implemented what God had commanded, He *the Exalted* made it an obligation so that the ruling was brought to its complete fruition. He *the Exalted* enjoins on the believers that concerning the inheritance of their children, God enjoins upon them: The male shall have the equal of two females’ shares; but if there are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what their parents leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half thereof. And as for the parents of the deceased, each of them shall have one-sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of his having left a child; but if he has left no child and his parents are his only heirs, then his mother shall have one-third; and if he has brothers and sisters, then his mother shall have one-sixth after the deduction of any bequest he may have made, or any debt he may have incurred. As for their parents and their children – they do not know which of them is more deserving of benefit from them: hence this ordinance from God. Surely, God is All-Knowing, Wise (*an-Nisa’:* 11). And so after the portion left to one’s parents had been a voluntary bequest, which he could either give or not, it became obligatory.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘…Do you not know that God has power over all things?’ That is, everything is within His Will and Power. We said that if God decrees a law for a particular time, this is the absolute best thing because once the first law has served the purpose for which it was ordained in its time, the new law which replaces it will also be the absolute best thing; for God has the power to do anything, and He gives every time that is best for those who live during it. And so it is out of God's grandeur that He did not simply make this statement as a pronouncement from Himself, but rather, He involved the addressee too: He *the Exalted* did not say 'Indeed, God has the power over everything;' but rather, He said, '…Do you not know that God has power over all things?' because He was sure that anyone who heard it, would say 'Indeed yes.' This is what is called a 'rhetorical question.'

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُۥ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَمَا
لَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ١٠٧

Do you not know that control of the heavens and the earth belongs to Him? You [believers] have no protector or helper but God [107] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 107)

After telling us that there are verses of the Quran which have been cancelled, God *the Most High* wants to tell us that He has the power to do whatever He wills with His creation, and so He begins the noble verse with the words 'Do you not know….' This expression is called a 'rhetorical question' because the one addressed will only find one answer, which is to confirm what God *the Most High* is saying, to which he says, 'Yes, Lord, You are the True Lord, and Your word is the truth.'

God *the Glorified* says, 'Do you not know that to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth….' Dominion requires a dominator and a dominated, and it requires the ability to retain this dominion and prevent its loss. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us that He has power, and He possesses this power exclusively; mankind has no power to dominate, nor the power to retain that which he possesses, and mankind has not the power to act in this universe: If he wants to build a building, for example, he might not find the land to build it on, and if he finds the land, he might not find the workers to build for him, and if he finds them, he might not find the materials to build with, and if he finds all this, the government or the state might prevent him from building on this land, or the land might belong to someone else so that events conspire to prevent the building from going ahead.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Do you not know that to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth…' that is, everything in existence is in God's possession, and He has the power to do as He chooses with what He possesses. When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated to Medina, the Jews possessed wealth and had some worldly knowledge, and so they controlled Medina, and they began to plot against the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. And so God *the Most High* reassured His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that power in the universe belongs to God Alone, and that although they had some dominion, it would never last because God takes dominion from whom He wills and gives it to whom He wills. And so when the Day of Resurrection comes, and God destroys the earth and everything upon it, He *the Exalted* will put forth the rhetorical question: With whom does sovereignty rest on this Day? (*Ghafir:* 16).

And He *the Exalted* will provide the answer Himself, a testimony of the Self to the Self, that Sovereignty rests with God, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists (*Ghafir:* 16).

As long as God Alone has dominion, He is well able to remove from the Jews and from anyone else in the world that which they had dominion over. The following story illustrates God's Absolute power over things. Scholars tell us that the night guards in a certain city once found a man walking one night, and when they approached him, he fled, and so they ran after him until he came to a place filled with ruins where he could hide. The guards went forward and caught him; and then they found a dead body lying in the same place. 'You are the murderer,' they said to him, 'for you ran away when you saw us, and now you are here in the same place as the corpse.' So they took him away to charge him for the crime, and he said to them, 'Let me first perform prayer to God.' So they let him, and he prayed and then raised his hands to the sky and said, 'O God, You know that there is no one to attest to my innocence save You, and You commanded us not to conceal our testimony; so I ask the same of You.' So whilst this was going on, a man approached them and said, 'I am the one who killed that man, and I wish to confess my crime.' The people were amazed, and said, 'Why do you confess your crime when no one saw you and no one accused you?' He replied, 'By God, I did not confess; rather, a voice came and moved my lips and made me say what I said.' When the murderer confessed what he did, the next of kin of the deceased, his father, stood up and said, 'O God, I call You to bear witness that I forgive my son's killer, his debt and his penalty.'

Look at the extent of the power of the True Lord *the Most High*. The murderer wanted to hide, but look at the precision of the innocently accused man's petition; he performed prayer because the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that if a grave matter afflicts us, we should resort to prayer, for there is no door open to us save this one. After praying, he beseeched God, 'O God, You commanded us not to conceal our testimony, and there is no one to attest to my innocent save You, and so I ask You to do the same for me.' And then events unfolded as we have narrated.

This story shows us that we are all in the palm of God's hand, whether we want this or not, and whether by material means or without them. Why? Because God has dominion over the heavens and the earth, and He has the power to will anything. God *the Most High* then says, '…and that you do not have besides God any protector or any helper?' A protector is the one who watches over you and loves you, and the one who gives help, is the one who has the power to give you victory. The one who helps, might not necessarily be one who protects, but the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'I am for you all a protector and a means of help,' i.e. 'I love you, and I will give you victory over those who show you enmity.'

أَمْ تُرِيدُونَ أَن تَسْـَٔلُوا۟ رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سُئِلَ مُوسَىٰ مِن قَبْلُ ۗ
وَمَن يَتَبَدَّلِ ٱلْكُفْرَ بِٱلْإِيمَـٰنِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَآءَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ﴿١٠٨﴾

Do you wish to demand of your messenger something similar to what was demanded of Moses? Whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has strayed far from the right path [108] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 108)

After telling the believers that He is their protector and source of help, the True Lord *the Glorified* discusses the matter of how the people of the Book, specifically the Jews, behaved towards their messengers so that they could avoid behaving in the same faulty way. He *the Exalted* puts forth to the believers the question: ‘Or do you intend to ask your Messenger as Moses was asked before?…’ The True Lord *the Most High* says to the believers, ‘Would you ask the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* what the Jews asked of Moses *peace be upon him*?’ The True Lord *the Most High* did not want to compare the believers to the Jews, and so He said, ‘…as Moses was asked before,…’ when He might have said, ‘Or do you intend to ask your Messenger what the Jews asked of Moses before?…’ But God did not want to liken the Jews to those who believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this was an honour from God to the believers in that He saved them from being likened to the Jews. The Noble Quran addresses the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him that the People of the Book will ask him to bring down to them a book from the heaven. But they had asked of Moses even greater than that and said, ‘Show us God manifestly,’ so the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing. Then they took the calf for worship after clear evidences had come to them, and God pardoned that. And He gave Moses a clear authority (*an-Nisa’:* 153).

Also, the Noble Quran tells us that the People of the Book and the disbelievers said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that they would not believe him until he breaks open for them from the ground a spring, or until he has a garden of palm trees and vines and makes rivers gush forth within them in force and abundance, or he makes the heaven fall upon them in fragments as he has claimed or he brings God and the angels before them, or he has a house of gold, or he ascends into the sky; and even then, they will not believe in his ascension until he brings down to them a book they may read. God commands His Messenger to answer them: ‘Exalted is my Lord! Was I ever but a human messenger?*’* (*al-Isra’:* 90-93).

God *the Most High* is warning the believers not to ask the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as the people of the Book and the disbelievers did, and telling them that the Jews asked Moses *peace be upon him* for more even than that. After they saw so many miracles, and God cleaved the sea into two parts for them so that they crossed it, and the miracle was not hidden from them, but rather was plain for them to see, a plain and self-evident proof of the existence of God *the Glorified* and of His awesome Power. Yet despite this, the Jews said to Moses *peace be upon him*, ‘We will not believe in you until we see God face to face.’ That is, these miracles were not enough for them; it was as though because of their materialism, they wanted to see in their worldly lives that which no eye can encompass. As soon as they had crossed the sea, they wanted Moses *peace be upon him* to make an idol for them to worship, and they worshipped the calf despite all the signs they had witnessed.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…And whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has certainly strayed from the right path.’ We have already mentioned that the Arabic particle bi (rendered here as ‘for’) which is used with the word ‘faith’ here always refers to the thing which is discarded in a transaction. If you say, ‘I bought this item for (bi) so many *dirhams*,’ this means that you discarded the *dirhams* and took the item. So here, it means that disbelief was accepted and belief was discarded, and so the Jews accepted disbelief and discarded faith when they asked Moses *peace be upon him* to make them see God manifestly (*an-Nisa’:* 153).

God *the Exalted* says, ‘…has certainly strayed from the right path.’ What does it mean to stray? It means to follow a path which will not take you to your destination. ‘The right path’: the word *sawa’* (‘right’) means ‘middle’, so ‘the right path’ means ‘the middle path.’ The same word *sawa*’ is used in another verse, meaning middle/midst, where God *the Most High* mentions that in the Hereafter a believer would ask for a companion of his, who was an infidel, and then he looks and sees him in the midst of the blazing fire (*as-Saffat:* 55).

That is, in the middle (*sawa’*) of hell, i.e. equally far from both sides. So the path which is (*sawa’*) is the middle of the road. Before the appearance of modern technology, the sides of a road or path would be rugged like earth was before it was flattened, so they would not be fit to walk on, and so walking in the middle of the path would keep you far from difficulties and problems. God wants those who believe in Him to walk on the smooth road, i.e. in the centre of the road, because it is safer for them there, and they will not wander right or left, but will rather follow the way of God and faith in Him; and the way of faith is always smooth, and never leads you to unbelief.

وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ إِيمَٰنِكُمْ
كُفَّارًا حَسَدًا مِّنْ عِندِ أَنفُسِهِم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلْحَقُّ ۖ فَٱعْفُوا۟
وَٱصْفَحُوا۟ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِىَ ٱللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِۦٓ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٩﴾

Even after the truth has become clear to them, many of the People of the Book wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of their selfish envy. Forgive and forbear until God gives his command: He has power over all things [109] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 109)

This noble verse refers to some events which occurred after the battle of Uhud. At the battle, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed the archers not to leave their positions at the foot of the mountain irrespective of whether the Muslims were winning or losing; but when victory seemed imminent, the archers lusted after the battle-spoils, and so disobeyed the command of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and so God made them taste defeat; but the idolaters did not gain victory because victory means that you take the battle field and remain there.

After the battle, the idolaters set out to return to Mecca so that when the Muslims went out to meet them the next day, they found no one at all. The Jews of Medina took advantage of this incident, and when they met Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman, Tariq, and some others, they said to them, ‘If you are truly believers, why were you defeated? Return to our religion and abandon the religion of Muhammad!’ Hudhayfa replied, ‘What does your religion say about the breaking of treaties?’ By this, he was referring to what the Torah says about how the Jews broke their covenant with God and with Moses *peace be upon him*? He then said, ‘I will not break my covenant with Muhammad as long as I live.’ As for ‘Ammar, he said, ‘I believe in God as my Lord, and Muhammad as my Messenger, and the Book as my leader, and the *Ka‘ba* as my prayer direction, and the believers as my brethren; and I will remain this way as long as I live.’

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* heard about what Hudhayfa and Tariq ibn Yasir had said, and he was pleased with this. Yet the Jews exploited what happened at Uhud to pour scorn on the faithful conviction in the hearts of the Muslims, just as they had exploited the changing of the prayer direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba* to pour scorn on the faith in their hearts, saying, ‘If it was wrong to face Jerusalem, why did you face it? And if it was right to do so, why did you stop?’ And so God *the Glorified* revealed His words: ‘Many of the people of the Book desire to bring you back to unbelief after you have believed….’

Look at the precision of the words used by the Quran: ‘Many of the people of the Book….’ This implies that only a part of them were trying to turn the believers away from their religion; yet there were a few among them who considered believing in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and if God *the Most High* had passed judgement on all the people of the Book as a whole, this would have closed the way for these few to believe. So the meaning is that there are from amongst the people of the Book, specifically the Jews, some who would like to make you abandon your religion, and these are the majority, for God *the Glorified* says, ‘Many of the people of the Book….’

God *the Glorified* says, ‘…bring you back to unbelief after you have believed….’ In what exactly is unbelief? It was unbelief in what they had believed in, or what their religion had required of them. And they are not doing this for any principle, or for the sake of a belief, or for your own good, but rather ‘Out of selfish envy….’ Their religion commanded them to do the opposite; it commanded them to believe in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. And so they are not doing what the Torah commanded them to do when they refuse to believe in Islam, and the thing that drives them try to make you apostate from your religion is selfish envy. Envy is to wish for a blessing to be taken away from someone you hate. God *the Glorified* says, ‘Out of selfish envy…’ That is, this came from their own selves because they envied the Muslims for the blessing of faith, and hoped for an end to this blessing which had made the Muslims into brothers, bonded together, whilst they themselves were split into factions and sects. There can be praiseworthy envy which is centred on competing on religious matters, and this is permissible, which is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘There can be no envy, except in two things: a man to whom God gives wealth, and so he is empowered to spend it in the way of truth; and a man to whom God gives wisdom, and so he judges with it, and teaches it to people.'(1)

So, it is as though envy is forbidden except in these two instances. It seems that the Jews envied the Muslims their religion, and this envy was of their own making, and was not inspired by the Torah or any of their other scriptures. God *the Most High* says, '…even after the truth has become clear to them…', i.e. even after the Torah had given them conviction about the character of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that he was the Seal of the Prophets.

God *the Most High* says, '…But forgive them, and overlook them until God delivers His command.' What is forgiveness, and what is overlooking? The word for forgiveness (*'afw*) comes from the verb that describes how the wind blows a track in the dust away and blots it out.

When someone walks on the sand, his feet leave prints, and then the wind comes and blows the prints away. So forgiveness is to wipe away from your soul the print left by any wrong done to you so that it is as though it never happened. To overlook (*safh*) means to fold the pages (*safahat*) upon which this matter is 'written' so that they leave your mind and do not occupy you. God *the Glorified* says, '…until God delivers His command….' This situation concerning the Jews and what they are doing to the believers will not last because God *the Exalted* has set His will against them; but the time for this will to be made manifest has not yet come, but when it does, everything will change. And so God seems to be saying to the believers, 'You shall not remain in this state, but rather, there will be a day when you shall hold them to account for their crimes, and this day is not far off.' When God *the Most High* says '…until God delivers His command…,' this means that God's command shall soon be delivered because this issue is related to the very essence of faith. It could not be the case that God *the Most High* says, '…until God delivers His command…' and then this would not take place; but rather, God's command must certainly be delivered, and He will give you victory over them. God *the Most High* then says, '…Truly God has power over all things.' God has absolute power over His dominion, and so if He says He will do something, it will definitely happen without any doubt. There is no power in this universe except the power of God *the Most High*, and there is no strength except His strength, and nothing happens except by His will.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Al-'Ilm, and by Muslim in Qasr As-salat, and by Ibn Majah in Az-zakat, and by Ahmad in Al-Musnad*

وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُوا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ ۚ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا۟ لِأَنفُسِكُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ
تَجِدُوهُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١٠﴾

Keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms.
Whatever good you store up for yourselves, you will
find it with God: He sees everything you do [110]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 110)

After telling us that the highest aspiration of the people of the Book is to turn us back into disbelievers, and that this is a result of their selfish envy, God *the Most High* wanted to show us what it is that the people of the Book hate, and tell us that what frustrates them is the balance of justice and truth that we follow: the teachings of God *the Most High*. And so God commands the believers to be firm and cling to their faith, and to embrace their responsibilities, for this is the best response to disbelievers. Of the responsibilities that Islam brought, some only require a little time and effort, such as the testimony that there is no god but God and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Messenger, and paying the alms (poor-due), and fasting *Ramadan*, and making the pilgrimage for those who are able to do it.

The testimony that there is no god but God is required to be made only once in one's lifetime, and the poor-due and fasting *Ramadan* are required once a year, and the pilgrimage is required once in the lifetime of those who are able to do it. But there are other acts of worship which are repeated every day to give the believer a recharge of certainty and faith, and take him away from his worldly concerns with the declaration of 'God is Great!' five times a day. This is the act of worship from which a believer is never exempted, whether a person is healthy or ill. The believer can pray standing, or sitting, or reclining, or simply perform the motions of prayer in his heart. And so this was the first act of worship mentioned in God's words: 'And perform prayer…' that is, respond to your Lord's call to you to pray. When the *mue'dhdhin* (caller to prayer) raises his voice and calls Allahu Akbar ('God is the Greatest'), this is a call for the people to come to God, to come forward at a specific time and stand before Him *the Exalted*, and be in His Presence as He gives you aiding strength; and this is why 'when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* faced a difficulty, he would perform prayer.'(1)

This means that the means were exhausted, and there was no way out of the problem except to turn to God. When this happens, one should perform *wudu'* (ablutions) and pray two *rak'as* (units) of supererogatory prayer, and then supplicate for his need, and God will give him deliverance. So 'And perform prayer…' is the appropriate response to all their attempts to take you away from your religion because this is the action that announces one's commitment to faith in God five times every day. We leave everything in the world and turn to God in prayer. It is the pillar and the foundation of the religion.

God *the Most High* then says, '…and give *zakat* (alms)….' Paying the poor-due is only obligatory if one has more than he needs. It is as though God *the Most High* wants us to work on earth so that we can earn enough to meet our needs and the needs of those we support, and more besides this. In this way, the Muslims were able to break out of the economic control of the Jews, by means of which they attempted to humiliate the Muslims.

When the believer pays the poor-due, this means that his work is sufficient to meet both his needs and the needs of others, and so even the poor person finds in the surplus wealth of the Muslims enough to suffice him so that he does not have to go to the Jews and take a usurious loan. And so God *the Most High* wants the Muslims to be a self-sufficient body so that their wealth is enough for all of them, rich and poor, and those of them who can work and those who cannot. And God *the Most High* increases the wealth of the Muslims by more than the amount they give out in the poor-due; this is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Charity does not diminish wealth; and no servant forgives, but that God increases his honour; and no one humbles himself before God, but that God raises him.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa God be pleased with him; one narration has the wording: 'If a difficulty faced him, he would seek refuge in prayer.'*

It is called *zakat* (from an Arabic word meaning ‘growth’) because although it appears to diminish one’s wealth, it is actually a growth; usury, on the other hand, seems to be a profit, but really it is a loss. God *the Most High* says that He destroys usurious money and causes charity to grow (*al-Baqara*: 276).

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…and whatever good you put forward for yourselves, you shall find it with God….’ So the believer must be content because his life’s work will be rewarded by God *the Most High*. If he prays he has a reward, and if he gives the poor-due, he has a reward, and if he gives supererogatory charity, he has a reward, and if he fasts, he has a reward, and if he makes the pilgrimage, he has a reward. Everything he does according to God’s teachings brings him a reward, and not only a reward equal to the action, but rather many times greater than the action, as God *the Most High* likens the action of those who spend their possessions for the sake of God to a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains: for God grants manifold increase to whom He wills; and God is infinite, All Knowing (*al-Baqara*: 261).

And so we see that every action done in accordance with God’s teachings has not just one single reward from God *the Most High*, but rather is rewarded many times over. And it is not a reward commensurate with human power, but rather commensurate with the power of God *the Most High*, and so it is not only multiplied in quantity, but also in quality. So it is as though all non-believing people have no reward in the Hereafter, and when they are rewarded in this world it is only a reward equal to the work they did. The believer alone, however, is given the multiplied rewards of the Hereafter, which is a reward that does not end like the rewards of this worldly life, but rather lasts for all eternity.

The good you do is not stored up by you or by someone who might deny it and say, ‘You never did me any good,’ it is rather stored up by God. Look at the contentment that comes from knowing that the work will be kept in

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him*

God’s secure hand, and in His will from which nothing escapes, and in His power which multiplies it over and over; and you will get it back at the time when you are most in need of it: at the Reckoning.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…God sees what you do.’ That is, do not think that there is anything which escapes God’s notice, or that anyone can fool God; for God *the Most High* sees everything. He sees not only what you reveal openly, but also what you conceal within yourself, not showing it to any of God’s creatures. He knows everything. And we find this meaning in the supplication of Ibrahim *peace be upon him* to the Lord Who knows all that we may hide as well as all that we bring into the open, as nothing whatsoever remains hidden from God, be it on earth or in heaven (*Ibrahim:* 38).

And so we can rest assured that God sees everything; notice that God *the Most High* says, ‘what you do,’ so we can understand the importance of action.

وَقَالُوا۟ لَن يَدْخُلَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَن كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَٰرَىٰ ۗ تِلْكَ
أَمَانِيُّهُمْ ۗ قُلْ هَاتُوا۟ بُرْهَٰنَكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

They also say, ‘No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.’ This is their own wishful thinking. [Prophet], say, ‘Pro- duce your evidence, if you are telling the truth’ [111] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 111)

After showing us how every action done in accordance with His teachings has a reward, an eternal reward multiplied by God and preserved by His power; the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to answer the claims of the Jews and Christians who try to instil despair in the hearts of the believers by use of lies and frustration, hoping they will abandon Islam; and so God *the Most High* tells us what they have fabricated.

Read His words: ‘And they say, “None will enter paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian.”’ In this noble verse, the contradiction between the statements of the Jews and Christians is made clear. We see how the Jews said, ‘…None will enter paradise except one who is a Jew…’ and the Christians said, ‘None will enter paradise except one who is a Christian.’ God *the Most High* will further reveal this contradiction in a coming verse when He *the Most High* says that ‘The Jews say “the Christians have nothing to stand on,” and the Christians say, “The Jews have nothing to stand on …”’ (*al-Baqara*: 113).

This means that their statements were contradictory; the Christians said that they alone would enter paradise, and the Jews said the same about themselves; and then they said, ‘None will enter paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian.’ Then the Jews said, ‘The Christians have nothing to stand on,’ and the Christians said, ‘The Jews have nothing to stand on.’

The proverb says that if you are taken to lying, you should have a good memory; this is because the liar’s statements contradict one another because he forgets what he has said since he is not telling the truth. And so you find that the investigator or the judge will keep asking the accused person different questions so that when his different statements contradict one another, it will be shown that he is lying. If you tell the truth just as it happened, even if you tell it one hundred times there will be no changes in the details, but if you lie, you will contradict yourself. God *the Most High* says, ‘…That is their wish…’ What are wishes? They are for your soul to attach itself to a hope, whilst this hope has no basis in fact which could help you to realise it. If the hope is dependent on an action which could actually lead you to realising it, this is something else.

Some people say that even if hopes are not realised, they give peace to the soul; the soul might relax when it attaches itself to a false hope, and so lives for a time in a kind of happiness, even if it is delusional. We say that the shock which will afflict the person after this will destroy him, and so there is never any peace in falsehood. Daydreams cannot be realised because they are not based on any kind of reality, and they only take a person further from reality, and of hope, a poet said:

If a hope is real, it is the best of hopes;
But if not, then we enjoy our life while it lasts.

That is, if a hope is real, or is based on reality, it is the best of hopes because it lives with you; but if it is not real, the poet concludes:

But if not, then we enjoy our life while they last:
Dreams from Layla are sweet, as though by them
Layla has quenched our thirst with cool water.

God's words '…That is their wish…' show us that wishful beliefs are nothing but foolish dreams because they cannot be realised. God *the Most High* then commands His Messenger: '…say, "Produce your proof…."' What is proof? Proof is evidence; you only ask for evidence if someone gets into a dispute with you and your point of view is different from his. You do not ask for evidence unless you are sure that the one with whom you are speaking is lying, and that he has no proof for what he claims.

Imagine that a person claims you owe him money, and asks you to pay him back, yet you never took any money from him. In such a situation, you will ask him for evidence, such as the receipt you gave him or a check or an I.O.U; or at least, you would ask him if he has any witnesses who can verify that you took money from him. But before you ask for evidence, you must be sure of yourself that he is really lying, and that you did not borrow any money from him.

So, the call of the True Lord *the Most High*: '…say, "Produce your proof…."' is a statement from God that confirms that they were lying, and that if they wished to bring any proof, they would not find anything in the Books of God or the statements of His messengers to corroborate what they claimed; and if they were to insert it, this would constitute a lie against God, which would be the biggest proof that such a claim is not from God, but rather only of their own fabrication.

So, there is no evidence for what they say, and if there was any proof, and if there was even a shred of truth to their claim, God *the Most High* would not have asked them for evidence for it.

So you do not say 'produce your evidence' unless you are sure that there is no proof for what they say because you are giving them the chance to prove what they claim, and they would love to prove it, and will do all they can to produce evidence for it. It is not possible that God *the Most High* would say, 'Produce your proof….' unless He *the Exalted* knew that they were lying, and so He then said, '…if you speak the truth,' that is, if you are sure that what you say is true; for God asserts that you are lying.

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُۥ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُۥٓ أَجْرُهُۥ
عِندَ رَبِّهِۦ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve [112]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 112)

After revealing the falsehood of the Jews, and demanding that they produce evidence for what they said about how none but the Jews and Christians will enter paradise, God *the Most High* then gives us the truth of the matter, informing us who will actually enter paradise. God says, 'Yes, indeed….' The term *bala* is used here, which is an Arabic particle of response, meaning 'yes,' but, at the same time, negating the previous statement, implying that it is incorrect. If someone says to you 'I do not owe you any money,' and you say *'na'am'* ('yes'), this means that you have confirmed that he is right and he does not owe you anything. But if you say '*bala,*' this means that he does owe you something and he is not saying the truth when he says he does not. So *'bala'* is an answer which confirms what has just been negated.

They said, 'None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian' (*al-Baqara*: 111). When God *the Most High* says to them, 'Yes, indeed,' this means that their statement is not correct, and that others besides these will enter Paradise. The fact that no other than the Jews and Christians will enter Paradise, does not mean that all the Jews and Christians will enter paradise because God *the Most High* has decreed, when Islam came, that those who do not accept Islam will not enter paradise, as He *the Exalted* stated categorically that anyone who seeks a religion other than Islam (total submission to God), it will never be accepted from him, and in the Afterlife, he will be among the lost (*Al-'Imran*: 85).

Why did God *the Most High* not say that the Jews and Christians will not enter Paradise? It is because the Quran is timeless; and what does 'timeless' mean? It means that it refers to all that has taken place from the beginning of time up to the Day of Resurrection, for the Quran is the Word of God *the Most High*. If He had said that no one will enter paradise except those who believe in

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, this would be going into excess since there were those who believed in Moses *peace be upon him* at the time of his Message, and followed him and made good their religion, and then died before the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, will these people not enter paradise and be rewarded for their good deeds? And there were also Christians who believed in Jesus *peace be upon him* when he lived, and followed him and applied his teachings, and then died before the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Will these people be denied paradise? No, they will enter it, and be given a position therein according to their deeds, and they will be rewarded with the best reward. But after Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and Islam came, and the Quran was revealed, all who did not believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and embrace Islam will not enter paradise, and will not see it. And so God's words here are precise, and do not wrong any of His creatures.

So God's words 'Yes, indeed, whoever submits his face in Islam to God, while being a doer of good…' mean that no one will enter paradise save those who surrender their faces to God and do good deeds; for a person could falsely surrender to God, displaying what their hearts do not truly contain, but such hypocrites are not doers of good, but rather doers of evil because they have two personalities: a believing personality which they show to the people, and a disbelieving personality which is the truth of what is in their hearts.

God's words '…whoever submits his face in Islam to God…' indicate to us that the entire being is surrendered to God since the face is the noblest part of a person which identifies him, and ennobles him, and gives him character, and is the most sublime part of the body. Man is usually defined as a 'talking animal,' i.e. a living being possessed with the capacity for abstract thought; some others say he is the 'upright animal,' i.e. the animal which stands upright, and the part of him which stands on the rest of the body is the face. Man is above all the other species on earth and his face is above the rest of his body, and so if he surrenders his face to God, he has surrendered the noblest part of himself to God. And so it is said that the closest a person can be to God is when he prostrates himself; why? Because he takes the face which God raised and ennobled and places it next to his feet so that the most perfect part of himself is level with the lowest part, and so there is no way left for him to feel self-important before God.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…will have his reward with his Lord….' The words '…reward with his Lord…' indicate that God did not make us compelled, but rather He held us morally responsible and gave us free will and the choice whether to obey Him or not: if we obey, we are rewarded. And because these responsibilities come from God *the Most High*, it makes sense that their reward should also be from God, and that there should be neither fear nor grief; for fear is of something which will happen, and grief is over something which has already happened, and neither of these is a concern when our reward is from God.

If a person is owed something by his equal, he might fear that his equal will deny his right or seek to usurp it, or that he might need it and so pretend he does not have the right to it. But God *the Most High* is free of need of anything in the world, and so He does not covet the good we possess because it all comes from Him; and He does not covet the wealth we possess because He possesses the treasures of the heavens and the earth.

God *the Most High* does not deny any of our rights because He gives us from His bounty and gives us more and more, and so there is no reason to fear for what God possesses, but rather, it will increase and multiply; and there is no need to grieve for what God possesses, for a person only grieves if he loses something good, but what God possesses is everlasting, and will never be lost to you or be taken from you. There is nothing that God *the Most High* possesses for which you might grieve of its loss, and so the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* '…no fear will come on them, nor will they be grieved' is the most precise way the state of the believers in the Hereafter could be described. They will rejoice in what is with God, and they will neither fear nor grieve.

وَقَالَتِ ٱلۡيَهُودُ لَيۡسَتِ ٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ عَلَىٰ شَيۡءٖ وَقَالَتِ ٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ لَيۡسَتِ ٱلۡيَهُودُ
عَلَىٰ شَيۡءٖ وَهُمۡ يَتۡلُونَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَۗ كَذَٰلِكَ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ مِثۡلَ قَوۡلِهِمۡۚ
فَٱللَّهُ يَحۡكُمُ بَيۡنَهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُواْ فِيهِ يَخۡتَلِفُونَ ١١٣

The Jews say, ‘The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences [113] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 113)

We say that the truest thing that the Jews and Christians ever said is that each one of them accused the other of having no valid ground for their beliefs. The Jews said that the Christians have no valid ground for their beliefs, and the Christians said that the Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs; and the strange thing is that both of them are People of the Book; the Jews have their Divine scripture, as do the Christians, yet they each accuse the other of having no faith, and by this they become equal to the idolaters, who said that the People of the Book had no basis for their beliefs. That is, the idolaters said that neither the Jews nor the Christians had any basis; and the Jews said that neither the idolaters nor the Christians had any basis. Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…And those who have no knowledge say the same as their words….’ So we have three factions who all oppose the Islamic Message, one which believes in no Divine teaching or message, namely the idolaters, and two factions who have a religion, and messengers, and scriptures, namely the Jews and the Christians. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…And those who have no knowledge say the same as their words….’ That is, those who know no religion, nor any god, nor any Divine teaching say the very same thing as the Jews and Christians, and they are all united on a single statement.

The people of the Book, who had a connection with Heaven, and scriptures which descended to them from God, and messengers, who came to them with guidance, should have kept themselves distinct from the idolaters. Yet those with knowledge were equal to those with no knowledge at all, and this is the implication of God’s words: ‘…And those who have no knowledge say the same as their words….' As long as the three groups all said the same thing about themselves, the size of the difference between them is great, not small because each of them accuse the other of having no religion whatsoever.

But who judges on this great difference? It is none other than God Who judges on it; for He knows everything, and He *the Exalted* is well able to judge between them with the truth. But when will this judgement and this final word come? Will they come in this world? No, they will not. This world is the world of trial, not the world of reckoning, or accounting, or pronouncing final judgement on matters of faith. And so the judgement between them will take place on the Day of Resurrection, in front of all God's creatures.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…But God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ.' The meaning of judgement here is not separating the right from the wrong, for all three factions are wrong; by denying Islam, all three factions have left the realm of faith, and so on the Day of Resurrection, the judgement will come to show this, and deal to the wrongdoers their requital.

وَمَنۡ أَظۡلَمُ مِمَّن مَّنَعَ مَسَٰجِدَ ٱللَّهِ أَن يُذۡكَرَ فِيهَا ٱسۡمُهُۥ وَسَعَىٰ فِي
خَرَابِهَآۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مَا كَانَ لَهُمۡ أَن يَدۡخُلُوهَآ إِلَّا خَآئِفِينَۚ لَهُمۡ
فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا خِزۡيٞ وَلَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿١١٤﴾

Who could be more wicked than those who prohibit the mention of God's name in His places of worship and strive to have them deserted? Such people should not enter them without fear: there is disgrace for them in this world and painful punishment in the Hereafter [114] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 114)

After presenting to us the position of the Jews, Christians, and idolaters concerning one another and Islam, and how each of these three factions showed enmity to Islam and also cast accusations against one another, each one accusing the other of having false beliefs, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to warn them against waging war on Islam and fighting this religion, and so He said, 'And who are more unjust than those who prevent the name of God from being mentioned in His mosques….' God's mosques (*masajid*) are the places where people prostrate themselves (*sujud*) to God. Prostration is a sign of surrender and worship, as we said, because you place the noblest part of you, your face, onto the ground in surrender and humility before God.

Before Islam came, the followers of every religion could only pray in the places their religion set aside for worship, special places where prayer was exclusively permitted. Then God sent the Message of Islam, and made the entire earth a place of worship, and made it all pure. The meaning of the whole world being a place of worship is that it broadens for the servants of God the places where they can meet their Lord, and the places where they can worship Him so that you can come to God in any place and at any time; for He did not specify for you a special place where prayer is exclusively accepted. If you want to offer a supererogatory prayer to God, such as a prayer of thanks, or a prayer to seek aid in a time of doubt, or a prayer to seek solace in a time of peril, or any of the non-obligatory prayers taught to us by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, you can do so at any time; and so it is as though you can meet with God wherever and whenever you like.

So when God *the Most High* blessed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and his community by making the earth a purified place of worship for them, He wanted to broaden the prospects of His servants to meet with their Lord.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘I had been granted five things which no prophet before me was granted: I have been succoured with dread (over all who live within) a month’s journey (from me); and the earth has been made a purified place of worship for me so that if the time for prayer comes to any man of my community, let him pray wherever he is; and battle-spoils have been made lawful for me, whilst they were lawful for none before me; and I have been granted intercession; and before me prophets were sent to their own people alone, whilst I have been sent to all people.’(1)

But why did God single out the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with this blessing? God did so because Islam came at a time when science and worldly ambitions would begin to develop greatly; and every time worldly sciences were developed, and laws of nature were discovered and boundaries surpassed, and innovations and inventions were made, the people's minds were dazzled by this, and drawn far away from religion so that they worshipped the means instead of the Creator of the means.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Jabir God be pleased with him.*

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to make His servants' worship of Him always easy to protect them from this temptation. He *the Exalted* wants, for example, that when we see the television transmit news of an event from one side of the earth to the other and from the moon to the earth at the moment it happens, we prostrate ourselves before God to thank Him for His blessing in allowing us to discover this, no matter where we might be. The properties of the ozone layer have been with us ever since the time God *the Most High* created the earth; none of God's creatures placed it there in God's universe in recent times, but rather, it was created when the world was created. But God willed that we would not know of its existence while we benefitted from it until these times. And so we must prostrate ourselves before God in thanks for His blessings by which secrets of the universe which we knew not have been revealed to us; and these secrets show us the intricacy of creation, and take us closer to the matters of the unseen.

If it is said to us that on the Day of Resurrection, all of God's creatures will stand together and witness the Reckoning, and that every one of them will see the Reckoning the moment it happens, we should not be incredulous and say 'This is impossible' because we can witness the important events of the world the moment they happen even now, whilst we relax in our houses in front of our television sets; that is, we can all see them at the same time without any great effort. If this is possible for human beings to do with each other, then what do you think the Creator of mankind can do?

When we see the secrets of God's natural laws in His universe, we must prostrate ourselves before the grandeur of the Creator *the Most High*, who placed all of this knowledge and these miracles in the universe. This prostration requires that the whole earth be a place of prayer so that you can prostrate before God in thanks wherever you are, and not need to go to another place which might be far away or difficult to reach and so cause you to forget to thank God and prostrate to Him. Therefore, God *the Most High* willed to broaden for the believers in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the area in which they can meet with their Lord because there were things which would be revealed to God's creatures soon after the Muhammadan Message came, and every time another secret of the universe was uncovered, mankind would be deluded by themselves; and as long as the human soul was prone to self-delusion, God willed to place in the world something which would counterbalance this delusion.

The situation was unlike this before the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Things used to go according to natural dispositions, so when the rains failed and the springs and wells dried up, there was nothing left for them to do but turn to the heavens and pray for rain, and the same was the case for every difficulty that faced them. But now, after God has revealed some of the secrets of His universe to His creatures, there are many methods for mankind to deal with many natural crises; and these methods have made mankind believe that they can solve all their problems themselves without the need for God *the Most High*. And so they have begun to rely on creation instead of relying on the Creator, True Lord, and so the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His words: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in glass – the glass, as it were, a radiant star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire had not touched it! It is light upon light. God guides whom He will to His light, and God sets forth parables to men, for God knows all things (*an-Nur:* 35). In houses of worship which God has allowed to be raised, people will remember His Name in them (*an-Nur:* 35-36).

What are these houses in which people can see the Light of God *the Most High*? They are the mosques. So those who maintain the mosques and always pray in them, are those who see God's Light; and if anyone comes to these houses and violates them and bars the mention of God's Name in them, this means that the believers who maintain these mosques have weak faith, and weak religious conviction so that their enemies can get to them; for if they were strong, their enemies would not dare to try and bar the mention of God's Name from His mosques, or try and destroy them so that they are demolished, and the Friday Prayer is not offered in them. But when someone tries to destroy one of God’s houses, and the people hasten to prevent him and strike his hand, this means that faith is strong, whilst if they leave him, this means the believers have capitulated to their enemy. Why? That is because the disbeliever who tries to extinguish the place where the rays of God’s Light shine upon His creatures, lives in the midst of evil, which is strengthened every time the non-believers can prevent God’s Name from being mentioned in His house, and destroy it.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…It is not for them to enter them except in fear….’ That is, it was not right for those disbelievers to enter God’s mosques without fearing that that the believers who pray within them might overtake them; and if they entered without having any fear, this would mean that the faith in the souls of those believers was weak.

God’s words ‘…who are more unjust…’ mean that there is no one more unjust than those who prevent the Name of God from being mentioned in His mosques, i.e. this is the most grievous kind of injustice, the peak of wickedness. God *the Exalted* says, ‘…and strive towards their destruction….’ i.e. for their obliteration, or their being rendered unsuitable for prayer; so to strive for the ruin of a mosque means to demolish it.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘…For them in this world is disgrace, and they will have in the Hereafter a great punishment.’ That is, God will not leave them be in this world nor in the Hereafter, but rather, He will afflict them with ignominy in this world, i.e. something shameful which one does not like the people to see on him; so, God’s words ‘…For them in this world is disgrace…’ is a manifestation of God’s great care for the protection of His houses. A clear example of what God inflicts upon such as these in this world is what happened to the Jews of Medina who strove to ruin God’s mosques: their wealth was seized, and they were expelled from their houses. This happened, and this is the implication of God’s words ‘…For them in this world is disgrace….’ As for the Hereafter, the enemies of God will be held to severe account for daring to attack the mosques of God *the Most High*; but at the same time the believers who were silent in the face of this, and shied from supporting God’s religion and defending God’s houses will also have to face a painful torment.

I warn every believer not to capitulate or be weak before those who try to prevent the mention of God's name in His mosques because if he does, he will share in their crime, and perhaps he will be even more guilty than they are, and God will not leave him alone on the Day of Resurrection, but will drive him into Hell.

وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَشْرِقُ وَٱلْمَغْرِبُۚ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا۟ فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١١٥﴾

The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn,
there is His Face. God is all pervading and all knowing [115]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 115)

After telling us about the punishment in store for those who damage and destroy God's mosques and prevent His Name from being mentioned there, and the suffering that awaits them in the Hereafter, God *the Most High* wanted to remind us that to implement this completely and perfectly is impossible, since the entire earth is a mosque, and so to destroy it, would mean to destroy the entire earth. And since God *the Most High* is present everywhere, wherever you go you will find God facing you in His manifestations.

God *the Most High* says '…there is the Face of God…' i.e. the countenance of God is present there. God *the Most High* then says, '…Indeed, God is All-Encompassing and Knowing' i.e. do not constrict the places where you meet your Lord because God is Infinite and ever-present, everywhere in this universe and everywhere outside this universe. But when God *the Most High* says, 'And to God belongs the east and the west…' this is not meant to specify the east or the west in particular, but rather the meaning extends to every direction, whether east, west, north, south, northeast, southwest, and every other direction you can imagine.

So why, then, does the verse mention only east and west? It is because beyond these, every direction is determined by the rising and setting of the sun: there is northeast, and southeast, and northwest, and southwest; furthermore, east and west are instinctively known to people because no one is unaware of where the sun rises and where it sets, as every day you see it rise and set.

When God *the Most High* says, 'And to God belongs the east and the west…' this does not mean that He only possesses these two directions, but rather, this is an example of what is known as a ‘specificity fronting,’ just as you say ‘With a pen I wrote’ or ‘by car I came,’ where, by fronting (mentioning first) the pen and the car you specify that the writing was with the pen and not with any other instrument, and the coming was by the car and not by any other means of transport, and this is the meaning of ‘specificity.’ And so by fronting the expression ‘to God,’ the meaning of ‘And to God belongs the east and the west…’ is that the dominion belongs to God *the Most High* Alone specifically, and no one else shares it with Him.

The changing of the prayer-direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka‘ba* does not mean that God *the Most High* was in Jerusalem, and that then He *the Exalted* moved to the *Ka‘ba*. The unification of the prayer-direction means nothing more than that the Muslims have a single direction when they pray which is a symbol of their united goal. We must be clear on the difference between direction in prayer and direction outside of prayer; direction in prayer means that we all face a single place chosen by God for us to face when we pray. People all over the world pray facing the *Ka‘ba*, and the *Ka‘ba* is in one place which never changes, but rather, it is our orientation when facing it all over the world which changes: one person faces north, another faces south, another faces east, another faces west. We all face different directions according to the point on the earth in which we find ourselves, but we all face the *Ka‘ba*. Despite our different directions, we are all united in our facing towards a single place.

God *the Most High* wants us to know that when we say, ‘…to God belongs the east,…’ we should not think that the east is a single direction, for east changes depending on our position. Every place on the earth has its own east and west, and when the sun rises in one place it is setting at the exact same time in another place. It rises for me, but sets for someone else, and after a minute, it will rise for someone else and set for someone else. If you consider east and west as being the places where the sun can be seen rising and setting, you will find that sunrise and sunset never end on the face of the earth, and that every minute, there is a sunrise and sunset.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…God is All-Encompassing and All Knowing.’ That is, He encompasses all of His dominion, and one thing does not distract

Him from another; and so when Imam 'Ali God *be pleased with him* was asked how God will reckon all mankind at the same time, he said, ‘The same way He provides for them all at the same time.’ So God *the Exalted* is not distracted by anything from anything, and when He acts He has no need of anything, but rather His action is simply ‘Be,’ and it is.

وَقَالُوا۟ ٱتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَدًا ۗ سُبْحَـٰنَهُۥ ۖ بَل لَّهُۥ مَا فِى
ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ كُلٌّ لَّهُۥ قَـٰنِتُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾

They have asserted, ‘God has a child.’ May He be exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him, everything devoutly obeys His will [116] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 116)

After affirming that He has dominion over everything in existence, and that nothing distracts Him from anything else, God *the Most High* wanted to respond to those who try to assign to God a helper in His dominion, and so said, ‘…God has taken a son....’ God *the Most High* responds to them: Why would He take for Himself a son, when He possesses all that is in the heavens and the earth, and all things devoutly obey His Will? The response revolved on three points: God *the Exalted* says, ‘…Exalted is He!...’ This implies that He is exalted above having a son; then He says, ‘…Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth….’ And so if all this belongs to Him, and if all the universe is His creation, and under His control, why would He need a son?

Then He *the Exalted* says, ‘…All are devoutly obedient to Him.’ That is everything in the heavens and the earth worship God *the Most High*, and affirm His Divinity.

The notion that God has a child is mentioned in the Quran nineteen times, each time with a rebuttal of it. Because it is a matter of doctrine of the highest importance, it is repeated, and the rebuttal of it is repeated, again and again. If you consider the statement of the people who hold this belief, you will see that there are various different versions of it. There is the belief of the idolaters, as the Noble Quran reports that they, out of their falsehood, say that God has begotten; and assuredly they are lying. Has He chosen daughters over sons? (*as-Saffat:* 151-153). And the Jews believed, as the Quran states, that Ezra is God's son (*at-Tawba:* 30). And the Christians believed that the Messiah (Christ) is God's son (*at-Tawba:* 30). And concerning the story of the creation of Jesus *peace be upon him* from Mary *peace be upon her* without a father, God *the Most High* says that some people say, 'The Most Merciful has taken [for Himself] a son.' God *the Exalted* says that they have done an atrocious thing. The heavens almost rupture therefrom and the earth splits open and the mountains collapse in devastation that they attribute to the Most Merciful a son. And it is not appropriate for the Most Merciful that He should take a son. There is no one in the heavens and earth but that he comes to the Most Merciful as a servant (*Maryam:* 88-93).

God *the Most High* wants us to know that this is a dangerous, inappropriate, reprehensible claim. The chapter of Maryam deals with the matter extensively, such that it shows how the different forms of creation aside from mankind reacted to this claim: the reaction of the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, and the other creatures of God who curse all who make such a claim; indeed, because of the enormity of this crime, their reaction is such that the sky is almost rent asunder, shattering into pieces, and the earth almost splits apart, and the mountains almost crumble into dust. All of this is from the horror and falsehood of this claim because this claim is a lie against God. All of these verses are mentioned in the chapter of Maryam, the same chapter which tells us of the miracle of the creation of Jesus *peace be upon him*, which is also mentioned in several other chapters.

The question here is: What is the doubtful matter that has made them think that God had a son? What has made them resort to such falsehood? The Quran says that Jesus, son of Mary, *peace be upon them* is the Word of God which He cast into Mary *peace be upon her*; we say to them that we were all made by the word 'Be!'

Why have you becomes deluded by Jesus, son of Mary *peace be upon them*, in this way? God *the Most High* explains the matter, saying that surely, in the sight of God, the nature of Jesus is as the nature of Adam, whom He created out of dust and then said to him, 'Be' – and he is (*al-'Imran*: 59).

His words ‘as the nature of Adam’ are simply to make the point; yet in fact the miracle of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* was greater than that of Jesus *peace be upon him*. You have become infatuated and intrigued with Jesus because he had no father; yet Adam had neither father nor mother, so the miracle is even more powerful. It would have made more sense for you to be infatuated with Adam *peace be upon him* rather than Jesus *peace be upon him*, and it is strange that you were not infatuated with Adam, but you were infatuated with Jesus, since he had neither father nor mother, whilst Jesus was only without father. It would have been more appropriate to ascribe this to Adam *peace be upon him*, yet you did not.

God *the Most High* told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that this is not a matter of denial, but rather, it is simply that the claim is false; God *the Exalted* commands His Messenger to proclaim that if the God of Mercy truly had a son, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would be the first to worship him (*az-Zukhruf:* 81).

That is, it would not harm God *the Most High* to have a son, but He *the Exalted* did not have a son, and so people cannot worship something which God does not have. Rather, they invented and fabricated this themselves.

God *the Most High* says, ‘They say, ‘God has taken a son.’ *Exalted is He*! Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth….’ The words ‘Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth….’ ascribe to God *the Most High* complete dominion over everything in existence, and dominion negates fatherhood; why is this? It is because dominion means that everything in existence is a creation of God, and He is the Creator of everything without any doubt; and as long as He is its Creator and Maker, none of it can be a part of Him because the one who creates something is the subject, and every subject has its corresponding object, and the object cannot be part of the subject. Have you ever seen anyone make a part of himself? The one who makes a car, for example: Did he make it from his own flesh, or from human flesh? Likewise, cars, chairs, clocks, and televisions: Are these products of the same nature as their producers? Of course, they are not.

So as long as there is dominion, it cannot be said that it is of the same nature as its Maker, and it cannot be said that the Maker created something of

His own nature because no one can make something of his own nature, but rather, the maker always makes something which is less than he is. So God *the Most High* says, '…*Exalted is He*!…' that is, He *the Exalted* is completely exalted above this. Why? It is so, because a son is ordinarily begotten in our life in order to be a continuation of the life of his father which will not be preserved for him forever; so he takes over his father's name when he dies, and inherits his possessions. And so his purpose is to preserve his own species, and whoever wants to preserve his species, will not be content to have only one child.

If we accept, for argument's sake, that He had a single son, so this son is His, yet we see that the one they claim is the son of God, had no sons of his own; and before the son existed, what did God *the Most High* do when He had no son? And what was the new thing for God and His creation when He took a son, as they claim? Nothing at all changed in the universe; for the presence of a son for God, does not give Him any kind of extra power because even before the supposed 'son' came into existence, and after this, the universe did not change in the slightest.

So what is the purpose of His taking for Himself a son? Is it to get help? God's Power never decreases. Is it to preserve His Life? God's Life is eternal: He is the One Who created life, and He is the One Who gives it, and He is Alive, and does not die; so why would He need anything to preserve His Life? All things obey the True Lord *the Most High*, that is, He can make anything come into existence simply by His will; and He *the Exalted* possesses Attributes of Absolute Perfection, and always has, and by these Perfect Attributes, He created this universe and brought it into existence. And so He has no need for any of His creatures because when He created them, He had the Attributes of Absolute Power to create; and indeed even before He created anything, He possessed all the Attributes of a Creator, and it was with these Attributes that He created. God *the Most High* was Creator before He created any of His creatures, and He was Provider before there was anyone to provide for, and He was All-Dominant before there was anything to dominate, and He was Most-Forgiving before there was anyone to forgive; and with these Attributes, he made, and created, and provided, and dominated, and frorgave His creatures.

So, this entire creation did not add any extra attribute to God's Attributes of Absolute Perfection, but rather, it was God by His Perfect Attributes who created everything. And so we read in a Qudsi Hadith: 'O My servants! Were the first of you and the last of you, and the human of you and the jinn of you, to rise up in one place and ask of Me, and were I to give everyone what he asked for, this would not decrease my dominion in the slightest, any more than a needle decreases the sea when it is dipped into it.'(1)

Moreover, if God *the Most High* had a spouse and a child, which one existed first? If God *the Most High* existed first, and then the spouse and son came into existence, this means that He is the Creator and they are His creations; and if each of them created themselves, this would mean there were three gods, yet there is only One God. So the son must be either a creation or a god. Absolute Perfection was God's from the first, and the son could not have increased Him in anything; and so this means the son's existence has no purpose. The True Lord *the Most High* throws light on this matter extensively in many chapters of the Noble Quran, principally in the chapter of Maryam, where God *the Most High* says that some people say, 'The Most Merciful has taken [for Himself] a son.' (*Maryam:* 88).

God *the Most High* is exalted above being identical to His creation, not in His Self, nor in His Attributes, nor in His Actions. God is exalted above everything that you see in existence; whatever enters your mind, God is different from it. God *the Most High* says, '…Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth….' This negates the possibility that He took for Himself a son because everything in the Heavens and the Earth is under God's control.

God *the Most High* says, '…All are devoutly obedient to Him.' That is, they all submit to Him; and this confirms for us that all of God's creation is in His grasp, and subject to His will, whether willingly or unwillingly.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in Al-Birr, and by Ahmad*

بَدِيعُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰٓ أَمۡرٗا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿١١٧﴾

He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth,
and when He decrees something, He says only,
'Be,' and it is [117] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 117)

After affirming that their claim that God took a son is a lie against God, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to an aspect of His Omnipotent Power, and so He *the Exalted* said that He is 'Originator of the heavens and the earth….' That is, He created the heavens and the earth and all within them in a completely unique manner, i.e. there was never before this any sky, nor any earth, nor any angels, nor any jinn, nor any men, which God *the Most High* then made similar creatures to them in their shape, size, and nature; in other words, He *the Exalted* did not make use of what we would call a 'template' (a mould or prototype).

The maker of a drinking glass first makes a mould into which he pours molten glass so that in the end the glasses are all the same. Every production, aside from that of God, is done by first making a template, after which production can begin. And so the real work is in the production of a good template, which will give us the form we require. The one who bakes bread, for example, might not use a mould, but he imitates what has come before, because the forming and assembling of the ingredients of bread have already been done before, and so he copies them every time; but he cannot be completely consistent in the form, or weight, or the shape of the bread, but rather, each time his copy of the traditional method will be slightly different, and his production will not be perfect.

From the moment God *the Most High* created man from Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of time, He has made mankind similar in every aspect: in the makeup of their bodies and their shape, each having one head, two hands, two eyes, and two feet, and so on for the rest of the body, with a precise uniformity in form and function so that every part performs its purpose in life. Yet this uniformity was not based on a template, but was rather achieved by the word 'Be!' Despite the similarity of mankind, we are all different from each other in a way that makes it possible for us to tell one another apart by science and by the eye: by science in that we all have different fingerprints and voice prints which voice-recording experts can tell apart; and different scents which we cannot detect, but which trained dogs can so that it can smell an object and then take us to the owner of the object even if he is hidden in a group of one thousand people; and by our DNA, which makes the body recognise itself so that if you introduce a single cell from another body it will reject it, whilst if you introduce a cell from the body itself, it will unite with it and its wound will heal.

If this is part of what science has thus far discovered, there are many more things which we might discover which will confirm to us that despite the similarity of billions of people, everyone has something which makes them different and is not repeated in any other of God's creatures. This is the miracle of creation, and the proof of God's Omnipotent Power in His universe.

God *the Most High* gives us this broad concept in the Noble Quran that this is one of His signs, and that it was no accident, and was not unplanned, but rather, it was prepared by the Power of God *the Most High*. He *the Exalted* says that among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of our tongues and colours: for in this, there are signs indeed for all who have knowledge (*ar-Rum:* 22).

This diversity illustrates for us God's Omnipotent and absolute power to create without precedent. Every one of God's creatures is different from what came before it, and what will come after it and what is around it, although in their general form, they are the same. If you gathered together all mankind from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of time, you would find that they are all in the same image, and yet each of them is different from the other. There are no two human beings in God's creation who are exact copies of one another. This is the precision of creation, and this is what we understand from God's word *Badi'* 'Originator.' This precision shows God's Wisdom, and the existence of all these various images shows His Power. And so after we die and our bodies decay into the soil, God will gather us on the Day of Resurrection. The miracle of this gathering is that everyone will be resurrected with the same components, and the same image, and the same form as he had been in this world, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says that He knows what the earth diminishes of them, and with Him is a retaining record (*Qaf:* 4).

So God *the Exalted* created us by His Omnipotent Power, and He will bring us back to life after our death with His Omnipotent Power in the very same form, flesh, attributes, and every atom within us. Is there anything more precise than this?

If we come to the most skilled and gifted craftsman, and ask him to make us something skilfully, and then when he made it, we asked him to make another exactly like it, he would not be able to make another one exactly the same because he would lack the precise measurements with which to duplicate exactly the one he had made. He would be able to give us something similar, but not an exact replica of what he made. God *the Most High*, however, will cause His creatures to die and then at the Resurrection He will return them to the very same constitution they had before, without any addition or subtraction. This is because God *the Most High* does not create by the use of specific template, but rather, He merely says to a thing, ‘Be!’ and it is. The noble verse says, ‘Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.’

The word ‘Be’ is mentioned many times in the Noble Quran. In Arabic linguistics there is what we call (*mushtarak*), that is, a single word which has many different meanings according to the context in which it is used. For example, the word (*qada*) has many different meanings as well as a single meaning which links all the other meanings. Sometimes the True Lord *the Most High* uses it to mean ‘complete’ or ‘finish with,’ as when He commands the believers that after they *qadaitum* (have performed (completed)) their pilgrimage rites, they should continue to remember God as they would remember their own fathers – even, with a yet keener remembrance (*al-Baqara*: 200).

In another place, He *the Exalted* reports the magicians’ defiant response to Pharaoh when he threatened them with torture to *iqdi* (decree), then, whatever he wanted to decree: he can decree only something related to this worldly life (*Ta Ha:* 72). Here it means ‘do as you will.’

And in another verse, God *the Most High* decides that it is not for a believer, man or woman, to have any choice in their affairs, when God and His Messenger have *qada* (decreed) a matter (*al-Ahzab:* 36). Here it means ‘if God says something, He does not leave the believers the choice whether to obey or not.’

And when God *the Most High* gives us the image of how the disbelievers in the Hereafter in Hell will seek to be relieved from their suffering by death, He *the Exalted* says that they will cry out to Malek, the angel in charge of hellfire, to let his Lord *yaqdi* (put an end to) them, and he will reply that they would stay on (*az-Zukhruf:* 77). Here the same word is used to mean 'kill.'

We find another meaning of the word in God's words about the Final Judgement that when everything has been *qudiya* (decided), Satan will speak (*Ibrahim:* 22). That is, when everything is over and the requital has been handed out.

And in another verse, He *the Exalted* speaks about Moses *qada* (fulfilling) his term of residence with Shu'aib (identified with the biblical figure Jethro) in the city of Midyan, and leaving with his family (*al-Qasas:* 29). 'Fulfilled his term' here means 'completed his term'.

And in another verse, we read that *qudiya bainahum* (a rightful judgment was passed) between rivals in all equity; and they will not be wronged (*Yunus:* 54). That is, a decisive judgement will be passed on their rivalries.

And He *the Exalted* says that He had *qada* (made it known) to the children of Israel through revelation that twice, indeed, will they spread corruption on earth (*al-Isra':* 4). That is, He conveyed to the Israelites in their scripture.

So, the word *qada* has many different meanings which are determined by context, but there is one concept around which these meanings revolve, which is 'to decree/judge,' and this is the principal meaning.

So, the meaning of God's words '…and when He decrees a thing,…' (Where the word *qada* is used) means that when He decrees/wills something, it comes to pass. We must be aware that when God *the Most High* says, '…and when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is', the meaning of 'He only says to it' is that the thing exists for Him, and exists in His knowledge, but it has not yet reached our knowledge. That is, it is not a new thing; and since God *the Most High* says, 'He only says to it', this indicates that He *the Exalted* is addressing something which exists; but this thing is not known to us, and we know nothing about it, but rather, it only exists in God's knowledge. And so it is said that God 'reveals' things, and does not 'start' them since they already exist; for the pens have been lifted, and the pages have dried, but He reveals these things to us, who know them not so that we come to know them.

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَوْلَا يُكَلِّمُنَا ٱللَّهُ أَوْ تَأْتِينَآ ءَايَةٌ ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن
قَبْلِهِم مِّثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ تَشَٰبَهَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا ٱلْـَٔايَٰتِ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿١١٨﴾

Those who have no knowledge also say, 'If only God would speak to us!' or 'If only a miraculous sign would come to us!' People before them said the same things: their hearts are all alike. We have made Our signs clear enough to those who have solid faith [118] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 118)

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Those who do not know…,' meaning those who know nothing about God's Revelation are idolaters. Those were the ones who asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to have God address them directly, which means that they wanted to hear God speaking to them just as Moses *peace be upon him* did.

And what did they want with the speech of God *the Most High*? Did they want God to tell them that He had sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver to them His teachings? It is as though all the miracles by which God aided His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, at the summit of which is the Noble Quran, were not enough to convince them, even though the Quran was a miracle given to an unlettered Messenger. They asked him about things which had taken place in the past, and God revealed them to him in detail; and the Quran issued challenges concerning the future and the secrets of the human soul. This should have been enough for them, had they but used their reason, but they desired to be obstinate so that every time a sign came to them, they denied it and asked for another. God *the Most High* tells us that because of his nature, man cannot hear God's speech directly, as He *the Exalted* says that it is not given to mortal man that God should speak to him other than through hidden inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills (*ash-Shura:* 51).

So human beings, even those who have been chosen by God as worthy to receive His Revelation, are not spoken to directly by God *the Most High* except by means of revelation, or inspiration, or from behind a barrier as Moses *peace be upon him* was spoken to, or by means of a messenger who passes on to the people God's teachings. As for direct communication, it is simply impossible because of man's very nature.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…or there comes to us a sign….' The idolaters asked for signs and God *the Most High* sent signs to them but they did not believe in them, but rather persisted in their disbelief and obstinacy. God *the Most High* says that nothing has prevented Him from sending this message, like the earlier ones, with miraculous signs, but that the people of past times gave the lie to them: thus, He provided for the tribe of Thamud the sign of the she-camel before their very eyes, and they sinned against it (*al-Isra':* 59).

So, the signs for which the disbelievers ask in order for them to believe would not make them believe, but rather cause them to persist in disbelief, even if they knew fully well that these signs were from God *the Most High*, as was the case with Pharaoh's people, as the True Lord *the Most High* says that when His visible signs came to them, they said, 'This is clearly plain sorcery' and in their wickedness and self-exaltation, they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth: and look what happened in the end to those spreaders of corruption (*an-Naml:* 13-14).

And so their demand that God *the Most High* speak to them or send them a sign was nothing but an indication of their disbelief and obstinacy. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, '…Thus spoke those before them like their words….' The Israelites had said to Moses *peace be upon him*, 'Show us God manifestly,' and those who did not know said, 'If only God speaks to us…'; but the ones who said 'Show us God manifestly' were not devoid of knowledge because they had the Torah in their hands, and so those who knew were no different from those who knew not, and this is why God *the Most High* said, '…Their hearts resemble each other….' That is, the hearts of those who said they were following God's teachings and those who were not, were alike, and they used the same reasoning.

If it were that only those who were devoid of knowledge said this – and not also those who had knowledge – it would have been a lighter matter. We would say that it was their ignorance that inspired them to say what they said; but what was the excuse of those who had knowledge, and possessed scripture, for saying ‘Show us God manifestly’? So the matter was that they had something deep down in their hearts in common which made their hearts alike in their wantonness. The root of every behaviour and action is the heart, from which the motives of action come. As long as the heart is not faithful to God, those who have knowledge and those who are devoid of knowledge, are equal.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…We have shown clearly the signs to people who are firm in faith.’ What is firmness in faith? It is that a matter be settled in the heart so that it bears no doubt, and never wavers, so, there is no need for the matter to return once more to the mind to be deliberated because it has become a matter of certainty. Certainty comes from being informed by one you trust so that what he tells you becomes certain for you; and so if God speaks, He says what is certain, and if the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* speaks, his speech is the truth. And so the trust of faith was manifested when the Meccan infidels sarcastically told the prophet’s companion, our master Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him*, ‘Your friend claims he was taken up to the seven heavens and then to Jerusalem in a single night,’ and he replied, ‘If he said it, he spoke the truth.’ His firmness of faith was based on the fact that he was told by someone he trusted; and this is what we call ‘the knowledge of certainty.’ This might develop to become ‘the vision of certainty’ when you see the thing with your own eyes after having been informed of someone else having seen it. And then, when you enter into the reality of the thing itself, you have ‘the certainty of truth.’ So, ‘certain knowledge’ is based on the report of someone you trust, and ‘certain vision’ is when you see the thing with your own eyes, and ‘certain truth’ is when you enter the reality of the thing.

God *the Most High* explains this matter to us when He addresses mankind saying that they are obsessed and diverted by greed and competition for increase in worldly matters until they visit the graves. No, in time, they will come to know. And once again: No, they will come to know. No, if they only knew with knowledge of certainty, they would, most surely, see the Hellfire (*at-Takathur:* 1-6). This is the first stage, which is the certain knowledge coming from God *the Most High*. Then comes the second stage, when God *the Most High* says that then they will surely see it with the eye of certainty (*at-Takathur:* 7).

That is, you will see hell with your own eyes on the Day of Resurrection. So we have certain knowledge and certain vision, and then after this comes the third stage, that of certain truth, of which God *the Most High*, in describing the status of the infidels on the Day of Judgement, says, that if one happens to be of the straying deniers, his accommodation will be one of scalding water and burning in Hellfire. Indeed, this is the true certainty (*al-Waqi'a:* 92-95).

God exempts the believer from having to experience hell as certain truth; he will see it as he passes over the bridge, but it will be the disbeliever who will be cast into it to experience it as certain truth.

The people of the Book made statements and put demands to their prophets which were akin to those of the disbelievers: the Jews told Moses *peace be upon him* that they would not believe him until they see God manifestly (*al-Baqara*: 55); and the Christians asked Jesus *peace be upon him* if his Lord could send them down from heaven a table furnished with food (*al-Ma'ida*: 112) to which he replied by commanding them to fear God if they are truly believers (*al-Ma'ida*: 112). And so, those who believed in the Scripture encouraged those who did not, to demand to see God, but rather demand material miracles.

إِنَّآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ بَشِيرٗا وَنَذِيرٗاۖ وَلَا تُسۡـَٔلُ عَنۡ أَصۡحَٰبِ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ﴿١١٩﴾

We have sent you [Prophet] with the truth, bearing good news and warning. You will not be responsible for the inhabitants of the Blaze [119] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 119)

We must be aware here that when God *the Most High* tells us of something He has done, He uses the first person plural of majesty ('We'); and we can observe that this plural form is also used by heads of state and monarchs, so, they say 'We have decreed such-and-such.' It is as though the might of this person has control over all the different elements required to implement the decision of the head of state so that it involves the police, the judiciary, the state, and the armed forces (if it is a military matter); many different elements represented by different groups all share in the implementing of the decision.

God *the Most High* possesses Absolute Power, and everything that is necessary to manifest His will is found in His Attributes. And so when God *the Most High* speaks of an action which requires the Absolute Perfection of His Attributes to come to pass, He uses the 'We' of majesty. We have an example of this in God's statement: 'Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian' (*al-Hijr*: 9). But when God *the Glorified* speaks of His exclusive Divinity and His exclusive right to be worshipped, He uses the singular pronoun, as is the case when He *the Exalted* said, 'Indeed, I am God: There is no deity but Me; so worship Me, and perform prayer for My remembrance' (*Ta Ha:* 14). He did not say 'Worship Us'; so, with respect to His actions, God *the Most High* uses the plural of majesty, and with respect to His worship and Oneness, He uses the singular. This is so that we understand that God's actions are not the product of His power alone, nor His knowledge alone, nor His wisdom alone, nor His mercy alone, but rather all of God's actions are the product of the harmonisation of all of His Attributes of Perfection.

The plural of majesty comes to alert us to this fact in order that the mind can see clearly the harmonisation of all Perfection in God; for you might have power but not knowledge, or you might have knowledge but not power, or you might have knowledge but lack wisdom, and so all these attributes must be in harmony.

God *the Most High* says, Indeed, 'We have sent you with the truth…' i.e. We have sent you with the truth as a messenger. The truth is that which is firm, and can never be changed or contradicted. If you witness something happen and then you are asked to relate what you witnessed, you will do so; and if you are asked to relate it again after some time has passed, you will tell it with all the same details. Yet if you were lying, your statements will contradict one another; and so it is said, 'If you are taken to lying, you must have a good memory.'

The truth cannot be contradicted or changed, and as long as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with the truth, he had to convey it to the people, and then the truth would remain the same until the end of time.

God *the Most High* says, Indeed, '…as a bringer of good tidings and a warner….' 'Glad tidings' involve informing of something pleasing which will come, and a warning is informing of something miserable which will come, but which you might be able to avoid. What were the glad tidings he *peace and blessings be upon him* bore? And what did he warn of? He gave the believer glad tidings of the delights of Paradise, and warned the disbeliever of the suffering of Hell. Glad tidings and warnings presuppose Divine guidance to be conveyed, which carry glad tidings to those who believe in it and a warning to those who do not.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, Indeed, '…and you will not be questioned about the people of hellfire.' That is, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not responsible for those who would cause themselves to be cast into the fire and suffering of hell; he was not responsible for guiding them, but only for delivering to them the Message. God *the Most High* comforts His Messenger by saying that perhaps he would kill himself through grief over the infidels if they do not believe in the message out of sorrow (*al-Kahf*: 6). In another place, God tells His Messenger that he would wear himself with sorrow because they will not believe; God *the Most High* states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down to the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 4).

Had God *the Most High* wanted to force us to believe against our will, none of His creatures would have been able to disbelieve; but He *the Most High* wanted us to come to Him with hearts that love Him, not with hearts forced to believe. God *the Most High* created mankind with the free choice whether to believe or not, and it is not the job of any messenger to force people to believe because had God wanted this, He would have compelled His creatures Himself to do so. As '…the people of Hellfire,' they are the denizens of hell. The Arabic word (*jahim*) ('hellfire') is derived from the verb which means to rage, be wild and ungovernable. It describes the blazing and raging of a fire when its flames are multiplied so that everything that touches it is consumed, and it never dies down.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to reassure His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that his heart should not have been disturbed by those who disbelieved; for he had warned them, and this was all he had to do, and this was the mission with which God had charged him.

وَلَن تَرْضَىٰ عَنكَ ٱلْيَهُودُ وَلَا ٱلنَّصَـٰرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى ٱللَّهِ هُوَ ٱلْهُدَىٰ ۗ
وَلَئِنِ ٱتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَآءَهُم بَعْدَ ٱلَّذِى جَآءَكَ مِنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ ۙ مَا لَكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِىٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١٢٠﴾

The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you unless you follow their ways. Say, 'God's guidance is the only true guidance.' If you were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would find no one to protect you from God or help you [120]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 120)

The Jews used to go to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to try to trick him, and say to him *hadina.* So, it would not be right to say that 'The Jews and Christians will not be satisfied with you….' Even if you were to please the Jews, you would not please the Christians; and were you to please the Christians; you would not please the Jews.

Then the True Lord *the Glorified* says, '…until you follow their religion….' The word *milla* used in the verse means religion, and it is called *milla* because you incline (it is derived from the Arabic term mayl meaning inclination) to it even if it is false. God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim to the disbelievers that he will not worship that which they worship; and neither do they worship what he worships; and he will never worship what they worshipped; and neither will they ever worship what he worships. To them, their religion, and to him, his (*al-Kafirun:* 3-6).

So, He asserts that they have a religion even though they are disbelievers and idolaters. But what can protect us from falling into following the religion of the Jews or Christians? The True Lord *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim that God's guidance is the only true guidance (*Al-'Imran*: 73).

The Jews corrupted their religion, as did the Christians, but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had God's guidance with him. Guidance is that which leads you to the shortest way to your destination; or it is the straight path since this is the shortest way to the destination. God's guidance is a single road; as for human beings, each one of them has their own guidance which is based on their caprice.

Because of this, they are diverse and varied roads which lead you to error; but the guidance which leads you to the truth is a single guidance: the guidance of God *the Most High*.

God *the Most High* says, '…If you were to follow their desires….' which is an indication from God *the Most High* that the creeds of the Jews and Christians are based on human caprices. Caprice (*hawa*) is when the soul desires that which is false and far from the truth; and so God *the Most High* says, '…If you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you would have against God no protector or helper.'

God *the Glorified* is saying to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: If you were to follow the crooked path which is filled with passions and bereft of truth, be it the path of the Jews or that of the Christians, after guidance has come to you from God, you would have no one to protect you and look after you, nor any helper to help you.

We must stop for a moment and consider this address to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*: Why would God address His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, whom He elected, in this way? When God *the Most High* addressed these words to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, they were really meant for the community of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and his followers coming after him, for they were the ones whose hearts might have inclined towards the Jews and Christians; as for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, God protected him from ever possibly following them.

God *the Most High* wants us to know with certainty that if there was something which He would not accept from His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, He would certainly not accept it from any of his community, however high their status might be. This is so that no one would come after the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* claiming to have knowledge and say, 'Let us follow the creed of the Jews or the Christians in order to attract them to us.' We say to such as this: That which God would not accept from His Beloved Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, He will certainly not accept from anyone else.

So, using the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as the example here is to illustrate that following the creed of the Jews or Christians is completely unacceptable under any circumstance; God *the Most High* used the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* as the example here to bar any capricious people from playing around with this religion under the excuse of improving relations with the Jews and Christians.

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ يَتۡلُونَهُۥ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِۦٓ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ
يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِهِۦۗ وَمَن يَكۡفُرۡ بِهِۦ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾

Those to whom We have given the Scripture, who follow it as it deserves, are the ones who truly believe in it. Those who deny its truth will be the losers [121] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 121)

After telling us that the Jews and Christians corrupted their own scriptures, God *the Most High* wanted to affirm that there are some Jews and Christians who did not corrupt their scriptures, and that they believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Message because they recognise him from the Torah and the Gospel.

If God *the Most High* had not revealed this verse, those who did indeed read the Torah and the Gospel in their true form, and considered believing in the Messenger of God's Message, would have said, 'How can these accusations be levelled at all the Jews and all the Christians when we have chosen to believe in Islam?' This is what is known as 'allowing for the possibility'. That is, there were bound to be a number, however small, of Jews and Christians who were considering embracing Islam as the true religion; and there were forty Jews who came from Sinai with Ja'far ibn Abu Taleb *God be pleased with him* to testify to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that they had read the Torah in its uncorrupted form and that they believed in his Message. God wanted to honour these people, and honour all those of the people of the Book who were to believe, and so He *the Glorified* said, 'Those to whom We have given the Book recite it as it should be recited….' That is, they read it just as it was revealed to them, without any corruption or alteration, and so they recognised the pure truth, untouched by human caprice, and free from the alterations that changed the truth to falsehood.

God *the Most High* says, '…They [are the ones who] believe in it. And whoever disbelieves in it - it is they who are the losers.' Notice that the Noble Quran always uses contrasts in order to honour the believers and cast sorrow and regret into the hearts of the deniers; for contrast always shows the difference between two things.

God *the Most High* wants those to whom He gave the Scripture and who did not corrupt it and believed in it, to arrive at the grace which will lead them to eternal bliss, namely the blessing of Islam and faith; as opposed to those who corrupted the Torah and Gospel, whose end will be clear loss and an eternity in hell.

يَٰبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتِيَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَنۡعَمۡتُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلۡتُكُمۡ عَلَى ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ١٢٢

Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you
and favoured you over other people [122]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 122)

If we go back to what we said when we examined verse 40 from the chapter of *al-Baqara*, we see that God *the Most High* said, 'O children of Israel! Remember My grace which I bestowed upon you, and be faithful to your covenant with Me and I will fulfil My covenant with you; and of Me, Me alone, stand in awe' (*al-Baqara*: 40). The True Lord *the Most High* did not conclude this treatment of the Israelites without first repeating to them the words with which He started it. He *the Exalted* would not end His address to them in this passage except after reminding them a final time of the blessings with which He graced them, and how He favoured them above many of His creatures; and one of the greatest aspects of this favour was there in the Torah, giving the glad tidings of the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, which is a great favour indeed.

The reminder here of this grace and favour is a rebuke to the Israelites for not believing in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* even though He was mentioned in their Torah. They should have been awakened by this reminder and hastened to believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, because he was a great favour from God *the Most High* to them. God *the Most High* tells that when the tremor overcame Moses *peace be upon him* and his chosen companions, Moses *peace be upon him* asked God *the Most High* for mercy and prayed that God ordain for them what is good in this world as well as in the life to come, as to Him they have turned. God answered that with His chastisement, He afflicts whom He wills, but His Mercy encompasses everything; and so He shall confer it on those who fear Him and spend in charity, and who believe in His messages, those who shall follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel- the Prophet who will enjoin upon them the doing of what is right and forbid them the doing of what is wrong, and make lawful to them the good things of life and forbid them the bad things, and lift from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them. Those, therefore, who shall believe in him, and honour him, and succour him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him, it is they that shall be successful (*al-A'raf:* 156-157).

وَٱتَّقُواْ يَوۡمٗا لَّا تَجۡزِي نَفۡسٌ عَن نَّفۡسٖ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَا يُقۡبَلُ
مِنۡهَا عَدۡلٞ وَلَا تَنفَعُهَا شَفَٰعَةٞ وَلَا هُمۡ يُنصَرُونَ ١٢٣

and beware of a Day when no soul can stand in for another. No compensation will be accepted from it, nor intercession be of use to it, nor will anyone be helped [123] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 123)

This noble verse is similar to verse 48 from the chapter of *al-Baqara*, in which God *the Most High* says, 'And be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail for another at all, neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped' (*al-Baqara*: 48).

We say that this is only an outward similarity, but every verse has its own unique meaning. In verse 48, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…neither shall any intercession be accepted from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from it…' while in the verse we are currently examining, He says, '…neither will any compensation be accepted from it, nor will intercession benefit it….' The wording of the first verse will be more suitable if we are referring to the soul that is seeking to be availed; however, if we are referring to the second soul, the one offering avail, the wording of the second verse which we are currently examining, is more fitting. It is as though we are dealing with two souls, one of whom attempts to avail, while the other seeks to be availed. The one who attempts to avail is the one who intercedes, and so the first thing that might be accepted from him is intercession; and if his intercession is not accepted, he says 'I will pay a ransom,' i.e. I will offer compensation or offer something to make up for the sin. On the other hand, the first thing that the one who seeks to be availed, will offer is a ransom, and if this is not accepted, he will seek someone to intercede for him. We spoke about this in detail when we discussed verse 48 of the chapter of *al-Baqara*.

وَإِذِ ٱبۡتَلَىٰٓ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمَ رَبُّهُۥ بِكَلِمَٰتٖ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامٗاۖ
قَالَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِيۖ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهۡدِي ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١٢٤

When Abraham's Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, 'I will make you a leader of people.' Abraham asked, 'And will You make leaders from my descendants too?' God answered, 'My pledge does not hold for those who do evil' [124]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 124)

Now the True Lord *the Most High* comes to the story of Abraham *peace be upon him* to settle the debate and doubt raised by the Jews about the changing of the prayer direction, when the Muslims began to face the blessed *Ka'ba* instead of Jerusalem, and also the debate caused by the claim of the Jews that they are Gods' 'chosen people' and that no prophet could come from any people but them.

God *the Most High* wanted to make clear the Arabs' connection to Abraham *peace be upon him* and their relationship with the temple he built; and so He *the Exalted* said, 'And when Abraham was tried by his Lord…' that is, remember when God *the Glorious and Exalted* tried Abraham *peace be upon him*. The word *idh* ('when') here is an adverb of time, and is distinct from the word *idha* ('if') which marks a conditional clause and is also used as an adverb of time, as in God's statement: 'When the victory of God comes and the conquest, and you see people enter God's religion in hosts' (*an-Nasr:* 1-2).

The word '*idha*' here is also an adverb of time, but it indicates a conditional clause; as for *'idh'*, it is used only as an adverb of time. God's words 'And when Abraham was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them…' mean 'Remember the time God *the Most High* tested Abraham *peace be upon him* with certain commandments.'

What does 'trial' mean? People think that it always means a bad thing or an ordeal, but this is not the case; for a trial is a test which, if we pass it, will be good for us; but if we fail it, will be bad for us. A trial is not a bad thing, but rather it is a means by which good or evil is tested. The one who tried was God *the Most High*; He is the Lord, and the Arabic word *'rabb'* ('lord') means an educator (*murabbi*) who uses certain methods to guide those whom he teaches to fulfil their purpose perfectly. One of the foundations of teaching is that the teacher tests those he teaches so that he can determine whether they have been successfully taught yet or not. The trial here was by 'commandments' (*kalimat*), which is the plural of *kalima* (literally 'word') which can be used to mean a saying/statement, as we see in the verse that warns those who say that God has taken for Himself a son; they have no knowledge whatsoever of this, neither do their fathers; that was a grievous word (saying) to come out of their mouths and they utter nothing but falsehood (*al-Kahf*: 4-5).

So the word *kalima* can mean a statement, and it can also mean a single word, such as if you say 'Muhammad', and then stop speaking; in such an instance, what you have said is not a meaningful sentence. In the verse we are examining now, the meaning of *kalima* is a command from God.

God *the Glorious and Exalted* says 'Do' and 'Do not'; it is as though God's commandments are in single words which you then, either obey, or do not. The scholars differ as to what exactly these commands were which Abraham *peace be upon him* received from his Lord; we say to them that these words must have reflected Abraham's status as the Father of the Prophets. It was a trial which made him worthy to bear the Message, and so it must have been a great trial. Some scholars say that the trials were ten in number, and others say they were forty, of which ten are mentioned in the chapter of *at-Tawba* where God *the Most High* describes the believers, the repentant, the worshippers, the praisers of God, the travelers for His cause, those who bow and prostrate in prayer, those who enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and those who observe the limits set by God (*at-Tawba:* 112). This was related by 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas God *be pleased with him*.

It is also said that another ten are mentioned in the chapter of *al-Mu'minun,* where God *the Most High* asserts that the believers will certainly have succeeded. They are those who are, during their prayer, humbly submissive, and who turn away from ill speech, and who are observant of *zakat* (alms), and who guard their private parts except from their spouses or those their right hands possess, for indeed, they will not be blamed – but whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors – and they who are to their trusts and their promises attentive, and who carefully maintain their prayers. And after enumerating their attributes, God *the Glorious and Exalted* asserts that those are the inheritors (*al-Mu'minun:* 1-10).

And in the chapter of *al-'Ahzab,* some more of them are mentioned where God *the Exalted* says that truly the men who resign themselves to God (Muslims), and the women who resign themselves, and the believing men and the believing women, and the devout men and the devout women, and the men of truth, and the women of truth, and the patient men (in adversity) and the patient women, and the humble men (before God) and the humble women, and the men who give alms and the women who give alms, and the men who fast and the women who fast, and the chaste men and the chaste women, and the men and the women who unceasingly remember God: for them God has prepared forgiveness and a rich recompense (*al-'Ahzab:* 35).

And in the chapter of *al-Ma'arij*, after mentioning the negative aspects of man like impatience in adversity, greed, and miserliness, God *the Most High* makes an exception for the believers and gives a list of their positive characteristics: They are those who observe and are constant in their prayer; and in whose wealth there is a due and known right for him who asks for charity, as well as for him who is deprived and is ashamed to ask, and who have belief in the Day of Judgement, and who are fearful of the punishment of their Lord- for, indeed, no one is safe from the punishment of their Lord- and those who guard their private parts except from their spouses or from those whom their right hands possess as those, indeed, are not to be blamed; but whoever seeks beyond that, these are transgressors, and those who are true to their trusts and pledges and who are in their testimonies upright and who strictly maintain their prayer (*al-Ma'arij:* 22-34).

We can remove ourselves from this argument by saying simply that God *the Most High* tried Abraham *peace be upon him* with certain commands and prohibitions; and He also tried him by subjecting him to being cast into fire alive and was found not having any fear or doubt in God's protection, and not turning to any but God; and the ultimate trial came when he was commanded to slaughter his own son.

And Abraham *peace be upon him* obeyed all these commandments eagerly and with love to God, and added to them even more supererogatory acts of their kind; and then he was cast into a fire and did not fret so that when Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to him and said 'Have you any need?', he replied, 'As for you I have no need; and as for God, He well knows of my condition, and has no need of me to ask Him,' and in his old age, he was tested by being commanded to slaughter his only son and he obeyed with a tranquil soul, content with God's decree; and the True Lord *the Exalted* honoured him by saying that he was faithful to his pledge (*an-Najm:* 37).

That is, he was true to all that was asked of him, and fulfilled it with love for God's teachings and trials. Abraham *peace be upon him* passed every test and trial to which he was subjected, and God was dearer to him than his family, and his own self, and his son. How did God *the Glorious and Exalted* reward him for this? He said '…I will make you a leader for the people.' That is, the True Lord *the Most High* trusted him to be a leader for mankind. God *the Most High* knew well that Abraham *peace be upon him* was faithful, but He tested him so that we humans would know how God chooses His closest servants, and how they become leaders who are given the reins of command. Abraham *peace be upon him* responded to the glad tidings from God *the Most High* by saying, as the Noble Quran tells us, '…And of my descendants?'

What does the word 'descendents' mean? It means the offspring and children to come; for he loved that goodness would reach to his children and grandchildren as well, and this is human nature. Men give the fruits of their life's work to their children and grandchildren, and are glad to do this. And so Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted leadership to be passed down to his children and grandchildren so that they would not be deprived from the values of faith that would govern their lives and lead them to eternal joy. But God *the Most High* answered Abraham *peace be upon him* by stating a matter of doctrine which also served as a rebuke to the Jews who abandoned those values and worshipped matter; and so He *the Exalted* said, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers.'

It is as though Abraham *peace be upon him* had attained this leadership by virtue of his works, but this would only be passed along to those of God's servant who were righteous, and worshipped Him and praised His Name.

The words of the True Lord *the Exalted* 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers' refer to the Jews who exchanged their religious values for materialism, and it was a foretelling that in the future, there would emerge from Abraham's descendants those who would go astray and do evil.

It is amazing that Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* were messengers, and although the original messenger was Moses, and Aaron was only added to assist him because of his eloquence, and yet God's will was that prophethood would continue in the line of Aaron *peace be upon him*, not Moses *peace be upon him*; for prophethood is not a matter of blood inheritance.

God *the Most High* says, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers.' It is as though it is God's covenant which pulls its followers to it, that is, it is the covenant which acts. After this, we come to the matter of race, blood, and colour. The filial bond of prophets is not like the filial bond of ordinary people; the prophets have been distinguished by certain values, and their true children are those who inherit these values from them, not those who inherit their race, blood, and colour. Let us look back to the story of Noah *peace be upon him* when his son drowned: he raised his hands to the sky and prayed, protesting that his son is of his family (*Hud:* 45). And the True Lord *the Most High* replied that he was not of his family as he was unrighteous in his conduct (*Hud:* 46).

The true family of the prophets are those who inherit their values. If God *the Most High* had not said that the son was unrighteous in his conduct, we might have thought that he was not his son because he actually had a different father or something like this; but God *the Most High* wanted us to know that the reason he was not considered the true son of Noah *peace be upon him* is that he was unrighteous in his conduct.

وَإِذۡ جَعَلۡنَا ٱلۡبَيۡتَ مَثَابَةٗ لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَمۡنٗا وَٱتَّخِذُواْ مِن مَّقَامِ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمَ مُصَلّٗىۖ وَعَهِدۡنَآ إِلَىٰٓ
إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلَ أَن طَهِّرَا بَيۡتِيَ لِلطَّآئِفِينَ وَٱلۡعَٰكِفِينَ وَٱلرُّكَّعِ ٱلسُّجُودِ ١٢٥

**We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people,
saying, ‘Take the spot where Abraham stood as your place of
prayer.’ We commanded Abraham and Ishmael: ‘Purify My
House for those who walk round it, those who stay there, and
those who bow and prostrate themselves in worship’ [125]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 125)**

The previous verse explained to us that the Jews annulled their link to Abraham *peace be upon him* when they abandoned his values and religion and turned to simple materialism. You claim that you are the best people on earth because you are descended from Isaac son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, yet the Arabs also have this honour because they are descended from Ishmael, son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, and so in this respect, you are no better than they are. And so now that we move on to the story of how the prayer direction was changed from Jerusalem to the *Ka‘ba*, we say that it was destined from the moment the world was created that the *Ka‘ba* would become the prayer direction for all who wished to worship God.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And when We made the House a place of return for the people and a place of security….’ Consider the word *bayt* (‘house’) and the word *mathaba* (‘a place to which people might return again and again’). The word bayt is derived from the concept of *baytuta*, meaning the place where you go and rest, and where you find your spouse and your children. And so the *Ka‘ba* was called a *bayt* because it is the place where all God’s creatures can go to find repose. The word mathaba means a place you go to again and again, and likewise those who go to God’s Sacred House once love to return to it time after time, so, it is a *mathaba* for them because they have tasted the sweetness of being in their Lord’s House. I challenge you to find anyone in God’s Sacred House whose mind is concerned with anything but the remembrance of God, His Word, His Quran and prayer to Him. The moment you look at the *Ka‘ba*, all the anxiety, worry, and grief leave your heart, and you do not think of your family or your worldly affairs. If the attraction of the House of God remained in the hearts of the people, they would abandon all their worldly affairs to remain within its precincts, and so ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab God *be pleased with him* would make it obligatory for people to return to their homes and families as soon as they had finished the rites of the pilgrimage.

Out of His mercy, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* makes this worldly life fade from the mind and the heart of the pilgrim, for the pilgrims are in the House of their Lord, and if any woe or worry comes to them and they turn to their Lord while they are in His House, this woe and worry will leave them immediately. And so the True Lord *the Most High* mentions Abraham’s supplication to God to make people’s hearts incline towards them (*Ibrahim:* 37).

Their hearts, not their bodies, incline, that is, they cast themselves towards the House. The pilgrimage is the one Pillar that everyone tries their utmost to perform; even those who cannot afford it, strive and struggle to perform the rite, and even those who have performed it once – having thus fulfilled their religious obligation – still try to do it again and again.

So, it is a good thing that people are left to return to the House of God again and again so that God *the Glorious and Exalted* would remove the anxiety and worries about life from their hearts.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…a place of return for the people and a place of security…’ and this means that people are safe within it. Even after they had abandoned the religion of Ishmael *peace be upon him* and took to idolatry, the Arabs still guaranteed the safety of the pilgrims who came to God’s Sacred House so that one of them would even find his own father’s murderer in the House of God and leave him alone until he went out.

God *the Most High* establishes laws which relieve people from their hostilities and keep for them their dignity, so He makes certain places into sanctuaries, and makes months inviolable where there can be no fighting therein so that when the people experience peace and purity, they might give up their warring ways altogether.

The discussion of this verse requires us to explain the difference between God informing us that the House is a sanctuary, and His commanding us to make it a sanctuary ourselves. He *the Exalted* is not telling us that the House is a sanctuary, but rather, He is commanding us to make it a sanctuary and guarantee the safety of all who enter it; so, those who obey their Lord, will guarantee the safety of all who enter the House, and those who disobey their Lord, will not do so. When certain factions create disturbance in the House in order to use it as a cover to achieve their goals, does this contradict God's statement that He has made it '…a place of return for the people and a place of security…'? We say that is does not. In saying this, God is not informing us of a fact, but rather, He is giving us a command. If we obey God, we will fulfil this command, and if we do not obey Him, we will not fulfil it.

God *the Most High* says, '…And take from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer….' We must pause for a moment here to consider the meaning of the Arabic word *maqam* ('standing place'), and distinguish it from the other similar word *muqam* which we find in the verse where the Quran mentions the call of a party of the hypocrites to Muslim fighters during the battle of the Trench, that there is no *muqam* ('staying place') for them in the battlefield (*al-Ahzab:* 13). The word *maqam* means a place where someone has stood, while *muqam* means a place where someone stays/resides, and so if you mean residence, the word to use is *muqam*, and if you mean a place of standing, *maqam* is the word. God *the Most High* says, '…And take from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer….' using the word *maqam*; so, it means the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* stood when he raised the foundations of the House, where even now, there lies the stone upon which Abraham *peace be upon him* stood to raise the foundations.

But why did God *the Most High* command us to take the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* once stood as a place of prayer? It is because they used to avoid praying there because if you pray behind this place, the stone lies between you and the *Ka'ba*, and the Muslims would seek to avoid having anything between them and the *Ka'ba* when they prayed, and so they would not pray in the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* had stood. And so our master 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Should we not take the place where Abraham stood as a place of prayer?' 'Umar's question sprang from the concern not to have anything stand between him and the *Ka'ba* when he prayed which they did not want to have it occur; but when Omar God *be pleased with him* saw that there being a place in the House where no one prayer was creating a gap between the people in the congregational prayer, he wanted the prayer to be offered in every space in the House. And so in response, the noble verse was revealed: '…And take from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer….'

If God *the Most High* commanded us to take the place where Abraham *peace be upon him* stood as a place of prayer, it is as though He *the Exalted* approved of the fact that the place of Abraham would cause something to be between the believers and the *Ka'ba* when they prayed. This is because the Station of Abraham *peace be upon him* has a story connected with the offering of worship in the best and most complete way, and the station itself gives us the key to this way of complete worship, for God *the Most High* describes the House as being full of clear signs, and He specifies the standing place of Abraham (*Al-'Imran*: 97).

So, there are clear signs which God *the Most High* wants us to see and understand. The station of Abraham *peace be upon him* is the place where he stood when God commanded him to raise the foundations of the House. The order of events of this matter implies that the House existed first, and then after that, its foundations were raised and the Black Stone was put in its place by Abraham *peace be upon him*.

In this, God *the Most High* does not want to give us history so much as He wants to give us a lesson. The matter of the original building of the House is a matter of dispute amongst the scholars. When was the House built? Some scholars say that it was first built at the time of Abraham *peace be upon him*, while others say it was at the time of Adam *peace be upon him*, a third group say that it was built even before Adam *peace be upon him*. We should use logical reasoning and apply it to the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, they prayed: 'O our Lord! Accept this from us: for, indeed, You alone are All-Hearing, All Knowing' (*al-Baqara*: 127).

We ask: What does it mean to raise? It means to take up, and lift. Every building has its width, length, and height, and as long as Abraham's mission was to raise the foundations, this suggests that there was already a length and width to the House, and that Abraham *peace be upon him* just added the third dimension, namely the height. So the House existed before Abraham *peace be upon him*, and then came the flood which covered the earth at the time of Noah *peace be upon him* and so its traces were covered over; and so God *the Most High* wanted to uncover it once more, and show its location to the people.

The *Ka'ba* is not this House, but it is the object which shows us where the House is. And so to those who understand from God's words that when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (*al-Baqara*: 127), that Abraham *peace be upon him* was the one who built the House, we say: The House had already existed before Abraham *peace be upon him*, and the mission of Abraham was merely to raise its foundations to show the people where the House was. Our evidence for this is that nowadays, since there are high buildings all around the *Ka'ba*, those who pray on their roofs do not prostrate towards the *Ka'ba* itself, but rather prostrate in the direction of the air above the *Ka'ba*, and those who pray on the lowest level also face the *Ka'ba* because the place is not restricted to the object alone.

Perhaps the biggest proof of this is to be found in the Noble Quran: When Abraham *peace be upon him* took Hajar *peace be upon her* and her son Ishmael *peace be upon him* and left them at God's Sacred House, at which time the *Ka'ba* had not yet been built, he mentioned the House. We find this in the words of the True Lord *the Most High* stating Abraham's supplication when he left Hajar *peace be upon her* and her baby: 'O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Your sanctified House so that, O our Lords, they might devote themselves to prayer…' (*Ibrahim:* 37).

This means that the House was already present when Ishmael *peace be upon him* was still a baby, but the foundations of the House were built after Ishmael *peace be upon him* had grown into a young man who could help his father build the *Ka'ba*. So the place where the House of God stands, existed before Abraham *peace be upon him* built the *Ka'ba*, but the position of the House was not clear for the people to see. And so God *the Most High* showed the position of the House to Abraham *peace be upon him* so that he could place there a sign for people to identify it. We find this in God's statement that when He designated to Abraham the site of the House, He enjoined on him to associate no divinity with Him (*al-Hajj:* 26).

Many exegetes do not grasp the truth of what the Quran says. If we want to consider the matter of the building of the House, we should look at all the verses in the Noble Quran which are concerned with this story, among which is God's statement that the first House ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakka (Mecca): rich in blessing, and a source of guidance to all the worlds (*Al-'Imran*: 96).

The discourse here concerns the House, and says that it was set up for mankind, meaning Adam *peace be upon him* and all his progeny until the Day of Resurrection. In light of this, we must understand that since the House was set up for man, this means that man did not set it up himself, but rather, it was God *the Most High* who set it up and ordained it; and God's justice necessitated that the House should exist before Adam *peace be upon him* was created. So it was the angels who set it up by God's command, in the place where God willed that His House should be built. And when Adam *peace be upon him* descended to earth, God established repentance and set up this House so that mankind could repent to their Lord therein, and pray and worship therein.

When Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to raise the foundations of the House, it would have been enough for him to make them as tall as he stood, but he brought the stone and stood on it so that he could make the foundations as high as he could reach while standing on the stone. By drawing attention to the Station of Abraham *peace be upon him* and making it a place of prayer, God *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the fact that a believing person should deal with God's commandments with passion, and so he should not simply perform them superficially, but should rather go about them with love, and attempt to add extra supererogatory works over and above the limits of what God has obliged him to do.

The stone which stands at the station of Abraham is proof of his love for fulfilling his Lord's commands, and his attempt to go even further than them. The stone upon which Abraham *peace be upon him* stood has his footprints imprinted into it; there are those who say that the stone grew soft under the weight of Abraham's feet out of fear of God, and those who say that Abraham *peace be upon him* himself dug hollows into the stone in which to place his feet so that when he stood on it and raised his hands as high as he could build the foundations of the House, he would keep his balance.

God’s words ‘…Purify My House…’ indicate that the traces of the House were completely covered so that it was not distinct from the rest of the land around it so that animals were slaughtered there and refuse was thrown there, and so God *the Most High* commanded that Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon him* purify the House from all the dirt, and make it a fitting place for three groups: ‘those who perform circumambulation’ (*ta’ifin*), derived from the word *tawaf*, which means to walk around something, which is why they call the police who patrol at night *tawwafa* because they walk around the streets at night. We find the word in another verse about the orchard which was destroyed by an encircling desolation (*ta’if*) sent by the Lord, while the owners were asleep so that in the morning it became barren and bleak (*al-Qalam:* 19-20).

This refers to the story of the orchard whose original owner had died, and then his sons denied the poor and the needy their right from it, and so God *the Most High* sent an affliction to encircle it burning the trees; so ta’if here means something which encircles or goes around. The second group mentioned in the verse are ‘…those who stay there for worship…’, and the third group are those ‘who bow down and prostrate themselves’ i.e. those who will pray there. So the purification of the House was so that there could be circumambulation around it, and vigils kept in it, and prayers offered in it; and it was also purified because it would one day be the prayer direction for the Muslims, for all those who bow and prostrate all over the world, until the end of time.

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ رَبِّ ٱجْعَلْ هَـٰذَا بَلَدًا ءَامِنًا وَٱرْزُقْ أَهْلَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ مِنْهُم بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ
ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ ۖ قَالَ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَأُمَتِّعُهُۥ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُۥٓ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٢٦﴾

Abraham said, ‘My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day.’ God said, ‘As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire – an evil destination’ [126]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 126)

The True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘And when We made the House a place of return for the people and a place of security…’ (*al-Baqara*: 125), and as long as He made it a sanctuary, why did Abraham *peace be upon him* need to ask that Mecca be a secure town? We say that when you hear a request for something that already exists, know that it is a request for the continuation of this thing. It is therefore as though Abraham *peace be upon him* was asking God *the Most High* to preserve the blessing of security for the House; for an illustration of this kind of situation, let us read how the True Lord *the Most High* addressed the believers: ‘O you who believe! Believe in God and his Messenger, and the Book which he has sent down to his Messenger, and the Book which he has sent down before. Whoever does not believe in God and his Angels and his Books and his messengers, and in the Last Day, he has surely gone far astray’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136).

He addressed them with the title of believers, and then asked them to believe. How can this be? We say that God *the Most High* was commanding them to continue and preserve their faith. And so every request for something that already exists is a request for its continuation.

Abraham *peace be upon him* said, ‘…My Lord, make this a secure town…’ that is, ‘O Lord, as You made this House secure once, keep it secure until the end of time so that everyone who enters it will be safe; for he will be in a valley of barren land.’ In the past, people used to fear to go there because the roads leading there were unsafe. Or, ‘secure’ (*amin*) might mean it was a request for God to preserve for all who entered it the continued blessing of faith (*iman*).

Abraham’s supplication ‘…Make this a secure town…’ is repeated in a slightly different wording in another verse, where it says, ‘…Make this town secure...’ (*Ibrahim:* 35). So in one verse, the word ‘town’ is indefinite, while in the other it is definite. We say that when Abraham *peace be upon him* said ‘…O my Lord! Make this town secure…’ (*Ibrahim:* 35), he was asking for two things: to make the place a ‘town’, and to make it secure.

What does it mean to make the place a town? It is to be noted that some abstract words are derived from concrete meanings; for example, the Arabic word *ghasb*, which means to take forcibly, originally means to skin a sheep, and so it is as though when someone forcibly robs someone else, it is like he is ‘skinning’ his possession from him as he holds on to it.

When you hear the word *balad*, you automatically think of a town. The Arabic word *balad* means a mark on the skin which stands out from the rest of the skin, such as a white mark on the face or the arms, where the skin affected is marked out by its whiteness. If a place has no permanent dwellings or buildings, it is just flat earth and you cannot easily tell it apart from the rest; but if you build structures there, you give it a mark which distinguishes it from the lands surrounding it.

He then says, '…and provide its people with fruits….' This is one of the requirements of security, for as long as there is provision and fruit, the basic needs of life will be found and so people will stay in the land. But Abraham *peace be upon him* added a modifying phrase to his supplication, saying, '…and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in God and the Last Day….' It is as though he was praying for sustenance for the believers only – why? This is because when God said to him, '…'Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people…', Abraham asked, 'And of my descendants?' and God answered him, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers' (*al-Baqara*: 124). This is why Abraham *peace be upon him* feared, when praying for those who would dwell in Mecca, that God's answer would be the same as the one He gave before, by perhaps saying to him, 'The wrongoers will not gain the sustenance of God.' And so Abraham *peace be upon him* was careful, and said, '…and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes…' (*al-Baqara*: 126). But God wanted to inform Abraham *peace be upon him* that Godly bestowal is not the same as Lordly bestowal: Spiritual leadership of the people is Godly bestowal which can embrace none but a believer; as for sustenance, it is a Lordly bestowal which comes to both the believer and the disbeliever because God is the One who called us all into existence and provided us all with our sustenance. It is as though when the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers' (*al-Baqara*: 124), He was speaking about the values of His teachings which are given to none but the believers; but sustenance is given to believers and nonbelievers alike, and so God *the Most High* said, 'And whoever disbelieves….' This was a correction of Abraham's understanding so that he would see that everything which God has called into existence has its sustenance, whether believer or disbeliever, and the goodness of this world is apportioned universally. Since it was God who called you forth to existence, He undertakes to provide you with your sustenance.

God *the Most High* did not say to the sun, ‘Rise upon My believing servants only,’ and He did not say to the air ‘Let no evildoer breathe you;’ rather, He gave the blessing of the preservation and continuation of life to all whom He created, believer and disbeliever alike. But as for those who disbelieve, God *the Most High* says of them, ‘And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little….’ Enjoyable things are things which a person loves, and hopes that they will stay with him and be repeated for him.

God’s statement ‘…I will grant him enjoyment…’ indicates that this enjoyment will last, that is, he will have enjoyment in this world. Every blessing gives some enjoyment: food gives enjoyment, and drink gives enjoyment, and sexual relations give enjoyment; and so enjoyment in this world comes from many varied things. Yet God *the Most High* describes it as being ‘…a little…’, because however great and varied are the enjoyments of this world, they only last a little while.

Consider what He then says, ‘…then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire….’ The meaning of ‘I will force him’ is that he shall have no free will in the Hereafter. It is as though man has free will in this world, and can take this and leave that, but in the Hereafter he will have no free will; so as one of the denizens of hell, for example, he will not be able to choose paradise, but the limbs which were subjugated to his will in this worldly life, and which he commanded to do sin, will not be under his control in the Hereafter; and this is the meaning of God’s words about the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by recalling all that they did (*an-Nur:* 24).

That is, the organs which obeyed the disbeliever in committing sin in this worldly life will not obey him on the Day of Resurrection: the tongue which used to speak words of disbelief (we seek refuge in God) will on the Day of Resurrection testify against its owner, and the feet which used to walk to places of alcohol, debauchery, and licentiousness will testify against their owner, and the hand which used to kill and steal will testify against its owner. So God’s words ‘I will force him’ mean that he will lose his free will in the Hereafter, and will end up dwelling in Fire and severe suffering, as God *the Most High* says, ‘…then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination.’ That is, God *the Most High* warns the disbelievers that they are headed for fire and suffering in the Hereafter, wherein they will have no free will, but rather will be compelled.

وَإِذۡ يَرۡفَعُ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمُ ٱلۡقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ ٱلۡبَيۡتِ وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلُ رَبَّنَا
تَقَبَّلۡ مِنَّآۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ﴿١٢٧﴾

As Abraham and Ishmael built up the foundations of the House [they prayed], ‘Our Lord, accept [this] from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing [127]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 127)

God *the Glorified* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: Remember when Abraham *peace be upon him* raised the foundations of the House; and the verb *yarfa*‘ (‘were raising’) used here in Arabic is the imperfect tense of the verb, which usually refers to events which are happening now and events which will happen in the future.

But is Abraham *peace be upon him* raising the foundations of the House now? Or has he already raised them, and finished with the task? Of course he has already raised them, but God *the Most High* wants to evoke an image of Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon them* as they raised the foundations of the House, and He wants the believers to envisage the act of raising. Abraham *peace be upon him* had no ladder with which to stand above the House, and he had no scaffolding; but the absence of these useful tools, did not stop Abraham *peace be upon him* from trying, and so he went and got the stone.

God *the Most High* does not want us to forget this action, and how Abraham and his son Ishmael *peace be upon them* went to look for a stone – and the stone had to have been light enough for them to carry it to the construction site – and then Abraham *peace be upon him* stood upon it and Ishmael *peace be upon him* passed up to him the other stones they used to build the foundations of the House. Despite the toil that the pair of them underwent, they were happy, and all they asked from God was that He would accept their action. The Arabic word for ‘accept’ (qabul) and its cognates are all derived from a root which means ‘to face’ or ‘to respond.’ So, they asked God, upon the occasion of finishing

His work, seeking nothing but its reward: '…Accept this from us…', i.e. reward us for what we have done for You, in obedience to Your command.

God *the Glorified* then mentions their supplication: '…for, indeed, You alone are All Hearing, All Knowing.' That is, You O Lord are the 'All Hearing,' who hears our prayers, and hears all that we say; and 'All Knowing,' i.e. You know our intention and our sincerity to You, and that we do this work seeking Your Pleasure alone, and nothing else. This is because all actions are valued by the intentions behind them; and two men might both do the same work, but only one of them be rewarded because he did it to please God and draw nearer to Him, while the other will not be rewarded because he only did it for the sake of this worldly life.

God *the Most High* knows well our intentions; and so if the work is sincerely for God, He accepts it, but if it is not offered sincerely to Him, he does not accept it. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'Actions are but according to intentions, and for every man is that which he intends: and so he whose emigration was to God and His Messenger, his emigration is to God and His Messenger; and he, whose emigration was for a worldly desire, he might claim, or a woman he might marry, his emigration is to that which he emigrated to.'(1)

So, if an action is not sincerely offered to God, it deserves no reward from Him.

رَبَّنَا وَٱجۡعَلۡنَا مُسۡلِمَيۡنِ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَآ أُمَّةٗ مُّسۡلِمَةٗ لَّكَ
وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبۡ عَلَيۡنَآۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ١٢٨

Our Lord, make us devoted to You; make our descendants into a community devoted to You. Show us how to worship and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful [128] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 128)

There is a difference between being commanded to do something and so doing it with love, and merely offering the outer shell of the action, so, you perform it like someone who is throwing from his back the burden of the commandment. In this noble verse, Abraham and his son Ishmael *peace be upon them* prayed, saying: O Lord, You commanded us to raise the foundations of the House, and we did as You commanded; but this does not mean that we are finished with Your commands, for we wish to further taste the sweetness of Your commands again and again: ‘Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You…’ so that we surrender all our affairs to You.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud,An-Nasa'i, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Abu Nu'aim in Al-Hilya, and Ad-Daraqutni, in different wordings*

A person only finishes with one responsibility and then immediately seeks another if he yearns for the sweetness of obedience, and takes joy from it; and no one takes joy from obedience unless he envisages what the reward for it will be: Whenever he performs an action, he envisages the bliss that awaits him for doing it, and so he seeks to do more.

As soon as Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon them* finished raising the foundations of the House, they said ‘Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You….’ And they did not stop there, but rather they desired that the sweetness of obedience be passed on to their descendants after them, and so said, ‘…and make from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You…’, in order that the support of God’s teachings remain on earth, and obedience be passed down from one generation to the next until the Day of Resurrection. Then they said, ‘…And show us our rites of worship…’, that is, show us, O Lord, what You want from us; show us how to worship You, and how to draw near to You. The rites of worship are the means by which God *the Most High* wants us to worship Him.

The supplication ‘…And show us our rites of worship…’ shows us that Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to open the door of obedience for himself because he only saw obedience as a means of self-purification, and goodness for his progeny, and bliss in the Hereafter. And so he said, as the True Lord *the Most High* tells us, ‘…and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Acceptor of repentance, the Merciful.’ We should not necessarily understand ‘accept our repentance’ as repentance from sin, as though Abraham and Ishmael *peace be upon them* had fallen into sin and so wanted to repent to God; rather, it was because they knew that after them, would come those who would sin, and so they asked God to accept the repentance of their descendants. How did they know this? They knew it because God *the Most High* had said to Abraham *peace be upon him*, ‘And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination’ (*al-Baqara*: 126)

They asked God *the Most High* to forgive and have mercy on their descendants; and God loves that His servants repent to Him, and He *the Exalted* is more joyful when His believing servant repents than a man who finds his camel after losing it in the wilderness. For when sin draws a person away from God’s teachings to give him a brief advantage, the sweetness of faith – if he is a believer – will draw him back once more to faith, and far from sin. And so it is said that when you repent and regret what you have done, God does not only forgive your sins, but also changes your bad deeds into good ones. We said before that the establishment of repentance was a means for the protection of society from the harm of a great evil because if a single sin meant that you were bound to spend eternity in hell, and there was no possibility of repentance, everyone who sinned, would simply sin more and descend into greater evil, and all society would be afflicted by their evil, and people would despair about their Hereafter, for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Every son of Adam is a sinner, and the best of sinners are the repentant.’(1)

And so out of His mercy, God *the Glorified* established for us repentance, to relieve us from the evil of sin and wickedness.

رَبَّنَا وَٱبۡعَثۡ فِيهِمۡ رَسُولٗا مِّنۡهُمۡ يَتۡلُواْ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ءَايَٰتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡحِكۡمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمۡۚ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ﴿١٢٩﴾

Our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them: You are the Mighty, the Wise’ [129] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 129)

Abraham *peace be upon him* prayed to God *the Most High* to make complete His favour upon his offspring, and increase his mercy upon His servants, by sending them a Messenger to convey to them the teachings of Heaven so that there would be no time of darkness on earth in which sinfulness, corruption, disbelief, and idolatry would be rife as was the case in the time before Abraham *peace be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ad-Darimi in As-Sunnan, and Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak*

The words '…a Messenger from themselves…' refutes the statement of the Jews who resented the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was an Arab, when they assumed that prophethood was exclusive to them alone. We say to them: Our grandfather and your grandfather is Abraham *peace be upon him*, and you are the descendants of Jacob son of Isaac *peace be upon them* while Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the descendant of Ishmael, son of Abraham and brother of Isaac *peace be upon them* and there is no proof to your claim that God preferred you and chose you alone out of all the peoples of the earth. Rather, the True Lord *the Glorified* willed to take prophethood away from you since you did evil on earth, and God's covenant does not embrace the evildoers.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to say to them: This Prophet is from the line of Abraham, and he is descended from Ishmael, son of Abraham *peace be upon them*.

God *the Most High* then states Abraham's supplication: '…who will recite Your verses to them…' i.e. the verses of the Noble Quran. And Abraham's supplication goes on: '…and teach them the Book and Wisdom….' We should know that there is a difference between reciting and teaching. Reciting the Quran means to read it, while teaching it means that you teach what it means, and for what purpose it was sent, and from whence it came. If 'Book' here means the Noble Quran, then 'wisdom' means the sayings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* which the True Lord *the Most High* mentioned in commanding the wives of the Prophet to bear in mind all that is recited in their homes of God's verses and wisdom …(*al-Ahzab:* 34).

Abraham's supplication continues: '…and purify them…' i.e. cleanse them and lead them to the way of goodness and wholeness of faith. The supplication concludes with: '…for indeed You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise.' That is, You are the Almighty, whose might cannot be assuaged, and whom no one can question; and You are the Wise, whose every action has behind it a wise purpose.

وَمَن يَرۡغَبُ عَن مِّلَّةِ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمَ إِلَّا مَن سَفِهَ نَفۡسَهُۥۚ وَلَقَدِ
ٱصۡطَفَيۡنَٰهُ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَاۖ وَإِنَّهُۥ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ لَمِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ١٣٠

Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Abraham? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter [130] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 130)

What is the religion of Abraham *peace be upon him*? It is the worship of God Alone without partner, and to yearn to obey His command. Abraham *peace be upon him* was true to everything that God commanded him, and added more devotional acts besides them, and he accepted his trials with obedience and patience: when God tried him by commanding him to sacrifice his only son, he did not hesitate; and he obeyed all God's commands with love, and tried to preserve the upright way for his progeny also.

God *the Most High* puts forth the rhetorical question: 'And who would be averse to…', that is, refuse and reject. The root of the Arabic word used here is *raghiba* which, when followed by the preposition *fi* (in), literally means to desire something, but when combined with the particle *'an*, means to avoid and reject something. Those who avoid and reject Abraham's religion are the ignorant and weak-minded, and so God *the Most High* describes such a person as '…one who makes a fool of himself…' indicating irrationality and an inability to distinguish what is beneficial from what is harmful. If wealth is inherited by someone who is mentally disadvantaged so that their intelligence is not in line with their age, they are termed 'weak-minded' (*sufaha'*) and because their intelligence is not developed, their guardians or trustees take charge of their wealth as they themselves cannot manage it properly because of their weak-mindedness.

The Noble Quran addresses this matter thoroughly in commanding the guardians of the weak-minded not to entrust to those, who are weak of judgment, the possessions which God has placed in their charge for their support; but let them have their sustenance from it, and clothe them, and speak to them in a kindly way (*an-Nisa':* 5). Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* refers to the possessions of the weak-minded as being in the charge of the guardian, not in the charge of the weak-minded one since he is not able to manage them properly, and so God places these possessions under the supervision of someone whose mind is properly developed.

And when God *the Most High* addresses the guardian about the possessions of the weak-minded, He uses the expression ‘your possessions’ so that the guardian or the trustee will be as careful with them as he would be with his own possessions, or even more so; but he is only supervising them, and so when the owner reaches the age of reason, or is cured from his mental illness, his possessions are given to him to use as he will.

We see many children bringing cases against their fathers or mothers, accusing them of weak-mindedness because they do not spend their wealth effectively, and then they take control of this wealth and squander it themselves. Everyone who does this should be aware that he has no right to take this money and spend it for their own interests; but rather, there are two possibilities: If the guardian is poor, he has the right to take from it fairly; and if he has sufficient wealth, he must be sincere to God in his supervision of this money, and must not lay claim to any of it. But if he takes the money and spends it on himself, and his passions, and his wife and children, this is forbidden, and he will be held to account for it. God *the Glorified* enjoins that he who is rich should abstain entirely from his ward’s possessions and he who is poor can take from it in a fair manner (*an-Nisa’:* 6).

So, those who reject the creed of Abraham *peace be upon him* are weak-minded, and do not possess enough intelligence to judge between what is beneficial and what is harmful.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…And We had chosen him in this world, and indeed he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous.’ God raised him high in this world with His teachings, and by making him a spiritual leader, and by trying him. Many people think that their possessing a high rank in worldly affairs is a sign that God has raised them by giving them the ornaments of this worldly life, and that this justifies their belief that they will also have a high rank in the Hereafter; but we say no; the ranks of this world have no relationship with the ranks of the Hereafter. And so God *the Most High* says, ‘…And We had chosen him in this world,…’ and then added, ‘…and indeed he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous' so that we would know that Abraham *peace be upon him* has a high rank in this world as well as bliss in the Hereafter; that is, he has both.

إِذۡ قَالَ لَهُۥ رَبُّهُۥٓ أَسۡلِمۡۖ قَالَ أَسۡلَمۡتُ لِرَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾

His Lord said to him, 'Devote yourself to Me.' Abraham replied, 'I devote myself to the Lord of the Universe' [131] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 131)

God *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that He said to Abraham *peace be upon him* '…Surrender yourself…', and so Abraham *peace be upon him* directly replied '…I surrender myself….' So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants from His servant to surrender himself to Him. The True Lord *the Glorified* did not say 'Surrender yourself to Me,' since this is implicitly understood, and He did not say 'Surrender yourself to your Lord,' since true surrender can only be to God, because He *the Exalted* is the only one in whom we can place our complete trust; although Abraham *peace be upon him* did say in reply, '…I surrender myself to the Lord of the worlds.' This meant that he was not alone in this world; for when he surrendered to God, who subjugated for him everything in the heavens and the earth, he thereby placed himself in harmony with the world which was created by God for mankind. And who can be more mature in their intelligence than the one who surrenders his being to God *the Most High;* for in doing this, he surrenders to the Almighty and Wise, the All-Powerful who cannot be defeated, the Fully Capable whose ability knows no limits, the Conqueror who cannot be conquered, the All-Provider from whom all provision comes; and so it is as though he has submitted his being to goodness in its entirety.

The true religion of God *the Most High* from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection is self-surrender to God (literally in Arabic to 'surrender the face (*wajh*)'). Why is it the face? It is because the face is the noblest part of a person, and the source of his dignity, and he considers it a mark of his nobility and dignity; and so when we want to show the utmost humility to God in our prayer, we place our foreheads and our faces on the ground, and it is the limit of humility and surrender to place the noblest part of you, your face, on the ground to show your submission to God *the Most High*.

God *the Glorified* wants a person to surrender his reins to God, by making all of his choices in this worldly life in accordance with the will of God *the Most High*; and so when he speaks he does not lie, because God loves truthfulness; and when he is commanded to do something he does it, because obedience is for our own good, and God gets nothing from it. And when God *the Most High* says ‘Give charity,’ he hastens to give his money in charity so that it will come back to him many times over in the Hereafter, according to the power of God.

And so we see that the source of all goodness for man is to subjugate his will in this worldly life to the will of God, whereby he places himself in harmony with the entire world, and finds that the world serves him, and gives to him, and he finds happiness.

As for those who surrender themselves to other than God, they are relying on a power which might weaken, and on wealth which might turn to poverty, and on a being which might die and thereby cease to exist; and so he can rightly be described as weak-minded, since he is relying on what is harmful and ignoring what is beneficial.

وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَآ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعۡقُوبُ يَٰبَنِيَّ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصۡطَفَىٰ
لَكُمُ ٱلدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُم مُّسۡلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

and commanded his sons to do the same, as did Jacob: ‘My sons, God has chosen [your] religion for you, so make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment’ [132] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 132)

When you read the word ‘bequeath’, you should know that a bequest means for you to encourage someone to do something good during the last moments you have to live in this world; for even if a person has lived his life cheating people, he will not cheat himself during the last moments of his life, nor will he cheat anyone else. Why not? Because he feels that he will soon be meeting God *the Glorified*, and so he speaks the truth.

Counsel or bequest is advice which you hope that the one you give will take heed of, and which you impart to him sincerely at the last moments of your life. And so God *the Most High* will explain this to us in the next verse in calling the Israelites to testify for Jacob's question to his children when death was approaching him; he put to his sons the question: 'Whom will you worship after me?' (*al-Baqara*: 133).

And so God *the Most High* wants to show us that a final bequest is always addressed to those whom you love, and that a person's love for his children is firm and steady, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever. We never like to see anyone in this world do better than us, except our children; and we do our best to ensure that this happens so that they will have all manners of goodness.

Abraham *peace be upon him* bequeathed advice to his children, as did Jacob *peace be upon him*; and the bequest was: 'O my children, God has chosen for you this religion.'

So the bequest was not something Abraham or Jacob *peace be upon them* thought up themselves, but rather was something God had chosen for all humanity; and so Abraham and Jacob *peace be upon them* did not seek to advise their children with anything more than what God had chosen for them. It is as though Abraham *peace be upon him* trusted God for himself, and so obeyed His commands, and trusted Him for his children and so wanted them to hold fast to what God had chosen for them.

God *the Most High* says, 'And this very thing did Abraham bequeath to his children, and [so did] Jacob….' Abraham *peace be upon him* was the patriarch, and his son was Isaac *peace be upon him*, and Isaac's son was Jacob *peace be upon him*; and Jacob *peace be upon him* was the immediate ancestor of the Jews, and he advised them, as the Noble Quran tells us: 'O my children, God has chosen for you this religion; so do not allow death to overtake you while not in submission to Him.'

You do not forbid a person from doing something unless it is possible for them to avoid it, and you do not command them to do something unless they are able to obey; and so did Jacob's *peace be upon him* children have the ability to allow death to overtake them while in surrender to God? No one has the ability to determine when death overtakes him, but rather, it can come at any time. But when Jacob *peace be upon him* counselled his children: '…do not allow death to overtake you before you have surrendered yourselves to Him,' this means: do not spend even a single moment away from submission to God lest death surprises you while you are not in surrender to God.

God *the Most High* has made the time, place, and cause of our deaths unknown to us so that this be a sign to us of its imminence so that people expect it at any age, and in any place, and at any time. And so we might seek good health from things in which death lurks, as a poet said:

If death leaves you alone, all medicine is beneficial;
But if it leaves you not, the medicine itself will kill you.

That is, if your time of death is not yet nigh, medical treatment will help you and cause you to be cured; but if your time has come, the treatment itself will cause your death such as when you have a surgical operation and it causes your death. One must constantly hold fast to Islam and God's teachings, and never be heedless of them lest death come to him, while he is heedless so that he dies while not in surrender to God – and with God is our refuge.

أَمْ كُنتُمْ شُهَدَآءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ ٱلْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا
تَعْبُدُونَ مِنۢ بَعْدِى قَالُوا۟ نَعْبُدُ إِلَـٰهَكَ وَإِلَـٰهَ ءَابَآئِكَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ
وَإِسْمَـٰعِيلَ وَإِسْحَـٰقَ إِلَـٰهًا وَٰحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

Were you [Jews] there to see when death came upon Jacob? When he said to his sons, 'What will you worship after I am gone?' they replied, 'We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, one single God: we devote ourselves to Him' [133] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 133)

This address from Jacob *peace be upon him* applied to and included the Jews living at the time when the Noble Quran was revealed. Jacob *peace be upon him* said to his sons, 'What will you worship after me?' and they replied, '…We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac – one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.'

This was an affirmation by the progeny of Jacob *peace be upon him* that they surrendered to God, and that their forefathers too surrendered to God.

Reflect on the precision of the Quranic discourse when God *the Most High* says, '…We will worship your God and the God of your fathers….' This indicates that from the death of Abraham *peace be upon him* to the last days of Jacob *peace be upon him,* there had been no change to the worshipped deity, the One God *the Most High*, and so they said, as the Noble Quran tells us, 'one God.' We can take a lesson from this verse which will benefit us greatly in many ways because the Quran will show us in the story of Abraham *peace be upon him* how he discussed issues of doctrine with his father, as the Noble Quran tells us that Abraham reprimanded his father Azar for taking idols as deities, and told him that he and his people were in manifest error in doing this (*al-An'am:* 74).

We know that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was from the line of Ishmael, son of Abraham *peace be upon them*, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am the master of the Sons of Adam.'(1)

If Azar, the father of Abraham *peace be upon him*, was a disbeliever and an idolater, how could the noble lineage of prophethood be pure? We say that if the Quran had only said that Abraham spoke with his father, without mentioning his name Azar (*al-An'am:* 74), it would have meant that the one being addressed was indeed Abraham's father; but God qualified the statement by stating that Abraham spoke to his father Azar, and this qualification came for a reason because when the name of the father is mentioned in this way in Arabic, it means not the literal (biological) father, but rather the paternal uncle. If you visit a house and a child comes and opens the door to you, you say to him 'Is your father there?' You do not say 'Is your father So-and-so there?' because it is clear what you mean, and the child will not make a mistake. But if you want his uncle, you say to the child 'Is your father So-and-so there?' In such a situation, you want the uncle, not the father, because the position of the uncle is like that of the father, especially if the father has passed away.

And so when the True Lord *the Exalted* specifies that Abraham spoke to his father Azar, it meant that he spoke with his uncle. If someone asks 'Is there any evidence of this?' we say: Yes, there is evidence in the Quran, in this noble verse: 'Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob, when he said to his sons, “What will you worship after me?” They said, “We will worship your God and the God of your fathers….”’ The word *aba’* (‘fathers’) is the plural of the word ab (‘father’); and then God *the Most High* specifies who these fathers were: Abraham *peace be upon him*, who was the grandfather, is called here ‘father’; and Ishmael *peace be upon him*, who was the paternal uncle, is also called here ‘father’; and then there is mentioned Isaac *peace be upon him*, who was the actual father – and Ishmael *peace be upon him* was mentioned even before Isaac *peace be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim*

So, in this verse, we have a plurality of three fathers: Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac *peace be upon them*; and Jacob *peace be upon him*, who was about to die, was the son of Isaac *peace be upon him*, yet when the sons of Jacob *peace be upon him* addressed their father, they said ‘your fathers’ and then listed their names: Abraham *peace be upon him* the grandfather, Ishmael *peace be upon him* the paternal uncle, and Isaac *peace be upon him* the father of Jacob *peace be upon him*, and called each of them ‘father’ (*ab*). So it is as though Ishmael *peace be upon him* was called ‘father’ although he was the uncle, and Abraham *peace be upon him* was called ‘father’ although he was the grandfather, and Isaac *peace be upon him* was called ‘father’ and indeed he was the father. And so when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I am the noblest of men in lineage, and I boast not,’(1) some people say, ‘How could this be, when the father of Abraham *peace be upon him* was a disbeliever?’ And the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘I am the master of the Sons of Adam.’(2) So, if someone says, ‘How could this be when the father of Abraham *peace be upon him* was a polytheist and a worshipper of idols?’, we say to him: Azar was not the father of Abraham *peace be upon him*, but was actually his paternal uncle, and so the Noble Quran said ‘to his father Azar,’ mentioning him by name because it meant a figurative paternity, not a literal one. The fatherhood of Abraham and Isaac to the sons of Jacob *peace be upon them* is clear enough, but Ishmael *peace be upon him* was living in Mecca, far away from them, and so why is his name mentioned alongside Abraham and Isaac *peace be upon them*? We say it is there to show chronological order, since Ishmael *peace be upon him* was fourteen years older than Isaac *peace be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Dailami in Musnad Al-Firdaws*

(2) *Narrated by Imam Muslim*

The fact that all three are called ‘fathers’ (*aba’*) is a sign to us from God *the Most High* that the word ‘father’ (*ab*) can also mean ‘uncle’.

God *the Most High* wants us to be aware of the significance of the mention of the name ‘Azar’, and also to be aware that multiple messages from God do not mean that there are multiple gods: and so He *the Exalted* said, ‘one God.’

تِلۡكَ أُمَّةٞ قَدۡ خَلَتۡۖ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتۡ وَلَكُم مَّا كَسَبۡتُمۡۖ وَلَا تُسۡـَٔلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

That community passed away. What they earned
belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you:
you will not be answerable for their deeds [134]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 134)

The word *khalat* (‘passed on’) means literally to be alone, as when a place is vacated by its occupant so that the place is alone, and the occupant is now alone, and there is no connection between them. We find this word also in another verse where God *the Most High* says about the hypocrites in the early Muslim community, ‘…but when they find themselves alone with their devils, they say, “Verily we hold with you, and we are only mocking”’ (*al-Baqara*: 14).

However, the word (*khalaw*) ‘find themselves alone’ means that they are alone with their devils, and no one else is present with them in the place they occupy. We said that every event must have a cause, and nothing happens of its own accord, and that every event must also have a time and place. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘That was a nation which has passed on…’, this means that their time has come to an end, and that they are separated from your time.

So, the meaning of God’s words ‘That was a nation which has passed on…’ is that their time has come to an end. The word ‘that’ (in Arabic *tilka*) which is a demonstrative pronoun in the feminine form, referring to ‘nation’, and the address is being made to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers in general. When God *the Most High* says ‘That was a nation…’ this suggests that they were marked out by their common beliefs and their common religion to the point where they were considered a single entity, and so they had to be referred to as such. We find the same word *ummah* (‘nation/community’) in another verse where God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that theirs is one single community, and He is their Lord, and they should worship Him Alone (*al-Anbiya’:* 92).

‘That’ here refers to the communities of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob *peace be upon them*, who represented a great number of people who all held a single doctrine.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned….’ That is, those people who had a common religion, will be held accountable for their deeds, just as you will be held accountable for yours. But God *the Most High* says that Abraham indeed was an umma (literally ‘nation/community’) (*an-Nahl:* 120).

Yet was not Abraham *peace be upon him* an individual, and not a group? We say yes, he was an individual, but he embodied so many attributes of goodness and perfection as are normally only embodied by a nation umma.

God *the Most High* says, ‘passed on’ meaning thereby to make the Jews understand that they should not ascribe themselves falsely to Abraham *peace be upon him* because the kinship of the prophets is not a tie of blood, or race, or childbirth, but it is rather a kinship of allegiance to teachings and guidance. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying to the Jews: It does not benefit you that you are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *peace be upon them*, for the kinship of prophethood is a kinship of faith, based on way of life and doctrine; and this kinship of blood will not avail anything on the Day of Resurrection since everyone is judged according to their actions.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned….’ The word *kasaba* in Arabic is used for earning reward for good deeds, while its derivative the word *iktasaba* is used for chastisement for evil deeds; the increase in the structure of the word reflects the fact that evil implies affectation and artificiality in action.

We must pay close attention to the wording of the verses of the Noble Quran and study them carefully so that we can respond to those who attempt to criticise the Quran. There is no concept implied by a verse which is contradicted by any other, but rather, there is only a lack of understanding on the part of the reader.

Some orientalists say that there is a verse in the Quran which affirms that God *the Most High* grants favours to people because of their lineage, namely when He *the Exalted* says that those who have believed and were followed in faith by their offspring, God will unite them with their offspring and will not deprive them of any of their deeds (*at-Tur:* 21).

Here the offspring are believers, and so God *the Most High* says that He will unite them with their offspring (*at-Tur:* 21); the word *alhaqa* ('unite') literally means to complement, to complete something which was incomplete. If both are believers, this seems to suggest that the status of the offspring is being raised as an honour to their faithful forefathers. We say that faith is one thing, and acting in accordance with faith is another. The ancestors and the offspring are both believers, but the forefathers did many good works while perhaps the descendants did less; but here, the raising of status is for those who are already believers: that is, the father and the progeny must be believers, while the non-believers will be far removed, and will have nothing to do with their believing forefathers, and the connection between them will be severed because of the division between faith and disbelief. So if the forefathers have in their credit many good deeds, while the descendants have fewer good deeds, God will unite the descendants with their forebears in Paradise because their faith is one.

God *the Most High* then says that He will unite them with their offspring (*at-Tur:* 21); that is, their good deeds will not be decreased; so, the forefathers and the descendants will be judged according to whether they have faith, and then out of His grace, God will unite the descendants with their forebears.

God *the Most High* says, '…It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned….' This refers to the influence of belief in doctrine. Some people might say that God *the Most High* says that every person will be held responsible for whatever he has earned (*at-Tur:* 21), and He *the Exalted* says that man will have nothing but what he had strived for (*an-Najm:* 39).

So, how can the descendants gain reward without striving for it? To this, we say: You need to understand the texts properly. God's words that man will have nothing but what he had strived for (*an-Najm:* 39) refer to God's justice, but they do not refer to the grace which God *the Most High* grants to those He wills from amongst His servants, and which is given without any account. Furthermore, who said that this was not due to their striving? The believing descendants are taken to the high position which their forefathers occupy as a way of honouring the forefathers' good deeds, not as an increase of the descendants' deeds.

The scholars tell us that there was a young man who was a devout and obedient believer, while his father was a sinner, and when the father died, the son grieved for him; and then he had a vision of his father sitting on high with a maiden of Paradise to comfort him. The son was amazed that his father could have been given this reward when he was a sinner, and so he asked him, 'How did you reach this station?' The father replied, 'What station?' The son said, 'That you have a maiden of paradise to keep you company.' The father said, 'And do you imagine that this is a reward for me?' 'Yes,' said the son. 'No,' said the father, 'but rather, I am a punishment for her!' God *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim to believers that they rejoice in God's Grace and Mercy; that is better than what they may amass (*Yunus:* 58). In the Hereafter, you rejoice more in God's Grace and Mercy than in your own good deeds, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Do what is right, and approach right as much as you can, and be of good cheer; your actions will not cause any of you to enter paradise.' They said, 'Even you, O Messenger of God?' He said, 'Even me, except that God enfolds me in His mercy.'(1)

Someone might come along and say, 'What is the purpose of performing the funeral prayer and praying for the deceased according to the Sacred Law? Were it to do him any good, this good would be above what he gained through his works; and if it will not give him any more than his works did, what is the point of it?' We say that as long as the Sacred Law commands us to do it, it must bring some benefit. Do you imagine that when we pray for the dead, this is not counted as one of his deeds? It is counted among his works because he was a believer, and his faith is what made you pray for him. If you pray for goodness, mercy, and forgiveness for someone, and God accepts this prayer, is it said that he has gained from other than his own works? No, because you only pray for him after some good comes to you from him; but you would not pray, for example, for someone who took you to a bar, or led you into depravity and sin. Rather, you pray for those who have given you something good, and so if God *the Most High* answers your prayer, it is counted as one of their own deeds.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad in Al-Musnad*

God *the Most High* says: You will not be asked about what those who came before you did; and so if you claim that Abraham *peace be upon him* was a Jew or a Christian, we say to you that you will not be asked about what Abraham *peace be upon him* did, but rather, you will be asked about what you yourselves did. The question will concern your own deeds.

وَقَالُوا۟ كُونُوا۟ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَـٰرَىٰ تَهْتَدُوا۟ ۗ قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ
حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

They say, 'Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.' Say [Prophet], 'No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God' [135]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 135)

When we hear 'they say' (with a plural subject), we know that we have a group speaking, and here the ones speaking are the Jews and Christians; but each of them say something different to the other: the Jews say 'Be Jews,' and the Christians say 'Be Christians.'

In fact, we have three groups of people involved here: the Jews, the Christians, and the polythesists, and all of these are in contrast to the believers. 'And they say, 'Be….' Who are they addressing? They are addressing the believers. Or, it might mean that the Jews said to the believers, the Christians, and the idolaters, 'Be Jews,' and the Christians said to the believers, Jews, and idolaters, 'Be Christians;' for none of them see any good except in themselves. But Islam came and recovered Moses *peace be upon him* and his true Torah from the Jews, and reclaimed Jesus *peace be upon him* and his true Gospel from the Christians, as well as all that came through Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The meaning of this is that Islam laid claim to the covenant of faith between God *the Most High* and every believer, and so we find in the Noble Quran that God *the Most High* says that the believers make no distinction between any of His messengers (*al-Baqara*: 285).

And we notice that the idolaters are not included in this statement since they are not People of the Book.

God *the Most High* says, '…Rather, [we follow] the religion of Abraham, inclining towards truth….' That is, [o Muhammad] answer them. The address here is made to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, affirming that he was following the religion of Abraham *peace be upon him*, that is, the religion of truth. They could not differ about Abraham *peace be upon him*, but rather, the Jews considered him to be one of their prophets, as did the Christians, and neither denied his prophethood, but rather tried to claim him for themselves.

What does the word hanif (inclining) mean? The root meaning of a word must have some relationship with its lexical meaning; the word hanaf describes the condition of legs which bend towards one another so that the right foot points towards the left or the left towards the right – this is called hanaf. But how could a word meaning bending/crookedness be used as a symbol of the straight path?

We have said that messengers only come forth when God's teachings have been completely ignored because as long as there still remain those who follow the last messenger and call to his way, and enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, there is still goodness.

The human soul has many aspects; there is the self-reproaching soul, which commits evil and then is reproached from within for this evil, and so returns to good; but there is also the soul which commands evil, which only lives in evil and encourages others to do it too. A society may degenerate to the point where the souls which command evil prevail and you do not find someone to interdict it. This kind of situation is described in the Noble Quran where the True Lord *the Most High* describes the disbelieving Israelites as accursed because they would not prevent one another from doing abominations (*al-Ma'ida*: 79)

At this point, God intervenes and sends a messenger to correct the corruption of society. But God *the Most High* has ensured that the constituents of goodness will remain within the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until the end of time, as He addresses the believers in the Muslim community saying that they are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for the good of mankind; they enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and they believe in God. Now if the followers of earlier revelations had faith, it would have been for their own good; but only few among them are believers, while most are iniquitous (*al-An'am:* 110).

So, God *the Most High* has trusted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with following His way, and since there will always be those amongst them who will enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, there will be no messenger after Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Let us return to God's word *hanif,* '…inclining towards truth….' We said that *(hanaf)* was originally used to mean bending/crookedness; but to bend away from crookedness is in fact straightness. The Messengers only come when society is completely crooked, in order to take people away from this crookedness and cause them to incline to straightness; for the contrary of crookedness is straightness.

God's words '…inclining towards truth…' remind us of God's blessing upon all creation, in that He corrects man's heedlessness of His teachings and takes people from crookedness to straightness. The guidance offered by the Jews and Christians is nothing more than the pursuit of the cravings of their souls and God *the Most High* says to His Messenger that 'never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you until you follow their religion' (*al-Baqara*: 120).

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sought to live amicably with the Jews in Medina, but they fought him and refused to accept him. And Abraham *peace be upon him* was a true believer, and not an idolater.

قُولُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡنَا وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰٓ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلَ
وَإِسۡحَٰقَ وَيَعۡقُوبَ وَٱلۡأَسۡبَاطِ وَمَآ أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَآ أُوتِيَ
ٱلنَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمۡ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيۡنَ أَحَدٖ مِّنۡهُمۡ وَنَحۡنُ لَهُۥ مُسۡلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

So [you believers], say, 'We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him' [136] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 136)

This noble verse gives us an explanation of God's words '…the religion of Abraham…' (*al-Baqara*: 130) as belief in God Alone, without any associates, and belief in what had been sent down to us, namely the Quran, and that which was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants *peace be upon them*, and that which was given to Moses *peace and blessings be upon him*, namely the Torah, and that which was given to Jesus *peace and blessings be upon him*, namely the Gospel, and that which was vouchsafed to all the other prophets; for the true Message from God, from the time of Adam *peace and blessings be upon him* until now, has been the single doctrine that there is no god but God, Who has no associate, and that God is the sole Creator and Director of the universe; and everything which deviates from the ascription of Divinity to God, the One and Only, as a result of the deviations of previous religions, is a lie against God *the Most High* which we cannot accept.

God *the Most High* says, Say, [O believers], 'We have believed in God and what has been revealed to us…' namely the Noble Quran; and nothing could be added alongside this if it contradicted it, and so that which was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants *peace be upon them* represents the creed of Abraham; and this affirms for us that the creed of Abraham *peace be upon him* was revealed to him by God. And as we said, all the Divine Messages call to the worship of God, the One and Only, Who has no associate.

God *the Most High* says: '…and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him…' which means that Abraham *peace be upon him* was one who surrendered himself (Muslim), and likewise all the prophets were Muslims, and anything which contradicts this is nothing but the invention of human beings. The meaning of surrender (Islam) is that there is one who surrenders, and one who is surrendered to, namely God *the Exalted*. We surrender to Him *the Exalted* by worshipping Him and following His teachings. One should only surrender to someone who is more powerful than one, and more knowledgeable than one, and stronger than one, and to someone who has no caprice; and so if you are doubtful about any of these aspects, then your surrender is not real, but is only imagined. You only surrender yourself to God *the Most High* if you are convinced that His powers are beyond the powers of all created beings, and that He *the Exalted* has no need of anything in the world, and so He has no need of what you possess, but rather, He *the Exalted* gives you all aspects of goodness and blessing; and there is no being that you should surrender yourself to except the Higher Power of God.

فَإِنْ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِمِثْلِ مَآ ءَامَنتُم بِهِۦ فَقَدِ ٱهْتَدَوا۟ ۖ وَّإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِى شِقَاقٍ ۖ
فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٣٧﴾

So if they believe like you do, they will be rightly guided. But if they turn their backs, then they will be entrenched in opposition. God will protect you from them: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [137] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 137)

We say that this verse provokes us to ask this question: Does that which we believe in have a ‘like’, in which they could believe? In order for you to be a believer, you must say ‘There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God,’ and if someone else says it after you, has he said the same thing as you, or the like of what you have said? He has said the like of what you have said. That is, when I announce my faith and make the testimony which you have made, I say the like of what you said because what you have said does not become separate from you; rather, if I make something and then say to someone else, ‘Make the like of this,’ he will make something new, and will not make the very object which I made.

It is the same thing when you say to me, ‘Give in charity the like of which So-and-so has just given.’ The charity will not be the very same money, but rather, it will be the like of it. So we say to those who raise this question: You have not understood the meaning. Their belief was that they said, ‘There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God,’ and the belief of the others is that they utter the like of this statement, i.e. they announce that their belief in God and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is like ours. So the likeness here refers to the testimony of faith, and all who believe in Islam utter the two testimonies just like those who believed before them did. The likeness here refers to the statement, and their belief is that they say the same thing we said.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘So if they believe in the same as you believe in, then they have been [rightly] guided…’ that is, they will be guided to the truth; ‘…but if they turn away, they are only in dissension,…’ To ‘turn away’ means to reject, and ‘in dissension’ means that they will be in conflict with you, and in conflict with one another as well, since each of them will have their own point of view to which they lay claim, and their own path which they have invented; and so even though they are united in their disbelief, they will not be united in the causes of their disbelief, as each of them will have their own reasons, and so they will differ amongst themselves. The word *shiqaq* (rendered here as ‘dissension’) means difficulty, conflict, and quarrel, derived from the word *shaqq,* which means a fissure between two things.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…and God will be sufficient for you against them…’ that is, do not be concerned by their enmity or by their words, for God will suffice you in every way from needing any other than Him. God *the Most High* puts forth the rhetorical question: ‘Is not God all-sufficient for his servant?’ And then He addresses His Messenger saying that the disbelievers would scare him by their idols. But the one whom God misleads shall find no guidance (*az-Zumar:* 36).

God *the Most High* is saying to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: If the Jews, the Christians, and the hypocrites try to plot against you, and hurt you and the believers, God *the Exalted* will protect you because He is All Knowing, All-Seeing, and All-Hearing, and nothing escapes His notice. The Jews tried to assassinate the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* more than once, and they tried to hurt him with sorcery; but God brought their plots to nothing, and showed what they hid, and let His Messenger see it; and so whatever means they use, whether open or concealed, God will protect you from the evil of it. And so God *the Most High* said,

'…and God will be sufficient for you against them. And He is the Hearing, the Knowing.' That is, He hears all that is said, and knows all that they have planned, and He knows what is in their hearts even before they say it; so do not think that anything escapes the knowledge of God *the Most High*. God *the Most High* knows everything that will happen even before it happens, and He can bring an end to any plot even before it is devised. And if God *the Most High* is with you, what could you then fear? And whom could you fear? And who could possibly harm you? You have on your side the Creator and Director of this universe, whose knowledge does not miss anything in the heavens or the earth, and who knows everything that will happen until the Day of Resurrection and beyond it; and as long as you have on your side the All-Powerful who never weakens, and the Living who never dies, and the One Who knows everything, do not fear anyone, since you are in God's care.

صِبْغَةَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ صِبْغَةً ۖ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ عَٰبِدُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

'[Our life] takes its colour from God, and who gives a better colour than God? It is Him we worship' [138] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 138)

What is 'dye'? To dye means to change the colour of something by introducing another colour to it. You might dye something red, or blue, or any colour you choose. Dye will take to an object especially if it is made of porous fabrics like cotton or wool, while synthetic fibres cannot be dyed so well. Why? This is because the strands of cotton and wool are like tubes in their shape.

If you take a jar of oil and place a strand of cotton in it so that the tip of the strand is in the oil, and then you set it on fire from the top, you will find that the oil runs down the tubes of the strand and it sets alight; but if you try this with a synthetic fibre, the oil will not penetrate it, but rather, the fire will just consume the fibre because it is not composed of tubes of fibre like cotton or wool is. Synthetic fibres are easy to wash because sweat does not enter their weave, while cotton garments need a lot of work because their pores are full of sweat and dust. So, dye must enter the pores of the fabric, while painting is different, as it is an outer layer which can be removed; and so to those ladies who like to paint their fingernails, and say that it is like *henna*, we say: No, *henna* is like a dye, which mixes with the living tissue, and stays there until the skin comes off with it so that you cannot just wash it off when you like, while you can remove nail-paint at any time, even right after you have applied it. So fingernail paint is not a dye.

God *the Most High* says, 'dye of God.' It is as though belief in God and the religion of Abraham *peace be upon him*, and all that which God revealed to His messengers, is like the dye of faith which permeates the fabric of the human body. Why is the word 'dye' used? So that we know that faith enters into the fabric of the whole body; it is not a dye that comes from outside of your body, but rather, it is a dye which God has placed in the very cells of the heart which existed therein the moment it was created. And so the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Every child is born with natural disposition, until his tongue expresses it; and then his parents turn him into a Jew, or into a Christian, or into a Zoroastrian.'(1)

So it is as though faith is a dye which is naturally present; it is the dye of God. If the child's parents are Muslims, he will remain in his natural state; and if his parents are Jews or Christians, they turn him into a Jew or a Christian, that is, they take him and place him in water, and say 'We have baptised him with holy water;' this is the meaning of the dye of God.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to illustrate this to us by making, as one of the signs of His power, our differing colours. This difference in colour is from the dye of God; the different colours of human beings is not a matter of paint, but rather, it is part of their constitution so that one is white, one brown, one yellow, and one red, and this is from the dye of God. So when they baptise children, this does not change their dye since faith and religion come from within a man, not from without. And so faith makes all the parts of the human body tremble, as the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration. The skins shiver therefrom of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts relax at the remembrance of God. That is the guidance of God by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom God leaves astray - for him there is no guide (*az-Zumar:* 23).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, At-Tirmidhi, At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, and Al-Bayhaqi in As-Sunan*

This is the effect which God places in the heart; it is something intrinsic, not extrinsic. As for the faith of the non-Muslims, it is paint from the outside, not a dye because they have abandoned God's dye, and so we say to them: No, this paint is from yourselves, while our religion is from God's own dye.

God *the Most High* says, '…And who is better than God in giving a dye [ordaining religion]?' This is a question which cannot be answered falsely, but rather the answer will inevitably be what the Questioner *the Exalted* wants to imply, which is that there is no one who can give a better dye than God.

God *the Most High* then says, '…And we are worshippers of Him.' That is, we obey His commands; for the worshipper is the one who obeys God's commands and stays clear of what God forbids.

Commandments always entail something difficult which you are required to undertake, and prohibitions always involve something beloved to your soul so that it is difficult for you to forsake it. This is because mankind desires instantaneous benefit, superficial benefit, while God *the Most High* wants to direct us towards that which is truly beneficial. Instantaneous benefit gives you instantaneous pleasure, but bars you from the eternal delight of the Hereafter and enjoyment which is commensurate with the powers of God *the Most High*.

When you hear the *mue'dhdhin* (caller to prayer), but do not get up to pray because your lower self finds it a burden, you give yourself an instantaneous pleasure by chatting with someone, or playing backgammon, or whatever, but you are giving up the true benefit which will lead you to paradise. This is why God *the Most High* says that prayer 'indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him' (*al-Baqara*: 45-46).

So worship is about commandments and prohibitions: commandments which are difficult for your soul so that it finds them a burden and prohibitions of things beloved to your soul, which give you instantaneous pleasure so that you desire to indulge in them.

[And say, ‘Ours is] the dye/religion of God. And who is better than God in [ordaining] religion? ‘And we are worshippers of Him’ So, God *the Most High* says, ‘…And we are worshippers of Him,’ that is, obey His commandments because we believe in Him Who commands as our Lord and God. And if you believe, God will make beloved to you the things which you used to find a burden, and make it easy for you to abstain from the things you used to love for their instantaneous pleasure. This is the dye of God which makes it easy for us to worship. God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that they should know that God’s Messenger is among them. Were he to comply with their inclinations, they are bound to get in difficulty. But God has endeared the faith to them, and has given it favour in their hearts, and has made unbelief, and wickedness, and disobedience hateful to them. Such indeed are they who pursue a right course (*al-Hujurat:* 49).

And so by the dye of faith, God *the Most High* makes goodness beloved to us, and makes us hate evil – not out of ostentation and hypocrisy on the surface of the soul, like paint, but rather like dye which infuses something and becomes a part of it so that they become a single entity which cannot be divided.

قُلْ أَتُحَآجُّونَنَا فِي ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ وَلَنَآ
أَعْمَٰلُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَٰلُكُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُخْلِصُونَ ١٣٩

Say [Prophet] [to the Jews and Christians], ‘How can you argue with us about God when He is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds belong to us, and yours to you. We devote ourselves entirely to Him’ [139] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 139)

When God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with the word ‘Say,’ before a statement, it is an indication of the importance of the charge given to the Messenger in making the proclamation. It would have been deemed enough if God simply stated what He wanted to say. If you say to your son, ‘Go to your brother and say, ‘Your father wants you to do such-and-such,’ the boy goes and passes this on without using the word

‘Say;’ but when God *the Most High* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with the word ‘Say,’ we are alerted to the fact that this command is not from him, but is from God *the Most High*, and that the mission of the Messenger is only to pass it on.

The repeated use of the word ‘Say’ in the verses of the Quran is a way of ascribing the subsequent speech to the might of its original Speaker, God *the Most High*. The speech is not from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but rather is the speech of God *the Most High*.

God *the Exalted* says, ‘Say, “Do you argue with us about God while He is our Lord and your Lord ….”’ To argue means to discuss something with someone else using lines of reasoning so that each party comes up with an argument that supports his idea or his point of view. God *the Most High* tells about the king who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord, simply because God had granted him kingship (*al-Baqara*: 258).

That is, each one of them made his case. So there must be two rival parties whose opinions conflict with one another, each one trying to make an argument which will show the truth of his own position, after which his rival replies with an argument which refutes what he has said, and so on.

God *the Most High* says, ‘Say, “Do you argue with us about God while He is our Lord and your Lord? …”’ Since God is the Lord of all, it makes sense that we should come together, since He is my Lord and your Lord, and we both have the same claim to Him. But since there is an argument between us, one of us must be in the wrong. God *the Most High* tells us that those who argue about God, after He has been responded to – their argument is invalid with their Lord, and upon them is wrath. And for them is a severe punishment (*ash-Shura:* 16)

An argument cannot take place between two truths, but rather, it is between truth and falsehood, or between two falsehoods because there is only one truth, and there are a hundred roads which lead to falsehood. So, as long as there is an argument between us and you, and we are in the right, this must mean that you are wrong. And to finish this matter decisively, and do away with any further debate, the True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers to say, ‘…For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. And we are sincere [in deed and intention] to Him.’ That is, we do not want an argument because argumentation does not help anything. We have our deeds, and you have your deeds, and each will be requited for his deeds according to his level of devotion to God. We have devoted our worship to God Alone, while you have directed your worship to whatever your caprices desire.

God *the Most High*, our Lord and yours, does not prefer anyone to anyone else except on account of the good deeds they devote to God Alone. And so we put devotion first; for two deeds might seem equal in the eyes of the people, yet one is rewarded while the other is punished. What matters is whether or not the deed is sincerely devoted to God.

One might say, 'Devotion is a matter of the heart, and so as long as a person is not hurting anyone and not doing anything evil, it is not essential that he prays, as long as his intention is sincere.' We say that it is not about intentions only, but rather it is about intentions and actions together. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Actions are but according to intentions.'(1)

So there must be action after intention; for intention is something that you alone benefit from, while actions benefit others also. If it is your intention to give charity, and you do give it, then the poor benefit from your wealth; but if it is not your intention to do a good deed, but rather you do it just for the sake of your reputation, or to please someone, then the poor benefit from your money but you yourself do not gain any reward for it. God *the Most High* wants your action to be accompanied by a sincere intention of devotion to God. Action is the physical movement of this life, while intention is that which causes one to gain a reward or lose a reward; and on this God *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that if they give alms openly, it is well; and if they hide it and give it to the poor in secret, it will be better for them, and it will atone for some of their bad deeds. And God is aware of all that they do' (*al-Baqara*: 271).

God *the Most High* wants us to give charity, and the poor will benefit from your charity whether your intention is to be known as a good and charitable man, or whether you want to be known as a man of righteousness and piety, or whether you want to give charity secretly hoping from reward from God only. People will benefit from the action irrespective of your intention. If you decide to build a building, your intention is to gain ownership of a property; but thousands of people will benefit from this, starting with the one who sells you the land, and the one who makes the plan for you, and the workmen who dig, and the ones who make the foundations, and the ones who do the building, and many others besides them. They all benefit from your action according to the provision destined for them; whether God is on your mind or not, they benefit.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, An-Nasa'i, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Abu Na'im in Al-Hilya, and Ad-Daraqutni, with different wordings*

So, every action benefits people whether you like it or not, but God does not reward actions according to their outward appearance, but according to the sincerity of the intentions behind them. If your action is sincerely devoted to God, God will reward you for it, while if your action is for some other purpose, you will have no reward from God since He *the Exalted* has no need of any associates.

Some people might wonder whether a disbeliever who makes an important and beneficial discovery for mankind, he will be punished in hell, despite his service to humanity. We say that indeed this is the case as he has nothing with God, because he did his action without having God in his mind and heart, though he was rewarded in this worldly life, and statues were made of him, and squares named after him, and his name will live forever in the world for which he worked. Since he did not have God in his intention, he will have no reward from God.

أَمْ تَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسْمَـٰعِيلَ وَإِسْحَـٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَٱلْأَسْبَاطَ
كَانُوا۟ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَـٰرَىٰ ۗ قُلْ ءَأَنتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ ٱللَّهُ ۗ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن كَتَمَ
شَهَـٰدَةً عِندَهُۥ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَـٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٠﴾

Or are you saying that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?' [Prophet], ask them, 'Who knows better: you or God? Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony [they received] from God? God is not unmindful of what you do' [140] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 140)

The Jews and Christians claim that the prophets who came before Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them* were Jews or Christians, the Jews claiming them as Jews and the Christians claiming them as Christians; and so God responds by saying, '…Are you more knowing or is God?…'

This question can only have one answer because they cannot say 'We are more knowing than God is.' We said before that if a question is posed in the Noble Quran, its answer will surely support the concept the True Lord *the Most High* wants to impart, and will only have one possible answer. And so God *the Most High* says, '…Are you more knowing or is God?' And there is no doubt that it is God who knows more.

It is as though God has by posing a question, actually made a statement. But notice that this noble verse mentions Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants *peace be upon them*, and the constant mention of Ishmael alongside Isaac and Jacob *peace be upon the;* this indicates the oneness of the call to belief in God since Ishmael *peace be upon him* was part of the Arab nation while Isaac and Jacob *peace be upon them* were of the Israelite nation.

The True Lord *the Most High* is speaking of the oneness of the source of faith for His creatures because it does not make sense that Ishmael *peace be upon him* would be for the Arabs and Isaac *peace be upon them* for the non-Arabs when the Divine Message is one. And this is what we find in the answer of Jacob's sons as reported in the Noble Quran: 'They said, "We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac - one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him"' (*al-Baqara*: 133).

The God who sent Ishmael *peace be upon him* is the same God *the Most High* Who sent Isaac *peace be upon him.* He is a One Unique God; and since God is One, the teachings of faith must also be one, and so if there is any dispute, it must have been caused by the human beings who corrupted these teachings in order to gain pleasure and profit for themselves. Every soul shall have what it has earned, and so your tie of lineage to them will not help you, or add anything to your prospects in the Hereafter. If you were disbelievers, it will not avail you in the Hereafter to say, 'We are descended from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob *peace be upon them*' and if this is not the case, it will not harm you in the least.

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُم مَّا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْـَٔلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤١﴾

That community passed away: what they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you. You will not be answerable for their deeds [141] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 141)

Some people say that this verse is the exact repetition of a previous verse (*al-Baqara*: 134), where God *the Most High* says, ‘Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob, when he said to his sons, “What will you worship after me?” They said, “We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac - one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.”’ (*al-Baqara*: 133) That was a nation which has passed on. It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned. And you will not be asked about what they used to do’ (*al-Baqara*: 134).

So, some people with superficial understanding say that this verse is a repetition of the previous one. We say to such people: You have missed the meaning in context. The first verse says to the Jews: Your descent from Abraham and Isaac *peace be upon them* will not avail you anything from God because of how you have corrupted and altered the Torah and because of your actions which contravene God’s Law, and so be aware that you will be held to account for your actions, not your lineage.

As for the verse we are currently examining, the context is that they said that Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac *peace be upon them* were Jews or Christians. God *the Most High* does not argue with them about this, but He simply says to them: Let us suppose – for argument’s sake – that Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac *peace be upon them* were indeed Jews or Christians, this is still no excuse for you because they have what they have earned and you have what you have earned, and so you cannot use this as an argument against God on the Day of Resurrection. You cannot say, ‘We thought that Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac were Jews or Christians’, i.e. we thought that they were not part of the Islamic religion because this argument will not be accepted. Do you know more than God *the Most High*, Who has declared that they were Muslims?

So, be careful of saying that this is mere repetition since the context of the first verse says, ‘No intercession will come to you on the Day of Resurrection simply because you are descended from Abraham, or Ishmael, or Isaac *peace be upon them*,' while the context of the second verse says, 'You cannot argue on the Day of Resurrection that they were Jews or Christians, and your claim of association with them will not avail you anything, and God will not accept your argument.' And so the meaning is completely different because of how two different situations on the Day of Resurrection are being treated.

سَيَقُولُ ٱلسُّفَهَآءُ مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَا وَلَّىٰهُمۡ عَن قِبۡلَتِهِمُ ٱلَّتِي كَانُواْ عَلَيۡهَاۚ قُل
لِّلَّهِ ٱلۡمَشۡرِقُ وَٱلۡمَغۡرِبُۚ يَهۡدِي مَن يَشَآءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ١٤٢

The foolish people will say, 'What has turned them away from the prayer direction they used to face?' Say, 'East and West belong to God. He guides whoever He will to the right way' [142] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 142)

This verse was revealed to clarify the matter of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers facing the *Ka'ba* instead of Jerusalem which was the first case of abrogation in the Noble Quran. God *the Most High* wanted to give this matter sufficient attention since it would cause doubts and heated arguments from all of those who opposed Islam; for the idolaters of Quraysh would take the opportunity to cast doubts, as would the hypocrites and the Jews. God *the Most High* wanted to clarify the matter before these doubts were even raised, and so He *the Exalted* said, 'The weak-minded among the people will say, 'What has turned them away from their *qibla*?...'' (i.e.direction of prayer, which they used to face). The word 'will' here, indicating the future, implies that they had not yet said it, and thus He *the Exalted* said, 'The weak-minded among the people will say….' So, before the prayer-direction was changed, the True Lord *the Most High* said: This matter will cause a great upheaval which the doubters will take advantage of.

God *the Most High* says, 'The weak-minded among the people will say,…' which means that they had not yet said it at the time this verse was revealed, and this shows that they truly were weak-minded because God *the Most High* informed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of this in a Quran which was recited out loud, and used in the canonical prayer, and which would never be changed or altered until the Day of Judgement, saying, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say….’ Had they then not said anything, and not commented on the changing of the prayer-direction, this would have been a cause to cast doubt on the Noble Quran because in such a situation, they would have been able to say, ‘The Quran, which God revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and which cannot be changed or altered until the Day of Resurrection, said, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say, ‘What has turned them away from their *qibla* (direction of prayer),…’ yet no one said anything of the kind.’

But because they truly were weak-minded, i.e. ignorant and foolish, they did say it; and so although they disbelieved in the Quran, and wanted to destroy this religion, they actually served to prove the truth of this faith and the veracity of the Quran by their actions; for God *the Most High* said, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say,…’ and indeed they did say it. The idolaters of Mecca used to say of the *Ka‘ba*, ‘It is our House and the House of our fathers, not the House of God,’ and so God turned His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the early days of Islam and directed him towards Jerusalem, upon which the Jews said, ‘He is mocking our religion and following our prayer-direction.’ God *the Most High* wanted Islam to incorporate every religion that came before it so that sanctity was preserved for all, and so He took His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem so that Jerusalem would become one of the sacred sites of Islam, and would become part of Islam.

God *the Most High* did not want to make the *Ka‘ba* the prayer-direction from the beginning because they used to revere it as the ‘House of the Arabs’ and place their idols inside it; and the fact that the *Ka‘ba* was chosen for the placing of the idols, shows that it had a sacred character in itself; the sanctity did not come from their idols, but rather, they wanted to protect these idols, and so they placed them in the *Ka‘ba*. Why did they not place them somewhere else? That was because the *Ka‘ba* was already sacred even without the idols.

God *the Most High* says, ‘The weak-minded among the people will say, ‘What has turned them away from their *qibla* (direction of prayer) which they used to face?…’ ‘Turned them’ here means moved them around and made them return, and '…their *qibla* (direction of prayer), which they used to face…' means Jerusalem. Then, the True Lord *the Most High* gives a comprehensive reply to this, which is that the sacred commands of God do not require explanations, but rather, it is sufficient reason for us to obey God's commands that it was God *the Most High* who issued them. If the True Lord *the Most High* explained to us the reason for the change of the prayer-direction, the command would not represent any kind of test of the faith in our hearts because faith and worship mean to obey the One worshipped in everything that He commands and forbids. For example, God tells you to revere this stone, the Black Stone in the *Ka'ba*, and so you revere it with complete submission and acceptance; and He tells you to pelt this other stone, which represents Satan, and so you pelt it with pebbles; yet God *the Most High* does not tell you why because if He did, all faith would be lost and it would simply be a matter of being intellectually convinced.

If I say to you, 'Do not eat that; it is bitter; eat this one instead; it is sweet,' the reasoning is clear, but God *the Most High* tells you to eat this and not to eat that so that if you eat what He has forbidden, you are a sinner, while if you abstain from it, you are obedient and will be rewarded.

So the reasoning of faith is simply that the commandment is from God *the Most High*. If you abstain from drinking alcohol because it is bad for your health, or because it damages your liver, you will have no reward for this; and if you abstain from eating pork because it is high in cholesterol and is unwholesome for you, you will have no reward. But if you abstain from alcohol and pork because God has forbidden them, this is true worship, and this is what is rewarded.

God *the Most High* wanted to respond to those weak-minded people, and so He said, 'Say, "To God belongs the east and the west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path."' That is, whether you face Jerusalem, or face the *Ka'ba*, or face any other place in this universe, God is present there. Jerusalem does not have any special distinction in itself, nor does the *Ka'ba*; but the commands of God *the Most High* is what gives them this distinction. When we faced Jerusalem, we faced it in obedience to God's command; and when God *the Most High* told us to face the *Ka'ba*, we faced it in obedience to God's command.

God *the Most High* says, '…He guides whom He wills to a straight path.' This way is the straight path which has no turns in it so that it represents the shortest route to the final destination. God *the Most High* directed us to Jerusalem, and so that was the straight path that we followed; and then He directed us to the *Ka'ba*, and so this is the straight path that we follow; and all command belongs to God.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلۡنَٰكُمۡ أُمَّةٗ وَسَطٗا لِّتَكُونُواْ شُهَدَآءَ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ ٱلرَّسُولُ
عَلَيۡكُمۡ شَهِيدٗاۗ وَمَا جَعَلۡنَا ٱلۡقِبۡلَةَ ٱلَّتِي كُنتَ عَلَيۡهَآ إِلَّا لِنَعۡلَمَ مَن يَتَّبِعُ ٱلرَّسُولَ
مِمَّن يَنقَلِبُ عَلَىٰ عَقِبَيۡهِۚ وَإِن كَانَتۡ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ هَدَى ٱللَّهُۗ وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ
لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَٰنَكُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِٱلنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٞ رَّحِيمٞ ١٤٣

We have made you [believers] into a just community, so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you. We only made the direction the one you used to face [Prophet] in order to distinguish those who follow the Messenger from those who turn on their heels: that test was hard, except for those God has guided. God would never let your faith go to waste [believers], for God is most compassionate and most merciful towards people [143] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 143)

When you see the word 'thus,' know that it implies a similarity between things. The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to be aware of His blessing in making us a community of the middle way. Everything which God legislates is a blessing for the believers; and if this change of direction to the *Ka'ba* was a test of faith for the Muslims, then God *the Most High* made us a community of the middle way as a blessing from Him, and as long as we are on the middle way, there must be sides so that the middle can be defined: There is one side, then the middle, then the other side. The middle of something is its centre, or that which lies between its two sides.

But what does '…a just and central community…' mean? A middle way of faith and doctrine; there are those who deny the existence of The True God, and there are those who go to the other extreme and believe in many gods. Each extreme is in the wrong, while we Muslims say that there is no god but God, Alone and without partner, the One and Only. This is a basic principle of this universe because God *the Most High* created the universe and created everything in it; and He *the Exalted* declared that He created it and no one else has ever claimed to be the creator, and so the claim belongs to God *the Most High* Alone. If there were many gods in this universe, each of them would claim to be the creator, and God *the Most High* says that He has not taken any son, nor has there ever been with Him any deity. If there had been, then each deity would have taken what it created, and some of them would have sought to overcome others. Exalted is God above what they describe (*al- Mu'minun:* 91).

That is, they would have fought over the position of creator, and the universe would have been wrecked by this. So Islam is a middle religion between atheism and polytheism. Furthermore, there are those who go to extremes of materialism and so neglect spiritual values, and there are those who reject materialism and believe in spiritual values alone.

The fact of life is that materialistic people intrigue those who strictly adhere to spiritual values because they have wealth and power; and so Islam came as a middle way between the material and the spiritual. Do not say that the spiritual is better than the material, or that the material is better than the spiritual; the material is one thing, and the spiritual is another, and they are both subject to God, and both praise and glorify Him. But when the material and the spiritual come together, the soul is created; and the soul is that which has free will whether to obey or disobey, and whether to worship or to disbelieve (in God is our refuge).

God *the Most High* wants the believers to live in the material world according to heavenly values, and this is the middle way of Islam which does not consider the spiritual alone, or the material alone, but rather, guards the material life with heavenly values. When God *the Most High* informs us that He made us a community of the middle way which combines the good of both extremes, we recognise that this religion came to protect mankind from the caprices of mankind.

God *the Most High* wants us to seek out the material things of this world which lead to advances, comforts, and strength for mankind. People would not differ regarding those things which are material and practical, but regarding those things where human caprice is involved; there, God establishes laws to govern them. If you live according to caprices, you will find turmoil; but if you live according to the laws of Heaven, you will find happiness.

Someone might ask: Has communism, which has been around for more than half a century now, made advances for those living under it, or not? We say Look at it now; it built all the advances it claimed on the back of lies and falsehoods, and then it declined, and then it utterly collapsed. And just as communism collapsed, capitalism too will collapse, for they are two opposite extremes; yet we are a community of the middle way, and so God has promised us the goodness of this life and of the Hereafter.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…that you may be witnesses over the people….' That is, the plea will be yours in the future, and the world will be forced to return to what your religion teaches. To be noticed is that God *the Most High* said, '…a just and central…'; He did not say 'the central…,' with the definite article so that it would not be said that these communists and capitalists will have to completely turn around in order to reach the truth; rather, each of them will incline slightly one way or the other so that they will meet. And so when they say we should take all the wealth of the rich and distribute it amongst the poor, we say to them: And when there come other poor people in the future, how will we provide for them once we have got rid of all the rich?

I once heard a person with some experience in politics and governance say, 'The one who used to work with me, and who squandered all his money on wine, gambling, and women fared better than I did because I saved up all my money and invested it, and so they said, 'You are a capitalist and they seized all my money; while the one who squandered it all, was left alone.' I said: God *the Most High* wants you to invest your money because if you do not invest it, and the poor-due of 2.5% is taken from it every year, it will all disappear in forty years; but if you invest your money, and so they come and seize the fruit of your labour under the pretence that you are a capitalist, they will bring an end to work itself in society because if you take away the fruit of a man's labour for no lawful reason, why would he work? Islam came to increase the field of work, and preserve the wealth of the worker so that it could then take the poor-due from his wealth to help those who cannot work themselves so that they do not come to hate society. This is the middle way.

God *the Most High* says, '…that you may be witnesses over the people….' It is as though God *the Most High* were telling us that there will be a battle in this world which will only be resolved by the testimony of this community. The rightists, or the capitalists, are wrong, and the communists are wrong, while the way of God which balances the scales of justice for the universe and the life of man, is right and correct. Then the True Lord *the Exalted* tells us that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* will bear witness over us: have our actions and our works been in accordance with what God revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* passed on to us? Or have we followed our desires, and strayed from the right way?

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* will bear witness over us regarding this matter. Although this verse gives glad tidings to the community of the middle way that the world will return to its senses, this will never happen unless it is led by the testimony of truth and justice.

God *the Most High* then says, '…And We did not make the *qibla* which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels….' This is a return to the subject of the changing of the prayer-direction from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba*. God *the Most High* does not prefer one direction to another, and those who face the *Ka'ba* will be facing different directions according to the position of their city with respect to the *Ka'ba*: one will face east, another northeast, and another southwest.

God *the Most High* does not favour one direction over another, but rather, He *the Exalted* made the change of the prayer-direction a test of faith, not in order to know for Himself, but rather to show to people; for God *the Most High* already knew, but He *the Exalted* wants that men be witnesses over their own selves until the Day of Resurrection. Rather, it was a test of faith so that God could show the extent of your faith, and show who would obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in what he passed on from God, and who would turn on his heels. It is as though the changing of the prayer-direction would cause a great challenge of faith for the Muslims themselves, and so God made a distinction between those who would remain true to their faith and follow the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and those who would reject it and turn away from the religion of Islam.

God *the Most High* says, '…And indeed, it is a difficult test except for those whom God has guided….' God wanted to make a distinction which would be a testimony for the people on the Day of Resurrection. The test or trial of the changed prayer-direction was indeed a difficult thing, except for those believers who welcomed any command from God, knowing as they did that faith means obedience, and not needing to know the reason behind everything.

But the idolaters, hypocrites, and Jews did not let the matter of the changed prayer-direction pass, but rather, they said, 'If the true prayer-direction is the *Ka'ba*, then all the prayers you offered towards Jerusalem were in vain; and if the true prayer-direction is Jerusalem, then all the prayers you offer towards the *Ka'ba* will be in vain.' We say to them: Do not separate a ruling from its time. The prayer-direction of Jerusalem was appropriate for its time, and the *Ka'ba* then came in its own time. It is not that one of them came to oust the other, or that one violated the right of the other. Some of the believers died having only prayed to Jerusalem, and so the doubters said, 'Their prayers were not valid,' and so God *the Most High* refuted this by saying, '…And never would God have caused your faith to be wasted…' for those who died having only prayed towards Jerusalem were obedient to God, and believers in Him, and so God would not ignore their faith.

God *the Most High* then says, '…Indeed God is, to the people, Kind and Merciful.' That is, remember that you believe in a Lord who is compassionate, and does not want you to undergo hardships, and who is merciful and will protect you from tribulation.

قَدۡ نَرَىٰ تَقَلُّبَ وَجۡهِكَ فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِۖ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبۡلَةٗ تَرۡضَىٰهَاۚ فَوَلِّ وَجۡهَكَ
شَطۡرَ ٱلۡمَسۡجِدِ ٱلۡحَرَامِۚ وَحَيۡثُ مَا كُنتُمۡ فَوَلُّواْ وُجُوهَكُمۡ شَطۡرَهُۥۗ وَإِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ لَيَعۡلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ ٱلۡحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّهِمۡۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا يَعۡمَلُونَ ١٤٤

Many a time We have seen you [Prophet] turn your face towards Heaven, so We are turning you towards a prayer direction that pleases you. Turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque: wherever you [believers] may be, turn your faces to it. Those who were given the Scripture know with certainty that this is the Truth from their Lord: God is not unaware of what they do [144] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 144)

We know that the word *qad* (‘surely’) is used to give emphasis, and that the verb here *nara* (‘see’) is in the imperfect tense (literally ‘we see’) in Arabic, which indicates an ongoing action. The True Lord *the Most High* here gives us an image of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; he loved and yearned to face the *Ka‘ba* rather than Jerusalem (in prayer), and usually the revelation would come to Him *peace and blessings be upon him* from above, and so he would look to the sky from whence revelation came; and this was solely because his heart yearned that a revelation would come to him telling him to change the prayer-direction. So it seems that this matter occupied his thoughts.

God *the Most High* here assures His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He had seen him turn his face to the sky, and that He has answered his prayer for the prayer-direction that fulfilled his desire. Does this mean that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not content to face the direction of Jerusalem in prayer as he had been doing? We say no, but rather contentment is always linked to emotion, and there is a difference between emotional love and intellectual love. And so no one should say that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was not content with praying to Jerusalem. Rather, he faced Jerusalem even though his heart yearned to face the *Ka‘ba*, and this is a clear sign of his obedience and steadfastness.

God *the Most High* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, '…We will have you turn to a *qibla* [prayer direction] which will please you…' that is, which you shall love with your emotion. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was awaiting this change, and so it is as though His *peace and blessings be upon him* emotion was the first step of the change.

God *the Most High* says, '…Turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque….' The word 'face' here means the whole being, and the word 'towards' (*'shatr'*) means 'in the direction of;' and literally shatr means 'half'; and both of these meanings make sense here because wherever a person is, he is the centre of a circle which is bordered by what we call the horizon which is as far as the eye can see and where it appears to you as though the sky meets the land.

So we all have a circle according to our point of view, and when a person goes to higher altitudes, the circle becomes wider, and if his eyesight is weak the circle will be smaller. Thus, he is in the middle of a circle of which half is in front of him, and half behind him.

So to say that shatr here means 'half' is correct, and to say that it means 'towards' is also correct. God *the Most High* says, '…Turn then your face towards the Sacred Mosque….' That is, make your face point towards the Sacred Mosque, or make it so that the Sacred Mosque is in the half of the circle which is in front of you. In the past, acts of worship were offered only in specific places until the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came and God made the entire earth a place of prayer for him.

The mosque (*masjid*) is the place of prostration (*sujud*), and since prostration is the ultimate sign of humility before God, the place where we pray is called a 'place of prostration' (*masjid*). But there is a difference between a place where you prostrate yourself and a place you reserve solely for prayer and nothing else. Mosques are reserved solely for prayer and worship, while the place where you pray and also work is not considered a mosque except during the very time you prostrate in it. The *Ka'ba* is the House of God, by the choice of God Himself, while all the other mosques in the world are the houses of God by the choice of God's creatures; and so the House of God, which God chose, is the prayer-direction for all the houses of God which God's creatures chose.

God *the Most High* says, '…and wherever you [o believers] may be, turn your faces towards it [in prayer]…,' that is, whatever place you might be in, '…turn your faces towards it…' for the verse was revealed while they were in the mosque of Banu Salama in Medina, and so the Muslims turned towards the Sacred Mosque; and so that we do not think that the change was meant for this mosque alone, and for the time the verse was revealed alone, God *the Most High* said, '…and wherever you [o believers] may be, turn your faces towards it [in prayer]….'

God *the Exalted* then says, '…Surely, they to whom the Book has been given, know this to be the truth from their Lord: and God is not regardless of what they do.' That is, those who had been given revelation before and who attempted to cast doubts on the followers of the Messengers of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, knew well that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Final Messenger, and they recognised his description from what the Torah and Gospel told them, and they knew that he was the Keeper of the Two Prayer-Directions. If the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had not turned from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba*, they would have said, 'The Torah and Gospel say that the Final Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, will pray to two directions; so, why has he not?' And this would have been a pretext to sow doubts.

And so those who had been given revelation before, knew well that this came in truth from their Lord because the Torah stated that the Messenger would come and pray to Jerusalem and then change and pray to the Sacred Mosque; and so for the people of the Book, this change should have been a means of strengthening their faith in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, not a reason for their certainty to be shaken.

God *the Most High* then says, '…and God is not regardless of what they do.' The True Lord *the Most High* wants to reassure the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that their attempts to sow doubts would not avail them anything, and their position was not for the lack of proof, but was simply a matter of obstinacy; they desired no evidence or proof of faith, but rather, they only wanted to be obstinate.

وَلَئِنۡ أَتَيۡتَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِكُلِّ ءَايَةٖ مَّا تَبِعُواْ قِبۡلَتَكَۚ وَمَآ أَنتَ
بِتَابِعٖ قِبۡلَتَهُمۡۚ وَمَا بَعۡضُهُم بِتَابِعٖ قِبۡلَةَ بَعۡضٖۚ وَلَئِنِ ٱتَّبَعۡتَ أَهۡوَآءَهُم
مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا جَآءَكَ مِنَ ٱلۡعِلۡمِ ۙ إِنَّكَ إِذٗا لَّمِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١٤٥

Yet even if you brought every proof to those who were given the Scripture, they would not follow your prayer direction, nor will you follow theirs, nor indeed will any of them follow one another’s direction. If you [Prophet] were to follow their desires, after the knowledge brought to you, you would be doing wrong [145] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 145)

Following the prayer-direction is a sign of faith in your religion, and so as you believe in your religion, you will face your prayer-direction. If I do not believe in your religion, I will not follow your prayer-direction.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And even if you brought….’ When you hear the words ‘and even if’ (*wa-la’in*), this indicates an avowal, a solemn declaration, and so the True Lord *the Most High* is asserting that even if the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were to give the people of the Book every kind of sign, they would not believe in his religion or follow his prayer-direction. Why? Because they are not looking for evidence, or seeking to be convinced of the truth of the new religion, and if they really wanted evidence or wanted to be convinced, they would find this in their own scriptures, which told them of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and that he would be the Final Prophet, and described him for them. So it is as though they already had the proof, but they handled the matter foolishly and obstinately.

God *the Most High* then says, ‘…Nor will you be a follower of their *qibla*….’ So, it is as though when the verse came to change the prayer-direction, God informed us that the Muslims would never again pray towards Jerusalem, nor would God turn them to a third direction. And in order to inform us that the Jews and Christians would be on one side and we would be in another, and that there would be no meeting between us and them, God *the Most High* then said, ‘…Nor would they be followers of one another's *qibla*….’ So the difference on the prayer-direction will remain until the end of time.

God *the Most High* then says, '…So if you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, indeed, you would then be among the wrongdoers.' When God *the Most High* addressed His Messenger and His Beloved, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, with this verse, He knew full well that Muhammad, the Infallible Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, cannot possibly follow their errant views; and so we say that this verse is really directed to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So God *the Most High* addresses his community through him, saying, '…So if you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, indeed, you would then be among the wrongdoers.' What was the errant desire of the People of the Book? It was that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would indulge them, or say that the changes they had made to their scriptures were truly ordained by God; and so they made their own desires the object they followed. It is as though God *the Most High* wanted to alert the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the fact that everyone who follows the errant views of the people of the Book and their corruptions will become one of the wrongdoers, however great his faith might have been. And if God *the Most High* would not accept this from His own Messenger and His Beloved *peace and blessings be upon him*, how could he accept it from any member of the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?

This address concerns one of the primary matters of faith which has the potential to corrupt the entire doctrine. God *the Most High* wants us to know that He will not tolerate it, or allow it even if it were to be done by His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, although this could never happen; and this is in order for us to see how completely unacceptable it is to God, no matter what level of faith a person has, even if they have the very highest level of faith possible so that the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would steer well clear of this kind of action.

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ يَعۡرِفُونَهُۥ كَمَا يَعۡرِفُونَ أَبۡنَآءَهُمۡۖ
وَإِنَّ فَرِيقٗا مِّنۡهُمۡ لَيَكۡتُمُونَ ٱلۡحَقَّ وَهُمۡ يَعۡلَمُونَ ١٤٦

Those We gave Scripture know it as well as they know their own sons, but some of them hide the truth that they know [146] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 146)

God *the Most High* says here that those to whom revelation came before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* knew it – what did they know? Did they know about the changing of the prayer-direction? Or did they know about the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his coming, and his Message, about which they were trying to raise doubts? God *the Most High* explains this to us when He says, ‘And when a Book had come to them from God, confirming that which was already with them – although they had before prayed for victory over those who disbelieved – yet when there came to them that which they knew, they disbelieved in it. The curse of God will be on the infidels’ (*al-Baqara*: 89).

So, it is as though the Jews and Christians recognised the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, as it was written in the Torah and Gospel that it was the truth, and that they were required to believe in it. Ka‘b Al-Ahbar God *be pleased with him* was sitting one day, when ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab God *be pleased with him* asked him, ‘Did you all know about him, Ka‘b?’ That is, did you know about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Message, and his description? Ka‘b, who was one of the rabbis of the Jews, replied, ‘I knew him as I knew my own son; indeed my knowledge of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was even stronger.’ When they asked him why this was, he replied, ‘Because it could be possible that my wife cheated me with regard to my son; but as for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, his description was given so precisely in the Torah that we could not mistake him.’

So, the people of the Book knew the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and knew his time, and his Message; and those of them who embraced Islam and believed in him did so because they were convinced; while those who did not believe, and denied what the Messenger of God *peace* *and blessings be upon him* brought, also knew, but they concealed what they knew. And so God *the Most High* says, '…but truly a part of them do conceal the truth, though they know it.' When you talk about something being concealed, this means that the thing should naturally have been evident and available for all to see. By its nature, the truth should be plain and open to all; but to deny the truth and suppress it, requires effort.

Those people, who investigate delicate matters, try to prevent a person from having the power to suppress the truth, and so they deprive the subject of their investigation of sleep until his strength crumbles and he tells the truth. This is because to tell the truth, does not require any effort, but rather, to suppress the truth, requires effort and strength, and to refrain from telling the truth is a difficult thing. But God *the Most High* says, '…but truly a part of them do conceal the truth, though they know it.' That is, they were not ignorant of this but rather they knew the truth of the matter. The truth is from God, so could these people suppress it? Of course they could not, but rather, it had to come out. When lies and falsehoods spread, it is like pain which afflicts the body; people hate pain, but pain is one of the means of cure because it lets you know where the malady is so that you can set about treating it.

The most dangerous of illnesses are those which are not accompanied by pain and which you cannot feel until it is too late to treat them. The truth is always upmost, and so you never find conflict between two truths: as for falsehood, you can find falsehood in conflict with another falsehood, and falsehood in conflict with truth; for there is only one truth, while falsehood is legion.

Battles between truth and falsehood always end with a swift defeat of falsehood, while those conflicts which drag out are always between two falsehoods. And so the battles of these current times drag on, and make the world weary. The effects of the Second World War, for example, are still being felt in the Cold War and other smaller conflicts. The Messenger of God said, 'None of you (truly) believes until his desire is in line with what I have brought.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Dailami in Musnad Al-Firdaws*

ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ ۖ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

The truth is from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt [147] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 147)

The truth is from God *the Most High*, and since it is from God, do not be from those who doubt that the truth will win out. But the truth must be protected with strength, as a poet once said:

A sword might gleam and shine,
But it does nothing without a warrior's hand.

What is the use of having a sharp sword if there is no strong hand to wield it? We usually squander the truth because we do not give it the strength it needs to be victorious.

God *the Most High* says, '…Be not then of those who doubt.' A doubter is someone who has reservations about whether something will happen, and doubt means that something is seen as being equally probable and improbable, that is, as likely to happen as not. But the truth is from God, and so there is no probability against it, and so we must not have any doubt, or enter into any fruitless debate, about whether the truth will win out.

وَلِكُلٍّ وِجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّيهَا ۖ فَٱسْتَبِقُوا۟ ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ ۚ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا۟
يَأْتِ بِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٤٨﴾

Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything [148] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 148)

It was God's Will to make man free, and so he has the free choice whether to believe or not, and whether to support truth or falsehood, and whether to do good or evil. All of these are tests which God willed to give to man in this world so that he could either respond to them or not; but this will not last forever, and this free will applies only to the life of this world.

But the human nature of man ends at the moment of death, and when a man faces death and the end of life, he becomes compelled and no longer free; and so he cannot avail himself at this time, and cannot say ‘I will not die now.’ His human nature expires, and his whole person is compelled, and even his limbs will testify against him. In the life of this world, everyone faces the direction he chooses; this one chooses disbelief, that one chooses faith; this one chooses obedience and that one chooses disobedience. As long as man has free will, everyone has their own direction, distinct from everyone else. Those whom God guides turn towards good works as though they are racing towards them. Why? Because he does not know when he will die, and so every time he races to perform a good deed, it will be one more he can add to his credit.

What is required from the believers in this life is that they race to do good deeds before their time to die comes, and none of them should imagine that they will escape from God, for He *the Exalted* says, ‘…Wherever you may be, God will bring you forth [for judgement] all together….’ That is, there is no place where you can hide from God’s knowledge, for God *the Most High* knows where everyone is, each one individually, and He will gather everyone, as He wants us to keep in mind the day on which He will cause the mountains to move and we shall see the earth a levelled plain, and He will gather mankind together, and not leave any one of them (*al-Kahf*: 47).

And He commands His Messenger to give advice to people to flee to God, as he is from Him a plain warner (*adh-Dhariyat:* 50). That is, the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to know with certainty that we cannot flee from His knowledge, His decree, or from His chastisement, and that the only way open to us is that we flee to Him, and that there is no refuge from God except with Him. And so no disbeliever or sinner should imagine that he can flee from God, or that he will not be present on the Day of Resurrection, or that he will not be held to account, or that he will be able to hide.

The delusions of this worldly life might take hold of some people so that they imagine that they are immune from God, and that they will never meet Him. We say to them: You will be shocked in the Hereafter when you find that the Reckoning is real, and that Paradise is real, and Hell is real. You will be surprised at what happens to you. And those who did not believe and did not rush to do good deeds will find ignominy and grievous suffering. God advises us to believe and to vie with one another in good works so that we can be saved from His chastisement. He tells us that none of us will escape, nor will a single atom from any of our bodies, from standing before God to be reckoned. God *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, '…Indeed, God is over all things Powerful.' That is, nothing is beyond God *the Most High*, and nothing is out of his control: He *the Exalted* has the power to will anything.

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ ۖ
وَإِنَّهُۥ لَلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

[Prophet], wherever you may have started out, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque – this is the truth from your Lord: He is not unaware of what you do [149]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 149)

We need to reflect on how many times the Noble Quran refers to the matter of the changed prayer-direction. It refers to it three times in close proximity because the changing of the prayer-direction caused a great upheaval in the souls of the believers, and so the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to put an end to this reaction and to confirm the changing of the prayer-direction as a matter of faith.

So, the number of verses is three which is the smallest plurality: one verse refers to those who face the *Ka'ba*, while in the mosque, the second to those who face it outside the mosque, and the third to those who face it from wherever they might be.

God *the Most High* says, 'And from whatever place you come forth, turn your face [in prayer] towards the Sacred Mosque; for indeed this is the truth from your Lord; and God is not unaware of what you do….' This is in retort to the hypocrites, Jews, and Christians, who tried to raise doubts about Islam by confronting the Muslims about the issue of the changed prayer-direction on the basis that it did not need to happen because there is no extra responsibility or effort required that would give greater reward to the believer. The effort the believer needs to face the House in Jerusalem is the same as the effort needed to face the Sacred Mosque. Whether you face left or right when you pray, or east or west, it takes no extra effort; so why this change? We say to them that this is no kind of argument to use, to doubt the prayer-direction because to face the Sacred Mosque is an act of obedience to God. As long as God has commanded us, we must obey Him out of faith. The Lord *the Exalted* says, '…for indeed this is the truth from your Lord; and God is not unaware of what you do.' That is, the way you have changed your prayer-direction is a true command from God Who was not unaware of your action when you turned to face the Sacred Mosque, but rather, He knows all that you do openly and all you conceal. So rest assured that you are doing what is right, and turn your faces to the Sacred Mosque, and know that God has encompassing knowledge and power over you and all that you do.

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ ۚ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ فَوَلُّوا۟
وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُۥ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَيْكُمْ حُجَّةٌ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ فَلَا
تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَٱخْشَوْنِى وَلِأُتِمَّ نِعْمَتِى عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ (١٥٠)

wherever you may have started out, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; wherever any of you may be, turn your faces towards it, so that people may have no argument against you, except for the wrongdoers among them: do not fear them; fear Me, and so that I may perfect My favour on you and you may be guided [150] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 150)

The True Lord *the Most High* emphasises here to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he and the Muslims should turn to face the Sacred Mosque, whether they are in Medina or outside it, or in any place on earth. This is their prayer-direction for every prayer, regardless of where they might be praying.

God *the Most High* says, '…lest people will have a chance of raising an argument against you….' The people meant here are the hypocrites, Jews, and Christians. What kind of argument is meant? The answer is that the Muslims used to face Jerusalem in prayer, and then they changed to face the Sacred Mosque; and neither Jerusalem nor the Sacred Mosque has any sanctity in their own right, as we said, but rather, we obey the commands of the Highest Commander, God. God *the Most High* says of the hypocrites, Jews, and Christians that they were '…unjust…', and describes them as being wrongdoers. What is an unjust person, a wrongdoer? (*al-Baqara*: 45-46).

So, the humble in spirit are those who link obedience to its reward and disobedience to its requital and chastisement; for those who avoid obedience because of its difficulty, separate obedience from its reward and so make it seem a burden; and those who disobey, separate disobedience from its punishment and so make it seem easy. The fullness of blessing is that God makes the requirements of faith constant for us. So at the Farewell Pilgrimage, the verse was revealed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* carrying God's Message to him that on that day, God has perfected the religious law for the believers, and has bestowed upon them the full measure of His blessings, and that He was satisfied with Islam (submission to Him) as their religion (*al-Ma'ida*: 3).

This was an announcement of the completion of the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, in that the commandments of the faith had been completely delivered. But those who see responsibilities as a burden, will say to you, 'There is corruption everywhere, and God does not hold a soul responsible for more than it can bear,' as though they are deciding what is within their ability and what is not, and on this basis, they decide what their responsibilities are. We say to them: Has God ordained these responsibilities, or has He not? If He has, then they must be within your ability because when He *the Exalted* sees a difficulty He commands that it be lightened, such as the allowance for the traveller to shorten his prayers and the allowance for the ill person and the traveller to eat in *Ramadan*; and so He *the Exalted* has already made allowances for your abilities.

God *the Most High* says, '…and that you may be guided aright.' Guidance is the straight path which leads to the goal by the shortest possible route; and the goal of this life is to reach the bliss of the Hereafter. In this world, God has given you the material means to live your life, but this is not the goal of life. Rather, the goal is that we go on to a world without means; and this is the greatness of God's power. God *the Most High* teaches us that He has created us to live in this world with material means, while in the Hereafter, we will live in His shelter without need for any material means.

So, God's words '…and that you may be guided aright' mean that you might become aware of the goal which is required of you, and that none of you might imagine that the life of this world is the goal, or the end, or the purpose, and so work for the sake of this life alone, taking whatever he can from it, whether it be lawful or unlawful, considering it the sole means of enjoyment that has been created for him; we say no; in this state he will have gone astray, and has not been guided because if he had been guided, he would have known that the true life of mankind is the Hereafter, and he would have known that the bliss of the Hereafter which neither leaves you nor do you leave it, must be the goal for us in this worldly life so that , we do everything we can to reach the bliss of Paradise which depends on no material means.

كَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا فِيكُمۡ رَسُولٗا مِّنكُمۡ يَتۡلُواْ عَلَيۡكُمۡ ءَايَٰتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمۡ
وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡحِكۡمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمۡ تَكُونُواْ تَعۡلَمُونَ ١٥١

just as We have sent among you a Messenger of your own to recite Our revelations to you, purify you and teach you the Scripture, wisdom, and [other] things you did not know [151]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 151)

After having spoken to us of guidance to His teachings and His way, God *the Most High* now speaks to us of the blessing He gave us by sending a messenger to convey to us the signs of God; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was destined to be the channel for the coming of the greatest blessing of all: the Quran, and the final religion.

God *the Most High* says, '…a Messenger from yourselves….' That is, he is not from any other race. Rather, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was one of you, and you knew him before that he was given the Message and before he came with any argument. Why? It was because he was known for his impeccable conduct, his noble speech, and his trustworthiness, and for possessing every characteristic which raises a person's standing and respectability. The first persons to believe in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were those who knew him the best, such as Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *God be pleased with him* and the Prophet's wife, our Lady Khadija *God be pleased with her*, and his nephew 'Ali ibn Abu Talib *God be pleased with him*. They believed without requiring any evidence because they based their faith on how they knew the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* before he was given the Message. They had never known him to lie, and they reasoned that the one who will not lie about other people will certainly not lie about God, and so they believed. So out of His mercy, God *the Most High* sent to them a Messenger from among themselves, who was unlettered that his Lord might teach him. And so the True Lord *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that indeed, there has come to them a Messenger from among themselves; it heavily weighs upon him that they might suffer, and he is full of concern for them and is full of compassion and mercy towards the believers (*at-Tawba:* 128).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…reciting to you Our verses and purifying you….' The verses referred to here mean the verses of the Noble Quran, and purifying means cleansing. So there must have been some impurity which had to be cleansed from them; he purified them from idol-worship, from burying their newborn daughters alive, from alcohol, gambling, and usury. Purification also means to remove that which is harmful; so, it is as though he brought them benefit and removed harm from them.

God *the Most High* says, '…and teaching you the Book and wisdom….' The Book in its general sense means the Noble Quran, and wisdom means to put things in their right places. The Book charges you with responsibilities, either by commanding you to do something or by forbidding you from doing something.

So, it revolves around action and abstinence. Wisdom (*hikma*) means to do those actions which bring goodness to you and keep evil from you; the Arabic word is derived from the word for the bit of metal which is placed in a horse's mouth so that it can be steered and stopped, and always does what it is required to do. 'Wisdom' here also means the collected sayings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, as God *the Most High* addresses the Prophet's wives instructing them to bear in mind all that is recited in their homes of God's verse and wisdom (*al-Ahzab:* 34).

God then says, '…and teaching you that which you did not know,' for you are an unlettered nation, and so if the world stuns you with its civilisation, you will amaze it with the rays of faith which mark you out above them all, as everything that comes from heaven is superior to all the civilisation of earth. And this is what made 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* say, 'Were it not for Islam, what would Omar be?'

فَٱذۡكُرُونِيٓ أَذۡكُرۡكُمۡ وَٱشۡكُرُواْ لِي وَلَا تَكۡفُرُونِ ١٥٢

So remember Me; I will remember you. Be thankful to Me, and never ungrateful [152] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 152)

God *the Most High* says, ‘So remember Me,’ That is, you should not forget all of these blessings and favours, and you should always remember the One who gave them to you. God *the Most High* wants His servants to remember Him; and every time they remember Him and thank Him, He thanks them and gives them more. God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me: if he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself; if he remembers Me in a group, I remember him in a group which is better; if he draws nearer to Me by a hand’s span, I draw nearer to him by an arm’s length; if he draws nearer to Me by an arm’s length, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.’(1)

This is the desire of the Most Generous to give, on condition that we are worthy to receive; for He wants to give us more and more. So He says ‘So remember Me,’ that is, remember God at all times: His blessings, His bestowal, His shelter, His mercy, His forgiveness. One of the pious persons said: ‘I heard from someone, who had heard it from my beloved, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, that when you drink water, you should divide it into three parts: for the first sip, say, “In the Name of God,” and drink and then say, “Praise be to God,” and then for the second sip say, “In the Name of God,” and drink and then say, “Praise be to God”, and then say, “In the Name of God”, and drink the third sip, and finish by saying “Praise be to God.” As long as this water is in your body, no atom of your body will incline towards sin.’ Try it one day yourself; say, ‘In the Name of God’, and drink and then say, ‘Praise be to God,’ and repeat it three times. In doing so, you will have received God’s blessing by remembering the One Who gave it, and you will have set aside your own strength and power, and then you will have completed this blessing by praising God. But why water? That is because water fills the belly more completely than anything else.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa’i, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad in his Musnad, with different narrations*

God *the Most High* says, '…and be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.' Being grateful for blessings makes God *the Most High* increase them, as He *the Exalted* tells us that if we are grateful to Him, He will most certainly give us more and more (*Ibrahim:* 7). Offering thanks to God puts an end to self-delusion so that you do not become infatuated by material means, or say, 'I was given this because of my own knowledge.' '…and do not deny Me,' that is, do not ignore God's blessings, but rather keep them always in your mind and on your lips; for if you receive every blessing from God by saying 'This is what God willed! There is no power except with God!', you will never find any fault in these blessings because you will have kept the blessing connected to the One Who granted it, and thereby recognised God's right in His blessing; but if you do not do so, and ignore it as though it was your own doing, and your own creation, forgetting the One Who gave it, God *the Most High*, the blessing will leave you.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱسْتَعِينُوا۟ بِٱلصَّبْرِ وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

You who believe, seek help through steadfastness and
prayer, for God is with the steadfast [153]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 153)

God tells us here to seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer – aid with what? It is aid with everything that God requires from us: His teachings and His commandments; and the way to seek aid with these things is through steadfast patience and prayer. But why is it through steadfast patience? That is because patience is to keep the soul from becoming frantic because of something that happens; and it takes many forms according to the level of one's devotion.

For example, Imam Ali God *be pleased with him* was asked about the rights of the neighbour, and he replied, 'You know that you should not harm him, don't you?' They replied that this was so. He went on: 'It is also that you bear his harm with steadfast patience.' So, it is not only required from you that you do not harm your neighbour, but you must also bear it patiently if he harms you. Steadfast patience is what helps you to do what God has commanded you, and to abstain from that which He has forbidden you. God *the Most High* has forbidden you from doing certain things which are tempting to the soul, and has commanded you to do things which may be difficult, and this requires patience. If you accept God's teachings out of devotion to Him, then you will become accustomed to them after a while. One of the pious people prayed: ‘O God, I ask you not to leave me to my own devices; for I fear, Lord, that You might not reward me for my devotions to You because I have come to enjoy my devotions, and – Glory be to You! – You commanded us to fight our desires!’ Because of intense love for God, obedience can become desirable and beloved to the soul. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Bilal *God be pleased with him* when it was time for the call to prayer: ‘Give us peace with it, o Bilal!’

He did not say, as some people do (in God is our refuge), ‘Let us be rid of it.’ This is because there are those who will say to you, ‘Prayer is like a mountain on my shoulders, and then I relax when it is done.’ We say to them: You relax because of it, not because you are done with it because you have stood before God, the Lawgiver; and as long as a person stands before their Lord, every difficulty becomes easy.

One of the devotees said, ‘I do not approach God with my servanthood, but rather, I approach Him with His Lordship; and so I find peace, for He is my Lord and the Lord of the worlds.’ If someone has a father to help him, he has no worries; so what of one who has a Lord to aid him and succour him?

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…for, God is surely with those who are patient in adversity.’ That is, He asks you to approach life with awareness of being in the company of God; for if you face all your problems with the company of one in whose power you trust, you will face all things bravely – so, what if you are in the company of God, He to whom everything in existence yields? Will anything dare to stand in your way when you are in the company of God?

Events do not fill people with panic and fear unless they have forgotten about the protection of their Lord, as for those who live in the protection of their Lord, Satan does not dare to approach them, for Satan is insidious; what does ‘insidious’ mean? If you forget God, he will dare to approach you, while if you remember God, he sneaks away and is enfeebled. He has no power, and he cannot enter into a battle with God *the Most High*, but rather, his battle is with the creatures of God who forget God and stray far from Him. The Noble Quran tells us that Satan has sworn by the Might of God that he will seduce all mankind into sin except those of them who are true servants to God (*Sad:* 82-83).

Since God *the Most High* is with those who are patient in adversity, we should yearn to be patient; how can we not yearn for that which means that God is with us? The True Lord *the Exalted* says in the Qudsi Hadith: ‘Son of Adam! I fell ill, and you did not visit Me! He will say, O Lord, how could I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds? He will say: Did you not know that my servant, So-and-so, was ill, and you did not visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him, you would have found Me with him?’(1)

A pious man once said, ‘O Lord, I am reluctant to ask You for cure and health, lest this prevents me from being with You.’ So, we must yearn to have patience because it means that we are always with God.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…for, God is surely with those who are patient in adversity.’ We want God to be always with us; and this verse means that one must never despair, whatever hardships life might bring.

وَلَا تَقُولُوا۟ لِمَن يُقْتَلُ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَمْوَٰتٌۢ ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَآءٌ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تَشْعُرُونَ ١٥٤

Do not say that those who are killed in God’s cause are
dead; they are alive, though you do not realize it [154]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 154)

The True Lord *the Most High* knows that the events in the course of the faith, and the enemies of the faith, will cause the Muslims much suffering, which will endanger not only their material possessions but also their lives. And so God *the Most High* wanted to give the believers immunity against these events, and so He counselled them to have steadfast patience and prayer so that they could face every event that disturbed them. He told them that things might go so far that some of them would be killed, and be martyred in God’s cause. He wanted to reassure them that martyrdom is the highest level of faith that a believer can reach in this world, and so He *the Exalted* said, ‘And do not say of those who are killed in the way of God, ‘They are dead….’ To be killed is the worst thing that can happen to a person. You could lose your possessions, or your children, or your earnings, or your health, but to lose your own life by being killed is the absolute loss. God called death a ‘calamity’ when He instructed the believers that they should have two witnesses to testify for the testament of the dying person if the calamity of death comes upon them while they are travelling far from home (*al-Ma'ida*: 106).

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih*

God *the Most High* wants the believers to understand that those who are killed in God's cause do not die, but rather God gives them a new kind of life which contains blessings which cannot be counted or reckoned. He *the Exalted* says, 'And do not say of those who are killed in the way of God, 'They are dead;' rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not.'

What distinguishes the life that they have? The sign of life for us is movement; so, what is the aspect of life for someone who is killed in God's cause? It is that the non-believers and enemies of Islam and who have killed him have not really taken his life from him because he goes on to a happier life, and his death takes him on to that which is better than what he left behind. Although the non-believers may have killed him, they have not taken anything from him, but rather, all they have done is send him on to a greater blessing than anything he had before. As for the believers, he will protect for them the teachings of God so that they continue to be conveyed to them until the end of time.

All of the battles in which the believers are martyred are a continuous chain of protection for the existence of faith. The greatness of life is not only that I live, but rather that I make it so that others can come after me. When the believer is martyred, he leaves his trace in existence in the form of the works of all who come after him. Every subsequent action to protect the faith is based on what he did, and inspired by it, and from his own faithful action, motivation is taken for another to fight and be martyred. So it is as though the action is continuous, and the work is continuous. As for the disbeliever, life ends for him when he dies, but another life is waiting for him when God raises all mankind, and then brings forth death itself to die; and once death is dead, there begins life without death, either in paradise or in hell.

God *the Most High* wants us to know that those who are killed in God's cause are alive with their Lord, and pass from the life of this world to the life of the Hereafter immediately, and do not have to lie dead in the isthmus zone until the Day of Resurrection as those who die ordinary deaths must. And because this life is reserved for the martyrs, God conceals its details from us because it is another order of life altogether, and it is unseen to us; and so He *the Exalted* says, '…but you perceive [it] not.' Since we cannot perceive it, it must be a life which is greater than our worldly life.

People suppose that the one who is martyred has lost his life, while in God's sight he has gained a new life. When we open the grave of a martyr, and we find that his body is how it is (dead before our eyes), we say, 'He is obviously dead!' You must be aware that the moment you opened his grave, he came from the realm of the unseen to the realm of the seen. God *the Most High* says that they are 'alive with their Lord,' not that they are alive with us in the realm of the seen. He is alive as long as he is in the realm of the unseen, but once you open his grave and expose him, you find that he is a body in a grave because he has returned from the realm of the unseen to the realm of the seen. As for the 'how' of this, we said before that the unseen has no 'how', and so you cannot know, and you do not need to know.

If we perform a surgical operation on a sick person, the doctor anaesthetises him so that he loses consciousness and sensation, but he does not simply make him die so that he can do the operation without him feeling any pain.

So, the matter itself is (does not feel), since you can perform the operation on it while the body is still alive, its blood flowing, its lungs breathing, yet it feels nothing. Rather, it is the conscious soul, which in this case is absent, that feels pain.

When there is some pain in your body and you sleep, the sensation of pain goes away, as though pain is not a matter of nerves, but rather of consciousness so that when you sleep, you go to another world which has different laws. Scientists have studied the brains of people while they sleep, and found that they can have dreams which last no more than seven seconds which they can then take hours to tell. When God *the Most High* says that they are alive with their Lord, we must understand that this life is drawn from God's power and is from Him. God *the Most High* wants to help us understand the notion of the Resurrection by likening it to sleep, and so He *the Exalted* says that it is He Who takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die He takes during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specified term (*az-Zumar:* 42).

So it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* gives the martyrs an eternal, everlasting life because they died in His cause. And since He said '…you perceive [it] not,’ do not attempt to imagine it with your feelings and sensations because you will never be able to envisage it. And the martyr must be killed in God’s cause, not for any worldly cause; it must be the result of an effort to make the Word of God uppermost.

وَلَنَبۡلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيۡءٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡخَوۡفِ وَٱلۡجُوعِ وَنَقۡصٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَمۡوَٰلِ
وَٱلۡأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ١٥٥

We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger,
and loss of property, lives, and crops. But [Prophet],
give good news to those who are steadfast [155]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 155)

We know that trials in themselves are not bad, but rather, what is bad is that you fail the trial. Every trial is a test and an assessment, and no one says that tests are always bad. Rather, they only become bad in the eyes of the one who cannot bear the hard work required to succeed; as for the one who makes effort and so passes with flying colours, the test was a good thing for him. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And We will surely test you…’ that is, we will give you a test to establish the challenge of the new religion.

Before this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* reminded us of the ultimate trial which is for a person to be martyred in God’s cause; and He told us the reward of the martyr which is to remain alive with his Lord. This served as an introduction to the mention of lesser trials; for the absolute trial – in our eyes – is to lose one’s life, and so the True Lord wants also to give the believers immunity from that which is less than the loss of life, an immunisation against danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, of lives and of labour’s fruits. Everything less than the loss of one’s own life is easy compared to it, and so those who do not lose their lives will be tried by that which is less than this, namely the trials of danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, and the loss of one’s fellow believers, and the loss of labour’s fruits. All of these things are beloved to man, and so religion comes and asks the believer to sacrifice some of what he loves; and these trials are part of what it means to preserve the religion.

The first of these trials is fear. Fear causes the soul to be disturbed and lose its wellbeing because of expectation that something unpleasant will happen. The soul has many faculties, and when it is faced with danger, it suffers a lack of harmony. Fear is an unnecessary weakness because if you want to brace yourself against some danger which frightens you, you must strive as hard as you can to keep this fear at bay; but if you give in to fear, you cannot face up to the danger with all your faculties because you will face it while some of your faculties are weak and confused.

Yet your spiritual faculties must be in equilibrium at times of danger so that you can draw from your spirit what you need to protect you from this danger. If your worry goes too far, you do nothing but help the source of this danger against yourself because you do meet the challenge with neither all your power nor all of your concentration.

So to the one who fears danger, we say: You are helping the source of your fear against yourself, and your fear and worry will not hold back this danger. You must concentrate on that which will hold this danger back, and forget about fearful things until they actually happen. Do not live in fear of danger before it comes to you because the trouble with people is that they live with calamities before they even occur, and so they make these calamities last even longer for themselves. A calamity might be due after a month, for example, so why extend the life of this calamity by fretting about it and dreading the time you will have to face it? If you leave it until it comes, you will lessen its span. You should know that when calamities come, the True Lord *the Most High,* in His mercy, sends His subtle kindness along with them. If you live with a calamity before it occurs, you thereby live with the calamity alone, without this subtle kindness that accompanies it; but if you remain steadfastly patient, and brace yourself to meet any difficulty, you will not need to live with the calamity without God’s subtle kindness.

The call to God and Islam was still in its infancy, and so it was necessary that the people’s faith be well prepared and strong. Danger was expected because the enemies of the religion were plotting and scheming against it, and this was a trial indeed. What is required from a believer when he faces the trial of danger? It is that he uses his fear to amass the means required to ward off this danger, and if he does this, he will have passed this trial successfully.

Now, we come to the second trial mentioned in this noble verse, which is hunger. Hunger is a powerful desire for food which is necessary for the preservation of life.

Out of His mercy, the True Lord *the Most High* placed within man the ability to store nutrients in their body at times of ease to save for times of hardship. A person stores the extra nutrient in the form of fat and flesh, and so when he is hungry and finds no food, he consumes this fat; and when there is no more fat, he uses the flesh; and when there is no more flesh, the body takes its sustenance from the bones so that the person can stay alive.

A person is composed of many different systems, the most important of which is the brain. As long as there is life in the cells of the brain, everything else in you is ready to work; but if these cells die, everything is over. This is why we see that sometimes people say that someone has died, and then they give him a certain treatment and he comes back to life. They thereby ignore the confirmed scientific fact that life only leaves a person when their brain ceases to function. And so a person's heart might stop, but the doctors treat him with electric shocks so that the heart begins to beat again, or they open his chest and massage his heart back to life. But once the brain cells are all dead, this is true death, and all the other parts of the body are at the service of their master, the brain.

It is amazing that the master of man, the brain, is at the summit of his body, and the same is the case for animals, whilst plants are controlled from their roots; so, the leaves wilt first, then the high branches deteriorate, then the trunk; and eventually the trunk dries up when no water comes to it, but if water comes to the roots at the right time, they spring into verdure once again, and the plant grows and life returns. The same is the case for the human brain. When a person's reserves of fat and flesh run out so that he draws sustenance from his bones, he can still be saved if his brain is nourished; and so the Arab woman, who did not know anatomy, famously said, describing what three years of famine did to them, 'We spent years when in one year our fat melted away, and in another our flesh was eradicated, and in the third our bones were destroyed.'

We must understand that hunger makes any kind of food seem fair to us; if you are hungry, every food is delicious. The thing that makes people cook all kinds of different foods is lack of hunger; a person wants to have something tasty, so he eats, but if he were truly hungry, any kind of food would be good for him. And so they say, 'A hungry man welcomes any food, and a tired man welcomes any bed.' When a person is tired, he will happily sleep on rough ground, and sleep very well; but if a person is not tired, he will keep tossing and turning in bed even if it has silken sheets.

So the trial of hunger is that you have to put up with only the bare essentials of nutrients that will keep you alive, eating it simply as fuel to keep you alive, not as a way of gaining pleasure. When a person takes sustenance just to keep himself alive, any food will do. And so God ordained fasting so that we could practise bearing the pangs of hunger because the believers might be forced in a battle to spend long hours without food, and if they are not used to bearing the pangs of hunger, they will weaken and tire.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants the believer to be completely prepared; the believer faces danger and so prepares to meet it, and he faces hunger and so takes as much (or as little) sustenance as he needs to survive.

And so you find that some societies deal with economic difficulties by living more simple lives, whilst other societies are incapable of doing so, and some people in these societies cannot live simply. So we say to those who lead lives of luxury: You are not preparing yourself properly to face the vicissitudes of time. I say as Ibrahim ibn Adham said:

If something becomes dear for me, I leave it be,
And so it is as cheap as can be when it is dear.

If something is very expensive and you leave it and do not buy it, it becomes the cheapest of all things because you do not lose any money by buying it.

The third trial is the loss of worldly goods which occurs because the believers busy themselves with the call to the faith. If they are distracted from worldly pursuits by having to face the enemy, they will be forced to sacrifice their work by which they earn their livelihoods, and so their worldly goods will be affected, for their efforts will be directed towards facing the enemies of God. Likewise, they may have to face the enemy on the battlefield, and some of them might be martyred. And last of all they will face a loss of labour's fruits, which are the goal of all worldly work. When the True Lord *the Most High* prepares us in this way, if we succeed therein, it will have been glad tidings for us because we will have borne with patience all these misfortunes. We will have borne fear, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, loss of lives, and loss of labour's fruits.

So, it is essential for the believer to endure all of these trials successfully so that he can face life with strength and vigour, and so he knows that life is just a journey, and so he will not be distracted by the journey from the journey's end. And so the True Lord *the Most High* gives their characteristic identification in the next verse:

ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَٰبَتۡهُم مُّصِيبَةٞ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيۡهِ رَٰجِعُونَ (١٥٦)

those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return' [156]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 156)

A calamity (*musiba*) is something that causes one difficulty and pain, and is derived in Arabic from the word isaba, which means to hit a target. The believer should accept calamities with certitude that, however painful they are, the reward for them will be commensurate with them. And so when the disbelievers were happy to see calamites befall the believers at a certain battle, God *the Most High* revealed to the believers the true words: 'Say, "Never can anything befall us except what God has decreed for us!"' (*at-Tawba:* 51). That is, say, o believers, to these foolish disbelievers: Nothing happens to us except that which God has destined.

Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* instructed them to say, '…what God has decreed for us' (*at-Tawba:* 51), that is, the matter would be counted for them, in their favour, and they would be well rewarded for it by God. The True Lord *the Most High* did not have them say 'what God has decreed on us,' because if this were the case, it would mean that it would be requital and punishment from God.

If a calamity befalls a person, either he has a hand in it, in which case he cannot complain because he is the one who has brought it upon himself, or else, he has no hand in the calamity, and it has been caused by someone else, for example, and in this case he should look for the cause of it; was it just, or unjust? If it was just, then his misdeed has been expiated by it, and if it was unjust, then God will give him retribution from the one who wronged him. Because of this, the believer wins either way.

So the believer should expect every calamity to bring him some kind of good; and every believer should evaluate himself sincerely: ‘Does God owe me anything? I belong to God, and He owes me nothing, and so whatever He does to me, He does to that which He owns.’ Anyone who finds this far-fetched, let him refuse to accept any calamity, and say to it: ‘Do not afflict me.’ He will not be able to ward off any calamity like this. As long as we cannot prevent calamities and accidents from happening, we should accept them as believers; for the True Lord *the Most High* wants to honour us and give us esteem by the connection that exists between us and Him, so He tells us to say, ‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.’ By saying this, we ascribe ownership of ourselves to God, and we accept what happens to us. Here we must give an example of this (and God is beyond compare): Have you ever seen anyone in their right mind deliberately destroy their own possessions? No, I have never seen any. The one who owns something will do everything he can to keep his possessions in good condition, even if people from the outside imagine that he is doing them harm. So what about God *the Most High* and we are His possessions? He *the Exalted* never exposes His possessions to harm, but rather, He maintains them with wisdom and rectitude.

‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.’ That is, we are God’s possessions, and we shall go back to Him; and even if we were afflicted with calamities in this world because of injustice done to us by someone, we will be compensated for the injustice done to us when we return to God. So we belong to God in the first place, and we are headed for God in the end when we return to Him, and so He has possession from sides, beginning and end. So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that when any calamity afflicts us, we should say: ‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return,’ and he added that we should also say: ‘O God, reward me for my calamity, and recompense me with that which is better than it.’ If you say this when any calamity afflicts you, you will certainly find that goodness will come to you after it; and even if one forgets to say this when the calamity occurs, and then remembers it and says it later, he will be rewarded for it as though he said it at the time of the calamity.

There is a story about Umm Salama *God be pleased with her* that upon the death of her husband Abu Salama God *be pleased with him*, to whom she was completely devoted, she grieved for him severely, and so someone said to her, ‘Say what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us.’ She said, ‘What did he teach you?’ They replied, ‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return. O God, reward me for my calamity, and recompense me with that which is better than it.’ She said it, and then after her mourning period had finished the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked for her hand in marriage. It was said to her, ‘Did you find better than Abu Salama, or not?’ She replied, ‘I never imagined that this could happen!’

So whenever a person is beset by a calamity, he should say, ‘Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return. O God, reward me for my calamity, and recompense me with that which is better than it.’(1)

And what will be the state of those who make this supplication? The True Lord *the Most High* says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ صَلَوَٰتٞ مِّن رَّبِّهِمۡ وَرَحۡمَةٞۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُهۡتَدُونَ ١٥٧

These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord,
and it is they who are rightly guided [157]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 157)

See the ultimate end to which God directs us so that we can take forth His call, and protect the way of the truth, and bring down the power of the spreaders of falsehood: these are goals, but they are not the ultimate goal; the ultimate goal is that we do all this to obtain God’s blessings and grace in the Hereafter. So, the ultimate goal of all faith and all action is to gain God’s Pleasure and Grace. As Sheikh Sayyid Qutb *God rest his soul* said, ‘Do not let anything distract you from trying to attain God’s blessings, graces, and benedictions – even the struggle to support the religion.’ This means that the struggle to support the religion is a way to obtain the blessings and graces of your Lord, and anything apart from this is a way to reach the goal; and the goal of the believer is to be one of those who are included in God's words: 'Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy, and it is those who are the [rightly] guided.'

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim, beginning with the words ‘No servant says, when beset by a calamity, “Indeed to God we belong, and to Him we shall return…”’*

We know that the Arabic word *salat* (rendered as 'blessing' here) literally means prayer. People make *salat*, the angels make *salat;* and God too makes *salat,* as He *the Exalted* says that He makes *salat* for us, and His angels also (He bestows His blessings upon us, and His angels pray for us) (*al-Ahzab:* 43).

We all live with God's graces. Even the disbeliever lives on this earth by the grace of God, and he obtains the means of his livelihood by the grace of God, and all of the gifts and beneficial things by means of which he lives come to him by the grace of God. The believer obtains the beneficial things of this world by the grace of God, and then God increases the grace for him by blessing him and giving him inner peace. Inner peace is the supreme gift, and those who live this life with the assurance that they will go on to a better life after it, thereby have an immense inner peace.

So, *salat* from God means the bestowal of grace and favour ;

And *salat* from the angels means supplication for forgiveness ;

And *salat* from the believers means supplication.

And when you pray for goodness, mercy, and blessings for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, you are thereby praying for yourself. Why? That is because every time the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is raised in status, this also applies to his community and to the whole world.

Who is it that will intercede before God at the Resurrection so that God will hasten the reckoning of His creatures? It will be the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, every goodness that comes to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* also comes to his community, and so when you pray for him you are also praying for yourself. When you send one prayer for him, God sends ten prayers upon you. Is this not good for you? 'Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy, and it is those who are the [rightly] guided.' The ones who are guided to the right path are those who adhere to the way which leads directly to the goal which is blessings and grace from their Lord. You are now enjoying the blessings of God by the means God created; and in the Hereafter, you will find enjoyment, by God’s leave, in the blessings of God and the meeting with God.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّ ٱلصَّفَا وَٱلْمَرْوَةَ مِن شَعَآئِرِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَمَنْ حَجَّ ٱلْبَيْتَ أَوِ ٱعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ
عَلَيْهِ أَن يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا ۚ وَمَن تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٥٨﴾

***Safa* and *Marwa* are among the rites of God, so for those who make major or minor pilgrimage to the House it is no offence to circulate between the two. Anyone who does good of his own accord will be rewarded, for God rewards good deeds, and knows everything [158] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 158)**

As-Safa and Al-Marwa are two small hills known to those who have visited the sacred sites. As for those who have not gone, I ask that God allow them to see them as well; and when they see them with their own eyes, they will have absolute certainty. These are the two hills around which our Lady Hajar *peace be upon her* walked searching for water for her son Ishmael *peace be upon him* after Abraham *peace be upon him* left them at the Sacred House of God. I ask you by God, what would a woman think if her husband left her with her suckling baby in a place bereft of food and water? Upon this, Hajar *peace be upon her* said to her husband Abraham *peace be upon him*, ‘In whose care do you leave us? Has God commanded you to do this?’

Our master Abraham *peace be upon him* replied, ‘He has.’ And so she said, ‘Then He will not desert us.’ She found sufficiency for herself with the Creator from having need of His creation, and she only uttered these words under Divine inspiration. This was a primary matter of faith, which also came from the sacred character of the land in which she stood, as Abraham *peace be upon him* prayed to his Lord, saying that he has settled some of his offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to God’s Sacred House so that they might devote themselves to prayer (*Ibrahim:* 37).

When you read the words ‘no arable land,’ know that this means that there was no water; for where there is water, there is vegetation. Water is the basic source of life; and if a mother and her baby are without water, what will their condition be?

The child became thirsty, and so she wanted to search for a spring of water, or a bird landing somewhere to indicate the presence of water, or a caravan passing by who could give her water. And so she set out for the highest place, leaving the valley floor and climbing Mount As-Safa; but she found nothing, and so she went over to Mount Al-Marwa on the other side and climbed it, but found nothing. She continued to run between As-Safa and Al-Marwa until she had done so seven times. We can imagine the state she was in, a woman of her age, alone as she was, having no water. She must have been as thirsty as her baby. But when she had no more energy, she gave up and returned to where she had left the baby.

Had her running between As-Safa and Al-Marwa paid off, and had she found water, we would have said that it was her effort alone which brought her water. But she herself had said before, ‘Then He will not desert us,’ and by saying this she looked to the Creator of means, not the means themselves. Had He given her water as a result of the means she utilised, namely her search for water, she would have had nothing to show the truth of her words ‘Then He will not desert us.’ The True Lord *the Most High* wanted her seven passes between the two hills to be fruitless so that she returned to her baby and then found water right there at his feet. And so Hajar’s certitude was proved correct when she trusted that God would not desert her. God wanted to say to her, ‘Indeed I would not desert you; it will not be by means of your running, but rather, by means of the foot of your baby boy: he will strike the earth with it, and water will spring forth.’ And so the baby’s striking the earth with his foot, was not an ordinary means, but rather, God wanted it to be the means so that causality would remain, even if it would ordinarily not be enough.

When Hajar found the water at the foot of her baby, she saw with certainty that God indeed would not desert her. So this passing between the hills remained as one of the symbolic rites of the pilgrimage to God’s Sacred Mosque, to preserve a person’s faith in the Creator of means, whilst not ignoring the means themselves so that, he would approach all his actions with faith in the Creator of the means. And so we must be clear on the difference between putting trust in God (*tawakkul*) and indolence (*tawaakul*). To trust in God is an act of the heart, not the body, whilst indolence means simply to be inactive (while saying or pretending to be putting trust in God). There is no place for indolence in Islam, but rather the body should work, whilst the heart trusts in God. This was how Hajar *peace be upon her* practised trust in God; she acted, and trusted in God at the same time, and so God gave her what she needed by the simplest of means, by her baby's striking the earth with his foot, and this remained as one of the symbolic rites of the pilgrimage namely seven circuits between As-Safa and Al-Marwa.

But when people forgot about the worship of God, and idolatry entered the Arabian Peninsula, they made an idol on Mount As-Safa called 'Isaf', and another on Mount Al-Marwa named 'Na'ila', and so they would go between Isaf and Na'ila, not between As-Safa and Al-Marwa. In doing so, they turned their worship from pure monotheism into unclean idolatry.

And so when Islam came, God did not want the believers to pray towards the Sacred Mosque until it had been cleansed and devoted to God Alone; and likewise, when some of the believers went to the *Ka'ba*, they were reluctant to pass between As-Safa and Al-Marwa while the idols Isaf and Na'ila remained standing on them. It is as though they wanted to cut off every link to the old ignorant ways of worship, and they were too proud of their new faith to pass between Isaf and Na'ila. And so God *the Most High* revealed His words: 'Indeed, As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols set up by God; so, whoever performs pilgrimage to the House or performs *'Umra* - there is no blame upon him for going round about them. And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, God is appreciative and Knowing.' That is, do not be reluctant to do this because you will pass between As-Safa and Al-Marwa, not between Isaf and Na'ila as the polytheistic idolaters used to do; so, the action here was determined by the intention behind it.

The intention of the first passing between the mountains by Hajar *peace be upon her* was exercising belief in God *the Most High* and practising the use of means at the same time; but idolatry changed pure faith into vile disbelief. And so when they visited the Sacred Mosque, the Muslims had to invoke the original intention as they passed between As-Safa and Al-Marwa. In Islam, we yield to the command of the Commander. He tells us to kiss the Black Stone, and at the same time He tells us to pelt another stone, symbolising Satan, with pebbles. So the true significance is in the intention, not the outer form of the action, and the true significance is the obedience of God's command. It is as though with this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* is saying to the believers: The idolaters worshipped Isaf and Na'ila, but you should cast this from your minds, and proceed to As-Safa and Al-Marwa; for As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols set up by God, not the symbols of idolatry, but it is only the error of the idolaters that has caused them to be linked with the idols of Isaf and Na'ila. By placing Isaf on As-Safa and Na'ila on Al-Marwa, the idolaters wanted to give sanctity to these idols. If As-Safa and Al-Marwa had not already been sacred sites, they would not have put their statues on top of them, and they would not have put their idols in the *Ka'ba*. This proves that these sites were sacred long before the idols were placed there; they were trying to give Isaf and Na'ila sacred status by placing them on As-Safa and Al-Marwa.

After explaining to the believers that As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols He set up, the True Lord *the Most High* then affirms that the occupant of a place does not make that place impure. This is proved by the fact that once the faith was destined to become victorious, all the idols were broken and removed from the *Ka'ba*, and the House became pure; and when the believers were reluctant to perform an action which had existed at the time of the pagan ignorance, the True Lord *the Most High* reassured them by saying to them, 'Indeed, As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols set up by God….'

The word *Safa* literally means 'smooth stone,' and indeed it was smooth because of all the people who had touched it over the years. It is also said that the name *As-Safa* is derived from the Divine election (*istifa*) of Adam *peace be upon him*. And it is said that the name Al-Marwa is named after the woman (Arabic (*mar'a*)), namely Eve *peace be upon her*; but these are just stories, and so we need not pay them much attention because knowing it, does not bring any good and being ignorant of it, does not harm. What is important for us is that it was the place where Hajar *peace be upon her* ran to and fro searching for water for her son. The True Lord *the Most High* made striding between them one of His symbols, meaning the signs of worship connected with certain places so that, one place is for circumambulation, another for walking to and fro, another for flinging pebbles at stones, and another is the site of the sacred shrine (*mash'ar*) of Muzdalifa.

The meaning of (*mash'ar*) is a place where a specific act of worship is offered, and since As-Safa and Al-Marwa are both also places, they are described as being '…among the symbols set up by God…' (*sha'a'ir* Allah). So '…whoever performs pilgrimage to the House or performs *'umra* - there is no blame upon him for going round about them….' The rites of *hajj* (greater pilgrimage) and *'umra* (lesser pilgrimage) can either be obligatory or supererogatory. If the Muslim performs the greater and lesser pilgrimage once, he has fulfilled his obligation; but this does not stop him from performing the pilgrimages again, and this is a supererogatory act which will be accepted, God willing, and rewarded by God.

When you say 'there is no blame upon you if you do such-and-such,' this means that if you do it, you will not be sinning, and that it is not a mistake to do it, but it is also not obligatory to do it. This has made some people imagine that walking between As-Safa and Al-Marwa is not one of the obligatory acts of the pilgrimage. To these people, we say: This verse came for a specific purpose, which is that they were reluctant to walk in the same place where the idolaters walked, and so God *the Most High* said to them, '…there is no blame upon him for going round about them….'

The negation of wrong does not mean that if you do not do it, it is acceptable. No; rather, God *the Most High* was responding to a situation in which they were reluctant to do it. God's words '…going round about them….' require us to pause for a moment. The pilgrim walks back and forth between As-Safa and Al-Marwa, so, why does God use the word *yattawwaf* for this, which literally means to walk around in a circle?

In order to understand this, we must explain the meaning of the Arabic verbs *tafa, jala,* and *dara*. *Tafa* means to walk in a circle around something; so, what circle is there between As-Safa and Al-Marwa so that the True Lord *the Most High* would express it with this verb? When someone walks in circle, they begin in a certain point and then return to the same point; and so any point on a circle can be considered both, the beginning and the end of it, and any movement that starts and ends in the same place makes a circle.

It is true that the one who goes back and forth between As-Safa and Al-Marwa does not make a perfect circle, but he does go from As-Safa to

Al-Marwa, and then back to As-Safa, and then back to Al-Marwa again, and so it becomes a kind of circling. Let us take another example from our ordinary lives: a policeman who patrols to guard the streets and houses at night might go around the whole town, or he might stick to a single street which is his jurisdiction. This walking around the street from one end to another and then back several times is called 'walking around' (*tawaf*), and this explains why God *the Most High* uses the verb *yattawwaf*, that is, to walk between them several times from beginning to end.

And so we see that to walk between As-Safa and Al-Marwa is one of the symbolic rites of the greater and lesser pilgrimages, and we see that the obligatory performance of the greater and lesser pilgrimage is essential once, after which it is good to repeat it as a supererogatory act. '…And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, God is appreciative and Knowing'. These words lead us to understand that the One who thanks has derived some good from the one He thanks: so what good does the True Lord *the Most High* derive from repeated pilgrimages?

When the believer fulfils what God *the Most High* has charged him with, he merely fulfils his obligation; but when he adds more than he is bound to out of love for the rite itself, God thanks him for this additional effort. So gratitude from God *the Most High* means that a blessing will come. When the True Lord *the Most High* commands His servant to do a certain action, the faithful servant is bound to do this; and if the servant then adds more of the same action that God has charged him with, this indicates his love and yearning for God's commands; and if he loves and yearns for God's commands without God imposing it on him, and not only performs them, but also loves to do so, this deserves gratitude from God – and for God to 'thank' a servant means for Him to give him untold blessings.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (2)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (2)

The Chapter of

al-Baqara

Continued

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَآ أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَٱلْهُدَىٰ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّٰهُ
لِلنَّاسِ فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ۙ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ ٱللَّٰعِنُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

As for those who hide the proofs and guidance We send
down, after We have made them clear to people in the
Scripture, God rejects them, and so do others [159]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 159)

When the True Lord *the Most High* puts forth this matter, He tells us what the requital will be for those who conceal that which God has revealed. Some of the People of the Book suppressed the evidence of truth which God revealed in the scriptures they had in their possession, evidence of the truth of Muhammad's Prophethood; and this suppression would cause evil to thrive and spread, and every time the world suffered this evil, it would curse them; and to 'curse' here means to expel and exclude from God's mercy.

The True Lord *the Most High* is telling those who believe in our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that this requital of denunciation and curse is not for those people specifically, but rather, it includes all those who suppress the evidence of truth that God has sent down. So this is both a description of the action already done by some People of the Book and also a warning to those who believe in Islam not to suppress God's evidence of truth; otherwise, they will risk the same fate as the others, which is to be rejected.

The word 'curse' (*al Baqara*: 159). This clarifies for us that this rejection from God will be in both this world and the Hereafter, and that all the people will reject them. In the verse, we are currently examining, we find that the curse is even more comprehensive because '…those who curse' means both human beings and all other creatures, as though everything in existence will share in their curse. For example, if God withheld rain from a people because of their sins, the plants will curse them because they, too, will be deprived of water, and the animals will curse them because they will be deprived of water, and the whole place will curse them because they will have contravened the action of all places, which is to praise God. As for the curse in the Hereafter, where plants and animals have no part to play, the rejection will be from God and the angels and all of humanity, meaning everyone from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of time. But these will include both disbelievers and believers, and so how can it be that the curse comes from a disbeliever, who is himself cursed?

We say: In this world, there are those who deceive other people about religious matters, and there are those who allow themselves to be deceived. And so once everything comes into the open in the Hereafter, and the deceivers are revealed and fall into the hands of those whom they had deceived, at this point, the ones who were followed, will disown their followers, and the deceiver will disown those whom he had deceived, and those who were deceived will disown those who deceived them; and every time a group of those who allowed themselves to be misled are cast into the fire, they will curse the ones who deceived them; and every time a group of deceivers are cast into the fire, they will curse the ones who allowed themselves to be deceived, and so they will exchange curses. The True Lord *the Most High* says that those who were followed would come to disown their followers (*al-Baqara*: 166). And He says that every time a group of them enters the fire, it will curse its fellow group (*al-A'raf*: 38).

So, the disbelievers will reject one another, just as this is the case in this world. Those who disbelieve in God's teachings and act with corruption and injustice are cursed by those who follow God's teachings, and they are cursed by the ones they treat unjustly; and then again, they in turn curse the one who treats them with injustice, and he curses them back, and so all humanity curses the evildoers.

So, cursing by angry and violent banishment is different from the legal disciplinary banishment, to which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sentenced the deserters at the battle of Tabuk. They called the battle of Tabuk 'the battle of Hardship,' because it was fraught with all kinds of difficulties: Tabuk was very far from Medina; and there were not enough mounts to carry all the warriors so that ten men would take turns riding a single mount; and there were also meagre supplies so that they had to eat dates ridden with maggots, and they ate(1) fat, and lard, and rotten food; and water, too, was scarce so that , they were forced to slaughter camels to drink the water stored in their humps and bellies; and the weather too, was harsh, and extremely hot. All of these conditions were very difficult to endure, and meant that only those who were sincere in their faith went out to the battle.

That battle was a test and a trial of faith for the people, and some of them gave in to their misgivings and remained in Medina. One of them then said, ‘Will I remain here in shade, while the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is in the glare of the sun? By God, this will never be!’ Then, he stood and set off to catch up with the Muslim army. Another of them had an orchard which gave him shade and fruits, and he looked to his orchard and said, ‘Is it you that has prevented me from going out with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*? By God, you will no longer be in my possession after today, but I will offer you to God’s cause!’ A third was sitting in his house with his beautiful wife amidst his trees and crops, and he said: ‘Will I sit here with shade and palm dates, and a fine woman, while the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is in the hot glare of the sun? By God, this shall never be!’ And he saddled his horse and set out to the desert to catch up with the Muslim army.

When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* returned victorious, those who had not gone out with him sought his pardon on the grounds that they had not possessed the means to fight such as mounts, shields, swords, and arrows. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* accepted their excuses, but left their inner secret intentions to God, except for the three who told the truth, saying: ‘O Messenger of God, we were never richer than at the moment we failed to go out with you: we possessed the means to fight, and the mounts.’

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* decreed that no one should speak to them or have any dealings with them. Two of them remained in their houses, namely Hilal ibn ‘Umayya and Marara ibn Ar-Rabi‘, while

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(1) We find that this is still the case now with the training of elite troops in armies. They are trained to get used to eating anything they find of food or drink to stay alive in case they should find themselves without supplies of food and drink in order to preserve their lives and defend their nations.

Ka‘b ibn Malik would go out to see the people, but no one would speak to him, and he would go to pray with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and try to catch the Prophet’s eye and greet him, but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would not reply, and would lower his eyes and avoid him, and Ka‘b said later that he would look to the Messenger of God’s lips to see if he returned the greeting silently or not.

Why was this? The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to show the people the correct way to discipline, banish, and chastise someone. Life became miserable for the three of them, and Ka‘b went to his cousin Abu Qatada and climbed his wall because he knew he would not be admitted if he knocked on the door. But even after he climbed over the wall, his cousin would not look at him, and so he pleaded with him: ‘I ask in the Name of God, I ask in the Name of God, I ask in the Name of God!’ But his cousin would not answer him, and so he said to him, ‘You know that I love the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*!’ But his cousin would not answer him, and so he kept on pleading with him to tell him when he would be pardoned, and Abu Qatada said: ‘God and His Messenger know best.’

After forty nights of this banishment had passed, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* intensified the punishment and told the three men – by means of an envoy he sent to them – to stay away even from their wives. The banishment entered a new sphere of society, that between a man and his wife. Ka‘b asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* if he should divorce his wife, and the Messenger answered, ‘No, just do not go near her.’ Some people suggested to Ka‘b that he or his wife should go to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and ask permission for her to remain with him to serve him, as Hilal ibn ’Umayya’s wife had done so, and had obtained permission from the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to stay and serve her old enfeebled husband. But Ka‘b said, ‘By God, I will not; for when Hilal’s wife went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and He said, ‘He should not go near you,’ she replied, ‘By God, O Messenger of God, Hilal cannot do anything by himself!’ And so he allowed her to remain to serve her husband; but I am a young man, and I fear that if I ask the Messenger of God, he will not give me this right.’

So, this is the nature of the punishment of disciplinary banishment, and it is not the same as an outright expulsion from the faith which is proved by the fact that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* made those he banished subject to commands which he issued to them; and then, ten days later the glad tidings of pardon came when the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His word that He has turned in His mercy towards the three who had been left behind, until in the end – after the earth, despite all its vastness, had become too narrow for them and their souls had become utterly constricted – they came to know with certainty that there is no refuge from God other than by returning to Him; and thereupon, He turned again to them in His mercy so that they might repent: for, indeed, God alone is the Acceptor of repentance and the Dispenser of Grace (*at-Tawba:* 118).

And so the True Lord *the Most High* does not close the door, but rather He leaves it open for people, even for those who disbelieve, and even for those who conceal the truth, so they should not think that their past disbelief, or concealment, or failure to support the truth, have closed the door on them, or have come between them and their Lord; and so the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُواْ وَأَصۡلَحُواْ وَبَيَّنُواْ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَتُوبُ عَلَيۡهِمۡۚ وَأَنَا ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ١٦٠

unless they repent, make amends, and declare the truth.
I will certainly accept their repentance:
I am the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful [160]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 160)

That is, they announce their repentance which is originally an inner matter, and then they put right what they had made wrong, and then they make known to the people the truth which they had suppressed. The condition of repentance is to give back to people what is rightfully theirs; and so those who have concealed the truth, must reveal it. Concealment of truth is not only a matter between a person and their Lord, but it also harms other people. Concenring the opening of the door of repentance to His servants, God *the Most High* says that He turns to them in His mercy so that they might repent (*at-Tawba:* 118).

The word ‘repent’ (*taba*) means to go back to God; when a servant repents, he returns to his Lord seeking forgiveness for his sins and errors; and when

God turns to a servant, this means that He accepts their repentance. And so after it appeared that they would be punished, God pardons them and does not punish them. So repentance is to turn back to God, and when God's turning was placed before the repentance of the servants in His words 'He turns to them in His mercy so that they might repent' (*at-Tawba:* 118); this meant that the True Lord *the Most High* established repentance and made it possible in order to open the door of return to Him. So repentance has three stages:

The first stage is that God made repentance possible.

The second stage is that the servant repents.

The third stage is that God accepts this repentance.

And all of this means to turn away from disobedience and sin.

So if a person commits a sin, he must rectify this sin in the same way he committed it: if he sins in secret, it is sufficient that he repents in secret; but if he violates one of God's laws publicly, we say to him: It is not right for you to disobey God publicly in front of the people, thereby giving people a bad example which incites them too, to sin, and then, for you to repent secretly between you and God; rather, your repentance, too, must be public. And so the popular expression says, 'You punched me in the street, but you make up with me in the alley!'

To him who violates one of God's laws in front of the people, we say: You must also announce your repentance in front of the people. And so we avoid applying penalties where there is any doubt, but if a person boasts about the sins he has committed, we cannot leave him alone. For example, if four witnesses see a person committing a major sin like adultery, and has been brazen enough to allow four people to witness his sin, does it make sense for us to say that we should not apply the penalty because there is doubt? No; he has violated the law in public, and so he should be punished with the proper legal penalty. But as for those who repent, and put right what they had wronged, and make known what they had concealed, their reward is that God will accept their repentance.

Out of His kindness to man, God made it possible that they could repent when they feel they have sinned, and made it a matter of one action from the one who repents and another from the One who accepts this repentance, namely

God *the Most High*; and so He said, '…those who repent…' and '…those, I shall accept their repentance….' This is so, that when a person sins and repents, he will not feel that this is an irredeemable matter. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…those, I shall accept their repentance, and I am the Acceptor of repentance, the Merciful.' He will accept the repentance of all who repent of their sins, and will accept the repentance of all sinners; for He is *At-Tawwab* ('the Acceptor of Repentance'), which, in Arabic, is an intensive form of the adjective.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَمَاتُواْ وَهُمۡ كُفَّارٌ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ لَعۡنَةُ ٱللَّهِ
وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ أَجۡمَعِينَ ١٦١

As for those who disbelieve and die as disbelievers,
God rejects them, as do the angels and all people [161]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 161)

They are those who are firm in their refusal to repent; and so their reward is curse and rejection by God, and by the angels, and by all men. God *the Most High* then continues:

خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۖ لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنۡهُمُ ٱلۡعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمۡ يُنظَرُونَ ١٦٢

They will remain in this state of rejection: their punishment
will not be lightened, nor will they be reprieved [162]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 162)

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the suffering of the disbelievers in hell, and the duration of this suffering, and then indicates that this duration will be eternal, this tells us that there will be severe eternal suffering in Hhell. Because God's Mercy outstrips His wrath in the matter of suffering, He never mentions the eternalness of hell except in the chapter of al-Jinn, where He says that for him who rebels against God and His Messenger – indeed, the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide for all eternity (*al-Jinn:* 23). Since there is a specification here, this means that every general statement about his matter is governed by this. The fact that the True Lord *the Most High* does not generally use the phrase ‘for all eternity’ (*al-Jinn:* 23) when referring to the suffering of hell indicates that His mercy outstrips His wrath even in the matter of the decree of suffering. A problem has arisen because of a superficial understanding of the words of the True Lord *the Most High* when He describes events on the Day of Judgement when not a soul will speak unless by His permission; and of the hosts that are gathered for Judgement, some will be wretched and some, happy. As for those who will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, they will be in the fire where they will have nothing but moans and sobs; to abide therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless your Lord wills otherwise; for, indeed, your Lord is a Doer of whatever He wills. As for those who will have been blessed with happiness, they will be in paradise, to abide therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless your Lord wills otherwise – as an unceasing gift (*az-Zumar:* 105-108).

The True Lord *the Most High* speaks here about the Day of Resurrection and of the wretched and happy amongst mankind, and of how the wretched amongst them will be in hell where they will moan and sob; and we can imagine how they will breathe in the midst of the fire in its choking flames. A person breathes so he can take in air, but how can he take it from fire? This is indeed grievous suffering. And the denizens of hell will remain therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure.

Some superficial people may say, ‘God places the wretched in Hell for as long as the heavens and earth endure, and then says the same thing about those who find happiness in paradise.’ We say to them: The heavens and earth which exist now are different from the heavens and earth which will exist in the Hereafter. The heavens and earth of this world are the means by which we live, while in the Hereafter we will not eat by any means, but rather directly by the Creator of all means, and we will live in the Hereafter by the word ‘Be!’, not by means of farming, planting, and rain. The True Lord *the Most High* will replace the heavens and the earth on the Last Day; and this is what we gather from the words of the True Lord *the Most High* about the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens (*Ibrahim:* 48).

In light of this statement, we understand that what is meant here is the new heavens and earth which replace the old ones. Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* qualifies His statement about the eternal suffering of the wretched by saying, ‘unless your Lord wills otherwise’ (*az-Zumar:* 107). It is as though the eternal suffering of the wretched in hell will be ended by the Will of God; for the wretched are not only the disbelievers, but also some of them will be the sinful believers, and these wretched sinful believers will suffer in hell commensurate with the severity of their sins; when the Hour rises and the requital comes, they will enter hell and receive their requital, but once they have paid their due they will be taken out. And so this duration spent in Hell will come to an end, and so the meaning of the words ‘unless your Lord wills otherwise’ (*az-Zumar:* 107) means that they will remain in Hell until a specified time.

With respect to paradise, the exception refers to the beginning. Why is this? It is as such because the believer who disobeys God will not enter paradise from the beginning, but will rather have to spend time in Hell before entering paradise, and so eternity in paradise for him will have something missing from the beginning. As for the wretched, eternity in hell for them will have something missing from the end. So the words ‘unless your Lord wills otherwise’ (*az-Zumar:* 107) mean that the disobedient believer will not enter paradise from the moment the Afterlife begins. The word ‘unless’ here is an exception of time from its beginning with respect to the happy ones, or an exception from the end of the time with respect to the disobedient wretched ones. So there is no contradiction although a superficial understanding makes it appear as though there is.

Coming back to the verse, we are currently discussing, and as for God’s words: ‘…the punishment will not be lightened for them…’, this means that when a person is punished for something, the repetition of his punishment might make him grow accustomed to it; but in reality, the punishment remains severe for him, and the passage of time will not make it lighter. God *the Most High* then says, ‘…nor will they be reprieved.’ We know that to grant reprieve means to leave alone, and so here it means that they will not be given a respite from their torment. Or, it may mean that they will not be looked at (the Arabic word used in the verse *yunzharun* supports both meanings); and there is another verse which suggests this meaning, when God *the Most High* says that He will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, and nor will He purify them (*al-'Imran*: 77). This is because to look at someone suggests a kind of care. Why does God *the Most High* say, '…nor will they be reprieved' (looked upon)? It is because you might look at something automatically without meaning to, but this look does not mean that you care about the thing. Yet He *the Exalted* will not look at them at all because to look at them, might indicate some kind of pity. And so they will not be looked at, meaning they will never be looked at, as though they will be completely ignored. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَإِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٦٣﴾

Your God is the one God: there is no god except
Him, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [163]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 163)

'…Your God is one God;' This is the foundational principle of all truth. The words 'your God' mean that the Deity is One God, and the fact is that the True God existed before disbelief did.

'…There is no God but He…' is the second truth because due to certain people's heedlessness some others tended to turn to other 'gods. 'God's saying *ilah wahid* ('One God') means that there is no second god. It is worth our while here to discuss the difference between the Arabic words *wahid* and *ahad* (both usually translated as 'one'). The difference is that *wahid* means that He has no second, there is none like Him, while *ahad* means that He is not made up of parts. And so we cannot say that God is a 'whole' or that He is 'holistic' because the word 'whole' is the opposite of the word 'part,' and the word 'holistic' is the opposite of the word 'partial,' and 'whole' means something which is made up of parts or systems. God is Unique in His Oneness, and He *the Exalted* is Transcendent above everything, and beyond all compare, but I will give this example to illustrate, not to compare: A chair is a 'whole' because it is made of wood, nails, glue, and paint; can we say that the wood is a 'chair,' or the nails, or the glue, or the paint? No. So each part is not considered the total, but rather, the total is the sum of all the parts.

The word 'holistic' can be used of many things, but every individual part of each one can also represent the total. The word 'man' is a total word, whose parts are the individuals like Muhammad, Zaid, Bakr, ‘Umar and Khalid; and we can also say that Zaid is a man, and this is correct, and we can say that ‘Umar is a man, and this is also correct. So, God *the Most High* is not ‘holistic’ because He is Unique (*Wahid*)*;* and He is not ‘whole’ because He is One (*Ahad*).

The foundational principle of religion is: ‘And your God is one God; there is no God but He….’ The Quran does not use negation by saying ‘there is no god but God’ unless human heedlessness has ascribed godhood to any but God, or has ascribed it to God but to others as well as Him. The Quran negates this, and says, ‘…there is no God but He, the Compassionate, the Merciful.’ Besides God, there exists nothing except in His blessings and those whom He blesses.

Apart from God, there is nothing but a blessing, or one to whom blessings are given, and these are all gifts from the Most Merciful, and gifts from the Dispenser of Mercy. As long as everything except God is either a blessing or a blessed one, no blessing can be described as a god, nor can any recipient of blessings be called a god; for to receive blessings means that another has given these blessings to one as blessings are gifts and the one who receives them has been gifted them; and something which is a gift or is gifted cannot be a god, but rather, those who are infatuated with such things are only infatuated with means and causes, while the True Lord *the Most High* is the Originator of all causes.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention to the things which serve this essential principle, and so He invites us to look at the universe and reflect on all the blessings we find therein. After this, o you whom God has blessed with these blessings, if you find anyone who can claim all this for himself, then give it to him and leave it to him, so ascribe blessings to their true Maker, God. Be careful not to ascribe God’s blessings to anyone but Him because God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘I am the most self-sufficient above any need for partnership, and so if anyone offers a work to others alongside Me, I will leave it for those partners of his.’(1)

So the True Lord draws our attention to the universe, saying:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim and Ibn Maja.*

إِنَّ فِى خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ وَٱلْفُلْكِ ٱلَّتِى
تَجْرِى فِى ٱلْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنفَعُ ٱلنَّاسَ وَمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مِن مَّآءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ
ٱلْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ دَآبَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ ٱلرِّيَٰحِ
وَٱلسَّحَابِ ٱلْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٦٤﴾

In the creation of the heavens and earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the seas with goods for people; in the water which God sends down from the sky to give life to the earth when it has been barren, scattering all kinds of creatures over it; in the changing of the winds and clouds that run their appointed courses between the sky and earth: there are signs in all these for those who use their minds [164] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 164)

Out of His mercy, God *the Most High* created man in a blessed state, and created everything in the universe as a blessing for him, and He draws our attention to this fact by using the universe itself as proof, and lists many phenomena of the universe which no one has claimed to be their doing and their creation. If those who do not believe in the One God were to come and ascribe divinity to anyone but Him, we say to them: This amazing universe which is represented by the earth and the heavens, the succession of night and day, the ships which pass through the sea, the waters which God sends down from the sky, and by the clouds which run their appointed courses between the sky and the earth: all of these signs, these amazing matters, show that their Maker must be more magnificent than all.

He *the Exalted* wants to alert the mind so that it will take the blessing of existence itself, and the universe which is subdued for it, and from these amazing signs realise the truth of God’s words ‘And your God is one God’ (*al-Baqara*: 163), for it is nonsensical that anyone but God could have created all of this, and then failed to lay claim to it! In any case, no one has ever claimed to have created it; and as long as no one has claimed this, and you yourself, O mankind, have not created it, and whatever their disbelief and rebelliousness, no one has ever claimed such a thing, and until now no one has ever dared to make such a claim, this proves that God is One and Unique. The True Lord *the Most High* says that greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth; yet most people do not understand (*Ghafir:* 57).

Why? This is because man was created from the earth, and he subsists upon what the earth contains; and so based on this, it is clear that the creation of the heavens and the earth was greater than the creation of man. Men are the sons of the soil, and they derive all their sustenance from it and their lives depend on it for their continuation. It makes sense that the True Lord *the Most High* created mankind's constituent parts before creating mankind; and so that mankind could live, God then provided them with sustenance made of the same constituents from which they were made. Remember well what we said that when God presents the story of creation to mankind, He *the Exalted* presents it in a way that pre-emptively refutes any contrary explanation that could be offered for it. And so He is saying to us: The creation of the heavens and the earth, and your own creation, are all matters of the unseen, and as long as they are unseen, no one can have any opinion or point of view about them except the One Who created them, so take your knowledge of creation from Him. He *the Exalted* asserts that He did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves; and neither does He take as helpers those that lead people astray (*al-Kahf*: 51).

This is why we must beware of those misleading people who try to lead us into error with ideas which have no basis in fact. The True Lord *the Most High* knew in pre-eternity that there would one day be people who would say that the heavens and the earth were created in such-and-such a way, and mankind was created in such-and-such a way. When we hear such things, we should say: These are the misleading people whom God warned us about from pre-eternity.

So, the presence of these misleading people is itself a proof of the truth of what God said about these people who say that the earth was a piece of the sun which broke away from it, and that mankind is descended from apes. If there were no misleading people like these, we would have said, 'Lord, where are those people who you said would lead others astray?'

When God *the Most High* tells us that He created us from the earth, and made all our sustenance come from it, science comes – even from those who disbelieve in God – and confirms this matter. When they analysed the human being, they found that he is composed of sixteen constituents; and when they analysed arable soil, they found that it was also composed of the same sixteen constituents, the first of them being oxygen and the last being magnesium. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘I created mankind from soil,’ and we say, ‘It is true, Lord, for you have made all of our sustenance come from the soil.’

So, the matter of the creation of the heavens and the earth must inspire awe; and you, o mankind, must look at what has been created for you so that it can point you towards your Creator, and so that you can believe, and testify that He is One God; and if any of the misleading people tries to lead you astray and tells you that there is another god, say, ‘There is no god but He *the Exalted*!’

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about mankind, He *the Exalted* speaks about an object in the universe, and this object requires two things: time and space. The space for mankind is the earth upon which he walks, and the sky which covers him, and his time is the passage of day and night; and so the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us a lesson from the alternation of day and night. The meaning of ‘the alternation of day and night’ is that each one of them follows the other: day follows night, and then night follows day. God *the Most High* makes it clear that He is the One Who causes the night and the day to succeed one another, thus creating a sign for anyone who has the will to take thought, or has the will to be grateful (*al-Furqan:* 62).

The succession of night and day means that day does not last forever without ever being interrupted, nor does night. There are other signs connected with this blessing of which the True Lord *the Most High* reminds us when He puts forth to us these questions to ponder: If God had willed that there should always be night about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection – is there any deity other than God that could bring you light? Will you not, then, listen? And, if God had willed that there should always be daylight about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection – is there any deity other than God that could bring you night, wherein you might rest? Will you not, then, see? (*al-Qasas:* 71-72).

And so as you, who move in the universe, everything applies to you which applies to the other things which move therein: you must rest commensurate with how much you work. And so time is divided into night in which you rest, and day in which you toil, and so the True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He is the One Who made the night a garment for us, and made sleep a rest for us (*al-Furqan:* 47).

He *the Exalted* knows from pre-eternity that the night – the time of repose – cannot be a rest for everyone, but rather, there must be some people who do things which require them to stay awake at night, and to these people He *the Most High* says that among His signs is sleep, at night or in daytime (*ar-Rum:* 23). He gives those who must stay awake all night a chance to find rest during the day.

So, out of His greatness, the True Lord *the Most High* made time successively different; if it were night all the time, or day all the time, life would be ruined. And so we find that the True Lord *the Most High* made an oath, enjoining on us to consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark (*ad-Duha:* 1-2).

Midmorning is the time of work and toil, and night is the time of repose, and the two of them must exist. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Indeed in the creation of the Heavens and of the Earth; and in the alternation of night and day; and in the ships which pass through the sea….' The Arabic word *fulk* (rendered here as 'ships') can be both singular and plural, as for instance when He *the Exalted* ordered Noah *peace be upon him* to build the *fulk* (ark) under His eyes (*Hud:* 37), He meant build a single ship; but as for the *fulk* ('ships') that pass through the sea, this means all ships. How can the passage of ships in the sea be a sign? You know that if water was not as yielding as it is, boats and ships would not be able to sail upon it, and water must flow in order that ships can sail upon it. Before the invention of engines, ships used to sail by the power of wind. Why? That is because water is divided into two kinds:

- The water of rivers,
- And the water of the seas.

The water of a river always flows from high to low towards its mouth, and so it makes sense for us to let the passage of ships upon it follow the direction of the current. But if we want to travel on the river against the current, we need wind to help us do so. We usually think of wind (*'rih'* in Arabic) as being the same as air, but wind is power, and this is the meaning we have of the word, albeit in a different context, in God's instructing the believers not to allow themselves to be at variance with one another, lest they lose heart and their *rih* (moral strength) desert them (*al-Anfal:* 46). That is, being at variance only causes strength to wane. Wind is an obvious power, but when mankind developed the steam engine and used it to power ships, they no longer needed to seek to power ships with wind. And so we see that the word *rih* can mean 'wind,' but it can also mean simply 'power,' and a third meaning for it is 'scent.'

The Quran shows us this, for when the word rih is used to mean power, we find the Quran saying that if God so wills, He stills the wind, and then they lie motionless on the sea's surface (*ash-Shura:* 33).

That is, when God wills to remove the power of motion from anything, He *the Exalted* does so. As for the word *rih* meaning 'scent,' we find it when the True Lord *the Most High* says that as soon as the caravan with which Jacob's sons (carrying with them Joseph's shirt) were travelling was on its way, their father said to the people around him that he truly feels the scent of Joseph (*Yusuf:* 94).

Jacob, the father of Joseph *peace be upon them* had a powerful sense of smell, and when the caravan left Egypt, the father said, 'I can smell the scent of Joseph!' In the countryside, we hear people say, 'I will take revenge on So-and-so so that there will be no scent of him left on earth!' What he means is that there will be no trace of him left on earth; but why does he use the word 'scent' here? Just recently, it has been proven that scent is the longest-lasting trace left by living beings since those creatures with powerful senses of smell like police dogs are able to find fugitives by their scent alone. It is as though the criminal leaves a trace of his scent at the crime scene, and all that is needed is something with a powerful sense of smell to find him.

The True Lord *the Most High* gave us the power of reason, but he gave to those creatures which have no such power something which most of us cannot attain. The dog, a dumb animal, is able to find things which we could never find because he lives in the world of the sensory alone, while human beings have access to a part of the sensory world and also a part of the intellectual world.

God *the Most High* says, '…and in the rain which God sends down from Heaven, giving life by it to the earth after its death….' Does this mean that there is water in the sky? No. the origin of water is on the earth; but the water of the earth is no good for us or for our crops, since it is salty and bitter. The water on the earth is only a store, and so God has placed within it chemicals which prevent it from becoming stagnant so that it does not change its state. Moreover, the surface area of this water is three times larger than that of the dry land: why? Because God wants the surface area of the water to be vast so that there is a large amount of water which can evaporate; for this evaporation is a kind of Divine distillation.

This sending down of water from the sky is what we know as rain; but before it falls, there are several stages, namely evaporation, and condensation, and seeding of clouds by wind, and so on. We have only just been guided to knowledge of these various stages quite recently since we have attempted to copy this cycle by evaporating salt water and condensing it to make water drops, but this costs a lot of money to fund; a single cup of distilled water takes a lot of time and effort, while the Divine process gives us so much pure water that we could not count it all. This process goes on, and we are unaware of it.

The water cycle begins with water vapour rising, and then it reaches a cold area and so it falls as pure fresh water. With amazing precision, the Wise Creator *the Exalted* made the level of sweet water always higher than the level of saline water. If the level of salt water was higher than sweet water, the saline water would flow down into it and spoil it, and we would have no water to drink. But the Wise Creator placed sweet water in the rivers on a higher level than the waters of the seas and oceans so that the water from the rivers would flow into the seas, and this does not cause any harm.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* informs us that He sends down water from the sky. How does this water come down? This is what we have come to know recently. And with this sweet water, God brings the earth back to life after its death. What is death? Death is the absence of motion; and when the earth dries up, there is no motion left in it. We cannot detect the motions of the earth while the crops grow from it with our senses, but God *the Most High* affirms this when He says that we see the earth dry and lifeless – and when He sends down water upon it, it stirs and swells (*al-Hajj:* 5).

When rain falls onto the earth, its crust swells up, and rises to the surface. Then what happens? It puts forth every kind of luxuriant plant (*al-Hajj:* 5). This is the meaning of God's words '…giving life by it to the earth after its death…'

Then the verse continues: '…and by scattering over it all kinds of moving creatures…' that is, He places throughout it all the creatures which live on the earth. And the verse proceeds to mention '…the change of the winds….' The meaning of change (*tasrif*) is variation, that is, the way the wind changes and blows in a different direction, whether north, south, east, or west. This change means that the air has not a regular pattern of movement; and if we reflect on the movement of the air we find that it gives the air a diverse balance: sometimes it comes from hot regions and blows on cold places, and sometimes it comes from cold regions and blows on hot places. This change is a blessing from God; for if the winds never changed, they would be a source of woe for mankind.

We hear different names for the winds such as the east wind, and the west wind, and the north wind, and the south wind, and gales, and hurricanes, and icy winds. Generally, when, in the Quran, you hear the word 'wind' in the plural form 'winds' (*riyah*), this means that it is a good and useful kind of wind; while if you hear the word in its singular form 'wind' (*rih*), this means that it is a harsh and destructive wind, such as when God *the Most High* speaks of the fierce roaring wind that destroyed ancient aberrant tribes (*al-Haqqa:* 6). But this general rule is broken in a single verse when God *the Most High* speaks about a good favourable wind helping people in sailing in ships on the sea (*Yunus:* 22). Why? That is because if the wind changes for a ship, this is a disaster, and a ship needs all the wind to come from a single direction. And so God did not simply use the word 'wind' by itself, but rather, He added that it was a 'favourable wind'; and then the True Lord *the Most High* continues that they rejoice with it, until there comes upon them a tempest (*Yunus:* 22).

Thus He *the Exalted* reminds us of His power so that , no one will think that God created everything, and created laws for it all, and then left it to its own devices. No, He *the Exalted* still directly sustains and manages the heavens and the earth, and He has absolute power over them.

Coming back to the verse under discussion, God gives further signs of His Power in the universe: '…and in the change of the winds, and in the clouds that are made to do service between the Heaven and the Earth….' To be made to do service means to perform a specific action forcibly. God *the Most High* appoints a course for the clouds because He wants them to send rain down onto us, and so winds come to the cloud and take it where God wills it to go. You might benefit from rain which falls from a cloud in a place other than where you are, and we here in Egypt benefit from the waters of the Nile even though the rain falls in southern Sudan, and in the mountains of Ethiopia. If we only had the water which falls as rain from the skies above Egypt itself, we would all die of thirst. This shows the meaning of God's statement that when the winds carried heavy clouds, He would drive them towards dead land and cause thereby water to descend (*al-A'raf*: 57).

A cloud follows its appointed route to the destination required from it, and it has no choice in the matter. The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the verse by saying that in those wonders of the universe '…are signs for people who use reason.' When the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…for people who use reason,' it is as though He is awakening the faculty of intelligence and reason in the human soul. When someone addresses you and appeals to your faculty of reason, know that whatever he tells you, your intellect will agree after only a little thought; if not, he would not have mentioned the word 'reason' to you.

The Noble Quran always speaks of those who think, and those who use their reason, and those who reflect, and those who ponder. All of this means that if they thought, and if they used their reason, and if they reflected, and if they pondered, they would arrive at the fact that God wants them to grasp. The True Lord *the Most High* always wants the Muslim to respond to all matters with his reason, and his intelligence, and his reflection because He *the Exalted* knows that if a person thinks, or uses his reason, or reflects, or ponders, he will arrive to the right conclusion.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَندَادٗا يُحِبُّونَهُمۡ كَحُبِّ ٱللَّهِۖ
وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَشَدُّ حُبّٗا لِّلَّهِۗ وَلَوۡ يَرَى ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓاْ إِذۡ يَرَوۡنَ ٱلۡعَذَابَ
أَنَّ ٱلۡقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعٗا وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلۡعَذَابِ ١٦٥

Even so, there are some who choose to worship others besides God as rivals to Him, loving them with the love due to God, but the believers have greater love for God. If only the idolaters could see – as they will see when they face the torment – that all power belongs to God, and that God punishes severely [165] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 165)

A rival is an equivalent or a counterpart, and the disbeliever is the one who sets up equivalents or counterparts to God. The idolaters do not deny the Divinity of God, but they set up rivals alongside Him, and they love those rivals as much as they love God, or they love them as much as you love God; that is, as much as the believer loves God, the disbeliever loves the god which he chooses to worship. '…But those who believe are stronger in love for God….' Why? Because this is the love about which no one differs. While the love of the idolaters for their false gods does differ; for when the idolater is beset by difficulties, he turns to God Alone and not to his false gods, as God *the Most High* says that when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto God, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing (*Yunus:* 12).

By his primordial nature, the idolater reveals how he lies to himself by choosing to set up rivals against God, and so when things become difficult for him and the means fail him, he does not deceive himself any longer by saying 'Save me, O idol!' Rather, he says: 'Save me, Lord!' As for the believer, he never changes in his love for God; the believer loves his Lord whether times are good or bad, and so those who believe are strong in their love of God because they never forget Him, whether times are easy or difficult. But the disbelievers only recognise the True God when the going gets tough, and once the affliction is over, they behave just as the Quran says that every disbeliever behaves; he goes on as though he had never invoked God to save him from the affliction that befell him (*Yunus:* 12).

The Quran describes the situation when some trouble touches a man, and he turns to his Lord and calls on him: yet no sooner than God has touched him with His favour he forgets God on whom he before had called, and sets up rivals with Him, that he may beguile others from His way. Such a person is told to enjoy himself a little in his ingratitude; but he will surely be one of the inmates of the Fire (*az-Zumar:* 8).

They forget God, and return to their worship of these false rivals to His Divinity, and in doing this, they only wrong themselves. '…And if only they who have wronged would consider [that] when they see the punishment, [they will be certain] that all power belongs to God and that God is severe in punishment.' These idolaters will be surprised by something which they had not been expecting. They believed in these rivals, and they will come forth on the Day of Resurrection to see that these idols are the fuel of the fire which torments them. If the idols made of stone which they used to worship did not come with them, they would say, 'These stones will save us from this suffering!', but the True Lord *the Most High* will say to them: These stones are not only sharing in your suffering, but they themselves are the fuel for the fire which torments you, as He says to them that indeed they, and all that they used to worship, instead of God, are but the fuel of hell (*al-Anbiya':* 98).

And the True Lord *the Most High* also says that the fuel of the fire of Hell would be human beings and stones (*al-Baqara*: 24).

And so the idolatrous disbelievers will lose all hope that their false gods might rescue them. The meaning of '…when they see the punishment…' is, when they see their suffering with true certainty; they had already been told of it, but they did not believe in the Last Day. Had they but believed in the Day of Resurrection, it would have been enough for them to witness the suffering of hell with true vision and insight. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying '…that all power belongs to God and that God is severe in punishment.' That is, when they see their suffering with true certainty, they will finally realise that all might belongs to God, and that He is severe in meeting out punishment.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* tells us what their state will be when they witness this suffering, saying:

إِذۡ تَبَرَّأَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتُّبِعُواْ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُواْ وَرَأَوُاْ ٱلۡعَذَابَ وَتَقَطَّعَتۡ بِهِمُ ٱلۡأَسۡبَابُ ١٦٦

When those who have been followed disown their followers,
when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them
are severed [166] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 166)

Everyone who enticed others to disbelief and disobedience will disown all those whom they had tempted to disobey God, and associate partners with Him. Even Satan, the arch-deceiver, will disown them, and will tell them at that time that God promised them something that was bound to come true; and that he, too, held out promises to them, but that he had deceived them. Yet, He had no power at all over them, except that he but called them and they responded to him. So they should not blame him, but blame themselves. It is not for him to respond to their cries for help, nor for them to respond to his (*Ibrahim:* 22).

Satan will not be able to save any of the idolaters, and he will not call the idolaters to come and save him, and if the idolaters call for Satan, he will not come to save them. They will all disown one another, and the disbelievers will disown all those who made idolatry seem alluring to them; or the disbelievers will say to all those who made idolatry seem alluring to them; ‘We renounce you, there is no connection between us and you!’ The verse mentions those who were followed first, since they were the ones who tempted the others, and then it mentions the followers after that. They will see the suffering that waits them, and their hopes will be shattered, and every soul will be requited for what it had earned. Satan himself will confess that he never had any power except simply to invite them, and those who answered his invitation wound up in this final ending place. Having power over someone is based either on arguments or force; and Satan was never able to force the disbelievers to do anything, and only one action was possible for him without any power which was to invite them to associate partners with God, and they answered his invitation. So what will happen when their hopes are shattered? The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُوا۟ لَوْ أَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةً فَنَتَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُمْ كَمَا تَبَرَّءُوا۟ مِنَّا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُرِيهِمُ ٱللَّهُ
أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ حَسَرَٰتٍ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ وَمَا هُم بِخَٰرِجِينَ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِ ١٦٧

the followers will say, 'If only we had one last chance, we would disown them as they now disown us.' In this way, God will make them see their deeds as a source of bitter regret: they shall not leave the Fire [167] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 167)

For those who followed to disown the ones they adored, will not do them any good, and their hope for a second chance – that is, a return to life – in order to disown them, will not be granted, and God will show them their previous actions so that they will regret them desperately. Despair is only felt when a person is afflicted with a calamity from which there is no possibility of escape. The meaning of '…and they are never to emerge from the Fire' is that their regret for their evil deeds will not help them, and this regret will not affect their release from the fire. The True Lord *the Most High* says after that:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ كُلُوا۟ مِمَّا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ حَلَٰلًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟
خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ١٦٨

People, eat what is good and lawful from the earth, and do not follow Satan's footsteps, for he is your sworn enemy [168] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 168)

Out of mercy for His servants, God *the Most High* did not address this statement to the believer alone, but rather, He widened the address to include both believers and non-believers, saying, 'O mankind.' It is as though He created everything on earth for all mankind, and this is what we referred to before as God's Lordly bestowal of sustenance to all humanity, believer and non-believer alike. He *the Exalted* created all mankind, believers and non-believers, and since He created them and called them into existence He addresses them all together, believers and non-believers. It is as though this address were saying to the disbelievers: Even though you do not believe in God, take lawful things from the believers and utilise them because they will benefit you in your worldly lives even if you do not believe in God; for it is in your best interest to eat what is lawful and good, as God only makes harmful things unlawful, and He only makes good things lawful.

Here there is an argument made by many of those who have wronged themselves, and who would love it if the matters of religion and the lawful and unlawful were false, because the only way they can feel good about themselves is to find things by which they can deny the religion because they cannot bring themselves to live up to God's requirements from them; and since they cannot do so, they cannot find any way out of this except to say that the religious standards of the lawful and unlawful are all false. Such people say, 'Since God has made something unlawful, why did He create it to begin with?'

It is as though they believe that every object in creation was created to be eaten, and as though they are unaware that every creature on earth has a purpose. In our times they extract the poison from serpents and snakes to use it to fight microbes which can kill people, while before they discovered the use of their poison they would say, 'For what purpose were these snakes created?' But once God put them in such a position that they needed to use the poison of these snakes in order to produce medicine, they realised God's wisdom in creating these species: He did not create them for us to eat, but rather, for our medicinal use.

So, if you see something unlawful to eat, do not ask why God created it because you do not know its true purpose for existence. It is not the purpose of every creature to be eaten by mankind, but rather, every creature serves a purpose in existence which might be unknown to you.

We use this same reasoning when considering our own lives. For example, when summer comes and we fear that moths might damage our woollen clothing, we use insect repellent to kill these insects and we warn our children not to go near this repellent or eat it. Insect repellent should not be eaten, yet it is beneficial because it kills harmful insects.

The same is true of the disinfectant which we buy and keep in bottles in our homes so we can use them to clean with. We warn our children to keep away from it because it is harmful, yet, it is useful for cleaning the house of insects. The same is the case for all those creatures for whom we do not know the wisdom of their creation. God created them to serve a special purpose, and so we should not transfer something from its own purpose to that of something else.

If mankind has not yet discovered the purpose of some creatures, then there are many things they do not know, and every day they discover another secret about God's creatures. For example, there is a fish which grows no bigger than a finger's knuckle, never getting any larger, and they were clueless as to its benefits. But when we went to Saudi Arabia, and saw places where the drinking water might be thought to be in danger of going stagnant, we found that this kind of fish was abundant there. We asked about this, and they told us that it never grows but stays the same size, and it cleans the water in places where people do not clean it themselves. We tested what they said, and threw some leftover food into the water, and the fish came from all over to eat it, and did not stop until they had finished it all.

And so the Living, All-Sustaining Lord creates creatures to look after other creatures, and He *the Exalted* says to mankind: Do not eat this, but eat this instead; and we might not know the wisdom behind this.

Another example: the bird called the white egret was known as the friend of the farmer; the role it played in life was to eat all the insects and worms when the earth was irrigated. And when this bird disappeared because of the use of pesticides, the danger posed to crops by worms, especially roundworm, became excessive. It was a Divine balance, perfectly designed. The same is the case with flies: some people ask what the purpose of their existence is, not knowing that flies play an important role for mankind by eating disease carrying garbage; and if people guarded themselves with cleanliness, they would not be bothered by flies.

So everything in existence is arranged in a precise order, the order of a Wise, All-Knowing Creator. As long as it was the All-Wise who created, no one should object and ask why He created such-and-such because every creature serves its purpose in the universe. And so the Creator tells mankind – believers and disbelievers alike – to eat what is lawful and good on earth. He says to the disbeliever: If you reflect on things, you will see that everything I have commanded you to do is for your own good; and even if you do not believe, I will guide you to what is good for you. So eat nothing but that which is lawful and good, and look to what the believers have been permitted to eat, and eat the same.

History and experience has shown that the disbelievers resort to following God's teachings in many things in order to solve problems in their lives – not following God’s religion as a religion, but following God’s commands as a system. If those who disbelieve in God have any wisdom even where their worldly matters are concerned, they will take what God commanded those who believe in Him and follow it.

Here follows an example of this: The True Lord *the Most High* made unlawful the meat of dead animals, that is those animals which die without being slaughtered; and such meat is damaging to the health because blood vessels in animals and all living things are of two kinds: veins and arteries. Before the blood reaches the kidneys or the lungs, it is impure blood, and when we slaughter an animal all of the blood, impure or not, comes out of it, and the meat becomes purified. But if an animal is not slaughtered, it is not purified from this impure blood, and this is harmful to one’s health.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says ‘O mankind,’ it is as though He is saying to the non-believers: ‘If you use your reason, you will surely be prudent enough not to eat anything except that which God has made lawful to the believers.’

God’s teaching ‘…and do not follow the footsteps of Satan…’ means do not walk behind Satan. A footstep (*khatwa*) is the space between one’s two feet when one is walking, i.e. between one step and the other. So do not make Satan your leader because Satan’s enmity towards you is already established, and so you must be prudent and always mistrust him. He is the one who disobeyed his Lord, and so he cannot be obeyed in anything he commands: ‘…indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.’ The enmity of Satan towards mankind goes all the way back to the days of Adam *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, about the commands of Satan:

إِنَّمَا يَأْمُرُكُم بِالسُّوٓءِ وَالْفَحْشَآءِ وَأَن تَقُولُوا۟ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

He always commands you to do what is evil and indecent, and to say things about God that you do not really know [169] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 169)

‘Evil’ in this verse means every kind of misdeed that has no specified legal punishment, such as backbiting and tale-bearing; and ‘immorality’ means those sins which have a prescribed legal punishment in Islam. And Satan commands you to say about God things of which you have no knowledge.

The True Lord then says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱتَّبِعُوا۟ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ قَالُوا۟ بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَآ أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ ءَابَآءَنَآ ۗ
أَوَلَوْ كَانَ ءَابَآؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

But when it is said to them, 'Follow the message that God has sent down,' they answer, 'We follow the ways of our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers understood nothing and were not guided? [170] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 170)

This verse concerns an important matter for Islamic society, namely the way people imitate the customs of their forefathers. Imitation is a natural phenomenon for mankind because when a person comes into existence with the power of life, this power wants to act, and its actions are always identical to the actions it sees around it. A young baby only knows that its hand can grasp things because it sees people around it doing the same; and when a baby wants to move, it copies the movements of those around it. And so children always imitate their parents in most of their actions; and when a child lives amongst different generations of his family of different ages, you will find that his basic actions are a mixture of imitations of these generations: he imitates his grandfather, his grandmother, his mother and father, and his siblings so that his different actions represent all these generations.

And so when a child grows up in an extended family consisting of parents and grandparents, this presents him with a model for mankind of natural life which is connected to both worldly works and religious teachings. If a child lives with his father alone, he might find that he is busy with his worldly work that might bring him away from moral or religious values; but if he sees his own father's father, his grandfather, who has retired from worldly work and has devoted himself to morality and religion because he feels that he will soon meet God so that even if he did not pray when he was young, he will pray now, and if before he did no good works, he will do them now – the child will see very dedicated worldly work and exertion from his father, and will find moral values and acts of worship from his grandfather. And so you might find that he aids his grandfather in his good works so that, when the child hears the *mue'dhdhin* (caller to prayer) say 'God is Great,' he knows that his grandfather will want to pray and so he goes and gets the prayer-rug and spreads it out for him, and he imitates his grandfather. And if the child is a girl, we find her imitating her mother or her grandmother, putting a scarf on her head to pray. So the mixture of generations gives the best of both sides of life, the material side and the religious side; and this is why the True Lord *the Most High* reminds us of His blessings saying that He has given us through our spouses, children and grandchildren (*al-Nahl:* 72).

So, imitating previous generations is something natural. But when God calls people to follow what He has revealed to His messengers, He forbids them from following the customs of their forefathers because these might have become permeated by heedlessness or ignorance of the teachings of God, and so He *the Exalted* calls us and commands us to abandon those corrupted things and follow what He has revealed, and not to degenerate to the level of the lowly life, as worldly ways might change, but the way of God *the Most High* never changes; so, follow what He has revealed.

When people are challenged, they say, '…Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers are doing.' This is a mere excuse, and if it were true and right, and in accordance with reality, God would not have sent more and more messages after having taught Adam *peace be upon him* everything He wanted from him; for if we truly followed everything which our forebears passed on to us, the sons of Adam would have done the same as Adam *peace be upon him* did, and their sons would have followed them, and so the teachings of God would have remained and been passed down without any alteration.

So, why do the teachings of God have to change? This shows that it is people who changed their ways, and so their claim '…we will follow that which we found our fathers doing' is a lie because had they truly followed what their forefathers were doing, God's teachings on earth would have remained alive and unaffected by the heedlessness of the people, and unaffected by the diversion of the people of earth away from the teachings of Heaven. And so this excuse of theirs reveals that they only followed those things that their forefathers did if it agreed with their caprice.

God’s word ‘Follow’ means: Make what was revealed to you a guide, and follow it, and follow nothing besides it; for all that is besides the way of Heaven can only be the invention of the people of the earth which is an unreliable way to follow. Their words ‘…that which we found our fathers doing…’ mean that we deemed everything we saw them doing appropriate to follow and imitate.

The True Lord *the Most High* tells them that this is incorrect, and that it is merely an excuse which is untruthful; and the fact that it is untruthful is shown by considering that if you were truly following the way of Heaven, this way would not have changed; this is the first point and the second is that, in many ways you differ from your forefathers, as when offspring have their own personality and identity, we find that they are very keen to differ, and we find that whole generations deteriorate: the father wants one thing and the son wants another. And so it is not right for them to say, ‘…Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing…’ because if this were true, God’s way on earth would never have been contravened; rather, the way of God was changed because of the influence of human caprice. Moreover, we can see some differences between the behaviour of children and their parents, and we accept this saying, ‘This is the natural way that each generation differs from the last,’ that is, the Children get an identity of their own. And so the claim that the offspring were following their parents is a falsehood which does not represent reality.

The True Lord *the Most High* retorts to this because it is a mere excuse which is not backed up by even a shred of evidence, nor any proof from real life. He *the Exalted* says, ‘…Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they rightly guided?’ That is, will they follow what their forefathers were doing even if their forefathers did not use their reason, nor were guided?

So, the response comes from two sides: from the side of reason, and the side of guidance; and each of these, reason and guidance, is ruled out for the forefathers in this verse. So you are following without thinking, and following blindly. A person should not obey anyone blindly unless it is someone whom he trusts has absolutely infallible insight, and this cannot exist between one human being and another. Absolute obedience should not be given to anything except God’s guidance; and if you blindly trust someone whom you are sure has absolutely perfect and wise insight, this is an obedience which is both enlightened and insightful because you are protecting yourself from the error of your own vision and the error of your insight by following He whom you believe possesses vision and insight which never err; and so this obedience is in no way blind.

So the True Lord *the Most High* alerts them to the fact that it does not make sense for them to say that they are merely following what they found their forefathers doing because their forefathers might well have acted without using their reason, and they might not have been rightly guided. If your forefather had used their reason or been rightly guided, it would have been right for you to follow them; not because you would be merely following your forefather, but because you would have been following reason and guidance.

Thus, we find that imitation is a false claim because you never imitate something which is equal to you, but rather, you follow those whom you believe to be wiser than you; if he is your equal, it is not right for you to imitate his every move, but rather you should submit his actions to your mind. And so God’s commands to His servants are only obligatory upon them once their minds have reached maturity – He *the Exalted* does not take the mind unawares before it has matured, but rather, God does not hold any of His servants to be morally accountable unless their intelligence has matured, and He does not hold them to be accountable unless they have intelligence, and He does not hold them to be accountable unless they have power behind their intelligence; and so if a person has strength and intelligence, they are accountable. He *the Exalted* only holds people accountable for their actions if they have mature minds and the ability to perform that which their minds guide them to; that is, without being forced.

And so the One Who holds mankind accountable according to these principles knows that if the mind is found mature and unforced, it will naturally be guided to the truth. The True Lord *the Most High* does not hold a person accountable until all of his faculties are fully formed because the final faculty which is formed in the human being is his sexual instinct, i.e. his ability to procreate, and to preserve the life of his species. We said before that the fruit we eat does not become ripe and tasty until after it fulfils its primary purpose; its purpose is not merely that man should eat it, but rather that, the seeds inside it are ready to extend the life of its species. Once the seeds are formed, the fruit is ready to be eaten. The same is true of mankind: he is not ready to reproduce until he reaches the age of maturity. God *the Most High* has made the sexual instinct extremely strong, because the life that comes as a result of it is filled with the difficulties and strains of childrearing; had God not linked it with this pleasure, many people would not have bothered with it, but He *the Exalted* linked it with pleasure so that there would be a strong and voracious need for man to extend the life of his species.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* does not surprise man with moral responsibility before first preparing him properly for it; for were He to hold him accountable before his instincts matured, and before he had the power to extend the life of his species, man would say, 'God has made me morally responsible before I had this inclination,' and so the pact of faith would not be properly made.

The True Lord *the Most High* withholds moral responsibility from His servants until their minds and instincts have both matured so that a person can enter into the sphere of moral responsibility with all of his potency and all of his instincts and emotional responses so that when he makes a pact of faith with God, he will be fully aware of its implications and he can live up to this pact.

So the True Lord *the Most High* wants to develop man's identity as soon as he is able to reproduce; and as soon as he has a complete identity, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to prevent him from blindly following any teaching. This is why no one should say, 'I will do whatever my father did.' But there are those who say, '…we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.' But why do they follow their fathers only in their false ways, and not follow them in all other matters of worldly life as well, such as clothes, food, and all the other areas of life?

So, they only followed what they found their fathers doing because they found things about it which agreed with their whims which is proved by the fact that there were certain instances when they did not follow what they found their fathers doing because they did not agree with them; and as long as they differed with them in many things, why did they follow them in their false religion?

God *the Most High* wants to rescue mankind from the clutches of this imitation, and He says to His servants: Use your reason since you have your own identity, and let each of you know that because his intellect is mature, he should be guided to the One Unique Creator. If you followed the example of your father at first because he provided for you and raised you, then this father is only a means which God provided for you, but God is your Creator, and He has revealed to you the way which you should follow in order that your life is fruitful and good. He *the Exalted* enjoins on all people to fear the Day on which no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child to his parent (*Luqman:* 33).

The True Lord *the Most High* explains this matter to us in great detail. If the fathers did not use their reason, what would be the position of their offspring? The offspring should correct themselves by following the way of the True Lord *the Most High*. There is a verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* which phrases the same concept in a different way. Here in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, God *the Most High* says, 'And when it is said to them, "Follow what God has revealed …"' while the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* says that when they are told to come to that which God has revealed and to the Messenger, they say that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing; even though their fathers knew nothing and were not rightly guided? (*al-Ma'ida*: 104).

The verses are similar in some ways and different in others. Here, God *the Most High* says, '…Follow what God has revealed…' which means that we should be careful to implement God's teachings; while the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* says, '…Come to that which God has revealed and to the Messenger…' (*al-Ma'ida*: 104). This is the first difference. The second difference between the two verses is the answer given by the disbelievers in each to the words of the True Lord *the Most High*. Here in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, they say, '…Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing….' This statement is in itself objectionable; but in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* they say that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing (*al-Ma'ida*: 104). This means that they were content with what they had, and rejected the idea of following the guidance of Heaven; and this is an even firmer and more rigid refusal. And so we find that in this verse the True Lord *the Most High* does not say to them 'follow' but rather says 'come,' that is, rise from the depths where you now find yourselves to faith in the guidance of Heaven. As long as you have said 'sufficient for us' with a full mouth, this means you have sufficed yourselves with what you have. The phrase 'sufficient for us' (*hasbuna*) has a subtle meaning because when someone says this, it means he has calculated (in Arabic: *hasiba*) his words and that he is sufficed. The word hisab means precise calculation or measurement, and it implies the idea of counting and enumerating. So when they said 'sufficient for us…' it means that they had weighed things up and considered themselves sufficed. We find that every time this word is mentioned in the Quran, it either refers to a physical, numeric measure, or else it means a measure of perception and supposition. We find the same term used in the rhetorical question that the True Lord *the Most High* puts forth as to whether people suppose (*hasiba*) that by claiming that they have belief, they would be left without being put to test (*al-'Ankabut* :2). This means, do the people suppose that they will be left alone without their faith being tested? This measure is not about numbers, but it is rather about thought, and such a measure might be incorrect, which is why we call it 'supposition.'

We also find it in another question put forth by the True Lord *the Most High* to all mankind whether they think (*hasibtum*) that He created them in mere idle play, and that they would not have to return to Him (*al-Mu'minun:* 115).

So the word *hisab* sometimes indicates something counted and measured, and sometimes it has an abstract meaning. We know it by its verbal form: the form (*hasaba/yahsibu*) means to count, while the form (*hasiba/yahsabu*) means to suppose.

The verb has perfect and imperfect forms, and if you mean numerical counting, about which people cannot differ, you say (*hasaba*) in the perfect tense and (*yahsibu*) in the imperfect, while if you mean supposition, about which there can be difference of opinion, you say (*hasiba*) in the perfect tense and (*yahsabu*) in the imperfect.

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the Reckoning (*Hisab*) of the Hereafter, this means that something will be counted. If something is counted with special vigilance, however, it is called *husban*, which is an emphatic form like *ghufran* (to forgive (*ghafara*) completely) or *shukran* (‘to thank (*shakara*) profusely). The word *husban* means a very precise account which never errs.

And so the True Lord *the Most High* uses the word *husban* about precise things which were created with a precise measure and order, such that if anything interferes with them, there will be a disturbance in the universe. He says that He the Lord of Mercy has taught the Quran, has created man and taught him eloquence, and has made the sun and the moon run by precise calculation (*ar-Rahman:* 1-5).

That is, the universe runs according to a very precise order, which must never be disturbed; for if the slightest disturbance were to occur in the course of the sun or moon, the order of the universe would be spoiled. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* did not say that the sun and the moon run according to a measure (*hisab*), but rather, He said that they run by a precise calculation (*husban*). Moreover, there is a difference between the words *husban*, ‘precise calculation,’ and *mahsub bilhusban* (‘measured with precise calculation’). The True Lord *the Most High* says that He is the cleaver of daybreak and has made the night for rest and the sun and moon for calculation (*al-An‘am:* 96). He did not say ‘according to a precise calculation’ because in itself, it is used for calculation and measurement, that is, its measure is automatic.

The word is used in a different way in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, when God *the Most High* tells of how the righteous man warned his haughty neighbour saying that God may send a *husban* (‘calamity)’ upon his garden, the source of his pride, from the sky (*al-Kahf*: 40). Here, the word *husban* is used to mean ‘calamity’. This means a punishment which is commensurate to the wrongdoing, and so this too is a kind of measure.

Their statement that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing is outwardly more emphatic than their assertion ‘…we will follow that which we found our fathers doing’ but each phrase is appropriate for the context in which it appears. The imperative ‘follow’ suits the answer ‘we shall follow…’ and the call to them to ‘come to…’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 104) suits their reply that sufficient for them is that which they found their fathers doing (*al-Ma’ida*: 104). That is what we have already is enough for us, and we want nothing else.

From this, we can understand why God *the Most High* uses in the verse in the Chapter of *al-Baqara* the imperative 'Follow,' while in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* He *the Exalted* uses 'Come to…,' and why their response in the chapter of *al-Baqara* is '…Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing,' while in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* it is 'sufficient for us….'

There is a third difference between the two verses: the verse in *al-Baqara* says, '…Even though their fathers understood nothing…?' while in *al-Ma'ida* it says: even though their fathers knew nothing (*al-Ma'ida*: 104). So the difference is between 'understood nothing' and 'knew nothing.'

What is the difference between understanding and knowing? Understanding means that something was produced by their thought and reflection on things; but there are people who do not know how to use their reason, and so they accept everything that those who can use their reason tell them.

So, the one who merely knows is at a lower degree than the one who understands and uses his reason because the one who uses his reason, has deduced something for himself, while the one who knows has just taken his knowledge from someone else. For example, an illiterate person might learn a particular fact from someone else, but he does not deduce it for himself. So to say that someone has no knowledge is stronger than saying he does not understand because to say he has no knowledge means that he knows nothing at all, whether he learned from someone else or deduced for himself.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says that they 'understood nothing,' this means that they might have had some knowledge; but when He says that they 'knew nothing,' this affirms that they neither used their reason nor had any knowledge at all; and this is a sufficient answer to their statement. When they said, '…Rather, we shall follow…' they are described as being people who '…understood nothing…' and when they said 'Sufficient for us…' He described them as being people who 'knew nothing,' just like animals.

From what we have said, we can conclude that there are three differences between these verses: In the first verse, God *the Most High* used the verb 'Follow,' and they responded by saying '…Rather, we shall follow…' and the response to this was '…Even though their fathers understood nothing….'

In the second verse, He *the Exalted* uses the verb ‘Come to…,’ and they responded ‘Sufficient for us’ and the response to this was ‘…even though their forefathers knew nothing?...’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 104).

And so we see that each verse is harmonised so that no one can say: ‘One verse has its form, and the other has another form.’ Rather, each verse uses the form which is most appropriate for its content, and every verse in the Quran is harmonised in its words, phrases, and context.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And when it is said to them…’ in the passive voice, in order to include every saying of this kind made by any of God’s messengers when they began to preach their messages. It is not something which applies to this time only, but rather, it has been said before. Or, it means that whenever any messenger said to them, ‘…Follow what God has revealed…’ they said, ‘…Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.’ Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they rightly guided?’

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘…nor were they rightly guided?’ and so too, the verse in *al-Ma’ida* concludes with the same so that we would know that the guidance of Heaven does not differ, whether understanding or knowledge is concerned. The first one ends with His questioning ‘…Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they rightly guided?’ while the second ends with His words ‘…even though their fathers knew nothing and were not rightly guided? (*al-Ma’ida*: 104). This indicates that the guidance of Heaven is not different for those who use their reason than it is for those who have knowledge.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ كَمَثَلِ ٱلَّذِى يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا
دُعَآءً وَنِدَآءً ۚ صُمٌّۢ بُكْمٌ عُمْىٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧١﴾

Calling to disbelievers is like a herdsman calling to things that hear nothing but a shout and a cry: they are deaf, dumb, and blind, and they understand nothing [171]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 171)

The shepherd’s cry is the shout he gives to his flock, and so this word gives us the image of a shepherd tending his flock. The shepherd would give this cry to tell the animals to walk behind him; and he does not tell them in words what he wants from them, but rather makes noises to tell them. He would walk in front of them so that they would follow him to the grazing land or to a water source. So the shout was only a cry and a call, but the intention of the shout was to give a directional command to which the animals would respond. So it is as though the tended animals do not understand anything the shepherd says except as cries and calls. Cries and calls to what purpose? They do not understand the point of it, but they have the shepherd in front of them to show them which way to go. And so we see that we have here a shepherd, and a flock, and a shout from the shepherd which is nothing but a cry and a call. These three represent for us the Messenger; when he calls, he is the 'shepherd.' Who does he call? He calls the 'flock,' which represents the people. To what does he call the flock? Does he call them just so they will come, or does he call them that they come, and then command them with something? He commands them to follow the way of Heaven. This is the difference between the shepherd who tends sheep and the shepherd who tends people.

So, when the Messenger goes to them and says, 'O people, I am a messenger and a warner to you,' this is the call; and the essential content of this call is 'Worship God.' 'Reflect upon the heavens and the earth;' 'obey these commandments and prohibitions': this is what the Messenger wants.

So, the Messenger is like the shepherd in that they both make a call, and their flocks are alike in that they understand nothing but cries and calls, but when it comes to responding: '…deaf, dumb, and blind….' So the one called does not hear the call and so it is as though they share an animal nature in that they hear nothing but cries and calls, while not understanding the content of that to which they are called. And they are dumb in that they do not utter the requirement of this call, which is the testimony that there is no god but God *the Glorious and Exalted* and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God. And they have no reason to control the movement of their eyes so that they might reflect on the realm of the heavens and the earth to guide them to the truth of this matter.

So, those who disbelieve in the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* are like animals with their shepherd; they hear nothing but cries, just as the animals hear the cries of the shepherd, but do not understand them. The difference is that the animals are not asked to respond to those who call them, and they do not pay heed to anything but the call; and so the disbelievers are the worst of all beasts.

God *the Most High* says, ‘Deaf,’ i.e. afflicted with deafness, which is an ailment which prevents the ear from performing its function; and ‘dumb,’ i.e. afflicted with an ailment which damages the tongue and prevents it from performing its function. Yet, the cause of deafness is an active cause since it means that something has damaged the tools of hearing so that you cannot hear. And because of this deafness, they are also dumb which means the inability of the tongue to speak; this is because when a person never hears a word, he will not be able to speak. And so if a person grows up in an Arabic-speaking environment he will speak Arabic, while if he grows up in an English-speaking environment he will speak English. Imagine if you had grown up in an Arabic-speaking environment, but you had never heard a word of it: would you be able to speak it? No. And so the tongue speaks what the ear hears, and if the ear does not hear, the tongue will not speak. Deafness comes before dumbness, and so dumbness is a negative ailment. You find that the tongue moves and produces sounds, but these sounds are meaningless. So should we understand from God’s word ‘deaf’ that they are really afflicted with deafness? No; the True Lord *the Most High* is saying that the ear was made to hear beneficial things; so, if it does not do this, it is as good as deaf. Likewise, the tongue was made to utter beneficial speech; and so if it does not do this, it is as good as useless, and its owner is as good as dumb. And the mind was made to reason and reflect; and so if it does not reason in a sound and logical manner, it is as though its owner has no mind at all. So the one who really is deaf is better off than the one who possesses the means to hear, but comprehends nothing because the one who is really deaf has his excuse and so does the one who is really dumb; and the insane person also has his excuse. It would be better for these disbelievers if they were the same; for they made their own ears deaf to the call, and made themselves dumb so that they could not utter that which would give them salvation: ‘There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God;’ and they made themselves blind to the signs of God in the universe, for had they possessed true sight they would have reflected on the universe, as God *the Most High* says that indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are messages for all who are endowed with insight (*Al-'Imran*: 190).

Had they reflected on the creation of the heavens and the earth, they would have been guided by their natural disposition to the realisation that this perfectly designed, orderly universe has a Maker; but they did not use their reason because reason can only develop after you have first heard, and used your senses properly. This is because a human being, in its first stage of development, is a being of simple action and sensation: he sees, hears, tastes; and then after this, his rational faculties start to develop.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُلُواْ مِن طَيِّبَٰتِ مَا رَزَقۡنَٰكُمۡ
وَٱشۡكُرُواْ لِلَّهِ إِن كُنتُمۡ إِيَّاهُ تَعۡبُدُونَ ١٧٢

You who believe, eat the good things We have provided for you and be grateful to God, if it is Him that you worship [172] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 172)

This is an address from God to those who believe, telling them to eat of the good things. In verse 168 there was a similar address on the same subject, but it was addressed to all mankind: 'O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good…' (*al-Baqara*: 168). We said that when the True Lord *the Most High* addresses all mankind, He is drawing their attention to the matter of faith; but when He addresses the believers alone, He is giving them the commandments of faith. God only issues commands to those who believe in Him; and to those who do not believe in Him, He issues no commands; for belief is commitment, and if you have committed yourself to the fact that He is a Wise God, then take from Him the laws of your religion.

God's justice necessitates that He not hold anyone morally accountable except those who believe in Him, which is in contradistinction to the human practise; for the commands of human rulers apply to both those who accept their rule and those who do not. If a human ruler has any power, he uses it to force all those under his rule to do as he says.

God’s address to the believers is worded thus: ‘O you who believe, eat of the good things which we have provided for you….’ This is because the believer is completely certain that God is the Creator, and that He is the One who provides all sustenance. God *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘…and give thanks to God if you indeed worship Him. ’It is essential that the believing servant thanks the Creator Lord since he wishes to dedicate his worship to God Alone.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْمَيْتَةَ وَٱلدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ ٱلْخِنزِيرِ وَمَآ أُهِلَّ بِهِۦ لِغَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ
فَمَنِ ٱضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَآ إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٧٣﴾

He has only forbidden you carrion, blood, pig’s meat, and animals over which any name other than God’s has been invoked. But if anyone is forced to eat such things by hunger, rather than desire or excess, he commits no sin: God is most merciful and forgiving [173] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 173)

We find that the basic Arabic word (*mawt)* (‘death’) has many words derived from it, such as *mayyit, mayyita,* and *mayta.* For example, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks of the wind carrying rain laden clouds that He drives towards a *mayyit* (‘dying’) land (*Fatir:* 9).

The word *mayyit* (‘dead’ or ‘dying’) means someone/something that will end in death even if it is still alive for the moment, so every one of us can be said to be dying, that is, bound to die; and so God *the Most High* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he is *mayyit* (bound to die) and, surely, they, too, are bound to die (*az-Zumar:* 30). So the word *mayyit* means that you are ‘bound to die,’ even if you are alive at the moment. As for the word *mayt*, without the doubled letter ‘y’, this means that someone/something is actually dead. An line of an Arabic poem says:

> The dead is but he who is borne to the grave.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘He has only forbidden to you carrion (flesh of animals that died of themselves), blood….’ Had He said *mayyita,* we would have said that everything that will one day die would thereby be forbidden. But God is talking here about *mayta*, which means something which has already died, and whose spirit has left its body naturally – for the spirit can be removed deliberately, which is what happens when you slaughter an animal so it dies; but some creatures die of natural causes, and when animals die of natural causes, the traces of the food they had been taking in is retained within them in their blood, and this blood contains many harmful things. The blood contains harmful impurities which the body would have cleansed itself of were it still alive, and which were on their way to being removed. But when we slaughter the animal, all of the blood, both the pure and the impure, runs out. And since preventing harm should be prioritised over seeking benefit, we give up the pure blood along with the impure blood. This blood is retained within the body upon a natural death, and these harmful things remain within it so that the meat becomes filled with harmful material which can cause diseases in those who eat it. By simply looking at two chickens, one of which has been slaughtered so that its blood has all run out and the other of which has been strangled so that its blood has not run out, we find a clear difference in colour; and if we cook them both, we will find a clear difference in taste, and the taste of the slaughtered chicken will be acceptable while the taste of the dead chicken will not. Even those who did not believe in any god or any religion used to slaughter animals before eating them. Why? Their experience had guided them to the fact that this method was the most beneficial, even though they did not know the proper Islamic method of slaughter.

When God *the Most High* forbade ‘carrion,’ there was no need for any of us to answer the question on God’s behalf as to why He made it unlawful. It is enough that God said it was forbidden; and as long as He provided for you and then said, ‘Do not eat this,’ He has only excluded it from the beneficial sustenance He has provided. Even if we do not know of any harm in it, He *the Exalted* said, ‘Do not eat it,’ so do not eat it. He is the One Who provided, and He is the One Who created you, and He is the One Who commands you not to eat it; and so it is not your right to ask why it has been forbidden for you.

Suppose that we were not guided to the discovery of the wisdom behind a certain prohibition, and we had no idea of the harm that afflicts people when they eat carrion: Would people ignore the prohibition until they knew the reason for it, or would they unthinkingly obey God's commands? The believers hear God's commands and obey them without hesitation.

So, since God addresses us, the simple fact of our faith should be enough for us to accept His rulings, and the only reason for accepting the ruling is that it came from He Who rules. As for knowing the reason behind the ruling, this is a matter of comfort for the mind, and a reassurance that God would not command us to do something unless it was good for us. The believer should not make his faith dependant on the knowledge of these reasons.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'He has only forbidden to you carrion…' The verse is unequivocal in its prohibition of all carrion; and if it is carrion, this means that it had life and a spirit within it, but then they came out of it. But we eat fish even though it is dead; and this is a clarification from the Sunna about a general matter mentioned in the Quran. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Two dead things are lawful for you to eat: fish and locusts, as well as two kinds of blood: the liver and the spleen.'(1)

Why are these things accepted? They are accepted because convention has a role in defining the words of the Lawgiver. If you vow not to eat meat, and then you eat fish, have you broken your oath? No; your oath remains unbroken even though God described fish as being fresh meat because the conventional definition of meat does not include fish.

So, convention has some importance which is why Az-Zamakhshari, author of the book Al-Kashshaf, says about this, 'If you vow not to eat meat and then you eat fish, the consensus of the scholars is that you have not broken your vow. He also gives another example, saying that if you vow to ride a mount (*dabba*), which also means 'creature' – and God *the Most High* used this word ('creatures') in referring to disbelievers whom He describes as the vilest creatures in the sight of God (*al-Anfal:* 55) – is it permissible for you to ride a disbeliever? It is not permissible, even though the outward sense of the verse seems to say that you can. He commented on this: ‘It is true that a ‘mount’ (*dabba*) can mean literally everything that walks (*yadubb*) on the earth, but convention deems it to mean specifically four-legged creatures.’

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(1) *Narrated by Ash-Shafe'i, Ahmad, Ibn Maja, Ad-Daraqutni, Al-Hakim, and Al-Bahaqi on the authority of Ibn 'Umar.*

So, convention does have a role to play in the matter of the lawful and unlawful. If someone says, ‘God has forbidden carrion, yet fish and locusts are carrion, so why are we allowed to eat them?’ we reply: Convention says that fish and locusts are not meat, which can be seen by considering the popular saying: ‘If locusts are many, meat becomes cheap.’ This means that locusts are distinct from meat.

As for fish, they are not like the carrion which God forbids because the carrion which is forbidden, is all that which could be slaughtered; so, all its blood runs out, and fish do not have blood of this kind. Locusts, too, do not have blood of this kind, and so the reason it can be eaten even when dead of natural causes is that it does not have this same flowing blood which can cause the harmful things in it to be transferred to those who eat it. Likewise, the liver and the spleen are not really blood since blood flows, while the liver and spleen are solid pieces of meat, the remainder of the blood from which the constituents of the liver and spleen are formed.

So, the Sunna has the role of clarifying the lawful and unlawful. God’s words ‘He has only forbidden to you carrion (flesh of animals that died of themselves), blood…’ mean that He has forbidden it because of the way that the blood remains in carrion and does not run out of it, and so a priori, blood must also be forbidden. The True Lord *the Most High* also forbade ‘…the flesh of swine…’ We said that the reason to obey the law is that God is the One Who commanded it; and if the passage of time has come to confirm the truth of these religious rulings, this is something which serves to reinforce faith. But if we were to wait, and postpone obedience to God’s commands until we had found the reason for them, we would be believers in scientists and scientific discoveries more than believers in God. If we waited until the scientists had their say, this would mean we considered the scientists to be more reliable than God; yet, is there any creature which is more reliable than the Creator? Such a thing is impossible. So the believer is the one who accepts every ruling issued by God, convinced as he is that God would only command him with that which is good for him.

In reality, harmful things are not harmful in their essence since they might be beneficial in other ways. For example – and God is beyond compare – when you discipline your son in some way, withholding his pocket-money or not allowing him a particular treat, this punishment is not harmful in itself; rather, to shower him with everything he loves, even when he behaves badly, would only encourage him to continue behaving badly. To fail to properly discipline one's son with rewards and punishments would be harmful for him.

And so we say to those people who want to find a reason for every forbidden thing: You have not considered the notion of prohibition as a means of discipline. Something might be forbidden because it is harmful, and other things might be forbidden for another reason, such as discipline. It is not right for you to consider the principle of discipline as being of lesser importance than the principle of physical well-being. The True Lord *the Most High* is more merciful to His creatures than a father is to his son; and He forbade some of the good things of life to the Israelites as a way of disciplining them, as He *the Exalted* says that due to the wickedness of certain Jews, and due to their turning away from the Way of God, He forbade them certain good viands that had been before allowed them (*an-Nisa':* 160).

So, the True Lord *the Most High* forbade them these good things to discipline them for the wrong they had done to themselves. So when you see something forbidden, do not automatically think that it must be forbidden because it is harmful, but rather consider whether it might be forbidden for the sake of discipline; for to allow some good things for these people while they were going against their religion, would have been an enticement for them to keep on contravening it, and keep on wronging themselves. The True Lord *the Most High* forbade that which is harmful to one's health, and he also forbade some good things to some sinners as a way of disciplining them.

As for the prohibition of pork, God *the Glorious and Exalted* willed to have the secret of this prohibition revealed to people, and so scientists confirmed that pork causes some illnesses which had not previously been known, and whose danger was clear to them, such as tapeworm. If the True Lord *the Most High* revealed to them a single secret, the tapeworm, there may well be other secrets more dangerous than tapeworm yet to be discovered.

The True Lord *the Most High* also forbids '…that over which the name of other than God has been invoked….' To 'invoke' (*ihlal*) literally means to raise the voice, and so the verb (*hallala*) means to raise one's voice when saying 'there is no god but God.' And the new moon in Arabic is called *hilal* because when we see it we shout 'God is Great! My Lord and your Lord is God.' And when a child is born and leaves its mother's womb, and becomes aware of its life and its own existence, after having been bound up within its mother's existence, it cries out. It begins life by crying out, and so when those who are waiting for the baby to be born hear its cries, they relax. A poet said:

When the world bids him enter its realm of woes,

The child cries the moment it is born.

It is as though the child is starting something woeful, and it does not show any awareness of the breadth of the world and all the variety of life therein. If not, why should it cry when it has found something wider and more varied than it had before? It is as though the cries of the child are the cries of one who is forced to leave its mother's womb and face life.

The life of the child in its mother's womb was routine, and its sustenance came to it from the umbilical tube. But when it is separated from its mother, it is disconnected from the means by which its sustenance was carried to it in its mother's womb, and it loses access to this sustenance the moment it comes out of its mother's womb when it has not yet been given the sustenance of the breast. Breastfeeding is the sustenance of this world, and the child cannot take it until its first breath has circled through its lungs. And so the doctors always try to make sure the baby comes out head first because if it comes out feet first and its head is still inside, its breaths are trapped by its mother's womb, and there is a risk of dying. And so nowadays, they can inspect the mother to determine the position of the foetus inside her and if needs be, they can perform a caesarean section to protect the life of the baby. The first thing the doctor does after the child is born is to clear its nasal passages, after which he treats the rest of the body.

It is an instinctive cry, just as is the case when his mother forgets to feed him and he cries. So we know that ihlal means to raise the voice, and when God *the Most High* says, '…that over which the name of other than God has been invoked…' this refers to the raising of the voice at the moment of slaughter. Slaughtering is of two kinds: you can slaughter in order to get meat for you and others to eat, or you can slaughter as a sacrifice for God. That over which God's name is invoked is a slaughter of sacrifice for God, while '…that over which the name of other than God has been invoked….' is a slaughter which is only made to benefit people, and an act of sacrifice for their idols and all that they worship besides God.

Since God is the One Who has given us animals and subdued them so that we can eat of them, we should remember this blessing of His; the primary intention should be that the sacrifice is for God Alone. And so the believers sacrifice and then eat, while the disbelievers just eat, and they do not sacrifice to God but rather they slaughter and sacrifice for their false gods.

When the True Lord *the Most High* issues rulings, His rulings always make allowances for contingencies; and this is not the case for human lawmakers who are always forced by circumstance to change their laws after having made them because things have happened after the laws are implemented which they did not anticipate when they made them. This is because they had no knowledge of things that might happen in the future which would force them to amend their laws. When a human law is changed, this means that cases occurred which could not be solved by the implementation of the law as it was, and so the lawmakers were forced to change the law in order to accommodate these cases.

But when the True Lord *the Most High* makes laws, He makes them in such a way that they accommodate any new situations which might come along without the need for the laws to be changed; and because Islam came as the final religion, after which no further guidance from Heaven would come, it is able to incorporate any possibility. It might have been logical for laws to be changed while the Messengers were still succeeding one another, but once God completed the messages of Heaven with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the laws which God sent through His Messenger had to be endowed with ways to accommodate this role. So, the things which force a lawgiver to change his laws were unknown to him at the time he first made the law, but these things do not apply to the laws of Heaven because God has knowledge of everything that will come to pass.

Suppose that there were no developments which made it necessary to change the law, and then they appeared. Would the True Lord *the Most High* make all His creatures die because He had told them not to eat carrion? If this were the case, we would say: 'What is this? It is true that carrion can be harmful, but hunger can kill; so, why can we not eat what might harm us rather than eat nothing at all and so die of starvation?'

The justice of the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…But whoever is driven by necessity, neither coveting it nor exceeding his need, there is no sin upon him….' To be driven by necessity has two conditions: '…neither coveting it nor exceeding his need….' 'Nor exceeding his need' means not to exceed the proper limit, but rather only to take what he needs; for example, one should not say, 'God has made carrion lawful for someone in a desperate state such as I am in,' and then fill his belly with it. No; he should just take enough to keep himself alive; and he should not think that it has become lawful, but rather, he should keep in mind that it is unlawful, but allowed in times of dire necessity.

Also, we should recognise the rights of others. Suppose that a person has only a glass of water which will do nothing but wet his throat, and then another person in a state of dire necessity who is stronger than him comes and hits him and takes this water from him. We say to this covetous person: Do not transgress, because someone else has prior ownership. If there is enough water for you both, then go ahead; but if there is not, then the owner of the water has more right to it. The other one should not say, 'I am forced by necessity to take his water;' by this he will only satisfy his need and cause someone else to suffer from it. So, at times of need, basic principles remain unchanged, and rights of ownership must be respected, and it is not right for us to go beyond the limits of our need. This is the meaning of God's words '…But whoever is driven by necessity, neither coveting it nor exceeding his need, there is no sin upon him….' God's words '…there is no sin upon him' indicate that there is a sin which has been made permissible by God in times of necessity. This is so that we do not make it lawful all the time; once the necessity has passed, we return to the original law.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.' We might ask what '…Forgiving and Merciful' has to do with the meaning of this verse. Forgiveness and mercy imply that there has been a sin; but what has gone before, is nothing but the word of the True Lord *the Most High* and His law; and the prohibition of carrion except at times of necessity is the law of the True Lord *the Most High*, and when one is forced by dire need to eat of it as much as he needs, he does so by permission of the True Lord *the Most High*. And so is there any sin, then, that would require the verse to conclude with the words: '…Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful'?

We say: If God forgives sins, will He not forgive the acts of dire necessity for which this law was made? Logic dictates that if God forgives sins which happen without any excuse, will He not forgive the person who is forced by circumstance to eat carrion? God is much-forgiving to begin with, and so will He not forgive those to whom He has given a dispensation? So, He is forgiving and merciful, and He adds no sin to the account of one who is forced by dire need. Out of His mercy God forgives the sinner who contravenes His law for no reason, and He will certainly forgive those who are forced by dire need to partake of what He has forbidden. Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَيَشْتَرُونَ بِهِۦ
ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۙ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِى بُطُونِهِمْ إِلَّا ٱلنَّارَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ
ٱللَّهُ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٤﴾

As for those who conceal the Scripture that God sent down and sell it for a small price, they only fill their bellies with Fire. God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them: an agonizing torment awaits them [174]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 174)

The True Lord *the Most High* sends His messengers to His creatures so that His guidance will govern the actions and lives of people. He makes laws for the good of the people, and He makes laws against the people when they cause benefits for others to be missed out; for if one person causes another to lose some benefit, he should be aware that this other person will cause him to lose benefit in turn.

If legislation is to be fair, it should be for people and also against them so that every law which is ‘against’ a person is complemented by a law which is ‘for’ him; for if he has a right, his right is due to him from everyone else; and if his right is due to him from everyone else, he must also owe everyone else their own rights. If not, how could anyone claim their rights?

When the True Lord *the Most High* reveals His guidance, it is passed on by His messengers and then carried by those who are endowed with knowledge so they can convey it to the people. Those who suppress what God reveals are only attempting to resist the way of Heaven, and a person will only try to resist the way of Heaven if he desires to benefit from falsehood and usurp the rights of others. When they suppress what God has revealed, they become impediments in the Way of God which came to govern all aspects of life.

What do they stand to gain from this? There must be something for them to gain, and this gain of theirs is but a trifling gain, such as the bribes or other things they would take from their followers in exchange for making God’s laws follow the whims of people.

God *the Most High* is telling them: Nothing can be valued except by someone who knows the true significance of it; you are attempting to put a price on the way of God, but no one can put a price on the way of God except God Himself. And so the price, which God offers for the implementation of His way, must be a price which is profitable and convincing for you. Yet, if you take a price for suppressing the Way of God and pleasing the people with legislation that satisfies their caprices and desires, you will surely lose out; for however large this price might be in human terms, it is a paltry gain which lasts for a limited time.

Prices usually start with the basic things a person needs to sustain his life, namely food and drink; and so God *the Most High* says, ‘…those consume not into their bellies except the fire….’ If they will fill their bellies with fire, how will the reception of the fire be for all those bellies? For ‘the believer,’ as the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘eats to fill one stomach, while the disbeliever eats to fill seven stomachs.’ That is, the disbeliever only eats to gain enjoyment from his food, and he wants to enjoy it always so that his belly becomes filled with what he puts in it. The believer, however, should take that food which he needs to survive. The master of mankind, Muhammad ibn Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him*, said in a Noble Hadith, ‘Sufficient for a Son of Adam should be a few morsels which meet his need.’(1)

So, eating for the believer is for the purpose of sustaining life and fuelling action, but the disbeliever considers food to be nothing but a source of pleasure. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…those consume not into their bellies except the fire….’ That is, just as they wanted to fill their bellies for the sake of pleasure and enjoyment, God will make their punishment akin to the paltry gain they made; they took this gain in order to fill their bellies with foul things, and so God will fill their bellies with fire as a just requital for what they did. This punishment of a material nature is followed by another kind of punishment, as God *the Most High* says, ‘…And God will not speak to them….’ That is, the True Lord *the Most High* will abandon them on a day when there is no means of comfort for any creature except with the Face of the True Lord.

When we hear that someone is not speaking to someone else, we feel that there is anger involved here, because speech is a sign of amiability for human beings. If someone refuses to speak to someone else, this indicates that he dislikes and abhors them. So ‘…God will not speak to them…’ means that He abhors them; and it is punishment and torment enough for God to abandon His creatures. He gave them His blessings before, but now He forsakes them. Someone might say: How do we read here that the True Lord *the Most High* will not speak to them, when He *the Exalted* also tells us that on the Day of Reckoning, the disbelievers will say to Him that their ill-fortune had prevailed against them and they went astray. They will beg to be allowed to be let out and if they go back to their sins, they will indeed by wrongdoers. He will tell them to be driven down into it with ignominy and not to speak to Him (*al-Mu’minun:* 106-108).

We say: It is true that He *the Exalted* will tell them not to speak to Him; but when God says that He will not speak to the disbelievers, this means the speech of warmth, mercy, and tender kindness; as for the speech of punishment, this is a curse. So ‘…And God will not speak to them…’ means that the True Lord *the Most High* will not speak to them in a way that comforts them; for when God wishes to comfort some of His creatures, He speaks to them at length. For example, when Moses *peace be upon him* came to meet with his Lord, what did God *the Most High* say to him? He *the Exalted* asked him what he had in his right hand (*Ta Ha:* 17). Does this question mean that God *the Most High* needed Moses *peace be upon him* to tell Him what was in his hand? Rather, the question was meant to give the comfort of speech so that the fearful awe of Moses *peace be upon him* would be calmed.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Mundhiri in At-Targhib wa At-Tarhib, and by Az-Zubaidi in Ithaf As-Sada Al-Muttaqin, and by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir, and by Al-Kahhal in Al-Ahkam An-Nabawiyya fi AS-Sina‘a At-Tibbiyya.*

We gave an example of this before – and God is beyond compare – of when a person goes to his friend's house to visit him, and his young son comes along with a toy in his hand, and so the visitor asks the child, 'What have you got there?' The visitor can see the toy in the boy's hand, but he speaks to him in order to be amiable with him. And so when God *the Most High* spoke to Moses *peace be upon him*, it was to comfort him, and He asked him what he had in his right hand.

It would have been enough for Moses *peace be upon him* to say, 'a staff,' and this would have answered the question; but had Moses *peace be upon him* simply said, 'a staff,' this would have been a failure to appreciate the comfort he derived from his conversation with God. And so our master Moses *peace be upon him* made the most of God's question so that he could draw out the comfort he felt from God, and so he said that it was his staff: he leans on it, and he beats down leaves with it fir his sheep, and he has other uses for it (*Ta Ha:* 18).

Reflect on how Moses *peace be upon him* extended his answer: the words 'It is' are redundant, and the words 'I lean on it' are redundant, that is, not essential to answering the question; and the words '…and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep…' make the reply even longer, and then the words '…and other uses I have for it' show his desire to extend the conversation even further. So to speak with God and look upon Him *the Exalted* is the greatest of all the blessings He will give to the believers on the Day of Resurrection.

Thus if God will deny the disbelievers the means to material bounty and then not speak to them, this will be difficult indeed. '…And God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. And they will have a painful punishment.' After denying them His conversation and the comfort of His Presence, He will not cleanse them of the foul things they did, and He will not make them fit to draw near to Him. And after this, He will subject them to grievous suffering. It is as though there will first be suffering, after which will come suffering which is even more grievous; for they must be subjected to multiple suffering because they concealed God’s Way from His creatures, and so caused them to go astray, and so they will bear the sin of their error and also further sins on top of their own because they led others into error.

The matter of God’s speaking to people on the Day of Resurrection was related to us by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said:

There are three to whom God will not speak on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them, nor will He look upon them, and grievous suffering will be theirs: An adulterous old man, and a lying king, and a proud pauper with family.(1)

Why is it that these three will be denied God’s speech, and His cleansing, and His looking upon them? The adulterous old man commits a sin which he has no need to commit since he does not suffer from the voracity of youth; and the lying king lies to his own subjects, and lying means fear of the truth – and so who does the king have to fear if the people are under his command? And when a family’s provider suffers from pride while he is poor, this pride will cause him all kinds of problems and will make it hard for him to find ease and make a living, and will cause him to live in miserable poverty; and if anyone wants to help him, his pride will be a barrier between him and those who would help him. This is why God will not speak to them nor cleanse them. But why will He not look upon them? To look upon someone is to have compassion for them, and so the True Lord *the Most High* will cut off mercy and kindness from them from their very beginning which would be to look upon them.

The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘…And they will have a painful punishment,’ i.e. grievous suffering; and when an adjective in Arabic has the form which the word ‘painful’ (*alim*) has here, it can be thought of either as an active or a passive form; and so we understand the word ‘painful’ to mean really ‘grievous.’ Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him.*

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱشۡتَرَوُاْ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةَ بِٱلۡهُدَىٰ وَٱلۡعَذَابَ
بِٱلۡمَغۡفِرَةِۚ فَمَآ أَصۡبَرَهُمۡ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٧٥﴾

These are the ones who exchange guidance for error, and forgiveness for torment. What can make them patient in the face of the Fire? [175] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 175)

God *the Most High* here tells us the reason why this judgement has been passed over them, and why He will not speak to them, and why He will not cleanse them, and why they will be subjected to grievous suffering in the Hereafter: they took error in exchange for guidance, and suffering in exchange for forgiveness. When you see the severity of the punishment, do not find it too severe, but rather consider the enormity of the crime. When people separate the crime from the punishment, they feel sympathy for the criminal because they only see the criminal when he is tried and convicted, and forget about his crime. And so when you see a punishment and find it horrific, you should call to mind the crime which has necessitated this punishment. We find that people often sympathise with criminals who are given stern punishments because the crime took place long before and we did not see it, and its effects and repercussions are finished so that only the criminal remains, and so people feel sympathy for them. This is why it is wrong that legal proceedings take so long. Rather, criminals should be tried immediately, while the crime is still recent so that the people do not sympathise with them because the sympathy of the people for them makes their punishment seem harsh.

‘It is they who have taken error in exchange for guidance….’ We know that ‘in exchange’ refers to the thing which is left, and so here error has been taken and guidance has been left, and in turn suffering has been exchanged for forgiveness. Since they have taken error in exchange for guidance, and suffering instead of forgiveness, it is only just that they are subjected to a grievous suffering as punishment for this.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘…how great their endurance in the fire!’ This is a way of showing the severity of the punishment so that the people will avoid it. God wants us to wonder at how the misguided person can reject guidance and accept error and, as a result, bring suffering upon himself instead of mercy. What has given him this hope that he will be able to withstand Hellfire? Does he have such fortitude that he can carry out sins that will send him to the fire? What will make him able to bear this suffering? Does he have some kind of power to withstand the fire? What is this power?

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying: You have no idea what requital awaits you; and if so, then what will make you able to bear this fire? You insist upon your wrongdoing and error, and you forget that hell will be your punishment. If you were convinced that hell would be your requital, how could you be so sure that you will be able to bear it? hell is something that no man could ever bear.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ نَزَّلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۗ وَإِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱخۡتَلَفُواْ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لَفِي شِقَاقِۭ بَعِيدٖ ١٧٦

This is because God has sent the Scripture with the Truth; those who pursue differences in the Scripture are deeply entrenched in opposition [176] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 176)

‘That is’ is a reference to what has just passed; and what has just passed is the error which they took in exchange for guidance, and the suffering which they took in exchange for forgiveness, and the fire in which they will suffer, and which they seem to fear little. So there are three interlinked things: suffering, error, and hellfire.

Error is the primary reason for the suffering, and so if God says that He will punish them with such-and-such because of their error, this is true; and if He says that He did such and-such to them because they deserved punishment, this is true. And generally speaking, this punishment will be by fire.

So, when the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the fire, or about suffering, or about error, all as being one thing, He says, ‘That is [deserved by them] because God has sent down the Book in truth,…’ and those who would try to alter and suppress the Book only do so because they hate the truth, and ‘…indeed, those who differ over the Book are in extreme dissension.’ It is a wide chasm they fall into, as errors of religious values represent a huge chasm. If the error had only concerned a material matter, mankind could have been left to sort it out amongst themselves, and it would have been easily resolved; but error concerning moral matters cannot be solved by mankind alone. And so the gulf of this error is wide, and no one can close it but God. This is why He *the Exalted* asserts that He will judge between them on Resurrection Day concerning all they differ on (*az-Zumar:* 3).

لَّيۡسَ ٱلۡبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّواْ وُجُوهَكُمۡ قِبَلَ ٱلۡمَشۡرِقِ وَٱلۡمَغۡرِبِ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلۡبِرَّ مَنۡ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ
ٱلۡأٓخِرِ وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ وَٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ وَءَاتَى ٱلۡمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِۦ ذَوِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ
وَٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ وَٱلۡمَسَٰكِينَ وَٱبۡنَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَٱلسَّآئِلِينَ وَفِي ٱلرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَى
ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱلۡمُوفُونَ بِعَهۡدِهِمۡ إِذَا عَٰهَدُواْۖ وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ فِي ٱلۡبَأۡسَآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ وَحِينَ
ٱلۡبَأۡسِۗ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ صَدَقُواْۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُتَّقُونَ ١٧٧

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God [177] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 177)

When the command came from the True Lord *the Most High* to change the prayer-direction to the *Ka'ba* so that the Muslims would face it in prayer after having previously faced Jerusalem, this created disquiet; and now the followers of every faith had their own prayer-direction: the Muslims faced the *Ka'ba*, the Jews faced Jerusalem, and the Christians faced the east.

This verse confirms that the difference was not a simple matter of prayer-direction; before the prayer-direction was changed, everyone who prayed faced a certain direction, and the change of this direction required no effort.

The True Lord *the Most High* is saying to them: Do not suppose that turning to face the *Ka'ba* represents all of piety because this is not something which requires any effort. It was not difficult for the believers to face the *Ka'ba* after having faced Jerusalem, but rather, it was a matter of obeying the command of the Commander. Piety, therefore, is not about easy things which require no effort, but rather is about matters of great good. It includes faith, God-fearing, honesty, obedience and excellence; and all kinds of goodness are contained within the meaning of the word 'righteousness' (*birr*). The root meaning of *birr* is something large and wide; and since this is what it means, every aspect of it will require effort.

Consider the requirements of righteousness, and the implications of righteousness which require that you expend effort; and do not differ over something simple and easy which does not require the slightest effort such as the matter of the changed prayer-direction. If you think that this is what righteousness means, we say to you: No; righteousness has many different responsibilities, and the essence of righteousness is that the truth of one's faith is tested, and that one puts God's demands over his own comfort, and that the believer be eager to obey God even if it is difficult for him, and that the Muslim refrains from disobedience, and that he realises that disobedience may be pleasurable in the short run, but that its consequences are grave. These are the requirements of righteousness and faith; so, do not make the question of facing the *Ka'ba*, or Jerusalem, or the east, into the main issue because your faces can turn towards any direction, even without your being commanded to do so. As we know, righteousness is the immense good which covers all the kinds of beauty in the universe; and the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes….'

Why does God *the Most High* speak about righteousness as if it is a physical body even though piety is an abstract concept? The True Lord *the Most High* embodies this abstract concept, righteousness, in the being of the servant who believes because when He *the Most High* wants to emphasise a particular concept, He represents in it a concrete way. For example – and God is beyond compare – when we say 'So-and-so is just,' we describe him in a way which tells the listener that he is a man known for being just. But if we say he is justice,’ it is as though he is justice personified. Likewise, when we say that So-and-so is honest, this means that he has a character which is marked by honesty, but that it might sometimes be possible for his character to be separated from this honesty; however, if we say that So-and-so is honesty, this means that honesty has become an integral part of him and can never leave him. Or, it may be that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say to us: ‘But the one who has righteousness is he who believes.’ Or, He might be saying: ‘But true righteousness is the righteousness of one who believes.’ Or, the description of the being of the ‘one who believes’ as the attribute ‘righteousness’ might indicate that the attribute has become incarnate in the being such that it can never be separated from it so that righteousness has become embodied by such people.

The text of the Noble Quran is capable of bearing all these interpretations. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God….’ This is the beginning of faith, and after this comes the ultimate concluding point of faith: ‘…the Last Day….’ The starting point is belief in God, and the concluding point is represented by belief in the Last Day.

Here it might be asked how belief in the Last Day is attained. We say that belief in the Last Day is attained by your first believing in God, and then believing in what God tells you. So you should not consider the two to be the same, but rather, belief in God is primary, and after this comes belief in all that God tells us; and God has told us that there will be a Last Day, and so we believe what He has told us. Then comes the matter of belief in the angels, as the True Lord *the Most High* mentions ‘the angels.’ How can we believe in a creature of God’s which we have never seen?

As long as we believe in the principle matter, which is belief in God, we believe in what God has informed us that there are angels. Even if the existence of angels is a matter of the unseen, we believe in them because God has told us about them. Likewise, we believe in the jinn even though we have not seen them; and we have been informed of all the other matters of the unseen by One in Whom we believe, and so we believe in it all.

All the matters of faith are unseen matters; you do not say that you ‘believe in’ a tangible thing, but rather, you only believe in unseen things because they are things which cannot be perceived by the physical senses, and you make these things into doctrines, which mean things that are firm and never change. And as they are unseen matters, they might escape us, while if they were perceptible things, no one would ever be unaware of them because their perception of them would make them remember them. So faith is a matter of the unseen, and it is called ‘doctrine’ (*‘aqida*) because it is something firmly tied (*ma‘qud*) which can never be unravelled.

The pinnacle of all doctrine is to believe in God, and then to believe in all the unseen matter of which God informs you, and for which you have no evidence except the fact that God has informed you. If you see things connected with faith which are tangible matters, you should know that the path of faith has forked; for the angels and the Last Day have been mentioned, and they are both unseen matters, and after them come revelation (the Book) and prophets, both of which are tangible matters.

It is true that the Book is a tangible matter, as are the prophets; but we cannot sense that God has sent down revelation, or that He has sent forth the prophets. We were not alive when the revelation was sent down, nor when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and our faith is based on our belief that God sent revelation down to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that this revelation came in the form of the Book, and that God chose Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver this revelation; and all of these things are unseen, and intangible to us. Unseen matters are the basis of belief, or the foundation of faith.

After this, the verse moves on from speaking about matters of belief, to show us that righteousness is composed of matters of belief which are the basis for actions, and that actions are the essence of all religious devotion. The True Lord *the Most High* is not concerned whether one believes in Him, or believes in His angels, or His revelations, or His prophets; what God wants is that life on earth be governed by His teachings. And so the discourse turns to material matters, and God *the Most High* says, ‘…and gives away money, in spite of love for it…’ indicating that a person possesses wealth and then spends (*ata*, with a long first vowel) it, meaning that he gives it; it is a different verb from the word (*ata*, with a short first vowel) which means ‘to come.’

What is 'money' (*mal*)*?* Money means everything which can be amassed, although in Arabic we often use the word (*mal*) to mean the thing by which all substances can be attained: money. Money has become the means by which things are almost always obtained because we buy everything with money; but the real meaning of (*mal*) is everything that can be owned. How does substance come to me, to you, or to anyone else? Has anyone ever come out of his mother's womb possessing anything? No. All that a person owns comes either from the work done by other people before him, whether from his father, or his grandfather, or it comes from his own work. So, we cannot say that he 'gives away money' unless he has either done some work of his own which has caused him to earn wealth, or he has inherited from someone else who had earned it. A person who earns devotes his life to work either to earn for himself, or if he makes more, then for his children too, or if he makes even more, then for his grandchildren as well.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and gives away money, in spite of love for it….' The word 'love' (*hubb*) is a gerund, and gerunds sometimes refer to their active agents and sometimes to their passive recipients. Take the word 'punch' for example: we say 'Zaid punched 'Umar;' it is clear here that the 'puncher' is Zaid while the 'punched' is 'Umar. But if we say, 'I liked Zaid's punching;' the meaning is vague; if we add 'of 'Umar', it is clear who punched and who was punched, but if we only say 'I liked Zaid's punching,' it could bear two different possible meanings: either Zaid was the one who punched, or he was the one who was punched. So when a gerund is ascribed to something, it could be ascribed either to the active agent (the 'doer') or the passive recipient of the action.

God's words '…and gives away money, in spite of love for it….' (*wa ata al-mala 'ala hubbih*) may be understood in more than one way. This may mean that man gives up his wealth although he cherishes it, or that he gives his wealth because he loves to give away from what he cherishes in deference to God's bidding that one would never attain true righteousness unless one spends out of what one cherishes (*Al-'Imran*: 92). It could mean either thing. Or, we could move higher to another meaning and say that it means 'and spends his money out of love for spending,' that is, of giving; that is, he loves to give, and finds comfort in giving. We could also go further and understand it in a way which incorporates all of these other meanings, which is to say that it means: ‘And spends his money out of love for God Who bade him do so.’ All of these meanings are possible. The True Lord *the Most High* praises those who give food – however great their own want of it may be – to the needy, to the orphan and to the captive (*al-Insan:* 8).

All of these verses clarify for us the difference between owning and cherishing what you own. There might be a lot of things in your possession, but you do not cherish everything that you own. When you give your possessions away, you might give something away which you owned, but did not cherish, and so all you have done is to release it from your possession. But if you cherish the thing which you give to another, you thereby release it from your possession and from your love for it.

Otherwise, the possession in your hand is only a tool which you or anyone else could use, and which has no place in your heart. In context, a poet said:

I do not care for hoarding my wealth up for [difficult] times,
Rather, I spend it in times of ease and hardship;
If it is in my hand, and not in my heart,
It belongs to me, not I to it.

The words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘…and gives away money, in spite of love for it…’ show us that either it can be given from one’s possession, or it can be given from one’s heart. The True Lord *the Most High* criticises those who want to do acts of obedience to God *the Exalted,* but only offer those things which they themselves dislike, and He says that such people ascribe to God something that they themselves dislike (*an-Nahl:* 62).

But to whom should this money be given? It is to be given to ‘relatives….’ Have you ever seen someone who has enough means to support himself, but his relatives who cannot work for themselves are needy? What kind of psychological condition does such a person have? He must have a wretched condition; for a believing person should make all people his kinsmen. In this regard, we might mention the story of Mu‘awiya *God be pleased with him* when he was the ruler of the Muslims, and his guard came to him and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, a man is at the door claiming to be your brother.’ Mu‘awiya *God be pleased with him* exclaimed, ‘Do you not even recognise my own brothers? Let him in!’ When the man came in, Mu‘awiya *God be pleased with him* asked him, ‘Which brother of mine are you?’ He said, ‘I am your brother from our father Adam *peace be upon him*.’ What did Mu‘awiya say? He said, ‘A broken tie of kinship! By God, I shall be the first to reconnect it!’ And he welcomed him.

If a person cannot keep his tie of kinship to all humanity, can he not at least keep it with his closest kinsfolk? How, then, could the believer enjoy the blessings of life while his near of kin are needy? Even if we forget about religion and humanity for the moment, should a person not share the good he has with his family?

In the sphere of faith, when God divides life into mutually complementary spheres, He *the Exalted* wants goodness to be distributed throughout the society. When He *the Exalted* wanted our species to continue, He decreed that the union of a man and woman be accompanied by a public contract and witnesses. Why? It is due to the fact that the fruit of marriage is the children which will bring a new generation of humanity into existence; and this new generation must be ascribed to their fathers in eye of the public; and if the father does not look after his children as God demands he should, people will censure him for it because they are his children.

And so when we see a person keep his marriage secret, for example by conducting an ‘unofficial marriage’ not disclosed to the authorities, we say to him: You only want to disown the fruits that will come from you so that your children are not ascribed to you. So we must be certain that every abandoned child on earth is the result of a mistake which is either public, or else which cannot be made public by a man who cannot bear the responsibility for the relationship he had with the woman. No man would reject a child of his unless he doubted it was his child, and this is what makes him deny its parentage.

The purification which God *the Most High* wanted to make for the relationship between men and women was willed by Him because He allows for the building of new generations from which the society of the future will be formed; and before these children come along, they must have a firm basis to carry them. And so God gave us children and grandchildren, and He advised children to be good to their parents before this, and then the circle widens to include the immediate family.

Take a person and make a circle like this for him, and take another and make the same circle, and then take a third and make it again, and then make a census of all fit and able people, and define their family circles. You will find that every person in the world will enter into one of these circles; and so if you see any deviation from this, know that the centre of the circle has abandoned those within its circumference.

God *the Most High* says, '…and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives….' Reflect, then, on this exhortation to righteousness: the first thing mentioned about it is to spend on one's near kin because they have a special place. If we all spent upon our near kin and gave to them from our excess wealth and the excess fruits of our labour, there would be no needy people; or, if there were any needy people, they would be few in number, and the obligatory poor-due would be enough to suffice them.

Or, as one scholar said, the term 'relatives' here refers to the kinsfolk of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. They say this because God commands His Messenger to proclaim to the believers that He does not ask of them any recompense for his efforts except having loving kindness towards his kin (*ash-Shura:* 23).

Why the kinsfolk of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*?

It is because they have no share of the poor-due so that the one who delivered God's message could be free of deriving any material benefit from this for himself or his family; and so God denied them any right to the poor-due. It is as though God wanted to say to us: You should not bar those whom God has raised above having recourse to the poor-due to which paupers have recourse – you should not bar them from having recourse to anything, but rather, you should consider them as your own near kin so that you do not force them into poverty.

And even if we take the verse to be referring to our own families, we can still say that the Prophet has a higher claim on us, as believers, than we have on our own selves (*al-Ahzab:* 6), and so his family and household should be dearer to us than our own kinsfolk and families.

After this, God *the Most High* mentions 'orphans.' We know that an orphan is someone who loses his father before he grows into a man. Human orphans are not like animal orphans: an orphaned animal is one which has lost its mother, but an orphaned human is one who has lost his father. An orphan does not have a guardian unless he has inherited some money, in which case a guardian is charged with looking after his affairs. And so the True Lord *the Most High* commanded us to give form our wealth – however much we may love it – to the orphans, and He did not say 'to the guardians of orphans,' for there might be an orphan who is alone, for whom no one comes forward to be his guardian, and who may have no possessions that would necessitate his having a guardian; and so we have to give the orphan some of the money which God specifies as being part of righteousness, or else we give it to the guardian of the orphan so that he can spend it on him, if he does have a guardian.

Also, we have to give to the needy; the word *miskin* ('needy') is derived from the word *sukun* which means 'stillness'; this is because a needy person is one who is unable to work, as though his lowliness and degradation in life have made him unable to move.

Scholars differ as to who is poor (*faqir*) and who is needy (*miskin*). Some of them say that the *faqir* is the one who does not possess anything, while the miskin owns less than he needs, that is, he does own something, but it is not enough to suffice him. Others say that the *faqir* is the one who owns less than he needs, while the *miskin* owns nothing.

In any case, God's wisdom has willed that the poor be given part of what entails righteousness, and the needy another part. The difference of opinion amongst the scholars does not deny a share to either one of them because both the poor and the needy have a right to God's wealth; and hence the difference is inconsequential.

Likewise we should give to the traveller (*ibn as-sabil*), literally 'the son of the road.' *Sabil* means the road, and the traveller is the one who is on the road. Usually a person is named after the place where he lives or where he is from; this is why when a person is called 'the son of the road,' this means that he has no place to call his home except the road, and that he is a stranded man. In his home, the traveller might be rich, but the road has cut him off from his wealth and his possessions. Or he might have been rich, but his money had been stolen, and so he is stranded.

Why has God allotted a portion of righteous giving to the traveller? God has allotted a portion of this wealth to the wayfarer so that the believer understands that the mutual solidarity of faith centres on the environment in which he finds himself; if he is in one place and then moves on to another, he will still be in an environment of mutual solidarity based on faith.

We also give from our money to beggars, that is, to those who put themselves in a position where they beg; give to those who ask of you, even if they are riding on the back of a horse because you do not know why he is begging. Some people like to justify their stinginess by saying, ‘Lots of beggars are nothing but professional beggars!’ We say to them: As long as they are begging, that is the end of the matter. Our basis for saying this is the injunction of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Give to the beggar, even if he comes mounted on the back of a horse.’(1) As long as he has subjected himself to begging, then give him without hesitating.

You might think that he is carrying a bag filled with bread, or that he has hidden all his money far away. I say that he might well have bread, but not enough for his children, and he might well hide his money, but yet, it does not suffice him. You will not lose anything by giving to him, and to be wrong about giving is better than to be right about withholding.

We also give money ‘for freeing slaves’, i. e. to those who are in bondage (*riqab*). The root word *raqba* means the base of the neck, not the neck itself. The word *raqba* is also used metonymically to mean a whole being that is, representing the whole person. Why? This is because you can take control of a person’s life from his neck: you can grasp him by his neck and control him, or put pressure on him so that he cannot breathe and so dies; so, sometimes the word raqba refers to the person himself. An example of this is found in the

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn ‘Udayy in Al-Kamel on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him with a weak chain of narrators.*

Quran when God *the Most High* tells us that one of the things we can do to break through the hard pass is ‘untying a neck,’ that is freeing a slave or ransoming a captive (*al-Balad:* 12-13).

Thus ‘…for freeing slaves…’ means release a slave from bondage. A righteous person might buy a slave and then set him free, or share in freeing them, which is one way of abolition of slavery. There are also two other ways for abolition of slavery which are called *tadbir* and *mukataba*.

Suppose you have a slave who serves you faithfully and because of his long-serving faithfulness you decide to set him free after you die (*tadbir*), that is, you give him his freedom upon the event of your death so that his bondage is conditional on your continued life. Once your life is over, he becomes free, and so he is not considered your property and so is not inherited by anyone else.

Or you might agree to a contract (*mukataba*) with him for a fixed sum of money, so, for example you say that you will free him for one hundred pounds, and you give him permission to go and work and earn this money, and once he gives you one hundred pounds, you set him free. In such an instance, the people of righteousness would help this slave by contributing towards his *mukataba* contract to purchase his freedom.

Another aspect of righteousness is to be constant in prayer, so, the meaning becomes: but true righteousness is in he who believes in God, and the Last Day, and is constant in prayer. We know that the meaning of constancy in prayer is to offer the prayer at its proper times in its proper form.

An aspect of righteousness is also that we pay *zakat* or poor-due, and this indicates that the previously mentioned words ‘…and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and for freeing slaves…’ do not refer to the poor-due, but rather, they are all additional acts of righteousness aside from prescribed *zakat*; for if *zakat* was included in what went before, God would not have mentioned it again in the same verse.

So, these are the forms of righteousness that the verse mentions, namely spending upon one’s relatives, orphans, the needy, the stranded traveller, beggars, and for the freeing of slaves from bondage; establishing prayer, and paying the prescribed *zakat*. All of this is for those who wish to reach the station of spiritual excellence (*ihsan*) which as we know is to commit yourself to things which God has not obliged you to do, but rather, you do so in order to feel that God is pleased and contented with you; and so God accepts it from you.

And when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked if there were any duties related to wealth except the poor-due, he mentioned this verse: Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and for freeing slaves; [in who] establishes prayer and gives *zakat* (prescribed alms); [in those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [in those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and in time of danger. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the pious (*al-Baqara***:** 177).

So these are the requisite acts of righteousness, and the *zakat* is also required. The distribution of the *zakat* does not include the relatives, or the orphans. It is true that the *zakat* does give an allowance to the needy and the stranded traveller, but righteousness includes things which are not included in *zaka*t. It is as though if you want to open the door for yourself to be truly righteous before God, you have to widen the sphere of your giving. You will find that righteousness involves a great deal of giving because the one who gives is acting as God's vicegerent. God is the One Who called mankind into existence; and since He called them into existence, He *the Exalted* made Himself responsible for providing their sustenance. When you spend upon the needy person whom God *the Most High* called into existence, you show your love for God by helping the needy people of His creation without God having commanded you to do so, and this is why we see that God *the Most High* puts forth to people the proposition: Who will lend to God a goodly loan? God will repay it to him with manifold increase (*al-Baqara*: 245).

If God *the Most High* is the One Who gives all wealth, how can He say, ‘Offer Me a loan’? Indeed, this is so because He would not ask for a return of the gift of wealth He gave you; the wealth you possess is a gift from God, but if your fellow man is in need of it, He does not say to you, ‘Give him from what you have, or lend him what you have;’ rather, He says to you, ‘Lend it to Me;

for I am the One Who made him, and His sustenance is required from Me.’ So, when you give, it is as though you are giving a loan to God. This is the meaning of His words ‘Who will lend to God a goodly loan?’ (*al-Baqara*: 245). He *the Exalted* grants you His blessings, and then asks that you loan them to Him.

Let us give an example of this drawn from worldly matters – and God *the Most High* is beyond all comparison and example – suppose that you are in need and have money troubles, and your children have lots of money saved up from what you used to give to them. And so you say to them, ‘Loan me some of the money you have, and I will give it back to you once my troubles are over.’ You do not want to ask for a return of your gift to them and the money you gave them, so, you ask for a loan from them. This is like what God *the Most High* does.

We can also learn from the example of our Lady Fatima Az-Zahra' *God be pleased with her* when her father, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* visited her and found her with a rusty coin in her hand which she was polishing. Her father asked her, ‘What are you doing, o Fatima?’ She replied, ‘I am polishing a coin.’ ‘Why?’ he asked. She replied, ‘Because I want to give it in charity.’ He said, ‘If you are going to give it in charity, then why are you polishing it?’ she replied, ‘Because I know that it will fall into God’s hand before it lands in the hand of the poor person.’

It is also part of righteousness that a person keeps his promises. The True Lord *the Most High* mentions those who ‘…fulfill their promise when they promise….’ What is a promise? There are promises (*‘ahd*), and there are contracts (*‘aqd*). A promise is conducted between two parties who agree on something, but it might be that only one of them gives, while the other does not give back; as for a contract, it is also between two parties, but in this case, both of them give something and take something.

It is also part of righteousness that you be one of those who are ‘…patient in poverty and hardship and in time of danger….’ We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…fulfill their promise when they promise…’ using the nominative case in Arabic, because it is linked to the predicate of the nominal phrase ‘but true righteousness is…’ while we find the word ‘patient’ in the accusative case in Arabic; why is this so? What does this change of case signify? The Arabic ear is used to speech which is sound and eloquent, and so if speech like this comes from an eloquent source, we say that he must have used the unusual grammatical case here in order to alert us to something which must be well understood; for the One speaking here is eloquent, and since He is eloquent, but nevertheless has said *'al-mawfun'* ('those who keep their promises') in the nominative case, and then said *'as-sabirin'* ('those who are patient') in the accusative case right after it – which apparently is a grammatical error, there must be a reason for this. But what is the reason?

The way to attain all the good things that have just been mentioned is patience: spending one's money, despite loving it, on relatives, and so on and so forth; this is why God wanted to give special attention to the quality of patience, and so He changed its grammatical case. This change of case requires that we substitute an appropriate verb, and so it is as though the implied meaning of 'and are patient' is 'I single out those who are patient,' and 'I especially praise those who are patient.' This way, the accusative case would be in place.

So, the purpose of the change of grammatical case here is to alert the ear to something new which merits this change of case. This is because patience is the key to all these other actions, and the one who can patiently observe the prayer, and give the *zakat,* and give money despite cherishing it, has truly succeeded and triumphed; and all of this is a test of patience. For this reason, God singled out those who are patient by using a different grammatical case so that we would understand they are the subject of praise, or of special emphasis.

And why did God single out the patient for His praise? It is because all religious responsibilities can be hard for the soul, and no one can bear these hardships unless he is able to be patient. If he can be patient, then all of this will be easy for him, and this is why God singled out patience for this special emphasis.

What is important is that the verse mentions 'those who are patient' after those 'who keep their promises' so that the change in case would be noticeable and unambiguous; since the grammatical case of all that comes before 'and are patient' is that it is all added to the predicate of '…but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God….' This is why '…those who keep their promises…' is in the nominative case so that we can see it is added to the predicate of 'but true righteousness…' and then after this comes 'and are patient' in the accusative case so that we would clearly see the difference between the two concepts. Had it been in the nominative case just like what came before it, this might have passed us by without paying much attention to it.

In the phrase '…and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship…' ba'sa' means misery and poverty, and it is related to a person's state: We say that So-and-so is in a miserable state. Hardship (*darra'*) means pain, hunger, and sickness, and the afflictions of the body. 'And in time of danger.' Danger (*ba's*) here means times of war when the warrior meets his enemy in combat, and must have the patience and fortitude to fight.

So the attribute of patience is here linked to three things: in times of misery/poverty, illness and war against the enemy; with patience in all these three things. This is why the Noble Hadith says, 'No calamity afflicts a believer save but God expiates (his sins) for him by it, even the thorn which pricks him.'(1)

The True Lord *the Most High* says of those who attain to true righteousness that they are '…the ones who have been true….' So, the '…one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and gives away money, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives *zakat* (prescribed alms); [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and in time of danger. Those are the ones who have been true….' What does it mean that they have been true? Truthfulness means that speech reflects reality; and so they were truthful in their proclamation of their faith and the reality of their life's actions; and they were truthful when they said, 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God.'

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Kitab Al-Marda.*

So, the truthfulness of your faith depends on whether your life’s actions are in line with the dictates of your faith. If you believe, and declare your surrender to God, but your life’s actions contradict this declaration, we say: You have not proved yourself true; but if the attributes of faith are found in a person, we say to him: You have proved your faith true because your life’s actions are in harmony with your faith. How many people there are who are all talk and no action, and who ascribe themselves to Islam with nothing but words.

What is the fruit of true faith? The True Lord *the Most High* answers us by saying of them that they are the ‘ones who are the pious.’ When you hear the word ‘pious,’ or ‘fear God,’ this means to place a barrier of protection between oneself and something. It is not required that you place a barrier between yourself and something unless you would not be able to bear this thing.

An example of this is God’s injunction to the believers that they protect themselves and those who are close to them from the fire (*at-Tahrim:* 6). That is, place a barrier between yourself and the fire. We said that it is curious that the word ‘fear/shield yourself against’ can be used in such different ways as ‘fear the fire’, and then ‘fear God.’ How can there be fear of two such contradictory things? Indeed it can, because the meaning of ‘fear the Fire’ is ‘place a barrier between yourselves and the fire.’ Does the fire have any intrinsic power, or does God set it upon the sinner? It acts by virtue of the fact that God has set it upon the sinner. And so ‘fear God’ means ‘shield yourself against God’s wrath and the manifestations of His attributes of Majesty;’ this is because God has attributes of Majesty and attributes of Beauty, and so you should place a barrier between yourselves and God’s attributes of Majesty because you could not possibly bear God’s wrath, nor God’s overwhelming power, nor God’s reprimand. So place a barrier between yourselves and His attributes of Majesty, one manifestation of which is the fire of Hell. So there is a correspondence here, not a contradiction.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡقِصَاصُ فِي ٱلۡقَتۡلَىۖ ٱلۡحُرُّ بِٱلۡحُرِّ وَٱلۡعَبۡدُ بِٱلۡعَبۡدِ
وَٱلۡأُنثَىٰ بِٱلۡأُنثَىٰۚ فَمَنۡ عُفِيَ لَهُۥ مِنۡ أَخِيهِ شَيۡءٞ فَٱتِّبَاعُۢ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَأَدَآءٌ إِلَيۡهِ بِإِحۡسَٰنٖۗ
ذَٰلِكَ تَخۡفِيفٞ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ وَرَحۡمَةٞۗ فَمَنِ ٱعۡتَدَىٰ بَعۡدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَهُۥ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ﴿١٧٨﴾

You who believe, fair retribution is prescribed for you in cases of murder: the free man for the free man, the slave for the slave, the female for the female. But if the culprit is pardoned by his aggrieved brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and the culprit shall pay what is due in a good way. This is an alleviation from your Lord and an act of mercy. If anyone then exceeds these limits, grievous suffering awaits him [178] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 178)

When God *the Most High* calls ‘O you who have believed…’ this call is a prologue to the decree which will then follow. The implication of these words is, ‘I do not command you against your will, or your choice, but rather I command you because you have chosen to believe in Me; and as long as you believe in Me, pay heed to My commands.’ God *the Most High* does not command those who do not believe in Him, and since God only commands those who believe in Him, your faith in Him has made you a partner in the contract; so, if He prescribes something for you, you are party to this deal because if you did not believe, it would not have been prescribed. So it is as though the deal has already been struck, and as long as it has already been struck, you share in the responsibility. And God *the Most High* says *‘kutiba*’ (‘prescribed in the passive voice), and not *‘kataba’* (‘has prescribed’) in the active. You can notice that this difference shows up wherever man has a share in the matter. On the other hand, when the matter is concerned with God’s Will alone, He *the Exalted* uses the active voice, like when God says that He *kataba* (‘has ordained’) that He shall most certainly prevail, He and His Messengers (*al-Mujadala:* 21). He is the One Who has ordained this, and He has no partner.

When you read *kutiba ‘alaikum* (‘prescribed upon you’), you should understand that this implies there will be a need for effort and endeavour; this is contrary to *kataba lakum* (‘ordained/willed for you’), as is the case when

God *the Most High* teaches the believers to say that nothing can befall them save what God has decreed for them (*at-Tawba:* 51).

The words 'Prescribed for us' make us feel that this thing is in our interest. On the face of the matter, it seems that just retribution is something ordained as a burden upon you. If retribution is prescribed upon you and you are a murderer, as for the family of the victim, it has been prescribed for them. So every 'upon' has a 'for' as its counterbalance. You could either be a murderer or a victim; if you are a victim, then God has prescribed it for you, and if you are a murderer, then God has prescribed it upon you. This is because if something is 'for' me, it must be 'upon' or 'against' someone else; and if something is 'against' me, it must be 'for' someone else. Laws are not made for one person, but are made for all people.

When He *the Exalted* says, '…prescribed upon you is legal retribution…' and then in the next verse says that in the law of just retribution there is life for those who have reason (*al-Baqara*: 179), He says both 'for' and 'upon'; 'upon you' refers to the murderer,' and 'for you' to the victim. The law is just because it does not benefit one at the expense of another; and contracts always look after the interest of both parties.

'O you who have believed, prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered - the free for the free….' Who is free? A free man (*hurr*) is the opposite of a slave, someone who is not owned as bondsmen by someone else. The Arabic word (*hurr*) also means the noblest part of anything: when applied to money, it means the money one has at one's disposal which is the noblest form of money; when applied to human beings, it means those who are not owned by anyone; when applied to plants, it means those which are eaten raw, i.e. uncooked, like pistachios and almonds.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…the free for the free….' The outward, apparent meaning of this is that a free person should not be executed for murdering a slave because He says, '…the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female….' But what if a slave murders a freeman or a woman murders a man, should we execute them, or not?

The True Lord *the Most High* decides the rules of retribution, and He *the Exalted* did not decree that a freeman should only be executed for murdering a freeman;

rather, the meaning of the verse is that a freeman should be executed for killing a freeman, and a slave should be executed if he kills a slave, and a woman should be executed for killing a woman. This is absolute justice since the punishment of the murderer is commensurate with his crime, and does not necessitate that any more than this be done to expiate the murder. By this law, the True Lord *the Most High* was addressing a practice which was prevalent amongst the tribes at the time, when they used to kill for revenge and retaliation.

In the ignorant pre-Islamic times, if fighting broke out between two tribes naturally, people would die and fall victim to this fighting. If a slave were killed from one tribe, the tribe which owned him would try to go one step further in their retaliation for him by taking a freeman in revenge for him. Likewise, if a woman were killed in the war, her tribe would go one step further in their retaliation by taking a man.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to eliminate this cycle of revenge gradually, and so He issued this injunction: '…the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female….' Here, the True Lord *the Most High* is addressing the matter of the escalation of revenge-killings, and giving a decree which eliminates this disproportionate revenge.

In Upper Egypt, we still suffer the results of those who, out of heedlessness, do not implement the Law of God. When a man is killed, his people do not seek out the murderer for retaliation, but rather, they go and kill the highest member of his household in revenge. The ones seeking revenge want to do as much harm as they can, and they might make the price of the murder victim be ten men from the other family, and they might mutilate their bodies as part of their revenge. None of this has anything to do with just retribution. In the times of ignorance, they would be excessive when taking vengeance, and so the True Lord *the Most High* tells all humanity that this excessive vengeance will cause the fires of enmity to rage forever. And so the True Lord *the Exalted* here returns the matter of retaliation to its lowest level so that if one tribe kills a slave, the other tribe cannot escalate matters by killing a freeman in retaliation for this slave.

Thus the True Lord *the Most High* here was legislating about a matter which concerned these old civil conflicts and the mass killing that would occur because of them, and the excessive acts of vengeance which would take place as a result. This is an example of gradual legislation, and God *the Most High* decreed that the matter of retaliation be reduced to its lowest level so that if one tribe killed a slave, the other tribe could not escalate matters by killing a freeman. And after this, the True Lord *the Most High* decreed that in normal circumstances, the murderer should be subjected to just retribution either by being executed or by paying an indemnity; and therefore, another verse was revealed in which the True Lord *the Most High* said that in the Torah, He prescribed for the Jews: life for life, and eye for eye, and nose for nose, and ear for ear, and tooth for tooth, and for wounds retaliation; but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins. And they who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed, they are the transgressors (*al-Ma'ida*: 45).

So, just retribution in cases of murder is a life for a life, and there is no distinction made between slaves or freemen or women, but rather, it is simply a life for a life. The True Lord *the Most High*, by this legislation of just retribution, wants to bring an end to cycles of revenge and hatred. When you hear the words 'just retribution' and 'killing,' this means that the soul is filled with hatred and loathing, and God wants to cleanse all malice and hateful desire for vengeance from the souls of the believers. The True Lord *the Most High* gives the near of kin the right whether to demand execution or to forgive; and when God gives the near of kin the right to demand execution, the life of the murderer is in the hands of the victim's kinsman; if the kinsman forgives, it will not be because he is forced to by law, but rather will be out of the largesse of his soul. In this way, the True Lord *the Most High* drains away all anger and rage.

After this, God *the Most High* wants to soften the heart of the kinsman by saying, '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct….'

If we reflect on God's words '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct…', we notice that there is a switch from wrathful vengeance to forgiveness, and then, highly-stressed compassion, as though He were saying, 'Do not forget the brotherhood of faith.' '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct….’

When the True Lord *the Most High* says ‘brother’, consider whether this refers to a brother who shares the same father, such as was the case when God *the Most High* said ‘Joseph’s brothers came,’ (*Yusuf:* 58), or is it one of the cases when God raises the connection of faith to the level of brotherhood, saying that all believers are but brethren (*al-Hujurat:* 10), that is, be careful not to maintain your material ties of kin without maintaining your spiritual ties of faith.

The basic meaning of ‘brothers’ *ikhwa* are those who share a father, as is the case in ‘Joseph’s brothers came.’ If they are brethren in the sense of comrades, but have different fathers, they are termed *ikhwan*; and if they ascend to the connection of faith, they are called *ikhwa*. When God called them *ikhwan,* He *the Exalted* reminded the believers of the blessings which He has bestowed upon them: how, when they were enemies, He brought their hearts together so that through His blessing they became brethren (*Al-‘Imran*: 103). They had been divided by war, hatred, and discord, and so He did not call them *ikhwa* because they were still somewhat at odds, but rather, He called them *ikhwan*; and once faith had taken root in their souls, He called them *ikhwa*.

Let us consider events in the battle of Badr. Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umair *God be pleased with him*, who, before his conversion to Islam, had been the spoiled and pampered boy of Quraysh, always smelling of fine perfume and wearing silk; had had everything changed after he embraced Islam, for his faith took him away from this finery and made him share in the hardships of the early believers to the extent that he was reduced to wearing animal skins, and when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him in this state he said, ‘Look what faith has done to your friend.’

When the battle of Badr came, he encountered his brother, Abu ‘Aziz, who had kept to the religion of Quraysh. The two of them met in battle, Mus‘ab *God be pleased with him* on the side of the believers and Abu ‘Aziz on the side of the idolaters. During the battle, Mus‘ab *God be pleased with him* saw that his brother Abu ‘Aziz had been taken captive by Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with him*, who was one of the Medinan Helpers, and so Mus‘ab *God be pleased with him* looked to Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with him* and said, ‘O

Abu al-Yusr! Bind your prisoner well, for his mother is wealthy and will pay for him a hefty ransom!'

Abu 'Aziz looked at him and said, 'Brother, is this how you commend me to others?' Mus'ab *God be pleased with him* replied, 'No, you are not my brother, but rather, he is!', and he pointed at Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with him*. The connection of blood was finished, and the connection of faith had become primary, and Mus'ab and Abu Al-Yusr *God be pleased with them* had become brothers in faith, and his connection with his flesh-and-blood brother had ended because he was still an idolater.

So, it is as though God's words '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything…' are meant as an encouragement for the kinsman to forgive, and not to forget the brotherhood of faith. True, he is the kinsman of the murder victim, because he is connected to him in flesh and blood; but God *the Most High* wants to make the brotherhood of faith ascendant over the brotherhood of blood: '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct….'

The True Lord *the Most High* mentioned brotherhood here to soften emotions, to alert both, the families of the murderer and the victim, to the fact that murder does not mean that the brotherhood of faith is over. No. the believers should bear in mind that sometimes the bond of the brotherhood of faith can weaken; and when the kinsmen of the victim remember the brotherhood of faith, forgiveness will become easier for their souls to accept. We should notice that the True Lord *the Most High* always wants us to take the higher path, and so He reminds us that if the kinsmen have any mercy, then mercy should prevail in this matter so that the murderer is not executed.

After this, let us consider the precision of the ruling of the True Lord *the Most High* in how He cleanses anger from the hearts by making the blood indemnity stand in place of the just retribution of execution. The indemnity which the kinsmen take from the murderer might be postponed, or the murderer and his family might be able to pay it right away. And so the one who is responsible for the indemnity should pay it, and the family of the victim should accept it with fairness and good conduct, and the family of the murderer, or the murder himself, should give the restitution in a goodly manner.

God *the Most High* says, '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything….' The word 'anything' means that if one of the kinsmen of the victim forgives, then this is one single forgiveness and he does not have the right to seek retribution after this, and the matter is finished and the blood is spared. God did not want to put a text which completely prohibited just retribution, but rather, He wanted to give the kinsman the right to demand execution; and since he has the right to demand execution, the matter is in his hands: if he forgives, the life of the murderer will be considered as a fruit of his goodness; and if the murderer lives, this would not leave any hatred in the heart of the kinsman, but rather the murderer would seek his favour because he was good to him and gave him his life.

But if the text referring to the retribution for murder taken by the tribes had been the only text to remain, and God had not raised the matter of forgiveness, the rancour would have remained in the heart.

The cycles of revenge found in modern societies exist because we do not give the kinsman the right to decide the fate of the murderer. If the murderer was allowed to go to the family of the victim and see them in their house, and beg them for mercy, and take his burial shroud with him and say to them, 'I have come to you so, you can take retribution from me, and here is my burial shroud, so, do as you will,' it would never be the case that the kinsmen would exact revenge upon the killer, but rather, it would be the normal thing for them to forgive him. Why?

Because they would have him at their mercy, and his life would be in their hands, and the normal thing in such an occasion is that enmity turns into compassion. And so the killer owes his life to those who forgive him, and those of his children who know this see that their father's life was a gift given to him by the family of the victim, and they will see that the mercy of the victim's family is what saved the life of their relative. And so the circle widens, and the enmity turns into compassion.

God enjoins on the believers to repel evil with something that is better – and then you will find that the one with whom there was enmity has become a true friend (*Fussilat:* 34).

Had God *the Most High* not allowed just retribution, this would have caused chaos; and so He did allow it, and then subtly encouraged mercy by making the waiving of retribution a matter of largesse on the part of the victim's kinsman, and making us incline to it, saying, '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct….' Does it make sense to say that the indemnity be paid 'with good conduct'? Let us remember that the one speaking here is God, and His Word is the Quran, and the precision of the Quran is without limit. The True Lord *the Most High* here draws attention to the fact that if the family of the victim accept the indemnity, this means that they had the right to demand that retribution be exacted from the murderer, but they chose to give him the right to live; and this should be met with a response or an acknowledgement which is better than it: one good turn deserves another.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* does not want the kinsmen to put excessive pressure on the murderer or his family when they claim their right, just as He wants the killer or his family to give the indemnity in a way that properly acknowledges the mercy which has been shown to the killer. This is a lightening of the commandment of the Torah; for in the Torah there was no way for the killer to expiate his crime with an indemnity, but rather, the only retribution accepted by the Torah was 'a life for a life.' And in the Gospel, there was neither retribution nor indemnity, for there was a principle by which the followers of Jesus *peace be upon him* wanted to rise above the Jews who were entrenched in materialism. Jesus *peace be upon him* was sent as a messenger to the Israelites to cleanse their hearts of materialism, and so he brought them the principle of: 'If someone slaps you on your right cheek, offer him the left.'

But Islam came as a universal religion for all, and so it encouraged the soul to rise above, and at the same time gave people their rights, and so it preserved the right of just retribution and made a place for lenience also. The True Lord *the Most High* says about the indemnity, '…This is alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. But whoever transgresses after that will have a painful punishment.' What could this transgression be after the allowance for indemnity and mercy has been made?

The practice of some of the tribes was that if one of them was killed, they would claim to have forgiven and buried the hatchet, and take the indemnity so that the killer would feel safe to come out of hiding, whereupon they would kill him. The True Lord *the Most High* affirms here that such an action is transgression, and that anyone who transgresses after forgoing the right to demand execution and taking the indemnity, will be subjected to a painful punishment. We can infer from God's ruling of painful punishment here that the one who transgresses by killing he whom he had claimed to forgive cannot himself offer any indemnity for this, and should be executed for his action; and God does not absolve him from the suffering of this world, nor that of the Hereafter.

The True Lord *the Most High* excuses the murderer any punishment and suffering if he accepts the retribution he owes and submits to it, or if he is pardoned and gives the indemnity; but the True Lord *the Most High* does not accept anything but the use of the opportunities which He has given to humanity that they might elevate their relationships. The True Lord *the Most High* does not accept that the family of the victim should hide behind forgiveness simply in order that they can kill the murderer once they have publicly forgiven him; for to do this is to play around with the commandments God has issued to His servants. And so the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَكُمْ فِي ٱلْقِصَاصِ حَيَوٰةٌ يَٰٓأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٩﴾

Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding, so that you may guard yourselves against what is wrong [179] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 179)

Notice here that the Quranic discourse at first said, 'O you who have believed, prescribed upon you is…' (*al-Baqara*: 178), and now it says, 'And in legal retribution there is life for you….' Precise, ordered legislation decrees responsibilities and rights, and there can be no responsibility without a corresponding right, and no right without a corresponding responsibility. In order to recognise the loftiness of this legislation, every believer should consider his responsibilities and compare them to his rights; in doing so, the believer will discover that in the light of God's Law he has attained absolute justice.

God is the Lawgiver, and He is the Lord of all mankind, and so no believer has more right to God than any other. Religious responsibility prohibits injustice, and upholds rights, and protects and preserves a person's property and dignity. People usually argue for their own rights and demand them in full, yet, they try to reduce their responsibilities; but the believer is the one who shoulders all of his responsibilities and so receives all of his rights as the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And in legal retribution there is life for you, o you people of insight, that you may be God-fearing.'

Legal retribution is ordained for the killer, the victim, and the kinsman. If the killer knows that God has ordained just retribution, this makes it necessary for the killer to give himself up, and his family must not hide him far from the eyes of the people; for the murderer must bear responsibility for what he has done. When the killer finds himself surrounded by a believing society which does not accept murder, he will be deterred from killing. Legal retribution is a source of life because the one who intends to kill, might be deterred if he knows that someone will exact retribution on him, and that people will not agree to hide him.

After this, let us now consider those who prattle away, saying, 'Retribution is barbaric and inhumane.' We ask them: Why are you aggrieved to see a person being subjected to retribution rightfully after he had killed someone else wrongfully? Why do you grieve for him?

God *the Most High* did not legislate these punishments so that they would be carried out, but rather, He legislated them as a deterrent. When we carry out just retaliation on the murderer, we protect the rest of society from having amongst them a murderer who does not respect the lives of others, and at the same time we protect this criminal from himself because he will think one thousand times before he commits the crime.

So, taking retribution from a murderer is a warning to others and a means of protection for the rest of society; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And in legal retribution there is life for you….' The True Lord *the Most High* wants to forewarn us against being swayed by false leniency, thoughtless 'humanity', and foolish emotion, into doing away with just retribution.

How can we be outraged when a murderer is rightfully punished, and be unmoved when an innocent person is murdered? When the True Lord *the Most High* legislates just retribution, it is as though He were saying: Beware of killing anyone because if you do, you too will be killed; and this is a means of protection for all people from being killed. The legislation of just retaliation is a means of life for you because when you know that if you kill an innocent person, you in turn will be killed for it, you will refrain from killing anyone, and so it will be as though you have saved your own life; and this is truly just and righteous legislation.

So, there is life in just retaliation because everyone is subject to retaliation, and everyone has the right to claim it. It is a legislation which addresses those endowed with intelligence and insight who recognise the essential purpose of rules and laws; as for those who do not possess insight, they are the ones who argue about things without understanding the essence of them. If there were no retaliation, no one would be deterred; if there were no retaliation, humanity would descend into barbarity. The wisdom behind legislating punishments is to prevent the crime from being committed, and in this way the crime can decline along with the punishment so that the right is equal to the responsibility.

Anyone who reflects on the matters of the universe will find that the balance in this world, for example, came in the past from two great powers who each feared the other, and who were distinct from each other, and this difference gave life to other peoples; for had they been agreed upon falsehood, the fundamentals of their nations would have been destroyed, and this would have destroyed the whole world, and made slaves out of all the other peoples.

And so every regime in the world bore hatred and malice towards the other regimes and wanted to make its own system dominant, but feared the power of the other regime; and this mutual fear protected the lives of the others, and provided the believers with an opportunity to utilise the means of scientific advancement so that they could present to the world a fine example of how life can be for those who follow God’s guidance. Now that one of these powers, the Soviet Union, has crumbled, the United States has begun to search for another rival because it knows that if it were to live without another equal power to counter it, the smaller powers might be encouraged to challenge it.

Fear of punishment is what creates balance between the powers of the world; and fear of punishment is what creates balance where individuals are concerned, as well. The justice of the Dispenser of Mercy is what requires us to meet crimes with their appropriate punishments, and that others witness these punishments so that they will be deterred.

And so concerning the crime of fornication, for example, the True Lord *the Most High* emphasises the need for the punishment to be witnessed by a group of people so that they will be deterred. Very strict investigation is required in matters of fornication because if there is no careful investigation the people will be beset by worries, and doubts will be raised about parentage; and the punishment is also strict, as the True Lord *the Most High* ordains that the punishment for the adulteress and the adulterer is to flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion with them keep you from carrying out this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a group of the believers witness their chastisement (*an-Nur:* 2).

The one who violates the rights of his fellow men also thereby violates the rights of God, and so true faith means to seek to please God, not please the people. To carry out a punishment on a transgressor is to obey God's Law, and to display this punishment to others is a way to spread the notion that transgressors will be punished; and so the True Lord *the Most High* legislated punishment and made it public so that the human soul would be balanced.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* deals with another social matter. After dealing with the matter of homicide, the True Lord *the Most High* then moves the discussion to another of life's concerns, the concern of natural death. It is as though, after clarifying for us the matter of death by criminal means, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to clarify for us some of the matters connected with natural death, which is not caused by any deliberate action. In the next verse, the True Lord *the Most High* deals with some of the things connected with death in order to establish economic equilibrium in society, just as the verse before it established penal equilibrium in society. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ إِن تَرَكَ خَيْرًا ٱلْوَصِيَّةُ
لِلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۖ حَقًّا عَلَى ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٨٠﴾

it is prescribed that he should make a proper bequest to parents and close relatives a duty incumbent on those who are mindful of God [180] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 180)

As we explained before, the True Lord *the Most High* does not force people to do anything, but rather, He presents to them the case of faith in Him, and if they believe, their belief requires them to follow His teachings. Therefore, because of his faith, the believer also believes in everything that God ordains upon him. The believer is the one who accepts God as Deity and Lawgiver, and so when God ordains something upon the believer, the believer shares in the ordination of this thing by dint of the faith he professes. As for he, who disbelieves in the True Lord *the Most High*, God does not force him to give up his decision to disbelieve, but only ordains one thing for him: chastisement in the Hereafter.

God *the Most High* only issues commands to those who believe in Him, and love Him, and believe in all of His attributes of Majesty and Perfection. This is why religious responsibility is an honour by which God has ennobled those who love Him and believe in Him. If the disbelievers realise that God has ignored them because they do not believe in Him, they would be quick to accept faith, and they would see the nobility of every believer manifested in the responsibilities to which God holds him. The believer keeps to his responsibilities out of submission to God's will, and to submit to God's will means to love Him; as long as there is love between the servant and his Lord, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to make this love continue, and so the commands of God are a means of sustaining love between the servant and the Lord.

The servant loves the Lord by his faith, and the Lord loves the servant by His commands; and these commands are a higher level than the faith of the servant since God does not gain anything from the faith of the servant, but the servant does gain from the commands of God. The believer must be conscious of the honour of God's commands; to be commanded is not a shameful thing to which the True Lord *the Most High* subjects His believing servants, but it is rather, an honour which God wants for His believing servants. And so the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘it is prescribed upon you…’ imply a matter in which the servant and the Lord share; this ordainment is something shared by the True Lord *the Most High* who reveals the command, and the servant who believes in the command.

The True Lord *the Most High* here issues a command related to bequests, saying, ‘It is prescribed upon you, when any one of you is at the point of death, if he leaves wealth, that he should bequeath to his parents and kindred in accordance with what is acceptably fair; this is binding on those who fear God.’

We find here two conditions: the first condition begins with ‘when,’ which refers to a certain matter which will definitely occur. Death is an absolute certainty for everyone, and so the True Lord *the Most High* introduces this condition with the word ‘when’ (*idha*), which is a particle used to introduce a condition clause, and also an adverb of time. Death is certain, but no one knows exactly when it will occur.

The second condition begins with ‘if’ (Arabic *‘in’*) which is a particle to introduce a conditional clause we use when speaking of something which is not certain. A person might leave a fortune behind him when he dies, or he might leave nothing at all. And so the True Lord *the Most High* commands His servant to make bequests of his wealth. Why? Because the True Lord wants to make laws which preserve social well-being, and so the True Lord counsels His servants to work hard in life so that they can earn enough provisions to make them comfortable, and to meet their needs with some left over; and this excess is the meaning of ‘wealth’ and the exact definition of wealth differs from one person to another and from one time to another.

In the old days, when a person died and left ten pounds, this amount was considered to be valuable, while in these days if a person dies and leaves a thousand pounds some people might consider this to be a small amount. Wealth is valued according to its time, and so God did not specify any particular amount here. In Egypt, for example, we used to exchange a pound note for a gold pound coin and have two-and-a-half pence left over, while now the same amount of gold is worth more than two hundred and fifty pounds. This is because the value of the Egyptian pound in the past was high, while now, hard currency far outnumbers gold reserves, and as a result, the golden pound has become much more valuable than the pound note.

Because the True Lord *the Most High* wants the best for people, He did not specify the amount of wealth or its value. Before a person dies while in possession of some wealth, he must make bequests of it. We can observe that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade that one should wait until the moment of death to give his bequests, or to tell his family what debts he owes because at the time of death, a person may not be thinking about these kinds of things. And so we should understand that the True Lord *the Most High* is telling us that a person should keep a record of what he has and what he owes during his life, and stipulate and write down the bequests he wishes to leave upon his death; the believer should say, 'When I die, my parents will receive such-and-such, and my relatives such-and-such.'

That is, the believer is commanded to write his bequests while he is still healthy, and not wait until he is dying to give his bequests. To whom does the True Lord *the Most High* say wealth should be given? He '…should bequeath to his parents and kindred in accordance with what is acceptably fair; this is binding on those who fear God.' The True Lord *the Most High* knows that His servants are likely to consider their children and forget about their parents because people consider their parents as people who do not have long to live even though parents are the reason why children even have life at all. And so the True Lord *the Most High* counsels His servants to leave some of their wealth to their fathers and mothers, and also to their near of kin. He *the Exalted* wants to protect two potentially vulnerable groups of people: parents and relatives.

This ruling came before the laws of inheritance had been ordained. Before the laws of inheritance, people would leave everything they owned to their children, but God *the Most High* wanted them to cease the practice of giving everything to the children and leaving out parents and near of kin. After this, God specified the parents' share of inheritance; as for the near of kin, the True Lord *the Most High* left it up to His servants to decide how much to leave them. The parents might be disbelievers, who therefore do not inherit from their child, but the True Lord *the Most High* says that He has enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: his mother bore him by bearing weakness upon weakness, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years: hence, he should be grateful towards God and towards his parents, and he should remember that to God all shall come. Man should revere his parents; yet should they endeavour to make him join a divinity with God, something which his mind cannot accept, he should not obey them; but even then, he should bear them company in this world's life with kindness, and follow the path of those who turn towards God. In the end, to God everyone must return; and thereupon, He will make people truly understand all that they were doing in life (*Luqman:* 14-15).

The True Lord *the Most High* here reminds His servants of the favours He gave them, and also the favours of their parents, but if the parents are idolaters, they must not be obeyed if they try to impose their idolatry on their offspring; yet still, there is the commandment to bear them kind company in this life and to follow the path of the believers who adhere to God's teachings. And so the believer is entitled to leave some of his wealth to his parents even if they are disbelievers, and we know that the upper limit of a bequest is a third of all a person owns, the rest being reserved for the legal process of estate division. As for if they are believers, we follow the Noble Prophetic Hadith: 'There can be no bequest for one who legally inherits.'(1)

So bequests are for the weak relatives who do not stand to inherit; and this is the meaning of societal welfare. When the True Lord *the Most High* tells His servants to make bequests, while they still live, for their weak relatives, He wants to make them understand that they have a responsibility towards these people, and so it is good that a person works in life and earns a lawful livelihood so that he can make his heirs wealthy instead of leaving them a burden on someone else.

Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas *God be pleased with him* relates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to visit him during his illness in Mecca and said, 'May God have mercy on the son of 'Afra.' Sa'd asked, 'O Messenger of God, should I leave all my wealth as a bequest?' He said no, so, he asked, 'Or half of it?' He said no, so, he said, 'Then a third?' He said, 'A third, and a third is a lot: it is better that you should leave your heirs wealthy than that you should leave them in need, begging from people.'(1) If God *the Most High* gives you much wealth as a result of your work, you should be very careful not to confine all this wealth to those who stand to inherit from you. Why? Because if you confine everything to those who stand to inherit from you, you might come across someone in your life who is related to you, but who does not stand to inherit from you, and who needs help him to make ends meet; and if you do not help him, he will envy you and envy all the blessings God has given to you. But if this relative knows that he has the chance to obtain some of the favours that God has given you, although it will be by a bequest and not an automatic legal inheritance, this relative will be happy for you, for the favours God has given you.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Baihaqi in his Sunan and by Ad-Daraqutni on the authority of Jabir God be pleased with him.*

And so the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'It is prescribed upon you, when any one of you is at the point of death, if he leaves wealth, that he should bequeath to his parents and kindred in accordance with what is acceptably fair; this is binding on those who fear God.'

The True Lord *the Most High* wants His servants to bear in mind their relatives who will not inherit from them automatically, after He made parents automatic beneficiaries. When a person is related to someone who dies leaving wealth, and who leaves him some of this wealth as a bequest, this relative will be taken by the same sentiment, and so will learn not to keep wealth from the needy; Love will then spread and bonds of regard will be formed.

The True Lord *the Most High* knows – and He well knows the souls of His servants – that the one who receives a bequest might not be honest, while the one who inherits might be honest, and so His legislation takes this into account; for when someone takes his bequest from the estate, this reduces the amount inherited by the heirs. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to protect all parties: the one who leaves a bequest, and the one who receives it, and the one who inherits, and in this regard He *the Exalted* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, and An-Nasa'i.*

فَمَنۢ بَدَّلَهُۥ بَعۡدَ مَا سَمِعَهُۥ فَإِنَّمَآ إِثۡمُهُۥ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يُبَدِّلُونَهُۥٓۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨١﴾

If anyone alters the bequest after hearing it, the guilt of the alteration will fall on them: God is all hearing and all knowing [181] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 181)

We know that at the time the Quran was revealed, bequests were made orally and were not generally written down. And so the True Lord *the Most High* deals here with the aspect which is equally shared by the one who bequeaths, the one who receives the bequest, and the legal heir, namely that of speech. Speech was the method used to arrange all this in the past, and there were none of these modern methods such as official will-readings; this is why altering the provision of a deceased person's bequest was a sin for the one who did it.

The one who bequeaths is clearly innocent, while the one who receives the bequest and the legal heir should be aware that God knows the secrets of the heart, and He is All-Hearing and All-Knowing. The True Lord *the Most High* wants there to be a good relationship between the one who receives a bequest and the legal heir, and so He *the Exalted* says:

فَمَنۡ خَافَ مِن مُّوصٍ جَنَفًا أَوۡ إِثۡمًا فَأَصۡلَحَ بَيۡنَهُمۡ فَلَآ إِثۡمَ عَلَيۡهِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٨٢﴾

But if anyone knows that the testator has made a mistake, or done wrong, and so puts things right between the parties, he will incur no sin: God is most forgiving and merciful [182] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 182)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants justice for all, and so if a bequest is unjust and deviating from the straight path, and a poor person has been neglected while a rich person has been made even richer, or the relatives have been excluded, this prevents the societal well-being which God desires. And so if someone tries to do the right thing by correcting the bequest, he does not sin by altering the bequest to make it sound and pleasing to God; for God is forgiving and merciful.

A person might fear that the testator has made a mistake, meaning an injustice or an imbalance. A person may be created with some kind of a physical imbalance, i.e. in such a way that one side of him is lower than the other. We know from the scientists of anatomy that one half of the human body is different from the other half; this difference might be obvious in some cases, while in others it cannot be observed except by careful scrutiny.

A person might not have any choice about being imbalanced, but the sin comes when a person chooses, that is, when he knows it is a sin but does it anyway. And so if someone fears that a testator has made a mistake, i.e. an imbalanced decision, unintentionally, this is something that the testator had no choice about and fixing this error and this injustice is doing a favour for the testator. As for the case if the testator deliberately intended to do wrong, it is obligatory to right this wrong. This is the precision of Quranic legislation which trains all a person's faculties to accomplish complete justice.

The True Lord *the Most High* dealt with the matter of legal retribution by invoking all the faculties of good in mankind when He said, '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct….'

This is not a dry legislation like that of human beings, but rather, it is legislation from the Most-Merciful Creator Who knows all the secrets of mankind. The True Lord *the Most High* stirs up all the inclinations to good in the human soul, and in this same way He deals with the matter of alterations made to the bequest made by a deceased person; and so whoever corrupts a bequest which was based on justice, will be punished.

As for if someone intervenes to correct a bequest in such a way that saves the deceased person from injustice which is unintentional but causes harm, or amend a bequest which is deliberately wrong, this is something which God wants, and which incurs no sin, and which God will bring to fruition with forgiveness and mercy. And so the True Lord *the Most High* teaches us that those who hear or read a bequest, must judge it according to the standards of truth, justice, and God's law; if it contradicts these, its author must revise it. We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* describes the feeling of this person as fear of injustice, either accidental or deliberate, saying, 'But if one fears from the testator any mistake or wrong, and shall make a settlement between the parties; that shall be no wrong in him: verily, God is Forgiving, Merciful.'

The use of the word ‘fear’ here shows the unity of faith in the souls of the Muslims. The believer who undertakes to achieve this kind of settlement, might be neither an heir, nor a recipient of the bequest, nor the one giving the bequest, but rather might be only a witness, but this position of being a witness makes him seek a proper settlement based on the justice of faith. Every affair which involves a single believer matters to all the believers, and so if there is any injustice, this should make the believer feel fear because the result might be bad for another believer even if it is unintentional. And so we see the unity of faith; faith joins the believers to one another so that they are like a single body: if one part of it ails, the rest of it suffers restlessness and fever on account of it.

Thus, when the believer intervenes in a matter of inheritance or bequest to rectify it even though he can derive no direct advantage from doing so, the True Lord *the Most High* will reward him with the best reward.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘But if one fears from the testator any mistake or wrong, and shall make a settlement between the parties; that shall be no wrong in him: verily, God is Forgiving, Merciful.’ This statement alerts us to the fact that if a person resolves to make a bequest, he should ask the advice of those around him, and should be willing to take advice from people who possess wisdom and knowledge so that grudges do not arise once the bequest becomes final, that is, when he dies. The True Lord *the Most High* has established the necessary precautions to make sure that bequests can be rectified if problems arise because the True Lord *the Most High* wants the believers to support one another with the unity of faith. And so the problem of corruption must be guarded against before it takes place, which is why the Messenger of God said:

The likeness of the one who keeps to God’s limits and the one who transgresses them is that of a group of people who draw lots for places on a ship, some of them getting a place on the upper deck, and some of them on the lower so that when the ones on the lower deck need to drink, they have to go to the upper deck to get it, and so they say, ‘If we make a hole in our half, we will not need to bother the people above!’ if they leave them to do as they want, they will all be ruined; if they prevent them from doing it, they will all be saved.(1) This Noble

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and At-Tirmidhi, and by Ahmad in his Musnad, on the authority of An-Nu‘man ibn Bashir.*

Hadith gives an example of the vital importance of assistance and advice amongst the believers as a way of protecting them. These people drew lots to decide their places on a ship, and drawing lots is a completely impartial way of selection. Some of them got places on the lower deck depending on what lot they drew, and others got places on the upper deck. Those who were on the lower deck wanted some water, and so one of them suggested that they bore a hole in the ship to get the water, justifying this by saying that such an action would not disturb the people on the upper deck of the ship. Had they gone ahead with this, and had the people on the upper deck not stopped them, they would all have drowned; but if those on the upper deck had intervened, they would have stopped everyone from drowning. This is the case with the boundaries God has set: the believers must counsel one another to ensure that they are observed so that no one should say, 'What happens to other people is none of my business' because the affairs of the Muslims should concern every Muslim. So we have a verse of which our master Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* said, 'There is a verse which you read in the wrong way,' i.e. which you understand incorrectly; the verse being God's instruction to the believers to be afraid of temptation: the evil doers among them will not be the only ones on whom it will light: And they should know that God is severe in punishment.

Our Sheikh, Hassanain Makhlouf, former Grand Mufti of Egypt, explained this verse thus: That is, beware of God's test in the form of hardships which will afflict you, and will afflict both the sinners and everyone else, in the form of trials, drought, inflation, prevalence of tyrants, and so on; and the meaning is a warning to avoid the sins which cause these tests, such as the acceptance and approval of evil and heretical beliefs, and the dissimulation of enjoining what is good, and disunity concerning the True Lord *the Most High*, and the failure to observe God's laws, and the open spread of sins, and so on. Al-Bukhari narrates that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Woe to the Arabs on account of an approaching evil!' It was said to him, 'Will we be destroyed when some of us are righteous?' He said, 'Yes, if wickedness prevails.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih in the section Al-Fitan.*

So, the Muslim should not think that he is not responsible for the corruption that spreads through society, but rather, he should warn of it and call attention to it. This is why we find that God in His wisdom decreed that the indemnity should be paid by the family of the murderer because it might have been the case that they saw that he was beginning to act wickedly, but did nothing to stop him; had they controlled him at the outset, they would not have ended up having to pay the indemnity. And so we see that God *the Most High* says, ‘But if one fears from the testator any mistake or wrong….’ That is, be careful not to say ‘This is none of my business;’ no; it indeed does concern you, and you should try to bring about a settlement between the recipient of the bequest and the heir. God *the Most High* says, ‘…that shall be no wrong in him….’ This means that he will not be counted as one of those who alter the bequest, of whom we spoke when we examined the previous verse; rather, you will be rewarded for intervening because you have not changed the truth into falsehood, but rather, you have removed a falsehood and replaced it with the truth; and so you soften the heart of the heir about what was taken from him, and you uphold the balance of justice by giving good advice so that he is willing to accept that the bequest be given after it has been altered to meet the demands of God’s law. God wants justice to be established, and common purity shared by the believers so that the bequest is not tainted by wickedness

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ
عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ١٨٣

You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God [183] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 183)

The True Lord *the Most High* begins this noble verse by paving the way for the coming command, which is fasting. It is as though He were saying, ‘O you who believe in Me, and love Me: I have ordained fasting upon you.’ If a command comes from one in whom you believe, you trust that He is giving you the command for your own good. For example – and God is beyond compare – suppose that you are telling your son to do something which is difficult but will result in benefit. You do not say to him, ‘Son, do such-and-such,’ but rather, you use more endearing terms, saying for example, ‘My boy, do such-and-such.’ It is as though you are saying to him, ‘O my child, do not judge this difficult thing I ask you to do according to the standards of your mind which has not reached maturity, but rather take it according to the standards of your father’s knowledge and experience.’

Believers take God’s address to them with the words ‘O you who believe’ according to the standard of love for all the commands that come from Him *the Exalted* even if they are difficult. By their acceptance of faith, the believers enter into a contract of faith with the True Lord. He *the Exalted* does not command those who do not believe in Him to fast because they have not entered into an agreement of faith with Him, and so they will be cast into perdition.

Fasting (*siyam*) is a form of abstinence, since the verb to fast (*sama*) means also to abstain. The term is used in the verse where the True Lord *the Most High* commands Mary, Mother of Jesus *peace be upon them*, that if she should see any human being, she should say to him that she has vowed *sawm* (abstinence from speech) to The Most Merciful; hence, she may not speak today to any mortal (*Maryam:* 26). This abstinence (*sawm*) means to abstain from speaking. So the meaning of fasting is to abstain; but the meaning of fasting in the Sacred Law is to abstain from the desires of the stomach and the private parts from dawn until sunset.

The principle of fasting does not differ from one era to another; fasting was a fundamental devotional act for the religions which came before Islam, but it took the form either of a complete abstention from food or an abstention from certain kinds of food like the Christian way of fasting. Fasting is therefore a universal religious discipline although the exact days in which it is offered and the form of abstention it involves, differ. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘…that you may fear God.’

We know that the meaning of the fear of God is that we place a barrier between ourselves and God’s attributes of Majesty, and that we fear God’s wrath, and that we fear the fire which is a manifestation of God’s Majesty.

God *the Most High* says, '…that you may fear God,' that is, that we refine and hone our behaviour so that we steer clear of sins; the soul's inclination to sin comes from its materialistic desire for things; and as we know, fasting weakens materialistic desire and helps to keep it under control. Therefore, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says to youths and others besides them, 'O young people, those of you who can do so should marry, for it aids you to lower your gaze and guard your chastity; and those who cannot, should fast, for it shall be a shield for him.'(1)

It is as though fasting cuts off the materialistic desire in the young person's body. Less food means less fuel for the body, and this in turn lessens the voracity which pushes people to commit sin. Fasting in *Ramadan* offers a person virtue for a whole month, and he tastes the sweetness of virtue and so keeps it up after *Ramadan* ends. The True Lord *the Most High* does not ask you to be virtuous during *Ramadan* only, but rather, He *the Most High* chose *Ramadan* to be the time when we train ourselves to live virtuously so that it will continue afterwards throughout our whole life. When God elects a time, place, or person, the purpose of this is not simply to exalt the time, place, or person; rather, when God chooses a messenger, He wants the effect of this messenger's election to be spread to all people. And so we find that the history of the messengers is full of hardship and toil, which shows that the messenger bears the hardship and toil of his message himself; and so God has not chosen him simply to exalt him, but rather, He chose him to make him an example for others.

In the same way, God *the Most High* elects certain periods of time, not to exalt them above all other times, but rather because He *the Exalted* wants the special qualities of this time to spread throughout all other times, such as His election of the days of *Ramadan*. And the True Lord *the Most High* elects certain places so that their special qualities will spread to all places. We hear people say, 'I visited Mecca and Medina, and tasted the sweetness of purity and enlightenment, and I forgot about everything else.' The one who says this thinks that he is praising the place, forgetting that the place itself will rejoice if its specialness spreads to all other places. If you go to Mecca to visit the Sacred Mosque, and go to Medina to visit the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, you should also remember wherever you go that God is present everywhere, and that if you establish the pillars of Islam and behave with good Islamic conduct, you thereby draw nearer to God and to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, Ahmad, and Al-Baihaqi.*

It is true that when you are within the confines of the Mosque of God, your acts of worship are characterised by acute consciousness and sound intention; it is as though whilst you are in God's Mosque and in the company of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, you would be ashamed to commit any sin. When you hear the call of 'God is Great!' you go to pray with humility, and you do not harm anyone. So why do you not maintain this behaviour at all times and in all places? You can invoke a good devotional intention in any place, and you will find the same spiritual purity.

So, when God *the Most High* elects a time or a place, or elects a person, the True Lord *the Most High* only intends thereby that the election of this person extends to all people, and that the election of this place extends to all places, and that the election of this time extends to all times. And so I am amazed when I find people who begin to praise God and read the Quran at the onset of *Ramadan*, and then when it finishes, they forget all about this. I say: is the purpose of *Ramadan* to administer the religion for us, or is the purpose of *Ramadan* to train us to live righteously all the time?

God *the Most High* says, 'fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you….' This indicates to us that Muslims were not unique in the act of fasting, but rather, there were others before them who fasted, although the exact forms of the fast differed. When the True Lord *the Most High* said '…Fasting is prescribed to you…' this was the affirmation of the basic concept of fasting; and the True Lord *the Most High* then gives the details of this concept, saying:

أَيَّامًا مَّعۡدُودَٰتٖۚ فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوۡ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٖ فَعِدَّةٞ مِّنۡ
أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَۚ وَعَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُۥ فِدۡيَةٞ طَعَامُ مِسۡكِينٖۖ فَمَن تَطَوَّعَ
خَيۡرٗا فَهُوَ خَيۡرٞ لَّهُۥۚ وَأَن تَصُومُواْ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡۖ إِن كُنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ١٨٤

Fast for a specific number of days, but if one of you is ill, or on a journey, on other days later. For those who can fast only with extreme difficulty, there is a way to compensate feed a needy person. But if anyone does good of his own accord, it is better for him, and fasting is better for you, if only you knew [184] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 184)

The word ‘days’ indicates a period of time, and it is not specific; God says of these days that they are ‘a certain number’, meaning that they are a small and exactly defined number of days. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies for us when these days of fasting are to be, saying:

شَهۡرُ رَمَضَانَ ٱلَّذِيٓ أُنزِلَ فِيهِ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانُ هُدٗى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَٰتٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡهُدَىٰ
وَٱلۡفُرۡقَانِۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ ٱلشَّهۡرَ فَلۡيَصُمۡهُۖ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوۡ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٖ فَعِدَّةٞ
مِّنۡ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَۗ يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ بِكُمُ ٱلۡيُسۡرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ ٱلۡعُسۡرَ وَلِتُكۡمِلُواْ ٱلۡعِدَّةَ
وَلِتُكَبِّرُواْ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَىٰكُمۡ وَلَعَلَّكُمۡ تَشۡكُرُونَ ١٨٥

It was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur'an was revealed as guidance for mankind, clear messages giving guidance and distinguishing between right and wrong. So any one of you who is present that month should fast, and anyone who is ill or on a journey should make up for the lost days by fasting on other days later. God wants ease for you, not hardship. He wants you to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him for having guided you, so that you may be thankful [185] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 185)

So the period of fasting is the month of *Ramadan*; and because He *the Exalted* well knows the contingencies that might affect this command, He makes allowances for them. God’s legislation of dispensations for contingencies tells us that it is not right for anyone to circumvent the proper definition of contingencies which God has legislated. Some of those people who indulge in superficial philosophising, like to make up their own contingencies to allow themselves to abandon God's law. Some of them might justify this by using God's words: 'God does not burden a soul with more than it is well able to bear...' (*al-Baqara*: 286).

We say: You understand and define the words 'well able to bear' according to your own way of thinking and then you use this to define your responsibilities, despite the fact that the One Who created you decides your responsibilities, and He well knows that you are able to bear them, and He *the Exalted* only commands you with what you are able to bear. This is proved by the fact that the Lawgiver *the Exalted* gives dispensations for the occasions when it is not possible for someone to meet the responsibility. Let us consider the mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* when He says, '…and whoever is sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days….' The word 'sick' is a nonspecific word, for which you can be your own witness, or a skilled Muslim doctor may tell you that if you fast, you will make yourself sick. Sickness can sometimes be chronic, in which case you must make up for the missed fasting by feeding a poor person.

Likewise, the True Lord *the Most High* exempts you from fasting if you are 'on a journey.' The word 'journey' (in Arabic *safar*) is derived from a root meaning 'to appear' or 'to be uncovered;' for example when we use the verb asfara, we mean that morning has broken. The word 'journey' means to move from the place where you live to another place, and so every time you take a step, new things appear to you, and the place you go to is also new to you even if you are used to going there because every time it is different because of the changing conditions time brings. It is true that some buildings and streets do not change, but what do change are the conditions that accompany them. It is also true that the conditions of travel in our times are very different from how they were in the past.

In the past, travelling meant to endure great hardships, but if we compare the travel of yesterday to that of today from the side of accommodation, we find that it is today's travel with today's accommodation which is difficult. It is strange that whenever people discuss this dispensation today, they discuss it in order to prevent it. We say to them: You should know that God's legislation of this dispensation makes it a requirement of the Sacred Law. Jaber ibn 'Abdullah *God be pleased with him* relates that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was once on a travel when he saw a crowd and a man who had sought shade from the sun. He asked, 'What is wrong with him?' They replied, 'He is fasting.' He said, 'It is not pious to fast while travelling.'(1)

When we read the text of the Quran, we find that it says, '…and whoever is sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days….' That is, the very fact that one is travelling means that he should eat and make up the fast on another day. This means that God does not accept that you fast. It is true that He *the Exalted* did not say, 'Eat,' but the very fact that you are temporarily sick or on a journey means that you should fast on other days; for you do not make the rules up for yourself.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is a good example for us, and he prohibited fasting on the day of *Eid al-Fitr* because its very name means 'the feast of breaking the fast,' and because it is a time for coming together to celebrate the end of the fast and the passing of the test; and so there should be no fasting on this day. To fast on the first day of *Eid* is a sin, but to fast on its second day is permissible which is shown by the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* which states: 'The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade fasting on two days: the festival of *Fitr* (breaking the fast) and the festival of *Adha* (sacrifice).'(2)

Someone might say, 'But fasting in *Ramadan* is not like fasting on any other days because *Ramadan* is the month in which the Quran was sent down.' I reply: It is fasting which is honoured by its being in the month of the Quran; moreover, the One Who sent down the Quran and prescribed fasting in *Ramadan* is also the One *the Exalted* Who gave the dispensation for the sick person and the traveller to eat, and transferred their fast to other days outside *Ramadan*, and He *the Exalted* is well able to give these other days the same purity He gives to the one who fasts in *Ramadan*. When the True Lord

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Kitab As-sawm*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim*

the Most High prescribed fasting in *Ramadan*, He wanted this limited time – the time of *Ramadan* – to extend to a wider time, namely the whole year round. We fast *Ramadan* in summer and we fast it in winter, in autumn and in spring; and so *Ramadan* passes through all the days of the year.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and as for those who are able to keep it [but with hardship, and so break it], the expiation of this shall be providing sustenance for a poor person….' To be able to afford (*yuteeq*) means to be capable, and so if they can afford it, this means that they are capable of doing it, and are strong enough to do it; and the compensation here is to feed a needy person.

Someone might ask: if a person is able to fast, why would he be allowed to forgo fasting in exchange for compensation, namely feeding a needy person? I say that this verse shows that the obligation of fasting came gradually, just as the True Lord *the Most High* gradually introduced the Islamic system of estate division, which was first confined to bequests and then finalized as a system of inheritance. In the same way, God wanted to take the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from a situation where they were not fasting at all to one in which they were given the choice whether to fast or not; for at first they did not fast, and then later they were commanded to fast and were given no choice about it, and so it is as though fasting was originally prescribed as voluntary, and then once the Muslims had got used to fasting, the True Lord *the Most High* sent down His command: '…So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it….' In this latter verse, the True Lord *the Most High* does not mention any sacrifice or expiation. So fasting was at first a matter of choice according to God's words '…and as for those who are able to keep it [but with hardship, and so break it], the expiation of this shall be providing sustenance for a poor person….' And then the final ruling came and fasting became a fixed obligation for the month of *Ramadan*. 'The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. 'So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it….' And so there was no longer any possibility for those who were able to fast to exempt themselves by making a sacrifice; as for those who were unable to fast, like the sick and the elderly, if a Muslim doctor tells you that your sickness is incurable, then you do not have to fast any other days to make up what you miss but rather you must make an expiation in lieu of them.

The prescription of fasting came gradually like many of the laws which meant people had to change their habits, such as wine, for example, and gambling, and estate division; these were all things which God wanted to establish gradually. Someone might ask, ‘If fasting was originally a matter of choice, then why, after speaking about the expiatory sacrifice for it, did the True Lord *the Most High* then say, ‘…And he who of his own accord volunteers a good work, shall derive good from it…’? (*al-Baqara:* 184)

I say: When fasting was still optional, it was also necessary that the door to goodness and devotion remain opened; and so if someone fasted and also fed a needy person, this was accepted from him, and if he fasted and fed two needy people this was even better. If someone offers devotion to God without limit, God will reward him without limit; and if he offers to God in a limited way, God will reward him in a limited way. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…and good shall it be for you to fast…’ (*al-Baqara*: 184). This was a further step towards the final obligatory status of fasting, which He finally affirmed by saying, ‘…So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it….’ In this latter verse, God *the Most High* did not say ‘…and good shall it be for you to fast…’ (*al-Baqara*: 184) because it had gone from a matter of choice to a matter of obligation.

So, fasting is a way to discipline a person, and it existed before the True Lord *the Most High* sent our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came, fasting was at first an option for the Muslims, and then it was prescribed as an obligation. At first God prescribed fasting for a certain number of days, and then explained to us that these days meant the month of *Ramadan*.

What makes sense to me is that God first prescribed fasting to be on a certain number of days, namely three days out of every month, namely the tenth, twentieth and thirtieth of every month. These were the certain number of days that God prescribed for fasting, and everyone had the choice on those days, if they were able to fast, to either fast or to expiate. But when God prescribed fasting in *Ramadan*, it became an obligatory act of worship and one of the pillars of Islam; and after that, we were told of the exemption for the ill person and the traveller.

Thus we can notice that fasting in Islam went through two stages: the first stage was that God *the Most High* prescribed fasting for a certain number of days, and we have explained how this worked; and the second stage was that fasting was prescribed for a particular time: the month of *Ramadan*. To the scholars who hold the opinion that it is permissible for the sick person and the traveller to refuse to break their fast because they do not want to miss out on the wisdom of God's law, we say: When the True Lord *the Most High* gives dispensations, He must have a wise reason for doing so which is above the level of our own deduction; this is affirmed by the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* said, '…and whoever is sick or on a journey….'

The ruling here is to make up for these fasts on other days. Notice here that God did not say, 'And he that breaks his fast shall fast for the same number of other days'; this means that the fast for the sick and the traveller is transferred to the time when he returns from his journey or is cured of his illness. So those scholars who say, 'It is a dispensation, and a person is free to take it or leave it' must have interpreted the Quranic text thus: '…and whoever is sick or on a journey…' and breaks his fast, '…then [shall fast instead] an equal number of other days….' We say: If a text can be understood without any need for subjective interpretation, it is more correct to take it as it is than to explain it in a way which requires subjective interpretation. Our understanding of expressions should not be a matter of subjective taste, but rather a matter of obedience; for obedience takes precedence over taste.

So, those who say this have not taken into account the fact that God wants to lighten our burden. Moreover, what prevents us from understanding that the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make a clear dispensation for the sick and the traveller, and so ordained that both of their fasts take place on other days? And so if he fasts in *Ramadan* and he is sick or on a journey, his fast is not counted; that is, his fast is not considered valid and is not accepted from him. This is the meaning I incline towards; but we take into consideration here that the meaning of sickness and travel are those things which put all of a person's faculties out of balance.

What is the meaning of ‘month’ in God’s words ‘…So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it….’? The Arabic word for month (*shahr*) is derived from the root meaning ‘to make plain and apparent,’ and we still use the word when we speak about deals, meaning a public announcement of a deal so that two deals are not made for the same thing. So the word *shahr* means to make something plain and obvious; but why is the period of time called a *shahr*? It is called so since it has a sign which shows it. We know we cannot determine the start of a month using the sun, but rather, the sun can be used to determine the time of day; a full day lasts from sunrise to sunset, and is divided into daytime and night.

But the sun has no obvious signs to indicate the beginning of a month, but rather, it is the moon which tells us this by the new moon which comes at the beginning of each month, looking like an old date-stalk. So the new moon identifies the month, and the sun identifies the time of day, and we need them both to tell the time.

The True Lord *the Most High* links acts of worship with clear signs of the universe such as the new moon. After this we use the sun to tell days because the new moon does not tell you the time of day. The new moon appears after it had waned and disappeared, and the birth of the new moon is a sign and an indication that the month has begun, and so the first acts of worship of *Ramadan* begin at night because the sign – the new moon – comes at night. We look for the new moon when the sun goes down, and if we see it, we say that *Ramadan* has begun. This never changes because the day never overtakes the night except for one devotion which is the standing at *'Arafa* at the pilgrimage. The night that comes after it is considered as an extension of the day of *‘Arafa.*

The word ‘*Ramadan*’ is derived from the root (*r-m-d*)*,* which means scorching heat. The verb *ramada* means for a person to feel burning in their belly because of thirst, and *ramda* means hot sand. If you use the verb *ramada* to refer to an animal, it means that the heat has harmed the skin of its feet so that it cannot put them on the ground. So the word *Ramadan* is derived from the term for excessive heat. It seems that when people gave names to the months, they named *Ramadan* at a time when the weather was very hot and so they called it *Ramadan*; likewise, when they named the two months of *Rabi‘,* the weather was like that of spring (*rabi'*), and when they named the two months of Jumada, the water was cold enough to freeze (*jamuda*) at the time.

So, it is as though they noticed the characteristics of the months at the time they named them, and then the particular Arabic way of defining months by the cycle of the moon moved around the solar year so that *Ramadan* fell in summer, and in autumn; but at the time it was named, the weather was very hot.

Imagine a person has a son who is very beautiful, so he calls him 'Jamil' ('beautiful'), and then later the boy contracts smallpox (we seek refuge from harm in God) so that his face is blemished. The name fitted at the time it was given, even if something happened later which seemed to be contrary to the meaning of this name. It is as though when the True Lord *the Most High* inspired minds to give the month this name, it was a sign of the hardship that the one who fasts would have to endure in *Ramadan*. After this, God *the Most High* gave it a distinction which confirmed why it was chosen, which is that it was the month in which the Quran was sent down from on high. The Quran came as a way of moral guidance, and fasting is abstaining from nutrients; and so the status of this noble month is that it disciplines the body and disciplines the soul. It was therefore appropriate that the duty which imparts physical and moral discipline should have been prescribed for the same time in which the Quran was sent down to deliver its moral teachings.

'The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down….' When you hear the words '…the Quran was sent down…' keep in mind that we have three similar but distinct words *anzala, nazzala*, and *nazala;* and you will find that the word *anzala* ('to send down from high') is invariably ascribed to God *the Most High*: He was the One Who *anzala* ('sent down') the Quran on the Night of Power (*'Laylat al-Qadr'*) (*al-Qadr:* 1).

As for the word *nazala* ('descend from high'), God *the Most High* says that it was the Faithful Spirit that has come down with it (i.e. the Quran) (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 193). And the True Lord *the Most High* says that angels descend on the Night of Power (*al-Qadr:* 4).

So, the verb *anzala* is used exclusively for God alone, whilst the verb *nazzala* refers to the angels, and the verb *nazala* ('to come down') refers to the Faithful Spirit, Gabriel *peace be upon him*. So it is as though the verb *anzala*, with its prefixed letter *hamza* (making it a transitive verb) describes how the Quran was taken from place in the Preserved Tablet to be revealed to mankind and fulfil its purpose. From the words *nazala* and *nazzala* we understand that the True Lord *the Most High* sent the Quran from high in the Preserved Tablet to the sky of the material world, from where it was then revealed gradually in instalments according to circumstances and events. So it was sent down from high in one movement in *Ramadan*. People criticise us and say, ‘How can you say that the Quran was sent down from high in *Ramadan*, when you also say that the Quran came down at different times, so, it came down here, and came down there, and that its coming down lasted the length of the Muhammadan mission?’

We say to them: We did not say that it *nazala* (‘came down’), but rather that, it was *unzil* (‘…sent down…’), which means that it was sent forth from the Higher Knowledge to fulfil its purpose in existence; and in order to fulfil its purpose in existence, the Quran came down ‘piecemeal’ according to worldly events so that rulings could come when needed and so become established on earth. If the Quran had come in one piece all at once, it might have been the case that we had a ruling, but did not know what it meant; but since the rulings did not come until we needed them, they were settled firmly in our souls.

I will give an example to illustrate this – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare – you might want to stock a medicine cabinet in the house, putting in it everything that you imagine you might need in cases of emergency, and you might get some medicine which you do not have any need for. But if you wait until the time comes when you do need the medicine, and go to the chemist’s and give them the doctor’s prescription in exchange for the medicine, there will be no risk of confusion or a mix-up. In the same way, when God wanted to give a ruling to deal with a particular issue, He did not wait until the time came to send the ruling through the angels from the Preserved Tablet, but rather, the ruling had already been sent to the sky of the material world, and so He told the angels to take it down, and Gabriel *peace be upon him* took it whenever the True Lord *the Most High* willed it to be taken down during the mission of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, or the time when God *the Most High* wanted there to be a ruling to solve a particular problem.

So, when people try to raise doubts about this, we say: No. We possess a very precise Arabic language, and there is a difference between *anzala, nazzala,* and *nazala.* The word *nazala* ('to descend' or 'to bring down') refers to revelation, and also to the one who brings down the revelation. God *the Most High* says that it was the Faithful Spirit that has come down with it (i.e. the Quran) (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 193). And He *the Exalted* says that in truth He has sent down the Quran; and in truth it has come down (*al-Isra':* 105).

Some of the idolaters exclaimed, 'Why was the Quran not sent down in one piece all at once?' Look at the precision of the way in which God wanted to reveal the Quran: The True Lord *the Most High* registers their statement by saying that disbelievers ask why the Quran has not been sent down on the Messenger from high in one single revelation. He answers them by saying that it has been revealed in this manner so that God would strengthen his heart by it; and He has arranged its component parts well (*al-Furqan:* 32).

If we reflect on the words of the True Lord *the Most High* 'in this manner,' this means that He *the Exalted* revealed the Quran in the way in which He did in order to strengthen the hearts of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. Had it been revealed all at once, it would have represented a single charge; yet every event and incident in the march of the call to God required strength. And so whenever something happened, a piece/instalment of the Quran would be revealed, and by this the True Lord *the Most High* would strengthen the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. I will give a simple example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare, and absolved of all likeness – if your son wants a new outfit, will you get it for him all at once so that he gets one nice surprise, or will you get him a tie one day, and a new shirt the next day, and then get him the jacket the next? In that case, as each piece comes to him, he will have renewed joy.

Why did the True Lord *the Most High* reveal the Quran piecemeal? To strengthen the Messenger's heart by it (*al-Furqan:* 32). The meaning of 'strengthen his heart' is: You will experience all kinds of disturbances, and each of these disturbances will require you to be supported and reassured, and so each piece of the Quran will come to do this, and to illuminate the way for you. Then God *the Most High* adds that He has arranged its component parts well (*al-Furqan:* 32). That is, We have not sent it all at once but rather, We have arranged it in a way which best suits the unfolding of events so that each piece will be acted upon, and the believers will have time to digest it, and then the next piece will come. Notice also the precision of the True Lord's expression when He gives added reason for the manner of the revelation of the Quran: that when the disbelievers taunt the Messenger with any deceptive half-truth, God would reveal to him in a Quranic instalment, the full truth thus providing him with the best explanation (*al-Furqan:* 32).

The disbelievers had objections, and they employed half-truths to make them; if the Quran had been revealed in one movement all at once, it would have overlooked this matter. Add to this that the believers also used to ask questions, and the Quran reported these queries: They ask you about such-and-such. Had the Quran been revealed in one piece, how would these questions have been answered? As long as they were bound to ask, He waited until they asked and then furnished them with answers.

So, this is the meaning of *anzala* ('sent down'); that is, it was sent down from the Preserved Tablet to fulfil its purpose in existence, and after that Gabriel *peace be upon him* took it down, or the angels took it down, according to the circumstances which the Quran came to address.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…in which the Quran was sent down, guidance for the people….' We know that the word 'guidance' means that which leads to the desired destination in the quickest way. When we put signs on uncertain roads, this is because we want the traveller to reach his destination as easily as possible. The word 'guidance' means the signs we follow which were set up by the Creator *the Most High*; for if He had left it up to people to set them up, their caprices would have conflicted with one another; and even if we supposed that they had no caprices, and all searched for the truth, and all had mature minds – even if we allowed for all this and left them to set up these directional signs, we still ask: what about the one who set up these signs: what will guide him?

So, he too must have guidance before he can use his mind to think. Moreover, the one who sets up this guidance must not stand to benefit from it in any way, and God *the Most High* is completely free of need of all creation and does not stand to gain anything from His servants; as for mankind, if they decided their own guidance, the one who decided it would stand to benefit from it; and we have seen this with our own eyes, for the one who wanted to take the wealth of the wealthy and benefit from it invented communism, and the one who wanted to exploit the toil of others invented capitalism. These are systems which sprang from capricious desire, and none of the philosophers who invent such systems can claim that they are free of caprice: the capitalist makes his laws and inclines to his own caprice, and the communist does the same. We want someone to make laws for us without standing to benefit from the laws he makes; and no one meets these criteria except the True Lord *the Most High*, and so He alone has the right to make laws, and He alone makes laws for the benefit of mankind.

The proof of this is that man-made legal systems contradict one another because even though people may be knowledgeable, they are still ignorant of many things, no matter how hard the lawmaker might try to consider all possible future events. So man-made laws are always being amended because when the original lawmaker made the law, he did not think of contingencies which later came about, and things happened which he did not foresee, and so he said, ‘This law is inadequate, and no longer suitable, we must change it.’

So, our requirement is from the one who makes the guidance and teachings which all people will follow, alongside his not benefiting from it in any way, that he also has full knowledge of the details of everything that will happen in the future. This cannot be the case with anyone except the Wise, All Knowing God, and so He instructed us not to follow other ways, lest they cause us to deviate from His way (*al-An‘am:* 153).

If you follow other ways, each one made by someone’s caprice, temporal laws will be made which will spell the end of everyone on earth because we will follow our own caprices which are always changing, instead of following the Guidance of He who does not stand to benefit anything from this matter. And so I say: Understand well that the true guidance which should not be resisted is the guidance of God: ‘…guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion….’ The Quran in its entirety is ‘guidance,’ and the ‘criterion’ (*al-furqan*) means that which makes a clear difference between things in which truth and falsehood are unclear, and so wise revelation comes to discern truth from falsehood.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…So whoever of you is present in the month, let him fast it; and whoever is sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days….’ When a ruling is followed by a clarification, this means that we should understand that this means: Whoever lives to see this month shall fast it if he is not sick or on a journey; this must be the case as long as God has made this ruling.

So, the one who ‘is present’ is one of two groups: there is he who ‘is present’ i.e. sees the month start and is neither sick nor on a journey – that is, he is resident in a certain place; and there is the one who is ‘…sick or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. God desires for you ease and does not desire for you hardship….’ We want to understand this text with the awareness that it has come from a Wise God. When God *the Most High* says, ‘…God desires for you ease and does not desire for you hardship…’ what does this refer to? It refers to the fact that He has exempted the sick and the traveller from fasting; and so it is as though God wants ease for you, and so if you go against this, it means that you want God to be hard on you, not easy; but God is not this way, but rather, it is you who is being hard on yourself. If fasting is truly sacred to you, and you do not want to harm your reputation, then do not break your fast in front of other people. Hold to God’s ruling ‘…then an equal number of other days…’ because if you do not, you will be making things difficult, but we say to you: No; God wants things to be easy for you. Do you care about the act of worship itself, or the One you worship? Your faith dictates that you care about the One you worship.

Here is another example which we find in our lives: Some people call the *adhan* (call for prayer), and then after it, they raise their voices and say, ‘Blessings and peace be upon you, O my master, O Messenger of God!’ They say that they do this out of love for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but can you show love for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* except by doing that which he commanded? He said, ‘When you hear the call, repeat what the *mue'dhdhin* says, and then send blessings upon me.'(1) So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* gave permission to the *mue'dhdhin* and the one who hears the *adhan* to send blessings upon him quietly, not for him to use the same loud voice he uses for the *adhan* and the tune of the *adhan* to send blessings on the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is because people might be confused, and imagine that this is part of the *adhan*. I say to the one who does this: Brother, is there no acceptable way to send blessings on the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* except with a loud voice? Indeed, you have the right to send blessings on the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, but you should do so quietly to yourself.

In the same way, if someone has to break their fast in *Ramadan* because he is sick or on a journey, we say to him: Be discreet so that you will not be a bad example to others; for people do not know that you are sick or on a journey. Be discreet so that people will not say, 'A Muslim is illegally breaking his fast.'

The True Lord *the Most High* says that He wants '…for you to complete the period…' that is so that you do not miss out on any days of fasting.

Consider the precision of the Quranic discourse when God *the Most High* says, '…and to exalt God for that [to] which He has guided you; and that you may give thanks.' The act of worship which we see as being difficult is fasting, and then after it, we are to exalt God. This is because the True Lord *the Most High* knows that when His servant obeys one of His commands despite its difficulty, such as fasting, and he bears this difficulty, God knows that when the servant feels that this act has come to an end, he will feel a kind of relief which necessitates that he give thanks to God, who commanded him to fast and helped him to do it. The meaning of 'to exalt God' is that you say, 'God is Great!' and that you thank Him for the act of worship which you had thought would be too much for you, but yet, you found in it much glory and delight; and so you say, God is Greater than all that; God is Great because when He keeps things from me. He really gives to me, and He *the Exalted* gives even when He withholds. You take the sustenance you need to live, and in *Ramadan* He gives you something more than this which is the glory that appears to you therein; and you taste the sweetness of His Commands; and although you have to give up one favour, He gives you a favour which is better than it.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad, on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri God be pleased with him*

Apart from this, the Quranic discourse is not the discourse of a human being. We find that human beings divide books into sections and chapters, grouping similar themes together, and separating each subject into its own section, after which it moves on to another chapter. But God does not want the religion to be divided into chapters; rather, He wants the religion to be a whole unit which is integrated into the fabric of mankind. And so after He *the Exalted* says, '…and to exalt God…' He then says, '…and that you may give thanks.' This means that you will see the thing which makes you say 'God is Great' because God will do something good for you. When there is a pure relationship between the 'worshipper,' mankind, and the 'Worshipped,' God, the worshipper is certain that the Worshipped will not command him to do anything unless it is good for him; and so the servant thinks the best of his Lord, and turns to Him always, and asks Him for everything.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided [186] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 186)

If you have tasted the sweetness of the pure illuminations which the True Lord *the Most High* gave you through fasting, you will be moved to thank Him *the Exalted*; and so it is fitting that the True Lord *the Most High* responds to you by saying, 'And if My servants ask you about Me–indeed, I am near….' Notice that the word *idha* ('if/when') is used here, and not in ('if' but implying a lesser probability); the True Lord *the Most High* asserts to you that after you experience this sweetness you will certainly be thankful to God for His favours. In a Qudsi Hadith, He *the Exalted* says: 'Three there are whose supplication is not refused: the one who fasts, when he completes his fasts; the just ruler; and the supplication of the oppressed. God raises it up above the clouds, and the doors to Heaven open for it, and the Lord *the Most High* says, 'By My Glory, I will give you victory, though after a while.'(1)

He *the Exalted* will answer the call; and you might be an ordinary person, not a ruler, and you might not be oppressed, so, there remains the supplication of the one who fasts.

When you read the word 'ask' in God's Book, you will find that whenever a question is mentioned in the Noble Quran, the answer starts with a command to the Prophet to give the answer: 'Say…' as we find in the following examples. The Quran reports that the companions ask the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about wine and gambling. The answer came mediated by the imperative 'Say': In both, there is great evil as well as some benefit for man (*al-Baqara*: 219). The same manner is followed in answer to their question as to what they should spend in God's way: 'Say': Whatever you can spare (*al-Baqara*: 219). And in answer to their question as to what they should spend on others: 'Say': Whatever of your wealth you spend (*al-Baqara*: 215).

This was the case with almost every question except for one verse when the command to answer, came beginning with 'then say' with an additional 'then.' This was the case with their question about what will happen to the mountains at the end of time. The Prophet was commanded with 'then say,' to answer them that his Lord will blast them into dust (*Ta Ha:* 105). Look at the syntactic precision: first there is 'say,' and then there is 'then say.' The implication is that on the question about wine and gambling, the question has actually been asked, while the question on the mountains has not come yet, and the verse anticipates a question that will be asked. It is as though when God gives answers to questions that have already been asked, He uses 'Say,' while when the question which is yet to be asked is mentioned, the reply given to it starts with the command 'then say,' that is, He is giving an anticipatory answer to a question that is yet to come. So there is a difference between answering a question which has been asked and answering a question which will be asked, to show you that no one would surprise God *the Most High* by asking questions.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, and Imam Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him*

But now in the verse under discussion, we have a question followed by a direct answer, without the mediating 'say,' or 'then say': 'And if My servants ask you about Me….' He did not say 'Say: I am near,' because for Him to say 'Say' would be to add distance to the nearness, and God wanted to make nearness manifest by answering the question without using any kind of intermediary: 'And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near….' God gave the answer from Himself to His servants directly, even though the one who would transmit the answer would be His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. There is a story behind this. It is narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was once asked, 'Is your Lord near so that we may have intimate discourse with Him, or is He distant so that we must call to Him?' This is because you usually call to those who are far and speak intimately with those who are near; and so to show them this nearness, He left out the word 'Say' and the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near…' What is the advantage of this nearness? The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me….' But what are the necessary prerequisites for this?

The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And if My servants ask you….' We know there is a difference between 'slaves' (*'abid*) and 'servants' (*'ibad'*). Although the singular form of both these Arabic words is *'abd,* there are two plurals, *'abid* and *'ibad.* People on earth are slaves (*'abid*) of God, but not all are servants (*'ibad*) of God. Why? It is because slaves are those who are compelled to do certain things just like everyone else; but there are those who choose to rebel against the True Lord *the Most High*, and so take rebelliousness as their decision and way of life, but the servants (*'ibad*) are the ones who choose to obey God in everything. They are compelled along with everyone else in that none of them can choose when to be born, or when to die, or how to exist; but the servants are distinguished in that for those things in which God has given them free will, they say: It is true, Lord, that You have given us free will; and we have chosen Your guidance, and we will not let our own whims control us. You have said, 'Do this,' and 'Do not do this,' and we accept commands from You, Lord.'

Your Lord does not tell you to do something unless you are capable of choosing either to do or not to do it; and He does not tell you not to do something unless you are capable of going one way or the other. So the words ‘do’ and ‘do not’ apply to matters governed by free will. The True Lord *the Most High* said ‘do’ and ‘do not,’ and then, He left certain things alone without telling you whether to do them or not so that you are free as to whether to do them or not; this is called the ‘sphere of lawful free choice.’ So, there is an aspect of free will concerning commands and prohibitions, and an aspect of free will concerning things which you can take or leave and are harmless either way. The one who takes free will and says, ‘Lord, You have given me free will, but I leave it to You, o He Who gives free will, to direct this free will as You please. I will give up my free will, and if You tell me to do something, I will do it, and if You tell me not to do something, I will not do it.’

So, the servants (*‘ibad*) are those who take the sphere of free will and give it over to Him who created free will in them, and they say to God, ‘Even though I have free will, I entrust myself to You.’ The servants are those who leave the matter of free will to the One Who created free will. The True Lord *the Most High* describes them thus: The true servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with words of peace; and are those who remember their Lord far into the night, prostrating themselves and standing (*al-Furqan:* 63-64).

These are the servants of the Most Merciful; and the True Lord *the Most High* said to Satan that indeed he will have no power over His servants (*al-Hijr*: 42). Satan has power only over slaves (*‘abid*) because he can get to them through their free will. The term ‘My servants’ (*‘ibadi*) is only used in the Quran once to describe ‘misguided slaves’ when the Hour comes in the Afterlife, and the True Lord *the Most High* holds to account those who led people astray, asking the misguiding leaders whether it was them who led ‘My servants’ astray (*al-Furqan:* 17).

This is because when the Hour comes, there will be no free will and everyone will come under the category of ‘servants’ (*‘ibad*)*;* even the disbelievers will no longer have any free will. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me,…’ the servants who commit themselves to

God by following His religious way will only ask God for that which does not contradict their faith and its responsibilities.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…let them, then, respond to Me,…' because a call requires a response; and as long as you require a response to your call, have good manners with your Lord; for He *the Exalted* has called you to His way, and so respond to Him. If you wish for God *the Most High* to respond to you, heed His call '…let them, then, respond to Me….' After this, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about 'him who calls', and He does not leave this ambiguous but rather says '…whenever he calls upon Me…,' it is as though the word 'him who calls' might leave things ambiguous as someone may indeed call, but direct his call to other than God, one who cannot possibly respond to him; we find a reference to this in the True Lord's statement that all those whom you invoke besides God are but created beings like yourselves (*al-A'raf*: 194), and in His assertion that even if you invoke them, they do not hear your call (*Fatir:* 14).

It is as though the one who calls might do so in a way which will not ensure a response to his call. Here, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me….' When someone goes and calls someone who is not able to deliver, God is not responsible for answering his call.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to teach us that one might supplicate for good for oneself, but one cannot exactly specify this good because you might see something as being good when really it is bad, but as long as you are praying for it you believe it to be good. And so the basis of supplication is that you love goodness, but you might not properly understand what is good, or what the right way to goodness is. There is no dispute that you love goodness, and so the way your Lord – who has better knowledge of what is really good for you – answers your supplication might be to deny your supplication if it is not actually good for you. Therefore, when your supplication is not answered as you had hoped and as you had asked, you must not infer from this that God has not responded to you, and say, 'Why did God not respond to me?' Indeed He did respond to you, but He protected you from you the foolishness of your supplication, or that which you did not realise was bad for you. The One Whom you call upon is Wise, and He says: I shall give you what is good, and that which I know to be good is better than that which you suppose to be good; and what is good for you is that this supplication not be answered.

I will give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare – your young son might ask you to buy him a gun, and he imagines that having a gun is a good thing; but you put off his request and say, ‘I will buy you a gun some other time, God willing,’ and you procrastinate, and you do not get him the gun. Does the fact that you did not get him the gun as he wanted mean that you have denied him something good? Not allowing your son to have a gun is beneficial, safe, and good for him.

So, goodness is always determined by a wise consideration of matters; you prevent your son from having a gun because you see that he is a child and that he plays with his friends, and something might happen to make him lose his self-control and result in someone hurting him, or him hurting them because of this gun.

Likewise, the supplication you make might not be answered because this would be bad for you. The True Lord *the Most High* explains that man often prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good: for man is prone to be hasty in his judgments (*al-Isra’:* 11). This is why God *the Most High* says that man is a creature of haste; but in time He shall make obvious to people the truth of His signs (*al-Anbiya’:* 37).

Scholars say that if the intention behind supplication is to express humility and servitude, this is virtuous; as for the answer, it is subject to God’s will. If you measure your share from supplications by how often they are answered, you are not judging things properly. Your benefit from supplication is that it is an action of worship and humility before God; for you only call on Him because you believe that your own means as a human being cannot avail you with this matter, and so you ask Him who rules all. God *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘Whoever is too preoccupied by remembering Me to ask Me, I shall give him that which is better than what I give to those who ask.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in At-Tarikh*

Let us take a lesson from that which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught ‘Aisha, Mother of the Believers *God be pleased with her*. She once asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Night of Power, ‘If I live to see the Night of Power, how should I supplicate to God?’ Notice how the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught the Mother of the Believers Aisha *God be pleased with her* to supplicate for broad, comprehensive goodness; he said to her, ‘Say, “O God, You love to pardon, so pardon me”’(1).

There is no favour better than pardon, and no goodness better than pardon; so I should not pray, ‘Give me, give me,’ because this might come under the impart of the True Lord’s statement that man often prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good: for man is prone to be hasty in his judgments (*al-Isra’:* 11).

So to those who say, ‘I called my Lord and He did not answer me,’ we say: Do not be so unperceptive because it is good for you that you are not granted all you ask for; for God will give you goodness at the time He wills.

The True Lord *the Most High* sometimes lets events unfold in society which bring you something of what you asked for and then show you that it was bad for you so that you know that when God withheld it from you this was totally for your own good. And so supplication has prerequisites, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* urged us to make sure our livelihoods are lawful. In a Noble Hadith related by Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* we read: ‘… Then he mentioned a man who travels far, and is dishevelled and covered in dust, who raises his hands to the sky and says, ‘O Lord, O Lord’ – yet his food is unlawful, and his drink is unlawful, and his clothes are unlawful, and he is nourished with the unlawful – how shall his prayer be answered?’(2)

The Messenger reveals to us here how the ‘equipment’ of the one who supplicates can be defective. So the lack of response to the supplication can be either because the supplication is made with defective equipment, or because you supplicate for something you think is good for you but which God sees is not, and so He leads you to the sanctuary of His wisdom and denies you the thing which would be bad for you.

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(1) *This is the wording of the Hadith as narrated by At-Tirmidhi who declared it to be sound and authentic. It was also narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak, who declared it to be authentic according to the criteria of Al-Bukhari and Muslim.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih*

Moreover, the response might be veiled from you because if He gave you what you wanted, He would have given you only the good things of this transient world; but He loves you, and so preserves the response for you to be a never-ending good; and such an advantage is only attained to by the elite few. And there are other advantages besides this, represented by the fact that as long as supplication is an expression of humility and devoutness, God might grant you that which was mentioned in the Sacred Hadith: ‘God descends to the earth’s sky and says, “Who calls unto Me that I might answer him, or asks Me that I might give unto him?” Then He says, “Who would give a loan to One Who is neither lacking, nor unjust?”’(1)

Since a person is attached to certain things, which he loves, when he does not get them, he keeps praying, ‘O Lord.’ God loves to hear this call from this kind of servant, so, He *the Exalted* says, ‘There are those among My servants whose calls I love, and so I send upon them trials so that they will say, “O Lord”’. A believing person does not judge the success of his supplication based on whether it is answered or not, but rather, the success of his supplication is, as the True Lord *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim to the believers that no weight or value would his Lord grant them, were it not for their prayers (*al-Furqan:* 77).

The meaning of Lordship and servitude is that you always say ‘O Lord.’ I will give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare. A father might give his son pocket-money once every month so that the boy takes his monthly allowance and then vanishes for a month without bothering to see his father. But if the father gives his son pocket-money every day, the son will wait for the father, and if the father is a little late, the son will stand at the door waiting for his father to come; the father will have made the son attached to his need so that he can enjoy seeing him.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim, Abu Dawud, and At-Tirmidhi*

The True Lord *the Most High* makes a condition for the answering of supplications, which is that the servant also responds to God *the Most High* in what He calls him to, whereupon the servant will be worthy of calling God in supplication. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says in a Sacred Hadith, ‘Whoever is too preoccupied by remembering Me to ask Me, I shall give him that which is better than what I give to those who ask.’(1)

An example of this is: When our master Abraham *peace be upon him* was being cast into the fire, the archangel Gabriel *peace be upon him* asked him, ‘Are you in need of anything?’ He did not deny that he was in need, and he was not arrogantly refusing to admit he was in danger, but rather, he said to Gabriel, ‘As to you, no.’ He was in need, but not to Gabriel *peace be upon him* because he knew well that his rescue from the fire – whose nature was to burn, and into which he was being cast – was not something that any created being could control, but rather, it was something that none could govern save He Who created fire. And so he said to Gabriel *peace be upon him*, ‘As to you, no; His knowledge of my state means I have no need to ask.’ And so the decree came from the True Lord *the Most High* to the fire to be coolness and safety for Abraham (*al-Anbiya’:* 69).

We can also learn from Imam Ali *God be pleased with him* when someone came to visit him when he was ill and found him moaning, and said to him, ‘Are you moaning and you are Abu Al-Hasan?’ He replied, ‘I have no need to show bravado to God.’

So, God’s words ‘And if My servants ask you about Me – indeed, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls upon Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me…’ indicate the importance of responding to God’s teachings. ‘And believe in Me,’ that is, let them believe in Him *the Exalted* as a Wise God. Not everyone who asks will find his exact request answered because divinity necessitates wisdom which gives to everyone who calls that which is good for him, not according to his own criteria but according to the criteria of He Who answers the call.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in At-Tarikh*

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…so that they may be rightly guided.' What does following the right way mean? It means to reach the way which leads to what is good and right. This verse came after the verse 'The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down, a guidance for the people…' in order to show us that the purity of fasting makes the one who fasts worthy of calling God; and the success you gain from this call might not be that it is answered, but rather, what you gain from is that it is an act of worship; and in order to explain to us some of the Divine Commands to mankind, the True Lord *the Most High* then tells us what is permissible for us to do in *Ramadan* in the following verse. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

أُحِلَّ لَكُمۡ لَيۡلَةَ ٱلصِّيَامِ ٱلرَّفَثُ إِلَىٰ نِسَآئِكُمۡۚ هُنَّ لِبَاسٞ لَّكُمۡ وَأَنتُمۡ لِبَاسٞ لَّهُنَّۗ عَلِمَ ٱللَّهُ
أَنَّكُمۡ كُنتُمۡ تَخۡتَانُونَ أَنفُسَكُمۡ فَتَابَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَعَفَا عَنكُمۡۖ فَٱلۡـَٰٔنَ بَٰشِرُوهُنَّ
وَٱبۡتَغُواْ مَا كَتَبَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡۚ وَكُلُواْ وَٱشۡرَبُواْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ ٱلۡخَيۡطُ ٱلۡأَبۡيَضُ مِنَ ٱلۡخَيۡطِ
ٱلۡأَسۡوَدِ مِنَ ٱلۡفَجۡرِۖ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّواْ ٱلصِّيَامَ إِلَى ٱلَّيۡلِۚ وَلَا تُبَٰشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنتُمۡ عَٰكِفُونَ فِي ٱلۡمَسَٰجِدِۗ
تِلۡكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِ فَلَا تَقۡرَبُوهَاۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَّقُونَ ١٨٧

You [believers] are permitted to lie with your wives during the night of the fast: they are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them. God was aware that you were betraying yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and pardoned you: now you can lie with them – seek what God has ordained for you – eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black. Then fast until nightfall. Do not lie with them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques: these are the bounds set by God, so do not go near them. In this way God makes His messages clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong [187]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 187)

After telling us the proper manners of supplication, and integrating and including it with the devotion of fasting, the True Lord *the Most High* now clarifies for us the proper way to conduct marital relations when fasting. This integration and intermixing of different themes in the Quran occurs to make us understand that the religion is a single integrated entity which addresses all of mankind's faculties, and God does not want one faculty ever to supersede or overrule any other.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'It has been made permissible for you on the night preceding fasting to approach your wives….' When you hear the words 'It has been made permissible for you,' this suggests that the thing which is being declared as lawful was prohibited before this, and the thing which God here declares to be lawful was the very thing which is prohibited when fasting; for fasting means to refrain from the desires of the stomach and the desires of the private parts. It is as though before this verse was sent down, it was forbidden to go to one's wife during the night of the fast so that in the beginning fasting meant to abstain from food from just before dawn until the moment of sunset, and for spouses to abstain from relations both at night and at day. And so sexual relations on the nights before the fast were forbidden, and they were also forbidden to eat or drink after the night prayer, and after sleeping, until they opened the fast at sunset.

A man said to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'I came home and found that my family had not prepared any food for me, and then I slept, and when I woke, O Messenger of God, I realised I could not eat, and so I am very weak.' And so God made two things lawful: The first was to go to one's wife at night, and the second was the ruling in God's words: '…and eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread at dawn….' That is, eat and drink until dawn, even if you have during that time. This was a dispensation for all the Muslims, just like the earlier dispensation which was for the sick and the traveller. The earlier dispensation was specifically meant to address the difficulty fasting poses for the traveller or the sick; as for this new dispensation, it was general for every Muslim, and was a way to deepen the understanding of the matter.

The True Lord *the Most High* delayed this dispensation somewhat in order for every Muslim to appreciate the extent of the alleviation; for he would have had experience of being exposed to the risk of breaking the rules, and then God lifted this from him. Consider how this Quranic verse expresses it: '…they are clothing for you and you are clothing for them. God knows that you used to deceive yourselves….' The words 'used to deceive yourselves' inform us that a person is not strong enough to abstain from sexual desire all the time; and so if you were left to this you would deceive yourself, and then He decreed a dispensation for you so that you would be aware of God's favour upon you.

Some of the dispensations that God gives to His servants in their responsibilities are dispensations which come alongside the ruling, whilst others are dispensations of alleviation which come after the ruling comes in order for the True Lord *the Most High* to show that had He not done so, you would have been exposed to the risk of self-deception and sin. '…God knows that you used to deceive yourselves….' Look at the bravery of 'Umar *God be pleased with him* when he went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of God, I acted as a young man would act!' And those who were hungry also went to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and said that they were hungry. And so the ruling came to accommodate all these circumstances: so, during the day, abstain from the urges of the stomach and the private parts, and at night God has made these urges lawful for us. This alleviation only came after there had been self-deception in order to show us God's mercy in how He makes allowances for human nature. 'It has been made permissible for you on the night preceding fasting to approach your wives….' To 'approach' (rafath) means to have sexual relations with a woman, whether foreplay or actual intercourse. '… [T]hey are clothing for you and you are clothing for them….'

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to show us how the union of man and woman takes place by the word of God. 'Clothing' is something which is put on the body to cover it, and so it is as though woman is a garment for man and man is a garment for woman and the first function of clothing is to cover one's nakedness. It is as though man is a garment for woman in that he covers her nakedness, and she covers his, and so it is as though this is a reciprocal action. And this happens in reality, for they are entwined in a single cloth, and so God *the Most High* says, '…So now, have relations with them…' means place your skin next to their skin.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to teach us that woman is a garment which covers man and that man is a garment which covers woman; and the

True Lord *the Most High* wants this garment to keep covering so that no part of the spouses is exposed to anyone else. And so the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us that the things which take place between a man and woman at night should not then be divulged to others by the woman or the man by day; and this is part of the cover that each gives the other.

'… [T]hey are clothing for you and you are clothing for them….' As long as they are a garment for you and you are a garment for them, this is the mercy of this law for mankind; and man and woman have been wrapped in a single garment, and then asked not to abstain from this connection (during fasting).

God's words '…you used to deceive yourselves…' refer to a natural and inevitable occurrence which is why the True Lord *the Most High* then says after them, '…so He accepted your repentance and forgave you….' 'He accepted your repentance' is an announcement from God that He has granted forgiveness; and when God announces that He has granted forgiveness, this means that He has established repentance for them. As we know, repentance has three stages: first God establishes repentance, secondly you repent, and thirdly God *the Most High* accepts this repentance. Then God says, '…and forgave you….' because as long as He has brought this matter about as a way of highlighting the exaltedness of this law of alleviation, the intention is that it should first take place, and then He *the Exalted* should forgive and remove this hardship.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…So now, have relations with them and seek that which God has decreed for you….' He did not want to make this permission to lie with them be completely unrestrained, and so He said that when you lie with them, you must remember what God has ordained; and what God has ordained is the protection from sin that comes from this union and relation. The wife seeks to keep her husband chaste so that he does not look at any other woman, and likewise the husband seeks to keep her chaste so that she does not look at anyone else but him. God wants chastity to arise from this matter so that the child that grows from this union will grow up in an environment based firmly on purity and decency.

And so that a man does not have any doubt about his own flesh and blood, his children, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to purify mankind; and so every child must be ascribed to the one who sired it; and after he has his enjoyment he must bear the consequences. It is not right for a Muslim to have his enjoyment and then leave someone else to bear the consequences of it, but rather, the Muslim lives up to all his responsibilities. '…So now, have relations with them and seek that which God has decreed for you…' that is, what God ordained in that marriage is to preserve chastity and produce children; and this is a means of purifying everyone in society, and this is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, '…And for one to have sexual relations is charity.' Companions exclaimed, 'O Messenger of God, could one do that which he desires and yet be rewarded for it?' He answered, 'Do you see that if he were to indulge it in an unlawful way, would he not thereby be sinful? Likewise, when he indulges it in a lawful way, he is rewarded.'(1)

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…and eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread at dawn….' That is, until the true dawn is clear for you to see. At the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* there were two *adhans* (calls for prayers) given for the Dawn Prayer: Bilal *God be pleased with him* would give the call at night, when it was still night-time, and Ibn Umm Maktoum *God be pleased with him* would give the call at the first moment of dawn. And so the Messenger of *God be pleased with him* said, 'When you hear the *adhan* of Ibn Umm Maktoum, begin the fast,' but one of the Companions, 'Adiyy ibn Hatim, said, 'I keep beside me a white thread and a black one, and I keep eating until I can tell the white from the black.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'You are slow on the uptake: what is meant here is the whiteness of day and the blackness of night!'

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…then complete the fast until nightfall. And do not have relations with them as long as you are retired for worship in the mosques; these are the limits set up by God, so do not approach them….' They understood that to lie with one's spouse at night as God ordained did not spoil the fast, but there still had to be specified the proper way in which to act whilst in the mosque, or whilst keeping the Prophetic practice of the spiritual vigil (*i'tikaf*) which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to keep in the last ten days of *Ramadan*. Because of this, the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies that the permission for spouses to lie with each other at night is only for the one who is not keeping a spiritual vigil during the nights of *Ramadan*. As for the one keeping vigil in a mosque, this is not permissible for him. The meaning of keeping a spiritual vigil is that you restrict your movements for a period of time to a certain place, and so if they say that so-and-so is keeping vigil during these days, it means that he has restricted his movements for a certain period of time to a certain place. This vigil is not restricted only to the last ten nights of *Ramadan*, but rather, the Muslim can make a vigil in God's house (mosque) at any time.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim, Abu Dawud, and Ahmad.*

Scholars differ about spiritual vigils: some say that a condition of the spiritual vigil is that one fasts when he makes it, and also that the vigil lasts a specific period of time, and that it takes place in a mosque. They say that if you want to make a spiritual vigil, you must confine your movements to one place, the house of God.

Many scholars say that whenever you enter a mosque, you can obtain the reward of a spiritual vigil as long as you make the intention that you are making a spiritual vigil according to the Prophetic practice, on condition that you do not speak about any worldly things; for you have left your free actions in the world to come to the house of God at this time; so, make all your concern be focused on God. This is why when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saw a man in the mosque asking after something he had lost, he said to him: 'May God not return it to you! Mosques were not built for this!'(1)

Why? It is because the mosque is a place for worship, and so I say to those who speak to me in the mosque about anything connected with their livelihood: 'Be sure that it will not work.' This is because you enter a mosque for worship alone, and the moment you enter the mosque is a moment when you come to draw close to your Lord and engage in intimate discourse with Him, and to live in the sanctuary of His care; and so why bring your worldly life with you? We should take as our example one of the companions, who said, ‘We take off worldly matters when we take off our shoes.’ And another companion added to this: ‘We also leave our ranks alongside our shoes.’

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja.*

Look at this exactitude. The second companion did not only leave his worldly concerns at the door of the mosque, but he also left his worldly rank. This worldly life might occupy you for many hours of the day, whilst the mosque only takes up a little time, and so leave your rank with your shoes outside the mosque, and enter with no rank except that of your faith in God, and sit wherever you find a free space, and do not step over people’s necks to get to a specific place in the mosque. You enter with your servitude before God, and you might take your place alongside the one who serves you, and the young person sits next to the old, and you are afforded no rank save the rank you hold in God’s sight.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would sit down wherever the gathering dictated, that is, wherever he found a place. This is the opposite of what takes place in our time, when people reserve places for others with prayer-mats, and a person might come in and step over other people in order to sit in the first row, not knowing that God had already decided the rows before he arrived at the mosque. As long as we leave aside our worldly ranks, do not say, ‘Where should I sit, and next to whom?’ rather, sit wherever you find a place, and do not step over people; and intend to keep a spiritual vigil, and do not speak about any worldly matters so that you do not thereby apply to yourself the supplication of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* that God not give you success in finding the lost thing you seek and ask after.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would keep spiritual vigil in the mosque for the last ten nights of *Ramadan*. Does this mean that spiritual vigils can only be offered in mosques? No; a spiritual vigil can be kept in any place, but the spiritual vigil which is offered in a mosque is the more complete form of spiritual vigil because you consider both, the matter of time and space as well.

‘…And do not have relations with them as long as you are retired for worship in the mosques; these are the limits set up by God, so do not approach them….’ The ‘limit’ is a barrier which prevents two things from mixing. The limits of God are those things which He prohibits, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘… And those who fall into doubtful matters fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture, and is on the brink of entering it. Every king has his reserved land, and the reserved land of God is all He has prohibited.’(1)

So, unlawful things are those things around which God *the Most High* placed a boundary; so, do not transgress it. We can observe that when God forbids something, He *the Exalted* says, ‘do not approach them’ (*al-Baqara*: 187), and when He issues a command, He *the Exalted* says, ‘Do not transgress them’ (*al-Baqara*: 229). This is out of God’s mercy for us, His servants.

Do not let your wife come to you when you are keeping a spiritual vigil, as she might be beautiful and you might be tempted by her presence. Even if you do not intend to do anything, you should not approach the things which lead to unlawful things. For example, when wine was prohibited, God forbade that we should go near it, i.e. that we even should not approach the places where wine is found; for to approach something might tempt you to try it. So in order to keep yourself from this forbidden thing, you must not even approach it; and in the case of those things which you are commanded to do, you must not transgress them.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘…Thus God makes clear His signs to people that they may fear Him.’ Signs (*ayat*) are amazing things, and a sign is something amazing which captures the attention. This is why we say in idiomatic Arabic that something is a ‘sign of beauty’ or a ‘sign of radiance.’ The word (*aya*) can also mean a mark because a mark or a sign is that which directs us to something. And so everything mentioned in this verse is summed up by God’s words: ‘…Thus God makes clear His signs to people that they may fear Him.’

This verse and the verses before it explained the laws of fasting and the exceptions to these laws which lifted certain interdictions and alleviated certain hardships after they had occurred, and all of this was in order that the law was able to accommodate everything that God asked from those to whom the law was issued. When everyone takes this clear elucidation from his Lord and applies it to his life in light of God’s way, he will have shielded himself (become pious/God-fearing). God-fearing, as we know, does not only relate to fear of hell but also to all the other problems of this life. The thing that plagues our lives with problems is that we take the laws we invent ourselves and apply them; but if we were to take God’s laws, this would allow us to avoid all these problems. The True Lord *the Most High* says that anyone who turns away from His remembrance shall have a straitened life (*Ta Ha:* 124).

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa’i, and Ibn Maja on the authority of Nu‘man ibn Bashir God be pleased with him; it is part of a longer Hadith.*

That is, his life will be filled with problems and worries because he disobeys the way of God. If no problems arose because of disobedience, people would say, ‘We disobeyed God’s way, and we found success!’ And so problems were bound to arise in order to alert us to the fact that God’s way must prevail in our life. When people hold fast to God’s way, these problems will not befall them, by God’s leave.

Look at the precision of the Quranic discourse in the way it arranges things one after the other. Mankind, a creature of God living on the earth which is subdued for him along with all that is upon it, has a life which he must preserve. Individual life continues as long as there is provision of sustenance: food and drink; and likewise the human species survives by means of procreation. God *the Most High* spoke about the provision of sustenance, and He declared it to be for all people when He said, ‘O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good…’ (*al-Baqara*: 168).

And He *the Exalted* then spoke specifically to the believers about this provision: ‘O you who believe, eat of the good things which we have provided for you…’ (*al-Baqara*: 172).

Then it was God’s Will to charge those who believed in Him with certain responsibilities, and He forbade them food, drink, and marital relations during *Ramadan*, all of which are permissible outside of *Ramadan,* and God permitted them during the night in *Ramadan*. If it has been found that the purpose of every action in life is to preserve life, and if food is essential for life, and is something necessary for all people, and if life is extended and passed on by procreation so that a man matures and becomes ready to fertilize and a woman matures and becomes ready to conceive – if all of these aforementioned things are necessary for everyone, then there must be laws to organise all this.

The law allows you to eat what you own, or to eat what has no owner like those plants which grow but are not owned by anyone; but before you eat, you must consider whether the food is of a kind which God has permitted or not. The law does not allow you to eat the plants of the earth which belong to someone else, and it forbids you from hunting animals which belong to someone else; for the law respects the work undertaken by the owner of the land in planting the crops or raising the livestock. So you cannot say, ‘This crop is in the ground, and so I will eat it,’ or ‘this animal is right there before me, and so I will hunt it.’

The True Lord *the Most High* makes laws to regulate actions involving wealth owned by others after He regulates actions involving things which no one owns and food which no one owns. If someone else beats you to some money or some food that no one owns; or if a person does some work and so produces some wealth, there will arise another matter which is not related to the thing consumed itself, but rather with the ownership of the thing consumed. God *the Most High* made it clear that all the actions by which you gain your nourishment are not things which you could do alone, but rather, the work of others must combine with your own; you can only eat from what is in their possession, and they can only eat from what is in your possession.

For example, the farmer sows seeds, but he needs someone to make him the hoe, and the plough, and the irrigation channel; and the one who makes all these things needs someone to teach him how, and get the raw materials for him. And so if you were to follow the chain of events which brought the food to you, you would see that all the motions of the universe play a part in this. So we find that consuming common goods is something known to all mankind and God wants to regulate it with a system, and so He *the Exalted* says:

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوٓا۟ أَمْوَٰلَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِٱلْبَٰطِلِ وَتُدْلُوا۟ بِهَآ إِلَى ٱلْحُكَّامِ
لِتَأْكُلُوا۟ فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَٰلِ ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلْإِثْمِ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٨﴾

Do not consume your property wrongfully, nor use it to bribe judges, intending sinfully and knowingly to consume parts of other people’s property [188] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 188)

As long as they are my possessions, why can I not consume them? The command here is issued to everyone, and the possessions are ascribed to everyone;

when a possession belongs to me, it can, at the same time, be something which others can benefit from.

So, it is something shared by all, but what regulates how it is passed around? What regulates how it is passed around is the firm truth which never changes; and wrongfulness cannot regulate it. What is wrongfulness, and what is truth? Wrongfulness is that which passes: it is transient and does not last, and always fades away. The truth is that which is firm and never changes. So do not consume wrongfully, that is, do not consume that which belongs to someone else unless you have a right which God has established with a ruling. So do not steal, and do not usurp, and do not snatch, and do not take bribes, and do not embezzle and betray the trusts with which you are charged; for if any of this takes place, you will have consumed these possessions unjustly.

When you unjustly consume, you cannot personally exempt others from what you have allowed for yourself, and so other people will also consume unjustly so that everyone will plunder everyone else. But when mankind is governed by justice and truth, you will only take rightfully, and everyone else will be obliged only to give to you rightfully, and so all of life's motions will conform to a law organised by the firm truth which never changes. Why? That is because wrongfulness might sometimes be ascendant but does not have any stability. The True Lord *the Most High* says that He sends down water from the sky, and once-dry river-beds are running high according to their measure; the stream carries swelling foam on its surface; and, likewise, from that metal which they melt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, there rises scum. In this way does God set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as does all dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does God set forth the parables (*ar-Ra'd:* 17).

When you see rain falling onto a rivulet or valley floor, you find that this rain washes away all the refuse and impurities and carries it off so that it floats on the water and produces foam. Likewise, when you put iron into fire it melts and all the impurities come out of it and float on the surface. And so we find that for something to be on the top and rise to the surface, does not mean that it is truth; God *the Exalted* mentions tangible matters to allow us to derive from them abstract concepts, and so you see that what is wrong might rise and come to the surface, but it does not remain; it rather ends. The popular phrase has it: ‘What goes up must come down.’

God *the Most High* wants our livelihood to be pure, noble, and upright so that nothing enters your stomach unless you have worked for it, and so every person takes what is theirs rightfully. Before a person thinks of eating, he should work so he can eat, not wait for the fruits of other people’s labour. Why? It is because this laziness will immerse life in chaos. If we see a person who does not work and yet lives comfortably, eating by means of the efforts of others, this person will become an example which others will imitate, and everyone will thus be tempted to stop working and live by sponging off others. This will bring all of life’s productive motions to a halt, and this is a transient wrong, and so all the fruits of labour will cease to be produced, and everyone will go hungry.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants people to work to fulfil their needs for food, drink and shelter so that the cycle of life will continue. He *the Exalted* wants to preserve for us the honour of work in life, meaning that you work for everything you benefit from; for the benefit of your work is not reserved solely for you, but rather, it is part of an ongoing chain of different works, and when you spread the honour of work, everyone will work for this honour. But wrongfulness brings about the opposite of this, for when you consume the fruits of the works of others, you spread chaos throughout existence.

Because of this, lawful work is not only that you work; you must also consider the honour of work by not being on the side of wrong; this is because those who steal are working when they steal, but their work has no honour, and is unlawful. So every stolen item in existence is the fruit of unlawful work, and the same is the case with extortion, fraud, deception, dishonest work, embezzlement, betrayal of trusts, and disavowal. All of this is wrongful, and every work which God has not sanctioned is sinful, and even to aid work which God has not sanctioned is sinful.

The True Lord *the Most High* commands us: ‘And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly….’ That is, beware of wrongfully consuming and then employing legal artifices so that the authorities absolve you and say that the wrong you have done is actually right. There are many people who see the actions of an authority figure as an excuse to act just like him; and this is a mistake because everyone is responsible for his own actions.

Do not say that since the ruler has made certain actions permissible, your own actions are his responsibility; the likeness of this is those things which we call ‘fine arts,’ such as dancing, singing, and profligacy: the fact that the authorities have allowed these things rather than banned them – does this make them lawful? No, because there is a difference between civil law and Divine law; and so you find that corruption only becomes widespread in life because of this kind of behaviour.

Those people, who work in professions which God *the Most High* does not sanction, thereby consume their own possessions wrongfully, and they force the produce of wrongful wealth into the bellies of their children. Those who consume these kinds of things should be well aware that the one who supports them is feeding them with unlawful and wrongfully gained produce; and they should be mindful of their Lord, and say, ‘No; we will not eat from this source because it is unlawful and wrong, and we were created by God, and He *the Most High* has undertaken to provide for us our sustenance.’

I, very often, hear people say, ‘These wrongful practices have become a part of life, and our life is built around them so that we cannot do without them.’ I say to them: No; you should rebuild your lives on a lawful basis, and if someone insists on doing unlawful work in order to support their dependants, the dependants should take a stand and refuse it, and insist on not consuming anything wrongfully.

Can you imagine what would happen if a son refused to eat from the proceeds of his mother’s work if she was a dancer or a singer, for example, or from the produce of his father’s work if he knew that he worked in a wrongful profession? It would be very hard on the mother or father themselves.

To those who say, ‘This is our means of sustenance, and we have no other sustenance besides it,’ I say: God *the Most High* provides sustenance for those whom He wills beyond all reckoning, and no one should think that his work is what brings him sustenance; rather, God provides him with sustenance by means of this work. If he moves from a wrongful job to another job which is lawful, God will not begrudge him a righteous job and a righteous means of sustenance to support him.

The True Lord *the Most High* explained this matter when He wanted to forbid the idolaters from entering God's Mosque in Mecca. There were people who made their living from what the idolaters would spend in the pilgrimage season, and during this economic season the inhabitants of Mecca would sell all kinds of things to the idolaters who came to the House. If God made it forbidden for the idolater to go to the Sacred Mosque, what were these people to do?

The first thing that comes to mind is the thought, 'How would they live?' Let us reflect on the matter which God *the Most High* wanted to establish in the soul of every believer. The True Lord *the Most High* addresses the believers saying that idolaters are indeed impure, and they should not approach the Sacred Mosque after that year (*at-Tawba:* 28).

And then He addresses the matter which would come to the minds of people, telling the believers that should they fear poverty, then God will give them wealth from His bounty if He so wills (*at-Tawba:* 28). So we see that this matter was not hidden from God. So no one should say: 'This wrongful and unlawful work is the source of my sustenance, and I will not be able to live if I leave it,' whether the job is to compose music, or to play a musical instrument, or to write profligate songs, or to dance, or to sculpt statues. We say to him: No; do not make this your source of livelihood when God *the Most High* tells you that should you fear poverty, then God will give you wealth from His bounty. If you have fear of God, He *the Exalted* will make for you a way out and provide for you from whence you had not expected (*at-Talaq:* 2-3). You need to quit every job which entails disobedience to God, and look to the hand which God stretches out to you bearing His favours.

So God's words: 'And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly…' are a caution to people not to feed themselves and their dependents on anything but rightfully-gained wealth, wealth earned by noble, wholesome work, and that the support of the believer should always be the word of the True Lord *the Most High* that whoever has fear of God, God will make for him a way out and provide for him from whence he has not expected (*at-Talaq:* 2-3).

We should also know that one who consumes what is unlawful, will be denied what is rightful; meaning that God *the Most High* would try him with an illness which would prevent him from eating what is good and lawful. You can find a person who possesses much wealth, and can afford to consume any kind of food and drink, but the doctors forbid him from eating all kinds of food because to eat them would be dangerous and harmful to his health. So the blessing is there before him, and belongs to him, but he cannot eat it rightfully; and at the same time, this blessing is enjoyed by his children and his servants, and his entourage, and everyone he supports. To a person such as this, we say: You must have taken something wrongfully that God has denied you what is rightful.

This is why we say: He who consumes what is wrongful will be denied what is rightful; and likewise we say: If someone uses something as a means to do what is wrongful, God *the Most High* will show him the ruin of it rightfully, so, if someone wrongs the people using his power and his strong muscles, there will surely come a day when he becomes weak.

And the woman who shakes her waist elegantly will surely find a day when her waist stiffens so that she cannot move it; and the one who dazzles people with her beautiful eyes from right to left will surely find a day when she goes blind and so cannot see anyone, and the people are revolted by her ugliness.

So, everyone who consumes unjustly will be denied what is rightful; and everyone who uses something as a means to do what is wrongful, God *the Most High* will show him the ruin of it rightfully. Make a list of all the people you know, and review the life of all those who use what God *the Most High* has created to spread perversion, or make it a means to do something wrongful: God *the Most High* will surely make them see the wrongfulness of this.

I want people to make a list of all those who deviate from God's way, and reflect on the outcome of their lives. Each one of us knows his neighbours and colleagues: what is the source of what they consume? How do they earn their livings? Let him reflect on their lives, and thereby recognise what is lawful work and what is unlawful work, and make their lives a lesson for himself and for his children. How did they live? How did they turn out? And then he should look at how these people ended their lives.

Out of our love for these people, we say to them: Change your ways, for you cannot deceive God about how you are gathering unlawful wealth by then giving some of it as charity; God *the Most High* will not accept this act of yours because God is good, and He only accepts that which is good.

We hear about many deviant people going to perform the pilgrimage, and building mosques, and giving charity, all of which with money they unlawfully earned. To such people, we say: God *the Most High* has no need of your worship, and your unlawful charity; and we advise them that God does not require you to build mosques for him with unlawful funds, or to give charity to His servants with money which is unlawfully earned. Rather, He *the Exalted* wants you to be true to His Way.

If we reflect on the verse, we find something amazing about it. God *the Most High* says, ‘And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or present it to rulers….’ The True Lord *the Most High* mentions rulers in the verse because the ruler is the one who makes laws, and can give legitimacy to money even if it was amassed wrongfully. God’s word ‘present’ (*tudlu*) is derived from the Arabic verb *adla*, which means to lower a pail on a rope down a well; the verb *dallah* means to raise the pail from the well, whilst the verb *adla* means to lower it. And the word is used in the story of Satan’s temptation of mankind, the True Lord *the Most High* says that Satan led them (Adam and his wife) on (*dallahuma*) with deluding thoughts. But as soon as the two had tasted the fruit of the tree, they became conscious of their nakedness (*al-A‘raf*: 22).

God’s words ‘…or present it to rulers…’ means to bribe the judges in order to consume some of the possessions of others unlawfully. It is amazing that this very verse is a clear text about bribery. The Arabic word for bribery is *rashwa* which is derived from *risha*’ which is the word for the rope which the pail is tied to so that the verb *adla* and *dalla* are connected to the concept of bribery. Why do they use their wealth to bribe the judges? They do it so that the judges will give them legal edicts allowing them to wrongfully consume the possessions of others. This is how it is when we are governed by man-made laws; yet, when we are governed by the laws of God, the judge will not allow this kind of thing.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* established this principle by saying: ‘I am but a human being, and antagonists in disputes come to me; and it may be that one of you is more eloquent than the other, and I might consider him right and judge in his favour because of that. So if I give what is the right of one Muslim to another, it is but a piece of hellfire – he may take it or leave it.’(1) The one who said this is the infallible Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and he is warning against anyone trying to use eloquent arguments in order to take something which is not rightfully his.

So, when corruption becomes law, this is a result of the ruler having sanctioned it, and people then taking the ruler’s decision as final. An example of this is: some rulers did not ban usury, and so people engaged in it with the excuse that since governments allow it, there is no harm in it. This kind of understanding is not correct because no government can allow what God has forbidden; and if they do so, the believer should be cautious and know that both he and the rulers are governed by Divine Law; and if governments do not judge according to what is lawful because they seek to preserve their temporal power, the believer still must not stray from the teachings of his religion.

If we consider any corruption in the world, whatever form it may take, we will find that the reason for it is the wrongful consumption of wealth. And so the True Lord *the Most High* did not allow these matters to be muted, but rather, He made them manifest in things which could be readily observed. If you want to know the people of any era, with respect to their religious observance and the honesty of their dealings, look at the architecture of any era. Look at the buildings, and through them, you will be able to gauge the morals of the era. If you look at the process of building now, you will find therein misuse of funds, untrustworthy contractors, and duplicity amongst the workers. We can see all of these things in architecture. Let us consider, for example, the At-Tahrir compound, and let us think back to the time when it was built; and then let us compare it with the postal authorities building or the Supreme Court, and the other buildings constructed at the same time as them.

Let us consider the buildings and structures which we hear about, which collapse over their inhabitants; and then let us compare them with the postal authorities building or the Supreme Court. We will find that the old buildings were established with safety and security; as for the buildings which collapse over their inhabitants in our times, or whose sewage pipes are damaged, they were established by the fraudulence of the voraciously greedy contractor, and the swindling architect who designed or supervised the building, or who supervised the building and vouched for its soundness, and the deceitful builders who worked on it. The result of this is the loss of innocent people who have done nothing wrong: the building collapses upon them and they end up as dead bodies pulled out of the rubble. The poet Ahmad Shawqi looked at this matter, and he saw that morals and religious spirit were priorities in life:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

The building of a people cannot thrive
If their morals are in ruins.

I suggest to the state that they make a permanent record of every building which is constructed, and keep in this record the name of its contractor, and the architect who supervised its construction, and the names of all the builders who worked on it, and the ones who kept the accounts, and the ones who installed the plumbing and electricity, and all those who worked on its construction. All this should be kept in a special file for each building, and if something happens they should go to these people, each according to his specialisation, and hold them to account for their negligent work. If not, people's lives will be lost in vain. Every one of us has a chance in this life, and he must not usurp the chance of anyone else.

Suppose we take our goods be waiting in a queue so that no one could take anyone else's turn, and the first one in the queue comes at seven o'clock in the morning to take his turn, while another comes later after sleeping, and relaxing, and doing everything he needs to do, and then goes to the association and finds that the queue is very long; and so he bribes someone to let him cut into the queue in exchange for some money to help him get his things. This person has violated the rights of everyone else in the queue.

He might say, 'But I took the same thing they did.' We say to him: No; you took the time that belonged to someone else; the last person cannot come along and take the right of the person who had been standing in line since seven o'clock in the morning. Your right is connected to your time, and so do not infringe upon the time of the others who have less power or money than you do.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or present it to rulers in order that you consume a portion of the wealth of other people in sin, while you know.’ A portion is an amount taken from a given larger amount so that if a small amount is taken from people, this amount is termed a ‘portion.’

The essence of sin – even if there were no religion – is doing something for which one is blamed and censured; and likewise, you are also blamed and censured for it by the religion, and on top of that you are punished in the Hereafter. What is the criterion of right and wrong? The criterion which saves you from wrong is that you accept for yourself the same you would expect from others in any deal or transaction because you only like for yourself those things in which you see benefit for yourself.

The True Lord *the Most High* then throws light on a matter which concerns something that the Islamic mission was faced with. The Islamic mission only came to take those who believed in God from a situation in life which was largely, if not totally, wrong, but which they had become accustomed and used to, for some people had benefitted from this wrong; and falsehood does not last unless there are those who benefit from it. Islam came to rid people of these wrongful things. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to inform us that not everything people used to do before is completely evil, but rather, there were certain things which Islam accepted as they were. Islam did not change things simply for the sake of change, but rather, it confronted the harmful things in life which only wrongdoers benefitted from.

For example, the standard practice for blood indemnities was that one hundred camels would be paid by the murderer’s family; and Islam left this as it was. When the Muslims accepted faith in God, they thereby accepted all of His laws, and they wanted to base their lives on a new, pure, Islamic system. They would even ask for rulings concerning those things which they used to do in the times of pagan ignorance because they did not want to do them in the customary way they were done, but rather they wanted to draw near to God with obedience. So they looked forward to shouldering their religious responsibilities, and they knew that God would only charge them with those things which were to their benefit. Whenever you read the words ‘They ask you’ in the Quran, know that it refers to something of this nature.

For example, He *the Exalted* says the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will be asked by his companions as to what they should spend in God’s Way. He was commanded to say, ‘Whatever you can spare’ (*al-Baqara*: 219). And He *the Exalted* says that he *peace and blessings be upon him* will be asked about menses. He was commanded to say that it is a vulnerable condition (*al-Baqara*: 222). And He *the Exalted* says that he will be asked how to deal with orphans (*al-Baqara*: 219). And He *the Exalted* says that they will ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* as to what they should spend on others. He was commanded to say, ‘whatever of your wealth you spend shall [first] be for your parents, and for the near of kin’ (*al-Baqara*: 215). And He *the Exalted* says that they will ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* about Dhul Qarnain (*al-Kahf*: 83). And He *the Exalted* says that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will be asked about the spoils of war, and he *peace and blessings be upon him* was commanded to say that all spoils of war belong to God and the Messenger …. (*al-Anfal:* 1).

So, every question meant that they wanted to base their lives on an Islamic system, and even in the cases of those things which Islam did not change, they wanted to know them and do them as Islamic rulings, not simply as matters of custom.

The question which we will be examining next concerns a natural phenomenon. When the Muslims asked about a natural phenomenon, this shows that they looked to God’s creation with another kind of religious outlook. They found the sun rising every day without changing; but the moon which rises at night does change: it begins the month small, and then gets bigger until it is full, and then it begins to get smaller again until it becomes like it was. They noticed what happens to the moon and yet, does not happen to the sun, and so they asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Or, the case might be that some Jews wanted to embarrass the Muslims, and so they said to them, ‘Ask your Messenger about the new moon: How does it start off small and then grow until it is full, and then repeat the same cycle again until there are two nights in which we cannot see it at all?’ The Quran recorded this question when God *the Most High* said:

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْأَهِلَّةِ ۖ قُلْ هِىَ مَوَٰقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَٱلْحَجِّ ۗ وَلَيْسَ ٱلْبِرُّ
بِأَن تَأْتُوا۟ ٱلْبُيُوتَ مِن ظُهُورِهَا وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلْبِرَّ مَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰ ۗ وَأْتُوا۟
ٱلْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَٰبِهَا ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ١٨٩

They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons. Say,
‘They show the times appointed for people, and for the
pilgrimage.’ Goodness does not consist of entering houses by
the back [door]; the truly good person is the one who is
mindful of God. So enter your houses by their [main] doors
and be mindful of God so that you may prosper [189]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 189)

The word *ahilla* (‘new moons’) is the plural of *hilal* (‘new moon’). It is called *hilal* because when a person sees it, he ‘hails,’ that is he utters *tahlil* (‘glorification of God’), meaning he raises his voice and extols God. In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* gives an answer which gives the details of the moon, which is the celestial body which subjected to the curiosity of the human mind to discover its reality. The ancient Arabs did not know much about this moon; they would use it to tell the dates, and their knowledge of it did not go beyond the limits of the benefit they gained from it, and they did not have the intellectual opulence by which they could reflect on the signs of God in the universe. Every sign of the universe is first benefited from, and after that it spurs the mind to discover its reality; and it might not spur the mind, but in this case, the benefit remains as it is.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to an important principle, which was to teach us how to benefit from natural signs such as the moon. It is not enough just that it appears and disappears, and changes size because the mind cannot comprehend this; rather, we benefit from it as a marker of time, and we use it to measure the passage of time. If, now in the twentieth century, scientists have still not found satisfactory explanations for all the phenomena of the moon, what can we say about those who asked about it fourteen centuries ago?

Modern scientists explain, for example, that the sun is one-and-a-quarter million times bigger than the earth, and the moon is smaller than the earth; and when the earth comes between the sun and the moon, despite the massiveness of the sun the earth covers part of the moon, and this covered part accords with the covered arc of the earth so that this part of the moon becomes dark.

The existence of the moon is confirmed, but when the earth is between it and the sun, it shades it from the sun's light, and the size of its light increases as the earth moves away from it. When the earth moves completely out of the way, the moon appears in the sky as a full moon, after which the earth once again shades it from part of the sun, and this increases day after day, and the sunlight which reflects from the moon is cut off as a result so that it gradually becomes smaller until the earth comes between it and the sun so that none of it is visible. We say that when we cannot see the moon by night or day even though it still exists in its place, this means that it is covered by the shadow of the earth, and this is why we cannot see it. This does not happen to the sun because the sun is extremely big; and when it does happen, its effect is slight – it is called a 'solar eclipse.'

When the Arabs looked at the universe, they said, 'What is it about the new moon that makes it come like this, and then grow until it is full?' The True Lord *the Most High* said, '…say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for pilgrimage…."' They were asking about new moons and their cycles, but God cut short this line of thinking of theirs and gave them the essence and the most important significance from which they can benefit, and said, '…say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for pilgrimage…."' This was all the minds of the time could understand; as for the rest of the matter, you should wait until the time comes for it to be discovered; and your ignorance of it does not prevent you from benefiting from it.

The answer to any question at that time would be commensurate with the capabilities of the minds of time to grasp; as for the other answers, God *the Most High* left them for the right time. He does not tell us anything except that which imparts unto us a ruling. For example, in the past they said that the earth was spherical, and then science confirmed that this was indeed the case, and we saw it for ourselves by use of satellites, and that was that.

When the Arabs asked about the new moons, the True Lord *the Most High* told us that they were an indication of periods *mawaqit* (plural of *miqat*), which is derived from the word *waqt,* meaning ‘time.’ We know that every action requires a time and a place, and so time and place are linked to action, and there can be no time and place without there also being an action.

If someone says, ‘What was time like before God created all creation?’ we say to him: Time was made for finite beings, namely created beings, whilst God is infinite. Since God is infinite and not finite, there is neither time nor place, so, do not ask ‘when?’ or ‘where?’ because ‘when’ and ‘where’ are created beings. How do we define time? We define time by saying that a period of time is a period in which a given event or action takes place. What does place have to do with this definition? Time sometimes determines place so that time is the basis and place is incidental to it; on other occasions, place is the basis and time is incidental to it; and on a third kind of occasion, both time and place are essential.

Here in Egypt, if we want to perform the pilgrimage, we enter into the state of ritual consecration (*ihram*) when we reach the place called Rabigh, and we call Rabigh ‘the *miqat* of the Egyptians,’ i.e. the place where no one going to perform pilgrimage passes without first entering into ritual consecration. So, the word *miqat* can also refer to places, such as Rabigh, and as soon as an Egyptian on the way to the pilgrimage gets to Rabigh, he enters into ritual consecration, whether the time is morning, noon, afternoon, or evening.

But when we begin fasting, time is the basis for your fast wherever you may go. Time is what determines the occasion of fasting, whether you are in TanTa, or London, or Tokyo; and so we see how time can also be a *miqat*.

So, sometimes, time is the determinant of a *miqat,* whilst place is incidental to it, and sometimes, it is place which determines the *miqat*, whilst time is incidental to it, and sometimes both time and place determine the action such as is the case with the *Day of ’Arafa* during pilgrimage.

This is how we know the meaning of ‘…measurements (*mawaqit*) of time for the people….’ By the new moon, we know that the month of *Ramadan* has begun, and we know when the festival of *’Eid Al-Fitr* has begun, and likewise the season of the pilgrimage, and a woman’s waiting-period between marriages, and the sacred months. We know all of these things by their appropriate periods of time, and the True Lord *the Most High* decreed that the new moon would be the means for us to determine these things; and He decreed that the sun would only determine days for us, although it does have another function in that it determines the zodiacs which are connected to weather conditions and the agricultural cycle. Therefore, He *the Exalted* said that it was He who has made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light reflected (*Yunus:* 5).

Look at the precise language used here, and how the True Lord *the Most High* explains to people the nature of reflected light (*nur*) and radiant light (*diya'*). The sun produces its own light, whilst the moon only reflects light because its light comes from a source other than itself. It is like a piece of bright stone upon which the rays of the sun are reflected, thus giving it light. The moon shines with light which comes from something other than it, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says in another verse that He has placed in the sky a radiant lamp and a light-giving moon (*al-Furqan:* 61).

The radiant lamp in this verse means the sun, which gives off heat, and to which the True Lord *the Most High* has allotted zodiac segments (called *buruj* (towers) in Arabic); as for the moon, it has phases, and it gives off the light which comes from something other than it. On the same theme, the True Lord *the Most High* says that it is He Who has made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light reflected, and has determined for it phases so that you might know how to compute the years and to measure time (*Yunus:* 5).

So, the computation and measuring of years comes from the moon, and in our times when they want to measure the passage of time precisely, they base this on the moon because they have found that measuring by the moon is more accurate than measuring by the sun because measurements based on the sun lose a day every few years.

Let us understand the difference between the phases of the moon and the zodiac segments *(buruj)* of the sun. The zodiac segments are names taken (in Arabic) from the Syriac language. These are: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Virgo, Leo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. There are twelve zodiac segments, and these represent the twelve stages of the sun. They are connected to the agricultural seasons, and weather and climate. We must understand that God has secret wisdoms connected to the zodiac which is indicated by the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* made them into an oath when He swore by the sky that has buruj (constellations/stars/towers) (*al-Buruj:* 1).

And so you find that solar time never changes so that the same months come at the same seasons of year every year. There is a difference of twelve days between the solar year and the lunar year, and the lunar calendar is the one we use to date the Arabic months; and we know the beginning of each month by the new moon. God *the Most High* states that the number of months with God is twelve months (*at-Tawba:* 36).

And so religious responsibilities are determined by the moon so that the phases of the moon would travel through the zodiac signs of the sun, which mean that the religious duty comes in every kind of weather which occurs throughout the year, and therefore you do not always fast *Ramadan* in summer, or always in winter, but rather, God distributes the periods of worship throughout the days of the year. For those who live in cold regions, for example: if the pilgrimage was always in summer, they would not be able to fulfil the obligation; but the season of the pilgrimage rotates through all the months, and so when the pilgrimage occurs in winter it will be easier for them to fulfil the obligation in an atmosphere which is closer to that of their own habitat.

In this way we find that God's wisdom has willed that the periods of worship rotate through every day of the year so that all people, regardless of the climate in which they live, are able to perform their worship without difficulty. So the lunar cycle is distributed through the solar cycle, which is why some of the scholars say that the Night of Power is always passing through each night of the year, considering the passing of the lunar cycle through the solar cycle.

The sun has its zodiac cycle, and the moon has its phases, and the stars have their positions; and God *the Most High* states that it needs not that He swears by the position of the stars, and indeed it is a most solemn oath, if but people know (*al-Waqi'a:* 75-76).

Perhaps a time will come when God *the Most High* will reveal to mankind the effect of the positions of the stars on the lives of man and this will happen when souls are ready for it, and minds are able to comprehend it. So everything in the universe has a system: the sun has its zodiac cycle, and the moon has its phases, and the stars have their positions. All of the secrets of the universe and its laws and systems are present in these created beings. God has imparted to us one of the secrets of the new moons, which is that they indicate periods for various doings of mankind, including the pilgrimage. When God *the Most High* spoke about the pilgrimage, He wanted to give us a ruling concerning it. There were certain Arab tribes known as ‘zealots’, and those zealots were particularly enthusiastic about their religion. They included Quraysh, Kinana, Khath‘am, Jashm, and Banu Sa‘sa‘ ibn ‘Amir. If a member of one of these tribes performed the pilgrimage, he would not enter his house from the front door upon returning because he would be dirty and dishevelled after performing the rites of the pilgrimage. He would try and enter his house in an unusual way, and so he would enter from the back. This was an act of extremism on their part, and God did not want to sanction it so that they would not find their wives, or their families doing something they would not like. When God *the Most High* mentioned the rites of the pilgrimage in the Quran, He wanted to cleanse the rites from these customs which the Arabs had adopted, and so He said, ‘…and it is not righteousness to enter houses from the rear, but righteousness is in having fear of God; and enter houses by their doors. And fear God that you may succeed.’ That is, do not take things superficially and focus on formalities, for We want the essence of piety, that which is good and beneficial.

Notice that the word ‘righteousness’ here in this verse is in the Arabic nominative case because its grammatical function is to be the subject of the verb *laysa* (‘it is not’). In this regard it differs from the word ‘righteousness’ mentioned previously in God’s words: ‘Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east or the west…’ (*al-Baqara*: 177), where the word ‘righteousness’ in this sentence is in the Arabic accusative case because its grammatical function here is to be the predicate of the verb *laysa* which here is mentioned before the subject (in Arabic this is known as *khabar muqaddam* (‘forwarded predicate’). Some orientalists have tried to criticise the Noble Quran because of this difference in the nominative and accusative cases. We say to them: You do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the

Arabic language, so, what can we do for you? It can be correct to mention the predicate first. We say, ‘Zaid is hard-working;’ this is the case if we know who Zaid is, but we have yet to learn his attribute, and so ‘Zaid’ is the subject of the sentence and ‘hard-working’ is the predicate. But if we know that there is someone who is hard-working, but we do not know who that person is, we say: ‘The hard-working one is Zaid.’

Sometimes the name is known to you, and so you follow it with the attribute, whilst other times the name is unknown and the attribute is known, in which case you follow the attribute with the name. This is the secret of the difference in the nominative and accusative cases of the word ‘righteousness’ in these two verses. We say to the orientalists: Every word in the Quran has its proper place and meaning, and so do not treat the Quran ignorantly and then, raise issues which do not detract anything from the value of the Book, but rather serve only to expose your own ignorance.

What does ‘righteousness’ mean? We said that righteousness is something good and beneficial; and had God *the Most High* left us to define what ‘righteousness’ is, each of our abilities to understand what is good and beneficial would have been different according to our different minds: You see this as being ‘good’, whilst another person sees something else, and a third person sees the opposite of what you see. And so God *the Most High* did not leave it to us to give the definition of what righteousness means, and He *the Exalted* determined for us those things which are good and beneficial. No one ever deviates and inclines towards something unless he believes it to be good and beneficial, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…but righteousness is in having fear of God; and enter houses by their doors….’

This indicates to us that every goal has a path which leads to it, so, you should go to the goal via the path which leads to it. The verse then continues with what God wants to say about piety: ‘…And fear God that you may succeed.’ God-fearing is still the major theme of this chapter and every ruling that is explained in it is followed by its reason for being legislated, which is having fear of God.

We know that the meaning of God-fearing is to protect oneself from the perils and problems of life by adhering to God’s way. When you see God’s way and you follow it, you protect yourself from these problems; as for those who reject God-fearing, the True Lord *the Most High* describes their destiny saying that whoever turns away from the remembrance of God will indeed have a depressed life (*Ta Ha:* 124).

No one should think that God-fearing merely means to fear hellfire; no; it is broader than that; it is to fear all the problems and dangers that come from contravening God's way. A person should know that for every sin he commits, a day will surely come when these sins are done to him just as he did them to others; and so he who would not like to be sinned against should not sin against others.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* brings up another issue that gives the Islamic community a unique distinction; for He *the Exalted* brought this community into existence and made it naturally disposed to an upright way which none of the other communities before it attained. This distinction is that God *the Most High* charged the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the responsibility of chastising those who stray from God's way. In the past, heaven would chastise those who strayed from the way; the Messenger would explain and deliver the way, and if the people contravened it, Heaven would intervene and punish them, either with a thunderbolt, or with torment, or with a flood, or by some other means. The messengers themselves were not responsible for forcing and coercing the people to follow the way of the religion. When the children of Israel asked their Lord for permission to fight, they were not fighting for the sake of the religion, as the noble verse shows; rather, they asked for permission to fight in God's Cause because they and their children had been driven from their homelands (*al-Baqara*: 246).

So, the reason for fighting was that they had been driven from their homes and forced to leave their children; when they asked for permission to fight they did do not so in order to defend their beliefs, but rather because they and their children had been driven out of their homes.

As for the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, God has charged them with the responsibility of bearing the standard in their hands; and this was not a standard of reign by force, but rather, a standard which protected the dignity of man by preserving for him the freedom to choose using the mind God gave him, for there can be no compulsion to belief in

God. God *the Most High* gave permission to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight, not in order to force upon people His religion, but to preserve for you the freedom to choose the religion which you are satisfied with, and to prevent the forces of tyranny which come between you and your freedom to choose to accept your religious responsibilities.

And so to those who try to accuse Islam of having been 'spread by the sword,' we say: Your argument is feeble and false. Likewise, concerning their assertion that Islam imposed the non-Muslim poll-tax (*jizya*) simply in order to raise money, we say: Who was this poll-tax imposed upon? It was imposed upon non-believers. As long as they had a tax imposed upon them, this means that they were allowed to be non-believers. If Islam forced people to accept the religion, there would be no one to take the poll-tax from. Islam did not force anyone, but rather, it protected them from the forces that attempted to dominate them so that , no one could force them to leave their religion, after which they were free to decide whether to accept Islam or not. It is as though those who criticise Islam defend it at the same time so that their own arrow comes right back at them.

Here, a question might arise: If this is the case, why did the Muslims ever fight wars? We say that the wars of Islam were fought to counter those who forced false beliefs onto others, and Islam came to say to these tyrants: Take your hands off the people, and give them freedom to choose the religion they want. Why did Islam leave them free? As it was sure that as long as a person is free to choose, it is not possible that he will find the plain Truth anywhere else but in Islam. And so many of those who read God's words that there shall be no coercion in faith (*al-Baqara*: 256), do not realise that the reason for this is plain in God's words in the very same verse declaring that the right way has become clearly distinct from the way of error (*al-Baqara*: 256). So the matter is clear: why would people need to be coerced when Truth and falsehood are plainly laid before them? All that we do is to prevent those who try to impose their false beliefs on people. You can coerce the outer shell of a person, but you can never coerce his heart; and we want faith to be followed by the heart. And so the True Lord *the Most High* comforted our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that perhaps he was wearing himself away with grief because they (the Prophet's people) would not believe; He *the Exalted* further states that if He had so willed, He could have sent down unto the disbelievers a sign from the skies so that , their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara*: 3-4).

God *the Most High* does not want to force necks into submission; Had He wanted that, no one would have been able to escape His decree; for if God wants to try someone with sickness or death, no one can escape His decree. The True Lord *the Most High* wants faithful hearts not coerced shells. If someone wants to force others to believe by using a whip, no one will follow him, and he himself will not truly believe in what he forces upon others. If he truly believed in it, he would not violently force it upon others; and so they would kill him off freely and willingly as soon as they realised that this was the right way to preserve their lives.

When we look around ourselves, we find that the regimes and governments which force their principles by violence and compulsion end up collapsing one after the other, for when these governments stop using violence and tyranny the people abandon these ideas. Here, the Quran deals with this issue when it speaks about fighting and legislates fighting, that thing with which God distinguished the Islamic community; and He *the Exalted* did not permit fighting during the Meccan period of the Islamic mission which lasted thirteen years, allowing it only after the emigration to Medina. It was necessary that the option of fighting be delayed because the True Lord *the Most High* first wanted the Muslims to take care of following His way so that they could be a model for others, and so others could see in them a good example; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* commanded the believers to forgive and forbear, until God shall make manifest His will (*al-Baqara*: 109). And He *the Exalted* also commanded His Messenger not to obey the infidels and the hypocrites, and yet to refrain from hurting them (*al-Ahzab:* 48).

Why this gradual progression? It was because the True Lord *the Most High* knew that the call to Islam would enter the Arab households so that a single household would contain both, those who disbelieved in God and those who believed in God. Had God *the Most High* permitted fighting from the beginning, there would have been battles in every household.

Moreover, the True Lord *the Most High* knew that these Arab tribes were full of weak-mindedness, recklessness and carelessness, and that they would fight for the most trivial of reasons; because Kulaib, a tribal chief, fired an arrow at a she-camel and hit it in the udder and killed it, a war erupted which lasted forty years.(1) In this regard, a poet said about rancour and anger:

> There are people who, if evil bares its teeth at them,
> Fly towards it, in groups and individually.

And another says:

> They do not ask their brother, when he calls upon them
> In times of hardship what proof he has.

That is, they do not ask their brother, ‘Why are we fighting?’ They fight for any reason and for no reason, and wild fervour often pushes them to fight for no reason. On the other hand, ancient Arabs also had a great sense of justice so that if they saw someone wronging someone else, they would be moved by this sense of justice and would fall upon the wrongdoer. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to kindle in them this fidelity when they saw the weak Muslims being oppressed; a party of the tribe of Quraysh had confined them to the quarter of Abu Talib, where they were subjected to an embargo and famine. This lasted until the five leading men of Mecca gathered and said, ‘How can we be content to eat and drink and have relations with our women, when the Sons of Hashim and the sons of Muttalib are blockaded in the valley unable to eat, drink, or trade?’

They were unbelievers, but despite this, they took a mighty stance and said, ‘Bring forth the paper on which we pledged to cut off the Sons of Hashim and the Sons of Muttalib so that we can tear it up,’ and they agreed on this. They were five of the leaders of Mecca, namely: Hisham ibn ‘Amr, Zuhair ibn Abu ‘Umayya, Abu Al-Buhturi ibn Hashim, Zam‘a ibn Al-Aswad, and al-Mut‘am ibn ‘Adiyy, and they were the leaders of the fidelity to justice which ended the embargo upon the Muslims. So we see that the Arabs were characterised by wild fervour offset by strong fidelity to justice.

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(1) The Basous War was a conflict between two rival clans in medieval Arabia. The Taghlib and Bakr tribes fought for roughly forty years (from 494 to 534 CE), locked in a perpetual cycle of vengeance. In parts of the Arab World today, the Basous War has been incorporated into an aphorism warning people against vendettas.

The True Lord *the Most High* knew that for the Arab nation to move away from what they had grown accustomed to would not be easy on them, and so He handled them with leniency. Some say, 'Why did the Muslims not fight their enemies in Mecca from the first moment, and why did they not slay the leaders of disbelief in Mecca?'

We say to them: Many of the people whom you would have seen it proper to fight at the beginning of the Islamic mission went on to become those who carried forth the banner of Islam after that. An example of this is Khalid ibn A-Walid *God be pleased with him* who was a brave commander of the idolaters' army, and who fought against the Muslims early in his life; and then, God *the Most High* guided him to Islam, and he became known as 'God's unsheathed sword.' What if this great commander had been killed by the Muslims? This would have resulted in the Muslims being deprived of his talents which proved decisive in most of the Islamic conquests in Syria and Iraq.

So, God's wisdom decreed to preserve the likes of Khalid, though they were the enemies of Islam at the beginning of the mission because God *the Most High* prepared a role for them by which they would serve Islam; and so those who first waged war against Islam would maintain the ardour which would lead them to do things by which God *the Most High* would forgive them for what they did before.

Consider 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl *God be pleased with him*, who was a thorn in the side of the Muslims at the onset of the mission, and then embraced Islam and did extremely well in serving it; when he was injured at the Battle of Yarmouk and his spirit was close to returning to its Creator, he looked to his commander, Khalid ibn Al-Walid *God be pleased with him*, and said, 'Is this a death which would make the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* pleased with me?' It was as though he knew that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had been angry at him before he embraced Islam.

'Amr ibn Al-'As *God be pleased with him* was the sagacious and resourceful statesman of the Muslims, without whom Egypt would not have been opened to Islam; for by his sagacity, he won over the Egyptians so that they refused to fight him, and he debated with them after that until their hatred for the Muslims died away, and he told them how the Messenger of God *peace and* *blessings be upon him* had spoken well of them, saying, 'Treat the Copts kindly for they have (with us) ties of kinship and safekeeping.' Moreover, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had also sent him to some of the Arabs to consolidate their allegiance to Islam. So, out of His mercy, God *the Most High* did not legislate fighting right from the start; otherwise we would have lost many of the great leaders of Islam who carried the banner of the Islamic mission later on. Everyone who was drawn to Islam after having been a foe and an enemy to it, God *the Most High* destined that after he embraced Islam he would play a role by which he served the final religion.

In this way we understand the wisdom of delaying permission to fight in Islam because God *the Most High* wanted to test and examine people, and He wanted that no one enter this religion but those who were ready to bear the hardships and trials that came with it because they would be responsible for the honour of a community, and the way of Heaven, and not just any person can undertake these kinds of things.

It would have been possible that God *the Most High* give victory to His religion right from the start without the Muslims playing any part in it, and this would have meant that all people would have been equal in their faith from the first to the last of them. But His wisdom decided to make for this religion, men who would sacrifice their lives and their possessions to attain martyrdom and rise to the level of the prophets. And so the command to fight was delayed and was given gradually; and the first stage of the command to fight came with God's words:

وَقَٰتِلُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِينَ يُقَٰتِلُونَكُمۡ وَلَا تَعۡتَدُوٓاْۚ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُعۡتَدِينَ ١٩٠

Fight in God's cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits: God does not love those who overstep the limits [190] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 190)

The circumstance behind the revelation of this verse was that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions yearned to visit the Sacred Mosque, and they wanted to perform the *'umra* (lesser pilgrimage), and so in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi'da* in the sixth year of the *Hijra* they went, intending to perform the *'umra*. But when they went and got as far as a place called Al-Hudaybiya, Quraysh confronted them and said, 'Muhammad and his companions cannot enter Mecca.'

Negotiations were held between the two parties, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* agreed to return home that year on the proviso that he could return the following year, when they would be given three days from the month of *Dhu Al-Qi'da* to spend undisturbed in Mecca.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had given his Companions glad tidings that they would enter the Sacred Mosque with shaved or shorn heads, and this news had spread around, and the Muslims rejoiced and were glad with it; and then they were shocked by the negotiations of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and his agreeing to return when they were only around twenty kilometres shy of Mecca, and so the Companions were saddened. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* was overwhelmed with anger and said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Are you not the Messenger of God? And are you not in the right?' So, our master Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* said to him, 'Stick to your position, 'Umar, for he is the Messenger of God!'

This incident served to highlight the position of the Mother of Believers Umm Salama *God be pleased with her*, which was a position that expressed compassion, mercy, gentle and temperate counsel. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* went to her and said, 'The Muslims are ruined, Umm Salama: I commanded them but they did not obey.'

Consider the important role of the wife when her husband comes to her in a troubled state; here, her role as a source of tranquillity becomes manifest. Umm Salama said, 'Excuse them, O Messenger of God, for they are disappointed. Their souls were yearning to enter God's Sacred Mosque with their heads shaved and shorn, and then they were denied this when they were but a few miles away from it. Adhere to what God commanded you, and do not speak to anyone until you have done it; for if they see you do it, they will know that this is firm resolve.'

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* went by Umm Salama's advice, and did what God *the Most High* had commanded him and all the Muslims followed his lead, and that was that. Before they returned to Medina, God *the Most High* did not want to hold out on those who criticised this decision so that bitterness would not remain in the souls of the believers. This was a difficult thing for them, and so God *the Most High* did not extend the time before telling them the reason for it, and He gave them the explanation, saying to them: What saddens you about having to return to Medina? You have believing brethren in Mecca who have kept their faith secret and who live secretly amongst the disbelievers. Had you entered, and they fought you, you would have had to fight everyone, believers and disbelievers alike, and so you would have unknowingly killed your own brethren. Yet, if these brethren of yours were all apart in a separate section of Mecca, I would have given you permission to fight the idolaters, as you desired. God tells the believers that the Meccan idolaters had indeed disbelieved, prevented them from reaching the Sacred Mosque and prevented their offerings from reaching their intended place for sacrifice. And had it not been for believing men and women who had remained under cover in Mecca, whom they would have inadvertently trodden down – so that they would have been unknowingly dishonoured on their account – and that God will admit to His Mercy whom He liked, God would have given them permission to fight and enter Mecca. Had the believing men and women residing in Mecca under cover been apart, God would have inflicted on the disbelievers among them a painful punishment (*al-Fath:* 25).

After the revelation of the verse, the Muslims knew that the interdiction was for a reason and a wisdom; and when the next year came, God *the Most High* gave permission to the believers to fight during the sanctified months(1) if they were attacked: for a violation of sanctity is subject to the law of just retribution (*al-Baqara*: 194).

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(1) In pre-Islam Arabia, by convention, Arab tribes acknowledged four months as 'sanctified,' meaning fighting was prohibited during these months, except in self-defence. These months were: *Dhu Al-Qi'da, Dhu Al-Hijja, Muharram, and Rajab*. The convention remained largely in force after the coming of Islam - Ed.

The True Lord *the Most High* was reassuring the believers: ‘The ones who barred your way in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi‘da* this year, you will fight them, and you will enter Mecca in *Dhu Al-Qi‘da* of next year.’ The Muslims feared that when they came the next year, Quraysh would violate the treaty and fight them, and so the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His command: ‘And fight in the way of God those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, God does not like transgressors’ (*al-Baqara*: 190).

If we reflect on God’s words ‘And fight in the Way of God,’ we find that the True Lord *the Most High* emphasises the words ‘in the Way of God’ because He wants to place a barrier on man’s use of force. The intention must be to fight in God’s cause, not merely to fight in order to gain power and oppress and tyrannise. There should be no fighting for the sake of this life, or for wealth, or to protect economic markets, but rather, fighting should be for the sake of raising the word of God, and succouring the religion of God; this is the purpose of fighting in Islam.

‘And fight in the way of God those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, God does not like transgressors’ (*al-Baqara*: 190). The True Lord forbids aggression; that is, a Muslim should not fight anyone who does not fight him and should not transgress.

Suppose that Quraysh had been the ones to fight, but some people such as women, children, and the elderly did not fight the Muslims, even though they were on the side of those who did fight them; so in this case, it would not be permissible to fight those non-combatants; but rather, there can only be a reaction which is commensurate with the first action. Why? It is so because to fight women and the elderly is transgression, and He *the Exalted* does not like transgressors. Rather, the fighting of the believers can only be to combat aggression, not to instigate it.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَٱقۡتُلُوهُمۡ حَيۡثُ ثَقِفۡتُمُوهُمۡ وَأَخۡرِجُوهُم مِّنۡ حَيۡثُ أَخۡرَجُوكُمۡۚ وَٱلۡفِتۡنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ ٱلۡقَتۡلِۚ وَلَا تُقَٰتِلُوهُمۡ
عِندَ ٱلۡمَسۡجِدِ ٱلۡحَرَامِ حَتَّىٰ يُقَٰتِلُوكُمۡ فِيهِۖ فَإِن قَٰتَلُوكُمۡ فَٱقۡتُلُوهُمۡۗ كَذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ١٩١

Kill them wherever you encounter them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, for persecution is more serious than killing. Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do fight you, kill them – this is what such disbelievers deserve [191]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 191)

We hear the words *thaqafa* and *thaqaf,* meaning ‘learning/culture’. Culture means refined education, or that you attain a certain amount of knowledge of various things. A person becomes cultured by possessing knowledge of a certain amount of information so that he knows something about everything, and then specialises in a branch of learning so that he knows all there is to know about one topic.

All of these abstract concepts are taken from concrete ones. The verb *thaqqafa* for the Arabs meant to straighten a branch; the Arabs would take tree branches to use as spears and staffs, and the branch would be bent or bulged, so the Arab would straighten (*thaqqafa*) it, i.e. remove its extraneous parts and its curvature; and then he would use a *thaqaf* which is a piece of hooked iron to straighten the bent branch, just as a reinforcement worker does with the iron used for building.

It is as though the educator (*muthaqqif*) is the one who straightens something which is crooked in the world so that a learner knows about this and that, and becomes properly refined. And so we find that linguistic concepts and words are derived from the concrete things around us. And in the expression in the verse at hand ‘…you shall find them…’ (*thaqiftumuhum*) means ‘find them’; so the verb *thaqifa* means ‘to find’.

In another verse, the True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers, if they find the infidels at war with them, to scatter them and make of them a fearsome example for those who follow them (*al-Anfal:* 57). That is, make them an example wherever you find them. God’s words ‘And kill them wherever you shall find them,…’ that is, do not merely say that they drove you out of somewhere, but rather drive them from wherever they drove you, that is, from wherever it was that you were; in that case, you will not be aggressors. And His command '…and expel them from whatever place they have expelled you…' reminds us of a similar logic in another verse, when God commands the believers, if they are responding to an attack, to respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against them (*an-Nahl:* 126). And in another verse, He *the Exalted* states that the recompense of an evil deed is an evil deed like it (*ash-Shura:* 40).

If we look between the lines of this text, 'the recompense of an evil deed is an evil deed like it,' this notion might come to our minds: If I take my right from one who has done evil to me, and I take requital from him with an action which resembles what he did to me, can it be said that I have done an evil deed?In order to understand the matter, we need to know that the True Lord *the Most High* sometimes uses parallel expressions, meaning to describe something with a word which ordinarily means something else only because it is mentioned in that context. An illustrative example of this is God's statement that the infidels scheme, and God schemes (*Al-'Imran*: 54): God does not scheme, but the word is used to bring about parallelism in the expression.

The noble verse may be interpreted in a different way also. It might mean that your claiming your right is also an 'evil deed' in order to alert you to the fact that, to seek your right of retaliation for what has been done to you, is considered evil if compared to showing clemency and forgiveness for the ill turn; and God *the Most High* points to this meaning at the end of the verse by saying that whoever pardons his foe and makes peace, his reward rests with God; indeed, God does not love evildoers (*ash-Shura:* 40). And the other aforementioned verse also ends with a similar admonition advising the believers to bear themselves with patience, as it is indeed far better for those who are patient in face of adversity (*an-Nahl:* 126).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and *fitna* (discord) is worse than killing….' The word *fitna* (rendered here as 'discord') is derived from a concrete concept: the practice of the goldsmith when he takes a piece of gold and places it in the fire to melt it, and if it had been mixed with any metal other than gold this metal will come out and the gold will become pure. So it is as though fitna means a trial and a test. The idolaters had done something worse than killing, which is that they had tried to turn the believers away from their religion by torture, and so the believers fled away with their religion.

The True Lord *the Most High* commanded the believers, in the course of their fighting with the idolaters, to respect the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque so that they were not to violate it by fighting within it unless the idolaters attacked them there.

So, we find that the first commandment to fight only came as a response to aggression, and the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to remove from the hands of the enemies of Islam a card which they might have played against the Muslims. They knew that the believers in Islam would respect the sacred months and the sacred place and that they would respect their sanctity and so not fight within them; and perhaps this tempted the enemies of Islam to only fight the Muslims in the sacred months, thinking that the Muslims would be deterred from fighting them. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give them what they needed in this situation, and so He gave them permission to fight. If they fight you in the sacred month, fight them back in the sacred month; if they fight you in the sacred place, fight them back in the sacred place; and if they fight you when you are in a state of consecration for the pilgrimage, fight them back; for a violation of sanctity is subject to just retribution.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* took this card away from the hands of the disbelievers; and He *the Most High* justified this on the grounds that although fighting in the sacred months, or in the sacred place, or whilst in a state of consecration, is a very difficult thing, discord and oppression in the matter of God’s religion is even worse than killing because oppression aims to corrupt the religion of the people. It is true that it does not prevent people from following religion, but it oppresses those who follow religion. They attempted to force the early Muslims by use of torture to give up their religion, and this was even worse than killing because it was oppression against the religion.

God is the One Who ordained the sacred months, so, how could the believers be oppressed and forced to give up God’s religion for idolatry, and then say afterwards, ‘We were in the sacred month’? The sacred month is only sacred because God made it sacred, and to be drawn away from God is idolatry, and this is worse than fighting in the sacred month. And so there is no call for anyone to refrain from fighting in the sacred month when he is being oppressed on account of his religion, and when we know that this fighting is only in self-defence.

Having said this, a delicate question comes up: If fighting is about defence, is it only the defence of those who believe – as the enemies of Islam would like to make of it, and as those who want to defend Islam against the accusation that it is a religion of fighting say? We ask these people: Fighting for the defence of whom? It was for the defence of those who believe only? Or is it also fighting for the sake of all mankind's freedom to choose their religion?

This is also defence, and we will call it defence; but it is the defence of those who believe in that we defend them from those who aggress against them; and it is also a defence of those who do not believe in that we defend them from anything that threatens their freedom to choose their religion. So we are protecting their freedom to choose; we do not force them to accept the religion, but rather, we endeavour to make it so they are free to choose. If there is a power which forces people to accept a certain religion, we sweep this power out of the way, and we make the call to Islam; and if anyone stands in the way of this call, we fight them because they are ruining the right of the people to choose their religion; and this is also defence.

Then God says, '…and do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there….' This is because it is right and fitting that you respect that God *the Most High* has sanctified the Sacred Mosque, but if they dare to fight in the sacred Mosque, He *the Exalted* has given you leave, o Muslims, to fight them in the Sacred Mosque as long as they have attacked you there. The verse is concluded by saying, '…but if they fight you, kill them. Such is the reward of the infidels;' and the next verse says, 'But if they desist – indeed, God is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-Baqara*: 192) How magnanimous this religion is!

If they desist and find faith, we do not seek retribution from them for all that they did in their aggression against the believers, as long as they have come to have faith. This is why we see that when 'Umar ibn al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* passed by the killer of his brother Zaid ibn Al-Khattab and a man informed him that it was Zaid's killer, 'Umar *God be pleased with him* said, 'And what can I do to him after he has embraced Islam? Islam has made his blood sacrosanct.'

The matter ended with his embrace of Islam, for faith in God is dearer to the believer than his blood and his soul, and when he believes, the enmity ends. And there is Wahshi, the killer of the Prophet’s uncle, Hamza *God be pleased with him*: The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* met with him after he had embraced Islam, and all that He *peace and blessings be upon him* did was to turn his face away from him; he did not kill him or take revenge on him. And the wife of Abu Sufiyan, Hind bint ‘’Utba, who ate Hamza’s liver; she embraced Islam, and her deed was expunged by her Islam. So Islam is not a religion of grudges, or revenge, or the settling of scores; if the blood boils when one confronts disbelief, the disbeliever’s faith in Islam gives him protection. This is what the religion means.

فَإِنِ ٱنتَهَوۡاْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿١٩٢﴾

but if they stop, then God is most forgiving and
merciful [192] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 192)

That is, as long as they cease their obstruction of the Islamic call and their idolatry, and are restrained by the authoritative religion, leaving behind their disbelief – after this, there will be no grudge between us and them; for God is Forgiving and Merciful. And so there should be no resentment in our souls because of what they did to us in the past, but rather, we should seek recompense for this from God. As long as they have believed, this is enough for us. After giving us the stages of fighting and its justifications, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَٰتِلُوهُمۡ حَتَّىٰ لَا تَكُونَ فِتۡنَةٞ وَيَكُونَ ٱلدِّينُ لِلَّهِۖ فَإِنِ
ٱنتَهَوۡاْ فَلَا عُدۡوَٰنَ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٩٣﴾

Fight them until there is no more persecution, and worship
is devoted to God. If they cease hostilities, there can be no
[further] hostility, except towards aggressors [193]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 193)

We have already seen that *fitna* (‘discord/oppression’) originally means a trial and a test; this is the meaning we have in the rhetorical question put forth by the True Lord *the Most High* as to whether people think that they will be left to say that they have believed, and they would not be tried (*al-'Ankabut*).

The True Lord *the Most High* tests faith by means of fitna, and He sees whether those who claim to have faith will be able to steadfastly bear the trials therein or not. If embracing Islam does not lead to engaging in a war or fighting, and could not lead to the martyrdom of some of the believers, it would be tempting for many people to embrace Islam; but God made their test that they be defeated, or that some of them be martyred so that only the elite who could bear the honour of the mission, and protect the earth from corruption, would embrace the religion; the believers had to be the finest of people. This is why God *the Most High* says, 'And fight against them until there be no more fitna (discord)….'

The meaning of '…and the only worship be that of God…' is: remove them from the religions they invented themselves, or from the religions which the tyrants imposed upon them. When we take them from the religions which the oppressors forced upon them, and the religions which others made alluring to them, to the religion of the Creator, this is something good for them, and it is a lofty mission.

By undertaking this lofty mission, you guide the human mind and prevent it from worshipping something which is equal to it and make it worship God Who created it; so, he whose mind is guided this way should thank the one who guides him to this straight path. This truth is made plain in God's command to His Messenger to declare to his people that he asks no payment for his efforts in his mission other than that whoever wishes might take a way to his Lord (*al-Furqan:* 57).

It is as though if we look at what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did for us from an economic point of view, we would conclude that he should be rewarded because he has done something beneficial for us; yet, despite the good he has done for us he asks for no payment because he renounces this reward, knowing as he does that a reward from an equal is small, no matter how great it might seem; he wants reward from his Creator, and this is the highest of aspirations as no one gives reward for faith except God *the Most High*, and He gives without any limits.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, '…but if they desist, then let there be no hostility, except against the wrongdoers.' That is, if they stop fighting you, you will not assault them, but rather, you will only respond to the aggression of the wrongdoers amongst them. When a wrongdoer aggresses, he thinks that no one is able to stop him; it is as if the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to say to such an aggressor: Indeed, we are able to stop you, and we will respond to your aggression as you have aggressed against us. And the True Lord *the Most High* gives us the details of this when He *the Exalted* says:

ٱلشَّهۡرُ ٱلۡحَرَامُ بِٱلشَّهۡرِ ٱلۡحَرَامِ وَٱلۡحُرُمَٰتُ قِصَاصٞۚ فَمَنِ ٱعۡتَدَىٰ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فَٱعۡتَدُواْ
عَلَيۡهِ بِمِثۡلِ مَا ٱعۡتَدَىٰ عَلَيۡكُمۡۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ ١٩٤

A sacred month for a sacred month: violation of sanctity [calls for] fair retribution. So if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him as he attacked you, but be mindful of God, and know that He is with those who are mindful of Him [194] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 194)

The meaning of this is: If they fight you in the sacred month, fight them back in the sacred month; if they violate the sanctity of a period of time, just retribution will be taken in the same period of time; and if they violate the sanctity of a place, just retribution will be taken in the same place; and if they violate the sanctity of the state of consecration, the response will be in the same state of consecration. This is because just retribution is to give back to the wronged person the same as the wrongdoer took from him.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to reassure and comfort the believers who were turned back in the year of the events of al-Hudaibiya in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi'da* in the sixth year of the *Hijra*, when the idolaters forced them back to Medina. And God restored their respect for them by making them return in the month of *Dhu Al-Qi'da* of the following year, the seventh of the *Hijra*. Since they had been denied access in the sacred month, God wanted them to return to visit the Mosque in the sacred month, the very same time.

The words of the True Lord *the Most High*: '…and for [all] violations is legal retribution….' require us to ask: How can this be? What does it mean for something to be sanctified (*haram*)*?* If something is *haram*, this means it must not be violated, whilst if something is permitted (*halal*), it means something which is allowed and permissible. Does this mean that if someone does something forbidden (*haram*)*,* we should take just retribution by doing something similar to him?

If a man fornicates with a woman, do we say that we should take retribution on him by cuckolding him? No. Just retribution for things which are inviolable only applies to those things which have been specifically allowed. Likewise, if someone steals my money and I have no proof, but I am convinced that he is the one who stole from me, can I take retribution from him by stealing something from him? No; just retribution is only for plain and proven things; as for unproven things, we cannot take our own retribution from someone according to what they did.

But imagine there is a member of your family whom you are required to provide for, and you refuse to give him anything – which is unlawful for you to do: Since you are not within your right to refrain from providing for them, they have the right to take from your money and use it to eat, and this is just retribution. Consider the example of Hind bint 'Utba, wife of Abu Sufiyan, who complained to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about her husband's stinginess and that he does not provide sufficiently for his family; and he answered her: 'Take rightfully, from his money, what you and your child need.' Another example is: Suppose you have a guest in your house, but you refuse to extend to him your hospitality, and he takes advantage of the fact that you are far from where he is sitting and takes something and eats it. He will not be wronging you as long as he does not do anything else which is unlawful. Beyond that, the True Lord *the Most High* leaves it up to the authorities to deal with these things so that matters do not break down into chaos. God's words '…So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you….' call us to attention so that no one can deceive us and pretend to be a believer when actually he is after revenge. We need to keep in mind the saying of the poet:

If the scorpion comes back, we are back at it:
With the shoe, and the shoe is ready for it!

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, '…And fear God and know that God is with those who fear Him.' That is, do not think that God has given you dominion over them; rather, they and you are all under the dominion of God.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَأَنفِقُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا تُلۡقُواْ بِأَيۡدِيكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلتَّهۡلُكَةِ وَأَحۡسِنُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿١٩٥﴾

Spend in God's cause: do not contribute to your
destruction with your own hands, but do good, for God
loves those who do good [195] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 195)

This verse comes after the verses about fighting, and it means: Prepare yourselves to fight in the Way of God. God's words '…and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]….' require us to know that the word 'destruction' (*tahluka*) is in the morphological form *taf'ula,* which is not attested to in the Arabic language except in this one word. There is no word in the Arabic language which has the morphological form of *taf'ula* except for the word (*tahluka*). 'Destruction' (*Tahluka*) means to perish, that is, for something to leave its proper state so that it is uncertain what will become of it. An example of this is the perishing of a person which comes when his spirit leaves his body. We find the verb form of this word used in another verse where the True Lord *the Most High* says that he who would perish (in the battle between faith and disbelief) might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth (*al-Anfal:* 42).

So, to perish is the opposite of living; and one should know that life is not just the sensation and movement that we witness, but rather, the life of each thing has its own exact nature: the life of animals has its laws, and the life of vegetables has its laws, and the life of minerals has its laws; this is evidenced by the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* contrasted 'perishing' with 'living', and He *the Exalted* also said that everything is bound to perish, except His Face (*al-Qasas:* 88).

So, we are not the only ones, who will perish, nor the animals, nor the vegetables; but rather, it will be everything, including minerals. Minerals will perish just as we will, and as long as they will perish, this means they have life, but it is not like our life; it is rather, a life with its own laws. Every created being has a purpose to fulfil, and this is its life.

God's words '…and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]…' show us an example of the exquisite rhetorical style of the Quran, for a single sentence gives us one thing and its contrary, and this is something you do not find in the styles of human speech. The True Lord *the Most High* directs us in this verse 'And spend in the Way of God…' that is, spend to support the struggle, and then He says, '…and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]….' Why? Because spending means to give money to someone else who is doing something for you to help with the struggle in God's Way, such as making weapons or supplying provisions, or establishing buildings and fortifications; these are different ways in which money is spent.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]….' The word 'throw' implies that there is something high and something else lower than it, as though God is saying: Do not cast yourselves into destruction. But would any of us cast himself into destruction, or cast himself into destruction amongst his enemies? No; rather, the hand which refuses to spend in God's Way is the one which throws its owner into destruction as when he refuses to do so, the enemy will be able to get to him. When the enemy is able to get to the believers, he will oppress them in the teachings of their religion, and if he oppresses them in their religion, they will be destroyed. So to prepare for war is the best means of deterring war, and when the enemy sees that you are strong he will fear you, and will be reluctant to fight you.

Just as the True Lord *the Most High*, by legislating fighting, wanted us to be ready for war, He commands us to properly and accurately weigh up the matter of fighting so that we are not overcome by false confidence or wild enthusiasm. So the meaning of this is: Do not begin to fight unless you strongly believe that you will win. Judiciousness might require you to weigh things up very carefully, and bravery might mean that you hold back and refrain from fighting sometimes, in order that you can gain victory later when you are ready for it.

The first meaning makes you spend in God's Way, and not throw yourself into destruction by refusing to fight; the second meaning is that you do not let your own hands throw you into destruction by beginning to fight for no good reason, or without being sufficiently prepared. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the believers to weigh things up so that they neither leave off the struggle and so perish when their enemies are thus emboldened against them, and neither does He want them to let their own hands throw them into fighting simply out of a desire to fight without being properly prepared for it. This is the judiciousness of faith; and one single sentence has given us all these meanings.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…And do good; indeed, God loves the doers of good.' The True Lord *the Most High* says 'do good,' and to do good, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us, is 'To worship God' – that is, to obey His commands – 'as though you see Him; for if you do not see Him, He sees you.'(1)

The problem with people these days, is that they emulate 'He sees you,' putting hidden cameras in large places so that they can monitor the work people are doing everywhere. This is what human beings do; but look at the loftiness of faith which commands you to see God so that , you do not do your work in a superficial disinterested way just to get it off your back, but rather, you must work with the intention of working as best as you can.

To do one's best in everything is to do it as well as possible so that one person does for another the same he would like the other to do for him. If all people acted according to this basis, all production would be exemplary, but if cheating takes over, you cheat others and others cheat you, and then we will are prattle away with complaints. And so we should do our best in everything: for example, we should do our best when we spend charitably, and we will not attain to this unless we do our best in the work which brings us the money that we spend; for money is the fruit of work, and there can be no spending without money, and you take the recompense for your work and spend it on those things you need.

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(1) *Part of a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The sphere of goodness encompasses not only fighting, and so the command here is a general one. Do not think that this is just a subsidiary matter of the religion which is meant to be applied to a single aspect of life; but rather, every aspect of the religion is meant to be applied to every aspect of life. If doing good is connected with money, this means that one must do one’s best in all one’s actions in life, and must do enough work to provide sufficiently for himself and for those whom he supports, and then leave him enough to do good charitable works with.

If money is not available to you, you must do good using your influential position by interceding for others. Islam has reformed the concept of influence, i.e. it has given it a moral basis, and so people who have influence should use it to intercede and help people to get their rights. Influential people should also take the weak under their wing and protect them from the oppression and tyranny of the strong, and should use their influence to establish justice in the environment in which they live.

Influence means that a person is respected, or valued, or esteemed, and these things are all based on the prior goodness of a person; he has not attained them without reason, but rather, he did something in the past which made him reputable in the eyes of people. People normally do not respect anyone unless he has done them some kind of favour, and so it is as though their respect comes at a price, and it is not free. Benefaction could also be by imparting knowledge to those who do not have it, or by using bodily strength to aid the weak, or by extending one’s experience to help others, or by relieving Muslims from a distressful situation.

So, there are many ways to do good, and they all serve the cause of faith. When the disbeliever sees the believers and each one of them is doing his work as well as he can, this will attract him to faith. If we ask ourselves: What is it that has made our modern world reject our faith? We find that the world judges the religion of God by the actions of the Muslims, which are mostly un-Islamic in nature. It is true that some of the intellectuals and philosophers of the west do not judge Islam by the actions of the Muslims; and this is very fair of them, because it might be that some Muslims, who are attached to Islam only nominally, do not adhere to the teachings of their religion, and so no one should judge Islam by his actions just because he is a Muslim by name.

The followers of other religions know that there are things which their religions have prohibited. Since their religions have prohibited them and set punishments for them, this indicates that they might well occur. When you see a person who is attached to Islam and yet steals, do you say, 'Muslims are thieves'? No; you should look as to whether the laws of Islam consider the thief to be a criminal or not. So no one should say, 'Look at the state of the Muslims,' but rather, they should look to the laws of Islam because God allowed for the possibility that human beings would do all kinds of actions, good and bad, and so He commended good actions and made bad ones punishable.

Intellectuals and thinkers judge religion by its principles, not by the actions of people attached to it; for the on-looker might see someone contravening the religion by doing something it prohibits; so, do not consider the sinful action as representing Islam, but rather consider it as being outside Islam.

When the world sees us as people who do good in everything, we will give them the example that our forefathers were upon, which made Islam spread in such an unprecedented way so that within half a century, it reached the eastern and western limits of the world, after which it faded as a political force from the world, but remained as a religion, and there remained for Islam the order which draws people to it. Islam has its own intrinsic 'immune system' to maintain its preservation and its wholeness, and this is what attracts non-Muslims to it so they believe in it; it is not the Muslims who draw people to Islam.

And so I say: If the political representatives of the Islamic nations in the civilised non-Islamic lands had adopted the principles of Islam, they would have been a sound role-model.

Look at any single capital city in a western country, and you will find more than sixty-three Islamic embassies, each with a staff of more than twenty people. Imagine if they were all good Islamic role-models in their behaviour and dealings, in a non-Islamic capital city. If this were the case, the inhabitants of that land would find a practising Islamic community not infatuated with the charms of urban life, not drinking wine, or dancing, or frequenting places of ill-repute, nor having their women display themselves wantonly; by God, would the decorum of these people go unnoticed?

But what actually happens – unfortunately – is that the people of the west, despite their being misguided, have overcome the sons of Islam, despite the guidance they have in their religion, and have taken them into their dissolution; and this blind imitation makes the westerners say: ‘If Islam had any means of protection, it would have protected its sons from falling into that which we fell into.’

So, for the Muslims to do good, would be the greatest way to call and invite others to the religion of Islam. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…indeed, God loves the doers of good.’ As we know, love means the inclination of the heart of the lover to the beloved, and this is the case with respect to the human realm. As for the True Lord, it means the affection shown by the Creator in the form of mercy and honour upon the creature. The True Lord *the Most High* loves for His servants to adopt His moral standards; just as He makes excellent everything that He creates (*as-Sajda:* 7), He wants His servants, having given them thinking minds to plan, and power so that thoughts can become actions – The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to make our guiding principle in all our actions to do them well so that , we adopt the moral standards of God, and the word ‘o God’ proliferates in admiration – this noble word with which a person greets every beautiful thing in any kind of craft, saying ‘o God!’

So, the proliferation of the word ‘God’ is a blessing in existence inasmuch as it is an exclamation on every good thing; even those who do not believe in the Deity also say ‘God!’ It is as though the natural disposition which God has instilled in man announces that every good thing must be ascribed to God: whether God did it directly by means of causality and natural laws, or whether He created the one who did the good thing, everything goes back to God in the end.

If those who do not work well knew what they were depriving the world of, they would feel ashamed of themselves; it would be bad enough for them to only be depriving the world of the word ‘God’, but they are also making it so that the word ‘God’ is replaced by foul words, and so they are spreading ugliness in existence; and when ugliness spreads through existence, all mankind lose out.

So, God’s words ‘…indeed, God loves the doers of good’ are an encouragement to everyone who undertakes any work to do it well, in order that they adopt God’s moral standards. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَأَتِمُّواْ ٱلۡحَجَّ وَٱلۡعُمۡرَةَ لِلَّهِۚ فَإِنۡ أُحۡصِرۡتُمۡ فَمَا ٱسۡتَيۡسَرَ مِنَ ٱلۡهَدۡيِۖ وَلَا تَحۡلِقُواْ رُءُوسَكُمۡ حَتَّىٰ يَبۡلُغَ
ٱلۡهَدۡيُ مَحِلَّهُۥۚ فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوۡ بِهِۦٓ أَذٗى مِّن رَّأۡسِهِۦ فَفِدۡيَةٞ مِّن صِيَامٍ أَوۡ صَدَقَةٍ أَوۡ
نُسُكٖۚ فَإِذَآ أَمِنتُمۡ فَمَن تَمَتَّعَ بِٱلۡعُمۡرَةِ إِلَى ٱلۡحَجِّ فَمَا ٱسۡتَيۡسَرَ مِنَ ٱلۡهَدۡيِۚ فَمَن لَّمۡ يَجِدۡ فَصِيَامُ
ثَلَٰثَةِ أَيَّامٖ فِي ٱلۡحَجِّ وَسَبۡعَةٍ إِذَا رَجَعۡتُمۡۗ تِلۡكَ عَشَرَةٞ كَامِلَةٞۗ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن لَّمۡ يَكُنۡ أَهۡلُهُۥ حَاضِرِي
ٱلۡمَسۡجِدِ ٱلۡحَرَامِۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ١٩٦

Complete the pilgrimages, major and minor, for the sake of God. If you are prevented [from doing so], then [send] whatever offering for sacrifice you can afford, and do not shave your heads until the offering has reached the place of sacrifice. If any of you is ill, or has an ailment of the scalp, he should compensate by fasting, or feeding the poor, or offering sacrifice. When you are in safety, anyone wishing to take a break between the minor pilgrimage and the major one must make whatever offering he can afford. If he lacks the means, he should fast for three days during the pilgrimage, and seven days on his return, making ten days in all. This applies to those whose household is not near the Sacred Mosque. Always be mindful of God, and be aware that He is stern in His retribution [196] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 196)

So, the discourse concerning the pilgrimage comes here in its natural context; and when God *the Most High* says, ‘And accomplish the Pilgrimage and *‘umra* (lesser pilgrimage) for God…’ we understand from this that the command to ‘accomplish’ (*itmam*) something is not issued unless there has already been a command enjoining this thing; it is that you begin the action after it has been legislated, and He *the Exalted* wants from you not only to perform the pilgrimage, but to accomplish it, and make it whole so that it meets all of the requirements of the One Who ordained it.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And accomplish the Pilgrimage and *‘umra* (lesser pilgrimage)…’, someone might say: Pilgrimage is one thing, and ‘Umra is another, which is indicated by the fact that they are connected by the conjunction ‘and’, which implies distinction as well as correspondence so that if there is correspondence, but not distinction, it does not make sense, but rather, there must be both correspondence and distinction. The correspondence between the pilgrimage and the ‘Umra is that they are both religious rites and acts of worship, whilst the distinction between them is that the pilgrimage has a set time and must include a standing at Mount ‘*Arafa*, whilst the *‘umra* has no set time and does not require a standing at *‘Arafa*.

But when the True Lord *the Most High* legislated the pilgrimage, He declared that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*al-‘Imran*: 97).

In this verse, He did not mention the *‘umra*, and from this we can infer that the pilgrimage is one thing and the ‘Umra is another, and that the one which is obligatory for us is the pilgrimage. Because of this, I always say that we must take the Quran as a unified whole, and we must consider every verse which refers to a particular subject in order to understand it properly. When the True Lord *the Most High* also says in the Quran, ‘And accomplish the Pilgrimage and *‘umra* (lesser pilgrimage) for God,…’ we can infer from this that the *‘umra* is not the same thing as the pilgrimage. And when you read God’s words in the chapter of *Bara’a* (also known as *at-Tawba*) about a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all mankind on the day of the Greatest Pilgrimage (*at-Tawba:* 3), We know that there is a ‘Greatest Pilgrimage’ as well as a second ‘great’ pilgrimage. Therefore, the verse saying that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*Al-‘Imran*: 97) contains a reference to the Sacred Mosque, which is the common factor shared by the pilgrimage and the ‘Umra. We know that the ‘Greatest Pilgrimage’ is the pilgrimage in which the Muslim stands at Mount ‘Arafa, because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Pilgrimage is *‘Arafa*.’(1) It is the ‘Greatest Pilgrimage’ because the throngs which gather at *‘Arafa* are immense; and it comes at a specific time, and the standing at *‘Arafa* is an essential requisite of it.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa’i, and Ibn Maja*

So, in God's statement that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*Al-'Imran*: 97), the word 'pilgrimage' means travelling towards a sanctified thing, namely the 'pilgrimage to the House.' As for the *'umra*, it is the 'great pilgrimage,' and it can be undertaken at any time of the year, and those who go to visit the House scattered in time throughout the whole year. This was confirmed in legislation when God said that pilgrimage to the House (Sacred Mosque) is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it (*Al-'Imran*: 97), as long as He gave a joint commandment by saying 'pilgrimage to the House,' this means both the greatest pilgrimage and the great pilgrimage.

The True Lord *the Most High* addresses His servants and He knows that some people will undertake acts of worship in a superficial way, and they might undertake acts of worship for other reasons besides worship. It was therefore necessary to make clear the purpose of the pilgrimage and the *'umra*, and that what is required is that they be performed completely, and that the intention must be to honour God and nothing else; not so that you earn the title of '*Hajj*', or for trade where you buy cheap wares and sell them at a profit when you return home.

We know that the pilgrimage is the one act of worship which continues to be associated with the one who performs it; we do not say 'So-and-so the performer of the prayer', or 'So-and-so the giver of the alms'. Therefore, if the one who makes the pilgrimage is eager to be given the title *'Hajj'*, and this is the reason why he does this act of worship, he, inevitably thereby, takes his act of worship outside the purpose for which it was ordained. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And accomplish the Pilgrimage and *'umra* (lesser pilgrimage) for God….' The words 'for God' impart to us numerous matters; what are they?

When a Muslim wants to perform the pilgrimage in honour of God, it is not correct that he make the pilgrimage with money earned by any means other than those which God has ordained. Many people, when they hear the Noble Hadith: 'He who performs pilgrimage and commits neither lewdness nor wickedness returns as he was the day his mother gave birth to him,'(1) believe that a person can commit whatever acts of disobedience and injustice that he wants, and then imagine that a single pilgrimage will expiate for him all his sins. We say to such as these: First of all, the pilgrimage must be in honour of God.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him.*

Secondly, it must be made with lawfully-earned money. As long as it is in honour of God and made with lawfully-earned money, we must then, know which sins are expiated after the pilgrimage. Not all sins are expiated, but rather only those sins in relation with God *the Most High*; for when you sin against God you do not wrong Him, but rather, you wrong yourself; however, when you sin against your fellow men you do them ill, or usurp their rights; and wrongs committed against one's fellow men can only be expiated by returning to them their rights.

We know that the *'umra* means to visit the Sacred Mosque (the *Ka'ba*), and this can be done at any time of the year, and that the pilgrimage means to visit the Sacred Mosque, and this is done at a specific time of the year. Some scholars say: Since each of them is a separate devotion, is it permissible to do them both together, or should each one be offered separately from the other?

Each of them has a point of view as to which way is best and most preferable; as for those who say that to perform the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) separately is better, this is because it means that each devotion will have its own journey devoted to it. Others say that one should do them both together, entering into ritual consecration (*ihram*) for both, the pilgrimage and the *'umra,* with a single consecration so that , he first goes and performs the rites of the *'umra* and then remains in his state of ritual consecration until he performs the pilgrimage. In this case, he will have done both acts together, that is he will have done them in one single state of ritual consecration; and this is what some of the scholars prefer because God knows that the servant has performed two rites with a single consecration. There are also those who perform *tamattu',* that is to perform the *'umra* and then come out of the state of consecration after it, and then re-enter the state of consecration once more before the pilgrimage begins in order to perform it. This is called *tamattu',* and the pilgrim who does it is called *mutamatti* 'because he comes out of the state of consecration. Some of the scholars say that *tamattu'* is best because the person separates the two acts in a way which means he is not doing the cust'Umary thing: he enters the state of consecration, and then leaves it, and then enters it once more.

So, every scholar has his point of view, and so it is as though God does not want to excessively limit His servants' options in their performance of rites in any way, and the Lawgiver *the Most High* made provisions when ordaining responsibilities, and took all conditions into account, whether those things which can occur without the intervention of any adversary, namely the vicissitudes of fate, or whether those things which occur because of adversaries, namely those things which have other causes. And so He *the Exalted* said, '…But if you are prevented, then [offer] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals….' The term 'prevented' (*uhsirtum* in the original) is derived from the verb *hasara*, which refers to the vicissitudes of fate, and the other related verb *ahsara* is used to refer to the actions of someone, such as the intervention of the enemy, as when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was held back in the year of Hudaybiya, and he was prevented from entering Mecca that year. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* facilitates things for us, as though He were saying to us: I will not overlook the willingness of My servants, nor their intentions, nor their preparations, nor their ritual consecration; and if you are held back, '…then [offer] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals….' The 'offering' here means that which is sacrificed as an act of seeking God's pleasure, and an expiation of what has happened.

After this, God *the Most High* says, '…And do not shave your heads until the sacrificial animal has reached its place of sacrifice….' That is, until it has reached the place set aside for this purpose. This is if you are the one who is managing the sacrifice; but if you are not, there is no need for you to slaughter it yourself, but rather, you can ask someone to slaughter it for you. And His words '…And when you are secure, then whoever performs *'umra* [during the Pilgrimage months] followed by Pilgrimage [offers] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals...' mean that it is correct for one to sacrifice the offering before '*Arafa*, and it is also correct for him to leave it until the day of the Sacrifice (*Eid Al-Adha*), and it is also correct for him to sacrifice it after all that.

The phrase '…what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals...' also means 'if it is easy to obtain an offering,' whether because it is easy to pay the price for it, or easy to buy it; for the price might be at hand, but the merchandise might not be available. The word ‘offering’ (*hady*) means that which is offered to the Sanctuary, or that which guides a person to the way of righteousness; it is derived from the word *huda* (guidance), which means the way that leads to the desired end.

God *the Most High* says, ‘…And do not shave your heads until the sacrificial animal has reached its place of sacrifice. And whoever among you is ill or has an ailment of the head [making shaving necessary, must offer] a ransom….’ This refers to the ill person who cannot make the sacrifice, and suffers from an ailment of the head, like the Companion who had head-lice which caused him pain, so, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed him: ‘Shave your head and fast three days, or feed six poor people, or sacrifice a ram.’(1)

These are successive legislations, and each one has its occasion: just as He legislated that the one who is held back should give whatever offering he can afford, He legislated that someone who needs to shave his head because of illness or an ailment of the head should do one of three things: fasting, charity or sacrifice.

Anyone who reflects on these three things will find that they are given in ascending order: Fasting is something which does not give any direct benefit to others; and charity is an act of worship which gives benefit to others, but in a limited way because it is the feeding of six people, for example; and to sacrifice means to slaughter, and a great many people can benefit from the meat that comes from this.

So, look at the progression of benefit: either fasting three days, or feeding six poor people, or slaughtering a sacrificial animal, namely a ram. This is an ascent from the weakest to the strongest, each according to his power and ability.

When the True Lord *the Most High* ordains specific expiations, this is to ensure that the required actions of the pilgrimage will be observed, and to accommodate the conditions and state of the Muslim. In the case of *tamattu‘*, (performing *‘umra* before pilgrimage), for example, He allowed the pilgrim to divide the fast into two stages: three days whilst on the pilgrimage, and seven upon returning. This is the progressive ascent of legislations, and the possibility of choosing the easier path, in order that, the Muslim can get out of the difficulty he is in.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

'…And whoever among you is ill or has an ailment of the head [making shaving necessary, must offer] a ransom of fasting [three days] or charity or sacrifice. And when you are secure, then whoever performs *'umra* [during the Pilgrimage months] followed by Pilgrimage [offers] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals. And whoever cannot find [or afford such an animal] – then, a fast of three days during Pilgrimage and of seven when he has returned [home]….'

The words 'whoever cannot find…' mean that he does not possess it, and so to the one who does not possess it we say: Do not do what many people do before they perform circumambulation of the *Ka'ba*. Some of them go to the market and buy gifts, and then when the time for the sacrificial offering comes they say, 'I cannot afford it, and so, I will fast.' We ask them: Would not the price of all those gifts have been enough to buy the sacrificial offering?

It is indeed strange for a pilgrim to buy all kinds of presents, clocks and electric devices, and fill his bags, and then say, 'I cannot afford to buy the sacrificial offering.' Is this not cheating and deception? The one who does this cheats himself.

So, God's words 'whoever cannot find…' mean he who cannot truly afford it, not he who spends his money on presents and then, empties his hands. Therefore, those who do the rites of the pilgrimage properly do not buy their gifts until after finishing all the required rites, and if they have some money left over, they buy what they can afford.

Those who spend all their money on gifts and then come to the point of offering '…what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals…' and say, 'We do not have enough to buy the offering; we will fast' – it is strange that they only remember to fast when they return home. Would it not be better for them to fast right from the start, since they know that they cannot afford to pay for the offering when they enter into consecration for the pilgrimage and *'Umra?*

One should begin to fast the three days right away, so, his excuse will come first, not last. Some scholars allow fasting the three days of *tashriq* that is the three days after the *Eid* (Feast). These days were given the name *tashriq* (from *shurouq*, meaning sunrise) because prople would leave the meat in the sun (*sharraqa*), so, it would dry and become jerked. After this, when he is done with all the rites, the pilgrim can either fast the remaining seven days on the way home, or when he gets home; he can choose what suits him best. '…And whoever cannot find [or afford such an animal] – then, a fast of three days during Pilgrimage and of seven when you have returned [home]. Those are ten full [days].' It is clear that 'three' plus 'seven' equals 'ten', and this is emphasised so that people do not think that the meaning is either three days or seven days, and so He said 'ten full' so that it would not be misunderstood.

Perhaps the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the fact that the one who fasts will fast ten days, and these days will serve to fulfil the performance of the rites, and the one who sacrifices is not better than the one who fasts; as long as he could not afford the sacrificial offering and so fasted ten days, he has the same reward and recompense as the one who could afford to and sacrificed. Be careful not to think that fasting lessens the reward, or that it is lower than sacrificing.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…This is for those whose family is not in the area of *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* (the Sacred Mosque)….' This legislation refers to the one whose family does not live in Mecca. We know that the limits of the Sacred Mosque of Worship cover twelve miles, and that those who live within these limits are not obliged to sacrifice or fast. Why not? Some scholars say that it is because those who live near the sacred Mosque are in the habit of always circumambulating it, and this means they do not need to perform the *'umra,* and so if they perform the pilgrimage, they are not included in this legislation.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying, '…And fear God and know that God is severe in punishment.' Why would the True Lord *the Most High* say that He is 'severe in punishment' right after ordaining these dispensations of ease? This means, be careful not to cheat with these dispensations of ease, as it is not conceivable that it could be acceptable for us to cheat in any of them; and so He *the Exalted* warns us against cheating in any of these rites by saying, '…and know that God is severe in punishment.'

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

ٱلْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَٰتٌ ۚ فَمَن فَرَضَ فِيهِنَّ ٱلْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ
وَلَا جِدَالَ فِى ٱلْحَجِّ ۗ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمْهُ ٱللَّهُ ۗ وَتَزَوَّدُوا۟
فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ ٱلزَّادِ ٱلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَٱتَّقُونِ يَٰٓأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿١٩٧﴾

The pilgrimage takes place during the prescribed months. There should be no indecent speech, misbehavior, or quarrelling for anyone undertaking the pilgrimage – whatever good you do, God is well aware of it. Provide well for yourselves: the best provision is to be mindful of God – always be mindful of Me, you who have understanding [197]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 197)

We notice here that the True Lord *the Most High*, when speaking about fasting, has specified its month: 'The month of *Ramadan* [is that] in which the Quran was sent down…' (*al-Baqara*: 185), yet, He did not mention the months of the pilgrimage, S*hawwal, Dhu Al-Qi'da,* and ten days of *Dhu Al-Hijja,* whilst He did mention *Ramadan*. This is because the legislation concerned with *Ramadan* was special and unfamiliar to the Arabs, and so its time had to be specified, whilst the pilgrimage was known to the Arabs before Islam, and they knew its months and everything about it. It was therefore not necessary to mention the names of the months reserved for it, and these well-known months were: *Shawwal, Dhu Al-Qi'da*, and ten days from *Dhu Al-Hijja* which ended with the standing at *'Arafa* and the days of Mina. The month of the pilgrimage only lasts for ten days, but it was counted with *Shawwal* and *Dhu Al-Qi'da* because a fraction of a month is counted as the month.

The word 'well-known' gives us the wisdom in the names of the months of pilgrimage not being mentioned since they were already known to them.

God *the Most High* says, '…so whoever has made Pilgrimage obligatory upon himself therein….' But it is not the person who makes things obligatory in this case; rather, obligations come from God, who made the pilgrimage an obligatory pillar of the religion; and if you hold yourself to it with intention and action, and you set off intending to make the pilgrimage at the time reserved for the pilgrimage, you thereby impose the pilgrimage upon yourself for the season in which you choose to do it, and it becomes binding on you. And the expression ‘make obligatory’ (*farada*) shows that you bind yourself to the pilgrimage even if it is only recommended i.e. not mandatory.

God says, ‘…so whoever has made pilgrimage obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of ihram (ritual consecration)], there is [to be for him] no lewd speech and no transgression and no wrangling during Pilgrimage….’ The word ‘lewd’ (*rafath*) refers to actions of the tongue; the eye and the other parts of the body also have their own lewd actions, and they all come together in the process of sexual intercourse and its preambles. The lewdness of the tongue during the pilgrimage means to speak about sexual intercourse, and the lewdness of the eye means to look at a woman with sexual desire. So lewdness means everything which leads up to sexual intercourse, or it means sexual intercourse itself, or those things which lead to it in the form of words, or looks, or actions.

Although lewdness is permissible under certain conditions outside of the pilgrimage, they are forbidden within it. As for transgression, it is forbidden both within the pilgrimage and outside it. It is as though God is drawing attention to the fact that although it might be possible for a Muslim to commit wickedness outside of the pilgrimage, it would be terrible manners for a Muslim in the House of God to do wicked things. Transgression is forbidden at all times, and so the True Lord *the Most High* is here alerting those who sin against themselves; they must remember that although they might have committed evil when far away from the House of God, they should be ashamed to disobey God in His own House. The one who goes to the House of God seeks to cleanse himself of his sins, and so does it make sense for him to sin while he is there? You must have shame, o Muslim, when you are in the House of God, and know that this is the only place where you are held accountable even for merely willing or intending something: God *the Most High* states that whoever intends therein a deed of deviation from religion or wrongdoing, He will make him taste a painful punishment (*al-Hajj:* 25).

So, sexual contact is permissible in certain situations, but forbidden in the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*), whilst wickedness is forbidden at all times, and especially in the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*).

And wrangling, although it is permissible outside the pilgrimage, must not take place during the pilgrimage. We should be aware that the level of wrangling is lower than the level of wicked conduct, and lower than the level of disobedience. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'He who performs the pilgrimage and commits neither lewdness nor wickedness returns as he was the day his mother gave birth to him,'(1) but he did not say, 'and does not wrangle.' The humanity of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* made allowances for the various states of Muslims; it is possible that wrangling might come up during the pilgrimage as a result of an action which provokes it. It is as though the absence of the mention of wrangling in the Hadith is an accommodation for the believer – but we cannot go to extremes in it.

Arguing is permissible outside of the pilgrimage, which is evidenced by the verse in which God commands His Messenger to argue with non-believers in the most kindly manner (*an-Nahl:* 125). However, in pilgrimage, there can be no arguing during it.

Arguing means having two sides answering each other back and forth each attempting to encircle the other with their argument. Then consider the way the True Lord *the Most High* acknowledges human states and emotions, and legislates for things which are realistic and accepted. The pilgrimage removes a person from his homeland and the place where his family resides, and his wealth, and the things which he is accustomed to doing in life. When a person is removed in this way, people's manners might become somewhat strained because they are all living in unusual circumstances; some people have to sleep in rooms shared with people they do not know, and some families stay in a shared apartment with only one bathroom, and it might be that one person needs to answer the call of nature at the same time as someone else. When these kinds of things occur, people cannot always act rationally, as they say, ‘The one who withholds cannot be rational,’ that is, the one who has a desperate need to answer the call of nature by urinating cannot be rational, and the same is the case for the one who is withholding his need to defecate because this is something which upsets a person’s balance.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him.*

So, life for one in the pilgrimage is not normal, and the circumstances of the people are not normal, and so the True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to enter into arguments; for the discomfort caused by the changes to life’s usual order might be a cause for people to behave poorly with others, and the True Lord *the Most High* wants to prevent this discomfort from spoiling our relationships with others. Experience has shown that those who go to the pilgrimage in a group either have great love for one another upon their return, or else end up as bitter enemies.

And so the True Lord *the Most High* wants from everyone to patiently bear the things he sees others do whilst on the pilgrimage, and to take account of how they have been removed from their usual habits and routines and from the comfort of their families; they should be willing to bear this for God’s sake, and be engaged with the comfort of God, and to bear everything while by His side – and it is enough that one is in the House of God and in His hospitality.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…And whatever good you do, God knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of God….’ After issuing to us a prohibition by saying, ‘…no lewd speech and no transgression and no wrangling during Pilgrimage…’ – and these are negative things and actions which one must abstain from; and here the True Lord *the Most High* follows these negative actions by commanding positive actions, actions of good which God has knowledge of.

God *the Most High* wants us, in our worship, to combine two things, to act both negatively and positively: the negative aspect is to abstain from those things He called lewd speech, transgression, and wrangling; and He wants us to be positive and to do something good: ‘…And whatever good you do, God knows it….’ What is this good? It means those things which are in direct contrast with the things He prohibited. If a person cannot engage in lewd matters whilst on the pilgrimage, this means that he must be chaste in his speech, and his looks, and his behaviour, and his relations with his lawful wife, abstaining from these things as long as he is in a state of consecration; and He asks him to do the opposite of wickedness by doing things which are pious and good.

As for wrangling, we find that the opposite of this is to speak with gentleness, good manners, and softness, and to be sweet-natured and kind to others. This is the meaning of His words '…And whatever good you do, God knows it….'

The word 'whatever' in the phrase 'whatever good' is a starting-point, as though God *the Most High* wants you to do something good, and He *the Exalted* sees even the smallest amount of good, which is why He *the Exalted* said, '…God knows it….' It is as though it is a good, which no person can see; for obvious good can be seen by all people. The expression 'God knows it' means that any kind of good, however small, and however little, is known to God. Many kinds of good are no more than intentions; and God rewards goodness according to what it merits.

God *the Most High* says, '…And take provisions….' Provisions mean those things which a traveller takes with him to sustain him on his journey, and this was something that the Arabs had been accustomed to doing for a long time because there would not be any food at the places they would go to. All of these circumstances have changed in our time, as have the habits of the people who go to such places. In the past, people used to go to the pilgrimage carrying their burial shrouds with them, and salt for their food, and needles and thread, as there was not enough in Mecca and Medina to suffice all the people. Nowadays, people go there in order to buy luxury items, and it is not strange to find people coming back from the pilgrimage bringing all kinds of things with them. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* made all this as a sign of what He foretold long ago when the valley was bereft of agriculture, saying that He has established the House as a sanctuary to which are brought the fruits of all things as provision from Him (*al-Qasas:* 57).

Look at the precision of the Quranic discourse: the word *yujba* ('are brought') means to be taken with force, not by the will of those who bring it, as though those who bring all of these different fruits to that place are compelled to bring them there; and it is provision sent from God, not from the hands of the people. This is a confirmation of Abraham's prayer as read in the

Quran, asking God to provide for his family that he left in that valley and their descendents from the fruits (*Ibrahim:* 37).

God’s command *wa tazawwadu* (‘…And take provisions…’), as we know, is derived from the word (*ziyada,* ‘increase’), and ‘provision’ (*zad*) means the food of the traveller. When someone stores something for a journey which is above and beyond what he will consume on his stay, he does this so that he will not have to endure the burden of begging or take recourse in begging; for the pilgrimage is an act of humble servanthood, and God *the Most High* wants humble servanthood to be for Him alone. If someone does not have provisions for his journey he might humble himself before someone else and ask him to give him food, and God does not want the pilgrim to humble himself for anyone.

This is why He asks him to take provisions according to his needs so that he will be able to suffice himself, and his humility will remain solely for his Lord, and he will not ask of anyone but his Lord, and will not need to take recourse in asking of his fellow men. He who asks of others or begs others thereby takes something of the humility which should have been, on this journey, solely for God, and directs it to other people, whilst God wants it to be for Him alone.

And if people do not give to the one who asks or begs, he might steal or pilfer what he needs, and his journey will change from an intention of piety to one of evil. Some of the Yemenites used to go out to the pilgrimage without any provisions and say, ‘We depend on God; if we go to the House of God, will He not feed us?’, and then circumstances forced them to steal. This is the reason why stealing and pilfering occur at the pilgrimage; the urgency of hunger can make someone steal and pilfer to get what he needs.

Because of this, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to cut the human soul off from this evil, and so He said, ‘…and take provisions....’ This is a command from God to take provisions for this journey in which a person is removed from his wealth, his family, his loved ones, and his routines. He *the Exalted* then says, ‘…but indeed, the best provision is fear of God….’ We know that provisions are those things by which you protect yourself from hunger and thirst; and if provisions are good for preserving this temporary life of yours, what about the eternal life which never ends – does it not require a greater provision? Making provisions for temporary journeys teaches you to make provisions for the eternal journey.

So, His words '…but indeed, the best provision is fear of God…' include the provisions of this world and the Hereafter. God *the Most High* uses concrete things to remind us, and take us from them to abstract concepts; but if you reflect deeply, sincerely and truthfully, you will find that abstract concepts are even more powerful than concrete matters. This is why we notice that He *the Exalted* reminds the children of Adam that He has bestowed upon them garments to cover their nakedness (*al-A'raf*: 26). This is a concrete matter, and then He *the Exalted* tells us more by saying that He bestowed garments as a thing of beauty and adornment. He *the Exalted* does not only cover our nakedness, but He also elevated the matter to the luxuries by which we adorn ourselves, and these luxuries are things of beauty, i.e. those things by which a person adorns himself. Then the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…the best provision is fear of God….' That is, 'I have blessed you with garments and things of beauty, but there is something which is better than either, namely the garment of God-fearing (*al-A'raf*: 26). If you think that your physical clothes conceal your nakedness and protect you from heat and cold, and you adorn yourself with its beauty, understand that this is a concrete concept; but the superior matter is the garment of God-fearing. Why? Because to be exposed in the Hereafter, is worse than being exposed in this world.

So, His words '…And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of God. And fear Me, o men of understanding' mean that the True Lord *the Most High* wants you to take provisions for the journey to save you the need to ask or beg, or to steal or snatch; and beware of doing anything that God has forbidden, but rather, for you to make provisions is part of the sphere of '…And fear Me, o men of understanding,' that is, those of you who have minds. God does not alert the people to the minds they possess unless He wants them to use their minds to judge things because He *the Exalted* wants you to use your mind; and if you use your mind judging the matter, the judgement of the mind will be in line with God's Command.

Since God *the Most High*, out of His kindness and mercy, wants people to cooperate in this holy rite and this blessed journey, He gave permission for one group of pilgrims to serve the others in order to make things easier for them. It is amazing that God gives a dispensation to those who serve the pilgrims that they can leave before the others because this is a necessary task. Suppose that everyone refused to serve others, who would see to the needs of the people? Therefore, it is necessary that some people go with the task of working to serve the pilgrims; and God *the Most High* clarifies and explains this by saying:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَن تَبْتَغُوا۟ فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۚ فَإِذَآ
أَفَضْتُم مِّنْ عَرَفَٰتٍ فَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عِندَ ٱلْمَشْعَرِ ٱلْحَرَامِ ۖ
وَٱذْكُرُوهُ كَمَا هَدَىٰكُمْ وَإِن كُنتُم مِّن قَبْلِهِۦ لَمِنَ ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ﴿١٩٨﴾

**but it is no offence to seek some bounty from your Lord.
When you surge down from Arafat remember God at the
sacred place. Remember Him: He has guided you. Before
that you were astray [198] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 198)**

‘There is no blame upon you…’ meaning that you will be doing no wrong ‘…for seeking bounty from your Lord [during *Hajj*]...’ i.e. if you make profits during the pilgrimage when it is a religious rite; and the gains made therein will be considered bounty from God. In the past, they used to say, ‘There is the *Hajj* (the pilgrim), and then there is the *dajj’*, one word beginning with *‘h’* and the other with ‘*d’*. The *dajj* is the one who goes to the sacred lands solely in order to trade. We say to him: There is nothing wrong with going to the pilgrimage and trading there because you are helping others by doing this; for if we forbade him, who would look after the needs of the pilgrims?

Why did the True Lord *the Most High* say, ‘…seeking bounty from your Lord…’ rather than ‘seeking provision of sustenance’? The True Lord *the Most High* has explained in the previous verse that you should not go without taking provisions with you, and so you are not intending to gain sustenance by doing this work. That is, you are not going to the pilgrimage in order to eat from the fruit of your business, but rather, you go taking your provisions with you, and the profit you make is extraneous to your needs, and is a bounty from God *the Most High*. He *the Exalted* wants that there be no impediment to your doing lawful work there, and so He negated that it would be blameworthy to do so. You have come bringing with you your food and drink, and it suffices you to make a reasonable profit without any suspicion of wrongdoing such as exploiting the needs of the pilgrims; so, He called it a ‘bounty’, implying something extraneous to one’s needs.

Whenever sustenance and bounty are sought, the one who seeks sustenance and bounty should not be heedless; for all come from God. Be careful not to say that they come from the power of means, or from intelligence, or caution; they do not come from any of these things, for all sustenance is from God, and is a bounty from God. There is nothing wrong with seeking bounty from the Lord because He is the Creator and the Sustainer, and we are in His care, and so there is no shame in seeking bounty from God.

We need to have a closer look at a word used in this verse. For the departure of the pilgrims from Mount Arafat the True lord uses the word *afadtum* (rendered here as ‘depart’), derived from *fada* (‘overflow’). The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…But when you depart from *Arafat*, remember God at *Al-Mash'ar Al-Haram* (the holy site)….’ When you overfill a glass, the excess liquid pours over (*tufid*) its sides, so, the word *fa’id* means something which breaks away from something else because it is too much.

The words ‘…But when you depart from *Arafat…*’ (where the verb for ‘depart’ is *tufid*) indicate that God had willed that *Arafat* would be completely filled to overflow so that , whenever people left it they would be like the overspill from the number of people who can fill it at one time. This was a decree of God concerning the pilgrimage; and if you witness this scene – may God grant this to all believers, God willing – you will see this for yourself; it is as though a vessel has filled up, and all of this is overflowing from it, and you cannot tell where the pilgrims have come from, and nor where they are going; and he who sees the people circumambulating the *Ka‘ba* will think they are a human block. Likewise, when the pilgrims surge forth in the afternoon of the Day of *Arafat,* it seems to you when you look at them that they cannot be individually distinguished. In describing a similar scene, a poet once said:

The people of the district poured upon him when he called them,
The faces of his companions were like so many coins.

And another said:

When we finished everything at Mina,
And those who wished to lay their hands on the pillars did so,
We began to converse with one another,
And the valley overflowed with necks of mounted steeds.

That is, as though they were flowing liquid. This is exactly what the surging flow of people from *Arafat* is like. And when we look at the people heading for Muzdalifa, you wonder with amazement, ‘Where did all these people come from?’ you see the valley with people and vehicles moving through it as though they are flowing liquid, and you cannot tell one person out of the throng. During the movements of the pilgrims, there are two occasions where there is a surge: the surge from *Arafat*, and then a second surge which the next verse clarifies, when He *the Exalted* says:

ثُمَّ أَفِيضُوا۟ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَفَاضَ ٱلنَّاسُ وَٱسْتَغْفِرُوا۟
ٱللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٩٩﴾

Surge down where the rest of the people do, and ask forgiveness of God: He is most forgiving and merciful [199]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 199)

Mount Arafat is known by two different names: sometimes we call it *‘Arafat’* as is the case in this verse, and sometimes we call it ‘*Arafa’*, as when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The pilgrimage is *Arafa*.’(1) The word *Arafat* is a plural form, whilst *Arafa* is singular.

This word has become the name for the spacious area where the pilgrims gather on the ninth day of *Dhu Al-Hijja.* Do not think that it means the mountain; if you hear ‘Mount Arafat’, as the people say understand that this means the mountain which is associated with *Arafat*, not *Arafat* itself. This is why there are many people who imagine that if they do not climb the mountain called *Jabal Al-Rahma* ‘Mount of Mercy’ which stands at the rocks where the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* stood at the Farewell Pilgrimage, it is as though they have not made the pilgrimage. We say to them: No, the standing should be made in the valley, and we call the mountain which stands next to the valley ‘Mount Arafat’; the mountain so is named after *Arafat*; the valley is not named after the mountain.

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa’i, Ibn Maja, Al-Hakim, and Al-Bayhaqi.

There have been many different explanations given for the origin of the word Arafa. There is a difference between a word being an adjective and then becoming a proper noun, and its being a proper name from the beginning. We said before that if the name was given as a proper noun right from the start, it does not necessarily have any particular meaning; a miserable person might be named *‘Sa‘id’* (‘happy’), or an ugly black girl might be called *‘Qamar’* (‘moon’); they have not been named in order to describe them , but rather to give them an identifying name; keeping in mind that when people give names, they do so out of optimism, so, they say, ‘I named my son *Sa‘id* because I hope he will be happy.’ And if you have a girl, you might give her a name which is different from her actual state, so, if she is unattractive you call her *‘Jamila’* (‘beautiful’) to be optimistic with her name. In this case, the name is adopted for optimistic reasons; and when the Arabs gave names, they would be optimistic in doing so. For example, they might call a boy *‘Sakhr’* (‘rock’) in order to be optimistic about him in the face of the enemy, or call him *‘Kalb’* (‘dog’) so that no one would dare to bother him.

It was once said to an Arab, ‘You give nice names to your servants, calling them ‘*Sa‘id’* (‘happy’), *‘Sa‘d’* (‘bliss’), and *‘Fadl’* (‘bounty’), yet you give bad names to your own sons, calling them *‘Murra’* (‘bitterness’)*, ‘Kalb’* (‘dog’), and *‘Sakhr’* (‘rock’).’ The Arab replied, ‘Yes, because we name our sons with our enemies in mind so that they will be worried by them, and we name our servants for ourselves.’ The word Arafa (from an Arabic word meaning recognition) is now a name for a place, but there is a difference of opinion about the origin of this name. One explanation says that it is because Adam *peace be upon him* came down to earth at one place and Eve *peace be upon her* at another, and they each searched for the other until they met in this place, and so it was called *‘Arafa’* (meaning ‘recognition’).

The story about Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* requires us to look for a reason why they should have been separated so that they had to look for each other: if God created them to be a couple, why would He separate them? You can imagine the state of Adam *peace be upon him*, a being in a huge, strange world all alone, looking around and not finding any other human being like himself: By God, would he not long for someone to relieve his loneliness?

What would his state be upon seeing another person? There is no doubt that he would receive them very affectionately. For this reason, God separated them and made each of them search for someone to relieve their loneliness. If they had remained at each other's side, perhaps things would have been mundane; God wanted both Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* to long for each other, and so He placed them far away from each other and allowed them to be reunited after this long separation, and they longed to be reunited. And after the reunion, there would be love, mercy, comfort and peace, and this is what the life of a married couple should be.

There is another explanation for the naming of *Arafat*, which is that the angels said to our master Adam *peace be upon him* when he was in that place, 'Recognise (*i'rif*) your sin, and repent to your Lord,' whereupon he prayed to his Lord that they had sinned against themselves – and unless He grants them forgiveness and bestow His Mercy upon them, they shall most certainly be lost (*al-A'raf*: 23). In this case, he recognised his mistake, and he knew how to repent.

In still another explanation, the case may be that God wanted to teach Abraham *peace be upon him* when he prayed to his Lord to make the souls and hearts of people desire and incline towards this place. Abraham *peace be upon him* had a vision in his sleep in which he sacrificed his son; and this was something difficult in three ways: the first difficulty was that it was a vision, not revelation; the second difficulty was that he was his only son; and the third difficulty was that he was the one who would sacrifice him with his own hands.

These were three difficulties, and it is inconceivable that such a thing could have been simple and easy for the Father of the Prophets *peace be upon him* to do, but rather, it must have caused him a great deal of inner turmoil: was it a true vision, or what? This is why the day before the *Day of Arafa* is known as the 'Day of Visioning.' When our master Abraham *peace be upon him* became certain that the visions of the Prophets are true, he realised that he had to carry on what he had seen; and the place in which he realised (Arabic *'arafa*) the Truth of the vision was named *Arafa*. Or, it may be that when the vision to sacrifice his son came to him, Satan would not let such an opportunity pass him by, and he had to intervene and whisper his insinuations to Abraham *peace be upon him*. Did he not threaten that he will most certainly lie in ambush for people all along God's straight way (*al-A'raf*: 16)?

And when Satan appeared to Abraham *peace be upon him* the first time, he pelted him with seven pebbles, and then he came back, so, he pelted him with seven more, and then, he came back a third time and he pelted him with seven more, and after that, he did not come back again, and Abraham *peace be upon him* ran away in haste out of fear that he would meet him again, and so the place was named 'Muzdalifa', as *muzdalif* means 'one who hurries;' and it is also called *Dhu Al-Majaz*, 'The One who Crossed.' i.e. he crossed though Muzdalifa, and recognised (*'arafa*) the truth of the matter at *Arafa.*

Or, it may be that Gabriel *peace be upon him* would teach (in Arabic 'arrafa) him the rites at this place, and say to him, 'Do you see?' (in Arabic *'arafta*), and Abraham *peace be upon him* would reply 'I see' (*'araftu*). Or, it may be that a person recognises (in Arabic *'arafa*) his Lord upon completing the final pillar He has ordained for him; we all recognise the Pillars (of faith): this one recognises, and that one, and a third, and a fourth…. So we are all a plurality of recognition (*'arafat*), and the place becomes centred on servanthood to God in which all the pilgrims share.

'…But when you depart from Arafat, remember God at Al-Mash'ar Al-Haram (the holy site)…' (*al-Baqara*: 198). The holy site is Muzdalifa. And 'remember God' means: God has made this difficult journey easy for you, and has brought you safe and sound to God's Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*); and then you return home with your sins forgiven, which is something that merits that you remember God with thanks and gratitude.

'…And remember Him, as He has guided you…' (*al-Baqara*: 198). This is because His guidance for you and His teaching you the nearest way to reach goodness was a greeting from God to His creatures; and greetings must be returned; so, as He guided you, remember Him. Then God *the Most High* says,

'…for indeed, you were before that among those went astray' (*al-Baqara*: 198). This is because Arabs used to make many pilgrimages in the time of pagan ignorance, and these pilgrimages were based on misguidance, whilst now your pilgrimage in Islam is rightly-guided.

Coming back to the verse under discussion, 'Then depart from the place from where [all] the people depart….' The word 'then' (*thumma*) indicates that one must stand at *Arafa*, or spend the night at Muzdalifa because the word *thumma* in Arabic indicates a progression which is slow and delayed.

So, the words 'Then depart…' support the argument of those who say that one must spend the night at Muzdalifa. This verse was revealed because Quraysh saw themselves as being the people of the Sanctuary so that they were never required to do the things which other people were required to do, and therefore they would not go with the people to *Arafat*. God wants that all people be equal at the pilgrimage, which is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said at the Farewell Pilgrimage, 'You are all the children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust; let people stop taking pride in their forefathers, lest they be lower in God's sight than dung beetles.'(1) And God *the Most High* wanted to do away with this custom of Quraysh, and He said, 'Then depart from the place from where [all] the people depart…' that is, there is no special distinction for you, and no difference between one Muslim and another.

Some exegetes say that the expression '…where [all] the people depart…' means the way that Abraham *peace be upon him* departed, i.e. that our master Abraham *peace be upon him* had set all the rites of the pilgrimage after God *the Most High* had taught them to him. In this case, although the word 'people' (*nas*) is a plural, here it refers to Abraham *peace be upon him*. Do not find it strange that the word 'people' could be used to refer to Abraham since God also described him as being a 'nation' (*ummah*). The word 'people' can be used to describe a person who embodies many different qualities, and we find the word 'people' used in a Quranic verse to refer to our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* where God speaks about the disbelievers who envied ‘people’ (in this case the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*) for what God has granted them out of His favour (*an-Nisa’:* 54). The True Lord *the Most High* used the word ‘people’ to refer to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. And we find this usage in another instance: when a man went to the believers to forewarn them that the idolaters were gathering to fight them, God referred to this man as people (*Al-‘Imran*: 173). He was one man, but God *the Most High* referred to him as ‘people’, as though by the warning he gave to the Muslims, he had combined all the attributes of goodness that people have.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bazzar on the authority of Hudhayfa.* The dung beetle *(ja'lan)* is a kind of lowly insect.

The verse concludes with ‘…and ask forgiveness of God. Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.’ The True Lord *the Most High* knows that the children of Adam *peace be upon him* cannot fulfil His rights as they should be fulfilled, and that they will surely miss out on certain things. He *the Exalted* knows this because He is their Creator, and so He commanded them – in His infinite wisdom – to seek forgiveness of Him, in order that, He expunges their sins.

فَإِذَا قَضَيۡتُم مَّنَٰسِكَكُمۡ فَٱذۡكُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ كَذِكۡرِكُمۡ
ءَابَآءَكُمۡ أَوۡ أَشَدَّ ذِكۡرٗاۗ فَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَآ
ءَاتِنَا فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَمَا لَهُۥ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ مِنۡ خَلَٰقٖ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

When you have completed your rites, remember God as much as you remember your own fathers, or even more. There are some who pray, ‘Our Lord, give us good in this world,’ and they will have no share in the Hereafter [200]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 200)

We know that the word *qada* (rendered here as ‘performed’) has various meanings, and that the central concept of all these meanings is ‘to finish something with decisiveness.’ Something might be finished with decisiveness because its performance has been completed: ‘And when you have completed…’ i.e. when you have done your rites. This is one meaning. It can also be because you have finished the matter with a decisive statement, as is the case with God’s by ordaining to us that we shall worship none but Him (*al-Isra’:* 23).

The meaning of *qada* might also be ‘to give a decisive judgement / verdict’ as when a judge (*qadi*) gives a verdict (*qada*). So all of these meanings revolve around the notion of finishing work with wisdom and decisiveness. ‘And when you have completed your devotions, remember God….’ That is, when you finish your devotions (*manasik*), and the word *manasik* (plural of *mansak*) literally means the places where worship is offered; *Arafat* is the place of the standing, and Muzdalifa is the location of the holy site where the pilgrims spend the night, and Mina is also a place to spend the night; so, every place where worship is offered is called a *mansak.*

God *the Most High* says, ‘remember God,’ that is, the remembrance of God continues to be mentioned in these verses, as though, if you are given the felicity to perform some act of worship, beware of being deluded; but rather remember your Lord, who ordained it for you and then gave you the felicity to do it, and aided you. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make an end to the things which the Arabs had become used to at that time; in the past they used to go on the pilgrimage, and when the tribes gathered in Mina, every tribe would stand with its poet or orator so that he could enumerate his virtues and the virtues of his forefathers, and the proud achievements of the time of pagan ignorance, and they would pay blood indemnities, settle scores, serve food and engage in other customs besides these. God *the Most High* wanted them to cease these customs which were based on pride in forebears and their deeds, and so He said, ‘…remember God like your remembrance of your fathers….’ To bear something in mind means to direct one’s thoughts to something which is not present at the time you invoke it. One cannot remember past events apart from those things which had some kind of positive effect on him, and the intensity of remembrance is accordant with the strength of the positive effect which it had.

In the past they would serve food, and those who serve food are fulfilling an important role in such a barren place as this. The exaggeration in the size of the bowls of food was such that some of them, like Al-Mut‘im ibn ‘Adiyy, had a bowl so big that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said that you could find shade under it at midday. A bowl is a container in which food is placed, so, can you imagine how big this bowl would have been?

And they would settle scores, meaning that if one tribe had attacked another and killed many people, a man of nobility, manliness, valour and decency from amongst them would take the responsibility of all this upon himself by paying indemnities; and if someone from their tribe had killed someone and could not afford to pay the indemnity, the people of valour would volunteer to pay it for them; and all of these actions were about competing for pride and glory.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to turn them towards Himself in all things, and it is as if He was saying to them: You make remembrance of your forefathers because they used to do such-and-such, and your forefathers were proud of their own forefathers; go further back, and follow the chain back to the Creator of all fathers and all men; all the good that came at the hands of the forefathers ultimately goes back to God. Therefore, if you remember your forefathers for the good things they did, remember the One Who gave them the ability to do this good.

He wanted them to remember God *the Most High* as they remembered their own forefathers, or with a keener remembrance; for every being only deserves to be remembered for the good he has done, and there is no goodness except from God; and so we must remember God.

Furthermore, Islam wanted to end the practice of seeking pride and glory in one's forefathers and make glory a matter for the individual self of the believer, that is, glory based on good, honourable works which are achieved by the person himself. This is why they say about those who have pride in their ancestors that they are *'izhamiyyun*, derived from the word '*izham,* meaning 'bones', because they associate themselves with glories which were achieved by those who are now bones buried in graves. God wants us to have our own intrinsic glory so that we are proud of the things we do ourselves not what our forefathers did; for our forefathers have already moved on to what they sent ahead. God wants a person to have his own identity of faith and responsibility, and if someone wants to be proud he should be proud of himself. This is why a poet said:

Do not ascribe yourselves to bones, being proud
Of a glorious past, but living in a ruined present;

Nobility inherited from the past does no good
Save for those who are eager to maintain this nobility.
If a branch bears no fruit, no matter how high it stands
People will see it as nothing but firewood.

If a plant does not bear fruit, people consider it to be nothing but firewood. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to awaken in the believer an active identity, not an identity which takes pride in what happened in the past; rather, everyone should do something to be proud of:

The true youth is not the one who says, ‘That was my father,’
But rather the one who says, ‘Here I am!’

When the Arabs competed with one another in prideful boasting, one would say to the other: ‘Brother, what do you have to be proud of that I do not?’

The other would reply, ‘I take pride in my fathers and grandfather!’

The first would then say, ‘Be well aware that the glory of your forebears has ended with you, whilst the glory of my forebears has begun with me! Why should it not be a source of pride for my forebears that they produced me?’

Someone said about this:

They say Abu Saqr is from Shaiban, but I say:
No, by my life, Shaiban is from Abu Saqr!
Many a father has been exalted by their progeny,
Just as the tribe of ‘Adnan was exalted by God’s Messenger!

As long as people take pride in someone who is still alive amongst them, they thereby cleave to one who can give them support so that they will be something enduring and influential in existence, not only by means of that limited example of serving food, settling scores, and paying indemnities, but rather by bearing the message of global humanity.

‘And when you have completed your devotions, remember God like your remembrance of your fathers or with yet more intense remembrance….’ This is because your remembrance of God *the Most High* will connect you to the support which comes from Him, and will give you the assistance you need to be a people who will lead the motions of life on earth, establishing therein security, peace, mercy and justice; and this is what you should be proud of.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention to the fact that when a person finishes with his acts of worship, he becomes worthy to beseech God, and ask God for those things which he wants to ask. Asking of God differs according to the different aspirations of those who ask; they used to only ask God by saying, ‘O Lord, give me camels, O Lord, give me sheep, O Lord, give me cows, O Lord, give me an orchard; O Lord, as you gave to my father, give to me!’

Nothing was on their minds except material things, and God wanted them to rise up to a higher level when asking of Him, and to aspire to something more lasting, permanent and beneficial. From here comes the distinction of faith: if you are only going to ask God *the Most High* for the enjoyable things of this world, what is the difference between you and the people of pagan ignorance? This is what we understand from God’s words at the end of the verse: ‘…And among the people is he who says, ‘Our Lord, give us in this world,’ and he will have in the Hereafter no share.’ When the servant completes his acts of worship for God, he finds himself worthy to ask God; and as long as you find yourself worthy to ask God, ask God for an everlasting good; for a person only raises his need with someone according to the position and rank of the one he asks. You might go to a person and ask him for ten pence, and go to another who is richer than him and ask for a pound, and then, go to a third and ask him for twenty pounds; you ask according to the readiness of each of them to meet your request.

So, as long as, after completing their acts of worship, the servants are in a position to ask of God, they should elevate their request to God and ask him for something which is eternally beneficial, and they should not lower their request by asking for purely worldly, limited, things.

‘…And among the people is he who says, ‘Our Lord, give us in this world,’ and he will have in the Hereafter no share.’ The servant might not want anything from his supplication to God but worldly matters, and so shall have no portion or share of the Hereafter; and this kind of person has poor aspirations because he is asking for the things of this passing life. God wants us to elevate our faithful aspirations, which is why He continues by saying:

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَآ ءَاتِنَا فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِى
ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٢٠١﴾

others pray, 'Our Lord, give us good in this world and in the Hereafter, and protect us from the torment of the Fire' [201] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 201)

Why are we not told to forget about this worldly life here? It is because this life is the farming ground for the Hereafter. Scholars have differed concerning what is meant by the words '…give us in this world [that which is] good….' Some of them narrowing it and saying that the good of this world is a righteous wife, and that the good of the Hereafter is paradise. Some of them say that the good of this world is knowledge because action is based upon it, and that the good of the Hereafter is forgiveness as this is the believer's ultimate wish.

By examining all the statements of the scholars, we find that they are in agreement that the good of the Hereafter is that which leads to paradise, forgiveness and mercy. I say: Why should we not make the good of this world more comprehensive and wide-ranging by praying, 'O Lord, grant us everything which makes this life good for Your servant in Your service.'

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by the prayer, '…and protect us from the torment of the Fire.' When He *the Exalted* grants blessings to His servants, He blesses them by sparing them torment of the hellfire and admitting them into paradise. It looks as though, being spared the torment of Hell is a blessing in itself. And if one is admitted into paradise, after having been spared Hell, it is as though He has been bestowed upon by two blessings; for God *the Most High* addresses mankind saying that every one of them will come within sight of Hell (*Maryam:* 71).

This means that everyone will see the hellfire. A believer will see it on his way to paradise where he will say, 'Praise be to God, faith saved me from this fire and its torment;' so, when he sees the fire and its horrific sight, he will praise God for the blessing of Islam which saved him from the hellfire, and when he enters paradise and sees its blessings, he will praise God a second time. Likewise, the people of *al-A'raf* the heights, i.e. those who are neither in Hell nor in paradise, will see the hellfire. The True Lord *the Most High* says that whoever is drawn away from the fire and admitted into paradise will indeed have won (*Al-'Imran*: 185).

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا۟ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٠٢﴾

They will have the share they have worked
for: God is swift in reckoning [202]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 202)

A 'share' means a portion; as for '…of what they have earned….' We already know that in Arabic there are the verbs *kasaba* and *iktasaba*, both meaning to earn; but *iktasaba* implies some affectation or additional effort, whilst *kasaba* refers to ordinary or normal actions, which is why you find that *iktasaba* always applies to evil actions, as though the one who does evil thereby burdens himself, whereas to do good is a natural thing for a person to do. The meaning of '…of what they have earned…' here is that which they have earned *kasaba* from accomplishing the actions they have performed on the pilgrimage, namely consecration, the *talbiya* (supplication on answering God's call for pilgrimage), the circumambulation of the *Ka'ba*, the running between As-Safa and Al-Marwa, the journey to Mina, the journey to *Arafat* and standing there, the surging forth to Muzdalifa, the pelting of the pillars at Mina, and the final circumambulation; and all of this is a gain for the one who has attained the honour of the pilgrimage.

When we read '…And God is swift in reckoning,' we should understand that swiftness means for an action to take place in a short period of time; so, instead of an action taking one hour for you to do, you might finish it in half an hour. Every action takes time, and when an action takes time and you want to reduce the time it takes, you must do it swiftly so you finish it in the shortest time possible, and reducing time requires swift movement when acting. This is the case for actions which requires effort and human actions; but God *the Most High* acts by just saying ‘Be!’, and His actions do not require any endeavour, just as they do not require any time. And so He is swift in reckoning because He does not require any time, and because nothing keeps Him from anything else. This is the difference between the power of the One *the Exalted* and the power of contingent beings; for when a contingent being performs an action, this action prevents him from doing any other action, and he cannot do two things at once. But as for the One and Only, no action keeps Him from any other; moreover, He does what He wants, when He wants, and for whomever He wants.

Therefore, when Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Talib *God be pleased with him* was asked, ‘How can God make account for all beings at the same time?’ he replied, ‘In the same way He provides for them all at the same time.’ He *the Exalted* is the One who provides for them, and just as He provides for them He will make account for them.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَٱذۡكُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ فِيٓ أَيَّامٖ مَّعۡدُودَٰتٖۚ فَمَن تَعَجَّلَ فِي يَوۡمَيۡنِ فَلَآ إِثۡمَ عَلَيۡهِ وَمَن
تَأَخَّرَ فَلَآ إِثۡمَ عَلَيۡهِۖ لِمَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰۗ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّكُمۡ إِلَيۡهِ تُحۡشَرُونَ ﴿٢٠٣﴾

Remember God on the appointed days. If anyone is in a hurry to leave after two days, there is no blame on him, nor is there any blame on anyone who stays on, so long as they are mindful of God. Be mindful of God, and remember that you will be gathered to Him [203] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 203)

We can observe here that the remembrance of God *the Most High* is something which pervades all the rites; and ‘…during the appointed days…’ mean the days of *Tashriq* (the three days following the *Eid*). We spend the ninth day at *Arafa*, and then, we spend the eve of the tenth day at Muzdalifa, and then after this, we surge forth where the people surge forth, and we go to stone the pillars of Aqaba, and some go to perform the farewell circumambulation of the *Ka‘ba* and end their rites, or they might go to perform the sacrifice and come partially out of consecration (*ihram*) if he does not have his wife with him, or else if he has performed the circumambulation, then, he comes completely out of consecration. As for the appointed days, these are the days of *Tashriq,* the three days after the Day of the Sacrifice. The name *Tashriq* derives from *shuruq* (sunrise). In the past, when they made their sacrifices they would take the meat and put it in the sun, exposing it to sunrays to preserve it, and this is why the days became known as the days of *Tashriq*. When we hear God's words '…during the appointed days…' we understand that this means more than two days.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…then whoever hastens [his departure] in two days, there is no sin upon him; and whoever delays [until the third], there is no sin upon him - for him who fears God….' The fact that the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…during the appointed days…' and then says, '…then whoever hastens [his departure] in two days…' indicates that the word 'days' means a plural consisting of more than two days, namely three days; but the True Lord *the Most High* made it so that staying for two days is akin in value to staying for three days so that if you hasten away within two days you will incur no sin, and if you complete three days you will also incur no sin. How can this be?

It is because it is not a question of time, but rather, it is about invoking an intention of worship. You might stay for three days but without invoking an intention of worship, and this is why He *the Exalted* said, '…for him who fears God….' Be careful not to judge actions by how long they take; rather, they are judged by the sincerity of the intention and the God-fearing that accompanies them.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, '…And fear God and know that to Him you will be gathered.' He *the Exalted* uses the word 'gathered' because it fits the description of the throngs of the pilgrimage; for just as He gathered you in this great gathering, whilst you had a choice in the matter, He *the Exalted* is able to gather you without your having any choice in the matter. If you came by your own free will to this great human gathering at the pilgrimage, know that the One who commanded you to go by your own free will to participate in this huge assembly is able to bring you forth when your free will is taken from you. The True Lord *the Most High* says after this:

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُۥ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهِدُ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا
فِى قَلْبِهِۦ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ ٱلْخِصَامِ ﴿٢٠٤﴾ وَإِذَا تَوَلَّىٰ سَعَىٰ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ
فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ ٱلْحَرْثَ وَٱلنَّسْلَ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْفَسَادَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾

There is [a kind of] man whose views on the life of this world may please you [Prophet], he even calls on God to witness what is in his heart, yet he is the bitterest of opponents [204] When he leaves, he sets out to spread corruption in the land, destroying crops and livestock. God does not like corruption [205]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 204 - 205)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to present to us a matter related to our existence, namely that every action has an outward appearance and an inner reality; and it is possible that you could make the outward appearance seem as it should be expected, whilst on the inside you are cheating the people. If some people have outer and inner sides with each other, it is for the good of a person that he and all other people ascribe themselves to be part of a world in which everyone knows that there is a Wise God who knows everything about us all.

If you are keeping back something which I do not know, and I am keeping back something which you do not know, how can things go well between us? Therefore, one of our life's essentials is that we all believe together in a God who is cognisant of all our secrets; and this is what will make us behave properly. This is why it is said, 'If you evade the justice of the world, you will not evade the justice of Heaven.'

This is why the justice of Heaven and God's knowledge of the unseen are matters which we should grateful to Him for because He is the One who will protect each one of us from the others. When God conceals our secret thoughts from others, this is a blessing for which we should thank Him; for souls are fickle, and if you knew a passing thought that I had against you in my soul for a single moment, it might not please you, and you might never forget it and always feel bad about me; but transient thoughts and opinions come to you and to me, and then go again, and if all of us knew each other's secret thoughts, life would be unbearable. The popular saying regarding this goes: 'If only the things you feel about one another were to be revealed, you would have left each other unburied after death.'

So, it is a mercy from God, and one of His greatest blessings to His creatures, that he conceals their secret thoughts from one another. The True Lord *the Most High* warns us of those whom He describes thus: '…And from among the people is one whose speech … pleases you…,' that is, those who display goodness which contradicts the evil they conceal inside. A poet depicted this situation by saying:

Every one of us scorns the other, yet out of fear

We act as though we all praise one another.

That is, if we were frank, we would all condemn one another, but we all praise one another when we meet, each one saying with his tongue what is not truly in his heart. Does the statement '…whose speech pleases you…' mean that it is forbidden for you to be pleased with any speech? No; speech can please me, but not that connected with this worldly life. The discourse which pleases is that which is concerned with the eternal life of the Hereafter in order that we secure goodness from the One Who has dominion over all goodness.

It is bad enough for a person to hear someone praise him when they harbour hatred towards him in their hearts. This is enough proof of how the one being praised has been fooled; the one who praises him says to himself: 'This fellow whom I am praising is a fool; I praise him and he takes my praise seriously!' God *the Most High* is alerting us to the necessity of the Muslim being alert and vigilant so that if someone pleases us with speech about this worldly life, we should deem his speech to carry no good; for the best of speech is that which concerns those matters which are everlasting.

Therefore, when the Caliph of the Muslims wrote to Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq saying, 'Why do you not visit us as other people do?', Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq wrote back to the Caliph saying, 'I have nothing in this world which I fear losing, and you have nothing of the Hereafter which I seek.' It is as though he wanted to say to him: Leave us alone, for you need those who will sit before you and praise you, and you do not know that the first people to think ill of you, are the same ones who praise you. 'And from among the people is one whose speech concerning worldly life pleases you…' This verse was revealed concerning a person named Al-Akhnas ibn Shuraiq Ath-Thaqafi, whose real first name was Ubay, but who was given the nickname 'Akhnas' because he sneaked away (Arabic *khanasa*) and went home on the day of the Battle of Badr and did not fight against the Muslims with Quraysh making the excuse that the caravan had escaped from the Muslims and returned to them and there was no need to fight. When he met the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, he would claim to be a Muslim, and speak gently to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and claim that he loved him; but when he left the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* he passed by crops and donkeys belonging to some Muslims and burned the crops and killed the donkeys. Although the verse was revealed about Al-Akhnas, it applies to all hypocrites.

'…and he calls God to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents.' Do not say 'God is my witness,' but rather bring your witnesses to testify that what you say is true; for the meaning of 'God is my witness' is that you are stating that God will testify for you, and you are lying about this, and you want to make your lies seem believable by bringing God into the matter.

When you hear someone say, 'As God is my witness, I am such-and-such,' say to him, 'This is a statement from you that God *the Most High* testifies, and you might be lying about this; and I would prefer if two people were to testify rather than for you do bring God into the matter.' God says, '…and he calls God to witness as to what is in his heart, yet, he is the fiercest of opponents.' The fierce opponent is the one who is wilful in his disobedience. If it is said that someone is a fierce opponent, it means that he is wilful in his antagonism and that he argues on the side of falsehood. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'The most abhorrent man in God's sight is the most contentious of adversaries.'(1)

This means the one who argues on the side of falsehood and is harsh in his sinfulness, not only sinning, but also being harsh in his sin. Why is he the fiercest of opponents? Because the one who opposes you head-on makes you cautious of him, whilst the one who greets you with hypocrisy is the one who seeks to deceive you, and this is extreme enmity. The open adversary is better because he confronts you with his heart on his sleeve; but if you confront the one who hides his enmity to you and acts as though he loves you, he will be very hard in his enmity because he wants to deceive you and plot against you.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*, and 'the most contentious of adversaries' means the one who is severe in his antagonism.

'And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein….' The Arabic word *tawalla* (rendered here as 'turn away') means to leave; that is, he says things to you which please you, and when he turns away, he brings out what he had been concealing. The Arabic verb *tawalla* can have another meaning, giving the verse a different import. It may mean to take charge of something. In this case, the verse would mean that when the person in question is given responsibility of something, he wastes it and spreads corruption.

In the second reading of the verse 'And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy tilth and progeny….' the meaning has a wider scope. Without human interference, the earth was created in a state of soundness, and corruption is something which mankind introduced to it; and we know that corruption never afflicts anything without the interference of mankind.

Why do we undergo critical food shortages, but not critical air shortages? Because mankind has not interfered in the air; and it is according to man's level of interference in things that they become corrupted. We have interfered with water a little, and so it has been corrupted, for we have not seen that it is transported well in good-quality pipes, and so it arrives to us in a polluted state, or contains too much, or too little chlorine. The level of the corruption is commensurate with the level of the human interference. In the past, however, one used to go to the direct source of the water in wells and take water in the natural state in which God created it, without any interference from man, and there was no pollution or anything else.

So, to the extent that man's actions in life are not rightly-guided by faith in God, there will be corruption, and because of this, religious guidance needed to be issued to man. Other creatures apart from man do not have religious guidance, and are created with instincts, and they only fulfil their purpose.

Beasts of burden never refuse to allow people to mount them, and never refuse to carry their loads, or to be used for ploughing or irrigation; even when you slaughter them they do not resist you. Why? Because they are created to instinctively do beneficial things without having any choice in the matter; and if they ever refuse to do so, it is only because of some external matter such as illness.

But those who have free will must have religious guidance which says to them ‘Do’ and ‘Do not’; if they adhere to this guidance of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not’ their lives will become balanced, and if they do not adhere to it their lives will be corrupted. This is what we understand from God’s words ‘And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein….’ It is as though corruption is what requires effort: leave nature and created beings as they are, and you will find that they function with harmony and perfection, just as they should.

So, corruption comes from the one who lives without any religious guidance, because ‘…when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein….’ It is as though the original state of the earth and everything in it were in a state of soundness; and if you cannot make sound things better, do not try to corrupt them. God *the Most High* says, ‘And if they are told, “Do not spread corruption on earth,” they answer, “We are but improving things!” Verily, it is they, who are spreading corruption – but they perceive it not!’ (*al-Baqara*: 11-12)

From this we understand that they were under the illusion that the earth needed their actions to improve it even though the earth was already sound; this is because they were not acting in accordance with God’s guidance.

So, we understand from this verse that if a person *tawalla* (whether this means to turn away or to take charge of some authority), he goes about the earth to spread corruption therein; it is as though corruption on earth is something foreign to it which is caused by mankind not acting in accordance with God’s guidance. As long as man has free will, he must have guidance which is higher than him to keep this free will sound; if he does not have any guidance, and follows his whims, he will inevitably cause corruption.

Look at the foolishness of the one who causes corruption on earth: does he think that he is the only one who has the right to benefit on earth so that he can allow himself to corrupt the earth for others? He forgets the truth of matters; for just as he corrupts things for others, others will corrupt things for him, and so who loses? We all lose.

‘And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy tilth and progeny….’ The Arabic word *harth* (rendered here as ‘tilth’) may mean one of two things: sometimes it is used to mean ‘crops/cultivated land’, and other times it is used to mean ‘women’. The first meaning is found in the Quranic verse where God *the Most High* mentions David and Solomon when they gave judgement concerning the field into which some people’s sheep had strayed (*al-Anbiya’:* 78). So the meaning of the word *harth* (‘field’) in this verse is crops, resulting from turning the land and tilling it. Your job, man, is to turn and till the earth, and to place the seeds which God created into the earth which God created, and to water them with the water which God created so that they grow into the air which God created. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* draws out attention to this when He asks mankind to consider the seed which they cast upon the soil; is it they who cause it to grow; or is it God (*al-Waqi‘a*: 63-34).

The second meaning of *harth* is ‘women’ as bearers of progeny; and this is the meaning we find in God’s address to men that their wives are their tilth (*al-Baqara*: 223).

If the goal of tilling the earth is to produce crops, the case is similar with the woman, who bears children. The above quoted verse continues with telling men to go, then, to their tilth as they may desire (*al-Baqara*: 223). Licentious and promiscuous people want to understand that the verse makes it permissible to sexually penetrate a woman in any part of her body. We say to them: Notice that the verse says ‘your tilth’, and tilth is the place where germination occurs, and so penetration should be in the place of germination only. Do not understand it as a generalisation when actually it is a specification.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues the description of the one who speaks good words but spreads corruption in the earth, by saying, ‘…and destroy tilth and progeny….’ Progeny means offspring and descendants.

The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the verse by saying, ‘…And God does not like corruption….’ That is, the True Lord *the Most High* wants that if you do not intervene in things using the ability which God created for you to think and contribute, at least leave things the way God created them; for God does not love that you corrupt the things which He created to be inherently sound.

What this verse shows is only a single example of the different ways in which the Islamic call was received when it first began by those who hypocritically adopted it because it had acquired strength, coming up with statements and actions which pleased those who they deceived. We know that this hypocrisy was a sign of the strength of the Muslims, which is why hypocrisy did not begin in Mecca (where Muslims were weak and tyrannised), but rather in Medina; and the True Lord *the Most High* describes this situation saying that among the people of the Prophet's City there are such as have grown insolent in their hypocrisy (*at-Tawba:* 101).

One might wonder how this phenomenon could have emerged in the atmosphere of strong faith which prevailed in Medina at the time. We say: It was because Islam in Mecca had been weak, and no one seeks to deceitfully align himself with the weak, and then, Islam in Medina became strong, and people usually tend to flatter and align themselves with the strong side even if they do not share the same beliefs.

So, the existence of hypocrisy in Medina was a natural and healthy phenomenon which showed that the faith had become strong to the extent that people who were not truly Muslims would claim that they were. These people would say things which were good and pleasing, and they might do things in front of those whom they sought to deceive which pleased those who saw them or heard them; yet, they were not steadfast upon truth, and as soon as they turned away, that is, covered from the sight of those whom they sought to deceive, they would return to their true state of disbelief; or as soon as they were entrusted with some kind of power, they went about the earth spreading corruption.

The verse here exhibits something which shows the discernment of the believers. It exposes one of the hypocrites, and *Al-Akhnas* was one of the leaders of the hypocrites; and to expose a hypocrite in this way, shows that behind Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the believers in

Muhammad, is a Lord who informs them of what is being plotted against them; and it also alerts them of the essential need for them to have discernment, as is shown by the words of the True Lord *the Most High*:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ ٱتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ أَخَذَتۡهُ ٱلۡعِزَّةُ بِٱلۡإِثۡمِۚ فَحَسۡبُهُۥ جَهَنَّمُۖ وَلَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡمِهَادُ ٢٠٦

When he is told, 'Beware of God,' his arrogance leads him to sin. Hell is enough for him: a dreadful resting place [206]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 206)

It would not have been said to him, 'Fear God,' unless it was already known that he was a hypocrite; and as long as they said that to him, this shows that this hypocrisy did not escape their discernment. We understand from this verse that the believer is sagacious and discerning, and that he must consider things according to the criterion of mental alertness; he should not simply leave it up to Divine clarity to tell him what is going on, but rather, God wants every believer to have autonomy and sagacity.

'And when it is said to him, "Fear God"….' It is as though the image he presents when he speaks or acts is incompatible with God-fearing because it is a pleasing speech which is not in harmony with a displeasing inner state. It is true that he may pray in the first row and show enthusiasm for the affairs of the religion, and say nice things that please the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and please the believers, but his behaviour and speech come from a corrupt intention. The meaning of 'Fear God' is to make your outer appearance correspond to your inner intention; it is not enough that you utter pleasing speech, and it is not enough that you do things that please others, for God loves that speech be in harmony with action, and that the actions of the body be in harmony with the intentions of the heart.

So, the believer must have discernment, intelligence and composure, and observe the conduct of others; he must not accept outward appearances, nor the façade of speech and actions, where there is no harmony between actions and intentions; and he must not suffice himself with merely knowing this, but rather must tell the hypocrite the truth of what he sees so that the hypocrite will find his recourses to hypocrisy dwindling because when he says to him, 'Fear God,' the hypocrite will understand that his hypocrisy is uncovered, and perhaps after this he will renounce his hypocrisy, and so this is a mercy from the believer to the hypocrite. If anyone sees, and notices with his intelligence, that someone is practising hypocrisy, he should say to him, ‘Fear God’, intending to expose his hypocrisy by saying this. If one person says to him, ‘Fear God’, and then, another person says to him, ‘Fear God,’ and then, a third, and then, a fourth, he will know with certainty that his hypocrisy has been uncovered, and that his speech no longer pleases people.

‘And when it is said to him, “Fear God,” pride in the sin takes hold of him….’ The Arabic word *‘izza* (rendered here as ‘pride’) has different meanings; it can also mean: self-esteem, honour, or glory. The linking of pride to sin in the verse indicates that there can be pride without sin; as long as God has said, ‘…pride in the sin takes hold of him…’ there can therefore be pride (in the sense of self-esteem) without sin. Indeed, this kind of pride is a desirable attitude from the believer, and God *the Most High* decreed that *‘izza* (honour) belongs to Him, to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and to the believers in saying that all honour belongs to God, and to His Messenger and to the believers (*al-Munafiqun:* 8).

This pride in truth is not a sin; and what is the difference between taking pride in truth and taking pride in sin? Let us look to the Noble Quran to know the difference. The sorcerers of Pharaoh, as God *the Most High* relates, swore by Pharaoh’s might (*‘izza*) that they would prevail (*ash-Shu‘ara’*: 44). This is pride in sin and falsehood. Likewise, God *the Most High* states that the disbelievers are absorbed in pride, and in contention (*Sad:* 2). This is also false pride.

On the other hand, God’s exaltation of Himself, the Lord of Might and Glory, above what they may describe (*as-Saffat:* 180) is pride in truth. So this is true pride, pride in the Power which always prevails, and can never be prevailed upon. As for false pride, it is the pride of arrogance which is associated with sin and disobedience. The True Lord *the Most High* challenges everyone who takes this kind of pride in sin: If you truly had invincible power as you proudly boast, then no one would be able to overpower you; but look at Pharaoh’s sorcerers, those who swore by Pharaoh’s might that they would prevail (*ash-Shu‘ara’*: 44), they were the ones who, at the end of the day, fell in prostration before Moses *peace be upon him* and declared their belief in the Lord of all the worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 47-8).

Pride in the might of Pharaoh did not avail them at all because it was pride in sin; pride in truth came and defeated pride in sin. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* shows us that in order for pride not be in sin, we must be proud in front of the disbeliever and humble towards the one who believes in God *the Most High* (*al-Ma'ida*: 54). This is the meaning we find also in God's description of the believers as firm and unyielding towards the infidels, yet full of mercy towards one another (*al-Fath:* 29).

This is the mark of pride in the truth; its sign is that when you gain victory, you show complete humility towards God. We have a fine example in our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who left Mecca because he could not protect the weak and tyrannised believers, and after that he returned to Mecca to conquer it by God's succour; and when he entered Mecca, his head was lowered in humility before God so that it almost touched the pommel of his mount's saddle. This is real power, and it is the opposite of pride in sin which, when it gains victory, acts with tyranny; it is only pride in truth which, when it gains victory, shows humility.

'And when it is said to him, 'Fear God,' pride in the sin takes hold of him….' That is, pride and arrogance are linked to sin, and sin means to go against the command given by the True Lord *the Most High*. '…Sufficient for him is Hellfire, and how wretched the resting place is.' What kind of pride is this which takes one to hell in the end? This is not pride, but rather, it is ignominy, and there is no goodness in an action which leads toh, nor any evil in an action which leads to paradise. If you want to be honourable, think about your end and where you are headed.

The expression '…Sufficient for him…' means that this will be a sufficient exposure of his pride in sin. As for the word 'resting place' (*mihad*), it literally means something laid and spread out which is something comfortable to sit on, or travel on, or sleep on. This is why they call a baby's cradle (*mahd*). Does this image of a resting place suit the suffering of hell? Yes, it absolutely does, because the one who sits in a resting-place has no will to get out of it, like a baby which does not have the strength to leave its bed. So he will have lost his will and his control over his body; and if the resting-place in hell will be like this, it will be the vilest of resting-places. This is one kind of person; and in contrast to this, God *the Most High* gives us another kind of person, saying:

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَشۡرِي نَفۡسَهُ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ مَرۡضَاتِ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ رَءُوفُۢ بِٱلۡعِبَادِ ﴿٢٠٧﴾

But there is also a kind of man who gives his life away to please God, and God is most compassionate to His servants [207]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 207)

When God *the Most High* uses the word ‘sells’ (*shara*), we should notice that this is one of the verbs which can be used to mean one thing and its opposite depending on the context. The word (*shara*) can mean to buy and also to sell, so, it has two meanings. Read what God *the Most High* says in the chapter of *Yusuf* when He tells that the people of the caravan who found Joseph sold (*shara*) him for a paltry price (*Yusuf:* 20).

It can also mean ‘to buy’, as when the ancient Arab poet ‘Antara ibn Shaddad described his horse wading through the thick of the battlefield where it bought (*shara*) and sold.

Thus the word *shara* can be used to mean either ‘buy’ or ‘sell’; it is wording and context that determine what it is intended to mean. When ‘Antara said ‘bought and sold’, we understand that *shara* here means ‘bought’ because it is in contrast with the word *ba‘a,* meaning ‘sold.’ And in God’s telling of the story of Joseph, the context of the verse makes it clear that they sold him. This is part of the greatness of the Arabic language; it is a language which wants people to understand words using their minds, making context determine their understanding of the meanings.

‘And from among the people is he who sells himself….’ We understand that the meaning of the verb *shara* here is ‘to sell’ his self; and the one who sells his self is the one who gives it away in return for some recompense. When a person gives away his self, he sacrifices it; and when the sacrifice is in order to seek God’s pleasure, this is martyrdom in God’s Way. It is as though he sells his self and takes God’s pleasure in return for it. We find this meaning also in God’s statement that He has bought of the believers their lives (*at-Tawba:* 111).

The True Lord *the Most High* gives them paradise in return for their lives and their possessions. So His words ‘And from among the people is he who sells himself, seeking means to please God…’ mean that he sells his own self and receives paradise in return for it; this is if the meaning of *shara* is ‘to sell.’

But what if the meaning of the word here is ‘to buy’? In that case, we understand that he buys his own self meaning that he sacrifices everything in the cause of securing his believing soul. It is amazing that it is said that the reason for the revelation of this verse is something which could accommodate both meanings: ‘sells’ and ‘buys.’ Abu Yahya, whose full name was Suhayb ibn Sinan Ar-Rumi was in Mecca, and was at an old age. He embraced Islam and wanted to emigrate to Medina, and the disbelievers said to him, ‘You came to Mecca as a pauper, and we took you under our wings; and now you are a wealthy man, and you wish to emigrate and take your wealth with you.’ He said to them, ‘If I leave my wealth to you, will you let me go?’ They said yes. He asked them, ‘Will you grant me a mount and provisions to take me to Medina?’ They said, ‘You may have this.’

By doing this, he bought his own self, and gave his riches to preserve his soul’s faith. When he arrived in Medina, he met Abu Bakr and ‘Umar *God be pleased with them*, who said to him, ‘A profitable sale, Abu Yahya!’ He replied, ‘And may God make all your dealings profitable!’

Our masters Abu Bakr and ‘Umar then said to him, ‘The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that Gabriel *peace be upon him* told him your story.’ It is also narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the one who said to him, ‘A profitable sale, Abu Yahya!’ so, the meaning of the verse, in light of this story, is that he bought his soul with his wealth, and the wording of the verse agrees with this meaning. This is one of the benefits of the Quranic discourse, wherein a single word can give two contrasting meanings that are both possible.

But if the meaning is that he sold it, this is a different story: At the battle of Badr, the first battle in the history of Islam, in which the leaders of Quraysh gathered to fight the Muslims, the Muslim fighters were able to kill some of these leaders and capture many others; and one of those who were slain in this battle was one of the leaders of Quraysh, Abu ‘Uqba ibn Al-Harith ibn ‘Amer. The one who killed him was one of the Companions of the Prophet, named Khubaib ibn ‘Adiyy Al-Ansari Al-Awsi *God be pleased with him*, who was a member of the Aws tribe of Medina. After this, some of the disbelievers plotted and sent a message to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, saying: ‘O Messenger of God, we have embraced Islam, and we want you to send us some people to teach us Islam.’ So, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sent to them ten of his Companions to teach them the Quran, and the disbelievers ambushed those ten men and killed all of them except Khubaib ibn ‘Adiyy *God be pleased with him* who was able to escape with his life along with another Companion named Zayd ibn Ad-Dathana. But Khubaib *God be pleased with him* was captured, and those who captured him knew he was the one who had killed Abu ‘Uqba Al-Harith at the battle of Badr, so they sold him to the son of Abu ‘Uqba so he could kill him in revenge for his father. He decided not to kill him, but rather to crucify him alive. When he left him crucified on the stake, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina said, ‘Who will take Khubaib down from his stake and he will have paradise?’ Az-Zubayr *God be pleased with him* said, ‘I will o Messenger of God!’ and Al-Miqdad *God be pleased with him* said, ‘I am with him, o Messenger of God!’

They went to Mecca and found Khubaib *God be pleased with him* on the stake, dead, and was surrounded by forty men of Quraysh guarding him. They took advantage of a moment of heedlessness from the guards, and went to the stake and took Khubaib *God be pleased with him* down and took him away. When the people woke up and did not find Khubaib *God be pleased with him* there, they followed the tracks to find the ones who had taken him. Az-Zubayr *God be pleased with him* saw them, and so he threw Khubaib God *be pleased with him* to the ground, and then, looked on as the earth swallowed him up, which is why he was thereafter known as ‘The one the earth swallowed.’ After this, he looked to them and removed the turban behind which he had concealed his face, and said, ‘I am Az-Zubayr ibn Al-‘Awwam, my mother is Safiya bint ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, and my Companion is Al-Miqdad. If you wish, I will contend with you (that is, compete in boasting about oneself, as was the custom); and if you wish, I will fight you; and if you wish, you can go away.' They said, 'We will go away.' They went away, and when Az-Zubayr and Al-Miqdad *God be pleased with them* returned to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him,* he gave them the glad tidings of the same paradise to which Khubaib had gone.

So Khubaib *God be pleased with him* sold his self in return for paradise. Therefore, if you consider the reason for the verse's revelation to be Abu Yahya Suhayb ibn Sinan Ar-Rumi, *shara* means 'to buy'; and if you consider the reason for the verse's revelation to be Khubaib *God be pleased with him*, then *shara* means 'to sell.' In this way we find that a single word in the Noble Quran can refer to more than one situation.

Mawiya, the daughter of the man who bought Khubaib ibn 'Adiyy *God be pleased with him* to give him to 'Uqba to kill him in revenge for his father, relates: 'By God, I saw Khubaib eating a bunch of grapes the size of a human head, and by God, there is neither orchard nor grapes in Mecca; it was nothing less than provision which God sent to him.'

When they came to kill him, he said, 'Allow me first to pray two *rak'as* (cycles) of prayer.' He prayed two cycles, and then looked to the people and said, 'By God, were it not that I feared you would say, "He prayed more simply to delay us from killing him", I would have prayed more.' And he said before they killed him, 'O God, count each one of them and kill them all entirely, and spare not a single one of them!' Then he chanted:

I care not, as I die a Muslim,
On what side my death in God was.

Those were his last words.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and God is kind to His servants.' What is the relationship between what has come before and '…kind to His servants'? As long as God is kind towards His servants, God did not want to make this obligatory on all Muslims; rather, He made it a rare occurrence in order to strengthen the truth of the matter of faith because He does not want all the Muslims to sacrifice their lives, but rather wants some of us to remain to bear the call of Islam.

After presenting those people who receive the call with disbelief and hypocrisy and then contrasting this with those who receive it with pure faith, the True Lord *the Most High* called all the believers, saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱدۡخُلُواْ فِي ٱلسِّلۡمِ كَآفَّةٗ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُواْ
خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمۡ عَدُوّٞ مُّبِينٞ ٢٠٨

You who believe, enter wholeheartedly into submission to God and do not follow in Satan's footsteps, for he is your sworn enemy [208] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 208)

The verse begins with a call to those who believe in God, as though He is saying to them: O you who believe in Me, listen to My words! God does not hold morally responsible those who do not believe in Him, but rather, He addresses those who love Him and believe in Him. As long as they love God, every believer must turn to He Whom he loves; for God will only give him that which makes him happy.

So, moral responsibilities from God *the Most High* are means of giving happiness to those He loves: 'O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely….' The word 'into' (*fi*) indicates enclosure which means that something contains something else, like a cup which contains water so that we say 'The water is in (*fi*) the cup.' Likewise, a mosque contains the congregation so that we say, 'The congregation is in the mosque.'

Enclosure means that the container encompasses and surrounds the contents. As long as the container has surrounded the contents, this means that there is nowhere for the contents to escape the container. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* gives us an image of the domination of enclosure when He *the Exalted* relates Pharaoh's threats to the sorcerers after they embraced faith in God: he threatened to most certainly crucify them in trunks of palm-trees (*Ta Ha:* 71). Notice the use of the word 'in' (*fi*) is used instead of 'on' (*'ala*).

Crucifixion is always done on something, and the noble verse wants to explain for us how the cross can completely dominate the one who is crucified on it. If you want to crucify something on something else you attach it to it, and if you go very far in attaching it, it is as though you have entered the thing you crucify into the thing upon which you crucify it.

For an example of this, take a matchstick and place it on your finger and then tie it on very tightly with a thread; you will notice that the stick sinks into your skin. The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…enter into Islam completely….' The words *silm, salm*, and *salam* all mean islam, that is 'surrender', and they are all based on the same root meaning; for peace (*silm*) is the opposite of war, and Islam came to stop the war between you and the universe in which you live, for your own good and for the good of the universe, and in order that you are in a state of peace with God, and peace with the universe, and peace with other people, and peace with yourself.

He *the Exalted* says, '…enter into Islam completely…' meaning 'until surrender encloses you.' God is the Divine Creator of the universe, and you must live in peace with Him because you only believe in Him as the One God. We must live with the earth, the sky and the universe in peace; for the universe, which is subdued, overpowered and compelled so that it cannot evade what has been ordained from it, works to serve you, and does not defy you.

When a person is obedient to God, everything in existence is pleased with him because existence obeys and extols God; and if it finds a person extolling God as it does, it will *be pleased with him* because he is in a state of peace with the universe; and you are at peace with yourself since you have will, and God has subdued all of your limbs to this will, and every limb does what you want it to do; but is each limb pleased by what you tell it to do? This is something else. For example, your tongue responds to your will, and you use it to say, 'There is no god but God', whilst other people such as idolaters say something else, associating with God human beings and other things which they worship; and atheists use their tongues to say, 'There is no god'. The tongue does not disobey any of these because it is compelled to obey their wills.

The will by which a man controls his tongue and other limbs shall end on the Day of Resurrection, and it will testify against him just as his other limbs will testify against him: the feet, the hands, the eyes and the ears; every limb will admit what he did with them because mankind will have no control over those limbs on that day, but rather, all control will be for the Almighty Creator. On that day, He *the Exalted* poses this question: With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? And He answers it: With God, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists (*Ghafir:* 16).

When the True Lord *the Most High* calls the believers to enter wholly into self-surrender, this also means that the True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers not to enter the religion partially, leaving some of it aside. He says to them: Take Islam in its entirety, and implement it completely because Islam is like a building which has plain foundations and clear bases; so, no one should try and take something from one ruling whilst being far from another, for otherwise there will be imbalance.

For example, you might find a dispute between a husband and wife, and this dispute might lead to acrimony and divorce, and after this we find people who accuse Islam of having given men too much power over women. We say to them: Why do you accuse Islam? Did you enter marriage from an Islamic perspective? If you entered marriage from an Islamic perspective, you will find that there are organised rules which preserve the woman's dignity; but there are those who enter marriage from a non-Islamic perspective, and then, when there is a crisis, they start calling out to Islam. Did the man choose someone to share his life based on the standards of the religion? Did he consider the conditions for choosing a good wife mentioned in the Noble Hadith: Abu Huraira *God be pleased with him* relates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, and her religion; so succeed by choosing the one who has religion, may your hands become dusty (otherwise)!'(1)

Did the man prefer a religious woman to another? Or, did he give preference to some other quality? And when a man came to ask for a woman's hand in marriage from her father, did the father give any consideration to Islam when he approved this marriage? Did you choose someone whose religion and character pleased you? Or did you leave aside these principles? You left aside the principles of Islam, so, why do you blame Islam when things turn out badly?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja.*

If you want to judge, you must subject all your affairs to the standards of Islam, and then act in a way which is appropriate to Islam. If you do so, Islam will protect you from everything. Islam supports the powers in the universe, and supports the power of the soul so that it lives with peace and does not rebel; for the opposite of all of this is war, and war only occurs when powers oppose one another so that the powers of your soul oppose one another in a war within your soul, and human powers oppose one another in wars between humans and other humans; and your power opposes the other powers of the universe, as you oppose nature and you oppose the True Lord *the Most High*.

So, opposition causes war, and war only occurs if whims differ from one another. The whims of human beings cannot come together unless they are governed by the values of the One Who has no whims; this is why God *the Most High* says that if the truth were to follow their inclinations, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

Why? Leave aside the mute universe around you; or leave aside those things in the universe which have no free will to act or respond to you, acting or responding to you without having any choice in the matter. Rather, consider human beings, your own race: what is it that makes the whim of one man dominate the whims of all others?

What extra thing does this man have so that you should follow him, or that he should follow you? Nature decrees that no one will follow anyone else unless they believe him to be superior to them, but no human being can have this kind of superiority. Therefore, all human beings must follow a power which they believe is superior to all of them. When we believe, we enter into self-surrender, and there is no opposition between any two powers because I am not subservient to you or you to me, and you and I are both in surrender to a power which is superior to both of us. And it is essential that the power which we both dutifully follow should gain no benefit from what it decrees.

Human lawmakers look after their own benefits when they make laws; the communist lawmaker makes laws which are against capitalism, and the capitalist lawmaker makes laws which are against communism. But when the lawmaker does not benefit from what he legislates, this is the legislation of the True Lord *the Most High*.

When we enter Islam, we all enter so that none of us is left out, and this is the meaning of '…enter into Islam completely….' This is one possible meaning for the verse; there is also another possible meaning which is: Enter into self-surrender, namely Islam, with all of its moral responsibilities so that you do not leave out a single responsibility.

When the first meaning applies, it is because if we did not all enter into self-surrender, the ones who surrendered would be made miserable by those who did not because the one who surrendered would refine his way of behaving with others, and the one who surrendered would give benefit to other people, but would suffer at the hands of those who did not surrender. It is for all of our benefit that we all surrender to God, and those who do not comprehend this fact interpret incorrectly God's words to the believers that those who go astray can do them no harm if they themselves are on the right path (*al-Ma'ida*: 105).

Part of your being on the right path is that you guide those who do not believe so that they believe; for it is in all of your interests that you all surrender. If you yourself surrender, your surrender will affect others positively because your behaviour will become upright and refined; as for the one who does not surrender, his behaviour will be neither upright nor refined, and you yourself will suffer because of him. It is therefore in your interest to spend much time and expend much effort in calling others to enter into Islam. Beware of saying that this will cause you to miss out on opportunities in life; no; it will secure for you opportunities in life, and your time will not be wasted because you will protect yourself from the evils of those who do not surrender.

Remember well that when we spoke about the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, we said that God *the Most High* teaches us to pray in the plural and say 'You alone do we worship' (*al-Fatiha:* 5), so, all of us, Lord, worship You, and this will make us all happy; and guide us all, Lord, for if I alone am guided, then, others will enjoy my guidance, whilst I will suffer from their misguidance. It is therefore in all our interest for all of us to be guided.

This is considering the meaning of 'enter completely' as 'all of you,' 'into Islam'. Keeping this in mind, the meaning of the verse stating that those who go astray can do the believers no harm if they themselves are on the right path (*al-Ma'ida*: 105), will be: You will not bear the burden of their misguidance if you enjoin upon them what is right and forbid them from what is wrong.

As for the second meaning: 'Enter into Islam in such a way that none of you is left out by taking certain things and parts of Islam and leaving others.' You want to build your life, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* explains that Islam has bases which are five Pillars; so, beware, for example, of taking three pillars and leaving two aside because the architecture of Islam is built upon five pillars.

An architect once said to me: 'We can support a building on three pillars, or four, or five.' I said to him, 'But once you have made the building with four pillars, and the weight and burden has been distributed over four pillars, can you, after it has been built, make it three pillars only?' He said no.

I said, 'Then a building can only be built from the beginning on the supports that you have planned for it, and this is why you distribute the strength on three, four, or five pillars at the beginning.' God *the Most High* willed to make the supports of Islam five, and after this Islam was built; and now, that Islam has been built, beware of taking one brick of Islam and not another, but rather, Islam must be taken in its entirety. The current problems of the Islamic world have only been caused by the picking and choosing that has occurred in the Muslim world, this picking and choosing which attempts to take part of Islam and leave part of it. This is the cause of all the hardships and problems because Islam must be taken in its entirety all at once. So '…enter into Islam completely…' means: Beware of leaving any rulings aside. The thing which causes hardships for those people who belong to the religion in these days is that we live a partial Islamic life in nations which take their laws from non-Islamic nations.

In order for us to succeed in our lives, we must take all of Islam. Sadly, many rulers of Muslim countries take nothing from Islam except the final part of God's command to the believers to obey God and obey the Messenger and those who are in authority from among them (*an-Nisa':* 59). They take the command concerned with obeying those who are in authority and leave out the command concerned with obeying God and the Messenger.

I say: Why do you take the final part and leave out what comes before it? God *the Most High* did not ordain an independent obedience for the one who has been entrusted with authority; but rather, He ordained obedience to God and obedience to the Messenger and those who are in authority in order to show that obedience to the authority figure comes after obedience to God and obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. We do not want any picking and choosing in Islam; take it all, and you will find peace, and we will find peace with you.

By calling us to enter into Islam, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to safeguard people from the trials and ordeals of their differing whims, and He removed from His servants the burden of those things in which they might differ, and left them free to continue the mission of discovering God's secrets in the universe by empirical science, as they wish; if they want to advance, let them apply their minds which God created to the universe which God created with the power which God created, in order that they make themselves happy and push themselves towards advancement. And if any of them finds out a fact about the universe and discovers one of the secrets of the universe, he will not be offering the people anything new connected with religious guidance, and so they will accept this new thing and will not oppose him.

So, it is possible that scientists can unravel some of the material mysteries of the universe by using empirical science, and these are things which people would willingly agree upon; but people can differ about those things which come from their whims because each one of them has his own whim, and each one of them wants to follow his own whim and not the whims of others. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to protect us from caprices, and so He said to us, '…Enter completely into Islam….' That is, enter into every facet of Islam so that conflicts of whims will not affect society.

Be, o believer, at peace with yourself so that your tongue does not contradict what is in your heart. Do not be a believer with your tongue and a disbeliever in your heart; be at harmony with yourself so that you do not suffer from inner turmoil. Also, enter into peace with the universe in which you live: with the sky, and the earth, and with animals and with plants. Be at peace with all of these creatures because they have been created in a state of compulsion and obedience to God; so, do not go astray yourself lest you incur their anger and resentment.

Be in harmony with time, as well, for the time in which you disobey God's Way of guidance will curse you, as will the place. If you want to spread your peace throughout the universe, you must do as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught you, and extend peace towards the whole universe. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* would spread peace through times and places; for example, He *peace and blessings be upon him* would fast more than anyone else in the month of *Sha'ban,* and when the Companions asked him about this, he told them that *Sha'ban* is a month which people ignore because it falls between *Rajab* – one of the four sacred months – and *Ramadan* (the month of fasting), and so he loved to greet this month which the people ignored. It is as though the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to please this time by associating an act of worship with it so that it would not be inferior to other times and months.

Likewise, places want to be pleased by you, and every place is pleased when God is remembered within it. After commanding us all to enter into Islam with 'Do' and 'Do not', the True Lord *the Most High* warned us against following Satan because he is the one who works to make us stray far from God's Way of guidance, and so He *the Exalted* said, '…and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.'

Why should we not follow in Satan's footsteps? Because of his enmity towards mankind is a long-standing enmity. He took this stance in relation to Adam *peace be upon him*, and after that he swore by God's might that he would lead all of you astray. By telling us this story, the True Lord *the Most High* gave us immunity so that Satan would not surprise us. The True Lord *the Most High* only told us the story of Satan and Adam *peace be upon him* in clear terms in order to give us immunity which is indicated by the fact that when we want to protect our bodies, we give ourselves immunisations before the illness comes: we protect ourselves against polio, cholera, and so on. It is as though God *the Most High* reminds us of the story of Satan and our father Adam *peace be upon him* in order to say to us: Be aware that his enmity is a lasting one.

Since Satan holds a long-standing enmity towards you, he will not take you by surprise because God has told you what happened with the first man. When Satan is mentioned in the Quran, sometimes what is meant by him is the disobedient jinn – for an obedient jinn is just like an obedient human being – and sometimes what is meant are the wicked demons from amongst mankind. So some jinn are demons, and some humans are demons as well.

In order to tell the difference between what Satan makes to allure you and what your own soul makes to allure you, notice the following: if you find that your heart is bent upon one particular act of disobedience, know that the cause is your own soul because the soul wants you to disobey in a way which will satisfy something it craves, and so it will insist upon it. If a person loves wealth, his base soul would overcome him through wealth; another person loves sex, and so his soul would overcome him through women; a third person loves pride and praise, and so his soul would overcome him through those who flatter him hypocritically. But Satan does not insist upon any particular form of disobedience: if he sees that you have refused to do one sin, he will try and tempt you to do another because he wants you to sin in any way.

The True Lord *the Most High* warns us: '…and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.' There is no enmity clearer than that of Satan after he opposed Adam *peace be upon him* and threatened, as the True Lord *the Most High* related about him, to beguile Adam's children all into grievous error except those of them who are truly and genuinely God's servants (*Sad:* 82-83).

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَإِن زَلَلْتُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْكُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتُ فَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٠٩﴾

If you slip back after clear proof has come to you,
then be aware that God is almighty and wise [209]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 209)

To 'lapse' (*zalla*) means to disobey, and it is derived from the verb (*zala*), which means for something to cease being straight and upright. It is as though everything has its proper upright position, and to depart from this is considered a 'slip' (*zalal*)*;* and a 'slip' means those sins and acts of disobedience by which the upright way is contravened.

By saying, '…after clear signs have come to you…' God *the Most High* explains to us: There can be no excuse for you to stumble because I have clarified everything for you, and I have not left you to your own minds; it is logical that you utilise your minds correctly to manage the motions of the universe in which I have made you My vicegerents; but despite this, if heedlessness afflicts you, I send messengers. This is why He *the Exalted* said that He would never chastise before He has sent a messenger (*al-Isra':* 15).

Out of God's mercy on mankind He sent the messengers to show mankind the right way from the crooked way. The True Lord *the Most High* left some things for mankind to deduce by their own intellect, and then Islam approved of what they deduced, in order to teach us that if the mind is healthy and logical, it is able to be guided to the right conclusion by itself. In the history of Islam, we find that our master 'Umar *God be pleased with him* had certain opinions and made certain suggestions, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* agreed with them, and then the Quran was revealed in accordance with what 'Umar *God be pleased with him* suggested. Someone might wonder about this, and say: 'Would it not have been more appropriate for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to do this?'

We say: If these opinions had come from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, it would not have been unusual because the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is infallible and divinely inspired. But God wanted to say to us: When the natural intellect is pure, it can be guided to the right conclusion even if this conclusion has not yet been revealed from heaven. This is why many of the orientalists were so perturbed by our master 'Umar *God be pleased with him* that they said: 'Do you not have anyone but 'Umar? What about Muhammad?'

We say to them: 'Umar *God be pleased with him* was educated in the school of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and everything he said, he took from the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* and 'Umar *God be pleased with him* himself acknowledged this when he said, 'There would be no 'Umar were it not for Islam.' We use 'Umar *God be pleased with him* as an example because he was an ordinary human being, not a messenger, and he was subject to all that other human beings are subject to, and he received no Divine revelation, nor was he infallible.

So, it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to take us closer to the power of deduction and understanding so that we would all be like ‘Umar because ‘Umar was guided to the truth by natural disposition. He would say to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘We should do this,’ and then the revelation would come down in agreement with what he said. It is as though God did not command us excessively, but rather, His commands of moral responsibility came to protect the intellect from the caprices of the soul which stifle the intellect. The nemesis of idea is caprice, and were it not for caprice, all ideas would be united in agreement.

In the past, they used to tell the parable of the woman who made it summer and winter in a single night. Her son and daughter both got married, and all four lived with her in one house: her son and his wife, and her daughter and her husband, and the woman with them. She would sleep a little and then, go to her daughter and say, ‘Keep your husband warm and please him, for the weather is cold,’ and then go to her son and say, ‘Keep off your wife, for it is very hot!’

It was the same place, on the same night, but the woman made it summer and winter at the same time; and the cause of this was the caprice of the soul. God *the Most High* clarifies this when He says that if the truth were to follow their inclinations, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them (*al-Mu’minun:* 71).

So, the True Lord *the Most High* protects us from error when He legislates for us. Human beings are destined to fail when they make laws by themselves for themselves, trying to lessen the mistakes of man-made laws by legislating other things to alter what they already have. If you look at the laws they have altered, you will say that these changes are in line with Islam, or are close to Islam.

In America, some people asked me, ‘Why did Islam not prevail over all other faiths, yet, you say that God *the Most High* says in His Book that He would make Islam prevail over all religions (*at-Tawba:* 33), yet your religion has not prevailed over all other religions, and many people are still not Muslims, whether they are Jews, Christians, or agnostics?’ I answered: if you reflect on God’s words that Islam would prevail however hateful this may be to disbelievers and however hateful this may be to polytheists (*at-Tawba:* 33), this would show you that the rise of Islam occurred in the presence of disbelievers, and in the presence of polytheists; if it had risen without there being anything else with it, then who would find it hateful? The doctrine that the people of disbelief hate is the same which gives might to the existence of Islam. Therefore, the statement that Islam would be made to prevail over all other religions indicates that the rise of Islam entailed the existence of disbelievers and idolaters, both of whom would exist, and would hate the spread of the religion.

We all witness the events of life which disturb the western nations when they find errors in their legislations and try to alter them, but they cannot find any proper way of altering them other than adopting the laws of Islam, which they do not adopt as a religion, but rather as a system. Their recourse to Islam is a clear proof and a confirmation of the soundness and correctness of the laws of Islam. Had they taken those laws as religious laws, some people would have said, 'They have only shown allegiance to the religion in which they believe by applying its laws;' yet despite their hatred for the religion they are forced to adopt its teachings, as though there is no solution for them other than to adopt what Islam established.

So, God's words that He will make Islam prevail over all other religions (*at-Tawba:* 33) show the strength of the system of Islam: you do not believe in it, but yet, you are forced to adopt it. In Italy, for example, they used to criticise Islam because it allows divorce, and they considered this to be a contravention of women's rights; but then, conditions of life and domestic problems forced them to legalise divorce. Did they legalise it because Islam said so? No, but rather, they found that they could only solve their problems by doing it.

And in America, when they waged a broad campaign against alcohol, did they ban it because Islam banned it? No; but rather, because the realities of the healthy life required them to do so. So the words: however hateful this may be to all disbelievers, and however hateful this may be to all polytheists (*at-Tawba:* 33) mean that they will turn to the system of Islam to solve their problems; if they do not adopt it as a religion, they will adopt it as a system.

'But if you lapse after clear signs have come to you, know that God is Mighty, Wise.' This means: beware of thinking that by your lapses, you have gained what you wish for and evaded God's judgement; for you shall return to God, and He is Almighty, and His Might lies in the fact that He always prevails and cannot be prevailed upon, and He manages our affairs with mercy and wisdom.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

هَلۡ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّآ أَن يَأۡتِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِي ظُلَلٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡغَمَامِ
وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَقُضِيَ ٱلۡأَمۡرُۚ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُرۡجَعُ ٱلۡأُمُورُ ٢١٠

Are these people waiting for God to come to them in the shadows of the clouds, together with the angels? But the matter would already have been decided by then: all matters are brought back to God [210] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 210)

That is, what are they waiting for? Are they waiting for things to catch them unawares so that they find themselves in a universe which, although they have enjoyed its bounties, will turn into chaff blown by the wind, whereupon mankind will come to the moment of reckoning?

God *the Most High* says, 'Are these people waiting….' The word for 'wait' (*nazhara*) is derived from the word *nazhar*, which means 'to consider', that is, to attempt to comprehend something general. Seeking to comprehend anything by any means is called 'consideration' (*nazhar*). For example, we say to someone who is speaking about an abstract concept, 'Do you have no consideration?' That is, do you possess the ability to comprehend, or not?

So, to consider means to seek to comprehend something: If you seek to see something by eyesight, this is *nazhar,* meaning 'to look at' with the eye; if you seek to know and understand, this is *nazhar*, meaning to contemplate with the mind and the heart. Sometimes the word *nazhar* can also mean 'to wait' (*intizhar*), which is to seek to comprehend something which is expected to happen.

The expression 'Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them…' which means: Are they waiting for the Hour to come and surprise them at the specific time? For it will not surprise anyone at a random time since it will be foreshadowed by signs, both major and minor; and the meaning of it having signs- major and minor- is that this is proof that God *the Most High* grants us respite so that we can correct ourselves; He will keep the door to repentance open until the sun rises from the west.

When we hear God's words 'Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them…' we say: What is it which has kept them from entering completely into Islam? What are they waiting for? It is just like when you say to someone standing inactive in front of you, 'What are you waiting for?' Likewise, the True Lord *the Most High* urges us to enter completely into Islam; if you do not, what are you waiting for?

Let us now look at the expression '…for God to come to them in shadows of clouds, with the angels….' When you say '…for God to come,' or 'Your Lord comes,' and God *the Most High* uses similar expressions in the Quran which pertain to things which we recognise as actions of created beings, such as 'coming' and 'going', and human features like 'face' and 'hand', we must understand them in the light of God's statement: There is nothing like Him (*ash-Shura:* 11); for God exists, and you exist, but is your existence like His? No.

God *the Most High* is Alive, and you are alive; but is your life like His? No. And God *the Most High* hears, and you hear; but is your hearing like His? No. And God sees, and you see, but is your sight like His? No. As long as you believe that He has attributes which are like those which you have, you must understand them in relation to God *the Most High* in the light of: There is nothing like Him.

Those who explain the 'Face of God' as His Being, and His hand as His power, and the statement that the hand of God is over their hands (*al-Fath:* 10) as meaning 'His power is over their powers,' we say to them: Why these interpretations? If we simply took these things the way the True Lord said them about Himself, but in the light of 'There is nothing like Him,' we would be safe from error: we would not neither liken Him to His creation, nor remove a text from its proper meaning.

This is why the people of discernment say: You should believe in God *the Most High* according to the image of faith in Him which He has given you, but in a way which does not go against the fact that 'There is nothing like Him.' If you imagine anything, your Lord is different from what you imagine; for whatever occurs to your mind, God *the Most High* is different from that, since nothing can occur to the human mind save those images with which it is familiar, and as long as they are familiar images this means they are creations of God, and He *the Most High* does not resemble His creation.

The moment the True Lord *the Most High* reveals Himself, all those who imagined God as having any particular form will be surprised that He is not as they imagined He was, and God will come to them with a reality which never crossed their minds; for if the image of the True Lord *the Most High* were in the minds of men, this would mean that they had become capable of imagining Him, and He is the All-Powerful Who can never be encompassed. It is part of His magnificence that the mind cannot physically imagine Him. Therefore, God *the Most High* gives us an example in order to illustrate this for us, saying that there are signs for men of belief in their own selves (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21). The spirit which resides in the realm of our bodies, and which if it exits from a person he becomes a corpse and then breaks down into components which rot and dry up – this spirit which is inside all of us cannot be envisaged by anyone, nor can its position or shape be ascertained. We cannot even envisage this spirit which was created by God, so, how can we hope to envisage the Almighty Creator?

The question ‘Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them…’ means: in a way which they had not expected. Are they waiting until they see the amazing, harmonious universe be obliterated, the whole universe be disintegrated and the sun overthrown, and the stars fall, and everything in existence change; and then they will be surprised to find themselves before their Lord. So what are they waiting for?

They must grasp the opportunity to act before all of this takes place, and before the chance slips from their hands and their possibility of returning to God ends. Why do they delay entering completely into Islam? What are they waiting for? Are they waiting for God to change or for God’s Way to change? This will not happen.

We emphasise again that when we hear something related to the True Lord *the Most High* which has an equivalent in humans, we must take this in the light of ‘There is nothing like Him;’ for just as you believe that God has an Essence which is not like other essences, you must also know that God has attributes which are not like other attributes, and that God has actions which are not like other actions. Do not affirm that God’s Essence is different from human essences, and then, take the attributes which God ascribes to Himself and make them just like human attributes. If God 'comes', do not imagine that His coming is such that He goes from one place to another, for He *the Exalted* is omnipresent and no place is devoid of Him, and this is part of His majesty.

When it is said '…for God to come to them…' do not think that His coming is like yours because His Essence is not like your essence and because people's actions differ according to their levels so that their actions differ according to their status and their attributes differ according to their status, whilst the True Lord *the Most High* is beyond all things and all imagination. Let us take everything about Him according to 'There is nothing like Him': your Lord's actions are different from your actions, and beware of subjecting His actions to the laws of your own actions; for your own actions require effort and time which differ according to your power and your ability, whilst God does things without any effort so that it takes Him no time at all, but rather, He says 'Be!', and it is.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us an image of the event which humans will not be able to choose to avoid, and so says: When this thing takes place, no created being will have any power over it, and all authority will be for God Alone.

Are these people waiting, probably, for God to come to them in shadows of clouds, with the angels; and by then the matter will have been decided? And to God all matters are returned.

'…In shadows of clouds….' There are things which shade you, and things by which you seek shade. You have no control over the things which shade you except inasmuch as you see where their shadow falls and so go to that place. There are other things which you can control, such as parasols, which you can open wherever you want. The word 'shadows' (*zhulal*) means things which cover you from the source of light; this meaning is illustrated in another verse, albeit in a different context, where the True Lord *the Most High* describes the state of people on board a ship in a storm where the waves engulf them like shadows (*Luqman:* 32).

That is, the greatest fear comes to them like a shadow engulfing them. It is as though God *the Most High* wants to tell us that the entire universe will be obliterated and there will come unto you the terrifying thing, the calamitous thing. The believer will have been expecting it, and it will be cool and peaceful for him because this is what he embraced faith for. But the disbeliever will be afflicted with the greatest fear because he will be surprised by something he will not have been expecting.

Compare the coming of this event to the one who was expecting it, and its coming to the one who was not expecting it. The True Lord *the Most High* is saying that when these shadows and the angels come, the matter will have been decided. When you hear, '…the matter will have been decided…' know that this means that the chance will have slipped from the hands of the people, and so those who have not already returned to their Lord will have no further chance to return. An example of this is what the True Lord said in the story of Noah *peace be upon him*: And the matter was decided and the ark came to rest on Mount Judi (*Hud:* 44).

That is, everything was over, and the people had no ability to repent what they had been doing. God *the Most High* says: What are you waiting for? Are you waiting until this day comes to you? You must take the opportunity to return to your Lord before the chance to go back slips away from you. '…And to God all matters are returned.' Sometimes, in other verses, we have a slightly different version of this statement: 'and to God all matters return.'

There is a difference between 'matters return' in the active form, and 'matters are returned' in the passive form. It is as though matters sometimes are said to move of their own accord, and other times they are said to be driven to God: the willing person will return to his Lord by himself because he will be going on to the goodness which he is waiting for; on the other hand, the unwilling one, who did not hope to meet his Lord, will be taken back against his will, and another force will come and send him back; those who do not come willingly will be made to come against their will.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

سَلۡ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ كَمۡ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُم مِّنۡ ءَايَةِۭ بَيِّنَةٖۗ وَمَن يُبَدِّلۡ نِعۡمَةَ
ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا جَآءَتۡهُ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ﴿٢١١﴾

[Prophet], ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs
We brought them. If anyone alters God’s blessings after he
has received them, God is stern in punishment [211]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 211)

It is as though God *the Most High* is not directly rebuking the children of Israel because He wanted them to admit themselves the good with which God honoured them previously. When you say, ‘Ask so-and-so what I did for him,’ you only ask that because of you are certain that he will not be able to answer in any way that does not support your side. The True Lord *the Most High* is telling His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the children of Israel about the goodness which He previously bestowed upon them, and He *the Exalted* well knows that despite their argumentative nature they will not be able to say anything which does not confirm the point which He is making, and will therefore become an argument against them.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs we have given them….’ When you hear the words ‘how many’ in a situation such as this, know that it is a way of affirming that something is copious, and is different to the expression ‘how many’ which is intended as a question. You say, ‘How many times have I done this for so-and-so,’ or ‘How many good turns have I done him,’ and ‘How indulging have I been with him,’ and ‘How generous have I been to him!’ So when you hear this kind of ‘how many’, know that it implies a large quantity which could be figuratively described as being ‘beyond counting.’

‘Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs we have given them….’ The True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us an example like the example of someone who usurps your wealth and denies your favours, and complains about you to others, and so you respond to the one who conveys to you his complaint: ‘Ask him about all the favours I have done for him;’ I myself will not talk, but rather will make him do the talking. You would not say this unless you are certain that he will not be able to deny a thing.

Did He not part the sea for them? Did He not transform Moses' staff into a snake? Did God not shade them with clouds? Did God not give them manna and quails? God gave them all of this, and they did not give thanks for God's blessings, and so they incurred His wrath. He afflicted them with drought and famine, and sent upon them lice, frogs, and blood; God did all this with them. And when the True Lord *the Most High* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Ask the Children of Israel…' this applies also to the community of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. If one of them comes to you, ask him: 'How many signs did God give to you, and then you denied them, and procrastinated, and were stubborn?' Now we come to the question: '…how many clear signs we have given them….' The words 'how many' indicate a large quantity, and 'sign' means a miraculous thing, and 'clear' means something plain which no one can fail to notice.

'Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs we have given them. And whoever changes the favour of God after it has reached him; assuredly God is severe in chastisement. How can someone change God's favour? When God's favour comes to a person, they should meet it with gratitude; and 'gratitude' means to ascribe the favour to the One Who gave it, and to be ashamed to disobey the One Who granted the favour to them. If people meet God's favour in any other way than this, it has thereby been changed. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* poses the question in another verse: Have you not seen those who have changed God's favour for disbelief? (*Ibrahim:* 28) Since they have preferred to deny it, this means that disbelief has taken the place of faith. So they should have met God's blessing with faith, and by drawing nearer to God, but they exchanged the blessing for disbelief.

'…And whoever changes the favour of God after it has reached him, assuredly God is severe in chastisement.' We might understand that 'severe in chastisement' is something related to the Hereafter; and perhaps there are some who see the Hereafter as something very far-off, or who do not believe in the Hereafter at all, and if this chastisement were confined to the punishment of the Hereafter only, people would be made miserable by those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or who see it as far-off because they would spread corruption throughout the earth, not fearing the Hereafter, or even believing in it, or even thinking of it at all.

The one who believes that the Hereafter will come and that there will be a reckoning therein, will behave according to this belief; on the other hand, the one who does not believe that there will be a Last Day, he will make the world miserable. If God had not made a form of immediate chastisement for those who do not believe in the Hereafter, or those who see the Hereafter as far-off, people would all be made miserable by those who do not believe, or who see it as far-off.

For every group which does not accept the way of God, and exchanges God's favours for ingratitude, it must be that God has some kind of immediate chastisement for them; this is so people know that he who is not deterred by faith and fear of the Last Day should be deterred by fear that retribution will come to him in this world. If a wrongdoer knows that another wrongdoer like him was punished and held to account in this world, he will fear to do wrong even if he does not believe in the Hereafter because he will be sure that he will definitely be held to account himself. This is why God *the Most High* does not delay all retribution to the Hereafter, but rather, He unleashes some of it in this world. The True Lord *the Most High* says about those who exchange God's blessings for ingratitude that they have caused their people to land in that abode of utter desolation, hell, which they will have to endure, and how vile a state to settle in (*Ibrahim:* 28-29).

This is the punishment of the Hereafter; and God *the Most High* will not leave them in this world without any punishment.

And even those who do wrong and deviate despite being Muslims, God will not leave them unpunished in this world, and will not delay their punishment to the Day of Resurrection; rather, something must happen to them in their worldly life to make them a lesson to others so that the motions of life will be upright for all people, otherwise people will suffer on their hands, and the hands of those who do not believe in the punishment of the Hereafter.

A righteous scholar used to say, 'O God, the people see Your Hereafter as being far-off, and Your forbearance has deluded them; so, take them to task as only the Almighty Who can determine all things!' For if He *the Exalted* delayed their punishment to the Hereafter, they would be corrupted and would be a trial for the believers around them. Because of this, God decreed to ordain, in His way of faith, laws of crime and punishment which take place in this world. Why? It is so that corruption is not spread by those who doubt in the Hereafter. God does not make His severe chastisement in the Hereafter only, but rather, He also makes it in this world as well, which is why God *the Most High* says that the one who turns away from His monition, his shall be a life of misery; and on the Day of Resurrection He shall raise him up blind (*Ta Ha:* 124).

Then He *the Exalted* says:

زُيِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱلَّذِينَ
ٱتَّقَوْا۟ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَن يَشَآءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢١٢﴾

The life of this world is made to seem glamorous to the disbelievers, and they laugh at those who believe. But those who are mindful of God will be above them on the Day of Resurrection: God provides immeasurably for whoever He pleases [212] (The Quran, *al-Baqara:* 212)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to make us see the place of man in the universe, this place which shows that he is the master of that universe, which means that all other beings serve him. We know that minerals serve vegetables, and minerals and vegetables serve animals, and minerals, vegetables and animals all serve man, and so man is the master of these beings.

Logic dictates that this master should search for a being higher than himself; for just as the beings below him were at his service, this higher being must in turn also merit mastery. Yet, he could find nothing in existence which is higher than the race to which he belonged, and so man should have said: I want another being to tell me about myself, for I am in dire need of this. And so when the messengers came and said, ‘The One Who is higher than you, o man, is God, and there is nothing like Him, and He is exalted above all species;’ man should have welcomed this information, for the knowledge of God solved the mystery for him. The messengers only came to solve the mystery which man was trying to solve, and so man should have rejoiced in the coming of the messengers, especially since God *the Most High* did not want any favour from him; man is the one who needs to worship God so, He will subdue all created beings for him, and he worships Him so that He gives him honour. So the believer stands between two things: between that which is compelled to serve him and is lower than him, namely the species of minerals, vegetables and animals, and One Who gives to him and favours him willingly and is higher than him, namely God.

So, if someone takes one of these and leaves the other, he has thereby taken the lower and left the higher, and so the True Lord *the Most High* says to him: Take the higher. If you are happy with what you are given by creatures which are lower than you, and you like to get more from them, how can you not want to get more from One Who is higher than you? He is God.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Beautified for those who disbelieve, is the life of this world…’, He wants to alert us to the fact that the standards of the disbelievers are inferior, base standards because the thing which seems goodly to them is the lower matter, and it is terrible judgement for a person to take the lower thing and favour it to the higher. When the word ‘beautified’ (*zuyyina*) is mentioned in the Quran, it is in the Arabic passive voice verb form, such as in God’s statement that beautified for man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, children and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver (*Al-ʻImran*: 14).

There, it is ‘beautified for man,’ and here in the verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara* which we are currently examining, it is ‘Beautified for those who disbelieve….’ Why did the True Lord *the Most High* say here ‘Beautified for those who disbelieve…’? It is because those who disbelieve have nothing, but the life of this world, for they do not believe in anything higher; but when it comes to people in general, God *the Most High* says that beautified for man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, children, heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, horses of high mark, cattle and lands. All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world – but the most beauteous of all goals is with God (*Al-ʻImran*: 14). He *the Exalted* is saying to mankind: Take life as it comes. The word (*zuyyinat*) literally means ‘was made beautiful. Who was it who made them beautiful? God *the Most High* made them beautiful. How can you forget the One Who made them beautiful for you, and made them attractive, and placed them under your command?

It was essential that you took them as a means to faith in Him Who provided them to you, and that whenever you see something beautiful in existence, you say ‘Glory be to God!’ and increase your faith in God. As for you taking the thing and removing it from the One Who created it, this is an inferior standard of judgement.

Or, God *the Most High* made them beautiful by placing in man instincts which are attracted to the things which this worldly life offers him. We say: Did He *the Exalted* give these instincts and then not give a way of guidance to elevate these instincts? No; He gave these instincts and also gave a way of guidance to elevate these instincts, so, do not take one and leave the other. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says that good lasting deeds are of far greater merit (*al-Kahf*: 46).

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Beautified for those who disbelieve is the life of this world…’ He exposes those who think that there is no life after this life. We say to them: This is an inferior standard, and an imprecise judgement, and proof of foolishness because you have gone to what is lower and discarded what is higher; and it is strange that you have done this; and then there are these clear differences between you and those who chose what is higher. You are in the lower position, and yet you ridicule those who gave regard to what is higher. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…and they ridicule those who believe….’ Why do they ridicule them? Because those who believe are devout, and as long as someone is devout, he will keep himself away from anything in existence which comes to him from an unlawful source, whilst those others have turned all their powers and faculties to all in life which is attractive to them.

This is why you find a person living within the means of his lawful income, owning nothing, but a single suit of clothes, while another person steals from others. You find that the latter person lives, by the wealth of others, with a fine and neat appearance, and when the two of them meet, the one who steals ridicules the one who lives lawfully. Why? That is because he sees himself as being superior to him; he sees himself in his neat and ‘chic’ attire. So the True Lord passes final judgement on this matter and says, ‘…but those who fear God are above them on the Day of Resurrection….’ Why on the Day of Resurrection? Are they not already above them now?

The True Lord *the Most High* is speaking about the way people see things; for they do not see inner peace, the harmony of a person's faculties when he goes to sleep having not inflicted upon himself a religious error, or a moral error, and having hurt no one, and having not engaged in corruption, and having not tale-borne or backbitten anyone; how will he be, when he thinks about his actions during the day before he sleeps? He will certainly feel a happiness which cannot be rivalled by the wealth of this world.

This is why God does not enter this feeling into the comparison, but rather, He uses something over which no one has power: '…but those who fear God are above them on the Day of Resurrection….' Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says that wrongdoers are wont to laugh at believers, and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another derisively, and whenever they return to people of their own kind, they return full of jests, and whenever they see those who believe, they say that these people have indeed gone astray but they have not been given the charge to watch over the beliefs of others (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-33).

And then, after this, the True Lord *the Most High* gives us the final picture: On the Day of Judgment, the believers will laugh at the erstwhile disbelievers as, resting in paradise on couches, they will look on and ask whether the disbelievers were justly rewarded for what they were doing (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36).

That is: 'Did We not know how to requite them?' We say, 'Yes, Lord!' – Particularly since the laughter of the Hereafter will not be followed by weeping.

God says, '…but those who fear God are above them on the Day of Resurrection….' Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* changes the usual approach in this verse since it might have been supposed that He would say: Those who believe, shall be above them. Instead, He said '…but those who fear God are above them…' because faith might only be nominal: it might be known of you that you are a believer, but this attribution is not enough to ensure that you will attain the highest rank unless your actions show you to be God-fearing.

So do not say, 'I am a believer', and then, someone else says, 'I am a believer', and the 'believers' come to number billions of people all over the world; we say to them: You cannot attain faith simply by name; you can only attain faith by adhering to the Way of Heaven. This is why God *the Most High* did not say: Those who believe shall be above them on Resurrection Day; but rather, He said, '…but those who fear God are above them…' in order to show the distance between the mere name and the real attribute. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, '…and God gives provision to whom He wills without account.' What is 'provision'? They say that provision is everything that is beneficial so that everything from which you benefit is your provision. According to this definition, thieves consider ill-gotten gains to be provision; but it is unlawful provision.

People always reduce the word 'provision' to one thing which is always on their minds, namely 'money.' We say to them no; provision is everything which brings benefit, and everything which gives benefit, is part of provision: your knowledge is a kind of provision; your moral character is a kind of provision; your honour is a kind of provision, and everything you benefit from is provision. When you say that all of this is provision, consider God's statement that those who are more abundantly favoured, are often unwilling to share their provisions with those whom their right hands possess so that they all might be equal in this respect (*an-Nahl:* 71).

It is as though God *the Most High* wants His creatures to share their provisions with others, and that everyone who has a distinction, and has more of some kind of provision, must share this with others; but people only understand provision to mean money; they do not understand that it means everything which is benefitted from.

If this is the case, then, what does '…and God gives provision to whom He wills without account' mean? We must understand the word 'without account' on the basis that account requires one who reckons, and one who is reckoned, and that for which he is reckoned. In this light, for the words 'without account,' who reckons, and who is reckoned, and for what is he reckoned?

It is provision without account from God. God *the Most High* might give you provision according to your work, or He might give you more; and He gives provision without account because there is no power higher than Him which could say to Him, 'Why did you give so-and-so more than he deserved?'

He grants provision without account because His stores are never exhausted; and He grants provision without account because no laws govern Him; He grants it by His Omnipotent Power. He *the Exalted* gives to the disbeliever so that you might be confused by this and say, ‘Why does He give to the disbeliever and not the believer?’

If anyone is able to hold Him to account, let them ask Him why this is so. He repays good deeds seven hundredfold, beyond all reckoning. There can only be reckoning when you take something which is countable: if you take, for example, one hundred from one thousand, you subtract one countable from another, and so it must become less, and when you see it becomes less, you are afraid to give more. But God is not like this, for He gives that which is countable from that which is beyond counting.

So, when you read ‘without account’, say that if reckoning comes from God to others, he does not give according to a person’s labour, but rather gives them more than this; and He does not reckon Himself, nor could anyone else hold Him to account. God addresses mankind saying that all that is with them is bound to be exhausted, whereas that which is with God is everlasting (*an-Nahl:* 96).

So, the statement that ‘…God gives provision to whom He wills without account’ should make every person keep his good manners and hold his tongue when he sees that someone else has been granted more provision than he has; for he does not know God’s wisdom behind this. There are many people who, when God gives them a blessing, say, ‘Our Lord has honoured us,’ but when He takes this blessing from them they say, ‘Our Lord has humiliated us!’ About this, God *the Most High* says that man, whenever his Lord tries him by His generosity and by letting him enjoy a life of ease, he says, ‘My Lord has honoured me;’ and whenever He tries him by straitening his means of livelihood, he says, ‘My Lord has disgraced me’ (*al-Fajr:* 15-16).

You are wrong when you consider a favour to be an honour from God; and you are also wrong if you think that withdrawal of favour is a humiliation from God. A favour is an honour from God only if He gives you the success to use this favour well; and a favour is only a humiliation if God *the Most High* does not give you the success to fulfil the right of the favour – and the right of the favour is always to thank the One Who gave it, and not to be distracted by it from the One Who provided you with it.

We should understand also that God’s words ‘…and God gives provision to whom He wills without account’ can have another meaning which is that

He *the Exalted* does not like for you to estimate your provision by a reckoning based on your work alone; for a reckoning based on your work might be incorrect, like in the case of the farmer who sows crops and then estimates what his provision will be according to what grows from the land, but then a pestilence might come and take everything away, as we see happening sometimes, and in such a case the provision of the farmer at that time comes from a different source which he had never thought of. Because of this, a person must work using the means available to him, but he must not make a reckoning based on these means, thinking that this is his provision; for provision might come from a place which never entered into your reckoning or your accounts. About this the True Lord *the Most High* says that for whoever fears God, God will always grant him a way out of misery and provide for him from whence he has never expected (*at-Talaq:* 2-3).

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says to us in another verse something which clarifies and elucidates the matter of doctrine and the succession of messengers on earth, which began and then, continued successively from one messenger to the next. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

كَانَ ٱلنَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنزَلَ مَعَهُمُ
ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ ٱلنَّاسِ فِيمَا ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فِيهِ ۚ وَمَا ٱخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ
أُوتُوهُ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتُ بَغْيًۢا بَيْنَهُمْ ۖ فَهَدَى ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لِمَا
ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فِيهِ مِنَ ٱلْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَهْدِى مَن يَشَآءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢١٣﴾

Mankind was a single community, then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So by His leave God guided the believers to the truth they had differed about: God guides whoever He will to a straight path [213] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 213)

Someone might say: If the people were one community, and God *the Most High* links the coming and sending of the prophets to their being one community, where did the conflicts in human life come from? We say: You must seek to explain this general verse in the light of another, specific verse, namely God's statement that mankind was but one community united in religion, but then, they differed; and if not for a word that preceded from the Lord, it would have been judged between them immediately concerning that over which they differed (*Yunus:* 19).

We must therefore take this verse in the light of the verse in the chapter of *Yunus:* when the True Lord *the Most High* addresses man, He addresses him in a way which will awaken his mind and his thought so that he can receive God's word with his entire intellect, and so that the whole Quran will be present in your mind, each part of it serving the other.

'Mankind was one community [before their deviation]; then, God sent the prophets….' Before God sent the Prophets, all mankind were one community who followed Adam *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* imparted to Adam *peace be upon him* His way of guidance after He elected him and guided him, and Adam taught his children the Way of God, and his children continued to have faith in a single doctrine, and nothing happened between them to make their caprices differ; for the world was vast, and no one lived in it save Adam *peace be upon him* and his children alone, and the bounties of the world were more than enough for everyone in it. So there was no squabbling over anything, and if someone wanted something, he could just take it, and possession was shared between everyone because no one had any private ownership of anything. If someone wanted to build a house, he could build it, even if it took up two thousand acres; and if someone wanted to eat a fruit or a berry from any orchard, he could take whatever he wanted.

An example of this from our daily lives: The head of a household might bring twenty kilos of oranges and put them before his children. Each child wants one or more oranges, so, he takes what he wants without any problems, but if he had only bought one kilo of oranges, every child would only be able to take one orange.

So, mankind were one community, that is, there was no greed, and no desire to monopolise beneficial things that could make them clash. The root of conflict is greed for worldly pleasures, and this is where caprice comes in.

This should have been the case after Adam *peace be upon him* took the way of guidance from God *the Most High* and taught it to his children: they should all have accepted the Way. But one of his children rebelled against God's Way, and love of monopolising arose because of the scarcity of those beneficial things which were monopolised; and from here, conflicts arose. The story of Cain and Abel explains this to us: each one of them offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them, but was not accepted from the other. And Cain said, 'I will surely kill you.' Abel replied, 'God accepts only from those who fear Him' (*al-Ma'ida*: 27).

We know that Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* are the root of existence, and Eve *peace be upon her* bore a set of twins every time, and Adam *peace be upon him* wanted to marry them to one another. But how could they be married when they were all his children, and the children of a single generation, and each one of them knew the other as a sibling?

The Sacred Law dealt with this matter at that time by considering the division to be that of separate pregnancies; in other words, if two children were born from the same pregnancy, they were considered siblings, whilst if one was born before or after the other, they were not considered siblings. In this way, Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* would wed those children to one another who were not born from the same pregnancy, and the purpose of this separation was so that the woman would be considered as not a close relation of her brother.

It is related from Ibn Abbas and Ibn Mas'oud *God be pleased with them* that Adam *peace be upon him* used to marry the male of one pregnancy to the female of another, and that Abel wanted to marry the sister of Cain; and he was older than Cain, and Cain's sister was beautiful and Cain wanted to take her for himself instead of his brother. Adam *peace be upon him* ordered him to give her in marriage to Abel, but he refused, and so he ordered them both to make a sacrifice. Abel offered a fattened lamb, as he owned sheep, whilst Cain offered a bundle of his worst crop. A fire came down and consumed Abel's offering, and rejected Cain's offering, so, he was infuriated and said to his brother, 'I will kill you so that you cannot marry my sister.' Abel replied that God accepts only from those who fear Him (*al-Ma'ida*: 27). So, the origin of the first dispute between men was that two people competed to have complete possession over something beneficial; and this was a clear example of what can happen when beneficial things are not sufficiently numerous to satisfy desires.

‘Mankind was one community….’ But they differed the moment they first began to seek to monopolise beneficial things, and every person came to have caprice. Had God willed to make the way of guidance He gave Adam *peace be upon them* last until the end of time, He would have done so, but in His Mercy, He knows that He created us, and He knows that we remember sometimes and forget at other times, and that we adhere sometimes and neglect at other times, and therefore God *the Most High* decreed to send His creatures the succession of messengers. This is what we understand from God’s words: ‘…then God sent the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners…’. The purpose of giving glad tidings and warnings is that people remember that there is a paradise and a Hell, and so every messenger gives those who believe in him glad tidings of paradise and warns those of them who disbelieve of Hell. The True Lord *the Most High* reminds us that He made us all bear witness against ourselves of His Oneness, saying that He brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their offspring and called upon them to bear witness about themselves that he was their Lord and they answered that they do bear witness to that. God reminds mankind of this lest they say on the Day of Resurrection that they were unaware of this; or lest they say that it was but their forefathers who, in times gone by, began to join idols with God, and that they were, but their late offspring; and they would ask God if He would destroy them for the doings of those inventors of falsehoods (*al-A‘raf*: 172-173).

God *the Most High* tells us that He *the Exalted* brought all of the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him* from their forebears to bear witness against themselves that God *the Most High* is their Lord and Sovereign, and that there is no god but He, just as He made it their natural disposition to do so. Then, after He sent them into existence through Adam *peace be upon him*, He came to the first man, Adam, and gave him His way of guidance at a time when caprice did not exist, and the way continued to be followed by the sons of Adam *peace be upon him*. After this, caprices grew numerous, and this only happens because of the desire to monopolise things of benefit, because of the fear that others will take them for themselves. So love of the self and egoism emerged, and when things of benefit were not enough to satisfy all the desires of the people, the love of monopoly and ownership spread.

We find this matter clearly illustrated when commodities are readily available and abundant in the markets so that you can buy any commodity at any time you like, and you find it readily available. When this is the case, there is no crisis; but crises arise when the available quantity of the commodity is less than the needs of the people so that they struggle to claim it for themselves. In this way, we see that when beneficial things exist but are not enough to meet desires, problems arise.

It is of the mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* with mankind, and the perfection of His knowledge of the weakness of mankind before their own caprices and their desire to monopolise benefits, that He sent messengers to mankind to give glad tidings and warnings, '…and sent down with them the Book in truth to judge between the people about that in which they differed. And none differed over the Book except those who were given it - after the clear proofs came to them….' It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* did not want to leave mankind to disagree, but rather, it was their own heedlessness which created this disagreement '…out of jealous animosity among themselves….' From this wise statement, we know that disagreement only arose out of a will based on 'jealous animosity' and jealous animosity arises when a person seeks to take what is not rightfully his. Whenever each of us wants to take what is not rightfully his, it is inevitable that hatred will arise.

'…And God guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission….' That is, God *the Most High* guides those who believe, from every nation, in the messenger who came as a herald of glad tidings, a warner and a bearer of the way of the True Lord *the Most High* in order to judge between the people in the matter of those things about which they disagreed. Thus, the way of guidance remains dominant until such a long time passed that the soul becomes heedless, and desires begin to come and cause God's way to be forgotten, and caprices arise, whereupon God sends messengers to return the people to the upright way. This continued until the message of Islam came as a seal, and God *the Most High* sent our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the entire world, and with this the True Lord *the Most High* ensured for us that no further disagreement would arise about the essential matters; for if we were to disagree about the essential doctrine, there would happen to us that which happened to the nations who came before us: they disagreed, so, God sent to them messengers as heralds of glad tidings and warners. But the True Lord *the Most High* wanted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to have a clear way which would protect them from disagreeing on the essential doctrine; and if people of the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* disagree, they must seek guidance from the true way embodied in the Quran and Sunna.

We know that one of the Prophet's distinctions is that he is truly the Seal of the Prophets, and you will not find, in the succession of messengers, any messenger whom God entrusted with establishing a new law which had not been revealed in the Book of God *the Most High* except our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. God gave our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* the mandate to issue laws on God's behalf, in light of how God made him infallible, as He *the Exalted* commanded the believers to accept willingly whatever the Messenger gives them and refrain from demanding anything that he withholds from them (*al-Hashr:* 7).

This is a clear command to the believers that they must obey the command of the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because what he commands them to do is good and right, and that they must refrain from what he prohibits them because He *peace and blessings be upon him* only forbids those things which entail no good for the believers. And the True Lord *the Most High* commands all the believers to obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because this is part of obedience to God, as he *the Exalted* says that whoever obeys the Messenger will be obeying God, and as for those who turn away, God had not sent the Messenger to be their keeper (*an-Nisa':* 80).

In this way we see that to obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is part of obeying God, and whoever refuses to obey him will be punished in the Hereafter. The True Lord *the Most High* emphasises coupling obedience to Him and obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when He commands His Messenger to proclaim to the believers to obey God and the

Messenger, and if they turn away, let them know that God does not love the infidels (*Al-'Imran*: 32).

Thus we know that obedience of the Most Merciful entails obedience of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. So God gave His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the mandate to legislate for mankind, and he *peace and blessings be upon him* does not speak out of his own desire.

Another distinction for the Islamic community is that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* left us the right to employ reasoning in those matters for which there came no text from the Quran or the *Sunna*, or for which there was a text, but it bore more than one interpretation. This means that the True Lord *the Most High* trusted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to arrive, by the use of reasoning, to a decisive settlement to any disagreement, and that no disagreement would arise about the fundamental matters. Had God known from pre-eternity that we would disagree about the true doctrine, He would have sent new messengers to us.

We find that all the disagreements between the Muslim factions do not go outside the bounds of different understandings of the texts of the Quran or the Hadiths of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that every Muslims seeks to derive his evidences from the Quran and *Sunna*.

This means that we have not abandoned the essentials, but rather, we each want to derive the correct ruling. Moreover, we find that some of the Muslims who could not find their evidence from the Quran and *Sunna* attempted to fabricate Hadiths which they ascribed to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to base the ruling they wanted upon them. Such people are destined for Hell because they have ascribed words to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* which he never spoke, and have lied against him; and whosoever lies against him intentionally, let him take his place in hell.

So, our point of convergence is the Quran and the Prophetic *Sunna*; so, where is the problem? The problem is that people should be intelligent and have knowledge so that they know whether an argument based on the Quran is acceptable or not, and whether Hadiths which have been properly subjected to textual criticism exist or not.

So, the judiciousness of reasoning and opinion in the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have made them trustworthy with every aspect of God's Way; and disagreements between them have not gone as far as was the case with the previous communities. But they must be vigilant, and ascend so that they can recognise those things which are not from the Quran, but which some people try to present as being from the Quran.

They must not explain the Quran by using their caprices, but rather by using what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought so that their caprice will be in line with what he brought. We must be aware that God *the Most High* entrusted the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Quran and the message of Islam, and the Quran and the message of Islam cannot be afflicted with alterations or corruptions; and all that is required, is that the believers be people of precision and sagacity so that if someone wants to abuse any temporal power, or fabricate a Hadith to promote his falsehood, the Muslims must uncover the evil intentions of this person.

We understand that God *the Most High* wanted Islam to support moral life, just as He willed water to support material life. In order for water to remain water, it must continue to be without flavour, colour, or smell. If you want to give it flavour, it loses its essential quality; it might become a drink, or juice, or the like. Some people might like a certain kind of juice, but everyone likes water because life is preserved by it. If you see a religion which has been coloured by a group, or an organisation, or a form, know that this is outside the sphere of Islam. Every group which wants to paint God's religion a certain colour, only thereby takes it out of its essential nature. This is why we find that our nation here in Egypt has preserved the sciences of Islam with the Noble Azhar University, and every Islamic scholar on the face of the earth is indebted to this noble university. And we find that we love the Household of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, but yet not one of us is Shi'ite, and at the same time, not one of us hates Abu Bakr or 'Umar *God be pleased with them*. This is Islam which cannot be coloured because Islam is the religion of man's instinctual disposition: '…the dye/religion of God. And who is better than God in giving a dye [ordaining religion]?…' (*al-Baqara*: 138).

So, those who try at any time to paint the religion with a particular form, or custom, or colour, or picture, or shape, we say to them: You want to take Islam away from the natural universality which God wants for it, and you must stop at the boundaries of the natural Islamic disposition, and not colour Islam in this way. In this way we will properly live up to God’s words: ‘…And God guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.’ We know that guidance means that which leads to a goal, and when God *the Most High* speaks of guidance, we must be aware that guidance from God has two different meanings: The first meaning is direction to the path which leads to the destination, and the second meaning is assistance.

I gave previously an example for this: that of the traffic policeman who shows you the way to get to the place you want to go – this is an example of the first meaning of guidance; if you respect his words and follow them, he will give you some assistance by going with you or taking you to the place you want to get to – and this is the second kind of guidance. So what about the True Lord *the Most High*, Who has the highest example? He guides everyone, meaning He shows them the way; and for those who believe in Him and love Him, He guides them a second time by helping them with that which they have chosen for themselves. Some of us are amazed when we hear the words of the True Lord *the Most High* that He offered the tribe of Thamud guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance; and so the thunderbolt of disgraceful suffering fell upon them as a result of all the evil that they had done, and God saved those who had believed and feared Him (*Fussilat:* 17-18).

Some of us might wonder: ‘How can He *the Exalted* say that He guided them, and then say that they preferred blindness to guidance?’ We say that the meaning of His having ‘guided’ them here is that he ‘pointed the way’ to them, but they preferred blindness to guidance; as for those who responded to the guidance of direction and believed, God aided them and saved them because they knew how to fear Him *the Exalted*.

We also hear some people saying: Since God guides whom He wills to a straight way, what is the fault of those whom He did not will to guide? We say: The True Lord *the Most High* guides whom He wills to a straight way, that is, He points to them the way to guidance; and if someone follows the guidance of direction, God *the Most High* gives him more with the guidance of assistance, and facilitates the matter for him. We know that God *the Most High* negated the ability to give guidance for His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in one verse and then affirmed it for him in another even though it is a single action with a single doer. The True Lord *the Most High* negated it when He told His Messenger that he cannot guide aright anyone whom he loves (*al-Qasas:* 56). And then He *the Exalted* affirmed it for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse, where He said to him that he does guide to a straight path (*ash-Shura:* 52).

From this we understand that guidance is of two kinds: the guidance of direction, so he 'guides' inasmuch as he directs people to the way of goodness; and there is another form of conceptual guidance which is from God, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is not involved in it, and this is the guidance of assistance.

So, God's words to His Messenger that he guides to a straight path (*ash-Shura:* 52) mean: You direct to the straight way, but God *the Most High* is the One who aids in this guidance, '…And God guides whom He wills to a straight path.' So, we must consider all of the verses in which God *the Most High* stated His will to guide a believer and not to guide someone else. The True Lord *the Most High* says that He does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the truth (*al-Baqara*: 264).

This means that God only guides those who believe in Him, and His guidance to the believers is by assisting them to continue to be guided; the guidance of direction came to everyone, but the True Lord *the Most High* distinguished the believers with the guidance of assistance. About this, the True Lord *the Most High* poses the rhetorical question on which is better: the one who has founded his building on God-fearing and His goodly acceptance or the one who has founded his building on the edge of a water-worn, crumbling river-bank so that it would tumble down with him into the fire of hell, and God does not grace with His guidance people who do wrong (*at-Tawba:* 109).

The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies for us the distinction between the one who founds the building of his life on God-fearing, seeking goodness and paradise – and he is the one who followed the guidance of direction when it came to him, so, the guidance of assistance also came to him from God – and the one who founds the building of his life on the edge of a crumbling river-bank which is close to falling so that the building falls down with him to the fire of hell. He is the one who ignored the guidance of direction when it came to him so that the guidance of assistance would not come to him; this is the wrongful hypocrite who desires bad things to happen to the believers. The True Lord *the Most High* tells his Messenger that it does not matter whether he prays for the forgiveness of the staunch infidels, or does not pray for them; for even if he were to pray seventy times that they be forgiven, God will not forgive them, seeing that they insist on denying God and His Messenger; and God does not grant His guidance to wicked people (*at-Tawba:* 80).

The True Lord *the Most High* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that however much he were to pray for the forgiveness of the hypocrites who pretended to be Muslims and concealed their disbelief, God *the Most High* would not forgive them. Why? That was because the guidance of direction came to them and they claimed to believe in it, and the guidance of assistance did not come to them because they disbelieved in God and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and God does not guide such wicked people who in their hearts are outside the Way of God. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

أَمۡ حَسِبۡتُمۡ أَن تَدۡخُلُواْ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأۡتِكُم مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ خَلَوۡاْ مِن
قَبۡلِكُمۖ مَّسَّتۡهُمُ ٱلۡبَأۡسَآءُ وَٱلضَّرَّآءُ وَزُلۡزِلُواْ حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَ ٱلرَّسُولُ وَٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُواْ مَعَهُۥ مَتَىٰ نَصۡرُ ٱللَّهِۗ أَلَآ إِنَّ نَصۡرَ ٱللَّهِ قَرِيبٞ ﴿٢١٤﴾

Do you suppose that you will enter the Garden without first having suffered like those before you? They were afflicted by misfortune and hardship, and they were so shaken that even [their] messenger and the believers with him cried, 'When will God's help arrive?' Truly, God's help is near [214]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 214)

That is, did you suppose you would enter paradise without any trials coming to you? The True Lord *the Most High* negates this supposition, and says that it is not so, but rather, the burdens of faith must be borne. If faith was a matter of words only, it would be easy; but what makes faith difficult is action, that is, making the soul follow the way of faith. Some of those who lived at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* were too arrogant to utter the testimonial of faith: 'There is no god but God,' because they understood what its requirements were. If it were only a matter of speaking words with no actions to back them up, it would have been easy for them to say it; but they would not say the word without fulfilling its rights, so they knew very well that if they said, 'There is no god but God,' all of their previous beliefs would have come to an end. But they did not say it because they were loath and averse to living up to its rights, and fulfilling its requirements.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Or do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by misfortune and hardship….' What is the relationship between this verse and the verses which came before it? The discourse before concerned the children of Israel who thought they would enter paradise without being tried first, and they came to have caprices with which they corrupted the Way of guidance. As for the community of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, they must prepare themselves for trials, and know how to bear hardships.

We know that in Arabic grammar, there are particles whose function is to negate and cause verbs to take the apocopate form. One of these particles of negation is lam, which means 'did not,' as in 'Zaid did not attend,' which refers to the past tense, as he might now be in attendance. But when you say 'Zaid has not attended yet' with the particle *lamma* ('not yet'), the negation is still continuing now, that is, he has not come at the time of speaking, but his attendance and his coming is expected. We find this meaning in the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that the Bedouins say that they have believed. Then He commands His Messenger to say to them that they have not attained faith yet; they should rather say that they have submitted (embraced Islam outwardly); for true faith has not yet entered their hearts (*al-Hujurat:* 14).

When the Bedouins heard this, they said, 'We praise God, for there is still hope that we will attain faith.' God wanted the Bedouins to be truthful with themselves; according to some exegetes, this verse was revealed about some members of the tribe of Asad who came to Medina in a year of drought, and they testified before the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, saying ‘There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.’ They were seeking charity, and attempted to ingratiate themselves with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying that they had not fought him as others had. This verse came to clarify that faith is a higher level than merely displaying Islam, but this does not mean that they were hypocrites, which is why the Noble Quran clarified that displaying Islam, does not mean one has faith because faith is a matter of the heart.

They announced their intention to submit to God, and they wanted to do the same things the Muslims did, but this is not all that faith means. They said that they have believed, and the True Lord *the Most High* answered them: No; you have not yet attained faith, but be truthful to yourselves, for faith is an act of the heart; it cannot be said that you have attained faith because it is something in your heart. Rather say, ‘I have submitted,’ that is, have submitted and done what the believers do. Yet, as to whether you did this out of faith or not, this is something else.

Here, the verse says, ‘…do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you?…’ That is, you cannot enter paradise without first coming to you trials such as the ones that came to the communities who lived before you, and you must be tested and tried with misfortune and hardship, and those who are still firm after this, truly deserve to enter paradise. Do not think your community is different from any other community in the matter of being tested; you shall not enter paradise without being tried; on the contrary, your trials will be commensurate with your blessings.

You shall take a high rank amongst the communities, and therefore your trials must be commensurate with your rank. If you are people of a high rank, and shall carry the Final Message, and spread throughout the world, your trials must be commensurate with the immensity of your responsibility and your mission.

The verse says, ‘…while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by misfortune and hardship and were shaken….' God's word '*lamma*' ('has not yet') indicate that the trials which came to those who lived before them would also come to the believers.

When you reflect on God's word *'zulzilu'* ('were shaken'), you will discover a unique onomatopoeic feature of the Arabic language, which is how the sound of the word expresses the meaning of the action. The verb *zulzilu* is derived from the word *zalzala* which is made of two parts: *zal* and *zal. Zal* means 'to drop from one's place', or 'to fall from one's place', and the second part has the same exact meaning, i.e. 'to fall from one's place', so, the word as a whole gives us the meaning of a repeated fall, a first fall and then a second; and the second fall is not a continuation of the first fall, but rather, it is in an opposite direction. If it was in the same direction, in would be in sequence; but the second fall is in the opposite direction to the first fall, as though it tumbles to the right first, and then to the left.

Likewise, the word *khalkhala* ('loosen by shaking') means to move in two opposite directions: the first *khal* is to the right, and the second *khal* is to the left, and in this way the loosening (*khalkhala*) continues.

In this way, the meaning of the word *zalzala* has within it the element of the change of direction which is termed 'inertia'. An example of this is what happens to someone when he is riding in a car and the driver forcefully and abruptly presses the brake. When this happens, the passenger is propelled forwards once and then backwards once; and perhaps the rear window of the car might break if the propulsion is strong enough. What is the cause of this propulsion? The cause is that the body of the passenger was set for moving forwards, and the driver stopped the car whilst the passenger was still set for forward motion, so, he rocks, and might bump into part of the car's interior when it stops so suddenly. The action of 'shaking' (*zalzala*) is just like this, as something is made to rock back and forth or left and right, in any two opposite directions.

So, the term '…were shaken…' means that they were stricken with the greatest calamity, recurring disastrously; and recurring not in the same pattern, but rather in numerous patterns: sometimes concerning faith, other times concerning misfortunes and events; and it kept recurring until the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believed with him said: 'When is the help of God?' This was followed by the statement: '…Unquestionably, the help of God is near.' Did they doubt at first, and then return to their senses and say to themselves, '…Unquestionably, the help of God is near,' or is this a clarification that the matter swings back and forth between 'When is the help of God?' and '…Unquestionably, the help of God is near'?

At the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the trials and tribulations reached their upmost limit, yet despite this, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and those with him continued to cling to their faith. Misfortune and hardship befell them, and they were shaken, that is, afflicted with a mighty upheaval which unsettled them so that the effects of this unsettling reached the point where '…the messenger and those who believed with him said, 'When is the help of God?' Unquestionably, the help of God is near.'

The form of this question 'When is the help of God?' means that help at first was seen to be slow in coming, and then, the glad tidings came after that with God's words: '…Unquestionably, the help of God is near,' and this was not due to any doubt or uncertainty in it. This worry about the slow coming of the help coupled with this expression of glad tidings, came in the midst of the violent shaking, when thoughts had become confused so that some people said 'When is the help of God?' whilst other voices in the midst of the battle responded to them, saying, '…Unquestionably, the help of God is near.'

The context of the verse indicates that the ones who said, 'When is the help of God?' were the Companions, and the one who said '…Unquestionably, the help of God is near' was the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The True Lord *the Most High* then discusses another matter, something which had become prevalent in this form, namely the questions of the believers about various things. This was a sound phenomenon of faith; and it was possible for the believers to refrain from asking about things for which no religious ruling had been issued, out of fear that the answer would lead to restriction of freedom. This is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said:

Leave me regarding those things which I have left [mentioning to] you; for those who came before you were only ruined by their excessive questioning and differing with their Prophets. If I command you with something, do it as well as you can; if I forbid you something, keep away from it.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Maja, and Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him*

Despite this, they would still ask about the most detailed aspects of life, and this phenomenon confirmed that they yearned for responsibilities from God; they wanted to base all their actions on Islam, and they wanted to ask about the ruling of Islam for every action so that they could act on its principles. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ ۖ قُلْ مَآ أَنفَقْتُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ وَٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ
وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱبْنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ۗ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِهِۦ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١٥﴾

They ask you [Prophet] what they should give. Say, ‘Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and travellers. God is well aware of whatever good you do [215] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 215)

The question came from ‘Amr ibn Al-Jamuh, a very elderly man who said, ‘O Messenger of God, I have much money, so, how much charity should I give, and to whom should I give it?’ He was not only asking for himself, but was expressing the feelings of others as well, which is why the answer was in general terms, and did not refer to the questioner alone, but rather encompassed all believers.

The question was about ‘…what they should spend…’, so, it is as though they were asking about the thing to be spent. Spending on others (*infaq*), as we know, requires a spender, and a spent thing – namely money – and someone who is spent on. They asked about what they should spend on others, as though the matter of spending on others itself was a given, but they wanted to know what they should spend. So the question concerned that particular aspect, and the response answered that aspect and also something else.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘They ask you, [O Muhammad], what they should spend….’ This is the question, and the answer is: ‘…Say, “Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents….”’ A person of superficial understanding may say that the question is only about what should be spent, and may ask why the answer was about whom it should be spent on. We say: No; why have you forgotten that God says that the spending must be from that which is ‘good’ (*khair,* which means both ‘good’ and ‘wealth’ in Arabic)? The money which is spent on others must be able to be described as having come from a good source.

After this, He elaborates and explains: As long as you believe that spending on others is obligatory, you must know what it is you should spend, and who deserve to be spent upon. '…Say, "Whatever you spend of good…"' and *khair* means something good and beneficial. The ones to be spent upon are the members of the social circles of the one who spends, because God wants to make the believer responsible for his personal circles so that each circle will link with the other and all of society will become responsible for all of society; for when He *the Exalted* makes me responsible for my family, parents, and relatives, this is a means for the security of the family. We all have parents and relatives; my circle encompasses my parents and relatives, and then spreads to something else: orphans and the needy.

Take every person and gauge his circles of parents, relatives, and the orphans and needy around him, and you will find that the adjacent circles encompass all those in need, and all members of the society will be responsible for one another, and after this there will be no one left but those who are unable to work. We know that the one who asked this question was 'Amr ibn al-Jamuh; and he had an amazing story: he was lame, and the lame are excused by God from having to participate in fighting, for there is no blame on the blind, the lame, or the sick for not taking part in fighting.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was about to go out to a battle when 'Amr ibn Al-Jumuh came to him and said, 'O Messenger of God, do not forbid me from struggling (in God's Way), for my sons have forbidden me from going out to fight because of my lameness.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* answered him, 'God has excused you amongst those whom He excused.' He said, 'But Messenger of God, I would love to enter paradise by my lameness!'

This was the one who asked about what they should spend on others, and the answer came from the True Lord *the Most High*: '…Say, "Whatever you spend of good …"' that is, the money you give – for to spend means to give, and good (*khair*) here means money, and spending means all that money that goes out of a person's possession in the form of a purchase, a gift, or a grant.

The root of the Arabic word *infaq* (‘to spend’) is the verb *nafaqa*, which means for a market to sell out: if you go to the market and find there are no goods left, this means that the market has sold out; whereas if you find the goods are piled up, this means that the market is still ongoing.

So, for a market to ‘sell out’ (*nafaqa*) means that all the goods go from it, just as life goes out of an animal which is why we also use the verb *nafaqa* to mean ‘die’. The ways of spending were specified by God *the Most High* in saying, ‘…for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer….’ Is every orphan in need? An orphan might have inherited wealth, but we must understand that it is not only about fulfilling a needy person’s need, but also about standing by a person who is weak in any way; for when a child is orphaned – although he may possess wealth – and then he sees you show him affection, he will feel as if his father has not died because his fatherhood remains in his believing brethren, and thereafter he will not grow up envying children whose parents are still alive. But if an orphan sees that every father is too busy with his own children to bother with orphans whose fathers have died, he will feel resentment, and the tendency to resent fate will develop in him, and he will feel: Why was I the one whose father died? But when he sees that all people are his parents, and they greet him with smiles, love, welcome and support, he will feel that when someone has one father the people leave him to rely on his father, but if his father dies, people turn to him with affection and love; and as a result of this, love will spread through the Islamic community, as will contentment and satisfaction with God’s decree, and no one will object to the death of one’s father; for when fate has taken his father, it has left for him many other fathers.

Those who neglect to show love and affection to an orphan just because his father left him enough money to suffice him – if they knew what spiritual benefits came from this affection, they would compete with one another to show him affection. It is not about material needs, but about spiritual needs.

I always say that we must instil in the youth the understanding that God never causes any of His creatures to die when there is a need for them in the world; consider this matter with respect to those around you, and you will find that someone dies and leaves behind young children, and so his family and friends are saddened because he has left his young children, and then, they forget about it after this; and time passes, and then the people are surprised to find that this man's children have become the leaders of the neighbourhood. It is as though their father was blocking off their provision so that when the father died, God opened the stores of provision for the children; and this is so that no one becomes deluded by a material cause.

After spending on orphans, we find that we should then spend on the needy and the wayfarer. We know that the needy person is one who is in need, and that the wayfarer is the one who is cut off from his family and his wealth during travel. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying, '…And whatever you do of good, indeed, God has knowledge of it.' God wants to turn human nature to a concept, which is: Beware of seeking the reward for the good you do for these people from any human being, but rather seek it from God; and beware of trying to make yourself known to the people as someone who spends on near kin, orphans and wayfarers, for those to whom you wish to be known are not able to reward you, and their knowledge of you will not increase you in anything. It is enough for you that God knows what He has given you, and that which you have given from what He put you in charge of by way of seeking His pleasure. When people spend to please others, they will find ingratitude and denial in return so that the one who gives, has wasted what he spent, and only preserved the evil of those whom he spent upon.

If a Muslim, by spending and doing good, intended to seek the pleasure of the Sublime Creator *the Most High*, he would thereby preserve what he spent as good deeds and reward on the Day of Resurrection, and God would soften the hearts of those upon whom he spent with love and gratitude for the favour; and this is the justice of God which is manifested in that He does this with those who give ostentatiously, for they give, whilst having it in mind that they are giving only to the recipient; if they had given to God, the recipient would not have shown ingratitude for the favour they gave. You gave to them to please them, and so it is as though God is saying to you: I will leave you for them to reward you. This is why the one who gives charity secretly, will be one of the seven whom God will place in His shade on a Day when there is no shade but His; for amongst them are: '…A man who gives charity and conceals it so that his left hand does not know what his right hand spends.'(1) This is the best way to give supererogatory charity; as for the obligatory poor-due, it is better to give it publicly. The same is true in the case of prayer: it is better to perform the obligatory prayer publicly, whilst supererogatory prayers are best offered privately.

But if God *the Most High* is on your mind when you act, you will find the effect of the giving in the gratitude of the recipient. Beware of trying, even slightly, to make people aware that you are doing good deeds.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* brings back a topic that He had treated earlier in saying, '…and do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there…' The True Lord *the Most High* brings back the subject of fighting, and speaks about the general principle of fighting, saying:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهٌ لَّكُمْۖ وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تَكْرَهُواْ شَيْـًٔا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْۖ
وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تُحِبُّواْ شَيْـًٔا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ٢١٦

Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it. You may dislike something although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you: God knows and you do not' [216] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 216)

To hate fighting is a natural thing, a thing which the Creator of mankind acknowledges; therefore, He *the Exalted* does not treat the issue in a sophistic way, like saying, 'Now what is wrong with fighting?' No; the Creator says: I know that fighting is hateful, and so when you are afflicted by that which you hate, you know that the One Who legislated it, took this into account. Had the True Lord *the Most High* not said that fighting is hateful, people would have understood that God was presenting something difficult as though it were easy.

God *the Most High* is saying to those who believe: Know that you will have to undergo hardships and difficulties, and to leave your wealth, and leave your pleasures and comforts. This is why we find that the great leaders who excelled in politics and succeeded in leadership, did not like their peoples to enter battles unless they were forced to; and when they were forced to, they would make it clear to their armies that they were fighting to ward off that which was even worse than fighting. This means that they mobilised the human soul so that it could face the situation with all its power, and all its faculties, and all its will.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him*

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Fighting has been ordained for you even though it is hateful to you….’; He *the Exalted* is saying to us: I know that fighting is hateful to you, but I want to instil a concept in you, which is that you cannot judge the great issues with your own knowledge because your knowledge is always imperfect; rather, take issues according to My Own knowledge; for I might ordain something hateful, but then good comes from it, whilst you might see something as beloved, yet, evil comes from it. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* alerts us to the fact that there are many things which we love and yet, they bring us evil so that one of us might say, ‘I was expecting something good from this, but it brought me evil instead.’

And there are other things which you think will bring evil, yet they bring good. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* leaves clues in society so that people can be sure that God *the Most High* does not make goodness proceed according to the requisites and standards of human knowledge, but rather, the judgement proceeds according to the requisites, standards and knowledge of the Lord of mankind. Let us consider, for instance, what the True Lord *the Most High* says about this as an example to mankind in the story of Moses and his servant during their wanderings: Moses said to his servant that he will not give up his journey until he reaches the junction of the two seas, even if he has to spend many years in his quest. But when they reached the junction between the two seas, they forgot all about their fish, and it took its way into the sea and disappeared from sight. And after the two had walked some distance, Moses asked his servant to bring them their lunch as they have indeed suffered hardship on that day of their journey. The servant told Moses that when they took rest at that rock he forgot about the fish and that was the doing of none but Satan, and the fish strangely took its way into the sea. Moses exclaimed that that was the place they were seeking; and the two turned back, retracing their footsteps (*al-Kahf*: 60-64).

Moses *peace be upon him* was heading with his servant to the junction of the two seas, which is said to be somewhere in the east, and they had with them some food, namely a salted fish. But the journey and the hardship made them forget the fish, and by a sign from God, the fish found its way back to the sea. When Moses *peace be upon him* arrived at the junction of the two seas, he asked his servant to bring them the food after this long toil, but the boy told Moses *peace be upon him* that he had forgotten the fish, and that none but Satan had made him forget it, and that the fish had made its way back to the sea. Moses *peace be upon him* said, ‘This is the sign we were looking for to tell us that we had reached our goal, the junction of the two seas.’ That is, ‘What happened with the fish, and how it was lost, were what we have been seeking – the sign they were waiting for; and the man whom we have come to see is there in that place.’ So, Moses *peace be upon him* and the servant turned and retraced their steps.

So, what happened? Moses *peace be upon him* met the righteous servant al-Khidr *peace be upon him*, who was one of the Friends of God to whom God had taught from the Lordly knowledge which He grants to His pious servants as a fruit of their sincerity and God-fearing. Moses *peace be upon him* asked this godly servant, our master Al-Khidr *peace be upon him*, to teach him something of the guidance he possessed. But this godly servant, to whom God had given knowledge which was beyond the cognisance of human capability, said to Moses *peace be upon him* that he will never be able to have patience with him, as how could he be patient about something that he cannot understand within the compass of his experience (*al-Kahf*: 67-68).

Moses *peace be upon him* had already known that losing the fish was something which appeared to be bad, but was actually good because this was the way and the sign by which Moses *peace be upon him* could recognise how to reach the righteous servant. The very same concept continues in the story of Moses and the righteous servant: events which seemed to be evil but which were actually good, whether it be story of the boat which he breached, or the lad whom he killed, or the wall which he rebuilt. The knowledge of the righteous servant was Lordly knowledge, which is why Moses *peace be upon him* wanted to learn some of this knowledge; but the righteous servant had warned Moses *peace be upon him* that what he might see, would be beyond the limits of his patience, for the things which Moses *peace be upon him* would see, would appear to be evil to him, when actually they were good.

Moses *peace be upon him* agreed to take the position of a student and have proper manners with his teacher to whom God had given this Lordly knowledge; and the righteous servant stipulated that Moses *peace be upon him* must not ask about anything until he himself gave him an account of it. Moses and the righteous servant *peace be upon them* came across a boat, and boarded it, and then the righteous servant damaged the boat, and Moses *peace be upon him* asked him why he made a hole in it – was it to drown the people in it? Indeed, he has done a grievous thing (*al-Kahf*: 71). The righteous servant replied by asking Moses: Had he not told him that he will never be able to have patience with him? (*al-Kahf*: 72). Moses *peace be upon him* recalled that he had promised the righteous servant *peace be upon him* to be patient; but what could Moses have done when he saw the righteous servant *peace be upon him* breaching a boat which was carrying them in the sea? This is something difficult for the soul, and so Moses *peace be upon him* asked the righteous servant not to take him to task for having forgotten, and not to be hard on him on account of what he has done (*al-Kahf*: 73).

Moses *peace be upon him* returned to the promise which he had made to the righteous servant, and asked him only not to burden him with things beyond his capability. The righteous servant *peace be upon him* set off again with Moses *peace be upon him*, and the righteous servant *peace be upon him* found a lad and killed him, whereupon Moses *peace be upon him* asked him why he had killed an innocent soul without him having killed another person. Indeed, he has done a deplorable thing (*al-Kahf*: 74).

The righteous servant *peace be upon him* reminded Moses *peace be upon him* that he would not be able to have patience with him, and Moses *peace be upon him* apologised for what he had not known. The righteous servant *peace be upon him* continued on with Moses *peace be upon him* until they reached a village whose inhabitants they asked for hospitality, but the people of the village refused to provide it to them, and then the righteous servant *peace be upon him* found in it a wall which was about to fall down and began to rebuild it, whereupon

Moses *peace be upon him* told the righteous servant that had he so wanted, surely he could have obtained some payment for it (*al-Kahf*: 77).

This spelt the parting of ways between the righteous servant and Moses *peace be upon them*, and the righteous servant *peace be upon him* informed Moses *peace be upon him* of what he had no knowledge and had not borne patiently: the boat was breached to save its owners from having it seized from them, for there was a king who was wont to seize every good boat by brute force, so, he wanted to damage it so that the king would leave those needy people alone.

And the killing of the youth was a mercy for his believing parents, as their son would bring them wickedness and disbelief, and God *the Most High* wanted to give them something better in his stead.

And the wall which he rebuilt stood over a treasure which belonged to two orphans from that village whose father had been a righteous man, so, the wall had to be rebuilt until the boys came of age, so they could dig up their treasure. And as God *the Most High* tells us, the righteous servant said that he had not done any of this of his own accord; that was the real meaning of all those events that Moses was unable to bear with patience (*al-Kahf*: 82).

The righteous servant did not ascribe these Lordly acts to himself, but ascribed them to the Creator who had taught him. So the True Lord *the Most High* disposes of some of the matters of existence in such a way to show man that goodness does not always lie in that which he loves, nor does evil reside in that which he hates. This is why He *the Exalted* says, '…but it may well be that you hate a thing while it is good for you; and it may well be that you love a thing while it is bad for you….' Although fighting is hateful for you, it may well be that it is good for you. Since hatred is mentioned, we clarify that in Arabic there are two words, *karh and kurh. Karh* means something hateful which you are forced and compelled to do, whilst *kurh* means something which is arduous.

Something might be hateful, whilst it is not arduous, or it might be arduous but not hateful. The True Lord *the Most High* says 'Fighting has been ordained for you even though it is hateful to you….' We can observe that when the

True Lord *the Most High* issues some legislation, He always uses a passive form ('is/has been ordained'), not the active form 'I have ordained.' This is so that we understand that God only legislates for those who believe in Him; He has not ordained any responsibilities for the disbeliever. But is it logical for God to hold those who believe in Him morally responsible, whilst leaving the disbeliever with no responsibilities?

Yes, it is logical because moral responsibility is a good thing. Some people might look at moral responsibility as being restrictive. We say to them: If the moral responsibilities of faith are restrictive, God would have charged the disbeliever with them; but God only holds those whom He loves morally responsible, and He *the Exalted* only commands that which is good. Moreover, God only holds those who believe in Him to be morally responsible because the believing servant is in a covenant of faith with his Lord.

So, when God *the Most High* says 'has been ordained', this means that He is implying that He did not infringe upon anyone's freedom of choice which was given to them; God *the Most High* left people the freedom to choose whether to believe or not to believe. Those who believe freely and dutifully thereby enter into a covenant of faith with God, and as a consequence of this covenant, God ordained moral responsibilities for them. One of these moral responsibilities is fighting, and therefore He *the Exalted* says, 'Fighting has been ordained for you….'

His words 'for you' (*'alaykum*, literally 'upon you') mean that when fighting is ordained, on the surface it seems like nothing but an arduous task, so, the word '*alaykum* is used to reflect this. Yet after the fighting is over, if we have gained victory, we will take the spoils, whilst if we have been defeated and martyred, we will enter paradise.

The True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the outward appearance of fighting, so, He says, '…even though it is hateful to you; but it may well be that you hate a thing while it is good for you; and it may well be that you love a thing while it is bad for you….' As we have said, this is a general matter, which is why we should refer it to the one who knows: '…and God knows, whereas you do not know.' We must refer everything to the wisdom of God Who ordained it, for He is the One Who knows.

There is a folk tale which tells the story of a man from China who owned a great expanse of land with many horses, and there was one stallion out of all these which he loved dearly. One day this horse went out into the pasture and did not return, and so the man grieved for it. The people came to him to console him over the loss of his horse, but he smiled and said, ‘What makes you think this is a bad thing, for which I need your consolation?’

After a while, the man was surprised by the return of the horse along with several other horses which it brought with it. When the people saw this, they came to congratulate him, and he said to them, ‘What makes you think this is a good thing?’ So, the people refrained from congratulating him. After this his son mounted the horse, but it reared and threw him, and he fell and broke his leg. The people came once again to console the man, but he said, ‘What makes you think this is a bad thing?’ It happened after this that a war broke out, and the government drafted all the young men of the land to fight in the army, but they left the man’s son because his leg was broken. The people came to congratulate him, but he said to them, ‘What makes you think this is a good thing?’

The lesson is that we must not judge everything by its outward appearance as to whether it is good or bad, but rather, we must take every matter of life in light of the teaching of the True Lord *the Exalted*: that we should not despair over whatever good has escaped us nor exult unduly over whatever good has come to us (*al-Hadid:* 23).

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…and God knows, whereas you do not know.’ God is beyond compare, however an example we have given before serves to illustrate the situation: The example of the loving man who loves his only son and hopes for a long life for him. When the son gets ill, the father gives him bitter medicine. When he is given the medicine, the son hates it, but it is good for him.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* answers another question:

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلشَّهْرِ ٱلْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ ۖ قُلْ قِتَالٌ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ ۖ وَصَدٌّ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
وَكُفْرٌۢ بِهِۦ وَٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِۦ مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَٱلْفِتْنَةُ
أَكْبَرُ مِنَ ٱلْقَتْلِ ۗ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَـٰتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَن دِينِكُمْ إِنِ ٱسْتَطَـٰعُوا۟ ۚ
وَمَن يَرْتَدِدْ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِۦ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَـٰلُهُمْ
فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ ۖ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَـٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢١٧﴾

They ask you [Prophet] about fighting in the prohibited month. Say, 'Fighting in that month is a great offence, but to bar others from God's path, to disbelieve in Him, prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and expel its people, are still greater offences in God's eyes: persecution is worse than killing.' They will not stop fighting you [believers] until they make you revoke your faith, if they can. If any of you revoke your faith and die as disbelievers, your deeds will come to nothing in this world and the Hereafter, and you will be inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain [217] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 217)

The question here is not about the sacred month because it was well known to them from the days of pagan ignorance. Rather, the question was about fighting in the sacred month – so, what was the use of the question? It was a provocative question, and there is a story behind it. We know that there are twelve months in the year, and that God made four of them sacred: One stands alone, namely *Rajab*, whilst the others are consecutive, namely *Dhu Al-Qi'da, Dhu Al-Hijja, and Muharram*. The meaning of 'sacred months' is that fighting is prohibited in those months.

God *the Most High* knew how human beings have pride in front of one another, and so He gave them a cover to shield their pride. One of these ways which God *the Most High* instituted is the prohibition of fighting in the sacred months and the sacred places. War may harm the warrior, but his pride in front of his enemy does not allow him to stop fighting, so he continues to wage war no matter what the cost. So the True Lord *the Most High* says to the warriors: Cease fighting in these months, for I have made fighting in them unlawful. The warriors themselves might have been longing in their hearts for someone to come and stop the war, but their pride did not let them back down. When the verdict of Heaven intervened, both sides would have a reason to back down whilst preserving their reputations. Likewise, God *the Most High* made certain places sacred, and prohibited fighting within them so that people would say that it was God who prohibited it and would thereby have a means of safeguarding their pride.

So, the True Lord *the Most High*, Who created man, wanted to protect man so that blood would be spared. When people went without fighting for three months, and then another month, they would enjoy in this time peace, tranquillity, and calm, and might thereby become used to peace and not think of waging war again. But if war continued without pause, the lust for war would remain in their souls; and this is the special nature of the sacred months.

The sacred months are sacred in time and place, for time and place are the loci for all events. Every event requires a time and place, and when the time and place are made sacred, both sides of the fighting can grasp the opportunity for calm.

The True Lord *the Most High* deals here with an issue which the enemies of Islam, the disbelievers of Quraysh and the Jews, wanted to stir up. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to send squadrons to scout, a squadron being a specific number of soldiers. Once the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sent a squadron led by ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh Al-Asadi, the paternal cousin of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, sending eight others with him and making him their commander. He gave him a written message and told him not to open it until two days’ journey had passed so that no one would know where the squadron was heading, which was a precaution to keep the information secret.

After the squadron had travelled for two nights, Abdullah opened the message and read it; it read: ‘Go to Batn Nakhla’ – a place between Mecca and Ta’if – ‘and scout the caravan of Quraysh, and do not force any of those with you to go unwillingly.’ This meant that each one of them had the freedom to do as he wished, and so if anyone did not want to go with the squadron, they had the right not to go.

Whilst they were on the way, a camel belonging to Sa‘d ibn Abu Waqqas and ‘Uqba ibn Ghazwan went missing, so, they set out to search for the camel, and the remaining six soldiers stayed with ‘Abdullah. These six went to Batn Nakhla and found ‘Amr ibn Al-Hadrami with three others with a caravan belonging to Quraysh. They began to battle them, thinking that the day was the last day of the month of *Jumada Al-Akhira* when in fact they realised later that it was the first day of *Rajab*, that is, a day of the sacred month.

The Muslim warriors killed Ibn Al-Hadrami; it was Waqid ibn ‘Abdullah, one of the companions of ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh, who killed him. They took two of those who were with him prisoners, and one got away. When this happened, and they knew they had done it on the first of *Rajab*, they realised that their fighting and spoils taking had violated the sanctity of the month of *Rajab.*

The event caused disagreements among the Muslims before Quraysh spoke about it, saying, ‘Muhammad claims that he respects sacred things, and respects the sacred months, yet, despite this, he fought in the sacred month, and spilled our blood, and plundered our wealth, and took men captive.’ So the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* refrained from taking the spoils and the captives until God had passed judgement on the matter, and then, the ruling of Heaven on the matter was revealed with these noble words: ‘They ask you about the sacred month - about fighting therein. Say, ‘Fighting therein is great [sin], but averting [people] from the way of God and disbelief in Him and [preventing access to] the Sacred Mosque and the expulsion of its people therefrom are greater [evil] in the sight of God. And *fitnah* (oppression/trial) is greater than killing.’ And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able. And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the inmates of the fire, they will abide therein eternally.’

We allow that fighting in the sacred month is a great sin, but look, o disbelievers of Quraysh what you have done with Our servants and compare the enormity of this with the enormity of that. You say that fighting in the sacred month is a great sin, but your turning men away from the Way of God and disbelieving in Him, and your barring the Muslims from going to the Sacred Mosque and your expelling the people of Mecca from it is all graver in the sight of God than fighting in the sacred month. Do not do what is even worse than killing in the sacred month, and then, become jealously protective of sacred things!

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make something plain, which is: Do not take individual religious matters and use them to hide behind a word of True Lord *the Most High* while you intend falsehood, for reality shows the truth of things. We say: Yes, fighting in the sacred month is a great sin, but you, O Quraysh, should know that to oppress the believers in the matter of their religion and to turn them away from the path of God, and your disbelief in Him *the Exalted*, and your violation of the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*) by worshipping other than God in it as you do, and your expelling its people there from – all of these wicked things are more grievous and more wicked in God's sight than fighting in the sacred month in order that the Muslims might reclaim from you some of that which is rightfully theirs.

So, God *the Most High* directs the accusation of the idolaters right back at them. '…And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able….' That is, beware of imagining that they will respect either the sacred month or the sacred place: rather, they '…will continue to fight you…' that is, they will insist on, and continue in, fighting you '…until they turn you back from your religion if they are able….'

Reflect on His words 'if they are able.' This is a challenge to them that they will never be able to do this, for the word 'if' always refers to doubtful things. The True Lord *the Most High* continues to say, '…And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the inmates of the Fire, they will abide therein eternally.' They will continue to fight you until they turn you away from your faith, if they can. The True Lord *the Most High* then concludes the verse by referring to the following issue: '…And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief]….' This verse is complemented by another in which the True Lord *the Most High* explains that whoever rejects belief, in vain will be all his works: for in the life to come, he shall be among the lost (*al-Ma'ida*: 5).

If we compare the two verses, we find that the verse which we are currently examining contains the words '…and dies while he is a disbeliever…' whilst in the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* this is not mentioned; but rather, it says that whoever rejects belief, in vain will be all his works (*al-Ma'ida*: 5).

Scholars have differed in interesting ways about this issue, but they are all in agreement, first of all, that if anyone leaves Islam and then dies, whilst outside Islam, all his works will come to naught. Their point of difference, however, is as to whether, if he returns once more to faith and so does not die as a disbeliever, but rather returns to faith after his apostasy, will his actions have come to naught or not?

Imam Ash-Shafe‘i was of the opinion that if someone apostatises from religion, his works will come to naught if he dies in a state of disbelief, but if he returns and embraces Islam again the works he did before he apostatised will be counted for him. Imam Abu Hanifa had a different view, saying: No; the verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* does not say '…and dies, while he is a disbeliever…', which means that we should apply this to the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* which mentions this, by way of applying the general to the specific; and in this case, if someone disbelieves after having had faith, his actions come to naught whether he returns to faith after this or not, and he will not have any works counted for him.

What, then, is the point of difference? Suppose that a person has faith and performs the obligation of the pilgrimage, and then – God forbid – apostatises and disbelieves, and then returns to faith, will the pilgrimage he performed before he apostatised remain for him, or will it be counted as naught so that he has to perform pilgrimage again? This is the point of difference; Ash-Shafe‘i sees that his actions do not come to naught as long as he has returned to faith because God *the Most High* says, '…and dies while he is a disbeliever…', which means that if he does not die upon disbelief, his actions do not come to naught, but he will gain no reward for the pilgrimage which he performed before. Imam Ash-Shafe‘i *God be pleased with him* paid attention to something which many people might neglect, which is that pilgrimage is one of the Pillars of Islam, and the one who does not perform the pilgrimage ,whilst he is capable of doing so, will be punished by God for his negligence, whilst the one who performs the pilgrimage, will not be punished, but rather rewarded for his action.

It is as though if you do not do the things which the True Lord *the Most High* requires of you if you are able to do them, you will be punished, whilst if you do them, your action will pass through two stages: The first stage is that you will not be punished, and the second stage is that you will be rewarded for your action. Ash-Shafe'i *God be pleased with him* said the one who does something for which people are rewarded, and then, disbelieves, and then, returns to Islam, he will not be punished, but he will not be rewarded either. As for Imam Abu Hanifa *God be pleased with him*, he said that the works which come before apostasy are totally fruitless, in accordance with God's judgement that in vain will be all his works, that is, they will be annulled, and will vanish as though they never existed.

The Quran uses the word *habita* ('have become worthless') here, which is used as an allusion to a tangible matter, as the verb *habita* literally means for an animal to be afflicted with an illness called *hubat* which is caused by its having eaten a kind of food which causes it to swell up and possibly die. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Some of that which spring produces can cause death by swelling, or almost cause it.'(1)

He *peace and blessings be upon him* is warning us here that evil might be concealed in what is good, such as that which occurs in spring when certain plants grow which animals like to eat, but which cause them to become bloated (*hubat*) so that they swell up and die, or almost die. Likewise, the works which the disbelievers do will become on the surface like a swollen belly, yet, all these works will perish just as the animal which eats this kind of plant perishes its stomach swelling up so that the onlooker might think it is fat, after which he is surprised to learn that it is ill. With these words, God gave us the concrete concept because of the similarity between the two images; when the animal swells up it looks as though it has grown and fattened, but its growth is abnormal – it is not fat or meat, but rather, distension. Likewise, the works of those who disbelieve are in vain, even though it seems to them that they have done great works which on the outside appear to be good and sound.

Some people say: 'Does it make sense that those disbelievers who made great accomplishments from which all humanity benefited should have their works end up like this? They found cures for malignant diseases and eased people's pain, and built machines which brought comfort and benefit to all people.' We say to those who have these kinds of opinions: Wait a moment. There is something which we must first agree upon, which is that when someone performs an action he seeks reward from the one for whom he performs it. Did all these people act whilst thinking of God, or were they thinking of humanity, glory and fame? Humanity gave them glory and fame, and as long as they received this reward in this life, they should not expect any reward in the Hereafter. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says that the deeds of the infidels are like a mirage in the desert which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: Instead, he finds God there, and He will pay him his account in full – for God is swift in reckoning (*an-Nur:* 39).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, At-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Maja.*

The disbeliever thinks that his works are good and beneficial, but in the Hereafter, they will be like the mirage which one sees in the desert and thinks it to be water, and then, he will find himself in the Hereafter at the moment of reckoning, and God will give him his reckoning with punishment; and they will have no reward save hell, and the same will apply to them as applies to all those who disbelieve in God *the Most High*, which is: '…and those are the inmates of the fire, they will abide therein eternally.'

This being said, the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies the truth of the matter to those who believe in Him and in His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to give them immunity of faith against the disbelievers' hopes of harming the believers, so, He teaches us that they will never relent until they have made you turn away from your religion; for the way of God always scares those who are on the side of falsehood alone. The well-organised and balanced person who wants to live in the world with peace and take goodness in accordance with his work in life, will not be alarmed by the ascendancy of the principles of Islam, but the principles of Islam only alarm those who want to usurp the fruits of the labours of others, and they try their utmost and use all the means at their disposal to make the Muslims leave their religion. But will God *the Most High* allow them to do this? No; for there will always be hope for goodness if the Islamic community hold fast to the way of the truth.

He *the Most High* gives an immunisation to the believers; and as we know, immunisation means to give a healthy person microbes of an illness in a weakened state so that, his immune system has an opportunity to defeat these microbes. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says to them, '…And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies ,while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter….' The essential difference between the believer and the disbeliever is that the believer only does good deeds with the intention that the One Who will reward them is God, and has a sincere intention in everything he does, and utilises God's means of knowledge so that others can benefit from it, and the benefit is all-encompassing and vast. The believer should be the first to make discoveries and inventions and revive the Muslim world, and the believing scientist should be a beacon which shines the light of faith before the people, not simply leave the disbelievers to make all the scientific discoveries whilst he is indifferent and lazy.

The believer must take the means God *the Most High* provides him with in life because Islam encompasses both the religious and worldly life, and it is the religion of knowledge and progress, and it secures for the one who follows its way the happiness of this world and the happiness of the Hereafter. If the believer enjoys products made by disbelievers, he should know that the disbelievers have taken their reward from those for whom they worked; as for the believer, when he excels in industry, agriculture, science and discoveries, he will take reward in this life and in the Hereafter because the One Who gives it in this case will be God.

As for the deeds of the disbeliever, they are deeds from a coerced and subjugated thing such as a tool, a mineral, a plant, or an animal, subjugated to serve mankind. If God distinguished the believer from the disbeliever with reward in this life and the best reward in the Hereafter, does it not befit the believer to outstrip the disbeliever in developing Islamic society, and be, by means of his works, a guiding beacon for those around him?

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُواْ وَجَٰهَدُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ ٱللَّهِۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٢١٨

But those who have believed, migrated, and striven for God’s cause, it is they who can look forward to God’s mercy: God is most forgiving and merciful [218]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 218)

The verse mentions three categories of people: the first category is those who have believed, the second is those who have emigrated and the third is those who struggle. Those who believe with a faith which is sincerely devoted to God, and emigrate to give support to the religion, and struggle for the sake of making the word of Islam ascendant, they do all this looking forward to the mercy of God. Someone might wonder: Is mercy not something absolutely assured for these people? We say: Nothing from God *the Most High* is absolutely certain for the servant because you might forget about some of your sins for which you have not made proper repentance, nor desisted from. You must always keep this in mind, and make sure that you have a sincere intention for God in everything you do; for your soul might suggest something to you which spoils your action. This is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, the master of mankind and the master of all who are connected with their Lord said: ‘O God, I seek refuge in You from knowledge which gives no benefit, and a deed which is not raised, and a prayer which is not heard.’(1)

The Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, the master of all those who are sincere in all that he did, taught us that the soul might cause one to do something which spoils the act of obedience. The Muslim should always be hopeful, and the believer who has trust in his Lord should not say: God has to do such-and-such for me; because the basis of your worship of God has already been recompensed, and anything else you receive after this is a favour from God upon you. Your worship was recompensed by the fact that you were brought into existence out of nothing and given sustenance out of nothing, and it was recompensed by the fact that God gave you to enjoy all kinds of things. If you compare this with what God asks of you – even supposing that you gained no benefit from it – you have already benefitted from what He gave to you first, and any good that comes to you after this is a favour from God to you; and favours are hoped for, not expected with certainty.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Hakim and Ibn Hibban on the authority of Anas God be pleased with him.*

The magnificence of the True Lord *the Most High* is that you call upon Him with both fear and desire. The example often given – and God is beyond compare – is that the greatness you ascribe to your father lies in the fact that that you have a father whom you fear, and who you hope will help you attain some of your ambitions. If one of these two aspects were absent, the whole essence of the father-son relationship will be absent.

Likewise, the greatness of the Lord inspires both fear and desire; if you desire Him, but do not fear Him, your faith is deficient; and if you fear Him, but do not desire Him, your faith is also deficient. Therefore, the two must coexist: fear and desire. If a person considered with insight the things which God has obliged him to do as religious responsibilities, he would find that he benefits many times over from these responsibilities. Everything which God gives His servants as reward is only favour and surplus; and every provision given to mankind is pure favour, and pure favour is hoped for, not expected.

The True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers to call their Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of their hearts. Indeed, He does not love those who transgress the bounds of what is right; and do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered. And call Him with fear and longing: indeed, God's grace is ever near to the doers of good (*al-A'raf:* 55-56).

The whole world is subjugated by the Power of the Most Merciful and His will, and He can do whatever He wants with everything in existence, and He is the Splendid Creator. Therefore, one should call upon God with humility and submission in private and in public; and the True Lord *the Most High* does not love those who transgress by speech, or by being ostentatious, or by harming others.

Faith must be sincerely devoted to God so that man does not corrupt the earth with idolatry or disobedience; for the True Lord *the Most High* has set in place, the true way to reform the world, which is the Quran and the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*; and God’s mercy is near to those who obey the True Lord *the Most High*.

One aspect of the greatness of the Lord is that He is both feared and desired; if you desire Him but do not fear Him, your deed will not be accepted, and if you fear Him, but do not desire Him, your deed will not be accepted. Desire and fear are both required together, which is why the believer who strives in the cause of God looks forward to God’s mercy.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…those hope for the mercy of God….’ What is mercy? Mercy is that you are spared from being subjected to pain from the outset. The True Lord *the Most High* says that through the Quran, He bestows all that gives health to the spirit and is a mercy to those who believe (*al-Isra’:* 82).

Giving health means that you were afflicted with an illness and then, God cures you of it, but mercy means that the illness does not afflict you in the first place. ‘…And God is Forgiving and Merciful.’

God *the Most High* knows that not all of His servants are free of sin, and if He were to reckon us with completely strict standards some of us would suffer, which is why I always love to make this supplication with my brethren: O God, with grace, not justice; and with kindness, not with the balance; and with clemency, not with strictness. That is, treat us with grace and not justice, and with Your kindness and not with the balance because the balance would be hard for us.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that admittance to paradise is not attained by works alone, but rather by God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness. The Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘None of you shall enter paradise by his acts.’ His companions asked, ‘Not even you, o Messenger of God?’ He answered, ‘Not even me, unless God enfolds me in His mercy.’(1)

So, the believer has hope in God, and does not set conditions for God; he offers his good deeds to God with sincerity and hopes for acceptance, forgiveness, and mercy, and all of this is from God’s grace.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Al-Bayhaqi.*

The True Lord *the Most High* then mentions another question:

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْخَمْرِ وَٱلْمَيْسِرِ ۖ قُلْ فِيهِمَآ إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَٰفِعُ
لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَآ أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا ۗ وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ قُلِ
ٱلْعَفْوَ ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْـَٔايَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١٩﴾

They ask you [Prophet] about intoxicants and gambling: say, 'There is great sin in both, and some benefit for people: the sin is greater than the benefit.' They ask you what they should give: say, 'Give what you can spare.' In this way, God makes His messages clear to you, so that you may reflect [219] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 219)

As we know, the Arabic word *khamr* ('wine') is derived from a word meaning 'cover', so, if a person enters a *khamra* it means he enters into the cover of tangled trees to hide there. The word *khimar* means the scarf a Muslim woman wears to cover her head, and this word, too, is taken from the same root. The verb *khamara* means to mix; all of these meanings are derived from the action of covering. The word *maysir* ('gambling') is derived from the word *yusr*, meaning 'ease', because it allows people to make easy money without much effort.

Intoxicants and gambling were things which were well known during the time of pagan ignorance before the coming of Islam. When Islam came to confront the establishments of this ignorance, it confronted the doctrine of the age without any clemency; it did not oppose it and confront it with gradual phases, but rather, it did away with it from the very outset, and the banner of 'there is no God but God *the Most High* and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God' was raised. After this, Islam came to those things which were considered customs and began to minimise them; since people were accustomed to them, Islam took them with a certain amount of gentleness and clemency. This was an aspect of the wisdom of the Sacred Law in that it did not initially make the laws a matter of compulsion, for this could have created disturbances in society and in all existence. Rather, it took things with lenience.

Since the word for ‘wine’ (*khamr*) is derived from the word meaning ‘to cover’, what does it cover? It covers reason, which is shown by the fact that the one who imbibes it loses his reason. God *the Most High* does not want man, whom He honoured with intelligence, to go to the thing with which He honoured him, and with which his vicegerency on earth is directed, and cover it and cause it to be absent; for it is as though the one who does this, returns to God the blessing which He gave to him, and this is foolish.

Moreover, those who take intoxicants justify their action by saying that they want to forget the troubles of this worldly life. We say to them: Does forgetting about troubles stop them from coming? No; and so Islam asks you to live with your troubles to face them with your whole intellect; and if there are troubles and problems, Islam does not want you to forget them. No; rather, you must use your intelligence to face them. As long as you are required to face your problems with your intelligence, do not come to the centre of management of life’s matters, the reason, which helps you to face your problems, and overrule it and prevent it from working.

Does escaping and forgetting difficulties prevent them? The thing which prevents difficulties is that you try with your entire mind to find a way out of them. If this is not within your capabilities, it is foolish to think of it; for God wants you to relieve your reason from these kinds of things. If the problem can be solved, and you are able to solve it, you need your intelligence with all of its power.

The True Lord *the Most High* guides us in this matter with the wisdom of the All-Wise, and gives us that by which we ourselves can judge the matter before it is required from us. He *the Exalted* reminds us of His blessings when He says that He grants us nourishment from the fruit of date-palms and vines; from it we derive intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance (*an-Nahl:* 67).

When God *the Most High* mentions ‘intoxicants’, He passes over it without any comment, whilst when He says ‘sustenance’ He describes it as ‘wholesome’. We should have been aware that God *the Most High* was laying the ground for the Islamic position on intoxicants. He did not describe the ‘intoxicants’ with any adjective, whilst He called the sustenance ‘wholesome’. When people derived intoxicants from these fruits, they changed it from being wholesome sustenance, since there is a difference between eating grapes as a meal and fermenting them and corrupting them and making from them a cover for the reason.

This being said, there is a difference between legislation and advice. When you advise someone, you say to him, 'I will show you the way to goodness, and you are free to follow it or not.' But when you legislate and make a ruling, you command this or that person to do that thing alone and nothing else.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'They ask you about wine and gambling….' He mentioned for us the evils of them, and left us to judge them. He *the Exalted* said, addressing His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, '…say, "In both is great evil and some benefit for people"….' Had He not said 'some benefit for people', they would have objected and said, 'We take benefit from wine, and we earn money from it, and we forget our troubles with it.' These were benefits as far as they were concerned, but the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies that their evil is greater than their benefit, that is, the advantage of consuming them is less than the harm they cause. This is a just appraisal, for the matter had not yet become a matter of prohibition since it was still a matter of advice and guidance.

God's words '…But their evil is greater than their benefit….' make them into a kind of sin. The gradual introduction of the ruling was required because He *the Exalted* was dealing with something which was a widespread custom, so, He *the Exalted* was laying the ground to bring an end to this custom. A custom is something which leads to habituation so that if time passes without you having what you are accustomed to have, there will be disturbance in your psyche and your blood. As long as something leads to habituation, it is better to close the door from the beginning and prevent this habit.

The beginning of the ruling on intoxicants came when one of the Muslims drank some wine before it had been prohibited, and then he went to pray and erroneously recited a Quranic verse saying, 'O you who disbelieve, I worship that which you worship,' whereupon came the reproach from the True Lord *the Most High* interdicting prayer, while in a state of drunkenness (*an-Nisa':* 43).

This was a way of getting those who were used to intoxicants to withdraw from them since the ruling was given to the one who prays not to attempt to pray whilst drunk; so, when will he have to abstain from it? When he wakes up in the morning, he cannot approach intoxicants until he prays the dawn prayer, and then the Noon Prayer is close so, he must prepare for it, and then after this, comes the mid-afternoon prayer, and then, the sunset and evening prayers. That is, he will have no time to drink in those times in which he is due to pray, so, his only chance will be late at night, so, when night comes, he will drink a glass and then, will fall asleep. The time in which he abstains from intoxicants, will be longer than the time in which he takes them.

Once their habit of taking intoxicants began to diminish, some problems and arguments arose which drove them to ask the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to clarify for them a final ruling about intoxicants, whereupon God's words were revealed explaining to the believers that intoxicants, gambling, idolatrous practices and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing, and enjoining them to shun them in order to attain success. By means of intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among the believers, and to turn them away from the remembrance of God and from prayer. The verse is concluded by exhorting the believers to desist (*al-Ma'ida*: 90-91).

Upon this, they said, 'We desist, o Lord!' So, by prohibiting intoxicants, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to protect man's reason, for reason is the anchor of man's moral responsibility, and it is the crux of selection between alternatives, so, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to protect this blessing for man.

The primary purpose of religion is to safeguard the five essentials which man cannot do without: to safeguard life, dignity, possessions, reason and religion. All laws revolve around the preservation of these five essentials; and if you consider these essentials, you will find that the protection of them all begins with the protection of the reason; for when reason is safe, it makes one think of religion, makes him think of work, and makes him cautious to preserve his dignity.

So reason is the basis of the responsible action which this matter revolves around, and the True Lord *the Most High* does not want man to obscure his reason with any kind of intoxicant so that there is no threat to these five essentials.

In the verse which we are currently examining, God referred to both intoxicants and gambling, for He *the Exalted* wants to guard man from moments of heedlessness. Gambling in its simplest form is for two people to sit before one another, each one eager to get what is in the pocket of the other. What kind of brotherhood will remain between these two? Each of them wants to send the other home with empty pockets, so, what kind of brotherhood will there be between them?

It is strange that you see those who gamble with one another seem to be friends, each one of them eager to meet the other: what treacherous friendship this is! And it is strange that each of them is content with what the other one does: taking his money and remaining his friend; and what is strangest of all is the cheating and stealing that goes on between those who habitually gamble. If you looked at the lives of those who gamble, you would find that they spend and squander money without any caution, and they never benefit from the money that comes into their hands, no matter how much it is. Why? It is because when money is earned through gambling, it is spent without any caution. This is the state of the one who wins; as for the one who loses, you find him living in woe and pain for what he has lost, and you find that he is always poor, and perhaps he is forced to sacrifice his dignity and honour, if not to sell his own clothes and the dearest things he owns. This all happens because of fallacious dreams and false hopes which Satan makes alluring to both sides, winner and loser: the winner hopes to increase the money he has more and more, and the loser hopes to regain what he has lost, and then win.

When a person becomes habituated to earning without working, everything loses its value to him, and he gets used to living on cheap and easy earnings; and when he can find no gullible person to play with, he might steal or pilfer. This is the state of those who gamble; they are blight on society, for they are the ones who bribe, steal, and act boisterously, and they have no manners, and no friends or companions, and their houses are wrecks, and their families are fragmented, and they are wretched even in their form and appearance.

This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘They ask you about wine and gambling; say, “In both is great evil and some benefit for people. But their evil is greater than their benefit.”’ As long as the evil is greater than the benefit, the side of evil is dominant. This is concerning the nature of the action itself; then as for the time of the action, He *the Exalted* commanded the believers to avoid praying while drunk (*an-Nisa’:* 43).

And after this, He *the Exalted* gave the final ruling by prohibiting intoxicants and gambling along with other blameworthy practices in explaining to the believers that intoxicants, gambling, idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing and commanding them to shun those practices in order to attain success (*al-Ma'ida*: 90-91).

Then the verse moves on to another issue: '…And they ask you what they should spend; say, "The excess (beyond needs)."' This is the very question which 'Amr ibn Al-Jamuh asked, and the answer given before was: 'Say, "Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer"' (*al-Baqara*: 215). Here the answer takes a different form: '…say, "The excess (beyond needs)."' The word *'afw* literally means 'excess/increase', and we find the word used in another verse where the True Lord *the Most High* tells us about past nations to whom He had sent prophets and tried them with misfortune and hardship so that they might humble themselves and pray to God; then, He transformed the affliction into ease of life so that they *'afaw* ('grew in number, increased, prospered') and said that misfortune and hardship befell their fathers. Then God took them to task, all of a sudden, without their being aware (*al-A'raf*: 94-95).

God Almighty is giving a warning and a caution so people take heed and reflect. He *the Exalted* did not send a prophet to any people whom they met with disbelief and denial save that He took them and tried them with poverty, misfortune, illness and hardship so that they would repent to their Lord and humble themselves before Him so that He would lift from them that with which He tried them. And then, when they did not return and abandon their disbelief and obstinacy, He tested them and tried them with prosperity, with verdure, wealth, health and ease, until they thrived and their wealth and possessions increased, and in the midst of these blessings they said, 'All of the fortune, misfortune, good and evil which comes to us is nothing, but the way of the universe, and the custom of time, and our ancestors and forefathers were met by the same as that with which we are met.' And when they insisted upon their disbelief, God *the Most High* sent His torment upon them all of a sudden, and sent down upon them a sudden punishment. God *the Most High* took them from hardship to ease, and treated them with good and ill fortune so that they would have no argument to make against God; and when the baseness of their natures emerged, and they adhered to their falsehood, God took them to task as only the Almighty Determiner can. Let us reflect on what God says about this. He *the Exalted* tells His Prophet that He had indeed sent messages to people before his time, and seized them with misfortune and hardship so that they might humble themselves; yet, when the misfortune decreed by God befell them, they did not humble themselves, but rather, their hearts grew hard, for Satan had made all their doings seem fair to them. Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, God threw open to them the gates of all good things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – God suddenly took them to task: and they were broken in spirit (*al-An'am:* 42-44).

That is, We did not bring forth their punishment immediately, but rather, We left them so that they continued in their disobedience, until when they rejoiced in the favours, riches and increase in numbers they had been given, He suddenly took them to task, and they were broken in spirit (*al-An'am:* 44), that is, despairing of God's mercy, or regretful and woeful, yet, regret could not avail them at that time, for the opportunity had passed, and they had squandered it.

The True Lord *the Most High* sends down this torment as a punishment, and it makes the transformation all the more difficult. They persisted, so, the True Lord *the Most High* punished them with a mighty punishment, just like one who lifts somebody into the sky and then, lets him fall to the earth. The word *'afaw* ('prospered') here might also mean that they increased in wickedness. Another meaning of the word *'afw,* can also be 'to leave' as we see in another verse where God, in the case of legal retribution for murder, says that whoever *is 'ufiya* ('left, given remission') from his brother anything, then, there should be a suitable follow-up (*al-Baqara*: 178).

That is, if someone is left something by his brother let him take it. So *'afw* can sometimes mean 'excess', and sometimes 'to leave'. Here, in the verse under consideration, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And they ask you what they should spend; say, "The excess (beyond needs)."' That is, spending should only be from that which one owns in excess of one's needs, so, the word ‘afw here means ‘excess’ or ‘left aside’. And so we see here that *‘afw* is the same in both instances; Do not think that the different meanings are contradictory because together they lead to the intended meaning in the end. *‘Afw* means ‘excess’ and it can also mean ‘forgiveness.’ So, spending from one’s excess wealth leads to forgiveness, and also to comfort in the society. If someone farms lands and produces that which he needs to support himself and his dependants and more besides, will he leave that which is in excess to his needs to go rotten, or will he spend it on his needy relative or neighbour? Which option is closer to reason and logic? This was before the True Lord *the Most High* had legislated the *zakat* (‘poor-due’) in its conventional form; and what was the secret behind its having been changed from voluntary charity to obligatory poor-due?

It was because the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give value to people’s work, and make their work a means of ease for them, not a burden; for others benefit from a person’s work, whether he intends it or not. This is why we find that there is a ‘poor-due on precious minerals’, which is the poor-due which must be paid on the treasures extracted from underground such as precious metals, oil, and so on; the True Lord made the proportion of this poor-due 20%, that is, one fifth, whilst the one who ploughs the earth and plants seeds in it and then, leaves them until rain falls on them and they grow, must pay poor-due of one tenth for what his farming produces.

As for the one who farms by irrigation, he only has to pay one twentieth; and for the one who trades every day and works hard, going to the producer and buying his wares and then supplying them to the customer who buys them, we tell him that he must pay only two-and-a-half per cent (2.5%).

So, the poor-due is in accordance with one’s work and effort, as though the True Lord *the Most High* protects man’s work from the foolishness of man-made legislation. God *the Most High* encourages the strong worker to increase his work so that society benefits; and God has granted the judge who follows the way of Islam to take from the rich that which will protect the dignity of the poor if the rich are stingy with the favours God has given them and refuse to spend God’s provision on the poor. The way of truth protects wealth from the corruption of greed, and the corruption of laziness, and it wants life to be upright and secure for the people.

The one who spends his wealth on his family, lives in security; and if one spends on his family and dependants, the circle of security increases. In this way, by the poor-due, God *the Most High* protects human aspirations from the foolishness of man-made legislations; for the human lawmaker comes to the one who works more, and increases his due taxes. We say to him: This worker does not intend to benefit society, yet, society will benefit from his work: a person might possess wealth, so, God *the Most High* places the notion in his mind: 'What if you build an apartment building with ten storeys, and each storey containing four apartments?' He calculates how much these apartments will make for him every month. This man is thinking of nothing but profit; so, let us leave him think of profit; we will find that society will benefit from this act when we consider how many people will work on the construction of this new building, starting from the builders and then moving on to the carpenters, blacksmiths, whitewashers, plumbers, and so on.

All of the poor sectors of society have benefitted and profited from this man's wealth before a single penny has entered his pocket. God *the Most High* put the thought in his head, so, he took everything from his pocket and placed it in the pockets of the others before he even had an apartment building. In this way, God *the Most High* protects the work of the worker because his work will benefit others whether he intends this or not.

But if we say to him, 'We will take your excess wealth forcibly,' he will inevitably say to himself, 'I will only work as much as I need, and only a little more.' The True Lord *the Most High* does not want this way of thinking to be prevalent amongst people; He wants them to work in life in a way that is earnest and lawful; and the more they work, the less their obligatory poor-due will be because it is not only the worker who benefits from his work, but rather, society as a whole benefits; one person is idle, another farms, and a third works; and it is better for a person to eat from the work of his own hands than to eat from the charity and poor-due of others.

Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'd Yakrib *God be pleased with him* narrates that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'No one ever ate any food better than that which he ate from the labour of his own hand; and God's Prophet David *peace be upon him* used to eat from the work of his hand.'(1)

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۗ وَيَسۡـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰۖ قُلۡ إِصۡلَاحٞ لَّهُمۡ خَيۡرٞۖ وَإِن
تُخَالِطُوهُمۡ فَإِخۡوَٰنُكُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ ٱلۡمُفۡسِدَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُصۡلِحِۚ وَلَوۡ شَآءَ
ٱللَّهُ لَأَعۡنَتَكُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ٢٢٠

on this world and the next. They ask you about [the property of] orphans: say, 'It is good to set things right for them. If you combine their affairs with yours, remember they are your brothers and sisters: God knows those who spoil things and those who improve them. Had He so willed, He could have made you vulnerable too: He is almighty and wise' [220]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 220)

The True Lord *the Most High* begins this verse by saying: 'On this world and the Hereafter….' It is as though He is saying to us: Beware of thinking that every moral responsibility which comes from God will be rewarded in the Hereafter only; never – the reward will come to you in this world as well.

Reflect on the lives of those who adhered to the way of their religion and the moral way in their lives, and you will find that they took their reward in this world as contentment, happiness, and security so that you might find people wondering, 'How could so-and-so have raised his children, and how could he have taught them, when his means were so modest?'

They do not know that God's Hand is with him in the form of blessings in every action of his life. Do not think that this reward is restricted to the Hereafter alone, but rather, God will bring the reward forward to this world; and as for the Hereafter, it will be an increase, and we will enjoy the delights of the Hereafter by the grace of God. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you shall enter paradise by his acts.' The companions asked, ‘Not even you, O Messenger of God?’ He said, ‘Not even me, unless God enfolds me in His mercy.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Al-Bukhari*

I would like us all to reflect on the state of those people who are upright in their way of life, and see how they live, and how they spend on their children, and reflect on the gladness and contentment which they enjoy, and how their lives are free of problems and psychological complications.

It is as though He *the Exalted* is alerting us to the fact that everything in the Straight Way only came to organise our lives for us and to take us away from the soul’s whims.

We say that after the True Lord *the Most High* concluded speaking about the pilgrimage, the fifth Pillar of Islam, He showed us two categories of people in society: The first is the hypocrites whose speech does not reflect the truth of their hearts and souls: ‘And from among the people is one whose speech concerning worldly life pleases you, and he calls God to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents. And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy tilth and progeny. And God does not like corruption’ (*al-Baqara*: 204-205). If only when this sector was alerted to this, they turned back and repented; but no; when they are told by someone who advises them out of love and concern to fear God, they are filled with false pride because of their sin!

The other sector of society are those who would willingly sell their own selves to please God, which is represented either by their giving up their lives when fighting and so being martyred, or by their keeping their lives in order to do good in accordance with the way of God. He *the Exalted* said, ‘And from among the people is he who sells himself, seeking means to please God, and God is kind to His servants’ (*al-Baqara*: 207).

Then God *the Most High* spoke about entering wholly into Islam (submission to God), since entering into Islam, requires us all to enter into every kind of peace in life: peace with yourself so that your faculties are not in disarray and you do not say anything that contradicts your heart; peace with the society in which you live; peace with the universe which serves you as minerals, plants, and animals; and peace with the community in which you live. He *the Exalted* said, ‘O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy’ (*al-Baqara*: 208).

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, Al-Baihaqi, and others in different versions*

All of this indicates to us that when the True Lord *the Most High* created mankind, He gave them the way of guidance which would secure peace and security for them in every aspect of this life; therefore, if you see a fissure or disturbance in the universe, or you see any fear or worry, know that one of the ways of Islam has been neglected. When the True Lord *the Most High* commands us to enter wholly into Islam, He *the Exalted* is forewarning us that if we stumble from His way of guidance, God is Almighty and All-Wise and cannot be overwhelmed by anyone, and no one can overpower Him, for He is the fully Capable and Powerful according to whose wisdom everything proceeds; so, do not think that you are doing God ill by dropping from His Way, for you are only doing ill to yourselves and your fellow men; for God cannot be overwhelmed.

The True Lord *the Most High* also alerts us to something else: He draws our attention to the fact that we do not know when the Hour (Doomsday) will come; for the Hour will come suddenly and unexpectedly, a calamitous cry and a tremulous earthquake. Take care, then, that this calamity does not come to you whilst you are heedless of it. This is all so that we also enter the Last Day in peace; it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is alerting us to the fact that the words of the Quran are not mere theoretical words, but rather, they are words of the All-Wise and Knowing, which governed the history of the communities that came before the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The True Lord *the Most High* sent many signs to the children of Israel, and they tarried, and did what they did; and they themselves suffered, and society suffered on their account; so, this discourse is not theoretical. And God wants us to look at the affairs of life, and not to look at the superficial surface of things; we must not let the allures of the life of this world deceive us about the life of the Hereafter, for the life of this world is short. We must measure the life of this world by how long we live in it; and we only live in it for a short while, for some of us die old, whilst others die young.

And the True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He did not neglectfully leave His creatures, but rather, He sent to them messengers to show them God's Way. The people were one community united in truth until the whims of their souls were agitated, yet, God had mercy on them and did not leave them to their whims, but rather, the succession of messengers continued for mankind; and every time whims reigned and corruption spread, the True Lord *the Most High*, in His mercy, sent a messenger to alert the people, until the Final Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came, whom God *the Most High* distinguished by making his way of guidance eternal, and placing its values in his community. And the Muhammadan community became the bearer of the duty of guarding God's way by which life on earth is made sound; for the True Lord *the Most High* trusted no other community to do this, this is why the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Seal of the Prophets.

Then after this, God *the Most High* alerted us to the fact that for a person to end up in the delights of paradise, does not come easily and lightly, but rather is a road surrounded by adversities; and therefore you must be cautious, and train your selves, and make them content with bearing these adversities, and accustom them to bearing these hardships, as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Paradise is surrounded by adversities, and Hell is surrounded by lusts.'(1)

The True Lord *the Most High* then mentions His blessing to His creatures in how He gave to man, His vicegerent on earth, reason to think with, and power to carry out the directives of the reason, and a material universe before him which responds to his actions. The reason plans, and the power carries out these plans in the material which was created and subdued by God. So all the tools of action belong to God, and you, o man, do not have the ability to create any part of it, other than to direct created powers to act in created substances; you do not bring anything into existence.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Anas God be pleased with him*

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* asks you, O Muslim, to preserve life's motions by allotting a part of your work's fruits to those who are unable to work; therefore, you must do enough work to suffice yourself, those you support, and those who cannot work themselves. In this way, God looks after those who cannot work by means of the works of those of their believing brothers who can work; and He *the Exalted* assures you that if you do this, and you look after those who cannot work, He *the Most High* will look after you when you yourself cannot work.

God *the Most High* has made life's conditions alternate through people so that there are not some people who are always able and others who are always incapacitated; rather, the True Lord *the Most High* makes those who were able yesterday incapacitated today, and makes those who were incapacitated yesterday able today so that work spreads evenly throughout existence, and so that we all know that God asks from you when you are able in order to give to you when you are incapacitated. This is why He asks us to spend on others, and the occasion for spending on others only arises after one has met the necessities of one's life. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is telling you that you must work enough in life to suffice yourself and allow you to spend on your dependants; if not, and if you only work enough for yourself, you might not find anything to spend.

After this, He *the Most High* tells us that every believer is charged with fulfilling the responsibility of spending on his near circle so that, everyone will be responsible for a part of society which is connected to him by blood, such as parents and near kin, and that we make the support of weak orphans a collective responsibility of the whole society, required of all; whether we have a family tie to them or not, they are all our family because God has made us responsible for taking care of them.

But can the way of God become settled without anyone ever transgressing it? No; which is why the True Lord *the Most High* alerts us to the fact that we will find people who are not happy to implement the way of God in life because they only live by wronging others; these people will be aggrieved by seeing the way of God implemented. So you should be aware of these people, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* ordained fighting so we can safeguard the earth from the mischief of disbelief; for disbelief asserts the existence of multiple gods so that each person follows whims and his 'god' becomes his whim, and there will be as many gods as there are caprices. This is why God *the Most High* ordained fighting for the believers and told them 'even though it is hateful to you.' All of this secures for us the goal we seek, which is to enter wholly into security, peace and Islam. After this, He asks us to struggle with wealth and our lives, and to leave our homes and families if the course of the faith requires this, saying, 'Indeed, those who have believed and those who have emigrated and struggled in the Way of God - those hope for the mercy of God. And God is Forgiving and Merciful' (*al-Baqara*: 218).

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention to the essential instrument of planning in the human being in order that he protects it and keeps it a sound instrument which is able to plan with clarity, wisdom and strength, namely reason; and He alerts us to how essential it is that we keep it from anything that intoxicates it, i.e. that veils it from working. Why do we keep it from intoxicants? So that it will remain, as God intends, a tool for selecting between alternatives.

Since reason is the thing that plans how the power that exists in man is to act on the material that exists in the universe, this planning reason must be left in a sound state, and man must not try to veil it; and no one should say, 'I veil it from the excessive increase of problems,' because problems do not require a single mind from you, but rather, they require two: so, do not take the only one you have and cover it with intoxicants, for the confrontation of problems requires you to plan robustly.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to usurp the work of others without any work or effort on our part, warns us against gambling, which is a means to easy earnings. The warning against gambling only came to ensure that everyone works in life with honourable work which is untainted by deception. And it is as though all that we have just said was inspired by God's words 'On this world and the Hereafter….' And after this, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And they ask you about orphans. Say, "Improvement for them is best. And if you mix your affairs with theirs - they are your brothers. And God knows the corrupter from the amender. And if God had willed, He could have put you in difficulty. Indeed, God is Mighty and Wise."'

We know that orphans might not necessarily be needy people, but God *the Most High* is drawing our attention to the fact that the case of orphans is not a matter of need for sustenance, but rather, the orphan is in need of our replacing, by our faithful solidarity, that which he lost when he lost his father, and this will stop him from becoming resentful of children whose fathers are still alive. When the orphan finds that all the believers are his fathers, he will feel the solidarity that replaces for him paternal love, and he will not suffer from pangs of grief when he looks at his fellows who are distinct from him in that their fathers are still alive; and in this way, he will be free of resentment.

Muslims in the past used to mix their wealth with the wealth of orphans in order to make it easier for themselves and to lessen the burden of the work needed to support the orphans. If an orphan entered into the care of someone, and this person wanted to give the young orphan an independent life and an independent sphere of movement and an independent way of life, this would prove difficult to manage for the man; and for this reason God *the Most High* gave permission for the guardian to mix his wealth with the wealth of the orphan, and to make the management of this wealth part of the management of his own wealth so that the guardian would not have any hardship. When the words of God *the Most High* were revealed that forbade the believers to approach the money of an orphan except to improve it until he comes of age (*al-An'am:* 152), people in the Muslim community were disturbed, and wondered how they should deal with orphans since the True Lord *the Most High* had said that those who sinfully consume the possessions of orphans fill their bellies with fire (*an-Nisa':* 10). So people kept their hands off the wealth of orphans, and the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make the matter easier, and so revealed His words: '…Say, "Improvement for them is best. And if you mix your affairs with theirs - they are your brothers….' This mixing must be on the basis that orphans are your brethren; and be very careful that there is nothing in this mixing which is not in the interest of the orphan.

And beware of understanding that social convention allows the guardian to supervise the orphan's wealth without keeping any accounts, for God *the Most High* distinguishes between him who spoils things and him who improves. No one should try and say to the people that he has opened his door to the orphan, and that he has taken care of the orphan, when in reality this is not the case; for God *the Most High* distinguishes between the corrupter and the amender.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And if God had willed, He could have put you in difficulty….' To put someone in difficulty means to take someone and put him in an adverse situation. Had God not allowed you to share your wealth, you would have been afflicted with hardship; so, God made it easier for the believers by allowing guardians to mix their wealth with the wealth of the orphans in their care. The meaning of 'mixing' is that the guardian unites the work of the orphan with his own work, and unites the living of the orphan with his own living, instead of the orphan having, for example, his own separate cutlery, which is what would happen.

In those days leftover food would be spoilt, since there was no way of keeping and preserving food like refrigerators; and this was a source of harm both for the orphan and for the one looking after him. But when God *the Most High* said, '…And if you mix your affairs with theirs…' this relieved the guardians of this hardship, since to share one's life means to live with them in a way which engenders no differentiation.

When we were children, we had in school a lesson called 'mixing and blending'. To *mix* (*khalt*) is to combine, for example, to mix the seeds of beans with lentils, or grains of rice with hazelnuts. If you want to tell one kind from the other, you are able to do so, and you can separate one kind from the other with a sieve; so, mixing takes place between seeds and the like.

As for blending (*mazj*), this takes place with liquids. The True Lord *the Most High* guides us to share or mix (*khalat*) with orphans, not to blend their wealth with our wealth; for the orphan will reach adulthood one day, whereupon the guardian will have to separate his wealth from the wealth of the orphan.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues: '…And God knows the corrupter from the amender…' because the guardian might claim to the people that he is looking after the rights of the orphan and that he is improving his condition and respecting his wealth, whilst his intention might be contrary to this; yet, He *the Exalted* did not leave the matter to the superficial understanding of society of the conduct of the guardian with the orphan and the mixing of his life, but rather, He ascribed all this to the supervision of God above all other supervision; and this is so a person can be cautious and aware that the protection of God is above all other protection. Had the True Lord *the Most High* willed it, He could have imposed hardships upon the guardians and made them work for the orphan alone, and separate the life of the orphan from their lives and their living conditions, and this would have caused severe hardship for the soul. In order for us to understand the exact meaning of hardship and suffering (*'anat*), let us consider the words of the True Lord *the Most High* when He tells the believers that there has come to them a Messenger from among themselves: heavily weighs upon him the thought that they might suffer; full of concern for them and full of compassion and mercy towards the believers (*at-Tawba:* 128).

To you has come, o believers, a Messenger from amongst you, an Arab from Quraysh to deliver to you the Message of God *the Most High*, full of concern for you lest you fall into hardship, or live in the wretchedness of disbelief, and concerned that you be of those who are rightly guided. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come from the kind of angels, but rather from the kind of humans; and no person can say, 'He is not an appropriate role-model for me.' He grew up in Mecca, where Quraysh lived, and his history was well-known to his people, which are borne out by the fact that they testified to his possessing the first of the necessary attributes of message-bearing, which is trustworthiness. The True Lord *the Most High* brought him forth from amongst mankind, and he was not a stranger to them; and simply by his telling of the Revelation, there were some who believed in him before he recited the Quran, and before he issued any challenge to them.

When the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to him in the cave of Hira' and said to him, 'Read,' he said, 'I am not a reader,' So, he took hold of me and whelmed me in his embrace until he had reached the limit of my endurance (that is, he hugged him and squeezed him; and the wisdom of this was to keep him from any distraction so his heart was alert), and then, let me go and said, 'Read.' I said, 'I am not a reader,' so, he took hold of me and whelmed me in his embrace a second time until he had reached the limit of my endurance, and then, let me go and said, 'Read.' I said, 'I am not a reader,' so, he took hold of me and whelmed me in his embrace a third time, and then, let me go and said, 'Read in the name of your Lord Who has created – created man from a clot. Read – for your Lord is the Most Bountiful Who has taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not' (*al-'Alaq*: 1-5). The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* went back home with a trembling heart to his wife Khadija bint Khuwaylid *God be pleased with her* and said to her, 'Cover me, cover me.' She covered him until the alarm left him, and then he told Khadija what had happened, saying, 'I feared for myself;' but Khadija *God be pleased with her*, with her sound reasoning, said, 'No, by God; God would never degrade you, for you keep family ties, support the needy, provide for the destitute, you receive guests with hospitality, and you help those afflicted with disasters.(1) Khadija *God be pleased with her* adduced that whoever possessed all these attributes was ready to receive the Message. The True Lord *the Most High* tells the believers that there has come to them a Messenger from among themselves who heavily weighs upon him the thought that they might suffer; full of concern for them and full of compassion and mercy towards the believers (*at-Tawba:* 128). That is, he loves you, and the same things cause him hardship and trouble him as cause you hardship and trouble you; this is why the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was so concerned for his community, and it is narrated that He *peace and blessings be upon him* used to repeat, 'My people! My people! My people!'

And the True Lord *the Most High* knew that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was concerned for his people. 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As *God be pleased with him* related that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* once recited God's words reporting the supplication of Abraham *peace be upon him* to his Lord that the idols have misguided many people and that he who follows him in faith is truly of him (Ibrahim: 36), and the supplication of Jesus *peace be upon him* asking God to spare his followers suffering and if He causes them to suffer, indeed, they are His servants; and if He forgives them, indeed, He alone is Almighty, truly Wise (*al-Ma'ida*: 118), and then, he raised his hands and said, 'O God, my people, my people!' And then, he wept. God *the Most High* said: 'O Gabriel, go to Muhammad – and your Lord knows best – and ask him why he weeps.’ Gabriel *peace be upon him* went to him and asked him, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told him what he had said – and God knew best – and then, God *the Most High* said, ‘O Gabriel, go to Muhammad and say: “We shall give you cause to be pleased with your people, and we shall not disappoint you.”’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the chapter on the beginning of the Revelation*

When we reflect on the exactness of the Prophet’s answer, we realise that the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was concerned for his people; he saw himself as being the brother of every believer; but a man might change towards his brother, which is why the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want the affair of the Muslims to be out of the Hand of God and His mercy – as He is the All-Generous Creator – to his own control *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* knows that God is more merciful with His creatures than anyone, even the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* himself. We are saying all this as we show the meaning of the hardship and suffering (*‘anat*) which could afflict a person if he does not preserve the right of God connected to the wealth of the orphan, for God is Almighty and Wise, and He is the True Lord *the Most High* Who overwhelms and cannot be overwhelmed by anyone. We see in the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘…Indeed, God is Mighty and Wise’ that the attribute of might is tied to the attribute of wisdom.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* takes us on to a new issue which, if we consider it, we will find it to be the basis of any motion in life and in society, which is the issue of marriage. He *the Exalted* wants to secure stability and happiness for the being whom He honoured and made him His vicegerent on earth, and for whose service He subdued all other beings.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants this being to go forth from a single spring of guidance because it is conflicting caprices that corrupt the motions of life, so, He wanted all of humankind collectively to emerge from a single spring of faith, and He wanted to protect this spring from being affected by the multiplicity of inclinations and caprices, which is why the True Lord

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

the Most High alerts us to this issue. He *the Exalted* wants to safeguard the soundness of the vessel which would produce man after marriage; since with marriage man reproduces and life continues through procreation. For this reason, there must be precision when choosing the spring from which one's progeny will come; so, He *the Exalted* says:

وَلَا تَنكِحُوا۟ ٱلْمُشْرِكَٰتِ حَتَّىٰ يُؤْمِنَّ ۚ وَلَأَمَةٌ مُّؤْمِنَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّن مُّشْرِكَةٍ
وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ ۗ وَلَا تُنكِحُوا۟ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّىٰ يُؤْمِنُوا۟ ۚ وَلَعَبْدٌ مُّؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ
مِّن مُّشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ ۗ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى ٱلنَّارِ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ يَدْعُوٓا۟ إِلَى
ٱلْجَنَّةِ وَٱلْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۖ وَيُبَيِّنُ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٢١﴾

Do not marry idolatresses until they believe: a believing slave woman is certainly better than an idolatress, even though she may please you. And do not give your women in marriage to idolaters until they believe: a believing slave is certainly better than an idolater, even though he may please you. Such people call [you] to the Fire, while God calls [you] to the Garden and forgiveness by His leave. He makes His messages clear to people, so that they may bear them in mind [221]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 221)

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe….' This is the first brick in the building of the family and society, because if she is not a believer, what will happen? She will raise the new-born in a way which reflects her idolatry and your role as a father and educator will not come until after a long time has passed, by which time, these things will have been implanted in the child. So beware of a union between a believing man and an idolatrous woman because this will disrupt the organisation of the family; the actions of the mother with the child affect its first stages of development: they affect its values and its moral development, and this is something which begins as soon as he can see and perceive. The baby spends its first years in its mother's care, and after this it grows up and comes into its father's care. If the mother is an idolatress and the father is a believer, faith will not come to the child until idolatry has already taken hold of him and overcome him.

We know that human infancy is the longest infancy of any living being; there are some infancies which last only two hours, such as that of a fly, and other infancies which last a month; and the longest infancy is that of man because this it is appropriate for the mission which man will undertake. All of the infancies which came before it are infancies which have very easy missions, yet man is the one who must take his values from it, which is why his infancy is so long. It lasts until he reaches puberty, and in this respect, the True Lord *the Most High* teaches the believers that when the children among them reach puberty, they should ask permission to enter their parents' chambers like those before them have been enjoined to ask it. In this way God makes clear His messages: for God is All Knowing, Wise (*an-Nur:* 59).

It is as though an infant remains an infant until he reaches puberty, so, how many years does he remain an infant? And how many years will this infant drink from the springs of idolatry if his mother is an idolater? It is such a long time that he cannot be a believer after this without his faculties being disturbed. Even if such a person can become a believer, his belief will remain under the compulsion, pressure and authority of his father and this kind of faith will be something superficial, not settled, or grounded on a sincere basis.

We know that the fruits we enjoy eating only ripen after the seeds from which the new tree are made ripen, and before this, they are only unripe fruits with no taste. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to this fact in order that man take care to keep fruits until they ripen and have seeds.

A woman cannot be good fruit unless she produces a child who, like her, is righteous and beneficial. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the youth not to be confused about its faith, which is why He *the Exalted* says, 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe.' That is, beware of being deceived by base, ignoble standards. You must all accept God's judgement that '…a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you...' because if a person is pleased by a woman without considering her faith, this will be a short-lived pleasure.

If we collected all the moments of time in which a woman's physical beauty can be enjoyed, the total would not add up to more than a single month of all the years of marriage. Every week, there might be a meeting which lasts only minutes, and then the beauty fades and the values remain deep-rooted in the soul; and we find that when a woman marries and is slow in becoming pregnant, she suffers from worry, as does her husband.

If the man marries her for her looks, her beauty, her figure, and her eyes, this will all cool off and fade away after a time, and then, there will be other standards for life to continue, and when the person looks for them, but does not find them, he will be consumed with regret because they were not in his mind when he made his choice.

Because of this, the woman tries to consolidate her position by having a child to tie the man to her, and so that society will say, 'You must put up with her for the children's sake!' After marriage, a man wants different standards from those physical standards which he first had. For this reason, God *the Most High* forewarns us, saying, 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe…,' and He stresses 'until they believe' because Islam expiates all that came before it as long as she attains faith, all the rest is forgotten.

Look at the precision of God's words: 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe, and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress….' That is, a Muslim slave is better than an idolatrous free woman '…even though she might please you….' God's words here refer to the standards of physical attraction in order to alert us to the fact that it is not right for us to ignore eternal standards and adopt standards which are ephemeral and transient.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe….' This is a similar statement, not an inverse one since He did not tell believing women not to marry idolatrous men, but rather said, '…And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe….' This is precise discourse because men have the authority to give women in marriage, and so He addresses them, saying: do not give in marriage, whilst women do not have the authority to give themselves in marriage. We know the legal principle which says, 'There can be no marriage without a guardian.' He did not address His words to women because a woman is governed by her emotions whilst her guardian will look at the matter from every other angle which influences the situation.

It is true that we ask for the virgin girl's assent to be sure that her feeling is not against the marriage, but the father or whichever male guardian it is will judge things according to various standards. If we leave the girl to judge according to her own standards, the marriage will collapse as soon as her emotions abate; and when she then applies rational standards, she might not find this marriage to have been right for her, so, the marriage fails. This is why Islam asks us to seek the woman's opinion so that we do not bring her someone she dislikes, but the one who actually gives her in marriage to this man is her guardian because he has rational, social and moral standards which the girl might not consider. She might be swept away by the suitor's fine appearance, handsomeness and smooth speech, but once we come to the matter of the motions of life and its endurance, she might find that he is not right for her.

In order that the matter combines the emotion of the girl, the reason of the father and the experience of the mother, the girl must be consulted, and the father must seek the opinion of the mother; and every marriage which takes place in this way, will have the opportunity to be blessed with success because all the standards will have been involved so that no standard is left out. The father bases his verdict on the agreement of the daughter; if the girl refuses – even if the standards of the father are all met, but the girl does not accept this man, the marriage should not take place.

Many marriages have failed because we did not find those who implemented God's way of entering matrimony; and then, when God's way of entering matrimony is not implemented, and they are met with failure, they cry out for the rulings of Islam to save them. We say to them: Did you enter the matrimony according to God's religion? Since you entered matrimony according to your own opinions, which were not in line with the way of God, then, solve the problem with your own opinions, too. The religion is only responsible for those who begin with its standards; but if you enter matrimony according to other than God's standards, and then, you want God, or those who adhere to God's command, to solve your problems for you, you thereby wrong yourself and those who adhere to God's command. If these problems did not occur, we would accuse the way of God, and we would say, 'Look, we have left the way of God, and yet lived happily!' Therefore it was necessary that such problems occur.

So, the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘And do not marry idolatresses until they believe….’ refer to a matter which had a specific cause, but their lesson lies in their general application, not their specific cause. The cause for the revelation of these words is that there was a Companion of the Prophet named Marthad ibn Abu Marthad Al-Ghanawi, who was sent by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to Mecca to bring some Muslims out of it. He had been in love with a woman before Islam named ‘Inaq, and she also loved him, and when she saw him, she wanted to be alone with him, so, he said to her, ‘Woe to you, Islam has come between us!’ She replied, ‘Marry me,’ so, he said to her, ‘I shall marry you, but only after I seek the leave and permission of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.’ When he asked him, the words of God *the Most High* were revealed: ‘And do not marry idolatresses until they believe, and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you….’

It is also said that God’s words ‘…and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you…’ were revealed about Khansa’,(1) a black slave-girl of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman to whom Hudhayfa said, ‘O Khansa’, you are remembered in the Highest Assembly despite your blackness and ugliness, and God has made mention of you in His Book,’ and he set her free and married her.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘…And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe, and a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he might please you….’ The standards are the same when it comes to choosing a life partner; it is the desire to build a family life on good foundations. The goal of anything is what determines its value, and it is not the means which determine something’s value; you might travel on a dangerous road, but its destination is good, or you might travel on a road carpeted with flowers and fragrant plants, but its destination is evil. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…Those invite to the Fire, but God invites to paradise and to pardon, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that they may remember.’ Those who invite to the fire are the people of idolatry; as for God, He invites people to paradise, and forgiveness comes by His permission, that is by His facilitation and His conferral of success. We all know the aphorism spoken by Imam 'Ali *God be pleased with him*: ‘There is no good in a good which is followed by Hell, and there is no evil in an evil which is followed by paradise.’

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(1) The name Khansa’ means a woman with a low-bridged nose with slightly wide sides (a pug-nose).

God’s words ‘…that they may remember’ are repeated often; what does this remembering achieve? To remember something makes you feel that the matter was known to you, but heedlessness veiled it. If you become aware of your heedlessness, it reminds you of what you had forgotten before; but if the heedlessness stretches on and the principle is forgotten, this is the real disaster which consigns the matter to oblivion.

So remembering involves several stages: the first stage is that you come to know if you had not known, or you learn if you had been ignorant. The second stage is that you remember if you have forgotten, or you make an accord between what you know and what you do. Remembering tells you to make an accord between your knowledge and your behaviour so that you do not fall into ignorance; and ignorance means that you ‘know’ something which contradicts the truth. God wanted to safeguard the person who chose faith when He forbade him from marrying a woman of the people of idolatry.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to secure for the one whom He made His vicegerent on earth a single doctrine from which would issue human conduct; for if doctrines multiply according to caprices, then ways of conduct will also multiply according to caprices; and when ways of conduct are manifold, the motions of life conflict instead of converging.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to secure the unity of doctrine which is immune to any outside influence; this is why He specified for the laying of the first brick of the family that a believer cannot marry an idolatress because in this situation the idolatress will undertake the raising of the child for a long period of time which, as we said, is the longest infancy of any living being. If the father is a believer and the mother is an idolater, the father will be busy with work so that many values which contradict sound faith will take root at the hand of the mother.

The True Lord *the Most High* also does not want the believing woman to marry an idolater because if she marries an idolater, she will go to live with him and his idolatrous environment and his family, and her child will grow up in an environment of idolatry so that values that contradict sound faith will take root in him. The True Lord *the Most High* wants by this protection, i.e. by believers not marrying idolaters of either sex, to protect the first stage of infancy; and when the first stage of infancy is protected, the first spring from which comes the doctrinal education of the infant, will be a united spring, and he will not swing to and fro between different doctrines. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And do not marry idolatresses until they believe, and a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even though she might please you. And do not marry idolatrous men [to your women] until they believe, and a believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he might please you. Those invite to the fire, but God invites to paradise and to pardon, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that they may remember.'

All of this is in order that the True Lord *the Most High* can conserve the environment in which the new-born child grows up. We must understand that the True Lord *the Most High* gave male believers a dispensation to marry women of the people of the Book when He addressed the believers saying that all the good things of life have been made lawful to them. And the food of those who have been given revelation before is lawful to them, and their food is likewise lawful to them. And lawful in wedlock to them are women from among the believers and women from among those who have been given revelation before their time – provided that they give them their dowers, taking them in honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as secret love-companions. But as for him who rejects belief – in vain will be all his works: for in the life to come, he shall be among the lost (*al-Ma'ida*: 5).

Scholars have taken two positions regarding the dispensation given by the True Lord *the Most High* to male believers allowing them to marry women from the people of the Book: the first position is that it is forbidden because some of the scholars are of the opinion that the people of the Book have deviated from their beliefs to the extent that they are in idolatry; for is there anything more idolatrous than to ascribe divinity to a human being? The second position is that some scholars have allowed one to marry a woman from the people of the Book, and he must ask her whether she believes in the divinity of a human being, or she believes solely in God, the One, the All-Dominant. If it is only a matter of differing about the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, it is not so serious; yet, if she believes in the divinity of a human being alongside God, she has entered into idolatry, and the believer must be cautious.

If the man has authority and he can marry a woman of the people of the Book, he usually takes her into his environment so that the influencing environment will be one; and the fact that authority is the father's, alongside the family's presence in an environment of faith, will affect and lessen the influence of the mother from the people of the Book on her children. Yet, since one should be aware that there are ways which entice and draw one subtly towards idolatry, it is better for the believing man to avoid all this and seek to fortify and protect himself by marrying a Muslim woman.

When the True Lord *the Most High* protects the first stage of infancy, He wants the infant to avoid being instilled with division, discord and conflicting dispositions. When we make sure that a child lives and grows up in an affectionate environment, he will grow up as a balanced child, and Islam wants to preserve the balance of this child. Some people pose the question: 'Why don't we make communal nurseries for raising children?' It is as though, they want to solve the problem by this means.

We say to them: The problem was not solved by those who did this before us, which is why when we read their books such as Children Without Families, we find that their infancies were torturous. Why should we go so far? When we look into the way they raise children communally in Israel, scientific studies confirm that the children live in terrible misery to the extent that they suffer from widespread incontinence until they are young adults.

How can it escape our notice that until a child reaches the age of two or more, it does not want to share its mother with anyone; even if it has siblings, it is jealous of them? So what about a whole group of children who are raised by a woman who is not their mother? The affection of a hundred carers does not amount to the affection of a mother, for all the carers combined, do not have the heart of the mother who bore the child. The affection which a mother gives is not superficial or professional affection, but it is a natural part of life which God created to give it in the right way. This is why the child must be given a period of time in which he thinks that the mother who bore him is for him alone, and no one can share her with him, even his own siblings. And when the time comes for him to leave the cradle and go out into the street to encounter the work of life, and he finds that those who work are men, and fathers of children like him, he loves after this to be ascribed to a father who has a clear role in the outer society.

One of the constituents of a child's development is that he feels he has a mother whom no one else shares with him, and that he has a father whom no one else shares with him; and if anyone shares them with him, they are his siblings, who are all included and covered by the affection of the mother and the care of the father. Those who know the science of child-rearing affirm that a child's need for its mother is an important and crucial need for child-rearing for the first two years and few months, and when the True Lord *the Most High* revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* fourteen centuries ago these wise and true words, He showed this fact as plainly and clearly as can be. God addresses man in general saying that He has enjoined upon him goodness towards his parents: in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months. And so when he attains to full maturity and reaches forty years, the righteous person prays to his Lord to enable him to be grateful for those blessings of God with which He has graced him and his parents, and that he may do what is right that will meet with God's acceptance, and grant him righteousness in his offspring. Indeed, to God he turns in repentance, and, assuredly, he is of those who have submitted themselves to God (*al-Ahqaf:* 15).

The mother is the child's natural carer, as the True Lord intended it. So the True Lord wants to protect the first brick of the formation of society, the family, in the doctrinal structure, from being influenced by idolatry; and He wants to preserve a sound structure for the family.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* deals with the issue of relations with a woman during menstruation; and legislation is given to regulate this matter since when Islam came there were two social attitudes in this regard:

One was to see a menstruating woman as suffering from contamination, which meant that her husband could not eat with her, or stay with her, or be intimate with her, or live with her in one house, and the same went for his sons. The other attitude was to see a menstruating woman as just an ordinary woman no different from a non-menstruating woman, that is, able to live her married life with her husband without any caution or reservations. The situation, then, was between one extreme and another, and Islam came to put a limit to this issue. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْمَحِيضِ ۖ قُلْ هُوَ أَذًى فَٱعْتَزِلُوا۟ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فِى ٱلْمَحِيضِ ۖ
وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهُرْنَ ۖ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلتَّوَّٰبِينَ وَيُحِبُّ ٱلْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ ﴿٢٢٢﴾

They ask you [Prophet] about menstruation. Say,
‘Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from
women during it. Do not approach them until they are
cleansed; when they are cleansed, you may approach them
as God has ordained. God loves those who turn to Him,
and He loves those who keep themselves clean [222]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 222)

When you read, ‘It is harm’, you take the ruling from One Who is trusted to give rulings, and the matter is not up for discussion. No matter what kind of explanations, analyses and causes medicine gives, we say to it: No; the One Who created said ‘It is harm.’ The Arabic word for ‘menstruation’ (*mahid*) means blood, and can also mean the place of menstruation and the time of it.

The fact that God *the Most High* says that menstruation is harmful, prepares the mind to receive a ruling about this harm. In this way, the mind prepares for the gravity of the ruling; and the ruling conveyed a warning and a prohibition, after its justification had already been given.

The True Lord *the Most High* – Who is the Creator – wanted the process of menses for a woman to be a chemical process essential for her life and her fertility, and He commanded men to keep from women whilst they are menstruating because menstruation is harmful for them. But is the blood of menses harmful for men, or women? It is harmful for both men and women because the verse affirms the harm to be general and did not specify who was meant by it. The thing which indicates this is that menses places impurities in a vulnerable place on a man, namely the place where he ejaculates, and if any microbes reach this place, they can infect him with dangerous illnesses.

What happens is that the True Lord *the Most High* created the woman's womb, and there are in her ovaries a number of egg cells known to Him *the Most High* Alone, and when one of these eggs detaches without having been fertilised, and the lining of the womb which is made of blood tissues has a low proportion of the hormones that strengthen the lining of the womb, and this proportion of hormones is low, menstruation occurs.

Menstruation is blood containing dead tissues, and the area of the vagina and uterus begins to be agitated because this area is very sensitive to the development of microbes which cause inflammations for the woman, as well as for the man if he has sexual intercourse with his wife during menstruation. Menstruation adversely affects the woman in her strength and her body, which is proved by the fact that God excuses her from fasting and praying. So it is tiring and exhausting for her, and so it is not permissible for a man to disturb her with anything more than she already has to deal with.

God's words 'it is harm' is general, meaning that the harm affects both the man and the woman. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* explains that the word 'harm' is a situation which requires a ruling to be given concerning it, either with a permission or a prohibition; as long as it is harmful, it will inevitably be a prohibition.

He *the Exalted* says, '…so keep away from wives during menstruation. And do not approach….' If someone says that mahid here means the place of menses, he bases this on the fact that the thing which is prohibited is sexual intercourse, but that which is above the navel or above the clothing is permissible to touch. This means that God's command '…keep away from wives…' means 'Do not go to them in the place where the harm, i.e. the menses, comes from, '…until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves, then, come to them from where God has ordained for you….' The verb 'they are pure' (*yat-hurna*) is derived from the noun *tuhur* meaning 'to be clean'; when we reflect on God's words '…And when they have purified themselves…' we find that He did not say 'and when they are purified'. So what is the difference between 'to be purified' and 'to purify oneself'?

'They are purified' means that their menses has finished, whilst 'they have purified themselves' means they have performed the ritual bath after menstruation; this is why there emerged a difference of opinion between scholars as to whether simply by the menstrual course ending and the blood stopping it becomes permissible for a man to have intercourse with his wife, or whether it is obligatory to wait until the woman purifies herself by bathing.

In order to avoid this difference of opinion, we say that God's words 'they have purified themselves' mean 'they have performed the ritual bath,' so, intercourse cannot take place until they have bathed. One of the wonders of the expressions of the Quran is that the words affect how rulings are derived. An example of this is God's words describing the Quran: It is a truly Honoured Quran, in a well-guarded book which none but the pure shall touch (*al-Waqi'a*: 77-79).

What does this mean, then? Does it mean that none can touch the Quran save the angels whom God *the Most High* purified from all impurities, or does it mean that human beings also have the right to touch the written Quran since they purify themselves? Some scholars say that we must include this matter under the general theme of purification which means that 'but the pure' means those who have been purified by He Who ordained purification for them. Because of this, when Muslims perform the ritual bath (*ghusl*) or the ablution (*wudu'*), two things have happened to him: self-purification, and purity.

Self-purification occurred with the ritual bath or with ablution whilst the purity was by God's law. Just as God *the Most High* purified the angels from the outset, He purified us humans by His law; in this way, we can understand the verse in its general sense so that the difference of opinion is removed. The words of the True Lord *the Most High* in the verse we are currently examining are: '…until they are pure…' that is, until God gives them leave by purifying them, and then, they obey God's law by purifying themselves. Then, God says, '…then come to them from where God has ordained for you…' that is, in those places which are lawful.

Then God says, '…Indeed, God loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.' The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make you feel comfortable, so, just as He asked you to purify yourself physically, He *the Most High* also accepts for you to purify yourself spiritually by making repentance, which is why he mentioned both the physical and the spiritual aspects of the issue. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* brought a new ruling, which brought an end to a dubious notion which the Jews had raised.

The Jews used to spread the notion that if a man enters his wife from behind, even in her vagina, the child would be born cross-eyed. The vagina is the proper place for intercourse, so, what is meant here is not anal intercourse – God forbid – such as the people of Lot *peace be upon him* used to indulge in. Since this dubious notion which the Jews spread had no basis in fact, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to refute it, so, He said:

نِسَآؤُكُمۡ حَرۡثٞ لَّكُمۡ فَأۡتُواْ حَرۡثَكُمۡ أَنَّىٰ شِئۡتُمۡۖ وَقَدِّمُواْ لِأَنفُسِكُمۡۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ
ٱللَّهَ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّكُم مُّلَٰقُوهُۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ٢٢٣

Your wives are your fields, so go into your fields whichever way you like, and send [something good] ahead for yourselves. Be mindful of God: remember that you will meet Him.' [Prophet], give good news to the believers [223]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 223)

The True Lord *the Most High* opened the way for a man and wife to enjoy each other in any way, provided that penetration occurs in the place of impregnation. The True Lord *the Most High* used the word 'tilth' here to show that tilling takes place in the place of planting. God teaches the believers: '…come, then, to your tilth….' What is tilth? Tilth is the place where plants grow; we find the word used in another verse where God *the Most High* speaks about the hypocrite who goes about striving to '…destroy tilth and progeny…' (*al-Baqara*: 205).

So, come to your wives in the place of crops, the crop of children; as for the place where no child can grow, do not go near it. Some people incorrectly understand that God's words '…come, then, to your tilth as you may desire…' mean that a woman can be entered in any place; but this is a mistake because

His words ‘Your wives are your tilth…’ mean the place where crops are planted, and the crop of men and women is children, so, enter her in the place where a child can be made, from any direction you wish.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues: ‘…but first provide something good for your souls…’ that is, be careful not to think that it is only a matter of sexual enjoyment; rather, the True Lord *the Most High* wants this sexual pleasure to protect the hardships that will come from this pleasure; for the offspring that come as a result of sexual intercourse will bring many hardships and responsibilities, and had God *the Most High* not linked them to this pleasure, people would have renounced sex.

This is why the True Lord *the Most High* links between the toil and effort of parents in raising their children with the pleasure of sexual desire to secure the continuation of the human race. Despite this, the True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to imagine that this sexual pleasure is the main purpose of sexual intercourse, and therefore says, ‘…but first provide something good for your souls…’ that is, be well aware that this matter is not the end, but rather, the means, so, do not confuse the means with the end. ‘…But first provide something good for your souls…’ that is, save for yourselves something which will benefit you in the days ahead.

So, the chief purpose of sexual relations is procreation; ‘…but first provide something good for your souls…’ that is, do not take the passing momentary pleasure as though it is the goal, but rather take it for that which will come in the future. And how can we provide something for our own souls? Or, what should we do? It is in order that we do not suffer on account of the one who will come; and you should be well aware of this matter by providing something for your soul which will give you ease, and do that which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us: When you come to this blessing and approach your wife, you must mention God’s name and say, ‘O God, keep Satan away from me, and keep Satan away from that which You grant me.’ Then, when a Muslim goes to his wife and conceives a child, Satan will have no way of getting to it. Some scholars say that the child will not be vulnerable to the influence of sorcery. Why is all this? It is because when you plant, i.e. conceive, you remember that the real planter was God *the Most High*.

As long as you recognise the Creator and planter, you give your child eternal protection. On the contrary, a child, whose father forgot to mention God when he went to his wife, will fall prey to demons.

'…But first provide something good for your souls…' that is, provide for them that which will give you ease, and extend your lives and your works in life; for when you approach the matter with the intention of conceiving a child, and you remember God and seek refuge from Satan, the Creator will bless you with a good child who will pray for you, and teach his own children to pray for you, and his grandchildren will pray for you, and this will continue so that your action does not end until the end of time; and in this way you will have provided for your soul the best thing that could be provided.

Suppose that you are blessed with a child and then he dies; you grieve for him and anticipate recompense and remuneration for him from God; you will have sent him ahead of you to close one of the doors of hell for you. For this reason, in every situation you must remember: '…but first provide something good for your souls….' And the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and fear God, and know that you will meet Him. And give glad tidings to the believers.' The meaning of 'fear God' is: Beware of incurring your Lord's wrath in any of these actions; and be, o Muslim, with this fear, completely certain that you will meet God, and never doubt in this meeting. As long as you will be conscious of God and certain you will meet Him, you will not need to do more than rejoice in glad tidings of paradise.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَا تَجْعَلُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عُرْضَةً لِّأَيْمَٰنِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوا۟ وَتَتَّقُوا۟
وَتُصْلِحُوا۟ بَيْنَ ٱلنَّاسِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٤﴾

[Believers], do not allow your oaths in God's name to hinder
you from doing good, being mindful of God and making
peace between people. God hears and knows everything [224]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 224)

The verse encompasses three things: firstly, virtuous deeds, and one might hate virtue because it is difficult for the soul; secondly, God-fearing, that is keeping away from evil, and God-fearing is also difficult sometimes; and thirdly, making peace between people, that is reconciling quarrelling parties, though making peace between men might be strenuous – and all this is after you refrain from allowing your oaths in the name of God to become an obstacle to this.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle….’ An obstacle (*‘urda*) is a barrier which comes between two things, and the word *(‘urda*) also means ‘suitable’, as when you say ‘So-and-so is suitable for any task.’ An obstacle, as we said, is something which comes between two things, as when one puts his hand over his eyes so he cannot see the light; in this case the hand is an ‘obstacle’ between the person’s eyes and the sun, and he shields his eyes from the light in this way.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying: I do not want oaths by Me to be an obstacle between a person and his good deeds, virtue and keeping away from evil. When someone asks you to be kind to someone who treated you badly, you might say, ‘I swore not to treat this person kindly.’ By doing this, you make your oath in God’s name a barrier between yourself and virtue.

In saying this, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that it is not permissible for oaths sworn in His name to prevent virtue, the maintenance of family ties, or promoting peace between men. If someone makes an oath to do something and then, sees that another course of action is better, let him do what is best and expiate his oath. Why? Because when the believer makes an oath not to do something good, he is making God a barrier between himself and goodness, and in this way the believer contradicts himself by making the barrier an oath in God’s name. God is the One Who commanded virtue, God-fearing, and promoting peace between men, this is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle….’ That is, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to protect acts of virtue, God-fearing, and promoting peace between men.

If you make an oath, o believer, not to do these deeds, the True Lord *the Most High* wants you to break this oath and to do acts of virtue, piety, and the promotion of peace between men so that you do not contradict God’s Law. If we find that everyone in society has acted with virtue, and every person has steered clear of sin, and everyone who sees a dispute between two parties acts to resolve this dispute, is this not entering wholly into Islam? So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants the means of goodness to remain open to the people, and for them not to bar themselves from them.

The True Lord *the Most High* is the One who commands that the believer not make oaths a barrier between himself and goodness, or between himself and piety, or between himself and the promotion of peace between men. Islam is lenient in the matter of breaking oaths for the sake of virtue, and the pious predecessors used to say, 'There is no oath-breaking better than that which is for the sake of virtue.' So, when society is filled with acts of virtue, God-fearing, and the promotion of peace between adversaries, it will live up to God's words: '…enter into Islam completely…' (*al-Baqara*: 208).

A person might use any kind of excuse to avoid having to do virtuous deeds, keeping away from evil, and the promotion of peace between men, and might even do something which excuses him and makes it seem as though he is acting in obedience to God's command. Let us give as an example of this in what happened with our master Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *God be pleased with him,* when Mistah ibn Athatha joined in with those who accused the Mother of the Believers, the Lady Aisha *God be pleased with her* of the false charge.

The gist of the matter is that 'Aisha *God be pleased with her*, the wife of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, went out with the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to the battle of Banu Al-Mustaliq which was after the time when the command for women to veil themselves had been given, so 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* went in a *howdah*.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* finished the battle, and the time came to return home, but 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* found a necklace of hers was missing; and she was very light because there was not much food at that time. 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* went to search for her missing necklace, and when they picked up her howdah, they did not notice that she was not inside it. 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* found the missing necklace, but the army was far ahead of her. She expected that they would miss her and come back for her; and behind the army came Safwan ibn Al-Mu'attal As-Salami. 'Aisha *God be pleased with her* recognised him, and he made his camel kneel down for her, and ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* returned to Medina. The gossip of the false charge spread around by efforts of ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Saloul, the chief of the hypocrites.

Distress and sorrow afflicted the Lady ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* for a long time, and then, the True Lord *the Most High* announced the falsity of this rumour. So a rumour had spread about the Mother of the Believers ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her*, who was the wife of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the daughter of Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* was the faithful friend of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and even if what happened to ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* had happened to anyone else, the position of Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* would have been the same when his relative Mistah ibn Athatha joined in the spreading of the false charge with the others who did so, and then God *the Most High* absolved ‘Aisha *God be pleased with her* and revealed the words which declared the Mother of the Believers *God be pleased with her* free from this false charge. Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* used to give Mistah an allowance, and after that incident, he cut him off and said, ‘By God, I will never spend on him again!’ Why? This was because he had shared in the spreading of the false charge. On the surface, this seemed to be the right thing to do since Mistah ibn Athatha had indulged in spreading the false charge; but look at the standards of perfection, beauty and virtue which God wants us to have: The True Lord *the Most High* showed that this was one way, but there was also another more favourable way, in instructing those of the believers who have been graced with God’s favour and ease of life never to vow to stop helping their near of kin, the needy and those who emigrated from their land in the Way of God, but let them pardon and forbear. Then God puts forth to them the question: Do they not desire that God forgive their sins? God is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (*an-Nur:* 22).

If you like God *the Most High* to forgive you, will you not forgive the one who does you wrong? Since you want God to forgive you, forgive other people for their mistakes. The True Lord *the Most High* said this to Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him* because he took a stance with someone who indulged in spreading the false charge with the others who did so, yet, He told him that this was not right.

God *the Most High* says, ‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle for not doing virtuous deeds and keeping away from evil….’ Do not say, ‘I swore an oath by God that I would not do that good deed;’ rather, do it, and God will be pleased for you to break your oath and atone for it.

‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle for not doing virtuous deeds and keeping away from evil and making peace among people; and God is All-Hearing, All Knowing.’ God *the Most High* is telling us: I do not want you to make your oaths in My name an obstacle, i.e. a barrier or an impediment against doing good. For example, if you are asked to be kind to a person who has ill-treated you, do not say, ‘I swore an oath not to treat him kindly because he does not deserve it;’ in this case, you will have made an oath by God a barrier to virtue. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say to you: No; I will excuse this oath in My name; if you swear an oath not to act with virtue, God-fearing, and promoting peace between rivals, I will excuse this oath.

The Hadith says: ‘If someone swears an oath, and then sees that another course of action is better, let him do what is best and atone for his oath.’(1) In this way, God *the Most High* protects acts of virtue, piety and promoting peace between men even if you have sworn an oath by God not to do them. Why? Because when you swear an oath by God not to do them, and you make God *the Most High* the impediment to them, you contradict the Sacred Law itself, for God commands virtue, promoting peace, and piety; so, do not make a human oath an impediment to following the way of the Lord of men.

‘And do not make [your oath by] God an obstacle for not doing virtuous deeds and keeping away from evil and making peace among people….’ If you make an oath to refrain from doing something which is obligatory, it is obligatory for you to take back the oath, break it, and atone for it. The same ruling applies to the one who prevents people from benefiting from his property such as his horse or mule, or machinery, or car under the pretence that he has sworn an oath not to loan them out, which happens a lot in the countryside.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, ‘…and God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.’ He *the Exalted* hears the oath you swear, and He knows whether your intention was good or evil; so, do not make your oath an excuse for preventing virtue, piety and promoting peace. When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about oaths, He makes one of the basics for judging an oath whether it was made sincerely or thoughtlessly; and out of His mercy, God only gives weight to oaths which are made from the heart, that is, those oaths which the one who makes them truly intends not to break; as for oaths made rashly and thoughtlessly, God excuses them.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, and Imam Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him*

Take, for example, the oaths which slip from people's tongues, such as when they say, 'By God, if you had not done that, I would have done such-and-such with you,' or 'By God, I will visit you', or 'By God, I did not mean that', or oaths which are based on supposition such as when you swear saying, 'By God, such-and-such happened' when you are not completely certain that it happened, but you do not mean to lie.

As for a false oath, it is an oath and a vow which you know to be a lie so that you swear the opposite of what you know, such as, when you see someone stealing or murdering and you swear by God that he did not steal or murder. Because of all this, God *the Most High* passed final judgement on this matter by saying:

لَّا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِٱللَّغْوِ فِىٓ أَيْمَٰنِكُمْ وَلَٰكِن يُؤَاخِذُكُم بِمَا
كَسَبَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٥﴾

He will not call you to account for oaths you have uttered unintentionally, but He will call you to account for what you mean in your hearts. God is most forgiving and forbearing [225]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 225)

It was appropriate for this verse to come after all that came before it because He *the Exalted* clarified for us the oath which does not count, as though He were saying of it: Go back on it, and break it, and I will accept your going back on it if in return you act with virtue and God-fearing and promote peace between men. If He accepted that we go back on these kinds of oaths, it is because they are replaced by doing good deeds. God's words '…what your hearts have earned…' means exactly the same as what He said elsewhere: '…But He will impose blame on you for oaths which you have sworn in earnest…' (*al-Ma'ida*: 89).

That is that which is tied fast in the soul, and which is firm in your soul; but God does not impose blame on oaths that runs off the lips. 'God does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths….' The word 'oaths' (*ayman*) is the plural of *yamin*. It means an oath or a vow. It was called *yamin* because in the past, when they swore oaths, they would each place their right (*yamin*) hand on the hand of the other as the right hand is the limb of action.

A propos of which, do not think that the active limb acts because of training and practice; it only acts by its creation, i.e. by the way God *the Most High* created it, and it is compelled to act according to its created nature.

This is why you may find someone whose right hand does not function and who uses his left hand instead. Do not try to make him use his right hand instead of his left because your efforts will be in vain and come to nothing; for the reason he uses his left hand instead of his right is because of how he was created; it is the part of the brain which controls movement that decides this. If it is created on the right side of the brain, the left hand will be the active one; if it is created on the left side of the brain, the right hand will be the one which works.

This is why you sometimes find that the one who writes with the left hand has better handwriting than the one who writes with the right hand. Because of this, we say that it is wrong to try and change the way of someone who uses his left hand and not his right since this is futile and will not be fruitful.

Sometimes you find that the part of the brain that controls movement is in the dead centre of the brain, in which case the left and right hands will both work with equal competency; this is why we find some people who can write with their left and right hands equally swiftly and well, and can use them both spontaneously and naturally. God *the Most High* has many ways of creating, and He shows us that He is not governed by any rules; He is capable of making the right hand work, and capable of making the left hand work, and capable of making both hands work equally well, or to make neither hand able to work. It is not something mechanical which is outside God's Will, but rather, everything is subject to His Will.

‘God does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths….’ Another word for oath in Arabic is half, which also means ‘consolidation’; it is derived from the word *hilf*, which means for people to join together for a certain task. When we come together to do something, we share the work between us, and when we do this, it becomes easier for all of us to do it.

‘God does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And God is Forgiving and Forbearing.’ Earning is a deliberate act; and when you swear by God unintentionally, He does not take you to task for it, which shows that God *the Most High* is ‘…Forgiving and Forbearing.’

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

لِّلَّذِينَ يُؤْلُونَ مِن نِّسَآئِهِمْ تَرَبُّصُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَشْهُرٍۖ فَإِن فَآءُو فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ٢٢٦

For those who swear that they will not approach their wives,
there shall be a waiting period of four months: if they go back,
remember God will be most forgiving and merciful [226]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 226)

Sometimes, some men ‘…swear not to have sexual relations with their wives….’ This is because a man sometimes feels he needs to discipline his wife, and he sleeps apart from her without making any vow or oath. Some men do not have enough will power to keep away from their wives, so, they take oaths not to approach them so that the oath will be a barrier for them, and an encouragement to be firm in doing this. This was part of the custom of the Arabs before Islam.

A man would refrain from sleeping with his wife for any length of time he wanted, and some of them would vow not to approach his wife for a specific period of time, and before this time ended, they would make another vow to extend the period of time again; this continued until the practice became a way of debasing one’s wife and frustrating her, and refusing to grant her marital rights; and this was a denial of the wife’s right to enjoy her husband.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to put an end to this practice; and He did not end it in order to favour one side over the other, but rather with the justice of the All-Wise Creator, the Dispenser of Mercy to His creatures. It was possible for Him to ban it and prohibit it completely, and forbid people from doing it, but He *the Exalted* knows the hidden aspects and nature of the human soul: a woman might see that she can take advantage of her husband being attracted to her, either because of her beauty or his passion, and try to degrade him by means of this; therefore God gave the man the right to abstain from his wife for up to four months; as for longer than this, a woman cannot bear for her husband to abstain from her so long.

'For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months, but if they return [to normal relations] - then indeed, God is Forgiving, Merciful.' Islam wants married life to be based on a realistic foundation, not on biased and partial notions which do not confirm to reality; it recognises inclinations, and does not do away with them, but rather elevates them; and it recognises instincts, and does not suppress them, but rather regulates them.

There is a difference between regulation and repression: repression gives the opportunity for the disease to worsen surreptitiously until it explodes in the tendencies of the human soul in an abnormal way with no caution; but regulation recognises instincts and inclinations, and only tries to guide them, not do away with them. Mankind submit to this principle in all of their actions, even their manufacture: for example, those who produce steam boilers, put vents in these boilers in which gas might build up pressure which will cause them to explode –so that if there is excess pressure, it can be released; and they might design an automatic system within them that works without human interference so that the machine controls itself.

The True Lord *the Most High* placed a clear ordered system in His creatures whom He created, and He established for them the family structure on sound foundations. Islam builds this system firstly on the soundness, purity, and oneness of doctrine so that there would not be a multitude of influences on the family's components, and therefore it forbade Muslim men marrying idolatresses, and forbade Muslim women marrying idolaters. After this, it taught us the meaning of the instinctive union of a married couple; and the True Lord *the Most High* did not want to give free rein to instincts at all times of married life, so He made menstruation a time in which sexual intercourse is forbidden, saying, '…do not approach them until they are pure' (*al-Baqara*: 222). This way, the True Lord *the Most High* regulated sexual relations between the married couple in a sound and pure way.

The True Lord *the Most High* knows that the human soul is subject to vicissitudes because man is temporal, and has a beginning and an end, and everything which is temporal must undergo change. If a man meets with a woman, this meeting must be done in the light of the way of God because if the meeting takes place according to the way of men and their emotions, it will end in failure for the ways of men are changing and ephemeral; and this is why the meeting of man and woman must take place according to God's standards.

God *the Most High* knows that the soul has inclinations and variables, and it is very possible that differences might occur between a married couple, which is why God *the Most High* makes breathing spaces in which the husband can resort to discipline which creates refinement and preservation; and therefore, He allowed man, if he sees that his wife is degrading him with her beauty and attractiveness, and the man might have a particular disposition and desire for such things – God allowed him a period of time in which he may take an oath not to approach his wife. God *the Most High* did not make this period of time free for the man to decide, but rather, He restricted it to this particular oath in order that the matter be properly regulated.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants healing, not cruelty. Were the man not regulated with an oath, he might change his mind and go to his wife, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months….' That is, you are allowed, o husband, to vow not to approach your wife for four months; but if the period extends over four months, it will not be discipline, but rather abuse; and the Creator *the Most High* wants discipline, not abuse. If this period is exceeded, the husband will thereby have transgressed, and will have no right to do so.

The True Lord *the Most High* is the One Who created inclinations, emotions and instincts, and made sound laws for them; and He *the Exalted* leaves for us things which indicates this. During the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab

God be pleased with him, ‘Umar was once walking in the dead of night when he heard a woman saying the famous lines of verse:

This night is long and dark,
And keeps me awake with no companion to play with,
And by God, were it not that God’s punishment is fearsome,
The sides of this bed would be shaken off.

This means that the woman – whose husband was away in war – was suffering from a longing for her husband, and this suffering was almost enough to make her act improperly, but her fear of God *the Most High* prevented her from going astray. We might well ask how it was possible for ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* to hear this woman whilst he was walking in the street. I say that the woman who feels this way sings in the stillness of the night, and when the night is still and there is no clamour, it is easy to hear what is being said within houses. Did ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* not hear the words of the woman who argued with her daughter about adulterating milk?

When ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* heard the words of this woman who was suffering from longing for her husband, he went, with his sound disposition and acute awareness, to his daughter Hafsa, the Mother of the Believers *God be pleased with her*, and said to her, ‘How long can a woman go without her husband?’ She replied, ‘Between four and six months.’

Upon this, ‘Umar(1) *God be pleased with him* established a practice which became a law thereafter, which is that no Muslim soldier should have to be separated from his wife for longer than four months. So the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months…’ came before this incident involving ‘Umar *God be pleased with him*, after which the True Lord *the Most High* left it for the reality of life to show us the truth of what He had legislated for us, and ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* came to derive this ruling from the reality of life.

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(1) One of the names of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khaṭab *God be pleased with him* was *Al-Farouk*, which means ‘the one who separates’ in Arabic. He was named so because he was always clear about truth from falsehood and was strong in standing for what is right.

Then God says, ‘…but if they return [to normal relations]…’ that is, if the man returns and wants to approach his wife before the four months have passed, he can atone for his oath, and that is that. But if the four months pass and the estrangement continues past its bounds, the man is commanded either to go back on his oath, or else to divorce his wife; and if the husband refuses to do so, the judge will force the divorce. Some jurists say that if the four months pass without the man going back, this counts as one finalised pronouncement of divorce. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِنۡ عَزَمُواْ ٱلطَّلَٰقَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

but if they are determined to divorce,
remember that God hears and knows all [227]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 227)

Scholars differ as to whether in this case, the wife is divorced with a finalised or non-finalised divorce. The meaning of a ‘non-finalised’ (*raj‘i*) is, as the Arabic name suggests, that the husband has the right to take back (*raja‘a*) his wife without her consent or permission; but as for finalised divorce, it means that he cannot take her back without making a new marriage contract and paying her a new dowry.

Divorce which comes from the four-month abstinence is a lesser separation, which requires a new marriage contract and dowry provided that it has not been preceded by two pronouncements of divorce. The greater separation, known as the triple divorce, is when a wife has been pronounced as divorced three times, in which case her husband cannot take her back unless she marries someone else and lives a proper married life with him, and then, he divorces her for whatever reason. After that, her old husband has the right to take her back with a new marriage contract and dowry, but only after he has endured the harsh jealousy of seeing her wife of another man. The True Lord *the Most High* presents this matter by saying, ‘For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months, but if they return [to normal relations] - then indeed, God is Forgiving, Merciful. But if they are resolved on divorce, indeed, God is All-Hearing, All Knowing’ (*al-Baqara*: 226-227)

Islam is a realistic religion which gives the Muslim husband ways to vent his anger and ways to discipline his wife; but Islam does not want a man to persist with this discipline, and if he persists and goes beyond these four months, we say to him: There must be a limit which brings an end to this.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the rulings of divorce, having previously spoken about marriage and abstinence which leads up to divorce.

When we reflect on Islam's stand concerning divorce, we find that it speaks realistically in a way which suits human inclinations; for as long as we are temporal beings subject to change, circumstances or feelings might affect the life of a married couple which they did not expect when they first married. When a person marries, he might be motivated by the burning of a single disposition, whilst after this, once life's realities come, many other dispositions influence him. The sexual instinct might overpower him and drive him to marry, and in seeking to satisfy his sexual desire, he might ignore the rest of the dispositions of his soul; and once he enters the reality of marriage, and the burning and passion of his instincts subside, his soul becomes aware of different qualities which he wishes to see in his wife, but which he does not find; and he asks himself what it was that hid them from him.

What hid them from him was the passion and fervour of sexual attraction. Before marriage, he looked at the woman from only one perspective, and did not consider any of the others. For example, the husband might find that his wife's character clashes with his own, and he might find that her way of thinking and her cultural attitude clash with his way of thinking and his cultural attitude, and he might find that there is no emotional concord between him and her, and that there is no mutual affection between them; and as we know, emotions have no laws.

It is possible that a man might find himself unable to suffice himself with a single sexual partner, and for this reason, he does not base his life on purity, yet he wants his wife to be pure and chaste in her life with him, whilst he gives himself the freedom to gain sexual experiences with more than one woman; or the opposite might be the case, wherein the man finds that one woman is enough for him, whilst the woman wants more than one man. Or, the man might be pure in his way of life ,whilst his wife wants him to bring her money in any way he can get it so that they differ. Or, the woman might be pure in her way of life so that she is not content that her husband earns money from an unlawful source.

Discord arises from such situations; discord comes when one of the spouses wants their life to be clean, pure and upright whilst the other is not concerned with this. This kind of scenario exists in the reality around us; how many houses suffer when family harmony is lost, and the view of one spouse about things conflicts with that of the other? This is the cause of the discord which arises between spouses when one of them does that which is not sufficient for the other; if a man and woman agree on chastity, purity and goodness, the affairs of their lives will be upright. For this reason, Islam brings its lofty rulings to accommodate all the factors of life, and the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَٱلۡمُطَلَّقَٰتُ يَتَرَبَّصۡنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَٰثَةَ قُرُوٓءٖۚ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَن يَكۡتُمۡنَ مَا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ فِيٓ
أَرۡحَامِهِنَّ إِن كُنَّ يُؤۡمِنَّ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِۚ وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ إِنۡ أَرَادُوٓاْ
إِصۡلَٰحٗاۚ وَلَهُنَّ مِثۡلُ ٱلَّذِي عَلَيۡهِنَّ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِۚ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيۡهِنَّ دَرَجَةٞۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ٢٢٨

Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods before remarrying, and, if they really believe in God and the Last Day, it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs: their husbands would do better to take them back during this period, provided they wish to put things right. Wives have [rights] similar to their [obligations], according to what is recognized to be fair, and husbands have a degree [of right] over them: [both should remember that] God is almighty and wise [228] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 228)

The whole verse contains legal rulings on life situations; the first of such rulings is: 'Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses….' We can observe that the ruling is not given in the form of an imperative, but rather as a statement; He says, 'Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses….' When the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give an obligatory ruling, He does not do so using the human imperative form, but rather, He gives it as a statement, as this is a firmer and more decisive way of giving the ruling. How is this? This means that when the True Lord *the Most High* gives a command, the command is met by those who believe in Him with obedience, and this obedience applies to all elements so that no condition is excluded from it, and it becomes a fact which is related, not a ruling to be obeyed. As long as it has become a fact which is related, it is as though it has become a narrated history, which is: 'Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses….' It is possible for us to understand the verse according to a different meaning, which is that God *the Most High* said, 'Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses…', and so these words are a statement.

We said that statements can either be true or false; it is God who said this, and so whoever wants to believe God's words must implement the ruling; and those who wish to challenge God *the Most High* by denying His words and not believing Him should not implement the ruling, and see in their own selves the sign of the lack of belief, which is manifest failure; is this not more of a coercion than for others? An example of this is God's words that corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men, for corrupt women – just as good women are for good men, and good men, for good women. These are innocent of all that evil tongues may ascribe to them, forgiveness of sins shall be theirs, and a most excellent sustenance (*an-Nur:* 26).

Although this is a statement of fact, it is also an issued legislation which might be obeyed or disobeyed; but God *the Most High* wants from us that the matter be thus: 'corrupt women are for corrupt men,' which means that your Lord wants is to be that 'corrupt women are for corrupt men,' and that 'good women are for good men;' this does not mean that in reality it will inevitably be as the verse says, but rather, reality will be this way if we implement God's instructions, and it will not be the case if we disobey God *the Most High* and rebel against His law. The same is the case with God's statement that whoever enters the Sacred Mosque is secure (*Al-'Imran*: 97).

This really means: Make all who enter the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*) secure;' and it is possible that someone might disobey God and not make the Sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*) safe and secure. So God's saying 'Divorced women remain in waiting for three monthly courses….' is a ruling of moral responsibility which merits obedience from all who believe in God. God’s words ‘remain in waiting’ (*yatarabbasna*) mean that they will wait, and the word used here is completely appropriate to the situation as the woman who waits (*mutarabbisa*) is the divorced woman, and ‘divorced’ means that she is not wanted, so, she stays and waits until her waiting-period is over, whereupon her esteem returns as she is now able to marry a new husband. The noble verse (in the Arabic original) has also the word *bi-anfusihinna* (‘by themselves,’ absent in the English rendering) after the term ‘remain in waiting,’ even though the one who waits is the same as the one who is divorced; this is because the mindful, responsible self and the evil-commanding self would be in turmoil all of this time, which is ‘three monthly courses.’ The word *quru’* (‘courses’) is the plural of (*qar’*) which can either mean menstruation or the time of purity in between two menstruations. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘three monthly courses,’ which of these does He mean? Does it mean the time of menstruation, or purity? The meaning here is purity because He said *thalathat* (‘three’) in the Arabic numeral form which is used with masculine Arabic nouns, not with feminine nouns, and the Arabic word for a menstrual period (*hayda*) is feminine, whilst the word for a period of purity (*tuhr*) is masculine; so ‘three monthly courses’ means three consecutive periods of purity. The reason for this is to make sure that she is not pregnant, as well as to give the couple some time to reconcile; for perhaps after the first or second period of purity one might begin to miss the other, and things might go back to how they were; but once the three periods of purity are over, there is no hope or expectancy of reconciliation.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘…and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs….’ What does creation mean? Creation means to bring into existence something which did not exist, and this thing which did not exist could either be a pregnancy or a menstrual period. The pregnant woman has her own waiting-term, as it is specified in God’s words that those who are with child, the end of their waiting-term shall come when they deliver their burden (*at-Talaq:* 4).

As for a woman who is not pregnant, her waiting-term is that she menstruates and becomes pure three times. There is also a third situation which concerns such women who are beyond the age of monthly courses, as well as for such who do not have any courses, their waiting-period – if there is any doubt about it – shall be three calendar months (*at-Talaq:* 4). That is, if a woman's monthly cycle has finished, her waiting-term is 'three calendar months, and the same ruling applies to the one who is too young to have begun menstruating, i.e. her waiting-term is three months. So the system of waiting-terms has several situations:

- If she is not pregnant, her waiting-term is three *quru'*, i.e. three periods of purity, if she has a menstrual cycle.
- If she is pregnant, her waiting-term ends when she gives birth.
- If she is not pregnant and has reached the menopause and so no longer menstruates, or if she is too young to have begun menstruating, in both cases the waiting-term is three months.

God's words '…and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs…' indicate that a woman testifies to her own condition, and no one else has the right to inspect her, and she is the one who reports the matter herself, declaring whether she is pregnant or not. And she must not conceal this; for she might be pregnant but then, conceal what is in her womb so that she does not have to wait the entire waiting-term for a pregnant woman, and then, marry another man so the child is ascribed to other than his true father; for pregnancies usually last nine months, but there are exceptions to this, and some pregnancies last only seven months, and sometimes only six. A divorced woman might remarry after three months and then claim she is pregnant by the new husband and that her pregnancy has only lasted seven or six months.

Some of us might know the story of the woman whose pregnancy lasted only six months: a woman was brought to 'Uthman *God be pleased with him* because she had given birth six months after marrying, and he wanted to punish her for adultery, but Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *God be pleased with him* intervened saying, 'How can you punish her for fornication for giving birth after six months; have you not read the words of the True Lord *the Most High*?' Othman *God be pleased with him* asked, 'And what did the True Lord *the Most High* say about this?’ Imam 'Ali *God be pleased with him* recited God’s words stating that divorced mothers may nurse their children for two whole years (*al-Baqara*: 233). That is, they nurse the child for a period of twenty-four months; and another verse says that a mother bears her child in pain, and in pain she gives him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her take thirty months (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). If we take from the first verse twenty-four months, which is the period of weaning, and subtract it from the thirty months which combine pregnancy with weaning in the second verse, we understand that pregnancy could last only six months. Upon this, our master ‘Uthman *God be pleased with him* said, ‘By God, This did not occur to me!’

So, a six-month pregnancy is possible, and from here we understand the wisdom of God’s words: ‘…and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs….’ so that a woman cannot claim she is not pregnant and then marry another man and ascribe a child to him who is not his flesh and blood, and more than one problem can arise because of this, including the fact that the child will not inherit from his real father, and his unmarriageable kin will not be forbidden to him so that his half-sister from his true father will not be deemed his sister, and the same for his aunts, and everything will be turned upside-down – and these are only the problems relating to his true father.

As for the case of the second husband, the child will take from him rights which are not lawfully his; he will inherit from him, and the second husband’s unmarriageable kin will become his unmarriageable kin too, so he will be in their company whilst they are uncovered without having the right to do so, and unlawful mixing will take place.

So, God’s words ‘…and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs…’ is a ruling which the True Lord *the Most High* wants to be observed so that life can be established on purity, nobility and chastity, and in which no one violates the rights of anyone else. This is with respect to pregnancies, but what about the matter of menstruation?

It is also not lawful for her to conceal her menses in order to make her waiting-term with her husband last longer. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…if they believe in God and the Last Day….’ What is the relationship between belief and legal rulings? It is a firm relationship because pregnancy, or menstruation is a secret thing which is not governed by public laws, but rather the thing which governs each is the act of faith; for this reason, it is said that 'only the unseen oversees the unseen': as long as something cannot be seen, no one can oversee it except *the Most High* Unseen Being, God.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period]….' The Arabic word *ba'l* means 'husband', and also means lord, master, and owner. During the waiting-term, the husband has the right to take his wife back. God *the Most High* says, '…And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period]….' Does this mean there are others besides the husband who are also entitled to take the wife back, since the True Lord *the Most High* used the word *ahaqq* which literally means 'have more right,' which apparently seems to give others besides the husbands the right to take the wives back? No; the meaning is that there is no entitlement for anyone here but the husband. To take the wife back during the waiting-term is the right of the husband, and the wife cannot say no, nor can the guardian of the wife. If the husband wants to take his wife back, and she declines and refuses, his will takes precedence over hers, and he has more right than she does, and he does not have to pay regard to what she says; she does not have a right in this matter since she accepted him in the first place. As for once the waiting-term has passed, the matter is different: there must be a guardian, and a new marriage contract, and a new dowry; and the wife's agreement is essential.

'…And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period]….' This is if they desire reconciliation, and desire is an unseen feeling. It is as though this is a warning to the couple that the law allows them to reconcile, but if the husband wants to take her back just in order to harm her for his own reasons, the religion says to him: No; you are not entitled to do that; although the law allows him to take her back, God forbids him to do this injustice. It is the right of the husband to take back his wife lawfully for the sake of chastity, integrity and matrimony, not for anything else. However, if he has wicked hidden motives such as to harm her and take vengeance on her, the religion does not allow him to do so.

Legally speaking, the law gives him the right to take her back, and no one can stand in his way, no matter what the motives of his soul might be, but if he has evil intentions behind this, he will carry the burden of sin for his actions. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable….' That is, the wife has the same rights as the husband; but what are their rights, and what are their responsibilities? The equality here is of sex, and each of them has a right over the other according to their nature. The husband provides the wife with certain services, and the wife provides him with other services in return; for married life is based on shared responsibilities: the man has responsibilities determined by his nature as a male, and the woman has responsibilities determined by her nature as a female. The man is required to work and toil in order to spend, and the woman is required to make for the man a home in which he can take solace from her when he comes home from doing his job in life. This is why God *the Most High* says that among His signs is that He creates for us mates out of our own kind so that, we find rest with them, and He engenders love and tenderness between us: in this, indeed, there are signs for people who reflect (*ar-Rum:* 21).

To find rest with something is the opposite of going to work; and 'find rest with them' means that you work all day in order to earn provisions, and then, you go home to find peace with your wife. The man must work, and the woman must make a good home life and pleasant atmosphere for him, with tender and warm relations. The responsibilities are shared fairly: you have rights which are incumbent on the other, and the other has rights which are incumbent on you.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]….' This is the degree of authority and guardianship. The degree of authority gives us a wider and more comprehensive concept, for every group must have a responsible custodian. Guardianship is responsibility, not supremacy, and he who takes guardianship as a chance to gain supremacy and control has perverted it from its proper purpose, for the basis of guardianship is that it is a responsibility by which the motions of life are organised.

There is no shame for a man to obey the directives of a woman in those things connected with her mission as a woman and in the areas of her service, that is, in women's matters; for just as a man has his area, a woman also has hers. The precedent for which man is raised is that he is more involved in worldly works, and this involvement means that the man has to spend on the woman in accordance with the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that men have the degree of guardianship because they are supposed to spend out of their possessions (*an-Nisa':* 34). So spending is a man's duty and responsibility, and he should know that God *the Most High* is Mighty, and does not like to see a man degrade a woman whom He created; and God is All-Wise, and able to retaliate for a woman when man understands that his precedence over her is for domination, or if a woman understands that her goodness towards a man is a special favour from her to him; for there should be no degradation in marriage because marriage is based on love and good will.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

ٱلطَّلَٰقُ مَرَّتَانِۖ فَإِمۡسَاكُۢ بِمَعۡرُوفٍ أَوۡ تَسۡرِيحُۢ بِإِحۡسَٰنٖۗ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمۡ أَن تَأۡخُذُواْ مِمَّآ
ءَاتَيۡتُمُوهُنَّ شَيۡـًٔا إِلَّآ أَن يَخَافَآ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ ٱللَّهِۖ فَإِنۡ خِفۡتُمۡ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ ٱللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ
عَلَيۡهِمَا فِيمَا ٱفۡتَدَتۡ بِهِۦۗ تِلۡكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِ فَلَا تَعۡتَدُوهَاۚ وَمَن يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ ٱللَّهِ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ٢٢٩

Divorce can happen twice, and [each time] wives either be kept on in an acceptable manner or released in a good way. It is not lawful for you to take back anything that you have given [your wives], except where both fear that they cannot maintain [the marriage] within the bounds set by God: if you [arbiters] suspect that the couple may not be able to do this, then there will be no blame on either of them if the woman opts to give something for her release. These are the bounds set by God: do not overstep them. It is those who overstep God's bounds who are doing wrong [229] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 229)

Here, the True Lord *the Most High* is speaking about divorce, having just spoken about a divorced woman's waiting-term and how she can be returned and taken back. He *the Exalted* is now speaking about divorce in itself; and the

Arabic word for divorce (*talaq*) is derived from a word meaning to be set free and liberated. It is as though it is the untying of a bond which existed, namely the bond of marriage; and the bond of marriage was made by God *the Most High* as a solemn bond, and a solemn pledge, as He said that women, in marriage, receive a most solemn pledge from men (*an-Nisa':* 21).

It is a solemn pledge because it makes the private parts of the spouses lawful for one another; noteworthy here is that God did not describe faith as a solemn pledge, but rather called it only a 'pledge', so, it is as though the pledge of marriage is more solemn than that of faith. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to instil in people the ability to seek solutions to their problems in the easiest way possible, which is why He allowed for us to untie the bond of marriage; and the end of the bond is not like its beginning: it is not thought-out. The beginning of the marriage was well thought-out, and we began it with consent, acceptance and witnesses, and when you began the thing you did so, after having thought about its demands and conditions. But divorce is different; for a man may not be able to hold back his overwhelming emotions, and he might do it for something trivial or for something which could have been overcome without resorting to divorce. So the True Lord *the Most High* wants to give people a chance to reflect and deliberate on untying this bond, so, He said, 'Divorce may be [done] twice…', that is, once and then, again. Someone might ask: How can it be twice, when we pronounce it three times? Indeed, a man once asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* this question, 'O Messenger of God, God *the Most High* says, 'Divorce may be [done] twice…', so why did it become thrice?' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* smiled and said, '…Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness….' It is as though the meaning of 'Divorce may be [done] twice…' is that you have, in your arena of choice, the ability to divorce a woman twice, whilst the third is not for you. Why? It is because after that, there will be a greater separation, and you will not have the right to take her back, and another man will have rights to this woman: It is God's ruling that after two divorces, the man cannot take his wife back in marriage until she first takes another man for husband (*al-Baqara*: 230).

And what if a man says to his wife, 'You are thrice divorced,' does this count as one pronouncement of divorce, or three? We say that time is an essential condition of the occurrence of divorce; a man divorces his wife once, then, time passes and he divorces her again as a second divorce, then, time passes again, and then, after this we arrive to the situation referred to in God's words: '…Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness….' So, the text of this verse is clear and direct in that a threefold divorce with a single statement is not counted as three divorces, but is rather only one divorce. It is true that our master 'Umar *God be pleased with him* made it count as three divorces; but that was because people had made light of the matter so, he wanted to be hard on them so they would stop abusive practice; but they did not stop it, and because of this we should return to the origin of the law as it came in the Quran, which is: 'Divorce may be [done] twice….'

The wisdom of spreading divorce over three times, and not in one single pronouncement, is that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to provide the chance to take it back; and the chance to take it back cannot come in a single breath or a single pronouncement. The man who says to his wife, 'You are thrice divorced,' has not taken the chance to search his soul; and if we consider this statement of his as amounting to three divorces, the entire married life will have been destroyed with a single utterance. But the greatness of the law is that the True Lord *the Most High* spread divorce into separate occasions so a person has a chance to search his soul; for he may have made a mistake the first time so that, he will be more careful the next time and regret what he did. When you find the law spreading out something which may or may not happen, there must be duration of time between each occurrence.

Some loudmouths want to justify to the people the criticisms they make against God's Way, so, they say: 'God *the Most High* declared that polygamy is not possible when He said to men that it will not be within their power to treat their wives with equal fairness, however much they may desire it (*an-Nisa':* 129). They say, 'God made fairness a condition of polygamy, and then He decreed that we will not be able to treat our wives fairly however much we may desire it, so, it is as though He changed His mind about the ruling.' This is their logic. We say to them: Finish reading the verse and you will understand its meaning. The True Lord *the Most High* says that it will not be within our power to treat our wives with equal fairness, however much we may desire it, and then, He adds to this negation, saying that for this reason, we should not allow ourselves to incline totally to one wife and ignore the other (*an-Nisa':* 129).

Since an exception has been made to the negation, this means that it has been negated, and it is as they say, 'Two negatives make an affirmative.' The ability is still there, and God's words that 'we should not allow ourselves to incline totally' allude to it.

The same is the case here with: 'Divorce may be [done] twice: Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness….' Since He said '…Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release [them] with kindness…' and said 'Divorce may be [done] twice…' – that is every action has its time – this is appropriate with stages of disciplining and refinement, not with punishment and separation. On the other hand, a single threefold pronouncement of divorce all at once is a single forceful action which is devoid of any disciplining, reconciliation, or refinement. About this matter, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and it is not allowed for you to take back anything of what you have given to them….' This is because the purpose of the dowry is that the husband pays it for the enjoyment of his wife; so, if divorce takes place, it is not lawful for the divorcer to take back any of the dowry he paid; but the True Lord *the Most High* made an exception to this, saying, '…unless they both fear that they cannot keep within the bounds set up by God. And if you fear that they cannot keep within the bounds of God, no blame shall be on either of them for what the wife shall herself give for her redemption….'

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give the woman a way out if she is subjected to abuse which she will not accept; so, the True Lord *the Most High* decrees: If they fear they will not keep to God's bounds, the woman is allowed to release herself with some money; and for this it is disliked to be more than the amount of the dowry she received, unless this is the result of her recalcitrance and disobedience to her husband, in which case it is not blameworthy for more than the dowry to be paid.

Reality came to confirm what God had ordained when the events took place concerning Jamila the sister of 'Abdullah ibn Ubay. When she was married to 'Abdullah ibn Qais, she went to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'I do not accuse him of any shortcoming in his religion or his character, but I do not wish to be faithless in Islam.’ She meant that she lived with him yet, disliked him, which meant she could not fulfil his rights; and this is faithlessness to a partner, i.e. a denial of the rights of the husband and his obedience.

She said that she did not accuse him of any shortcoming in his religion or his character in order to imply that there were other emotional reasons, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to know what these were, so she said, ‘I lifted the curtain and found him in a group of men, and he was the blackest, and the shortest, and the ugliest of them all.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to her, ‘Will you return his dowry?’ She said, ‘If he wishes, I will give him more besides.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘We do not need any increase, but return to him his dowry.’

This is called ‘release/redemption’ (*khul‘*), i.e. for the wife to release herself from her husband if she fears she will not be able to fulfil any of his marital rights. She releases herself from him with money so that he is not harmed, for he may want to marry someone else and need a dowry to offer her. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘…and it is not allowed for you to take back anything of what you have given to them….’ This is something about which God *the Most High*, in another verse, says that if a man wished to divorce his wife and marry another woman, and he had given the first wife a heap of gold, he should not take back anything of it (*an-Nisa’:* 20).

The True Lord *the Most High* then makes the exception: ‘…unless they both fear that they cannot keep within the bounds set up by God….’ This refers to the two spouses, and after this comes the responsibility of the families and guardians of the spouses and all those who are concerned with their situation: ‘…And if you fear that they cannot keep within the bounds of God, no blame shall be on either of them for what the wife shall herself give for her redemption. These are the bounds of God: so, do not overstep them; for whoever oversteps the bounds of God, they are the unjust.’

God’s bounds are those things which He has legislated for His servants as impassable bounds between the lawful and the unlawful. God’s bounds are either mentioned after prohibitions, or after commands. If they are mentioned after commands, He says, ‘…These are the bounds of God: so, do not overstep them…' that is, they are as far as you can go; so, do not transgress the bound. But when they come after prohibitions, He says, '…these are the limits set up by God, so do not approach them…' (*al-Baqara*: 187) because the True Lord *the Most High* wants to prevent the soul from the effect of unlawful things which insist on it to commit them; if you are far from them, it is best to remain distant.

Look carefully at what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The lawful is clear, and the unlawful is clear; and between them are doubtful matters, unknown to many people. And so those who stay clear of doubtful matters thereby free themselves of suspicion regarding their religion and their reputation; and those who fall into doubtful matters, fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture, and is on the brink of entering it. Every king has his own reserved land, and the reserved land of God is all He has prohibited.'(1)

As long as the bounds include God's prohibitions and commands, everything commanded and everything prohibited must remain within the domain of the command of 'do' and the prohibition of 'do not'. If the order of 'do', moves into the domain of 'do not', and that which enters the domain of 'do not', moves to the domain of 'do', the order of the universe will be disrupted; and once the order of the universe has been disrupted, injustice will have occurred, for injustice means to take the right of one man and give it to another. The ruling of divorce is one of God's bounds, and if you try and bring something which is not in line with what God has commanded for the social order, you transfer the commanded into the domain of prohibited, and by doing this you commit injustice.

When the True Lord *the Most High* treats the issues of society, He treats them in a way which prevents society from falling into illnesses and fatal diseases. Even if we think the best of human beings, and that they legislate for the sake of goodness and benefit, they legislate according to their own knowledge of things, but we cannot be sure that they will not be unaware of things that may happen of which they know nothing. They legislate for those things which they know, and if they legislate for those things they know, and are surprised by things which they did not know, what will the situation be? If they are truly sincere, they will overcome the arrogance of their legislative delusion and say, 'Let us change what we have legislated.' If they remain in their excess, who will suffer? The society will suffer as a result of their obstinacy.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja*

The True Lord *the Most High* does not accuse any of mankind of having ill will, but there is a difference between wanting what is good and being unable to do what is good. You legislated according to your ability and your knowledge, and we all know that the misery of experimentation in theoretical social law falls on the society.

We know well that there is a difference between experimental practical science and theoretical capricious speech: Experimental science causes misery for the one who conducts the experiments; the scientist toils and labours in his laboratory, and he is the one who suffers and sacrifices his time, money and health, and lives in a state of distraction from everything, but the experiment he is working on. When he arrives at a discovery, it is society which delights in it. But it is different for theoretical things because it is society which suffers misery on account of the mistakes of human lawmakers, until a lawmaker who sympathises with society, come along to alter the mistake of those who came before him.

As for the True Lord *the Most High*, He sent us a legislation which protects mankind from misery; for God *the Most High* leaves us free in the experimental material world: Enter the laboratory, and you will arrive at things which you might agree upon; but beware of differences of caprice. Therefore, God undertook to legislate for those things in which caprices differ in order to ensure that society does not suffer misery because of the mistakes of legislators for a period of time until another legislator comes and alters for the people that which others erred in.

This is why we find in our modern world many issues which have arisen because of caprice, and in which people have clung to their caprices, and then events put pressure on them until they could not merely ignore the problems of their making any more, and they had to confront them; and when they confronted them, they found no solution for them except that which Islam has legislated; and we find that they are in agreement with the laws of Islam.

Some of those who hate Islam say: You say that your religion came to prevail over all other religions, as the Quran says in one place that it is God who has sent forth His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over every false religion; and God is sufficient witness (*al-Fath:* 28). And in another verse the Quran says that the infidels aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths; but God has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the disbelievers. He it is Who has sent forth His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all false religions, however hateful this may be to polytheists (*as-Saff:* 8-9).

These haters of Islam continue to say: Your Islam has not prevailed over all religions until now since there are millions of people who have not entered Islam. We say to them: Do you think that its prevalence over all religions means that everyone believes in Islam? No; they should have noticed that God *the Most High* says that it will prevail however hateful this may be to the disbelievers; they should have known that the prevailing of Islam over all religions must be accompanied by the existence of disbelievers who hate it; and as long as Islam exists alongside disbelievers who hate it, it will not have prevailed as a religion; but it will prevail over them, i.e. overwhelm them, as a system to which they will be forced to resort in order to solve the problems of their disbelieving societies, and they will take the systems and laws of Islam whilst hating it; which is why we find them seeking their laws and social reforms from the teachings of Islam.

If it meant that they would take it as a religion, the True Lord *the Most High* would not have said 'however hateful this may be to the disbelievers' or 'however hateful this may be to polytheists' because if they adopted it as a religion, there would be no haters or idolaters left. But when He *the Exalted* says, 'however hateful this may be to the disbelievers' and 'however hateful this may be to polytheists,' this means: Be sure, o you who believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accept Islam as a religion, that the experiences of life will come to show the deniers the truth of your religion, and the truth of God in His legislation for you, and the disbelievers and idolaters will be forced to adopt many of the stances of your Islam and take them as a system to solve their problems, despite their obstinacy and determination to oppose Islam.

We gave an example for this before, of what happened in Italy, in which is located the Vatican, the spiritual centre of the Catholic faith, when they were forced to make a law allowing divorce, and the same thing happened in Spain and other countries. Look at how they turned back on their principles in relation to which they used to criticise Islam! The circumstances of life forced them to legalise divorce with a human law, not a Divine Law. These kinds of events show us how much we should trust our religion, and that the problems of people in lands of disbelief and idolatry cannot be solved without Islam; and if they do not accept it as a religion, they will be forced to accept it as a system.

It is a credit for Islam that they do not accept it as a religion, for if they believed in it, their actions and laws would be an application of Islam by a Muslim people; but if they continue to hate Islam and then accept the principles of the religion, they hate in order to reform their corrupted societies, this is a source of great pride for Muslims. This is the understanding of the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘however hateful this may be to the disbelievers’ and ‘however hateful this may be to polytheists.’ If anyone raises this issue to you, say: It is an honour for Islam that there remain in this world idolaters, and that there remain in this world those disbelievers, and then, they are forced to solve the problems of their societies with Islamic legislations; and Islam is proud that fourteen hundred years ago, it had already arrived at the things which they are still now chasing after all this time.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَإِن طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُۥ مِنۢ بَعۡدُ حَتَّىٰ تَنكِحَ زَوۡجًا غَيۡرَهُۥۗ فَإِن طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡهِمَآ أَن
يَتَرَاجَعَآ إِن ظَنَّآ أَن يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَتِلۡكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوۡمٖ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٢٣٠

If a husband re-divorces his wife after the second divorce, she will not be lawful for him until she has taken another husband; if that one divorces her, there will be no blame if she and the first husband return to one another, provided they feel that they can keep within the bounds set by God. These are God’s bounds, which He makes clear for those who know [230] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 230)

The True Lord *the Most High* said before that, ‘Divorce may be [done] twice…,’ after which He said, ‘…Keep [them] in good fellowship, or release

[them] with kindness….' Here in the verse under discussion, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about dissolution, saying, 'And if he has divorced her [for the third time], then she is not lawful to him afterward until she has married a husband other than him….' This is in order to show us that if things between the married couple come to the point of no return, there must be a hard lesson, and they cannot return to one another easily. God *the Most High* gave them respite with the legislation of the lesser separation which was followed by a new dowry and marriage contract, but they were not deterred, and so there had to be a greater separation where the woman must marry another man and experience another married life; and in this way, the lesson is hard.

Some men might take this matter superficially, marrying a woman who has been divorced three times with a marriage which fulfils all the conditions of a contract, dowry and witnesses, but does not include any sexual contact between them. This is the so-called *muhallil* (the one who marries a divorced woman only in order to divorce her so she can remarry her first husband) which we hear about, and which Islam does not allow.

The one who marries a woman as a *muhallil,* and the woman who accepts this, should both know that this is unlawful for both of them. There is no *muhallil* in Islam, and if someone marries with the intention of being such a *muhallil*, the wife is not lawful for him, and he has no rights over her, and moreover if he then, divorces her it is not lawful for her to return to her previous husband because the *muhallil* was not a real husband, but only an actor playing the part of husband; and acting has nothing to do with reality. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…she is not lawful to him afterward until she has married a husband other than him….' This means a normal marriage which is instituted in the normal way without any machinations or intention to allow the woman to remarry her previous husband. When this man divorces her because of unintended circumstances which lead to irreconcilable differences, not for pre-arranged reasons, it is possible then, for the previous husband to marry the woman to whom he was previously married and then divorced three times.

'…And if the latter husband divorces her, there is no blame upon the woman and her former husband for returning to each other if they think that they can keep [within] the bounds of God. These are the bounds of God, which He makes clear to people who know.’ That is, if it is deemed likely that the issues which were a cause of conflict before are now finished, and the couple have reached a state of mutual understanding and respect, and they have learned a lesson from the experience which has made each of them content with the other.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا طَلَّقۡتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَبَلَغۡنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمۡسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعۡرُوفٍ أَوۡ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعۡرُوفٖۚ
وَلَا تُمۡسِكُوهُنَّ ضِرَارٗا لِّتَعۡتَدُواْۚ وَمَن يَفۡعَلۡ ذَٰلِكَ فَقَدۡ ظَلَمَ نَفۡسَهُۥۚ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوٓاْ
ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ هُزُوٗاۚ وَٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَمَآ أَنزَلَ عَلَيۡكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ
وَٱلۡحِكۡمَةِ يَعِظُكُم بِهِۦۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٞ ٢٣١

When you divorce women and they have reached their set time, then either keep or release them in a fair manner. Do not hold on to them with intent to harm them and commit aggression: anyone who does this wrongs himself. Do not make a mockery of God’s revelations; remember the favour He blessed you with, and the Scripture and wisdom He sent to teach you. Be mindful of God and know that He has full knowledge of everything [231] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 231)

We can observe here that God *the Most High* says, ‘And when you divorce women and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term…,’ and we ask: If, once they have reached the end of their waiting-term, is there any opportunity for retaining them according to acceptable terms or dissolving the marriage according to acceptable terms? Is there anything left but dissolution? The next verse says that when men divorce women, and they have come to the end of their waiting-term, they should not hinder them from marrying their husbands if they have agreed with each other in a fair manner (*al-Baqara*: 232).

So, we are faced with two verses each of which begins ‘And when you divorce women and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term…,’ yet the first verse continues: ‘…either retain them according to acceptable terms or release them according to acceptable terms…’ whilst the second verse continues by the instruction not to hinder them from marrying their husbands (*al-Baqara*: 232). What, then, is the point of this difference?

We say that the verb *balagha* (used in the verses and rendered as '[nearly] fulfilled') has two meanings: The first meaning is 'to draw close to,' such as is the case with God's instruction to worshippers when they are about to pray, to wash their faces (*al-Ma'ida*: 6), that is, when you are close to begin praying, do so. The second meaning is the actual real arrival at the thing. When a person travels in a plane and lands at the destination, he notices that the pilot announces that they have arrived in whatever city it is. So sometimes to come to the end *(balagha*) means to be close to it, whilst other times it means to have actually reached it.

The first verse says, 'And when you divorce women and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term, either retain them according to acceptable terms or release them according to acceptable terms….' In this case, the man has divorced his wife, but her waiting-term has not ended yet, but rather, it is so close to ending that he can either let her go, or retain her in a goodly manner; there is enough time left of the waiting-term for the husband to choose either to retain, or let go, but not much time. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the husband to hold on to the preservation of the marriage until the last moment, and for the means to reconciliation, not separation, to remain until the last moment. This is the reason for the wording '…and they have [nearly] fulfilled their waiting-term…' that is, they are close to the end of the waiting-term. The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to hold onto the preservation of married life until the last possible chance we have for it, which is a moment in which the man might utter a word which either leads to divorce, or to the return to married life.

The second verse says that when men divorce women, and they have come to the end of their waiting-term, they should not hinder them from marrying their husbands if they have agreed with each other in a fair manner (*al-Baqara*: 232). God *the Most High* wants to restrict the discussion of whether to separate, or continue to the husband and wife alone so that no one but the husband and wife becomes involved in their affair because there exists between the two of them that which might make one of them soften towards the other.

But if a third party intervenes who does not have these sensibilities, the quarrel will be magnified in his mind, and, at the same time, he does not feel the need for reconciliation, and he will not seek to save the relationship of the couple. If the father, brother, or mother gets involved in the discussion, enmity will arise, and they will not feel the emotions that each spouse feels towards the other, nor the tenderness of the husband towards his wife, nor the wife's will to reconcile with her husband. These emotional matters only exist between the husband and wife; as for outside parties, they are only connected to the husband or wife by a family tie, and because of this, the desire of these outside parties to preserve the relationship of the couple, will not be like the desire of each spouse to hold on to the other.

Because of this, we must understand that every problem which arises between a husband and a wife, and which no one else interferes in, is resolved quickly without a father, mother, or brother's involvement. This is because the interference of an outside party will not have the same emotional and psychological motivations which exist between the couple; as for the couple themselves, a single glance from one of them to the other might be enough to bring things back to normal. The man might be amazed by the woman's beauty and yearn for her, and forget everything; and the woman might see in the man something which she does not want to lose, and forget what happened between them, and so on.

But will this be the case with her mother and his, or her father and his? There are no secrets, emotions, relations, or anything else between these people and the couple. For this reason, I always advise that differences be kept between the husband and wife because God *the Most High* has placed an emotional connection between them, and this emotional connection might lead to longing and desire for something, and this desire might be the thing to bring about reconciliation and make each side withdraw from enmity and divorce. For this reason, God's Will decreed that a man should not divorce his wife whilst she is menstruating? Why? Because when a woman is menstruating, her husband has no desire for her, and he might be averse to her; but the True Lord *the Most High* does not want the man to divorce his wife except when she is pure, and he has not yet had conjugal relations with her after she has performed ritual ablutions after menstruation so that he does not divorce her except at the time when he has the strongest desire for her.

So, the True Lord *the Most High* wants the disputes between husband and wife to be part of the private married life so that they are protected by the shield of love, affection and mercy. But the involvement of other parties destroys this shield, whether the party is a father, mother, or brother.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and do not keep them, intending harm, to transgress [against them]….' That is, do not keep them, o men, in married life simply in order to abuse the woman and degrade her. The meaning of *dirar* ('abuse') is to do something which on the surface seems to be based on an intention to do good from you, but by which you really intend evil. This is why they call a mosque a 'mosque of *dirar'* if it was built seemingly as a place of prayer, when actually the intent behind it was to spread disbelief and dissension amongst the believers. That same is true of *dirar* in marriage; the man says 'I do not want to divorce her, and I will take her home', saying this whilst plotting to take her back in order to humiliate her and take vengeance on her. Islam does not allow this, but rather forbids it.

The True Lord *the Most High* warns against this kind of behaviour, saying, '…and do not keep them, intending harm, to transgress [against them]. And whoever does that has certainly wronged himself….' Do not, then, suppose that when you harm your wife after taking her back, you are thereby wronging her; no; you are only wronging yourself because when you harm a person, you put God on his side, and if he supplicates against you, God will answer his supplication, and in this way you prevent yourself from attaining God's pleasure; and is there any greater wrong than the wrong which will afflict you if God's wrath falls upon you?

The True Lord *the Most High* then continues: '…And whoever does that has certainly wronged himself. And do not take the verses of God in jest….' That is, take God's method as a method which came to govern the motions of life without any trickery or flights of fancy; it is something realistic, and it is not right for anyone to take frivolously the methods which God *the Most High* has sent down to protect a human being's life and dignity, whether it be a man or woman.

'…And remember the favour of God upon you and what has been sent down to you of the Book and wisdom by which He admonishes you….' Recalling God's favour upon them, whilst speaking about divorce is meant to remind the believers of the state they were in before this legislation was revealed: what part did a woman play, in the pre-Islamic times of pagan ignorance, in the matters of marriage and divorce, and what was the difference in her situation after the Quran was revealed? Her rights became protected by the Quran.

The True Lord *the Most High* reminds the believers of this favour in order to draw their attention to the state they were in before Islam. The man would divorce his wife and then take her back, then divorce her and take her back, and do so even a thousand times, without any controls or regulations; and he would deny her conjugal relations for months at a time, leaving her to suffer the anguish of separation from him, unable to speak.

And when a woman's husband died, she would disappear from society, never appearing again, and never coming out of her house, as though she carried an infectious disease. And above all this, a daughter was a source of shame to her father, and he would kill her before she reached adulthood under the pretence of protecting his honour and dignity.

In a nutshell, marriage was more of a joke than a serious matter; and then Islam came, and settled matters so, they were no longer chaotic, with no rules or laws. So remember, o believers, how God blessed you with Islam; and look at how He blessed you with a domestic system which the whole world from east to west is eager to imitate.

You were a nation with no civilisation and no culture, worshipping idols and fighting wars which you started against one another for the most trivial and base of reasons, and you were ignorant of reading and writing; and then God *the Most High* sent down to you this sublime, refined law, the like of which no other civilisation has attained up to this day. Will you not remember this blessing, which you enjoy by the grace of God? For this reason, He *the Exalted* said, '…And remember the favour of God upon you and what has been sent down to you of the Book and wisdom by which He admonishes you….' The Book is the Quran, and the wisdom is the *Sunna* of the Messenger of

God *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the noble verse by saying, '…And fear God and know that God has knowledge of all things.'

Beware of accusing your religion of having left out any law for your benefit; for every law is present and accounted for in Islam because God has full knowledge of the states of the people, and nothing that occurs in God's universe could be beyond what God has ordained in His Book, for He *the Exalted* is the Creator of the universe, and the Revealer of the law.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَبَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ أَن يَنكِحْنَ أَزْوَٰجَهُنَّ
إِذَا تَرَٰضَوْا۟ بَيْنَهُم بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ يُوعَظُ بِهِۦ مَن كَانَ مِنكُمْ يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ
وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ ۗ ذَٰلِكُمْ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ وَأَطْهَرُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٢﴾

When you divorce women and they have reached their set time, do not prevent them from remarrying their husbands if they both agree to do so in a fair manner. Let those of you who believe in God and the Last Day take this to heart: that is more wholesome and purer for you. God knows and you do not [232] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 232)

The verse says, '…and they have fulfilled their waiting term….' This means that their waiting-term has ended, and the husband has not yet used up all his pronouncements of divorce, yet he no longer has the right to take his wife back unless he makes a new contract and pays a new dowry. Imagine that the husband wants to take his wife back again, and certain relatives who are argumentative and disputatious may become involved in the matter, and try to stand in the way of the marriage being completed. The couple themselves might each want to reconcile with the other, and have an emotional and psychological connection of which no one else knows, but the family members who become involved in the dispute are opposed to things going back to normal, out of fear that there will be a repeat of what happened, or for other reasons. We say to these people: As long as the couple are content to go back, it is not right for anyone to stand in the way of their returning to how things were.

God *the Most High* says, '…do not prevent them….' We know that to prevent is to hinder; and this is addressed to the relatives and those people concerned with the wellbeing of the couple who offer well-meaning advice; and '…from remarrying their [former] husbands…' refers to the ones who had divorced them.

The meaning of this is: Do not prevent husbands from taking back the wives they divorced before; and the family members who refuse to allow their daughters to go back to their husbands should know that by continuing with this disputation, they are preventing the beneficial course of the gradual stages of divorce, which was ordained by the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of legislating that divorce takes place once and then, twice is that those who do not reconcile the first time might reconcile the second time; and since God well knows the souls of men, He legislated for them that they may pronounce divorce once or twice, and gave some time to those who made a mistake the first time so that they would not make a mistake the second time. For this reason, it is not right that anyone creates an obstacle to bar married life from starting anew.

God *the Most High* says, '…from remarrying their [former] husbands….' Notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* ascribes marriage to women, saying 'from remarrying'; and this shows that it is conditional that the woman agrees to returning to the marriage; for it cannot be that he divorces her first and then, she has no say in whether she returns to him or not.

Then, the verse continues: '…if they agree among themselves on an acceptable basis….' That is, as long as they have agreed with each other, and they see that it is best to return to one another, the people of ill favour who wish to oppose the will of the two sides, should stay out of it, and leave that which is lawful to return to its course. '…That is instructed to whoever of you believes in God and the Last Day. That is better for you and purer….' This is the decree of your Lord, and an admonition to you, O you who believe in God as an All-Wise Lord and Lawgiver, Who has full knowledge of the inclinations to good in the human soul.

The word 'better' alerts us to the unlawfulness of standing in the way of a woman who wants to return to her husband who divorced her and then, her waiting-term finished, and who wants to marry her again. The True Lord *the Most High* tells us: Do not stand in the way of their wish to be reconciled, for any reason whatsoever. Why, o Lord?

The answer comes in the words of God *the Most High*: '…and God knows and you know not.' Consider the beauty of the Quranic discourse, and how God's words '…and God knows and you know not' serve the meaning intended by the verses. God knows, and you do not know that for a married couple's life to return to normal is more virtuous and cleaner.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَٱلۡوَٰلِدَٰتُ يُرۡضِعۡنَ أَوۡلَٰدَهُنَّ حَوۡلَيۡنِ كَامِلَيۡنِۖ لِمَنۡ أَرَادَ أَن يُتِمَّ ٱلرَّضَاعَةَۚ وَعَلَى ٱلۡمَوۡلُودِ لَهُۥ
رِزۡقُهُنَّ وَكِسۡوَتُهُنَّ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِۚ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفۡسٌ إِلَّا وُسۡعَهَاۚ لَا تُضَآرَّ وَٰلِدَةُۢ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا
مَوۡلُودٞ لَّهُۥ بِوَلَدِهِۦۚ وَعَلَى ٱلۡوَارِثِ مِثۡلُ ذَٰلِكَۗ فَإِنۡ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَن تَرَاضٖ مِّنۡهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٖ
فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡهِمَاۗ وَإِنۡ أَرَدتُّمۡ أَن تَسۡتَرۡضِعُوٓاْ أَوۡلَٰدَكُمۡ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ إِذَا سَلَّمۡتُم مَّآ
ءَاتَيۡتُم بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِۗ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ بَصِيرٞ ٢٣٣

Mothers suckle their children for two whole years, if they wish to complete the term, and clothing and maintenance must be borne by the father in a fair manner. No one should be burdened with more than they can bear: no mother shall be made to suffer harm on account of her child, nor any father on account of his. The same duty is incumbent on the father's heir. If, by mutual consent and consultation, the couple wish to wean [the child], they will not be blamed, nor will there be any blame if you wish to engage a wet nurse, provided you pay as agreed in a fair manner. Be mindful of God, knowing that He sees everything you do [233] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 233)

Look at the greatness of Islam: here, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about mothers nursing their children after divorce. Divorce creates dissension between a man and a woman, and the True Lord *the Most High* looks at the issue in the manner of the Dispenser of Mercy, and the All Knowing of His servants; He wants to protect the fruit of the marriage before the dissension emerges between the parents, and therefore He tells us: Do not make your dissension, and your separation and your divorce, a source of misery for the innocent baby child.

These words refer to the divorced women who leave the household of their former husbands because God *the Most High* says after this, '…Upon the father is the mothers' provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable….' The verse speaks about '…the mothers' provision and their clothing…' and this means that the woman and her child are away from the husband because if she was still with him, the provision and clothing of the child would be taken care of. The True Lord *the Most High* here imposes a right for the nursing baby, and his mother would not have the right to take him if she were not nursing. Some people misunderstand this and think that the provision and clothing here are for the wives in general, to which we say: No; the provision and clothing are to be provided for the divorced women who are nursing only.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to make this right a given, so, He ordained the right of the baby to be provided with sustenance and clothing by his father so that this would be known to him at the time of divorce.

God *the Most High* says, 'Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years….' We notice here that He did not use an imperative form here; He did not say: O mothers, nurse…. This is because a command is open to being obeyed or disobeyed; but God presented the matter using a statement of fact, as though this is a natural and real occurrence which is not contravened.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…Upon the father is the mothers' provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable…' Reflect on the greatness of the Quranic discourse in how God says, '…Upon the father…' (the expression used in the verse means literally 'to whom the child is born') and not 'Upon the father'; and He said, 'to whom the child is born' in order to charge the man with the responsibilities of providing sustenance and clothing because the responsibility of spending on a child rests with the father, not the mother; she carried him in her womb, gave birth to him, and nursed him, and the child is ascribed to the father in the end. A poet said:

People’s mothers are nothing but vessels
Storage-places; sons belong to their fathers.

Since the child is ascribed to his father, the father must provide for him sustenance and clothing, and he must also provide sustenance and clothing for the mother who nurses him, in a fair and equitable manner which does not do an injustice and a wrong to the father by making him spend too much. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…No person is charged with more than his capacity….’ These words refer to the mother and father for it is not allowed for the divorced woman to demand from the baby’s father more than he can bear, and she must suffice herself with a reasonable amount of spending.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, ‘…No mother should be harmed through her child, and no father through his child….’ The True Lord *the Most High* reminds the father that he is the one who has begotten the child, and he must not harm the mother of the child by refusing to spend on his child, and he must not leave her to ask others for her sustenance and clothing. At the same time, He reminds the mother: Do not make your baby a means of making his father suffer by demanding too much sustenance and clothing from him. He *the Exalted* gives us the specific framework which provides the infant with its rights; for there is a difference between a baby which enjoys the warmth of life with both his parents, and one whose parents are separated.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* gives us another cause to think, which is that the baby’s father might die; and if the father dies, who will spend on the baby in the care of his divorced mother? Here the True Lord *the Most High* gives the answer with His decree: ‘…And upon the [father's] heir is [a duty] like that [of the father]….’

The True Lord *the Most High* affirms that the responsibility of spending falls on the heir of the baby’s father. It is true that the baby itself will inherit from its father, but the care of the orphaned child is the responsibility of the one who inherits the custody, and has authority over the father’s wealth if he dies. In this way, God *the Most High* ensures the right of the baby with the one who begot it, the father, if he is alive, and with the father’s heir if he dies.

With this, God *the Most High* has legislated for the preservation of the way of life of the baby in the circumstance of the presence of its parents, and has also legislated for it in the event that its parents divorce and its father remains alive, and has also legislated for it in the event when its parents divorce and its father then dies. The True Lord *the Most High* then, says, '…And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them….' Look at the mercy of Islam: a man's divorce from his wife does not mean that everything that was between them has ended so that the children are neglected and made to suffer by the divorce. God's words '…through mutual consent from both of them and consultation…' indicate that there is still something shared by the two sides, which is related to the care of the children; and in this thing which is shared, the rights of the children to motherly affection and fatherly affection, must be observed so that the child will grow up without being deprived of the care of either mother, or father, even if they differed and are divorced.

They must meet with counsel and mutual consent in the matter of raising their children so that the children feel the affection of both parents, and grow up without any psychological pains, and understand that their mother values their wellbeing, as does their father; though there may be dissention and differences between them, they agree on what is best for the children with mutual consent and counsel.

The neglect of children that we witness in many cases of divorce is a very serious matter because it leaves deep negative effects and traces on the children's souls, and leads to their misery and perhaps instability in their lives. What is the sin of children for whom adults were the direct cause of their coming into this life? Is it not better that their parents should provide them with psychological and living conditions which will assure for them a dignified upbringing? The way of God is in front of us, so, why do we not follow it so that through it, we can find happiness for ourselves and for the coming generations?

At the beginning of the verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years….' But what will the case be if things come up which make the period of nursing shorter than two years, or special circumstances make the period of nursing longer than two years? Here, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them….'

He *the Exalted* shows us that separation, i.e. weaning, must take place after mutual consent and consultation between the parents, and they will thereby incur no sin. The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…And if you wish to have your children nursed by a substitute, there is no blame upon you as long as you give payment according to what is acceptable….' The meaning of 'to have your children nursed by a substitute…' is to bring a wet-nurse to the infant; and if you wish to do this, there is no harm in it.

When a divorced man gives the mother her child to nurse, the infant enjoys the affection of the mother which she naturally possesses. But suppose that the mother is unable to nurse, or that her circumstances do not allow her to nurse because of a weakness in her health or her strength. In this case, the father is required to bring his child a wet-nurse, and this wet-nurse, who nurses the infant, needs for the father to give her that which will pay tribute to her and ensure that she accepts to nurse the child in safety, and watch over him faithfully.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, '…And fear God and know that God sees what you do.' The True Lord *the Most High* warns against anyone's taking His rulings and claiming openly to be applying them whilst being indifferent to the spirit of these rulings. An example of this is the father who wants to dupe society so that, when he sees the wet-nurse of his child in public, he claims that he is spending on her, and giving her wages to her in full, greeting her with friendliness and kindness whilst the reality of the situation is contrary to this. God *the Most High* warns those who do this: You are not dealing with society, you are dealing with God, and '…God sees what you do.'

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَٰجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا ۖ فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ
أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِىٓ أَنفُسِهِنَّ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٤﴾

If any of you die and leave widows, the widows should wait for four months and ten nights before remarrying. When they have completed this set time, you will not be blamed for anything they may reasonably choose to do with themselves. God is fully aware of what you do [234] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 234)

As we know, the waiting-term is the period of time which God ordained after marriage finishes, either by divorce, or by the death of the husband. The waiting-term takes place either upon divorce or after the death of the husband. If it is after divorce, the waiting-term is three *quru',* which we said means either menstruation or the period of purity between menstruations; and if the divorced woman is too young to have begun menstruating, or old enough to have undergone the menopause, the waiting-term changes from being based on menses to being based on months, namely three months (*at-Talaq:* 4).

We know that it is the right of the husband to take back his wife at his own decision without the intervention of the wife or her guardian, as long as the waiting-period after a revocable divorce is still ongoing; and once her waiting-term ends, his right to take his wife back of his own volition ends, and he can only take her back with a new marriage contract and a new dowry, and as long as he still has the right to do this, i.e. he has not used up all his pronouncements of divorce.

We said that if there are two pronouncements of divorce and then a third is pronounced, the woman must marry another man in the normal way, not with an intention to make her lawful once more for her first husband. As for the waiting-term of the woman whose husband dies, we know that the Quran states that she must wait for four months and ten days. This is the case if she is not pregnant, but if she is pregnant, she must wait for whichever is further-off: if the waiting-term of four months and ten days is further-off, she must wait this long, and if the furthest-off date is the conclusion of her pregnancy, she must wait that long. But is it not possible that her husband might die during the ninth month of her pregnancy so that she gives birth before he is even buried?

Does this mean that her waiting-term is over? No, it ends with the furthest-off of the two terms, which in this case is the passing of four months and ten days, although some of the jurists say that the waiting-period of any pregnant woman ends when she gives birth

But if her husband has not died, her waiting-period ends when she gives birth, and she is free to marry after that if she chooses, even a single moment after. Some people explain the wisdom of making the waiting-period of a woman whose husband has died four months and ten days, saying: It is because if she is pregnant with a boy, her pregnancy will become known to her when he moves after three months, whilst if it is a girl it will become known to her when she moves after four months, and we give her ten extra nights to be sure.

We say to them: May God *the Most High* reward you for your explanation; but the purpose of the waiting-period here is not to make sure she is not pregnant; for if it was, the woman's waiting-term would end when she gave birth; and if the purpose of it was to see whether she is pregnant or not, her waiting-period would be three menstrual cycles if she has one, or else three months if she does not have one because of her youth or old age. But God specified that she wait four months and ten days out of loyalty to her husband's right, and in honour of their married life.

So, God *the Most High* made the woman whose husband dies wait the longest period a woman can endure; and when a woman's husband dies, she should not leave her house, beautify herself, or meet stranger men, out of loyalty to her husband. Once her waiting-term is over, i.e. four months and ten days, '…then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves….' This means that she can beautify herself in her house and then, go out without revealing her beauty, and if someone wishes to propose marriage to her, they may. When God *the Most High* says, 'four months and ten,' it means four months and ten days/nights.

Here there is a matter of faith and law which shows how every legal ruling affects all those who are morally responsible, even if the ruling does not directly concern them. The woman whose husband dies, waits for four months and ten days, and during this waiting-period, God decreed that she should not beautify herself, wear make-up, or leave her house, out of loyalty to her husband's right; and once she reaches the end of this waiting-term, He says, '…then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner….' He did not say: There shall be no blame upon them.

God *the Most High* addresses these words to men because every believing man has some form of guardianship over every believing woman, and if he sees something in her behaviour, or the way she takes care of herself which contravenes the rulings of the waiting-term, he has the right to intervene. For example, if he sees her beautifying herself, he says to her or sends someone to say to her, 'Why are you beautifying yourself?' God's words 'there is no blame upon you' make men guardians over the woman whose husband dies, so, they should not say, 'We have no right to intervene here;' for the ruling of faith is a ruling which affects every believer and governs every believer. The True Lord *the Most High* describes the believers as those who enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one patience in adversity (*al-'Asr:* 3).

God's words 'enjoin upon one another' do not mean that one group of people have been singled out with the role of enjoining others, whilst another group of people are only to be enjoined by others; rather, each one of us enjoins at some times, and is enjoined by others at other times; this is the meaning of 'enjoin upon one another.'

So, if you see weakness in someone else concerning any aspect of God's rulings, you can enjoin him; and likewise, if someone else sees a weakness in you concerning any aspect of God's rulings, he can enjoin you. When we all enjoin one another, no believer amongst us will be guilty of any open sin. So, the verse does not single out one group for counsel apart from others, but rather, everyone gives counsel to everyone else because human vicissitudes come in turns to all people. When I am weak, you watch over me and counsel me; and when you are weak, I watch over you and counsel you. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…there shall be no blame upon you….' He *the Exalted* did not direct these words to women only, but rather to all believers; and He did not address only the family guardians of the women, but rather, He left the ruling for all the community so that no one can say, ‘I have nothing to do with this woman whose husband has died, and she can do as she pleases.’ She can beautify herself according to Islamic standards, and adorn herself according to the boundaries which God has set for her in this regard.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying, ‘…And God is Cognisant of what you do.’ That is, God is aware of what is in her soul, or her intention. Suppose that she does something illegal without anyone seeing – she should not think that just because others did not witness this act, the matter is over; no; God *the Most High* is aware of what she does, even if no one else sees her.

The True Lord *the Most High*, by all the aforementioned laws, protected the right of the husband until the waiting-term ends, and the right of the woman whose husband dies during the waiting-term, and also protected, with all these laws, the honour of the woman, making the woman inviolable so that no one can come near her to tear her veil. She has a waiting-term in which she is ascribed to another man, so no one can approach her at this time. Why? Because the woman, especially if she has been divorced, might be taken by an urge to seek vengeance for herself and her honour, and she might remarry in haste; and the issues of separation or difference might have been the result of the insinuations of another man who desires her so that as soon as she is divorced and begins the waiting-term, those who desire her swarm around her, or she might herself look to one whom she believes is right for her to marry. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* stipulates a period of time, and makes the waiting-term like a forbidden zone to give the woman protection which is actual, not superficial.

Because this legislation is from a Merciful God, it does not disregard human emotions, neither those of the one who wishes to marry, nor of the woman who seeks someone to marry her. He handles this matter with precision, discretion and judiciousness, saying:

وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فِيمَا عَرَّضۡتُم بِهِۦ مِنۡ خِطۡبَةِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ أَوۡ أَكۡنَنتُمۡ فِيٓ أَنفُسِكُمۡۚ عَلِمَ
ٱللَّهُ أَنَّكُمۡ سَتَذۡكُرُونَهُنَّ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تُوَاعِدُوهُنَّ سِرًّا إِلَّآ أَن تَقُولُواْ قَوۡلٗا مَّعۡرُوفٗاۚ وَلَا
تَعۡزِمُواْ عُقۡدَةَ ٱلنِّكَاحِ حَتَّىٰ يَبۡلُغَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبُ أَجَلَهُۥۚ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعۡلَمُ مَا فِيٓ
أَنفُسِكُمۡ فَٱحۡذَرُوهُۚ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٞ (٢٣٥)

You will not be blamed whether you give a hint that you wish to marry these women, or keep it to yourselves. God knows that you intend to propose to them. Do not make a secret arrangement with them; speak to them honorably and do not confirm the marriage tie until the prescribed period reaches its end. Remember that God knows what is in your souls, so be mindful of Him. Remember that God is most forgiving and forbearing [235] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 235)

The *verb* (*'arrada*) (to 'allude') comes from the Arabic word (*ta'rid*), which means to indicate something without a direct statement, but rather with an intimation.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to give emotions a way to be vented in this regard; and venting does not mean simply to express one's emotions, but rather, it is to ensure what is most beneficial. It is possible that if He had forbidden hinting, this might cause the woman's chance of marriage to be squandered, or it might have caused those who wished to marry her to miss their chance. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* ordained rules which obliged the man and woman both to observe the manners of caution, as though He were saying to us: I forbid you from proposing marriage during the waiting-term, or making any plain statements during it; but there is no prohibition of making hints from afar.

For example, the man might praise the woman, and enumerate her virtues in a way which does not contravene the etiquettes of Islam. This kind of speech is a hint and intimation, and the benefit of it is that it expresses what is in the soul of the speaker to the divorced woman, so, she knows his opinion of her. Were he not to say this, someone else might beat him to her and deprive him of the chance to act out what is in his soul, and prevent him from coming forward to propose to her once the waiting-term is ended. This might incite him to think of something else, and express himself in an incorrect manner.

So, alluding has a benefit in that it lets the divorced woman know what so-and-so thinks of her so that if someone else comes to her, she can reject him right away. In this way, we see a part of the mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* with us, in that He made the waiting-term like a forbidden zone to protect the woman, and made alluding a chance to express emotions which can establish a beneficial situation thereafter. The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'There is no blame upon you for that to which you [indirectly] allude concerning a proposal to women….' The Arabic word for proposal or marriage-offer (*khitba:* engagement) is made up of the root letters *kh-t-b*, which indicate things which are shared by several concepts: there is *khutba* ('sermon' or 'speech'), *khatb* ('something momentous'), and there is the meaning which we are currently concerned with, which is *khitba* ('marriage-offer'). All of these concepts indicate that something momentous is being dealt with, for the word (*khatb*) means something momentous which has a strong impact, and an orator only gives a speech (*khutba*: sermon) on something which is very important, giving advice to society about something vital.

Likewise, a marriage-offer is a momentous thing because it is a dividing line between two lives: a life with no restrictions and a life restricted by a family and order. All of these words share in the meaning of a very important matter, a crucial matter. He *the Exalted* says, 'There is no blame upon you for that to which you [indirectly] allude concerning a proposal to women or for what you conceal within yourselves….' That is, you will incur no blame if you keep something in your soul of which the woman is unaware. The Muslim conceals and keeps in his soul whatever he likes; but what will let the divorced woman know that she is on your mind if you keep your feelings about her to yourself? You must intimate and hint in a way which is respectful to the woman.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…God knows that you will have them in mind….' The One Who created you knows that as long as she is on your mind, and her husband has died or divorced her, she has become a hope for you; and if He had restrained you, He would have impeded your emotions, and you would lose out on the opportunity to take her as your wife thereafter. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* permitted alluding so that no one would fall into a forbidden matter, namely: '…But do not promise them secretly…' by taking a pledge from them that they will not marry anyone but you, by saying to them, 'Marry me.' Rather, the man must hint, and not be plain and straight. Secret proposals are forbidden, but it is permitted to allude with proper manners: '…except for saying a proper saying…' by saying, for example, 'If someone had a wife like you, he would be so happy,' or compliments like that which normally please the woman. We all know that a woman who has been divorced or has lost her husband, possesses lucidity and brightness with which she can pick up the meaning and intention of words.

The True Lord *the Most High* continues: '…And do not resolve to undertake a marriage contract until the decreed period reaches its end….' In this way we see that even to resolve on marriage is forbidden. Resolution comes before action, so, if it is forbidden, this makes the unlawfulness of the action itself even stronger and more strictly forbidden. You may intend to marry her and place your trust in God, but do not make it a settled matter until her waiting-term is finished. Once the decreed period has come to its end and her waiting-term is over, resolve on tying the marriage-knot. It is as though the marriage contract passes through three stages: The first stage is that a hint and an allusion is made; the second stage is that marriage is resolved upon, which is not right or proper to take place until after the waiting-term ends; and the third stage is the accomplishment of the marriage contract.

The purpose of these stages is to allow each side to take their time to think deeply over this serious matter; if this thinking leads to resolution, one can go ahead with the marriage after the waiting-term ends; and if this thinking leads to abstention and the dismissal of this notion, then one is free to do as one pleases.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants these stages to give a chance to turn back if one party discovers something about the other which displeases them. All of these steps show us that the marriage contract should not be accomplished without resolve, and there should be no contract without resolve. The True Lord *the Most High* wants the Muslim not to tie the marriage-knot without firm resolve; and resolve means determination that you want to marry and are prepared to live up to the rights and responsibilities of marriage, and to pay the full marriage dowry, and to keep to it lawfully and chastely; for marriage which is not based on resolve is doomed to fail. The meaning of resolve is that you think about the matter deeply and thoughtfully in your soul so that you settle on a sure decision; after this, you can begin marriage on the basis that it will be permanent and lasting, not just an ephemeral passion which is not based on the resolve of the soul.

This is why marriage, which is not based on deliberation, but which rather hangs on ephemeral motivations such as the satiation of passion, does not last, or succeed. An instance of this is ‘temporary marriage’ (*zawaj al-mut‘a*): the reason temporary marriage was made unlawful is that the one who does it, does not want to continue in married life; and as long as he does not intend marriage to be permanent, this means that his intent is only ephemeral pleasure.

Those who seek to allow temporary marriage are flawed in their thinking because they ignore the element of approaching marriage with permanence in their minds. Why do you need to confine your marriage to a limited time? True marriage cannot be confined in this way. Reflect on the foolishness of these people, and you will see that it is not a case of marriage, but rather, a way to excuse fornication; if not, then why does he make it a condition of temporary marriage that he only marry her for a month, or more?

When a person specifies the limitation of the marriage to a certain period of time, this shows the foolishness of his thinking, and his bad intention because true marriage is that which one enters with the intention of permanency. He might end it after only an hour if he sees that this is necessary, and no one would object to this; so, why restrict yourself to a given period of time? The one who enters a temporary marriage, uses his reason in the wrong way; he might be intelligent in one aspect, but he is injudicious in another.

One must enter marriage with resolve after thinking deeply and carefully, and then tie the knot based on this thinking. Beware of harbouring in your soul this kind of marriage linked to desires and goals in your soul such as the lack of permanency or the goal of pleasure alone; for all of these lustful and worldly desires which some people think of, are ephemeral desires, so, abolish from your heart all of these notions; for if you seek something from marriage other than permanence and chastity, God *the Most High* will know it, and He will cause your thinking to bring misery to you, so, beware of this.

God *the Most High* does not warn someone against doing anything unless it would incur His wrath, and for this reason the True Lord *the Most High* concludes this noble verse by saying, '…And know that God knows what is within yourselves, so, beware of Him. And know that God is Forgiving and Forbearing.' He *the Exalted* knows the weakness of the human soul, and that it might weaken sometimes; and if it does some unfavourable thing, God gives the person the chance to repent, for He is Much-Forgiving and Forbearing.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

لَّا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِن طَلَّقْتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ مَا لَمْ تَمَسُّوهُنَّ أَوْ تَفْرِضُوا۟ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً ۚ وَمَتِّعُوهُنَّ
عَلَى ٱلْمُوسِعِ قَدَرُهُۥ وَعَلَى ٱلْمُقْتِرِ قَدَرُهُۥ مَتَٰعًۢا بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۖ حَقًّا عَلَى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٢٣٦﴾

You will not be blamed if you divorce women when you have not yet consummated the marriage or fixed a bride-gift for them, but make fair provision for them, the rich according to his means and the poor according to his – this is a duty for those who do good [236] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 236)

We notice here that the discussion in the previous verses was about divorces of consummated marriages, or the consummated marriage which ended with the husband's death, leaving the wife behind. But certain things might occur which make it necessary to divorce a woman before consummating the marriage, and this verse refers to the wife being divorced in an unconsummated marriage, and in this kind of situation we may have two cases: the first is where a dowry has been specified in the contract, and the second is where the dowry has not been specified. This implies that the specifying of a dowry, is not a necessary condition of marriage contract, but rather, if the woman marries the man and no dowry has been stipulated for this marriage, adequate dowry (of the likes of the woman in her community) is considered to have been agreed upon, and the contract is valid. The proof of this is that God *the Most High* says, 'There is no blame upon you if you divorce women while you have not touched them nor specified for them an obligation (dowry)….' This means that she was considered a wife, although the marriage had not been consummated.

We can ask here: what does ‘touched’ (*mass*) mean? In Arabic, we have the words *mass, lams,* and *mulamasa*, all meaning different degrees of touching. A person might touch (*mass*) something without being affected by what he has touched so that, he does not notice its nature, or whether it is hard or soft, or hot or cold, and so on. As for the word lams, the thing which is touched must be felt; and as for *mulamasa,* it means that there is interaction between the person who touches and the thing being touched. So we have three levels: the first is mass, the second *is lams*, and the third is *mulamasa*. The word mass in this verse means sexual contact and intercourse, and it is a lighter expression than the word lams, and subtler than saying ‘contact’ (*mulamasa*) or ‘coition’ (*mubashara*). We know that it means this because there is a Quranic expression elsewhere which clearly shows this meaning, and from the usage of the word mass in that context, we can have a better understanding of its meaning in this verse we are currently examining. The Lady Mary *peace be upon her*, given the glad tidings that she would be given her blessed son, wondered how she can have a son when no man has ever touched her, and never has she been a loose woman (*Maryam:* 20).

The Noble Quran clarifies, on the tongue of our Lady Mary *peace be upon her* that no man has ever had the connection with her from which a child could have been produced; and the expression is of the utmost precision. And because it involved the exposing of confidential and secret matters, the Quran used the lightest word (in a decent euphemistic expression) to describe this thing, namely touch (mass). It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to confirm her chastity even in her use of words, so, He negated that any man had even touched her, never mind had any kind of conjugal relations with her, although the meaning of the word in this context is indeed conjugal relations, since the verse is meant to affirm Mary’s chastity.

Let us reflect on the decorum and propriety of the Quranic expression in dealing with the matter in the verse which we are currently examining. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is using the word to express the limit of its meaning, with the lightest kind of expression.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…nor specified for them an obligation (dowry)….’ We know that when the Arabic word *aw* (meaning ‘or’ or ‘nor’) is used between two things, it means ‘either this or that.’ Is a dowry settled upon them in return for touching them? The direct contrast of ‘…while you have not touched them…’ is that you have touched them and the contrast of ‘…specified for them an obligation (dowry)…’ is that you have not specified a dowry for them. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is saying: You are not to blame by divorcing, while you have not yet touched them, whether you have settled a dowry for them or not. In this way, the Quranic style is intent on alerting the mind to note its meanings.

We can observe that the True Lord *the Most High* uses the word ‘if’ to refer to the possibility of divorce, and as we know the word ‘if’ refers to doubtful matters. It is as though God *the Most High* does not want divorce to actually take place, which is why He did not use the word ‘when’, but rather placed the matter in a doubtful position so that the verse corroborated what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The most hateful thing to God of all He has made lawful is divorce.’(1)

The True Lord *the Most High* says after this, ‘…But make provision for them – the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability….’ That is, if you divorce your wife before consummating the marriage, and you had not specified any dowry for her, give her provision. Scholars say that the value of this provision is that which is equivalent to half of the dowry which a woman of similar status would receive because it was assumed that she would take half the dower, and as long as no dower was specified for her, she is entitled to half the dower of a woman of her status. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability….’ That is, the provision should be within the limits of the husband’s capabilities: the affluent wealthy man must give that which reflects what God has granted him, and the poor man must give according to his ability.

The Quran’s word here ‘wealthy’ (*musi‘*) is derived from the verb *awsa‘a,* which means ‘to enrich.’ The active participle of this verb (i.e. ‘the one who enriches’) is *musi‘,* and the passive participle (i.e. ‘the one who is enriched’) is *musa‘ alayh.* Which of these words best describes the husband? If we consider that his provisions have come from the True Lord *the Most High*, he is ‘the one who is enriched,’ whilst if we consider that the True Lord *the Most High* requires you to broaden (Arabic *awsa‘a*) your life’s work so that your provision will come to you, and God will enrich you according to how much you broaden it, he is thereby ‘the one who enriches.’

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud, Al-Bayhaqi, and Al-Hakim on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar*

So, the ‘wealthy’ person is the one who enriches himself by broadening his means of work in this life; and to be impoverished (*iqtar*) means to be lacking, and provision will be given according to work, and to scanty circumstances. When the True Lord *the Most High* imposes a ruling of moral responsibility, He does not intend the ruling to be carried out by those from whom it is required alone, but rather, He spreads the responsibility throughout the faithful population. So His words ‘…the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability…’ mean that if there is someone who does not carry out God’s ruling, you must all come together to carry out God’s command that everyone who divorces his wife before consummating the marriage must provide for her. The fact that the imperative verb in Arabic ‘make provision for them’ is addressed to a plural, shows that the whole community must come together to obey God’s command. After this, He *the Exalted* says:

وَإِن طَلَّقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تَمَسُّوهُنَّ وَقَدْ فَرَضْتُمْ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً فَنِصْفُ مَا
فَرَضْتُمْ إِلَّآ أَن يَعْفُونَ أَوْ يَعْفُوَا۟ ٱلَّذِى بِيَدِهِۦ عُقْدَةُ ٱلنِّكَاحِ ۚ وَأَن تَعْفُوٓا۟
أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَلَا تَنسَوُا۟ ٱلْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٧﴾

If you divorce wives before consummating the marriage but
after fixing a bride-gift for them, then give them half of what
you had previously fixed, unless they waive [their right], or
unless the one who holds the marriage tie waives [his right].
Waiving [your right] is nearer to godliness, so do not forget to
be generous towards one another: God sees what you do [237]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 237)

That is, as long as he has not consummated the marriage with her, she does not take the whole dowry, but rather, she is entitled to half. We know that there is a difference between a ruling being based on the law of justice, and a ruling giving consideration to the side of grace, and I will tell a true story from which we can learn:

Two people went to a man to ask him to arbitrate between them, and said: 'Judge between us with justice.' He said, 'Would you like me to judge between you with justice, or with that which is better than justice?' They said, 'Is there anything better than justice?' He said, 'Yes: grace.'

Justice gives everyone their right, but grace makes a person give up his right, or some of it. So when the law establishes the scales of justice, it does not want to prevent the font of faith from giving forth the munificence of grace. He gives you justice, but He *the Exalted* says after this, '…And do not forget graciousness between you….' Justice alone might be hard, and may cause hatred to remain in souls; but the act of grace brings an end to dispute, enmity and hatred.

Disputation only comes when I believe I am in the right, and you believe that you are in the right; and it might be that certain circumstances come to make my understanding seem good to me, and other circumstances come to you to make your own understanding seem good to you. When we hold fast to the matter of justice, we will not reach the point of contentment for human souls; but if we open to grace, we will be content, and put an end to the matter.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'And if you divorce them before you have touched them…' that is, before you consummate the marriage, '…and you have already specified for them an obligation (dowry)…,' meaning that you have stipulated the dowry, '…then [give] half of what you specified – unless they forego the right…' meaning that the divorced woman forgoes her claim.

Some ignorant people say – and we seek refuge in God from ignorance – that the Quran has a grammatical mistake in it, thinking that the verb here for 'they forgo' should take the form of *ya'fu* instead of *ya'funa*. This is a kind of ignorance which does not differentiate between the letter *u* as part of the root form of a verb and the letter *u* as a masculine plural verb suffix. Here, the *u* is part of the verb, since the Arabic word for 'forgo' is '*afa,* which in the imperfect tense is *ya'fu.*

From this, we understand that the wife may forgo half of her dowry and leave it for her husband. The True Lord *the Most High* then, says, '…or the one in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it….' This means the husband, not the wife's guardian because the context of the verse indicates that it is the husband who is meant, although some exegetes say it means the wife's guardian. We should be aware that the wife's guardian does not have the right to forgo the woman's dowry because the dowry is the right of the wife, as it is a source of wealth and provision in people's lives and it is the counterpart to the man's sexual enjoyment of his wife. This is why you find that some people do not give their wives any dowry, saving it for her so that if someone is ill, she will buy medicine for him from this dowry even a single pill of aspirin because it is medicine bought with lawfully-earned provision, so God might place a cure in it. The woman saves her lawful dowry for these kinds of occasions so that she can do something with it in which God will place goodness because it is from a lawful source of provision, unadulterated by cheating or fraud.

To those exegetes who say that the wife's guardian is the one who is entitled to forgo the dowry, I reply: Why would God bring a ruling in which the woman can give up her right and forgo her half-dowry, whilst the man cannot be generous by forgoing the half? Why would Heaven place all the loss on the woman? It is logical for women, or the ones who have the marriage contract in their hands, i.e. their guardians, to forgo their right so that this forgoing comes only from the wives or their guardians, i.e. from only one side.

We should understand well the concept of grace of which God *the Most High* says, '…And do not forget graciousness between you….' The correspondence of forgoing is between the two of them, the man and the woman, and from here we understand that the words '…or the one in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it…' refer to the husband. Just as the wife may forgo half of her dowry to which she is entitled, the husband may also forgo half of the dowry to which he is entitled.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And to forego it is nearer to righteousness…' because it is very possible that one of the two parties might think himself to be wronged even if he takes the half to which he is entitled; but if he does not take anything, this is closer to righteousness, and better for the soul.

In these kinds of situations, we must always remember the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: '…And do not forget graciousness between you….' Even in situations of differences which lead to the husband leaving his wife before consummating the marriage, God *the Most High* says, '…And do not forget graciousness between you…' that is, do not turn it into enmity, vengeance and acrimony, and know that the True Lord *the Most High* destines some things to bring about certain fated things of which we were not aware, and this should make one aware that his means are not the only things which act in life.

For example: a man may be pleased with a woman he sees, and he marries her; or a man might see a woman whom he does not like, but then someone else comes and is attracted to her. This means that God *the Most High* destined acceptance between the two of them when she saw that the man was right for her and he saw that she was right for him. For this reason, in the past, villagers used to say: Do not be sad when someone comes to seek your daughter's hand in marriage, but then finds that he does not like her because it is written on the forehead of every girl: 'O men, keep off other men's women!' She is not for him, which is why this man is not destined for her. We should not ignore the influence of fate in these matters because it is more conductive to protecting the human soul from bearing resentment and grudges. The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…Indeed God, of whatever you do, is Seeing.' He knows what is in the hearts, and the intention behind every action.

After this comes a verse that affirms a matter of faith, which is that all of the moral responsibilities of Islam are integral parts of a single body of teachings so that one cannot be separated from any other. Do not say, 'This is an obligation of worship,' and 'This is a principle of benefit,' and 'This is a penal matter;' no, everything which the True Lord *the Most High* commands is a matter of faith which, with others, makes up a complete and integral way.

So, after speaking about divorce, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

حَـٰفِظُوا۟ عَلَى ٱلصَّلَوَٰتِ وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِ ٱلْوُسْطَىٰ وَقُومُوا۟ لِلَّهِ قَـٰنِتِينَ ﴿٢٣٨﴾
فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ فَرِجَالًا أَوْ رُكْبَانًا ۖ فَإِذَآ أَمِنتُمْ فَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ كَمَا
عَلَّمَكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا۟ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٩﴾

Take care to do your prayers, praying in the best way, and stand before God in devotion [238] If you are in danger, pray when you are out walking or riding; when you are safe again, remember God, for He has taught you what you did not know [239] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 238-239)

What should be noticed is that God *the Most High* will be returning to the matter of the family, and in particular to the widowed woman, in the next verse, saying, ‘And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind – for their wives is a bequest: maintenance for one year without turning [them] out [of the dead husband’s home]. But if they leave [of their own accord], then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable way. And God is Exalted in Might, Wise’ (*al-Baqara*: 240).

So, with the verse that begins with ‘Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers…’ the True Lord *the Most High* divided a single issue, namely the separation of a husband and wife, and split it into two parts, and placed between them talking about prayer. This was to remind us of the oneness of the responsibilities of faith; and since the True Lord *the Most High* is speaking here about things which either mean voluntary separation by divorce or inescapable separation by death, God *the Most High* wanted to place man in an act of worship which connects him to God Who placed the rulings for divorce and prayer, and destined death.

Why did God *the Most High* choose prayer, and not any other act of worship, to interrupt the flow of the discourse about the rulings concerning divorce and separation? It is because prayer is what gives the believers tranquillity if the affairs of marriage and divorce have become serious and worrisome for them either because of the voluntary separation of the divorces which have occurred, or the pain of separation through death. Nothing will strengthen their hearts except for them to stand in prayer before their Lord; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* would be the first to do that: when something became wearisome for him, he would rise to pray. The believer goes to the Creator Who granted him the means of marriage and decreed divorce and separation, to ask Him to lighten the worry and sadness he suffers. Since the believer has elected to go to the One Who decrees all fate, he should know that God Who has sent these decrees of fate upon him, did not leave them without any rulings to manage them, but rather, He made for every situation, an appropriate ruling. The believer has nothing more to do than to accept the turns of fate with contentment, and then, go to God in penitence, humility and prayer; for divorce and death bring shock, and separation which is either voluntary, or else decreed by death.

God *the Most High* then says, 'Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer….' We can therefore understand that the prayers referred to in the verse are the five daily prayers; so, what is the middle prayer? The admonition here contains what we call a specification and a generalisation. To have a better understanding of the issue let us have a closer look at God's mentioning of the supplication of Noah *peace be upon him* when he prayed to his Lord to grant forgiveness to him, to his parents, to everyone who enters his house as a believer, and to all believing men and believing women; and to grant that the doers of evil shall increasingly meet with destruction (*Nuh:* 28).

How many times are the mother and father included here? They are included and mentioned specifically in His praying to God to grant forgiveness to him and to his parents, and then, (but without specification) in his words: to everyone who enters his house, and then, in his words: to all believing men and believing women; that is, they are included three times. So, invoking of a general thing after a specific thing means that the specific will be included in the general, and there will be repetition with respect to the specific according to its level of specificity.

God's words 'Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer…' imply the same thing. If we ask what the command 'Maintain' (*Hafizhu*) means, the answer requires that we understand that the word *hifzh* may mean 'to memorise' i.e. the opposite of 'to forget', and may also have another meaning which is 'to save/keep', i.e. the opposite of 'to waste/lose'; and the two meanings are related because the one who remembers something and then forgets it has thereby lost it, whilst the one who saves money and then squanders it, has also lost it. So these meanings are all related to the concept of losing something, and *hifzh* means to assure the continuation of something which is in your possession. If you memorise a verse of the Quran, you must save it within yourself; and if God blesses you with wealth, you must look after it.

His words 'Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers…' mean, do not waste them; it could also mean something else, which is that you have tasted the sweetness of prayer in the closeness of your Lord's company, and it behoves you to hold onto this; and these words refer to the five-daily prayers with which we are familiar.

His words '…and [in particular] the middle prayer…' mention the specific after the general, as though God commanded us twice to be mindful of this specific: once included in the general, and once again in making specific mention of it. What is the reason for singling out the middle prayer specifically? The word 'middle' in Arabic (*wusta*) is the feminine form of *awsat,* and they both mean something which lies equidistantly between two things, that is, the two sides are equal. The two sides could not be equal in number – with regard to the five prayers – unless the prayers were of an odd number; for if they were of an even number, we would not be able to identify the middle one. As long as the meaning here is the middle one out of five, this means it is the third prayer, which is preceded by two prayers and followed by two more. This is the case if you consider the number, according to the order of first, second, third, fourth, and fifth.

If consideration is given to the obligation of the prayer, the first prayer which God *the Most High* made obligatory was the *zhuhr* (midday prayer); this was the first prayer to be prescribed, then came the *'asr* (mid-afternoon) prayer, then the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer, then the *'isha* (night) prayer, then the *fajr* (dawn) prayer. If you take the middle prayer according to the order of being prescribed, this would be the sunset prayer, and this is the opinion of many scholars.

If we consider the middle prayer according to the number of cycles of bowing (*rak'a*) within each prayer, we find that there is a prayer which has two cycles, namely the dawn prayer, and prayers which have four cycles, namely the midday, mid-afternoon, and night prayers, and a prayer with three cycles, namely the sunset prayer. The middle one of these is the prayer with three cycles, lying as it does it between two and four, which again is the sunset prayer. If you consider it according to the passage of day, the dawn prayer is first, then the midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night prayers follow, this makes the mid-afternoon prayer the middle one.

If you consider it as the midpoint between the silent and loud prayers, it could be the dawn or the sunset prayers, as the silent prayers are the midday and mid-afternoon, and the loud prayers are the sunset, night, and dawn; between night and midday comes the dawn prayer, or it could be the sunset prayer since it comes between the midday and mid-afternoon prayers on one side, and the night and dawn prayers on the other.

If we consider it according to the times when the angels gather, it is at the ends of the day at night, and so is either the mid-afternoon or the dawn prayer. So the middle position comes from whatever point of view you take, whether it is based on number, or order of prescription, or number of cycles of bowing, or silent and loud prayers, or the descent of the angels of day or night; and every one of these points of view has its own reasoning. So, the exact identity of the middle prayer is left obscure and open to different interpretations. But why did God conceal its identity from us? We say that He concealed it in order that we all observe and recognise that there is a difference between a thing being recognised clearly for what it is, and it being concealed in the midst of other things so that, they all might be it: for this leads to our being mindful of all the prayers.

As long as the middle prayer could be the dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, or night prayer, this is all the more reason to be mindful of all the prayers. The ambiguity of the matter serves only to widen its relevance. God *the Most High* made the exact date of *laylatul Qadr* (‘the Night of Power’) vague for the very same reason; so, instead of there being only one Night of Power, there are several.(1)

This is the case with ‘Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer…,’ that is, the five prayers in general and each individual one of them specifically. The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to stand in devotion in each prayer, and the plain command here is: '…and stand up full of devotion towards God.' The word *qunut,* ('devotion'), is derived from a root meaning of 'doing something constantly.' The Noble Quran urges us to be constant in obedience to God *the Most High* with humility and submission. We see a form of this word used in the noble words of the True Lord *the Most High* where He describes the worshipper who devoutly (*qanitan*) worships God throughout the night, prostrating himself or standing in prayer, ever-mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord's Mercy. God, then, commands His Messenger to put forth the rhetorical question as to whether those who know and those who do not know can be deemed equal. Then God states that only those who are endowed with insight keep this in mind (*az-Zumar:* 9).

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(1) The Night of Power is the night when God sent down the Quran to the earth. Muslims are greatly encouraged to observe the night with acts of worship and devotions. The exact date of the night is not known with certainty, but the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says that it is one of the nights of the last ten days of the month of *Ramadan* – Ed.

The True Lord *the Most High* is commanding His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell us Muslims, we who believe in His Message, to compare the one who humbles himself before God throughout the night, spending it standing and prostrating in prayer, hoping for the mercy of his Lord, and the one who calls on his Lord at times of trouble and forgets Him at times of ease: are those who know the rights of God, and obey Him and declare His Oneness, equal to those who do not know, and neglect to look at and perceive the signs of God's Power?

The way to remember God is to renew one's connection with Him and stand before Him in prayer. We are commanded to perform the prayer even in the midst of battle, which is why God established the prayer of fear (in times of fighting) for us. Fighting is something which takes one away from his security, so, God *the Most High* says, '…And if you fear [an enemy, then pray] on foot or riding….' Even in the midst of fighting and danger, we must not forget the remembrance of God because we are most in need of God when we face our enemy. For this reason, we should not take the occasion which most befits us to be with God, and make it an excuse for forgetting God.

The same is the case of the ill person. As long as he is ill, he is in the company of God, so, it is not fitting that he abstains from praying; for no one is excused from it even the ill person: if he cannot pray standing, he prays sitting; if he cannot pray sitting, he prays lying down; and this continues even if he is forced to pray only by making motions with his eyes. Likewise, if you fear an enemy then pray, whilst walking, that is, whilst travelling on foot, or while riding. The word *rijal* is the plural of *rajil* which means to walk on one's feet. This same word is also used in another Noble verse where God *the Most High* commands His Messenger to proclaim to all people the duty of pilgrimage; and they will come to him *rijalan* (on foot) and riding on every kind of fast mount, coming from every far-away point on earth (*al-Hajj:* 27).

People used to perform the obligation of the pilgrimage on foot, or riding on camels which they spurred on to travel from far-away places. So (*rajil*) means someone who travels on foot. Feet were created to carry man's body when he stands, and to make him move when he walks. When one stands still, his feet carry him, and when he walks, his feet move. The meaning here is that the prayer is obligatory for the believers as they travel on foot or riding.

The True Lord *the Most High* legislated the prayer of fear by dividing the believers into two groups: one group prayed with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in the first *rak'a* (cycle of bowing), and then, completed the prayer on their own, and the second group came to be led by the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the following cycle so that the prayer was finished for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* after which he waited for them until they finished their prayers, and then, gave the greeting of peace with them to end the prayer. The first group had the blessing of having begun the prayer with the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the second group had the blessing of having finished the prayer with the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. This arrangement was employed at the battle of Dhat Ar-Riqa', and each of the two groups faced the enemy to guard the other group during the prayer.

I have an opinion regarding this matter, which is that the prayer of fear, which the jurists mention, was only for those battles in which the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was present because there could not be some troops who prayed behind the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him,* whilst the others were denied this, and therefore God *the Most High* apportioned the blessing of praying with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to both groups. But when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* passed on to the Highest Companion, it was possible for those facing the enemy to have one *imam* (prayer leader) and the other group to have another imam. So the dividing of the prayer behind a single *imam* in the prayer of fear was only because the *imam* in that case was The Highest *Imam peace and blessings be upon him*, and God did not want some people to be prevented from praying with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* by others, so, He divided the single prayer between them. But in our time, when things have been organised, and all people have become equal, and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is no longer amongst us, it is correct for each group to pray behind their own imam.

From God's words '…And if you fear [an enemy, then pray] on foot or riding…' we can understand that one is not exempted from prayer even when facing the enemy in battle; when the time for prayer comes, the believer must pray if he can, and if he cannot, he must say 'God is great' twice.(1) The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…then remember God [in prayer], as He has taught you that which you did not [previously] know.' That is, remember that God taught you those things which you did not know; for had He not taught you them, what would you have done?

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* returns to speaking about the widowed woman, saying:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَٰجًا وَصِيَّةً لِّأَزْوَٰجِهِم مَّتَٰعًا
إِلَى ٱلْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍۚ فَإِنْ خَرَجْنَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِى مَا
فَعَلْنَ فِىٓ أَنفُسِهِنَّ مِن مَّعْرُوفٍۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ٢٤٠

If any of you die and leave widows, make a bequest for them: a year's maintenance and no expulsion from their homes [for that time]. But if they leave of their own accord, you will not be blamed for what they may reasonably choose to do with themselves: God is almighty and wise [240] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 240)

In a previous verse, the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind - they, [the wives, shall] wait four months and ten [days]. And when they have fulfilled their term, then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner. And God is Cognisant of what you do' (*al-Baqara*: 234).

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(1) See Al-Qurtubi's exegesis of the noble verse (*al-Baqara*: 239).

So here, we have before us two rulings concerning those who die and are survived by wives. One ruling says that they must undergo a waiting-term of four months and ten days; the other ruling says that when the husband is met with death, its causes, or its preludes, he should counsel and advise that his wife remain in his home for a whole year without being disturbed. The first four months and ten days are obligatory, whilst the rest of the year is optional; if she wants, she can take it; and if not, she can do otherwise.

'And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind – for their wives is a bequest….' This bequest is from the husband when he is about to die.

So, the woman whose husband dies is between two rulings: one compulsory ruling that obliges her to stay for four months and ten days, and another ruling where her husband bequeaths her the right to stay for a whole year without being disturbed, unless she decides to leave of her own accord, '…without turning [them] out [of the dead husband's home]…' i.e. without anyone forcing them to leave. '…But if they leave [of their own accord], then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable way. And God is Exalted in Might, Wise.' She has the choice whether to stay a full year according to her husband's bequest, or whether to leave after four months and ten days.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَلِلْمُطَلَّقَٰتِ مَتَٰعُۢ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِۖ حَقًّا عَلَى ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ٢٤١

Divorced women shall also have such maintenance as is considered fair: this is a duty for those who are mindful of God [241] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 241)

That is, all divorced women, under all circumstances, have the right to maintenance; but God *the Most High* clarified for us that this maintenance is for each one if you have not settled on a dowry for them. In a previous verse we have read God’s words: ‘…But make provision for them – the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability’ (*al-Baqara*: 236). If you have specified a dowry for her, she takes half of what you settled on. It is as though God has made an appropriate ruling for every situation, and every divorced woman has right to the maintenance as God declared for her. Then we need to reflect on what the True Lord *the Most High* says after this:

كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٤٢﴾

In this way God makes His revelations clear to you,
so that you may grow in understanding [242]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 242)

We know from what we have seen before that ‘signs’ (verses) are amazing things. And when the True Lord *the Most High* alerts the mind to receive a certain ruling rationally, it can be noticed that if the pure intelligence directs its thought to a study of the causes of this subject, it will only arrive at this same ruling. Because of this, you find that the True Lord *the Most High* allows some disputes in dealings and eruptions of enmity to stray from the ruling which God ordained concerning any of the matters just mentioned, and then society is afflicted with the evil result of this infringement. It is as though by this, He is confirming the wisdom of what He legislated; if no evil came from these infringements, people would say that there was no need for that legislation; and they would leave the legislation aside without being afflicted with any evil.

So, when we do not adhere to God’s laws, logic and universal perfection dictate that bad things happen; for if no bad things happened, people would accuse God’s way, saying: Lord, we did not adhere to Your way, yet nothing bad happened to us. It is as though the bad things we find in society are there to alert us to the truth of God’s teachings and the perfection of His wisdom in defining His way. In this way, those who contravene God’s way are thereby indirectly helping God’s way.

After this, the discourse moves on to treat a matter of faith, which is that when God destines something, no creature can escape this destiny. He *the Exalted* says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ خَرَجُواْ مِن دِيَٰرِهِمۡ وَهُمۡ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ ٱلۡمَوۡتِ
فَقَالَ لَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مُوتُواْ ثُمَّ أَحۡيَٰهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَذُو فَضۡلٍ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ
وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَشۡكُرُونَ ٢٤٣

[Prophet], consider those people who abandoned their homeland in fear of death, even though there were thousands of them. God said to them, 'Die!' and then brought them back to life again; God shows real favour to people, but most of them are ungrateful [243] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 243)

After speaking about things connected to the Muslim family in the situation of the separation of husband and wife either by divorce or death, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted the Islamic community to know that no one can escape God's destiny. The Islamic community is the community which God trusted to bear the Message and Way of Heaven to earth until the end of time, for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not come again and no other prophet would be sent. A community like this had to be educated in a way which is commensurate with the mission with which God has charged it, and the True Lord *the Most High* will surely place in the hands of this community everything that the succession of messengers in the previous nations encountered and underwent so that they could take admonition from these events, and represent the way of God, not just by speaking theoretically, but by studying real events which befell past societies.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to alert us to the basis of this issue, which is that He Alone gives life, and the One Who gives life is the One Who takes it. He did not allot to man the means to give life, but rather, it is He *the Exalted* Who gives life and deals death. Life and death are the means for the preservation of the human species; however, the preservation of individual lives only comes from the sustenance which in turn must be earned.

The True Lord *the Most High* treats this issue by presenting an incident which Moses *peace be upon him* experienced with his people, the children of Israel. We know that the story of Moses *peace be upon him* and his people is the story which the Quran gives most space to because this was the community which caused much toil for messengers and prophets, and it was necessary that the True Lord *the Most High* present this matter completely to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in accordance with what actually took place; He *the Exalted* therefore says, ‘Did not see those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death?…’ We know from these words that the reason they left their homes was fear of death; as for the cause of this death, the verses do not specify what it was, although exegetes have spoken at length about this, some saying that they left their homes in fear that they would die of a plague which had infested the land, and others saying that they left fleeing an enemy who had subjugated them with the intention of eradicating them. What is important is that they sought to flee from fear of death.

So, the Quran deals with this issue according to what mattered the most; but as for why they fled, this is not important because the Quran is not chronicling history, so, it does not say where these things happened, or the time they took place, nor who was responsible, nor does it specify the names of the people involved; the Quran is not concerned with any of these details. Those people who tire themselves out investigating the details of these matters in the stories of the Quran are only trying to link events to specific times, and specific places and specific people.

We say to them: Had the Quran wanted this, it would have done it, and had this had any kind of relevance to the lesson and the admonition, the True Lord *the Most High* would have told us of it. You are weakening the significance and import of the story with these details because if the time of the story is specified, someone might say, ‘During the time in which this story took place, it was possible that such a thing could happen, but nowadays, it is no longer possible;’ or it might be said, ‘The place in which this story occurred was a possible setting for it, but in other places, it would not be possible.’ Likewise, if we specify the people involved, it will be said, ‘The story could only have taken place for those specific people because such accidental events in the universe are not repeated.’

When God *the Most High* makes the factors of time, place, characters and general settings ambiguous in a story, He *the Exalted* gives it life in every age and every place and with all people; and no one would be able to say that it is restricted to a specific setting. I always give the example for this of the people who try to determine the time, place and identity of the People of the Cave and their dog. We say to them: You are not enriching the story because when you determine a time, place and characters for it, it will be said, ‘It is only beneficial for the time in which it took place.’

For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make it ambiguous. He made it ambiguous so it would have general application; when He wants to specify, He mentions names. We find an example of this in the verse where God *the Most High* says that He puts forth for those who disbelieve the example of Noah’s wife and Lot’s wife: they were wedded to two of God’s righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband; and neither of the two husbands will be of any avail to these two women before God when they are told on Judgment Day to enter the Fire with all those who enter it (*at-Tahrim:* 10).

The True Lord *the Most High* did not give the name of either of these two women, but only mentioned what was important which was that each one of them was married to a noble messenger; yet despite this, Noah *peace be upon him* was not able to remove the idolatrous doctrine from his wife, nor was Lot *peace be upon him* able to remove the idolatrous doctrine from his wife. Rather, both wives plotted against their husbands – though they were messengers – with their people and because of this, both of them were destined for Hell. One lesson we get from the story is that choosing one’s doctrine is something left up to every individual person, and freedom of doctrine is one of the clear principles of the Way of God.

Also, He *the Exalted* gives the story of the wife of Pharaoh as an example for those who believe; as she prayed to her Lord to build for her a mansion in paradise with Him, and to save her from Pharaoh and his doings, and save her from all evildoing people (*at-Tahrim:* 11).

He did not mention her name either because it is not what concerns us here; what concerns us is that she was the wife of someone who claimed to be a god, yet, despite this he could not convince his own wife that he was a god. But when He *the Exalted* wanted to make the story specific to one particular person, He *the Exalted* said that He puts forth as another example for those who believe Mary Daughter of ‘Imran *peace be upon her* who guarded her chastity, and God breathed of His Spirit into her, and she accepted the truth of her Lord's words and of His books, and was one of the truly devout (*at-Tahrim:* 12).

The True Lord *the Most High* mentioned her and her father's name because the thing that happened to her will never be repeated for any other woman. So to those who try to strengthen a story by mentioning its detail, we say: You are making the story poorer. What is important is that the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say that they left their homes in their thousands for fear of death. We want to take a moment to consider linguistically the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'Have you not considered….'

When you say to someone, 'Did you not see?' this usually means: did he not see it with his eyes? And I say: did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with him and the believers, who came after him until the end of time, see this event? No; the event reached them by their hearing of it, not seeing it. We know that sight takes place with the eye, and hearing with the ear, and tasting with the tongue, and smelling with the nose, and touching with the hand. These are the means by which the mind is given perception and sensation so that it can generate ideas; and about this God *the Most High* says that He has brought us forth from our mothers' wombs knowing nothing; but He has endowed us with hearing, sight, and minds so that, we might have cause to be grateful (*an-Nahl:* 78).

So, the means of knowledge comes through the senses, and the chief sense is the eye; for you may hear something from someone according to his own experience, but when you see the thing for yourself, you have your own experience. This is why it is said, 'The one who sees is not like the one who hears.' When the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to address us with the following question: Do you not know, you whom I address with the Quran, the story of these people? He *the Exalted* phrased it in this way: 'Did you not see those who left their homes….' This means: 'Do you not know…?' and knowledge here is by which means? It is through hearing. Why did He *the Exalted* not simplify things by saying, 'Did you not hear' instead of 'Did you not see'? By saying 'Did you not see,' He tells you of something which took place before you existed, or something which will take place after your existence, so, you must receive it in the same way you receive that which you have seen with your own eyes; for God *the Most High*, Who created the senses, is more truthful than the senses. For this reason, we find that the True Lord *the Most High* says, addressing the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, with a rhetorical question: ‘Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1).

We know that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, and he did not see this event; so how could God *the Exalted* ask him, ‘Have you not seen’? The meaning of this is ‘Do you not know?’, ‘Have you not heard it from Me?’ He did not say ‘Have you not heard?’ to affirm for him that He will be telling him of something that he had not seen, but since the True Lord *the Most High* was telling him of it, it was as though he did see it with his own eyes. It is as though God is saying: This matter is settled, and when I tell you of it, it is as though you have seen it.

In our daily lives we hear people say, ‘So-and-so is such a vivid storyteller!’ This means that he tells you the story as though he saw or heard it for himself. The vivid storyteller makes you think that he himself saw, and he himself heard. The True Lord *the Most High* tells us about these people here, saying, ‘Did you not see [consider] those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death? God said to them, “Die” then He restored them to life….’ He *the Exalted* tells us that the thing which they fled from caught up with them because no one can avoid God’s destiny; so, God made them die and then resurrected them so that, they could take heed. Had God left their revival until the Day of Resurrection, they would not have taken in the lesson because after the Day of Resurrection, there will be no reflection or moral responsibility, and none of this will have any relevance.

God’s words ‘fearing death’ give the reason for their leaving their homes. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to show them that precautions do not avail anything where this matter is concerned: You left your homes in fear of death, so, I shall make you die; and as for that which you sought after death, I shall make something else happen to you. For this reason, He brought them back to life again so that they would grieve, and live the rest of their appointed lives. ‘…then He restored them to life….’ to show them that death is in His hand. Whether they feared death from their enemies, or from plague and disease, the essence of the matter does not change. If the verse had said that they left their homes for fear of plague, we would not understand from it that they might have left their homes for fear of their enemies; so, the ambiguity of the direct cause serves to enrich the story.

God's words 'in their thousands' show us the extent of their failure and foolishness; for how could they leave out for fear of numbers when they themselves numbered in their thousands, and not a single one of these thousands said to them, 'Life and death are in the hand of God'? 'Did you not see [consider] those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death? God said to them, "Die"….'

When you issue an order to someone under your command, he must have the power to do what you command. If you say to someone, 'Die', will they die? If he causes himself to die he will have killed himself; and there is a big difference between dying and killing oneself. Death comes without any participation from the one who dies, whereas killing might be caused by suicide or any other means; the important things is that it is an act of killing, not death.

The True Lord *the Most High* shows us the difference between killing and dying when He addresses the believers saying that Muhammad is but a messenger; all the other messengers before him have passed away; if, then, he dies, or killed, will they turn about on their heels? He who turns about on his heels can in no way harm God, and God will reward all who are grateful to Him (*Al-'Imran*: 144).

This verse came to extract lessons from the defeat of Uhud when the report went around the Muslims that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had been killed, whereupon some of them thought of leaving Islam. The True Lord's words came to show that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was a prophet who had been preceded by other messengers who brought God's way, and it was not right for the community of Islam, whom God *the Most High* had entrusted with completing His way, to have its faith shaken by the death of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; for whoever apostatised and turned on his heels would not harm God in the least, and the reward would be for those who were grateful for, and aware of, the grace of God's way.

We should know that the True Lord *the Most High* mentioned death in contrast to killing, and clarified the matter of death in the verse where He said that no human being can die except by God's leave, at a term pre-ordained. And if one desires the rewards of this world, God shall grant him of it; and if one desires the rewards of the life to come, God shall grant him of it; and God shall reward those who are grateful (*Al-'Imran*: 145).

So, death is tied to God's will and Omnipotent Power and His setting of a pre-ordained term for every life which cannot be brought forward or put back; and everyone will find the results of their works, and those who work for this world alone will receive their reward in it, and those who work for the Hereafter will be rewarded by God in this life and the next. For this reason the command of the True Lord *the Most High* was issued by His words: '…God said to them, 'Die' then He restored them to life….' It was not their will to make their own deaths, or to return to life, but rather, this was a matter of compulsion. They died by the Omnipotent Power of God which is represented by the words 'Be! – and it is'; and they came back to life by the Omnipotent Power of God which is represented by the words 'Be! – and it is.' They had no say in their deaths, nor in their revivals; it was a matter of compulsion, just as the True Lord *the Most High* formerly addressed the sky – and it was but smoke – and the Earth and ordered them to come – willingly or against their will – and they replied that they would come in obedience (*Fussilat:* 11).

His will was to create the sky in the form of smoke, so, it came into being; and He created the heavens and the earth according to His will, and it was as easy for Him as to simply say to a thing, 'Come into being, whether you like it or not,' and it heard and obeyed Him. These are matters of compulsion from the Most Noble Creator, and no creature in the heavens, nor the earth, nor in what lies between them, can do anything, but obey the command of compulsion from the Creator *the Most High*. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…"Die" then, He restored them to life…' this was a command of compulsion to die, and a command of compulsion to come back to life.

Was it not death in the first place that they feared and ran from, and fled in order to evade? It was; but no one can evade the destiny of God because the True Lord *the Most High* wanted them to know that no one can flee from

God's destiny without running straight into God's destiny. This is why when our master 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him* wanted to prevent people from going to a land where there was plague, they said to him: 'Do you want to flee from God's destiny?' 'Umar *God be pleased with him* replied, 'Yes, we flee from God's destiny to God's destiny.' This makes one submit to God completely with all his being; it is true that one should be cautious, but the destiny which God has ordained will come to pass. The believer utilises the means, and submits his affair to God.

Someone might say: Why did God *the Most High* not leave those people of the children of Israel to die, and leave it until the Day of Resurrection to bring them to reckoning? I say: The True Lord *the Most High* wanted, by issuing a command of compulsion for them to be raised to life again, to impart a lesson and an admonition, which would remain before the eyes of all people, preserved in the noblest Book which God ever preserved to be a way for the people, the Noble Quran. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give an admonition, a caution, and an experience. They died by a command of compulsion, and then returned to life by another command of compulsion, and then lived the life which had been destined for them and then died whether they liked it or not. The lesson therefore remained for every true believer so that he would not fear death in God's Way.

By this experience, God wanted us to accept the struggle in God's Way so that no one would imagine that fighting is what brings about death, for death and life are in the Hand of the One Who gives life. Here are the words of Khalid ibn Al-Walid *God be pleased with him* as he lay on his deathbed, still here for every believer in God to consider: 'I witnessed a hundred military advances, or thereabouts and there is not a hand's span of my body but it has been struck with a sword or pierced by a spear; yet here I die on my bed as a camel dies! May the eyes of cowards never sleep!'

So, the matter of life and death is not tied to fighting or anything else, but is rather determined by God's Will. Let us consider how the True Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse: '…And God is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude.' What is 'bounty'? It is that you are given more than you need. The True Lord *the Most High* does not only give people what they need, but rather, He gives them more than they need.

Therefore, if those people who left their homes for fear of a plague or an enemy had died, this death would have been a bounty from God; for had they died from plague, they would be counted as martyrs, and this is a bounty from God; and had they died when fighting their enemy and struggling in God’s Way, they would also have attained martyrdom, and this is a bounty from God.

Why would this manner of death have been a bounty from God? Because we will all die, and if a person dies as a martyr in God’s Way, this is an additional gift. Yet most people are ungrateful because they do not know the extent of the blessing inherent in the things which the True Lord *the Most High* sends to them; for if people knew the extent of the blessings inherent in the events which the True Lord *the Most High* sends upon them concerning life and death, they would thank God for everything that happens to them. The True Lord *the Most High* only sends upon mankind, His handiwork, that which rectifies this handiwork and that which is good for this handiwork.

The True Lord *the Most High* preserved the lesson of what He sent upon some of the children of Israel in order for us to see that fighting in God’s Way is one of God’s blessings upon His servants, for there is no fleeing from God’s destiny. An Arab poet put it like this:

O you who would hold me back from attending the battle
And bid me seek pleasure: can you give me eternal life?
If you are unable to ward off my destiny,
Let me, then, meet it with all of my powers.

The poet is saying to the one who calls him not to fight, but, instead, to enjoy life’s pleasures: As long as you cannot give me eternal life, and you cannot keep death away from me, let me go and fight in God’s cause with all my powers.

After speaking about the attempt of some of the children of Israel to flee from God’s destiny so that He caused them to die with compulsion and then raised them back to life with compulsion – and this is a clear lesson for the believers who would be faced with the matter of fighting in God’s Way, telling them: Do not worry, O believers, that fighting will cause you to die since death can come at any time. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَٰتِلُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٞ ٢٤٤

Fight in God’s cause and remember that He is all hearing and all knowing [244] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 244)

This is a clear command to fight in God’s Way without fearing death. Why? This is due to the fact that the One who gives life and ordains its term is ‘…All-Hearing, All Knowing.’ He hears all that those who fight say, and knows their intentions.

In the past, struggling (in combat) was a heavy burden for the one who did it because he would have to spend on himself, and his mount – a horse or camel – and his weapon. Every warrior would have to equip himself for war; and if he was prepared to give up his life, he was all the more prepared to give up his wealth, and to equip himself for war. Because of this, to fight with one’s life and wealth was essential. God *the Most High* says, ‘And fight in the Way of God…’ that is, fight with your own life; then He *the Exalted* moves on to the matter of wealth, saying:

مَّن ذَا ٱلَّذِي يُقۡرِضُ ٱللَّهَ قَرۡضًا حَسَنٗا فَيُضَٰعِفَهُۥ لَهُۥٓ أَضۡعَافٗا
كَثِيرَةٗۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَقۡبِضُ وَيَبۡصُۜطُ وَإِلَيۡهِ تُرۡجَعُونَ ٢٤٥

Who will give God a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over? It is God who withholds and God who gives abundantly, and it is to Him that you will return [245] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 245)

When you hear the words ‘lend to God a goodly loan,’ this is a tremendous matter since when you give a person a loan, it is as though you are giving God a loan, but the matter is not clear. Why? Because that person will benefit directly, whilst when you spend in God’s Way, you do not give something to a specific person, but rather, you give to the general spirit of religion, and your dealing therein is with God. It is as though, when you spend money to equip yourself for war, you give a loan to God.

By using the word ‘loan’, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the fact that He is seeking from us an action which is not easy for the human soul; and He *the Exalted* knows the nature of the soul. The Arabic word for 'loan' (*qard)* literally means to gnaw at something with one's teeth. He *the Exalted* knows that loaning is a difficult thing, and in order to show people that He knows its difficulty, He says 'lend to God a goodly loan.' He appreciates its difficulty, and He rewards it according to this difficulty.

'Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan…?' What is a goodly loan? If you give a loan to one of God's servants, is this not a goodly loan? First of all, if you give a loan to one of God's servants, it is as though you have given a loan to God. It is true that you give a person that which allows him to get out of a difficult situation, and it is also true that when you engage in struggle, you do not give anything to a specific person, but rather, you give to God directly. He *the Exalted* tells us: Whoever gives a loan to my servants, thereby gives a loan to Me. How? Because God is the One Who called all of His servants into existence; and if one of His servants needs something, his need is for his provision in this world. So if a servant gives to his brother, it is as though he is giving a loan to God, who took it upon Himself to provide for this needy person.

God's words '…lend to God a goodly loan…' indicate to us that the loan is not wasted because a loan is something you give from your wealth in the expectation that you will get it back; and He *the Exalted* assures you that He is the One Who is borrowing from you, and He will give back what He has borrowed – not in the form you gave it, but rather in a form which has been multiplied many times over: the principal is secured, and increased. This is why He says, 'Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan? He will multiply it for him many times over….' It is increased manifold according to the standards of God *the Most High*, not our human standards.

The use of the expression 'goodly loan' here indicates to us that the source of the wealth which you loan must be lawful, which is why it was said of the woman who gave charity from money earned by prostitution: 'Would that she had not prostituted herself, and given no charity.'

It is said that the reward for lending is more than the reward for charity even though in the case of charity one gives the whole thing away whilst a loan is a debt which is repaid to the one who gives it. This is because the sting of giving charity is a one-time thing as it is kind of giving the money and then, giving up all hope of seeing it again; yet, you attach yourself to a loan, and every time you are patient, this is as another good deed to your account. Moreover, the one to whom you give charity might not really be needy whilst no one seeks a loan unless they are truly in need.

Lending money from what you have, makes your money decrease, which is why God *the Most High* repays you for this loan with manifold increase; this perfectly fits His words '…withholds and grants abundance…' in His saying, '…And it is God who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned', which means when we go to Him and each of us takes his right at the reckoning; that is to say, the money that you loan out appears to decrease, but God *the Most High* will increase it and repay it abundantly with manifold increase, and in the Hereafter the reward will be great.

God *the Most High* then brings up another matter which He introduces with His words 'Did thou not see…' [*al-Baqara:* 246], to emphasise that the report which will come after them is a true event, just as true as if one had seen it. He *the Exalted* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلْمَلَإِ مِنۢ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مُوسَىٰٓ إِذْ قَالُوا۟ لِنَبِىٍّ لَّهُمُ ٱبْعَثْ لَنَا مَلِكًا
نُّقَٰتِلْ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ قَالَ هَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِن كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْقِتَالُ أَلَّا تُقَٰتِلُوا۟ ۖ
قَالُوا۟ وَمَا لَنَآ أَلَّا نُقَٰتِلَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِن دِيَٰرِنَا وَأَبْنَآئِنَا ۖ فَلَمَّا
كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْقِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا۟ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٤٦﴾

[Prophet], consider the leaders of the Children of Israel who came after Moses, when they said to one of their prophets, 'Set up a king for us and we shall fight in God's cause.' He said, 'But could it be that you would not fight, if it were ordained for you?' They said, 'How could we not fight in God's cause when we and our children have been driven out of our homeland?' Yet when they were commanded to fight, all but a few of them turned away: God has full knowledge of those who do wrong [246]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 246)

The True Lord *the Most High* is giving us information through words we hear from Him, and we must receive this as though we see the incident with our eyes. What do we see? ‘Did you not see the assembly…?’ What does ‘assembly’ (*mala’*) mean? It is derived from the verb meaning ‘to fill up’ as a vessel fills up so that, there is no place for it to take any more, and that the container is so filled by what it contains that it cannot take anything else. The word (*mala’*) is used to mean the nobles of a community because it is as though the nobles of a community fill the life of all that is around them so that no one else can displace them. The ‘assembly’ then are the nobles and leaders of the people, who sit to hold council.

‘Did you not see the assembly of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Moses….’ That is, have you not heard of the leaders and nobles of the people after the time of Moses *peace be upon him*? For example, they may be those in the time of Joshua, Ezekiel, or Samuel *peace be upon them*, or any one of them. This does not concern us since the Quran does not mention what era it was. What is important is that they came after Moses *peace be upon him*; ‘…when they said to a prophet of theirs, “Send to us a king, and we will fight in the Way of God”?’

The nobles of the children of Israel gathered to hold council, then, went to the prophet of their time and said to him, ‘Send to us a king.’ From this, we can infer that they had no king; and what can we learn from it being mentioned that they had a prophet, but no king?

We can understand from this that prophethood was concerned with supervising the carrying out of actions, and not carrying them out directly; the king was the one who carried out actions directly. If prophethood directly carried out actions, they would not have asked their prophet to send a king for them. The reason for this is that the one who acts directly is likely to be the subject of hatred from many people, and subject to failure in some of the affairs he manages; and so instead of them directing failure at the highest level, they transferred it to someone lower: the king. This is why they asked the prophet to send them a king to revise the management of things so that prophethood would be a source of truth, not an object of criticism in any way.

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He said to the prophet of the children of Israel: ‘You are the ones who asked to fight, and you are the elders’ – that is, the nobles of the people – ‘and you came with the reason for fighting, which is that you were expelled from your homes and your children’ –

that is, you were subjected to such ignominy that you no longer have homes, and you were subjected to such ignominy that you no longer have children after your enemy captured them all. So the reason for asking to fight was there, but despite this, their prophet said to them, '…"Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if fighting was ordained for you?"….' Their prophet made the stipulation clear to them, saying: I fear that I might bring you a king so that you may fight in God's Way, and then God will make it obligatory for you to fight, but when we actually come to the harsh reality of the matter, you will not have the resolve to fight, and will capitulate.

But they said, '…"And why should we not fight in the Way of God when we have been driven out from our homes and our children?"…' Look at the exactness of how they said they wanted to fight 'in the Way of God,' and then attached this to their having been driven from their homes and their children! They wanted to turn things around, and say that their fighting was in God's Way, after they had suffered the experience of being hurt in those things they loved, namely their homes and children. So God is the refuge for all things, and He *the Exalted* accepted what they said, and considered their fighting to be in His Way.

That they were driven from their homes makes sense; but how could they be driven from their children? They must have left their children to the enemy, and the enemy might have taken them captives. But they were the ones who were driven from their homes, and their relationship with their children is like that which the poet described thus: If you set out to leave a people who had the ability keep you with them [but did not exercise it], it is they who are leaving. Look at the examination here; they were the assembly of the elders of the Children of Israel, and they went to their prophet saying, 'Send to us a king,' so that they could make a lawful war to fight in God's Way; and the prophet said to them what he said, and they said to him, '…"And why should we not fight in the Way of God …"' that is, 'How could we not fight in God's Way?'

So, the command for them to fight was issued, as God *the Most High* says, '…But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned away….' His word 'was ordained' (in the passive voice) means that they were the ones who asked to be allowed to fight, so, God made them part of the covenant, which is why the word 'was ordained' was used, not 'He ordained'. Yet despite this, they turned away, that is, they refused to fight. Their prophet was right in doubting their willingness to fight and in saying to them, '…"Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if fighting was ordained for you?"…' But did they all refuse to fight? No; for there were some of them who could have been described by the poet's words:

The One who made the truth bitter
Did not leave a single generation bereft of people of truth.

There were some among them who did not reject the command to fight but they were a minority. This is a necessary preparation for what was to come; so, if the majority capitulate, and the masses disappear from around you, do not say, 'I am a minority;' for it is not the large number of the group that counts, but rather, what counts is the True Lord's help and support.

Your enemies might be legion, but they have no aid from the Most-High Divinity; and you might be few in number, but you have the aid of the Most-High Divinity. This is what the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to be aware of when He says, '…But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned away, except for a few of them….' The words 'except for a few of them' came to impart a certain matter, which is why at the end of the story God *the Most High* says, '…How often has a small company overcome a large company by permission of God...' (*al-Baqara*: 249).

That is, victory comes by God's leave. So the thing witnessed is one, but the point of view of those who witness it differs according to their stores of faith. You see a beautiful flower and the vision is shared by all; it pleases you, you look after it, and leave it intact for its beauty to be enjoyed by you and by others; someone else sees it and thoughtlessly picks it, not caring who its owner is. In this way you see that inclinations differ from one person to another. The enemy before us might be many, whilst we are few, and all of us see the enemy as being many and see ourselves as being few, yet, feelings differ: I will consider myself to be accompanied by my Lord, whilst someone else sees them as being many and says, 'We cannot handle them,' because he has not included his Lord in the count.

‘…But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. And God has knowledge of the wrongdoers.’ So, to turn away is to wrong oneself because one of the basic meanings of wrongdoing is to give someone’s right to someone else; you were expelled from your home, and you remained in this state, and thereby you wronged yourself, and wronged your children who were taken from you, and you did not take them back; and above all this, you were doing wrong to your religion.

Those who turned away thereby wronged themselves, their families, their society, and their religion. God’s words ‘…and God has knowledge of the wrongdoers’ indicate that God was cognisant of those who crept away secretly, wanting to destroy the morale of the people, those who today are known as the ‘fifth column,’ who subvert morale without anyone seeing them; but God knows them.

These people from the children of Israel asked their prophet to raise up a king for them; and it was enough for the prophet who was sent to them to choose for them the king under whose banner they would fight, but they increased in their reluctance and obstinacy, and wanted to shift the issue to something not connected with religion. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَقَالَ لَهُمۡ نَبِيُّهُمۡ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَدۡ بَعَثَ لَكُمۡ طَالُوتَ مَلِكٗاۚ قَالُوٓاْ أَنَّىٰ
يَكُونُ لَهُ ٱلۡمُلۡكُ عَلَيۡنَا وَنَحۡنُ أَحَقُّ بِٱلۡمُلۡكِ مِنۡهُ وَلَمۡ يُؤۡتَ سَعَةٗ مِّنَ
ٱلۡمَالِۚ قَالَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصۡطَفَىٰهُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَزَادَهُۥ بَسۡطَةٗ فِي ٱلۡعِلۡمِ وَٱلۡجِسۡمِۖ
وَٱللَّهُ يُؤۡتِي مُلۡكَهُۥ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿٢٤٧﴾

Their prophet said to them, ‘God has now appointed Talout to be your king,’ but they said, ‘How can he be king over us when we have a greater right to rule than he? He does not even have great wealth.’ He said, ‘God has chosen him over you, and has given him great knowledge and stature. God grants His authority to whoever He pleases: God is magnanimous, all knowing’ [247] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 247)

They were the ones who asked their prophet to raise up a king for them, and it was sufficient, then, for their prophet to choose someone and give him sovereignty over them. But their prophet wanted to implant in them respect for the one he raised as their king, so, He said to them, '…Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king….' The Prophet who said this belonged to them, and was one of them, and when they asked him to raise up a king for them, they knew that he could reliably do this.

The manners of prophetic behaviour were manifested here when the prophet said, '…Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king….' He wanted to reassure them that the choice of Saul as king was not his own choice because he was a human being like them. He wanted to remove his human nature from the equation, so, he said, '…Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king….' And what was their response? '…They said, "How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than he is and he has not been given abundance of wealth?"…' This was the beginning of the reluctance and obstinacy and shifting the issue to something unconnected with religion.

They wanted prominence and wealth, whilst they should have taken the matter on the grounds that the king had come for their own good because they were the ones who asked for him to lead them in war. The matter of choosing the king was for their sake, and for their own good, so why did they imagine that the choice was against their interest, and not for their own good?

Something else we can understand from their words 'How can he have kingship over us …?' It is that this Saul was not a prominent person. Usually when the goings get tough for a community, they begin to think of who will lead them, and usually there are a few prominent personalities about whom these thoughts revolve, and the community thinks that it is possible that one of these people will be chosen. Heaven's choice of Saul was the opposite of what this community expected, and Saul was an unknown person, which can be inferred from the fact that they said 'How can he have kingship over us…?' that is, he never had kingship before.

They ascribed themselves to two lineages: One line had been granted prophethood, namely the line of Benjamin *peace be upon him*, whilst the other had been given kingship, namely the line of Levi, son of Jacob *peace be upon them*. When he said to them, 'Indeed, God has sent to you Saul (Talout) as a king,' they began searching for the records of his lineage, and found that he was descended from neither one of them, and this is why they said, ‘How can he have kingship over us…?’ This shows us that when people want a particular situation to exist, they do not want the man who is best for the job, but rather, the man who is best for themselves, which is shown by their words: ‘How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than him…?’

Does kingship come by arrogance and pride? As long as Saul was an unknown person, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to tell something to every believer which is that when you want to choose, do not let yourself be duped by lineage, descent, or fame, but rather choose the best person from those who have experience, not merely the people of authority. They ignored the fact that the thing they sought from their prophet required two qualities: a man of physical strength, and a man of knowledge; and in Saul, God had chosen for them a man of both physical strength and knowledge.

When we reflect on the contextual flow of the verses, we find that at first God *the Most High* said, ‘has sent to you,’ so that none of them would be troubled by thinking Saul to be better than he is; but when they were obstinate, he said to them, ‘…Indeed, God has chosen him over you…’ with these words confirming that there was no one among those of them who possessed skill and physical strength who also possessed knowledge, and there was no one among those of them who possessed knowledge who also possessed skill and physical strength. ‘Indeed, God has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature….’ They should have received God’s choice of Saul to be king with acceptance and satisfaction; and so what about if He also endowed him with knowledge and physical strength?

Being gifted with knowledge and physical strength were the qualifications which suited the task for which they wanted a king, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘…And God gives His sovereignty to whom He wills….’ It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying to them: Do not think that you are the one who will nominate the right king for yourselves; it is enough for you that you asked Me to send you a king, so, leave Me to choose the right king according to My own standards.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing.' That is, for every situation He has a ruling, and for every position He has the right man, and He *the Exalted* well knows who is right for this task, and who is right for that one; not out of scarcity or paucity of men, but rather, out of infinitude and knowledge.

They received this Divine choice with obstinacy, and obstinacy is a kind of stubbornness which can only be ended with something which is directly visible to be seen and which constitutes absolute proof; so, it was necessary for a miracle to come, and for this reason the True Lord *the Most High* then, said:

وَقَالَ لَهُمۡ نَبِيُّهُمۡ إِنَّ ءَايَةَ مُلۡكِهِۦٓ أَن يَأۡتِيَكُمُ ٱلتَّابُوتُ فِيهِ
سَكِينَةٞ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ وَبَقِيَّةٞ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ ءَالُ مُوسَىٰ وَءَالُ هَٰرُونَ
تَحۡمِلُهُ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةٗ لَّكُمۡ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ٢٤٨

Their prophet said to them, 'The sign of his authority will be that the Ark [of the Covenant] will come to you. In it there will be [the gift of] tranquillity from your Lord and relics of the followers of Moses and Aaron, carried by the angels. There is a sign in this for you if you believe' [248]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 248)

The True Lord *the Most High* sent with King Saul a sign to show he was chosen by God to be king, and their prophet said to them, '…Indeed, the sign of his kingship is that the ark will come to you….' That is, the sign which indicates his kingship is that 'the ark will come to you.' We can infer from this that the ark was absent and missing, and that it was something known to them, and that they were anxiously awaiting its coming.

What is the 'ark'? The Arabic word for ark (*taboot*) appears twice in the Quran: once in the verse which we are currently examining, and another time in the account that God *the Most High* told Moses about his childhood when God instructed Moses's mother with inspiration to place Moses the child in a *taboot* (chest) and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore, and one who is an enemy to God and an enemy to him (to Moses) will adopt him. And then God told Moses that He thus spread His love over him – and this was in order that he might grow and be formed under God's eye (*Ta Ha:* 38-39).

So, we know the ark from the days of the infancy of Moses *peace be upon him*, when his mother feared for his life, so, God *the Most High* inspired to her when she had cause to fear for him, to cast him into the river (*al-Qasas:* 7). Is this, then, the same ark which the verses we are now examining speak of?

It is likely that it is the same one because as long as it is referred to in this unrestricted way, it must mean the well-known ark. It is as though the means by which Moses *peace be upon him* was saved had a history with Moses, Pharaoh, their prophet, and Saul. From this, we can infer that we must take care of the relics connected with significant moments in the history of religion, and we should not say that they are objects of disbelief and idolatry; this is because they have a connection to doctrinal matters, and historical events, and a connection to sacred things. Look at the ark which contained the relics of that which the Houses of Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* left behind them, borne by the angels: this shows that it is something significant and important.

So, the relics which have a link and a connection to the events of religion and prophethood are very important to faith. It is as though the Quran is saying: Leave them as they are, and take counsel and admonition from them because they remind you of sacred things. The ark was lost, which indicates that an enemy had overcome the land in which they lived; and when an enemy lusts after a land, he first tries to destroy the sacred objects which link the land to the religion. If the ark was sacred to them in this way, their enemies must have taken it. These enemies are the ones who expelled them from their homelands in their thousands in fear of death; and if they expelled them from their homelands, they would certainly have forced them to leave the ark.

God *the Most High* was assuring them that the sign of the kingship of Saul would be the coming of the ark which they were anxiously awaiting and which was connected to their sacred things. The sign was '…that the ark will come to you in which is assurance from your Lord….' So, psychological serenity will come to you with this ark because when one finds the ark in which a prophet was saved, containing things which we will soon come to know, he feels the peace of his connection with Heaven, a physical connection which makes the soul find peace.

For example, think about how you would feel if it was said to you, ‘This is the Quranic manuscript from which our master ‘Uthman *God be pleased with him* used to read.’ It is a book like any other, but what makes it special is that our master ‘Uthman *God be pleased with him* used to read from it, and you find inner peace when you see it. Also, you might go to the seat of the Caliphate in Turkey, and be told, ‘This is the sword with which *Imam* 'Ali *God be pleased with him* used to fight,’ and find that its weight is like that of ten swords, and marvel at how *Imam* 'Ali *God be pleased with him* used to hold it and fight with it.

Likewise, when it is said to you, ‘This is one of the hairs of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*,’ or ‘this is the container where he kept his *kuhl’*, there is no doubt that seeing such things will bring illumination and tranquillity in your heart; and when a person who has some doubts or fears sees them, faith will become stable in his heart.

Because of all this, I say that authority figures should not consider sacred objects to be objects of idolatry and paganism, but rather, they must take care of them and protect them, and show them to the people so that, they will be a source of inner peace and spiritual wellbeing for the people. They should advise people not to become infatuated by them, but they must leave them to remind us of those things connected to our doctrine and our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Look at what the Quran says about the ark. The True Lord *the Most High* did not say, ‘The ark will come in a state of wholeness,’ and He did not say that it was the ark in which Moses *peace be upon him* was placed, but rather He only said it has ‘…assurance from your Lord and relics of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron had left….’ It is as though the Houses of Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* had looked after the relics of their prophets. Also, His words ‘carried by the angels’ confirm for us that there is no doubt that a relic carried by the angels must be something momentous of which the greatest care must be taken. ‘…Indeed, the sign of his kingship is that the ark will come to you….’

Notice that when He says, ‘the ark will come to you,’ God *the Most High* ascribes the act of coming to the ark itself. Was it part of the sign that the ark would come forth as they sat and watched? And because the ark was carried by the angels, no one would see them because they are invisible beings, so, no one would see them but rather, everyone would see the ark coming to them; which is why the True Lord *the Most High* ascribed the act of coming to the ark itself.

This sight would quicken the hearts, and make those who possessed the hardest of hearts fall down in prostration, saying, ‘O Saul, you are the king, and we will not object to you.’ We now want to know which relics of Moses *peace be upon him* his house were able to save, and which relics of Aaron *peace be upon him* his house were able to save.

Some people say that it was the staff of Moses *peace be upon him*, and that this was the relic which remained from the House of Moses. This makes sense since it was one of the tools of Moses’s miracle. Was it not the miracle which turned into a rapidly-moving snake and quickly swallowed all that the sorcerers had concocted? Moses *peace be upon him* would certainly not neglect a miraculous tool such as this, nor would those who believed in him, after what it did; and it does not make sense that the House of Moses would be careless with a staff about which God *the Most High* asked Moses what this is in his right hand and he answered that it is his staff; he leans on it (*Ta Ha:* 17-18).

There is a long story told about this staff, so, how could Moses *peace be upon him* and his people easily be careless with it? They must have looked after it, and deemed it sacred, and made it one of their prize possessions. The True Lord *the Most High* is showing us that these people were obstinate, argumentative, and hesitant, and that they did not believe in things unless they were tangible, like the ark which came to them alone; it is true that the angels carried it, but they could not see the angels, and they only saw the ark coming to them. The ark ‘…will come to you in which is assurance from your Lord and relics of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron had left, carried by the angels. Indeed in that is a sign for you, if you are believers.’ There are no signs more wondrous than the coming of the ark in order to prove the veracity of the prophet in that God had sent Saul as a king. If they could not believe in such a thing, they needed to re-examine their faith.

The flow of the Quranic discourse indicates that God *the Most High* silenced them with this argument and silenced them with this sign, and silenced them with the ark; this is implied by the omission of what needed to be said here, namely: So, they accepted Saul as their king, and Saul arranged the preparations for war, and divided the troops and set them in place. The verses do not mention any of these details. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِٱلۡجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مُبۡتَلِيكُم بِنَهَرٖ فَمَن شَرِبَ مِنۡهُ
فَلَيۡسَ مِنِّي وَمَن لَّمۡ يَطۡعَمۡهُ فَإِنَّهُۥ مِنِّيٓ إِلَّا مَنِ ٱغۡتَرَفَ غُرۡفَةَۢ بِيَدِهِۦۚ فَشَرِبُواْ مِنۡهُ إِلَّا
قَلِيلٗا مِّنۡهُمۡۚ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُۥ هُوَ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَعَهُۥ قَالُواْ لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا ٱلۡيَوۡمَ
بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِۦۚ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُم مُّلَٰقُواْ ٱللَّهِ كَم مِّن فِئَةٖ
قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتۡ فِئَةٗ كَثِيرَةَۢ بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ مَعَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ٢٤٩

When Talout set out with his forces, he said to them, ‘God will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused].’ But they all drank [deep] from it, except for a few. When he crossed it with those who had kept faith, they said, ‘We have no strength today against Goliath and his warriors.’ But those who knew that they were going to meet their Lord said, ‘How often a small force has defeated a large army with God’s permission! God is with those who are steadfast’ [249] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 249)

The Arabic word *fasala* (rendered here as ‘went forth’) literally means for one thing to separate from another. We have another example of the word used in the Quran when God *the Most High* tells of when the caravan, with which Jacob’s sons were travelling, *fasalat* (was on its way/broke away), their father said to the people around him that he truly feels the breath of Joseph (*Yusuf:* 94).

The statement: ‘The caravan broke away’, means that it left Egypt and went out of it. We also use the word *fasl* to mean the sections of chapters in a book, meaning an amount of connected information which forms a single whole so that when the sections of a book are placed together they form chapters; and when the chapters concerning a particular science are placed together, we call this a ‘book.’

We also use the word *fasl* to mean a ‘class’ or ‘grade’, that is, a group of pupils of the same age and academic level, and we separate them into class one, class two, class three, and so on according to how many classes and pupils there are. In this way, we understand that the words of the True Lord *the Most High* 'And when Saul went forth with the soldiers…' mean that he separated them from the non-combatants, and divided them into arrayed sections, each one with its own mission.

The Arabic word for 'soldiers' (*junud*) is the plural of (*jund*), which is a singular word that indicates plurality. The root of the word is *janad,* which means strong, hard, thick earth; and since soldiers should be hard and strong; the word *jund* was applied to them. Although the word *jund* is in the singular form, it refers to a group of people, just like the words 'troop' and 'band'; and these kinds of words are called 'collective nouns'. 'And when Saul went forth with the soldiers, he said, 'Indeed, God will be testing you with a river….' That is, when he went to the place where the army was camped, he began to perform his first mission as king. He wanted to test them, as they had been opposed to his being appointed king, so, he wanted to plant his rule in firm soil. He said to them, on behalf of the True Lord *the Most High*, '…"Indeed, God will be testing you with a river. Whoever drinks from it, is not of me, and whoever does not taste it, is indeed of me, excepting one who takes [from it] in the hollow of his hand.' But they drank from it, except a [very] few of them."…' He made it clear to them: You are about to undertake a mission for God, in God's Way, and He is the One Who will subject you to a test, not I; for the test is commensurate with the mission at hand. I am only here to see that the command is obeyed, and God will now test you by a river: he who will drink of it will not belong to us, except one who scoops up but a single handful.

When you hear the words 'will be testing you,' do not explain this as being an unfortunate thing, but rather see it as a trial which some might pass and others fail. The test here was by a river; and as long as the test was by a river, this word must have had psychological relevance and meaning for them. They must have been thirsty, for if they were not thirsty, the river would not have been a trial. '…"Indeed, God will be testing you with a river. So whoever drinks from it is not of me …"'

They were thirsty, and when water was spotted they would have rushed to it ravenously to drink it and quench their thirst. Given this, the True Lord *the Most High* tested their firmness of resolve by instructing them to refrain from drinking it. The test came by keeping them from that which their souls craved: '…So whoever drinks from it is not of me….' But why is it so? It is so because when they saw what they loved and desired, they would be drawn to it, and would forget about God's command; and if someone forgets God's command and favours himself over it, he is not worthy of being in God's soldiers. But as for the one who sees the water and refrains from it although he is in need of it, he is a man of steadfastness and self-control, and he will be a part of God's soldiers since he preferred God's requirement to the requirement of his own belly, and he is fit to undergo the trial.

Despite this, God *the Most High* did not make the trial excessively difficult and allowed them enough to take the edge of their thirst, not barring them from it completely: '…"Indeed, God will be testing you with a river. So whoever drinks from it is not of me, and whoever does not taste it is indeed of me, excepting one who takes [from it] in the hollow of his hand."…' He allowed them to take a single handful to allay their thirst and keep them alive, and He allowed them enough to meet necessity. But what does this trial have to do with the action they were set to undertake?

The act of war which they were about to undertake would cause them to encounter grave affliction, and to be exposed to the exhaustion of provisions; and they were also exposed to the possibility of their enemies blockading them. In such situations, a warrior must be able to resist his desires, and only use enough of his provisions and water to keep himself alive; and a single handful of water is enough to sustain life. It is as though this training was necessary for the mission; but did they do this?

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us: '…But they drank from it, except a [very] few of them….' In this way, the purification was completed: in the beginning, they turned their backs and refused to fight, save a few of them, and now only a few of these few refrained from drinking. These were the sieves of election, or the filters of testing; one person might be able to withstand half the hardship, and another might be able to withstand a third of it, and another might be able to withstand a quarter of it. A few of them remained, but these were the few who were right for the mission, and had retained their faith.

Look at the filters of trial for struggling in God's Way so that no one bears the banner of the struggle except those who are worthy of doing so and know what it entails. '…Then when he had crossed it along with those who believed with him, they said, "We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers."…' That is, when they crossed the river, having passed all the foregoing tests, some of them said, '…"We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers."…" Some of them feared the final test, but those who believed in God did not fear, as the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…But those who were certain that they would meet God said, "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God. And God is with the patient."'

Their feelings and responses were different although they all were looking upon the same scene. So those who crossed the river were divided into two groups: one group saw Goliath and his forces, and the other group saw the same thing; they were not divided concerning what they saw, but rather, they were divided concerning how they felt and responded concerning what they saw: one group feared whilst the other did not. Those who feared said, 'We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers.' Fear of Goliath and his forces arose in their souls, so, they said, 'We have no strength today against Goliath and his soldiers.' They went through three stages: The first stage was that they saw Goliath and his forces; the second stage was that they felt apprehension because of the power of Goliath and his forces, and the final stage was that they began to fear Goliath and his forces. But the group that did not fear, saw the same thing, and God *the Most High* said of them, '…But those who were certain that they would meet God said, "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God."…'

It is as though they included their Lord in their assessment so that they took their enemy lightly; but the other group detached themselves from their Lord so that they saw themselves as the lesser group, and felt fear. The mere supposition of the believing group that they would meet God was enough to give them this belief; and if this was the case for mere supposition, what about absolute certainty? '…"How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God. And God is with the patient."' We know that there are battles in which those who have the most steadfast patience are the victors, and our evidence for this is the words of the True Lord *the Most High* in reminding His Messenger when he gave the glad tidings to the believers that their Lord will support them by sending down three thousand angels to help them in the battle of Badr (*Al-'Imran*: 124).

This is the promise; but if you have patience, what will the aid be? The True Lord *the Most High* reassures the believers that if they are steadfast in adversity and they fear Him, and the enemy should fall upon them in hot haste, their Lord will aid them with five thousand angels with their marks (*Al-'Imran*: 125).

It is as though the starting position is three thousand angels to aid the people of faith, and then this is increased to five thousand if they have patience and fear God. So aid comes in a way which is proportionate to the people's patience, because the compassion of the Divine Omnipotence for you increases when He finds you are bearing hardships; He has compassion for you, and gives you even more. God wants His servant to utilise all of his personal means of power; and when you utilise all these means with manliness and firmness, God's aid comes to you, and God says to His angels: This one deserves to be aided, so, aid him. For this reason, God *the Most High* stated the statement of the believers: '…"How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of God. And God is with the patient."'

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَلَمَّا بَرَزُواْ لِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِۦ قَالُواْ رَبَّنَآ أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا
وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَٱنصُرْنَا عَلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٥٠﴾

And when they met Goliath and his warriors, they said, 'Our Lord, pour patience on us, make us stand firm, and help us against the disbelievers' [250]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 250)

This is the charge of faith for all who wish to face their enemy, calling out, 'O our Lord.' They do not call, 'O God,' but rather, 'O our Lord' because the Lord is the One Who undertakes sustenance and provision, whilst the implication of 'God' is worship and moral responsibility. This is why the believer calls upon his Lord in difficult times, saying ‘O our Lord,’ that is, ‘O You Who created us, and Who provides for us and aids us with means.’ The believers, who were with Saul, said: ‘…“O our Lord, pour upon us steadfastness, and set firm our feet, and give us victory over the infidels.”’

When we reflect on the words ‘…pour upon us steadfastness,’ this tells us that they asked God to fill their hearts with patience; and the effect of patience is to make firm one’s steps: ‘…and set firm our feet…’ so that they could face the enemy with faith; and at the end of patience and making firm their steps, God’s victory came to the believers against the disbelievers, and the result of the faithful resolve and fighting comes in God’s words:

فَهَزَمُوهُم بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِ وَقَتَلَ دَاوُۥدُ جَالُوتَ وَءَاتَىٰهُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡمُلۡكَ
وَٱلۡحِكۡمَةَ وَعَلَّمَهُۥ مِمَّا يَشَآءُۗ وَلَوۡلَا دَفۡعُ ٱللَّهِ ٱلنَّاسَ بَعۡضَهُم بِبَعۡضٖ
لَّفَسَدَتِ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ذُو فَضۡلٍ عَلَى ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٢٥١

and so with God’s permission they defeated them. David killed Goliath, and God gave him sovereignty and wisdom and taught him what He pleased. If God did not drive some back by means of others the earth would be completely corrupt, but God is bountiful to all [251]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 251)

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us that He gave victory to those who believed in Him; and the True Lord used the expression ‘they defeated them,’ which indicates that those who should have been on the attack turned away and fled. The warrior should always be attacking; and when he resorts to turning away, we need to stop to clarify his situation: is this retreat a strategy of war, and a way of getting to another position which is a more advantageous spot in which to fight? If this was the case, it does not mean defeat. But if the retreat was not for any strategy to beguile the enemy, but rather out of fear, this means defeat.

God *the Most High* says, ‘So they defeated them by permission of God…’ which indicates that the forces of Goliath were not all killed, but rather, the leaders of disbelief amongst them were killed; and this is indicated by what

God *the Most High* says next, '…And David killed Goliath….' Goliath was the leader of the disbelieving army which fled, and David *peace be upon him* chased him and killed him. For the first time, the name 'David' appears in this long story, and we do not have any information about this name up to this point; and information will come about him after this story, when God *the Most High* says that He graced David with His favour and ordered the mountains to sing with him the praise of God, and also the birds. And He made iron pliable for him and commanded him to make full coats of mail and calculate precisely the links, and commanded all to do good deeds; indeed, God is seeing of what they do (*Saba':* 10-11).

So, the beginning of David's story came with this battle, after he killed Goliath. David *peace be upon him* was the youngest of eleven brothers, and the prophet said to the people, 'The man who will enter the battle against Goliath is the one who fits in the armour of Moses *peace be upon him*.' David's father tried the armour on all of his sons, and it fit only one of them: the youngest, David *peace be upon him*. The armour fit him, and David *peace be upon him* entered the battle and killed Goliath, the leader of the idolaters; and the wisdom of God decreed that the youngest man amongst the believers would be the one to kill the leader of the idolaters' army.

This battle was the beginning of the history of David *peace be upon him*, and this battle brought him a mighty victory; and then God *the Most High* blessed him with kingship and wisdom, and made the mountains and the birds repeat with him expressions of the glory and transcendence of God; and all of this was the result of his killing of Goliath. David *peace be upon him* loved the armour, and it became his hope that God might teach him to make armours, which is why he never took up any craft in his life except the making of armours. God made iron malleable for him so he could make whatever he wanted from it, as God *the Most High* says that He taught him the fashioning of coats of armour to protect men from each other's violence (*al-Anbiya':* 80).

This shows that a person loves those things which are connected with the means by which their standing was raised; and the killing of Goliath was the beginning for David *peace be upon him*. God says, '…and David killed Goliath and God gave him the kingship and wisdom and taught him from that which

He willed. And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted, but God is bounteous to the worlds.' Here, the True Lord *the Most High* makes mention of a natural law of existence, which is that war is a societal necessity, and that the True Lord *the Most High* repels people with people, and that were it not for the presence of power in the face of power, the world would be whelmed in corruption; for if only a single temporal power had control of existence, it would be corrupted.

The thing which keeps the universe alive is the existence of equally-matched powers within it, one power facing another. This is why we find that the world is always guarded by two superpowers; if there were only one power, error would spread everywhere. If we reflect on history since ancient times, we find that this duality of power conserved stability in the world.

At the onset of Islam, the two great powers were the Persian Empire in the East, and the Byzantine Empire in the West. Now that the power of Russia has fallen from the world scales, we see that Germany and Japan are competing to counterbalance the power of America.

God's words '…And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted…' come as the epilogue to the story of the struggle between the children of Israel and their enemies who expelled them from their homelands. When we reflect on this story from its beginning, we find that the Israelites first asked God for permission to fight, and God *the Most High* raised up a king for them to fight under his banner, and the sign of the truth of this king was that God would bring them the ark. Then came a societal issue at which people can usually arrive by the use of their wisdom without the need even for revelation, which is that when one is about to do something, he must prepare for it with human means so that once his preparations have exhausted all their means, he may turn to God's aid; for as we said, the means are from the Hand of God, so, do not turn down God's Hand with its means and seek God's aid directly, but rather, you must take the means first because they are from the Hand of your Lord.

The True Lord *the Most High* also teaches us that these means include the purification of those who seek to defend the truth in a way which shows us the power of their resolve in the test of faith; for a person might say one thing with his tongue, but when it comes down to action, his soul tells him not to proceed. A few of the people were able to succeed in all the trials to which they were subjected, and the battle went ahead, and the believers defeated their enemies, and David *peace be upon him* was victorious by killing Goliath.

This was an instance when God checked one people by means of another, and the True Lord *the Most High* then, affirmed this as a general principle: '…And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted….' That is, had God *the Most High* not used the believing minority to check their many enemies, corruption would have overwhelmed the earth. To check something here means to bar it from its attaining its intention; and if the intention of people is to do evil, God checks this. So God checks, but He makes it through the hands of His servants, as He *the Exalted* commands the believers to fight against the infidels and God will chastise them by their hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will give victory to the believers against them; and He will heal the bosoms of those who believe (*at-Tawba:* 14).

God *the Most High* uses the believers to fight the disbelievers, and the True Lord *the Most High* inflicts suffering on the disbelievers by the hands of the believers. When we reflect on the wise words '…And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted…' we find that there was a previous incident which laid the way for this statement: they were driven from their homes and their children, and this was their motivation for fighting. There is also another verse which speaks about those who have been driven from their homes without right for no other reason than their proclaiming that their Lord is God; and if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques – where God's Name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed. And God will most certainly support him who supports His cause; for, surely, God is Most Powerful, Almighty (*al-Hajj:* 40).

The contexts of the two verses are different: in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, the verse refers to people who were actually at war, whilst the verse in the chapter of *al-Hajj* refers to people who believed in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, who left Mecca, where they were oppressed, to join their believing brethren in the abode of faith, in order that they might return again one day to enter Mecca as conquerors.

It is true that we find one thing being shared by the two verses, which is that they had left their homes. So in one case the defence is that you turn away in order to return, that is, you leave the abode of disbelief as an emigrant in order to get yourself together along with those who are with you, and then return to your home as a conquering warrior; and in the other case, the defence is that you actually fight right away. The verse which we are currently examining indicates that they actually fought right away whilst the second verse indicates that they left Mecca in order to return later as conquerors so that, the act of leaving itself was a form of defence. Why? If the early Muslims had remained in Mecca, their enemies might have wiped them all out so that no trace of Islam remained. So they went to Medina and established the Islamic state, and then, returned as victorious conquerors 'When there comes the help of God and the victory…' (*an-Nasr:* 1).

The contexts of the two verses are the same, but the outcome is different. Here, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted….' Why would the earth be corrupted? It is because the meaning of checking some people with others is that there are some people who accept corruption, whilst others come out from them and try to bring them back to rectitude. The True Lord *the Most High* gives us the reason for this in the second verse, saying that if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques – where God's Name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed (*al-Hajj:* 40).

Cloisters (*sawami'*) are like the Christian monasteries of today in which people used to worship God; for there are worshippers who fulfil common religious responsibilities, and other worshippers who charge themselves to do more than God commanded them, and those who worship God in this way sit in places far away from other people called cloisters, which are like the monasteries of today. The general meaning of Christian worship is that which takes place in churches, called here *biya'* in Arabic, whilst the special kind of worship is that which takes place in cloisters.

So, ‘cloisters’ are for those completely devoted to worship, and churches are for the generality of worshippers. The word ‘synagogues’ means the place of worship for Jews, and ‘mosques’ are the places of worship for Muslims.

So, God’s statement ‘…the earth would have been corrupted…’ in this verse and His statement ‘…cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques… would surely have been destroyed…’ (*al-Hajj:* 40) means that the earth would be whelmed in corruption if there were no cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques because they are what connects created beings to the Creator. Since these are the places which connect created beings to the Creator, if they are destroyed the people will no longer remember their Lord, and they will be infatuated by worldly means.

So, cloisters, churches, hermitages – when they existed – and mosques today are the guardian of morality in the world because they always remind you of your servitude and prevent you from being deluded; the name *masjid* (mosque) is derived from the word *sujud,* meaning prostration which is the ultimate act of humility before the Lord, and in them we humble ourselves before God five times every day and night. If the servant has any kind of delusion, it is sure to melt away, as he knows that the entire universe is a grace from God to His servants. So do not let any delusion enter you, O Muslims; and if no delusion enters you, you will use God’s means to do God’s bidding. But if you take God’s means and use them to do other than God’s bidding, this is an act of shamelessness on your part. Since God has given your hand the ability to move, why do you disobey God with it and strike others? And God gave your tongue the ability to speak, so, why do you speak words that hurt others? God gave you blessings; so, do not use them to disobey Him.

God *the Most High* said in this verse, ‘…the earth would have been corrupted…’ and He explained this when He said that cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques – where God’s Name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed (*al-Hajj:* 40), for these are the places which preserve the roots of religious values; and the ‘roots of religious values’ are not the same as ‘all religious values,’ which is why we said that the True Lord *the Most High* gave Islam five Pillars, and these are what Islam is built upon, and we must build Islam on these five Pillars; so do not say that Islam is these five Pillars. No; Islam is only built on them, and they are the supports or foundations upon which Islam is built. When you make foundations and set up supports for a house, this alone does not make the house fit to be lived in, but rather, the rest of the building must still be built. So Islam is built on these foundations.

The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies this in commanding us to look after the places which maintain these values because mosques – and we are speaking now about Islamic conventions – are the places where the True Lord's outpourings of illumination meet His creatures, and whoever wants the True Lord *the Most High* to pour His light upon him, should go to the mosque. So in order that the earth is not overwhelmed by corruption, these places of worship must exist; in one place, the True Lord *the Most High* mentions the result, and in the other He mentions the cause.

Why does God *the Most High* check people by means of others? Because there are people who desire evil, and others who desire good, and those who desire evil check those who desire good; and if the battle takes place in this way, the Hand of God will not forsake the side of the believer who seeks what is good; for He *the Exalted* says that He will most certainly support the one who supports His cause; and surely God is Most Powerful, Almighty (*al-Hajj:* 40).

That is, the battle will not be a long one. This is why we said before that of all the battles we see in the universe, we do not find any battle between two forces of truth because there are no two truths in existence, and truth is one. So no one can say that he is on the side of truth and his opponent is also on the side of truth; no; there is only one truth. When battles take place, they take place either between truth and falsehood or between falsehood and falsehood; and the battle between truth and falsehood is never a long one because falsehood always falls away. The battles which are long drawn are those which take place between one falsehood and another, as neither of them deserves to be aided by God for one is corrupt and the other is also corrupt, and He *the Exalted* crushes this corruption with the other; and when one corruption is crushed by another, the two wings of falsehood in the universe come to an end, and then, there come people who have no corruption, and they fill the universe.

In the battles which go on in any place, you find that one party has one caprice and the other party has a different one, and God does not stand on either side because no one side is more worthy of God than the other. Therefore, He leaves them to struggle with each other; and since the True Lord *the Most High* has left them to each other, the battle will be long; and were God on the mind of one side, He *the Exalted* would stand with them. This is why we see that the battles of modern times go on and on because we do not find the third party mentioned in the command of God *the Most High* that if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two groups goes on acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to God's command; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice, and deal equitably with them: for, indeed, God loves those who act equitably (*al-Hujurat:* 9).

The True Lord *the Most High* commands that when two groups of believers fight one another, a third group of believers must make peace between them; and if one transgresses against the other and refuses to make peace, the True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers to fight the side which transgresses until it reverts to God's command; and if it reverts to God's command, the peace made between the two sides must be fair because God *the Most High* loves those who are just and fair.

And we find that falsehood fights with falsehood, and there is no one to make peace between the two falsehoods; rather, we find that caprices battle each other, and every side allies itself with the group that suits its caprice.

This is the great failure of the modern age: battles are long drawn because there is nothing common shared in the minds of those who fight; if there were something common shared in their minds, the war would not have begun. As long as they are heedless of this shared thing, a party must intevene which can affect a truce; but even these people do not intervene to bring about a truce, which inevitably leads to failure in the whole world, and the world will continue to be in this state of failure until they repent and change their ways. They are making the experience longer for themselves, and they will remain in this state of failure until they become aware that the only way for all this to end, is for them to abandon their own caprices in favour of the Will of their Creator.

'…And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted….' Yes, the earth will be whelmed with corruption in those things over which God has given man influence; as for the things over which God *the Most High* has given man no influence, their natural laws will remain the same, and no one will affect them; no one will affect the sun, or the moon, or the air, or the rain; corruption only occurs in those things over which man has influence.

Look at the universe, and you find that those things over which man has no influence are sound, in the best form they could possibly be in, and corruption only comes to those things in which man intervenes without the guidance of God's way. Had man intervened in them according to God's way, things would have been sound just as the highest natural laws are sound.

In the chapter of *ar-Rahman,* God *the Most High* says that He has raised the sky high and that He has devised for all things a balance (*ar-Rahman:* 7). As long as the True Lord *the Most High* has raised the sky and devised the balance, the sky cannot fall onto the earth, and the system is completely controlled. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west and the moon and stars travel with absolute precision and singularity; this is because no human being has anything to do with it. If you want to make your lives sound, and that your affairs be in as perfect an order as the mechanics of the sky and the earth are, then, apply the balance of Heaven to all your actions. Follow what the True Lord *the Most High* then says: He has raised the sky high and He has devised for all things a balance, so you too, O men, never transgress the balance of what is right; weigh, therefore, your deeds with equity and do not cut not the balance short (*ar-Rahman:* 7-9).

As long as you see that the things in existence over which you have no influence move in an orderly way, and work soundly and you see that corruption comes to those things with which you have interfered, why do we not follow the way of God with those things with which we can interfere? If you follow in life the guidance of the way of God Who created life, your affairs will be sound for you just as the higher matters of the universe are sound. And be especially careful to adhere to His words: He has raised the sky high and He has devised for all things a balance, so you too, O men, never transgress the balance of what is right (*ar-Rahman:* 7-8).

All of us must carefully adhere to these words so that we know that the higher matters are balanced because the hand of man does not interfere with them.

The sky does not fall upon the earth because it is governed by an absolutely ordered system. And the earth does not spin away from its orbit because its Creator has established for it an absolutely ordered system. Because of this, the True Lord *the Most High* says that the system of the celestial bodies in the universe is such that, it is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming (*Ya Sin:* 40).It is a precisely-ordered system because man has no influence over it. So make a balance for all the things over which you have the ability to exercise your free will so that you do not transgress the balance.

Since God *the Most High* created man and gave him free will and some people choose one path, whilst others chose a contrary path, each path being outside the way of God, the True Lord *the Most High* left the two sides to battle and fight one another; and because He *the Exalted* is Merciful with all mankind, the elements of goodness remain in existence, in case someone sees them, and notices them, and goes to take them. When one group transgresses, the True Lord *the Most High* sends to them another group to set them right so that the elements of goodness remain in existence, in case someone comes to take one of them and applies it to his life; and people of goodness only come because of God's mercy upon mankind. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

تِلْكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ وَإِنَّكَ لَمِنَ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٢٥٢﴾

These are the revelations of God which We recite to you [Muhammad] with the truth, and you truly are one of the messengers [252] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 252)

We know that the word 'these' is a sign which God addresses to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* indicating the verses which came before, and which showed the magnificence and sustaining power of the True Lord. The True Lord *the Most High* said previously: Did you not see [consider] those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death? God said to them, 'Die' then He restored them to life. And God is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude (*al-Baqara*: 243). Their asking to fight and for God to send them a king, His sending them a king, and His sending them the ark which contained inner peace – were these not all signs as well? And after this, the True Lord *the Most High* willing the killing of Goliath the giant, to come at the hand of David *peace be upon him* the young lad – was this not a sign? And another sign was that a small group – as they themselves affirmed when they said, '…How often has a small company overcome a large company by permission of God and God is with the patient' (*al-Baqara*: 249), that this small group entered the battle and defeated the larger group; was this not a sign?

Did the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* know about these signs which came before his own mission? No, but he was informed of them by God, as all attest to, especially those who disbelieve in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; since he did not read, write, or sit with a teacher, and no one ever told him anything about those things. Even on the journeys which he undertook for trade, he was accompanied by others; and if they had seen him sitting with anyone to teach him something, they would have made it known that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had sat with so-and-so, and learned from him such-and-such. But no one ever said this because it never happened. Because of this, the fact that He *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to tell them things which they knew themselves was one of the secrets of his miracle; he knew about events of the past even though he never read, wrote, or took knowledge from anyone. One of the idolaters stubbornly disputed, claiming that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had sat with a youth in Marwa who had taught him these things, so the true words of God *the Most High* came to refute this fabrication stating categorically that God indeed knows that they say that it is only a human being who teaches him; the tongue of the one they maliciously refer to is foreign, and the Quran is in a clear Arabic tongue (*an-Nahl:* 103).

The True Lord *the Most High* affirms that this was a spurious argument and a false claim on their part since the one they claimed had taught the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was a non-Arab. The True Lord *the Most High* says to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'These are the verses of God which We recite to you [O Muhammad], in truth….' The phrase 'the verses of God' means wondrous things, and 'We recite to you' means God set them down word by word; the Arabic verb *yatlu* (recite) is derived from the word *wala* which means for one thing to follow another without interruption. '…We recite to you [O Muhammad], in truth….' The truth is that which is fixed in place so that it cannot change, and can never contradict itself.

Suppose an accident takes place in front of you, and then you are asked about it a thousand times throughout your life. You will find that your answer never changes because you are relating an actual event which you witnessed. But if the story is a lie, the way you tell it the second time will change because you do not remember what you said the first time i.e. as you are not relating something real which took hold of you so that you can stick to it. In this way, the truth never changes, or contradicts itself, or conflicts with itself.

'These are the verses of God which We recite to you [O Muhammad], in truth.' Since the True Lord *the Most High* is the One relating them, He will relate them to you truthfully, whereupon the others will know that you have come to know the things which they keep secret in their books and tell to one another; upon this, they will know that you are truly one of those entrusted with a message. This is why we find expressions such as 'you were not there' in the Quran, as when God *the Most High* tells His Messenger that he was not present repeatedly when He tells him of past events. One instance is God's telling the prophet that he was not present at the western side of Mount Sinai when He revealed the command to Moses, and he was not among those who witnessed that (*al-Qasas:* 44).

That is, you were not, O Muhammad, present with Moses on the western side of the mountain when God made the covenant of the message with him, and you were not a contemporary of Moses, and you did you witness him delivering the message; so how could your people deny you when you convey to them the stories of those who came before? Another example of this is God *the Most High* telling His Messenger that He reveals to him news from things that are beyond the reach of his perception; for he was not with the elders when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary's guardian, and he was not with them when they contended about it with one another (*Al-'Imran*: 44).

The great stories related to you by the Quran, O Muhammad, of those whom God elected, are from the matters of the Unseen which God has revealed to you. And you were not present with them when they drew straws to determine who would take care of Mary *peace be upon her*, and you were not with them when they argued over who would be granted this great honour. Another example of this is God *the Most High* telling His Messenger that he was not at the side of the mount when God called Moses but that he was sent as a mercy from his Lord to warn a people to whom no warner had come before him that they might be reminded (*al-Qasas:* 46). That is, you were not, O Messenger, present on Mount Sinai when We called Moses when the appointed time came, and His Lord spoke to him and engaged in intimate discourse with him, but God has informed you of this by revelation out of mercy for you and for your community, and in order that you can tell it to those to whom no messenger came before you, so that they might take heed and have faith.

Another example of this is God *the Most High* telling His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He has revealed to him a life-giving message, coming at God's behest. Before this message came to him, he did not know what revelation is, nor what faith implies; but God has made this message to be a light, whereby He guides whom He wills of His servants; and, surely, the Messenger, too, guides to the Straight Way (*ash-Shura:* 52).

The Quran is revelation sent down from God, which shows the believers the light of guidance and the commands of the True Lord *the Most High* and guides those who choose guidance; and you, O Muhammad, call by this Quran to a Straight Path. Every statement saying 'you were not' in the Noble Quran is an indication that everything which Gabriel *peace be upon him* tells you as a messenger from God to you, and a bearer of revelation from God, is the truth; so you know it, O Muhammad, by a special means and in a special way even though you never read a book, or sat with a teacher. And the signs of which you tell them are in agreement with the information they have, and they should therefore have said that the One Who taught you this was God *the Most High*, and they should have acknowledged and testified that you are one of those who have been entrusted with a message.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

تِلْكَ ٱلرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ مِّنْهُم مَّن كَلَّمَ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجَٰتٍ ۚ
وَءَاتَيْنَا عِيسَى ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَأَيَّدْنَٰهُ بِرُوحِ ٱلْقُدُسِ ۗ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَا
ٱقْتَتَلَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتُ وَلَٰكِنِ ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ
ءَامَنَ وَمِنْهُم مَّن كَفَرَ ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَا ٱقْتَتَلُوا۟ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿٢٥٣﴾

We favoured some of these messengers above others. God spoke to some; others He raised in rank; We gave Jesus, son of Mary, Our clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit. If God had so willed, their successors would not have fought each other after they had been brought clear signs. But they disagreed: some believed and some disbelieved. If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He will [253] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 253)

The True Lord *the Most High* refers to the Messengers by saying, '…Those Messengers…*'* (*tilka ar-rusul*). The word *rusul* is the plural of (*rasool*)*,* which means the one who is sent to deliver a message, which is a collection of words bearing a meaning which leads to a goal. Since *rusul* refers to a group, why then did the True Lord *the Most High* use the word *tilka* (which literally means 'that' used for singular nouns) instead of *ha'ula'i* ('these')? This is how the Noble Quran tells you that no matter how the messengers differ, they were all sent by the same One God with the same guidance. As we know, the word *tilka* is a demonstrative pronoun which is used with something distant ('that'). When we indicate something close, we say in Arabic *dha,* and if we are speaking directly to someone we say *dhak*; or if we are indicating a feminine noun, we say *ti,* and if we are speaking directly to someone and referring to a feminine noun, we say *tilka;* and the letter (*l*) here, as we know, refers to something distant, or something with a lofty status.

God's words '…Those Messengers…' refer to the messengers known to our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, or the messengers who have previously been mentioned in the Quranic text; and the Quranic text which came before spoke about Moses, Jesus *peace be upon them*, and about *ulu al-'azm* (those of firm resolve) from amongst the Messengers.

If you wish to consider the Quranic order here, it refers to what has been mentioned in this chapter; if you wish to consider the order of revelation, it refers to those previous messengers known to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. The occasion here is that the True Lord *the Most High* concluded the previous verse by saying, '…And indeed, you are from among the messengers' (*al-Baqara*: 252), and since this statement indicates the Prophet's membership of a general plurality, it is as though God is saying: Beware of thinking that just because they are united in being message-bearers, or being messengers of God, they are all of equal rank; no; rather, each one of them has his own general level of value as well as his specific level of preference. They are all messengers from God, but the True Lord *the Most High* gives each one of them a specific level of preference.

Since God's statement '…And indeed, you are from among the messengers' confirms for us that our master the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is one of the messengers, do not infer from this that all the messengers are equal in rank and say that they are all equally preferred; no; God *the Most High* has preferred some of them over others. What does it mean to prefer? It means that you go to someone and give him some kind of distinction; and when you give him a distinction over other people, someone might say to you: 'This is favouritism.' So, we say to those who say this: Be more precise, and know that to prefer someone, is to give them a distinction based on wisdom, whilst favouritism means to give someone a distinction based on individual whims and desires. For example, if we want to choose someone for an important job, we choose a number of people who might fit the bill and say, 'This one is suitable, and this one is suitable, and this one is suitable,' and 'this one has distinctions over this one,' and so on. If we look at them and appraise them with wisdom and aptness, this is preference. But if we choose someone because he is a relative or an in-law of ours, and the like, this is caprice and favouritism.

Preference means to single out and give a distinction but with wisdom; as for favouritism, it is to single out and give a distinction due to a caprice in your soul. For example, suppose that you bought a steam-boat and went in it for a voyage with your young son, along with a steam-boat driver, and your young son wanted to steer the boat, sat in the place of the driver, and began to steer; but then, tall waves started to come, and the sea became rough; you would quickly get up, take your son out of the way and tell the driver to steer. The boy might cry here; but is this favouritism on your part for the driver? No; for if there was any favouritism, it would be for your son; you preferred the driver for a wise reason based on your knowledge that he knows how to steer better than the young boy. So if you look at the circumstances of the choice and the selection using wisdom, this is preference; whilst favouritism is when caprice is in charge.

Every action of the True Lord *the Most High* is based on wisdom because He has no caprice or desire, and we are all the same to Him; so, when He *the Most High* gives a distinction, or a blessing, or a favour, there is a wise reason for this.

When the True Lord *the Most High* said, '…And indeed, you are from among the messengers' (*al-Baqara*: 252), He then, followed this by saying, 'Those messengers - some of them We have endowed more highly than others….', and He gives us an example of this preference by saying, '…Among them were those to whom God spoke….' When you hear the words '…Among them were those to whom God spoke…', what comes directly to mind is Moses *peace be upon him*; and apart from him, God *the Most High* also spoke to the angels.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…and He raised some of them in degree…', and then He says, '…And We gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear proofs….' He *the Exalted* first specified Moses *peace be upon him* with the predominant attribute, saying, 'to whom God spoke,' and He also specified our master Jesus *peace be upon him* by saying that He gave him signs and proofs; and between Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them* He said, '…and He raised some of them in degree….' These verses are addressed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, so here, we have words about others directed to someone, namely Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Sometimes a person is mentioned by name or by his predominant attribute so that the intended person has been specified; but other times, a person is mentioned by his attribute, and then, it is left to the intelligence of the listener to connect the attribute to its possessor; so, it is as though it is understood that God's words '…and He raised some of them in degree…' cannot rightfully be applied to anyone but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone.

God *the Most High* placed him in between Moses and Jesus *peace be upon them* even though the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come between them chronologically, but rather came as the Final Prophet; but you find that His way is the middle way. The Jews went too far with materialism at the expense of spirituality, and the Christians went too far with spirituality at the expense of materialism; but the world needs a middle way between materialism and spirituality, so, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came. It is as though Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the axis of equilibrium in the affairs of existence.

If we want to know the aspects of this preference, we find that there were messengers whom God *the Most High* sent to their villages, such as our master Lot *peace be upon him*, for example, and some messengers were limited in the scope or the life-span of their message; but there is one messenger to whom it was said: You are sent to man and jinn-kind, and to all who will exist of man and jinn-kind until the end of time. This was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

And if the preference is based on actions, it is also for our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and if we consider the miracles which God sent to His messengers to prove to the people that they were truly sent by their Lord, we find that all the miracles were miracles of nature, i.e. tangible, physical miracles which are believed by those who see them; for those who saw the staff of Moses *peace be upon him* strike the sea and part it, this was a physical miracle in which the people of Moses *peace be upon him* believed; and those who saw Jesus *peace be upon him* heal the blind and the leprous witnessed the physical miracle and believed in it. But do these miracles still have any existence now, except in the form of reports of them? No, they no longer exist.

But when God *the Most High* wanted to give Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a miracle, He did not send him a miracle in a material form(1) which happens once and then ends. He *the Exalted* sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a Message to remain until the end of time. His message is not limited. Therefore, His miracle had to be based not on matter, but rather on the intellect, for the intellect is something which everyone shares; and therefore, his miracle was the Quran, and everyone is now able to say, ‘Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of God, and this is his miracle.’ The miracle of our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is something which exists to be seen.

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(1) This said, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* also performed many great physical miracles; *see Ibn Taimiya's Al-Furqan*.

As to the aspect of application of teachings, we find that the messengers did not come to establish laws themselves, but rather, they would deliver laws from God, and they did not have the right to legislate themselves. As for the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, he is the only Messenger whose commands and prohibitions God *the Most High* ordered the believers to obey in commanding them to accept whatever the Messenger gives them and refrain from anything that he forbids them (*al-Hashr:* 7).

So, He *peace and blessings be upon him* was singled out by God with the right to legislate too; is this not a special distinction? The purpose of the Way of Heaven is to establish laws, which govern the lives of God’s vicegerents on earth. And these laws are of two kinds: One kind comes from God, and in this we find that all the messengers are equal; and the second type of laws are those which God *the Most High* left the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* to legislate as he saw fit, and this was a special preference for the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, when God *the Most High* says, ‘…and He raised some of them in degree…’, this can only mean our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and this says more than simply mentioning his name could. I will give an example of this – and God is beyond compare: You give one of your sons an ordinary pencil, and you give your second son an expensive pen, and you give your third son a watch, and for your fourth son you buy a very expensive gift. Then you go to the boys and say, ‘I bought so-and-so a pencil and so-and-so an ink pen and I bought so-and-so a watch, and for someone I bought an expensive gift.’ By ‘someone’, it is understood that you mean the fourth son whose name you did not mention, and he has been specified and identified.

‘Those messengers - some of them We have endowed more highly than others. Among them were those to whom God spoke….’ When you say that

God *the Most High* speaks, do not be unmindful of a universal matter which applies to every attribute of God which can also be applied to humans. I speak, and God speaks, but is His speech like mine? If you think that my being is like His Being, then, make my speech like His speech; and if my being is not like His Being, how could my speech be like His speech?

Someone might say that ‘speech’ is comprised of a voice, and vocal chords, and so on. To him we say: No; you should not understand anything related to God except in the light of the rule that there is nothing like unto Him (*ash-Shura:* 11); and we take every attribute ascribed to God according to what God says, and we do not come up with attributes on our own; and after this we do not compare Him to a human in attribute. God has life, and you have life, but are any of our lives like His life? No; for His life is intrinsic, whilst all of our lives are given to us and taken from us, so, they are not like His life.

The True Lord *the Most High* says that it is He Who created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days; then, He established (*istawa*) Himself above the Throne. Then, He addresses mankind saying that they have not besides Him any protector or any intercessor; so, will they not be reminded? (*as-Sajda:* 4).

Is the ‘sitting’ of the True Lord *the Most High* like the sitting of man? Or is the Chair of the Creator like the chair of the creature? Of course not. We believers take every attribute of God according to the principle of *tanzih* (the declaration of God’s absolute dissimilarity to all contingent being). Glory be to God, there is nothing like Him; the establishment (*istiwa’*) of God is not like the establishment of humans, and the sitting of the True Lord *the Most High* is not like the sitting of man.

Let us give this example – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare: Imagine that a friend of yours invites you to eat at his home, and then one of the leaders of the community invites you to eat at his home. You will certainly find that there is a difference in the quality and variety of the food between the tables of those who have invited you. If there are different degrees between the attributes of human beings themselves according to their situations, abilities, and resources, and if you follow the rising level of attributes to the Creator of all things, you will see with certainty that He *the Exalted* is far beyond everything other than Himself, and that there is nothing like Him.

So, the expression 'to whom God spoke' means that He informed his messenger via any means of passing information. '…Among them were those to whom God spoke, and He raised some of them in degree. And We gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and We supported him with the Holy Spirit….' The True Lord *the Most High* always confirms, when speaking about our master Jesus *peace be upon him*, that Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon them* was aided by the Holy Spirit; for the things to which our master Jesus *peace be upon him* was exposed, required that the Holy Spirit was always with him, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* states his supplication that *peace be upon him* on the day when he was born, and on the day of his death, and on the day when he shall be raised to life (*Maryam:* 33).

Upon the occasion of his birth, our master Jesus *peace be upon him* was exposed to a problem because he was born in an unconventional way, and his mother was accused because of this; and the Quran absolved her, declared her innocence, and put things in their proper place. Again, he faced a problem in the matter of his death, when they wanted to kill him.

When we look at the messengers, we find that the cause for God *the Most High* sending messengers to the world was that He *the Exalted* did not create mankind in a state of compulsion to act, and nor to be forced as all other creatures in the universe are forced; and directly after man comes animals which are lacking in intelligence; and after animals comes the genus of plants which are lacking in sensation and motion; and after this comes minerals which are lower than vegetables; and these are the genera of existence. Mastery was given to man in that all the other genera are bound to serve him, not by free choice, but by compulsion and subdual.

The sun has never come along and said, 'Creatures no longer please me, so I will not rise on them today.' And the wind never refused to blow, nor did the rain refuse to fall, nor did the earth refuse to give plants their means of sustenance. A man mounts a riding animal, a horse for example, and steers it as he likes and pleases, and nothing ever refuses to obey man. You, O men, are the one species to whom God has given the free choice as to whether to fulfil your purpose in existence; if you wish, you can do this, and if you wish you can do that.

But God *the Most High* did not leave you like this completely, but rather, there are certain things which occur despite your wishes, and you are compelled as far as they are concerned. You cannot, for example, decide the day you are born, or the day you die, nor the external things which will befall you, nor the activities which take place inside your body; in all of these matters, you are compelled, and you cannot escape the grasp of your Lord; but you have the freedom of choice in other matters.

We know that He *the Exalted* compelled certain genera to be as He wanted, and as He liked; and this is the attribute of Omnipotence, for the attribute of compulsion implies control. If He left one genus to decide whether or not to believe, and, if it believes, to decide whether or not to obey, this proves the love for God *the Most High* of the one who chooses and favours obedience to God over disobedience.

We know that compulsion subdues the body, but it does not subdue the heart. You can threaten someone with a gun and say, ‘Prostrate before me,’ and he will do so; but you cannot say to him at gunpoint, ‘Love me.’ The True Lord *the Most High* leaves it for us to choose faith, and leaves it for us to choose obedience or disobedience, so He knows who comes to Him in love, and who comes to Him in compulsion.

The whole world comes to God *the Most High* in compulsion, and in your own body, O man, there are things in which you are compelled. In this way, God’s Omnipotence is confirmed, yet love for Him is yet to be confirmed; the righteous servant is the one who obeys Him out of love. We have given the example before – and God is beyond compare – and said that a man might have two servants, one named Sa‘d and the other named Sa‘id. Sa‘d’s master ties him with a rope and pulls him along, saying: ‘Come along, Sa‘d!’ Does Sa‘d have the option not to come? No; but the master leaves Sa‘id to be free, and when he calls him, he comes.

So, which one of them loves his master, the one who comes by the rope, or the one who comes because of love? It is part of the honour of man that he confirms for God the attribute of love if he believes in Him; for had He *the Exalted* willed to guide all people, none of them would have been able to disbelieve in Him; and had He willed to be obeyed always, no one could ever have disobeyed Him. This is why we said that Satan had knowledge when he said before God *the Most High* that he swears by God's Might that he will most certainly beguile mankind all into grievous error (*Sad:* 82).

Satan swore to God by His Might *the Exalted* over His creatures; it is as though he said: O Lord, if You needed Your servants, I would not be able to take them; but since You have Might over them, if they want to believe, they will believe, and if they do not want to believe, they will not believe; and this is the door from which I will enter. This is why Satan then, excluded some of the servants from this because he would not be able to find any way to reach them with his insinuations: They are those that are truly God's servants (*Sad:* 83).

That is, for those whom God willed to make pure for Himself, Satan will not be able to get near them. So Satan is not engaged in a battle with God, but rather, he is engaged in a battle with us; the True Lord *the Most High* made this clear when he reported Satan in the Quran as saying that he swears by God's Might that he will most certainly beguile mankind all into grievous error, except for those that are truly God's servants (*Sad:* 82-83).

So, if God *the Most High* wanted us all to be obedient, could anyone disobey? They could not. And if He wanted us all to believe, could anyone disbelieve? They could not. Rather, God wanted to leave certain matters and actions open to your free choice because He wants to know who will come to Him willingly, and that the servant remains between fear and hope. This is why the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If the believer knows the chastisement God has, no one would hope for His paradise; and if the disbeliever knew the Mercy God has, no one would despair of His paradise.'(1)

This is why the requirement of higher faith and higher certainty is that you love God for God's own sake: He *the Exalted* sends whatever events to you that He wills, and you continue to love Him so that God shows you off to the angels and the angels would say, 'Lord, he loves You because You have blessed him,' so, He says to them, 'I shall take away My blessings and he will continue to love Me;' and then the True Lord *the Most High* takes away the blessings, but the servant continues to love Him, for he loves God, not His blessings because He *the Exalted* is deserving of being loved for Himself, without considering the blessings He gives us.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him*

So, the True Lord *the Most High* sent the messengers to bear the way of God to those who wish to announce their love to God, to be true vicegerents on earth, and to maintain the soundness of the universe, not corrupt it. We know that maintaining the soundness of something has two degrees: either you leave the sound thing as it is without corrupting it, or you make it even better; so, you do not come to a spring of water which flows forth for the people and block it up, but rather, you leave it in its sound state, if you are not able to improve it. You might be able to improve a spring of water so that instead of people having to wear themselves out by going to the spring and carrying water from it, you might make for them a high pump with a tank to which the water is raised, and lay pipes so that the water is carried to their houses. In this way, you make the sound thing even sounder, and this is the role of vicegerency and cultivation in existence. If you are unable to make a sound thing sounder, spare us the evil of your corruption and leave it as it is, and sit back, as you are a burden on the universe.

If man were honest with the universe, he would ask himself: 'Who was it who was guided to make the bread which we now eat?' He would realise that it took the experiences of all people since Adam *peace be upon him* to arrive at the production of this bread: one person farmed wheat, and another was guided by God to grind this wheat, and He *the Exalted* guided man to make a sieve to separate flour from chaff, and then, He guided him to make the flour into dough until he found a better taste from it. There is no doubt that it so happened one time, that he left a piece of dough and then was distracted from it in some way, and then, returned to find the dough had risen, and then when he baked it, the bread came out tasting even nicer. He *the Exalted* apportioned and guided; otherwise how could this long process have occurred?

Another example: When a person cleans his clothes, and if he considers the actions of all those who came before him in this regard since the time of

Adam *peace be upon him*, he would realise that everyone who existed before him contributed a beneficial stage until they arrived to the electric washing machine which washes for him without much effort on his part. All of these things came to him through acts of guidance from God.

I said once: Why do people cook zucchinis, not cucumbers? This shows that man underwent many experiences in order for him to see that zucchini cooks better than cucumber; in the same way, people cook mallow but not mint even though mint is better than it; this happened because there were accumulated experiences which showed us that mint does not taste nice when it is cooked.

If you look at anything from which you draw benefit today, and appraise the actions which it has gone through from the day it was first made, you will find that the True Lord allotted to every person a task and an area, and they continue to serve you. As long as you have been served by all of these people from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until this day, you must look and see what you will do for those who will come after you; do not be lazy in life, taking the good of everyone else in existence and giving nothing in return, but rather, you must also give something. Just as you have taken from your environment, you must give something to this environment; and were this not the case, life would never have advanced because the meaning of advancement of life is that one person takes the experience of those who came before him and tries to improve on them, that is, to reap more benefits from less work.

If the people were to appraise the effort of the one who invented the wheel, for example, upon which cars now move, they would have to pray for God's mercy for him for the comfort he gave them; for after man had carried on his shoulders the most he could carry, the one who invented the wheel relieved him of his toil and strain, and allowed him to carry larger quantities and transport them with less effort.

So, you must look at the blessings which you enjoy now, and see all the stages which they went through, and think whether people made it just as it is, or whether they toiled, strained and struggled from the beginning of their existence on earth, and generation after generation, man came to know how to develop these things; and there might have been mistakes at certain stages, so, they had to begin correcting it and improving it, and so on. When you find that the world has given all these products to you, you must ask yourself what you will give to this world; and in this way, the human chain will continue to advance and remain connected.

The True Lord *the Most High* sends the Messengers and establishes the way of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not’ so that people’s lives will be upright on this earth; but people are overwhelmed by heedlessness of this way which is why corruptions appear in existence according to the level of this heedlessness. When corruption increases, the True Lord *the Most High* sends a new messenger to remind them of the way of God once again; and when the new messenger comes, some people believe in him and fight with him, and the Messenger is given victory and God’s principles become established on earth. Then time passes, and heedlessness comes and divergence occurs; for there are people who adhere to God’s way and people who neglect this way; so, divergence occurs and conflicts break out.

If the True Lord *the Most High* wanted the universe to be free of battles between truth and falsehood, He would have made truth ascendant by compulsion. But God gave us free will, and gave us a choice which is why we find that some grow up to be believers, whilst others grow up to be disbelievers, and we find that some are obedient and others disobedient; this is one group, and this is another. Do not understand that the existence of disbelievers or disobedient people on the earth means that they are outside of God’s power; no; God is the One Who gave them this choice, and if God had willed to make the people one community, no one would have been able to escape God’s will.

In the verse which we are currently examining, the True Lord *the Most High* mentioned the men of great resolve from amongst the messengers: Our master Moses *peace be upon him*, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and our master Jesus *peace be upon him*; and after this He says, ‘…If God had willed, those [generations] succeeding them would not have fought each other after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed, and some of them believed and some others disbelieved. And if God had willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He wills.’

So, what made the people contend amongst themselves? It was the divergent views of them: they differed, so they contended. But was it not possible for them to differ without contending? Had this happened, it would have been unanimous assent on corruption to occur. The True Lord *the Most High* does not want this unanimous assent on corruption to occur. If goodness does not govern the affairs of man, at least the constituents of goodness will remain in existence, and someone will come and find the constituents of goodness, and will make them grow.

In times of falsehood, The True Lord *the Most High* does not eliminate the traces of goodness and righteous actions, but rather, He *the Most High* preserves them so that any person who wants goodness can go to them. Goodness might be weak, but God does not eliminate it; for He uses it to give a new incentive for new believers to raise the banner of the truth even if they are weak at the onset. This is why we find that the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Were it not for servants of God who bow in obeisance, and babies who suckle, and animals which graze, suffering would be poured forth upon you.'(1)

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is alerting us here not to see weak people as a burden and see ourselves as strong just because they are living in our care; rather, they might be the conduit for Divine tenderness and mercy, as the above Hadith indicates.

God *the Most High* withholds suffering from us because of the weak ones among us because there is a kind of goodness in weakness; an element of goodness remains in existence so that if people want to return to guidance, they will find goodness to guide them. So were it not for this contention, corruption would be absolute, and that would mean utter destruction for humanity; but people differed: some of them believed whilst others disbelieved, '…And if God had willed, they would not have fought each other….' That is, they would have remained on one way of disbelief or corruption, '…but God does what He wills.' In contention, as we know, there are self-sacrifices, and sacrifices for the sake of the continuation of heavenly values on earth.

Sacrifice requires that a person gives either his life, or his wealth, which is why it is appropriate here for us to speak about spending which means to give up one’s wealth. In the past, the warrior was the one who equipped himself with the necessary supplies for battle, such as his horse, his spear, his sword, and his arrows; so, he had to spend. The True Lord *the Most High* speaks about this because it is included in the matter of the preservation of the element of faith depicted in the heavenly way which the messengers brought in order that this way remains on earth so that people can return to it when they encounter evil or falsehood. He *the Exalted* says:

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Kabir and Al-Bayhaqi in As-Sunnan Al-kubra*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَنفِقُواْ مِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰكُم مِّن قَبۡلِ أَن يَأۡتِيَ يَوۡمٞ لَّا بَيۡعٞ
فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٞ وَلَا شَفَٰعَةٞۗ وَٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ٢٥٤

You who believe, give from what We have provided for you, before the Day comes when there is no bargaining, no friendship, and no intercession. It is the disbelievers who are wrong [254] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 254)

We know that every call from the True Lord *the Most High* beginning with His words ‘O you who have believed…’ indicates that what will come after this will be a command of moral responsibility for those who believe in God, not a command to all people, since God *the Most High* does not issue commands to those who do not believe in Him, but only to those who do believe in Him. And those who traverse this barrier and come to have the certainty of faith thereby become worthy of being directly addressed by God; and it is as though they find in this Divine utterance a call them, saying: O you who believe in Me as a Wise, All-Powerful God Who legislates for you: I want you to do this.

So, faith in God *the Most High* is the basis of every ruling; so, why do you do something? Do not say it is because the wisdom behind it is such-and-such, but rather say, ‘It is because God, in whom I believe, has commanded me to do these things,’ whether you understand the wisdom behind them or not; indeed, for you to obey God’s command to you without understanding the wisdom behind it might be a stronger act of faith than for you to obey the command whilst knowing the wisdom behind it.

If a doctor says to someone, ‘The alcohol you are drinking is damaging your liver and doing such-and-such to you,’ and then, he quits drinking, an act which happens to have the appearance of obedience to God, but did he quit because God said so? No; he did not quit because God said so, but rather, because the doctor said so; so, his faith in the doctor is greater than his faith in the Lord of the doctor. As for the believer, he says, 'I will not drink alcohol because God has forbidden it; and why would I wait for the doctor to tell me that my liver is being damaged by my drinking?' The true mercy is that the disease never comes .

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you….' That is: I do not ask you to spend on Me, but rather to spend from what I have granted you as sustenance; for sustenance comes from a person's work, and a person's work requires the power to act on something or some material, and this action comes after a process of thought, and this thought was arranged by the One Who created it; and the limbs which act, and the hand which moves, and the foot which walks, were created by God, and the material upon which you work was created by God. Let us take the farmer as a model: we find that the earth, in which the components exist, was created by God. So a man works with the mind which God created, and acts with the limbs which God created to give him the power to work on the material which God created to give man its goodness; so, which part of this belongs to man then?

Despite this, if man gains any good from all this, He *the Exalted* does not say: It is Mine; but rather, He says: I give it to you, man, but give Me my right from it; and I shall not take My right for Myself, but rather, it is for your needy brother. The True Lord *the Most High* says that He does not want from Jinn and mankind to give Him provision, or to feed Him (*adh-Dhariyat:* 57).

Be careful not to say: What do I have to do with the needy person? You must know that poverty is a contingent, and it is possible for any contingent to befall you yourself. Do not consider yourself to be always giving, but rather consider that something might happen to you that will make you need to take, not to give. The True Lord *the Most High* tells you to give to the poor when you are rich because He tells other people to give to you when you become poor. Respect God's command when it is asked of you so that it will protect you when it is asked of others for you; in this way, there is balance.

Although He is the One Who provides sustenance, He wants you, O servants, to cooperate and love one another so that rancour is wiped from your hearts; for the weak person – one who is naturally weak, not one who deliberately appears weak in order to beg and swindle out of laziness, but rather, one who is unable to work – is the responsibility of the believers, and He *the Most High* makes the strong responsible for aiding you when you are weak.

When you – as a weak and incapacitated person – see that the strong and able have not forgotten you, and that they have remembered to share with you what they have, you realise that you are in a supporting environment which loves goodness for you; and if you see a blessing come to you when you are incapacitated, you will never envy it, and you will not resent the one who gives it to you, but rather, you will hope, as a result of the sweetness of it in your soul – having it come to you in your hour of need –that God will make you able to repay it; and in this way, society will be united in solidarity and cohesion.

When God *the Most High* says, '…spend from that which We have provided for you…', you are not doing God Himself a favour, but rather, you are spending from what He has provided for you; and out of His grace upon you, God respected the fruit of your labours and ascribed it to you so that even when your brother is in need, He *the Exalted* says: Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan? He will multiply it for him many times over. And it is God who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned (*al-Baqara*: 245)

The True Lord *the Most High* considers spending in God's cause to be a loan from the servant to the Lord, Creator, and Giver of all sustenance. In order for us to understand the meaning of spending, I say: We said before that the Arabic word for spending (*anfaqa*) is derived from the root stem (*n-f-q*), which literally means for a market to finish quickly and for the wares to be sold for their set prices. We know that trade means the exchange of goods for prices, and goods can be directly benefited from where as prices cannot.

When you are hungry, will it avail you to have a mountain of gold? You cannot benefit directly from this mountain of gold while your benefit from a slice of bread is direct; likewise, you benefit directly from a cup filled with water, and the clothes you wear. So the thing you benefit from directly is called a 'good' whilst the thing you do not benefit from directly is called a 'price.' This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says to us as a warning and admonition for us not to seek pride in wealth: 'O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you before there comes a Day in which there is no exchange and no friendship and no intercession. And the infidels are indeed the wrongdoers.'

The True Lord *the Most High* urges us to spend from what He grants us as sustenance before the coming of the Last Day, in which there shall be no bargaining, that is, no opportunity to exchange prices for goods or vice versa; and also on that day, there will be no 'friendship' (*khulla*), which means sincere love, the relationship which exists between two people so that each one is connected by love to the other; for each of you will be separated from the other even if there was an emotional link between you, and in the Hereafter every person will be concerned solely with the matter of his own soul.

On the Last Day, there will be no selling, or buying, and no friendship, and no intercession; and these are the means of escape which a person can usually resort to. You will not possess any price with which to buy, nor will anyone else have any good to offer in the Hereafter, so, this door will be closed. Likewise, there will be no friendship or intercession; yet, intercession here is permitted if it is from those to whom God has allowed to intercede, so, the matter is in God's Hand. The meaning of 'intercessor' (*shafi'*) is derived from the word (*shaf'*), which means 'even', as in 'odd and even'; something odd is basically singular whilst something even is basically dual. It is as though the intercessor adds his voice to my voice because of my deficiency and need before someone. People seek intercession from those who have a high rank in the sight of the one to whom they intercede so that he will do as they ask. But in the Hereafter, these means will not be available, and there will be no bargaining, friendship, or intercession; and if you spend in God's Way you will protect yourselves from that day, so, take the opportunity now before the day comes when there will be no bargaining, no friendship and no intercession.

These are the gateways to salvation that people think they have, which will be closed on this mighty day; it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* were saying: I did not make a chance pass by My creatures; it is My creatures who have wronged themselves and put themselves in this position, and I have not wronged them. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…And the infidels are indeed the wrongdoers.'

After speaking about the messengers, the divergence, the fighting to uphold the Way of the True Lord *the Most High*, and the spending in His cause, God *the Most High* clarifies for us the correct image of faith in whose light, all of these things came; for the entire succession of Divine messages came for the sake of this way. He *the Exalted* says:

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلْحَىُّ ٱلْقَيُّومُ ۚ لَا تَأْخُذُهُۥ سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ ۚ لَّهُۥ مَا فِى
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ مَن ذَا ٱلَّذِى يَشْفَعُ عِندَهُۥٓ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۚ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ
أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ ۖ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَىْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِۦٓ إِلَّا بِمَا شَآءَ ۚ وَسِعَ
كُرْسِيُّهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ ۖ وَلَا يَـُٔودُهُۥ حِفْظُهُمَا ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَلِىُّ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿٢٥٥﴾

God - there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous [255] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 255)

We shall pause here to reflect on His words: 'God – there is no deity except Him….' The word Allah ('God') is a proper noun for the Necessary Being, and when you say 'God', the mind goes directly to the Necessary Being.

What does the 'Necessary Being' mean? Being is of two kinds: The necessary and the possible. The necessary kind of being is that which necessarily must exist – it is inconceivable that he does not exist. When the True Lord *the Most High* told us of His Name 'Allah' He gave us the idea that by this name 'Allah,' He *the Exalted* challenges anyone but Him to be named by it. Were we all believers, our respect for this challenge would arise from our faith; but there are those who do not believe in God, and there are rebels and atheists who say that 'God is a superstition;' yet, does any one of these people dare to call himself 'Allah'?

No one has done this because God has made this challenge and no one dared to expose himself to this experiment. The fact that the disbelievers and atheists do not dare to undergo this experiment proves that their disbelief is not firmly implanted in their souls; were their disbelief sound, they would say, ‘We will take this name and see what happens;’ but this has not happened.

So the word ‘Allah’ is the proper noun for the Necessary Being, to whom are ascribed all the attributes of perfection. After this there comes the fundamental matter, which is: ‘…there is no deity except Him….’ Here we find negation and then affirmation; the negation is ‘there is no deity’ and the affirmation is ‘except Him’. The negation is an act of clearing, and the affirmation is an act of adorning (and clearing of irregularities comes before the affirming of beauty): He *the Exalted* clears for us His existence of any partner to Him, and then affirms to us His Oneness. The expression ‘…There is no deity except Him…’ means nothing has the right to be worshipped except God. We know that some people, during periods of heedlessness, worshipped idols and celestial bodies; but were they true deities, or false ones? They were false deities, and the proof of this matter, which is that ‘there is no deity except God’, i.e. there is nothing which can be worshipped except God, is that none of these other ‘deities’ has objected to the truth of this; so, this statement is right and true.

If anyone claims the contrary, we say to him: God has told us that there is nothing which can rightfully be worshipped but Him because He is the One Who created and provided, and said: I am the One Who created; if this is correct, then, He is truthful in what He says and we must not worship anyone but Him; and if this is not correct, and it was someone else who created this universe, then, where is this one who created and then left another who did not create this universe to say, ‘I am the One Who created the universe’? It is one of two things: the first is that there is no deity besides Him, in which case the matter is settled; the other is that if there were other deities, and then one came and said ‘I am the Deity, and there is no other deity besides Me,’ then, where are these other deities? Do they not know that this has happened?

If they do not know about it, then, they are not worthy of being deities; and if they do know about it, why have they not said, ‘We are deities, and this is a lie’? Just as God sent messengers with miracles, they, too, should have sent messengers with miracles. If a person makes a claim and there is no one to dispute it, the claim stands until it is challenged.

So, the expression ‘there is no deity except God’ has with it the evidence of its truth; for either this statement is right and true, and that is the end of it, or else if it is not true, where is the deity who created, and who should be worshipped, after he heard someone else come and take this matter from him? And after this we do not hear or sense anything from him, and he does not speak, and we know nothing about him; so, what is the matter with him? Either he does not know, or he does not have power, in which case he is not fit to be a deity because if he did know but did not respond, this would mean he had no power. For this reason, our Lord *the Most High* approaches this matter from another angle, commanding His Messenger to proclaim that if there were – as some people say – other deities with Him, surely, they would have to strive to find a way to Him Who is enthroned on His Almightiness. Limitless is He in His Glory, and sublimely, immeasurably exalted above anything that people may say about Him (*al-Isra’:* 42-43).

If these supposed deities had any kind of power, they would have gone to God *the Most High* and denied His Divinity; and if there were any other deity than God, there would be a battle between the two deities, but this has not happened. The statement ‘there is no deity except God’ is true in its essence even for those who deny it. The evidence of this is the lack of existence of any challenger to this claim. If there is no challenger, then this confirms that there is no deity except God *the Most High*. If a challenger does exist, then, where is he?

I will give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare: Imagine that we are in a meeting, and then we find a wallet and we present it to the attendees, but we do not find its owner. Then someone, who had been with us and left, comes back and says, ‘Everyone, when I was sitting with you, I lost my wallet.’ Since no one among us claimed it for himself, it must be his wallet.

So, ‘there is no deity except God’ is something filled with integrity and truth, and God is the Divine Being to whom worship must be directed; and worship is obedience, and a worshipper is one who obeys. Every act of obedience requires a command and a prohibition, and since worship requires commands and prohibitions, the one to whom these commands and prohibitions are directed must be able to either obey or disobey. So when we say to him, ‘Do this as a way of faith,’ he must be able to refrain from doing it, and when we say to him, ‘Do not do this,’ he must have the ability to do it anyway. If not, and if he were not able to refuse, would He say to him, ‘Do this’? No, He would not say it to him. And if he were unable to comply, would He say to him, ‘Do not do this’? This would not be possible.

A worshipper must be able to do this deed or that and refrain from doing it; if not, commands and prohibitions would be a waste of time and pointless. This is why when they wanted to restrict Islam to the principal canonical acts of worship, namely the dual testimony that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, prayer, fasting, the poor-due, and pilgrimage, asking whether this is all that Islam is about, implying that it is a religion which depends on outward actions only, we said to them: No; Islam is concerned with every action in life which befits man’s role as vicegerent on earth; God *the Most High* was the One Who brought people into being out of the earth, and gave them dwelling therein (*Hud:* 61).

The expression ‘made them dwell therein’ means that He instructed them to fill the earth with life; so, every action in life which leads to the earth being filled with life is an act of worship. Do not think that worship is only fasting and prayer because fasting, prayer, and so on are the pillars upon which the motions of life stand, upon which Islam is built. So if you make Islam equal to these pillars alone, you have thereby made Islam a foundation with no building atop it, for these are only the pillars upon which Islam is built. So Islam is everything which befits man’s vicegerency on earth; and this is shown and confirmed by God’s statement that He brought people into being out of the earth, and made them dwell therein (*Hud:* 61).

Some people come to us and say, ‘We need only to worship, and not work.’ We say to any of them: How much of your day does prayer take up? It takes One hour perhaps. And how often is the poor-due taken from you? Once a year; and how much time does fasting take from you? It takes the daylight hours of one month. And does the obligation of the pilgrimage take more from you than one single journey in a lifetime? By God, what will you do with the rest of your life apart from this, which is so much? You need no more than one hour a day to pray and no more than one day a year to pay the poor-due; you spend one month fasting during the daylight hours, and you perform the pilgrimage once in your lifetime. So what will you do with the rest of the time? You eat, and wear clothes; you will ask for bread to eat, and who will make it for you? This bread goes through many stages before it becomes a morsel which you eat, and it requires more than one science , more than one action and more than one power.

The shop which only sells bread, but does not bake it, requires a window made of glass or the like, and there must be someone working there who goes with his van to the bakery to fetch the bread and take it to the store to sell it. And if you consider the bakery, you will find many stages, from the delivery and receipt of the flour, then, the making of the dough, then, the fire which is fuelled with oil; and this is done by workers who require someone to organise them. And before all this, the flour was just seeds, and then, it was milled into flour; and there were engineers who managed the machines which do this milling, and worked to keep them functioning. And after this, there is the land in which the wheat grew, and how it was ploughed, prepared for farming, irrigated, fertilized, planted, and harvested, and how the ears and the husks were threshed, and then, how it was fanned to spate the grain from the straw, and how the grains were then packed, and so on.

Look at how much effort was required to make the slice of bread you eat, and all the energy, and how many men were required to do it. How could you feel right to let it be made for you, whilst you just sit to pray and fast? No; you must not take the work of others without any effort on your part.

Another example: You wear a robe, but think how much work did this robe require, of spinning, weaving, and stitching? So, do not sit and benefit from the effort of those who work for a living, and say, ‘I have been created to worship alone.’ This is not worship; worship is to obey God in all that He has commanded, and refrain from all that He has prohibited, according to His statement that He brought people into being out of the earth, and made them dwell therein (*Hud:* 61). Every work is considered an act of worship; otherwise, you will be a burden to others. True faith requires that you benefit from your own work, and not rely on the work of others.

The True Lord *the Most High* made us His vicegerents on earth in order that we thrive upon it, and it is part of good worship that we do all our works well; and in this way, we will not only maintain the pillars of Islam, but we will maintain the pillars and the building too, and we will have fulfilled the responsibility of faith, and all of our actions will have adhered to our testimony that 'there is no god but God.'

We know that the word 'God' (Allah) is a proper noun for the Necessary Being, and this is the Name which God chose for Himself and then, informed us of; and God has many Names, as was narrated to us in the Hadith of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* when He asked God *the Most High* by every Name of His which He revealed in His Book, or which He taught to any of His creatures – that is, taught them exclusively – or which He kept to Himself as part of His knowledge of the Unseen. So do not think that the Names of God *the Most High* amount only to all those Names which are known to us, but rather, these are the Names which God *the Most High* allowed us to know.

It is possible – and from the words of the Hadith we know it to be the case – that God *the Most High* teaches some people some of His Names, and keeps other Names of His to Himself, which we will come to know on the Day of Resurrection when we meet Him. When we speak about the other Names, we find that they are actually adjectives, but they have become names because they are absolute attributes; so, if you say the word *qadir* ('capable'), you notice that we use this word to describe people; but when we say *'Al-Qadir',* we refer to the fully Capable, namely God. The same is the case with 'The All-Hearing,' 'The All-Seeing,' and 'The All Knowing.'

We find that some of the Names of God *the Most High* have opposites, whilst other Beautiful Names of God do not have opposites. If you say 'The One Who grants life,' there is also 'The One Who causes death;' and there is 'The Exalter' and 'The Humiliator.' This is because they are attributes whose effects can be seen on others: He causes death to others, and exalts others, and humiliates others. As for the attributes which have no opposites, we term them 'attributes of the Essence': He is the Living, and there is no opposite to this; but for 'The One Who grants life' we can give the opposite, which is 'The One Who causes death,' for the Name drawn from this is the attribute of action. God *the Most High* can be described by the attributes of action and also by their opposites because they apply to others; but as for the attributes of the Essence, He only is described by them.

When the True Lord *the Most High* said ‘Allah,’ He wanted to give us some of the manifestations of God in His Names so, He said, ‘God– there is no deity except Him…’ in order to affirm for us the attribute of Oneness. We must understand that the word ‘except’ here is not a particle of exclusion because if it were a particle of exclusion, it would be as though you are denying that there are any deities, and then, God is included in the deities which you are denying, and this is incorrect. Rather, what it means is that there was never any deity other than God, and He is One without associate, and nothing is worthy of worship but Him; so, the word ‘except’ here does not imply exclusion, but rather, it means ‘other than’, as in ‘there is no deity other than God.’

We know that this assertion has its evidence with it; otherwise, if there were another deity, it would have declared to us that it existed. But there is no deity except Him *the Exalted* who told us, ‘God– there is no deity except Him….’ I liked what Dr 'Abd Al-Wahhab ‘Azzam *God rest his soul* said; he was an admirer of the Pakistani poet Iqbal, who used to write poems in the style called *mathani,* which means to give two lines of verse on one subject, and then, to give another two lines on another subject. Most of Iqbal’s poetry was concerned with Islamic philosophy and thought, and Dr. 'Abd Al-Wahhab ‘Azzam admired Iqbal’s poetry, so, he wrote a kind of *mathani* couplet for him, in which he imitated the style of Iqbal, saying:

Monotheism is nothing but positive and negative,
And in these two for the soul are energy and light.

His statement ‘monotheism is nothing but positive and negative’ alludes to electricity; he says that monotheism is nothing but positive and negative, in which are energy and light for the soul: when you say ‘there is no deity,’ the words ‘there is no’ are for negation, and when you complete your words by saying ‘but God,’ the word ‘but’ is for affirmation; and Dr. ‘Azzam completed his words by saying that ‘There is no’ and ‘But’ are an overwhelming power; they are the two electric polarities of the heart, as though electricity comes when you make a negative and a positive, the positive is ‘but’ and the negative is ‘there is no’ and as long as there is positive and negative, there is an electrical charge.

‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence…’ must be the first attribute of this Deity because capability comes after life, and knowledge comes after life. So every other attribute must come after it in terms of the order they are mentioned; otherwise, no one of God’s attributes is preeminent to, or ahead of, any other, for they are all pre-eternal with no first; for had it ever not existed, how could attributes apply to something non-existent? When we hear the word ‘Ever-Living’, we say, what does ‘living’ mean? The philosophers were uncertain about the explanation of this – one of them saying that a living being is one who has the attribute of being able to perceive if there is something to be perceived.

The philosopher who said this meant by ‘life’, our life, as though beings other than us do not have any perception. We say to the one who has this opinion: No; if you mean life with its comprehensive, exact definition, you must say that life means that a being has an attribute which preserves its ability to fulfil its function; this is what the definition must be. So, a living being is something which has an attribute which preserves its ability to fulfil its function. An example of this is plant; as long as you find it growing, this means it has life which preserves its ability to fulfil its function; if it is cut, this ability ends; another example is man: when he dies, he is no longer in a sound state to fulfil his purpose. When inanimate elements come into contact with one another, they react; this reaction is a branch of the existence of life, but it is a life appropriate to these elements, not like our life.

When you see smooth, slippery pebbles, are they all the same size? No; their forms are different, and this indicates that there are several stages for a single stone of them; and if these stones remained in their natural environment, the large ones would certainly break apart one day and become small, and then become large once again; but when man uses these stones to put, for example, between the rails of train tracks, the stones have been taken from their natural environment. It is out of God’s wisdom that nothing ever loses its usefulness, but rather, He *the Exalted* prepares for everything another function.

Every being has an attribute which preserves its ability to fulfil its function and it has a life which is appropriate to this function. We have not devised these words of our own accord, but rather, we are saying this because we read the Quran with attentiveness and reflection; and we ask: What does the Quran mention as the opposite of life? It is perishing, as can be understood from God's words: That he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth (*al-Anfal:* 42). The opposite of life is perishing (*halak*), and 'living' means 'not perishing;' and something which has perished cannot be alive. God *the Most High* says about the Hereafter that everything is bound to perish, except His eternal Self (*al-Qasas:* 88).

This means that all genera, from the highest to the lowest, whether man, angel, animal, or vegetable, all will perish. As long as all will perish on the Last Day, it is as though they were not perishing before this, and everything had a life appropriate for it. Is a stone not a thing, and will it not be one of those who perish on the Last Day? So, before this it is not perished; but we humans cannot grasp this, and we understand life to mean only sensation and external movement although scientists have confirmed that even atoms contain within them rotation and have life. When you look through a microscope at a plant leaf, and see all the verdure and the cells on it, and see all the processes taking place on it, you say, 'This life is more advanced than our own life, and more intricate!'

So, everything has life; and do not think that you are the one who causes them to perish. When you take a stone and break it up and put it in an oven to make plaster, do not say that you have taken from the stone its appropriate form of life; you have only changed its function from being hard stone, and it now has a new function. The chain continues until everything in existence has a life which is appropriate for the function which is right for it.

Consider the Life of the True Lord *the Most High*: what is its form? It is the Higher Life, and He is *the Most High* Living Being, such that life can never be taken from Him because no one gave Him life, but rather, His life is intrinsic; and this is the Living Being in its absolute sense.

So, the Living Being in its absolute sense is God, and the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living…’, and the effect of this attribute is present in all the other attributes. He then says, ‘…the Sustainer of [all] existence (*al-Qayyoum*)....’ The Arabic word *Qayyum* is an intensive adjectival form of the word *qa’im*, which means ‘one who preserves and takes care of something.’ This is like when we say that God is *Ghafour* (‘the Much-Forgiving’), which is the intensive form of *ghafir* (‘forgiving’). Do we not have the simple adjective form *ghafir*? We do, but *ghafour* is the intensive adjectival form.

Someone might say, ‘Are some of God’s attributes strong, and others weak?’ We say: No; God’s attributes cannot be described as having strength or weakness, for God’s attributes are a single unified system. In order for us to understand this, let us give an example – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare: We all eat in order to stay alive, so, we are all ‘eaters’, which in Arabic is *akil.* But if you describe someone with the emphatic form *akoul,* this means that he has taken the attribute of eating, in which we all share, and increased it so that we can describe him with the emphatic forms *akkal* or *akoul.*

What is the nature of this increase? It might be that you normally eat one slice of bread, whilst he eats two or three so that on the occasion of eating, he consumes a lot, so, we call him *akoul*. Or, he might eat a single slice of bread as you do in one meal, but he eats five meals a day instead of three, and in this case, he is also *akoul.* So the emphatic form *akoul* either refers to an emphasis of the action itself, or else a repetition of the action.

We consider God’s attributes and say that they are not subject to strength and weakness in the action itself, but rather in the repetition of the action with respect to all mankind. God *the Most High* is forgiving (*ghafir*) to this one, and to that one, and to every sinner who repents; so, the action is repeated, and He is the Much-Forgiving (*al-Ghafour*) and the All-Forgiving (*al-Ghaffar*). This solves difficulties for us in many situations; when God *the Most High* says that He is never unfair to His servants, He *the Exalted* uses the term *zhallam*, the emphatic form of *zhalim,* (‘unfair’) (*Fussilat:* 46). Here we find a linguistic rule which says that when you use an emphatic adjectival form, and affirm it, the simple adjective form of the same word is also a priori affirmed. For example, if you say that someone is *'allam* or '*alim* (both meaning 'knowledgeable'), as long as you affirm the stronger adjective, the weaker form is also included. But if you negate the emphatic form, the ordinary form might still apply: he may not be '*allama* ('extremely knowledgeable'), but he might still be *'allam* or '*alim,* ('knowledgeable'). If you say that someone is extremely knowledgeable, you thereby also affirm the lower forms of the adjective, so, he is also a priori knowledgeable in the forms *'allam* and '*alim*. However, if you deny that he is very knowledgeable, have you denied the rest? No; so, the negation of the greater does not necessarily negate the lesser.

But if you affirm the greater, the lesser is also affirmed, and if you negate the greater the lesser is not automatically negated. If you say that God is not *zhallam* ('extremely unfair') to His servants, you have negated the greater: it is true that He is not emphatic in wronging them, but could He possibly be *zhalim* ('unfair') and do them a lesser wrong, according to what we said about the negation of the greater not necessarily negating the lesser? We say: No; because we must consider the principle matter here in light of the fact that the emphasis of an action and a deed sometimes refers to the action itself, and sometimes refers to the repetition of the action. If the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to wrong this person, and that person, the action would be repeated, so, He would be – Far from it! i.e. *zhallam*; this is why He did not say 'extremely unfair to His servant,' but rather said 'extremely unfair to His servants.'

So, one person may be wronged, and then, another, and then, another; and when someone wrongs them all, he is *zhallam*; this is why God *the Most High* negated this by saying that He is never unfair to His servants (*Fussilat:* 46).

The True Lord *the Most High* says here, '…the Sustainer of [all] existence…' (*al-Qayama*) which is an intensive adjectival form of the word *qa'im,* which literally means 'stander, one who stands' or 'one who manages and takes care of something,' as in the one who takes care of the affairs of his house, of his dependants, of a school's affairs, or takes care of management, meaning that he handles its affairs. It is as though caring and being in charge of something is a sign of being in a supervisory position; we do not say in Arabic that someone is the *qa'id* ('sitter, one who sits') of the affairs of something. And when you say *Qayyum,* this means an even greater level of sustaining, caring and supervision;

how so? Because the one who is *qa'im* might be dependent on someone else; but when He is self-subsistent so that others draw their subsistence from Him, this means that He sustains and manages every other being. God *the Most High* puts forth the question as to whom it is that is standing over every soul in what it earns. Yet, the idolaters set up associates with God. Then, God commands His Messenger to tell them to give their associates' names. Or, would they inform God of something that He does not know on earth? Or, is it just outward speech? But their fraudulent speech appeared embellished to the disbelievers, and they were turned away from the path; and He whom God lets go astray, no guide will be there for him (*al-Ra'd:* 33).

The idolaters arrived to the level of stupidity in their obstinacy, ascribing associates to God in their worship. Yet, can anyone reach that high level, the level of the creation of the world and the sustenance of everything in it, whether large or small? He is the Protector and Overseer of every being, and the world with all that is open and hidden within it, and these idols bring neither harm nor benefit; so, how could you doubt, O you who ascribe partners to God, that the True Lord *the Most High* is glorified above this by the fact that He sustains every being and all of creation? But the people of error are deluded by their error, and they have no guide without God.

The True Lord *the Most High* is Self-Subsistent, and He sustains others; if anyone else is subsistent, they only draw their subsistence from Him. So He must be '…the Sustainer of [all] existence...' and part of His subsistence is that '…Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep….' In the traditional books of scholars, it is narrated that the children of Israel asked Moses *peace be upon him*, 'Does our Lord sleep?'

God inspired him to take two bottles and place them in a man's hand and then let him go to sleep, and he will see the answer. When they put the bottles in his hand and then he slept, the bottles smashed, and then he said, 'This is it.' That is, He sustains the affairs of the sky and the earth, and if drowsiness and sleep were to overtake Him, the world would be destroyed.

So '…Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep….' The word 'drowsiness' *(sina)* is the first stage of slumber, i.e. light sleep. One of us might be sitting, and then, might doze off. But 'sleep' (*nawm*) means deep sleep; so, when God said ‘…Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep…’, they might have said, ‘He can overcome light sleep, but can He fight off deep sleep?’ The True Lord *the Most High* said of Himself, ‘…Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep….’ We know that slumber is the dozing which comes at the onset of sleep, the signs of which begin with the eyes and the eyelids. When a person begins to fall asleep, this shows first in his eyes, which is why they say that the eye is the body part which allows you to see a person’s states; and in our modern times, they have discovered that the state of the arteries can only be known accurately from the eye. The listlessness which first comes to the eye is slumber, or the beginnings of sleep which we also call ‘drowsiness.’

‘…Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep….’ Would you want a greater reassurance from the Deity you worship, the God *the Most High* you adore, and the Creator of all creatures, than His saying to the created worshipper: ‘Sleep as much as you need, and relax; for your Lord does not sleep;’ what more would you want? He *the Exalted* knows that He created you, and that you need to sleep, and whilst you are asleep the mechanisms of your body continue to work. When you sleep, does your heart stop? When you sleep, does your breathing stop? When you sleep, does your stomach cease to perform its digestive functions? When you sleep, do your intestines stop absorbing nutrients? No; rather, everything in your machinery continues to do its job. Who would supervise these processes if your Lord were to sleep?

So, you sleep, and He does not sleep; by God, is this servitude which degrades us, or one that exalts us? It is a servitude which exalts us, for the One whom we worship says: Sleep, all of you, for neither drowsiness nor sleep overtakes Me. Do not think that although neither sleep nor drowsiness overtake Him, anything in His universe can escape His will; no; everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him, and nothing, and nobody can escape His Omnipotent power; for this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth….’

He *the Exalted* then says, ‘…Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?…’ He *the Exalted* is clarifying things: I gave you relaxation in this worldly life, and I even allowed the disbeliever to enjoy My favours, and I did not make the means scanty for him, and as long as he strived with those means, I gave to him, which showed that I have no bias. I said to the means: O means, he, who uses you well, shall take you even if he is a disbeliever in Me. But on the Day of Resurrection, the disbeliever will have nothing but suffering because as long as he worked in his worldly life, and worked well, he took his reward. Beware of thinking, as the idolaters who thought that their idols are their intercessors with God. The True Lord *the Most High* said of them that they worship, as partners with God, things or beings that can neither harm nor benefit them, saying that these are their intercessors with God. Then He *the Exalted* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them if they think that they are informing God of anything in the heavens or on earth that He does not know. Limitless is He in His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything to which men may ascribe as partners with Him (*Yunus:* 18).

These people, who lied against God by associating partners with Him, and by adopting false idols which could neither bring them harm nor benefit, say of these idols that they will intercede for them before God in the Hereafter; and the True Lord *the Most High* commanded His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell the idolaters, ‘Say to them, O Muhammad: Do you tell God of an associate of whose existence God does not know, neither in heavens nor on earth, whilst He is the Creator of everything in the heavens and the earth, and He *the Exalted* is far above having any associate in His dominion?’

They wanted to annul the notion of monotheism, and ascribe associates to God and say, ‘These associates are the ones who will intercede for us before God.’ So, the True Lord *the Most High* says: No one can intercede before Me unless I have given them leave to intercede. Intercession is not anyone’s right, but rather, it is a gift from God, which is why He says, ‘…Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?…’

The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them….’ When the scholars turn their attention to the expression ‘…what is [presently] before them and what will be after them…’, they explain to us that what is presently before them (literally ‘between the hands’) is that which is in front of one, and what will be after them (literally ‘behind’) is that which lies behind one; and what is in front of a person is directed towards the organ of visual perception, the eye; so it means that which is witnessed. That which is behind one is unseen, and one cannot see it; it is as though the meaning of ‘what is between the hands’ is that which can be seen, and ‘that which is behind’ is that which is unseen; so, the expression ‘…what is [presently] before them and what will be after them…’ means that He knows their seen and their unseen affairs. The phrase ‘what is presently before them’ can also mean something else: we might ask whether what lies open before you is heading towards you, or away from you; if there are people in front of you, are they coming to you or going away from you?

If they are going away from you, they are ahead of you and you are following behind them, and those who are behind you will come after you. That is, the True Lord *the Most High* is telling us that He knows the past and the future. The True Lord *the Most High* knows what is open before them, that is, the visible world they call the ‘World of Dominion’ (‘*alam al-mulk*), and also what is hidden from them, that is, the Unseen, which they call the ‘World of Sovereignty’ (*‘alam al-malakoot*). He knows what they can see, and what is hidden from them. As the True Lord *the Most High* says that with Him are the keys to the things that are beyond the reach of a created being’s perception: none knows them but He. And He knows all that is on land and in the sea; and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth’s deep darkness, nor anything living or dead, but is recorded in His clear decree (*al-An‘am:* 59).

God *the Most High* has knowledge of all the Unseen, and His knowledge encompasses everything, and nothing escapes His ken; it encompasses things from all sides. ‘…He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills….’ The True Lord knows all there is to be known; and the fact that the True Lord *the Most High* knows does not mean that no one else could know, but the knowledge of human beings is a gift from the Creator to His servants.

When someone says, ‘I compose poetry’, does this statement prevent anyone else from composing their own poetry? No; he did not say, ‘No one composes poetry except me.’ God *the Most High* says, ‘…and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills…' and 'knowledge' is the attribute which knows things for what they truly are; this is knowledge. God's attribute and His knowledge are too mighty to be encompassed because if they were encompassed they would be limited, and God's perfections cannot be limited. For example, when you see something that amazes you, you say, 'This is God's Power!' Is it God's Power, or something decreed by God's Power? It is decreed by God's Power, i.e. it is the effect of God's Power. And when He says, '…and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge…', this means 'that which He knows.'

The word 'encompass' is very precise rhetorical usage because you might be aware of a fact from one side, but be ignorant of it from other sides. He *the Exalted* clarifies: You cannot encompass the knowledge or Power of God because the meaning of encompassing (*ihata*) is to know everything, like the circumference (*muhit*) of a circle; but this does not prevent us from knowing certain partial things, and we can come to know these by means of the laws of deduction which God has given us: there are premises from which we deduce conclusions. For example, does the student who solves an algebra problem or a geometry exercise have knowledge of the Unseen? No; he takes premises given to him in order to arrive at a conclusion previously known to his teacher. You cannot encompass the knowledge of anything but that which God wills you to encompass: '…and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills….'

God's statement 'except for what He wills' is an allowance from Him *the Exalted* that He will grace His creatures by willing for them to know something of that which He knows; this knowledge was hidden and concealed from them in the secrets of the universe, and then God gave the secret permission to reveal itself. Everything which has been revealed to the human mind was hidden in the knowledge of the Unseen, and was one of God's secrets, and then God gave the secret permission to reveal itself, so, we came to know it by His will. Every secret in the universe has a birth, just like a man has, i.e. it has an appointed time in which to appear, and this appointed time is called the 'birth' of the secret. This secret already existed, and the world was benefitting from it without knowing it. For example, we were benefitting from the law of gravity before we knew the law of gravity, and likewise we benefitted from relativity without knowing what it was. This is what the True Lord *the Most High* explains to us in another place in the Noble Quran, when He says that He shall make people see His signs in the horizons and within themselves so that it will become clear to them that this revelation (the Quran) is indeed the truth. Is it not enough for them to know that your Lord is Witness to everything? (*Fussilat:* 53).

When He *the Exalted* said that He shall make people see, this means that He *the Exalted* will cause new secrets to be born for us, and this birth is not a bringing into existence, but rather a revealing. This is why people say about scientific secrets, that they are 'new discoveries.' When they say this, they show good manners in dealing with the secrets of the universe, even though many of them are not religious: they say, 'We have discovered such-and-such,' meaning that what they discovered was already present. It is not their intention to have good manners when they say this, but this is simply the way it is. As for the believers, they say, 'God gave permission for this secret to be born.'

His words '…and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills…' imply a clear challenge; even if all of mankind came together, they could not encompass anything without His leave, and this is a challenge to all. When He *the Exalted* wills to make a secret of existence come to light, this secret is born; and the revealing of the secret might be adjacent to the investigations of man, such as the scientist who sits in his laboratory and conducts experiments on elements and reactions, and is thereby led to such-and-such a result. He works hard to know a particular secret, and we do not know anything about his hard work and exertion until the day his secret is uncovered.

He took the preliminary indications which God placed in the universe so that if we pursue them we will reach His secret, just as if we want to have a child we get married so that it will come. And on many occasions, God *the Most High* gave permission for the secret to be born without man's occupying himself with its preliminary indications; the time for the secret to be born came without the scientists having worked on its preliminaries, so, God *the Most High* caused it to come to any inventor as a result of a mistake which he made in one of his experiments.

When we study the history of discoveries, we find that most of them occurred in this way; they came about unexpectedly. There was a scientist studying something, and another fact was revealed to him which had been hidden from us all. The time came for it to be born without any investigation by man, so, God *the Most High* brought it to light in a different way altogether. And sometimes, God gives a scientist who researches the preliminary indications success, and allows him to discover the secret which he is looking for.

So, '…and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills…' means that man might come upon the secret by researching it, and sometimes the secret is uncovered in the process of an investigation into something else altogether. God does not withhold the discovery of the secret even if they were not looking for it so that we call it an 'accident'. Everything that takes place in the universe does so according to a fixed decree, and this is what gives us the difference between knowledge of the Unseen which already existed and had preliminary indications in God's universe by means of which we could arrive to it, and something which is concealed by God and has no preliminary indications; if He *the Exalted* wills, He gives it from His grace, out of generosity, not as the result of any effort from man; He *the Exalted* gives it as an 'accident' in one case, and gives it for things which have no preliminaries to some of His creatures whom He elects, in order that all people know that God gives graces to some of His servants whom He has chosen for His love, His illuminations, and His manifestations.

But does this mean that we can know all of the Unseen? No, because the Unseen is of two kinds: The first is the Unseen for which God places preliminary indications in His universe, which if we follow, will lead us to it, such as is the case with many discoveries; and if God wills for a secret to be born without our having searched for it, He gives it to us 'accidentally' from His generous grace, not through our efforts. There is another kind of Unseen which has no preliminary indications, and this is what God *the Most High* has kept within His own knowledge, although He might divulge it to some of His creatures, as He says that He alone knows the Unseen, and He discloses nothing of this Unseen except to a messenger whom He has been pleased to elect; and then, He sends forth a guard to watch over him in whatever lies open before him and in what is before him (*al-Jinn:* 26-27).

God *the Most High* is the Knower of the Unseen, and He does not allow any of His creatures to know His Unseen save those human beings whom He elects and chooses. For this reason, no one can learn this kind of Unseen, and so no one ever opened up a shop for knowledge of the Unseen, where people could go to ask them about unseen matters. The True Lord *the Most High* says that with Him are the keys to the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception: none knows them but He. And He knows all that is on land and in the sea; and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything living or dead, but is recorded in His clear decree (*al-An'am:* 59).

He *the Exalted* does not give this key to any of His creatures. God *the Most High* might want to grant a favour to someone, so, He puts words into their mouth which they might not understand themselves, whereupon the one who hears these words and benefits from them says, 'So-and-so said this to me, how incredible!' This is a grace from God to His servant so that God *the Most High* can show us that He provides His support to these righteous servants.

When God *the Most High* says, '…and they encompass not a thing…' we know that the word 'a thing' means the slightest amount. And His words '…of His knowledge except for what He wills. His *Kursi* (Seat) extends over the heavens and the earth…' teach us about those things which the True Lord *the Most High* ascribes to Himself and are also possessed by His creatures in their own way, such as existence – He *the Exalted* exists, and you exist, and like wealth – He is Rich, and you are rich, and like knowledge – He knows, and you know; but do we say that the attribute for God *the Most High* is like the attribute for us? No. Likewise, everything mentioned about the Unseen in connection with God, whether as an attribution or a description, must not be understood according to how it applies to yourself, but rather must be taken according to the rule that there is nothing like Him (*ash-Shura:* 11).

So, if it is said that God *the Most High* has a 'Hand', He has a Hand just as He has existence; and just as His existence is not like my existence, His Hand is not like my hand, but rather, I understand it according to 'there is nothing like Him.' So, when He says 'His seat extends…' we say: He said this, and as long as He said it we will understand these words according to 'There is nothing like

Him'. Do not say that He has a chair, and He will sit upon it like we do. Do not say so. We have found people who say, 'Where is God? When did He come into being?', and we said and still say: 'When' and 'where' do not apply to God, but rather, they apply to you. Why? That is because 'when' refers to time, and 'where' to place, and time and place are settings for contingent actions, so, only contingent beings have time and place. For example, if I say, 'I drank', as long as the drinking occurred, it had a time and place; but suppose that I did not drink: would there be any time and place? No. So as long as God is not contingent, neither time nor place applies to Him; for time and place came into existence when God created and made this universe. Do not say 'when' because 'when' was created by Him; and do not say 'where' because 'where' was created by Him, and as 'when' and 'where' are adverbial circumstances, one for time and the other for place, and as time and place are aspects of contingent actions; then, when an action occurs, you can speak of time and place.

So, as long as God *the Most High* is not contingent, beware of saying about Him 'when' or 'where' because 'when' and 'where' indicate products of contingent action. We must take God's words '…His *Kurs*i (Seat) extends…' as we said, according to 'There is nothing like Him'. Linguistically, the Arabic word for 'seat' (*kursi*) is derived from the word *kirs* which means 'to come together', from which also is derived the word *kurrasa* which means 'booklet', a number of pages brought together. The word *kursi* can be used lexically to mean the foundation upon which something is built. So the root of *kursi,* the letters (*k-r-s*)*,* indicate the notions of coming together and the foundation upon which things are laid firmly; you can tell someone to build a foundational (*kursi*) wall, it means a wall which will be a base to be built upon. The word can also be used to mean the knowledgeable people who resolve problematic circumstances; an Arab poet said, 'They are the *karasi* when misfortunes descend,' meaning that their help is sought out when difficult matters occur.

When any of this is ascribed to the True Lord *the Most High*, the early Muslim scholars had one way of dealing with it, whilst the later scholars had another way. The early scholars would say, 'We understand it just as God said it, but we place the 'how' of it and the envisaging of it in the light of '…There is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11). And some of them said, 'We should interpret it according to one of God's affirmed attributes,' like the manner they affirm the Omnipotent Power of the True Lord *the Most High* with respect to His expression: '…the Hand of God is over their hands…' (*al-Fath:* 10), that is, His Power is above their power, and as He *the Exalted* said about His own Power of creation that it is He Who has built the sky with His Hands; and, surely, it is He Who is steadily expanding it (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47).

The perfection of God's Omnipotent Power governed the creation of the sky, and the True Lord *the Most High* is sanctified and glorified far beyond any created being's envisaging the word 'Hand' with relation to God. We say that God said this, and we accept it from God because He knows best about His own Essence and His own Self, and we understand it according to the principle that He could have no likeness or counterpart, just as we affirm that God possesses many attributes the like of which are also possessed by God's creatures, and yet, we say that His knowledge is not like our knowledge, and His sight is not like our sight; so, why should His seat be like our seat? The whole thing is covered by the rule '…there is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Scholars say the seat is that which is used for support: so, could the 'seat' here mean His knowledge? Yes. And could it mean His Authority and His Power? Yes, it could because the word 'seat' indicates that it is sat upon; and a person does not sit down from standing unless things are being done and settled for him, which is why they speak of the 'throne (*kursi*) of sovereignty;' this is because when things require standing and work, it means that you cannot sit on a chair, and when you sit on a chair, this means that things are settled and being done for you; and so for God, it means authority, control, supremacy and power.

Or, we could say that since He said, '…His seat extends over the heavens and the earth…' for something to 'extend over' something else means that it is well able to handle it and deal with it; and we understand that the 'heavens and the earth' are enormous beings from our perspective. He *the Exalted* says that greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth; yet, most people do not understand (*Ghafir:* 57).

So, when He says that the seat overspreads the heavens and the earth, this means that it is greater than the heavens and the earth, that is, they are included in its vastness. In relation to this, Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari *God be pleased with him* relates: ‘I asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Seat, and he said, ‘O Abu Dharr, the seven heavens and the seven earths are naught, next to the Seat, but as a ring cast into an open expanse; and the superiority of the Throne over the Seat is like the superiority of the expanse over that ring.’(1)

After all the scientific advances which mankind has attained, they have only reached the moon, which is nothing but a satellite of the earth, mere light-seconds away from us. In our lives, we have become used to using units of miles and kilometres to measure large lengths and distances, but we discovered that single units are no use for measuring the distance between the stars; for we know, for example, that the sun is 93 million miles away from the earth, but if we want to measure the distance between us and another star, we will be forced to use a number followed by many zeros, and this makes the expression impractical. For this reason, scientists gave celestial bodies an appropriate unit to measure the distance between stars, which we call light years. We know that the speed of light is around three hundred thousand kilometres a second, so, measuring the distance between us and any star in the sky requires very precise calculations and the study of several sciences.

Between the sun and us there are 93 million miles, and its light takes eight and one-third minutes to reach us. In addition, the light of Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, takes nine light years to reach us. So a light year is a unit for measuring the distances of celestial bodies, and we are amazed when we find that the light of some stars takes fifty light years to reach us. All of this, yet we have not even reached the limit of this planet’s sky; so, what about the other skies? The limits of God’s dominion are beyond our envisaging; and so we can recognise the honour granted by the True Lord *the Most High* to the believers when He *the Exalted* tells of the immensity of paradise by commanding the believers to vie with one another in seeking to attain their Lord’s forgiveness and to a paradise as broad as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for those who have believed in God and His messengers; such is the bounty of God which He grants to whomever He wills – for God’s bounty is immense (*al-Hadid:* 21).

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(1) *A noble Hadith narrated by Ibn Jarir and Abu Ash-Sheikh in Al-‘Azama*

This is paradise which God *the Most High* has prepared for the believers in God and His messengers who race to seek God's forgiveness. If the breadth of paradise is as vast as the heavens and the earth, then what about how vast its length is. What are its dimensions? As we know, breadth is the shorter of the two dimensions.

So, we must understand that there are other worlds besides the sky and the earth, but our eyes can only see what part of the sky and the earth which the True Lord *the Most High* wants us to see. This is why when we hear the True Lord's words '…His seat extends over the heavens and the earth…' we can imagine the magnificence of the seat of Him who is full of Bounty and Majesty.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…His seat extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not….' If something tires one, this means it is heavy for him; in order for us to understand this, imagine that a man can lift ten kilograms: if we increase his load to twenty kilograms, it will be too heavy for him, and he will have to bend his back in order to bear this weight. If we increase the load any more, the man might fall to the ground because of the excessive heaviness of the load.

So, the meaning of '…and their preservation tires Him not…' is that it is not heavy for God to uphold the heavens and the earth. The sky and the earth, which cannot even be seen by mankind, are overspread by the Divine Seat; some of the exegetes say: If it is not difficult for the seat to uphold the heavens and the earth, then what about the Lord of the seat?

The True Lord *the Most High* gives us an assurance saying that indeed He holds fast the heavens and the earth lest they cease to function properly; and if they cease to function properly, no one could be able to hold them back but He; He is ever Clement, Forgiving (*Fatir:* 41).

The True Lord *the Most High* Alone is the One Who upholds the heavens and the earth in an amazing and remarkable balance; and were they destined to fall, no one could uphold them if God did not, that is, no one would be able to grasp them; for they are upheld by the power of the Invincible One, and if God wanted them to fall, no one would be able to grasp them and stop them from falling.

If these huge things are of God's creation and He is above them, when He describes Himself as being Exalted and Great, this is something natural;

so, the True Lord *the Most High* then, gives us a logical conclusion which is suggested by everything mentioned in this verse, the verse of the Seat (*Ayat Al-Kursi*), saying, '…And He is *the Most High*, the Most Great.' The word 'High' (*'aliyy*) is in Arabic an intensive adjectival form of the attribute (*'uluw*) which means 'height.' The 'Most High' is then, the One above whom there is nothing higher, so, everything is lower than He is.

The noble verse which we are currently examining is known to us as *Ayat Al-Kursi* ('the Verse of the Seat') because the word *Kursi* ('seat') stands out in it; and the word 'seat' here means authority, control, power and sovereignty, all of which are attributes of the True Lord *the Most High*. There is no deity except Him, and He is the Ever-Living, and the Sustainer of All being, and He is the One Who neither sleep and nor drowsiness overtakes. To intercede with Him is permitted only by His Will alone, not by the will of any other; And He is the All Knowing of everything whose seat extends over the heavens and the earth; and He is the Exalted, so, there is no one higher than Him, and He is The Most Great, with absolute might. All of these attributes come together to place before us the essentials of the envisagement of faithful doctrine. Many Hadiths have been narrated about this verse from which we can gather that it is a verse with a special rank and status with God. It is narrated that Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* related: 'The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* charged me with the job of looking after the *zakat* (alms) collected in *Ramadan.* Someone came and began to take from the food, so, I took hold of him and said, 'By God, I will take you to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*!' He said, 'I am needy, I have dependants, and I am in dire need.' So, I let him go, and the next day the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to me, 'O Abu Hurayra, what did your captive do yesterday?' I said, 'O Messenger of God, he complained of being in dire need and having dependants, so, I had mercy on him and let him go his way.' He said, 'Yet he lied to you, and will be back.' I knew that he would come back because the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had said he would, so, I kept my eye out for him, and he came and started taking from the food. I took hold of him and said, 'I will take you to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*!' He said, 'Leave me, for I am needy, and have dependants, and I will not come back again.' So, I had mercy on him and let him go his way, and the next day the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to me. 'O Abu Hurayra, what did your captive do?' I said, 'O Messenger of God, he complained of being in dire need and having dependants, so, I had mercy on him and let him go his way.' He said: 'Yet he lied to you, and he will be back.' So I kept my eye out for him a third time, and he did come and started taking from the food again. I took hold of him and said, 'I will take you to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*! This is the third and final time you will claim not to return!' He said, 'Let me teach you some words by means of which God will benefit you.' I said, 'What are they?' He said, 'When you go to bed, read the Verse of the Seat, 'God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence….' until you finish the verse; for it will remain as a protector for you from God, and no demon will approach you until you wake the next morning.' So, I let him go, and the next day the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked me, 'What did your captive do yesterday?' I said, 'O Messenger of God, he claimed he would teach me words by means of which God would benefit me, so, I let him go his way.' He said: 'What were they?' I said: 'He said to me: "When you go to bed, read the verse of the Seat from the beginning to the end, 'God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence….'" and he said: "It will remain as a protector for you from God, and no demon will approach you until you wake the next morning."' (The Prophet's Companions were extremely eager to learn good things.) The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said then, 'Indeed he has told you the truth, though he is usually a liar; do you know to whom you have been speaking these last three nights, O Abu Hurayra?' He said, 'No.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'It was Satan.'(1)

Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* also narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The chapter of *al-Baqara* contains a verse which is the mistress of the verses of the Quran; if it is recited in a house which lodges a demon, it will certainly go out of it: the verse of the Seat.'(2)

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(1) *Narrated in Al-Bukhari's Sahih, in Kitab Fada'il Al-Quran), and in Kitab Al-Wikala, and in Sifat Iblis*

(2) *Narrated by Abu 'Abdullah Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak*

And Abu Umama *God be pleased with him* narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whoever recites the verse of the Seat after every prayer, there is nothing between him and his entrance into paradise except death.’(1)

And *Imam* 'Ali *God be pleased with him* narrated that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whoever recites it (the Verse of the Seat) when he goes to bed, God Almighty will protect his household, and the household of his neighbour, and the people of the households around him.’(2)

All of these things have been related about the merits of this noble verse; and scholars have devoted much time to studying the secret of this matter, and one of them said: Look at the Names of God which are found in it.

And indeed one of the scholars counted all the Beautiful Names of God in it, and found that there are sixteen Names of God in it. Another said that there are seventeen Beautiful Names of God in it, and another said that there are twenty-one Names of God in it. All this was in order for them to derive things from the verse, and know the many virtues of this noble verse. Those who said that it contains sixteen Names of God explained this thus:

It contains the proper noun for the Necessary Being: ‘God’; and the pronoun ‘Him’ in ‘…there is no deity except Him…’ is the second Name; and ‘The Ever-Living’ is the third Name; and ‘…the Sustainer of [all] existence…’ is the fourth Name; and when we look at the True Lord’s words ‘…Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep…’ we find that the pronoun in ‘overtakes Him’ refers to God Himself *the Exalted*; and ‘…To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth…’ also contains a pronoun referring to Him *the Exalted*. Likewise, the pronouns in His words ‘with Him’, ‘His permission’, ‘He knows’, ‘His knowledge’, ‘He wills’, and ‘His seat’ all refer to Him *the Exalted*; and ‘…their preservation tires Him not…’ also contains a pronoun referring to Him; and the pronoun ‘He’ in His words ‘…And He is *the Most High*, the Most Great’ is also one of His Names; and ‘Most High’ is one of His Names; and ‘Most Great’ is also one of His Names.

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(1) *Narrated by An-Nasa’i in Alf-Yawm wa Al-layla and by Ibn Hibban in his Sahih*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Shu‘ab Al-Iman*

But another scholar said that there are seventeen Names of God here because in the previous enumeration you did not count the pronoun implied in the gerund from which a verb can be derived when He says ‘their preservation’: the pronoun ‘their’ refers to the heavens and the earth, and ‘preservation’ is a gerund; who is it that preserves the heavens and the earth? It is God *the Most High*. In this way, there are seventeen Beautiful Names of God in the verse of the Seat. A third scholar said: No; you have left out other Names because in the noble verse, there are obvious Names of the True Lord *the Most High*, and there are also names derived from verbs. For example: ‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living (is He), the Sustainer of [all] existence (is He)… Most High (is He), Most Great (is He).’

But other scholars answered this by saying: It is true that these are names derived from verbs, but they have become proper nouns. What is important is that in the verse of the Seat, there are sixteen Divine Names, and if we also count the elided pronoun in ‘their preservation’ there are seventeen, and if we also count the pronouns implied by the names derived from verbs thus: ‘…the Ever-Living (is He), the Sustainer of [all] existence (is He)… Most High (is He), Most Great (is He)’ this means that the Beautiful Names of God found in this noble verse are twenty-one in number. So this verse has gathered a large number of Divine Names, and this is the source of its greatness.

This noble verse explains and elucidates the fundamentals of the concept of faith, and it produced a complete doctrine, such that the believer can be proud that it is his doctrine. In essence, the verse contains the frame work of faith: As long as there is no deity except God, and as long as He is the Ever-Living, Sustainer of all existence and all the affairs of the heavens and earth, and everything is in His Hand, and He is *the Most High* and Most Great, all of which are reasons for us to believe in Him *the Exalted*, and to exult in that we hold to these doctrines; and they are a reason for the believer to be proud of this religion in which the matter of Absolute Divinity is so clear and plain.

Because of this, it is natural that the True Lord *the Most High* would not coerce anyone to believe in Him unwillingly; for the one who coerces someone to believe in a doctrine is the first one who is certain that were it not for this coercion, no one would believe this doctrine. In our daily lives, we find that those who hold to false principles are those who hold whips to force people to act according to these principles. All of those who promulgate these false principles know fully well that were they to leave aside the whip and the coercion, no one would follow these false principles. If any one of these promulgators of false principles truly believed that they were sound, he would say: I will present these principles up to the people, and leave the decision for them; because in this case, he would be sure of his principles. As for the one who forces people with the whip, or sovereign power to believe in something, he is the first one who doubts this belief, and the first one who knows that it is false. We see that when such people become too weak to use the whip, or sovereign power, their principles collapse and disintegrate.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

لَآ إِكۡرَاهَ فِي ٱلدِّينِۖ قَد تَّبَيَّنَ ٱلرُّشۡدُ مِنَ ٱلۡغَيِّۚ فَمَن يَكۡفُرۡ بِٱلطَّٰغُوتِ وَيُؤۡمِنۢ
بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدِ ٱسۡتَمۡسَكَ بِٱلۡعُرۡوَةِ ٱلۡوُثۡقَىٰ لَا ٱنفِصَامَ لَهَاۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٢٥٦

There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing [256]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 256)

The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies for us, believing servants and for all mankind, that 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion….' Compulsion means to force someone to do something which he does not think it would be good to do; that is, the coerced person does not see any good in the act which would motivate him to do it.

But there are things which we might do with those around us for their own good, such as making children revise their studies, which is something good for the children, or such as forcing sick children to take medicine. These things are not samples of compulsion, but rather, they are ways in which we do what is best for those around us because no one wants to remain ill.

Compulsion, rather, means to force someone to do something, which they do not believe to be good based on the reasoning of their sound mind. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion….’ The meaning of this verse is that God did not compel His creatures – and He is their Creator – to have religion; and it was possible for God to compel the free human being just as He compelled the heavens, the earth, the animals, the plants and the minerals, and then no one would have been able to disobey His commands, as He *the Exalted* says that had He so willed, He would indeed have guided all mankind aright (*ar-Ra'd:* 31).

But the True Lord *the Most High* wants to know who will come to Him freely out of love, not out of compulsion. For them to come to Him out of compulsion would affirm His compelling power, but not that He is Beloved; but if someone goes to Him willingly whilst able to choose not to, this proves that there is love. He therefore, says, ‘There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion…’, that is: I have not established the principle of compulsion in dealing with My servants; and had I willed, everyone on earth would have believed. Were the messengers whom He sent, meant to coerce the people? No; the messengers came to deliver God’s Message not to coerce the people. He *the Exalted* gave man free will; otherwise, had He coerced them, He would not have sent messengers to them. This is why the Lord *the Most High* addressed His Messenger saying that had the Lord so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have believed, all of them; would he then, think that he could compel people to believe (*Yunus:* 99).

The mission of the messenger is to deliver God’s message because God does not want His creatures to be coerced into following religion; so, the one who delivers God’s message does not force His creatures to follow the religion. But there is a subtle point here: there is a difference between compelling someone to embrace a religion and enforcing the requirements of a religion; and this is where the difference occurs.

You ask a Muslim why he does not pray, and he replies, ‘There shall be no compulsion in … religion…’, and in this, he supposes that he is cultured and quotes this verse to you to silence you. So say to him: No. you have misunderstood the verse. ‘There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion…’ means that there is no compulsion concerning doctrine and belief, but once you believe and declare that you believe in God, and you are a Muslim alongside us, you must know that if you break any of the laws of Islam, we have the right to ask you to adhere to it. You are free to believe or not to believe, but once you believe, you have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements of faith; otherwise, your behaviour will be presumed by others to be the behaviour of Islam. If you drink wine, you are free to do so because you are a disbeliever, for example; but will you believe and then drink wine?! No. If you do so, you thereby break one of God’s laws, and you must be penalized.

And since you know, as a sane adult, the requirements of Islam, you must fulfil these requirements. This is why God does not hold a person morally responsible until his mind matures when he reaches adulthood so that it could not be said that God has held someone accountable for faith and charged him with it before his mind has fully developed. Rather, He left moral responsibility until a person has matured and fully developed so that once he enters the sphere of moral responsibility he knows its requirements; and he is free to enter faith or not to do so, but once he enters, he will be held accountable.

No one should say when they hear one of the rulings of this religion, ‘There shall be no compulsion in… religion…’ because this verse was revealed concerning the fundamental matter of doctrine; once you accept this doctrine, it is binding upon you that you fulfil its requirements.

The enemies of Islam wanted to escalate this matter, so they said deceitfully and untruthfully that ‘Islam was spread by the sword.’ We say to them: God *the Most High* willed Islam to develop in a state of weakness, and for the early adherents to it to be oppressed with all manners of oppression, tortured, and banished from their homelands, their wealth, and their families, and for them to be unable to do anything; so the period of weakness which Islam first underwent was intended by Providence. We say to them also: Who was it that forced and compelled the first one ever to raise a sword to do so? The Muslims were weak and overpowered, unable to defend themselves. You are guilty of contradictions when you say that Islam was spread by the sword, and then you speak about the non-Muslim poll-tax negatively. We say: And what is this poll-tax which Islam takes from the non-Muslims in exchange for defending them? The Muslims would collect the poll-tax in the countries which were conquered by Islam, which shows that some people kept their old religions. As long as there were people who kept their old religions, this proves that Islam was not forced upon anyone.

The reason behind God's words 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion…' is that the right way is clearly distinct from error; as long as the matter is distinct, there will be no coercion because coercion comes at moments of ambiguity, and there is no ambiguity. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…The right course has become clear from the wrong….' As long as the right way is distinct from error, there is no coercion. Rather, God *the Most High* gives you proofs, and with your reason, O man, you can decide so that you know that if you enter the religion you must adhere to it, and you will be held accountable for your having entered the religion; so, do not enter it unless you believe and you are sure that it is the truth because part of accepting it is to accept the rulings to which the religion holds you.

'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion: The right course has become clear from the wrong….' The 'right course' means the way of salvation, and 'wrong' means the way of damnation. The True Lord *the Most High* says in another verse of the Noble Quran, by way of clarifying the right way and the way of error, that he will cause to turn away from His signs all those who, without any right, behave haughtily on earth, and when they see any sign of the truth, they do not believe in it, and when they see the path of rectitude, they do not choose to follow it, and when they see the path of error, they take it for their own; this is because they have given the lie to God's signs and have remained heedless of them (*al-A'raf*: 146).

The True Lord *the Most High* tells us that those who are unjustly arrogant on earth will not be able to find success in seeing God's signs and the proofs of His power; and even if they see the right way, they will not follow it, whilst if they see the way of error, they will follow it because they give the lie to the signs of the Most Merciful, and are heedless of them.

Error (*ghayy*) also means to lose the way, so, when a person is travelling in the desert and loses the way, it is said that he has 'erred' (*ghawa*), that is, he has lost the right direction in which to travel, and he might therefore be exposed to all kinds of dangers such as encountering wild beasts and so on. The True Lord *the Most High* also explains the right way to us in a different direction in another verse, reporting the saying of the jinn that they do not know whether evil fortune is intended for those who live on earth, or whether it is their Lord's will to give them knowledge of what is right (*al-Jinn:* 10).

The jinn thought, as some men did, that God would not raise anyone after death, and would not send any messengers from amongst men to guide the world. The jinn attempted to reach the sky and found there angelic guards and burning flames; and the jinn did not know the secret of the guarding of the sky, and whether this meant evil for mankind or whether God wanted goodness and guidance for them. So both the words *rushd*, ('the right course') and *rashad,* ('consciousness of what is right') clarify the way which leads to salvation; and the opposite of the right course is error.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, '…So whoever disbelieves in *Taghoot* (the force of evil) and believes in God has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold….' First of all, we notice here that the True Lord *the Most High* mentions first the rejection of evil powers, and then mentions belief in God; this is because what is required is purification first, and then adornment second. A person must first purify himself from the powers of evil so that he does not enter the faith, whilst in a state where he believes in God *the Most High*, but also has the powers of evil in his heart. Before we iron clothes, we wash them and clean them: purification before adornment.

What is 'the force of evil' (*At-taghoot*)? The word is derived from the root *tagha*, and the word *taghoot* is an intensive adjective form of (*tughyan*) which means 'tyranny'; He did not say *taghi* which is the ordinary adjectival form, but rather said *taghoot* which is an intensive form like *jabaroot* which means extreme power. The 'force of evil' may refer either to Satan, or to those who give themselves the right to make laws, who declare others to be disbelievers and ascribe faith to whomever they desire according to their caprices, and give things away by the temporal power they possess; and it may also refer to sorcerers and impostors, and also to all who transgress and go to extremes in any way. The word *taghoot* is an intensive adjectival form, and this intensiveness might take many forms; sometimes the evil force might be a demon, other times a priest, other times a sorcerer, or impostor, and still other times a ruler.

The form of taghoot indicates that the one described by this word goes further in his tyranny when he is obeyed; when he tries you out with something small and you obey him, this obedience makes him increase his tyranny over you. The True Lord *the Most High* says about Pharaoh that he incited his people to levity and they obeyed him; surely, they were a depraved people (*az-Zukhruf:* 54).

He goes further in this way until he becomes a tyrant. No one ever starts right away with high tyranny, but rather, they start off one step at a time, like any despotic dictatorial regime: it starts off with something slight, and if the people accept this, the regime becomes harder and harder until it becomes tyrannical (*taghoot*). So a *taghoot* is someone whose tyranny increases the more he is obeyed. It can refer to Satan because he is the origin of evil, and to those who speak in the name of religion in order to gain temporal power (whether they are priests or others), and to those who practise sorcery and trickery because they use their knowledge for evil ends, and they use things to wear down people. The word here is in the intensive adjectival form because it incorporates all these meanings; and if we examine the use of the word in the Quran, we find that the word *taghoot* is sometimes in the masculine Arabic form, and is given in the feminine form in one single verse of the Quran where God *the Most High* speaks of those who shun the force of evil lest they be drawn to worship her, and turn unto God instead, theirs is the glad tiding. Give, then, the glad tidings to My servants (*az-Zumar:* 17).

This verse explains that they abandon all forms and types of evil; that is, those who avoid all the different kinds of evil are those who direct their worship solely to God, and glad tidings are theirs. '…So whoever disbelieves in *Taghoot* (the force of evil) and believes in God has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold…' The word 'grasped' is not the same as 'to hold' because 'to grasp' indicates that there is a strong effort made to hold. The religious person needs to make great effort to hold to his religion because Satan will not leave him; so, it is not enough to just hold on, but rather, you must actively grasp. Every time Satan whispers something to you, you must grasp your religion; and this shows us that there is a strong effort and a firm grasping.

In the expression '…has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold…' the word *'urwa,* (rendered here as 'handhold'), literally means a hanging rope, like that of a bucket in a well which you hold onto, and it is usually made from a tightly-coiled rope; and 'most trustworthy*'* (*wuthqa*) means that which you trust will hold firm; so, His words '…has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold…' may be an allegory based on the rope of a well because one uses a well to bring water, which is life for the body, and religion is life for values.

When we hear the word *'urwa* ('handhold') in '…has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold…' we immediately think of a pail which brings water which is life for the body. So this conveys to us a clear image: '…has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold….' As long as it is a 'most trustworthy handhold' – which means the religion and faith in God – as long as it is the religion, and the rope of God, this is indeed most trustworthy; and as long as it is 'most trustworthy,' this means it will never give way. We should be aware that in Arabic there is the word *infisam*, which means to 'be broken', and the word *inqisam.*

Infisam means for something to be disjointed on the inside, like when the bones of an arm break, but it remains attached to the body; and *inqisam* means that one part is separated from the other, so, there is a clean break. The True Lord's words '…that shall not be broken; and God is All-Hearing, All Knowing' indicate that the actions of the powers of evil will always take the form of whispered insinuations meaning a voice which tempts with enticing words, which is why the term 'whispers of Satan' (*waswasat ash-Shaytan*) is taken in Arabic from the word meaning the jingling sound of jewellery and gold, a tempting rustling sound just like the whispers of Satan; and God is All Knowing concerning the matter.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

ٱللَّهُ وَلِيُّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ يُخۡرِجُهُم مِّنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوٓاْ أَوۡلِيَآؤُهُمُ ٱلطَّٰغُوتُ يُخۡرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ ٱلنُّورِ إِلَى ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِۗ
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِۖ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٥٧﴾

God is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are false gods who take them from the light into the depths of darkness, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain [257] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 257)

God *the Most High* is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe as long as they go by the ruling that '…whoever disbelieves in *Taghoot* (the force of evil) and believes in God has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold….' It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is explaining those words with this verse, and as long as the servant is connected with the most trustworthy handhold, and takes hold of it, and it will never give way, his protection by God is assured. The word *waliyy* (rendered here as 'Protecting guardian') is derived from the verb *waliya* which means for one thing to follow another successively, without any gap in between them. As long as it follows it without any gap, this means it is the nearest thing to it; and since it is the nearest thing to it, it will be the first one to come to its aid. If someone is walking with me and I lose my footing, I will call upon him because he is the nearest one to me, and he will be the one to help me.

So, there is no gap, and since there is no gap, he will be the first one you call and the first one who will come to your aid even if you do not call him; for you do not need to tell the one who is with you to take your hand; he will take your hand himself automatically. So if you consider the words 'God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe…' you will find that they are also in harmony with '…and God is All-Hearing, All Knowing' (*al-Baqara*: 256); He does not need you to call Him – for there are those who you call upon to save you, but He does not need to be called upon because He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing: 'God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe….'

The word *waliyy* is also related to the words *mawla in italics* (meaning 'protecting master'), and *wali* (meaning 'one who is in charge of certain affairs'): '…the Protecting Guardian of those who believe…' that is, He will take care of their affairs and concerns; it is like when you say, 'The governor who takes care of the affairs of the subjects.' Also, the word *mawla* can sometimes mean a master, and other times mean the master's servant, which is why a poet said:

O my *mawla,* your *mawla* has a request!

That is: 'Your slave, o master, has a request.' So, it is used with meanings which are related; as we said, *waliyy* means 'near', and if the slave is in need of something, who is the first person who can help him? His master is. when the master calls, who is the first person to answer him? His servant does. So the word can mean both the master and the slave, and it can also mean the one who takes care of things. 'God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe….' God's words 'those who believe' mean a group of people which includes many individuals, as though He wants those who have faith to make their faith one single thing, not many different things. Or, it may mean that God's nearness to each individual is as His nearness to all the believers, and as long as they are believers, there is no conflict of allegiances because they are all based in and acting upon a single faith, a single way, a single word, a single deed and a single movement.

How is it that 'God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe…'? He is near to them, that is, He is the One who supports them, loves them, answers them and aids them; He is near to them by the signs which lead to faith that He made clear to them; and is there any love greater than this? Did He leave us to search for the signs, or did He show them to us?

This is one aspect of God's nearness. Before we believed, He made signs for us; and once we believed, He manifested His nearness by aiding us, and if we fight enemies He is with us; and after this, His nearness to us continues until He gives us the ultimate reward in the Hereafter. He is near to us through all the stages: with the signs before faith He is near, and once faith is attained, He accompanies us and is our support against our enemies and His enemies, and in the Hereafter, He is near to us with love and bestowal, and He gives to us without limits; His nearness is infinite.

'God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe. He brings them out from the depths of darkness into light….' He *the Exalted* takes them from the deep darkness of ignorance into the light of faith because darkness usually conceals all that can be seen; for you cannot see anything unless some light comes to you from the object, i.e. rays of light reflecting from it reach you, and if there is darkness, this means that no rays of light will come from anything so, you will not see them; then, when light emerges, you can see and make things out. This is on the material level, and the same is true on the moral level. '…He brings them out from the depths of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve – their patrons are *Taghoo*t (false deities); they bring them out of light into the depths of darkness….'

Had they been in the light in the first place, O Lord? In fact, we can understand this as a reference to the apostates, to whom Satan whispered and so took them into the deep darkness of unbelief after they had been believers. Alternatively, the sentence '…they bring them out of light into the depths of darkness…' may mean that they bar them from the light, preventing them from reaching it i.e preventing them from believing. The Arabic word used here (*akhraja*) means literally to 'bring out,' but it can be understood to mean 'to bar or prevent,' as we find in the following illustration: Someone might say, 'My father has excluded (*akhraja* 'taken out') me from his inheritance?' This does not mean that he was really in the inheritance and was taken out; but rather means that he had the right to inherit, and his father disinherited him; and this applies to those who left faith and preferred darkness.

The Quran elucidates the concept of coming out of darkness into the light and from disbelief to faith in many places, such as the account we have in the story of our master Joseph *peace be upon him* and the two young men who happened to be with him in prison. One of them said that he saw himself in a dream pressing wine. The other said that he saw himself in a dream carrying bread on his head, and birds were eating from it. They asked Joseph to tell them the real interpretation of this, as they saw that he is one of the righteous. Joseph answered them that they would not receive food that is provided to them except that he would inform them of its interpretation before it comes to them; and that is from what his Lord had taught him; indeed, he had left the religion of a people who do not believe in God, and who were also disbelievers in the Hereafter (*Yusuf:* 36-37). The question here is: Was our master Joseph *peace be upon him* ever a follower of the ways of the disbelievers, and then left them? No; he never followed the ways of those who disbelieve in God to begin with; these ways were present for him to see, but he rejected them and refused to follow them, and he held fast to the way of Abraham *peace be upon him*; and this expression contains an affirmation of man's free will to choose.

There is also another verse, in which the True Lord *the Most High* addresses all mankind saying that He has created them, and in time will cause them to die; and many a one of them is reduced in old age to a most abject state, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well. Indeed, God is all knowing, infinite in His power (*an-Nahl:* 70). The meaning of the verse is that God created us all, and destined a time for all of us to die so that some die young whilst others reach an abject state of old age, becoming once again weak and lacking in energy, not knowing what they used to know. The verse does not mean that a person reaches old age and then becomes a child again.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And those who disbelieve – their patrons are *Taghoot* (false deities); they bring them out of light into the depths of darkness…', He refers to the powers of evil in the plural when He calls them 'patrons' (*awliya'*), which means literally 'those who are near,' because, as we said, there are many forms of evil powers: Satan is an evil power, swindlers are evil powers, sorcerers are evil powers; and the True Lord *the Most High* uses the singular word *taghoot* in conjunction with the plural word *awliya'*, and describes what these powers of evil do to those to whom they are near by saying that they '…bring them out of light into the depths of darkness…', with the verb 'bring out' in the Arabic plural form.

God *the Most High* gives the word *taghoot* ('patrons, false deities') in the Arabic singular form, and then, gives those whom the false deities lead into darkness in the plural form. So why did God not use the Arabic plural *tawaghit* for 'false deities' instead of the singular *taghoot*? The word *taghoot* here is used in the same way in which we can use, in Arabic, a word like *'adl,* 'just/justice', as an adjective to describe both a single man, two men, or a group of men, without changing its form. This is the same way the word *taghoot* is being used here. Satan, the swindler, the priest, the sorcerer, and the ruler who disregards God's commandments, are all false deities and powers of evil, and the verse uses the singular masculine form of the word. The word *taghoot* can be singular, dual, or plural; that is, those who are taken from the light into the darkness are the near allies of the powers of evil, or those who take the powers of evil as near allies, and they shall abide in hell forever. Both the powers of evil and their followers will enter hell, as the True Lord *the Most High* says in His Book that on the Day of Judgement, the worshippers of false deities will be told that they and all that they worshipped instead of God are but the fuel of hell: that is what they are destined for (*al-Anbiya':* 98).

The followers of the false deities, and the forces of evil themselves, are destined for the fire of hell- may God *the Most High* save us, and you, from its torment. The True Lord *the Most High* wants to give us a real-life image of His words 'God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe…'; for He is the Protector, and He is the Helper. He *the Exalted* therefore says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِى حَآجَّ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ فِى رَبِّهِۦٓ أَنْ ءَاتَىٰهُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُلْكَ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ رَبِّىَ
ٱلَّذِى يُحْىِۦ وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا۠ أُحْىِۦ وَأُمِيتُ ۖ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأْتِى بِٱلشَّمْسِ مِنَ
ٱلْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ ٱلْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ ٱلَّذِى كَفَرَ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٥٨﴾

[Prophet], have you not thought about the man who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him power to rule? When Abraham said, 'It is my Lord who gives life and death,' he said, 'I too give life and death.' So Abraham said, 'God brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.' The disbeliever was dumbfounded: God does not guide those who do evil [258] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 258)

When you hear the words 'Did you not see' you know that it is composed of the words 'Did', and the negative particle 'not' and the verb which it negates, namely 'see.' The use of the Arabic particle (*hamza*), which is used to indicate the interrogative, and is rendered here as 'Did', here implies denial, and denial means to negate in order to reproach; but it does not refer to a verb in the affirmative so that it could be said to have denied the verb which comes after it, as is the case when you say to your son, 'Would you hit your father?' The 'would' here, which is expressed in Arabic by the particle (*hamza*), is not meant to be a question, but is rather meant to repudiate this kind of action because the verb which comes after it is in the affirmative, namely ‘hit’, and the word ‘would’ comes before it. In Arabic this is called the (*hamza*) of reproachful denial, and is used for reproof. So denial means to negate something by way of reproof when it is used with a verb which is also negated.

As long as denial is a negation, and the verb which comes after it is also negated, it is as though you have negated a negative, which means you have affirmed something. It is as though when the True Lord *the Most High* says to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘Did you not see,’ it really means ‘You did see.’ So, why did He not say to him, ‘Did you see’? It came in this negative form so that it would be even more affirmed. It is possible to make the affirmation come from the responsible party: if a friend says to you, ‘You have not asked about me, and you have been neglecting me,’ you might reply reminding him by saying, ‘Did I not help you when you were weak? Did I not take your hand when you were sick?’

You have already done these favours for your friend, but you want to deny the negation which he is saying; and in this way we know that two negatives make an affirmative, which is why we can consider God’s words ‘Did you not see’ as meaning, ‘You did see.’ Seeing is done with the eye; and did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* – and he is the principal one who is addressed by the Noble Quran from his Lord – did the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* see this incident from the days of Abraham *peace be upon him*? Of course not, so it is as though ‘Did you not see’ here means ‘Do you not know.’

And why did He say ‘Did you not see’ here? He said it so that we would know that when God *the Most High* says ‘Do you not know,’ it is as though you can see the thing which He tells you about, and you must consider it to be as true as if you saw it with your own eyes. The eye is one of your senses, and senses might deceive you, but your Lord does not deceive. So, ‘Did you not see’ means ‘Do you not know with complete certainty,’ as though you indeed saw the event that God *the Most High* is telling you about. This is why He put the question to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* whether he did not see how his Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant (*al-Fil:* 1). The

Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, so, he did not see this incident; and it is as though God *the Most High* is telling him of it, and saying to him: ‘Do you not know’, as though He is saying to him: ‘Know it with certainty as if you can see it, because your Lord is more trustworthy than your own eyes.’ When it is said, ‘Did you not see’, it is usually followed directly by the doer of the action referred to, so, you say, ‘Did you not see such-and-such?’ Yet when the True Lord *the Most High* says ‘Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord…’, He used the particle *ila,* which means ‘to’, after the verb ‘see’; and the use of the particle *ila* here indicates that a wondrous thing took place; sometimes in Arabic we speak in this way, saying literally, ‘Did you not see ‘to’ (*ila*) Zaid and what he was doing?’

This means that what Zaid was doing was something amazing. Herein, it is as though God *the Most High* is alluding to the final end of the matter since the word ‘to’ implies the idea of arriving to a goal; it is as though it was something which reached the utmost end of wonder – so, do not only take it as though you saw it, but look at the final outcome of what had taken place.

The True Lord *the Most High* here says, ‘Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord….’ The use of the particle *ila* here in Arabic indicates that it was a matter which reached the utmost limit of wonder. The True Lord *the Most High* did not tell us who this person was who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord because his identity does not concern us, whether it was Nimrud or someone else.

If some exegetes stated that it was a king named Nimrud, we say to them: Thank you for your effort, but had God *the Most High* wanted the man’s name to be specified He would have specified it for us. What matters to us is that someone went to God’s Messenger Abraham *peace be upon him* and argued with him on this subject, and his identity is not significant. When the True Lord *the Most High* wants to make an event applicable and relevant to all times and places, He does not specify names. Any person, in any place, might argue with any believer, but this is not the case when a person is named and identified.

Another instance of this is about those people who seek to know more about the story of the People of the Cave, wondering where, and when, and how many of them there were, and who they were. We say: If any one of these things were discovered, the story would be ruined because if we specified its time, someone would come and say, ‘At the time when the story took place, such a thing was possible;’ and if we specified the place, someone else would say, ‘The place allowed the event to occur;’ and if we specified the identities of the people and their names, a third person would say, ‘It is possible that these personalities could have acted in this way, but how could we have the strength of faith that they had?’

The True Lord *the Most High* did not specify the place, time, or personalities, leaving them ambiguous to show us that any group of youths, in any time and in any place could have said what they said; and had He specified any of these things, the lesson to be derived from as an example, would have been spoiled. Let us consider the precision of the True Lord *the Most High* when he gives an example to the disbelievers of the wife of Noah *peace be upon him* and the wife of Lot *peace be upon him*, when He *the Exalted* puts forth for those who disbelieve the example of Noah’s wife and Lot’s wife: they were wedded to two of God’s righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband; and neither of the two husbands will be of any avail to these two women before God when they are told on Judgment Day to enter the Fire with all those who are doomed to enter it (*at-Tahrim:* 10).

He did not specify for us the names of these two women, but rather mentioned only the important thing which is that each of them was the wife of a noble messenger, yet, both of them insisted on disbelief and so entered hell. But when He *the Exalted* wanted to make the story specific to one particular person and to a specific event, that would not be repeated in any time or place, He *the Exalted* said that He puts forth as another example for those who believe: Mary Daughter of ‘Imran *peace be upon her* who guarded her chastity, and God breathed of His Spirit into her, and she accepted the truth of her Lord’s words and of His Books, and was one of the truly devout (*at-Tahrim:* 12).

What was the reason for the True Lord’s specification of Mary *peace be upon her* in this the event? It was because the event would not be repeated for any other woman. Specification here is necessary because a virgin birth would be granted to no other woman. If the event can be repeated in any time or place, He *the Exalted* describes it in general terms; and an example of this is the words of the

True Lord *the Most High*: ‘Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord….’ He did not tell us who this man was. The Arabic verb for ‘argued’ (*hajja*) has originally the form of *hajaja,* in the same morphological form as the verbs *qatala* and *sharaka*, for example; however, when the final two letters are the same, we join them together to make it easier in pronunciation, so, it becomes *hajja*; and this verbal form follows the morphological pattern of *fa‘ala,* which indicates mutual interaction; and in order to understand what is meant by this, consider the following example:

We may say, ‘Zaid fought ‘Amr,’ or say, ‘Amr fought Zaid,’ and this means that each of them fought the other, and each of them was both subject (active, doer of the action) and object (passive, receiver of the action) at the same time, but in one sentence we consider one of them to have been more active and in the other to have been more passive, although both of them were active and passive.

Another example: If you say that Zaid shared something with ‘Amr, and ‘Amr shared something with Zaid, this means that cooperation came from both of them, and both are active and passive at the same time, but we usually attribute the more active role to the one who began, and the more passive role to the second, even though the second one is also active. This is why when the poet wanted to describe the state of a person who walks in a place where there are lots of snakes, and is wary that a snake may bite him, he said:

The snakes and his foot made peace with each other,
The serpent and the strong thick adder.

The poet here describes for us a person who walks in a place full of snakes, and a person usually fears that a snake will bite him; but we find that the snakes were at peace with this man’s foot, i.e. they did not bite him because he did not attack them, and snakes usually do not bite unless they are first attacked. We find here that the snakes were active here because they left his foot alone; and we could also say that it was his foot that made peace with the snakes.

We have all studied, in the past, the Arabic linguistic phenomenon known as ‘substitution’ (*badal*), and a substituted word is subject to the same grammatical rules as the word for which it is a substitute: if the substituted word is in the nominative case, the substitute word will also be in the nominative case, and if the substituted word is in the accusative case, the substitute word will also be in the accusative case, and if the substituted word is in the genitive case, the substitute word will also be in the genitive case. In this verse of poetry, the word ‘snakes’ is in the nominative case, yet the word ‘serpents’ is in the accusative case even though it is a substitute for a nominative word, namely ‘snakes’; this is because the poet wanted to show that the noun is also a receiver of action, so, he gave it in the accusative case. Likewise, we can also read the first part of the verse as ‘his foot made peace with the snakes’ because they are both active and passive in a certain way.

Likewise, when we read the words of the True Lord *the Most High* ‘Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord…’, we notice that the word ‘Abraham’ in the noble verse is marked by the Arabic accusative case marker, which implies that it is largely passive. So who was it that argued with Abraham *peace be upon him*? It was a certain person, and he was the active one because he started the argument, and this is what the noble verse indicates to us. The verse describes the man by saying that ‘…God had given him kingship…’, that is, God *the Most High* had granted this man kingship, and then this man argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* about his Lord, as though it was this man who began the argument by saying to Abraham *peace be upon him*, ‘Who is your Lord?

So Abraham *peace be upon him* said, ‘…“My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death ….”’ This is one of the distinctions of the Quran; in that it leaves certain things out, trusting that the listener will put everything in its proper place. God’s words ‘…Abraham said, “My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death,”’ indicate that the one who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* said, ‘Who is your Lord,’ and Abraham *peace be upon him* said in reply, ‘…My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death.’

We can notice that this verse came after God’s words in the previous verse: ‘God is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe….’ Protecting guardianship means support, love and aid, so, He *the Exalted* wanted to show us how God *the Most High* aided Abraham *peace be upon him* against the one who argued with him.

Yet, the one who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* began to use deceptive sophistic argumentation after he heard Abraham *peace be upon him* say '…My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death….' And the True Lord *the Most High* said 'gives life and causes death' because this is something which no one has claimed they do, and no one has claimed to be a part of doing; even if you ask the disbelievers, 'Who created?', they will say, 'God. 'So, this is something certain, except that the contender who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to turn the argument into sophistry, and as we know this means speech which lengthens an argument so it never ends.

The man who was arguing with Abraham *peace be upon him* said, 'If your Lord grants life and causes death, then I also can grant life and deal death.' Abraham *peace be upon him* asked him, 'How do you grant life and deal death?' The man said, 'I could kill the prisoners I have, or not kill them; for the ones I do not kill, it is as though I have given them life, and for the ones I kill, I have dealt death.' Abraham *peace be upon him* did not say: Let us agree first: What is life? And what is death? This is because Abraham, the Friend of the Most Merciful *the Exalted*, did not want to lengthen this debate, so, he came up with something to silence the man completely and end the debate. He said to him, '…"Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so, bring it up from the west." The disbeliever was confounded….' In this way, our master Abraham *peace be upon him* ended this debate. It was possible for our master Abraham *peace be upon him* to have entered into further debate, saying: 'What is life?'

We know that life means giving an inanimate thing something which makes it move, feel, will and choose. As for death, it is removing the spirit from the body; what causes a man to die is for his spirit to leave his body. Killing is different from dying because death is for the spirit to leave the body without any wound, and without the body being destroyed, or by any action the person does to his own body, like suicide.

A person might be sitting in his place when suddenly his life term ends and he dies; and no one could have said to him before this, 'Die' so that he died. This is death; but to force the spirit out by a bodily wound or destroying the body is killing, not death. This is why God *the Most High* contrasted death with killing when He addressed the believers during the Messenger's life saying that Muhammad is only a messenger; all the other messengers have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is killed, will they turn about on their heels? But he that turns about on his heels can in no way harm God; and God will reward all who are grateful to Him. And no human being can die except by God's leave, at a term pre-ordained. And if one desires the rewards of this world, God will grant him from it; and if one desires the rewards of the life to come, God will grant him from it; and He will reward those who are grateful to Him (*Al-'Imran*: 144-145).

God *the Most High* clarified for us the difference between dying and being killed, and placed each of them in contrast to the other; when news went around that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* had been killed, some of the Muslims considered returning to disbelief, and God rebuked them by saying: Muhammad is a messenger sent from God, and other messengers have died before him; and if he dies or is killed, will you leave faith for disbelief? And whoever does this is only harming himself, and reward from God is for those who adhere firmly to God's Way and are grateful for His blessings. The True Lord *the Most High* clarified for us here that death can come to no one save by God's leave, and God has destined all deaths in a pre-ordained decree.

God *the Most High* wants to alert us and draw our attention to an important fact, which is that when the messengers argued with their people or those who conversed with them, the goal of this was not for the prophet to win a victory, but rather, the goal of the prophet or messenger was to reach the truth. This is why Abraham *peace be upon him* did not proceed with the man who argued with him about God, on the point of giving life and dealing death since he saw that the man's words were a kind of sophistry.

We must ponder upon the verses of the Quran according to the reflection of faith in order to understand the difference between causing death and killing. It is true that causing death and killing are alike in one thing, which is that the spirit comes out of the body; however, causing death is different from killing in that no one can do it except the Giver of life, who placed certain constituents in the human body so that the spirit could live within it, and He Alone is able to remove the spirit from it in an intangible way.

As for killing, it is for you to injure a person so he dies, or to destroy his body, for example by smashing his head. As for 'causing death' it is for you to take his life by merely commanding it, without coming near him: can any human being do this? No. So the one who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* did not really give life to the one whom he left without punishing him; he did not kill him, but rather merely left the life which was already in him. We need to heed this if we want to get into a debate on this matter.

God *the Most High* contrasted killing with death; it is true that they both end with the absence of the spirit, but there is a difference between a spirit being taken without any of these means, and the spirit leaving the body because it has been destroyed. Beware of thinking that the spirit does not obey certain laws; the spirit can only reside in a particular substance, and if the special constituents of this substance cease to exist, the spirit cannot reside in it. Do not say that when he struck him on the head, he dealt death to him! No, he did not make the spirit come out, because simply by the body being destroyed, the spirit is concealed.

An example to clarify this: Suppose that there is a light in front of us: if you break the bulb, the light goes. But is the bulb the light itself? No, it is not, but the electricity can only become plain by means of this bulb. In the same way, the spirit can only exist in a body which has specific constituents. So the killer does not take the spirit out, he only destroys the body in a tangible way; for the unseen matter, namely the spirit, cannot dwell in a body which has been destroyed.

'Did you not see the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [simply] because God had given him kingship?…' Look at the arrogance: Is being granted kingship, which is a blessing, a means for rebelling against the One Who blessed you? Do you show gratitude for the blessing by disobeying the One Who gave it? Who was it that made him so vain? Did he become so vain because God gave him kingship? How could God help someone who does not believe in Him? Sovereignty (*mulk*), meaning the right to command and prohibit, is only for those who are sent by God; as for the other sovereignty of kingship (*mulk*) which gives one man authority over a group, it is possible that this could be given to a believer, and it is possible that it could be given to a disbeliever.

God *the Most High* says, '…because God had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death…."' This was the reply to the one who said, 'Who is your Lord?' to which Abraham's reply was, '…"My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death". He said, "I give life and cause death."…' We saw that this is mere sophistry; and Abraham *peace be upon him* did not reply to him, 'Do you really give life and cause death?', but rather, he moved on to something else, as though he were saying to him: 'Forget about the unseen matter of the spirit, and consider instead what can be plainly seen': '…Abraham said, "Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." The disbeliever was confounded….'

Because God *the Most High* is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe, He *the Exalted* did not inspire the arguer with any way to respond; he could have said, 'Make the One Who brings it from the east bring it from the west,' but he did not say this, which shows that he was a fool. Or, alternatively, he might have been clever, and said to himself, 'Perhaps the Lord who is with him in this way might actually do it!', and so he was afraid to say it. So 'God is the Protecting guardian of those who believe…' is the truth; and He *the Exalted* '…brings them out from the depths of darkness into light…' (*al-Baqara*: 257).

What does it mean to be 'confounded'? To be confounded takes three forms: The first form is astonishment; he took him from something which he could speak about petulantly to something which he could not speak about, even petulantly and argumentatively. He wanted to find some way of responding, as he did when he said, '…"I give life and cause death…"' but he could not. He was astonished, and the first thing to take him off guard was this astonishment, after which came confusion: he wanted to find any way out of this trap, but he could not; so, he was defeated, and this is the final stage of being confounded. So '…was confounded…' means that firstly, he was astonished, and secondly he was confused and unable to respond, and thirdly the result of this was that he was defeated. This is not something surprising because as long as he was a disbeliever, he had no one near to him to help him since those who were near to him were incapable: '…And those who disbelieve – their patrons are *Taghoot* (false deities)…' As for Abraham *peace be upon him*, the Friend of the Most Merciful *the Exalted*, God was near to him.

The True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…and God does not guide the wrongdoing people.' He does not guide them to a proof, or an argument, or evidence since their patron is Satan, '…and God does not guide the wrongdoing people.'

The verse which comes after this deals all with life and death. And it is important that the verse deals with life and death so that we do not understand that Abraham *peace be upon him* left the argument with the one who argued with him about life and death, as a way of evading speaking about it; for this reason, God *the Most High* wants to conclusively deal with this matter by means of several stories, and the True Lord *the Most High* now expounds on the issue which Abraham *peace be upon him* avoided, namely death and life, saying:

أَوۡ كَٱلَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَىٰ قَرۡيَةٖ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّىٰ يُحۡيِۦ هَٰذِهِ ٱللَّهُ بَعۡدَ مَوۡتِهَاۖ
فَأَمَاتَهُ ٱللَّهُ مِاْئَةَ عَامٖ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُۥۖ قَالَ كَمۡ لَبِثۡتَۖ قَالَ لَبِثۡتُ يَوۡمًا أَوۡ بَعۡضَ يَوۡمٖۖ قَالَ بَل
لَّبِثۡتَ مِاْئَةَ عَامٖ فَٱنظُرۡ إِلَىٰ طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمۡ يَتَسَنَّهۡۖ وَٱنظُرۡ إِلَىٰ حِمَارِكَ
وَلِنَجۡعَلَكَ ءَايَةٗ لِّلنَّاسِۖ وَٱنظُرۡ إِلَى ٱلۡعِظَامِ كَيۡفَ نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ
نَكۡسُوهَا لَحۡمٗاۚ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُۥ قَالَ أَعۡلَمُ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ﴿٢٥٩﴾

Or take the one who passed by a ruined town. He said, 'How will God give this life when it has died?' So God made him die for a hundred years, and then raised him up, saying, 'How long did you stay like that?' He answered, 'A day, or part of a day.' God said, 'No, you stayed like that for a hundred years. Look at your food and drink: they have not gone bad. Look at your donkey – We will make you a sign for the people – look at the bones: see how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh.' When all became clear to him, he said, 'Now I know that God has power over everything' [259] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 259)

When we consider the beginning of this verse, we find that it begins with 'Or', and whatever comes after the word 'or' is connected to what came before it; so, it is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to say to us: Or 'Did you not see' the like of 'the one who passed by a village…'?

When you hear the word ‘village’, it indicates a group of people gathered together to live in a specific place; and we understand that the one who passed by this village was not one of its inhabitants, but rather that, he passed by it while on a journey or a voyage. We also notice that the True Lord *the Most High* did not want to give us the name of the village or the name of the one who passed by it.

Some people say that the man was Ermiya (Jeremiah) ibn Halqiya’, or that it was Al-Khidr, or ‘Uzair (Ezra); and we said before that if the True Lord *the Most High* left this ambiguous, this means that we should not try to specify it because such a thing could happen to anyone.

‘Or [consider such an example] as the one who passed by a village…’, and they said that the town was Jerusalem, ‘…which was deserted and had fallen into utter ruin….’ To understand how it could have been deserted (*khawiya*) and in utter ruin, we should know that in Arabic when one says, ‘I am famished (*khooyan*)’, what he is saying is that his stomach is empty (*khawia*), and that he is hungry. So the word *khawiya* here means that the town was empty of inhabitants; its structures might have still been standing, but it contained no inhabitants. The True Lord *the Most High* says of this town that it was ‘…deserted and had fallen into utter ruin…’, and the word *‘arsh* means a tent and also a ceiling; so, when He says ‘…deserted and had fallen into utter ruin…’ (literally ‘empty on top of its roofs’), this means that first the roofs caved in, and then the walls fell on top of them; it is like what we say in our dialect: ‘He brought the top of it down on the bottom.’

When one passes by a village like this one, the sight of it will certainly be something which draws his attention. He said, ‘…“How will God bring this to life after its death?”’ It is as though he was asking about the village, and about causing the people who lived in it to die and then raising them to life. When the True Lord *the Most High* mentions a village in the Noble Quran, He is sometimes referring to its inhabitants, such as is the case when He tells about Joseph’s brothers protesting their truthfulness to their father telling him to ask the (people in the) village in which they were staying and the people of the caravan with whom they travelled, and that they were indeed telling the truth (*Yusuf:* 82).

When the sons of Jacob *peace be upon him* came back from Egypt and left their youngest brother with Joseph *peace be upon him*, they said to their father, ‘Send someone to bring a testimony from the people of Egypt, and ask those who were with us in the caravan for yourself, and they will tell you that we left our brother in Egypt.’ But the question of the one who passed by the town which was deserted and in utter ruin was about the town’s inhabitants: ‘…“How (Arabic *Anna*) will God bring this to life after its death?”….’ The Arabic word *anna* is sometimes used to mean ‘how’ and sometimes ‘whence’; and here the appropriate interpretation of the question is: ‘…How will God bring all this to life after its death?....’ The fact that he said this indicates that he was a believer, and he did not doubt that life is given by God, but he wanted to know how this could be. It is as though he believed that God gives life and causes death; and we shall see this later in the story of our master Abraham *peace be upon him* when he asked his Lord to show him how He brings the dead back to life (*al-Baqara*: 260).

He did not doubt that God *the Most High* gives life to the dead, but he wanted to see how this is done; for the one who wants to see how something is done must be amazed by the existence of this thing, so, he wonders how this thing could have been executed. For example, we see the pyramids, and we do not doubt that the pyramids are built in this form, but we merely wonder how they built them, and how they transported those huge stones to the top without any scaffolding or mechanical cranes. So we are merely amazed, and amazement is part of belief in the event.

Asking about how something was done means that one is absolutely convinced that it was indeed done, so, the traveller’s question reported in the Quran using *anna* should be understood to mean: How will God bring this town back to life after its death? It is as though the one who said this, did not doubt that God gives life, but he wanted to know how. Knowing how is not essential for faith, but God has not forbidden us from trying to know how things come to be; for He knows that we believe that He is able to bring this event into existence.

I will give an example for this – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare: when a designer of clothes makes a delicate and beautiful item of clothing, you see it and you are certain that he is the one who made it, but you are simply amazed by the delicacy of the product, so, you say to him, 'By God, how did you do that?' It is as though you have fallen in love with his product, and you long to know how it was made; so, what about the products of the True Lord *the Most High*? You are astounded and amazed to live in the shadow of the secret which runs from the Creator to the created, and you want to share these blessings.

Another example – and God *the Most High* is beyond compare before and after: You see a painting done by an artist, and you say to him, 'By God, how did you mix these colours?' You do not doubt that he mixed the colours, but you want to please yourself by knowing how he painted them. So the man's question, and the request of Abraham *peace be upon him* about giving life and causing death -which are yet to be mentioned- do not mean that he was not a believer, but rather that, he longed and yearned to know how this takes place, in order that he could live in the light of the beautiful and magnificent production of the One who made this thing.

We know that to bring the people back to life, would mean that the town would be brought to life, for people send out the motion which fills existence with life, and people have life and they have death; and a town, with its rubble, walls and roofs also has life and death. When the man asked this question, God *the Most High* wanted the answer to be in the form of an experience that the questioner would live through, which is why the Noble Quran then says, '…So God caused him to die for a hundred years….'

The one who asked the question wanted to know how, and his request was for faith based on evidence so that from thenceforth, his faith would be based on something he had witnessed. '…So God caused him to die for a hundred years….' God *the Most High* made the question and the experience apply to the questioner himself; and this is how God *the Most High* gives information. He caused him to die for a hundred years; and the word for 'year' used here is *'am*, which means a full year; and they called it 'am because the sun 'swims' (*ta'oom*) through its entire celestial circuit in this time, and the verb *'ama* means 'to swim' or 'float', as the True Lord *the Most High* says that all of the celestial bodies float through space (*Ya Sin:* 40). This is why we call a year *'am.*

'…So God caused him to die for a hundred years; then He brought him back to life. He said, "How long have you remained?" The man said, "I have remained a day or part of a day."…' It is possible that God *the Most High* spoke directly to him as He spoke to Moses *peace be upon him*, or he might have heard a voice, or an angel, or it might be that someone present saw what happened to him and asked him; what is important is that there was a question and an answer, and the True Lord *the Most High* informs us of a dialogue which took place about this matter; the question was 'How long have you remained?' and the man answered, 'I have remained a day or part of a day.'

The man's answer shows that he had some doubt: he might have found that the day was close to ending or had ended and so answered in this way; or, it might have been that when he saw the sun still shining he gave this answer: 'I have remained a day or part of a day;' or he might have said this because he was unable to judge how much time had passed. Was he being honest in his words, or was he lying? He was being honest because he did not see anything that had changed so that he could have judged according to how it changed. Had he shaved his beard, for example, and then found after this that it had grown long, or had his hair had changed from black to grey as he slept, or had any other such changes occurred, he would have noticed them; but he did not find any change.

So, what was the answer of the True Lord *the Most High*? He said, '…Rather, you have remained one hundred years….' We are presented here with two sides, and the question is close to being a puzzle: On one side, we have the man saying, 'I have remained a day or part of a day,' and on the other side, the Lord *the Most High* says, '…Rather, you have remained one hundred years….' We wish to solve this puzzle: The statement of True Lord *the Most High* is beyond any doubt truthful and free of any error, whilst the believing servant is also speaking truthfully as best as he can based on what he sees his situation to be.

We need an evidence for this, and an evidence for that. We need an evidence that the servant is truthful in saying 'I have remained a day or part of a day' and we need from the True Lord *the Most High* an evidence to reassure us – not as a proof – that the man really died for one hundred years and then came back to life.

We say that in the story there is something to support the statement ‘I have remained a day or part of a day’ and also something which supports the statement ‘…Rather, you have remained one hundred years…’ for the man had with him his ass, and also his food and drink, of juice, grapes, and figs. The True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘…you have remained one hundred years…’ and He wanted to prove the truth of both matters together, so He said, ‘…Look at your food and your drink; it has not changed with time….’ The man looked at his food and drink and found that they had not changed, which is evidence that he had remained only a day or part of a day; this shows the truthfulness of the man, and there still remains the question of ‘…one hundred years….’

The True Lord *the Most High* then said, ‘…And look at your donkey; and We will make you a sign for the people….’ This shows that something amazing had occurred, and God wanted to show him this by having him look at the donkey to show that a hundred years truly had passed. So the man found that his donkey had become scattered bones, and this could not have happened in a short period of time; the donkey might have died in one day, but for its body to rot, and then its flesh to turn into dust so that only scattered bones remained required a long period of time not less than a hundred years. So it is as though, looking upon the donkey was evidence that a hundred years truly had passed, and looking upon the food was evidence of the truthfulness of ‘a day or part of a day.’

So, it was an amazing matter, how time was held back in the case of the food, and how time was let forth in the case of the donkey. He *the Exalted* shows us that He is the One Who holds back, and the One Who sends forth; He can hold back time for one thing and He can send forth time for another even if the two things are contemporaneous. Such an action could only be performed by an Omnipotent Power which is not subject to the natural laws of the universe, but which rather has dominion over these laws.

The True Lord *the Most High* said, ‘…and We will make you a sign for the people….’ Which men are they for whom God would make him a sign? There must have been other people in this story, but the town was deserted and in utter ruin, and there were neither people nor buildings in it; so, were they the people who had been in the town, or were they other people? Some exegetes say this, and others say that.

The thing which most applies to God's statement '…and We will make you a sign for the people….' is how He held back time for one thing and sent it forth for another. Most of the scholars affirm that it was Ezra who passed by the town; and Ezra was one of the four men who memorised the Torah, for no one memorised the Torah but four people: Moses, Jesus, Ezra, and Joshua *peace be upon them*, and God showed him how He puts bones together and then raises them so they come together, and then clothes them with flesh; that is, He showed him a direct vision of the act of raising the dead to life, and this was an answer to: '…How will God bring this to life after its death?....'

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And look at the bones [of this donkey] – how We raise them….' Ezra saw all the bones of his donkey rising from the ground, and witnessed each bone being put in its place, and once the skeletal structure of the donkey had been restored the bones began to be clothed in flesh, and then life came.

Ezra found an answer in his own self, and found an answer in the donkey, and after this he remembered his town from which he had come, and he wanted to return to it. When he returned, he found that it has changed as it would be expected to change over a hundred years. There was a slave-woman who lived in his family in the town, and she had gone blind and become infirm, and when he entered and said, 'I am Ezra', the slave-woman said, 'Ezra left a hundred years ago, and we know not where he went; nor did he ever return.' He said, 'I am Ezra,' so, she replied, 'Ezra has a sign, which is that his supplications are always answered;' and she did not forget herself, saying, 'If you are truly Ezra, then ask God to return my eyesight to me and to relieve me of my infirmity.' So, Ezra prayed to God and she was cured. When she was cured, she looked at him and saw that he truly was Ezra, so, she went to her people and announced that Ezra had returned. After this, Ezra went to his son and found that he was a man of over one hundred years of age, and Ezra was still young, at only fifty years of age.

A poet put it cryptically: 'Who was the son who saw his father when he was double his father's age?' The answer to this puzzle is Ezra whom God caused to die when he was fifty years of age, and then brought him back to life after one hundred years, upon which Ezra met his son, and the son said, 'I used to hear that my father had a mark between his shoulders, a birthmark', and when Ezra showed his shoulder to his son, he saw the birthmark there.

The people of the town confirmed the veracity of Ezra in still another way. When Nebuchadnezzar (Bakhtansar) came to Jerusalem and destroyed it, he burned the Torah; however, a man said that his father had buried a copy of the Torah somewhere; so, they brought forth the copy, and Ezra said, 'I have memorised it', so, Ezra recited the Torah just as it was in the copy, so, they believed that he truly was Ezra. The people were amazed to see a son who was over one hundred years old, whilst his father was only fifty, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying, '…he said, 'I know that God has power over all things.' Had he not known before this that God has power over all things? Indeed he had known this by means of reasoning based on evidence, but now he knew it based on actual witnessing, and he had absolute knowledge since there is no doubt once you have seen with your own eyes.

So '…I know that God has power over all things' is an emphasis and an acknowledgement of God's power to set forth time and hold it back, and God's power to give life and cause death; he came to know with absolute certainty after having known before with sure certainty.

This matter explains what modern science now says about 'suspended animation', and the meaning of suspended animation is the thing which certain snakes do when they undergo winter hibernation, that is, during winter they curl up into themselves and show no movement, and they remain in this state until winter ends; and the time spent in winter hibernation is not counted as part of the snake's age, which is why it is said that this is a process of 'suspended animation.' This process might also explain what happened to the People of the Cave; for the People of the Cave also underwent the same process. God tells that He awakened them; and they began to ask one another as to what had happened to them. One of them asked how long they have remained and the others answered that they have remained a day or part of a day (*Yusuf:* 19) They did not see that they had changed in any way, yet, after this the True Lord *the Most High* says that they remained in their cave three hundred years and nine more years (*Yusuf:* 25).

God *the Most High* specified the length of time which they remained, whilst they themselves said that it had been a day or part of a day. The meaning of this is that when they slept this kind of sleep and then woke up, they found themselves in the very same state as they had been before they slept; so, God suspended their lives. We can observe that all of this process came here in the story of Ezra after *Ayat Al-Kursi* the (Verse of the Seat), in which the doctrine of faith is depicted: God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him, nor does sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His *Kursi* (Seat) extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is *the Most High*, the Most Great (*al-Baqara*: 255).

And it depicts the matter of life and the matter of death; and we know that when the man argued with Abraham *peace be upon him* and said, '…I give life and cause death' (*al-Baqara*: 258), Abraham moved the debate onto the matter of night and day, and asked the man to reverse the sign of night and day, saying to him, '…"Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So, the disbeliever was confounded, and God does not guide the wrongdoing people' (*al-Baqara*: 258).

In order that no one might think that Abraham *peace be upon him* left the matter of life and death because he wanted to escape having to debate it and so changed the subject to that of the sun, God wanted to bring the story of this man who passed by the deserted town whereupon there happened to him all that we have seen in order for the True Lord *the Most High* to affirm for us that the matters of life and death are in His Hand alone, and in order for the True Lord *the Most High* to take the matter of life and death away from the realm of debate based on sophistry; and we know the meaning of 'sophistry' from before when we discussed the statement of the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord when he said about two of his prisoners, that he could kill one of them and let the other live.

This is sophistry, for he did not give life but rather let life continue; and we know that giving life is the opposite of causing death because to cause death means to take the spirit out of the body without causing any injury or destroying the body, or doing anything else to the body. But if one does any of these things to another person, it is not said that he dealt them death, but rather that, he killed them; and as we know, being killed is not the same as dying.

After this, comes another story of Abraham after the incident when he changed the subject of the debate with the man to the sun so that the one who disbelieved was dumbfounded. Abraham *peace be upon him* was a believer in God's Power, but he wanted to know how it happened. Abraham *peace be upon him* did not have any doubt as the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'We have more right to doubt than Abraham did when he said, 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead.' [God] said, 'Have you not believed?' He said, 'Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be fully at ease.'(1)

And we Muslims do not doubt this matter, so, Abraham *peace be upon him* certainly did not doubt it, as is attested to by the words of the verse in which God *the Most High* said:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِى كَيْفَ تُحْىِ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ ۖ قَالَ أَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِن ۖ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَـٰكِن
لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِى ۖ قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنَ ٱلطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ ٱجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ
جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ٱدْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا ۚ وَٱعْلَمْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٠﴾

And when Abraham said, 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead,' He said, 'Do you not believe, then?' 'Yes,' said Abraham, 'but just to put my heart at rest.' So God said, 'Take four birds and train them to come back to you. Then place them on separate hill- tops, call them back, and they will come flying to you: know that God is all powerful and wise' [260] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 260)

Abraham *peace be upon him* asked, 'Show me how You give life to the dead.' That is, he asked to know what the state of the action of raising to life is. Abraham *peace be upon him* is not speaking about raising to life, and his doubt was only regarding as to whether God *the Most High* would answer his request by showing him and letting him see how He gives life to the dead. Let us give an example to illustrate this – and God is beyond compare before and after, and the example is only meant to make the matter easier for minds to understand since God is far exalted above any comparison:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Kitab Al-Anbiya'*

One of us might say to an architectural engineer, 'How did you build that house?' The one who asks this question is referring to an action, and to a product, namely the house which was built. Does knowing how have anything to do with doctrine? No.

We must understand first what 'doctrine' (*'aqida*) means. A doctrine means something tied fast (*ma'qud*)*;* and if this is the case, then how could he have said, '…only that my heart may be fully at ease….' Does this indicate that before asking the question, and before it was asked, Abraham's heart was not at ease? No. Abraham was a believer, but he wanted to increase his heart's rest because he had begun to think about how the action of raising to life occurs, but he did not know what manner it takes.

So, his heart's rest was based on his will to know the specific mode, to take him out of the labyrinths of all the different modes he could depict and imagine; and this mode is not something which could be explained in words, but rather would need to be illustrated with a real practical experience: '…Take four birds and draw them to yourself....' This means: cause them to come to you, and hold them to yourself so that you can be sure of the identity of the birds and the form of each bird so that you will not wonder if it is another bird that comes back to you.

Exegetes say that the four birds were a raven, a peacock, a rooster, and a pigeon so that each bird had a different form.

'…Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them – they will come to you in haste….' Did our master Abraham *peace be upon him* actually do this, or was he satisfied with God's explaining the 'how' of it to him? The Quran does not mention this; so, either God told him how it was done, and if he wanted to confirm it, he could do so, or else, he may have been completely convinced without actually doing it. The Quran does not tell us whether our master Abraham *peace be upon him* actually did it or not. The True Lord says to Abraham about the stages of the experiment, '…then call them – they will come to you in haste…', yet it might be supposed that He would have said, 'They will come to you flying,' as the word used in the Arabic text (*sa'iyan*) implies hasty walking.

How do birds come walking in haste? Birds fly in the sky and in the air, but the True Lord *the Most High* wanted not to leave any room for confusion, so, He said 'in haste,' meaning that the birds would come running to him. The True Lord *the Most High* changed it from flying to walking in order that our master Abraham *peace be upon him* could be sure of them: In order that you can be sure, O Abraham, and so that your peace of heart can increase, We brought them forth from different kinds of birds, and you were the one who cut them, and you were the one who put a piece of them on each mountain, and then you were the one who called the birds and they all came to you in haste.

Here there is an illustration of God's Omnipotent Power, and the difference between the necessary power of the Necessary Being, namely the True Lord *the Most High*, and the power which is given by the Necessary Being, God, to the one who denies the Necessary Being, namely man. This One has Power, and that one has power; yet the Power of God is a necessary power, whilst the power of man is only a possible power; and no one can take God's power from Him, whilst God can take man's power from him; for a man is a human being, and the powers of human beings are different from one another so that while one of them has power another of them does not, i.e. he is powerless. The able-bodied human being is able to loan his power to the one who is powerless: the able person might carry a chair for the powerless one to sit in if he cannot carry it himself. But the power of the True Lord *the Most High* is different.

It is as though the True Lord is saying: 'I loan some of My power to those who are unable so that they become able; I say to the weak: Be able! And so he does.' This is what we understand from God's words to Abraham: '…then call them – they will come [flying] to you in haste….' Abraham, as a human being, was unable to know how the dead are raised to life, but the True Lord gave him the power to call the birds so that they would come running to him.

The True Lord gave to Abraham the power to call the birds so that they would come running to him, and this is the difference between Necessary Power and possible power. No one can give the power of a possible being to someone who lacks it, but the Power of the Necessary Being can be given to one who is unable and thereby make him able. This is the perspective of the wise words concerning the special characteristics of Jesus son of Mary *peace be upon him* who was sent as a messenger to the children of Israel to tell them that he has come to them with a message from their Lord. He will create for them out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and then breathe into it so that it will become a bird by God's leave; and he will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God's leave; and he will tell them what they eat and what they store up in their houses. Indeed, in all this, there is a message to them, if they are truly believers (*Al-'Imran*: 49).

The special characteristics of Jesus son of Mary only came about by the leave of God: the ability of Jesus *peace be upon him* to make birds from clay, which he then breathed into so that by God's leave, they became real birds, and likewise his healing of the blind and the leper and the raising of the dead to life – all of this was by leave of whom? It was by leave of God.

The same was the case for the experiment of Abraham, which is why the True Lord said to him, '…And know that God is Exalted in Might and Wise.' God is Almighty, meaning that no one can overcome Him; and He is Wise, meaning that He puts everything in its proper place.

In this way, the True Lord explained the story of life and the story of death with a physical experiment so that the heart of our master Abraham would be set at ease; and the story of life and death was mentioned because the doubt of those who lived at the time of the Muhammadan message was centred on the matter of the resurrection of the dead, and all of their words pointed to that, and they found far-fetched the notion that after they have died and become mere dust and bones, they will be raised from the dead (*al-Mu'minun:* 82).

And in another place the Quran tells about man who comes up with arguments about God and forgets how he himself was created. Man asks who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust. God commands His Messenger to answer that it is He Who brought them into being in the first instance, will give them life once again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation (*Ya Sin:* 78-79).

The True Lord *the Most High* commanded Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to answer this: Say, O Muhammad, He who brought them into life in the first place will give them life, for He created them before out of nothing. This is the meaning we find in the statement of the True Lord *the Most High* that it is He who creates all life in the first instance and then brings it forth anew; and most easy is this for Him. His is the loftiest example in the heavens and on earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise (*ar-Rum:* 27).

God *the Most High* is able to begin creation without any prototype, and then, to bring it back after death; and for Him to bring it back would be deemed easier for Him than to begin it, according to the standards of someone who believes that to start something anew is easier than beginning it for God has absolute Power over His creation, and He is the Master in His dominion, and He is All-Wise in His actions and His ordainment.

The one who brings something back only returns what already exists whilst the one who begins something, brings it out of non-being. So the easier task is to bring it back; as for beginning it, this means to begin it from nothing – and both modes are within the power of the True Lord *the Most High*. This matter only confirms the coming of the Last Day because faith in the Last Day is the balance of doctrine; if it settles in the heart and the person knows that he will be brought back to life and held accountable for his deeds in this life, he will direct his whole body towards the acts which are in accordance with the Way of God in order to gain the greatest reward.

When a person understands that there will be a reckoning, and there will be requital, and there will be a resurrection, he knows that he will not be left free in this world, and he will not escape from the One All-Dominant God. Man will return to life, and so we say to the one who is deluded by what God has given him: No, you will not escape from God's Hand, but rather, after you die, you will come back at the Resurrection. When this return settles in the minds of Muslims, everyone will base his prospects on this return.

After the matter of life and death was settled, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to discuss something which is the fruit of life for living beings, and the first of the signs of life, namely sensation and movement. God wanted man to have movement in existence because He, the True Lord, wanted man to assume vicegerency on earth, and vicegerency on earth requires man to fill the earth with life, as God *the Most High* reports the teaching of the prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* to his tribe Thamud to worship God as they have no deity other than Him. He brought them into being out of the earth, and made them settle and thrive in it (*Hud:* 61).

Man's vicegerency on earth requires him to work and fill the earth with movement; and when God wanted us to work and fill the earth with life, there must be certain actions which give order to this work, and there must be various arts upon which this thriving is based; and God distributes the active abilities of these various arts and makes them intellectual and artistic talents for mankind. The True Lord did not make a single man embody all faculties, but rather, He *the Exalted* dispersed talents throughout mankind, and everybody took one talent or another.

Why? That was because God wanted the world to be integrative, not repetitive and integration gives rise to amalgamation. If you know something that is within your talents, whilst I do not know it, I therefore will need to be in contact with you; and I also might know something which you do not, so, you will need to be in contact with me; and this kind of contact is not one of superiority or condescension, but rather, it is contact based on essential coexistence.

But if everyone possessed all talents, they would not need any other human being, and everyone would live alone, and no one would need communal life. It is as though when God dispensed the means of good livelihood throughout mankind, He wanted them to integrate and be in contact with one another, not out of condescending relationship but out of essential coexistence; because one person wants that which another can offer him with his talents, and the other wants from someone else that which he is gifted with. Because of this, people are well off as long as they are distinct from one another because each of them needs the other.

This is why we find there is no progress in a society unless the talents in this society are diverse and in integrative collaboration. But when in a people, you find that everybody has the same talents as everybody else, they will inevitably compete and fight with one another. On the other hand, when everyone needs the talents of someone else, they will coexist because life can only proceed if it does so for everyone. This is why when a group of people have the same talents, they will inevitably annihilate one another because they will compete over means of livelihood, and each one of them, will want to claim them for themselves. But if talents are integrated, no one will say, ‘Why is so-and-so better than I?’ He will know that it is essential that there are engineers, doctors, as well as labourers. For this reason, you find that the world organises itself naturally in a way that produces a base and a peak – the small peak carried by the large base. If the pyramid were turned upside down, it would become problematic because in this case, it would be weighed down by many sides, and would have no fixed base, and would not be focused on anything. This is why it is wise that if you see that someone in society has arrived to the peak, you help him to stay at the top; do not fight him, or else you will all fall down. There must be comparison so that there can be integration.

The True Lord *the Most High* presents this issue to us here in a sociological and economic fashion in order to show us that the basis of existence must be formed on social and economic grounds. Why? Because man is busy first of all with preserving his life, and then, with preserving his species; the preservation of man is attained by sustenance and nourishment, and the preservation of his species is attained through marriage. The preservation of life by nourishment requires work in life, and the True Lord respects the fruit of this work; and when the True Lord wants to soften the heart of the worker towards his incapable brother, He treats charity towards the incapable as a loan to Himself asking, ‘Who is it that will lend to God a goodly loan …?’ (*al-Baqara*: 245).

We gave the example before – and God is beyond compare – saying that a man gives his children pocket-money, which each one of them puts in his money box. Suppose that one of the children needs something urgent like an operation. Upon this, the man goes to his children and says to them, ‘Lend me what is in your money boxes because your brother requires an operation, and I will pay you back with extra afterwards.’ The father does not take back his gift and say, ‘What is in the money-boxes belongs to me, and I will take it;’ no; rather he says, ‘It is your money, and I will take it as a loan from you.’

This is what God does with mankind, explaining: Some of you are unable and others are able; and I will look after those who are unable, and take a loan from those who are able. It is necessary that some of us are unable so that no one would think that power intrinsically belongs to the human being; no; power is a gift, and the One Who gave it can take it away. In order for the one who has power to know that this power is not intrinsically his, he finds next to him someone else who is powerless. However, this powerless person who shows the powerful one that this power is not intrinsically his: what has he done wrong?

God has made him a means of clarification in existence, as though the True Lord were saying: We will assure for you, incapable person, the appropriate standard of living by means of the fruits of the work of him who is able to work since it is from the fruits of the work of him who is able to work; does this mean that the one who is able to work should work as much as he needs to, or as much as he can? He must work as much as he can because if he only works as much as he needs to work, he will not have anything to give to those who are unable to work.

After having just affirmed the matters of the Resurrection and giving life and dealing death, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about this important matter of the structure of society and economics so that these things are clear in our minds; and the True Lord *the Most High* then, moves on to clarify to us the nature of Islamic society and economics. He *the Exalted* says:

مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنۢبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ
فِى كُلِّ سُنۢبُلَةٍ مِّا۟ئَةُ حَبَّةٍ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُضَٰعِفُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٦١﴾

Those who spend their wealth in God's cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. God gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes. He is limitless and All Knowing [261] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 261)

God ascribes wealth to those people who work because they have earned this wealth by means of their work. In another place in the Quran, the True Lord instructs the believers to give the needy from the wealth of God that He has given to them (*an-Nur:* 33).

All wealth belongs to God and man obtains it by working. God respects this work, and He respects man's law of benefit, and so He makes the wealth which remains from your work a possession of yours, but if God wants, He will take this wealth; and out of His grace upon man, when He *the Exalted* asks man for some of the wealth which remains from his work, He asks for it as a loan, and He repays it many times over afterwards.

Therefore, God returns what is spent in His Way many times over; and since God does this, it means that what is spent brings increase. Therefore, do not grieve, or fear for your wealth because you have given it to One Who is Omnipotent, fully Capable, Infinite, and All Knowing. He is the True Lord Who is able to give everyone whatever He wills; and He gives according to the intention of the servant, and the amount which he spends on others. This verse deals with the matter of the greed of the human soul; for a person might have something extraneous to his needs, and greedily covet it for himself and be miserly, fearing to spend it, and thus he might lose it.

Here, the perspective of faith says to you: Spend it because He *the Exalted* will give you more, and the True Lord will give to you just as He gives to you from the earth which you farm. You place a single grain in the soil: does it give you only a single grain in return? No; the grain of wheat produces a number of stems, and each stem contains an ear which contains many grains. If the earth, which is a creation of God, multiplies for you what you give to it, will not The One who created it also give to you many times over? If some of God's creations give to you many times over, what do you think of the giving of God *the Most High*?

The inanimate earth, with its constituents, gives to you; when you take a quantity of wheat from your stores to plant it in the earth, is it said that you have reduced your stores by this amount of wheat? No, because you will plant it; and you will see how many grains come from it; this is the inanimate earth which was created by God. If a creation of God can give you seven-hundred grains in return for one, will the One Who created this earth not give you much more than this?

He is bountiful in giving; and the True Lord *the Most High* ascribes to those who spend ownership of the wealth which they spend when He says, 'The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God….' The words 'in the Way of God' are general words, and they could mean the holy struggle (*jihad*), or spending on charity; for all of this is in the Way of God because when the weak person finds himself in a society of mutual solidarity, and finds that those who have strength lend the fruits of their strength and their work to him, will he bear a grudge towards those who have strength? No, because their good will come to him. We have a parable in the countryside: 'When a milk-producing animal is allowed to walk free in the neighbourhood, everyone will pray for her and say, 'May He protect you!' Why? Because her owner gives her milk, cheese and butter to everyone around him, so, they all pray for her; and her owner does not tie her up, or chain her, or worry about her, as the good which comes from her goes to everyone. When we find a society of this form in which the incapable person finds that strong people help him, the incapable person will feel that he is in a cooperative and integrated world.'

And if one person has strength and another suffers from weakness, the weak person will not be resentful but will rather say, 'The good of others will come to me.' Likewise, the one who gives will rest assured that if he becomes incapable one day, he will find those who will take care of him – for power is subject to vicissitudes, and since man is subject to vicissitudes, the one who is strong today, might become weak tomorrow.

So, the words of the True Lord *the Most High* 'The example of those who spend their wealth…' represent a law by which God wants to fight the greed of the human soul. He says to each one of us: Look sagaciously: the earth does not reduce your stores when you give it a measure of wheat; it is true that you remove a measure of wheat from your stores to farm with, but you expect to receive many multiples of it from the earth. Beware of thinking that you can put your trust in what you give to the earth, but that you cannot put your trust in what you give to God.

The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is like a grain which produces seven ears; in each ear is a hundred grains. And God multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And God is All-Encompassing and All Knowing (*al-Baqara*: 261). The verse deals with greed and emphasises that charity does not reduce a person's wealth; rather, it gives him even more.

After this, He *the Exalted* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ لَا يُتۡبِعُونَ مَآ أَنفَقُواْ مَنّٗا وَلَآ
أَذٗىۙ لَّهُمۡ أَجۡرُهُمۡ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡ وَلَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا هُمۡ يَحۡزَنُونَ ٢٦٢

Those who spend their wealth in God's cause, and do not follow their spending with reminders of their benevolence or hurtful words, will have their rewards with their Lord, no fear for them, nor will they grieve [262] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 262)

This is another aspect of charity that the True Lord clarifies here: When you spend your money in God's Way and in the hope of getting God's reward, beware of reminding the one whom you give of your benevolence or hurting his feelings. To stress one's benevolence means for someone to go to the one to whom he has treated kindly and indicate to him that he is indebted to him, and that he has done him a favour; as the poet says:

The one who does me a favour
And reminds me of it a single time is a true niggard!

This is why it is from the manners of faith for a person to forget that he has given, and forget that he has spent, and not to let any of his family see the good he did for a poor person, or the charity he gave him, especially youngsters who do not understand God's reasoning for things: when my son sees me giving something to my neighbour, he might tease the neighbour's son and remind him of our benevolence to him, and he might be so conceited that he insults him; and no one can properly appreciate this matter except someone who is morally responsible and knows the ruling in its context from God.

The True Lord explains to us: Beware of following up your spending on others by reminding them of your benevolence and hurting people's feelings; for if you do, what will the situation be? The one to whom you gave charity will hate it, and he will develop resentment, and hatred. This is why they say, 'Beware the evil of the one for whom you do good,' which they explained as meaning that the way to avoid the evil of this person is not to remind him of the good you did him; beware of reminding him of this good because this will cause him to develop resentment.

This is why you find that many people say something like, 'I did so many favours for so-and-so, this and that, and this and that, and then, they turned around on me and denied it!' I say to everyone who says this: As long as you remember what you did for them – and this means that you were dealing with them not with God, and you had them in mind and not God – it is justice from God that they deny it; if you had acted for the sake of God, they would not have denied it, and since you did not act for the sake of God, you were inviting disavowal of what you spent.

It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* wanted, with the first verse, to soften the heart of the one who spends so that he will spend willingly and generously, so He said, 'Those who spend their wealth in the Way of God and then do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.'

The True Lord *the Most High* reassured us in the first verse that charity and spending on others do not decrease wealth, but rather, they increase it, and the True Lord gave us the example for this of the earth which repays a single grain with seven hundred grains. Then, the True Lord explains to us that the bane of spending charity is to accompany it with reminding of one's benevolence, or by hurting the feelings of the needy because this will spoil the pure chain of mutual solidarity for the weak and the incapacitated, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Those who spend their wealth in the Way of God and then, do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury will have their reward with their Lord….'

Look at the syntactic/semantic precision of the noble expression: '…and then do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury….' It would have been sufficient for the expression to be straight to say, 'They who spend their wealth in the Way of God and then, do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury,' but the True Lord *the Most High* used the word 'then' because it makes an impression here: the one who spends his wealth on others, might not remind them of his benevolence at the time when he gives it, but he might do this later. It is as though the True Lord *the Most High* is alerting every believer: The act of spending on others must remain unaccompanied by reminding them of it, and the one who spends, must always avoid reminding of his benevolence; he must not only refrain from reminding of his benevolence at the time of giving, but must continue to do this after giving, no matter how much time passes.

The word ‘then’ is used in this way because of the necessity of refraining from reminding of benevolence; the True Lord *the Most High* forbids this mean practice whether immediate or delayed, not only at the time of the giving, but also after the giving. When the ‘Prince of Poets’ Ahmad Shawqi *God rest his soul* wrote verses about carrying heavy burdens, he composed several lines about psychological burdens:

Have you ever borne a debt, even once in your life?
Have you ever borne rancour in your heart?
Have you ever had to bear night and day, repeatedly?
The benevolent boasts of one who did you a favour?

And after enumerating various kinds of burdens of life, Shawqi then says:

This is life, and these are its burdens;
If iron were compared to them, it would come slight.

It is as though reminding of benevolence is a serious psychological burden. The True Lord *the Most High* assures those who spend their wealth in God’s Way without reminding of their charity or hurting the feelings of the needy that they will have a reward with their Lord. The word ‘reward’ – accompanied by the modification that it is with the Lord – is a reassurance that the matter has been turned over to One Who is sure to take care of it, and to One Who is able to do so. As for the one who reminds of his charity, or hurts the feelings of the needy, he takes his reward in this life by boasting of his benevolence, or hurting the feelings of the needy, and he has no reward with God; for the one who reminds of his charity, or hurts the feelings of the needy, has not kept in mind the Lord of the weak, but only the weak.

When the one who spends in God’s Way, keeps in mind the Lord of the weak, and that the Lord of the weak is the One Who called him into existence, and that He sent weakness upon him, he will believe that God is the One Who has undertaken to provide for the weak; and when the strong spends on the weak, he does this on behalf of God, which is why we find in the sayings of those who are near to God say: ‘We place charity into the Hand of God before we place it in the hand of the weak.’ Let us consider how our Lady Fatima *God be pleased with her*, the daughter of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon her*, was polishing a coin and perfuming it, and when they asked her what she was doing, she said, ‘I am polishing and perfuming the coin because I intend to give it as charity.’ They said to her, ‘Why will you polish and perfume it if you want to give it as charity?’

Fatima Az-Zahra’ *peace and blessings be upon her,* daughter of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, said, ‘Because I know that it will fall in God’s Hand before it falls into the hand of the needy person.’ The reward is with The One Who values it, and raises it, and increases its value, and He is the All-Giving Creator.

Let us reflect on God’s words ‘…and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.’ Why did God not say, ‘No fear will they have’? Because the True Lord wants to explain to us by saying ‘…and there will be no fear concerning them…’ that a third element will become involved here, namely the involvement of a person who makes a show of love to the spender and give him false advice saying, ‘Save for the days to come, and save for your children.’

Because of this kind of element, the True Lord says, ‘…and there will be no fear concerning them…,’ that is: Beware, O you who have this kind of idea, of interfering in the name of love in order to ensure that your words are heeded; for the one who spends in God’s Way will only find bestowal and protection from God. So the one who spends in God’s Way has no need to fear; and not only this, but the True Lord also says of those who spend in God’s Way without reminding of their benevolence or hurting the feelings of the needy that: ‘…nor will they grieve.’ This means that the True Lord will treat them in such a way that they will rejoice in having given charity, either by its speedily being returned to them, or by their feeling contentment in their souls, or by passive provision; for the problem with people is that they always look for positive provision, that is, man measures his provision by that which is added to his wealth, and does not take passive provision into account; and passive provision is pure blessing.

Suppose that a person's income is fifty pounds, and then God relieves him of possible expenditure that might have reached one hundred pounds, for example by his coming home to find that his son is ill and has a fever; so, God provides the man's heart with tranquillity, and he asks the mother to prepare a cup of tea for the boy and he gives him a tablet of aspirin, and the illness goes and that is how similar matters come to pass.

Another man comes home and finds that his son is ill and has a fever, and the fever lasts for more than a day, so, God casts fear into his heart and all kinds of bad thoughts and worries about the illness come to the man's mind and he carries his son to the doctor and spends fifty, or one hundred pounds.

God healed the first man's son with a penny, whilst He healed the second man's son with numerous pounds. The provision of the first man was passive provision; just as God gives provision in a positive way, He also gives provision in a negative way, i.e. He relieves the need to spend and holds off misfortune. There is a man whose income is one hundred pounds; and God brings expenses to him which need two hundred; and there is another man whose income is fifty pounds, yet God relieves him from expenditure of more than one hundred pounds; so, which state is better?

It is the state of the man whom God relieves from having to spend more than his capability. So people should consider passive provision just as they consider positive provision; and God's words about those who spend in God's Way without reminding any of their benevolence or hurting the feelings of the needy that '…there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve', indicate that God will bring, as a result of spending without reminding of charity or hurting feelings, that which will cause the heart of the believer to rejoice, either by the blessing of provision, or by relieving them of possible expenditure, so, the heart of the believer will say: This is the blessing of the charity I gave. He might give something in charity, so, God withholds and relieves him from something potentially harmful, and the believer's heart will rejoice.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* alerts us to something important, which is that if you cannot do good with your wealth, O believer, then, at least do good with your speech; if you cannot accommodate people with your wealth, then, accommodate them with a kind treatment, as the Messenger of

God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Ward off the Hellfire even with half a date; and if one finds not even this, then with a kind word.’[1] The True Lord *the Most High* spells out the issue in the following verse:

قَوۡلٞ مَّعۡرُوفٞ وَمَغۡفِرَةٌ خَيۡرٞ مِّن صَدَقَةٖ يَتۡبَعُهَآ أَذٗىۗ وَٱللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٞ ٢٦٣

A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]. God is self-sufficient, forbearing [263] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 263)

What does ‘Kind speech’ mean here? Usually we find the word *ma‘roof* (rendered here as ‘kind’ and which literally means ‘known’), used to mean ‘conventionally acceptable’ and is often used in contrast with the word *munkar,* (‘bad/abominable,’ which literally means ‘rejected/denied/ unacknowledged’). It is as though goodness is something which is naturally acknowledged, and that the things which are naturally acknowledged are always based on beauty and goodness, whilst the things which the soul rejects are based on evil and ugliness, and because of this the True Lord *the Most High* says ‘kind (*ma‘roof*) speech’, as though it is the nature of beauty and goodness to be acknowledged, whilst the nature of their opposites is to be rejected. So ‘kind speech’ means to turn a beggar down in a nice way so that his soul does not fill with resentment against you, and that you do not censure him for having asked of you; and if the beggar glowers at you as a needy person does, then, forgive him for this. Why? It is because there are people who suffer greatly from need, and one of them might see that you are wealthy or well-off and hope to get some good from your charity and then, he might go a little too far when he speaks to you, and perhaps cross the line of polite speech with you; so you must bear with him.

And you, O servant of God, keep in mind that you commit sins which anger God, and yet, the True Lord treats you with forbearance and patience, forgives your misdeeds, and does not punish you; so, if someone treats you offensively in some way, be also a person of kindness, forgiveness and forbearance, as the True Lord *the Most High* puts the question to us: ‘…do you not desire that God forgive you?...’ (*an-Nur:* 22).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Kitab Az-Zakat*

We all desire that God would forgive us, which is why we must forgive other people, especially the needy. When the True Lord says, '…And God is Free of need, Forbearing,' this is a warning to the capable person who refuses to give to the needy, as though He were saying to him: You have only denied yourself, O capable person, the reward of God. O capable person, when you deny the poor, you are the one who is really being denied because God is free of need to you; and He *the Exalted* tells the believers that they are called upon to spend freely in God's Way; but some of them are niggardly. And whoever acts niggardly is only niggardly towards his own self; for God is free of need, whereas they stand in need; and if they turn away, He will bring other people to take their place, and they will not be the likes of them (*Muhammad:* 38).

God is Free of need by His Omnipotent Power, and He is able to replace miserly people with people who give willingly in God's Way from the provisions which God has given to them. The one who refuses to give, is only thereby closing the door to mercy upon himself, which is why the True Lord says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تُبۡطِلُواْ صَدَقَٰتِكُم بِٱلۡمَنِّ وَٱلۡأَذَىٰ كَٱلَّذِى يُنفِقُ مَالَهُۥ رِئَآءَ ٱلنَّاسِ
وَلَا يُؤۡمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِۖ فَمَثَلُهُۥ كَمَثَلِ صَفۡوَانٍ عَلَيۡهِ تُرَابٞ فَأَصَابَهُۥ وَابِلٞ فَتَرَكَهُۥ
صَلۡدٗاۖ لَّا يَقۡدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ شَىۡءٖ مِّمَّا كَسَبُواْۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهۡدِى ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ٢٦٤

You who believe, do not cancel out your charitable deeds with reminders and hurtful words, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in God and the Last Day. Such a person is like a rock with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare. Such people get no rewards for their works: God does not guide the disbelievers [264] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 264)

The one who gives charity and then follows it by reminding of his benevolence and hurting the feelings of the needy only nullifies his charity, and his loss is really twofold: the first loss is that he actually decreases his wealth because God will not replace it for him since he nullified his charity by following it by reminding of his benevolence and hurting the feelings of the needy; and the second loss is that he is denied the reward. So the one who spends on others just so that people will say that he did so, should know that the True Lord explains to us that rewards are given on the premise that the reward is paid by the one for whom you did the deed.

With the limited nature of his power, man gives reward to those who do something for him; and the one who does an action so that people will say he did and he will take his reward from the limited power of man. For this reason, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that the one who does a good deed or gives charity so that it will be said of him that he did it, will come forth on the Day of Resurrection and find there is no reward for him. The Noble Hadith says: '… And (there will come) a man to whom God gave all manner of wealth, and he will be brought forth, and He will remind him of His blessings, and he will acknowledge them; then He will say, 'What did you do with them?' He will say, 'I left nothing which You loved for me to spend without spending on it for You.' He will say, 'You have lied; you only wanted it to be said that so-and-so is generous; and it indeed was said.' Then he will be ordered to be taken and dragged on his face until he is cast into Hellfire.'(1)

So, beware of saying, 'I spent on others, but God did not increase my provisions,' because God might be testing you and trying you. Do not give charity in order to gain more provisions because God does not give to the believer in this worldly life alone; God might not want to give to you in this ephemeral world, but rather to preserve His gift to you in the everlasting world, the Hereafter, which is better and more lasting.

The True Lord says, '…and does not believe in God and the Last Day. His example is like that of a [large] smooth stone upon which is a little dust of earth….' The word *safwan* means a smooth stone, which we call 'pebble'; and the word *safwan* can also be used to describe a bald man because his head is smooth like a pebble. A smooth rock means one which has no fissures or pores that you can see with the naked eye, but which you can only see by using a microscope. When something is smooth, soil might fall upon it, and then when it rains the soil washes off it and slides off the smooth surface. If the rock has some cracks in it, some of the soil will stick in between the cracks. So the one who spends his wealth only to be seen and praised by people is like a smooth stone upon which a little earth builds up, and then when rain falls onto the earth, it is all washed away so that '…They are unable [to keep] anything of what they have earned…' that is, they will lose the ability to possess anything because God will make all their actions like dust scattered in the wind.

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(1) Part of a Hadith which Al-Hakim declared to be authentic according to the conditions of Al-Bukhari and Muslim; and indeed Muslim narrated it.

These people are like the smooth rock upon which there is a little earth which is then washed off by a rainstorm, that is, by heavy rain which leaves it bare; these are the attributes of those who spend their wealth only to be seen and praised by men so that God nullifies their reward, for God does not allow them to attain goodness and reward. God then gives their opposite, namely those who spend their wealth out of a longing to please God, saying:

وَمَثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُمُ ٱبْتِغَآءَ مَرْضَاتِ ٱللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيتًا مِّنْ
أَنفُسِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍۭ بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَـَٔاتَتْ أُكُلَهَا
ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِن لَّمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ فَطَلٌّ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٦٥﴾

But those who spend their wealth in order to gain God's approval, and as an affirmation of their own faith, are like a garden on a hill: heavy rain falls and it produces double its normal yield; even if no heavy rain falls, it will still be watered by the dew. God sees all that you do [265]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 265)

Seeking God's pleasure in spending means removing any ostentation in the soul from the act of spending so that it is sincerely devoted to Him Alone. As for their own inner strength, it is also for themselves; it is as though the faithful part of the soul clashes with the libidinal part, and when the faithful part of the soul seeks anything, the libidinal part seeks to prevent it; and the faithful part of the soul overcomes the libidinal part and seeks to gain victory for God's sake.

The meaning of '…the strengthening of their souls…' is that the believer affirms that he loves his own self with a deep love, not a foolish love. The act of spending on others must first of all be spending in God's Way, and the believer strengthens his soul first of all by giving his blood, and secondly by giving his wealth; and in this way, inner strength is affirmed, so, the likeness of it is, as the noble verse depicted it: '…a garden on high ground which is hit by a downpour – so, it yields its fruits twofold. And [even] if it is not hit by a downpour, then, a drizzle [falls upon it]. And God, of what you do, is Seeing.'

As we know, the word 'garden' (*janna*) means the place in which there are thick green plants so that it conceals those who are within it; from the same root is derived the word *jann* which means 'cover', so, those who enter this garden are covered. The True Lord wants to give us a parable to illustrate the second group of those who spend in God's Way, out of a longing to please Him and to strengthen the faithful part of their souls against the libidinal part; one of them is like one who enters a garden of thick plants, and this garden is on high, fertile ground; and when a garden is on high fertile ground, this means that it is surrounded by areas which are lower-lying than it. So what will the rain do to the garden if it is on high fertile ground? The True Lord tells us what would happen to a garden like this before modern science developed and discovered the effects which ground water has on crops.

This garden on high ground does not suffer from what flat lands suffer from: on flat lands, ground water can go down to the roots of crops and cause them to rot by drowning them so that these roots cannot absorb the necessary nutrients, and thus the plants first become pale and then die. The garden which lies on high ground, accepts the water which falls upon it as rain, and it is surrounded by ditches which drain the water down to the low-lying lands around it; and this garden is irrigated by the most modern form of irrigation to which modern science has arrived: it takes water from above, i.e. from rain, and the water falls on the leaves to perform a primary function, which is to wash the leaves.

As we know, plant leaves are like lungs for people, and their function is to breathe, and when rainwater falls on them it washes the leaves to allow them to play their part in the process known today as photosynthesis. After this, the water reaches the roots in order to absorb the essential elements in the soil to give nutrition to the plants, and the roots take what they need of the nutrients absorbed in the water, and the extra water flows down the ditches to the lower ground. This is the most modern of all current farming techniques, and they have discovered that yields are doubled by it.

The True Lord is telling us that he who spends his wealth out of a desire to please God and to strengthen their inner souls are like this kind of garden, which is irrigated by Divine means so that if a downpour hits it, it takes what it needs from it and the rest of the rain flows off it; '…And [even] if it is not hit by a downpour, then a drizzle [falls upon it]….' Drizzle (tall) means light and soft rain, and this is enough for it to give its produce twofold (*di'fayn*, which literally means 'two doubles'). If a double means that which is equal to two times of something, then, two doubles are equal to four times of it.

God *the Most High* then gives us another example to clarify more the state of the person who spends his wealth ostentatiously; He asks His believing servants, and He knows them best, saying:

أَيَوَدُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن تَكُونَ لَهُۥ جَنَّةٌ مِّن نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ لَهُۥ
فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ وَأَصَابَهُ ٱلْكِبَرُ وَلَهُۥ ذُرِّيَّةٌ ضُعَفَآءُ فَأَصَابَهَآ إِعْصَارٌ فِيهِ نَارٌ
فَٱحْتَرَقَتْ ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٦٦﴾

Would any of you like to have a garden of palm trees and vines, graced with flowing streams and all kinds of produce, which, when you are afflicted with old age and feeble offspring, is struck by a fiery whirl- wind and burnt down? In this way God makes His messages clear to you, so that you may reflect on them [266] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 266)

The True Lord *the Most High* includes us in the image, as though He wants us to take a clear picture from it. Would any of you like to have a garden of date palms and grape vines, through which running rivers flow, and have all kinds of fruit grow therein; and we know that dates and grapes were two of the most important fruits and products of the society in which the Noble Quran was first revealed; and we know that there are gardens in which there are date palms and grape vines, to which their owners add peach trees and other fruit trees, and this is similar to the situation that the True Lord describes about the owner of the two gardens, upon one of which God had bestowed two vineyards and surrounded them with date palms, and placed a field of grain in between. Each of the two gardens yielded its produce and never failed therein in any way, and God had made a stream to gush forth in the midst of each of them. And so the owner had fruit in abundance. One day he said to his friend, in conversation with him, ‘I have more wealth than you, and I am mightier in terms of followers.’ And having thus sinned against himself, he entered his garden, saying, ‘I do not think that this will ever perish; and neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if it should come, and I am brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this as my last resort’ (*al-Kahf*: 32-36).

The two gardens here contained many different things: they had grapevines, and in addition God gave to them both date-palms, and then grain; and in Arabic rhetoric this is called ‘adding the general to the specific, or adding the specific to the general,’ in order to mention the thing twice, once generally and once specifically for emphasis. When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about the Garden/Paradise of the Hereafter, He says that God has readied for the believers who struggle in His Way gardens underneath which running rivers flow, therein to remain forever; this is the great triumph (*at-Tawba:* 89).

God has prepared for those who believe in Him, those who fight for the cause of His religion and for raising His word, gardens underneath which rivers flow, and this is the supreme triumph and bliss. And in another place, the True Lord speaks about the Garden/Paradise of the Hereafter by saying that He has prepared it for those who led the way, the first of the *Muhajirun* (Migrants from Mecca) and the *Ansar* (who supported the religion in Medina), and those who have followed them in their noble conduct, whom God is well pleased with them, and they with Him – He has made ready for them gardens under which the rivers flow, to abide therein forever: this is the great triumph (*at-Tawba:* 89).

The discourse about the rivers which flow underneath the gardens contains in one place the Arabic particle min, which literally means ‘from’, whilst in the other verse there is no use of this particle. When the discourse about these rivers which flow through the gardens uses the particle min, this implies that their flowing is intrinsically theirs, and that their liquid state belongs to them.

And when the discourse about these rivers which flow underneath the gardens does not use the particle min, this means that the flowing of these rivers is not intrinsically theirs, but rather that, they flow through them by the will of God; so, no one could dare to hold back the flow of the water from this garden which God has prepared for the believers.

Returning to the verse at hand, God includes us in the debate posing the question: ‘Would one of you like to have a garden of palm trees and grapevines underneath which rivers flow in which he has from every fruit, but he is afflicted with old age and has weak offspring, and it is hit by a whirlwind containing fire and is burned? Thus does God make clear to you [His] signs that you might give thought?’

The garden is in the condition which is described here, and it contains a great amount of goodness; but its owner has grown old, and he no longer has the health and vigour of youth. He is surrounded by goodness, and he needs this goodness more than ever because he has grown old and no longer has the energy to work. Because of this, his soul is attached to the produce of this garden, not only for himself, but also for his weak offspring. This is the quintessential image of the need for goodness, not only for oneself, but also for one’s weak offspring.

We are here presented with a man who is surrounded by three conditions:

The first condition is the garden which contains all kinds of goodness;

The second condition is old age, weakness and the inability to work;

The third condition is the children, who are weak.

Then a fiery whirlwind smites the garden and it is scorched; so, what will the scale of the loss be for this man? It will be a severe loss; and this is the loss of the one who does good deeds in order to be seen and praised by people. A whirlwind, as we know, is a strong wind accompanied by thunder, lighting and rain, and it might cause fires if electrical charges are caused by clashing clouds, or if the wind is carrying with it burning brands cast up by a blazing conflagration. This is the state of the one who spends on others in order to be seen and praised by people: a hopeful start, but a hopeless end.

So, every believing person must remember when he spends, this beginning which inspires desire, and this ending filled with despair. It is a severe disaster, which a poet described by saying:

When the night was done, I became as one
Who clutches onto water, which slips through his fingers.

And another said:

As though a cloud came over people desperate for rain,
But when they saw it, it dissolved and cleared.

The one who does things so that others will see and praise him thereby, ruins all his credits, and will have no gain from all that he has done.

The True Lord then says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ أَنفِقُوا۟ مِن طَيِّبَـٰتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّآ
أَخْرَجْنَا لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَلَا تَيَمَّمُوا۟ ٱلْخَبِيثَ مِنْهُ تُنفِقُونَ وَلَسْتُم
بِـَٔاخِذِيهِ إِلَّآ أَن تُغْمِضُوا۟ فِيهِ ۚ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَنِىٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿٢٦٧﴾

You who believe, give charitably from the good things you have acquired and that We have produced for you from the earth. Do not give away the bad things that you yourself would only accept with your eyes closed: remember that God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise [267]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 267)

This verse depicts things which take place in human society, and these things were going on in Medina after the Messenger of God had established the Islamic state there. Some people used to take bunches of dates from date-palms and hang them in the mosque so that anyone who wanted could eat from them, and a bunch means a large branch of a date-palm containing many small stalks from which fresh dates hang. But some people would bring unripe bunches, or dates of inferior quality, and God wanted them to stop doing this so that they would not dedicate to God that which they themselves disliked; therefore He revealed these wise words: 'O you who have believed, spend from the good things which you have earned….'

Spending on others must be out of good, lawful possessions; do not obtain money from an unlawful source and spend it on good causes because God is

Good and He accepts only that which is good, and spending on others should not be from base and ill-gotten wealth.

The True Lord *the Most High* specifies the means of spending from His provision, saying, '…and from that which We have brought forth for you from the earth…' and He reminds us always, when He says '…Spend from the good things which you have earned…', that we should not think that earning is the source of provision; no; earning is an act which is given to you by God. As a servant, you can only work because of the energy given to you by God, and the reasoning given to you by God, and upon the earth which God has subjugated for you. It is down to the many tools which God has specially bestowed upon you, none of which you possess intrinsically; but the True Lord respects man's work and effort to earn provision, so He says, '…Spend from the good things which you have earned….'

The True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to choose the defective and the inferior things of our labour's produce to spend in charity when He says, '…And do not seek the defective therefrom to spend [from that in charity]…' that is, it is not right and not appropriate that we take for ourselves the good things we earn and offer to God the base and bad things because none of us would be happy to feed himself, or his family on those bad things which are unsuitable for us to spend, or consume ourselves: '…while you would not take it [yourself] except with closed eyes. And know that God is Free of need and worthy of all praise.' That is, as a believing servant you would not be content to eat these bad things without averting your eyes in disdain or without its price being lowered for you, such as if the seller offers you something of middle or low quality for a lower price than that of the high quality produce.

The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to elucidate for us these depictions of the aspects of spending:

- Spending does not reduce wealth, but rather increases it seven hundred-fold;
- It is not right for a person to nullify his spending by reminding of his benevolence, or hurting the feelings of the needy;

- A kind word is better than a charitable deed which is followed by reminding of one's benevolence, or hurt;
- Spending must not be for the sake of gaining the praise of others, but rather must be done out of a desire to please God.

These noble verses deal with the things which spoil the act of spending in charity, whether greed, reminding of one's benevolence, hurting other's feelings, spending to show off in front of others, or spending from one's inferior possessions. After this, He *the Exalted* says:

ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ يَعِدُكُمُ ٱلۡفَقۡرَ وَيَأۡمُرُكُم بِٱلۡفَحۡشَآءِۖ وَٱللَّهُ يَعِدُكُم
مَّغۡفِرَةٗ مِّنۡهُ وَفَضۡلٗاۗ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٞ ٢٦٨

Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and commands you to do foul deeds; God promises you His forgiveness and His abundance. God is limitless and All Knowing [268] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 268)

Satan might whisper to you that spending will make you poor, trying to prevent you from spending on good causes and tempt you into acts of sin and disobedience. When a rich person refuses to spend on the needy, the needy person's heart is filled with resentment; and if the heart of any society is filled with resentment, we will find that all manner of evil will spread therein. The True Lord treats this issue by stressing that the life of this world is but play and a passing delight; but if you believe in God and fear Him, He will grant you your recompense; and He does not demand of you to sacrifice in His Way all of your possessions as if He were to demand of you all of them, and urge you, you would niggardly cling to them, and so He would but bring out your moral failings (*Muhammad:* 36-37).

The True Lord *the Most High* does not ask you to return all the wealth He has given you, He only asks you to purify this wealth by spending some of it in God's Way in order that it grows and increases, and in order to remove resentment from society; for when resentment enters a society, the society will be overwhelmed by it, and this society will not awake from this resentment unless it is shaken by a strong blow which wakes it up to the need to expel resentment from itself. This is why God warns us not to listen to Satan: ‘Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while God promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty; and God is All-Encompassing, All Knowing.’

The one who listens to Satan’s words and promises and does not listen to God’s promises, will become as one who has supported God’s enemy against God – may God save us and you from such a position! Satan whispers to you that you will become poor if you spend; and man’s experience with Satan confirms to him that Satan is a misleading liar; and man’s experience with faith in God confirms to him that God is full of forgiveness, and He gives generously to His servants; and wisdom requires us to know which way to follow and adhere to.

After this, the True Lord says:

يُؤْتِي ٱلْحِكْمَةَ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَمَن يُؤْتَ ٱلْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا
كَثِيرًاۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّآ أُوْلُواْ ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿٢٦٩﴾

and He gives wisdom to whoever He will. Whoever is given wisdom has truly been given much good, but only those with insight bear this in mind [269] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 269)

Wisdom means to put things in their appropriate beneficial places. It is as though the True Lord is saying: Everything I have commanded you to do is wisdom itself because I want to safeguard your worldly lives for those weak offspring whom you will leave behind, and I want to safeguard felicity for you in the Hereafter. So if the believing servant does what God commands him to do, this is putting things in their rightful places, and he would have therefore attained wisdom.

The True Lord wanted to teach man by means of the emotion he feels for his children; for a person might go through times when his own self is of little importance to him, and he is concerned for nothing but his children’s affairs. He might go hungry so that his children can eat, and go unclothed in order to clothe them. We have a clear example in our master Abraham *peace be upon him*, the Friend of the Most Merciful: his Lord tested him at the beginning of his life by his being burnt in a fire; and because Abraham's faith was strong, God made the fire cool and peaceful.

Towards the end of his life, God tested him with a vision of the sacrifice of his son; and because Abraham's faith was great, he obeyed the commandment of the Most Merciful, Who ransomed Ishmael with a tremendous ram. When a person reaches later life, he becomes more attached to his children than to his own self; and in this way, God advanced His testing of our master Abraham *peace be upon him*, which is why God wanted to touch this sensitive spot of mankind, instructing those [executors and guardians] to fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear God and speak words of appropriate justice (*an-Nisa':* 9). The True Lord *the Most High* wants His servants to safeguard their children by doing good deeds and speaking in a just manner.

Another example on how the True Lord protects the wealth of orphans is: In the story of Moses *peace be upon him* with the righteous servant to whom God had granted special knowledge, we learn that the two went on, till when they came upon some village people, they asked them for food, but those people refused to give them hospitality. And they saw in that village a wall which was on the point of tumbling down, and he erected it, so, Moses protested that had he wished, he surely could have obtained some payment for it (*al-Kahf*: 77).

Moses *peace be upon him* did not know what the righteous servant knew that beneath the wall was a treasure belonging to two orphaned boys whose father had been a man of virtue whilst the people of this village were so mean that they refused to give some food to the righteous servant and Moses *peace be upon him*, which is why it was necessary to erect the wall so that the treasure would not be uncovered in this town of villains who would take it for themselves, preventing the orphans from inheriting the treasure of their father who was a righteous man. So, the True Lord *the Most High* teaches us to ensure the wellbeing of our children by means of performing righteous actions; and this is wisdom itself, which cannot be attained except by those who have minds capable of penetrating the depths of sound thought.

Our master Al-Hasan Al-Basri gives us an example of righteous action when he said to someone who came to him seeking help, 'Welcome to him who comes to carry my supply to the Hereafter free of charge!’ Our master Al-Hasan Al-Basri was given wisdom that made him view goodness not according to its time, but rather, according to what it would bring at a later time.

I gave the example before of the student who works hard and strives in his studies in order to succeed, while his brother loves to relax and laze around; then we find that the student who worked hard is the one who ascends in society whilst the one who was content to be lazy, becomes a wretch in the society.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَآ أَنفَقْتُم مِّن نَّفَقَةٍ أَوْ نَذَرْتُم مِّن نَّذْرٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
يَعْلَمُهُۥ ۗ وَمَا لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ مِنْ أَنصَارٍ ﴿٢٧٠﴾

Whatever you may give, or vow to give, God knows it well, and those who do wrong will have no one to help them [270]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 270)

We know about spending from before, but what is a vow? A vow means that you bind yourself to undertake some supererogatory act of worship of a kind which God has ordained but which is above that which He has prescribed. If you vow to pray a given number of *rak’as* (cycles) of prayer every night, this is a vow to do something of a kind which God has ordained since God ordained prayer and made five prayers obligatory, and if you vow to do more than what God made obligatory, this is what a ‘vow’ means. It is said of someone who vows to do something of a kind which God has ordained, but which is above that which He has prescribed, that this is a sign that worship has become sweet for him, and he loves it and yearns for it, and it is a sign that he is close to acknowledging the true due of his Lord, and that his Lord deserves more from him than what He has obliged him to do; it is as though God was merciful with us in what He obliged us to do because had He obliged us to do all that He deserves, none of us would have been able to offer Him His due.

So, when you make a vow, O believing servant, you bind yourself to do something of a kind which God has ordained, but which is above that which He has imposed on you. You have the free choice as to whether to make a vow, or not, but once you have made a vow, it becomes binding. Why? Because you have bound yourself to it, which is why it is prudent for one not to overburden oneself by making numerous vows; for when the time comes to fulfil them, he might not be able to do them.

Close worshippers of God would say to the one who leaves off a vow after having made it: ‘Have you tried out your Lord and found that He is not worthy of your continued devotion?’ And there is not one of us who would dare to assert this – because God is worthy of the deepest devotion. This is why it is better for a person to consider carefully before he vows to do something.

Let us pause to consider the concluding part of this verse: ‘…And for the wrongdoers there are no helpers.’ The wrongdoers are those who wrong themselves because the True Lord tells us that a person’s wrongdoing only harms himself, asserting that God does not do the least wrong to men, but it is men who wrong themselves (*Yunus:* 44).

One of the most severe ways to wrong oneself is to spend on others in order to be seen and praised by people, or to spend on sinful things, or to fail to live up to a vow; and those who do these things shall have no helpers to defend them from God’s punishment in the Hereafter.

The True Lord then says:

إِن تُبۡدُواْ ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَۖ وَإِن تُخۡفُوهَا وَتُؤۡتُوهَا ٱلۡفُقَرَآءَ فَهُوَ خَيۡرٞ
لَّكُمۡۚ وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنكُم مِّن سَيِّـَٔاتِكُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٞ ٢٧١

If you give charity openly, it is good, but if you keep it secret and give to the needy in private, that is better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds. God is well aware of all that you do [271]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 271)

If you openly give charity, what you do is good, as you are thereby giving a good example for others, and you keep resentment away from society. And if you secretly give charity and give it to the poor, God will expiate some of your sins by means of it; and God is aware of the intention behind making charity public or making it secret; and the conclusion of this noble verse serves both the principle of giving charity openly and the principle of giving it secretly. The True Lord knows the intention of the one who gives charity openly; if one is rich, one should give charity openly in order to protect his honour from people casting aspersions on it; for when people know that someone is rich, they must also know how this rich person spends on others; otherwise they might count the wealth that God has given to him without counting how he spends in God's cause. Why? Because God wants to protects people's honour from other people's tongues.

As for it if a person is not known to be rich, it is better that he conceal his charitable acts; and if you give charity publicly in order that people follow your example, as I said, not in order that they see you and praise you, this is also desirable. The True Lord says, '…And God, with what you do, is fully Acquainted,' that is, God rewards according to the intention of the servant for giving openly or secretly.

By examining the verses which concern spending, we find that He *the Exalted* blocks for the human soul all the avenues to avarice, and cuts off for it all the pretexts it might use to be stingy with what God has given it; and the Creator Who gave the creature what He gave him, requires him to spend. If we consider the matter from the perspective of logic, we find that it is perfectly natural because God does not ask His creatures to spend from what they have created, but rather, He asks them to spend from what He has created for them.

In this existence, when man is asked as an act of faith to spend, this means that he must have something to spend; and he can only have something to spend if he owns that which is beyond his need and the need of his dependents, and this can only come through the fruits of labour. So God's command to the believer to spend, requires that He first commands him to work as best he can, not only as much as he needs to; if every person who could work only worked as much as they needed to, how could those who were unable to work, find the essentials of life? So, the True Lord wants us to work to our full capability in order to be able to support ourselves and those who are in our care, and if we have something more than this, we give it to those who are unable to work.

Someone might say, 'If God wanted to make the hearts of those who spend feel compassion for those who are incapable, why did He not just make the incapable people capable of working as well?' To the one who says this we say: When the True Lord created, He created a universe that is complementary and in harmony, and to which the means of life yielded; and it might happen that man becomes filled with feelings of intransigence and haughtiness by the way the means obey him, and he might believe that he is the originator of all things; when the earth responds to him when he ploughs and sows, and the water responds to him when he lowers his pail, and when all the means respond to him, he might believe that he is the essential element of the universe. So God's will is to make the power which acts upon the means to make them produce – His will is to make this power one of the contingencies of this universe, and not to make it one of man's essential elements; so, sometimes you find that he is capable, whilst at other times, he is incapable. Were man to be intrinsically capable, there would be no incapable people; so, the presence of people who are incapable of working in life alerts people to the fact that they are not essential elements in this universe, and that the One Who gave them ability, can take it from them and return it to others so that the one who was incapable yesterday, becomes capable today, and the one who was capable yesterday, becomes incapable today. In this way, man continues to be aware of the granting power which made him God's vicegerent on earth.

This is why the difference between the believer and the disbeliever in terms of work in life is that they are united in one thing, and then, the believer is unique in another: they are united in that both believers and disbelievers work with life's means in order to obtain sustenance for themselves and their dependants, and this is something shared by the believer and the disbeliever; and the disbeliever restricts himself to this means of work, working only for himself and his dependants.

But the believer shares this aspect with him, and then he goes further in that he works for something else, which is to earn something extra which he can offer to those who are unable to work, hoping for reward for this from God. For this reason, we said before that when the True Lord *the Most High* spoke about alms-giving, he spoke about it once as being required to be paid, and He spoke about it another time as something which is required as a goal; He describes spenders as those who are doers of alms deeds (*al-Mu'minun:* 4); He did not say 'those who pay the alms.' The believers do not work for the purpose of paying the alms, rather, they work as much as they can to support themselves and their dependants, and then to earn something extra with which they can pay the alms.

Of alms giving, the True Lord *the Most High* also said, ‘And perform prayer and give *zakat* (alms), and whatever good you put forward for yourselves, you shall find it with God. Indeed, God sees what you do’ (*al-Baqara*: 110). So, the upshot is that the poor-due is something which the believer has in mind when he begins any work, and by this Divine command the poor-due becomes required as a goal; and it is one of the Pillars of Islam by which the believer is distinguished from the disbeliever.

When the True Lord *the Most High* presented the sources of stinginess in the human soul, He explained that the first thing to which the human soul is exposed is that man fears to spend because it will decrease his possessions; and the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* warned against stinginess when he said, ‘Beware of injustice, for injustice will become darkness on the Day of Resurrection; and beware of stinginess, for stinginess destroyed those who were before you, driving them to the point where they shed their blood and violated their prohibitions.’(1) This is the case, but the True Lord *the Most High* explains to every believer that it might decrease what you have, but it will give you more from what God has; if it decreases the fruit of your labour, it completes it by what God then, does for you; and when it completes the fruit of your labour by what God does for you, you must stop and compare a power which is incapable and is created with a power which is creating and omnipotent.

He *the Exalted* draws our attention to one of His creations, the earth - the earth in which we place a single grain – that is, a single seed – from which it gives us in return seven ears, each ear containing a hundred grains. If one looks at first to what he puts into the earth when he ploughs and sows, as a reduction of his stores, he would have never sowed or planted, but he looked at the seven hundred grains which the earth gives him in return for his single grain; this is why he set about planting and ploughing without any reservations: it will give him back many times more than what he gave.If the earth which is a creature of God, gives this much, how much will the Creator of the earth give?

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim.*

'The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is like a grain which produces seven ears; in each ear is a hundred grains. And God multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And God is All-Encompassing and All Knowing' (*al-Baqara*: 261) So, by this example, the True Lord blocked one of the avenues for stinginess to the human soul. Something else which these verses touches upon is that a person might be disturbed in his society by a beggar who asks of him, and because of his desire to keep his wealth, he is reluctant to spend, yet, because of his desire to safeguard his reputation in the community, he is reluctant to refuse, and he therefore gives, but does so grudgingly; and perhaps his grumbling might cross the line into chiding and rebuking the one who asked of him; so, in order to treat this kind of situation, the True Lord *the Most High* said, 'Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. And God is Free of need, Forbearing' (*al-Baqara*: 263).

God's words 'Kind speech and forgiveness…' (*al-Baqara*: 263) indicate that the one who is asked, must have been vexed by the beggar's request, and annoyed by the embarrassment it caused him, and the True Lord asks this person to forgive the one who asks him this offence, if he considers his request to be a misdeed: Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. And God is Free of need, Forbearing (*al-Baqara*: 263).

After this, the True Lord turns to the matter of the spender reminding the receiver of his charity of his generosity towards him which spoils the act of giving because it puts the recipient in a position of degradation and humiliation, and the giver wants to assume the position of the pride of the giver and the haughty spender. So God tells the spender: If you do this, the benefit of your charity will go to the hands of the other so he will benefit, whilst you will be the loser because you will benefit nothing from this where the one who asks, will benefit from it. So for your own sake, do not follow up your acts of charity by reminding of your benevolence, or hurting the feelings of the recipient.

Then, the True Lord comes to treat another one of the avenues of stinginess to the human soul which is that a person might like to give, but when he stretches his hand out to give, he finds it difficult to spend from the good things he possesses, so, he keeps them for himself and then, takes the things which he would be glad to part with and gives them away as charity; and He *the Exalted* warns us against doing this by saying, '…And do not seek the defective therefrom to spend [from that in charity] while you would not take it [yourself] except with closed eyes…' (*al-Baqara*: 267).

That is, if such a thing were given to you, you would only accept it whilst averting your eyes and reluctantly tolerating to take it, as though you do not want to look at its flaws as you take it. If you would not accept something for yourself, it is not right that you should accept it for someone else.

Then, after speaking about the avenues for stinginess to the human soul, the Quran then showed us that the one who opens these avenues and maintains them is none other than Satan: 'Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while God promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty; and God is All-Encompassing, All Knowing' (*al-Baqara*: 268).

If you see Satan's threat as being equal to God's promise to you of goodly acceptance, this will be a great loss and a misfortune for you; so, revise your faith; and you need to see the threat of Satan as obliterated before God's promise to you of forgiveness and bounty.

After this, He spoke of the time of charity and the form of giving it – whether public or private – and the intention you have is the criterion for preferring one act to another: if you are a rich man, protect your honour from being called into disrepute by people, and give the prescribed alms charity publicly to safeguard your honour from people's gossiping; and if you want to give extra supererogatory charity, there is nothing to stop you from concealing it so that your left hand does not know what your right hand has given. It is related that Ibn Abbas *God be pleased with them* said, 'Giving voluntary acts of charity privately is seventy times better than giving it publicly; and giving prescribed charity publicly is twenty-five times better than giving it privately.'

It is as though God has opened the way of the human soul to all the avenues of giving, and blocked up all the avenues of stinginess. Consider, after this, how the True Lord protects the weak believers by placing them in the care of the strong believers. Know, as a believing servant, that when you receive a ruling from God, do not think that it will be required from you always; but rather, you must receive the ruling as though it might become required for your benefit due to the vicissitudes of time; if you are rich, do not think that God will always be asking of you, but rather bear in mind that if the vicissitudes of life make it so you become poor, the ruling will be required for your benefit. Consider that just as the ruling is required from you now because you are rich, it may well be required from others for your benefit if vicissitudes should befall you and make you poor.

So, legislation is both for you and upon you; do not think then that it is always upon you because if you consider that it is always upon you, you thereby detach yourself from the vicissitudes of life; and the vicissitudes of life are in motion, and no one can free himself from them. This is why He *the Exalted* commands the believer to look after his fellow believer.

Consider the ambitions for faith in the human soul, even in the case of those who do not share your faith. If you are required to give obligatory charity to your fellow believer, it is also required from you to give voluntarily to those who are not believers. This is a distinction of Islam which is not found in other religions, which is that it protects the non-believer; for this reason, the True Lord says:

لَّيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَىٰهُمْ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَهْدِى مَن يَشَآءُ ۗ وَمَا تُنفِقُوا۟
مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِأَنفُسِكُمْ ۚ وَمَا تُنفِقُونَ إِلَّا ٱبْتِغَآءَ وَجْهِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَمَا
تُنفِقُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧٢﴾

It is not for you [Prophet] to guide them; it is God who guides whoever He will. Whatever charity you give benefits your own soul, provided you do it for the sake of God. Whatever you give will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged [272] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 272)

What is the root of this matter? The root of this matter is that some of the first people to embrace Islam had relatives who had not done so, and these relatives were poor, and the Muslims would have liked to give these poor relatives some of their wealth, but they were reluctant to do so without first asking the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* about it, which they did.

Qutayla, mother of Asma' *God be pleased with her* daughter of Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him*, was still a disbeliever at the time, and Asma' *God be pleased with her* asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* for permission to give some of her wealth to her mother so that she could live and have sustenance. Upon this, the True Lord *the Most High* revealed His ruling: ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills….’

It is narrated that Asma’ bint Abu Bakr *God be pleased with them* relates, ‘My mother came to me during the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, and she was still a pagan, so, I asked the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘My mother has come to me pleading her need, so, can I keep ties with my mother?’ He replied, ‘Yes, keep ties with your mother.’(1) Some of the believers thought of refusing to give to their relatives who had not yet believed to push them to belief, but the Most Merciful and Dispenser of Mercy sent down the noble words: ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills….’

It is the sublime religion, a religion which wants us to support the creatures on earth from Lordly bestowal even if they do not join with us in Divine bestowal; for Divine Bestowal is to command moral responsibility, whilst Lordly Bestowal is to provide and instruct.

Everyone on earth needs to be provided for and instructed because we know that no one in the whole world called himself into existence, but rather, his Creator called him forth; and as long as the Most Generous Creator is the One Who called forth His servant, whether believer or disbeliever, He has undertaken to provide for him. Provision is one thing, and belief in God is another, and therefore the True Lord says, ‘Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills….’

In an alternative interpretation of the verse at hand, we say that when the verse which encouraged spending was revealed, perhaps some people were hesitant, and perhaps some of the believers only gave away the less valuable of their possessions.

If Islam came to confront the human soul with all of its different states and notions, it is not surprising that it should attempt to cure them of this kind of behaviour and correct them if a notion came to them which adversely affected their conduct as believers. The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* loved it when any command was sent down that the believers immediately accepted it keenly; and if he saw any reluctance or neglect in this regard, he would be saddened; so, God explained things to him: Your responsibility is to convey to them God's command to spend; after that, it is not your responsibility to make them obey. 'Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills….'

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Someone might say: 'As long as God is the One who guides, we must leave people as they are, whether they are believers or disbelievers, and all we have to do is convey the message.' We say to those who have this opinion: 'Pay attention to utterances of the Quran concerning one thing, which is the thing we are currently examining, namely guidance. Let us consider all the verses which mention this, and we will find that those who consider that guidance is only from God, and that He does not have the right to punish a sinner, have their point of view; and those who say that He *the Exalted* does have the right to punish them because He has given them free will, also have a point of view; so, what is the point of view which will allow us to understand both sides of this matter?

When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks in His Quran, His revealed Word, He asks us to meditate on it and try to understand it; and the meaning of *tadabbur* ('meditating'/'trying to understand') is that we do not just look at the face of the text, but we try to look at what lies behind the text – or read between the lines so to speak (*tadabbur* literally means 'to look at the back of something'); that is, do not just look at the face, but look at what lies opposite to the face, namely the back. We find this instruction in God's words encouraging people to meditate and try to understand this Quran (*an-Nisa':* 82).

Now, for the issue at hand: guidance: About the tribe of Thamud, the True Lord *the Most High* says that He guided them, but they chose blindness over guidance (*Fussilat:* 17).

How could it be that God guided them, and then, they preferred blindness to guidance? The expression 'He guided them' here means that He pointed to them the way of goodness; and in doing so, He left them the power to decide between alternatives, so, they had the ability to choose this or that.

And when God guided them and directed them, they preferred blindness to guidance. God speaks to His Messenger in two other places in the Noble Quran about this. In the first, He tells him that indeed he cannot guide aright everyone whom he loves (*al-Qasas:* 56), thus negating that He *peace and blessings be upon him* guides; yet, in the second verse, the True Lord affirms that the Messenger does guide where He says that he assuredly guides to the straight way (*ash-Shura:* 52).

How could it be that God affirms a single action for a single person and then negate the very same action for the very same person? We say to this: The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* is obliged to direct people to the Way of God; but he is not obliged to force them to follow the Way of God because this is not his job. When God said that he cannot guide whom he loves, this means: You cannot force and compel those whom you love, but rather, he assuredly guides by giving direction only; it is for you to deliver the message, and for Us to deliver the Reckoning.

So, the words of the True Lord 'Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills….' do not constitute evidence for the compelled faith by which some of these morally dissolute people want to justify their psychological separation from God's way. We say to such people: There is a difference between the guidance of direction and the guidance of assistance; God guides both the believer and the disbeliever in that He points to them the right way, but He guides those who have faith in Him with the guidance of assistance, the guidance of providential support, and the guidance of making acts of obedience to Him seem easier to perform.

God says, 'Not upon you is [responsibility for] their guidance, but God guides whom He wills. And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves….' This is a way of dealing with stinginess logically; everything a person gives will bring benefit to him; the only one who gives and receives no benefit by giving, is God: He Alone does not benefit from what He gives to His creatures, since He *the Exalted* has possessed all the Attributes of Perfection from pre-eternity, from before He created all creation. What a person gives brings him benefit, and what our Lord gives brings benefit to us all.

This is why one of the early Muslims who possessed the insight of faith said, ‘I have never done any good for anyone.’ They said to him, ‘Do you say this, when you did such-and-such for so-and-so, and such-and-such for so-and-so, and such-and-such for so-and-so?’ He said, ‘I only did it for myself.’ It is as though he saw, when he did things for others, that he was really doing it for himself. We said before, that Al-Hasan AL-Basri – who had insightful knowledge of God – used, when someone would come begging from him, to smile and greet them warmly, saying: ‘Welcome to him who comes to carry my supplies to the Hereafter free of charge!’

So, he considered that they were giving to him even as they took from him. The True Lord *the Most High* discusses this matter by saying, ‘…And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves…’, that is, beware of thinking that I ask you to give to others; I have asked you to spend in order that I shall increase you in spending and giving. Then He says, ‘…And whatever you spend of good – it will be fully repaid to you….’ The word *yuwaffa* used in the verse means to repay in full. Do not think that you are spending on one who might be ungrateful for the good you have done; for whatever good you spend, God knows of it. So spend upon those who are ungrateful, not those who praise you in return; because by doing this, you take your reward from the one who praises you, and you will have no reward with God.

I always used to say to those who complain of people being ungrateful for favours and forgetting acts of kindness: You deserve this because you had them on your minds when you spent on them; if you had kept God in mind, this would never have happened. Then God says, ‘…And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves, and you do not spend except seeking the Face of God….’ Is this verse meant to praise the deeds of the believers, or it is a command in the form of a statement?

It is both at the same time and it means, ‘Spend seeking the Face of God,’ ‘…And whatever good you [O believers] spend is for yourselves, and you do not spend except seeking the Face of God. And whatever you spend of good – it will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged.’ You shall not be wronged by creatures, nor shall you be wronged by the Creator; as for the creatures, you will have exonerated your religion and your honour by giving up God’s rights from your wealth, so, no one will be able to say anything offensive about you; and as for God, He *the Exalted* will repay what you have spent in goodness many times over.

After this, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about one of the ways of spending on others which was in the early days of Islam:

لِلْفُقَرَآءِ ٱلَّذِينَ أُحْصِرُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ضَرْبًا فِى
ٱلْأَرْضِ يَحْسَبُهُمُ ٱلْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَآءَ مِنَ ٱلتَّعَفُّفِ تَعْرِفُهُم بِسِيمَٰهُمْ لَا
يَسْـَٔلُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ إِلْحَافًا ۗ وَمَا تُنفِقُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِهِۦ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٧٣﴾

[Give] to those needy who are wholly occupied in God’s way
and cannot travel in the land [for trade]. The unknowing
might think them rich because of their self- restraint, but you
will recognize them by their characteristic of not begging
persistently. God is well aware of any good you give [273]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 273)

When we hear a noble verse beginning with a preposition and its object, we know that something must be linked to this. So what does the phrase ‘for the poor’ stand for? Here, it stands for charity, i.e. spending upon the needy who are wholly restricted in the way of God. If we ask what ‘restricted’ *(’uhsiru*) means, we find that in Arabic we have the words *hasar* and *ahsar*, both of which imply preventing or hindering, except that sometimes hindering comes in a form which you are unable to deal with, whilst at other times, it comes in a form you are able to deal with.

If someone is ill, for example, and is therefore held back from travelling about the land, does he have the ability to do so? No; but if someone wants to travel about the land, but a human being like him stops him from doing so, he is thereby prevented. So in both cases, there is hindering, and it might be within the person himself, or it might be the result of the action of someone else. They were ‘restricted in the Way of God’ and held back because the disbelievers restricted the means of living for them; or they wrapped themselves up in struggling in God’s cause and did not want to occupy themselves with anything else because Islam was still in need of people to struggle. These were the ‘People of the Ledge’, ‘…the poor who have been restricted in the Way of God, unable to move about in the land [in search of livelihood]….’ And their inability to do so, stemmed from something which was out of their control, or else from something which they intended, namely to be prepared for struggling in God’s Way; both explanations are possible.

The Helpers (Medinan Muslims/Al-ansar) would bring dates and leave them on their stalks, and hang them on ropes suspended from the pillars of the mosque, and whenever one of the People of the Ledge was hungry, he would take his staff and strike the date stalk so that some dates would fall down for him to eat. Some people would bring poor quality dates and put them there, and this is what God referred to when He said, ‘…And do not seek the defective therefrom to spend [from that in charity] while you would not take it [yourself] except with closed eyes…’ (*al-Baqara*: 267).

If we consider the words of the True Lord ‘…unable to move about in the land [in search of livelihood]…’ we notice that the word in the verse that means ‘move about’ is *darb,* which ordinarily means ‘to strike something firmly’; so what does it mean to ‘(*darb*) about in the land?’ The True Lord wants to make it clear to us that struggling in life must be done with one’s utmost strength; and when you go about the earth, you must strike it with the plough, and strike it with the seeds; do not do things half-heartedly and feebly. For this reason, the True Lord says that He it is Who has made the earth easy to live upon; and He instructs us to go about, then, in all its regions, and eat of the sustenance which He provides; but to always bear in mind that to Him we shall be resurrected (*al-Mulk:* 15).

The earth has been subjugated by the True Lord *the Most High* for man so that he can travel upon it and consume the provision God gives him from it. About those who, being restricted in the Way of God, are unable to move about in the land, God *the Most High* says that ‘…An ignorant [person] would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint and modesty….’ This means that the one who is ignorant of their state might imagine them to be rich, and the reason he might think this is that they refrain from begging; and since this means that they abstain from begging, God then says, ‘…you will know them by their [characteristic] mark: They do not ask people with importunity [or at all]….’ A characteristic mark is a distinguishing sign that shows the state of the one marked by it. It is as though you will find them to be humble, meek, and of lowly appearance even if they do not beg or ask for anything, but you will know from their condition that they deserve to be spent upon. They abstain from begging; and God then says, '…They do not ask people with importunity [or at all]….' It is as though He allowed begging, but did not allow begging accompanied by harassment and importunity; if they simply asked without any harassment and importunity, would this not be a sign that they were not wealthy? Yes; but He said, '…An ignorant [person] would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint and modesty….' So, there is no begging – no begging at all; so, there is the more reason that there is no importunity in begging, which is proved by the fact that God says, '…you will know them by their [characteristic] mark….' If they begged, we would recognise them by their begging. The verse shows us that the thing which is negated here is begging in itself. As for the word 'importunity,' it is used here to give a particular meaning which is intended by the inimitable rhetorical style of the Quran. What is it?

A 'characteristic mark' (*sima*), as we said, is a distinguishing sign that shows the state of the one marked by it, so, it is as though you will find them to be humble, meek, and of lowly appearance even if they do not beg. That is, you will recognise them from their poor condition.

If the person were to actually beg after all this, his begging would be considered importune because his state alone should be enough to indicate his need; and as long as his state indicates his need, it is most likely that he will find someone who will alleviate him of the need to beg; so, if he merely asks, it will be as though he has been persistent and importune in his request.

Furthermore, the True Lord wants the believer to have a penetrating insight with respect to his brother so that he can determine his state just by looking at him and thereby save him the need to beg; for if you recognise the 'characteristic mark,' you must be insightful and discerning, but if you do not recognise the 'characteristic mark' and wait for him to speak to you and ask of you, you suffer from a deficiency of perception. He *the Exalted* wants the believer to be perceptive so that he can discern from the look of his fellow believers and see which of them displays the anxiety of need and which of them shows the concerns of want; and if he recognises this, he will have the insightful perception of faith.

We can learn from a true story of relevance to our topic: Someone knocked on the door of a God-loving man; he answered then, went back inside and brought out something and gave it to him; then, he went back in, weeping. His wife asked him, ‘Why do you weep?’ He said, ‘So-and-so knocked on my door.’ She said, ‘And you gave him something, so, why do you weep?’ He replied, ‘Because I left him until he had to ask of me.’

This Knower of God wept because he felt the responsibility of what he should have known by his insight, and that he should have been aware of the affairs of his brethren. This is why God ordained the gatherings on Friday so that a person can be aware of the absence of any of his brethren – ‘Why did he not come? Is he ill? Has something bad befallen him?’ – and in order that he does not have to leave them until they humiliate themselves and ask of him; and when he does this, he possesses the insightful perception of faith.

‘…And whatever you spend of good – indeed, God is Knowing of it….’ You must know that before you gave, God knew that you would give, and He has the whole matter recorded in a balance, and all of the actions of His creatures are in accordance with His predestination, and what He destined in pre-eternity will inevitably come to pass; and He *the Exalted* destined it because He knew that His servant would do it, and indeed he did. Every action has a time in which to occur and a form in which to occur, and the time is either by night, or by day.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says by way of clarifying the different forms of spending and the times in which they occur:

ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُم بِٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ
أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٧٤﴾

Those who give, out of their own possessions, by night and
by day, in private and in public, will have their reward with
their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve [274]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 274)

The act of spending will necessarily take one of two forms: either in private or in public; and the time will be either by night or by day. God confined the time and state to two things. With respect to time, it is night or day; so, do not hold back something which you want to give and say, ‘I will give it by day or by night because this is better,’ thereby giving yourself an excuse for tardiness in giving it. The True Lord wants you to spend on the needy person whether by night or by day. With respect to mode, it is either private, or public. The question of whether the time is night or day, or of whether the mode is private, or public, has nothing to do with the sincerity of intention in the act of giving.

God says, ‘Those who spend their wealth [in charity] by night and by day, in private and in public – they will have their reward with their Lord….’ Did the verse say ‘Those who spend their possessions by night, or by day’? No; we are all asked to make our spending both by night and by day, and it said ‘in private and in public’; so, spend by night, and spend by day, and spend in private, and spend in public; do not limit spending to night, or to day, nor to any particular time, mode, or state.

The True Lord *the Most High* broadened the time of spending to encompass both night and day, and also broadened the mode of spending to include both private and public, in order that spending will take place at all times and in all forms; and here, the True Lord *the Most High* says that those who do so ‘…will have their reward with their Lord….’ These words refer to all of those who spend, whether by night or by day, and whether privately or publicly.

Nevertheless, some scholars say that these words were revealed concerning a specific event, which was that Imam Ali *God be pleased with him* had four dirhams, and he gave one of them in charity by day, another by night, another in private, and another in public, and this verse was revealed about this act; though the words ‘will have their’ refer to the general meaning, not the particular cause; it is as though the reward which God *the Most High* associates with this act applies universally to all who do it.

When God says, ‘…they will have their reward with their Lord…’, we find the word ‘reward’ (*ajr*) here gives us an image of the position of the believer regarding all acts of spending, since a reward is only given for a deed: a thing has its price, and a deed has its reward. When you give someone a reward, this means they have made some effort for you, and this effort might have produced something of value. God’s words ‘…they will have their reward with their

Lord…' indicate that the believer must consider everything which he gains from his work as something which God wants him to spend from.

God does not give him the price of what he spends, but rather, God gives him the reward for his deed. Why? Because the believer who goes about the earth, plans with his mind, and the mind was created by God, and he implements the plan which he makes with his mind by means of his energy and his limbs, which were also created by God; and he acts with the material on which he works, which was also all created by God. So what part of all this belongs to the person? Not the mind with which he plans, neither the energy with which he acts, nor the material upon which he works, for they all belong to God. So you only have the reward for you work because you use a mind which was created by God, with energy created by God, on materials created by God; and if anything is produced from all this which God wants to take from you and give to your needy, incapacitated brother, He will give you the reward of your work, not the price of your work. Yet, if the one who is equal to you in creation, namely your fellow man, takes from you the fruit of your labour, he gives you the price of that which he takes from you. So from the equal creature, it is a 'price', and from *the Most High* Creator it is a 'reward' because you do not own any part of all this.

After this, He says, '…And no fear will there be on them, nor will they grieve.' Fear means the apprehension of something which may come; so, who fears here? And what is feared? And what is feared for? And from whom do they need not have fear?

It might be that '…no fear will there be on them…' means fear of their own selves, for a student might fear for himself that he will fail, in which case it is the same person that fears and is also feared for; it is fearful now, and feared for later. When the student fears that he will fail, it is not said that the one who fears is the same as the thing which is feared because they are each in a different state.

Or alternatively, '…no fear will there be on them…' might mean fear of someone else because many rich people may be surrounded by fools who, when they see these rich people sharing their wealth generously with others, encourage them to hold back out of fear that they will become poor, perhaps by saying to them, 'Prepare for the future because your children will live on after you.' But good people do not listen to such fools. So, '…no fear will there be on them…' either from themselves or from the fools around them; and the True Lord continues: '…nor will they grieve….' That is, they need have no fear now, nor shall they grieve when they come face to face with the realities of the goodness which God *the Most High* held in store for them; rather, they will rejoice.

After this, the True Lord speaks about one of the most critical issues of our times, which the Quran needed to deal with since it speaks about spending and charity, and there is no doubt that this necessitates one who spends, and one who is spent upon because he is incapable of working. Suppose that the people are all stingy and they do not spend; what will this incapable person do if he finds nothing? His position will be one of two things: he will go and take a loan, and if he finds no one to lend him anything, he will take an interest-bearing loan; otherwise, how will he live?

So, the verses which we are currently examining deal with the economic structure of a generous Islamic community, or a miserly Islamic community. Why? Because the One Who created man made a precise account for man so that if you calculate what those who are well-off are obliged to pay for the poor-due, and you calculate the needs of all those who are naturally unable to work, you will find that the incapable people need exactly what the capable people are obliged to give, no more, no less. If not, there would be a mistake – God forbid – in the reckoning of the Creator, and this could never be the case.

When we look at the makeup of societies, we find that a rich person may feel that he can no longer remain in a particular place, and so he moves to a new place, and the people are amazed, wondering why he left the place when he had ease, comfort and wealth. Were he poor, we would say that he went to seek wealth; but why did he leave this place when he already had wealth, and he had such an easy life? They do not realise that when God created the creation, He managed His universe by subjugating and directing the thoughts which occur to people's minds; you find that he felt he could no longer remain in his place, and his soul was filled with worry, so he decided to go somewhere else.

If we had a precise instrument of calculation, and we counted the needy people in the area from which this person moved, we would find that there was an amount of wealth which was extraneous to the needs of those who lived in this area; therefore, God directed him to another place which required precisely this amount. In this way, we find that the exchange is controlled. So if you see a needy person, or a person who wants to deal in usury, know that there is a deficiency in the implementation of God’s specified and clear rights (the rights of the needy that God prescribed as *zakat* in the money of the wealthy) – and I do not say God’s unspecified rights (charity beyond the prescribed *zakat*) – that is, the wealthy person has selfishly withheld that which he is obliged to spend on the needy.

When the Quran addresses this issue, it addresses it in a way which shows the ugliness of usurious transactions in a way that makes the well-formed human soul repulsed by it. He *the Exalted* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَأۡكُلُونَ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ ٱلَّذِى يَتَخَبَّطُهُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ
مِنَ ٱلۡمَسِّۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّمَا ٱلۡبَيۡعُ مِثۡلُ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْۗ وَأَحَلَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡبَيۡعَ وَحَرَّمَ
ٱلرِّبَوٰاْۚ فَمَن جَآءَهُۥ مَوۡعِظَةٞ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ فَٱنتَهَىٰ فَلَهُۥ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمۡرُهُۥٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِۖ وَمَنۡ
عَادَ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِۖ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ٢٧٥

But those who take usury will rise up on the Day of Resurrection like someone tormented by Satan’s touch. That is because they say, ‘Trade and usury are the same,’ but God has allowed trade and forbidden usury. Whoever, on receiving God’s warning, stops taking usury may keep his past gains – God will be his judge – but whoever goes back to usury will be an inhabitant of the Fire, there to remain [275]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 275)

Look at the word ‘consume.’ Are all the needs of life about eating? No; the needs of life are many, and eating is just one of them, but it is the most important of them because it is the means of preserving life. ‘Usury’ means that which is extraneous, and as long as it is extraneous, this means that it does not need to be consumed, so, this is a way of censuring it. The True Lord wants to show the ugliness of this matter, so, He says that such people have a characteristic mark; the scholars speculate as to whether this mark is something in the Hereafter which marks them out at the Resurrection, as the True Lord says that all who were lost in sin shall by their marks be known (*ar-Rahman:* 41).

Those who did not pray will have a special mark, and those who did not pay the poor-due will have a different special mark so that when you see them, you will know them by their marks, and know which type of sinners they are. It is as though when they arise on the Day of Resurrection, they will arise in a demented state like the one whom Satan confounds with his touch and thereby makes him demented or, alternatively, it might be that this will happen to them even in this world. Let us look into this matter: 'Those who consume usury cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one stands who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity….' We want to know about the words 'confounded,' 'Satan,' and 'touch.' To be confounded (*takhabbut*) means to walk unsteadily and erratically, and you say 'So-and-so is confounded' when his movements are not coherent, and not logical, but rather are movements without any order; this is to be confounded. 'Satan' is a species of God's creation, because God told us that He created man and jinn kind; some of the jinn are devils, whilst others are just jinn, and Satan is the sinner of the jinn. We have not seen Satan, but we know of him because the True Lord, in whom we believe, has told us of him saying: I have hidden creatures, which is why I called them 'jinn' – since the word *jann* means 'concealed,' and the word *majnoon* ('insane') means someone whose mind is covered – and the sinner from amongst these creatures is named Satan.

So, our belief in him is not based on sensation, but rather, on our faith in the unseen things of which He in whom we believe has told us. When we speak about something called 'belief,' we must be aware that it is concerned with things which cannot be tangibly sensed; for you are not asked to 'believe' in tangible things since you can see them for yourself. I do not say, 'I believe that the light is turned on now,' and I do not 'believe' that we are all gathered in the mosque now; I do not say this because it is something we can tangibly sense and witness. So matters of belief are connected to the Unseen such as belief in the existence of angels. Since we believe in the Unseen, we find that the True Lord *the Most High* gives us an image of Satan, but when He gives us an image of Satan or of Satan's head which identifies him just as our heads identify us, He *the Exalted* speaks of the tree of *'Zaqqum,'* saying that it is a tree that grows in the very heart of the blazing fire of hell; its fruit looks like satans' heads (*as-Saffat:* 64-65).

The tree of *Zaqqum* is in the Hereafter in Hell, so, we cannot see it, and we cannot see the heads of the devils; then why would God compare what we have not seen to something else we have not seen, comparing something unknown to something else unknown? We say: Yes, and this is an intentional aspect of the inimitable nature of the Quran; the image of Satan is ugly when imagined, which is borne out by the fact that if you asked the world's cartoonists to draw a picture of Satan, without giving them any particular guidelines, they would all draw the ugliest image they could imagine, each one depicting him from a certain perspective of ugliness so that if you collected all the pictures, no two of them would be alike. Each artist would make the picture he drew ugly; and when we give the prize for the best depiction of Satan, will we give it to the most beautiful picture, or the ugliest? We will give the prize to whoever drew the ugliest picture. So the representative image of Satan is a vile and ugly image; and if there were only a single image of this ugliness, perhaps people might differ about it; perhaps it would be ugly for you, but not ugly for someone else. But when God frees people's imaginations to envisage this ugliness, it will be subjective and clear for every person, which will make the image more perfect and complete; the way to perfection and completion is for the archetype of ugliness to be present in every image.

The True Lord says '…who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity....' We said that Satan is the sinful jinn, and we said that our Lord *the Most High* told us many times that devils have connections and links with many human beings and that certain kinds of humans would seek refuge with certain kinds of jinn: but these only increased their confusion (*al-Jinn:* 6).

They '…cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one stands who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity….' It is as though Satan has touched the human constitution in such a way as to disrupt the balance of his dispositions; for the dispositions of human constitution are balanced with one another, and each motion they make has its balance, and if Satan touches him, the equilibrium of his dispositions is disturbed; the psychological dispositions are unbalanced and inharmonious with one another, so, his actions are disorderly and illogical. What does this image have to do with usurious transactions? If we consider that it is a mark in the Hereafter, it means that if you see someone confounded in the Hereafter, it means that he was one of those who dealt in usury; and in this world too, you find that his actions are illogical and hysterical. How so?

Look at the world today. God created the world in a state of integration; one person enjoys certain abilities and talents, whilst another person has abilities and talents of another kind so that the one who has these abilities, requires the one who has those abilities, and existence is therefore perfected. If every person was simply a repeated unit, everyone would be independent of everyone else; and if everyone had equal talents, people would not need one other. But talents are different because if you are good at one of life's arts, another person will be good at another art which you require; and if they need you for what you excel in, you need them for what they excel in; and in this way, the world is integrated. Likewise, God created the world with hot areas, and cold areas, and mineral-bearing areas, and arable areas so that the world would have to integrate, and everyone in the world would have to live with one another; for this reason, the True Lord says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* that He had spread out the earth for all human beings (*ar-Rahman:* 10).

He spread it out – for whom? And the earth – which earth? And which human beings? 'The earth' means all the planet earth, and 'human beings' means all human beings; so, if it is restricted by barriers, it will be spoiled. Preventing man from moving from one place to another spoils man's motions in the world; a person might want to move to a virgin land to thrive thereupon, but the inhabitants of this land refuse this; yet, if the earth, all the earth, was for human beings, all human beings, if there was no work to be found in one place, you could go somewhere else without any restrictions – these restrictions which have come from temporal powers which seek to claim places for themselves; and this is what spoils the world. There are areas which suffer from food shortages, and areas which suffer from labour shortages so that good arable land is not worked; if all of the earth was for all human creatures, there would be no deficits.

We notice what they speak of 'overpopulation' or 'population explosions,' whilst there are other places which are in need of inhabitants, and there are people in need of places to live comfortably. So why does this lack of equilibrium occur? This lack of equilibrium is the result of the fact that human behaviour is illogical in this universe. The universe in which we live has seen all kinds of intellectual advances, and innovative ambitions have risen to the celestial bodies and invaded outer space, and in every house, there are devices of luxury; does logic not dictate that the world should be living in happiness and comfort?

Logic dictates that the world should be living in comfort and ease because everyday it invents things which allow it to produce more with less effort and in less time; what more do we want? But is the world in which we live in logical line with this reality? No, but rather, we find that even in the wealthiest and most economically powerful nation in the world, the people suffer from anxiety, and it is filled with conflict, and perversion is widespread throughout it, and it suffers from a high level of mental illness in its population.

So, the world is not logical, and this confusion affirms what the True Lord says, '…except as one stands who is being confounded and touched by Satan into insanity….' This hysterical activity in the world shows that the world is not comfortable, and not in harmony with its ambitions and innovations.

Should it not have been incumbent on the world, considering its intellectual advances, to search for the reason for this, and to know why we undergo all this suffering when we have these innovative ambitions? They should indeed have searched; for the affliction is general, and it does not affect underdeveloped and developing nations alone, but rather, it is also present in developed nations. Intellectuals should have held conferences to look into this concern; and since the problem is universal and affects all nations, both developed and developing, we must look for a shared cause, not look for a cause which might be true of some people but not of others. If we had searched, we would have said: It exists in this environment, and also exists in all other environments, so, there must be a common factor.

The kinds of provision which exists in this universe are two: there is provision which is directly benefitted from, and provision which is the means of attaining that which is directly benefitted from. I eat a slice of bread, and this is direct provision; and I drink a cup of water, and this is direct provision; and I wear clothes, and this is also direct provision; and I live in a house, and this fourth thing is also direct provision; and I turn on the light, and this is direct provision. But money brings direct provision, and cannot serve in the stead of direct provision. If I have a mountain of gold and I am hungry, what good is it to me? So, bread is better than it. This is direct provision; with money or gold I can buy this and that, but it cannot replace them for me.

A time has come when people think that money is everything so that it has become a goal, and people have become attached to it. Yet, the truth is that money is not a goal, and it is no good making it into a goal; rather, it is a means. If its nature as a means is lost, and it becomes a goal, it will inevitably corrupt the world; the cause of the entire world's corruption, with respect to the common factor, is money now that it has become a goal instead of a means.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to purify people's economic life in a way which conserves the majority of that which they eat, drink and wear so that their actions will issue from cells which are faithful, pure and clean; since that which issues forth from a cell which is faithful, pure, and clean, can only lead to that which is good.

It is amazing that we find that the people who invented the usurious banking system for us now are trying their utmost to be rid of it – not because they see that getting rid of it, will be a religious purification, but because they see that all of life's evils are the result of this usury. This cry is not something new occurring for the first time in our current times, but is rather old: in 1950, the global economist Schacht, having seen the imbalance of the system in his native country Germany and throughout the world, made a report saying that all of this corruption, was caused by the usurious banking system, and that this system assured that the rich would get richer; and as long as this system assured that the rich would get richer, from where would their extra riches come? Without doubt, they would become richer to the detriment of the poor. So this would lead to a situation where all wealth would end up in the hands of a minority in the world, which would determine everything about the world's future, especially its moral future. Why? Because the ones who love to invest money, consider nothing but financial benefit, and then, manage projects which will achieve financial gains for them. Another economist named Keynes, a leader of the 'free-market' theory of world economics, made his famous statement that wealth will not perform its function in life unless interest rates are lowered to zero which would mean that there would be no usury.

If we look at the procedure of a usurious contract in itself, we find that it is a false contract; for every contract is only made in order to protect the two contracting parties, and usurious contracts only protect the lending party. There is also another moral issue, which is that a person can only give usury if he possesses wealth which is extraneous to his needs.

Yet, a person only takes an interest-bearing loan if he is in need, so, look at the moral degeneracy of the world: the poor needy person who does not have enough to satiate his hunger and his need, is forced to take a loan, and yet, this poor needy person must then repay the principal and more besides to the one who is rich and free of need.

This is a moral degeneracy which will create resentment in society, and create bitterness in society, and it will spell the end of kindness and devalue it among people, and compassion in society will disappear. Whenever a poor person sees a rich person who has wealth, and the rich person stipulates to the poor needy person that he must repay what he takes from him and more besides, what will this do to the feelings and emotions of the poor person? It would have been enough for the rich person to give to the poor person and then, to take back later, what he gave him; but the usurious rich person wants the poor person to repay what he took and more besides. Some people are used to making excuses and say: The Quranic text only talks about usury which demands repayments which are doubled and redoubled, so, if we limit it so that it does not reach the level of redoubling, it will not be unlawful!

That is, they wanted to justify giving a poor person money and then, making him pay back only double, not many doubles so that this level of repayment would not be unlawful. To these people, we say: Those who say this are trying to manipulate the Quranic text, as though God would leave the text in such a way that they could manipulate it and steal from it what they want without placing anything in the text which prevents such manipulation. They should have noticed that God says, at the end of the matter, that if usurious lenders repent, then, they will be entitled to the return of their principal; they will do no wrong, and neither will they be wronged (*al-Baqara*: 279). This decisive statement clarifies that God did not make exception for either a single doubling, or many. So when God commands the believers not to consume usury, doubling and re-doubling it – but to fear God so that they might attain success (*Al-'Imran*: 130), these wise words only came to show the reality of the situation in which they were living, and God did not make exception for either single doubling, or any redoubling; for the True Lord made the starting-point of repentance: that a person takes back his principal only; God does not allow anyone to take an additional half, or double, or two doubles; He does not allow any doubling, or redoubling.

Similar people with usurious state of mind and intentions, also used to make the excuse that if two parties are both in agreement on anything this constitutes an agreement and a contract. This might well have been the case were it not for the fact that there is a Lawgiver higher than all men who has authority over this agreement and the right to control it – every time two parties agree on something, does it automatically become lawful?

If this were the case, fornication would be lawful because both parties agree on it. This matter – the agreement of both parties – only applies to those things for which there is no specific legislation from *the Most High* Lawgiver, namely God, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of All existence.

God has stipulated something which abrogates any agreement that might exist between you and me; for He has ultimate authority, and He is the One Who has passed judgement on the matter; and there can be no valid agreement between us about something which contravenes what God has legislated or what He has decreed. If we look at this matter in another way, we find that the agreement which they claim exists is to be rejected; it is a false 'agreement' when subjected to careful scrutiny and logical examination. Why? Because we say that an agreement between two people is only fair if what they have agreed upon does not affect anyone else; if what they agree on affects someone else besides them, it is a false agreement.

Suppose that a person has nothing, and another person has a thousand; the one who has a thousand possesses it, and puts it to work in some way; and when the one who owns the thousand does this work, he requires the payment for his work in order to live from this payment. As for the one who has nothing, who if he wants to do the same thing the one who owned a thousand did, he goes to someone and takes a thousand from him in order to put it to work as the owner of the thousand did; and the one who gives him this thousand stipulates that he must pay an extra hundred when he pays it back, then in this case, the one who borrowed the thousand not only requires a return for his labour like the owner of the thousand did, but also requires the extra hundred which the one who gave him the interest-bearing loan requires. Where will the one who borrowed the thousand get this hundred from? Even if his wares are the same value as the wares of the other man, he will lose out; and if his wares are of a lower value than those of the other, they will sell badly and fail.

So, he will have no option but to utilise a deceitful ruse, which is to make his wares superficially seem to resemble those of the other, whilst reducing the active elements of the production of his wares, taking from them that which is equal to the extra one hundred he has to pay to the creditor as usury. So who will pay for this? The consumer will. So, the consumer is harmed by this agreement and he is the one who will suffer because he will end up paying the value of the merchant's loan through his wares, as well as the value of the usurious amount which the creditor stipulated. So the usurious contract between the debtor and the creditor – even according to their understanding – is an invalid contract despite the fact that they – the debtor and the creditor – both agree on it.

the True Lord *the Most High* wants mercy and compassion to spread amongst people, and mutual affection to spread amongst people. The True Lord, the Owner of all blessings wanted to spread through the people the concept that everyone who is granted favours in this world, must share these favours with others; and when the needy person sees these favours, he will know that he will benefit from them, and since he will benefit from them, he will not look at them with bitterness, nor with envy, nor will he hope for them to end because he will get something out of them.

But if the general practice is that the possessor of favours in this world wants to take advantage of everyone who benefits from his favours, and does not look after the right of God in the purpose of these favours, and does not share these favours with others, and when the needy person sees this, he will hope for these favours to go away from their possessor, and he will look at them with envy, and so bitterness will spread along with resentment, and corruption will find the perfect opportunity to spread through the whole of society.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants three elements to regulate the economy: The first element is support and pure giving so that the poor needy person finds a rich person to give to him; not in the form of the True Lord's law of the known poor-due (prescribed *zakat*), but in the form of the True Lord's law of (unlimited) charity; and this is support. The second element is the right to that which is obligatory, namely the prescribed poor-due or *zakat*. The third element is the right to borrow, which is debt.

So, there are three things which govern Islamic economics: either voluntary charity, or paying the obligatory poor-due, or giving a goodly loan; this is what the Islamic economic system is built upon. Let us consider the words of the True Lord *the Most High* when He presents this matter and shows the ugliness of the state of those who consume usury by saying that they do not stand except as one might stand whom Satan has confounded and befuddled with his touch. Why? Because, as the True Lord says of them, '…"Trade is [just] like usury."' What is being discussed here – usury, or trade? It is usury which is being discussed here. It might have been more logical to say, 'Usury is just like trading'; so what made them turn things around? The Quranic text here alludes to how they are confounded even when it comes to the thing which they want to argue for. It is as though they said, 'As long as you want to forbid usury, trading is like usury, so, you must also forbid trade. 'The context should have made them say, 'Usury is like trading,' but the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to show us how they were confounded, so, He placed into their mouths the words 'Trading is just like usury, so if you have forbidden usury then forbid trading; and if you have allowed trading then allow usury.' They want them either to stay both or be eliminated both.

So, giving the decisive verdict, God said, '…But God has permitted trade and has forbidden usury. So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists….' Ibn Mas'ud *God be pleased with him* is narrated to have said, 'The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* cursed the one who consumes usury and the one who gives it.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim; the narrations of At-Tirmidhi and others add: 'And its two witnesses and the one who records it in writing'*

An admonition from God has come; and if an admonition comes from someone who does not stand to benefit from it, it is logical that it be accepted; on the other hand, the admonition that is doubtful is the one in which he who gives it, stands to get some benefit from it. If the admonition comes from someone who does not stand to benefit from this admonition, this is a reason to accept it. '…So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists….' Let us consider the word 'his Lord': when it comes here, it means the True Lord, Who has undertaken your sustenance and instruction, and Who takes care of sustenance through creation by bringing into being that which preserves life, and that which preserves the species, and who protects everything by subjugating everything to you, O man; so, as a human being, you must be respectful before your Lord, and not put yourself in a position where you accuse the Lord and Creator of any suspicion of benefiting from this admonition – God forbid. Why? Because the Creator is Sustainer and Educator, and since He is Lord, this means He undertakes your sustenance and instruction; so, beware, O man, of rebelling against the admonition of the Lord and Educator. '…So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past….' This means that the command was not retroactive, so, it did not apply to what had taken place before it was ordained because it was taken before the prohibition had been revealed; and this is mercy. Why? Because it might have been the case that a usurious creditor had managed his life by means of the usury he had been receiving before the prohibition was revealed; and if this was the case, the True Lord *the Most High* pardoned all that had gone before; and the usurious creditor had to begin his life afresh according to the new economic model.

This is the greatness of the Divine law: '…and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with God….' That is, he will be allowed to keep his past gains from before usury was prohibited; and the words '…his affair rests with God…' indicate that when God *the Most High* forgives what has gone before, He has the absolute right to legislate what He wills, so, you should always attach yourself to the continuation of grace from God; '…his affair rests with God….' Such a person might say, 'I will be financially destroyed, and my position will be toppled, and I will become such-and-such.' No; place your trust in God, for God can replace any loss, and He *the Exalted* does not want to put people's positions in jeopardy, but rather wants to say to them: If I take away any of your favours, then, place yourselves in the care of He Who gives all favours.'

As long as you have placed yourself in the care of the One Who gives all blessings, the blessing itself is nothing because the One Who gives all blessings, will replace this blessing. Usury is one of the seven deadly destructive sins that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded us to avoid when he said, 'Avoid the seven deadly sins.' His Companions asked, 'O Messenger of God, what are they?' He answered, 'Associating partners with God; sorcery; killing a soul that God made inviolable, save for a just reason; consuming usury; consuming the wealth of an orphan; turning back from a military advance; and defaming unwitting chaste, believing women.'(1)

The verse says, '…and his affair rests with God. But whoever returns to [dealing in usury]…,' that is, return to it after the admonition: what will be their case? The answer is: '…those are the inmates of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.' It would have been enough to say of them that '…those are the inmates of the Fire…;' for perhaps one of them might be a believer, and yet still return to sinful ways, and thus be required to spend time in hell. Yet, His words '…they will abide eternally therein' indicate that they have thereby left the realm of faith altogether; and in order to understand these final words, you must understand the preceding words very well; for there are two matters here: there is usury which God has forbidden, and there are people who wish to make usury lawful by saying '…"Trade is [just] like usury …"'; if you return to usury, whilst nevertheless believing it to be forbidden, you are a sinful believer, who will enter the hellfire. Yet, if you return to your old ways of debating its unlawfulness, saying '…Trade is [just] like usury…', and you argue against the unlawfulness of usury and seek to make it lawful like trading, you are thereby leaving the religion of Islam; and by leaving the religion of Islam, you thereby condemn yourself to eternity in hell.

With this in mind, we must alert those who argue for usury, and tell them to at least say, 'Usury is unlawful, but we are unable to bring ourselves to annul it and leave it,' and tell them that they must struggle against themselves to stop doing it so that they do not expose themselves to war from God and His Messenger. If they believe that usury is unlawful, they will only be sinners; yet, if they attempt to justify usury and make it lawful, they will fall into something even more evil than this, which is disbelief – and we seek refuge with God.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

We know that Adam *peace be upon him* disobeyed his Lord, and ate from the tree, and Satan also disobeyed his Lord; yet, when Adam received certain words from his Lord, He turned to him in forgiveness whilst God cast Satan out. So why did He cast Satan out and make him an object of curse? It is because Adam admitted the sin, and acknowledged that they had sinned against themselves (*al-A'raf*: 23). Adam acknowledged: 'Your judgement, O Lord is the judgement of truth, but I sinned against myself.' But Satan protested and objected, wondering to his Lord whether it will be right for him to prostrate himself before one whom the Lord has created of clay (*al-Isra':* 61). So it is as though he threw the command back at the One Who issued it.

After this, and after God made clear the ruling concerning usury, and stated that whosever desists would be allowed to keep his past gains; what about those who return to it? '…But whoever returns to [dealing in usury]…' which is the contrast, '…those are the inmates of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.' He *the Exalted* wants to say: Beware of allowing the word *riba* ('usury') to deceive you, for words can deceive people; for you called it *riba* which literally means 'increase' out of a superficial understanding that usury is an increase, whilst the poor-due is a decrease; usury will turn one hundred into one hundred and ten, for example, depending on the rate of interest, whilst the poor-due turns one hundred into 97.5 with respect to money and merchandise – with some difference in the case of agricultural and other concerns. On the surface, it seems that usury brings gain, whilst the poor-due brings a loss, but this decrease and this increase are only according to your definitions and your conventions. Yet, the True Lord *the Most High* deprives this increase of any blessing ,whilst He causes this loss to bring growth; so He *the Exalted* says:

يَمۡحَقُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ وَيُرۡبِي ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿٢٧٦﴾

God blights usury, but blesses charitable deeds with multiple increase. He does not love the ungrateful sinner [276] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 276)

The word *yamhaq* (rendered here as ‘destroys’) comes from the word *mahq* which means to be wasted gradually; that is, not to be destroyed in one strike, but rather to be lost gradually without being noticed; from this root is derived the word *mihaq* which means the waning of the moon. ‘…God destroys usury…’ thus means that He makes it seemly to its possessor, and then, ruin gradually comes to him without him noticing it.

If we perhaps carefully scrutinise the environments around us, we will find the corroboration of this. How many people have dealt in usury, and we have seen them and known them, and after this we saw how their lives ended up. ‘God destroys usury and gives increase for charities….’ In another verse, God says that whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through people’s money will bring no increase in the sight of God (*ar-Rum:* 39).

So, beware of thinking that you are deceiving God by doing this; and what is the contrasting side? In the same verse cited above, God states that whatever you give out in charity, seeking God’s Face, it is they, they that shall have their recompense multiplied (*ar-Rum:* 39). They are those who thereby make the thing multiply many times over.

When the True Lord says, ‘God destroys usury…’, do not underestimate the fact that the action is ascribed to God. When an action is ascribed to its doer, it must take its mode from the self of the doer. If you are told that so-and-so who is weak, will punch you, or that so-and-so the boxer will punch you, you will certainly judge this blow according to the one who delivers it. If God is the One Who says ‘God destroys usury…,’ could there be any destruction above this? No, there could not.

Also, when God says, ‘God destroys usury and gives increase for charities…’ in the Quran – which is recited by Muslims everywhere, and which is inimitable and preserved, and which challenges by being preserved, this is something which is absolutely guaranteed. ‘God destroys usury and gives increase for charities…’ because the One who said it is God, in His Preserved Book, which is recited as an act of worship; that is, the matter is on the lips of everyone, and in the hearts of all the believers. Would God say something, which would then, be preserved in this way, if a time could ever come to disprove it? No; this is not possible. A person only preserves the documents which he will rely on to help him; I only keep hold of the bill of exchange which concerns me. As long as He preserves it, and He asserts that it was He Who sent the ‘Warning’ and that He is its Guardian (*al-Hijr*: 9). This means that He *the Exalted* will mention certain issues in it, and these issues are what He has vowed to preserve; and He would not have vowed to preserve them unless they would be a proof of His veracity in saying them, since if something does not prove anything we do not preserve it.

For example, He *the Exalted* asserts that His soldiers will be the victorious ones (*as-Saffat:* 173). This is a matter of the Quran which God vowed to preserve, so, the reality of life must surely come to support it; for if the reality of life did not support it, what would the situation be? Would we disbelieve the Quran – and far be it for us to disbelieve the Quran – which is the speech of the True Lord, other than whom there is no deity to manage His universe besides Him?

‘God destroys usury and gives increase for charities; and God does not like every sinning disbeliever.’ Why did God use the intensive form *kaffar* (stubbornly disbelieving) instead of just *kafir* (disbeliever), and why did He use the intensive form *atheem* (persistent in sinful ways) instead of just *athim* (sinful)? It is because such a person wants to throw God’s ruling back at Him; and in doing this, he has disbelieved twice: once in that he did not acknowledge this, and once in that he threw God’s ruling back at Him. And he is a ‘persistent sinner’ (*atheem*) rather than just a ‘sinner’ (*athim*); and we can infer from this use of the intensive adjectival form that the issue which we are currently examining is a universal issue related to civilisation and society, and if it is not as God wants it to be, all the pillars of society will be shaken.

After having explained the bitterness of such a situation to us by using repeated intensive forms – *kaffar* (stubbornly disbelieving) and *atheem* (persistent in sin) – the True Lord presents to us the contrasting view so that we can taste the sweetness of the contrast. This is like the words of the poet:

The face is as white as the dawn,
And the hair is as black as night:
Two opposites which are beautiful when drawn together;
For the opposite shows the beauty of its opposite.

It is as though, after speaking about the stubborn disbeliever and the persistent sinner, God wants to bring us back to the sweetness of faith, saying:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَأَقَامُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَوُا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ
لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٧٧﴾

**Those who believe, do good deeds, keep up the prayer,
and pay the prescribed alms will have their reward with
their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve [277]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 277)**

We said that the word 'reward' (*ajr*) implies that no created being owns any product, but rather, we are all hired workers. Why? Because we use the brain which God created, work by the energy which God created, on the material which God created; so, what do you possess, apart from your work, O man? As long as you possess nothing but your work, you will have a reward: '…will have their reward with their Lord….' The expression 'with their Lord' here attracts our attention because when you are given a reward by your equal, he might bilk you; whilst the reward you take from your Lord Who has undertaken your sustenance, will never be lost.

The True Lord then says, '…and there will be no fear on them…,' no fear from themselves for themselves, nor any fear of their loved ones for them; '…nor will they grieve' because if any good had passed them by, they will find it there in front of them. After this, the True Lord says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَذَرُواْ مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ
ٱلرِّبَوٰٓاْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ٢٧٨

You who believe, beware of God, give up any outstanding dues from usury, if you are true believers [278] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 278)

When the True Lord says, ‘O you who have believed…,’ we know that the call to the faithful indicates that a command of moral responsibility will follow. When the True Lord calls with the words ‘O you who have believed…,’ this means: O you who believe in Me as a Wise, All-Powerful God Who is free of need of you and has control of everything; your disobedience does not harm Me, and your obedience does not benefit Me; so, if you believe in Me, and I am a Wise, All-Powerful God, listen to Me as I give you the rulings I have chosen for you.

So every call of ‘O you who have believed…’ in the Quran, lays the ground for every ruling which comes after it; you do as God commands you, and if anyone asks you, ‘Why did you do this?’, say to him, ‘I did it because I am a believer, and the One Who commanded me to do it, is the One in whose wisdom and power I believe.’ You do not enter into the labyrinth of attempting to find reasons for these rulings because you believe that God is a Wise, All-Powerful God Who sent down these responsibilities to you. Beware of entering the labyrinth of attempting to find reasons for rulings; why? Because there are some things whose reasons might elude you: will you put them off until you know the reason for them?

Did we postpone the ruling of the unlawfulness of pork until it was recently proven by analysis that it is harmful? No; if it was proven recently by analysis that it is harmful, this increases our trust in every ruling with which God has commanded us whose reason we have not yet been guided to. The True Lord says, ‘O you who have believed, fear God….’ One of the wonders of the command ‘fear God’ is that it is used for things which seem to be contradictory when actually they are related. ‘O you who have believed, fear God….’ He did not say here, ‘fear the Fire,’ as He indeed did say in another verse, ‘fear the Fire.’ So, why would He say, ‘fear God’ and also ‘fear the Fire’? It is because the word ‘fear’ (*ittaqu*) means, ‘Place a shield (*wiqaya*) between yourself and your Lord.’

How can we place a shield between ourselves and our Lord when our faith requires us to adhere to God’s Way in order that we be always in the company of God? We say that God *the Most High* possesses Attributes of Majesty such as the All-Dominant, and the Lord of Retribution, and the All-Compeller, and the Lord of Might, and the Lord of Stern Punishment; and He asks his believing servant to place a shield between himself and the Attributes of Majesty; and the hellfire is one of the hosts of the Attributes of Majesty. When He *the Exalted* says, ‘fear God,’ this means, ‘place a shield between yourselves and the Attributes of Majesty, one of the hosts of which is the Hellfire.’ So, ‘fear God’ is akin to ‘fear the Fire,’ that is, place a shield between yourselves and the fire.

The True Lord goes on: ‘…and give up what remains [due to you] of usury, if you are believers.’ The command ‘give up’ means leave, forsake, and abandon, and seek goodness from God, as far as all outstanding gains from usury are concerned, if you are truly believers in God. It is as though God wanted to make this a complete purification, after which the believer would be reborn in a pure and clean state.

This is a command from the True Lord, saying: Leave the usury which you have not yet collected; for that which you have already collected is covered by the words ‘past gains’, whilst you must leave that which you have not yet collected. This is God’s command: ‘…fear God and give up what remains [due to you] of usury, if you are believers.’ If you say that the contracts were agreed upon before the prohibition, and the contracts therefore give you the right to take this, remember that you have not yet claimed this right, so, it is not in your hand; do not say, ‘My economic life is based on it’ because the basis of your economic life did not arise from agreeing to this usury, but rather, it arises by your collecting it – and you did not collect it. The True Lord continues:

فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا۟ فَأْذَنُوا۟ بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ ۖ وَإِن تُبْتُمْ فَلَكُمْ
رُءُوسُ أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧٩﴾

If you do not, then be warned of war from God and His
Messenger. You shall have your capital if you repent, and
with- out suffering loss or causing others to suffer loss [279]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 279)

This verse presents a universal matter which many people ignore. A system came to protect one sector of people from the oppression of another sector, and this system only came after there emerged the sector of usurious profiteers who oppressed the sector of the weak and needy. Sufficient was for those weak people who were exploited by the usurious profiteers that the Quran gave them justice and brought an end to usury in such a way that it allowed those who dealt in usury, to keep what they had gained before since they had based their lives on it.

The verse warns the usurers: '…then be informed of a war [against you]….' The word 'be informed' here (*fa'dhanu*) is derived from the root (*'-dh-n*), from which are derived the words *idhn* ('permission') and *udhun* ('ear'); the basis of this root is the concept of informing; for a person is not automatically assumed to be able to read, and he cannot read unless he first hears, and therefore the passing of information can only arise through hearing. When the True Lord *the Most High* spoke about the means by which a person attains knowledge, He tells us that it was He Who has brought us forth from our mothers' wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed us with hearing, sight and minds so that we might have cause to be grateful (*an-Nahl:* 78).

This is why when the science of physiology came to study this matter, they found that it followed the same principle that God had described for them. If someone puts their finger right up to the eye of a new-born baby, it does not so much as blink because its eyes are not yet performing their function; but if you shout next to its ear, it will react.

We have discovered that the first sensory organ of a new-born child to perform its function is the ear, which is also the organ that performs its function for a person whether he is awake or asleep. The eye closes during sleep, so, it cannot see, yet, the ear remains alert at all times, so, it can hear because it is the organ of reception. So the root of the words *adhan*, ('call to prayer'), and *udhun*, ('ear'), revolves around the concept of hearing. God *the Most High* says that at the end of time, the earth will hear and obey the command of its Lord to split asunder, as in truth, it must (*al-Inshiqaq:* 5).

What does *adhinat* (hear and obey) mean? When you hear something from someone who is equal to you, you might obey, or you might not, but when you hear it from an All-Powerful God, you have no option but to obey. It is as though God is saying: The earth will be split asunder when it hears My command for it to split. Simply by the earth's hearing the command from the True Lord, it will do as bidden; and it is right for it to do so: it obeys (*adhinat*) the command of God, that is, it yields to it because the One Who uttered the command was God. So, all the meanings of this lexical root come from the word *udhun* ('ear') which is why God says to those who do not obey His command concerning usury, 'And if you do not, then be informed of a war [against you] from God and His Messenger….' As for the war with God, we only say of it what God said: No one can know the soldiers and forces of the Lord but He (*al-Muddaththir:* 31).

And no one can take precautions against them. As for the war with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, this is the manifest matter. It is as though God will unleash against usurious profiteers a terrible host of His forces which no one knows but Him, whilst in the war of the Messenger of God, the forces are those who believe in the Messenger, who must wage war against every manifestation of corruption in the universe in order to purify their lives from the taint of usury.

In this way, God set a limit to the modes of transactions so that wealth can be cleansed from this usury. When the True Lord said, '…you may have your principal – [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged,' this means that He *the Exalted* is showing us by these words that there is no right for usurious profiteers to claim one double or two, nor any further multiples; and in this way 'you do no wrong' to those from whom you took usury in the past, by taking more from them than your principal.

But what is the meaning of 'nor are you wronged' and who is it that would wrong them? The weak person who was wronged by them before, might wrong them by taking some of their principal under the pretence that they exploited him before by taking back more than their principal. The Lawgiver wants to prevent the former wrongdoer by forbidding his wrong, and to mollify the one who was wronged by giving him his right; He *the Exalted* does not want to direct injustice so that the one who was wronged before, utilises it to wrong the one who wronged him first. Rather, by this ruling He *the Exalted* wanted to bring a complete end to this kind of injustice, and make everyone benefit equally from the advantages of the ruling.

Many of the theories which come to change the system in a society are biased against the side that was in the wrong; they do not only put an end to their injustice, but they allow the one who was wronged to exact revenge on the one who wronged him. This is the bias of society, and this is what people need to be very aware of; for God has given you justice, O you who was wronged, and prevented the one who wronged you from doing so; and now you must respect His ruling when He says that the usurious lender '…may have what is past…,' and with this statement the matter is settled.

God *the Most High* renews the matter with a new and fair balance which brings you and him together on a level footing, without any injustice from you, O you who was wronged before, on the pretext that the lender has wronged you for so long. When societies live according to this system of '…you do no wrong, nor are you wronged…,' they live on a basis of fairness, not directed injustice.

We criticise one sector of people for having wronged others, then we bring another sector and allow them to wrong others in their turn! No; everyone must be on an equal footing from now on.

The corruption of any system in society comes from the directing of injustice from a new sector to an old sector because in this case, the injustice continues to exist. One sector was unjust, and then, the sector which was wronged comes to do injustice to the sector which was unjust before. We say to them: this is directed injustice, and we want fairness to be institutionalised and spread to every member of society so that everyone can claim what is rightfully his: We prevent the one who was unjust at an earlier time before the revelation of God’s rulings from doing any further wrong, and we give justice to the one who was oppressed before, and in this way everyone becomes on a level footing so that society can proceed in a way that is fair, and governed by a principle of faith. We can only respond to those who disobey God in our regard by obeying God in their regard.

After this, the Quran comes to open a new door of hope for those who have been wronged, and to set a limit for those who were unjust before and who were allowed to claim their principal and forbade from taking anything more than that; so, it softened their hearts towards those people, and told them, ‘It is not absolutely necessary to take your principal now, but rather, you should wait and allow the debtor some time if he is in straitened circumstances; and if you grow in maturity of faithful certainty, and you are pleased to accept God above anything else that you might lose, then forgo and give up even your principal, which God has allowed you to claim in order that you may rise in rank by means of it, and give it to those who are unable to pay.’ So, the True Lord says:

وَإِن كَانَ ذُو عُسۡرَةٖ فَنَظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيۡسَرَةٖۚ وَأَن تَصَدَّقُواْ
خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡۖ إِن كُنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ٢٨٠

If the debtor is in difficulty, then delay things until matters become easier for him; still, if you were to write it off as an act of charity, that would be better for you, if only you knew [280] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 280)

‘If someone is in hardship….’ The ruling was given to allow the creditor to claim his principal; but suppose the debtor is in straitened circumstances. There is an issue here which is raised by some of the orientalists who claim to have studied Arabic, yet have studied it in a mechanical way without acquiring the deep natural feeling for it; for language is not only about mechanics; language is also about nature, and language is about disposition, and language is about feelings. They say that the Quran breaches some of the rules of its own language, and they use this verse as an example of this: ‘And if someone is in hardship, then [let there be] postponement until [a time of] ease. But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew.’

Some orientalists say, ‘We want to ask Quran scholars about the predicate of the verb ‘is’ (*kana*) here in God’s words ‘And if someone is in hardship….’ It is true that there is no predicate for the verb *kana* here, but the one who asks this does not possess an intrinsic disposition for Arabic because since he has studied Arabic, he must know that *kana* requires a subject and a predicate, and that the subject is in the nominative case, whilst the predicate is in the accusative case, and in this case, the verb *kana* is called ‘defective’ (*naqisa*)*;* he should also have been aware that the verb *kana* can also come in a form known as ‘complete’ (*tamma*)*,* meaning that it does not have a predicate, in which case there is only a subject in the nominative case; and this requires a simple explanation.

Every verb indicates an action and a time, and when you hear the word ‘is’ (*kana*)*,* it indicates existence and a general action and does not indicate the specific condition of its subject, for example: Is he hard-working? Is he lazy? So, it indicates the general existence of something, but not its state; this means that the verb ‘is’ (*kana*) indicates the general time of existence, that is, the bare unfinished concept; and the purpose of something general can only be shown when it is specified: if you want to indicate the existence of something specific to clarify the meaning and show it, you must add to it a predicate; for example, by saying, ‘Zaid is hard-working’; this indicates something specific, namely the hard work of Zaid. So in this case, the verb ‘is’ is defective because it requires a predicate to complete it and to give it a specific existence. If this is not the case, and we wish to state the existence alone, the verb ‘is’ (*kana*) is complete, not defective, i.e. it is enough to give its subject alone, for example by saying, ‘The one who had been away came home, so, there was joy’, that is, joy existed; or ‘The sun came up, so, there was light.’ A poet said:

It was, and the dawn therein was not white,
And it passed, and the night therein was not black.

Therefore, the expression ‘…And if someone is in hardship…’ means ‘if there exists one who is in hardship,’ that is, if there is a person who is unable to pay the loan back, let the creditor grant him ‘…postponement until [a time of] ease…,’ that is, until things are easier for him; and in this case the principal will be a ‘goodly (non-usurious) loan,’ and for every moment in which the creditor is patient concerning it, God will give him a reward.

We should be aware that the reward for a goodly loan is more than the reward for charity because when you give charity, you have no further hope regarding it, and you do not think about it, and you earn your reward for this all at once; yet, when you give a loan, your heart remains attached to it, and every time the attachment to it is severe and the love of wealth rouses you yet you have patience, you thereby earn reward. This is why you must be sure to ascertain that the loan is a goodly loan, and the one who takes the loan is excused rightfully – for there is a difference between being excused rightfully and being excused wrongfully: the one who is excused rightfully, is the one who tries his utmost to repay the debt, but circumstances stand in his way and prevent him from doing so; whilst the one who is excused wrongfully has enough to repay his debt, but he delays doing so, and keeps the money and uses it – and in doing so, he is a wrongdoer.

For this reason, test yourself and you will find that for every debt which disturbs your heart, know that the debtor is able to pay it back, but he has not; and for every debt where you feel that your heart is at ease, cool and tranquil, know that the debtor is rightfully excused and is unable to pay it back; and you might be shy to pass him by out of fear that you will embarrass him, and he will feel ashamed just by seeing you. Such people as this do not remain in debt for a long time because the Messenger announced a judgement on this matter, saying: 'Whosoever takes people's money with the intention of paying it back, God will see that it is paid back for him; and whosoever takes people's money intending to waste it, God will lay waste to him.'(1)

As long as the debtor's intention when he takes it, is to pay it back, God will make it easy for him to pay it back; and if he takes it with the intention of wasting it, God will not make it easy for him to repay it because he will not be able to leave aside any money with which his debts might be repaid. There was an incident in the life of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* which explains this Hadith for us, which is that a man died whilst in debt, and when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* was told that he was in debt, he said to his Companions: 'Pray (the funeral prayer) for your brother.'

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him*

So, he did not pray it himself, but rather, he asked his Companions to do so. Why did he not pray? Because he had said before: ‘Whosoever takes people’s money with the intention of paying it back, God will see that it is paid back for him.’ As long as the man died without having paid it back, his intention must have been to put off repaying it; but the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* did not prevent his Companions from praying the funeral prayer for the man.

And the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* dealt with the one who is in hardship with the munificence of faith, saying, ‘Whoever gives more time to one who is straitened, or forgoes his debt, God will cover them with His shade on a day when there is no shade but His.’(1) The meaning of ‘gives more time’ is to delay and put off the deadline for the collection of the debt, and not to follow it up, and not to imprison him for his debt and chase him up; and if the creditor rises even higher in his certitude of faith, he would say to him, ‘Go, may God give recompense for both me and you,’ and that would be the end of it. This is why the True Lord says, ‘…But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew,’ and the fruit of this is the best of rewards from God. You may either delay and give more time, or else remit part, or all of the debt by way of charity, and you are free to do as you choose. Look at the precision of the treatment of the True Lord in how He put an end to this economic problem which was a major concern of the environment of the pre-Islamic times of ignorance.

From what has preceded, we know that Islam bases economic activity on munificence and giving, and the True Lord *the Most High* spoke about it in the verses of spending which began with His words: ‘…The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is like a grain…’ and He spoke at length about spending; and ‘spending’ includes both that which is obligatory upon you such as the *zakat* (poor-due), and that which you give voluntarily. When someone gives something voluntarily, above and beyond that which God obliges him to give, God *the Most High* considers this as the right of the needy person, but an ‘unspecified’ right. To have a good understanding of this matter we need to have a close look at God’s statements in the following verses: God states that the God-fearing will be amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them because, assuredly, they were *muhsinin* ('doers of good/seeking perfection in worship') in the past (worldly life); they would not sleep but for a short time during the night (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-17).

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Abu Al-Yusr*

Does Islam require us to only sleep for a short time of the night? No; the Muslim has the right to offer the *'Isha* ('night') Prayer and then sleep, and then rise to offer the *Fajr* ('dawn') Prayer, and this is what Islam requires. But here, the True Lord *the Most High* is speaking about the *muhsinin* (seekers of perfection in worship), the doers of good who have entered the status of excellence (*ihsan*) with God.

Furthermore, the God-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them because, assuredly, they were *muhsinin* in their worldly life; they would not sleep but for a short time during the night, and would pray for pardon in the pre-dawn hours (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-18). Does Islam oblige the believer to rise in the late hours of the night to pray for forgiveness? No; the Muslim has only to perform the obligations; but if he wants to enter the status of *ihsan* ('excellence'), he must know that the way to this is praying for forgiveness in the late hours of the night. The discourse here concerns the status of excellence. And the True Lord adds about those who have attained this status that in their wealth is a share to the needy beggars and to the deprived (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15).

God *the Most High* assigned, from the wealth of those who have attained the status of excellence, a due share for the beggar and the deprived, but He did not specify the value or form of this due share, and whether it is something known, or unknown. But when God speaks about the general believers, He *the Exalted* describes them as those in whose possessions there is a specific due share for those who ask for help and for the deprived (*al-Ma'arij:* 24-25).

So, we see that from the wealth of the one who has attained the status of excellence, there is an unspecified share for the beggar and the deprived, but from the wealth of the ordinary believer there is a specified due share, namely the poor-due. The status of excellence is above that of general faith because the due share of the believer's wealth is known, whereas in the case of *ihsan* ('the status of excellence') part of their wealth is a due share to be given to the needy, even though it is unspecified, i.e. unlimited.

We have seen that some jurists say that since the poor-due is the right of the needy person from the wealthy person, if the wealthy person refuses to give him this right, he should be considered to be stealing from the needy person; and if the amount is equal to the minimum value considered by the legal definition of stealing, he should be subjected to the legal punishment of stealing: amputation, and the minimum value considered by the legal definition of stealing is a quarter of a gold *dinar*. Islam then bases its social issues either on supererogatory spending, or obligatory spending. If people's souls are miserly, and they are unable to give anything more than what is prescribed for them, and the love of wealth settles in their hearts so firmly that they cannot be separated from it, God *the Most High* says to every one of them: You refuse to be separated from your wealth, and I have forbidden usury; so, how can we meet in order to set a sound foundation for society? We will preserve your wealth for you, and prevent you from gaining any usury; and in this way we will meet in the middle of the road: We will not take your wealth, and you will not take from others anything extra on top of this wealth

And the True Lord *the Most High* revealed the verse of credit to explain this; and this verse is the longest verse in the whole of the Quran. Why so? Because upon this credit, the economic issues of society are based for those who do not have an income allowing them to live easily. When the True Lord revealed the verse of credit, He did not issue it as a rigid and dry piece of legislation, but rather phrased it in an emotive way; that is, He combined legislation with emotion, and the True Lord combined the rigidity of the law with the spirit of Islam, and did not do it in a dry style.

When human lawmakers legislate, they issue laws in a dry spiritless fashion; for example, 'Whoever kills must be killed', and so on. But the True Lord *the Most High* does not speak in this way, even with respect to the most violent of disputes, namely disputes of blood: He *the Exalted* says, '…But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct. This is an alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. But whoever transgresses after that will have a painful punishment' (*al-Baqara*: 178).

And before issuing the verse of credit, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَٱتَّقُواْ يَوۡمٗا تُرۡجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى ٱللَّهِۖ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفۡسٖ مَّا كَسَبَتۡ وَهُمۡ لَا يُظۡلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨١﴾

Beware of a Day when you will be returned to God, every soul will be paid in full for what it has earned, and no one will be wronged [281] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 281)

We clarified before that fear of God necessitates that we perform the actions that will protect us from God's Attributes of Majesty, and we made it clear that when God says, '…fear the Fire…,' it means that we must do that which will place a shield between us and Hellfire, and that hellfire is one of the manifestations of the Attributes of Majesty. And here, the True Lord *the Most High* says to us, 'And fear the Day….' Should we fear the Day itself, or fear what will happen on that Day? A day is a period of time; and times are not feared in themselves, but rather, one has fears of what occurs in those times.

If everything in a certain period of time is frightening, then fear is ascribed to the entire period / day because it is a day of terror in which everything is shocking and frightening – may God save us and you from all the terror of it!

Consider the extreme accuracy of the Quranic expression in God's words: '…you will be returned to God….' The return on this day will not be by the choice of the servants, but rather by the Will of God. On the other hand, when He *the Exalted* speaks about the believers who do good deeds, He says of their return to God on the Day of Resurrection: 'And seek help in steadfast patience and prayer; and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit, who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him' (*al-Baqara*: 45-46). This means that the believing servant longs to return to God because he desires to achieve success.

As for the non-believers, the True Lord says that on the Day of Judgement, they will be harshly thrust into the fire (*at-Tur:* 13). The return of the non-believers will be a forced, unwilling return. And the True Lord says that on this day, '…Then every soul will be paid in full that which it has earned, and they will not be treated unjustly.' After this, the True Lord *the Most High* passes the laws of credit, saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا تَدَايَنتُم بِدَيۡنٍ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ مُّسَمّٗى فَٱكۡتُبُوهُۚ وَلۡيَكۡتُب بَّيۡنَكُمۡ
كَاتِبُۢ بِٱلۡعَدۡلِۚ وَلَا يَأۡبَ كَاتِبٌ أَن يَكۡتُبَ كَمَا عَلَّمَهُ ٱللَّهُۚ فَلۡيَكۡتُبۡ وَلۡيُمۡلِلِ ٱلَّذِى
عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡحَقُّ وَلۡيَتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ رَبَّهُۥ وَلَا يَبۡخَسۡ مِنۡهُ شَيۡـٔٗاۚ فَإِن كَانَ ٱلَّذِى عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡحَقُّ سَفِيهًا أَوۡ
ضَعِيفًا أَوۡ لَا يَسۡتَطِيعُ أَن يُمِلَّ هُوَ فَلۡيُمۡلِلۡ وَلِيُّهُۥ بِٱلۡعَدۡلِۚ وَٱسۡتَشۡهِدُواْ شَهِيدَيۡنِ مِن
رِّجَالِكُمۡۖ فَإِن لَّمۡ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيۡنِ فَرَجُلٞ وَٱمۡرَأَتَانِ مِمَّن تَرۡضَوۡنَ مِنَ ٱلشُّهَدَآءِ أَن تَضِلَّ
إِحۡدَىٰهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحۡدَىٰهُمَا ٱلۡأُخۡرَىٰۚ وَلَا يَأۡبَ ٱلشُّهَدَآءُ إِذَا مَا دُعُواْۚ وَلَا تَسۡـَٔمُوٓاْ أَن تَكۡتُبُوهُ
صَغِيرًا أَوۡ كَبِيرًا إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلِهِۦۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ أَقۡسَطُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَأَقۡوَمُ لِلشَّهَٰدَةِ وَأَدۡنَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَرۡتَابُوٓاْ إِلَّآ
أَن تَكُونَ تِجَٰرَةً حَاضِرَةٗ تُدِيرُونَهَا بَيۡنَكُمۡ فَلَيۡسَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ جُنَاحٌ أَلَّا تَكۡتُبُوهَاۗ
وَأَشۡهِدُوٓاْ إِذَا تَبَايَعۡتُمۡۚ وَلَا يُضَآرَّ كَاتِبٞ وَلَا شَهِيدٞۚ وَإِن تَفۡعَلُواْ فَإِنَّهُۥ فُسُوقُۢ بِكُمۡۗ
وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَۖ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ ٱللَّهُۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٞ ٢٨٢

You who believe, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing: have a scribe write it down justly between you. No scribe should refuse to write: let him write as God has taught him, let the debtor dictate, and let him fear God, his Lord, and not diminish [the debt] at all. If the debtor is feeble-minded, weak, or unable to dictate, then let his guardian dictate justly. Call in two men as witnesses. If two men are not there, then call one man and two women out of those you approve as witnesses, so that if one of the two women should forget the other can remind her. Let the witnesses not refuse when they are summoned. Do not disdain to write the debt down, be it small or large, along with the time it falls due: this way is more equitable in God's eyes, more reliable as testimony, and more likely to prevent doubts arising between you. But if the merchandise is there and you hand it over, there is no blame on you if you do not write it down. Have witnesses present whenever you trade with one another, and let no harm be done to either scribe or witness, for if you did cause them harm, it would be a crime on your part. Be mindful of God, and He will teach you: He has full knowledge of everything [282] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 282)

This is the longest verse in the Quran, and God begins it by saying, 'O you who have believed....' As we know, this beginning indicates that whatever ruling which will follow, the grounds of this ruling will be having faith: as long as you believe in God, you implement whatever He commands you with, since God does not hold disbelievers morally responsible, and man – as we said before – is free either to accept faith in God, or not.

If a man does accept faith, let him respond to every ruling of God by adhering to it. We will give an example of this – and God is beyond compare: If a person is ill, he is free either to go the doctor, or not; but once he goes to the doctor and he writes him a prescription, the patient does not ask the doctor – who is a created being like him – 'Why did you prescribe this treatment?' The doctor could reply, 'You were free to choose whether to come to me, or not, but now, that you have come, listen to my words and follow them.' The doctor does not explain all the chemical interactions and equations, but rather, he diagnoses the complaint and prescribes the treatment.

what is the case when we accept to have faith in *the Most High* Creator? We obey all His commands; and God only commands the believer based on wisdom, and the effects of this wisdom might become clear to the believer later on so that his trust in his faith in God increases. The True Lord says, 'O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down….' If we reflect on the True Lord's words 'contract a debt' (*tadayantum*), we find that there is the word *dayn* ('credit'); and we have the word *din* ('religion'); one of the meanings of (*din*) is 'requital,' and another meaning of *din* is religion, the Way of Heaven; as for *dayn*, it means borrowing something for an appointed term for its return. So we have three clear meanings: there is *din* meaning 'requital', and din meaning the Way of Heaven ('religion'), and *dayn* meaning borrowing money ('credit').

With His words 'contract a debt' (*tadayantum bi-dayn*) God wants to remove any possible ambiguity of two possible meanings so that there would only be one possible meaning, so, He added the word 'debt (*bi-dayn*)*;* the transaction here, therefore, is one of credit, not requital or religion. And the True Lord specifies that credit be for a stated term, and God used the word 'specified' to give further specification; for there is a difference between a term based on a specific time and a term based on a specific event which will occur: if you say, 'I set the term to be the moment when the pilgrims arrive,' this is an event in time, and no one can guarantee the exact moment when the pilgrims will arrive, since the plane might be delayed, or one of the pilgrims might be ill so that the rest have to be kept in the quarantine. But if you specify the term as being two or three months, this means that the term is the time itself. So it is not right for someone to set the term for his credit based on some event that is supposed to take place at a future time because it is possible that the event might not happen at the expected time. Therefore, contracting a debt for a specified term requires that the time be stated.

The True Lord specifies for us: '…when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down….' The words 'write it down' are a means of lifting embarrassment and inconvenience between loved ones. This is Divine legislation, so no one should be lax and say to his friend, 'We are friends;' it is a Divine Legislation which says to you, 'Set down credit in writing.' And do not say, 'We are friends,' for one of you might die, and if you have not set the credit in writing as a matter of necessity, then what will the sons do, and the widow, and the heirs?

So, the True Lord's insistence on setting credit in writing is a command from God which removes difficult inconvenience between loved ones. Many people think that by setting down credit in writing, God wants to protect the interest of the creditor; no; the intention of this is to protect the debtor because if the debtor knows that the debt is recorded, he will try his utmost to work and repay his debt; as for if the credit is not recorded, he might become indolent in working to repay the debt, and because of this, he and his family will only obtain their need a single time after which wealthy society will forsake poor society and refuse to lend to them, and take the inability of this person to repay as an excuse for doing this; and this person who did not repay his debt will bear the cumulative responsibility for this because his actions have served to close the door on goodly loans.

God wants the mechanism of economic life to function for those who are without wealth; because those who possess wealth are able to manage their own lives whilst those who do not possess wealth are in need. For this reason, there is a proverb in the Egyptian countryside which says, 'If someone takes and gives back, all wealth becomes his.' He borrows and then pays back, so, everybody trusts him and sees him as trustworthy, diligent, and faithful, and they know of him that when he takes, he gives back; so, all wealth becomes his wealth.

So, by ordaining the setting down in writing of credit, God *the Most High* wants to protect the motions of life for the one who does not possess wealth because the one who possesses wealth, does not need to borrow. For this reason, the command came from the True Lord *the Most High*: '…when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down….' But who is it that should write down the credit transaction?

Look at the accuracy in the expression: it is not you, the creditor, who will write it down, nor you, the debtor; but rather, there must be a scribe apart from these two, who does not stand to gain any benefit from the credit transaction: '…And let a scribe write [it] between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him….' This contains a clarification that if someone who knows how to write is asked to write down a credit record, he should not refuse to do so. Why? Because the verse – the verse of credit – was revealed at a time when literacy amongst the Arabs was rare, and only a few people knew how to write, so, there was an intense demand for those who knew how to write. But if none of those who know how to write are asked to write down the credit transaction, what should they do? The True Lord commands those who know how to write to volunteer, and the plain command comes to state this: 'and let a scribe write'; for if there is something which a person is required to do, but circumstance does not allow any prior experimentation, the Sacred Law obliges that he put himself forward for this task.

Suppose you are on a ship and a violent storm comes, and the one steering the ship is drowned, or is unable to steer. At this point, someone who knows how to steer a ship must come forward and appoint himself to do this task, for there is no time for any experimentation as known when the True Lord *the Most High* told us of the drought in the story of our master Joseph: Joseph told the king's messenger how to weather the drought. They will sow for seven years as usual; but they should let all the grains that they harvest remain untouched in their ears, excepting only a little, from which they may eat. After that period of seven good years there will come seven hard years which will consume all that they will have laid up for them, excepting only a little of that which they shall have kept in store (*Yusuf:* 47-48). Then our master Joseph told the king to put him in charge of the store-houses of the land as he is a good and knowing keeper (*Yusuf:* 55).

It was a drought, so, there was no time for experimentation; and he was qualified for this mission and possessed the talents of preservation and know-how, so, he put himself forward for the task. Likewise here '…Let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him…' if he is asked; and if he is not asked and appointed, then '…let him write….'

This is the reason for the two commands here; and as long as the purpose of writing is to record the credit transaction, who is the weak party? It is the debtor, and the written record will be evidence against him for the creditor. For this reason, God specified that the one who dictates, should be the one who contracts the debt, that is, he should dictate the wording of the document which will be an evidence against him: '…and let the one who has the obligation dictate….' Why is it not the creditor who dictates? Because the debtor is usually the weaker party, and perhaps when the time comes to write the date of repayment, the creditor might try to make this date too soon, and the debtor might be too shy to speak up about this and remain silent because he is the weaker party. God chooses the weaker party to be the one to dictate the wording of the credit record; he can dictate it at his own comfort, and thus it is assured that he will not be disadvantaged by his need at any point.

But what do we do when the one who contracts the debt is weak of mind or body, or is unable to dictate? The True Lord sets the rules in this case: '…But if the one who has the obligation is of limited understanding, or weak or unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate in justice….' The weak-minded person is the one who has reached manhood, but does not possess the aptitude to act on his own behalf, and the weak person is the one who does not possess the power to make him mentally mature enough to make transactions, such as if he is a young child, or an old man who has reached such old age that he has forgotten what he used to know, or someone who is unable to dictate because he is mute. In such a case, the guardian, or custodian, or advisor, must dictate in their stead.

Then, further documentation comes with God's words: '…And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses – so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her….'

Look at the accuracy of the documentation in the instruction of the True Lord: '…And bring to witness two witnesses….' We call upon witnesses and we set it down in writing because God wants, by this documentation, to safeguard the economic life of the one who has not; for when needs are secured for those who have not, the mechanism operates smoothly and the motions of economic life proceed because those who have are in the minority, and those who have not are in the majority, and every good and beneficial project needs a hundred people to implement the plan.

The one who provides finance for the project may need a hundred people to carry it out, and for this reason the majority of people are have-nots, and this is so that the system of life can proceed; for God does not want the system of life to be a matter of some people doing voluntary favours for others, but rather, God wants the system of life to be an essential system; for the worker who does not have a family to support might not bother going out to work, which is why God links his going out to work with his need. He needs food and supplies for himself and his family, so, he is forced by necessity to go out to work, and the repeated experience makes him feel affection for his work, and when he feels affection for his work, he loves it for its own sake.

In this way, he moves from a position of needing to work to a position of loving work for its own sake; and when he loves work for its own sake, the wheel of life moves forward. The True Lord *the Most High* identifies the witnesses by saying, '…And bring to witness two witnesses….'

Why did He use the emphatic form of the word *shaheedayn* ('witnesses'), and not *shahidayn* ('witnesses/onlookers')? Because a mere onlooker might be false, so, the True Lord used the Arabic emphatic adjectival form, as though this means a witness who is known for the fairness of his testimony so that he is considered a 'trustworthy witness' (*shahid*). He is someone who has repeatedly given just testimony, and people trust him to do this, and this shows that he is a suitable witness. And if there are not two men to be witnesses, the True Lord specifies for us: '…then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses….'

The True Lord *peace and blessings be upon him* asked us to do our best, that is, to choose witnesses from those whom we find acceptable; and He gave the reason why two women are called upon in place of one man by saying, '…so that if one of the women errs, then, the other can remind her….' This is because to give testimony implies being in close contact with society in order to bear witness to it and know what is going on therein, and women are generally far from this.

The general situation of women is that they have very little to do with these affairs, and they have no involvement in these transactions; so, if the situation calls for a woman's witnessing, the witnessing should be done by a man and two women because generally woman's thoughts are not occupied with the economic society which surrounds them, and one of them might make a mistake or forget, in which case the other can remind her, and they can both carefully study the matter together; for it is not the obligation of women to be closely involved with the affairs of the wide society, especially where labour is concerned.

After this, the True Lord says, '…And let not the witnesses refuse when they are called upon….' Just as the True Lord said that the scribe must not refuse to write up the credit transaction, the same is the case for being witness to the transaction. And what is the mode of the witnessing: is it concerned with the contraction of the debt, or the repaying of it? There are two stages: contracting, and repaying.

When we ask someone to come and bear witness to a credit transaction, he is not allowed to refuse; and this is the contraction. And after we have gone ahead with the loan, and we ask this witness to come before the judge and testify before him, this is the repayment stage. In this way, the witnesses must not refuse when they are called both at the stage of contraction, and the stage of repayment.

But the True Lord *the Most High* knows that every human being has his area of working in life, so, no one action should transgress against any other action. When the witness is called forth for either the stage of contraction first or repayment later, his own interests must not be impeded. His interests should not be impeded because he is just, and he is a witness; and so God ordained a ruling in this regard, saying, '…Let no scribe be harmed or any witness….'

So, the act of witnessing here requires us to respect the circumstances of the witness: if the witness has work, or an exam, or a deal to attend to, or something else, we may say to the witness: ‘You must be appointed this at the stage of contraction since there is no one else who can be trusted and viewed with confidence; as for the stage of repayment, you are compelled to attend.’ The witness can go to take care of the important things he has to attend to since no action should be allowed to transgress against any other action; for this reason, we must look for a witness who has the ability to control his work schedule to a certain extent; and if we do not find anyone else, what do we do? The True Lord said, ‘…Let no scribe be harmed or any witness….’ So, we must find some sort of payment for him to compensate for what he loses out on; we must not force him to neglect his own work, otherwise his honesty will be a source of harm for him because every person who is asked to be a witness, will have his work and interests hampered, and God does not protect the creditor and debtor by harming the scribe or the witness.

God uses of the word ‘harmed’ (*yudarr*) and this word can have two possible lexical meanings: in one meaning, it can be that the harm comes from the scribe, or the witness, and in the other, it means that the harm falls upon the scribe, or the witness. The word is the same, but since the final two root letters of the verb are combined, by taking them apart we can see what the meaning is. We may vocalise the verb thus: */yudarri/,* with the vowel *–/i/* at the end, and in this case it means that the harm comes from the scribe, by his falsifying what he writes, or the harm comes from the witness, by his testifying dishonestly.

And if we say ‘…Let no scribe be harmed or any witness….’ with the vocalisation */yudarra,* with the vowel *–/a/* at the end, what is being prohibited is that any harm should fall upon the scribe or witness from those for whom the writing is being done, and those for whom the witnessing is obliged, in order for the creditor to be assured of the money he lends, and to be certain that he will definitely get it back.

The scribe and the witness are two people who have their own lives, and each has a job which he does to obtain his livelihood; and if it is known that a scribe or witness is honest, he will therefore be called forth all the time by those who have an interest in contracting credit, and because of this, the interests of the scribe or witness might be hampered.

God wants to ensure, for this scribe or witness, that his interests will be preserved, which is why the laws set down in the Noble Quran address this principle, which is that if a witness is called from somewhere to be witness over a case, the travel expenses he incurs going to and from the case, must be paid for him, and if he is required to spend the night, he has the right to spend the night so that he does not incur harm by bearing witness, and so that the witness does not have to neglect his work, or pay his costs from his own pocket. The True Lord *the Most High* also wants to secure the interests of everyone, not the interest of one group at the expense of another.

The True Lord then, says of this 'harm', '…For if you do so, indeed, it is [grave] disobedience in you….' That is, if you do harm in either this way, or that, it will be sinful conduct on your part. He *the Exalted* warns us against any harm coming from the scribe or witness, or against any harm falling upon the scribe, or witness. To do harm is considered sinful, that is, disobedience.

The root word of 'disobedience' (*fusooq*) is *fisq*, which originally means for a ripe date to break free of its shell. When a fresh, hard date becomes soft, the shell breaks away from the root of the date and the fruit comes out of the shell, and this is call *fisq* in Arabic; from this root was derived the meaning of *fusooq* 'disobedience,' which means to break away from the obedience of God in all that He commands.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says, 'And fear God'; and we learnt before the meaning of 'fear of God,' when God says 'fear God,' or He *the Exalted* says, 'fear the Fire,' or He says, 'And fear a day when you will be returned to God…' (*al-Baqara*: 281). All of these concepts are based on the concept of a shield (*wiqaya*) from God's Attributes of Majesty, His Might, and His Overwhelming Power. When we say 'fear the Fire,' the fire of hell is one of the forces of God's Attributes of Overwhelming Power; so, 'fear God' is exactly akin to 'fear the Fire,' which is exactly akin to '…fear a day when you will be returned to God….' The True Lord *the Most High* also says, '…And fear God. And God teaches you….' And here there is a principle of faith which we must take from all of God's instructions of moral responsibility. If instructions come from one human being to another, you only obey a human being's instruction if he convinces you of its wisdom and purpose because the instruction is coming from one who is equal to you, and no one's intellect is greater than the other. You might say to the one who gives you instruction, 'Why should I do as you say when you do not do as I say? If you want to instruct me to do something, and you are my equal in humanity and fallibility, then, you had better convince me of the wisdom of your instruction.'

But if the instruction comes from a Higher Power, the True Lord *the Most High*, the God in whose Power, Knowledge, Wisdom, and lack of selfish desire, we have faith, then, in this situation the believer accepts the command before searching for any wisdom behind it because the wisdom behind this command is that it comes from God. And when the believer obeys the instruction which comes from God, he will come to know the secret of this wisdom later on; for the secrets of God's wisdoms come to the believer after he accepts to carry out his religious responsibilities.

For example, the True Lord *the Most High* does not convince His servant of the secrets of fasting; but if the believing servant fasts as God told him to, upon fasting, the believer will find the effect of the wisdom of fasting in his soul in a way that could not possibly have convinced him before he experienced it. When the believer carries out his religious responsibilities, God *the Most High* teaches him the wisdom of these responsibilities. We have a clear evidence for this from God's words to the believers that if they fear God, He will provide them with a standard by which to discern the true from the false, will efface their misdeeds, and will forgive them their sins; and God is limitless in His great favour (*al-Anfal:* 29).

God *the Most High* promises His believing servants that if they fear Him, He will grant them indicators to tell the true from the false, and he will blot out their misdeeds, and forgive them. Why? Because God Who teaches us is the True Lord *the Most High*, the Knower of all things, and God's Knowledge is intrinsic; as for human knowledge, it might be the result of the pressure of events on him, in a way that he thinks of ways to legislate to remove the evils that afflict him; but the knowledge of *the Most High* and All Knowing precedes this because it is intrinsic knowledge.

We saw before that God *the Most High* gave the issue of credit this much attention in order to secure the purity and soundness of life's motions; for the one who has no wealth has no way to move in life except by three things: either donations, that is voluntary gifts from benevolent people by which he can gain help in moving around in his life; the second is the *zakat* (poor-due) which God has made obligatory; and the third means is borrowing, in the manner that God has ordained.

When a poor believer finds no one to donate anything to him, or cannot get any *zakat* money, what can he do? He has to take a loan. So borrowing is the third resort for the economic life of those who have no wealth. We have learnt that God rewards loan with a greater reward than that He gives for charity because when you give charity, it leaves your soul right away, so, you do not think of it again; yet, in the case of a loan, your soul remains attached to it because you still remain the owner of the money; and every time you have patience for it, you earn more reward from God for every act of patience you extend to the debtor.

We know also that the True Lord *the Most High* made assurances for the credit process which we must understand from two angles: The first angle is that He thereby preserved the fruit of a man's labour in life, which is that he, by his labour, produces and possesses money. If we do not protect the fruits of his labour in life for him, he will not take work seriously; and if he does not take work seriously, many interests will be wasted because a person's work in life benefits many people whether he intends this, or not; we gave the example for this of someone who possesses wealth and wants to build an apartment building; so, God directs an inspiration in the form of a notion in the mind to him; and God says that no one can know the forces and the soldiers of the Lord but He (*al-Muddaththir:* 31).

So, the man says: Why should I hoard this wealth? Why should I not build an apartment building so that I can benefit from the rents? In this way, the money will not decrease, but will increase. And the man does not have any thoughts of benefitting others; he is concerned only with his own benefit; yet, even if he does not intend to benefit others, his action will benefit others nonetheless: the one who digs the ground, will be paid for this, and the one who lays the bricks, will be paid for this, and everyone who participates in the making of this building, either by construction, or installation of electricity and water, or decoration – every one of these people will be paid for this. So everyone benefits even if the investor does not have this in mind.

So, the True Lord wants to protect a person's work in life; for if God did not protect the fruit of his labour in life, the worker would suffice himself with enough to sustain himself and his dependants; and as for the weak person, who would support him? So, we must protect the wealth of the worker so that he will be encouraged to work. When God, the One Who gave people their provisions, asks the strong worker to give his weak, needy brother a loan, He does not say, 'Give a loan to the needy,' but rather, He *the Exalted* says, 'Who is it that would lend to God a goodly loan?' (*al-Baqara*: 245).

God *the Most High* respected the work of the working person in life, and considered wealth to be of the possession of the worker; so, God does not say to the worker: Give the needy person from the wealth which I gave to you; no; the wealth belongs to the worker, so, God says to him: Give Me a loan, for your brother is in need of it. We can only say – to illustrate, not to compare, for God is beyond compare – suppose you take something from your son's money box to help his brother, and you promise the son from whom you took the money that you will give him a lot in return. The money which you have taken from your son's savings as a loan, is the money which you gave to him in the first place.

So, God wants to protect life's motions; and if life's motions are not protected, no person will feel secure about his labour's fruits, and all life will be corrupted, and bitterness and resentment will become prevalent; and this is why God *the Most High* tells the believers that He does not demand of them to sacrifice in His Way all of their possessions because if He were to demand of them all of their possessions, and urge them, they would niggardly cling to them, and so He would but bring out their moral failings (*Muhammad:* 36-37).

When resentment spreads through society, there can never be any good in this society. So when the True Lord ordains the documentation of the debt contract, He wants to protect the work of the worker; for people differ among themselves in the ambition of their actions, and not all people have ambitious actions, but only some of them have. So let us make use of the ambitious actions that some people have because they will thereby benefit society, whether they intend to or not.

Furthermore, the True Lord *the Most High* wants also to protect man from himself; because when the debtor knows that the debt which he owes is contractually bound, and he has no way of denying it, he will try his best to work in life to pay it back; and when a person works to pay back his debt, this increases the amount of work in life, and the benefit thus increases.

In this way, we see that God wanted, by ordaining documentation of debts, to protect the debtor from his own self; for circumstances might come upon the debtor which would induce him to be lax in repaying his debt, and if he is lax, the loss will not be for him alone, but he will become an example for everyone else, and all those who have wealth would say, 'I will not give anyone any loan, because so-and-so, who was wealthy like me, gave to so-and-so the needy person, and he was lax with the money and used it all up.' At this point, the motions of life will come to a standstill. But if the credit is well documented and set in writing, the debtor will be eager to pay it back. God wants to preserve the motions of life in a way which is permanent, honest, noble and pure, which is why we find that in the verse of credit the word 'writing' and other words derived from its Arabic root (k-t-b) are repeated more than once – indeed many times: 'O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down. And let a scribe write [it] between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him. So let him write and let the one who has the obligation dictate. And let him fear God, his Lord, and not leave anything out of it. But if the one who has the obligation is of limited understanding or weak or unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate in justice. And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses – so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her. And let not the witnesses refuse when they are called upon. And do not be averse to write it, whether it is small or large, for its [specified] term. That is more equitable in the sight of God and stronger as evidence and more likely to prevent doubt between you, except when it is an immediate transaction which you conduct among yourselves. For [then] there is no blame upon you if you do not write it. And take witnesses when you conclude a contract. Let no scribe be harmed or any witness. For if you do so, indeed, it is [grave] disobedience in you. And fear God. And God teaches you. And God is Knowing of all things.'

This repetition in this verse of mentioning the action of writing gives the basis of relations between people; for writing is the basis of the contract, and it does not cheat because if you record something on paper, the paper will not come and deny what you wrote on it; but in the case of witnessing, things might be different, as it is possible that the witness might bend to someone's influence and deny the truth. For this reason, the True Lord presents to us a new matter of faith when He says, '…to write as God has taught him….' This means that the scribe should write according to how God has taught him the skills of writing; or, alternatively '…as God has taught him…' might mean that God was good to him by teaching him to write – something that not many others are skilled at – so, just as God was good to him, he must be good to others, and pass onto them the benefits of his writing.

It is not only a matter of writing, as this includes and incorporates every gift and talent by which God has distinguished any person from among the talents which God gives to His creatures; the believer is the one who acts in a way which passes on the effects of his blessing and talent to others, and you must pass on the effects which the talents of others have on you so that other people can benefit from them too. In this way, goodness and benefit will spread everywhere; for if you have a talent, you have a single talent which will suffice you in a single area of your life, and when you pass it on to everyone else and transfer it to them, so, everyone will use their communal talents for your benefit; and which of these is the greater benefit?

When you pass on and transfer your talent to other people, you are the one who benefits the most because everyone will pass on and transfer their talents to you. And if you work well for others, the work which you have to offer is one work, and when you do it well, God controls the notions which come to those who work for you and inspires them to do a good job for you, just as you did a good job for others. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* stresses to us the extreme importance of documentation and the written contract, saying:

وَإِن كُنتُمْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ وَلَمْ تَجِدُوا۟ كَاتِبًا فَرِهَٰنٌ مَّقْبُوضَةٌ ۖ فَإِنْ أَمِنَ بَعْضُكُم
بَعْضًا فَلْيُؤَدِّ ٱلَّذِى ٱؤْتُمِنَ أَمَٰنَتَهُۥ وَلْيَتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ رَبَّهُۥ ۗ وَلَا تَكْتُمُوا۟ ٱلشَّهَٰدَةَ ۚ
وَمَن يَكْتُمْهَا فَإِنَّهُۥٓ ءَاثِمٌ قَلْبُهُۥ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨٣﴾

If you are on a journey, and cannot find a scribe,
something should be handed over as security, but if you
decide to trust one another, then let the one who is trusted
fulfil his trust; let him be mindful of God, his Lord. Do not
conceal evidence: anyone who does so has a sinful heart,
and God is fully aware of everything you do [283]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 283)

As we know, a ‘journey’ entails leaving the routine of life in one’s home; and the routine of life in one’s home makes one completely aware of the constituents of his life whilst journeying takes a person out of his life’s routine so that he cannot do many of the things he does when he is at home. Suppose you are travelling, and you are forced to take a loan, yet you cannot find a scribe, or a witness: what do you do?

The True Lord gives us the answer: ‘…then a pledge [should be] taken….’ So God did not leave aside the matter of credit even when one is on a journey; He legislated not only for cases when one is resident, but also for cases of travel: ‘…then a pledge [should be] taken….’ So, when one is resident, there is writing and witnessing, and when one is on a travel, there is a pledge in hand, the purpose of which is to protect a person from the various pressures of society.

But does the True Lord *the Most High* prevent aspirations of altruism? Does the True Lord *the Most High* prevent chivalry in transactions? Does the True Lord *the Most High* prevent the ideals of valour from pervading dealings of people? No. The True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…And if one of you entrusts another, then let him who is entrusted discharge his trust [faithfully]….’ This is the aspiration of faith; and God did not block the way for valour or altruism in transactions. The writing of the debt, the witnessing, and the pledge are not obligatory since God says, ‘…And if one of you entrusts another, then let him who is entrusted discharge his trust [faithfully]….’

Also, you might understand that the one who is trusted is the debtor, to which we say: No; the matter is subject to change; there is a pledge, and this means that there are two matters here: the first is the ‘debt’ and the second is the ‘pledge,’ which is equivalent to the debt since one person is entrusted with regard to the pledge in his hand, whilst the other is entrusted with regard to the debt. For this reason, the wise words of the verse here refer to the one who takes the pledge and the one who takes the debt, which means that the one who takes the pledge, must fulfil his trust, and the other must fulfil his debt. And when we rise to this level of transactions, the thing which keeps a man in check is not the binding contract which is outside him, but rather, it is the binding of faith within his soul; but can we be certain that this binding of faith exists within all people?

Can we be certain of the circumstances? We cannot; for the trustworthiness of faith might exist at the time the debt is contracted and taken, but we cannot be sure that the trustworthiness of faith, will still exist when the time of repayment comes since someone might come to you and say, ‘I have one hundred pounds; I want you to keep it as a trust for me with you.’ The meaning of a ‘trust’ is that there is no contract and no witnesses, and it is all based on honesty and trust: if you wish, you can admit to the hundred pounds, and if you wish you can deny it. The man who does this with you, asks you to guarantee the hundred pounds with your faithful sense of honesty, and it is possible that you could say to him when he does this with you, ‘Yes, I will keep the hundred pounds with the utmost trust,’ with the intention of giving it back to him the moment he asks for it; but you cannot be sure of the circumstances of life for you, since as a human being you are subject to the vicissitudes of fate. It is possible that life might put such pressure on you that you are lax in returning the trust to him, or that you deny it, saying to the one who trusted you, ‘Get away from me, I cannot control myself now at the time of repayment even if I could control myself at the time I took it.’

Trust, in its general meaning, is a universal matter of existence, but the verse at hand deals with it from a specific angle. The True Lord *the Most High* deals with it in its general sense in all existence when He *the Exalted* says that indeed He did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet, man took it up – for, indeed, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

The entire universe feared for itself from bearing the burden of trust which meant that trust would be a matter of volition and free will, and no being in the universe was sure that it would be able to deliver when the time of implementation came. All these beings announced their decision, and refused to bear the burden of trust, as though they said: O Lord, we want to be subjugated and compelled with no free will. For this reason, we find that everything in the universe fulfils its purpose as God *the Most High* planned, except for man; that is, he was the one who accepted, with his intelligence and deliberation, to bear the trust of free will, and either by state or word he said: I am able to bear this trust because I am able to choose between alternatives.

Here, we remind man: You might be strong at the moment of assuming the responsibility, but what will be your condition when the time to fulfil it comes? This is why God said that man took up the trust – for indeed, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish. Man wronged himself when he assumed the burden of trust yet did not discharge it properly, so, he is wicked; and he is foolish because he took the time of assumption into consideration, but not the time of fulfilment; or he did consider it, but then he broke the promise he had made himself to fulfil it.

So, even if man was sure he would fulfil the trust, he is subject to vicissitudes, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And do not be averse to write it, whether it is small or large, for its [specified] term. That is more equitable in the sight of God…' (*al-Baqara*: 282). Writing the transaction down is an opportunity for a person to protect himself from weakness when the time of repayment comes, for God *the Most High* wants the matter to be guaranteed by contract so that you do not only rely on your own faithful honesty, but you are also subject to the binding contract which is exterior to your faithfulness; and this is achieved by writing down the debt transaction whether it is small, or big, together with the time at which it falls due.

The True Lord *the Most High* says, '…And do not hide testimony….' The command 'do not hide' is extremely expressive since the word 'testimony' implies ‘that which you have seen’; and since you saw it, this means it is a reality, and realities can never change. For this reason, the person who tells a true story, will never change the way he tells this story even if he tells it a thousand times because he is invoking a reality. On the other hand, the liar invokes something which is not real, which is why he says one thing and then, forgets the lie he told before, and so tells a different lie because he is not invoking something real. The word ‘witnessed’ means something which was actually seen; and as long as it was really seen and witnessed, it urges the one who saw it to tell it. So beware of hiding it because ‘to hide’ means that something wants to come out and you try to prevent it from doing so. This is why God *the Most High* says, ‘…And do not hide testimony….’ It is as though the natural disposition of faith urges the one who possesses it to speak of what he has witnessed because it is real. Because of this, the command comes from the True Lord: ‘…And do not hide testimony, for whoever hides it – his heart is indeed sinful….’ One might ask, ‘Is concealment here an attribute of the heart, or of the person who did not speak of what he witnessed?’ A poet said:

Speech lies in the heart,
The tongue is but the heart’s interpreter.

Whenever God emphasises something, he mentions the body part which is related to this matter. You say, ‘I saw it with my eyes; and I heard it with my ears; and I gave it with my hand; and I walked to it on my feet’: you mention the body part which plays a part in this matter.

When the True Lord says, ‘…for whoever hides it – his heart is indeed sinful…,’ know that all the body parts are subject to the heart; ‘…and God is Knowing of what you do.’ That is, your concealment of the truth does not change the reality of God’s knowledge in the slightest. And when the transaction of credit and its contraction and conditions are settled, whether it is at home, or on a journey, God preserves, for the man who works in life, a work which is noble and pure.

If this is not the case, all interests in the society will be in jeopardy and will be brought to a standstill; and what will the one who is unable to work do for a living? His heart will fill with resentment towards the wealthy, and he will hate the blessings that they enjoy; and when the needy person hates the blessings of his wealthy brother, the blessing itself will hate to go to the one who hates it for his brother. These are matters which the True Lord *the Most High* has planned to be connected with one another.

The blessing loves the blessed one more than the blessed one loves the blessing, and it goes to the one to whom God sends it lovingly; so, if someone hates to see the blessing go to the blessed one, the blessing will refuse to go to him, as though it is saying to him: You will not get any good from me. If anyone wants to know about this, let him try it for himself.

Love the blessings that others enjoy, and you will find that everyone's blessings are at your service. If you love the blessings that others have, they will come to you to serve you. Moreover, the believer must know that some blessings are not born of effort and striving, but blessing might be simply out of the grace of God which He grants to some of His creatures; and when you hate to see them with the one blessed by them, you are thereby objecting to God's decree of blessing; and when you object to God's decree of blessing, the True Lord *the Most High* will not allow you to benefit anything from them.

If you see someone withholding his blessings from his relatives, know that they hate to see him with these blessings; if they loved them, the blessings would rush to them. The Divine way wants to make people a single, cooperative, and self-completing entity so that if I see that you have obtained a blessing, I love to see it with you; and when I love to see the blessing with you, this blessing will in turn be given to me, and you will find no difference between the haves and the have-nots; you only find differences between haves and have-nots in societies which pay no regard to God's Law.

We said this in connection with the situation when a person is forced to take a usurious loan because he finds no one to give him a goodly loan, and finds no one to fulfil God's obligation upon them of the poor-due in order to meet his need, so, he is forced to take a usurious loan. In this way, the usurious society enters into a war with God; and does anyone have the strength to enter into a war with God? No. And the usurious society also enters into a war with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade usury, and said in his sermon in the Farewell Pilgrimage, ‘All usury is hereby annulled, yet you are entitled to your principal; and you will do no wrong, nor will you be wronged. God decreed that there is to be no usury, and the usury of ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib is all annulled.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* started with annulling the usury of his uncle.

This is the loftiness of Divine legislation; those who make human legislation seek to protect their relatives from the law, yet, Divine legislation imposes its application on the relatives before anyone else. The example of this is ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *God be pleased with him*: when ‘Umar wanted to enforce a law, he would first command his family and relatives to obey it, saying, ‘I will do (such-and-such), and by God in whose hand is my soul, if anyone of you disobeys me in this I will make an example of him to the Muslims.’ And ‘Umar *God be pleased with him* would announce this to all people; and why would he announce this? Because many people tend to make allowances for rulers (by being lenient with their relatives) when the rulers themselves might not be aware of this; we might find someone going to a group of people and, on the strength of his family name, getting what he wants from the people against their wishes by intimidating them; and the ruler might not be aware that this behaviour is going on.

But when the ruler announces to the people and to his relatives that there will be no distinction where the implementation of his law is concerned, and that the law applies to himself and his family, whoever uses the ruler’s name, or tries anything like this, will face the consequences for his actions; and in this way, things will be upright. But if, after the period of reign of the rulers has come to an end, facts come to light of their relative’s abuses, we will say: Why we know all this from the start? And where were these facts when they actually occurred?

The Muslim ruler must announce to his subjects that laws must be applied to him first of all, and to his dependants. Because of this, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said at the Farewell Pilgrimage, ‘The usury of *al-Jahiliya* (the pre-Islamic times) is hereby annulled, and the first usury I annul is our usury: the usury of ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, which is hereby all annulled.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in Khutbat Al-Wada‘ fi Hujjat Al-Wada‘*

And at the battle of Badr, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* brought out the people of his own family to fight; If no one from his family come out to fight, someone from the disbelievers would have said: He is protecting his own family; and if the reward of martyrdom is paradise, why does he send those who are unrelated to him instead of sending his loved ones to fight?

Yet, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sent forward his relatives and loved ones, and he was well-informed by his Lord about the matter of martyrdom, and how it shortens for a person the toils of life and causes him to enter paradise. In this way, the favouritism at the onset of Islam was based on that which lasts forever, not like the favouritism of fools which is based on that which is ephemeral.

When the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us this and strikes the hands of those who deal in usury, this is the war which has to be waged: the war of God, the Sovereign, the All-Powerful; as for those who are weak and cannot fight, they do not wage this war because they stand before their Creator and Conqueror, and they cannot wage war against Him. This is why the state must pay attention to these kinds of matters, and establish Islamic laws; and after this, if the obligatory poor-due is not enough to meet the requirements of the needy, the state could impose what it chooses in order to meet the needs of the needy.

After clarifying the matter of doctrine with His words ‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence…’ (*al-Baqara*: 255), and the matter of the law concerning the doctrine with His words ‘There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion…’ (*al-Baqara*: 256), and protecting the doctrine by commanding the believers to fight in order to ensure the ascendancy of God’s word, and then speaking about the economic motions of spending first of all on God’s cause, and then spending on the needy, the True Lord *the Most High* then says:

لِّلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۗ وَإِن تُبۡدُواْ مَا فِيٓ أَنفُسِكُمۡ أَوۡ تُخۡفُوهُ يُحَاسِبۡكُم
بِهِ ٱللَّهُۖ فَيَغۡفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

Whatever is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to God and, whether you reveal or conceal your thoughts, God will call you to account for them. He will forgive whoever He will and punish whoever He will: He has power over all things [284]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 284)

The verse opens with the prepositional phrase ‘To God’ before the main idea of the sentence: ‘…belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth…’ and the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth….’ This is the realm in which all creatures exist and no one has ever claimed that the heavens and earth belong to him, but there may be things within the heavens or the earth of which creatures claim ownership. If we look at the good things of this earth, we find that they are sometimes in the ownership of people who have been given ownership of them by God; those human beings who flew up into space and placed all their satellites and space stations, are able to claim their ownership of these satellites and space stations.

The True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention with His words here ‘To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth…,’ clarifying for us that although it appears that God has given ownership of means of living to His creatures, He only gave this ownership temporarily, and it will be taken from them later: either they will leave it by dying, or else it will leave them and be taken from them by sale, gift, appropriation, or theft.

The phrase ‘To God’ – coming at the beginning of the sentence – implies exclusivity and restrictedness; everything in existence belongs to God; and no one can claim, because of the causality of what God has given him, that he really possesses anything. Why? Because no human owner can ensure that his own life will continue.

We have never seen anyone who was not subject to vicissitudes; and since vicissitudes affect everyone, we should be aware that God wants His creatures to feel for one another, and complete one another, and He wants His creatures to cooperate. The True Lord does not do this because the matter is out of His hand – God forbid – no; God is telling us: I possess everything in the heavens and everything in the earth, and I can make it so that things pass around from person to person. For this reason, we say to those who reach high levels of wealth, prestige, or anything else: Beware when a blessing is completed for you. Why? Because if the blessing is completed for you in status, wealth, health, and offspring, you are subject to vicissitudes, and since it has been completed and reached its limit and you are certainly subject to vicissitudes, the blessing will inevitably start to decline. If a person reaches the summit, he must at some point come down from this summit, which is why the poet said:

When something is completed, it begins to diminish:
Expect to see it fade when it is said to be completed.

History has preserved for us the story of the Arab woman who went to see the caliph and said to him, ‘May God complete His blessings for you.’ The people sitting around the caliph heard this and were pleased, and expressed their pleasure; but the caliph said to them, ‘By God, you have not understood what she said. She said, may God complete His blessings for you; and if they are complete they will begin to fade because vicissitudes pursue men.’ This is how the caliph understood the woman’s intention.

A poet said:

My own soul, which owns these things, will depart:
So how can I mourn for anything that it loses?

The soul which possesses things will itself be lost, so, how can one be sad about anything he loses?

The True Lord *the Most High* requires us to always keep this in mind: that all the universe belongs to God, and all human beings, with their selves and their souls and all that they reveal and conceal, do not escape God’s knowledge; and the True Lord *the Most High* does not only hold us to account according to what He knows, but also according to what has been recorded against us.

Everyone will read his own record for himself, as God *the Exalted* says that He has fastened for every human being his fate to his neck; and on the Day of

Resurrection, God will bring forth for him a record which he will find wide open; and he will be told to read his record. Sufficient is his own soul on that day to make out his account (*al-Isra':* 13-14).

The Reckoning means that every person has an account of all that is for him and all that is against him; and the True Lord *the Most High* explains to us what 'for and against' means by speaking of weighing, as we are familiar with weighing things; He *the Exalted* says that true will be the weighing on that Day: and those whose weight of good deeds is heavy in the balance – it is they, they who shall be successful; whereas those whose weight is light in the balance – it is they who will have wasted their own selves by their wilful wrongdoing (*al-A'raf*: 8-9).

The Reckoning of the True Lord is precise and just: those people, whose scale of good deeds is heavy, are those who will gain the victory of paradise, whilst those who sold themselves to Satan and their soul's caprice, will see that the scale of their ill deeds is heavy, and will thus become the inmates of hell.

So, we are faced with two kinds of people: those whose scale of good deeds is heavier in the balance of the Reckoning, and those whose scale of bad deeds and evils is heavier in the balance of the Reckoning. So what about those whose two scales of deeds are evenly balanced so that their good and ill deeds are equal? They are the people of *al-A'raf* ('the Heights'), who will eventually obtain forgiveness from God because God's forgiveness – and He is the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy – outstrips His wrath. If the case of the people of the Heights was not mentioned in the Quran, someone might have said: God told us about those whose good deeds are heavy, and those whose good deeds are light, but He did not tell us about those whose evils are equal to their good deeds.

But the Forbearing and All Knowing Lord clarified everything for us, and explained that His forgiveness outstrips His wrath; therefore, God *the Most High* does not let it be sufficient with His knowledge when it comes to the Reckoning, but rather He makes a clear precise record, which is why the True Lord *the Most High* reassures us by saying that excepted from torment, however, will be those who repent and believe and do righteous deeds; for it is they whose previous bad deeds God will transform into good ones – seeing that God is indeed All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (*al-Furqan:* 70).

The True Lord *the Most High* reassures us that we will find all the good that we do in the scale of the balance, and He also assures us that He *the Exalted* will compensate us for the evil which evil people inflict upon us, and that we will take from their good deeds and add them to our balance. So the reassurance comes from two sides: The True Lord assures us that the good we do will not be left out of our account; and He also assures us concerning the evil which people do to us, and tells us that the True Lord will take from their good deeds and transfer them to us.

In observing events in life, we find that God might love many people because of an attribute of goodness which they possess, and this good attribute might be hidden so that other people cannot see it; but God Whose knowledge misses nothing, sees this person's attribute and loves him because of it; and the True Lord sees that this person's good deeds are scant, so, He makes some other people touch this man with their evil and their bad deeds so that He can take from the good deeds of these evil people and add them to this man's good deeds.

The meaning of '…you reveal what is within your souls…' is that you manifest your feelings in the form of practical expressions; but does 'conceal it' mean not to manifest your psychological feelings in the form of practical expressions? No; because not everything has a practical expression. Take love, for example: a person might love, but not find the power of expression to proclaim that he is in love. Likewise, the one who feels hatred, might not have the power of expression to proclaim this resentment. So there are actions which settle in the hearts; but does God hold us to account for what settles in our souls?

This delicate matter requires absolute precision in discussion, and we find that some of the Companions of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* took a position in this matter which caused some of them to weep out of fear for themselves. When 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *God be pleased with them* heard this verse, he said: 'If God is to take us up for that which we conceal in our souls, we would perish!' And he wept until his sobs could be heard. Ibn 'Abbas *God be pleased with them* heard about this, and he said, 'May God have mercy on Abu 'Abd Ar-Rahman, his fellow Muslims have found the same in this verse as he found.’ God then, revealed the words that He does not charge any soul with more than it is well able to bear (*al-Baqara*: 286) and the following verse till the end of the chapter.

We should be aware that the inclinations of the soul are many; there is something called a ‘notion or a passing idea,’ and something called an ‘idea,’ and something called a ‘conscious inclination,’ and there is ‘deliberation,’ and ‘resolve.’ These are five states, and the first four of these states are plain; it is the fifth state, where the intention is clear, which we must pay attention to. Let us consider each state in some detail.

A notion is a thought which occurs at once out of a sudden while an idea creeps into the mind little by little; in conscious inclination, the soul is always vacillating; deliberation is to gather all the means and debate about each of the means by which one can attain his desire; as for resolve, or intention, it is to arrive at the conclusion and begin to act upon it. t is resolve or intention which is meant by God *the Most High* when He says, ‘…Whether you reveal what is within your souls or conceal it, God will bring you to account for it….’ And we find that many scholars have pondered over these words, and some scholars have wondered whether, the verse which comes after this saying that He does not charge any soul with more than it is well able to bear (*al-Baqara*: 286) thereby abrogates this verse or not.

But when we realise that this verse is a statement of fact, and that it is not statements of fact which can be abrogated, but rather, only rulings, this calls us to conclude that it is intention and resolve which are being referred to when God *the Most High* says, ‘…Whether you reveal what is within your souls or conceal it, God will bring you to account for it….’ This is what God will hold us accountable for. When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘…Then He will forgive whom He wills….’ Who are these? God has made it clear that those whom He wills to forgive are those who repent, and those who turn back to God, of whom the True Lord said that excepted from torment will be those who repent and believe and do righteous deeds; for it is they whose previous bad deeds God will transform into good ones – seeing that God is indeed All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (*al-Furqan:* 70).

Replacing evil deeds with good deeds is something which the person whom God holds morally responsible, must pause to reflect on in order to see God’s grace; for when someone does an evil deed and it then pains him, whenever it pains him that he has done an evil deed and he laments it, God records a good deed for him. But the one who has not done an evil deed is not bothered by this; a sage once said, ‘An ill deed which breeds humility and contrition, is better than a good deed which breeds pride and arrogance.’

You can find that much of the goodness in the world comes from those who sinned against themselves in some way, and then, repented of it, but it still continues to give them anguish. One of those might be strong in everything, but he is weak in one matter; and his weakness in it causes him to fall into disobedience, whilst he tries his utmost in those things where he is not weak to do as much good as he can so that God will efface and wipe out this with that. The goodness in the world might well come from people who commit ill deeds and sin against themselves in one thing, so, God *the Most High* wills to make them directed towards many areas of goodness and they would think: Perhaps this will make up for that.

But for the one who continues routinely in this way so that his sin does not disturb him, these matters might remain lukewarm in his soul. For this reason, we must not look at those who sin against themselves from a single perspective, but rather, we must look from multiple perspectives, and we must have good manners with them, and pray that God would forgive them the deeds that we know of them, and bless them for what they have offered, and that God will relieve them from the burden of what they have done of misdeeds.

Some scholars say that God’s words ‘…Then He will forgive whom He wills and punish whom He wills…’ mean that God has made forgiveness dependent on the servant: if you want God to forgive you, then, do many good deeds so that God will turn your sins into good deeds; and if you want to be chastised – and no one wants this – then don not do any good deeds.

This matter lets us know that when the True Lord *the Most High* asks us to believe in Him, he gives the reins to us; and simply by believing in Him, we take from Him the reins of free will. The evidence for this is clear from the Sacred Hadith in which Abu Hurayra *God be pleased with him* related that the

Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'God *the Glorious and Exalted* says: I am as My servant thinks of me, and I am with him when he remembers Me: if he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself; if he remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in a better assembly; and if he draws nearer to Me by a hand-span, I draw nearer to him by an arm's length; and if he draws nearer to Me by an arm's length, I draw nearer to him by a fathom's length; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.'(1)

Simply by having faith, God gives you the reins; if you want God to draw an arm's-length nearer to you, draw a hand's-span nearer to Him; and if you want God to draw a fathom's-length nearer to you, draw an arm's-length nearer to Him. And if you want your Lord to come to you at speed – running – then go to Him walking. Simply by seeing you approaching Him and turning to Him, God will draw nearer to you; it is as though He says to you: No, you relax; I am the One Who will come to you.

This is why we said before when we spoke about prayer that when you believe in God, and then the *mue'dhdhin* calls for the prayer, you go to the prayer; it is true that you go to the obligatory prayer, but has God prevented you from standing before Him at any time? God asked you to stand before Him five times a day, and after this He left the door open for you, O believer; God does not lose interest until the servant loses interest.

In a person's ordinary life – and God is beyond compare – if he wants to meet an important person, he requests a meeting, and the important person either agrees to meet with the one who requests the meeting, or he declines. If this important person agrees to the meeting, the important person is the one who specifies the time and the place, and he might also request to know the purpose and subject of the meeting. But God leaves the door open for the believing servant; God will meet His servant for any reason, at any time, in any place, and at any moment.

It is enough honour for me that I am a servant
Whose Lord meets with him without an appointment;

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra God be pleased with him in Kitab Ad-Dhikr*

Despite His Holy Sanctity,
I can meet with Him wherever and whenever I like.

So, whose hand holds the reins? The reins are in the hand of the believing servant; so, when they say that '…Then He will forgive whom He wills…' means that it is in the hands of men as to whether they are to be forgiven, this means that if they want God to forgive them, they do things which merit this forgiveness, and repent to God, and do many good deeds; and if someone wants to be chastised, let him continue to recklessly do evil deeds.

After this, God *the Glorious and Exalted* says:

ءَامَنَ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡهِ مِن رَّبِّهِۦ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَۚ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ
وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيۡنَ أَحَدٖ مِّن رُّسُلِهِۦۚ
وَقَالُواْ سَمِعۡنَا وَأَطَعۡنَاۖ غُفۡرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيۡكَ ٱلۡمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers,' they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!' [285] (The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 285)

When we reflect on this noble verse, we find that the first instance of belief mentioned is the belief of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'The Messenger has believed in what was sent down to him from his Lord….' After this comes the belief of those to whom the Messenger delivered the call: '…and [so have] the believers….' After this, the belief of the Messenger becomes intermixed with the belief of the believers: '…Each one of them has believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], "We make no distinction between any of His messengers." And they say, "We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination."'

That is, both the Messenger and the believers believe in God. The first belief is that of the Messenger of God, and then, also the belief of those who believed in the Message which the Messenger brought, since the verb ‘believe’ refers to both the Messenger and the believers. And after this, God brings them together – the Messenger and the believers – in a single belief; and this is something natural, since the Messenger of God believed in God first, after which He delivered the Message to us, and we believed in God; and then, the faith became common, and our faith became the faith of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, and the faith of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* became our faith; and this is illustrated in God’s words: ‘…Each one of them has believed in God.’

So, in the first stage, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was the first to believe in God; and when the Messenger believed in God, he was required to believe that he was the Messenger of God; the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did say, ‘And I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.’ And when something in his own life pleased him, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would say, ‘I testify that I am the Messenger of God,’ and he would say it joyfully.

An example of this is the story narrated by Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *God be pleased with him*, who said: There was a Jew in Medina who used to give me a loan of dates which I would repay at harvest time – and Jabir owned the land which lay on the road to Rooma – and one year the harvest failed,(1) and when the Jew came to me at harvest-time, I had nothing for him; so, I began to ask him for a year’s extension, and he refused. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was informed of this, so, he said to his Companions: ‘Let us go and ask the Jew to give Jabir more time.’ They came to me at my orchard, and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* began to speak to the Jew, who said, ‘O Abd Al-Qasim, I will not give him more time.’ When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw this, he stood up and walked around the palms, and then came back and spoke to him again, and he refused. I brought a few soft dates and placed them before the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, and he ate, then he said: ‘Where is your hut, Jabir?’ I told him where it was, and he said, ‘Spread out a blanket there for me.’ I did so, and he went in and took a nap; and when he woke up I brought him some more dates, and he ate them. Then he got up and spoke to the Jew again, and he refused. So he got up and walked around the fresh date palms a second time, then said, ‘O Jabir, harvest, and pay (your debt),’ and he stood in the harvesting area, and I picked from the trees enough to pay my debt and more besides. I went out to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him the good news of this, and he said: ‘I testify that I am the Messenger of God!’(1)

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(1) In another narration, he said, ‘One year the harvest was different from usual.’

And the True Lord *the Most High* testifies that there is no deity but Him: God Himself gives evidence – and so do the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him, the Upholder of Equity: there is no deity save Him, *the Almighty*, the Truly Wise (*Al-‘Imran*: 18).

So, God testifies that there is no deity but Him, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* testifies that there is no deity but God, and he also testifies that he is the Messenger of God, who passes all of this on to the believers so that the formation of belief is completed. This is why the True Lord says of this, ‘…Each one of them has believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers….’ And the True Lord uses the word ‘Each’ (*kull*) in the Arabic indefinite form to mean both the Messenger and the believers.

God then, lists for us the components of faith: ‘…Each one of them has believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers.’ And they say, ‘We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination.’ We know that belief in God, and everything connected with belief, must be a matter of the unseen, and there can be no such thing as faith in tangible things. Faith is not concerned with tangible things, since they can be seen. The components of belief in this verse are as follows:

Belief in God Who is Unseen; and belief in the angels, who are unseen creations of God, and had God not informed us that He has creations called angels, we would not have known about them. God told us that He created the angels, and they do not disobey God in what He commands them, and they do as they are bid, and they are unseen; if not for this, we would not know about the angels.

Then there is belief in the Books and the messengers. Someone might say, ‘Are the messengers unseen? And are the Divine Revelations unseen? The messengers are human beings, and the scriptures can be seen.’ To answer this, we say: No; none of us have ever witnessed revelation being sent down to a messenger, and this means that the matter of the revelation of scripture to a messenger is a matter of the Unseen, which God knows and in which we believers believe. And how can we believe in all the messengers and not make any difference between them? We say that the messengers sent by God only deliver a way of guidance from God which contains doctrines that do not change with the passage of time, and rulings which change with the passage of time according to the circumstances connected with them.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Al-At‘ima, and by Muslim in Al-Iman*

So, the doctrinal essence of every message remains the same, but the required practical applications in life differ because life’s circumstances differ; and when life’s circumstances differ, the True Lord sends down the appropriate legislation. But the essence is the same, which is sent to us by the Creator besides whom there is no deity. For this reason, the wise words come: ‘…We make no distinction between any of His messengers….’ We make no distinction between the messengers in that they deliver to us from God what all the different forms of revelation agree on in terms of doctrinal matters, and what they differ upon in terms of rulings which are appropriate for the conditions of their time.

After this, the True Lord says, ‘…We hear and we obey….’ Hearing means that the call is delivered, and obeying means that its requirements are implemented, and that the believer obeys the commands and prohibitions in everything connected with the motions of life. Those who wish to separate religion from the motions of life say, ‘Religion is concerned with acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, the poor-due and the pilgrimage’; and beyond this, they seek to separate the motions of life from religion.

To these people, we say: You are speaking about what you have heard about a religion which did not come to regulate the motions of life, but rather came to restore the element which was absent from the Jews, namely the element of spirituality; but the Islamic religion came as a seal of all the religions to regulate the motions of life; for every matter of life and every motion within it are contained within the limits of obedience. When we read the Noble Quran, we find the wise words where God addresses the believers saying that when the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation (Friday), they should hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave all worldly commerce: this is for their own good, if they but knew it (*al-Jumu'a:* 9).

So, the True Lord *the Most High* commands the believers and takes them from one of the motions of life to a different motion, He does not take them arbitrarily, but rather, He calls them to announce their communal loyalty, which is an announcement from every believer of servitude before God in front of all other creatures. And after the believers finish praying, what does the True Lord *the Most High* say to them? He tells them that when the prayer is ended, to disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain something of God's bounty, but to remember God often so that they might attain success (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

So, dispersing freely on earth is a motion of life, just as the call to hasten to God's remembrance was. In this way, every motion of life is included within the realm of obedience; so '…We hear, and we obey…' means, we have heard all of the teaching. But when we hear the teaching and when we obey, do we have the ability to obey all the teachings of the Way, or will we make mistakes?

Since no one is able to be completely obedient, and we make mistakes, God's words then come: '…[We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination.' The final destination all goes back to You, and You are the True God; so, we servants ask You for forgiveness so that when we meet You, we will be sure that Your mercy outstrips Your wrath. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ ٱللَّهُ نَفۡسًا إِلَّا وُسۡعَهَاۚ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتۡ وَعَلَيۡهَا مَا ٱكۡتَسَبَتۡۗ رَبَّنَا لَا
تُؤَاخِذۡنَآ إِن نَّسِينَآ أَوۡ أَخۡطَأۡنَاۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحۡمِلۡ عَلَيۡنَآ إِصۡرٗا كَمَا حَمَلۡتَهُۥ
عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِنَاۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلۡنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِۦۖ وَٱعۡفُ عَنَّا وَٱغۡفِرۡ
لَنَا وَٱرۡحَمۡنَآۚ أَنتَ مَوۡلَىٰنَا فَٱنصُرۡنَا عَلَى ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ٢٨٦

God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear:
each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad –
'Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes.
Lord, do not burden us as You burdened those before us.

Lord, do not burden us with more than we have strength to bear. Pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Protector, so help us against the disbelievers' [286]
(The Quran, *al-Baqara*: 286)

'God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity….' He *the Exalted* only burdens you with what you can bear; why? Because with respect to the capacity of the human soul, there are three kinds of actions: the first kind is of those which we have no power over, and these are far removed from what God charges us with. The second kind relates to those which we have power over, but with great difficulty so that we have to exert our powers somewhat. The third kind is related to those things which we are well able to bear. So 'God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity…' This means that the True Lord *the Most High* only charges the soul with responsibilities which are within the confines of its ability. The True Lord *the Most High* held every Muslim responsible for praying five obligatory prayers a day, and our times are filled with prayer; and it could have been ten prayers since there are people who are able to offer supererogatory prayers. And He *the Exalted* held every Muslim responsible for fasting one month; yet, are there not some people who fast three months? The same can be said of the *zakat* (poor-due) since there have been people who give all of their wealth for God's sake, not only the poor-due which they are obliged to give.

So, we are well able to bear this, and even to do more. There are, then, three kinds of things: things which are beyond our ability so that they do not enter the realm of responsibility; and things which we are able to do, but only with difficulty; and things which we are well able to bear. When the True Lord *the Most High* gives us responsibilities, He gives us things which we are well able to do; and as long as He gives us things which we are well able to do, if you willingly do anything extra this is another matter: '…And he who of his own accord volunteers a good work, shall derive good from it: and good shall it be for you to fast if you know it' (*al-Baqara*: 184), as long as you offer something extra which is of the same kind as that which He made obligatory.

So moral responsibilities are within our ability to bear; otherwise, if you were not well able to bear them, you would not voluntarily offer anything more. He *the Exalted* says, ‘God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity…’ and after this He teaches us how to supplicate by saying, ‘…“Our Lord, and do not lay upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and do not burden us with that which we have no ability to bear….”’ And He has already told us that ‘God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity…;’ so He *the Exalted* holds us responsible only for that which we are able to do.

It is related that when God heard His Messenger and the believers saying, ‘…Our Lord, and do not lay upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us…,’ He *the Exalted* said, ‘I assent.’ And when they said, ‘…Our Lord, and do not burden us with that which we have no ability to bear…,’ He *the Exalted* said, ‘I assent.’ And He *the Exalted* did not burden us with more than we are well able to bear which means the lowest common denominator of all the believers. There are people whose aspirations are higher than those of others; and in the case of those whose aspirations are high, they may perform additional acts of worship voluntarily; and in the case of those whose aspiration is not so high, they only do that which is obligatory for them. And if anything happens to a person to make the ruling beyond what he is well able to bear, God lightens the burden: the Sacred Law says to the traveller: You have left your habitual life, and gone to places in which you are not settled, so the True Lord lightens your burdens for you; thus you may forgo fasting in *Ramadan*, and you may shorten your prayers.

The True Lord *the Most High* knows that what is within our capacity might sometimes be diminished, which is why He *the Glorious and Exalted* lightens some of the rulings of religious charges and gives dispensations when they cannot be borne. An example of this is found in God’s ruling concerning fighting when He reassured the believers in one of the battles that He has lightened their burden, for He knows that they suffer from weakness; and so if there is one hundred of them who are patient in adversity, they should be able to overcome two hundred (*al-Anfal:* 66).

Before this verse was revealed, the proportion in battle was one to ten (that is if the believers face an enemy force that was ten times their number, they should persist and fight), and then the True Lord *the Most High* lightened it and made it one to two (that if they face an enemy force that was only double their number) because there was weakness. In this way we see that He *the Exalted* will lighten the burden of responsibility whenever it goes beyond what we are well able to bear.

Many people interpret this in the wrong way, saying that some moral responsibilities are beyond their capacity. To these people, we say: No, it is not for you to determine what you are well able to bear and then, to measure the responsibility by this standard. Rather, consider whether He charged you with it, or not. If the True Lord held you responsible for it, you must judge that He burdened you with that which you are well able to bear, and all of the responsibilities with which the Most Merciful burdens us are things which we are well able to bear. 'God does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned….'

The expression 'it will have' implies possession and distinction, and it means that which benefits and gains reward for the soul; and 'it will bear' implies having committed a misdeed. We notice that the expression 'it will have' is always used with the Arabic verb form *kasab* (rendered here as 'gained') (in a positive context), whilst the expression 'it will bear' always goes with the Arabic verb from *iktasab* (rendered as 'earned' with a negative connotation, sinning), except in one single verse, when the True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Yea! Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed, these are the inmates of the Fire, therein to abide for ever' (*al-Baqara*: 81). (Here the verb form *kasab* is used)

There is an observation to be made here about style, since the form *kasab* means that there is a difference in the mode of action between this form and *iktasab*: the form *iktasab* is on the morphological pattern *ifta'al* which suggests affectation and the performance of an action which requires manipulation. As for *kasab,* it means doing something natural and in harmony with the soul's original inclination. So *kasab* is not the same as *iktasab*, and all good deeds are done by *kasab,* not *iktasab.*

For example, when a man looks at his wife and sees her beauty, does he have to employ any artifice, or is this something natural? It is natural; yet, when he looks at a woman who is not his wife or kin, he looks around to see if anyone saw him looking, and if he will be mocked or jeered because of what he did. Why? It was so because he has committed an unnatural act.

Another example: when a person eats food bought with his own money, or his father's money, he eats in a natural way; but when someone enters an orchard to steal from it, he employs artifice and trickery when doing so, and tries to hide himself. The evildoer employs artifice, whilst the actions of the one who does good are simple, with no artifice. Evil is that which requires artifice and affectation.

The greatest misfortune is when evildoing requires no artifice because the one who does it, must have reached the point where his faithful sensitivity has become blunted, and evil deeds become a simple (and natural) matter for him because he has become used to doing them so much. The True Lord says, 'Yea! Whoever earns evil and by his sin is engulfed…' (*al-Baqara*: 81). Sinfulness surrounds them from all sides, and there is no longer any way out, and he does not employ any artifice since he has developed and acquired a predisposition for evil. For example, when a thief first begins his act of stealing, he is nervous and watchful, but once stealing becomes like his vocation, he carries all the stratagems of theft and his sensitivity becomes blunted.

In the first stage of evil, evildoers are ashamed of their evil deeds, which shows that their consciences and hearts still have some good in them; but when they consider evil to be a vocation and a talent, this is the disaster; and their sinfulness engulfs them and overwhelms them, and leaves them no way to escape to God and repent. The one who plays gambling games, or is ensnared by the sin of licentiousness, might say happily, 'Last night was fantastic!' Yet, the one who commits the sin for the first time says, 'Last night was horrible; I wish it had never happened,' and he continues to chastise and reproach himself because he has hurt and exhausted himself by committing sin.

So, the True Lord's words '…It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned…' explain to us that it is evildoing which requires effort; and if the matter changes from *iktasab* to *kasab,* this is the great disaster, and it means that one's sinfulness has engulfed him. And every evil deed a person does will be counted against him, so, the intelligent and wise person is the one who does much that would be counted in, not against, his favour; for the One Who says this is the All Knowing, All-Dominant True Lord, with Whom is all destination, so, there is no way of evading this issue. After this, the True Lord states the supplication of His believing servants: '…Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred….'

Someone might say, 'The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* assured us: "My community has been excused mistakes, forgetfulness, and that which they are forced to do."(1) So, why would the Quran bring up something for which the Islamic community has already been excused, and have people call upon their Lord to pardon them for it?'

We reply to this: Did anyone tell you that the excusing of mistakes, forgetfulness and coerced acts existed from the beginning? Perhaps the excusing happened after the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the early believers had prayed for it. As long as they were 'excused,' this means that they must have been counted before that. So no one should say, 'How can you supplicate about something which does not exist?' Or, alternatively, we can say that this indicates the height of faithful purity; that is, God *the Most High* should not be disobeyed in any way except accidentally or in forgetfulness, and that it is not right that God be disobeyed deliberately; for the one who knows God's true worth, would never disobey God except accidentally or in forgetfulness because the Creator is the One Who gave us all blessings, and after this held us responsible, so, it is important that we not commit any disobedience intentionally. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* called what Adam did an act of disobedience even though He tells that He gave Adam a command before, but he forgot; and God found no firmness of purpose in him (*Ta Ha:* 115).

And God called the forgetfulness of Adam disobedience, when He said that Adam disobeyed his Lord, and thus did he fell into grievous error (*Ta Ha:* 121). So forgetfulness was originally considered an act of disobedience; but God was kind to the community of Muhammad excusing their forgetfulness. Concerning the matter of Adam, there is something which we need to be aware of:

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir on the authority of Thawban*

Adam was created by the Hand of God whilst we are created by the law of reproduction; and Adam received his charges from God directly without any messenger, and was given a single command: not to eat from the tree.

If Adam was created directly by God, and given his charges directly by God, and was only held responsible for a single thing, which was not to approach the tree, and did not have many responsibilities, what did he forget? And what did he remember? It was an act of disobedience; therefore: for Adam, forgetfulness was disobedience because he was created by the Hand of God. And this is what we understand from God's address to Satan when He chided him for not prostrating himself before what God created with His own Hands (*Sad:* 75).

For this reason, it was not appropriate or right for him to forget this single responsibility. Perhaps our master Adam was made to forget for a wise reason known to God which may have been to allow him to live upon the earth where God had made him His vicegerent. As for the community of Muhammad, when we say, '…Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred…,' it is as though we are saying: Lord, we recognise Your true merit, and we would never dare to disobey you intentionally; and if we disobey, it is only through our forgetfulness or error – and this is an acknowledgement of the merit of the True Lord.

But what is forgetfulness? And what is a mistake (*khata'*) First of all, there are the verbs *akhta'* and *khati'a;* and the word *khit'* can only mean a sin, since it means to deliberately do something wrong, so, you know the rule yet, you break it. Yet, the one who makes a mistake (*akhta'*) might not know the rule, so, you correct his mistake for him because he has fallen short of what is correct.

An example of this is as follows: When you learn in school that the subject of a sentence is in the nominative case, whilst the object is in the accusative, and during the middle of the year, when you make a mistake, the teacher will correct the rule for you until it settles in your mind; however, when the examinations come, does the teacher correct you, or take you to task? He takes you to task because you studied this rule all through the year. So there is *khati'a* and *akhta'*; and *akhta*' can sometimes be unintentional because there is no rule which I have broken, or I did not know the rule, but rather, I simply misspoke because they had not yet told it to me, or they told me once, but I did not remember, or the matter had not yet, become natural to me; for the student makes mistakes with the subject and the object for a long time, and after this, he matures and the language becomes an innate faculty for him if he is diligent in retaining it.

At first, the student speaks his Arabic sentences without any inflectional endings, but rather leaves the ends of the words without any case ending; and then, when he remembers the rule, he properly assigns the nominative and accusative case endings. Why? Because three rulings cross his mind: this is a subject and subjects take the nominative case, so, it must be nominative; and this is the object…. So he goes through a mental process; but after he goes through this process, he is able to say it correctly even if he does not remember the rule because it has become an innate talent of language for him which we describe as being 'automatic.'

An example of this is the child who learns how to sew. Look at how long it takes him to learn how to take the thread and pass it through the eye of the needle, and his teacher might need to discipline him more than once before he learns it; and the tip of the thread splits into two because it is long, so, he shortens it, but then, it will not go into the eye, so he twists it so it will go in. He takes such a long time, and then he begins to stitch and it does not come out neatly. He remains like this for a while, and then, he becomes able to do all this automatically, whilst conversing with someone because these actions have become innate for him, i.e. automatic.

When someone becomes accustomed by practice to a mental activity, according to limited rules such as learning a language, we call this a 'faculty'; as for physical activities such as threading a needle, we call it a 'mechanism.'

An example of a mental activity is: when you ask as student of Al-Azhar University a question of jurisprudence, he might need some time to familiarise himself with the chapter which contains the answer; yet, if you pose the same question to an experienced scholar, as soon as you ask the question, he will give you the ruling and the chapter where the ruling can be found; jurisprudence has become an innate faculty for the scholar.

The True Lord then states the supplication of the believers: '…Our Lord, and do not lay upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us….' A burden is something heavy which is difficult for a person to carry. An example of this burden is that which was sent down to the Jews: If you want to repent, kill yourselves, or give in charity one quarter of your possessions. But God does not deal with us as He dealt with the nations who came before us; and when we say, '…Our Lord, and do not burden us with that which we have no ability to bear…,' we believe what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'God said, "Yes."'(1) The meaning of God's word 'Yes' is that He *the Exalted* answered the supplication by lifting hardship from this community.

That is, God will not make us bear burdens which we have no strength to bear. And when we say, 'And pardon us,' we turn to God and beseech Him: You, the True Lord, know that however great the faithful consciousness and pious vigilance we are granted might be, we will not be able to give You your full due; so, we can only approach You by asking You to pardon us and efface our sins.

The meaning of the word *'afw* here is to efface sins, just like when someone walks in the desert and leaves tracks and the wind comes and removes them. It is as though there is a sin, and the sin left a trace, and you ask God to blot out this sin. And when you say, '…and forgive us…,' you know that one of the elements of the human constitution is the intention which desires to turn resolution into action and implementation; and this requires practice from you. For example, when someone sins against you, you have the right to take retribution for this sin; and you have the right to hold back your anger so that the anger still exists, but you keep it hidden; or you have the right to forgive.

But what about such a thing in the case of the Creator Who has Absolute Power? God might not punish the sinful slave, but still be angry with him; and who amongst us could bear the anger of the Lord? For this reason, we ask His forgiveness, and say, '…and forgive us; and have mercy upon us….' We ask Him *the Exalted* not to let us fall into sin which would incur His wrath – God forbid – upon us. The effacement of sin means that we commit sin and then ask God to forgive us, but mercy is to ask Him not to let us sin to begin with.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

And when the noble verse says, '…You are our Protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people,' this is a recognition of our servitude to Him, and that He is the True Lord, our Creator, our Lord, and our Protector. As long as the True Lord is our Protector, He is our Protector against the people who disbelieve. So the end of the chapter of *al-Baqara* is in line with its beginning, when He said, *'Alif. Lam. Mim.* This Book: there is no doubt about it; it is a guidance to the God-fearing who believe in the Unseen, who observe prayer, and out of what God has bestowed on them, expend for God' (*al-Baqara:* 1-3).

At the beginning of the chapter, God gave illustrations of the disbelievers and hypocrites, and at the end of it He taught a supplication by the believers: '…give us victory over the disbelieving people.' These words indicate the lasting battle between faith and disbelief, and that the believer always takes God's rulings in order to combat disbelief wherever he finds it, and the believer has absolute trust that God is his Protector because God is the Supreme Lord of those who believe, whilst the disbelievers have no true lord. And if God is the Supreme Lord of the believer, whilst the disbeliever has no true lord, this means that the battle will continue to rage between the believer and the disbeliever, in that whenever the believer sees a violation of Islam in any form, let him trust that God is his Helper and Supporter, and trust that God is with him; and let the believer trust that God only asks him to respond to His judgement and His aid of support because He is the One Who is always victorious; and He *the Glorious and Exalted* commanded the believers to fight against the infidels who attack them and God will chastise them by their hands (*at-Tawba:* 14).

As a believer, you must always be alert to the actions of disbelief in all their forms; for with its machinations, this disbelief endeavours to spoil the motions of life and to exhaust the world, and to give supremacy to man-made laws. It is also essential for you, as a believer, to be one of the God-fearing people with whose mention God started the chapter of *al-Baqara*, and after this, you must ask God to help you always against the infidels, and this is the crowning touch of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: '…give us victory over the disbelieving people.'

Concluding the chapter of *al-Baqara* with these words indicates that if someone has faith, he must try to share his faith in his Lord with all mankind so that the motions of life can be mutually supportive, avoiding any clash between the guided motions in life of the believer and the misguided motions of life of the disbeliever; for such a conflict will prove to be a burden for the human soul, and an impediment to the power and talents which God has granted to man, for whom He subjugated the entire universe. It is therefore not possible for man, to whom God gave authority and honour above all other creatures, to live without security, tranquillity, peace and a motion of cooperation and self-support so that the society in which you live has a cultural awakening which confirms for man that he truly is God's vicegerent on earth.

It is not sufficient for us that one of us has belief and then, leads a life that separates him from the rest of the world; for in this case, he will lose out on the motions of life in this worldly life and the infidels will have the upper hand in it. Rather, God wants the believer to make the world serve him as God willed for it to serve. When the believer passes on his faith to others, he will benefit from the good of others, whilst if he keeps his faith to himself alone and leaves others in error, others will benefit from his good, whilst he will suffer the harm and damage of the disbeliever.

So, it is for his own good if all people are believers, and he must try to pass on this faith to others. But other people might be gaining benefit from misguidance because it helps them with their tyranny; and at this point, the battle begins in which the goal of all who engage in it is to gain victory. God teaches us to seek victory from Him over the disbelievers; for victory over the disbelievers is not considered a real victory unless the attributes of goodness are thereby made to take root in all existence; and when the attributes of goodness take root in all of existence, the believer has truly gained victory.

When God instructs us to ask Him to grant us victory, we must do what God requires us to do in the battle, by being true soldiers of faith. We know that when the believers enter a battle with others, they can ascertain their level of faith by looking at the result of the battle: if the battle ends with their victory and success, they know that they are God's soldiers; and if they are vanquished and defeated, they must have a closer look at themselves; for God laid this out as a matter of faith in His Book – which He vowed to preserve – saying that His soldiers will assuredly be the victorious ones (*as-Saffat:* 173).

If we do not succeed, then, we must look within ourselves: what essential duty of those who represent God's force did we fail to fulfil? When the True Lord teaches us to supplicate '…give us victory over the disbelieving people,' this means that after we utilise the means of our existence from the materials of the earth which was created for us, with the mind which God created, working with it by use of the power which God created, in this case, we will be worthy of receiving support from God because the True Lord *the Most High* extended to us the means of support. He commanded the believers to prepare for the enemies whatever force and war mounts they are able to muster so that they might deter thereby the enemies of God – who are their enemies as well – and others besides them of whom they may be unaware, but of whom God has knowledge (*al-Anfal:* 60).

At this point, you will not fear anyone because God has forces which you cannot see; yet God does not send forth the forces which we cannot see unless we first utilise the means which God extended to us.

When the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* concludes the chapter of *al-Baqara* which is the first glowing chapter of the Quran, which is then, followed by the second glowing chapter, the chapter of *Al-'Imran*, we find that this is the order of the verses and chapters of the Quran as we know it now, but it is not the order in which the verses and chapters of the Quran were originally revealed or sent down. The Quran has two sequential arrangements. The first follows the chronological order of revelation, when the verses were sent down to deal with events which happened to the Muslim community in their struggle against those who disbelieved in their Lord, and its education for their souls. So each verse came down to deal with an event; and the events of the world only occur by the hands of men; so, it does not make sense that verses of the Quran would come down to deal with other events which had no connection to what was going on in the Islamic society, or in the world, at that time.

So, the events had to happen first, and then the Quranic passages came to deal with these events. But once the religion had been completed, as God stated that He has perfected the religious law for the believers, and has bestowed upon them the full measure of His blessings, and that He was satisfied with Islam (submission to Him) as their religion (*al-Ma'ida:* 3); it was time for the texts to be re-arranged in a holistic way because they had already been dealt with before in a partial way. When we say that a chapter was sent down after such-and-such event, or that a verse in it was revealed after such-and-such event, and we find that this is all different from the chronological order, we realise that God has in his Book two different sequential arrangements:

The first is the chronological order of revelation; and the second is that which we observe in the Quran now by which God's words were completed for the sake of guidance; and this arrangement is also from God.

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Al-‘Imran

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter we will now examine – the chapter of *Al-'Imran* – is contextually appropriate to follow the chapter of *al-Baqara*. This is because the chapter of *al-Baqara* provided us with information about the first human existence: it spoke about the creation of Adam, his vicegerency on earth, and his being taught the names of all things. It then spoke about some of the messengers who were sent to the creature who was made a vicegerent on earth, and presented some issues related to events connected with specific times which the Quran mentioned, and arranged in a precise sequence. It is appropriate, therefore, that after the chapter of *al-Baqara* would come the chapter of *Al-'Imran* because this chapter speaks about another kind of creation distinct from the first although it has its origin in it. This is because the chapter informs us of the creation of Jesus who was created according to a different mode from that of Adam's. Just as Adam was created without a father or mother, it stands to reason that another creation might come without a father.

God *the Most High* opened the chapter of *al-Baqara* with the names of three letters of the alphabet: '*Alif Lam Mim'*. We spent a lot of time examining this issue at the start of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, and focussed on the wisdom behind the occurrence of certain letters. We saw that every letter has both a 'sound' and a 'name' so that, for example, in reading the word *qara'a* ('read'), when you pronounce the letter *qa*, you pronounce a letter which is connected with the other letters, this being the 'sound' of the letter, whereas the 'name' of the letter is *qaf.*

So every letter has both a name and a sound. When we speak, we use the sound of the letter; whether we are illiterate or educated, we can all pronounce the sounds 'r-e-a-d'; but the names of the letters are not known except by those who are literate, as they have been taught 'this is *qaf*', etc. This is the name of the letter.

So from education, we learn the letters (names of the sounds), and in speech both the illiterate and literate use the sounds.

We know that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, and he did not sit with a teacher and did not study; so who taught him the names of the letters that no one knows except the educated? These letters are read differently in different places in the Quran, sometimes pronounced as sounds in connection, and sometimes as names of letters pronounced separately. At the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, '*Alif Lam Mim*' (*al-Baqara:* 1) are names of letters. But as we have mentioned, when we see them at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Fil*, we read them as *Alam tara* 'did you not see…' as three sounds forming a question word 'did you not see…' (*al-Fil:* 1), and we do not read the names of the letters, but rather their sounds, and so we read '*alam*'. Who is it, then, who differentiates for us between '*Alif Lam Mim*' in one place and '*alam'* in another place – and they are written the same in both cases? Without doubt, it is instituted by God. Truly, God has ordained that in one place it is *'alam'*, and in another '*Alif Lam Mim'*.

The True Lord leads us to the realisation that this Quran is not from the creation of a human being for there is no human fabrication before the revelation of the Quran that pronounces the names of the letters except certain letters called 'articles of attention' such as *ha*- used to call someone's attention. Why? It is because the speaker is free to speak, and to choose when to speak, but the one who hears, has no idea of what the speaker will say. The speaker can choose the time to speak what he likes, unlike the one who hears who does so only after the speaker speaks without having any choice. Because of this, they used to use some letters as a way of attracting the attention of the listener. So before speaking, they would use the letter *ha* to draw the listener's attention as though they were saying 'pay attention, I wish to speak to you and I want you not to miss anything that I say.' Some of these letters are called 'articles of opening' such as how *ala* was used in the well-known ancient Arabic verse to call a waiter before saying, 'give us a drink' in order to alert the listener so they are not distracted from what the speaker wants to say, and so miss the point.

So every expression that uses the names of letters or other words for alerting attention are used purely to prepare the mind of the listener. What prevents us, then, from assuming that these letters, too, are intended to alert the listener to the importance of being mindful of what is to come? One of the proofs that these ordained letters make an impression on the human soul is that none of the people who opposed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in his mission took exception to them, although they were people of eloquence and language skills.

Have we ever heard that any of them said, 'Look at Muhammad! How can he come up with senseless words and expressions with no purpose or meaning, and then claim he is the most eloquent of the Arabs?!' Did any of them say this? They did not; rather, they accepted them, and did not take exception to them, and never said, 'What is this "*Alif Lam Mim*" that Muhammad has brought?' This proves that the letters had impressed them when they heard them, as God intended, for they did not find fault in the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* because of them, and they did not use them as a criticism against him. We say that this is one of the secrets of these letters.

God stressed certain particular meanings by repeating them more than once; that was because the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came at a time when prophethood had been absent for a long time: there was no address from heaven. The meanings that God wanted to stress and clarify are repeated several times until they settle in the minds of those who receive them. For this reason, the first word of God *the Most High* in the chapter of *Al-'Imran* is:

الٓمٓ ١

Alif. Lam. Mim. [1] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 1)

This also appears in other chapters which are the chapters of *al-'Ankabut*, *ar-Rum*, *Luqman*, and *as-Sajda*. The letters appear with an additional *ra* in some chapters, and with *sad* in others, i.e. *'Alif Lam Mim Ra'* and *'Alif Lam Mim Sad'*. They come as a confirmation of the meaning, or secret that God has placed within these letters although we may not understand that secret.

A person can benefit from secrets within things which were placed there by the Creator of those things whether he understands them or not.

For example, we take a villager who is uneducated in electronics: Does he benefit from electricity or not? He does, and he is able to use the light-switch to turn the light on and off, but does he know the secret behind it? He does not, but yet he can benefit from it. Similarly, when the believer recites '*Alif Lam Mim'*, he takes the secret of the letters from the One Who said them whether he understands them or not. We do not need, then, to philosophise on this issue. It is true that the human intellect would delve into something in order to reconcile it with its understanding, but the provision of God and the wisdom of God's provision are above any intellectual reconciliation, or the absence thereof.

The Words of God *the Most High* at the end of the chapter of *al-Baqara:* '… so give us victory over the disbelieving people' (*al-Baqara:* 286) also suit the chapter of *Al-'Imran* – Why? It is because Islam would come to face the forces of disbelief and the forces of the people of the Book. Islam did not come to divide and split the call to God which came from God by means of the prophets who came before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, or to contradict any of it; but rather, it came to fortify the call to God so that all of the nations who followed these other religions would join the ranks of Islam (which means surrendering oneself to God). Because of this, when the Arabs rejected the Message of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*, God said to them that he who truly knows and understands the Divine Book and Revelation will testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (*ar-Ra'd:* 43). So if the disbelievers said that Muhammad had not been sent by God, Muhammad was commanded by God to say to them that sufficient to hold witness between him and them is God's testimony and the testimony of him who truly has knowledge of the Divine Book and Revelation (*al-Ra'd:* 43). For this reason, the duty of the people of the Book was that when the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they should have been the first to believe in him because he came to confirm the course of faith, and that by coming with a chapter called *Al-'Imran* ('The Family of *'Imran'*), all would know that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come to undermine the religion of Jesus, but rather to preserve it and confirm it, as though it were said: You who believe in Jesus: if you truly believe in him, then hasten at once to believe in Muhammad as God has named a major chapter of the Quran, that of *Al-‘Imran* after the family from which Jesus came.

The Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came neither to support tribalism and bigotry nor to wipe out that which preceded it in the manner in which bigotry prevails with one people seeking to erase every trace of another people so as to inaugurate an entirely new history. No. Rather, this Quran wants to correct and narrate history accurately, and so it brings a chapter entitled *Al-‘Imran* which is a great honour to that religion and its followers. God *the Glorious and Exalted* begins the chapter by saying:

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلۡحَيُّ ٱلۡقَيُّومُ ٢

God – there is no god but Him, the Ever Living,
the Ever Watchful [2] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 2)

This is the summit of all matters, and therefore the Quran repeats it to confirm it. ‘God – there is no deity except Him….’ As the scholars say, the word ‘God’ here is a subject, and ‘… there is no deity except Him…’ is a predicate. A subject must be clear in the mind, and the word ‘God’ is clear in the mind. However, God wants to give the word ‘God’ the description that is most appropriate for it which is ‘… there is no deity except Him….’ This is why the True Lord says that if you ask them who has created the heavens and the earth and made the sun and the moon subservient to His laws, they will surely answer that it is God. How perverted, then, their minds are! (*al-‘Ankabut:* 61)

So we see that the concept of God was clearly understood in their minds, but the incumbent authorities wanted to cloud this clarity. The Quran then came to remove and efface this confusion, confirming that ‘…there is no deity except Him…’ which is a matter that God has testified to saying that God Himself gives evidence that there is no deity except Him... (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

God’s testimony should be sufficient, as it is a Personal testimony. The testimony of the angels is a testimony of witnessing, as they see no one but Him. In addition, the people of knowledge have testified taking evidence from creation, confirming the truth of the angels’ and the truth of God’s testimony.

If we look again, we will see that God has testified to Himself and said '…there is no deity except Him…', and has made it the slogan of monotheism, and has made matters very easy and simple. God did not want to make the strongest evidence of faith complicated or philosophical, or one which no one could comprehend except the well educated and cultured; rather, religion is required from all people, from the shepherd to the philosopher; it is required from the street-sweeper as it is required from the university professor.

Therefore, it is necessary that faith should be at the intellectual level of all people; there is no philosophising in this matter. For this reason, God wanted to make the affair of utmost simplicity, and so clarified it thus: I testify that there is no god but Me. Either this is true and the issue is resolved, and there is no need for anyone to dispute it, or it is untrue and so tell us: Where is the other god who has heard the challenge, and from whom has God taken his creation, and said: I am alone in the Universe, and I am the One Who has created? Yet we have heard no response to Him, and nor of any opposition to Him. Does this not assume other gods know? If that is the case, then this other is not fit to be a god, and if the other does know and has not defended itself and its ownership of creation, then it is not worthy to be a god. The matter belongs to God unless a cause appears to contradict it, and so we see that '…there is no deity except Him…' is a true statement, and intellectually and logically He is God, and we find no contradiction. We have already seen that if a claim is made and there is no contradictory claim made against it, the claim stands until the contradiction emerges. For example, if ten people gather in a room, and then after they leave, the owner of the house finds a wallet, and one of them returns in a state of anxiety and says 'I lost a wallet,' and the house owner says 'we found one, but there were ten of you;' all the ten persons gather and none of the others claims the wallet was his when asked, so the wallet must be his.

God has said, '… there is no deity except Him….' If there is another god, it must show itself. Yet nothing shows itself to us except the Omnipotence of God – '… there is no deity except Him,...'and while there is no god but Him, and while this universe is in need of eternal sustenance to manage its affairs, then He must be alive in a manner that suits Him, as He bestows life upon many species, humans, animals, plants, inanimate beings, and the One Who gives life must be alive, and must have a life that suits Him.

The name *Al-Qayyum* ('… the Sustainer of [all] existence') is in Arabic in a morphological form called 'the intensive form'. Sometimes an action happens in an ordinary way, and sometimes it happens in a more intense way. For example, if you call a person a 'glutton', it is different from calling him an 'eater' because we all eat, and so we are all 'eaters', but we are not all 'gluttons' because this word is in an exaggerated form to show the intensity of the action. If God is the One Who sustains and arranges the affairs of the entire universe, is He an 'arranger' (*Qa'im*) or 'Sustainer' (*Qayyum*)? He must be a 'Sustainer'. Another meaning of *Qayyum* is 'self-sufficient', but what is the nature of this self-sufficiency? It is completely eternal. So the word *Al-Qayyum* is an exaggerated form derived from 'arranging a matter', 'being self-sufficient', and 'sustaining innumerable others'. As these others are numerous and varied, they require a strong attribute in their Creator, so the Creator is the Sustainer of all existence. The Words of God 'God – there is no deity except Him,…' are the support of the believer in all aspects of his life.

Ubayy ibn Ka'b relates that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him once, 'O Abu Al-Mundhir, tell me which verse of the Book of God you think is the mightiest.' He answered, 'God – there is no deity except Him….' The Messenger patted his chest and said, 'May knowledge benefit you, O Abu Al-Mundhir.'(1)

Tell us, by God: if there is a son and a father, does the son want for anything in life? No, because the father takes care of things. The popular saying goes: 'He who has a father wants for nothing.' So, as for the one who has a Lord, he must be modest because his Lord is saying: I am alive, and I am the Sustainer of all Existence meaning: I am managing your affairs.

God *the Most High* emphasises this sustaining and management in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, when He says in *Ayat Al-Kursi* (the Verse of the Throne), 'Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep' (*al-Baqara:* 255). It is as though He is saying: You sleep, for I do not sleep. If not, then who watches over you when you sleep, and are unable to guard your own life? God favours us in His Power as the Sustainer of all existence, as ‘God – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence.’ As long as He is living and sustaining, then it is logical that He is arranging and managing the affairs of all creation, and has granted to all creation that by which they live; of material and moral sustenance. As long as He is sustaining, managing, and taking care of the affairs of His creation, it is essential that He grants them that which is necessary to sustain their material and moral needs. As for their material needs, He says it is He Who, after creating the earth, placed firm mountains on it, towering above its surface, and bestowed so many blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it; and all this He created in four days (*Fussilat:* 10). So He fulfils our needs with regard to material sustenance. As for our moral needs, He says:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

نَزَّلَ عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ مُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا بَيۡنَ يَدَيۡهِ وَأَنزَلَ ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةَ وَٱلۡإِنجِيلَ ٣

Step by step, He has sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel [3] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 3)

So He did not give us the means of material sustenance only; rather, he also gave us the means of moral sustenance. This is because material life without morality would lead to reckless, frivolous folly, and so God wanted to lift the material to the level of faith. The revelation of morality is therefore necessary. For this reason, God *the Most High* says, ‘He has sent down upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth….’ The phrase ‘sent down’ indicates obligation because it means something is coming down from a higher position, and so God is saying: Do not look down upon moral values that come to you from Someone higher than you because they are not equal to you; rather, they come from the Creator of the universe and humanity; you may only look down upon something which comes to you from someone lower than you. But when legislation comes to you from someone higher than you, do not disdain it; for your submission to it does not debase you, but rather honours you.

God *the Most High* says, ‘He has sent down upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth….’ In the course of the Quran, we find God saying that the trustworthy Spirit has come down with it (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193); and in another place, God asserts that He has sent down the Noble Quran in truth, and in truth it came down, and that He has sent the Messenger but as a herald of glad tidings and a warner (*al-Isra':* 105). However, did the Quran descend by itself? Gabriel *peace be upon him* used to bring the Quran down to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*. This does not mean that the Quran did not 'come down' because Gabriel *peace be upon him* would come down with the Quran to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* and God *the Glorious and Exalted* says that He has sent down the Noble Quran in truth, and in truth it came down, and that He has sent the Messenger but as a herald of glad tidings and a warner (*al-Isra':* 105). This way the two phrases 'send down' and 'come down' are equal. When we consider an action in any given time, we must ponder: Is it confined to a particular time, or not? The Noble Quran came down to the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* over a period of twenty-three years, and was revealed in parts according to events so that every passage of the Quran's revelation was related to the course of a particular event. However, God *the Most High* says that He *anzala* ('sent down') the Quran on the Night of Power ('*Laylat Al-Qadr'*) (*al-Qadr:* 1).

Here, God *the Most High* is specifying a time. We should realise therefore that the Quran that came down over a period of twenty-three years is the same Quran that God sent down on the Night of Power.

The Quran, therefore, has two modes of revelation: It was 'sent down all in one motion' (*inzal*), and then'sent down in parts gradually' (*tanzil*). So the meaning of God's statement that He *anzala* ('sent down') the Quran on the Night of Power ('*Laylat Al-Qadr'*) (*al-Qadr:* 1) is that the Quran in its entirety was sent down from the Preserved Tablet to the first heaven in order to fulfil its mission in the universe, and this is what God sent down on the Night of Power. The Noble Book that God sent down to the heaven on the Night of Power was then revealed gradually according to events, as legislation or necessary clarification occasioned.

The other revealed scriptures did not have this form of revelation; rather, they were revealed in a single motion not according to events, but rather, all at once, as the Quran was first sent down from the Preserved Tablet to the heavens.

The Quranic rendition of this is as follows: ‘He has sent down (*nazzal;* step-by-step) upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming what was [revealed] before it. And He sent down (*anzal;* in one motion) the Torah and the Gospel.’

Here we need to pay attention to God’s word *nazzal* (‘sent down step by step’) when describing the Quran and *anzal* ‘sent down’ when describing the Torah and Gospel. The Torah and the Gospel are described together as *anzal* (‘…sent down…’) which indicates to us that God revealed them in one occasion. As for the Quran, God revealed it over a period of twenty-three years in parts according to events that influenced the situation of the Muslims, and including a comprehensive message encompassing everything from the day of the first creation until the Day of Resurrection.

God revealed the Quran gradually in parts according to events in order to fortify the Prophet’s heart because he was exposed to all kinds of events: every time something happened that required reassurance, a Quranic revelation would come down. The Quran reports that the disbelievers used to ask why the Quran has not been sent down on him in one single revelation. The answer was that it has been revealed in this manner so that God will strengthen the Prophet’s heart with it (*al-Furqan:* 32).

A passage of the revelation would come, and the believers would memorise it and act according to its guidance, and then another passage would follow. God *the Most High* adds another reason for this step-by-step revelation: that whenever the disbelievers came to the Prophet with a statement, God would send him the truth with the best explanation (*al-Furqan:* 33).

So by His mercy, God gave the Muslims the opportunity to ask questions, and seek the clarification of ambiguous matters.

Throughout these twenty-three years, God *the Most High* gave the Muslims the opportunity to model their lives in the light of the Quranic Way and have any mistakes in their actions corrected by the Quran. This shows that the Quran condoned discussion and debate, and enjoined the bringing of things in the time when they are required because if something (an idea or a ruling) is produced when it is needed, it is accepted with joy.

An example of this in our daily lives is: A person keeps a medicine cabinet filled with all kinds of medicines, but when he has a slight headache and needs an aspirin, he cannot find it amongst all those medicines. If he were to buy it when he needed it, it would be easier and more trustworthy.

God *the Most High* both sent the Quran all in one motion, and then step by step; so He says, in continuation of the verse:

مِن قَبۡلُ هُدٗى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ ٱلۡفُرۡقَانَۗ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِ
ٱللَّهِ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٞ شَدِيدٞۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٞ ذُو ٱنتِقَامٍ ﴿٤﴾

Earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down the distinction [between right and wrong]. Those who deny God's revelations will suffer severe torment: God is almighty and capable of retribution [4] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 4)

So the final word is: '… And He sent down the *Furqan* (Quran, Criterion of judgement between right and wrong).' So here we have the combination of 'sent down' both all at once, and step by step.

God often says of the Quran that it is '… the Book in truth, confirming what was [revealed] before it…' (*Al-'Imran:* 3). This means that the Quran highlights the right direction: It is a confirmation of what came before and preceded it, a confirmation of the doctrines that are unchanged from one divinely revealed religion to the next because the differences in these religions are only in terms of rulings and legislation, as certain rulings will be appropriate to certain times and may not be appropriate for other times; as for tenets of faith, they do not change or alter, just as histories and the stories of the Prophets do not change.

'Confirmation' means that which agrees with the actual reality, and this is what we refer to as 'honesty or truthfulness'. If it does not conform to the actual reality, we call it a 'lie'. So reality is the benchmark. For this reason, we said before that the honest person is the one whose narration of events does not differ from those events because he is true to reality and so whenever he narrates a story, he does so accurately and in detail. As for the liar, he does not narrate according to reality, but instead creates a new reality each time which is why people say: If you are taken to lying, make sure to have a good memory; meaning that if you are going to lie – God forbid – you should remember what you say, so as not to contradict it later. The honest person is the one who examines the reality, and as long as he speaks with honesty, he is describing a reality which is firm and unspoiled by vain whims; he does not speak now according to one whim, and then later according to another.

As long as a story of an event is conveyed with honesty, it becomes a truth because a truth is an unchanged fact. This is why God *the Most High* says, ‘He has sent down upon you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming what was [revealed] before it. And He sent down the Torah and the Gospel Before, as guidance for mankind. And He sent down the *Furqan* (Quran, Criterion of judgement between right and wrong). Indeed, those who disbelieve in the signs (verses) of God, will have a severe punishment, and God is Exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 3-4).

We have already discussed the Torah, and said that some scholars try to examine arabicised foreign words as though they are originally from the Arabic language, and find the Arabic form and description for it, and so some of them have said about the Torah that the name comes from the Arabic word al-wary, an old Arabic word used to describe the lighting of a fire by striking sticks together. Other scholars have said that ‘*Injil*’ (‘Gospel’) comes from the word ‘*najl*’, meaning ‘increase’.

To these scholars I say: You have viewed these words as though they are Arabic, but Torah is Hebrew in origin, and *Injil* is Greek. These words were adopted as proper names for those books, and then entered our language.

Do not assume that just because the Quran was revealed in Arabic, every word in it is Arabic. No; it is true that the Quran is Arabic, but it is also true that the Arabic tongue had become accustomed to these words, and their meanings had become clearly understood.

For example, in modern times we have begun to use the word ‘bank’ in our language and it has become part of Arabic because Arabs have become accustomed to using it. The meaning of the Quran’s being Arabic is that God addressed the Arabs with words that they understood, and that were prevalent in their speech even if their origin was not Arabic. When God mentioned the Torah and Injil and said that the Quran came as a confirmation of them, He said, 'Before, as guidance for mankind. And He sent down the *Furqan* (Quran, Criterion of judgement between right and wrong). Indeed, those who disbelieve in the signs (verses) of God will have a severe punishment, and God is Exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution.'

Which people are those whom God refers to when He says '… as guidance for mankind...'? Without doubt, they are the people who lived at the time when those scriptures were called to. If the Quran came as a confirmation to what is in the Torah and Gospel, could those books not also be a source of guidance for us? Indeed they are, but that guidance only extends to that which the Quran confirms in them, so not everything that is contained within them or that is ascribed to them is a guide for us. That which the Quran confirms within them is a guide for us; so the meaning of '… as guidance for mankind…' refers to those who lived at the time of those religions and scriptures; and we believe in whatever the Quran confirms to us from within them.

Then God *the Most High* says, '… And He sent down the *Furqan* (Quran, Criterion of judgement between right and wrong)….' This indicates that the Quran will come with a difficult mission because the word *Furqan* ('Criterion of judgement between right and wrong') is not appropriate except in the case of a conflict making clear the distinction between guidance and misguidance, truth and falsehood, happiness and misery, uprightness and deviance. The expression 'Criterion of judgement between right and wrong' indicates that the Quran came to witness a grave mission: the divide between good and evil. As long as it is dividing between good and evil, it makes mention of the forces of good, and the forces of evil. It involves within it, therefore, two factions. It comes to the faction defending the truth as a difficult struggle to differentiate truth and falsehood; and so God *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying, '… Indeed, those who disbelieve in the signs (verses) of God will have a severe punishment, and God is Exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution.'

Why does the verse end in this way? As long as the Quran is a Criterion for judgement, it must differentiate between truth and falsehood. The truth has its soldiers: they are the believers. Falsehood too has its soldiers: they are the disbelievers. Evil has come from the disbelievers, so they must be addressed: '… Indeed, those who disbelieve in the signs (verses) of God will have a severe punishment, and God is Exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution.' Punishment here is torment, and torment differs in intensity according to the one who is dealing the punishment. The blow of a small child is not like that of a youth or a strong man; each of them gives a blow which is commensurate with their strength. If torment were to come from the strongest of all, God, it would inevitably be unbearable. They '… will have a severe punishment, and God is Exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution That is, He is invincible, no power can stand to Him, and His vengeance is inescapable.'

God *the Most High* calls Himself *Al-Qayyum* meaning that He creates and sustains the affairs of His creation, both in terms of matter and morality. The necessary implication of this is that He has knowledge of all of His creation, and its secrets, and therefore imposes upon each of His creations the appropriate legislation for all their affairs. Man-made legislation differs from divine legislation. Why is this case?

It is because, when God legislates – by means of a scripture which He reveals to His Messenger, in order that the ruling (*hukm*) of God can be delivered – He legislates according to His knowledge which may or may not be known to His creation. Events might turn out in a way that was not imagined by a human legislator at the time when they legislated, and because of this they are usually forced to make changes to laws because new circumstances occur which the human legislator was not aware of. Why was the human legislator not aware of them? It is because his knowledge is confined to the phenomena that occur during his lifetime, and does not encompass those things which occur after his time; and also because he legislates for talents and dispositions that are not fully known to him.

God *the Most High*, being the Creator and Sustainer of all existence and Revealer of the Criterion which differentiates truth from falsehood, has encompassing knowledge in which no fault can be found. And so those who say: Such-and-such a ruling is inappropriate to our times,' we say to them: Are you finding fault in God's rulings? It is as though you are saying: God is unaware of this matter; let us correct the ruling for Him!

No, indeed, you cannot find fault in God. Take God’s ruling as it is, for it is the ruling that cannot be touched by falsehood from any direction. It is the ruling of One Whose knowledge is not renewed or changed. Above all else, He does not benefit from what He legislates, and so He says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَخۡفَىٰ عَلَيۡهِ شَيۡءٞ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ ٥

Nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden from God [5]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 5)

Look how this verse serves all the aims of the verses that came before it! As long as He is managing and sustaining all the affairs of creation, He must know everything about creation, so nothing in the earth or the heavens is hidden from Him. As long as He is differentiating between truth and falsehood, and sending severe punishment upon the unbelievers, nothing could be hidden from Him. So the verse is serving all of these purposes, and He knows these purposes, so when He legislates by virtue of being the Sustainer of all Existence, He legislates without being subject to emendation. If anyone deviates from His way, it is not hidden from Him. So the verse is the epitome of legislation, and of recompense: ‘Indeed, from God nothing is hidden in the earth or in the heaven.’

After this, God speaks about the first manifestation of His attribute ‘the Sustainer of all Existence’ in relation to humanity, saying:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡحَامِ كَيۡفَ يَشَآءُۚ لَآ
إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ٦

It is He who shapes you all in the womb as He
pleases. There is no God but Him, the Mighty,
the Wise [6] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 6)

‘Shaping in the womb’ is the creation of the substance from which the human being is fashioned in a special form. This form differs according to its type: male or female. Males and females also differ in their forms: light-skinned, dark-skinned, golden-skinned, brown-skinned, short, tall and all the different features inherent in humanity including the diversity of tongues and colours (*al-Rum:* 22).

This difference in colour, language, and many other things shows that they are not the product of a machine which makes a mould and then shapes it; rather, every human is born crafted by an inherently capable hand.

If a manufacturer in this age wants to make a cup, he will first make a mould, and then keep repeating it. As for the human being, everyone is created in a different mould, each one with its own distinct form, each one with its own distinctive voice – which has been proved to have a print just like that of a fingerprint, each one with its colour. These are all signs, pointing to an Absolute Power. Above all this, it is a creation which requires no processing meaning that a single mould is made for it to be filled with its substance. No; rather, He *exalted be His Name* says that He is the 'Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be," and it is' (*al-Baqara:* 117).

It is possible for a mother and father to be of the same colour, and their child to be of a different colour. God creates the majority of people in a sound and normal state, but He creates a few of them in an abnormal state: a child might be born blind, or physically disabled, or with extra fingers... and by these abnormal cases, God reminds the rest of mankind of the beauty of His creation. This is because when a physically normal person sees another person who is paralysed, he praises God for the perfection of his own creation. And when a person with five fingers on each hand sees another person with an additional finger which impeded the moving of his hand, he realises the wisdom of there being five fingers. Beauty is not confirmed except by the presence of ugliness, and things are distinguished by means of their opposites. The person who has seven fingers on his hand presents for medicine a challenge which it must strive to meet, until the doctor is able to remove the digits which are superfluous to human need. If God had created mankind with three fingers, one would not be able to keep control when using objects of precision.

Throughout his daily actions, the human being of ordinary health cannot comprehend the beauty of his normal form unless he sees one of these unusual cases. Those who have forgotten God's blessed favour upon them due to its ordinariness and familiarity to them, God alerts them to it by showing them its absence in others. When someone who has good eyesight sees a blind person walking with a cane, he is alerted to the blessing of eyesight that God has given him, and so becomes aware of God's favour. The exceptions in creation are a means of creating awareness and causing people to notice the blessings by which God has favoured them.

These examples in creation cause people to notice how God has favoured them, and for this reason, you find them before you. Also, in order that you do not find fault in God's creation, or that someone asks ('what is this person's fault that they are created like this?' God gives them ample compensation in another area, for example by granting (a blind person) intellectual competency far above that of the person with good eyesight.

An example (and God has the best examples), is the leader Tamerlane (Timur the Lame), a military commander who astonished the world with his military prowess. God gave him great skill in strategy and combat, in compensation for his disability. We also often find that geniuses have some disability in a certain way. Why is this? It is because God gives to the disabled person the motivation and aspiration to compensate for what they lack, and so brilliance results. 'He it is who shapes you in the wombs as He wills …' and every instance of shaping has its wisdom since every shaping has its wisdom and all of God's creation is beautiful.

Creation should not be viewed separately from the wisdom of its Creator; rather, every creation should be considered alongside the wisdom behind it. The reason why you might say 'this is ugly' is that you are separating creation from its wisdom. If a school pupil fails, his father could become saddened by this. But why does he consider the failure and not the wisdom behind it? He has failed so he can learn the importance of hard work and study. If he had succeeded despite playing around, what would result? All of his colleagues who saw him succeed despite his foolishness would begin to play around, and say: he played around and succeeded.... It is therefore necessary to consider every action alongside the wisdom behind its existence.

Similarly, punishment should not be considered separately from the crime. Every punishment should be commensurate with its crime. You might see a person who is condemned to death, and take pity on him; in this case we say, 'You have separated his execution from the murder that he committed; if you considered his crime, you would find that he is being killed justly and in fair recompense, for he has killed someone unjustly. So do not separate one aspect from the other.'

‘He it is who shapes you in the wombs as He wills. There is no deity except Him….’ The meaning of ‘… There is no deity except Him…’ is that He will shape knowing that what he shapes will come out according to this image; because there is no other deity, for example, to say to Him: This does not please me, I will create it in a different image. No, because the One Who does this is Mighty and Invincible, and everything He wishes to do He does, all according to His wisdom. When He says, ‘He it is who shapes you in the wombs as He wills…,’ someone might say: there are unusual forms, and unnatural forms. God *the Most High* is saying to you: I am Wise and I create these things with wisdom, so do not separate an action from its wisdom; take the action with the wisdom behind it; if you consider the action with its wisdom, you will find it the essence of beauty. God *the Most High* is the One Who shapes in the womb as He wills. This is with respect to its substance and physical form.

God *exalted be His Name* then explains that He does not leave the substance and form alone; rather, He will create, alongside this matter, ethical values so that the forces of life will be in harmony; He says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِنۡهُ ءَايَٰتٞ مُّحۡكَمَٰتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَأُخَرُ
مُتَشَٰبِهَٰتٞۖ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمۡ زَيۡغٞ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَٰبَهَ مِنۡهُ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ ٱلۡفِتۡنَةِ
وَٱبۡتِغَآءَ تَأۡوِيلِهِۦۖ وَمَا يَعۡلَمُ تَأۡوِيلَهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُۗ وَٱلرَّٰسِخُونَ فِي ٱلۡعِلۡمِ يَقُولُونَ
ءَامَنَّا بِهِۦ كُلّٞ مِّنۡ عِندِ رَبِّنَاۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّآ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ٧

It is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning –these are the cornerstone of the Scripture –and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific mean- ing of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it: it is all from our Lord’ –only those with real perception will take heed [7] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 7)

So, after He shapes in the womb as He wills, according to His wisdom, God does not leave the created image without an ethical system; indeed, He created an ethical system by revealing the Quran which contains a system of moral values. It is essential that we consider things with the wisdom behind them. If we do this, all affairs will seem upright, beautiful, and good. So God *the Most High* says, 'It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] perspicuous and precise….'

What does God mean by verses that are '…perspicuous and precise…'? Something perspicuous and precise is something which cannot be penetrated by confusion or misunderstanding because it is precise. These *Ayat muhkamat* are the texts over which people do not differ. So when God ordains that the man or woman who steals should have their hands cut off (*al-Ma'ida:* 38), we see that the verse contains a clear ruling. Similarly when He rules that the adulteress and the adulterer should be flogged (*al-Nur:* 2), this is also a clear ruling. This kind of verse is the one which is clear in and by itself, the one in which understanding does not differ because the text is clear and direct, without ambiguity. The allegorical or unspecific verse, on the other hand, is the one which we struggle to understand. If we struggle to understand its meaning, then why did God reveal it?

God *the Most High* explains for us, as we said, that we should consider things with the wisdom behind them in order to understand why they were revealed. The verses that are perspicuous and precise came with clear rulings which were required from mankind, as in: 'Do this, do not do this.' As long as they are required from all mankind, the one who performs them is rewarded, and the one who does not perform them is punished; so reward and punishment will be derived from them. For this reason they come in a clear expression for if they had not, someone would say, 'I did not understand.' Rulings say to you: Do this; and do not do this. When they say 'Do this,' you have the ability not to do it. If you had been created in such a way that you had no option but to do it, God would not say to you: Do it. But since you have the ability to do something or not to do it, He says to you: Do it.

When He says to you: Do not do it, you have the ability to do it. It is not said 'do' and 'do not do' unless He has created in you the ability to act or not to act. We therefore notice that when He says to us: do this; and do not do that, He wants us to stand before the desires of our souls with regard to performing or leaving actions. For this reason, God *the Most High* describes prayer as indeed a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit (*al-Baqara:* 45).

So when He says to us: Do this; do not do that, the meaning is that certain things will be difficult for us to do, and others will be difficult for us to leave: for example, God has created in eyesight the ability to see everything within its range according to the laws of optics. For example, God instructs us to look at whatever there is in the heavens and on earth (*Yunus:* 101).

However, with regard to a woman at whom it is impermissible to look, God says: Lower your gaze; He commands the Prophet to tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity: this will be most conducive to their purity – indeed, God is aware of all that they do. And to tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity (*al-Nur:* 30-31). To 'lower their gaze' means that God has put limitations on the movement of the eyes.

Another example is the hand that acts – but God *exalted be His Name* orders us not to move it except to do something permissible; so we do not harm someone with it or light a fire with it to burn and destroy; rather, we may light a fire with it to cook, for example.

So God issues commands of 'do this 'and 'do not do that' to restrict the desires of the soul to act or not to act. When the soul desires sleep, the command to worship says: get up, and pray. If the soul tends to become angry, the command of faith says: do not get angry.

The ruling, therefore, only came in the form of command and prohibition in order to control human action; a person might want to perform an action which is harmful, so it is said to him: Do not do it. A person might not want to perform an action which is beneficial, so it is said to him: Do it. Every human action is legislated by 'Do; do not do'. The mind is one of the means of acquiring knowledge, just like the eye, the ear, and the tongue. The function of the mind is to understand, and this will mean that it will be directed to understand some things, but not others. God has made the messages clear to relieve the mind of the task of searching for the wisdom of clearly defined matters, as it might be beyond human comprehension. God instructs the servant to adhere to the manners of obedience even with regard to matters in which the wisdom behind the legislation is not understood; and also to provoke the mind to refer all allegorical verses to those that are clear, perspicuous, and precise. When we read God's words that no human vision can encompass Him whereas He encompasses all human vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Informed (*al-An'am:* 103).

We see that this is a general statement. And in another verse, God *exalted be His Name* says that on the Day of Judgement some faces will be bright with happiness looking up to their Lord (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23).

And, as for the disbelievers, He says that on the Day of Judgement, they will be shut out as if by a veil from their Lord (*al-Mutaffifin:* 15).

The mind can become preoccupied with His saying that no human vision can encompass Him. This is with regard to this world. As for the Hereafter, the human being will be equipped in a different way so that he can see God. We are now, in this worldly life, by the way in which God has equipped us to live in this world, unable to see God. The idea of equipping something to perform a specific task that it is currently incapable of performing is something that we are familiar with in our world: we know that a person who is blind or with impaired vision may undergo surgery, or may have glasses made for him, so he can see, and someone who is deaf or hard of hearing can have a hearing aid made for him so he can hear.

So, if human beings are capable of producing, with their limited physical resources, things which can restore the senses, what about the Supreme Creator, the Sustaining Lord; is He not capable of repeating our creation in the Hereafter in a form which allows us to see His Being and His Countenance? He is able to do all things.

So the matter here is allegorical. God can either be seen, or not. Which rulings do this change with respect to you? They change none at all. So, these allegorical messages did not come to bring rulings; rather, they came only in relation to faith. For this reason, the teachings of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* puts an end to all difference of opinion between scholars regarding this issue by saying – and he is the Final Messenger, 'The Quran was not revealed so parts of it would be give the lie to other parts; so act in accordance with that which you understand of it, and believe in that which is allegorical and unspecific of it.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Imam ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (Exegesis), and by ibn Mardawaih*

The allegorical verses came to be believed in, and the clear verses came to be acted in accordance with, and the believer must always refer the allegorical verses to the clear ones. For example, let us consider God's words to His Messenger that all who pledge their allegiance to him pledge their allegiance to God; the Hand of God is over their hands. Hence, he who breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own hurt, whereas he who remains true to what he has pledged to God, on him God will bestow a great reward (*al-Fath:* 10).

A person might ask: Does God have a hand? That person should refer the matter to the realm of 'There is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). And the believer may hear God's words that God the Most Merciful sits on the throne (*Ta Ha:* 5). He may wonder: Does God have a body with which he settles on a throne? We say: This is the kind of allegorical verse which the believer must believe in, which is that your existence, O human being, is not like God's existence and your hand is not like God's Hand, and your sitting is not like God's sitting. As long as His existence is not like your existence, and His life is not like your life, why do you suppose that His Hand is like your hand?

It is as He has said about Himself: 'There is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:*11). Why has God even involved us in these affairs? It is because God wants to alert His creation to affairs that might not make sense to the mind, so whoever deems it necessary to interpret these things and refer them to the clear verse that states that there is nothing whatsoever like God, may do so; and whoever deems it necessary to say: 'I believe that God has a hand, but within the context of 'There is nothing like Him' may do so as well, and this is safer.

God says, '…in it are verses [that are] perspicuous and precise – they are the foundation of the Book….' The meaning of 'foundation' is the origin that the interpretation of the allegorical verses must refer back to if you interpret them, or return them back to the clear verses, saying: God has a Hand, but it is not like the hands of humans, but rather enters into the confines of 'There is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Why did God say, '…they are the foundation of the Book…' and not 'they are the foundations (in the plural) of the Book'? You must know, O believer that not each one of them is a foundation in itself, but rather, all of them aggregately are the foundation. To explain this, let us consider God's words that He made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and provided for them both an abode in a lofty place of lasting restfulness and unsullied springs (*al-Mu'minun:* 50).

God did not say that they were two signs. This is because Jesus *peace be upon him* did not exist as a sign except by being born to his mother without a father; that is, as a sign, he was supplemented by his mother. The mother of Jesus did not exist as a sign except by the birth of Jesus; as a sign, she was supplemented by Jesus. So together they constitute the sign. Similarly, the meaning of '…in it are verses [that are] perspicuous and precise – they are the foundation of the Book – and others allegorical and unspecific….' is not that every individual perspicuous verse is a foundation of the Book; rather, the clear verses as a whole are the foundation, and the origin to which the believer refers the allegorical. The purpose of the clear verse is that we act in accordance with it, and the purpose of the allegorical verse is that we believe in it, the proof of which is that no matter how you imagine them, it will not affect your behaviour. So God's statement that no human vision can encompass Him (*al-An'am:* 103) does not carry any ruling; it suffices only to believe in it.

What of those about whom God says, '…As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord by seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]…'? We should know that the word *zaigh* (rendered here as 'deviation') means to bend or incline, and that the word in Arabic derives from the curving of the teeth, where some of them grow outwards and others grow inwards. When teeth do not grow straight, nowadays, they have cosmetic surgery and straightening procedures to make them grow into a single straight line.

So those whose hearts are given to deviation, that is, inclining crookedly, go after the allegorical verses, seeking confusion and discord. It is as though crookedness is an extraneous condition in the hearts, and that the original state of hearts is purity: not to be crooked and given to deviation. Pure natural disposition has no crookedness, but lusts and base desires make hearts incline to deviation from the truth. A person might be aware of God's correct ruling on a particular matter but human caprice wins out, and so the person deviates from God's ruling. This deviation is of the making of the heart; a person can submit logic and reasoning to serve the inclination of his heart, and for this reason, the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* says 'One of you would not be a believer until his desire is in accordance with what I have come with.'(1)

Why? Because caprice is the bane of reason; even deviant people know the sound conduct, but they deviate toward what they desire. The proof that they know sound conduct is that, after they commit their iniquity, they repent and announce their repentance, as is frequent and well known. This is because capricious inclinations are affected by behaviour that requires justification, whilst sound behaviour is a matter of natural disposition which comes effortlessly and does not cause tension. For example, when a man looks at his wife, he does not find the stimulation of one aspect of his conscience vying with another; but when he looks at a woman other than his wife, his conscience is in turmoil, and he wonders: is it acceptable for him to look, or not? His character traits struggle. As for looking at his wife, his conscience is not overburdened. For this reason, faith brings solace to consciences, so all the traits of a person harmonise in unity without any of them stealing from another.

Another example: If a person goes to bring something from his house, he does not feel any conflict of conscience. Yet if a person goes to steal this thing, his conscience will be in conflict, and his limbs too because he is going against reason, uprightness, and truth.

'…As for those in whose hearts there is deviation, they will follow that of it which is unspecific seeking discord by seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]….' So their attempt to interpret the allegorical verses contradicts reality in order to serve the crooked inclinations of their hearts.

The inclination is present in their hearts first, and then reasoning submits to the inclination, and then the expression submits to the deviant reasoning. So we see that the original inclination comes from them. Let us consider the statement of the Quran in saying that when the perverted ones deviated from the right way, God let their hearts swerve from the truth (*as-Saff:* 5).

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(1) *Narrated in Sharh As-Sunna by Al-Baghawi, and in Kanz Al-'Ommal, and in Tabrizi's Mishkat Al-MaSabih*

It is as though God is saying: As long as you want to deviate, I will let you deviate further and assist you in it. God *the Most High* does not set a person on a course that contradicts His moral charges; but a person may be driven by his desires to deviate, and so God abandons him, and let him fall into the abyss of deviation. In another verse, God says about the disbelievers that whenever a Quranic chapter is revealed, they look at one another to see if there is anyone who can see them and then they turn away. God has turned their hearts away from the truth as they are people who do not have any understanding (*at-Tawba:* 127).

They are the ones who began it; they moved away from God, so God moved their hearts far away from faith. They are those who go after the allegorical verses seeking confusion, discord, and mischief seeking to confuse the minds of those who have no understanding. Since they seek to confuse the minds of those who have no understanding, they are going against the right way. Since they are going against the right way, they are not believers. Since they are not believers, God will not guide them to goodness because faith demands from a person that they direct themselves towards belief in the Wise Lord and God; and then aid will come from God. But as long as they are not believers, how can they seek aid from God? God says (in a Qudsi (Sacred) Hadith), 'I am the Most Self-Sufficient of associates, and have no need of association with anyone.'(1)

They seek confusion from the allegorical verses, and seek to have their own interpretation of them. *Ta'wil* (Interpretation) in Arabic means returning something to something else, so those whose minds are not deviant strive to refer the allegorical verses back to the clear verses, or to believe in them as they are.

God then says, '…And no one knows its [true] interpretation except God….' If God had wanted the allegorical verses to be clear, He would have revealed them as clear verses. So it is God's Will that there be allegorical verses, the purpose of which is to inspire the mind so that affairs do not come with a monotony that prevents the human intellect from thought and creativity, whilst God wants the mind to be inspired, think, and deduce. When the mind is inspired to deduction, it becomes a way for a person to exercise creativity and research so that all of us experience the attempt to refer the allegorical verses back to the clear verses, and by this attain a grasp of creativity and research; it is necessity that creates solutions.

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(1) *Narrated in Zubaidi's Ithaf As-Sada Al-Muttaqin, Ar-Rabi' ibn Habib's Musnad, Al-Mundhiri's At-Targhib wa At-Tarhib and Bayhaqi's Al-Asma' wa AS-Sifat*

God wants to give the human being the skill not to view all matters with dull monotony accepting them sluggishly and as simple as possible. Rather, they should receive them attentively with thought and reflection. God encourages people to ponder over the Quran – otherwise there must be locks upon their hearts (*Muhammad:* 24).

All of this is to make the mind take sufficient action to receive the tenets of faith as God wants it, and receive rulings as God wants them. God wants from us that we believe in the tenets of faith, and that we act in accordance with the rulings. '…And no one knows its [true] interpretation except God…' and those people whose hearts are given to perversion and deviation try to interpret it, whilst being controlled by their vain desires, so they do not arrive to the truth. The true interpretation is only known to God.

We have seen that someone criticised a person for something he has done. The one who was criticised said to him, 'O brother, do you claim to know everything God knows?' When he answered in the negative, he told him, 'I am one of the things you do not know,' telling him indirectly to leave him alone.

Let us have a closer look at the part of the verse saying, '…And no one knows its [true] interpretation except God. But those firm in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: all [of it] is from our Lord….' This rendering of the verse considers the pause in the Arabic text to be between the two sentences: 'And no one knows its [true] interpretation except God,' and 'But those firm in knowledge say, "We believe in it: all [of it] is from our Lord."' In this reading, the meaning of the verse is that only God alone knows the interpretation of the allegorical unspecific verses; and those who are firm in knowledge, that is they are not beguiled by their base desires, proclaim their belief in all the verses as they come from God, their Lord. And this is what the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said; thus they have belief in the unspecific verses and they act by the rulings of the perspicuous verses, and believe that both are from God.

However, according to scholars, you may place the pause at a different place in the text and the two sentences become: '…And no one knows its [true] interpretation except God and those firm in knowledge. They say, 'We believe in it: all [of it] is from our Lord ….'' The meaning here becomes that those who are firm in knowledge know the interpretation of the allegorical verses, and consequently they say, 'We believe in it'.

In fact, the two readings lead to the same meaning; whether we place the pause at 'except God' or not, the meaning returns to the same thing. The governing element of faith for those who are firm in knowledge is what God reports from their proclamation saying, '…We believe in it: all [of it] is from our Lord….' So the perspicuous verses are from our Lord, and the unspecific verses are from our Lord, and He has His Wisdom in that. It happens sometimes that a command comes from a higher authority to a lower functionary, with an explanation of the reason for it; the lower functionary understands the reason and acts by the command; the higher authority then may give another command without explaining it; in this case, we have difference: one person may obey, while another may say, 'No, you must explain the reason.' Does the one who has faith have faith in the command, or in the reason behind it?

God *the Most High* wants us to believe in Him as He commands. If everything became understood, there would be no value in faith. The majesty of faith lies in obeying some commands, whilst their wisdom is unknown to you because if you did everything, whilst understanding the wisdom behind it, your faith would be in the reason behind the command, not in the One Who gave the command.

When we consider pork, for example, which God prohibited fourteen centuries ago, we see that in modern times, it has emerged that eating pork is harmful, and some people stopped eating it because it is harmful; is their refraining from eating it something for which they will be rewarded? Of course they will not. The reward is for those who refrain from eating pork because God has forbidden it. Because the order is from God eventhough He has not informed us of the wisdom behind it, the one who has faith in God says: God created me, and it is not possible that He, my Creator, would deceive me, and I am the servant subject to His Will.

The servant who refrains from eating pork and drinking wine in accordance with God’s command is the one who earns reward; as for the one who does so out of fear of cirrhosis of the liver or disease, there is no reward for him. There is a difference between obeying a law because of its reason, and obeying a law out of obedience to the one who commands it.

So the allegorical verses came to be believed in, and those who are firm in knowledge are the opposite of those who are led by their desires. Desires lead to the lusts of the soul, and to seeking other than the truth. What is not the truth is falsehood, and all of the people of falsehood attempt to bring something which is in agreement with their desire. This is why God’s legislation came to protect people from harmful desires because one person’s desire could contradict another’s, and the rest of humanity could have desires which contradict each other. God *the Most High* says that if the True Lord were to follow their whims, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them. Rather, in this Book (the Quran) God has conveyed to them all that they ought to bear in mind: but from their reminder they turn away (*al-Mu’minun:* 71).

So we must follow in our actions one whose only desire is the truth. Religion only came to protect us from following desires and whims. It is desires that cause us to deviate. The proof that desires cause deviation from the truth is that a person who follows his desire could desire a ruling in a certain matter, and then other factors could arise to make him desire the opposite ruling, so he twists the issue according to his desire. If not, then what is it that has compelled people to leave the original Sacred Law that ruled the earth at the time of Adam *peace be upon him*?

They abandoned the Sacred Law when a group of people took it upon themselves to manage the affairs of the religion, and took from it for themselves temporal power, and began to entrust affairs to their desires. If we look at the history of world law, we find that the origin of affairs of law was reserved for men of religion, priests, and temple officials. Governance was for them alone because they were spokesmen for God’s religion.

Why did this not continue, and instead came Roman, English, French, and other laws? It is because it was discovered that those in control of religious affairs had abandoned the rule of the Sacred Law in favour of serving their desires. People noticed that those priests would rule in a case with a judgement which differed from another judgement in a similar case.

They were the same judges, with identical cases, but the judgement of desire differs from case to case; rather, it could completely contradict the first judgement, so people thought of these priests: They have left the pronouncements of religion, and followed their desires in order to gain temporal power, and so we no longer trust them.

Legislation and ruling thus came out of the hands of priests and holy men and went to other lawmakers. The matter of judgement had been the preserve of priests and holy men because people were certain that they took their rulings from God's religion. But because of human whims, people took legislation for themselves, with whatever justice they possessed even if it was slight.

With respect to the word *hawa* ('desire'), we find three related words:

1. *Hawa*' which means 'air': that which is between the sky and the earth. It also means 'wind', which moves things, and deviates and gathers them. It is a physical thing.
2. *Hawa* which means 'desire', the inclination of the soul, from the verb to incline to something.
3. Hawiyy or Huwiyy, which means 'falling'.

This indicates that he who follows his desire is bound to fall, and linguistic etymology gives this meaning. The meanings are related. So, those who are deeply firm in knowledge stay firm on God's way. As for those who follow their desires, they deviate like the deviations of the wind. If the wind changes, they go where it goes.

Those who are firm in knowledge say, as the conclusion of their knowledge, '…We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord….' So here, the issue comes together. We know that the clear verses were revealed to be acted in accordance with, and the allegorical messages came to be believed in for wisdom which God *the Most High* willed which is that we follow the command for the command's sake, not for the wisdom behind it. When we receive commands from God, we should not ask for reasons for them because we are taking them from a Just, Wise, Loving Creator. If a person does not obey a command from God unless he knows the reason for it and the wisdom behind it, we say to this person: You do not believe in God; you believe in reasons behind His rulings; the real believer is the one who believes in the command even if he does not understand it. Those who are deeply rooted in faith say: We believe in it; as all is from God, both the clear and the allegorical messages.

God *the Most High* then says, '…And no one will bear this in mind except those of understanding.' The expression 'those of understanding' means those whose intellects are free from whims because whim is the bane of reason and leads it to deviation. '…And no one will bear this in mind except those of understanding.' 'Understanding' is the mind; God informs us that the mind considers the core of things, not just their outward appearance. There are rulings that concern outward matters, and rulings which require insight. God *the Most High* orders the amputation of the thief's hand. Yet, people come playing the role of defenders of humanity and compassion saying: 'this is cruel and brutal!'

This is superficial understanding. Insightful understanding sees that I want the hand of the thief amputated to prevent him from stealing in the first place! This is because everyone will fear for themselves, and this will prevent them from stealing. We have said before that a single car accident could result in mutilations equal to the number of people whose hands have been amputated for stealing in the entire history of Islam. So do not concoct justifications, and claim to be merciful, and do not consider punishments only as they are meted out to criminals; instead look at the crime when it occurs from them. God wants to protect people's livelihoods so that if you work and toil and struggle and sweat, God will preserve for you the fruits of this labour so that no one else can come and get the better of you, and illegally take his own provision from your sweat and toil.

He protects everyone's livelihood so people can live in security; this is the implication of 'understanding' in the verse.

In the same way we should read God's words: 'And in legal retribution there is life for you' (*al-Baqara:* 179). Beware of saying: this retribution is aggression against an individual's life. No, because 'And in legal retribution there is life for you' means that when a person realises that if he murders, he will be executed, this will prevent him from killing, so his life is saved, and people's lives are safeguarded from him. This is why there is life in legal retribution, and this is insightful understanding of matters. God is alerting us and warning us not to take matters according to their outer appearance, but rather to take them by looking at their core, and leave the shell that those who desire to abandon God's rulings judge by. So, when those who are deeply firm in knowledge render judgement with regard to the allegorical messages, they supplicate to God *the Most High* with the words He revealed, saying:

رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغۡ قُلُوبَنَا بَعۡدَ إِذۡ هَدَيۡتَنَا وَهَبۡ لَنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ
رَحۡمَةًۚ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلۡوَهَّابُ ﴿٨﴾

Our Lord, do not let our hearts deviate after You
have guided us. Grant us Your mercy: You are
the Ever Giving [8] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 8)

So, the statement of those deeply firm in knowledge is: Every clear message and every allegorical message is from God; we act in accordance with the clear, and believe in the allegorical, and this is guidance. Then they supplicate for strength and firmness in guidance. The meaning is: Our Lord! Make us firm in worshipping You, and do not cause our hearts to deviate or swerve. This proves to us that hearts change and alter, so the last word is supplication for firm faith: 'Our Lord, let not our hearts swerve from the truth after You have guided us and grant us from Yourself mercy. Indeed, You are the Bestower.'

They seek mercy as a gift, not as a right. No created being has any right over God except to that which God bestows upon him. Those deeply rooted in knowledge ask God for grace not to fall into whims after God has guided them to this sound judgement: that all the clear and allegorical messages are from God. By this they teach us the way to reach guidance, and how to seek the bestowal of grace. As long as the person who is deeply rooted in knowledge knows something, he wants to spread it amongst the people, and so is saying to us:

Beware of thinking that the issue is just to understand the text, and that is all. From this issue, another derives. The latter does not exist only in this world, for there is Afterlife. This world will perish because it is limited, and has an ending; but there is also the Hereafter, which will come after this one and will last until eternity. And so God states what those who are deeply firm in knowledge say:

رَبَّنَآ إِنَّكَ جَامِعُ ٱلنَّاسِ لِيَوۡمٖ لَّا رَيۡبَ فِيهِۚ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُخۡلِفُ ٱلۡمِيعَادَ ٩

Our Lord, You will gather all people on the Day of which there is no doubt: God never breaks His promise [9] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 9)

Their saying 'Our Lord' can be understood to mean that He is the One Who takes charge of their sustenance. The meaning of sustenance is to take the person being sustained to the desired level of perfection. So there is a Lord Who raises and sustains, and a servant who is sustained, and the Lord gives the human being that which will take it to the perfection desired for it.

The believers beg of God, saying: O Lord! Part of Your Sustaining us is that You protect us from the torment of the Hereafter, so when we have lived our worldly life and it is over, we know that You gather the people to a day about which there is no doubt. As long as You are Lord and God, You will not break your promises. The one who breaks promises cannot be God because at the moment of promising, God knows with His perfect Omnipotence and perfect Knowledge that He is Able to fulfil His promise. Only those who are incapable of fulfilling promises are unable to promise without any condition, and this is the case in our saying, 'If God wills' – why? That is because none of us have the absolute ability to fulfil their promise.

Let us have a close look at God's words in His command: Never say about anything that you will do it tomorrow without adding, 'if God so wills.' And if one should forget, then he should remember his Lord and pray that his Lord would guide him to get closer to a consciousness of what is right (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

We say: Beware of saying 'I will do such-and-such' without including within it and connecting it with God's will because when you promise, you are not guaranteed of living, or fulfilling your promise. You do not do anything except by God's will, so do not promise except by His will as you are promising that which you cannot guarantee because in reality you possess nothing. If you want to do something, or go somewhere, the action requires an agent, an object, a time, a place and a cause. It then requires the ability to perform the action. The human being possesses none of these things except that which God wills him to possess. A human being cannot guarantee that he will remain capable of fulfilling his will. If the supposed doer of the action still exists, the human being cannot ensure the existence of the object. The human being does not possess time, and nor does he possess space, and nor does he have the ability to sustain a cause in order to do what he wants to do; all of these things, the doer, the object, time, space, and the cause, are not possessed by anyone except by God.

For this reason, a person should protect himself from being a foolhardy liar, and should place himself within the confines of God's command: Never say about anything that you will do it tomorrow without adding, 'if God so wills.' And if one should forget, then he should remember his Lord and pray that his Lord would guide him to get closer to a consciousness of what is right (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

The phrase 'if God so wills' protects the person from being a liar; when the thing that a person promises does not happen, this means that God did not will it because the person does not possess any of the elements of the action.

God says, 'Our Lord, surely You will gather the people for a Day about which there is no doubt. Indeed, God does not fail in His promise.' This is because the one who breaks promises is usually prevented by an overwhelming power that comes to them which could even be their changing their mind. As for God, there is no overwhelming power to change what He wills to do, and it is not possible for Him to change because change is not an attribute of the Infinite and the Eternal.

When God affirms that He will gather us by His will on a day about which there is no doubt, and that God does not break promises, it is an affirmation that we will meet. Why will we meet? Those deeply firm in knowledge have said: We have acted in accordance with the clear messages, and believed in the allegorical messages; and they have called on God to strengthen their hearts on guidance out of His mercy, and to keep their hearts from deviation because they fear the day when God will gather all mankind, the day when we will meet to account for our deeds and our faith. After this, God *the Most High* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَن تُغۡنِيَ عَنۡهُمۡ أَمۡوَٰلُهُمۡ وَلَآ أَوۡلَٰدُهُم
مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيۡـٔٗاۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمۡ وَقُودُ ٱلنَّارِ ١٠

Neither their possessions nor their children will be any use to the disbelievers against God. The disbelievers will be fuel for the Fire [10] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 10)

When you as a believer hears, and the disbeliever and the hypocrite hear with you, 'Our Lord, surely You will gather the people for a Day about which there is no doubt. Indeed, God does not fail in His promise,' the disbeliever or the hypocrite might imagine that there is something that could save him from what will occur on that day such as the strength and support of offspring, or great wealth with which to ransom themselves, or friendship, or intercession. Here, God is saying to them: No, your offspring and your wealth will not avail you anything.

In ordinary speech, we say: this will not avail so-and-so, meaning that he will remain in need of other than it because sufficiency is not to be in need of anything from someone else. Wealth and children will not avail anyone on the Day of Resurrection; the matter has no relation with ancestry as there will be no kinship between them on that day. Paradise is not for sale with worldly possessions, and no one can buy his place in paradise with the wealth he possesses.

The disbelievers at the time of the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say this corrupt statement, 'As long as God has given us wealth and children in this life, He will doubtless give us better than this in the hereafter.' This is why God says to them, 'Indeed, those who have disbelieved – never will their wealth or their children avail them in the least against God….' So the matter returns to God in its entirety. It is true that in this life God creates means, which apply to the disbeliever as well as the believer. So when the disbeliever utilises the means, he achieves his goals. In the Hereafter, however, things are different. Nobody possesses any means, and this is why God describes the Last Day as the Day when they shall come forth, with nothing of themselves hidden from God.

With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With God, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists (*Ghafir:* 16).

In this life, human beings possess means, and live in different levels of comfort according to their differing means, and their differing labours in life, and the differing availability of means of attaining enjoyment. In the Hereafter, however, there is no labour, and there are no means because the believer lives with the Creator of causes and means in the Hereafter, God *the Most High*; and so whenever anything crosses the mind of the believer in Paradise, that thing comes to him. As for the disbelievers, their wealth will not avail them, nor will their offspring because in this life they were absorbed with wealth and offspring, and disbelieved in God.

In one of the battles in the early days of Islam, some of the Bedouin stayed behind and did not take part in the fighting, and God informed His Messenger that they will say to him that their possessions and their families kept them busy, and that they will ask him to pray to God to forgive them. God says that they utter with their tongues something that is not in their hearts (*al-Fath:* 11).

So, we see that what the disbelievers busied themselves with in this life, will not benefit them. God adds concerning the disbelievers at the end of the verse we are discussing: '…And it is they who are the fuel for the Fire.' Being the fuel of the fire, they will be the tormenters, and soon they will be tormented in the fire. Consider the grave harm that will inflict them: those who torment are the ones who will be tormented because they will be the fuel of the fire. The one who is tormented will be the same one who torments.

So this is a struggle of the constituent parts: the atoms that make up the disbeliever are themselves believers and the atoms of the disobedient person are themselves obedient; the thing that has made these atoms perform actions that incur the wrath of God is the will of the person whom they comprise. In the past, we gave the example – and God has the highest of examples – of a squadron with a commander. The duty of the squadron is to hear and obey the orders of the commander. If they are brought before the high commander later, they will bring up the matter to him, saying: According to the regulations of the chain of command, we carried out the instructions that came to us from our direct commander, but we did not agree with his opinion. In religious life, this kind of situation is described in the wise words of our Creator that on the Day of Judgement, their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by recalling all that they did (*an-Nur:* 24).

So in this life the tongue speaks words of disbelief, while it curses its owner, and the hand commits sins and hates and curses its owner. God's Sublime Will has given the disbeliever authority over his hand and his tongue in this life, and God will remove the disbeliever's control over his limbs on the Day of Resurrection, so they will testify against him that he compelled them to commit sin, and so one part will torment the other. When God says, '…And it is they, who are the fuel for the Fire,' there is an issue which must be considered which we can take from historical facts. Those people who disbelieved in God's messages on earth encountered some torment in this life, because God does not reserve all torment for the Hereafter. If He did, people would be made miserable by the actions of the disbelievers and sinners, and because of this God hastens some torment for the disbelievers and sinners in this life. God gives an example of this:

كَدَأۡبِ ءَالِ فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡۚ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا
فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ شَدِيدُ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ﴿١١﴾

Just as Pharaoh's people and their predecessors denied Our revelations, and God punished them for their sins: God is severe in punishing [11] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 11)

In the phrase 'like the custom of the people of Pharaoh…' the Arabic word *da'b* (rendered here as 'custom') means constant, repetitive action; so we say that the *da'b* of so-and-so is to do this or that thing, meaning that he habitually and consistently does it. Or we could say, 'So-and-so has no da'b except backbiting people.'

Does this mean that all of his actions are characterised by backbiting people, or that he does other things? He does other things of course; but his usual action is backbiting. This is the meaning of da'b/'custom': it is repeating an action successively until the action becomes a habit. So this is the meaning of the phrase 'like the custom of the people of Pharaoh.' The people of Pharaoh came before the Islamic message, and before them were the tribes of 'Ad and Thamud and others.

God *the Most High* alerts us to consider these people and what happened to them: He did not delay their torment until the Hereafter perhaps because people might think that God *the Most High* will postpone all the disbeliever's torment until the Hereafter with His words: 'Indeed, those who have disbelieved – never will their wealth or their children avail them in the least against God. And it is they who are the fuel for the Fire' (*Al-'Imran:* 10).

Rather, torment is also in this life, and this is what we gather from God's words that for the disbelievers, there is suffering in the life of this world; but, truly, their suffering in the life to come will be harder still, and they will have none to shield them from God (*ar-Ra'd:* 34).

If the torment was postponed until the Hereafter, people would become miserable with the wicked. This is why God brings examples from this life and here He says, 'like the custom of the people of Pharaoh…', that is, like their custom, and nothing becomes a custom except by repetition of an action. The custom of the people of Pharaoh was denial, oppression, and Pharaoh's claim of divinity.

God *the Most High* says, '…and those before them. They denied Our signs, so God seized them for their sins. And God is severe in punishment.' So the custom became part of them, and part of what happened to them. When they became accustomed to disbelief and denial, God *the Most High* sent torment upon them. The custom of the people of Pharaoh was denial, and *the Exalted* Creator seized them for this by severe punishment. After urging us to consider the daybreak and the ten nights and to consider the even and the odd and to consider the night as it runs its course – after considering all this – could there be, to anyone endowed with reason, a more solemn evidence of the truth? Then God *the Most High* alerts us to be aware of how the Lord has dealt with the tribe of 'Ad, the people of Iram who had lofty pillars, the like of whom has never been created in all the lands, and with the tribe of Thamud, who carved out rocks in the valley, and with Pharaoh of the many stakes. They transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein; and therefore the Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering; for, surely, the Lord is ever on the watch (*al-Fajr:* 1-14).

So their custom was denial, and their punishment from God for this was torment and suffering. So God's words '…so God seized them for their sins. And God is severe in punishment' means that torment afflicted them in this life; and the end for the House of Pharaoh, and Thamud, and those disbelieving people before them, was what it was.

When we hear God's words: '…And God is severe in punishment,' the mind concludes that there must be a sin to merit this punishment. All metaphorical matters are always derived from physical tangible things, because the origin of the creation of any metaphorical image is the physical observable thing; physical matters are transferred to metaphorical concepts after this.

Why? It is because a physical thing is witnessed and can be grasped by everyone. As for metaphorical concepts, they are not comprehended except by reasoning beings; and the human being passes through many stages: in the stage of infancy, the human being does not understand or comprehend anything except the physical things before him. An example which I have already mentioned is the Arabic word *ghasb* (which means to take forcibly). Originally it means to skin a sheep and so it is as though when someone forcibly robs someone else it is like he is 'skinning' his possession from him as he holds on to it.

The word 'sin' (*dhanb)* and the word 'punishment' (*'uquba*) are interlinked. The word 'sin' in Arabic is derived from a physical word meaning the back end of an animal which follows the front end, so the physical meaning indicates something which follows. 'Punishment' in Arabic means something which comes after something else.

So, there is sin, and there is punishment. But what comes before the sin, and what comes after the punishment? There is no sin without a prior text: An action cannot be considered sinful or criminal except if there is a text to make it unlawful. No act is a sin; rather, there must be a text before the sin is committed that prohibits it. For this reason, conventional law views this issue thus: A person cannot be punished without criminalisation, and there is no criminalisation without a text, so nobody can come and suddenly say: This action is a punishable crime; rather, there must first be an announcement, and a text stating the criminalisation of the act.

There is no punishment without criminalisation, and there is no criminalisation without a text. The text explains the criminalisation of a given act, and that if a person commits this act, he is breaking the law. The sin is the same as this, as though it has come after a text of criminalisation. The punishment comes after the crime, and here we find that both sins and crimes are according to the original meaning of the word in Arabic, so the sin follows something, and this is why the Arabs call the pail they fill with water a *dhanub* (similar to the word *dhanb*, which means 'sin') because it comes after the rope, and dhanub is also the word for 'portion of punishment' in the verse in the Quran that warns that those who commit injustice shall have their portion of punishment like the share of their fellows of old: God warns them not to ask Him to hasten their doom (*adh-Dhariyat:* 59).

The naming comes because the punishment follows their crimes. So any Quranic text that mentions sin and punishment reaffirms for us the legally terminological matter that exists all over the world namely that there can be no punishment without a criminalising text. So punishment comes after the crime, that is, after the sin; and the sin is considered as such only by a legal text. We cannot come to anyone without a foregoing text and say: you have committed a sin; and this solves many problems. As an example, we can take God's judgement that He does not forgive the setting up of partners beside Him but He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills: for he who sets up partners with God has indeed committed a great wickedness (*an-Nisa':* 48).

God forgives any act other than the association of partners with Him, for the association of partners with God is the peak of high treason in monotheism, and there is no forgiveness for this. Other than this, He forgives whom He wills. In another verse, however, God commands His Messenger to proclaim to God's servants who have transgressed against themselves not to despair of God's mercy; indeed, God forgives all sins – for, surely, He alone is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful (*az-Zumar:* 53).

So, there are some people, in trying to cast doubt and find conflict between verses of the Quran, who say that God says He does not forgive that partners are associated with Him, and forgives other than that for whom He wills. (They are trying to insinuate that this verse stands in contradiction with the verse that says that God forgives all sins.) It is said that Ibn 'Abbas *God be pleased with them*, when this verse was revealed saying that God forgives all sins, said, ‘Except polytheism,’ so we see that this verse does not contradict the other verse.

In reality, if people of reason examine the issue in detail, they will not find any conflict. This is because the people who transgressed against themselves are from the servants of God who believe in Him and do not associate anything with Him, but who have strayed and fallen into misdeed, and so it is said of them that they are sinners because they believe in God and accept what He has revealed. As for the polytheist, he neither recognises God, and nor the rulings He has legislated, yet his actions are not described as sins, but rather as disbelief and polytheism. So there is no contradiction or conflict in the messages of the Most Merciful.

God says, ‘[Theirs is] like the custom of the people of Pharaoh and those before them. They denied Our signs, so God seized them for their sins. And God is severe in punishment.’This wise statement is balanced, and harmonised. The sin comes after the text, and the punishment comes after this. God then says, commanding His Messenger to deliver the message to the disbelievers:

قُل لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ سَتُغْلَبُونَ وَتُحْشَرُونَ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ ۚ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمِهَادُ ﴿١٢﴾

[Prophet], say to the disbelievers, ‘You will be defeated
and driven together into Hell, a foul resting place [12]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 12)

This is a command from God to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver God’s message, and carry to the disbelievers a message containing a warning. Who are these disbelievers? Are they the disbelievers of Quraysh? They may probably be. Are they the Jews? They also may probably be. In fact, this warning includes every single disbeliever.

The Quranic text does not come according to the usual way people speak. I will give an example – and God has the highest of examples, and He is Purified of any resemblance or parallel. Suppose you tell your son to go to his uncle and say ‘my father will visit you tomorrow.’ What will the boy say to his uncle? He will go to his uncle and say ‘my father will visit you tomorrow.’ But the one giving the instruction, i.e. the father, said: ‘Say to your uncle “my father will visit you tomorrow."' So, if the boy is meticulously trustworthy, he will say, 'My father said: "say to your uncle 'my father will visit you tomorrow."' When we read in the Quran 'Say to those who disbelieve, "You will be overcome and gathered together to Hell, and wretched is the resting place,"' this is the peak of trustworthiness from the Messenger who delivers the Message of God, who carried to the disbelievers the text exactly as God commanded him to deliver it to them. If not, it would have been sufficient for The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to go to the disbelievers and say to them, '…You will be overcome and gathered together….' But how would they know, in this case, that this word was not from Muhammad, a human being? It is because of this, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* tells them that God has instructed him to give them the message, with His words: 'Say to those who disbelieve, 'You will be overcome and gathered together to Hell, and wretched is the resting place."'

The Messenger did not inform them merely of the content of the statement; rather, he delivered to them the exact text of the message God charged him to deliver. When God commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Quran to deliver a message to the disbelievers, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one addressing, and the disbelievers are the ones being addressed, so when he confronts them, he says to them, 'You will be overcome....' In another verse, God commands the Messenger to tell those who disbelieve that if they desist, all that is past shall be forgiven them; but if they revert to their wrongdoing, then what happened to the like of them in times gone by will be repeated (*al-Anfal:* 38).

Analogy would suggest that he should say, 'if you desist, all that is past shall be forgiven you.' It is as though the disbelievers were not present when God said it, but the Messenger of God was the one present being addressed, and that God was speaking concerning those who were absent.

However, God *the Most High*, in the verse that we are currently examining, charges His Messenger to deliver with exactitude. So, sometimes the transmission is from the First Commander exactly as it issued from Him, as in His words 'if they desist,' and at other times, the First Commander charges the Messenger to deliver the word as though he were directly addressing them, i.e. do not say 'they will be overcome', but rather say '…You will be overcome' because you are the one who will address them. This compositional precision could not come from anyone but a Wise Power.

It is either a message directed at the disbelievers of Quraysh, or at all who disbelieve. The overcoming will be in this life, and the gathering will be in the Hereafter.

The Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered the Quranic text '…You will be overcome….' But let us consider the time when he said it. He said it when the Muslims were few in number, unable to defend themselves, unable to do anything. The believers lived under each other's protection or imigrated to far-off places. It is not possible for such an address to come except from someone who possesses the means of all things.

The Messenger of God said it, delivering God's message, while the believers were in an obvious state of weakness. When he said it, it became a point that had to be proved because the One Who charged him with delivering it, God *the Most High*, was capable of doing it. 'Say to those who disbelieve, "You will be overcome…"' not only with punishment in this life, but in the Hereafter also: '…and gathered together to Hell, and wretched is the resting place.' This gave glad tidings to the Messenger of God and his Companions, and a warning to those who disbelieved in him; and the realisation of it took place at the battle of Badr. When the verse was revealed stating that the host of the disbelievers will be vanquished and that they will turn their backs in flight (*al-Qamar:* 45), our master 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab wondered 'which host is this?' He knew that the Muslims were weak and incapable, and that the means for the Muslims' victory did not exist, but the Messenger of God was not speaking to the believers of mere means, but rather of the Lord of all means. He challenged and warned them, though he and his companions were weak before them, and reality came to confirm the veracity of God's statement: '…You will be overcome…' and the victory of the Muslims was truly complete, and the disbelievers were overcome.

Is not the veracity of the message delivered by the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning what would happen in this life, evidence of the veracity of the message concerning what would happen in the Hereafter? The realisation of '…You will be overcome…' confirms '…and gathered together to hell….' The verse contains two matters: firstly, a message of the defeat of the disbelievers in this life which is something that all people have witnessed; and the other matter is the affair of the Hereafter which some people might deny. God informed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that you, Muhammad, will overcome the disbelievers, though you do not possess the means to overcome them. Despite this, events came to confirm that the disbelievers were utterly defeated. Since the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was truthful with regard to the first message, despite his not possessing the means to do so, he is assuredly truthful with regard to the second matter, the report concerning the gathering in the fire of hell.

Some exegetes have said that this is directed at the Jews because when the Muslims triumphed at Badr, the Jews panicked. This is because they had not expected the Muslims and Islam to be victorious at Badr, and so when Islam triumphed, some of the Jews said, 'Muhammad is the Prophet God has promised us, and we should believe in him,' but others among them said, 'Wait until after another battle.' That is, do not accept it after the first battle. So they waited, and then the battle of Uhud came, which was a stalemate.

We say: what prevents the verse from being directed at the Jews, the polytheists, and everyone who disbelieved? The statement is general, although it is related that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* gathered the Jews in the market of Banu Qaynuqa'and said to them, 'O you Jews! Beware of that which has afflicted Quraysh, and submit (embrace Islam), before what has afflicted them comes to you, for you know I am a Prophet and Messenger.' What did they say to him? They said 'Do not be deceived because you have met a group of inexperienced people, who have no knowledge of war, and have taken your opportunity with them. If you fight us, you will find that we are the real people.' So God revealed His words: 'Say to those who disbelieve, "You will be overcome and gathered together to Hell, and wretched is the resting place."'

The *mihad* (rendered here as 'resting place') in Arabic is what we usually prepare for a baby to sleep on in security. The expression 'wretched is the resting place' indicates that they will not be able to change the state they are in, just as a baby cannot fight the one who puts them down to sleep in any place. God then says:

قَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ ءَايَةٌ فِى فِئَتَيْنِ ٱلْتَقَتَا ۖ فِئَةٌ تُقَٰتِلُ فِى سَبِيلِ
ٱللَّهِ وَأُخْرَىٰ كَافِرَةٌ يَرَوْنَهُم مِّثْلَيْهِمْ رَأْىَ ٱلْعَيْنِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يُؤَيِّدُ
بِنَصْرِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ ۗ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَبْصَٰرِ ﴿١٣﴾

You have already seen a sign in the two armies that met in battle, one fighting for God's cause and the other made up of disbelievers. With their own eyes [the former] saw [the latter] to be twice their number, but God helps whoever He will. There truly is a lesson in this for all with eyes to see' [13]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 13)

When God says 'Already there has been for you a sign …,' who is being addressed in this verse? There is no doubt that the ones being addressed are all those who lived after this event, whether they are believers or disbelievers. For the believer, it confirms for him that God's help will come, even without the presence of the means for it. As for the disbeliever, the verse comes to him with the admonition that God can cause him to fail even when he possesses many means. God has made this event a sign, and a sign is something wondrous, i.e. the event and its consequences are contrary to human expectations.

This is a general statement that applies to anyone who belongs to either of the two hosts it mentions, whether it is the host of faith or the host of disbelief. As for the host of faith, it is so they understand that material means are not everything in the battle between truth and falsehood because God has armies that they cannot see. This address also shows the error of the host of disbelief, so they cannot say, 'We have in our means numbers and strong preparations,' because the battle between truth and falsehood has raged before, and truth was victorious.

The word 'host' invokes a group of people, but it has further specification. A group could be found in which each person has their own interest in life. When we hear the word 'host', however, it indicates a group in the process of performing a single action. Outside of war, every person has actions which might differ from those of the next person. The word 'host', however, indicates a group of people with one enterprise, and one action, for one goal.

Doubtlessly war depicts this phenomenon most precisely; indeed, war is the one thing that unites every host in the way of one enterprise and one action for one goal. This is because each individual in a host is not capable of defending himself alone; everyone relies on and returns to the host, and is not capable of separating himself from his group. An individual in his ordinary life, however, is capable of separating himself from his group. So, the word 'host' indicates a group of people in a single operation, and the word is always used in connotations of war to depict the forces facing each other. When God says, 'Already there has been for you a sign in the two hosts which met …,' this means there was a struggle between two hosts. God clarifies for us the nature of these hosts, saying, '…one fighting in the Way of God and another of disbelievers….' When we examine the Quranic text precisely, we find that God did not give us any description of the host that were fighting in God's Way, nor did He specify that they were believers; yet He specified that the other host were disbelievers. This means that the host that fought in God's Way were necessarily believers. God also did not mention that the host who were disbelievers were fighting in Satan's cause, as it suffices to know that their disbelief inevitably led to their fighting in Satan's cause.

God left out of the description of the first host that which He indicated with His description of the second host. We know the description of the host who fought in God's Way by their opposite in the verse, which is the other host. The opposite of the disbelievers are believers. We also know that the disbelieving host fought in Satan's cause simply by our knowledge that the first, faithful host, were fighting in God's Way. In Arabic linguistics, this is called 'interweaving', meaning that we leave out from the first the counterpart of that which is affirmed in the second and we leave out of the second the counterpart of that which is affirmed in the first. This is to avoid repetition, and to highlight the link between fighting in God's Way and faith, and the link between fighting in Satan's cause and disbelief.

So, according to this meaning, the verse confirms to us the following: You have already had a sign, i.e. a wondrous matter, contrary to the logic of material means, in the two hosts; for when the believing host met the disbelieving host in battle, the limited believing host managed, by means of the goal for which they were fighting, which was to fight in God's Way, to triumph over the disbelieving host, who were fighting in Satan's cause.

After this, God says, '…They saw them [to be] twice their [own] number by [their] eyesight….' So, we have before us two hosts. Which are they that saw? Which are they that were seen? Who were the seers, and who were the seen? If the seers were the believers, then those seen were the disbelievers. If the seers were the disbelievers, then those seen were the believers. Let us consider the matter according to both meanings.

If it was the disbelievers who saw the believers, they saw them as twice their own number. The disbelievers numbered at almost one thousand, so they saw the believers as twice their number, i.e. two thousand. Or, the meaning could be that the believers saw the disbelievers as though they were twice their actual number. The number of believers was around three hundred and fourteen, so twice that is six hundred and twenty eight fighters.

So, if we take 'twice their own number' to mean the number of the believers, this would mean that the disbelievers saw around six hundred and twenty-eight fighters, and if we take the meaning of 'twice their own number' to mean the number of the disbelievers, then the disbelievers saw the believers as around two thousand. What is the aim of this? God is speaking about the confrontation between disbelief and faith, where God gave victory to faith over disbelief.

Some people who try desperately to find faults in the Quran put the question: Why does the Quran say 'twice their own number,' when in another place God says to the Messenger that He showed them to him in a dream as few; for, had He shown them to him as many, the believers would surely have lost heart, and would surely have disagreed with one another about what to do. But God saved them from this; surely, He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts of men. And so, when they met in battle, He made the infidels appear as few in the believers' eyes – just as He made the believers appear as of little account in the disbelievers' eyes – so that God might accomplish a thing which He willed to be done; for all things go back to God (*al-Anfal:* 43-44).

These verses confirm a large number, whether it is a large number of believers or disbelievers, yet the verse we are currently examining confirms a small number. Those who have doubt in the Quran say: How could the Quran handle a single event in two different ways? We say to these doubters: You are lacking in wisdom because there is a difference between courage when approaching a battle, and the practical and mental spirit that takes over the warrior in the midst of battle. God *the Most High* is speaking about two states: God decreased these people in the eyes of those, and decreased those people in the eyes of these so that the believers, when they saw the disbelievers as though they were few in number, they would increase in courage and strength of faith, in order to achieve victory.

As for the disbelievers; when they saw the believers as few in number, they would consider them lightly, and be scornful when confronting them. However, when the battle commenced, what occurred? Everyone entered the battle with hope in the paucity of the opposition, so what happened to their nerves? The believer entered the battle well prepared to meet the disbelievers. The disbelievers' nerve flagged when the number turned out to be more than they had expected, and so God says that when they met in battle, He made the infidels appear as few in the believers' eyes – just as He made the believers appear as of little account in the disbelievers' eyes – so that God might accomplish a thing which He willed to be done; for all things go back to God (*al-Anfal:* 44).

This depicts the state before the battle because God did not want one side to dread the other, and in this case the battle might not proceed. But when the battle began, God turned affairs around, and moved them from one opposite to the other. Changing something from one opposite to the other is a sign that a Higher Power is guiding emotions and feelings, and the Higher Power is able to create whatever emotions He desires.

God first decreased the perceived numbers so that they would not dread the battle, and then in the midst of the battle, God made each side of them seem many in the eyes of the other side so that each host saw the other as a great many, and faithful courage was inspired in the souls of the believers, and they fought with vigour, and the nerve of the disbelievers flagged when they encountered higher numbers than they had anticipated. And God says, 'Already there has been for you a sign in the two hosts which met - one fighting in the Way of God and another of disbelievers. They saw them [to be] twice their [own] number by [their] eyesight. But God supports with His victory whom He wills. Indeed in that is a lesson for those of vision.'

This verse is a message of glad tidings of victory to all those who believe, and at the same time a message of warning to every disbeliever that failure will befall him if he confronts the group of believers. Beware of judging matters according to the scale of material means. The means that are expected from you are only those within the ability of humans, and the rest should be left to Divine Predestination. The faithful host should not be dispirited in front of a great number, and the disbelievers should not be deluded by their strength of numbers because they have in front of them a precedent confirming that a small number of believers defeated a large number of disbelievers.

Another alternative meaning of the verse is that the disbelievers saw the believers as twice the number of the disbelievers. Another meaning (thirdly) is that the disbelievers saw the believers as twice their actual number. Another meaning (fourthly) of the verse is that the Muslims saw the disbelievers as twice their number, i.e. twice the number of the believers, i.e. just over six hundred. This would mean that the number of the disbelievers in the eyes of the believers was less than the actual number of disbelievers. So what is the meaning of ‘twice their number’ here? God promised His support to the believers when He commanded His Prophet to urge the believers to fight: if there are twenty of them who are patient in adversity, they will overcome two hundred; and if there are one hundred of them, they will overcome one thousand of those who are disbelievers because they are people who have no understanding (*al-Anfal:* 65).

The proportion here means that a single believer could defeat ten disbelievers in battle. This is the promise of God. When God wanted to make things easier and the noble verse was revealed stating that God has lightened the hardship for the believers, and He knows that in them is weakness. So if there are from them one hundred who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among them a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by permission of God. And God is with the steadfast (*al-Anfal:* 66).

So God lightened the proportion where one believer could defeat two disbelievers. The believers are promised victory by God even if they face double their number. In the verse we are currently examining, in which God brings glad tidings to the believers as well as warning to the disbelievers, He says, '…But God supports with His victory whom He wills. Indeed in that is a lesson for those of vision.'

We hear the word *'ibra* (rendered here as 'lesson'), and the origin of the word *'ibra* in Arabic conveys the meaning of 'crossing from one place to another,' which in Arabic is *'uboor* ('crossing'). In our ordinary life, we assign places in the streets for pedestrians to cross in order for them to cross safely from one side of the street to the other. The '*uboor* (crossing) of the ocean is (*'uboor*) crossing from one shore to another.

So, the meaning of the Arabic word 'uboor is crossing from one place to another and *'abra* means a tear-drop because it falls from its place in the eye to the cheek. *'Ibara* means a sentence that we utter because it travels from the mouth to the ear, so it, too, involves crossing. *'Abir* means the scent that travels from a distant flower to arrive at the nose. So, the root of the Arabic word ('uboor) indicates the meaning of 'crossing/penetration/travelling.'

When God says, '…Indeed in that is a lesson…' (*'ibra*), i.e. in your being transported from a state which threw fear into your hearts, O believers, because you are few in number, and they are many, to God's help; and in transporting you, O disbelievers, to defeat, despite your numerous host and preparations.

The 'lesson' here is an event which takes you from one state to a different state, like a tyrant whose day we see come, and so we say 'there is a lesson in this for us', i.e. it has transported us from seeing him in power to oppress to seeing him in humiliation.

So, in this way, the 'lesson' is an eye-opening admonition which transfers one reality to another, something which the intellect might find astonishing. The ending of this noble verse with this meaning is a comprehensive clarification and elucidation; in its beginning, God says, 'Already there has been for you a sign in the two hosts which met …,' and the verse concludes by saying, '…Indeed in that is a lesson for those of vision.'

So, a lesson is something which takes us from one matter to another that might be unusual according to material means, that is, if you are confined to your own views; but the believer is not confined to his own views. If God *the Most High* had willed to torment the disbelievers without their facing the believers and fighting them, He would have tormented them without it, but He willed that the torment of the disbelievers would be by the hands of the believers as He commanded them to fight the disbelievers and God will chastise them by their hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will help the believers against them; and He will soothe the bosoms of those who believe (*at-Tawba:* 14).

If God had willed to torment the disbelievers by means other than the hands of the believers, He could have sent a natural phenomenon to torment them such as an earthquake to destroy them, but God wanted to torment the disbelievers by the hands of the believers. '…God supports with His victory whom He wills. Indeed in that is a lesson for those of vision.' 'Support' is power, so He desires from you only the starting point of action, and then God will complete the victory. 'Supports' means 'gives power to', so God strengthens with His help whom he wills, and the lesson is there for those who have eyes to see.

Someone might say: 'Is the lesson for those who have eyes to see, or for those who have insight?' We say that the lesson is for those who have eyes because the matter that the verse is concerned with is a physical matter to be witnessed, so whoever has two eyes must use them. If reflection and pondering are not granted to every person, eyesight is present in the majority of people, and all of these people can open their eyes, and witness this matter.

If we look at the battle itself, we find clear evidence of the truth of the statement. The believers were few, and their numbers are known and recorded, and their equipment was light; they had not gone out with the intention of war. They had only set out to take possession of caravans carrying provisions such as food and clothing to replace what the polytheists had usurped of their wealth in Mecca. If they had only taken possession of the caravan, their victory would not have been as great as it was because caravans did not usually carry a lot of military equipment; they were only protected by guards. God, however, desired for them a resounding, mighty victory against a powerful, heavily armed force. God promised them victory over one of the two hosts: God gave the believers the promise that one of the two enemy hosts would fall to them; and they would have liked to seize the less powerful one, whereas it was God's will to prove the truth to be true in accordance with His words, and to wipe out the last remnant of the disbelievers (*al-Anfal:* 7).

God's promise was to give the believers victory over one of the two parties, and human nature would hope to have victory against the less dangerous party, i.e. the unarmed party, the caravan. But this kind of victory would not have had the reverberation of the victory against the armed party; it would have been easy to say: Muhammad and those with him fought against a group of tradesmen without weapons or an army. God, however, wanted to make from this battle a separation line between truth and falsehood, and for truth to win out.

You, O believers, did not set out except to capture the caravan; your preparations were not sufficient for battle. As for the disbelievers, they came in full power, with all of their force, for Mecca had sent out all its sons for this battle. When victory comes to the believers in an occasion like this, it is true victory, and a wondrous sign from among God's signs. It becomes a lesson to others, and for this reason we find wondrous things about this battle, the battle of Badr.

Of these wonders, we find brothers each having their own opposing stance, fighting against each other; and we find fathers and sons each with their own stance and opposition fighting against each other despite the close kinship between them. For example, the son of Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him*, who had not yet embraced Islam, was on the side of the disbelievers, and his father, the Siddiq, the great believer, was with the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him*.

After Abu Bakr's son converted, he told his father something out of gratitude and duty, saying, 'You appeared to me on the day of Badr, so I turned my face away from you.' Abu Bakr *God be pleased with him*, the trustworthy one, said, 'By God, if you had appeared to me, I would have killed you.'

Both of the positions are logical. Why? Because when Abu Bakr's son met with his father, and saw his father's face, he was drawing comparison between Abu Bakr and what? He was drawing a comparison between his father and falsehood, and he knew with certainty that it was falsehood, and so Abu Bakr's son preferred his father, and for this reason, he spared him and did not touch him with harm. Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *God be pleased with him*, however, was comparing faith in God with his son, and of course faith was greater in Abu Bakr's view, so if he had seen his son on the day of Badr, he would have killed him.

God has wisdom behind every Qurayshi war criminal killed at the hands of the believers, and God has wisdom behind every disbeliever who survived because they had been saved for a greater cause of faith, wherein they would serve well that cause. If Khalid ibn Al-Walid had been killed in any of the events in which he was on the side of disbelief, it would have been a great loss to us Muslims. This is because God saved him for religious battles in which he would be the drawn sword of God; and if ‘Ikrima had been killed, the Islamic community would have lost a military genius as well.

The Muslims were saddened on the day of Badr because they did not kill those heroes; that was because they did not know God’s wisdom in saving those warriors so that they could later join the ranks of Faith. God did not allow the Muslim warriors on the day of Badr to reach those warriors who at that time were still following the religion of their tribe because He was saving them for religious events that would come later, in which they would stand and fight in the ranks of the believers; and this was an unprecedented victory.

And we have Abu ‘Aziz, the brother of Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umair, one of the companions of the Prophet whom the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* sent to call to the Islamic religion and teach the people of Medina; Mus‘ab was one of the spoiled young men of Quraysh, surrounded by opulence, and whose mother was very wealthy; and when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him wearing a sheep-skin after a time when he had used to wear silk, He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his companions, ‘Look what faith has done to your companion.’

Mus‘ab met his brother Abu ‘Aziz in the battle, and Abu ‘Aziz was a disbeliever and Mus‘ab *God be pleased with him* was a Muslim standing with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

When Mus‘ab *God be pleased with him* saw his brother Abu ‘Aziz captured by a Muslim fighter named Abu Al-Yusr, he said, ‘O Abu Al-Yusr, keep strong hold of your prisoner as his mother is rich and well-off, and she will pay a large ransom.’

His brother Abu ‘Aziz said to him, ‘Is this your way of commending your brother?’ and Mus‘ab *God be pleased with him* said, pointing to Abu Al-Yusr, ‘This is my brother, not you.’ This was the spirit of faith that caused a small host to defeat the people of disbelief; the great power of faith overcoming the sentiments of brotherhood and of paternity, and the sentiment of filiation. God made the occasion of Badr a symbol so that no believer could be downhearted even if the numbers of believers were few, or their preparations were scant, and so that no disbeliever could be deluded even if his people were superior in number and materials.

God made it a symbol of true faith and this is why it is said: Covet death, and you will be granted life. The matter of faith is what fills the spirit of the believer; it is truly a profound and deep issue for the spirit. What do the disbelievers expect when they lie in wait for the believers? When they lie in wait to fight them, the believers will enter paradise if they are killed or they will gain victory over the disbelievers. In this regard, God commands the Prophet to put forth to the disbelievers the question: What are you expecting to befall us? It will be one of two good things (martyrdom and paradise or victory); and we hope that God will inflict you with suffering from Him or by our hands; so you wait and we wait, and we shall see (*at-Tawba:* 52).

So, success here will come in one of two ways: either victory over the disbelievers or martyrdom in God’s Way, and attaining the status of the martyrs in paradise – and both of these are desirable things. The believers wait for the disbelievers, either for God to afflict the disbelievers with torment from Himself, or to afflict them by the hands of the believers. It is a clear and perfect equilibrium of faith.

زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ مِنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلۡبَنِينَ وَٱلۡقَنَٰطِيرِ ٱلۡمُقَنطَرَةِ
مِنَ ٱلذَّهَبِ وَٱلۡفِضَّةِ وَٱلۡخَيۡلِ ٱلۡمُسَوَّمَةِ وَٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ وَٱلۡحَرۡثِۗ
ذَٰلِكَ مَتَٰعُ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَاۖ وَٱللَّهُ عِندَهُۥ حُسۡنُ ٱلۡمَـَٔابِ ١٤

The love of desirable things is made alluring for men – women, children, gold and silver treasures piled up high, horses with fine markings, livestock, and farmland – these may be the joys of this life, but God has the best place to return to [14] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 14)

Let us contemplate the context in which this noble verse comes. The verse addresses the battle that Allah *Glorified is He* has caused to be continuous and eternal in order to clarify for us that spiritual battles require sincere devotion to Him and drastic change of some habits to which a believer has become accustomed and from which he derives worldly delights and enjoyments. These spiritual battles require the sincere believer to sacrifice much of his wealth to equip himself and others and be prepared.

He who fails to rise up to such spiritual battles is a person overwhelmed by worldly desires. Pondering over the context of the verse in reference, notice that it comes after the verse depicting the path to the recurring unprecedented victories for believers so that we would not be dazzled by the glamorous worldly desires and distracted from relishing the delight of fighting in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He* for His word to prevail. Allah says: ‘Beautified for people is the love of worldly desires…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 14). The Arabic verb used in the verse- *Zuyyina*, meaning “(to be) beautified”, makes a clear distinction between the enjoyments and pleasures that Allah has deemed lawful for us and for the ones with which He is not pleased. This is because beautification usually denotes making additional improvements to the essence of the object or person. A woman is beautiful in essence and then further beautifies herself by means of make-up, clothes, ornaments, jewellery, etc. Such beautification is an additional improvement for the purpose of enhancing her original beauty.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is urging us to embrace the worldly life, not to reject it. He wants us, though, to be mindful of overindulgence in its alluring beautified pleasures and adornments. He wants us to embrace the worldly life but to consider the real nature of the worldly pleasures and enjoyments, which are associated with preserving life. He says: ‘Beautified for man is the love of worldly desires through women....’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 14). What is “desire”? A desire refers to the strong inner inclination towards a certain act or thing.

When one thinks more deeply on this verse, one can see that it clearly underlines the fact that such inner inclinations towards worldly needs that ensure the preservation of life are actually good and acceptable in Islam. However, when a person overindulges in the gratification of such acceptable needs, it is an undesirable and disliked attitude.

We have previously highlighted the example of the strongest human desire, namely the sexual desire, and we underlined that animals can be seen as better than humans in this respect. Animals embrace the sexual desire as a means for the preservation of their species. This is evidenced by the fact that once a female animal mates with a male, she does not allow another male to mate with her. Animals do not usually indulge in sex more than what is strictly necessary for conception. Similarly, a male would not solicit a female to engage in sexual intercourse if he finds out that she is pregnant!(1) For animals, the sexual desire is a means of preserving their existence and life on earth, unlike human beings who have pleasure-driven motivation to engage in sexual activities as a source of recurring pleasure(2).

However, human beings unjustly describe a person's strong sexual drive as having a "bestial sexual appetite." It would have been a good thing if such a person truly had a bestial sexual appetite because animals gratify their sexual desires and normally indulge in sex within what is necessary for conception. On the contrary, human beings have taken it so far beyond what is necessary for reproduction, adding a philosophical dimension to the equation. Hence, overindulgence in carrying out lawful acts beyond that which is permissible, is regarded as an indication of the lowness of the evil-inclined soul.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to guarantee the preservation of the universe, which can be attained through two things: the preservation of one's life by means of providing one's needed nutrition (food and water), and preserving the existence and continuity of life on earth by means of reproduction.

Contemplating this issue, we realise that the Creator is All-Wise, and All Knowing. He knows that raising animal offspring is rather a simple task compared to raising human offspring. The pigeon, for instance, feeds its chicks until they are able to fly and then the mother will have no knowledge of their whereabouts as they fly away and start their own lives independently. However, raising human offspring requires significant toil and tremendous efforts until the child reaches adulthood. This is why there should be harmony between the gratification of the human being's sexual desires and the hardship and toil they would have to endure in the process of preserving the product of such pleasure.

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(1) From Translator: The Sheikh's statement was made in a speech preaching virtue and urging his listeners to stick to chastity and avoid promiscuity which is generally attributed to animals.

(2) From Translator: The Sheikh's statement was made in a speech preaching virtue and urging his listeners to stick to chastity and avoid promiscuity which is generally attributed to animals.

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Beautified for man is the love of worldly desires through women...' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). The question arises as who has beautified such pleasures and desires for Man? If the beautification is channelled into the gratification of lawful enjoyments beyond what is needed, then it is the work of Satan. If it is within the scope of ensuring the preservation of the human existence and channelled into the lawful outlets, then it is from Allah.

Allah *the Exalted* adds the Arabic word *Al-Banin*, meaning "offspring," in the verse to the category of worldly desires. In this context, it refers to male offspring, specifically.

Why did not Allah refer to 'female offspring' as well? This is because people tended to seek sons to be a source of honour and pride for the family; sons would not expected to bring about them shame as daughters might. Before Islam, Arabs used to bury their female infants alive out of fear of future shame. For many people, male offspring were often more desirable than female offspring. In fact, this phenomenon is still evident in some present-day communities even among those who speak about and advocate women's rights.

Allah *the Exalted* also adds to the category of the worldly desires, '…heaped-up treasures of gold and silver…' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). The Arabic word *qanatir* is the plural form of *qintar*, denoting a specific weight. Besides being a unit for measuring weight, the qintar was also used as a unit for measuring volume until people noticed that it had a particular weight (about 100 pounds or 100 Kg). People started using it as a unit for measuring weight.

> It was a sign of affluence and richness in ancient times to bring the hide of a bull and fill it with gold; this amount of a bull's hide of gold was called qintar. The verse reads, 'heaped-up treasures (*qanatir muqantara*) of gold and silver…' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). Allah *Glorified is He* is confirming the literal meaning to denote the fact that they are complete *qanatir* in terms of weight, not less. We often find in the Arabic language words described with adjectives derived from the same root to confirm the intended meaning. The same applies to the word *Dinar* in the sentence "*dananir*

mudandarah" meaning a lot of *Dinars*. For example, we say "*zhil zhaleel*", meaning "a shadowy shade" to describe a shadow as being very heavy and thick, and we say "*layl alyal*" to describe a night as being very dark and dim.

Darkness, for example, blocks sunrays. There may be one barrier between a person and the sun or more than one barrier. The shade in the second case is thicker. This is why the shade of a tree is so nice because the leaves block the sunrays and these leaves shade one another. Thus, they provide a thick shadow forming something of a natural air-conditioner.

This is why people in modern times make tents from several layers of fabric with several inches of space between them so that one fabric would shade the other. The difference between the natural thick shade of the trees and that of such tents is that each leaf which shades a person is shaded itself by another one and the leaves of the tree are in different positions so as to give room for the breeze to flow between them. Tents, however, block out the breeze. An Arab poet described an orchard, saying:

It blocks the sunrays from all directions, but allows the breeze to flow through.

So, when Allah *the Exalted* describes the *qanatir* (treasures) as *muqantarah* (stored-up and hoarded), it means that these treasures are accurately measured. What is the nature of these treasures? The verse goes on, 'treasures of gold and silver, and fine horses branded (with their distinct mark)…' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). Horses were considered signs of nobility, leadership, and prestige. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "Good is tied to the forelock of the horses until the Day of Judgment."(1)

Allah says: 'fine horses branded (with their distinct mark)…' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). It is common that the word "fine" would have many different meanings. The Arabic word used in the verse to describe horses is *mussawwamah,* which is derived from the Arabic verb *sama,* denoting being bred in open pastures where they can eat freely, as opposed to being tied-up and forced to eat only what is offered to them. It also means that they have distinctive marks; one horse may be with "*ghurrah,"* i.e. white blaze on the horse's brow (*agharr*), another may be black (*adham*), and yet another one may be bright chestnut (*asqar*).

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(1) *[Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*

The word “fine” also denotes being well trained and tamed. Horses are originally wild and fierce; they must be tamed so that Man can benefit from them. Thus, we come to know that the Arabic word *mussawwamah* or “fine”, has diverse meanings.

These aforementioned fine horses are freely-grazed and bred in open pastures where they can eat freely; they have distinct marks such as *"ghurrah*," i.e. white blaze on the horse's brow, white spots on their feet, or black or bright chestnut colours; they are also well-trained and tamed. We notice that this verse, which lists different kinds of worldly pleasures, comes right after the one that discusses Jihad, or struggling in the cause of Allah, and in this context, it refers to war with those oppressing Muslim people.

War requires staying away from one’s family for long; accordingly, the fulfilment of one's desires, be it sexual desire or desire for offspring and wealth, must not come in the way, hindering the person's efforts in this regard. The believer gladly spends his wealth and efforts in *Jihad* and horses are items of wealth spent for that very purpose.

The previous verse reads: “You have already had a sign in the two hosts that met in battle, one host fighting in the cause of Allah and the other denying Him; with their own eyes [the former] saw the others as twice their own number: but Allah strengthens with His succour whom He wills. In this, behold, there is indeed a lesson for all who have eyes to see” (*Al-’Imran:* 13)

This underlines the fact that a believer should not give up his true aspiration (at times of war) - namely attaining martyrdom in the cause of Allah, or victory - for the sake of fleeting worldly desires and pleasures: women, children, heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, fine horses branded (with their distinct mark), and cattle. Allah says, concerning cattle, in the chapter of (*al-An'am:* 6) ‘And of cattle (He created) beasts of burden and those which are fit for slaughter only; eat of what Allah has given you and do not follow the footsteps of the Satan; surely he is your open enemy. [They are] eight mates - of the sheep, two and of the goats, two. Say, “Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Inform me with knowledge, if you should be truthful." And of the camels, two and of the cattle, two. Say, 'Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you witnesses when Allah charged you with this? Then who is more unjust than one who invents a lie about Allah to mislead the people by [something] other than knowledge? Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people)" (*al-An'am:* 142 - 144).

The verse made mention of the following: two sheep, two goats, two camels, and two cows; the total is eight pairs. They cannot be counted as sixteen as some early scholars suggested. A pair is not counted as two. It is one unit which consists of two people or things of the same sort considered together. Another example is the word "twin". A twin refers to two offspring; when we say two twins, this means four offspring. The Arabic word *taw'am*, meaning twins, is also used to refer to offspring in a multiple birth, or more than two offspring (twins, triplets, quadruplets, quintuplets, sextuplets, etc.).

Allah says regarding the beautification of worldly pleasures: 'Beautified for people is the love of worldly desires- of women; children; heaped-up treasures of gold and silver; fine, branded horses of high mark; cattle; and tilled lands.' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). The Arabic word harth means "tilled lands" and is used in this verse to refer to plants and crops. Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to bear in mind that, while He causes some plants to grow without any effort exerted on our part, He also requires us to exert effort in growing others through tilling and the preparation of land for crop bearing.

The word tilling means "stirring up soil and breaking up soil crusts and clods to prepare it for cultivation". Crops need water, air, and a suitable environment to grow; the farmer should provide suitable soil in which the tiny root hairs of the radicle (the embryonic root of the seedling) will have space to grow and become strong.

So, tilling involves stirring up the soil and preparing it so that the seed can grow. Allah *the Exalted* has placed within the two cotyledons (embryonic leaves) of the seed all the needed nutrients for the plant during the germination of the seed until it develops a stalk, by means of which the plant can derive the needed nutrients from the soil. As the stalk becomes stronger, the two cotyledons of the embryo within the seed of the plant dwindle and become mere leaves. So what happens to the volume of the two cotyledons?

The cotyledons are important for the seedling as it begins to grow because they contain the food reserves needed for germination and seedling growth, providing the seedling its initial burst of energy. They provide nutrients required for plant growth until the seedling is able to derive its own nutrients from the soil, and this is not possible unless the soil is tilled. This is why it is said that clay soil is difficult to manage and infertile. It is also said that sandy soil is also infertile. Why is that?

This is because there are two characteristics of good soil: First, the soil should allow water to penetrate through it to provide plants with the needed water. Second, the soil should be able to hold water. So, we need soil that allows both water penetration and water retention. Clay soil holds too much water, thus causing root rot; Sandy soil does not hold water (having the lowest water retention). For this reason, ideal soil is a mixture of clay and sandy types of soil. When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about plants, He uses the word "*harth,"* meaning "tilled land", in order to draw our attention to the fact that whoever wants to reap a harvest of crops has to work and exert effort in tilling the soil. He also says*:* 'And have you seen that [seed] which you sow? Is it you who makes it grow, or do We cause it to grow?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64).

In these verses, Allah uses the word "seed" because it is the origin of the plant's existence. All the above-mentioned desires and pleasures- women; offspring, heaped-up treasures of gold and silve, horses of high mark, cattle, and tilled lands- have great value for the individual. This is clarified by the conclusion of the verse: 'That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return' (*Al-'Imran:* 14).

This verse lists the pleasures and enjoyment of this worldly life. A person may feel worried that he may miss out on an enjoyment and he may not relish it, or that he might die before savouring it. One does not really treasure those enjoyments and pleasures that he fails to experience. When we ponder over the verse as a unit, we can easily recognise that it underlines the keys and triggers for all personalities by means of which people would be enticed to deviate from the straight path. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'Beautified for people is the love of worldly desires- of women; children; heaped-up treasures of gold and silver fine, branded horses of high mark, cattle; and tilled lands. All this may be enjoyed in the worldly life – but Allah has with Him the best return' (*Al-'Imran:* 14).

The verse made mention of the triggers by means of which a person may be enticed to deviate from the straight path. Allah *Glorified is He* requires His believing servant to follow a lifestyle that conforms to His will. So, what drives a believer to give up the will of Allah *the Exalted* in any given matter and opt for a contradictory action?

There is no doubt that it is sinful desires and urges that cause the heart to incline toward evil and lead a person astray. Every person has his own temptations. It could be the desire for women. Maybe it is love for his offspring, love for raising them and providing for them beyond what he can afford. Perhaps it is the pursuit of a career, enticing him to steal or cheat in order to please his boss. For others, it may be love of wealth, horses and steeds, or tools and arms. Every person has his own temptations.

Those who beautify deviation from the path of Allah and lure people into it, resort to these personality triggers. A person may not be tempted by women's alluring gazes or by gold and wealth, but could be lured by his love for his children. This would be his alluring desire.

So, everyone has his own temptations and those who wish to lead people astray know such triggers. When Allah *Glorified is He* says that these desires and pleasures are beautified for people, someone might say, "If Allah wants us to stay away from such things, why did He create them to begin with?"

The answer to this question would be as follows: Allah *the Exalted* says in the verse*:* 'Beautified for people…' in the passive form. The question arises, then: who has beautified them? Allah *Glorified is He* could have used the active form and would have clearly stated it in the verse. However, He wanted to draw our attention to the fact that it is possible that Satan would be the one who beautifies these things. It could also be the faith-oriented logic that beautifies these enjoyments for us. Allah *the Exalted* related the supplication of some of his pious servants in the verse that reads*:* 'And those who say, "Our

Lord, grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous.'" (*al-Furqan:* 74)

So, what is the criterion in this regard? Allah *Glorified is He* designated a specific function for every worldly blessing. For instance, one's wife is made a source of tranquillity and peace of mind providing the man with much-needed affection, kindness, and tenderness. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought' (*ar-Rum:* 21).

Allah *Glorified is He* is stressing the function of this great worldly blessing; namely wives providing their husbands with tranquility, satisfying their needs and guarding their chastity. What about a man's love for his children? Allah relates the supplication of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* in the verse that reads*:* 'He said, "My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened, and my head has filled with white, and never have I been in my supplication to You, my Lord, unhappy. And indeed, I fear the successors after me, and my wife has been barren, so give me, from Yourself, an heir. Who will inherit from me and inherit from the family of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You]"' (*Maryam:* 4-6).

Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* implored Allah for an heir to inherit from him, and the Prophets do not leave behind wealth as inheritance. Rather, their legacy is knowledge and wisdom. So, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was imploring his Lord for a son who would inherit wisdom from him and from the family of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* and that Allah would cause him (the son) to earn the pleasure of his Lord. Had the Prophets of Allah left wealth as inheritance, some might infer that Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* asked for a son so that he could inherit Zakaryya's wealth; but Allah willed that the Prophets should not leave wealth as inheritance, but rather that they pass on the knowledge of God's way. So, Prophet (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* asked Allah to bless him with a son to carry on his duty of consolidating the religion and divinely revealed way of life on earth.

Similarly, the one who desires wealth to spend it in the cause of Allah, horses and steeds to tame for war purposes (at times of war), or tilled lands to grow food for the benefit of the creation of Allah, will earn commendation, praise, and great reward from his Lord. Therefore, we need to bear in mind that a blessing bestowed upon you by Allah may be employed in what pleases Him or in what gratifies the evil inclinations of the "self." When you, oh servant of Allah, examine your own desires, you will realise that they can possibly be directed towards good. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "And those who say, 'Our Lord, grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous'" (*al-Furqan:* 74).

Allah *the Exalted* willed that His Prophets and righteous people would be blessed with children who would inherit their good character traits and serve as good examples for other people. A believer should love having children who could be good role models for others. The one who loves horses can channel this love into doing good deeds.

Abu Hurayrah *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The best of people is a man who is holding his horse's rein in the way of Allah (in *Jihad*) and is galloping towards the place wherever he hears a call for war or detects a note of danger; he goes on proceeding, seeking martyrdom or death wherever it is expected.'(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* encouraged Muslims to tame horses for war purposes. This proves that it is possible to channel our love for worldly pleasures and enjoyments toward what is good. It should be noted, though, that Allah *Glorified is He* is not urging us to abstain from relishing these blessings and enjoyments. On the contrary, He is urging us to abstain from employing what He has created for us in other than the way He has intended.

Let us ponder on the remark at the conclusion of the verse about the beautified enjoyments: The verse reads*:* 'All this may be enjoyed in the worldly life – but Allah has with Him the best return' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). This means that from a shallow and conventional view, these beautified enjoyments and desires are perceived as mere sources of pleasure. How long will these desires and enjoyments last? They are temporary, just like this worldly life.

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(1) *(Muslim)*

Let us also contemplate the situation of a person who attempts to refine the value of doing good in his life. This can be attained through several means: 1- carrying out more good deeds, 2- observing good deeds constantly making sure that good-doing is not forsaken, 3- devoting one’s life to doing good and not allowing oneself to miss out on any chance to carry out good deeds, 4- not associating good deeds with other than Allah. For example, one may associate the blessings bestowed upon him with a strong person who may become weak, ill, go absent, or betray him.

Any other good attained by any other way is not genuine. These desires-women, wealth, offspring, horses, cattle, and lands-provide the individual with enjoyment in this worldly life. Hypothetically speaking, let us assume that nothing can take away these pleasures from you as long as you live, and you will continue to relish these enjoyments throughout your whole life. You have to ask yourself: what is the value of this short worldly life when a person only lives for a limited number of years according to the decree of Allah? A person's life in this world should be estimated by his own life- span rather than the length of the worldly life itself.

Let us assume that one continued to relish these desires and enjoyments: women, wealth, children, horses, gold, silver, lands, cattle, equipment, and arms. What would happen then? There is no doubt that this worldly life is limited and no one can live beyond his designated life span. Therefore, no one can retain these enjoyments forever because his life in this world is limited.

Allah *the Exalted* has not set a fixed life span for all human beings in this world. Rather, every person has a specific limited life span. When a child is born, there is no card sent down with him specifying the number of years he will spend in this worldl.

Allah *Glorified is He* has rendered the exact number of years each person will live on this earth, unknown to the person himself. This is why it is said that ambiguity is the utmost clarity. Allah *the Exalted* has concealed the time and cause of death of people. When will death approach? Where? Allah had decreed that this information should be hidden from people so that a believer would be constantly anticipating death at all times.

This ambiguity of the time of death serves as the utmost clarity. No matter how long the worldly life is, it is still limited and a person cannot guarantee living in it for long. The pleasures and enjoyments a person relishes in his short life are commensurate with his abilities. Even if a person does not fail to savour the enjoyments of the worldly life, he will surely leave this world eventually. If we compared all these denotations to the linguistic connotation of the Arabic word *ad-Dunia*, meaning "worldly life," we will come to realise that it denotes "the lowest" as opposed to "the highest," which is the Hereafter.

Why is it described as "the highest"? It is because the Hereafter will elevate the good deeds performed by an individual in his worldly life.

After the end of this limited life in this world, a believer will go to paradise where he will lead an unlimited life. This is the first aspect of refinement and elevation. A believer is guaranteed that the foods and enjoyments therein are eternal and is also guaranteed that he shall abide therein eternally. A believer cannot realize the real value of paradise because his perception of goodness is commensurate with his knowledge. A person's knowledge of goodness is partial and limited, whereas Allah's knowledge of goodness is absolutely perfect.

A believer relishes in paradise all that is good in a manner that is commensurate with what Allah *the Exalted* knows of the goodness within a believer. Thus, our life in this world is the lowest, and the one to come is the highest. When we are commanded not to be deceived by this glamorous worldly life and not to be lured by these enjoyments and desires, is this a form of encouraging self-love or self-hatred?

It is a heavenly call towards self-love because it contributes to the refinement and elevation of goodness within every believer. The Islamic Message has made it clear that there are such-and-such pleasures and enjoyments in this worldly life and that this life is limited and none can live beyond his specified life-span. It has also made it clear that a person's ability to relish worldly enjoyments is limited to his own capabilities, whereas the enjoyments of the next life are commensurate with the capability of the Creator. It is, therefore, very logical to say: '…All this may be enjoyed in the worldly life – but Allah has with

Him the best return' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). This verse underlines that Allah *the Exalted* has with Him the best return and the best rewards.

When Allah *Glorified is He* demands of you, as a believer, to lower your gaze and refrain from looking at what is impermissible for you to look at, a superficial person might think that this is a restriction on the freedom of the eyes. However, Allah has commanded lowering one's gaze in this worldly life so that the eyes will savour the great enjoyments in the Hereafter upon which Allah has made permissible to gaze. Such a commandment, therefore, is generated from the love of Allah for His creation, and this is the elevation of goodness.

Let us assume that you have a small sum of money and you meet a poor person and give him the money, favouring him over yourself. You do so such a thing in order to earn doubled rewards in the Hereafter. So, the religious commandment can be perceived as a refined, lofty sort of selfishness, not a foolish one. Allah *the Exalted* then, clarifies this "best return" by saying*:*

قُلۡ أَؤُنَبِّئُكُم بِخَيۡرٖ مِّن ذَٰلِكُمۡۚ لِلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوۡاْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡ جَنَّٰتٞ
تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزۡوَٰجٞ مُّطَهَّرَةٞ
وَرِضۡوَٰنٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرُۢ بِٱلۡعِبَادِ ١٥

[Prophet], say, 'Would you like me to tell you of things that are better than all of these? Their Lord will give those who are mindful of God Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay with pure spouses and God's good pleasure – God is fully aware of His servants [15]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 15)

When we see the phrase 'Shall I inform you of [something]...' in a verse, we should bear in mind that the Arabic verb *ykhbir,* meaning "to tell", is different from *yunabbi*' meaning "to inform", as the second is often followed with huge news; It is often used to present extraordinary news. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'About what are they asking one another? About the great news [of resurrection]…' (*an-Naba':* 1-2) This verse used the Arabic word *naba*' which means "news" to refer to the event that will turn the entire world upside down. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'Shall I inform you of [something] better than that?' (*Al-'Imran:* 15). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* will inform us of something big that is better than these things. Thus, we know that Allah has rendered these things criteria for comparison. Why? It is because they are tangible. He has clarified for us the way to refine goodness within us by saying: 'For those who fear Allah will be gardens in the presence of their Lord' (*Al-'Imran:* 15). The Arabic word Rabb, meaning "Lord," denotes the One Who sustains and supports those under His care until they reach the desired state of perfection.

The verse clearly stated that these gardens will be "in the presence of their Lord." What has the Lord and Sustainer promised His pious servants? He has promised them 'gardens through which running waters flow' (*Al-'Imran:* 15). Let us compare these gardens to the tilled lands and plants mentioned, as well. We have previously underlined that when Allah speaks of plants, He uses the Arabic word *harth*, meaning "tilled land" so that we know that growing plants requires exerting effort and hard work.

On the contrary, the gardens in the Hereafter will be prepared and will not require any work or struggle on the part of a believer. Rather, he shall relish therein the pleasure of having the rivers flowing beneath them and will find therein the promised enjoyments. The verse reads: '...beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally...' (*Al-'Imran:* 15). A believer shall abide therein eternally; it shall be a never-ending eternity in permanent pleasures.

The verse makes mention of '... and purified wives' referring to the pure wives promised by Allah for the believers therein, compared to women in the worldly life. We all know that women go through phases that may cause repulsion among the spouses either pertaining to her physical appearance or her character. There are times when a husband would not be attracted to his wife and does not like to approach her. A woman may also have a bad quality that causes her spouse to hate her beauty. This is why a man may be deceived by the outward appearance of a woman in this worldly life that he may fall in love with her and then discover a bad characteristic that drives him to hate her. As for the Hereafter, things are totally different. The people of paradise shall be granted "pure wives" (*Al-'Imran:* 15). This means that the spouses will be void of any defect that could be regarded as a deficiency in this worldly life. A believer will enjoy her beauty and spare himself the evils and defects in this worldly life because Allah has caused him or her to be purified and void of them.

Who has caused these spouses to be "purified"? Indeed, Allah is the One Who causes them to be pure physically and morally. A man in this worldly life may love a woman, who can retain her beauty and ability to attract him for fifteen years, and then she will start having wrinkles and put on extra weight; he then would start to develop an aversion to her! On the contrary, the women in the Hereafter will be purified from all defects and evils and retain their beauty and youth eternally. Is this not an elevation and refinement of good? We can notice that Allah has made mention of two things:

First: the gardens beneath which rivers flow compared to the tilled lands in this worldly life.

Second: pure wives which we can also compare to the women of this worldly life.

Allah does not mention any details about the other enjoyments in the verse. What about the heaped-up treasures of gold and silver? What about the horses? What about the cattle? What about the offspring? We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* has made mention of two of the beautified enjoyments and desires, one in the opening of the verse and one in the conclusion. Let us read the verse again. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'Beautified for people is the love of worldly desires - of women; children; heaped-up treasures of gold and silver; fine, branded horses of high mark; cattle; and tilled lands. All this may be enjoyed in the worldly life - but Allah has with Him the best return' (*Al-'Imran:* 14).

The worldly love of women was mentioned in the opening of the verse and tilled lands were mentioned in its conclusion. Allah *the Exalted* has made mention only of the first and last beautified enjoyments and desires listed in the verse instead of detailing all the listed beautified enjoyments, and clarified for us that they constitute the elevation and refinement of good. This means that we should understand that provision entails whatever benefits a person. Everything that benefits a person is part of his worldly provision (*rizq*): good conduct, acquiring knowledge, refined manners, forbearance, and honesty are all parts of the divinely bestowed provision. However, sometimes the provision is bestowed on a person directly and he can avail himself of it directly and at other times provision does not benefit a person directly. Rather, it serves as a means and an intermediary to what can benefit a person directly.

For example, bread is a direct provision. Money is also a provision, but it is indirect because a person could be hungry and have a mountain of gold. If someone were to say to him: "I can give you a slice of bread in return for this mountain of gold," the hungry person would gladly give up the mountain of gold in return for a single slice of bread because one cannot eat gold! The same is true of a cup of water for a thirsty person.

There are kinds of provisions which are not sought, in and of themselves, but a person seeks them as a means to gain other provisions and attainments. We will not need any means to obtain whatever we may want in the Hereafter because it will not be the realm of means. Rather, whatever is wanted will be realised by a single word of Allah: '"Be!" and it is' (*Ya Sin:* 82). A person will not need wealth in paradise, nor will he require heaped-up treasures of gold and silver because he will be granted whatever he may aspire to therein. We will not need fine horses in the Hereafter because we will not fight with them or enjoy riding them.

All the things that a person will not need in the Hereafter were granted to him in the worldly life in order to avail himself of the available means. Allah *Glorified is He* does not list them in the verse that reads*:* 'Say, "Shall I inform you of [something] better than that? For those who fear Allah will be gardens in the presence of their Lord beneath which rivers flow wherein they abide eternally, and purified spouses, with approval from Allah. And Allah is seeing of [His] servants"' (*Al-'Imran:* 15). Allah has not made mention of these things in the verse because Allah *the Exalted* bestows on people in the Hereafter direct provision. As for those things by which a person seeks direct provisions in this worldly life, He did not mention them in the verse because they shall not be needed in the Hereafter. Why do we love wealth? It is because it allows us to buy things. Why do we love horses of high mark? This is because they allow us to fight and struggle in the cause of Allah. Why do we love cattle? It is because they enable us to obtain our necessary supplies.

In paradise, a believer will be granted therein everything he aspires to and whatever might cross his mind. There will be no need for means in this realm. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* made mention of the direct provisions only. He mentioned the gardens beneath which rivers flow and the pure spouses.

Let us ponder on the verse that reads*:* 'Say, "Shall I inform you of [something] better than that?"' (*Al-'Imran:* 15). One may ask, "Would it not be more logical that Allah *the Exalted* would have simply informed us what He wanted to tell us, instead of asking us first, 'Shall I inform you of this news, or not?'"

Well, this style helps attract the listener's attention to the kindness of Allah towards His creation. He is saying to us: "Do you not wish for Me to tell you about things that are better than these worldly enjoyments you have in this worldly life?" Allah *Glorified is He* is alerting those who are heedless of this fact. He did not wait for us to respond, "Yes, tell us, Oh our Lord!"

Rather, He informs us without our asking. This style is known as a "rhetorical question". When a person hears the phrase, 'Shall I inform you of [something] better than that', his attention is caught. If he does not hear the news, his mind will remain preoccupied with it. After drawing the listener's attention, the answer comes to touch the soul of a believer.

The news and glad tidings come for those who fear Allah. When we contemplate the above-mentioned enjoyments and desires- women, children, heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, horses of high mark, cattle, and tilled lands- wouldn't it be appropriate that a person should be conscious of his Lord with regards to them?

It is obligatory on a person to fear Allah with regards to these enjoyments. This is why we have said earlier that in response to those who wish to make their lives dull and void of movement: They confine life to worship in terms of performing the prayer and fasting and call for denouncing everything else. We say to them: "This is wrong. Your actions in this worldly life help you foster your fear of Allah." We know that when a person has the fear of Allah, a person hides from hellfire and shields himself from the wrath of his Lord. If you employed the blessings of Allah in a way that conforms to His religion, this is the permissible employment of those blessings.

We have also underlined that the Arabic term taqwa, meaning “fear” or “being mindful of something or someone,” is mentioned in the Quran in association with Allah on some occasions and in association with hellfire on others. Some verses read “fear Allah” and others, “fear Hellfire”. Fearing hellfire implies guarding oneself against its flames so as not to be harmed by them; Fearing Allah implies guarding oneself against whatever incurs His wrath. This is because incurring the wrath of Allah eventually leads a person to subjecting himself to His punishment. So, regarding those who fear Allah, do not think that they have renounced excessive pleasure in the worldly life simply for the sake of asceticism. Rather, they did so hoping for what is greater, namely the everlasting delights of the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies afterwards that a believers will not relish such delights in the Hereafter because there will be no need for it. These delights in the Hereafter will not be confined to rejoicing at the blessings bestowed upon a person, but extend to seeing the One who confers the blessings on him since a believer who will be admitted to paradise shall be granted whatever he aspires to. In fact, he will be granted whatever he wishes and will relish therein the enjoyments according to the generosity and power of Allah.

If a person does not aspire to any of these enjoyments in paradise, he will be preoccupied with seeing his Lord. His place will be in a garden in paradise, called *'Illiyyun* in which the blessings are nothing like whatever we may have heard about paradise; its dwellers only rejoice at their meeting with Allah. It should be noted that provisions and blessings in paradise will not be needed for sustaining the life therein. Rather, the inhabitant of paradise shall live therein for eternity, savouring everlasting bliss. The only thing a person really needs is earning the goodly pleasure of his Lord.

Indeed, the pleasure of Allah *the Exalted* is greater than any other attainment. Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us of the pleasures and enjoyments in paradise and told us of what is better than they are. He has informed us that earning His pleasure means that a believer is guaranteed to receive the privilege of seeing his Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord’ (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23).

Thus, we have come to know that there are levels in paradise. Allah *the Exalted* informs us after this with*:* 'And Allah is seeing of [His] servants...' (*Al-'Imran:* 15). This means that Allah is Well-Aware of His servants; He shall reward each person according to his actions and his adherence to the religion of his Lord. He who obeys Allah out of desire for the delights of Paradise will be granted paradise, and he who obeys Him because He deserves to be obeyed, Allah will grant him the delight and joy of looking at Him. Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah *may Allah rest her soul* said, in this regard: 'They all worship You out of fear of hellfire and perceives salvation from it as a great attainment. I am not like them; I only seek Your Love.'

She also said: 'Oh my Lord, if I worship you from fear of hell, burn me in hell. If I worship you from hope of paradise, bar me from its gates. But if I worship you for yourself alone, grant me then the beauty of your Face.'

So, Allah *Glorified is He* is aware of [the hearts of] His servants and will reward every person according to his actions and intentions. The one who loves the blessings and pleasures of his Lord will be rewarded with them in abundance. As for the one who loves Allah even if He withholds His blessings, Allah *the Exalted* will bestow on him the greatest blessing ever, namely having Allah boasting about him to the angels. One of the strongest proofs of faith and its perfection is favouring the love of Allah and His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* over anything else in the whole world.

Anas *may Allah be pleased with him* related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "There are three qualities, and whoever has them will relish the sweetness of *iman* (faith): 1. The one to whom Allah and His Messenger become dearer than anything else. 2. The one who loves a person only for the pleasure of Allah. 3. The one who hates to revert to disbelief after Allah has brought (saved) him out from it, as he hates to be thrown into Hellfire.(1)" This means that some servants love Allah *the Exalted* because He is worthy of love and worship, for He is the Bestower who organizes and manages this beautiful Universe.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

So, Allah *Glorified is He* underlines that He sees all that is in the hearts of His servants and knows exactly what every worshipper deserves. Each shall be rewarded according to his acts and intentions in his worldly life. He who worshipped Allah for His blessings, will be granted the desired blessings in paradise, and he who has obeyed Allah *the Exalted* because He deserves to be obeyed, even if he is denied the blessings of Allah *Glorified is He* will be rewarded with a seat in *‘Illiyyun*.

This is why it is said that the people who are most severely tested are the Prophets of Allah, then the next best and the next best. Why? That is because this is an evidence of the sincerity of their love. People usually love those who are good and kind towards them and do not love those who harm them unless they enjoy a very special place in their heart. A believer is genuinely confident in His wisdom. Allah *Glorified is He* afflicts him with calamities, while knowing that he will adhere to endurance and will patiently face the trials in order to grant him a great reward and recompense. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* ‘Say, “I am only a man like you, to whom has been revealed that your god is one God. So, whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord-let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone”’ (*al-Kahf:* 110).

He says, “Whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord” and not “hoping for his Lord’s Paradise”. We should not be distracted with the blessing, e.g. paradise, from the One Who confers it on us, i.e. Allah *Glorified is He*. When Allah demands that we do not associate any partner with Him in worship, we should bear in mind that Paradise is no exception. One should not associate anything, including Paradise, with Allah in worship! Allah *the Exalted* says*:*

ٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ إِنَّنَآ ءَامَنَّا فَٱغْفِرْ
لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ١٦

Those who say, “Our Lord, we believe, so forgive us our sins and protect us from suffering in the Fire” [16] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 16)

The statement,‘…Oh our Lord! Indeed, we have believed…’ is the first step towards treading the path of Allah. It indicates that faith in Allah requires a person who is competent for religious responsibility to be mindful of his actions because it is required by his faith. It is as if a believer is saying: “As a human being, I am unable to fulfil the rights of faith in You; so, my lord, forgive my faults, inattentiveness, sins, arrogance, or sinful whims.”

This supplication is a proof that such a person has become aware of the implications of faith that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified in his explanation of the meaning of ihsan, meaning “spiritual perfection and excellence in faith”. He said: “*Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see Him; if you cannot achieve this state of devotion (if you did not feel that you were seeing Him), then you must consider that He sees you”(1).

It means that a person remembers his Lord’s presence in all his actions because he knows his Lord sees him. Would any person have the audacity to violate the rights of his Lord Who sees him? A believer would recall the report on the authority of our Lord, reading, ‘Oh my servants! If you think that I cannot see you, then your faith is flawed. If you know that I can see you, then why have you made Me the least important of your viewers?’ (This has no basis in the *Sunnah*). It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is saying to His servant: ‘Am I less important to you than My own servants? Do you dare offend someone, while he can see you? How could you commit sin and disobey your Creator?’

The verse reads: ‘Those who say, “Our Lord! Indeed, we have believed (in You); so, forgive us our sins...”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 16). They said this because they believed, and therefore, they are asking for forgiveness of their sins. Why? Because as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed repentance, this means that He understands that His servants would wrong themselves and deviate from His path.

Allah *the Exalted* concludes the verse by relating the supplication of His servants: “… protect us from the punishment of the Hellfire” (*Al-‘Imran:* 16). When a person knows that Allah has guaranteed the concealment of his sins when he repents, he will be shy to commit sins or at least hasten in seeking His forgiveness. But why should the meaning of the verse not be “Oh our Lord! Guard us from sins that we would not commit them ever.” If we do

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(1) *Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, and An-Nasa’i*

[commit sins], it requires seeking forgiveness and repentance. If one commits a sin, but then seeks forgiveness of his Lord, he should know that his Lord has granted him forgiveness because He says*:* 'And I said, 'Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever a Perpetual Forgiver"' (*Nuh:* 10). Knowing this, a person's fear fades away and he whole-heartedly observes his religious obligations out of love for his Lord and obliges himself to abide by the way of life prescribed by Him, comprehensively. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* prescribed repentance for people as another aspect of His Mercy. This divine mercy manifests itself best, while one is pondering on the opposite scenario.

For instance, let us imagine that Allah *the Exalted* had not prescribed repentance and when a person committed one sin, he was denied the mercy of Allah. What would happen to him? What would happen to the community where he lives? All the evils that this person would afflict on the community and society would be the product of his utter frustration and despair. He would lose hope in rectifying his affairs after falling into the abyss of sin. However, if Allah *the Exalted* opens the door of repentance for the sinners, whenever a person commits a sin out of heedlessness, he hastens to repentance.

In fact, this reflects the realistic approach of the Islamic sharia. Islam is a realistic religion that takes into consideration the reality of the human nature. Allah *the Exalted* knows that His servants will inevitably commit sins and, therefore, He guides them to the way of seeking forgiveness. If a person commits sins, Allah *the Exalted* enjoins him to repent and seek His forgiveness. If a repentant feels uncomfortable when he remembers his sin, this annoying feeling will be counted as a good deed every time he experiences it, as well.

There is a difference between having one's sins forgiven and being safeguarded from hellfire. How is that? When a person knows that Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed for him the forgiveness of his sins if he repents, and if he knows that his Lord is the Sustaining Creator, he will hasten to repent of his sins, hoping for the forgiveness and mercy of his Lord. This is the supplication of the believers if they have forgotten to seek forgiveness for their sins. Why? That is because seeking the forgiveness of Allah for one's sins is a religious obligation enjoined by Allah on His servants. As we have said earlier, one may forget some of these commandments and religious obligations, and accordingly forget to seek forgiveness sometimes. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says relating the supplication of His servants*:* "…and keep us safe from suffering through the Hellfire" (*Al-'Imran:* 16).

The meaning of the Arabic word *taqwa* (usually translated as "fear and consciousness of something") could also be "to build a barrier between yourself and the hellfire" or "a barrier between yourself and your Lord's wrath". If you employed the blessings of your Lord in accordance with His commands and the way of life prescribed by Him, then it will count as a good deed for you. We have previously underlined that the commands to adhere to *taqwa* in relation to Allah and hellfire are closely related and were used in the Quran because the concept of *taqwa* in relation to hellfire denotes fearing and being mindful of ending up in it and taqwa in relation to Allah denotes making a barrier between ourselves and (whatever may incur) the wrath of our Lord. Next, Allah *the Exalted* says*:*

ٱلصَّـٰبِرِينَ وَٱلصَّـٰدِقِينَ وَٱلْقَـٰنِتِينَ
وَٱلْمُنفِقِينَ وَٱلْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِٱلْأَسْحَارِ (١٧)

Those who are steadfast, truthful, truly devout, who give
[in God's cause] and pray before dawn for forgiveness' [17]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 17)

These are the attributes of those who attained *taqwa*, i.e. those who fear Allah and are duly conscious of Him. He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, pure spouses, and (rewarded them with) His pleasure and acceptance. These people who spend in the way of Allah and seek His forgiveness in the last hours of the night before dawn are described as patient, true, and obedient.

The question arises: With what are they patient? They are patient about carrying out the commands of their Lord. When we receive the religious obligations and commandments, we experience a sense of discomfort because living in accordance with them requires effort and hardship. Religious obligations come with some hardship because they restrict a person's freedom to some degrees.

Allah *the Exalted* has created us and inculcated within us the inclination and ability to do good or refrain from doing good. When He commands you to carry out any given act, He has restricted your freedom in terms of commanding you not to be heedless in doing said act. Similarly, when Allah orders you not to do something, He has denied you the option of doing it. Thus, restricting your actions and imposing some limitations on your choices naturally incurs some hardship. When Allah commands you to do something, such an action might be difficult in and of itself. If you succeeded in enduring the hardship of the action and patiently carried out the command as enjoined, you are among "the patient" referred to here because you have endured and obeyed your Lord. You may also patiently give up a sin; when you are enticed to do a prohibited act which would incur the wrath of Allah, and you refuse to commit it and adhere to endurance, you have patiently refrained from committing the sin.

So, we are required to adhere to patience in relation to both, commands and prohibitions; doing the enjoined acts and refraining from the prohibitions require patience to endure the accompanying hardship. Patient people abide by patience in two aspects, namely when carrying out the religious obligations and avoiding the prohibitions. In the case of prohibitions such as the prohibition of consuming alcohol, or stealing, a person should patiently refrain from doing such forbidden acts. So, the divine commands and prohibitions make up the two types of religious requirements. A third category included the actions that do not fall into the realms of commands or prohibitions: these are the matters that occur beyond your control and fall into the category of divine decrees.

When Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to do something, He has created you and inculcated within you the ability not to carry it out as previously underlined. The same is true when Allah *the Exalted* commands you not to do something. How should a believer react concerning the divinely decreed actions that happen to him beyond his control? He should patiently endure the pain and hardship because he believes in Allah as his Lord, and the Lord is the One who takes care of His servants and provides sustenance for His creation until they reach the desired level of perfection. If Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that you should be tested by going through hardships and situations beyond your control such as an illness, or a calamity like having a rock falling on you or getting hit by a stray bullet, then, you should know that these matters do not fall into the realm of commands and prohibitions.

You should patiently endure such events by having faith in the wisdom of the One Who has caused them to occur. The One Who has decreed such matters is your Lord Who has created you, and no one would carelessly spoil his own creation. If a person is decreed to go through an experience or situation beyond his control, he should bear in mind that the One Who has decreed it has wisdom behind it. If he patiently endures the pains and hardships, he will become among "the patient" mentioned in these verses.

So, there are many kinds of patience: some patiently endure the hardship of carrying out acts of obedience, some patiently endure the temptations of sin, and some endure the decreed events that happen to them beyond their control or choice. When you see someone who patiently endures the hardship of carrying out acts of obedience, patiently refuses to give in to the desires of committing sin, and endures calamities that befall him, you should know that he loves his Lord, and is pleased with Him.

Let us move on and contemplate the other attributes mentioned in the verse. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'The patient, the truthful…' (*Al-'Imran:* 17). The opposite of truthfulness is lying. Truthfulness denotes conformity with reality. A statement which is true is in agreement with the actual reality.

If you say, "such-and-such happened," and the statement conforms to reality- that such a thing actually happened, the speaker is truthful and his statement is true. However, if the statement does not conform to reality, the statement is untrue and the speaker is lying. Why? This is because there are three standards for declaring a statement of a rational speaker truthful:

First: Before I utter a statement, I consult my intellect concerning the matter to see if it makes logical sense and then my intellect gives the signal to the tongue to speak. This is the first truth standard- the intellectual truth standard. I may refrain from uttering a statement after consulting my intellect; in this case, the intellectual truth standard is present, but the verbal one is missing.

I may also insist on pronouncing a statement anyway in which case the second truth standard is present that is the verbal truth standard. This deals with whether the matter I have described really happened: if it happened, the statement is truthful. If it did not happen, and the statement does not conform to reality, we say that it is a lie. So, "truthfulness" means that the verbal truth standard conforms to reality, and "lying" is when the verbal truth standard does not conform to reality. People very often misunderstand reality, and so they find contradiction in certain matters.

For example, some of the orientalists criticized the verb in the verse that reads*:* 'When the hypocrites come to you, [Oh Muhammad], they say, "We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah"'(*al-Munafiqun:* 1). This is the verbal statement. Does it conform to reality, or not? Indeed, it conforms to reality, and Allah *the Exalted* confirms this as He says*:* 'And Allah knows that you are His Messenger, and Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). What lie have the hypocrites spoken? Have they lied when they said, 'You are the Messenger of Allah'? No. Allah *the Exalted* does not state that they had lied when they said, 'You are the Messenger of Allah' because He has confirmed this by saying, 'And Allah knows that you are His Messenger.' He declared them liars because of the statement of the hypocrites of which the critic and orientalist lost sight. They said: 'We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah'. Allah *Glorified is He* declared them liars in their claims to testify that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger from Allah *the Exalted* and not the fact itself. There is no doubt that Allah *the Exalted* knows that Muhammad is His Messenger, whom Allah sent as a mercy to all the worlds; the lie is their own testimony.

The statement of the hypocrites is refuted by Allah. Why? Because a truthful testimony requires that the statement must be in agreement with the belief harboured in the heart of the speaker, and conform to it. Their statement was not in agreement with the belief harboured in their hearts and, therefore, they were lying. So, their testimony to the fact was what is declared a lie and not the fact itself. If they had said "You are the Messenger of Allah" without saying "we testify", their statement would have been true. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* declared their testimony false. Hence, we come to understand the statement of Allah, 'and Allah knows that you are His Messenger.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) Allah *Glorified is He* confirms the fact to which has been testified, namely that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* underlines that the hypocrites are liars in their testimony when they say, ‘We testify’. Truthfulness means that the statement conforms to reality. We have given the example of a person who is asked to tell a story he had witnessed and seen with his own eyes, and he is honest in relating it. If he honestly relates it, his account will be the same and will never change, no matter how many times he repeats it. If the story is a lie, the teller will be confused about the details; He will relate the tale in inconsistent ways. A liar may forget what he said the first time and change some details of his story each time he repeats it, and this is how his lie is exposed. However, the truthful narrator who relates a true story is the one whose account never changes each time he relates the story; he is consistent.

If we said, “Zayd is diligent”, then Zayd is either diligent or he is not. Then, a person who has witnessed Zayd’s diligence would speak about it. Zayd’s diligence was either observed or it was not. After this, there is the intellectual truth standard.

The “constative utterance” is the opposite of the “performative” one; constatives are the statements of facts which could be right or wrong, whereas performatives are utterances such as a warning, a command, a request, or a piece of advice. For example, you may say to someone, “Be diligent, and work hard.” Before uttering the statement, the concepts of diligence and working hard were present in the mind of the speaker, and when he spoke the statement, it became a statement with a verbal truth standard. Then, the event took place and both the intellectual and verbal truth standards were present. This is the constative. The constative in this case is a request. The “truthful” people are the ones whom Allah has chosen to praise. Why? They are the ones whose actions conform to the way of life prescribed by their Lord. When they said, “None is worthy of worship but Allah”, and believed it, they adhered to all of its implications to the best of their abilities.

“None is truly worthy of worship but Allah” means there is no entity which is worthy of being worshipped except Allah, and this means that there is no one worthy of obedience except Allah. Obedience, as we know, denotes abiding by commands and prohibitions. Thus, we have come to know that the implication of the testimony of faith, "none is truly worthy of worship but Allah," is that there is no one worthy of being worshipped except Allah, and that no onene must be obeyed but Him. No command or prohibition should be obeyed except those issued by Allah *the Exalted* (or those whom He commands us to obey in matters that are good and lawful). If a person follows the commands of his Lord after proclaiming, "none is worthy of worship but Allah," then this person is truthful in his statement "Indeed, none is truly worthy of worship but Allah." This is the peak of truthfulness: that all of the actions of a person who proclaims, "none is truly worthy of worship but Allah," conform with his own statement.

The true believer is the one who ensures that all his actions are in accordance with the religious guidelines of his Lord. As for a person who says, "none is truly worthy of worship but Allah and none has the right to be worshipped except Him" merely by his tongue, and then goes against his Lord's commands by disobeying Him, to him we say, "You are not truthful in your statement, 'none is truly worthy of worship but Allah'. Why? That is because your actions do not conform to your words." When a person who believes in any divine commandment, and then acts contrary to it, to him we can fairly say: "You are a hypocrite." Why? Because at the beginning of *al-Baqara* chapter (verses 8-20), when we spoke about the hypocrites, we said that when a believer believes in Allah and says as much, he is truthful because he says 'none is worthy of worship but Allah', while believing in it. When a disbeliever denies the divinity of Allah, he, too, is truthful.

However, the hypocrite is not truthful with himself or with people; rather, he wavers between this and that, belonging neither to the believers nor to the disbelievers. The hypocrite is untruthful and this is why Allah *the Exalted* describes them in the verse that reads*:* 'Wavering between them, [belonging] neither to the believers nor to the disbelievers. And whoever Allah leaves astray - never will you find for him a way' (*an-Nisa':* 143).

A disbeliever is truthful with himself; he does not proclaim "none is worthy of worship but Allah" because he does not believe it. On the contrary, the hypocrite says: "none is truly worthy of worship but Allah", but his conduct does not conform to its implications. Therefore, he is not truthful with himself and his

Lord. Allah *the Exalted* says: '…The truthful…' (*Al-'Imran:* 17) and the verse refers to those people whose actions conform to the way of life prescribed by their Lord. They do not believe in one thing and do the opposite. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Oh you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do? Great is hatred in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do...' (*as-Saff:* 2-3).

The truthful are those whose words conform to their actions, acting in accordance with the proclamation of *tawhid,* or Islamic monotheism and its implications. "None is worthy of worship but Allah," means that none is worthy of our obedience to his commands and prohibitions except Allah. Therefore, if you obey someone else in a matter contrary to the divine *Shari'a,* believers have the right to say to you, "You are a liar in your statement, 'Indeed, none is truly worthy of worship but Allah'."

Abu Hurayrah *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "The adulterer, at the time he is committing adultery, is not a believer; (the wine drinker) at the time he is drinking, is not a believer; the thief, at the time he is stealing, is not a believer."(1) This is the loftiness of a believer's faith: a believer cannot lie or go against the implications and prerequisites of his beliefs because a believer's conduct and his all actions are governed by his belief that none is worthy of worship but Allah.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* says: '...and the obedient…' (*Al-'Imran:* 17). The "obedient" here is the pious servant who worships Allah *the Exalted* with humility, tranquillity, and consistency. The obedient person is true to himself. When Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins His servants to observe a religious obligation, it may be beyond their ability to understand and they may fail to grasp the wisdom behind it. The obedient worshippers observe a religious obligation because the One Who ordered them to do so is their Lord, the Omnipotent, and they trust His wisdom. Therefore, they abide by His commands out of submission to His infinite wisdom. They obey the command because it is issued by their Lord not because of the wisdom behind it. As they obediently submit to the will of their Lord, Allah *the Exalted* shows them the resplendence of the divine command by granting them a divinely revealed criterion by which to differentiate between the true and the false for themselves:

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad*

Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'Oh you who have believed, if you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion and will remove from you your misdeeds and forgive you. And Allah is the possessor of great bounty' (*al-Anfal:* 29).

Considering this criterion, a believer will say to himself, "Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that I should relish the sweetness of the obedience to such a command." This is why one of the pious men once said, 'If you want to understand an obligation enjoined by your Lord without knowing the wisdom behind it, adhere to taqwa and observe it. Then, you will find your mind illuminated with the divinely-bestowed wisdom behind it." This is why Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "…And fear Allah. And Allah teaches you. And Allah is Knowing of all things" (*al-Baqara:* 282).

Before attaining *taqwa*, Allah *the Exalted* does not impart this knowledge to you. However, after attaining it, He imparts it to you. You carry out a commandment and, consequently, find a sign in the spiritual illumination within your soul (and heart). This is the difference between an order from an equal peer and a divine order issued by Allah *Glorified is He*. When we examine the Arabic word *Al-'A'la*, meaning "*The Most High*", we realise that it is only used to refer to Allah, *The Exalted* because He is *the Most High* in wisdom, position, status, and lordship.

So, a person does not demand to know the wisdom behind an order unless it is produced by an equal peer. If a person asks you to do something, you may ask him, "Why?" and if you are convinced of his reason, you will comply. You will carry out the request because your equal peer has convinced you of the wisdom behind it, not out of obedience to him.

However, when Allah *the Most High* issues an order, you obey the command immediately (as a believing servant), out of your love for obeying Him. The following example is meant to illustrate the matter and make the concept clear, not to liken anything or anyone to Allah *the Most High*. Indeed, there is nothing like Him at all; He is similar to nothing and nothing is comparable to

Him. If a father says to his son, “If you succeed at your exam, I will get you a new bicycle,” does this mean that the rationale and wisdom behind going to school is to get a bicycle? No, it is not. The wisdom behind the father’s statement is to encourage his son to study and learn at school. When the son grows up, he will realise the actual wisdom behind his father’s request. He will say, “Now I know that my father was right.”

If this happens in our daily lives among human beings, what about our obedience to the commands issued by Allah? When Allah *the Exalted* enjoins His servants to comply with a religious obligation, a servant might find difficulty in comprehending the wisdom behind it. The genuine believer knows that his compliance with the commands of his Lord is, in essence, submission to the authority of his Lord *The Most High*.

A believer knows that he believes in Allah *the Exalted* as the One God and Lord and that there is nothing like Him at all, as He has the ultimate and absolute wisdom, omnipotence, and Lordship of the whole creation.

A person might fall ill; Health is the most valuable possession. He may consider going to a doctor to whom he would complain of pain in his stomach, or heart, or bowels. He would specify the source of his pain. The intellect of a person guides him to consult the doctor who diagnoses his problem. Then, he takes the prescription from the doctor. A sick person takes the prescribed medication from the trusted doctor without asking how the medication works in details because it will mean engaging in a detailed discussion about specialized chemistry subjects, some may be beyond his ability to comprehend! If someone asks this sick person, “Why are you taking that medication in particular?” he will simply answer, “Because the specialized doctor prescribed it for me.”

The doctor might be wrong, but the judgment of Allah *Glorified is He* is never mistaken. He is utterly infallible. When a believer carries out the commandments of his Lord, he will recognise the effects of The Divine Wisdom behind it. The word “obedient,” as we have underlined above, is the attribute of those who lead a life of devotion, worship with humility, reverence, and constant submission to their Lord. Why are submission and humility needed in this regard? It is because Allah *the Exalted* did not prescribe the acts of worship merely for a person to perform them in order to save himself from hellfire. We see many people who may have very obstinate bosses setting strict rules for their employees and requiring them to come to work early in the morning and leave at a fixed time. They may even stipulate that, while on the clock, their employees should not engage in any other activity aside from work, such as drinking tea, reading newspapers, or chatting with their friends at work. One of these employees may describe his boss as follows: "He is a very strict and difficult person. I have no choice but to come at 7: 55 and leave at 2: 05, and I cannot read newspapers, or do anything that he does not allow." This employee complies with the instructions of his boss because of his harshness and strictness without being able to criticize his boss or complain about it. This employee obeys but due to fear.

It is obedience void of love; Rather, it is out of fear. A servant might try and say, "What does Allah want from me? Doesn't He command me to perform the prayer, pay *zakat* (obligatory alms giving), and carry out acts of worship? Fine, I will do that." To a servant like this, we say, "No! Allah *the Exalted* wants you to carry out acts of worship out of love and reverence because religious obligations are a kind of charity offered by Allah to His servant." Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins His servant to observe religious obligations so that they will become morally upright and find real value in this life.

"The obedient" in this verse refers to a servant who worships his Lord with full submission and reverence, constantly. Why? Because when someone initially complies with his religious obligations and then refrains from adhering to them, it is as if he has tested his love for Allah, and by giving up the adherence to the religious obligations, he has shown that he finds Allah *the Exalted* unworthy of his love! As for the truly obedient servant of Allah, he never forsakes worship because he has relished the sweetness of constant worship of Allah, and as long as he knows the sweetness of worship, he will perform it with reverence, tranquillity, and constancy, and will be one of the obedient.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* '…and (those) who spend in charity…' (*Al-'Imran:* 17). The Arabic word used in the verse is *anfaqa*, meaning "to spend," which is derived from the same root of the Arabic word for "die" or "run out (of something)". The word nafaqah, meaning "charity," is derived from this root to denote that when a person spends in charity, he wipes out what he has spent from his mind; He does not recall that he had given such-and-such to a poor person and such-and-such to another. He knows with certainty that what he has spent in charity is the rightful provision of the recipient of charity, and he merely earns the reward for delivering their due provision to them. There is no room for reminding the recipient of his favour or humiliating him.

Allah *the Exalted* wants the charitable person, who gives of his wealth, time, or effort in charity, to forget all about the act of charity, and refrain from reminding the recipient of it. "Spending in charity" requires three components; 1) the giver, who spends in charity, 2) the recipient, 3) and the charity itself. The giver is a believer who has wealth, time, or effort; the recipient is a poor person or the one in need; and the charity is that which the giver spends in charity, be it time, money, effort, or even kindness.

What is the source of this wealth? It is acquired through working and earning a livelihood which requires both mental and physical ability. If a person is unable to work and earn a living, how could he live? Allah *Glorified is He* provides for such a person's sustenance from those who are capable of working and providing for themselves.

Allah *the Exalted* has rendered the ability to work and earn a living one of the contingencies in this life. A person who is able to work today might become unable to work tomorrow. As long as the ability to work and earn a living is a contingency, so the one who is able to work and earn a living hears the command of his Lord to spend on a poor person (who is unable to work and earn a living), must bear in mind that his ability is of a contingent nature. The one who is currently able to work and earn a living might become unable to do so tomorrow. Hence, a person, who is able to work and provide for himself, would say to himself, "If I become incapable of providing for myself one day, Allah would bring someone to provide for me." This is the insurance of a believer. A believer gives in charity according to his ability so that Allah *Glorified is He* will spare him the hardship of begging for money when his situation changes; someone will be there to provide for him, from the mercy of Allah.

We must perceive the whole picture of this religious obligation and not only our side; we must consider the duties and rights of others as well. The one who is enjoined to spend on others should remember that he might become incapable of working and earning a living one day. We may ask him, "If you are incapable of providing for yourself, would you not like other people to help you without reminding you of their favour or harming you?"

This is true insurance, and the guarantor is Allah *the Exalted*. As long as a person realises that his situation may change in the blink of an eye, the one spending in charity today should forget his charitable act and the recipient of his charity and should refrain from informing anyone of the charity given.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that the man who spends in charity and hides his charity so that his left hand does not know what his right hand has spent, will be amongst the seven types of people whom Allah *the Exalted* will shelter in His shade on the Day of Judgment. The prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Seven people will be shaded by Allah under His shade on the day when there will be no shade except His. They are: (1) a just ruler; (2) a young man who has been brought up in the worship of Allah, (i.e. worshipping Allah (Alone) sincerely from his childhood); (3) a man whose heart is attached to the mosque (who offers the five compulsory congregational prayers in the mosque); (4) two people who love each other only for Allah's pleasure, and they meet and part because of Allah only; (5) a person who remembers Allah when in seclusion and his eyes become flooded with tears;(6) a man who refuses the call of a charming woman of noble birth for illicit sexual intercourse with her and says: 'I fear Allah'; (7) a person who offered charity so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given (i.e. nobody knows how much he has given in charity).'(1)

A believer who spends in charity must know that when he spends in charity, he is actually saving this wealth he is offering in charity to be received by him later, either when his situation changes or in the Hereafter in the form of multiplied rewards. So, the one who spends in charity provides for the one who is unable to work and earn a living, either as a form of insurance for himself in the future when he may become unable to provide for himself, or so as to earn multiple rewards in the Hereafter. Those who spend on the needy from their surplus wealth, act as a manifestation of the divine wisdom in creation. Since Allah *the Exalted* has created amongst us those who are able to provide for themselves and those who are not, He has decreed that we should know that ability is not necessarily guaranteed for all the creation. As long as our ability to provide for ourselves is of a contingent nature, a believer must hold onto his Lord, the Sustainer Who constantly grants him this ability. We should know that none of us can do good without his Lord and none of us was created capable of working and earning a living forever. Therefore, a believer must be constantly mindful of the provision bestowed upon him by Allah *the Most High* and Omnipotent.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ahmad*

We have underlined before that Allah *Glorified is He* has listed "spending in charity" as one of the attributes of those who have attained taqwa, for whom He has prepared gardens underneath which rivers flow. The wisdom behind this divine decree is that Allah *the Exalted* wants to protect any suffering people, as He has created them for a specific reason. Spending in charity should not be perceived as depriving the giver of his wealth; rather, it is a mere transfer of the wealth to a different realm. This is made clear by the fact that when a person has surplus wealth it is earned through his physical work in this worldly life.

This work requires both an intellect to plan, and body parts to carry out the plan. He must use his intellect to understand the subject matter to be processed, be it land for cultivation or a tool for production. A person does not have any of these things intrinsically. The intellect, by means of which he plans, is a gift from Allah, and the strength, by means of which he moves and works, is also a gift from Him. We see that some people may be deprived of sound mind and, therefore, cannot think and plan, while others are deprived of the physical strength to move and work. Allah *the Exalted* might also deny a person the actual means of which he may work.

So, none of these things are intrinsically owned by a person; they are all gifts from Allah. A believer must bear in mind that he is investing with Allah *Glorified is He* and must give the right of Allah, i.e. the charity, to those who are incapable of providing for themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* does not take this charity for Himself; rather, He wants it for your incapable brother. Allah *the Exalted* will insure this right for you, too, if the situation changed and you were in his place one day.

This is why "… (those) who spend (in charity)…" are counted amongst those who have attained taqwa. Allah *the Exalted* has rendered patience a manifestation of firm and true faith in the human soul; truthfulness as a manifestation of the harmony with the implications of the testimony of faith 'none is worthy of worship save Allah'; and spending charity as a protection for those who are incapable of providing for themselves.

Then, the verse moves to the spiritual character of a believer again, '…and those who seek forgiveness before dawn' (*Al-'Imran:* 17). We must bear in mind that this attribute came among other attributes describing the human soul. The beginning of these verses showed their proclamation of faith and supplicating Allah to forgive their sins and safeguard them from Hellfire. They adhered to patience, truthfulness, obedience, and sincerity in worship, and spent in the cause of Allah. All of these attributes absolve them from falling short in observing the rights of their Lord over them. For this reason, they get up at night, before dawn, and seek forgiveness from Allah *the Exalted*.

A person seeks forgiveness because either he has committed sin or he has fallen short in performing extra acts of obedience. This verse refers to the late hours of the night before dawn when a person is in a state of laziness and relaxation. The one who wakes up during this time of the night should have enough rest and must not exhaust himself throughout the day. Some people waste the precious hours of the night in playing and having fun.

This is an utter failure we witness among people in the present time. People are lost between toil during the daytime and playing during the night. People engage in vain talk and activities and stay up all night, and then they sleep late. How could such a person wake up in the last third of the night before dawn? The one who wakes up before dawn is he who has rested at night. After he comes from work, he sleeps soundly and wakes up before dawn to devote himself to the remembrance of his Lord at a time when most others are sleeping. Why is he doing so? Allah *the Exalted* distributes His mercy during the stillness of the night. When a person wakes up before dawn to implore his Lord and seek His forgiveness, he receives the mercy of his Lord as it descends.

When a person seeks the divine mercy descending during that time, it means that he will receive a great portion of the mercy of his Lord. It should be noted that one should beware of saying, “If we all wake up at this time, the mercy and provision of Allah will run out.” No, for Allah *the Exalted* has said:

‘Whatever you have will end, but what Allah has is lasting. And We will surely give those who were patient their reward according to the best of what they used to do...’ (*an-Nahl:* 96).

There is no doubt that the unlimited power of Allah is extensive enough for us all, without decreasing in the slightest. All of these things- firm faith, seeking forgiveness of sins, and protection from hellfire, patience, truthfulness, devotion, spending in charity, seeking forgiveness of Allah before dawn- are the fruits of the first quality, namely taqwa which is the very fruit of the proclamation of faith, “None is worthy of worship but Allah”. Therefore, every person must know that Allah has not called him to derive this fact from nothing (Allah’s exclusive right to worship); Rather, we know that Allah has testified that none is worthy of worship save Him, and His testimony is sufficient. Allah *the Exalted* says:

شَهِدَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَأُوْلُواْ ٱلۡعِلۡمِ
قَآئِمَۢا بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۚ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ﴿١٨﴾

God bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the
angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice.
There is no god but Him, the Almighty, the All Wise [18]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 18)

Let us ponder over the first part of the verse. Allah *Glorified is He* testifies that there is no deity worthy of worship but Him. A testimony means “a statement or declaration of a witness declaring what he has seen, known, or witnessed”. The Arabic verb *shahida*, meaning “to bear witness, or testify”, can also mean “to know”.

Allah *the Exalted* has created proofs and signs in the universe that indicate His eternal existence and that He is the One and Only God, the Ever-Living. Does this evidence not establish the fact that He is the One and Only God? Who has created these signs and proofs? It was Allah *the Exalted*.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* bears witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Him. We said that the testimony of Allah that there is no deity worthy of worship but Him is a personal testimony of a weighty statement. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, "Be," and it is' (*al-Baqara:* 117).

By Allah, if it is not an absolute truth that there is no deity worthy of worship but Him and none could oppose His will, why would He proclaim it? He *the Most High*, is testifying that there is no one worthy of worship but Him, so when He says 'Be', He knows that there is no other "god" who will say "Be not". Allah *Glorified is He* reassures us that there is no deity worthy of worship but Him and this entails testifying to it. When He issues a decree or command, He knows that there is none who can oppose it.

Is it not one of the requirements of the Prophet of Allah to testify that he is the Messenger of Allah? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say in his prayers: 'I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. Even if he had not testified to that Himself, how could He state it in the Quran as a fact? For this reason, when the news reached Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* that his close friend Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a Prophet of Allah, he said, 'Has Muhammad said so? If he said it, he is definitely truthful!'

Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* trusted his friend, given his history of truthfulness and honesty before he was commissioned to communicate the divine message to people. We read in the history books that a woman converted to Islam because of a single moment of reflection on the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* This woman read that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a group of believers guarding him from the disbelievers. One day, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dismissed the guards and said to them, 'There is no need to guard me anymore; Allah has guaranteed me protection from people!'

We have all read this incident many times in the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but Allah caused this woman to reflect further on this incident. She wondered, "Were these people not guarding him out of their fear for his life? Why would he say to them, 'Do not guard me anymore because Allah guards me from now on'? If he had deceived the whole world, is it possible that he would imperil his own life?"

She realized it is not possible. He must have been completely positive that Allah *the Exalted* had informed him of it and guaranteed his protection, as evidenced by the fact that he *peace and blessings be upon him* dismissed the guards. If not, how could he be sure that no one would try to kill him? The woman said, 'By Allah, he may have deceived the whole world, he could not have deceived himself and endangered his own life. I testify that none is worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Messenger.'

This woman's conversion to Islam came as a result of contemplating a single incident in the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

So, 'Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). This is a personal testimony, and His testimony is sufficient. But the angels also testified to it. The angels belong to the realm of the Unseen -something which is hidden from us- and they receive their orders directly from Allah. The angels never receive orders from other than Allah; they know that He is the One and Only God. In addition to the testimony of the angels is the testimony of "...those of knowledge…." They have pondered over the signs and derived from the pieces of evidence, that none is worthy of worship but Allah *the Exalted*.

This is the greatest testimony ever by He *the Most High* along with that of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* the angels, and those endowed with knowledge. The people of knowledge have reached a lofty status because Allah *the Exalted* has mentioned them alongside the angels.

He has informed us that He has inculcated in His creation many marvellous signs; whoever reflects on them will derive from the proofs that none is worthy of worship but Allah. We have said before that the simplest way to prove this fact is that if "none is worthy of worship but Allah" is true, then it would be sufficient for us. If it is not true, then we should ask ourselves: where is the god of this universe? Why did this god not inform us that this universe is his? There are two possibilities: may be the other "god" does not know or he knows but is incapable of doing anything about it! Thus, we come to realise that there cannot be another god besides Allah, who has informed us that there is no god but Him.

The testimony of faith "none is worthy of worship but Allah" remains manifest in all the events of life; we find that an action can be a source of grandeur or arrogance. For this reason, we say that Allah, *The Most High* Creator, who is the One and Only God, informs us that '…[He is] maintaining [creation] in justice'. Despite the fact that none can challenge or retract the decree of Allah, He reassures us that He maintains His creation with justice.

A nice observation about the verse is that Allah *the Exalted* says*:* 'Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge - [that He is] maintaining [creation] in justice. There is no deity except Him *the Exalted* in Might, the Wise' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). Why did He not say that the angels, as well as those endowed with knowledge, who bore witness that none is worthy of worship but Him, maintain justice in creation? Allah *the Exalted* testifies that there is no deity but Him, the Maintainer of creation with justice. The angels and those endowed with knowledge also testified to this fact. Why? It is because, had the verse read "They all are maintaining creation with justice", it would have meant that Allah *the Exalted* the angels, and the people of knowledge are all maintaining creation with justice; However, the verse means that He alone is maintaining creation with justice.

Allah *the Exalted* has created the angels and maintained the creation in justice. Had the verse read "They maintained the creation in justice" instead, it would not have been correct. Those who are endowed with knowledge were also created by Allah *the Exalted* and maintained in justice by Him. He has caused people's actions in the worldly life to be integrated; some employ their intellects, others employ their hearts, and others employ their limbs. This is an aspect of the divine justice otherwise, can anyone claim that a person may have all the skills required in this worldly life and can dispense with all other people? No such a person can exist. In fact, this is a manifestation of the divine justice of Allah the Most Merciful.

The divine justice entails that the skills and abilities required to maintain this worldly life should be distributed among all people; each of them is endowed with some so that they all would be constantly in need of one another. One cannot rely on himself to make his own clothes, food, beverages, and meet all the diverse needs of life. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* has caused such skills and abilities to be divided among people. Some people master agriculture in order to produce enough food to provide their own needs and those of others. Thus, people exchange services with one another. A person cannot have the skills and abilities required to cultivate cotton, harvest it, spin, and weave it to make clothes. Similarly, a single person cannot possess the skills and abilities to plant wheat, harvest, and mill it to make bread.

Allah *the Exalted* has not created people so that each one of them would fulfill his own diverse needs independently from the others; He has decreed that the skills and talents should be distributed among all people so that their efforts would be complementary and for the broader human society to form an integrated unit. One person farms the land, the second spins the harvested cotton, the third weaves the fabric, and the fourth produces the required tools for these processes, and so on. This is the ultimate justice because a single person cannot possess the adequate energy or abilities to meet all of the required needs in the worldly life by himself. Allah *the Exalted* has created such a variety of talents and skills distributed among people in order to inevitably bond them together. He does not favour any person over the others in this regard. One person may have knowledge in a certain field and another person does not have any knowledge in it; they simply help one another to fulfill their mutual needs. In this way, people will necessarily need to exchange services and benefit one another.

This is why the whole universe is perfectly integrated. Let each of us ponder over his life and try to estimate the scope of the knowledge granted to him and the talents, skills, and abilities with which he is endowed to serve the maintenance of the movement of life?

These talents, skills, and abilities are distributed among all people so that they can help one another and collectively contribute to the movement of life.

This is the ultimate justice. In order to illustrate the real value of justice and the way it is maintained in the establishment of love and respect between and among people, let each of us think of another person and ask himself: “Is this person working for my benefit?” The answer is: “Yes.”

So, when a person sees someone else skilled in a given craft, he should say: “His talents and skills in this craft will benefit me as well!” Thus, Allah *the Exalted* has justly redressed envy and jealousy among people, and made all people essentially interdependent, and in mutual solidarity, not favouring any of them over the others. Every person who strives to work and make a living in any given field is actually maintaining some of the collective needs of the broader human community. It is amazing that the field in which a person excels is usually that in which his own needs are less. This is why we find many proverbs to this effect. Some of these proverbs are the following: “The shoemaker’s children always go barefoot,” “The carpenter’s house always needs work,” and “The mechanic’s car is leaking.” This is important to make a person realise that the talents and skills that another person possesses, will benefit him as well, as evidenced by the fact that the skills that he possess, do not benefit him except within a narrow scope.

Thus, the conviction that the talents and skills of each individual will benefit them all is instilled within people generating love and respect to replace envy and jealousy. A witty person once asked: “Why should the cobbler’s children be the worst-shod or the shoemaker’s children go barefoot?” Another one answered him: “It is because that some professionals do not apply their skills in their own circles as efficiently as they do at work; they will not be paid for it.” Great marvellous aspects can be realised in this common wisdom. For instance, some doctors specialized in certain fields may accomplish many achievements in their field, yet they may be afflicted with a disease within the very area of their expertise in which they excelled as if their excellence has not benefited them at all, but has only benefited others. Let us ponder over the verse as one unit. Allah *Glorified is He* says: “Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no god but Him *the Almighty* the All Wise” (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). The verse highlights that Allah *the Exalted* witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge - [that He is] maintaining [creation] in justice." It is concluded with the emphasis that none is worthy of worship but Allah *Glorified is He the Exalted in Might, the All-Wise*. It is as though the verse means: As Allah *the Exalted* has testified that none is worthy of worship but Him, and so has the angels and scholars, through intellectual reflection and deduction, the matter is firmly established with no room for doubt. Therefore, we are urged to accept it as an established fact that "None is worthy of worship but Him." As long as there is no deity save Him, one should rely on Him only and know that if he depends upon Him alone, he has depended on Allah *the Almighty* Who cannot be overpowered or challenged.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said: "Be mindful of Allah and He will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, then ask Allah [alone]; and if you seek help, then seek help from Allah [alone]. And know that if the nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, they would not benefit you except with what Allah had already prescribed for you. And if they were to gather together to harm you with anything, they would not harm you except with what Allah had already prescribed against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried."(1)

No one can argue with Allah or challenge His decrees. The created beings may engage in arguments with one another and debate with their equal peers; however, none can repel the divine decrees because Allah is *the Almighty* Lord Who cannot be challenged. If you believe in Him alone, you shall attain success (in this worldly life and the Hereafter). The phrase "Him alone" in the verse may apparently suggest belittling the reliance to Allah *the Exalted* alone according to human standards. One may say, "I rely on so-and-so only;" would i not be in a stronger position if I rely on twenty people instead of one? However, there is no comparison between relying on Allah alone and relying on the created being. You rely on the Creator in whose Hands lie the keys to all things and who is able to do all things. The phrase "Him alone" in the verse, actually, suffices you to stand in need of nothing or no one else. You should simply seek the sake of Allah *the Exalted* alone, and He will suffice you and you will not be in need of all others. You should know that there is nothing that can challenge or repel His decrees.

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(1) *At-Tirmidhi*

The greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* lies in the fact that He is the One and Only God, the Unique, the Eternal Refuge. He is *the Almighty* Lord, whose decrees cannot be challenged or repelled by anyone. He has the ultimate wisdom in the creation and arrangement of all things. When one knows the wisdom behind the divine decrees in governing and maintaining the creation, he will be amazed at the magnificence of the divine power of his Lord because wisdom means placing everything in its correct place. As long as something is in its right place, it is stable and as long as it is stable, it does not change and this entails calls for trust in it. The word "wisdom" in the Arabic language is derived from the word "*Hakamah*" which means the bridle that is placed in a horse's mouth. It is made of a piece of leather which is placed on the tongue and has a piece of iron; it is used to steer and direct the horse veers towards the wrong direction.

The presence of wisdom, i.e. the "bridle," requires the presence of something to be steered and directed towards the right direction. As long as Allah *the Exalted* testifies to the fact that none is worthy of worship save Him, and the angels and those endowed with knowledge has testified to the same fact and the fact is established that there is no deity save Him, the Almighty and All-Wise, this means that we should submissively abide by and follow His guidance. As long as Allah *the Exalted* has testified that none is worthy of worship but Him, that there is no partner associated with Him in worship to repel or challenge His decrees, He has caused the whole creation to exist with no partners and accordingly none can be associated with him in legislation.

Therefore, the source from which we derive the fundamentals of our way of life is one. It would have been possible that such one and only source of guidance may wrong the created beings because none of the creation of Allah has a right over Him. However, Allah is Just and He reassures us of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* All-Powerful, All-Knowledgeable, and All-Wise One and Only God does not wrong anyone in the slightest because He has underlined, "Despite being The One and Only God of this universe and none can repel or challenge my decrees, I maintain the creation is justice."

We should ponder over the concept of maintaining the creation in justice and upholding justice in the universe to have a better and more profound understanding of it. Allah *the Exalted* states that He upholds justice. The verb "uphold" in this context means that Allah *the Exalted* has created the first beings and creatures and maintained His creation in justice and equity. It also means that the religious obligations as assigned by Allah *Glorified is He* to the creation, are based on justice and equity. Justice and equity necessitate an unbalanced scale held by the powerful Hand of Allah, the Omnipotent, with no higher power to repel the judgments and decrees. Allah *the Exalted* maintains the creation in justice as He provides us with all the requirements of life before He has created us and upholds justice in the universe. He has not caused life to be exclusively dependent on the worldly means. Rather, He caused some matters to be beyond our control. He did not limit our movement and our freedom of movement in the worldly life; He has created some worldly means for us to avail ourselves of them, if we choose to do so, and they yield the relevant results; we are given the option not to avail ourselves of these means and causes as well.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* has not caused us to control the first creation in the slightest compelling us to do anything. Rather, He has not caused our actions to have influence on many of the movements of life upon which our lives depend. For instance, He has not caused us to control the movement of the sun, moon, wind, or rain. He has willed that all these means should be under His control. Why? It is because these means will work for the human being before any power or ability is imparted to him. They work for the benefit of a person even before his life starts in order to prepare the life granted to him by Allah *the Exalted* in this world. Had these responsibilities been assigned to people instead, they would not have been fulfilled until the human being possesses the required willpower and knowledge first.

Allah *the Exalted* has caused the means for life to be under His sole control such as breathing, for instance. Breathing does not depend on a person's willpower. Rather, Allah, *The Exalted and Powerful*, controls the breathing of the human being until he develops the willpower to carry on the breathing. The possession of willpower entails the acquisition of knowledge that he needs to fill his lungs with oxygen to be carried to all the cells of the mind and the whole body through the blood and in order to clean the blood and the body from harmful bodies. This requires knowledge. Had breathing required knowledge and learning first, what would have the infant, who has no knowledge, done? How would he have taken his first breaths? Therefore, the divine mercy entails that breathing, for example, should be under His control. However, He has not decreed that His creation should exist without any freedom or choice. Rather, Allah *the Exalted* has left great room for human freedom and choice.

So, Allah *the Exalted* does not completely control all the actions and choices of a person leaving him no freedom of choice and nor does He grant him the freedom of choice and action in all matters. This is the ultimate justice. Allah *the Exalted* has respected the human being's existence, life, willpower, and choice. He grants the human beings the indispensable means of life and renders them under His sole control because were a person to be given control over such matters, he would have abused them and delayed their fulfilments until he acquires the needed knowledge. Allah *the Exalted* wills that the human beings should be given these means of life and they are unable to do anything before acquiring such means. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* has caused them to be under His control because He is the Creator, Who best preserves and maintains His creation. However, He does not limit the freedom of the human being when he wishes to progress in life and better his conditions; he is given the chance to do so and if he does not want to do it, it is his choice. This is the ultimate justice.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* underlines that He upholds justice in the universe which includes maintaining justice, the legislations, and religious obligations. This means that His justice in legislations is absolute. Some people believe that there is no God and others worship many gods; Allah *the Exalted* maintains justice between the two positions. He is an Existing God, oh you who claim that there is no God! He is The One and Only God, oh you who associate others with Him in worship. This falls into the category of maintaining justice in terms of rulings. We find that Allah *Glorified is He* commands a person to do certain acts without giving him a choice in the matter. Other matters are left for the human being on which to decide. The person is not left completely free to do whatever he wants in all matters with no restrictions; he is not compelled into all actions and is deprived of neither willpower nor choice in all matters.

Allah *the Exalted* willed that there should be a scope of compulsion and another for free will and choice for the human beings. He has imparted to the human being the ability to act; He has commanded the human being to work and has guaranteed the protection of the results of his work. He has decreed that He should have a right to part of the wealth with which He has entrusted him, to help one's fellow humans who are in need.

Allah *the Exalted* has given humankind the chance to work and toil and has preserved for them their possessions. However, He has not given free rein to their actions in all matters. Rather, He confined them in certain matters that fall within the scope of "the rights of Allah, The Exalted." Thus, we realise that Allah *Glorified is He* has maintained justice in this regard.

Thus, it becomes clear how Allah *the Exalted* upholds justice in the universe. We can see His justice evident in all affairs: in creation, imparting provisions, and legislation. As long as He is The One and Only God who maintains the creation in justice, what should prevent you, as a human being, from submitting to His will and abiding by His commands? Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "Behold, the only [true] religion in the sight of God is [man's] self-surrender unto Him... "

And Allah *the Exalted also* says:

إِنَّ ٱلدِّينَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡإِسۡلَٰمُۗ وَمَا ٱخۡتَلَفَ ٱلَّذِينَ
أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡعِلۡمُ بَغۡيَۢا بَيۡنَهُمۡۗ
وَمَن يَكۡفُرۡ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلۡحِسَابِ ١٩

True Religion, in God's eyes, is Islam: [devotion to Him alone]. Those who were given the Scripture disagreed out of rivalry, only after they had been given knowledge – if anyone denies God's revelations, God is swift to take account [19] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 19)

Allah *the Exalted* underlined that He is The One and Only God, the fact that He maintains the creation in justice is the logical result. The verse means that Islam, i.e. submission to Allah *the Exalted* is the only true religion in His sight, is the logical result of the fact that Allah *the Exalted* testifies that there is no deity except Him, and so do the angels and those of knowledge, that He is maintaining the creation in justice. Why? Because there should be no submission to anyone except Allah *Glorified is He* since none is worthy of worship but Him. He has no partners in worship. He says*:* "Allah has never had a child. Nor is there any god beside Him – if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to over- come the others. May Allah be exalted above what they describe!" (*al-Mu'minun*: 91)

As long as it is established that He is the One God, what prevents the human being from submitting to His will and commands? The emphasis in the verse that the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam is, in fact, the logical conclusion to which the wise person's intellect arrives. Despite this fact, Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed His mercy on us, and sent His Messengers to inform us of the premise and conclusion, namely that Islam is the true religion in the sight of Allah. If we ask ourselves what religion is, the answer will be that religion is a word with many connotations. The Arabic word for religion is "*Din*" and it is derived from the root "*D-a-n*" meaning to draw closer, submit, and abide by someone's commands. It also means recompense. The Day of Judgment is also known as *Yawm Ad-Din*, i.e. the Day of Recompense. It is the day when a person is rewarded for obedience and punished with disobedience. If the human being submits to the will of Allah, then it is as described in the words of Allah *the Exalted* stating that the only true religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. Thus, we become aware that although there might be other religions which people follow, they are not true religions in the sight of Allah *the Exalted* Who says*:* "For you is your religion, and for me is mine." (*al-Kafirun:* 6) This means that there might be a religion, the adherents of which submit to someone other than Allah *the Exalted* comprising reverence, submission, and obedience to orders of another entity. However, it is not accepted by Allah *Glorified is He* and it is not considered a true religion in His sight. The only religion that is accepted by Allah *the Exalted* is Islam, i.e. genuine submission and devotion to Him. Religion can mean a way of life or a divine Law. If it is used to refer to the religious rulings and commandments, it is called *Shari'a,* or divine Law and if it is used to refer to obedience, reverence, and the consequent recompense, it is called way of life. However, if he is referring to the umbrella that encompasses all that, it is called faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* underlines that the only true religion in His sight of God is Islam; this means that there is no religion accepted by Allah *Glorified is He* except Islam. The Arabic word "*Islam*" is derived from the root "*s-l-m*". This root denotes many meanings. The root of the word denotes diverse meanings revolving around safety from evil and corruption. It could also mean the realization of inner peace between a person and his self, his Lord, the universe, and his fellow brothers. It denotes righteousness and the absence of corruption. All of the derivatives of the root denote these meanings. Since the word "Islam" denotes these commendable meanings, why do we not follow it?

We have previously underlined that a person does not submit to his equal peer unless he is convinced with what he is saying. A person says to an equal who gives him an order: "Why should I obey your order? You must convince me first of the wisdom behind that order." However, when a person believes in Allah *Glorified is He* who maintains the creation in justice, he must obey His commands.

Hence, we came to know that Islam, in essence, means submission and surrender to Allah, *The Exalted* stemming from dignity, understanding, honour, reason, and wisdom. There is a rational servitude when a person abides by the superficial meaning of servitude. There is a profound dignity realised when a person ponders over the true meaning of servitude to Allah *the Exalted* which cannot be approached by falsehood from any direction. It is the dignity of the sound intellect that does not lead to anything except genuine submission to the consistent commands that is void of contradictions.

As long as Allah *the Exalted* is The One and Only God, who maintains the creation in justice, when a person believes in Him and abides by His commands, he should know that there lies genuine dignity in the understanding, reason, and servitude because he worships Allah *the Exalted* who has control over all the created beings and creatures. He does not worship an equal peer. The one who worships his equal has nothing but the false pride and zeal of a subservient servant. As long as Islam is submission and surrendering to Allah *the Exalted,* it is not submission to an equal. Embracing Islam means embracing submission, peace, and consistency, security, and rest. It means freeing oneself from everything except Allah, *The Exalted.* He says*:*

"Allah puts forward this illustration: can a servant, who is owned by quarrelling partners at odds with each other, be considered equal to a man belonging exclusively and devoted wholly to one master? All praise be to Allah, though most of them do not know." (*az-Zumar:* 29) Allah *the Exalted* wants to demonstrate the difference between submission to the commands of a single master and submission to several masters.

He gives us an example that is familiar to us. He gives us an example of a servant owned by ten masters at odds with one another, each of whom gives him an order; what should he do? The second example is of a servant owned by one master. There is no doubt that the second will be more at peace because he has one master only, whereas the one owned by ten masters will be lost between the conflicting orders of his masters.

A servant owned by many masters is miserable because his masters are not in agreement; they are disputing partners. If one master sees him following the instructions of another, he will give him orders to do the very opposite! Accordingly, a servant's efforts will be squandered and he will be exhausted trying to please and obey them all. On the contrary, a servant owned by one master only is at peace. The same goes for worshipping one Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* gives this example from the daily life to show us the sweetness of *Tawhid* (Islamic monotheism) and worshipping Him alone with no partners. A servant who believes in One God should express his gratitude to Him because he submits to One God only. Islam, in essence, is submission, surrendering, and embracing inner peace. The Arabic word for peace is *"Silm."* Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "And if they incline towards peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah. Indeed, it is He who is The All Hearing, The All Knowing." (*al-An'am:* 61) This submission is not to an equal peer; rather, to a Higher Entity. The Higher Entity, to whom we submit, is the One Who has created all things; He is *The Most High* Who has sustained and granted us all things.

Thus, when a person embraces Islam, i.e. submits to Allah *the Exalted,* he earns the recompense of such submission from his Lord. Hence, submitting oneself to Allah and embracing Islam are in the best interest of a person. As long as

Islam is the only true religion in the sight of Allah *the Exalted* it is the religion, the adherence to which yields rewards. Islam is the religion of all the Prophets and all of them followed it. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the close friend of Allah *Glorified is He* said: “Our Lord, and make us submit ourselves to You and from our descendants a Muslim community submissive to You. And show us how to worship You, and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are The One who accepts the repentance and the Most Merciful.” (*al-Baqara:* 128)

Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* was telling the truth in his conversation with his sons related in the following verse. Allah *the Exalted* says: “Or were you there to witnesses when death approached Ya’qub (Jacob); when he said to his sons, “Whom shall you worship after me?” They replied, “We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isma’il (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) - one God. And we submit ourselves to Him.” (*al-Baqara:* 133)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: “Say, “Indeed, my Lord has guided me to the right path; (to) a most right religion, the faith of Ibrahim (Abraham), the upright one inclining toward truth. And he was not among the polytheists who associated others with Allah in worship.”[161] Say, “Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my life and my death are for Allah, The Lord of the worlds. [162] No partner or associate has He; and this I have been commanded, and I am the first of those who submit to Him. [163]” (*al-An‘am:* 161-163).

Islam is a comprehensive term and the word “Muslims” is a common description for all the Divine Messages. Islam does not merely refer to the Divine Message revealed to Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*. Rather, it means devotion and submission to Allah *the Exalted* according to the divine guidance sent with the Prophets of Allah who were assisted by miracles. The difference is that the term “Islam” is used as a description and not a name for these past Divine Messages. However, Muslims, i.e. the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* were distinguished with the enduring nature of this description in relation to their Divine Message. This is because the Divine Message revealed to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* has encompassed the ultimate and most perfect submission and devotion to Allah *the Exalted* and there will be no further refinement. The followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* were distinct in being given a name derived from the word "*Islam*." Islam became used as a name for the religion of the the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* who have become known as "Muslims."

Islam, i.e. submission to Allah *the Exalted* is used as a description for the previous Divine Messages revealed to the past Messengers of Allah. However, in case of the final and concluding Divine Message, with which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessing be upon him* was sent, Islam became its distinguishing name because it is the concluding Divine Message. Thus, Islam is the universal religion for all humankind. This is why we describe ourselves as "Muslims," whereas those who followed the past divinely revealed messages are also described as Muslims, in the sense that they had submitted to Allah, *the Exalted*. Muslims, the adherents of the concluding Divine Message have been named as such by Allah *Glorified is He* in His Book. This is an aspect of the verbal miracles pertaining to nomenclature in which Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the close friend of Allah, was in agreement with the will of his Lord.

Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "And strive hard for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty or hardship. [It is] the religion of your forefather Ibrahim (Abraham). Allah has named you "Muslims" before [in former scriptures] and in this [revelation] that the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people. So, establish prayer and give *zakat* and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protector and Guardian; and how excellent the Guardian and how excellent the Helper is!" (*al-Hajj:* 78)

Islam has become a name for the followers of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*. This description is not used as a name except in the case of someone who has perfectly submitted to Allah *Glorified is He*.

How? We know that the name "Allah" is exclusively used in reference to Allah *the Exalted* and the attribute "Pre-eternally Living" is among His divine attributes. However, the attribute "Pre-eternally Living" has become one of the divine Names of Allah because He is Eternally Living. Thus, an attribute is not used as a name except if the description denotes an enduring and absolute meaning. Hence, the past Prophets of Allah who were sent before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and the previous peoples were also all Muslims in the sense that they submitted themselves to Allah, *the Exalted*. However, the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* are distinguished with the fact that Islam is used in reference to them as both an attribute and a name. The religion of the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* became a universal name. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* foresaw it as related in the verse that reads*:* “[It is] the religion of your forefather Ibrahim (Abraham). Allah has named you “Muslims” before [in former scriptures]” (*al-Hajj:* 78) Allah *Glorified is He* relates on the authority of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that he clearly gave the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* the name “Muslims.” The verse did not read, “Allah has described you as Muslims.” Rather, it reads, “Allah has named you Muslims” because the previous peoples were described as Muslims, whereas the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* are named Muslims, derived from the word Islam. One of the miraculous aspects of the name “Muslims” is that the followers of other Divine Messages attribute themselves to other than Islam. The “Jew” (in Hebrew, *“Yehudi”*) is derived from the name Judah which was the name of one of the sons of Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him.* They also describe themselves as “Followers of the Mosaic faith” attributing themselves to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him.* Similarly, the Christians name themselves after the Christ, the son of Mary *peace be upon him.* We, the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* do not call ourselves “Mohammedans;” rather, we call ourselves “Muslims.” No other name is used in reference to the followers of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*. The name “Islam” has become a distinguishing honour for us.

Allah *the Exalted* underlines that the only true religion in His sight is Islam. This means that any other Prophet of Allah or his followers could be described as “Muslims, namely submissive to Allah *the Exalted*” one of the Messengers of Allah might have been sent with new laws and teachings that were not revealed to previous peoples, we, as Muslims, top this by being granted the honour of bearing the name Muslims. The submission to Allah

Glorified is He has been perfected by Muslims and this is why it has become a name for the followers of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that the people, who were given divine revelation, differed after knowledge was imparted to them.

Why did they diverge? He *the Most High* answers, "out of rivalry and jealous animosity between themselves." The reference to the divergence indicates that they were once in agreement. Islam is the submission to Allah and abidance by His way of life and guidance because He is the One and Only God who upholds justice. What was the source of such divergence? What has caused it? Had another "god" come to the picture challenging His supremacy? No! As long as there is only One true God and the guidance that comes from Him is one, what has caused such animosity and divergence?

Allah *the Exalted* clarifies for us that the divergence arose among the people of the Book, i.e. those who had been given divine revelation, after they were granted knowledge. This is truly outraging and wicked. If they had diverged before they were given knowledge, we may have perceived their divergence excusable.

However, for the divergence to take place after being given knowledge by Allah, the One Who maintains the creation in justice, they should be asked, "What happened causing you to diverge?" A new element must have been added to the equation, namely their sinful desires. First, we should identify the meaning of divergence in this context. Divergence, in essence, denoted having different inclinations and views.

Why does divergence occur despite the fact that there is no deity other than Allah *the Exalted* Who maintains the creation in justice? We must draw the conclusion that a new element is added to the equation. What was it? It was the different inclinations. The verse underlined that "they have diverged" which means that a group held a certain view and the other held a different one. We may conclude that one group arrived at the truth and the other fell into the abyss of falsehood or that both groups fell into the abyss of falsehood. In fact, inclining to falsehood may be of different forms because there are many forms of falsehood. Did the verse mean that Allah *the Exalted* has revealed the divine messages and His mercy for the creation entailed that some people may adhere to the truth even if some others would differ with them in this regard? A good example of this is the situation of the Jews when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessing be upon him* was sent. They held different views about the concluding Divine Message. Some of them embraced Islam and believed in the Divine Message of the final Prophet of Allah, while others did not. Those who accepted Islam attained the truth. It is as aspect of the divine mercy that He has caused those who knew of the fact that the tidings about the Divine Message of Islam were documented in their scriptures would proclaim them. They did not conceal this knowledge; rather, they proclaimed their faith, while others insisted on concealing the knowledge that had been imparted to them by their Lord and insisted on denying it. The following poetic verse applies to those who embraced Islam:

He who has rendered the truth taste as unbearably bitter as gall to some,
has spared some generations of people who would adhere to the truth

If Allah *the Exalted* has protected the successive generations of Muslim community by preserving the Quran, some of the followers of the past divine religions had adhered to the truth. Allah *the Exalted* credited them when He says: "But they are not all alike. There are some among the People of the Book who are upright, who recite God's revelations during the night, who bow down in worship, [113] who believe in Allah and the Last Day, who order what is right and forbid what is wrong, who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous [114]" (*Al-'Imran:* 113-114).

Allah *the Exalted* has done them justice. Those who have believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* from among the adherents of the past divinely revealed messages, have been guided to the truth and differed from others. The reference to the "People of the Book" in the verse, i.e. those who were given the divine scripture, requires a pause for reflection. The verse underlines that they were given these divine books and they were not their own production. So, the divine revelation is not the product of the human thought because if such a guidance and way of life were the human production, it would have been possible that people would disagree on them. The fact that the verse uses the passive form makes us wonder who gave them the book. It was Allah *Glorified is He* Who does not bring anything inconsistent.

As long as the Quran is revealed to us by Allah *the Exalted* it is inconceivable that it should include any contradiction. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "Had it been from any other than Allah, they would have found in it much contradiction and discrepancy." (*an-Nisa': *82)

Allah *Glorified is He* is underlining that any product of the human thought, will inevitably contain contradiction and discrepancy and people will differ about it. Only the divine product produced by Allah, the One and Only God, is free of contradiction and discrepancy. It is not possible that the divine products that are produced by the very source should contain contradictions or discrepancy unless they are altered and modified by human interference. These modifications are made due to the sinful desires and inclinations of the people who claimed to be attributed to Allah *Glorified is He*!

So, Allah *the Exalted* is clarifying for us that the divine books were not given to them by their human peers; rather, the divine books were granted to them by Allah, the One Omnipotent God. This is intended as an admonition for the followers of past Divine Messages. It means that when they follow the guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* and adhere to the way of life set by Him and revealed to their Messengers, they are not following the guidance of a human being because all the Messengers of Allah were sent to communicate the divine guidance of their Lord to their peoples. None of the Messengers of Allah claimed that the guidance was his own production. Rather, the Messengers of Allah themselves were the firsts to obey and submit to the divine guidance revealed to them. In fact, this should be perceived as a source of honour for them. All people must be mindful of the fact that the true guidance was revealed to the Messengers of Allah by their Lord.

When we see the term "The scripture or Book", we must bear in mind that it was used in different occasions in the Quran. The Quran is referred to as "Quran," literally meaning "recitation" because it is recited and sometimes as "the Scripture or Book" referring to the Quran in written form. The Arabic word *Quran* is derived from the root *q-r-a* meaning to recite. It means to recite something from memory. The information that is only preserved in the hearts and minds of people could become distorted and altered due to sinful desires. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* preserved the Quran in written form and also in the hearts of Muslims.

When Allah *Glorified is He* refers to “the people of the Scripture or the Book,” it draws our attention to the fact that the divine scripture is the divine guidance preserved in a written form. This means it was not just preserved in the memories and hearts of people and would be eventually forgotten and lost. Rather, it is documented and preserved in written form as well. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* described the divine revelation prior to the revelation of the Quran as being preserved in written form. If the adherents of the past Divine Messages followed their sinful desires, as happened, this means that the divine revelation was altered and distorted. Now, let us ponder on the word “knowledge.” What is knowledge? Knowledge is the realization of an existing fact that can be proven with evidence. Some propositions do not amount to knowledge because they cannot be proven with evidence.

For example, we say that the earth is spherical. This fact about the earth has been ascertained and we are certain of it. In the past ages past, some people argued that the earth was flat, and attempted to prove this. However, those who proved the earth to be spherical were actually correct. In modern times, the spherical shape of the earth could be seen from spaceships and by other means. We know without any doubt that the spherical shape of the Earth is a fact, of which we are certain, and we can prove it with evidence.

This is an example of “knowledge”. The problem is that people bring forth propositions which have not amounted to knowledge and label as established facts and knowledge. For example, the proposition suggests that human beings evolved from apes. No one can ascertain such a contention beyond doubt and it does not amount to true knowledge. The word “knowledge” refers only to ascertained propositions that are certain and existent in the real world and can be proven with evidence. If a proposition is certain and exists in the real world, yet we are unable to prove it with evidence, what is it called? It is called “imitation,” like a little boy imitating his father in every action before his intellect is fully developed and says, “None is worthy of worship but Allah, The One and Only God.” Another example of imitation is the pupil who accepts the propositions of his teacher without understanding their relevant proofs. We call this “imitation” or adherence to previous authoritative positions without verifying the supportive evidence himself. When the pupil’s intellect and analytical skills become fully developed, he is asked to do his own research on the matter, examine the proofs himself, and then arrive at his own conclusions.

So, imitation in this context denotes adherence to previous authoritative positions on existent and established propositions lacking the supportive evidence. Thus, we come to realise that knowledge is different from imitation in terms of the ability to prove the proposition with evidence. However, what do we call a proposition which is certain and held to be true, but non-existent in the reality? This is called “ignorance.” Ignorance does not mean lack of knowledge; rather, it means that a person’s knowledge of a certain issue is contrary to the reality. As for the one who has no knowledge, he is in need of instruction and edification on the truth and the correct notion. The ignorant person, on the other hand, is different; he needs first to remove the false and incorrect notion out of his mind first to be replaced with the correct notion. Thus, convincing an ignorant person to accept the truth comprises two actions: removing falsehood out of his mind and then replacing it with the truth.

Therefore, we find it difficult to edify the ignorant people on Islam and not those who lack knowledge because the ignorant person is convinced of a false propositions which are contrary to the truth, whereas the one lacking knowledge simply does not know the truth and needs to be informed of it. What if the contention is not certain and not held to be true and the degree of certainty and uncertainty are equal? This is known as doubt. If certainty outweighs uncertainty, we call it “conjecture.” If uncertainty outweighs certainty, we call it “illusion.”

Thus, the means by which propositions are perceived are: firstly: knowledge; secondly: imitation; thirdly: ignorance; fourthly: doubt; fifthly: conjecture; and sixthly: illusion. Knowledge is the highest level in the perception of propositions. This is why Allah *the Exalted* specifies the subject matter of the difference among the people of the Book; they diverged after being granted knowledge. The verse did not underline that they had diverged after being granted “imitation, conjecture, ignorance, or doubt.” Rather, He says that they had diverged after attaining the perfect perception, namely, knowledge. As long as there is a divine command issued by Allah the One and Only God Who maintains the creation injustice, it must be true and amounts to the degree of knowledge. So, what has caused their divergence? There must have been a new factor. The new factor was their sinful desires. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* specifies that they diverged out of rivalry and jealous animosity among themselves. What is meant by rivalry in this context? It means seeking eminence without any right to it. Seeking eminence is not blameworthy in and of itself because it is the essence of the worldly ambition in the universe. The person naturally seeks to better himself and his life conditions by means of hard work, striving and exerting greater efforts in order to arrive at a certain academic or social level or the like. This is a natural right for all people. We know that the world has been developed and enhanced because of such human ambition. Had people of any given generation settled for their current conditions, the world would have been left in a state of dullness and inactivity. However, people have caused the developments in the world through the efforts exerted by some of them to support beneficial causes. They strove to enhance their situations and succeeded in bettering their life conditions by means of the knowledge earned through the real effort they have exerted and learning about the efforts of their predecessors.

So, seeking eminence is not blameworthy in and of itself; rather, it is praiseworthy as long as it is based on hard work and striving. However, if a person seeks eminence without any right to it and without exerting the needed efforts to attain it, this is what is meant with “rivalry and jealous animosity.” Allah *the Exalted* confirms in this verse that every conflict between the genuine scholars or between religions is a result of “rivalry and jealous animosity”. The origin of such rivalry and jealous animosity is that the scholars seek eminence without any right to it. The manifestations of seeking undeserved eminence can be seen in hastening to issue *Fatwas* (legal positions of juridical cases) that conform to the inclinations of the people and contradict the divine revelation. Such a person might claim to be civilized, yet issue *Fatwas* that contradict what Allah *the Exalted* has revealed, claiming that he is following the religion in the light of the spirit of the present time or claim that he does not give in to dull rigidity and may even go far and accuse those who hold on to their religion of being backward. In fact, the hidden objective harboured in the heart of such a person is seeking undeserved eminence among his people. We must understand that the origin of every divergence among the followers of one religion or between different religions is as Allah *the Exalted* coined it, “out of rivalry and jealous animosity between themselves.” This means that some of them follow their own sinful desires instead of abiding by the revelation of their Lord. Why? It is because the religious rulings are either decisive, leaving no room for personal reasoning and intellectual efforts (by competent scholars) or indecisive, leaving the door open for personal reasoning and intellectual efforts by competent scholars.

Allah *the Exalted* wills that not all the rulings are decisive and nor are they indecisive and open for personal reasoning of the competent scholars. Rather, both kinds of rulings are produced so that the human being would respect the intellect that his Creator has granted him and in order to assign him with the task of contemplation, research, and examination, arriving at a conclusion and declaring one position preponderant. The person employs his intellect, which is an aspect of the divine mercy so that the human intellect would not be left in a state of dullness and rigidity.

When we find a divergence between scholars or adherents of different religions, we should know that the reason is as coined in the Quran as, “out of rivalry and jealous animosity between themselves.” Troubles arise as a result of such rivalry and jealous animosity. The one who aspires to attaining undeserved eminence is the one agitating the jealous animosity, claiming to be more intelligent than others are. He seeks undeserved eminence and superiority over those who have authority over him or when his opinion conforms to the ruler’s, trying to justify the ruler’s opinion.

The phrase “out of rivalry and jealous animosity between themselves” encompasses all kinds of waves of deviation from the divine guidance that we see around us. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* directed us to the preventative measures against spiritual ailments resulting from such rivalry and jealous animosity just like people are given serums to protect them from physical diseases. He *peace and blessing be upon him* has edified us on the preventative ways so that we would be safe from the spiritual diseases resulting from jealous animosity.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said: “The essence of virtue and righteousness is (manifested in) good morals, whereas sinful conduct is that which turns in your heart (making you feel uncomfortable) and you dislike that it would be disclosed to other people.”(1) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is warning us as well in another Hadith. He *peace and blessing be upon him* also said: “Righteousness is that about which the soul feels at ease and the heart feels tranquil. And wrongdoing is that which wavers in the soul and causes uneasiness in the breast eventhough people have repeatedly given their legal opinion [in its favour].”(2)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is warning us in order to clarify that the people given to jealous animosity insist on proclaiming their opinions and issuing *Fatwas* (legal positions and opinions) on all matters. What is meant by the issuance of *Fatwa* from which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* has warned us? Is it an opinion expressed by a person known for his knowledge of the divine rulings? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* pointed out this in order to instruct taking the preventative measures against such spiritual ailments. The people of truth might be outnumbered and lack the means to communicate their opinions to people. Moreover, the ones who control the circulation of news and information might not be siding with the people of the truth and might be on the side of others, who follow falsehood or please the mob.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* has drawn out attention to the preventative measures so that those, who keenly hold on to the truth, would not despair. The adherence to the religion cannot always be smooth and easy. Rather, we will find some people interpret the religious rulings wrongly and distort the facts. Therefore, he *peace and blessing be upon him* has clarified that a believer has the ability to make his own judgments and warned us from those who hasten to issue *Fatwas* out of rivalry and jealous animosity. People need the Fatwas of those endowed with knowledge. This is why the words “they seek your *Fatwa*” are found in more than one verse in the Noble Quran because those who ask for *Fatwas* are in need of clarification about a certain religious matter as they are keen to foster their faith. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is warning us from those who try to issue *Fatwas* that are not based on genuine knowledge and alert a believer not to follow the *Fatwas* of unqualified people.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*
(2) *Ahmad*

Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in [taking] account" (*Al-'Imran:* 19) Who disbelieves in the verses of Allah *the Exalted*? The disbelief in the signs of Allah *the Exalted* is specified in the reference to divergence and jealous animosity, i.e. seeking undeserved eminence without any right to it. Allah *the Exalted* describes it as disbelief so as to warn us against concealing the divine commandments of Allah *Glorified is He* by the divergence of views or jealous animosity. The verse was concluded with the warning. "...then indeed, Allah is swift in [taking] account" (*Al-'Imran:* 19) The person should beware of thinking that recompense will be delayed for long, saying, "I can enjoy the results of divergence and rivalry to serve those who benefit from the divergence" because he wants to hasten matters that he thinks to be beneficial for him. Allah *Glorified is He* is warning you from assuming that His reckoning to be slow because it is possible that the recompose would be in this worldly life. If a person is not afflicted with an adversity in this worldly life, he will have a severe reckoning in the Hereafter.

Someone might say: "Allah *the Exalted* may defer the reckoning and recompose to the Hereafter; we are experiencing the lesser signs of the Day of Resurrection now, and the greater signs have not appeared yet." To such a person we say that there is a difference between the event itself and a person's experience of the event. There is a difference between the Resurrection of all people and the end of a person's life by an accident that he did not foresee. A person might issue a *Fatwa* today and then have a sudden accident, ending his life and bringing about the swift reckoning. Had a person thought that the reckoning would have been far away, he would not have known that his life could come to an end as fast as the abrupt events take place in this worldly life because no one is capable of extending his own life span. He could die at any given moment. Thus, the life of a person who might have thought that his recompose would be distant could end very swiftly. The word account or reckoning used in the verse is intended to reassure a believer that Allah *the Exalted* maintains the creation in justice and does not leave the acts of those who disbelieved in Him and disobeyed Him to go unpunished; every person will receive his due recompose. Then, He says: “So if they argue with you, say, “I have submitted myself to Allah [in Islam]. “

فَإِنۡ حَآجُّوكَ فَقُلۡ أَسۡلَمۡتُ وَجۡهِيَ لِلَّهِ وَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَنِۗ وَقُل لِّلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡأُمِّيِّـۧنَ ءَأَسۡلَمۡتُمۡۚ فَإِنۡ أَسۡلَمُواْ فَقَدِ ٱهۡتَدَواْۖ وَّإِن
تَوَلَّوۡاْ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡبَلَٰغُۗ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرُۢ بِٱلۡعِبَادِ ٢٠

If they argue with you [Prophet], say, ‘I have devoted myself to God alone and so have my followers.’ Ask those who were given the Scripture, as well as those without one, ‘Do you too devote yourselves to Him alone?’ If they do, they will be guided, but if they turn away, your only duty is to convey the message. God is aware of His servants [20]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 20)

“If they argue with you” indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* reveals His guidance to the last of Prophets, Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and informs him of the reality he would be facing. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was confronted by three camps: First, the pagans of Quraysh who were in utter disbelief. Second, the Jews and Christians, who are both coupled together in the verse because they are among the people of the Book. Third was the camp of the hypocrites. The argument was started by the second camp because the pagans of Quraysh did not claim that they followed a divinely-revealed religion. The people of the Book, on the other hand, claimed that they were following a divinely-revealed religion. Since polytheism and paganism oppose to the divine religion, the conflict between them is logical; however, when the followers of a past divinely-revealed Message opposes the divine Message revealed to the final Messenger, this is a matter which calls for a pause for reflection.

The meaning of “argument” in this context is that they were debating with Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*; “arguing”in the verse simply means that each party presents his argument and contentions. This indicates a dialogue; as long as there was a debate between truth and falsehood, Allah *the Exalted* would not leave Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* unequipped. Rather, He says to him: “If they argue with you”, meaning if they debate with you about the religion of Islam with which you have been sent as the final and concluding Divine Message, which clashes with idolatry and paganism followed by Quraysh and the alterations done by the people of the Book to their divinely revealed Messages, changing the meaning that Allah *the Exalted* intended, say, Oh Muhammad: “I have submitted myself to Allah [in Islam], and [so have] those who follow me.” We have previously underlined that when Allah *Glorified is He* commands the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* to say something, it would have been possible that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* would simply relate the statement of Allah *the Exalted* directly without referring to the command of his Lord “Say such-and-such.” When a father says to his son: “Go to your uncle and tell him such-and-such” and the son goes to the uncle and tells him as instructed, he does not say to his uncle, “Say to your uncle such-and-such…” However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* repeated the command of his Lord to us as clearly stated in the verse. The verse reads*:* “If they argue with you, say, “I have submitted myself to Allah (in Islam), and (so have) those who follow me.” (*Al-‘Imran:* 20) Is this a rebuttal and refutation of an argument? Indeed it is because the people of the Book and the pagans of Quraysh have been described as related in the following verse.

Allah *the Exalted* says: “And if you should ask them, “Who created the heavens and the earth?” they would most certainly say: *The Almighty* and All Knowing, has created them.” (*az-Zukhruf:* 9)

Moreover, Allah *the Exalted* says about them*:* “And if you should ask them who created them, they would surely say, “Allah.” So how are they deluded, and turned back (for the truth)?” (*az-Zukhruf:* 87)

The universe compromises two things: the place, namely the heavens and the earth, and the human being. The heavens and the earth as well as the human being are created by Allah *Glorified is He*. It is logical that we should submit ourselves to the Creator of all things and beings. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* says*:*

"Say, "I have submitted myself to Allah [in Islam]," means, "Bear in mind that I have not gone out of the fold of the belief in The One and Only God whom you believe in." He is the One Who has created all things and beings and has caused the universe to exist.

Islam, in essence, is submission to Allah *the Exalted* He has decreed that the noblest part of a person should be placed on the floor where this submission is manifested (prostrating oneself before Him). Prostration is the highest degree of obedience and servitude because a person places on the earth the loftiest part of his body, i.e. his forehead, and expresses humility and weakness in the presence of the Omnipotent Authority. The face is the body part that shows feelings: happiness or sadness. It reflects a person's inner character and feelings; when a person prostrates before someone against his will, it shows on his face. When he prostrates willingly, savouring proximity to Allah *Glorified is He* happiness and delight will be written all over his face. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "(Say) I have submitted myself to Allah [in Islam]." (*Al-'Imran:* 20) It means that the face, the loftiest part of a person's body, should submit to Allah *Glorified is He*. No loftier body part is worthy of expressing submission to Allah *Glorified is He*. The word 'face' in the Arabic language can be sometimes used to refer to a person. When someone says, "I have surrendered my face," he means, "I have submitted myself and my whole being." Let us ponder on the words of Allah *the Exalted* as He says*:* "Everything is perishable but His Face; His is the judgment, and to Him you shall be brought back." (*al-Qasas:* 88)

This means that everything shall eventually perish and cease to exist except Allah *the Exalted.* This is the meaning of the phrase "but His Face" in the verse. If we interpret the verse according to the literal meaning referring to His Face in particular and not to Allah *the Exalted* someone might say: "Does Allah *the Exalted* not have a Hand, for example?" We believe that He has a Hand that is not like anything in the creation. His hand or any of His attributes shall not cease to exist or perish. The word "Face" in the verse is a reference to Allah *the Exalted* and not merely to His Face, with the emphasis that there is nothing whatever like unto Him. The word 'face' is used to refer a person as a whole because the face is the feature which best distinguishes a person. Unlike any other body parts, the fact is crucial for human identify; we recognise people by their face. Allah *the Exalted* has instructed His Messenger to proclaim, "I have submitted myself to Allah (in Islam) and so have those who have followed me." This indicates that Prophet Muhammad, blessing and *peace be upon him*, submitted his face to Allah *the Exalted* as He has commanded him in the divine revelation since the revelation was given directly to him. However, when he says "and all who have followed me," this is proof for all those who followed him eventhough they are not directly addressed by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, there is no room for any person to say to Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*: "You have submitted to Allah *the Exalted* because he has commanded you directly." It is as though the speaker wants the divine command to be directly addressed to all believers instead. Allah *the Exalted* says "and all who have followed me." Everyone who follows Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* believes that he *peace and blessing be upon him* is a true Prophet of Allah, delivering the Divine Message and true guidance to mankind. There is no need to demand that the divine command should be addressed to every person individually because the Divine Message has reached them by virtue of their belief in what Allah *the Exalted* has revealed to His Noble Messenger, and Allah *the Exalted* has commanded His Messenger, *peace and blessing be upon him*: "Say to those who were given the Scripture and [to] those without one, "Have you submitted yourselves to Allah?"

When you find a question in the Quran, you should know that it is intended as a request for you to seek the truth. It is like the case when a person says to another, "Is Muhammad there?" or "Has so-and-so visited you?" The intention of a question is to know the truth. Sometimes, the question is used in order to give an order, such as the case when someone visits you, and your father may say to you, "Have you made coffee for your guest?" This is an instruction for you to make coffee for him if you have not and failed to fulfill the obligations of hospitality.

Thus, we understand the question in the verse, "Have you [too] submitted yourselves unto Him?" Let us ponder on the verse revealed in relation to alcohol: "Satan only wants to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will you then desist?” (*al-Ma‘ida*: 91) The exclamation of Allah *Glorified is He* “Will you then desist?” includes a question and the question in this context is meant as an order for them to desist. The verse in reference reads, “Have you [too] submitted yourselves unto Him?” It is a call for them to submit to Allah. It means, “Submit to Allah.” Then, Allah *the Exalted* says: “And if they should submit [in Islam], they are rightly guided” (*Al-‘Imran:* 20) It means that they have been guided to the right way to accomplish the objective for which Man was created. We should emphasize that the word “Islam” in this context indicates submission and surrender to Allah *Glorified is He*. Submission is not recognised except by the humble. Submission is manifested in action not only in belief. This is why Imam 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* who was blessed with a share of the prophetic eloquence, said to his brothers: “I am defining Islam as no one has defined before me: Islam is submission; submission is conviction,; conviction is affirmation; affirmation is acknowledgment; acknowledgment of the Divine Power means recognizing and accepting His Majesty; acceptance of His Majesty means fulfilling the obligations laid down by Him and fulfilment of obligations means actions (Therefore, Islam does not mean mere faith, but faith plus deeds).” In our daily life, we may ask: “Who is so-and-so? To whom so-and-so is attributed?”

In other words, we ask who his father is. The meaning of the word ‘genealogist’ is a person who knows the chains of lineage of people. As *Imam* ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was defining Islam as none has defined it before, he, *Allah be pleased with him*, underlined that Islam does not mean mere faith, but faith plus deeds. He remarked that a believer’s faith is verified by means of his actions. The best proof of a person’s faith is his actions. *Imam* ‘Ali *may Allah exalt his mention* then added: “A disbeliever’s disbelief is known by his denial of truth. A believer has taken his religion from his Lord and is not following his own personal opinion.” It is better to be a Muslim and commit a sin than being a non-Muslim and carry out a good deed. This is because when a Muslim commits a sin, he can simply repent of it and seek forgiveness of his Lord. Moreover, the good deeds carried out by non-Muslims are not rewardable because the doer disbelieves in Allah *the Exalted*. How great the affiliation to

Islam is! The verse reads*:* "And if they submit to Allah [in Islam], they are rightly guided..." (*Al-'Imran:* 20) The opposite of submission is mentioned in the following statement in the verse: "but if they turn away, your only duty is to convey the message." The opposite of submission is "turning away;" this means that they refrained from submitting themselves to Allah *the Exalted.* He commands His Messenger *peace and blessing be upon him* not to be saddened by their attitude if they turned away from guidance. This is similar to the verse that reads*:* "Then perhaps you would kill yourself with grief over them, [Oh Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow." (*al-Kahf:* 6)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was only required to deliver the Divine Message to people. As stated in the opening of the verse, "(Say, Oh Muhammad,) I have submitted myself to Allah [in Islam], and [so have] those who follow me." The duty of communicating the Divine Message includes the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* and his followers. This is why another verse is revealed to explain this doctrinal issue so that the duty of communicating the Divine Message would be maintained by his followers. It also informs us why there is no longer need for other Prophets after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* because Allah *the Exalted* has caused some of the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* to shoulder the duty of rectifying the corruption in the universe. There is no longer a need for sending another Prophet of Allah. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said: "The scholars are the heirs of the Prophets."We understand that the duty of communicating the Divine Message to people was not exclusively the duty of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*. Rather, it is the duty of all those endowed with knowledge of the Divine Message revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*, and believe in it. He *peace and blessing be upon him* served as the optimal role model in this regard. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse*:* "[Believers], you are the best community produced (as an example) for mankind; you enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah. If the people of the Book had also believed, it would have been better for them. For although some of them do believe, most of them are defiantly disobedient." (*Al-'Imran:* 110) Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse*:* "And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him." (*al-Hajj:* 78) This means that you shall witness against the people to whom you had delivered the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* Those who failed to deliver the Divine Message to people as enjoined, have not taken on the inheritance of prophethood. Shouldering the duty of communicating the Divine Message to people and celebrating the prophetic inheritance are a great privilege and honour. It also requires patience and endurance. The Prophetic inheritance is sometimes savouring the honour of delivering the divine message to people as enjoined and at others the adherence to forbearance of arduous labour in delivering it. This enjoined arduousness is what the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* should display because Muslims inherit the honour of prophethood. They also inherit the duty of communicating the Divine Message to mankind arduously. This is the meaning of the verse that reads: "that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people." (*al-Hajj:* 78)

What does a "role model" mean in this context? The fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is our role model entails that he should arduously shoulder the duty of communicating the Divine Message to humankind. This means that we should follow his example in this regard. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* strove in communicating the Divine Message to people and his followers should also carry on the struggle for the sake of promoting the religion of Islam, following his example. If you see the religious people lax, lethargic, and unable to struggle in the course of delivering the Divine Message to people, know that they are not the heirs of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*. Therefore, when you see an Islamic scholar who has no enemies, know that his share of the Prophetic inheritance is small.

Why? That is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* had enemies. When we see a scholar who has enemies, we should know that he has received his full share of the Prophetic inheritance. Let us now contemplate the concluding statement of the verse clarifying for us what Islam (submission) is: "And Allah is All Seeing and Aware of [His] servants." (*Al-'Imran:* 20) Allah *Glorified is He* knows His servants because He is Seeing of all matters; the reference to Him as the All Seeing is always in the context of addressing faith-related matters. He is All Seeing of [His] servants. Sight is not used except in reference to witnessing action and behaviour. What does Allah *Glorified is He* see of His servants? He sees their actions in the universe and whether these actions conform to the teachings of Islam. Monitoring action requires sight and not knowledge; it is as though Allah *the Exalted* is saying: “If you think that I cannot see you, your faith is defective. If you believe that I can see you, why have you made Me the least important of those who can see you?”

Allah *the Exalted* underlines that He is Seeing of [His] servants. We understand from this verse that Islam must be translated in a person’s conduct and actions; it is not a mere conviction because unlike conviction, actions can be “seen.” As long as Allah *the Exalted* is All Seeing of every movement and stillness of a person, he should feel ashamed that his Lord should see him doing something He does not approve. Let us ponder over the following example to clarify the meaning further, with no intention to draw comparison. Indeed, there is nothing like Allah *the Exalted*. We see that a young man who smokes feels ashamed to smoke before the elders of his family; he would refrain from smoking in their presence. What about a servant who believes that Allah *the Exalted* sees him? Then, Allah *the Exalted* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَيَقْتُلُونَ
ٱلَّذِينَ يَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ فَبَشِّرْهُم بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ٢١

Give news of agonizing torment to those who ignore God’s revelations, who unjustifiably kill prophets, who kill those who command that justice is done [21] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 21)

We have previously underlined that when Allah *Glorified is He* refers to those who disbelieve in His signs, it means those who disbelieve in the divine signs of Allah *the Exalted* in their totality. There is a difference between disbelieving in the signs of Allah *the Exalted* and disbelieving in Him. This is because the belief in Allah *the Exalted* necessitates proofs that of His existence and there are many proofs of the existence of Allah *the Exalted* in the universe.

The proofs of His existence are clear; however, whoever disbelieves in Allah *the Exalted* essentially denies the evidences which prove the existence of the Creator.

The verse did not refer to “Those who disbelieve in Allah,” in order to clarify for us that the knowledge of Allah *the Exalted* falls into the category of the Unseen, whereas the knowledge of His signs are apparent in the universe. This is why the verse referred to those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah in particular. We notice that the word “kill” is always used with the word “Prophets of Allah” and not the Messengers of Allah. It is inconceivable and not logical that Allah *the Exalted* would send a messenger to preach His guidance and make it possible for His servants to kill him! Allah *the Exalted* sends His Prophets, however, to be role models for believers and none of them is given new legislations. On the contrary, the Messengers of Allah are sent to communicate the divinely revealed guidance and way of life to their peoples. It is inconceivable that Allah *the Exalted* should choose a servant to communicate His Divine Message, and then would allow some people to kill His Messenger!

No created being can kill a Messenger of Allah; however, they may kill the Prophets of Allah. Every Prophet of Allah is sent as a role model for his people. This is why we find some Prophets of Allah adhering to the very divine religion of the previous Messenger of Allah. The question arises as why people would kill the Prophet of Allah since he is merely a role model for them and was not sent with a new Divine Message. If a Prophet of Allah is sent with a new Divine Message, we would say that the reason for killing him was the zeal for the previous divine message. Why would they kill a Prophet of Allah who is merely sent as a role model for his people? The Prophet of Allah performs acts of worship as enjoined and thus people come to realise that the conduct of the Prophet of Allah does not conform to their sinful desires.

Those people who kill the Prophets of Allah are those who do not want to follow the Islamic way of life, namely submitting and surrendering oneself, one’s body, and actions to be in accordance with the religion. This is because, while the Prophet of Allah follows the Divine Message of the Messenger who was sent before him, when he abides by the teachings of the religion among a group of people who do not practice the religion, they will feel offended by his actions.

The presence of a Prophet of Allah, who holds fast to the divine laws of his Lord, submits his body and actions to the divine guidance among his people, who claim to follow the religion of Allah *the Exalted* but those who do not hold fast to His guidance, would say: "Why should the Prophet of Allah display this upright conduct? Why should not he submit his body to the divine decrees and embrace faith, while we are not practicing our religion like him?" These questions caused rage and envy towards the Prophet of Allah to grow in the hearts of these people, who do not practice the religion of their Lord, although claiming otherwise. They envy the Prophet of Allah because he is elevating his status and bettering himself by means of devotion to his Lord and they are not able to do the same.

The Prophet of Allah submits to the divine guidance as a clear and evident role model for people, demonstrating the difference between the mere claim of believing in the divine guidance and practical adherence to it. Therefore, when we see a person following the divine guidance and way of life as enjoined, we find that the non-practicing person takes the practicing person as a target of scorn and ridicule because the non-practicing person is filled with rage and envy towards the practicing one for being capable of submitting himself to the divine guidance. The non-practicing person asks himself:

"Why should this person follow the divine guidance and abide by the divine way of life and I do not?" He tries to get rid of such a person who complies with the divine guidance. This is because the non-practicing person sees himself small and is perceived as such by others as well when he compares himself to the one who adheres to the divine guidance. When people compare the conduct of the one who adheres to the divine guidance, and that of the non-practicing person who does not adhere to the divine guidance, they do not respect the non-practicing person. Accordingly, the non-practicing person feels belittled before the practicing person and others. The non-practicing person tries to banish the practicing one and get him out of the picture. He mocks and scorns him as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse that reads*:* "Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. [29] And when they passed by them, they would exchange derisive glances. [30] And when they returned to their followers, they would return jesting and exulting.[31] And when they saw them, they said: "Most surely these are in error." [32] But they had not been sent as keepers over them. [33]" (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-33)

Do these clear verses not underline what non-practicing people in our societies would say to those who adhere to the divine guidance? Do we not hear non-practicing people mockingly say to the practicing ones, “Intercede with Allah for us”? These non-practicing people are referred to in the verse that reads: “And when they passed by them, they would exchange derisive glances. [30] And when they returned to their followers, they would return jesting and exulting.[31] And when they saw them, they said: “Most surely these are in error.” [32]” (*al-Mutaffifin:* 30-32)

A non-practicing person might rejoice at being able to mock the devout believer who adheres to the guidance of Allah *the Exalted*. Some non-practicing people might accuse a devout person of being misled and deviant. Allah *the Exalted* refutes this false accusation saying: “But they had not been sent as keepers over them.” (*al-Mutaffifin:* 33)

Allah *the Exalted* defends the believers who adhere to His guidance. The believers on the Day of Resurrection will laugh at disbelievers, and Allah *the Exalted* shall ask them: “Today those who believed are laughing at disbelievers, [34] On adorned couches, observing. [35] Have a disbelievers [not] been rewarded [this Day] for what they used to do? [36]” (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36)

Thus, the non-practicing person is duly punished. What about those who wrongfully kill the Prophets of Allah? We are entitled to ask for the reason why Allah *the Exalted* describes their killing of the Prophets of Allah as “without right.” Could the Prophets of Allah be rightfully killed? It is not possible that a Prophet of Allah could be ever killed rightfully? When Allah *Glorified is He* says “…and kill the Prophets of Allah without right.…” (*Al-‘Imran:* 21), this statement is intended to clarify a fact. He then continues listing the evil actions of those people who slay the Prophets of Allah without any right. He says: “…and kill those who command justice from among the people...” (*Al-‘Imran:* 21) They were not satisfied with killing the Prophets of Allah; rather, they also killed believers who defended their Prophet. When a Prophet of Allah is slain, those who believed in him will surely become angry and agitated at his murder.

The followers of the Prophet of Allah would be angry at his murder and if they are unable to prevent it, they will at least enjoin good and forbid evil.

However, the transgression of the murderers did not stop at that point; they even killed anyone who forbade their evil deeds and sins. If anyone should ask them why they killed the Prophets of Allah, they would have killed him as well. With regard to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* we know that his enemies attempted to assassinate him several times and this indicates the stupidity of those who planned these assassination attempts because they did not consider his status. He *peace and blessing be upon him* was not only a Prophet of Allah; rather, he was also a Messenger as well.

He was a Messenger of Allah, a role model for his people, and the one responsible for communicating the divine guidance and way of life to humankind at the same time. If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was only a Prophet of Allah, they would have been able to kill him as people had killed other Prophets of Allah in the past. Rather, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was a Messenger sent by Allah, The Exalted. They have witnessed him communicating the divine guidance and new way of life that shattered their dreams, exposed their lies, and underlined how they altered the divine scriptures that were revealed to them.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was a Messenger, of Allah sent with a Divine Message, guidance, and way of life. When they tried to kill him, as the previous peoples did with their Prophets of Allah, they forgot that he *peace and blessing be upon him* was also a Messenger of Allah. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in order to reassure us*:* "Oh Messenger, deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you have not delivered His message, and Allah will protect you from the people; surely Allah will not guide a disbelievers." (*al-Ma'ida:* 67)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* has been sent with a Divine Message and protected by Allah *the Exalted* from his enemies. Allah *the Exalted* is telling us of the previous peoples who killed their Prophets in order to reassure believers, and reassure Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and in order to underline for the enemies of the Messenger of Allah that they cannot kill him. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* "Say, "Then why did you kill the prophets of Allah before, if you are [indeed] believers?" (*al-Baqara:* 91). The verse refers to the past situation to clarify for us, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and his enemies that killing the Prophets of Allah was possible in the past only. However, things changed and none can kill Prophet Muhammad, the final Messenger of Allah, *peace and blessing be upon him*. Allah *the Exalted* is reassuring a believers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* that none could harm him. This is why the following verse was revealed: “And Allah will protect you from the people.” (*al-Ma‘ida:* 67).

Allah *the Exalted* denied those who wished to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* any chance by saying, “Say, “Then why did you kill the prophets of Allah before, if you are [indeed] believers?” (*al-Baqara:* 91).

Had the matter been confined to the Prophethood, and had they not given any credence to the fact that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was a Messenger of Allah and had they merely denied his Message out of stubbornness, they would have said: “The killing of the Prophets of Allah did not stop at that point; we will make sure it does not.” They would have gathered all their forces and tried to kill Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*. However, Allah *the Exalted* caused them to despair of it and denied them this out of His absolute omnipotence.

When Allah *Glorified is He* tells us of those who killed the Prophets and those who enjoined equity was that in the same context as this statement of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessing be upon him*? To whom was it addressed? It was addressed to some of the people of the Book who believed in following the example of those who killed the Prophets of Allah in the past and killed those who enjoined equity. They believed in the same thing as those who came before them, who killed the Prophets of Allah, and those who enjoined justice.

This is a reproach for those who followed the example of the killers of the Prophets of Allah and killed those who enjoined justice. It is a reproach and a rhetorical question. How could you believe in that which those who killed the Prophets of Allah believed? How can you follow people who did hideous acts? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* had related to them the story of the Israelites who killed forty-three Prophets of Allah in one occasion! One hundred and seventy followers of these Prophets stood up to them and forbade their hideous act; they killed them as well. This is the very meaning of the verse that reads: "Those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah and kill the prophets without right and kill those who order justice from among the people - give them tidings of a painful punishment" (*Al-'Imran:* 21).

Why does Allah give them tidings of a painful punishment? Is the meaning of "give tidings" not to relate good and pleasant news? Why is it used in the verse as such? Glad tidings are always used to refer to good news that will bring happiness to the listener such as giving the glad tidings of Paradise to believers. It means that Allah *the Exalted* informs a believer of a pleasant thing and gives him the opportunity to follow the guidance in the worldly life in order to attain such a reward and glad tidings. Why are these tidings directed at the descendants of such people? We know that those who killed the Prophets of Allah and those who enjoined equity were not contemporary to the revelation of this verse. The people of the Book who were contemporary to the revelation of this verse were the descendants of those who had killed the Prophets of Allah and those who enjoined equity. Allah *Glorified is He* gave them tidings of a painful punishment because they might have been under the impression that what their ancestors did was right. If they thought that what their ancestors did was right, they were also meant with the tidings of a painful punishment.

The scope of such painful punishment extends to encompass them too. The question arises as to why they should be given the glad tidings of a painful punishment despite the fact that the glad tidings are generally used with good news. When a person is told of "glad tidings," his heart is ready to receive the pleasant news. As their hearts are ready to receive pleasant news and savour happiness and joy, they are informed of the painful punishment. What would happen to them? They experience a sudden painful dejection. They were prepared to receive good news, but instead were informed of their "painful punishment". Accordingly, their pain becomes more intense. This is because if Allah *the Exalted* forewarns them right from the start, without saying: "give them tidings," the delivery of the news would have been less painful.

Allah *Glorified is He* however, wanted the news to be of a startling on them similar to the verse that reads: "And if they cry for water, they shall be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces; evil the drink and ill the resting-place.” (*al-Kahf:* 29).

They will beg for water in the Hereafter and their calls will be answered. However, Allah *the Exalted* will give water like melted brass that will scald their faces! When we hear that “they will be answered,” we might think that they would be provided with fresh water to extinguish their thirst. However, the verse underlines that they will be given water like melted brass that will scald their faces! Thus will be the glad tidings for those who killed the Prophets of Allah or their followers who followed their belief of these murderers. The verse reads, “…give them tidings of a painful punishment” (*Al-‘Imran:* 21). The word “punishment” in the verse means torment afflicted on a living being who can feel the pain. The punishment is afflicted on the living being not the dead. Killing, on the other hand, ends the life of the conscious being; so, it is not a punishment. The punished person must remain alive so that he can feel the pain and torment. The reference to the “painful punishment” in the verse reminds us of the other verse that reads*:* “Indeed, for those who disbelieve in Our verses - We will drive them into a fire; every time their skins are roasted through, We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted in Might and Wise.” (*an-Nisa’:* 56)

It means that Allah *the Exalted* will cause them to live therein eternally so that their torment would be eternal. Next, Allah *the Exalted* refers to,

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ حَبِطَتۡ أَعۡمَٰلُهُمۡ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا
وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن نَّٰصِرِينَ ٢٢

The deeds of such people will come to nothing in this
world and in the next and no one will help them [22]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 22)

Those who disbelieved in the signs of Allah *the Exalted* killed His Prophets and those who enjoined equity and justice among them will be subjected to torment and their actions will be made worthless in the worldly life and the Hereafter. The same applies to whoever follows their example. The meaning of causing their actions to be worthless is that they would not yield any rewards or fruits. The sane person has a purpose or objective for all his actions; an action done without a purpose is like the aimless blow of an insane person. A sane person must know the purpose for his actions before he does them and must know the benefits such act yields and whether such benefits are the best and most lasting ones possible or not.

In the light of this criterion, the sane person judges his actions. Allah *the Exalted* says, "They are the ones whose deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and for them there will be no helpers." (*Al-'Imran:* 22) He is informing us that a person might perform an action that outwardly seem to be good, but a believer should beware of being deceived into thinking such an action to be good. Why? This is because a good action is only credited to a person according to the level of his intention and faith in the One Who rewards action. If a person performs an action by means of which his worldly life is rectified, it is a good action. Why will the deeds of these people be worthless in this worldly life and the Hereafter? They will be worthless because their actions were not performed by a believer. The person had performed the good action for the sake of its outcome not in abidance by the command of Allah *the Most High*.

When a believer performs an action, he does it out of his trust in the command of Allah *the Most High*. Some people in the present-day may criticize Islam for not rewarding the non-Muslims for their good actions, which are beneficial to humanity. One of them might say: "Could anyone conceive that Louis Pasteur who discovered microorganisms, and the other scientist who discovered radiation, and many others are going to hellfire?" In response, we say: "Yes, they will. The divine justice of Allah *the Exalted* entailed it." Let us judge the matter according to the human norms. From whom a person seeks the reward for his action? He seeks it from the one for whom he performed the action. Had these scientists devoted such good actions to Allah *Glorified is He*? No, they had not. Rather, they did their actions for the sake of humanity and people rewarded them with immortalizing their memory and crediting them for their great discoveries; they have received other worldly rewards as well. The following Hadith applies to them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said: "The first to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who had died as a martyr. He will be brought forward. Allah will remind him of the favours He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. Then He will ask him: “What did you do to express gratitude for it?”The man will reply: “I fought for Your Cause till I was martyred.” Allah will say: “You have lied. You fought so that people might call you courageous; and they have done so.” Command will then be issued about him and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into hell. Next a man who had acquired and imparted knowledge and read the Quran will be brought forward, Allah will remind him of the favours He had bestowed upon him, and the man will acknowledge them. Then He will ask him: “What did you do to express gratitude for it?’” The man will reply: ‘I acquired knowledge and taught it, and read the Quran for Your sake.” Allah will say to him: “You have lied. You acquired knowledge so that people might call you a learned (man), and you read the Quran so that they might call you a reciter, and they have done so.” Command will then be issued about him, and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into hellfire. Next a man whom Allah had made affluent and to whom Allah had given plenty of wealth, will be brought forward; Allah will remind him of the favours He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. He will ask him: “What did you do to express gratitude for it?” The man will reply: “I did not neglect any of the ways You liked wealth to be spent liberally for Your sake.” Allah will say to him: “You have lied; you did it so that people might call you generous, and they have done so.” Command will then be issued about him and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into hellfire.”(1)

As we receive the rewards from Allah *the Exalted* we must ask ourselves, “Did these scientists achieve such great discoveries and accomplishments for the sake of Allah?” No they did not. The one seeks the reward for his action from the one for whose sake he does it. Allah *Glorified is He* did not allow their good deeds and the fruits of their labour to go lost; rather, their work yielded them fame, prestige, and admiration. Allah *Glorified is He* does not allow the reward of the doer’s good deeds to go lost. “Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter - We increase for him in his harvest. And whoever desires the harvest of this world - We give him thereof, but there is not for him in the Hereafter any share.” (*ash-Shura:* 20)

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(1) *[Muslim]*

As we have previously underlined, we should try imagining the surprise of a person who performs a deed which is outwardly good, but he does not believe in the existence of Allah. The following verse applies to this case. Allah *the Exalted* says*:* “But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.” (*an-Nur:* 39) This person shall be surprised when he discovers the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* and he has not thought of Him, while performing the good deed i.e. he was not in his mind when he performed the action which was superficially good. It is as though Allah *the Exalted* is saying to the one who performs the like of this action: “You did not do such act for My sake; receive your reward from the one for whose sake you did it.” Allah *the Exalted* says*:* “They are the ones whose deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and for them there will be no helpers” (*Al-‘Imran:* 22). Their deeds will be worthless in this worldly life because they might perform actions which are intended to be against Islam. Allah *Glorified is He* would cause their deeds to be futile. He causes His religion to triumph despite the fewer and less modest equipment, and these people will have no one to help them. This means that they will have no one to help them as they would be defeated by their adversary. They will not find helpers if Allah *the Exalted* decrees their defeat; there is no one equal to Him. Then, Allah says,

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ نَصِيبٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ يُدۡعَوۡنَ إِلَىٰ كِتَٰبِ ٱللَّهِ
لِيَحۡكُمَ بَيۡنَهُمۡ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّىٰ فَرِيقٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ وَهُم مُّعۡرِضُونَ ٢٣

Have you considered those who were given a share of the Scripture? When they are asked to accept judgement from God’s Scripture, some of them turn their backs and walk away, all because they declare [23] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 23)

The verse opens with the question “Have you considered?” The expression in Arabic literally means “Have you not seen.” When Allah *the Exalted* says to

His Messenger: “Have you considered [Oh Muhammad] those who were given a share of the Scripture? When they are asked to accept judgment from the Divine Scripture, some of them turn their backs and walk away” (*Al-‘Imran:* 23) It is a call to a clear matter. However, sometimes the phrase “Have you not seen” is used as a reference to a past event that occurred before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* commissioned to communicate the divine message to mankind, and which he did not witnessed. For example, Allah *the Exalted* says*:* “Have not you [Oh Prophet Muhammad] seen how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?” (*al-Fil:* 1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did not see the army of the elephant and nor did he witness this past event. When we find the Arabic expression “*alam tara*,” literally meaning “Have you not seen” in reference to a present event, it may be used to denote the literal meaning and refer to actual sighting and witnessing of a current event leading to certainty. However, if the expression is used in reference to a past event, it means “have you not known or considered,” because the evidence of an eyewitness is the best evidence. The verse reads, “Have you not seen”; it actually means, “Have you not known?”

A person may say, “Why does He not simply say ‘*ta'lam*’ (to know), instead of ‘*tara*’ (to see)?” This is because the most irrefutable evidence is the visible one. This indicates that Allah wishes to inform us by using *‘‘alam tara*?’ (do you not see?) That is, we should deal with the piece of information which Allah tells us as though it were visible. We should regard our Lord as more trustworthy than our own eyes. The matter of which Allah informs us may not be visible to us. However, as the speaker is Allah and there is no force that can change that which Allah says, Allah speaks of future matters which have not yet occurred using the past tense. For example, Allah says, ‘The command of Allah is coming, so be not impatient for it. Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him’. (*an-Nahl:* 1)

Does His saying, ‘*ata amru* Allah’ (Literally, ‘the command of Allah came’) go together with His saying ‘*aala tast'jiluh*’ (so be not impatient for it)? The Arabic words indicate that Allah’s command came, so how can the people be impatient for it? The literary meaning of the Arabic word "*ata*" is "came” which indicates that this command came before Allah said His Words. It should be noted that the One Who says "*ata*" (came) can bring it about, so it is a matter of fact and an incontestable issue because there is no force capable of changing that which Allah has willed to happen. This indicates that Allah's saying '*'alam tara*?' (Literally: "Do you not see?") refers to an event in the past and is intended to give information, as it is Allah's saying. If it refers to a contemporary matter, it also gives information based on seeing and witnessing.

As for Allah's saying, 'Do you not consider, [Oh Muhammad], those who were given a portion of the Book?..'. (*Al-'Imran:* 23), the phrase "were given" refers to a people who received Revelation of guidance from an Exalted Entity. Therefore, when the Quran refers to a Book of Allah, it uses the words "*nazal*" and "*anzal*a" (sent down) so that the people recognise the loftiness of the place from which the Book or guidance has descended. What does the word "*nasib*" mean? It means "a share or portion". For example, if twenty dinars are divided among four people, everyone will receive five *dinars,* which are called a "share" or a "portion" of the original sum of *dinars*. The word "*nasib*" refers to a share or portion which is allocated to a person.

Therefore, when Allah says, '…those who were given a portion of the Book?…' (*Al-'Imran:* 23), it draws our attention in a subtle matter to the fact that the Book of Allah, as a whole, did not remain with them; rather, a small portion of it reached them. The word "*nasib*" indicates that the Prophet and those who heard this saying should excuse those people because they received only a small portion of the Book of Allah.

Allah reveals this point in other verses: 'So, for their breaking of the covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They distort words from their [proper] usages and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were reminded. And you will still observe deceit among them, except a few of them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). The abandoned part of the Book was not received by those who were contemporary to Prophet Muhammad. Allah has clarified that some of them concealed part of the Book: 'Those to whom We gave the Book know him [Muhammad] as they know their own sons. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth, while they know [it]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 146)

Due to the fact that some people concealed part of the Revelation, this meant that it would be concealed from those who were contemporary to Prophet

Muhammad. Some people among them were deluded due to the missing parts of the Book which was wiped from their collective memory. In addition, parts of the Book were concealed so that it was known to some people and was not known to other people. As for the parts they did not conceal, Allah says concerning them, ‘There are some who twist the Book of Allah with their tongues to make you [people] think that what they say is part of the Book of Allah when it is not; they say it is from Allah when it is not; they attribute lies to Allah and they know it’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 78)

Therefore, the Book sent down to them by Allah has been exposed to much transgression on their part and only a portion of it remains. This portion of the Book is that by which the Quran debates with these people. The Quran does not debate with them in relation to that which has been altered by their former rabbis and monks; rather, it debates with them concerning the protected share that they have been granted.

Allah says, ‘Do you not consider, [Oh Muhammad], those who were given a portion of the Book? They are invited to the Book of Allah that it should arbitrate between them; then a party of them turns away and they are refusing?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 23). To which Divine Book does this verse refer? Does it refer to the Quran? If so, this would mean that it inevitably arbitrated between them and Prophet Muhammad. However, those who were given a portion of the Book differed with each other. Why? If the Book referred to is the Quran, does the Quran not confirm what they have?

Therefore, when they are called to confirm that which was mentioned in their Books, this implies that the Quran will arbitrate among them. What is the meaning of ‘…they are invited to the Book of Allah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 23)? The person who invited them here is Prophet Muhammad and they are the people who were invited. Allah says, ‘…those who were given a portion of the Book…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 23). Have they differed over the portion that they have in their possession, or over the portion that has been lost? The difference between them is over the portion that they had in their possession so that it could be a proof that they are not trustworthy even with regards to what was revealed to them and what they had in writing. When the scholars discussed this issue, they traced it back to a certain incident: they differed over the issue of our

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and said that he was a Jew, while others said that he was a Christian. The Quran settled the matter:'Ibrahim (Abraham) was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining towards truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the polytheists'. (*Al-'Imran:* 67) Why? Because the words "Jew" and "Christian" appeared after the death of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and they had to be more rational and order events according to the time in which they occurred. Therefore, over which did they differ? Did they differ in regards to Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*? Did they differ in regards to a ruling they found in the Torah? What were they called to? They were '…invited to the Book of Allah that it should arbitrate between them…' (*Al-'Imran:* 23). This indicates that the words: '…out of mutual transgression…' (*Al-'Imran:* 19, *al-Haqqa:* 19) refer to a state that prevailed amongst them. When the scholars mentioned the incident in which they were called to the Book of Allah-that it should arbitrate between them-, they said that two Jews, a Man and woman from Khaybar*,* committed adultery and were both from the tribe's nobility. Those who were responsible for judging the matter according to the Torah did not want to apply Allah's ruling on this matter that was stated in the Torah: stoning. They devised a trick, which was to go to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* Why then did they go to Prophet Muhammad in this regard? We consider the mere referral of the issue to Prophet Muhammad as acceptance of his judgment.

Why did they not accept from the beginning the Message brought by Prophet Muhammad? They wanted to refer it to him in order that he might benefit them with regards to their issue. Otherwise, they would not have referred this issue to Prophet Muhammad. The fact that they went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* implies that they wanted a sentence more lenient than stoning. The two adulterers of Khaybar wanted to save themselves from the Torah's ruling of stoning, for they were from the nobility of Khaybar and because the Jews at that time made a temporal power for themselves. Therefore, the adulterers went along with the rabbis, who wished to circumvent Allah's ruling which was revealed in the Torah: stoning.

When they visited Prophet Muhammad, there was a person named An-Nu'man ibn 'Awf, and another named Bahary ibn 'Amr. They said, 'Oh Messenger of Allah, judge between these people'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said 'Do you not have a ruling?' Then, he added, 'I defer to the Torah, which is your book'. They said, 'You have done justice to us'.

The Messenger of Allah clarified for them that Islam's ruling in respect to adultery is stoning. The remaining part of the Torah which included this ruling came as a proof on the fact that Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* matters that never crossed anyone's mind. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said an oath that was mentioned in the Torah and then said, 'Which of you is most knowledgeable about the Torah?' They said it was a Man named 'Abdullah ibn Suriyyah and they brought him forward. He gave him the Torah and said, 'Read'. So, 'Abdullah ibn Suriyyah sat and read, and when he arrived at the verse in the Torah pertaining to stoning, he covered it with his hand and read something else. 'Abdullah ibn Salam was present, so he said, 'Oh Messenger of Allah, did you not see him covering the verse of the Torah with his hand and reading the following one?' Ibn Salam moved the Man's hand and read what the verse was of the Torah which the Jew had covered and which was relevant to stoning. This issue shows that the ruling of the Noble Quran is the same as that of the Torah with regards to adultery and also indicates that Allah revealed to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so as to knew this part of the Torah that contained the text. Then one of the Soldiers of Allah, mamely 'Abdullah ibn Salam, who had been a Jew and converted to Islam, disclosed the desire of these people to forge and falsify.

The story of 'Abdullah ibn Salam's conversion to Islam is incredible. After faith had ripened in his heart, he came to Prophet Muhammad and said, 'Allah has caused my heart to be delighted with Islam. There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. But before I declare my conversion to Islam, I would like you to gather the leaders of the Jews and ask them about my character because the Jews are a slanderous people known for lie, slander, and deception'. When Prophet Muhammad asked the leaders of the Jews about their opinion regarding 'Abdullah ibn Salam, they said, 'He is our master, the son of our master and our rabbi…,i,e.' They praised, commended and appreciated him extremely. Then, ''Abdullah ibn Salam said to them, ‘Now I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. The leaders of the Jews then changed their minds and said the opposite of what they had said previously: ‘He is the worst of us and the son of the worst of us…, i.e.’ When they changed their praise into vilification, 'Abdullah ibn Salam said, ‘Oh Messenger of Allah, have I not told you that that they are a slanderous people? By Allah, I wanted to show you their view of me before I have converted to Islam’.

This Man, 'Abdullah ibn Salam, is the one who removed 'Abdullah ibn Suriyyah’s hand from the text of the Torah that contained the verse of the Torah on stoning and the following saying was revealed in this regard, ‘Do you not consider, [Oh Muhammad], those who were given a portion of the Book? They are invited to the Book of Allah that it should arbitrate between them; then a party of them turn away and they are refusing’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 23) They are the people some of whom turned away from the acceptance of the truth. Why did they turn away? Was it a general issue? Or, was the cause of this rejection the temporal power that the Jews wished to assume? The meaning of “temporal power” is that people take from the parts of religion that will provide them with sanctity which they enjoy, and then use it in other than religious matters. We said before that the cause of each act of perversion of Allah’s Guidance is transgression. It is held that some of the followers of the Torah would predict their victory over the Arabs saying, "A prophet will come from the Arabs and we will follow him and fight you with him, as 'Ad and Iram were fought”. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them, they denied him. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* said in this regard clarifying their stance in regards to faith, ‘And those who have disbelieved say, "You are not a messenger”. Say, [Oh Muhammad], "Sufficient is Allah as a Witness between me and you and (The witness of] whoever has knowledge of the Scripture"’. (*ar-Ra‘d:* 43)

This means that the one who had knowledge of the Book of Allah is supposed to testify to the veracity of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* otherwise, Allah would not have said, ‘…whoever has knowledge of the Scripture…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41). Allah says such only because those who have knowledge of the Divine Book know that Prophet Muhammad is truthful with regards to the Message, a matter which is confirmed by Allah. The reason behind the attempt of some of the Jews to deny the Message of Prophet Muhammad was the temporal power and their desire to make religious matters overly for their followers.

Every impostor who tries to fabricate any principle attempts to assume temporal power and tries to decrease the religious obligations that might contain some difficulty for people, or to make a religion which contains only light acts of worship. For example, Musaylamah, a false prophet and liar, lightened the prayer so that those who found prayer difficult would join his religion. Musaylamah also reduced the *zakat,* an act which created the opportunity to escape from religious obligations. Therefore, the matter that distorted the pre-Islamic religions was that some clergy applied the facilitations they found in other religions to their religion because the religious obligations of true Islam are sometimes hard and no one can fulfil them except a person with real and true faith. Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says concerning the pillar of worship-prayer, ‘Seek help with steadfastness and prayer– though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble’. (*al-Baqara:* 45) And He says in another verse about prayer: ‘Order your people to pray and pray steadfastly yourself. We are not asking you to give Us provision; We provide for you and the rewards of the Hereafter belong to the devout’. (*Ta Ha:* 132) Allah is All Knowing and All-Wise; He is aware of the human being whom He has created and the weaknesses that may afflict his soul. He may not steadfastly pray, or he considers prayer a difficult obligation. However, the one who observes prayer steadfastly is truly devout.

Therefore, we find that every deviant person tries to lighten religious obligations and tries to make forbidden things permissible. We do not see deviant people increasing the number of impermissible things; deviant people always want to annul prohibitions. If we ask those deviant people about the reason for doing this, we will find that they do this in order to attract people to the forbidden matters which are made lawful by those deviant people. Accordingly, some of the Jews wanted to make the religion easy for their followers and some of their rabbis told the Jews not to worry about the Day of Resurrection. Then, Allah’s saying reveals that they believed falsely that Allah had made previously forbidden things permissible for them. However, Allah does permit lawful matters and forbids unlawful matters. As for Allah's saying, 'He has ordained a way for you [believers] to release you from [such] oaths — Allah is your helper: He is the All Knowing, the Wise' (*at-Tahrim:* 2), this verse is concerned with a specific context and means that the matters which Allah has allowed, no one should forbid them and the matters which Allah has forbidden should not be made lawful by anyone.

They desired to allow their followers to commit sins because they believed that Hellfire would only harm them for a limited number of days. However, if we scrutinize Allah's saying which quoted them, we will notice the following: It is well known that every event occurs in a certain time, with certain intensity. In relation to time, those who fabricated lies about Allah's rulings concerning the Day of Resurrection said that hellfire will be experienced for only a few days, i.e., it is not eternal punishment. Moreover, even if the torment is severe, it will only last for a few days and the human being can bear it. As for the intensity of the event, they desired to belittle it, saying that the torment is not severe; it is only a light touch. They tried to delude people in order to appease them. These rabbis said that they were the sons of Allah whom He loves. They believed that Allah selected Ya'qub (Jacob) as a prophet and he would never punish his progeny except in much as required for releasing oneself from an oath.

In regards to Ayyub (Job), Allah says: 'Take a small bunch of grass in your hand and strike [her] with that so as not to break your oath. We found him patient in adversity; an excellent servant'. (*Sad:* 44) When Ayyub *peace be upon him* swore that he would whip his wife one hundred times if he regained health, Allah wanted to release him from this vow, so He ordered him to take a small bunch of grass in his hand, or straw, consisting of one hundred stalks and hit her once lightly, in order to fulfil his vow. This was a mercy from Allah to him and his wife, who had taken care of him during his illness. Ayyub (Job) was a grateful servant to Allah. It was as if a single blow was equivalent to one hundred blows. In this way, he was released from the vow.

Some of the children of Israel said that that the progeny of the children of Ya'qub (Jacob) will not be tormented by Allah except in so much as is required for releasing oneself from an oath. They said this to attract the people to embrace their religion, in which punishment in the Hereafter will only be a touch of the fire that will last only a few days. They said this, claiming that the sons of Ya'qub (Jacob) are Allah's children and His beloved people and that Allah promised Ya'qub (Jacob) that He would not punish his children except in so much as required for releasing oneself from an oath. Certainly, this is clear fabrication of Allah's Religion and Guidance. They turned away from Allah's Guidance in disobedience. This clarifies what Allah says: 'All because they declare, "the Fire will only touch us for a limited number of days". The lies they have invented have led them astray in their own religion'. (*Al-'Imran:* 15)

They turned away in aversion from Allah's rule. They believed that the fire would not touch them, except for a limited number of days. We must understand the meaning of the Arabic words *gharrahum* (led them astray) and *ghurur* (going astray). They mean "the desire for something that is unrealistic and cannot be obtained." When someone is described as *maghrur* (going astray), this means that this person is following a path that will not lead him to the desired goal. Therefore, *ghurur* (going astray) is the desire for something unrealistic and unobtainable. Accordingly, Allah describes Satan as 'the deluder': 'People! Allah's promise is true, so do not let the present life deceive you. Do not let the Deceiver deceive you about Allah: Satan is your enemy—so treat him as an enemy—and invites his followers only to enter the blazing fire'. (*Fatir:* 5-6)

Satan is the one who beautifies some things for people and urges them to wish them to happen, but when these things occur, no benefit will be gained from them. Satan has beautified them and so their yield is not worthy. Allah *Glorified is He* says, concerning this world, 'Bear in mind that the present life is just a game, a diversion, an attraction, a cause of boasting among you, of rivalry in wealth and children. It is like plants that spring up after the rain: their growth at first delights the sowers, but then you see them wither away, turn yellow, and become stubble. There is terrible punishment in the next life, as well as forgiveness and approval from Allah; the life of this world is only an illusory pleasure'. (*al-Hadid:* 20)

A Man who has no experience is described by the Arabic word "*ghir*" (fool), meaning that he does things without any experience, so he does not benefit from them and they are inappropriate. Accordingly, all the words that share the root of the word "*Al-ghurur*" (going astray) mean "aspiring for something unrealistic and unobtainable" and therefore Allah calls Satan "*Al-Gharur*" or "the deceiver" because he influences humans to desire unrealistic and unobtainable things. Satan will disavow himself on the Day of Resurrection from those who followed him and will accuse them of foolishness: 'When everything has been decided, Satan will say, "Allah gave you a true promise. I, too, made promises but they were false ones. I had no power over you except to call you and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with Allah before". A bitter torment awaits such wrongdoers'. (*Ibrahim:* 22)

The Arabic word "*sultan*" means "power that urges a person to do a certain action". There are two kinds of power: the power of persuasive evidence when a person is urged to do something, while being convinced and the other type is that of coercion which means forcing a person to do a certain act. Therefore, Satan declares to his followers on the Day of Resurrection that he had no power over them, i.e., he had no persuasive evidence to convince them to commit sins, and nor did he have any power to compel them to do such. Rather, they were on the brink of committing sin and he called them and they responded to him. Satan adds, addressing his followers, '…I cannot help you, nor can you help me…' (*Ibrahim:* 22). In other words, Satan confirms that he will not call on any of his followers to save him. The Arabic word "*yasrukh"* here means "to call on someone for refuge and help." Therefore, Satan says he will not save anyone from Allah's punishment and no one will save him from Allah's punishment.

In this way, some of the people of the Book were deluded and ascribed fabricated statements to Allah that did not come from Him and believed in their fabrications. If only their delusion had not been with regards to religion! For delusions in non-religious affairs can be tolerated, but delusion with regards to religious affairs is grave. This is because religion is not confined to a limited period of time; it is permanent because it represents guidance sent from Allah to mankind. If a person experiences failure in any aspect of life due to delusion, his failure will be confined to that particular aspect and will not last for the rest of his worldly life. However, delusion with regards to religion causes permanent loss because such a person has not followed Allah's guidance. Moreover, he will experience loss and torment in the Hereafter.

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا۟ لَن تَمَسَّنَا ٱلنَّارُ إِلَّآ أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَٰتٍ ۖ
وَغَرَّهُمْ فِى دِينِهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

'The Fire will only touch us for a limited number of days.'
The lies they have invented have led them astray in their
own religion [24] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 24)

"Lying" means "telling fabrications deliberately". Allah clarifies the meaning for them, saying that they rejected His rulings and Judgment which are mentioned in His Book claiming that the fire will not touch them except for a limited number of days which represented - as claimed - the number of the days in which they worshipped the Calf. They also said that they were Allah's children and beloved people. They made these fabrications and lies on purpose. If this is their case in the worldly life, what will be their status when Allah gathers them on a day in which there is no doubt? In this respect, Allah says,

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جَمَعْنَٰهُمْ لِيَوْمٍ لَّا رَيْبَ فِيهِ وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ
نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

How will they fare when We gather them together for a Day
of which there is no doubt, when every soul will be paid in
full for what it has done, and they will not be wronged? [25]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 25)

Their lies will be disclosed on the Day of Resurrection, a day wherein Allah will expose all the people who lie, cheat, and make false claims. Allah says that they commit all these misdeeds in the worldly life, in which He has given them free will to do whatever they want, while knowing that He will give good rewards to those who follow His obligations and will punish those who deviate from His obligations. How will they behave when Allah will deprive them of free will on the Day of Resurrection?

In this worldly life, Allah gives people free will and choices between alternatives and has created them in a manner that enables them to control their limbs. Some of them use their limbs in a way that pleases Allah, while others use these limbs in a way that displeases Him. A person’s limbs are subservient to his will, which allows him to choose between different alternatives. The limbs that obey those who deviate from the Path of Allah in the worldly life will disobey them on the Day of Resurrection because the limbs will not be subject to the human will and their nature will change: ‘…on the Day when their own tongues, hands, and feet will testify against them about what they have done. On that Day, Allah will pay them their just due in full– and they will realise that Allah is the Truth that makes everything clear’. (*an-Nur:* 25)

On the Day of Resurrection, the tongue that is used to announce disbelief will witness against a disbeliever, the hand that is used to commit acts of disobedience will witness against its owner and the skin will also testify. In the worldly life, limbs are subject to the people, but they commit sins unwillingly and so Allah says*:* ‘How will they fare when We gather them together for a Day of which there is no doubt, when every soul will be paid in full for what it has done and they will not be wronged?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 25) What will their status be on the day when Allah will gather them in order to hold them to account? It should be taken into consideration that this day will certainly come because there is evidence that confirms that it will come.

Despite their enmity towards Allah, He will not wrong them; rather, He will judge them justly:

قُلِ ٱللَّهُمَّ مَٰلِكَ ٱلْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي ٱلْمُلْكَ مَن تَشَآءُ وَتَنزِعُ
ٱلْمُلْكَ مِمَّن تَشَآءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَن تَشَآءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَن تَشَآءُ ۖ
بِيَدِكَ ٱلْخَيْرُ ۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ٢٦

Say, ‘God, holder of all control, You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hand: You have power over everything [26] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 26)

There is a difference between the Arabic words *mulk* and *milk*. The latter means “a person's ownership of some things, such as his clothes, books...etc”.

But when we refer to possessing a person who possesses properties, we use the word "*mulk*". If the properties possessed are apparent to us, we refer to them as "*'alam al-mulk*", but when we refer to the possession of unseen properties, we call it "*alam al-malakut*". Therefore, the words under discussion are *milk, mulk and malakut*. When Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* revealed Himself to Ibrahim (Abraham), the elect of Allah and revealed to him apparent and unseen matters, He said, 'In this way We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth so that he might be a firm believer'. (*Al-'Imran:* 75)

This means that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* wanted Ibrahim (Abraham) to witness the *malakut* (dominion) of the heavens and the earth, i.e., everything both apparent and unseen to people. The following are the levels of possession: *milk* refers to the case when a person owns his properties, but the owning of a person who owns properties is referred to as *mulk*. Every human being owns some properties and the ownership of all those who possess properties returns to One Owner: Allah. Ownership with regards to human beings refers to the case when a person possesses some properties. It also applies to a person whom Allah gives authority over people and causes to become a king.

As for the divine realm, we see that the One Who possesses every owner and king is Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. No one believes that a person can possess anything in this world without Allah's Will. Every person possesses things according to Allah's Will. If the people go astray, it is inevitable that Allah will place a wicked ruler in authority over them because virtuous people may not excel in chastising people. Allah says, 'In this way, We make some evildoers have power over others through their misdeeds'. (*al-An'am:* 129)

Allah *Glorified is He* intends to reveal that virtuous people may spare themselves the trouble of taking revenge on the evildoers, as He gives a worse tyrant authority over the evildoers. Allah takes revenge for the virtuous people without letting them engage in committing misdeeds. Therefore, Allah says: 'In this way, We make some evildoers have power over others through their misdeeds'. (*al-An'am:* 129)

There is a well-known saying: "Allah gives oppressors authority over other oppressors". If those who were oppressed could gain authority over their oppressors, they would not treat them as harshly as oppressors would treat each other. Allah gives oppressors authority over oppressors and spares benevolent people the trouble of taking revenge from their oppressors. Therefore, there are the words *malik, mulk,* and above all-Malik *Al-mulk.* Allah has not said here that He is *Malik Al-mulk* (King of all dominion), because if we consider the matter of ownership well, we will find that there is no true owner except Allah.

'Say, "Allah, holder of all control"…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) He is in full control of His dominion. No one should imagine that anyone can have authority over Allah's creatures against His Will. However, when people disobey Him, He causes an oppressive ruler to rule them. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith (direct revelation from Allah in the Prophet Muhammad's words): Prophet Muhammad said, 'Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* will roll up the heavens on the Day of Resurrection and then take them in His Right Hand and say, "I am the King! Where are the tyrants? Where are the arrogant people?" Then, He will roll up the Earth in His Left Hand and say: "I am the King! Where are the tyrants? Where are the arrogant people?"'

The believer should not imagine that anyone can take sovereignty from Allah. He gives sovereignty to those who will chastise some people. If the ruler disciplines people oppressively, Allah will send to him someone who will oppress him. Allah may cause the person who has been treated oppressively by this ruler to see him oppressed. This noble verse confirms that Allah Alone is the Lord of all dominion. Allah *Glorified is He* orders His Prophet, Muhammad, saying: "Say, 'Allah, holder of all control'…" (*Al-'Imran:* 26). The word "Allahumma" (Oh, Allah) is itself a linguistic marvel. The Quran was revealed in Arabic and the Arabs of that time were eloquent in speech, oratory, and rhetoric. Allah willed to give the word "Allah" a unique distinction in the Arabic language.

Arabic has a grammatical rule stating that it is not correct to refer to a noun with a definite article using the Arabic word article "*Ya*". The Arabs do not say, "*Ya Al-rajul*" (Oh, Man!), but they say, "*Ya ayyuha Al-rajul*" instead. However, the language that Allah has facilitated for His servants has this divine name distinct in terms of sanctity (Allah), so people can say, "*Ya Allah*" (Oh, Allah). This holy expression is distinct, even with regards to its pronunciation.

This fact was not clear to the Arabs from among the disbelievers of Quraysh, although they were eloquent. This means that Allah makes this holy word distinct, compelling the disbelievers to say along with the believers, "*Ya Allah*" (Oh, Allah).

As for the rest of the nouns which were preceded by definite articles, it is not possible to precede them with "Ya", saying for example, "*Ya Al-Rajul*" or "*Ya Al-'Abbas*", but we should say, "Ya ayyuha Al-rajul" or "*Ya ayyuha Al-'abbas*". Even when calling the Prophet, we do not say, "*Ya Al-Naby*,” instead we must say "Ya ayuha Al-Naby". However, when calling upon Allah, we say "*Ya Allah*" (Oh, Allah), a distinct name to which Allah draws our attention, clarifying that it is specific to Him alone. In addition, no word is prefixed by the Arabic letter "*Ta*'" to make an oath, except the holy name Allah, as we say "*tallahi*" (by Allah), but this Arabic letter never precedes any other name to make an oath. For example, "*ta-Zayd*" and "*ta-‘Amr*" are impossible to find in classical Arabic.

The Arabic letter "*Ta*" is not used for making an oath except with the Divine Name. In addition, there is no proper noun in Arabic with which the vocative "*Ya*" can be replaced by the Arabic letter "*Mim*", except the Divine Name. We say "*Allahumma*"; this indicates that the name itself has the distinct features of the One holding it. ‘Say: “Oh Allah!..’”. (*Al-‘Imran:* 26) The removal of the vocative letter shows us that Allah is the Only One Who is called without a vocative letter. Some dialects combine the "*Ya*" and the "*Mim*,” as in the poem:

If a calamity ever befalls me, I call *Ya Allahum Ya Allahumma* (Oh Allah! Oh Allah!).

This indicates the distinction pertaining to the One Who is most distinct.

‘Say: “…holder of all control”…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). A person may ask, "Why does Allah not say "*Malik Al-mulk*" (King of all dominion) here?” We must be aware that a day will come when no one will possess anything but Allah. Therefore, He will be the Only Possessor and He says: ‘He is Exalted in rank, the Lord of the Throne. He sends Revelations with His teachings to whichever of His servants He will, in order to warn of the Day of Meeting, the Day when they will come out and nothing about them will be concealed from Allah. Who has control today? Allah, the One, the All Powerful'. (*Ghafir:* 15-16) Allah's saying, 'Say: "…holder of all control"…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) clarifies that Allah's ownership is eternal, omnipotent, mighty and confirmed. If Allah had described Himself as the *"Malik Al-mulk*" (King of all dominion) here, it would have meant that some people would hold ownership alongside Him; rather, He alone is Lord of all dominion. Allah is Lord of all dominion, as He may grant it to whom He wills and take it from whom he wills. This meaning comes after the establishment of clear reasoning and after some of the people of the Book abstained from applying Allah's rule when they were called to it. Some of them obstinately turned away from Allah's rule. They justified this by claiming that they were Allah's children and beloved people and that the fire would not touch them, except for a limited number of days.

Out of Allah's kindness, He gave His servants choices: either to follow Allah's rule, or to follow one's vain desire. However, they made the wrong choice and followed their vain desire. Consequently, Allah informed them of the day that will come, a day on which no one will have any power or choice. The right of making a choice exists in this worldly life, so people must make the right choices in light of Allah's guidance.

In this respect, there is an example which the prophetic biography stated: On the Day of the Battle of the Confederates, all the enemies of *Da`wah* (the call to submit to Allah in Islam) gathered together and the Jews plotted and vowed dissension among themselves. Then, Prophet Muhammad wanted to dig a trench around Medina, upon Salman Al-Faresi's advice. It is worth mentioning that a trench is a large hole in the ground which is dug up to impede passing. The fighters knew that a horse can leap a certain distance while digging the trench, the believers tried to make it wider than a horse's leap. Prophet Muhammad's wise leadership should be taken into consideration; when Salman Al-Faresi suggested that the trench should be dug- and it seems that he got the idea from his homeland, a land of disbelievers- Prophet Muhammad accepted the idea and the Muslims carried it out.

Not everything the disbelievers did was rejected by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* rather, he put into practice any useful action, whether it was done by disbelievers or not. Prophet Muhammad felt that such digging would be arduous because of the rocky and hard nature of the land in some areas. Therefore, he allocated a piece of land amounting to forty cubits long to each group of ten companions. In this way, Prophet Muhammad allotted work and responsibility and did not leave it up to each group for fear that they might depend too much on each other.

Assigning responsibility means that every group knows the size of the task that it will carry out, along with the other groups. A person may ask, "Why did not Prophet Muhammad allocate responsibilities to every individual?" The reason is that Prophet Muhammad's insight and good Management made him aware of the fact that the Companions who would dig the trench were not all of equal strength. Therefore, he wanted every weak person to be supported by nine companions.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not make the matter open, but he specified responsibilities for his companions. He did not specify this responsibility for each individual in order that the strong would help the weak. Prophet Muhammad veiled the weakness of some companions with their brothers’ strength. If a weak person finds himself in a group of ten brothers, carrying things and digging together, he will feel a sense of love and comradery towards them and the strong will aid the weak.

'Amr ibn 'Awf belonged to the group of ten Companions, among whom was Salman Al-Faresi. When they came to dig, they encountered a piece of land called "Al-ka'ud" (insurmountable) which was a piece of land that was very hard and could not be dug up easily, while digging the earth, a digger might find the land soft and easy to dig, but if he encountered a hard patch of land impossible to dig with his spade, it was said that the land was insurmountable. When 'Amr ibn 'Awf, Salman Al-Faresi, Al-Mughirah and others encountered this rocky and insurmountable piece of land, they said to Salman, "Go and tell Prophet Muhammad about our problem”. We learn from this situation the lesson that when someone is given a responsibility and encounters a problem preventing him from carrying it out, he must refer it to the one who assigned the responsibility to him.

Salman Al-Faresi went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who accompanied him to the place and struck the rocky land with the spade. Upon doing so, sparks flew up due to the strength of the strike of the iron against the rock. Prophet Muhammad exclaimed, 'Allah is the Greatest! The palaces of Basra in the Levant will be conquered'. Then, he struck the rock again and said, 'Allah is the Greatest! The palaces of Al-Hamra' in Byzantium will be conquered'. He struck the rock a third time and said, 'Allah is the Greatest! The palaces of Sana'a in Yemen will be conquered!' It seems that every time he struck the land, Allah showed him one of the places Islam would conquer. When these statements reached the enemies of Prophet Muhammad, they said to the Companions, 'Muhammad gives you a reason to hope for conquest of the palaces of Sana'a in Yemen, Al-Hamra in Byzantium and Basra, while you are not even able to meet us in battle'. Following this incident, Allah revealed the verse, 'Say, "Allah, holder of all control, You give control to whomever You will and remove it from whomever You will…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 26).

The matter is intention on the part of the believers, as they should have the intention to do a good deed, as much as they can. If they do so, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* will help them. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One who gives control and who removed control from the disbelieving rulers of Persia, Byzantium and Sana'a and gave it to Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah and his companions. He also removed it from Quraysh and the Jews of Medina, when they desired it. Allah's saying: 'Say: "…and remove it from whomever You will…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) makes us wonder: what does the Arabic word "naz'" (meaning "remove") mean here? It means "plucking out by force." Kings usually desire to cling on to their thrones because some of those who hold power view it as a privilege without paying attention to responsibility, hard work, or concern for human rights. They forget to ask themselves about how they benefit people. They do not pay attention to the necessity of fearing Allah with regards to the people's rights and exerting every possible effort to protect human rights.

There are rulers who are avid for power, so this implies that they regard it is a privilege, not a burden. In this regard, we should consider what 'Umar ibn

Al-Khattab said, when the people said to him, ‘If we lose you – and we hope not to lose you – we will appoint 'Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, as he is a very pious person. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, ‘It is enough for the family of Al-Khattab that one Man from amongst them should be asked concerning the *ummah* of Muhammad’. He said this because ruling in Islam is hardship and toil.

Allah says, ‘Say: “…and remove it from whomever You will…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26) to draw our attention to those who cling on to authority and so Allah seizes it from them. A believer should consider the nations that were very prosperous and powerful and then power was removed from their rulers for the simplest causes, all because it was the Will of the Supreme Creator Whose will cannot be overturned. Allah either takes power from this kind of ruler, or takes them from their position of power. We see that some rulers attempt to keep their power so that it becomes difficult for anyone to dethrone them easily, but Allah removes power from them whenever He wills.

Then, Allah says*:* ‘Say: “…You elevate whomever You will and humble whomever You will…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). Power is not restricted only to rulers, but there are some people surrounding every ruler known as "shadow rulers.” This means that they also hold power and authority, but not in apparent manner, and these shadow rulers are often a source of evil. They hide behind the king’s authority so they do whatever they want and others follow their orders. When power is seized from them, those who were oppressed will doubtlessly be elevated by Allah, while the oppressors will be abased by Allah. Therefore, Allah’s saying ‘Say: “…You give control to whomever You will and remove it from whomever You will…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26) is followed by ‘Say: “…You elevate whomever You will and humble whomever You will…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). Rulers are surrounded by those who enjoy their power and influence, yet when the authority of this ruler is removed, these people appear suddenly. This happens in every age.

‘Say: “…You elevate whomever You will and humble whomever You will. All that is good lies in Your hand…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26) We notice here that people regard the blessing of dominion and power as good and the removal of power and authority is bad. Let me say to them then: the removal of power is bad for those from whom it is taken, but it is good for whomever it is granted to. It could also be good for a person from whom it has been removed because sometimes Allah has removed power from him to lessen the burden of his oppression. If the deposed ruler is wise, he will accept this and say, "Allah wants to remove my burden so that I may repent".

Therefore, if individual and general cases are considered, we will find that the blessing of power and the honour and elevation that follow it, as well as the removal of power and the abasement that follows it, are all a source of ultimate goodness. Therefore, Allah says here, 'Say: "…All that is good lies in Your hand…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). If all people consider matters carefully, they will find that Allah is the One Who gives and takes power and the One Who elevates and abases, causing goodness in all cases. Therefore, He says, 'Say: "…All that is good lies in Your hand. You have power over everything…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 26)

Giving power requires preparation and logical causes. Sometimes, gaining power takes place by means of military or political coups and the removal of power also needs the same effort. Allah clarifies this meaning, saying that it is not a difficult matter for His absolute, omnipotent power, for He does not handle things by work or endeavour; He merely says "Be" and it is so. Then, Allah brings evidence from the His signs in the universe which prove the truthfulness of His saying, 'Say: "…You have power over everything…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). Allah says,

تُولِجُ ٱلَّيۡلَ فِي ٱلنَّهَارِ وَتُولِجُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فِي ٱلَّيۡلِۖ وَتُخۡرِجُ ٱلۡحَيَّ مِنَ
ٱلۡمَيِّتِ وَتُخۡرِجُ ٱلۡمَيِّتَ مِنَ ٱلۡحَيِّۖ وَتَرۡزُقُ مَن تَشَآءُ بِغَيۡرِ حِسَابٖ ٢٧

You merge night into day and day into night; You bring the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living; You provide limitlessly for whoever You will' [27] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 27)

Allah says that this is a type of phenomena which comes frequently to you: the night and day, and life and death. We are all aware of the phenomena of night and day because they are miraculous signs. Allah says, 'Say: "…You merge night into day and day into night…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27). Allah did not fix the hours of night and day, but He *Glorified and Exalted is He* willed that the night may sometimes last five hours more than the day and that the day may exceed the number of hours of the night by five hours. The question is: Do these five hours decrease from the night or the day suddenly? Does the day become seven hours after it has been twelve hours long suddenly? No; this change happens gradually, in a manner that is unnoticed. There is a type of motion called "clockwork motion.” When we examine a clock’s movement, we see that it depends on several cogs, each of which has a moment when it stops, and when it stops, we must wind it again so it continues to work. If we examine the minute hand carefully, we will be able to notice this. There is a moment of rest between the movements of the minute hand from one minute to another. This type of movement is called "clockwork motion.” There is another type of motion called "streamlined motion,” where movement exists at all times, which is the case of human, plant and animal growth.

The new-born child does not grow from morning to evening in a noticeable manner. He could grow only as much as a millimetre during the whole day. The infant does not have a constant weight or height for twenty-four hours and then suddenly grows at the end of the day. Rather, the infant’s daily growth is spread out over the whole day. This process requires extreme precision in the distribution of the elements of the event over the elements of time, an action which shows the magnificent power of creation, which the human being will be forever incapable of replicating.

I said once that if a person looks at his newborn child and keeps an eye on him constantly, he will not notice his child’s growth at all. However, if a person is apart from his child for a month or several months and returns, he will be able to see very clearly the total growth which his child has experienced during his absence. If a person who sows a certain plant watches its growth, he will never be able to notice the growth of that plant because the parts grow in a manner which the human being cannot notice.

We should be aware that anything that grows can also shrink and the human being cannot notice that directly, either. There are other examples in life, from which we will consider the following example: when scientists began to photograph the earth from satellites, the first photograph of New York City was an image of an undistinguished speck. When the scientists enlarged this image, the details emerged, such as streets, etc. Where were the streets in this tiny speck? The streets were shrunk in the image in a manner that was impossible for the human senses to discern and so it was necessary to enlarge the image in order for a person to see it. Distant things appear small to us, but when we approach them, we see them as larger.

Therefore, Allah's saying, 'Say: "…You merge night into day and day into night…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27) alerts human attention to the fact that night and day do not have defined boundaries splitting them equally. Rather, by His Omnipotent Power, Allah merges night into day and merges day into night. The meaning of the Arabic word "tulij" is "merge or cause to enter into". For example, the *mue'dhdhin* calls for the *Maghrib* (sunset) Prayer on a given day at five o'clock and calls for it on another day at seven o'clock. This does not happen suddenly and sunset does not change from five o'clock to seven o'clock from one day suddenly to the next, but this happens gradually and smoothly. We take lessons from these facts.

Oh Servant of Allah, when you see a king ruling over a stable civilisation, you should know that subtle events which cannot be noticed by the eye eat away at that dominion until the day arrives when it will come to an end. Accordingly, civilizations collapse after reaching the peak of advancement, while their populations were attaining great potentials and overwhelming capabilities because the causes of collapse have been eating away at these civilisations from inside.

Allah draws our attention to the magnificence of His Omnipotence and the accuracy and precision of His creation by the example of night and day: 'Say: "…You merge night into day and day into night…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27). Then, Allah sets another example, saying, 'Say: "…You bring the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27). This is absolute Omnipotent Power, without the employment of means.

If we pause for consideration here, we will see how we have been guided by the discovery of some of the secrets of the universe which Allah has revealed to some of His servants.

Science has arrived at the fact that everything has its own unique life - we see that many processes occur inside the leaves of the plant and each one has its unique life. In addition, some interactions occur inside each atom and each one has its own unique life. "Interactions" imply movement and it is well-known that movement manifests life essentially; there is a difference between how life is perceived by ordinary people and how it is perceived by educated people. At the time the Quran was revealed, an ordinary person did not know that there is life in a sperm and in a seed; only scientists and knowledgeable people knew such things. Ordinary people did not know that the seed has a visible life and has unseen growth. In addition, they did not know that there is a difference between a living object and an object that can be alive.

For example, the date pits that we take and plant to grow palm trees remain simply as pits until someone takes them and places them in the right environment to enable palm trees to grow from them.

The date pits are potentially alive. When we consider grains of soil, we are not able to plant them just anywhere to produce something from them. However, grains of soil have certain energy. Scientists say that the energy contained in the heads of the sticks of a single box of matches is sufficient to enable an electric train to circle the world for several years.

Scientists are aware of these facts, but ordinary people do not know them. When ordinary people listen to Allah's saying, 'Say: "…You bring the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27), they would say that an example of this is date pits, for they are aware that palm trees grow from date pits. However, scientists have performed research and discovered that there is life within the date pits and identified how they grow. Scientists know that everything in existence has a life that suits its purpose. Life is not only apparent movement and obvious growth; rather, there is life in everything.

Ordinary people can find clear examples of the fact that Allah brings the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living. As for scientists, they are aware of Allah's Omnipotence through their awareness of the fact that everything has life. If we take some of the soil in which seeds are planted and place it in isolation, nothing will come from it. This is what scientists describe as "dead in the first degree." As for pits that can be taken and placed in this soil, scientists term it "dead in the second degree."

When we move the dead in the first degree to be used as a means of planting something dead in the second degree, the results of this indicate the life present in both the soil and the pits. The Quran handles this issue with great precision because when the Quran mentions things that intellects might be curious about, it handles them in such a way that all intellects accept including the elite and the ordinary people. This is because the Quran deals with any issue using comprehensive language that is acceptable to all. Then, the human intellect discovers new details about the matter.

For example, the Quran did not say to us that the atom has energy and life within it, as well as charges that produce a certain type of power. Rather, it handled the atom and other matters with the elucidation of divine omnipotence, especially that those things were not associated with any controversy regarding any ruling or guidance. If the human being had been aware that the atom contained life within it at the time of the Revelation of the Quran, this information would not add anything to him. Moreover, if someone proved that atoms do not contain life within them, this would not affect the rulings of the religion. If we consider the Quran intelligently and understand the significance of its words, we will find that the word "life" has an opposite, which is "death". Allah *Glorified is He* has not used the word "death" in several verset, replacing it with "to perish", such as His saying: '…so that those who were to perish might perish after seeing a clear proof and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof– Allah is All-hearing and All-seeing.' (*al-An'am:* 42).

The word "perish" is used here as the opposite of living. The word "death' is not used here because the Creator is aware of His servants and knows that they differ concerning the issue of death: some of them define a person who does not move, sense, or grow as "dead." However, this dead body has a form of life which suits it such as the life existing inside the atoms, the grain of sand, or that of any dead thing. In this way, we understand from the previous verse that the opposite of living is perishing. Allah *Glorified is He* says the following about the Hereafter, to inform us of what will occur on the Day of Resurrection: '…Everything will perish, except His Face' (*al-Qasas:* 88). Allah has excluded His Face or Divine Entity from the things that will perish. Since everything will perish, this means that everything is alive even if we are not aware of its life. Therefore, true life is present in all things in the manner that suits them: sometimes you recognise it and sometimes not.

Accordingly, Allah's saying, 'Say: "…You bring the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27) can be understood according to how ordinary people will perceive it, or to how the elite (the scientists) will perceive it. This is an apparent matter that can be perceived by seeing the night merging into day and day merging into night. In the Arabic language, a Man's closest friends are termed his "*walijah*" (confidants) which is derived from the Arabic word which Allah uses when referring to the night that merges into the day and the day which merges into the night. This is because friends are closely interlocked together in friendship; therefore, if any person wants to know the innermost character of any other person, he should meet his friends, who closely mix with him.

In this way, the concept of night's merging into the day and day's merging into the night is completely clear and the issue of life and death is handled with expressions that both ordinary people and the elite can understand. If these phenomena reveal part of Allah's Omnipotence, a person can never find it far-fetched that Allah also has the power to give power to whom He wills, to elevate who He wills, to take power from who He wills and to abase who He wills. Evidence has come from the signs inherent in the universe, which we witness every day, first-hand.

'Say: "Allah, holder of all control, You give control to whomever You will and remove it from whomever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hand: You have power over everything."' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) Allah is the One Who has established all these things in His Universe, which are all good even if their goodness is not apparent to some people.

When a person sees that his son has a medical problem, he takes him quickly to the doctor and asks him to do all the necessary measures to restore the health of his son even if it be a surgery. The father is doing what is good for his son, though the treatment might cause the child to feel pain. If this is true in regards to the relationship between two created beings, what about the Supreme Creator who does what He wills in His creation giving power and removing it, and elevating and abasing people? All of these things must lead to goodness. Allah's signs bear witness that He is able to do what He wills; the next verse (Quranic verse) states it as such: 'Say: "…You merge night into day and day into night; You bring the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living; You provide for whomever You will beyond reckoning…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27).

If a person is aware of the night merging into the day, or the bringing of the living out of the dead, he must be aware of His sustenance, for all human beings have an inevitable relationship with their sustenance and so Allah mentions this clear reality: 'Say: "…You provide for whomever You will beyond reckoning…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27). When a person hears the Arabic word *"hisab*" (reckoning), he will know, as we have said previously, that this word means "a clarification of that which is for him and that which is against him."

When Allah says, 'Say: "…You provide for whomever You will beyond reckoning…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27) we know that "reckoning" necessitates the presence of someone who reckons, someone who is reckoned and something to be reckoned for. When Allah says, 'Say: "…You provide for whomever You will beyond reckoning…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 27), we must consider: from whom and for whom? From where does this sustenance come and where does it go? It comes from Allah and goes wherever He decrees, as He is the Sustainer and Allah whom no one can hold to account. He is the One Who reckons us all, has no partner, and does whatever He wills.

Allah performs reckoning for mankind and He does not only give them sustenance according to how hard they work; rather, sometimes He provides them with sustenance that is greater than what their efforts have earned. Allah may grant you something that you have not expected because "reckoning" entails holding an account of the matters that a person expects and plans for; for example, when a farmer reckons the yield of the land which he sows, or a craftsman expects a certain income from his craft. This is considered reckoning, but sometimes a person finds that Allah has given him sustenance, without any reckoning, or he may expect to receive something, but he does not get it.

For example, it is said that a certain country announced that it had sown enough wheat to suffice the entire world, but when the crop ripened, a storm came and destroyed it and the country had to import wheat from abroad.

Those who had announced that they would feed the people ended up being fed by the people.

This proves the veracity of Allah’s saying: ‘…beyond all reckoning’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 27). Allah does not count the people's work to provide them with sustenance equal to it, but He sometimes gives them more than what the effort they have exerted deserves.

We see our brothers whom Allah has blessed with oil wealth which sprang without any effort from them. Allah wished to show people His omnipotent power and that sustenance is in His Hand. We see people pointing to the oil-bearing regions and accusing the people there of laziness and we find that Allah has harnessed to them active people in order to work for them. When Allah blessed the Arab regions with oil, the other countries which regard themselves "developed" have become in need of them, this is provision without reckoning.

These reflections confirm to a believer Allah’s Absolute Omnipotence. He has created the means and has not left people to control matters; He has given them to the human being to make use of, though He may not grant him sustenance in accordance with his efforts. Allah may provide people by other means, for which they did not reckon. One who considers his affairs and the affairs of those he knows, will find that this matter prevails throughout creation: Allah grants sustenance beyond all reckoning; He does not give people their sustenance according to the efforts they exert. He gives without reckoning on the part of the human being because the scales by which a person measures could be nullified by incidents which he does not expect.

Therefore, ‘Say: “…You provide for whomever You will beyond reckoning…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 27) means that Allah’s Absolute Power over sustenance is beyond all reckoning from any authority higher than His autority that might question Him. Moreover, He gives sustenance to His creatures, often more than the effort they have exerted would earn. He also may give people sustenance that they do not expect; everything is under Allah’s control and He is the Lord of all dominion Who gives to whom He wills, elevates whom He wills, causes day to merge into night and grants sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.

Therefore, the foolish person is the one who gives allegiance to someone who has no authority and abandons this Supreme Authority (Allah).

Let us consider this issue of faith: since all these matters are under Allah's control, people should not give allegiance to His foes because everything is in His hand. Allah says, 'You who believe: do not take for your intimates such outsiders as spare no effort to ruin you and want to see you suffer. Their hatred is evident from their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made Our Revelations clear for you; will you not use your reason?' (*Al-'Imran:* 118)

Allah commands us not to give allegiance except to Him. If a person makes reckoning for everything, he will not give allegiance to anything except the Possessor of all of these things. He should beware of relying on an enemy to the Omnipotent Power which is in control of everything in existence, and of relying on Allah's enemies by taking allies from amongst them. If he does so, he is not of sound mind. Allah says,

لَّا يَتَّخِذِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ أَوْلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۖ وَمَن
يَفْعَلْ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ فِى شَىْءٍ إِلَّآ أَن تَتَّقُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ تُقَىٰةً ۗ
وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسَهُۥ ۗ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨﴾

The believers should not make the disbelievers their allies
rather than other believers – anyone who does such a thing
will isolate himself completely from God – except when you
need to protect yourselves from them. God warns you to
beware of Him: the Final Return is to God [28]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 28)

A person will not take a warring disbeliever as an ally unless he sees signs of strength in this disbeliever and weakness in himself. The Arabic word "*wali*" means "ally". When we say, "Allah, *Huwa Al-Wali*" (Allah is the ally), we use the word in its broadest sense. However, when we use it to refer to people, we use it in the limited and relative sense. Allah says, 'Allah is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light…' (*al-Baqara:* 257). Allah is an "ally" in the broadest sense of the word. He also says, 'But for those who are on Allah's side, there is no fear, nor shall they grieve' (*Yunus:* 62).

The singular of "*awlia' Allah*" (Allah's allies) is "*waly Allah*" (Allah's ally); a believer is Allah's ally. Allah says, 'In that situation, the only protection is that of Allah, the True Allah: He gives the best rewards and the best outcome' (*al-Anfal:* 44). We notice here that allegiance is sometimes attributed to Allah and sometimes to Allah's servants. It is understood and well known that Allah is the ally of a believer, but how can a believer be an ally to Allah? We can understand the matter in this way: Allah is the helper of His believing servants, so He is the ally of those who believe, i.e., their helper and supporter. The allies of Allah are those who support Allah and so He helps them. Allah *Glorified is He* says*:*

'You who believe! If you support Allah, He will help you and make you stand firm' (*Muhammad:* 7). Is Allah not able to take revenge on those who fight against Muslims, all at once and cause them to perish? However, Allah says, 'Fight them: Allah will punish them at your hands, He will disgrace them, He will help you to conquer them, He will heal the believers' feelings' (*at-Tawba:* 14). If Allah were to fight them, His fighting would be a hidden affair, and they might say that this is a natural phenomenon. Therefore, He caused the believers to fight the warring disbelievers who considered them weak. So, sometimes the word "*wali*" means "helper" and sometimes it means "the one who is helped" because if a person supports Allah and He becomes this person's ally, this means that Allah is the Helper and this person is the one who is helped.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants His religion to prevail by His servants' belief in Him; otherwise, He would have compelled all humanity to obey Him by His Omnipotent Power, as no one can escape Allah's Power. It is incumbent on a person to think deeply and know that his life from birth to death is under Allah*'s* control: 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though most people do not know it' (*Ghafir:* 57). Nothing escapes the Creator's Will. Allah handles the affairs of the motion of the heavens and the earth with the strength of His Might and Absolute power.

Nothing escapes His Hand. As for humanity, He wishes for the people to believe in Him and love Him, but faith is left up to a person's choice. Certainly, Allah can make all people believers, but He wishes to see who will believe in Him, while having the option of not believing.

The subduing of things shows Allah's absolute power and the human being's free will shows their love of Allah, who wants us to see His power and come to His Path (Islam, submission to Allah) out of love. Therefore, He says: 'The believers should not make the disbelievers their allies rather than other believers…' (*Al-'Imran:* 28). The meaning of this verse is that if the warring disbelievers appear to be allies to the believers, they will try to make them feel at ease with them. Perhaps the warring disbelievers may approach the believers stealthily and with subtlety and false affection. Since they are warring disbelievers, they do not love the believers, as there is no meeting between faith and warring disbelief. Therefore, Allah says, '…anyone who does such a thing will isolate himself completely from Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 28).

Whoever takes the warring disbelievers as allies isolates himself from Allah because he thinks that these warring disbelievers can help him. Therefore, Allah warns us and clarifies the matter for the believers saying that they should not be deceived by the power of the warring disbelievers and take them as allies. A believer should not say that he has nothing else to do, because Allah wants him to do his best. Therefore, He says, 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including war-horses, to frighten off Allah's enemies and yours and warn others unknown to you but known to Allah. Whatever you give in Allah's cause will be repaid to you in full and you will not be wronged' (*al-An'am:* 60).

Allah did not ask the believers to prepare that by which they will defeat the warring disbelievers. He says, 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster…' (*al-Anfal:* 60). A believer must exert every possible effort and trust Allah. Therefore, there are certain things that the intellect might question, but Allah reassures the believers concerning them. He tells the believers not to panic and not to think that the large numbers of the warring disbelievers can defeat them and not to say that "there is nothing we can do." Allah has taught us what will protect us from this situation and so He says, '…I shall put terror into the hearts of the [warring] disbelievers– strike above their necks and strike all their fingertips!...’ (*al-Anfal:* 12)

When Allah puts terror into the hearts of these warring disbelievers, what could they do, however large their numbers and preparations? Is this not the end of the matter? Terror is one of Allah’s soldiers. The believers must not take allies from among the warring disbelievers, in preference to the believers so that the saying of Allah may not apply to him: ‘…I shall put terror into the hearts of the [warring] disbelievers– strike above their necks and strike all their fingertips…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 28). Allah then gives an exception to this: ‘…except when you need to protect yourselves from them. Allah warns you to beware of Him: the Final Return is to Allah.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 28)

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* gives guidance to the human being, who is one of His creatures and He knows all his instincts, emotions and thoughts and that circumstances may be greater than he can bear. Therefore, Allah treats him as a creature with limited abilities. In another verse, Allah gives another exception, saying: ‘…if anyone does so on such a day– unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting group– he incurs the wrath of Allah and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination!’ (*al-An‘am:* 16)

Allah says in this regard, ‘The believers should not make the (warring) disbelievers their allies, rather than other believers– anyone who does such a thing will isolate himself completely from Allah– except when you need to protect yourselves from them…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 28).

Tuqah means “protection”. They may be extremely powerful and it might be unlikely that a believer could gain victory over the warring disbelievers. In this case, a believer may seek protection from their evil by seeming to be allied with them. Concealment is a concession from Allah. It is related that Musaylamah, a false prophet and liar, brought two Muslims and said to one of them: ‘Do you testify that Muhammad is a Messenger of Allah?’ One believer said, ‘Yes’. Musaylamah said: ‘Do you testify that I am a Messenger of Allah?’ The believer said, ‘Yes’. Musaylamah brought the other Muslim and said, ‘Do you testify that Muhammad is a Messenger of Allah?’ The second believer said, ‘Yes’. Musaylamah said, ‘Do you testify that I am a Messenger of Allah?’ The second believer said, ‘I am deaf’. How could a believer answer him by claiming to be deaf? Musaylamah knew he was feigning deafness, so he took him and killed him. The matter was raised before Prophet Muhammad. What did he say? He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘As for the one who was killed, he said the truth openly, so glad tidings for him. As for the other person, he made use of Allah’s concession (to conceal his faith). So, concealment is a concession and announcing the truth is a virtuous act’. 'Ammar ibn Yasir made use of this concession, whereas Bilal ibn Rabah chose to bear the hardship.

Let us consider the wisdom of legislation in this matter. Every principle of goodness came to counter a Manifestation of evil. This principle required guidance from a wiser being and demanded firm conviction and strong will and the guidance needed to be borne. In order that it could remain for humanity, strong will was required so that a believer could face warring adversaries. If Allah had not allowed concealment with His saying, ‘…with the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith…’ (*an-Nahl:* 106), we would truly have to sacrifice for Allah’s Religion by giving our lives easily in Allah’s cause. But if every believer took this stance, then who would carry Allah’s knowledge to others? For this reason, Allah legislated resorting to concealment in order that some believers remain to hold the Message. He established sacrifice for the sake of the faith, and concealment for the sake of preserving the faith. Allah brought two matters: standing in the face of falsehood and achieving martyrdom for His cause, and concealment of one’s religion to protect some people so that His Guidance would not be lost if a tyrant came to put an end to all the believers. Therefore, Allah legislated that which would preserve self-sacrifice for some believers and preserve others to carry His Religion. Allah desired that His guidance would fill the entire earth and be passed down through generations. If He had not allowed concealment with His saying, ‘…with the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject Allah after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of Allah upon them and a grievous punishment awaiting them’ (*an-Nahl:* 106).

Accordingly, there is no allegiance between a believer and a warring disbelieving people except if he fears something from them because Allah warns us to beware of Him, saying: ‘…Allah warns you to beware of Him:

the Final Return is to Allah' (*Al-'Imran:* 28). A believer should beware of following the way that the disbelievers present to him pretending to make use of concealment. A believer should know that the reason for permitting disguising one's faith is to protect the guidance and to save oneself for the purpose of preserving the path of faith. If a person follows this guidance in this regard, he is really considered a true believer. Allah says, '…Allah warns you to beware of Him: the Final Return is to Allah' (*Al-'Imran:* 28).

Allah orders the believers not to conceal their faith in order to attain something that they desire, however. Allah set certain limits for this matter, saying, '…with the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject Allah after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief, will have the wrath of Allah upon them and a grievous punishment awaiting them' (*an-Nahl:* 106). The main objective should always be Allah's cause, which is why the believers should beware of fooling themselves. Then, Allah says,

قُلْ إِن تُخْفُوا۟ مَا فِى صُدُورِكُمْ أَوْ تُبْدُوهُ يَعْلَمْهُ ٱللَّهُ ۗ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِى
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

Say [Prophet], 'God knows every- thing that is in your hearts, whether you conceal or reveal it; He knows everything in the heavens and earth; God has power over all things' [29] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 29)

This is because a disbelieving person may misuse concealment, but a believer never does this because the warning in this verse is clear. A person may say, "Concealing that which is in the heart is known to Allah. As for revealing that which is in the heart, people also know it. So why is this saying mentioned?" This beautiful verse was revealed because someone may imagine that because Allah is unseen, He only knows the unseen and not the apparent. However, Allah is not veiled from one place by another or from one time by another. A believer should beware of imagining that because Allah is unseen and He only knows the unseen. Allah knows both the unseen and that which is apparent.

Then, Allah says,

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُّحْضَرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِن
سُوٓءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُۥٓ أَمَدًۢا بَعِيدًا ۗ وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
نَفْسَهُۥ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ رَءُوفٌۢ بِٱلْعِبَادِ ﴿٣٠﴾

On the Day when every soul finds all the good it has
done present before it, it will wish all the bad it has done
to be far, far away. God warns you to beware of Him,
but God is compassionate towards His servants [30]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 30)

An action is a phenomenon which has a beginning and an end. How, then, can a person come on the Day of Resurrection and find his previous actions? There is no doubt that he will find the recompense for his actions. Perhaps Allah will enable some later people to discover the secrets of existence and make more additions to the explanation of this verse. It is now possible to make a recording of an action and after a time, a person may show another person that which he did and said, recorded in a way that can be viewed later. If we humans can do this with our capabilities, what about Allah's Capabilities? There is no doubt that they are beyond ours, as He knows everything in the heart and in the heavens and earth. Allah's wisdom encompasses the entire universe, as He says, 'He has the keys to the unseen: no one knows them but Him. He knows all that is in the land and sea. No leaf falls without His knowledge, nor is there a single grain in the darkness of the earth, or anything, fresh or withered, that is not written in a clear Record'. (*al-An'am:* 59)

Allah ends this verse with His saying, '…Allah has power over all things' (*Al-'Imran:* 29). He knows the people's heedlessness and so warns them of the absoluteness of His Power, as He says in the previous verse '…You have power over all things' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). We are Allah's creatures and He is the Highest Power, able to do anything and will bring to all people a record of their reckoning on the Day of Resurrection: 'As for him who is given his Record in his right hand, he will say: "Here, read my Record!"' (*al-Haqqa:* 19). So, bearing this point in mind, one should remember the Day he will be brought to justice and find "…all the good that he has done…" (*Al-'Imran:* 30), being provided with the reward of his actions. As for the evil deed a person has done, he will wish that there was a great distance between him and his evil and will say to himself: “If only it had not been so!”

Allah *Most High and Glorified is He* says*:* ‘…And Allah warns you against Himself (His Punishment) and Allah is full of Kindness to (His) servants’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 30). Here Allah repeats the warning so that we are mindful of His Absolute Power. But at the same time, He is also the Allah of Mercy and He is Compassionate and Merciful. Then, Allah says*:*

قُلْ إِن كُنتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ ٱللَّهَ فَٱتَّبِعُونِى يُحْبِبْكُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ
لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

Say, ‘If you love God, follow me, and God will love
you and forgive you your sins; God is most forgiving,
most merciful’ [31] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 31)

We must take note that the word “Say” in the Quran indicates that what follows is a Message that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is passing on from his Lord; it is indeed a Message of command directed to those concerned with it (i.e. mankind, the believers, etc.). But some people whose hearts are deviated from the Truth might say, “It was possible for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to simply say ‘If you (really) love Allah, follow me and Allah will love you…’ without the word “Say”. To such people, we say: if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had done that, he would have thus been delivering a Message without properly carrying out the command itself (from his Lord) Why? Because the command is in the word “Say” and the subject of command here is “If you (really) love Allah, follow me”. So, this makes it clear to us that in any situation of divine command from Allah preceded with the word “Say”, what was expected of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was to deliver both the command from Allah and the Message itself (i.e. the subject of command), which gives an indication that whatever he (Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed is a direct Message from Allah.

Some people claim that the word “Say” should be removed from the Quran so that instead of saying, for instance, ‘Say: He is Allah, the One and Only’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), we should simply say “He is Allah, the One and Only”. To those people, we say: This claim reveals your desire to see Prophet Muhammad delivering only what is commanded and enjoined, detached from the wording and expression of command itself.

Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* ‘Say [Oh Muhammad to mankind]: “If you (really) love Allah, follow me and Allah will love you”’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 31) What does this Quranic verse indicate? No doubt, some people claim that they love Allah, but they do not follow Allah in what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought. It is as though they draw a distinction between love for Allah and abidance by His commandments. In truth, they should realise that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Mighty Creator and Sustainer and this is a blessing which Man should be grateful for. And at the same time, He has favoured Man (His creature) with responsibility, the benefit of which all returns to him (as a creature of Allah), not to Allah, the Source of responsibility, and this is another blessing.

Allah *Glorified is He* is not in need of anything or of anyone. By making us responsible, Allah wants us to follow the laws that make life better for human beings. We have mentioned before the example of tools made by humans. As we know, any tool designed by an engineer is accompanied by a pamphlet or a brochure that gives information about the product and its safe use. The pamphlet serves as a guide, with instructions of “do’s and don’ts”, for the safe use of the tool.

So, as we know, having a list of rules for the safe use of a particular tool and distributing them in a small booklet is for the benefit of those who use the tool. This is with regards to Man-made products, so what about Almighty Allah’s design, and creation? The aspect of Allah’s Blessing for Man is reflected in His creation, sustenance and His choice to make Man religiously responsible. So, Allah thus made Man’s responsibility a means for realizing the wisdom behind Allah’s Creation and His Sustenance. If Allah had not fashioned our life on a certain system, guarded by laws and regulations, the whole aspect of living would have been corrupted. One of Allah’s perfect blessings upon His creatures is that He laid down for us a system of religious responsibility. So, if Man, Allah’s servant, with his recognition of Allah’s blessings through His Creation and Sustenance, has realised His true worth, still more, he should also recognise Allah's favour upon him, by accepting the tasks Allah laid on him. Not only that, but he should also love his Lord, thanking Him for the fact that He charged him with religious responsibilities.

You might be saying you love Allah, but you must be fully aware of the difference between you loving Allah and Allah loving you. Religious responsibilities might seem too arduous for you and for this you may tend to show recalcitrance or neglect. But listen: it is not enough for you to love Allah only from the aspect of recognizing the blessings of His Creation and Sustenance because by so doing, you are neglecting the other blessing which is inherent in the concept of Allah's commissioning you with tasks and making you responsible. This is also for your own good! Mankind must realise that rising to the expectations and discharging the tasks ordained by Allah is for his own good, so he should not neglect them.

It is possible to find people who love Allah just for being their Creator and Sustainer, but they should know that Allah's love for His servants emanates from a servant's perpetual recognition of Allah's blessing of making him responsible and commissioning him with deeds. Allah loves a servant who understands the value of that blessing.

We, as humans, often notice a person loving another person, but with no reciprocal love from the latter; it is a one-sided love. The poet Al-Mutanabbi says: You are my beloved, but I pray against being a lover who is not loved. As you can see, Al-Mutanabbi detested loving someone who does not reciprocate one's love, so he sought Allah's refuge from it. To those who claim that they love Allah just because they recognize Allah's blessings of creation and sustenance, but they are too proud to bring themselves to live up to their responsibility, we say: You have refused a portion of the aspect of love of Allah. Whatever Allah ordains is not for His own good; He ordains it for Man's own good and benefit because the act of Allah's charging His servants with responsibilities goes side-by-side with the purpose of Allah's Creation and Sustenance. Why? Responsibility,in Islamic Law, involves having a proper perception of Allah's creation and sustenance and love, as we know, makes a heart glow. And when we apply that to Man's relationship with Allah, the more the heart gets attached to Allah with love, the more we see its glowing and beautiful effects on everything, reflected in compassion, mercy and satisfaction.

Also, with regards to Man's heart when it is filled with love for Allah, we see its effect in the way he shows obedience to Allah. Love which makes the heart grow and glow is within the realm of Man's capacity. What this means is that everybody can show love. However, Allah requires that, along with what love does to the heart; its effects must be transparent on the surface (being reflected in actions). Man must seek to understand Allah's commandments and live up to them -out of obedience and love for Allah- to be rewarded with Allah's love and love's effects of mercy, compassion and pleasure in one's life.

The love that is required by Allah differs from our narrow understanding of love. The reason I say this is that I want us to know that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Upholder of justice and does not command unfairly; He does not command anything that is beyond Man's capacity to do. The type of love required, with regards to religious responsibility, is an intellectual one. Let me quickly explain the difference between intellectual love and emotional love: Emotional love is controlled by nature, not by laws. I cannot order you, "You must love so-and-so emotionally!" because emotional love is not subject to laws. As we know, it is natural for Man to love his son even if he is not that brilliant, or he is disabled; such love is emotional; just as distaste a person naturally has towards a child who is not brilliant; such dislike exists according to logic or intellect, not emotion.

For instance, when a person shows love to his neighbour's child for being brilliant and even to his enemy's child, that love is not emotional love, but rather, it is intellectual love. One does not naturally show emotional love to one's neighbour's child or enemy's child the way one does to his son. It is your son whom you naturally pamper with gifts or presents, not your neighbour's son. All this shows the difference between intellectual love and emotional love.

Responsibility, in the context of Islamic law, is always something possible to attain and it is controlled by intellectual love. Within the context of such love, a person might ask himself: "What would my life be like if I had not embraced this religion? Would I survive in life without Allah's mercy and the blessings of this religion He generously gave us and sent to us with His Noble Messenger?” Such discourse is controlled by intellect, not emotion and it is emanated from intellectual love.

Such love might grow into emotional love, but that which is required to fulfil Allah’s commands is intellectual love, not emotional. For this reason, we must consider what was narrated from ‘Umar ibn-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘None of you will have [perfect] faith until he loves me more than his love for his father, his children and all mankind’. Prophet Muhammad’s Companion, ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him*, paused at this point, and said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: “Is it possible that I could love you more than I love myself? I love you already more than my wealth and my child… but myself? How come? I do not really get this.”

Here we see a perfect example of honesty, in the religious context, from ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab may *Allah be pleased with him*. Then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated it a second time and a third time and at this point, the Companion ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* realised that it had become a religious responsibility. That is an instance of a love which is easily attainable and this is intellectual love, not emotional love.

Then, ‘Umar said: ‘Now, Oh Messenger of Allah?’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* replied ‘Now, Oh ‘Umar’, i.e. it is now time you have your faith completed. So, from this we understand how Prophet Muhammad’s Companion ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* understood the meaning of this love which is an intellectual love.

Let us give an example, so this issue does not become an obstacle to hearts or minds. With regards to taking a bitter medicine, a person asks himself: “Do I have to love that medicine or not?” So, it is clear that it is a mandatory love we have for bitter pills; it is love by mind, not by heart.

So, what we love with our mind is something we know is good for us, something beneficial, even if we dislike it. When the true worth of something becomes clear to you, you love it and that love sinks into your heart. So, the love required for religious responsibility is intellectual love which then often develops into emotional love and this is the meaning of what Allah *Glorified is He* says here: 'Say: "…If you (really) love Allah, follow me and Allah will love you…"'. (*Al-'Imran:* 31) This love is not a mere claim. When someone claims he loves a person, everything connected with that person will be loved as well, in such a way that his love for that person spreads. Did the poet not say: 'And whatever my beloved may do, it is ok (I have done it)? So, in the same context, if you love Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* follow him by rising up to meet all religious requirements.

Let us take note of the two phrases here: "follow me" and "listen to me". What is the difference between them? The word "follow" here means when one takes a person as a leading example, in his manners and conduct. So, by saying you love Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it requires you to observe what he *peace and blessings be upon him* used to do and to do your best to do the same. But if you are merely claiming to love him and you do not follow the example of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this is insincere love. The proof of the love you claim is that you follow Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If we truly follow Prophet Muhammad, then we should perceive all the aspects of Allah's Commandments as a blessing and we should be accepting and obeying them, without any hesitation eventhough they might seem difficult and arduous.

This will earn us Allah's love, rewarding our sense of putting Allah first and our choice to go through hardships in obeying His Commands. Understanding this Quranic verse leads us to realise that Allah is alerting us. It is as if He is saying to us, "You love Allah because of His blessings of creation and sustenance, but you have stopped short of your religious responsibilities because they are difficult for you."

Let us consider responsibility: Is it for the benefit of the Allah, the One Who commands it, or is it for the benefit of those who receive it? It is surely for the benefit of the one being addressed by Allah's Command; it is for the sake of those who are religiously responsible, in the eyes of Islamic Law. In this way, we must include "responsibility" among Allah's blessings. So, these blessings are creation, sustenance, and responsibility. If you love Allah for His creation and sustenance, you must also love Him for His enjoining responsibility to you. The proof of sincere love is a servant’s fulfilling of his responsibilities. Since you express your sincere emotion in loving Allah, He will surely love you and we all know that our love for Allah is not of any consequence in the scheme of things; it is Allah’s love for you that matters.

The words of Allah *Glorified is He* which He taught His Messenger (Muhammad) to convey to mankind are: ‘Say: “…follow me and Allah will love you…”’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 31) This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was sent by Allah, has conveyed everything that Allah revealed, without concealing anything, so no one can put a boundary between Allah’s Messenger and Allah *Glorified is He*. The mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was to deliver everything that Allah revealed to him.

Then, Allah says, ‘Say: “…and forgive you of your sins….”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 31) The point here is: In the phrase “…and forgive you,…” we see something similar to what is known in man-made laws called “retroactive law”. So, if somebody does not know the impact of Allah’s love for us and for our choice to follow the instructions of Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he should still know that it is his responsibility to immediately begin following the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and fulfilling his religious responsibilities. In doing so, Allah will forgive him for all that he has done wrong. But which sins does Allah forgive here? They are those sins which made some people turn away from obeying Allah’s Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* came with divine commandments regarding this matter.

Thus, it is clear to us that, considering His Supreme Justice, Allah *Glorified is He* does not punish any of His servants for a previous sin, as long as he has agreed to abide by his religious duties henceforth. Having received the Message from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* creates an obligation upon people to use their brains in comprehending the Message he conveyed to them. But I have to stress that religious responsibility follows commandments, i.e, once Allah’s Message has been delivered, it becomes binding on people to follow. In this context, it has already been delivered. What follows is that Allah forgives sins committed before the Message was conveyed. Then Allah

Glorified is He says*:* 'Say: … and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful….' (*Al-'Imran:* 31) We know that mercy and grace are both from Allah. After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says*:*

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلرَّسُولَ ۖ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Say, 'Obey God and the Messenger,' but if they turn away, [know that] God does not love those who ignore [His commands] [32] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 32)

I have said this before: when it comes to Allah's Command for obedience, it only occurs in the Quran in three forms. Sometimes, Allah *Glorified is He* says, "Obey Allah and His Messenger," as mentioned here in this Quranic verse which we are now discussing and trying to reflect on. We notice here that Allah did not repeat the command of obedience (as was the case in some other verses), but He used it only once, saying: "Obey." And if someone asks, "Who should be obeyed?" the answer is: both Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while conveying Allah's Message, '…follow me. Allah will love you….' (*Al-'Imran:* 31) mean that showing obedience to Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is part of obeying Allah. It is also important to note here that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not order us to obey him; rather, he ordered us to obey Allah, hence Allah did not repeat the command of obedience. Allah used it once, giving an indication that it' is for both, Allah and His Messenger. In Arabic, when Allah commands his servants to "obey Allah," it is linked with "obey His Messenger" *peace and blessings be upon him* by the coordinating conjunction "*wa*," meaning "and."

Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'Say: "Obey Allah and obey the Messenger [Muhammad]". If they turn away, then he is responsible only for what he is charged with. If you obey him, you will be rightly guided. The Messenger is responsible only for delivering the Message clearly'. (*an-Nur:* 54)

Allah *Glorified is He* repeats the command to obey three times: once, it is a command to obey Allah, then, it is a command to obey Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the third time, Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* ‘Oh you who believe! Obey Allah and obey Prophet Muhammad, The Messenger and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination’. (*an-Nisa’:* 59)

What exactly is the concept of “command” to obey, as mentioned in the above verse? It implies obedience in different forms of responsibilities. The rulings that the believers are required to obey are sometimes commandments which have come from Allah, or which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as confirmed with his words and deeds. If a believer obeys these commands, he is obeying Allah and the Messenger together. Sometimes, the ruling comes from Allah in a general form and the Messenger specifies it, such as the command from Allah: ‘And establish prayers and (ensure) the payment of *zakat* and accomplish (absolute) obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that you may be granted mercy’. (*an-Nur:* 56)

None of us could have known how many prayers there are in a day, or the number of cycles in each prayer, or the manner of their performance, without Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* having specified the matter for us for every prayer. So, while a believer obeys Allah’s Command in general matters, he also obeys Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in specifics. We must be aware that there are two types of obedience: firstly, obedience to Allah; secondly, obedience to the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* When the command is one, the obedience is for both Allah and the Messenger because it is a single command.

As for it when a general commandment comes from Allah, the details and explanations are left for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as part of his mission from Allah. A believer obeys Allah in regards to the general aspects of His Divine Command such as the prayer and its establishment, and obeys Prophet Muhammad in regards to the details of the prayer and the manner of its performance. Sometimes, there are some instances when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was given higher authorization from Allah to explain some important details about religion and so it is as if

Allah tells His Messenger, Muhammad, that he has the authority to articulate on the affair and this is also explained by Allah *Glorified is He* when he says, '…And whatever the Messenger [Muhammad] gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it…". (*al-Hashr:* 7)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* left it up to Prophet Muhammad to establish the legislation necessary to make the lives of the believers righteous. He gave him general authorization to do so. In that context, with Allah giving Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such general authorization, it becomes imperative for the believers to show obedience to Prophet Muhammad in everything that he says even if Allah did not say it explicitly.

For example, we do not find evidence in the Quran that the dawn (*Fajr*) prayer is comprised of two *rak'as* (cycles), but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who specified the details of the prayer to us, so we know that the dawn prayer (*Fajr*) is of two raka's (cycles). The same applies to the other prayers: the midday prayer (Zhuhr) is four, just like the afternoon prayer ('Asr), the sunset prayer (*Maghrib*) is three and the night prayer is four raka's (cycles). The evidence is in the specification given by Prophet Muhammad, on which Allah *Glorified is He* has made clear to us how we ought to respond to that, as He says: '…and whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it….' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

This is the evidence from the Noble Quran. Thus, the command for obedience occurs in the Quran in three forms. Firstly: if the "obedience" is for both Allah and His Messenger, then the conjunction "and" is used here to link "the Messenger (Muhammad)" with Allah *Glorified is He*. Secondly: Obedience to Allah in a general matter and obedience to Allah's Messenger, Muhammad, with regards to the details, as Allah *Glorified is He* has made clear in the following: 'Say: "…Obey Allah and obey the Messenger…."' Thirdly: The issue on which there was no specific ruling from Allah, and so the matter was left for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to legislate in line with what Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…And whatever the Messenger [Muhammad] gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it….' (*al-Hashr:* 7) This is pertaining to showing obedience to Allah's Messenger, Prophet Muhammad.

Then with regards to the issue of obeying those who have been entrusted with authority, as Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'Oh you who believe! Obey Allah and obey Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination'. (*an-Nisa':* 59)

As we see, Allah *Glorified is He* did not put the command of showing obedience to rulers and people in authority in a way that will make it look like it is being mixed with the command of showing obedience to Allah and His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad. He did not make it look like a single act of obedience; rather, He mentioned the issue of "obeying those in authority" in the Quranic verse in which He made a distinction between obedience to Allah and obedience to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad. Thus, Allah is making it clear that obedience to those in authority is part and parcel of showing obedience to the Messenger. Why? It is because there is no inherent required obedience to those in authority, unlike Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who commands a very special and inherent obedience. As for obedience to those in authority, it takes its significance and merit from obedience to Allah and His Messenger; there is no obedience to those in authority in a matter in which there is no obedience to Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'Say: "Obey Allah and His Messenger". And if they turn back – verily, Allah does not love those who reject the Faith"'. (*Al-'Imran:* 32) In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* instructs His Messenger to address those who claim that they love Allah, in the way that believers earn Allah's love, so that they can reap benefits from such love and thus the benefits extends to mankind. Allah's love is greater than anything mankind could offer. So, there is no doubt that the actual form of obeying Allah and His Messenger emanates directly from following the instructions of Prophet Muhammad and meeting our religious responsibilities.

This is the best way for people to express their love for Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* And then Allah says, "…if they turn back", i.e. if they do not listen to you, Oh Muhammad and do not follow you, they will then be regarded as disbelievers and may Allah save us from that. This is in line with how Allah *Glorified is He* described such people: '…And if they turn back – verily, Allah does not love those who reject the Faith'. (*Al-'Imran:* 32) There is no graver abomination than this.

The phrase "turn back" gives an indication of renouncing Allah's Command and rejecting it after being exposed to it. So, due to laziness, they fail to respect Allah's Decree and honour their religious obligations. Rather, they disdain Allah's Divine Decree. For this reason, I have said and I still say that those who disobey Allah's Command should beware of making a distinction between accepting what is considered a binding rule and bringing oneself to follow the rule and carry it out; they are one in the same.

Beware, Oh Muslim, of denying a rule that you are unable to bring yourself to follow. If you deny it, you take yourself out of the sphere of Islam into the sphere of disbelief and we seek Allah's refuge from that. You must abide by and believe in Allah's ruling and in case you fall short, you should say: "I believe it is Allah's rule and there is no doubt, but to err is human and I cannot control myself." This failing to obey Allah's Command will make you just a sinner and not a disbeliever.

We have seen Allah *Glorified is He* explain to us the roots of faith with His Words, 'Allah bears witness that none has the right to be worshipped but He and the angels and those having knowledge (also give this witness); (He is always) maintaining His creation with justice. None has the right to be worshipped but He, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise'. (*Al-'Imran:* 18) We then see also how Allah gave the believers the glad tidings that He would grant them dominion of faith (i.e. He would grant them authority in this world, based on their true faith), and that He has the Supreme power to do that and among the signs of His Absolute Power is that He enters night into day and day into night and brings life from the dead and death from the living. Not only that, but we have also seen how He describes His love and makes it clear that if a believer claims that he loves Allah for the blessings of His Creation and Sustenance and he wishes to earn Allah's love in return, he must obey Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by living up to the responsibilities prescribed by Allah. And then, we have seen how Allah *Glorified is He*, explains to us the religious principles, be they creedal or legislative ones.

After all this, He gives us practical examples from people's behaviour. This is because there is a difference between theoretical doctrines and putting them into practice; when it comes to applying the doctrines, some people fail to rise to expectations. Allah *Glorified is He* does not make people responsible frivolously or meaninglessly; He says to us, "I have charged you with religious responsibilities and there are people just like you who are capable of living up to and honouring them". For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us examples that clearly show this.

Let us also recollect, Muhammad, The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to illiterate people and Islam was new to them. For this reason, Allah gave them some antique examples that would suit their mentality. This highlights the fact that Islam is not a religion of tribalism because it is the same religion that came down from Allah to Adam *peace be upon him* and the same religion that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* brought from Allah. It is the same religion that was revealed to the Family of 'Imran and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as well as Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him.*

So, it is clear that Allah *Glorified is He* gives attributes of nobility to those who follow religions that are based on the guidance that He revealed. And Islam, upon its advent, abrogated some of what these previous Messages brought and placed them all in a single religion that would continue until the Day of Resurrection. This is the religion of Islam, which is the final compilation of magnificence.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says*:*

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصۡطَفَىٰٓ ءَادَمَ وَنُوحٗا وَءَالَ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَءَالَ عِمۡرَٰنَ عَلَى ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٣٣

God chose Adam, Noah, Abraham's family, and the family of
'Imran, over all other people [33] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 33)

This is an indication of justice which is one of the characteristics of the Noble Quran; it also gives a sense of justice in the way Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knowledge about some of his good ancestors. The Message was carried over by these noble descendants, and it would be a shame for descendants to veer away from the line of good ancestors!

'Verily, Allah has chosen Adam....' (*Al-'Imran:* 33) The word "chosen" gives a sense of a satisfactory selection. We may ask: "Did Allah *Glorified is He* choose those Messengers, Adam, Nuh (Noah), the Family of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the Family of 'Imran, *peace be upon them* all, while they were already obedient servants of Allah? Or was the choice a resultant effect of Allah's Supreme Knowledge of their inherent righteousness, i.e. that they would be automatically obedient?

Of course, Allah's Knowledge is Eternal and it is not dependent on things; rather, it preceded them. Sometimes, in our human capacity, for example, we entrust somebody with a position, based on our predictions and when that person succeeds, it elates us and we get excited about getting it right. But is this not by means of Allah's Knowledge and Power?

So, it is clear that it is by the Eternal Knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* that Messengers were chosen for the mission because He knew, from pre-eternity, that they would be obedient. Someone might say, "They are obedient to Allah because He made them special." To such a person we reply: On the general level of being human beings, they were inherently "obedient servants" and then the moment they were charged with this responsibility and were specially chosen for it, their level of piety and obedience increased. This means that had Allah *Glorified is He* left it up to their intellects, they would still have been guided to obedience. And when they were charged with this responsibility, they were specially chosen by Allah to become Messengers, conveying His Heavenly Guidance.

When a person hears Allah *Glorified is He* saying: 'Verily, Allah has chosen Adam….' (*Al-'Imran:* 33), he might wonder about its meaning. This is because by saying "Allah has chosen Adam" *peace be upon him* it would mean that Allah chose him and singled him out from others. How could that be? How could Adam be chosen when there was no other human being before him or with him at that time? Since he was the first human, how could he be chosen and from whom? Yes, this sounds like a valid question.

We know that Allah's choosing of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is quite easily understandable because he was chosen from amongst other humans who were in existence at that period of time. The same is true with the case of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who is known as the Friend of Allah the Most Merciful and this is also the case with the rest of the Prophets.

So, what about the case of Adam *peace be upon him*? How was he chosen? The meaning of "Allah has chosen Adam", as we said, is that Allah *Glorified is He* selected him and it might mean that "the chosen one" would come from him and from his progeny. And, as we know, the chosen one has truly come from his progeny, so this explanation fits. Allah says*:* 'Verily, Allah has chosen Adam and Nuh (Noah)....' (*Al-'Imran:* 33) We know that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was sent by Allah, but a group of people disbelieved in him and Allah *Glorified is He* drowned them with the Flood as a punishment and saved Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and those with him by His Will and Decree.

Thus Allah says*:* 'At length, behold! There came Our command and the fountains of the earth gushed forth! We said: "Embark therein, of each kind two, male and female and your family - except those against whom the word has already gone forth, - and the believers". But only a few believed with him'. (*Hud:* 40)

Those who remained after Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were believers, but then, they turned to worshipping other false gods, and rejecting the True Faith, and unfortunately this act of worshipping false deities spread after them, thus leading to the situation where we had disbelief and faith side-by-side in society. Why? It is because when Allah *Glorified is He* created Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* He gave him a test of responsibility, while making him dwell in paradise and it was essential that what Allah taught him should be transferred to his descendants.

Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* passed on to them the details of their material lives and taught them how to eat and drink and so on. It was essential that they had moral values. Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* delivered his Message along that line. He taught his offspring how to take care of the material aspects of their lives and he taught them moral values as well. However, with the passage of time, some of Adam's progeny began to deflect from their religious responsibilities and bit-by-bit, with this kind of heedlessness on their part, the religious doctrines got weaker, forgotten and then completely vanished.

But out of His pattern of mercy and graciousness towards His creatures, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* renews His Divine Message from time-to-time by sending new Messengers.

First of all, the new Message tries to keep and maintain those things that are true and basic from the old Message, such as doctrines and information, in addition to things that do not normally change. Then, the new Message sets forth rulings that are appropriate to the time in which it comes. It is an established fact that when Man succeeds in creating a system of law and order in the society, life will be better for everybody and no crime will go unpunished. This is an important yardstick for a Divine Message to remain intact and flourish and thus enabling its adherents and the society to remain in prosperity. Why? The reason for this is that there is a tendency towards restraint that is naturally inherent in human beings, something we can feel and notice.

For instance, when a person upon dropping his standards and becoming unable to control himself commits a sin, with just a quick strike from his reproaching soul, we see him turning remorseful and thus seeking repentance. Another person with no such reproaching soul may not be able to have this quick comeback. So, it is something existing in some people and lacking in some other people. But in general, it is better for the society to be blessed with people who command good and forbid evil. If the people in the society are void of faith-based personal restraints and there are no people who are religiously equipped to restrain people from evil, things will certainly become gloomy in such a society and failures and dispiritedness will become the norm. In that case, it becomes imperative for a new Divine Message to come down through a Messenger who will be sent by Allah and aided with a miracle.

It is clear that Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that no other Messenger would come after our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* And this stands as a testimony for the special status of the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it is also a clear evidence that Allah has secured His religion (Islam) through Prophet Muhammad's followers; and it is quite evident that in this ummah (global community of Muslims), people are imbued with communal religious restraints, which are never lost, even if individual's personal restraint gets weaker or lost. And this must be the case since he is the last Messenger of Allah; otherwise, it would have been necessary for Allah to send a new Prophet.

So, in this, we see why Allah *Glorified is He* did not bother to send any other Prophet after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because He *the Almighty* has secured His guidance and imbued the ummah of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with what it takes for them to preserve His Message.

Also, with regards to what we said about Allah's equipping the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a powerful religious spirit of restraint both on an individual and communal level which help them to preserve Allah's Message, Allah *Glorified is He* referred to this in the following verse: 'You are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it would be best for them. Among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors'. (*Al-'Imran:* 110)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses us so we know that the spirit of communal religious restraints will always remain active in the soul of the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* And after the waves of disbelief and heedlessness that followed the demise of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* Allah, out of His Mercy for mankind, selected and chose others as Messengers who were sent to guide people to the Right Path. On this, Allah says: 'Verily, Allah has chosen Adam and Nuh (Noah), the Family of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the Family of 'Imran over all the worlds'. (*Al-'Imran:* 33) We call Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the 'Father of the Prophets' and in the above verse, Allah mentioned some of the progeny of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) i.e. The Family of 'Imran and He gave them higher distinction.

When the name ‘‘Imran’’ is mentioned in any Islamic context, we should be aware that there are two people with this name: “Imran” was the name of the father of Prophet Musa (Moses) and Prophet Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them,* but there is another “Imran”. With regards to the first, “Imran”, the father of Prophet Musa (Moses) and Prophet Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was born to someone called Yashur whose grandfather’s name was Fahath. Next in the line was Lawa; before this, was Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob), and before this, Prophet Ishaq (Isaac), and all the way back to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.* The other “Imran” is the father of Maryam (Mary), the mother of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon her and him.*

Some scholars and researchers might be confused and wondering about “Which ‘Imran did Allah refer to here?” This confusion might likely come from the fact that the name of the sister of Prophet Musa (Moses) and Prophet Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*, was also named Maryam (Mary), *Allah be pleased with her* and of course, she was also “the daughter of ‘Imran” which some might allude to the above verse.

So, both of these women were named Maryam (Mary), “the daughter of ‘Imran”. The name Maryam (Mary) was very common in those times because it means ‘devout’. For those scholars who fall into this confusion, it is because they forgot that the Quran is clear and precise in its meanings. They should have understood that the intention here is not ‘Imran, the father of Moses and Aaron, *peace be upon them*; rather, the Quran is referring here to ‘Imran, the father of Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* the mother of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him.* This ‘Imran, (the father of Maryam (Mary), was the son of Mathan, in the family line of Prophet Sulaiman (Soloman), son of Prophet Dawud (David), son of Awsha, son of Judah, son of Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob), son of Prophet Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*.

Years ago, during our days at schools, we used to memorize the following phrase, using the first letters of the names, saying (‘am’am sad’iyya’), which means (Prophet) ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with them* Maryam (Mary) daughter of ‘Imran, son of Mathan, son of (Prophet) Sulaiman (Solomon), son of (Prophet) Dawud (David), son of Awsha, son of Judah, son of (Prophet) Ya’qub (Jacob) son of (Prophet) Ishaq (Isaac) *peace and blessings* *be upon him* but as you can see, this matter has confused some people and they have been unsure as to which ‘Imran, of the two, Allah *Glorified is He* is referring in this noble Quranic verse. The fact that Allah mentioned the name of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* immediately after this, shows that it is ‘Imran, the father of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* being referred to. We must also be aware that Allah *Glorified is He* said concerning Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*: ‘Her Lord accepted her in a handsome manner and caused her to grow like a lovely plant and told Zechariah to take care of her. Every time Zechariah entered the shrine to [see] her, he found she had already been supplied with food. He said: “Maryam (Mary), where did this provision come from?” She replied, “This is from Allah. Allah provides for whomever He wills without measure”. (*Al-‘Imran:* 37)

Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was the son of Adhan, who was a contemporary to Mathan. So, in this context, it is ‘Imran, father of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him* who is the one meant here. Thus, it is clear now that we have clarified which “Imran” Allah *Glorified is He* meant when He said: ‘Verily, Allah has chosen ‘Adam and Nuh (Noah) and the Family of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the Family of ‘Imran over all the worlds’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 33)

With regards to the word “chosen”, when you say that you have chosen somebody and preferred him over somebody else, this means that you have picked that person out of a group and rated him above the others. For this reason, we can clearly understand the meaning of the phrase “over all the worlds” in the above Quranic verse as giving an indication that the people mentioned in the verse were chosen from the people of their time, and Allah *Glorified is He* chose one person from amongst them. But this aspect of “being chosen and given preference” is not applicable to the generations that came after these people, which means that this is not applicable to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* i.e. none of these were given preference above him.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They are the offspring of one another. And Allah is All-Hearing, All Knowing’. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘They are the offspring of one another,...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 34), there is a question here: Is this referring to descent of lineage, or of religion and moral values? We must take note that Allah has taught us through the example He gave about

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that the bloodlines are not of any significance when it comes of the Prophets of Allah; what is of a paramount importance with regards to the Prophets is the posterity of moral values and religion.

We have already considered this in the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘And when his Lord put Ibrahim (Abraham) to a test with certain Words and he fulfilled them, He says, “I am going to make you an Imam (leader) for mankind”. He [Ibrahim] asked, “And from among my progeny?...” (*al-Baqara:* 124)

So, Allah *Glorified is He* answered him, saying: ‘…He (Allah) replied, “My promise does not extend to the unjust”’. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* was addressing all humanity through Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* saying: ‘…”My promise does not extend to the unjust”’. (*al-Baqara:* 124) Why? It is because a leader should be followed in matters of guidance. So, this issue of Prophetic leadership is not something based on a bloodline; it transcends that level. That is how Allah *Glorified is He* made this clear to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: the posterity of the Prophets is not based on heritage or ancestry. This is what Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to understand in His Words,

ذُرِّيَّةَۢ بَعۡضُهَا مِنۢ بَعۡضٖۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٣٤

In one line of descent – God hears and knows all [34]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 34)

This is in order to show us how such extraordinary nobility was passed down in moral values.

We hear, in the Quran: ‘The hypocrites, both men and women, are all alike. They enjoin what is evil, forbid what is right and they are stingy when it comes to spending for the cause of Allah. They have forgotten Allah, so He has forgotten them. The hypocrites are the disobedient ones’. (*al-Tawba:* 67) The hypocrisy referred to here has no relationship with lineage; it is a matter of moral values. And so the Quranic phrase, ‘And Allah is All-Hearing, All Knowing’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 34), means that Allah knows all words, deeds and secrets. Then, Allah says: ‘Remember when the wife of ‘Imran said, “My

Lord, I have dedicated what is in my womb entirely to Your service. So, accept this from me. Surely You are the All-Hearing, the All Knowing’.

When you read the word “when,” know that it is an adverb of time and in linguistics, it can mean “remember when….” Someone may say (in Arabic) “*idh je'etuka*” meaning “remember when I came to you.” When Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Remember when the wife of ‘Imran said...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 35), some of the people with proper enlightenment understand this as a perfect indication of how Allah *Glorified is He* is of Supreme Awareness and full comprehension of what was going on at the time when:

إِذْ قَالَتِ ٱمْرَأَتُ عِمْرَٰنَ رَبِّ إِنِّى نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِى بَطْنِى
مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّىٓ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٥﴾

‘Imran’s wife said, ‘Lord, I have dedicated what is
growing in my womb entirely to You; so accept this from
me. You are the One who hears and knows all,’ [35]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 35)

So, they attempt to link this Quranic verse with the one preceding it, which said that Allah *Glorified is He* is “All-Hearing, the All Knowing.” Let us consider the statement of ‘Imran’s wife: ‘My Lord, I have dedicated what is in my womb entirely to Your service….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 35). When we hear the Arabic word “*muhararan*” as mentioned in this verse, we understand that it means “not owned by anyone; it gives a sense of freedom. So, if we say, “I freed a servant,” this means that he is now a free person and no longer in bondage. Another meaning for that Arabic word is “to revise,” so when I used it for a book, it means “I corrected the errors in it.” Therefore, the general meaning of that word (*muhararan*) is to rectify the faults in something and purge that thing of all its blemishes, or keep it away from restraints. As for the statement made by ‘Imran’s wife here: ‘My Lord, I have dedicated what is in my womb entirely to Your service...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 35), it is a prayer to Allah, an invocation. But what is the reason behind this supplication?

‘Imran’s wife lived in an environment in which people exulted in their children. As we know, parents influence their children’s manners and as they act as watchdog for their kids, children also have an impact on their parents' behaviours. And it is also true that parents strive hard to make their children better successors and a source of delight. This makes the society prosperous, thanks to such material continuity of legacy. But this is not what 'Imran's wife wanted for her and for her child. She wanted the child in her womb to be free of all such material constraints. She wanted him to be completely dedicated and committed to something of higher value, something bigger than herself. This means that she wanted the child in her womb to be unconnected to anything, or with any physical love or patronage.

It is because no matter level of maturity a person reaches in life, he always gets affected by his circle of social connections and it is normal for such a thing to sway or distract him from his purpose. For this reason, 'Imran's wife wanted the child in her womb to be free from all this. It could be said that by this vow, 'Imran's wife was attempting to control the nature of a fellow human being, blending it to resemble her own nature. We answer this as follows:

In the past, parents used to dedicate their children to the service of the Temple and they took vows for that. This vow would last as long as the child was in their custody thus preserving him to do what they planned and desired for him and that would continue until the child reached adulthood. Then, the child had the right to choose between remaining as his parents wished, or choosing his own lifestyle.

Reaching adulthood is an acknowledgment of a person's maturity and readiness to make appropriate decisions in his life. As said above, 'Imran's wife did not want her child to be only a source of delight, or to have him just attached to her; no; she wanted the child to be completely devoted to the service of the Temple and from this it is understood by human comprehension that the child must have been a male because the ones who were chosen for such religious missions at that time were males.

Though we know that the word "child" can mean a boy or a girl, generally speaking, whenever the Arabic word "*walad*" is used, it refers to a boy. However, the linguistic meaning of that Arabic word is "child," whether male or female. Also, whenever we hear the word "vow," we understand that it means committing oneself to an act of worship above and beyond that which one is charged with by Allah, but of the same type of act of worship which one is obliged to do.

For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* has made five daily prayers obligatory upon us. If a person vows to pray extra cycles of prayer beyond this, he has thus made it compulsory for himself to do something extra beyond that which Allah charged him with, but which is of the same type that Allah has obligated him with: prayer. Also, Allah *Glorified is He* has made fasting in the month of *Ramadan* obligatory. If a person vows to fast Mondays and Thursdays, or to fast for two solid months, this is up to him, but it is clear that he has chosen to abide by something extra, but something of the same type which Allah has obligated, which is fasting. Allah *Glorified is He* has also obligated *zakat* (alms giving) with the rate of 2.5% of a person's extra wealth, but a person might vow to give more than this, for example 10% or even 50%.

It is up to a person to make such vows. One is free to commit himself to doing more than what it is obligated by Allah on him, but of the same type of what he is originally charged with. Thus, such vows represent an intention to do more than what Allah *Glorified is He* ordained. One of the meanings of '…I have dedicated...' (*Al-'Imran:* 35) is that the wife of 'Imran was a virtuous, upright woman and it is clear she was not compelled to make the vow, but she did so of her own volition in order to dedicate herself to the service of Allah's House (the Temple, at that time).

A vow, as we know, expresses a servant's longing and readiness to obey Allah's commandments by charging himself with extra acts of worship. Then 'Imran's wife prayed for Allah's acceptance of this vow, saying: '…So, accept this from me....' (*Al-'Imran:* 35) "Acceptance" means taking something gladly. Something might be taken unwillingly, or reluctantly, but when the word "accept" is used, it means taking something with pleasure.

In responding to this supplication and a sign for answering that prayer, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Her Lord accepted her in a handsome manner'. (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

We notice here that 'Imran's wife said at first: '…My Lord, I have dedicated what is in my womb entirely to Your service, so accept this from me. Surely

You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing' (*Al-'Imran:* 35) and she did not say "Oh Allah, I have dedicated…." This is so that we come to know that her Lord is the One Who takes care of human beings and all creatures. Sometimes, one says "My Lord" and this gives a sense of invoking the One Who takes care of and sustains everything. And when one says "Oh Allah," this gives a sense of invoking a higher authority and a source of command. So, with 'Oh Allah', it is a call to the One Who is Only to be worshipped and obeyed in that which He commands. But using the word "Oh Lord," means calling on the One Who assumes care and sustenance. Imran's wife said: '…My Lord, I have dedicated what is in my womb entirely to Your service, so accept this from me. Surely You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing'. (*Al-'Imran:* 35) That's her prayer and look at how Allah answered her: 'And Her Lord accepted her in a handsome manner….' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about those things related to upbringing: '…and caused her to grow like a lovely plant and told Zechariah to take care of her....' All this is connected to upbringing and sustenance. We have seen how the wife of 'Imran invoked Allah and how she mastered that and vowed to dedicate the child in her womb to the service of Allah. Then, the answer came from Allah for her prayer in a way that gives an indication of Allah's acceptance and pleasure: 'And Her Lord accepted her in a handsome manner….' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

The word "handsome" here gives a sense of something extra; it exceeds the normal level of satisfaction because the word "acceptance" in the verse gives us the meaning of taking something with approval. So, the word "handsome" clarifies for us that there was an increased status of approval which indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* took what 'Imran's wife offered with approval, as something good and beyond expectation. And this also indicates that people would see her upbringing as something extraordinary, with higher distinction. Thus, it is not an ordinary acceptance; rather, it is extremely nice.

The verse '…and caused her to grow like a lovely plant…' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) indicates that the wife of 'Imran, when she vowed to dedicate the child in her womb to serve the Temple, did not have the intention to keep the child with her and then release it at the age at which it could serve Allah's House.

No, on the contrary, her vow was to release the child from the moment of its birth. She did not intend to have the normal enjoyment with her child and this is the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* '…and told Zechariah to take care of her....' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Zakaryya was the husband of Maryam's (Mary) maternal aunt.

After the prayer of 'Imran's wife, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتۡهَا قَالَتۡ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعۡتُهَآ أُنثَىٰ وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعَتۡ وَلَيۡسَ ٱلذَّكَرُ
كَٱلۡأُنثَىٰۖ وَإِنِّي سَمَّيۡتُهَا مَرۡيَمَ وَإِنِّيٓ أُعِيذُهَا بِكَ وَذُرِّيَّتَهَا مِنَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ ٱلرَّجِيمِ ٣٦

But when she gave birth, she said, 'My Lord! I have given birth to a girl' – God knew best what she had given birth to: the male is not like the female –'I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan' [36] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 36)

This statement came from her because she had said that she had vowed the child in her womb to be devoted to the service of the Temple. Her word "dedicated" gives an indication that she wanted a male child to serve the House of Allah, but the child was born female. It is as though she was saying: "It looks like I will be not be able to fulfil the vow and this is something beyond my power; it is predestined that the child would be female". However, Allah *Glorified is He* says after this*:* '…And Allah knew very well what she had given birth to…." (*Al-'Imran:* 36) So, this means that she did not intend to inform Allah about the child's sex; she was just expressing her grief because she thought the goal of her vow would not be realised.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…a male is not like a female….' (*Al-'Imran:* 36) The question here is: Is this her statement, or Allah's?

'Imran's wife said: '...I have given birth to a girl' (*Al-'Imran:* 36) and Allah says*:* '…a male is not like a female....' (*Al-'Imran:* 36) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to her, "Do not think that the male child you dreamt of having could ever reach the rank of this female child you are blessed with. Behold, this girl has a mighty and elevated status!" Or, we could say the statement could have been a completion of her statement "...I have given birth to a girl...." (*Al-'Imran:* 36) and the words of Allah *Glorified is He* '...And Allah knew very well what she had given birth to...' was between brackets and the rest of her statement was '...a male is not like a female..'., as if she was saying "Oh my Lord, a male child is not like female one: she cannot, for instance, serve the Temple".

Let a believer take the meaning that he likes; we find that the first meaning is more illuminating. It suggests that Allah *Glorified is He* said addressing 'Imran's wife: "You want a male child so that your vow can be fulfilled according to your understanding and so that he can serve the Temple; and I have given you a female child, but I will give her a sign much greater than dedicating service to the Temple. The sign that I will give this female will make her a great support for the creed, not just a service of a plot of land where rituals take place. I will make this sign a means for the creed to remain established in the world until the Day of Judgment. And because I am the Creator, I will also bless this female child with a sign that does not exist anywhere else and it would be a sign that confirms the omnipotence of Allah."

As I have said before, an Absolute Power is different from an ordinary one: power gets created using means, but from where do the means come? The means come from Allah, the Source of Power. So, as Allah, the Creator of means, desires to use these means to create, this is up to His Supreme Will and no one can question that. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* gave us the ability to witness the absoluteness of His Power because it is a matter of faith which must remain central to doctrinal awareness and solid in the mind of a believer, and be always intact.

Allah *Glorified is He* created some creatures with means, as He created us and all other creatures through means of reproduction: from fathers and mothers. As for Allah's creation of Adam *peace be upon him* it was accomplished without any means. We know that everything divided into two has a logical and rational permutation; since there is a system of creation where we have mothers and fathers, males and females, there will definitely be reproduction...

Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'And in everything, We created pairs so that you might bear in mind [that Allah alone is One]'. (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49) When a pair come together, this makes a complete image and this is the imaginable level of the first logical permutation. The second logical permutation imaginable here is in the scenario of having both pairs absent. Another case is to have one of the pair absent (female, for instance), while the other (male) remains and this is the third logical permutation imaginable. The fourth logical permutation imaginable is to have the other one of the pair (male) absent and the first one remaining (female). So, therefore, we have here four logical permutations imaginable.

All of us human beings come from the mating of two elements of creation: a man and a woman. As for Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* created him by His Omnipotent Power, that he would be the means for the creation of others. In this way, Hawwa' (Eve) *peace be upon her* was created from Prophet Adam *peace be upon him.* And then Allah brought out from the mating of Prophet Adam and Hawwa' (Eve) *peace be upon them* his progeny. There was a female, Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* from whom the Messiah, Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) came without means of a male. And this is definitely a sign for mankind and it confirmed a pinnacle of faith.

No one should say "I want a male child!" or "I want a female child!" We should all learn from the wife of 'Imran whose intention was to serve Allah by having a male child, but look at how the Mighty Lord willed something higher than the worship that 'Imran's wife understood. Thus Allah says: '…a male is not like a female…' (*Al-'Imran:* 36) i.e. no male could ever reach the rank of this female (Maryam) *peace be upon her*.

Then, 'Imran's wife said: '...and I have named her Maryam (Mary) and placed her and her children in Your protection from the rejected Satan'. (*Al-'Imran:* 36) The wife of 'Imran spoke in a way that indicated her perception, for when the child was born a female and because of her being a female, she was therefore unable to serve in the House of Allah. 'Imran's wife then reaffirmed her wish that the child would be obedient and pious, so she named her Maryam (Mary) because, as we said, in their language this name meant "devout".

Then, as we know, Satan always comes to dissuade Man from worship and he uses all his schemes to influence mankind to rebel against worship. One of the schemes Satan uses is laying down traps for people to fall in, thus leading people astray from worship. The wife of 'Imran wanted her daughter to be protected against the insinuations of Satan. So, she named her Maryam

(Mary) in hopes that she would be a devout servant of Allah. Also, given the fact that 'Imran's wife possessed a sound religious intelligence and was imbued with a high level of creedal guidance, she said: '…and I place her and her children in Your protection from the rejected Satan'. (*Al-'Imran:* 36)

As we can see, it is the divine protection from Allah *Glorified is He* that she sought and Satan is the one against whom the protection was sought. When Satan approaches Man to trap him into committing sin, he enters into conflict with him; but Satan is unable to engage in a conflict with his Lord and for this reason, it is said about Satan that when he hears the remembrance of Allah, he flees. The Noble Quran describes Satan as "the one who withdraws." Satan is only able to be in a person's company when that person is far from Allah and for this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches mankind, saying: 'If Satan should prompt you to do something, seek refuge with Allah- He is All-seeing, All knowing'. (*al-A'raf:* 200)

Satan trembles fearfully whenever Allah's protection is sought. And when Satan's trembling is repeated because of these words, he knows that this person will not be led astray from Allah's obedience and cannot be pulled down into committing sin. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for instance, taught us on the significance of seeking Allah's refuge from Satan saying that when Man wants to have intercourse with his wife which is a very important moment that can lead to pregnancy, he should say: "Oh Allah! Shield me from Satan and keep Satan away from what you grant me." (Excerpt from the prayers of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) Whoever says this statement before sexual intercourse, Satan will have no authority or power over the child that will come, by Allah's decree. For this reason, the wife of 'Imran said, '…and I place her and her children in Your protection from the rejected Satan'. (*Al-'Imran:* 36)

People might understand that the Arabic word "*dhurriyy*a" (which means "children") implies a large number of offspring, but the word itself could mean one, two, three or more children and not necessarily in higher multitudes. And the word "children" in respect to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*, means Prophet Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and no other person.

After the prayer of ‘Imran’s wife, ‘…and I place her and her children in Your protection from the rejected Satan’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 36), Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* ‘Her Lord accepted her in a handsome manner and caused her to grow like a lovely plant and told Zechariah to take care of her. Every time Zechariah entered the shrine to [see] her, he found she had already been supplied with food. He said: “Maryam (Mary), where did this provision come from? She replied,

فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَنۢبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا زَكَرِيَّاۖ كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ
عَلَيۡهَا زَكَرِيَّا ٱلۡمِحۡرَابَ وَجَدَ عِندَهَا رِزۡقٗاۖ قَالَ يَٰمَرۡيَمُ أَنَّىٰ لَكِ هَٰذَاۖ قَالَتۡ هُوَ
مِنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَرۡزُقُ مَن يَشَآءُ بِغَيۡرِ حِسَابٍ ٣٧

Her Lord graciously accepted her and made her grow in goodness, and entrusted her to the charge of Zechariah. Whenever Zechariah went in to see her in her sanctuary, he found her supplied with provisions. He said, ‘Mary, how is it you have these provisions?’ and she said, ‘They are from God: God provides limitlessly for whoever He will’ [37]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 37)

We know already the meaning of ‘in a handsome manner’ and also the phrase ‘to grow like a lovely plant’. As for the words of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘…and told Zechariah to take care of her’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37), this means that this command came from Allah *the Most High*. It was Allah who accepted Maryam in a handsome manner and it is He who caused her to grow like a lovely plant. So, it is clear that having Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* take care of the child was only by Allah’s decree. The evidence of this is what happened, while Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was placed into the custody of somebody.

The leaders of the people gathered, all wanting to take her into their care and they drew lots to decide the matter. In such situations, when you find people drawing lots, or casting divining arrows, this means that they have left their own desires to follow Allah’s will. Sometimes, when we differ on something we draw straws: everyone takes a straw and after this, we see which person’s straw was shortest, and everyone accepts the result in order to prevent human caprice from influencing the decision. The matter is taken out of the hands of the people and put in the Will of Allah. This is what happened when Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was placed in the care of Prophet Zakaryya's care *peace be upon him.* This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him:* 'This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you [Muhammad]: you were not present among them when they cast their lots to see which of them should take charge of Mary, you were not present with them when they argued [about her]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 44)

So, this means that the custody of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* provoked a kind of competition and this is proven by the fact that they resorted to drawing lots to decide who would take care of her. It is not possible that they would resort to drawing lots unless there had been some sort of dispute and competition on who would take custody of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her.* And it was by the grace of Allah *Glorified is He* that Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was married to Maryam's (Mary) aunt, Ishai', sister of Hannah, who was Maryam's (Mary) mother.

The Quranic exegetes say that the words "their lots" here refer to either the divining arrows that they used to make in the past, or they refer to the pens that they would write the Torah with and then throw into the sea; the owners of the pens which floated would not take the custody of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* and the owner of the pen which sank would gain custody of her. That is how the matter was taken out of their own will and put completely in the Will of Allah.

Leaving behind desires and caprices and resorting to an object with no will of its own, as drawing lots, does not engender any bitterness in the soul. However, if someone had taken custody of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* by means of strength and force, this would inevitably have caused the souls of the others to be filled with rancour or anger. That is why the drawing of lots was prevalent in those times: they would resort to it if it was feared that someone would be wronged, or someone would be thought badly of. In the story of Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* when the ship was close to sinking, in order to save it, someone had to jump into the sea. Allah *Glorified is He* describes this in the following verse: 'Jonah, too, was one of the Messengers.

He fled to the overloaded ship. They cast lots, he suffered defeat, and a great fish swallowed him, for he had committed blameworthy acts. If he had not been one of those who Glorified Allah, he would have stayed in its belly until the Day when all are raised up'. (*as-Saffat:* 139-144)

Someone had to jump the ship and so lots were drawn so that a dispute or fight would not ensue among the people on-board the ship and the matter would not reach the level of "survival for the fittest." Drawing lots is normally an effective tool to ward off such an unpleasant situation. So, the people on-board the ship said, "Let us draw lots and whoever's lot is drawn will be thrown over." Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* had to jump into the sea and the whale swallowed him. However, because he was one of those who glorify Allah, He saved him. Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* accepted Allah's decision and even in this terrible situation, he did not forget to glorify Allah and so he was saved. This is how we read Allah's words, to understand that Prophet Zakaryya's winning of the custody of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was the decision of Allah *Glorified is He*:

'Her Lord accepted her in a handsome manner and caused her to grow like a lovely plant and told Zechariah to take care of her'. (*Al-'Imran:* 37) The words "to take care of her" mean He was assigned all the affairs of her upbringing. We know that in our culture that the Arabic word *"kafil"* means "guarantor," or the one who assumes payment of a debt if a person is unable to pay. Allah's words '…and told Zechariah to take care of her…' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) give us the clear meaning that Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon him* was the one who undertook responsibility for all of the affairs of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '…Every time Zechariah entered the shrine to [see] her, he found she had already been supplied with food'. (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Prophet Zakaryya did not visit Maryam just this one single time; rather, he visited her in the sanctuary many times. Every time Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon him* visited Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* he found she had provisions with her. For this reason, he must have wondered from whence this provision came. His question was surely an expression of amazement and so Allah *Glorified is He* says that Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon him* asked her, '…where did this provision come from?'

When we hear '…where did this provision come from' (*Al-'Imran:* 37), this indicates that he had secured the place where Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* stayed; otherwise, it might be supposed that someone had visited Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* and supplied her with provision. But Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* had locked the doors on Maryam for security reasons. So, if the doors had not been locked, it would be assumed that someone had visited Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* and supplied her with the provisions.

"Provision" is whatever one is benefited from. When Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said: '…where did this provision come from?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) let us remember what we said before that. If a Man who is entrusted by Allah *Glorified is He* with responsibility and authority such as a ruler discovers that some of his subjects live in excess, possessing extra wealth beyond their means or their income, he must surely pose this same question: "Where did this provision come from?" This is because corruption gets spread in homes and communities due to a lack of such concern for "checks and balances" and the need for calling people to account, using this similar phrase, "Where did this provision come from?"

The same applies to domestic affairs. If a person, upon entering his house, finds his daughter wearing an expensive dress beyond the means of the family, or finds that his son has bought something that the family would be unable to afford, he, whether he a father or a guardian, will find time to ask, "Where did this provision come from?" This is a means of protecting the family's moral standards from collapse or dissolution. Thus, if every family man was shrewd enough to ask his family and everyone within his care, where this provision came from, he would then be able to monitor the acts of the people under his care, knowing the details of their actions and deeds. He knows that if the reins are slackened, everything will be ruined.

So, the question posed by Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*: '…where did this provision come from?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) is a direct question about the source of this provision. Let us consider the response of Maryam (Mary): '…She would answer: "This is from Allah...."' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) She did not leave the intuition of faith up to Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* without mentioning it herself. She did not forget a plain truth present in the central understanding of every believer: '…Allah provides for whomever He wills without measure'. (*Al-'Imran:* 37) This issue touched Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* deeply and as we can see, it was an extraordinary matter. Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* told him that the provisions she had with her were from Allah Who grants sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning; He is the Almighty Allah, capable of saying: 'Be' and it is!

Then Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* reminded himself of Allah. It was as though his soul was saying to him, "If Allah is able to act without means and give without reckoning, I desire a son to succeed me, eventhough I am old and advanced in years, and my wife is barren". The matter of the provision Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* found every time he visited Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* caused him to hope and wish.

It is clear that the thoughts that go through a person's mind are many, but those thoughts do not become forefront in Man's consciousness. There is a difference between notions that exist at the forefront of Man's consciousness and thoughts that occupy the margins, which are only called for when it is necessary. When Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* found the various provisions that Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* had and when she said to him concerning their source, '…It is from Allah; Allah provides for whoever He wills without measure', Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said: 'How could this matter have escaped me?' And so, Allah *Glorified is He* said of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*: 'There and then Zakaryya (Zechariah) prayed to his Lord, saying, "Lord, from Your Grace, grant me virtuous offspring: You hear every prayer".'

When she (Maryam) told Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* that the provisions came from Allah and that He grants them to whom He wills beyond all reckoning, this statement stirred up a very important faith issue in him and so hope arose in the consciousness of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him.* He said to himself, "Let us ask our Lord to provide us with what we wish for ourselves". Since he uttered this statement, this shows that he believed deeply, with conviction, that the provisions supplied to Maryam (Mary) came from Allah. Another evidence for his trust is that he must have noticed that the kinds of provisions that Maryam (Mary) had were not from the surrounding environment or from its season and yet it was all present in the Sanctuary.

We know that the word "sanctuary" means a place of worship. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'They made for him whatever he wished of sanctuaries and statues and basins as [large as] great watering-troughs and cauldrons firmly anchored. [And We said]: "Labour, Oh David's people, in gratitude [towards Me] – and [remember that] few are the truly grateful [even] among My servants!"' (*Saba':* 13) The Arabic word for "sanctuary" (mihraab) is also used for a place in the mosque where the Imam stands during prayers. It is also used as a chamber which is reached by a staircase such as the places built in some mosques to show the movements of the prayer.

So, Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* informed Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* about the source of the provision she was blessed with, while she was in the sanctuary and that Allah was her Sole Provider. We have seen how the incident had a very powerful touch of faith on Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and what was his reaction? Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* invoked Allah, whilst he was in the sanctuary, saying:

هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُۥ ۖ قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِى مِن
لَّدُنكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ ٱلدُّعَآءِ ﴿٣٨﴾

There and then Zechariah prayed to his Lord, saying, 'Lord, from Your grace grant me virtuous offspring: You hear every prayer' [38] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 38)

He was asking for a child. We should, however, note the following: Did his request for a child follow the same pattern of ordinary people in the sense that they pray for a child just for the sake of enjoyment, or preserving their 'ancestry', or merely from being obsessed with a male child? No; Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* invoked Allah for pious offspring and using the phrase of "pious offspring" indicates his full awareness of the fact that a person might be afflicted with bad offspring.

Then in the statement of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* quoted by Allah *Glorified is He* '...to be my heir and the heir of the family of Jacob…' (*Maryam:* 6), we can see that he was praying for someone to inherit his Prophethood and the heritage of guidance and morality. This was how Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* supplicated to Allah for a child: he requested it for a mighty mission. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said, '…Oh my Lord! Bestow…' (*Al-'Imran:* 38), which means that he was requesting something without any recompense and was acknowledging that saying, "I do not possess the qualifications necessary for a person to have a child, for I am old and my wife is barren. So, my Lord, your granting me a child is a blessing from you, not a right". Even in the situation that all such qualifications are present, having a child is still not a right and so everybody must know that Allah's granting him a child is a blessing. So, beware of thinking that the presence of means, like youthfulness, vigor, health, etc., is what brings children. Allah *Glorified is He* is alerting us in the following verse that we should not fall into fooling ourselves and getting deceived by the presence of means:

Allah says, 'Allah has control of the heavens and the earth; He creates whatever He wills- He grants female offspring to whomever He will, male to whomever He will, or both male and female and He makes whoever He wills barren: He is All-knowing and All-Powerful'. (*ash-Shura:* 49-50) This is a clear Message and warning that we should not become infatuated with the means. So, everything Allah grants is a blessing from Him and having the means does not automatically grant a person what he/she desires.

Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said, '…Oh my Lord! Bestow upon me, too, out of Your grace....' (*Al-'Imran:* 38) When you say "out of Your grace", this means "grant me my requests out of Your means, by Your Grace". Why? That is because everything is from Allah.

However, there is a difference between Allah's blessing us with means such as a person going to seek knowledge and spending, for instance, for 20 years before attaining his goal, whereas you can see another person being blessed with knowledge from Allah without having to go through all this ordeal, i,e, his knowledge is a blessing from Allah. This is what the Illuminati people call "The knowledge of blessing," i.e. knowledge granted as a blessing from Allah without being worked for. So, the phrase '…out of Your grace…' (*Al-'Imran:* 38), indicates that no means were employed here and this is what Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* means in his prayer, '…Oh my Lord! Bestow upon me, too, out of Your grace....' (*Al-'Imran:* 38) Furthermore, the word "bestow" clarifies for us what is mentioned in the Quran (chapter of *Maryam*), when Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said: 'Oh my Lord! How can I have a son when my wife has always been barren and I have become utterly infirm through old age?' (*Maryam:* 8).

The word "bestow" clarifies these meanings for us. The prayer of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was '…Oh my Lord! Bestow upon me, too, out of Your grace, the gift of pious offspring; for You, indeed, are the Hearer of all prayers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 38) Does this mean that Allah hears prayer, or answers prayer? Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was placing all his hope in Allah, as though he was saying, "Oh Lord, as soon as You hear me, You will answer me by virtue of Your Omnipotent Power. Oh Lord, You know the sincerity of my intentions. You know that I want a boy, not to a be a source of delight, or just a source of pride, or for honour, or anything else; I want a child so that he can inherit from me the bearing of Your guidance on earth".

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* said,

فَنَادَتْهُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَآئِمٌ يُصَلِّى فِى ٱلْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيَحْيَىٰ مُصَدِّقًۢا
بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

The angels called out to him, while he stood praying in the sanctuary, 'God gives you news of John, confirming a Word from God. He will be noble and chaste, a prophet, one of the righteous' [39] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 39)

Did all the angels gather or call Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*? No, Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* was the one who called him. Why did Allah say that the angels called him? This divine statement came in order that we could be aware of something: the human voice makes a sound which comes from a definite direction, but as for the voice of angels, a person does not know from whence it comes and hears it as though it is coming from every direction. It is almost as though there are angels everywhere. In today's world, the modern surround-sound technology has developed, making sound that encompasses the listener from many directions.

So, the following statement from Allah *Glorified is He* '…the Angels called out unto him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 39) means that the voice came to Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* from all directions: 'Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him: "Allah sends you glad tiding of [The birth of] John, who shall confirm the truth of a word from Allah and [shall be] outstanding among men and utterly chaste and a Prophet from among the righteous."' (*Al-'Imran:* 39)

The angels called to him when he was in the most devout moment of spiritual connection with his Lord. When he prayed, he followed what Allah *Glorified is He* taught the Prophets: in times of severity, they resorted to prayer. Was his request not from Allah? If so, then it was definitely logical that he stood before Allah in supplication. All of us should try this whenever things become difficult for us, or when life becomes stressful with no means to turn things around. So, in such a situation, a person should get up, perform ablution (*wudu'*) and focus his intention even if he is already in a state of purification. Standing up before Allah, he can say, "Oh my Lord, there is a matter within Your means which is difficult for me", or something like this. I believe that if a person prays with such humility, by the time he finishes his prayer, deliverance will have come. Have we not received such a great guidance from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Whenever things got rough and he got sad, he would rush to Allah, standing in prayer.

And what we mean by "things got rough and he got sad" is that his means became sparse, so he (Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) would invoke Allah, the Creator of means, supplicating to Him in prayer, seeking means from the Creator of all means. Rather than being preoccupied with yourself, go to Allah through the shortest path which is prayer. Why would you tire yourself out, Man, oh servant of Allah, when you already have a wise Lord? It was said in the past that "whoever has a father has no worries and is it not more fitting for one who has a Lord to have peace of mind?"

Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* called on Allah in his time of severity and hardship and to do that, he stood in prayer and so the angels called him, while he was praying. They did not wait for him to finish his prayer: 'Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him, "Allah sends you the glad tiding…"'.

'Glad tidings' means information about something good, the time for which has not yet come. If this is the case, let us consider: who was the one who gave these tidings? Was it one who was able to bring them about, or not? If Allah *Glorified is He* was the One Who gave the tidings, He was indeed able. So, in that case, there is no doubt that what was promised would be delivered: '…Allah sends you the glad tiding of [the birth of] John....' Allah *Glorified is He* said to him, "I will give you". In addition to this blessing, Allah named the boy "John", he who would '…confirm the truth of a word from Allah....' (*Al-'Imran:* 39).

Let us consider the precision of Allah's words: '…John, who shall confirm....' (*Al-'Imran:* 39) This is an indication that the promised child (Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* would live in accordance with Allah's guidance and that his acts of obedience would follow this path and would be a confirmation of it, and that he would bring Allah's word, or that he would come to believe in the words of Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* was later the first to believe in the Message of Prophet Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him.* He is described by Allah *Glorified is He* as '…outstanding among men and utterly chaste and a Prophet from among the righteous'. (*Al-'Imran:* 39)

The phrase "utterly chaste" means he is absolved from everything that is forbidden to him, or absolved from the supreme instinct, which is desire. And the phrase "a Prophet" indicates that he posed as an example of a follower of the Messenger sent in his time. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* called upon Allah and stood in prayer and received the glad tidings about Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him.* Here, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* in his humanity, was dumbfounded by the turn of events and Allah *Glorified is He* depicted him as saying:

قَالَ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي غُلَٰمٞ وَقَدۡ بَلَغَنِيَ ٱلۡكِبَرُ وَٱمۡرَأَتِي
عَاقِرٞۖ قَالَ كَذَٰلِكَ ٱللَّهُ يَفۡعَلُ مَا يَشَآءُ ﴿٤٠﴾

He said, ‘My Lord, how can I have a son when I am so old and my wife is barren?’ [An angel] said, ‘It will be so: God does whatever He will’ [40] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 40)

As you can see, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* – the one who made the request – was amazed by the response and so wondered: how could this be? Allah *Glorified is He* relates this in order to show us that the human soul is always in the realm of uncertainty, not in the realm of certainty. This is so that Allah *Glorified is He* could give those of His creatures who have not been guided onto the straight path an example that, if a person is afflicted by tribulation, they must turn to Allah. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said, ‘…How can I have a son when old age has already overtaken me and my wife is barren?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 40).

Reaching old age does not make a person incapable of producing children because a person could be old and still be able to impregnate a woman. This is because for some men, impregnation is not a difficult matter, even if they become old, as long as they are not sterile; the woman, however, is the important element. If she is barren, this is the height of incapability. If Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* had merely said “my wife is barren” without mentioning his own case of being very old, it would not have been pleasant for his wife for this would mean he had attributed vigor to himself and incapability to her.

This is one of the instances of the high virtues and the good manners of Prophethood. For this reason, he (Zakaryya) *peace be upon him* began with, ‘…old age has already overtaken me and my wife is barren....’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 40) Let us consider the precision of the phrase: ‘…old age has already overtaken me....’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 40) He did not say “I have become very old”; rather, he said, “Old age is what has overtaken me; it is not something that I did to myself”. Reaching something means that there is an intention and a desire to go for it. When Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said ‘…my wife is barren…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 40), this was a magnification of Allah’s omnipotence to anyone who listens to the story: it has mentioned all human misgivings and then the final word comes: 'Thus it is: Allah does what He wills'. This is the Divine Omnipotence which is above all means, for it is that omnipotence which creates all means. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said: 'Oh my Lord! Appoint a sign for me!' The angel replied, 'Your sign shall be that for three days you will not speak to men, other than by gestures. And remember your Lord unceasingly and declare His limitless glory, by night and by day'.

Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* sought a sign from Allah that his dream - on which he had received a glad tiding - would become a reality. Zakaryya (Zechariah) exclaimed: 'Oh my Lord! How can I have a son when my wife has always been barren and I have become utterly infirm through old age?' (*Maryam:* 8-9) No doubt, this word serves as a strong sign of Allah's Supreme Omnipotence, for if Allah *Glorified is He* merely says something, it is done, pure and simple, with no doubt. So, what did Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* want after that? He wanted a sign, an indication that Prophet Yahya (John) had been created in his mother's womb. As the woman was old, she must have apparently even passed the menopausal state. So, the Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* must have known the sign because he knew his wife was barren.

However, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* did not want to miss a single moment of having Allah's gift within his reach. Since his wife had conceived (by Allah's Grace), the prayer of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was something like, "Oh Lord, do not leave me to recognise the pregnancy by the usual physical signs; for I want to live, from the first moment of Your favour upon me, in a state of being always thankful to You for your favour. The mere conception of a child is sufficient to make it incumbent upon me to turn my whole life into an expression of thanks because otherwise the favour might come, whilst I am not thankful".

So, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* sought a sign from Allah so that he might make his life an expression of thanks; he did not seek a sign because he doubted the power of Allah. Rather, it was just that he did not want a single moment of the favour to pass by, from the beginning of its existence, without him meeting it with full thanks and gratitude. What gives us this impression is Allah's words,

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱجۡعَل لِّيٓ ءَايَةٗۖ قَالَ ءَايَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ ٱلنَّاسَ ثَلَٰثَةَ أَيَّامٍ
إِلَّا رَمۡزٗاۗ وَٱذۡكُر رَّبَّكَ كَثِيرٗا وَسَبِّحۡ بِٱلۡعَشِيِّ وَٱلۡإِبۡكَٰرِ ﴿٤١﴾

**He said, ‘My Lord, give me a sign.’ ‘Your sign,’ [the angel]
said, ‘is that you will not communicate with anyone for three
days, except by gestures. Remember your Lord often;
celebrate His glory in the evening and at dawn.’ [41]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 41)**

The meaning of this must be that he wanted to speak, but was unable. There is a difference between someone’s being able to speak but not speaking and someone being totally unable to speak. Since the sign is a gift from Allah, He, Allah, is the One Who said to him: “I will prevent you from speaking, so, when you find yourself unable to speak, know that it is the sign, but you will be able to speak to people with hand-gestures”. And so that we would know that the sign is from Allah - and that Allah knows that His servant does not wish to allow a single moment of Allah’s favour to pass him by without giving thanks to Him for it- and that Allah *Glorified is He* will allow him to speak later, He says, ‘…And remember your Lord unceasingly and declare His limitless glory by night and by day’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 41) .

So, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* wanted to live that moment in full thankfulness and gratitude from the first moment, appreciating Allah’s favour and to fill his time with remembrance and did not want to be distracted by people through any form of worldly matters, such as talking. Allah knew that the intention and aim of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he requested the sign was to spend the whole moment in ceaseless remembrance of Allah, thanking Him for His Grace. So, the words of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘…And remember your Lord unceasingly…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 41) indicate that Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was able to remember Allah’s faithfulness inwardly, but unable to speak about it to the people because Allah did not want him to be distracted by speaking to the people. It is as though Allah wanted to say to him, “As you desire to live in thanks for My favour, I will make you unable to speak with the people, but able to make remembrance of me”.

“Remembrance” here means making mention of Allah and His Power, Might, Omnipotence and attributes of perfection. “Declaring Allah’s Glory” means to declare His Unique Perfection, for that which Allah does, cannot be done by any other. “Glory be to Allah!” means that Allah is uniquely perfect, for He can do that which the means (His creation) cannot and that which no one else can do. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* wished to give thanks to Allah who gives sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning. Such a remarkable observation was passed to Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* through the demeanour of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*.

As we know, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was her guardian and the fact that she spoke this statement is evidence that Allah had given her provisions which had come from other than Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* in the form of her receiving things without any means. It was as though Allah wished for her to have a taste of such a tremendous divine experience, of being supplied with provisions without human intervention , as a prelude to what would happen to her later, for she would be exposed to a situation connected with a woman’s honour and dignity. So, it was necessary for her to know, before this, that Allah gives sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning and without the use of means. If she then happened to conceive without the means of a father, it would be then, no strange thing for her, for she would know that Allah grants sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning.

When Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* heard this from her, he said, “Since Allah grants sustenance without reckoning and brings things without the use of means and I have reached such old age and my wife is barren…why should I not ask my Lord to bless me with a son?” So, the words of Maryam (Mary): ‘…behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) caught the attention of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and aroused the faith present in the depths of his consciousness. We do not say that it created a new belief in Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* that Allah *Glorified is He* grants sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning; rather, it brought this matter of faith from the margins of his consciousness to its forefront.

Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said to himself, “As long as the matter is so, I will ask Allah to bless me with a gift of son”. So, the words of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* ‘…Bestow upon me, too, out of Your grace, the gift of pious offspring…” (*Al-‘Imran:* 38) indicate that he and his wife were unable to produce children and so he appealed for a gift from Allah. The word “gift” means something given, free of charge. When he ,Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* prayed to Allah for this, his prayer was answered with Allah saying to him, essentially, “I will bless you with a son without the means of your fertility, or your wife’s ability to conceive. The matter will occur without means and I – the Creator – will undertake its creation, by My word “Be!’ and for a lofty, noble purpose, I will grant you something else, which is usually undertaken by you, fathers and mothers”. Allah bestowed them with another favour, which was the naming of the child after He had bestowed His mercy on them by blessing them with a child in their states.

Here, let us consider the gift of the name. ‘Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him: “Allah sends you the glad tiding of [the birth of] John, who shall confirm the truth of a word from Allah and [shall be] outstanding among men and utterly chaste and a Prophet from among the righteous.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 39) When people have children, they give them names and this is one of the well-established human customs and traditions. However, people, being concerned with the child’s welfare, try to be positive when naming their children, so they tend to choose names that have good and positive meanings that imbue them with high spirit and hope. For instance, they might choose a name like Sa’id (which means “happy” in Arabic), hoping that this might be an omen of happiness for them, or they might name the child Fadl (“goodness”), or Karim (“generous”).

So, parents choose names that they would like to see their children live up to. This is their hope, but as a saying goes: “If hopes and wishes were horses, beggars would ride for free.” A child might be named Sa‘id, but turn out miserable, with his life full of sadness. Likewise, a child might be named Fadl (which means “goodness”) but he is very far away from being good. Also, a child with the name ‘Izz (“honour”) might turn out to be a full disgrace to the family. But what happens when Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* names someone? There is no doubt that it will be completely different. So, when He says to Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* that the child's name would be Yahya (John) (which in Arabic means "he lives") this meant that he indeed would live, and would not die young.

In the old days, a poet would say, with high optimism, when he named his child Yahya (John):

I named him Yahya (John) so that he might live; But there is no way Man can go against his destiny.

Thus, as you see, the poet named his son Yahya (John), hoping that he would live, but Allah *Glorified is He* did not will this, so the boy died. Why? It is because men are mortal, regardless of the names given to them; humans are naturally weak. However, the One Who gives life is the Omnipotent Allah, and it is no doubt that when the One Who has Omnipotent Power gives someone a name, implying that a person will live, according to His Will, there is no doubt that this person will live a distinguished life. It should not be inferred that the life Allah *Glorified is He* indicates with His Words "his name is John" is different than the ordinary life known to mankind; for when a Man names his son Yahya (John), he hopes that he will live long, or at least reach the normal, average age of people at that time, such as sixty years, or seventy, or whatever number of years were written for them. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* gives the child the name Yahya (John), He does not intend "he lives" to be taken in an ordinary way, the way that people might have perceived it. Rather, He must surely have given him more than the ordinary human life-span and created for him enemies that would kill him and make him a martyr, and by his martyrdom, he would remain alive in a religious sense, granted a permanent life, for as we know, martyrs are alive with their Lord and are provided for.

In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* willed that Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* would live a normal life and then live a longer life beyond what is ordinary, i.e., remain alive until the Day of Judgment. We can also take note of the fact that Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he was given the glad tidings that Allah *Glorified is He* would bless him with a son and would name him Yahya (John), he was astonished. How could Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* have received the news of his being given a son with such astonishment, though he had already envisioned it when he saw the unusual provisions he found with Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* bearing in mind this Quranic verse, 'Allah provides for whomever He wills without measure'. (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

To this, we ask: Would you like to see such a miraculous, extraordinary situation happening to Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and see him receiving that as if it were an ordinary matter, not worthy of any astonishment or amazement? No, he surely must have been astonished and amazed and so he said, 'Oh my Lord! How can I have a son…?' (*Al-'Imran:* 40) It is as though this amazement alerted him to the fact that an incredible sign would come; were it not for this amazement, the matter would have been lack-lustre and would have been perceived as if it was an ordinary issue. So, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was alerting us to the incredible matter that Allah had distinguished him with. The affair was also in contradiction to the laws of reproduction and procreation: '…old age has already overtaken me and my wife is barren....' (*Al-'Imran:* 40). The entire matter was a gift from Allah.

When the glad tidings came, Allah did not say to him, "I will bless you with a son named Yahya (John), while your wife is in this situation (of being barren) and you are also in the state (of being very old)", which would have prompted him to be confused. He may have then responded: "Do You say that a child named Yahya (John) would come from me, when I am in this state, with my wife barren and I have reached this old age?", or perhaps he might have assumed that Allah would make them young again so that his wife could conceive, or perhaps that Allah would bless him with another woman to marry so that he could have a child; any of these are possible confusions he could have faced.

The astonishment we see in him was related to the manner in which the conception would occur. So, the question posed by Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*, '…how can I have a son when old age has already overtaken me and my wife is barren?..'. (*Al-'Imran:* 40) was his way of seeking knowledge of the manner in which this conception would occur, for conception occurs in many different ways. And in confirming this, Allah says, 'Thus it is....' What does this mean? It means, "You and your wife will conceive, though you are in the condition you are in, your having reached old age and your wife being barren" because that was the point and that was the reason for amazement. Again, was it logical that Allah would make them young again in order to facilitate the Will of Allah for them to have a child? No, definitely not. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* '…Thus it is: Allah does what He wills' (*Al-'Imran:* 40), i.e. "as you are, in the state you both are currently in".

Allah *Glorified is He* made the sign that Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* would not speak to the people for three days except by gestures. The inability to speak might seem to people to be some kind of illness, but it was not so because Allah *Glorified is He* said to him, '…And remember your Lord unceasingly and declare His limitless glory by night and by day'. (*Al-'Imran:* 41) So, Allah *Glorified is He* made Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* able to declare His glory, though not, while he was unable to speak. This is another manifestation of Allah's Omnipotence: a man with the same tongue, at one time, is unable to speak so that even if he tried to, his tongue would not move, yet at a different time, with this same tongue, the person is able to declare and make remembrance of Allah by night and day. This remembrance was made with the tongue so that people could hear. This is a clear indication of Allah's Omnipotence.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* takes us to another issue which is connected with Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* and she is the subject of all of this discourse because the provision that came to her from Allah *Glorified is He* without reckoning, was what inspired Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* to invoke Allah for a son. And thus Allah *Glorified is He* brings us the story of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and the child he was given, and then He takes us back to the story of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*: 'And lo!:

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَىٰكِ
وَطَهَّرَكِ وَٱصْطَفَىٰكِ عَلَىٰ نِسَآءِ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

The angels said to Mary: 'Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women [42] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 42)

The word "angels" in 'the angels said…' (*Al-'Imran:* 42) refers to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him.* The reason for Allah's referring to Jibril (Gabriel) as "the angels" is that human speech, as we mentioned previously, emerges from a certain source and the voice's direction determines the location of that source. Observe what you do when you hear a sound: you move your head to put your ear in the direction from which the sound comes. If the sound comes from the direction of your right ear, you turn your head to the right; if it comes from the direction of your left ear, you turn your head to the left. However, the speaker here is Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* and his voice comes from every direction in a wondrous way. That is why the speech here is attributed to "the angels" (plural).

What did Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* say? Passing on Allah's Message, he said: 'Mary, Allah has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women'. (*Al-'Imran:* 42). What does "choosing" mean? It is selecting and distinguishing one among all others. It is derived from the Arabic word "*Al-safw*" (noun) or "*Al-safi*" (adjective), which refers to something free from doubt. A meaning is usually derived from physical denotations. As we have said, the root of the word "chosen" in Arabic is "*safi*". When water is described as *safi*, this means clear, pure water, or as Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* '…rivers of honey clarified and pure....' (*Muhammad:* 15) In this case, "*musaffa*" is used, meaning "clarified and pure".

When Allah says, "Allah has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women" (*Al-'Imran:* 42), we notice that the choosing of Mary occurred twice. The first occurrence is not followed by "above"; the second occurrence is followed by "above." The meaning of the first occurrence is to tell Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* that Allah has distinguished her with faith, righteousness and good conduct. The occurrence of choosing Maryam

(Mary) *peace be upon her* is not followed by “above” because there might be others who are distinguished with the same characteristics. This is indicated by Allah’s words: ‘Indeed, Allah chose Adam, Noah, Abraham’s family and the family of ‘Imran over all other people’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 33) Allah then mentions that He purified her. Then, the second mention of choosing her comes followed by “above” for He says*:* ‘…chosen you above all women’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 42) This excludes men from the scope of selection and clarifies that it has no relation with masculinity; she is chosen above all women. This implies that there is no other woman in the world who shares the blessing of being distinguished with her. Why? She is the only one who will have a child without the involvement of a man and this is something that no one else will share with her.

Allah says*:* ‘…chosen you above all women’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 42) This statement must have made her wonder what it was that distinguished her from all women. The mind would be occupied with such a question and it would also be occupied with an issue related to the role of a female. If we add this to what Allah says on Maryam’s (Mary’s) tongue, ‘Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37), we find that all are allusions to what would happen later: the incident that would involve her honour and virtue. Thus, it was inevitable that Allah would have paved the way to assure her that nothing would hurt her dignity.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…chosen you above all women’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 42) We can ask, “What was the result of this choosing?” We have learned that “choose” means to select and distinguish. In Arabic, it can be read “mustafa”, meaning “the one who is chosen” and can also be read “*mustafi*”, meaning “the one who chooses”. The one who chooses here is Allah, but what is the reason for this choosing? When Allah chooses someone or something, He chooses them to undertake a mission and particularly a difficult one. Thus, Allah chooses this specific person so that this choosing becomes widely known amongst the people. It is as though Allah has chosen this thing, in particular, for the sake and benefit of people, whether the chosen one is a place, a person, or a time so that this distinction becomes widelyknown among those above which the chosen is distinguished. For example, why did Allah choose the *Ka‘ba*? It was chosen so that every human being would turn to its direction. Allah has chosen it for the sake of mankind and to spread its distinction everywhere else. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says about the *Ka'ba*: 'The first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Mecca. It is a blessed place, a source of guidance for all people'. (*Al-'Imran:* 96)

If Allah, *the Glorified,* has chosen a time such as His choosing *Ramadan* (a month in the Gregorian calendar) as a special time of fasting, then why has He done so? He has chosen it so that its distinction and the distinction of what was revealed in it become widespread in all times. So, Allah's choosing of a particular person, place, or time is for the benefit of the rest of humanity, places, and times. Why? Because none of the creation is Allah's child and there is no one with a better position than another is in Allah's sight. However, Allah chooses a certain time over another, or a place over another, or a person over another in order that the distinction of the chosen one becomes widely known amongst those over which the chosen is distinguished. So, should people rejoice over the chosen one or not? Yes, they should rejoice because it has been chosen for their benefit. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Mary, be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself in worship, bow down with those who pray'. (*Al-'Imran:* 43)

It is as if the previous findings of both the first and second choosing call for her devoutness and her sincere, submissive, and humble worship. Someone may wonder, "Why would Allah choose one thing in particular to make its distinction widespread among people?" It is because the blessing of being chosen by Allah entails that the chosen is absolved from whatever its counterparts might fall into, among them, unsatisfactory decisions. Allah *Glorified is He* intends what He chooses to be a model from which only goodness should come. The best example of this is Allah's choosing of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* He willed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only acted in a praiseworthy manner from the very beginning of his Prophethood in order to provide us with the model of faith throughout the twenty-three years of his mission.

Allah says to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* on the tongue of the angel: 'Mary, be devout to your Lord'. (*Al-'Imran:* 43) This is a command to remain in constant, sincere worship of her Lord. The Arabic word "*lirabbiki*" (your Lord) indicates edification. It is as though being chosen by Allah is one of His favours upon Maryam (Mary) and they merit devotion from her. 'Prostrate yourself in worship, bow down with those who pray…' (*Al-'Imran:* 43) means humble and submit yourself in excess, by placing your forehead, the noblest part of the human body, onto the floor, for prostration is the highest level of submission.

However, does this form of submission excuse Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* from having to bow to Allah alongside other people? No, for Allah's true command to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was to 'bow down with those who pray'. (*Al-'Imran:* 43) Hence, she was not excused from bowing in congregation by performing a higher act in terms of submission which was prostration; rather, she still had to bow down with those who bow down. Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* did not have the right to say, "Allah has commanded to perform a higher act of worship, so I will not perform the lower one". Allah commanded her, also, to join the procession of bowers.

This is similar to Allah's statement concerning the disbelievers: '"What drove you to *Saqar* (the Scorching Fire?)" [they will ask] and they [those in the hellfire] will answer, "We did not pray…"' (*al-Muddaththir:* 42-43) They were disbelievers, so how could they pray? This is an admission by them that they were disbelievers and did not follow the path of those who pray and an admission that they were not Muslims (following the religion of Islam), and nor were they believers in Allah. Here, someone may ask: "Why does Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* say to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* 'Mary, be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself in worship, bow down with those who pray' (*Al-'Imran:* 43) and not say "with those women who bow down (pray)"?

In answer to this, we would like to provide you with a simple introduction to the philosophy of terminology. Names are words in a language used to identify certain objects. There are names of inanimate objects, names of plants, names of animals and names of subtle beings such as jinn, angels and everything that Allah *Glorified is He* has made unseen. These names refer to their meanings. Allah *Glorified is He* guided humanity to this when He taught Adam *peace be upon him* all the names; how else would Adam *peace be upon him* have been able to refer to those things with their names? So, everything must have a name to be distinguished among other things by one single simple word.

Were it not for this, how would a person be able to talk with another person about a mountain, for instance? Should the speaker take the listener to where the mountain is located and point to it? Or would it be enough for him to say the word “mountain” so that the listener could recall the picture of the named thing in his mind? So, Allah’s philosophy of teaching us the names of things removed the load of futile misunderstanding from our shoulders. Were it not for this, we would have been unable to make anything understood unless it was directly in front of us so that we could point to it. The word “mountain”, the word “rock” and other similar words, are names of things and beings. When I speak, for example, about America, I do not have to take the listener there and point to it, saying, “This is America”; rather, the single word “America” provides the listener with the meaning of what it refers to and so we attach terms to whatever they are used to name.

Since this is the case, names must exist for things or beings to which they refer. These are the names Allah taught to mankind so that they can understand one another. Man’s origin is from Adam *peace be upon him.* The word “Adam” in Arabic is grammatically masculine. The opposite of masculine is feminine. Allah, *Exalted is He* above everything, created males and females because by their union progeny comes forth. So, the distinction must have been made between the two forms of a single species. Males and females are the children of Adam *peace be upon him* and from them comes reproduction. However, it is extraordinary that Allah *Glorified is He* named Adam *peace be upon him* with a masculine name and named Eve with a feminine name and made a generic name to refer to all creation: “Soul”.

Allah says*:* ‘People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of Allah, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship: Allah is always watching over you’. (*an-Nisa’:* 1)

Allah referred to Adam *peace be upon him* using the word “soul”, which is a feminine word. So, the concept of femininity is not less than the concept of masculinity; rather, the masculine form of words is merely an indication that gives things and beings their appropriate names and so is the feminine form.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to every one of us as a "soul," which is a feminine word and when He makes another statement about creation, He says*:* 'Oh people, We created you all from a single Man and a single woman and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In the sight of Allah, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: Allah is All-knowing, All-aware'. (*al-Hujurat:* 13)

The word "people" here is the plural of a human being. In this way, we know that the word "human" can be used to refer to a male in one case and a female in another. Thus, the Lord has used a masculine word in one instance and a feminine word in another so that we would not claim that males are better than females. This distinction is nothing but a means of understanding. For this reason, Allah emphasizes to us that He has given names to things so that we can get to know one another by their means: '…and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another'. (*al-Hujurat:* 13) The meaning of "recognise one another" here is that all of us have a name by which we are known to others. In an example from our daily life, let us say there is a man who has many children and so he gives each child a name by which the community will know them. The extraordinary quality of this verse is that part: '…and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another'. We find that the Arabic word "*shu'ooban*" derived from *sha'b* (races) is masculine and the Arabic word "*qaba'ila*" derived from *qabeelah* (tribes) is feminine. So, there is no distinction based on preference; rather, the words here are just named so for the purpose of recognition. Allah *the Almighty* says*:*

'By the declining day, Man is [deep] in loss except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth and urge one another to steadfastness'. (*al-'Asr:* 1-3) So, what about the women who believed? They fall into the category of "those who believe," *'alladhina amanu'*in Arabic, which is masculine. Why has Allah put the feminine among the masculine? It is because the masculine is the origin and the feminine is derivative, as a branch, from it. So, the feminine is included in the masculine in matters which apply to both sexes.

'People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you so that you may be mindful [of Him]'. (*al-Baqara:* 21) This means that the "feminine" is included in the masculine in terms of worshiping. The general meaning specifies human beings, as a species, as those required to worship, both male and female. In matters specifically relating to women, Allah addresses women, in particular. Allah Almighty says*:* ‘When Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad) have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing Man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter: whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger is far astray’. (*al-Ahzab:* 36) Why? It is because the matter here includes both sexes of the same species: the man and the woman, husband and wife. For example, a husband might want to divorce his wife and so Allah clarifies this in detail. If there is a matter specifically related to women, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* specifies His commands, such as in His wise words: ‘Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other woman. If you are truly mindful of Allah, do not speak too softly in case the sick at heart should lust after you, but speak in an appropriate manner; stay at home and do not flaunt your finery as they used to in the pagan past; keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet’s] House and to purify you thoroughly’. (*al-Ahzab:* 32-33)

Everything mentioned in the previous verse specifies the duties of the wives of the Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* This speech, addressed to women, clarifies the specification by using the Arabic pronoun “*na*” used at the end of the following Arabic words: “*lastunna*” (you are not), “*ittaqaytunna*” (are truly mindful of Allah), “*takhda’ana*” (speak too softly), “*qarna*” (stay at home) and “*tabarrajna*” (flaunt your finery). The speech in this verse is concerned with women and so it addresses women using the feminine pronoun.

However, if a matter is related to mankind in general, Allah inclusively addresses all men and women using the masculine form. For this reason, when women asked why it should appear that men are better than women, Allah’s words were revealed: ‘For men and women who are devoted to Allah - believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember Allah often - Allah has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward'. (*al-Ahzab:* 35)

Thus, Allah settles the matter, when He *the Exalted* says confirming this: 'Anyone, male or female, who does good deeds and is a believer, will enter paradise and will not be wronged by as much as the dip in a date stone'. (*an-Nisa':* 124) Here, the male and the female are both included in one description which is "a believer". So, when a commandment is related to a general matter, required from both men and women, women are included and addressed in the masculine form. The feminine is concealed into the masculine because a woman's position is based on her being concealed, veiled, and hidden in man. Therefore, she is included with him.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her,*

يَٰمَرْيَمُ ٱقْنُتِى لِرَبِّكِ وَٱسْجُدِى وَٱرْكَعِى مَعَ ٱلرَّٰكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Mary, be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself
in worship, bow down with those who pray [43]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 43)

The bowing is not specific to women. If that was the case, Allah would have said "with those women who bow down." Rather, it is a general matter encompassing both men and women. For this reason, Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was commanded to bow down with those who bow down (to pray). After this, Allah says:

ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ ۚ وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يُلْقُونَ
أَقْلَٰمَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We
reveal to you [Muhammad]: you were not present among
them when they cast lots to see which of them should take
charge of Mary, you were not present with them when they
argued [about her] [44] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 44)

We said before that the word for "account" in Arabic is only used to refer to highly significant news. "*Al-Ghaybi*" (things beyond knowledge) refer to what is beyond perception. There are some things beyond perception that a human like you can recognise and there are some things beyond perception that a human like you cannot recognise.

We also said before that the veils of the unseen (things beyond knowledge) are three: sometimes the veil is time that has passed; sometimes it is time that will come; and sometimes the veil is of the location. Why? It is because all events are based on the two factors of time and place. If someone gives me an account of an incident that took place in the past, they break through the time barrier; though the event took place several years in the past, I have been informed of it in the present and this means that the past time barrier has been penetrated. If they inform me of something that will happen two years from now, this penetrates the future-time barrier. Say that a person informs you of news that is contemporary to you. Here, the barrier of location is present, for, while I am with you now, I do not know what is happening in another city though the time is the same.

For this reason, we should know that the barrier is sometimes one of time –such as the past or the future– or the barrier might be one of location. If Allah informs His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this account, then the means by which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gained his knowledge are three, for the means by which an event is known about are three: witnessing, hearing, or reading.

The first means of knowing about an event –witnessing– necessitates that a person be present at the time of the event, yet the account that Allah gave to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was of an event that occurred at least six centuries before his mission. So, knowing about this event by means of witnessing must be ruled out because it took place in the past. Someone might say, “Perhaps the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* read or heard about it”. Yet even the enemies of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* admitted that he could not read, so this means is ruled out as well. The enemies of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* admitted that he had never sat with a teacher, so he could not have heard it from a teacher.

There was no means by which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could have known this account except by Revelation and so Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you [Muhammad]: you were not present among them when they cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Mary, you were not present with them when they argued [about her]…' (*Al-'Imran:* 44).

We have said before, that Revelation means the imparting of concealed information because the ordinary act of informing happens when a person tells something to another person. As for the imparting of concealed information, it is called "Revelation." Revelation requires One Who reveals (who is Allah), one who receives the Revelation (who is the Messenger, Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*), and something which is revealed (which is the Quran). If we consider the imparting of concealed information, we will find that it has many different methods.

Allah is the one who reveals, whereas the one who is revealed to is different. Allah Almighty sends Revelation to the earth: 'When the Earth is shaken violently in its [last] quaking, when the earth throws out its burdens, when Man cries, 'What is happening to it?'; on that Day, it will tell all because your Lord will inspire it [to do so]'. (*az-Zalzala:* 1-5) This is imparting of concealed information. None of us hears Allah when He sends Revelation to the earth. Allah also sends Revelation to the bees, the angels, and the Prophets. There are even revelations from other than Allah, such as the incitement coming from the devils: 'The evil ones incite their followers to argue with you: if you listen to them, you, too, will become idolaters'. (*al-An'am:* 121)

Human beings also give revelation in the form of suggestions to each other: 'In the same way, We assigned to each Prophet an enemy, evil humans and evil jinn. They suggest alluring words to one another in order to deceive - if it had been your Lord's will, [Prophet], they would not have done this: leave them to their inventions'. (*Al-'Imran:* 112) However, when the word "revelation" is used without qualification, it refers to Revelation from Allah to whomever He chooses to bear His Message. Other forms of revelation are called "linguistic revelation." The conventional use of the word "revelation" means Revelation from Allah to one of His Messengers. So, Allah's Revelation to the Earth is not conventional revelation, nor is His Revelation to the bee, nor His Revelation to the mother of Musa (Moses), nor His Revelation to the disciples of Jesus. Allah says: '…and how I inspired the disciples to believe in Me and My Messengers - they said, "We believe and bear witness that we devote ourselves [to Allah]"'. (*al-Ma'ida:* 111)

This is a form of unconventional revelation; indeed, it is linguistic revelation, meaning that He informed them of some concealed information. True Revelation is when Allah *Glorified is He* teaches whomever He chooses to deliver His Message and this is the Revelation given to the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon hi.*

Allah says: 'This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you [Muhammad]: you were not present among them when they cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Mary, you were not present with them when they argued [about her]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 44) Thus, Allah informs us that the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received this account by means of Revelation; he neither read it nor saw it. We know that the enemies of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* testified that he couldn't read, and nor did he hear anything from a teacher. Thus, Allah informs us that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not present with Maryam's (Mary's) people when they cast their lots.

The Arabic word for "their lots" here is "*aqlamahom*" meaning either the pens we use to write, or lots they used to cast to settle a dispute. When they disputed, they used lots to determine who would win the thing about which they disputed. This is called lot casting and it is performed to remove caprice from the process of allocation between individuals in order that no one's whim could influence the decision in favour of one person or another over the rest. Nowadays, we also cast ballots combining pieces of paper representing several persons, then picking one of them. So, no one's desires can influence allocation by means of voting. In this way, we refer the matter to Allah because a piece of paper has no inclinations. When Maryam's (Mary) people disputed and argued over her custody, they decided to remove caprice from the matter and leave it up to fate so that the decision would be made by the lot, not by desires as these lots would be in accordance with fate.

Their "pens" or lots in this verse refer either to the lots that they used for casting, or to the pens with which they wrote the Torah, seeking its blessing. Some might wonder about the meaning of Allah's words, 'When they cast lots…' (*Al-'Imran:* 44) and about the place where these lots were cast. It is said that they were cast into the sea. When lots are cast into the sea, how could someone be distinguished by this procedure? It is said that if the lot (or pen) stood with its point upwards, its owner was the winner; if all the lots sank but one floated, its owner was the winner.

They must have agreed on some sign or signal that would distinguish the lot of the one who would take custody of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*: 'This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you [Muhammad]: you were not present among them when they cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Mary, you were not present with them when they argued [about her]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 44) The phrase "when they argued" indicates that the strength of the dispute between the people wanting to take custody of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* reached the level of argument. Eventually, they resorted to casting lots to end the dispute. We'll move on now to another stage:

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says*:*

إِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ يَـٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ ٱسْمُهُ
ٱلْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ وَمِنَ ٱلْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

The angels said, 'Mary, God gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, who will be held in honour in this world and the next, who will be one of those brought near to God [45] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 45)

The first stage of Maryam's (Mary's) preparation was Allah's words on her tongue, 'Allah provides limitlessly for whoever He will'. (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Thus, she recognised Allah's Omnipotent Power. The second stage was her hearing the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) and Yahya (John), and Allah's confirmation for her that He had chosen her above all women. This was a matter related to women. This was a source of comfort from Allah to her.

Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* then, proceeded to a new stage. ‘The angels said, “Mary, Allah gives you news of a Word from Him…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 45).

Glad tidings do not come except for momentous, happy news. Some might wonder what Allah means by, “a Word from Him”. The answer is that Allah Almighty practices His Power in His dominion by means of merely a word, not by any biological means. Allah *Glorified is He* made us aware of this by His Words: ‘This is how Allah creates what He will: when He has ordained something, He only says, “Be” and it is’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 47). This statement clarifies Allah’s Omnipotent Power. We have no faster way of commanding other than the word “Be.” Allah’s Omnipotent Power, with its limitlessness, surpasses - with speed!- the time we take to pronounce even the first letter of the word “Be”. Allah clarifies this in the closest way possible to our human perception. When Allah *the Exalted* wills a matter, He says ‘Be’ and it is. This is to clarify that the mere divine will of a matter makes it exist immediately. ‘Be’ is just a manifestation of the way He gives commands to humanity. Thus, we understand the meaning of Allah’s giving glad tidings to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* of “a Word from Him”. Allah says: ‘…whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 45) These are three names: the Messiah, Isa (Jesus) and son of Maryam (Mary).

What is the meaning of “the Messiah”? It could mean one who is absolved from all sins, or that one of his signs was wiping the body of the sick with his hands to cure them, or it could mean “blessed”. As for Isa (Jesus), it is the name of the child, whereas “the Messiah” is his title. “Son of Maryam (Mary)” is his surname. We know that proper nouns, in Arabic, are of three types: names, titles, and surnames. Ibn Malik said: ‘There are names, surnames, and titles’. A proper noun for a person has three types. The “name” is what a person is called by, at first. The second name is what we give to a person, something which denotes the elevated status of a person, or otherwise, and it is called a “title”. If the name includes the name of their mother or father, it is called a “surname”. All three are mentioned to refer to Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* ‘…whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 45)

Mentioning Isa (Jesus) by title, name, and surname has a wisdom that will be revealed to us later. Allah *Glorified is He* says of him: ‘…who will be held in honour in this world and the next…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 45) The Arabic word "wajihan" (held in honour among his people) means that no one can deny him a request, for his honour showed in his face. In our daily lives, we say that it is not appropriate to cause embarrassment to someone by turning down their request. As common people exclaim upon accepting a request, "Can anyone turn down that face?" So, a person held in honour is distinguished and privileged, so much so that people cannot bring themselves to reject his requests. In contrast, there are others who beg from you or from others. This results in people neglecting them, for they dishonour themselves and the issue is put to an end.

Allah says, describing Isa (Jesus) that he is one who 'will be held in honour in this world and the next'. (*Al-'Imran:* 45) It means that no one will turn him down if he asked them all because of the honour in his face. People are shy to refuse someone of such honour and for this reason, we find beggars sometimes say, "Give me for the pleasure of Allah's face", i.e. do not look at my face, but think of Allah's face, for it is Allah, the Creator, who brought me into this world and created me; thus, He is responsible for my provision. When you assist in the providing for someone whom Allah called into existence, you have given for Allah's pleasure; for He is the Creator who gives provision to all His creatures even those who disbelieve in Him.

So, a person's giving to a beggar is not for the sake of the beggar; it is giving for the pleasure of Allah. Allah describes Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* as one 'who will be held in honour in this world and the next....' (*Al-'Imran:* 45) We know how a person can be distinguished in this world; why does Allah mention Isa's (Jesus') distinction in the hereafter especially when all the faces of the believers will be radiant, then? Allah mentions the distinction of Isa (Jesus) in the hereafter because he will be asked a question about the peak of faith: 'When Allah says, "Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, 'Take me and my mother as two gods alongside Allah'? He will say, "You are the Exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say - if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen"'. (*al-Ma'ida:* 116)

Beware of imagining that this question is a rebuke from Allah to Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), *peace be upon them*; rather, Allah wants to rebuke all those who made such claims. For this reason, Allah says about him, on his tongue *peace be upon him:* ‘Peace was on me the day I was born and will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again’. (*Maryam:* 33)

This is because his birth caused a sensation and some of the children of Israel (Israelites) spoke ill of his mother, the virgin, Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*. Later, they spoke of his “death,” and we all know the story of the crucifixion which also caused a sensation. He was not crucified; rather, the one who betrayed him and informed against him was crucified, for Allah cast Isa’s (Jesus’) likeness upon him and so they killed him. On the Day of Resurrection, when he will be raised to life again, Allah will ask him, “Did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two gods alongside Allah’?” He will say, “You are the Exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say...’”. (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116) It is Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), who is blessed by Allah with peace in these three states. Allah continues describing Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) as one who will ‘be held in honour in this world and the next, who will be one of those brought near to Allah’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 45) The words “brought near to Allah” indicate Allah’s sublime greatness; when some people get infatuated with a person, some others might get angry with this particular person though he himself is blameless.

Allah *the Exalted* teaches us that the one who goes to excess in religion will be recompensed for it, but the one who is the innocent subject of this going to excess will be saved by the mercy of the Most-Forgiving. Allah teaches us that the infatuation of some people with Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), does not affect the status of Isa (Jesus) in the sight of Allah; for he is one of those who are brought near to Him and the infatuation of the others does not affect his position.

Allah says*:*

وَيُكَلِّمُ ٱلنَّاسَ فِي ٱلۡمَهۡدِ وَكَهۡلٗا وَمِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ٤٦

He will speak to people in his infancy and in his adulthood.
He will be one of the righteous’ [46] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 46)

“Speaking to people in infancy” refers to the enunciation by which the thought of the speaker is transferred to the listener. Allah says*:* ‘…will speak to people in the cradle (in his infancy)'. (*Al-'Imran:* 46) Those who will encounter Isa (Jesus) in his cradle are the people spoken to, and a cradle is whatever is prepared for a child to sleep in.

Allah mentions 'in the cradle (in his infancy) and in his adulthood...' (*Al-'Imran:* 46) in order to illustrate that Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), is a changeable being: one time, he is in the cradle; in another time, he is a grown man. Since he is subject to change, no one should become infatuated with him as though he is a "god," or the "son of a god."

We also understand from '…will speak to people in the cradle (in his infancy)…' (*Al-'Imran:* 46) the secret behind the existence of the sign of the miracle bestowed on him in the cradle by Allah. This is because the issue was related to the virtue, the honour and the morality of his mother. The sign had to come to exclude, in advance, people's possible astonishment at her giving birth without a father for the child, or a husband. We have no account of this being mentioned by them, though it was necessary for it to be mentioned because they glorify their Prophet and so they must not have been heedless of this extraordinary matter.

The speaking of an infant was very peculiar, and that should have been mentioned and circulated amongst the people. People would not have been content to merely relate the fact that he spoke in the cradle; they would have memorised what he said and repeated it many times. The words that Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said in the cradle do not sustain the argument of those who describe Isa (Jesus) in a way that contradicts his humanity because the very first thing that he said was: 'I am a servant of Allah'. They concealed this whole issue because these words refute the claim they wanted to ascribe to Isa (Jesus). Allah says: '…will speak to people in the cradle (in his infancy) and in his adulthood...' (*Al-'Imran:* 46).

We know that 'speaking in the cradle' means that he was an infant and that 'in adulthood' means when he would reach the age of thirty, i.e. his fourth decade. Some have said that the word "adulthood" means one who has reached the age of forty. In their account, the story of the crucifixion occurred before he reached this age and that he spoke in the cradle but did not get the chance to speak openly as a grown man. They say that the story of the crucifixion (or his being hidden from human awareness) happened before he reached this age. Then, there must come a time when Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* will speak at this age. Allah’s true words ‘will speak to people in the cradle (in his infancy) and in his adulthood...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 46) also mean that he spoke in the cradle as a child and he will speak as a fully mature, grown man. We know that Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) underwent change and passed through different states. If they claim that he is God or the son of God, is the divinity in the cradle the same as the divinity in maturity?

If the divinity was in the cradle only, it is deficient because he did not continue being in the cradle and underwent changes. Since he underwent changes, he was mutable, and if he was mutable, he could not have been God or the son of God. After this, Allah says of Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary): ‘He will be one of the righteous’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 46). What is the story behind this? The prodigy that Allah speaks of is that when Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* spoke to the people in his cradle; it was not by his own choice and his speech as a grown man would be inspired by a Revelation, so he would have no choice in that, either. The statement, ‘He will be one of the righteous’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 46), refers to his deeds and behaviour. Why? Because it is not sufficient for him to just deliver the Message, and nor to bear signs; it was a must that he carries out the faith-based behaviours.

Allah says, on the tongue of Virgin Maryam (Mary):

قَالَتۡ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٞ وَلَمۡ يَمۡسَسۡنِي بَشَرٞۖ قَالَ كَذَٰلِكِ ٱللَّهُ
يَخۡلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُۚ إِذَا قَضَىٰٓ أَمۡرٗا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٧﴾

She said, ‘My Lord, how can I have a son when no man has touched me?’ [The angel] said, ‘This is how God creates what He will: when He has ordained something, He only says, “Be”, and it is [47] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 47)

We wish to pause here and reflect on her statement: ‘My Lord, how can I have a son when no Man has touched me?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 47) If she had stopped at ‘My Lord, how can I have a son...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 47), her question would have been logical. However, her addition of '…when no man has touched me?' (*Al-'Imran:* 47) raises the question: why did she add the part '…when no man has touched me?' (*Al-'Imran:* 47). Did someone say to her, "You will bear a child without means of a father"? The Angels did not tell her that. So, her thoughts were directed by them to the issue of being touched.

It is the instinct and intelligence of one who was ready and prepared to receive from Allah when He says to her*:* '…the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary...' (*Al-'Imran:* 45).

She said to herself, "By Allah's command, his lineage is ascribed to me and so he has no father." Allah calls Isa (Jesus) the '…son of Mary' and so she asked, '…when no Man has touched me?' (*Al-'Imran:* 47) It is not possible in her culture for a child to be ascribed to the mother, while the father exists. Thus, we see Virgin Maryam's (Mary's) shrewdness in receiving from Allah. She was concerned when she realised that Isa (Jesus) had been ascribed to her and she said to herself, "My pregnancy of Isa (Jesus) will occur without a father, yet how can pregnancy occur when no Man has touched me?"

The Creator *the Most Generous* says, 'This is how', i.e. that no man will touch you. He does not say to her, "We have ascribed him to you because you are vowed to the service of the Temple"; rather, He says*:* 'This is how', confirming what she had understood: that Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* would be conceived without any man touching her. The Omnipotence of His Power is revealed in His Words, 'Allah creates what He wills...' (*Al-'Imran:* 47) This is omnipotence of power, the absolute control over human reproduction, procreation, and childlessness. Omnipotent power does not stop at the creation of males and females. If this were the case, how was Adam, the first human, created? Allah is able to create without a male or a female as in the case of Adam's creation *peace be upon him.* He also creates by means of only one of them such as the creation of Eve, or Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him. The Almighty* Creator who initially created masculinity and femininity is capable of fulfilling creation. The male and female can also be present and the ability to reproduce is not.

Allah says, 'Allah has control of the heavens and the Earth; He creates whatever He wills - He grants female offspring to whomever He wills, male to whomever He wills, or both male and female and He makes whoever He wills barren: He is All-knowing and All-powerful’. (*al-Shura:* 49-50)

This is the will of Allah, so do not say, “It is the completion of the two elements, male and female, that causes creation.” Creation occurs by Allah’s will. Allah says*:* ‘This is how Allah creates what He wills: when He has ordained something, He only says, "Be" and it is’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 47) You, oh mutable beings, act by the use of means, but the One Who created you and created the means has the power to create without means, for He created the world, in the beginning, without any means.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about Isa (Jesus) *peace be with him*:

وَيُعَلِّمُهُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَٱلتَّوْرَىٰةَ وَٱلْإِنجِيلَ ﴿٤٨﴾

He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, the
Torah and the Gospel [48] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 48)

When we hear, ‘He will teach him *Al-kitab* [the Scripture]...’, we understand that Allah will teach Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) the Revelations He will send down to him; namely, the Gospel. However, Allah says afterwards, ‘…and the Torah and the Gospel’; this matter poses a question: what, then, does “*Al-kitab*” refer to? Does it mean that he will be taught the Scriptures that have been previously revealed such as the Psalms and the Scriptures of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*? This may be the case. Therefore, ‘And He will teach him *Al-kitab…*’ may mean Allah has taught Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) the Books that were revealed before him: the Psalms of Dawud (David), the Scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the Torah of Musa (Moses), all which Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) came to complete.

Some scholars have said that Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was endowed with nine-tenths of all the beauty of calligraphy ever granted to humankind. This means that we may also interpret *Al-kitab* as “writing” or “the ability to write”. The Arabic word ketab (literally: “book”) is derived from the stem kataba (literally: “to write”). Let us consider the meaning of the verse at hand. In addition to *Al-kitab* (”the scripture” or “the ability to write”), Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* received from Allah ‘…wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel'. (*Al-'Imran:* 48) The word "wisdom' is usually mentioned in the Quran following mention of a revealed Scripture, as in Allah's words: 'And keep to mind what is recited in your houses of the communications of Allah and the wisdom; surely Allah is Knower of subtleties, Aware'. (*al-Ahzab:* 34)

"The communications of Allah" here means the Noble Quran and "the wisdom" means the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Prophet Muhammad received the Quran and delivered it as it is and Allah also revealed to him matters that he was allowed to deliver in his own words. That was the wisdom Prophet Muhammad shared. As for the Torah, Allah has taught it to Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him.* As we know, the mission of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) was to complete the Torah and restore what the Jews had concealed of the truth told in it. The Torah was the basis of legislation during his lifetime and for the community to whom he was sent. Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) was, according to this verse of the Quran, '... a Messenger to the Children of Israel'.

Allah says*:*

وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ أَنِّى قَدْ جِئْتُكُم بِـَٔايَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ أَنِّىٓ أَخْلُقُ لَكُم
مِّنَ ٱلطِّينِ كَهَيْـَٔةِ ٱلطَّيْرِ فَأَنفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًۢا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَأُبْرِئُ
ٱلْأَكْمَهَ وَٱلْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْىِ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا
تَدَّخِرُونَ فِى بُيُوتِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

He will send him as a messenger to the Children of Israel: "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with God's permission, it will become a real bird; I will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life with God's permission; I will tell you what you may eat and what you may store up in your houses. There truly is a sign for you in this, if you are believers [49] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 49)

Prophethood requires a sign to prove it. It is not for anyone to just claim, "I am a Messenger from Allah!" Rather, he must show people a miracle to prove he truly is a Messenger from Allah. A miracle, as we know, is an extraordinary matter that goes beyond the limitations of natural laws and norms. Its purpose is to confirm the truthfulness of the Messenger. Such a sign stands as evidence against whoever denies the Message of Allah, as if it were saying to them, “If you deny that this is a Messenger of Allah, how, then, can you explain that he is able to perform a miracle, an extraordinary thing that goes beyond laws and norms?!” Thus, a miracle confounds a denier who defies the Messenger since he can neither explain it nor produce one like it.

For this reason, we have previously said that whenever Allah gave a miracle to a Messenger, it was meant to challenge his people with something at which they excelled. If Allah challenged a people with something they had no knowledge of, their reply to the Messenger would be, “You have brought something completely new to us. If we were familiar with it, we would certainly surpass you in it!” For this reason, whenever Allah granted a miracle to any of His Messengers, it was of a kind that his people were particularly excellent in. An example of this is the miracle given to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him:* Allah sent him to a people who excelled in magic, so his miracle was of a kind that was suitable to challenge magicians.

It is very important to note that the miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) was by no means magic; it apparently resembled the magic that his people mastered, but it was a real miracle, not an illusion. Magicians used to deceive people with things that were not real. In the Quran, Allah clarifies to us the difference between the miracle He has given to His Messenger and his people’s magic. Allah says*:* ‘Musa (Moses), what is that in your right hand?” “It is my staff,” he said, “I lean on it; restrain my sheep with it; I also have other uses for it.” Allah says, “Throw it down, Musa (Moses)”. He threw it down and– lo and behold! – it became a fast-moving snake’. (*Ta Ha:* 17-20)

Allah meant to tell Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that the limit of his knowledge of that thing in his hand was confined to its being a staff he used for those common chores. However, in the Knowledge of Allah and with His Power, it could be something entirely different. For this reason, Allah commanded Prophet Musa (Moses) to throw down the staff. Once he did, he saw it turn into a snake moving rapidly which cast fear into his soul. The fear it cast into his soul was the sign that distinguished the miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from the magic of his people. Why? When a magician throws down his staff, people see it a snake, but he still sees it as a staff; people see his illusion, but he sees reality. If the magician himself saw it as a snake, he would be as frightened as his audience would. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* felt that fear since he saw his staff turn into a real snake. Hence, Allah says to him: 'He [Allah] said, "Pick it up without fear: We shall turn it back into its former state"'. (*Ta Ha:* 21) If it had been magic meant to delude his people, it would not have made him afraid because he would have seen reality, not the delusion. He would have seen it as a staff, though others would have seen it as a snake. This is the difference that proves it to be a miracle, a real one, and not sheer deception.

The people of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) were renowned for medicine, so Allah gave him a miracle that was related to medicine. Allah challenged the people of Prophet 'Isa, not just by making him superior to them in the field wherein they excelled, but He also made him bring the dead back to life. Needless to say, that it is completely out of the scope of medicine. A physician can never grant life to the dead, but the Messenger of Allah did it by Allah's Might and Will to prove his Prophethood. For this reason, Allah granted His servant and Messenger 'Isa (Jesus) a miraculous sign that went far beyond the scope of human ability. Prophet 'Isa did not only heal the sick, but also raised the dead by the Will of his Almighty Creator. Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) said, '…"I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with Allah's permission, it will become a real bird...."' (*Al-'Imran:* 49) Let us ponder the meaning of this noble verse.

To "make" or "create" something means to produce something according to a design determined by its maker or creator. It is an idea that starts in the mind, and then it becomes crystallized and is finally put into reality accordingly. If the final product does not match that design, then it is not creation; it is just something random produced with neither knowledge nor design. If someone takes a piece of clay and makes a random shape of it, this is not creation. Creation means making something according to a definite design. An example of this is a cup or glass that we use to drink. Cups are not grown on trees. A manufacturer melts sand, mixes it with chemicals to remove impurities from it and then shapes it into a cup. So, a cup does not exist until a maker determines its design and produces it accordingly. This is what “creation” means.

Nevertheless, there are remarkable differences between human creation and the creation of Allah *the Exalted*. Humans create things using materials that already exist, but Allah creates things from nothingness. A human employs the materials Allah has created for him to produce things by His Will. No one can produce a cup were it not for the raw material Allah has created. This is the first difference between the creation of Allah and the creation of humankind. Both are comprised of the process of production based on a definite design; however, Allah creates things from nothingness, based on no materials that had existed before, whereas man must use the materials Allah has made for him to create things.

Moreover, there is the secret Allah puts in His creation, a secret not in the scope of humankind to give: life. It is what makes the creatures of Allah grow, develop, and reproduce. One may create a cup, but it would remain a cup; it would not grow and there would never be male and female cups to reproduce! We may produce things, but the secret of life that leads to growth, development, reproduction, etc. is only in the Hands of Allah *the One and the All-Powerful Creator of all things*. Human creation is thus dependent on the existence of necessary materials and cannot exceed the limits set by Allah Who creates things out of nothing, without depending on previously-existing materials.

Also, Allah creates things male and female and gives them the capability to reproduce, as He says in the Noble Quran, ‘And certainly did We create Man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a sperm-drop in a firm lodging. Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot and We made the clot into a lump [of flesh] and We made [from] the lump, bones and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So, blessed is Allah, the best of creators!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 12-14). Allah has created all things from nothing, whereas human creation is confined to the raw materials He has made available to them. Allah creates life in His creatures and endows them with the ability to reproduce. Humans can create things, but they cannot put into them the secret of life. Glory is for Allah, the Best of all creators!

Now, let us reflect again on the words of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) as quoted in the Quran: ‘…“I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with Allah’s permission, it will become a real bird...”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 49) Any human being can create a statue in the form of a bird, but Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) made a real bird out of that statue and that was the miracle Allah gave him to support his call. Someone might ask, “Which did he breathe into? Did he breathe into the bird statue, the clay, or the shape he created?” The first supposition is that he breathed into the clay after he made it in the form of a bird and the case is similar if he breathed into the clay. Another verse of the Quran mentions that life was breathed into the shape: ‘Then Allah will say, “Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Remember My favour to you and to your mother: how I strengthened you with the holy spirit so that you spoke to people in your infancy and as a grown Man; how I taught you the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; how, by My leave, you fashioned the shape of a bird out of clay, breathed into it and it became, by My leave, a bird...”’. (*al-Ma‘ida:* 110) The pronoun “it” in the aforesaid verse refers to “the shape”. So, the act of breathing is sometimes associated with the clay or the bird and sometimes with the shape.

About the Virgin Maryam (Mary), Allah says*:* ‘…And Maryam (Mary), daughter of ‘Imran, whose body was chaste, therefore We breathed therein something of Our Spirit. And she put faith in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and was of the obedient’. (*at-Tahrim:* 12) The act of breathing in this verse is associated with her womb to which the adverb “therein” refers. Another verse also in relation to Virgin Maryam (Mary) says*:* ‘Remember the one who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her from Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all people’. (*al-Anbiya’:* 91).

In one verse, the act of breathing is associated with her womb and in another with herself. The two statements have the same meaning. In the verse we are dealing with, the miracle is not that Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) made a clay statue of a bird because anyone can do such a thing; it is the act of breathing into it thus causing it to be alive: '... I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with Allah's permission, it will become a real bird...' (*Al-'Imran:* 49).

As for the shaping of a bird from clay, anyone can do this. Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* shaped the bird and breathed into it. The assertion that he did that "by Allah's permission" encompasses both the making of the bird form and the act of breathing into it that caused it to be a real bird. Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) would not have dared do all that without Allah's permission. The statement "by Allah's permission" was made by Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) as a recognition by him that this was not his own doing, but the Will and Might of Allah Who wanted to support him by that miracle. It was as though Prophet 'Isa meant to say to his people that this miracle should not mislead them into worshiping him, or why were they not thus misled by the test they were put through when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) cut up the four birds, placed each part on a separate mountain and then called them, so they flew to him: 'And when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead". Allah says, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied". Allah said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them - they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise"'. (*al-Baqara:* 260)

If the act of breathing into a bird statue and making it real should mislead you into considering 'Isa (Jesus) a deity, then the temptation should have been stronger with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who slew the birds that then came back to him when he called them! If the reason you worship 'Isa (Jesus) is that he came into this world without a father, then it would have been more fitting to idolize Adam whom Allah brought into this life with neither a mother nor a father! Thus, their flagrant sin of ascribing divinity to 'Isa (Jesus) is entirely groundless and illogical.

Then, Allah continues to quote Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him:* '…I will heal the blind and the leper and bring the dead back to life with Allah's permission…' (*Al-'Imran:* 49). Why did 'Isa mention these two diseases in particular? They were the two epidemics of that time. The Arabic word akmah (rendered in the verse as “blind”) means he who is born blind and leprosy is a disease that starts with whitening of parts of the skin, even brown or dark skin. White patches continue to spread over the skin, which indicate a decrease in the substance that causes the skin colour. In the course of time, whiteness covers all the body and a person becomes a leper.

It has been proven that skin is given its colour by special glands in the body. If they stop producing the colour substance, leprosy occurs (and we seek refuge with Allah from it). It was an incurable disease then. When Allah sent ‘Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) as a Prophet, He gave him a miraculous sign in the same field his people mastered: medicine. He brought them a sign from Allah by curing what they could not cure despite their excellence in the field.

In an attempt to simplify the miracle of Prophet ‘Isa and make it easier to comprehend to the minds of people, some say they were only miracles given in their time, for it is possible that cures for these diseases will be discovered later. To them, I say: No, a miracle remains a miracle until the end of time. How is that?

For example, let us consider ophthalmology. They said there can be a cure for blindness by transplanting an artificial cornea into the eye of a blind person. Dermatologists also said there can be a cure for leprosy. Several kinds of treatment have been discovered to unify the skin colour eventhough the original colour of the skin cannot be restored. Such discoveries have made some people think that the miracles of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) were only advanced for their time. However, this understanding is obviously faulty bearing in mind the means used in each case.

Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* used to cure by words and prayers. No matter how much science develops, it will still be far behind such a method of treatment! Scientists do analysis, mix chemicals and conduct surgeries to treat diseases. Thus, till the end of time, the miracle of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* remains a miracle. Allah then mentions Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) saying: ‘...and bring the dead back to life with Allah’s permission; I will tell you what you may eat...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 49).

As for bringing the dead back to life, Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) did not have an absolute power to do that without any limitations. He was not granted the power within himself to raise any dead person; he only did it with certain individuals by the permission of Allah, such as Sam, son of Nuh (Noah), and Lazarus (Eleazar). Allah enabled His Messenger to do that only to prove the truth of his call, but it was a limited ability over which Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) had no control. No Prophet or Messenger of Allah could contradict or change the life spans Allah has predestined for His servants. Due to this fact, it has been related that when Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) raised Sam, son of Nuh (Noah), from death, the latter came back to life only to say one word then returned to death again. It was as a mission assigned to him by Allah to support the call of His servant and Messenger.

Allah then states Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), as saying: ‘…I will tell you what you may eat and what you may store up in your houses...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 49).

Everyone has his personal life of which no one knows the details. Every person, for instance, prefers certain kinds of foods that he cooks in certain ways, ways which he knows well and others do not know. The other miracles, like creating a bird, healing the blind and the leprous and raising the dead, are general matters that have no relation to any particular person. However, the fact that he could tell what every person used to eat at home was quite a personal matter. How can anyone tell what you had for breakfast today unless you told him, or he saw you, or someone else saw and told him? Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) was given this miracle by His Almighty Lord. It is far from plausible to think that Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) entered every house or had any means to obtain such information other than by Divine Revelation.

The same applies to his knowledge of what his people stored up in their houses. Some would claim that perhaps Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) caught the scent of every person and thus managed to tell what they usually ate. To refute such a claim, Allah made him also tell his people what they stored up in their houses: that was an obvious sign that he received Revelation from Him Who knows all hidden affairs.

‘... There truly is a sign for you in this, if you are believers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 49). This is a wondrous sign that confirmed he received Revelation from a Transcendental Power, the power of Allah *Glorified is He*. If you believe in the existence of this power, then you must believe in the Message that ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), brought. A “Messenger” means a servant of Allah chosen by Him to receive His Message and deliver it to those above whom he has been elevated. A miraculous sign influences only those who believe in the existence of the All-Powerful Allah. It is meant to firm up the faith of those who already submit to Allah and have readiness to accept His Message. As for him who does not believe in Allah in the first place, a sign, eventhough miraculous cannot benefit him or establish faith in his heart.

In the following verse, Allah continues quoting Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus):

وَمُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا بَيۡنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةِ وَلِأُحِلَّ لَكُم بَعۡضَ ٱلَّذِى حُرِّمَ
عَلَيۡكُمۡۚ وَجِئۡتُكُم بِـَٔايَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿٥٠﴾

I have come to confirm the truth of the Torah which preceded me, and to make some things lawful to you which used to be forbidden. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. Be mindful of God, obey me [50]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 50)

We have said before that the word “confirm,” in this context, means that what Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) brought was in accordance with what came in the Torah. We have said before: the Torah was revealed before him and still existed at his time. Now, this might pose a question: If ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), came to confirm the Torah and if the Torah still existed at his time, why then was he sent with a new Message? Allah answers this question in the same verse by telling us that Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) came with new rulings: ‘…and to make some things lawful to you which used to be forbidden…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 50) So, the Message of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) came, not just to confirm the truth revealed in the Torah, but also to make lawful some of the things forbidden in it.

Someone might wonder: If divine Books come to confirm one another, what is the point in their successive Revelation? The answer is: first and foremost, each Book is revealed to remind those who have forgotten what was revealed in the previous Books. Second, each divine Book came with new rulings that suited the time, place and circumstances of the people to whom it was revealed. This is the point of sending the divine Books that were successively revealed by Allah to His Messengers: they have served as reminders to people of understanding and established new rulings.

It goes without saying that the fundamentals of faith do not change, and nor do events and stories of past nations. However, rulings are subject to change based on circumstances. This is the meaning intended by the words of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) as quoted in the Quran: '…and to make some things lawful to you which used to be forbidden…' (*Al-'Imran:* 50) We know that Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was sent to the Children of Israel and whatever Allah has forbidden or permitted is for a reason He knows. There is wisdom behind everything Allah ordains. Do not think that everything Allah forbids is harmful. No, Allah may forbid certain things simply to discipline people. A believer should avoid whatever Allah forbids without questioning the reason or the harm such things may pose. One could live and die without discovering the harm behind some of the things Allah has forbidden. One may wonder: Why has Allah forbidden such-and-such? What harm does it do us? Allah does not always forbid things because they are harmful. Allah may forbid things for other reasons and therefore He says: 'For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before: for having frequently debarred others from Allah's path'. (*an-Nisa':* 160).

In another verse, Allah explains to us the "certain good things" the Jews have been forbidden: 'We forbade for the Jews every animal with claws and the fat of cattle and sheep except what is on their backs and in their intestines, or that which sticks to their bones. This is how We penalized them for their disobedience: We are true to Our word'. (*Al-'Imran:* 146).

Therefore, harmfulness is not necessarily the only reason for the prohibition of a certain thing. This explains to us what Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), a servant and Messenger of Allah, said to the Children of Israel: '…and to make some things lawful to you which used to be forbidden....' (*Al-'Imran:* 50) Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), came with a command from Allah to make lawful for the Children of Israel what He had previously forbidden them.

Allah concludes the noble verse by quoting the words of His servant and Messenger, ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary): ‘I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. Be mindful of Allah, obey me’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 50) All that has been stated- the miraculous signs and the commands of Allah to allow some of what the Jews have been forbidden- constitute indisputable evidence: they prove that ‘Isa (Jesus) was the Messenger of Allah, for it would have been impossible for a mortal like him to bring any such miraculous signs unless he had been sent and supported by Him *the Exalted and Almighty.* After thus proving his Prophethood, Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) called his people to believe in Allah Who has Absolute Power and Might to suspend laws and norms and Who has given those miracles to His servant and Messenger. He called them to be mindful of Allah and obey His ordinances.

In the following verse, Allah still quotes Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary):

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَٱعْبُدُوهُ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ (٥١)

God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him – that is a straight path [51] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 51)

In this verse, we find a declaration by Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) that he- as well as those he was sent to-were all servants of Allah Who has created them from nothing, provides for them and protects them. By this declaration, ‘Isa (Jesus) asserts that he is but a servant of Allah. He meant to make it clear to his people that the miraculous signs he was given were by no means intended to make him a master over them, let alone a deity! Rather, both he and they were servants of Allah Who is worthy of worship.

‘Indeed, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is the straight path’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 51) A “straight path” is one that does not deviate, for if it does, it takes those walking along it away from their goal. Consider the circle as a geometric shape: it has a circumference, a centre, and radii that join this centre to any point on the circumference. The farther we get from the centre, the greater the distances separating us and vice versa. Closeness to the centre means agreement and harmony. Differences occur between human beings when they stray from the centre. This centre is the essence of faith; it is servitude and submission to the One (Allah) Who has created us all. People split into sects when they follow their whims and stray from the Straight Path of Allah. Unity and harmony can only be achieved when we devote ourselves to Him *Glorified is He*.

Even the radii of a circle, from the circumference to the centre, are separated from each other by certain distances. Then, they get closer to each other as they approach the centre, and become all united in one point at the centre, with no distance whatsoever separating them. Likewise, people find harmony and agreement when they unite under the banner of servitude to Allah, the One God. If they stray from this point of agreement and unity, they become distanced from each other and disagreement ensues. For this reason, Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), called people to the worship of Allah: ‘Indeed, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is the straight path’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 51) Such is the Message Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) was sent with. Allah made him declare this creed when he was still in the cradle: ‘He said, “Indeed, I am a servant of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet”’. (*Maryam:* 30)

The issue of his servitude to Allah was settled from the beginning: ‘Isa (Jesus) is a servant of Allah, not his son or partner, and this is the essence of his Message. Then his role as a Messenger who was assigned delivery of the ordinance of Allah to His creation comes so they would act upon it in every aspect of their lives. Normally, when a Messenger comes with guidance from Allah, his aim is to call all his people to follow this guidance and abide by the commands and prohibitions of Allah. Obedience to commands may involve difficulty since moral obligation is always heavy. Prohibitions also involve difficulty since they may deprive one from something he loves to do.

Throughout life, one often sways between two things: a difficult thing he tries to avoid and a desirable thing he craves. Divine guidance has been sent down to discipline humankind, to tell us what to do and what to avoid for our own good. However, moral obligation always involves the trying difficulty of commitment to what is right, on the one hand, and holding one's reins to abstain from what is wrong, on the other hand. Most people do not realise the sublime end meant to be achieved through this commitment, so they let the evil inside them prevail over goodness and defy the commands of their All-Wise Creator. When evil insinuations tyrannize over one's mind, they drag him into rebellion against the responsibilities of faith. They tempt him into committing things prohibited by Allah. Such rebellion is what brings on disunity and dispute among people, of whom the majority fail to realise- let along focus on- the ultimate goal behind their existence.

Human deeds fall into two categories: deeds complying with faith and thus causing harmony among humankind and the universe, and deeds committed in defiance or disobedience of faith which thus spoil this harmony and throw one into the calamity of conflict with oneself and the universe. Deeds that agree with and firm-up one's faith are considered deeds of righteousness. On the other hand, deeds that cause one to deviate from his goal are evil deeds. In all that one does, his goal is what motivates him and directs him to make his choice.

For example, a school or college student has the goal of graduating with a particular skill-set and starting a particular career. Assessment of his actions depends on these criteria: Does this action draw him closer to his goal, or farther from it? If he is hard working, then his conduct is of a kind that serves his purpose. If he is sluggish, he thus deviates far away from his goal. Therefore, goals contribute to determining whether a deed is useful or otherwise. Most people are deceived into directing their efforts to unworthy goals, thus straying from the real goal they should be reaching for. When one reaches for the wrong goal, he will slide into conflict, perplexity, and misguidance. Whoever makes this worldly life his ultimate goal will crave transient enjoyment however he can even by indulging in unlawful pleasures. Some people understand that this life is not the goal, but is only a journey. A question must follow: What is the goal, then? A believer would answer: It is the meeting with Allah and success in the Hereafter. His deeds will, therefore, be in line with this goal. However, a disbeliever who makes this life alone his goal, and who does not believe in the Afterlife (when people will enter Paradise or Hell), is immersed in his misguidance seeking whatever his soul desires and refraining from everything that tires him even if his ultimate happiness lies in it.

A believer, however, knows that the life of this world is just a journey and the goal is achieving success at the conclusion of this journey. For this reason, he strives to fulfil his duty to Allah in order to reach his goal: Paradise. So, behaviour is corrupted when one fails to determine the real goal he is brought to life for. Goodness is to realise this goal, know the deeds that get you closer to it and do them with diligence and patience. Evil deeds, on the contrary, make us refrain from reaching for this goal and do what causes us to deviate from it.

Knowledge of the goal we are created for comes first and foremost, and then comes our reaction to this knowledge. Some people’s attitudes towards many events come in a way that is contrary to knowledge of the ultimate goal. If you know that we are all going to experience the Hereafter and will meet Allah, why do you grieve- to the extent of despair- when someone you love passes to the Mercy of Allah? Why do you immerse yourself in sadness when, in truth, Allah has only taken him nearer to the ultimate goal? Grieve we must, doubtless; your beloved person must be missed and you must feel sad for yourself for a time. As for sadness on his account, there is nothing to justify it: No harm has been done to him; he has only reached the goal we are all seeking.

Suppose a group of people wanted to travel to Alexandria from Cairo. One may have to go on foot because he has no money or access to a means of transportation. Another may go riding a donkey and a third on horseback. One may go on a bus, or on-board a plane. Maybe someone could even travel by a rocket! They perhaps take different ways, but each of them finally reaches the goal by the means available to them. Likewise, the journey of one person to Allah may take him seventy years, whereas another may be called to meet Him after a short journey. Why then, should you feel sad for him?

We should be sad for a person who has strayed from the goal and led a misguided life. As for him who was guided to serving the goal in the manner Allah has ordained, we should be happy for him: Allah has cut short for him the distance that separated him from his goal. A parent would break his heart over a beloved child who died at a young age lamenting his misfortune of not seeing enough of the world. Dear parent, just think again: Allah has only spared your child many sins he would have committed and a long journey he would have travelled, and has taken him faster to the ultimate goal we all seek, so why let sadness overcome you? This is not meant to sound callous; rather, it is a call to resign ourselves to whatever Allah decrees in matters out of our hands. He is the All-Wise and All-Merciful and everything He decrees is for a reason.

After those noble verses where Allah speaks about the Virgin Maryam (Mary) and Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), He *the Exalted and Almighty* says*:*

فَلَمَّآ أَحَسَّ عِيسَىٰ مِنْهُمُ ٱلْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنصَارِىٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۖ قَالَ ٱلْحَوَارِيُّونَ
نَحْنُ أَنصَارُ ٱللَّهِ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَٱشْهَدْ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ٥٢

When Jesus realized they [still] did not believe, he said, 'Who will help me in God's cause?' The disciples said, 'We will be God's helpers; we believe in God – witness our devotion to Him [52] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 52)

Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) was keen to obviously declare the essence of faith and purpose of his Message from the very beginning: 'Indeed, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is the straight path'. (*Al-'Imran:* 51) Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) thus indisputably clarified the truth to his people: both you and I are servants of Allah, the One God, and I have no advantage over you except that He has chosen me to deliver the Message to you. With regards to worship, we are all equal before Him: Allah is my Lord and your Lord and the straight way is to worship Him alone, with no partners.

The phrase "the straight path" conveys the meaning of a road leading to an end. No road is made for its own sake; it must be meant to lead somewhere. When we hear the word "path," we instantly understand that there must be an end to be sought through this path. Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'This is My path, leading straight, so follow it and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it'. This is what He commands you to do so that you may refrain from wrongdoing'. (*al-An'am:* 153)

One must first determine the end he wants to pursue so that he may find the right way that can take him there. Let us read again the words of 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), as Allah quotes him in the Quran: 'Indeed, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 51).

The concept of worship encompasses every deed by which a servant shows devotion to his Lord. It is not restricted to observance of rituals; it is not just about uttering the Testimony of Faith- “I testify that there is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”. It is not just about performing salah (prayer), paying zakat (poor dues), and observing sawm (fasting) of *Ramadan* and performing *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) for whoever can afford the journey are the only practices connected to worship. These are the tenets of Islam on which it is based, but does a building constitute of pillars only? Likewise, one’s faith cannot be complete when he is disconnected from his Lord except for the limited time when he observes rituals. Rituals are mandatory for every Muslim; they are the source of spiritual energy that refuels faith and empowers the soul to struggle for the cause of Allah. Worship is not confined to rituals, but it includes every action one does to contribute to the welfare of humanity and prosperity of the world, while directing his intention to pleasing Allah. “The pillars of worship” is a term Islamic scholars of jurisprudence have developed to draw a distinction between the various sections of worship and their juristic rulings. However, it does not mean worship is confined to those pillars; rather, everything Allah commands is included under the name “worship”. So, worship is comprised of the acts one observes to be connected to his Lord and Creator and recharge his spiritual power, as well as the actions one does to contribute to the prosperity of the universe. We have previously said that the rituals Allah has enjoined on us usually require one to suspend a worldly occupation for a, while to observe them. One is always busy earning or managing other affairs of his life. The clearest example of this is illustrated in the following verse: ‘Oh you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know’. (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9)

This command to observe the congregational prayer on Friday requires one to leave off trade temporarily and return to it after the prayer is done. “Trade” is particularly mentioned in the verse since it is the most obviously direct way of earning money and sustenance. This choice of the word “trade” represents one of the countless instances of miraculous precision in the wording of the Noble Quran. Allah did not say, for example, “Leave off manufacturing” or “Leave off farming”; rather, He mentions trade since it is the kind of occupation that yields instant profits. Farming involves waiting for a long time for crops to grow and profits to be generated. Trade, on the other hand, is the kind of occupation where profits are instantly generated upon concluding a transaction. The divine command to leave off this instant profit to hasten for observing the Friday Prayer necessarily implies that every other occupation that can yield profits must be suspended and resumed after the prayer is done.

Precision of the expression used in the verse does not stop here. Even though the term is rendered in the English translation of the verse as "trade," the Arabic word used literally means "selling." Allah particularly addresses sellers, for one would sometimes buy something reluctantly, unlike a seller who is often eager to sell his commodities to gain profits. A man may be buying something for his household and when he hears the call to the Friday Prayer, he should hasten to answer the call and postpone his purchases; he should suspend his shopping once he hears the call to the Friday Prayer. This is normal in the case of a purchaser, for people do not love to pay money, but it would take a seller more effort to suspend his transactions to observe the prayer. By that command, Allah enjoins on us to leave off the tempting occupation of making instant profit by selling goods and receiving their prices.

What should we do when the Friday Prayer is over? 'And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the Bounty of Allah and remember Allah often that you may succeed'. (*al- Jumu'a:* 10) After we observe the Friday Prayer, Allah commands us to return to our worldly affairs and seek out His Bounty. This implies that dispersing throughout the land to seek lawful provision is an act of worship, too.

In the aforementioned verse, a word is particularly worthy of reflecting on: 'disperse within the land…' (*al- Jumu'a:* 10). The Arabic word "*fantashiru*" (meaning "disperse") denotes spreading over a wide range which implies a command from Allah that we should take care of all aspects of life and excel in all fields to fulfil our goal and responsibility of achieving prosperity and the wellbeing of humankind. Every act of goodness done for the pleasure of Allah is an act of worship and this is how we should understand the words of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) quoted in the Quran: 'Indeed, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is the straight path'. (*Al- 'Imran:* 51)

After this, Allah says*:* ‘But when ‘Isa (Jesus) felt [persistence in] disbelief from them...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 52) He had already made a clear and decisive statement summing up the essence of faith when he declared, ‘Indeed, Allah is my Lord and your Lord...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 51) This implies a warning that the followers of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) may perhaps ascribe to ‘Isa (Jesus) something more than that he is a servant of Allah, who is totally submissive to Him and ordered to obey and worship Him. He thus clarified to them the fundamentals of faith: ‘…That is the straight path’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 51)

Then, Allah says*:* ‘But when ‘Isa (Jesus) felt [persistence in] disbelief from them...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 52) Everyone with a mission and a goal must necessarily have vigilance and discretion. The bearer of a religious call must have sound judgment so he can take people out of the darkness and into the light. Someone may wonder why people tend to live in darkness and are not interested in coming into the light without resistance. The answer is: Some benefit from keeping most people in darkness. Such oppressors usurp the rights of others and spread corruption, so they fear and hate those who call people to the way of Allah. They hate to be advised against evildoing or called to right guidance and logic. They cannot bear to listen to the voice of reason and the call to faith and hate as much those who undertake to spread them.

A caller to the way of Allah has to be wise and discreet. He should know that, while some accept his call and happily embrace the religion of Allah, others are enraged by his call. In every community, there are people who live in corruption; that is their religion. A caller to Allah has to be well aware of such feelings and attitudes so he can deal with them successfully. He has to employ all the senses Allah has granted him- eyesight, hearing, etc. - for this purpose. One who calls to Allah has to dedicate all the abilities Allah has endowed him with to distinguish between those who truly welcome his call and are sincerely ready to accept it, and those who reject it or try to bar people from the way to Allah. He must have judgment and understanding to tell a hypocrite from a true believer.

Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) declared the essence of faith and the ordinance of Allah. Then, he understood that some who were prone to misguidance and evildoing did not want to accept faith. He was full of vigilance and attentiveness. He knew he was sent with a Message from Allah to save people from deviation and teach them uprightness. When he felt their persistence in disbelief, he found it time to single out those who truly believed with him to aid him in the issue of his call to Allah: '…he said, "Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?"' (*Al-'Imran:* 52)

Delivering the Message of Allah is like fighting an uphill battle: losses and sacrifices are inevitable. For this end, one may have to sacrifice wealth and even life; so Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) had to choose and urge forward those who believed themselves capable of undertaking such a mission. He did not call specific individuals; rather, he declared his purpose so that supporters who found in themselves the ability to carry the banner of the call would join him. He wanted their sacrifices to be offered voluntarily out of deep faith and true enthusiasm, not just as an answer to an obligation. 'But when 'Isa (Jesus) felt [persistence in] disbelief from them, he asked, "Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?"...' (*Al-'Imran:* 52) What does "supporter" mean? It means a person who offers all the power he possesses to support your cause.

When Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) asked: 'Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?' (*Al-'Imran:* 52), he meant to single out those whose intentions were directed to pleasing Allah. He did not want those who sought any worldly gains, such as spoils of war, power, prestige, etc. He wanted to win to his side true supporters who had determination and sincerity so they would give their all to the cause of Allah alone.

This is similar to what happened between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the men of Medina who pledged allegiance to him at Aqabah. Muhammad, The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* told them: 'I take allegiance from you that you will protect me from what you protect your women and children from'. Ad-Da' ibn Ma'rur took his hand and said, 'Yes, by the One Who has sent you with the Truth, we will protect you from what we protect our families'. They pledged allegiance to Prophet Muhammad on these terms. Then, Abu Al-Haytham ibn At-Tayhan stood up and said, 'Oh Messenger of Allah, we have ties with the Jews and we will sever them. If we do so and Allah grants you victory, will you return to your people [in Mecca] and leave us?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* smiled and said, ‘No, but I shall sacrifice my blood as you do [during war] and shall hold your property as inviolable and sacred as mine. I belong to you and you belong to me. I shall fight against whoever you fight and make peace with those with whom you make peace’.

Did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* promise them that they would defeat their enemies and rule the world? No; rather, he *peace and blessings be upon him* told them: ‘I belong to you and you belong to me’. Had he promised them victory, some of them might have been martyred before seeing it. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directed them to the ultimate goal which was not necessarily living to see victory. Rather, he said he belonged to them and they to him, which meant they were to be granted his company in paradise. That is the end worth seeking.

Likewise, when Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), asked, ‘…Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 52), he meant, ‘Who will help me for the pleasure of Allah?’ Why do we understand it in this way? I reflect on the meaning as much as the capacity of my mind allows; the words of Allah are forever rich in their meanings and implications. Therefore, someone else may well derive a different meaning from the verse that has not come to my thoughts. As I have said before, a “supporter” is someone who spares no effort and employs all the power he possesses to back a cause. Given this understanding, what does it mean to “support faith”? Allah answers this in the Noble Quran: ‘Oh, you who believe! If you help (the cause of) Allah, He will help you and make firm your feet’. (*Muhammad:* 7)

Supporting the cause of Allah is committing ourselves to His religion: this is what He enjoins on us. Thus, a believer’s “help/support” for the cause of Allah is to obey His ordinance. The result is that Allah supports the believers, too, and grants them victory. Accordingly, Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* may have meant by his question, ‘Who will support me so that Allah will include them in His support?’

We are before two forces here: the people of faith and the people of disbelief. Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) asked: ‘…Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 52) In other words, he asked about those who were ready and able to join the cause and support it wholeheartedly for one goal:

pleasing Almighty Allah. We understand this meaning in light of what Allah says in the following verse: 'Oh you who believe! If you help (the cause of) Allah, He will help you and make firm your feet'. (*Muhammad:* 7)

The believers are ordained to support the cause of Allah through obedience and when they do, Allah supports them by making them firm in faith and granting them victory. In this way, the question Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) asked his people, '…Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?' (*Al-'Imran:* 52) bears both senses together. Thus asked, some of the people of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) answered: '…We are supporters for [the cause of] Allah. We have believed in Allah and testify that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 52) The disciples were a group of people in whose faces the sign of faith shone as though they were brilliantly illuminated. This "light" of the face does not mean white skin; rather, the light of a believer's face is a reflection of the light of faith in his soul. Allah describes those who believed in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as: '…forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] Pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration...' (*al-Fath:* 29).

Even if a believer is black-skinned, he has brilliance on his face. How is this and why? Because the human body consists of many systems and has been made of atoms, and every system in the human body has a fixed function. When all of these systems are directed to what Allah wishes, all of his body systems work in harmony. Consequently, the soul is at rest. When the functions of these systems are in conflict with one another, a person appears to be gloomy.

When 'Isa (Jesus) said, '... Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?…' (*Al-'Imran:* 52), he heard the answer from the disciples who were people that enjoyed the brilliance caused by harmony between soul and faith. Perhaps they had good and commendable characteristics which cast brilliance on their faces.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* named some of his Companions "the disciples of the Messenger of Allah." They were the ones whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accompanied all the time. When the disciples of Isa (Jesus) said, 'We are supporters for [the cause of] Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 52), this meant that all of them wanted to be supporters for Allah's cause, and join in with the cause of supporting Allah's guidance. This required each one of them to know the guidance of Allah. We know that the basic element of supporting the cause of Allah is faith. What is faith? It is the heart's tranquillity with regards to something, and this is considered the general meaning of faith. If a person does not believe that the way he takes will lead him to the destination he seeks, he will not follow it.

For example, if a traveller from Cairo to Damietta does not believe that the road he takes is the right road, he will not take it. In addition, if a person does not believe that he will fail if he does not study his lessons, he will not study. So, everything in this world is based on faith. However, if the specific significance of faith is intended, then it refers to the heart's tranquillity towards the most important cause: belief in Allah. Therefore, the basic element of supporting the cause of Allah is the submission of all of a person's limbs to Allah. Therefore, the disciples said, '…We have believed in Allah and testify that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 52)

Why did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bear witness upon them? Because a Messenger should convey Allah's Message to his people and bear witness upon them, as Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '…and in this [Revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people. So, establish prayer and give zakah and hold fast to Allah. He is your protector; and excellent is the protector and excellent is the helper'. (*al-Hajj:* 78)

We should note that Allah caused the disciples to mention the words denoting faith first because it is an unseen matter that settles in the heart. Then, they asked for witnessing that they submitted to Allah because submission to Allah involves submission to the obligations and rulings of faith. Their statement '…and testify that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]' (*Al-'Imran:* 52) is also a request from them to 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), to inform them with all the prerequisites of submission to Allah, i.e., to tell them what they should do and what they should not do.

They said, '... we have believed...' and since they declared their belief in Allah, they believed in the Message conveyed by 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam

(Mary), who had to witness that they submitted to Allah. This testimony could not be fulfilled unless he informed them of all the rulings and he did, so they acted in accordance with these rulings and then said,

رَبَّنَآ ءَامَنَّا بِمَآ أَنزَلْتَ وَٱتَّبَعْنَا ٱلرَّسُولَ فَٱكْتُبْنَا مَعَ ٱلشَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

Lord, we believe in what You have revealed and we follow
the messenger: record us among those who bear witness [to
the Truth] [53] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 53)

Does their declaration of faith mean that they believed in the legislation of a previous Message? No; faith here means belief in the Message which ‘Isa (Jesus) conveyed from Allah because every Messenger conveyed a certain Message from Allah, as this is the reason for sending a new Messenger. We know that creeds, historical reports, and stories do not change, but rulings change. This implies that the declaration of faith made by the disciples was a declaration of their belief in the former creeds that were sent before the mission of ‘Isa (Jesus), as well as the rulings and legislations conveyed by him.

They said, ‘Oh our Lord, we have believed in what You revealed...’ The phrase ‘…what You revealed...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 53) refers to the Message of guidance which was sent from a high status to a lower one and we receive legislation from a Sublime Entity. We said previously that when Allah calls those who believe in Him to follow the guidance of faith, He says, “come”, i.e., rise to the level of receiving a Message from Allah, follow His Guidance and do not remain at the lowest level of faith. In addition, Allah orders the people not to follow the vain desires, opinions, and legislations of each other. Since a believer desires loftiness with regards to faith, he should adopt the Divine Law in his conduct on earth.

They said, ‘Our Lord, we have believed in what You revealed and have followed the Messenger 'Isa (Jesus)...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 53) A follower is usually convinced first by a person he follows so that the act of following originates willingly from the depth of one's heart, not compulsorily or coercively. If we find a person forcing another person to go along with him, we cannot say that a person being forced is “following” the other one. However, we can use the word "follow" when this act takes place willingly and voluntarily. If a person accompanies another by force or compulsion, this act can be called “superficial” following. Accordingly, it is possible for a tyrant to hold a whip and force a weak person to follow him, an act which involves outward submission on the part of the weak person; but his heart has not submitted, as compulsion causes outward submission, but not inward submission.

‘Perhaps, [Oh Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain humbled’. (*ash-Shu’ara’:* 3-4) Allah informs His Messenger that it is not difficult for the Creator to handle any person's affairs, as He is able to give life and death. If He wants to send down a miracle that may cause all His servants to submit humbly to Him, He will do so. However, Allah does not want to compel people, but He wants their hearts to submit to Him willingly. He also wants His Servant and Messenger to have faith, while not being able to compel them to belief. This shows the greatness of faith.

After they had declared their belief in the Message conveyed by 'Isa (Jesus), the disciples said: ‘…so register us among the witnesses [to the truth]’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 53) This is a request which denotes sublime and vigilant faith. They bore the responsibility of conveying the Message from their Prophet and they bore witness over their nations in the way the Messengers did. In addition, they asked Allah to count them among those who testify that the Messengers convey the Message of Allah which they would convey after them. Therefore, we said about the community of followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that it is the community that Allah has charged with the responsibility of conveying Muhammad's Message until the Day of Judgment. Why? The answer is Allah’s saying: ‘And strive for Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you, in the religion, any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Ibrahim (Abraham). Allah named you "Muslims" before [in former scriptures] and in this [Revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people. So, establish prayer and give *zakat* and hold fast to Allah. He is your protector; and excellent is the protector and excellent is the helper’. (*al-Hajj:* 78) For this reason, no Prophets or Messengers will come after Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him* as Allah gave Muhammad's community of followers the responsibility of conveying His Message after his death.

Then, Allah says*:*

وَمَكَرُوا۟ وَمَكَرَ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ خَيْرُ ٱلْمَٰكِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

The [disbelievers] schemed but God also schemed; God is the Best of Schemers [54] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 54)

Things that can be perceived by the mind have names and are recognised first by the senses, as they help him conceive things. Then, we come to know the meanings of things when we grow up. The beginning is always with perceivable matters. Therefore, Allah describes religious Guidance as a straight path because we know the goal and the path that leads to it. The phrase "straight path" is a perceivable matter which people come to know by implementing the rules of this guidance.

The word "*makr*" (plan) in Arabic is derived from the context of trees. When a person sees a tree whose branches are not twisted around one another, it is possible for him to recognise the branch to which a certain leaf belongs. However, some kinds of trees have their branches wrapped around each other, so a person cannot recognise the branch to which a certain leaf belongs. Therefore, this word "*makr*" in this context refers to the person who deceives and cheats people. When a person tricks another in order to discover the truth, or uses artifice in order to expose the truth - provided that he intends no harm - this is called a "strategy." However, if harm is intended, this is called an evil makr (plot or plan). Therefore, Allah says*:* '…but the evil plot does not encompass except its own people. Then do they await except the way of the former peoples? But you will never find in the way of Allah any change and you will never find in the way of Allah any alteration'. (*Fatir:* 43)

This means that there is harmless *makr* (plan) which is not intended to do harm to anyone: this is called a good *makr*. However, the *makr* (plan) that is intended to cause harm is called an evil *makr* (plot or plan). The question is: what drives a person to scheme? The one who schemes conceals his motives; he may show love when he actually has feelings of hatred. In addition, this person may make an act appear pleasing in order to scheme against people. He may also try to take another person to a distant and uninhabited place in order to severely harm him, or perhaps to kill him.

So, one of the basics of scheming is plotting which requires craftiness and experience because the one who tries to plot may encounter a person who uncovers his plot by conjecture and guessing. As scheming requires plotting, this shows human weakness because the strong person does not scheme or deceive; rather, he confronts directly.

When a strong person catches a weak enemy, he may let him go because he is confident that his strength can harm this weak person. However, when the weak person captures a strong person, he considers this matter as an opportunity that may not come again. Regarding this, a poet said:

When a weak person finds an opportunity, he kills: Such is the power of the weak.

The weak person is the one who schemes and plots. The schemer may take into consideration that his foe has a more cunning plot and more wisdom and that he may harm him severely. Accordingly, the schemer conceals his *makr* (plan or plot). If the opponents of religious Guidance want to scheme, against whom do they scheme? The Messenger is not alone at this battle; Allah is with him. ‘They [think to] deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive not except themselves and perceive [it] not’. (*al-Baqara:* 9) Allah knows what any person conceals; therefore, when He wants to reveal something and make it prominent, no one can resist His Will and Command. Hence, Allah’s *makr* (good plan) is unmatchable.

‘And the disbelievers planned, but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 54) When you find an attribute that seems inappropriate to describe Allah with, you should know that it has been mentioned for the purpose of showing similarity only, but it is not one of the Magnificent Names of Allah. The believers may say to the disbelievers, "If you desire to plot against us, Allah is able to turn the scheme against you”. As for the Names and Attributes of Allah, they are tawqifiyah (bound by a religious text and not amenable to personal opinion) and were sent down by Jibril (Gabriel) to

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* If an action is ascribed to Allah, it is not possible to derive an attribute from it and use it as a name for Allah. In this verse, ‘And the disbelievers planned, but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 54), “plotter or schemer" cannot be considered among Allah’s Magnificent Names and we should never say this because the Names and Attributes of Allah are tawqifiyah (bound by a religious text and not amenable to personal opinion). The Planning of Allah is mentioned in order to draw analogy with the people's planning and to show them that they cannot deceive Allah or scheme against Him. This is because if Allah wills to scheme against them, they will be unable to encounter His Scheme. Allah says*:* ‘And the disbelievers planned, but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 54).

This means that there is a good *makr* (plan) and this indicates that some people use schemes for good purposes. Why does this verse come here? It came here because ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), engaged in a battle in which he did not fight with a sword to protect the creed. However, he was sent as an adviser to guide the people to faith. Victory is not only attained by a sword, but it can be attained by overwhelming evidence. We know that Allah did not ask any Messenger to fight in the cause of faith because He undertook the punishment of the disobedient.

‘So, each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones and among them were those who were seized by the blast [from the sky] and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow and among them were those whom We drowned. And Allah would not have wronged them, but it was they who were wronging themselves’. (*al-’Ankabut:* 40)

No fighting took place except when the children of Israel asked for it: ‘Have you not considered the assembly of the children of Israel after (The time of] Musa (Moses) when they said to a Prophet of theirs, "Send to us a king and we will fight in the way of Allah"? He said, "Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if fighting was prescribed for you?" They said, "And why should we not fight in the cause of Allah when we have been driven out from our homes and from our children?" But when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 246)

However, Allah has given the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* permission to fight in defence of themselves in order to punish those who attempt to prevent the true creed from reaching people. The sword is not intended to compel the people to accept the creed; rather, it is intended only to protect the choice of the creed made by the believers. Instead of leaving the people to be compelled to follow a false creed, the Muslims fight any tyrant that oppresses Allah’s servants. Moreover, Allah’s servants have the right to choose their own creed. Therefore, when the enemies of Islam say that Islam was spread by the sword, we reply: Allah caused Islam to begin in a weak state in order to refute this accusation and the earlier Muslims were weak and unable to defend themselves. Therefore, some of them immigrated to Abyssinia seeking protection. If Islam was spread by the sword, a question should be asked: who held the first sword to force the first person to believe? The Muslims chose Islam as a religion when they were extremely weak. Islam began, continued, and still exists by the power of faith.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came from an illiterate nation, a tribe marked by power and valour. However, Allah willed not to support His Religion by causing the powerful members of Quraysh first to embrace Islam; rather, it was initially the weak people who believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and who spent thirteen years in Mecca calling the people to Allah. Then, he migrated to Medina and all the Muslims were strongly united by faith. The sword was not used to impose a creed on the people; rather, it was used to protect a people’s freedom to choose the true creed. If Islam was spread by the sword, how can we explain the presence of followers of other religions in Muslim lands? Islam gave every person the opportunity to choose his faith.

So, every Muslim represents an independent unity of faith and must be aware that Islam was spread by following good examples. In addition, as a believer in Allah and His Religion, every Muslim should know that Allah has chosen them to put the instructions of faith into practice, and that Allah has caused Islam to be firmly established on the earth by good conduct and good habits.

Every Muslim's conduct should be free from shortcomings which may be exploited by the enemies of Islam. This is because the imbalance between the Muslim's conduct and Allah's Law is considered as a gap that is exploited by the enemies of Islam. Therefore, when the intellectuals of other religions review Islam, they become convinced of Islam because it is a True Religion. They examine it intellectually and are guided to it by their intuitive faith. As for those who wish to slander Islam, they consider the behaviour of some Muslims and find therein the shortcomings which they can use to accuse Islam. The honest thinkers always make a distinction between the creed and its followers. Therefore, most of the intellectuals who follow this approach embrace Islam and believe in it. However, as for those who judge Islam by its followers, if they find a devout Muslim, this calls them to believe in Islam, and vice versa. Therefore, the majority of populations in the modern Islamic countries are in countries that were not reached by the Islamic conquest; rather, devout Muslims who were good examples caused the spread of Islam. The pious life, upright behaviour, and tolerant, honest, and righteous ways of dealing with people represented by those devout Muslims appealed to the people of these countries and drew their attention to Islam. They asked these Muslims, "What makes you adopt this good behaviour?" And they replied, "Because we are Muslims".

The people in these communities wondered, "What is Islam?" Then, the Muslims began to explain it to them. Thus, what attracted the people to Islam was the upright and disciplined behaviour of one who abides by the instructions of the religion. Therefore, when Allah outlines the methodology of successful *da`wah* (the call to the worship of Allah), He says: 'And who is better in speech than he who [says], "My Lord is Allah (believes in His Oneness)," and then stands firm (acts upon His Order) and invites (men) to Allah's (Islamic Monotheism) and does righteous deeds and says, "I am one of the Muslims"?' (*Fussilat:* 33)

Da`wah (calling to the worship of Allah) should be carried out by speech and righteous conduct so that a believer proves that what he calls others to, has been beneficial for him and so he has adhered to it. Righteous conduct proves the accord between word and deed. The Muslim should not merely be content with this; however, he should declare: '…I am one of the Muslims'. (*Fussilat:* 33) To whom should he say this? He should say this to whoever sees him adopting this good, upright, and tolerant conduct. This draws attention to his religion rather than his own self.

This explains how Islam was spread by means of a group of traders who travelled from one country to another, dealing with people using Islamic manners, earnestness and piety so that their devout conduct drew the people's attention. When the people asked them about the secret behind their righteous conduct, one of them said, "I have not invented such a conduct, but this is instructed in Allah's Religion, Islam, which I follow".

An example of this exemplary behaviour is the earlier Muslims from among the Companions of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* They *may Allah be pleased with them* feared for him from his opponents and so they guarded him in shifts in order to protect him against any danger. Allah *Glorified is He* willed that His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should migrate from Mecca to Medina in secret and 'Ali ibn Abu Talib *Allah be pleased with him* slept in Muhammad's place. 'Ali wanted to be Prophet Muhammad's guard and to protect him from any possible danger.

There is no doubt that he did that because he was sure that the survival of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was good for Islam even if he sacrificed himself for his sake. This is the case of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: all of them loved Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because taking the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad as an example and following Allah's Religion can only result in good in all aspects of life. If one of them died in the cause of protecting a person whom Allah sent as a Messenger to deliver His Call, they would attain martyrdom in Allah's Cause.

Consider Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* when he was in the cave with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him.* Did he not tear pieces of his clothes to block the cracks he found? Did he not place his foot in a crack for fear that an insect might harm Prophet Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him*? He wanted to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even if it required the sacrifice of his own life. This is a testimony to the fact that the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believed that the preservation of his life was better for them, their faith, and their souls than the preservation of their own lives. In this way, Allah wanted to give victory to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after his migration to Medina, when he fought the enemies of Islam who schemed –but Allah is the best of planners.

It is as though Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* were saying with this victory, "You will not be able to harm Muhammad, neither by confrontation nor by scheming". One of his followers, 'Umar, *Allah be pleased with him*, migrated in public, saying, 'Whoever wants his mother to be bereaved, his wife to be widowed, or his son to be orphaned, let him follow me behind this valley!' On the contrary, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* migrated secretly. Why? Because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an example for the weak. The strong person was able to protect himself and emigrate openly; however, the weak person had to migrate secretly. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a good example for the weak. The enemies of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* schemed against him, but Allah schemed against them: ' And they had planned their plan, but with Allah is [recorded] their plan, even if their plan had been [sufficient] to do away with the mountains'. (*Ibrahim:* 46)

Despite the violence and severity of their planning - which had been sufficient to do away with the mountains - their plan failed when it faced Allah's plan which protects His Messengers and pious servants. The Children of Israel made a scheme about which Allah has revealed His saying, 'And the disbelievers planned, but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners'. (*Al-'Imran:* 54) This is because they wanted to get rid of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says*:*

إِذْ قَالَ ٱللَّهُ يَٰعِيسَىٰٓ إِنِّى مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَىَّ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا۟ وَجَاعِلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۖ ثُمَّ
إِلَىَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

God said, ‘Jesus, I will take you back and raise you up to Me: I will purify you of the disbelievers. To the Day of Resurrection I will make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieved. Then you will all return to Me and I will judge between you regarding your differences [55]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 55)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned this wise saying after tackling the issue of their scheming. This indicates that 'Isa (Jesus) sensed disbelief on the part of the children of Israel, plotting and conspiring to murder him, so Allah reassured him about the end of the struggle: ‘Oh 'Isa (Jesus), indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you [in submission to Allah alone] superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection....’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 55) This verse includes four situations that Allah *Glorified is He* willed for 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him.*

Let us consider Allah’s saying ‘... I will take you….’ Generally, we understand words according to their common meanings, disregarding the other meanings so that the common meaning circulates and we understand the meaning of the word. We understand that the Arabic word "*Al-Tawafy*" means “death,” but here we must refer to the original root of the word. A particular meaning may generally be associated with a word, though the word actually encompasses several meanings; a person eventually uses it exclusively for one of these meanings. A person may understand the meaning of the Arabic word "*Al-Tawafy*" as death, but does Allah not say ‘... I will take you...’? (*Al-‘Imran:* 55) He also says in the Noble Quran: ‘And it is He who takes your souls by night and knows what you have committed by day. Then He revives you therein that a specified term may be fulfilled. Then to Him will be your return; then He will inform you about what you used to do’. (*al-An‘am:* 60)

So, what does the Arabic word "*yatawaffakum*" mean here? It means “cause you to sleep.” "Sleep" is another meaning of this word. Allah also says in His Book, ‘…I will take you....’ (*al-An‘am:* 60) Also: ‘Allah takes the souls at the time of their death and those that do not die [He takes] during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specified term. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought’ (*az-Zumar:* 42).

Allah also referred to the Arabic word "*Al-Nawm*" (meaning “sleep”) as “death.” This is one of the expressions of the Quran which clarifies that the word “"*Al-Tawaffy*" does not only mean death; rather, it has other meanings, although the word is generally used to refer to one meaning. The common people consider that this is the only meaning of the word, so when it is used, they do not imagine any other meaning. Therefore, we say: We must be extremely precise when considering words and why they are used.

Someone may say, "Why does Allah choose words in this way?" The answer is: Because these matters which the mind has to scrutinize deeply do not affect rulings. Allah mentions them in a way that has many possible meanings so that no one exerts himself to scrutinize deeply a matter that does not require this. If someone believes that Allah raised 'Isa *peace be upon him* up to heaven, does this add any ruling to his religion? If someone does not believe that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was raised, does this diminish any ruling from his religion? This issue does not affect any religious rulings, but the mind may deeply consider it, and someone may say, "How was he raised to heaven?" Another may say, "Allah caused him to die”. Any person can consider it in the way he likes because it does not affect the rulings required by the religion.

So, matters which do not affect the rulings enjoined on the people are mentioned by Allah in a way that can be understood in more than one way so that the mind does not get bogged down in issues that bring neither harm nor benefit. We know now that the Arabic word "*tawaffa*" which is derived from "*Al-Wafat*" means "sleep" from Allah's saying: ‘And it is He who takes your souls by night and knows what you have committed by day. Then He revives you therein so that a specified term may be fulfilled. Then to Him will be your return; then He will inform you about what you used to do’. (*al-An‘am:* 60)

And from His saying: ‘Allah takes the souls at the time of their death and those that do not die [He takes] during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specified term. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought’ (*az-Zumar:* 42).

Allah *Glorified is He* referred to the Arabic word "*Al-Nawm*" (sleep) as "death" because it is absence from life. The Arabic language clarifies this point: for example, when you lend a person some money and he asks you to waive some of it, you say, "No, I must *astawfy maly*” (receive my money in full). When he gives it all to you, you say, "*istawfayt maly*" (I have taken my money in full).

So, the Arabic word “*mutawaffika*” may mean "taking something in full”. I say this point in order to clarify the difference between "death" and "killing" both of which meaning taking someone's life. This may occur by physical destruction, as when a person strikes another on his head and kills him. As for death, it is not always associated with physical destruction; Allah takes the soul and the body visibly remains as it is. Therefore, Allah has distinguished in His Wise Quran between "death" and "killing,” although they share the meaning of “the ending of a life.”

‘Muhammad is not but a Messenger. [Other] Messengers have passed on before him. So, if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]? And he who turns back on his heels will never harm Allah at all; but Allah will reward the grateful’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 144)

Both death and killing result in the termination of life. Yet, only killing ends a life by destroying the body. Some people overpower others and kill them. However, no one says, "I want so-and-so to die" because death is that which Allah causes to His servants to end their lives by taking their souls. Human beings are able to kill the body, but the body is not entitled to cast the soul out. Rather, the soul gives life to the body it enters; and when Allah takes it from the body, it dies and becomes a corpse.

So, ‘killing’ is considered as a disturbance of the special attributes that Allah decreed for the existence of the soul in a body such as the soundness of the brain or heart. If one of these basic special attributes is disturbed, the soul does not stay in the body anymore.

When the soul is extracted, it is not because it wants to be extracted for any reason; rather, the body is not suitable anymore to accommodate it. We will give an example: If electricity has been installed in a house, you know that it is available because of the light which the lightbulb emits. The lightbulb is not the source of light because light does not appear except in a form that has these particular attributes. The evidence is that if the lightbulb is broken, electricity is still available, but light is not emitted. Such is the case with the soul with respect to the body.

The soul does not exist except in a body which has certain attributes, the most important of which is that the cells of the body are suitable. If the heart stops, it is possible to massage it and return to life before the lapse of eight seconds. If the brain cells are damaged, however, life ends because the attributes which are necessary for the soul to exist have been disturbed. Therefore, the soul only inhabits a body which has special attributes and killing is a basic way of destroying the body and ending life. Death, however, is the termination of life without the necessary destruction of the body and no one is capable of that except Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He.*

However, Allah's creatures can harm the body because it is a physical substance. Therefore, the Arabic word "*famutawaffika*" means "to receive something in full such as money" and it also means "sleep." When Allah says: '... *inny mutawaffika*...' (*Al-'Imran:* 55), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* intends to say, "I will take you in full. My creatures are unable to harm your body; I will take you as a whole, because on earth you will be subject to the plots hatched by people. I will take you to a place where you will be devoted entirely to Me; I have taken you completely from people with the soul still remaining in the body with all its attributes. Therefore, those who are able to damage the body (physical substance) will not be able to do this."So, Allah's saying, '…raise you to Myself…' (*Al-'Imran:* 55) is in accordance with His previous saying: '... I will take you...' (*Al-'Imran:* 55)

Someone may say, "Why should we understand the Arabic word '*Al-Wafah'* according to this meaning?" We say the Omnipotent Allah is able to say, "I will raise you to me and then cause you to die". We also say that the Arabic letter "*Waw,*" which means in English "and" does not suggest a particular order of events? Does Allah not say, ‘And how [severe] were My punishment and warning’. (*al-Qamar:* 16)

Does the punishment take place before or after the warnings? Surely, it takes place after the warnings. The Arabic letter "*waw*" means "and” in English. It simply refers only to the combination of two events. In addition, Allah says in His Book: ‘And [mention, Oh Muhammad], when We took from the Prophets their covenant and from you and from Nuh (Noah) and Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary); and We took from them a solemn covenant’. (*al-Ahzab:* 7)

The Arabic letter "*waw*" which means "and" in English does not imply a particular order of events, so if the word "*mutawaffika*” (*Al-‘Imran:* 55) is considered to mean "I will cause you to die", no one can say that the Arabic letter "*waw*" implies a certain order of events, i.e., that Allah caused 'Isa (Jesus) to die and then raised him.

If someone says, "Then why has the word "*mutawaffika*” (*Al-‘Imran:* 55) been mentioned first?" the answer will be: Because some people may think that the act of raising means exempting 'Isa (Jesus) from death. However, `Isa (Jesus) will definitely die, as death is inescapable and something that every human being will experience. This explanation is in regard to the Quranic text. If we consider the Hadith, we will find that Allah entrusted His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with explaining and clarifying matters. Allah says*:* ‘…And We revealed to you the Message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them and that they might give thought’. (*an-Nahl:* 44)

The following Hadith was related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim: ‘What will be your state when the son of Maryam (Mary) descends amongst you and there will be an Imam amongst you?’ So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us that ‘Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) will descend again.

Let us scrutinize the matter in order to refute the rationalists who always try to tire the world out. The rationalists accept that 'Isa (Jesus) came into existence without a father and without the usual way of creation and birth. Now, if they accept that he was born in a miraculous manner that goes beyond all codes and laws, why do they question the end of his life, being also a miraculous matter? The fact that they have accepted the first miracle should make it easy for them to accept the second.

Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* '…indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you [in submission to Allah alone] superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 55)

Allah *Glorified is He* was telling 'Isa (Jesus) that He would take him in his entirety, safe from all mankind, and would purify him from the impurity of those disbelievers. He would also place those who followed him above those who disbelieved until the Day of Resurrection. The word "follow" indicates that there is a "follower" who comes after the "followed," i.e. the "follower" is the one who comes after. Who came after 'Isa (Jesus) with guidance from the heavens? It is Muhammad *peace be upon him,* but what guidance would the people who followed 'Isa (Jesus) be upon? Would they be upon the guidance that they brought, or upon that which 'Isa (Jesus) delivered? The person who follows guidance other than that which 'Isa (Jesus) conveyed is not really considered a follower of him. However, a person who comes to rectify the situation according to True Guidance is a real follower.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to rectify the situation and to deliver Allah's Guidance in the way that Allah intends. '…and make those who follow you [in submission to Allah alone] superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 55) If we perceive the meaning in this way, we will understand that the follower of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one that has followed Allah's Guidance which all the Messengers, including 'Isa (Jesus), conveyed.

In addition, the followers of Muhammad have rectified many of the issues that the misguided people had perverted. The intended meaning here of the Arabic word "*fawq*" is not conquest and victory; rather, it means "clear proofs and rational evidence." This can only occur in the presence of impartial and rational people who weigh matters according to their evidence and proofs. At the end, they will arrive only at the issue and creed of Islam.

Hence, the Arabic word "fawq" here refers to the emergence of proof and the strength of evidence. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'It is

He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although they who associate others with Allah dislike it...’ (*at-Tawba:* 33) In another Quranic verse, Allah confirms the manifestation of Islam over all other religions and that He bears witness to this: ‘It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion. And sufficient is Allah s Witness.” (*al-Fath:* 28)

This means that Allah has willed for Islam to prevail over all religions. Someone may say that there are many religions in the world, over which Islam has not prevailed. In addition, there are one billion Muslims in the world now, and double this number of people who follow other religions. We say that Allah has willed for Islam to prevail as a rational proof not only before this person, but also before the followers of other religions.

Let us consider the one who legislates a positive man-made legislation and ask: does any man-made legislation remain always the same? No, it is constantly amended. Why? That is because the one who introduced the first legislation did not have knowledge of the new consequences of matters that might arise in the future. Then, upon the arising of new matters in life- which were not taken into the first legislator's consideration- the people need to amend the law. Consider any amended man-made law relevant to any issue in the world: which direction does it take? It is always directed towards Islam; and if it does not arrive at Islam, it comes close to it.

When a furore occurred in Europe about divorce in Christianity, what happened? Divorce was legislated in Italy right under the nose of the Vatican. Have they legalised divorce because Islam allows it? No, they have legalised it because the circumstances of life have forced them to legalise it. They have been forced by life’s circumstances to prove that the guidance of Islam which was revealed before this experience is correct. This is proved by the fact that Europe has resorted to legalising divorce, not to follow the Muslims, but to attain their life interests which cannot be attained without it. Is there a more manifest and overwhelming evidence than that which is provided by the opponent? This is the true proof. They have decided to legalise divorce despite their hatred for Islam, a decision which is considered as a proof of the truthfulness of the Islamic guidance.

Moreover, in the case of usury, which some people here want to legalise, we find Europe trying to get rid of it because they have found by experience that money does not perform its role in life unless interest rates are lowered to zero. They have realised that the cancellation of usury is necessary for money to perform its true role in life. They have resorted to this truth because usury is a cause of corruption in life, so they want to prohibit it. They have only now realized a fact which was proven by Islam fourteen centuries ago. Is there eminence or superiority for Allah's Religion greater than this? So, the opponents' understanding of that which will improve their life affairs has forced them to accept Islamic principles without even knowing it.

Let us continue our reflection on Allah's saying: '…and make those who follow you [in submission to Allah alone] superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 55). It means that Allah will make those who follow the original guidance which has been revealed by Allah superior to those who disbelieve. The people who improperly attribute godhood to 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), do not really follow him. The true follower of 'Isa (Jesus) is the one who follows Allah's Guidance. 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was sent as a Messenger to the children of Israel. Divine religions are not dedicated to certain races, tribes, or nations and so on; guidance results in unity. This is why Allah has stated the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) in order to help us comprehend this point. Allah promised Prophet Nuh (Noah) that He would save his family. When he called his son to board the ark with him, his son refused. Then, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to Allah: 'My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges!' (*Hud:* 45) Does the word "family" refer to blood ties in the case of Prophets? No, because Allah says*:* 'He said, "Oh Nuh (Noah), indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant." (*Hud:* 46) Why? This is because the real followers of Prophets are comprised of those who believe in them. Those who follow the guidance conveyed by 'Isa (Jesus) from Allah are not those who ascribe themselves to him, or those who call themselves Jews; these are only names. The true follower is the one who follows the guidance revealed by Allah. The legacy of the Prophets is guidance and knowledge. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about Salman, the Persian, who did not share the Arab origin with Prophet Muhammad: ‘Salman is one of us and belongs to our family’. Salman was ascribed to the Prophet's family by virtue of his faith and according to the text of the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

Therefore, ‘…and make those who follow you [in submission to Allah alone] superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 55) means that Allah renders superior those who follow His true Guidance. The one who corrected the Guidance of 'Isa (Jesus) was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Is the concept of superiority relevant to the geographical area, as the area of land inhabited by non-Muslims is bigger than the area inhabited by Muslims? No, superiority is irrelevant to rational evidence.

Someone may say that evidence is not compelling, but we tell them that evidence is compelling, as we see those who do not believe in Islam still unintentionally prove that it is the True Religion. How do they prove that? They derive their man-made laws from the Divine Law. Since this verse contains the words “superior to” and “disbelieve”, and tackles the matter of following, then there is an issue of enmity, truth, falsehood, guidance and delusion. There must be a final word in this matter. The final word comes when a person has no free will over himself, or over others.

Oppressors are able to act on the earth, but when they return to Allah, He will say, "I gave you dominion, yet you disobeyed Me in many ways, but there is a time when your dominion over the means will come to an end”. So, the oppressors and those who commit falsehood may have power in this worldly life, for Allah has given us all free will and choice.

However, on the Day of Resurrection, there is no will except Allah’s Will: ‘The Day they come forth nothing concerning them will be concealed from Allah. To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing’ (*Ghafir:* 16).

So, judgment will undoubtedly be given, as indicated by Allah’s true saying, ‘[And they should consider that] when those who have been followed disassociate themselves from those who followed [them] and they [all] see the punishment and cut off from them are the ties [of relationship], those who followed will say, "If only we had another turn [at worldly life] so we could disassociate ourselves from them as they have disassociated themselves from us”. Thus will Allah show them their deeds as regrets upon them. And they are never to emerge from the Fire’. (*al-Baqara:* 166-167)

The one who follows a deviant person will find on the Day of Resurrection that the one he followed will absolve himself from him. These followers will ask Allah to let them return to the world so that they can take revenge on those who deceived them. This is in regard to the relationship between human beings. As for each body, we will find the skin, the tongue and the hands bearing witness for or against a person. He will be deprived of his will, and his limbs and senses which were subjugated to him, will stop serving him. If he was misguided, they will say that their owner had the power to command them to do what they did not want to do. But on the Day of Judgment, there will be neither power, nor force, nor subjugation because the dominion is entirely for Allah. Therefore, the tongues and skin will bear witness and so Allah says, ‘…Then to Me is your return and I will judge between you concerning that in which you used to differ’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 55)

Allah judges between them concerning that on which they used to differ. What is the outcome of this judgment? Are there any other obligations? No, but the outcome of the judgment is the recompense. No deeds will be accepted in the Hereafter and judgment therein is for the sake of recompense. As we have said, as long as there are followers and disbelievers -and one group is superior to another and their return is to Allah- we must see the judgment that will be made. Allah, The All-Wise, says*:*

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ فَأُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن نَّٰصِرِينَ ٥٦

I will make the disbelievers suffer severely in this world and the next; no one will help them [56] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 56)

Why did not Allah mention the judgment on the believers first? That is because the believers entirely understand and believe in this fact. We must be aware here that the judgment includes torment not only in the Hereafter, but also in this worldly life. The worldly torment will occur before the judgment. It is as though Allah were saying, "Do not imagine that the torment which I will inflict on them in this world will excuse them from the torment they will find in the Hereafter because torment in this world alone could even afflict the believers.’’

As for those who disbelieve in Me, I will torment them in this world and in the Hereafter. I will not delay the torment of the disbelievers until the Hereafter; rather, My torment will be inflicted on them both in this world and the Hereafter”. Allah says about this torment that it will be severe because when a punishment (torment) occurs, it should reflect the power of the One Who inflicts it (Allah).

Let us give an example (and Allah gives the best descriptions): A child may break something within the limits of his power and a young man may break something in the manner that suits his power. So, we must consider events in accordance with the one who carries them out. If the doer is Allah, will anyone be able to tolerate His Torment? This is unimaginable. None of these people will have any helper because the one whom Allah debases and torments will not be helped.

Afterwards, Allah sheds light on the other group of people, saying,

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمۡ أُجُورَهُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٥٧

God will pay those who believe and do good deeds
their reward in full; God does not love evildoers [57]
(The Quran, *Al-‘Imran:* 57)

This means that just as those who disbelieve will receive severe torment from Allah, those who believe will receive permanent delight, by Allah’s Leave.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ نَتۡلُوهُ عَلَيۡكَ مِنَ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ وَٱلذِّكۡرِ ٱلۡحَكِيمِ ٥٨

We relate to you [Muhammad] this revelation, a decisive
statement [58] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 58)

The Arabic word "*dhalika*" (meaning “this”) refers to the events that have been previously mentioned concerning the wife of ‘Imran, Maryam (Mary) and Zakaryya (Zechariah), Yahya (John) and ‘Isa (Jesus). Each one of these people experienced a miraculous event which went beyond the laws of the universe and was full of wondrous signs. These wondrous events were conveyed to us by those who witnessed them. The certain accounts of these wonders are mentioned in the Quran which cannot include any falsehood and is the true Book that is described by Allah as ‘…the precise [and wise] Message’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 58) The believers should be assured concerning the accounts they receive by means of the Quran, as they are true and cannot be tainted by falsehood. The accounts that were mentioned concerning these signs is the actual truth of the matter which the people lived through and of which they spoke.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* presents the case of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* which we must be completely aware of. We will also outline the viewpoint of those who place him in other than the place that Allah intends as well as recognise the viewpoint of those who do place him in the place that Allah intended. It is not a matter of gaining victory in this world over a group who says such-and-such. Rather, it is an issue which has an outcome in the Hereafter for which Allah *Glorified is He* will hold us to account. Therefore, it is extremely important that we clarify it in a manner that reveals the truth so that no one wrongs himself.

'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* lived during the era in which Judaism was prevailing and we know that Judaism was perverted by the Jews in a manner that made it exclusively focused on material concerns without the slightest regard for spiritual matters and belief in the unseen. They were materialists in a manner that was reflected by what they said to Musa *peace be upon him* and what the Quran relates: ‘And [recall] when you said, "Oh Musa (Moses), we will never believe you until we see Allah outright”; so the thunderbolt took you, while you were looking on’ (*al-Baqara:* 55).

They did not pay attention to the fact that part of Allah’s Perfection and Majesty is considered unseen; for if it were possible to be seen and perceived, it would be limited and encompassed. Since it was limited and encompassed in their imagination, they imagined that Allah *Glorified is He* could be present in one place and not in another. However, Allah *Glorified is He* is too Exalted to be in one place only because He is omnipresent in the existence as a whole and we do not see Him with the eye; rather, we see the effects of His Actions and the beauty of His creation inherent in the universe.So, the fact that Allah is unseen reveals His Majesty and Perfection.

The Jews, however, considered everything tangible, even the matter of their sustenance. Allah wanted their provisions to come from a place unseen in order to relieve them of worry in the desert. Therefore, He sent down to them manna and quails as provisions from the unseen that they did not plant, purchase, or understand. They did not work to obtain it; it was provision from the unseen. However, they insolently rejected this provision that was sent down to them from the unseen and said as Allah informed us: ‘And [recall] when you said, "Oh Musa (Moses), we can never endure one [kind of] food. So, call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions”. [Moses] said, "Would you exchange what is better for what is less? Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked”. And they were covered with humiliation and poverty and returned with anger from Allah [upon them]. That was because they [repeatedly] disbelieved in the signs of Allah and killed the Prophets without right. That was because they disobeyed and were [habitually] transgressing’. (*al-Baqara:* 61)

They wanted to have the food they were accustomed to and to see this food as a tangible matter. Therefore, they were suspicious of the provision of the unseen, the manna, and quails, saying that the manna and quails may not be sent again. They had no trust in the provisions granted to them from the unseen because they handled all their affairs with absolute materialism. Since all their affairs were materialistic, they were in need of a great shock to shake this materialism and take them to a spiritual meaning by which they could believe in the unseen.

We know that this materialistic thought considers life as a matter of cause and effect. So, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* wanted to rid the Jews of this materialistic thought process. Therefore, He brought 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* into existence in a way contrary to the natural way through which people come into existence. Hence, He willed that 'Isa (Jesus) should be birthed by a mother only-without a father-in order to shake the Jews' materialistic laws and beliefs. However, temptation afflicted his people who called him the Son of Allah though He is utterly too Exalted to have a son. What was the obscurity that caused them to claim that Jesus is the son of Allah?

They said that since he had a mother but no father, the obscurity came from Allah’s breathing His spirit into him. Therefore, they considered Allah as the father of ‘Isa (Jesus), and we seek refuge in Allah from this belief. If the matter were so, it would be more appropriate for you to be tempted by the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* rather than the creation of 'Isa (Jesus) because there is a mother in the creation of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* but there is neither a mother nor a father in the creation of Adam. If they say that Allah says that He breathed His Spirit into him, then they should be aware of Allah’s saying about Adam *peace be upon him*: ‘And [mention, Oh Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "I will create a human being out of clay from an altered black mud. And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration’. (*at-Tawba:* 28-29)

So, Adam was also breathed into with the Spirit of Allah, so why have they been silent about this story from the time of Adam until the time of 'Isa (Jesus)? In this way, this argument has been refuted. Then, the next issue is concerned with Allah’s taking 'Isa up and his death, and we will clarify both issues. When we ask why they have been tempted concerning this matter, they say that 'Isa (Jesus) brought the dead to life. Have they not considered the incident in which Allah says to Ibrahim *peace be upon him:* ‘And [mention] when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead”. [Allah] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied”. [Allah] said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them - they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise”’. (*al-Baqara:* 260)

So, the scope of temptation in the case of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is also wide. Likewise, did Musa (Mosus) *peace be upon him* not bring his staff as a sign? He did not bring a dead object that was previously alive; Allah caused life to be created by his hand in an object which had never been alive. So, the staff – a lifeless object – became a snake, moving quickly. Why, then, were they not tempted with the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to worship him as a son of Allah? In this way, we see that it is not right for anyone to be tempted by the miracles associated with 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* or in his giving life to the dead by Allah's Leave. The followers of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* agree with us that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is Unseen, but they differ with us on this point: They say that Allah wanted to comfort mankind by appearing in the form of a human for them, so he brought 'Isa *peace be upon him* in order to provide them with comfort.

We will examine this issue without any sensitivity or prejudice but in a rational manner. We ask: did Allah create 'Isa (Jesus) in order for Him to appear in a certain form? 'Isa (Jesus) was an infant, then he grew up, so at which phase of growth did 'Isa (Jesus) represent Allah? If it is the phase of childhood or maturity did Allah come in the form of a child or a middle-aged person? Allah has one form which we neither see nor comprehend, as '…there is nothing like Him…." (*ash-Shura:* 11) Which form represents Allah, as claimed? If all these forms represent Allah, this means that He undergoes changes; yet He *Glorified is He* is too Exalted to undergo changes. If He has one form, we say that Allah *Glorified is He* is stable and never changes. They also say that Allah wanted to take the form of a human in order to comfort the people, so He took the form of 'Isa (Jesus).

But there is a question: how long did `Isa (Jesus) live on earth? The answer is thirty years or slightly more. This means that the span of the people's knowledge of the Divine Form would be limited to these thirty years, according to your conception. There is an inevitable question: what is the entire duration of the human race? It amounts to millions of years. Did Allah leave His earlier creatures without revealing His Figure to them? Then, did He leave the creatures who lived after the end of 'Isa's (Jesus) mission and ascension without showing them His Figure? This is a conception of a tyrannical god; yet He *Glorified and Exalted is He* is too Exalted to be tyrannical. It does not make sense that He would take a human form for only thirty years and then withhold it. This statement is unacceptable to any intellect that trusts Allah's infinite justice.

These people also say that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was crucified and they are excused for this saying, as Allah has excused them for this and has related a true and fair account, saying: 'And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), the Messenger of Allah”. And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain’. (*an-Nisa’:* 157)

Allah has excused them for saying that 'Isa (Jesus) was killed or crucified because another was made to resemble him to them. It would make sense to them to seek a solution from Islam for this problem because Islam came to say that another was made to resemble him to them for they neither killed him, nor crucified him. If the crucified person was a god, or the son of a god, he would have power surpassing that of the one who crucified him. How could any person conceive that a god or the son of a god could be overpowered by a creature? Islam says that 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was not crucified, as Allah has honoured him. In this way, you see that Islam came to purify all beliefs from the defects of perversion committed by the followers of these religions.

After this issue, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* presents to us an issue of debate that occurred during the era of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* This is in order that all people – Muslims, Jews and Christians – could come out of this confusion to a state of cordiality, for they all believe in worshipping one Deity. A delegation of the Christians of Najran came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina and met with him. These people had a dispute with the Jews and with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just as the Jews and the Christians together had a dispute with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* The origin of the dispute between the Jews and the Christians was that they had conflicting views about one another, which are stated by Allah: ‘The Jews say, "The Christians have nothing [true] to stand on," and the Christians say, "The Jews have nothing to stand on," although they [both] recite the Heavenly Books. Thus, the polytheists speak the same as their words. But Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ” (*al-Baqara:* 113).

The Jews said that Ibrahim (Abraham) was a Jew and the Christians rejected this saying that he was a Christian. The cause of the dispute that took place between the Christians and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was that they wanted to speak about the issue of ‘Isa (Jesus) and Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* wanted to finally clarify the matter in order for it not to remain a pending matter that is circulated by people and made a source of sedition. The Christians of Najran assembled under the banner of their leaders, including a person named Sayyid and another named Al- 'Aqib, a giver of advice and a priest. Prophet Muhammad asked, ‘What do you say about 'Isa (Jesus)?’ They said, ‘He is the son of Allah’. Prophet Muhammad said that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said, ‘I am a Servant of Allah’, and he was His Servant, His Messenger and His Word that He bestowed on the Blessed Virgin Maryam (Mary)’. They became angry and said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Have you ever seen a person without a father? If you have seen that, then tell us!’ Then, the verse was revealed:

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ ءَادَمَ ۖ خَلَقَهُۥ
مِن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٥٩﴾

In God’s eyes Jesus is just like Adam: He created
him from dust, said to him, ‘Be’, and he was [59]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 59)

The final word came with a compelling proof: for if 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* came without a father, then they should remember that Adam *peace be upon him* came without a mother or a father. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, ‘You know that I am the Messenger of Allah and the Prophet of this people’. They said, ‘Give us respite until tomorrow and we will discuss this matter’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called them to believe, but they said, ‘No’.

When Allah *Glorified is He* presents the struggle between truth and falsehood, He says: ‘…And indeed, we or you are either upon guidance or in clear error’. (*Saba’:* 24) This means that one group of us is guided and the other group is in error. Why? It is because the two issues are contradictory and mutually exclusive. Messenger Muhammad called them to meet him in an open place, to invite their women and children and to ask Allah to send His Curse upon the liars. In this regard, the following saying of Allah was revealed:

ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ ٱلْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾ فَمَنْ حَآجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَكَ مِنَ
ٱلْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا۟ نَدْعُ أَبْنَآءَنَا وَأَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَنِسَآءَنَا وَنِسَآءَكُمْ وَأَنفُسَنَا وَأَنفُسَكُمْ
ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَل لَّعْنَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ ﴿٦١﴾

This is the truth from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt [60] If anyone disputes this with you now that you have been given this knowledge, say, 'Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, and let us pray earnestly and invoke God's rejection on those of us who are lying [61]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 60 - 61)

The clear truth and final word have come from Allah to his Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so there is no room for doubt or argument. Whoever wants to resort to anyone's authority let them resort to the authority of Allah, the Just Who never judges falsely, for He *Glorified is He* is the Absolute Truth.

Then, the following saying is mentioned: '...Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then supplicate earnestly [together] and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars [among us]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 61)

The two groups are invited to summon their women and children; so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is invited to summon his women and children and whoever he is responsible for and to attend in person, in order for them to beseech Allah. A question may be raised: why should the women and children be summoned? The answer is that women and children are the close relatives that every person cares about whether he is a Messenger or not, for they are part of his own self and his family. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was commanded to ask them to bring their beloved ones, including women and children being the closest members and the dearest to the heart, to implore Allah. Imploring here means supplicating Allah to curse the liar.

When the two groups say, 'Oh Lord, may Your Curse descend upon the liar from among us', this supplication implies absolute justice; for the only

God that is able to send down a curse is Allah. He will send His Curse upon whoever associates partners with Him; if curses could be sent by multiple gods, they would descend upon the followers of One Allah.

This is the reason for calling the people to supplicate Allah to send His Curse on the liar. This represents earnest invocation to the Overwhelming Force which will dispose with the matter to end the dispute. Then, the intended meaning of invocation is clarified here. When we say, "Let us invoke Allah," this means "Let us supplicate to Allah”.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them with a command enjoined by Allah, the Absolute Truth, to summon their people, including their children and women, but they said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Give us a respite until tomorrow and we will come to you’. In the morning, they sent someone to see what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had done and whether he was really ready for this matter, or it was only an empty threat. Their emissary found that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had come, accompanied by Al-Hasan, Al-Hussain, Fatimah Az-Zahra' and ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib. Therefore, they said, ‘We cannot meet to supplicate Allah to send down this curse. By Allah, no people have held the meeting in order to invoke Allah to send down curse except that they were destroyed’. They tried to please the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘We will continue to follow our religion and Muhammad and his followers will follow his religion’. They thought that the call to perform invocation was only a threat and would not be carried out. However, the Messenger who had sincere faith came with his family ready for this meeting and invocation. This step cannot be taken except by a person who has deep faith and certainty. However, a person who has no certainty will never accept such an action; rather, he will back down.

They backed down, saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* ‘Let us agree that you will not raid us or scare us and we will send you *jiziah* (a poll tax required from non-Muslims living in an established Islamic state) in the months of *Rajab* and *Safar*, paid in horses and other things’. They fled from the invocation because they knew that they were doubtful about their stance. As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* he was certain about that which Allah had revealed to him. When the Arabs went to war, they used to take their women with them so that men would be ashamed to flee and leave their children and women to be disgraced if thhe died; if they were killed, they would be killed along with them.

If we wish to end the dispute about the issue of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* we should heed the saying of Allah, *Glorified and Exalted is He*: '…Indeed, the example of 'Isa (Jesus) to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was. The truth is from your Lord, so do not be among the doubters'. (*Al-'Imran:* 59-60) This is the truth from the Lord; therefore, do not be among those who doubt this issue. We will settle any argument contrary to that which comes from Allah by saying, '…Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then supplicate earnestly (Together] and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars [among us]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 61) None of them will dare to do so. Why? It is due to the fact that those who came before them fled from this invocation and because Allah wants the believers to have more faith in and contentment with the fact that the Message He has revealed to His Messenger is the truth.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says,

إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ ٱلْقَصَصُ ٱلْحَقُّۚ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦٢﴾

This is the truth of the matter: there is no god but God; God is the Exalted, the Decider [62] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 62)

Allah's saying: 'Indeed, this is the true narration...' (*Al-'Imran:* 62) draws our attention to the fact that what He relates here is the absolute truth, not only a tale or a story. It is also not a mixture of fiction and fact, as occurs in the modern age, when the word "story" has been adopted by modern literary language from the western civilisation. Fiction plays a significant role in the popular modern form of the concept of a story. However, if we realise that the literary meaning of the word "story" in Arabic is derived from "narrating an incident", educated people would search for another word than "story" when writing their novels and fictions. In reality, the actual literary meaning of "story" is an account of what actually happened without any alteration or fiction.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘Indeed, this is the true narration. And there is no deity except Allah’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 62) If a narration comes from the Only Lord, we should be confident that there is no other god to come with a different narration because Allah, the One, is ‘…*the Exalted* in Might’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 62), i.e., in the control of His Dominion. Therefore, He is also Wise with regards to His Actions. However, did those who disputed take heed? No, they did not. Allah says,

فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٦٣﴾

If they turn away, [know that] God is well aware of anyone who causes corruption [63] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 63)

This verse indicates that Allah knew previously that they would not accept the meeting for invocation thus judging themselves as spreaders of corruption. So, Allah is truthful in His saying: ‘But if they turn away, then indeed - Allah is Knowing of the corrupters’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 63)

However, Allah commanded His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call them to the complete religion as they believed in Allah and His Book; so Allah says*:*

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَآءٍۭ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا
ٱللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِۦ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَإِن
تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا ٱشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Say, ‘People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.’ If they turn away, say, ‘Witness our devotion to Him’ [64] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 64)

This is a call to an equitable word that includes no perversion: ‘... that we will not worship except Allah...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 64), which is an undisputed matter. Then, Allah says, ‘…and not associate anything with Him...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 64), i.e., we will not include with Him anything which is not able to match the majesty of His Perfection. Sound intellects reject the idea of associating anything with Allah in divinity.

The question is: Do some people associate partners with Allah in divinity with regards to the creation of the universe? Actually, any creature which they associated with Allah in divinity came into existence after Allah created the universe. Do they associate partners with Allah with regards to managing the affairs of this universe? If this is the case, it is not a worthy cause of associating partners with Allah because Allah *Glorified is He* is able to control the universe and has revealed Guidance that will cause the universe to be in harmony if followed by people. So, there is no need for associating partners with Allah.

If He had had a partner (and we seek refuge with Allah from this belief) and some sort of deity had enjoyed special powers, these powers would detract from the powers of the second deity. This is regarded as incapacity on the part of these deities. Allah settles this matter by saying, 'Allah has not taken any son, nor has there ever been with Him any deity. [If there had been], then each deity would have taken what it created and some of them would have sought to overcome others. Exalted is Allah above what they describe [concerning Him]'. (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) So, the issue of the partners is unacceptable.

Then, Allah says*:* '... and not take one another as lords instead of Allah...' (*Al-'Imran:* 64) i.e. we will not take from amongst ourselves people who act like middle-men between God and men, determining the permissible and impermissible matters for us. Allah is the Only One Who is entitled to permit and prohibit matters.

Then, Allah says*:* '…But if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]"'. (*Al-'Imran:* 64) This means those who do not accept the worship of Allah- the One Who has no associates, nor other lords that permit and prohibit want deities and partners. This means that their hearts are not ready to accept the matter of faith which is based on the existence of only one entity that has Omnipotent Power. Faith is also based on the existence of a source of all actions: the One and the Unique so that no contradiction in natural laws occurs in the universe.

Allah gives the believers certain commands and prohibitions which they should follow; if there had been another deity, there would have been contradiction in natural laws in the universe. This would mean that these deities would be temporal beings with capricious desires.

Allah *Glorified is He* refutes this matter, saying, ‘But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined. Rather, We have brought them their Message, but they are turning away from their Message’. (*al-Mu’minun:* 71)

The following is the approach of the call to Allah as adopted by His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Say, "Oh people of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah”. But if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]”’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 64) This verse encompasses an equitable call free from any irregularities as Allah is the Only One Who should be worshipped and Allah is the only Source of commands and prohibitions and no one should be associated in worship with Him. In addition, no one should take another as a source that permits and prohibits matters. If the people being called refuse this call, the believers should say, ‘…Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 64) It means that there is only one Allah, and He has no partners and we do not take one another as lords. This is a testimony that Islam came with an equitable call that includes no irregularities and that commands that we follow its instructions. Then, Allah says*:*

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تُحَآجُّونَ فِيٓ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَتِ
ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةُ وَٱلۡإِنجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦٓۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ٦٥

People of the Book, why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand? [65] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 65)

Allah asks the people of the Book, about the reason they argued about Ibrahim (Abraham), the chosen one of Allah. The Jews among them ascribe themselves to Musa (Moses) and the Christians to 'Isa (Jesus). It is not possible that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a Jew, as the Jews claim for

Judaism came after the time of Ibrahim (Abraham). Similarly, the Christians cannot claim that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a Christian because Christianity came after his time. Why, then, do they argue? The Torah and the Gospel were revealed after Ibrahim (Abraham), so how could he be a follower of the either the Torah or the Gospel?

Then, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says*:*

هَٰٓأَنتُمۡ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ حَٰجَجۡتُمۡ فِيمَا لَكُم بِهِۦ عِلۡمٞ فَلِمَ تُحَآجُّونَ فِيمَا
لَيۡسَ لَكُم بِهِۦ عِلۡمٞۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ وَأَنتُمۡ لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ٦٦

You argue about some things of which you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? God knows and you do not [66] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 66)

They argued concerning the part of the Torah that still remained in their possession and they wished to argue about everything; yet they do not know what the All-Merciful Creator knows, for He knows all hidden matters.

Allah clarifies this matter, saying:

مَا كَانَ إِبۡرَٰهِيمُ يَهُودِيّٗا وَلَا نَصۡرَانِيّٗا وَلَٰكِن كَانَ
حَنِيفٗا مُّسۡلِمٗا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ٦٧

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God, never an idolater [67] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 67)

The verse confirms that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was not a Jew because Judaism was revealed after his time. He was not also a Christian because Christianity was revealed after his time. Rather, he was the chosen one of Allah and '…he was one inclining towards truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 67) We know that that the literal meaning of the Arabic word "*hanifa*" is "the Pure Religion" which was revealed by Allah. The word is derived from the Arabic word "*hanaf*" which refers to the bend of the bottom part of the legs, or means “crooked.” Then, the word was used for everything that is not straight.

Here, a person may ask: Did Ibrahim *peace be upon him* follow a crooked or upright way? How could he be called "*hanifa*" (meaning the Pure Religion), while this word means "crooked"? We say that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* followed an upright way, but he rose at a time of idolatry and extreme delusion, and he came to guide and get the people out of this crookedness and delusion. Since he deviated from this crookedness and delusion, he was upright because the Messengers were sent only at a time of religious corruption and tyrannical legislation.

When Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* sends down His Guidance, He places some faith in every soul. This faith sometimes becomes strong, causing a person to adhere to the instructions of his religion; and sometimes, this faith fades, and so a person deviates. Then after deviation, sometimes a person observes the instructions of his religion, and so is the status of the self-reproaching soul which reproaches a person when he commits a sin. It also draws a person's attention to Allah’s prohibitions. The person then returns to Allah’s Guidance, repenting and seeking forgiveness. If a person does not have the self-reproaching spirit, then he has a soul that incites him towards evil which always turns to deviation. There are many other souls around the evil soul, trying to resist its evil and rectify its crookedness and delusion. These are the souls of some people from the surrounding environment and society.

Sometimes rectitude and the return to righteousness after sinfulness are urged by a person himself, i.e., from his self-reproaching soul. On other occasions, a person has no self-reproaching soul; rather, he incites towards evil, but the society around this person is not bereft of some goodness which guides to rectitude. However, if all the members of the society have souls that incite towards evil, who will rectify and reform it?

In this case, it is inevitable that Allah brings a new Messenger because a person lacks deterrence and the seed of faith on the part of his own self. In addition, he lacks deterrence on the part of the society because it is also empty of these good members. In this way, darkness spreads, and so Allah sends a Messenger to reignite faith in these souls. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* has guaranteed for the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that no Prophet will come after him *peace and blessings be upon him* Therefore, goodness will necessarily remain within the community of Muslims. If a person is heedless, his self-reproaching soul will reform his attitude, and if a person has a soul that incites towards evil, there are many people who certainly will guide the evil soul to rectitude.

In this way, the followers of Muhammad will not be bereft of goodness at any time. As for the other previous nations, the matter is different, for Allah sent Messengers to them when the spark of goodness had been extinguished from the souls and tyranny and corruption had spread. At that moment, Allah intervened in order to reform and rectify crookedness and delusion.

So, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was declared *hanifa* because he deviated from the delusion that spread at his time. Since he deviated from delusion, he was upright; so tolerant *hanifiah* means uprightness. In this way, we can understand Allah's saying, 'Ibrahim (Abraham) was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining towards truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the polytheists'. (*Al-'Imran:* 67)

Ibrahim (Abraham) is the father of the Prophets and if Judaism and Christianity had not been corrupted and distorted, it would be acceptable to say that the Jews and the Christians followed his religion. This is because Abrahamic religions do not differ in their fundamentals; they differ in some of their legislations in the manner that makes them appropriate to the times. For this reason, Ibrahim (Abraham) could not have been a Jew that follows the instructions of Judaism due to its distortion of Judaism. Likewise, he could not have been a Christian for the same reasons. Rather, he was '…one inclining towards truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]...' (*Al-'Imran:* 67) This means that he deviated from delusion.

A person may ask, "Why did Allah not say that Ibrahim (Abraham) was "upright," instead of using a word that means crookedness? We say that if He had said "upright," some people might have thought he adopted the line of his contemporaries who were crooked and misguided. Therefore, Allah describes Ibrahim (Abraham) saying, '...but he was one inclining towards truth, a Muslim...' (*Al-'Imran:* 67) The word "Muslim" here indicates submitting to Allah and believing in His Guidance. When Ibrahim (Abraham) submitted to

Allah, he submitted to every command and prohibition. If we apply the same idea to all the Prophets and Messengers, we will find that Adam, Nuh (Noah) and all the Prophets who came before Messenger Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon them all*, submitted to Allah, i.e., were Muslims.

Every Prophet and Messenger submitted completely to one Supreme Being: Allah. They followed the Guidance that He sent down. Therefore, the Prophets and believers who preceded Islam were described as Muslims, i.e., submitting to Allah. Then, the perfect guidance which sealed the heavenly Messages was revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* including commands and prohibitions. Nothing new will be revealed and no one can bring about any Message other than that which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

The goal of submitting to Allah was perfected by sending down the perfect guidance. Islam became a firm and pure creed, to which the Islamic community, the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is attributed. It will not be followed by any other community because it has surrendered to Allah in everything that was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* Therefore, Allah says,

إِنَّ أَوْلَى ٱلنَّاسِ بِإِبْرَٰهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَٰذَا
ٱلنَّبِيُّ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ وَلِيُّ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

And the people who are closest to him are those who truly follow his ways, this Prophet, and [true] believers – God is close to [true] believers [68] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 68)

We should notice that all of the Messengers sent before Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* were only sent to specific nations: Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was sent to the children of Israel, as was 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him.* Allah said, '...And [make him] a Messenger to the children of Israel...' (*Al-'Imran:* 49), i.e., a Messenger who submitted to the implementation of the Guidance that was revealed to him and to these Messengers. Then, some of the legislation was changed and the Message of faith was perfected by the final Message - the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which is general for all humanity.

Some of the people of the Book believed in his Message, just as those amongst whom he was sent, and belief in the final religion continued until it reached us. In this way, the community of followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* became the final community that has submitted to Allah because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the seal of the Prophets and Messengers.

Abu Hurayrah *may Allah be pleased with him* related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The likeness of me to the Prophets before me is as that of a man who built a house well and beautifully except for the place of one brick in one of its corners. People began to tour the house marvelling at it, saying, "If only this brick were in its place!" I am that brick and I am the seal of the Prophets'.

Some people say that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a Jew or a Christian because he was the father of the Prophets. They want to ascribe the origin of faith to themselves as if it was transferred from one generation to another until it reached them. Faith is not related to race, nation, blood ties, or anything other than to Allah's Guidance. Accordingly, the people who have the best claim to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* are not his descendants; rather, they are those who follow him. Our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* certainly followed Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.* Therefore, Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) descendants have no claim to him, as they distorted the guidance that was conveyed by him and did not persevere in faith. Allah gives the final word in this issue regarding Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) when He *Glorified is He* says*:*

'And [mention, Oh Muhammad], when Ibrahim (Abraham) was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them. [Allah] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people". [Ibrahim (Abraham)] said, "And of my descendants?" [Allah] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers"'. (*al-Baqara:* 124)

Allah tried Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) with commands and prohibitions and he *peace be upon him* fulfilled them in the most rigorous manner. It was not merely an outward, superficial fulfilment; rather, it was concerned with both form and content. An example of adherence to commands and prohibitions only superficially is a person who responds to Allah's Command to offer the five obligatory prayers by offering them without the heart being submissively attuned to the prayers. Another person, however, offers these five prayers in the manner they should be offered - he fulfils the divine commands in a way that pleases Allah.

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was tried by Allah’s Commands that represent obligations, and he fulfilled them in the best way possible. Was Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* content merely with carrying out Allah’s Command to raise the foundations of the Ka'bah as high as his hands could reach? Had he done so, he would have carried out the command, but he *peace be upon him* wanted to fulfil the command to build the foundations of the *Ka'ba* in the best possible way. Therefore, he built it as high as his hands could do using every possible means; he brought a stone to stand on it so that the wall of the *Ka'ba* would be raised insomuch as the height of that stone. At that time, there were neither scaffolds nor the other tools that allow people to scale as high as they want today.

If Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* had only raised the foundations of the *Ka'ba* as high as his hands could reach, he would have carried out Allah’s Command. However, he wanted to fulfil the task with his personal abilities as well as the innovative means he used, so he brought the stone to stand upon it in order to raise the height of the *Ka'ba's* wall. The place in which Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) stood, while building the *Ka'ba* is known as “*Maqam* Ibrahim.” When he fulfilled Allah’s Command in such a perfect manner, Allah *Glorified is He* said to him, ‘…Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people...’ (*al-Baqara:* 124)

This means that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) deserved to be a leader of the people with regards to religion because he fulfilled the commands and prohibitions thoroughly and perfectly. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had deep concern for his Lord’s Guidance, as he did not want it to be limited to his lifetime only; rather, he asked Allah to pass the guidance and leadership to his progeny. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* stated what Ibrahim (Abraham) said when he requested leadership to be entrusted to his descendants, “…And of my descendants....” (*al-Baqara:* 124)?

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was full of deep concern for the course of faith and he feared for it even after his death. But Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* informs all mankind through Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) that His '…Covenant does not include the wrongdoers...' (*al-Baqara:* 124) This means that the transfer of faith and leadership is not a matter of inheritance because there were amongst his descendants those who wronged themselves, and amended the course of faith in a manner that suits their interests. Therefore, they were not fit for leadership. Allah informs us with the rules of inheritance of Prophethood which entail that Prophethood is only inherited by those who are able to implement the instructions of faith completely, without distortion.

As an example: Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this point when he said about Salman, the Persian: "Salman is one of us, from our family". The Master of mankind, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not tell Salman that he was one of the Arabs, but he ascribed him to the Prophetic family, i.e., to the inheritors of Prophethood which require perfect implementation of the instructions of faith. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew what Allah *Glorified is He* had taught Prophet Ibrahim about the inheritance of Prophethood, as it is not a matter of blood ties, but it is associated with the thorough and precise implementation of the instructions of faith. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also learned this from the incident relevant to Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* which Allah revealed to him.

When Allah promised Prophet Nuh (Noah) to save him and his family from the flood, and he saw that his son was about to be drown, he wondered about the fact that Allah promised him to save his family, so he called his Lord, as the Noble Quran states, 'And Noah called to his Lord and said, "My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges!"' (*Hud:* 45) Then, Allah said in response to Nuh's request to save his son: 'He said, "Oh Nuh (Noah), indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant"' (*Hud:* 46).

The reason why the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) should not be considered as part of Nuh's family according to the Quranic explanation is that '...he is [one whose] work was other than righteous...’ (*Hud:* 46) Allah did not say that he is not an impious person, as a person himself is not the subject of concern because Allah judges according to deeds.

Faith is not concerned with lineage, a particular country, or tribe. It is concerned with one's deeds; whoever acts according to the Guidance conveyed by any Messenger is considered as one of that Messenger’s kin. Ascription to Prophets is not concerned with a person who is descended from a certain Prophet’s linage; rather, it is concerned with the deeds that this person does.

In another verse, Allah states a situation relevant to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* indicating the Creator’s Mercy for all of His Creatures, both those who believe and those who disbelieve. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked for provision for his family, whom he ordered to live in Mecca, as Allah says*:* ‘And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in Allah…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 126)

Allah did not answer Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham’s) supplication by giving provisions only to whomever believed in Him from among the people of Mecca, but He provided for both the believers and the disbelievers. He also informs Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) of this fact, when He says to him*:* ‘And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire and wretched is the destination’ (*al-Baqara:* 126).

Material sustenance is provided by Allah to all humanity, both the believers and disbelievers because He is the One Who has brought both a believer and a disbeliever into existence. However, the provision given due to following Allah’s Guidance is a different matter, for following Guidance necessitates submission to its content as a whole without any alteration. None but a few of those who came after Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* followed this guidance, as very few people also believed in the Message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* without any distortion.

Then, Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* conveyed to the children of Israel a Message that was supposed to take them away from pure materialism to belief in the unseen. However, the Message of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was also distorted. Accordingly, the people who have the best claim to

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* are the followers of the final Guidance of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that includes the essence of all the preceding Messages. Allah is the Guardian of the believers who believe thoroughly and completely in the Message of Ibrahim (Abraham), the chosen one of Allah *peace be upon him* as well as the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَدَّت طَّآئِفَةٞ مِّنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لَوۡ يُضِلُّونَكُمۡ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ
إِلَّآ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَمَا يَشۡعُرُونَ ٦٩

Some of the People of the Book would dearly love to lead you [believers] astray, but they only lead themselves astray, though they do not realize it [69] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 69)

The meaning of the Arabic word "*waddat*" is "would love to" or "wish to." Why does this faction of the people of the Book wish to lead the believers astray? Because when the deviant person sees the upright person, he realises his failure to abide by the religious obligations with its commands and prohibitions. However, the practising believer has been able to control himself. When the non-practising person sees a practising person, he despises himself and feels jealous of the believer because he is able to control himself.

The deviant person tries to cause the upright person to deviate and when he becomes unable to do so, he mocks and scorns him and tries to scheme against him to cause him to deviate.

Allah says, 'Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. And when they passed by them, they would exchange derisive glances. And when they returned to their people, they would return jesting. And when they saw them, they would say, "Indeed, those are truly lost". But they had not been sent as guardians over them"'. (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-33)

This is what occurs nowadays: when the deviant people see an upright believer, they mock him with sardonic comments, or they attempt to belittle his faith. When they return to their companions, they jokingly tell them of how they mocked the believers, as though they make their companions happy by these tales. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* reassures the believers that they will have a day in which they will laugh at those disbelievers. ‘So, today those who believed are laughing at the disbelievers, on adorned couches, observing’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-35). Allah will ask the believers, ‘Have the disbelievers [not] been rewarded [this Day] for what they used to do?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36) This verse means that Allah asks the believers if they have known the reward of the disbelievers.

Therefore, the people with the best claim to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) are the believers in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Some of the disbelievers are still trying to attract the believers to misguidance. They wish and aspire for this, but their wish will not be fulfilled. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to this matter, saying, ‘A faction of the people of the Book wish they could mislead you. But they do not mislead except themselves and they perceive [it] not’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 69). An example of this is what some of the Jews did when they went to Mu`adh ibn Jabal, Hudhayfa and `Ammar, the great Companions, in an attempt to delude them, but they were unable to do so.

We should know that the Arabic word "*Al-Dalal*" has many meanings; it may mean “loss and extinction”, as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And they say, "When we are lost within the earth, will we indeed be [recreated] in a new creation?" Rather, they are, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, disbelievers’ (*as-Sajda:* 10). The polytheists wondered if they will be recreated after the decay of their bodies and the loss of the basic elements of their bodies within the earth. "*Al-Dalal*" may also mean “a person’s misguidance”, as Allah says, describing His Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon him* when he refused to worship idols and remained in search of the true guidance: ‘And He found you lost and guided [you]’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 7). This verse means that Muhammad was not pleased with Quraysh’s act of worshipping idols and he remained in search of the True Guidance until Allah guided him and revealed to him this upright religion. Prophet Muhammad was lost, searching for guidance, then Allah sent down to him the perfect grace.

Another meaning of "*Al-Dalal*" is that a person realises the true guidance, but he deviates from it and he goes astray. An example of this meaning is the saying of Allah, ‘A faction of the people of the Book wish they could mislead you. But they do not mislead except themselves…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 69). The question is: how can a person go astray? The deviant person who knows the true guidance but denies it commits a sin which aggravates the situation when he attempts to lead others astray. He is not content with his misguidance; rather, he aggravates his sin by attempting to lead others astray. This verse clarifies to us the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. And if a heavily laden soul calls [another] to [carry some of] its load, nothing of it will be carried, even if he should be a close relative…' (*Fatir:* 18). It also clarifies the saying of Allah *the Exalted*, 'That they may bear their own burdens in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear' (*an-Nahl:* 25).

Therefore, the burden in the former verse mentioned in the chapter of *Fatir* refers to the burden of going astray, while the burden in the verse mentioned in the chapter of *an-Nahl* refers to misleading others. These misguided people are not merely satisfied with their own misguidance, but they increase the burdens of their misguidance by leading others astray. Therefore, they aggravate their misguidance. '…But they do not mislead except themselves and they perceive [it] not' (*Al-'Imran:* 69). They do not perceive the tragic outcome of this aggravated misguidance, for which they will be chastised. If they had only reflected a little on the matter of faith, they would have ceased to mislead others and to go astray. Then, Allah says,

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَكۡفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَأَنتُمۡ تَشۡهَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

People of the Book, why do you deny God's revelations when you can see they are true? [70] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 70)

Allah asks them through the words of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for the reason why they disbelieve in the miraculous verses of Allah, while they witness to their truth. A person may ask: Did the people of the Book witness the miraculous verses during the time of the Prophet Muhammad? The answer is: When the Jews prayed for victory against those who fought them, they asked Allah "by the illiterate Prophet," whom He has promised them to send at the end of time, to give them victory over their enemies. Then, they gained victory; however, when Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, they disbelieved in him out of transgression and jealousy. Allah says: ‘And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognised, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers’. (*al-Baqara:* 89)

They disbelieved for the sake of temporal power, for they wanted rule and authority. 'Abdullah ibn Sallam, who had been a Jew before he embraced Islam, said about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘I recognised him when I saw him in the manner I recognise my son, but my knowledge of Muhammad is deeper’.

So, they knew the attributes and characteristics of Prophet Muhammad from the Torah and they witnessed the clear verses, but they denied them out of greed for temporal power. They even distorted their religion and used it in gaining corrupt temporal power. An example of this is those who sold the contracts of forgiveness. Therefore, Allah says about those who distort His guidance: ‘So, woe to those who write the "Book" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn’. (*al-Baqara:* 79) Torment is the destiny of those who distorted Allah’s saying and Guidance. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَلۡبِسُونَ ٱلۡحَقَّ بِٱلۡبَٰطِلِ وَتَكۡتُمُونَ ٱلۡحَقَّ وَأَنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ٧١

People of the Book, why do you mix truth with falsehood?
Why do you hide the truth when you recognize [it]? [71]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 71)

The literary meaning of the Arabic word "*talabbus*" is to place something inside another thing. When a person wears his clothes, he places his body into the clothes; and in this way, the "wearer" is distinct from the "clothes worn.” In the sphere of *da`wah* (calling people to Allah), we do not always find the truth confronting falsehood, and some people mix truth with falsehood. This verse outlines the attempt of some of the people of the Book to confuse the truth with falsehood. This occurred when they distorted the Torah and the Gospel and placed within them statements which neither Musa (Moses) nor 'Isa (Jesus) conveyed. This was one of the attempts to confuse the truth with falsehood. Then, the most considerable attempt to confuse the truth with falsehood was their denial of the glad tiding of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* despite the fact that it was mentioned in their Holy Books.

They announced their belief in Prophet Musa (Moses) and Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), but did they not believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so they denied the tidings carried by Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus) about the final Message of Muhammad. This was the greatest confusion between the truth and falsehood because they announced their faith in two Messengers and refused to believe in the final Prophet, as they knew that Islam which was conveyed by Prophet Muhammad, was the True Religion. However, when they were alone together, they confessed this fact, but publicly, they rejected it. 'And they rejected them, while their [inner] selves were convinced thereof, out of injustice and haughtiness....' (*an-Naml:* 14) In addition, they tried to find a scheme by which they could drive the people away from this final Message, persisting in disbelief. Allah says on this occasion,

وَقَالَت طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ءَامِنُوا۟ بِٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا۟ وَجْهَ ٱلنَّهَارِ وَٱكْفُرُوٓا۟ ءَاخِرَهُۥ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

Some of the People of the Book say, 'At the beginning of the day, believe in what has been revealed to these believers [the Muslims], then at the end of the day reject it, so that they too may turn back [72] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 72)

Some of the people of the Book wanted to cause the Muslims to doubt their religion, so they devised this scheme. The believers from among the Arabs and Quraysh at that time were illiterate and they knew that the people of the Book were knowledgeable about religious matters and the Quran had not yet been revealed in its entirety to Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him.* If some of them believed in the Message of Prophet Muhammad during the day and denied it at the end of the day, this would confuse the truth with falsehood, an act which involves deceiving the believers.

It is worth mentioning that the intended meaning of the Arabic words "*wajh al-nahar*" is the hours of morning up to the noon because the wajh (beginning) is the first thing to be encountered in any matter. For example, when we say about a fruit seller, "*Sana' wajh lilfakihah*", this means that he has placed the freshest fruits at the front of the cart and has hidden the rotten fruits behind the fresh ones. When a tradesman does something like this, his intention is to cheat and deceive because if a person buys an amount of these fruits, he will find that a quarter of what he has bought is fresh and the rest is rotten.

In the same way, some of the people of the Book attempted to deceive the believers by professing faith at the beginning of the day, then announcing their disbelief at the end of the day. Certainly, the goal was to make believers suspicious and dubious about this religion, as some of the illiterate people may say that the people of the Book who were knowledgeable about the Divine Messages reviewed this new religion and found it not conforming to the Divine Messages.

This verse may have been revealed regarding the issue of changing the direction of *Qiblah* (towards the *Ka`ba,* the direction faced in Prayer). When Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to change the direction of *Qiblah* from Jerusalem to the *Ka'ba* in Mecca, the disbelievers from among the people of the Book wanted to disobey it. Therefore, they thought of obeying Muhammad and praying towards the direction of the *Ka'ba* at the beginning of the day and then praying towards the direction of Jerusalem at the end of the day.

Allah wants to reveal that all the methods used by the disbelievers stem from a complete lack of shrewdness and thorough reflection on matters. They wanted to launch a psychological war against the Muslims in order that some of them might be dubious about the new religion. However, they did not notice that they had disgraced themselves and unintentionally admitted that those who believed in the Quran were the true believers, while they disbelieved. Allah *Glorified is He* says about them that they '…believe in that which was revealed to the believers at the beginning of the day and reject it at its end that perhaps they will abandon their religion...' (*Al-'Imran:* 72) They were content with their disbelief.

Those who tried to make the believers uncertain about their religion announced their belief in Islam in order that the people would know this about them. As they belonged to the people of the Book, they were able to judge it so that when they would reject Islam after getting to know it, they would say that the reason for their rejection of Islam was not ignorance or prejudice; rather, they reviewed this religion and found it inappropriate and inconsistent with the Message revealed to their Messenger. This is one of the methods of psychological warfare. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* unveiled the cunningness and deceit of those who tried to conceal their plot by which they intended to spread doubt and deceit. Allah sends down to His Messenger this following truth when he says*:*

وَلَا تُؤْمِنُوٓا۟ إِلَّا لِمَن تَبِعَ دِينَكُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْهُدَىٰ هُدَى ٱللَّهِ أَن يُؤْتَىٰٓ
أَحَدٌ مِّثْلَ مَآ أُوتِيتُمْ أَوْ يُحَآجُّوكُمْ عِندَ رَبِّكُمْ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ
ٱللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَآءُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

But do not sincerely believe in anyone unless he follows your own religion'– [Prophet], tell them, 'True guidance is the guidance of God'– [they say], 'Do not believe that anyone else could be given a revelation similar to what you were given, or that they could use it to argue against you in your Lord's presence.' [Prophet], tell them, 'All grace is in God's hands: He grants it to whoever He will – He is all embracing, all knowing [73] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 73)

Allah *Glorified is He* disclosed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the illiterate believers the plot devised by some of the people of the Book, as they pretended to believe in Islam at the beginning of the day and disbelieved at its end. Those plotters agreed to keep this matter secret so that the scheme would not lose its goal: confusing the illiterate Muslims. Therefore, they said to one another, 'And do not trust except those who follow your religion…' (*Al-'Imran:* 73). This means "do not reveal the scheme except to those who follow our religion." However, Allah disclosed the whole matter by sending down this verse to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who conveyed it to the believers. In this manner, the planned confusion failed and the psychological warfare reverted to those who launched it. Then, Allah completed unveiling the scheme of some of the people of the Book with the following verse: '…Say, "Indeed, the [true] guidance is the guidance of Allah. [Do you fear] lest someone be given [knowledge] like you were given or that they would [thereby] argue with you before your Lord?"...' (*Al-'Imran:* 73)

Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the plot of this cunning faction of the people of the Book who wanted to profess faith at the beginning of the day as a kind of guidance, but actually this was a means of misguidance. This is because Allah's Guidance leads mankind to the goal that Allah wills, while this faction of the people of the Book desired, by means of scheming, to make Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bereft of believers in Islam. This faction of the people of the Book advised one another to conceal their agreement to pretend to be believers at the beginning of the day and to be disbelievers at its end. They also agreed to unveil this plot only to those who followed their religion so that the plot would not lose its goal: confusing the Muslims.

They were consumed with fear because if the people accepted the religion of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they would have knowledge of Allah's Guidance and the Guidance that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed is the final Guidance. This cunning faction from among the people of the Book wanted to prevent people from faith. Perhaps they feared that the Muslims would enter into debate with them concerning faith. This indicates a lack of wisdom that may amount to foolishness. This is because they imagined that Allah did not know their hidden intentions and the action they did in public; they forgot that Allah knows the treachery of the eyes and all that the hearts conceal.

This is in accordance with their ancestors' previous action, when they left Egypt and went into the wilderness, while travelling through the desert. They claimed that Allah said to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* "Mark your houses, Oh Israelites, for I will descend and smite the land entirely". It is as if they believed that had they not placed marks on their houses, Allah would not have known which of them were believers. This statement indicates misguidance and failure. Allah says to His Messenger, Muhammad: '…Say, "Indeed, [all] bounty is in the Hand of Allah - He grants it to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Wise’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 73).

All bounty is in Allah’s Hand, and the people who plot against the Muslims will not be able to misguide and deceive them because when Allah gives His bounty to those who believe in Him, none can remove it except Him. Schemes cannot remove the bounty of belief in Allah because He has granted it. Allah is All-Encompassing, i.e. He can grant His bounty to all creatures and this would decrease nothing from His Bounty. Allah *Glorified is He* knows those who deserve this bounty because their hearts are preoccupied with their Lord. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلْفَضْلِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾

And He singles out for His mercy whoever He will.
His grace is infinite [74] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 74)

No one has any right over Allah, for every moment of life is a bounty from Him and He *Glorified and Exalted is He* grants His Mercy in the form of belief in His Guidance to whom He wills and He is the Owner of absolute bounty. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَمِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ مَنْ إِن تَأْمَنْهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِۦٓ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ إِن تَأْمَنْهُ بِدِينَارٍ
لَّا يُؤَدِّهِۦٓ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَآئِمًا ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا۟ لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِى ٱلْأُمِّيِّـۧنَ
سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

There are People of the Book who, if you [Prophet] entrust them with a heap of gold, will return it to you intact, but there are others of them who, if you entrust them with a single dinar, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over them, because they say, ‘We are under no obligation towards the gentiles.’ They tell a lie against God and they know it [75] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 75)

This verse indicates absolute divine equity: just because Allah revealed to the Messenger some of the cunningness of the people of the Book, this does not mean that there is a campaign against the people of the Book, as though they were all evil. Rather, some of them are marked with trustworthiness. This saying confirms the justice of Allah, the Just Deity.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* addresses all people, whom He knows, as He knows that the da`wah (calling to Allah) of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came as a mercy to all people. He addresses the whole world including the people of the Book who know the signs of the coming of the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Some of them attached great care to the da`wah (calling to Allah) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to study and believe in it. If Allah had waged a campaign against all of the people of the Book, those who considered believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have said that they were thinking of believing and they wanted to follow Allah's Commands, but Muhammad waged a campaign against all of the people of the Book.

When Allah says that some of the people of the Book are marked with trustworthiness, those who are considering embracing Islam will say that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only conveys what his Lord wills to reveal. If the Quran had applied a general judgment on all of them, those who were considering believing in the Message of Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have asked: "Why does this judgment apply to us all when we are thinking of belief?"

Therefore, Allah says the final word stating that some of the people of the Book are considering faith: 'They are not [all] the same; among the People of the Book is a community standing [in obedience], reciting the verses of Allah during periods of the night and prostrating [in prayer]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 113) This verse reassures those who preoccupied themselves with studying this religion and considered believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

If the Quran had cursed them all, those who were considering believing would have said that Muhammad came to curse them and they did not deserve to be cursed. Therefore, the verse that reads, 'And among the People of the Book is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth], he will return it to you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 75) represents absolute justice and equity.

Some of the exegetes said that in this verse, the Quran refers to the Christians because among them are those who are conscientious of Allah. We know that the "people of the Book" refer to the Jews and Christians. This explanation does justice to the Christians, as Allah does not deny their good attributes; rather, He confirms them in the Quran which will be recited until the Day of Judgment. This is also in order for the people of the Book to trust the verses of the Quran with regards to any bad matter because the Quran is absolutely truthful. Since it mentions their good attributes, it must be honest when it mentions their bad attributes.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says*:* 'And among the People of the Book is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth]...' (*Al-'Imran:* 75), Allah uses the Arabic word "*qintar*" here as a hyperbole that indicates a large quantity of money. When the Arabic word "*amanah*" is mentioned in the Noble Quran, we find that sometimes it is followed by the Arabic preposition "*ba*", as in this verse, "*Man in ta'manahu biqintar*" which means '…if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth]....' (*Al-'Imran:* 75) But sometimes it (*amanah*) is followed by the Arabic preposition "*'ala*", meaning "over", as in the verse: 'They said, "Oh our father, why do you not entrust us with Joseph, while indeed, we are to him sincere counsellors?"' (*Yusuf:* 11)

Allah also says, 'He [Ya'qub or Jacob] said, "Should I entrust you with him [Yusuf or Joseph] except [under coercion] as I entrusted you with his brother before? But Allah is the best guardian and He is the most merciful of the merciful"'. (*Yusuf:* 64)

Therefore, the Arabic word "*amanah*"' is sometimes followed by the Arabic preposition "*ba*" and sometimes by the Arabic preposition "'*ala*". Both of these prepositions are mentioned for a certain reason, as the speaker is Allah.

The Arabic word "*amanah*" means "an object which is entrusted to someone without any guarantee except the conscience of the person entrusted." If the relationship between them is governed by a receipt, contract, or witnesses, this is not considered a trust because a trust is the object entrusted to a person who may take care of it or not.

We said before that a true believer must be cautious of trusts because there will be a time when a trust may be assumed and a time when it may need to be returned when its owner requests it. An example of assuming a trust is if a person gives another a sum of money and tells him to keep this money as a trust, and the latter agrees to do so and takes the money. This action is considered an assumption of trust. When the owner of this money asks for it and the other person returns it, this is called giving back the trust. Everyone is confident of himself when he assumes trust and he may have good intentions to keep the trust. However, the true believer cannot guarantee safety from the life circumstances of other people. Perhaps when the owner of the money requests his money back, the person entrusted with the money may betray the trust, being forced by his life circumstances or his soul may incite him to take possession of the trust and tell him that nothing will happen if he betrays the trust. The true believer cannot be sure of himself when the time comes to return the trust though he may be sure of himself when he assumes it.

Therefore, we must be aware of the two words that are associated with trust: assumption and redemption. Those who assume trusts, while having the intention of redeeming them are confident of themselves at the time of assuming it, but they cannot be confident of themselves at the time of returning the trust. Therefore, the cautious believer does not want to subject himself to this situation for fear that he may fail to give it back. Hence, he apologizes to the owner of the object which will be entrusted clarifying that he cannot take on this trust. He fears of not being able to redeem it and this occurred at the time of offering the trust to heavens and the earth, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says,“Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains and they declined to bear it and feared it; but Man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant….” (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

The heavens, the earth, and the mountains requested not to have free will and to remain under compulsion because they were not confident of themselves about the time of Allah’s redeeming the trust. However, as the human being is unjust and ignorant, he has claimed that he is intelligent and can arrange for this matter. The human being is unjust to himself and ignorant because he does not know what he will do at the time of redeeming the trust.

Accordingly, we understand Allah’s saying, ‘And among the People of the Book is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth]....’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 75) We find that the Arabic word "*amanah*" (trust) is followed by the Arabic preposition "*ba*" which linguistically means “adherence and joining”. This means that wealth is closely associated with trust. At the moment of redeeming the trust, one should not be tempted by the treasure of gold, and betray the trust because considering the treasure without the trust is the real failure.

When the Arabic preposition "'*ala*" is used with the Arabic word "*amanah*,” it means “superiority.” This means that the trust should be considered superior to the treasure. Therefore, when a person thinks of taking the treasure because it will positively affect his life and will cause him to live in luxury, he will remember the superiority of the trust.

Accordingly, we find that some of the scholars have given a legal opinion to the effect that a thief’s hand should be cut off for stealing a quarter of a dinar; but they made the compensation for cutting off an innocent person’s hand five hundred dinars. Some people wondered, saying,

A hand is compensated with five hundred gold pieces, so why is it cut off for stealing a quarter of a *dinar*?A scholar answered a person objecting to this, saying:The rank of trust is superior and the disgrace of betrayal is mean; so understand the wisdom of the Creator!

Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘And among the People of the Book is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth]….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 75) In these words of Allah, the Arabic preposition "*ba*'" follows the Arabic word "*amanah*" (trust) in order to link the trust firmly to the one who is entrusted. If "*amanah*" is separated from the wealth, a person entrusted may think of taking hold of the wealth, and disregard the trust. Likewise, when the Arabic word "*amanah*" is followed by the Arabic preposition "'*ala*" (over), the trust becomes superior to the object that is entrusted; the trust must be held superior to the object entrusted, no matter how valuable it is.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…And among the People of the Book is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth], he will return it to you. And among them is he who, if you entrust him with a [single] silver coin, he will not return it to you unless you are constantly standing over him [demanding it]’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 75) This means that the owner of the silver coin which is entrusted should demand it constantly.

Then, Allah says, '…That is because they say, "There is no blame upon us concerning the unlearned...."' (*Al-'Imran:* 75) Some of the children of Israel deceived some of the illiterate Arab believers and denied their rights at the time of Prophet Muhammad, may *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Arabic word "*Al-Umiyyin*" here refers the believers who did not belong to the people of the Book. It may also mean those who are ascribed to their mothers, as Allah says*:* 'And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful'. (*al-Nahl:* 78) It also may refer to the illiterate people of Mecca who were given this name because they were ascribed to *Umm Al-Qura* (Mecca).

How did the people of the Book know this double-faced way of dealing with people? Who devised this approach which involves deceiving the illiterate believers? Do merits and manners differ from dealing with one person to another? Do good morals involve taking the trust owned by an illiterate person then denying it, while returning the trust if it is owned by a Jew? Is it right that a person lends money with interest to the non-Jews and lends the Jews money without interest? These dealings are biased and double-faced. The rule should be fair, fixed, and suitable to be applied on every person at every time.

How did they bring this saying, while they are the people of the Book? This is contrary to the teachings of the Divine Book which was sent by Allah. They deceived themselves and added to Allah's Law new matters, as the Divine Book that was sent down to them did not divide people into two groups: The people of the Book (who are to be treated in a special manner) and the illiterate people (who are to be treated differently). It was incumbent upon them to learn from the just and fair conduct of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in their dealings.

Their history is truthfully and justly recorded in an honourable saying, which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and which we tackle in this book "*Al-Khawater*" (Thoughts). This verse records the history of the Jews with Islam, about whom Allah has not made a single judgment applicable to all of them. Rather, He has treated the truthful and just Jews fairly. Accordingly, the truthful and just persons among them had a firm belief that Islam has come with the whole truth. Had Islam issued only one general judgment against all of the Jews, whether those who opposed the *da`wah* (calling to Allah) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the truthful and just among them who were considering embracing Islam, the fair Jews would have said that they were thinking of believing in Islam, so why did the Quran attack them in this way? However, Allah is Just and gives everyone his due right.

Allah said about those people, 'And among the People of the Book is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth], he will return it to you….' (*Al-'Imran:* 75) This is a testimony of the true belief of those people. As for the ones who have been overwhelmed by materialism, they are described in this Noble saying: '…And among them is he who, if you entrust him with a [single] silver coin, he will not return it to you unless you are constantly standing over him [demanding it]'. (*Al-'Imran:* 75) This is a true statement about those who were so overwhelmed by materialism that a person would not return the object entrusted to him except after being followed and asked constantly to return it. In this way, the Quran chronicles their conduct truthfully.

The reason why those entrusted with a treasure return it is that they abide by the teachings of their religion, taking into consideration that their Lord is called "the Absolute Truth" and wants His servants to face all the situations of their lives with truthfulness. I repeat again that when the Arabic word "*amanah*" is mentioned in the Noble Quran, it is sometimes followed by the Arabic preposition *"ba*" and sometimes followed by the Arabic preposition "'*ala*"(over) because "*ba*" linguistically means close attachment between two objects. Therefore, it means that if something is entrusted to a Muslim, he should return it. When the Word "*amanah*" (trust) is followed by the Arabic preposition "'*ala*", it means that a believer should treat the object entrusted to him as something sublime which should not be stolen or abused.

For example, if a person is entrusted with one hundred pounds, he should not consider the material benefit he will get if he takes this sum for himself; rather, you must rise above this benefit. Oh believer, beware of dishonesty and being deceived by the benefit and preciousness of that which you misappropriate from the trust; rather, compare that thing with the weight of the trust and you will find that the trust is outbalancing.

The people of the Book who permitted the betrayal of trust did not pay heed to the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was famous for his trustworthiness, both before and after the Message was sent down to him. They disregarded the fact that the True Religion does not differentiate between people with regards to the returning of trust. In addition, the True Religion encompasses a Law from Allah Who has created all the people. Therefore, we find that the law that differentiates between people with regards to the returning of trust was created by them and was not sent by Allah, He Who takes charge of the affairs of all His Creatures. Moreover, Allah refutes the reason for which they decided to deal with the illiterate people differently from the way they dealt with the people of the Book.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…And they speak untruth about Allah, while they know'. (*Al-'Imran:* 78) They know that they tell lies, for they know the true ruling, yet they deviate from it. In addition, they did not say that this ruling was created by them, but they ascribed it to the teachings of their religion, which are revealed by Allah. Accordingly, they invent a lie against Allah, and we seek refuge with Allah from such things, by saying that He has created mankind and divided them into two groups: The first one should have their trusts returned and the second one may not have their trusts returned. Therefore, they fabricated a lie about Allah, while being aware of that. Although they also knew the punishment awaiting the one who lies about Allah, they committed this act.

Allah did not mention the direct object in this verse as He did not say, "They are well-aware of such-and-such". When Allah omits the direct object, He intends to generalise the meaning and the action. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to inform us that those people knew that they were lying and the punishment of lying, as well. When an issue is negated and followed by the Arabic word "*bala*" ("but yes"), this implies that the issue preceding it is disproved. This means that the opposite is affirmed. They said, '…"There is no blame upon us concerning the unlearned"…' (*Al-'Imran:* 75) This Arabic saying is negated by the word "*laysa*" ("no"). Allah says in the next verse:

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِعَهْدِهِۦ وَٱتَّقَىٰ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

No indeed! God loves those who keep their pledges and are mindful of Him [76] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 76)

As Allah says the Arabic word "*bala*" ("but yes") at the beginning of this verse, He intends to disprove the previous claim of the people of the Book. It is as though Allah says, "Yes, there is blame upon you with regards to the unlearned people because the legislator is Allah to whom all people are equal. Then, Allah states a general issue: '... whoever fulfils his commitment and fears Allah - then indeed, Allah loves those who fear Him'. (*Al-'Imran:* 76)

Which commitment is referred to here? This is the commitment to faith which we have accepted, as we believe in Allah. When a person believes in Allah, he accepts every ruling issued by Him *Glorified is He* and he tries his best to adhere to everything enjoined by Him. If he does not adhere to Allah's Commands, his faith has no value because the benefit of faith is obtained by adherence. Therefore, we said that when Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* wants to legislate a ruling for those who believe in Him, He first enjoins certain commands on the believers. He *Glorified is He* does not enjoin the commands on all people; He only enjoins them on the believers. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* says, "Oh you who believe in Me as Allah: obey the command that I enjoin on you. I do not ask those who have not believed in me to obey the command".

Allah says, '…whoever fulfils his commitment and fears Allah - then indeed, Allah loves those who fear Him'. (*Al-'Imran:* 76) Some people may understand that whoever is committed to faith and fears Allah in the manner that his actions are in line with His Commands and Prohibitions, is loved by Allah. This is the meaning that may be understood at first glance, but Allah did not say this. "Love" is not related to a person; rather, it is related to one's deeds. Allah says '…indeed, Allah loves those who fear Him' (*Al-'Imran:* 76).

A person may commit a mistake and think that because Allah loves him, he can commit whatever mistakes he wants. We remind this person with the fact that Allah loves the good deeds that a person does sincerely for Allah. Therefore, He says, '... whoever fulfils his commitment and fears Allah - then indeed, Allah loves those who fear Him' (*Al-'Imran:* 76).

Those who fulfil their commitments and fear Allah, He will love the attribute of piety ascribed to them. Therefore, every believer should work hard to ensure that he is always characterized by this attribute so that Allah will always love him.

Hence, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* has clarified that individuals are reproduced by other individuals, all of whom are derived from one origin. It is not a matter of race; only good deeds matter. An example was previously given when Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* promised Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to save him and his family from drowning, then Nuh (Noah) was surprised that his son was amongst those who drowned. Allah *Glorified is He* says about this incident, '[But] he said, "I will take refuge on a mountain to protect me from the water". [Nuh (Noah)] said, "There is no protector today from the decree of Allah, except for whom He gives mercy". And the waves came between them and he was among the drowned' (*Hud:* 43).

What did Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* do? He called to his Lord, asking Him to rescue his son and said, 'My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges!' (*Hud:* 45) Allah informs us, through His reply to Nuh (Noah), that the families of the Prophets are not their descendants; rather, they are those who follow their guidance, so Allah said to Nuh (Noah) about his son, '…"Oh Nuh (Noah), indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous…' (*Hud:* 46)

Why should Nuh's (Noah's) son not be considered of his family? That is because the families of Prophets are those who follow the Prophets' guidance. Therefore, Allah did not say to Nuh (Noah) about his son, "He is not a good-doer"; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* said about Nuh's (Noah) son, '... he is [one whose] work was other than righteous….' (*Hud:* 46) Allah ascribes the matter to a person's deeds.

Therefore, the intended objective is that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* clarifies by His Quranic style that He loves a person's deeds and attributes. He did not say, "Those who fulfil their commitment with Him are loved by Allah." This clearly reveals that Allah loves the deeds of a person. Therefore if a person seeks Allah's Love, he must constantly adhere to Allah's Guidance. Then, Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَشۡتَرُونَ بِعَهۡدِ ٱللَّهِ وَأَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡ ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلًا أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَا
خَلَٰقَ لَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَلَا يَنظُرُ إِلَيۡهِمۡ يَوۡمَ
ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمۡ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ٧٧

But those who sell out God’s covenant and their own oaths for a small price will have no share in the life to come. God will neither speak to them nor look at them on the Day of Resurrection – He will not cleanse them [of their sins] – agonizing torment awaits them [77] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 77)

When we hear the words "selling" and "buying", we must reflect on their meanings in order to precisely understand them. In the countryside, barter and exchange of items have an immediate benefit; for example, when one person exchanges wheat for cloth with another person, both walk away with what they needed. In the case of exchanging commodities, there is neither a buyer nor a seller because both parties have bought and sold. So, the question is: when does it become a matter of buying and selling?

Buying and selling occur when we exchange a direct source of provision with an indirect one; for example, when a person buys a loaf of bread for five dollars. This transaction is regarded as buying and selling because the five dollars are not a source of provision that have a direct benefit, as money cannot satisfy hunger or thirst nor provide shelter. Bread is a source of provision with a direct benefit because it satisfies one's hunger. When a person wants to buy something, the sum of money he pays is called the "price.” So, how can the price be bought?

Allah clarifies that prices are never bought, but they are paid in return for buying things. Accordingly, the first failure concerning the deal is that those who sell commitment to Allah for a trifling price have bought the price which cannot be bought, as the objects that can be bought are commodities. Even the price that they bought was very low and worthless. The prohibition of usurious interest stems from this point, as the usurer gives a person 100 hundred pounds and wants to receive back 110. In this way, the usurer has treated money as a commodity, so the deal becomes a failure from the outset. Therefore, the first failure faced by those who exchange guidance with misguidance is that they will suffer a loss: ‘Those are the ones who have purchased error [in exchange] for guidance, so their transaction has brought no profit, nor were they guided’ (*al-Baqara:* 16).

Allah *Glorified is He* says here, ‘Indeed, those who exchange the covenant of Allah and their [own] oaths for a small price.…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 77) We know that the Arabic preposition "*ba*" is usually attached to the object that is discarded, so they have discarded the Covenant of Allah and the oaths they made that they would believe and support the Messenger if he came to them in need. They exchanged all this for a trifling price. How did this happen? Although this matter refers to an actual event, it has a general meaning which is not limited to a certain event. Therefore, no one should say that this verse was revealed about such-and-such and it has nothing to do with anybody else. Rather, this verse applies to everyone who exchanges Allah’s signs for a small price.

The actual event for which this verse was revealed was when a group of people came to Ka'b ibn Al- Ashraf, a Jew, seeking food and clothing during a time of drought and famine. He said to them, ‘Do you know that this person is the Messenger of Allah?’ They said, ‘Yes’. He said, ‘I was going to feed and clothe you, but Allah has prevented you from great blessings’. They asked, ‘Why has Allah prevented us from great blessings?’ He answered them saying, ‘You have declared your belief in Muhammad’. When they found themselves in this situation, they said to Ka'b ibn Al- Ashraf, ‘Leave us for a, while, for perhaps a doubtful matter has overcome us and we will consider the matter’. After a period of time, they preferred food and clothing to faith and said to Ka'b ibn Al- Ashraf, ‘We have read our books and found that we are mistaken; Muhammad is not a Messenger’. Then, Ka'b gave them food and clothing.

These are the people who exchanged Allah’s signs for a small price: food and clothes. Everyone who exchanges Allah’s signs for a small price veils one of Allah’s rulings for the sake of appearing to be modern before people, following the line adopted by people during his time, or urging those in authority to do something that does not please Allah. Therefore, whoever does these actions exchanges Allah’s signs and Messages for a small price and this verse applies to anyone who makes Allah’s signs subject to sale in return for a price. ‘Indeed, those who exchange the Covenant of Allah and their [own] oaths for a small price…' (*Al-'Imran:* 77) The meaning of "the Covenant of Allah" here is either a covenant which Allah causes people to adhere to by nature, or the covenant that He took from the people of the Book, which states that if they lived to see Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they would declare their belief in him. This covenant is stated in Allah's saying, 'And [recall, Oh People of the Book], when Allah took the covenant of the Prophets [saying], "Whatever I give you of the Book and wisdom and then there comes to you a Messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him". [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My Commitment?" They said, "We have acknowledged it". He said, "Then bear witness and I am with you among the witnesses"' (*Al-'Imran:* 81).

When they denied their faith after declaring it in return for food and clothes, they experienced great loss, as they exchanged Allah's signs for a small price. Therefore, Allah says about them, '... will have no share in the Hereafter and Allah will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment'. (*Al-'Imran:* 77) The Arabic conjunction "*ula'ika*" indicates linkage between '…those who exchange the covenant of Allah and their [own] oaths for a small price…' (*Al-'Imran:* 77) and anyone who is characterised by these attributes. This shows that all of them will have the same destiny. Although this verse was revealed in connection with those who bought food and clothes in return for abandoning their belief in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it also includes anyone who is characterised by these attributes in any time, whatever his religion is. Allah *Glorified is He* describes them saying*:* '…Allah will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 77)

The Arabic words "*khalaq*", "*khuluq*", "*khaliqah*", and *"khalq*" have similar meanings. As they all have the same root letters of "*kh", "lam*" and *"qaf"*. This word "*khuluq*" refers to an attribute which becomes deep-rooted in a person's character. Sometimes a person is characterised by truthfulness or generosity, and this means that truthfulness and generosity have become deep-rooted in this person's character, so he does not find it tiresome to be truthful or generous. This deep-rooted attribute is relevant to intangible matters, which is parallel to spontaneity and skills in the tangible realm because we know that every action requires training for a person to be expert in performing it.

For example, the one who weaves with a tool requires practice in manoeuvring the spool of thread and must learn how to do so between the threads of the weave, and then to take the threads together for them to latch onto the second movement of the spool when it returns. By these means, the textile is weaved. A person needs training and practice for a long period of time to become proficient. At the beginning, the action is difficult. Then, after receiving thorough training, the weaver is able to sit in front of the loom with his hands manipulating the spool skilfully and spontaneously. The matter has become a spontaneous action for the experienced weaver.

I previously gave an example of a person learning how to drive a car. The instructor teaches him how to turn the key, wait for the engine to warm up, release the handbrake, manoeuvre the gear stick and balance pushing between the accelerator and the clutch, then balance the speed of the car and slow it down by a gentle push on the brake. At the beginning, a person may make mistakes and be confused, but after receiving thorough training, he acts spontaneously without deep thinking. I also previously gave an example of a young person learning how to stitch clothing. He will take some time to get the thread into the eye of the needle and will make some mistakes in judging the distance between the stitches, but after training, he will get used to doing these actions that were difficult at first and will perform them skilfully. Spontaneous action in the tangible realm is the equivalent of a deep-rooted trait in intangible matters. It may be said that "So-and-so is characterized by honesty" which means that it is not tiresome for him to be honest but it has become second nature for him after many opportunities to choose between deceit and honesty.

When we teach our children grammar, for example, we tell them that the subject of a sentence is in the nominative case and the object is in the accusative. When the child reads a sentence, he tries to apply the rules, but he may forget them or stammer when speaking, and when he remembers them, he reads the words correctly. After practicing the rule, the child reads properly without making mistakes and grammar becomes easy and smooth for him.

Such is also the case with morals which are deep-rooted attributes that result in doing relevant actions easily and smoothly. It may be said that honesty, generosity, and bravery are morals which result in doing their relevant action easily and smoothly if a person is attributed with them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '... will have no share in the Hereafter and Allah will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 77). Some exegetes have explained this verse saying that those people will have no share of morals because morals are deep-rooted in a person's character.

Allah has specified the time saying, "in the Hereafter" when nothing can be rectified; it is the time of sound and final appraisal. A person may not have any share of upright conduct, so he rectifies his behaviour until he gains this upright conduct in the worldly life; but in the Hereafter, there is no way to make any rectification which is a tremendous loss. In the worldly life, a person may perform an action and receive no reward, or we may not see the reward that Allah gives him, but Allah will compensate him in the Hereafter for the action for which he received no reward in the worldly life. As for the one who has no share in the hereafter, it is impossible for them to be compensated. Allah adds, '…and Allah will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment' (*Al-'Imran:* 77)

Allah says in another verse in the Noble Quran about the disbelievers, 'He will say, "Remain despised therein and do not speak to Me"'. (*al-Mu'minun:* 108) Why does Allah say to them at one time, 'Remain despised therein and do not speak to Me' (*al-Mu'minun:* 108) and in this verse, '…and Allah will not speak to them…'? The answer is: Allah will not speak to them in a manner that will benefit them or He *Glorified and Exalted is He* will speak to them by means of the angels. But how will Allah not look at them?

Whenever we find that an attribute that is relevant to people has a counterpart that He ascribes to Himself *Glorified and Exalted is He* ,we must consider it in the light of '…there is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11) In our human realm, we may say, "So-and-so is not looking at so-and-so" which means that his eyes are not directed at him and the pupils of his eyes are turned away from him. It is not possible, however, to compare this to Allah because He is far above any comparison. In our human realm, we find that a person loves his friend and directs his face and his eyes at him. In addition, the Arabic phrase "*fata Huwa qaid Al-`ayn*" means that when the eye looks at him, it is attracted to him so that it cannot be turned away from him, perhaps, for example because this young man has fine qualities which prevent the eye from turning away from him. In this way, we consider that the eyes look at something as a sign of taking interest in it. This matter applies to the human realm.

However, when it comes to Allah, we must consider it in light of '…there is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11) In this way, we understand that when Allah does not look at '…those who exchange the covenant of Allah and their [own] oaths for a small price…' (*Al-'Imran:* 77), this means that He will disregard them, will not be concerned with them and will not be merciful to them. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is far above any comparison.

In addition, we must understand the matter of not looking at them in the light of '... there is nothing like unto Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11) When a person of authority amongst human beings desires to punish one of his subjects, he does not look at him and ignores him, so what about Allah's disregard for His servants? It means distancing them from His Mercy and Pleasure.

Allah *Glorified is He* adds:'…nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment'. (*Al-'Imran:* 77) The Arabic word "*tazkiyah*" means "purification, praise, or blessed growth." The Arabic phrase "*fulan zakka fulan*" means that a person praised another, or purified him. Therefore, the word "*zakat*" means purification and blessed growth. When Allah *Glorified is He* informs us that He will not speak to those people, nor look at them, nor purify them from their sins, this introduces what He has prepared for them, as He says: '... and they will have a painful punishment'.

We must consider the power of an action according to the one who performs it. In our worldly life, when we hear that a child has hit a man, we naturally understand that a child's blow differs in strength from that of a young man which differs in turn from that of a boxing champion. Therefore, actions differ in accordance with the strength and weakness of a person who performs them upon the object of the action. If the one who torments is Allah, it will no doubt be grievous with limitless pain- may Allah save us all from it.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا يَلْوُۥنَ أَلْسِنَتَهُم بِٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ
ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ
وَمَا هُوَ مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

There are some who twist the Scripture with their tongues to make you [people] think that what they say is part of the Scripture when it is not; they say it is from God when it is not; they attribute lies to God and they know it [78]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 78)

This means that they distort Allah's Words with their tongues in order to alter their meanings, or that they distort their meanings with their tongues when they want to express them. The Arabic word "*layy*" here means "to twist"; a rope is twisted by coiling two lengths of cord together in order to make the rope strong because the cords have limited strength. However, when they are twisted, we increase their strength by coiling them. Therefore, the aim of twisting is to strengthen an object. In this way, they twisted their tongues altering Allah's Words and claiming that it was revealed by Allah, although it was not. They did this to strengthen their position, belittle Islam's position and slander Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* They had said before "*Ra'ina*", (an insult in Hebrew which means "listen to us" in Arabic), so Allah said to the believers, 'Oh you who have believed, say not [to Allah 's Messenger], "*Ra'ina*" but say, "*Unzhurna*" and listen. And for the disbelievers is a painful punishment'. (*al-Baqara:* 104)

Allah clarifies to us that we should not give them an opportunity to change His Words, as He *Glorified is He* says, 'Among the Jews are those who distort words from their [proper] usages and say, "We hear and disobey" and "hear but be not heard" and "*Ra'ina*" twisting their tongues and defaming the religion. And if they had said [instead], "We hear and obey" and "Wait for us [to understand]", it would have been better for them and more suitable. But Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so they believe not, except for a few....' (*an-Nisa':* 46)

Allah *Glorified is He* has disgraced them because they distorted words from their proper usage. He says in this regard that what the Messenger Muhammad hears will not harm him, and He has recorded for them that they said, “We hear and disobey” and that they altered and distorted words and said, "Hear but be not heard". (*an-Nisa’:* 46) In addition, they changed Allah’s saying, ‘*Qulu hittah’* ‘…and say, "Relieve us of our burdens"….’ (*al-A’raf:* 161) and said instead, "*Qulu hintah*" (a meaningless phrase based on the similarity of the spelling of the words in Arabic). This they did so the people would imagine that this distorted saying was actually from the Divine Book although it is not. In other words, they twisted some of the meanings that can be derived from the words so that the believers would imagine that these incorrect meanings were actually the intended meanings. They ascribed to the Guidance which Allah revealed things which were not actually revealed by Allah.

Therefore, He *Glorified is He* says*:* ‘…And they say, "This is from Allah", but it is not from Allah’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 46) They twisted their tongues and distorted the Words of Allah with the aim to deceive and defraud the believers in order for them to believe that they are from the Book revealed by Allah to their Messenger Musa (Moses). Had they only done that, it would have been possible for them to repent and return to their Lord, regretting what they did.

Their saying, “This is from Allah” indicates that they added something to the Book and insisted on it. They intended to absolve themselves from suspicion that they had distorted the Book. If they had not distorted the Book, would they have thought of saying this? Their action is in accordance with the saying, "When a person feels guilty, he is about to say to those who suspect him, ‘I am guilty‘out of fear”. With this saying, they attempted to conceal what they had done.

Allah *Glorified is He* emphasises that they were actually treacherous saying, ‘…but it is not from Allah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 78) This noble verse disgraces them and unveils their alteration of Allah’s Book. H *Glorified is He* says*:* ‘…And they speak untruth about Allah, while they know’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 78) They knew that what they were telling was a lie. It is known that a lie is a saying that is not in line with reality. Sayings ascribed to incidents appear in three types: Actual reality, mental thought concerning the incident, or a saying uttered about the incident.

If we know a person named Mohamed who is actually hard working, this is considered as actual reality. If it occurs to us to tell a friend of Mohamed that he is hard working, this refers to a mental thought. The moment that we tell a friend about this fact, it becomes a saying uttered concerning this person. Truthfulness is defined as conformity between the speech and the actual reality. For example, when a person says, "Mohamed is hard-working" and this man named Mohamed who is actually hard working, the one who says that Mohamed is hard working is a truthful person. However, if this particular Muhamed is not hard working, the saying is not in conformity with the reality, so it becomes a lie. Scholars differentiate between truthfulness and lying by this standard. Therefore, truthfulness means conformity between speech and reality and lying is the deviation of speech from reality.

Some of those who like spreading doubt tried to question the chapter of *al-Munafiqun* in which Allah says, ‘When the hypocrites come to you, [Oh Muhammad], they say, "We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah”. And Allah knows that you are His Messenger and Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). The hypocrites said, “We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah” and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is indeed the Messenger of Allah and Allah says, ‘... And Allah knows that you are His Messenger...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). Is their knowledge like Allah’s Knowledge? No, because Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘... And Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). Why does Allah describe them as liars although they testified to the same thing that He testified to?

Allah does not belie them with regards to the fact that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, as this is true; rather, He *Glorified is He* belied their saying, ‘...we testify...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) because it means that their speech is in conformity with their belief; yet their saying is not actually in conformity with their belief. Therefore, they are considered liars.

Hence, Allah’s saying, ‘…And they speak untruth about Allah, while they know’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 7-8). This means that they utter speech that does not conform to reality, while realising that it is a lie. It cannot be said that they uttered it in ignorance, as they lied intentionally knowing that they were telling a lie.

Precision requires differentiating between a true statement and a truthful speaker. A true statement is the one that agrees with reality. Sometimes a speaker may be honest, but the speech itself is untrue. When someone says, "So-and-so spent all night studying" because he saw that the light in a person's room was turned on all night and that he opened a book, but in reality, he was only absorbed in reading a novel, the speaker here is honest, but the speech is untrue. In terms of this verse, however, we find that they were deliberately lying, as the tongue is a means of revealing what is in the heart: What is intended to say lies in the heart; the tongue is only a guide to the heart. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَن يُؤْتِيَهُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحُكْمَ وَٱلنُّبُوَّةَ ثُمَّ
يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا۟ عِبَادًا لِّى مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَٰكِن كُونُوا۟ رَبَّٰنِيِّۦنَ
بِمَا كُنتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَبِمَا كُنتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

No person to whom God had given the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood would ever say to people, 'Be my servants, not God's.' [He would say], 'You should be devoted to God because you have taught the Scripture and studied it closely' [79]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 79)

It is known that when Allah willed to reveal His Guidance, He sent it down as a book and this required that He *Glorified is He* chose a person to receive the Message. This means that the Messenger brings the guidance, applies it to himself and passes it on to mankind. A Messenger is chosen by Allah and his mission differs from that of a Prophet. The Prophet is also chosen to follow the Guidance so that people do not only hear the Message in words; rather, they see it implemented. Therefore, the Messenger is a means of delivering the Message and he also sets an example with regards to behaviour, while a Prophet is not a means of delivering a Message, but he only sets an example with regards to behaviour.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* sends Prophets and Messengers and so He says*:* 'And We did not send before you any Messenger or Prophet except that when he spoke [or recited], Satan threw into it [some misunderstanding]. But

Allah abolishes that which Satan throws in; then Allah makes precise His verses. And Allah is Knowing and Wise'. (*al-Hajj:* 52)

Accordingly, we know that both Messengers and Prophets were sent by Allah, but the Messenger was sent to deliver Allah's Message and set a good example for people, while the Prophet was sent solely to set a good example for people because during some eras the Divine Message was present, but the motive needed to put it into practice was lacking - just like what happens in our present times. The Divine Guidance is present and all people know the permissible and impermissible matters, but the failure existing in this era stems from the fact that the people are not able to urge themselves to follow it. Therefore, they are in need of a good example to be copied in terms of behaviour. This is the explanation of "the Book" and "Prophethood." What is "sound judgement," then?

Allah has used the term "sound judgement" here to show that wisdom that is based on faith is not necessarily found in only Messengers and Prophets; rather, it may be granted to any person from amongst the believers who has genuine faith, and so he speaks according to this wisdom. Allah has told us Luqman's advice to his son because this advice represents religious Guidance. Accordingly, it is possible that a person who is neither a Prophet nor a Messenger will follow and admonish people with religious Guidance when he has strong and genuine faith. This is a clear Message from Allah that any person can follow religious Guidance and pass it on to people when he is convinced of it.

We must emphasise that whoever Allah grants wisdom with regards to calling to and following His Guidance does not add anything to it. By virtue of his sincerity to Allah, he will not claim that he is sent by Allah to mankind; he only calls people to worship Allah, and sets them a good example for people.

Why was this verse revealed? It was revealed after the debate that took place between the Christians of Najran and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina during which a group of Jews joined them and asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* "In what do you believe and what do you command the people to do?" Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed them of the commands and prohibitions of the Message and the fundamentals of worship. As this group belonged to the people of the Book who included some Christians of Najran and some Jews of Medina that invented commands of worship which were not sent by Allah and wanted the people to obey them, they did not recognise the difference between the guidance of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with its commandments, and the commandments they had invented. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called people to worship Allah in the light of the guidance that He *Glorified is He* sent down to him. However, they asked people to obey commandments that they had invented themselves.

It is well established in all Abrahamic religions that Allah is the only One Who should be obeyed. If a person brings a commandment that has not been revealed by Allah and asks people to obey him, this means that a person asks the people to worship him -and we seek refuge with Allah from this- because obeying a person's commands which have not been sent by Allah commandments is a form of *shirk* (associating others with Allah in His Divinity or worship). Therefore, the position was unclear to some of these people of the Book who imagined that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was calling them to obey his own commandments in the way they did after they had altered the religion, so they said, "Do you want us to worship you and take you as a god?"

They did not understand the difference between the Messenger, who treated Allah’s Guidance in a trustworthy manner and their own leaders, who had gone against the rulings and replaced them with other rulings. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not ask them to obey him in person; he asked them to obey the guidance he conveyed and followed as a Messenger. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* disapproved of what they said.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* sent down His true saying, ‘It is not for a human [Prophet] that Allah should give him the Book and authority and Prophethood and then he would say to the people, "Be servants to me rather than to Allah’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 79) They reached such a level of heedlessness and idolatry that they thought that Allah did not choose a Messenger who was loyal with regards to the conveyance of the religion and they thought badly of Allah, or they imagined that the Messenger would alter the religion, just as they had done, turning from the worship of Allah to the worship of the one He sent as a Messenger.

Therefore, the final saying was revealed in this regard, ‘It is not for a human [Prophet] that Allah should give him the Book and authority and Prophethood and then he would say to the people, "Be servants to me rather than Allah”’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 79) The meaning may also include the fact that some of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* revered him and it is known that every believer should revere and glorify Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Due to the Companions' great love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* some of the people of the Book said to him, "Should we greet you just as we greet one another or prostrate to you?"

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not ask anyone to prostrate to him. Allah *Glorified is He* enjoined on His believing servants to honour His Messenger, saying: ‘Do not make [your] calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another. Already Allah knows those of you who slip away, concealed by others. So, let those beware who dissent from the Prophet's order, lest *fitnah* (temptation) strike them or a painful punishment...’ (*an-Nur:* 63) What is required is to revere Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but not to do with him the same acts that should be devoted solely to Allah.

The reverence that should be shown by Muslims to Prophet Muhammad is represented in calling him in a way different from the way Muslims call each other. Allah says in this verse which is relevant to the topic we are handling, ‘…but [instead, he would say], "Be pious scholars of the Lord because of what you have taught of the Book and because of what you have studied”’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 79) The Arabic word "*lakin*" (meaning “however”) is used here as a disjunctive and, as we said before, the Arabic word "*bala*" negates the statement preceding it and affirms the contrary statement that follows it. Allah here sets right the matter for us to understand that no one has the right to say, “Worship me” after Allah has given him Revelation, sound judgment and Prophethood. The statement that is affirmed here and for which the preceding sentence is negated is "*kunu Rabaniyyin*" (or "Be pious scholars of the Lord"). The Arabic words "*Rabban*y,” "*Rab*", "Rabbiyun" and "Rabban" include the Arabic letters "*Ra*” and “*Ba*" which indicate raising, guardianship, parenting and other meanings within the same scope. The "*Rabban*" (captain) of the ship is the one who controls it, is he not? The Arabic word "*Rab*" means the one who undertakes guardianship and raising. Then, what is the meaning of the word "*Rabbany*"? When a person puts the word "*Ra*b" in the possessive case, he says, "*Rabby.*" If he wants to put the word "*Rab*" in the intense form, he will add the Arabic letters "*alif"* and "nun," so it becomes "*Rabbany.*" In the modern Arabic expressions, we find other similar terms. For example, when a person wants to ascribe something to the Arabic word "*'ilm*" (meaning “knowledge”), he says, "'*almany*" which is an intense form of ascription to the word "*'ilm*". The difference between the words "'*ilmy*" (scientific) and "'*almany*" (secular) is that the later refers to a person who claims that all of his affairs proceed in accordance with knowledge apart from religious beliefs. The word in Arabic has the same two letters added to it.

A person may say, "Why should the ascription to Allah be emphasised 'by the word "*Rabbany?"* The answer is: Because the word is derived from the Arabic word for "*Rab*"(Lord) which indicates several meanings. Everything concerned with the Message must be revealed by the Lord, as the Messenger did not make any additions to this Message; this means that the source of his Message is only the Lord. Therefore, he has become "*Rabbany*" (the pious scholar of the Lord). This word also has another meaning: The Messenger adopted the morals enjoined by the Lord Who refines the people's morals in order that they achieve the objective intended they are asked to accomplish. Therefore, when he passes the religious teachings to mankind, he becomes a "*murabby*" (instructor), managing affairs for the sake of success and righteousness.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…because of what you have taught of the Book and because of what you have studied’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 79) The word "*'ilm*" in the Arabic text means the acquisition of religious texts. The word *tadrusun*" (study) in the Arabic text is intellectual examination of the religious text. Therefore, the people say in the countryside "*nadris Al-qamh*" (thrash the grain) meaning that they thrash it with a sharp tool like a thrasher so that the seeds of grain separate from the hay. Then, this thrashing will result in extracting the useful part of the grain.

Therefore, there is a difference between the Arabic word "*tu'allimun*," which means “teaching others Allah’s Guidance (which should be revealed by

Allah)” and "*ma kuntum tadrusun*" meaning “that which you have studied”, or teaching your own thoughts concerning the understanding of the texts.

Understanding the text requires interactive study. The Arabic verb "*darasahu*" means a person studying with another. In addition, the Arabic word "*tadarasna*" means exchanging what has been studied and understood in order to deduce a ruling from the text. The text may have only one meaning or it may encompass more than one meaning. Because a person has learned and studied the text, he must be able to recognise the texts that have only one meaning. Since a person has exchanged learning with people of discernment, he must have understood that the texts that encompass different meanings should be explained clearly and in accordance with Allah’s Guidance. Therefore, a person must be "*Rabbany*" (a pious scholar of the Lord) in both matters. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَلَا يَأْمُرَكُمْ أَن تَتَّخِذُوا۟ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ وَٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ أَرْبَابًا ۗ
أَيَأْمُرُكُم بِٱلْكُفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ٨٠

He would never command you to take angels and prophets as lords. How could he command you to be disbelievers after you had devoted yourselves to God? [80] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 80)

This means that no person whom Allah has granted the Book, authority and prophethood is entitled to order people to take the angels and the prophets as lords. It is not acceptable for a person who has been given knowledge, a Book and prophethood from Allah to ask the people to worship him, the angels, or the prophets because Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…Would he order you to disbelief after you had been Muslims?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 80)

Allah’s saying, ‘…after you had been Muslims’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 80) indicates that the incident behind the issue that is under explanation took place with Muslims. It seems that when they intended to revere Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they said that they wanted to declare and glorify him in a manner that had not been shown to anyone else and wanted to prostrate to him, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified to them that they should not prostrate to anyone but Allah.

Therefore, those who asked them to prostrate to him were Muslims who intended to honour Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* If Messenger Muhammad had agreed with them, this would have meant taking them out of the fold of Islam. No one can imagine that this act could be done by our beloved Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* or by any other Prophet. Allah *Glorified is He* says*:*

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِيثَٰقَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ لَمَآ ءَاتَيْتُكُم مِّن كِتَٰبٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ جَآءَكُمْ
رَسُولٌ مُّصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِۦ وَلَتَنصُرُنَّهُۥ ۚ قَالَ ءَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَىٰ
ذَٰلِكُمْ إِصْرِى ۖ قَالُوٓا۟ أَقْرَرْنَا ۚ قَالَ فَٱشْهَدُوا۟ وَأَنَا۠ مَعَكُم مِّنَ ٱلشَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

God took a pledge from the prophets, saying, 'If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes con- firming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?' They said, 'We do.' He said, 'Then bear witness and I too will bear witness' [81]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 81)

This verse clarifies the reasons why Allah sent the Messengers. It is well known that Allah sent down to Adam *peace be upon him* the first Guidance which contained everything that causes life to proceed in harmony. Then, Adam *peace be upon him* passed this guidance on to his children just as he taught them things relevant to their life affairs, exactly in the manner that a father teaches his children those matters that will help them in their lives and the teachings of their religion. Then, the children taught them to their children and the Message was passed down from generation to generation so that the religion could reach the progeny. However, with the passing of time, some of the prerequisites of religion were forgotten.

This is a sign that people have become heedless of the religion; and we see that negligence of the religion occurs in different forms. After the religion is conveyed to humans, we find one person who is heedless of a single part of the religion and he reproaches himself for losing that part. We term such a person as a possessor of a self-reproaching soul; he sins, but then his soul wakes up and returns to Allah's Religion because he is in possession of immune faith cells. Another person enjoys going against the religion and his soul urges him to do so. He is a possessor of an evil-inciting soul; he always finds an excuse for himself to commit sins and such a person needs someone else to lead him back to good.

Then what happens to a community if all its members have become possessors of an evil-inciting soul? This means that corruption has become total and so a Messenger must surely come because the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* is to guide mankind. Allah has created us and He is in possession of all Attributes of Perfection. Our creation has added nothing to Him. In this regard we quote a Qudsi Hadith (a holy saying whose meaning is only revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) narrated by Abu Dharr, *Allah be pleased with him*, who says: 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* narrates that Allah *Glorified and exalted*, says: "Oh My servants! I have forbidden oppression for Myself and I have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another. Oh My servants, all of you are astray except those whom I have guided, so seek guidance from Me and I shall guide you. Oh My servants, all of you are hungry except those whom I have fed, so seek food from Me and I shall feed you. Oh My servants, all of you are naked except those whom I have clothed, so seek clothing from Me and I shall clothe you. Oh My servants, you commit sins by day and by night and I forgive all sins, so seek forgiveness from Me and I shall forgive you. Oh My servants, you will not attain harming Me so as to harm Me and you will not attain benefiting Me so as to benefit Me. Oh My servants, if the first of you and the last of you and the humans of you and the jinn of you were all as pious as the most pious heart of any individual amongst you, then this would not increase My Kingdom an iota. Oh My servants, if the first of you and the last of you and the humans of you and the jinn of you, were all as wicked as the most wicked heart of any individual amongst you, then this would not decrease My Kingdom an iota. Oh My servants, if the first of you and the last of you and the humans of you and the jinn of you were all to stand together in one place and ask of Me and I were to give everyone what he requested, then that would not decrease what I possess except what is decreased of the ocean when a needle is dipped into it. Oh My servants, it is but your deeds that I account for you and then recompense you for. So, he who finds good, let him praise Allah and he who finds other than that, let him blame no one but himself".

Allah has created us, having the full eternal Attributes of Perfection forever and ever, and this creation has added nothing to Him. He*, Glorified and Exalted*, says in this context*:* 'I want no provision from them, nor do I want them to feed Me– Allah is the Provider, the Lord of power, the Ever Mighty'. (*adh-Dhariyat:* 57-58)

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* legislates something for us, He does it for our benefit; He *Glorified is He* wants His handiwork to attain happiness through the Religion with its "do and not do" commands. Hence, He sent down the Religion. When this Religion orders people to "do and not do" things, it does not want to restrict man's freedom of movement except in a way that protects him: It limits one freedom here to protect another there. When Allah prohibits stealing, for example, the matter is all-inclusive for all humanity, so no one is allowed to steal from anyone else, while Allah *Glorified is He* prevents one person from stealing; He prevents other millions from stealing things from that one person. This provides protection for all humanity against stealing and represents a source of gain for everyone.

So, when you look at Divine Legislation, do not look at it as just something required from you, but look at it as something required for you as well. Another example: Religion prohibits a male believer from casting his eyes on a woman that is not his *mahram*. This prohibition is not directed towards only one person; it is directed towards every believing person. As a single person, you are ordered to lower your gaze away from others, while, for your sake, millions of other eyes are forbidden from looking upon you.

So, every believer enjoys a tranquil life through the Divine Legislation and all sacred laws have come for the benefit of us all. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* has been merciful to us as shown in the procession of Messengers He sent us, from Adam *peace be upon him* until Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the teachings of all these Messengers never contradict as they all represent a source of benefit for mankind. Thus, it is far from being possible that the march of one Messenger goes against the march of another.

What, then, is the cause of contradiction that exists among the religions although the Legislator is One and all people are dependent on Him? We absolve the Messengers of bringing any contradiction eventhough some people have attempted to depict a picture full of contradictions. We must know that those followers of the Messengers do want to have a temporal power for themselves by which they can rule on earth. Those who had a temporal power in a religion such as Judaism or Christianity were responsible for that. When Christianity came to the Jews, the rabbis said: "We do not want Christianity." Why? Because the temporal power was in their hands and if those rabbis had adhered to what Allah had sent down to them, they would have kissed the hands of any new Messenger. Being grateful for his coming, they would have verily said to him: "Help us to have a deep understanding of Allah's Religion." So, differences do not occur except when caprices are in control of temporal powers.

Since Man was first created, the procession of Divine Messages has been marked by harmony, not disagreement. When a Messenger comes upon people who do not believe in any god, the job becomes quite easy as he will guide them to One Allah and to the Religion that Allah wants. But the problem is much bigger with that group of people who actually have a Messenger and a Divine Message. When a Messenger from Allah *Glorified is He* comes to them, he comes at a time when these people have established a temporal power through their claimed attribution to a former Messenger, just as happened with the Jews and the Christians. They stuck to the religion that they already had ignoring the fact that their leaders had corrupted the religion to gain a temporal power.

The procession of Messengers continued as Allah wanted to protect humanity from corruption. Allah *Glorified is He* has selected the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to lead humanity since Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed the preservation of good in this community. When you see people who have gone to extremes in their atheism, trust that there are others whom Allah *Glorified is He* has provided with more power so that there can be a sort of balance. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says*:* 'Be an ummah [community of

Muslims] that calls for what is good, urges what is right and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones'. (*Al-'Imran:* 104)

In another place in the Glorious Quran, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says*:* 'You are the best *ummah* [community of Muslims] singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If the People of the Book had also believed, it would have been better for them. For although some of them do believe, most of them are defiantly disobedient'. (*Al-'Imran:* 110) Then, once a member of Muhammad's *ummah* (community of followers) loses the conscience of his self-reproaching soul, other faithful Muslims will help him return to the right path. Allah *Glorified is He* does not make people faultless. He, Glorified and Exalted, says*:* 'By time, Man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, advise one another to be truthful and advise one another to be steadfast'. (*al-'Asr:* 1-3) Allah *Glorified is He* states the phrase "advise one another "and does not say just "advise others" to show us that advice is a mutual practice among community members. When a person has a moment of weakness in relation to the religion, another person should be strong enough to give him some good advice. This point also applies to the one who gives advice, for he might also experience a moment of weakness and then he will surely find someone to advise him. So, we see that there are no special people entrusted with advising, while others are charged with receiving the advice. Rather, it is an exchange of role-playing, or what we may call solidarity of faith. Once a person becomes weak concerning a certain point, he finds another believing brother to advise him: "Get rid of this weakness". This act is alternately done to resist the vicissitudes of the human soul as these vicissitudes do not stabilize Man's life. So, if we see a person who is too weak to adhere to a commitment, we must advise him as well as advising one another to be truthful and patient. You, too, will find people from your brethren in faith to advise you when you are weak.

This is the picture of the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* As for the former peoples, they used to not prevent one another from wrongdoing. So, Allah intervened and brought a new Messenger with a new miracle to forcibly alert people's minds to the fact that there are certain things that miracles can bring which are contrary to natural law. This was a signal from Allah *Glorified is He* to make people aware of the spheres of His Omnipotence.

Allah took the covenant of the prophets that they would pass the following message on to their people: Be alert in looking for Messengers sent by Allah *Glorified is He* and when a Messenger comes to convey Allah's Religion, stand by him and support him. The Messengers, *peace be upon all of them*, were ordered to state in the religion and the crux of it, that when Allah intervenes and sends a new Messenger, all of their people must follow him and not be bigoted. They must welcome him and submit with him to Allah. This is because a Messenger only comes to help people find the True Guidance. However, the followers who are fond of possessing a temporal power distort facts on purpose and in order that Allah *Glorified is He* protects His creation from this plague, He takes the covenant that He wants from the Prophets, saying: 'And [recall, Oh People of the Book] when Allah took a pledge from the Prophets, saying, "If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a Messenger comes [with a scripture] confirming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him …"'. (*Al-'Imran:* 81) Someone might say that this statement makes sense when a messenger comes at a time, while another messenger is already present. An example of this is when Shu'aib ('Jethro),' *peace be upon him*, lived at the same time of Musa ('Moses)' *peace be upon him*, while another one is when Lut ('Lot)' *peace be upon him*, was a contemporary of Ibrahim ('Abraham)'*peace be upon him*. We would say that this occurs too, when messengers are not contemporaries of one another, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants every messenger to convey a clear message to his people. If two messengers are contemporaries of one another, the first messenger still has to provide his people with the means to protect themselves against bigotry. As the people are believers and followers of the first messenger, they must cordially welcome the messenger who comes after him. Every messenger must convey the following message to his people: 'Be prepared for Allah's intervention at any moment. When He *Glorified is He* intervenes at any time and sends a messenger to confirm what is with you, beware of doing harm to him or showing him enmity. Instead, you must support him.' This is an explicit statement with no ambiguity. 'And [recall, O People of the Book] when Allah [God] took a pledge from the prophets, saying, 'If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes [with a scripture] confirming what you have been given....' (*Al-'Imran:* 81).

Here we are going to explain the phrase '…a messenger comes confirming what you have been given...' (*Al-'Imran:* 81). The religion raises some issues that are generally accepted since doctrines, chronicles and stories are the same. The difference lies in legislative rulings that might be appropriate for one time and inappropriate for another. When a messenger 'comes with a scripture confirming what you have been given...' in the sphere of doctrines, chronicles, or stories, you must then believe in him. The Jews, however, did not do so when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to newly guide the group that believed in the messengers and had a god. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with a religion of clear doctrine, as well as incorruptible chronicles and stories that supported it; likewise, he introduced legislation appropriate to the time. The coming of the last Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was a great shock to those who enjoyed temporal power. Some of them insisted on solely following their own messenger and their corrupt religion and refused to follow Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Others believed in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* A third group believed in another messenger. Failure is an inevitable result of bigotry. So, the Call of Islam aims to purify the doctrines and ask every follower of a former message to study and contemplate if the last Religion has come with something different from the doctrines of the former religions or has it come to confirm them?

The last Religion comes to confirm doctrines, chronicles, and stories that preceded it. However, it differs in legislation, which may be appropriate to one era, yet inappropriate to another. We can say that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to protect humanity from thoughtless and blind bigotry that results from following a particular messenger, while refusing to accept another. When Allah *Glorified is He* sends a messenger and prophet, He gives him the chronicles and facts, while taking a pledge from him and his believers that they will be prepared to believe in every contemporary or upcoming messenger; they must confirm what he brings, and the prophet must advise his followers of the necessity of this belief.

Why? This is due to the fact that the True Lord *Glorified He* wants the processions of messengers of the faith not to be enemies of one another. They must instead face the enemies of the religion, united. What has made atheism widespread nowadays is that the followers of the divine religions are in disagreement. The enmity that exists amongst them is perhaps greater than the enmity between them and the atheists who deny Allah altogether. This disagreement allows the atheists to say, 'If these religions were true, their followers would agree and not disagree. Then, what does it mean when the followers of every messenger say that they follow a messenger sent by Allah?'

The disagreement among the followers of the Divine religions gives atheists an opportunity to sow the seeds of atheism amongst people. Basically, some atheists do not find any unity or power of faith among those who believe in Allah and His Religion. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'And [recall, O, People of the Book] when Allah took a pledge from the prophets...' (*Al-'Imran:* 81). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* took a pledge from every prophet He had sent and had given the Scripture and wisdom, that if a messenger came to his people confirming this Scripture and wisdom, they would believe in him. It is not enough for the first prophet and his people to announce their belief; they must also support the new messenger. We may say that if the followers of every prophet had acted in accordance with this pledge, atheists, in general, would not have had any argument. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* then says: "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My Bond?" They said, "We have acknowledged it.'"He said, "Then bear witness and I too will bear witness."'' (*Al-'Imran:* 81). Acknowledgment is one of the best forms of evidence as said. Bond means a strong vow. We say, 'the bond of love', i.e. a strong, firm connection. When addressing Allah, the procession of prophets say, 'We have acknowledged it', and then The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Then bear witness.' Witnessing always requires a witness, a person(s) involved in witnessing, and what is being witnessed.

Since the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who says to the prophets to give Him the true covenant and pledge by saying, 'Then bear witness', so they are the witnesses here. Then, who are the people involved in witnessing? And what is the content of witnessing? Do the prophets bear witness in relation to themselves or does every prophet bear witness concerning the other prophets? Or is it that he bears witness that he has delivered the Divine Decree to his people?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness concerning his *ummah* (followers), whereas the prophets testify for each other. Thus, the witness could be a prophet, and the person involved in witnessing could be another prophet, while what is being witnessed might be that the believers must believe in and support the new messenger. Once again, the witness could be a prophet, while the people involved in witnessing could be his followers. What is being witnessed is that he has informed them of the necessity of believing in the coming messenger and his Divine Religion. Since the people of a given community believe in a messenger, they must support him and the messenger coming after him so that the procession of Faith would not disappear behind the falsehood of atheism: '...you must believe in him and support him. [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My Bond?" They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then bear witness and I too will bear witness." (*Al-'Imran:* 81).

Let us put the testimonies mentioned in this Glorious verse in order: The prophets bear witness concerning one another; the prophets bear witness concerning their followers; then Allah testifies for the prophets.

Confirming this point, we should note that if we find the followers of a previous religion being intolerant towards a new religion especially after the latter has brought a miracle that proves the veracity of what the new messenger brings from Allah, and then it becomes clear that those followers have betrayed the religion. Allah wants to keep the Call of Faith in total harmony so that no messenger may be intolerated for his own self, his race or his homeland. The same thing applies to the followers who must not be blindly following for their doctrine or creed because they all deliver the Message of one God and have one religion. So, the religion must remain coherent, with no intolerance for other prophets or creeds. The aspired goal is to have a cohesive and unified procession of of messages. Thus, there are no grounds for any prophet or a follower of his to oppose the call of any new messenger, as long as he confirms the truth that comes before him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that He has demonstrated the testimonies of the prophets concerning each other, the testimonies of the prophets concerning their followers, and Allah's own Testimony for all, which is the most faithful and trustworthy of all testimonies. Hence, the procession of faith becomes so clear and unified that we can hardly find a believer in a divine message oppose one of another divine message. Let us leave opposition to those who do not believe in the Divine Messages. When the followers of the Divine Messages join forces, they can stand against atheists. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

فَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

Those who turn away after this are the ones who break pledges [82] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 82)

The words 'Turn away' here are the opposite of 'approach'. 'Approach' means 'come face to face'. 'Turn away' means 'keep away from', or state a well-known expression, 'He turned his back on me.' This means that he does not care about me nor does he approach me. So the goal of taking pledges is to make people approach that religion. Allah threatens those who turn away and give their backs to the new Faith by saying: 'Those who turn away after this are the ones who are defiantly disobedient.' (*Al-'Imran:* 82) What does 'after this' in the glorious verse mean? The verse refers to turning away after taking the pledge and covenant from the prophets, along with the testimonies of the communities concerning each other and Allah's Testimony for everyone. So, there is no excuse for anyone. What will be Allah's Punishment for those who turn their backs on the new prophet, 'Muhammad' *peace and blessings be upon him*?

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* describes them: '...those... are the ones who are defiantly disobedient', i.e. the punishment prepared for them by Allah is similar to that of the defiantly disobedient. Disobedience, as we may know, means straying from the confines of Allah's Obedience. It is well known that words take their meanings from tangible things. Tangible things are the first to be established within the human conscience, then what follows are abstract concepts that depend on tangible things themselves. In Arabic, the word fisq (defiant obedience) is derived from the extraction of a ripe date out of its skin. When a date ripens, it becomes small and moves away from its skin. When a date becomes small in size, the skin becomes so loose that the fruit can easily come out of it.

We say in Arabic that a date *fasaqat* (in the past form) which means that it came out of its skin. The Quran borrows this expression to describe those who leave Allah’s Religion. It is as though Allah’s Religion surrounds man in all his actions. Thus, when man abandons Allah’s Religion, he is like a date that comes out of its skin.

We have discussed major disobedience, but there is minor disobedience as well. Now, let us ask this question: Is disobedience here representing just a violation of the Religion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* that must be obeyed? Such a violation may be committed by all sinners who still believe in the religion, but they partially stray from the straight path. We say that the sinner ‘has strayed from the right course’, i.e. he believes in the religion, but he ignores some of its legislations. Meanwhile, the disobedience that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is referring to, is the gravest one because it is abandonment of the procession of faith in its entirety. Since Allah has taken the pledge, and the prophets have borne witness concerning their communities, and the communities have borne witness concerning each other, and Allah *Glorified is He* has testified for all, could there be any excuse after this for a person to turn away and reject the Guidance? Why then does this person turn away and reject the Guidance? He does so because he wants another religion, which is other than that sent down by Allah. Had he been convinced of Allah’s religion, he would have turned to this religion. What religion do you want, O you who are not satisfied with this testimony and this confirmation? You surely know that there is no true religion except this one and that there is no other god who can send other religions.

Thus, we realize that the alternative to Allah's Religion is a religion created by humans for each other. We should ask those who follow a religion other than Allah’s Who has put a certain person in a position that qualifies him to be followed by others?’ Followers have to select the one they follow, and this person must be superior to them. It is wrong for a man to follow another who has created a religion of his own. This is a grave disobedience of Allah's Religion, as equals must not follow each other at all. It is from Allah’s Grace that He has given His Own Religion to all people so that they will not follow one another. Why did He do that? The purpose is to prevent the mind of a certain person to control the destiny of another person, while the True Lord *Glorified is He* has no caprices.

Man must direct his mind to be in accordance with the Will of Allah who has created all humanity.

Since there is no god except Allah, what is then the religion with which man can be pleased? If man does not follow Allah's religion, he will certainly be satisfied with man made religions which are always based on whims. When whims exist, we find that every human lawmaker works on his own; and this leads to the corruption of the universe. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He,* says:

'But if the Truth [i.e. Allah] had followed their desires, the heavens, the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined. Rather, We have brought them their Message, but they, from their Message, are turning away.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

If they are not satisfied with Allah's religion, what disobedience do they commit? It is truly a most grave disobedience because Allah *Glorified is He* has taken their pledge, as well as the pledge of their prophets, and has confirmed these pledges. So is it other than Allah *Glorified is He* they desire? Yes, they want other than Allah *Glorified is He*. But who is this other? Is it another god? No, for there is no god but Allah. Rather, they have put created beings in place of the Creator. So Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ ٱللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُۥٓ أَسْلَمَ مَن فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

Do they seek anything other than submission to God?
Everyone in the heavens and earth submits to Him,
willingly or unwillingly; they will all be returned to Him [83]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 83)

Not believing in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, whom Allah sent as a prophet and messenger, reveals their desire for a religion other than Allah's. But nothing is available to them except the religions of humans which rely on whims and inevitably lead to misguidance. Allah *Glorified is He* wants His human creatures to think logically. Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified His religion as if to tell us that we have been made successors upon earth, and we are the masters of all, who are served by the entire universe. Look at all the species in existence, and you will find that they are at your disposal; animals are less intelligent than you are. Plants are inferior to animals regarding the senses, while inanimate objects are inferior to plants.

So, all the species of the universe including animals, plants, and inanimate objects conform to your will, O man. Plants serve animals, and animals serve you, O man, while inanimate objects serve all. The various things that we humans take from inanimate objects also benefit plants and animals. Then, you can see with your own eyes that every species in existence serves the species that has superiority over it. Inanimate objects serve plants. Inanimate objects and plants serve animals. Inanimate objects, plants, and animals serve man. Yet, who do you serve, O man? You must have thought, O man, of the One to whom you are related in a way, matching your superiority over the other species. You must have searched for the one who has given you mastery over the other species. Have you, O man, subdued these species by means of your power and might? No, for you possess no inherent power that would allow you to do as such. Has it not occurred to you to think about the power that has enabled you to subject what you have no control over and make it serve you when you have no power, and even serve you, while you are sleeping? Has that thought never occurred to you?

You, O man, must be honest with yourself and search for a master who matches your mastery over others. You have no master in this tangible universe. But if someone tells you that there is a god unseen to you who orders you to serve Him, you must say: ‘This is a logical statement in view of my understanding of the universe.’ Afterwards, look at the universe; for you are not alone in it; there are other species, and every species has its own laws and mission. Animals have a mission, plants have a mission, and inanimate objects have a mission. Have you ever found species rebelling against its mission? No.

For example, you easily mount a horse that has a saddle of silk and leather and a bridle of silver. On another occasion, you use this horse as a means or a mount to willingly carry fertilizer made of animal dung. Thus, it serves you as a mount and as a carrier, and it never rebels against you. Every species duly performs its mission, and thus, matters go smoothly. Why do matters go in such a smooth way? Allah is the One Who has created these species and subdued them (to man) as if to say to them to‘serve people whether they are believers or non-believers.’ This is the Divine Justice; so these species do not delay or rebel in their service of humankind.

Have any of you ever seen the sun saying, ‘Man no longer pleases me; so I will not rise for him anymore, and, in fact, I will disappear today?!’ Has the air ever rebelled by saying, ‘No, mankind no longer deserves to breathe air; so I will not allow them to benefit from me?’ Have we ever seen rain refuse to come down? Has man ever planted crops in good soil and then have it disobey him? No, everything in existence humbly and dutifully fulfils its mission. In this context, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He,* says: ‘And made them [grazing livestock] obedient so that some can be used for riding, some for food, some for other benefits, and some for drink? Will they not give thanks?’ (*Ya Sin:* 72-73).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* sets some animals free, so they are neither subjected to the will of man nor tamed by him. The purpose here is to know, O man, that the camel, for instance, is not tamed by your own power. If you had absolute power over the universe, would you tame some of the snakes of this world? Or tame the lion?

O man, you see many runaway, untamed creatures in this universe such as snakes and wild animals. The True Lord *Glorified is He* shows us through this exception that you cannot subdue such creatures to serve you with your own power unless Allah subjects them for you. This subjection and taming of these creatures is a grant and a grace from Allah *Glorified is He* to you, O man, who is still a weak and impotent creature.

We can hardly find anything beneficial in the universe that has disobeyed man because all the creatures are subjected by Allah to serve mankind, both the believers and the disbelievers. This is the Divine Sustenance that encompasses all creatures. The Most Generous Creator is the Lord of all humanity Who gives provision. Hence, the other species obey man whether he is a believer or a disbeliever. If a disbeliever conducts his life well, he will be successful (in this world), in contrast to a believer who fails if he does not work hard or conduct his life well. Again, this is the Divine Sustenance that is extended to all people. As for the Divine Bestowal, it is related to commandments and prohibitions ‘do and not to do’. It is extended to the believers alone.

So this is the image of the universe. It performs its mission in an optimal way and experiences wonderful total harmony. Here, we may ask ourselves from where has the imbalance in the universe come from? The imbalance has come from you, O man. Hence, whenever you find corruption in the universe, be sure that man has a part in it. But when man does not intervene, corruption never occurs.

Have you ever seen anyone complaining that the air has been insufficient? No.

This is because man has nothing to do with this matter. However, we intervene in the air issue via polluting it with exhaust and waste. It is a fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* generously grants man discoveries that could lessen this corruption; but when mankind gets involved afterwards, things are corrupted. Does this mean that we should not get involved at all? Should we stand aside with no actions? No, we must be involved in the universe, but according to Allah's Guidance.

If you get involved in the universe according to Allah's Guidance, everything will run through subjection and taming. Just as the sun performs its mission, inanimate objects perform theirs; and animals perform theirs. You, O man, are required to perform your mission which is to obey Allah *Glorified is He* by ‘doing so and so and not doing so and so’. If you adhere to the Guidance of ‘do and not to do’, verily you will be in harmony with the universe.

Allah concludes this issue with a deeply moving and touching question for the believers: ‘So is it other than the Religion of Allah they desire, while to Him have submitted [all] those within the heavens and earth, willingly or by compulsion, and to Him they will be returned?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 83)

Everything in the heavens and earth has submitted to Allah, willingly or by compulsion. One may ask what the meaning of ‘willingly’ is. ‘Willingly’ refers to obedience stemming from subservience, as the heavens and earth said in the wise text of the Quran: ‘Then He turned to the heaven, which was smoke—He said to it and the earth, “Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion,” and they said, “We come willingly.” (*Fussilat:* 11)

Everything that has not been given the freedom of choice comes in obedience and subservience to Allah *Glorified is He*. Then what is the meaning of 'by compulsion'? Some scholars say that 'willingly' denotes that the species of angels, inanimate objects, plants, and animals fulfil their missions in submission. None of them objects or even has the capability to disobey. As for the phrase of 'by compulsion', some scholars have understood that it refers to those people who serve others by force, such as slaves. In reference to scholars who say this, we may say that it is not correct or sound to give the opponents of Islam a chance to claim that Islam forces a man to serve another unwillingly because the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'There is no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The true Guidance has become distinct from error. So whoever rejects *taghut* [false gods] and believes in Allah has grasped the firmest handhold, one that will never break. Allah is All-Hearing and All Knowing.' (*Taghut* is an Arabic word that means false objects of worship such as idols, heavenly bodies, spirits, human beings, etc.) (*Al-'Imran:* 256)

Since Allah does not force anyone to believe in Him, how does He force a person to serve another one?! So we must understand 'by compulsion' according to its real meaning. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has informed us that the whole universe is subservient to Him because He *Glorified is He* is the One Who created it, and there is no god but He. This is a fact beyond doubt. The entire universe is possessed by Allah, and He is the Arranger and Subjugator of it. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Allah [God] has never had a child. Nor has there ever been any god beside Him. [If there had been,] then each god would have taken his creation aside and sought to overcome the others. 'Exalted is Allah above what they describe [concerning Him]' (*Al-'Imran:* 91).

Since He is the One and the Creator, no one can rebel against His Will. It is necessary for man to understand his mission as being the only creature that Allah has given him the freedom of choice and made him responsible for his own actions, while other species have no choice and are not held responsible before Allah *Glorified is He* concerning 'do and not to do' commands. Responsibility is verily the result of free will. The religion asks you to 'do and not to do so and so' because the One Who has sent it down and created you knows well that you are capable of doing what He commands you to do and not doing what He commands you not to do.

Consider this example. Man's hand is created to move as he wills. This is quite true because when the nerves that connect this part of the body to the brain are severed, this part is paralysed. Furthermore, if the afflicted person wants to lift his hand, he cannot [we seek Allah's refuge from such a bad thing]. The hand, then, is under the control of man and when your will, O man, is in accordance with Allah's Guidance, you will direct it in the course of His 'do and not to do commands'. When you are told, for instance, 'Do not use your hand to strike anyone,' this means that the hand is capable of striking. When you are asked to take the hand of the one who may stumble', then your hand is able to take the hand of the one who may stumble. So, you have been created in such a way that your body organs willingly respond to your will. Religion comes to order you to do the following: 'Go with the will for so and so, and do not go with the will for so and so'.

When man follows the religion, he is in perfect accord with the subservient things and does everything in the best manner. But man loses this accord when he does not adhere to the religion and breaks away from the unity of the universe. Let us read what Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Do you realize [Muhammad] that to Allah prostrates [submits] whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many others the punishment is well deserved. Anyone disgraced by Allah will have no one to honour him. Indeed, Allah does whatever He wills.' (*al-Hajj:* 18)

All the species lie prostrate to Allah: the sun, the moon, the stars, and the mountains. All of these inanimate objects prostrate. The trees and plants, too, prostrate to Allah *Glorified is He* and so do the animals and the moving creatures. So many people also prostrate. However, in contrast to the so many humans who do prostrate, we find that there are many who do not, and so the punishment has been justified upon them. If man had only adhered to Allah's Guidance, he would have been like all the other species; but he has chosen to be different by saying: 'I undertake to bear the Trust (Commands of Allah) because I am learned and wise.' For example, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* tells us: 'Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, yet they declined to undertake it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he has always been unjust and ignorant.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 72).

If man accepts the Guidance of Allah in accordance with the 'do and not to do' commands, he will be in harmony with all the created beings, and thus no violations will occur on his part or the part of the other species. When this does occur, the universe will be in perfect harmony. We know that when man is occupied with some of his scientific ambitions, he intends to do good, but he is aware of some aspects and ignorant of others. If man learned from Allah, the Knower of all things, the world would be in harmony.

The inventors who designed engines that run on petrol have made human transportation much easier, but the exhaust and waste produced by petrol harm the universe. This is why scientists are making great efforts to find ways to combat environmental pollution. When firewood was the only fuel available, there was no environmental pollution. Why? Because every element was fulfilling its mission: as a part of the burned wood became charcoal, another part turned into gases; thus, everything took a natural course.

This shows us that man has approached modern inventions with only half his knowledge. Man has planned to make movement easier, transport heavy loads and shorten journeys, but he has not considered the consequences that affect the environment and cause pollution. Hence, we have encountered waste materials that corrupt the environment. If man had comprehensive knowledge, he would have, when inventing these engines, searched for a way to avoid these waste materials.

Let us contemplate the Greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. He lets the human intellect develop, but the human intellect is limited and does not apprehend factors which certainly result in harm. Those who have invented insecticides thought that they had made a major breakthrough in the universe, but the Will of the True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed that the very people who invented these insecticides were the ones to ban them because they found them to be harmful. In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘Say, [O, Muhammad], “Shall we inform you [believers] of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose efforts are lost in this worldly life, while they think that they are doing good work.” It is those who disbelieve in their Lord’s Verses and Signs and deny that they will meet Him’, so their deeds become worthless; and on the Day of Resurrection We will not assign to them any weight [i.e., importance]’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-105).

If you want to perfect your product, search for the best one in the light of Allah's Guidance. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us the clearest of examples.

We know that the waste products of our inventions are harmful, like the waste of factories, vehicles, etc. On the other hand, the waste excretions of the creatures of Allah *Glorified is He* like animals, for example, are beneficial. Man takes animal droppings and manufactures fertilizers out of them to increase soil's fertility. It is not strange that animal dung that fertilizes land is not repulsive to us, nor does it have the same stench that human waste has. Why is this? This is because animals eat according to their need. They might find before them many different kinds of food, yet they will eat dry grass only. When an animal is full, it stops eating, and so its waste is not foul-smelling. The human being, on the contrary, eats many different kinds of food, eats beyond his need and does not control his desires and appetites. An animal has no free will and is ruled by instinct. It finds before it what can be eaten and what cannot be eaten, and it, instinctively, chooses the appropriate food. When its belly is full, it stops eating because it is governed by instinct and subjugation. Meanwhile, man enjoys free will which corrupts him, distances him from Allah's Guidance and causes him to cross the boundaries of satiation since he has the power to do so. Thus, we clearly see that the entire universe willingly submits to Allah *Glorified is He* by way of subjugation.

Never think that Islam could exist by force and compulsion. Some scholars have missed this point and thus have given those who oppose Islam a chance to argue and say, ‘Your religion spread by the sword.’ We may say to them that nobody can accept Islam by compulsion. The sword was only raised for one cause: the protection for the freedom of choice. The sword was raised to prevent compulsion and eliminate the hegemony of some people who forced others to accept their beliefs; so the sword addressed them saying, ‘Know your limits and let people choose what they believe.’ The proof of this is that the lands that Islam conquered still contain non-Muslims. If they had been conquered by the sword, we would not have found any religions there other than Islam. We would have also found the opponents of Islam further emphatically saying, ‘You (Muslims) impose *jizyah* or ‘protection fee’ (a tax taken from non-Muslims living in a Muslim state to protect them).

We could say to them, refuting their argument that we do not impose *jizyah* on the believers, but only on the disbelievers whom we freely leave to disbelieve. A disbeliever pays *jizyah* so that the believers can defend him if the homeland is attacked.

Then, how should we understand Allah's Statement that man sometimes submits by compulsion? We can understand this by the following statement: Man does not understand matters well. Some matters fall under his control, whereas he has no control over other matters which happen to him against his will and choice. A person chooses his own actions, but he does not choose the things that happen to him or around him. For example, none of us chooses the day he is born, the day he dies or the day he becomes ill. A wise man is the one who recognises this fact by saying to the one who does not know or ignores it, ‘O man! Get rid of such foolishness. You are compelled to unwillingly surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* during some times in your life. You submit to Allah *Glorified is He* against your will concerning many matters that happen to you and that cannot be prevented. So why not fulfill yourself by submitting to Islam with its freedom of choice?’

All creatures surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* and so does man since he is incapable of repelling the things that happen to him or around him. Here man, like other beings, is forced to surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* Who has the upper hand over these areas of submission, in which you, O man, play no part, or have no control. Then, must you not surrender in all aspects of your life? Is it possible for a disbeliever to prevent some parts of his body from surrendering [to Allah's Will] and performing their functions?

Let us see what would happen to this disbeliever if he thinks he can do so: he must stop breathing because breathing occurs whether he likes it or not; and his heart must stop beating because it beats without him ordering it. Since there are people who enjoy disbelieving, let them make all their body parts disbelieve; yet they cannot, for they will find that they want certain things that do not come to them and that they dislike things that happen to them. No one can avoid surrendering to Allah because Allah *Glorified is He* has predestined for every person the day he is born and the day he dies. Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that man cannot resist the things that happen to him, thus becoming submissive against his will. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '..., while to Him have submitted [all] those within the heavens and earth, willingly or by compulsion, and to Him they will be returned?' (*Al-'Imran:* 83).

So, let us understand 'willingly' to mean beings other than man, as well as the believers who carry out the Teachings of Allah's religion, whereas 'by compulsion' refers to all the undesirable matters that happen to man, for which he has no control over. He is unable to prevent them because the one who causes them to happen is the Creator Who does what He wills. Since there are some aspects of your life, O man, in which you are drawn, why have you rebelled concerning the matters of free will? It is incumbent upon the disbelievers to accept this point and say 'no' to disbelief and turn to faith. A believer is actually aware of this point, saying, 'I want to be in harmony with the entire universe so that no (natural) endowment may supersede another, and no will may dominate another. This represents Allah's *Glorified is He* Mercy with the creation.'

When man surrenders himself to Allah *Glorified is He* he does what the religion requires and abstains from what the religion forbids. We could say to whoever refrains from following Allah's Commands of 'do and not to do': If you do what Allah wants, what will be the benefit for Him? Nothing will benefit Him, so you must consider this matter carefully, for a command may be rejected or rebelled against if the one who gives the commands seeks to benefit from them. There is no benefit for the True Lord *Glorified is He* behind what He wants from the creation except what is in the best interest of the creation itself.

Then the Guidance of the True Lord *Glorified is He* is for the benefit of mankind. The one who refuses Allah's Guidance only harms himself and loses harmony with the creation. If someone does not want to surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* let him try not to surrender (to Allah) concerning those things on which he has no control. This is impossible.

Let us carefully contemplate what the Quran says after the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about the covenant, pledge and testimonies: ‘So is it other than the Religion of Allah they desire, while to Him have submitted [all] those within the heavens and earth,willingly or by compulsion, and to Him they will be returned?’ (*Al-'Imran:* 83). The one who desires a religion other than Allah's religion is not being logical, or honest, with himself or with the universe because the entire universe belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*. Included are the heavens and the earth with all they contain, both animate and inanimate objects, as well as the people who accept Allah’s Guidance, and even the disbelievers who submit to Allah *Glorified is He* concerning the things on which they have no control.

The word ‘submitted’ in this Glorious Quranic context means surrendered, and we are subjected and forced to obey. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions that the heaven and the earth ‘... said, “We come willingly.”’ (*Fussilat:* 11). Naturally, the heavens and the earth submit to Allah's Commands, but when ‘They said, “We come willingly.”’, they actively submit to Allah *Glorified is He*. All must return to Allah *Glorified is He*. Mankind, both the believers and the disbelievers, will most assuredly return to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The verb ‘return’ at the end of the verse can be found in other places in the Quran; sometimes it comes in the passive form ‘they will be returned’, which means that they are compelled to return to Allah *Glorified is He*; and sometimes it is in the active form ‘they will return’, which means that they wll rushed forward to return to Allah *Glorified is He*. In this verse, we understand that those who desire religions other than Allah’s religion do not wish to return to Allah *Glorified is He* and so they will be compelled to return, as Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says in the passive form in another chapter of the Quran: ‘On that Day they will be violently thrust into the Fire of Hell’ (*at-Tur:* 13).

After this, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

قُلْ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسْمَٰعِيلَ
وَإِسْحَٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَٱلْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَآ أُوتِىَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَٱلنَّبِيُّونَ
مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

Say [Muhammad], 'We [Muslims] believe in God and in what has been sent down to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes. We believe in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of the [prophets]. It is to Him that we devote ourselves' [84] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 84)

When we examine this verse, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* groups Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* together with those who believe in him and the former messengers regarding the belief in Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* talks about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers as one faithful entity. The True Lord's word 'Say' is directed (in the Arabic imperative singular form) to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the statement 'We [Muslims] believe...' is evidence of the unity between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the *Ummah* (followers) that believes in him. It is as though the Muslim *Ummah* is included in 'Say', and as though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is included in 'We [Muslims]believe...'. Thus, complete harmony, or unity, is achieved between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believe in him. So when the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses them, He addresses a single faithful unity that has no divisions.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses this form of discourse to clarify for us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come in order to gain ascendancy over his *ummah*; rather, he came to carry the burdens of this *ummah*. As we have said before, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had two forms of faith: he had faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and he was faithful to the believers. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will intercede on our behalf (on the Day of Resurrection) because he had made so many great efforts to intercede for his entire *ummah*. He delivered the Message in the best manner and assumed responsibility for the benefit of his entire *ummah*. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Say: "We [Muslims] believe…" Some may argue that it would be more obvious in this context to say,' I [Muhammad] believe,'or to say, 'Say (all of you): We [Muslims] believe….' Be certain that True Lord *Glorified is He* in His Glorious Quran puts every word in its proper place, in such a way that there is cohesion between the word and its meaning. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Say: "We [Muslims] believe…"' in order that we know that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a messenger who is inextricably mixed with his Ummah, and that the Muslim *ummah* willingly obeys her Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus the commands come to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, from the True Lord *Glorified is He* and all are required to obey these commands. This shows or proves to the opponents (of Islam) that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has a strong, faithful following. If Allah *Glorified is He* had said, 'Say: I [Muhammad] believe…,' this would have meant that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* possesses nothing more than his own personal belief. But the fact is that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was believed to be a prophet by his *ummah*, as well as many others, which includes those who embraced Islam at the Fath (Conquest) of Mecca, as the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'When the Victory of Allah comes and He opens up your way [Prophet], when you see people embracing Allah's [God's] Religion in Crowds...' (*an-Nasr:* 1-2).

When we read the True Lord's words: 'Say, "We [Muslims] believe in Allah [God] and in what was sent down upon us..."' (*Al-'Imran:* 84), we should note, as we have said before, that scholars discuss the issue of Revelation (*Inzaal* or *Nuzul* in Arabic). Sometimes the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '...And who believe in what has been revealed to you, [O, Muhammad], and what was revealed before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter.' (*al-Baqara:* 4)

Other times, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'And We have not sent down upon you the Book ''the Quran", [O Muhammad], except for you to make clear to them that wherein they have differed and as guidance and mercy to those who believe.' (*an-Nahl:* 64)

So, when the concept of Revelation is expressed, we sometimes find that the verb 'reveal' is used, followed by the proposition 'to' ('*ila*' in Arabic); and sometimes the phrasal verb 'send down' is used, followed by the proposition 'upon' ('*ala*' in Arabic). Other scholars say that when speech is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'sent down upon you', it is as though these scholars make –unintentionally– a distinction between Allah's revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and His revelation to his *ummah.* They do not keep in mind that the goal of sending down the religion upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the guidance of the *ummah.*

We should say that we must not consider the matter in a superficial manner because according to the direct usage of the language, there is a subtle usage of it here.Namely, both 'to' and 'upon' imply that the religion has been sent down to the *ummah* together with her Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* sometimes uses '*ila*' (to), which combineswith the verb 'reveal', when the statement is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as in: 'And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognised of the Truth. They say, "Our Lord, we have believed, so count us among the witnesses."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 83)

On another occasion, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses 'ala' (upon), which combines with the phrasal verb 'send down', when the statement is also addressed to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as in: 'And We have not sent down upon you the Book " the Quran", [O Muhammad], except for you to make clear to them that wherein they have differed and as guidance and mercy to those who believe.' (*an-Nahl:* 64)

Yet another time, the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about 'coming down' *(Inzaal* or *Nuzul* in Arabic) when addressing the believers themselves: 'And it has already come down upon you in the Book [the Quran] that if you hear people denying and ridiculing Allah's Revelation so do not sit with them unless they start to talk of other things, or else you yourselves will become like them. Indeed, Allah will gather the hypocrites and disbelievers in Hell all together.' (*an-Nisa':* 140).

This Supreme Book came down from heaven for the benefit of the *ummah*. So the use of '*ala*' (upon) implies loftiness that matches this supreme Ummah and puts the religion in a high status for the believers since it came for their interest. According to Arabic, coming down, or sending down of, (the revelation) requires loftiness which is shown in the proposition 'upon'. This coming down also requires having a goal which is conveyed in the proposition 'to' when used with 'reveal'. So, this religion comes from the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'upon' and 'to' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who delivered to the believers for their own benefit. Thus, we say that if a (religious) ruling seems to limit an individual's freedom, we should not misunderstand that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to actually limit this freedom; rather, this limitation limits millions of people for the sake of the freedom of this individual. An example of this is the religion's prohibition of stealing: this is a command for every one among the millions of people in existence, which strives to benefit every person. The Quran is revealed for your benefit, as well as the benefit of all the believers.

When we read the words of the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*: 'Say [Muhammad], "We [Muslims] believe in Allah and in what was sent down upon us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and *Al-Asbaat* [the Tribes representing the twelve children of Prophet Jacob]. We also believe in what was given to Moses, Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of the [prophets]. It is to Him that we devote ourselves [as Muslims]."' (*Al-'Imran:* 84), we find that this statement clarifies that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came only with a religion that contains the most truthful doctrines, stories and chronicles in accordance with the procession of messengers from the day that Allah created the earth and sent the first messenger. Allah *Glorified is He* took a pledge from the prophets and their followers that whenever a messenger comes, confirming what is with them, they must believe in him. Allah *Glorified is He* also took a pledge from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he must believe in the former messengers because he did not come to destroy the religions, yet rather to perfect them. So we find the Glorious Quran say: '…This day I have perfected for you your Religion and completed My Blessing upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3)

The previous religions with all their correct doctrines, stories, and chronicles are similar to Islam; moreover, Islam comes with legislation that is appropriate to every time and place. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* addresses us in his noble Hadith, saying: 'The likeness of me to the prophets before me is as that of a man who built a house well and beautifully, except for the place of one brick in one of its corners. People began to tour the house, saying: "We would not have seen finer than this, if only for the place of this brick!' I am that final brick." (1)

So, the religion perfected itself with the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since Allah *Glorified is He* took a pledge from the other messengers that they would believe in him when he came. Meanwhile, he trusted and believed in the prophets who preceded him. No one came afterwards asking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers to believe in him. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* ends this Glorious verse saying: '... "It is to Him that we devote ourselves [as Muslims]."' (*Al-'Imran:* 84)

This means that none of the followers of any previous messengers has anything that would grant them a temporal power. Rather, everything starts with Allah, *Glorfied is He*, and ends with Him. This is the final word in the procession of messages. Islam means man's submission to Allah *Glorified is He* to be in harmony with himself as well as with the universe that contains animals, plants, inanimate objects and others. Thus, the whole universe, including believing people who surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* becomes subjected to Him, or His Will. When the universe and mankind have become subdued to Allah *Glorified is He* no action will be in conflict with another because the One Who has this authority is the One Who makes laws to govern man's daily life and protect him from clashing with other beings. We find that people have managed to set standards for themselves which can prevent that which may result in disasters and crises.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim: Traceable to Prophet Muhammad's Hadith*

For instance, let us look at railways. There is one who is called 'track controller' whose job is to change tracks for trains so that one train coming from a particular direction can change its course so as to avoid colliding with another train coming on the same line. This is the action of mankind in relation to his inventions of trains and forms of transport: he has designed ways to prevent these vehicles from hitting each other. So, what about the True Lord *Glorified is He* to whom belongs the noblest descriptions and Who has created man himself? He *Glorified is He* has granted us the Guidance so that no movement, or action, in the universe may clash with another.

Let us compare the sphere of subjugation with that of the free will. Have we ever heard of two camels walking along opposite paths and hitting each other? This has never happened because a camel keeps itself, and what it carries away from other camels and what they carry. Yet, we have heard about vehicles crashing into each other since a vehicle does not drive itself; it is driven by a person who has the will of choice and who can make it collide with other things and cause disasters due to his carelessness.

So, clashes between movements occur only in the matters which are governed by free will, e.g. a person who is heedless of his job, as is the case of the track controller when directing trains. Meanwhile, the clash of a movement in the universe with another is impossible because the matter is in the hands of *the Most High*, the Overseer Who controls the earth and the heavens. He *Glorified is He* keeps the universe in complete harmony and teaches us His Attributes, as when He says: 'Allah – there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep...' (*al-Baqara:* 255). This means that He has the means to sustain your life and arrange your affairs. He neither sleeps, nor slumbers, and nor does He become heedless; so we can sleep, for He has subdued the entire universe for us.

Since this is the nature of Islam and due to the fact that the universe is self-harmonising, why do you deviate from all existence, O man? And why do you deviate from your own intrinsic, innate nature? Why are you not in harmony or in unison with the universe? If you are in harmony or in unison with yourself and the universe, you will be a happy person.

Today, we see that the world has materially developed in such an incredible way that, for example, if something happens in America, we see it immediately on television, and that a person can board a spaceship and travel to outer space. However, does the world feel comfortable or at peace now? No, it has faced more hardships, as though it has racked its brains and burdened scientists in their labs to invent things that inevitably caused it to be more disturbed, unsettled, divided, and conflicted. Thus the world is always witnessing real and cold wars.

All of this is the result of managing the world's affairs through human caprices, or whims. We do not all return to a single source of guidance which commands us, and thus we obey, and which forbids us, and thus we refrain. Rather, every person follows his own desires, and this is why we see worries, conflicts, disasters, and screams of terror everywhere. One of today's afflictions is drugs. A drug addict is a person who is unhappy with his life and does not want to face his problems. Instead, he tries to escape his reality by means of addiction. To such a person, we may advise him that this is not a solution to any crisis because when a person faces a problem, he needs an intellect other than his own in order to tackle it. You, addict, squander your own intellect through this addiction, despite the fact that you are required to use another intellect beside yours to solve your problems. Fleeing problems does not solve them; rather, it results in foolishness and lack of intelligence as problems become more complicated. We may say to the communities that suffer from such inflictions that if you would only take your laws from Allah's Guidance, you would be protected from such disasters.

Thus, we see that all new inventions always lead first to evil, and if we find that they have no evil intent, we direct them towards good. If only they were good purely for Allah's Sake, but if they are a deviant and distorted good because those who do not possess such inventions, such as the developing countries and the Third World, are made to be slaves and guinea pigs for the inventors, as a result of their discoveries and inventions. The latter use their advancements as ways to enslave and degrade others, even if they seemingly appear to do otherwise.

Why is this so? It is because we have been truely honest neither with ourselves nor with the reality of our advancements. Unlimited scientific ambitions should not be causing us all this trouble; we should have achieved more comfort after the actualisation of these ambitions. But this has not occurred. Why? This is because we, humans, are being led by our whims, which are not trustworthy guides. The true trustworthy guide is the Law of Allah *Glorified is He* Who legislates only for the good of those He has created. Since Islam outlines the safe way with the Creator, the self and the universe around us with all the species on it, then the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* is surely Islam (which means submission and surrendering to Him). This is the inevitable conclusion. So the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '...It is to Him that we devote ourselves [as Muslims].' (*Al-'Imran:* 84) The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* then continues saying:

وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ ٱلْإِسْلَٰمِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ مِنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

If anyone seeks a religion other than [*islam*]
complete devotion to God, it will not be accepted
from him: he will be one of the losers in the
Hereafter [85] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 85)

What will bring happiness to the entire world is the religion of Islam. Whoever desires a religion other than it, Allah *Glorified is He* will not accept it from him. If anyone is not pleased by the Legislation of Allah and with amasement says, 'This legislation is too harsh; you cut off a person's hand and disfigure him.' We reply to such a person with the following analogy:

A car might crash into another and disfigure tens of people inside both cars, or a train accident might cause a disaster and disfigure hundreds of people. If we count the number of hands that have been cut off throughout the entire history of Islam, we will find that the number is considerably lower than the number of people disfigured by road accidents. Any argument about protectng the beauty of human beings is indeed ironic, for the law of hand amputation regarding thieves brings righteousness and discipline to life, whereas whimsically motivated wars have disfigured and annihilated hundreds and even thousands of people. This kind of statement is sheer sophistry. Does the carrying out of the legislation of punishments cause crimes to occur? No; carrying out the legislation of punishments is meant to act as a warning for people to commit such crimes.

When we tell anyone, ‘If you kill someone, the authorities (commissioned by the ruler) will kill you’, is this not a way of preserving his life as well as the lives of others? When legislation in the religion preserves one person’s life, it preserves the life of every person at the same time. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding so that you may guard yourselves against what is wrong.’ (*al-Baqara:* 179)

Thus, this legislation is proven to be perfectly sound. Then, the Statement of the True Lord, *Glorified and Exalted is He*: ‘And whoever desires other than Islam as religion – never will it be accepted from him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 85) indicates that whoever legislates a law that contradicts what Allah *Glorified is He* has legislated, it is as though he has put Allah *Glorified is He* in the wrong. In essence, it is like he is saying to Him: ‘We are more concerned about humanity than you, O Lord, because you have erred in this issue.’

This statement is a clear deviation from the Law of Allah *Glorified is He* and man must always behave properly with his Creator, and refer all matters back to Allah, his Lord. When you refer all matters back to your Lord, O man, then you can rest and relax with peace of mind and in comfort unless you benefit through deviation. If you benefit through deviation, this means that you desire what Allah *Glorified is He* does not. But if you desire the good of the people, you will find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has legislated laws that serve the interests of all mankind. So, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘And whoever desires other than Islam as religion – never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 85).

Someone might say regarding this statement, ‘... never will it be accepted from him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 85) that it does not completely reassure me that I will be rewarded by Allah in return for my good deeds, for He *Glorified is He* may or may not accept them since no one can force Him to do anything. To such a person, we can say that you will eventually meet or come back to your Lord whether you like it or not; so why do you utter such words? Be as wise as you can be and do not rebel against the Commands of your Lord. '…and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 85). A loser as a word is a noun whose present participle (gerund) is 'losing', which means, in Arabic, waste and squandering of capital. The Hereafter is a final life. Yet man is foolish enough to say, 'I will be tortured a little, and then it will be over.' No; it will never be over because the Hereafter is an eternal life after which there is no other life that follows it. Then the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Why would Allah guide people who deny the Truth, after they have believed and acknowledged that the Messenger is true....' (*Al-'Imran:* 84).

كَيۡفَ يَهۡدِى ٱللَّهُ قَوۡمٗا كَفَرُواْ بَعۡدَ إِيمَٰنِهِمۡ وَشَهِدُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱلرَّسُولَ
حَقّٞ وَجَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتُۚ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهۡدِى ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٨٦

Why would God guide people who deny the truth, after they have believed and acknowledged that the Messenger is true, and after they have been shown clear proof? God does not guide evildoers [86] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 86)

Here we witness incredible use of language: The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls on us to wonder at the act of those who disbelieve after having believed. Had they not announced their faith before, we would have said that they had not tasted the sweetness of faith. However, can the one who has believed and tasted the delight of faith go back to disbelief? This is a bizarre rebellion.

Someone might ask the following question, 'Since Allah *Glorified is He* has not guided them, why are they held accountable?' To such a man, we should stress what we have always repeated in this context in order to clarify a certain issue which is common among the non-religious people who say: 'Allah did not want to guide me, so what can I do?' This is an argument to give an excuse for being deviant.' Such a statement only comes from someone who has transgressed against himself (by sinning). This statement never comes from someone who obeys Allah *Glorified is He*. That one who says, 'It has been ordained by Allah that I should commit sins, so why am I held responsible?' must learn that obedience also comes from Allah *Glorified is He,* so why does he not say instead, 'Obedience is from Allah; so why does He reward us for that?' Why do you, O sinner, ignore mentioning the reward of obedience and think only of sins? You say that you'have been destined by Allah to commit sins, so why does He punish you?' You should have also said, 'Since Allah has decreed that I should obey Him, why does He reward me for that?' We can say to those who justify deviating from the right course that they want to be rewarded for obedience and to escape the punishment for disobedience.

You need to duly understand this matter. I have said before, that 'Guidance' has two meanings. First, it means simply directing (people) to the way that leads to the aspired goal. An example of this is inanimate road signs. Every sign shows a specific road and guides towards it. There is no one at these signs to help any person and say to him, 'I will help you and repair your car' or 'I will get in the car with you and take you to your destination.'

These signs are only a means of guidanc, i.e. they show the road that leads to the desired destination. Allah *Glorified is He* has guided all people, the believers, and the disbelievers, i.e. Allah *Glorified is He* has shown them the way that leads to the ultimate goal. Afterwards, people have been divided into two groups: a group that accepts the religion is pleased with it and acts as Allah wants, and a group that does not. When a believer resorts to Allah's Omnipotence and believes in Him, it is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to him, 'You have believed in Me and My Religion, and so you will have another reward. I will assist you to overcome the troubles of life.' This is the second form of Guidance which Allah *Glorified is He* grants as a reward to those who believe in Him and choose His religion. This form of Guidance means 'assistance'. Allah *Glorified is He* gives His believing servant the sweetness of obedience and helps him to do good deeds, energetically. So, Guidance sometimes means 'direction' and sometimes means 'assistance'. I repeat these words so that this point may become clear to the mind of everyone. Let us always remember this matter and ask, 'Who assists man?' The one who assists man is the One Who man believes in. As for those who disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* they are not assisted by Him.

I have cited this example several times: A person drives towards Alexandria, then he gets confused about choosing the correct direction to reach his destination. He finally finds a policeman and asks him how he can reach Alexandria. The policeman shows the motorist the way leading to Alexandria by saying, ‘This is the correct road to Alexandria.’ Here, the policeman is directing this man, and when the motorist says to him, ‘Praise be to Allah that I have found you here, for you have made the journey easier to me. ‘These words soften the heart of the policeman and make him give further information to the motorist, showing him in detail how to get to his destination. He may warn him of any obstacles he might face. If the motorist thanks the policeman more and more, this will please the policeman and motivate him to get in the motorist’s car and lead him to the right course, explaining to him the obstacles he needs to avoid. Thus, the policeman has given all forms of assistance to the one who thanked him profusely.

Suppose, however, that another man asks the policeman about the right path, and then he refuses to believe him. In such an instance, the policeman will ignore this man. I give this example with the objective to clarify, not to compare. Allah *Glorified is He* provides (His slaves) first with the general guidance that covers all people and shows them the right path to the religion. Whoever believes in Allah *Glorified is He* and relies on His Omnipotence will be granted a second guidance, the guidance of facilitation and assistance.

‘Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path, and given them their righteousness...’ (*Muhammad:* 17). The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives them the true sweetness of guidance: righteousness. It is as though He says to the believing servant, ‘Since you have accepted Faith in Me, you are, thereby, granted the sweetness of this Faith.’ As for the one who disbelieves and wrongs his own soul by being polytheist, the True Lord *Glorified is He* withholds the guidance of assistance from him because he has already experienced the general guidance that showed him the straight path, but he has not followed it. So, the question in this verse: ‘Why would Allah guide people who deny the Truth, after they have believed…?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 86) is for denial and exclusion, and not regarding general guidance of showing the straight path, but in regards to the guidance of assistance instead. In other words, the question is ‘Why would I assist those who disbelieve in Me?’

This question refers to some people of the Book to whom the description of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been revealed in their scriptures to the extent that Abdullah ibn Salam *God be pleased with him* who was one of them said, 'When I saw Muhammad, I knew him well, as I know my own son. Indeed, my knowledge of Muhammad is even better.' The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* confirms this fact in the Glorious Quran, saying: '...those... who follow the Messenger – the unlettered Prophet (Muhammad) they find, described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel– who commands them to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens, and the iron collars that were on them. So it is those who believe him, honour, and help him, and who follow the light which has been sent down with him, who will succeed.' (*al-A'raf:* 157)

Let us contemplate the accuracy of the Quranic expression in this verse, which does not say: '... the unlettered Prophet (Muhammad) whose description they find in the Torah that is with them and in the Gospel...' Rather, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '…the unlettered Prophet [Muhammad] they find, described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel …' (*al-A'raf:* 157).

It is as though whoever reads the Torah and the Gospel is able to see the very image of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by means of a precise description. The Torah and the Gospel knew him in a detailed, comprehensive way with supporting statements described by some people of these two messages. There is a difference between 'knowing' and 'speaking': a person might know something and conceal it, but they knew Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and admitted this fact. They used to pray for victory over the disbelievers through this prophet, as the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'When there came to them a Book (the Quran) from Allah confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it: so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

Before the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they considered him a source of their victory over the disbelievers by saying, 'There will come a prophet, and we will follow him. We, together, will kill you as was the case with the people of 'Ad and the City of Iram.' But what did they do on the ground? The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* answers: '…even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it: so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

So, they had believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before he came. But when he came, they disbelieved in him. See the Fairness of Allah *Glorified is He* when He guides them to honesty, truth, and faithful dignity: '… Say, Allah– and those who have [true] knowledge of the Scripture– are sufficient witness between us."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43)

Those who have knowledge of the Scripture are the Jews and the Christians. They bear witness that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*. The most equitable Quran is fair to the Torah and the Gospel: the books that are in their possession: 'Why would Allah guide people who deny the Truth, after they have believed and acknowledged that the Messenger is true…' (*Al-'Imran:* 86). They believed in him as a messenger relying on their own books, then announced this belief when they said, 'There will come a prophet, and we will follow him. We, together, will kill you as was the case with the people of 'Ad and the City of Iram.'

Since they have done such a thing, why would Allah guide them? Neither are they prepared for guidance nor shown any signs of love towards Allah *Glorified is He*. So, Allah *Glorified is He* does not assist them to be rightly guided. Had they only turned to Allah *Glorified is He* He would have assisted them, for He *Glorified and Exalted is He* declares as such: 'Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path, and given them their righteousness...' (*Muhammad:* 17). For those who have not sought guidance, Allah *Glorified is He* has left them without the guidance of assistance. This clarifies the meaning of Allah's words: '... If Allah leaves anyone to stray, you [Prophet] will never find the way for him.' (*an-Nisa':* 88)

Those, who do not follow the general guidance of adhering to the right path and, thus, turn down faith, Allah *Glorified is He* sends them astray, i.e. leaves them in their delusion and disbelief. Does Allah *Glorified is He* help those who originally reject Him and grant them His Guidance of Assistance? Of course, he does not. Having disbelieved in Allah *Glorified is He* are such people going to trust that Allah *Glorified is He* grants facilities and conveniences to His slaves? No, they are not going to trust that. You must know that the guidance of showing the right path is a general guidance for all people of every age. As for the guidance of assistance, it is solely for those who accept faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.You can say that the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses man as follows: ‘you have believed in My General Guidance, so take My Guidance of Assistance’, or ‘you are worthy of My Assistance’, or ‘you will find easiness in all matters’. As for the one who disbelieves, Allah *Glorified is He* does not guide him.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not assist a disbeliever because assistance first requires an action on the part of the one being helped, and a disbeliever has not done what he is required to be granted this assistance. He has not believed, and so the final word is this: ‘...and Allah does not guide the disbelievers’ (*al-Baqara:* 264), and the true word is this: ‘…and Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 108), and the true word is also this: ‘…and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 86) These are the wrongdoing people who commit the greatest evil: attributing partners to Allah. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says in response: ‘Luqman counselled his son, ‘My son, do not attribute any partners to Allah: attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong!’ (*Luqman:* 13)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* leaves them, He increases their misguidance and seals their hearts so that they do not know the path to Faith: ‘Why would Allah guide people who deny the Truth, after they have believed and acknowledged that the Messenger is true, and after they have been shown clear proof? Allah does not guide evildoers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 86)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them with signs, proving the sheer truthfulness of his Message, but they wronged themselves greatly and terribly by attributing partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. But was this verse revealed in regards to the people of the Book who had in their possession a description of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* along with signs and glad tidings of his coming? Or was it revealed on another occasion to the point that some people believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then disbelieved in him?

In fact, the two groups are included here: the people of the Book who believed in the previous messengers, but did not believe in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believed in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then denied it, as during the time of the Messenger in the case of Ta'ma ibn Ubayriq, Ibn Al-Aslat and Al-Harith ibn Suwayd. They all announced their faith, went to Mecca and stayed there. One of them repented, so his brother obtained a pledge of protection for him from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* while the others did not repent. This actually applies to both groups, and Allah's *Glorified is He* Glorious Words refer to the members of both: 'Why would Allah guide people who deny the Truth, after they have believed and acknowledged that the Messenger is true, and after they have been shown clear proof? Allah does not guide evildoers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 86)

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* explains to us the punishment of these people with His Wise Words:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ جَزَآؤُهُمۡ أَنَّ عَلَيۡهِمۡ لَعۡنَةَ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ أَجۡمَعِينَ ٨٧

Such people will be rewarded with rejection by God, by the angels, by all people [87] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 87)

'Curse' in this verse means deprivation of mercy. Allah *Glorified is He* knows every cursed man belonging to those people. Since they are deprived of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* then the angels who believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and witness what man does not see repeat this curse. The believers among Allah's Creation and everyone do as well. The question is this: How could the people all together, the believers and the disbelievers curse them? How could the disbelievers, in particular, curse them? We know that when a disbeliever sees a person committing a sin, he both looks down upon and despises him.

Suppose that a disbeliever meets with a person who disobeys the religion and commits sins. Does this disbeliever not curse such a person? Actually he does because the disposition instilled by Allah *Glorified is He* in mankind rejects this and never approves it.

It is the Will of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to make them, as disbelievers, curse one another. We also find that everyone rejects them because they disbelieved Allah's (God's) *Glorified is He* religion after they had believed. This has led them to commit sins causing them to be rejected by everyone. Moreover, they are eternally cursed, as Allah *Glorified and Exalted* says:

خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

And so they will remain, with no relief or respite for their suffering [88] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 88)

'…with no relief... for their suffering.' (*Al-'Imran:* 88) means that the torment will remain always and forever. Some people might imagine that when a disbeliever enters Hell and is burnt in it, his affair will, thereupon, come to an end. No, this is not the case. One remembers one thing and ignores another; he forgets the True Lord's Words: 'We shall send those who reject Our revelations to the Fire. When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they will continue to feel the pain: Allah [God] is Mighty and Wise.' (*an-Nisa': 56*).

They will continue suffering by the Command of the True Lord *Glorified is He* forever and ever. Some may say that science has proven that man's feeling of pain as a result of whipping decreases after the first twenty lashes. These people forget that torment in the Hereafter is of another kind. Allah *Glorified is He* will create for the tormented person a new sensation so that he will feel the torment eternally. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '... with no relief or respite for their suffering.' (*Al-'Imran:* 88) This means that their torment is not questioned, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not even give them respite from such torment. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُوا۟ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٨٩﴾

Not so those who afterwards repent and mend their ways – God is most forgiving and merciful [89] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 89)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all creatures and wants them to be as He wants them to be since they are the handiwork of Him. Allah

Glorified is He loves both those who turn to Him and those who keep themselves clean. He *Glorified is He* has ordered His servants to sincerely repent to Him, faithfully, honestly, and with no setbacks. This repentance requires renouncement of sins, regret for what happened, determination never to return to repeating them and finally seeking the forgiveness of those you have wronged, if there are any.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says regarding this, 'Allah, stretches out His Hand during the night so that the people may repent for the faults committed from dawn till dusk, and He stretches out His Hand during the day so that the people may repent for the faults committed from dusk to dawn. (He would accept repentance) before the sun rises in the west (before the Day of Resurrection).'(1)

This way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* lays down the conditions for His slaves' repentance so as to reform the universe, for had Allah *Glorified is He* not laid down repentance for the sinners, this would have meant that those who have been heedless of Allah's religion even for a single incidence, would have become, in their own view, lost, corrupted and guilty of committing sheer follies. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* by encouraging man to repent from sins, provides an opportunity for sinners, who have wronged themselves, to return to Him, as well as bestowing mercy on the community by preventing the evils of these corrupt people. Thus, repentance is laid down for the good of the universe and the benefit of mankind so that they can enjoy Allah's Love. For this reason, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Not so those who afterwards repent and mend their ways– Allah [God] is Most Forgiving and Merciful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 89) Despite their previous disbelief, Allah *Glorified is He* by His Mercy, exempts them from this admonition since they still have a chance to repent. The meaning of '*aslaha'* is to do what elevates something that is already good and righteous. Allah *Glorified is He* has not created anything in the universe that is fundamentally corrupt. Rather, corruption results from the misdeeds man commits by his free will. Repentance entails that one increases righteousness in the universe, which, in turn, guarantees that he would not corrupt anything that is already good and righteous. Since repentance means to elevate something that is already good, it necessarily includes not damaging or harming what is good and righteous.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim: good and authentic Hadith*

Perhaps those who have wronged themselves at a moment of heedlessness and decrease of faith would remember the sin or misdeed they have committed with remorse and be determined to do good deeds with diligence and sincerity; so Allah *Glorified is He* will blot out their previous sins by virtue of their latter good deeds.

For this reason, many of those who strive with zeal and perseverance in the cause of goodness and reformation may have previously wronged themselves in some way, so they try to make amends for their past by doing good deeds in many different ways. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to each of them, 'You have committed something that I have forbidden, and I want to guide you to what I have ordained you to do so as to compensate for that.' Allah, the True God *Glorified is He* thus, turns an individual's past sins into a compelling motivation that constantly picks at their conscience and directs them to diligently do good, so they would generously give charity to the poor so as to undo their past. Perhaps those who do good without sufficient earnestness or zeal do not have any powerful incentive in their lives.

However, those who have constantly trespassed the limits of Allah *Glorified is He* are the ones continually motivated by this fierce power so that when any of you sees a person who has transgressed against himself by doing sins, prays to Allah *Glorified is He* to guide them to the Straight Path. Know with certainty that Allah *Glorified is He* will ease the means for him to do good because no one can ever cause the universe to deviate from the laws of the Creator. This applies to those whom Allah *Glorified is He* describes in the Noble Quran, by saying: 'Not so those who afterwards repent and *aslahu…*' (*Al-'Imran:* 89). *'Aslahu'* means to do righteous deeds with earnestness and zeal, motivated by the kindled remorse constantly felt over previous transgressions so that always struggling to do righteous deeds, would lead to eliminate previous deviations.

Next, Allah, the True God *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بَعْدَ إِيمَـٰنِهِمْ ثُمَّ ٱزْدَادُوا۟ كُفْرًا لَّن تُقْبَلَ
تَوْبَتُهُمْ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلضَّآلُّونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

[although] the repentance of those who, having believed, then increase in their disbelief, will not be accepted. They are the ones who have gone [far] astray [90] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 90)

This verse of the Noble Quran talks about those who not only disbelieve after having believed, but also increase in disbelief. The repentance of such people will not be accepted, and they are truly astray. This verse follows, contrasting the previous one: It talks about those who do not repent in comparison with those who do. But how does a disbeliever increase in disbelief? He not only disbelieves in Allah, but also forms an obstacle for other people to believe. He is not content with his own failure; rather, he attempts to spread disbelief among others. This is an increase in disbelief. [We seek refuge with Allah from it!]This verse has been revealed to tell about some of the Jews who had believed in the signs that foretold the advent of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Then when Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) was sent by Allah *Glorified is He* they denied his Message, and when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a Messenger, their denial of the Truth was further increased.

They first disbelieved in ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and then increased in their disbelief when they denied the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and claimed they were the children and beloved, or chosen people of Allah *Glorified is He*. These are not among those who have repented. They may have claimed their repentance with their tongues, but their hearts were not sincere, and ‘deliberately violating repentance in disrespecting Allah. May Allah protect us all from such a calamity!

Next, Allah, the True God *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَمَاتُواْ وَهُمۡ كُفَّارٞ فَلَن يُقۡبَلَ مِنۡ أَحَدِهِم مِّلۡءُ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ
ذَهَبٗا وَلَوِ ٱفۡتَدَىٰ بِهِۦٓۗ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن نَّٰصِرِينَ ٩١

Those who disbelieve and die disbelievers will not be saved even if they offer enough gold to fill the entire earth. Agonizing torment is in store for them, and there will be no one to help them [91] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 91)

They disbelieved, and Allah *Glorified is He* did not decree that they should repent, so they died as disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us the end results of their deeds in life, as well as their destiny in the Hereafter. They are punished for the misdeeds they have committed in the worldly life since they were given free will to choose between good and bad; therefore, they are deprived of this privilege of a good life in the Hereafter and have no free will to choose their destiny. Scholars of the Quran have debated a point in this verse: Does '…enough gold to fill the entire earth…' (*Al-'Imran:* 91) figuratively mean that they have spent in their lives the equivalent of an earth-full of gold? We can say concerning this that no matter how much they spend on good causes in this life, they do not benefit from their spending since Allah has erased all their deeds due to their disbelief.

Suppose a disbeliever dies without repenting to Allah *Glorified is He* and had spent the equivalent of an earth-full of gold for a good cause. We tell them that this spending will bring a disbeliever no fruits in the Hereafter, for they have committed the greatest treason against Allah *Glorified is He*: disbelief in Him combined with denial of the Truth He has sent. As long as he does not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* it means he had spent that money for the sake of people who are definitely in no position to reward him for these good deeds in the Hereafter. His intention had not been directed to Allah when he did his good deeds, so he receives no reward from Him. Whoever does a deed should seek reward from whomever they have done it for. Was Allah *Glorified is He* in the mind of that disbeliever when he did a given good deed? No, because he died, while still disbelieving, so even if he spends an earth-full of gold, it will not be accepted from him.

People are in his mind when doing a given good deed, and they already have given him the praise they think he is worthy of. He could be an inventor, a philanthropist or whatever beneficial position, and he will receive his reward from mankind. Concerning people like this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'You did that so that such-and-such would be said (in praise of you), and indeed it was said.'

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to him, 'I was not in your mind when you did that good, so why do you ask Me for a reward in the Hereafter? It did not cross your mind that all the dominion is Mine.' He *the Exalted and Almighty,* says in the Quran: 'The Day when they will come out with nothing about them will be concealed from Allah. "Who has control today?" Allah, the One, the All-Powerful!' (*Ghafir:* 16)

Some people say that they have generously enriched the world and added to people's welfare with countless discoveries and innovations with which they have reduced humanity's pains and suffering; so how is it that they will have no reward in the Hereafter?!' To them, I reply that, indeed, they have done much for humanity, but humanity has given them their due reward already. They have been eulogized and commemorated in history. Statues, records, celebrations, and prizes have been dedicated to them. They have worked for the sake of people, and people have rewarded them, so no injustice has been done to them. The intention behind their deeds was not directed to Allah Who vividly depicts their situation in The Quran, saying: 'But the deeds of those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a desert: the thirsty person thinks there will be water, but when he gets there, he finds only Allah, who pays him his account in full–Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39)

A mirage is seen from afar in the form of a water hole in the eyes of a thirsty desert traveller; in actuality, it is only an optical phenomenon formed by light rays. A traveller keeps moving towards the imagined water and pins desperate hopes on reaching it, but when he arrives, he finds nothing and is surprised to find that only Allah *Glorified is He* is there. Remorse strikes him, and he receives his recompense. Even if he spends an earth-full of gold in good deeds, it will not be accepted from him, nor will Allah *Glorified is He* accept from him an earth-full of gold to ransom himself in the Hereafter, if he has such a ransom at all. Even if he has an earth-full of gold to ransom himself in the Hereafter, will Allah *Glorified is He* accept it from him? No, and in fact, he will not even have the gold, for in the Hereafter, he will have nothing, not even choice. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: '…Who has control today?" Allah, the One, the All-Powerful!' (*Ghafir:* 16)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says in the Quran: 'If the evildoers possessed the earth's assets twice over, they would offer them to ransom themselves from the terrible suffering on the Day of Resurrection; God will show them something they had not reckoned.' (*az-Zumar:* 47)

'... Agonizing torment is in store for them, and there will be no one to help them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 91) These people will face an agonizing torment because every action derives its power from the power of him who performs it. When torment is from Allah *Glorified is He* Who has Omnipotent Power and Might, this torment will be insufferable. The evildoer will find no one who can spare him this torment. For he will have no one to help him or intercede for him; no one will make the following offer: 'So-and-so is suffering severe torment, let us go and help him.' No help will be offered by anyone.

After this, Allah, the True God *Glorified is He* says:

لَن تَنَالُوا۟ ٱلْبِرَّ حَتَّىٰ تُنفِقُوا۟ مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ ۚ وَمَا تُنفِقُوا۟ مِن شَىْءٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِهِۦ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٢﴾

None of you [believers] will attain true piety unless you give out of what you cherish: whatever you give, God knows about it very well [92] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 92)

The Arabic stem formed from the letters '*b-r-r'* denotes 'ampleness', 'vastness', etc. '*Barr*' may mean 'ample', 'extensive', etc., or it may refer to the spacious land on earth in contrast to the sea. Someone might say that'the sea is wider than land (*barr*) because the size of the continents is far smaller than the waters running through or separating them!' We can reply to someone who might say this that your movements, however, are far more expansive on land than they are at sea; a ship or even a log is required, in most cases, to move through the sea, which is a form of constraint. As for land, on the contrary, one can walk, ride, or run, so one's scope of movement on land is wider than at sea.

The Arabic word *'berr'* mentioned in the verse may mean 'true piety', 'devotion', or 'Paradise'. Thus, they are all interrelated since they all denote 'ampleness'. True piety and devotion lead one to attain the ample Mercy and reward of Allah *Glorified is He* and paradise is the fruit to be reaped as a result. They are all interrelated because they all denote the meaning of 'ampleness'; worship and piety constitute the cause for attaining such ampleness, and Paradise is the outcome. Someone might ask why Allah speaks about spending after speaking about the suffering of the disbelievers. The answer to this is that when Allah, the True God *Glorified is He* speaks about those who will be grievously tormented because they disbelieved and died as disbelievers and that they will have no help in the Hereafter, the following contrast comes to mind: those who believe, do good deeds and die as believers,will be spared such grievous suffering and granted the opposite of it which is delight, and they will find abundant help and reward unlike the disbelievers who will find no one to help them. Believers will receive their reward from Allah *Glorified is He* for their true piety (berr); *'berr'* is a word that denotes every form of goodness, and when it is mentioned generally, it refers to the reward Allah *Glorified is He* grants believers for such goodness, the ultimate manifestation of which is paradise.

How Allah *Glorified is He* deals with believers, is thus presented in contrast with His way of dealing with disbelievers. The Quran is the Miraculous Speech of Allah and when He *the Exalted* addresses His creatures, who are entrusted with delivering and committing to His Message, He addresses the human faculties which He has created; so this Speech must enrich and satisfy those faculties. If speech is not addressed by the Creator of those faculties, there may not be tuning between the speech and such faculties. However, since these are the Words of Allah (the Creator), they are necessarily in harmony with the nature of these faculties.

Human nature encompasses several faculties which are linked together precisely; so it is possible when addressing the faculty of hearing that the sentimental faculties can be stirred and moved. Were speech from other than the Creator Who has Omnipotent Knowledge of such faculties, it would not be able to influence the faculty of hearing, while also agreeing with and affecting sentimental faculties in such a way that makes human nature capable of grasping meanings and associating them with each other. ‘Association of meanings’ is a unique quality true of human beings. It is the process through which one grasps a particular meaning that, in turn, brings to the mind other meanings linked to it. For example, when you see a person you know, this process of ‘association’ brings memories to your mind, makes you recall your relationship with him, and retrieves your mental image of his family, friends, acquaintances, etc. All what has passed between you and him along with the events you have witnessed together flash in your mind upon seeing him, and this is what we call ‘association of meanings’, the process of one meaning invoking another.

When Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* addresses mankind, He addresses every quality within their disposition, all at the same time so that one quality will not be nourished at the expense of another. The Speech of Allah *Glorified is He* has come in its miraculous way to completely satisfy all the qualities human nature is comprised of. For example, The True Lord *Glorified is He* has commanded that idolaters should be forbidden from circulating the *Ka’ba* in the Sacred Mosque of Mecca. Before that divine prohibition, idolaters used to circulate the *Ka’ba*. They came from far and wide to witness the season of pilgrimage; they brought their money along to spend it on the people of Mecca and bought everything they needed from there. The season of pilgrimage was also an economic season. When Allah *Glorified is He* decreed the prohibition of idolaters from performing pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque of Mecca, He addressed the Muslims who lived then in Mecca so they would prevent idolaters from circulating the *Ka’ba*. He the Exalted and All Knowing knew the abilities He has created and that the prohibition would provoke one of those abilities, so He says in the Quran: ‘Believers, those who ascribe partners to God are truly unclean: do not let them come near the Sacred Mosque after this year...’ (*at-Tawba:* 28).

When this command was revealed, it inevitably provoked certain qualities in the natural disposition of the human soul; Allah knew, through His Eternal, Omnipotent Knowledge that the natural human instinct that craves economic benefit would be kindled in the people of Mecca upon hearing this command, and that this would induce some of the Muslims who lived then in Mecca to say, ‘If we stop idolaters who come to us with their money to buy our goods, the economic season, on which we depend for sustenance throughout the year, would recede, and then what will we do?!’ Allah *Glorified is He* knew that prohibition of idolaters from approaching the Sacred Mosque of Mecca would inevitably awaken this disposition of the human soul that cares about material benefit, so He *the Exalted* says directly afterward: ‘…And should you fear poverty, then [know that] in time Allah will enrich you out of His Bounty, if He so wills: for, verily, Allah [God] is All Knowing, Wise!’ (*at-Tawba:* 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* knows that poverty would be a concern, and concerning this, the magnificence of His Speech is clearly manifested. When a person speaks, he may well forget to stress some ideas of importance, which may cause confusion, uproar, and chaos to erupt among his addressees. The True High Lord, however, says: ‘...those who ascribe partners to God are truly unclean: do not let them come near the Sacred Mosque after this year...’ (*at-Tawba:* 28). Then directly comes reassurance: ‘….And should you fear poverty, then [know that] in time Allah will enrich you out of His Bounty…’ (*at-Tawba:* 28), and indeed He did. Allah *Glorified is He*provided the people of the Sacred Mosque with produce. It was as if He were saying, ‘Do not think this provision has come on its own; rather, it is, truly, provision from Us’, a meaning which He confirms in His Words: ‘They say, ‘If we were to follow guidance with you (Prophet), we would be swept from our land.’ Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary where every kind of produce is brought, as a provision from Us? But most of them do not comprehend.’ (*al-Qasas:* 57).

No one has the choice to offer sustenance to the people of the Sacred Mosque or begrudge them of it. Rather, provision is brought to them by the Will and Bounty of Allah *Glorified is He* as a reassurance to the soul’s inclination to seek material benefit. Allah *the Exalted* gives economic security for which life necessitates. If we closely examine the verse of The Quran, we find that they are arranged in context in such a way where the idea in each verse is associated with those represented in the preceding and following verses. This perfect arrangement of the Quranic context aims at satisfying all the qualities comprising the natural human disposition so that nothing of what is revealed falls short of generating such satisfaction. Let us consider an example of this when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and they say to themselves, 'Why does not Allah chastise us for what we are saying?' Hell shall be their allotted portion: they shall [indeed] enter it – and how vile a journey's end!' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

The idolaters did not disclose what they had in mind to anyone, but they said it within themselves. However, Allah, the True God, *the Most High* and All-Knowing, reveals their secrets and also what they conceal. He is the One Who knows all the secrets of His servants and their natural dispositions He has created within them. Ponder these words of Allah *the Exalted*: 'None of you [believers] will attain berr [true piety, or Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish: Whatever you give, Allah knows about it very well.' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) This verse encourages the believers to give generously, and, for a reason, it follows another verse declaring that there is a form of spending Allah will not accept: 'Those who disbelieve and die disbelievers will not be saved even if they offer enough gold to fill the entire earth. Agonizing torment is in store for them, and there will be no one to help them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 91)

When people realize that there is a kind of charity that Allah *Glorified is He* rejects, association of ideas in the human mind would make them wonder what, then, is the charity He accepts. This has made it necessary to make the following declaration: 'None of you [believers] will attain berr [true piety or Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish….' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) Just as Allah *Glorified is He* warns against the kind of charity He rejects, He also tells us of the kind He accepts. Therefore, we see that the verse that encourages spending is in har with the one before it. 'None of you [believers] will attain berr [true piety or Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish….' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) Some may wonder why one should spend of what he prefers in order to attain *berr* (true piety/ Paradise).' As a matter of fact, the human soul is naturally inclined to greed; that is why Allah says in the Noble Quran: 'Remain, then, conscious of Allah as best you can, and listen [to Him], and pay heed. And spend in charity for the good of your own selves: for such as from their own covetousness are saved – it is they that shall attain to a happy state!' *(at-Taghabun:* 16)

Human greed stems from insecurity; man fears strength would turn into weakness, so he craves material possessions to secure himself against such a perceived weakness, which makes him reluctant to give. From this, the notions of possession and property arose, for they did not exist at the dawn of mankind creation; instead they started when resources became scarcer than needs. If resources accommodate needs, there will be no reason to worry about possible weakness, inability, or destitution.

Suppose a man bought a large box of oranges and took it home. His children would be allowed to indulge themselves. However, if there were not that many oranges, his wife would make sure to divide them between the children. She would not let every child get what satisfies his desire at the expense of the others.

When man was first brought on earth, land and fruits were right at man's disposal to have of them as much as he liked. When opportunities grew gradually fewer in the face of needs, due to the scarcity of resources, there emerged a desire for appropriation and possession. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to an important point: If you look at spending in its true light, you will find that you are only a worker for Allah and one for whom He guides to do good deeds so as to set things aright. The meaning of 'worker' is that you work in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He* using what He has endowed you with: a mind to plan with, strength to employ with diligence and materials to use. So what do you actually possess?

The dominion is only Allah's; everything is His, and you are only a worker who possesses nothing. Since this is the case, O servant of Allah, do your duty to Him as you should. Allah is in no need for whatever you give, for He is the Richest of the rich. Instead, fulfill your duty to Him by helping your weaker brothers who are unable to produce what they need. Do not think Allah *Glorified is He* wants you to spend out of what you cherish because He wants to begrudge you by asking you to give charity. Rather, when He asks you to help your poorer brother, while you are capable of it, He is only reassuring you that, if you were to become weak or poor yourself, He takes out of the possessions of the able to satisfy your need. This is reassurance from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to motivate us to spend generously and lovingly on others, but perhaps one may feel inclined to spend out of what he does not cherish, so he would give worn-out clothes or shoes that are no longer fit to use to a poorer person. However, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to spend out of what we cherish. See how the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reacted when they heard this verse: 'None of you [believers] will attain berr [true piety or Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish...' (*Al-'Imran:* 92). When Abu Talha *Allah be pleased with him* heard this, he said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, the most beloved of my possessions to me is *Bayruha*' (a tract of land with plantation, and I am giving it to Allah's cause.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Then divide it among your relatives.' So, he did. Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* heard this noble verse, and he had a horse named 'Sabal' that he loved. So he said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, you know how I love my horse, so I am giving it to Allah's cause.' Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* took it from him and brought Usama ibn Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* to mount it. So, Zayd said, 'I felt something in my soul.' When he said this, he meant that he felt sadness. Then, he said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, I had meant to give this horse to Allah's cause, and you give it to my son to ride!' Hence, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told Zayd, 'Indeed, Allah has accepted it from you!'

The Companion Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* gave a no less admirable reaction to the aforementioned verse. He had some she-camels and a stud that helped them to produce offspring. That stud was the dearest to him among his possessions. A guest came to Abu Dharr, and the latter said to him, 'I am busy, so go to my camels, and choose the finest one to slaughter for your reception.' The guest went out and returned with an emaciated she-camel. When Abu Dharr saw it, he said, 'Brother, I told you to bring the finest camel!' The guest said, 'O Abu Dharr, I saw that the finest was a stud, and I thought of the day when you would need it.' Abu Dharr replied, 'The day when I need it is the day when I am placed in my grave!'

The great Companion, Abu Dharr, realized that the day a person is put in his grave is the most important day worthy of preparing for.

The Companion 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* had a beautiful slave-girl from Persia, whom he loved. When he heard the aforementioned verse, he said, ‘Nothing in my possession is more beloved to me than this slave-girl.’ So, he freed her. He could have married her afterward, but he said, ‘If I did not fear it would diminish my reward [from Allah] for freeing her, I would marry her.’ The Companion Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* has taught us an invaluable lesson concerning the issue of spending, a lesson that shows his understanding of human psychology. He said, ‘Wealth belongs to three partners: fate, which does not ask your permission before afflicting you with destruction and death.’ When Allah *Glorified is He* sends His Decree, He asks no one’s permission before doing as He wills with his wealth, so riches may be destroyed or dear ones may pass away, and one would not be able to stop it. So the first partner that shares one’s wealth is fate.

As for the second partner, Abu Dharr said, ‘It is your inheritor who awaits the day when you lay down your head (die) then takes control of your wealth.’ By death, one is deprived of everything he had possessed in this world as he stops being an inhabitant of it. It is as if an inheritor said to himself, ‘Let me enjoy what is left for me!’ This is the second partner in one’s wealth.

Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* then clarified the third partner to which wealth belongs: ‘The third partner is you; so if you can avoid being the weakest of the three, then do so.’ Do not let fate or inheritors defeat you in regards to your wealth. Unless you spend out of your wealth generously for Allah’s cause, the other partners will outdo you!

So did the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* react to the verse when it was revealed. They competed in giving their most beloved possessions to others, and the reward of their doing was Paradise. They grasped well the meaning of the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘None of you [believers] will attain berr unless you give out of what you cherish...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 92). ‘*Berr*’ can mean paradise, as a result of one's obedience to Allah, piety, expansive blessing or an increase of strength, which are all interrelated meanings denoting ‘ampleness’. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Divine Hadith: ‘People requited doers of good deeds in worldly life with goodness, and today I requite them with Paradise.’

The True Lord *Glorified is He* grants *berr* [piety/paradise] as a reward for giving charity, and He knows whether you have spent out of what you truly cherish or have chosen to give away something inferior you no longer value. Beware, O, believer, of cheating yourself in this matter, for He Who promises piety and paradise as a reward for spending out of what you cherish knows fully well the secrets of the soul and what you conceal. Thus, He *Glorified is He* says: '…Whatever you give, Allah knows about it very well.' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) Allah has All-Encompassing Knowledge; He knows your real intentions and in what manner you have given charity.

Allah *the Exalted* has thus clarified the kind of spending He rejects, even if it were an earth-full of gold and the kind He accepts and grants paradise as a reward for. This helps us to clearly see the meaning of both through contrast. What is the need for this clarification? Some of the people of the Book denied the Message revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the onset of his call. They denied the glad tidings that foretold his prophethood eventhough such glad tidings and the attributes of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* are stated in the Books sent down to them: the Torah and the Gospel. They rejected and denied his Message eventhough they had previously believed and hoped in this good news that the disbelievers might embrace faith: '... they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it...' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen to disclose their ill will and what they had done to the Torah though they believed it to be their scripture. They had distorted some of the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* in the Torah, imagining that such distortion would remain secret from the rest of the world. Allah *Glorified is He* disclosed their falsehood through events that were beyond their expectations in order that it would clearly understand that they had corrupted the Torah. We have mentioned before the woman from Khaybar who committed fornication and whom the leaders of the Jews wished to lessen her punishment, for the punishment prescribed for fornication in the Torah is stoning. Those leaders said, 'Let us go to Muhammad, for perhaps he has some lighter punishment.' When they went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he told them stoning was the prescribed punishment. They said, 'No, you are not just in your judgment.' Hence, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him* told them to seek judgment from the Torah that they held to be their book. The Torah was brought forth, and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them to start reciting. When they reached the verse of stoning, they wanted to skip it, so Ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, they have skipped the verse where stoning is mentioned!'

This made everyone realise that the leaders of the Jews wanted to disregard and deny one of rulings Allah has prescribed in their book, just as they erased the description of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described in it by leaving no trace of it. Allah *Glorified is He* however, made them forget to erase other parts of the Truth so that they would serve as a proof of the truthfulness of the Message revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* On another occasion, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declared that the consumption of the milk and meat of camels is permissible, they said those two have been forbidden since the days of Ibrahim (Abraham) and even before him, during the days of Nuh (Noah). Therefore, they could not accept their lawfulness eventhough Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained to them that Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed their consumption.

They should have understood that even if the consumption of the milk and meat of camels had been forbidden before, a Messenger was then sent by Allah *Glorified is He* with a legislation that abrogated what came before it. However, camel meat and milk had not actually been forbidden, and for this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered that the Torah should be consulted. This event is, in and of itself, magnificent evidence that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* received revelations from Allah *Glorified is He* for he would not have ordered that the Torah be consulted unless he was confident that it would bring forth a ruling that would support what he was saying. This was despite the fact that he could neither read nor write! The Torah was brought forth, and a statement was found in it that confirmed what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said. Allah reveals this fact in The Quran, saying:

كُلُّ ٱلطَّعَامِ كَانَ حِلًّا لِّبَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ إِلَّا مَا حَرَّمَ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِۦ مِن
قَبْلِ أَن تُنَزَّلَ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةُ ۗ قُلْ فَأْتُوا۟ بِٱلتَّوْرَىٰةِ فَٱتْلُوهَآ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

Except for what Israel made unlawful for himself, all
food was lawful to the Children of Israel before the
Torah was revealed. Say, ‘Bring the Torah and read out
[the relevant passage] if you are telling the truth [93]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 93)

When Allah’s Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob/Israel) *peace be upon him* forbade consuming certain foods for himself eventhough he was free to do so. Perhaps he did that so as to fulfill a religious oath, or as a form of medical treatment or as a way of practising asceticism, but Allah *Glorified is He* did not forbid him from such a thing. The pretext the Jews sought, as a proof of their claim, was concerning only Prophet Ya’qub's case which he applied only to himself. Allah says: ‘All food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Israel made unlawful for himself…’ So why do you claim that the milk and meat of camels were forbidden?

They shamefully plotted this falsehood to conceal their wrongdoing and spare themselves disgrace. Nevertheless, Allah discloses their disgrace in the Noble Quran: ‘And unto those who are Jews, We forbade every (animal) with undivided hoof, and We forbade them the fat of the ox and the sheep except what adheres to their backs or their entrails, or is mixed up with a bone. Thus, We recompensed them for their rebellion [committing crimes like murdering the Prophets and eating of Riba (usury)]. And verily, We are Truthful.’ (*al-An‘am:* 146)

So some things, like the foods listed in the aforementioned verse, were made unlawful for the Jews because of their wrongdoing, thus, they were being punished for their sins as the noble verse points out. The verse clearly says all animals with feet that included undivided hooves (like camels, ostriches, geese and ducks), except for the fats on their backs, the fats contained in their entrails and the fats that mix with their bones. That prohibition was not made to protect the prohibited animals from harm; rather, it was their punishment for wronging themselves and transgressing against others.

I say this so there would be no chance for whoever desires to trespass the laws set by Allah *Glorified is He* to say this: 'What is the harm that requires such-and such to be forbidden?!' Posing such a question reflects a desire to trespass the limits set by Allah *Glorified is He*. Prohibition might be legislated for the purpose of discipline or chastisement. On our human level [and, undoubtedly, Allah's is the Highest Description; nothing is comparable to Him], one may forbid his child from pocket money or candy to punish him for disobeying his mother. Likewise, the aforementioned prohibition was recompense for the Jews due to their evildoing, as Almighty Allah says in the Quran: 'For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before: for having frequently debarred others from Allah's path; for taking usury when they had been forbidden to do so; and for wrongfully devouring other people's property. For those of them that reject the truth, we have prepared an agonizing torment.' (*an-Nisa':* 160-161).

This is the recompense that Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed for them.

It is as if divine legislation is laid down as a warning to wrongdoers who deviate from the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* to think twice about the reason for which they commit the transgression.

Why do they commit injustice? Why do they eat riba (usury)? Why do they hinder people from the way to Allah *Glorified is He*? Why do they usurp the wealth of others? Wrongdoers commit the likes of these in order to gain enjoyments of which they have no right to. Hence, the divine legislation forbids them from lawful enjoyments to chastise them for craving unlawful ones.

For example, it is prescribed that a murderer is denied inheritance of the one he has murdered since he has murdered him to hasten a privilege Allah *Glorified is He* has delayed for him, namely, receipt of his inheritance, which is why he committed murder. Thus, the divine law withholds from him inheritance, the very privilege he sought to hasten by sinning.

It is as though the Legislator said to him: 'Since you harboured evil intention, you are deprived from inheritance.' This ruling guarantees protection of anyone who possesses wealth, or else they would face the threat of their inheritors' attempts to murder them so that their wealth would be transferred to them. The Legislator addresses them by saying, ‘No! There will be no inheritance for them. They have committed various forms of transgression: denying the Truth, blocking off people's way to Allah *Glorified is He* accepting riba (usury) and wrongfully consuming the property of others. The more they craved gains that were not their right, the more Allah forbade them from things that were previously lawful for them.

The Jews at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* absolutely did not want such things to be known about them, so they said, ‘This food was prohibited for the children of Israel.’ However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then found out that these foods were permitted in the Torah, and thus he exposed what they tried to conceal not causing them to be disgraced eventhough they were trying to avoid that.

Why does this verse follow these words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘None of you [believers] will attain *berr* [true piety/ Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish...’? (*Al-‘Imran:* 92). We know that this verse follows the one that describes the kind of spending Allah *Glorified is He* does not accept. Let us review what we mentioned earlier about the association of meanings in the human mind. Within the human disposition, when one quality is stimulated, it influences other qualities. When the True Lord says: ‘All food was lawful to the Children of Israel...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 93), those who hear this will react in different ways. A satiated person may not pay full attention to this point; a person who has little to satisfy his hunger may be provoked to wish for other kinds of food, and he who barely has any food will long to know what food is permissible and what is not.

Therefore, before stating the rulings of what is permissible and forbidden, the ruling would stimulate a hungry person’s desire for food and cause sadness over its scarcity; Allah *Glorified is He* first encourages the able to give out of what they have. For this reason, before Allah *the Exalted and Almighty,* mentions food so as not to trigger the poor's desire for it, He revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the followng: ‘None of you [believers] will attain berr [true piety/Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 92). Thus, Allah *Exalted is He* first encourages the wealthy to give generously before revealing the ruling that would incite sorrows of the destitute. This way, the balance, on which basis Allah *Glorified is He* has created the universe, can be struck.

He is the Lord Who manages the affairs of His universe, and never does He forget anything. '...My Lord does not stray, nor does He forget.' (*Ta Ha:* 52) His Omnipotent Knowledge encompasses all things, and He is the All-Knowing, Almighty Creator. He does not remember some of His creation and forget some; rather, He makes some poor and some rich for a reason.

Allah has made some people poor to be a reminder and a lesson to the rich, but He has not abandoned them. Poverty reminds every person that the ability to accumulate wealth is nothing but temporary. A person who is now able to earn may become incapable of it at any given time, and the strong may turn weak. When the strong and the able learn this lesson, they will be encouraged to give generously to others; and, in turn, Allah *Glorified is He* will be there for them if they become weak and will send them help through the strong. Therefore, it is for the good of the able to help the needy as Allah *Glorified is He* commands them, for if they become the needy party, those who are able will help them and relieve their distress.

As we have learnt, this verse of the Quran: 'None of you [believers] will attain berr [true piety/Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish...' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) serves the purpose of its preceding verse which tells that Allah *Glorified is He* will not accept charity given by any disbeliever even if it amounts to an earth-full of gold. Since they disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He,* their deed will be rendered futile, and they will reap no fruit from it.

After elucidating this point, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the kind of spending that will not be in vain. Then, He discloses the falsehood of the Jews by unveiling a ruling stated in the Torah, which they had lied about. Since that ruling is also related to food, Allah *Glorified is He* knew it would rouse the natural desire for this worldly pleasure in the souls of the poor. Reactions of the rich and poor to such an issue will not be the same. To prevent poverty from kindling the longing of the poor for what they miss and afflicting them with distress, Allah *Glorified is He* first softens the heart of the rich by encouraging them to give generously to the poor and prevent their feelings of distress: 'None of you [believers] will attain berr [true piety/ Paradise] unless you give out of what you cherish. Whatever you give, Allah knows about it very well.' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except what Israel made unlawful for himself before the Taurat (Torah) was revealed. Say (O Muhammad...): "Bring here the Taurat (Torah) and recite it, if you are truthful."' (*Al-'Imran:* 93)

The Arabic word for 'lawful' used in the aforementioned verse is '*hel'* which is a noun stem that has no plural in the Arabic language; so it does not take the plural form even if it functions as a modifier of a plural noun, as in this verse of the Noble Quran: 'O, you who have attained to faith! Whenever believing women come unto you, forsaking the domain of evil, examine them, [although only] Allah is fully aware of their faith; and if you have thus ascertained that they are believers, do not send them back to the deniers of the truth, [since] they are not [any longer] hel (lawful) to their disbelieving husbands, and they are not [any longer] hel (lawful) for them...' (*al-Mumtahana:* 10).

In this verse, the singular word 'hel' is used as a modifier for 'they', the plural pronoun referring to a group of women. In reference to the main verse, the True Lord says: 'All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except what Israel made unlawful for himself...' (*Al-'Imran:* 93), which means Prophet Ya'qub (Israel) forbade certain foods for himself, while he was free to eat them.Perhaps, he forbade these foods for himself, and Allah sanctioned that, due to the fact that when a person vows something that Allah *Glorified is He* has not enjoined on him, he has thus made himself bound before Allah to fulfill that vow.

The time when Prophet Ya'qub (Israel/ Jacob) forbade these certain foods for himself was '…before the *Taurat* (Torah) was revealed…' (*Al-'Imran:* 93). This proves that this prohibition was not from Allah *Glorified is He*. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* commands His Noble Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to address the children of Israel: '…Say (O Muhammad...): "Bring here the *Taurat* (Torah) and recite it, if you are truthful."' (*Al-'Imran:* 93) Their falsehood was exposed, and they knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that the text would confirm his veracity was in the Torah. Therefore, the Jews did not bring forth the Torah; they knew it contained a clear, indisputable text confirming what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said. Since they did not bring forth the Torah to resolve the argument, this was clear evidence of their untruthfulness. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

فَمَنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

Those who persist in making up lies and
attributing them to God after this are the
wrongdoers [94] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 94)

This statement contains a clear warning that no one should make up anything about Allah *Glorified is He* that He did not reveal to any of His Messengers or in any of His Books. Whoever invents lies about Allah does not wrong anyone but himself. Allah then says:

قُلْ صَدَقَ ٱللَّهُ ۗ فَٱتَّبِعُوا۟ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾

[Prophet], say, 'God speaks the truth, so follow
Abraham's religion: he had true faith and he was
never an idolater' [95] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 95)

Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: '(Prophet), say, "Allah speaks the truth, so follow Ibrahim's (Abraham's) religion: he had true faith..."' (*Al-'Imran:* 95).

We know that the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) is that which first gave the name of 'Muslim' (one who surrenders to Allah) to all those who believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah's command for us to follow the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) elucidates that the essence of faith is one with all the messages of Allah; all the Messengers and Prophets call for one faith. The word 'follow' means that there is a leader and a follower. The word 'religion' encompasses all beliefs and general legislations just as 'law' encompasses rulings and 'creed' includes beliefs.

We have said before that the word '*hanif*' means he who walks in a straight line and, likewise, follows a straight, upright way. We call our religion, Islam, 'the tolerant *hanifiyya* (true religion)'. What most would be surprised to know is that the root word '*hanaf*' means 'clubfoot' which is a kind of deformity, or deviation. How, then, is it plausible to say that the True Religion, guiding to the Straight Path of Allah, is '*hanif*'?

We have said before that Allah sent each of his Messengers at a time when corruption was prevalent. In a world rife with corruption, the one who deviates from it is the one who is guided to the straight path, so 'hanif' means a definite deviation from corruption, and the one who does so is truly upright. '[Prophet], say, "Allah speaks the truth, so follow Ibrahim's (Abraham's) religion: he had true faith and he was never an idolater."' (*Al-'Imran:* 95).

'Allah speaks the truth', of course, because 'truth' is when speech conforms to reality. When Allah, the True God, speaks and He is the eternal All Knowing, what happens? Invariably, reality must conform with what He *Glorified is He* says. It does not make sense that Allah *Glorified is He* would make a statement through a Messenger and his followers that life's reality would contradict or variate. The True Lord Who has eternal, omnipotent knowledge, sends down speech with the main purpose of calling to His guidance.

Logically, therefore, when Allah *the All-Mighty and All Knowing* mentions an aspect of faith, He has eternally known that it would happen according to what He said even when the circumstances in which His Words were revealed did not seem to lead to immediate comprehension, or understanding. In the beginning, the believers were oppressed and subjugated, and those who had no ties to clans that could protect them had to emigrate from Mecca, or else they were tortured and oppressed. Amid such hardship which was right at the time when oppression of the believers reached its peak, Allah sent down these reassuring words to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

When the Companion 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* heard this verse, he wondered what those forces were. The reality of the situation at that time offered no clue for understanding. Later, at the Battle of Badr, the believers did meet the forces who turned their back, were defeated, and thus fled. Allah *Glorified is He* had foretold an event and guaranteed that it would take place. This is the Absolute Truthfulness. One may choose to deny what is told as truth if it is told by other than the One Who has created all things and Who possesses Absolute Knowledge of them as well. So, from where can contradiction emerge? This is the meaning referred to in the following verse: ‘Will they not, then, try to understand this Quran? Had it come from any other but Allah, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction!’ (*an-Nisa’:* 82)

The Quran is the truth told by the True Lord and One Creator of all things Who has Eternal, Omnipotent Knowledge. Surprisingly, people of the Scripture, Jews and Christians disputed over Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham): the Jews claimed he was a Jew, and Christians claimed he was a Christian. They disregarded the fact that the revelation of Judaism and Christianity was long after the time of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), so how could he have been a Jew or a Christian since these religions came after him? For this reason, Allah gave them the following reply in the Noble Quran:

‘People of the Book, why do you argue about Ibrahim (Abraham) when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 65) Then, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the religion of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him:* ‘Ibrahim (Abraham) was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God, never an idolater.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 67).

How could they allege that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was a Jew or Christian? Only someone who is utterly bereft of insight would make such an allegation. The words of Allah *Glorified is He* in the aforesmentioned verse, brings forth a clear statement that is the undeniable truth: Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), as the verse says, was ‘never an idolater’. Are the people of the Scripture idolaters? Yes. When they claim that ‘Uzayr (Ezra) and ‘Isa (Jesus) were the sons of Allah; such a claim is a form of associating other divinities with Allah. The Arabs, who were idolators too, likewise claimed that they were followers of the religion of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham); they brought forth the following pretext for their false claim in the fact that the rituals of pilgrimage were first revealed to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.* To refute this allegation and clear Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) of it, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: ‘[Prophet], say, “Allah speaks the truth, so follow Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) religion: he had true faith and he was never an idolater.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 95) This indicates that the religion of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) conforms to the religion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him* and Islam is essentially the same religion as the religion of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* called for. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِى بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩٦﴾

The first House [of worship] to be established for people
was the one at Bakkah (Mecca). It is a blessed place; a source
of guidance for all people [96] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 96)

We have previously discussed the process of the association of meanings through which Almighty Allah satisfies every quality in the human disposition. Before the aforementioned verse, which discusses construction of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, Allah addresses the truth about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him:* '[Prophet], say, "Allah speaks the truth, so follow Ibrahim's (Abraham's) religion: he had true faith and he was never an idolater."' (*Al-'Imran:* 95)

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was the first of the Prophets to have a connection with the Sacred Mosque of Mecca. He raised the foundations of the Sacred Mosque after it was buried by the Great Flood that took place at the time of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him.* When the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his message is mentioned *peace be upon him* the greatest event in his history comes to mind which is the construction of the Sacred Mosque of Mecca. Furthermore, when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the debate between the Muslims (led by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and guided by the Quran) and the people of the Scripture (in whose hands were the distorted Torah and Gospel), He *the Exalted* refers us back to one thing: the religion of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) who gave all believers the name of Muslims [literally those who surrender to Allah]. Allah *Glorified is He* wants people to be guided by divine values and abide by them through their actions.If whims replace these values, the balance Allah wants to strike on earth will be shaken by contradiction, and human's actions, deviating from the divine guidance, will be squandered and fruitless.

For a person to act upon the beliefs ingrained in his heart and approved by his mind, he must possess a physical form through which puts the Laws of Allah into action. Otherwise, such laws and beliefs would remain confined to the heart and mind and would never find their way to the world by performing the mission for which mankind are created.

For this physical body to perform this mission, acts of worship have been ordained for refining and elevating it above mundanity. As we work for the prosperity of the world, we also direct our faces to the Scared House of Allah and direct our intentions to Him in all our deeds. Allah has sent His Messages to reveal to us His Laws by which He governs both the human heart and the physical form. He has enjoined on us *salat* (the Five Daily Prayers) that we observe by directing our bodies to the Sacred House of Allah as we direct our hearts to Him, feeling His Presence. Why is it necessary to engage the body with the heart in worship?

When Allah *Glorified is He* sends down His Mercy and Revelations, He wants the human body to be prepared for receiving these blessings. The Sacred House of Allah *Glorified is He* toward which every Muslim directs his face represents the unity of religion. Just as Allah has created unity in the Messages sent down to all His Messengers, He has also decreed to emphasise unity among the believers by directing them, their bodies, and their hearts to His Sacred House. Every place where Allah *Glorified is He* is worshiped, in the manner He commands, is a mosque, and Allah has made this easy for the nation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said: 'The earth has been made for me a mosque and a pure place (for worship).'

Observing acts of worship in the previous religions required a special place, but Allah *Glorified is He* has granted anabundance of His Mercy to the nation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as He has not granted to any prior nation of any other Prophet.

Sand of the earth is ritually pure. Therefore, when water is unavailable to perform ritual ablution, dry sand, which is commonly considered as unclean when accumulated on a given surface, has been made a means for attaining purity for us.

A person can perform dry ritual ablution with clean sand when water is unavailable. Allah *Glorified is He* has thus made it exceptionally easy for every person of the nation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* to get ready for standing before Him in *salat* (prayer). Every place where a Muslim worships and prostrates himself to Allah *Glorified is He* is considered a mosque.

However, there is a difference between any place where we worship Allah and a mosque. A worker may worship Allah in his factory, a student in his classroom, a farmer in his field and even a person walking on the street may observe *salat* (prayer) anywhere. However, when somewhere is dedicated to be a place of worship, it must be solely for worship, where none of life's daily activities may be pursued in it, for it is a consecrated place.

It is permissible to observe worship anywhere, but there is a difference between a place where one engages in a worldly activity, but can perform worship as well, and a place designated to be a mosque. A mosque is a place made solely for worshiping Allah *Glorified is He* so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered that nothing should be pursued in connection with our worldly lives in this consecrated place. He taught us that whoever engages in a business transaction in a mosque will not have that transaction be blessed by Allah; whoever uses a mosque to announce something he lost will not find what he is looking for, and even if he prayed, Allah will withhold from him whatever he lost.

Twenty-three hours is more than enough time to managing daily worldly affairs. Thus, it befits a believer to then devote the remaining hour observing acts of worship sincerely for Allah and leaving all the cares of this life just as he leaves his shoes at the door of the mosque. It is not showing enough respect and good etiquette with Allah *Glorified is He* for one to engage in anything other than worshiping Allah. This is especially true when he is in the place appointed solely for worship, during the times ordained to be dedicated to it.

Once you enter a mosque, you should keep yourself getting involved in any frivolous talk, along with making the intention to remain there as a form of spiritual retreat by observing worship only. When a particular place is chosen to be a mosque, what direction should worshipers face as they stand before Allah *Glorified is He*? Should everyone be left to choose his own direction? No. Unity amongst the believers manifests itself by their all directing toward one particular place: the Sacred House of Allah (in Mecca). We are given freedom to choose whatever place to use as a mosque, yet in all of them, we are commanded to direct ourselves toward the place chosen by Allah: His Sacred House.

By so doing, all the believers everywhere will be facing each other every time they stand before Allah in *salat* (prayer). It is like forming a vast circle of worshipers all over the world with all of them directed towards the Sacred House of Allah along with facing each other. Now, why must we face the *Ka'ba* each time we observe *salat* (prayer) eventhough Allah *Glorified is He* says:

'And to Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn (yourselves or your faces), there is the Face of Allah (and He is High above, over His Throne). Surely! Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knowing.'? (*al-Baqara:* 115).

The answer is that there is no contradiction; this verse supports what we are saying. Indeed to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the east and the west. At first, people recognised the east and the west, then the north and the south. In addition to these four directions, science later specified the intercardinal directions: the northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest. All these directions belong to Allah, and by directing to the *Ka'ba* from all over the world, we do actually face all of these directions from our various places, and this conforms to the aforementioned noble verse.

When a person faces the *Ka'ba*, the east might be behind him and the west in front of him. At the same time, another person might be facing the west with his face directed toward the *Ka'ba*. A third might be in a different spot of the world and also facing another cardinal point. This way, human beings from the east, west, north, south and all other directions face the *Ka'ba* throughout the day.

Thus, the words of the Almighty Allah: 'And to Allah belong the east and west...' are in harmony with the fact that the believers all over the world face all the various directions as they direct themselves towards the *Ka'ba.* No direction is preferred or more sacred than another. I do not want to further mention the belief that the *Ka'ba* is the focal point of the earth and that the earth was created from it; if an object is spherical, any point on it can be the focal point; therefore, let us not dwell on such a discussion. Is it not proof enough that it is superior since Allah has chosen it to be His Sacred House? Yes, this is more than enough. It is superior to all other places because it is the House of Allah chosen by Him *the Almight* and this suffices.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has taught us matters that the intellect cannot resolve; those that do not constitute a fundamental part of faith should not be a point of dispute or debate. It has been narrated on the authority of Companion 'Ali ibn Abu Talib *Allah be pleased with him* that a man asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this question,

‘Is this the first Sacred House of Allah?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained that before it there were other Sacred Houses of Allah, but it is the first ever set up for all of mankind. The *Ka‘ba* is, therefore, the first place of worship Allah *Glorified is He* has made for mankind, as He *the Exalted and Almighty* says: ‘The first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Bakkah (Mecca). It is a blessed place; a source of guidance for all people.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96) However, if species other than the human race have existed before, there must have been other places of worship.

No human being ever preceded Adam in existence, but other Adam preceded mankind at a distance. For this reason, existence of the Sacred House of Allah may clash with the logic of common Muslims who have only a shallow religious background. When one of them hears that discoveries have been made of fossils dating back to millions of years ago, he may wonder how that is possible when Adam did not exist millions of years ago. Let us suppose that five generations descended from Prophet Idris (Enoch), three generations from Prophet Nuh (Noah), eleven generations from Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and thirty generations from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* This means that human existence dates back to thousands of years, not millions!’

Concerning this question, we reply by asking if anyone has ever claimed that Adam was the first creature to exist on earth. Islam does not claim as such, rather, it says that Adam is the father of the human race, but it does not mean he was the first person to live on the earth. Therefore, leave scientists to say that the earth has existed for millions of years, while we reflect on the words of Allah: ‘Prophet, do you not see that God created the heavens and theearth for a purpose? He could remove all of you and replace you with a new creation if He wished to.' (*Ibrahim:* 19)

Basically, there is no need for us to conduct such an investigation, which is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'No, there were several Houses of Allah before it.' Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* clarifies that the jinn lived on earth before us: 'The jinn We created before, from the fire of scorching wind.' (*al-Hujurat:* 27)

Does Allah *Glorified is He* not say that He has willed placing humans on this earth as successors to which the angels replied: 'Prophet, when your Lord told the angels, "I am putting a successor on Earth," they said, "How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?" He said, "I know things you do not."' (*al-Baqara:* 30)

What the angels meant to allude to what other creatures who preceded human existence on earth did. So Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the *Ka'ba* was the first place of worship ever set up for mankind, and its useless and needless to ask about matters the mind cannot resolve. If Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to tell us that the *Ka'ba* was the first place of worship ever built on earth, He would say: 'The first House [of worship] to be established on Earth...' and would not specifically point out the race that House was set up for. However, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Bakkah (Mecca). It is a blessed place...' (*Al-'Imran:* 96). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified that there were other places of worship before it, but it was the first one set up for mankind. It is an answer that can well encompass and supercede all that science may claim.

Let us ponder the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'The first House of worship) to be established for people was the one at Bakkah (Mecca). It is a blessed place...' (*Al-'Imran:* 96). What is the meaning of 'first'? It means, or implies the beginning of something, but does every beginning necessarily lead to an end? No, some things have beginnings but no ends. Take numbers, as an example. Roughly, we may say numbers start from 'one', but can we specify where they end? We have perhaps imagined numbers running into decillions, yet there are other far larger numbers. In the past, people stopped at one thousand

and would describe a million as ‘one thousand thousands’. Paradise is another example of an entity that has a beginning, but no end.

So the first place of worship set up for mankind was the *Ka‘ba*. The previously mentioned verse proves that a place of worship was indeed set up for mankind, and as long as Adam is one as well as the first of mankind, then that House was set up for him too which means it preceded his initial appearance on earth.

This leads to the conclusion that the Sacred House was built before Adam, which is true, for Adam is from mankind. Allah *Glorified is He* further elucidates this point by saying: ‘The first House [of worship] to be established for people….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96) Is Adam not one of ‘people’? Therefore, the Sacred House must have been built before him. Some people believe that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was the one who built the Sacred House in Mecca. To those who adhere to this belief, we say in reply that we should first understand The Quran, for such a statement contradicts what Allah *Glorified is He* says in it: ‘The first House [of worship] to be established for people….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96) And since many people existed before Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did they not have a place of worship to direct to in their devotion? Is this a privilege granted only to people who came after Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*?!

Allah has granted those who lived prior to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the same rights as those who came after him. A Sacred House, then, must have been made for them, as well. In the Quranic text: ‘The first House [of worship] to be established for people...’, the doer of the action of ‘establishing’ is not mentioned, and the past participle form ‘established’ implies that such doer is not one from mankind. This leads one to ask who set up the Sacred House. Were they the angels?

We may consider the possibility that the angels received a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to undertake the building thereof, but Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Sacred House: ‘... a source of guidance for *al-’alamin...*’ This Arabic word literally means ‘worlds’, which implies that the Sacred House of Allah *Glorified is He* is a source of guidance for the angels as well since they too form a ‘world’ among the creatures of Allah. It may, therefore, be suggested that Allah *Glorified is He* set up the Sacred House before the existence of the angels. Indeed, the human mind will fall short of comprehending everything in this endless universe, so let the mind rest and respect its limits by not exceeding them to realms beyond its capacity. The idea that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was the first to set up the Sacred House is indicative of misunderstanding the Quranic text that states: 'And (remember) when Ibrahim (Abraham) and (his son) Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the House (the *Ka'ba* at Mecca), (saying), "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us. Verily! You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower."' (*al-Baqara:* 127).

What does 'raising' mean? It means establishing the third dimension, which is height, as well as implying that length and width had already been specified. This is clear proof that the House already existed before Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* raised its foundations. Bearing this in mind, we reach the conclusion that just the foundations and height of the Sacred House remained to be established, but its length and width that marked the area of that sacred spot had already been there. The sacred place of worship had already existed and just needed to be marked by raising the building. This is proven by the fact that when the *Ka'ba* was destroyed, people still made pilgrimage to the place itself. When we pray in the third floor of the sacred place, we face the air above the *Ka'ba*. If we were to dig a hole in the ground a thousand metres deep to pray, we would face the roots of the *Ka'ba*, thus proving that the Sacred House encompasses the *Ka'ba* and its surrounding environment.

Accordingly, what Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did was just the construction of the building, marked by that place and not actually setting the place itself up. Let us contemplate, guided by our understanding of faith, what happened with Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.* Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* set out with his wife Hajar and her son, Ismail (Ishmael) and left them in Mecca. Hajar knew that the basic necessities of life are water, air, and food. Seeing that there was no water in that place, she asked Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* 'Do you leave us here of your own volition, or by a command from Allah?' He replied, 'By a command from Allah.' So she said, 'Then I am relieved. Allah will never abandon us.'

Her worries were cast away when she realised that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him,* left them there as an act of obedience to the command of Allah, and this is the pinnacle of faith. If a mother's faith had not been strong, would she let her husband leave her alone with her little child in such a place that had no foreseeable source of food or water? It was not in Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that she put her trust, but in the Lord of Ibrahim *Glorified is He*. It is worth mentioning that Allah *Glorified is He* quotes from Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) in the Quran as saying: 'Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord so that they may keep up the prayer. Make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce so that they may be thankful.' (*Ibrahim:* 37)

According to this verse, we realise that the time when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* left his family in that area, the Sacred House of Allah did exist. Besides, we know that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not raise the foundations of the House alone because it was his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* who helped him: 'And (remember) when Ibrahim (Abraham) and (his son) Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the House (the *Ka'ba* at Mecca), (saying), "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us. Verily! You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower."' (*al-Baqara:* 127)

Undoubtedly, Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* must have been older and grown up enough to have been able to help his father, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in raising the foundations of the Sacred House. We have learnt that when Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was a child in the very place where his father, Ibrahim, left him with his mother, the Sacred House did exist. Therefore, we arecertain that the Sacred House was there before Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.* Now, let us examine the meaning of the Arabic word 'Bakkah' which is mentioned in the noble verse: 'The first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Bakkah (Mecca). It is a blessed place...' (*Al-'Imran:* 96). The place where the Sacred House exists has names: one of which is 'Bakkah'and the other 'Mecca'. Some scholars say that the Arabic letters *mim* (m) and *ba'* (b) are related in regards to the articulation as well as the meaning of both. Regarding articulation, we would notice that a person with nasal problems would pronounce (m) like (b). The Arabic letters mim and ba' are phonetically close to each other, and the words starting with them are sometimes correlated in meaning.

Let us examine the derivation of 'Mecca' and 'Bakkah'. The Arabic verb stem bacca means 'crowded', so we can understand the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* in this light: 'The first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Bakkah. It is a blessed place...' (*Al-'Imran:* 96). So it is the ever-crowded place to which people come from all around the world to perform the pilgrimage to the Sacred House of Allah *Glorified is He*. Due to this inevitable, undeniable crowdedness, Allah *Glorified is He* pardons men and women for mixing together, while circulating the *Ka'ba*.

Another difference may be that Bakkah is the name of the place where the *Ka'ba* lies and circumambulation takes place, whereas Mecca is the name of the whole city where the Sacred House is located. As for 'Mecca', it is derived from the verb makka which refers to the suckling of a mother's udder by a young cow or camel until it is empty. Consuming all the milk of a she-cow or she-camel until the last drop means the baby is hungry. Due to the scarcity of water resources in Mecca, people tend to consume any small amount of water they can find; hence the name is due to the resemblance and its name.

The word *mubarak* (Arabic for blessed) is derived from the root (b-r-k) that denotes 'durability'. So does it mean absolute durability or growing durability, which increases in the face of consumption? In daily life, we say money is 'blessed' when it seems never to decrease by spending, so it is like a durable source that continues to give and does not run out. Likewise, the word *birka* (the Arabic for pool) is derived from the same root; no matter how much we take of its water, it is ever abundant.

We say *tabaraka* Allah, which means that Allah *Glorified is He* has always existed, with no beginning and no end; He is the Self-Sufficient, the One God, Who has no partners, Who does not have a need for anything or anyone and Who never changes and is above experiencing any decrease *Glorified is He*. Thus, we see that the concept of 'durability' is intrinsic to the meaning of the name of the Sacred House of Allah. The Sacred House is ever blessed. How? The reward for goodness performed there is multiplied. Could blessedness come in any better form? It is a place where all sorts of provisions are ever abundant and never cut off. In the past, a pilgrim would travel with all his needs, even his burial shroud, a needle and thread, salt, etc. Now, pilgrims to the Sacred House of Allah find all they need there. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the sacred, blessed House as being: '... a source of guidance for all people.' (*Al-'Imran:* 96). What is guidance? We have defined it previously as the direction that leads to a goal. Whoever visits the Sacred Mosque returns from it purified from his sins as pure as the day he was born. *Hajj* (Islamic pilgrimage) has, therefore, made him closer to Paradise. It is by making Pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque that one finds the path to paradise. That is what makes it 'a source of guidance'. When Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* speaks about the Sacred Mosque of Mecca, He specifically mentions the Station of Ibrahim (Abraham) *Glorified is He* eventhough there are many other signs worthy of mentioning: Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فِيهِ ءَايَٰتُۢ بَيِّنَٰتٞ مَّقَامُ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَۖ وَمَن دَخَلَهُۥ كَانَ ءَامِنٗاۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ حِجُّ ٱلۡبَيۡتِ
مَنِ ٱسۡتَطَاعَ إِلَيۡهِ سَبِيلٗاۚ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

There are clear signs in it; it is the place where Abraham stood to pray; whoever enters it is safe. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to God by people who are able to undertake it. Those who reject this [should know that] God has no need of anyone [97] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 97)

For those whose minds cannot comprehend the thought that Allah *Glorified is He* has softened the boulder for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* we say that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* made a plan, due to fearing that his feet would slip as he stood on the boulder to build the Sacred House. Therefore, he carved a place in the boulder the size of his feet so that they would be firm as he carried and raised the stones. These are clear signs. Let us look more deeply into the story. Allah *Glorified is He* aided Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* because he had decided to raise the foundations for the House higher than the level his hands could reach. So Allah *Glorified is He* helped him to do this. We know that there are two kinds of guidance: the guidance of direction and the guidance of assistance:

'Allah [God] has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path and given them their righteousness...' (*Muhammad:* 17).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'There are clear signs in it; it is the place where Abraham stood to pray; whoever enters it is safe...' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). Signs, in this verse, mean amazing matters that cannot be denied or overlooked. Entering the Sacred House produces a feeling of security and inner peace. It is a feeling commonly associated with the place where the Sacred House is built eventhough it has witnessed feuds, blood and war among the tribes that once lived there. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* explains the condition that bloodshed must be prevented: '... whoever enters it is safe....' Why is this? It is the House of Allah *Glorified is He* and it does not befit its sacredness that anyone should be punished or oppressed in it, even if he has committed a crime for which Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed a punishment. A statement of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* illustrates this point further when he said, 'If I find the killer of Al-Khattab (his father) there, I would not stand up against him.'

However, this is not meant to be a way of escaping justice, for a criminal must be closely guarded until he leaves the Sacred House. This safety only pertains to his worldly life. As for his safety on the Day of Resurrection, this is a different issue. This is a high status Allah *Glorified is He* bestows on whom ever He wills, out of His Grace. The clear, indisputable signs in the Sacred House are witnessed by everyone who visits it. May Allah *Glorified is He* answer the hopes and intentions of everyone who desires to visit or revisit His Sacred House. As you face one side of the *Ka'ba*, another person is perhaps facing an opposite side of it; thus, the sacred building is surrounded by worshipers from all directions. When we are at the Sacred House, we direct our faces to the building that we know which makes up a part of the Ka'bah because we can plainly see it. We know this building, along with Hatim, the semicircular wall around the Stone of Ismail (Ishmael), form the entire construction of the *Ka'ba*. At one time, insufficient funds caused the construction of the building not to be completed, and the wall was made to demarcate the location of the *Ka'ba*. As such, it remained like this. When a person is far from the *Ka'ba*, it is sufficient that he faces its direction.

For this reason, we find that the rows around the *Ka'ba* are circular during *salat* (prayer) since those who pray inside the Mosque can see it. As for those who pray farther away from it, they can face its direction even if the length of a row runs a thousand metres long. That makes the rows of the worshippers, while praying always straight when praying outside the Scared Mosque; this is due to the fact that they all face one direction, whereas inside, rows are circular since all are directing their faces towards the *Ka'ba*, where the longest dimension of it is twelve and a quarter metres. Among the one of the more amazing signs seen round the *Ka'ba* is how people struggle to kiss the Black Stone which is just a stone that belongs to the species of inanimate objects, the lowest species after mankind, animals, and plants.

We see people, and masters of the universe submit to the command of Allah *Glorified is He* Who would not completely accept their ritual unless they kiss that Stone or greet it. It is incredible how Allah *Glorified is He* thus makes the highest species among His creatures show such respect to an object belonging to the lowest species. People crowd around the Black Stone, and those who do not manage to kiss it feel that they have missed out on something tremendous, a wonderful manifestation of how people submit to the ordinance of their Lord and Creator. Even human arrogance is humbled when one fulfills a command from Allah to kiss or greet a stone, even when a simple greeting suffices. Therefore, one strives to kiss it to perfect his observance of the religious ritual. Although merely a stone, an inanimate object of the lowest species, it is so lovingly shown reverence solely due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has ennobled it. It is a command intended to let man transcend his ego, and no one should interpret it to be any form of stone-worship or idolatry, whereas there is another stone that Allah *Glorified is He* commands performers of hajj (Islamic Pilgrimage)at which to throw pebbles.

So it could not be stone-worship. That would be out of the question, for we find that one stone is made sacred, whereas another is pelted with pebbles. We find one stone venerated and sought to be kissed, while another is despised and cursed. This is only to show submission to the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*. When He commands us to honor a stone and pelt another with pebbles, a believer does so only in obedience to Allah Who commands us to do as such. The nature of the stones themselves is completely irrelevant. Some of those inclined to think the worst of everything claim that Islam has preserved a form of idolatry.

For those who think that, I pose a question: Why do you mention veneration of the Black Stone and deliberately disregard the pelting with pebbles of the three stones representing Satan?! A believer observing *hajj* (Islamic Pilgrimage) venerates one stone and despises three others only because Allah *Glorified is He* commands him to do so. That is the significance of the ritual since it is not the stone itself that is meant to be worshipped. Allah *Glorified is He* has elevated us above the baseness of idolatry which is the sheerest form of disbelief. He has commanded us to kiss the Black Stone, so when we do, it solely out of respect for His commandment. This is the peak of trust and glorification of the Lord Who has given this command. Both are stones, yet the veneration shown to one represented the height of polytheism, while that shown to the other is the height of belief in the One Allah. Are these not clear signs?

Is the Well of Zamzam that is located near the *Ka'ba* a clear sign as well? It is the miracle that commemorates the struggle of Hajar who kept running between the mountains of Safa and Marwah, desperately seeking water for her infant son, Ismail (Ishmael), whom she left beside the *Ka'ba*. In her quest for water, Hajar ran seven times back and forth between Safa and Marwah hoping to see a bird or a person who could lead her to a source of water so as to quench the thirst of her infant son. Had she found water between Safa and Marwah when she began running, would she have confirmed what she said to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he left her in that place: 'Allah will never abandon us'? Rather, Allah let her exert herself first in order to teach her and everyone that one must exhaust all possible means, for success comes from Allah Who grants when He sees His servant truly striving. Water did not emerge where she ran, instead it appeared under the feet of Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him.* This proves her statement, 'Allah will never abandon us.' Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* let Hajar run seven rounds, and a woman of her age, in all likelihood, could not manage to do more than that. This is a lesson meant to teach us that one must exhaust all possible means, while his heart depend only on the One Who controls those means: Allah *Glorified is He*. Such is the criteria that should govern human behavior and struggle in this life. When we see the Well of Zamzam where Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* moved his little feet, this is a clear sign that delivers a message since it happened around him instead of between Safa and Marwah where Hajar struggled. The message taught is that we should exert our best effort, while directing our hopes and trust only to the One Who manages all affairs.

This teaches a believer that true faith truly means reliance on Allah *Glorified is He*. However, it does not mean that one should do nothing and just wait for the sky to rain good luck. Rather, it is working hard, while trusting that success comes from Allah *Glorified is He* only. To do nothing and expect that Allah will do everything for you, claiming that this is trust in Him, is but idleness. I say to such a person that if your belief is true, why do you stretch out your hand to attain food and eat with such an appetite? Why not wait for food to jump into your mouth? Do you not trust Allah?! Such is a true quality of the indolent; they would exhaust every possible means to satisfy their desires, yet when it comes to work, they sit back, claiming that is what it means to rely on Allah *Glorified is He*. The lesson we learn from Hajar, from the effort she made and from the gushing forth of water is that we should exhaust the means Allah has given us when we have an end to seek.

In the Sacred Mosque, one is so preoccupied thinking about his relationship with Allah to think of those around him, even the absolute dearest to him. Once one looks at the *Ka'ba*, the world and its cares flee from the mind. When the rituals are finished, one's mind becomes preoccupied once again with his work, family, money, etc. If one's attachment to the Sacred House remained so strong all the time, this blessed place would constantly be too overcrowded to give peace or calmness to anyone. Allah *the Exalted* says about the Sacred House: '…whoever enters it is safe…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). Here, we must understand the difference between a sentence meant to describe reality and that meant as a command eventhough it comes in the form of a statement.

The Arabic sentence rendered as '…whoever enters it is safe…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) is not meant as a description of reality, otherwise, many things would contradict it since the security of worshipers at the Sacred Mosque was threatened at times.

We know the story of the attack attempted by Juhayman some decades ago. When Juhayman attacked pilgrims at the Sacred House of Allah, they were stripped of the feeling of security, and some of them may have wondered how that could happen since it contradicts what Allah says: '...whoever enters it is safe...'! Some maliciously alleged that the assault Juhayman launched against worshipers at the Sacred Mosque proves the verse '... whoever enters it is safe...' is an untrue statement. This allegation is overwhelmingly refuted when we know that statements in Arabic language can be either informative or imperative.

Were the aforementioned sentence meant as a statement, it would mean that no one may ever be attacked or frightened so long as he is in the Sacred Mosque. However, that sentence is meant as a command and cannot be judged as true or false. Rather, a command can be obeyed or disobeyed. When Almighty Allah says: '... whoever enters it is safe', it is as if He means, "O, believers, whoever enters the Sacred Mosque should be kept safe."

Let me give an example [and Allah *Glorified is He* is above all comparison]. If you tell your son, 'O son, know that ours is a house of hospitality', would you mean to state an essential fact that no guest has ever been or may ever be treated in your house other than hospitably? Or would it rather be meant as a command to your son?

It is in the form of a statement, yet it implies a command to your son that he should be generous and kind to any guest who visits the house. Such a command is likely to be obeyed or contravened, based on how docile the son is. Likewise, we understand from the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '... whoever enters it is safe...' that the sentence is meant as an imperative one that will likely be obeyed or disobeyed. Another example of this is the noble verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men are for corrupt women; good women are for good men and good men are for good women. The good are innocent of what has been said against them; they will have forgiveness and a generous provision.' (*an-Nur:* 26).

Some people say that we find reality to be in conflict to this; a good woman would be doomed to marry a bad man, or a good man would be afflicted with a bad wife; so how is it plausible that Allah says so? The answer to this is that Allah *Glorified is He* in the aforementioned verse does not mean to state an actual fact of life, but He is giving a command that should be obeyed. In accordance to that verse, Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins on the believers that a good man should be married to a good woman, and so should the corrupt be married to each other. If people obey the commandments of Allah, reality will synchronise with the outcome expressed in the noble verse. Otherwise, good men will be married to bad women, and vice versa.

Thus, the Words of Almighty Allah: '...whoever enters it is safe...', though apparently a statement, is meant as an imperative sentence. So whoever wishes to be faithful to what Allah *Glorified is He* commands should provide security to whoever enters the Sacred Mosque. After giving that command, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse: '... Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by people who are able to undertake it. Those who reject this (should know that) Allah has no need of anyone.' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

When one hears the phrase 'owed to', it is understood that the benefit goes to the object of the prepositional phrase and the obligation is on the subject of the verb 'owe'. If we say: 'so-and-so owes something to so-and-so', it means the benefit is for the object of the preposition and the obligation is on the subject. Based on the same rationale, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by people...' (*Al-'Imran:* 97), the benefit thus goes to Allah *Glorified is He* and the obligation is on people. However, if we grasp the meaning of the sentence, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* does not benefit from anything that He commands us to do; *hajj* (Islamic pilgrimage) is observed for the sake of Allah, but the benefit goes to the one who observes it. Whatever you do for Allah, he returns it to you; so it is an obligation on you and a benefit for you at the same time.

The fruit of every command of Allah that you obey actually returns to you; so it does not befit Him, which is how we understand the noble verse: '...Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by people...' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) that 'owed to' implies that Allah benefits from your obedience of this obligation. You perform *hajj* (pilgrimage) for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* but the benefit goes to you and is meant for you only. Allah *Glorified is He* is far exalted above deriving benefit from any of the rulings He enjoins upon us. When He *the Exalted* ordains something, a believer must know that the benefit of submission is meant for him only. Worship must be devoted to Allah *Glorified is He* and the intention behind it directed to Him and none but Him; yet the fruit of devotion goes to the servant of Allah for his obedience.

Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* orders the believers to make *hajj* (pilgrimage) to the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, and He is the Creator and knows that obligations are always heavy to the soul. Still, for a believer to undertake a difficult responsibility, he must reflect on the benefit that comes from compliance. That makes it easier for him to bear the difficulty. When one does not consider the reward he would be granted for devotion, he finds obedience tiresome and feels reluctant to observe acts of worship. Likewise, when one thinks only of the pleasure derived from a sin and ignores the punishment, it is easy for him to commit that sin without any remorse. Consider the purpose of obedience, and you will realise that its fruit goes to you only. You will understand that it is for you, not against you.

If a sinner thinks of the punishment for disobedience, he will realise that it is against him, not for him, and the pleasure derived from it is only transient. Heedfulness of punishment would prevent him from ever approaching a given sin. However, when one commits a sin, he thinks only of the instant ecstasy he feels and never thinks of the requital. Were one honest with himself, he would let reminder of punishment at the moment of desire reason away and desist the lure of sinning. Remembering punishment extinguishes the desire to sin. I always find that the best example to give here is the fiercest of human instincts: sexual desire.

Suppose that a man saw a beautiful girl and wanted to win her affections. I advise him then to think of the punishment prepared for him. Imagine yourself before a blazing fire and just about to be thrown into it. This is what you should expect if you were to enjoy that girl outside the lawful boundaries of marriage. Would he then insist on winning the affections of the girl or even think of his desire, seeing that such severe torment awaits him? Will this sexually deviant approach such a sin? No, for the desire to sin disappears upon recalling its punishment. Allah *the Most High* says: 'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all who can make their *sabeelan* (way) to it' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). In Arabic, *'sabeelan'* signifies the path leading to a goal. Such path is usually well-trodden. When a person sets off to fulfill his/her obligation of the *Hajj* (pilgrimage), s/he is a pilgrim travelling on this path. There are three points to observe regarding this:

1. a pilgrim: a person upon whom Allah ordains *Hajj* who must be legally qualified to perform the *Hajj,*
2. a well-trodden path,
3. an ultimate end: the pilgrimage to the Sacred House.

Since the pilgrim will take a road, s/he must have the ability to use this path. However, how could s/he get this ability? The ability, prior to taking it, requires the attainment of provisions and means of transport. As such, the pilgrim needs provisions and a means of transport in his/her *Hajj* journey.

Furthermore, the way to *Hajj* must be safe and free from danger. To conclude, the ability to perform *Hajj* requires three things: provisions, a means of transport and safe road. Provisions usually pertain specifically to the personl; s/he provides for him/her self only. However, if this said is supporting a family and young children,the legal ability requires that s/he must leave them sufficient provisions that would last until his return from the journey of *Hajj*. We should carefully observe that the Divine formula used in all obligations is the following: ‘O you who have believed, (such-and-such) is ordained upon you…’ Yet, in *Hajj*, Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states that *Hajj* is a Divine Obligation due to Allah upon all people, Muslims, or non-Muslims. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even invited the people of the Book who laid claim to Ibrahim (Abraham) as their prophet, to make pilgrimage to the Sacred House of Allah. However, they refused. If *Hajj* was only for Muslims who believed in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Prophet Muhammad would not have offered the Jews and Christians pilgrimage to the House of Allah so that it would be a means of gathering all of mankind in the House of Allah to worship One God, the Lord of the House, but they refused. As such, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* strongly condemned those who do not go to perform *Hajj* without having a legal excuse, such as a debilitating illness, fears from tyrant rulers, or abject poverty and penury.

Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whoever has the provisions and the means to enable him to go to Allah’s House, and he does not perform *Hajj*, then it does not matter if he dies as a Jew or a Christian. Simply, Allah *Glorified is He* says in His Book: 'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all who can make their way to it' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

It is for that reason that the obligation of the *Hajj* is directly followed by Allah's saying: 'But whoever disbelieves' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). In other words, do those who do not perform *Hajj* without a compelling, legal excuse, fall into disbelief? Concerning this, scholars have to elaborate. In response to this question, the scholars say that, indeed, they do fall into disbelief.'Why? According to scholars, there are two kinds of disbelief: first, the disbelief in Allah, and second, the disbelief in the blessings of Allah. For example, Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'And Allah presents an example of a town which enjoyed peace and security; its provision coming to it in abundance from all places, but it denied the favours of Allah. Thereupon, Allah afflicted them with hunger and fear in punishment for their evil deeds' (*an-Nahl:* 112).

It may also mean actual disbelief, as pertains to the case when a person dies as a Jew or a Christian. In this instance, we say to be careful and not to issue biased judgments that would disregard any of the given contextual evidence. This practical obligation is clearly set out by Allah *Glorified is He* in His words: 'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all who can make their way to it.' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) Do you dispute that this is obligation? Or, do you believe in it but fail to carry it out?

The obligation is 'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all who can make their way to it' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). Do you believe in it or not? 'Yes' is the normal answer of all believers. However, it differs from one believer to another. Some believers are careful to keenly perform the obligations prescribed by Allah *Glorified is He*; those are the obedient believers. Others may not show keenness to perform the obligations and thus become disobedient.

In this regard, we find that disbelief is of two kinds. Some disbelieve in the ruling of *Hajj,* that is, they deny the obligation of it as owed to Allah *Glorified is He* by the people. These are truly disbelievers. There are others who may commit the sin of denying Allah's blessings; Allah has given them the ability, i.e. provisions, a means of transport, safe passage and enough provisions for their dependents. In this case, it is obligatory upon them to perform *Hajj*. As such, a God fearing man, endowed with esoteric knowledge, once said: 'If any of them is told that he has a share of inheritance in Mecca, they will make their way thereto by all possible means.'

Therefore, Allah's *Glorified is He* saying: 'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all who can make their way to it.' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) Therefore, it is an article of faith; those who believe in it are free of disbelief, whereas those who dispute or deny it fall into disbelief. Whoever performs *Hajj* is obedient, and whoever does not, whilst believing in the *Hajj* is disobedient.

Let us consider the exactness of the Quranic discourse in Allah's, saying: 'But whoever disbelieves, then, indeed, Allah is free from need of the worlds.' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) Someone may raise a question and ask: why does Allah not say: 'but whoever disbelieves, then indeed, Allah is free from need of 'them'?' instead of saying, 'Allah is free from need of the worlds'? The proper response to this is that Allah is really in no need of any of His creatures. Be careful! Never think that those who believe and observe their obligations do any favour to Allah by their obedience. Allah is All-Sufficient; He needs neither the obedient nor the disobedient. Beware of presuming that those who obey Allah have done Him any favour or lent Him a hand: 'Indeed, Allah is free from need of the worlds' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

He is in no need of those who obey or those who do not. After this, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَىٰ مَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾

Say, 'People of the Book, why do you reject God's
revelations? God witnesses everything you do?' [98]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 98)

When you hear 'say', it is a command from Allah to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as previously stated. When you entrust someone with a message to another, does this person mention the command 'say' or just say the message? For example, when you say to your son, 'Say to your uncle," My father will visit you tomorrow."' Your son goes to his uncle and says: 'My father will visit you tomorrow.'

Someone might say, ‘Would it not have been sufficient enough for Allah to have said to Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him:* ‘Say, O Muhammad.’ As such, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have passed it on to us saying, ‘O, People of the Book, why do you disbelieve?’ That would have been enough, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered the commandment itself from Allah; he only narrated it verbatim as he had received it from (Allah). The message Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received from Allah was the following: ‘Say: "O, People of the Book.”’ This indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered the message he received from Allah verbatim. There are many verses in the Quran that begin with Allah’s Command: ‘O, People of the Book’ without preceding it with the introductory verb, ‘Say.’ Other verses begin with the command ‘Say.’ What is the difference between these two styles? We find that the True Lord sometimes kindly addresses His creatures directly so He shows that they are worthy of being addressed directly. He does this by saying: ‘O, People of the Book!’ This is a direct address from Allah *Glorified is He* to them. Other times, He says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘O, Muhammad, Say to them’ because they do not have a position worthy of being directly addressed by Allah. When Allah *Glorified is He* addresses mankind, the address may or may not begin with ‘Say’; so, we know that when the True Lord addresses His creatures directly, He is honouring them as being worthy of the direct Divine address. However, when they show obstinacy, He tells His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ‘say to them.’

An example of this [and Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond compare] from everyday life is when one of us says to a person next to us, ‘Tell the one with the loud voice to keep silent.’ This person deems himself above directly addressing the person with a loud voice, so he asks his neighbour to tell the noisy person to keep silent. When an address comes to the people of the Book, we know that they are the Jews, the Companions of the Torah, and the Christians, the Companions of the Gospel. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to them saying: ‘O, People of the Book.’

No one has ever said to us, ‘O, People of the Quran’. Why? The answer is simple: when the Lord says to them, ‘O, People of the Book’, we know that any written material forms a ‘book’, but their disbelief contradicts the revelation written in their books as sent down to them by Allah *Glorified is He*. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who sent it down to them, and He knows that it calls to belief, not to disbelief. Since He is the True Lord Who sent down the revelation, He also stands as Witness over them. It is absurdity on the part of the people of the Book to throw themselves into the snare of disbelief. This way, they tell lies against Allah. Allah *the Most High* records that they went against the revelation written in their Books. However, if the people of the Book can deceive the people of the world, they will never be able to do so with the Creator of the heavens and earth.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Why do you disbelieve in the verses (revelation) of Allah' (*Al-'Imran:* 98), should we understand that their disbelief in Allah's verses mean their concealment of Allah's revelation from the onset? Or does it mean that they first believed in them but fell to disbelief afterwards? The glad tidings of the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were written in the Torah and in the Gospel. They even believed them before his coming. Yet, when Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* actually came, they disbelieved. In this respect, the Wise Quran declares:

'And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them, although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved. Then, when there came to them that which they recognised, they disbelieved in it, so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

Why did they disbelieve in Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*? It is because he removed temporal power from them that was causing them to sell both paradise and Allah's *Glorified is He* pleasure in order to achieve their own interests without the least regard of the rulings of Allah *Glorified is He*. I said before that Quraysh had refused to say '*La ilaha illa Allah'*, i.e. there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah. This refusal proved that they understood the meaning of '*La ilaha illa Allah.*' If it were just a simple phrase, they would have said it. However, they knew and understood that there is no one, who is worthy of worship, of obedience and of having the right to legislation and commandments, except Allah *Glorified is He*. In His Address to the people of the Book, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ مَنۡ ءَامَنَ تَبۡغُونَهَا
عِوَجٗا وَأَنتُمۡ شُهَدَآءُۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

Say, 'People of the Book, why do you turn the believers away from God's path and try to make it crooked, when you yourselves [should be] witnesses to the [truth]? God is not heedless of anything you do' [99] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 99)

Suppose that you betrayed yourselves and bore the sins of your own misguidance, why would you also bear the consequences of sending other people astray? Is it not enough that you bear your own sins without also bearing the sins of misguiding others? Allah *the Most High* says: 'They shall bear their own burdens in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear' (*an-Nahl:* 25). This judgment came eventhough Allah *the Most High* says: 'No burdened soul carries the burden (sins) of another' (*Fatir:* 18).

The one who does not bear any burden other than his own is the misguided person who does not send others astray; this person bears only his own sins. As for the one who bears his own burden along with the burdens of others, such is the misguided person who sends others astray. In this verse, the Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* asks them from the mouth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Why do you hinder him/her who believes from the way of Allah? You seek (to make) it crooked' (*Al-'Imran:* 99). It is as though the Lord is saying to them: 'What do you want from the religion that connects the servants to their Lord? Do you not want it to be an upright religion? You seek to make it crooked.' The crookedness only occurs for some evil intent. Simply, the crooked way is not straight and is thus elongating distances. Why should a person who travels a straight path want to divert from it and make his journey longer? If one wants to reach a destination directly, he will choose the straight path. As for the one who diverts from the straight path, he does not want to reach the intended destination. Rather, he makes his journey longer and might never ever reach the destination.

The True Lord says: ‘Why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allah? You seek (to make) it crooked….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 99) The Arabic word *‘‘iwajan’*, or ‘crooked’, has two pronunciations: ‘‘*Awajan* and *‘iwajan.*’ Each of them has a different meaning. The former describes a slanted upright thing such as a wall or a spear, whereas the latter describes the abnormality of values and morals. For this reason, the True Lord spoke to them about their crookedness in values and morals: ‘You seek (to make) it crooked, while you are witness, and Allah is not heedless of what you do.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 99) Allah *Glorified is He* as a result, tells them that they want the religion to be crooked despite the fact that they shall stand as witnesses over the Truth brought by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He is only delivering the message of truth which they used to foretell, for which they previously besought Allah for victory over the pagans of Mecca. It is like He is saying, ‘A prophet will soon come whom we will follow and with whom we will destroy you just like 'Ad and Iram were destroyed.’ O people of the Book, you are witnesses to the truth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

They committed several acts of disobedience: they went astray and they strove to lead others astray. If only this were a result of ignorance! Indeed, it was committed intentionally with full knowledge. Although they were witnesses to the truth, they insisted on going astray and leading others astray. The meaning of ‘witness’ is that they knew exactly what they were saying since witness can stand for seeing things. Seeing something is not like hearing about it. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* reminds them: ‘Allah is not heedless of what you do’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 99).

The Message that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered is very clear as also mentioned in their own manifest scriptures. What has caused your deviation, from the way of the truth, O, people of the Book, although you count as witnesses to that truth? You must have doubted Allah’s awareness of this. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: ‘Allah is not heedless of what you do’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 99). After this, Allah *the Most High* says, ‘O, you who have believed, if you obey a party of those who were given the Scripture, they would turn you back, after your belief, [to being] disbelievers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 100). In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* warns the believers that those who disbelieve in

Allah's revelation will not be at ease so long as you, O, Believers, are firm and upright. The disbelievers who deny the Divine revelations will not be at ease unless they stir doubts in the hearts of the believers about their religion. All they want is to make it crooked and turn the believers into disbelievers after they have accepted Islam.

The believers must be aware of this issue because those who want to advocate crookedness have gone astray and lead others astray, as well, eventhough they are witnesses to the truth and know that Allah is not unaware of what they do. What should then the stand of the believers be? Allah makes it evident in His saying: 'O, you who have believed...' (*Al-'Imran:* 100).

The people of the Book try to prevent the believers from the path of Allah. The meaning of '*al-sadd'* or prevention does not refer to someone who prevents believers from faith; rather, it refers to an attempt on the part of the people of the Book to convince the believers to denounce their faith and apostatise from it. The believers, in this sense, refer to the group that adheres to Allah's Commandments. Therefore, Allah warns them by saying: 'If you obey a party of those who were given the Scripture, they would turn you back, after your belief, [to being] disbelievers' (*Al-'Imran:* 100). In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* specifies only a group from the people of the Book which is a clear sign of the truthfulness, objectivity, fairness, and unbiasedness of this account. It is as if Allah *the Most High* is telling us that there is a group from the people of the Book who will behave in a straight manner and will eagerly come to Muslims, individually or in groups, to accept Islam. As such, Allah was not referring to all the people of the Book. He only says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن تُطِيعُواْ فَرِيقٗا مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ يَرُدُّوكُم بَعۡدَ إِيمَٰنِكُمۡ كَٰفِرِينَ ١٠٠

You who believe, some of those who were given the Scripture would turn you into disbelievers if you were to yield to them [100] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 100)

Allah *Glorified is He* relates the accounting of events in full preservation of the truth. After that, He says.

وَكَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ وَأَنتُمْ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَٰتُ ٱللَّهِ وَفِيكُمْ رَسُولُهُۥ ۗ
وَمَن يَعْتَصِم بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدْ هُدِىَ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

How can you disbelieve when God's revelations are being recited to you and His Messenger is living among you? Whoever holds fast to God will be guided to the straight path [101] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 101)

It is a rhetorical question states a denial of believers possibly returning to disbelief after enjoying the delights of the Divine Knowledge. The messages of Allah are recited to them and Prophet Mohamed, the true Messenger of Allah, is actually with them.

Allah *the Most High* says to the believers: 'If you obey a party of those who were given the Scripture…' (*Al-'Imran:* 100). This verse has a story to tell. The Jews of Medina had dominated the economy with absolute authority; they mastered the financial transactions. Since they were acting as moneylenders, those who were in need of loans would go to them. The Jews also excelled in knowledge because they had the scripture, whereas most of the people of Mecca and Medina were illiterate and had no access to the divine scriptures. In addition, there was another way the Jews showed excellence: their experience in war, for they had fortresses and strongholds. Hence, the Jews had three points of excellence: wealth which lent them dominance and leadership over the economy, knowledge of scripture which helped them to achieve scholarly superiority and finally their experience in the arts of war. Moreover, they would attempt to create and deepen conflicts among groups of people. For example, they attempted to stir up enmity between the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. They frequently bestirred this enmity to keep war raging at all times so they could guarantee the marketability of arms trade which they manufactured and sold to all conflicting parties. When Islam started to flourish, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* united the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, then the Jews lost their economic superiority.

Islam brought forth a religion and a scripture that superseded all past scriptures; thus, the Jews lost their scholarly status. Likewise, the Jews lost their military advantage as they witnessed a small number of believers making the disbelievers suffer an emphatic defeat at Badr. Due to these reasons, all the powers of the Jews in Medina faded away. Consequently, they wanted to return to their pre-Islamic situation. They decided to rekindle and stir up enmity between Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. A Jew, Sha's ibn Qays, once passed by the men of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj as they were experiencing faithful harmony and peace. He was so irritated by their kind friendship and sincere smiles that he said, 'By Allah, we must cause war to break out again and return them to their former state of hatred and enmity, for we will have no stability as long as they are united.'

Then, he sent a young Jew to sit with men of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. The Jew led the conversation to the memories of the Day of Bu'ath, a pre-Islamic day in which Al-Aws defeated Al-Khazraj. This Jew kept quoting chivalrous poems said in the context of military victories achieved on that day to rouse the passions of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. Consequently, the conflict grew with the boastings of achievements, and tempers flared. As such, a fight was about to break out. They shouted, 'Take arms! Take arms!' Thus, the plan worked and news of the event reached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He went out with his Companions until they reached the gathering of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj where they found the situations at the height of agitation, conflict, and rage. Weapons were at hand. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Do you recall the shouts of the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, while I am amongst you?' In other words, you should be ashamed of yourselves because the Messenger of Allah is amongst you. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then added, 'Allah has honoured you with Islam, by means of which He has removed the affairs of the days of ignorance from you and united your hearts!' What was the effect of the Prophet's words on the souls of the people? His words made them put their weapons, weep, and then embrace each other. They left in the company of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* No day began uglier yet ended finer than that day.

Reflecting on the Jewish act of inciting the civil strife between Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, we find that they understood the nature of the old conflicts between them and wanted to reignite old hatred and enmity. Likewise, we find that their stirring up the emotions of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj had opened a door for chaos, causing fighting to almost break out. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke to them, they calmed down, dropped their weapons, and regretted their actions.

If we wanted to deeply envisage why this happened, we would find that the Jewish knowledge of the conflict between the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj inspired them to reignite the old vendetta. Then, the tribal fanaticism of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj led them to take up arms.

In this way, we find that the perception of something has three stages: firstly, perception; secondly, emotional reaction to it; and thirdly, the corresponding behaviour. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke, Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj understood the matter in the correct manner; so they dropped their weapons, their anger abated, and they abandoned these incorrect perceptions.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* reminded them of three things: ‘Do you recall the shouts of the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, while I am still among you? Allah has honoured you with Islam, by means of which He has removed the affairs of the days of ignorance from you and united your hearts!’ In response, they first put down their weapons before weeping. Such was the result of being emotionally moved which inevitably led them to embrace one another. In other words, they corrected their perceptions and behaved in the opposite manner. When this happened, the Jews were enraged, disappointed and gloomy. The one who narrated this account said, ‘There never was in Islam a day that began uglier yet ended finer than that day.’

The day began gloomily and ended with reassurance. Prophet Muhammad’s *peace and blessings be upon him* words acted as a shield against any evil suggestions within the souls of the believers: ‘Do you recall the shouts of the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, while I am still among you? Allah has honoured you with Islam by means of which He has removed the affairs of the days of ignorance from you and united your hearts!’

This noble statement was remembered, thus, thwarting every evil suggestion or enemy’s scheme. The True Lord *Glorified is He* immunised the believers of

Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj from the wicked plots and devilish temptations. Hence, we see that Allah even uses a disbeliever to raise the status of faith. If this event had not happened, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have made his poignant speech. As such, Muslims would not have had this immunity from such tensions amongst them. If one of the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said these words, his words may have had the same temporal effect. However, having these words said by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* created an immunisation from other similar situations that had yet come whether the prophet was there or not.

For this reason you, O, believer, if you look at the disbelievers, you will find that their intellects are miserable. They spread Islam, unintentionally, by their foolish attitudes. For example, they said to the people of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, 'A prophet will soon come whom we will follow and with whom we will destroy you just like the people of 'Ad and Iram were destroyed.' Then, what happened? Once the people of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj heard about the new religion, they said to each other, 'Listen, people, it is the religion that the Jews foretold. Before they rush to it, let us be ahead of them.'

The Jewish arrogance and boastfulness against Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj motivated them to embrace Islam. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* makes the disbelief of disbelievers a means to strengthen the belief of believers.

When the Lord *the Most High* says: 'And how could you disbelieve, while Allah's messages are being conveyed to you and His Messenger has come to you? And whoever holds firmly to Allah has [indeed] been guided to a straight path' (*Al-'Imran:* 101), we understand that this is a divinely formed rhetorical question. When you hear, 'How could you disbelieve' it is an astonishing matter, for it is so unlikely that the believers could disbelieve, whilst the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* is being revealed and recited to them and the Messenger of Allah is amongst them.

After this comes the call to hold firmly to Allah *Glorified is He*. The Arabic word *'i'tisam'* (holding firmly) signifies the firm adherence to something that is of superior position. For example, 'I adhered firmly to the rope of faith.' A human being has integral weight. If this weight is not lifted by something else, the person will fall. This does not happen unless the person is hanging in the air, while holding on to a rope with no one to push him down, but he does fall due to his own weight. Whoever adheres firmly to Allah and to the rope of faith protects himself from falling.

In essence, we feel that holding firmly to Allah *Glorified is He* is to follow the verses recited to us and the example of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* To illustrate further, the key to the firm adherence to Allah *Glorified is He* is by following the Book of Allah and the example of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Likewise, the presence of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* amongst them was needed at the time due to the fact that they were immersed in the mire of ignorance. The presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* showed them that Allah *Glorified is He* had saved them by pulling them out of the darkness into the light. The True Lord did not take His Messenger's soul until after He had perfected the religion for us, completed His favour upon us and chosen Islam as our religion. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘I have left with you two things with which will keep you from going astray: the Book of Allah and my *Sunnah*.’

In this way, we see that the presence of Allah’s revelation and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* protect and guide us to the Straight Path. Guidance, as well known, is a means leading to the desired destination. Suppose that your goal was going to a specific place; what leads you to this place is guidance. Whatever directs a person to a destination is called ‘guidance’.

Allah *the Most High* created all the creatures making some of them subservient and others free-willed. All the creatures in the universe are subservient except for mankind. However, human beings are subservient in some matters. As we have stated before, every single being other than mankind fulfils its predestined purpose; the sun never refuses to rise, the wind never refuses to blow and the sky never refuses to rain. For example, the earth never says to man, ‘You disobey Allah, so I will not produce crops for you.’ Likewise, no one attempts to ride a tamed steed and endures its refusal by it saying, ‘You are sinful, so I am going to buck and not allow you to mount my back.’

Therefore, in this respect, we see that everything except mankind is compelled to fulfil its intended purpose which is the serving of mankind. Only human beings are endowed with free will. As such, we must always be aware that Allah's plans decreed that all creatures of every species shall be subservient by nature and act in harmony with one another except for mankind who has free will and, thus, suffers division. In this regard, Allah *the Most High* says: 'See you not that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and *Ad-Dawab* (moving living creatures, beasts, etc.), and many of mankind? But there are many (human beings) on whom the punishment is justified. And whomsoever Allah disgraces, none can honour him. Verily! Allah does what He wills.' (*al-Hajj:* 18)

The subservient inanimate objects that humbly prostrate are 'the sun, the moon and the stars; and the subservient plants that prostrate are the trees; and so do the beasts as included in the Divine decree of uniformity and agreement. All these subservient beings are subservient to Allah's command by their very nature. As for the human being, the Lord says about them: "But there are many (human beings) on whom the punishment is justified…" (*al-Hajj:* 18).

Therefore, what is the source of division amongst humans? Simply, it is because Allah *Glorified is He* endowed mankind with free will. Was it not possible for Allah *Glorified is He* to create mankind subservient like the rest of His creation? Is it not a truism that subjecting these creatures substantiates the power of the Dominant Lord, as nothing from His creation can escape His Power? This is absolutely true. However, in the same respect, the Lord wanted to confirm His Power and Might by subjecting His creatures. He also wanted to acknowledge His love of the creation by granting them free will. Whoever is endowed with free will to believe or to disobey then he chooses to believe, he is, in essence, asserting his love of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, in light of this, Allah *Glorified is He* classified the creation into two groups: a subservient group that naturally submits in recognition of His Power and a free group that is endowed with freedom of choice in confirmation of the Divine Love of the creation. Allah willed mankind to have freedom of choice to do an act or not to do it. Why then, do human beings not always act in harmony with the faith? It is due to the fact that desires have an outer glitter that attracts mankind just as fire attracts moths. When a person lights a fire in the open, its light attracts moths. Then the moths burn in the flame of the light. The light attracted and allured them, while they were not aware that it will burn them.

An Arabic proverb says: ‘Many a soul has longed for its own ruin!’ The same holds true for desires that appear alluring and attractive to human beings, leading them to nothing but destruction. But how can mankind protect themselves from this? Protection occurs only in following the Divine Guidance: ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do.’ Anyone who seeks salvation from the schemes of Satan and their lower self should submit to Divine Guidance in Commands and Prohibitions.’ I have previously said that it is inconceivable that someone would manufacture anything and forget to develop a manual of its rules for effective maintenance. Mankind, in their limited crafts, do not forget this, so what about the Creator in His absolute Omnipotence? The Creator *the Glorious and Exalted* created human beings and revealed the effective rules for the maintenance of humankind as declared in His Commands and Prohibitions: Do that! Do not do that! Whoever wants to hold fast to the firmest rope and escape satanic temptations, schemes of enemies or capricious desires must stick firmly to Allah’s guidance. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator Who created mankind and placed His guidance as a Divine manual for the maintenance of His creation.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘And whoever holds firmly to Allah has [indeed] been guided to a straight path’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 101). The fundamental meaning of *‘i’tisam’* is when a person is hanging in the air and his own weight pulls him down. However, when he holds firmly to Allah’s *Glorified is He* guidance, he saves himself from decline and fall. The main work of Satan is to make sins alluring and make humans drawn to them. Therefore, Satan will come on the Day of Resurrection, arguing against us. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And Satan will say when the matter has been decided: Verily, Allah promised you a promise of truth. And I too promised you, but I betrayed you. I had no authority over you except that I called you, so you responded to me. So blame me not, but blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I deny your former act in associating me (Satan) as a partner with Allah (by obeying me in the life of the world). Verily, there is a painful torment for the *zhalimun* (polytheists, wrong-doers, etc.)''' (*Ibrahim:* 22)

Confirming what we already know, authority is of two kinds: firstly, to control by force, but Satan cannot control the mankind in this manner and secondly, to convince a human being to commit a sin and Satan may convince a person to commit a sin. In this regard, what is the difference between forced control and convincing? In forced control, Satan forces a human being to do something against the will of man, but this is beyond the capability of Satan. In the case of convincing, however, Satan makes the sin seem alluring to a person, and so he does it out of his own free will. Satan will announce on the Day of Resurrection, 'I had no power over you, O, mankind, to make you disobey Allah. I only made the sin alluring to you, O, mankind, and you responded to me.' Satan will say on the Day of Resurrection, 'I cannot help you, nor can you help me' (*Ibrahim:* 22). What does the word musrikhiyya (help me) mean in the verse in question? It is derived from the verb (*Asrakh*) which means 'to hear a cry for help and respond to it.' Satan is saying that he cannot help mankind, and mankind cannot help him.

As such, the heavy inclination of human souls to this world leads them to plummet into hell without being pushed or thrown therein by force. There is no rescue for humankind from this plummeting or falling except by holding fast to the rope of Allah *Glorified is He*. Divine Guidance acts as a rope extended to us all, and whoever holds on to it is saved from this falling.

Since we hold fast to Allah's rope which is the Quran revealed from our Creator and the pure Prophetic *Sunnah*, Allah is well aware of the natural inclinations of human beings, and He will surely guide us to the Straight Path. After giving that command, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِۦ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

You who believe, be mindful of God, as is His due, and make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment [102] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 102)

Allah *Glorified is He* has granted believers the basic rules for protection: first, they should not listen to the words of the enemies of the religion. When we hear the word *‘‘ittaqu Allaha*' or fear Allah, we must understand that there are things that will cause you exhaustion and suffering, therefore, you must take a preventive action from them. For this reason, the True Lord says: ‘And fear the Fire, which is prepared for the disbelievers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 131) Allah instructs human beings to make a shield and a barrier between themselves and Hell in order to save themselves from it. For example, Allah *the Most High* says, ‘Fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Swift in reckoning’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 4); this means to place a barrier between yourself and Allah to avoid His Wrath. Someone might ask, ‘How can this be when I am a believer, and I want to live in Allah’s company?’ The answer is that you shall protect yourself from the Divine Attributes of Might and remain in the shade of the Divine Attributes of Beauty. The true believer is the one who protects himself from the Attributes of Might such as the Overwhelming Power, Dominance, and so on. Likewise, Hell is one of the agents of Allah’s Attributes of Might.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Fear the Fire’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 131) or ‘Fear Allah’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102), the meaning is the same. When a person hears the words of *the Most High* Lord: ‘*’ittaqu Allaha haqqa tuqatihi* ' (i.e. fear Allah as He should be feared’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102), what does ‘*’ittaqu Allaha haqqa tuqatihi’* mean? In Arabic, the word ‘*haqqa*’ refers to the ‘firmly confirmed and invariable fact which never ends or quivers'. Surely, this is the truth. But how can one fear Allah *Glorified is He* as should be feared? One can fear Allah *Glorified is He* as should be feared when his faith is firm and unwavering. The should-be feared is manifested by following His guidance, obeying all of His Commands, glorifying Him with frequent remembrance and thanking Him without any trace of ingratitude. Obedience is achieved by following the guidance of ‘do’s' and 'don’ts'.’One may frequently engage in the remembrance of Allah and may obey and follow His guidance, but he may become distracted by the graces of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah’s guidance calls you to remember all the Divine Blessing you have, yet beware of forgetting the One Who bestows them upon you.

The worshiper should praise Allah *Glorified is He* in a way that is due to Him, and should not be ungrateful for the blessings bestowed upon him. As long as you accept, O, servant, each and every blessing and return to Allah by saying ‘this is what Allah has given; there is no power except by Allah’, which is an expression of gratitude for blessings, you are fulfilling the rights of the blessing. Fulfilling the right of a blessing is to praise the Lord for it and avoid ingratitude.

It is said that ‘as He should be feared’ means that no critic can waver your firm belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and that you shall speak the truth, even if it is against yourself. Such is the utmost, best form of fearing God. It is to fear Allah as He should be feared with sincerity and piety. The scholars say that when this verse was sent down and the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad heard it, they considered themselves too weak to live up to it. Some of them then said, ‘Who could ever be up to this level of piety?’ In response, Allah sent down: ‘So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16)

Does this mean that Allah first commanded the believers to something beyond their ability, and then provided them relief by saying: ‘So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can’? No, Allah *Glorified is He* does not charge a soul beyond its capability. People might misunderstand His words, ‘So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can,’ by claiming that they are unable to fulfill this obligation. Furthermore, they might think that this obligation is no longer incumbent upon them. The truth of the matter is that this is a form of misunderstanding. The Divine Direction ‘So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can’ means that you should be conscious of Allah within your given abilities, so what you can do, you should do. No one is allowed to understand the opposite meaning and say, ‘I am unable.’ To put it more simply, Allah *Glorified is He* knows the limits of your capability.

When you are unable, He is the One Who can relieve you. You cannot relieve yourself, O, servant. Only the True Creator is the One Who knows whether a given matter is beyond your capability or not, and, therefore, could relieve you. Consequently, a person must not manipulate Allah words: ‘Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity’ (*al-Baqara:* 286) by taking them out of context. Indeed, a human being cannot assess the ability to make a parallel evaluation of the religious duties accordingly. Rather, man must understand that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created the soul, and He is the One Who sent down the religious duties and responsibilities according to the ability of human beings. Since the Creator of man is Allah, He knows better the duties and responsibilities that man can bear. He *the Most High* is the One

Who assigns the responsibilities, and He knows better that the soul has a limited capability. Thus, He does not burden a soul with more than it can bear. If He gives a commandment, know, O, servant that He has commanded that which is within your capability. Likewise, when something happens to a person that is arduous for him or completely prevents him from performing that which he is responsible for, He *the Most High* grants exceptions so as to provide relief, as set out in legal concessions.

For example, those who are sick or in a state of travel have the concession to break their fast in *Ramadan*. Similarly, a traveller may shorten the four-unit prayers during the time of his journey.

Evidently, Allah *the Most High* is the Omniscient and knows the bounds of the capability of the human soul, which He created. In conclusion, do not calculate your capability first, and then measure the religious duties against it. Instead, you should respect the religious duties first and maintain the attitude that as long as Allah has commanded it, it must be within your capability. Allah concluded this noble verse saying: ‘Die not except in a state of Islam (as Muslims)’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102). In this verse, we have a proscription: ‘Die not unless you are surely submitting yourselves (as Muslims) to Allah at your dying moment.’

How could that be done? Can anyone ask another person not to die! Death falls into the arena of which man has no choice. It is part of the divine decrees. If someone says to you ‘Do not die,’ you would definitely find it strange because it is beyond your power or control. However, if someone says to you ‘Do not die except as a Muslim [in submission to Allah *the Exalted*],’ you begin to realise the intended meaning of the command through contemplation. The person has no control over death, but he does have control over the state he is in when death approaches. It is a divine command not to die except as Muslims [in submission to Allah *Glorified is He*.] There is no doubt that this is within the capability and control of a person. The phrase ‘except as Muslims [in submission to Him]’ in the verse renders the action within a person’s capability because he can make the choice to submit himself to Allah *the Exalted*.

It is true that one does not know when he shall die. Therefore, he has to be wise and quickly submit to Allah *the Exalted* so that whenever death befalls him, he would die as a Muslim [in submission to Allah *the Exalted*].

Thus, the divine command in the verse, 'do not die except as Muslims [in submission to Him]' is a prohibition from doing the first action, 'not to die', which is not within the scope of human power or choice. Furthermore, it is a prohibition from being in a state contrary to what is enjoined at the moment of dying, and this is within a person's power and choice. The verse says: 'Do not die except as Muslims [in submission to Him].' (*Al-'Imran:* 102). How can we reconcile the two commands? No one has any choice or control over the time of his death, and, likewise, no one knows when the calamity of death will befall him. However, a person has control over the state in which he dies. We are enjoined to submit ourselves to Allah *the Exalted* and hold fast to Islam so that whenever death approaches us, we would meet our Lord as 'Muslims' (in submission to Him). Allah *the Exalted* is commanding us to hold fast to Islam, i.e. submit to Allah *Glorified is He* because we do not know when the calamity of death will befall us.

The concealment of the time of death is not vague as some people may think. Rather, it is the pinnacle of clarity because the concealment of the time, the cause, and the surrounding circumstances of death best clarifies the essence of death. Why? Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained that such information is exclusively His. Accordingly, each of us should expect death at any time. As long as a person expects death at any time, this is the perfect clarity as referred to. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hold fast to Allah's rope all together; do not split into factions. Remember Allah's favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by His grace.You were about to fall into a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it– in this way God makes His revelations clear to you so that you may be rightly guided.' (*Al-'Imran:* 103).

This verse is intended to warn the believers by reminding them of the Aws and Khazraj tribes that gave in to ugly tribal-pride and prejudice of the Pre-Islamic era. After Islam was introduced to Medina, Muslims were enjoined to find pride in Islam alone. If a Muslim gives in to ugly tribal-pride and prejudice and vies in boasting to others about having so-and-so as a member of his tribe, he should be reminded that this may have been acceptable before Islam.

It happened that some members of the Aws and Khazraj tribes vied in boasting with one another. A man from the Aws tribe said to one from

Khazraj tribe, ‘Khuzaymah is one of us.’ The man from the Khazraj tribe responded, ‘Well, Ubayy ibn Ka‘b and Zayd ibn Thabit are from us.’ Then, one from the Aws tribe said, ‘Well, Hanzhalah ibn Ar-Rahib is one of us, and he was bathed by the angels after his death!’ Khuzaymah ibn Thabit *may Allah be pleased with him* was an honourable companion whose testimony was made equivalent to the witness of two people by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* This was due to the fact that he *may Allah be pleased with him* possessed illuminating faith and the light of certainty which led him to sound judgments. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once bought a horse from a Bedouin. He *peace and blessings be upon him* went to bring the money to pay for this horse. The Bedouin denied the sale agreement because someone else had offered him a higher price! The Bedouin called Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘If you want this horse, (then buy it), otherwise I shall sell it. ’Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to the Bedouin, ‘Have not I already bought it from you?’ The Bedouin said, ‘I swear by Allah, I have not sold it to you. Bring a witness!’ This Bedouin had taken advantage of the fact that there were no witnesses at the time when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bought the horse from him. Khuzaymah ibn Thabit *Allah be pleased with him* was present when the Bedouin requested a witness. Driven by his absolute confidence in the truthfulness and honesty of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for which he was known possessing among his people even before he was commissioned to communicate the Divine Message to mankind, Khuzaymah *may Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘I bear witness that you have bought it.’

Because this Bedouin was lying, he perhaps said to himself that possibly Khuzaymah had seen what happened!’ He kept silent and left. After the Bedouin left, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called for Khuzaymah ibn Thabit *Allah be pleased with him* and said, ‘O, Khuzaymah, how could you testify when you were not with us? On what (grounds) do you bear witness?’ He *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘On grounds of believing you, O, Messenger of Allah, to be trustworthy.’(What he meant in saying this is: how can we believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning all what he conveyed from heaven and not believe him in this?) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* realised the illumination of trust and sound reasoning of Khuzaymah. He *peace and blessings be upon him* made the witness of Khuzaymah equivalent to the witness of two people.

Usually, two witnesses are required. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* honoured Khuzaymah *Allah be pleased with him* by making his testimony equivalent to that of two people. Let us now examine how Allah *the Exalted* united the Aws and Khazraj tribes after Islam by pondering over the compilation of the Quran. Zayd ibn Thabit *may Allah be pleased with him* who was entrusted with the duty and honour of compiling The Quran, had said: I obliged myself not to accept a verse of the Book of Allah unless two men gave evidence of its being so and attested to it until I found the last verse of the chapter of *al-Tawba* written, and only Khuzaymah Al-Ansari attested to it. I did not find it with anybody other than him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about him, "The testimony of Khuzaymah alone is sufficient."' It should be noted that Zayd ibn Thabit *Allah be pleased with him* belonged to the Khazraj tribe, while Khuzaymah *Allah be pleased with him* belonged to the Aws tribe. Allah *Glorified is He* had brought them together as evidenced by the incident of compiling the Quran. This underscores that people found pride in their tribal affiliation, or other worldly gains, before Islam. When they embraced Islam, Muslims of different races and colours found pride in their religion instead. Both the members of the Aws and Khazraj tribes should be proud of both Khuzaymah and Zayd ibn Thabit *may Allah be pleased with them* because they were united by the bond of Islam and the Quran. This is the way to hold fast to the divine bond with Allah *the Exalted.*

He says: 'Hold fast to Allah's rope all together; do not split into factions. Remember Allah's favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together…' (*Al-'Imran:* 103). The Aws and Khazraj tribes were at war for one hundred and twenty years despite the fact the two tribes were originally of the same origin; they were the descendants of two brothers born to the same mother and father. When they embraced Islam, their hearts were brought together, and they became brothers by the grace of Allah *the Exalted*.

This indicates that every impulse of wickedness materialised by the actions of the limbs is the product of the heart's rage. A hand does not strike unless the heart is enraged. The condition of the heart is the most important factor.

This is why the verse underlined that Allah *Glorified is He* has 'brought your hearts together…' (*Al-'Imran:* 103). Then, He says: 'And you were about to fall into a pit of Hellfire and He saved you from it.' (*Al-'Imran:* 103) They were about to fall into hellfire. The verse means, 'You have been guided to Islam. Were it not for it, you would have fallen into Hellfire.'

Allah *the Exalted* concludes the verse by saying: '... in this way Allah makes His revelations clear to you so that you may be rightly guided.' (*Al-'Imran:* 103). Thus, we realise the blessing of being guided to Islam in this worldly life. A believer does not have to wait for the Hereafter to witness the power of faith saving humankind from hellfire; it can be witnessed in this worldly life as well. Before Islam, Arabs were steep in conflict, dispersed due to ugly tribal-pride and prejudice, and dealing with discord and dissension prevailing amongst them. When Islam was first introduced in the Arabian Peninsula, they were made brothers. Indeed, this is a great blessing conferred upon them in this worldly life, even despite the fact that this worldly life is not the abode of recompense. What about the Hereafter, which is the abode of recompense and eternal existence? Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَٱعۡتَصِمُواْ بِحَبۡلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعٗا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُواْۚ وَٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ إِذۡ كُنتُمۡ
أَعۡدَآءٗ فَأَلَّفَ بَيۡنَ قُلُوبِكُمۡ فَأَصۡبَحۡتُم بِنِعۡمَتِهِۦٓ إِخۡوَٰنٗا وَكُنتُمۡ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفۡرَةٖ مِّنَ
ٱلنَّارِ فَأَنقَذَكُم مِّنۡهَاۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَهۡتَدُونَ ١٠٣

Hold fast to God's rope all together; do not split into factions.
Remember God's favour to you: you were enemies and then
He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by
His grace; you were about to fall into a pit of Fire and He
saved you from it – in this way God makes His revelations
clear to you so that you may be rightly guided [103]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 103)

When the divine command requires that you should do something you are already doing, you should know that it is urging you to continue to do it and hold on to it. When Allah *the Exalted* says: 'O, you who believe,' (*Al-'Imran:* 102) it means, 'Renew and foster your faith so that you will continue to believe and hold on to it.' Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلۡتَكُن مِّنكُمۡ أُمَّةٞ يَدۡعُونَ إِلَى ٱلۡخَيۡرِ وَيَأۡمُرُونَ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ
وَيَنۡهَوۡنَ عَنِ ٱلۡمُنكَرِۚ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ ١٠٤

Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones [104] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 104)

The Arabic word for 'community' is '*ummah*'. It may be used to refer to a group belonging to any given race, such as the community of Arabs, Persians, or Romans. The Arabic word ummah may also denote a way of life, i.e. a religion. A third meaning of the word is a period of time as it is used in the following verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And of the two (prisoners) he who had been freed and remembered after a long time said, "I will inform you of its interpretation, so let me go."' (*Yusuf:* 45).

The man, for whom Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* interpreted his dream in prison was reminded of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* after an ummah, i.e. after a long period of time. Sometimes the word ummah is used to refer to a man or leader who embodies all the good, righteous qualities. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely, Ibrahim was an exemplar (who embodies all the good, righteous qualities), obedient to Allah, upright, and he was not of the polytheists.' (*an-Nahl:* 120)

This is because it is not necessary that one person should be endowed with all the righteous qualities and attributes of goodness. Rather, one person may be endowed with one righteous quality, while the other is endowed with another one, and so on. Thus, the broader community is collectively endowed with all the good, righteous qualities. However, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was endowed with all the good, righteous qualities.

When you say to a person, 'Be brave!' this means that he should train himself to be brave by training himself to embody this quality until it becomes second nature. When you tell someone, 'Be generous,' it means you are telling him to train himself to possess such a righteous quality.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Be a community that calls for what is good...' (*Al-'Imran:* 104). This divine command in this verse is for the believers to train themselves to enjoin good and forbid evil. It may mean that the whole Muslim community is commanded to do as such, not just a group of them. Or, as some scholars say, a group from among the believers should undertake the duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

However, there is a much more profound understanding of this verse suggesting that the entire community of believers should be one that calls for goodness and advises against evildoing. In other words, this verse commands the whole community of Muslims to shoulder this duty and not let it be confined to just a group from amongst them. Whoever knows a religious ruling should call his fellow Muslims to abide by it.

Based on this understanding, some Islamic scholars hold that committing sins should not prevent a Muslim from submitting to the command in this verse. Even if you commit a sin, this should not prevent you from cautioning others against it. So a believer is required to do two things: first, he should avoid committing evil deeds and second, he should call others to avoid it, as well. Therefore, when someone advises you against a sin eventhough he commits it, you should not say to him, 'Just practise what you preach!' An Arab poet once said: 'Avail yourself of my knowledge and do not focus on my action; reap the fruits and leave the wood for the fire!'

However, it befits one who enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong to be the first to act upon his advice; in doing as such, he would not be among those addressed by the following admonition of Allah *the Exalted:* 'O, you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to Allah that you should say that which you do not do.' (*as-Saff:* 2-3)

Based on this understanding, let us reflect the divine command again: 'Be a community that calls for what is good...' (*Al-'Imran:* 104). It is a command to the believers to be a community themselves in which each individual does his share of the duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'I swear by Time! Surely, most of man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3).

This noble chapter of the Quran underscores the essence of Islamic creed: faith reflected by good deeds. Let us further examine the command of Allah

Glorified is He: 'enjoin on each other' which implies that every believer has a tendency to do wrong; no one is safe from temptation. A believer may be too weak to resist one given sin, but quite strong in the face of another. Thus, he should offer advice regarding the former and, meanwhile, receive advice regarding the latter. This is what Allah *Glorified is He* means by 'enjoin on each other'. Islam does not assign the duty of advising what is right and cautioning against what is wrong to one group and make the rest of the Muslim community just recipients. Rather, the duty should be collectively and interchangeably shouldered amongst all believers based on the situation of each. Every believer should offer advice when he sees his fellow believer weak in the face of a certain sin, and he himself should accept advice when he is offered it during his times of weakness. Therefore, enjoining good and forbidding evil is a role to be performed by all Muslims. At times you are the giver of advice, while at others you are the recipient. The same applies for enjoining one another to adhere to patience in the face of adversity.

When a calamity befalls a Muslim, his fellow Muslims should advise and encourage him to endure it patiently. The very advice giver in that situation may himself need it if a calamity were to befall him later. Thus, the whole Muslim community is required to shoulder this duty: '... and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 3)

This is the best understanding of the noble verse: 'Be a community that calls for what is good, enjoins what is right, and forbids what is wrong. Those who do this are the successful ones.' (*Al-'Imran:* 104) The verse, thus, presents the divine command and also elaborates on its meaning: The duty to 'call for what is good' means to 'enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong'.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '... Those who do this are the successful ones.' (*Al-'Imran:* 104) The Arabic word used in the original text, *muflihun* (successful) denotes reaping fruits of a profitable deal. It is derived from the root *f-l-h* meaning 'to cultivate the land'. The one who ploughs the land then sows the seeds will reap the fruits in the end. The word *muflihun* is used figuratively to denote the wider meaning of 'success'. When Allah *Glorified is He* uses this word, He also wants to convey another deeper meaning. It is the fact that the difficulty one incurs when he does a good deed, will bring relief, and ease afterward. Whatever you give in the cause of Allah comes back to you many folds over. Consider a person who tills his land and sows in it a measure of wheat seeds. Suppose he had a foolish wife who would scold him: ‘We have only four measures of wheat! How come you threw one of them in the land like that?’ Such a woman does not know that this single measure of wheat seeds will produce a countless number of bushels of wheat in time. In the same manner, Islam does not command you anything except that which will certainly bring forth abundant fruits and rewards.

A farmer who works hard tilling the soil and irrigating the plants, whose forehead is covered with sweat and whose feet sink in mud and water, rejoices on the day of the harvest at the produce he gains. Another farmer who spares himself the trouble of work will reap nothing on the day of harvest except regret and distress. Muslim brothers and sisters do not therefore look on religious obligations as shackles or burdens meant only to deprive you of enjoyment. Rather, they are meant to protect you from regret and maximize your reward in both this life and the Hereafter. A Muslim should not assume that the ordinances of Allah are meant to impede his freedom. Rather, they are meant to protect people and prevent transgressions.

We have previously underlined that when the Islamic *Shari'a* (legal code) prohibits theft, for example, this is meant to protect the wealth of millions of people and not to restrict those who desperately need money! Thus, security prevails when people abide by the commandments of faith.

If we consider prohibitions in Islam in the same light, we will realise the true value of religious obligations. When Islam enjoins you to lower your gaze and refrain from looking at the women of your neighbour, for example, it simultaneously protects your own women from the eyes of other men. This commandment restricts the freedom of others so as to protect your women just as it restricts your freedom so as to protect the women of others.

Therefore, we need to remember that every Islamic obligation is meant to bring rectitude and success. The earth takes in a seed and gives you several shoots in return, each containing many seeds. Do not look at what religious duties take from your freedom, for it takes, for your sake, from the freedom of others, as well. Do not complain that religious obligations restrict your personal freedom; they earn you valuable fruits far greater in value than what you have to give. The True Lord then says:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا۟ وَٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَهُمُ
ٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتُ ۚ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ (١٠٥)

Do not be like those who, after they have been given clear revelation, split into factions and fall into disputes: a terrible punishment awaits such people [105] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 105)

This wise statement includes a prohibition of following whims and desires in regard to religion which, in turn, prevents conflict and disunity. Despite clarity of the signs and revelations of Allah *the Exalted* some insist on defying them. Those who follow their own whims after they were given clear revelations, therefore, deserve to be cast into hellfire. The severe torment awaiting them is in proportion to their flagrant denial of the clear truth. In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ ۚ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ
أَكَفَرْتُم بَعْدَ إِيمَـٰنِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا۟ ٱلْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ (١٠٦)

On the Day when some faces brighten and others darken, it will be said to those with darkened faces, 'How could you reject your faith after believing? Taste the torment for doing so' [106] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 106)

In this worldly life, darkness and fairness of faces are associated with the various environments where people live. Allah *Glorified is He* has increased the colour pigments in the skin of darker-skinned, or black, people so their bodies can endure the conditions of their environment. As for the lighter or white-skinned, their bodies do not have the same level of colour pigments because their environment does not require them needing as such.

So darkness of skin in this world is not a sign of degradation in any way; instead, it is for the good of dark-skinned people and necessary for their survival. In the Hereafter, as the aforementioned verse clarifies, blackness and whiteness will have a totally different significance. Just as the earth and the heavens will be completely different, so will be the matter of blackness and whiteness; the environment will stop being the cause. You will be amazed on the Day of Resurrection to see that a person who was black in the worldly life is white in the Hereafter, and vice versa.

Needless to say, darker, or black skin in this worldly life is not a sign of debasement or dislike by Allah *Glorified is He*. To this we say an emphatic no. Allah *the Exalted* has made everyone in the form that best suits them; He has granted people who live in certain kinds of environments concentrated colour pigments so they can endure the conditions they live in. On a human level, vaccinations, for example, are given to any person travelling to an infected place so as to protect them from diseases. Likewise, and surely Allah is above all comparison, He has created every creature in the best physical form and provided him with the immunities that help protect him. Blackness of skin is not a sign of divine wrath or dislike, but a means of protection in tough environments. This does not apply on the Day of Resurrection. The earth will be a totally new one, and the faces of the believers will whiten and shine, whereas the faces of the disbelievers will turn gloomy and dark. Also, whiteness and blackness referred to in this verse may be figurative and not meant to actually allude to these colours. The face of a white person may be covered in gloom and repulsion, whereas a black person's face may be bright with the light of faith and trust in Allah; you would feel as if it were radiant due to goodness and piety that you cannot help to look at him. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: '(Some) faces on that day shall be bright, looking to their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

What lies within the soul shows on the face of a person. A black person might be bright-faced with cheerfulness and attractive warmth, while another person might have a white face, yet his dark soul spreads over it.In this way, we understand that darkness or blackness of a person's skin in this life is purely meant to help him be in harmony with his environment. Take the example of the eyes. Is the white of the eye better than its dark pupil, or vice versa? No, but both are equally vital with each having an essential role.

Let us reflect upon another example. Consider a builder who is bending a straight iron girder. Can we say that he has ‘disfigured’ the iron girder?! No, he has simply moulded it so it can fit or be used for a specific purpose. Similarly, blackness and whiteness of skin are created for people to enable them to live in different environments. In the Hereafter, the laws and norms of this worldly life will not exist; the earth will not be the same, and nor will the sky remain as it had been. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On the day when the earth shall be changed into a different earth and the heavens (as well), and they shall come forth before Allah, the One, the Supreme.’ (*Ibrahim:* 48)

When a believer sees the eternal bliss Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for him, with what elation he will receive the Mercy and Bounty of Allah? As for the one who sees his place in hell, his face must be pale due to his state of fear and anguish, no doubt. After declaring that their faces will be dark on that Day, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the disbelievers: ‘…"How could you reject your faith after believing?..." (*Al-‘Imran:* 106). This may be interpreted as a question by which Allah *Glorified is He* reproaches them, or it may be a question posed by those who knew these disbelievers in this life. Perhaps they will be taken by surprise for seeing them on the Day of Resurrection with black faces, whereas they used to be white in the worldly life. Thus, they will wonder: ‘…‘How could you reject your faith after believing...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 106)? They inferred by their dark faces that they had denied faith after having adhered to it; it is as if this darkness were the sign of forsaking faith. This will be their mark in the Hereafter, and as such people will ask, ‘What is it that has changed you into this colour?’ It is disbelief after having embraced faith. What does it mean that they have rejected faith after having accepted it? They had, at first, accepted faith, but then disbelief overcame them, and, as a result, they died as disbelievers. This statement refers to those who turned apostates after having been Muslims, such as Ibn Al-Aslat and others.

However, there can be another interpretation of the verse: ‘…"How could you reject your faith after believing?..."’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 106) So they had been believers and turned disbelievers afterward. How did this happen? Has Allah *Glorified is He* not brought from Adam’s loins his offspring and taken a pledge from them? Has He not said to them: ‘…"Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness."...’ (*al-A’raf:* 172)? Thus, all the children of

Adam, when they were still seeds in the loins of their father, testified that Allah is their Lord. Whoever denies this truth has, therefore, disbelieved after having accepted faith. This verse may also mean that you (disbeliever) have disbelieved after having believed in Muhammad even after he had come to you with the signs and news that you had already known and read about in the Torah and the Gospel. They already expected his advent and knew he was the final Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him.* Therefore, they deserved to be addressed by these words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '... then when there came to them that which they had recognised, they disbelieved in it. So let the Curse of Allah be on the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

Therefore, the question posed in the verse may refer to apostates who had proclaimed faith then forsook it, or it may be an allusion to the pledge taken from mankind when they were still seeds in the loins of Adam *peace be upon him.* It may also refer to denying the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after having found news and signs of his advent in the Torah and the Gospel. This verse may be addressed, as well, to those who have innovated in faith for that which has not been revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* and, thus, causing them to split into different denominations, all falsely alleging to be Muslims, such as the Bahá'ítes, the Qadianis and others. The aforementioned verse can be understood in all these ways. When we examine the Quranic text closely, we find it open to various interpretations.

In the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the torment of the disbelievers: '... "How could you reject your faith after believing? Taste the torment for doing so." (*Al-'Imran:* 106) The statement closing the verse is addressed solely to disbelievers; their disbelief will cause them to be severely punished, which in turn means that faith will lead believers to be granted ample reward. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱبْيَضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِى رَحْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

but those with brightened faces will be in God's grace,
there to remain [107] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 107)

It is particularly worthy to notice that when Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the reward of the believer for his faith and obedience, He sometimes says:

'…they are destined for Paradise, therein to abide.' (*al-A'raf:* 42), while at other times, He says: 'Allah will admit those who believe in Him and hold fast to Him into His mercy and favour; He will guide them towards Him on a straight path.' (*an-Nisa':* 175)

What is the difference between the two? With respect to worship, people are of two kinds. Some of them worship Allah *Glorified is He* aspiring to the never-ending delights of paradise; so Allah gives it to them as a reward for their devotion. Others worship Allah *Glorified is He* out of pure, unselfish love for Him. Paradise hardly ever crosses their minds. These are the servants of Allah whom He grants the essence of His Mercy because they are blessed with seeing the Face of Allah *the Exalted* above all that does not befit His Majesty.

What is the difference between the two rewards: His paradise and His Mercy? Paradise is one of the creations of Allah *Glorified is He* that He will keep as long as He wishes. Allah's Mercy, however, is an Attribute, and not created by Allah *Glorified is He* that will remain as long as He remains. This is an absolutely sufficient assurance; Allah's Existence has no end. Allah *Glorified is He* will grant those special rewards, His Mercy and seeing His Face, to His servants who worship Him purely out of love for Him, not just aspiration to His reward.

We have previously underlined that there is a rank in paradise called 'Illiyyun where there are none of the pleasures of paradise we have been foretold of except seeing the Face of Allah *Glorified is He*. In the Hereafter, the dwellers of paradise will experience no hunger and no need of any kind. So, what is better for them: the sensual pleasures of paradise or the matchless bliss of seeing the Face of Allah *Glorified is He*?

Which is better: enjoying blessings or enjoying the company of the Bestower of these blessings? No doubt, the delight of looking at the One Who bestows blessings is a far more profound type of happiness than enjoyment of sensual pleasures. The syntactic precision of the Arabic text of the Quran shows how overwhelming the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* will be for His righteous servants. They will not only be treated with Mercy, but they will be completely surrounded by it. They will not just feel it, but it will constitute the entire realm that encompasses their existence. In that Mercy, they will live forever '... therein to abide….' It is as if the Mercy of Allah were a vast space that His righteous servants will be admitted to and out of which they will never be taken. To the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* they will be admitted, and in the Mercy of Allah they will abide eternally.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱللَّهِ نَتۡلُوهَا عَلَيۡكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلۡمٗا لِّلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ١٠٨

These are God's revelations: We recite them to you
[Prophet] with the Truth. God does not will injustice for
His creatures [108] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 108)

The 'communications' of Allah *Glorified is He* also include His evidences and recompenses. Among them are the rewards to be given to His servants on the Day of Resurrection: The disbelievers will have dark faces and will receive torment, while the believers' faces will be bright, along with them being granted the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* eternally. 'These are the communications of Allah which We recite to you with truth…' (*Al-'Imran:* 108). What makes a person conceal the truth? There must be some motive; perhaps the truth will cause him trouble, so he resorts to telling falsehoods. But is there anything that can cause trouble to the Creator? No, Allah is Exalted above any deficiency or failure. What then can prevent Him from speaking the truth? Absolutely nothing can. He speaks nothing but the truth, and the dominion of all things belong to Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '...Allah does not desire any injustice to the creatures.' (*Al-'Imran:* 108). In another verse, Allah reasserts that no injustice may ever be done on His part: '... and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants.' (*Fussilat:* 46)

TheTrue Lord does not like injustice, neither from Him nor from His servants. Injustice may mean to punish or harm someone without their having committed any crime. This is a form of injustice. It may also mean begrudging a person the proper recompense he deserves. This is yet another form of injustice. Through injustice, one usurps benefits to which he has no right. He may take vengenance on an innocent person just out of bitterness and malice. He may falsely accuse a person of a crime because the latter poses a threat against a particular interest he longs for. A person of authority may detain someone who has committed no offense for simply objecting to his corruption or despotism.

One would not abandon the truth and resort to injustice unless he desires a benefit he has no right to, or he desperately wants to protect himself from danger. Allah *Glorified is He* has no need to do injustice to attain any benefit for Himself or ward off any harm that His creatures might cause Him! He is *the Almighty* Creator and Lord Who is far elevated above all that. He is the All-Powerful, Supreme Master over His servants. Allah *Glorified is He* says in this Divine saying: 'O, My servants, verily I have made oppression unlawful for Me and has forbidden it amongst you. So do not commit oppression against each other...'

In fact, oppression is a striking manifestation of ignorance and foolishness! It has only strengthened the oppressed for it has earned them support and assistance from Allah *Glorified is He*. An oppressor intends by his injustice to weaken the oppressed, but, in fact, he is of little sagacity. In reality, he has only added a new power to the oppressed: the power of being aided by Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, an oppressor does exactly the opposite of what he wants. Consider the following example, and Allah *Glorified is He* is above all comparison. Imagine a child has wronged his brother. How will the father react? His heart would be inclined toward the wronged child; he will try to appease him and restore his right. The unjust child has harmed his brother a little that he, as a child, was able to inflict. He was unaware then that he has only given his brother such a benefit commensurate with the power of his father. He acted ignorantly of the fact that he has strengthened his brother, not vice versa.

We are all dependents of Allah *Glorified is He*. So what will He do when He sees one of His dependents oppressed? He *the Exalted and Almighty* will certainly be on the side of the oppressed person. This way, the oppressor has only shown his foolishness by strengthening the oppressed. Were he sagacious, he would have begrudged his opponent such power and would, therefore, have abstained from wronging him. He would have refrained from wronging him, so Allah *Glorified is He* would not grant him the great compensation of placing him directly under His protection and care.

One may commit injustice to gain a transient benefit, forgetting that he can never escape from the One Who has created him. I would love to say to such a person: You cannot escape from the One Who has created you. You may escape punishment of a mortal like you; you may crave a transient gain you have no right to. Remember then that your Almighty Creator is ever Watchful: He is overtaken neither by slumber nor by sleep. It is a reassurance from the Almighty Creator to the oppressed: Sleep to your hearts' content, for you have a Lord Who is never overtaken by slumber or sleep.

'... Allah does not desire any injustice to the creatures.' (*Al-'Imran:* 108) Injustice results from a desire to get an undeserved gain or inflicting harm without a just cause. Allah *Glorified is He* is free of the need to do either of the two. He is the Self-Sufficient Creator of all things and the Possessor of all creation. He says in the following verse: 'Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Allah; it is to Him that all things return.' (*Al-'Imran:* 109)

He is the Holder of all control. Everything belongs to Him, is sustained by Him, and is part of His dominion; unto Him all things will return. We know that the Noble Quran has several modes of recitation. The closing sentence of this verse is recited in two ways: '... It is to Him that all things *tarje'u* (return)', or '… it is to Him that all things *turja'u* (are returned).' (*Al-'Imran:* 109) So in one recitation, the verb is in the active voice and in the other it is in the passive voice. In the same way, elsewhere in The Quran, we find the following: '... to Him you *tarje'un* (will return)', or it can be recited as: '... to Him you *turja'un* (will be returned)'. Based on these two different ways of recitation, we 'return' to Allah, or we 'are returned' to Him.

What is the difference between the two? *Tarje'un* (you will return) implies acceptance of our return to Him. The believer loves to meet Allah *Glorified is He* and longs to reach the Hereafter. He works doing righteous deeds in this worldly life because he aspires to the Afterlife and would love to return to His Lord, *the Almighty*. As for *turja'un* (you will be returned), the verb is in the passive voice since it applies to the disbelievers or sinners. Both would not like to proceed to the Hereafter, but it is not their choice. They are compelled to move to the Hereafter and receive their recompense, as Allah says: 'On that Day they will be thrust into the Fire of Hell.' (*at-Tur:* 13)

They are pushed into hell. They have no choice. Take this example [just for illustration, for Allah is above comparison]: A police officer would take hold of a criminal and push him into a cell. The criminal would not do that voluntarily. This is what the aforementioned verse refers to. Likewise, this is how we understand the words of Allah: '... to Him you *turja'un* (will be returned)'; they will be pushed with a compelling force to return to Allah and meet their final destiny. A true believer, contrarily, would love to hasten to his Afterlife, longing to see the Face of his Lord.

Now, let us contemplate the verse:

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُرۡجَعُ ٱلۡأُمُورُ ١٠٩

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God; it is to Him that all things return [109] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 109)

Someone may wonder if things are out of His control so that they would need to 'be returned' to Him. Let us answer this. When Allah *Glorified is He* created the world, He made it subservient to mankind for their own benefit and created in it the law of causality, i.e. when a person exhausts all possible means, Allah grants him the outcome he seeks. Other benefits are not dependent on any means; they are given to all people effortlessly. The sun rises for us all and spreads its light, warmth, and heat, due to Allah's order, for both believers and disbelievers. Allah does not command the sun to single out believers alone granting them the benefit of its rays. The air is available for believers and disbelievers to breathe, and water is there for all to drink. A disbeliever would reap the fruits when he cultivates a land; it is not an advantage confined to believers only.

Thus, the blessings Allah *Glorified is He* has created for us fall into two categories: one is made submissive to the service of all mankind, and the other is reached solely by effort. Whoever does the necessary effort will be granted such blessings, be they a believer or a disbeliever. Thus, in this life, Allah *Glorified is He* makes the means that lead to desirable results partly in the hands of His servants, and He is the holder of the complete control over all means, results, and the creation in its entirety. In the Hereafter, however, there are no causes or results: On that Day, all things 'return/are returned' to the control of Allah alone, and none of His servants will have possession of any authority. '"Who has control today?" "God, the One, the All Powerful..."' (*Ghafir:* 16).

In this world, Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that some people possess abundant means, servants and power because such is the nature of this worldly life. In the Hereafter, this will not be the case. Allah, by His Will and Benevolence, has given us power over causes and means that we can use to attain our ends in this worldly life. In the Hereafter, we will be stripped of any such power, and all things will be returned to Him alone: '"Who has control today?" "God, the One, the All Powerful..."' (*Ghafir:* 16).

Whoever takes pride in the transient power he has over causes and means should know that causes and means can bring him no benefit by themselves. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* has made them subservient to you. Some believe that physical strength is the source of activity and movement irrespective of the Creator Who has created it. Let them preserve that strength forever then if they can. Some are lured by their power and authority to the extent of forgetting about the Creator. Let them keep that authority forever if they can. No one has real power over anything. Allah *Glorified is He* has made the universe temporarily submissive to us in this life, but everything will return solely to Him in the Hereafter. Even though it may seem that certain things belong to you now, in the Hereafter, we all will be stripped of every power, and everything will be solely His. Allah *Glorified is He* has created all things from the beginning, and to Him all things will return in the end. Allah *the Exalted* says in the following verse:

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ
عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ ۗ وَلَوْ ءَامَنَ أَهْلُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَكَانَ
خَيْرًا لَّهُم ۚ مِّنْهُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ ٱلْفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

[Believers], you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. If the People of the Book had also believed, it would have been better for them. For although some of them do believe, most of them are lawbreakers [110] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 110)

What makes the Muslim community 'the best'? The best community must have particular attributes to deserve this superiority: '…You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110). If any of these attributes is lost, there is no superiority in such a case, for being the best community is dependent on specific conditions: enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah *Glorified is He*.

The words *ma'ruf* (right) and *munkar* (wrong) have special significance. The former is derived from the stem *'arafa* which implies acceptance and approval. It describes a thing that one likes, takes pride in or is pleased to have others know about. The other word *munkar* implies disapproval and describes a thing that people are ashamed of. Naturally, approval and acceptance are granted to deeds of righteousness; such are the deeds one would love others to know about. Likewise, evildoing is subject to condemnation, and an evildoer is often keen to conceal or deny whatever misdeeds he has done.

Acts of goodness naturally lead to approval and regard even of the corrupt. A thief would not declare his 'profession' among strangers and would even profess contempt towards it whenever it is mentioned. Theft is a detestable act even by those who commit it. Allah *Glorified is He* has created in our natural disposition approval for *ma'ruf* (what is right) and disapproval for *munkar* (what is wrong). A sound disposition would always be inclined towards doing good deeds and see them deserving of commendation, while, on the other hand, would always see wrongdoing worthy of despise, even if the person himself commits bad deeds.

Why does Allah mention 'faith in Him' after 'enjoining what is right' and 'forbidding what is wrong'? Some people do good only to please themselves. They enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, do acts of righteousness, give generously, establish nonprofit medical and economic organisations for the needy and the weak, etc. Still, they do all that driven by an inner personal feeling, not out of keenness to follow the guidance of Allah and to please Him. Such a person will receive no reward from Allah *Glorified is He* for whatever good deeds he does, as it is not faith in Him that motivates him. Good deeds without faith will not avail their doer in the least. Allah *Glorified is He* rewards those who believe in Him, and who have Him in their minds when they do good. Whoever does good for the sake of gallantry, fame and reputation will gain his reward of the same type of his motives. Since he works for self-satisfaction, praise or commemoration, his reward will be nothing but what he has worked for. This is what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had explained, ‘The first whose case will be decided on the Day of Judgment, will be a man who had died as a martyr. He will be brought forth. Allah will remind him of the blessings He had bestowed upon him in life, and the man will acknowledge them. Then, Allah will ask him, ‘What did you do to express gratitude for them?’ The man will reply, ‘I fought for Your cause till I was martyred.’ Allah will say, ‘You are lying. You fought so it would be said, "He is a brave warrior", and so was it said.’ Then, orders will be given to drag him on his face and throw him into hellfire.

The next will be a man who had pursued [Islamic] knowledge, taught it to others, and recited the Quran. He will be brought forth. Allah will remind him of the blessings He had bestowed upon him in life, and the man will acknowledge them. Then, Allah will ask him, ‘What did you do to express gratitude for them?’ The man will reply, ‘I acquired [Islamic] knowledge, taught it to others and recited the Quran for Your sake.’ Allah will say, ‘You are lying. You acquired [Islamic] knowledge so it would be said, "He is a learned scholar", and you recited the Quran so it would be said, "He is an able reciter [of the Quran]", and so was it said.’ Then, orders will be given to drag him on his face and throw him into hellfire. The next will be a man whom Allah had given plenty of wealth. He will be brought forth. Allah will remind him of the blessings He had bestowed upon him in life, and the man will acknowledge them. Then, Allah will ask him, ‘What did you do to express gratitude for them?’ The man will reply: ‘I left no way in which You like money to be spent without spending in it for Your sake.’ Allah will say, ‘You are lying. You did that so it would be said, "He is generous", and so was it said.’ Then, orders will be given to drag him on his face and throw him into Hellfire.’

The reward he receives for his good deeds is people’s praise. Allah *Glorified is He* will grant reward in the Hereafter only to those who devoted themselves to Him and sought to please Him only by their good deeds. Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* says: ‘Who speaks better than someone who calls people to Allah, does what is right and says, "I am one of those devoted to Allah"?’ (*Fussilat:* 33)

A believer does good deeds and declares that he does so because he is one of those who surrender to Allah *Glorified is He*. He does not do good driven by communist, existentialist, or philanthropic impulses. Disbelief is the most flagrant act of perfidy. Whatever good works a person does, while not acknowledging that Allah *Glorified is He* is his Lord, will inevitably be futile. A disbeliever denies the existence of his Creator. Let him then receive his reward from whomever for whom he worked.

Thus, as the verse illustrates, the best community is that which enjoins what is good, forbids what is wrong, and believes in Allah *Glorified is He*. But what makes them do good for other than Allah and disbelieve in Him? It is their coveting of disingenious honour. At the onset of Islam, the people of authority from among the adherents of other religions thought Islam would strip them of their privileges, powers, positions and prestigious benefits they had come to enjoy. They sacrificed Paradise for transient worldly advantages. They feared for their mundane interests that showed they had but very little sagacity, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... If the People of the Book had also believed, it would have been better for them. Although some of them do believe, most of them are lawbreakers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 110)

Had they believed, they would have earned the pleasure of Allah *Glorified is He* and would not have lost their authority and prestige either. They would have received their reward twice: once in this world and another in the Hereafter. They would have been amply rewarded both for having believed in the Prophet who was sent to them before and for accepting the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well. This is not a generalisation, though. Some of the people of the Book did believe, and Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states this fact in the Noble Quran: '... Although some of them do believe, most of them are lawbreakers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 110). Since disbelief is the opposite of belief, Allah would have said: '...Although some of them do believe, most of them are disbelievers.' However, He says: '... most of them are lawbreakers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 110)

It is Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* Who speaks, so every word is selected with utmost precision. Disbelieving, while having no prior knowledge of faith or the signs and proofs associated with it, is one thing yet disbelieving, while you know the fundamentals of faith, having read the Torah and the Gospel, is another thing.

People of the Book have read the Torah and the Gospel and have known the truth and clear signs of Allah *Glorified is He* from them. When they denied the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they thus added rebellion to disbelief and deserved to be called ‘lawbreakers’. The plausible outcome, or result of their recognition of the proofs and signs associated with the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was that they should have embraced faith. Their denial of his prophethood makes them, not only disbelievers, but also defiers of Allah; they had recognised the truth, but then denied it.

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Although some of them do believe, most of them are lawbreakers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 110), what then will the lawbreakers do with believers? The former constitutes the majority of the Jews and Christians, and they will sure plot against the believing minority and try to inflict harm and suffering upon them. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

لَن يَضُرُّوكُمْ إِلَّآ أَذًى ۖ وَإِن يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ يُوَلُّوكُمُ ٱلْأَدْبَارَ ثُمَّ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

they will not do you much harm: even if they come out to
fight you, they will soon turn tail; they will get no help [111]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 111)

Allah *the Exalted* reassures this minority that the disbelieving majority cannot do but a trifling harm to them. ‘These can never inflict more than a passing hurt on you...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 111). It is a promise filled with relief for the minority of the people of the Book who have believed, such as ‘Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* who converted from Judaism. Allah *Glorified is He* reassures them that the rebellious majority cannot inflict torment upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* reassures them that any attempt of the disbelieving majority to inflict harm upon them would not amount to anything more than a passing hurt.

What is the difference between *darar* (harm) and ‘*adha* (a passing hurt)? The latter causes pain at the moment of its occurrence then, this pain quickly dies away. As for harm, its pain continues, and its effect persists for some time. If one receives a simple blow, it hurts, but its pain subsides immediately. If the blow is powerful and causes bruising and swelling, this is what we mean by *darar* (harm). A passing hurt can be caused by a word; the disbelievers may mock the believers, insult them or utter words of disbelief. Such words do not cause the believers any real 'harm', rather, they simply offend their ears. Allah *Glorified is He* reassures believers that the people of disbelief cannot do much harm to them; all they can do is to cause them a trifling hurt that has no lasting effect.

Thus, the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'These can never inflict more than a passing hurt on you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 111) that they will never be able to hurt believers except with mere insults, taunts, and gestures that hurt their feelings or praise disbelief or by uttering vile words that faith does not have moral support. This is the most that the impious can do, but as to really harming believers, they are in no position to do so. Reality afterward comes in accordance with this divine reassurance; we see how Allah *Glorified is He* protects Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions *Allah be pleased with them* from disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* has made this statement: 'These can never inflict more than a passing hurt on you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 111), so it becomes a rule. Throughout the struggle between Muslims and disbelievers, it was clear the latter were not able to inflict more than a passing hurt on the people of faith.

Let us consider what happened to the tribes of Banu Qaynuqa', Banu Qurayza and Banu An-Nadir and what happened to the Jews of Khaybar: Did they inflict more than a passing hurt on the believers? They said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Let it not deceive you, Muhammad, that you have confronted feeble people who know nothing about war and defeated them. If you fight us, you will know who true men are!' That proved to be mere talk since history has kept an account of what has happened to them all: Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* inflicted a bitter defeat on them. No matter how hard they tried to inflict real harm on the believers, Allah *Glorified is He* did not allow them to. In light of this, He says: '…and if they fight against you, they succoured.' (*Al-'Imran:* 111). If disbelievers attempt to inflict real harm on believers, they will turn out to be too weak to do so; they will only turn their backs and flee before the believers, so their defeat will be inevitable.

In the Arabic language, the conditional particle '*en'* (literally 'if') causes omission of the letter '*nun*' (literally 'n') from the verbs in the subordinate and the main clauses when these verbs fall under the category of present verb forms suffixed with pronouns referring to the second or third persons: '…and en (if) they *yuqatelukum* (fight against you), they *yuwallukum* (will turn their backs upon you) [in flight]…' (*Al-'Imran:* 111).

The verb in the subordinate clause *'yuqatelukum'* is originally '*yuqatelu(n)akum'*, but the '*n*' has been omitted for the reason explained above. Likewise, the verb in the main clause '*yuwallukum*' is originally *'yuwallu(n)akum'*, but the '*n*' has been omitted for the reason explained above. When another clause is connected to the conditional sentence with the conjunction '*wa*' (literally 'and'), the verb in that clause should also be without '*n*' if it falls under the same category of present verbs, since it follows the same rule as the two verbs in the conditional sentence.

Nevertheless, the verb in that clause is written in the verse without omission of the '*n*': '…and then they will not be *yunsaru(n)* (succoured).' (*Al-'Imran:* 111). Apparently, this is a breach of the rule established in the Arabic language which is bound to suggest to the Arab mind that there is a special reason for this since the speaker is Allah Who is far elevated above error. Why then is the letter '*n*' kept and not omitted in the verb '*yunsaru(n)*'? According to the Arabic grammatical rule explained above, the verse should read as follows: '…and en (if) they *yuqatelukum* (fight against you), they *yuwallukum* (will turn their backs upon you) [in flight], and then they will not be *yunsaru* (succoured)', with the '*n*' omitted in all three verbs. Were the verse written this way, with the verb in the third clause '*yunsaru(n)*', it would mean this verb falls within the scope of the conditional sentence and is dependent on the occurrence of the condition in them. Were this to be the case, all three clauses would have been referring to a single situation, a single battle and describing the results to be expected in that single battle only.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* in the third clause means to state a general truth, not dependent on the conditional sentence or occurrence of the condition stated in it. Reflect upon this verse: '…then they will not be *yunsaru(n)* (succoured).' (*Al-'Imran:* 111) This wise statement incorporates a matter beyond the realm of the preceding conditional sentence; it does not take the form of the two verbs in the conditional sentence since it does not follow them in meaning and is not dependent on occurrence of the condition involved in them. It is a ruling from Allah *Glorified is He* that disbelievers will never be aided, whether or not they fight against the believers. The clause after the conditional sentence refers to a separate issue, a truth which is not dependent on the condition. The disbelievers will not be aided in any way, whether or not they fight against the believers just because they have disbelieved in Allah *Glorified is He*.

Now that we have examined the sentence as a whole, let us examine it more closely, and we will find in it a new meaning. In Arabic, '*thumma*' (later afterward) and '*fa*' (immediately after) are both particles implying order and succession, yet the latter implies 'immediate succession'. Therefore, one might assume that the verse should read instead: '…they will turn their backs upon you [in flight], *fa* (and immediately after) they will not be succoured.' (*Al-'Imran:* 111) That would mean disbelievers would not be able to defeat you if they were to attack you again immediately after their defeat. However, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the particle '*thumma*' which denotes deferred, not immediate, succession. By this, Allah *Glorified is He* means disbelievers will not defeat you, O, believers, even if they take time to prepare for another battle to snatch victory from you after they had fled defeated from the earlier battle. Using the particle '*thumma*' (later afterward) denotes an open-ended consequence, namely, defeat of the disbelievers whether they fight again immediately or later after fleeing. The particle 'fa', on the other hand *may* be used to denote, or imply, a direct consequence that immediately succeeds the earlier action. The particle '*fa*' is used in such contexts of the Quran as in the following verse: 'Then He causes him to die, *fa* (and immediately after) assigns to him a grave.' (*'Abasa:* 21). Use of the particle '*fa*' is appropriate in this verse because entering the grave comes directly after death. Look also at the verse that follows immediately after the aforementioned one:'*Thumma* (later) when He pleases, He will raise him to life again.' (*'Abasa:* 22).

Again, *fa* denotes, or implies, immediate succession, while *thumma* implies deferred succession. The use of '*thumma*' in the verse we are discussing implies that disbelievers will not gain victory over the people of faith, neither sooner and nor later. They are doomed to be defeated regardless of when they choose to fight against believers again. '…And *thumma* (later) they will not be succoured.' (*Al-'Imran:* 111). If Allah had said, '... they will not gain victory', the verse would not involve such strong emphasis. Why? 'Succoured' implies that disbelievers will not succeed by their own means, and nor will they be aided by any other means so as to achieve victory.

'…And *thumma* (later), they will not be succoured' is a declaration that is a lasting fact, which is not confined to just the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but will continue forever. The disbelievers may never gain victory over the believers, either by their own means or through the assistance from others.

Improper understanding might lead a person to think that an error occured in the verb form in the aforementioned clause, but we have already explained why the verb *'yunsaru'* (succoured; aided) comes in this form instead of '*yunsaru(n)*'. It is a promise from Allah *Glorified is He* which gives reassurance and security to the Muslim nation that disbelievers may never, by any means gain victory over them. As we have noted also, this expression is more accurate than '... they will not gain victory', for 'gain victory' implies that they may not be able to defeat the believers by their own means, whereas '…they will not be succoured' implies that they may never achieve victory even if they are joined by allies who attempt to succour them so that they may defeat the believers. Thus, whether by themselves or through assistance from allies, disbelievers may never gain victory against believers.

O, Muslims, know then if disbelievers gain victory over you, whether by their own doing or by the help from others, it means you do not abide by the guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* in your fight against them. Someone might ask: how do the Jews defeat us, while we are Muslims?! To this, I reply with pertinent questions: Do we presently follow the guidance and spirit of Islam? Do we have firm faith in our hearts that we put into action, abiding by the ordinance of Allah *Glorified is He*? Do you think Allah *Glorified is He* has let you down by causing your defeat? Do you consider your battle an Islamic one in the first place?

The answer is a resounding'No!' We are motivated to fight for anything else but Islam. We give precedence to socio-cultural prejudice, nationalism, and ethnic affiliation over faith. So how is it plausible that we hope for aid from Allah? We have no right to ask for His aid unless we enter into our battle as His troops who hold fast to His guidance and fight in His cause. Defeat results from straying from the path of Allah for He has guaranteed victory and predominance for those who follow His path: 'And the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.' (*as-Saffat:* 173)

If we do not win a given fight, be certain then that we are not true supporters of His cause. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

ضُرِبَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلذِّلَّةُ أَيۡنَ مَا ثُقِفُوٓاْ إِلَّا بِحَبۡلٖ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَحَبۡلٖ مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَبَآءُو
بِغَضَبٖ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَضُرِبَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡمَسۡكَنَةُۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ يَكۡفُرُونَ
بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَقۡتُلُونَ ٱلۡأَنۢبِيَآءَ بِغَيۡرِ حَقّٖۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَواْ وَّكَانُواْ يَعۡتَدُونَ ١١٢

and, unless they hold fast to a lifeline from God and from man- kind, they are overshadowed by vulnerability wherever they are found. They have drawn God's wrath upon themselves. They are overshadowed by weakness, too, because they have persistently dis- believed in God's revelation and killed prophets without any right, all because of their disobedience and boundless transgression [112] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 112)

The Arabic word '*dureba*' (cleave) is also used in the context of money. It refers to making coins by stamping metal. A blank disc is made when an image is struck on it. The softer metal used to make the coin is poured into a mold made of a harder metal, and then this image is impressed on it. In this context, the verb *dureba* means 'impressing'. The blank disc is forced to take the shape of the mold and cannot resist it. The images in the mold are impressed onto the disc that cannot be formed in any other way.

Thus, '*dureba*' implies forcing or coercion. Accordingly, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*Abasement durebat* (is made to cleave) to them,...' it means that abasement has been forced on them just as an image in a mold is impressed on a blank disc to make a coin: They can never be rid of such abasement just as the metal disc of a coin can never be separated from the shape and image impressed on it. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...wherever they are found', which means abasement will follow them wherever they go. Still, there is an exception to this. What is this exception?

We find it in the words of Allah *the Exalted* '… except under a covenant with Allah and a covenant with men…' (*Al-'Imran:* 112). They will not suffer from indignity and disgrace when they are under a covenant of protection from Allah, or from strong people. When they were under a covenant from Allah first and a covenant from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after his arrival in Medina, they were safe. When they breached that covenant, what happened? They were overshadowed by ignominy again.

Therefore, they were safe so long as they kept their covenant with Allah *Glorified is He* but when they betrayed it, Allah *Glorified is He* deprived them from His protection. So, they ignited the conflict that we all know about and were paid their due. That is what happened to Banu Qaynuqa', Banu An-Nadir, Banu Qurayza and the Jews of Khaybar.

Before that affliction, they were under protection from Allah *Glorified is He*. We know that the first thing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did when he entered Medina was build his Mosque, and he also entered into a treaty with the Jews. They lived in peace until they violated the treaty, so Allah *Glorified is He* punished them by indignity and vulnerability, and they were expelled from Medina. This is how the words of Allah *Glorified is He* manifested themselves: 'Abasement is made to cleave to them wherever they are found, except under a covenant with Allah and a covenant with men….' (*Al-'Imran:* 112)

They were granted protection from Allah *Glorified is He* through the covenant they entered into with the one who was in authority: Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* They are always allowed to enter into such covenants with whoever has authority over Muslims at times when the doctrine of Islam is the ruling constitution. That exception, in fact, shows that they have no inherent strength; they are always overshadowed by vulnerability and ignominy unless they seek strength by making a bond with Allah *Glorified is He* and a bond with people. This is also evidenced by the state of things during our present time: The Jews always need to live under the protection of others.

When we fought Israel in the October war, we inflicted a pending defeat on them until the USA intervened with its military force. On that occasion, the Egyptian president at the time said, ‘I do not have the power to fight the USA.’ If the war had been between us and Israel alone, their power would have fallen short of victory. They have no strength of their own and can only attain dignity when they are under a bond of protection from Allah *Glorified is He* and a bond with people. Allah *Glorified is He* says about them after that: ‘…and they have become deserving of wrath from Allah, and humiliation is made to cleave to them…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 112). It is worth noting that *adh-dhellatu* (abasement; disgrace) has an exception, for they may be spared abasement and disgrace if they are under a bond with Allah *Glorified is He* or a bond with people. As for *al-maskanatu* (humiliation; weakness), it has no exception, and reflects what Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Jews in another chapter of the Noble Quran: ‘…And so *adh-dhellatu* and *al-maskanatu* overshadowed them, and they earned the burden of Allah’s condemnation…’ (*al-Baqara:* 61)

The fact that the Jews cannot be spared *al-maskanatu* (humiliation or weakness) under any exception is due to the fact that it is an inner quality, associated with their own selves, and therefore, cannot be compensated by any external assistance. Allah *Glorified is He* has willed that they will forever feel inner humiliation and misery even at times when they seem to gain apparent power through the help of their allies. *Adh-dhellatu* (abasement, ignominy) is an external matter that can be gained through external assistance, but *al-maskanatu* (humiliation, weakness) is intrinsic to them, so no bond or apparent power can save them from it. Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed them no chance to be spared the feeling of humiliation and weakness even through a bond with Him or a bond with people. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘... and they have become deserving of Wrath from Allah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 112). Has anyone ever seen a greater manifestation of Allah’s Wrath than the Jews being doomed to be dispersed throughout the earth? Let us read these words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth…’ (*al-A’raf:* 168).

The one place that accommodated them at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Arabian Peninsula, especially Yathrib (present-day Medina). They settled there for a time, and they had scholarly superiority over other communities, which stemmed from their being people of the Book, as well as having economic and military superiority. It is surprising how they returned the favour to the one place where they found a home! The thing that made them go to Yathrib was what they found in the Torah: a prophet would come in this place, and they must follow him. Allah has mentioned this obligation in The Quran, as we have previously explained: ‘Allah took a pledge from the prophets, saying, "If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming what you have been given. You must believe in him and support him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?" They said, "We do." He said, "Then bear witness, and I too will bear witness."’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 81)

This pledge meant that the Messengers of Allah *peace be upon them* took it upon themselves to deliver their Message to the communities to whom they were sent and to inform the people of faith who followed them that a messenger would come to whom Allah *Glorified is He* will reveal the Perfect Message. The Jews did not go to Yathrib except out of hope that they would meet the expected Prophet, believe in him and fight in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He* against disbelievers. Still, what happened? Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* tells us about what they did: ‘…Even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 89).

Thus, the Jews earned the Wrath of Allah *Glorified is He* and He has caused them to be forever doomed to humiliation, misery and weakness. What was the reason? Allah *Glorified is He* gives us the answer in the Quran: ‘…This is because they disbelieved in the communications [revelations] of Allah and slew the Prophets unjustly…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 112). They have denied all the miraculous signs Allah sent them, of which some are mentioned in this noble verse: ‘And We caused the clouds to comfort you with their shade and sent down unto you manna and quails, [saying,] "Partake of the good things which We have provided for you as sustenance"….’ (*al-Baqara:* 57)

Numerous were the signs Allah *Glorified is He* sent to the children of Israel, and immediately following is another one mentioned in the words of Almighty Allah: 'Remember when We took your pledge and made the mountain tower high above you, and said, "Hold fast to what We have given you and bear its contents in mind so that you may be conscious of Allah."' (*al-Baqara:* 63)

Before their eyes, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the rock with his staff, and water sprang forth from it so that they could drink: 'Remember when Musa (Moses) prayed for water for his people and We said to him, "Strike the rock with your staff." Twelve springs gushed out, and each group knew its drinking place…' (*al-Baqara:* 60).

Despite the signs they were sent, they disbelieved and even killed the Prophets when having no right to do so. The Jews accused their Prophets of lying and slew them, so Allah *Glorified is He* punished them for their wrongdoing: '…This is because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits.' (*Al-'Imran:* 112) Their rebellion caused ignominy to cleave to them Allah's Wrath to befall them, and humiliation and weakness to overshadow them forever. This punishment has come as a result of their transgression of the limits of Allah. He *the Most High* has sent punishment down on them as a retribution for what they have done.

To understand this, let us recite these words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before: for having frequently debarred others from God's path.' (*an-Nisa':* 160)

Allah *Glorified is He* forbade them lawful enjoyments because of the wrong they did to themselves. They sought pleasure through things Allah had forbidden, so He prohibited them from enjoying lawful things. Thus the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* comes contrary to that of whoever abandons His ordinance.

As we have said before, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in the Quran the truth about what happened to them. However, He does not include them in a statement that groups them together. Some of them thought of embracing the Message sent down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and some of them did believe with him. Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Justice differentiates between those who considered embracing faith and those who insisted on disbelief. Thus, He *Glorified is He* says:

لَيْسُوا۟ سَوَآءً ۗ مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ أُمَّةٌ قَآئِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ
ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ءَانَآءَ ٱلَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

But they are not all alike. There are some among the People of the Book who are upright, who recite God's revelations during the night, who bow down in worship [113]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 113)

Therefore, some of them were upright, but which of the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* did they recite? They recited the verses of the Perfect Book: the Noble Quran. Now, why does Allah *Glorified is He* say: '…prostrating themselves...'? In prayer we recite the Quran during prostration? To understand this, we need to know that the Jews do not observe the Night time prayer ('*Isha*'), and to give them an Islamic identifying mark, Allah *Glorified is He* says about them: '…prostrating themselves', thus identifying them as people who perform the Nighttime prayer ('*Isha*') which is enjoined on Muslims. As long as they observe the prayer of Muslims and prostrate themselves, they are Muslims. Here is another meaning we may infer from the words of Allah *Glorified is He* '…Prostrating themselves....' Salat (Prayer) is a symbol of solemnity and submissiveness to Allah *Glorified is He* and prostration represents the peak of such solemnity and submissiveness in prayer. As long as they perform the prayer, they must, therefore, recite the Quran throughout the night, in total submission to the One Who has revealed it. We know that one of the best acts of worship in Islam and one of the well-known acts of *Sunnah* (Teachings of Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him*) is recitation of the Quran at night and observing *tahajjud* (voluntary night prayer; night vigil). It is one of the acts of worship that elevates a Muslim to the state of utmost devotion (*ihsan*).

The Arabic wording of the verse uses the expression *ana'* that encompasses every time of the night, not a specific part of it. The believers do not all recite the Quran at the same time of the night. Each chooses the time that suits him best; it is as though believers were dividing up the night between them so the

Quran would be recited throughout every part of it. Those who aspire to the station of utmost devotion (*ihsan*) not only observe the mandatory nighttime Salah ('Isha') which takes but one part of the night, rather, they pray throughout the night, above what is mandatory. They do not tire of reciting the Quran because they want to attain the state of utmost devotion (*ihsan*). They have found that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord Who should be worshiped with earnest effort and sincerity; as a result, they exert themselves in worship above what He has enjoined on them. It is as though they said to themselves, 'O, Allah, You have enjoined on me five daily prayers, but I find this too little in my duty to You.' That was what some of the people of the Book did; they were not satisfied with sheerly announcing their conversion to Islam, but they let their faith manifest itself in such a special act of worship: observing voluntary prayer throughout the night. They loved having the thought that these words of Allah *Glorified is He* apply to them: 'The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs. They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the ihsan (goodness; utmost devotion) they did before.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16)

What is the meaning of *ihsan*? It is to have such firm faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and love for Him that you exert yourself in worship above what He has ordained on you. Allah *Glorified is He* has enjoined on us five daily mandatory prayers (*salat*), yet some perform the prayer twenty times a day, for example. We are commanded to observe fasting *(sawm*) just one month of the year, yet some of us do not let a month pass by without observing fasting some days in it.

Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to pay a fixed amount of poor due (*zakat)* yet some of us give so generously going beyond the prescribed amount. *Hajj* (Pilgrimage) is ordained once in a lifetime, for whoever can afford to observe it, yet some of us perform *hajj* several times. When a servant wants to reach the station of utmost devotion (*ihsan*), the way to that is to maximize good deeds, by doing more and more of the acts of worship Allah *Glorified is He* has enjoined on us. However, an important point must be said: We are not permitted to invent our own ways of worshiping Allah *Glorified is He*; rather, we exert ourselves more in observing worship of the same kind as Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained.

To reiterate, people of the Book who believed in Allah *Glorified is He* and whom He praises in the Quran did not just embrace Islam, but they showed utmost keenness to do their duty to Allah. They prayed throughout the night and recited The Quran, aiming to reach the station of utmost devotion (ihsan) and acting upon the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Sleeping only little at night.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17)

They performed voluntary prayer throughout much of the night, sleeping only little. Just as we look at the sky and admire the light of its stars, so do we appear to the dwellers up there when we strive to reach the station of utmost devotion (*ihsan*) by praying at night. They too look down at the earth and see spots of light shining brightly on it. Thus, they inquire about those earthly stars, and the answer comes to them, 'These are the houses whose inhabitants pray throughout the night and prostrate themselves to Allah.' Every such house shines like a star to the dwellers of the sky. In description of these diligent worshipers, Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 18) Does Allah command His servants to pray throughout the night and sleep just little? No, but those who aspire to the elevated station of utmost devotion, i.e. (*ihsan*) do so. As for ordinary Muslims, they perform the Nighttime *Salat ('Isha'*), and when dawn comes, they perform the Dawn *Salat* enjoined upon them. Only those who hope to attain the station of utmost devotion *(ihsan*) sleep only little and spend the night in worship, thus deserving to be praised by Almighty Allah in the Noble Quran:

'The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs. They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before: sleeping only little at night, praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness, giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19)

Preciseness of the Quranic language is truly worth contemplating. When the Quran speaks about the station of utmost devotion (*ihsan*), it tells us its seekers to give their money to those who are in need, yet the amount they give is not specified. When the Quran speaks about the station of faith (*iman*) which comes next after that of *ihsan*, it says: 'Who give a due share of their wealth to beggars and the deprived, who believe in the Day of Judgement.' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24-26)

He who aspires the station of faith (*iman*) might restrict his giving to the limits of the prescribed *zaka*t (poor dues), or a little above it, but he who hopes to attain the higher station of utmost devotion (*ihsan*) would set no limit to what he gives to those in need. So we know that people of the Book are not all alike, for some of them have entered Islam right through the door of *ihsan* (utmost devotion) which is proven by the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Not all of them are alike; a party of the people of the Scripture stand for the right. They recite the Verses of Allah during the hours of the night, prostrating themselves in prayer.' (*Al-'Imran:* 113). Allah *Glorified is He* thus emphasises that people of the Book are not all encompassed in His words: '…This is because they disbelieved in the communications [revelations] of Allah and slew the Prophets unjustly; this is because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits.' (*Al-'Imran:* 112). People of the Book are not all the same, so the aforementioned verse does not apply to them all; a group from the people of the Book pray, recite The Quran, and prostrate themselves to Allah *Glorified is He* throughout the night. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* describes this category of the people of the Book as *qa'ema* (upright). In Arabic, *qa'em* (standing) is the opposite of *qa'ed* (sitting up); *jales* means 'sitting down'. It is different from *qa'ed* in the sense that it means changing from a reclining position to a sitting position, so one who is sitting (*jales*) has been reclining and then he sat up.

Yet when we say someone is qa'ed, it means he has been standing then he sat down. Sitting down in prayer is comfortable, unlike standing; we know Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would stand up in prayer until his feet swelled up. When one is standing, all his weight is on his feet, but when one sits, he distributes his weight all over the lower part of his body. When Allah *Glorified is He* describes some of the people of the Book by saying: '... a party of the people of the Scripture are *ummatun qa'ema* (a nation that stands for the right)...' (*Al-'Imran:* 113). This means that they have accepted the responsibility of performing their obligations with complete sincerity, while observing prayer constantly and submissively. Allah *Glorified is He* continues to describe them in the following verse:

يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِ وَيَأۡمُرُونَ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَيَنۡهَوۡنَ عَنِ
ٱلۡمُنكَرِ وَيُسَٰرِعُونَ فِي ٱلۡخَيۡرَٰتِۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ١١٤

who believe in God and the Last Day, who order what is right and forbid what is wrong, who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous [114]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 114)

By their belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Last Day, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, they are described with the same attributes with which Allah *Glorified is He* describes the best community that has ever been brought forth from mankind, the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* This group of the people of the Book embraced faith wholeheartedly from the beginning and aspired to reach the station of utmost devotion (*ihsan*). Their diligence testifies that they were truly awaiting the advent of the new prophet. Once the new prophet came, they believed in his message and became part of the best community ever brought forth for humankind. Allah *Glorified is He* then says about them: '…who yusare' una (are quick) to do good deeds….' (*Al-'Imran:* 114) This bears resemblance to His address to the believers: '*Sare'u* (be quick to seek) your Lord's forgiveness and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth prepared for the righteous.' (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

The following two Arabic nouns have almost the same meaning, but with different connotations; *sur'ah* (from which the above-mentioned two words are derived), which means to do something quickly, and the word '*ajalah* which means 'rushing'. They both agree in meaning with respect to performance of an action in the shortest possible time, such as a person covering a certain distance from one place to another within a certain time. The difference between the two words becomes clearer by considering their opposites: The opposite of *sur'ah* is *ebta*' (dawdling), while the opposite of *'ajalah* is anah (prudence; discretion). For example, to make a decision with *anah* is to take your time and think about the matter carefully before deciding. So *sur'ah* (quickness) is praiseworthy, whereas its opposite *ebta'* (dawdling) is not. *'Ajalah* (rushing) is blameworthy, whereas its opposite *anah* (prudence; caution) is praiseworthy. In other words, *sur'ah* is to advance quickly when quickness is required, whereas 'ajalah is to rush, or to do hurriedly what should be done with patience and caution. For this reason, the Arabic proverb goes: 'Rushing brings regret: Be cautious, be safe.' In the aforementioned verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*Sare'u* (be quick to seek) your Lord's forgiveness...' (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

In the verse we are discussing, He says: '…who *yusare'una* (are quick) to do good deeds.…' (*Al-'Imran:* 114) which means that whenever they have a chance to do good, they seize it; they advance with quickness when it is appropriate to do. They know that life is short and that there is no guarantee for a person that his life will continue to do a good deed he intends. Realizing this, we must be quick to do good deeds and avoid procrastination. 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz *Allah be pleased with him* was taking his usual siesta, and his guard prevented people from waking the Caliph up. The son of 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz approached and said to the guard, 'I want to talk to the Commander of the Believers this instant.' The guard would not allow him and said, 'This is the time when he rests, and he rests at no other time of the day or night, so leave him to rest.' Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz *Allah be pleased with him* heard the noise and asked the guard about it. The guard said, 'It is your son. He wants to talk to you, but I am asking him not to do so that you can rest.' Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz said to the guard, 'Let him come in.' When he entered his father's place, the son said, 'Father, I heard that you will give such-and-such estate as an endowment for Allah's cause.'

'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I will, God willing. Tomorrow we will settle this.' The son asked, 'Will God preserve you until tomorrow?' Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz *Allah be pleased with him* said, with tears in his eyes: 'Praise is to Allah Who has given me children who aid me in doing good!'

The son wanted his father to be quick to do that good deed. When you feel the desire to do a good deed, do it without delay; you do not know what will prevent you from doing it if you procrastinate. If an opportunity to do good appears, seize it before you lose it. The son of Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz was keen on helping his father to do good without delay. Contrarily, presently, a son would sue his father for interdiction to prevent him from giving money to charity, thus ignoring the words of Almighty Allah: '…who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous.' (*Al-'Imran:* 114). Therefore, the following question arises: Why are they among the righteous? The answer requires a little reflection. We say things like, 'So-and-so is a righteous man, or so-and-so is an evil man.' Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen mankind to be His vicegerent and has made them fit to carry out this responsibility. Allah *Glorified is He* has created Adam and made him and his progeny vicegerents on earth. When a man who is righteous and able sees a good or beneficial thing, he would leave it either as it is or increase its goodness or benefit. An evil person would rather spoil what is good and would not do what renders anything better or more beneficial.

Suppose a man found a well that people get water from. If he were an ordinary person, not one with strong will, he would leave the well intact. If he were evil, he would perhaps fill the well with sand to make it unfit for use. If he were a person of both righteousness and strong will, he would try to be creative in serving people who get water from the well. He would, for example, build a tank, draw water from the well with a lever, and/or install pipes to carry water from the tank to houses so that people would get water directly at their homes. A man with righteousness and good will would use his intellect to maximise the well's benefit.

So a man is described as righteous and able when he is fit to be a vicegerent on earth and work for its prosperity by leaving beneficial things intact increasing their beneficence or trying to rectify anything that needs rectifying. A righteous and able man works based on deep knowledge, so he does not do any work that gives a superficial benefit, which then causes harm in the course of time. For example, the inventors of pesticides thought they managed to combat infection in crops, but they did not know they have actually done more harm to agriculture and the environment than good, if any good at all. Later, they changed their minds and started warning people against using these pesticides. Every action must be based on sound scientific principles, so let us recite these words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Do not follow blindly what you do not know to be true: ears, eyes, and heart. You will be questioned about all these.' (*al-Isra':* 36). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Say

[Prophet], "Shall we tell you who has the most to lose by their actions: whose efforts in this world are misguided, even when they think they are doing good work?' (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

So Allah *Glorified is He* praises the people of the Book who believed with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and describes them perfectly in the Quran. They recite the Quran throughout the night, prostrate themselves, believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Last Day, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and are quick in doing good deeds. Then, the True Lord judges them generally to be righteous and able and worthy to be vicegerents on earth. After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَن يُكْفَرُوهُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾

and they will not be denied [the reward] for whatever good deeds they do: God knows exactly who is conscious of Him [115] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 115)

Allah *the Exalted* will give them fair recompense. He is the True Lord Who denies no one the rewards for their good deeds. The good that they do will not be effaced or concealed from people. He *the Exalted and Almighty* has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him. A person might do things that no one sees, but Allah *Glorified is He* watches over everyone and gives everyone their due reward for their deeds. After this, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the state of disbelievers by saying:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَن تُغْنِىَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَٰلُهُمْ وَلَآ أَوْلَـٰدُهُم مِّنَ
ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا ۖ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَـٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۚ هُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾

As for those who disbelieve, neither their possessions nor their children will help them against God – they will be companions in the Fire, there to remain [116] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 116)

The disbelievers assume that their possessions and children will avail them against Allah *Glorified is He*. They do not see things the way they are; possessions and children are rather meant for trial not rescue, as Allah

Glorified is He says: ‘And know that your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation, and that with Allah there is a tremendous reward.’ (*al-An‘am:* 28)

The fact that possessions and children are trials, does not mean they are things to shun or detest; trials are not detestable in their own right, but they are only tests, and a person may endure a trial and succeed in the test. One may have wealth but is not deluded by its lure and so uses it for doing good. One may have children, but instead of taking improper pride in them, he teaches them to follow the guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* and raises them according to religious ethics. Any matter that is meant as a trial, is not necessarily detestable in itself; rather remember that it is only a test, and one must do his best to succeed in it. A trial is destructive only when one falters and gives in to weakness instead of facing it with strength and patience. The disbelievers do not pass the test of possession and children, but they surrender to the lure. The Day will come when they possess neither wealth nor children. Even if they had wealth, it will avail them nothing in the Hereafter and each of their children will be occupied with their own selves, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘People, be mindful of your Lord and fear a day when no parent will take the place of their child, nor a child take the place of their parent, in any way. Allah’s promise is true, so do not let the present life delude you, nor let the Deceiver delude you about Allah.’ (*Luqman:* 33).

Everyone will have something to deal with which will distract them from everyone else on the Day of Resurrection. In the life of this world, disbelievers are busy with their possessions and their children. Reflect upon the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘...neither their possessions nor their children will help them against Allah...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 116) What does ‘rich’ mean, then? A rich person is he who is in no need of anyone else, who does not need anyone to provide for him. Therefore, reflect upon this Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Richness is not having many possessions, but it is contentment of the soul.’‘Possessions’ refer to the material objects of this worldly life, whether one has many or only a few of them. Indeed pleasures of this world are like salty water: The more you drink, the thirstier you feel! A disbeliever is doomed to self-deception; he cheats himself and lets the temptations of wealth and children dazzle him forgetting that this life proceeds by the ordinance of He Who possesses all dominion in Whose Hand is disposition of all affairs. He considers life something other than its true purpose; he does not realize that the pride and pleasure associated with wealth and children are but sheer deception, for a person can live his life until the end without wealth or children. Whoever is deluded in this life by wealth and children will come on the Day of Resurrection only to find that what had pleased him in his worldly life has turned into a source of sorrow and remorse in the end. Whenever he remembers that wealth and children distanced him from preparing for that Day, anguish and regret eat his heart.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about him who is lured by wealth and children, while disbelieving in Him: '... they will be companions in the Fire, there to remain.' (*Al-'Imran:* 116). This is the end for those who fall into self-deception and let wealth or children captivate them.

What does it mean that they will be 'companions' in (literally: of) the fire? First, we must understand the meaning of 'companion'. If we say that so-and-so is someone's companion, it means he is close to him, but where does this companionship begin? It begins with the first person, while it is for the second person to either accept or reject this companionship, an attitude which may be revealed to us or concealed from us. Companions of the fire cannot conceal their regret; they blame and condemn themselves for choosing Hell as their company and final destination.

In this life, a person would commit a sin and receive his due punishment as a result; therefore, we would find him rebuking himself and admitting that he deserves to be punished for what he has done. Likewise, a disbeliever, when thrown into hellfire on the Day of Resurrection, will regret his wrongdoing and say to himself, 'I deserve what I am suffering! It is all my own doing!' Hell will say, in reply to the question of its Lord *the Exalted:* 'We shall say to Hell on that day, "Are you full?" and it will reply, "Are there no more?"' (*Qaf:* 30)

In the Hereafter, a disbeliever's organs that he used in sinning will hate him and curse him. He has control of them in this life, and they are submissive to his will, but on the Day of Judgment, their owner will be submissive to their will. An oppressor would order his hand to strike the weak with hard blows, and his hand would just obey because Allah *Glorified is He* has created it to be submissive to his will. A disbeliever would command his tongue to utter a word of disbelief, and his tongue would not defy him. In this worldly life, one's organs are submissive to his will, but the situation will be reversed on the Day of Resurrection. A disbeliever will be stripped of his free will, and his organs will be set free. He cannot force them on that Day to do what they dislike. Organs will rebel against their master and testify against him before Allah *Glorified is He*. Someone might say that it looks as though his organs will testify against themselves! It is they that will be punished! However, they will accept punishment as a means to have their sins expiated.

Such will be their final destiny: '... they will be companions in the Fire, there to remain.' (*Al-'Imran:* 116). If you see disbelievers doing good in this life, beware of being deceived. Instead, remind yourself that such goodness must not deceive you into thinking they will have a reward in the Hereafter. Disbelief renders every effort futile. Allah *Glorified is He* does not accept the deeds of those who do not believe in Him, even if such deeds are not rejected by people. Allah *Glorified is He* says about them in the following verse:

مَثَلُ مَا يُنفِقُونَ فِي هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا كَمَثَلِ رِيحٖ فِيهَا صِرٌّ أَصَابَتۡ حَرۡثَ قَوۡمٖ
ظَلَمُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ فَأَهۡلَكَتۡهُۚ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَلَٰكِنۡ أَنفُسَهُمۡ يَظۡلِمُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

And whatever they give away in this life will be nullified: a frosty wind strikes and destroys the harvest of people who have wronged themselves. It was not God who wronged them; they wronged themselves [117] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 117)

Allah *Glorified is He* likens what the disbelievers spend in this worldly life to *serr* (a wind with intense cold) that smites the seed produce of a people who have done injustice to themselves. In the Arabic language, the root made of *sad (s)* and *ra*' (r) denotes severity or clamour, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, describing the wife of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham): 'Thereupon his wife approached [the guests] with sarrah (a loud cry), and struck her face [in astonishment] and exclaimed: "A barren old woman [like me]!"' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 29)

She cried out due to her state of disbelief in the news because she was very old and barren so naturally unable to conceive. Another example is seen is the following verse: 'And as for the ʿAd – they were destroyed by *sarsar* (a stormwind) furiously raging.' (*al-Haqqa:* 6). *Sarsar* is a wind that carries frost and makes a roaring sound.

Reflect upon the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '...a frosty wind....' It means the wind has caused the frosty weather to be prevalent. Frost may be confined to a certain place, but when the wind blows, it carries this frost from one place to another and widens the scope of the area affected and harmed by the frosty weather. What would a frosty wind do? It can cause disasters, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…A frosty wind strikes and destroys the harvest of people who have wronged themselves….' (*Al-'Imran:* 117) The word used in the Arabic text of the verse is *harth* which literally means 'tilth' but is used here to refer to 'harvest'. We know the word means 'produce', but Allah *Glorified is He* refers to it with the word *harth* (tilth) so we realise that if we do not sow, we will not reap fruits. Allah *Glorified is He* says : 'Have you ever considered the seed which you tahruthun (cast upon the soil)? Is it you who cause it to grow – or are We the cause of its growth? [For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff, and you would be left to wonder [and to lament].' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-65)

Thus, tempestuous wind destroys tilth (which is a necessary action for the growth of crops). Tilth is the turning of land to make it soft so that weak roots can grow in it and be strong enough to penetrate it, making it possible for us to take sustenance from it. These roots are able, due to the softness of the tilled earth, to take in the air necessary for them to grow.

The condition of such a land destroyed by frosty wind is like that of disbelievers who spend their money in good ways; however, whatever they spend will be in vain and will avail them nothing before Allah *Glorified is He*. He illustrates this when He says (and true are His words): '... A frosty wind strikes and destroys the harvest of people who have wronged themselves. It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.' (*Al-'Imran:* 117).

This is the result of spending with an intention directed to other than Allah *Glorified is He*. Whatever is spent is fruitless in the end, exactly like tilth, in which a fierce, frosty wind has blown on and destroyed. The Arabic word sarr we have already introduced conveys the meanings of severity, chill, and violence. Hatem At-Tai, the famous generous Arab *Allah be pleased with him* once said to his slave: Light the fire, for this night is bleak, and the wind, O son, is too icy for the weak. Let a passerby catch a glimpse of your fire. Bring a guest to us, and you will be set free! This generous man, Hatem At-Tai, promised to free his slave in case he guided a cold guest to the warmth of his house! A guest would be most welcome in a night of extreme cold, with icy winds that violently carry the frost everywhere. Villagers know that frost can ruin some kinds of crops. Allah *Glorified is He* brings forth this verse after confirming to us in the one preceding it that those who disbelieved will not be availed by their possessions and children, and their fate will be the fire. He *the Exalted and Almighty* then removes any doubt that might occur to the listener that the wealth disbelievers spend in good causes might avail them anything in the Hereafter, for it will not. Why is this?

Deeds are judged by intentions; one is driven by a certain intention that motivates him to do a given deed. Consider the deeds of disbelievers: When they spend their money on good causes, like distributing aids, relieving the distressed or establishing hospitals, do they direct their intentions to Allah *Glorified is He* Who has granted them all these blessings? Or are they driven by greed for fame, commemoration in history and praise for their humanity?

Doubtlessly, they do good for the sake of fame, commemoration, or praise, for they believe in nothing beyond that. They do not believe in the existence of Allah, the One God, nor do they believe in the coming of Judgment Day when they will be held accountable for what they had done in this life. We have said before when one does a good deed, recompense should be sought from whomever he has done that deed for. As long as disbelievers work to earn fame and esteem in this world, they already receive their fair recompense based on their intention.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us parables so that we may reflect. The meaning of a parable is as follows: An abstract concept, the understanding of which might be above some minds, so it is compared to a material thing that everyone knows. We all know that material things are the means by which abstract concepts can be comprehended. A child first learns to be aware of material things, and then he develops understanding of abstract concepts through these things.

A child, for example, would see a fire, try to catch it and, as a result, is burned by it. That makes him develop the idea that fire burns. He would taste honey, find it sweet, and, therefore, develop the idea that honey is sweet. A child would realize that colocynth is bitter when he tastes it, and so on. Thus, one learns abstract concepts through the tangible things he realises with his senses.

Tangible things, as we know, are detected by means of the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and each of the sense plays a key role in developing conception. The human body is rich in abilities and skills, the effects of which we are aware of although we are not aware of their means of functioning. For example, there is depth perception, which allows a person to judge whether an object he looks at is near or far. Weight perception allows a person to gauge the weight of an object he is carrying; he feels its weight by means of a sense other than the five senses. Weight perception allows a person to find out which of two objects is heavier through the muscles that carry these objects; one knows which one requires more effort to lift. Another sense peripheral to the five senses is the sensation of an interval; this is by means of which a person grasps a piece of material with his fingertips, and by doing so, determines whether it is thicker than another piece of material. To gauge the thickness of something, it must be held and touched between two parts of the body.

Therefore, we have many senses that lead us to realise abstract concepts. All perceptions are born of sensation. Reflect upon these words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing and gave you hearing and sight and minds so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

These are the means of perception, and Allah *Glorified is He* mentions hearing and sight first because they are the primary senses. After this, He mentions minds that harbors abstract concepts, emotions and so on. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* wills to set forth a parable of an abstract matter, on which minds might differ, He uses a tangible matter on which the senses agree. In language, we use similes, so when a student does not understand something, he may ask his teacher to compare that thing which is new to him to another thing that he knows and understands. One of us may ask another, 'Do you know such-and-such person?' If the answer is 'No', He would try describing that person, who is unknown to his addressee, perhaps by comparing him to the height, colour, etc. of another person he knows. This is one way one knows how a thing that had been unknown to him. Allah *the Exalted* gives us parables based on tangible matters so that we can understand abstract matters. Allah *Glorified is He* illustrates to us how a disbeliever is afflicted with confusion when he worships other deities besides Allah by saying: 'Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to Allah, though most of them do not know.' (*az-Zumar:* 29)

With this clear example, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies to us the state and end result of a slave who is owned by several partners who are not in agreement and, instead, are in discord with one another. Naturally, this slave will be under intense pressure. The same is true in the case of associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He:* a person in this state will be internally divided between those who possess him as a slave, especiallywhen they will be rivals to one another. Contrarily, the state of a believer who embraces monotheism is illustrated with a different parable: '… a man devoted wholly to one master…' (*az-Zumar:* 29).

Out of His Mercy, Allah *Glorified is He* simplifies for us a spiritual concept by means of a tangible parable familiar to us all so that we can see that a slave owned by a single master and receives orders from him alone is spared confusion and pressure. In the same way, Allah *Glorified is He* sets forth an example of those who spend money on charitable works, but direct their intentions to other than Allah *Glorified is He*. No matter how much they spend, their spending is in vain. Parables Allah draws in the Noble Quran have to be analysed with profoundness. We need to look at the complete state represented by the parable to fully comprehend its meaning. Allah likens an idolater who associates partners with Allah to a slave who is owned by several disputing masters. To grasp the meaning, we have to look at the example given as a whole, and not take it literally. It is a parable intended to explain a certain concept, not to be considered identical to the state illustrated. Here is another example Allah *Glorified is He* gives: 'And propound unto them the parable of the life of this world: [it is] like the water which We send down from the skies, which is absorbed by the plants of the earth, but [in time] they turn into dry stubble, which the winds blow freely about. And it is Allah [alone] who determines all things.' (*al-Kahf:* 45)

Is the life of this world really like water? No, but the story of life in its entirety bears resemblance to the story Allah *Glorified is He* sets forth as a parable, which is that of rain falling and mixing with the earth that then quickens and produces plants with beautiful flowers, which, in turn, become dry stalks. Such is the truth about this world and its transient adornment: the beginning is splendid, full of delights, vigour and wonder; and its end is characterised with pain and destruction.

Allah *Glorified is He* shows us an abstract concept, the meaning of this life by compareing it to flowers and plants, the end of which become dry stalks, blown about by the wind. In another verse of The Quran, Allah says: '…and We reduce it to stubble, as if it had not flourished just the day before. This is the way We explain the revelations for those who reflect.' (*Yunus:* 24).

Now, let us look more deeply into the aforementioned verse: 'And whatever they give away in this life will be nullified: a frosty wind strikes and destroys the harvest of people who have wronged themselves. It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.' (*Al-'Imran:* 117)

The verse contains the two components of a simile: the tenor, or the disbelievers who spend their wealth for other than Allah *Glorified is He* and the vehicle, or the tilth which is afflicted by a freezing wind. The resemblance between them is that both situations result in futility.

Does the wind differentiate between the righteous and the evil? Does it destroy the harvest only of the latter and not of the former? Those who wrong themselves are afflicted with this disaster as a punishment. They are like the owners of the garden whose story Allah relates in the Quran: 'We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning and made no allowance [for the Will of Allah]: a disaster from your Lord struck the garden as they slept and by morning it was stripped bare, a desolate land.' (*al-Qalam:* 17-21)

Allah *Glorified is He* recompensed them for their wrongdoing, but have we never seen a man who did not wrong himself, and as a result, lose his produce by a disaster? We indeed do see this happen, yet a man who does not wrong himself bears the loss patiently and, therefore, earns reward from Allah *Glorified is He*. Perhaps by means of such an affliction, Allah *Glorified is He* has erased some unlawfully earned wealth that the man had unintentionally obtained.

For a believer, affliction and suffering bring reward, or may be meant as a means to purify his wealth from any ill-gotten money unintentionally earned. For a disbeliever, contrarily, no matter how much he spends of his wealth in charitable works, there will be no reward for him since he does not direct his intention to pleasing Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* closes this verse by saying: '…It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.' (*Al-'Imran:* 117) He *the Exalted* does not wrong disbelievers when He makes their spending futile in the Hereafter; rather, they wrong themselves, for they did not seek, by their spending, to please Allah *Glorified is He*. They wrong themselves by disbelieving in Him, so their deeds avail them nothing with Him, and this is the Justice of Allah, the True God *Glorified is He*. In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُواْ بِطَانَةً مِّن دُونِكُمۡ لَا يَأۡلُونَكُمۡ
خَبَالٗا وَدُّواْ مَا عَنِتُّمۡ قَدۡ بَدَتِ ٱلۡبَغۡضَآءُ مِنۡ أَفۡوَٰهِهِمۡ وَمَا تُخۡفِي
صُدُورُهُمۡ أَكۡبَرُۚ قَدۡ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِۖ إِن كُنتُمۡ تَعۡقِلُونَ ١١٨

You who believe, do not take for your intimates such outsiders as spare no effort to ruin you and want to see you suffer: their hatred is evident from their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made Our revelations clear for you; will you not use your reason? [118]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 118)

When Allah *Glorified is He* addresses believers with His words 'You who believe', know that what comes next is an obligation from Him *the Exalted and Almighty.* When Allah *Glorified is He* calls the attention of those who believe in Him, He means to give them a command; commands are not fit to be addressed to other than believers. As for those who disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* when He calls them to embrace faith, He incites their minds to contemplate the signs of His creation.

He calls them to meditate on the sky, the earth, and the wonders of the universe so that they may come to believe that the universe has One God: Allah *the Exalted and Almighty.* When one believes in Allah, the One God, only then does he become ready to receive His commands.

When Allah *Glorified is He*addresses believers by saying: 'You who believe', He is thus preparing them for an obligation, a duty. Allah *Glorified is He* does not address disbelievers with His commands; rather, He calls them first to enter the domain of faith: 'O mankind! Worship your Lord...' (*al-Baqara:* 21). When a person enters the domain of faith, Allah *Glorified is He* elevates him to the status of His believing servants by commanding him to do what is right and forbidding him from doing what is wrong.

As long as one believes in Allah, the All-Powerful, All-Wise, Ever-Watchful Creator of all things, he must then pay heed to what Allah *Glorified is He* ordains for him so as to live his life correctly. Sometimes, it appears that Allah *Glorified is He* is calling the attention of the believers only to command them to believe, as when He says, 'You who believe, believe in Allah and His Messenger and in the Scripture He sent down to His Messenger...' (*an-Nisa':* 136).

One might wonder why Allah calls the attention of believers only to order them to believe. This command is, in essence, for them to continue to adhere to faith and strengthen it by submitting to the ordinances of Allah and obeying His orders. When Allah *Glorified is He* commands believers to do something they already have been doing, it means He wants them to be firm and constant in doing that thing which He loves. In the aforementioned example, when Allah says, 'You who believe, believe in Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 136), it is a command to believers to be constant in faith and adhere to it firmly because human beings are apt to change and deviate. We know that Allah *Glorified is He* has given us free will which some people misuse and forsake faith after they had believed. Therefore, it is not just about proclaiming faith, but holding fast to it through time.

When we recite the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'You who believe', we understand that a new command will be given. Allah *Glorified is He* has made obedience subject to our free will and has made this honouring call an introduction to every command: 'You who believe'. Do not, O, believer, search for the reason behind every ruling, for your mind may be too limited to go that far. Do not engage your mind in a needless pursuit, trying to answer this question, ‘Why, Lord, do you command this?’ Allah *Glorified is He* gives His ordinance only to those who believe in Him. As long as you believe that Allah is All-Wise, Omnipotent and Just, then trust Him and obey His commands whether you understand the reason behind them or not.

I have given this example before, and I will still repeat it: A person who suffers from indigestion would go to a digestive system doctor to seek specialised treatment. Trusting the doctor, the patient does not bother to think of his illness. He has chosen a specialist who will carry out a detailed examination, order the necessary tests, diagnose the illness, and then prescribe medication. When a doctor writes a prescription for a patient, the latter would not say, ‘I won’t take this medicine until you convince me of its benefit!’ Rather, he just obeys the doctor, trusting his expertise, eventhough he is just a human being who is subject to error. What, then, when it comes to *the Almighty* Creator *Glorified is He?* Does it not befit a believer to trust His handling of all affairs? Work of the mind should be limited to reflecting the signs of Allah in order to attain faith. Once you have believed in Allah *Glorified is He* and that He is the All-Wise, and then you accept His rule: His guidance is the best for you, for He is the One Who has created you and knows what sets your life right.

Allah *Glorified is He* commands believers to observe mandatory *salat* (prayer) five times daily, and they just have to obey and not try to investigate into the reason behind this obligation. Allah *Glorified is He* has enjoined *salat* on you, and when you observe it, you feel that your soul has found peace and serenity. That makes you realise that tranquility associated with devotion is the instant fruit we receive when we obey Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, we realise this reason behind every command when we obey it. Allah the Most-Bounteous clarifies to us this essential aspect of faith in His words: ‘…Be mindful of Allah, and He will teach you: He has full knowledge of everything.’ (*al-Baqara:* 282)

When you are mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* and obey His commands, He guides you to the reason, the wisdom behind it and makes you feel the tranquility associated with faith. So understanding follows from obedience, not vice versa.

Allah *Glorified is He* might delay revealing the wisdom behind some of His commands for centuries. For example, we remained for fourteen centuries without knowing the reason why we are forbidden from eating pork. Should the believers have delayed submission to that prohibition for fourteen centuries until they had labs and scientific instruments to analyse and discover the harm associated with eating it– the harm that has been scientifically corroborated? No.

The believers did not delay obedience of the law of Allah *Glorified is He*; they did comply, and the later generations then discovered the harm. This should, in turn, encourage us to obey every law of Allah *Glorified is He* even when the wisdom behind it is unknown to us. The reason for some rulings and commands may well be beyond the scope of the human mind. However, things will arise that will explain some of the rulings that mankind did not understand before, which should make us trust the wisdom behind every other ruling eventhough still undiscovered. This teaches us that the criteria on which devotion should be based is simply true faith, by which Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the believers: 'You who believe'.

With these words, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses all of His believing servants: O, you who have believed in Me as the Only God, take from Me this obligation. I have already given the example of the doctor and patient, yet, of course, Allah *Glorified is He* is above all comparison. Since we trust a doctor as a specialist in his field, one would take the medicine he prescribes believing that he will be cured by the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Suppose you visited a sick person and asked him: "Why do you take this medication?" The sick person would normally reply: "Because the doctor has prescribed it for me." Shouldn't we then trust what Allah(1) prescribes for us? In the same way we must follow what Allah has told us purely because He has prescribed it and that it is coming from Him. This is the course of action of people of understanding compared to those who claim to have understanding, and the difference between the two is most certainly noticeable. Those who have true understanding consider the mind as a means that leads them to the Ultimate Truth and not as an authority in itself that can judge or prevail over this Truth. The mind should be the means that leads us to the belief in Allah, but it should not be allowed to go beyond its limits.

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(1) "The Islamic concept of "Allah" is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of "God". However, the word "Allah" does not refer to a tribal god or God of Muslims alone, rather, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (Who has no son). Therefore, we prefer to use "Allah" rather than "God" as it has a unique character. For example, it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe."

After calling the believers and attracting their attention, Allah addresses them with His command: “O’ believers, do not take as betanah (intimates) those who are not from you…” (*Al-‘Imran:* 118). For as long as you believe, guard your faith against the whispers and suggestions of Satan and the plots of the enemies. The way to do that is to be careful of taking as close friends those who secretly harbor malice and grudges against you.

A man’s *bitanah* are his close friends, his inner circle, those he keeps as close company and confides in. From a linguistic perspective, the word betanah literally means the inner lining of an item of clothing. A coarse piece of cloth requires a tailor to add a soft inner lining because it will be in direct contact with the body. Similarly the close friends of a person are just like this: they are the soft and gentle company that captures their heart with kindness. In praise of The Medinan Muslims, the Helpers (*Al-Ansar*), Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: “The Helpers (Medinan Muslims) are the inner soft layer, whilst all the others are the outer garment.”

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* likens the Helpers to the layer of clothing that is the closest to the skin, an endearing expression which is meant to pay them respect for their acceptance of his call with gentleness and affection. Just as the *bitanah* of clothes is the closest part to the body, the part that protects it from the coarseness of the outer layer, it also refers to the closest friends who enter one’s life and either do them great good or great harm, based on their traits and purpose.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was protected against sin by the Grace of Allah, received Revelations from Him, and had Companions that any believer would look up to as role models. Take a look at how the Companion 'Ali ibn Abu Talib describes this noble Messenger in a conversation with his son, Al-Hussain *Allah be pleased with them both*: “Dear father, tell me about the gatherings of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*" 'Ali ibn Abu Talib replied: "The Messenger of Allah would not sit down or stand up without glorifying the Name of Allah." In another narration, Ali replied: "The Messenger of Allah would not stop remembering and glorifying Allah."

Sitting down or standing up is the act of moving from one position to another. Standing after having been sitting, or sitting after having been standing, is an action, a movement that Allah has made our bodies capable of doing. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would praise Allah with every action and every moment, being grateful for the blessings and the abilities the Creator *Exalted is He* has endowed him with. One may ask himself: "How many muscles do I use in order to sit or stand?"

Suffice to say that it takes a large number of muscles to move in order to lift or lower the body, a number that is unknown to most. What is it that makes these deaf limbs understand a person's will, so much so that they enable him to stand up or sit down whenever he wants? When you lift your hand, you do not know which muscles are moving in order for your hand to be lifted. This miraculous creation has been eulogized in the words of poets: "Within you is a smaller version of this miraculous universe!"

It is as though the entire world with all its wonders has been wrapped up inside you! You sleep or wake up whenever you want and your body obeys you in whatever you wish to do. Allah has made your muscles and all that is in your body completely subservient to you. This blessing is most felt and appreciated when you see another person stripped of the ability to move an arm. It is not you have a hand so you can move it, simply. Others do have hands, but they are unable to move them. Therefore, we realize that any authority which one exercises over his body is only by the Will and Grace of Allah, Who has subdued that body to him for his service.

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "When any of you wakes up, let him say: "Praise is to Allah Who has returned to me my soul, given strength to my body, and allowed me to remember and praise Him."

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* intended to teach us to remember and praise Allah at every physical movement, whenever we stand up, sit down, or wake up, etc. He taught us that at every movement we should remember the One Who has created us and created within us the ability to move and control our bodies.

Let each of us ask himself: How many muscles need to move for a person to scratch his back, for example? This is unknown to most of us. Therefore, we should show reverence and gratitude to Allah by glorifying His Name at every movement, for He has given us those abilities.

Let us return to what 'Ali ibn Abu Talib said about The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: “The Messenger of Allah would not sit down or stand up without glorifying the Name of Allah.”

A point of reflection is the way The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* treated his *bitana*h. His caution in dealing with his Companions is worthy of admiration. He would not specify certain places for particular individuals to sit in and forbade assigning preferences to anyone. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would sit in any spot that was vacant and so would each of his Companions. He kept no special place near him for any of them so no one would imagine that he was preferred over the others. He treated them all equally. We see it now that some would reserve certain places for themselves at the mosque and almost forbid others from approaching them, but this is forbidden in Islam. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with them both*, said: “The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade pecking like a crow (i.e. seeming as if you were doing so when prostrating too quickly in prayer), stretching like a kneeling lion (i.e. flattening the forearms entirely against the ground, while prostrating in prayer), and for a man to reserve a place for himself at the mosque like the way camels choose places to settle in.”

'Ali ibn Abu Talib *may Allah be pleased with him* also added this description of The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: “When he visited someone, he would sit wherever there was an empty space; he would sit on the floor, eat on the floor, sit down to milk an ewe and accept the invitations of slaves.”

He was the very model of politeness. He was the noble Messenger of Allah and would sit anywhere and would never ask to be given a special or privileged seat at any gathering. He gave us an example to follow and was keen that every

Muslim should mingle with more of his brothers on a daily basis by sitting next to one today and tomorrow being beside another. By this, gatherings of the followers of Islam can result in creating unions among them all and make all Muslims a united ummah (used to refer to Muslims collectively: a group of brothers or a congregation of people sharing the same faith).

'Ali ibn Abu Talib *may Allah be pleased with him* said about Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* : "The Messenger of Allah would give each of his companions their share of his company so none of them would think that another was dearer than him to the Prophet." He would not prefer one over another with a look or a word. By this conduct, Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* wanted to teach us that the believers are equal and that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all humankind and not to a particular group of people. He divided his attention equally among his companions so much so, that each of them would feel as though Allah sent the Messenger to him in particular!

Such were the ways of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He meant to give us an example to follow and to teach us that too much attachment to one person in particular more than others may cause injury to the unity of the whole. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* warns the believers that they are being ambushed by the disbelievers who wholeheartedly wish to defeat them and defy their faith, and they would not rest until they dissuade them from belief. Beware, O believers that they will sure plot against you and try to infiltrate you.

We all know that when Islam came, most of those who believed had relatives and friends etc from amongst the disbelievers. Therefore, Allah warned with great caution regarding these ties so that no believer would be deceived in thinking that family ties, friendships or any kind of alliance or relationship would prevent the disbelievers from harming them. Consequently Allah draws the attention of the believers and tells them that brotherhood in faith prevails over all relationships. This is a warning to the believers so that they will not be deceived by those who approach them lovingly in the name of friendship as the gap between belief and disbelief cannot be removed or even narrowed. The disbelievers will not refrain from plotting against you and your religion in whatever way they can, and they will never tire of trying. For this reason, Allah addresses the believers with His command: “Oh you who believe, guard your faith and do not take the disbelievers as close allies or friends or they will continuously attempt to dissuade you from belief. They would not sit back or give up the desire of destroying you. What will the disbelievers do if you take them as bosom friends? The answer is this: They “... spare no effort to ruin you…” (*Al-‘Imran:* 118) They will never stop plotting against you and will seek every means to corrupt you. Allah says: “Oh you who believe, allado not take for your betanah those who are not from you. They will spare no effort in ruining you and wanting to see you suffer. Their hatred has become evident from their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made Our Revelations clear for you are you not then going to use your reason?” (*Al-‘Imran:* 118)

This is a direct command to the believers so as not to take the disbelievers as close friends or advisors. A believer has faith to discipline him, whereas a disbeliever adheres to no law that can deter him. Allowing the disbelievers to be your close allies will give them a chance to sow the seeds of corruption among you for which they will spare no effort. It always pleases them to injure the believers “... and [they] want to see you suffer...” (*Al-‘Imran:* 118), and Allah does not want to inflict distress or suffering on the believers, and in this regard He says*:* “… And if Allah had wished, He could have put you into difficulties. Truly, Allah is *The Almighty*, All-Wise.” (*al-Baqara:* 220)

If He *the Exalted* had so willed, He would have enjoined on you many things that would involve difficulty but He has made things easy for you, O believers. The disbelievers, in contrast, want to throw the believers into hardship and suffering.

Now, from where does suffering arise? A believer acts upon the command of Allah, and he does what He commands and avoids what He forbids. The disbelievers try to convince a believer in doing what his religion does not allow just so that he would be stripped of inner peace. Torment arises within when one’s actions conflict with his principles, a situation which causes overwhelming worry and confusion due to the uneasy feeling of one’s conscience.

We see this nowadays in the societies that enjoy the highest levels of economic prosperity. In a society where all material needs are answered, the old are provided for with health and social insurance for everyone and high salaries, people should be contented. Nevertheless, we see many such societies where people are generally exhausted, suicide rates are soaring, and perversion is so rife. Loss of inner peace and failure to reconcile with conscience are to be held culprit for this suffering: Peace of mind cannot be attained unless one believes in his Creator and acts upon His guidance. For example, nothing stings the conscience of a man when he looks at his wife because his conscience is in harmony with his action. The contrary happens to him when he turns his eyes to a woman who is unlawful for him as he is afraid of getting caught, whilst doing so. If he is caught in the act, he would tremble and his conscience would be in turmoil.

To protect them from such conflict, Allah warns the believers about the dangers of taking close friends from other than themselves because they will never stop trying to cause them harm and suffering. Suffering comes when a disbeliever tries to get a believer to slide into deviation, confusion, and trouble of his conscience, taking advantage of family ties or friendship. It comes when a believer has to go against his religion to please his disbelieving relatives and friends etc. A believer cannot satisfy both what the religion requires from him and what a disbeliever wants him to do, therefore creating a gap that comes in between his conscience and actions, hence the suffering and trouble. The disbelievers would not miss any opportunity to corrupt the believers; they take advantage of every opportunity and use it against the believers.

“Oh you who believe, do not take for your *betanah* those who are not from you. They will spare no effort in ruining you and wanting to see you suffer. Their hatred has become evident from their mouths…” (*Al-‘Imran:* 118).

As long as hatred has emerged from their mouths, how can we take them as close friends? When you surround yourself with a group of disbelievers and make them your close company or advisors, be aware that you are only among a group of hypocrites who are not in harmony with themselves and who will spare no effort to drag you to their confusion and misguidance. A hypocrite says with his tongue the opposite of what he harbors in his heart. Then, when he is among those like him, he scornfully passes on what the believers have said.

This is how powerful the hatred that comes from the mouths of the hypocrites is, who are neither one thing nor another, neither with one group, nor with the other. They have no allegiance to either faith or disbelief. The amount of hatred that manifests itself before the believers is but a small pebble of the mountain their hearts conceal. The hypocrites would unveil such hatred only among themselves and would exchange words of scorn and mockery of the believers only in their absence. Still, Allah knows best what they mean and what they conceal, so He exposes them to the believers.

The Omnipotent Knowledge of Almighty Allah encompasses all secrets. The disbelievers and hypocrites should have known that Allah guards the faith of the believers and warns them against the subtlest dangers that might threaten it. However, the people of disbelief and hypocrisy were foolish and they were taught a lesson when Allah revealed His words: "...their hatred is evident from their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is far worse…" (*Al-'Imran:* 118). They had an opportunity to defend themselves had their hearts been free of the bitterness ascribed to them in the noble verse, but they came to realize that Allah was already aware of what was in their hearts. Hatred in the hearts of those malicious disbelievers appeared from their mouths, but who told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions of what was in the hearts of the disbelievers, which was even worse? Almighty Allah exposed them when He sent down His words*:* "... but what their hearts conceal is far worse…" (*Al-'Imran:* 118). Therefore, the believers have no excuse since Allah has guided and showed them how to protect their faith. He has explained to the believers that their enemies will never stop plotting against them to dissuade them from faith, so the believers have to be careful.

This is why Allah closes the verse by saying*:* "...We have made Our *ayat* (signs, revelation) clear for you so will you not then use your reason?" (*Al-'Imran:* 118) The signs sent down by Almighty Allah clarify this, and we have already learnt that the word ayat (literally meaning "miracles") can refer to either Quranic Revelations or signs of the creation. Both the Quran and the universe flourish in divine miracles. Let us consider what Allah says about this in relation to the Quran: "When We substitute one verse for another– and Allah already knows best what He reveals– they say, 'You are just making it up,' but most of them have no knowledge." (*an-Nahl:* 101)

In relation to the universe, He *the Exalted and Almighty* says*:* “The night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His *ayat* (signs). Do not bow down in worship to the sun or the moon, but bow down to Allah Who created them, if it is truly Him that you worship.” (*Fussilat:* 37)

So we understand that the word ayat denotes an amazing thing, a miraculous sign that we must heed from which to derive guidance. In this light, *ayat* (as in verses) of the Quran presents to us guidance from Allah and *ayat* (as in signs) of the universe bear testimony to the Truth of the Quranic verses. A believer should reflect on both in order to be guided to the Straight Path of Allah. The believers have indeed taken heed of the warning. The aforementioned verse has forbidden them from taking close friends or advisors from other than the followers of the faith and the following verse proves that they have understood the message and submitted to the command of Allah*:* “This is how it is: here you are, you love them, but they do not love you; you believe in all the Scriptures and when they meet you, they say, ‘We believe,’ but when they are alone, they bite their fingertips in rage at you...” (*Al-'Imran:* 119).

هَٰٓأَنتُمۡ أُوْلَآءِ تُحِبُّونَهُمۡ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمۡ وَتُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡكِتَٰبِ كُلِّهِۦ وَإِذَا
لَقُوكُمۡ قَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوۡاْ عَضُّواْ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡأَنَامِلَ مِنَ ٱلۡغَيۡظِۚ قُلۡ
مُوتُواْ بِغَيۡظِكُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمُۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿١١٩﴾

This is how it is: here you are, you love them, but they do not love you; you believe in all the Scriptures and when they meet you, they say, ‘We believe,’ but when they are alone, they bite their fingertips in rage at you. [Prophet], say, ‘Die of rage [if you wish]!’ God knows exactly what is in everyone’s hearts [119] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 119)

Allah still addresses the believers on the issue of closeness and alliance with the disbelievers. The verse implies that the faith of the believers has remained firm so much so, that it was they who tried to dissuade the disbelievers from denying the Truth and have them taste the sweetness of belief. The efforts of the disbelievers were rendered fruitless. They did not manage to drag the believers to deviation or stop themselves from denying faith. The only choice left for them, therefore, was hypocrisy, so they said to the believers: "... 'We believe'..." (*Al-'Imran:* 119) The verse testifies that the believers have indeed grasped the admonition sent down to them by Allah, but why, then, does He say*:* "... Here you are; you love them, but they do not love you..."?

Love on the side of the believers was represented in their keenness to save the disbelievers from the tough outcomes of disbelief both in this life and in the afterlife. This is true love, but did the disbelievers reciprocate that love? No. They wanted to drag the believers into disbelief which proves the fact that they harboured nothing except hatred and grudges for the believers. The disbelievers, however, completely failed to achieve their purpose, so they resorted to lying by saying*:* "... 'We believe'..." (*Al-'Imran:* 119) Since the believers remained absolutely firm and their faith was undeviating, the disbelievers had no choice but to cheat them through hypocrisy: "…and when they meet you, they say, 'We believe,'…" (*Al-'Imran:* 119) Despair is what drove them to making that allegation despite their hatred already appearing from their mouths. In their perplexity and rage, they failed to let their words support their behavior. The Muslims already began to restrain their love for the disbelievers which ignited worries of the latter who feared that if the Muslims continued to be so constantly firm, their would be no chance for them to deviate or harm them. In order to avoid this, they claimed to have embraced faith and suppressed their grudges until they were alone to spell it out secretly, away from the believers. Nevertheless, Allah has exposed their real attitude to the believers by saying*:* "… but when they are alone, they bite their fingertips in rage at you…" (*Al-'Imran:* 119). What does it mean to "bite"?

Linguistically, the word "biting" means holding something between the jaws in order to tear it. The aforementioned verse makes use of the habit of "biting the fingertips" to depict the rage of the disbelievers. It is a forced nervous reaction that involves no thinking or control. No one wants to keep on biting their fingertips since it is a painful thing. Despite this, excessive rage would push a person to involuntarily bite their fingertips. It is as though the feeling of anger automatically prevails over the feeling of pain and almost eliminates it. Where does this rage come from? What ignited the disbelievers' rage was failure to dissuade the believers even slightly from adhering to the guidance of Allah. Rather, the opposite happened; the believers tried to attract the disbelievers to the light of faith. The disbelievers attempted to infiltrate the believers in the name of friendship in order to spread corruption among them. Failing to achieve their purpose this made them fall into extreme rage. One would fall prey to rage when they are unable to vent their anger on their enemies, so if a believer wants to counter the grudge of his opponent, he should shower kindness and generosity to him, an act which will only increase their rage and bitterness. Islam teaches a believer not to repay an injury or injustice done to them and that two wrongs do not make a right. Instead, a believer's conduct and attitude should be based on the following narrative: "We do not repay those who disobey Allah with regard to us except by obeying Him with regard to them."

The Muslims' kindness to them strips them of their power to harm and therefore only hardens their grudge, rage, and bitterness against Islam. The Early Muslims behaved in this way and their faith was as firm as the mountains.

The enemies of Islam disobey Allah by the manner in which they treat Muslims, but it befits a dignified believer to offer kindness and generosity as a reward for this hatred and injury. Therefore seeing their plots rendered futile, rage and grudge eat into the hearts of the enemies of Islam. Once alone, they release their repressed rage so much so, that they bite their own fingertips which, as we know, is a forced nervous reaction spontaneously resulting from anger and failure to fulfill one's purpose. Every perceptual influence on the human soul causes an emotional response that manifests itself through involuntary physical reaction. Arouse someone's anger and they will immediately fall into a fit of verbal frenzy. Such an immediate response is usually associated with warm heartedness. As for a person who can stay composed at times of anger, he should be treated with caution. Such a person would continue to check his emotions and it is just unpredictable when anger and bitterness overpower him. Ait is as the saying goes: "Beware of the rage of a forbearing person," i.e. when emotions accumulate in a patient heart, no one knows when the dam will overflow.

So perception arouses emotions which a person responds to with a physical action. Islamic Law does not require a person to be a voiceless stone without ever reacting; rather, it simply requires a Muslim to be polite and reasonable in his reaction. Allah guides the believers to this discipline by praising in the Quran those who: "…restrain their anger and pardon people– Allah loves those who do good." (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

The Quran recognizes that some events will make a person angry and the one who never feels angry at all behaves in a way that is inconsistent with human nature. Allah wants the human being to remain a human being, with the natural emotions and reactions associated with his disposition; however, our Creator and Guide, wants to refine the reactions of this human being. We have the best example in The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by his reaction to the death of his son, Ibrahim. Upon hearing of this news, he said: "The eyes shed tears, and the heart grieves, yet we do not say except that which pleases our Lord. O Ibrahim, for your loss we are deeply saddened!"

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has struck a balance between emotions and faith. Cry we must. Grieve we must. We are not expected to remain feelingless in the face of hardship, but we are only required to react in a way that shows respect for Allah. The Quran requires a Muslim to be an upright person, yet it does not teach us that "upright" means to act like a creature made of iron or stone where nothing can change or affect him. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* describes the true believers by saying: "…people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers…." (*al-Ma'ida:* 54)

So a believer is not a creature who is set to always be humble or always be hard; rather he reacts differently to different circumstances, which is normal. When a situation demands humility and modesty, a believer should be humble; when a situation demands strength in the face of arrogant disbelief, a believer should be stern. Allah *the Almighty* says about the believers: "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. You see them kneeling and prostrating, seeking Allah's bounty and His good pleasure…" (*al-Fath:* 29).

Therefore, a believer is not made to constantly be lenient or tough. Instead, he responds to events, so when a believer is among believers, he is compassionate and when he is confronting the disbelievers, he is strong and severe. Allah *Glorified is He* has not created a human being to remain continuously fixed to a single pattern of behavior. Allah just wants a believer to refine his behavior in the face of events, so He says in praise of the believers: "…those who restrain their anger and pardon people– Allah loves those who do good." (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

He *the Exalted* also says*:* "If you [believers] have to respond to an attack, make your response proportionate..." (*an-Nahl:* 126). So Allah does not forbid a believer from punishing someone for their crime or to fight them in order to restore his rights which have been taken away from him. This is because Allah has created humankind and knows them best. He does not want us to act against our nature otherwise our very faith would be endangered. If a believer relinquished his rights, the disbelievers would give themselves free rein in corruption and evildoing. For this end, a believer should understand the rules of carrying out legal punishments even if it is against the believers who commit crimes. This is to make it clear to everyone that anyone who dares transgress the limits set by Allah must and will receive his fair recompense. Allah even encourages a believer to transcend revenge. Therefore, a believer may either execute punishment in proportion to the offense done or rise above recompense and heed the words of Allah when he says*:* "... but if you are patient, it will certainly be best for those who are patient." (*an-Nahl:* 126)

Allah has prescribed for the believers the rule of retribution but he also guided them on how to rise above revenge and commit themselves to patience. This way, Allah does not want to set human nature in a stone mould otherwise He would not have created this variable nature within us. He *the Exalted* explains to us that there there exists the feeling of anger but that a believer should try to keep check on his anger and should not express it in an overdone manner. When a believer can overcome the frenzy of anger, it means he has managed to pass the test and transcend nervousness. So we've learnt that restraining one's anger means that the believer does not express his exasperation emotionally. That is, if someone insults you, you do not insult them in return. This suppression of anger means keeping emotions in the heart. If a believer rises above this and refrains from even getting agitated, he takes the rage out of his heart and truly rises above the situation. Allah describes him as having attained the rank of utmost devotion by saying*:* "and Allah loves the doers of good (to others)." (*Al-'Imran:* 134) Therefore, by using kind words, a believer treats the one who angers him better.

What would the attitude of the person who offended you be then, O believer, after you first restrained your anger, then forgave and after that -if you managed to take the rage out of your heart- you reached the third stage which represents the peak of faith '*ihsan*' (utmost devotion) as Allah says: "and Allah loves the doers of good (to others)." (*Al-'Imran:* 134). The person who provoked your anger would certainly reconsider his action and regret what he has done.

Islam does not neglect human emotions when it requires believers to treat well those who treat them badly. Those who think deeply will see that Islam gives the believers the right to behave according to the human nature. This is evident in The Quran when Allah says: “And if you punish [an attacker, O believers], punish similarly to that with which you were harmed.” (*an-Nahl:* 126). However, Islam elevates the believer to a higher level.

When we consider this, figuratively, as an economical issue (a matter of loss and gain) we will conclude that the believer has made a gain. For example, when a father sees that one of his sons has wronged the other, the father’s heart will be with the one who has been wronged. Imagine that a person abuses one of Allah’s servants?! Allah, as The Lord and Protector, will certainly be on the side of his servant who has been wronged. We know that a person once said to a man who was very close to Allah: ‘How is it that you treat well those who harm you?!’ The man replied: ‘should I not treat well those who have been the cause of Allah being on my side?’

Let us now return to the rage of the disbelievers towards the believers. The disbeliever is offended because his rival, the believer, wishes him to have faith and has no malice in his heart whereas the disbeliever is full of enmity. It leads the disbeliever to nearly lose his mind. That is why the True Lord says: “but when they are alone, they bite their fingertips in rage at you.” (*Al-‘Imran:* 119)

The meaning of ‘find themselves alone’ is that when they are in a gathering composed entirely of disbelievers they openly announce their hatred for the believers. They bite their fingertips in rage in the absence of those who believe in Allah. If these disbelievers had an atom’s weight of contemplation, they would have wondered how the Quran exposed them when they had carried out this action behind the backs of the believers.

Did their thoughts not lead them to the notion that these believers had a Lord who informed His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* of these hidden matters and that the Messenger then passed them on to the believers?

Despite this, they did not understand this exposure of their conduct: "but when they are alone, they bite their fingertips in rage at you." (*Al-'Imran:* 119) Here, we should be aware that there are things that might cause rage, but a person might be too frightened to show his reaction. If someone makes you angry, you might go straight to him and be emotionally reactive or you might keep your emotions to yourself, which is known as 'diversion of emotions'. An angry person's heart is filled with rage. The opponent whom he would react wrathfully against might be powerful and influential. As a result he timidly avoids a fiery outburst against that person. So, he then vents his anger out on himself, by biting his fingertips. If this is the case, the True Lord says to His Messenger: 'Say: "[Prophet], say, 'Die of rage [if you wish]!' Allah most definitely knows what is in everyone's hearts."' (*Al-'Imran:* 119) What this verse is telling the disbelievers is, the rage that the believers cause within you, O' disbelievers, will continue until you perish in your rage, so your attempt to draw the believers into disbelief is futile. 'Say: "Die of rage!"' (*Al-'Imran:* 119)

We know that when a person is commanded to do something that is not of his choice, such as dying, and he has to choose between this and something that he is capable of choosing such as rage, it means that the commandment has been issued to him to remain a prisoner of what is within his power, which is rage, until death comes to him.

When the True Lord says: "Die of rage" (*Al-'Imran:* 119), this means that the disbelievers would not be able to perish but would remain in a state of rage until they perish because they do not know when they would die. Therefore they would remain in a state of rage against the believers and for as long as the disbelievers are enraged by the believers; this indicates that the believers are implementing their religion correctly.

This verse is a conveyor of glad tidings to the believers and a severe warning to the disbelievers: "Say [Prophet], 'Die of rage [if you wish]!' Allah most definitely knows exactly what is in everyone's hearts." (*Al-'Imran:* 119).

The True Lord is telling us that He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts, i.e. the things that occur to the mind but have not yet been articulated as speech and He *Glorified is He* said before*:* “but what their hearts conceal is far worse.” (*Al-‘Imran:* 118)

As long as He is the True Lord Who has full knowledge of what the hearts conceal, He is able not only to requite them for the physical actions that they do, but is also able to requite them by exposing the actions that they conceal in their hearts. After this, He says*:*

إِن تَمْسَسْكُمْ حَسَنَةٌ تَسُؤْهُمْ وَإِن تُصِبْكُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا ۖ
وَإِن تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا
يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿١٢٠﴾

They grieve at any good that befalls you [believers] and rejoice at your misfortunes. But if you are steadfast and conscious of God, their scheming will not harm you in the least: God encircles everything they do [120] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 120)

The Quran is the word of Allah, and He *Glorified is He* has absolute omnipotence and complete self-sufficiency. Several expressions for one meaning might actually differ because every situation has its appropriate expression. Allah selects the appropriate term with absolute accuracy. He *Glorified is He* says*:* “Man was truly created anxious. When misfortune touches him he is distressed but when good fortune comes his way he is stingy. Except those who pray and are consistent in their prayers.” (*al-Ma’arij:* 19-23)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says*:* “Anything good that happens to you [Prophet] is from Allah and anything bad that happens to you is [ultimately] from yourself. We have sent you as a messenger to people and Allah is sufficient as a witness.” (*an-Nisa’:* 79)

Allah *the Exalted* sometimes talks about good and evil ‘coming’, and sometimes refers to what happens to mankind as the ‘befalling’ of good or evil. In the verse which we are currently examining, we find the two expressions, for He *the Exalted* says*:* "If good fortune comes to you, it grieves them; and if evil befalls you, they rejoice in it…" (*Al-‘Imran:* 120). He did not refer to both as 'coming to you', nor as 'befalling you'. This is the speech of a Wise Lord and when we examine the meaning closely, we will surely say: 'This is a speech that none but a Wise Lord would say.'

Let us now define the terms 'coming' and 'befalling'. Some scholars say they mean the same thing citing as evidence for this when Allah says*:* "Man was truly created anxious. When misfortune touches him he is distressed but when good fortune comes his way he is stingy. Except those who pray and are consistent in their prayers." (*al-Ma'arij:* 19-21)

However, we say that the word 'coming' (which in Arabic is "*mass*" and linguistically means 'touching') is the establishment of a connection between two components. If a man touches his wife, we say he needs to make the lesser ablution because he has only touched her. It is nothing more than a touch so he has no need to make the greater ablution. As for 'befalling', it means more than just touching. The one who strikes someone else might give them a bump on the head. The hand makes contact with the cheek and injures the temple (in Arabic the word for 'injure' is (*isaba*), which is the same as the word for 'befall'). So, we see that there is a difference between 'coming' and 'befalling' and when the True Lord says*:* "If good fortune comes to you, it grieves them" (*Al-'Imran:* 120).

This means that the good fortune that comes is not much, not a great one but only some gain or a small amount of wealth. In our daily lives, we find people who are enraged simply because their rival earns ten pence more and someone might say to them: 'why do you not keep your rage until he earns one hundred pounds, for example?' This kind of anger at small instances of good fortune indicates that any good that comes to the believers will only cause annoyance and outrage to the disbelievers. By the mere coming of good fortune to the believers, the disbelievers are aggravated; what then, about bad fortune?

The True Lord says*:* "and if evil befalls you, they rejoice in it" (*Al-'Imran:* 120). The disbelievers rejoice at any evil that befalls the believers, though, in accordance to human nature, those who hold grudges should become merciful in such a situation: It is enough of a calamity to befall a person that you see those who hate him show him mercy! That is, it is enough evidence that a person has been surrounded with calamity that those who had previously held grudges against him show him mercy, and say: ‘By Allah, I feel sorry for him!’

So, when the believers were encircled with difficulty, did this change the disbelievers’ attitude? No. The disbelievers used to rejoice at the difficulties of the believers and when even the slightest bit of good fortune came to the believers, they were outraged. The True Lord says*:* "If good fortune comes to you, it grieves them" (*Al-‘Imran:* 120) and this refers to any slight good fortune that may come to them. Allah also says*:* "and if evil befalls you, they rejoice in it. But if you are patient in adversity and conscious of Allah, their deceit cannot harm you at all" (*Al-‘Imran:* 120). In other words no matter what they plot against you, they will never harm you.

What is required from you is to show patience in the face of their enmity, evil, their rejoicing at your discomfort and their grief in the good that comes to you. Have patience, and you will be invincible. Be patient, and their deceit will never affect you. Be patient and be pious to Allah. This will guarantee that Allah will be on your side. "But if you are patient in adversity and are conscious of Allah then their deceit will never harm you at all" (*Al-‘Imran:* 120).

What is deceit? Deceit is that you plot and plan to harm someone, whilst making it appear that it was someone else who plotted against them. It is planning to hurt others. The word deceit (which in Arabic is *‘kayd’*), is derived from the two Arabic words ‘*kayd*’ (deceit) ‘*Kabid*’ (liver). Both words refer to one meaning because whatever harms the liver causes pain, as it is one of the strongest organs of the human body and if it is harmed, the person is injured and incapacitated. There is a saying in Arabic which says: ‘So-and-so has reached the liver of the truth’, i.e. he has reached the core of the issue about which he is speaking.

What does “plot by night” mean? They say: plotting is not evidence of bravery. When you see someone planning and engaging in plots, know that he is a coward because a brave person does not plot and plan behind one’s back. Only those who are too weak to face confrontation do so. If you are patient in the midst of their plotting and are conscious of Allah then their deceit will never harm you because Allah will be with you.

The True Lord ends the verse with the noble words: "Verily, Allah encompasses all that they do" (*Al-'Imran:* 120). The word 'encompasses' explains to you that He has full knowledge and awareness of everything. Encompassment means that nothing escapes Him. This verse is referring to a specific event in the history of Islam about which Allah, the True Lord says with emphasis: "But if you are patient in adversity and conscious of Allah then their deceit will never harm you at all: for, verily, Allah encompasses all that they do" (*Al-'Imran:* 120). We must all keep in mind the truth of this statement.

Allah also says*:*

وَإِذۡ غَدَوۡتَ مِنۡ أَهۡلِكَ تُبَوِّئُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ مَقَٰعِدَ لِلۡقِتَالِۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ١٢١

[Prophet], remember when you left your home at dawn to assign battle positions to the believers: God hears and knows everything [121] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 121)

On this occasion (the battle of Uhud), the disbelievers were three thousand in number, whereas the believers were the minority, with only seven hundred warriors. The True Lord verifies the truth of His words when he says*:* "But if you are patient in adversity and conscious of Allah then their deceit will never harm you at all" (*Al-'Imran:* 120) ; and the meaning here is not a secret plot; rather, it refers to their open action, i.e. remember the truth of this matter, "when you, [O Muhammad], left your family in the morning" (*Al-'Imran:* 121). Here it refers to 'Aisha's apartment because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was there at the time when the disbelievers of Quraysh wanted to avenge the dead and the captives of Badr. They gathered their hordes. Every individual from the battle of Badr had two horses and men. After the battle of Badr, their leader Abu Sufyan told them: 'Tell your women not to weep for the dead because weeping takes away sadness, as they used to refer to tears as the "cleansers of sadness" or the "dissolvers of griefs" and when a grieving person weeps, those around him say: 'leave him to find rest.'

If the women grieved and wept for those who died in the battle of Badr, the urgency of revenge would have subsided and so Abu Sufyan said: 'Tell them (the women) not to weep.' He wanted the rage over Badr to remain until revenge is taken. Three thousand warriors all assembled in the ranks of disbelief at Uhud and The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sought the advice of his companions in the matter and sent for one of the leaders of the hypocrites, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul whom he had not called on before except in this battle. ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul and many of the *Ansar* (the people of Medina who supported The Prophet Muhammad) said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, we have never gone out of the city to fight except that the enemy have caused us great loss and no enemy has ever entered upon us except that we have caused them great loss and so we think that you should not go out to them. If they stay, their plight will be wretched and if they enter, the men will fight them full on and the women and children will pelt them with stones from above and they will return home dejected.’ Yet, other companions suggested going out of Medina to fight them, by saying: ‘O Messenger of Allah, come out with us to our enemies, so they will not think that we are too cowardly and weak to face them.’ The people who held this opinion did not leave the The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone until he had agreed with what they wanted.

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered his house, put on his armour and took up his weapon. Those who had insisted that The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be better off going out to fight began to think that they had persuaded him into doing something that he did not agree with, so they regretted their actions and when he came out, they said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, we have persuaded you, and it was not for us to do so. If you wish, stay.’ The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: “It is not for a Prophet, when he has put on his armour, to remove it until he has fought.”

So they went out to fight and it is this event that the Quran reminds us of to show the truthfulness of the previous verse: "But if you are patient in adversity and are conscious of Allah then their deceit will never harm you at all: for, verily, Allah encompasses all that they do". And [remember] when you, [O Muhammad], left your family in the morning to post the believers at their stations for the battle [of Uhud]" (*Al-‘Imran:* 120-121).

Notice the syntactic precision of the words of Allah when He says: "And [remember] When you, [O Muhammad], left your family in the morning to post the believers at their stations for the battle [of Uhud]" (*Al-'Imran:* 120), i.e. to identify a place to which they would return and remain. The word 'stations' here (*maqa'id*) means fixed positions, for war is composed of attacking, retreating, and standing. Allah makes firm those who fight in battle as though they are made to reside in their homeland. It is as though the Messenger's command to the troops includes that they should give no attention to anything except to their positions, which He *peace and blessings be upon him* had fixed and arranged for them. It is as if these stations have become their homeland and the future of their faith depends on this.

So, His words: "*Wa-idh ghadawta min ahlika tubawwi'o*" "And [remember] when you, [O Muhammad], left your family in the morning to post" (*Al-'Imran:* 121) i.e. to identify the stations for "the believers", and to say to them: 'your abode is now the position in which I have placed you'. the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* (God) *peace and blessings be upon him* took the archers, who numbered fifty, and appointed Abdullah ibn Jubayr as their leader, then, said to them: "Stay in your station here, and protect our backs. If you see that we have gained victory, do not join us; and if you see us being slain, do not come to our aid."

But they were unable to do this because they were inclined towards the battle-spoils, and Allah willed that experience to take place in the presence of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him peace and blessings be upon him*, To show the believers, in every battle that followed, that abiding by the instructions of the leader is the basis of being in the military; and that if you disobey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, you will surely be defeated.

Someone might say: 'Islam was defeated at Uhud.' The answer is: no, Islam was victorious; if the Muslims had been given victory at Uhud, despite the disobedience of the archers to the order of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, would the commands of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have been followed?

So, the Muslims who failed to obey the order were defeated, and they had to have this experience, whilst they were with the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When victory seemed destined for the believers early on in the battle, the troops began to busy themselves with gathering plunder and spoils, and the archers said: ‘Everyone will take the spoils, and leave us with nothing!’ So they went down to take the spoils, and Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him*, who was still at that time on the religion of his tribe, took the opportunity to encircle them, and chaos erupted. The news of the death of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spread among the people, so they turned and fled, and the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* (God) *peace and blessings be upon him* began to call: “Come to me, servants of God!” until a group of his companions rallied round him, and he rebuked them for fleeing, when they said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, ‘Let our fathers and mothers be sacrificed for you! We heard news of your death, and our hearts trembled, and we turned on our heels!’ An accurate chronicle of the battle of Uhud shows that it was neither a defeat nor a victory because the battle was undecided.

Afterwards the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* called upon those who were with him at Uhud to go and find the enemy. They overtook them at Hamra’a Al-Asad, and the disbelievers fled. Allah wanted to give the believers a lesson in the importance of following the orders of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord said: "And [remember] When you, [O Muhammad], left your family in the morning to post the believers at their stations for the battle [of Uhud]" (*Al-‘Imran:* 120). The True Lord reminds us of the responsibilities of the leader, who appoints duties, and the ranks of the army; the right wing, the left wing, the forefront army, and the back army.

He ends the verse by saying: “and Allah is Hearing and Knowing” (*Al-‘Imran:* 121) so that the believers know that He indeed witnessed His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* placing the believers in battle array, and that He is All Knowing of what the intentions were because the purpose of the war was defending the faith: not just submission of outer forms, but submission of hearts, on the first place.

The True Lord then says: "When two parties among you were about to lose courage, but Allah was their ally... ".

إِذْ هَمَّت طَّآئِفَتَانِ مِنكُمْ أَن تَفْشَلَا وَٱللَّهُ وَلِيُّهُمَا ۗ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

Remember when two groups of you were about to lose heart and God protected them – let the believers put their trust in God [122] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 122)

To 'lose heart' means to be afraid; and the two groups were Banu Haritha of Al-Aws, and Banu Salama of Al-Khazraj. They were the left and right flanks, and were on their way to battle, when they heard the hypocrite Ibn Salul say: 'There will be no fighting, for as soon as the troops of Quraysh see us, they will flee.'

The hypocrite Ibn Salul then said to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'If we knew how to fight, we would have followed you.' But 'Abdullah ibn Haritha said: 'I implore you for Allah's sake, and I implore you for the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*'s (God's) sake, and I implore you for your religion's sake!' And so they went to fight, and stood firm, after they had considered going back.

What does 'were about to' mean here? To be about to do something refers to the mind when it inclines to a certain action. This inclination then moves to the second stage, and becomes a firm intention. What they did was just an inclination to withdraw; but they stood firm. Why was this? By this, Allah wanted to emphasize that Islam is logical in its view of mankind. Many thoughts would occur to the mind of man. That is why the True Lord mentioned this issue in order to provide us with its remedy, saying: "when two groups of you were about to lose heart" (*Al-'Imran:* 122).

One person from amongst these two groups said: 'I am happy that I wavered because this confirms that I am one of those about whom Allah said: "but Allah was their ally" (*Al-'Imran:* 122), and Allah's alliance is sufficient to me.' He was happy because he had received a badge of honour: Allah's alliance.

Thus, we receive the lessons revealed in the noble verses concerning the battle of Uhud, and we know that this battle followed the great battle of Badr. The battle of Badr ended in victory for the Muslims, although they were fewer in number and preparations. At Badr, the Muslims did not go to battle to start a war; they only went to seize the wealth of Quraysh's caravan, in recompense for the wealth they had left in Mecca. Despite this, Allah willed that they should not confront only a laden caravan, but that they should face the armed troops – and victory was theirs.

This victory, however, despite casting fear into the hearts of the enemies of the Muslims, also accumulated their fervor to muster their forces to deliver a blow which would regain the advantage for the side of disbelief. This is why the heads of Quraysh forbade their women from weeping for their dead, because weeping relieves an anguished soul, and they wanted to keep the sorrow fresh so that they could stir up a hateful grudge that would incite the people to seek revenge. From an emotional perspective, they wanted to keep emotions inflamed. From a financial perspective, they saved the money of the caravan they had managed to save, as means to plan for another battle in which their supremacy would be restored.

Before Uhud they tried to do something, but they were always sent back on their heels. For example, Abu Sufyan led a campaign of one hundred men to attack Medina; but when news of this reached the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, he rushed with his companions toward them. Abu Sufyan heard of this, and fled with the rest of the raiders, casting off their possessions on the way to lighten the load of the animals so they would be able to move faster. This was known as the battle of ‘Suwayq’, because the raiders abandoned their rations, which was mainly a kind of food called ‘suwayq’ (fine flour).

Likewise, groups of disbelievers attempted to assault Medina several times after this, but every time, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out to meet them at the head of groups of warriors. Sometimes they numbered one hundred, sometimes one hundred and fifty, and sometimes two hundred; every time, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dispersed them. It was part of his strategy *peace and blessings be upon him*, that when pursued people who he had heard were planning to invade Madina, that he would remain in their city and amongst their forces for long periods of time.

All this took place before Uhud; afterwards, they gathered to go out to the battle of Uhud, and things happened as they did. The verses that discuss this battle include allusions to what happened on the battlefield. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* arranged the troops in their battle array, and ordered them to stand firm in their positions; but some of them left their places, and others were about to turn back, and then at last stood firm, and the disbelievers of Quraysh fled. In the course of the battle, many of Allah's great signs were manifested.

When Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* granted victory to the Muslims at Badr, though they were a minority, they had not gone out to fight in a battle, but had only intended to seize a caravan.

Perhaps some of them imagined that it was only their being associated with Allah and Islam would lead to constant victory, regardless of the means. So, Allah wanted to teach them that it is essential to make use of the means, attaching importance to preparations as well as numbers, and obeying the rules of the leader.

When they disobeyed, what happened had to happen. Their disobedience did not occur until they were on the brink of victory, and so sixty verses now follow concerning this battle, in order to fully explain all the lessons that we can derive throughout its proceedings. We know that those who are victorious usually feel prosperous; but the discourse here is concerned with the defeat of those who do not use the means Allah puts at their disposal. This matter needs to be considered, and so the Quran here gives us account of a part of the battle, that we can derive lessons and admonition from it. The first lesson is:

When they went out, the hypocrites, led by Ibn Ubayy, stayed behind; so the battle only came to purify, through trials, the true believers. Purification, through trials, puts the believer through intense struggle, and shows the worth of his steadfastness, and certainty. The True Lord only puts the believers to the test because they would be entrusted, throughout history until The Day of Judgment, with the protection of this creed, and none can undertake this task but the firm-hearted, those who are strong under pressure, and those with aspirations beyond the allures of this world.

After this, He considers the human soul, with its human status; for belief does not reside in the hearts of the Muslims by a proclamation of faith alone; rather, every occasion gives a new gush of the faith that all belief will consist of afterwards. For this reason, the True Lord explains to us that two groups from amongst the believers were about to turn back, for they were only human; but did they act on this inclination, or did they return to Allah's command? They regained their resolve.

So, we see that, from amongst those people who claimed to have faith, some stayed behind from the outset, and others wavered, then, stood firm. The minds began to wander, but those people did not pay heed to their self-talk (misgivings), and stood firm to the end. Some of them were superficially firm, like the archers who at first saw victory. They were from amongst those who stood firm; they did not flee at the outset like Ibn Ubayy, and they were not from amongst those who were about to lose heart. They were from amongst those who stood firm, but at the first sign of victory, they longed for battle-spoils, and disobeyed the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Let us read Allah's words: "God fulfilled His promise to you: you were routing them, with His permission, but then you faltered, disputed the order, and disobeyed, once He had brought you within sight of your goal* - some of you desire the gains of this world and others desire the world to come - and then He prevented you from [defeating] them as a punishment. He has now forgiven you: God is most gracious to the believers." (*Al-'Imran:* 152)

After this, another lesson can be derived, which is that we should never be deluded about any human being. Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* was the hero of the disbelievers at Uhud, and he seized the opportunity provided by the descent of the archers from their posts, and routed the Muslims army. Then, what was done was done; by Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* who had not yet embraced Islam at the time. Yet was he not present at the battle of the Trench? Indeed he was present there, and he was present at many battles, fighting on the side of polytheism; yet where was his genius at these battles? Human genius is in conflict with human genius; but no human genius can stand in the way of divine ordain. For this reason, Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* had no role to play at the battle of the Trench; but his role was apparent at the battle of Uhud because his opponents disobeyed the orders of their leader, and so it was a matter of two opposing human geniuses. Had they remained in the confines of Allah's guidance in their directions, the genius of Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* would never have been able to match his Lord's ordain.

An accurate chronicle by any military figures who study Uhud would lead them to say that there was no defeat for the Muslims, nor any victory for the disbelievers because victory entails one side forcing the other out of the battlefield, while the victorious party alone remaining there. Did Quraysh remain on the battlefield, or did they flee? Quraysh fled.

Victory also is manifested when a number of those on the losing side are taken captive. Did Quraysh capture a single Muslim? No. They knew that Madina was completely empty of believers and that only the hypocrites, and the weak, had stayed behind, along with the women and children; yet their superficial victory did not render them eligible to enter Medina.

So, they took no captives, took no spoils, did not enter Medina, and did not remain on the battlefield. How could this be called a victory? Rather, we say that the battle reached a stalemate, and the Muslims remained on the battlefield.

Here, true heroism was revealed because, as we said, victory creates an atmosphere of prosperity, and even those who did not fight valiantly seized the occasion and walked about proudly. Whereas, those who were defeated, and saw their leader *peace and blessings be upon him* injured, and too weak to climb the mountain, that Talha ibn 'Ubayd *Allah be pleased with him* had to bend his back for the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to lean on so he could climb the rock; and the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was bleeding from where his tooth had been broken, and the rings of the helmet had been driven into his cheek. After all this, what happened? The cry even went up that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been killed.

Purification was behind it all; for those who could stand firm after all this were truly worthy to carry the sword to give victory to Allah's word until the rising of the Hour. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* missed one of the heroes of Islam who had been with him, who was named Sa'd ibn Ar-Rabi'.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Which man will tell me what has become of Sa'd ibn Ar-Rabi'? Is he amongst the living, or the dead?' A man from the Ansar, Ubayy ibn Ka'b said: 'I went to find news of him, and I saw him; he had seventy wounds caused by stabbing of swords and striking and shooting of arrows and spears. When he saw him in that condition he said: ‘the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sends you greetings of peace, and asks you: how do you find yourself, which means how are you?'

Sa’d ibn Ar-Rabi‘ replied: 'Tell the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: May Allah grant you on our behalf, a reward higher than the one Allah has ever granted a prophet on behalf of his followers. And tell the Ansar (supporters) that they have no excuse before Allah if the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is harmed and there is still amongst them an eye that blinks!’ Then, he passed away.

Notice his final actions! When he was wounded in the battle so that he could fight with his blade, he used the last strength in him to fight with his speech so that his words would reverberate in the ears of the Muslims, and they would know that those who inflicted wounds upon him did nothing more than to send him closer to meeting his Lord, and to paradise. Every believer wishes for such an end.

We also find that those whom the Quran, excused from participating in war still volunteered to fight! For example, Amr ibn Al-Jumuh was lame, and the lame are excused by Allah from fighting, along with the sick and the blind, for He *the Exalted* said: “the blind, the lame, and the sick will not be blamed. Allah will admit anyone who obeys Him and His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Gardens graced with flowing streams; He will painfully punish anyone who turns away.” (*al-Fath:* 61)

‘Amr ibn Al-Jumuh had four lion-hearted sons who went out to the battle. Yet, he too requested permission from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to go as well, saying: ‘O Messenger of Allah! My sons want to keep me away from this source of goodness and from going out with you to it, but by Allah, I hope that I will enter paradise with my lameness!’

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: “As for you, Allah has removed the duty of Jihad from you. He, then, said to his sons: “It is not for you to forbid him, for perhaps Allah will grant him martyrdom.” And so he went out with them, and was killed.

Another believer said to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Messenger of Allah, I saw my son, who was martyred at Badr, in a dream, saying: ‘Father, come to us!’ ‘So I hope that you will let me fight at Uhud.’ He gave him permission, and he fought, got killed, and became a martyr. The splendour of faith and Islamic loyalty were manifested in Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman *Allah be pleased with him*. His father was a very old man and a Muslim, who took his sword and followed the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hoping that Allah would grant him martyrdom in His cause. He joined the battle without anyone noticing him. The Muslims killed him without recognizing him. His son Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘It is my father, by Allah!’

They swore by Allah that they did not recognize him, speaking the truth. Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* then said: ‘May Allah forgive you, for He is The Most Merciful.’ the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to pay his *deyyah* (blood money), and so Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah *be pleased with him* said: ‘I give it to the Muslims as charity, O Messenger of Allah.’

The events that took place in the battle show us that the battle of Uhud had to be how it was, in order to purify the believers so that they would be worthy to carry Allah’s word, and promote it throughout the earth.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: "And already had Allah given you victory at [the battle of] Badr, while you were utterly weak... "

وَلَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِبَدْرٍ وَأَنتُمْ أَذِلَّةٌ ۖ فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

God helped you at Badr when you were very weak.
Be mindful of God, so that you may be grateful [123]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 123)

With this, Allah took them from a battle in which there was a suspicion of defeat, or a lack of clear victory, to a battle that they won, as though He wanted to say: ‘Your affairs are in the hands of your God, who is watching you, aiding you, providing for you and taking care of you. Beware of relying on numbers and harness; rather, rely on the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* and on whatever direction He wants for you, because Allah's succour is only provided for those who are prepared to receive it, not to those who are not.'

We know that there is a difference between an action and a response; an action is one thing, and the response to the action is something else. An example of this is that an action is one, but the response might differ. To make this clear, consider when you take a cup of tea, and find it too hot, so you blow in it to make it cool down; and in the winter, you find your hands are cold, so you blow on them to warm them up. You blow in one situation to cool down the tea, and in another to warm your hands. The action is one: blowing; but the corresponding responses are different. So, there is an action, and a response. Another example: the Quran is the word of Allah; and even if it were sent down upon the mountains, they would fall down in humility. Despite this, some people hear it, and Allah does not cover up their fault, but rather reveals it to us, by His divine might: "Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, 'What was that he just said?' These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed, those who follow their own desires."(*Muhammad:* 16)

They did not react to the Quran, and when they said: 'What has he said just now?' It refers to the way they belittled what they heard. We find that the True Lord responds to this by saying: "These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed, those who follow their own desires." (*Muhammad:* 16)

The action is one, but the responses differ. The True Lord continues His wise notification with His words: "Allah helped you at Badr when you were very weak. Be mindful of Allah so that you may be grateful." (*Al-'Imran:* 123) So, Allah's aid to you only comes for a believing receiver; and if there is no one to receive it, there is no aid. If you are unable to receive divinely granted aid, we say to you: repair your means of reception because it is like a broken radio: the broadcast is being continually sent, but a broken radio does not receive it. So, if you want to receive from Allah, your means of reception must be sound. The True Lord *the Exalted* explains this further with His words: "Remember when you said to the believers, 'Will you be satisfied if your Lord reinforces you by sending down three thousand angels?'"'

إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَن يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَن يُمِدَّكُمْ رَبُّكُم
بِثَلَٰثَةِ ءَالَٰفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ مُنزَلِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

Remember when you said to the believers, Will you be satisfied if your Lord reinforces you by sending down three thousand angels? [124] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 124)

He *Glorified and Exalted is He* then explains how the means of reception can be rectified, in order that Allah’s aid can be received, saying:

بَلَىٰٓ ۚ إِن تَصْبِرُوا۟ وَتَتَّقُوا۟ وَيَأْتُوكُم مِّن فَوْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا يُمْدِدْكُمْ
رَبُّكُم بِخَمْسَةِ ءَالَٰفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ مُسَوِّمِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

Well, if you are steadfast and mindful of God, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand swooping angels if the enemy should suddenly attack you!’ and God arranged it so [125] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 125)

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* gives us the example of patience and piety at Badr, when the believers were few, and still victory was attained. At Uhud, they were not patient, and when they saw the battle-spoils, they began to salivate, and did not show patience; and they were not conscious of Allah’s command delivered through the words of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, which were to keep to their positions. So how could they be worthy of divine aid?

So, what determines aid? Allah is the one who gives aid; but who is capable of receiving it, and benefiting from it? It is the one who is able to be patience and conscious of Allah.

So, patience and consciousness to Allah are the harness of war, every bit of them is as important as numbers and preparations. For this reason, our Lord said to us: "And prepare against them whatever you are able of power" (*al-Anfal:* 60) "prepare for them what you think you need to defeat them with; no, you prepare what you are capable of, and when you have prepared what you are capable of, and have prepared all the means at your disposal, Allah, then, will complete your endeavor with victory.

Humans, by nature, are capable of doing this. For example (and Allah has the highest example, before and after), imagine that you are an important trader, and huge trucks come to you, laden with goods, big boxes and crates, and you sit, whilst the workers unload the goods. One worker comes to carry a crate to take it down, but it is too heavy for his strength. The moment you feel that he is about to fall, you rush without thinking to help and support him. This worker exerted all his efforts, but was still unable, for the one who is in charge stretched out his hand to help him. So what about the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*?

It is as though He is saying that we must strive, and utilize the means we possess; and if you see that your means are exhausted, and that the situation is too much for you to handle, know that it might be too much for you, but it is not too much for your Lord, who says:

وَمَا جَعَلَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَىٰ لَكُمْ وَلِتَطْمَئِنَّ قُلُوبُكُم بِهِۦ ۗ
وَمَا ٱلنَّصْرُ إِلَّا مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿١٢٦﴾

As a message of hope for you [believers] to put your
hearts at rest – help comes only from God, the
Mighty, the Wise [126] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 126)

Be careful of imagining that the aid of the three thousand, or five thousand, that Allah sent to aid you with, or the angels that are well trained for fighting etc… were in any way a condition on which depends the victory of Allah for you. He was indeed able to give you victory without your or the angels’ participation; He is capable of granting you with victor without the participation of the angles, but it was a means of glad tidings for you, to comfort your human natures. When the believers saw such great numbers coming to their aid, although the disbelievers were greater, in number, than them, they were reassured and were confident of victory. So, the angels were only a means of glad tidings, and succour was from God, the Mighty, who cannot be defeated. All things enfold by His wisdom, which is unsurpassable. The True Lord then says:

لِيَقْطَعَ طَرَفًا مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ أَوْ يَكْبِتَهُمْ فَيَنقَلِبُوا۟ خَآئِبِينَ ﴿١٢٧﴾

and in order to cut off the flanks of the disbelievers' army and frustrate them, to make them withdraw in total defeat [127] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 127)

Cutting down a section is determined by understanding what *tarf* (section) refers to? If it refers to a large number, then 'cutting down a section' implies that some of it would be killed. If (*tarf*) refers to an expanse of land, then 'cutting down a section' implies that some of their land would be taken. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: "Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders? God decides - no one can reverse His decision - and He is swift in reckoning…." (*ar-Ra'd:* 41)

Every day, a part of the land of disbelief was lost to be added to the land of faith; this is in regard to the expanse of land. Supposing that (*tarf*) refers to wealth, the verse would mean that some of their wealth was taken in the form of battle-spoils. Then, there is Quraysh's stature, that the entire peninsula feared: the whole peninsula looked upon Quraysh with awe, and no tribe could threaten its caravans in the north or the south, because all the tribes knew that they would go to the Temple (*Ka'ba*) in the season of pilgrimage; no tribe would threaten them because they would soon be heading toward Quraysh. So, Quraysh had great power and authority. When the tribes learned that the men of Quraysh had been broken and routed, and that their trade route to the Levant had been threatened, they sought another faction to go to.

The cutting down of a section mentioned in this verse has many possible interpretations. If it refers to people, some of them were killed; if it refers to land, some of their land was taken and became the land of the faithful; if it refers to power and authority, they had been visited by defeat, and although their power had stretched throughout the peninsula, it was now wavering: "and in order to cut off the flanks of the disbelievers' army" (*Al-'Imran:* 127).

Notice that the True Lord said: "and in order to cut off the flanks" (*Al-'Imran:* 127). He did not say that He might annihilate; for Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* let some of the disbelievers survive because they had a role to play in faith. the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was full of compassion, mercy, and tenderness for his community, and he *peace and blessings be upon him* had good expectations from Allah, in that He will guide them to the right path, and so there are several verses in the Quran that deal with this matter. The True Lord says: “Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.’’ (*al-Kahf:* 6)

And elsewhere in the Noble Quran, He says: “Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers. *If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility.” (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4)

Allah said to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him peace and blessings be upon him*: "You are only charged to deliver the message" (*Al-‘Imran:* 20). The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* hoped to guide to faith every individual member of his community, and so the True Lord said:

لَيۡسَ لَكَ مِنَ ٱلۡأَمۡرِ شَيۡءٌ أَوۡ يَتُوبَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ أَوۡ يُعَذِّبَهُمۡ فَإِنَّهُمۡ ظَٰلِمُونَ ١٢٨

Whether God relents towards them or punishes them is
not for you [Prophet] to decide: they are wrongdoers [128]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 128)

That is to say, it is not for you, O Muhammad except to rejoice if Allah accepts their repentance; and if He punishes them, you should not be saddened by this, for they are wrongdoers, and you are charged with nothing but delivering the message. As for them, they have wronged themselves by disbelieving. As we know, wrongdoing (injustice) is to take something from its rightful owner and give it to another; and the height of wrongdoing is to ascribe godhood to any but Allah, which is polytheism (*shirk*); and so the True Lord says: And so the True Lord said: “For, Indeed, attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong.” (*Luqman:* 13)

The True Lord says to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: “Whether Allah relents towards them or punishes them is not for you [Prophet] to decide: they are wrongdoers.” (*Al-‘Imran:* 128)

This matter is not out of Allah's dominion, for the heavens and the earth and all that they contain are Allah's dominion. It is said that, after the disbelievers covered his face with blood, when he only called them to their Lord, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to pray against them, but Allah forbade him, for He knew that there remained among them those who would believe, so He sent down His words:

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِۚ يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ
وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢٩﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God. He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will: God is most forgiving and merciful [129] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 129)

Since we are talking about some features of the battle of Uhud, I wish to say: '*Allah be pleased* with mount Uhud: for we heard that a great scholar and knower of Allah, once said: 'Uhud *may Allah be pleased with it*…' People were amazed at 'Abdullah Al-Zaydan, saying this, and when he noticed their amazement, he said to them: 'Did the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not address the mountain saying: "Be firm, Uhud, for upon you is a Prophet, a great-faithed one, and two martyrs!" and did the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad not say about it: "Uhud is a mountain that loves us, and we love it"? Do you wish for better companionship than this? Say: Uhud, *Allah be pleased* with it!'

We said previously: if your mind is confused about something, do not consider it according to your own standards; consider it according to the higher standards. We say this because science, now, moves at an incredible rate, seeking to uncover some of Allah's secrets of the universe; it has shown us that animals use their own languages to communicate, and they are now trying to decipher the language of fish. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* told us the story of the ant and Prophet Solomon *peace be upon him*, saying: "O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers without [even] being aware [of you]" (*an-Naml:* 18).

This speech shows us that an ant came out to scan the horizons to protect those with her, then, returned to speak to her fellow ants. Our master Solomon *peace be upon him* heard her, and smiled at what she said. So, modern science is developing rapidly, confirming that every species has its own means of communication, and that every species has emotions, and every species has a means of multiplying. In light of this, the True Lord said, through our master Solomon *peace be upon him*: "O people, we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given from all things. Indeed, this is evident bounty." (*an-Naml:* 16) This was a special attribute that our master Solomon *peace be upon him* possessed. So, birds have their own speech. If we go deeper and consider inanimate objects, we hear the word of the True Lord *Glorified is He* about the people of Pharaoh, and see that the inanimate objects did not weep for them: "Many a garden and spring they left behind, *And crops and noble building, *many a thing in which they had delighted.* Thus. And We caused to inherit it another people. *And neither sky nor earth shed tears over them, nor were they reprieved." (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-29)

Do the sky and earth weep? This is an extraordinary matter, for inanimate objects like the sky and the earth, do not only communicate, but they also have emotions because weeping only arises as an emotional response. This means that inanimate objects do not only talk, but that they also feel. The earth will cast off its burdens, and speak its news; how? This is because "…your Lord has inspired it to do.''(*az-Zalzala:* 5) And the sky and the earth approached Allah in complete obedience and humility: "Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke — He said to it and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not,' and they said, 'We come willingly.'" (*Fussilat:* 11)

So, there is more than just communication: they also have emotions, just like you; and just as things make you sad, the earth too weeps. As long as it weeps, it must also be able to be happy; and Allah Almighty says, about the world of Pharaoh: "and neither sky nor earth shed tears over them" (*ad-Dukhan:* 29). If they did not cry for some people, this statement would not have any significance.

In this regard, Imam 'Ali *may his face be honored by Allah* said: 'When a believer dies, two places weep for him: the place where he prayed because it will be denied the blessings of faith; and the place where his good deeds rose up. One place is on earth, and the other is in the heavens.' So, we must be aware that everything has feelings.

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said: "When a believer dies, the earth rejoices in him; and there is not a single plot but wishes he would be buried therein." Why are we saying this now? We say it so that if it is confirmed scientifically that everything has its own language, and that every species in the universe has a means of communication, it should be said that there were people who were visited by the cool breezes of faith, and they perceived and felt this fact in the Quran; no one can claim that they invented it by themselves because it is in the Quran, even if we did not know the how of it.

This battle, the battle of Uhud, is mentioned over the course of sixty verses. We notice that Allah here says: "And [remember] when you, [O Muhammad], left your family in the morning..." (*Al-'Imran:* 121), and "When two parties among you were about to lose heart..." (*Al-'Imran:* 122). And "already had Allah given you victory at [the battle of] Badr, while you were very weak..." (*Al-'Imran:* 122). After this, He leaves the battle in its heat, and mentions other things, then, returns to finish the battle. Had this been just a scene from the battle, and had simply stopped here, and a new subjects had started, we would not have needed to search our souls. The battle is mentioned over sixty verses; so how could the speech about the battle end when it has given us nothing but the beginning of it, and after that, the Quran, would focus on a totally different subject? What makes Allah leave aside the battle, and say: You who believe, do not consume usurious interest, doubled and redoubled. Be mindful of God so that you may prosper – '"beware of the Fire prepared for those who ignore [Him] - * and obey God and the Prophet so that you may be given mercy. * Hurry towards your Lord's forgiveness and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth prepared for the righteous,* who give, both in prosperity and adversity, who restrain their anger and pardon people - Allah loves those who do good - '"those who remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins if they do something shameful or wrong themselves - who forgives sins but God? - and who never knowingly persist in doing wrong.* The reward for such people is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will remain. How excellent is the reward of those who labour! ‘”Allah’s ways have operated before your time: travel through the land, and see what was the end of those who disbelieved. *This is a clear lesson to people, and guidance and teaching for those who are mindful of Allah.” (*Al-‘Imran:* 130-138)

Why did the True Lord only give us a hint of the battle, and then move on different subjects, the first of which is usury; what is the connection between these issues and the battle? I say: may Allah have mercy on the author of ‘In the Shade of the Quran, commentary, Sheikh Sayyid Qutb, who was able to derive several important principles of faith from this change of subject; if the Muslims in every corner of the earth were only able to put them right in front of their eyes, not a single disbelieving nation would be able to overpower us.

We wish to understand these issues; why did they begin with the issue of usury? It is because one of the reasons for their routing, and their lack of clear victory at Uhud, was their desire for battle-spoils. Battle-spoils represent superfluous wealth, and usury is based on greed for superfluous wealth.

Since the Quran is making mention here of an event-based issue, and events come and go, Allah wants to preserve the event so that it has relevance to other than the time in which it occurs. If not, the event might disappear along with the lesson that can be learned from it, and become useless. When the soul is in the midst of an event, it is more receptive of it, because, as Sheikh Sayyid Qutb said, the event is still hot. When the Quran utilizes an event before it cools off, the issue upon which the lesson is based can easily touch the human soul. Allah did not want the events of Uhud to disappear with all its potential lessons without the noble Quran using them to confirm particular issues of faith that are prevalent in times different from times of war, and that can conform to times of peace. It is as if the verse of usury here has fallen into the middle of the texts that discuss the battle of Uhud.

People who consider it superficially might say: ‘What has made the Quran, go from talking about the battle of Uhud to talking about usury again, after it had talked about it before?’ To this, we say that the Quran, does not chronicle events. Rather, it uses events to simplify and explain the concepts that give events their breadth, their length, and their depth; for every event that occurs takes up the amount of time that is appropriate to this event, and the event takes up a certain amount of time, like an hour, two hours, or a night. This is the event's length.

The events that Allah sets in motion have lengths that demarcate the length of time the event will last, and they have breadths, which give them their extents. After they were straight lines, they become areas, and the True Lord makes them applicable to many things; for He does not want events to flow in a straight line, He wants them to have a wide track, with an area, and a width. This width produces a terrain that contains many different things, yet this might also end with the event itself, and so Allah wants to give the event a third dimension, which is historical depth, which gives its own gift, just as we are now able to benefit from what we have been given by the event of the battle of Uhud.

So, events have sizes too, and this is what makes people stop to say: 'Maintaining the bond of kinship lengthens the lifetime'; and life has a limited time span, which is a straight line, yet there are those who increase the breadth of their lives so that instead of benefiting people in a small way, they work to give benefit over a wider area, making their lives cover a larger space.

Other people desire their lives to be even more powerful; what do they do? They give their lives depth, and so instead of working for the extent of their lives only, which will end however expansive they are, they increase their good works, leaving a legacy of knowledge or charity that will continue after their lives end, ''as the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said:

"When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things: ongoing charity, or knowledge that gives benefit, or a pious son who prays for them."(1)

And so the True Lord said: "[Prophet], do you not see how Allah makes comparisons? A good word is like a good tree whose root is firm and whose branches are high in the sky, * yielding constant fruit by its Lord's leave - Allah makes such comparisons for people so that they may reflect." (*Ibrahim:* 24-25)

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Hurayrah-Muslim*

It is but a good word spoken, yet it is like a healthy tree because it takes root in the ear of the one who hears it and becomes an action that conforms to the word, and every time the one who hears this word performs an action that results from its effect, some of the reward for it goes to the one who said the word, even if they have died. It is as though the one who said this word is still alive, and as though his life span has been extended by his good word. So, the good works of a person do not actually extend his life because life is limited to a certain span; but there are people who give their lives breadth and others who give it depth so that it will keep on giving until the Hour rises. It is as though they have given themselves an eternal life. It has been said that: '*Dhikr* (supplication to Allah) is a second life for a person.'

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* clarifies the useful lessons that can be derived from the battle of Uhud. The first incident of disobedience was the reason not behind defeat but, let us say, it was behind the failure to accomplish victory because they were victorious at first, yet the victory was not completely secured because of the act of disobedience. The motivation for this disobedience was that when they saw the battle-spoils, they rushed toward them. So, their motivation was seeking wealth unlawfully because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said to them: "Keep the cavalry from us, and let them not come upon us from your side. Keep to your posts, whether the tide of battle be for us or against us. Even if you see the birds pecking at us, do not leave your posts!" Thus, forsaking their posts became unlawful. It is deemed an unlawful act, when the self seeks something different from what the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded. The desire here was for money; and such is the case with usury.

The true Lord willed that the heat of the event as well as its effect result in the unaccomplished victory, and the Muslims' suffering. The cause of this suffering was that a few of them wanted to gain superfluous wealth in an unlawful manner. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted this to be a way of illustrating the evil affect of dealing in usury.

So, it is appropriate that we should find a verse dealing with usury here, for it illustrates the evil consequences of coveting superfluous wealth gained unlawfully. There are many positions in the Quran, where effects of actions are illustrated in ways that appear to be unrelated, but on deeper reflection they actually are related.

We already discussed the words of Allah Almighty where He says*:* "Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer and stand before Allah, devoutly obedient. *And if you fear [an enemy, then pray] on foot or riding. But when you are secure, then remember Allah [in prayer], as He has taught you that which you did not [previously] know." (*al-Baqara:* 238-239)

A person who thinks superficially might say that the True Lord speaks about divorce before these two verses, when He says*:* "And if you divorce your wives before consummating the marriage but after having fixed a bride-gift for them, then give them half of what you had previously fixed, unless they waive [their right], or unless the one who holds the marriage tie waives [his right]. Waiving [your right] is nearer to righteousness, so do not forget to be generous towards one another. Indeed Allah sees what you do. *Take care to do your prayers/praying in the best way/ and stand before Allah in devotion…." (*al-Baqara:* 237)

The True Lord then leaves the issue of divorce and enjoins the preserving of prayer, saying*:* "Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer and stand before Allah devoutly obedient." (*al-Baqara:* 238)

After that, the True Lord returns to finish speaking about divorce and the separation of death, saying*:* "And those who are taken in death among you and leave behind their wives - for their wives is a bequest: maintenance for one year without turning [them] out. But if they leave [of their own accord], then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable way. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." (*al-Baqara:* 240)

He speaks about divorce and death in two verses, yet He sends down a verse about prayer in between. Why? It is to show us that the Islamic way is a perfectly complete way. Be careful of saying, 'Divorce is different from prayer and death.' No, it is a complete way of life. It is also because He *Glorified and Exalted is He* wants to alert us to the fact that divorce is an action that comes when a person feels anger and when the husband, the wife and their families are in a disturbed state. For this reason, the religion advises them, 'if you understood clearly, you would rush to prayer whenever these disturbing matters afflict you.'

When you are in a state of anger and worry, perform ablution, and pray because The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that when something distressed him, he would stand and pray. So, when tension arises between a husband, his wife and their families, tell them, 'The situation has gone beyond our manipulations, so let us pray so that Allah will help us solve these difficult issues.' I challenge that there is no problem for which Allah will not provide a solution, if a Muslim turns to prayer.

Therefore, we understand that the True Lord says, "Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer" (*al-Baqara:* 238) because maintaining these prayers is the means to preventing disagreements. This is because Allah is not in your minds at times of stress and hardship and instead you submit yourself to the stress and hardship and forget the prayer, at the time when you need it the most. At times of stress and hardship, you must turn to your Lord. I give the example (and Allah has the highest example) of a boy whose friends beat him up and so he runs to his father for comfort and help. Likewise, if you make your wife angry, she will go to her family; how then can you not turn to your Lord at times of hardship and stress?

Hence, we find that what Allah says in this verse, "Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer"; (*al-Baqara:* 238) this comes in the right sequence and the same is true for the verse about usury; it is in its proper place, especially because He has mentioned usury beforehand. Then, comes the incident and its heat, and this noble word is sent down so that anyone who desires wealth that exceeds what Allah has made lawful would know that it would bring strife upon him and others; for the strife during the battle of Uhud affected everyone - the archers and everyone else.

As a result, the whole world suffers when the teachings of Allah are contradicted. If excessive and unlawfully gained wealth is not forsaken in obedience to the Laws of Allah, He declares war upon those who take it; a war from Allah and His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَأۡكُلُواْ ٱلرِّبَوٰٓاْ أَضۡعَٰفٗا
مُّضَٰعَفَةٗۖ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُفۡلِحُونَ ١٣٠

You who believe, do not consume usurious interest, doubled and redoubled. Be mindful of God so that you may prosper [130] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 130)

Usury is excess wealth; can it be gorged upon? Indeed it can because all financial matters are for the sake of the scraps that one eats; this is the origin. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: “Whosoever of you reaches the morning feeling secured among his ‘flock’ (i.e. his people, healthy in body, possessing provisions for his day, it is as if the world has been gathered for him.”

We know that if any of us are in a place where there is not a single slice of bread, it will not help him to own a mountain of gold. "Do not consume usury, doubled and multiplied" (*Al-‘Imran:* 130). The statement of Allah, "doubled" and "multiplied" are modern economic terms. Doubling, in Arabic is something which has increased that when it is compared with the original, that original appears to be feeble. For example, if the original capital is one hundred and an interest of twenty percent is added to it, the total will be one hundred and twenty. So, the one hundred and twenty makes the original one hundred appear feeble; this is what is understood by the word ‘doubling’.

What about the meaning of "multiplied"? The one hundred and twenty will become a new capital and when another year goes by, interest will also be taken on the one hundred and twenty so that the increase will itself be increased upon. This is called ‘compound interest’. Does this mean that it is acceptable for us to consume usury if it is not doubled and multiplied?! No, it is because the situation was like this at the time of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

Someone might say: ‘I understand from the Quran, that all that is prohibited is doubling and multiplying; if it is not doubled and multiplied, is it acceptable to make a simple profit in the form of an interest rate based on the original sum only?’ We direct such a person to the words of Allah, "But if you repent, you may have your principal - [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged." (*al-Baqara:* 279) This wise statement confirms that repentance entails that a person returns to the limits of his capital and does not contaminate it with either plain or compound interest. When we find the words "doubling and multiplying," they have only been used to highlight the situation that was prevalent at the time.

After this, the True Lord ends the verse by saying, "but fear Allah so that you may be successful." (*al-Baqara:* 149) We always say, when we see the phrase "fear Allah", that it means 'to place a means of protection between yourselves and Allah'. Does this mean a barrier between yourselves and the majestic and beautiful attributes of Allah? No because protection is against those things that cause suffering and pain. Therefore when Allah says "but fear Allah" in this verse, it means to place a means of protection between yourselves and His attributes of majesty, such as The Compeller, The Subduer and The Avenger. When the True Lord says "but fear Allah" in this verse, it is akin to His words "And fear the Fire (of Hell)" (*Al-'Imran:* 131) as the fire (of Hell) is one of the hosts of the majestic attributes of Allah.

When the True Lord says, "so that you may be successful" (*al-Baqara:* 149), we know that the word successful (or '*falah*' in Arabic) in this verse is meant to encourage those who believe in Allah and His Guidance. The word successful in Arabic is derived from the word farming ('*filaha*') and Allah uses this word as it is something that can be felt and seen all the time as it is connected with our survival; you plough and sow and only reap the benefits afterwards.

Therefore Allah wants to show you that the hardships that come with ploughing, sowing, and watering show their results at the time of reaping. A farmer might take two measures of grain from his stores to sow a patch of land. When he does this, you do not say him that he has reduced the amount of grains in his stores because he has not taken from his stores except to increase this amount. The one who never takes from his stores and never sows, will have his head in his hands with regret when it is time to harvest, but regrets will not benefit him by then.

What The True Lord wants to say to us is, 'Even if the religion exhausts you and requires much action from you, you will gain benefit in return, depending on your intention and your dedication to your work. Allah gave us an example by His words*:* "like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and knowing." (*al-Baqara:* 261) The meaning is clear: we take one seed from you, which might reduce your supply but in return it gives you back seven hundred. So, when the seed is taken from you, do not say that you have lost something. Rather realise that you will have a profit of so and so. Allah draws this example for us of one of His creations, the land; the inanimate land. If you give this inanimate land one seed, it will give you back seven hundred. If one of the creatures of Allah, in this case the land, can give you back many multiples of what you gave it, can the Lord of this land not give it back to you doubled and multiplied? Allah is able to grant the finest of gifts and this is what true success is. After this, when He mentions the true success, He also tells you that you will not only gain success, but you will also safeguard yourself from the Fire.' The True Lord says*:*

وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱلنَّارَ ٱلَّتِىٓ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾

beware of the Fire prepared for those who ignore
[Him] [131] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 131)

So, there are two issues here: the deprivation of harm and the obligation of benefit. He obliges the benefit of success on you, and deprives you of the harm of Hell. For this reason, Allah says*:* "And whoever is drawn away (and protected) from the Fire and is admitted into Paradise has most definitely attained the ultimate success". (*Al-'Imran:* 185)

This is because if he is drawn away from hell and is admitted into heaven, then this is the greatest success and this is why our Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* at the moment when the Straight Path is crossed, will lead us over hell so that we pass over it. Why? So that we realize how our faith has saved us from it. So, what is the means by which we attain success and avoid hell? The means to this is following the Guidance of Allah which He has placed on the tongue of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, as Allah says*:*

وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

And obey God and the Prophet so that you may be given mercy [132] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 132)

"Mercy" manifests in Allah not afflicting you with hardships whereas, recovery means that you fall into hardships and then, it is removed from you. For this reason, if we follow the guidance from the very beginning, we will receive mercy. Allah also says*:* "And We send down the Quran as healing and mercy." (*al-Isra':* 82)

Health here means eliminating the sin that we have become embroiled in and which the Quran heals. Mercy is manifested when we follow the religion from the beginning so no hardships afflict us.

The True Lord then says*:*

وَسَارِعُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

Hurry towards your Lord's forgiveness and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth prepared for the righteous [133] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 133)

We know that 'hurrying' is different from 'rushing': hasting means to advance when it is appropriate, which means to do something in as little time as possible. An example of this is when a person drives from Cairo to Alexandria, trying to cover the two hundred and ten kilometres in the least amount of time possible. Instead of taking three hours, he drives faster so that it takes only two. So, 'hurrying' means advancing when appropriate and it is praiseworthy. It is the opposite of 'dawdling' which is blameworthy.

Rushing, on the other hand, means advancing when it is not appropriate and it is blameworthy. Its opposite is deliberation, which is praiseworthy. So, hasting is praiseworthy and its opposite, dawdling, is blameworthy; and rushing is blameworthy, and its opposite, deliberation, is praiseworthy. One popular proverb says: In deliberation lays safety and in rushing lays regret.

The True Lord says*:* “And hurry to the forgiveness from your Lord" (*Al-‘Imran:* 133) i.e. seek forgiveness and Paradise as quickly as you can because you do not know how long you will remain in this world. Beware of putting off a good deed or an act of charity because you do not know if you will stay alive to perform it or not.Your life is a chance, so take it and seek forgiveness and paradise. This is the meaning of the well-known proverb: ‘work for this life as though you will live forever, and work for the Afterlife as if you will die tomorrow.’

People perceive reality in accordance to what matches their psychological needs. For example: ‘work for this life as though you will live forever’ is undestood by them as: ‘gather as much as you can in this world so you are provided for until the Day of Resurrection’; but this is not a correct understanding. The correct understanding is that whatever passes you by of worldly things today, consider that you will live long enough to get it tomorrow; as for the affairs of the Hereafter, you must be quick where they are concerned.

“And hurry to the forgiveness from your Lord and a garden that is as wide as the heavens and the earth." (*Al-‘Imran:* 133) We know that area is comprised of length and width because something with an equal length and width is a square, and something with a smaller width and a longer length is called a rectangle. When the True Lord says "as wide as the heavens and the earth" (*Al-‘Imran:* 133), we know that width is the lesser of the two dimensions, i.e. it is wider than we can see. It is as though He has compared the smallest dimension of paradise with the widest dimension that we know, the heavens and the earth combined together, thereby giving us something much wider than we can see. If its width is greater than we can imagine then what about its length? It is an extent that we cannot comprehend.

Someone might ask why does Allah mention its width, saying “as wide as the heavens and the earth" (*Al-‘Imran:* 133), without mentioning its length? To this, we say: do the heavens and the earth alone comprise the entire universe? Allah *Glorified is He* says: "His throne (i.e knowledge and power) extends over the heavens and the earth." (*al-Baqara:* 255)

In addition, The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: “The heavens and the earth and what lies between them are akin to nothing more than a ring thrown by a king into an empty desert. Is it not Allah’s dominion?

And so we see that this paradise has been prepared for those who are conscious of Allah. The meaning of “prepared” is formed and made, and that is that. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* confirmed this, by saying: “Paradise was shown to me; and had I wished to bring you a fruit from there, I would have.” Why? Because mere information about a thing might mean that it does not yet exist, but will exist later; but a thing’s existence negates the possibility that it might not exist because its existence has become a reality. When Allah says: "Prepared" in this verse, it means that Allah has finished its creation and He will not take the raw materials of this world and wait until the world develops under your watch and then use the means and materials that you have developed to prepare Paradise. No.

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us about it saying: “There will be bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.”(1) Allah had created paradise in its entirety with nothing more than the word “Be!” When He says: "Prepared" in this verse, this means it is something that is finished and done with. As long as this is the case, the matter of the final journey to it or to its counterpart, has also been settled. Paradise has been made ready for those who are fearful of Allah; but who are they? Allah says*:*

ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ فِى ٱلسَّرَّآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ وَٱلۡكَٰظِمِينَ ٱلۡغَيۡظَ
وَٱلۡعَافِينَ عَنِ ٱلنَّاسِۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

who give, both in prosperity and adversity, who
restrain their anger and pardon people – God loves
those who do good [134] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 134)

These are some of the attributes of those who fear Allah an example of those who restrain their anger can be found in the battle of Uhud.

Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him*, the master of the martyrs, and the uncle of our master the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was killed. If only it was just a killing but further than that he was mutilated.

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(1) *Narrated by Sahl bin Sa’d Al-Bokhari*

His liver was taken out and Hind (bint Otbah) chewed on it. This is more than just a killing. This is the fruit of vile malice.

When the news of the killing of Hamza *may* Allah *be pleased with him* reached the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and they told him that Hind had taken his liver and chewed upon it before spitting it out as Allah had made it hard for her to chew, he said: "Allah would not torment any piece of Hamza in Hell". This is because Hind was destined for hell and if she had eaten the liver, it would have formed part of the cells of her body, and so if she entered hell, then a part of Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him* would enter with her. Therefore, her Lord made her body tremble and prepare to vomit, so she spat out the morsel of liver that she had bitten off.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* considered the death of Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him* as the most abominable thing he had ever encountered, saying: "If Allah grants me victory over Quraysh in any place, I will mutilate thirty men of their dead!'

But then the matter of restraining anger became necessary for the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, on the occasion of the death of one of the most beloved people to him, an event that angered him more than any other. Allah then sent down His words*:* "And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], then punish them with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed with. But if you are patient then it is better for those who are patient." (*an-Nahl:* 126)

This was in order that we know that our Lord, His the Most High, does not react to anything because reaction is a trait of temporal beings and this is His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so He *Exalted is He* sent down to him the words*:* "And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], then punish them with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed with" (*an-Nahl:* 126), and this is a command to withhold anger, which He sent down specifically in relation to the Messenger and the event of the battle of Uhud. After this, He makes it a general principle, applicable to times of peace as well as war and applicable to all people, not just the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* as it already applied to Him.

"And who restrain their anger" (*Al-'Imran:* 134). We know that all abstract concepts are derived from material ones. The word for restraining anger (in Arabic *'kazhm'*) is derived from the word which refers to filling a water skin (a leather pouch used for transporting water). When the bag was full of water, its neck would be tied tightly so that no water could spill out. This action; of tying the bag was called *'kazhm'*. The water skin was soft and if it were put on the back of a man or a beast, it might spill water because of its softness, so it needed to be tied well to prevent water spillage.

In the same way, anger stirs in the human soul. Allah does not forbid the arousal of anger in the soul because it is a natural reaction and if Allah did not want natural reactions, He would have prevented their causes when creating the human being.

Rather, He wills their existence for certain reasons. For example, the sexual instinct: He wills that it exists in order to preserve the species, and He subjected it to legislation just to refine it. The same is true for the natural reaction of anger: Islam does not want the believer to be poured into an iron cast, with no emotions; rather, Allah *the Exalted* wants the believer to react to events, but in an appropriate manner, with a gracious, productive reaction and not a destructive one. For this reason, the True Lord says: "Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. You see them kneeling and prostrating, seeking the bounty of Allah and His good pleasure." (*al-Fath:* 29)

So the believer is not supposed to always be stern or always merciful; the situation is what should determine human emotions. The True Lord *the Exalted* says: "people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers." (*al-Ma'ida:* 54)

Is anyone humble and mighty at the same time? We say: It is the guidance of faith that makes a believer such: humble to his brother, and mighty before the disbeliever. So, Islam does not cast the believer in a mould so that he does not react to events.

Another example can be found in the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when his son, Ibrahim, died. Did he react? Indeed he did and he wept and grieved. Allah does not want the believer to be made of stone; He wants the believer to react to events but in a way that corresponds with the event in question. And so our master, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, said upon the passing of his son: "The eye weeps, and the heart grieves; but we only say that which pleases our Lord."(1)

At the time of reacting, we should not say something that will displease our Lord. Our reaction should be properly directed. The believer requires anger when he is provoked into defending the religion of Allah, but the believer must restrain this anger, i.e. he should not allow his reaction to prevent him from behaving well and considering his actions. Restraining anger (of *'kazhm'* in Arabic) as we have seen is derived from something tangible. Another example for this is in the case of camels and other beasts that have two stomachs, one for storing food, and the other for rumination.

When a camel ruminates, it regurgitates the food from the extra stomach and chews it. When the camel stops rumination, the Arabic verb for this is '*'kazhama"*, derived from the same root word as *'kazhm'* (restraining anger). The True Lord *the Exalted* says*:* "who restrain their anger and who pardon the people" (*Al-'Imran:* 134) and we said that there are different types of reaction. A reaction might be suppressed and held in check, meaning that a person is able to turn it into a physical reaction but refrains from doing so. As for 'pardoning', it means that the anger is removed from the heart, as though the incident never happened. This is the second level. The third level is that you give a corresponding reaction, i.e. you do not stop at this limit, but rather, you repay the bad deed with a good deed. So, there are three stages: Firstly, suppressing anger, secondly, pardoning and forgiving, and thirdly going beyond these two in repaying the ill turn with a good one.

This is the development along the stages of certainty because if you do not hold your anger in check, and instead react, the other person is also capable of reacting in a way that matches your reaction, and directing his rage and anger towards you. This rage might then continue to grow, passing from generation to generation. If you suppress your anger however, the other person might be ashamed of himself and the issue might be closed.

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(1) *Narrated by Anas - Al-Bukhari*

"And who pardon the people" (*Al-'Imran:* 134). The verb '*afa*' (to pardon) is derived from '*afa 'ala al-athar*' (the wind blowing away the tracks someone leaves in the desert sand). The True Lord finishes the verse by saying: "and Allah loves those who do good (to the extent of perfection)." (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

We have previously discussed the philosophy of this. We said that we are all the creation of Allah and all creatures are dependent on Allah. As long as we are all dependent on Allah, if one of us wrongs another, Allah will be on the side of the one who is wronged and will shower him with His mercy, pardon, and compassion. In this way, the one who is wronged gains; so should they not treat well the one who wronged them?

Yet the human intellect abandons its intelligence at times of anger and so if someone wrongs a person, he considers him an enemy. We must understand however that those who wrong us only put Allah on our side, so their poor treatment of us gains for us more than what it takes from us. For this reason, you must have strong faith and treat well the one who wrongs you.

The True Lord then adds to the attributes of the residents of paradise:

وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُواْ فَٰحِشَةً أَوۡ ظَلَمُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ ذَكَرُواْ ٱللَّهَ فَٱسۡتَغۡفَرُواْ لِذُنُوبِهِمۡ وَمَن
يَغۡفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ وَلَمۡ يُصِرُّواْ عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُواْ وَهُمۡ يَعۡلَمُونَ ١٣٥

those who remember God and implore forgiveness for their
sins if they do something shameful or wrong themselves –
who forgives sins but God? – and who never knowingly
persist in doing wrong [135] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 135)

An immorality means a vile sin. Does this mean that when the archers at Uhud left their posts, they abandoned their faith? No, it was only a mistake, but it was a grievous sin on the part of those who encouraged the believers to descend from their positions and a minor sin on the part of those who were persuaded to descend from their positions.

It is, therefore, appropriate to say: "And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah" (*Al-'Imran:* 135). In this verse, The True Lord wants us to "remember Allah" as a reminder to us that those who commit shameful deeds and wrong themselves do so because they forget Allah and when they perform their sin, Allah is not on their mind. What allows a person to dare to sin in order to satisfy his passions is that he does not consider Allah or His reward and punishment in the Hereafter. Were he to envisage this, he would not sin.

In the same way, the one who is careless in obeying Allah does so because he does not think of Allah and how He rewards the pious. If he remembered Allah and how He rewards the pious, he would not be too lazy to obey Him. And so the True Lord says*:* "(They) remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins" (*Al-'Imran:* 135). If someone prays for his sins to be forgiven, he has surely remembered Allah.

The scholars differ over the meaning of '*fahishah*' (immorality). Some say it means an enormity (a grievous sin), whereas wronging oneself is a venial (minor) sin. Other scholars say that *'fahishah'* means fornication because the Quran mentioned it explicitly and that everything else is a minor sin.

However, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "There is no grievous sin when forgiveness is sought; and there is no minor sin when there is persistence."

So, it is not permissible for someone to disregard his own sins, saying: 'This is only a minor sin, and that is only a minor sin...' because the accumulation of minor sins causes them to become grievous sins. When we consider the word of Allah: "And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression]" (*Al-'Imran:* 135), we find that the one who committed the shameful deed has also sinned against himself because he has gained for himself a fleeting pleasure, but has earned himself eternal suffering.

In that case, why did the True Lord not simply say: 'and wrong themselves…' with 'and' instead of 'or wrong themselves'? It is because He wanted to show us the difference between an immorality and a sin against the self.

The one who performs an immorality only gains for himself the satisfaction of a lust or desire, even if it is only fleeting. The one who sins against himself, however, performs a sin without gaining any benefit for himself. For example, the one who gives false testimony does not gain any benefit for himself because the benefit goes to the one who is falsely attested to. The bearer of false witness sins against himself because he fulfils the fleeting need of another person, but does not save himself from the punishment of the Hereafter. As for the person who performs an immorality, he takes some pleasure in this world, then, faces recompense in the Hereafter.

However, the one who sins against himself does not benefit himself, but hurts himself. It is an evil thing to sell your religion for a worldly gain; for you only receive the pleasure of this world, and the life of this world is short.

The True Lord did not forbid the pleasures of this world, but He says: "Say (O Muhammad), the enjoyment of this world is little" (*an-Nisa': 77*). There are also those who sell their religion for the sake of another person's worldly gain, receiving nothing in return, and only sinning against themselves.

The True Lord says: "and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allah?" (*Al-'Imran:* 135) The meaning of 'sin' is the contravention of the directions of the religion: the religion gives an order, but the order is not followed; the religion gives a prohibition, but the prohibition is not heeded. Nothing is called a sin until Allah tells us that it is a sin; this is divine ordinance. In the sphere of human ordinance, we say: 'There is no prohibition without a text (that contains legislation); and there is no punishment without prohibition.'

This stresses the importance of clarifying what constitutes a crime so that a crime can be properly punished; and nothing is a crime unless it is confirmed with a text, i.e. it is criminalised before it is allocated a punishment. So what about the law of Allah? He first tells us what sins are, and then allocates the punishment that those who commit them merit.

Consider the words of Allah when He says: "and those [who] do not persist in what they have done, while they know." (*Al-'Imran:* 135). Therefore, asking for forgiveness is not to follow a sin by saying 'I seek the forgiveness' of Allah; whenever you fall into a sin; fall forward and say, 'I seek Allah's forgiveness' and be persistently keen not to do it again.

This does not mean that you never commit a sin again. Actually, you might commit it, but when you seek forgiveness, you are firm not to repeat it. The sin might occur again, but without premeditation to commit it, such as saying to yourself: 'I will commit the sin and, then, seek Allah's forgiveness afterwards.'

In this manner, you are only mocking your Lord. More dangerous, indeed, is that Allah might not allow you the time to seek forgiveness after the sin. When Allah says*:* “They do not persist in what they have done [of sins], while they know” (*Al-‘Imran:* 135) which makes it clear for us that there is no penalization without a clear criminalization declared in the [*Shari'a*] texts.

Before anything else, Allah informs us about the meanings of the sin and punishment and the proper way to seek forgiveness. Then, theTrue Lord says*:* “These are the ones whose reward will be forgiveness from their Lord and gardens with flowing streams underneath; therein they will abide forever. What a blessed reward for the workers!” “These” is a demonstrative pronoun that refers to the preceding Quranic verse in His saying*:* “And hurry with one another to attain to your Lord’s forgiveness and to a paradise as wide as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious” (*Al-‘Imran:* 133)

Allah also sets out the attributes of the God-Conscious in His words: “Those who spend [in His way] in time of ease and hardship, and who restrain their anger and pardon the people. Surely, Allah loves those who do good”. (*Al-‘Imran:* 134)

They spend at times of ease out of gratitude and at times of hardship because they are really humble and mindful of their Lord. Evidently, when the blessings are abundant at the times of plenty, thanksgiving must be shown for them. Similarly, when the blessings are given at times of hardship, one shall express humility before Allah to relieve the doers of good from trials and hardships. As such, they keep spending whether they are in hardship or in ease.

At times of ease, many people forget about the Divine blessings imagining that these blessings have come from their own endeavours. Other people are too distracted by their blessings to feel the pains of others; they are only concerned with their own pains. But the believers never forget their Lord and His Commandment that they spend at times of hardship and ease. Because of this, they say about a generous person ‘S/He never refrains from giving, neither on days of joyful happiness nor on days of sorrows.’

Let us continue the description of those who are conscious of Allah: "And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allah? - and those [who] do not persist in what they have done, while they know." (*Al-'Imran:* 135)

This is kind of reassuring the believer about the changes of his soul; if he once submits to the Satanic temptations, this does not remove him from the fold of *taqwa* (God-consciousness), for Allah has made the repentance from sins as one of the attributes of the God-conscious. The shameful act is instigated by the Satanic temptations. As such, the true servant is immediately mindful of Allah and beseeching Him for forgiveness with a sincere intention not to repeat it, which keeps them within the company of the God-conscious. Indeed, Allah is the All-Forgiving: “for who but Allah could forgive sins...”? They are informed about that, for the True Lord never declares anyone guilty without a definitive text and never punishes anyone without a crime. And of this Allah says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ جَزَآؤُهُم مَّغۡفِرَةٞ مِّن رَّبِّهِمۡ وَجَنَّٰتٞ تَجۡرِى مِن تَحۡتِهَا
ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ وَنِعۡمَ أَجۡرُ ٱلۡعَٰمِلِينَ ١٣٦

The reward for such people is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will remain. How excellent is the reward of those who labour! [136] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 136)

It refers to those endowed with all of the previous characteristics. Notice that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* has promised two rewards for those who mindfully act upon *taqwa* (God-consciousness): The first promise He declared in His words: “And hurry with one another to attain to your Lord’s forgiveness and to a paradise as wide as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious” (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

The second promise speaks of their final abode: “These are the ones whose reward will be forgiveness from their Lord and gardens with flowing streams underneath” (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

The first mention of paradise stimulates emotions that yearn for paradise. Then, Allah mentions the characters and categories of people declaring paradise as a reward. “What a blessed reward for the workers!”

The 'reward' usually refers to what a person takes in exchange for a service rendered. The workers take this reward for their work dependent on the evaluation of the employer himself. A pay increase or decrease is determined by the judgement of the employer or the employee. For example, if many employers request the services of one worker, s/he may ask for a pay increase; if no one wants him, he will accept the first pay offer he finds.

As such, the entire matter is determined by the need of employers or the need of the workers. When it comes to the dealings of the hereafter, it is with Allah *the All-Sufficient* Who is in no need of your works. Yet, He has offered a reward for them.

How to understand this issue? He has no need for your works and rewards you for them, saying: 'This is the minimum reward but I can double it and even give you more and more.' How many are the stages here? They are three. Although, He benefits nothing from the work, He provides three levels of reward for it.

Apparently, the need here is on one part only: it is on your part, O servant. You are in need of your Creator, but He is in no need of you. Yet, the One True Lord not only rewards you what is equal to your work but actually gives you much more than that. Your employer in this world may pay you a limited wage enough to provide for a day, for example, or a day and a half. Nevertheless, when you take the reward from Allah, He gives you an endless reward; He says: "What a blessed reward for the workers!" This is the reward worthy of praise, such as saying: 'What an excellent reward! It is not a reward for my work but rather greater and greater than all I did. It also comes from the One Who has no need for my work.

He *the Most High* has blessed me at the beginning and blessed me at the end. In other words, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* guides you that when you do a good deed, O servant, the effect of this deed returns to you, yet despite this He rewards you for it.

We have previously explained that these Quranic verses came in the midst of the accounts of the battle of Uhud to provide a practical guidance and shed further light on the events of the battle. As such, if a person lives through the events in imagination, the events come back fresh and the lessons and morals taken from them reach the soul easily. Evidently, they have direct contact with real events, which confirm and emphasize them. After this, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says*:* "[Many] Ways of life have passed away before your time. Go, then, in the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth" (*Al-'Imran:* 137).In other words, you are not the first to experience these matters. "Passed away" here means 'gone before' i.e. they were real events that took place in the past times before revealing this statement.

Usually, one's speech may be true or false, but this issue is not open for probabilities because the current reality does not belong to the future. The reality has already taken place. Therefore, the speech on reality needs nothing to confirm the veracity of the statement because it has already taken place. Allah *the Most High* says*:* "[Many] Ways of life have passed away before your time…" (*Al-'Imran:* 137).

'Ways of life' (*sunan*) refer to the ways in which Allah *the Most High* orders His universe for the good of the creation to guarantee the benefit of mankind as the masters of this universe. The benefit of mankind comes true when the Truth dominates human life, by their free choice; in the same manner the Truth dominates the universe without choice.

We previously said that the universe has no free will. Inanimate objects, plants, and animals have no free will to benefit you or not. No one ever went to a fertile plot of land and sowed seeds in it to find the land refusing to produce plants saying: 'I will not give you anything.' The earth never said about a person: 'He is a disbeliever, so I will not give him any provision.' The earth is subdued for the service of mankind; as long as man utilises its means, it will give to him/her. Likewise, animals are subdued for your service, not by your choice or power, but only because Allah has subdued them to you.

We said: a person may have an animal, as some farmers do, which s/he sometimes uses to carry piles of manure made of the farm animal waste. The farmers may then decide to use the animal as a mount. As such, beautiful saddles and bridles, comfortable life and cleanliness are all possible favours from the farmers to their mounts.

In this case, did the animal at first refuse to carry the manure or later refuse to carry the person? No. You can lead it wherever you wish, for it has no freewill. Likewise, plants have no freewill, nor do the inanimate objects or the animals have. Only the human beings have the freewill.

Truly, Allah has controlled man's will by some elements to which s/he submits so that they never think that they are absolute masters or have an intrinsic power. In His dominance of man, the True Lord makes some things inevitable to keep humans submitted. Meanwhile, He leaves other things to man's freewill. If we look at the universe, we find that things devoid of the freewill follow a very perfect system without any trace of chaos or clash. Only things left to man' interventions suffer imbalance. Why? Clearly, man's choices may go contrary to the way of the Creator. As such, when the free man seeks a well-balanced life, they shall follow the guidance of Allah.

When your choice follows this way, you have harmony similar to the rest of the creation and your affairs will be in order. If we compare things in which mankind have freewill to those in which they do not, we find that the latter things are completely well-organised without the least bit of disorder, whereas the former matters fall into chaos and disorder.

For example, the animals used for transportation, such as camels, horses or donkeys move about; they walk in a straight line and meet one another in opposite directions without ever crashing into each other or killing their riders. Animals avoid one another and keep out of each other's way, even if the rider is asleep. No matter how crowded with animals a street is, they never crash because this is part of the plan of Allah for the control of animals.

Let us now consider man's invented modes of transport. Mankind have produced many kinds of car which people drive; yet despite the fact that they drive them, many accidents and crashes occur because of man's intervention in the matter.

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* wants to show you that things created and put under control by the Commands and Guidance of Allah never become a source of corruption. Corruption only comes from those things left to man's freewill. In conclusion, endeavour to make your decisions according to the Guidance of Allah. When the True Lord commands or prohibits, you must believe and obey. Evidently, when the True Lord puts things under the control of mankind, they are all in perfect order. Likewise, when you obey Allah, the affairs of your life will proceed with ease. For this reason, we said before that people never complained of a ‘sun crisis’, or a ‘wind crisis’; so why do they complain of ‘food crisis’? It is simply because man interferes with the production of food. Everything left to mankind must follow the Divine Law: “Do that and Do not do that.”

The universe is really created in harmony; everything in the universe performs its duty in line with the Divine Plan. Similarly, when mankind live up to their imposed responsibilities, everything would be in order and harmony. When mankind neglect their duties and follow their delusive choices, they turn to the ways of falsity and the result is nothing but false things, whilst the universe is based on the truth. Allah says*:* “We did not create them (the heavens and the earth i.e. the universe) except with the truth, but most of them do not know” (*ad-Dukhan:* 39). The True Lord *the Most High* fixes the universe on some certain firm laws so that nothing can infringe upon anything else. It is mankind’s choice that brings about the opposite of truth that is falsehood. For this reason, Allah preserves the universe in such a way that He makes it clear that the truth is in conflict with falsehood, but the truth will eventually survive and dominate, whereas falsehood will vanish and disappear. Allah shows us this in front of our eyes with His words: “And say: “the truth has now come [to light], and falsehood has withered away: for, behold, all falsehood is bound to wither away!"” (*al-Isra’:* 81)

As such, the statement of Allah: “[Many] Ways of life have passed away before your time…” intends to guide people to reflect on the past conflicts between the truth and the falsehood; the falsehood did not dominate the truth because it is ever withering away.

As such, we see many practical examples of the defeat of falsehood, not only in the conflicting relationships of individuals, but in the conflict of falsehood with the Divine Truth as well. The Divine Truth is represented by the Prophets and their Divinely revealed messages. Indeed, every Divine Truth revealed by Allah was opposed by the people of falsehood.

Why? Simply, the Divine intervention only comes when corruption has become widespread. This means that there are people who are befitting from this corruption. The people who benefit from corruption and falsehood will defend it. Consequently, the powers of the Divine Truth rise to challenge the falsehood and its advocates. Such is the moment of the battle. Allah *the Most High* says: "[Many] Ways of life have passed away before your time…" (*Al-'Imran:* 137). This statement declares that falsehood is ever vanishing. Actually, whenever the people of the earth battle the Divine Guidance, the Divine Truth always proves victorious. In the chapter of (*al-'Ankabut*: 29), Allah explains this fact to us in several illustrative examples; Allah *the Most High* says: "And to [the people of] Midyan [We sent] their brother Shu'aib, who said: "O my people! Worship Allah alone, and look forward to the Last Day, and do not act wickedly on the earth by spreading corruption!" However, they belied him. Thereupon, an earthquake overtook them and they lay lifeless, in their very homes, on the ground." (*al-'Ankabut:* 36-37)

This was the first example, then the second follows: "And the tribes of ʿAd and Thamud, [too, did We destroy] as should have become obvious to you from [whatever there remains of] their dwellings. [They perished] because Satan had made their [sinful] evils seem goodly to them, and thus had barred them from the path [of Allah], despite their having been endowed with the ability to perceive the truth" (*al-'Ankabut:* 38).

Now, look at their remnant dwellings to show you the punishment that befell them. Then, the third example is given: "And [thus, too, did We destroy] Qarun (Korah) and Pharaoh, and Haman: to them had come Moses with all evidence of the Truth, but they behaved arrogantly on earth [and rejected him]. Yet, they could not escape [Us]" (*al-'Ankabut:* 39).

When we hear "Yet, they could not escape [us]", it implies that something was chasing them. Clearly, when someone chases another, the latter tries to escape. As such, they tried to escape, but never succeeded. Then, the ways of life are clearly presented.

Allah also says: "We took each by his sins. Some of them We sent upon violent winds; and some of them were overtaken by a sudden blast; and some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some of them We caused to drown. And it was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who had wronged themselves" (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

As such, the conflict between truth and falsehood occurred in the past nations before you. Their dwellings still exist, and you can visit them for confirmation if you so wish. The cities of Prophet Saleh stand as a witness and so are the remains of the Tribe of 'Ad. Indeed, every place has some relics of the past. That is why Allah *the Glorified* informed you of it and whoever believes in Me shall believe My word. As for the unbelievers and other seekers of certainty, Allah *the Most High* says: "Then, go about the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth!" (*an-Nahl:* 36)

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* illustrates the conflict between the firm truth and the falsehood. This kind of conflict occurs even among the creatures that have no freewill. It is the Divine plan the struggle takes place between the truth and the falsehood even among the creatures with no free will, for people to benefit. Allah has placed this struggle between things beyond the realm of mankind for the service of mankind as seen in material matters. For example, in the area of values, Allah says: "He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does Allah set forth the parables" (*ar-Ra'd:* 17).

Allah *the Most High* sends down rain which runs into the valleys. As we know, a valley is lowland between two mountains. When rain falls on high ground, it flows to low ground and runs in the valleys. Valleys are fertile places because the mud and silt that flow down from the mountains with the rain and then settle become fertile spoil from which crops grow. Every valley takes water to its full capacity and the rest of water finds its way to other paths or to the underground. This scene was well known in the Arabian Peninsula; when it rains, the valleys are filled with water each to its full capacity. "The stream carries scum on its surface…" (*ar-Ra'd:* 17) as we see in the fields and we call it the ‘froth’ which refers to the filmy matters that accumulate on the surface of water. What happens to this froth? It is accumulated to form a layer on the surface before turning to the sides. Have you ever seen a pan of boiling meat overflowing? We see the foam floating on the surface.

This foam contains matters that have come out from the substance in the pot. Heating the pot by fire lets it come out to the surface. As such, man either removes it and cleans the pot or leaves it to solidify on the sides to its end. Where does this froth come from? It comes from the earth. Many things are kept in the earth, such as the roots of plants, and the remains of what the wind carries. They all seep into the earth and then hinder the growth of small roots preventing them from absorbing the nutrients from the soil. When Allah sends down rain, the water carries these things which begin to float on the surface. So the small roots find their way to nutrition and grow.

Allah sends rain to wash the soil, which makes foamy things float because they are scum. Indeed, the scum always floats. When the scum floats, do not imagine that it is going high. It is rather, the rise to death. Such is the case with outbursts of falsehood. Do not think that the useless is useful or that the rising froth is higher than the rest of the pot. No, it is a purgation of the substance in the pot. So, the True Lord says: “the stream carries scum on its surface…” (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). If all traces of the scum do not disappear with the wavy movements of the water, they will disappear one way or another. Consider the filthy things cast into the sea; they all wash up on shore after a while “And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except He” (*al-Muddathir:* 31). It washes up on the shore for those in charge of cleaning to collect. If not, how could the water remain pure? Allah *the Most High* has made the movement of the water a means for the water to clean itself. Therefore, when rain falls and flows in streams, it cleans the soil from the impurities that impede the nourishment of the primary roots. Some people might not feel satisfied with this example, so Allah gives us another example: “…and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth...” (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17) .

We see this every time any metal is put into fire. The metal melts and becomes soft like dough, and then bubbles emerge from it, which we call slag. When the slag is taken from the metal, it becomes strong. So, the fire melts the metal, and removes the harmful or dysfunctional waste from it. I might make a strong suit of armour from iron or refine steel from it. These activities require us to melt the iron with fire and remove the slag in order to make it stronger. The same goes true for gold and silver; when we want to rid them of these impurities, we melt them to remove extraneous matters mixed with them.

Why, then, does the Lord use these visible examples of water? As for *Al-Hilyah* (ornaments), it refers to what is unnecessary whereas *Al-Mata'* refers to the necessary needs. He *the Most High* says*:* "In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood…" (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

Truth is similar to water and fire. Water carries the scum far from the pores of the earth and fire removes the scum and slag from metal which qualifies it to the jobs required. In this way, Allah sets forth the examples of truth and falsehood: "for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away…" (*ar-Ra'd:* 17), i.e. it is cast aside and rejected "but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth…" (*ar-Ra'd:* 17). This is a material example that Allah presents for the struggle between truth and falsehood over principles and morals. It is wondrous that He draws the example using two opposites which perform the same function: water and fire. When you see opposing matters, do not think that they are working against each other. Indeed, each of them is necessary for a certain task.

Allah *the Most High* says*:* "[Many] Ways of life have passed away before your time…" (*Al-'Imran:* 137) to alert us to the struggle between truth and falsehood. At times, we might see falsehood dominating and in control. Yet, it is only the scum on the riverbank. This is one of the Divine Norms in life. If you wish to confirm this, look at the precision of the True Lord's words: "…Go, then, in the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth" (*Al-'Imran:* 137).

Here are two observations; one is general and the other is specific: The general observation is that we understand the statement (go in the earth) to mean that we travel on the earth; but this is according to our own limited perspective. However, when Allah speaks, His perspective is wider, for He is the Creator of this universe. We are still ignorant of many facts about this universe and have only known some of them very recently. The Creator of the universe is the One Who knows all of its secrets.

We used to say that we travel on the earth in belief that there was nothing on this earth except us. Then, science discovered that were it not for the existence of the air on the earth, there could be no life. When the earth turns, the air around it turns with it; they call this the 'the atmosphere.' The atmosphere is a part of the earth with huge expansion. When man travels, s/he travels in the earth, but the one travelling on the earth is the one who walks over the atmosphere. The one who travels on the land with the atmosphere above him is travelling in the earth, not on the earth.

The issue at hand is still one of ways of life that have gone, but Allah wants us to consider them saying: "Go, then, in the earth": how should we go? Either we go by travelling, or we go by means of reflection because someone might not have the means to travel leaving that job to travellers. The travellers, for instance, went to the south of the Arabian Peninsula and saw the valley of Ahqaf where they discovered that a single sandstorm had buried an entire caravan.

Storms have buried many things; one storm alone buried a caravan. How many storms have raged throughout the centuries? The True Lord *the Most High* tells us about City of Pillars, Iram when He says*:* "Are you not aware of how Your Lord has dealt with the tribe of ʿAd, [the people of] Iram, the town with great columns, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? And Thamud who carved the rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein: and therefore Your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering" (*al-Fajr:* 6-13)

He *the Most High* tells us that the like of Iram was never created in the land, i.e. it surpassed the ancient civilisation of Egypt, which is full of wonders; so where are they now? As long as a single sandstorm could bury an entire caravan, how many sandstorms passed over these lands? Simply, we all dig under the ground to uncover the artefacts. Why do we have to dig when these artefacts were originally above the ground? Sandstorms buried them.

An example to illustrate this: if you leave your house for a month and come back, you find that the inside of the house is covered with dust eventhough the windows were closed. How much dust would you find if you left the house for a year, two or three years, even if all the windows and doors are closed and sealed? Dust would creep in and cover the furniture and the floor. If this happens in our own homes, what about the places exposed to hurricanes and sandstorms? Could whole cities be covered or could they not? Indeed, some entire cities and civilisations were buried under sand. As such, when we search for artefacts, we dig under the ground. This is another way of going through the earth for discovery and contemplation. When Allah says:

قَدۡ خَلَتۡ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ سُنَنٞ فَسِيرُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَٱنظُرُواْ
كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡمُكَذِّبِينَ ١٣٧

God’s ways have operated before your time: travel through the land, and see what was the end of those who disbelieved [137] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 137)

What does ‘the end to those who gave the lie to the Truth’, mean? When a nation established a great civilisation, the True Lord says in this concern: ‘Are you not aware of how Your Lord has dealt with the tribe of ʿAd, [the people of] Iram, the town with great columns, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? And with Thamud who carved the rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein. Therefore, Your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-12).

Were those who established this civilisation not able to ensure its safe survival? How could these great civilisations come to an end and fall into oblivion? It is undoubtedly true that this could only happen because of an even greater power. Despite the awesome development of these civilisations, they were unable to protect themselves from annihilation. It was a superpower higher than them. As such, we understand Allah’s words: ‘…behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the Truth.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 137) It was the All-Sustaining, Who sees all the creation, so those who go beyond limits and spread corruption will eventually meet the same fate. Consequently, Allah's words are absolutely true: '[Many] Ways of life have passed away before your time. Go, then, in the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth.' (*Al-'Imran:* 137)

Next, the True Lord says:

هَٰذَا بَيَانٌ لِّلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ١٣٨

This is a clear lesson to people, and guidance and
teaching for those who are mindful of God [138]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 138)

Consider the phrase, 'This [should be] a clear lesson unto all men…' (*Al-'Imran:* 138). When the clear lessons come, they take their force and authority from the power of the one who issues them. When a revolution takes place in a given society, the whole world is shaken by the first declarations of the new power. This is a declaration issuing from a human being; so what about a declaration issued by Allah?

It is a clarification from Allah that He will not take us suddenly: 'This [should be] a clear lesson unto all men, and a guidance and an admonition unto the God-conscious.' (*Al-'Imran:* 138). The guidance, as we know, means the way that leads to the desired end. The 'admonition' is defined as forcing one's self to do what is good and avoid what is evil, either by encouragement or fear. This is the 'admonition'.

All these matters are mentioned in the course of the Quranic verses dealing with the battle of Uhud, after we have taken the moral lessons from it, whilst the event is still fresh in minds. As such, before He completed for us the account of Uhud, Allah encouraged our souls by this issue and presented to us these material and moral issues to guide therewith in our lives. So, the story of Uhud did not finish and people miss the lessons drawn from it.

Given this fact, those who fought in the Cause of Allah are the soldiers of truth, who are assured of the truth by receiving Allah's support when His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was with them as a bearer of the miracle proving his veracity, the events of Uhud should not weaken you. Simply, you know how Allah supports the truth and strengthens it, and campaigns against the falsehood. We have clarified to you the ways and set out the clear lessons. In light of this, Allah *the Most High* says:

وَلَا تَهِنُوا۟ وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا۟ وَأَنتُمُ ٱلْأَعْلَوْنَ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

Do not lose heart or despair – if you are true believers you
have the upper hand [139] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 139)

His saying: 'Be not, then, faint of heart...' (*Al-'Imran:* 139) means 'do not be weak.' It particularly refers to the weakness of bodies because many were injured at Uhud to the extent that some of them were unable to stand. Even the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was unable to climb the mountain. Talha ibn 'Ubaidillah *Allah be pleased with him* had to support him on his back to stand. For this reason, Allah says: 'Be not, then, faint of heart...' (*Al-'Imran:* 139) because when you remember that you are a believer, you know that Allah will not let the forces of falsehood overcome you. You are on the side of truth, and the truth is from Allah Who is the Lord of Truth, Who never leaves His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people fall to their enemies. If you remember all this, never be weak. Indeed, the weakness essentially signifies a lack of physical strength.

'And grieve not...' Grief is an emotional sentiment in the heart. They grieved because many of them had died; seventy-five martyrs in all, of whom five are from the Meccan migrants and five from the Helpers of Medina. It was very difficult and distressing. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* grieved for the martyrs and was deeply moved by the death of Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* saying: 'I will never suffer any painful loss graver than your loss! Nothing has ever angered me more than this!' Then, he said: 'If Allah gives me victory over Quraysh, I will mutilate thirty of their men for your sake!' Allah then says: 'And grieve not!' Why? That is because you must always view events in the light of their ends.

It is true that the killing was hard and repulsive to the soul,but consider the ultimate end. Then, consider what is left behind. The martyrs have gone to an immortal life with their Lord, which is quite unlike the life in this world.

Our worldly life has its laws, as does the life with our Lord. Is our status higher than His? No, of course not; it is not.

Considering the case of martyrs proves that they have a life higher than the world they left behind. Therefore, do not grieve for them but rejoice for their ultimate happy end. To epitomise, the martyr has a shorter life span in this world but the ultimate end is to reach Allah's mercy and win the life of Heavens. S/He is happy enjoying his/her Lord's company. In this world, when we are on a journey to a certain destination, we are pleased if someone shortens for us the time to get there.

Rather than going to Alexandria on foot, I go there on horseback or by car; and the well-off person goes by plane. If you wish to reach a certain destination, then something makes your journey shorter, why would you grieve? S/He is martyr. Beware of saying: 'Allah denied me his/her strength to support the religion.' Allah has indeed provided further powers and aids for the victory of the Truth; when hearing that a person has given himself to Allah, you must be aware that the ultimate end is tremendous. As such, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* sent the members of his own family first at the battle of Badr, because he knew where any of them would go, if killed. He loved his family greatly beyond the limits of this world. Some people also love their families, but their love is confined to the worldly affairs.

'And Grieve not' for the battle-spoils missed or for the victory lost. Why? That is '…for you are bound to rise high….' Practical illustration soon came in the words of Abu Sufyan who proclaimed the glory of his idol saying: 'Glory to Hubal!' That means their idol 'Hubal' had been victorious. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his Companions: 'Will you not answer them?' They said: 'How should we answer them?' He said: 'Say: Allah is *the Most High* and Most Exalted.' In reply, Abu Sufyan said: 'We have al-'Uzza, while you have no 'Uzza.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his companions: 'Answer him'. 'What to say'? they asked. He said, 'Say: Allah is our protector and you have no protector.' Then, Abu Sufyan said: 'We will meet you at Badr next year.' In response, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to one of his companions: 'Say, yes, we shall meet. You have our pledge.'

Therefore, ‘you are bound to rise high if you are [truly] believers.’ So long as you have faith, you will be the uppermost. If you want to know the true meaning of ‘bound to rise high’, compare the battle of Uhud to the battle of Badr. They killed your men at Uhud and you killed their men at Badr. However, you took some of them prisoners at Badr and they took no prisoners from you at Uhud; You took spoils at Badr but they took no spoils at Uhud. You are in the superior position because Allah protected your city, eventhough it had no military protection. This shows your higher position when we consider the results of the two battles. If we consider the battle of Uhud alone, leaving aside Badr, in the light of Allah’s words: ‘…for you are bound to rise high if you are [truly] believers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 139), we see this fact confirmed; when you were truly believers, as conditioned by obeying the commands of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who only speaks by Allah’s leave, you were splendidly victorious. You killed more than twenty of their leaders including the standard bearer, in the first phase of the battle. However, when they disobeyed the commands of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* the faith in their hearts was shaken.

The events that unfolded confirmed the truth that ‘…you are bound to rise high if you are [truly] believers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 139). They first had the superior position but when they disobeyed, there followed what followed. As such, there came true the truth of Allah’s words: ‘…for you are bound to rise high if you are [truly] believers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 139).

Furthermore, if you consider the battle, you note that the enemy did not remain on the battlefield. Only, the Muslims remained there. Where did the enemy go? Did they go to another place to gain victory and success? There was nothing left but Medina which was entirely vulnerable as left without defence. However, the enemies did not go there. Instead, they took their way to Mecca. As such, they escaped.

In the aftermath of the battle, the caller of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* announced that they should pursue the enemies to cast fear into their hearts and demonstrate that the Muslims still had strength to fight; the afflictions they suffered had not weakened them.

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out to pursue the enemy. He did not mobilize battalions of soldiers, who had not witnessed the battle.

Rather, he called upon the believers: ‘Come to me, O servants of Allah.’ Seven hundred men attended the battle, of whom many were injured and seventy-five were killed, including Hamza, Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umair, ‘Abdullah ibn Jahsh, Shammas ibn ‘Uthman, and Sa‘d *Allah be pleased with them* the ally of ‘Utba. These five are from the Meccan emigrants whereas the rest of martyrs were from the Helpers of Medina. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accompanied the rest of his army after losing the support of this number of martyrs who first attended the battle. He did not take anyone in their places from his followers in Medina, of those who offered to go with the army in pursuit of Quraysh. Rather, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* preferred to go only with those who first battled the enemies, leaving behind, of course, those martyred or injured.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not accept anyone who did not attend the battle except one man, Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* who did not go to the battle of Uhud. He explained to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that his father ‘Abdulah ibn ‘Amr ibn Haram had ordered him to stay behind and look after his seven daughters saying: ‘Son, it is not appropriate that you and I should leave these women without a man, and I am not leaving my position in support of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to you. Stay behind with your sisters.’ So, he stayed to look after them and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* accepted his excuse and allowed him to accompany him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pursued them to Hamra’ Al-Asad. As for his father ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr, he was martyred at Uhud. Despite the martyrdom of his father, Jabir asked the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* for permission to go to Hamra’ Al-Asad. It reminds us of Allah’s words: ‘And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except He’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31).

In the wake of the battle of Uhud, there passed by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* one of the idolaters who was fully trusted as one of the ardent allies of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and whose name was Ma‘bad Al-Khuza‘i, who said: ‘O Muhammad, by Allah, your afflictions grieved us deeply.’ Then, he met Abu Sufyan ibn Harb and those with him at Ar-Rawhaa’. They had decided to go back for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to his Companions. Abu Sufyan said to him: ‘What is the news behind you, O Ma‘bad?’ He said: ‘Muhammad has come out along with his companions to pursue you with huge numbers of hosts I have never seen the like.’ He did not leave them until Abu Sufyan and those with him were dissuaded taking their way back to Mecca in fear and hurry. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived at Hamra’ Al-Asad where he found no one; so he camped for three days. In other words, it was Quraysh who fled the battle. Thus, you are bound to rise above but be carefully mindful of the condition: ‘If you are [truly] believers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 139). Allah then consoled the believers saying:

إِن يَمۡسَسۡكُمۡ قَرۡحٞ فَقَدۡ مَسَّ ٱلۡقَوۡمَ قَرۡحٞ مِّثۡلُهُۥۚ وَتِلۡكَ ٱلۡأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيۡنَ
ٱلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعۡلَمَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَيَتَّخِذَ مِنكُمۡ شُهَدَآءَۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٤٠﴾

if you have suffered a blow, they too have suffered one like it. We deal out such days among people in turn, for God to find out who truly believes, for Him to choose martyrs from among you – God does not love evildoers [140]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 140)

We have spoken before about the meaning of ‘Al-mass, i.e. touching.’ We said that it is to contact with someone or something without feeling it; it touches you, but you do not feel, for example, any warmth or softness. Unlike the word ‘*lams*’ in Arabic, it means that you come to contact with something and feel it, which requires contact for a certain length of time. In the case of al-Mass, you almost do not feel anything. *Al-Qarh* ‘misfortune’ here means ‘injuries’. It is also pronounced “*al-qurh*” which refers to the pains of injuries. Every word has its own specific meaning.

You might sometimes see words and think they have the same meaning, but actually each word has its own meaning. For example, the words ‘*ra’a, nazhara, lamaha, ramaqa and rana*’, all indicate sight. However, each word has its special meaning: "*Ramaqa*" is to glance stealthily by the far side of one's eyes whereas "*Lamaha*" is to glimpse taking a brief look for a short moment from a distance. As for "*rana*" it is to take a long look, and so on. Another example is '*jalasa*' and '*qa'ada*', both of which generally mean 'to sit down'. Yet, the more precise usage reveals that '*jalasa*' takes place after the posture of 'reclining', while '*qa'ada*' takes place after standing i.e. to 'sit down'. The two verbs result in the same end. The same goes true for qarh and *qurh*. They have their own meanings. For example, people say that lions have many names in Arabic: *Al-asad, Al-ghadanfar, Ar-r'ibal, Al-ward, and Al-qaswara.* Truly, these are all names of the lion. However, each of them has its own specific meaning. For example, Al-Asad is the namse of the genus; *Al-ghadanfar* identifies the lion with a sprouted mane; Al-ward is a lion whose backbone has stretched out. Every posture of the lion has its own specific name.

As to Allah's words: 'If misfortune touches you, [know that] similar misfortune has touched [other] people as well…' (*Al-'Imran:* 140), notice that the speaker here is Allah, so understand His speech as carefully as possible. In the conditional sentence, as we know, the condition comes first, and then the result follows. For example, we say: 'if you study hard, you will succeed.' Success is the result of that condition, which is hard studying.

As to His truthful statement: 'If misfortune touches you, [know that] similar misfortune has touched [other] people as well…' (*Al-'Imran:* 140). Does this conditional sentence mean that the misfortune touched the disbelievers at Badr for the misfortune that touched the believers at Uhud? No, it could not be a result of that condition because if it were, the Lord would rather have said: 'If misfortune touches you, similar misfortune will touch the other people.' However, He did not say it in this like manner. Simply, the misfortune that afflicted the disbelievers at Badr happened before the misfortune that befell the believers at Uhud.

These words of Allah mean: If misfortune touches you, do not be downcast, for similar misfortune has touched your opponents as well. The final clause in the previous sentence is not the main clause in the conditional, but a complementary clause that explains and justifies the meaning of the main clause. This analysis is essential to eliminate any misunderstanding of the verse.

By this justification, Almighty Allah, means to console the believers and reassure them. Suppose someone has experienced a disaster, so we may tell him by way of condolence: ‘Let it suffice as solace that your adversary has undergone the same disaster.’ This can be a sort of condolence. Likewise, Allah means to console the believers by reminding them that eventhough a wound has touched them, they should not be downcast. Rather, they should find solace in the fact that their enemies suffer a wound, too. This should hearten them and help them overcome their hardship.

Do we offer condolences based on events that had already taken place, or events yet to take place in the future? Sure, we offer condolence by reminding the distressed of events that did occur and this is what Allah has done with the believers:

‘If you have suffered a blow, they too have suffered one like it...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 140).

After this, Allah in the same verse states a general law He has established among people: ‘… We deal out such days among people in turn …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 140). What does that mean? It means to transfer a person from one state to another; to take a thing from one person to another. Let us consider here the two battles of Badr and Uhud. Muslims won undisputed victory in the Battle of Badr. As for the Battle of Uhud, none of the two parties can be said to have been victorious or defeated. This explains the words of Allah: ‘…We deal out such days among people in turn…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 140). It means that even if the disbelievers are roughly considered to have won victory in the Battle of Uhud (although they did not), then know, O believer, that it is the law of Allah to give people victory and defeat in turns.

Do not let it escape you, however, that victory was only taken from you, O believers, when you disobeyed the instructions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* By disobeying divine guidance, the believers are thus stripped of the advantage they have over their enemies, and material power is then to determine victory.

Since they have turned thus equal in terms of spiritual power, material power can give one of them victory on a day and defeat on another. Such is how Allah deals out days among people. There is something particularly worthy of notice in the noble verse: Days are dealt out in turns among people so long as they are thus equal, but if the believers hold fast to divine guidance, victory is impossible to be apportioned to the disbelievers. And ponder the words of Allah: '…We deal out such days among people in turn…' (*Al-'Imran:* 140). Allah says, 'among people' and not 'among the believers and disbelievers'.

The word 'days' here does not refer to the common meaning of the period of time encompassing the day and night; rather, 'days' here refers to victory and predominance that take turns with people through time. We say: 'The day was his," which means victory was his. So '…We deal out such days among people in turn…' (*Al-'Imran:* 140) does not mean victory is apportioned between the believers and disbelievers; rather, when the believers were occupied with the battle-spoils, their faith wavered, so they lost their advantage as 'believers' and Quraysh roughly won victory over them. If they had remained steadfast, they would never have been deprived of victory, but they deviated from their Lord's guidance, and in doing so, became no better than the disbelievers. So long as such is the case, it is normal then for days of victory to be appointed in turns between one party and another; this is absolute justice.

We must bear in mind the condition Allah states, not for avoidance of defeat, but for superiority and outright victory: '…you shall have the upper hand if you are believers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 139).

In stating the law of apportioning days among people, Allah means to remind the believers whose faith has wavered that, as long as they are equal to their enemies, by losing the advantage of faith they have over them, victory will be given them and their enemies in turns; it will be for those who are the most tactful and powerful, for material power will then decide who the winner is.

If Muslims leave aside the guidance of Allah, they become human beings facing other human beings, without the spiritual power that gives them superiority over their opponents. Given this law, when the archers failed to obey the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the genius of Khalid ibn Al-Walid who was the commander of the disbelievers' army, then overcame the genius of the Muslim warriors.

The words of Allah are so clear. '…We deal out such days among people in turn…' (*Al-'Imran:* 140). Victory is not apportioned between the believers and disbelievers, but between 'people' where each party has no special power or assistance to aid them. So long as they leave aside divine guidance, people become all equal, and victory is then determined by material power: the best in this realm is the one who gain victory.

What is it then that guarantees victory for the believers regardless of material power? It is faith: if you have Allah on your side, no creature can be able to face Him in a battle. I have given this example before, and let me repeat it again: If a little boy's peers bully him, and he takes refuge with an adult man, they will all leave him alone. They cannot face the man, but if the child strays far from him, they can harm him then. How about having Allah on our side? He is above all comparison and such is the case of the believers with the disbelievers.

The disbelievers can achieve victory only when the believers stray from divine guidance; Allah will not succour those who do not follow His guidance. If He were to do so, this would render the issue of faith completely devoid of meaning. Exalted is He above all that does not befit His Majesty! Let us consider the Noble Quran; any statement made about people who deviate from the guidance of Allah confirms that the outcome of such deviation is misery. For instance, Allah says: 'By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss...' (*al-'Asr:* 1-2). Humankind would have been wholly doomed to loss and misery, but what is the only way that can save them? Here is the answer offered to us by Allah: 'Except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness.' (*al-'Asr:* 3).

This truth is confirmed in another context in the Noble Quran, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Man was truly created anxious: he is fretful when misfortune touches him, but tight-fisted when good fortune comes his way. Except those who pray...' (*al-Ma'arij:* 19-22).

So, every general statement in the Quran about humankind denotes that we are generally doomed to misfortune. What then is the only way for us to be saved? It is abiding by the guidance of Allah.

Thus, the Words of Almighty Allah: '…We deal out such days among people in turn…' (*Al-'Imran:* 140) imply mild blame to those who have proclaimed faith yet disobeyed the commands of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

At the end of the same verse Almighty Allah says: '…for Allah to find out who truly believes, for Him to choose martyrs from among you– Allah does not love evildoers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 140)

At times of victory, everyone, even those who has not participated in the battle, wish to include themselves among the victorious. At times of defeat, however, people are differentiated. Only the truthful would share the burdens and difficulties of defeat, even those who have not directly engaged in the battle, and would not try to evade responsibility, whether they blame or excuse those who have directly caused the defeat. Someone might wonder: 'Did Allah need to "find out" who truly believes'? He *the Exalted and Almighty* certainly knows who the believers are whether battles occur or not. However, we do not know what the Omnipotent Knowledge of Allah encompasses. Therefore, unless Allah unveils to us the truth about something, it cannot be held as evidence against us. When Allah makes manifest to us the truth that He eternally knows, it becomes a proof and an argument in favour of those who believe and against those who disbelieve. This way, no one would claim that he had been ready to proclaim faith if only he had been granted the chance!

Therefore, we are tested through trials and tribulations: so that we can know ourselves, and for our attitudes to stand for us or against us. Accordingly, Allah has absolute, eternal Knowledge of all things, but they do not represent evidence against us unless we are made to know them. Someone might claim that if a great battle were to take place, they would stand up and fight with perseverance; still, it is only when the battle actually takes place that the valiant are differentiated from the cowardly. Let us give an example of this (and Allah has the Highest Example). The dean of a college may ask one of the teachers to run an exam to assess students and give prizes to the best. The teacher may reply that there is no need for an exam and he can just tell who the best students are. By experience, the teacher may classify the students in order of excellence. The dean, however, would insist on holding the exam so no one will have an excuse, and would choose another teacher to carry out the exam. The results would come out, and the expectations of the first teacher would turn out to be true, but now his knowledge is proved by unquestionable evidence so none of the student would be allowed room to object to or deny the truth.

If human beings can have knowledge and tell truths by experience, what about Allah Who has the absolute, omnipotent Knowledge? Allah, with His Omnipotent Knowledge, knows everything; His Knowledge encompasses all that was, is, will be, and would have been. Still, He does not say to us, for example: ‘I know if you entered a battle, you would have done such-and-such.’

This would have allowed deniers of the truth a chance to argue for themselves and make unfounded allegations. To prevent this, Allah has willed that a battle must take place and the truth, which He already knows, to be thus proven to people so none of them can have an excuse. So, Allah does not need to ‘find out’ anything; He just makes His Knowledge known to us to remain a standing proof for or against those who witness it.

The True Lord says: ‘…for Him to *yattakhidh* (choose) martyrs from among you…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 140). The Arabic word yattakhedh denotes selection of a person or thing in preference to others. For example, Almighty Allah says: ‘…Allah *ittakhadha* (took) Ibrahim (Abraham) as a friend.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 125) This means Allah has singled Ibrahim (Abraham) out and exalted him with His Love. The word ‘*yattakhidh*’ means selection of a person or thing based on preference to elevate them to a special status. Accordingly, ponder these words of Almighty Allah: ‘…for Him to *yattakhidh* (choose) martyrs from among you…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 140). The classical meaning of the Arabic word shahid is one who fights in the cause of Allah and is killed in the battle, yet he remains alive and amply provided for up there with his Lord.

Here is a common misconception. Some would say: ‘If we open the grave of a martyr, we will find dust and bones, which means that his life has been taken from him’! No, Allah has given him a new life up with Him, not in the world of people. If someone were to open the grave of a martyr, they indeed would find bones and dust, for Almighty Allah has given the martyr a life with Him, not with us: ‘[Prophet], do not think of those who have been killed in Allah's way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for.' (*Al-'Imran:* 169). The martyrs have with their Lord a life we do not know the nature of. When we open their graves, we are dealing with a material issue, but the life of martyrs is not in the material world, but up with Allah as He has told us. The Arabic word *shaheed* (literally: "martyr") also conveys "to bear witness"; martyrs will testify to the truth the battle was fought for. Everyone wants the best for themselves, and if those people had not known that to expose their lives to death in the cause of Allah was better for them than their staying alive, they would not have done so.

In this way, each martyr bears witness to the Truth for which they have lost their lives. The word *shaheed* (literally: "martyr") can also mean they struggled to deliver the Message of Allah to the last drop of blood. Allah concludes the verseby saying: '…Allah does not love evildoers' (*Al-'Imran:* 140).

This implies an emphasis that the battle must be fought under the banner of truth. As we have said earlier, as long as both opponents contradict divine guidance, Allah will not wrong any of them in any way; He will let material power determine victory in the battle, since none of the fighting parties has any nonmaterial advantage over the other. Despite Allah's aversion to disbelief, He will not be on the side of the believers if they do not hold fast to the requirements of faith. It is only in this case that the disbelievers can defeat the believers. Nevertheless, if the believers hold fast to their faith, Allah guarantees victory for them. Then, Allah says,

وَلِيُمَحِّصَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَيَمْحَقَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾

For Him to cleanse those who believe and
for Him to destroy the disbelievers [141]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 141)

To "cleanse" something means to render it pure by removing only harmful elements; it is unlike destroying which means to remove the thing in its entirety. The reason for this process is then clarified in the following verse where Allah says:

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَن تَدْخُلُوا۟ ٱلْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ
جَٰهَدُوا۟ مِنكُمْ وَيَعْلَمَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٤٢﴾

Did you think you would enter the Garden without God first proving which of you would struggle for His cause and remain steadfast? [142] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 142)

Faith is not simply a word that is spoken; you must go through a test to prove your faith is true. It is not just proclaiming faith that can constitute sufficient evidence that you are true bearers of the Message. If you are truthful in your claim, you must stand up for the Truth to be predominant when the party who holds it is short of power. When the Truth is victorious and its people are strong, it has no need for anyone to stand up for it. Only at times of weakness does the Truth need to be consolidated by sincere believers. Attaining Paradise is subject to a test that a believer must pass.

Allah says: '... before Allah tests those of you who fought (in His Cause) and (also) tests those of you who are patient?' (*Al-'Imran:* 142). We must be aware that Allah has known from eternity those who strive in His cause and those who are patient. He only makes His Knowledge evident to people through events so no one can deny the truth. In the following verse, Allah says:

وَلَقَدْ كُنتُمْ تَمَنَّوْنَ ٱلْمَوْتَ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تَلْقَوْهُ فَقَدْ رَأَيْتُمُوهُ وَأَنتُمْ تَنظُرُونَ ﴿١٤٣﴾

Before you encountered death, you were hoping for it. Well, now you have seen it with your own eyes [143] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 143)

Those who missed the honour of participating in the Battle of Badr wanted to make amends for that by participating with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Battle of Uhud. Therefore, Allah addresses them by the aforesaid verse. Did you think that longing for confrontation with enemies would alone bring victory? Did you think that every battle the believers enter must end in their victory? If you think victory is so easy, it means you have embraced faith with only auspice, ease and victory in your mind. However, Allah has willed to make plain those who have embraced faith with readiness to give their lives for His cause.

If victory were so easily attained, everyone would embrace faith, and this is why Allah says: 'Do you think that you will enter Paradise before Allah tests those of you who fought (in His Cause) and (also) tests those of you who are patient? (*Al-'Imran:* 142). Did you think Allah would admit you to Paradise before He makes plain to all what He has eternally known, before He manifests through events what is in your hearts to be a proof for or against you? No one is to attain Paradise unless Allah reveals those who strive in His cause and patiently endure adversity for the sake of the Truth.

Allah says: 'Before you encountered death, you were hoping for it. Well, now you have seen it with your own eyes.' (*Al-'Imran:* 143). That which you had longed for in the past (dying in the cause of Allah) was right in front of you, so if you are sincere, you should be eager to sacrifice your lives as you are eager to remain alive. After this, Allah says:

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهِ ٱلرُّسُلُۚ أَفَإِين مَّاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ
ٱنقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰٓ أَعْقَٰبِكُمْۚ وَمَن يَنقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقِبَيْهِ فَلَن يَضُرَّ ٱللَّهَ شَيْـًٔاۗ
وَسَيَجْزِى ٱللَّهُ ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ١٤٤

Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways? If anyone did so, he would not harm God in the least. God will reward the grateful [144] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 144)

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the name of the final Messenger of Allah. He has another name which is mentioned in the Quran as well as the Bible; namely, Ahmad. 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), said, 'Children of Israel, I am sent to you by Allah, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad.' Yet when he came to them with clear signs, they said, 'This is obviously sorcery.' (*as-Saff:* 6). 'Muhammad' is mentioned in the Quran four times and 'Ahmad' only once.

The verse we are dealing with now mentions the name of 'Muhammad': 'Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone…' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). Let us recite these words of Allah: 'Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is Allah's Messenger and the seal of the prophets: Allah knows everything.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 40). And His words: 'And (as for) those who believe and do good, and believe in what has been revealed to Muhammad, and it is the very truth from their Lord, He will remove their evil from them and improve their condition.' (*Muhammad:* 2)

Let us recite this noble verse as well: "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. You see them kneeling and prostrating, seeking Allah's bounty and His good pleasure…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

A name is a word given to a thing or person to distinguish them so that when the name is spoken, the mind envisages that thing or person. In case the same name is given to two things, a description must be added to differentiate between them. If two people in the same family are named 'Muhammad', a description has to be added to tell who is who. In the country, they would say, for example, 'the eldest Muhammad' and 'the youngest Muhammad'.

The words 'Muhammad' and 'Ahmad' are both derived from the same Arabic root *h-m-d* which denotes 'praise'. Still, the morphological pattern of each results in a difference in meaning. When a word is used as a name, it is stripped from its linguistic meaning and turns into just a word by which a person or thing is distinguished.

A black slave-girl may be called Qamar (literally: 'the moon'; in the Arabic culture, a beautiful girl is likened to the moon), or a miserable slave-boy may be called Sa'id (the Arabic for 'Happy'). When a word becomes a name for a person or thing, it loses its original meaning and becomes more like a label distinguishing the named person or thing. However, when people give their children names, they hope that the meaning of the name will be manifested in the character and conduct of the child.

Perhaps one who names his plain girl Qamar (literally: 'the moon') wishes her to have the beauty of the name, since she lacks outward beauty in reality. As we said, the Arabic root *h-m-d* denotes 'praise'. The derivative Muhammad means 'highly praised'; someone or something profoundly praised and admired by others. It means someone highly esteemed and honoured by others.

As for the derivative Ahmad, it means someone who pays high homage to someone or something else.So, he is the one who offers high praise and not the one who receives. Now, let us examine the two names of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Muhammad and Ahmad. Both are derived from the root *h-m-d* (praise). As for Muhammad, it means a person who receives high praise and admiration from others. A near synonym to it is Mahmoud which means 'praiseworthy', but Muhammad means highly and profoundly praiseworthy and extolled, so the latter is stronger in meaning.

As for Ahmad, it means someone who offers high praise to another person or thing. The word Ahmad is a comparative form; it means someone who offers praise to someone or something more than others do. A near synonym to it is Hameed which also conveys offering praise to someone or something, but not so highly. Thus, Ahmad is an intensified form of Hamed; it denotes offering a great deal of praise to someone or something, and Muhammad is an intensified form of Mahmud; it denotes receiving a great deal of praise from others.

Hence, Allah has granted His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* a combination of two commendable attributes: He is highly praised by Allah and he is also a devout servant of Him who praises Him highly. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been granted his elevated status in two forms: He is the choicest servant of Allah who is Muhammad (highly praised) by Him, and he is also the most devout of His servants who is Ahmad (praises Allah more than anyone else does). So, we are dealing here with two sublime stations granted to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I am Muhammad, Ahmad, Al-Muqaffi (the Final Prophet), Al-Hasher (the Gatherer), the Prophet of Repentance, and the Prophet of Mercy.'

There is much to be said about this point, but now let us return to our main topic: the Battle of Uhud. After the archers disobeyed Prophet Muhammad's orders *peace and blessings be upon him* the idolaters of Quraysh seized the chance and launched a counter attack. The Companions ran here and there, fleeing, and the idolaters were able to approach Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the extent that Ibn Qami'ah was able to strike the noble Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a stone that broke his tooth! The two rings of Prophet Muhammad's Helmet pierced his cheeks, and he took to bleeding. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* tried to climb a rock of the mountain to stand on top of it, but he could not, so the Companion Talhah ibn 'Ubaydullah *Allah be pleased with him* supported Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from beneath and lifted him on the rock. The noble Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was thus subject to hardship and suffering like any human being. Was it not in the Power of Allah to protect the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from all this? Undoubtedly, Allah has power over everything. Still, He did not want to deny His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the honour and pleasure of fighting and suffering in His cause. Also, Allah wanted the believers to understand why He has sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a Messenger to all humankind. Allah *the Exalted* did not send Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as His Messenger to spare him the inevitable human struggle; rather, He wanted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be a role model for every believer who wants to taste the sweetness of faith and struggle in the cause of Allah. In the Battle of Uhud, some warriors fled from the battlefield, and the winds of defeat almost blew upon the believers. The Companion Abu 'Ubaydah ibn Al-Jarrah hurried to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and found the helmet rings penetrating his cheeks. As Companion Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* tried to take them out, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* felt pain, so Companion Abu Ubaydah said: 'O Abu Bakr, spare yourself the trouble. I beg you to let me do it'! Companion Abu 'Ubaydah bit down on one of the rings and pulled it from Prophet Muhammad's cheek and in doing so lost one of his front tooth. He did the same with the other ring and lost another front tooth. It marked the noble Companion ever after that his two front teeth were lost, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* honoured him with this testimony: 'Every nation has a trustworthy guardian, and the trustworthy guardian of this *ummah* (all Muslims collectively) is Abu 'Ubaydah ibn Al-Jarrah'. Prophet Muhammad's blood was flowing. Allah inspired Fatema Az-Zahra' *Allah be pleased with her* to take a piece of a straw mat, burn it, and use its ash to cure the wound. Allah did not want to deny His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the honour and pleasure of struggling in His cause.

Mean, while, Anas ibn an-Nadr saw a group of the noble Companions, including 'Umar Al-Khattab and Talhah ibn 'Ubaydullah *Allah be pleased with them* sitting, having thrown down their weapons. Companion Anas asked them: 'What makes you sit back'?! They replied: 'The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been killed'. He said: 'Then, what will you do with life after him?! Stand up and die for the cause the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* has died for'! He resumed fighting against the polytheists until he was martyred.

Those were true believers; their firm faith would not have been revealed if the battle had not occurred. Hence came this message from Allah: 'Muhammad is only a messenger...' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). Allah willed to teach the believers that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a human being like them; he was sent as a Messenger from Allah just as Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and all the Messengers have been sent. They were all human beings, all mortals, and death must come to them. 'Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways?...' (*Al-'Imran:* 144)

O believers, did the followers of the previous Messengers forsake faith when their Messengers passed away? How can you be of less mettle than they were? Suppose Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, would you not undertake to deliver the timeless Message he has passed on to you so it would reach people until the Day of Resurrection? If a man's good deeds die with him, does it mean he truly established something? No, one's struggle is successful only when its fruits outlive him.

Unsuccessful leaders, eventhough remarkable in themselves, are those who die and leave people desperate for good leaders after them. They are those who leave their subjects baffled and wondering why their late leader did not pass on his wisdom to anyone. They continue to lament his loss and wish he had prepared an able successor to take control after him. This is why Allah says: 'Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone…' (*Al-'Imran:* 144).

When we hear the statement: 'Muhammad is only a messenger', we feel the emphasis placed on the meaning intended. Allah emphasizes that Prophet

Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* status is elevated only in the sense that he is a Messenger. This implies that some of his contemporaries perhaps believed him to be more than a human messenger and believed he could not die. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is but a messenger before messengers have been and gone: Allah gives no one an eternal life in this world.

Were people heedless of this plain truth? Yes, they were; even after this verse was revealed, eventhough they would recite it day and night along with the other verses of the Quran, we find that Companion 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* himself seemed to almost forget it. He had faith just as firm as mountains, a disposition perfectly in harmony with the revelations of Allah, and a mind inspired by His guidance.

Despite that, once he heard the news of Prophet Muhammad's death *peace and blessings be upon him* he said: 'By Allah, the Messenger of Allah is not dead, and he will not die until he destroys a lot more of the hypocrites'! The shock of Prophet Muhammad's death stunned Companion 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab, *Allah be pleased with him*. Deep anguish drove him to say that as if he had forgotten that verse. Hence, Companion Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* reminded him of the truth: 'If you worship Muhammad, know that Muhammad has died, and if you worship Allah, know that Allah is Ever-Living and He never dies'! Then, he recited these words of Almighty Allah: 'Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways? If anyone did so, he would not harm Allah in the least. Allah will reward the grateful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 144) Commenting later on this circumstance, Companion 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'It was as though I had never recited this verse until that day'.

After Muslims pledged allegiance to companion Abu Bakr as caliph, Companion 'Umar said: 'Yesterday, I said something that has no truth in it. By God, I have found nothing to support it in the Book of Allah [the Quran] or in any covenant His Messenger [Muhammad] *peace and blessings be upon him* has made with me. Indeed, I had hoped that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would outlive us all, but Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* has preferred for His Messenger His Company above your company. Hold fast, then, to the Book by means of which Allah has guided His Messenger, and follow its guidance just as Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had followed it."

This momentous event teaches us two things: First, we learn from it how ardently the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loved him. Second, we know that faith is our safeguard. Our love for someone must not prevail on our love for Allah and our faith in Him. Listen what 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said afterward: 'When I heard Abu Bakr recite this verse, I saw the truth of it. [Conscious of the situation at last,] My legs would no longer carry me, and I fell to the ground.'

Thus, we understand what Almighty Allah means by His words: 'Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone…' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). It is a message to the believers: 'Do not raise him, due to his prophethood, higher than I Myself have raised him'.

Allah says in the verse: '... If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways?' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). The Arabic expression rendered here as 'revert to your old ways' is literally translated as 'turn back on your heels'. Accordingly, it may mean 'to retreat before their enemy' or 'to return to disbelief after having proclaimed faith'. As for the words of Allah: 'If he died or was killed', it is a clear statement. Earlier, we have considered death and murder, and we said their end result is the same, which is the end of someone's life. However, murder necessarily involves damage to the physical form that hosts the soul which makes it unfit to host it anymore. The word 'death' is different in the sense that it means the end of one's life without damage to that physical form; death would come upon any person without necessarily being preceded by physical harm, illness, etc.

Destruction of the body that leads to loss of one's life is 'murder' or 'killing'. The soul cannot reside in a material form unless it has certain characteristics, and if these characteristics are deformed, the soul leaves. On the other hand, when the soul leaves without destruction of the body, this is the classical meaning of 'death', unlike 'murder' or 'killing'.

In the verse we are dealing with, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... if he died or was killed...' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). In the battle of Uhud, word spread that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been killed. Some would wonder how the Companion believed such a rumour whereas Allah says: '…Allah will protect you from people…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67).

The answer to that is: Do you know whether this verse was revealed before or after the Battle of Uhud? Do you think Companions always had every verse of the Quran flashing into their conscious minds? Do you not see that the rumour of his death threw them into extreme confusion that they started fleeing? Even 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* the revered Companion, almost forget about this verse upon the news of Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* death: '... if he died or was killed...' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). It is also possible that the protection Allah granted His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was protection against their mischief and their degradation.

In this way, Allah has willed that all those who had proclaimed faith would be tested so what each harboured in his heart would be revealed. 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, for example, retreated from the battle and took with him one third of the army. Two other groups were about to lose heart, but Allah has willed to make their hearts firm, so they remained steadfast with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* the archers also had their own part to play at the Battle of Uhud.

They saw victory close at hand and lure of the battle-spoils dazzling, so some of them craved the spoils, and they were split in dispute. Commander of the archers, 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr, and few archers insisted on obeying the orders of Prophet Muhammad, so they fought until they were martyred. Those were the ones who yearned for reward in the Hereafter. The rest of the archers yearned for the spoils. When the rumour of Prophet Muhammad's murder spread, the remaining archers fled the battlefield along with others, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was calling out: 'Come back to me, O servants of Allah! Come back to me, O servants of Allah'!

It was a severe trial through which Allah has willed to reveal the true colour of all those who had proclaimed faith. The stand each one took unveiled what was in their hearts, and those whose stand was contrary to the ordinance of Allah were obviously exposed. Meawhile, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced a sharp decrease of his human strength to such an extent, as we have said, that he was unable to climb the rock by himself, so Companion Talhah ibn 'Ubaydullah lowered his back for the Prophet to mount and ascend the rock. In such a state of physical weakness, Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* willed to give His Messenger strength sufficient to enable him to stand firm before one of the tyrants of Quraysh who was threatening him.(1)

If it had been a moment of strength for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then, it would have been no wonder that he should triumph over his tough opponent. However, Allah wanted to show us His support and assistance of His Messenger at a moment of weakness and exhaustion. That tyrant of Quraysh was Ubayy ibn Khalaf Al-Jamhi. He had a horse that he sarcastically mentioned to the Messenger of Allah, saying: 'I feed this horse many measures of corn every day [so it can bear the burden of your corpse!] and upon it I will slay you'! Full of certainty that his Lord would not let him down, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'No, it is me who will slay you by the Will of Allah'.

This man did not dare approach Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he enjoyed full strength. Rather, he took chance of his severe injuries, his broken tooth, his cheeks pierced with the rings of his helmet and his blood pouring. In a tone of groundless defiance, Ubayy ibn Khalaf Al-Jamhi said: 'Where is Muhammad? Let me perish if he survives'! The Companions said: 'O Messenger of Allah! Should one of us confront him'? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* signified to them to remain silent. He knew Ubayy showed such boldness only because he knew the Messenger of Allah was physically almost powerless. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took up a spear and struck Ubayy who fell off his horse, bellowing like a bull. The companions of Ubayy exclaimed: 'No harm has been done to you, O Ubayy! What a fine fellow you are! It is only a scratch'! By that scratch, Prophet Muhammad killed the man on whom the

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(1) *Khawater As-Sha'rawi, Voulme Three*

Wrath of Allah was severe. It has been reported on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas: ‘The Wrath of Allah was severe upon him. The Messenger of Allah killed, with his own hand, for the cause of Allah, and the Wrath of Allah was severe upon those who made the face of the Messenger of Allah bleed’.

Those who harboured enmity toward Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were driven by arrogance and stubbornness, not by beliefs firmly ingrained in their hearts. They believed him to be truthful and believed what he delivered was indeed the Message of Allah. This is what Allah reveals in the Noble Quran: ‘But when Our enlightening signs came to them, they said, “This is clearly [just] sorcery”! They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, eventhough their souls acknowledged them as true. See how those who spread corruption met their end!’ (*an-Naml:* 14)

Deep inside, they did know Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told the Truth, and how this conviction manifested itself in the case of Ubayy ibn Khalaf Al-Jamhi. As we have said, companions of Ubayy told him: ‘What a fine fellow you are! It is only a scratch’! Ubayy replied: ‘By Him Whose Hand is my soul, were my injury to be distributed among the entire population of Hejaz, they would surely all die’! His companions, however, again reassured him: ‘You are fine, Ubayy. it is only a simple scratch’. However, Ubayy replied: ‘No. By Allah, I know that blow will kill me, for he told me in Mecca: “No, it is me who will slay you by the Will of Allah”. By Allah, had he only spat on me, he would have killed me!” Ubayy died on their journey back to Mecca.

That was a sign from Allah: He willed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should kill that die-hard Qurayshite idolater despite his physical weakness and injured body. That constitutes a clear proof that material human power is not the criterion to determine victory. Allah, by His Power and Might, aided Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and granted him victory despite his lack of physical strength then. That aid bore testimony to the Might of Allah Who sustains and protects His servants, independent of their material means. Were victory to come at a time of predominance and power, people would simply say: ‘They are strong, so they won victory, naturally’.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* struck that Qurayshite tyrant and killed him despite his physical weakness. That was a sign from Allah, and other signs followed to consolidate confidence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers in the fact that he was the Messenger of Allah and supported by Him. One of those signs was that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before that battle already knew what would happen there, for he said: ‘By Allah, I have seen a good vision: I have seen cows being slaughtered, a crack at the tip of my sword, and I saw myself placing my hand in fortified armour that I interpret to be Medina’. He *peace and blessings be upon him* also said: ‘I have seen myself [in a vision] on the day of Uhud and no creature near me except Gabriel on my right and Talha [ibn ‘Ubaydullah] on my left’.

So, the battle and all its events had already been revealed to him, and despite that he was eager to fight it, which testifies that Allah had immunized and prepared him for all that would occur. So, on one level, Allah supported Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by those visions that revealed to Him those future events. On another level, events of the battlefield afforded miraculous signs as well. We know that martyrs are not washed before burial, yet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about one of those who were martyred at Uhud: ‘The angels are washing your companion’ by which he referred to the martyr Hanzhalah. The believers knew that this was contrary to the usual case with martyrs. Later, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers found out why this was the case with Hanzhalah. That Companion Hanzhalah was washed, did not represent a breach of the law of martyrs except that they were the angels who washed him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed that exceptional scene, and when he went back to Medina, he asked the family of Hanzhalah about him. He discovered that he had only consummated his marriage when he was called for battle. Eager to answer the call, Hanzhalah had no time to perform ritual ablution after his intercourse with his bride. The story thus told by his own wife revealed the one reason why Companion Hanzhalah was washed by the angels. That incident was another sign, another reassurance from Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* that He did not abandon them at the time of weakness and need. Rather, the events of the battle all happened for a reason.

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to send Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* signs to prove to himself that he was the Messenger of Allah. Let me remind you of a story I have related before. Some of the Companions went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him Companion Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah was indebted to a Jew and repayment was due upon harvest of dates. The produce of Jabir’s dates decreased that year because of some infection or the like. Consequently, they asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the Jew to grant Jabir respite for repayment of the debt. The Messenger of Allah went to the Jew and asked him that, but the Jew refused. ‘No, Abu Al-Qasim’!

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated his request, but the Jew said: ‘No, Abu Al-Qasim’! The Messenger repeated his request a third time, but the Jew insisted: ‘No, Abu Al-Qasim’! Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the confidence of faith in Allah, asked Companion Jabir to take him to his garden. He went to the garden, walked among the palms trees, then went to the arbour where Jabir would sit, and, reclining, he said: ‘O Jabir, harvest your dates and repay your debt’! Jabir reported: ‘I harvested the dates and the profits yielded were enough to repay the debt I owed to the Jew, and moreover the amount that remained exceeded what I ever had at times when I had no debts to repay’.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this, he said: ‘I testify that I am the Messenger of Allah’! Allah *the Exalted* thus willed to give His Messenger clear signs to show him that he was truly the Messenger of Allah. The Jew did not accept the Prophet’s intercession, so Allah gave him a sign to be both solace and evidence. At times of weakness or inability, Allah would not leave Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* without reassurances and aids. Some of Prophet Muhammad’s *peace and blessings be upon him* opponents wanted to insult him. We have learnt that his name Muhammad literally means ‘highly praised’. His enemies wanted to insult him and curse him, but Almighty Allah did not allow them even to insult the name, let alone the person of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

Allah has encompassed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with His protection, so He even prevented his enemies from associating any insult with his honoured name, Muhammad. Instead, He inspired them to fake another name that did not belong to the Prophet: Mudhammam (literally: "disgraced"). Thus, the Prophet's noble name, Muhammad, was never associated with an insult in one sentence! Rather, the fake name they had invented, Mudhammam, was the one that bore the burden of the impudence! Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* laughed when he heard what Umm Jamil, the wife of Abu Lahab, said: 'Mudhammam we have defied! His call we have rejected and his religion despised'! She was alluding to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by these verses. The 'firewood-carrier' (as Umm Jamil is referred to in the Noble Quran) passed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was sitting at the Sacred Mosque, by the *Ka'ba*, along with Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him*. As she stood before them, Allah blocked her vision so she would not see Prophet Muhammad. With a stone in her hand, and seeing only Abu Bakr, she addressed him: 'O Abu Bakr, where is your companion? I was told that he has affronted me, and by Allah had I found him, I would have struck his mouth with this stone! By Allah, I am a poetess [and can compose poetry to affront him too]'! Then she said the abovementioned verses.

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Does it not surprise you that Allah has prevented Quraysh from associating my name with an insult [in one sentence]? They curse Mudhammam (literally: 'disgraced'; a name Qurayshite idolaters have faked for the noble Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*) and they insult Mudhammam, but my name is Muhammad [literally: "highly praised'; thus Allah has protected Prophet Muhammad's name from their insults]."(1)

Thus, we see that out of the mouths of those who hated the messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he was protected by Allah's will, and Allah even preserved his name from being cursed, and the named one himself *peace and blessings be upon him* was neither insulted nor cursed.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Hurayra – [Al-Bukhari]*

The events of the battle of Uhud were a primary lesson for the Companions of the messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a confirmation of the truthfulness of his divine message. The battle depicted and embodied this, and so when we examine the battles that followed, we do not find a single instance where the believers were defeated because they were purified and educated so that each one of them became aware that Allah knew whatever he concealed, and that if he did not excel in times of trial and struggle, Allah would reveal what was in his soul, and announce it. So, every believer from amongst them entered every battle prepared to strive, and every battle after Uhud brought victory and safety.

The True Lord teaches us here that sticking to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the way to salvation and victory; and He warns us that the believer should never turn back on his heels. He said: ‘So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]? And he who turns back on his heels will never harm Allah at all; but Allah will reward the grateful.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144)

‘And he who turns back on his heels…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144) is a kinetic, physical, and visual image. Some of the companions turned back on their heels at the battle of Uhud, and fled to Medina. The meaning of "turn back" is when somebody faces the enemy in a battle, and then gives the battle his back to flee. The expression is congruent to another one in the Quran, when Allah says: ‘turned their backs [in flight]’ (*al-Fath:* 22).

Yet, the expression in the verse: ‘you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144), has a tangible connotation. It has a moral connotation too, which refers to deviation from the fundamentals of the religion. The True Lord informs us that after this incident, and after the assumption, of killing the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had spread, what the hypocrites said was different from what the people of weak faith said. The hypocrites who were more evil than the disbelievers, said: ‘If he was truly a Prophet, he would not have been slain; go back to your brothers and your former religion’. As for those whose faith was weak, they said: ‘We will go to Ibn Ubayy and seek amnesty from Abu Sufyan’. Anas ibn An-Nadr stood firm, and said: ‘O Allah, I absolve myself from what these people (the hypocrites) have brought, and I seek your pardon for what these people (the weak of faith) have said'.

He divided it evenly; he absolved himself from the hypocrites who said: 'They will return to their former religion', and sought pardon and forgiveness for those who were weak of faith. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'And he who turns back on his heels will never harm Allah at all; but Allah will reward the grateful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). Why? It is because Allah, before creating anything, is eternally endowed with attributes of absolute perfection; and none of these attributes can be affected in the slightest by any of His creatures. He created the universe and all in it because He is Omnipotent, Wise, All Knowing. Thus, the creation of the universe did not add to Allah's attributes. When He created you, and formed you, He gave you guidance so you would be an upright, well-balanced creation. The benefit returns to us, creatures, and so we must understand that the revealed ways of guidance sent by Allah give no benefit to Him, but benefit us. That's why the verse continues: 'but Allah will reward the grateful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 144) This is because a person only gives thanks for blessings: the blessings of purification, teaching, and the clarification of the true rank of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the sight of his Lord. The believers are aware that Allah deserves thanks from them for these blessings.

After this, the True Lord bids us consider a general matter, which applies to all humanity:

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَن تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ كِتَٰبًا مُّؤَجَّلًا ۗ وَمَن يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ ٱلدُّنْيَا
نُؤْتِهِۦ مِنْهَا وَمَن يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ نُؤْتِهِۦ مِنْهَا ۚ وَسَنَجْزِى ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

No soul may die except with God's permission at a predestined time. If anyone strives for the rewards of this world, We will give him some of them. If anyone strives for the rewards of the Hereafter, We will give him some of them: We will reward the grateful [145] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 145)

'It is not for one to...' (*Al-'Imran:* 145) means 'should not'. In our daily life we say: 'It is not for you to strike Zayd (Arabic name for males)'; we mean you should not strike him. Allah says: ‘No soul may die except with Allah’s permission...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 145); this might make us wonder: ‘Is death a voluntary action?’ No, but the True Lord’s expression here suggests something, because if you say: ‘It is not for so-and-so to do such-and-such’, this means that they can choose whether to do it or not, and that the person can either do it or not. No one can describe Allah’s power in these terms, however.

We understand from this that even if someone were to expose themselves to destruction, they could not die except by Allah’s leave. If this is the case, what about it if someone does not expose themselves to destruction?

So, if a person seeks death, it will not visit them unless Allah allows it. In our daily life, we find many different manifestations of this. We find that some people cannot cope with this life because their faith is not sufficient to deal with its trials and tribulations, and so they commit suicide, wanting to flee from that which they cannot control. As for someone with strong faith, no matter what trial or difficulty befalls them, they say: ‘I have a Lord, and whatever He decreed for me, He is the Wise, the Sustainer who knows what is good for me better than I know myself. Perhaps this tribulation will efface my sins for me’.

This is the opposite of the one who flees from what he cannot control, and so kills himself; all of us have seen or heard of those who attempt this, but are saved by someone who reaches them in time to carry out Allah’s will in saving them, for example by pumping the stomach of the one who takes an overdose, or putting out the fire on the somebody who tries to burn themselves to death. The one who attempts suicide wants to die, but if Allah does not give His leave, He will not allow them to do so. A person might attempt suicide by shooting himself, but the gun does not fire; someone might attempt to hang himself with a rope from the ceiling, but it breaks. Why? That is all because no one can take life except He who gives life.

Someone might say: ‘But what about those who are killed by another person’? The popular adage says: ‘If the killer were patient enough to leave his victim alone, he would die of his own accord’. The moment when the soul leaves the body is assigned to a fixed time. Sometimes it arrives without any cause, and a person dies suddenly, his friends saying: ‘He was with us a short, while ago’! They forget that he died because his death was ordained for a specific time.

For this reason, we find that a person might seek to improve his health by undergoing a certain operation, and during the operation, he dies. Ahmad Shawqi Allah *rest his soul* said:

Death sometimes overwhelms, and sometimes is expected, and every man is hostage to the closing of his book;

He who dies by the claws of a lion is akin to he who dies by a bite from its teeth.

If death sleeps from you, all medicine is helpful; But if it sleeps not, medicine is one of its henchmen!

If the book is closed, then, it is the end. If a person comes face to face with a lion, it makes no difference whether he is killed by its teeth or its claws. If death leaves a person alone, he might be cured of his illness by a pill or a tonic; but if it awakens, medicine and treatment might ultimately cause death or become an instrument of death. What the murderer is capable of is destroying the body of the one he kills; and this is for what he is punished.

So, the True Lord says: 'No soul may die except with Allah's permission at a predestined time.' (*Al-'Imran:* 145) This is a general fact of life. The expression 'pre-ordained term' is sometimes used to mean the entire life span, and sometimes used to mean the absolute final moment of life, which is true death. When the murderer destroys the body of the one he kills, he is only doing so in accordance with the term ordained by Allah. But why, then, is the murderer punished? We punish him because he has destroyed another person's physical body.

The True Lord says: 'No soul may die except with Allah's permission at a predestined time.' (*Al-'Imran:* 145) Notice His words; 'except with Allah's (God's) permission' (*Al-'Imran:* 145). This shows us that Allah is the One Who gives permission. Permission is given to the angles for implementation. Because of this, we find that when the Noble Quran addresses this issue, it sometimes ascribes this act to Allah, and so He says: "Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die [He takes], while they sleep. He keeps hold of those whose death He has ordained and sends the others back until their appointed time. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect." (*az-Zumar:* 42)

Elsewhere, the Quran ascribed the act to one angel: Say, ‘The angel of death will take you who has been entrusted with you. Then to your Lord you will be returned.’ (*as-Sajda:* 11) Elsewhere, the True Lord ascribes the act to envoys who aid the angel of death: ‘He is the Supreme Master over His subjects. He sends out recorders to watch over you until, when death overtakes any of you, those sent by Us take his soul - they never fail in their duty.’ (*al-An‘am:* 61).

Every proclamation issued by the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* is the absolute truth because every commandment that sets the pre-ordained term is not subject to the will of the one entrusted with carrying it out; it is by leave of Allah Almighty, who ordained it. As long as every commandment issues from Him, it is He who causes death, and then the angel of death, Azra’il, passes on the commandments that issue from Allah to his helpers, each of whom carries out their mission. So, the bringing of death ultimately goes back to Allah.

The bringing of death being delegated to the angels is the meaning of Allah’s permission, and ‘permission’ requires someone to be given it, which in this case is the angels, who are given permission by the angel of death, who is given permission by Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*.

The True Lord then says: ‘If anyone strives for the rewards of this world, We will give him some of them.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 145). Whoever wants the rewards of this world asking for recompense for his work therein, will receive it even if he is a disbeliever: ‘If anyone desires [only] the fleeting life, We speed up whatever We will in it, for whoever We wish; in the end We have prepared Hell for him in which to burn, disgraced and rejected.’ (*al-Isra’:* 18).

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* also says in the Noble Quran: ‘If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20)

This prevents us from saying: ‘the disbelievers are in a better position than we are: they are advanced, and we are behind.’ Was there not a time when the believers were highly advanced? There was a time when the believers were advanced, and for a thousand years they led the world, whilst at the same time the disbelievers described themselves as living in the 'Dark Ages'. Why did you ignore this!? It is because history is written and misrepresented by them (the disbelievers), and so we say to them: we used to be the advanced, and you and history attest it.

We said before that those who believe in Allah must be eager for Allah's means, and must not leave them to those who disbelieve in Him. Will the disbelievers utilize Allah's means, and you, the believer, leave those means for them? No, because those who believe in Allah have more right to the secrets of His creation, and if we leave the disbelievers to take advantage of the secrets of science, and we refrain from competing with them, we are being negligent.

'If anyone strives for the rewards of the Hereafter, We will give him some of them: We will reward the grateful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 145) Notice that the True Lord used the word 'grateful' twice, and the Quran emphasizes this point. Allah, exalted be He, gave us means, and if these means will aid us in this world, this merits gratitude; and if, in addition to the means, we are assigned with a task, this responsibility will bring us reward in the Hereafter and this also merits gratitude.

After this theoretical statement, 'No soul may die except with Allah's permission at a predestined time.' (*Al-'Imran:* 145) Allah confirms that this has been manifested during the life of the believing nations that preceded us; for there is a difference between speech and the actual occurrence of what the speech entails, and the truth of this statement indeed occurred before us. Allah says:

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن نَّبِيٍّ قَٰتَلَ مَعَهُۥ رِبِّيُّونَ كَثِيرٌ فَمَا وَهَنُوا۟ لِمَآ أَصَابَهُمْ
فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا ضَعُفُوا۟ وَمَا ٱسْتَكَانُوا۟ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ١٤٦

Many prophets have fought, with large bands of godly men alongside them who, in the face of their sufferings for God's cause, did not lose heart or weaken or surrender: God loves those who are steadfast [146] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 146)

They say that '*Waka'ayyin'* (and how many) is to suggest large numbers, like 'how many'. For example, if a person asks you: 'Why do you shun me?' and you reply: '*Kam'* (How many times) have I visited you?' When you said:

'How many times have I visited you?', it may have seemed like a question, but you do not really want him to tell you how many times you have visited him, what you really mean is: 'You are the one who should answer your question because when you do, you will recognize that I have visited you many times!' Thus the answer will match what you actually did.

You asked 'How many times have I visited you?' because you are sure that were he to answer, he would say: 'You have visited me many times.' If you were not sure of this, you would not have asked it to begin with. So, when you ask: 'How many times have I visited you, and how often have I been good to you, and how often have I supported you, and been kind to you?' Your words 'how many' are like the '*Waka'ayyin*' used to suggest a big number. We say yama (a word in Egyptian dialect) so and so happened. *'Yama'* means the same as '*Waka'ayyin*' (in the verse); both mean 'how many'.

A friend might ask you: 'How could this have happened?' You may respond: *ka'ayy* (Like any) one who does this or that, then, so and so happens to him.' You mean that the matter is not unusual, and that it happens a lot. When you say *Kam* or *kam min* (how many times), both are correct. The meaning is that how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought people who believe in his message, just like what happened in the case of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord's word '*ribbiyyoona*' (men who are devoted to Allah) means people who are experts and knowing the ways of war, it also means followers who fight, and it could also mean people who follow divine guidance.

Allah's words: 'But they never lost heart' (*Al-'Imran:* 146) mean that they did not become weak. Allah shows us the role model, as though He were saying: 'Why did you become weak, in attitude, at the battle of Uhud, when you were fighting with the Messenger of Allah? It had been better for you to have more eagerness in fighting with him than that of other followers of other prophets because he is the Seal of the Prophets who is establishing the principles that will live on until the Final Hour, and none will come after him; so it was necessary that you strived with eagerness, for you are the best "*ummah*" (followers of Islam) brought out for mankind, and I have chosen you for that purpose.'

The True Lord was giving them an example which refers to them indirectly, admonishing them and teaching them too. Allah says*:* 'And how many a prophet', i.e. many Prophets, 'with him fought many religious scholars. But they never lost heart due to what afflicted them' (*Al-'Imran:* 146), i.e. they did not become weak, which implies that they were afflicted in the course of fighting with something that usually weakens people. 'But they never lost heart' (*Al-'Imran:* 146), i.e. they did not suffer a decline of faith as you did. 'Nor did they weaken or submit.' (*Al-'Imran:* 146) The words 'they never lost heart', 'nor did they weaken' and 'or submit' come here in their proper order because losing heart is the first sign of weakening; it takes place in the heart and then spreads to the limbs.

What does *istakanu* (submit) mean? It is derived from sukoun in Arabic, which means 'stillness', the opposite of movement. War necessitates movement, and whoever comes to war needs to be able to advance and retreat. The one who does not move stays still because he does not have the power to move. The verb istakan (to submit) begins with the three letters 'i-s-t' which denote a request. When you say *istafhama* (to elicit), you are requesting or asking for comprehension. These three letters (i-s-t) denote a request for the meaning that the rest of the word shows, like in the Arabic word *ista'alama* (to inquire) which means that you are asking for the information you want to know. The word istakhbara means to ask for news; istakan means literally 'to seek existence' as though they had lost heart and weakened to the extent that they sought only to have some kind of existence because the manifestation of existence is movement, and movement had ended. This is the meaning of *istakanu* (to submit).

This implies that the word here is indeed of, what the Arab grammar scholars call, the '*istaf'ala*' pattern. The word *Istakanoo is* derived from kawn (existence). However, the word may not follow the '*istaf'ala*' pattern. If so, the first three letters *ist* in *istakanu* do not denote a request. Instead, the 's' is original in the word, and the word is actually derived from '*sakan*' (stillness) on the *ifta'ala* morphological pattern. Does this mean that they sought stillness? No, for they were already still, so the more suitable meaning is that they sought only to exist, and this is what I am inclined to and prefer. It is also said that it means that they did not yield or humiliate themselves.

ʽBut they never lost heart due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves those who are patient in adversity.' (*Al-'Imran:* 146) Whatever afflicts the servant is a trial from Allah. The Prophetic Hadith says: ʽIf Allah loves a people, He sends tribulation upon them.' – *narrated by Anas ibn Malik*. All of this losing of heart and weakness should not have distracted them from the battle, for if had borne their adversity with patience, Allah would have sent them His aid because when the means of creatures run out and end, there comes the aid of the Creator.

With the end of this verse, the True Lord draws our attention by saying: ʽAnd Allah loves those who are patient in adversity' (*Al-'Imran:* 146), i.e. it is enough reward for patience in adversity that one becomes beloved to Allah because, as we have said before, we might love Allah for the blessings He sends us, but what is pivotal is not that you love Allah, but that you, by following His guidance, become beloved to Him. Someone once said: ʽHave you not seen so many who loved but they were not loved?!'

You love Him for His blessings, but you also want to be loved by Him, because your love for His blessings is not enough, for the disbeliever enjoys these blessings too; therefore, something else is required. There is something ready to hand, and something delayed until later: the blessings of life are ready to hand, and all humanity shares in them, believers and disbelievers alike, but what is delayed is Allah's reward in the Afterlife, which is the principal one.

So, if people reflected on Allah's's words: ʽAllah loves those who are patient in adversity' (*Al-'Imran:* 146), they would, whenever they were tested with adversity say: 'Patience is sufficiently rewarded with Allah's love.' Truly, adversity did not make them faint at heart, weak or abased, and this means that they enjoyed the absolute certainty of conviction in Allah, and the absolute certainty of conviction in Allah made them worthy to receive Allah's aid. All you have to do to know Allah's aid is to patiently bear your afflictions. Allah's aid and support is not truly manifested except in times of weakness because when you are strong, you might behave as did those whom the Quran describes thus: ʽWhen man suffers some affliction, he cries out to Us, but when We favour him with Our blessing, he says, "All this has been given to me because of my knowledge" it is only a test, though most of them do not know it' (*az-Zumar:* 49).

Yet the believers, when they were afflicted ‘did not lose heart’ (*Al-ʻImran:* 146) because they were certain of an issue that concerns faith: Allah does not leave you to your own devices except when you leave Him. They asked themselves: ‘Why did this happen to us?’ They did not say: ‘Lord! Help us so we can emerge from this weakness!’ Rather, they thought deeply about the reasons why they had reached such a state:

وَمَا كَانَ قَوۡلَهُمۡ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُواْ رَبَّنَا ٱغۡفِرۡ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَإِسۡرَافَنَا فِيٓ
أَمۡرِنَا وَثَبِّتۡ أَقۡدَامَنَا وَٱنصُرۡنَا عَلَى ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

All they said was, ‘Our Lord, forgive us our sins and our excesses. Make our feet firm, and give us help against the disbelievers’ [147] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 147)

It is as if what happened was the result of the sin that had preceded it, and so, they discovered the cause. They were in a battle, and this battle had made them struggle and grow exhausted. True, they did not weaken, yet in such a state, one might suppose that they would say ‘Our Lord, give us victory’, before saying anything else. Instead, they said ‘We have to know the reason for the initial reverse.’ The reason behind this reverse is that Allah does not leave anyone to their own devices unless they forget Him.

ʻAll they said was ″Our Lord...″’ (*Al-ʻImran:* 147). Consider the wording of their call: ʻOur Lord!’ They could have said ‘O Allah’, but they chose to say ‘Our Lord!’ Why is that? It is because the the servants’ relation with the Oneness of Allah’s Lordship precedes their relation with the Oneness of Allah’s Divinity. The Oneness of Allah’s Divinity is binding, for ‘the Divine’ means ‘He is worshiped’, and as long as He is worshiped, there is an obligation to obey Him, and this obligation is what comes next. He has Lordship over all mankind before He obliges them with His commands. As long as the Lord is the One who attends to the nurturing of his subjects, it is more fitting that they say ʻOur Lord!’ This expression ʻOur Lord!’ means: ‘You are in charge of our affairs and You sustain us.’

ʻOur Lord, forgive us our sins…’ (*Al-ʻImran:* 147). It is as though they said: ‘Nothing afflicts us except as a result of committing a sin due to heedlessness.’

Whoever truly understands the meaning of the word ʽsin' will never fall into committing it because the word, in Arabic, '*dhanb*' is derived from the word '*dhanab*' (tail or end of something). The '*dhanb*' (sin) has an end result, which is punishment. So the uttering of the word itself inspires the fact that a result will follow; and if you call to mind the punishment for a sin, you will not commit it.

ʽForgive us our sins and our excesses' (*Al-ʽImran:* 147) because every sin represents the breaching of the boundary of what Allah made permissible, and an unlawful overindulgence, even if it is of the same type of something that Allah made permissible, nevertheless it exceeds the requirements of your life. Allah allowed us to marry and raise children, but if we seek what marriage grants us from persons other than our spouses, we are being immoderate. Allah gives us wealth in accordance with the effort we exert, but if we covet the wealth of others, we are being immoderate.

Acting immoderately means to take something which is not necessary for you to live. For this reason, the True Lord says*:* ʽSay: [Thus speaks Allah:] ″O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against themselves! Despair not of Allah's mercy: indeed, Allah forgives all sins – for, verily, He alone is the Forgiving, the Merciful.' (*az-Zumar:* 53)

He *the Exalted* clarifies: 'I have made a category of women permissible for you, so what has made your eyes swerve to what Allah has not permitted for you? I permitted for you whatever your hands earn, and if you are poor, you can receive charity; so why have you acted without moderation?' Thus, excessive gratification of anything that is beyond the requirements of preserving life is called 'immoderation'. ʽForgive us our sins and our excesses. Make our feet firm' (*Al-ʽImran:* 147). They began to enter the truth, but in the beginning they saw falsehood, and falsehood is one of the causes of the True Lord's not succouring us to begin with, but when He forgives sins and immoderation, we become worthy of receiving His aid and being granted steadfastness.

ʽMake our feet firm' (*Al-ʽImran:* 147). Why does the True Lord say this when it is clear that in battles, feet do not remain firm? Battles require people to be in constant swift motion. So what does the term: ʽmake our feet firm' mean? The True Lord's words: ʽMake our feet firm' mean 'do not make us flee from the battlefield, and make it so that we never leave it'. For this reason, we have said that after what the disbelievers had done, they did not remain on the battlefield, but rather left it and dispersed. Even though the believers had been routed, they remained on the battlefield for a time, and then gave chase and pursued their enemies. Eventually, humanity realized this. In France, there is a medal of honour called the ‘Medal of the Fly’. Why does it have this name? It is because no matter how many times you wave a fly away from a place, it will return; the same is true for a leader who has withdrawn from an area: he must be prepared to return to it, and so they award him the ‘Medal of the Fly’.

So His words ʿmake our feet firm’ mean that in any area and any battle, we must not desert our posts because leaving them is the first step towards defeat, and the enemy will use this opportunity against us.

ʿMake our feet firm, and give us victory over the disbelievers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 147) The ʿgive us victory over the disbelievers’ part (*Al-‘Imran:* 147) is relative because as long as they said ʿgive us victory over the disbelievers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 147), they were believers, true believers. In light of this, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah *be pleased with him* made his famous statement: ‘You will defeat your enemy by obeying Allah; if you and they are equal in disobedience, they will defeat you with their superior equipment and numbers.’

Faith, therefore, requires that you, first, carefully consider your own weaknesses which caused your afflictions. That is why you truly did not weaken nor surrender, though the battle brought pain and exhaustion upon you. The True Lord is showing us that they realized this, and began with inspecting their status, spoke of their sins, sought forgiveness, spoke of their immoderation, and then they spoke about the battle. What did Allah then bestow upon them? The answer follows:

فَـَٔاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ثَوَابَ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَحُسْنَ ثَوَابِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٤٨﴾

And so God gave them both the rewards of this world and the excellent rewards of the Hereafter: God loves those who do good [148] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 148)

In other words, whoever wants this world, Allah will give it to them of battle spoils and the like. We should notice that when the True Lord speaks here about this world, He does not describe it as being good or as anything else; He simply mentions ‘the rewards of this world’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 148). When He speaks about the Hereafter, however, He says ‘the goodliest rewards of the life to come’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 148). This is the beauty that we must truly long for because however long the life of this world lasts, it is nothing, but a brief pleasure, a fancy, and a passing delight. However blessed you are in this world, you still await one of two things: either the blessings will leave you or you will leave the blessings.

The True Lord ends the verse with His words: ‘Allah loves those who do good.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 148) They did well when they called on their Lord after He tested them. They asked forgiveness, asked that their immoderation be forgiven, asked that He made their feet firm, and that He succoured them against the people of disbelief. They saw that their own human strength, without Allah’s aid, was nothing but dust in the wind; it had no power.

‘Allah granted them the rewards of this world, as well as the best rewards of the life to come; for Allah loves the doers of good’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 148). We have said before about patience that ‘Allah loves those who are patient in adversity’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 146). To become beloved to Allah is sufficient for the believer as a reward for his patience as well as his ‘ihsan’ (doing good to the extent of proficiency).

Next, the True Lord says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن تُطِيعُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ
يَرُدُّوكُمۡ عَلَىٰٓ أَعۡقَٰبِكُمۡ فَتَنقَلِبُواْ خَٰسِرِينَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

You who believe, if you obey the disbelievers, they will make you revert to your old ways and you will turn into losers [149] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 149)

As long as you are believers, and they are disbelievers, how could you ever obey those who disbelieve? First of all, you are different from them, for you are believers and they are disbelievers. Disbelievers and hypocrites will take advantage of any weakness in the Muslim’s faithful heart and try to sneak into it. As we have already mentioned, a group of the hypocrites said: ‘Muhammad got killed, and we no longer have a messenger, so let us return to the religion of our fathers!' The believers who were in a moment of weakness said: 'Let us go to Ibn Ubayy (the leader of the hypocrites in Medina), ask him to mediate between us and Abu Sufyan and take an amnesty from him.'

And so the True Lord has said: ʽYou who believe, if you obey the disbelievers, they will make you revert to your old ways and you will turn into losers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 149) If you need patronage, do not seek it from the disbelievers; seek it from the One in whom you believe. Allah then has said:

بَلِ ٱللَّهُ مَوۡلَىٰكُمۡۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلنَّٰصِرِينَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

No indeed! It is God who is your protector: He is the best of helpers [150] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 150)

Did Abu Sufyan not say: 'We have Al-'uzza, and you have no 'uzza!' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them to say to him: ʽAllah is our Protector, and you have no protector." When Abu Sufyan said: 'One day for another (i.e. Uhud for Badr), war sways to and fro'. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* replied: 'It is not the same, for our dead are in Paradise, whilst your dead are in Hell!' How, then, could they be alike, and how could war sway to and fro between them?

ʽNo indeed! It is God who is your protector; He is the best of helpers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 150) We understand from Allah's words: ʽHe is the best of helpers' that Allah creates men, whether disbelievers or otherwise, who could help you in a superficial way, yet it is not real help; true help is what comes from Allah alone. Why? Because as soon as help comes from Allah, you can rest assured that you are true and sincere to Allah because if not, help would not have come to you. When Allah's help comes, be assured of your faith and that you are with Allah. Allah's words: ʽHe is the best of helpers'" show that help could come by human means. The believers said: 'O Lord, we are now weak, and if we do not go to someone to protect us, what will we do?' The True Lord has clarified for them that they should stand as the forces of faith against the forces of disbelief, and they should not turn to those who disbelieve in their Lord because those are not trustworthy. If they wanted to know what Allah would do "We will strike panic into the disbelievers' hearts.” If He cast dread into the hearts of the disbelievers, what could their equipment and numbers avail them?! Their equipment and wealth would pass on to the believers in the form of battle spoils.

سَنُلۡقِي فِي قُلُوبِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ٱلرُّعۡبَ بِمَآ أَشۡرَكُواْ بِٱللَّهِ مَا لَمۡ
يُنَزِّلۡ بِهِۦ سُلۡطَٰنٗاۖ وَمَأۡوَىٰهُمُ ٱلنَّارُۚ وَبِئۡسَ مَثۡوَى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١٥١

We will strike panic into the disbelievers’ hearts because they attribute partners to God although He has sent no authority for this: their shelter will be the Fire – how miserable is the home of the evildoers! [151] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 151)

The True Lord indeed did cast dread into their hearts. When they told Abu Sufyan that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was coming with a great army from Medina, with additional forces which had not yet fought, to meet him at Hamra Al-Asad, what did Abu Sufyan and his people do?

The word ‘*sanulqi*’ (to cast) is derived from the word (*ilqa*’) and it is only used for material things. The Quran makes this clear to us when Allah says: ʻAnd He threw (cast) down the tablets...’ (*al-A’raf:* 150) A tablet is a material thing. Allah says: ʻAnd he threw down the tablets [of the Law] and seized his brother’s head, dragging him towards himself. Cried Aaron: “O my mother’s son! Behold, these people over-powered me!”’ (*al-A’raf:* 150)

This is a material thing. We say: ‘he cast the stone’, i.e. he threw it. The True Lord says*:* “They threw their ropes and staffs, saying, ‘By Pharaoh’s might, we shall be victorious.’” (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 44) They were ropes, i.e. material things. He, *the Glorified the Exalted* also says about the inspiration revealed to the mother of Moses *peace be upon him*: ʻWe inspired the mother of Moses saying ″Suckle him, and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river; do not be afraid and do not grieve for We shall return him to you and make him one of the messengers.”’ (*al-Qasas:* 7)

So, to cast is a physical action, as though Allah wanted to make the emotion of dread absolute by saying*:* ‘I will collect dread and place it in the heart so that its effect will be physical.’ If dread takes root in the heart, lassitude soon follows; and when lassitude takes root in the heart, it spreads exhaustion throughout the body. Allah says: 'Into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth We shall cast dread.' (*Al-'Imran:* 151). It is as though He symbolized dread for us, and dread is an emotion that means to become fearful of everything. Therefore, He explains that He will bring dread to them and cast it into their hearts, where it will remain to produce lassitude and exhaustion.

'Into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth, We shall cast dread…' (*Al-'Imran:* 151). Observe the expressions that Allah uses. He uses the plural of majesty in the word '*sa/nu/lqi*' (*nu* in the middle of an Arabic word means We); notice that when the True Lord speaks about a matter that requires an action, He refers to it with the plural of majesty: 'Behold, it is We Ourself who has sent down the Quran and We Ourself will guard it [from all corruption].' (*al-Hijr:* 9)

As sending down the Quran is a mighty act, Allah uses the plural of majesty, seeing that He will send it down with might, wisdom, knowledge, hearing, sight, sustenance, contraction, and expansion. So He says: 'Behold, It is We'. The plural of majesty is used in the Arabic words '*Inna*' (We) '*nahnu*' (for people, ourselves; for Allah, ourself), but when He speaks about His own Being, He says: 'Indeed, I am Allah…' (*Ta Ha:* 14) He does not say 'We are Allah', but on the subject of divine revelation, He says: 'Behold, from on high have We bestowed this [divine writ] on the Night of Decree.' (*al-Qadr:* 1)

This is because these actions are mighty. So, the plural of majesty is used to describe actions, and these actions require the manifestation of many divine attributes. As we said, before you begin any action, you should say: In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy'; why? Because the action you will perform requires the power to perform it, and it also requires knowledge and wisdom, i.e. it requires many attributes, and so you should begin the action with the name of the fully capable Who can give you power, the All Knowing Who can give you knowledge, and the Wise, Who can give you wisdom.

All of these attributes will work together to bring out the action so that He has mercy on you even when He aids you. He does not ask you to invoke all the attributes required to perform your action, for there are attributes of which you are unaware. Rather, He says to you: ‘Here is the name that embodies all of these attributes of perfection, say: ″In the Name of Allah”’. By this, all the attributes of perfection are brought together.

Now you notice that when we see the plural of Majesty represented in the letter ‘*nun*’ (the ‘*n*’ sound in Arabic words like *sanulqi, inna* and *nahnu*), you say ‘we’ to refer to a group of people. A single person also uses it when he magnifies himself. We find it even in our human sphere. Do royalty not say ‘We, the king…’? This ‘we’ in the case of Allah is not a plural, it is a symbol of majesty, majesty that combines all the attributes of perfection that any action requires. And so Allah says*:* ‛Into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth We shall cast dread.’” (*Al-‘Imran:* 151) Every heart in which there is disbelief will have dread cast into it. So, the plural of majesty comes to overwhelm these disbelieving hearts.

Allah does not impute guilt unjustly to them by casting dread into their hearts; it is they who deserve to have dread cast into their hearts. Why? ‛Because they attribute partners to Allah.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 151) Associating partners with Allah is what has brought dread to them because Allah acts, whilst these ‘partners’ do not act. If these partners were real, they would not have abandoned them; so why do they not bring their partners to succour them? Dread visited them because they had no protector, and if they had any powerful gods, as they claimed, they would have said to these gods: ‘The Lord of Muhammad does such-and-such to us, so why do you not stand up to Him, O lords of ours?’ However they associated with Allah that which can neither help nor harm, yet is closer to harming than helping.

‛Because they attribute partners to Allah although He has sent no authority for this’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 151). The ‛authority‛ is power, proof, and evidence. The Arabic word (*sultan*) is derived from the root s-l-t. We say that someone ‘*tasallata*’ (dominates over) someone else, which means ‘to overpower’. They say that someone is *saleet Al-lisan*’ (sharp-tongued) to describe someone who is capable of verbal abuse. Hence ‘*sultah*’ (authority) means power and force that impose action or in its abstract sense it means proof and evidence. The believers always have authority from Allah because when they have a material victory, this is the authority of power; when they are defeated materially, they still have the authority of truth and evidence. We have mentioned before that Iblis (Satan) will come forward on the Day of Resurrection and say: 'Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves'" (*Ibrahim:* 22).

We said that this authority is of two kinds: either a power that forces us to commit sins or a piece of evidence and proof that motivate us to commit sins. The difference between an overwhelming power and the authority of evidence is that an overwhelming power forces you to do something against your will, whereas the authority of evidence convinces you to do it, so you do it willingly. Thus, sometimes 'authority' means a force that compels you to do something unwillingly; and the authority of evidence and proof will convince you to do it. Satan will come to testify for himself in the Hereafter saying that he 'had no authority over you', i.e. 'I had no power to force you to sin and I had no evidence to convince you to sin'. So what happened then? 'Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me.' (*Ibrahim:* 22) That is, 'you obeyed me, and answered my call without any authority of power that would enable me to compel you to do anything, or any authority of evidence that would enable me to convince you.'

The True Lord ends the verse by saying: 'their shelter will be the Fire—how miserable is the home of the evildoers!' (*Al-'Imran:* 151); i.e. their final destination is hell. A shelter is the eventual location to which one retreats. It is as though there was an integral part of the self of someone who disbelieves that pushes them into hell, which then becomes their shelter and sanctuary to which they retreat. For this reason, we must pay attention to the fact that the True Lord sometimes says: 'and that they will return to Him' (*al-Mu'minun:* 60); other times He says: 'and to Him you will be returned' (*al-Baqara:* 245) and 'How miserable is the home of the evildoers!' (*Al-'Imran:* 151) That is, an abode from which there is no escape because we can leave any abode, but the abode where the evildoers will eternally remain is hell, the worst of abodes. Next, the True Lord says:

وَلَقَدۡ صَدَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَعۡدَهُۥٓ إِذۡ تَحُسُّونَهُم بِإِذۡنِهِۦۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا فَشِلۡتُمۡ
وَتَنَٰزَعۡتُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِ وَعَصَيۡتُم مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ مَآ أَرَىٰكُم مَّا تُحِبُّونَۚ مِنكُم مَّن
يُرِيدُ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَمِنكُم مَّن يُرِيدُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَۚ ثُمَّ صَرَفَكُمۡ عَنۡهُمۡ لِيَبۡتَلِيَكُمۡۖ
وَلَقَدۡ عَفَا عَنكُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو فَضۡلٍ عَلَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

God fulfilled His promise to you: you were routing them, with His permission, but then you faltered, disputed the order, and disobeyed, once He had brought you within sight of your goal – some of you desire the gains of this world and others desire the world to come – and then He prevented you from [defeating] them as a punishment. He has now forgiven you: God is most gracious to the believers [152]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 152)

We know that the sentence ‘Allah fulfilled His promise to you’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152) contains two objects (in grammar), the first (second person pronoun in Arabic) is “you” in the word ‘*sadaqakumu’* (fulfilled to you), and the second is ‘*wa’dahu*’ (His promise), i.e. Allah’s promise. He made a promise, and actual events played out in accordance with that promise. The True Lord says: ‘If you help [the cause of] Allah, He will help you, and will make firm your steps’ (*Muhammad:* 7) and He has also said: ‘And the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.’ (*as-Saffat:* 173) These two verses confirm the issue of making a promise; after that, the actual implementation came. Was the promise fulfilled or not? It certainly was, but when? Is the True Lord referring to the battle of Badr in this verse?

‘When, by His leave, you were about to destroy your foes’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152) means literally ‘you were about to remove their sense’ (sense meaning the five senses). The meaning of ‘remove their sense’ is to deprive them of their five senses. ‘You were about to destroy your foes’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152); it indeed did happen, and the believers overwhelmed them, killed them and captured them; or it might refer to the sound that comes out of a human being, and when a human being loses sense, he is done. ‘When, by His leave, you were about to destroy your foes’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152). When you were true to your approach towards your enemy, according to Allah's guidance, Allah has fulfilled His promise. This was the situation at Badr.

As for there, at Uhud, He has said: '…until the moment when you faltered' (*Al-'Imran:* 152), i.e. you became fearful, 'And disputed the order and disobeyed [the Prophet's command]' (*Al-'Imran:* 152) 'Once He had brought you within sight of your goal' (*Al-'Imran:* 152), i.e. the battle spoils, 'some of you desire the gains of this world and others desire the world to come' (*Al-'Imran:* 152). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were giving us a moral drawn from two battles: a battle in which Allah's promise was fulfilled and victory was attained and the other when Allah has also kept His promise when you disobeyed Prophet Muhammad, and hence, defeat ensued. So, the issue is laid out before you in the form of an actual experience, not just theoretical speech or in the form of a verse, but an actual event.

Moreover, the whole thing might even refer to the battle of Uhud. Let us suppose that this is so and leave Badr aside. When you first plunged into the battle, O believers, were you victorious? Indeed you were, and Talha ibn Abu Talha, the standard-bearer for the disbelievers, was killed along with twenty or so others. The standard of the disbelievers fell early in the battle; its bearer killed as well, and this is alluded to by Allah's words: 'And, indeed, God fulfilled His promise to you: you were routing them, with his permission, but then you faltered, disputed the order, and disobeyed..." (*Al-'Imran:* 152). One group said: 'Let us stay on the battlefield' and another said: 'Let us withdraw', and when you saw the booty, you awkwardly reacted and did what this verse mentioned. Consequently, the defeat took place. Had not been for your erratic reaction, you would have had the right to doubt this religion, for what happened was a proof of its truthfulness, and evidently that shows that, when you part with Allah's guidance, you would land on failure and debacle.

But '… then you faltered, disputed the order, and disobeyed...' (*Al-'Imran:* 152). One group said: 'We will remain where Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded us to be', while others said: 'We will go to collect the battle spoils.' 'Some of you desire the gains of this world and others desire the world to come' (*Al-'Imran:* 152). As long as you disputed the command, and some of you elected to stay in their positions, while others elected to collect the spoils, this means that those who wanted to continue fighting desired the Hereafter and were not distracted by the booty, whilst those who cared for this world alone elected to go after the booty.

Ibn Mas‘ud *Allah be pleased with him* said about this: ‘By Allah, I was unaware that any of the Companions of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, desired this world until what was revealed about us on the day of Uhud.’ In other words, he did not imagine that any of Prophet Muhammad’s companions desired this world; he thought that they all desired the Hereafter alone, and when Allah has revealed His words: ‛Some of you desire the gains of this world and others desire the world to come’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152), Ibn Mas‘ud realised that there were some among Prophet Muhammad’s Companions attracted to worldly material pleasures.

However, Ibn Mas‘ud’s opinion does not detract from their status. When they witnessed victory, they thought that the battle came to an end because the standard of the disbelievers had fallen, and the believers had killed a number of Quraysh hardliners. Allah *Almighty is He* pardoned the believers and forgave them for their disobedience to the command of His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad.

‛Whereupon, in order that He might put you to a test, He prevented you from defeating your foes’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152). You were busy fighting them before you looked to the spoils, and when you looked to them, you looked to the desires of your worldly lives, therefore you were distracted from your foes, and you neither finished them off, nor did you completely rout or overwhelm them. ‛Whereupon, in order that He might put you to a test, He prevented you from defeating your foes’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152). Your test in this battle was one of the implementation of Allah’s guidance, as though it were a battle especially intended to test, and you see now everything that happened therein. After that hard test, the experience proved a success because the Muslims were never defeated in battle again after this one.

For this reason, the Battle of Uhud is not considered a defeat, rather a precious lesson that led the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* to numerous victories afterwards. Let us set an example. Suppose that a boy fails one school year and feels humiliated for such a failure, for such a discredit, he then works diligently and ends up as one of the top students; that is to say the initial failure encouraged him to improve and thus it was for his own good.

ʿBut now He has effaced your sin’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152) ; such a pardon was granted because you had your own perspective: thinking that the battle had ended with the fall of the disbelievers’ standard, the killing of Talha ibn AbuTalha and some of the war veterans on the disbelieving front; so you believed that it was all over. You had to remember, however, that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said to you: ‘Stay in your posts and positions, even if you see us pursuing them to Mecca or you see them entering Medina.’

Could there be any warning more articulated than that? ʿFor God is limitless in His bounty unto the believers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 152). Allah *the Almighty* has not ousted them from the fold of faith for their indiscretion with this wise revelation. The truth then says:

إِذْ تُصْعِدُونَ وَلَا تَلْوُۥنَ عَلَىٰٓ أَحَدٍ وَٱلرَّسُولُ يَدْعُوكُمْ
فِىٓ أُخْرَىٰكُمْ فَأَثَٰبَكُمْ غَمًّۢا بِغَمٍّ لِّكَيْلَا تَحْزَنُوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَا
فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا مَآ أَصَٰبَكُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

You fled without looking back, while the Messenger was calling out to you from behind, and God rewarded you with sorrow for sorrow. [He has now forgiven you] so that you may not grieve for what you missed or for what happened to you. God is well aware of everything you do [153]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 153)

Here “[Remember] when you [fled and] climbed [the mountain] without looking aside at anyone”, Allah gave them an image from the battle so that if any one of them heard this, they would recall the shameful image which should not have taken place: ʿWhen you fled’. The Arabic word used for ‘flee’ is taken from a root that means ‘to ascend’ and ‘to go to a flat plain’, i.e. to the land to which it is easiest to flee: The Arabic root '*‘seda’*. The one who flees does not look here or there; there is nothing in front of him except easy land to traverse.

'Paying no heed to anyone' (*Al-'Imran:* 153), i.e. not halting for anything. The crucial thing about this is that there was an appeal from the greatest commander, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, who was calling them: '…, while at your rear the Apostle was calling out to you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 153), i.e. calling you from behind you, requesting that you return to the battle field, 'wherefore He requited you with woe in return for [The Apostle's] woe' (*Al-'Imran:* 153). You caused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* woe by disobeying his commands, and so Allah *Almighty is He*, placed you in this position.

In the phrase 'wherefore He requited you with woe in return for [the Apostle's]' (*Al-'Imran:* 153), 'woe' really means 'punished you', but He *Almighty is He* expressed it and coated it with His divine tenderness and says: 'He requited you'. It was requital! By His Lordship and Divinity, He has acknowledged them to be believers, so He was not tough on them by saying: '…wherefore He requited you with woe in return for [The Apostle's] woe…' (*Al-'Imran:* 153) as though what happened to them was a true expiation so that'… you should not grieve [merely] over what had escaped you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 153). If there had been no grief, humiliation, or debasement, you would have been obsessed with the loss of battle spoils and victory, and your minds would have remained with the spoils because they were the cause of it all. It is as if the woe that afflicted them only came to purify their hearts from excessive yearning for worldly desires, the killing, and defeat that afflicted them. 'Wherefore He requited you with woe in return for [The Apostle's] woe so that you should not grieve [merely] over what had escaped you, nor over what had befallen you: for God is aware of all that you do' (*Al-'Imran:* 153), i.e. Allah *Almighty is He* appreciates what overcame you. Since there was likelihood that 'while at your rear the Apostle was calling out to you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 153), they did not hear the call over the din of battle, but 'God is aware of all that you do' (*Al-'Imran:* 153), and He is aware of every action and emotion. The truth then says:

ثُمَّ أَنزَلَ عَلَيۡكُم مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ ٱلۡغَمِّ أَمَنَةٗ نُّعَاسٗا يَغۡشَىٰ طَآئِفَةٗ مِّنكُمۡۖ وَطَآئِفَةٞ قَدۡ أَهَمَّتۡهُمۡ
أَنفُسُهُمۡ يَظُنُّونَ بِٱللَّهِ غَيۡرَ ٱلۡحَقِّ ظَنَّ ٱلۡجَٰهِلِيَّةِۖ يَقُولُونَ هَل لَّنَا مِنَ ٱلۡأَمۡرِ مِن شَيۡءٖۗ قُلۡ
إِنَّ ٱلۡأَمۡرَ كُلَّهُۥ لِلَّهِۗ يُخۡفُونَ فِيٓ أَنفُسِهِم مَّا لَا يُبۡدُونَ لَكَۖ يَقُولُونَ لَوۡ كَانَ لَنَا مِنَ ٱلۡأَمۡرِ شَيۡءٞ
مَّا قُتِلۡنَا هَٰهُنَاۗ قُل لَّوۡ كُنتُمۡ فِي بُيُوتِكُمۡ لَبَرَزَ ٱلَّذِينَ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡقَتۡلُ إِلَىٰ مَضَاجِعِهِمۡۖ وَلِيَبۡتَلِيَ
ٱللَّهُ مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمۡ وَلِيُمَحِّصَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمُۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ (١٥٤)

After sorrow, He caused calm to descend upon you, a sleep that overtook some of you. Another group, caring only for themselves, entertained false thoughts about God, thoughts more appropriate to pagan ignorance, and said, 'Do we get a say in any of this?' [Prophet], tell them, 'Everything to do with this affair is in God's hands.' They conceal in their hearts things they will not reveal to you. They say, 'If we had had our say in this, none of us would have been killed here.' Tell them, 'Even if you had resolved to stay at home, those who were destined to be killed would still have gone out to meet their deaths.' God did this in order to test everything within you and in order to prove what is in your hearts. God knows your innermost thoughts very well [154] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 154)

Then, after this woe, He sent down upon you a sense of security, a drowsiness which enfolded some of you, whereas the others who cared mainly for themselves, entertained wrong thoughts about God – thoughts of pagan ignorance – saying, 'Did we, then, have any power of decision [in this matter]?' Say: 'Verily, all power of decision does rest with Allah – [but as for them,] they are trying to conceal within themselves that [weakness of faith] which they would not reveal unto thee, [O Prophet, by] saying, 'If we had any power of decision, we would not have left so many dead behind.' Say [unto them]: 'Even if you had remained in your homes, those [of you] whose death had been ordained would indeed have gone forth to the places where they were destined to lie down. And [all this befell you] so that Allah might put to a test all that you harbour in your bosoms, and render your innermost hearts pure of all dross: for God is aware of what is in the hearts [of men].' The phrase 'sent down' indicates that there is a lofty bestowal unrelated to material means or human laws because sleep is a state that overcomes living beings, and this state is necessitated by certain chemical activities in your body. Until now, we do not know exactly what these chemical reactions are, and the most that is understood about them is that they are an inherent restriction in the human body. It is as though the mobile equipment (the human) composed of a brain that works, eyes that see, ears that hear, senses and movement, had a certain limited power, and when it runs out of energy, it does not say to you 'You are the one who will stop working'; rather, it says 'I am no longer apt for work'. It is self-detterence, just as the case of machines which stop running the moment the power supply is cut.

So, this self-detterence mechanism is manifested in sleep when drowsiness overpowers one. Scientific research shows that there are some substances in the body that are not expelled as waste, but rather require equilibrium and chemical balance. We know that there are discharges in the metabolism process that result from motion; the residues of which are excreted in the form of urine, faeces, mucus, etc. So, much of the waste is the result of energy production, but it is not desirable to expell other substances, rather to be equilibrated. When one sleeps, motion stops, and the chemicals within the body begin to be equilibrated; and those things are caused by sleep which is a basic natural process. A distraught and distressed person never sleeps well; rather, he exhausts his body, leading to a more serious problem. Given those circumstances, sleep would be a blessing from Allah.

Remember that we have said before that Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* became renowned for issuing *fatwa* (legal opinion) and for being able to answer all questions raised to him. They said, 'We used to seek his legal advice on a complicated issue and see how he would answer us', as though they had forgotten that he could deliver his '*fatwa*' (legal opinion) efficiently because he was raised under the patronage of Prophet Muhammad. The Divine Call was awarded to Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* when 'Ali Allah *be pleased with him* was still young, whereas the other Companions were old, so they had absorbed some practices from the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, whilst 'Ali was not polluted with such pre-Islamic debased practices. He received all the vast dimensions of education at the hands of his guide, Prophet Muhammad. Such an interaction had entitled him to be well grounded in religious issues and delivered *fatwa* pretty quickly.

For example, a woman came to him and said: 'O son of Abu Talib, how could they give me only one *dinar* from six hundred? The one from whom I inherit left six hundred *dinars,* and they gave me a single *dinar*.' He said to her: 'Perhaps he died leaving behind a wife, two daughters and a mother, so the wife takes one eighth (seventy-five *dinars*), the daughters two-thirds (four hundred *dinars*) and the mother takes a sixth (one hundred *dinars*); and perhaps he had twelve brothers and one sister, full or half brothers, and you are the sister, and there were twenty-five *dinars* left to be shared amongst twelve brothers and one sister; so your share is one *dinar*.'How could he have known this? It was the precision of arithmetic skill from one who was raised in the house of Prophethood.

In the verse that we are currently examining, we find that the Truth *Almighty is He* bestowed them with 'drowsiness' to protect them, and so sleep did not come by their own will, but rather, Allah sent it down. The meaning of 'sent it down' is that He sent a new Divine mercy to rescue those people who were afflicted by chagrin because of what they had done. For this reason, Abu Talha said: 'Drowsiness enfolded us, whilst we were at our posts on the day of Uhud so that one of us would drowsily drop his sword, pick it up, drop it, and pick it up again.

It was a matter of compulsion then. When Allah *Almighty is He* sends down drowsiness, it is a matter of rescue from misdeeds dictated on them by the frailty of the human nature and made up for by Allah's compensation. But what was it about the hypocrites? Without a doubt, those who fought in the battle out of hypocrisy felt no woe whatsoever over what had happened; on the contrary, they must have been delighted and reassured by what happened. Such people were not worthy of Allah's compensation in the form of the security of sleep. Rather, Allah let them be for their selves, because they were not under Allah's protection as they neither followed the Straight Way of guidance nor devoted themselves to the concept of absolute surrender to Him or at least being true to the concept of surrender to Him. Allah *Glorified is He* left those to their own discretion.

Hence, the security of sleep would not be sent down to them. As long as this was so, they became worried. Why? It was because they cared only for their own safety. When a person truly believes in Allah and accepts to surrender to Him, he implicitly and devotedly sells himself to Allah. And this trade with Allah has to continue for long. Any time that a Muslim feels conceited, we may assume that he has gone back on the trade, and so Allah, the One purchased his life from him, will leave him to his own discretion. Therefore, His words 'who cared mainly for themselves' (*Al-'Imran:* 154) mean that they went back on the pledge of faith because the one who concludes such a pledge with his Lord is the one whom Allah described thus: 'Behold, Allah has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return, [and so] they fight in Allah's cause, and slay, and are slain: a promise which in truth He has willed upon Himself in [the words of] the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Quran. And who could be more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain which you have made with Him: for this, this is the triumph supreme!' (*at-Tawba:* 111)

As long as Allah *Almighty is He* has purchased the believer's own self, the believer must not get immersed in self-indulgence and must plunge into the battle pursuant with the conditions of the pledge of faith. If one fails to abide by them, he will become worried, troubled, and restless. Finally, he would be entangled into the web of misconceptions and delusions and, even worse, fall easy prey to kaleidoscopic visions. His soul would be insecure then, and as long as a person is concerned with his own cares and indulgences, sleep would never overtake him eventhough it is a natural reaction.

And so we find that Imam'Ali, *Allah be pleased with him* when asked about the strongest of Allah's soldiers, he stretched his hands and said: 'The strongest of Allah's soldiers are ten: well-pegged mountains, yet iron cuts them, so iron is stronger than the mountains; yet fire melts iron; and water extinguishes fire; and the clouds suspended between the sky and the earth by Allah's command carry the water; and the wind disperses the clouds; and the son of Adam can overcome the wind by covering himself with garments and then goes out to fulfil his needs; and intoxication overwhelms the son of Adam; and sleep overwhelms intoxication; and care overcomes sleep; so the strongest of Allah's soldiers is care.'

When care overpowers the human soul, it is then the strongest of Allah's soldiers, for care overcomes the human soul in many forms in one single situation. He imagines many complicated issues in relation to one single issue. An event might only have one form, but care maximizes the matter in every possible form. Those people worried about themselves, and as long as that was so, they breached the pledge of faith. As long as they breached the pledge of faith by means of which Allah purchased from them their own selves, Allah relinquished them. And since Allah has relinquished them, they had to face their doom.

Care and anxiety took hold of them to the extent that they are horrendously scared when confronted with any vicissitudes. However, the state of the first group was different because Allah *Almighty is He* treated them well as they sustained their pledge of faith, albeit their human nature misleads them to interpret the course of action incorrectly, they thought the battle was over dashing to claim the spoils of war. Allah *Almighty is He* appreciated their devotion to Islam, admonished them for their incorrect interpretation of the events, and requited them with woe because of their disobedience, but He sent down security upon them because they remained devoted to the cause of Islam.

'Whereas the others, who cared mainly for themselves, entertained wrong thoughts about God - thoughts of pagan ignorance' (*Al-'Imran:* 154). They were "a group" that had particular idiosyncrasies they strongly adopted. It was not just any group, but one which adopted a single notion and the wise statement here came to reveal their internal monologue. Did anyone hear them? No, but Allah was well aware of it, and He revealed what lay within all their souls with a single statement which explains that they all adopted a single notion expressed by a single sentence: 'Did we, then, have any power of decision [in this matter]?' (*Al-'Imran:* 154) They said this to themselves, so who heard them as a group? Allah *Almighty is He* heard 'for Allah is aware of what is in the hearts [of men]' (*Al-'Imran:* 154).

The word 'group' (*tai'fa*) in Arabic denotes a singular word; *twa'aif* is the plural form for the word. But in Arabic, the reference of the singular word *tai'fa* may be singular and plural. The verb used with the dual word takes the dual form at times and plural form at other times. In Arabic, such a remark is only grasped by a professional linguist who distinguishes between its usage in the singular form and its connotation referring to the plural; for this reason, we find this as the inimitable and miraculous nature of Quran linguistics. The Truth *Glorified is He* says: ʽHence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two [groups] goes on acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to Allah's commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice, and deal equitably [with them]: for, verily, Allah loves those who act equitably!' (*al-Hujurat:* 9) When He says, ʽHence, if two groups of believers', He relates to two groups that ʽfall to fighting' in the plural form; the Arabic word *ta'ifatan* is used to refer to the dual sense (for two groups), yet out of syntactic precision, each group constitutes a plurality. ʽIf two groups of believers fall to fighting', what should we do? We should ʽMake peace between them.' The dual form is used this time, meaning the two groups). Sometimes it refers to the plural form; other times to the dual form. On the battlefield, one group does not fight with a single sword, and nor does it deliver a single strike; during fight, every individual member of the group has his own role, so the individuality of the group is numerous in a way.

When we seek conciliation between them, however, do we go to every individual member of each group, or do we consider each group represented by their leaders and make peace between them? The syntactic precision of the Quran is shown: ʽIf two groups of believers fall to fighting'. After this, the truth returns to the dual sense of the word, saying: ʽHence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them' (*al-Hujurat:* 9), with the plural used first and the dual used second. Then, Allah returns to the dual, saying: ʽbut then, if one of the two [groups] goes on acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to Allah's commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them' (*al-Hujurat:* 9). Peace accords are concluded between groups represented by their leaders.

Allah says: ʽwhereas the others, who cared mainly for themselves, entertained wrong thoughts about Allah – thoughts of pagan ignorance – saying, "Did we, then, have any power of decision [in this matter]?" Say: "Verily, all power of decision does rest with Allah" – [but as for them], they are trying to conceal within themselves that [weakness of faith] which they would not reveal unto thee, [O Prophet, by] saying, "If we had any power of decision, we would not have left so many dead behind' (*Al-'Imran:* 154). This statement indicates that they were a group who adopted the same idiosyncrasies, and it also indicates that their hypocrisy was commonly agreed upon; it was not that each of them worked in recluse; rather, they were a group of hypocrites and they constituted a faction which had a common policy, codes and uniformed thought; laid bare by the words of Allah *Almighty is He*: ʿwhereas the others, who cared mainly for themselves, entertained wrong thoughts about Allah – thoughts of pagan ignorance' (*Al-'Imran:* 154).

We know that the truth is firm: Unchanging is He; Being Truthful is out of the question. Allah is Truth, and He created the heavens and the earth and the entire universe truthfully. He sent down His Book with truth, all with truth. They entertained thoughts about Allah that were untrue, eventhough He is the Truth, He created the universe according to true laws, Allah's *Sunnah* (ways) in creation were fulfilled truthfully and He always succours the truth. They entertained untrue thoughts about Allah, saying: 'Our Lord did not grant us victory, despite having promised to do so,' totally ignoring the fact that Allah devised the elements as means to victory. This is Allah's *Sunnah*; and Allah's Sunnah always prevails, even in the case of those He favours. They disobeyed the order of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, hence they received an instant retribution by being routed, for no one is exempted. Whoever disobeys must accept the consequences because this is the right thing to do.

They should have mulled over the crystal clearness of the truth. As when the people whom Allah favoured and yet disobeyed Allah's commandment, though were on the side of His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad, they received their lot, the *Sunnah* of Allah took its very course for being the way of truth; they entertained thoughts of pagan ignorance about Allah, *Almighty is He*. Either this means the thoughts of the people of the pre-Islamic ignorance, or it refers to ignorance of all kinds.

In saying: ʿ…"Did we, then, have any power of decision [in this matter]?"' they might mean that ʿHad we gained any victory or even collected war spoils?' In saying: '… "Did we, then, have any power of decision [in this matter]?"…' Or 'We went out to fight despite our views, for we were of the opinion to not go for fighting and to stay in Medina, and fight them only when they entered it.' And in saying "…"Did we, then, have any power of decision [in this matter]?" say: "Verily, all power of decision does rest with Allah"' (*Al-'Imran:* 154). They lacked the subtlety of faith insight and so were unable to grasp the gist behind their loss. They thought that they had not been victorious, but truly, it was a victory. Why? It was so because the battle consolidated the principle that when orders are disobeyed, victory is denied. So Islam was victorious, but the defeated were those who had forsaken the guidance of Islam, and this in itself was a victory for Islam. For this reason, we must always differentiate between the Islamic principle and those who are only outwardly affiliated to it. Be careful not to judge a principle according to the persons who outwardly embrace it. Those persons can serve as a manifestation of this principle only if they adhere to it wholeheartedly. This is because when Allah *Almighty is He* announced a religion, i.e Islam, in order to regulate people's lives, He ordained legislations to certain actions, while He prohibited others. As long as there are prohibitions and permissions set by Allah, Muslims are susceptible to a sort of breach to these laws. When Islam sanctions the flogging or stoning of the adulterer and adulteress and the amputation of the thief's hand, and likewise, when Islam legislates all punishments for crimes, there is a possibility that these crimes will be committed. If they are committed, this is not a pretext to incriminate Islam, but rather, the perpetrator. We do not assume that Islam permits stealing; rather, we say that a Muslim stole something, and Islam sanctions severe punishment in his case; i.e, the amputation of the hand.

'[But as for them,] they are trying to conceal within themselves that [weakness of faith] which they would not reveal unto thee, [O Prophet by] saying, "If we had any power of decision, we would not have left so many dead behind."' (*Al-'Imran:* 154) This exposes them because what was it that they wanted for themselves? They did not want to have to go out to fight, and hence said: 'If we had had any choice in the matter, and if he had followed our own suggestion, we would not have come to the battlefield, and none of this would have happened.' This is one explanation; another is: 'If we had been granted the victory that God promised Muhammad and his Companions, we would not have left so many dead behind'. According to both explanations, the meaning is correct; it was as though they wanted to relate killing and death to material causes; yet, who dares to ascribe killing or death to material causes? Death signals the end of life; the cause of which is unknown, together with its time, place, and age which are only known by Allah.

Since the matter is unknown, why should you relate the killing to the battlefield? Have you ever not seen a person die, while not in battle? Have you ever not seen a person killed, while not in battle? If killing only took place in battles, you would have the right to say that, but deaths and killings are common things, they are facts of life. They are not linked to a place, a time, an age or a cause; one dies because the die is cast; it is predestined.

By relating killing and death to the battle, they abandoned their faith, so the reply came from the True Lord in the form of a decisive command to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: ʽSay [unto them]: "Even if you had remained in your homes, those [of you] whose death had been ordained would indeed have gone forth to the places where they were destined to lie down' (*Al-'Imran:* 154).

A person may be a reason of his own death. This can be exemplified as the situation of a person who is ill and insists on having surgery, but the doctor apologises saying: 'I have a lot of operations to perform, so wait for a month,' but the patient seeks mediation to convince the doctor to operate. The patient insists, increases the doctor's fees and then dies in surgery. Was not the patient a reason of his own death? Indeed, he was.

The True Lord says: ʽEven if you had remained in your homes, those [of you] whose death had been ordained would indeed have gone forth to the places where they were destined to lie down.' (*Al-'Imran:* 154) The Arabic root *baraza* (to go forth) indicates a hasty movement indicating that a row is actually coherent, and the person who comes forth is the one who advances in the opposite direction of the the row, so he sticks out.

ʽSay [unto them]: "Even if you had remained in your homes, those [of you] whose death had been ordained would indeed have gone forth to the places where they were destined to lie down." And [all this befell you] so that Allah might put to a test all that you harbour in your bosoms, and render your innermost hearts pure of all dross: for Allah is aware of what is in the hearts [of men]' (*Al-'Imran:* 154). The one who goes forth to his final resting place is the one who leaves a secure place, otherwise how could those whom Allah destined to fight for Islam be tested until the Hour? There must be hard experiences testing people so that only chosen elite is allowed to carry weapons during wars.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* announced that they would go out to fight at Uhud, some lagged behind seeking the intercession of Ibn Ubayy not to be among the fighters. This was the first filtration test. Then, the archers were tested, and this was the second filtration; some of them remained, while others went to collect the battle spoils. Afterwards, word spread that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been murdered. This was the third filtration. '…And [all this befell you] so that Allah might put to a test all that you harbour in your bosoms, and render your innermost hearts pure of all dross: for Allah is aware of what is in the hearts [of men]" (*Al-'Imran:* 154).

A person attempts to conceal within his heart that which he must keep to himself, with the care that one friend has for another. It is as if the heart were careful not to reveal what lay within, but Allah revealed them to the people, and exposed them to themselves because they could even be fooling themselves. The True Lord then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ تَوَلَّوۡاْ مِنكُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡتَقَى ٱلۡجَمۡعَانِ إِنَّمَا ٱسۡتَزَلَّهُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ
بِبَعۡضِ مَا كَسَبُواْۖ وَلَقَدۡ عَفَا ٱللَّهُ عَنۡهُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٞ ١٥٥

As for those of you who turned away on the day the two
armies met in battle, it was Satan who caused them to slip,
through some of their actions. God has now pardoned
them: God is most forgiving and forbearing [155]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 155)

When we read the words "caused them to slip" (*Al-'Imran:* 155), we see that the verb is in the *istaf'ala* form, which implies a request or requirement.

'Slip' means to to err, i.e. to make a mistake. So, Satan wanted them to stumble 'only by means of something that they [themselves] had done' (*Al-'Imran:* 155), as though Satan did not dare to cause any believer to slip unless they had fallen into dissolution in some way. But as for those who have no dissolution, Satan has no power over them. When a person allows himself to entertain a certain desire, Satan labels him and says: 'This one is weak; we are able to cause him to slip.' However, he never approaches those whom he sees to never allow themselves fall into dissolution.

Hence, the lower self is Satan's instrument of sin. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'Satan flows in the son of Adam as blood flows.' When Satan sees anyone overpowered by his lower self, he says: 'This person is a promising would-be evildoer!' This is the one through whom he flows like blood, as the Hadith describes. As for the one who practices his religion, when his lower self incites him to evildoing, and he refuses, Satan fears him. So, Satan cannot cause anyone to slip except those who are weak, and if someone keeps their Lord in mind at all times, Satan will not dare to approach them.

Allah has named Satan 'the whispering, elusive tempter (*alwaswas Al-khannas*)' (*an-Nas:* 4). He whispers to people, but when Allah is mentioned, he sneaks away. He only remains with you when he sees that you are distracted from your Lord; but if you are with your Lord, he is unable to reach you and he disappears. He is prevented from whispering if you seek Allah's refuge from him.

So, His words, 'Satan caused them to stumble' (*Al-'Imran:* 155), mean that Satan sought for them to stumble as a result of what he knew they had done, thereby showing their weakness. 'Satan caused them to stumble only by means of something that they [themselves] had done…' (*Al-'Imran:* 155). The phrase 'only by means of something that they [themselves] had done…" (*Al-'Imran:* 155) being followed by '…but now Allah has effaced this sin of theirs…' (*Al-'Imran:* 155) suggests that Satan was unable to take them by means of everything that they did, for our Lord pardons much. 'Satan caused them to stumble only by means of something that they [themselves] had done. But now Allah has effaced this sin of theirs: verily, Allah is much-forgiving, forbearing' (*Al-'Imran:* 155). Why did Allah efface their sins? He effaced their sins in honour of the principle of Islam which they had embraced sincerely, but their souls were a little bit detached regarding certain matters. He could have punished them for that, but He pardoned them, for this is the right of Islam; 'Verily, Allah is much-forgiving, forbearing' (*Al-'Imran:* 155). The True Lord then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَكُونُواْ كَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَقَالُواْ لِإِخۡوَٰنِهِمۡ إِذَا ضَرَبُواْ فِي
ٱلۡأَرۡضِ أَوۡ كَانُواْ غُزّٗى لَّوۡ كَانُواْ عِندَنَا مَا مَاتُواْ وَمَا قُتِلُواْ لِيَجۡعَلَ ٱللَّهُ ذَٰلِكَ
حَسۡرَةٗ فِي قُلُوبِهِمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُحۡيِۦ وَيُمِيتُۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ بَصِيرٞ ١٥٦

You who believe, do not be like those who disbelieved and said of their brothers who went out on a journey or a raid, 'If only they had stayed with us they would not have died or been killed,' for God will make such thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts. It is God who gives life and death; God sees everything you do [156] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 156)

You who believe, do not be like those who disbelieved and said of their brothers who went set forth on a journey or a raid, 'If only they had stayed with us they would not have died or been killed,' for Allah will make such thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts. It is Allah Who grants life and death; Allah sees everything you do.

'Setting forth on a journey' here means to travel in search of Allah's bounty and for the cause of making His word the uppermost. Those who disbelieve related death and killing and the loss of human life to what? They related it to their having travelled afar or going out to fight in Allah's cause, saying: 'Had they not gone out, none of this would have befallen them!' We would rather clear it out saying: it is as though you never saw a man die in his bed, or a man killed by a falling wall, or a bucking camel, or a stray bullet. Is it a must that everyone who dies or is killed should be travelling or fighting in Allah's cause?

This is a foolish way of judging; the True Lord has mentioned this to give us an example of how they judge matters, a judgment with no basis in true inductive principles. If we know them to be disbelievers, we say that this is their nature; their judgments on clear matters is incorrect, and whilst their judgments of particulars is unsound and unrealistic, if you know them to be disbelievers, you will find that it makes sense that they would say such a thing because their state is such that their arguments have no consistency, and so it is no wonder that they do not believe.

The term 'Or gone forth to war…" used in Arabic rendered as 'gone forth to war' is actually *ghuzza* which is the plural form of *ghaz* (which simply means the one who goes forth to war)—just as the plural words *suwwam* and *quwwam* of the active participles *sa'im* and *qa'im* meaning, respectively someone who is fasting and someone who is standing up [praying late into the night]). 'If only they had stayed with us they would not have died or been killed,' for Allah will make such thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts. ' (*Al-'Imran:* 156). So, Allah *Almighty is He* depicts for them what they said in order to chastise them therewith. Why? Because it will lead them to say: 'If they had been with us, we would have prevented them from going out or from being killed, so it is our fault.'

In this way, we find that every time they remembered their dead, they realised that they were wrong, and this instilled bitter anguish into their hearts. If they had only referred back to the Higher Truth, they would have found respite and would not have put themselves into such a labyrinth. This also occurred on their part so that their foolishness is uncovered, for it was manifested by all their actions their understanding of individual events, their judgment of absolute faith and their intervention in other people's matters; and our Allah wished to make that a source of anguish for them.

'"If only they had stayed with us, they would not have died or been killed,' for Allah will make such thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts' (*Al-'Imran:* 156). The principle of faith here is: '…it is Allah who grants life and death…' (*Al-'Imran:* 156). Travelling and fighting in Allah's cause is not the cause of death, and this is why Khalid ibn Al-Walid said: 'I saw a hundred advances or thereabouts and there is not a part of my body except that it has been struck with a sword or pierced by a spear; yet here I am, dying in my bed as a wild donkey dies! Let the eyes of the cowards sleep not!'The poet said:

‘O ye who would prevent me from the tumult and the glory: Can you grant me, then, eternal life?’

That is, ‘O you who seek to prevent me from entering the battle, can you guarantee that I will live forever if I forgo fighting?’ The poet continued:

‘If you indeed cannot meet my request, let me rush to it with all that I possess!’

The True Lord ends the verse with His words: ‘Allah sees everything you do.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 156) It is as though their foolishness were off limits; they failed to cover up their sin; it was made seen. The statement ‘sees’ is stronger than ‘All-knowing’ because if the word were ‘knows’, it would have suggested that they had some moral scruples to enshroud their actions. It is not Allah’s knowledge at play here; it is rather, His sight. Their action, i.e. their mistake, was too plain to be seen, so Allah says: ‘…and Allah sees all that you do’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 156). The Truth then says:

وَلَئِن قُتِلۡتُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَوۡ مُتُّمۡ لَمَغۡفِرَةٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَحۡمَةٌ خَيۡرٞ مِّمَّا يَجۡمَعُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

Whether you are killed for God’s cause or die, God’s forgiveness and mercy are better than anything people amass [157] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 157)

Those who do not want to go to war for fear of not being killed, what pushes them to such intent? It is nothing but relating prosperity to the quality of being alive.

As long as they linked their prosperity to the quality of being alive, they must have entertained false assumptions that being alive would bring about their welfare. So they feared to be killed and leave behind that prosperity. They possessed no faithful insight, and we say to such people: your prosperity in life is determined by your actions, your strength, knowledge, and wisdom. As for the delights you would receive upon meeting Allah as a martyr, they are determined by what Allah possesses of bounty and mercy; enumerable are they! You have failed to grasp the difference between your ability, wisdom and knowledge and your efforts to earn a living, and that which Allah Himself would grant you of these means. So the True Lord says: ‘Whether you are killed for Allah’s cause or die, Allah’s forgiveness and mercy are better than anything people amass.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 157). Next, the True Lord says: ‘for, indeed, if you die or are killed, it will surely be unto Allah that you shall be gathered.’ We should notice that in the first verse, the True Lord mentioned killing first and then death, saying: ‘And if indeed you are killed or die in Allah’s cause…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 157); whereas in the latter, He mentioned death first and then killing, saying:

وَلَئِن مُّتُّمْ أَوْ قُتِلْتُمْ لَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

Whether you die or are killed, it is to God that you
will be gathered [158] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 158)

He mentioned killing first in the first verse because it was addressing warriors who die and meet their Lord as a result of being killed more often than they die of natural causes. The purpose of this verse, however, is to remind us that, on the Day of Resurrection, all humanity will be brought before Allah *Almighty is He* and most of them will have their souls separated from their bodies by means of death, not killing, so death is mentioned first. Every word and sentence, then, is commensurate with its context, for this is the word of the Wise, the Knowing. Afterwards, Allah says: ‘By an act of mercy from Allah, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them—had you been harsh or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you—so pardon them and ask forgiveness for them. Consult with them about matters, then, when you have decided on a course of action, put your trust in Allah: Allah loves those who put their trust in Him.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 159)

The verse, as we see, begins with a statement of fact which is: ‘By an act of mercy from Allah, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 159). It is as though Allah wanted to say: ‘Your nature, O Muhammad, is in line with what is required from you in this matter. They disobeyed you, and did not pay heed to you when you said: “To me, servants of Allah, to me, servants of Allah, I am the Messenger of Allah!” This is something that could have caused vexation and anger, but it did not vex your disposition or anger your temperament, because your inherent nature when dealing with your community is to show mercy.’ It is as though He wanted Prophet Muhammad to show tenderness to his community who were afflicted with woe, saying to him: ‘Be careful not to punish them for this, for you are by nature merciful, and you are not by nature harsh or hard-hearted; so do not act contrary to your nature in this matter.’ It is akin to when you say to someone: ‘You are a good person by nature, so be a good person in this matter!’

‛By an act of mercy from Allah, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 159) Literally, it reads ‘And by some grace from Allah....’, i.e. by some grace that was placed within you. When you say, ‘by some grace..., you are making the matter ambiguous, and when you do this, it shows the immensity of the matter because things are referred to with ambiguity either because they are very small or very big, i.e. either too big to be conceived or too small to be conceived. We can only see a small portion of immense objects and we cannot see minute objects at all. If something is referred to as being unknown, this sometimes indicates its immensity, sometimes its minuteness, sometimes its magnitude and sometimes its scarcity. If it is inconceivable because of its magnitude, it is huge in quantity; while if it inconceivable because of its minuteness, out of the range of human eyesight, it is minute or infinitesimal.

So, when Allah says: ‛And it was by Allah’s grace…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 159), it means ‘by Allah’s grace, which is inherent in your nature, you dealt gently with them. Why is the word *ma* (some) used here in Arabic? It can either be understood as a device to illustrate ambiguity, i.e. ‘grace that is mighty beyond comprehension’, or it can be understood as a lexical connector, as though the True Lord were saying to him: ‘By the mercy that your Creator placed within you, commensurate with your place in your community, you dealt with them gently, and as long as this is your nature, be gentle with them in this regard, pardon them and pray that they be forgiven.’

This verse came after the mention of several events that took place at Uhud. The first event was that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* preferred not to go out and fight the Quraysh outside the city, but rather to stay in Medina; but those who longed for martyrdom and battle and longed to make up for what they had missed out on at Badr, preferred to go out to meet the Quraysh. Prophet Muhammad deferred to their opinion and donned his armour. When they saw that they had coerced the Messenger of Allah into something that was contrary to the opinion he had arrived at, they went back on what they had said and suggested that he was right not to go out; but he said: 'It is not for a Prophet, when he has put on his armour, to remove it until he has fought.' Since he had prepared to fight, it is over. This was the first event: that of the consultation.

The second matter was that of ibn Ubbay's lagging behind with a third of the army. The third event was the archers' disobedience of Prophet Muhammad's order and their abandoning of their posts, despite His having warned them not to do so, saying to ʿAbdullah ibn Jubayr, whom he had placed in authority over the archers: 'Keep the cavalry from us with your arrows, lest they come to us from our rear; whether the battle swings for us or against us, keep your position and let us not be approached from your side.' But they disobeyed the command of Prophet Muhammad. The fourth event was their fleeing when word went out that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had been murdered. The fifth event was that when he tried to rally them, they fled without paying attention to anything.

All these events were about to exert effects on him *peace and blessings be upon him.* As such, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to say, ʿI created you with such mercy which makes you feel tolerant about all these mistakes. I am the One Who grants mercy and thus I embedded you with such energy that enables you to endure all disobedience committed by your followers. Did you think that you were sent to an angel-like *ummah*?! You were sent to mankind who frequently commit mistakes and who also change from time to time. That is why I want you to learn the lesson. I actually embedded you, O Muhammad, with mercy and you had already invoked Me for bestowing a lot of goodness upon your followers'. His mercy may be shown clearly in the event when Jibril (Gabriel) called upon him saying, ʿIndeed, Allah *the Exalted* heard what your people said to you and the response they gave you. And He has sent you the angel in charge of the mountains to order him to do to them what you wish.' Muhammad then added, ʿThen the angel of the mountains called me, greeted me and said: "O Muhammad, Allah listened to what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mountains, and my *Rubb* (Lord) has sent me to you so that you may give me your orders. (I will carry out your orders). If you wish, I will bring together the two mountains that stand opposite to each other at the extremities of Mecca to crush them in between.' But the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'I rather hope that Allah will raise from among their descendants people who will worship Allah the One and will not ascribe partners to Him (in worship).'

So, it is as though Allah said: I ask you (O Muhammad) to show them that particular mercy I implanted into your heart and which you made use of in all spheres of life. Certainly, it is by means of that mercy that you became lenient with them and thus they gathered around you due to your great moral character, great modesty, and warm smile; they gathered around you because you offered them considerable relief. As well, you took their individual affairs into your account to the extent that you were never the one who withdrew his hand first from theirs. You are of a great moral character. In fact, I implanted all of this into you so as to show them tolerance towards the mistakes they committed and to forgive them by virtue of such mercy and forbearance. That is because you are entitled with the role of educating them and cultivating their manners. As a matter of fact, these two characters of education and cultivating manners entail that you should not become angry at any mistake committed by them; otherwise, you are not performing your role perfectly.

فَبِمَا رَحۡمَةٖ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لِنتَ لَهُمۡۖ وَلَوۡ كُنتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ ٱلۡقَلۡبِ لَٱنفَضُّواْ
مِنۡ حَوۡلِكَۖ فَٱعۡفُ عَنۡهُمۡ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡ لَهُمۡ وَشَاوِرۡهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِۖ فَإِذَا عَزَمۡتَ
فَتَوَكَّلۡ عَلَى ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ١٥٩

By an act of mercy from God, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them – had you been harsh, or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you – so pardon them and ask forgiveness for them. Consult with them about matters, then, when you have decided on a course of action, put your trust in God: God loves those who put their trust in Him [159] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 159)

Why? Because you are weaning them off the practices they used to do in the pre-Islamic time of ignorance. In reality, it is taken for granted that a person who takes the responsibility of weaning someone off the practices he used to do, should not resort to unfriendly manner. That is because that particular person is in need of compassion and mercy. As such, it is not right to bring about two difficulties upon him; that is, declaring the act he used to do ugly and deniable as well as weaning him off it. Therefore, anyone who gives a piece of advice to someone else should take into account that 'giving advice is not an easy matter. That is because the act of advice itself entails declaring to be criminal the deed committed by the person to whom advice is offered. So, when you advise someone not to do that particular act, what does this truly mean?

This means that it is hard enough to make a person who does a bad act wean off the practices he used to do in the past. So you should not add to this difficulty by directing advice in a way which is not good and harsh. In reality, this is not true because, in this particular situation, the person needs the adviser to be compassionate and lenient in order to remove the bad moral characters from him. We, in fact, apply this in our life when we coat the bitter medicine with sugar so that it could pass over the tongue without pain or annoyance until it reaches that particular area where we cannot feel its bitterness.

Hence, since you apply this in your worldly affairs, you should apply the same as to spiritual matters. Due to the fact that 'giving advice is not an easy matter,' you should not turn it into an argument. In addition, you should not offer it in a way which is difficult. It goes without saying that offering advice in a lenient way achieves the goal without agitation or annoyance. Similarly, being kind, while offering advice strongly urges the person to accept it and act upon it.

As such, you establish your goal. A case in point is the story of the king who dreamt that all his teeth had been fallen and thus he asked someone to explain it for him. The man said, 'All the members of your family will die,' but the king felt unpleasant with the interpretation of the dream in such words. So, he sought another person to explain it for him and the man said, 'Your life span will be longer than any of your family members.' It is the same interpretation given by the first man but in different words. It is true that as long as his life span will be longer than the life spans of his family members, then all of them will pass away before him. It is exactly the same interpretation. Therefore, Arabs used to say, 'Telling truth is difficult and thus you should do it in soft and kind words.'

'And had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you' (*Al-'Imran:* 159), so, it is due to mercy that you became lenient with them. As well, it is by virtue of soft words that they followed you, gathered around you, and gave you their love. Linguistically, the word *fazhzh* (rough) refers to the water camels store in their stomachs. It is known that camels drink great quantities of water which suffice them for long periods of time. So, when they, the camels, find no water to drink, they make use of these quantities of water stored in their stomachs. It is historically recorded that fighters slaughtered camels to drink water from their stomachs. It is known for certain that the taste of water taken from the stomachs of camels is unpleasant, and this actually indicates the true meaning of the word *fazhzh*. Due to the fact that this act of drinking water from the stomachs of camels brings about roughness, Arabs used to refer to 'harsh words' as roughness. Being hard-hearted automatically brings about harsh words.

'And had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you....' (*Al-'Imran:* 159) It is a mercy upon which you (O Messenger of Allah) were created by Allah *the Almighty* Who truly sent you with the Message.

And it is due to this mercy that you became gentle and lenient with them. The fruit of this mercy was crystal clear in the fact that they gathered around you and gave you their love. If you had shown them something otherwise, they would have dispersed from around you. As such, these previous events undoubtedly prove that mercy and leniency truly manifest your nature and moral character.

After telling about the mercy He *the Almighty* implanted in The Messenger's heart and after telling about his leniency, He *Glorified is He* ordered him *peace and blessings be upon him* to pardon them. We have previously explained that the word *al-'Afwa* (pardon) means to entirely erase sins. This act of pardoning is totally different from *kazhm al-Ghayzhzh* (restraining anger). That is because the latter means that you do not punish for the sin, eventhough you are angry with it, but you restrain your body parts and tongue. Concerning the act of pardoning, it means the entire sin is completely forgiven. Placing emphasis on this act of pardoning, one says, 'As for me, I pardoned you.'

However, the matter is not like that. It is because the issue is not related to you alone and thus you are also supposed to ask Allah to forgive them. The person against whom the sin is committed may pardon, but My Lord and the master of that particular person may not. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* puts it in clear words, 'If you pardon them, this is your right. But you are required to ask Allah to forgive them so that Allah does not punish them for the mistakes they committed against you.'

'Pardon them therefore...' (*Al-'Imran:* 159) This order is directed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in particular. 'And ask forgiveness for them...' (*Al-'Imran:* 159). You should ask Allah to forgive them for the mistakes they committed in the battle of Uhud, which led to your defeat and injury. You (O Muhammad) should not say, 'I consulted with them and acted upon their advice, but we were defeated. This defeat should not make you keep away from consulting with them. In spite of the fact that the defeat you had was the outcome of this consultation, you should not shut the door to it. That is because education, cultivation of manners and testing the truthfulness of belief were the lessons to be deduced from the battle of Uhud. So, you should not hate to consult with them because of that. Rather, you should permanently have their consultation. As such, as long as you pardon them, and as long as you ask your Lord forgiveness for them, even if not in their presence, this indicates clearly that you feel content with them, and thus you are to resume your previous relations normally because you have already learned the lesson that will enormously benefit you in many subsequent events.

From the battle of Uhud on, Muslims always gained victory because they had learned the lesson very well to the extent that when Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* consulted with the companions concerning the apostasy wars, some of them advised him not to engage in them. But he did not follow their advice; rather, he consulted with them. The most important of all of this is that a counsel should be sought. Also, we shall follow the best opinions offered. The word *Al-Mashuratu* (counsel) means to draw comparisons between the various opinions and to choose what is best from among them. According to a line the a poem, 'Seek counsel of others if affliction should befall you, even if you are of those who give counsel.' The poet managed to convey the true meaning to us. Eventhough one may be from among those people known for giving counsel to others, he should also seek the counsel of others. But why should he? You will find the answer to this question in the following verse by the same poet who said, 'The eye may see what is near to it and what is far from it, but it cannot see itself without the recourse of a mirror.'

It is true that the eye sees what is near and far, but it is incapable of seeing itself without a mirror. The same applies to other people' issues you examine because your mind minutely examines them, and truth is your strong motive. Your own personal affairs, however, may be negatively influenced by your caprice which may make them pleasing to you.

As such, Muslims became fully aware of the result of the Messenger of Allah seeking their counsel in Uhud. It seems that Allah *the Almighty* wants to say to His Messenger, 'Do not rely on the previous act of counsel to break off your relationship with them, and thus not consulting with them anymore. That is because, for certain, you will pass away one day, and another person will rule them. So, as long as they are governed by a person from among themselves, you should not prevent the ruler from seeking the advice of others. As a matter of fact, when various opinions are offered to the ruler in question, he will be able to choose the most correct one due to the fact that he is the ruler. Also, he will have the option to compare them all and say, 'This opinion is good but this is not, and so on.' Of course, this will be the case unless he authorises another person to make the decision

'And consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah...' (*Al-'Imran:* 159) The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was determined to set off to war and thus he put on his armour, so the question to be asked here is: 'Is it for the Prophet to put his armour on and then take it off due to their counsel?' No, it does not go like this because there must be no hesitation in the matter. 'And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah.' (*Al-'Imran:* 159) This is the benefit of belief which is clearly manifested in the fact that all the body parts shall work, while the role of hearts is to trust Allah; what a good equation it is!

The body parts say, 'We sow good seeds, plant, plough, irrigate and fertilise the land.' In spite of all of these acts, we suppose that frost may affect our plants and thus we bring straw and the like to cover the crop. This is the work to be done by the body parts. Then, hearts shall trust Allah *the Almighty*. So, be careful not to say, 'It is for certain that I am going to harvest my crop because I perfected my work.' No, this is not right because Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who prepares reasons. So, it becomes crystal clear right now that the body parts shall work, while the hearts have to trust Allah—this is the benefit of belief; that is, I truly believe in Allah Who is Omnipotent and Who is able to create with and without reasons and means. You serve as reasons (O mankind), but Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who has nothing to do with reasons. So, your work means that you have actually considered reasons, and trusting Allah means that you seriously have to consider Allah, the One Who brings about reasons.

So, the body parts, as we explained previously, shall work and the hearts shall trust (Allah). Be careful not to think that trusting Allah means to leave your body parts idle. That is totally wrong. In fact, this is called indolence and laziness. In other words, it is the false trust. Liars are those who claim that! This is proved by the fact that such people like to trust Allah in difficult matters, while they do not do so when it comes to easy ones. To such man who claims that he trusts Allah but he does not work, we say, 'You have no trust because if you did, you would never stretch out your hand to food and place it into your mouth. You claim that you have trust in Allah, but you do not work, so let your (false) trust place food into your mouth, and chew it for you!'

Of course, he will not do such thing. To that person, we also say that his claim of trusting Allah is nothing but misunderstanding of the true meaning of belief. It is not a real trust in Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah.' (*Al-'Imran:* 159) The word '*azamta* (you have decided) requires the existence of determination, while trust requires showing impotence. The true meaning to be understood from the sentence 'I trust Allah' is that man has used up all his means and thus he resorts to the One Who is All-Omnipotent, i.e. Allah *the Almighty*.

In our daily lives, we hear people say that they have entrusted the matter to so-and-so. This means that a person is unable to do that particular thing and thus entrusts another to do it on his behalf. Also, it shows that this person is incapable of doing that thing. That is why he entrusts the matter to someone else who is able to do it. Similarly, this is the case with placing trust in Allah resulting from true belief in Him *the Almighty*. The word *At-Tawakkul* (having trust in) means to entrust your affairs to Allah *the Almighty* because you truly believe that He *Glorified is He* perfectly arranges matters of the entire creation including the fact that He has provided the means to you. Thus, you are not to neglect those means and meanwhile ask Him *Glorified is He* to work instead of you. We previously explained in (*al-Fatiha:* 5) that a man invokes Allah *the Almighty* for His Help.

The word *nast'ain* (we seek help) means that we want such help from You (O Allah) so that we can perfect o`ur work. Moving to the next verse, He *the Almighty* says, 'If Allah should aid you, no one can overcome you; but if He should forsake you, who is there that can aid you after Him?' (*Al-'Imran:* 160) 'If Allah should aid you, no one can overcome you; but if He should forsake you, who is there that can aid you after Him? And upon Allah let the believers rely.'

In this particular verse, He *Glorified is He* says, '... And upon Allah let the believers rely.' Thus, the question to be asked in this verse is who the believers are. Undoubtedly, it means those ones who truly believe in Allah. As long as they believe in Him *the Almighty* it is clearly implied that He *Glorified is He* is Omnipotent and fully aware of man's interests; thus there is nothing better than to entrust all your affairs to Him *the Almighty*.

Upon reciting the saying of Allah 'If Allah should aid you, no one can overcome you...,' one may ask, 'What is the opposite of Allah's Aid or Victory?' The answer is clearly given in the following part of this particular verse, which is, '... but if He should forsake you, who is there that can aid you after Him?'. As such, you have made use of all available means mentioned by Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, you have obeyed the heavenly-revealed orders clearly embodied in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, the one who conveyed His Message. In the same connection, you have prepared your troops as far as possible. But be careful not to draw a comparison between the number of your troops and the number of your enemy's. That is because Allah *the Almighty* ordered you not to do that. He *the Almighty* rather has said, 'You shall prepare your troops as far as possible.' But why did He *the Almighty* order them to do that? That is because He *the Almighty* wants to make the believers superior to the disbelievers, thanks to their true belief in Him *Glorified is He*. In reality, if matters had had to run normally, the (weak) force of the believers would have met with the (strong) force of the disbelievers. But He *the Almighty* wants the number of the believers' troops to be fewer than that of the disbelievers. As such, believers will confess their weakness and say, 'Our Lord, this is all our ability. We trust that You (O Lord) will provide this small number with Your Support. You the Almighty are our All-Powerful Supporter. You clearly stated in the Noble Quran that You are the Protector of those who have believed, while the disbelievers have no protector.' (*Muhammad:* 11) As for this particular verse (*Al-'Imran:* 160), He *the Almighty* says, 'If Allah should aid you, no one can overcome you...' This means that if you engage in war with the aim of making the Word of Allah superior, you will undoubtedly guarantee victory.

But the question here is how we can realise that we support Allah. We fully realise that when victory is ours. This is based on the undeniable fact that the Laws set by Him *the Almighty* can never contradict reality, otherwise, Muslims would have been deceived, Allah forbid, by these divine laws. As a matter of fact, if reality contradicted religion, people would surely say, 'Reality contradicts this particular topic of religion.' However, this is not the case. That is why Allah *the Almighty* places emphasis on the following undeniable fact that if you support Him *the Almighty* He will support you. (*Muhammad:* 7) Then, reality comes to confirm this fact. Therefore, our belief will not be particularly restricted to that topic, but it will exceed it to include all other unknown topics. For example, when factual findings of modern science prove the truthfulness of the Quran as to a particular topic, then my belief in such authenticity should not be solely confined to that topic; rather, one shall say, 'All that I am unaware of in the Quran is included under this truthfulness.'

This is why we previously said that Allah *the Almighty* left unveiled certain secrets of the universe which are not fundamental; if we come to know about these secrets, we will get no great benefit. Also, He *the Almighty* keeps certain secrets in the universe for peoples' minds to ponder over. Hence, that particular thing which was not to be accepted in the past has been approved by today's minds—the passage of time has proved it right. That is why we should make an analogy to this particular rule.

For example, they say that Pasteur discovered microbes, but the question here is whether or not microbes existed before Pasteur. They did exist, but no one had ever seen them because man cannot see microscopic items without a suitable instrument. Before the time of Pasteur, the microscope (instrument used to magnify tiny items thousands of times) had not been invented.

Similarly, when the telescope was invented, people were able to see the extremely remote items that they were unable to see before. Although these items may be extremely tiny and unnoticed, yet we became fully able to see them by means of the magnifying instrument called microscope.

The telescope makes distant objects look nearer, whereas the microscope makes very small objects look larger, so we are able to observe their movement and life. These findings make me firmly believe in the authenticity of the Quran when it tells about the unseen worlds like the jinn and the angels. Undoubtedly, I can never think otherwise because there are creatures which have been created from the same material I was created from, however, I cannot see them. Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* tells that there are other creatures like angels and jinn, I can never believe that the Quran tells a lie. Therefore, understanding this topic (about the microscope and the telescope) makes the meaning clearer.

إِن يَنصُرْكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَإِن يَخْذُلْكُمْ فَمَن ذَا ٱلَّذِى
يَنصُرُكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ ۗ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ١٦٠

If God helps you [believers], no one can overcome you; if He forsakes you, who else can help you? Believers should put their trust in God [160] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 160)

We know for sure that obtainig the Support of Allah relies entirely on the fact that you should engage in war only for the sake of supporting His Word, but how can we achieve that goal? It can be achieved by submitting to His Orders, making His Word superior, and making the word of disbelievers the lowest.

But '... if He should forsake you, who is there that can aid you after Him?' (*Al-'Imran:* 160) He *the Almighty* supports us all the time, but sometimes we feel that He *Glorified is He* has forsaken us; why? That is because we sometimes abandon some of His Orders. Accordingly, He *Glorified is He* seemingly supports you all the time. But when you do not follow His Orders, He makes you go through hard times to teach you a lesson. He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '...And upon Allah let the believers rely.' (*Al-'Imran:* 160) In the previous verse, He *Glorified is He* states that He *the Almighty* loves those who rely upon Him. So, the person who does not rely upon Him *Glorified is He* shall check the veracity of his belief.

Moving to the next verse, He *the Almighty* says,

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَن يَغُلَّ ۚ وَمَن يَغْلُلْ يَأْتِ بِمَا غَلَّ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۚ
ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾

It is inconceivable that a prophet would ever dishonestly take something from the battle gains. Anyone who does so will carry it with him on the Day of Resurrection, when each soul will be fully repaid for what it has done: no one will be wronged [161] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 161)

What does the word *yaghull* (acting faithfully in regard to war booty) mean? The word *ghalul* means to take something in secret. It is derived from *Aghall Al-Jaziru*, i.e. when the butcher skins an animal and folds the skin to hide some meat in it. This is the original meaning of the word. From the Sharia perspective, it is used to refer to acting unfaithfully in regard to war booty. It is true that amidst the horrors of war, one may find something precious thus takes it in secret—this is the meaning of *Al-ghalul*. In addition, the word may be used to refer to people hiding hatred in their chests. So, the meaning of this noun revolves mainly around the hiding of something.

He *the Almighty* says, 'It is not [attributable] to any prophet that he would act unfaithfully [in regard to war booty]...' (*Al-'Imran:* 161) But why is it not?

The booty seized from the battle of Badr was not divided among all who participated in the battle. The ones who found it took it. That was to encourage fighters to exert their utmost efforts because Badr was the first battle. So, when archers saw the booty in the battle of Uhud, they hastened to seize it. Similarly, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have previously said, 'Whoever kills someone in battle, having a proof for that, then his goods are his.' Because of that, warriors during the battle of Uhud thought that the Messenger of Allah would not divide the booty among them, as was the case in Badr, so Allah *the Almighty* explicitly instructed them that there was a big difference between the two battles stressing that whoever did something like that would have committed the act of ghalul. When Allah says: 'It is not [attributable] to any prophet that he would act unfaithfully [in regard to war booty]...' (*Al-'Imran:* 161), it means that the nature, upon which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was created, indicates that the act of ghalul can never be committed by him. However, it may be committed by a person from his followers. Therefore, there is a big difference between the two examples; that is, the fact that the Prophet can never commit this act of betrayal and the fact that a believer may prevent himself from committing it; it is so because the act has nothing to do with his nature; however, it may be committed by one of the warriors in his army. A case in point is when the companions brought the crown of Khosrow to 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*, he said, 'Truly, honest are those people who bring such a thing to their commander.' This means that it is conceivable that they could have concealed it.

'It is not [attributable] to any prophet that he would act unfaithfully [in regard to war booty]...' (*Al-'Imran:* 161) When you hear the words *wa ma kan* (it is not attributable to), this means that this act of betrayal can never be committed by the Prophet. Then, He *the Almighty* states the general ruling as to this act of *ghalul*; that is, it may be committed by any other person. He *the Almighty* says, '... And whoever betrays, [taking unlawfully], will come with what he took on the Day of Resurrection.' (*Al-'Imran:* 161) This means that if a person unfaithfully takes something from the war booty, Allah *the Almighty* will bring it on the Day of Resurrection. In this regard, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'By Allah, any one of you will not take anything from (the public funds) without any justification, but will meet his Lord carrying it on himself on the Day of Judgment. I will recognise any one of you meeting Allah and carrying a growling camel, or a cow bellowing or a goat bleating'. Then he raised his hands so high that whiteness of his armpits could be seen. Then he said, 'O my Lord, I have conveyed (Your Commandments).' So, whoever secretly takes something unlawfully will come on the Day of Resurrection carrying that thing, be it a camel, a cow or a sheep, even if it is a donkey braying.

Thus, if the person will bring all what he takes secretly on the Day of Resurrection, the stolen object itself will expose his deed. That is why the Day of Resurrection is known as *Al-Fadihah* (the day when people evil deeds will be exposed) and *Al-Tammah* (the greatest Overwhelming Calamity). So, a person may take something secretly in this worldly life, but he will carry that secretly stolen object on his back on the Day of Resurrection. Then, such a person will call upon the Messenger of Allah and say, 'O Muhammad... O Muhammad!' He will call upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* because they (Muslims) are fully aware of the fact that he is kind and merciful, and that the punishment intended to that particular person will not please him *peace and blessings be upon him*. But he *peace and blessings be upon him* had already told about the punishment prepared for such person on the Day of Resurrection, thus those who firmly believed in him must not have taken from the war booty in secret.

But why is the hiding of war booty viewed as something evil? It is due to the fact that fighter in the battlefield takes into account one ultimate goal; that is, to make the Word of Allah superior, so how can he be content with such betrayal?! He fights for the sake of making the Word of Allah superior and thus he must take into consideration this ultimate goal.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* lays down the general rule that is: 'Then will every soul be [fully] compensated for what it earned, and they will not be wronged.' (*Al-'Imran:* 161) This verse refers to unfaithfully taking something in secret, either from the booty or from any other thing. If we apply this verse to all those who betray the trust given to them, we can deduce that a person who betrays the trust regarding the construction of a building will come on the Day of Resurrection carrying the building on his back, and so is the person who stole a hundred tons of fish or imported rotten cheese.

Therefore, anyone who steals will come on the Day of Resurrection carrying the stolen item on his back. Undoubtedly, people do not like their evil deeds to be exposed to their peers, who are limited in number. So, what about the disgrace that will afflict the person on the Day of Resurrection? Indeed, man's evil deeds will be exposed to the entire humanity, from Adam to the end of time. So, every person must take into account that his act of betrayal will be exposed on the Day of Resurrection.

'... And whoever betrays, [taking unlawfully], will come with what he took on the Day of Resurrection. Then, will every soul be [fully] compensated for what it earned, and they will not be wronged.' (*Al-'Imran:* 161) This means that since He *the Almighty* will fully compensate people for their deeds, there will be no injustice at all. But if the matter was to be fulfilled without rewarding/punishing people for their deeds, then it would be sheer injustice, Allah forbid. Having clarified this rule for the Muslims, He *the Almighty* then says, 'So is one who pursues the pleasure of Allah like one who brings upon himself the anger of Allah and whose refuge is Hell? And wretched is the destination.'

أَفَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ رِضْوَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ كَمَنۢ بَآءَ بِسَخَطٖ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ
وَمَأْوَىٰهُ جَهَنَّمُۚ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ١٦٢

Can the man who pursues God's good pleasure be like the man who has brought God's wrath upon himself and whose home will be Hell – a foul destination? [162] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 162)

In reality, when Allah *the Almighty* proposes an issue in the form of a question, this does not mean that He *the Almighty* wants to know further about it. Rather, He *Glorified is He* does so in order to encourage people to express their opinions about it. Their opinions will be offered as evidence against them (on the Day of Resurrection). Indeed, there is a big difference between the one who pursues the pleasure of Allah and the one who brings upon himself His Anger. This is totally true. But Allah *the Almighty* wants people to express their opinions on this particular issue. That is why He *the Almighty* says, 'So is one who pursues the pleasure of Allah like one who brings upon himself...'. The word *baa'* means to bring upon himself [the anger of Allah].

Undoubtedly, whoever knows about the differences between pursuing the Pleasure of Allah and provoking His Anger shall say, 'Most surely, pursuing the Pleasure of Allah makes man superior, while the one who brings upon himself His Anger *Glorified is He* will be in the lowest depth of loss and misfortune.' So, the listener says his own opinion about that particular issue. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to express our opinions on the issue in order to use them as evidence against us. Here arises a very important question, namely: Is there some sort of similarity between that person who pursues the Pleasure of Allah and that one who brings upon himself His Anger?

In other words, is there any sort of similarity between the person who follows the Pleasure of Allah *the Almighty* who does not take from the war booty in secret and who does not betray the trust and that one who acts otherwise? This means that there is no similarity whatsoever between those who obeyed the Orders of Allah and hastened to strive against the enemy and those who did not obey the Orders. It is for sure that there is no similarity between them at all. In reality, those who do not obey the Orders of Allah will bring upon themselves His Wrath and Anger.

The word *Al-Sakhat* (anger/wrath) means to reproach someone or some people openly. However, this act of reproaching may not exert impact upon those people with harsh feelings. That is why Allah *the Almighty* then states the ruling of such people. He *Glorified is He* says, '... and whose refuge is Hell? And wretched is the destination.' (*Al-'Imran:* 162) The word *ma'wa* refers to man's abode. In this context, it refers to hellfire which is an evil destination. Having concluded this verse, He *the Almighty* says,

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد [4]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (4)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (4)

The Chapter of

Al-‘Imran

Continued

هُمۡ دَرَجَٰتٌ عِندَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرُۢ بِمَا يَعۡمَلُونَ ١٦٣

They are in a different class in God’s eyes; God sees exactly what they do [163] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 163)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty:* ‘They are [varying] degrees in the sight of Allah...’ means that people’s different positions in the Hereafter will be in accordance with their deeds in this worldly life. In the Hereafter, everyone will be held accountable for his deeds. In this context, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* uses the word *darajat* (degrees) with reference to the paradise and uses the word *darakat* (the lowest depths) to refer to the fire. Thus, it becomes clear that word ‘degree’ refers to the high rank in paradise, while the word ‘the lowest depth’ refers to the awkward position in the fire.

‘They are [varying] degrees in the sight of Allah..., this clearly indicates the Divine Justice of Allah *the Almighty*. He *Glorified is He* sees all His creatures equally. In addition, He has no enmity towards them. This rule laid down in this verse is applicable to all mankind, be the ruling for or even against them. Allah then concludes this verse saying, ‘...and Allah is seeing of whatever they do.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 163) This is to make people feel assured that Allah is All-Seeing of what they do; thus their good deeds will not be to waste, nor will their evil deeds. ‘... And Allah is seeing of whatever they do.’ We frequently hear the following three verbs *yaf‘al* (do/does), *ya‘mal* (work/works) and *yaqul* (say/says). It goes without saying that ‘work/action’ is the most important of the three. That is because it entails the fact that every part of the body shall perform the act assigned to it. For example, the function (work) of the heart is to intend, and the function of the ear is to listen, while the function of the eye is to look. So, it is crystal clear now that every part of the body has a certain function to do. Therefore, every function performed by a body part is called an action.

However, all the body parts perform actions, except the tongue, which produces saying (speech), and speech is the opposite of actions and “work” includes both “action” and “speech”. But why is what the tongue produces known as saying or speech; not action? That is because man talks too much, but putting his words into practice is another thing. That is why Allah *the Almighty* warns the believers against saying that which they do not do, stressing that this act is one of the most hateful acts in the sight of Allah. (*as-Saff:* 2-3)

It becomes clear now that saying is in contrast to doing, and both of them are included in the action category. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says, '... and Allah is seeing of whatever they do.' This means that He *the Almighty* hears their sayings and sees their actions. He *Glorified is He* then says,

لَقَدْ مَنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ لَفِى ضَلَـٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٦٤﴾

God has been truly gracious to the believers in sending them a
Messenger from among their own, to recite His revelations to
them, to make them grow in purity, and to teach them the
Scripture and wisdom – before that they were clearly astray [164]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 164)

In reality, conferring a favour upon someone is to grant him something he needs. Hence, Allah wants to say, 'Do I need your belief? Do I need your submission? Is there any of My Attributes which is imperfect and thus you are going to remove this imperfection?' The answer is no. Therefore, when I send you a Messenger who is merciful to you, the favour is to be attributed to Me Alone. 'Certainly did Allah confer [great] favour upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves...' (*Al-'Imran:* 164).

The question to be asked here is: 'Did He *the Almighty* send an angel?' The answer is no. He *Glorified is He* sent a human being so that people could take him as a perfect example. Thus, when he, the Prophet, orders Muslims to follow his *Sunnah*, they must adhere to his orders. But if Allah had chosen an angel, would he have been taken as an example? Of course not, because if that angel orders you to do a particular act, you might reply, 'I am unable to do it because you are an angel.' Along the same lines, ascribing divinity to a Messenger negates the fact of being a perfect example because if he says to you, 'Be like me,' you may reply, 'Can we do so? Your nature is different; could we reach such a level? We could not!' For this reason, all those who ascribe divinity to any Messenger are ignoring the possibility of taking him as a perfect example. A Messenger is known to be a perfect example of behaviour, to convey the Message of Allah and to declare that he is a mere human being. He shall say, 'I am a human being and I can obey and submit (to the Will of Allah). Furthermore, I am following the Orders of Allah assigned to you.' So, a Messenger is a practical example of behaviour.

Even though the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all creatures, Allah *the Almighty* declared, as shown in the verse, that His favour is restricted only to those who believe. Why? It is because the believers are the ones who will benefit from this situation, while others missed the opportunity of taking him *peace and blessings be upon him* as an example, and that is why the favour of Allah is conferred only upon those who believe. 'Certainly did Allah confer [great] favour upon the believers...' (*Al-'Imran:* 164). So, what does the word *minnah* (favour) mean? Originally, this word means cutting off. But when we hear it, we realize that it may indicate several opposite meanings. For instance, it may give the meaning of giving money away without expecting its return. It may also mean to spoil a good deed by permanently reminding others of it, as shown in the verse (*al-Baqara:* 262).

Hence, the kind of favour we are discussing in this particular verse is to give to others without expecting its return. However, the word *Al-mannu* has been frequently used to spoil the good deed by always mentioning it. A case in point is when one says to a person who all the time reminds him of the favour he conferred, 'I do not want you to do me that favour you are speaking about all the time.' So, the word *Al-mannu* was used to refer to the blessing and the act of spoiling it. One may say 'So and so did me a favour as he helped me overcome a difficulty.' Arabs used to say, 'So and so has no *munnah* (strength).' As clearly shown, all the meanings of the word have to do with cutting off even with blessings and expenditure since a blessing is received to cut off one's needs. In addition, expenditure also indicates the meaning of satisfying the need. Therefore, the word has been used in this context to indicate its original meaning.

So, when the need is satisfied by the existence of a blessing, thanking the one who granted you this blessing, especially Allah *the Almighty* is a required act. Nevertheless, the act of always reminding the person of your favour annuls the act of thanking. This is because when you remind the person of your favour to him all the time, he might get annoyed and thus reject your favour.

So, this annuls the act of thanking. As a matter of fact, if you give a needy person something that satisfies his need, this is called a blessing or favour; however, if you are proud of the favour you did, to the extent that you spoil it, this is viewed as annuling the favour because it implies the negation of the act of requirement to thank that person. This act is called *Al-mann* because it hurts people’s feelings and emotions. However, in case you completely annul or cut off something, this is called *Al-munnah*. Arabs say, ‘So and so has no *munnah*; that is, he has no strength to make decisions about matters.” In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Certainly did Allah confer [great] favour upon the believers...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164). The word *mann* in this context indicates the meaning of doing a favour. The worldly favours are exclusively confined to the affairs of this worldly life; however, the favour conferred by Allah upon us, by sending the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, involves the affairs of this worldly life and the life to come, thus it is a great blessing.

‘Certainly did Allah confer [great] favour upon the believers when...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164). The word *idh* (when) in this verse means ‘[remember] when Allah *the Almighty* sent you a Messenger from among yourselves.’ This is actually viewed as a great blessing granted by Him *the Almighty* to you (O mankind). In reality, if the ultimate goal of sending a Messenger was to guide people to the Way of Allah, this is already viewed as a blessing. But what if the Messenger sent to them were from among them? This is actually viewed as an additional blessing because as long as he is from among them, it obviously indicates that his lineage and moral character are known to them; he does not betray the trust; he does not tell a lie—this (i.e. sending of a Messenger with these qualities) is ‘a favour’ because they did not have to exert any effort to know him *peace and blessings be upon him* and ask questions like: Has he ever told a lie?’ and ‘Has he ever betrayed the trust?’ Did it not come into their minds? Besides, they did not concern themselves with asking about whether or not he wanted his news to be spread here and there. On the contrary, they were fully aware of his lineage; his grandfather was Al-Muttalib, chief of Mecca, and all his family members were of senior ranks.

All his followers knew for certain that he was honest since early childhood. Therefore, all this information stopped people from having to assure themselves whether he was truthful. That is why when He *the Almighty* sent the best of creation to people; there was a group from among them who immediately and firmly believed in him once he said to them, 'I am Allah's Messenger to you.' Although he did not perform a miracle for them at that time, they did not doubt him and asked what he was saying or doing.

But once he told them that he was the Messenger of Allah, they firmly believed in him. So, upon what events did, they rely on for their acceptance of his Message? They entirely relied upon the events of the past.

You called him 'the reliable man of the tribe' in his youth; and the reliable person is not to be doubted in what he says. In this regard, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* may be quoted, 'If he said so, he had told the truth.' So, the previous information they knew about him *peace and blessings be upon him* was the way leading to their acceptance of his Message. Because of the same reasons, Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* believed in him *peace and blessings be upon him* eventhough he did not perform miracles for her and nor did he recite the Quran to her. Rather, once he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to her, 'I am the Messenger of Allah,' she replied, 'You have told the truth. You must be a Messenger.' Look! Even though he *peace and blessings be upon him* himself was doubtful, she firmly believed in him. He *peace and blessings be upon him* even wonders, 'May the one who attended me in the cave be a jinn?' But Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* took him *peace and blessings be upon him* to Waraqat ibn Nawfal, her cousin, and further explained to the Prophet that what he was talking about could never bring about a calamity or disgrace upon him because his previous life led directly to that expected result; that is, he would be a noble Messenger sent by Allah *the Almighty*. She said to him, 'By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving afflicted by calamity. A man with such qualities can never be approached by jinn. Let us go to consult with one of the people of the Book who knows about these matters. So, she believed in him *peace and blessings be upon him* even before Waraqat told her anything.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*, '... from among themselves' (*Al-'Imran:* 164) clearly indicates that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was known to them, and that Allah *the Almighty* did not send an angel from heaven and He said to them, ‛This is the Messenger of Allah to you.’ No; this did not happen so. But Muhammad is a Messenger {from among themselves}; this is actually the first blessing and favour from Allah. He *the Almighty* says, ‛Certainly did Allah confer [great] favour upon the believers when He sent to them a Messenger from themselves’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164). This is the meaning if we consider the verse in the light of the tribe of the Prophet. As for the saying of Allah ‛...from among themselves...,’ this indicates that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is an Arab, which is viewed as another favour conferred upon them; he *peace and blessings be upon him* is an Arab, thus they are able to understand his speech. Also, they will not need any medium to translate to them. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to bring mankind out of darkness and into the light. Therefore, he was in need of a people who were able to understand him. That is why Allah *the Almighty* clarified His Favour upon them by saying ‛I did not burden you with the need to interpret his speech. He is from among you. He has your same characteristics.’ However, due to their obstinacy, they did not believe in him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Their obstinacy led them not to believe in him *peace and blessings be upon him* on the grounds that he was a mere human being. (*al-Isra’:* 94)

They did not believe that Allah *the Almighty* had sent a mere human as a Messenger. As a matter of fact, this is a stupid argument. But Allah *Glorified is He* answered them that if angels were to walk on the earth in peace, He *Glorified is He* would have sent an angel from heaven as a Messenger to them. (*al-Isra’:* 95)

Due to the fact that you are human beings, it was inevitable that any Messenger sent to you, must have been from among you. Therefore, when he orders you, ‛Do this,’ you will obey his orders because he is a human who works and so are you. Yet, if he were an angel, you would say ‛We can never act as an angel.’ Accordingly, their argument in this regard proves tenuous. It is in this way that Allah *the Almighty* conferred His Favour upon the believers by sending them a Messenger from among themselves. Undoubtedly, it is a Favour in the truest sense of the word; if we view it in the light of the fact that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was from their tribe, it is a Favour; and so is the matter if we consider it in regard to the Arab race, who speak one language; it is also the case if we view it regarding all mankind.

At this point, an important question shall be asked, 'Does considering one particular meaning negate the other meanings? Or can they all be accepted together?' Certainly, all of those meanings can be accepted together. That is because Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who states all those meanings; thus one word may carry various meanings. He *the Almighty* says, 'Certainly did Allah confer [great] favour upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves....' (*Al-'Imran:* 164) Yet, there is one particular mode of recitation (that is odd) reads anfasihim (the best of them) because his lineage goes back to the family of Hashim who are the best of Quraysh, if not the best of all Arabs.

But what is the role attributed to the Messenger? One can understand from the saying of Allah that 'a Messenger' does not bring anything from his own. Because, in spite of his high rank, great moral character and glorious past, he is sent by Allah *the Almighty* Who is better than him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, do not occupy your minds only with thinking of this great man; rather, you must wonder who sent him?' You must pay full attention to the fact that the One Who sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is better than Muhammad himself.

'... A Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses...' (*Al-'Imran:* 164) The word *yatlu* means to recite or to read. That is because words follow each other, one after the other. The word *ayat*, as we know, is used to refer to wonderful matters. For example, we say, 'So and so is a manifestation of beauty,' that is, his beauty attracts people's attention. It is along the same line when you say, 'So and so is a manifestation of intelligence.' It is true that there are many intelligent people, but he is the most intelligent. This means that the intelligence of that particular person is something which gains admiration. As such, the word aya means a wonderful matter that one should reflect upon to realise its amazing aspects. Signs are of two kinds: those which are seen and observed in the universe, such as the signs of the night, the day, the sun, the moon, etc. (*Fussilat:* 37)

In reality, all the phenomena of the universe are considered amazing and wonderful. As for the second kind, it has to do with the ayat (verses) of the Quran, shown in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* replaces one aya (verse) by another. (*an-Nahl:* 101) Therefore, signs are those amazing matters. They are of two kinds, namely that which is seen and observed, and that which is recited. As for the first kind, the seen and observed signs, it includes the entire universe. As for the second kind which is the recited signs, it has to do with the Quran. The Quran explains the signs of the universe and vice-versa. Besides, the Messenger was sent to recite the verses of the Quran to them which was amazing and surprising to them. As for the other signs of the universe, they (people) saw and observed them. The Messenger was sent with these recited verses to drive their attention to the ones that could be seen and observed. One is absolutely astonished by knowing about the absolute accuracy in the creation of the universe, so he finally believes in the One Who created the universe.

Talking about the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, Allah *the Almighty* says, '... reciting to them His verses and purifying them...' (*Al-'Imran:* 164). But his mission is not exclusively confined to reciting the verses to them to gain their admiration. Rather, the Messenger was given a mission regarding belief; this mission shall drive the attention of all who listen to the Quran, to the One Who created this wonderful universe full of amazing signs. Then, He *Glorified is He* gives the Messenger the methodology compatible with the beauty of the universe. Therefore, the Messenger was sent to guide believers to that particular methodology under which they can purify themselves. In fact, when one hears the word *yuzakkihim* (purify them), he immediately realises that it is derived from the word *Az-Zakat*. The most important meaning given by the word *Az-Zakat* is purification, cleansing and growing. Hence, the verses of the Quran with which the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, were meant with purifying their souls.

But is such purification beneficial for the one who commands it or the purified person? It is undoubtedly beneficial for the one commanding it. However, you are the ones who will get benefit from growing and increasing. Yet, this matter should not be taken against *taklif* (legal charge/obligation). That is because *taklif* has nothing to do with the *mukallif* (the One who imposed those legal obligations/Lawgiver); rather, it is concerned with the *mukallaf* (a person who has a duty ordained by law). I give this example to fully illustrate the point; a rich man who loves his children and wants to encourage them to learn may say to them, 'If you succeed, I will do such-and-such for you.'

Actually, he does not want anything from them for himself because he has what suffices him and meets his requirements. Thus, it is the interest of his children that he wants to achieve.

Therefore, the Lawgiver does not gain any benefit by our obligations; rather, it is we who will get benefit from that; it is good for us to be cleansed, to be purified and to achieve growth. *At-Tazkiyah* (purification) gives the meanings of purification, cleansing and growing. Let us consider the condition of Arabs in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance in the light of these three meanings given by this word.

In fact, there was neither purification, nor cleansing nor growing during that particular period. That is because it was a period of ignorance during which they were subject to whims, despotism, and injustice. It is known for certain that the first thing man pays attention to is to keep his life. As a matter of fact, *At-Tazkiyah* encompasses all of these matters, i.e. purification of the man himself. So, instead of telling a lie, he purifies it from that; instead of unlawful looking at women; he purifies his eye from that; and instead of stealing, he purifies his hand from that by refraining from doing it.

It is known for certain that theft is considered a vice. This is proved by the fact that the thief hides from people, while committing this crime. Religion, therefore, comes to instruct such a person not to steal. Hence, religion purifies the movement of man's body parts in this worldly life, and also purifies his heart from hatred so that he will live in great comfort. Similarly, a man's strength will be preserved, by virtue of religion, thus it could be used in hard work. A number of questions are to be asked here, 'Why should man weaken his strength?! Why should he look at what Allah has forbidden?! And why should he break off relations with others?!'

It becomes clear now that religion is meant to purify man; it has actually to do with purifying and cleansing him, as well as improving his living conditions. So, when one feels impotent or incapable, he will not accept humiliation for the sake of sustenance. In such a way, religion protects man from humiliation to the extent that it prescribes a certain share for the poor from the money of the rich. Not only that, but it is the rich who shall search for the poor to give them their due share as well. Therefore, when the poor finds all the riches the believers are searching for, in order to give them their shares prescribed by Allah *the Almighty* then they will say, ‘We are not alone in this world. We are backed and supported by our fellow Muslims.’ It is in such a way that man’s purification takes place.

But what is it about the preservation of human race? Most surely, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to purify mankind from all vices by guiding them to the divine code of ethics manifested clearly in chastity. Therefore, religion came to purify you (O mankind) in all your affairs; it has to do with purifying the movements of your body parts so that one movement by a particular body part shall be in its proper context set by Allah *the Almighty* the One Who created it. In reality, Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified the primary roles to be performed by all the body parts including the eye, the tongue, the hand, the leg and the heart. Therefore, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who created all the body parts and clearly defined the role of each. Therefore, there shall be neither extravagance nor negligence. Yet, if any of the body parts breaks the code established by Allah *the Almighty* this will be considered disobedience to Him *the Almighty*. In such a way, it becomes clear that religion has come to purify and cleanse you (O believers). It is also meant to improve your living conditions ‘...And teaching them the Book and wisdom...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164). As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* uses the word “the Book” in this context to refer to the Quran, the Book that He revealed down upon the heart of Muhammad. As for the word *Al-Hikmah*, it is used here to refer to the *Sunnah* (of the Prophet). This is proved by the fact when Allah *Glorified is He* asked the wives of the Prophet to remember the verses of the Quran and *Al-Hikmah* recited in their houses (*Al-‘Imran:* 34).

It is known for certain that *ayatu Allah* (or the verses of Allah) in this context refer specifically to the verses of the Quran, while ‘*Al-Hikmah*’ refers to the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Here in this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘... reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164) This verse clearly indicates that the Book is the Quran. This means that he, Muhammad, will recite the verses of the Quran to them, and then he will teach them what has been revealed down in the Book. Yet, some mufassirun (scholars who are able to give explanation for the verses of the Quran) opine that there is another explanation for the word *Al-Kitab* in the verse. They said, 'The word *Al-kitab* must be interpreted and explained to mean something other than the Quran.' 'In this context,' they added, 'it means writing.' And the first instance of writing was the writing down of the Quran. Thus, the two meanings apply. A case in point is the battle of Badr, when disbelieving captives were to be released in return for either money or teaching ten unlettered Muslims how to read and write. Muslims, at this time were unlettered—a fact proved by Allah *the Almighty* Who states clearly in the Quran that He *Glorified is He* has sent an unlettered Prophet (Muhammad) to an unlettered nation (The Arabs) to recite to them His Verses (the verses of the Quran) to purify them and to teach them the Quran and the *Sunnah*. (*al-Jumu'ah:* 2)

Therefore, I believe that explaining the word *Al-Kitab* in this context as referring to 'writing' is the most correct opinion because it fits the illiteracy of the Arabs. You may also consider the following point on the grounds that there is a difference between recitation and education as follows: recitation means that the Messenger himself is the one who recites to them the verses of the Quran, while education means that they themselves are the ones who recite the Quran. '... And teaching them the Book and wisdom...' (*Al-'Imran:* 164) The verb *'Allam* bears the meaning of conveying knowledge from a teacher to a student.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '... although they had been before in manifest error.' (*Al-'Imran:* 164) The Quran contains various linguistic styles including the preposition '*in*'. As a matter of fact, sentences containing this preposition may indicate different meanings. For example, it may mean "if" indicating condition in some sentences, that is, it is to be followed by a verb of condition and a verb of action. A case in point is when Allah says "If a wound has afflicted you (at Uhud), a wound like it has also afflicted the (unbelieving) people…" (*Al-'Imran:* 140).

This verse means that if wound afflicts you, O Muslims, do not despair or be downcast because the same wound has already afflicted the opposing people. This particular linguistic style is also clear in the verse: "If you give alms openly, it is well…" (*al-Baqara:* 271). In this verse, we notice that the preposition '*in'* has been used to indicate condition; that is, the sentence contains a verb of condition and verb of action. In another linguistic style, this preposition '*in'* may be followed by ‘*illa*’ (or except/save). This is clear in the verse: “None can be their mothers except those who gave them birth…” (*al-Mujadala:* 2).

In this context, He *the Almighty* tells about those people who commit the act of *Zhihar* against their wives. *Zhihar* means that the husband says to his wife, ‘You are to me as like the back of my mother.’ But the Quran declares this act as wrong. That is because the husband’s mother is the woman who gave birth to him. It is for certain that man’s wife did not give birth to him. So, if your wife were your mother, you would be forbidden from getting married to her. (*al-Mujadala:* 2) As a matter of fact, this linguistic style in which the preposition ‘in’ is followed by ‘*illa*’ indicates that what comes after ‘*illa*’ is different from what comes before it. This is crystal clear in (*al-Mujadala:* 2). Concerning this particular verse of (*al-Mujadala:* 2), Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that men’s mothers are those women who gave birth to them and not their wives.

However, concerning the preposition ‘*in*’ in the verse (*Al-‘Imran:* 164), it indicates neither condition nor negation. It actually indicates reality; that is, it is true that those people were in manifest error. Yet, there are some Arabic language grammarians who believe that it (i.e. the preposition ‘*in*’) is used in this context to make the situation plain and obvious.

At that point, we shall know what is meant by the word *Ad-dalal* (error). Arabs say, ‘So and so *dalla at-Tariq* (deviated from the way) in case he walked on a way that would not lead him to his final destination or when that way may even bring him a different result.’ But what about deviation regarding moral conduct? Most surely, it will not achieve man’s ultimate goal that is being admitted in Paradise, but rather, it will lead to the opposite which is hellfire. Actually, this is the manifest error. It is proved by the fact that the one who commits a crime does not like people to know about it. For instance, a thief does not like people to know about his crimes, and so is the liar who will be deeply shocked once someone calls him a liar. Therefore, these vices are committed by people who do not want anyone to see them or know about them (i.e. vices).

The verse ‘... Although they had been before in manifest error’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164) describes error as manifest and obvious. This is proved by the story of the two young men who entered prison (*Yusuf:* 36). The two young men had realised that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was a doer of good because he was able to distinguish good from bad. Due to the fact that they (the two young men) were fully aware of the criterion of doing good, it was easy for them to recognise Yusuf. But why did any of them not say such a thing before? They gave this testimony about Yusuf *peace be upon him* because it was at that time that they were in need of his advice concerning the interpretation of visions. Yusuf *peace be upon him* was imprisoned and none dealt with him but as a prisoner. It was due to his behaviour towards these two young men that they perfectly knew that he was a doer of good and kindness. That is why they resorted to him and became certain that he was able to interpret their two visions. We have already stated clearly that the deviant himself knows very well the value of uprightness. Therefore, we can deduce that uprightness is something naturally implanted in man. This is based on the fact that the deviant himself realises the essence of uprightness.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* sheds light on a very important topic; He *Glorified is He* conferred His favour upon the believers by sending them a Messenger who was from among them, who recited His Verses (the verses of the Quran) to them, and who was sent to purify them and to teach them the Book and the wisdom (i.e. how to make use of something in the best way). So, it was due to this Favour that when the Messenger ordered you to do something, you did not have the right to disobey him *peace and blessings be upon him*, and when he makes a miracle for you, you should not argue with him in this regard. So, what is wrong with you? Allah *the Almighty* says,

أَوَلَمَّآ أَصَٰبَتۡكُم مُّصِيبَةٞ قَدۡ أَصَبۡتُم مِّثۡلَيۡهَا قُلۡتُمۡ أَنَّىٰ هَٰذَاۖ قُلۡ هُوَ
مِنۡ عِندِ أَنفُسِكُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ١٦٥

Why do you [believers] say, when a calamity befalls you,
even after you have inflicted twice as much damage [on your
enemy], 'How did this happen? [Prophet], say, 'You brought
it upon yourselves.' God has power over everything [165]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 165)

Why do you (O believers) say, ʽHow could the disbelievers defeat us?' In reality, you were defeated because you disobeyed the orders of the Messenger of Allah; He *Glorified is He* conferred His Favour upon you by sending you a Messenger who was from among yourselves and who came to you, purified you and taught you the Book and the wisdom. This actually implies that you are obliged to obey all the orders of such a Messenger; none of you should say, 'Why were we defeated as such?' In other words, none of you should say, 'Why did the situation go like this in the battle of Uhud?' You should not say this because your saying does not match with the favour of Allah *the Almighty* conferred upon you by sending you a Messenger. In addition, the defeat in Uhud was inflicted upon you after you had already defeated the disbelievers (in the battle of Badr) and after you had certainly afflicted them with misfortune which was twice as much the misfortune you were afflicted with in Uhud. So, you were the first to defeat them (in Badr); Allah *the Almighty* gave you victory; you killed seventy from the disbelievers and took other seventy as captives, while in Uhud they killed seventy of you but they took no captives; you (O believers) took the booty of Badr, while they (the disbelievers) did not take any booty in Uhud, so what is unusual about this? You were supposed to inspect yourselves and examine the truthfulness of your belief and the faithfulness of your obedience and submission to the leadership of the Messenger of Allah! As a matter of fact, the question 'Whence is this?' should not have been asked by you because it indicates objection to the occurrence of the defeat; that is, you wondered, 'How could we be defeated as such eventhough we fight in the Cause of Allah and the Messenger of Allah is among us, while the others are idolaters?' We answer your question by asking you the following, 'Have you (O believers) reached the required level of belief?!' As a matter of fact, this required level of belief necessitates that you obey the orders of the Messenger, but you (O believers) did not really reach that level of belief that you previously had in the battle of Badr.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'What! When' indicates interrogation and time respectively; that is, you have believed in Allah as the True Lord and you have believed in Muhammad as a Messenger, but when a misfortune afflicted you, and you had certainly afflicted the disbelievers with twice as much before; you say, 'What! When!'

Reason indicates that you were never supposed to ask such a question because you have believed in a Fair God Whose Laws are neither altered nor changed. Do you think that He *the Almighty* would change these laws for your sake? No, since He *Glorified is He* says: "(Such has been) the course of Allah with respect to those who have gone before; and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah…" (*al-'Ahzab:* 62). He *Glorified is He* affirms this undeniable fact that His Laws are neither changed nor altered in another verse of the Quran in which He *the Almighty* also states that evil scheming will not engulf but its authors (*Fatir:* 43).

Had you recalled your belief in the One God Who established these laws to perfectly run the affairs of His Universe in such a way that is most beneficial, you would not have said something like that, and as long as you have believed in the fact that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who established these laws, you would have known for sure that He *Glorified is He* would not change His Laws for your sake because you chose Islam (submission to the will of Allah). So, you would have known for certain that in case you disobeyed His Orders, all His Laws would have been applied to you, so you must have understood the matter. Furthermore, you would not have asked this question because you have believed in Allah as One Who established Laws and in Muhammad as a Messenger from Allah.

So, when a misfortune afflicted you (O believers), and you had already afflicted the disbelievers with a misfortune that was twice as much as yours, you said, 'How could this happen?!' You (O believers) had already afflicted the disbelievers with a misfortune which was twice as much as the misfortune you were afflicted with, so you would have reviewed your deeds in light of the criteria of belief, and if you have already done this, why would you ask this question 'How could this happen?! When one hears this question *anna hadha* (how could this happen?!), he should realise that it indicates two meanings; that is, it means either the question, 'How could this happen?', or the question, 'Whence did this happen?'

If it were used to refer to a person who would like to know about something, as was the case with Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah), it means 'from where?'; Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* wanted to know 'whence' came the provision to Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* while in her sanctuary. (*Al-'Imran:* 37) It may also have the meaning of 'how' as shown in the story of that Prophet who passed by a town that had fallen into ruin. Therefore, he wondered, 'How will Allah bring this town into life after its death?' (*al-Baqara:* 259)

In the above mentioned example, it (i.e. *Anna*) indicates the meaning of 'how'. Hence, it has the meaning of 'whence' or 'how'. As for the believers who fought in the battle of Uhud, they were surprised at their defeat, hence Allah *the Almighty* clarified the matter for them, 'Had you already taken into your account the fact that you truly believe in a Just (God) Who established unalterable and unchangeable Laws to run the affairs of His Universe, you would have known for certain that He *the Almighty* will not change these laws for your sake; rather, you are the ones who must change for the sake of Allah.

'What! When a misfortune befell you, and you had certainly afflicted (the unbelievers) with twice as much...' (*Al-'Imran:* 165) The word lamma in this verse gives the meaning of an adverb of time 'when'. It may also be used exactly as the case with the particle *'lam'*. Furthermore, this Arabic adverb of time '*lamma*' is also used to negate verbs. This is clearly shown in the Quran when Allah *the Almighty* told the dwellers of the desert that faith had not yet entered into their hearts. (*al-Hujurat:* 14)

This verse (*al-Hujurat:* 14) means that faith had not yet entered the hearts of the dwellers of the desert, but it might enter into their hearts later. This is the apocopate function of the word *lamma.* This word may also be used to indicate condition. For example, Arabs say, "*Lamma yaqum Zayd yahrauthu kadha.*" This sentence means 'when Zayd ploughs the earth, this particular thing will take place.' This conditional usage of *lamma* is confirmed in the Quran when Allah *the Almighty* tells the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them* (*as-Saffat:* 103-105).

These verses of (*as-Saffat:* 103-105) refer to 'When both Ibrahim and his son Ismail surrendered to the Order of Allah and Ibrahim laid his son down to his forehead in submission to the Order of Allah, We called out to him saying: "O Ibrahim! You have indeed shown the truth of the vision."' With regard to the particle *waw* (and) in these verses of (*as-Saffat:* 103-105), it is used for emphasis, exactly like the verse of the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* talks about the opening of the gates of paradise (*al-Haqqa:* 73). It becomes crystal clear now that the particle 'and' in this context is used to indicate emphasis. Other Arabic language grammarians, though, believe that this particular word was used in this context to indicate that the act of Allah *the Almighty* calling Ibrahim, came shortly after he *peace be upon him* laid down his son Ismail to his forehead to slay him in submission to the Order of Allah *the Almighty*.

So, the word *lamma* here in this verse is an adverb of time. This means, 'When a misfortune afflicts you and you had certainly afflicted (the unbelievers) with twice as much', you began to say, 'Whence is this?' (O believers) it would have been better for you if you would have drawn a comparison between what happened in Badr and what happened in Uhud; it was in Badr that you had certainly afflicted (the unbelievers) with twice as much you were afflicted with in Uhud, but why did your enemy defeat you in Uhud as such? You must have asked yourselves this question because criteria are already established, and as long as you paid them no attention, here is the answer to your proposed question, 'Say to them, O Muhamamd, "It is from yourselves."' You disobeyed the order of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, thus your defeat was inevitable because of the belief in Allah Whose Laws are neither changed nor altered.

'What! When a misfortune befell you, and you had certainly afflicted (the unbelievers) with twice as much, you began to say: Whence is this? Say: It is from yourselves....'

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '... surely Allah has power over all things.' (*Al-'Imran:* 165) So, the question to be asked here is 'why did Allah *the Almighty* conclude the verse that way?' The answer is that as long as Allah has established unchangeable Laws and He *the Almighty* has absolute power over all things, no other (false) god will come to nullify any of these Laws established by Him *the Almighty*. And since there is no other god, then it is the Almighty the One Who has power over all things and has power to keep His Laws unchanged. In fact, there is not any other power that can change the Laws established by Allah *the Almighty* Who, then, can change them?! As a matter of fact, these laws can never be changed except by a power which is more enormous- Allah forbid- than that of Allah *the Almighty*. Accordingly, He *Glorified is He* clarified the matter, 'I have power over all things and thus I can keep My Laws in the Universe in such a way which is perfect. Therefore, there is no other power that can change or alter these Laws established by Me'.

As well, you should not think that what afflicted you was a result of the fact that My Laws are unchangeable; no, it afflicted you by My Permission. He *the Almighty* put it clear that whoever disobeys His Commands will be afflicted with His punishment. Therefore, there is nothing which takes place in the universe without the Knowledge and Permission of Allah *the Almighty*. Then, He *Glorified is He* says,

وَمَآ أَصَٰبَكُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡتَقَى ٱلۡجَمۡعَانِ فَبِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِيَعۡلَمَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١٦٦﴾

What befell you on the day the two armies met in
battle happened with God's permission and in order
for Him to see who were the true believers [166]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 166)

This means that He *the Almighty* made the army of the believers fight against the army of the disbelievers at Uhud by virtue of His Knowledge and Permission. He *Glorified is He* previously knew the result of the battle, and that they would disobey the orders of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Yet His saying, 'with Allah's Permission' may be explained in the light of His Laws which are unchangeable. Therefore, all what happened to them has taken place with the Knowledge of Allah *the Almighty*. Yes, it happened with His Permission, and it is for certain that the divine laws are applied to all those who disobey His Orders.

'And what befell you on the day when the two armies met (at Uhud) was with Allah's knowledge, and that He might know the believers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 166) When Allah *the Almighty* says, 'and that He might know the believers,' and 'that He might know the hypocrite,' this truly means that He *the Almighty* knows them perfectly well before the occurrence of the events, but His Knowledge will not bear testimony against people unless they do the action themselves. That is because a person may say, 'O my Lord, you held me accountable for this deed by virtue of Your Knowledge, but I would not have done this deed.' He *the Almighty* therefore, will clarify the matter, 'No, it does not go like this. You knew about it because you had already done it, thus it bears testimony against you.’

For more clarification, I will offer the following example: A teacher may say to one of his students, ‘You have failed.’ The student then replies, ‘No, you must test me.’ The teacher will then say, ‘I know that you have failed,’ whereupon the student says, ‘I do not rely on your knowledge in this regard, but you must test me.’ The teacher will then say, ‘I will test you.’ But upon giving some questions to the student, he fails. Then, the student became fully aware of his failure; it is true that he already knew about it, but now he is unable to argue with the teacher about the matter which has now turned into an undeniable fact.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...and that He might know the believers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 166) indicates that there are some believers whose faith is steadfast; it is those believers whose belief in Allah increases with the misfortunes afflicting them. He *Glorified is He* then says,

وَلِيَعْلَمَ ٱلَّذِينَ نَافَقُوا۟ ۚ وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا۟ قَٰتِلُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَوِ ٱدْفَعُوا۟ ۖ قَالُوا۟ لَوْ
نَعْلَمُ قِتَالًا لَّٱتَّبَعْنَٰكُمْ ۗ هُمْ لِلْكُفْرِ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْهُمْ لِلْإِيمَٰنِ ۚ
يَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَٰهِهِم مَّا لَيْسَ فِى قُلُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَكْتُمُونَ ﴿١٦٧﴾

When it was said to them, ‘Come, fight for God’s cause, or at least defend yourselves,’ answered, ‘We would follow you if we knew there was going to be fighting.’ On that day they were closer to disbelief than belief. They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts: God knows exactly what they conceal [167] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 167)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And that He might know the hypocrites...’ means that He *the Almighty* will reveal the deeds of the hypocrites so that people recognise them. But if these events did not take place, how could you recognise them? It goes without saying that they will conceal themselves. These events must have then taken place in order to expose them (the hypocrites) because the nature of the hypocrites entails cheating. That is why Allah *the Almighty* causes these events to take place in order to reveal and expose them.

'And that He might know the hypocrites; and it was said to them: Come, fight in Allah's way, or defend yourselves.' (*Al-'Imran:* 167) Medina was under attack, and if the disbelievers gained victory, they would enter it and take Muslims as captives and do all sorts of evil deeds. That is why 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Hiram said to the hypocrites, 'Come out to fight with us, and if you do not come out to fight with us, then come out to defend yourselves, your property and your women because if they (the disbelievers) gain victory over you, they will enter the city and do all sorts of evil deeds.' He called them out to fight by evoking their feelings of pride and zeal. But when he *Allah be pleased with him* became fully aware that they would not come out to fight with the believers, he said to them, 'Go away, O enemies of Allah! Most surely, Allah will suffice His Messenger.'

Hence, the verse clearly indicates that there is a difference between 'fighting in the Cause of Allah' and 'defending themselves.' That is why He *the Almighty* says, 'Come, fight in Allah's way or defend yourselves.' The believers said to the hypocrites that in order for the disbelievers to know that Muslims are large in number. They (the hypocrites) replied, 'If we knew fighting, we would have certainly followed you.' If we consider the story carefully, we will find that Ibn Ubayy was of the opinion that Muslims should have stayed in Medina, but why? Because it is proved by evidence that all those who tried to attack the people of Medina from inside it were defeated, but when they (the people of Midyan) fought against any enemy outside the city, they gained victory.

Therefore, Ibn Ubayy was fully aware of the matter; he did not want to go out to fight because he knew from experience that the people of Medina gained victory over enemies when they fought from inside the city, but when they came to fight outside Medina, they were defeated. So, he was fully aware of the result of coming out to fight the enemies outside Medina. But since it was 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the head of the hypocrites, the one who said that, you were unable to know where the truth was. It is possible that the impact of the migration of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was felt by him because it was on that day of migration that he would have been crowned as the king of Medina. But when the Messenger of Allah arrived at

Medina, the situation completely changed, and Ibn Salul was not appointed as the king of Medina. So, he might have kept his feeling hidden.

'They said: If we knew fighting, we would certainly have followed you.' (*Al-'Imran:* 167) Ibn Salul claimed that coming out of Medina to fight against the enemy was nothing but simply throwing oneself into destruction because war means that you engage in it, while thinking that you may gain victory; nevertheless this particular act of coming out of Medina to fight against the disbelievers was nothing but marching into destruction, and not real fighting. Allah *the Almighty* said, 'If we knew fighting, we would certainly have followed you.'

Allah *the Almighty* exposed their evil deeds by stating that, '... They were on that day much nearer to unbelief than to belief.....' (*Al-'Imran:* 167) This means that their hypocrisy was concealed, and as long as hypocrisy is concealed, it means that the tongue says, while the heart denies and rejects. Therefore, they are wavering between this and that, (belonging) neither to these nor to those; and this issue made him closer to manifest disbelief.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts....' (*Al-'Imran:* 167) This verse clearly indicates that the heart has to do with 'intentions', while the tongue has to do with 'speech', so one may say that which he does not. That is why we have already said that hypocrites' souls are divided, and their faculties are shattered; they say with their tongues what they deny in their hearts. That is why they will be in the lowest depth of the hellfire because they are deceivers and their souls are divided.

'They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts....' (*Al-'Imran:* 167) The mouth is very important for the act of 'saying' because it reflects what is in the soul. Similarly, if one expresses what is in his soul in writing, this is considered as an act of 'saying.' That is why whoever feels shy to say something to someone, he will write it on a paper, and thus his writing is considered an act of 'saying'. As for those hypocrites, they say with their mouths and not in writing; this is considered sheer hypocrisy because if they were shy, they would just whisper it. '... They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts....' This indicates that the saying of the tongue does not match the intention of the heart; the heart is absolutely determined to committing disbelief, Allah forbid, and the tongue lies by declaring belief.

We know for certain that truthfulness is achieved when the act of ‘saying’ agrees with reality, which is the topic of belief. As a matter of fact, belief entails the existence of an intention in the heart and a deed to prove that belief. As for the hypocrites, their sayings do not match their intentions. But when Allah exposed their evil intentions, people knew their deceit. That is why they were closer to unbelief. Allah says, ‘They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts....’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 167) This saying of Allah *the Almighty* indicates the lack of belief in their hearts, for they dealt with Allah in the same way they dealt with human beings. Allah *the Almighty* then says,

ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوا۟ لِإِخْوَٰنِهِمْ وَقَعَدُوا۟ لَوْ أَطَاعُونَا مَا قُتِلُوا۟ ۗ قُلْ فَٱدْرَءُوا۟
عَنْ أَنفُسِكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتَ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٦٨﴾

As for those who stayed behind, and said of their brothers, ‘If only they had listened to us, they would not have been killed,’ tell them [Prophet], ‘Ward of death from yourselves, if what you say is true’ [168] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 168)

When Ibn Ubayy wanted to desert the army, some of the hypocrites agreed with him, while others did not. But when those hypocrites who did not agree with him were killed, other hypocrites, who obeyed the command of Ibn Salul not to come out, were delighted and said, ‘Had they only obeyed us and stayed in Medina, they would not have been defeated or killed.’ Hence, Allah *the Almighty* explains the way they think to us. It is true that they stayed behind and said to their brothers who were killed in the battlefield and who mainly belonged to their own group of hypocrites, ‘... If they had obeyed us….’ This clearly indicates that an order was issued by the hypocrites to their brothers to ‘stay behind’. But those members of the group who are of less hypocrisy did not obey them and came out to fight, so they were afflicted with defeat and killing.

But how did Allah *the Almighty* answer them? You say, ‘If they had obeyed us...’, this means that their obedience to you would serve as a means of survival to them. So, you (O hypocrites) know the way to be safe from killing.

But the question to be asked here is: Does the person who knows how to be safe from killing, know how to be safe from death?! That is why Allah *the Almighty* scorns them saying, '... Then prevent death from yourselves, if you should be truthful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 168) As a matter of fact, this part of the verse is in response to their speech 'if they had obeyed us, they would not have been killed.'

Similarly, if you know a way to be safe from being killed, then use this particular way to prevent your deaths. You and your forefathers will surely die, and you cannot prevent death for yourself. So, you do not know how to be safe from death. How many fighters are those who safely came back from war! How many are those who fled from fighting but died? Even if some believers who were fighting in the Cause of Allah were killed, does this mean that they are of a lesser degree in the sight of Allah *the Almighty*? Of course, they are not! But those believers who were killed are more beloved to Allah than those who fled the battlefield.

We know for certain that an action is either praised or despised based on the goal behind it. In reality, every action that gets you closer to your gaol is praised, while every action that drives you away from the goal is despised. For example, if your goal is to travel to Alexandria, you may go there on foot, thus you will need more days; however, if you go there on a horse, a donkey, etc., you will need less time to reach there; if you use a car, you may reach it in a few hours. In the same way, if you use a plane to travel there, you may reach it in half an hour. That is to say that, the faster the means of transportation, the less time it needs to reach a destination. That is based on a rule stating that the active power is in adverse proportion with time. It also means that the more the power, the less the time. Since my goal is to travel to Alexandria, surely the means of transportation which takes less time is better than the ones that take more time, thus it is for sure the best means of transportation.

Since the ultimate goal (of the believer) is to meet Allah *the Almighty* and to live in His Company, then it is better for the believer if Allah hastens his death. But people improperly misunderstand the concept of death. It goes without saying that death gets the true believer closer to his goal, so why would he be sad?

‘And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169). You truly fear death, but those who are killed in the Cause of Allah are not dead because their lives continue. In fact, there is a big difference between death and martyrdom. The lives of those who are killed in the Cause of Allah are continuous and they will not experience the period of death that those who die normally suffer. We must understand that they are alive and in the Company of their Lord. This is totally done under the Law of Allah *the Almighty* so you must not judge things according to your own point of view. It is true that if you open the grave, you will find the martyrs with dismembered limbs, but this is your own judgment according to your point of view. As a matter of fact, those martyrs are alive with their Lord and receive provision.

Let us ask a very important question: what is the difference between life and death? Most surely when the soul leaves the body, one’s life is over and thus he will not get benefit from provision which is used by man to maintain life. In the same way, Allah *the Almighty* wants to give us some characteristics to prove that martyrs are indeed alive. It goes without saying that provision is one of the most essential elements for maintaining of life. Also, we must understand that the Company of Allah is totally different from that of others. Martyrs are alive with their Lord and are sustained by Him *the Almighty* in such a way that is destined by Him *Glorified is He*. We know perfectly well that the need for sustenance is the characteristic which distinguishes the alive from the dead. When we read the saying of Allah *the Almighty,*

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَمْوَٰتًۢا ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَآءٌ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

[Prophet], do not think of those who have been killed in God’s way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for [169] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 169)

We may say that it is possible to take a man, keep him alive and provide him with food and drink, but will that person be pleased with his situation? No, such a person will not be pleased. For this reason, we must realise that the life of the martyr is not in the grave, but in Allah’s Company, and he is pleased with his situation destined by Allah. That is why Allah *the Almighty* confirms the fact by the verse: ‘Rejoicing in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty, and they receive good tidings about those [to be martyred] after them who have not yet joined them—that there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 170)

All human beings are to die and this is a sign of justice, but it is due to Allah’s Favour that He *the Almighty* hastens the death of those whom He loves and moves them to live in His Pleasure and Bounty. This is confirmed by His Saying, ‘Rejoicing in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty...’. However, we find that the fraternity they share with each other, as Muslims, turned into a form that is purer than the one that existed when they were alive. Belief entails that a believer must love for his fellow believer what he loves for himself and so is the case of martyrs with their Lord *the Almighty*. This clearly indicates that the life of martyrs is one that is full of provision and happiness, and every martyr believes that Allah *the Almighty* has favoured him with this bounty. That is why the martyr receives good tidings about the believers who did not join him yet and says,

فَرِحِينَ بِمَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضۡلِهِۦ وَيَسۡتَبۡشِرُونَ بِٱلَّذِينَ لَمۡ يَلۡحَقُواْ
بِهِم مِّنۡ خَلۡفِهِمۡ أَلَّا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا هُمۡ يَحۡزَنُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

happy with what God has given them of His favour;
rejoicing that for those they have left behind who have yet
to join them there is no fear, nor will they grieve [170]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 170)

The phrase *yastabshirun* is derived from *Al-bushra,* which means glad tidings/good news. The saying of Allah *the Almighty,* ‘... receive good tidings about those [to be martyred] after them who have not yet joined them,’ refers to the believers to be martyred after the already martyred ones. So, martyrs say, ‘They (our fellow brothers) will come to us, and we would like them to enjoy the same pleasure and bounty we are in.’ Besides, all of them love each other, for they know well the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘No one of you becomes a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself.’ Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him and his father* narrated that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “When your brethren were struck at the battle of Uhud, Allah put their spirits in the crops of green birds which go down to the rivers of paradise, eat its fruit and nestle in lamps of gold in the shade of the Throne. Then, when they experienced the sweetness of their food, drink, and rest, they asked, “Who will tell our brethren about us that we are alive in paradise provided with provision in order that they might not be disinterested in *jihad* (fighting in the cause of Allah) and recoil in war?” Allah *the Almighty* then said, “I shall tell them about you”, so He *Glorified is He* sent down the verses “And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision,” and what comes next.

We know that the word *Al-bishr* has the meaning of happiness that appears on a man’s face. So, when someone is happy, this happiness appears on his face, and it becomes radiant. That is why we call it *Al-bisharah* because it causes the face of the person who receives glad tidings to be radiant and smiling.

‘... And they receive good tidings about those [to be martyred] after them who have not yet joined them—that there will be no fear concerning them, and nor will they grieve.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 170) This verse means that those believers who were not martyred yet shall fear nothing because they may be involved in a battle and gain martyrdom. So, Allah *the Almighty* conveys to the believers who are still alive, the message of their fellow brothers who gained martyrdom before them, that they shall not fear because they will be moved to another life which is better than that worldly life. He *the Almighty* says, ‘that there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.’

Allah *the Almighty* then says,

يَسۡتَبۡشِرُونَ بِنِعۡمَةٖ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَفَضۡلٖ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجۡرَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ١٧١

[rejoicing] in God’s blessing and favour, and that God
will not let the reward of the believers be lost [171]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 171)

Most surely, Allah *the Almighty* will not waste the reward of those believers who fought in His Cause. He *the Almighty* then says,

ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَجَابُوا۟ لِلَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَآ أَصَابَهُمُ ٱلْقَرْحُ ۚ
لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ وَٱتَّقَوْا۟ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٢﴾

Those who responded to God and the Messenger after suffering defeat, who do good and remain conscious of God, will have a great reward [172] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 172)

If you contemplate the higher position prepared by Allah *the Almighty* for the believers, you will know that the misfortune that afflicted them in the battle of Uhud has reinforced belief in the spirits of the believers. That is why Allah *the Almighty* wanted not to overextend the period of grief upon them (the believers). Also, He *Glorified is He* did not want to overextend the period of happiness for the disbelievers who felt happy about the misfortune that afflicted the believers in their last battle. So, the situation was like this: *Al-mushrikun* (ones who associate partners with Allah in worship) were happy, while the (defeated) believers were sad. We have already explained that as long as they were Muslims, they had the right of Islam, but they were only punished in return for the mistake committed. That is why He *the Almighty* punished them with defeat in Uhud as a result of their disobedience. However, they are still the superior by virtue of the right of Islam. As a matter of fact, He *the Almighty* destined their defeat in order to cultivate them, test them and check the veracity of their belief. So, He *the Almighty* did not overextend the period of grief on the believers. Also, He *Glorified is He* did not overextend the period of happiness for the disbelievers. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* then came and ordered his announcer to call upon people, 'None shall come out with us except those who attended fighting with us.'

Then, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came out with a number of fighters that was not more than the number of believers who had already attended battle with Prophet. He *peace and blessings be upon him* did so in order for the disbelievers not say that Muslims received additional support. So, those who came out to fight were the ones who remained with the Messenger of Allah in the battle of Uhud, with the exception of the martyred and those whose serious wounds prevented them from fighting. Therefore, the number of believing fighters then was even less than the number of those who attended the main battle. So, Allah *the Almighty* wants to show us that purification has produced its desired result.

Even though they (the believers) were in an unpleasant situation due to their defeat, they obeyed the order of the Messenger to come out to fight. Therefore, it seems that the call for coming out served as a means to rehabilitate the believers who had attended the battle so that they would not experience weakness, and the misfortune would not become humiliation chasing them all the time either. Rather, they must realise that the battle of Uhud had finished. Also, they must learn the lesson from this battle very well.

Once the announcer of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed the message of the Prophet to people to come out to fight, they all answered: No. No one was allowed to join the Muslim army except Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah whose father who had been martyred in Uhud, ordered him to stay to take care of his seven sisters. Jabir explained the matter to the Messenger of Allah who allowed him to join the army.

As we explained before, Allah *the Almighty* wanted the misfortune that afflicted Muslims in the battle of Uhud to reinforce their belief, and since belief had been reinforced, they were well prepared to receive the Orders of Allah. That is why they answered the call of the Messenger of Allah in the blink of an eye and came out to Hamra’ Al-Asad (a location eight miles away from Medina). Then, Allah *the Almighty* supported the Muslim army with those who cast fear in the hearts of the disbelievers. One of those soldiers sent by Allah *the Almighty* said to the army of the disbeliever, ‘Muhammad has come out with a large army to fight against you.’

We notice here that Allah *the Almighty* uses the phrase ‘Those [believers] who responded...,’ to refer to the difference between ‘those believers who responded’ and ‘those who disobeyed the order of the Messenger of Allah’ (the archers). He *the Almighty* says, ‘Those [believers] who responded to Allah and the Messenger after injury had struck them.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 172)

This verse means that the believers responded to the order of the Messenger of Allah eventhough they were in pain and severely wounded. Even though all of them suffered the pain and fatigue from fighting, they responded to Allah and His Messenger. The word al-qarh means pain or wound. He *the Almighty* says, ‘... after injury had struck them. For those who did good among them and feared Allah is a great reward.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 172) The verse means that they did a good deed by their swift response, thus they deserved a great reward because they had already been punished for the disobedience they committed. Allah *the Almighty* then says,

ٱلَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّ ٱلنَّاسَ قَدۡ جَمَعُواْ لَكُمۡ فَٱخۡشَوۡهُمۡ فَزَادَهُمۡ
إِيمَٰنٗا وَقَالُواْ حَسۡبُنَا ٱللَّهُ وَنِعۡمَ ٱلۡوَكِيلُ ١٧٣

Those whose faith only increased when people said, ‘Fear your enemy: they have amassed a great army against you,’ and who replied, ‘God is enough for us: He is the best protector’ [173] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 173)

The hypocrites did not suffice with deserting the Muslim army. They rather spread false rumours that the polytheists had recalled a new number of the disbelievers of Mecca to fight against the Muslims. They (the hypocrites) did so with the intention of casting fear in the hearts of the believers whose belief remained steadfast and did not budge. ‘Those to whom the people said: Surely men have gathered against you, therefore fear them...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 173) When you find that Allah *the Almighty* using the word *an-naas* (people) in this context, you must know that those people are away from belief, so they will fight against ordinary people like them. It is true that in such a battle, those who will gain victory will be the ones who are more skilful and exert greater efforts. But in the case where believers fight against disbelievers, Allah *the Almighty* provides believers with His Support.

Some people say, ‘Satan may take the form of a big gathering to terrify the believers. We know that Satan belongs to the jinn who can see human beings whence humans cannot see them. Allah *the Almighty* gave them the ability to take any form they want. So, they can take the form of human beings, animals or whatever. But once they are represented in any form, they are governed under the laws of the form they are content with. So, if they take the form of humans, the laws of humans will be applicable to them. That is to say that if you shoot them or stab them with a dagger, they will die. As a matter of fact, this is what keeps us safe from their terror. That is why we find that Satan appears for a brief moment and then disappears for fear that the person before him may be fully aware of the fact that the form he is in, governs him, thus that person may throttle him. For this reason, he fears man and does not appear except for brief moments.

In addition, we may interpret the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Those to whom the people said: Surely men have gathered against you...' (*Al-'Imran:* 173) in light of the narration that some of the disbelievers spread rumours that Abu Sufyan had gathered his people once again (to fight against the Muslim army). The phrase *jama'u* (they gathered) indicates that the disbelievers recalled other fighters or that their gatherings had reorganised. Irrespective of such two meanings for this particular word, it is clear that the gatherings of the disbelievers went out in defeat because defeated armies do not flee from the battlefield in an organized way; rather, each solider fled as far as possible. It is also true that the defeated gatherings may reorganise themselves once again or even call other fighters. We should take into account that the style of the verse may offer all these explanations.

'Those to whom the people said: Surely men have gathered against you, therefore fear them...' (*Al-'Imran:* 173) In fact, such a saying (by the hypocrites) may even weaken believers, but they (the believers) did not pay attention to such sayings, thanks to the process of purification through which they had been. Therefore, it becomes clear that believers learnt the first lesson perfectly well; they learnt that disobedience to the Order of Allah, clearly manifested in the order of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, causes them weakness. They also recognised that the firm adherence to the orders of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* brings about the power of Muslims, and that is why they paid no attention at all to that threat and said, 'Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector.' (*Al-'Imran:* 173) This verse means that the believers paid no attention at all to the number of the disbelievers. Besides, they (the believers) understood that their belief in Allah and His Messenger entailed that they must fight against the disbelievers’ army so that Allah punished them by the hands of the believers. In reality, this is viewed as a lesson to all fighters; that is, when a fighter is in battle, Allah will make firm his feet if he is a true believer. This is clearly shown in the battle of Badr when Allah *the Almighty* told the Messenger that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was not the one who cast fear in the hearts of the disbelievers, but it was Allah *the Almighty* the One Who did that. (*al-Anfal:* 17)

It becomes crystal clear now that Muslims became fully aware of the mistake they committed, thus they were purified and their belief was reinforced. This matter is manifested in the fact that some people tried to frighten them, but they could not. The only reply from them was ‘and they said: Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector; this clearly indicates that the Muslims were fully aware of the fact that it was the Power of Allah *the Almighty* that gave them victory. They also fully realised that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who supports them and protects them from all the troops of the enemy; He *Glorified is He* is the most excellent Protector. The word *Al-wakil* means that when one is unable to do a particular act, he entrusts someone else to do it on his behalf. So, when we entrust Allah *the Almighty* to do acts we are unable to do, it means that He *the Almighty* is the most excellent Disposer of affairs. Allah *Most Exalted* tells us about the result of the believers’ reliance upon Him,

فَٱنقَلَبُواْ بِنِعۡمَةٖ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَفَضۡلٖ لَّمۡ يَمۡسَسۡهُمۡ سُوٓءٞ
وَٱتَّبَعُواْ رِضۡوَٰنَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو فَضۡلٍ عَظِيمٍ ١٧٤

returned with grace and bounty from God; no
harm befell them. They pursued God’s good
pleasure. God’s favour is great indeed [174]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 174)

This verse indicates that He *the Almighty* gave believers victory by casting terror in the hearts of the disbelievers. The Muslims did not engage in fighting with the disbelievers. Allah *the Almighty* favoured believers by casting terror and fear in the hearts of their enemies. (*al-Anfal:* 12)

Allah *the Most High* then states His reward to the believers when they realised their mistake and entrusted their affairs to Him *the Almighty.* ‘So they returned with favor from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them and they followed the pleasure of Allah; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 174)

All believers, who underwent such purification of Allah *the Almighty* must be fully aware of this experience. Also, they all must always pay attention to the experience gained from the battle of Uhud. In fact, it was one particular night that made a big difference; the group of believers spent that night in the Company of Allah before they came out to chase the army of disbelievers. Also, since they learnt the lesson of Uhud very well, they performed wonderful acts. That is because when they chased the disbelievers, they paid no attention at all to the psychological warfare waged against them by their enemies; on the contrary, they increased in faith and said, ‘Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector.’

So, they became unattached to their own selves, strength, power, and troops, and from everything else, but to say, ‘Allah is the most Sufficient for us, and He is the best Guardian for those who are unable to achieve their aims.’ Thus, the believers fully realised the most important matter; that is, all of them must remain in the Company of His Lord all the time. As a matter of fact, Companions of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his family members have used the lessons learnt through this experience to solve a lot of their problems.

In fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector’ reminds us of Imam Ja‘far As-Sadiq, son of Imam Mohammad Al-Baaqir, son of Imam 'Ali Zayn Al-‘Abidin. Imam Ja‘far was one of the most knowledgeable scholars who are well-versed in the understanding of the Quran. Besides, he was one of the most skilful scholars in deducing its secrets. Imam Ja‘far perfectly understood the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector.’ He expresses surprise at people who feel afraid of anything. As a matter of fact, man does not fear anything but what causes him discomfort and worry as well as what threatens his life and safety. This fear must have a particular reason. So, when a believer faces any fear, he must remember the saying of Allah *the Almighty*

'Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector.' That is because this statement benefited the entire Muslim army in the battle with the disbelievers. So, when the individual believer utters this statement, he regains his composure. His heart will harden as well, thus he will not flee in times of terror and fear.

Imam Ja'afar As-Sadiq also drives our attention to this statement so that we resort to it in times of distress. He says, 'I am surprised at those people who do not resort to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* "Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector at times of fear."' The Imam is surprised at those people who do not have recourse to that particular statement in times of fear. He Allah *be pleased with him* then tells us the reason behind his surprise and says, 'Because Allah *the Almighty* followed it with His saying, "So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them..."' If you contemplate the statement of Ja'afar As-Sadiq, 'Because Allah *the Almighty* followed it with...', you will find that he read it with the eyes of a true believer. As a matter of fact, when the believer reads the Quran, he must take into account that he is hearing Allah *the Almighty* speaking to him. Imam Ja'afar said, "Because Allah *the Almighty* followed it with His saying, 'So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them.'" That is why Allah *the Almighty* instructs us to be very attentive, while listening to the recitation of the verses of the Quran (*al-A'raf:* 204).

So, when the Quran is being recited, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who is speaking to you, thus it is not right to ignore Him *Glorified is He*. Therefore, the wonder cure for fear is to say firmly, 'Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector.' You are supposed to heartily say it, because in case you do so, Allah *the Almighty* will confer His Favour upon you and no evil will touch you. He *Glorified is He* says, 'So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them...' O Muslims! Consider this grace and bounty; they are from Allah. Allah may confer His Favour and Bounty upon a person, but he may realise these favours of Allah too late. So, Allah *the Almighty* explains that His Favour in this situation is not accompanied by any evil. This actually represents the true meaning of favour. So, if one understands the value of Favours from Allah too late, he is mistaken. He *the Almighty* says, 'So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them...' It was due to the valuable experience of Uhud that the believers followed the Pleasure of Allah.' In reality, the experiment had borne its fruits.

Imam Ja'afar As-Sadiq then proceeds to prescribe the treatment for the fear and worry that may afflict the human soul, which is to say, Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector. Furthermore, he adds, I am surprised at the person who is afflicted by sorrow and does not hasten to read the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* uttered by Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* when he was in the stomach of the whale. (*al-Anbiya':* 87)

The word 'sorrow' refers to that kind of worry afflicting a man's soul. As a matter of fact, the reasons for this worry are unknown and complex. Besides, it causes one's chest to tighten, and that is why one may say, 'My chest is tight; I am tired, but I do not know why.' This clearly means that there are no obvious reasons for such tightness in your chest; however, it may be the result of particular actions and events you do not remember at the moment. This is known as *ghamm* (sorrow). So, when man hastens to read the saying of Allah *the Almighty* uttered by Prophet Yunus *peace be upon him* (*al-Anbiya':* 87), he is confessing his sins and saying, 'I was afflicted with this sorrow only because I deviated the sound approach.' Imam Ja'afar As-Sadiq tells us that when one utters this statement, Allah *the Almighty* will surely respond to him and deliver him from sorrow and distress. (*al-Anbiya':* 88)

It is known for certain that Prophet Yunus *peace be upon him* is the one who uttered this statement. In addition, when he *peace be upon him* said it, Allah *the Almighty* responded to him and delivered him from the sorrow that afflicted him.

However, answering the call of Yunus *peace be upon him* in this regard was not something just for him; rather, it pertains to all the believers who may say it. This means that Allah *the Almighty* opens the door widely to all the believers who utter this statement. Imam Ja'afar then added, I am really surprised at the person who is plotted against and he does not hasten to entrust all of his affairs to Allah *the Almighty* as clearly mentioned in the Quran. (*Ghafir:* 44) Imam Ja'afar continues, 'Whoever does so, Allah *the Almighty* will protect him for the evil of their schemes.'

The Arabic phrase *mukir bihi* (he is plotted against) means that a conspiracy has been secretly organised against him. That is because *Al-makru* (evil plotting) means that your enemy is plotting an evil act against you, while you are supporting the truth. In reality, this act is viewed as an evil plotted against uprightness. It goes without saying that this kind of plotting is nothing but evil. Nevertheless, there is another kind of plotting, which is the good one. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells that evil scheming will engulf none but its authors. (*Fatir:* 43)

Therefore, it becomes clear now that there is another kind of scheming which is not evil. The good scheming is achieved when an upright person secretly makes a plot against an evildoer. As a matter of fact, this is known as 'the good scheming,' for it implies fighting against evil. So, Allah *the Almighty* explained the matter to us, 'O Muslims! Be aware of that point, for if they waved conspiracies and plots against all mankind, they cannot do so against Allah *the Almighty* Who is All Knowing and the Creator'. In reality, if Allah plots against them, they will never be able to uncover His Plotting, for He *Glorified is He* is the best of planners. So, all of their plots are surely known to Allah *the Almighty* thus all are weak. As for the genuine plotting, there is no particular way to discover it.

Let us continue with the opinion of Imam Ja'afar As-Sadiq on the treatment of the human soul. He Allah *be pleased with him* continues, 'I am surprised at the person who wants to acquire the adornment of this worldly life and does not hasten to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in (*al-Kahf:* 39).

Whoever says this statement, Allah *the Almighty* will provide him with great provision as clearly shown in the story of the 'owner of the garden.' (*al-Kahf:* 39-40) In reality, Imam Ja'afar As-Sadiq Allah *be pleased with him* deduced that particular point from the story of the 'owner of the garden' (*al-Kahf:* 39-40).

As a matter of fact, when one says, 'It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power save in Allah,' he will easily obtain the adornments of this worldly life because he has already detached himself from his own power, his strength and means and entrusted his affairs to Allah *the Almighty* Who is able to do anything.

So, the different trials that may afflict the human soul include fear, worry, evil scheming, and seeking the adornment of this worldly life, all of which have cures. Concerning our particular cure here, it has to do with the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...and they said: Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector. So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them, and they followed the pleasure of Allah; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace.’

‘Favour’ means that Allah *the Almighty* will confer His Favour according to your work, whereas ‘grace/bounty’” means that He *the Almighty* will increase His Favour. As a matter of fact, no evil touched the believers who chased the fighters of Quraysh. Hence, those believers acquired all what Allah *the Almighty* had granted them including His Favour, Grace and Pleasure. In truth, those believers became fully aware of the lesson they learnt (from the battle of Uhud), thus He *the Almighty* describes them, ‘and they followed the pleasure of Allah; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace.’

The hypocrites attempted to prevent the believers from meeting the disbelievers of Quraysh, but Allah *the Almighty* wanted to uncover their conspiracy and reveal the reasons behind their position. That is why Allah *the Almighty* told the believers about what the hypcorites said to them, ‘... Surely men have gathered against you, therefore fear them...’ He *the Almighty* then tells the believers with the real position of the hypocrites, saying, ‘It is only the Shaitan that causes you to fear from his friends...’.

He *the Almighty* tells the believers about the actual situation of the hypocrites, saying,

إِنَّمَا ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَآءَهُۥ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُونِ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ (١٧٥)

It is Satan who urges you to fear his followers; do not fear them, but fear Me, if you are true believers [175]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 175)

This verse may mean that it is the call of Satan that causes you to fear from his allies. In reality, Satan may do so, while taking the form of a human being. Satan may also do so to a person who, in turn, does the same to other people.

When we read the verses of the Quran very carefully, we can certainly understand their meanings correctly. So, who are the allies of Satan? In this context, the allies of Satan may be either the disbelievers of Quraysh or the hypocrites, or even both of them. 'The allies of Satan are those who support his ideas. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that it was only Satan who said, 'Surely men have gathered against you, therefore fear them...,' but this Satan frightens none but his allies. From the first while, we understand that the context supposes that Satan was to frighten his enemies and not his allies. But we are here observing that Satan sows dissensions by causing them to be afraid, so the question to be asked is: who are those to be frightened and who causes them to fear? By reason, Satan is supposed to cause his enemies to fear.

As a matter of fact, in our daily lives we say, 'I caused someone to fear someone else.' Thus, Satan tries to take control over the believers and to cause them to fear his allies from the disbelievers and hypocrites. In Arabic, we understand that prepositions may be omitted from certain sentences, while the meaning remains the same. This is clearly shown in the Quran.

In the light of this rule of the Arabic grammar, we may understand the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'It is only the Satan that causes you to fear from his friends' to mean that Satan causes you to frighten his allies and this meaning is supported by the mode of recitation adopted by Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud, both recited this particular verse as 'It is only the Satan that causes you to frighten his friends.' But Allah *the Almighty* instructs the believers not to fear them, saying, '... But do not fear them.'

This clearly means that Satan wants to cause the believers to fear his allies (the hypocrites and disbelievers). Some other exegetes of the Quran interpret this part of the verse... *yukhawwifu awliyaahu*... or '... frightens his allies...' (*Al-'Imran:* 175) as meaning that Satan frightens his allies so that they would not take part in fighting, thus he told them that they would be killed in case they came out to fight against the believers, but this meaning is not correct because if it applied to the hypocrites who did not come out to fight with the Muslims, then how could it apply to the polytheists who had already come out to fight against the believers?! Along the same lines, we understand from the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... but do not fear them, and fear Me if you are believers...' (*Al-'Imran:* 175) that the allies of Satan are not the ones who are afraid, but they are the ones who cause others to fear. 'It is only Satan that causes you to fear from his friends, but do not fear them, and fear Me if you are believers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 175)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* asks the believers to draw the following comparison: Should they fear the allies of Satan? Or must they fear Allah *the Almighty*? It goes without saying that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who must be feared because He *Glorified is He* is the One Who is able to defeat the allies of Satan. He *the Almighty* then says,

وَلَا يَحْزُنكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُسَٰرِعُونَ فِى ٱلْكُفْرِ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَن يَضُرُّوا۟ ٱللَّهَ شَيْـًٔا ۗ
يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ أَلَّا يَجْعَلَ لَهُمْ حَظًّا فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٦﴾

[Prophet], do not be grieved by those who are quick to disbelieve. They will not harm God in the least; it is God's will that they will have no share in the Hereafter – a terrible torment awaits them [176] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 176)

In the first battle between the believers and the disbelievers (the battle of Badr), the hypocrites were concealed and hidden. But when it was the battle of Uhud, the first sign of their deceit appeared, thus they were nearer to disbelief than belief. However, after that they hastened to disbelief as if there was someone lashing them with a whip to do so.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* defines the parties of the battle, or the forces of the battle, or the battlefield, or the soldiers of the battle, thus He *the Almighty* instructs His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'And do not be grieved, [O Muhammad], by those who hasten into disbelief.' We should notice that He *Glorified is He* did not say, 'They cannot harm you at all' because the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the companions were not a real part in the conflict; rather, the enmity of the disbelievers was against Allah *the Almighty* and that is why He *Glorified is He* says, '... Indeed, they will never harm Allah at all.' This indicates that the battle of disbelievers was with Allah *the Almighty* and not with the believers. Since the battle was with Allah *the Almighty* the believers were His Soldiers and the means with which He *the Almighty* chose to defeat the disbelievers.

This meaning is clearly shown in another verse of the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* orders the believers to fight against the disbelievers, and He *the Almighty* will punish them by the hands of believers, disgrace them, give believers victory over them and heal the hearts of the believing people. (*at-Tawba:* 14)

So, if the battle was between the disbelievers and believers, He *the Almighty* would have said: 'And do not be grieved, [O Muhammad], by those who hasten into disbelief. Indeed, they will never harm you at all.' But the case is not like that. As a matter of fact, both disbelievers and hypocrites wanted to enter into a battle with Allah *the Almighty* in spite of the fact that there is no power that is able to do so. That is why Allah *the Almighty* provides the believers with more assurance so that they would be more steadfast in their belief. It is taken for granted that all humans—be they believers or disbelievers—are similar to each other in terms of creation. In addition, some of the believers may deviate from the way for a, while, thus when the battle is between humans fighting against each other, one of the two parties may gain victory by virtue of its power.

In order to give further assurance, He *the Almighty* took the battle against disbelief into another level. He *the Almighty* obviously states that He is the One Who stands against the disbelievers. But the most important thing in this regard is that believers must be in the Company of Allah *the Almighty*. The Messenger was saddened that some people hastened into disbelief. Thus, did not the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* know that his own responsibility is to convey the Message of Allah?! Of course, he *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that for certain, yet he was keen to make all people believe so that they could feel the sweetness of belief. In reality, it was this keenness that made him *peace and blessings be upon him* feel sad. That is to say that when he *peace and blessings be upon him* saw a person who did not believe, he wished that particular person believed so that he would taste the sweetness of belief. In truth, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was kind and merciful to the believers, and even to all humanity. Allah *the Almighty* tells this fact in the Quran; He *Glorified is He* tells that the Messenger of Allah was not sent but as a mercy to mankind. This is proved by the fact that when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked to choose either to pardon the people of Mecca or to order the angel of mountains to destroy them, he chose to pardon them. It was narrated that Jibril (Gabriel) called upon the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* heard what your people said to you and the response they made to you. And He has sent you the angel in charge of the mountains to order him to do to them what you wish.' The Messenger of Allah then said, 'Then the angel of the mountains called me, greeted me and said, "O Muhammad, Allah listened to what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mountains, and Allah has sent me to you so that you may give me your orders. (I will carry out your orders). If you wish I will bring together the two mountains that stand opposite to each other at the extremities of Mecca to crush them in between.' But the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "'No, but I hope that Allah will bring out of their offspring people who worship Allah alone with no associates."'

As a matter of fact, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was keen not only on the disbelievers of his time, but on the next generation as well. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* fulfilled the wish of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because it was from the progeny of those disbelievers that Islam was supported with heroes, brave soldiers, callers to Allah and martyrs. As such, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, as shown clearly in the verses of the Quran, felt sadness when there were some people who did not taste the sweetness of belief. Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran: 'Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement…' (*al-Kahf:* 6).

He *the Almighty* then affirms this fact in another position in the Quran where He says: 'Perhaps you will kill yourself with grief because they do not believe. If We please, We should send down upon them a sign from the heaven so that their necks would remain humbled…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4).

But He *the Almighty* does not want their necks; rather, He *Glorified is He* wants that hearts came freely to Him out of love. As a matter of fact, He

Glorified is He is fully able to create human beings in such a way that forces them to obey Him *the Almighty* as it is the case with the angels. We know for certain that all creatures glorify His Praise. Therefore, the Quran clearly shows that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was very keen on people's belief so that all of them would taste the sweetness of meeting their Lord *the Almighty* following the methodology of Allah and following such laws that would make them happy and satisfy all their faculties. But when things turned out contrary to what the Messenger of Allah liked, Allah *the Almighty* ordered him not to feel sadness, 'And do not be grieved, [O Muhammad], by those who hasten into disbelief.'

This indicates clearly that Allah *the Almighty* wants to convey the following message to mankind, 'O people! Out of the Messenger's great love for you, he is saddened by your disobedience and thus I told him not to grieve.' Undoubtedly, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is merciful to the entire *ummah* as shown in that particular verse of the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that Muhammad was not sent but a mercy to mankind. (*al-Anbiya':* 107)

It is sufficient here to consider his position on the Day of Resurrection when every *ummah* will go to seek the intercession of its own Prophet or Messenger, but they will not help. Afterwards, all of them will come to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* who Allah *the Almighty* will honour by accepting his intercession to Him *the Almighty* to hasten judging people's deeds and holding them accountable for them. As a matter of fact, this (intercession) is a mercy to all mankind because during that time people will wish the situation to be over even if they are to be thrown in the fire.

We have already explained that Allah *the Almighty* knows for certain how His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* loves his *ummah*, and how he is merciful to his followers, thus Allah *the Almighty* wants to assure him that He *Glorified is He* will never expose the followers of Islam to anything that displeases Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of* Allah *be upon him*. At that point, a very important Hadith may be quoted. 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of Ibrahim, 'My Lord, indeed they have led astray many among the people. So whoever follows me - then he is of me; and whoever disobeys me—indeed, You are [yet] Forgiving and Merciful.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* then recited the saying of Allah on 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*, 'If You should punish them−indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them indeed, it is You who is *the Exalted* in Might, the Wise.' Then he raised up his hands and said, 'O Allah! My *ummah*, my *ummah*,' and wept; Allah *the Exalted* said, 'O Jibril (Gabriel)! Go to Muhammad and ask him: "What makes you weep?" So Jibril came to him and asked him (the reason of his weeping), and the Messenger of Allah informed him what he had said (though Allah knew it well). Upon this Allah said, 'Jibril, go to Muhammad and say, "Verily, We will please you with regard to your *ummah* and will never displease you."'

There is yet another situation for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, which obviously indicates his infinite mercy towards his followers. After the revelation had come back to him *peace and blessings be upon him* at the very beginning of the mission, Allah *the Almighty* sent down the following verse, 'And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied.'

Concerning this verse, Imam 'Ali Allah *be pleased with him* is narrated to have said to the people of Iraq, 'You say that the most important verse in the Book of Allah is "Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.'" They said, 'Indeed we do.' The Imam then replied, 'But we−the members of the family of the Prophet−believe that the most important verse in the Book of Allah is His saying, "And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied."' Hence, it is narrated that when this verse was sent down, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'In that case, I will not be satisfied, while any of my *ummah* is in the fire'.

Along the same line, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is related to have said, 'There is, for every apostle, a prayer which is granted, but every prophet showed haste in his prayer. I have, however, reserved my prayer for the intercession of my *ummah* on the Day of Resurrection, and it would be granted, if Allah so willed, in case of everyone amongst my *ummah* provided he dies without associating anything with Allah.'(1) Now we can see how the members of the *ummah* of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* were at the forefront of his sentiments.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'And do not be grieved, [O Muhammad], by those who hasten into disbelief' is a clarification from Allah *the Almighty* to His Messenger; he *peace and blessings be upon him* performed his role properly, and he was not to be blamed for the disbelievers' haste into disbelief. He *the Almighty* then adds, '... Indeed, they will never harm Allah at all.' We should notice that He *the Almighty* did not say, 'They will not harm you (O Muhammad), nor will they harm the believers; rather, He *Glorified is He* declared that the war of disbelief is with Him *the Almighty* and the All-Omnipotent. By this statement, He *the Almighty* wants to reassure the believers.

In addition, He *the Almighty* does not want to give any share in the Hereafter to those who hasten into disbelief, thus He *the Almighty* says, '...Allah intends that He should give them no share in the Hereafter, and for them is a great punishment.' (*Al-'Imran:* 176) In truth, since this is the Will of Allah *the Almighty* can those who hasten into disbelief prevent the Will of their Lord?! No, they cannot.

Indeed, He *the Almighty* wants His *Sunnah* to reach them (the disbelievers), and it is known for certain that He *Glorified is He* punishes whoever disobeys His *Sunnah* because He *Glorified is He* commanded *Al-mukallafin* (people obligated by law to discharge a legal duty) to apply the *Sunnah* He legislated for them.

In Arabic grammar, we should differentiate between *lam al-'aqibat* (an Arabic preposition) which is followed by a result different from that intended by man, and *lam al-iradat wa al-t'alil* (an Arabic preposition) which is followed by a result that is in line with that intended by man. We can give the following example for the latter when we say: 'The student studied his lessons to succeed.' This preposition is rendered by "to" in this example where the main reason behind the process of studying is to achieve success. Concerning the first kind of *lam*, which is *lam al-'aqibat*, we can offer the following example of a father who says to his son, 'I have pampered you, so you failed in your final exam.' This preposition is rendered by 'so' in this example. Hence the uses of those kinds of *lam* are totally different.

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(1) *[Muslim, Sahih]*

Did the father pamper his son so that he failed? No, this did not happen. But the result of his son's exam was opposite to his own will because of a greater power. For further clarification note when Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran, 'We inspired the mother of Moses, saying, "Suckle him, and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river: do not be afraid, and do not grieve, for We shall return him to you and make him one of the messengers."' (*al-Qasas:* 7)

We must pay attention to the Order of Allah *the Almighty* to the mother of Moses to cast him into the river. If an ordinary man said to a mother: 'If you fear for your son, throw him into the sea,' she would have never believed him. But the mother of Moses realised that what she received was a revelation from Allah, which could not be interrupted by Satan or any human thoughts. Therefore, the Inspiration of Allah is crystal clear in the verse where Allah tells explicitly that He *Glorified is He* inspired her. Since it was Allah *the Almighty* Who inspired her, no satanic incitement could come through, and that was why she carried out His *the Almighty* Order. Then He *the Almighty* assured her and asked her not to fear or grieve, for He *the Almighty* would give him back to her and make him from the Messengers.

Thus, He *Glorified is He* drives the attention of the mother of Moses that He would give him back to her, not because she loved him very much, but because He *the Almighty* would assign him to a particular mission. Speaking about the act of inspiration to the mother of Moses, He *the Almighty* says in another verse in the Quran, 'Saying: Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore; there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him, and I cast down upon you love from Me, and that you might be brought up before My eyes...' (*Ta Ha:* 38-39).

Here, He *the Almighty* describes the moment when she fulfilled the task that she had been inspired to do. So, this description is different from the previous one which described the preparation for the task. In truth, when Allah *the Almighty* asked her to cast him into the river, it gave indication of the stage of preparation. Then, when it was the time to carry out the mission, He *Glorified is He* informed Moses of the inspiration He gave to his mother. This is a series of events that show that the action had taken place at the time when the soldiers of Pharaoh were taking away the children of the Israelites to kill them. He *the Almighty* wants to show us that He has countless soldiers, to the extent that the inanimate items understood the divine order and protected Moses. So, the word *iqdhifihi* (cast him) indicates that the matter took place swiftly. Moreover, when the river received the Order from Allah to throw Moses to the bank, it had to carry out the Order. Therefore, these are divine Commands issued to a creature that never disobeys Allah.

But how did Allah issue His Order to His enemy? Indeed, He *Glorified is He* casts them in the mind of Pharaoh to carry out His Will. So, the wife of Pharaoh asked him not to kill him because he would be a refreshment of the eye to both of them, or they could even take him as a son. (*al-Qasas:* 9) Hence, Allah's Command came in the form of a notion, and the family of Pharaoh took the child in, not in order to become the refreshment of the eye to the wife of Pharaoh, but to execute something willed by Allah.

When they took him in, did they think that Moses would be an enemy to them or a source of joy?! Here, *lam al-'aqibah* which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'to be an enemy and grief for them.' As a matter of fact, man may want something, but the Ultimate Will of Allah wants something else.

When a person plans to do something for a certain purpose, the Unchallenged Power of Allah *the Almighty* may want it for another purpose, to the effect that He *the Almighty* may be the One Who inspired him to do that particular act. The reason why the family of Pharaoh took the child in is the best example for this. Pharaoh wanted the boy to be a refreshment of his eye, but Allah *the Almighty* wanted him to be the enemy of Pharaoh. This example shows us the big difference between *lam al-'aqibah* and *lam al-i'radah wa al-ta'lil.* When we see events like these, we cannot say: 'This is the Will of Allah;' rather, we should say: 'The result of their actions was not what they had planned for.' Allah *the Almighty* then says,

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱشۡتَرَوُاْ ٱلۡكُفۡرَ بِٱلۡإِيمَٰنِ لَن يَضُرُّواْ ٱللَّهَ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ﴿١٧٧﴾

Those who sell their faith for disbelief will not harm
God in any way; agonizing torment awaits them [177]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 177)

Indeed, they could not harm the Messenger and his companions because they were in Allah's Company, and nor could they harm Allah *the Almighty*. This verse is viewed as assurance to the believers because Allah *the Almighty* tells them, ʿO you who faithfully believe in Me and trust in Muhammad! The battle with disbelief is not between the believers and the disbelievers; rather, it is a battle between your Lord and those disbelievers.' Undoubtedly, this verse provides the believers with further assurance.

ʿIndeed, those who purchase disbelief [in exchange] for faith...,' the word *Ishtiraa'* (purchase) indicates the existence of a transaction which, in turn, entails the existence of a ʿpriceʿ and a ʿcommodity'. The ʿprice' here is the belief, as indicated by the Arabic preposition ʿ*bi*' which has to do with the item left, whereas ʿthe commodity' here refers to disbelief, for it refers to what is to be taken. So, did they buy disbelief in return for belief? And does this mean that they were previously believers? Yes, they were previously believers, but their belief was that old one upon which Allah *the Almighty* created them in the very beginning, before they came to life.

In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that He *Glorified is He* took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify of themselves that Allah is their Lord (*al-A'raf:* 172).

We can also say that by virtue of the human soul's ability to choose, they (the disbelievers) preferred disbelief to belief. That is to say that they took disbelief instead of belief. This replacement of belief for disbelief is crystal clear because the preposition *bi*, as I said before, is followed by the item to be left. They had already abandoned the intrinsic belief upon which they were created, and which is shown clearly in the Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* where he states, ʿEvery child is born with a true faith (i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone); his parents then make him a Jew, or a Christian or a Zoroastrian.'

They slunk away from belief and paid it as a price for disbelief. So, when one of them embraced disbelief, he has taken it in place of belief, and yet they cannot harm Allah at all. Moreover, He *the Almighty* prepared for them a painful punishment. But why did He do so? Because if we suppose that the entire world became believers, this would still not benefit Allah *the Almighty* in anyway.

It is narrated in a Qudsi Hadith that Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another. O My servants, all of you are astray except for those I have guided, so seek guidance of Me and I shall guide you, O My servants, all of you are hungry except for those I have fed, so seek food of Me and I shall feed you. O My servants, all of you are naked except for those I have clothed, so seek clothing of Me and I shall clothe you. O My servants, you sin by night and by day, and I forgive all sins, so seek forgiveness of Me and I shall forgive you. O My servants, you will not attain harming Me so as to harm Me, and will not attain benefitting Me so as to benefit Me. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My kingdom in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I have, any more that a needle decreases the sea if put into it. O My servants, it is but your deeds that I reckon up for you and then recompense you for, so let him who finds good, praise Allah, and let him who finds other than that, blame no one but himself.'

Therefore, people's belief in Allah will never benefit Allah at all, nor does their disbelief harm Him *the Almighty* at all. That is because man has come into existence in this world and he does not add anything new to it. That is to say that man is the creation of Allah, whom Allah created from the elements, existed in His Universe. The Hadith then continues to indicate that Allah *the Almighty* needs no time at all to do whatever He wants; rather, He *the Almighty* says to anything, '"Be!" and it is.'

The word 'Be' itself is the shortest form of commands – His commandments are too subtle and swift to be fully realised by any creature. But He *the Almighty* gives us the simplest form so that we, humans, can understand the matter. Hence, those who purchase disbelief in exchange for belief will never harm Allah *the Almighty* at all. In addition, He *the Almighty* prepared for them a painful punishment.

So, they will not be secure and safe from the punishment; rather, a painful punishment is prepared for them.

We sometimes notice that Allah *the Almighty* describes the abode of the disbelievers as having painful punishment; He *the Almighty* other times describes it as having great punishment. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* describes it as having humiliating punishment; why so? That is because punishment is of various kinds; eventhough the punishment may be very painful, the person being tortured may show patience for it; he feels awful pain, but they do not show it. At that point, the following poem may be quoted,

My endurance before those who hurt me shows them that I waver not before the misfortunes of fate! Endurance is a kind of resistance to reality. That is why Allah *the Almighty* tells us next that such people will have a humiliating punishment; that is, they will be afflicted by a humiliating and painful punishment, and none of them will be able to endure it. As a matter of fact, this kind of punishment does not stop at the limits of ordinary pain; it is rather, a great punishment in terms of degree and intensity. In addition, it is painful in terms of its nature, and is humiliating because it humiliates the human soul and removes its arrogance. So, when we see Allah *the Almighty* describing the abode of the disbelievers as having 'painful punishment,' 'great punishment' and 'humiliating punishment', it shows clearly that each of them indicates a different meaning.

Now, I would like to stop to shed more light on *lam al-'aqibah* because many people try to pose problems concerning it. As a matter of fact, those criticising the verses of the Quran search for these so-called weak points in the Quran, according to their own thinking. In truth, He *the Almighty* tells us that the disbelievers will ask Him to get them out of the fire so to obey Him all the time, but He *Glorified is He* will reject their request telling them that they had mocked the believers in the worldly life, but the believers are now in Paradise, while they are suffering great punishment. (*al-Mu'minun:* 107-110)

The disbelievers occupied themselves with mocking the believers; they used to do that either by scorning, mocking or even accusing them of backwardness or any different form of contempt, to the extent that they forgot the topic of belief. But what caused them to forget the Remembrance of Allah? Indeed, what caused them to forget was that they occupied themselves with mocking the people of belief all the time. The disbelievers spent all their time mocking the people of belief to the extent that they forgot that this universe has a Creator. Actually, this is what we call 'the consequence of actions'; it has nothing to do with the will or intention, for they did not mainly want to forget the Remembrance of Allah, but this happened eventually.

Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* will punish those disbelievers severely, greatly and humiliatingly. In truth, each description for these punishments in this context has been used to indicate a particular meaning; that is, they are prepared to include all different kinds of punishment. So, whoever suffers now with a light punishment will have a severe one, and so will the person who shows patience to the great punishment; he will be tortured with a humiliating punishment. Allah *the Almighty* then says,

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ أَنَّمَا نُمْلِى لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّمَا
نُمْلِى لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوٓا۟ إِثْمًا ۚ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾

The disbelievers should not think that it is better for them that We give them more time: when We give them more time they become more sinful – a shameful torment awaits them [178] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 178)

When we read the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'And let not those who disbelieve ever think,' we at once realise that it indicates interdiction; but from what does Allah *the Almighty* prohibit the disbelievers? As a matter of fact, when a disbeliever survives at a battle with believers, he thinks that Allah *the Almighty* has left him because it is good for him. That is because he views his life as the most important thing in this world. Thus, as long as he is safe, this is the ultimate blessing according to him. But we say to such disbeliever that one's age is a particular period of time, and time encompasses all events. So, we cannot glorify time in itself, but rather, because of the events that take place within it; if the event to take place in a certain time is good, then that time will be good; but if the event to take place in a certain time is evil, then that time is evil. Since they are disbelievers, all of their actions and works are necessarily evil, not good, because they do not abide by the Guidance of Allah *the Almighty*. They may even be following a way which is the complete opposite of the Way of Allah. So, this is actually nothing but evil. Thus, He *the Almighty* does not extend their time to do them good; rather, He *Glorified is He* extends their time for them because, since they are disbelievers, they occupied their time with evil actions which are against His Guidance. In truth, every evil act has a defined punishment and torture. So, it becomes clear now that prolonging their life is nothing but bad for them.

When Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And let not those who disbelieve ever think that [because] We extend their time [of enjoyment] it is better for them,' we notice that the verb *yahsabanna* (think) is in the present tense, and its past form is *hasiba* (thought). In truth, the past form was used in another position in the Quran, where Allah *the Almighty* wonders about those people who though their utterance of belief would make them safe from tests. (*al-'Ankabut:* 2)

So, *hasiba* is the past form of the verb, while *yahsabu* is the present form. The same verb, with different vowels (*hasaba/yahsibu),* means to count the numbers.

As for the forms *hasiba/yahsabu*, they indicate the meaning of 'thinking', which, as we know, is a matter of conjecture. So, Allah *the Almighty* tells them that they were wrong when they thought that the continuation of their life was something good for them. As a matter of fact, their thinking was nothing but a matter of conjecture and guessing which do not lead to any certainty.

True is the fact that life is calculated in years. Moreover, it is to be seen in the light of actions; thus one's life cannot be judged as good or bad without looking at his actions. That is why we say: 'Life is judged as good or bad based on the actions done by the person. As for the actions done by a disbeliever, they are undoubtedly judged evil, even if he does what apparently seems to be good because he originally does these actions with the intention of opposing the Guidance of Allah.' So, we use the forms *hasaba/yahsibu* to indicate the counting of numbers; the form *yahsibu* is in the present tense to give the meaning of 'thinking', and *yahsabu* gives the meaning of 'to think.'

Allah *the Almighty* says: "... *Innama numli lahum...*," which means: "We grant them respite only that they may add to their sins." So the question to be asked here is: what is meant by *numli*'. It means to prolong time. That is why we find that Ibrahim (Abraham)'s father, as mentioned in the Quran, ordered him to leave him for a prolonged period of time. (*Maryam:* 46)

The father of Abraham, as shown clearly in this particular verse, orders him to leave him for a long period of time. This is the true and profound meaning of this verse of the Quran. So, this particular verse of *Al-'Imran* means that prolonging the periods of time of those disbelievers who were not killed in the battle with the believers is not something good for them, and nor should they think it is good for them. That is because Allah *the Almighty* does so with them 'so that they may increase in sin, and for them is a humiliating punishment.'

So, be careful, O believers, not to say that Allah has destined this in order to punish them. This is not right. That is because He *the Almighty* had laid down laws by means of which the affairs of the universe are run and these laws are undoubtedly to be applied upon those who do not abide by His Guidance. Whoever commits evil, Allah will punish him in return. Thefore, the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'We only extend it for them so that they may increase in sin...' means that they, the disbelievers, commit sins and evil all the time.

The word muhin in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... and for them is a humiliating punishment' is an entirely appropriate description for that kind of punishment. That is because the disbeliever, after the battle is over *may* feel proud and arrogant that no one beheaded him. So, the severe punishment in that particular case may not be sufficient because he may show endurance and patience with it. But when it is humiliating, this will be the most appropriate punishment for this situation. The One Who destined this is Allah *the Almighty* Who is fully aware of what fits every situation. Then, Allah says,

مَّا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَآ أَنتُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ ٱلۡخَبِيثَ مِنَ
ٱلطَّيِّبِۗ وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيُطۡلِعَكُمۡ عَلَى ٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَجۡتَبِي مِن رُّسُلِهِۦ مَن
يَشَآءُۖ فَـَٔامِنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦۚ وَإِن تُؤۡمِنُواْ وَتَتَّقُواْ فَلَكُمۡ أَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿١٧٩﴾

Nor was it God's aim to leave you as you were, with no separation between the bad and the good. God would not show you [people] what is hidden; God chooses as His messengers whoever He will. So believe in God and His messengers: if you believe and stay mindful of God, you will have a great reward [179] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 179)

Upon hearing the saying of Allah *ma kan*, this clearly indicates that there is some sort of negation and denial; that is, there are some who deny this matter.

It is known that before the battle of Uhud, the hypocrites were intermingled with the believers. So, would Allah *the Almighty* leave the situation as such without revealing the hypocrites' real positions in terms of faith? No, He *the Almighty* did not accept this so that the hypocrites would no longer be able to cause harm to the believers. So, events must have come to reveal them. Hence, the battle of Uhud was meant to test those so-called believers, in order to separate those who are good from those who are evil, as shown clearly in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* where He *Glorified is He* states that the scum will pass away as a worthless thing, while that which benefits people will remain in the earth. (*ar-Ra'd:* 17) So, the occurrence of the battle of Uhud was essential.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'On no account will Allah leave the believers...,' it means that He *Glorified is He* would in no way leave the believers in the condition they were in until He exposed the hypocrites for one reason or another, and so knowing about the hypocrites will not be confined only to Prophet Muhammad through the knowledge conveyed to him by Allah *the Almighty*. If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, through the knowledge conveyed to him by Allah *the Almighty* informed the believers about the hypocrites, without the latter being actually tested, this experience would be viewed as a theoretical identification of hypocrisy from one direction. That is why Allah *the Almighty* wanted to expose the hypocrites by means of a real test. Therefore, they (the hypocrites) will not be able to object when they are called hypocrites. Also, their description of hypocrisy will not be a matter of telling a lie, thus the evidence for their hypocrisy will be concrete and convincing.

The hypocrites used to hasten to attend the first rows of the congregational prayers; they wanted to completely hide and conceal the matter of their hypocrisy, thus they were keen on performing such acts firmly adhered to by the believers. They (the hypocrites) were fully aware of the fact that the true believers hastened to attend the first rows of the congregational prayers, so they wanted to act like them. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that if He *Glorified is He* willed, He would make him recognise them by their marks and by the tone of their speech. (*Muhammad:* 30) This means that if you think of their speech very carefully, you will be able to recognise them because they are merely hypocrites like all other hypocrites in the world. For example, when it is the time of the noon prayer, the true believer will say: 'Let us go pray', but the hypocrite will mock him and say: 'You can carry me on your wings to paradise on the Day of Resurrection!' As a matter of fact, such sentence refers to what Allah describes as *lahn Al-qawl* (or the tone of their speech). Another example is when a believer joins a gathering where there is a hypocrite, the latter will greet him with the following statement 'How are you doing Mr Sheikh?' This obviously means that he (the hypocrite) does not feel comfort with the existence of the believer, so he mocks him.

Such an act also falls under the category of the tone of the speech through which the affairs of the hypocrites are exposed. In reality, when the true and intelligent believer upon whom Allah *the Almighty* bestowed His Favour, undergoes such acts, his belief increased, and these acts served as a spur for him. That is because the true believer follows the Way and Guidance of Allah *the Almighty* thus he is able to control himself, whereas the hypocrite is unable to do so, and that is why he wants to misguide the believer to follow his path of hypocrisy. Hence, the believer must be fully aware of the fact that he will face such hypocrites who want to turn him back to disbelief; he will be confronted with those people who will mock him. Allah *the Almighty* tells us about this in the Quran when He *Glorified is He* talks about the guilty people who laugh and wink at the true believers whenever the latter pass by them. (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-33)

The hypocrite or the disbeliever may say his family: 'Today, I saw a Sheikh, or clergyman, or religiously committed man and I mocked him and humiliated him.' By this, he wants to mock the believers among his corrupt followers, but Allah *the Almighty* exposes their hypocrisy to us in the Quran so that the believers will be assured and relieved from all the disasters afflicting them caused by the corrupt and the hypocrites.

In this regard, He *the Almighty* tells us that the believers, who will be observing, sitting on adorned couches, will laugh at the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection. He *the Almighty* then tells us clearly that they (the disbelievers) truly deserve this punishment for the acts they used to do in the worldly life. (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36) So, He *the Almighty* will ask the believers on the Day of Resurrection, 'Have We adequately requited the disbelievers and hypocrites who mocked you in the worldly life?' The believer will then reply: 'Yes, O Lord of the Worlds, they have been requited and rewarded for their deeds fairly and equitably.' The hypocrites' and the disbelievers' sarcasm will undoubtedly come to an end within this worldly life, but that sarcasm of the Hereafter will never come to an end.

When we, the believers, think of the matter very carefully, we will realise that we are the prosperous, if Allah so wills. If they hypocrites were allowed to mix with the believers, while the believers knew nothing about them, remedy would be difficult. That is why Allah *the Almighty* tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that if He *the Almighty* willed, He would make him recognise them by their marks and by the tone of their speech. (*Muhammad:* 30)

Allah *the Almighty* did not stop at this point; rather, He *Glorified is He* revealed the reality of the hypocrites in a practical way so that none of them would say: 'I am not a hypocrite.' When Allah reveals and exposes the affairs of the hypocrites with a tangible, practical and ignominious event that clearly shows his hypocrisy, thus he is to be stigmatised as a hypocrite. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* will never leave those hypocrites, who spend their life practising the act of hypocrisy, relying on the fact that they apparently practice the rituals of Islam, without exposing their affairs. He *Glorified is He* will cause their hypocrisy to be exposed for a reason or another. As a consequence, the believers will recognise them and know their essence. That is because He *the Almighty* is the One Who says: 'On no account will Allah leave the believers in the condition which you are in until He separates the evil from the good...'

The word *yazhhar* means 'to leave' or 'to abandon.' Grammarians are fully aware of the fact that the following two verbs *yazhharu* and *yada'u* are never used by the Arabs in the past simple tense, thus they are used to indicate the present tense all the time.

In truth, Allah *the Almighty* would never leave the hypocrites intermingled and intermixed with the believers without revealing their affairs to the believers, and that is why He *the Almighty* separated those who are good from those who are evil.

So, He *Glorified is He* did not suffice with informing Prophet Muhammad about the affairs of those corrupt people; rather, He *the Almighty* exposed them with tangible evidence. Thus, He *the Almighty* says: '... nor is Allah going to make you acquainted with the unseen...' This means that if He *the Almighty* made the believers acquainted with the unseen so that they could recognize the hypocrites, the latter would have concealed their affairs from them. That is why He *the Almighty* wanted to separate the good from the evil based on tangible evidence and situations. As such, the hypocrite will himself admit his hypocrisy.

'... nor is Allah going to make you acquainted with the unseen, but Allah chooses of His apostles whom He pleases....' He *the Almighty* chooses whomever He will from among His Messengers to make him/them acquainted with some of the unseen so that the Messengers' trust in Allah increases due to the fact that He *the Almighty* never leaves them. This means that He *the Almighty* told Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the marks of the hypocrites so that he would be fully assured that He *the Almighty* has never abandoned him.

Allah's Mercy decrees that the unseen will never be revealed to all the believers because this may render corrupt the affairs of so many laws in the universe. So, if we imagine that Allah *the Almighty* informed man about the unseen matters of his life, including one thousand happy events and just one which is tragic, his continuous thinking of this one tragic event, which may occur twenty years later, will corrupt his happiness.

Also, if a person wants to be acquainted with the unseen matters of a particular person, will he be content with allowing others to know about his unseen? So, why do you want to be acquainted with the unseen matters of other people? Will any of us feel content when others know about his unseen? The answer is no. So, the concealment of information from people and involving them in the unseen are viewed as a great blessing.

Despite this, some people are eager to know the unseen. Furthermore, we see some people who hasten to the charlatans and soothsayers, who falsely claim that they are the Patrons of Allah, in order to know some of the unseen. At this point, we say that the true skill of a soothsayer is not to tell you what will happen to you in the future; rather, it is to inform you that an evil will afflict you and that he will protect you from it. In reality, none can fend off Allah's Fate, thus we are supposed to abandon thinking of the future and wait until it really occurs so that we will never live in sadness before the occurrence of that evil. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... nor is Allah going to make you acquainted with the unseen...' refers to one of Allah's Laws through which the affairs of the universe are run perfectly.

Everyone has their ups and downs. Also, a person may go through a time of weakness in some regard. If other people knew someone's point of weakness and vice-versa, everyone would see each other as weak. It is due to the favour of Allah *the Almighty* that He *Glorified is He* concealed the unseen from people; He *the Almighty* grants someone a strength we do not know and so on. Thus, the affairs of life run normally in a way that pleases Allah *the Almighty* '...nor is Allah going to make you acquainted with the unseen, but Allah chooses of His apostles whom He pleases...' This verse means that He *the Almighty* selects whoever He wants from among the Messengers; that is, He selects some of them and not all of them to make them acquainted with the unseen. Consequently, those Messengers will feel assured that Allah *the Almighty* supports them, for He *Glorified is He* did not send them to leave them alone; that is not the point. Rather, they are supported by Him *the Almighty* all the time, and that is why He makes them acquainted of the unseen. We have already explained that the unseen is of several types; that is, the absolute unseen, which is unknown to others. Yet, there is another kind of the unseen, which is unknown to you, whereas others may know about it. As a matter of fact, this is not considered as unseen.

A case in point is when one's wallet is stolen; the thief is unknown, and the place to which the wallet is taken is also unknown by its owner. But the person who steals it surely knows its whereabouts. So, the act is unknown to the person who has been stolen, but meanwhile it is known by the thief; therefore, it is not part of the absolute unseen. This is how charlatans are able to exploit naive people. Some corrupt charlatans may be in contact with the jinn or demons and thus they may tell the person who has been stolen about the stolen item. In reality, those charlatans are not acquainted with the unseen because none knows the absolute unseen except Allah *the Almighty* alone.

Another striking example is the many discoveries made by mankind in the universe. As a matter of fact, these discoveries were secrets before Allah *the Almighty* unveiled them to people to the extent that they may also be made at the hands of the disbelievers themselves. So, did anyone claim that they knew the unseen? The answer is definitely no. That is because there were reasons that led to this unseen. All these people did was exerting their utmost efforts to unveil Allah's Secrets in the universe. In doing so, Allah *the Almighty* guided them to depend fully on the means He made available in the universe. Moreover, it is noteworthy to mention that He *the Almighty* gives people, be they believers or disbelievers, the ability to understand how these laws act in the universe. So, as long as they make use of these divine laws, He *the Almighty* grants them reward (the ability to unveil the secrets of the universe) in return. For more clarification, I will offer the following example to make the topic very clear:

When a teacher gives a geometry problem to one of his students, can we claim that the solution the student will provide for that problem falls under the category of the unseen? The answer is no. That is because the student knows how to provide answers for geometry problems. He makes use of the problem's givens and rules and thus he knows the answer. So, as long as the student arrives at the solution to a problem by applying certain principles, this is not the knowledge of the unseen. For this reason, we must be fully aware of the fact that the absolute unseen is something that is unknown to everyone. As a matter of fact, no one knows this absolute unseen except Allah *the Almighty* Who may, as clearly shown in the Quran, make some of His Messengers acquainted with it.

In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* states that He will not allow any of His Creatures to know the unseen, with the exception of those Messengers whom He *the Almighty* allows to be acquainted with it. (*al-Jinn:* 26-27)

As for the secrets of the universe, some people knew nothing about them until they have been unveiled, we cannot declare ‘the act of unveiling them’ as knowing about the unseen. This point is previously explained in the commentary I made for the Verse of the Throne (*Ayat Al-Kursi*) in which Allah *the Almighty* affirms the following points: He *the Almighty* Alone is the One Who deserves to be worshiped; He, the Ever-living, the Self-Subsisting, is not overtaken by a slumber or sleep; He *the Almighty* owns all what is in the heavens and all what is in the earth; none can intercede with Him but by His permission; He *the Almighty* knows for certain what is before the creatures and what is behind them, while they cannot encompass anything of His Knowledge, except to whom He wills; His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth and He *Glorified is He* feels no tiredness in their preservation; and He is *the Most High*, the Most Great. (*al-Baqara:* 255)

This verse clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* may allow people to attain knowledge by His Permission. As a matter of fact, He *the Almighty* is the One Who allows the creation of secrets, exactly like the creation of people’s different descendants in a particular period of time.

In reality, every secret in the universe will be uncovered at a particular period of time predestined by Allah *the Almighty*. So, if mankind make use of the premises in their pursuit of unveiling a particular secret and the unveiling coincides with its birth, they will be viewed as the ones who unveiled it. But if the (predestined) time of unveiling this particular secret has not come yet, it would not be uncovered. However, in case the time of uncovering the secret already comes and there is no scientist to make use of the premises and reasons in revealing it, Allah *the Almighty* will cause a particular human to unveil it by means of chance. As such, it may be said that this secret has been unveiled by chance.

As a matter of fact, a lot of Allah's Secrets in the universe, which encompass the new discoveries, have been unveiled by chance. This is crystal clear in the fact that eventhough scientists may be planning to make a particular discovery, Allah *the Almighty* may cause them to make a completely different one. It becomes clear now that it is not a must for all discoveries to be the result of certain premises; rather, scientists may plan to make a particular discovery, but Allah *the Almighty* enable them to make a completely different one. That is because the predestined time for the unveiling of these secrets have come and people did not occupy themselves by uncovering them. It is due to Allah's Favour that He *the Almighty* enabled His creatures to uncover these secrets even without premises or expectations.

Continuing His address to the believers, Allah *the Almighty* says, '...therefore believe in Allah and His apostles; and if you believe and guard (against evil), then you shall have a great reward.'

It is at this point that a very important question may be asked: When Allah *the Almighty* addresses a particular people using a particular description, and then He *Glorified is He* asks them to fulfil this description, what does this truly mean? A case in point is that verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! Believe...' (*an-Nisa':* 136).

They are truly believers and Allah *the Almighty* has already called them using this particular description. This means that He *the Almighty* asks them to firmly adhere to the characteristics of belief over the passage of time. This is based on the fact that belief requires certainty in all the matters pertaining to it in a particular period of time. It is taken for granted that time never stops, thus different periods of time follow one another. This means that the present, which was previously future, will change into past. It clearly means that the future turns into present which, in turn, changes into past. Time is a condition that never stops at any point; so it is changeable. Place, on the other hand, is something which is unchangeable. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wants to say, 'You were a true believer (in the past) before this address was delivered to you, and you must also remain a true believer in the life to come.

So, this style indicates that Allah *the Almighty* asks the believers to keep up their belief. He *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying, "...and if you believe and guard (against evil), then you shall have a great reward." Let us imagine how great the Favour of Allah *the Almighty* is; eventhough the believer's obedience benefits him alone, He *the Almighty* rewards him, as well. As such, when Allah *the Almighty* lays down a particular law, He *Glorified is He* does so for the good of people. As well, He is going to reward them for abiding by it. Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that whoever adheres to His Guidance, he will not go astray nor be unhappy; and whoever turns away from His Guidance, his life will be straightened and he will be raised blind on the Day of Resurrection. (*Ta Ha:* 123-124)

In reality, the person who follows the Way of Allah *the Almighty* will get the benefit of his obedience at once. In addition, He *Glorified is He* increases His Favour by rewarding him for this obedience. This is actually a pure Favour conferred by Him *the Almighty*. We have previously explained that prolonging the life of the disbelievers and the hypocrites is not something good for them. Therefore, people must consider events and times in the light of their consequences, impacts, and results.

He *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَبْخَلُونَ بِمَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُم ۖ بَلْ
هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ ۖ سَيُطَوَّقُونَ مَا بَخِلُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَٰثُ
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٨٠﴾

Those who are miserly with what God has granted them out of His grace should not think that it is good for them; on the contrary, it is bad for them. Whatever they meanly withhold will be hung around their necks on the Day of Resurrection. It is God who will inherit the heavens and earth: God is well aware of everything you do [180] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 180)

We said previously that some of the hypocrites and disbelievers thought that prolonging their life spans is something good for them, however, this particular verse tells us about another kind of people who thought that the property they acquire is good for them; that is, the bigger the size of their properties, the more they rejoice. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who are miserly with what Allah has granted them out of His grace should not think...’ This means that they got their property by Allah’s Favour, for they were born owning nothing at all. In addition, none of us has ever seen a burial shroud or a newborn baby’s diaper with pockets. Indeed, man comes to life with nothing at all and leaves it with nothing either. All the provision that comes to man is due to Allah’s Favour. In truth, there is not one man who creates things by which he is provided sustenance. However, one may make use of the existing provision to get another one by developing the means and reasons. As a matter of fact, man has a role to perform in the process of getting his provision. He may farm the land, but he has no ability to create the land himself, and neither does he have the ability to create the seeds nor the power to bring forth water. So, we can conclude that Allah is the Creator of the land to be farmed; the seeds are (exist) due to His Favour and water is from His *the Almighty* Provision. Man’s movement is even seen as a favour from Allah *Glorified is He*.

I swear by Allah that man does not know how many muscles move in his body when he picks his hoe to farm the land; does man know how many muscles move in his body when he picks the hoe up? And does he know how many muscles move when he puts it down?! Even when he breaks up the surface of the earth with his hoe, He tills the land of Allah. When a man wants to have a hoe, he has to go to the blacksmith to make it for him, but does this man ask himself ‘where does this iron come from?’ In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us the answer: ‘He *Glorified is He* sent down iron wherein is great military might and benefits for the people.’(*al-Hadid:* 25)

So, what do you create or produce (O mankind!)? You create nothing from nothing at all; rather, you make use of the movement granted to you by Allah *the Almighty* to change the raw materials into provision. So, everything (in this universe) is due to Allah’s Favour. You (o mankind) is a speculator in this universe of Allah. Who created the mind you use with which to think? It was Allah. And who created your body parts that carry out the orders of the mind? It was Allah. Thus, your body parts, which are created, break the surface of the earth, which is also created, with a tool (the hoe) and then you irrigate it with that water that comes down from the sky; so, what is the role you are due to perform in this regard, O mankind? Indeed, you must know that you have nothing to do with all of this; you are only a speculator in the Land of Allah. Therefore, you (o man) must perform the role of speculation commissioned to you.

In reality, He *the Almighty* requires nothing but a small amount of the crops and produce of the land. If the land is only watered by the rain falling down from the sky, then one-tenth of its produce is due; but in case it is artificially irrigated, then one-twentieth is due. The farmer ploughs the land every day and irrigates it once per two weeks. As for the trader, he is in need of continuous work. That is why the amount of *zakat* due upon him is estimated at 2.5%. Indeed, the more a person works, the less Allah *the Almighty* is the portion of *zakat* due upon him. This process is opposite to the nature of mankind; that is, the more a person works, the more they take from him!

In truth, Allah *the Almighty* wants the universe to be in continuous movement. That is because people get benefit from such movement. It is at this point that a very important question comes into existence, where to does the *zakat* taken from you go? It is given to your fellow Muslim brothers. So, as long as He *the Almighty* gives a portion from the produce of your work to your fellow Muslim brothers, this makes you feel assured and safe that, in case you become unable to earn your living, others will give you. This is an assurance against the vicissitudes with which Allah might afflict you. So, in case you are afflicted with a calamity, others will give a hand to you. Consequently, all the members of society shall help and support one another. This process of supporting one another clearly indicates “social security” in its highest meaning. So, all of this is due to Allah’s Favour.

He *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who are miserly with what Allah has granted them out of His grace should not think that it is good for them; on the contrary, it is bad for them...’ This verse indicates that misers think that miserliness is something good fort them as it enables them to hoard large amounts of money, but this is not true because Allah *the Almighty* tells that ‘Whatever they meanly withhold will be hung around their necks on the Day of Resurrection...'. This means that Allah *the Almighty* will change their money into a collar which will be hung around their necks. The moment the people see the collar hung around the neck of the miser, they will say: 'That person rejected to pay out Allah's Share in his property.'

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* vividly depicts this topic when he informs us that whoever rejects to pay out Allah's Portion in his wealth, the wealth will turn into a white-headed serpent with a sac of venom in each cheek, which will seek him out until it encircles his head. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Anyone whom Allah has given wealth, but he does not pay its *zakat*, then, on the Day of Resurrection, his wealth will be presented to him in the shape of a bald-headed venomous male snake with two poisonous glands in its mouth, and it will encircle itself round his neck and bite him over his cheeks and say, "I am your wealth; I am your treasure."' Messenger Muhammad then recited the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Those who are miserly with what Allah has granted them out of His grace should not think...' Thus, the more the miser accumulates wealth and rejects to pay out *zakat*, the more the collar will tightly encircle his neck on the Day of Resurrection.

'It is Allah who will inherit the heavens and earth: Allah is well aware of everything you do.' It is true that He *the Almighty* will inherit the heavens and the earth and then He *Glorified is He* will put them wherever He wants. All what is in the universe is owned by Him *the Almighty*; thus He *Glorified is He* distributes it as He wills. Our belief entails that we must not delay the giving of charity until the soul reaches the throat. In this regard, Abu Hurayrah Allah *be pleased with him* narrated: 'A man came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said: "O Messenger of Allah, which kind of charity is best?" Messenger Muhammad then said: "Giving charity (in a state when you are) healthy and close-fisted, haunted by the fear of poverty, and still hoping to live (as rich). And you must not defer charity (to the time) when you are about to die, and would then say: "This is for so and so, and this for so and so." That is because when the soul reaches the throat, man owns no wealth"'.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Allah is well aware of everything you do;' it refers to something which makes the heart of man tremble with fear and horror. Man may deceive others; for example, there are some people who evade taxes. In doing so, they may falsely keep two records; one for the exact amounts of money they gain, while the other is for keeping false information about their loss. This man who owns money and evades taxes shall know that Allah *the Almighty* is well aware of everything he does. He *the Almighty* then says:

لَّقَدْ سَمِعَ ٱللَّهُ قَوْلَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ فَقِيرٌ وَنَحْنُ أَغْنِيَآءُ ۘ سَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَالُوا۟
وَقَتْلَهُمُ ٱلْأَنۢبِيَآءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَنَقُولُ ذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابَ ٱلْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٨١﴾

God has certainly heard the words of those who sneer, 'So God is poor, while we are rich'. We shall record everything they say, as well as their killing of prophets in defiance of all that is right, and We shall say to them, 'Taste the torment of the scorching fire [181] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 181)

As for the cause of the revelation of this verse, it is narrated that Sa'id ibn Jubayr narrated that Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with them* narrated that when the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Who is it that will offer of Allah a goodly gift, so He will multiply it to him manifold...' (*al-Baqara:* 245) was revealed down, the Jews said: 'O Muhammad! Your Lord is so needy that He asks His Creature to lend Him?' Thus, He *Glorified is He* revealed down the following verse 'Allah has certainly heard the saying of those who said: Surely Allah is poor and we are rich.'

The Jews experienced Islam in Medina. As we know, they used to brag and be proud of being the people of the Book and knowledge; they also used to be proud of being masters of economy, exactly as they do nowadays. People used to get everything they needed from the Jews. Furthermore, they used to build fortresses, which were well equipped with weapons, to show their power. But when Islam came, it deprived them from all these characteristics of leadership, but at the same time they enjoyed the same rights of Muslims including the protection of their property and life.

So, the question to be asked here is: Would Islam leave them (the Jews) enjoy the same rights of Muslims including safety, assurance, and the protection of their property and souls with nothing in return? That is why Islam obliged them to pay the tribute. As a matter of fact, it was inconceivable that Muslims paid out *zakat*, while the Jews, who were under the protection of Muslims, lived as such without paying for their protection. For this reason, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent Abu Bakr to the place wherein the Jews used to receive knowledge. Ibn 'Abbas narrated that Abu Bakr entered into the place where the Jews used to receive knowledge. He saw them gathering around one of their scholars called Finhaas who was attended by another Jewish scholar called Ashia'. Abu Bakr then said to him: 'Woe to you, Finhaas! Fear Allah and surrender to Him, for I swear to Allah that you know that Muhammad is a true Messenger sent from Him *the Almighty* and he has been sent with the truth. As well, you found his characteristics in the Torah and the Gospels,' whereupon Finhaas replied, 'O Abu Bakr! By Allah, we are in no need for Allah, but He is in need for us. We (the Jews) do not beg to Him, but He begs to us. We need Him no more. If He was rich, He would not ask us for loans as your so-called Messenger claims. He prevents you from taking interest and meanwhile gives it to us! If He was rich, He would not give us such interest.' Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* became very angry and hit Finhaas severely on his face and said: 'By the One in Whose Hand my life is, I would cut off your head but for the covenant we made with you. So, prove us liars if you are truly faithful, O enemy of Allah!'

Then, Finhaas went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said: 'O Muhammad! See how your companion hurt me.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then asked Abu Bakr, 'Why did you hurt him as such?' Abu Bakr replied, 'O Messenger of Allah! The enemy of Allah has said something very grievous about Allah *the Almighty*; he claimed that Allah is poor and that they are in no need of Him. So, when he said that, I hit his face.' But Finhaas denied the accusation of Abu Bakr and said: 'I said no such thing." Then, Allah *the Almighty* revealed down His Saying, 'Allah has certainly heard the saying of those who said: Surely Allah is poor and we are rich...' As a matter of fact, those Jews did not understand the great secret behind the divine order on offering up to Allah a goodly loan; an order shown clearly in (*al-Hadid:* 11).

In truth, this statement indicates that Allah *the Almighty* honours man's right of possession. But why does Allah *the Almighty* honour this particular right of man? That is because He *the Almighty* wants to spur the man who already works to exert more and more efforts in his work. Also, He *Glorified is He* wants to spur the person who does not work to start working. So, when He *the Almighty* asks man to pay out a portion of this money, He *Glorified is He* does not say to man: ‘Pay out (this portion from) what I gave you’; rather, He *the Almighty* says: ‘I really honour your toil, work, intellectual endeavour, body parts and energy, as well as all what you do. So, in case I ask you to pay out of a portion of the wealth I granted you, I will not say to you: ‘Pay out (this portion from) what I gave you;’ rather, I will say: ‘Lend it to me.’ In fact, when you do so, you do it for the benefit of your fellow man and not for My benefit. Similarly, I may ask the rich to lend Me for your sake in case you are afflicted with a calamity. But why do I do so? Because I am Allah *the Almighty* Who created all the worlds. Thus, I am in charge of providing them with sustenance.

When one invites two of his friends for food, he cooks food which suffices five or ten persons. Therefore, since it is Allah *the Almighty* Who created all the creatures, He *the Almighty* is responsible for providing them all with sustenance. This provision indicates that they must exert efforts to obtain it.

So, when creatures do so, He *the Almighty* guarantees that all of them will be provided with sustenance that makes him content, or at least providing them with the most essential requirements.

But due to the interference of humans in nationalizing the fruit of work represented in money, man got used not not exert more effort as usual. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* is fully aware of the fact that man is very keen on achieving his own interest, thus He *Glorified is He* spurs him to work more and more so that the entire society would get benefit from his work, intentionally or unintentionally. So, when Allah *the Almighty* borrows from some of His Creatures for the sake of others, He *Glorified is He* does not take back His provision. Rather, He *the Almighty* affirms that whoever offers Allah a beautiful gift, He *the Almighty* will multiply it to him manifold. (*al-Hadid:* 11)

I will offer the following example for clarification because we, human beings, may experience such a situation one day: Daily a father gives his children an amount of money to spend, and all the children used to save the change. One day, one of the children may undergo a particular condition which requires much more money which the father is unable to provide. So, the father says to his children: 'Lend me the money you collected and I will give it back to you manifold.' The man already took the money for their brother, but as long as it is the one who granted it, he did not take it back; rather, he asked them to lend him. When it is the beginning of the next month, he will give back the loan manifold. So, if such actions take place among human beings themselves, what about the Favour Allah *the Almighty* conferred upon His slaves?

He *the Almighty* asks people to offer Him beautiful gifts for the sake of their fellow humans, but the Jews did not understand it this way; rather, they stupidly interpreted the meaning of the verse in a materialistic way, thus said: 'Allah is poor and we are rich.' For this reason, He *the Almighty* revealed down, 'Allah has certainly heard the saying of those who said: Surely Allah is poor and we are rich. I will record what they say...'

But why does Allah *the Almighty* write down this eventhough He *the Almighty* is fully aware of all matters? This statement refers to the process of documentation; that is, when that person is going to read his record on the Day of Resurrection, he will find all his actions and sayings written down. So, writing down people's deeds is a matter of documentation so that they would not deny the acts they committed and the sayings they uttered.

In truth, eventhough Allah *the Almighty* is fully aware of the sins committed by the slave, the latter may, upon being inflicted with the Punishment of Allah, say: 'O Lord! You are the One Who (has the right to) punish and thus You can say whatever You like'. If, however, their deeds are written down, and they will read them themselves, this is considered a process of documentation that cannot be denied. In reality, this Jew (i.e. Finhaas) did not understand that by offering this loan to Allah *the Almighty* He *Glorified is He* wants to encourage humans to show mercy towards each other.

O Man! Allah *the Almighty* honours the efforts you exerted in possessing wealth. So, when you earn money, then it is yours. In this regard, it is important to know that He *the Almighty* did not say to you: 'Give your fellow brother'; rather, He *the Almighty* out of His Mercy and Kindness to His creatures, says: 'Lend Me', so the lender will feel assurance that his/her money will be repaid manifold by the One Who owns the treasures of the heavens and the earth. But the children of Israel were impolite with Allah *the Almighty* to the extent that He *the Almighty* cursed them for their saying 'the Hand of Allah is chained'; and stated clearly that His Hands are spread out and He spends as He wishes. (*al-Ma'ida:* 64)

The reason behind their accusation towards Allah *the Almighty* is that they experienced a year of drought and starvation as a result of their disobedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him**. At this point, Ibn 'Abbas is quoted: 'Allah *the Almighty* abundantly provided the Jews with wealth to the extent that they became the richest of the world. But when they disobeyed Him *the Almighty* and disbelieved in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, He *Glorified is He* made them lose all of their property, during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is why Finhaas ibn 'Aazuraa' and others said: "The Hand of Allah is chained...," and then Allah *the Almighty* revealed down this verse. They (i.e the Jews) said: "The Sky has been miserly to us (i.e. it does not rain at all or even it rains small quantities of water, and Allah's Hand is chained and, thus, we are not provided." As such, Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad that He, Himself, was not safe from their mocking. Thus, in case they (i.e. the Jews), Allah says, were rude to you (O Muhammad) and to your Companions, they had already been rude to Me, eventhough I am the One Who created them and provided them with sustenance; they said: "Surely Allah is poor and we are rich." They also said: "Allah's Hand is chained."' So, (as long as I informed you (O Muhammad) of their bad behaviour even with Me), you should not feel sad or sorrowful for their bad behaviour with you and with your Companions!

This solace offered by Allah *the Almighty* to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is good. He *Glorified is He* then adds, '... I will record what they say...', but the question to be asked here is 'Why would Allah record their words, eventhough He *the Almighty* is fully aware of everything and never forgets?'

In the Quran, He *the Almighty* stresses the fact that He never errs nor forgets. (*Ta Ha:* 52) As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* will record all of their deeds and actions so that they will not say on the Day of Resurrection that Allah held us accountable for things we did not commit (in the worldly life). So, their records will produce evidence against them. This indicates that the act of recording may include the process of recording voices and breaths, as well. Then, when it is the Day of Resurrection, everyman shall receive his/her own record in which all his/her actions and sayings are recorded. On the Day of Resurrection, all people will be asked to read their records, themselves, and to confess everything they did and said in this worldly life. (*al-Isra':* 14)

This aforementioned verse of the Quran indicates, obviously, that when *man reads what has been written down in his/her record, s/he will fully realise that these are the actions and sayings that had been committed and uttered by him/her (in the worldly life). Nowadays, we may record what our enemies say and do, so why do not we firmly believe that Allah *the Almighty* Who taught us to do that, is able to record all our breaths, voices and movements in such a way which forces them not to deny?!* Allah says: '... I will record what they say...,' and they said: 'Surely Allah is poor and we are rich.' In reality, this is viewed as one of the most sinful major sins and bad behaviour against Him *the Almighty*. But the Jews did not stop at this point, they, in addition, killed the Messengers whom Allah sent to guide them. That is why He *the Almighty* says: '... I will record what they say and their killing the prophets unjustly...'.

When Allah *the Almighty* *told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, this is considered a kind of solace to him from Allah *the Almighty*. 'O Muhammad! They fabricated lies against your Lord and killed the Prophets before you, so if they abused you, do not grieve deeply because I will hold them accountable for the actions and sayings written down on* their records and for which they testified. I will say to them: "Taste the chastisement of burning."' In truth, burning people with fire, causes their souls to suffer severely.

One's sensation differs according to his/her different senses; sometimes it is done by the eye, while other times it is done by the ear. It may also be done with smelling, or* touching or tasting. Taste is the leader of all senses, for no one loses it at all. Even the blind, the deaf, the paralyzed and those who suffer from colds and, thus, are unable to smell, do not lose this* particular sense of taste. As such, taste is a sense* which comes from man's essence and, thus, the punishment will be extremely severe. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* gives an example of a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which, thereupon, blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's Blessings: consequently, He caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear as a result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently committed. (*an-Nahl:* 112)

If we contemplate this Quranic expression 'Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear,' we will find that Allah *the Almighty* used the word, '*adhaqaha*/ Allah caused it to taste,' to refer to something which is not tasted, that is, *libas* (clothing). So, the question to be asked here is, 'Can clothing be tasted?' The answer is definitely, no. But He *the Almighty* wants to direct the attention of mankind to the fact that all the different senses of mankind, including that sense originating in his/her essence, perform their due functions properly. This, undoubtedly, includes man's different parts*.

According to the Quran, tasting completely encompasses man. He *the Almighty* tells us that He caused that particular town to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear. As such, this verse tells how severe and painful the punishment is inflicted upon all the body part, to the extent that man felt it in every part of his/her body. The word, '*hareeq*/burning,' in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Taste the chastisement of burning,' refers to the blazing fire that burns. He *the Almighty* then says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمَتۡ أَيۡدِيكُمۡ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَيۡسَ بِظَلَّامٖ لِّلۡعَبِيدِ ﴿١٨٢﴾

That is on account of what you stored up for yourselves with your own hands: God is never unjust to His servants' [182]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 182)

The demonstrative adjective, '*dhalik*/this,' in this context refers to the chastisement of burning. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* did not wrong them, but they were the ones who wronged themselves. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'This is for what your own hands have sent before'; so does this truly mean that all the sins and acts of disobedience are committed only by one's hands? As a matter of fact, there are different sins; there is a sin which may be committed by the eye; there is another sin which may be committed by the tongue, and so on. We can say that there is no definite number for the sins and the acts of disobedience. So, the question to be asked here is, "Why did Allah *the Almighty* limit the commitment of sins in this particular verse to hands? The answer is that most of our actions are usually committed by our hands. As such, Allah *the Almighty** says, 'This is for what your own hands have sent before', means that (You will be punished) for all the sins committed by all your body parts.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '... and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants'. This verse indicates that Allah *the Almighty* will have them taste the chastisement of burning as a result of their sayings and actions. They fabricated lies against Him *the Almighty* when they said: 'Surely, Allah is poor and we are rich'. As well, they killed the Messengers sent by Him *Glorified is He* and, thus, they deserve this punishment. In reality, it goes without saying that Allah *the Almighty* is not ever unjust to His servants. At this point, the orientalists- enemies of Islam- claim that the word "zhallam" in this verse indicates an exaggerative form of the word "zhalim/the one who wrongs others." The word "zhallam," itself gives the meaning of frequently committing injustice and wrong.

As a matter of fact, whoever wants to refute this misconception must be fully aware of, *siyagh Al-mubalaghah* (exaggeration forms). Linguistics believe that the following patterns of nouns derived from verbs give the meaning of exaggeration, that is, *fa'aal, fa'il, mef'aal, fa'el and fa'ul.* It becomes immediately clear now that the word, 'zhallam', takes the same pattern and form of, '*akkal*/ the person who eats a lot'. It also comes in accordance with the pattern of the form '*qattal*/ the person who frequently commits the crime of killing'. At this point, we must differentiate between the two forms, '*qatil*/ the person who commits the crime of killing just one time', and, '*qattal*/ the person who commits the crime of killing more frequently, to the extent that he takes it up as an occupation'. Similar to the aforementioned pattern are* the following two forms of, '*nahib*" and '*nahhab*;' the first refers to that person who commits robbery just one time, while the latter refers to that person who commits this crime of robbery frequently. These forms and patterns are known as the exaggeration forms. In truth, in case these forms are used in the affirmative, they indicate the bare minimum. For example, when one says: ‘Someone is “zhallam”, this obviously indicates that he is a “zhalim/a wrongdoer,”’ as well. That is because we have proved exaggeration in the form and, thus, its least is proved too. We offer the following example, as well. When we say, ‘This person is ‘*allamah,*’ this means that he is well-versed in a particular field of knowledge. If, however, we say that this person is an* *'alim*’, this means that he is a* scholar, but not necessarily well-versed. As such, these forms indicate increase in the active participle forms because the action in these forms is strong or frequently repeated. So, if the increase form is proved, it is then necessary to prove the other* form. For example, when one says, ‘This person is *akkal*’, this includes the increase form of the verb, ‘eat’, and its bare minimum form, as well. But this is not the case in negation. In truth, if we negate the increase form, this does not mean that the bare minimum of this from is also negated.*

If we apply these rules to the verse in question, that is, ‘... and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants’, Orientalists believe that negation of this particular from in this verse is applicable only to ‘the exaggeration in injustice’ and that it (i.e. negation) does not apply to the bare minimum of the form. However, they (i.e. Orientalists) did not understand the reason behind the existence of exaggeration in this verse. In reality, Allah *the Almighty* says that He *Glorified is He* is never unjust to His Servants; He *the Almighty* does not say that He is never unjust to the servant, so what does this mean? This means that He *the Almighty* wrongs none of His servants from the very beginning of the time of Adam to the end of time because if He *the Almighty* wronged all of these people, Allah forbid, He would be described as, ‘zhallam’, even if He did not wrong them significantly. This is based on the fact that if this had been the case, the act of committing injustice against the servants would have been repeated frequently. So, let those who are obtuse understand that Allah *the Almighty* says here *that He *Glorified is He* is never unjust to His Servants. He *the Almighty* does not say that He is never unjust to the servant.

If the one who commits an offense *must be stronger than the one who is wronged, then every act of wrongdoing is facilitated by the power of the wrong doer. Thus, if Allah *the Almighty* allowed Himself to wrong, He *Glorified is He* would not be just committing a mere act of injustice; rather, He would be a ‘dhallam’, due to His Unchallengeable Power.

So, if the case is as exactly aforementioned, there will be no difference between the act and its repetition. So, the Orientalists' attempts to declare they discovered a mistake in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants', clearly indicate that they are unable to understand the Arabic language properly, or even deceive those people who know nothing about Arabic. But Allah *the Almighty* enables some of His faithful servants to show the miraculous nature of this Noble Book.

Having finished His speech on the battle of Uhud, He *the Almighty* wanted to shed light on the characteristics of the *means by which the enemies of Islam are known. He *the Almighty* tells Muslims that the list of their enemies includes the people of the Book, the polytheists of Quraysh in Mecca*, and those polytheists who lived around * Medina, who used to raid it.

After talking about this battle of Uhud, which purified, educated, tested, tried, and taught people religious lessons, He *Glorified is He* wanted to highlight these characteristics, and He, in the Quran, ordered Muslims to *be aware of those people who fabricated lies against your Lord, who abused Prophet Muhammad and who killed the Prophets and Messengers before.

He *the Almighty* then says:

ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَهِدَ إِلَيۡنَآ أَلَّا نُؤۡمِنَ لِرَسُولٍ حَتَّىٰ
يَأۡتِيَنَا بِقُرۡبَانٖ تَأۡكُلُهُ ٱلنَّارُۗ قُلۡ قَدۡ جَآءَكُمۡ رُسُلٞ مِّن قَبۡلِى
بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ وَبِٱلَّذِى قُلۡتُمۡ فَلِمَ قَتَلۡتُمُوهُمۡ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ١٨٣

To those who say, 'God has commanded us not to believe in
any messenger unless he brings us an offering that fire [from
heaven] consumes,' say [Prophet], 'Messengers before me
have come to you with clear signs, including the one you
mention. If you are sincere, why did you kill them?' [183]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 183)

They (i.e. the Jews) falsely claim: 'Our Lord ordered us, in the Torah, not to believe in any messenger until he shows you a tangible miracle, that is, he should bring us an offering that fire [from heaven] consumes'. This was true.

We all know about the story of Cain and Abel mentioned in the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* tells us these two sons of Adam offered an offering to Allah *the Almighty,* but He *Glorified is He* accepted it from one of them and rejected it from the other. So, the son whose offering was rejected decided to kill his brother, whereupon the latter told him that Allah *the Almighty* accepts only the offerings of the pious. (*al-Ma'ida:* 27-28)

As a matter of fact, we are in* dire need of reflection regarding the meanings of the verses of the Quran; why did Allah *the Almighty* accept the offering of one of them and rejected the other? In truth, acceptance is something unique* to Allah *the Almighty* Alone, so how can we know why He *the Almighty* accepted this offering or not? He *the Almighty* must have made a particular sign to indicate His acceptance.

We know that someone may perform an act of worship that Allah accepts, while another person may perform an act of worship which Allah does not accept- we seek Refugee in Allah-; so, how can we know for certain that He *the Almighty* accepted the deeds and offering of a particular person, while rejecting those from the other? Just as acceptance is one of the secrets of Allah, we are unable to recognize its sign, unless there is tangible evidence. This is proved by this particular verse in which Allah *the Almighty* tells us that He accepted the offering presented by one of the two brothers, while rejecting the other. The one whose offering was not accepted by Allah said (to his brother): 'I will surely kill you'. This part of the verse indicates clearly that the person whose offering was accepted was fully aware of this fact, and so was the brother whose offering was not accepted. As such, a tangible sign must have taken place.

We explained previously that Allah *the Almighty* used to address His servants according to the capacity of their intellect*, corporeally and incorporeally. This is* the reason we find that the miracles He gave to the previous Prophets and Messengers were tangible. For example, Abraham's miracle was a fire which did not burn, while that of Moses was a stick that turned into a serpent. As for Jesus *peace be upon him*, he healed the blind and the leprous, and brought forth the dead, by the permission of Allah. Physical miracles are distinguished by the fact that they convince the senses, but their effects end the moment they are over. As for those miracles that address human* intellect, they are the everlasting ones. As such, the tangible miracles can in no way be everlasting.

So, this necessitates that the eternal miracle given to the seal of all the Prophets and Messengers (i.e. Prophet Muhammad), should* last until the Day of Resurrection, and must not be a physical miracle*. This* is because tangible miracles are confined only to those who see them, while others, who do not see them, will not believe in them, unless they have great trust in the one who saw them. Now, both of the two sons of Adam offered an offering.

The word, '*qurban*', takes the same morphological pattern as, '*ghufran*', and *''udwan'*. *Al-qurban* is something by which the servant gets closer to Allah *the Almighty*. *Acceptance of this good deed is a secret known only to Allah. So, the question to be asked here is: 'How did these people know that Allah accepted the offering of Cain and rejected that of Abel?" The sign, as such, must be a tangible one. The two sons of Adam must have differed, but the Quran did not tell us about the reason behind their discord. It only tells us that one of them is closer to Allah, but how?* The Quran did not detail the matter for us. I believe if it was an important matter, He *the Almighty* would have told us. So, let us not conclude that they differed over marriage or something like this. That is because the Quran only tells us that there was a dispute between them and that they agreed to make Allah their arbitrator. It is taken for granted that no one can nullify Allah's Judgment. Both of the two brothers had their own claim against the other and, thus, there was no way, but to arbitrate.

In modern times, if we disagree about something, we draw lots, so no one yields to another's whim; rather, they both yield to what is predestined for them and, thus, each of them write on a card and ask a third person to pick one of the two cards. As for Cain and Abel, the Noble Quran tells us that they both made an offering to Allah *the Almighty* and that He accepted the offering of one of them and rejected the other. So, each of the two brothers had his own claim and neither* was able to convince the other. Accordingly, Cain, after having his offering rejected by Allah, told Abel that he would surely kill him, but how did Abel reply to him? He told him that Allah *the Almighty* only accept the deeds of those who are pious. So, the one whose offering was accepted by Allah would be the one killed, while the* one who was full of anger and whose offering was rejected by Allah would be the killer. But what did the one whose offering was accepted say?

He said to his brother that if you stretch forth your hand towards me to kill me, I will not do the same as you, for surely I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds. (*al-Ma'ida:* 28) So, the brother whose offering was accepted by Allah met those requirements that made his offering accepted. As a matter of fact, he was fully aware of the Divine Laws. We also should not believe that the other brother "Cain" was completely full of evil, for he was only under the control of his lust.

In truth, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that he was, to some extent, a good person. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the soul (inner-self) of Cain permitted him to kill his brother and, thus, he became one of the losers. (*al-Ma'ida:* 30) This indicates that he hesitated before he committed his crime. In this regard, it is important to know that Arabs do not say: '*taww 'at* al-maa*'; rather, they say: *'*taww'at al-hadid'* (*made the iron fillable/pliable). This clearly indicates that the belief that originated in the killer's soul tried to prevent him from killing his brother, but he finally responded to the temptation of the soul and killed him. When Cain killed his brother, and his anger and will for revenge abated, he saw his brother cast down in the open. It is at this point Allah *the Almighty* sent a crow that began scratching *the dirt, to show him how he should cover the corpse of his brother. Subsequently, Cain felt deep regret for the crime he committed. (*al-Ma'ida:* 31)

The Jews said, accordingly: 'Allah ordered us not to believe in any Messenger, unless he brings a tangible miracle'. But why did they say this? As a matter of fact, they said this because they knew, for certain, that the greatest miracle of Prophet Muhammad (i.e. the Noble Quran) had nothing to do with the tangible aspect. In reality, Prophet Muhammad had brought many tangible miracles. Due to the fact that the impact of tangible miracles ends the moment they are over, the Noble Quran is, thus, the eternal miracle which befits the last Message. As such, they (i.e. the Jews) asked for tangible miracles to occur, so they could give excuses for their disbelief. Consequently they said:

'To those who say, ''Allah has commanded us not to believe in any messenger unless he brings us an offering that fire [from heaven] consumes...''.

It is in this particular verse of *Al-'Imran* that Allah *the Almighty* tells us how the offering of Abel was accepted. We [then*] knew that it was consumed (burnt) by fire. This matter clearly proves that the Quran does not contain repetitions. Then, He *Glorified is He* refutes their allegation by means of persuasive evidence. He *the Almighty* says: 'Say [Prophet], "Messengers before me have come to you with clear signs, including the one you mention. If you are sincere, why did you kill them?"

This means that He *the Almighty* had, prior to the mission of Prophet Muhammad, sent Messengers with their own offerings, yet you killed them and disbelieved in them. If your allegation had been true, O, Jews, you would have believed in the Messengers who brought you offerings that were consumed by fire. Allah *the Almighty* accordingly, shows us that they lied to themselves and to Messenger Muhammad confirming that all their allegations are nothing but a matter of petulance and stubbornness, and persistence in dissension and hostility. That is why He *the Almighty* asks Prophet Muhammad to ask them: 'If you are sincere, why did you kill them?'

He *the Almighty* wants to tell us, by offering this example, that the era of tangible miracles is over, and that the period of humans' intellectual maturity and perfection has begun. That is why He *the Almighty* chose a miracle that addresses the intellect so that it would last to the end of time. If the sign were a material one, it would have been restricted to the time in which it took place. As well, it would have no impact on those generations who came afterwards. As for such a miracle that addresses the intellect, it is possible for any believer in our time to say: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and this is his miracle'. If the miracle was a tangible one in the form of an offering consumed by fire, what impact would be left, then, on those who would come after in next eras?

As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that He *Glorified is He* is the One Who makes signs according to His Will, and not as humans wish. In addition, He *the Almighty* tells us that His signs are accompanied by evidence to prove their veracity. Thus, humans have no right to suggest their making of a particular miracle. That is because He *the Almighty* brings the miracle, wherein the evidence exists. But why does he do so? It is because some people said to Messenger Muhammad: ‘We will not believe in you, until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us, or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us), or you should have a house of gold, or you should ascend into heaven and in spite of all of this, we will not believe in your ascending until you bring down to us a book which we may read’. (*al-Isra’:* 90-93)

What the disbelievers say to Messenger Muhammad clearly indicates that all the miracles and signs they asked for were material ones. He *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad that the only reason He *the Almighty* did not* bring these miracles is that their forefathers denied them. In the Quran, He *Glorified is He* confirms this fact. He clearly states that the only reason that He *the Almighty* did not* bring these miracles is that their forefathers denied them. (*al-Isra’:* 59)

Even those Jews who said: ‘We will not believe until you bring us an offering that is consumed by fire’’, had Messengers with the same required miracles sent to them before Prophet Muhammad, yet they did not believe in them. It becomes immediately clear now that it was a matter of petulance and stubbornness, and persistence in dissension and hostility. Allah *the Almighty* then consoles Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by offering him examples of what had happened with the Messengers before him. It is as when *the Almighty* calls on saying: ‘If they disbelieve in you, do not grieve (O Muhammad) for they had previously denied and rejected the Messengers who were sent to them himbefore you.’ He *the Almighty* says:

فَإِن كَذَّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ جَآءُو بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَٱلزُّبُرِ وَٱلْكِتَٰبِ ٱلْمُنِيرِ ﴿١٨٤﴾

If they reject you, so have other messengers been rejected
before you, even though they came with clear evidence,
books of wisdom and enlightening scripture [184]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 184)

Allah *the Almighty* shows us how He raised Prophet Muhammad to the highest rank, a rank that no human being can attain. He *Glorified is He* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* that He knows for certain that he is saddened with what the disbelievers say. He *Glorified is He* then tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* that the disbelievers know for sure that he is not a* liar. (*al-An'am:* 33)

In truth, it is not your problem, Muhammad, for they know perfectly well that you are truthful and never tell lies. The entire problem may be summarised in the following sentence, that is, '... but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject'. This means that you are not the reason behind them denying My signs because the disbelievers do not say that you are a liar, rather, they call Me, Myself, a liar. As such, He *the Almighty* addresses His Prophet Muhammad to console him and to tell him of the stories of the Messengers before him so that he would not feel sad about the actions and sayings of the Jews. He *Glorified is He* says: 'If they reject you, so have other messengers been rejected before you, eventhough they came with clear evidence, books of wisdom and enlightening scripture.' (*Al-'Imran:* 184)

It is taken for granted that a condition is the cause for the existence of result. So, what is the case if the result occurred before the condition? He *the Almighty* says: If they reject your Message, they had already rejected and denied the Messages of the Messengers and Prophets who were sent before you. In other words, the result of the conditional clause happened before the condition itself. If any of those people, who superficially understand Islam, including the orientalists who do not understand the styles of the Arabic language properly, read this particular style in this verse, they may say: 'The result in this conditional clause has occurred before the condition itself.' We respond to these people by* asking the following questions, 'Is the saying of Allah *the Almighty* "... so have other messengers been rejected before you..." the resultant clause or is it an indication of it'? As a matter of fact, He *the Almighty* sent down this verse to say to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'If those people reject and deny your Message, do not grieve, for Messengers before you had been denied and rejected by their people', indicating* that this statement is the reason for the resultant clause. As such, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If they reject and deny your Message, do not grieve.' The statement in this context is not the true resultant clause; rather, it is only the reason leading to the resultant clause '... If they reject you, so have other messengers been rejected before you..."'etc.

When we say: 'Someone brought me such and such', this indicates that this particular person might be the one who brought the item himself; it might also indicate that he only accompanied the person who brought the item. For more clarification, let us imagine that there is an employee who was sent by his employer to deliver an envelope to another person. In this case, the employee will be viewed as accompanying the envelope. As such, it can be concluded that clear and conclusive evidence was sent down by Allah *the Almighty* to prove the veracity and authenticity of the Messengers accompanying them and, thus, He *Glorified is He* says: 'If they reject you, so have other messengers been rejected before you, eventhough they came with clear evidence...' This means that those Messengers were supported with such clear evidence that proved the veracity of their Messages. As a matter of fact, Allah's signs (in the universe) may pertain to natural phenomena or miracles.

We know perfectly well that all the miracles of the Messengers sent before Prophet Muhammad had nothing to do with their heavenly-revealed Book. The Scriptures of Abraham *peace be upon him*, for example, contain his Message, but they are not his miracle, for we know that his miracle is the fire that did not burn him. Similar is the case with Moses whose Book, the Torah, contains his Message, but it is not his miracle. In truth, the miracle of Moses is the stick that turned into a serpent, as well as, the sea that was divided into two parts. Similarly, Jesus *peace be upon him*, had the Gospel which contained his divine Message, yet his miracle was that he healed the lame and leprous, and raised the dead. As such, it becomes clear that all the miracles of the Messengers before Prophet Muhammad had nothing to do with their Books, with the exception of him *peace and blessings be upon him* whose Book represents also his miracle, but why?* It is because he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with the most important and complete Message, that is, the Noble Quran. As well, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the seal Prophet and, therefore, the miracle must go hand in hand with the Message so that it establishes the evidence. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... they came with clear evidence...,' indicates that they brought miracles that prove their truthfulness.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...books of wisdom and enlightening scripture', it refers to those Books that contain the Message. So, all the Messengers (before Prophet Muhammad) were in need of two important things, that are*, a Message and a miracle.

The word '*Al-Bayyinnat'* refers to the clear evidence established by Allah *the Almighty* *and not by any of human. Then, He *Glorified is He* refers to the Message by saying, '... books of wisdom and enlightening scripture'. The word '*Al-zubur'*, means the (heavenly revealed) Book. Arabs say: 'This thing *qad zubir* (i.e. has been written down)'. This actually refers to a process of documentation, that being, as long as it is written down, it could not be erased. So, the word '*Al-zabru'*, means 'writing' or 'admonition' because it prevents the person from committing any sins or mistakes, and from falling prey to misguidance. It also gives the meaning of 'the intellect' because it protects man* from falling into ruin.

As for those who want to rely on intellect to have unrestrained liberty and licentiousness, we say to them: 'You should understand the meaning of the word, "*aql*/intellect", properly.' This particular word gives the meaning of restriction, for it prevents the person from doing any act, without taking its consequences into consideration." The word, "*aql*," is derived from the verb "*aqal*" which means "to tie". We must take into consideration all of these meanings. So, it means to prevent people from doing those actions for which s/he may be blamed. As for the word "*Al-zubur*", it can also mean, "walling up the well". For example, when we dig a well for water, we do not leave it as a hole; to the contrary, we build a rim of stone around it. In addition, we line the inside with stones so that it does not fill with soil. As a matter of fact, all the meanings given by the word "*Al-zubur*" have to do with each other, as follows: (When it is given the meaning of) "*Al-maktubaat*/the written items", it is qualified to be described as being "enlightening" because this description means that it shows the reader the consequences of the path s/he is in so that s/he would not deviate from*.

As such, Allah *the Almighty* consoles His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and says to him: 'Do not grieve if they deny and reject your Message, for they had already denied and rejected the Messages of the

Messengers sent before you with both the Message and the miracle'. Having immunised Messenger Muhammad and the believers against the fabricated lies of the Jews, Allah *Glorified is He* then moves on to shed light on a very important topic. But it is important here to point out that making belief steadfast in the hearts of the believers, Allah *the Almighty* informs us of the challenges we may face so that we are not surprised by what they say and do.

By the way, we do the same thing in this worldly life. If we fear a disease like cholera, for example, what do we do? We take the microbe itself, weaken it in a particular way, and then inject it in the body of a healthy person so that it causes his immunity to resist the disease.

Allah *the Almighty* then highlights a very important topic pertaining to belief and which all believers must think about all the time. If they disbelieve in you, their disbelief will not last forever, for they will come to an end by death. So, their conflict with you is limited to a certain time, and they will be held accountable before Allah *the Almighty*. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَآئِقَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِۗ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّوْنَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِۖ فَمَن زُحْزِحَ عَنِ
ٱلنَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَۗ وَمَا ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَآ إِلَّا مَتَٰعُ ٱلْغُرُورِ ١٨٥

Every soul will taste death and you will be paid in full only
on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is kept away from
the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed.
The present world is only an illusory pleasure [185]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 185)

We notice that the word, 'taste', has come in this context too. As well, we know that there is a difference between 'the act of killing' and 'the death', as follows: the meaning of 'death' is more comprehensive, for it means the end of life, irrespective of the fact of whether it was because of being killed, or otherwise. So, those well-versed scholars who pay great attention to 'the meanings of' words say: "If this slain person had not been killed, would he have died?!" We say: 'Yes, because his predestined time for death has come'. But was the killer knowledgeable of the time of death? The answer is 'No'. Therefore, he is punished for committing the crime of separating the soul from the body. As for the slain person, Allah destined that they would part with life in this way.

So, every soul will taste death, either naturally or by killing. In spite of the fact that most of those who are killed are considered living martyrs [this statement is false], all mankind will die. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that.

When the trumpet is blown, all those who are in the heavens and all those who are on earth will lose consciousness, except those who Allah pleases. (*az-Zumar:* 68)

If we reflect carefully on the accuracy of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... and you will be paid in full only on the Day of Resurrection...', we will realize that Allah *the Almighty* is warning the believers against waiting for the reward for their good deeds in this worldly life because this life will come to an end and consequently, you must be rewarded for your deeds in the Hereafter so that you will gain endless reward.

We know what happened during the Second Oath of Allegiance given to Prophet Muhammad in, Al-'Aqba, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* took the oath of allegiance from the Supporters. They said: 'How will we be rewarded for this (O Messenger Muhammad) if we keep our promise?' Messenger Muhammad did not say to them that they would defeat so and so, or you will own this and that, in this worldly life. Rather, he said: "Paradise". Whereupon they replied: 'O Messenger Muhammad! Extend your hand so that we can give you our pledge'. As a matter of fact, if he *peace and blessings be upon him* promised them any of the worldly life's adornments, those who are intelligent among them might have said: 'How lowly is this'! That is why when someone said to his friend: 'I love you exactly as I love this worldly life', his friend replied: 'Am I as worthless to you, as this?' As such, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell the believers not to think that they are going to be rewarded for their deeds in this worldly life, because if they were to get it, as such in this present life, it would not be great and infinite. That is because reward comes from Allah *the Almighty* Who is infinite and, thus, it must be infinite, as well. Concerning the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... and you will be paid in full only on the Day of Resurrection...', some well-versed scholars, relying on the word, '*tuwaffawn*/you will be paid in full', understand that people will be rewarded or punished for all they did and said in this present life, before the Day of Resurrection. That is because the meaning of the expression, '*Waffaituhu Ajrahu*/I paid him in full' implies that you gave him part of the reward and adjourned another part. That is true, because He *the Almighty* gave them those items necessary for their belief. This tremendous impact of belief on the faces of the believers is the best example of this. As such, the answer here must be consistent with the reason, for whoever listens to the verse because a person may die in battle shortly after hearing this particular verse and, thus, he took no spoil, nor did he obtain victory so what will be his reward? He will receive his reward in full on the Day of Resurrection. So, whoever obtains part of the reward in this life, like achieving victory over the disbeliever, what is comparable will be paid in full in the Hereafter, as clearly indicated from the word, '*tawfiyah*' which means that the reward will be paid in full on the Day of Resurrection.

He *Glorified is He* then says: '... Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed...' Abu Hurayrah Allah *be pleased with him* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'A place in paradise equal to the size of a whip is better than the whole world and whatever is in it". Recite if you wish: "... Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed...".

When you say: 'I kept someone away from this and that', it means that this person was in fear, so how could this happen in the fire? It goes without saying that disobedience is the main reason behind throwing people into the Fire. The sinful are attracted to committing acts of disobedience. When belief tries to pull them, they are fully attracted by disobedience and, thus, they will be punished in the fire. As such, the fire will have its own lure, for it will be in a state of terrible anger. Allah *the Almighty* informs us of that matter in the Quran when He stated clearly that the fire will burst with rage. (*al-Mulk:* 8)

The fire will burst with rage (to severely punish) the disbelievers. What does this mean? Have you ever seen a pot boiling over? When it boils, bubbles come out and what is inside comes out over the pot. This is the true meaning of the word, "*tamayyazu*/literally, "to separate". When a person is in a state of blind rage, something emerges from him like the bubbles of a boiling pot. These bubbles can burn whoever stands in front of them or touches them.

They come out because of the intensity of the boiling, coming out from the pot. This is exactly the same as for the fire. Why does it burst with rage? It does so because of the disbelievers who disobeyed Allah. It is known for certain that the fire, primarily, *originally* praises the Glory of Allah.

In the same vein, He *Glorified is He* tells us in the Quran that on the Day of Resurrection, He will ask the Fire whether it is filled with people or not. (*Qaf:* 30) The Fire, for its part, will ask Allah *the Almighty* for more and more people to be punished. (*Qaf:* 30) This indicates that the action of bursting with rage will take place, literally, by the fire. That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us that the fire has a particular kind of attraction. It is taken for granted that people will be thrown in the fire because of their disobedience, which, in turn, attracts and seduces the disobedient. In this regard, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘My example and your example is that of a person who lit a fire and insects and moths were attracted to it and began to fall in it, and he is making efforts to take them out; and I am going to hold you back from fire, but you are slipping from my hand.’(1) It is a very striking example. In fact, when someone lights a fire in an open area, the first thing to be seen around the fire will be those insects, moths and mosquitoes. That is why the Arabs said: ‘Many a soul yearned for its own ruin’. These insects were drawn to the light of the fire and came to it. When we light a fire in an open area, you find a lot of insects are killed around the fire. So, we say that these insects had yearned for their ruin; they came to the light, but the flames from the fire burnt them. This is exactly what happens to those people who are disobedient; they yearn for their ruin because they do not realise that these (forbidden) lusts will cause him to be thrown in the fire.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘... Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed...,’ implies that just as the fire attracts people to it, as the acts of disobedience attract people to them. If a person is kept away from the fire to any other place between the fire and paradise, this will be good for him/her. So, what will be the state of the person who has been kept away from the Fire and admitted to the paradise? Such a person has undoubtedly triumphed.

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(1) *Muslim, Sahih*

This is, indeed, a good thing. That is why there is a bridge over the fire that we will have to cross. Why? It is so that the believer will see the fire beneath their feet and, thus, s/he praises Allah for being a Believer because if they were not a believer, s/he would have fallen into the Fire. So, they will say: ‘Praise be to Allah Who saved me from the Fire’.

‘... Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed...’. ‘Triumphed’ in this context means salvation from what you hate and receiving what you like. As a matter of fact, just attaining salvation from what you dislike is considered a blessing; and to be indulged after that is a blessing and is considered a triumph. The saying of Allah, ‘whoever is kept away from the fire ...’ indicates that there is someone else who has kept him/her away from the Fire. That is totally true because it is Allah *the Almighty* Who has conferred His Favour upon him/her by guiding them to belief in the worldly life, and by keeping them away from the fire in the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse by saying, ‘... The present world is only an illusory pleasure’. As a matter of fact, when He *the Almighty* describes the life in which we live as ‘*dunia*/of a lower rank’, this means that there is another life which is not like this (i.e. *‘ulia*/of a higher rank”.’ That is why He *the Almighty* states in another verse that the Hereafter is the abode of eternal life, but people are unaware of the fact. (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) That is, it is the life that truly deserves to be called ‘life’ because the life-span of the person should not be calculated from the very beginning of the universe to the end of time, for this life span pertains mainly to the universe. As for mankind, every one of them has his own life span starting from their birth, and ending with their death; it is totally different from that of the universe.

As a matter of fact, one knows nothing at all about their life span; is s/he predestined to live for a moment, or a day, or a month or a century? All we know about that matter is that everyone has his/her own life span which is predestined for them.

Enjoyment of this worldly life is commensurate with the person’s allotment of enjoyment, that is to say, according one’s own abilities. If we contemplate this verse from this perspective, we realise that its enjoyment is simple and, thus, it is not right for a person to fall prey to its seduction. One must bear in mind that Allah *the Almighty* warns us in the Quran that man will transgress when he sees himself as self-sufficient. (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7)

As such, delusion of this worldly life is when a short-term pleasure distracts you from the endless pleasure. People must draw a comparison between these two pleasures so that they will not be deluded by the simple (enjoyment) and, consequently, leave the great (one) in the Hereafter. You must weigh the pleasure you obtain, according to your abilities, and the pleasure you will obtain due to the Bounty of Allah. That is why this present life is of an illusory pleasure.

In reality, Allah *the Almighty* accurately and exactly describes this worldly life as "an enjoyment". But He *Glorified is He,* meanwhile, directs our attention to the fact that man must not be deluded by this simple pleasure and, preferring it to the endless one in the Hereafter. After that, He *the Almighty* tells Messenger Muhammad and his followers, that belief alone is the best reward for them in spite of the fact that it may not result in pleasure in this worldly life. That is why He *the Almighty* informs us that belief will not be victorious all the time, for if it was, they would have been accustomed to it due to the fact that it ensures them a happy life. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* explains to them that they will be afflicted by trials. As such, He *the Almighty* says that belief entails that you (O, believers) will be afflicted with trials in yourselves and properties. He *the Almighty* says:

لَتُبْلَوُنَّ فِىٓ أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ وَلَتَسْمَعُنَّ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوٓا۟ أَذًى
كَثِيرًا ۚ وَإِن تَصْبِرُوا۟ وَتَتَّقُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ ٱلْأُمُورِ ١٨٦

You are sure to be tested through your possessions and persons; you are sure to hear much that is hurtful from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with God. If you are steadfast and mindful of God, that is the best course [186] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 186)

How is one tested through possessions? This happens by consuming all of the person's properties and possessions through a calamity. It may also happen through monitoring how the person is going to spend their income; is s/he going to spend it charitably or not? In this particular verse, Allah *the Almighty* gives precedence to money over the soul because testing one through their soul is done either by killing, injury, or disease. As a matter of fact, not all people will be killed, but everyone will be tested with their possessions.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... You are sure to hear much that is hurtful from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah...' indicates that there are two groups of disbelief, as follows: People of the Book and the polytheists. As a matter of fact, these two groups of disbelievers used to oppose Islam. In addition, they injured Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* severely, and his Companions, by such acts such as mocking him and his Companions. That is why Allah *the Almighty* asks the believers to prepare themselves to face these trials with pleasure.

People mistakenly think that all afflictions are inherently evil. This is not true. In fact, afflictions are nothing but a test and thus one may pass it or fail it. So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'You are sure to be tested', and this asserts that He *Glorified is He* is going to test His creatures just as a teacher says to his student: "I am going to give you a test".'

So, the phrase, 'We shall try you' means that we are going to test you, but does this mean that afflictions are bad or good? It is evil only for those who do not react well. Those who pass the trial of possessions say: 'Everything in this life will come to an end, and Allah *the Almighty* has lessened my own responsibilities. Even though I may have had a lot of money, I was not spending it in correct, lawful ways and, as a result, it would have led me to destruction. Consequently, He *the Almighty* has taken my money so that He will not throw me in the fire'. In the Quran, He *Glorified is He* tells us about human nature as it relates to money. He states that when He *the Almighty* is generous to him and favours him, he says, 'My Lord has honoured me'. But when He *Glorified is He* tries him and restricts his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me". (*al-Fajr:* 15-16)

These aforementioned two verses of, the chapter of *al-Fajr* emphasize two issues as follows: when the person is given money, he says: 'My Lord has honoured me'; this is better than the person who reacted the opposite way. The story of that person is mentioned in the chapter of *al-Qasas* in which He *the Almighty* tells us about Qarun who claimed that he had acquired this money by virtue of his own knowledge and thus Allah *the Almighty* destroyed him completely. (*al-Qasas:* 78) Such a person, who believes that richness is an honour given to him and who believes that poverty is a kind of humiliation, is not fully aware of the fact that money is not the proof of honour, nor is poverty the proof of humiliation. But the question to be asked here is: 'When is money viewed as proof of honour?' This actually happens when one spends it charitably in its correct, lawful ways. But if one does not pay Allah's due portion of his/her money, it (i.e. money) will be proof of one's humiliation. As a matter of fact, sometime a person may be rich, but he does not pay the shares of Allah from his/her money and in this case, poverty may be better than richness. That is why He *the Almighty* comments in the following verse on these two types of people by clearly stating that these two positions are not right. This obviously means that having wealth is not an indication of honour, and nor is poverty an indication of humiliation.

He *the Almighty* thus, wants to provide the evidence to this point. So, He *Glorified is He* informs those who believe that having wealth is an indication of honour of their behaviour, as seen in what follows: 'You do not honour the orphans, nor do you encourage one another to feed the poor. As well, you consume inheritance, devouring [it] altogether'. (*al-Fajr:* 17-19)

As long as you do not treat the orphan kindly, how can wealth be an indication of honour? In this case, wealth is a burden on you and so , why do you, who do not honour the orphans, think that taking it away from you is an indication of humiliation? He *the Almighty* has saved you from being abased, so you do not have to bear the responsibilities that wealth entails. As such, it becomes instantly clear that wealth is not an indication of honour, and nor is poverty an indication of humiliation. But if even you do not have money, why did you not encourage one another to feed the poor? You do not even encourage one another even by words. If you do not even want to urge one another, how do you think that money is an indication of honour? You seize inheritance, taking both your own share and the share of others without even investigating whether this money is lawful or not. If this is the case, how can being given wealth viewed as an indication of honour and how is poverty viewed as humiliation? It is neither one, nor the other.

He *the Almighty* says: ‘You are sure to be tested through your possessions and persons; you are sure to hear much that is hurtful from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah...’ and thus these trials and afflictions will surely take place. O, Allah! We firmly believe that we are going to be tested, but what are the ways to overcome these trials and afflictions? The remedy is mentioned clearly in the saying of Allah, ‘... If you are steadfast and mindful of Allah, that is the best course’. You (O, believers) must show patience if you are afflicted by your possessions; you must also be patient if you are afflicted and tested in yourselves; and you must, furthermore, show patience for the harm you may face from the people of the Book and the polytheists. As such, if you do face difficulties from them, then patience for all these afflictions and trials is the best route for you. The word, ‘*Al*-‘*azm*/determination’ refers to gathering one’s strength to do a particular act. So, if you intend to do a particular action, and then set your intention in your heart, you gather your strength. The saying of Allah ‘that is the best course’ indicates that you are supposed to be steadfast and gather all your strength to do a particular act.

As such, the matter revolves mainly around testing the person through his/her possessions and self. Additionally, they (i.e the believers) will experience a great deal of harm from the polytheists and the people of the Book. In truth, all these afflictions and trials are in need of patience. We previously explained that patience is of three kinds: patience for a calamity that afflicts you, or an act of worship to be performed, and patience when being prevented from doing something. As such, the kind of patience is defined according to the preposition used with it. One may show patience when being prevented from committing a forbidden act. As well, s/he may show patience when performing acts of worship.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty:* ‘You are sure to be tested through your possessions and persons...,’ indicates that your enemy is not defined because you may be afflicted either in your property or in your person. But His

Glorified is He says, '... You are sure to hear much that is hurtful from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah...,' which explicitly defines your enemy for you. So, when you see this enemy before you, you burst with rage. He *the Almighty* therefore, clarified the matter warning us to 'Be careful not to allow them to cause your anger to consume you, instead, you should control your anger and not be deceived by vain matters. Rather, you should be calm, and not respond, unless you are certain of victory'. That is why He *the Almighty* says: '... If you are steadfast and mindful of Allah, that is the best course'.

The phrase, '*ittaqu Allah*/fear Allah' orders believers to prevent themselves from committing an action which brings the Wrath of Allah *the Almighty*. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* rode a donkey having a saddle with a fadakiyya, a velvet covering. He mounted me behind him and went to visit Sa'd bin 'Ubada, and this was before the battle of Badr. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* proceeded until he passed by a group of people in which 'Abdullah ibn Ubai ibn Salul was present. This was before 'Abdullah embraced Islam. The group comprised of Muslims, polytheists, i.e., idolaters and Jews. 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha was also present... When dust from the donkey covered the gathering, 'Abdullah ibn Ubai covered his nose with his upper garment and said, "Do not annoy us with dust". Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* greeted them, stopped and dismounted. Then, he invited them to Allah (i.e., to embrace Islam) and recited some verses of the Holy Quran to them. On hearing the verses, 'Abdullah ibn Ubai said, "O, Man ! There is nothing better than what you say, if it is true. Do not disturb us in our gathering with it, but return to your house, and if somebody comes to you, teach him there". 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha said, "Yes, O Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*! Bring your teachings to our gathering, for we love that". So the Muslims, the pagans and the Jews started insulting each other until they were about to fight. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* kept on placating them until they calmed down. Subsequently, the Prophet mounted his animal and proceeded until he reached Sa'd ibn 'Ubada. He said to him: "O Sa'd! Have you not heard what Abu Hubab (i.e., 'Abdullah ibn Ubai) said?" He said such and such. Sa'd said: "O Allah's Apostle! Excuse and forgive him, for Allah has given you what He has given you. The people of this town (Medina) decided unanimously to crown him and make him their chief by placing a turban on his head, but when that was prevented by the Truth, which Allah has given you, he ('Abdullah ibn Ubai) was jealous, and that was the reason he behaved this way with you'. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forgave him.'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says,

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِيثَٰقَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُۥ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُۥ
فَنَبَذُوهُ وَرَآءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ وَٱشْتَرَوْا۟ بِهِۦ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۖ فَبِئْسَ مَا يَشْتَرُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾

God took a pledge from those who were given the Scripture
– 'Make it known to people; do not conceal it' – but they
tossed the pledge over their shoulders, they bartered it for
a small price: what a bad bargain they made! [187]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 187)

We knew beforehand, that Allah *the Almighty* had taken the pledge to believe in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and all the previous Prophets and Messengers. He *Glorified is He* states this matter clearly in the chapter of *Al-'Imran*. He *the Almighty* took the pledge of all the previous Prophets and Messengers that they must support and believe in the Message of Muhammad. (*Al-'Imran:* 81)

Here we are examining another pledge taken by Allah from the people of the Book who believed in the Prophets sent to them. Allah says: 'Allah took a pledge from those who were given the Scripture– "Make it known to people; do not conceal it..."'. So, the question to be asked here is 'What is that they must make known? And why did they conceal it?' Did they conceal the Scripture? Yes, because they forgot some of it which means that they paid no attention to it.

This is a fact that is supported by another verse in the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the people of the Book forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded. (*al-Ma'ida:* 14) But what did they do with that unforgotten portion of their religion? The answer to this question is provided by Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, when He *Glorified is He* states that those, who conceal clear proofs and guidance sent down by Allah, after He made it clear for the people in the Scripture, will be cursed by Allah and cursed by those who curse. (*al-Baqara:* 159)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih*

They concealed the clear evidence that Allah sent down in the Book. So, concealment is a matter of choice. As for forgetfulness, they may be excused, eventhough it is a blameworthy action because if they had occupied themselves with their religion, they would not have forgotten it. As for that which they did not forget, they concealed some of, and what they did not conceal, they altered with their tongues [meaning, they changed the words]. Did they stop at that point? No, they did not. They, in addition, fabricated lies from their own illusions and attributed it to Allah. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* tells us that He prepared a severe punishment for those who write a 'Book' with their own hands and then attributed it to Allah in exchange for a small price. (*al-Baqara:* 79)

The parts that were fabricated by the people of the Book are not accepted as being from Allah unless it can be verified by another unaltered book from Allah. As for the concept of 'exchanging this Book for a small price', we have to understand it from another perspective. It is taken for granted that we use money (price) to buy objects, so how can we buy the money (price) itself? This happens when you put a price on a commodity, and here appears the first contradiction in the matter. Originally, the description of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was mentioned in their Scriptures to the extent that they used to pray for victory over those who were determined to deny the truth, but when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, they denied and rejected him. (*al-Baqara:* 89)

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '*Latubayyinunnahu*/to make it known', means to tell people about the description of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, as they are mentioned exactly in your Books, with neither alteration nor distortion. As a matter of fact, when they do so, they will be conveying the same message that was revealed in their Books, sent down to them from Allah *the Almighty*.

As such, the various meanings are interrelated. Accordingly, in case they (i.e. the people of the Book) showed the Book revealed from Allah, the characteristics of Prophet Muhammad would then be found within. As a result, we find a correlation between the meaning of "showing the Book" and that of 'showing the description of Prophet Muhammad.'

The word, '*nabadh*/to toss', is in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Make it known to people; do not conceal it'– but they tossed the pledge over their shoulders..."', means to toss something away in such a way that reveals hatred because the person who dislikes something wants to get rid of it quickly and completely. For instance, if a person gives another something to keep, but while holding the item, finds that it is an ember of fire, how will he act? He will undoubtedly, and unconsciously, throw it away. When one throws something away, they can throw it to right, left, or in front. But when he tosses it over his shoulder, this means that he never wants to see it again. So, if we contemplate the expression 'but they tossed the pledge over their shoulders', we will find that the act of tossing itself, indicates deep hatred. If a man throws something in front of him, he may want it when remembering it, but if he tosses it over his shoulder, this indicates a deep and intense hatred. That is why the Arabs used to say: 'Do not make my demand behind your back,' that is, do not ignore my demand. The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...but they tossed the pledge over their shoulders...,' means that those who committed this crime were a group. Using the plural word 'shoulders', points out that every one of them did the act of tossing the pledge over his shoulder. This clearly signifies that they unanimously agreed to do this, as if they all agreed on misguidance. They (i.e. the people of the Book) did not stop there; rather, they exchanged it for a small price and, certainly, what a bad bargain they made! If we reflect carefully on this Quranic expression, we will find that the thing to be purchased here is 'the price'. This is used, in spite of the fact that we use 'the price' to indicate a purchase. As such, we may deduce that there are some people who may barter the matter for a meal, while others may do so for a beautiful piece of clothing; there are still some who may exchange it for some need. They simply say: 'We want money so that we can buy anything we desire with it'. This is the meaning of the saying of Allah '...they bartered it for a small price...'

Commenting on the item they purchased, Allah *the Almighty* says: '... What a bad bargain they made'! Why? It is because one may think that they can buy everything they want with money (referred to as the price in this particular verse). This is incorrect because meeting one's urgent needs is more important to him than money. We have actually explained this point before and said: 'Imagine that there is a person in the desert and he owns a mound of gold, but he is in a dire need for a glass of water.' It is true that we can buy items with money, but there are, in the meantime, some things which may be more useful than money and gold. In such a situation, that person will purchase a glass of water with all the property he has. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَا تَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَفْرَحُونَ بِمَآ أَتَوا۟ وَّيُحِبُّونَ أَن يُحْمَدُوا۟ بِمَا لَمْ يَفْعَلُوا۟
فَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّهُم بِمَفَازَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلْعَذَابِ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨٨﴾

Do not think [Prophet] that those who exult in what they have done and seek praise for things they have not done will escape the torment; agonizing torment awaits them [188]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 188)

The word '*al-husban*/to think' means that a person thinks that something is not true. As a matter of fact, when one listens to something, they view it in the light of what is obvious, without even reflecting on the reasons behind it. So, those who exult in what they have done are of two kinds: the first kind includes those who exult in what they do to oppose the call of Truth. It includes the hypocrites who, pretending to be believers, exulted in their deception to the believers. This actually happened before Allah *the Almighty* exposed them to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. The other kind includes those who exulted in what they do to support the Call of Truth. As such, we have two kinds; the first are hypocrites, while the second have to do with the believers whose exultation is judged lawful. Allah *the Almighty* states in the Quran that the believers are allowed to rejoice in the Bounty and Grace of Allah. (*Yunus:* 58)

So, Allah *the Almighty* did not forbid all kinds of exultation; rather, they were permitted to exult in His Bounty. But in another place in the Quran, we find Him *Glorified is He* forbidding exultation, exactly as it happened in the story of Qarun.

In the Quran, He *the Almighty* states that the people of Qarun advised him not to exult, for Allah *the Almighty* does not like the exultant. (*al-Qasas:* 76)

As such, we find that there are verses in the Quran that declare exultation forbidden, and others allowing the believers to rejoice and exult. So, the essence of exultation itself is not detested, but what is detestable are the reasons behind the exultation. As for the believers, they rejoice the Victory of Allah and with making His Word supreme which are legal reasons. As for the forbidden reasons, they include expressing opposition to any divine law for the sake of eradicating it. As a matter of fact, this is what the disbeliever rejoices in. But the genuine exultation is that which is not followed by regret and, thus, the exultation of the believers is continuous to the end of time, and even after that. As for the exultation of the disbelievers, the hypocrites and the people of the Book, who lied to Allah *the Almighty* it is forbidden, and they will regret their actions. In reality, the person who shows his true feelings is always sad.

So, Allah *the Almighty* wants to protect the believers against the forces of disbelief that oppose them, and who exult in what they did against you, so what they did should not weaken you. As well, you should not think that they will be saved from the fire. As long as their exultation leads to their eventual punishment, it is, in effect, something which is worthless.

But what did those, who are referred to by Allah saying ‘Do not think [Prophet] that those who exult in what they have done...’ do? This verse may refer to the people of the Book who concealed the description of Prophet Muhammad in their Book because the previous verse says: ‘Allah took a pledge from those who were given the Scripture– ‘Make it known to people; do not conceal it’– but they tossed the pledge over their shoulders....”’ So, what did these people do? They concealed the description of Prophet Muhammad mentioned in their Book and revelled in what they did. In addition, they sought praise for things they had not done, by those disbelievers who are like them.

As a matter of fact, a person may sin but regrets committing the sin. However, if they persist in taking pride in what they did, this is considered another sin. As such, committing this (forbidden) act is viewed as sin and exulting in it is another sin because if they regretted the sin, it would be considered an indication of his repentance. As for that person who commits the sin, and then takes pride in what they did, is foolishness; they committed a sin, exulted in it and sought praise for what they did.

Was he to be praised for what he did not do, or for what he did? It goes without saying that he was to be praised for what he did not do because he deviated from the right path. If someone says that this verse was sent down concerning the hypocrites who left Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during his war against the disbelievers of Mecca, it is also true. That is because those hypocrites were happy not to have the burdens and hardships of the journey, and *Jihad* with the believers. After the battle was over, they gave weak excuses to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If they regretted what they did, it would have been good for them. As for the believers, they were not aware of their lies and, consequently, they were praised. Those hypocrites committed the sin and were happy doing it; they were also safe from the hardships of war and were happy for that too; their apology was a kind of hypocrisy. In fact, this verse lays down a general principle, that is, opposing the truth is a sin and exulting in it is another sin. In addition, seeking praise for it is a third sin. So, it is a complex sin. As a matter of fact, they conceal the sin and show otherwise so that we thank them and praise them. That is why He *the Almighty* establishes an everlasting principle which is applicable for all times and places.

Concerning the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... and seek praise for things they have not done...,' there are very important questions to be asked here: 'Are they blamed for seeking praise? Or are they blamed for seeking praise for that which they did not do?' In truth, they are blamed for seeking praise for that which they did not do. There is no blame if the person wants to be praised for an act they have done. When the Quran addresses the faculties of mankind, it knows perfectly well how to do it because it is the revelation of Allah *the Almighty* Who is fully aware of the nature and essence of mankind. The nature of man seeks praise from others because this act gives the person a sign of prestige which results, in turn, from one's own work. It is known for certain that people do not praise one's existence, except for their actions and deeds.

As long as people love praise, it will encourage them to do good deeds so that they will receive praise; and as long as they are praised, they will perfect their work. Accordingly, all people around them will benefit from their perfect work. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* wants benefit to spread an, hence, He does not prevent the act of praising others so that people will work more and more. If Allah *the Almighty* forbade the act of praising, this would necessitate that only those people with outstanding abilities would be the ones who work, while those with poor abilities would not benefit the society any more. As such, those people with poor abilities are in need of praise so that they work more and more, and so on. It goes without saying that the person who seeks the praise of people will not gain the rank of the person who seeks the praise of Allah *the Almighty*. However, we will praise them so that they will utilise their instinct for loving praise and, as a consequence, increase the number of workers. When Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the issue of praising the good and criticising the bad in the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn, we find that He *Glorified is He* tells us through Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He is the One that established him in the land and granted him means of access to everything. (*al-Kahf:* 83-84)

This verse clearly indicates that people have no power to establish themselves, but it is the Power of Allah *the Almighty* that does so. Therefore, if he is a true believer, he will not be deluded by those means that cause him to disobey. That is because belief makes the believer fully aware of the fact that means are established by Allah *the Almighty*. To conclusively prove that He *the Almighty* is the One Who makes means, He *Glorified is He* tells that He takes the Kingdom from whomever He wants, and grants it to whomever He wants. Accordingly, we say to such people who understand otherwise: ‘If the means were established by you, you should firmly adhere to them. But they are a gift from Allah *the Almighty* Who tells us in the Quran that He granted means of access to whomever He wants’. In reality, means are of various kinds; they are means that directly accompany actions, and means that precede them. For instance, if you wear a beautiful dress, this means that you brought a beautiful piece of cloth and gave it to a tailor who made it perfectly. But even before the tailor made it, it was woven from cotton which is the fruit of the processes of ploughing, planting and irrigating. If you reflect on the direct means, you should then follow them back to their source, and you will come to something which has no cause, a matter which obviously indicates that He *the Almighty* is the One Who makes and establishes causes.

If you carefully examine the chain of anything in existence, you must reach the most preliminary source which is Allah *the Almighty*. Electric light is a striking example of this. You will find factories that manufacture the special glasses for these bulbs, whereas another factory manufacture the wires within the light itself, and so on, until you will arrive at something human hands have nothing to do with, and as a result, you will admit that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who makes all causes. For example, when you sit on a chair, you may say: 'The carpenter made it after getting the wood from the dealer who, in turn, brought it from the woods. But how did the wood get into the woods?' You will say: 'I do not know'. Yet, if you are a true believer, you will say: 'Allah is the One Who created it'. As such, you will find, from examining the chain of anything in this life, that Allah is the One Who created everything. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* tells that He granted Dhu Al-Qarnyn the means of access to everything. Thus, when Allah gave him the means, he achieved the results. He *the Almighty* continues the story of Dhu Al-Qarnyn. He *Glorified is He* tells us that when Dhu Al-Qarnyn reached the place where the sun sets, he found it going down into a black sea, and found by it, inhabitants. As a matter of fact, when you are on a ship, you will see the sun at the time of sunset sinking in the sea, but when you reach that particular place, you will find that the sun is intact. That is because it never vanishes, it 'sets in a spring of dark mud'. He *the Almighty* continues the story of Dhu Al-Qarnyn, confirming that he found inhabitants by this place, and they asked him either to punish [them], or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness. (*al-Kahf:* 86)

If we carefully examine it, we will find that Allah *the Almighty* authorises Dhu Al-Qarnyn either to punish these people or to guide them to righteousness. Dhu Al-Qarnyn understood that this is an authorisation from Allah to him, but he chose to impose severe punishments on the people. He declared that he would punish those who did wrong in this present life so as to prevent evil from spreading among people. But this is not the only punishment they are going to be afflicted with; they will return to their Lord to be punished with a terrible punishment. We notice that Dhu Al-Qarnyn did not describe his punishment as "*nukran*/terrible," but he did so while describing the punishment afflicted by Allah; why? That is because when a human inflicts punishment on another, they do so according to their human ability. Accordingly, the punishment of Allah is in accordance with His Power. So, can we endure the punishment of Allah- we seek Refuge in Allah? Of course, we have no power to endure it. As for those who believed, Dhu Al-Qarnyn took another position. Allah *the Almighty* tells us that Dhu Al-Qarnyn gave a goodly reward to those who believed and did righteous deeds. As well, he spoke to them using his authority with ease. As such, those people who like to be praised ask: 'Why did he honour him?' Accordingly, he acted like one that should be honoured. It is for this reason that you will find youths competing with one another to play football, but why? That is because they see that people honour those who score goals and, therefore, they want to score goals.

Moreover, our pure religion instructs us to thank those who do us favours so that they are encouraged to continue to do favours. In this regard, the following *athar* (i.e. a statement said by pious people) may be quoted: ['He who does not thank people, do not thank Allah.'] So, the love of praise is something which is naturally and inherently embedded in man. In order to motivate people to work, you should ask them to do those kinds of jobs which fit their various abilities. But in case the excellence of work is confined to those people who do not like praise, we will reduce the number of the workers. That is why you will find the flawlessness of work where you find encouragement to those who perfect their work and determent for those who are careless. So, bosses should not reward those who act according to their own whims; rather, they should reward those who flawlessly perform their work. When others see that it is only those who perfectly do their work, who are rewarded and praised, they all will work hard. But if the opposite occurs, that is when disaster strikes.

Allah *the Almighty says* '... Do not think [Prophet] that those who exult in what they have done....' This establishes a principle and a constitution of belief applicable to all aspects of life including the relationship between the ruler and the subjects, the relationship between the individual and himself and those around him, and the relationship between a person and good deeds or sins. When a person sins, this means that they might relieve some emotion, by committing this sin. But when they realize what they did, they must regret that sin and not take pride in it.

This is the first stage. Then, they should not persist in committing the sin. But if they commit a sin and claim that they are doing a good deed to the extent that they want to be praised for this act; this sin, as such, is a compound sin. Such a person will fall under the category about which Allah says: '... never think them [to be] in safety from the punishment...'

The word '*Al-mafazah*/escaping the punishment,' means to go to a place where a person thinks they are safe, i.e. that they will find success in this place. The word, '*Al-mafazah*" in Arabic is used to describe the desert in terms of optimism. They do not call it '*mahlakah*/a place of destruction' because the person who travels through it will die. So, they call it '*Al-mafazah* to encourage optimism, or because the person who passes it will win, or because it is an open area and, by doing so, man will not be faced with any wild animals or enemies. All of these meanings are true, for one has escaped all the dangers. In reality, hills and valleys may not protect a person from the fierce attacks of the wild beasts that can injure him. But when he is in open land, he can see these wild beasts and animals and manages to be safe. Whoever believes that the desert is a place of destruction let him know that it has been called so to inspire optimism, exactly as Arabs call the person who is stung by a snake '*Al-Salim*/The Healthy Person'.

Due to the fact that we are optimistic, our customs necessitate us to call an item by its opposite. For example, if you are someone's guest and you are offered coffee and after you finish, the servant comes and the employer says to him: 'Take the cups which are full', instead of saying: 'Take the empty cups'. This is a kind of optimism.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... never think them [to be] in safety from the punishment, and for them is a painful punishment' indicates that those people think that they will escape punishment eventhough they do not believe in the Truth, and nor do they believe that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who is the One Who has control over all their affairs. As such, they wrongly think that their victory in this worldly life will not be followed by defeat. But Allah *the Almighty* follows this verse by saying: '*Walillahi mulku as-samawati*' 'Control of the heavens and earth belongs to Allah...' He *Glorified is He* has control over what He possesses, and no one is beyond His possession. As long as Allah has dominion over the heavens and the earth, for instance, when He says: 'Do not think [Prophet] that those who exult in what they have done and seek praise for things they have not done; do not think they will escape the torment. An agonizing torment awaits them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 188)

This promise will certainly be fulfilled because no one can escape it. Due to this, people who have been granted insight, smartness and abundant wisdom say, 'Save your obedience for the One you cannot do without, and save your gratitude for the One Whose favour never leaves you, and save your submission for the One Whose dominion and sovereignty you could never leave, So Allah's words,

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٨٩﴾

Control of the heavens and earth belongs to God; God has
power over everything [189] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 189)

indicate that when Allah *Glorified is He* promises, He is quite able to enforce what He promises, and no one is able to evade Him. This confirms the meaning. If the enemies of the religion delight in the immediate aftermath of their apparent victory, the believers apprehend the end result and what it will be. For this reason, you find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too!* neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: *he will burn in the Flaming Fire,* and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier,* with a palm-fibre rope around her neck' (*al-Masad*: 1-5). This chapter was revealed about the uncle of the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it is one of the evidences of believing in the truthfulness of Muhammad's conveyance of the message of Allah, for Abu Lahab was a disbeliever. There were many disbelievers just like him. Was not 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* one of them? Was not Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* one of them? Was not 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* one of them? Was not Safwan *Allah be pleased with him* one of them? All of these people were disbelievers, and then became believers. Who informed Muḥammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Abu Lahab when He said: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too!* neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: *he will burn in the Flaming Fire,* and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier,* with a palm-fibre rope around her neck.' (*al-Masad*: 1-5); this chapter of Quran was recited and memorised by many believers. After all that Abu Lahab would not say: 'I testify that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah. He might have added, 'If Muhammad says that I will enter a blazing fire, I am a believer!' Who informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* that Abu Lahab would not do these, whereas ibn Al-Khattab and 'Amr ibn Al-'Aṣ, *Allah be pleased* with them, did? The One Who informed Muḥammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this knew well that Abu Lahab would never choose faith, thus the Quran states this as evidence of its truthfulness. After that, indeed, Abu Lahab died a disbeliever.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wants to emphasise this by clarifying: 'Do not imagine that this threat of punishment would fail to materialise, for I am the One, the Eternal Refuge and Self-Sufficing, and no one can oppose this judgement of Mine.' And so He says in the chapter of *al-Ikhlaṣ*: 'Say, 'He is Allah, [who is] One Allah,* the Eternal Refuge.* He begot no one nor was He begotten.* No one is comparable to Him.' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1- 4)

As long as He Alone is Allah, the One, what He says would not be contradicted by any other assumed god, and His word will last forever. So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* after saying, 'Do not think they will escape the torment. An agonizing torment awaits them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 188), and says, 'And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth' (*Al-'Imran:* 189), He wants to make it clear that He added the threat to this new fact of faith: 'And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth' (*Al-'Imran:* 189). He mentions the heavens and the earth as if they are two brackets since the heavens overshadow, while the earth carries. Therefore, we are all enclosed between two things that belong to Allah *Glorified is He*. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to mankind: 'As long as you are all surrounded by Allah's dominion, where can you go?' 'And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth' (*Al-'Imran:* 189). There might be someone who has dominion over something, yet has no power to rule it. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this by saying His case is unlike that since He possesses both dominion and power: 'And Allah has power over everything.' (*Al-'Imran:* 189) Then, He depicts another image of faith, to help believers realise it in the souls. After the introduction which confirmed Allah's truthfulness in all that He says, which is witnessed in real-life events:

إِنَّ فِي خَلۡقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱخۡتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ﴿١٩٠﴾

There truly are signs in the creation of the heavens and
earth, and in the alternation of night and day, for those with
understanding [190] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 190)

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to build a religious conception on solid foundation in the human soul, amazed by this universe, in which there is a sky designed by Allah *Glorified is He* that has no pillars to support it, while beneath it lies the celestial bodies and the firm earth, would it not reflect on the One Who created these things? By Allah *Glorified is He* if someone were to wake from his sleep and find that a canopy had been erected in the field during the night, he would get up saying, 'What's going on?' So what about someone who opens his eyes and finds this well-organised universe which provides him with the means by which he lives?

For this reason, in another chapter, He explains this point in a way that clarifies to us the concept of faith in the human mind. We do not simply wait for the admonisher who comes to us with a message and a prophecy to show us the path chosen for us by the Creator. Rather, he made it mandatory that we use our natural disposition to be directly be aware of the Creator. As we said before, if a person's plane crashed in the desert, and he found no water, no trees or no people there, then, he fell asleep due to exhaustion and woke up to find a table laden with delicious food, by Allah *Glorified is He,* and before stretching out his hand to partake of it, would he not stop to wonder who it was that made or gave all this? His amazement at what had happened would make him wonder who it was that brought it. He would think about this for even tasting the food, before giving in to his hunger. The same can be said of those people who open their eyes to find this amazing universe in which not one of them would have claimed to have created it. If one of them had claimed to have created it, the argument would have been simplified; yet none have claimed this. Has anyone ever claimed to have created this universe which we all see in its wonderful order and with its sound laws? No, never. Therefore, whoever did indeed claim to have created it would be safe in his claim until someone else came along and claimed to be the one who created it. Yet this has never happened, despite the existence of atheists and fabricators who invent lies about Allah *Glorified is He*. For this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Who created the heavens and earth?' (*an-Naml:* 60)

It is as though the True Lord says: 'If it were not Me Who created them, then who did?' No one has ever dared to ascribe the universe to himself, especially since atheists and disbelievers are unable to create even the most trivial of things out of nothing. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* chose not to create a drinking glass with its man-made shape in order that mankind would manufacture it with their hands; therefore they would understand that everything is accomplished by using the means of His creation. A drinking glass is a trivial matter that adds luxury to life. Before it was invented, we had been able to drink. There had been no tree that had borne glasses as its fruit; instead, a human being designed it simply out of a desire to make life easier. This small thing required a designer with great knowledge of different sciences and materials. He then searched the earth for the material that, when melted, resulted in this transparency and shine. He experimented with different elements of the earth and found that only sand would do.(1) He discovered this material and mixed it with other substances in order to melt it. The design of the drinking glass required skilled workers and scientists; all of this just for a little glass cup which could have been done without. Think about what was required to create it: great effort was needed to roam the earth, examining all its elements and many means of production. Then, people deduced the correct chemical proportions for the original materials and what was required to create them.

Every production needs matching requirements; as such, no one ever claimed to have created these. Thus, the True Lord asks who created all this. When He asks a question, He does not do so because He wants to find out the answer; He is perfectly able to say: ‘I am the One Who created the sky and the earth.’ So what would the one who is asked do? He would search for an answer, and eventually, would find no one but Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) It is said that the sand of Sinai is one of the best materials for this production.

The questioner would not put forth a question like this unless he was sure that the answer could only be the one he intended. 'Who created the heavens and earth? Who sends down water from the sky for you— with which we cause to grow...' (*an-Naml:* 60). In this verse, He mentions the matter directly: ‘…with which We cause gardens of delight to grow…’ (*an-Naml:* 60), i.e. pleasing to the eye with their greenery, vigour, freshness, shade, flowers and fruits. He does not restrict His words to saying: ‘that you may eat therefrom’ because only the owner eats the fruits, whereas the beautiful view cannot be withheld from anyone to look upon it and enjoy what they see. When any of us sees a beautiful garden, it pleases us to see it. True, you cannot stretch out your hand to eat its fruits since it does not belong to you, but can anyone stop you from enjoying its view or its pleasing smell? No.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the bounties that are available to all, both those who own and those who do not, by saying: 'gardens of delight'. We know that when the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* reminds us of the favours he bestows upon us, He does so to clarify to us that we should not mistake the purpose of these things as just with which to fill our bellies. In essence, there are many beautiful delights from a garden that we are capable of enjoying in other ways rather than simply eating. There are kinds of trees that produce no edible fruit, yet they must have other purposes: their beautiful leaves give shade, and they perfume the air with their scent and they produce needed wood. In addition to this, some trees also produce fine fruits that are beneficial.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'It is He who sends down water from the sky. With it, We produce the shoots of each plant, then bring greenery from it, and from that, We bring out grains, one riding on the other in close-packed rows. From the date palm comes clusters of low-hanging dates, and there are gardens of vines, olives, and pomegranates, alike yet different. Watch their fruits as they grow and ripen! In all this there are signs for those who would believe.' (*al-An‘am:* 99)

Allah asks mankind: 'You have no power to make the trees grow in them— is it another god beside Allah? No! But they are people who take others to be equal with Allah.' (*an-Naml:* 60)

One of the orientalists gave the following shallow remark: ‘Does Allah censure and reproach His creatures for being just?’ Since the Arabic word ‘*ya’diloon*’ usually means 'to be just'; however in this verse it means 'take others to be equal with Allah '. He did not understand the true meaning since the meaning of the word ‘*adl’* (justice) in this verse is to deviate and swerve away from the truth. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Who is it that made the earth a stable place to live? Who made rivers flow through it? Who set immovable mountains on it and created a barrier between the fresh and salt water? Is it another god beside God? No! But most of them do not know.' (*an-Naml:* 61)

It is He *Glorified is He* Who created the earth and placed within it rivers and firm mountains. The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains the reason for the existence of the firm mountains in another place in the Noble Quran: 'Say, "How can you disregard the One Who created the earth in two Days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds! He placed solid mountains on it, blessed it and measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them - all in four Days without distinction for those who ask.’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10).

Why did you bless the earth, O, Allah? Allah *Glorified is He* blessed the mountains and determined therein the sustenance for the inhabitants of the earth. ‘Sustenance’ means anything that is useful to preserve life. We know that sustenance is derived from crops and that crops always grow in fertile land. We also know that fertile land exists in valleys and that a valley is land between two mountains. Why is a valley between two mountains fertile? It is because when rain falls from the sky, it lands on the mountains; and as we know, mountains are affected by factors of erosion. Hot weather comes after cold; heat makes the land expand, while cold makes it contract. This constant expanding and contracting makes the surface of the mountains split. Therefore, when rain falls, it sweeps through these cracks, so that the mountain's surface flows down from the summit powerfully and turns into a soft substance, which is called alluvial mud or silt. This is what used to happen to us (in Egypt) from Ethiopia and, in turn, caused the fertility of the Nile Valley.

Thus, mountains are stores of sustenance. Out of Allah's bounty, He made mountains firm. If they had been brittle, a small amount of rainfall would have been sufficient to bring them down entirely making the earth a single flat plane; as such, humanity would not have had the benefit of even half a metre of fertile land, thus causing famine to soon follow. We know that the True Lord *the Exalted* brought about, along with the manifold increase of humans, the increased manifold of the means of sustenance. How did the True Lord *Glorified is He* make sustenance increase?

We see that mountains have summits and bases and that between every two mountains there is a valley. We know that the narrowest part of a valley is the lowest part, and the widest part is the highest. Contrary to valleys, mountains are narrowest at the peak and widest at the base; in other words, the peak of a mountain is narrower than its base. When silt descends from the mountain by means of rain, it descends to the valley, raising the level of the valley floor and increasing the area of the valley. Every time rain falls on the mountain, the area of the adjacent valley increases, and the rain carries with it pieces of the mountain; this is silt. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* decides to bring about the end, every mountain will break into fragments, and He will bid the Hour to begin by saying, ‘Begin now.’

He says: 'Who set immovable mountains on it and created a barrier between the fresh and salt water? Is it another god beside God? No! But most of them do not know.' (*an-Naml:* 61) Elsewhere in the Quran, He says: 'He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet, yet there is a barrier between them that they do not cross.” (*ar-Rahman:* 19-20)

Water moves freely in its own course; Allah made it flow as springs and rivers in the earth. Man might dig in a certain place and find sweet water, while in another place, someone else digs and finds salt water. Why, then, does the salt water not seep into the sweet when they are both underground? It must be the case that salt water has courses different from those of sweet water, and, as such, neither one transgresses and mixes with the other. Why is this? It is due to the fact that we find that sweet water comes from above, and we find that the sources of rivers are always high up. Then, they flow down into the sea. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not make the level of salt water higher the level of sweet water so that salt water would not flow into sweet water. Rather He wanted to allow people to quench their thirsts with water, and He wanted plants to grow. Thus, sweet water would flow into stores of water, whether on land or at sea. Then, afterwards when evaporation occurs, the water rises as vapour and turns into clouds, which, in turn, rains back down as fresh water. The amount of water that Allah *Glorified is He* created in the beginning remains the same, without increasing or decreasing.

A person drinks much water throughout his life. Does all this water he drinks remain in his body, or is it expelled as bodily waste? A person does not store up any water except the amount of water that is currently in him. The human body is around ninety percent water. After a person dies, the water evaporates from him, while the rest of his body goes beneath the ground. Therefore, the amount of water remains the same, but it submits to the different roles that Allah *Glorified is He* decrees for it.

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him? Who removes their suffering? Who makes you successors in the earth? Is it another god with Allah? Little is that you reflect. (*an-Naml:* 62)

The meaning of 'distressed' is the person who expended his human means yet finds nothing with which he can preserve his life. Due to this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'When trouble befalls man, he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting or standing, but as soon as We relieve him of his trouble, he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble. In this way, the deeds of such heedless people are made attractive to them.' (*Yunus:* 12)

In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified is He* also says in another verse in the Noble Quran: 'When you get into distress at sea, those whom you pray to besides Him desert you, but when He brings you back safely to land, you turn away: man is ever ungrateful.' (*al-Isra':* 67)

When man is afflicted with a great calamity, he does not lie to himself, even if he is a disbeliever. When he finds that none of the material means before him can help him, he seeks refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* and admits that there is only one god, Allah and Creator. Thus, he calls, 'O, my Lord!'

So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him? Who removes their suffering? Who makes you successors in the earth? Is it another god with Allah? Little is that you reflect. Who is it that guides you through the darkness on land and sea? Who sends the winds as heralds of good news before His mercy? Is it another god with Allah? God is far above the partners they put beside him! Who is it that creates life and reproduces it? Who is it that gives you provision from the heavens and earth? Is it another god with Allah? Say, "Show me your evidence then, if what you say is true.' (*an-Naml:* 62-64)

All of these verses serve to emphasise the word of the True Lord: 'In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day there are indeed signs for men of understanding.'

These are phenomena of creation. The succession of night and day means that there is one thing that follows the other, or comes after it. So, the succession of night and day has two meanings: the coming of night after day means that they are in succession, i.e. each of them is the successor of the other. Such is the case with time. Another succession is represented by the fact that the day is bright, whilst the night is dark; the day is a time of activity, whilst the night is a time of inactivity. Therefore, the succession of night and day is not just one sign; the signs are manifold for many people.

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* and explains to us: ‘A single individual is incapable of inferring all that lies in the signs. Rather, each one of you, O, humans, must perceive one sign, and everyone who perceives a sign can benefit from it, as with others and so on.’ Inferring that the signs are widespread for most people who possess insight and utilise Allah's *Glorified is He* means, this implies that the Truth can be spread. Inferring is among Allah’s secrets to all of His believing creatures till the coming of the Hour. By inferring, Allah *Glorified is He* shows us people of true intelligence, who are not distracted by any blessing from the Giver of all blessings. This is due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* grants help when He created everything out of nothing. He gives divine support when He lends aid to those who have nothing, and He grants help when He places extra blessings upon His favours. Those who receive Allah's favours, which had existed before they did, became heedless of the True Lord *Glorified is He;* the favours benefit them, yet, these favours lack His blessing.

The meaning of ‘blessing’ is whatever you derive from your effort that does not result in but every good to you and to other people as well. Allah *Glorified is He* might grant you many ways and means, but He does not give you any blessing if you take the favour and forget the One Who granted it. If only you mention Allah *Glorified is He* at all times, you would have been granted both the favour and the blessing. When you see that you have something that you love, you must therefore say, 'only that which Allah wills comes to pass. There is no power save in Allah.’ (*al-Kahf:* 39) It is not by your own doing; it is Allah's *Glorified is He* Will and Power.

For this reason, they say that if you see any favour that you have, whether wealth, children, character, or attire, you should say when you see it: 'Only that which Allah wills comes to pass. There is no power save in Allah.' (*al-Kahf:* 39) And you will never experience anything bad from it. This is due to the fact that you have returned it to the One Who created it, and you have been guaranteed Allah's protection for it by doing so; and what ensures this protection is the plain statement: 'Only that which Allah wills comes to pass. There is no power save in Allah.' (*al-Kahf:* 39)

Due to this, we see Allah's *Glorified is He* words: 'Tell them the parable of two men: for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between; both gardens yielded fruit and did not fail in any way. We made a stream flow through them, and so he had abundant fruit. One day, while talking to his friend, he said, "I have more wealth and a larger following than you." He went into his garden and wronged himself by saying, "I do not think this will ever perish or that the Last Hour will ever come— even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there.’ (*al-Kahf:* 32-36) What did his companion say? 'His companion retorted, "Have you no faith in Him Who created you from dust, from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man? But for me, He is Allah my Lord, and I will never set up any partner with Him. If only, when you entered your garden, you had said, ‘This is Allah’s will. There is no power not [given] by Allah Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than you, my Lord may well give me something better than your garden, and send thunderbolts on your garden from the sky so that it becomes a heap of barren dust.' (*al-Kahf:* 37-40)

He should not have allowed himself to be deluded by the presence of a favour; instead, he should have ascribed it and returned it to the One Who granted it. This explains for us the meaning of the True Lord's words: 'If you are thankful, I will give you more.' (*Ibrahim:* 7)

The means might grant you the ends, but without the increase above these ends that Allah *Glorified is He* bestows in the form of blessings. Rather, they might end up causing disaster for their owner, at first giving to him and then withholding from him so that they are for him a source of deep sorrow.

So, who are 'those with understanding' (*Al-'Imran:* 190)?

The True Lord's answer is the following:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ قِيَٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِى خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَٰذَا بَٰطِلًا سُبْحَٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾

who remember God standing, sitting, and lying down, who reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth: 'Our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose – You are far above that! – so protect us from the torment of the Fire [191]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 191)

They say: 'Our Lord, you have not created this universe in vain.' (*Al-'Imran:* 191) They believe that Allah is the Truth, and He has created the heavens and the earth with Truth. He ordained their laws and natural order with Truth; therefore, we must receive the favours that He created for us with Truth. If some people receive these favours according to other than the Truth, it will bring to them evil consequences. It is said that if a true believer of the sons of Israel, before the message of Jesus *peace be upon him,* worshipped Allah with sincerity for thirty years, a cloud would overshadow him wherever he went. When people were overshadowed with a cloud, others knew that he had worshipped Allah *Glorified is He* sincerely for thirty years.

One of them worshipped Allah[1] *Glorified is He* for thirty years, but saw no cloud had come to give him shade. He complained of this to his mother[2]. She said to him, 'Perhaps you were negligent of something.' He said to her, 'O, mother, I cannot remember anything of the kind!' She replied, 'Perhaps, you once looked to the sky and did not reflect upon it.' He said, 'Perhaps, this did indeed occur.' She replied, 'This is why this has happened to you.' This story reminds us of the importance of reflecting on Allah *Glorified is He* constantly.

It is narrated that our master 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'When the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* woke up during the night, he would clean his teeth and then look to the sky.'

To look to the sky is to look to something high above. Looking to the earth is also a means of reflecting on the wisdom of the Creator, but looking to the sky makes one aware of the loftiness of the Creator. For this reason, the Arab who lies down on his back, while sleeping, and then wakes up to see the beautiful blue colour of the sky and the stars shining, and therein, says: 'I bear witness that you have a Lord and Creator. O, Allah, forgive me!' This man knows when to call upon Allah, and how to call, so Allah forgives him.

The books of Prophetic biography narrate that 'Once the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to sleep one night, a night he happened to be spending with 'Aisha, *Allah be pleased with her*. 'Aisha said to 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, *Allah be pleased* with them, "He slept next to me so that my skin was touching his, and then said, 'O, 'Aisha, do you give me permission to worship my Lord this night?'"[3]

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked her permission because the night was her right. 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* and then said, "O, Messenger of Allah, I love your closeness, and I love what your inclination, so I give you permission."

She graciously acted with cautiousness, for she loved Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so she said, 'I love your closeness.' This

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(1) The story of the Arab who contemplate the sky

(2) The story of the devout Israelite with his mother

(3) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of 'Aisha, and by Ibn Majah on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, and by At-Tabarani on the authority of Mu'awiya*

statement has a nice meaning. It so happens that one of those who are stubborn in their opposition to Islam said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was much older than ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* and this statement of hers was due to her indifference to him. However, ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* had already put this suspicion to rest by saying, ‘O, Messenger of Allah, I love your closeness, and I love your inclination, so I give you permission.’ This is a lesson that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us in order that we would know how to behave with our spouses, even if the thing that keeps us from them is worship. He did not want believers, who perform everything that is obligatory upon them, to be distracted from taking care of their family, even by worship, except after obtaining their families' permission first.

Why is this? It is due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* requires that the wife not perform any supererogatory act of worship without obtaining permission from her husband first. If the wife wishes to offer a supererogatory prayer or fasting, she must ask her husband’s permission first. If he grants it, she can offer the supererogatory act of worship, but if he does not, she should not perform this extra act of worship. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘the best of you is the one who is best to your family, and I am the best of you to my family.'(1)

When the husband approaches his wife, he wants to fulfil her human needs. For this reason, when the wife wants to have her time, especially if she has co-wives, this time is her right. If the husband wants to use this time for supererogatory worship, he must, therefore, ask her permission first. A woman’s state of mind, when she has no co-wives, might make her more accepting whenever her husband asks her permission to engage wholly for worship. Because of this, we see that the scholars entitled to interpret Islamic law have successfully explained this issue: A woman(2) went to ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* to complain about her husband because he would not be intimate with her. ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was with another companion of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* whom he asked to give her a legal opinion on the matter. The Companion said to the husband, 'Suppose that you had four wives. So, if that were to be your case, your wife has the right to one night out of every four.' If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked permission of 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* to worship his Lord, this implies that this is a lesson to all husbands to treat their spouses well so that they do not leave them unfulfilled.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Majah, and Darimi in (Kitab Al-Nikah)*

(2) *The story of the woman who complained of her husband to ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab peace be upon him*

However, we find that many people do not ask their spouses for permission to offer supererogatory worship and may even spend their nights engaged in sin. This is what ruins households and families. Households are ruined because the husband is distracted from his wife, going to see his friends in cafes and other places, not caring about the members of his family.

Why does he not go home to comfort his family, fulfil their needs, and spend time with his wife and children? Would his wife not want to feel reassured that her spouse is with her and not somewhere else? This would make things stable. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked permission of 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* and she gave it to him. 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* then continued, 'He headed to the water skin and performed ablution. Then, he stood in prayer and wept. After that, he recited the Quran and wept more. He then praised and glorified Allah *Glorified is He* and wept more until the ground became wet. Finally, Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* came and said, "O, Messenger of Allah, it is time for dawn prayer!" He saw him weeping and asked, "O, Messenger of Allah, do you weep, while your past and future sins have been forgiven?" Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, "Should I not be a grateful servant? O, Bilal, this night a revelation has been sent to me": "In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day there are indeed signs for men of understanding. Those who remember Allah standing, sitting and lying on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth; and say, `Our Lord, you have not created this universe in vain. Holy are You. Save us then from the punishment of the fire. Our Lord, whomsoever you cause to enter the fire, him You have surely disgraced. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers. Our Lord, we have heard a Crier calling us unto faith, saying, "You believe in your Lord," and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us, therefore, our sins and remit from us our evils and in death join us with the righteous. Our Lord, give us what You have promised to us through Your Messengers and disgrace us not on the Day of Resurrection. Surely, You break not Your promise. So their Lord answered their prayers by saying, "'I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female. You are from one another." Those, therefore, who have emigrated and have been driven out of their homes, and have been persecuted for My cause, and have fought and been slain, I will surely remit from them their evil deeds and will cause them to enter gardens through which streams flow - a reward from Allah, and with Allah is the best of rewards. Let not the moving about of the disbelievers in the land deceives you. This is only a brief enjoyment, after which hellfire will be their home– a miserable resting place! But those who were mindful of their Lord will have Gardens graced with flowing streams where they will stay as a reward from Allah. What Allah has is best for those who are truly good. Some of the people of the Book believe in Allah, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them,: humbling themselves before Allah., They would never sell Allah's revelation for a small price. These people will have their rewards with their Lord. Allah is swift in reckoning. O, you who believe, be steadfast and strive to excel in steadfastness. Be on your guard and fear Allah so that you may prosper.' (*Al-'Imran:* 190-200)

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then added, 'Woe unto him who recites it and reflects not upon it, and woe unto he who lets it pass between his lips and ponders it not!'(1) This is what has been told from our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning the verses of the chapter of *Al-'Imran*, beginning with Allah's *Glorified is He* words: 'In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day…." (*Al-'Imran:* 190-200)

These verses contain guidance within them, sound reasoning and remembrance of the True Lord at all times, whether standing, sitting or reclining. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'those who remember Allah standing, sitting and lying on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth and say, "Our Lord, you have not recreated this universe in vain. Holy are You. Save us then from the punishment of the Fire.' (*Al-'Imran:* 191)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in (At-Tahajjud), and by Muslim and At-Tirmidhi in (As-Salat), and by An-Nasa'i in (Qiyam Al-Layl), and by Ibn Majah in (Al-Iqama), and by Imam Ahmad in (Al-Musnad).*

In this verse, we see the requirement of 'those who are with understanding' is that they remember Allah *Glorified is He* sitting, standing and lying on their sides. Some of the scholars explain that the meaning of the True Lord's words 'Those who remember Allah standing, sitting and lying on their sides,' (*Al-'Imran:* 191) is the prayer, since those who are unable to pray standing pray seated, and those who cannot pray seated pray lying down. We say to these scholars, 'Why have you made the meaning of this statement so specific, when the occasion here is that of generalisation? The Quran does not contradict itself; rather, parts of it serve to explain others.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the Prayer of Peril: 'When you [Prophet] are with the believers, leading them in prayer, let a group of them stand up in prayer with you, taking their weapons with them. When they have finished their prostration, let them take up their positions at the back. Then let the other group, who have not yet prayed, pray with you, also on their guard and armed with their weapons. The disbelievers would dearly like you to be heedless of your weapons and baggage, in order for them to take you in a single assault. You will not be blamed if you lay aside your arms when you are overtaken by heavy rain or illness, but be on your guard. Indeed, Allah has prepared a humiliating punishment for the disbelievers!' (*an-Nisa':* 102)

The believer should not misunderstand and think that he should remember Allah *Glorified is He* only during the five obligatory prayers. Thus, He says: 'And when you have finished your prayer, continue to remember Allah - standing, sitting, and lying on your sides - and once you are safe, keep up regular prayer, for prayer is obligatory for the believers at prescribed times.' (*an-Nisa':* 103)

In other words, the prayer is performed first, and then performed again, making the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* as a continuous state, obligated both within the prayer and outside of it. After that, believers reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth, realising that Allah *Glorified is He* did not create this in vain. They are required to say: 'Holy are You. Save us then from the punishment of the Fire.' (*Al-'Imran:* 191)

Why? Because all of this remembrance does not, in any way, fulfil our Lord's right upon us, and for this reason, they then say in the next verse:

رَبَّنَآ إِنَّكَ مَن تُدۡخِلِ ٱلنَّارَ فَقَدۡ أَخۡزَيۡتَهُۥۖ وَمَا لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ مِنۡ أَنصَارٖ ١٩٢

Our Lord! You will truly humiliate those You commit to the Fire. The evildoers have no one to help them [192] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 192)

This is the Greatness. They do not mention the suffering of those who enter hell; they mention the disgrace that Allah *Glorified is He* will envelope those who enter hell, as though the disgrace is worse than the torment of the fire. Then, who was it that gave us this bounty? It is He *the Glorified* Who helped us to remember Him and enabled us to reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. Is it right that we repay this with ingratitude? And what will happen to those people who enter hell? They will be disgraced [Allah is our refuge]. 'And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 192), i.e. they will have no one to protect them from the torment of the fire.

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

رَّبَّنَآ إِنَّنَا سَمِعۡنَا مُنَادِيٗا يُنَادِي لِلۡإِيمَٰنِ أَنۡ ءَامِنُواْ بِرَبِّكُمۡ فَـَٔامَنَّاۚ
رَبَّنَا فَٱغۡفِرۡ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرۡ عَنَّا سَيِّـَٔاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ ٱلۡأَبۡرَارِ ١٩٣

Our Lord! We have heard someone calling us to faith, "Believe in your Lord", and we have believed. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, wipe out our bad deeds, and grant that we join the righteous when we die [193] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 193)

It is as though before any messenger comes, mankind must use their hearts and intellects to recognise the signs inherent in the universe, and they must notice that behind the universe is a power, but this power is obscure to their minds. What is this power? They observe this amazing universe and say to themselves, 'It is impossible that this universe could have no creator. There must be a power behind it that has wisdom and omnipotence.' This is the least that the intellect should be able to arrive at, but can the intellect realise that the name of this power is Allah? Can the intellect realise what this power wants from it?

The answer is no. Therefore, it is necessary that a messenger should come to pass on this power's will. For this reason, we said that this is the error that the philosophers fell into, for it is they who sought for meaning behind the material world. We know that knowledge is of two kinds: material knowledge based on experiment and metaphysical knowledge that searches beyond the material realm. This kind of knowledge forms the labyrinth of philosophers; it is a confusing place, where no school agrees with another, along with no student in a school agreeing with another.

Why do they not agree? It is due to the fact that they are searching for what lies beyond the material realm, which is the unseen, and the unseen cannot enter a laboratory, whereas material things can. When a laboratory gives the results of an analysis, there is no bias in these results. If someone performs a scientific experiment in a laboratory with true impartiality, the laboratory will give him results. If he does so without impartiality, it will give him nothing.

Due to this, we always say that there is no difference in the material sciences between Soviet communist science and American capitalist science; there is no 'capitalist chemistry' or 'communist chemistry', or 'Russian electricity' or 'American electricity'. Chemistry is one, and electricity is one since they are the products of laboratories and material experimentation.

It is amazing that these deluded people do not realise that material science, which is subject to experimentation, laboratories and inanimate materials that do not prejudice, has become something that each side attempts to steal from the other. We find that spies travel from one power to the other to steal plans for aircraft and rockets, and they spy on one another so that they can gain knowledge of material science.

However, what about the science of desires and theories! We find that each side builds walls so that desires cannot infiltrate the society. They build barriers when it comes to desires, but when it comes to material science, they turn into thieves. Why do they not include desires along with material science? Each side is bent on enmity towards other's convictions in terms of law, society, and economics, but when it comes to material science, they steal from one another. This is due to the fact that theoretical convictions follow desires, while material sciences, as we have said, follow practical facts that cannot be biased.

So, when man uses his intellect, he will certainly conclude that there is an overwhelming power behind the universe. Arabs innately knew this by saying, ‘Camel droppings indicate the presence of a camel, and footprints indicate footsteps. Does all of this not indicate the presence of the Most Subtle, the All Aware?’

It is innate evidence, which proves the existence of power, but what is this power called? We do not know. So, the ear calls for someone to tell it the name of this power. If someone comes and says, ‘I have been sent from this power, and its name is Allah’, it is necessary that people should flock to him since he will have solved the puzzle that has absorbed them. For this reason, believers say: Our Lord, we have heard a Crier calling us unto faith by saying, "You believe in your Lord, and we have believed.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 193)

It was as though the intellect of each one of them was obsessed with the need to know the Creator. After this, they said: 'Our Lord, whomsoever You causes to enter the Fire, him You have surely disgraced. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 192)

The first thing they that came to their mind, was averting evil, since virtuous people always find fault in themselves. Thus, they said: Our Lord, forgive us, therefore, our sins and remit from us our evils and in death join us with the righteous.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 193)

When we look at the details provided in the Quran, we find that a *dhanb* (a sin) is one thing, and a *sayyi’a* (a misdeed) is another. A sin requires forgiveness, whereas a fault requires expiation; such is the expiation made when a believer swears an oath and then breaks it. This expiation is a compensation to make up for the breaking of the oath. As for things related to the servant disobeying his Lord, these are sins. A misdeed is when one goes against Allah’s guidance with respect to His other servants. When you commit an act of disobedience, regarding something between you and Allah *Glorified is He*; you have not harmed Allah in any way. In essence, what are you, O human, concerning Allah’s Glory? However, by this act of disobedience, you sin, and this sin is followed by retribution. As for going against Allah’s guidance, regarding His other servants, this is a misdeed since by committing it, you have wronged them. For this reason, the believers say: 'Our Lord, forgive us, therefore, our sins and remit from us our evils and in death join us with the righteous.' (*Al-'Imran:* 193).

Who was it that guided them to the knowledge that there is a difference between a sin and a misdeed and that sins require forgiveness, whereas faults require expiation? It was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who bore a message from Allah *Glorified is He*. It was he who taught us the difference between a sin and a misdeed. Once, when he was sitting with his companions, he became drowsy and took a light nap. When he woke up, he smiled. Anas *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Once, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sitting, we saw him smile until his incisor teeth showed. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, "What makes you smile, O, Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "Two men from my community will fall on their knees before the Lord of Might. One of them will say, 'O Lord, take recompense for me from the wrong my brother did me!' Allah will say, 'Repay your brother the wrong you did him.' He will say, 'O Lord, none of my good deeds remain.' (The other) will say, 'O Lord, he can take the burden of my sins from me.'" The eyes of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* filled with tears, and then he said, "Indeed that will be a grave day, the day when people will need their sins to be carried for them! Allah will say to the requester, 'Lift your gaze and behold Paradise.' He will lift his head and say, 'O, Lord, I see cities of silver and palaces of gold adorned with pearls. For which Prophet is all of this? For which man of truth is this? For which martyr is all of this?' He will say, 'It is for he who gives the price.' He will say, 'O, Lord, who owns its price?' The Lord will say, 'You do.' He will reply, 'What is it?' The Lord will say, 'That you pardon your brother.' He will say, 'O, Lord, I pardon him!' He will say, 'Take your brother's hand and enter Paradise.' "Then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Be conscious of Allah and make peace between one another, for Allah will make peace between the believers on the Day of Resurrection."'(1)

This is the meaning of expiation: that we are born for. That's why we we were taught to say in the prayer, 'O, Allah, I ask you forgiveness for what is owed to you and ask You to bear for me (compensate on my behalf) for what is owed to Your servants.’ That is, the servant asks the True Lord to satisfy His servants (whom he may have treated unjustly) on his behalf, and His bounty has no limits.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Ya'la and Al-Ḥakim, who declared it rigorously authentic, and by As-Suyutii in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) and by Ibn Kathir in (At-Tafsir)*

The believing servants say: 'Our Lord, forgive us, therefore, our sins and remit from us our evils and in death join us with the righteous.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 193). That is, grant us the end that the virtuous enjoy. After this, Allah continues to convey to us their words:

رَبَّنَا وَءَاتِنَا مَا وَعَدتَّنَا عَلَىٰ رُسُلِكَ وَلَا تُخْزِنَا يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ إِنَّكَ لَا تُخْلِفُ ٱلْمِيعَادَ ١٩٤

Our Lord! Bestow upon us all that You have promised us through Your messengers do not humiliate us on the Day of Resurrection. You never break Your promise’ [194] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 194)

This can be said in another way, ‘Our Lord, give us that which you promised on the tongues of Your Messengers.’ Now listen to the True Lord’s reply to them:

فَٱسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّى لَآ أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَٰمِلٍ مِّنكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ ۖ
بَعْضُكُم مِّنۢ بَعْضٍ ۖ فَٱلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا۟ وَأُخْرِجُوا۟ مِن دِيَٰرِهِمْ وَأُوذُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِى
وَقَٰتَلُوا۟ وَقُتِلُوا۟ لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن
تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عِندَهُۥ حُسْنُ ٱلثَّوَابِ ١٩٥

Their Lord has answered them: ‘I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female, each is like the other [in rewards]. I will certainly wipe out the bad deeds of those who emigrated and were driven out of their homes, who suffered harm for My cause, who fought and were killed. I will certainly admit them to Gardens graced with flowing streams, as a reward from God: the best reward is with God’ [195] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 195)

Look at the beautiful way the answer is phrased: 'So their Lord answered their prayers by saying, "I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female. You are from one another."' (*Al-‘Imran:* 195) They used to remember Allah *Glorified is He* while standing, sitting, and lying down and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, fearing the disgrace of entering hell. They prayed to Allah *Glorified is He* to forgive their sins and erase their bad deeds. They prayed to Allah *Glorified is He* to grant them what He had promised them on the tongues of His Messengers*, peace be upon them.*

Allah *Glorified is He* does not say: ‘I answer your prayer. 'Rather, His answer is the acceptance of their works by saying: 'I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 195) It is not a case of empty words being spoken; Allah *Glorified is He* wants believers to apply themselves to this verse and to incline towards always putting this in practice. It is not just a matter of wishing, for Allah *Glorified is He* has put a clear condition, which is work. Whosoever wants the True Lord to answer his prayers, he must be prepared to work. Reflection on Allah’s *Glorified is He* creation is not a replacement of work because the True Lord wants to be reflected upon, while believers are utilising His means, and the means granted by Allah *Glorified is He* should not distract believers from Him.

'So their Lord answered their prayers by saying, "I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female. You are from one another." Those, therefore, who have emigrated, and have been driven out of their homes, and have been persecuted for My cause, and have fought and been slain, I will surely remit from them their evil deeds and will cause them to enter gardens through which streams flow - a reward from Allah, and with Allah is the best of rewards.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 195)

There are those who migrated from their countries, their families, their homes and their loved ones, and did so freely and without coercion. Their migration was driven out of a need to survive, along with being a move from one place to another in Allah’s cause. There are those who migrated and went out of their own free will, and there are those who left their homes and fought, and were hurt or killed in Allah’s cause, they will have their sins erased and will enter paradise.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* shows a visible way in which faith is manifested, for man is busy with his possessions, families, homes and the preservation of his life; if he sacrifices all of this firstly for the sake of remaining firm on Allah’s Word and then secondly for the sake of raising and spreading Allah’s Word, then, as a believer, he extends this to people other than himself. He struggles in Allah’s cause to extend this way of life with all the goodness it contains to others. Int this way, he loves for others what he loves for himself.

As a result, we arrive from all of this with a clear perspective or conclusion: reflection alone is not enough. If someone were to say, ‘My faith is fine. Do not bother me with formalities’; we reply by saying, 'Allah does not need this. Rather, He requires that you make the universe flourish by means of your endeavours. The most blessed and best of endeavours is that you work to make Allah’s guidance firm on earth since this is the way to exist and preserve existence in a beautiful way.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَا يَغُرَّنَّكَ تَقَلُّبُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فِي ٱلۡبِلَٰدِ ﴿١٩٦﴾

[Prophet], do not be deceived by the disbelievers’
[lucrative] trading to and fro in the land [196]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 196)

When we hear the words: 'Let not the moving about of the disbelievers in the land deceive you' (*Al-‘Imran:* 196) we should know that this requires the ability to act. A person’s ability to act lies within his domain and homeland. If someone’s ability to act widens and they move somewhere else, it is said about them, ‘So-and-so is widely active.’ i.e. the environment in which he lives is not equal to his capability; in fact, his capability is greater than his environment. Therefore, he leaves his homeland. This indeed happened with the idolaters of Quraysh who travelled from their homeland and journeyed abroad. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Let not the moving about of the disbelievers in the land deceive you.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 196)

Movement, as we said, requires capability, activeness, expansion, and ambition. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to show us that life’s allurements might be granted to other than believers, for every enticement is only a pleasure of this worldly life and is connected with a person’s life span. No matter how much they take, they are only taking adornment of worldly life and its delusion. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 185)

It is a life that has an end; as for the one who desires to increase the favours given to him by Allah *Glorified is He* and amplify their benefits, he works for the sake of a life that has no end. Disbelievers might take that which is immediately available yet ends, whereas believers take that which comes eventually and never ends.

When we compare one who seeks the life of this world with one who seeks The Hereafter, we see that the situation needs to be discussed from different aspects, which are as follows: do not measure the life-span of this world according to itself, but measure it in respect to the life span of a single individual; for the life span of this world with respect to each individual is no more than the time he remains in it. Suppose that the world still exists for other than yourself. What do you have to do with it? The life span of this world is as short as the time a person remains in it. Be careful not to measure it by saying, 'The world will remain for millions of years.' Indeed, it will remain for millions of years for millions of people – but not for you. The life span of this world, as far as you are concerned, is how long you live in it, and your life within it is limited. This is assuming that you will live an average life span. What about the fact that the length of your life is only a matter of speculation? Death comes at any age; it is not related to a particular reason or time. Due to this, a person has no guarantee that he will enjoy an average life span. The life span of the Hereafter is absolutely certain to be eternal.

The exact duration of the human life is unknown, and a person's exact life span in this worldly life is not definite. However, their life in the Hereafter is certain and definite. This worldly life is limited as opposed to the Hereafter in which life is unlimited or in other words, eternal. The pleasures a person relishes in this worldly life are dependent on his perception of them and the possibility of attaining them. However, the pleasures in the Hereafter are commensurate with the greatness of their Lord and His All-Encompassing Bestowal of abundant blessings. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes the worldly life as 'an illusory pleasure' in the concluding sentence of the verse reading.

'And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185) He describes the worldly life with the demeaning description *dunia* which literally means 'the lowest'. There are no lower or more demeaning descriptions than this. Anyone who is deceived by the worldly gains obtained by those who abandon divine guidance through travelling and movement throughout the land should remember that the entire worldly life will eventually come to an end. We should compare their travelling and movement throughout the land (as well as their gains and achievements) with what Allah *Glorified is He* has promised us in the Hereafter. Such an analogy according to this criterion sounds fair.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* continues His description of the disbeliever’s (lucrative) trading and travelling through the land by saying:

مَتَٰعٞ قَلِيلٞ ثُمَّ مَأۡوَىٰهُمۡ جَهَنَّمُۖ وَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡمِهَادُ ١٩٧

This is only a brief enjoyment, after which Hell will
be their home – a miserable resting place! [197]
(The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 197)

The Arabic word *mahd* used in the verse literally means a cradle in which an infant sleeps. This means that Allah *Glorified is He* will place them in hellfire wherever He wishes since he will be unable to do or object to anything. He shall be as helpless as an infant, who is placed in his cradle turned over, and moved by others from one place to another as they see pleasing. This is contrary to the situation of believers described in the following verse that reads:

لَٰكِنِ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوۡاْ رَبَّهُمۡ لَهُمۡ جَنَّٰتٞ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا نُزُلٗا مِّنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِۗ وَمَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ خَيۡرٞ لِّلۡأَبۡرَارِ ١٩٨

But those who were mindful of their Lord will have
Gardens graced with flowing streams where they will stay
as a reward from God. What God has is best for those who
are truly good [198] (The Quran, *Al-’Imran:* 198)

The Arabic word *nuzul* used in the verse means a place allocated for guests. When such guest rooms are arranged by humans, the guests find repose and comfort therein according to their capability. I was once travelling with a group of people, and we stayed in a luxurious hotel. My companions remarked, 'How great and luxurious this hotel is. This is a manifestation of human greatness!' I responded, 'This is what human beings prepare for other human beings. Can you imagine what Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for the believers in paradise?'

When you see the disbelievers lucratively trading, moving throughout the land and obtaining worldly gains and achievements as described in the verse, you should know that they do not believe that Allah *Glorified is He* would punish them during their lives in this world. He says: 'Say: Have you considered if the punishment of Allah should overtake you suddenly or openly? Will any be destroyed but the unjust people?' (*al-An'am:* 47) He also says: 'Or that He may not seize them in the course of their journeys, then shall they not escape.' (*an-Nahl:* 46)

The disbeliever surrenders to arrogance and delusion in their lucrative trading and moving throughout the land doing whatever he pleases and then suddenly the divine punishment befalls him. Sometimes the divine punishment strikes the sinners all of a sudden, and sometimes it may be expected. When the divine punishment befalls abruptly, people have expected at any time; it may also strike when it is least expected, which triggers greater fear within people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when you said, "O, Musa! We will not believe in you until we see Allah manifestly." So the punishment overtook you, while you looked on.' (*al-Baqara:* 55)

If death befalls people abruptly, they would not be aware of its horrors except at the very moment when it befalls them. However, if death befalls them, while they are mindful of it, they would face with a heart filled with terror and fear. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِنَّ مِنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لَمَن يُؤۡمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكُمۡ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡهِمۡ
خَٰشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا يَشۡتَرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلًاۗ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ أَجۡرُهُمۡ
عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلۡحِسَابِ ﴿١٩٩﴾

Some of the People of the Book believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God, they would never sell God's revelation for a small price. These people will have their rewards with their Lord: God is swift in reckoning [199]
(The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 199)

Allah *Glorified is He* always relates honest and truthful historical accounts concerning past events in the Quran. The Quran is never biased against the people of the Book (Christians and Jews) because of their stubborn opposition to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* They showed enmity towards his call, and they contrived evil schemes to undermine his efforts and hinder the spread of his call.

The Quran speaks about some of them in all honesty: 'Some of the People of the Book believe in Allah …' (*Al-'Imran:* 199). We have underlined earlier that this is known as 'Preservation of Probability'. When Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Some of the People of the Book believe in Allah …' (*Al-'Imran:* 199), and some of the people of the Book who were actually considering believing and following Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* listen to it. What would their position be since they were thinking about believing in what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* preached? Concerning this, they would certainly ask themselves, 'These very thoughts were buried deep inside our souls. How could Muhammad possibly know of them? This proves that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not speak based on whims and that Allah *Glorified is He* imparted to him the knowledge of what was hidden within people's very souls! These people of the Book would have said to themselves, 'As long as Allah *Glorified is He* is imparting to him the knowledge of things that have not been made open to anyone else, he (Prophet Muhammad) *peace and blessings be upon him* must be telling the truth (about being a Messenger of Allah)!' If the verse had been revealed after they had believed, it would not have had this effect.

Therefore, this statement must have been part of the glad tidings that many of the people of the Book were thinking about believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the Messenger of Allah. This statement of Allah *Glorified is He* made the process of their believing come to fruition because they said, 'The Messenger of Allah who tells us such hidden things the knowledge of which must been imparted to him by Allah *Glorified is He* Who knows the treachery of the eyes and whatever the breasts conceal.'

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱصْبِرُوا۟ وَصَابِرُوا۟ وَرَابِطُوا۟ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ (٢٠٠)

You who believe, be steadfast, more steadfast than others; be ready; always be mindful of God so that you may prosper [200] (The Quran, *Al-'Imran:* 200)

The chapter of *Al-'Imran* concludes with this beautiful verse. This chapter comes right after *al-Baqara* (Chapter 2), and they both address one of the fundamental doctrines, namely to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Divine Message with which he was sent that concludes and supersedes all the past divine messages (sent with previous Messengers of Allah). This is why Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about faith, divine guidance, and revelation, and then mentions the remaining teachings of those who followed previous divine messages which had been distorted and deviated from the true divine guidance being affected by human whims. In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah speaks about the Jews and in *Al-'Imran* He speaks about the Christians. Then, He illustrates a faith-related point pertaining to the position of those who believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and place their trust in His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* He also describes one of the situations in which believers were tested with a bitter adversity. He, then, mentions another faith-related point pertaining to the believers' return to the divinely revealed way of life set by their Lord after falling into the abyss of neglect. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O, you who believe...' (*Al-'Imran:* 200). He is addressing those who believe in all that which was mentioned above: Allah *Glorified is He* His Book and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* He also addresses the actual and genuine purification of truth with the Jews (polytheists of Quraysh) and all the people of the Book in the Battle of Uhud. The verse means, 'O, you who have sincerely believed in Allah *Glorified is He* pay heed to Me. O, you who believe in Me, be patient…' (*Al-'Imran:* 200). This is the first commandment stated in the verse. The second is 'be steadfast,' the third is ' Be on your guard' and the fourth is 'fear Allah.' (*Al-'Imran:* 200)

These are four divine commandments listed in the verse and addressed to believers, and the ultimate objective is clearly stated in the verse as well: 'so that you may prosper.' Whoever yearns for attaining genuine happiness and prosperity must fulfil these four requirements: be patient, be steadfast, be on guard, and fear Allah so that he may prosper.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to prosperity with a tangible term, reflecting that which is easily recognisable by all people. He does not say to you, 'Abide by such commands so that you that you may succeed' or 'win'; rather, He uses the word 'prosper'. As we have previously underlined, the Arabic word for prosperity is *falah* which is derived from the verb *falaha* which means to cultivate the land by tilling the soil and allowing air and water to penetrate the ground more readily. This opens up the soil structure, allowing air, water, and nutrients to penetrate more deeply, reaching the roots. When you till the soil, plant seeds and irrigate the land, what will be the results? Your efforts will yield the plants and crops as desired. It is a material with a tangible and visible outcome. The usage of the Arabic word "*tuflihun*" (that you may prosper) in the verse reflects this connotation.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to prosperity in a tangible sense so that all people can grasp the intended meaning. What is the nature of the prosperity promised in the verse? It is the ultimate prosperity and genuine happiness in the worldly life and the Hereafter.

Prosperity in this worldly life could mean triumphing over one's enemies or leading a safe, secure, and pleasant life. On the other hand, prosperity in the Hereafter means obtaining one's share of the eternal and enduring bliss. Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to be patient, which indicates that hardships and difficulties are inevitable on the path of truth. Faith leads to paradise, and the path to paradise is filled with adversities; hardships are inescapable.

As we reflect over hardships and adversities a person faces on the path to truth, we come to realise that some of them may be related to personal concerns, whereas others are related to the broader society. As for personal concerns that are not connected to society, the enjoined steadfastness entails adhering to endurance, while performing acts of obedience and bearing the discomfort of abstaining from the prohibited acts, even if this prevents a person from obtaining some worldly pleasures and fulfilling his desires. A person should patiently abstain from surrendering to temptations. The struggle of believers is to be steadfast in abstaining from indulging in the fulfilment of the sinful desires and acts that Allah *Glorified is He* has deemed forbidden and to endure the tribulations that befall them in the process. Believers should patiently bear the personal hardships they shall inevitably face on the path to truth and abstain from pursuing the sinful pleasures, vices and the prohibited acts that Allah *Glorified is He* has prohibited.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to you, 'I have created you, and I know how your soul inclines towards sinful desires because you love them. Therefore, be patient and steadfast in abstaining from pursuing them. You should also adhere to endurance because carrying out acts of obedience will cause you some discomfort, possibly leading you to face hardships in the process, which you should bear patiently.' Thus, endurance is required in the adherence to the divine commandments, as well as the avoidance of prohibitions. This is related to the personal context. If a matter goes beyond the scope of personal concerns and into that of the broader society, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflicts- these are they who are true (to themselves) and these are they who guard (against evil).' (*al-Baqara:* 177).

Therefore, patience is required, while enduring unpleasant situations, abstaining from prohibited acts and withstanding misfortunes caused by society. Could they be afflicted with misfortune by society? Yes, they could be due to divine guidance and the way of life revealed to rectify the mistakes committed by society. The people, who benefit from such mistakes in society, do their best to lead astray those who wish to follow divine guidance. They do not hold back from hurting, ridiculing, harassing, and even fighting against them. This is the meaning of patience, while enduring misfortunes and hardships and in times of peril. If your opponent adheres to patience and endures your harm, Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to compete with him in patience and be more steadfast.

What does this mean? It means that the divine command 'be patient' is not the same as 'be more steadfast than others' (*Al-'Imran:* 200). Being patient is an attitude that can be further developed to enable you to cope better during hardships and unpleasant events. What would be the case if your enemy also endures your struggle against him patiently and has enough strength to face you? Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to be more steadfast than him. In other words, if your enemy adheres to patience, you must be more steadfast in patience. This meaning is conveyed in the Arabic root *fa'il,* which is a form for the exaggeration of description in the Arabic language, e.g. the Arabic verb *nafasa* means to compete with another party in doing something or obtaining a goal. The verb is used to describe competition between two parties who seek to accomplish the same goal. The one who strives more to attain the objective and beats the other party to it wins. This is the essence of competition; it is a struggle for victory. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...So, for this let the competitors compete.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26)

The origin of the Arabic verb describes holding one's breath under water. The Arabic word *nafasa* is derived from the Arabic verb *nafas* 'to breathe'. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* once said to Al-'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* 'Would you compete with me in holding your breath under water?' He challenged him to hold their breath under water and see which of them could hold his breath under water longer. The wise skilful person in such a situation trains himself ahead and does not hasten to go into water. Rather, he takes a deep breath and fills his lungs with air so that he can stay under water for longer than his opponent can. The one who goes under water without taking these preparations will only be able to stay under water for a shorter period of time. Therefore, the Arabic verb *nafasa* means competing with another party in holding his breath under water. This entails that the two parties are able to take deep breaths and can hold their breath under water for a period of time. This is why a physician may examine the lungs of his patient by asking him to take a deep breath since he wants to see how long the patient would be able to hold it.

Thus, we come to realise that the verse encourages a Muslim to be patient and more steadfast than his opponent in adhering to patience. Thus, the whole society should collectively adhere to patience and enjoin one another to do so. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I swear by Time. Most surely mankind is in loss except those who believe and do good, enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3).

This means that when you see one of your Muslim brothers lagging behind and his adherence to patience is undermined or fading away, you should wholeheartedly encourage him to be more steadfast in adhering to patience. This is because the human soul is innately prone to change. Sometimes a person is strong and can adhere to patience as due, and at other times, he may have weak willpower. However, a believer's willpower is fostered all the time since he has their fellow brothers' breathe steadfastness into their heart. The verse underscores that believers enjoin one another and does not state that there is one group of people enjoining others all the time. Rather, sometimes a person is the one being enjoined to adhere to steadfastness and patience, and sometimes he is the one enjoining others. We cannot uphold this mutual exchange of advice to adhere to patience unless we first enjoin one another to adhere to truth, the very pillar on which the struggle between those who compete with one another in patience is founded.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ' O, you who believe, be steadfast, and strive to excel in steadfastness. Be on your guard and fear Allah so that you may prosper.' (*Al-'Imran:* 200)

We start to realise the meaning of patience and being more steadfast than others in patience. What does 'be on your guard' in the verse mean? It is to make your enemy feel that you are always prepared to meet him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And prepare against them what force you can with horses tied at the frontier so as to thereby frighten the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know (but) Allah knows them. Whatever thing you will spend in Allah's way, it will be paid back to you fully and you shall not be dealt with unjustly.' (*al-Anfal:* 60)

The verse means that they have their horses tethered and ready for riding whenever war is declared. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The best lifestyle (at times of war) is that of the man who holds his horse's rein in Allah's Way and flies on its back to the places from whence he hears a war cry or the clatter of arms, seeking martyrdom or killing on the battlefield.'(1) This means that we should be ready before the unpleasant events occur so that when adversities suddenly befall, we are ready to face them. We should take the required preparations before any unexpected events take place. When your enemy knows that you are ready to meet him and well prepared at any time, they will fear you. [The preparation of military strength (and other aspects of material and spiritual preparation) serves as deterrent to possible enemy attack.] If, however, you are lax and heedless, your enemy can easily take you by surprise and defeat you. Until you prepare yourself, they are one step ahead of you. What is the benefit of preparation in this aspect? The benefit of such preparations is that it will be indicative of your awareness of your enemy and that you have not given up the duty of taking the required preparations in case he assaults you. Rather, you will be ready for his attack at all times. Being prepared and ready in the verse does not merely mean that you prepare the warhorses, weapons and equipment for material strikes and attacks of your enemy; it also means that you prepare yourself for any moral assaults in order to be able to ward off falsehood and defend the Truth. An aspect of the enjoined preparation is equipping the Muslim youth to redress atheism before it befalls the Muslim community. Why should this be considered part of the required preparations? It is due to the fact that the preparations in the verse are not confined to warhorses, weapons and equipment needed for the fighting on the actual battlefield. Rather, they are also required for any potential mental invasion of evil ideas spoon-fed to Muslims. Therefore, a believer must be equipped with the mental ability to redress any potential atheism-related ideas that might be introduced to Muslims so that all believers would be immune to such evils and able to remedy them as due.

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(1) *[Muslim]*

We have previously underlined that the problem of the current educational curricula (in the Muslim world) is that they borrowed all the western scientific methodologies and concepts. Muslims study history in the light of the western methodologies and learn about nature just as the western scientists do, forgetting that we have been blessed with a religion that protects us from some misleading methodologies. For instance, when a western historian says that the French Revolution was the first to recognise human rights, we must pause, reflect, and ask ourselves when the French Revolution erupted. It erupted about two hundred years ago. These western historians are ignorant of the fact that Islam recognised human rights fourteen centuries ago as stated in the Quran and the authentic *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* If every Muslim student upon hearing the inaccurate statement suggesting that the French Revolution was the first to recognise human rights, should respond by saying, 'No, this is not accurate. The French Revolution took place in the late 1700s. Did you not know that Islam recognised human rights fourteen centuries ago? The fact that you do not believe in Islam should not lead you to distort the truth.'

When a western biology student may say that nature has given a certain animal a skin colour suitable to its environment so that its enemies could not identify it, a Muslim should say, 'Nature does not give anything to any being. Nature itself is created by Allah *Glorified is He*. It is not true that nature has given any powers or abilities to any created being. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* has created the whole universe and has caused all things to come into existence in such forms.' The required preparations, then, are not confined to military power; rather, they extend to include knowledge as well. The enemies of Islam have given up hope that they could eradicate the call of Islam with military force after the failure of the Crusades. Their only alternative was to invade Muslim communities with their distorted methodologies and ideas introduced by their orientalists and our occidentalists that export their cultures that are incompatible with the divinely revealed way of life to us. In fact, they are excused since they do not know the divinely revealed way of life. Thus, we have come to realise that the preparations must also and completely be on the military, mental, moral, spiritual, and scientific levels.

The enemies of Islam employ different techniques to implement their schemes, all of which we should educate the younger Muslim generation to them. They claim that European civilisation prospered, while Muslims lagged far behind. We may respond by saying, 'Was it because of Islam? The Muslim civilisation prospered and moved ahead to be the vanguard of civilisation for a thousand years, while Europe, about whose civilisation you boast, was living in the Dark Ages.' Either these people do not know our history, or they are speaking to people who are ignorant of their own history.

The enjoined preparedness entails that Muslims should be edified on their religion in order to be able to address such borrowed ideas and beliefs before they are equipped with military power to repel the military attacks of their enemies. Muslims should stand up to face the invasion of alien ideas and the attacks on the principles of Islam as devotedly as they stand up to face a military invasion. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ' O, you who believe, be steadfast, and strive to excel in steadfastness.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 200) This divine command encompasses 'patience, while enduring hardships, abstaining from prohibited acts and being more steadfast than opponents concerning enjoining patience and making necessary preparations, on both the material and moral levels. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse with saying: 'Be on your guard and fear Allah so that you may prosper.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 200)

The divine command 'fear Allah' is similar to the command 'fear Hellfire' because fearing Allah means to make a barrier between yourselves and your Lord’s wrath. What is this protective barrier? It is the obedience to your Lord. What does obedience mean? It means adhering to the commands of Allah *Glorified is He* and abstaining from committing the actions He has deemed prohibited. Those who interpret fearing Allah as obedience to His commands are correct because it is the means to protect oneself from the wrath and punishment of Allah *Glorified is He*. Some may interpret it according to the end. When it is said to you, 'Fear Allah', it means, 'Make a barrier between yourself and Hellfire', which is one of the tools of divine punishments. If it is said to you, 'Fear Allah', it means that you should obey His commands and avoid His prohibitions. What is the meaning of fearing hellfire and the wrath of Allah? It means the obedience to Allah *Glorified is He*. The fearing of Allah is sometimes interpreted by its means and at other times by its end.

We have previously underlined the 'prosperity' in the concluding statement 'so that you may prosper" as either attained in this worldly life or in the Hereafter. In this worldly life, prosperity means triumph of truth and faith and attaining victory over the enemies as opposed to being humiliated and becoming subservient to others. This is one aspect of prosperity. However, suppose that your opponents prosper, and you are weakened at some point in time. In this case, you should be assured that you are on the way to attaining another aspect of prosperity, namely the prosperity in the Hereafter. If this were not true, how did those addressed by this verse interpret prosperity before they witnessed the triumph of Islam over its enemies? How did those who had struggled and were oppressed in their unstable lives and died before Islam prevailed attain prosperity? Their prosperity lies in the Hereafter. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* prudently relates the story of the People of the Cave in the Quran. He says: 'And thus did We rouse them that they might question each other. A speaker amongst them said, "How long have you tarried?" They said, "We have tarried for a day or a part of a day." (Others) said, "Your Lord knows best how long you have tarried." Now send one of you with this silver (coin) of yours to the city, then let him see which of them has purest food. Let him bring you provision from it and behave with gentleness. By no means make your case known to anyone. Most certainly, if they were to prevail against you, they would stone you to death or force you back to their religion, and then you will never prosper.' (*al-Kahf:* 19-20) We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They would stone you to death'. The verse continues: 'or force you back to their religion, and then you will never prosper.' (*al-Kahf:* 20)

If they were to stone them to death, this would mean they would triumph over them in this worldly life, but they would win the Hereafter. If they were forced back to their false religion, they would have never prospered in this worldly life or the Hereafter. So, all aspects of human prosperity in this worldly life, the Hereafter or in both lie in the obedience to the divine commandments in the verse that reads: 'O, you who believe, be steadfast, and strive to excel in steadfastness. Be on your guard and fear Allah so that you may prosper.' (*Al-'Imran:* 200)

The Chapter of

an-Nisa’

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

In the previous pages, we shed some light in our reflections on the names of the Quranic chapters. Reflecting over the third chapter of the Quran, *an-Nisa'* which is chosen to honour the women, we see that it addresses a considerable number of Islamic rulings and provisions concerning women. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* has touched upon women's rights in a number of Quranic chapters such as *al-Ma'ida* chapter (no.5), *al-Ahzab* (no.33), *al-Mujadala* (no.58), *al-Mumtahana* (no.60), *at-Talaq* (no.65) and *at-Tahrim* (no.66). All of these chapters of the Quran underline the religious rulings and rights of women who are the incubating bosoms of the human soul.

We know that the primary tasks of men in this worldly life mostly involve dealing with inferior species: with inanimate objects he uses in the laboratory, with animals he breeds and with plants he cultivates. Men mostly deal with these lower species as compared to women. We have four species: inanimate things, plants, animals, and humans. The working sphere of men is mostly restricted to inanimate things, plants, and animals. In contrast, women deal mostly with human beings. This is a means of honouring women. Reflecting over the childhood period of all animate beings, especially plants and animals, we realise that it is relatively short. There are animals that have relatively short period of childhood that does not extend beyond a month or even a few days. The childhood of some plants may extend to seven years, such as perennial trees. However, the childhood of humans continues from birth until the age of fourteen. It is a long period. The question is why Allah *Glorified is He* makes the childhood of humans that long.

The mission of human beings in life is refined. Therefore, the childhood of human beings requires extensive care. During childhood, the human being develops and acquires wisdom from those around him in order to form his own code of conduct. During this period, the child is nurtured mostly by his mother and thrives under the female's care and attention, while his father works to earn a living and provide for the family in whose company he relishes tranquillity.

It has been narrated in Islamic history books that a Muslim woman once sued her husband who wanted to take her son away from her. She said to the judge, 'He carried him effortlessly in his backbone (or loins) and brought him into being by satisfying his sexual desire (during the intercourse). However, I endured great hardship to give birth to him! I am worthier of custody over him!'

One of the anecdotes of classical Arab literature tells of how a mother fought before a judge for her son who was claimed by the father (some sources indicate that it was Abu Al-Aswad Ad-Du'ali); the child probably had reached the age of seven. She said, 'This is my son. My womb was a vessel for him. My lap was a courtyard to play for him. My breasts were milk springs for him. When he awakes, I care for him with delight. I protect him when he sleeps at night. For several years I have done this. Now, when he is fully weaned, his limbs are well formed, and his character has proved to be fine, his father wants to take this son of mine.' The judge then said to the husband, 'You have heard the words of your wife. What do you have to say in return?' The man replied, 'She has spoken the truth, but I carried him in me before she gave birth to him, and I placed him in her before she put him in the world. I will teach him knowledge and great wisdom.' The judge turned to the woman and asked: 'What is your answer to this, woman?' She replied, 'He is right in what he has said. However, he carried him when he was weak and light, while I was burdened with his weight. He put him in me yearningly, while I put him to the world with agony.' Her words were pleasing to the judge, and he ordered the man, 'Give her her son. She has more right to him than you.'

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed a chapter of the Quran about the family of 'Imran since they were an ideal role model, worthy of receiving the divine messages and religious missions. Some of the Messengers of Allah were among their descendants, and many of them were honest adherents to the divinely revealed way of life like 'Imran's wife. Neither she nor

Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with them* was a Prophet or a Messenger of Allah; however, each of them obeyed the commandments of their Lord.

When Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the believers specifically in the verse, we should know that He is issuing religious assignments and commandments for believers. He says to His believing slaves, 'I have granted you freewill to make your own choices in this worldly life and have never obliged you to comply with any religious assignments, except what you have voluntarily accepted when you believed in Me. Since you believe in Me as the All-Capable and Wise God, you must obey My commands.'

Allah *Glorified is He* does not force anyone to believe in Him. The Muslim willingly and voluntarily chooses to believe in Him. Therefore, he has to obey the One Whom He chose to believe in. We have previously emphasised that when someone chooses to go to any given physician, it is always because he thinks that this physician is the one who can treat them. Once he consults the chosen physician, he complies with their orders, takes the prescription, and immediately hurries to the pharmacy to buy the medicine. If he does not find the prescribed medicine, he may travel to get it. The patient follows the instructions of the physician and does exactly as ordered.

In this context, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O, People.' He is not commanding man to perform any religious assignments. Rather, He is commanding all human beings to believe in Him. He clarifies this meaning by addressing all people in the verse. He is calling upon all people and inviting them to believe in Him. What does 'O, People' in the verse mean? It refers to Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* and his posterity. Allah(1) *Glorified is He* opens the chapter with the following verse:

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God.' However, the word ' Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفۡسٖ وَٰحِدَةٖ وَخَلَقَ مِنۡهَا زَوۡجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنۡهُمَا رِجَالٗا
كَثِيرٗا وَنِسَآءٗۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى تَسَآءَلُونَ بِهِۦ وَٱلۡأَرۡحَامَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ رَقِيبٗا ١

O, People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship: God is always watching over you [1] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 1)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses people and commands them to be mindful of Him. He says: 'O, People, be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul' (*an-Nisa':* 1). The meaning of being mindful of Allah is to protect yourself from His wrath and punishment. How can one be mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* and what should one do to avoid His punishment?

The first step towards attaining mindfulness of Allah *Glorified is He* is to believe in Him as the Lord of the universe and to embrace this belief intellectually. Allah *Glorified is He* explains this fact to people and says: 'O People! Be mindful of your Lord.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) He does not say be mindful of your God because the concept of divinity is intertwined with worship. God, by definition, is the One worthy of worship and in this vein, He issues His commands and prohibitions. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not address people as their God in this verse. They are still in the stage of grasping the concept of Lordship. The Arabic word *Rabb (God),* meaning Lord, is the One Who nurtures. The same root is the verb *yurabbi* which means 'to raise' (as in raise a child). *Rabb* also means 'the Creator' Who originates something from nothing and nurtures it. Is the One Who creates and nurtures all beings not entitled to set His own set of rules for preserving His creation? It is His right to set the laws and rules of the preservation of created beings. We see the inventor or craftsman setting the rules of maintenance for the things he invents. Would it not be senseless if Allah *Glorified is He* creates human beings out of nothing and then abandons them in the worldly life, allowing them to do whatever they wish with no limits or rules? Should He rather command them to do certain acts and refrain from others in order to fulfil their mission in this worldly life as due? Allah *Glorified is He* thus lays down the fundamental ruling of the promotion of faith. He says: 'O People, be mindful of your Lord

Who created you from a single soul…' (*an-Nisa':* 1). This means that people are required to be mindful of their Lord. The meaning of being mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created them, is to protect themselves from His punishment by obeying His commands. Why would Allah *Glorified is He* emphasise the fact that He has created people for a reason to be mindful of Him unless it was an established truth accepted by all of them? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Be mindful of your Lord Who has created you' (*an-Nisa':* 1); this attests the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has created us is an established truth recognised by all human beings. Were it to be a doubtful matter, we would have retorted, 'But You have not created us!' Indeed, to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the loftiest attributes.

You may hear someone saying, 'Be good to the one who did such and such favours for you.' You may, then, choose to acknowledge that this man did you such favours or not. If you admit that he did you such favours, you are assenting to this statement. The Divine Command 'Be mindful of your Lord Who has created you' implies that the creation of mankind is an established fact and not a disputable or controversial matter. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to remind us of the truth in which we all believe, namely that He has created us for the purpose that He has willed, i.e. receiving the divine guidance and the shares of His divine attributes that would protect us. Allah *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic word *Rabb*, e.g. Lord or Master instead of Allah or God. The concept *rabb* refers to the Supreme Being Who has created the whole universe out of nothing, has cared for His creatures and has nurtured them into a human perfection that they are intended to attain. He is the One Who has created the whole universe in the best and most perfect fashion and form. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if you ask them Who created the heavens and the earth and made the sun and the moon subservient, they will certainly say, "Allah" Whence are they then turned away?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 61)

Since the issue of the creation is established beyond doubt and you believe in Allah, the Creator, then we inevitably acknowledge that He has power and control over us. We believe that He is our Lord Who has nurtured us, and accordingly we recognise His wisdom in all matter. Familiarising ourselves with the God and Lord Who has such limitless abilities and infinite wisdom, we should be either afraid of His Power and Might or express our gratitude towards His Wisdom and acknowledge Him as the God and Creator of the universe.

The verse continues: 'O, People! Be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul' (*an-Nisa':* 1). If Allah does not say 'and from it created its mate', the verse would not have been complete. The reason is that He elucidates about the purpose of creation: 'And of everything We have created pairs that you may be mindful.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49)

Allah *Glorified is He* has created mankind from a single soul and has created from it its mate. In interpreting the meaning of the creation in this context, some commentators were quite confused as whether the verse means that Hawwa (Eve) was actually created and fashioned from the rib of Adam *peace be upon them*. Some commentators asserted this view, while others held that it is not true adding that the reference 'from it' in this context means from the very kind. In support of their interpretation, they adduced evidence from another verse that says: 'Certainly, a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves…' (*at-Tawba:* 128).

Does the verse mean that Allah has created Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from our souls? No. The verse means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger of Allah sent to all mankind from amongst themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* is underscoring a piece of evidence that would help us to understand the creation of Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her* since her creation has not been detailed in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* has given us an account of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and how He has fashioned him out of clay along with the stages of his creation until he became a complete human being. It is plausible to assume that He intended the description of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* to be an example of the creation of the human beings, in general, and that the creation of Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her* would be just the same. In this context, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'has created from it', which means He has created a being belonging to the same species of Adam *peace be upon him*. Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her* was thus created of clay and then fashioned in the same manner Adam was fashioned.

Therefore, the verse did not repeat the creation process of Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her* as done in the case of Adam *peace be upon him*. The verse could mean that Hawwa (Eve) was created from Adam's rib. Yet this was an event that was not witnessed except by the Creator, and in such a case, the proof should be taken only from the One Who witnessed it. Allah *Glorified is He* thus has conferred His Mercy upon us and relieved us of being entangled in doubts about the creation, how it happened, and how we came into being.

The human being has no say in the way in which he was created. The One Who has created Man teaches us about the creation. His account is the correct one because this matter goes beyond the scope of any empirical science. This is why when Darwin arrogantly tried to make conjectures about the evolution of mankind, he went astray, and later modern theories refuted his claims. Modern theories challenged his claims by posing the question as to why the factors that caused the first ape to evolve into a human being did not affect the rest of the apes as well and cause them to evolve into humans and accordingly led to the extinction of every species of apes. Darwin failed to respond to this question. For this reason, we emphasise that this matter was not witnessed by us, and therefore, we need to listen to the Creator in this regard. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth nor of the creation of their own souls. Nor could I take those who lead (others) astray as helpers.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) Since there were no witnesses to the creation of the heavens, the earth or Man, none of the created beings can claim any knowledge about it. No one should thereby raise claims about the creation of Man. Allah *Glorified is He* responds to those who try to claim that they have knowledge about this matter by saying: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth nor of the creation of their own souls. Nor could I take those who lead (others) astray as helpers.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) The meaning of 'those who lead (others) astray' is those who will lead people astray as far as the question of the creation is concerned. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is equipping us to address the false claims that could be arbitrarily put forth in this regard.

Thus, when He says: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth nor of the creation of their own souls, Nor could I take those who lead (others) astray as helpers.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) He has clarified to us the nature of those who lead people astray concerning the subject of the creation. They were not there to assist Allah *Glorified is He* in the creation of the universe or to claim knowledge of the creation and how it took place. Accordingly, if human beings want to know about the creation of Man, they should remember that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who can tell them how Man was created. Those who make unfounded allegations about the creation of Man are the ones who mislead people and divert them away from the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O, People! Be mindful of your Lord who created you from a single soul.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) Reflecting upon the verse, one wonders why Allah *Glorified is He* does not simply say that He has created human beings in pairs? The reason is that when He declares that Man is of two origins, a male and female, this means that each of them may have its own personal desires and inclinations. Thus, He is attributing all mankind to a single origin so as to imply that we should not have conflicting arguments since we all are from the same origin. In refutation of Darwin's theory of evolution, Allah *Glorified is He* has guided a group of non-Muslim scientists to defend Islam by finding evidence conforming to the narrative of the creation of man in the Quran. For instance, when the French scientist Monier wanted to refute such superstitious claims that the origin of Man was an ape, he said: 'I am astounded by those who think in such a way. Could chance cause human beings to exist in pairs of the same species, but differ in gender so that when they mate they would produce male or females?' How could such a process happen by chance?

Let us concede, for argument's sake, that Adam *peace be upon him* was created by chance. Was Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her* created by chance as well? Could it happen by chance that Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her* was created of the same species, yet differ in gender so that when they mate together, an emotional effusion flows between them, allowing the fertilisation process to take place, thus producing either a male or a female child? Does this also happen by chance? If this were true, it would be such a rational and remarkable chance! They may call it 'chance', and we call it the work of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Monier thought that he had found the evidence whereby he could refute Darwin's views. However, we would like to assert that the Quran has touched upon this very subject in the verse that reads: 'O, People! Be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul and created from it its mate.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) This is wherein its greatness resides.

Allah *Glorified is He* has created males and females. The females are of the same species of males but differ in gender so that when they mate together. Allah *Glorified is He* would cause them to produce through their union new generations of men and women. It is a purposeful process entailed by His wisdom. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate' (*an-Nisa':* 1). This verse has adduced the evidence to which the French scientist Monier was guided to later. The verse continues: 'And from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide…' (*an-Nisa':* 1). Let us contemplate the greatness of the style used in the verse. How great is the word choice! Human beings need to spread throughout the earth in order to avail themselves of the divine blessings and bounties therein. 'Spreading', in this context, means to scatter something over a specific area. The verse means that Allah *Glorified is He* has spread (from the pair of them) countless men and women far and wide; the pair refers to Adam and Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with them* and the countless men and women are their offspring. Why did the verse not clearly state that He spread countless men and countless women? The number of males tends to be less than the females in all species. For instance, if you examined a field of palm trees, you will only find two male trees among a majority of female ones!

The relative increase in the number of males in all species is thereby intended because the male is the fertilising agent and can fertilise thousands of females. Many species are dominated by females, and the males have multiple female mates. Accordingly, when Allah *Glorified is He* says:' ... and from the pair of them spread countless men, and women far and wide.' (*an-Nisa':* 1), this means that the human species is mostly dominated by females. In this context, the Quran draws your attention to the implications of the words because the speaker is Allah *Glorified is He*. Let us contemplate the verse: 'And from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) The pair in this verse refers to Adam and Hawwa (Eve) *peace be upon them*.

From this pair, He has spread countless men and women far and wide from a single pair.

We should properly understand this point to deduce from it the statistical evidence in support of the existence of the Creator, for He is the One Who '…and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide…' (*an-Nisa':* 1) has spread more people from the posterity of the first pair of humans. Then, He produces a third generation from the second one, and so forth. The more we progress in time, the greater the number will be.

Thus, when you examine the population of any given country, we will find that it grows by the passage of time. For instance, the population of Egypt a century ago did not exceed five million, while two centuries before, it was even less, and ten centuries before it was even less, and twenty centuries even less, and so on. The further we go into the future, the greater the population becomes because Allah *Glorified is He* continues to spread from men and women countless generations who will in turn produce more humans, and so on. Accordingly, the further we go forward in time, the more the population increases. We notice this phenomenon on the level of the family. A family initially is made up of a pair, a father, and a mother. Afterwards, they produce sons and daughters who, in turn, will produce grandsons and granddaughters, and so on. Sometimes when the parents live long enough, they see the grandchildren of their own grandchildren. Thus, the more we advance forward in time, the more the population increases, whereas the more we retrogress into the past, the more it decreases.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has created Adam and Hawwa (Eve) *peace be upon them*. We can trace the entire human population to them. This makes us wonder about the origin of this first pair. Allah *Glorified is He* answers this inquiry by saying: 'O, People! Surely, We have created you of a male and a female and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Certainly, the most honourable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty). Verily, Allah is All Knowing, Aware.' (*al-Hujurat:* 13) He relieves us of pursuing statistical counting. This verse is, thus, necessary to solve such a statistical riddle in order to understand that the further we proceed into time, the more the population of the world increases, whereas the more we retrogress into the past, the more it decreases until it ultimately comes down to the first pair. We cannot say that mankind may be traced back to a single person because multiplication requires a pair. The question arises about the origin of this pair of humans. Someone who is capable of creation must have created them. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us this and says: 'He has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) Thus, we see the importance of the reference to 'spread far and wide' in the verse. If the verse did not state that, the contemporary minds would have gone astray and would have been confounded about the origin of the first pair from whom mankind descended. Therefore, we need to believe that someone must have created this pair. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide' (*an-Nisa':* 1) because spreading in the land is mostly the activity of males. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But when the prayer is ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah's grace, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful….' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) He also says: 'He it is who made the earth smooth for you. Therefore, go about in the spacious sides thereof and eat of His sustenance. Unto Him is the return after death…' (*al-Mulk:* 15).

In many communities, females are mainly entrusted with the duty of taking care of the family, managing the household affairs, and making the home a proper dwelling, in which the husband and family can repose. The dwelling should be one in which a husband can savour peace of mind and serenity. If she does so, she has fulfilled her fundamental mission.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Be mindful of your Lord,' and then says: 'And remain mindful of Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 1). He initially puts forth the evidence that He is a Powerful and All-Capable God Who has created man from nothing, nurtured mankind and rendered the entire world subservient to man. He, then, brings forth the evidence concerning the spreading of people in the earth in order to clarify that He is the One and Only God and that we have to accept His commands and worship Him. This worship involves obedience, and obedience requires compliance with a prescribed way of life that lays out what you should do and what you should not do. Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed the Quran as the final and concluding way of life He will reveal to mankind.

He, then, says: 'Be mindful of Allah, in Whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship. Allah is always watching over you...' (*an-Nisa':* 1). We should consider the discrepancy of the ungrateful created beings. After Allah *Glorified is He* has reminded them of bonds connecting them and by means of which they show mutual compassion and mercy towards each other, He explains to them the following: even though no Messenger of Allah was sent to you for a while, your innate natural disposition recognises Allah *Glorified is He* as your Creator.

If you want to convince someone with doing something for your own sake, you may say to him, 'for the pleasure of Allah, do such-and-such.' Allah *Glorified is He* has extracted the evidence from them. The fact that you say, 'For the pleasure of Allah, do this' means that you are invoking and appealing to the power of a Higher Being to make the addressee do as you wish. Thus, the glorification of Allah *Glorified is He* is instilled within the human nature. The thing that is concealed is the method and way of life or, in other words, the set of commands and prohibitions by which you need to abide. When man is oblivious to this truth, he ungratefully denies it even though when he asks someone for something important, he may say to him, 'Do this for the pleasure of Allah.' As long as he said, 'For the pleasure of Allah', this means that the innate natural disposition inclines to recognise the truth that Allah *Glorified is He* is the True Lord of the universe, that He is the One to be sought and that if he invoked Him, He would not fail him. Thus, you should invoke Allah *Glorified is He* to fulfil your needs. Sometimes you also invoke blood and familial relations by saying, 'For the sake of the ties of kinship bonding us together, I am your relative, so please do such-and-such for me.'

Why were familial ties mentioned in this context? The reason is that when people invoke familial relations, they remind the individual of his duty and responsibility towards his relatives by bringing it to his attention. In other words, as I may invoke these familial ties, I may say to you, 'As long as you and I descend from the same origin, you should do such-and-such for me.' Accordingly, sometimes you invoke Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created you, and sometimes you invoke the ties of kinship since blood ties are the direct reason for material existence. The example of this is the verse that reads: 'Worship Allah (alone). Join nothing with Him (in worship). Be good to your parents…' (*an-Nisa':* 36). Allah *Glorified is He* thus mentions the parents who are the cause of our existence, and as such, He wants us to show kindness to them and treat them well. However, we should contemplate our existence until we realise that the ultimate cause of our existence is Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes this verse with the statement: ' Allah is always watching over you.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) The meaning of the Divine Command 'Be mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* as we have previously mentioned, is to avoid the punishment of Allah *Glorified is He* by means of obeying His commands and avoiding His prohibitions. The Divine Attribute *ar-raqib* means 'Watching' —or in this verse, as 'Ever Watching (over you)'—is derived from the Arabic verb *raqaba* which means to watch over, observe or monitor. Sometimes the word *marqab* is also used to denote the same meaning. We often find an observer or a watcher in the places that require security. In addition, there is often a booth or shack wherein the security guard sits and watches over the monitored area. This booth or shack is always higher than the guarded area. Moreover, the attribute 'Ever Watching' means intentionally observing and watching something or someone. When people say, 'This person is watching this other one', it means that he is intentionally observing this other person. It is true that people may see the person who is being watched unintentionally, but if this person is being watched, this means that someone is deliberately keeping track of their moves. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ' Allah is always watching over you.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) Allah *Glorified is He* is thus not only the All-Seeing, but He is also Ever Watching—and Allah *Glorified is He* is the supreme example.

Anyone of us may see what we do not intentionally want to see. For example, one may pass by many things and see them by accident, but one does not watch someone or something unless he intentionally wants to observe and monitor him or it. However, Allah *Glorified is He* is watching over all of us as is stated in His saying: 'Most surely your Lord is watching.' (*al-Fajr:* 14)

After Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the subject of creation and how mankind was created from a single soul and from it He has created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide throughout the earth, He wants to demonstrate how He organises His universe and protects those men and women whom He has spread all over the earth. Such men and women can be classified into two groups: a group who have been endowed with the strength and the capacity to realise their pragmatic interests independently and satisfy their needs, and a group who are weak and lack the capacity of fulfilling their needs independently. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* wants to establish a well-ordered society of mankind. He decrees that those who are capable and have sufficient power in the society should look after those who are weak. The question arises as to which segment of this weak group Allah *Glorified is He* is talking about in this context. The answer is that He is talking about orphans. Why does He speak of them in particular? The reason is that when Allah *Glorified is He* has created us from Adam and Hawwa (Eve) *peace be upon them* He decrees that human beings must go through a phase of childhood. During this phase, the father is usually the parent who strives and works to provide for the family and tend to their needs, while the mother nurtures and raises the children. Driven by the instinctive tenderness and affection that are instilled within their hearts as parents, both the mother and the father collaborate in the bringing up of their children. Such love, tenderness, and affection are always found in proportion to their children's needs. For instance, the father and the mother always devote more tenderness and affection to their younger child than their older ones. Justice entails this because if you consider how they treated their older children when they were younger, you will realise that the oldest children are the ones who were mostly given the majority of his parent's time and care. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to compensate the youngest child and motivate the father and the mother to give him an additional share of their affection. Moreover, the oldest child may dispense with his parents' care and assistance, as he grows older, while the youngest remains in need of their care and most of their attention. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: '…When they said, "Certainly, Yusuf and his brother (Benjamin) are dearer to our father than we, though we are a (stronger) company. Most certainly our father is in manifest error….' (*Yusuf:* 8) The verse means that Prophet Yusuf's brothers were stronger (older) and thought that their father must, by default, like them more. Such a thought proves the fact that their father knew that they were greater in number and stronger, so he, therefore, assigned greater care and attention to the children who were young and weak. However, his attitude was the opposite of their expectations. Thus, they brought forth the evidence that was, in essence, against their argument.

Accordingly, given the fact that any young child needs the care, tenderness, and affection of the parents, we need regulations and provisions to protect the orphans who have lost the primary source of care and affection in their lives. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* divides the human society into segments and assigns to everyone the other segment for which he should care and be responsible. If each one of us takes care of the segment, for which he is responsible, the relation between the benefactors and beneficiaries will be properly defined so that each one will know his commitments towards his mother, father, and nephews, and so on, until a balance is reached in society. Thus, the entire society may live in mutual solidarity. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make the means of expressing tenderness self-driven in every one of us, for as long as the orphan child is a member of the society, it is incumbent on all of us to take care of him.

An orphan is a person who lost their breadwinner. This is why some people may describe a pearl as '*Durrah Yatimah*' (lone pearl). Likewise, an orphan is lonely and single. However, an orphan is defined in a different way for humans, animals, and birds. An orphan in the human species is defined as the person who has lost their father, whereas an orphan in the animal world is the animal that has lost its mother since animals have unrestricted sexual relationships with each other; the males fertilise the females and then leave them to suckle and take care of the baby animals. Furthermore, if another male animal approaches this female animal which has been fertilised, the latter keeps away. As for an orphaned bird, it is defined as the bird that has lost both its mother and father since the male and female pairs tend to develop affection and love towards each other. They build a nest together, alternatively take care of the eggs, and work together. Accordingly, birds lead a family life.

Allah *Glorified is He* wills to decree special regulations and rulings for an orphan as he represents the weakest in human societies:

وَءَاتُوا۟ ٱلْيَتَـٰمَىٰٓ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ ۖ وَلَا تَتَبَدَّلُوا۟ ٱلْخَبِيثَ بِٱلطَّيِّبِ ۖ وَلَا تَأْكُلُوٓا۟
أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ إِلَىٰٓ أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ حُوبًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٢﴾

Give orphans their property, do not replace [their] good things with bad, and do not consume their property with your own–a great sin[2] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 2)

How can we give an orphan child their wealth if he has not yet reached adulthood, not to mention that we are worried about giving them the money, fearing he should lose it? Allah *Glorified is He* uses precise wording in the following verse: 'Test orphans until they reach marriageable age; then, if you find they have sound judgment, hand over their property to them….' (*an-Nisa':* 6)

However, what should be done before an orphan reaches this age? Should we give them their wealth? Allah *Glorified is He* explains that an orphan's guardian should keep and preserve this wealth, and once he (an orphan) reaches adulthood, he should hasten to give them their wealth in full. Furthermore, he should beware of mixing an orphan's wealth with their own or replace anything thereof, especially by taking the beautiful or precious properties an orphan has and replacing them with cheaper and less useful properties. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Give orphans their property…' (*an-Nisa':* 2) which means that He has specified the money for an orphan, and their guardian should only preserve and keep it. Another important point to consider is Allah's saying, 'Test orphans…' (*an-Nisa':* 6) as some people want to prolong the period of guardianship so that they can take advantage of an orphan's wealth. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that guardians should not wait until an orphan reaches adulthood and then ask them to wait until they know how to manage their wealth. Rather, a guardian should test an orphan's attitude in some situations and then decide whether he will act properly or not.

Allah's saying, 'Test the orphans…' (*an-Nisa':* 6), means to test them whether they can take care of their properties on their own or not. If they can do that when they reach adulthood, certainly they will act properly. It is worth mentioning that Allah *Glorified is He* distinguishes between an orphan and a feeble-minded person. The latter does not suffer from a deficiency due to his young age; rather, he suffers from a mental deficiency. Allah *Glorified is He* has addressed this subject by saying: 'Do not entrust your property to the feeble-minded…' (*an-Nisa':* 5). Is this money possessed by a guardian? No, it is not. A feeble-minded person will not be able to manage their wealth properly. Thus, the management of their wealth is transferred to person who can manage it properly and wisely. A guardian should manage the wealth of a feeble-minded person as if he was its owner since this person cannot manage their property properly. Conversely, when an orphan reaches adulthood and becomes rational enough, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…hand over their property to them….' (*an-Nisa':* 5)

One notices that when Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the subject matter of guardianship, He uses the expression 'your money', but when He addresses the subject matter of giving the money, He uses the expression 'their money.' Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the money to be squandered. He wants a guardian to take care of an orphan's or a feeble-minded person's fortune as if it were their own money since a feeble-minded person needs a guardian to take care of their money, but without them regarding the money that is their own. They may only take a sum of money in return for managing the wealth during the period of orphanage or feeble-mindedness.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches those who do not manage the wealth of orphans or feeble-minded people well by saying: '… Make provision for them from it…' (*an-Nisa':* 5). Guardians may take provisions from the returns of this property, but they should not usurp it. Otherwise, what will be the value of your guardianship and taking care of the wealth of an orphan or a feeble-minded person? A guardian should increase the wealth of the orphan and should not plunder or misuse it in a manner that decreases it gradually. Concerning '…make provision for them from it…' (*an-Nisa':* 5), the phrase *'Warzuquhum fiha'* in the Arabic text means that a guardian should make provisions for an orphan or a feeble-minded person under their guardianship from the yields of their wealth.

'Give orphans their property. Do not replace [their] good things with bad…' (*an-Nisa':* 2). Allah's saying, 'Bad things' in this verse refers to unlawful matters, while 'good things' refers to lawful matters. It also means that if the wealth of an orphan includes good and precious items, a guardian should not take them for themselves and replace them with bad and worthless items. For instance, if an orphan has a beautiful horse, while a guardian has a bad one, a guardian cannot replace the beautiful horse with the bad one. The same example applies to the replacement of a bad buffalo with a good one or a fruitless palm tree with a fruitful one. This meaning is clarified by Allah’s saying: '… Do not replace [their] good things with bad…' (*an-Nisa’:* 2). The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘…and do not consume their property with your own for the good…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 2) means that a guardian should separate his money from that of an orphan's, and keep their money because failing to do so is a great sin.

Allah *Glorified is He* then moves to another subject concerning the weakness of an orphan that is coupled with the weakness of gender. The orphan whether male or female is weak, but if the orphan is a female, then the ordeal is by fargraver. The reason is that in the case of the female orphan there exists the weakness of gender together with the weakness of being an orphan. Sometimes, in the case of a female orphan, a guardian may think of marrying her in order to take her wealth, a situation which happens frequently. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِنۡ خِفۡتُمۡ أَلَّا تُقۡسِطُواْ فِي ٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ فَٱنكِحُواْ مَا طَابَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ مَثۡنَىٰ وَثُلَٰثَ
وَرُبَٰعَۖ فَإِنۡ خِفۡتُمۡ أَلَّا تَعۡدِلُواْ فَوَٰحِدَةً أَوۡ مَا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدۡنَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعُولُواْ ٣

If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one, or your slave(s): that is more likely to make you avoid bias [3] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 3)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* asserts the aforementioned point about keeping away from the orphans’ wealth, especially when the weakness and vulnerability is doubled as pertains to the case of a female orphan. Wronging people in general is prohibited, but wronging a weak person, especially a female, is more drastic since she cannot defend herself. Only the full-grown woman can properly defend herself.

In the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '… If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them]…' (*an-Nisa': 3*), the Arabic verb *taqsitu* (be equitable) is derived from the word *aqsata*. However, the Arabic noun *'Al-Qist'* is among the words that is often confusing; in some instances, it is used to mean 'justice', if the letter *'qaf'* in the Arabic word has a *kasrah* (vowel point that sounds like 'I'). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no god but He *the Almighty* the All Wise…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

Accordingly, we know that the word *'qist'* in the Arabic text of the versemeans 'justice' in some instances and means 'injustice' and 'wronging' in other instances. The Arabic words '*qasata*', '*yaqsatu*', '*qastan*' and '*qusutan*' with a *fat-hah* (vowel point that sounds like 'a') on the Arabic letter "*qaf*", which is represented by the English letter 'q', means 'wronging.' However, the word *'qist'* with *kasrah* (vowel point that sounds like 'I') means 'justice', while *'qast'* with *Fat-hah* (vowel point that sounds like 'a') means 'injustice.' There is another root of the word which is *'Qusut',* but the verb is the same. Accordingly, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, '… If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them]….' (*an-Nisa':* 3)

The Arabic word '*taqsitu*' means 'wronging.' In Arabic language, there is a *Hamza* which can be attached to a verb and give it a contrary meaning. For example, when someone blames another or reproaches him for a particular thing he did, the Arabic word '*ataba*' refers to this meaning, but when the one who was blamed, responds to the one who blamed him; the Arabic verb '*a'taba*' refers to this case. Thus, the addition of *Hamzah* means that the blamed person conciliated the blaming person and removed the cause of the blaming. For example, 'Muhammad '*ataba* '*ala* '*Ali'* (Muhammad blamed 'Ali), and ''*Ali a'taba Muhammad* ' ('Ali conciliated and appeased 'Ali). Another example is '*Jama Al-Kitab'* which does not mean that a person has turned a book into a dictionary, but means that a person has removed the ambiguity and vagueness of the book. Similarly, *'aqsat'* and *'Iqsat'* mean 'removing injustices', but *'Al-Qist'* means 'justice.' Accordingly, if justice comes after injustice has been removed, then the word *'aqsata'* refers to this case. *'Aqsata'* and *'taqsutu*' also mean that there was a state of injustice which was removed, and then was followed by justice.

There is a verse which states: 'But those who go wrong will be fuel for Hellfire.' (*al-Jinn:* 15) The word *'Al-Qasitun'* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is derived from the Arabic words *'Al-Qast'* and *'Al-Qusut',* meaning 'injustice.' There is another verse which says: '… but if you do judge between them, judge justly. God loves the just.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42) This means that Allah *Glorified is He* likes those who remove injustice and replace it with justice. Allah says in the chapter of *an-Nisa'*: 'If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls…' (*an-Nisa':* 3), this means that if a guardian fears that he will not be able to relieve an orphan from justice (fearing of not being able to remove justice implies that a guardian is righteous and pious and knows how to redeem himself from situations where he may slip into injustice), he should keep away from them. Each believer should block the means leading to sins so that he can prevent himself from wronging a female orphan. If a guardian wants to get married, he can choose a woman other than a female orphan under his custody. This means that there are many women, and it is possible for a guardian to marry any of them. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* does not intend that a guardian should abstain from marrying a female orphan and marry only one woman; rather, He clarifies that by saying a guardian can choose any of the numerous women available. Mentioning the issue of polygamy befits the context since Allah *Glorified is He* wants to deter a guardian from marrying orphan girls under his custody lest he should wrong them. Therefore, He commands him to give up marrying a weak orphan since there are many other females. 'If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three or four….' (*an-Nisa':* 3)

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He*, '… whichever [other] women seem good to you…' refers to marrying any woman whom a guardian is not forbidden to marry, as He has enumerated the women unlawful for him to marry in the following verse: 'Do not marry women that your fathers married with the exception of what is past. This is, indeed, a shameful thing to do, loathsome and leads to evil.' (*an-Nisa':* 22) He also says: 'You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts, the daughters of brothers and daughters of sisters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters, your wives' mothers, the stepdaughters in your care– those born of women with whom you have consummated marriage. If you have not consummated the marriage, then you will not be blamed– wives of your begotten sons, two sisters simultaneously– with the exception of what is past. Allah is most Forgiving and Merciful–Forbidden to you are women already married, other than your slaves? Allah has ordained all this for you....' (*an-Nisa’:* 23-24) Thus, any person can marry any woman, whom he is not forbidden to marry, as mentioned in the verse: “…you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one or your slave….” (*an-Nisa’:* 3) Therefore, we must understand why the text of this verse is worded as such, and why the numbers two, three and four are mentioned in this context.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to encourage people to abstain from marrying orphan girls so that no one wrongs another, as he may marry her due to greed. Allah *Glorified is He* orders a guardian to abstain from marrying a female orphan since there are many other women to marry, and he can marry two, three, or even four women. Allah orders him to keep away from a female orphan lest he covets her money or takes advantage of her weakness since she no longer has a guardian who accepts responsibility for her.

We should consider deeply the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '… you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three, or four….' (*an-Nisa’:* 3) The word '*mathna*' in the Arabic text of the verse mainly means two things. For instance, the sentence *'Ja’ Al-Qawm Mathna'* means that some people walk in a line where each row consists of two people walking beside each other. The word thus implies unity. Another example is *'Ja’ Al-Qawm Thalath*', which means that people walk in a line where each row consists of three people walking beside each other. Also, the sentence *'Ja’ Al-Qawm Ruba’*; means that people walk in a line where each row consists of four people. The opinion that the words *'mathna*', *'thulath*', and *'ruba*'' mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse mean that every person is allowed to marry nine women can be refuted by saying that this is a wrong understanding of the verse. Following this logic, the word *'mathna*; would mean four people, *'Thalath'* six people and *'ruba''* eight people. Therefore, the total sum would be eighteen. However, this is not the intended meaning since Allah *Glorified is He* is addressing a group and not a single individual. He thus says: 'If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three or four….' (*an-Nisa':* 3)

Accordingly, if a teacher asks students to open their books, does this order mean that only one student should open all the books? No, it is an order for every student to open his own book. Ordering a group of people in the plural form means that each person in this group is addressed by this order. When the teacher asks students to get out their pens, this means that each student should get out his own pen. In addition, when a group of people are ordered to get in their cars, this means that each one of them is being addressed by this order and should get in his car. Thus, ordering a group of people in the plural form means that each person in this group is being addressed by this order. The saying of Allah *Glorified is He*, '…you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one, or your slave(s). That is more likely to make you avoid bias,' (*an-Nisa':* 3) refers to men in general, among whom one man may marry two women, another may marry three women and a third may marry four women.

When Allah *Glorified is He* enacts a ruling, He sometimes makes things obligatory, and on other times He makes other things permissible. In this context, Allah *Glorified is He* does not enjoin and decree polygamy on every man; rather, He makes it permissible. There is an evident difference between obligation and permissibility. Even marrying one woman is only a permissible and not an obligatory act. Accordingly, there is a difference between what Allah *Glorified is He* obligates and what He makes permissible. However, in the second case, the motive that directs a person's action is simply his desire.

Furthermore, if a person applies a particular ruling, he must make sure to follow all the conditions relevant to this ruling. For example, the person who follows the ruling on polygamy should deal with his wives fairly. If he does not, corruption will spread on the earth, and this will cause people to doubt Allah's rulings and wonder whether they are fair or not. If a person marries more than one woman and refrains from treating his wives fairly, then this means that he has followed only one part of the ruling and has left the other part which is relevant to justice. People always refrain from polygamy since many have suffered greatly from marrying more than one wife by abandoning Allah's ruling that stipulates treating one's wives fairly.

The divine course has to be taken as an indivisible whole. So, why does any married woman hate polygamy? The reason is that she knows that when any husband marries a new wife, he directs his complete attention, wealth, care, and even smiles to this new wife. Therefore, most women hate the idea that their husbands may marry other women. Those who follow Allah's ruling regarding polygamy have to strictly abide by His ruling of dealing with their wives justly. If they do not do so, they will cause people to rebel against Allah's ruling, and many will try to find reasons and pretexts for such rebellion and disobedience. Many will criticise this person for marrying a second wife and neglecting the first one, or leaving his children without care and directing all his attention to his new wife. How can this person follow Allah's ruling concerning something and disobeying it concerning something else? Whoever does so makes people doubt Allah's rulings and further incites them to rebel against them. People with shallow understanding may say that those who partially follow Allah's rulings may be excused. However, this is an unacceptable logic.

The major problem that occurs in dealing with any of Allah's rulings is to partially follow them without considering the conditions of these rulings. Allah's rulings must be followed as a whole. We can rarely find a person who has managed to achieve justice in marital life regarding his expenditures, housing and not favouring any of his wives over another. If the first wife objects, by any means, no one will give her any consideration. However, when a husband fails to treat his wives fairly, she will have justifiable reasons for objecting to polygamy. The complaints arising nowadays amongst married couples are caused by the fact that some people have used Allah's concession in practising polygamy and have not followed His ruling regarding the fair treatment of wives. Justice is enjoined concerning the matters in which man has choice, but this command is not enjoined concerning the matters in which Allah *Glorified is He* has not given him choice.

Some shallow-minded people may say that Allah commands men to treat their wives justly, and then He decrees that no one can achieve such justice. However, can this be considered proper legislation and ruling? Would Allah

Glorified is He give people things, and then take them away? Allah decrees legislation for the case of man's inability to maintain justice by saying: "You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so. But do not ignore one wife altogether, leaving her suspended [between marriage and divorce]. If you make amends and remain conscious of Allah…." (*an-Nisa':* 129)

Since Allah has decreed a ruling concerning inability to maintain absolute justice, He has not abrogated it. A true believer should not follow Allah's rulings in part, depending on his interests; he should not just follow the rulings which he considers in his interest and reject that which does not appeal to him. Allah's Guidance must be followed as a whole by all people due to the fact that if any Muslim deviates from this Guidance, he will cause harm to other people. What may be considered as someone's right may be considered as another one's duty. Therefore, a person should take his rights and perform his duties. Those who follow Allah's ruling with in regards to practising polygamy have to follow His rulings regarding justice. Otherwise, they will give the opponents of the religion strong pretexts to refute and alter Allah's legislation, depending on the situations noticed by them, which result from Muslims abiding by one ruling and neglecting another.

The fairness required of one who practises polygamy is primarily concerned with distributing different objects among his wives fairly, i.e. he should provide them with equally good residences; the time he spends with each of them should be divided equally; the furnishing of each of his wives' houses should be of the same quality, and his personal belongings should be divided equally amongst his wives. A husband should not keep valuable things with one of his wives, while keeping cheap things with the other one. For instance, a husband may keep pyjamas made of high-quality wool in the house of one of his wives, while keeping another one made of lower quality material in the house of his other wife. Equality should not only be observed with wives' properties and belongings, but also with a husband's belongings which are kept in each wife's house. Early Muslims used to strictly observe this rule to the extent that they would make sure that the shoes they wore in each of their houses were the same in kind, colour and shape so that none of their wives would show off among the others and boast that her husband wears better things when he is at her house than he does when he is in the other wives’ houses. The form of justice that a person is required to maintain is pertaining to the matters which fall under the realm of a husband’s choice. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does oblige a person to observe justice in matters in which He has not given him choice. Allah *Glorified is He* orders a husband to be just with his wives regarding their houses, the time he spends with each one of them, the properties he buys for one and his personal belongings which he keeps in each one’s house. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not enjoin on a husband to be fair in his love and inclination towards his wives since this matter is not under his control.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asserts this rule. ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* says, 'Messenger Muhammad used to divide things fairly and say, "O, Allah, witness that this is how I divide things which I have control over and possess, so do not blame me for that which I do not have control over or possess (i.e. the heart)."(1)

This is the meaning of the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so….' (*an-Nisa’:* 129) The reason is that there are things that a person cannot control, such as feeling comfortable at one of his wives’ houses more than the other ones or feeling more sexually comfortable towards one than the other. Nonetheless, regarding the points which are apparent to people, equal division should be observed so that none of them boasts it and provokes another wife. If this is the case with multiple wives who are considered temporary (in the sense that the man can leave any of them at any time either by separation or divorce), then it is more likely that a husband treats his children from each wife justly.

Some people abstain from following Allah’s rulings when they find a man who has more than one wife taking advantage of polygamy which Allah has made lawful, yet he has failed to establish justice among his multiple spouses. Furthermore, they may find out that his children from one of his wives are neglected and displaced; therefore, they take this as a ground for censuring Islam. Those who changed the matrimonial laws in Egypt considered the egregious discrimination that some foolish parents cause when they prefer the offspring of a particular wife to the offspring of another in regards to food, clothing and education. Therefore, problems arise when a Muslim abandons his religion and exposes it to criticism and attacks by its adversaries. Every Muslim should pay attention to his behaviour and should not deviate from the righteous path in order that he protects his religion from criticism. He should not give a chance to the enemies of Islam to attack and censure Islam.

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(1) *Related by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and Al-Darimy*

When a Muslim behaves in an inappropriate way that is unacceptable to Islam, he gives the adversaries of Allah *Glorified is He* the opportunity to attack His religion. Therefore, a Muslim should observe good behaviour in order to protect his religion. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* maintained justice amongst his wives to such an extent that was not restricted by his ability. When he was ill, his illness could exonerate him of any blame for staying in any of his wives' houses. However, he ordered some of his companions to carry him to the houses of the rest of his wives on the days specified for them. Therefore, he used the power and ability of others in order for him to maintain optimal justice. Furthermore, whenever he travelled, he used to draw lots to choose a wife who would travel with him; this is utmost justice.

When such a form of justice exists, people will believe that Allah's legislation involves only goodness, and this will dissuade all the opponents of the religion of Allah from attacking it since they will not find a gap through which they can make lawful what the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* prohibits. Accordingly, if a Muslim is incapable of maintaining justice properly, he should be content with one wife. However, this does not mean that if a Muslim restricts himself to only one wife the need for observing justice is obviated. It is completely unacceptable for a man to neglect his wife. This is why when a woman(1) complained to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* that her husband did not approach her though he did not have other wives, he told one of the companions who was present to give her a *Fatwa* (the religious ruling applicable to such a situation). This Companion said that her husband should spend a night with her every three nights. The companion based his judgment upon the assumption that the man had three other wives. Therefore, she deserved the fourth night. Accordingly, ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was pleased with this companion because he knew how to give proper judgement even in the case of having a single wife.

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(1) The story of the woman who complained about her husband to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him*

Therefore, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so…' (*an-Nisa’:* 129) does not mean that a person is obligated to maintain justice among wives pertaining to the inclination of his heart and whereas love is concerned. Justice should be maintained only in matters over which a person has control. As for the matters which are not within a person’s capacity, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…but do not ignore one wife altogether….' (*an-Nisa’:* 129) The shallow-minded who want to justify their deviation from the Guidance of Allah would claim that observing justice is required, whereas Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that we are incapable of doing so. This opinion can be refuted by the questions, 'Will our Lord give us a concession then take at the same time? Does Allah ask husbands to be just even though He knows that they will not be able to be so?' This is impossible to imagine. When Allah *Glorified is He* says: “You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so….” (*an-Nisa’:* 129) He means that achieving justice does not involve matters a person cannot control such as his feelings and love. Therefore, He says: '…but do not ignore one wife altogether….' (*an-Nisa’:* 129)

We clarify this point to those who make judgments without understanding Allah’ sintention first and to those who understand this intention, but want to deliberately misconstrue it and falsely misquote religion. However, this is a serious matter to which any family may be subjected. For instance, if a man does not have any inclination towards his wife, what is the right course of action in this case? Would it be better to divorce and release her, or should he keep her and marry another wife with whom he feels comfortable? Or should he follow his sexual desires without any control? Allah *Glorified is He* has enacted an integrated religion which should be followed as a whole, and not observing certain rules of the religionand abandoning others.

The problems and crises that ailed countless non-Muslim societies have impelled them to apply many Islamic solutions. I do not like to elaborate on this subject matter, but it is worthwhile to mention that a number of countries have considered allowing polygamy not because Islam has decreed it, but due to the fact that their social conditions have demonstrated that it is the only solution for their problems, especially in order for them to eradicate the problem of mistresses. Mistresses are the women with whom men have illegitimate affairs and then have illegitimate children from them as a result.

It is preferable that a man's relationship with a second woman to be within the framework of marriage which should be known to the public. Furthermore, a man should undertake the responsibility of his family. Whoever wants to know more about these countries and their decision in this particular regard can refer to Dr. Muhammad Khafaja's interpretation of the relevant verse, as he has stated a complete list of the countries that have decided to allow polygamy.

We also have to heed an important fact: Allah *Glorified is He* has not enjoined polygamy; rather, He has allowed itonly. The man, who does not feel comfortable with having more than one wife, should abstain from doing it. Permissible matters are those concerning which a Muslim can choose whether to do them or not. If we consider the matter from a different perspective, we will find that if multiplicity is allowed for one party, and the two parties are equal in number, then the option for multiplicity cannot be attained. The following example illustrates this point. If ten people enter a room that has ten chairs, everyone can sit on a chair. No one can use a chair for sitting and another for stretching his legs. But if there are eleven chairs in the room, then one of the ten people can use a chair for sitting and another one for stretching his legs. Accordingly, multiplicity is allowed when there is surplus. If there is no surplus, then no multiplicity should be allowed because every man will marry only one woman, as then, he will not find any other woman to marry.

Therefore, the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed polygamy means that He knows that there is a surplus, as it is well known that the number of males in each species is less than the number of females. We have given the example of palm trees and the eggs that are produced when a roaster fertilises a hen, hens always outnumber roosters. Thus, the number of females in the realm of plants, animals and every other species exceeds the number of males. If this is the case, and every male will marry only one female, what will be the destiny of the remaining females? They will either try to be permanently chaste and suppress their desires or release them in their attitude towards men surrounding her, or they may unleash their desires with married men, spoiling social relations.

When Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed polygamy, He willed that it accommodates the excess number of women, but upon the condition of observing justice. Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one…' (*an-Nisa':* 3), this means that if the person fears that he cannot observe justice (in matters that are under his control), then he should restrict to and be content with marrying only one woman.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…or your slave(s)….' (*an-Nisa':* 3) Some people argue about the following verse, "…or your slave(s)…." (*an-Nisa':* 3) However, we are reassured regarding this by clarifying that there is no source of slaves now due to the fact that Muslims are passive and subservient, a fact which has emboldened infidels to attack them and seize parts of their land and countries. However, Muslims have not tried to defend their lands. Likewise, there is no longer a war between Muslims and disbelievers, so there are no captives or slaves. It must be noted that we support and defend this legislation when it was applicable in the past. The rationale underlying the permission for a Muslim to take pleasure in his female slave is that the abolition of slavery was among the main goals which Islam has intended to achieve, as it does not promote slavery.

Before Islam, the liberation of slaves depended solely on the will of their masters. Then, Islam came and introduced different ways for liberating the slaves. For example, a sinner may be asked to free a slave in order to atone for a sin or false oath. In addition, the man who has committed *Zhihar* (a man likening his wife to an unmarriageable relative) should expiate for this sin by freeing a slave, whereas a person who has broken his fast in *Ramadan* should free a slave.

Moreover, the expiation for murder is to free a slave. Thus, Islam offers several possibilities of freeing slaves, allowing for the eradication of slavery.

As for the believer who has not committed a sin that entails manumission of a slave and has women slaves, Islam has set rules for how he should treat his female slaves: he must feed her the same food from which he and his family eat along with providing her clothing like that which he and his family use. Furthermore, he should not ask her to do anything beyond her capacity. Accordingly, if he assigns her any work, he should assist her. The only thing that she misses is the satisfaction of her desire, especially when she resides in a house dwelled by a man and his wife, and she sees this wife beautifying herself for her husband and living a full marital life with her husband. Women are sensitive to these matters which may rouse their desires and feelings.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* allows a master and female slave to enjoy each other, He soothes her feelings, and this suggests that she is equal to her lady, the wife of her master, and is thus entitled to the same enjoyment. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to eradicate slavery gradually since He only allows the slave woman to marry a slave man, she will never escape slavery, and any child she may bear will be doomed to being a slave. However if she could copulate with her master and beget a baby, she would free herself and her child. Therefore, this act helps in annihilating slavery, that in addition to respecting a slave's desire and natural instinct. However, foolish people always want to censure and criticise Islam for this.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one, or your slave(s). That is more likely to make you avoid bias.' (*an-Nisa':* 3) This means if a person fears that he may not be fair, he should be content with only one wife or a slave in order to avoid bias. Some people say that it means to avoid the increase of children. Allah *Glorified is He* allowed a person to copulate with the slaves; therefore, there will be a greater chance for increasing the number of children. His saying '…that is more likely to make you avoid bias.' (*an-Nisa':* 3) means that this attitude should be adopted in order to avoid wronging anyone since the word *'Al-`Awl',* which is the root of *'ta'ulu'* and is mentioned in the verse, means inclination, and in the context of inheritance, it means the case in which the shares increase over the original assets. If the number of people sharing a particular property increases, each one's share will decrease.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَءَاتُواْ ٱلنِّسَآءَ صَدُقَٰتِهِنَّ نِحۡلَةٗۚ فَإِن طِبۡنَ لَكُمۡ عَن شَيۡءٖ مِّنۡهُ نَفۡسٗا فَكُلُوهُ هَنِيٓـٔٗا مَّرِيٓـٔٗا ٤

Give women their bridal gift upon marriage, though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience[4] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 4)

It means to give wome their dowries. The word '*sadaqatuhun*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means the dowry, and the word '*nihla*' means gift. So, is the dowry considered a gift? No, it is a wife's right and a compensation for having sexual relations with her. However, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that giving dowries to women should be like giving a gift. Thus, it is based on religious motive, rather than a court judgement.

We should consider Allah's use of words and meanings in this context since what happens in reality is the following: a man marries a woman for satisfying each other's desire and for begetting children. If this is the case, this may not have entitled her to a dowry since she will enjoy relations as much as he does, and will have children. In addition, she will undertake the household affairs, while her husband will exert efforts to earn his livelihood. However, this gift was decreed by Allah *Glorified is He* in order to dignify women: 'Give women their bridal gift upon marriage….' (*an-Nisa':* 4) Who is commanded to give the gift? It is either the husband or the guardian as per His saying: 'Give women their bridal gift upon marriage….' (*an-Nisa':* 4) This implies that a woman has become his wife, and he has become obligated to pay her a dowry. This dowry may be considered as a debt if a husband has married without giving her the dowry due to financial problems, but he should pay it whenever he becomes financially capable. Allah *Glorified is He* may also be addressing the guardian of the bride since he may take the bride's dowry. Therefore, the command in this verse is, thus either addressing husbands or guardians. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* decrees legislation to protect rights, he always gives room for the one whom He has entitled to this right to voluntarily and gracefully give up part or all of it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

'…Though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience.' (*an-Nisa':* 4)

Allah has first defined the rights by asserting to the husband or the guardian of the bride that her dowry is exclusively hers since it is compensation for having marital relations with her. However, He *Glorified is He* has permitted voluntary concession. Thus, if a wife renounces her right, there is nothing wrong with her husband not paying her the dowry. Such a graceful act on her part is bound to strengthen the foundations of their marital life. What matters in this context is the voluntary accord and acceptance of a wife to renounce her right, but her guardian should not take advantage of her bashfulness and appropriate part of her dowry. The important matter is that she should voluntarily accept to renounce it: '… Though, if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience.' (*an-Nisa':* 4)

The Arabic word *'hani"* means the food that a person enjoys eating. However, one may eat something that he finds delicious, but it may cause many health problems. It may thus be enjoyable to eat but may not be healthy and generally good food. What is intended by the words *'Han'an Mari'a'* which are mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, is the generally good food that does not have bad health effects. It is different from the tasty food that may cause health problems that require treatment after eating. Accordingly, tasty and enjoyable food is not necessarily good and healthy. Therefore, we should make sure that we eat healthy and tasty food.

One day a man came to Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* complaining of pain. It is well known that 'Ali had profound and extensive knowledge and a great ability to issue legal opinions. Although he was not a physician, the man sought a remedy based on 'Ali's insights and great knowledge. He told the man to take two dirhams from the dowry of his wife and buy some honey, and then he advised him to dissolve it in some fresh rainwater and drink it. 'Ali advised him as such based on Allah's saying about rainwater: 'and how We send blessed water down from the sky….' (*Qaf:* 9) 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* also said that he heard Allah's verse about honey: 'From their bellies comes a drink of different colours in which there are healing for people.' (*an-Nahl:* 69) 'Ali added that he heard Allah's verse concerning a wife's dowry: '… Though, if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience.' (*an-Nisa’:* 4) Therefore, ‘Ali believed that if the medicine combines blessing, healing factor, good taste, and healthiness, Allah *Glorified is He* can cure the patient if He wills. ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* combined four elements into a medicine in the same way a physician cures patients by mixing different elements. In this case, ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* made a treatment from Quranic verses.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the subject of orphans, feeble-minded people, money, guardianship, and sponsorship. Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَلَا تُؤْتُوا۟ ٱلسُّفَهَآءَ أَمْوَٰلَكُمُ ٱلَّتِى جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ قِيَـٰمًا وَٱرْزُقُوهُمْ
فِيهَا وَٱكْسُوهُمْ وَقُولُوا۟ لَهُمْ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا ﴿٥﴾

Do not entrust your property to the feeble-minded. God has made it a means of support for you: make provision for them from it, clothe them, and address them kindly [5] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 5)

Who is the feeble-minded person? He is the one who does not have a sound mind and cannot manage his wealth wisely. Who would ever give his money to a feeble-minded person? Allah *Glorified is He* says this to teach us how to manage money and use it. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: “… do not speak ill of one another…” (*al-Hujurat:* 11). Certainly, no one speaks ill of himself, but he may speak ill of his opponent or enemy, an act which may lead his opponent or enemy to speak ill of him, i.e., both of them speak ill of one another. Therefore, Allah’s saying, 'Do not entrust your property to the feeble-minded…' (*an-Nisa’:* 5) means that a feeble-minded person may have a fortune, but his feeble-mindedness precludes him from managing it properly, as unwise handling of wealth may lead to losing and wasting it. Thus, if a feeble-minded person has wealth, he should not manage it; rather, a proper guardian should handle and manage it for him.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses a problem that existed in society: some men, whose children who were slightly grown up, gave the responsibility of their wealth to them in order to spare themselves the trouble of managing wealth, even if their children were incapable of doing so wisely. Allah *Glorified is He* warns these parents in this verse against giving their wealth to the feeble-minded based on the excuse that they are their children. Allah *Glorified is He* also warns parents against letting their feeble-minded children manage their sources of livelihood since He has made this wealth as a means of support for them. Therefore, they should not give this wealth to anyone else.

'Do not entrust your property to the feeble-minded. God has made it a means of support for you. Give provisions to them from it….' (*an-Nisa':* 5) Allah clarifies that the feeble-minded person should enjoy all aspects of living, such as food, clothes, etc. Allah *Glorified is He* commands Muslims: '… Give provisions to them from it, clothe them and address them kindly.' (*an-Nisa':* 5). This is a command to treat feeble-minded people well, not to mock them for their foolishness, as no one should increase the suffering of the feeble-minded.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* returns to the subject of orphans:

وَٱبۡتَلُواْ ٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغُواْ ٱلنِّكَاحَ فَإِنۡ ءَانَسۡتُم مِّنۡهُمۡ رُشۡدٗا فَٱدۡفَعُوٓاْ إِلَيۡهِمۡ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡۖ وَلَا
تَأۡكُلُوهَآ إِسۡرَافٗا وَبِدَارًا أَن يَكۡبَرُواْۚ وَمَن كَانَ غَنِيّٗا فَلۡيَسۡتَعۡفِفۡۖ وَمَن كَانَ فَقِيرٗا
فَلۡيَأۡكُلۡ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِۚ فَإِذَا دَفَعۡتُمۡ إِلَيۡهِمۡ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ فَأَشۡهِدُواْ عَلَيۡهِمۡۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ حَسِيبٗا ٦

Test orphans until they reach marriageable age; then, if you find they have sound judgment, hand over their property to them. Do not consume it hastily before they come of age: if the guardian is well off, he should abstain from the orphan's property, and if he is poor he should use only what is fair. When you give them their property, call witnesses in; but God takes full account of everything you do [6] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 6)

Allah *Glorified is He* orders guardians in the case of dealing with an orphan to test and train them on how to manage their wealth before they reach full age. This means that a guardian should not wait until an orphan reaches full age, and then try to test him. A guardian should rather test him before he reaches full age in minor matters. If an orphan shows proper action and wisdom, a guardian will readily give him his wealth as soon as he reaches full age and will not be forced to delay giving him his money until he tests him after having reached full age. When an orphan is tested before reaching full age, he will receive his wealth and manage it by himself once he reaches full age. Allah *Glorified is He* commands a guardian to do as such in order for the wealth not to be kept with the guardian for even a moment after an orphan reaches full age. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Test orphans until they reach marriageable age. Then, if you find they have sound judgment, hand over their property to them. Do not consume it hastily….' (*an-Nisa':* 6)

When an orphan reaches full age after being trained by his guardian on how to manage his wealth properly, and when the guardian is certain that he is perfectly capable of doing that, he should hand over his wealth to him and should not consume it hastily and excessively. Excessiveness means exceeding the proper limits allowed in spending money. A guardian may consume this wealth hastily since this wealth is not his own, as it is owned by the orphan. When a greedy man was asked, 'O, greedy, what do you want greedy man?' He said, 'I want a bowl of porridge that I can keep on eating in the same way that a bad guardian does with the wealth of an orphan.' May Allah *Glorified is He* save us from such a situation! Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '… Do not consume it hastily before they come of age. '(*an-Nisa':* 6) Allah *Glorified is He* warns us against squandering the fortune of an orphan before he reaches full age. This is in order that an orphan's wealth is not to be squandered by a guardian before he reaches full age. However, Allah's legislation is perfect and does not prevent a fair, poor person from being a guardian. Allah *Glorified is He* could have enjoined that guardianship should be assigned only to wealthy persons since they will not be in need of an orphan's wealth. Therefore, Allah does not preclude the honest, poor person who has both faith and expertise from being assigned as a guardian. Allah *Glorified is He* says about a guardian: '…If a guardian is well off, he should abstain from an orphan's property, and if he is poor, he should use only what is fair….' (*an-Nisa':* 6) So, nobody should say that if a poor person becomes in charge of an orphan's wealth, he will misappropriate it, as this judgement is based on human criterion. No one should prevent a poor believer from being assigned guardianship of an orphan since it is true that a person who has faith can rise above greed and avarice. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says about a guardian who undertakes an evident responsibility towards an orphan's wealth: '… If a guardian is well off, he should abstain from an orphan's property, and if he is poor, he should use only what is fair….' (*an-Nisa':* 6)

Scholars have determined the fair amount that a guardian is entitled to take to be equivalent to fees which his counterpart may receive for the same job. The word *'Al-Ma'ruf'* which is mentioned in the verse, means what is common and accepted among people. A guardian may receive an amount that is common for people to receive in such cases, or he may take as much as he needs. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…When you give them their property, call witnesses in; but it is God Who takes full account of everything you do.' (*an-Nisa':* 6) Allah *Glorified is He* protects a guardian, as He knows well His creatures since their nature and feelings change. A guardian of an orphan has to manage his wealth wisely and carefully so that the orphan will not hate him. Sometimes a guardian gives an orphan everything he asks for, but this action is not recommended since an orphan should receive only what he needs, and not to be spoiled. A guardian may not give an orphan all the things he asks for since he may regard them as unsuitable for the orphan, an action which may lead the orphan to hate the guardian and lead him to accuse the guardian of misappropriating his wealth when he reaches full age. However, Allah *Glorified is He* protects a guardian when an orphan reaches full age in so much as the guardian has protected the orphan's wealth and managed him properly.

Therefore, a guardian should bring witnesses to oversee the transaction when he hands over an orphan's wealth since fluctuations of the human soul cannot be controlled. An orphan may hate his guardian for being strict regarding spending the wealth or for punishing him whenever he deviated from the right path. In this case, an orphan may hate his guardian and falsely accuse him. Therefore, a guardian must bring just and impartial witnesses when he delivers an orphan's wealth, in order for a guardian to be discharged from the wealth. However, anything else is left to Allah *Glorified is He*: '… it is Allah Who takes full account of everything you do.' (*an-Nisa':* 6)

Thus, you may notice that the chapter of *an-Nisa'* addresses the weaknesses of women and orphans due to the fact that in the pre-Islamic society, people used to refuse to bequeath women and children until they became adults. This was a strange rule. This was an extremely horrible form of subjugating the weak at the hands of those endowed with power. Indeed, a main underlying objective of the Islamic mission is to eliminate widespread injustices. An example of this is how Islam ruled that women and children must be given their rights. Allah says:

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ ٱلۡوَٰلِدَانِ وَٱلۡأَقۡرَبُونَ وَلِلنِّسَآءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ
ٱلۡوَٰلِدَانِ وَٱلۡأَقۡرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنۡهُ أَوۡ كَثُرَۚ نَصِيبًا مَّفۡرُوضًا ٧

Men shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, and women shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, whether the legacy be small or large: this is ordained by God [by God] [7] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 7)

But who enacts this share? It is Allah Who is the only True Owner and Lawgiver. In this context, the martyr Allah *rest his soul in peace* Sayyid Qutb, the author of *fi Zhilal al-Quran* [In the Shades of the Quran] critically observes the injustices of depriving the deceased's children or women, for whom he was responsible, a share of their inheritance, yet they were denied it. Indeed, the young deserve to take more since the elder have grown up and become stronger. The young are worthy of more care and nurturing. Furthermore, if the heredity laws of Mendel demonstrate that children inherit features from their parents and grandparents, both the good and the bad, and even diseases, chastity and countenance, why should they not inherit their fortune?

When we listen to the Lord's statement: '… a share ordained' (*an-Nisa’:* 7), we conclude that there must be a lawgiver who ordains this law and a recipient who must obey it. The Lawgiver is Allah, the Possessor. In Arabic, there is a subtle difference between *farada* (ordained) and a*wjaba* (obligated). The *'ordainment'* is issued by a higher authority, while the *'obligation'* may originate from the person himself; anyone may place an obligation upon themselves to undertake a particular duty. The True Lord *the Most High* addresses the matter of the ‘prescribed share’ making it clear that it is a precisely known portion. The True Lord explained it only after mentioning those usually present, yet undeserving of inheritance, those around the deceased but are not legally specified heirs. Allah *the Most High* explicitly invites us to allot a portion of the legacy to those who have no prescribed share, forewarning against settlements that distribute ordained shares to those who have none. For this reason, Allah *says*:

وَإِذَا حَضَرَ ٱلْقِسْمَةَ أُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْيَتَـٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَـٰكِينُ
فَٱرْزُقُوهُم مِّنْهُ وَقُولُوا۟ لَهُمْ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا ﴿٨﴾

If other relatives, orphans, or needy people are
present at the distribution, give them something too,
and speak kindly to them [8] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 8)

When kinsfolk, orphans, and needy persons attend the distribution of inheritance and each legal heir receives their share, people who are not legal heirs may say that the heirs are effortlessly appropriating a fortune that fortuitously came to them. Such a situation may ignite bad feelings in the hearts of kinsfolk, orphans, and needy persons. It is true that kinsfolk, orphans, and needy persons are not legal heirs and, as such, are not entitled to take any share of inheritance. Nonetheless, they attended the distribution of shares. Therefore, Allah commands: '… give them something thereof for their sustenance and speak unto them in a kind way.' (*an-Nisa':* 8). Thus, had they not attended the division, the situation would have been different. Accordingly, Allah *the Most High* commands us to give to kinsfolk, orphans, and needy persons to eliminate any trace of envy or rancour towards the heirs or the deceased.

As a result, love, compassion and the joy of doing good deeds will be common amongst people since they all share the benefits. Furthermore, the True Lord *the Most High* not only commands us to bestow upon kinsfolk, orphans, and needy persons a portion of the heritage, but He also commands us to speak kindly unto them, e.g. invoking Allah to increase their sustenance, children and wealth, all of which could be inherited by their children. Such is the duty of the mature heirs endowed with wisdom and common sense. However, if the heir is an orphan, those present should tell kinsfolk, orphans, and needy persons that the heritage is for an orphan, thus, they do not have custody over it. Had they the custody over it, they would have surely given them more so as to soften their hearts and comfort them, Allah says, 'And when [other] near of kin and orphans and needy persons are present at the distribution [of inheritance], give them something thereof for their sustenance and speak unto them in a kind way.' (*an-Nisa’:* 8) In other words, you ought to bear in mind that if you were weak, or an orphan or one not entitled to inheritance, you would definitely be happy if you were allotted a share of inheritance. You should remember that Allah asks you to give a share to those who have no share to inheritance, for you may one day be in their position; Allah *the Most High* may recommend a share for you and your children. Consideration of Divine Laws should not be reduced to be a mere commitment and obligation on believers; rather, these laws should also commit others to fulfil some rights and obligations towards them.

The religious legal ruling simultaneously gives and takes away from you. For this reason, we advise those who pay *zakat* (obligatory charity to the poor) from entertaining the thought that it takes from the fruit of their work and effort to give others. Indeed, *zakat* (Alms) takes from you when you are capable of building security in your life, and when you are incapable; it takes your right from capable people. It is a wise, divine insurance. Subsequently, Allah says:

وَلْيَخْشَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَوْ تَرَكُوا۟ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّةً ضِعَـٰفًا خَافُوا۟
عَلَيْهِمْ فَلْيَتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَلْيَقُولُوا۟ قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ﴿٩﴾

Let those who would fear for the future of their own
helpless children, if they were to die, show the same
concern [for orphans]; let them be mindful of God and
speak out for justice [9] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 9)

One who has weak children that he could leave behind is always worried about their future. Thus, if you, believers, have weak children and you are worried about them, be kind and show sympathy to all weak orphan children; in return for your care, others would be kind to your weak offspring if you were to leave them after death. O, believers know that our Lord is the Watcher and the All-Sustaining. He will repay the good that you have done to your offspring. We once mentioned that Mu‘awiyah and ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As *Allah be pleased with them* met towards the end of their lives. ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As asked Mu‘awiyah, 'O, Commander of the Believers, what worldly pleasure do you continue to enjoy?’ At that time, Mu‘awiyah was the Commander of the Believers or Caliph, that is the head of a strong and rich state. In response, Mu‘awiyah said, 'As for food, I have become bored of the luxurious kinds. As for clothes and apparel, I have become bored of the softest and finest of them. My pleasure in this world is a sip of cold water under the shade of a tree on a summer day.' Mu‘awiyah *Allah be pleased with him* then kept silent for a while before asking ‘Amr *Allah be pleased with him* ‘What about you ‘Amr? What worldly pleasure do you still desire?’ ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As, a great commercial genius, replied, ‘My fortune and pleasure is an endlessly flowing water spring in a fertile land that abounds with mooing cows and accrues a sufficient livelihood for me and my posterity.’ He asks for a continuously flowing spring of water in a land where animals and plants abound with benefits and fruits. They had a servant serving them something to drink. Mu‘awiyah looked at him and wanted to joke around and get him involved in the discussion. He said to a servant, ‘What about you, ‘Wardan’? What pleasure still appeals to you?’ In response, he said, ‘O, Commander of the Believers, it ardently appeals to me to do a favour for some noble people who would not repay it to me during my lifetime but bear it in mind for my children.' The servant has clearly understood Allah's saying: 'And let them stand in awe [of Allah], those [legal heirs] who, if they [themselves] had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account, and let them remain conscious of Allah, and let them speak [to the poor] in a just manner.' (*an-Nisa’:* 9) Those who are conscious of Allah and take care of the weak posterity left behind by others guarantee that Allah will bestow upon them someone who is conscious of Him to look after their own weak offspring.

We have talked about the good servant and worshipper to whom Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went to visit, Al-Khidr *Allah be pleased with him* Musa (Moses) said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?’ The man (Al-Khidr) said, ‘You will not be able to bear with me patiently. How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ Musa (Moses) said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.’ The man said, ‘If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.’ They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it. Musa (Moses) said, ‘How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!'' (*al-Kahf:* 66-71) 'He replied, ‘Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?’ Moses said, ‘Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you.’ And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Moses said, ‘How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!' (*al-Kahf:* 72-74) After that, they arrived in a village where they asked its people for food. When a traveller who is passing through asks you for food, it is always for a pressing need. Simply, if he begs for money, you may think he is doing so just to amass wealth. However, if he asks for some food to eat, then it is incumbent upon you to meet his need. How was the response of the villagers when the righteous servant and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked them for food? Allah says: 'And so they travelled on. Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down, and the man repaired it. Musa (Moses) said, “But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that.” (*al-Kahf:* 77) It was a mean village. The good servant then found a wall on the verge of collapsing and he rebuilt it. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* objected him doing this since he had a reservation about the people of the village who denied them simple hospitability. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in essence, said: 'If you wished, you could have asked for a payment for rebuilding the wall. The people of the village are mean, and you should not have rebuilt the wall for them unless you had received a payment for your effort.'

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was oblivious to facts that Allah did not let his good servant (Al-Khidr) miss. By Allah, if the wall had collapsed, and those wicked people, who did not feed them when they had asked for food, had found the treasure left for the poor orphans, they would have definitely taken this fortune for themselves. Therefore, when the righteous servant saw that the wall was about to collapse, he erected it so that he would hide the treasure away from the wicked, mean people. Thus, he says: 'The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.'' (*al-Kahf:* 82)

This process aims to protect the two orphans. We have to be careful and meticulously examine the text. The good servant repaired the wall in a manner that gave it new life so much so that it would be on the brink of collapsing by the time the two orphans would reach the age of wisdom and rationality. This way both of them would find the treasure. The wall was well timely rebuilt so that when the two orphans reach the age of wisdom and rationality, they could take their treasure. It is the timing willed by Allah since the father of the two orphans was a good man. He was ever conscious of Allah and carried out his responsibilities well. In return, Allah sent them soldiers and made arrangements to protect and preserve the treasure of the man's two orphan boys. Therefore, we need to understand well the wisdom in these words of Allah that we may know how to deal with our children and protect them: 'And let them stand in awe [of Allah], those [legal heirs] who, if they [themselves] had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account, and let them remain conscious of Allah, and let them speak [to the poor] in a just manner' (*an-Nisa': 9*). Why? Simply, when one is young, his egotism is strongly present. The older he becomes, the more he cares for the interest of his children in so much that he would deprive himself of pleasures he enjoys just to meet the needs of his children. Furthermore, when he sees that his offspring are still weak and feel his death is nearing, he grieves at the thought of for leaving his offspring in a weak position. The Lord *the Most High* clarifies the best way for all His servants to deal with this situation: while you are still alive, give strength and support to your children when they are in a weak state; and how to emanate this strength is by adhering to the way of Allah, especially by caring for the orphans under your custody. In this way you secure the livelihood of your children after your death and should find rest after death.

The proper advice to guardians is the following: 'Never harm orphans! You should address them in the same kind and welcoming manner in which you address your own children. Call them ‘dear child’ and ‘dear kid.’ ' When a believer is conscious of Allah and seeks to avoid His punishment, Allah *the Most High* graces their children with a pious person to care for them. The Divine Law concerning orphans continues:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَأۡكُلُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَ ٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ ظُلۡمًا إِنَّمَا يَأۡكُلُونَ فِي
بُطُونِهِمۡ نَارٗاۖ وَسَيَصۡلَوۡنَ سَعِيرٗا ﴿١٠﴾

Those who consume the property of orphans
unjustly are actually swallowing fire into their own
bellies: they will burn in the blazing Flame [10]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 10)

Why does the Quran focus on this matter? It does due to the fact that Allah *the Most High* wants His creation to accept His decreed plans contently regarding their beloved ones, as well as those whom they need for support. A young child may lose his father who strived to care for him and provide him with everything beautiful in life. However, the child subsequently finds the entire society of believers hastening to take care of them and alleviate the loss of their father with multiple fathers in faith. If the case is as such, the father of the child would die and accept the Divine Plan and trial without feeling any fear. What makes people react towards times of difficulty in fear, despair and horror is that they often see that the loss of fathers turns children hopelessly helpless. Children may tell themselves, 'When our father dies, we will be lost.' However, when society protects the rights of orphans and every believer finds it incumbent upon himself to become an alternative father/mother, the situation will radically change. In this case, when the Divine Decree wills to take away the soul of a father, the child will receive it in patience and contentment. 'Behold, those who sinfully devour the possessions of orphans do fill their bellies with fire, for [in the life to come] they will have to endure a blazing flame!' (*an-Nisa’:* 10) Devouring is repeatedly happening as a result of stealing and appropriating what is not one’s own. Eating is different from wearing clothes. In every season, one needs clothes that suit them, but eating is an everyday practice. For this reason, any stealing is intended for devouring. This is why we say in our popular proverb about avaricious people. Such and such has ‘a big stomach’ because it is but an act of devouring. The True Lord *the Most High* has explained the matter of eating the fortune of an orphan by saying: 'O, eaters, of the money of the orphan, you fill your stomach with fire!' In other words, you are eating what will lead you to hellfire in the Afterlife. Nevertheless, punishment may take place immediately in this world;

the devourer of the fortune of orphans may be plagued with lethal painful diseases. On the Day of Judgment, believers will see the traces of the crime of devouring the fortune of orphans on faces with smokes coming out of perpetrators' mouths. Do not think that the stomach will only be filled with fire, while eyes are relieved. No, fire in stomachs occurs while they are exposed to burning flame. The True Lord *the Most High* says:

يُوصِيكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِيٓ أَوۡلَٰدِكُمۡۖ لِلذَّكَرِ مِثۡلُ حَظِّ ٱلۡأُنثَيَيۡنِۚ فَإِن كُنَّ نِسَآءٗ فَوۡقَ ٱثۡنَتَيۡنِ
فَلَهُنَّ ثُلُثَا مَا تَرَكَۖ وَإِن كَانَتۡ وَٰحِدَةٗ فَلَهَا ٱلنِّصۡفُۚ وَلِأَبَوَيۡهِ لِكُلِّ وَٰحِدٖ مِّنۡهُمَا
ٱلسُّدُسُ مِمَّا تَرَكَ إِن كَانَ لَهُۥ وَلَدٞۚ فَإِن لَّمۡ يَكُن لَّهُۥ وَلَدٞ وَوَرِثَهُۥٓ أَبَوَاهُ فَلِأُمِّهِ ٱلثُّلُثُۚ فَإِن كَانَ
لَهُۥٓ إِخۡوَةٞ فَلِأُمِّهِ ٱلسُّدُسُۚ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ وَصِيَّةٖ يُوصِي بِهَآ أَوۡ دَيۡنٍۗ ءَابَآؤُكُمۡ وَأَبۡنَآؤُكُمۡ لَا
تَدۡرُونَ أَيُّهُمۡ أَقۡرَبُ لَكُمۡ نَفۡعٗاۚ فَرِيضَةٗ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمٗا ﴿١١﴾

Concerning your children, God commands you that a son should have the equivalent share of two daughters. If there are only daughters, two or more should share two-thirds of the inheritance, if one, she should have half. Parents inherit a sixth each if the deceased leaves children; if he leaves no children and his parents are his sole heirs, his mother has a third, unless he has brothers, in which case she has a sixth. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts. You cannot know which of your parents or your children is more beneficial to you: this is a law from God, and He is all knowing, all wise[11] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 11)

Exalted is our Lord, the Creator, the Most High. The Lord of the Great Throne tells us how to handle inheritance with our kids, as if we were more loved by Allah than we are by our parents. His noble saying, 'concerning [the inheritance of] your children, Allah enjoins [this] upon you…' (*an-Nisa':* 11) shows His Mercy and Love for us. If we explore the way Allah expresses advice in the Quran, we conclude that the content of the advice is often accompanied by *the ba'* (lit. *with*) letter. Thus, Allah *the Most High* says: 'All this has He enjoined upon you so that you might remain conscious of Him.' (*al-An'am:* 153)

Allah *the Most High* says, 'In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Nuh (Noah)….' (*ash-Shura:* 13) He *the Most High* also said: 'We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents. His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain….' (*Luqman:* 14) All these Quranic verses are associated with *the ba’* letter; it indicates company and association. However, when He advises parents to be good to their children, Allah *the Most High* says: 'concerning [the inheritance of] your children, Allah enjoins [this] upon you….' (*an-Nisa’:* 11) The Arabic preposition '*fi*' (which literally means 'in' but contextually means 'concerning') is indicative of being firmly imprinted and connected to the nature of children. Whenever you see the matter of advice which in this case is the child, you remember it. What is the advice then? It is 'the male shall have the equal of two females’ share….' (*an-Nisa’:* 11) We said before that the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind….' (*an-Nisa’:* 7).

In this verse, Allah *the Most High* did not specify the share of the male immediately after this verse; He only did so after mentioning the matter of orphans and forewarning people against devouring their money. Why? The answer is simple: the course of discussion creates curiosity and craving in readers for the correct judgment. When a reader yearns for a ruling, it comes forth when the reader's soul is ready to apply it. Conversely, when a ruling is enjoined without prior request, the human psyche may either accept or reject it. Allah does not reveal rulings abruptly to His servants, but He prepares them first so they may be eager to receive them, and this is noticeable in the way He reveals to us the rulings of inheritance. At first, Allah *the Most High* said: 'Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind…' (*an-Nisa’:* 7)

Subsequently, He *the Most High* prescribed the rules of distributing the inheritance and the laws requiring kind treatment of orphans, needy people, and family members. Therefore, Allah enjoins due care for the properties of orphans and warns against appropriating them. He *the Most High* says: 'concerning [the inheritance of] your children, Allah enjoins [this] upon you….' (*an-Nisa’:* 11) The first part of this Divine instruction reads as follows: 'The male shall have the equal of two females’ share….' (*an-Nisa’:* 11) But why did He not say, 'Two females shall have a share equal to that of a male' or 'The female shall have the equal of half the share of the male'? All these phrases express the same apparent meaning. However, Allah *the Most High* wants the criterion, or the yardstick, for measurement to be the share of females, so the share of males is determined in the light of his female counterparts. If He *the Most High* says that the female shall have the equal of half the share of the male, the criterion for measuring would be 'the male', but Allah *the Most High* wants the criterion to be defined in terms of 'the female.' Therefore, He says: 'The male shall have the equal of two females' share….' (*an-Nisa':* 11)

Some may claim that this ruling is the first injustice against women. In reply, look at the justice in this context. A male needs a wife to support, and a female needs a husband who must support her. Therefore, half the share of the male is enough for her if she lives without a husband. If she gets married, her share will continue to be hers and, in addition, her husband will support her. Which one has a better share in this distribution of inheritance? Actually, it is the female who has a better share. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* made her the basis and the criterion for distribution by saying: 'The male shall have the equal of two females' share....' (*an-Nisa':* 11) What does this mean? Is it a form of injustice against women or a favour for women? Indeed, it implies a favour for them. Simply, her share is made the criterion for the distribution process. Furthermore, a male must support his female, while a wife shall receive support from her husband. Accordingly, half the share of a man is entirely for her. Therefore, people should have said, 'Why did Allah *the Most High* favour women? He favoured her because she is divinely honourable, and Allah wants to protect her. In the case when she is not married, she has enough means to support her; yet, if she has a husband, her share will be a grace from Allah.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says: 'But if there are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what [their parents] leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half thereof….' (*an-Nisa':* 11) Here, I want the dear readers to focus on understanding the meaning intended by the True Lord *the Most High* and the methods the Quran uses in grasping the attention of minds to receive the words of Allah. Allah *the Most High* has honoured mankind with reason, but reason needs to be exercised. The exercise signifies the intellectual training of the mind to gain the ability to solving problems. Having said this, when a problem emerges, the mind is prepared to solve it and has the capacity of deduction and evaluation; these are among the tasks of minds. The True Lord *the Most High* thus assigns a creative task to the mind in two serious areas of great significance to man: religion and Quran, as guide and preserver of the religion.

Allah *the Most High* does not give laws in articles like the ones of criminal laws concerning misdemeanours and felonies. Rather, Allah gives a part of the ruling in a particular place, while the remaining part appears in another place within another matter to evince the Divine Course as one integrated unit; it takes you from a context to another and prescribes the details of a single ruling in various places of the Quran. As such, you may recognise the Divine way as a whole. Furthermore, if you explore a specific Divine Ruling, you should not think that it solely stands for the Divine Course. Indeed, many things interfere with the matter from which you seek a relevant ruling. A good example is the matter of orphans, which interferes with the laws of inheritance. The verse in question illustrates this matter. However, why are Divine rulings expounded in this way? It is simple: Allah *the Most High* wants you to exercise and train your mind to understand the general framework that encompasses life as a whole. Anyway, what should matter in the first place is your religion, so exert your mind in it. If you employ your mind to understand the religion, you give it the energy it needs for other fields.

Conversely, if your mind gets carried away by any partial matter, it is deviated from the general framework of life and becomes engrossed in details that have no relevance to the universal objective of life. Our children could teach us from their experiences with games. A child may play hide-and-seek game with other kids in which many conceal themselves in places, while one searches for them. We also play a game with our children wherein we hide something in one hand and fold both hands for our children to guess by intuition in which hand the thing is hidden. It is a kind of training and deductive exercise. If a child has some kinds of mental agility, is quite observant, and is full of intelligence, he would look at the hands of his father and see which one shakes a bit or which one does not look normal when folded in order to choose correctly. This way, a child's wit excels his father's. This is a process of training a child on deduction and understanding through which he learns not to take things for granted without enough reflection or experience. The True Lord *the Most High* wants His rulings to be interspersed amongst different places. In this respect, we should understand His saying: 'Concerning [the inheritance of] your children, Allah enjoins [this] upon you: the male shall have the equal of two females' share; but if there are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what [their parents] leave behind; and if there is only one, she shall have one-half thereof….' (*an-Nisa':* 11) It means that if the deceased leaves no boy but has more than two girls, they are entitled to two thirds of the inheritance. However, if they have a brother, each of them is entitled to half of his share. To reiterate, if an inheritor is a single girl, the verse entitles her to half of the inheritance, 'and if there is only one, she shall have one-half….' (*an-Nisa':* 11) Yet, there is a case for which Allah *the Most High* did not decree a ruling, namely, when the deceased has two girls. In this case, we find that the Lawgiver has guaranteed for the two girls a share equal to three or more girls; they share two thirds of the inheritance. This is what scholars said, but why did He not state this explicitly? He left this out this situation for a reason. When a girl shares the inheritance with a brother, she takes one third of the wealth, and when there is another sister without a brother, she takes one third as well.

If she has a brother who would be, in such a case, responsible for earning the livelihood required to sustain them, she would be entitled to the third. For this reason, it is logical that each female would be entitled to one third of the inheritance if the deceased has two daughters. To illustrate further Quranic coherence, there is another verse (*an-Nisa':* 176) that discusses another part of the same subject matter for the mind to work and investigate. Allah *the Most High* says: 'They will ask you to enlighten them. Say: 'Allah enlightens you [thus] about the laws concerning [inheritance from] those who leave no heir in the direct line: If a man dies childless and has a sister, she shall inherit one-half of what he has left, just as he shall inherit from her if she dies childless. But if there are two sisters, both [together] shall have two-thirds of what he has left; and if there are brothers and sisters, then the male shall have the equal of two females' share.' Allah makes [all of this] clear unto you, lest you go astray; and Allah knows everything.' (*an-Nisa':* 176) In this context, Allah *the Most High* mentions the two sisters of the deceased and shows that they are entitled to two thirds of the wealth if the deceased has no child, a son, or a daughter. However, if the two sisters are entitled to two thirds of the deceased's wealth, we should wonder who is closer to the person: daughters or sisters? If the deceased has two daughters, they are definitely closer to him than the two sisters. For this reason, the two daughters are entitled to two thirds. Furthermore, if the daughter has a brother, she is entitled to one third, and if she is the only child, she is entitled to half of the wealth. On the other hand, if there were more than two inheriting daughters, they share two thirds of the wealth together.

If there were two daughters, each takes one third. Why? In response to this, Allah *the Most High* has entitled the two sisters of the deceased to take two thirds of the wealth if the deceased has no children. It is also quite intriguing that Allah uses the plural form in the first verse concerning the inheritance of daughters and the dual form in the verse concerning the inheritance of sisters. Allah guides us to apply the ruling in the verse concerning the inheritance of two sisters to two daughters and the ruling on the inheritance of daughters to sisters.

The True Lord *the Most High* challenges our minds to a task of searching, investigating and deducing so we can accept the rulings wholeheartedly, using our understanding. When Allah *the Most High* says: 'They will ask you' (*an-Nisa’:* 176), He means that they are asking you to give them your legal opinion. This is evidence that a believer who asks for a legal opinion loves Allah's assignment; he likes to know the ruling of Allah in the cases when He does not specifically state a ruling. In this respect, the early believers asked and requested legal opinions about different matters since they loved Divine Laws: 'They will ask you to enlighten them. Say: “Allah enlightens you [thus] about the laws concerning [inheritance from] those who leave no heir in the direct line….” (*an-Nisa’:* 176) The Arabic word *kalalah* (a childless person who has no heir in the direct line) is etymologically derived from *ikleel* which is a crown or diadem, an object that surrounds the head. In this context, the word *kalalah* also means family members who are related to a person but are not direct descendants from the same blood lineage. 'If a man dies childless and has a sister, she shall inherit one-half of what he has left, just as he shall inherit from her if she dies childless. But if there are two sisters, both [together] shall have two-thirds of what he has left; and if there are brothers and sisters, then the male shall have the equal of two females’ share. Allah makes [all this] clear unto you, lest you go astray; and Allah knows everything.' (*an-Nisa':* 176) This verse conveys the same meaning as the earlier one. In reference to the details of the first verse currently in question: 'And as for the parents [of the deceased], each of them shall have one-sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of their having [left] a child; but if he has left no child and their parents are their [only] heirs, then their mother shall have one-third…' (*an-Nisa':* 11) the meaning of this part of the verse is that if the deceased is childless, the mother is entitled to one third and the father to two thirds. However, if the deceased has full brothers or maternal/ paternal brothers, the mother is entitled to only one sixth, according to the literal text of the Quran: 'If he has brothers and sisters, then their mother shall have one-sixth after [the deduction of] any bequest he may have made or any debt [he may have incurred]….' (*an-Nisa':* 11)

The distribution of inheritance under the prescribed system should be carried out after deducting any bequests the testator makes along with settling all of their debts. Bequests come first in the text even though repayment of debts takes priority over bequests since creditors may ask for the repayment of the money owed to them. On the other hand, no one will come forth and ask for the bequest. Allah *the Most High* has thus given bequests priority by mentioning them first so as to pay more attention to it. Allah *the Most High* then concludes the verse by saying: 'As for your parents and your children – you know not which of them is more deserving of benefit from you: [therefore this] ordinance from Allah. Verily, Allah is All Knowing, Wise' (*an-Nisa':* 11).

Do not determine shares of inheritance following your own estimation and pragmatic value of parents or children. The value of parents becomes clear when one says that my father has raised me, and he is the one who made all my future opportunities possible. The value of children becomes clear when one says that my father will die, but my children will cling to my memory and bear my name. The future is still ahead of them. In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* forbids biased personal prejudgments since you do not have a say in this matter: 'You know not which of them is more deserving of benefit from you: [therefore this]…' (*an-Nisa':* 11). Since you do not know the better source of value and benefit to you, adhere to the Divine Law of Allah Who knows the best interest of all and knows how to best achieve it through the proper division of shares.

In these verses, 'Verily, Allah is (literally 'was') All Knowing, Wise' (*an-Nisa’:* 11) or 'Verily, Allah is (literally 'was') All-Forgiving and Most-Merciful' (*an-Nisa’:* 106) *kana* (was) which is the Arabic past tense of the verb to be, was used, making us bear in mind that Allah is unchangeable. He has eternally been All Knowing and All-Wise and He will continue to be so for eternity. Vicissitudes cannot be attributed to Allah. His Omniscience, Wisdom, Awareness, Forgiveness and Mercy are all eternal. He does not change, and His Attributes are unchangeable. Therefore, when a Muslim hears, ' Allah is (literally 'was') All Knowing, Wise' (*an-Nisa’:* 11) or ' Allah is (literally 'was') All-Forgiving and All-Merciful' (*an-Nisa’:* 106) expressed in the past tense, he should say, ‘And Allah is still so.’

Then, Allah *the Most High* says:

وَلَكُمۡ نِصۡفُ مَا تَرَكَ أَزۡوَٰجُكُمۡ إِن لَّمۡ يَكُن لَّهُنَّ وَلَدٞۚ فَإِن كَانَ لَهُنَّ
وَلَدٞ فَلَكُمُ ٱلرُّبُعُ مِمَّا تَرَكۡنَۚ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ وَصِيَّةٖ يُوصِينَ بِهَآ أَوۡ دَيۡنٖۚ
وَلَهُنَّ ٱلرُّبُعُ مِمَّا تَرَكۡتُمۡ إِن لَّمۡ يَكُن لَّكُمۡ وَلَدٞۚ فَإِن كَانَ لَكُمۡ وَلَدٞ
فَلَهُنَّ ٱلثُّمُنُ مِمَّا تَرَكۡتُمۚ مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ وَصِيَّةٖ تُوصُونَ بِهَآ أَوۡ دَيۡنٖۗ وَإِن كَانَ
رَجُلٞ يُورَثُ كَلَٰلَةً أَوِ ٱمۡرَأَةٞ وَلَهُۥٓ أَخٌ أَوۡ أُخۡتٞ فَلِكُلِّ وَٰحِدٖ مِّنۡهُمَا ٱلسُّدُسُۚ
فَإِن كَانُوٓاْ أَكۡثَرَ مِن ذَٰلِكَ فَهُمۡ شُرَكَآءُ فِي ٱلثُّلُثِۚ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ وَصِيَّةٖ يُوصَىٰ
بِهَآ أَوۡ دَيۡنٍ غَيۡرَ مُضَآرّٖۚ وَصِيَّةٗ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَلِيمٞ ١٢

You inherit half of what your wives leave, if they have no children; if they have children, you inherit a quarter. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts. If you have no children, your wives’ share is a quarter; if you have children, your wives get an eighth. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts. If a man or a woman dies leaving no children or parents, but a single brother or sister, he or she should take one-sixth of the inheritance; if there are more siblings, they share one-third between them. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts, with no harm done to anyone: this is a commandment from God: God is all knowing and benign to all [12] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 12)

The Quranic verses continue in the same stream, clarifying that the share of a male is equal to the share of two females. Justice indeed is this distribution.

When a woman dies, her husband may get married and rebuild his life. Similarly, when a woman's husband dies, she takes her share of the wealth he left behind and at the same time she may get married and receive support from her new husband. This Divine Plan for the distribution of inheritance achieves perfect justice in the case of *kalalah*. The *kalalah* refers to the deceased who is childless deceased, thus having no agnate heirs, e.g. father or child who could inherit from them. In such a case, when the deceased has a brother or a sister, each is entitled to one sixth of the inheritance, but if they are more, their total share is the third after carrying out the bequests left and settling debts. We see that much emphasis is placed on this subject matter. Why? Simply refer to the other verse on *kalalah*: 'If there are two sisters, both [together] shall have two-thirds of what he has left; and if there are brothers and sisters, then the male shall have the equal of two females' share. Allah makes [all of this] clear unto you, lest you go astray; and Allah knows everything' (*an-Nisa':* 176).

The first verse being discussed prescribes that each brother/sister shall be entitled to one sixth of the inheritance, but if there are two or more brothers/ sisters, their share is one third of the inheritance when they are maternal brothers/sisters. As for the verse wherein the True Lord *the Most High* assigns two thirds of the inheritance to the two sisters when they have no brother, it refers to the paternal sisters left without full/paternal brothers. In this manner, the Quran sets out the details precisely. What does the following verse mean '…neither of which having been intended to harm [the heirs]. [This is] an injunction from God: and Allah is All Knowing, Forbearing' (*an-Nisa':* 12). Allah *the Most High* wants to establish justice. No one is ever harmed if the law of Allah is implemented; harm always arises from the pursuits of self-interests that corrupt the Divine distribution.

In this context, someone may not desire to debar the uncle from the inheritance of his full/paternal brother's daughters or to exclude the children of the male brothers, full or paternal, from the legal heirs of an aunt, or daughters of a full/paternal uncle. Replying to those who follow their personal desires, we say that the profits expected is proportional to the loss risked. If you die leaving daughters behind, would it not be the duty of the uncle to bring up the daughters? Why does the True Lord *the Most High* compel the uncle to look after the daughters of his brother if the brother died without leaving any wealth? To understand this, you have to pay attention to the rationale behind assigning the uncle a share in the inheritance. We have to understand that there is always a profit corresponding to an expected loss.

When it comes to the legal regulations, we say that the Noble Quran must be considered in its entirety. For example, the issue of *kalalah* is explored in two verses. Allah *the Most High* says: 'They will ask you to enlighten them. Say: ‘Allah enlightens you [thus] about the laws concerning [inheritance from] those who leave no heir in the direct line. If a man dies childless and has a sister, she shall inherit one-half of what he has left, just as he shall inherit from her if she dies childless. But if there are two sisters, both [together] shall have two-thirds of what he has left; and if there are brothers and sisters, then the male shall have the equal of two females’ share.’ Allah makes [all this] clear unto you, lest you go astray; and Allah knows everything' (*an-Nisa':* 176).

What is the difference between this verse in which a sister receives one-half and two sisters receive two-thirds and the other verse in which a sister receives one-sixth and two or more brothers/sisters receive one-third collectively without differentiation between males and females? We have to distinguish between the two cases of *kalalah*. They have in common is that the deceased is childless, but they differ in the relationship of brothers and sisters. In the first verse, the brother/sister concerned is a full or paternal brother/sister. If the brother is either a full or just a paternal brother, he is an agnate heir as discussed in the Quran (*an-Nisa':* 176). Concerning the other verse (*an-Nisa':* 12) in which the shares of one-sixth goes to a sister or a brother, and one-third to two or more brothers or sisters, it only pertains to maternal brothers/sisters. Accordingly, the case of *kalalah* takes place when a childless person dies leaving full, paternal or maternal brother(s) and/or sister(s). Therefore, the two rulings are different since the case to which each applies is also different. If an orientalist reads these two verses related to the inheritance of *kalalah* with malicious intent, hoping to find an excuse to attack the religion and the Quran, they might say, (Allah forbid), 'The Quran contains contradictions. In one verse, it states a ruling that the heirs of *kalalah* case should receive one-sixth, while in another verse, it gives them one-third, and in a third one, it assigns one-half and two-thirds, while the male is entitled to twice the share of the female. To silence their argument, it is obvious that they do not realise the meaning and purpose of the context of each case of *kalalah*. Consequently, they grasp certain things while missing others.

Allah *the Most High* then says: '… after [the deduction of] any bequest that may have been made or any debt [that may have been incurred]' (*an-Nisa': *12). Obviously, this ruling is applicable to all cases of inheritance. Accordingly, the distribution of the inheritance should be undertaken after carrying out the bequests made by the deceased and paying his debts. So, which step takes priority: the bequest or the repayment of debts? Indubitably, the payment of his debts takes priority. The reason is simple: the debt is a binding obligation, while the bequest is voluntarily made. How can the bequest which is voluntary and is, although, mentioned before the debt, come before the debt which is an obligation? When Allah *the Most High* says: '…neither of which having been intended to harm [the heirs]…' (*an-Nisa': *12), we understand that the Divine Law never intends to harm anyone.

This verse addresses the testator who may hate that some of their legal heirs with prescribed shares in the inheritance he is leaving behind may write a bequest to preclude them from inheritance or to diminish their shares. The testator may also bequeath their wealth to some foreign person whom he wants to give a share of the inheritance to preclude the undesired family members and kinsfolk from their inheritance as legally prescribed. In such a case, the testator may claim that he owes a debt to a person to whom he makes a bequest. If he claims that the debt is equivalent to the entire wealth, then this creditor will take the debt before giving the prescribed shares to the legal heirs and, accordingly, the heirs are without any share in the inheritance.

This case happens and is witnessed in reality. In certain cases, some people, who only have daughters, may say to themselves that their daughters' uncles and cousins will take a portion of the wealth, so they may think that it is wise on our part to distribute their wealth amongst their daughters. People who do this may claim that they are indebted to their daughters. We forewarn them by saying, 'Do not be unfair.' They could fall prey to a shortsighted plan. Instead they should consider the opposite scenario of them dying and leaving nothing to their daughters. This would raise the question, 'Who would be responsible for them?' It is definitely the duty of paternal uncles. Thus, the loss incurred is commensurate with the gain accrued. To further explain this point, the girls may sue their uncles in the court to force them to pay the familial aids if their father dies without leaving enough means for their sustenance. So what is the benefit of precluding their brothers from their divinely prescribed shares of inheritance?

Moreover, someone may want to divest uncles or brothers of their shares in his wealth for any reason. What does he do in such a case? He writes a bequest to persons not entitled to the inheritance. Therefore, Islam limits the scope of bequest to be within one-third of the wealth to avoid injustices or harmful plans. However, some people may try to falsely claim that their debt is equivalent to their entire fortune, so their legal heirs would not take anything. In such a situation, they should bear in mind that Allah carefully watches over them every moment of their lives until their deaths; they are accountable for all personal actions. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* said: 'As for your parents and your children – you know not which of them is more deserving of benefit from you: [therefore this] ordinance from Allah. Verily, Allah is All Knowing, Wise.' (*an-Nisa’:* 11)

Allah *the Most High* warns us against harmful behaviours. It is Divine Advice concerning the complete rulings of inheritance, the bequests of the testator and the repayment of debts. It is Divine, and not human, Advice. Therefore, it is mandatory and binding. Allah *the Most High* says: 'In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Nuh (Noah)…' (*ash-Shura:* 13). This advice signifies religious duties. He *the Most High* also says: 'Do not take any human being’s life – [the life] which Allah has declared to be sacred, except through [due process of] law. That is what He enjoins you that you may comprehend' (*al-An‘am:* 151).

Since this is a Divine Ordainment from Allah *the Most High* the Lord of all dominion, it is compulsory. Allah concludes the verse being further explored by saying: 'Verily, Allah is All Knowing, Wise' (*an-Nisa’:* 12). It is a warning! Do not take any action against the Divine Law; even though judicial authorities may authorise what you want, you will still be guilty before Allah. For example, a debtor may die, so the debts must be repaid. However, if this man forges a false document of debts in order to deprive some legal heirs of their inheritance, he has to realise that Allah knows the intentions behind all actions. If one escapes earthly justice, he will not be able to escape the judgment of the Heavens. This matter requires profound knowledge and insight to perceive the truth of intentions.

Actually, the subject of litigation is a matter of dispute amongst human beings, but religion and religious duties form a different issue between the Lord and His servants. In his Honourable statement, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Verily, I am only a human! You refer your disputes to me for judgment. Some of you may be more eloquent in their plea than others are, so I declare a judgment on their behalf according to what I hear from them. As such, if I slice off anything for a person from the right of his brother/sister, he should not accept that, for I sliced off for him a portion from Hell.'(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us that he is a human being; he neither knows the unseen, nor does he know the secrets of disputes. When Muslims resort to him for judgments concerning disputes, some may be so eloquent that they turn falsehood into truth, while others stand helpless. The Messenger of Allah passes the judgment, relying upon the judicial evidence, even if the unknown realities go against that evidence. Thus, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* forewarns us that he is a human being; when we seek his judgment on disputes and controversies, none of us should use the power of speech to take what is not his right. If one does take what is not his right, even after the judgment of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he just takes a piece of fire.

In other words, we must be careful not to deceive or mislead anyone or take something by abusing the power of judicial authority and neglecting religious warnings. A believer should not try to tamper with religious matters. Do not think that the judgment of any judge can render something forbidden to becoming something permissible or making something permissible to becoming forbidden. This never happens! The permissible is evidently clear, and so is the forbidden. The judge only passes the judgment based on explicit evidence. For example, assume that you borrowed a thousand pounds from someone who took from you a promissory note. The borrower then repaid the loan he owed and told the lender, ‘Kindly send me the note as soon as you go back to your house.’ However, the lender soon died and his family said, ‘We have the promissory note!’ They then referred it to the judicial authorities to take back their debt. The judicial authorities may rule that the debt must be repaid anew. However, the ruling of religion in this case is different. The man, the borrower, has already repaid the debt, making it improper for heirs to take it again if they know that the deceased had already taken it.

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(1) *Related by Malik, Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Abu Dawud on the authority of Umm Salamah Allah be pleased with her*

That is why Allah *the Most High* says: 'Verily, Allah is All Knowing, Forbearing' (*an-Nisa’:* 12). We can understand the difference between the stance of religion and the one of judicial authorities. The True Lord *the Most High* says 'He is Forbearing,' so do not be lured if one does an injustice, and Allah does not avenge it immediately in life. His refraining from revenge in this world does not imply that the action is right or permissible. The Divine Wisdom and Patience is decreeing to postpone the punishment till the Afterlife. Allah then says:

تِلْكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِۚ وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ يُدْخِلْهُ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى
مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ وَذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٣﴾

These are the bounds set by God: God will admit those who obey Him and His Messenger to Gardens graced with flowing streams, and there they will stay – that is the supreme triumph! [13] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 13)

All the past rulings and laws are simply laws set by Allah. When Allah *the Most High* sets a law, it is a limit to keep a right from being confused with another or preclude the confusion of rights with falsities. Surely, He is the One Who sets the laws and separates rights from one another. When we separate certain rights from others, whether they are related to homes or lands, we set certain demarcation lines. A limit or a bound is the demarcation line that separates two rights from each other so that none of them would encroach upon or overlap with the other. The bounds that we set in our daily life are of two kinds, even though some people may not notice this distinction. The first kind cannot be trespassed since it is concretely constructed and delineated.

For instance, someone may want to construct a building. He can only do so on a certain piece of land he owns with distinguishing bounds from his neighbours' land. When he erects the building, the wall will be adjacent to the building of his neighbours. Similarly, a farmer may cultivate a piece of land beside another farmer; each of them plants their own piece of land, and there is usually a boundary between the two pieces of land.

In this manner, each person achieves his own interests. Now, suppose that a farmer wants to grow rice, and their neighbour will plant it. The land of the one who will not plant rice may be flooded with much water; water is good for rice, but it may harm other crops. Under these conditions, the ruling should be that the farmer should construct a boundary called the ‘neighbourhood boundary’ to prevent any harm from their neighbours. This border is different from the ‘ownership border’ since the one who grows rice should cut down the cultivated land by two metres and make this space the ‘neighbourhood boundary’ so that the water used for irrigating would not overflow on the land of their neighbours. It is thus a boundary preventing harm and is different from the one preventing ownership. When it comes to protecting others from harm, injury, or damage, one must pay heed to the clear statement: ‘Do not let the scope of your right extend to the periphery of your boundary with others; rather keep it away from such a boundary.'

This is in the case of ownership. Your utilisation of your ownership should not harm or cause any damage to your neighbour. Allah *the Most High* treats us in the same way as well. In respect of Commands, He says: 'These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, transgress them' (*al-Baqara:* 229). Likewise, He says about following proscriptions: 'These are the bounds set by God; do not, then, offend against them' (*al-Baqara:* 187). Accordingly, if you receive a command, you should not violate it. Likewise, if you receive a proscription, do not approach it. In the case of the proscription of intoxicants, Allah *the Most High* does not say: ‘Do not drink wine.’ Rather, He says: 'Intoxicants, games of chance, idolatrous practices and the divining of the future are but loathsome evils from Satan’s doing. Shun them, then so that you might attain to a happy state' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 90). In other words, do not approach the places of these vices and separate yourself physically from them.

And as we have asked before—when talking about the story of Adam's eating from the tree—does Allah[1] *Glorified is He* say, 'Do not eat from this tree' or does He say,' Do not approach this tree'? Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…but do not approach this tree…' (*al-A'raf:* 19). This represents a limit which is called 'the limit of avoiding harm.' It is a command to not even approach that specific tree so that one may not desire to eat some of its fruits. The same holds true for drinking gatherings: we are commanded not to attend them because we may be lured into drinking. In the course of decreeing His Commands, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…These are the Limits set by Allah; do not, then, overstep them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229). This denotes that Allah *Glorified is He* owns or possesses these Limits.

In decreeing His Prohibitions, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…These are the Limits set by Allah do not, then, approach them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). In this regard, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says the following Hadith: 'What is lawful is clear and what is unlawful is clear, but between them are certain doubtful things which many people do not know. So, he who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and his honour blameless. But he who falls into doubtful things, falls into that which is unlawful, is just like a shepherd who grazes his cattle in the vicinity of a pasture declared prohibited (by the king); he is likely to stray into the pasture. Mind you, every king has a protected pasture and Allah's limits are those which He has declared unlawful. Verily, there is a faculty in the form of a piece of flesh in the body: if it is healthy, the whole body is healthy, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily, it is the heart.' [2]

Thus, we must keep away from transgressing the Limits of Allah *Glorified is He*. We can see an example of this when Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…Do

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(1) 'The Islamic conception of "Allah" is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of "God". However, the word "Allah" does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use "Allah" rather than "God" as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.'

(2) *[Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah based on the narrative of Companion An-Nu'man ibn Bashir]*

not lie with them (your wives) during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques: these are the Limits set by Allah, so do not approach them. In this way Allah makes His Verses clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong.' (*al-Baqara:* 187)

The True Lord Allah *Glorified is He* commands *Al-Mu'takif* (meaning 'the one who devotes himself to worship for a specific number of days in the mosque') not to sleep with his wife in the mosque in case she comes to discuss any matters with him. Further, he should not do anything related to intimate contact during these days because this represents encroachment upon the Limits of Allah as He *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '...these are the Limits set by Allah, so do not approach them.' (*al-Baqara:* 187)

Similarly, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states following the verses of inheritance: 'These are the Limits set by Allah, and whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]will be admitted by Him to Gardens [in Paradise] from under which rivers flow, and there they abide eternally– that is the supreme triumph!' (*an-Nisa':* 13)

It would have sufficed had Allah *Glorified is He* —after demonstrating the Limits—said, '…and whoever obeys Allah…', but He says: '…and whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger Muhammad..' This is to clarify that Messenger Muhammad himself *peace and blessings be upon him* may set limits of what is permissible and other limits of what is prohibited. This is an authorization from Allah *Glorified is He* to his Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to legislate; so, do not say in every matter, 'I want the (religious) ruling in question from the Quran.'

We sometimes encounter some people who say, 'The Book of Allah *Glorified is He* (i.e. the Quran) is the judge between you and us; whatever it permits, we will take as permissible and whatever it prohibits, we will consider prohibited.' These people do not notice that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is authorized to legislate as Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is the One Who says: '…so accept what the Messenger [Muhammad] gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7). He *peace and blessings be upon him* is empowered by Allah *Glorified is He;* and those who call for referring only to the Quran as the sole source of legislation in Islam want to cast suspicions on the *Sunnah* of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They resort to the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* and forget or do not even acknowledge that the Glorious Quran includes an authorization from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to lay down legislation.

They say, ‘The Book of Allah [i.e. the Quran] is the judge between you and us; whatever it permits we will take as permissible and whatever it prohibits we will consider prohibited.’ Such words on their part are evidence of the truthfulness of what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says. If they had not uttered such words, we (Muslims) would have wondered why the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said the following words in a Hadith narrated by Al-Miqdam ibn M‘ad Yakrib, *Allah be pleased with him*: Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prohibited things on the Day of Khaybar [the day when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions fought against the Jewish at the fortress of Khaybar] including eating of domestic asses. At that time, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘soon a Hadith from me will be conveyed to a man while he is reclining on his couch, and he will say: ‘The Book of Allah is [sufficient] between us and you. Whatever it states is permissible, we will take as permissible, and whatever it states is forbidden, we will take as forbidden.’ Verily, whatever the Messenger of Allah Muhammad has forbidden is like that Allah has forbidden.’(1)

What would have happened if nobody had repeated such words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? As we can see their foolish words are evidence that supports the veracity of what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says. The True Lord Allah *Glorified is He* uses those people to voice such a statement so that we can be fully certain of the veracity of the Ahadith (plural of Hadith) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through the phrases of his adversaries.

The True Lord Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: ‘…and whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger Muhammadwill be admitted by Him to Gardens [in

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(1) *[Related by At-Tabarani in (Al-Awsat) based on the narrative of Jabir]*

Paradise]...' (*an-Nisa':* 13) The one who obeys Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this world is the one who accepts the assignment of Allah *Glorified is He* and fulfils it. This person will be rewarded with the enjoyments of the Gardens of Paradise in the Hereafter. But does one's admission to the Gardens represent the core purpose of the religion or is it a reward for adhering to the religion? It is a reward for adhering to the religion. And the test of the religion is placed in this life. Whoever follows the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* is admitted to the Gardens of Paradise in the Hereafter. The Hereafter is not, then, the place where the test of the religion is placed; the test of the religion is placed in this life. Thus, when you tend to isolate this life from the religion, we immediately tell you that you missed the point. Do not say that the test of the religion is placed in the Hereafter because the Hereafter is the place of rewarding and punishing.

Throughout the year since they are the subject of exams? In fact, syllabi learned by students contain the material they will be tested on in exams and not vice versa. Similarly, the worldly life is where the test of the religion is placed and the Hereafter is where the reward is given to the one who succeeds and the punishment is given to the one who fails. So, do not put this life against the religion; there is no barrier between this worldly life and the religion because this life is the subject of the religion. This worldly life is put against the Hereafter, and the religion is for the good of both. This life is the place of sowing and the Hereafter is the place of harvesting. This is how we respond to the one who says that the worldly life is separated from the religion. Will each person obeying Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* be admitted to a Garden, to two or more? Another question related to this verse: Does *'man'*—an Arabic relative pronoun translated as 'whosoever' or 'whom'—imply one person? No. it may refer, in Arabic, to the singular, the dual form, or the plural. For example, we say, 'The one whom I met yesterday came.' We can also say, 'The two people whom I met yesterday came.' Further we can say, 'The people whom I met yesterday came.' In these three cases, we use the Arabic pronoun *'man'* translated here as 'whom.' The True Lord Allah *Glorified is He* does not talk here about a singular or a plural, as we have said when explaining the chapter of *al-Fatiha,* when Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5) Though it might be argued that it is logical to say,'It is You *I* worship; it is You *I* ask for help', Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'It is You *we* worship; it is You *we* ask for help.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5) to clarify that all the believers are a single unity in relation to worshipping.

Some say that we should examine the form when the Arabic relative pronoun *'man'* refers to the singular, whereas we should examine the meaning when it refers to two persons or more. But this statement is not academically valid because no scholar has ever said that *'man'* refers to the singular only; it is rather related to singular, dual and plural references.

One of the kind audience members asked me the following question in one of the sessions: 'Why does Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* say in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'For those who fear [the time when they will] stand before their Lord there are two Gardens [in Paradise]' (*ar-Rahman:* 46)? I answered that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* starts the chapter of *ar-Rahman* as follows: 'It is the Lord of Mercy who taught the Quran. He created man' (*ar-Rahman:*1-3) Afterwards, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'He created mankind out of dried clay, like pottery, [and] the *jinn* out of smokeless fire.' (*ar-Rahman:* 14-15) Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '[One day] We shall take you to task, O you sin-laden two [of *jinn* and mankind].' (*ar-Rahman:* 31) Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* also says: 'O jinn and mankind, if you (think that you) can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so: you will not pass without Our Authority' (*ar-Rahman:* 33).

The one who fears the presence of his Lord belongs to either jinn or human beings. If he belongs to jinn, he will have a Garden in Paradise; and if belongs to mankind, he will also have a Garden. So, the two beings of jinn and mankind (expressed by the Arabic relative pronoun '*man*') who fear the presence of their Lord will have two Gardens.

Some Scholars say that this verse means that there will be two Gardens to every human and every jinn, for Allah *Glorified is He* does not lack adequate spaces. When He *Glorified is He* willed to create mankind, He *Glorified is He* counted them all from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Judgment. He *Glorified is He* considered as if all His servants would be obedient believers, and accordingly prepared for each of them his/her place in

Paradise. In the meantime, He *Glorified is He* considered as if all His servants would be disobedient sinners, and accordingly prepared for each of them his place in the fire. Allah *Glorified is He* did such a thing to prove that Allah *Glorified is He* is Fair and that man has free will to choose the path of good or evil so that no one should think that He *Glorified is He* may find difficulty in accommodating all the human beings in either Paradise or the Fire. Thus, when a believer is admitted into his Garden in Paradise, the Garden that is prepared for a disbeliever, who is supposed to be a believer, remains uninhibited. So, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: These are the Gardens (in Paradise) you are given as your own because of what you used to do.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 72) Hence, the believers will inherit what had been originally prepared for the infidels had they chosen to believe.

Accordingly, the meanings imparted by the Quran are always consistent, regardless of the style used to convey them. Here Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '...will be admitted by Him to Gardens [in Paradise] from under which rivers flow…' (*an-Nisa':* 13) We should understand that a river is a stream into which water flows and is not the water itself. The True Lord Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…Gardens [in Paradise] from under which rivers flow…' (*an-Nisa':* 13), so where do the rivers run? Do the rivers run under the plants or under the buildings of these Gardens? We know that plants need water, whereas buildings need to be kept away from water. How come these two things meet together? We have to bear in mind that there is nothing impossible before the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* because everything is ultimately governed by Divine Design.

When people dig to change the flow of a river, we may find the surrounding buildings affected by water leakages. But the Designs of Allah *Glorified is He* are the result of His Infinite Power which Makes Rivers run under the Gardens in Paradise with no damage, whether beneath the buildings or the plants of these Gardens. Whoever cherishes the Words of his Lord Allah *Glorified is He* and asks Him to be able to understand them in the best way, will be bountifully taught by Him. The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says in many verses says: '…Gardens [in Paradise] from under which rivers flow…'—using the Arabic preposition *'(min')* meaning 'from'—whereas He *Glorified is He* says in one single verse: '…Gardens [in Paradise] under which rivers flow…' (*at-Tawba:* 100) without using the preposition *'min.'* Both structures are linguistically possible in Arabic. The verse wherein Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, '…Gardens [in Paradise] under which rivers flow…' (*at-Tawba:* 100) —without using the preposition *'min'*—may indicate that these rivers come from another place and only run under the Gardens. But in fact, these rivers spring from the Gardens themselves. When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…Gardens [in Paradise] from under which rivers flow…' (*an-Nisa':* 13) —using the preposition *'min'*—He *Glorified is He* does this so that no one would think that there may be a power that can keep the water from reaching you from a higher place. They are indeed self-acting rivers.

When we learn that the rivers run under the Gardens together with their inhabitants and contents, including palaces, a person may ask, 'Can I, as an engineer concerned with creating designs of buildings in this life, draw on this concept and produce designs of buildings under which rivers run, as stated by Allah *Glorified is He*?' Actually, humans have adopted this outstanding approach. We construct dams which are buildings under which rivers run. And when we are committed to sound building specifications, including those related to cement and bricks, we usually find no leakages or cracks. Building flaws often result from cheating and embezzlement. Then, rivers could run under the palaces of the Gardens of Paradise that contain what has never been seen by an eye, or heard by an ear, or imagined by a human being. Could the Muslim engineer be inspired and urged by such Divine Knowledge to erect buildings under which rivers may run? If this engineer has faith enough to learn from his Lord Allah *Glorified is He* how to invent, he will succeed with the Support of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Let us speak about Egypt which suffers from a housing crisis. We find that the area covered by the Nile River, its branches, small canals or waterways occupy a large space. If there were faith-motivated engineers, so to speak, the people would benefit from unused spaces and surfaces to construct buildings that would accommodate all state offices. Such buildings could be erected over roads, watercourses, or channels. This does not mean that we should use all the areas in building until they get blocked with construction. Rather, we should use only one third of the area for building and leave the other two thirds in order not to spoil the landscape and encroach upon the agricultural land. Anyway, the Muslim engineer should pay attention to those faith-based hints in the Glorious Quran.

A city like Cairo needs a wide variety of utilities, a fact which urges us to build on vacant areas whether they are around the Nile or in other places provided that we leave enough spaces for open air and maintain sufficient greenery to preserve the beauty of the environment and prevent pollution. Or shall we build under the ground? We can further benefit from desert-land reclamation in this regard. Perhaps if we tried all these methods, there would be no housing crisis.

The True Lord Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…Gardens (in Paradise) from under which rivers flow and there they abide eternally...' (*an-Nisa': *13) It is true that paradise will be bliss which you cannot imagine as it is created by the Perfect and Sublime Omnipotence of Allah *Glorified is He*. Man has always experienced pleasure according to his capacity to imagine the elements of such pleasure. We narrated earlier that a village mayor once said: 'I want to build a guesthouse, a phone room, and an outdoor stone bench and furnish them.'(1) This is the concept of pleasure as seen by the mayor. In this life, we are always afraid of losing pleasure because of death or any other reason. But what is pleasure in the view of the Creator of all concepts? Hence, the Gardens of Bliss are everlasting, as there you neither die, and nor do they vanish.

'Eternal abidance' here has clear significance: it indicates persistence and continuation that is never followed or disrupted by cessation of being. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, '…that is the supreme triumph!' (*an-Nisa': *13) But what does *fawz*—translated in this verse as 'triumph'— mean? In general, the word *fawz* means victory, triumph, success, or attainment of one's goal. When we win something in this life, our joy and pleasure with such winning could last for one's lifetime in this world. If this is the case in the worldly life, what about winning in the Hereafter, i.e. the eternal winning in the Gardens of Paradise created by our Lord Allah *Glorified is He*? Is this not supreme triumph?

In our worldly life, we rejoice over moderate wins and gains, so what about those wins and gains granted by Allah *Glorified is He* which are commensurate with His Might? If we compare the wins and gains of this worldly life to those of the Hereafter, we will immediately realize that those of the Hereafter are of absolute greatness. Thus, however much the believer sacrifices for the sake of the Hereafter, there will be gains that greatly over compensate all those sacrifices.

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(1) *[The story of 'Na'im Al-'Omda' (Mayor's Pleasure)]*

Someone might say: would not it have been better if Allah had said, ‘that is the most supreme triumph’? This is a narrow-minded understanding of things. If Allah *Glorified is He* had put it this way, this would have indicated that the triumphs and gains of the worldly life are great or supreme. As we may know, the greatest or most supreme thing is always compared to a great or supreme thing, and a great or supreme thing is always compared to a small or petty thing. Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* describes the triumph of the Hereafter as great, this means that the triumph or gain of the worldly life is small and petty. The description of the triumph in the Hereafter is thus a Divine one as it is given by Allah *Glorified is He*. Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* talks about the opposite case:

وَمَن يَعْصِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَيَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَهُۥ يُدْخِلْهُ نَارًا
خَٰلِدًا فِيهَا وَلَهُۥ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿١٤﴾

But those who disobey God and His Messenger and overstep His limits will be consigned by God to the Fire, and there they will stay – a humiliating torment awaits them! [14] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 14)

Earlier we spoke about Limits when Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘These are the Limits set by Allah…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 13) These Limits show either the Commands of Allah or His Prohibitions. These Commands and Prohibitions may be obeyed by some people and disobeyed by others. If you obey them, you will be rewarded for your obedience and granted eternal abidance in the Gardens of Paradise, which is the supreme triumph. But what will be of the disobedient? They will get the exact opposite. They will be punished by being consigned to torment: ‘But those who disobey Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] and overstep His Limits will be consigned by Him to the Fire, and there they will abide eternally– a humiliating torment awaits them!’

(*an-Nisa':* 14) Note here that the word 'Fire' is in the singular, whereas the word 'Gardens' is in the plural. When we pay more attention to the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* —bearing in mind all the time that the Speaker is Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* —we notice another point represented in the eternal abidance of the believers in the Gardens of Paradise. As for the disbelievers, they will be thrown into the fire. Here Allah *Glorified is He* does not say 'Fires', nor does He *Glorified is He* say that they will eternally abide in it. Why? This is because in the Gardens of Paradise, the believers will sit on couches face-to-face and they will exchange visits, enjoying one another's Gardens. Another point may be mentioned here: When a person does a lot of good deeds, while his children—who share their father (or mother) in Faith—are not as righteous as he, Allah *Glorified is He* reunites him with his offspring as a sign of honour, and lets them rejoice together in the bliss of the Gardens and enjoy each other's company.

As for the disbeliever, the situation is quite different. Allah *Glorified is He* will not reunite him with any of his family. Every disbelieving person will have his own share of the fire; none will enjoy the company of other partners or human beings in torment, just as is the case in solitary confinement, so to speak. Again, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about a lot of Gardens versus a single fire; He *Glorified is He* uses the plural form when talking about eternity in paradise, while He *Glorified is He* uses the singular form when mentioning eternity in the fire. Every use of certain words here has its own purpose. So, the obedient person will be rewarded with Gardens in which he will enjoy the company of his offspring and believing brothers and sisters for eternity. Meanwhile, the disobedient sinner will be eternalized in the fire in isolation of others, and'…a humiliating torment awaits them!' (*an-Nisa':* 14)

Though torment may be extremely painful, one sometimes endures it when it comes from an enemy, for instance. In this case, the tormented person does not want to see the one who tortures him rejoice in his suffering. In this context, Abu Zu'ayb Al-Huzalli, an old poet, says to that effect:

I have the patience of a saint before those who rejoice in my misfortune

So that they may learn that I never surrender to the calamities of life

Such a person may thus hide his pain and torment in this worldly life so that his enemy may not notice it. But in the Afterlife, torment and suffering involve debasement of the human self as the punishment of Allah *Glorified is He and* combines pain with debasement. So, do not think that someone will be capable of enduring this torment and pain, as may be the case in the worldly life. Torment and suffering in the Hereafter are extremely sever and humiliating for the self.

Thus, we find that the chapter of *an-Nisa'* deals with mankind as fathers and as mothers. It shows how Allah *Glorified is He* has spread from the pair of them countless men and women, far and wide. Furthermore, this chapter talks about the changes that happen when Allah *Glorified is He* ordains that some people die and leave helpless children. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to ensure a noble life for the human soul. So, He *Glorified is He* orders us to be benevolent and affectionate towards orphans and guides us to the proper way of dealing with them according to the Islamic Faith. If we were to serve as guardians of orphans, we must undertake this responsibility honestly and administer their wealth in a sound and modest manner until they become of age and take charge of it.

The chapter of *an-Nisa'* also addresses another issue: securing a decent life for women and children as an integral part of social fabric. It is well known that the Arabs used to prevent women from getting their share of inheritance. The same thing applied to children who did not engage in war or drive away attacks, using spears, daggers, or swords. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted these debased, persecuted segments of society to restore their rights so that they could lead an honourable and dignified life. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* allots specific shares—big or small— of inherited fortune to women, which differ from those dedicated for men. Allah *Glorified is He* shows us in this chapter the shares of inheritance determined by Him to different heirs. So, whoever desires to be admitted to the paradise of Allah *Glorified is He* must obey Him and His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through observing the Limits they have set. And whoever does not desire paradise may disobey Allah *Glorified is He* and may commit sins that lead him to eternal torment in the Fire.

Human life is a gift from Allah to His servants. Allah *Glorified is He* is Most Generous and prepared the components of a decent life for mankind before He created him. Thus, man came into being after the environment appropriate for his life had been established and not the other way around. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* did not create man first and then the sun, the moon, the earth and other elements. No, Allah *Glorified is He* had already created first all the elements that serve man and prepared them to receive this newcomer—the human being—that Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen to be His vicegerent on the earth. Again, the components of human survival preceded the creation of man. This is verily Divine Providence from the Giver of Mercy to his creation.

In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* created for man a means of reproduction accompanied with a feeling of pleasure and gratification. This way of reproduction is different from other ways in plants and some animals, which are only aimed to preserve species. Allah *Glorified is He* wills that the process of human reproduction is associated with delight and pleasure to cope with the numerous hardships and troubles entailed in giving birth to and raising offspring. Allah *Glorified is He* provides the process of reproduction with a feeling of pleasure and gratification to urge man to reproduce and bear whatever difficulties are related to such a process.

The Wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* ordains that weak people (e.g. orphans) come into being and lead a normal life. Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to be compassionate towards orphans. Someone may say: Since Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to benevolently help orphans to be good people, why then does Allah decree the death of an orphan’s father? We respond as follows: Allah *Glorified is He* decrees such fate so that we may learn that Allah *Glorified is He* is the only One Who controls man's life. He *Glorified is He* sets a certain age for every man. This age is only known to Allah *Glorified is He* while man has nothing to do with it. A man may die when he is an embryo, a child, a teenage boy, a grown up or an old man. We sometimes see very old men who are still alive but have lost their great-grandchildren already. Why so? Allah *Glorified is He* wants to conceal the timing of death from people so that no one may know how long he will live or when and where he dies. Hence, man tries to always be ready for death at any moment. As a man learns that he may die at any moment during his lifetime, he often feels ashamed of meeting Allah *Glorified is He* while committing sins. Another point needs to be explained in this regard. The Islamic Faith aims to make all the believers as if they were a well-compacted wall the bricks of which support one another. Thus, when a man dies and leaves an orphan child behind, that child will find new fathers from among the community of believers to take care of him. At that time, this child's heart will be filled with faith and peace. Furthermore, the fact that no one can learn the time of his death makes children trust and depend on Allah *Glorified is He* and not feel too dependent on their parents—or their power and fortune, which are also granted by Allah *Glorified is He*.

While Allah *Glorified is He* has granted us the means of preserving our life and shown us how to act on this earth in ways that guarantee the continuity of life, He *Glorified is He* has guided us to a decent way to protect the species and has made some people exert efforts for the benefit of their relatives. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* not only entices man to work and seek his own livelihood, but He *Glorified is He* also encourages him to work and toil to meet the needs of those he supports. The True Lord Allah *Glorified is He* sends a Message to man: 'Your efforts in this life will benefit your children as well.'

So, Allah *Glorified is He* has implanted the instinct of love and tenderness in the soul of every father (and mother, of course). Being one of Allah's signs, this instinct is deeply ingrained in the souls of parents. Driven by this instinct, every father strives in life to earn his livelihood so that both he and his children are satisfied. When a man works hard and exerts every effort in life, he may reach a stage at which his wealth granted by Allah *Glorified is He* may suffice to support him for the rest of his life. Another man may work for twenty years or more and amass for himself and his children a huge fortune. A third man may toil and strive in life and generate wealth sufficient for him, his children, and his grandchildren.

Thus, we find that those who work hard in life and are destined by Allah *Glorified is He* to earn much money not only benefit themselves; but they benefit the entire society as well. The Most Exalted Wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* decrees that wealth be distributed according to Divine laws so that all people—children in particular— may have their own shares. Hence, the Muslim community gets used to this smooth distribution. For example, imagine a man owns one hundred *feddans* (a measurement of land in Egypt which equals 4,200.81 square metres) of agricultural land and has got a number of sons and daughters. When this man dies, his sons and daughters will inherit all his fortune. Thus, the fortune is distributed among the children in a normal and smooth way, away from coercion that leads to enmity and envy. Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to respect the efforts exerted by the breadwinner to earn a living and ensure that the fruit of his endeavours will go to him and his dependent relatives. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…the life of this world is only a game, a pastime, but if you believe [in Allah] and are mindful of Him, He will recompense you. He does not ask you to give up [in His Cause all] your possessions.' (*Muhammad:* 36) Allah *Glorified is He* does not tell anyone, 'Give me back the money that I have bestowed upon you.' Rather, as I have said before, Allah *Glorified is He* evokes the compassion of His Slaves towards one another. He *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'Who is it that will offer up to Allah a good loan, which He will amply repay? Such a person will further be generously rewarded [by Him].' (*al-Hadid:* 11)

Allah *Glorified is He* appreciates the toil and strife of His servants who earn their living via exerting efforts. The True Lord Allah *Glorified is He* commands His rich servant to share his wealth. He says, in effect: 'Your poor brother is in need; lend Me — Allah— by giving *zakat* and *sadaqa* (alms and charity) to your poor brother.' Allah *Glorified is He* does not say to this rich servant, 'Lend your brother'; but, He says, 'Lend Me.*'* Why? The reason is that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who has brought all creatures into being and He is the All-Providing for all of them—the believers and the disbelievers. So, He *Glorified is He* guarantees the livelihood of all and makes it easy even for the disbelieving person to earn a living because He *Glorified is He* is the One Who has created him.

Allah *Glorified is He* legislates this inheritance system to ensure the smooth distribution of inheritance. Such a system is aimed at precluding any arbitrary divisions that might suddenly render some of the children—who have led a good life—impoverished, needy and deprived. By contrast, the fair and smooth division of wealth makes everyone contented and satisfied with his fixed share. In this context, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: ‘…the life of this world is only a game, a pastime, but if you believe [in Allah] and are mindful of Him, He will recompense you. He does not ask you to give up [in His Cause all] your possessions.’ (*Muhammad:* 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘I have granted you this fortune to be yours’, nor does He say, ‘I have provided you with livelihood’—even though Allah *Glorified is He* is indeed the One Who has given you this fortune to be yours. Rather, He *Glorified is He* highly evaluates your efforts in life. Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* in the same chapter of (Muhammad) says: ‘…you would withhold if He were to ask you and press you for them [all your possessions], and so He would bring your ill-will to light.’ (*Muhammad:* 37) Even if Allah *Glorified is He* pressed you to donate all your money, you would withhold as you feel that you earned it through exerting huge efforts. Now let us see the difference between someone who has not been a squanderer, has led a moderate life and so left a fair fortune to his children, and another one who has spent all his money on things prohibited by Allah *Glorified is He* such as drugs. What makes one person different from another? The difference lies in the status given by Allah *Glorified is He* to the efforts and endeavours made by a man in life. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* indicates: ‘I do not ask you to give up your money because if I ask you to do this, you will not give it up since it is the fruit of your toil.’

The True Lord Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: ‘…and so He would bring your ill-will to light.’ (*Muhammad:* 37) If ill will appears and is brought to light in one community, the entire community will greatly suffer. So, we find that coercive actions always lead to the emergence of animosity and hatred in the whole community. Once such animosity and hatred prevails, all positive aspects come to an end. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* sets the foundations and instruments of maintaining a decent life.

Allah *Glorified is He* sets foundations for the protection of the weak as well as the women who were deprived of their inheritance before the advent of Islam. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* sets Limits and Rules for the inheritance of young children and women. ‘These are the Limits set by Allah….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 13)

So beware of overstepping or transgressing these Limits since if man does so, he will condemn himself to the fire— Allah forbid. To sum things up: Allah *Glorified is He* decrees these Limits for safeguarding your life and the lives of those you support.

There is another form of preservation which is the preservation of the species. Since man has a finite age and his life comes to an end, he must preserve his existence through others. How so? We get married to be endowed with offspring (children and grandchildren) by Allah *Glorified is He*. Hence, the line of mankind continues. The True Lord Allah *Glorified is He* wants the preservation of mankind to be noble. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to preserve the species by choosing for our seeds (semen) a sacred vessel—the uterus of our wives. So, beware of preserving the human race through an evil vessel wherein the semen of different people is mixed so that no one may know to whom a child is ascribed. Being of unknown parents, such a child will be rejected by the society. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* explains to man that he must select for himself a sacred vessel to keep mankind dignified.

Obtaining sacred vessels is made through marriage alone. A man has to choose a modest female who has religious faith and accepts him as a husband in a public ceremony. It thus becomes well known for everyone that this is the wife of this man and that he is her husband. He may comfortably enter and leave his wife's home whenever he wants. Their coming offspring will be surely attributed to him. A good man is always ashamed of his children being in need of clothes, humiliated, hungry or unrecognized; for this reason, the good father endeavours to ensure that his children get all their rights so that they can lead a decent life, with no one daring to affront and offend any of them by asking, ‘Where have you come from?’ Or ‘Who is your father?’ Thus, the child will not live as a humiliated, broken-hearted person throughout his life. Accordingly, Allah has willed to preserve the human race through a legitimate bond that everybody recognizes.

It is quite surprising that we find this issue has evident effects in our life. The woman who tries to remove the traces of the crime of adultery is often impelled by instinctive love ingrained in her as a mother not to throw her baby into the sea; but rather to put it in front of a mosque gate. A child is always attached to his mother's tenderness, but here such tenderness is illegitimate. This is why the adulteress would throw her baby in front of a mosque gate so that a good person might pick him up. The adulteress knows well that only good people go to the mosque and one of them may pity her baby and carry him home.

In contrast, she would not leave her infant at an inn or a movie theatre; rather, she would leave it in front of a mosque. Love drives her to put her illegitimate child at such a place to be secure from any dangers. She would thus wrap him in the nicest clothes, and if she was rich, she would put with him some money as her instinctive love pushes her to do so, whereas shame of guilt pushes her to get rid of the child.

The adulteress—as we have said— is keen to put her baby at a place that is frequented by good people so that a good man might find this baby and care for him. Thus, even a disobedient sinner who deviates from the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* seeks refuge in this religion; and this is quite strange.

Allah *Glorified is He* intends the preservation of the human race to be based on modesty, purity, and chastity, and does not want evil and corruption to prevail in the homes of Muslims. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* decrees marriage to be the only legitimate sexual relationship between man and woman since a man must marry a woman through the *Shari'a* (Law) of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Let me give an example: A man lives in a house that overlooks a street, and he has a beautiful daughter attracted by a lot of young men. What would the father's reaction be if he learned that a young man comes to the house and deliberately looks at his daughter? He might hire someone to beat this young man or report this incident to the authorities out of his rage.

By contrast, what would this father's behaviour be when a good man's family came to his house and expressed their son's desire to propose to his daughter? He would surely be pleased and immediately ask his daughter about her feelings, congratulate the mother, fetch drinks and send out invitations for the wedding party. Can you see the difference between the two reactions? Why should the father be upset and enraged by the one who sneaks to gaze at his daughter? The reason is that such a young man does not want to have a sound relationship with the father's daughter according to the *Shari'a* (Law) of

Allah. On the other hand, the other young man who comes to seek the daughter as a lawful wife as decreed by the *Shari'a* would delight the heart of the father and bring him peace and happiness. Afterwards, matters would proceed smoothly and the wedding party would get concluded. Then the father would visit his happy daughter the next morning to congratulate her.

The difference between the two cases is shown in the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Take care of your prayers and the slaves you rightfully possess; do not burden them with what they cannot endure. Be conscious of Allah when dealing with the women (wives) who are at your disposal as if they are held captive by you; you have taken them under the custody authorized to you by Allah and their private parts have become permissible to you by the authority of the Word of Allah.’ (1)

Allah *Glorified is He* has created both man and woman and decreed their joint life through marriage. He *Glorified is He* ordains that when a young man proposes to a girl and says to her father, ‘I want to marry your daughter’, such words should fill the father’s heart with peace and happiness. All people would joyfully celebrate a wedding party since it is a matter of chastity and purity. Allah *Glorified is He* intends the preservation of the human race to be a moral, pure process that neither brings shame upon the one who gives birth to children, and nor does it disgrace the society. If we preserve the human species in this manner, this will be a supreme form of preservation. The preservation of mankind is the goal for which sexual intercourse has been created. Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that this process be a legitimate and permissible one recognized by all people.

Someone once asked me the following question when I was in Algeria: ‘How come that the relationship between any two spouses is originally based on wordsor promises? A woman’s guardian may marry her to a man by saying, ‘I have agreed to let you marry the woman I am responsible for.’ Alternatively, a woman may marry herself to a man by saying, ‘I marry myself to you.’ Consequently, the man accepts the marriage. Also, the relationship between any pair of spouses is terminated with a single sentence: ‘I divorce you.’ I answered that man as follows: Why does man agree to seek pleasure with the wife and her private parts with a couple of words and then find it hard to accept that she might be released from his custody with a couple of words as well? So, words determine both marriage and divorce.

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(1) *Related by An-Nasa’i and Ibn Majah*

As Allah *Glorified is He* has preserved life via old elements, He *Glorified is He* intends to preserve the human race through new elements. He explains to us that every organism that reproduces needs to do so by means of fertilization. Fertilization means that the sperm goes from the male to the ovum of the female so that the reproduction process may occur. As for the procreation of non-human organisms, it is made through a compulsory process. A female animal such as a cow, for instance always cries out when an ovum drops down in her womb. Whenever this happens, people realize that the cow desires to be fertilized. When her owner takes her to a bull to fertilize her, she calms down and never allows another bull to approach her while she is pregnant. In this manner, the species is preserved in animals.

As for plants, the female is fertilized even if the male is miles away. While we may distinguish the male from the female in certain plants, like palm and sycamore trees, we might not be able to discern the difference in other plants; only specialists can make such a distinction. Some plants may have the male and female parts in the same stem, like corn, for instance: the petals of the corncob represent the female part, while the male parts are located in the spike that is moved by the air so that it may bend down and fertilize the female part. The same holds for wheat. There are also plants whose male parts are not known to us. Could you tell me about a male mango tree or a male orange tree?

So, there are a lot of things that we do not know about organisms. They, either way, have to pollinate and fertilize one another so that reproduction would occur. Our Lord Allah *Glorified is He* thus explains: ‘Be comforted. I have made the wind carry the means of pollination (pollen) to plants.’ Allah *Glorified is He* has also made certain insects in the service of the plants that cannot be reached by the wind. These insects find nourishment in special places in these plants. In addition, they are attracted to particular colours and fragrances in such plants. Thus, an insect may be attracted to a red colour, while another may be attracted to a white colour. When an insect moves to the male part of a plant, this part sticks to it; then, it goes to the female part which is beautified with colours and fragrances. This process occurs while we are not aware.

Who causes pollination to happen? Who teaches these helpless organisms? It is Allah, the Lord of all existence Who neither slumbers, nor does sleep overtake Him. He *Glorified is He* has preserved the different species through a compulsory and instinctive process about which we do not fully understand. Even rain would not fall unless the pollination process happened. Here Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'We send the winds to fertilize (plants), and we bring down water from the sky for you to drink–you do not control its sources.' (*al-Hijr:* 22)

The True Lord Allah *Glorified is He* has thus secured the essentials of your life, O human being, while you are absent-minded. He has made the processes needed for this purpose involuntary so that each organism would play its role and accomplish its mission. Having granted man the freedom of choice, Allah has linked the protection of the species with pleasure and gratification in view of the numerous troubles involved in the reproduction process and the preservation of the human race. Accordingly, do not separate the preservation of mankind from pleasure. If you had sexual intercourse solely for the purpose of gratifying yourself, you would be then concentrating on a less important goal. A more important goal of having sexual intercourse through marriage is to preserve the race to which you belong.

Hence, make sure that you throw your sperm in a sacred vessel (womb) that is only yours so that you can evade fatal diseases that may destroy you and others. This way we can avoid the emergence of impure, humiliated generations with no clear origin. Here we speak about the persons engaged in abnormal cases of sexual intercourse, such as lesbians (women having sex with one another), gays (men having sex with each other) and adulterers and adulteresses who seek pleasure away from legitimate marriage decreed by Allah *Glorified is He*. We may say to that woman who has an affair with another woman or that man who sleeps with another man for pleasure: O woman, you have received pleasure and relinquished the straight path of having sex; and O man, you have committed the same crime.You both must learn thatthe true Lord Allah

Glorified is He intends that you seek both the pleasure and the preservation of the race. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that sexual pleasure has to be obtained in the light of the religion of Allah *Glorified is He*. Listen to what Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says:

وَٱلَّٰتِى يَأۡتِينَ ٱلۡفَٰحِشَةَ مِن نِّسَآئِكُمۡ فَٱسۡتَشۡهِدُواْ عَلَيۡهِنَّ أَرۡبَعَةٗ مِّنكُمۡۖ فَإِن
شَهِدُواْ فَأَمۡسِكُوهُنَّ فِى ٱلۡبُيُوتِ حَتَّىٰ يَتَوَفَّىٰهُنَّ ٱلۡمَوۡتُ أَوۡ يَجۡعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُنَّ سَبِيلٗا ﴿١٥﴾

If any of your women commit a lewd act, call four witnesses from among you, then, if they testify to their guilt, keep the women at home until death comes to them or until God shows them another way [15] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 15)

Here *(allati)* is an Arabic relative pronoun of feminine-plural, translated as ‘those.’ I believe that this verse refers to lesbian women. But what does Allah *Glorified is He* intend by saying: ‘…bring against them four [witnesses]…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 15)? Allah *Glorified is He* intends to protect the honour of people so that no one would injure or offend the honour of others. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* sets necessary precautions to safeguard people’s honour and chastity. Again, why does He *Glorified is He* stipulate the testimony of ‘four’ people? This is because there are two women having sex with each other, and so two persons are needed to testify against each one; thus the total number would be four. Anyhow, what would we do if we saw the incident with our own eyes and made certain that it had occurred? Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says ‘…confine them (the guilty women) to their houses…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 15), i.e. lock them up and restrain their movement in order that they cannot meet each other until they die ‘…or Allah opens for them a way [through repentance].’ (*an-Nisa’:* 15) Allah *Glorified is He* indeed opens a way for such people.

We may say to those who contend that this verse refers exclusively to the sexual intercourse between man and woman: the pronoun *(allati)* is a relative pronoun of the feminine-plural. If the intercourse occurred between a man and another man, Allah *Glorified is He* would use ‘*alladhan’*—the relative pronoun for the masculine-dual in Arabic, rendered in the following *verse* as ‘both.’ ‘If two men commit an immoral act [i.e. sexual intercourse], punish them both; if they repent and mend their ways, leave them alone– Allah always accepts repentance, He is the Giver of Mercy' (*an-Nisa': * 16) The verse here concerns an affair between a man and another man. Meanwhile, the preceding verse is surely related to an affair between two women. Why would the punishment in the case of the affair between two women for the sake of pleasure be the confinement in the houses up to the moment of death? The reason is that this act is an evil and plague that must be eradicated from society. It verily represents total corruption since women tend to meet each other freely as far as clothes are concerned. Thus, the seizure of lesbians in their houses till they die is much better than having them accustomed to this awful, immoral act. We do not know how big the harm brought about by such an obscene practice might be. We have only been given a little knowledge. For the One Who has created us is verily the One Who has decreed that a male and a female must have sex with one another within the framework of marriage, with all its legitimate requirements, including two witnesses and the dowry. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* has created the woman as a receiving party, while the man has been prepared as a sending party; this is quite obvious. If the two parties were not compatible, dissonance would inevitably occur.

If the relation between both sexes is not based on the legitimate path that has been decreed by our Creator, Allah *Glorified is He*, something wrong and harmful must happen. Similarly, when we connect an electric wire with another of the same kind—i.e. a positive wire with another positive one, or a negative wire with another negative one—a fire will break out. Were this to happen, we would say there is an electric short circuit, i.e. there is a fault in the connection of wires. Seeing the big damage resulting from a small fault in the connection of few wires, what do you think of the harm caused by those faults arising from misconnection in sexual relations among humans? Note well what I am going to say: science will sooner or later discover that there is a secret kept by Allah *Glorified is He* in this context. When a man wants to have a relationship with a woman in the way decreed by Allah *Glorified is He* he proposes to her, asking, 'Will you marry me?' She answers, 'I agree to marry you.' Through this process, Allah *Glorified is He* makes the relationship between them normal and smooth. But if there was a defect in this relationship between the receiving and sending parties (sexes), there would be a shocking fatal 'short circuit', plaguing the entire society.

I assert what I have just said so that it may be transferred as a testimony to the coming generations. The truthful faith of our ancestors guided them to enjoy the Gifts of Allah and recognize His Signs. The True Lord Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'We shall show them Our signs in the horizons (of the universe) and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this [revelation] is the Truth….' (*Fussilat:* 53)

Since we have been guided to the fact that if wires are connected in a correct way, the light will be good, and if wires are misconnected, there may be a short circuit and a fire, we should note that it is the same case in humans. The relation between a male and a female is similar to that relation between positive and negative charges in electricity. The True Lord Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'And We created pairs of all things…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49) If we learn that light is the result of a correct connection of positive and negative parts in inanimate objects, whereas fires break out if the connection is wrong, then what about misconnection among humans?

During some of our trips abroad, we were asked the following question: Why do you allow man to have more than a wife, while you do not allow the woman to have more than one male spouse? In raising this question, those want to provoke women and arouse anger against the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* so that a naïve woman—who tends to be rebellious against her religion—may say, 'There is no justice in this religion.' So, I asked those who had just asked me, 'Do you have special resorts for the sexually liberal youth?' They answered, 'Yes, there are places in some states.' I said, 'What precautions have you taken to protect the health of these humans?' They said, 'We have periodical, unexpected medical check-ups.' I asked, 'Why?' They said, 'So that we may isolate those who are infected with any disease.' I asked, 'Do you use this method for married men and women?' They said no, they did not. I asked why not, but they kept silent and did not answer. So I said, 'The fact is that married women are exclusively devoted to their husbands; they are vessels dedicated to their spouses, and thus no diseases emerge. Meanwhile, diseases would result from having the semen of several men in the same womb.'

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* intends to preserve the human species in a clean way. He *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'And as for those of your women who become guilty of an immoral act [i.e. unlawful sexual intercourse], bring against them four [witnesses] from among you; and if these bear witness thereto, confine them (the guilty women) to their houses until death takes them away or Allah opens for them a way [through repentance].' (*an-Nisa': 15*) '…Your women…' refers to the Muslim women because we do not decree laws for others since they do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. As to the testimony, it must be requested from four Muslims because true Muslims appreciate the value of justice and honour. Thus, if they testify, the Punishment of Allah *Glorified is He* must be enforced and the guilty women must be confined in their houses.

In our modern age, this is known as quarantine where some people or animals are kept for a period of time apart from others in case they are carrying an infectious disease. There is, of course, a difference between those who have infectious illnesses and those who feel a deep sense of shame for bringing dishonour on themselves. Since we isolate those who suffer from infectious diseases, do not we do the same thing with those who bring shame and scandals? Thus, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…confine them (the guilty women) to their houses until death takes them away or Allah opens for them a way [through repentance].' (*an-Nisa': 15*) This means that each woman must stay in isolation until she dies. Books on Islamic legislation tell us that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* interpreted this verse to be concerned with the adultery that might happen between a man and a woman, not between two women.

'Ubadah ibn As-Samit related that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Adhere to what I say…Adhere to what I say. If a virgin commits adultery with another virgin, each must be punished with a hundred lashes and banishment for a year. If a married person commits adultery with another married person, each must be punished with a hundred lashes and then stoning.' (1)

Afterwards, upon the Revelation of the chapter of (*an-Nur:*24), the punishment set for adultery became as follows: whipping for those virgins having sex with each other, and stoning for those married persons having sex with each other. Some people argue that stoning is not mentioned in the Quran. We may answer:

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(1) *[Related by Muslim as narrated by 'Ubada ibn As-Samit]*

who dares to say that legislation in Islam is confined to the Quran? The Quran is a miraculous Book concerned with the fundamentals of the religion. As we have said before, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '...so accept whatever the Messenger [Muhammad] gives you...' (*al-Hashr:* 7). Let us examine this issue: if there is a text that decrees a particular ruling, we may or may not understand this ruling from the text. If we understand it, then it must have an application in the life of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

If Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* issues a ruling regarding a specific violation in Islam and applies it, the priority here is for the action because actions are stronger than words. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* may make a statement, but such a statement may not be applied because it is superseded by another one, for instance. By contrast, actions are practical examples. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stoned Ma'iz and Al-Ghamidiyya for committing adultery. He also stoned a Jewish man and a Jewish woman when they asked him to modify the ruling related to stoning in the Torah. Thus, the actions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are stronger and more binding than the texts, particularly that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is a legislator.

Once, someone said: stoning, as a penalty, is only meted out to adulterous married people. But what will we do to a married man who has committed adultery with a virgin girl? In this case, the proper ruling is to stone the man and whip the girl. Thus, if both the man and the woman have the same status, then the same ruling applies to them. If not, each must get the ruling that matches him or her.

When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the limit (punishment) of slave women—those who are rightfully owned by others—He says: '…their punishment will be half that of free women.' (*an-Nisa':* 25) What is implied here is whipping only because stoning cannot be divided into two halves. A slave woman receives half the punishment of a free virgin woman who is whipped a hundred times for committing adultery; so, a slave woman is whipped fifty times.

Since the punishment meted out to a slave woman is half that inflicted on a virgin, such punishment must be divisible and stoning is indivisible. Evidence has in this regard become final via the actions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is a legislator, and does not merely deduce rulings, as any Muslim scholar may do. The fact that he actually stoned several people, demonstrates that Islam has decreed stoning. But why must a slave woman receive half the penalty of a free woman? The reason is that slave women do not have dignity while free women do(1). So, Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan once said: How come a free woman commits adultery? She said so even at the apex of her disbelief and opposition to Islam. This means that adultery is not something that a free woman with dignity would do. But a slave woman does not have dignity because she may be the possession of anyone.

For this reason, a slave woman receives only half the penalty prescribed for free women. Some would ask, 'What punishment should a married slave woman get for committing adultery?' Stoning means killing, and such a punishment cannot be halved. The answer is: the prescribed punishment of stoning ends in death of the punished sinner, so such a punishment can never be reduced to a half. Rather, the words of Allah(2), '…they shall suffer half the *'adhab* (punishment) which is inflicted upon free women…' (*an-Nisa':* 25) refer to the physical torture, not the stoning to death. The Arabic word '*'adhab'* does not refer to death, or punishment that leads to death, but to physical torment only, as Almighty Allah says in the Quran, quoting Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) when he was checking the birds and did not find the hoopoe: '[If so,] I will (punish him most severely) or will kill him….' (*an-Naml:* 21)

The word '*'u'adhebannahu'*, derived from the noun '*'adhab'* (meaning 'torture') does not denote killing, or the latter would not be mentioned along with that word in the same sentence. Likewise, *'adhab* in the verse we are dealing with refers to torture or infliction of pain and not to stoning that leads to death. This refutes the argument of those who claim there is not such a punishment in Islam for adultery as stoning to death, for slave women get half the punishment prescribed for free women, and stoning to death cannot be halved. To those people who say this, we respond as follows: what you use as evidence to substantiate your argument is false because the word used in the verse is '*'adhab'* and Allah has distinguished between that word–which means torture–and death or execution. As we have said, Allah quotes Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) as saying: '[If so,] I will (punish him most severely) or will kill him…' (*an-Naml:* 21) this verse differentiates between *'adhab* (torture) and 'killing.' Similarly, in the versewe are dealing with, *'adhab* refers to physical torture and not to killing through stoning. Let us not interpret Quranic text to mean something different from what it actually intends to convey. Now, let us discuss the matter rationally.

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(1) Slavery was common before the coming of Islam which Islam has put an end to it gradually. The reason behind the fact that a slave woman was receiving half the penalty of a free woman is that slave women do not have freedom, and so they are not fully responsible for their actions since responsibility necessarily requires freedom.

(2) "The Islamic conception of "Allah" is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of "God". However, the word "Allah" does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use "Allah" rather than "God" as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.'

If a man commits fornication with a virgin girl, what is the scope of offense done to her honour? It is relatively narrower than that done to a non-virgin because the latter is often married. In the case of a virgin, the assault is against her honour, but not a husband's. As for the non-virgin, the offense includes the honour of her husband as well. Thus, the scope of offense is wider since the non-virgin has two families instead of one: that of her parents and siblings and that of her husband and offspring. In the case of the virgin fornicator, the disgrace may be forgotten by the death of her parents and those of their generation who knew about it. Disgrace of a married fornicator, however, is likely to outlive her, so long as her children are alive. Shame in the case of a married woman can be thus perpetuated. It would be unfair to make the punishment for such perpetuated shame equal to an offense which is not that wide in its effect. If the two offenses were equal in punishment–whipping for both–it would mean the wide range of the injury done to honour in the case of a married fornicator has not been discerned. The injury done to honour in the case of a virgin fornicator is relatively limited and may not take long to end, being often confined to the generations of her parents and siblings. Think, on the other hand, of a married fornicator whose shame will continue to the generation of her children and grandchildren. The scope of offense is wider and its effect deeper and more lasting. So, would Allah, the Just, decree the same punishment of whipping for virgin and non-virgin fornicators? This could never be.

The matter must be dealt with in the way Prophet Muhammad did. He was the Messenger of Allah who did not only understand the Quranic text perfectly, but also had the authority and responsibility to clarify the rulings not explicitly expounded in the Quran. Allah has commanded us to abide by what Prophet Muhammad did, and he actually executed the punishment of stoning to death and declared it as a final ruling: a non-virgin adulterer should be stoned and a virgin fornicator should be whipped, provided that the conditions for applying the ruling are fully satisfied. These rulings are meant to preserve the life and purity of humankind in general and, therefore, protect the entire existence of human beings. Preservation of life encompasses both protection of individuals—through disciplining them, providing for them by lawful means, etc—as well as protection of family lineages through forbidding sexual relationships outside marriage.

When people stray from the ordinance of Allah, He sends them signs that attract them back to it, and such signs may be sent by means of those who disbelieve to prove its truth. We have repeatedly dealt with this divine norm, and will repeat it still so it may be ingrained in the minds of people. Allah says: ‘It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to show that it is above all [other] religions, however much the idolaters may hate this.’ (*at-Tawba:* 33)

Some would say the Quran makes a claim that has nothing to do with reality, for Islam has not been proved to be above all other religions. To anyone who may thus contend, we respond: This is the result of a faulty understanding of the words of Allah. He says in one verse, ‘... to show that it is above all [other] religions, however much the idolaters may hate this’ (*at-Tawba:* 33) and in another verse, ‘... however much the disbelievers may hate this.’ (*Ghafir:* 14) So the fact that Islam will prevail over other religions does not mean abolition of all those who hate it: the idolaters and the disbelievers. Allah does not say that Islam will preclude the existence of anyone who is against it.

Since they do not believe in Islam, the disbelievers hate to see Islam prevail over all other religions, but does Islam prevail over other religions by abolishing them all and having every one of their adherents convert to it? No. Allah has explained in the Quran and proved by reality that this is not the way Islam gains victory. Rather, the manifestation of this victory is that life events will force those who hate Islam to resort to it for relief of disasters; they will not find a way out of their crises except by applying one or another of the rulings of Islam which they hate, perhaps without even knowing it.

When life forces someone to follow the opinion of his rival, this is evidence of the truth of the latter. This is how Islam prevails over all other religions, however much the disbelievers may hate it. We have seen this happen in our modern age. Since 1981, the USA—that major world power—has been suffering under the crisis summed up in these four letters: AIDS. Islam has established a law that organizes sexual relationships to protect and preserve humankind. Through its system of legal and publicly recognized marriage, Islam has guided us to the best and purest form of sexual relationships. Through defiance of this divine law, America has been suffering terror of the aforesaid disease, which proves the truth of Islam as the timeless religion of God. AIDS, or 'Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome', is transmitted mainly through genital fluids in sexual relationships outside marriage. Scientists are still studying the formation of the virus causing AIDS. That virus secretes poisons and cause severe pains, and until today, the western world withal its advancement is still unable to defeat this disease. It is worthy of mention that the HIV virus that causes AIDS is transmitted through sexual man-woman relationships outside of marriage as well as homosexual relationships. They are a punishment from Allah to all those who practice sex outside the lawful limits set by Him.

Allah has made marriage the valid channel through which a man and a woman can have a clean relationship. It is the process of offer and acceptance through which both parties- the man and the woman through her guardian- give their consent, the groom pays the mandatory marriage dowry, and the union is announced at the presence of witnesses. This is the system of marriage decreed by Allah; it goes perfectly in line with the chemical constitution of the human soul and is the best manner in which human bodies can enter into an intimate union.

Ponder this example: when positive and negative electric wires are properly connected, they produce light. However, when they are connected in the wrong way, a short circuit and perhaps a fire will ensue. In the same manner, when masculinity and femininity are brought together by the lawful bond of matrimony, the result is perfect harmony between the natural chemical constitution of the human soul that transmits, i.e. the male, and that of the soul that receives, i.e. the female. Naturally, the outcome of this pure union is a light, not a fire.

It is enough to enrage a man to see a stranger sneaking glances at a woman under his guardianship. If that stranger follows the legitimate path of proposal decreed by Allah, the guardian of the woman, who would have otherwise been enraged, would be elated and a wedding ceremony would be held to announce the blessed union.

Adherence to the law of Allah positively affects the chemical constitution of the human soul, whereas rage and resentment are the inevitable result of disobeying this law; abidance by it brings happiness and creates solid relationships among people. Following the guidance of Allah is what works this wonderful effect in the human soul and lets happiness and peace replace rage and enmity through a clean and honest relationship.

Every relationship between a man and woman that exists beyond the limits of purity and chastity ordained by Allah must result in an unbalance in the constitution of human life that ultimately leads to psychological and physical diseases difficult to be treated. This happens nowadays already. Let us reflect on the following verse: ‘And those of your women, who commit illegal sexual intercourse, take the evidence of four witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify, confine them (i.e. women) to houses until death comes to them or Allah ordains for them some (other) way.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 15) This was intended as a preliminary stage until Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad the prescribed punishment for fornication. Allah also says:

وَٱلَّذَانِ يَأْتِيَـٰنِهَا مِنكُمْ فَـَٔاذُوهُمَا ۖ فَإِن تَابَا وَأَصْلَحَا
فَأَعْرِضُوا۟ عَنْهُمَآ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١٦﴾

If two men commit a lewd act, punish them both;
if they repent and mend their ways, leave them
alone – God is always ready to accept repentance,
He is full of mercy [16] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 16)

As the aforesaid verse tells, Allah always accepts repentance and is full of Mercy. When an adjective form is used to describe Allah, it does not have the same quality or degree as when it is used to describe human beings. We should not think that the Attributes of Allah are sometimes manifested in a higher degree than others are; rather, all the Attributes of Allah have the same Absolute Perfection. When we describe a person as an ‘excessive eater’, it is an exaggerated depiction of this man’s appetite or eating habits. However, it does not tell whether he eats a lot in every single meal or he eats more meals than others normally do. Perhaps, instead of eating three times daily, he eats five times, for example. Thus, he is an ‘excessive eater’ in the sense that he eats more meals than usual, even though the size of each meal is not really larger than usual. It may also mean that he eats in every single meal much more than what a normal person would eat. Instead of one piece of bread, he would perhaps eat four pieces. Therefore, when an exaggerated expression or adjective form is used to describe a human being, it may indicate either that the stated quality manifests itself intensely every single time, or the rate of recurrence of that quality is higher than usual.

This is different when an adjective is used to describe an Attribute of Allah. When we say that Allah is the Accepter of Repentance, this refers to both, the repetition of the manifestations of this Attribute as well as the uniquely high degree and quality of the Attribute each time it is manifested. Allah accepts repentance of millions of human beings, and moreover, He forgives even grave acts of disobedience. It means both the rate of recurrence and the degree of the Attribute are characterized by the same unique and absolute perfection. He is the Accepter of Repentance, the All-Merciful, and the All-Wise Lord and Creator of all things. He has created humankind and decreed laws to regulate their lives. The establishment of laws necessarily entails condemnation of whoever violates these laws and prescribing punishments to deter violators.

Ordaining laws rules out excuses. Since Allah has revealed to us His laws, no one may be excused to say, ‘I did not know such-and-such was forbidden.’ The fact that Allah forbids something and prescribes a punishment for it is itself a proof that Allah knows that the human soul may be so weak as to contradict divine ordinance; our Creator knows we are not angels. Prescription of prohibitions and punishments leaves no excuse for violators. As we have pointed out, prohibition of a specific deed implies that it is likely to be committed; otherwise, Allah would not mention it, let alone set punishment for whoever commits it. Some acts are worthy of condemnation, yet the Ultimate Legislator and Law-Giver does not set punishments for them, not due to any deficiency on His Part—the Exalted above every failure or deficiency!—but Allah has not mentioned the punishment for some condemned acts in His Ordinance for a reason. Let us illustrate this. Allah knows that human beings may be prone to commit theft, for example, or fornication. Therefore, He prescribes a punishment to be applied in case someone is too weak to resist the temptation of such acts. However, there are other acts, also worthy of condemnation, that Allah does not set punishments for. By such deliberate overlooking, Allah wants to implicitly tell us that no rational human being should even conceive of the possibility of doing such evil acts. An example of this is homosexuality.

Allah has not decreed a particular punishment for it because a sound natural disposition would never even think of committing it. Let it suffice as evidence that homosexuality does not exist in the worlds of animals, for they have natural dispositions that have not been contaminated, unlike human beings.(1)

It is very important to understand, though, that the fact that Allah has not prescribed a particular punishment for an evil act does not mean that one will not be held accountable on the Day of Judgment for committing it. Rather, one may receive severer reckoning on account of this evil act. When Allah condemns an act and rules a punishment for committing it, this indicates that such an act is likely to be committed, given to human weakness. However, if an act has no prescribed punishment, this is only meant to suggest that it is neither natural nor normal for a sound human disposition to be inclined to do such an act. For this reason, no punishment has been decreed for it. The matter in such cases was left to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was authorized to legislate proper punishments for such abnormally evil acts.

Thus, the absence of an explicit text in the Quran that prescribes punishment for a certain crime does mean that one will not be recompensed for committing it. It is quite the reverse: punishment for such crimes may be severer than the ones explicitly established in the Quran. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered that both parties engaging in a homosexual relationship should be thrown off a mountaintop, which is severer than the stoning punishment prescribed for fornicators. From this we understand that not decreeing a specific punishment for a certain bad deed is only meant to indicate that it is very inconsistent with reason and a sound natural disposition, not that such a deed is by any means admissible. When Allah overlooks certain matters, it is meant as an indirect intimation that these matters should not be practiced among human beings; they are not even practiced by animals even though they belong to a lower class.

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(1) This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha’rawi *may Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

Some would describe such an atrocious act as ‘animalistic lust.’ However, animals are certainly vindicated from such a groundless accusation! In actual fact, animals would never do such an abnormal thing. No female of any animal species would mate with another female, nor would two male animals ever copulate with one another. Furthermore, if a female animal conceives, it would never allow any male animal other than her mate to approach her. Therefore, practicing sexual relationships beyond the legitimate process set by Allah should better be called a ‘humanistic’ desire, not an animalistic one! Animals would not commit such anomalous acts. Whoever describes such lewd practices as animalistic actually does grave injustice to animals. Despite the fact that human beings commit such ugly sins, Allah asserts that He is the Accepter of Repentance, the All-Merciful. Why? Consider the wisdom underlying repentance and Allah’s acceptance of it. If the believers did not commit any sins, the notion of obligation to fulfil the commands and duties we are assigned by Allah would lose its essence and meaning. Abidance by the Divine Ordinance involves a continuous process of fighting against one’s self, on the one hand to prevent it from sliding into error, and on the other hand, to compel it to endure the difficulty of undertaking the enjoined acts of worship.

A believer should resist the temptation of committing sins in the course of his attempts to submit to the assignments of faith, and this is the essence and meaning of obligation; otherwise, Allah would have created us like angels and there would be no need for obligations. Allah has decreed repentance since He knows that human beings are weak. Even a believer may be too weak to resist one sin or another, one day or another, but this does not mean that Allah will banish him from His Mercy. Rather, the fact that Allah has decreed certain punishments for sinners is itself evidence that those who choose Islam but then commit sins out of ignorance or weakness are not altogether excluded from the realm of faith. Were it not for the Mercy of Allah Who has prescribed repentance for us–a sinner would be doomed to damnation, and would therefore give himself free rein to rebellion and disobedience ever after. Knowing that Allah already deprived him eternally from His Mercy, desperation would drive him to go on offending the honours of people, spreading corruption, and committing all evils with no deterrent.

By prescribing repentance, Allah has foreclosed the door to desperation that would make a sinner persist in error since he knows there is no hope for him to be forgiven. Just as Allah has prescribed repentance for sinners, He has also made Mercy for those who guard themselves against sinning. He says: '…Allah is Ever All-Forgiving (the One Who forgives and accepts repentance), (and He is) Most-Merciful.' (*an-Nisa':* 16) If Allah described Himself as 'the Acceptor of Repentance' only, each one of us would have to sin in order to attain pardon from Him through this Attribute. However, Allah says: '… Ever All-Forgiving (the One Who forgives and accepts repentance), (and He is) Most Merciful.' (*an-Nisa':* 16)

So, He has made repentance for those who sin and has made Mercy for those who guard themselves against sinning. Therefore, one does not need to necessarily be a sinner to attain the Forgiveness of Allah: one of the manifestations of His Mercy is that He will bless some of His servants so they will not sin to need repentance. Then, in the following verse, Allah explains the issue of repentance:

إِنَّمَا ٱلتَّوۡبَةُ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٱلسُّوٓءَ بِجَهَٰلَةٖ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِن
قَرِيبٖ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يَتُوبُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِمۡۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمٗا ﴿١٧﴾

But God only undertakes to accept repentance
from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon
after- wards repent: these are the ones God will
forgive, He is all knowing, all-wise [17]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 17)

The precision of the Quran has left no room for misunderstanding. Since Allah accepts the repentance of sinners, someone may think that he can commit as many sins as he wishes and then repent to Allah. Such conduct is the result of heedlessness of the wisdom underlying Allah's concealment of the time of each one's death. Can anyone be sure that he will live until he decides to repent? Anyone of us may die while sinning, so ponder again the words of Almighty Allah: 'But Allah only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent: these are the ones Allah will forgive, He is All Knowing, All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 17) 'Doing evil out of ignorance' means to commit a sin without bearing in mind, at the moment of committing it, the punishment assigned for it. If one recalls the punishment Allah has made for the sin he is about to commit, he will refrain from yielding to its temptation. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this when he said: 'A fornicator is not [truly] a believer at the moment when he is committing fornication. A thief is not [truly] a believer at the moment when he is committing theft, and he who drinks an intoxicant is not [truly] a believer at the moment when he is drinking.'(1)(2)

If he bore in mind, at the moment of committing fornication, for example, that he is a believer and faith prescribes the punishment of whipping or stoning for fornicators, he would not commit that sin.

Allah clearly states that repentance is accepted only from those '… who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent...' (*an-Nisa':* 17) Some may plan to commit a particular sin, rejoice in doing it at the transient pleasure they gain, and even talk proudly about having committed that sin and the time when they did. On the other hand, some may fall prey to a sin, out of weakness, and immediately sink under remorse and self-reproach for committing it; they wish they had not done that act of disobedience and wonder how they dared commit it.

Let me give an example to distinguish between the two cases: Assume that two people were preparing to travel to Paris. One of them inquired from those who lived there before about the places of extravagant entertainment and debauchery. Once he arrived in Paris, he indulged himself in such a wasted, obscene life and, and when he returned home, he took pride in talking about his delicious adventures! By contrast, the other person travelled to Paris to pursue his studies. During his stay there, he could not combat the temptations and fell a weak prey to a sin; he did not plan it, but it happened. Once the ecstasy of desire was extinguished, he became severely overcome by regret and self-reproach. When he returned home, he was far from proud of what he committed, and was just anxious to conceal news of it from all others. The difference between one who plans for a sin and one who weakly falls prey to sinning without intending it is remarkable.

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(1) In the version cited by Imam Muslim and Imam Ahmed, there is the addition: "…He who dishonestly takes something of the battle gains is not [truly] a believer at the moment when he is doing this sin, so beware of these deeds! Beware of these deeds!" In the version cited by Abd Al-Razzaq, there is another addition: "…And he who usurps a right that is not his is not [truly] a believer at the moment when he is doing so".

(2) *Cited by Imam Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayrah*

By decreeing repentance for his servants, Allah has bestowed His Mercy on all humankind. Otherwise, the entire world would be immersed in endless evils, with people who, by deviating once from the right path, are doomed to desperation of His Mercy and, therefore, take deviation as their lifetime vocation. So Allah accepts the repentance of him who has done a sin, ignorant or heedless of punishment, then repents before his time runs out. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified the exact meaning of ‘running out of time’ when he said: ‘Allah accepts the repentance of His servant as long as the death-rattle has not reached his throat.’(1) (2)

As the Quran relates, this dialogue took place between Allah *the Exalted* and Satan: ‘[Iblis (Satan)] said: “O my Lord! Because you misled me, I shall indeed adorn the path of error for them (mankind) on the earth, and I shall mislead them all, except Your chosen, (guided) slaves among them.”’ (*al-Hijr:* 39-40) Satan thought he would destroy all humankind and lure them into committing sins, except the few servants of Allah whom He *the Glorified and Exalted* selected, elevated above all others, and made them devoted to Him. However, Allah disappointed Satan and decreed repentance for His servants so they can always return to Him so long as the death rattle has not reached their throat. At the moment when the soul is leaving the body, what benefit would society reap if the dying person repents then? Society will not benefit anything from such a repentance that comes at a time when the person is already stripped of any power to either do harm or do good. For this reason,

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(1) *Shu‘ab Al-Iman* (*The Branches of Faith*), by Ibn Hayyan in his *Sahih*, and Al-Hakim in his *Al-Mustadrak*

(2) *Cited by Imam Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Al-Bayhaqi*

Allah gives a sinner respite to repent and spare society the evils of his sins so long as his soul has not reached his throat. 'But Allah only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance....' (*an-Nisa':* 17) Now, does one repent first and then Allah accepts his repentance and forgives him? Allah says: '… He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return [to Him]. Allah is the Ever-Relenting, the Most-Merciful….' (*at-Tawba:* 118)

Here scholars posed a good question: Does a servant repent first and then Allah accepts his repentance, or does Allah turn to His servant in mercy first and then the servant repents as a result? The aforesaid verse explicitly states: '…He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return [to Him]….' (*at-Tawba:* 118) No one has invented repentance. Rather, Allah first prescribed repentance and made it possible for his servants; accordingly, His servants repent to Him whenever they sin, and He accepts their repentance.

Repentance then revolves around three aspects: First, Allah has decreed repentance for His servants; no one invented repentance and then imposed it on Allah. Rather, the One Who has created us knows that we may be too weak to resist our desires, so He has decreed repentance for those who sin in ignorance then regret their misdoing. This is what Allah means by saying, '… He turned to them in mercy….' (*at-Tawba:* 118) It means that Allah, out of His Mercy, has prescribed repentance so that His servants may turn to Him again if they slide into error: '… in order for them to return [to Him]….' (*at-Tawba:* 118) When they do turn to Him, Allah accepts their repentance, as He says about Himself in the Quran: 'Forgiver of sins and Accepter of repentance….' (*Ghafir:* 3)

Ponder these words of Allah: '… Allah… undertakes to accept repentance….' (*an-Nisa':* 17) The expression denotes endless bounty. If a wealthy person tells a poor one in debt, 'I undertake to repay your debt to your creditor', the debtor would be elated for the favour bestowed on him. What elation and reassurance, then, we should feel when Allah–to Whom all Perfection and Majesty belong– says He 'undertakes to accept repentance'! Allah ascribes acceptance of repentance to Himself and not to any of His creatures. He commits himself to accept sinners who turn to Him in regret, and no one can change what He has decreed. Allah then says: '…and soon afterwards repent…' (*an-Nisa':* 17). No one knows when he will die, so one should not delay his repentance. So those who do wrong in ignorance and soon after turn to Him, regretting their sins, Allah promise them: '… these are the ones Allah will forgive...' (*an-Nisa':* 17). Indeed, He is the One Who accepts repentance and forgives sins.

Allah concludes the verse with His words: '… He is All Knowing, All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 17) We know that establishing laws requires vast knowledge of what was, is, and can possibly be in the future, and this is the reason for the confusion constantly arising regarding man-made laws. What makes people enforce a law on one day and amend it on the following day? Things arise which they had not expected due to their limited knowledge. A law is issued, and when an unexpected thing happens, the legislator has to amend that law. When the legislator is ignorant of all the past, present, and future implications and circumstances associated with those subject to his legislations, the result is a defective legal code. Knowledge of a human legislator does not encompass the past, except just the limited scope of events that has taken place in his own environment or other places whose news has reached him.

Needless to say, human knowledge is also limited by the boundaries of the present and cannot trespass them to know the future. Even with regard to the present, no one can have a full account of it since the present associated with a particular environment and context can be quite different from that associated with another. We know that realms of the unseen are three: First, the past: people of a certain time do not witness events of the times that went before them. The past is hidden from people due to the fact that its events happened at a time preceding their existence. In the Quran, Allah draws our attention to this fact as evidence for the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You [Muhammad] were not present on the western side of the mountain when We gave Our command to Musa (Moses)…' (*al-Qasas:* 44). Prophet Muhammad was not present when Allah revealed His law to Prophet Musa (Moses). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was also illiterate and was therefore incapable of reading history and learning it. Allah also says: 'This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you [Muhammad]: you were not present among them when they cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Maryam (Mary); you were not present with them when they argued [about her].' (*Al-'Imran:* 44) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not witness these events. Furthermore, as everyone knows, he was illiterate and never learnt history from any teacher. This is sufficient evidence that it was Allah Who unveiled the past to the Prophet and made known to him those events. Second, the present: events of the present time can also be part of the unknown, not due to a difference in time of course, but a difference in place. At any present moment, I may know what happens in my place, but I cannot know what happens in other places. Besides difference in place, we cannot know what others hide in themselves. Allah says: '… and they say to themselves, 'Why does not Allah chastise us for what we are saying?'…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) In this verse, Allah tells Prophet Muhammad about a thing that belonged to his time, yet it was concealed in the hearts of his enemies. If they had not harboured that feeling in themselves, would they have believed the Messenger of Allah when he told them about what lurked in their minds as was revealed to him by Allah? Allah has thus removed the veils of place and the inner self of his enemies and exposed their secrets to His Messenger. Third, the future: Allah says in the Quran: 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

This verse was revealed in Mecca at a time when Muslims were a small, persecuted, powerless group. When Companion 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* heard this verse, he asked Prophet Muhammad with eager interest: 'What forces will be defeated?' Muslims then confronted the 'forces' in the Battle of Badr and they were indeed defeated. News of that defeat was foretold in Mecca; then, it took place after the Immigration to Medina. Can it be plausible that Allah would say, 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee' (*al-Qamar:* 45) unless he knew this would actually happen? Had events contradicted the foretold news, those who have believed would have forsaken faith.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* confidently delivered the revelation of Allah who thus foretold the future to be evidence against the adversaries of His Messenger. When the truth of what has been foretold is proven, those adversaries should immediately realize that they were truly revelations of the One Who has created all things and Whose Knowledge encompasses all events.

Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughirah was a huge man among the nobility of Quraysh, a man who was surrounded by an aura of awe and fame. With all his grandeur, Allah said about him: 'We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 16) Allah foretold that he would receive a blow that would leave an indelible mark on the highest point of his nose. In the Battle of Badr, Al-Walid got struck on his nose. Allah foretold Prophet Muhammad of it and events came to confirm it. When reality corroborated the news foretold in the Quran, the believers were established more firmly in faith; they grew assured of the truth of whatever the Messenger of Allah told them. Such an incident, even though minor in itself, constituted solid grounds for believing whatever Prophet Muhammad told them regarding the Afterlife. If he could foretell events that would happen in this life, then he is truly the Messenger of Allah and whatever he told about the Afterlife must certainly be true.

Back to the verse we are dealing with, we say Allah concludes it by saying: '…He is All Knowing, All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 17) His knowledge encompasses all things, and this is why He has decreed repentance for His servants. Allah knew that without repentance, the world would be rife with evils committed by desperate sinners who have lost all hope of deliverance once they committed their first sins. It is out of His Mercy that He has prescribed repentance for His servants. He is the All-Wise Who has not only saved sinners, but saved the entire world from woes and trials that desperation would push hopeless sinners to cause. In the Arabic text of the verse, the verb used is in the past-tense form—which literally translates as 'He was All Knowing, All-Wise.' However, this should not be understood to denote what the past tense linguistically denotes typically; indeed, when it comes to Allah, nothing should be understood or interpreted based on the norms and limits that govern mortals. Rather, 'There is nothing like Him.' Time is but one of His creations; He controls time and it does not control Him.

A sceptic may contend that using a past-tense verb form proves that the Knowledge of Allah is confined to the past. However, the fact that Allah does not change is sufficient to refute this unfounded claim. Allah has always existed with no beginning and no end, so all His Attributes, including Knowledge and Wisdom, have always been His, with no beginning and no end. Wisdom is putting everything in place. Allah has created and decreed everything based on His Omnipotent Knowledge, so everything goes exactly in accordance with the predestined course, and this is the peak of Wisdom. Let us recite again the words of Allah: 'But Allah only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent: these are the ones Allah will forgive, He is All Knowing, All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 17) Allah has decreed repentance so His servants may repent to Him, and He accepts their repentance. This is based on His Omnipotent Knowledge and Absolute Wisdom. In the aforesaid verse, Allah obviously declares that He 'undertakes' to accept repentance of His servants who sin in ignorance and repent soon after. In the following verse, He tells us about the other category of sinners whose repentance will not be accepted:

وَلَيْسَتِ ٱلتَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا حَضَرَ
أَحَدَهُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّى تُبْتُ ٱلْـَٰٔنَ وَلَا ٱلَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ
كُفَّارٌ ۚ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ١٨

It is not true repentance when people continue to do evil until death confronts them and then say, 'Now I repent,' nor when they die defiant: We have prepared a painful torment for these [18]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 18)

This verse tells us about those who persist in wrongdoing and do not think of repentance. Allah accepts repentance of those who live in accordance with His ordinances, yet human souls may at times are too weak to resist the lure of sins. As for those whose repentance is not accepted, they are those whose hearts and souls have deviated from the path of Allah and who give free rein to themselves to enjoy unlawful pleasures. They did not just fall prey to a particular sin out of weakness, but they persisted in sinning and indulged themselves however they wished, irrespective of what Allah has commanded.

One may be too weak before a certain sin, yet he tries so heartily to improve and meanwhile struggles in other aspects of worship in an attempt to compensate for his weakness.

Some, for example, give themselves over to charity projects. Seeing weakness in themselves in a certain aspect, they try to compensate for this weakness by pursuing good deeds through as many channels as possible. They do more good in the hope that Allah may eliminate the sins they have repented from.

No one can be cunning in dealing with Allah. Trespass the limits of Allah in a certain aspect and see how He will employ your efforts in other aspects and make you devoted to His service through righteous deeds. Allah puts fear in the heart of a sinner concerning the destiny they will meet if they do not repent from their sins, which makes them hasten to do good deeds. It is like a message He sends to the one who committed evil deeds: you pursued pleasure and violated the limits set by Allah in a certain aspect, so He has employed you in the service of His path in several other aspects, like building mosques and schools and giving generously to the poor. This is one way how sins are expiated.

No one can deceive Allah. The Quran describes the one who has weakly fallen prey to a sin as one who does ‘evil’ whereas the one who is engrossed in deviating from the path of Allah is described as one who does ‘evil deeds.’ The latter does not just have a certain weak point he cannot control or deal with, but he commits several evil deeds and persists in straying from the Way of Allah. He does not stop there, but he continues to delay repentance until just the moment before his soul is about to be severed from his body. Even the good deeds he may have done were not purely for winning the Good Pleasure of Allah, but he thinks religion is confined to rituals and has nothing to do with real life, as do atheists and those ignorant of the meaning and essence of the religion of Allah.

An example of this is the tradition of the Masons. It is said that this sect was founded by the Jews. Apparently, the behaviour of the Masons gives the impression that they only mean to collaborate to do good to serve the interests of society. However, the undeclared aim of the Masonic faction is to serve the Zionist aspirations. Unaware of the real objectives, some Muslims may join them only to participate in community work. I say to every one of them: your religion is sufficient for you! It already urges you to do these good things, so why do you then turn to the Masons and do not do these good deeds based on the commands of Islam? Why do you not ascribe doing this good to Islam instead of ascribing it to other doctrines and beliefs?

Another example is Rotary Clubs. Someone may boast: ‘I am a member of the Rotary Club.’ Asked why he is so proud of that, he would answer: ‘These are clubs that boost collaboration, communication, affection, and compassion among people.’ This poses a question: does Islam not command the same things? Why then do you need to belong to this group or that? This sounds like hostility to the religion of Allah.

So, Allah does not accept repentance of those who defy Him by persisting in sinning. They are like a man whose soul incited him to break his fast during *Ramadan* by drinking a glass of wine for the price of a stolen pig! The first sin he commits is neglecting fasting in *Ramadan* even though it is mandatory. Second, he breaks his fast by drinking wine even though this is forbidden. He also wants to buy the glass of wine for the price of a pig even though Muslims are forbidden from eating pork. In addition, the pig itself is stolen! When he was asked why he committed all that, he answered: ‘To defy divine ordinance through a complex act of disobedience’!!

This is a flagrant infringement of the laws of Allah and a complete deviation from His Path. Will Allah then accept him if he professes repentance just at the moment of death? No. ‘Whereas repentance shall not be accepted from those who do evil deeds until their dying hour…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 18) having indulged in countless unlawful pleasures, when death comes, the daring sinner is overcome by cowardice. Why does he not insist on his disobedience till the end? When death comes, this is the moment when one cannot deceive himself anymore: ‘… until their dying hour and then say, ‘Behold, I now repent’….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 18) Such repentance is not fit to be accepted, and what benefit would society or the world gain from it? What is the use of declaring repentance at a time when the evildoer is no longer capable of doing any mischief?! This shows disrespect for Allah; therefore, repentance will not avail him.

The verse makes a distinction between two types of sinners: those who embrace faith but persist in sinning and those who die as disbelievers. Now, ponder the mercy of Allah towards the former and His respect for their declaration of faith by testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah gives sinners from among the believers a less-severe recompense than that of the disbelievers. His torment will be commensurate with the sins he committed. He will not be treated like the disbelievers, and this is why Allah adds: '…nor from those who die as deniers of the truth…' (*an-Nisa':* 18). The disobedient believers will receive torment in proportion to their acts of disobedience, but they will finally be admitted to paradise as a reward for their having kept their faith. This is why Allah does not conclude the verse by saying, for example, '…They will be the dwellers of Hell; there to abide.' Rather, He says: '…it is these for whom We have readied grievous suffering…' (*an-Nisa':* 18). Suffer they will–both disobedient believers and the disbelievers–but the torment of each will be commensurate with his sins. Allah says in the following verse:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَن تَرِثُوا۟ ٱلنِّسَآءَ كَرْهًا ۖ وَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ لِتَذْهَبُوا۟
بِبَعْضِ مَآ ءَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّآ أَن يَأْتِينَ بِفَٰحِشَةٍ مُّبَيِّنَةٍ ۚ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ فَإِن
كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تَكْرَهُوا۟ شَيْـًٔا وَيَجْعَلَ ٱللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا ﴿١٩﴾

You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women
against their will, nor should you treat your wives
harshly, hoping to take back some of the bride-gift you
gave them, unless they are guilty of something clearly
outrageous. Live with them in accordance with what is
fair and kind: if you dislike them, it may well be that you
dislike something in which God has put much good [19]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 19)

We have said before that when Allah calls upon His believing servants, saying: 'O you who believe', it means He tells them that since they have voluntarily chosen to believe in Him as the One God Who is the All Knowing, Almighty, All-Wise, and Self-Subsisting, then they must obey His ordinance. Using this special and honourable form of address indicates that non-believers are not included. Rather, Allah calls upon those who have willingly embraced faith. He says: 'There is no compulsion in religion…' (*al-Baqara:* 256). In the verse we are dealing with, Allah wants to address a problem that has to do with women and the way they are oppressed and mistreated. In the pre-Islamic era of ignorance, women suffered from injustice and bias. Allah says: 'O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will…' (*an-Nisa':* 19). The context of the verse refers to inheritance, or a thing which a deceased person has left behind to an heir. The command in the verse is addressed to heirs and it forbids them from taking hold of a thing that belonged to the deceased person yet is not fit to be inherited. Allah has made it lawful for heirs to inherit the wealth of a deceased person and set laws for just distribution of wealth among heirs. However, not everything left behind by a dead person is fit to be inherited. What is that? Allah says: '…You are forbidden to inherit women against their will…' (*an-Nisa':* 19). Is this meant to refer to slave women? No, an heir is entitled to inherit the slave women left behind by the deceased person. Bear in mind that when the word *an-nisa'* (Arabic for 'women') is used in an indefinite way, it is taken to refer to free women since slave women are considered to be rightful possessions of men and therefore can be inherited by heirs. Allah says: '… You are forbidden to inherit women against their will…' (*an-Nisa':* 19). How can a woman be inherited?

In the pre-Islamic era of ignorance, when a man died, his heir would come and throw his gown over the deceased man's wife heralding that she has become his. If the woman then refused, he would take her against her will. If he had no desire for her, he would lock her up in his house until she died and would then inherit her wealth. Alternatively, he would marry her to a man and take her dowry for himself. In short, he treated her as if she had been a possession of his. For this reason, Allah revealed His clear command: '…You are forbidden to inherit women against their will; and you should not '*ta'duluhunna'* (treat them with harshness)…' (*an-Nisa':* 19). The Arabic word '*ta'duluhunna'* is derived from the *root ''adala'* which denotes 'forceful prevention.' We say a woman '*'addalat'* (constrained) her fetus, which refers to muscular contractions which prevent her from delivering her baby. This is the etymological root of the word. Out of the Grace of Allah, when a woman delivers a baby, her muscles expand and contract; they expand so there would be a large enough space that allows the baby to get out. However, these muscles may contract during delivery, which prevents the baby from coming out. In such a case an operation is conducted to get the baby out, like the well-known Caesarian section.

So the Arabic word '*'adala'* refers to a difficult childbirth, and it also refers to an egg having difficulty leaving a chicken's body due to muscular contractions resulting from a defective movement. But what makes the muscles move at odds with the expansion process required for delivery? Allah has willed that things do not always happen as expected as if everything were functioning mechanically. Rather, Allah wants us to bear in mind that He is the One Who disposes all affairs and who brings effects and results. Causes have no power in themselves, so if He wills, He may suspend them and prevent them from producing the anticipated outcomes.

When we see anomalous and exceptional events happening contrary to what their causes usually lead to, this is evidence of the infinite Power of Allah. If everything happened as expected, people would perhaps think that the mechanical order of the world is so precise that it may never falter. Allah draws our attention to the fact that He possesses full power and control over His Kingdom. Contrary to the beliefs of Deists, Allah did not only create the universe and then leave it to function mechanically through the interaction of material causes. No, Allah is the All-Sustaining One Who never slumbers or sleeps; He orders the causes to operate or not to operate, and He is the One Who holds control over all things.

Allah shows us these abnormalities in the universe so that we will not be allured by the monotony and constancy of natural causes and in order that we will continuously remember Allah and the fact that He is the One Who has created all causes and means and conferred power on them so they can produce effects. This is meant to protect us from becoming indifferent or heedless of the Creator due to the constant monotony of the process of causation and results. Allah reminds us of His existence through the various instances in which He diversifies natural causes or suspends them. He thus teaches us that these causes are not autonomous actors; they have no power in themselves. Rather, they act the way they do because Allah has created them and ordered them to act in this manner, and if He wills, He may suspend them.

We have addressed this matter while discussing the miracle of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. His people threw him in the fire, but he was not burnt. Allah could have saved Prophet Ibrahim in a different way, but was it only about the survival of the Prophet *peace be upon him*? If this had been the case, Allah would not have let him fall into their hands at all, but He did let them capture Ibrahim and did not enable him to escape from them. Allah could have ordered the sky to rain when they threw him in the fire to extinguish it. However, it did not rain and the fire was inflamed and got fiercer. By this, Almighty Allah wanted to send us one of His signs: ‘But We said, “Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham).”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69) Was this not a provocation and defiance of those who wanted to burn Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)? It was indeed! They were indeed capable of catching him and throwing him in the fire. No rain fell to extinguish the fire, while he was in it. Still, the fire did not burn him. This is the greatness of the Might of Allah.

Back to the verse at hand; Allah says: ‘…and you should not ‘*ta’duluhunna’* (treat them with harshness)…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 19). What does ‘harshness’ here refer to? As we have clarified, the Arabic word ‘*ta’duluhunna’* is derived from the *root ‘‘adala’* which denotes ‘forceful prevention.’ We say a woman ‘*‘addalat’* (constrained) her fetus, which refers to muscular contractions which prevent her from delivering her baby. What does this word mean then when it is used to refer to women? It means forcefully preventing a woman from her natural right (when her husband dies) to marry whomever she wants or whoever proposes to her after the widow’s prescribed waiting period is over. To stop that pre-Islamic habit, Allah has sent down this command to prohibit keeping a woman under such constraint. Allah commands us not to lock them up in our homes and deny them access to their legitimate rights, but why would a man do so? What is the practice against which the Quran here means to caution? Allah explains the reason in the same verse: ‘… that you may take away part of the *Mahr* [mandatory marriage dowry] you have given them….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 19) The verse then presents two distinct rulings: do not inherit women as if they were your property, and women should not be prevented unjustly from marrying whom they want.

A good example of the latter is when a man who hates his wife decides not to live in a healthy marriage with her, but also never to divorce her, and instead, leaves her suspended between marriage and divorce; so he is neither a husband to her, nor does he divorce her and let her marry another man. A bad man may choose to do so because he wants to force his wife to free herself from constraint by waiving her alimony and all or part of her dowry. Islam thus protects women by prohibiting such deeds.

When are men allowed to exercise such constraint on their wives? Here is the answer: '…unless they commit open illegal sexual intercourse…' (*an-Nisa':* 19) In this case, the man is allowed to lock his wife up and prevent her from leaving home. This was prior to prescribing the punishment for adultery, namely stoning to death. Some scholars of Islamic jurisprudence have said a husband may take from his wife whatever she is willing to give in order to free her. This was in the form of money or any other thing if she was guilty of adultery, or if she was a bad companion to him. This is different from what we call *khul'*, or the divorce granted in return for a compensation paid by the wife to the husband. The latter is a gift to women who want to end their marriages even without any reasons at all. This is unlike the aforesaid punishment that was prescribed for adulteresses before the stoning punishment was ordained.

Allah continues: '… and live with them '*bil ma'ruf*' (honourably)...' (*an-Nisa':* 19). The Arabic word '*ma'ruf*' (here rendered as 'honourably') is wider in its meaning than the word '*mawadda'* which denotes 'affection.' The latter refers to being good and kind to someone to whom you are bound by affection and intimacy. The word '*ma'ruf*', on the other hand, means treating someone in accordance with what is fair and kind even if you dislike them. Some orientalists who are antagonistic towards Islam have scrutinized the Quran only to find anything that may be used as a proof that the Quran involves contradictions. They argue: 'Your Quran says, '[Prophet], you will not find people who truly believe in Allah and the Last Day '*yuwadduna'* (giving their loyalty to) those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or other relations...' (*al-Mujadala*: 22). This includes a command to the believers that they should avoid '*yuwadduna'* (be affectionate/ loyal) towards a son, father, or anyone of their clan just because the latter is a disbeliever.' Contrarily, those orientalists argue, 'The Quran says in another verse: 'If they [your parents] strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life '*ma'rufa'* (according to what is right)…' (*Luqman:* 15). So how come the Quran forbids the believers in one verse to '*yuwadduna'* (give loyalty to) their relatives if they are disbelievers, yet meanwhile orders them in another verse to keep company of their disbelieving parents based on '*ma'ruf*' (what is right/ fair/ kind)?'

That allegation is founded on a failure to understand the difference between *mawada* (affection/ loyalty/ friendship) and *ma'ruf* (honourable treatment, i.e. based on justice and goodness). The former denotes love that leads to loyalty and friendship, whereas the latter refers to treating others based on justice and goodness irrespective of our love for them. If you find a hungry person and you give him food and try to satisfy his material needs, this is an example of *ma'ruf* (just and kind treatment). As for *mawadda,* however, it involves showing kindness or advocacy to someone based on your affection towards them. When a believer is good towards his disbelieving father, it is not affection that really drives him, but keenness to abide by the command of Allah to treat him based on justice and goodness. A Muslim is ordered to treat his disbelieving parents well, but as to advocating for them, taking their side, or giving them loyalty–as disbelievers–this is a completely different thing, and this is what we are forbidden to do.

Did Allah not blame Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) for turning down a guest when he found out he was a disbeliever? Our Lord told Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: 'Do you want to change his religion to host him for only one night whereas I have been sustaining him for forty years while he is a disbeliever?' What did Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) do then? He ran after the man, and when he reached him, the man asked Prophet Ibrahim what made him change his attitude so suddenly. The Prophet *peace be upon him* answered: 'By Allah, my Lord has reproached me because I have behaved in this manner towards you', so the man told him: 'Your Lord blamed you even though you are a Prophet and I do not believe in Him; the Lord Who justly blames the ones who love Him for the sake of His enemies must be a great Lord!' The man embraced faith as a result! This is what we mean by the word *ma'ruf* (treatment based on justice regardless of feelings). These are the values Allah has enjoined on spouses in the course of their marital lives. Muslims should heed this so they do not destroy their homes. Some believe that families are built only on the basis of love, yet in case love is absent, Allah tells us to '…live with them *bil ma'ruf* (honourably)...' (*an-Nisa':* 19). Even if you do not love your wife, treat her based on what is fair and kind. Some men dislike their wives only because they are not beautiful enough on the outside and therefore do not arouse sexual desire in their husbands. Here is a serious misunderstanding: Allah has not prescribed marriage for a man to have a woman who would arouse his desire. Rather, marriage is meant to give you a spouse with whom you can lawfully practice the intimate relationship whenever your desire is excited chemically due to its nature. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'If any of you sees a beautiful woman and feels his desire aroused, he should hasten to have intercourse with his wife. His desire will be equally quenched this way since his wife has what that other woman has [the same physical form, natural ability, etc. required for intercourse].' (1)

This means that women are of the same nature as to the satisfaction of one's sexual lust. That is why when a man came to 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* and said, 'O Commander of the believers! I hate my wife and I want to divorce her', 'Umar replied: 'have families been built only on love?! What about values?' The man thought that his wife would continue capturing his heart until the end of her life, to the extent that he believed that he would kiss her or have sexual intercourse with her as often as he liked. But, 'Umar drove the man's attention to the fact that even though such a thing may happen at the very beginning of marriage, later, the family is built upon the mutual respect between the husband and his wife.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '… Live with them in accordance with what is fair and kind…' A man might have hated his wife for a particular reason, yet she may perfect her character later on in such a way that enables her to remedy and correct any deficiency she may have had. So, a man should not shape his opinion about this issue on the idea that he wants a woman who looks like a fashion model and who can constantly excite his instinctive desires, even when he has no desire at a certain moment. In truth, Allah *the Almighty* created woman to offer a man companionship, and this includes satisfying his sexual desire when he is naturally aroused. But if a man believes that a woman is nothing but something through which he can arouse his sexual desire, this denigrates her to the status of a live-in prostitute to be with him for the sake of sex only. This is a great wrong because there are various factors that constitute the relationship between a husband and his wife. Thus, a man should not mould his opinion about a woman on the idea of sexual desire only; rather, he should consider other aspects.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Khatib on the authority of 'Umar*

In the same vein, a man should know for certain that Allah *the Almighty* conferred His Favour on His creatures in different ways; He *Glorified is He* may cause a woman to be beautiful while giving another a sound mind. He *the Almighty* may grant wisdom to a woman while causing another to be honest and trustworthy. He may grant success to a particular woman and not another. So, the Provision of Allah is distributed to His creatures in so many ways. If you want to be fair and wise, you should take all of these different aspects into account. Thus, to believe that woman serves only as a means to arouse sexual desire is a vast misjudgement. That is why He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying '… if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which Allah has put much good.'

If you contemplate over the Quranic verse, you will find it extremely succinct. That is because you may rightfully or wrongfully dislike something, but if you dislike something about which Allah *the Almighty* says that He has put much good in it, Allah will compensate you in full in other ways, so long as you are patient with her and if your hatred of her is not pertaining to her religion. Because Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who causes this good, one must be assured that He *the Almighty* will compensate him in other respects if he shows patience for his hatred of certain things about her.

Even though the context of the Divine Speech has to do with the affairs of the family, He *the Almighty* lays down general rules and principles here. He *the Almighty* could have said, "If you dislike women, it may well be that you dislike them even though Allah has put much good in them", but He did not say this. Rather, He *Glorified is He* wants to generalize the matter to include everything that a man may dislike. It goes without saying that reality proves the truthfulness and veracity of the Quran, for there are so many things that man dislikes even though they are good for them and vice versa. This clearly indicates that man does not judge things correctly all the time because he may wrongfully dislike something even though it is good for him. As well, he may like something which is evil or bad. As such, it becomes clear that Allah *the Almighty* causes matters to be contrary to man's own judgment. So, when He *Glorified is He* says: '… if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which Allah has put much good', this means that man should all the time believe that the act of dislike, stems from him himself, while good is put into woman by Allah. So, you should not let your hatred overcome the good put into the woman by Allah. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِنْ أَرَدتُّمُ ٱسْتِبْدَالَ زَوْجٍ مَّكَانَ زَوْجٍ وَءَاتَيْتُمْ إِحْدَىٰهُنَّ
قِنطَارًا فَلَا تَأْخُذُوا۟ مِنْهُ شَيْـًٔا ۚ أَتَأْخُذُونَهُۥ بُهْتَـٰنًا وَإِثْمًا مُّبِينًا ﴿٢٠﴾

If you wish to replace one wife with another, do not
take any of her bride-gift back, even if you have
given her a great amount of gold. How could you
take it when this is unjust and a blatant sin? [20]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 20)

If you have exhausted all means of tolerance and endurance in an endeavour to live with your wife in a reasonable manner and it transpired that the marital life cannot continue in a manner satisfactory to Allah—to the extent that you became afraid of losing control of yourself and doing things that Allah has prohibited—what should you do, then? Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If you wish to replace one wife for another…', this means that you have the right to replace your wife with another in the event you fear falling prey to committing what Allah has forbidden. While doing so (replacing the wife with another), you are supposed to adopt the path of belief which is indicated clearly in the statement of Imam Al-Hassan *Allah be pleased with him* to a man who consulted him concerning the engagement of his daughter: 'Marry your daughter to the good and pious man, for if he loves her, he would treat her gently and kindly; and if he dislikes her, he would not wrong her.'

As such, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If you wish to replace one wife for another…', this means that your desire has been totally diverted away from the first wife and that you cannot overcome this desire except by deviating away from the Path of Allah. It may also happen that a man may get fed up with his wife even though he does not feel any aversion towards her. He thus divorces her and does not get married to anyone else immediately. So, the question to be asked here is, "What are the stipulations and conditions laid down by Allah *the Almighty* in this regard?"

He *the Almighty* says: '…do not take any of her bride-gift back, even if you have given her a great amount of gold….' Linguistically, the two words "*qintar"* and *"qantarah*" refer to a thing which is great. The word "*qintar"* itself gives the meaning of money. It was estimated in the past to be equivalent to the amount that could fill the skin of a cow. When a cow is skinned, its skin looks like a big bag, and the particular amount that can fill such a bag is called *qintar*. The *qintar* that is known to us today is a measure of weight. When Allah *the Almighty* uses the word *qintar*, He wants to give us an example of a big dowry: that is, even though you might give your wives big dowries, you are not allowed to take anything back from it in the case of divorce, but why? That is because the dowry you give your wife is in return for enjoying her in sexual intercourse even for a moment, and not for the entire period of time you spend with her.

Therefore, the dowry (even if it is equal to a *qintar*) cannot be taken back after the moment the marriage is consummated. By the way, this verse reminds me of that particular incident where 'Umar ibn Al-Khatab *Allah be pleased with him* upon addressing the topic of high dowries, said: "'Umar made a mistake and a woman was right." 'Umar asked the Companions not to give high dowries to women, whereupon a Qurayshi woman answered him, 'how can you say that even though Allah *the Almighty* says: "…even if you have given her a great amount of gold"?'

It is narrated that 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* while delivering a speech at the pulpit, forbade people to give more than four hundred *dirhams* as a dowry to their wives. Upon descending the pulpit, a woman from Quraysh went to him and said: 'Did you not hear the saying of Allah *the Almighty*

"…even if you have given her a great amount of gold…"?' 'Umar then replied, 'I seek pardon from Allah. All people understand religion better than 'Umar.' He *Allah be pleased with him* went up to the pulpit once again and said: 'I have already forbidden you to give them (women) more than four hundred *dirhams* as dowry, but now you are allowed to give whatever you want from your money.'(1)

In the same vein, it is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mus'ab that 'Umar said: 'Do not pay dowries to women more than forty *uqiyyah* (one *uqiyyah* equals forty *dirhams*), and whoever does so, the excess will be put in the treasury of Muslims.' A woman then said: 'You do not have the right to do so.' 'Umar replied, 'Why?' The woman answered, because Allah *the Almighty* says, "… even if you have given her a great amount of gold…"', whereupon 'Umar said: 'A woman told the truth and a man made a mistake.'

The Quran then indicates clearly that it is even forbidden to think of taking the dowry back from the wife. He *Glorified is He* says: 'How could you take it when this is unjust and a blatant sin?' But, why does the Quran impose such a ruling? Because the dowry you give your women is not paid in return for enjoying her for a long period of time; rather, it is for consummating the marriage with her, a matter which is resolved the moment the two have enjoyed sexual intercourse together. So, man will be sinful if he takes back any portion of the dowry from his wife after their marriage is consummated, unless she freely consents to that. The saying of Allah '*ithman mubina*' (or "a blatant sin") means that this sin is manifest and destructive.

He *the Almighty* does not even suffice with describing this act as a blatant sin; rather, He *Glorified is He* makes another firm and strong denial in His saying: 'How could you take it?' In this verse, He *the Almighty* strongly and firmly denounces the act of taking back anything from the dowry.

He *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Sa'id ibn Mansur and Abu Ya'la*

وَكَيْفَ تَأْخُذُونَهُۥ وَقَدْ أَفْضَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ
وَأَخَذْنَ مِنكُم مِّيثَٰقًا غَلِيظًا ﴿٢١﴾

How could you take it when you have lain with
each other and they have taken a solemn pledge
from you? [21] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 21)

If you try to consider all the acceptable ways to take any portion of the dowry back, you will find nothing at all. But why? Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘How could you take it?’ He *Glorified is He* states clearly that the main reason behind this prohibition lies in the fact that both of them have lain with each other. So, it becomes crystal clear now that the dowry is paid to the woman in return for sexually pleasing one another. Since the Quran is Divinely inspired by Allah, the meaning of the word “*ifdaa*” (meaning “lying with each other”) includes all the possible meanings of sexual intimacy between the man and his wife. In reality, the word “*afda”* is derived from the verbal noun “*al-fadaa”* which gives the meaning of “a spacious place.” Thus, the saying of Allah “*afda ba‘dukum ila ba‘d”* (meaning “lying with each other”) indicates that you have given yourself to each other in a way that was not restrained or forced. As such, *al-ifdaa* means that you have revealed yourselves to each other in the widest and most comprehensive sense, to the extent that she had enabled you to see her private parts which she concealed from her father and brother, and even her mother and sister. As a matter of fact, this represents the climax of giving oneself to another. You have given yourselves to one another in the truest sense of the word; you touch each other; you are in contact with each other; you have sexual intercourse with each other; you use the same entrance and the same exit of your shared home; you use the same bathroom and the same kitchen. This clearly means that all your life implies the giving of oneself to another. So, as long as you gave yourself to her and she gave herself to you—in accordance with the fact that Allah *the Almighty* described in the chapter of *al-Baqara* that man and his wife are clothing for each other (*al-Baqara:* 187) —there is nothing greater than this. So, when a woman harshly and badly treats her husband, he may get angry, but we ask him: “Is it not enough for you that Allah *the Almighty* has allowed you from her what He *Glorified is He* forbade to others? Did she not allow you to have sex with her?” So, when she acts and behaves like this, do not get angry and remember the Hadith of the Messenger Muhammad, *Peace and Blessings be upon him*: ‘The best of you is the one who is best to his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives.’(1)

The word “*mithaq*” (meaning “solemn pledge”) in the Words of Allah *the Almighty* ‘How could you take it when you have lain with each other and they have taken a solemn pledge from you?’ gives the meaning of a pledge made between two parties. This pledge has been made when you asked the guardian of the woman to give her in marriage to you and the guardian consequently accepted and approved your request. It goes without saying that this solemn pledge of “marriage” will constitute the nucleus for the establishment of a new family. At this point, it is of great importance to know that any pledge made between people themselves is viewed as ordinary, apart from that pledge made between the man and the woman concerning marriage, which is judged as a “solemn” pledge. As a matter of fact, throughout the Quran this description is never applied to any other pledge except that Pledge made by the Prophets. (*al-Ahzab:* 7) In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* describes the relationship between a man and his wife as giving oneself to another, while He *Glorified is He* in another place in the Quran describes both the husband and the wife as clothing for each other; and that is why the pledge of marriage is described as “solemn.” In truth, this solemn pledge obliges you to treat her kindly and gently in case life becomes difficult. In addition, if a peaceful life with her becomes impossible, you are allowed to replace her with another, yet you are not allowed to take anything back from the dowry you gave her. That is because this dowry is paid in return for giving oneself to another. It actually has nothing to do with the period of time a man spends with his wife, be it short or long.

Concerning this particular verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘How could you take it when you have lain with each other and they have taken a solemn pledge from you?’ It is of great importance to know that Allah *Glorified is He* establishes rights but He *the Almighty* meanwhile does not forbid the conferment of favour, a fact which is definitively proven and clearly indicated in the same chapter when He *Glorified is He* states clearly that it is allowed for men to take in satisfaction and ease what their women give up to them willingly. (*an-Nisa': 4*)

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(1) *At-Tirmidhi, Sahih*

As such, there is a difference between the due and basic right owed to a woman and the favour to be conferred by the woman. It is at this point that the following story may be recounted: One day a judge said to his people, "You have chosen me to settle the conflict taking place between you, so how do you want me to judge? Am I to judge you based on justice or on what is better than justice?" The people said to him: "Is there anything which is better than justice?" whereupon the judge replied, "Yes, grace is better than justice, because justice entails that everyone shall take his due right whereas grace means that both of the two parties may waive their rights. Thus, grace is better than justice." In the same vein, when Allah *the Almighty* establishes rules, He issues guarantees that secure the fulfilment of these rights, yet He *Glorified is He* does not stop people from conferring favours to each other. This is a fact which is clearly indicated in the Quran.

He *the Almighty* orders both of the parties in marriage not to forget this act of grace between them. (*al-Baqara:* 237) He *the Almighty* also orders us in the chapter of *al-Baqara* to write down debt owed, for this process of writing it down protects not only the creditor but the debtor, as well. That is because when the creditor knows for certain that the money is legally documented, he will not be able to deny it. Yet, in case the debt is not documented, he may deny it. As such, Allah *the Almighty* protects the rights of both the creditor and the debtor. In fact, this is the due right to be fulfilled. This does not mean that He *the Almighty* makes no room for favour and grace. As a matter of fact, when one borrows a sum of money from someone else, the debtor may ask for no legal documentation for the loan, an act which is not prohibited by Allah *the Almighty* if both of them trust one another and fear Allah. Since He *the Almighty* makes room for grace and favour in the light of the obligation of rights, you, Oh Muslims, should not forget that.

So, what about the "solemn pledge"? In truth, there is no pledge which is as solemn as that made by the Prophets to Allah and that made between the wife and her husband. That is because it implies the establishment of a relationship which is not eligible except between both the husband and his wife. A man is duly obliged to fulfil the rights of his wife. He is not allowed to take anything from her unless she willingly approves it. This is based on the verse mentioned previously in the beginning of this chapter where Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that in case the wife gives up anything from her dowry to her husband willingly, he is thus allowed to take it in satisfaction and ease. (*an-Nisa':* 4)

As long as the woman gives up her dowry freely and willingly, this indicates that consent is existing between the two parties, a matter which deeply expresses the affection and mercy that existed between the married couple. Even though the dowry is the woman's due right, it is not a must to pay it to her in full. It is allowed for the husband to delay the payment of the dowry. This means that he can pay it in full at the beginning of marriage, but he is also allowed to pay some of it and delay the payment of the other part. However, in case the marriage ends in divorce, she is entitled to receive all of her due dowry if the husband did not pay it at all, or to receive the rest of it if he did not pay it in full. When the ownership of the dowry moves to the wife, she may give up some portion from it willingly and freely to the husband in a way that lays emphasis the continuity of affection, mercy, and love between the married couple.

It is on this point that we wish to shed light: what if the dispute between the man and his wife flared up to the extent that the woman strongly dislikes her husband and wants to redeem her freedom? If this is the case, the man will likely get married to another woman and thus he is allowed to receive back some of the dowry he gave her, as proven by the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* states that in case the two fear that they will not keep within the limits set by Allah, then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she excuses herself from the marriage–her dowry. (*al-Baqara:* 229)

Stressing the fact that the woman must receive her due right, Allah *the Almighty* uses the exclamation style to refer to that very issue on the impermissibility of taking anything from the dowry of the wife, except in the above case. He *Glorified is He* says: 'How could you take it when you have lain with each other and they have taken a solemn pledge from you?'

This exclamatory style indicates clearly that man has no right to take anything from the dowry given to his wife. So, using the interrogative style in this particular Quranic verse implies the absolute and total prohibition of such an act. As well, we previously explained that all the pledges made between people do not particularly tarnish one’s honour, apart from that particular solemn pledge made between the husband and his wife. Pledges or covenants made between any two parties may have to do with money, or providing a service, or blood money or even giving a hand to someone who is in need; these are different forms of pledges and covenants which have nothing to do at all with the topic of honour (chastity) which represents a solemn pledge between the married couple.

Allah *the Almighty* then sheds light on a very important topic by means of which the purification, dignity and nobility of the family is maintained. As well, it is through this topic that love, mercy, and affection are preserved and kept among the family members and thus there will be no room to break off or damage this relation. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَنكِحُوا۟ مَا نَكَحَ ءَابَآؤُكُم مِّنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ
سَلَفَ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فَٰحِشَةً وَمَقْتًا وَسَآءَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٢٢﴾

**Do not marry women that your fathers married –
with the exception of what is past – this is indeed
a shameful thing to do, loathsome and leading to
evil [22] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 22)**

This verse indicates that this act used to be practiced before the advent of Islam, so there was no blame for the son to get married to the wife of his dead father if she was not his real mother. For example, Safwan ibn Umayyah*,* one of the leaders of Quraysh, got married to the wife of his late father Umayyah ibn Khalaf. Her name was Fakhitah bint Al-Aswad ibn Al-Muttalib. Allah *the Almighty* wants to put an end to such an act, but the question to be asked here is “Why does He *the Almighty* want to do so?” That is because the fatherson relationship is characterized with affection, mercy, love, kindness, and righteousness. As well, the son is obliged to show submissiveness and politeness towards his father. When a man gets married to a woman while having a son, this clearly indicates that the man was married to that son’s mother before this new marriage. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the son to be too emotionally attached to the wife of his father. The son may like her and thus say, “After the demise of my father, I will get married to her." As such, he may be happy with the death of his father due to having this hope of getting married to his wife. He may even think of getting rid of his father. All of you know for certain how strong the sexual desire is. That is why Allah *the Almighty* wants to block the means for the son so that he would not even think of that matter; rather, he should consider his father's wife as his mother. In reality, if the son firmly adheres to the Divine Guidance in this regard, he will be able to protect himself from the seduction of Satan.

In this verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'Do not marry women that your fathers married.' The word *"nikah"* (usually meaning "marriage") in this context refers to sexual intercourse. It may also give the meaning of making and concluding the marriage contract. But, its indication to sexual intercourse is viewed as the most correct opinion in this regard, a point which is proven by that particular verse of the chapter *an-Nur* in which Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that the fornicator shall not marry any but a female fornicator; that is, fornication involves unlawful sexual intercourse by two unmarried people. (*an-Nur:* 3)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do not marry women that your fathers married, except for what is past…', so what is meant by *salafa* ("what is past")? This means the act of marrying a woman who was previously married to one's father used to be practiced before the advent of Islam. But, when Islam came, it was prohibited completely. Allah is saying that even though you used to practice this act before the advent of Islam, you are no longer allowed to practice it now. That is why He *the Almighty* says *"illa ma qad salaf"* (meaning "except what is past"); the relative pronoun refers to the past tense. This means that such act can in no way happen in this new era (that of Islam).

Let us imagine that there is someone who got married to the wife of his father before the revelation of this ruling: can this marriage be judged sound and valid after its revelation? The answer is no, because the time during which this act was practiced is over. As such, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* *"illa ma qad salaf*" (meaning "except what is past") refers to that particular period of time during which this act was practiced. Since that time is over, this new period of time shall in no way witness the existence of such practices. For this reason, He *the Almighty* used the relative pronoun *"ma"* instead of *"man."* It is of great importance to know that if He *Glorified is He* used the relative pronoun *"man"* in this context, this would mean that all the marriages of this kind that took place before the revelation of this ruling were valid. But, He *the Almighty* did not use it; rather, He used the relative pronoun *"ma,"* to indicate that this kind of marriage shall never be practiced in the future. As well, it is a must to nullify marriages of such kind.

In truth, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to tell us that all of His Laws and Decrees go hand-in-hand with sound human nature. In this context, He *the Almighty* did not say that the practicing of this act falls under the category of fornication, even though people in the past used to call it so. Sound human nature can in no way accept such practice. However, when people became misguided from the right path, they married the former wives of their fathers. People in the past used to call this kind of marriage *"nikah al-maqt"* (meaning "hateful marriage"). In addition, they used to call the offspring produced from this marriage *"al-maqti"* (meaning "the detested offspring").

Allah *the Almighty* says *"innahu kan"* (meaning "indeed it was") referring to this act of getting married to your fathers' former wives. It is as if He is saying "It was prohibited even before I (i.e. Allah *the Almighty*) declared it as a shameful thing to do, loathsome and leading to evil." Therefore, He *the Almighty* wants to tell us that all of His Legislations are in accordance with sound human nature which may be plainly evident in some matters and completely obliterated in others. Cases in point are when someone got married to his mother, or his daughter, or even his sister. It becomes clear now that there were certain acts that none dared to practice even in the pre-Islamic period. Therefore, He *the Almighty* laid down this rule which nullifies and invalidates this act (getting married to the former wives of their fathers) practiced by people in the pre-Islamic period and which is against sound human nature. He *Glorified is He* says, 'Do not marry women that your fathers married, except for what is past….' He *the Almighty* describes this act of getting married to one's father's former wives as a shameful thing to do, loathsome and leading to evil (i.e. having detrimental repercussions on the family).

He *the Almighty* then starts telling about those other women to whom that man cannot get married. Here, it is very important to know that even though people in the pre-Islamic period also prohibited marriage to these women, Allah *Glorified is He* did not tell us about this ruling because of that; rather, He *the Almighty* does so because it is in line with sound human nature. Concerning the fact that people in the pre-Islamic period did not commit this act, this clearly means that it is a sound nature that the period of ignorance was unable to change. Allah *the Almighty* says:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أُمَّهَٰتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُكُمْ وَأَخَوَٰتُكُمْ وَعَمَّٰتُكُمْ وَخَٰلَٰتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُ ٱلْأَخِ وَبَنَاتُ
ٱلْأُخْتِ وَأُمَّهَٰتُكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِىٓ أَرْضَعْنَكُمْ وَأَخَوَٰتُكُم مِّنَ ٱلرَّضَٰعَةِ وَأُمَّهَٰتُ نِسَآئِكُمْ
وَرَبَٰٓئِبُكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِى فِى حُجُورِكُم مِّن نِّسَآئِكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِى دَخَلْتُم بِهِنَّ فَإِن لَّمْ تَكُونُوا۟ دَخَلْتُم
بِهِنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَحَلَٰٓئِلُ أَبْنَآئِكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِنْ أَصْلَٰبِكُمْ وَأَن تَجْمَعُوا۟
بَيْنَ ٱلْأُخْتَيْنِ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٢٣﴾

You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts, the daughters of brothers and daughters of sisters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters, your wives' mothers, the stepdaughters in your care – those born of women with whom you have consummated marriage, if you have not consummated the marriage, then you will not be blamed – wives of your begotten sons, two sisters simultaneously, with the exception of what is past: God is most forgiving and merciful [23] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 23)

But the question to be asked here is, "Who is the One Who has the absolute right to legislate?" It is undoubtedly Allah *the Almighty*. It is of great importance here to know that even though people in the pre-Islamic period had deviated from the pure religion, they had still declared marriage to those women mentioned in this verse as prohibited. In other words, there are certain prohibited acts which are not acceptable even by non-Muslims, a point which is crystal clear in the fact that the disbelievers in the pre-Islamic period had forbidden marriage to one's mother, daughter, sister, etc. So, the question to be asked here is, "Why did they do so?" Allah *Glorified is He* gives us the answer in the Quran where He *the Almighty* states clearly that there is no people group which has existed without having been sent a Messenger from Allah to warn them. (*al-Ahzab:* 24)

Guidance revealed by Allah *the Almighty,* is as old as the creation of mankind itself; it is a point of view which is proved by the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* while telling us about the story of expelling Adam and Eve from the paradise, told us that He would reveal to them Guidance from Him. In addition, He *the Almighty* asserted that whoever follows this Divine Guidance will not go astray nor suffer total misery. *(Ta Ha:* 123)

This clearly indicates that the moment Allah *the Almighty* created Adam and his wife, He *Glorified is He* sent them down the Guidance they must follow and adhere to. The elements of this Guidance are incontrovertibly complete and perfect. Thus, to find some practices from the pre-Islamic period which are in line with the teachings of Islam mean that all religions are of one Divine Source, although some people may think that these practices are associated with customs and traditions and not Divinely inspired in the previous religions.

Modern science undoubtedly helped us gain profound and deep understanding of many rulings revealed by Allah *the Almighty*. Scientists discovered that the greater the variation of blood relation between parents, the stronger the offspring. This pertains to plants, animals, and even mankind. When the parents of male and female are close relatives of each other, their offspring will be weak. That is why scientists of agriculture and zoology devised a new technique to keep the offspring strong called “outbreeding.” In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *Peace and Blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said: “Get married to women who are not from your relatives so that the offspring would not be weak.” As well, he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said: “Do not get married to women who are from your relatives, for the offspring will be weak.” (1)

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* orders us not to marry from among our relatives because the offspring will be weak. It is well known that the offspring of these families whose members are accustomed to getting married to each other are weak to the extent that they may be afflicted with mental retardation, or sexual impotence, or even weakness in the immune system. That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* orders us not get married to our relative women. The word *“dawi”* implies weakness. So, if you want your offspring not to be weak, you must keep away from getting married to women to whom you are closely related. Arabs were fully aware of this fact even before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declared it. A poet in the pre-Islamic period is related to have said:

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(1) *Ihyaa’ ‘Ulum Ad-Din, Gharib*

I advise whoever wants to marry his children to their cousins no to do so
For if he did he would never be safe from weakness and illness

When the Egyptians want to praise the strength of a person, they say that he is a *futuwah* (or a "well-built man"), that is, he was not bred by a female paternal cousin. The same applies to plants: if you want to grow corn in Al-Gharbiyyah Governorate, you are supposed to bring the seeds from Ash-Sharqiyyah. In the same vein, the seeds of the sweet Chilean watermelon are imported from America. But, some people may refuse to buy from such seeds due to its high prices and thus take seeds from the previously planted watermelons. It is for this reason that the yielded crop is always weak. But if he continues to import the seeds from outside –even if the price of the kilo reaches a very high price –he will harvest a good crop.

The same applies to animals and humans. That is why the Arabs used to say, "Only foreigners can overcome heroes because they come from a different race." This means that this hero inherited the complete and salient characteristics of another race. Indeed, the cross-exchange of the good attributes in each race yields better attributes.

The prohibition of getting married to the mother, the sister, etc. may also be seen from an organic angle. Why did Allah *the Almighty* forbid marriage to the mother, the sister, etc.? It is because mothers represent our origin and sisters are descended from them. Brothers and sisters are descended from the same origin. The same ruling applies to getting married to paternal and maternal aunts, the daughters of brothers and daughters of sisters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters, etc. Thus, the reason behind this prohibition is complex and has to do with family relations. Allah *the Almighty* wants human offspring to be strong.

In addition, He *Glorified is He* wants to draw our attention to the fact that marital relations are prone to psychological fluctuations. A man may get married to a woman, but after a period of time, disagreements begin to emerge between them due to psychological fluctuations, to the extent that he may dislike her so much that they cannot live in peace. How would the relationship between a mother and her son be if they were to marry one another? Naturally, the mother-son relationship obliges the son to be permanently loyal to her. The same applies to his relation to his daughter, sister, paternal aunt, maternal aunt, etc. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* orders us to stay away from this main source of discord.

Sound human reason decrees that we must not engage in reciprocal marriage, an arrangement wherein the sister of a particular man gets married to another man provided that the sister of the latter marries the first man. In such a case, if disagreement occurs between one married couple, it will extend to afflict the other one even though they may usually live in harmony. That is why sound reason requires that a man must not marry his sister to another one in return for marrying the latter's sister. We should also consider they how the stance of the mother will be when she sees that there is disagreement between her daughter and her husband, while her son lives in happiness with his wife (i.e. sister of the mother's daughter's husband)? It goes without saying that the area of disagreement and discord has unreasonably widened.

In truth, we should know that Divine Wisdom is not only pertaining to one particular topic; rather, it is comprehensive and covers all different topics. That is why when He *the Almighty* says: 'You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers, daughters, sisters…', it is taken for granted that the prohibition of marriage to the mother includes the grandmother, be she paternal or maternal, as well as whoever descends from her. In the same vein, one is not allowed to get married to the mother of his wife. The prohibition of marriage to the daughters includes the daughters of one's son and whoever descends from them. The same applies to the daughters of one's daughter.

He *the Almighty* declares that it is prohibited for a man to get married to his sisters, his paternal and maternal aunts, his brother's daughters and sister's daughters, and his milk-mothers, but the question to be asked here is, "Why does He *the Almighty* forbid marriage to the milk-mother?" That is because the body of that particular man who wants to marry her had been formed somewhat by her milk and thus he is viewed as part of her. It is for this reason that a man is not allowed to get married to his milk-mother. It is of great importance here to quote scholars' different opinions concerning this point as such: a group of scholars holds the position that it is not allowed for the man to get married to such a woman who nursed him since it is likely that the milk of that woman had participated in the formation of his cells. Another group of scholars yet opines that it is allowed for the man to get married to that woman who nursed him, so long as it was only once or twice. Imam Abu Hanifah is of the opinion that it is not allowed for the man under any circumstance to get married to any woman who nursed him. But the most correct opinion in this regard is that a man is not allowed to get married to the woman who nursed him for five or more different sessions. As well, he is not allowed to get married to that woman who nursed him for a day and a night. The last two rulings are to be put into practice in case the act of nursing takes place in the period fixed for breast-feeding which is estimated by two (*Hijri*) years. (*al-Baqara:* 233)

It is historically recorded that ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* had discussed this topic with ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan *Allah be pleased with him*. It is narrated that a woman had given birth to her child after a six-month period of pregnancy. It is known that women usually deliver their babies after nine months of pregnancy. In some exceptional cases, they may do so after seven months of pregnancy. When the woman was brought before ‘Uthman *Allah be pleased with him*, he wanted to afflict the legal punishment on her on accusation of committing fornication because if she delivered her baby six months after conception, this means that she committed fornication. It was at that point that Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* explained the matter to Caliph ‘Uthman. He said, ‘Oh Commander of the Believers! Why are you going to punish her?’ ‘Uthman replied, ‘Because she has given birth to her baby after six months!’ Here, Allah *the Almighty* provided Imam ‘Ali with deep and profound understanding of the issue. Sometimes, a man may not pay attention to a subtle observation mentioned in the verses of the Quran. This subtle observation yet may be understood from one particular text or from two or more texts. Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* reviewed the Book of Allah and extracted that particular verse that provides solution for this issue. He said to ‘Uthman, ‘Allah says otherwise’ (That is, she has committed no major sins and thus she did not deserve any punishment).’Uthman said to him, ‘What did Allah say in this regard?’ Imam ‘Ali consequently told him about that verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which Allah *Glorified is He* states clearly that mothers should nurse their babies for two whole years. (*al-Baqara:* 233) Based on this aforementioned verse, the child must be nursed for two whole *Hijri* years, i.e. twenty-four months. In addition, He *the Almighty* says in another place that the period of pregnancy and breast-feeding altogether extends to thirty months. (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* explained that point, as follows: the sum total of the period of pregnancy and breast-feeding is thirty months, while the complete period of breast-feeding is twenty-four months, so if we deduct the latter period from the total sum, this will clearly indicate that pregnancy may last for just six months. Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* extracted the legal ruling from the Quran. One may not have profound understanding about all the subtle observations mentioned in the Quran. In the same way, He *Glorified is He* did not specify a particular period of time with prominent scholars while depriving other times from them; rather, His Revelations cover all ages and places. Someone yet may say that Muslims nowadays do not reach the rank of the companions. But, whoever holds this position is unaware of what Allah *the Almighty* said in the chapter of *al-Waqi'a*. He *Glorified is He* states clearly that there will be a group of people at the end of time not deprived of being close to Allah, and so will be able to deduce rulings from the verses of the Quran.

As we have said, scholars differed concerning the issue of breast-feeding: some scholars hold the position that one suckling or two may entail prohibition of marriage; another group is of the opinion that there is no prohibition except in the case of suckling ten times; there is still a third group of scholars who opine that prohibition is entailed by nursing the baby for five separate sessions within the period fixed for breast-feeding. So, if the child was nursed by a woman in a period of time other than that one fixed for nursing, it may be said that he became in no need of milk as he was sustained with solid food. Clearly, the issue of breast-feeding is complicated, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said: 'What becomes unlawful (for marriage) through breast-feeding is that which becomes unlawful through lineage.'(1)

The list of those women who are prohibited through breast-feeding includes the milk-mother, the milk-daughter, the milk-sister, the milk-paternal aunt and the milk-maternal aunt. Thus, due to the complexity of this topic of breast-feeding, all Muslim families must pay it full attention. If we consider things more deeply, we may see one of the deeper reasons why we are not perfectly happy in our homes.

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(1) *An-Nasa'i, Sahih*

All people must be attentive to the Instructions and Teachings of Allah *the Almighty* and they must hurry to work upon them and implement them. The Divine Transmission is continuous; we just need sensitive reception systems to receive it, for if the reception system is defective, one will not avail him/ herself of the transmission even if the latter continues to flow. Assume that a radio broadcasting station was trying to air a program using a defective microphone: how would the transmission reach the people? As such, the Support and Blessing of Allah are sent down all the time, but there are some people who do not receive them because they have certain problems that prevent them from doing so. It goes without saying that the first and foremost reason for attaining the Blessings of Allah is that all the corners of the family must be founded on obedience to Allah; the husband-wife relationship must be a lawful one. In fact, there are a lot of people who may unintentionally commit prohibited acts as a result of paying no attention to that complex issue of breast-feeding. Some women may nurse the children of each other without taking into account the subsequent legal ruling. We say to such people: “You have taken all precautions to guarantee the soundness of the biological health of your children. You keep a record for each child that includes his birth certificate and the dates on which he should take his vaccinations against Polio and Diphtheria. So, why did you not insert a paper in this file including the name of those women who nursed the child other than his mother so that when he is going to get married, we may inform people of authentic information on that point.” If we do this, we will be able to build new families on solid and concrete foundations. If we do not do so, we may be extremely surprised when it transpires that a man and a woman who got married and had kids are milk-brother and sister and thus, religious, civil, and social problems ensue because people no longer heed the Divine Guidance as much as they do the material one.

Muslim families must insert a piece of paper in the file of their sons and daughters including the names of those women who nursed them. Anyway, this becomes no longer a necessity since the dry milk that comes from animals can suffice and put an end to the problem. We thus may be able to avoid this complex issue which may cause a man to get married to his milk-sister, or milk-mother, etc. A marriage like this (wherein a man marries his milk-mother or milk-sister) would consequently not attain the Blessings of Allah. He *the Almighty* says: 'You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts, your brother's daughters and sister's daughters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters…' On the same topic, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is narrated to have said: 'What becomes unlawful (for marriage) through breast-feeding is that which becomes unlawful through lineage.' (1)

The Quran sheds light on these major issues only. So, when one gets married to a particular woman, is he, under any circumstance, allowed to marry her mother? It is something which is not acceptable at all. The word "*rabibah*" in the saying of Allah '… the stepdaughters in your care–those born of women with whom you have consummated marriage…' means the daughter of your wife from a previous marriage. A man may get married to a previously married woman, be she a widow or a divorcee, and the daughter of that particular woman is called his *rabibah*. It is expected that the mother's new husband will protect her and raise her up. As such, she will be considered his daughter. But the Quranic verse implies a condition: a man's marriage to this girl's mother must be consummated. So, in case the man finishes the marriage contract, but has not consummated the marriage yet, he is thus allowed to marry that woman's daughter. The issue is yet totally different with marrying the mother: a man is not allowed to get married to the mother of his wife even if the marriage has not been consummated.

The phrase "*hala'il abnai'kum*" refers to the wife of the son. Inserting the words "*min aslabikum*" in this context indicates that the word "*abnaa*" used also to refer to those sons who were not from the loins, otherwise He *Glorified is He* would not add the words "*min aslabikum*" to the phrase "*abnai'kum*." This clearly indicates that the pre-Islamic period witnessed the existence of sons who were not from the loins of their fathers–i.e. adopted sons–a matter that was common among the Arabs during that period of time. A man used to adopt a child and give him his name, to the extent that they allowed those adopted sons to inherit from them. But, upon the advent of Islam, this practice was completely abolished. It stated clearly that a man is in no way allowed to attribute to himself sons who are not from his own loins. The legal wisdom behind that prohibition is that these adopted sons of your father will be the brothers of your sisters. As well, they will be fully aware of all your private secrets. Allah *Glorified is He* nullified this act at the hands of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*.

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(1) *An-Nasa'i, Sahih*

We know for certain that Zayd ibn Haritha was abducted from his family. He was sold as a slave and was bought by Hakim ibn Hizam. He was then given to Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* who, in turn, gave him to Prophet Muhammad. Thus, Zayd became the slave of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*. When the family of Zayd knew that their son, who was abducted, was in Mecca, they went to Prophet Muhammad and asked him to let Zayd go with them. So, he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said to them: ‘Let him choose between staying with me or departing with you.’ But how did Zayd respond to them? His belief in and love of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* motivated him to say: ‘I will choose none but Messenger Muhammad.’ He stayed with him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad consequently wanted to reward Zayd for this and thus, he adopted him and briefly called him Zayd ibn Muhammad. Allah *the Almighty* wanted to put an end to that act that reached the house of Prophet Muhammad himself. He *Glorified is He* states clearly that Prophet Muhammad was not the father of any one of the men of Quraysh. (*al-Ahzab:* 40) This Quranic style indicates clearly that the legal ruling in this regard is decisive and conclusive.

Some people who are adversaries to the Quran may say: “Messenger Muhammad had sons–including Ibrahim, At-Tayyib and Al-Qasim– so how can the Quran state that he is not the father of any men?” We answer those people saying: They died while they were children; they did not even reach the age of puberty, and when Allah talks about this fact in the Quran, He *Glorified is He* states clearly that he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was not the father of any men. Even if we assume that children were men, the Quran does not say that he was not the father of his son; rather, it says that he was not the father of your men (oh Quraysh). This consequently means that there is nothing wrong when we declare that Prophet Muhammad is the father of his sons, the father of Al-Qasim, the father of At-Tayyib and the father of Ibrahim. This issue was mischievously used to make a big issue by the opponents of Islam and the orientalists. Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who adjusted that act of adoption practiced by Prophet Muhammad himself. As a matter of fact, this modification by Allah *the Almighty* is viewed as something which gives great honour to him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*. If we ask about the One Who makes this reform of Prophet Muhammad, the answer will be "It is Allah *the Almighty*."

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…wives of your begotten sons…' indicates clearly that it is the wife of the begotten son who is not allowed for the father to marry. The saying of Allah, "*min aslabikum*" obviously indicates that there were sons who were not from the loins of their fathers, a point which means that the act of adoption was common before the advent of Islam and thus Allah *the Almighty* wanted to abolish it at the hands of Prophet Muhammad. In the same vein, it is important to know that Allah did not want Prophet Muhammad to be a mere conveyer of the ruling; rather, He *Glorified is He* wanted to give a practical example through him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* so that the ruling would be judged decisive and conclusive. Also, we must consider the fact that the act of adoption itself aimed at attributing a clever son to a man's family to give him all the rights his begotten sons were given as a sign of ennoblement.

That is why we must observe that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* acted in a human way in the light of the ultimate human justice. When Prophet Muhammad adopted Zayd, he did so in order to compensate him for his family because Zayd preferred him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* to his own father. As such, this act of adoption of Zayd by Prophet Muhammad was done in fulfilment of his human perfection and justice for a person who preferred him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* to his family. So, Allah's Modification to this Prophetic ruling was in fulfilment of the Divine Perfection and Justice. Thus, there will be no blame if Divine Perfection and Justice correct the human counterparts. That is why He *Glorified is He* revealed that verse in the Quran in which He orders Muslims to call their adopted sons by their begotten fathers' names, stressing meanwhile that this is more equitable with Him *Glorified is He*. (*al-Ahzab:* 5)

The word "*aqsat"* (meaning "more equitable") must be discussed in the light of the two comparative adjectives "great" and "greater." As a matter of fact, the opposite of the comparative adjective must be derived from its stem. So, the comparative form of "great" is "greater" and so is the comparative form of "equitable" which is "more equitable." As such, we deduce that the act of adoption by Prophet Muhammad was equitable and just, but the modification made by Allah *the Almighty* is more equitable and just. Thus, we must be fully aware of the fact that there is a big difference between human perfection and justice and those divine ones. Undoubtedly, Allah *the Almighty* conferred His Favour upon that person whom He chose to judge according to the Divine Justice instead of the human one.

Orientalists tried to exploit this incident to accuse Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* of making a mistake. We say to them: You do not understand the matter properly because it is Allah *the Almighty* who corrected the matter for Prophet Muhammad. As well, He *Glorified is He* corrected that act practiced by him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* in the light of his human nature. Furthermore, when Allah declares that this act of asserting the relation of those adopted sons to their father is more equitable, can we draw a comparison between the human equity, justice and perfection and those of Allah *the Almighty*?

There is a lie that is promulgated by the adversaries of Islam and the so-called Muslims that Islam, Allah forbid, contains lies and fabrications. Since none of these people can adhere to the Divine Guidance, they believe that the only thing to save them is to declare that this religion is false and incorrect. They hold this position because if they say otherwise, this will imply their damnation. Thus, they lie to themselves and make fabrications hoping that they will be safe. Ironically, such people have no hope but that this religion must be based on fabrications!

Now, let us discuss this story that made orientalists rejoice: Prophet Muhammad's name is Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib. His grandfather 'Abd Al-Muttalib*,* had a daughter called 'Umaymah bint 'Abd Al-Muttalib and thus she is the sister of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib.

‘Umaymah gave birth to a female baby who was named Barrah. But Prophet Muhammad changed the name of the girl to be Zaynab because he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* hated that people may say afterwards: “Messenger Muhammad came out of the house of Barrah.” (1) Barrah was the daughter of ‘Umaymah and thus she was the cousin of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We previously explained that Zayd ibn Haritha was abducted and sold as a slave. Zayd moved from the ownership of different people until he came under the ownership of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* who wanted, out of his human perfection, to honour Zayd and thus called him Zayd ibn Muhammad.

When Zayd ibn Haritha wanted to get married, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* married him to Barrah (later called Zainab) who–being the daughter of the leader of Quraysh–reluctantly accepted the marriage to Zayd, Prophet Muhammad’s slave. It should be taken into account that Messenger Muhammad did so because he wanted to achieve unity among the Muslim society in such a way that indicates no difference at all between a master and a slave. Accordingly, he married his female paternal cousin to Zayd. After the consummation of marriage, their marital life was extremely unhappy in a manner that paved the way for divine decree to be fulfilled.

By Allah, if she had fallen in love with him and they lived in harmony, would Allah, upon willing to decree His Rulings, do so at the expense of two sympathetic, loving hearts, and tear them apart? No. As such, the entire matter was preparing the Muslim society for the consequent Divine Rulings. She did not have any desire for him, and when a man realizes that his wife does not have interest in him, his dignity is immediately threatened, especially if he were the adopted son of Messenger Muhammad. Thus, Zaynab’s rejection of Zayd was not an easy matter for him and thus he went to complain to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*. It is narrated that Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*: ‘I did not like being the consort of Barrah and I want to divorce her.’

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(1) "Barrah" means "righteous" and this name is not bad in itself, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not like names that claim piety which no one can confirm. It is up to Allah to decide.

Allah *the Almighty* willing to totally abolish the act of adoption had predestined all that had happened between Zayd and Barrah. He *Glorified is He* did so because people in the pre-Islamic period used to prohibit men from getting married to the former wives of their adopted sons. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the story of Zayd and Barrah. In the chapter of *al-Ahzab*, He *Glorified is He* tells us that Prophet Muhammad told Zayd to keep his wife and to fear Allah even though he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was previously told by Allah that Zayd would divorce Barrah. (*al-Ahzab:* 37)

The Quranic style in the chapter *al-Ahzab* clearly and plainly indicates that Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* had a strong desire to divorce her. But the adversaries of Islam–and their proponents from among Muslims–mistakenly interpret the saying of Allah *the Almighty* to Prophet Muhammad: '… and you concealed in your soul what Allah would bring to light…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37) They accuse him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* of falling in love with Zayd's wife and therefore concealing the matter in his soul. We say to those people: You do not have a profound and deep understanding of the text, for you do not listen to reason. When Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran that He is going to bring to light what Prophet Muhammad concealed in his soul, justice entails that if you want to know what he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* concealed, you must consider what Allah *the Almighty* revealed later. Instead of propagating such lies and fabrications to satisfy the sickness of your soul, you were supposed, first and foremost, to know about the minute details of the story. He *Glorified is He* tells us that He is going to reveal what Prophet Muhammad concealed in his soul, so the question to be asked is "What did our Lord *the Almighty* expose and reveal?"

In truth, when our Lord reveals a matter, this is precisely what His messenger has hidden and concealed. Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* went to Prophet Muhammad and told him that he wanted to divorce Barrah, but Messenger Muhammad–as clearly shown in the Quran–told him to keep his wife with him and to fear Allah *the Almighty*. As a matter of fact, he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was told previously by Allah that He *Glorified is He* wanted Muhammad to marry Barrah, the wife of his adopted son, Zayd. He *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was fully aware of the fact that Allah wanted to totally abolish the act of adoption and to tell people that they are allowed to marry the wives of their adopted sons. It goes without saying that when Prophet Muhammad applied this himself, this was a striking and perfect example.

But there are some people whose hearts are still full of disease. Undoubtedly, hypocrites fall under this aforementioned category. That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* wanted this command to be included by Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran. If this command was just inspired by Allah to him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* they would have said: "This is the fabrication of Muhammad." For this reason, the Quran tells us clearly that he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* told Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* to keep his wife with him and to fear Allah; The Quran tells us clearly about the minute details of the story. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* did not say: "Our Lord inspired me" or "placed this in my consciousness"; no, this command was revealed plainly and obviously in the Quran. As I said previously, Allah *the Almighty* gave us minute and vivid details about this story in the chapter of *al-Ahzab*. He *Glorified is He* tells us that a believing man and a believing woman should have no choice in their matter when Allah and Messenger Muhammad decided a matter. He *the Almighty* then states clearly that whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger is far astray.

After that, He *Glorified is He* sheds light on the story of Zayd and Barrah. He tells us that Zayd went to Prophet Muhammad to tell him that he wanted to divorce Barrah, but he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* ordered him to keep her with him and to fear Allah. This particular verse of *Al-Ahzab* shows clearly the legal wisdom behind Prophet Muhammad's later marriage to Zayd's previous wife: He *Glorified is He* wanted to totally abolish this act of adoption through giving a striking example using Prophet Muhammad himself. As such, He *the Almighty* tells us that a man is not blamed if he gets married to the former wife of his adopted son. (*al-Ahzab:* 36-37)

These aforementioned two verses in the chapter of *al-Ahzab* also tell us that Allah *the Almighty* has conferred a favour upon Zayd by making him embrace Islam and so did Prophet Muhammad by adopting him. He *Glorified is He* advised Prophet Muhammad: You, Messenger Muhammad, should not fear that people would say, "Muhammad granted the divorce between the woman and Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* to marry her himself." It is as if the ultimate goal of this marriage (Zayd's and Zaynab's marriage) was to make Muhammad's adopted son, Zayd, get married to Zaynab–previously called Barrah–whom Prophet Muhammad married later, thus abolishing the previous ban on marriage between a man and his adopted son's ex-wife. This is proven by the aforementioned verse of *al-Ahzab* in which Allah states clearly that when Zayd had decided to divorce Zaynab, He *Glorified is He* gave her to Prophet Muhammad as a wife. Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who ordered Prophet Muhammad to get married to Zaynab, and that he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* did not do the act out of his own desires.

Accordingly, if you want to examine the issue, you are supposed to ask Allah *the Almighty* why He did so. When He *Glorified is He* states clearly in the Quran that Zayd's marriage to Zaynab was none but a mission to be conducted by both of them, this clearly indicates that the entire matter was pre-destined, and that the ultimate objective of this marriage was to allow men to get married to the previous wives of their adopted sons. Zayd, Prophet Muhammad's adopted son, got married to Zaynab even though she was reluctant to take part in that marriage. Thus, Zayd thought that his dignity had been destroyed and declared that he wanted to leave her. Afterwards, he went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* and said: "I want to divorce Barrah", whereupon he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* ordered him to keep her and to fear Allah, although Allah *the Almighty* had told him previously that he would marry Zaynab. In truth, what Allah *the Almighty* revealed is what He, Glorified to He, states clearly to His Messenger Muhammad: that Zayd was married to Zaynab only to conduct a mission commissioned of him by Allah *the Almighty*. As for Prophet Muhammad's role, he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was ordered by Allah to marry Zaynab.

Those who want to examine this topic to falsely and unjustly accuse Prophet Muhammad should ask Allah *the Almighty* why He decreed this order. He *Glorified is He* states clearly in the Quran that the ultimate objective behind Prophet Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab was that there should be no difficulty for the believers in respect of the previous wives of their adopted sons. It is clear now that the entire matter has mainly to do with abolishing the act of adoption and allowing men to get married to the former wives of their adopted sons. Allah *the Almighty* clearly states that it is He Who would reveal to us what Prophet Muhammad concealed in his soul. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* tells us all that the ultimate objective of this matter is predestined in accordance with the Divine justice and perfection; That is, men shall not be prohibited from getting married to the former wives of their adopted sons, those who are not from the loins of their so-called fathers.

It is taken for granted that whenever our Lord wills a particular matter, He *Glorified is He* does it. You have believed in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a Messenger, and if you denied his Message, your denial would be more sinful than just criticizing his demeanour. Why then do you propagate lies and fabrications against him *peace and blessings be upon him*? In reality, your denial of Muhammad's Prophet-hood is even severer than criticizing his marriage to the former wife of his adopted son. But, if you believe that he is a Messenger of Allah, then you must know for sure that he is delivering the Message revealed to him from Allah.

Thus, the actions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* who delivered you the Message of Allah represent the main criteria by means of which the soundness of your actions and deeds are judged. So, do you dare to say to such a Prophet, "We are going to weigh your deeds and actions according to the criteria we established"? It is inappropriate for anyone to do so. In fact, if one said so, s/he would be judged as committing the mistake of subjecting that which is perfect to that which is relative and imperfect. The basic assumption about Prophet Muhammad is that all his actions and deeds are perfect. Thus, you should not create a criterion for perfection on your own and then weigh the actions and deeds of him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* according to this imperfect criterion. In doing so, you would be setting the yardstick of perfection on your own and then weighing the demeanour of Messenger Muhammad according to it, a matter which clearly indicates self-contradiction since you have believed in him as a Prophet.

He *Glorified is He* then moves to lay down a general ruling: He *the Almighty* states clearly that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was not the father of any men of Quraysh; rather, he is the seal of all Prophets and Messengers. (*al-Ahzab:* 40) But how should one understand the fact that

Muhammad was not the father of any man? We should interpret it to mean that he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is your father. That is true; he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is not the father of a particular one, but all of you. The proof of this is that his wives are your mothers and you are absolutely forbidden to marry them. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad is the father of all of you. Accordingly, we must pay full attention to the accuracy and precision of the expression when He *the Almighty* states that He *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is not the father of any particular one because reality tells us that he is the father of all of you. That is why he would never pick one of you and say: “This is my son.” He did not do so because he is the father of all of you; all the believers are his sons, a point which is conclusively proved by the fact that his wives are the mothers of the believers. But it is at that point that someone may object and say: “Muhammad had sons.”

We respond to that person and say: His children did not reach the age of puberty. Even if we assumed that they would reach this age in the future, this clearly means that they were his men and not yours. Bearing the Message and being the seal of all Prophets and Messengers gives Muhammad *peace and blessings of be upon him* an honour that surpasses being a father. In reality, Allah *the Almighty* revealed this story in the Quran, to urge Zayd not to be sad because Prophet Muhammad had honoured him by attributing him to himself, to the extent that people used to call him Zayd ibn Muhammad. Yet, what gives you greater honour is that you believed in him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*. As such, the greatness of Muhammad stems from the fact that he was the Messenger of Allah.

For this reason, we previously stated that the idea of being a blood or biological father is meaningless in the sight of Prophets. That is why we find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* stating clearly and plainly that “Salman Al-Farisi is from his family.”(1) Based on its style and its rhetorical structure, when Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that Muhammad is not the father of any particular one of you men, this plainly means that he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is a father to all of you, Oh Muslims.

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(1) *At-Tabarani, Classified as “Weak”*

Therefore, none of you should try to solely single himself out with the honour of being the son of Messenger Muhammad.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse by stating that Muhammad is His Messenger and the Seal of all Prophets, stressing meanwhile that He *Glorified is He* is All Knowing of everything. (*al-Ahzab:* 40) As such, Zayd was called once again under the name of his biological father, so Zayd ibn Haritha. It is like Allah was saying to Zayd: "If you believe in him as a Messenger, then this fact shall make up for the annulment of his adoption to you because you also fall under the blessing of Messenger Muhammad's fatherhood to all the believers." As a matter of fact, if we reflect more carefully upon this Quranic verse, we will realize that Allah *the Almighty* comforts and compensates Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* as well. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell Zayd: "Though you have publicly lost the name Zayd ibn Muhammad–which was a source honour for you–you should bear in mind that you are the only one among the companions of Messenger Muhammad whose personal name is explicitly mentioned in the Quran; this is a better honour for you. The name "Zayd" has become part of the Quran that is recited and remembered day and night. In addition, people worship Allah *the Almighty* using the recitation of the Quran. Moreover, those believers who recite the Quran are ennobled and given high ranks by Him *Glorified is He*. Accordingly, He *the Almighty* has compensated you, Zayd."

If we assume that Zayd was still called "son of Muhammad," what would happen then? We will only read about it in the biographies of Prophet Muhammad, but Zayd's honour has been elevated, evidenced by the fact that we read his name in the miraculous Book of Allah whose recitation is an act of worship and which Allah *the Almighty* has promised to preserve. As such, Allah *the Almighty* has guaranteed the name "Zayd" will be preserved until The Day of Judgment. Which one of the two names then takes priority: calling him Zayd ibn Muhammad throughout his life or mentioning his name in the Quran for all time? It goes without saying that mentioning his name in the Quran undoubtedly takes priority.

Back to the chapter of *an-Nisa'*; the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…wives of your begotten sons…' indicates that you are permitted to marry the former wives of your adopted sons that you used to prohibit in the pre-Islamic period. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…two sisters simultaneously…' Forbidding having two sisters as wives at the same time is decreed because they have familial ties that bind them and which in turn require that affection, mercy and harmony should exist among them. But, were they married to the same man, animosity may flare up. That is why He *the Almighty* declares that it is forbidden to take two sisters as wives at the same time. Yet, scholars differed concerning how to understand the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… you must not have two sisters as wives at the same time…' and the saying of Allah '…other women are lawful to you…' We must first state that she-slaves do not have the right to ask their masters to have sexual intercourse with them. Thus, the master is not obliged to his slave woman or women who are mothers to his children.

At this point, it is of great importance to mention that Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* and 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* had two different positions concerning this issue of having two slave girls under one's ownership: is one allowed to have sex with them both or just with one of them only? When 'Uthman was asked about this issue, he answered: 'I would neither command nor forbid you to do so because one verse had admitted this, while another forbade it.' Thus, 'Uthman abstained from giving his opinion. Imam 'Ali forbade having intercourse with the two sisters that are possessed by one master. As for possessing without having intercourse, it is lawful. This is actually the opinion viewed the most authentic by the majority of scholars. There is no consideration for any contradictory opinions.

He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '… except for what is past: Allah is most forgiving and merciful.' This means that if such a practice took place before Allah *the Almighty* decrees His Ruling, He *Glorified is He* will not–out of His Mercy and Compassion–hold us guilty or accountable for committing it by a retroactive application of the law. Nothing is condemned except with a clear text and there is no punishment without condemnation and conviction. Since the ruling was not revealed before that point, it would be then applied starting from that point onwards. It has thus become clear that it is forbidden for anyone to marry two sisters at once or to have sexual intercourse with both of them when they are under his ownership. One must not also have two sisters at the same time even if one of them is his wife, while the other is a possession of his right hand. He *Glorified is He* then says:

وَٱلْمُحْصَنَٰتُ مِنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ إِلَّا مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُكُمْ ۖ كِتَٰبَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ ۚ وَأُحِلَّ
لَكُم مَّا وَرَآءَ ذَٰلِكُمْ أَن تَبْتَغُوا۟ بِأَمْوَٰلِكُم مُّحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسَٰفِحِينَ ۚ فَمَا
ٱسْتَمْتَعْتُم بِهِۦ مِنْهُنَّ فَـَٔاتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً ۚ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا
تَرَٰضَيْتُم بِهِۦ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ٱلْفَرِيضَةِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿٢٤﴾

women already married, other than your slaves. God has ordained all this for you. Other women are lawful to you, so long as you seek them in marriage, with gifts from your property, looking for wedlock rather than fornication. If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their bride-gift – this is obligatory – though if you should choose mutually, after fulfilling this obligation, to do otherwise [with the bride-gift], you will not be blamed: God is All Knowing and all-wise [24]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa': * 24)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'and [forbidden to you are] all married women…' is in conjunction with the prohibitions mentioned in the aforementioned verse. This means that He *Glorified is He* will add married women to the previous list of women that one is forbidden to marry. But why are married women described as *muhsanat* (meaning "chaste and pure")? The etymological root of derivation often leads to a common meaning between the original sense of the word and the way it may be otherwise used in a specific context. The Arabic word "*muhsanat*" is derived from the word "*hisn,*" or "fortification" which means the place wherein people take refuge to defend and protect themselves against their enemies. Thus, if they protect themselves by staying in the fortification, they will be safe from their enemies or else, they will be prone to their attacks and raids. This is the exact and precise meaning of the word "*Al-hisn.*" There are a lot of derivations deduced from this root. For example, He *Glorified is He* describes Maryam '(Mary) as the one who had guarded her chastity.' (*at-Tahrim:* 12) This means clearly that she *peace be upon her* protected herself from being approached by any man.

As for the word “*Al-muhsinat”* (meaning “chaste women”) in this particular verse under discussion, it refers to “married women.” So, if a woman is married, this means that she is not eligible for any other man and thus no man but her husband is allowed to take her in marriage. In other words, she is no way allowed to agree to another marriage contract with any other man so long as her contract is still valid. Thus, the meaning of “*al-muhsinat min an-nisa”* refers to those women who secure their chastity through marriage.

In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* ‘talks about the legal punishment prescribed for the slave women who committed fornication.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 25) So, the question to be asked here is: "If the slave women protect and guard their chastity through marriage, would this imply that they are to be considered equal with the free married women?” The answer is no; there is a big difference between the two cases. Undoubtedly, slave women who protect their chastity are not included among the free married women who guard their chastity through marriage, for if they are included among them, the ruling thereby should be the same for both of them. Yet, He *Glorified is He* states clearly that the legal punishment prescribed for them is half the penalty prepared for the free married women.

Free women are originally described with chastity, for they never allow anybody to approach them. At this point, we may quote the saying of Abu Sufyan’s wife who, while hearing Prophet Muhammad ordering women not to commit fornication, wondered, “Is it even possible that a free woman could commit adultery?” It is as if adultery is a disgrace that can only be committed by slave women because they do not have dignity and do not have either a father or a mother or even honour. Therefore, anyone may have the audacity to approach a slave woman because she has neither dignity nor a family to protect her. For this reason, her legal penalty is half that of a free woman because slave women may be highly vulnerable to the seduction of a lot of people who want to commit fornication with them due to the fact they have none to protect them.

Thus, *ihsan* is used to refer to chastity and to free women. As well, it may be used to refer to married women. Free women are furthermore called “*Al-muhsanat.”* In general, a free woman often has a family that protects her and dissuades anyone from having the audacity to illegitimately assault or offend her chastity and honour. But, if we assume that there is a married woman whose people fought against Muslims and then she was taken as a captive by Muslims, this woman is no longer able to be a *muhsinah* for she has become a she-slave. Accordingly, the fact that a woman is possessed by the right hand of a man supersedes and takes precedence over the fact that she was once married. A Muslim is thus allowed to marry her and enjoy her if he possessed her even if she was once married. This is because there is a difference between the two settings and contexts; she is now in the land of Islam coming out of the land of the war and thus becomes eligible for being rightfully possessed by any Muslim. Yet, there must be no sexual intercourse with her except after assuring that her womb is empty of any embryo that may have been begotten by any of her people. This ruling is deduced from the Saying of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* concerning those women from the tribe of *Awtas* who were taken as captives by the Muslim army: 'There must be no intercourse with a pregnant woman until she gives birth to her child or with the one who is not pregnant until she has had one menstrual period.'(1) As a matter of fact, this legal ruling honours and ennobles the female captives because it allows them to enjoy their masters sexually and emotionally after being separated from their husbands. In addition, they will be under the protection of their master and thus be safe from the audacity of people.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…Allah has ordained all of this for you…' means that He *Glorified is He* has enacted this ruling upon you and has documented it in His Book; it is thus a documented command. It is of great importance to know that if you adhere firmly to this ruling, you will gain considerable benefit. He *Glorified is He* then says: '… Other women are lawful to you…' This means that the main causes behind prohibiting man from getting married to certain women include blood ties, breast-feeding and binding marriage. It also means that it is lawful and admissible for you to marry them, a point which is definitively proven by the fact that He *the Almighty* follows this aforementioned part of the verse with His Saying '… if you seek them in marriage…'

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(1) *[Abu Dawud, Sahih].*

It is taken for granted that money is the fruit of one’s labour and thus one must exert great efforts to acquire it. That is why nearly all people passionately like money, to the extent that they may sacrifice their souls for protecting it. Even if you inherited this wealth, this means that the person you inherited from had formerly exerted considerable efforts to possess this wealth. We previously explained that if someone labours for a period time estimated, for example, to be ten years, Allah *the Almighty* may provide him with a great wealth which will enable him to live comfortably for the rest of his life; Similarly, He *Glorified is He* may provide that man who labours for twenty years with a considerable wealth that enables him and his children to live comfortably for the rest of their lives; And in case there is someone who labours for thirty years, Allah *Glorified is He* may thus provide him with such considerable wealth that enables him, his children and even his grandchildren to live comfortably for the rest of their lives. Thus, all the inherited fortunes you may see are the result of the labour and toil of the parents.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…so long as you seek them in marriage, with gifts from your property…’ means clearly that man is the one who is particularly entitled to pay the dowry of marriage. This is proven by the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* in which he says: ‘Oh young men, you should get married, for it is more effective in lowering the gaze and protecting one's chastity. Whoever cannot afford it should fast, for it will be a restraint (*wija*’) for him.’(1)

If one’s possessions are dear to him—being obtained through labouring, toiling, and sweating—he ought to spend them only on what accrues to him immediate good. As well, he should consider what will bring him good in the future. In truth, if he obtains an immediate good while being oblivious to a delayed or future evil, he has not then used the money properly. He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘… so long as you seek them in marriage, with gifts from your property, looking for wedlock….’ We previously explained that the word *“muhsinin”* indicates various meanings: it may refer to those people who refrain themselves from offending and infringing upon the honours of the people, for example. The saying of Allah, ‘…with gifts from your property…’ means that people should invest the possessions they earned through hard labour in what will accrue to them immediate and future benefit. Thus, you must not exploit your wealth to offend and destroy the honour of people.

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(1) *An-Nasa’i, Sahih.*

A man may possibly desire to have unlawful sex with a woman by offering her some of his possessions and thus he does not guard his chastity and purification. We say to this person: You have elicited an impermanent, worldly gratification, but you were oblivious to a future evil. This forbidden relation is described by Allah *the Almighty* as *sifah* (meaning "fornication"). Thus, be careful not to unlawfully satisfy your sexual desire.

As mentioned before, the word "*muhsinin*" means "adhering firmly to chastity." In this particular verse, He *the Almighty* explains the meaning of this word (*muhsinin)* through the meaning of its opposite–*musafihin* (meaning "fornicators"), which is derived from *as-safh* which gives the meaning of pouring water down forcefully. In fact, water may fall drop-by-drop, but this is not the meaning of *as-safh*. For this reason, the foot of the mountain is called *as-safh* because water falls from all parts of the mountain as if it were poured.

At this point, we can extract a wonderful subtle observation: Allah *the Almighty* describes chaste men as "*muhsinin*" using the Arabic diacritic mark "*kasrah*" (or the lower accent) under the letter "*sad"* (Arabic letter for the "S" sound), but while describing chaste women, He *Glorified is He* says "*muhsanat"* using the diacritic mark *"fathah"* (or the higher accent) above the letter *"Sad*", so what is the wisdom of that? The wisdom is clear in the fact that the original case is that men are the ones who seek after women and not vice versa. The word *istimta'* (enjoying) in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their bride-gift…' means gratifying the self. As a matter of fact, enjoyment starts with the period of engagement. Once a man gets engaged to a woman, this implies enjoyment and so is the case when they conclude the marriage contract and consummate the marriage. All of these are undoubtedly stages of enjoyment and rejoicing. Yet, it is very important here to point out that enjoyment is not the only purpose of marriage. Allah orders you to give her the dowry as long as you enjoyed her. But in case you divorced her before the consummation of the marriage, you are supposed to pay her half the dowry, for you have enjoyed her for a while: the period of engagement. This clearly indicates that the matter of enjoyment is not totally restricted to sex, for it were so, he would not have been asked to pay her anything of the dowry. As such, it becomes clear that the matter of enjoyment stems mainly from proposing to the daughter of such-and-such a man, going through the engagement period, and then concluding the marriage contract; all of these are unquestionably preludes to the greater enjoyment of consummating the marriage.

Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* wants us to build our families on the basis of purification and on securing one's psychological faculties. In truth, man finds no fear at all when he closes his door for the sake of having intercourse with his wife, a matter that is totally different from the case when he is with an unmarried woman. It is in such a latter case that his psychological faculties will start to conflict with each other; he will fear the exposition of his sin and he will be in a terrible state of fear and trepidation, but why? That is because his psychological faculties are not in harmony with each other because by doing so, he is only gratifying one particular desire, while all of his faculties are in a terrible state of fear. This plainly indicates that what he is doing is unnatural and that is why his psychological faculties oppose it. As such, it becomes clear that Allah *the Almighty* wants the family to be built on purity and security. It is this psychological security that gives the soul all its power and enjoyment.

We have explained before that if one had a girl and discovered that a young man was passing frequently by the house to sneak glances at the balcony hoping that he may see the girl, how would this father act in case he discovered the matter? It goes without saying that he would be extremely angry. But, if the young man came with his father and knocked on his door and said: “I would like to get engaged to your daughter”, and his father said “I would like to have your daughter as a wife to my son”, what would be the stance of the father of the girl at that point? He would definitely be delighted and happy. He would be content with the matter, and the marriage ceremony would be held after that to publicly announce the fulfilment of marriage. The reason for this great happiness is that Allah the One Who created the two spouses, the male, and the female–prepared human psyches to be content with gathering with each other. For this reason, Arabs used to say: “The lawful [pursuit] has cut off the nose of jealousy." This means that even though the father previously showed jealousy about his daughter, he is now the one who sends out the invitations to her wedding himself. This clearly indicates that jealousy implies zeal and fervour. Thus, if one adopts a wrong methodology in fulfilling his desire, the soul must be in a state of terrible anger, but when he does so in a legitimate way, the soul is content with the act. As a matter of fact, one finds difficulty in understanding how the soul addresses both of the two cases, but the question to be asked here is "Who caused the soul to be content and Who caused it to feel angry?" Undoubtedly, it is Allah *the Almighty* who does so.

A person must consider that he is composed of several powers and faculties. So, how do the marriage contract, the approval of marriage, and the presence of witnesses make the soul feel happiness and delight? It is the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. This is a well-known matter. When you meet a new friend of yours, it is enough to say to him: "peace be upon you." But the case is totally different when it is your intimate and long-life friend who will not suffice with just verbal greetings and thus wants you to shake hands with him. Thus, affection and loyalty make chemical changes in the human soul. Repulsion, on the other hand, occurs as a result of committing what Allah has forbidden. Adhering to the Way of Allah thus causes affection and loyalty among people. When the poet addressed the one whom he loves, he said:

I would sacrifice my dad for the one I love but from whom I was separated
But Allah then decreed a reunion of us
I have desired him so that when we were united
His shaking hands with mine was like bidding adieu to me

This means that the poet wants to elongate the period and time of greeting so that he could give and receive deep affection from his beloved friend. He, in other words, is saying: "I met with the one I love and so he dissolved in me and I dissolved in him." This emanates from the combination of the two souls. As such, emotions serve as a means to achieving unity among people who follow the Way of Allah; otherwise, they will serve as a means to stirring up hatred. But the question to be asked here is, "What causes the soul to act as such?" It is the Bounty of Allah *the Almighty* Who created both man and woman. Thus, when the union takes place in accordance with the laws decreed by Allah, one should not exclude the possibility that the Creator *Glorified is He* would harmonize the constituent atoms of the two souls to mix with each other and thus loyalty and honesty shall naturally come into existence. But if the union between the male and the female does not happen according to the *Sharia* of Allah, there will be no harmony. This would thus imply a negative impact.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wants the Muslim families to be built upon this basis of purification, mercy, and affection. You know for certain that unlawful unions take place in secrecy and its fruit or yield is often disowned and repudiated. Thus, if pregnancy takes place, the baby will likely be thrown out into the streets and so becomes a foundling child, or they may even kill him. But as for that fruit produced from lawful unions, it elates and delights everyone.

The Saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… Other women are lawful to you, so long as you seek them in marriage, with gifts from your property, looking for wedlock rather than fornication. If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their bride-gift…' indicates that "enjoyment" involves a lot of things. The Shiites, on the other hand, use the saying of Allah, '…If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their bride-gift…' to declare the permissibility of *Nikah Al-Mut'ah* (or "temporary marriage"). They opine that this verse refers clearly to that kind of marriage because Allah *the Almighty* orders us to give women their *ajr* (meaning "dowry") in return for enjoying them. Answering them, we say that "*ajr"* is an Arabic word which is used in the context of true marriage, a point which is proven by the story of Moses *peace be upon him* when Prophet Shu'aib *peace be upon him* asked Moses to work for him for eight years in fulfilment of the dowry Moses should pay to his daughter. (*al-Qasas:* 27) Also, this particular word–*ajr*–has been used in the following verse in reference to dowry. Allah *the Almighty* says: '… so marry them with their people's consent and their proper bride-gift…' (*an-Nisa':* 25) so, we shall ask them—the Shiites— "Why do you interpret this verse as such?" If they say, "This kind of marriage was taking place during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad," we will say to them, "Yes, we agree on that point, but what are the reasons that led to its occurrence?" It is the true that this temporary marriage was happening during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, and that was for a great wisdom, but what should be the case after the legislator *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* totally abolished it before his death? It goes without saying that this ruling has thus been invalidated and nullified. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* allowed this kind of marriage for a short period of time and in exactly one of the battles. Some people went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* out of their true belief, and said: "O Messenger Muhammad! Should we emasculate ourselves?" If *Jihad* required staying away from their wives, why should they not emasculate themselves so that they would no longer have desire for women? Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* thus allowed them this kind of marriage, but he abolished it totally later on. This is because 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said concerning this kind of marriage: "If anyone marries a woman for a defined period of time, I will stone him." The status of 'Umar is known to all Muslims. His suggestions were in conformity with the Quran.

As such, it becomes clear now that this kind of marriage has been totally abolished, a point of view which is supported by Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him*. But, the Shiites quote the opinion of Ibn 'Abbas in this regard and say that he once allowed this kind of marriage. Yes, it is true that Ibn 'Abbas held this position for a while, but he later admitted that he was wrong. We know that the Companions of Messenger Muhammad did not receive knowledge in classes; rather, they used to go to Messenger Muhammad to learn from him after finishing their work. Thus, some heard certain things that others did not. This is actually the main reason why some may narrate a saying of the Prophet, while others do not. Consequently, Ibn 'Abbas admitted that he knew about the permissibility of the temporary marriage and that he did not hear about the news of its annulment except at the end of his life.

Thus, the opinion of the Shiites on the permissibility of temporary marriage is based on a wrong deduction. Therefore, we shall understand the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their bride-gift—this is obligatory…' in the light of His saying in the following verse, '… so marry them with their people's consent and their proper bride-gifts…' That is because there is a difference between a normal price and *al-ajr* (meaning "compensation"): A price is paid for a specific object but the compensation is paid for the benefit procured from an object. A man does not own or possess a woman by paying her the dowry; rather, he is entitled to enjoy her and thus it is acceptable to refer to the dowry with the word "*ajr.*" The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their bride-gift—this is obligatory…' indicates clearly that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who enacted this due dowry. He *Glorified is He* then leaves the door open to favour and says: '… though if you should choose mutually, after fulfilling this obligation, to do otherwise [with the bride-gift], you will not be blamed…' This means that there is a big difference between what is legally due and what is done out of favour and grace; even though a man is obliged to pay the dowry to his wife, she, upon being content, may accept to give it up for him. In the same vein, favour also entails that the husband, out of love, may increase the dowry of his wife. This is truly what is profoundly understood from the Order of Allah *the Almighty* to the married couple not to forget the grace towards each other. Thus, there shall be no reproach or blame for anything that is voluntarily and mutually agreed upon by both spouses if it is done lawfully. As a matter of fact, the phrase '… if you should choose mutually to do otherwise…' is implied in His Saying '… though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience.' (*an-Nisa':* 4)

In our modern age, we find that women use the dowry they take from their husbands to furnish their houses. This happens in spite of the fact that a man is the one who is mainly responsible for furnishing the house, while the dowry should all be left to the woman. But it is cooperation that brings about sympathy and solidarity.

He *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…Indeed, Allah is All knowing, All-Wise.' Thus, all the Rulings decreed by Him *the Almighty* are based on the fact that He *Glorified is He* is All-knowledgeable about what is best for His creation; He is never oblivious to anything and thus everything is predestined by Him *Glorified is He* by due measure. The delaying of the ruling or legislation means that that the lawgiver was not fully aware of some relevant particulars at the time of legislation and thus he is obliged to issue new laws upon discovering the defection of the ones he previously enacted.

As to those who believe that Divine Legislation does not satisfy the needs of humans, we say: "Who will then issue such laws that satisfy these needs? Will you thinkers modify the Legislation enacted by Allah *the Almighty*? Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* exposes your deficiency; you come up with all these Rulings and edicts which later on reveal their defects and mistakes. You thus find yourselves compelled to amend them. But, Allah *the Almighty* is All Knowing and All-Wise." Thus, if He chooses to delay the enactment of a certain ruling, He does so because His Wisdom decrees that.

A good illustration of this point is the prohibition of drinking wine. He *the Almighty* did not prohibit the drinking of wine all at once; rather, He did so gradually, because this bad thing that is done by habit and custom must be addressed patiently. Accordingly, the ruling of the prohibition of drinking wine had to be enacted in several stages each of which paved the way for the forthcoming one. The matter would be so difficult if the ruling was decreed all at once because giving up a habit immediately and not gradually is often difficult and onerous, especially if it was a daily habit which was practiced day and night. This is proven by the fact that when a person who is addicted to wine does not consume it for a particular period of time, he feels annoyed and disturbed and thus rushes to drink a glass of wine. Accordingly, the first stage in the prohibition process required that He *Glorified is He* should disrupt this habit. If it is a deeply entrenched habit in the soul of the person, he will not be able to give it up all at once. Thus, the first stage of prohibition took the form of a piece of advice: He *Glorified is He* ordered them, in the very beginning, not to attempt to pray while they were in a state of drunkenness. (*an-Nisa':* 43) As such, He *the Almighty* prevented them from drinking it during five windows of time each day–the time during the five daily prayers. He thus accustomed them to be able to give up drinking wine only for particular periods of time in the beginning. Thus, with time, they were accustomed to give it up the whole day. Then, He *Glorified is He* moves to the second stage of prohibition: He states clearly that both wine and games of chance (gambling) include both little benefit and great evil. (*al-Baqara:* 219)

But those who are fools often tend to continue in committing sins. The aforementioned saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Baqara* indicates clearly that the evil acquired from both of these two acts–drinking wine and playing games of chance–is greater than the benefit to be obtained from them. He *the Almighty* then declares the total prohibition of these evil and bad acts. In truth, it is the Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty* that decrees that this prohibition should be carried out gradually, a point which is definitively proven by Him *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which He clearly states that whenever He abrogates a verse, He, out of His Ultimate and Unchangeable Power, brings another one which is better or even similar to it. (*al-Baqara:* 106)

Allah *the Almighty* is All Knowing of everything to the extent that nothing could be concealed from Him. He knows that a woman may love her husband to the extent that she no longer cares about such *ajr* (or compensation) or a man may love his wife to the effect that money becomes of no value to him. Because He *the Almighty* is All-Wise, He may predestine the course of events to proceed based on the grace of the people involved and not on the inevitability of what He *the Almighty* imposed. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَن لَّمۡ يَسۡتَطِعۡ مِنكُمۡ طَوۡلًا أَن يَنكِحَ ٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ فَمِن مَّا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُكُم
مِّن فَتَيَٰتِكُمُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِۚ وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِإِيمَٰنِكُمۚ بَعۡضُكُم مِّنۢ بَعۡضٖۚ فَٱنكِحُوهُنَّ بِإِذۡنِ أَهۡلِهِنَّ
وَءَاتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ مُحۡصَنَٰتٍ غَيۡرَ مُسَٰفِحَٰتٖ وَلَا مُتَّخِذَٰتِ أَخۡدَانٖۚ فَإِذَآ
أُحۡصِنَّ فَإِنۡ أَتَيۡنَ بِفَٰحِشَةٖ فَعَلَيۡهِنَّ نِصۡفُ مَا عَلَى ٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتِ مِنَ ٱلۡعَذَابِۚ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَنۡ
خَشِيَ ٱلۡعَنَتَ مِنكُمۡۚ وَأَن تَصۡبِرُواْ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿٢٥﴾

If any of you does not have the means to marry a believing free woman, then marry a believing slave – God knows best [the depth of] your faith: you are [all] part of the same family – so marry them with their people's consent and their proper bride-gifts. [Make them] married women, not adulteresses or lovers. If they commit adultery when they are married, their punishment will be half that of free women. This is for those of you who fear that you will sin; it is better for you to practice self-restraint. God is most forgiving and merciful [25]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 25)

The word "*istita'ah*" (meaning "ability") means that you are capable of doing a particular thing which you claim you are in a position to do, and that this thing would not be resistant to whatever you want to do with it. If one holds a piece of iron and bends it, it would be under his control. The story of the two sons of Adam offers a striking example for that point. Both offered a sacrifice to Allah, but He *the Almighty* accepted it from one of them and rejected the sacrifice of the other. The son whose sacrifice was rejected told his brother that he would kill him, whereupon the latter told him that Allah accepted only the sacrifice of those who are pious. The soul of the sinful son then prompted him to kill his brother and thus he became one of the losers. (*al-Ma'ida:* 27-30)

What does the phrase "*taw'at lahu*" (meaning "prompted him") mean? It means that his soul made him capable of killing his brother. Upon reflecting more carefully upon this phrase, we will find that it contains a pronoun which refers to killing his brother himself, a point which means that a man has multiple powers and faculties, and one of these faculties may entice him to kill, while his conscience orders him not to do so. Yet, his soul incites him to evil and tells him to kill; thus, he becomes in a state of total confusion.

As well, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '… his soul prompted him…' clearly indicates that his inner self did not want to submit to his own will. But his soul that incites him to evil encouraged him to kill his brother. After he had satisfied his desire by killing by his brother, he lamented and regretted his deed. This regret was then explicitly expressed in his own discourse recorded in the Quran: Allah tells us that he felt bitter regret for being unable to conceal the nakedness of his brother. (*al-Ma'ida:* 31)

He killed his brother and fulfilled his wish, so why did he regret his deed? The reason is that the good powers and faculties always encourage and foster one to do the good and dissuade one from doing evil. One may start his life with doing evil, but if his good powers are predominant, he may change and his evil tendency may be mitigated. However, if his evil powers are predominant, he may start his life with doing little evil and then this evil will aggravate. He may thus say to himself, "That person did such-and-such to me and I want to avenge myself by slapping him on the face!" Afterwards, his evil may be further escalated and so he may say to himself, "I will beat him." But, if a good person undergoes such a situation, he will say to himself, "This person has conspired against me; I do not want to shoot, slap or even rebuke him." Thus, instead of considering the more-evil choice, he starts considering the one that is less evil.

The story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* illustrates this point fully for us. His brothers, in the very beginning, planned to kill him or to cast him out to another land, but then they moved to another a lower level of evil that is, throwing him *peace be upon him* into the bottom of a well. (*Yusuf:* 8-10) They, the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) were from the tribes of Israel and were the sons of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob). They thus wanted to find a way to mitigate their evil intention so that they would not kill Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. That is why they thought of another less-harmful means to get rid of him: they thus decided to cast him out to another land. They even thought of another means which was of more less evil: they thus decided to throw him into the bottom of a well.

Thus, His saying '… not being in the position…' refers to that one who is not capable of subjugating a particular thing to him for meeting his needs. This is actually the true meaning of the word *"at-tawl."* So, the phrase *"talathu yadahu"* means that he became able to do that particular act. Also, when the Arabs say that someone *"tafaddal 'ala"* it means that he conferred a favour upon another. Furthermore, when they say that someone *"tatawal 'alayya"*, this means that he insulted someone and abused him; all of these meanings come from the root *"at-tawl."* As such, in this context, the word *"al-tawl"* means "being capable of marrying the one you like." Accordingly, it here means that you do not have enough money to marry the one you like. But there is another possible way for you through which you can fulfil your desire of getting married. There is no need to marry a free woman if her dowry is too high for you; you can marry instead a slave woman or maiden from among the captives you have because their livelihood and expenses are relatively light. Furthermore, they do not have a family who will dispute with you about the dowry. He *Glorified is He* thus says: 'And as for those of you who, owing to circumstances, are not in a position to marry free believing women, [let them marry] believing maidens from among those whom you rightfully possess.' We deduce from this verse that marrying the ones rightfully possessed is possible for the one who does not own her because her master does not need to marry her; he may enjoy her without marriage since she is a rightful possession of his hand.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* allowed Muslims to marry a woman that is rightfully possessed by someone else, provided that he gets the permission of her master. That is because by getting married, she will take away a portion of the time and service she devotes to her master and that is why the master should be asked for permission so that her dedication to the service of her husband may be known to him, her master. He *the Almighty* also decreed that we should not look down on a slave-maiden because she is possessed and humiliated and so refuse to pay her the dowry to which she is entitled. Slave-maidens should be paid the dowry due to them in an equitable manner based on the custom of the society they live in. That is because the dowry is paid as a compensation for consummating the marriage. But since He *Glorified is He* orders us to ask their masters for permission and to pay them their due dowries, a problem may arise: the one who is possessed does not possess anything at all since the slave and what he possesses is a possession of his master.

To the person who may be concerned about this problem, we say: "Yes, this is true. But if you say that a slave and whatever she possesses is a possession of her master, she should firstly own a possession so that this possession becomes then possessed by her master. So, if you trespassed her and gave the money to her master, then you would not be giving her the due dowry in the first place." The statement "the slave and whatever his hands possess" implies that you should give her a chance to be an owner and possessor by honouring her and giving her the dowry due to her. Thus, the fact that her other money is possessed by her master is a different issue. Afterwards, you may then go and marry her; this is permitted. But could we infer from this that if you are financially capable, you should not marry maidens or slave women? The answer is "No." Does this belittle maidens? The answer is also "No." But why should you not? We should consider the deep and profound wisdoms that are only done by our Lord. Allah *the Almighty* wants to abolish slavery. As a matter of fact, when one marries a maiden possessed by someone else, her children will also be slaves. It is important to know that children shall follow the pure religion adopted by the better one among their parents; however, concerning freedom and slavery, they follow their mothers. Thus, if someone marries a slave woman of someone else, the children she may bear for him will also be slaves. But if he leaves her to her master and marries a free woman, the child she will bear from her master will be free. As such, He *the Almighty* wants to totally abolish slavery. This is an aspect of the wisdom intended here.

The other aspect is crystal clear in the fact that marriage is the union of the male and the female to establish the nucleus of a family. Thus, if the husband and wife are of equal status, the husband will not feel any superiority over his wife and the wife will not feel any superiority in dealing with her husband since they are equivalent to each other. Such equality undoubtedly guarantees that their life and association with each other will be balanced and steady. As a matter of fact, when one marries a slave-maiden who does not have a family, he may exploit her weakness and deal with her with superiority. He may also humiliate her and disgrace her for being a slave. Further, if she bears children, people may abuse them by telling them that they have no maternal uncle whatsoever. The Legislator wants to build a balanced family life. For this reason, he stipulated equivalence in social status among the spouses as a condition for the soundness of marriage.

In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that corrupt and immoral men shall only get married to corrupt and the immoral women, while good and pious men shall only get married to good and pious women. (*an-Nur:* 26) When some people see a good woman, they think that she must be married to a good man. To these people, we say: “This is a law enacted by Allah and the law is an assignment and so it is subject to being obeyed or disobeyed. When Allah *the Almighty* decrees that good women are for good men and that corrupt women are for corrupt men, this means that if you apply the ruling, the matters will be upright and correct.” This fully truthfully answers those who say, “Since our Lord decreed that law–that good women are for good men and corrupt women are for corrupt men–how is it possible that one of the two already married couple is good, while the other is bad?” We say that the ruling is not about a case of a universal fact; rather, it is a legal case we are required to obey by marrying good men to good women and bad men to bad women so that balance may be achieved. In the case of bad men and women, they may exchange insults often. Therefore, it is [advisable] he does not insult her so that she does not insult back. The good couple, however, are lenient and tolerant with each other.

‘And as for those of you who, owing to circumstances, are not in a position to marry chaste, free believing women.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 25)

The word *muhsanat* is translated as ‘free [married woman], who cannot marry another person. They may wed believing girls from among those whom your right hands possess.’ The word *girls* usually refer to any slave young girl, or an old maid. Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* taught us not to use the word ‘slave’ when [speaking about or calling] the servants, but rather, we should say: ‘my boy’ and ‘my girl’ to those your right hands possess.’ Some people wonder why one would marry a woman that he possesses. We say to these people: No. She is lawfully his since he rightfully possesses her; he can thereby have a child from her. Thus, in this context, it means those women whom men’s right hands possess because Allah addresses believers as one single unit. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘A believer must support his fellow believer like a building wherein each part supports the other.’(1) The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘...And neither shall you defame one another...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 11). He also says in a different place: ‘But whenever you enter [any of these] houses, greet one another—a greeting from Allah.’ (*an-Nur:* 61) Should a believer greet himself or greet the ones whose houses he enters? Through this ruling, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make the believers be like one body. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘and do not kill one another.’ This means do not kill other believers. In other words, the unity of faith should make us stand in solidarity with each other.

They may wed believing girls from among those whom your right hands possess. And Allah knows all about your faith’ You may assume that the faith of a young captive girl is weak so one can use it as a pretext [for not following the ruling of Allah]. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells you: No, ‘… Allah knows all about your faith.’ It may even be the case that a maiden’s faith is better than yours because this is an internal matter of the heart, and it should be enough for you to know the apparent.

When the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* addresses a matter, He does so [in a manner] befitting a Lord who knows the reality of what He created and provides all the needs of His creatures. At first, He explains that if you are incapable of marrying free women, then marry the slave ones. This is intended to further contribute to the abolition of slavery.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasa’i on the authority of Abu Musa*

After this, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘ Allah knows all about your faith; each one of you is an issue of the other.’ Thus, if you plan to get married, bear in mind that each one of you is an issue of the other.’ This means that all of you descend from Adam *peace be upon him* and since you have believed, this belief has made you all equals. Accordingly, if you want to get married, and then bear in mind that Allah *Glorified is He* addresses an existing reality. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: So marry them with the permission of their people.’ This gives the impression that the maiden girl under one’s care should be treated as if she were a member of his family, compensating her for the loss of her family in her home country, and so that she would feel in the custody of Islam the same way she used to feel when she was in the custody of her family, parents and maybe more.

Thus, the master should act as if he were a member of the family of the one in his custody. This way, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* gives more reasons to abolish slavery. He thus explains that if you do not free the slave you possess, he will continue to be a slave, which entails feeding him of what you eat, dressing him from the same clothes you wear and assigning to him what he is capable of undertaking; if you do so, you will have to assist him. When you have a person that you feed from your own food and dress from the same clothes you wear, and you find that he is trying to do a task he is incapable of doing, you would help him. But what kind of treatment is this? It is the way you treat a member of your family.

Consider how many issues and matters the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses; He addresses the one proposing for marriage, the maiden or slave woman and the masters. It is indeed the law of the Lord of all. He does not decree a ruling for one party at the expense of the other. As long as she is a maiden and has a master, this master has issues to attend to, and therefore she has to ask for his permission since he may not be able to dispense with her because she serves him.

Thus, He says: ‘…with the permission of their people.’ But with respect to the question of dowry, He says: ‘…Give them their dowry according to what is reasonable.’ A slave woman is married after the permission of her master so that the husband, who will have intercourse with her, would know there is someone else; and after the permission, she is no longer his. As permission was granted, no one can intrude. Thus by granting the permission and marrying his slave woman to another man, he prepares himself for the fact the he will not be able to have intercourse with her again, and that all what is left for him is that she is his slave. As for the right of sexual intercourse, it has been transferred to the husband.

‛Give them their dowry according to what is reasonable.’ This warns one not to say that for a slave woman, anything should suffice. No, she is entitled to a dowry corresponding to what is customary in the community, which would thus preserve her dignity in her community. ‛[They should be] chaste, neither [of] those who commit unlawful intercourse randomly, nor those who take [secret] lovers.’ They should be chaste women, not women who commit adultery; such women are also called public women.

And when they are married, and thereafter become guilty of adultery, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable.’ This means that if slave women were married and one of them was found guilty of adultery, then she is to receive a penalty. But if she is not married, then she should not submit to a judge; rather, her master should punish her and penalize her because the slave woman is customarily humiliated, which changes after she gets married. Thus, if she commits an immoral conduct we say to her: You have your designated penalty. You will not be penalized in the same way a free woman is penalize because the free woman always finds it difficult to commit adultery, unlike the slave woman who finds it easy to do so since she does not have a father, a brother or a family. He thus says: ‛...thereafter become guilty of adultery, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable.’ This means half the penalty to which the free married women are liable. But *Al-khawarij*(1) limited the meaning of the word to a single interpretation to serve their purpose. They consider the ‘chaste woman' as the one who is married. They want to interpret it this way so that the slave woman would be liable to half the penalty to which the married woman is, at which case the married woman would not be stoned since stoning cannot be halved. They adopted this interpretation and said that the Quran does not mention stoning; thus they were contented with their view of whipping the adulteress hundred times. We say to them: You have interpreted the word *muhsana* as married, and forgot, 'and as for those of you who, owing to circumstances, are not in a position to marry free believing women.' The word *muhsana* actually refers to the free women. So why did you switch the meaning of the word *muhsana* to mean 'free' in the first mention and 'married' in the second? You have to take the meaning as 'free women' and you do not have any justification to adopt this fallacious rationale. Thus, the premise of their argument falls apart because if the evidence carries a potential probability, it cannot be used as a premise for valid argument.

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(1) Al-khawarij is mostly associated with their political orientation. In this *Fiqhi* case, the definition would not be of crucial importance because the background it will provide, would not affect this particular issue.

We move to the next point. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable to.' If the ruling follows the generalized sense, the True Lord would not have said penalty.' It is as if she is liable for half the penalty/punishment. What is punishment? It means the infliction of pain on the one who is susceptible to feel pain. Stoning does not involve inflicting pain because it is intended to put an end to life. The verse shows that half the penalty is an infliction of pain. But what does not involve an infliction of pain is a process of putting an end to life and the ruling is not related to it. Pain is only possible for the one who can feel pain. Pain is felt by a living thing, whereas stoning is the termination of life. Thus, stoning is not part of the *'penalty.'* The evidence that penalty is the opposite of death is that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and his investigation of the birds. He *Glorified is He* says: 'He inspected the birds, and said: 'How is it that I do not see the hoopoe? Or could he be absent? I will punish him most severely or will kill him unless he brings me a clear reason.' (*an-Naml:* 20-21) Killing and terminating life is thus the opposite of penalty. Therefore, His phrase 'half the penalty to which free married women are liable,' means that what is being addressed in this context is the infliction of pain, not stoning, nor the termination of life. Thus, using it as proof is invalid.

We say to those who say that the verses of the Quran do not refer to stoning: Who told you that the Quran encompasses all the rulings of the path of Allah in Islam, and that it detailed everything? The Quran was not only revealed as a Book about the path of life, but it also came as a miracle and a Book about principles of such a path. It is, therefore, left to Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* the task of explaining to people what was revealed to them, not to mention that Prophet Muhammad, as per the statement of the Quran, was authorized to issue laws, which is a privilege granted to the seal of the Prophets and Messengers. The evidence is that Allah *Glorified is He* says about the essence of the Quran that includes the principles of the path of Islam: 'And whatever the Prophet (Muhammad) has given you, take; and what he has forbidden you, refrain from.' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

Prophet Muhammad has a role with the Quran, otherwise the one who claims that the Quran includes all the rulings of the religion of Allah should tell me from where he learnt the detailed ruling regarding praying five times a day? In what verse is it mentioned the Dawn Prayer consists of two rak'as? And from where did he learn that the Noon and Afternoon Prayer are each four rak'as, while the Sunset Prayer consists of only three *rak'as,* and the night one is four? From where did he acquire this knowledge? Nothing of this sort exists. What is the meaning of that? The meaning is that the Quran was revealed as a miraculous Book, and it includes a methodology that addresses its fundamentals which gave Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the right to legislate; his legislation is binding and authorized by the Quran. For this reason, if an adamant disputer asks you about a specific ruling and says: Show me the basis for deducing this ruling from the Quran, and then you looked in the Book of Allah but did not find it, tell him that the evidence of the ruling in the Quran is the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And whatever the Messenger (Muhammad) has given you, take; and what he has forbidden you, refrain from.'

Based on this, any ruling that you come across but failed to locate its basis in the Book of Allah, yet you are asked to provide it, then say: 'And whatever the Prophet (Muhammad) has given you, take; and what he has forbidden you, refrain from.' This methodology is simply an array of commands and proscriptions. Obviously, obedience to it requires following commands and avoiding proscriptions. Every religion or path of life consists of an array of commands and proscriptions; you have to follow the command and avoid the proscription. If you leaf through the Quran, you will find that commands and proscriptions are tied to the verses that address the obedience required of the one who believes in the path of Allah and who professes that there is no God worthy of worship but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, if you read the Quran you will find—as we have said before—that the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says about obedience: 'Say: 'Obey Allah and the Messenger.' (*Al-'Imran:* 32)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has not repeated the command related to obedience, but rather, the person obeying is repeated. But whom should we obey? We should obey Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In another instance, He repeats the command of obedience: 'Hence, obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad).' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) In a third instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Obey the Prophet so that you may receive mercy.' (*an-Nur:* 56) In a fourth instance He *Glorified is He* says: 'Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority.' (*an-Nisa':* 59) Here, Allah has included 'people of authority' for the first time. In one instance, He commands us to be obedient, and then He repeats the recipient of this obedience. In another instance, He repeats the command and also repeats the recipient of obedience. In the third instance, He says: '…and obey the Messenger.' So, if Allah *Glorified is He* says to you: 'obey Allah and the Messenger,' then know that the matter in question involves a ruling by Allah and His Messenger, Muhammad *peace be upon him* which makes obedience a must. In addition, if Allah's command is general, whereas the Prophet's command is detailed, as is the case with prayers, *zakat* and pilgrimage, then you have to obey Allah and obey Prophet Muhammad.

In case the matter in question lacks a ruling by Allah, but rather came as an implicit authorization when Allah say: 'And whatever the Messenger (Muhammad) has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from,' then obey Prophet Muhammad in such a matter. Moreover, in another verse, Allah says: 'He who obeys the Messenger (Muhammad) has obeyed

Allah.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 80) Why? That is because Prophet Muhammad acted in accordance with the authorization granted to him by Allah; the True Lord says: ‘And whatever the Messenger (Muhammad) has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from.’

We are left with the obedience to ‘those in authority,’ that was mentioned when He says: ‘Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger (Muhammad) and those in authority.’ This means that obeying ‘that in authority’ is part of obeying Allah and Prophet Muhammad. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has not singled out ‘those in authority’ with independent obedience, rather, as a part of ‘obey Allah and obey the Messenger.’ He did not say ‘obey that in authority’; instead, He mentions that in authority only as a part of obeying Allah and His Prophet, Muhammad. This shows the precision of the style of the Quran.

We must ponder well over the words of the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted*: ‘And whatever the Messenger (Muhammad) has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrained from’ We have already said that obedience is submitting to Allah’s commands and avoiding His proscriptions. Similarly, we find two clauses in this verse ‘he has given you’ and ‘he has forbidden you.’ ‘He has given you’ has been used instead of ‘he commands you’; and the act prohibition is present in ‘forbidden.’ But why has Allah not said: ‘Accept whatever Prophet Muhammad commands you to do and refrain from what he prohibited you to do?’ Further, why did He not briefly say: ‘Accept whatever Prophet Muhammad gives you?’ The reason is that if the act of giving a command is undertaken by Prophet Muhammad, it assumes the form of either an utterance or an action. But would the proscribed thing be an actual deed that Prophet Muhammad does? No, it is impossible that this would be the case.

Prohibition comes exclusively in the form of proscription of an action, whereas a command is expressed by giving it and it can be in the form of both an action and an utterance. For instance, when He says to you to not drink wine, there in no way that Prophet Muhammad would do such an act in order to learn to avoid it. Prophet Muhammad has certainly never drunken wine or any other intoxicant. The command is related to the Prophet’s utterance or action, whereas a prohibition is only conveyed verbally. Is it even possible that someone would assume otherwise? Indeed, it is not.

Then, we turn to another round in response to the *khawarij*. Prophet Muhammad was sent to convey is the message so as to teach us the ruling in order that we act accordingly. Thus, if a ruling is stated in the text—meaning in the Quran,—the action of Prophet Muhammad explains it, and when Prophet Muhammad does it, would there be any room left to argue about the meaning of the text yet? No, it would have been concluded. Thus, action is the best reflection of the textual proof it promotes as far as command is concerned because, without an action, the textual proof will be open to interpretation. But when Prophet Muhammad follows the textual statement with his action, the ruling becomes binding because the one who undertook the action is a lawgiver.

Did Prophet Muhammad stone or did he not? Prophet Muhammad did stone, and his action proves the text. Action is not a verbal or textual statement subject to interpretation and construing. Prophet Muhammad stoned Ma'iz and Al-Ghamidyyah. He also stoned a Jewish man and a Jewish woman, even though they were protected by their marriage and freedom. Hence, the action of Prophet Muhammad is the fundamental origin of the ruling. The evidence of the *khawarij* does not suffice as the basis to support the conclusion they reached. Thus, what is left is the action of the legislator, Prophet Muhammad, who is authorized by Allah to legislate through his sayings and actions or even through the mere tacit approval of an action.

Now we will investigate the issue rationally. If you want to claim that the only bound penalty for committing adultery is whipping, would you hold those who are married and those who are not as being equal? The married one has honour, a husband, familial ancestors and descendants. Would you equate this one with the one who has not been married? This is rationally unacceptable. The ruling of stoning actually exists and its source is Prophet Muhammad. The evidence that *al-khawarij* adduce is indeed probable at best, and if the evidence is probable, it cannot serve as a premise for logical deduction.

'And after they have been taken in wedlock, if they commit illegal sexual intercourse, their punishment is half the punishment assigned for free (unmarried) women. This is for him among you who is afraid of harming his religion or his body.'

What is intended by ‘this’? It refers to the permission to marry slave women and girls granted to those who were incapable of marrying free women. What does *‘al-‘anat* (translated as ‘harmed in his religion or in his body’) mean? It means toil and exhaustion, the wearing out of nerves and the corruption of ethics and values because when a man’s desires are spurred, he may either retain chastity or become morally loose. If he is morally loose, he has become corrupted. But what would happen if he retains his chastity? He may suffer from a psychological and nervous breakdown. This is why Allah allowed him to marry a slave woman if he could not afford to marry a free one.

In view of this elaboration, the meaning of the verse would be that the one who does not fear ‘the harm’ does not necessarily have to marry a slave woman.(1) This is not a discouragement to marry slave women; it involves respect for her because if she got married, and then bore a child from the one whom she married, her child would also become a slave. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to abolish slavery. Allah *Glorified is He* explains to the person interested in getting married to a slave woman: leave her to her master; if he likes her and had sexual intercourse with her, and later she bore his child, both she and her child will become free.

The True Lord wants to abolish slavery. He *Glorified is He* then say: ‘But it is better for you that you practice self-restraint.’ This instructs patience and endurance, not resorting to marry slave women. Stay in chastity and purity, away from committing sin; this is better for you than marrying a slave woman. Therefore, marrying free women is indeed better.

The True Lord then appends the verse: ‘And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’ This means that He is much forgiving of what you have committed and the sins you perpetrated but repented from. He is also Merciful to you, as He does not haste to punish you, out of pity for you and love for your returning to Him.

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(1) Some jurists stipulate the presence of certain conditions for someone to marry a slave woman: first, the one marrying a slave woman must have found no free woman to marry; second: the slave woman he chose to marry must be a Muslim. Further, he must be in a state where he fears falling prey to sin.

يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَيَهْدِيَكُمْ سُنَنَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن
قَبْلِكُمْ وَيَتُوبَ عَلَيْكُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

He wishes to make His laws clear to you and
guide you to the righteous ways of those who
went before you. He wishes to turn towards you
in mercy – He is All Knowing, all wise [26]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 26)

What does He ‘make clear unto us’? Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear and explains to us the laws governing the steadiness and organization of life. We have said that the condemnation of any act is not possible except with an explicit text, and there is no penalty unless the act penalized is condemned. Before Allah punishes you for a matter, He tells you that it is a crime and He explicitly states it; He does not come to tell you that you did something, and here is the punishment, since you may say: ‘I have done this before and I did not know it was prohibited and condemned, and that I deserve to be punished for it.’ You cannot be punished unless you have committed an act that is condemned; thus you cannot be condemned except based on explicit text in which Allah condemns the act you committed. Allah wants to enlighten you about what is best for rectifying the course of your life. Allah is indeed more concerned with you than you are with yourself because Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created you, and He knows those whom He created. Allah *Glorified is He* alone enacts what is best for His creation; hence, the idea that He creates you and then leaves you to be the lawgiver is a transgression because Allah *Glorified is He* enacts laws upon whom He best knows—and to Allah pertains the highest example. We have said previously: the engineer who manufactures a TV is the one who sets the rules for its maintenance since he is the one who designed the machine, and he is the one who is best qualified to set its maintenance rules. ‘This key is for such a function; that button is for adjusting the volume, and that other one is for the image,’ the engineer would say.

The One who created man is the one who ordains the law that is best for his preservation and well-being, and that is manifested in the ‘do’s and don’ts’ that He reveals. Allah *Glorified is He* left out a number of matters about which He did not reveal any ‘do’s and don’ts.’ Those are considered permissible, so you may do or not do them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And to guide you onto the [righteous] ways of life of those who preceded you.’ The ‘righteous ways’ in this context is the *Sunnah* governing the course of life. The True Lord says: ‘[This is] the established way of Allah with those who passed on before; and you will not find in the way of Allah any change.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 62)

There were messengers who preceded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We have also learnt about what happened to those who obeyed the Messengers sent to them and what happened to those who disbelieved and repudiated the Messengers sent to them. The True Lord says about them: ‘So each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the (awful) Cry [from the sky], and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned. And Allah would not have wronged them, but it was they who were wronging themselves.’ (*al-Ankabut*: 40)

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to clear to us the paths which the preceding nations pursued. These paths refer to the methods that they used to rule with, and how it turned out for the people of truth as well as the people of falsehood. Therefore, this is not a baseless ordinance; rather, there are a lot of precedents that support its verity and document it. Allah *Glorified is He* explains, clarifies and forgives. ‘For Allah is All Knowing, Wise,’ because He is a Wise Creator Who puts things in their rightful place. Wisdom is the rightful disposition of matters, which Allah *Glorified is He* does based on His knowledge. Knowledge, in a general sense, implies vastness of knowledge. Wisdom is the placement of anything included in this knowledge in its rightful place. The next verse says:

وَٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَن يَتُوبَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَيُرِيدُ ٱلَّذِينَ
يَتَّبِعُونَ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ أَن تَمِيلُواْ مَيۡلًا عَظِيمٗا (٢٧)

He wishes to turn towards you, but those who
follow their lusts want you to go far astray [27]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 27)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the previous verse: ‘ Allah wants to make [all this] clear unto you’ followed by and to guide you,’ and afterwards accept your repentance.’ In the verse we are currently discussing, Allah says: ‘and Allah wishes to accept your repentance.’ Why does He initially say ‘accept your repentance’, and then follow it with wishes to accept your repentance’? In this respect, we say that repentance had already been decreed lawful by Allah initially; otherwise, how would you repent form a sin and ask Allah to forgive you had He not already decreed repentance as lawful? Would this repentance be correct? Allah *Glorified is He* first decrees repentance as lawful. After that, you may repent in the light of what He decreed, and He may then accept that repentance. So far, we have three stages: 1) The decreeing of repentance as lawful by Allah as a sign of His mercy for us; 2) The actual repentance of the slave; 3) Allah *Glorified is He* accepts the repentance out of His mercy. In short, the repentance of the slave is between two repentances originating from Allah: the decreed repentance and the accepted repentance. And Allah wishes to accept your repentance. But would Allah *Glorified is He* decree repentance as lawful and then refuse to accept it? No, since He has decreed repentance and taught you how to repent, this means that He has opened the door to repentance and forgiveness for you, which is a part of the Mercy of the All Knowing and Wise for His creation. Moreover, when the True Lord created man, He privileged him over other species with the power of free will. Man can always choose to either do a certain action or refrain from it. Further, he made all his faculties flexible to comply with both commands and prohibition. The eye can see one of the signs of Allah in the Universe, and learn from it, just as it can also look at what Allah has forbidden. The same can be applied to the tongue; it can be used for cursing as much as it can be used for remembering Allah and saying: ‘I profess that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah,’ besides all other kinds of remembrance of Allah. The hand can be used for beating as much as it can be extended in aid of someone who stumbled and fell on the street.

This is the meaning of choice in one’s statements, action and limbs. Free will is an absolute power that is directed by the will of the one who chooses. If you consider the hand, you will find that if you want to raise it, you do not need to know anything about the muscles to make such movement. What does the one who raises his hands do? And what are the muscles that he uses in the process of raising his hands? You may see this, for instance, in robots, levers or cranes that lift heavy weights. Just consider how many operations are performed for these machines to operate? You do not know anything about this matter, but if you want to move your hands, you are capable of doing so, and your hands obey your will. By contrast, when an engineer desires to move a robot, he instructs it through certain calculations to do so, but the normal human being can move his hands, legs or eyes as soon as he wills to do so.

When the True Lord deprives man of his power —Allah forbid—He causes him to be paralyzed. If this paralyzed person wants to do something, his hands will not move, and he will not know what defect caused such malfunction until he goes to a physician to check his nervous system. Then he will know why his nerves did not execute the orders they received; it is a long process. Accordingly, when a man wants to move, he just directs the power and faculties that were originally created by Allah. In actuality, he is incapable of doing anything. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* rewards and forgives one for being obedient only inasmuch as he employs his faculties to do good things. When you hear that all of us—humans—are helpless, know that this statement is correct because no one knows how to do anything; one just wills. Therefore, your task is to voluntarily channel your energy to behave and act in accordance with Allah's enactments. Hence, the meaning of free will is to be able to obey the command just as you are able to do its opposite.

When the True Lord clarifies and reveals the path, you should follow it. He tells you to channel your energy to do is the right, not the wrong. This means that you are capable of doing both. Therefore, if you do what lies outside the scope of the path of Allah as to whether or not you should 'do' or 'don't' do in a way that is not corruptive or damaging to the cosmic order and to your life, then know that what you have done is lawful and admissible.

When the True Lord has decreed repentance, He has explained that if someone wills a particular act, but directs his power to do the opposite; his desire and craving may overwhelm him which leads him to do something evil in a moment of weakness. For this reason, repentance has been decreed and ordained. Why? The reason is that if we were to expel someone out of the obedience realm for one evil act he did, all his actions and deeds would be evil afterwards. This is the one that we described as the one who is lost or went astray. The True Lord, however, has enacted that if you commit a sin, do not despair as He will forgive you and absolve your sin.

Inasmuch as Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed repentance, He spared the society the evils of the one who first committed sins. Indeed, if repentance did not exist, the number of sins would proliferate. The opposite of the saying of the True Lord: ‘And Allah wishes to accept your repentance,’ and his assertion that he may purify one of the sins he committed through repentance are the people who follow their lusts and cravings, and want you to commit new sins. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘but those who follow their lusts wish that you (believers) should deviate.’ ‘Deviate’ in this context means committing sins, whatever they may be. By doing this, you drift away because drifting means deviating from the righteous path delineated by the All-Wise.

But who has created this righteous path? It is the All-Wise. If a man deviates once, our Lord will direct him back to the righteous path and tell him: ‘I have forgiven you.’ Allah *Glorified is He* does so to protect the world from that person’s evil. But those who follow their lusts not only want you to deviate once; they want you to deviate to extremes. Why? The reason is—as we have said before—that even if man lies, he would respect the honest person; and if he is a traitor, he would respect the loyal. To prove it, if a traitor had something he is worried about, he would choose an honest person to entrust it with. Honesty, truth, and faithfulness along with all other values are ingrained in us and recognized by our natural inclination. If a man were not able to compel himself to follow the righteous values, but then finds someone else capable of doing so, he would be quite frustrated. What would comfort him? He cannot right his wrongs, and nor is he able to rectify himself. For this reason, he tries to make the righteous person a deviant like himself. Thus, if both, the righteous and the deviant became friends, the latter would be ashamed of himself for his deviance and would try to make his righteous friend deviant as well so that he would not feel inferior to him. He would not even want him to deviate from the righteous path in the same way as he did. He would want him to be even more deviant so that he would be better than him. Thus, even the deviants and the corrupt recognize values. Indeed, remember well the wise saying we read in the chapter *Yusuf*: ‘And there entered the prison with him two young men. One of them said, ‘Indeed, I have seen myself [in a dream] pressing wine.' The other said, 'Indeed, I have seen myself carrying upon my head [some] bread, from which the birds were eating. Inform us of its interpretation; indeed, we see you to be of those who do the good.'' (*al-Hajj:* 36)

They were in prison with Yusuf (Joseph). Each had his own reason for being in prison. They were in prison because they committed a crime, but the reason underlying Yusuf's presence in prison is that he was innocent. The innocent only thinks about Allah. Unlike those who have deviated from the righteous path, they saw that he was in a good condition; the evidence is that they were concerned about something related to them, viz. that each of them saw a dream.

That is why they went to the one whom they thought was a good person, despite being in prison with them. They admired him given that they said to him: 'We see you to be of those who do the good.' If someone says such statement, it implies that he has the ability to distinguish values. They measured Yusuf's action against that scale of values they used to assess; how would they otherwise make a judgment? Therefore, they went directly to Yusuf when it was something about their own selves.

Another example is of a thief who keeps stealing and never quits until something happens that requires him to travel to an unsafe place. In that case, the thief would look for an honest person to spend the night with; he would not go a thief like himself. Values are values. When the companions of Yusuf said: 'We see you to be of those who do the good,' Yusuf took advantage of this matter as he noted their confidence in him. So he has not immediately interpreted their dreams; rather, he called them to believe in Allah. He said: 'O [my] two companions of prison, are Different Gods better or Allah, the One, the Prevailing?' (*Yusuf:* 39) He diverted their attention from their story to his. As long as they wanted to take advantage of the fact that he appeared to be a good man, and knew how to interpret dreams well; why would he not take advantage of their need and preach to them the religion of Allah? It is as if he were telling them: 'You came to me because you say that I am a good person. You did not see all that I have, which Allah has given me from His grace and bounty.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* says that Yusuf said: 'That is from what my Lord has taught me.' (*Yusuf:* 37) This means that the honest Yusuf has a lot of knowledge, and that he acknowledges Allah's grace and endowment as he asserts that the knowledge was not from him.’ That is from what my Lord has taught me.’ Afterwards, Yusuf called them to worship Allah so that they can invoke Him to save them and redeem them instead of the several deities that they used to worship because, in fact, they can neither harm them nor benefit them: ‘Are separate lords better or One Lord (Allah), the One, the Prevailing?’

Values do not change and Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to forgive the sins of all, but those who follow their lusts want you to deviate from the righteous path so that you would not be any better than them in a way that would make them feel contempt and despise themselves even more. They want you to be more deviant than them because they want to be distinguished as much as you want to be; they say to themselves: ‘if we are evil, there are others who are worse than us.’ Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ أَن يُخَفِّفَ عَنكُمۡۚ وَخُلِقَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ ضَعِيفٗا ﴿٢٨﴾

God wishes to lighten your burden; man was created weak [28] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 28)

After Allah *Glorified is He* has said: Allah wants to clear unto you’ to direct our attention, He follows it with: And wishes to accept your repentance’ to forgive us; He now says: Allah wants to lighten your burdens to make things easier for us. These are three important matters. Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘In the chapter of *an-Nisa’*, there are eight verses addressing the followers of Muhammad which are better than whatever upon which the sun rises and sets.’

The first:

‘Allah wants to make clear to you [the lawful from the unlawful] and guide you to the [good] practices of those before you and to accept your repentance. And Allah is Knowing and Wise.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 26)

The second:

‘ Allah wants to accept your repentance, but those who follow their lusts, wish that you (believers) should deviate tremendously away from the Right Path.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 27)

The third:

‘ Allah wants to lighten your burdens: ‘for man has been created weak.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 28)

The fourth:

‘If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall remit from you your (small) sins, and admit you to a Noble Entrance (i.e. paradise).’ (*an-Nisa’:* 31)

The fifth:

‘Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. And he who associates others with Allah has certainly fabricated a tremendous sin.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 48)

The sixth:

‘And whoever does evil or wrongs himself but afterwards seeks Allah's Forgiveness, he will find Allah Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 110)

The seventh:

‘Surely! Allah wrongs not even of the weight of an atom (or a small ant), but if there is any good (done), He doubles it, and gives from Him a great reward.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 40)

The eighth:

‘Why should Allah punish you if you have thanked (Him) and have believed in Him? And Allah is Ever All-Appreciative (of good), All Knowing.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 147)

These are the eight verses that no other nation has been given their like except the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Among them is the saying of the True Lord: Allah wants to lighten your burdens: ‘for man has been created weak.’ But what is that weakness? Weakness is his proneness to be deviated by allurements and losing the capacity to conjure up Allah’s reward for obedience and His punishment for sinning because the one whose self is directed by lust often disregards the idea of punishment. For instance, if a thief bore in mind that his hand would be chopped off if he stole, he would be reluctant to steal. But he may try to choose a safe way for himself and think: ‘I will steal, deceive people, and then do this and that in order to escape.’

Man is weak inasmuch as Allah has given him the freedom to choose. He is prone to be swayed by his transient desires. However, if man examines all his desires in order to identify the most exalted among them, he will realize that no desire is more worthy of his care and attention than his desire to deserve Allah's contentment and meeting Him in the Hereafter.

The True Lord says: Allah wants to lighten your burdens: for man has been created weak.' We notice that Allah lightened the burdens of the believers in proportion to their human weakness. As we explained above, human weakness is an outcome of freedom of choice which is conferred upon the human to choose to follow or to not follow Allah's obligations. The One Who made him weak also gave him freedom of choice so that he may obey or disobey. Man always needs some kind of motivation or enticement to fulfil any obligation. In fact, the temptations of this life are in the present, whereas those of the hereafter are in the future, but man always gives the transient present priority over the eternally abiding future. Afterwards the True Lord says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَأْكُلُوٓا۟ أَمْوَٰلَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِٱلْبَـٰطِلِ إِلَّآ أَن تَكُونَ
تِجَـٰرَةً عَن تَرَاضٍ مِّنكُمْ ۚ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا (٢٩)

You who believe, do not wrongfully consume each other's wealth but trade by mutual consent. Do not kill each other, for God is merciful to you [29] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 29)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to invite His creatures to believe in Him, He directs their attention to the universe and the phenomena He has created so that they may be assured that these phenomena could not have been produced except through the will of the All-Capable, All Knowing and All-Wise Allah. If they voluntarily choose to believe in Him, they will willingly receive His assignments as they are presented in the array of commands and proscription He has revealed to them. Thus, when Allah imposes His obligations, He always preludes it by reminding them that they have committed themselves to accept their assignments, and that Allah did not force them to do so; rather, they have voluntarily chosen to believe in Allah. As long as they have voluntarily chosen to embrace faith, they must submit to every ruling Allah imposes on them. In other words, they must submit to all the do’s and do not’s that He ordains. In this respect, none of them should wonder why they should do something and why they should not. It is enough to say: ‘I have believed in Him as He is Allah who is All-Capable and All-Wise.’ Allah *Glorified is He* is entitled to command and forbid. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* always prefixes the verses that involve His assignments with ‘O you who have believed.’ This explicitly shows that Allah does not ordain an obligation for everyone, but rather, for those who believed in Him. It is not unjust for Allah to decree an array of obligations on the one who believes in Him simply because they have voluntarily believed in Him.

But if you command someone to do one of Allah's obligations, like praying or refraining from a prohibition, he might tell you: ‘There is no coercion in religion.’ (*al-Baqara:* 256) If this ever happens, you have to respond by saying that he did not understand the words of the True Lord properly. In principle, belief in Allah is hinged on free choice, not on compulsion. But once you voluntarily believe in Allah, you are bound to follow to Allah’s Commands and avoid His Proscriptions. The verse, ‘O you who believed,’ provides us with circumstances that demand obedience to Allah’s obligations, which is belief in Allah as the All-Capable and All-Wise God. Once you believe as such you have to submit to all the commands and proscriptions of Allah *Glorified is He*. But if you pause and reject any command or proscription, you should revisit your faith in Allah.

Accordingly, Allah says, ‘There is no coercion in religion,’ which means that you are free to have faith in Allah or not. But if you do, beware not to violate a ruling from Allah in Whom you have believed. If you do so, you will be committing sins.

The preceding rulings assigned to those who have believed are concerned with the principles of preserving the believers' honour and constituting the family based on a pure system so that reproduction occurs in a sound manner. The verses also speak about the women whom you are forbidden to marry as well as those whom you are allowed to marry. Here Allah *Glorified is He* talks about money which is the engine of life. Wealth and possessions are generally, as we know, the fruit of one’s toiling and labour. Everything that is exchanged and used as sustenance is considered to be wealth and possessions; wealth is divided into different kinds: wealth that provides a direct benefit –like owning food, drink and/or clothes; and wealth that provides an indirect benefit like money or currency, of which one cannot avail himself directly; rather, one may benefit and avail himself of it to obtain something that he can directly use, and from which he can procure benefit.

Accordingly, wealth is divided into direct livelihood and indirect livelihood. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to protect the course of life because by doing so, He encourages those living to flourish. But if we were to assume that He is not protecting the cycle of life, what would happen? The cycle of life would be broken. We notice that in any society wherein the purpose and fruit of human labour is not secured, work diminishes, and everyone works only as much as his capacity allows him. One will even say to himself, why should I work? The fruit of my labour is not guaranteed or secured.' But if he were sure that he would reap the fruit of his labour, such security would entice him to work more. If he worked more, society would benefit more, even though that person did not intend so. It is not necessary that one should intend to benefit the society with his work. No, let everyone work for his own benefit and advantage.

We have given an example in this respect before; someone may have thousands of pounds that he keeps in a safe. He then wonders: Why should I keep it in a safe? Why would I not build another house and rent out two apartments in order to generate some income for me? Did this person bear the good and interest of the society in his mind? No, his mind is concerned with maximizing his own interests. For this reason, let everyone worry about his own interests. This way the entire society will benefit from his work whether he intended it or not. The reason is that when the time comes to lay the foundation of his new house, he will have to pay the workers he hired for the task; similarly, when he goes out to buy the bricks, he will pay for them. He will also pay the engineer and the construction workers' wages. Therefore, strive in pursuit of fulfilling your personal interests in the light of the law of Allah, and society will subsequently benefit from it whether you intended it or not. It is quite surprising that when you want to benefit yourself, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that you will benefit others before any benefit accrues to you from the revenue of the house you are building. Do not think that someone will usurp the livelihood that Allah has prepared for His creatures, and then will not dispense it to His creation. No, the entire society will benefit from it against your will.

Accordingly, preserving the natural course of life and securing the livelihood of everyone who works and labours is conducive to the best interest of society. Then, if we wish to pass any judgments about that person, we have to keep our eyes wide open as to whether he earns such livelihood in a legitimate and lawful way or not. If he earns his livelihood in a lawful manner, we should thank him; but if he earns it in an unlawful manner, we should question him. If one does not follow the lawful way of earning his livelihood, the natural course of life would be disrupted, and this is detrimental to those incapable of working. Why so? The reason is that Allah *Glorified is He* has distributed talents among people. Not everyone possesses the same energetic ambition, and nor everyone has a sound logic whereby he can plan. Only few in society undertake the mission of planning, while the rest of the members of society function as faculties or agents that execute the plans devised by the thinking minds. This structure is analogous to that of the human being in the sense that one’s reason controls the rest of his faculties. Thus, there is often one main thinker who devises a plan from which a lot of people benefit.

We have to honour and secure the work of the one who strives to earn his livelihood because society benefits from it even if he or she does not do so except for the fulfilment of his own interests. However, it is true that the one who is only concerned with his own selfish interests misses the divine reward for his work. It is also true that whoever keeps other people in his mind reaps the fruit of his work coupled with receiving a reward from Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* fully explains issues related to financial issues to protect the progress of the course of life and foster people to work more. This way, the number of people who work hard would increase, and then benefit would accrue to society. He says: ‘O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly.’ In some instances, you may find a command phrased in a plural form. For example, when we say to a group: Get in your cars’, this actually means: 'May every one of you get in his car.' Similarly, when a teacher walks into his class and says to his students: ‘Get your books out’; this means that every student has to get his book out. Thus, the plural form necessarily applies to each person involved. Accordingly, the statement means that none of you should consume his possessions, but what is the way by which we are forbidden to consume our possessions? The True Lord explains: unjustly.’ Each of us is required not to devour his possessions wrongfully. Man eats to avail himself of what he eats. The True Lord *Glorified is He* commands you not to spend a single penny of your money except in something that is lawful and honest. This would be the meaning if the verse addressed each person alone. Thus, no one should devour his own possessions wrongfully; rather, he should direct these possessions towards something beneficial that is not forbidden, and that will not incur any torture in the hereafter.

In contrast, if the intended meaning were that no one should devour the possessions of another, we will clarify it via the following example. Let us assume that a student told his teacher: Sir, my pen was here and now it is lost. The teacher then responds to the students: Do not steal each other’s pens’; does this mean that the teacher said that none of them should steal his own pen or rather, he means that no one should steal the pen of another? Therefore, the alternative meaning of do not consume one another's possessions is that none of you should devour the possessions of his brother wrongfully.

How could it be that Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘…Your wealth…’? And since it is their wealth, then should they not be blameworthy for consuming it? No, the intended meaning is that every one of you should not wrongfully consume his brother’s wealth. So, why does Allah *the Exalted* not say that instead of saying ‘…your wealth…’? The reason is that the commands ordained by Allah *the Exalted* are not usually directed towards two groups: one is created to consume people's wealth and another to have their wealth consumed. Rather, everyone is liable to be a consumer of someone else's wealth and, in another instance, to have his wealth consumed. Thus, if I consume the wealth of someone else, another may consume mine. By doing so, I would set an example to the latter who, following my example, came forth and consumed my wealth. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* says to you: ‘Do not consume one another's wealth wrongfully in order to protect your own wealth.’

Allah *the Exalted* wants the believers' society to be one entity. Thus, He explains that everybody's wealth is for the interest of all people. Therefore, if you preserve other people's wealth, they will preserve yours. But if you encroach on anyone's wealth, they will encroach on yours. Indeed, in so far as you consume the wealth of someone else, you embolden thousands of people to consume your wealth. Similarly, when you refrain from consuming the wealth of others, it is as though you have not consumed your own wealth.

The word 'consume' in this context means 'to take' because 'eating' is the most important process in life due to its recurring characteristic; you may live in one house throughout your entire life and buy new clothes every six months, but you have to eat every day. When this verse was revealed, the Muslims said: 'we should not consume one another's wealth wrongfully.' Thus, they became embarrassed to eat at each other's houses. Afterwards, the matter was referred to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who explained that eating the food served to you by your host was not wrongful consuming. Allah *the Exalted* also revealed a verse stating that there is no blame for someone if he ate in his relatives' or friends' houses. (*an-Nur:* 61) This verse relieved them of any embarrassment about eating at each other's houses; but when the companions heard the part about wrongful consuming, they said: 'We would not take anything from anyone unless we give him something in return.'

What does *al-batil* (wrongfulness) mean? It is to take something to which you are not entitled. An example of that would be usury because it means that someone will have a surplus and another who is in need, does not have a principal. How could the needy be asked to repay the principal with an excess to the one who already has the principal?

How could this be admissible? This is the meaning of taking money by usury. The same ruling applies to taking money by stealing, embezzlement, bribes or cheating in commodities. All of them are different forms of wrongfully consuming the wealth of others. When you decide to wrongfully consume someone else's wealth, it is as if you want to unrightfully enjoy the fruits of someone else's labour and, by doing so, you get used to enjoying it. Consequently, your capacity to work declines and you become dependent on misappropriating the wealth of others—coercively and unrightfully. As a result, your labour in life breaks down and you become a jobless person—who will become a bandit. Further, the one who works and exerts effort will start to live in fear because he is forced to pay tribute to bandits, and his labour, consequently, will diminish. If this happened, how would society look like? In this case, society would suffer from distress and difficulties.

Thus, not wrongfully consuming each other's wealth is a command to all Muslims who are ordered not to practice usury, not to steal, cheat, lie, gamble, embezzle, nor to accept bribes because all of these practices are forms of consuming other people's wealth wrongfully. When you reflect more closely on gambling, you will find that it is quite a weird matter. Gamblers claim to be friends with each other as they wait for one another and eat together, while they are actually sitting together waiting for a chance to seize what is in his friend's pocket. What kind of friendship is this?

Thus, when Allah *the Exalted* commands you not to ever think that the obligations are difficult to be fulfilled because they are onerous, rather, consider not only what the obligations take away by limiting your actions, but also what they give you by limiting others' actions towards you. Allah *the Exalted* tells you that you must not take the wealth of others so that they may not take yours; therefore, you win and society also wins; it is a win-win situation. When a command is ordained to someone to refrain from stealing, it is indeed a command to all people to refrain from stealing. For this reason, whenever you receive any ruling from Allah *the Exalted* do not only consider the way in which the ruling may limit your freedom; rather, consider what the ruling has given you by simultaneously limiting other people's demeanour in their associations with you.

Here is an illustration of the foregoing point. When Allah *the Exalted* strictly forbids you to look at women who are not lawful to you, you must not lay your eyes on the women in custody of others. However, this command is not ordained to you alone; it is a command to millions of people not to lay their eyes on the women who are not in your custody. Thus, when you ponder over the matter, your will realizes that you gain more than what you lose. For this reason, I always say: 'Do not focus on the difficult elements in Allah's obligations or what they take away from you, but always consider what they give you.' If you adopt this viewpoint, you will realize that every obligation that comes from Allah *the Exalted* is a profit to you. Otherwise, if Allah *the Exalted* let your hands loose to encroach upon all people, He would also let loose the hands of all people to encroach upon you and your properties—you would be affected more than them. Thus, it is for your interest to refrain from that.

Allah *the Exalted* excluded trade by mutual consent from wrongful consumption of wealth (*an-Nisa':* 29). This means that you should not consume others' wealth unless there is a mutual benefit; that is, upon the condition that you exchange benefits with each other as compensation for what you take or give. Trade was mentioned because it is the ring that connects all vocations and professions in this life since the merchant is viewed as the middleman between the producer of the commodity and its consumer. Commodities are circulated through production and consumption, and the production may be agricultural, industrial or even in the form of services. Thus, trade encompasses all of them.

The phrase 'based on mutual agreement' means that the consent of the person is a condition for the determination of what is given as a compensation for the exchanged benefit. Hence, what is appropriated by way of taking advantage of the other party's bashfulness is proscribed and forbidden. For this reason, I say that everyone needs to reconsider and check his faith to see whether or not he has been fair throughout his life in the compensations he has given or taken in money, trade and exchanges, and whether or not they were equal and proportional. Thus, if any of them transpired to be incommensurate with the benefit he had elicited, he has to ponder over the matter so that he may give everyone, who has a right, his due right so as not to slip into the realm that was defined by the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'I am just an ordinary man like you, but you resort to me to arbitrate on your disputes. I may be swayed by the arguments and evidence furnished to me by some of you based on what I hear. So let whoever of you whom I have given a right to which another Muslim is entitled to bear in mind that what he has taken is but a piece of fire; he may thus take it or leave it.'(1)

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(1) *Related by Malik in (Al-Muwata'), Ahmad in his (Musnad) and Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasa'i and ibn Majah based on a relation by Umm Salama*

Allah *the Exalted* then says: '…and do not destroy one another….' (*an-Nisa':* 29) Here again, a plural is predicated of another plural. He means that you are forbidden to kill your own selves. This is what the one who commits suicide does. Only the one who has found himself enmeshed in a situation from which he does not have means whereby to disentangle and salvage himself, so he commits suicide. We say to this person: 'you have looked at yourself merely as a human being in isolation from a Higher Creator.' But the believer never isolates himself from his Creator; thus, when he is struck by a calamity beyond his capacity, he has to think, 'Am I alone in this universe? No, I have a Lord and, as long as I have a Lord, I have to remember that even if I am not capable, Allah *the Exalted* is All-Able to do everything. In this manner, he would banish the idea of committing suicide from his mind because the one who does so could not find means to handle the conditions of his life, thus he ends it.

The value of faith is that once you find yourself entangled in a harsh condition and have no means to resolve it, you immediately say: 'Allah *the Exalted* will not let me down and will provide for my livelihood from sources that never even occurred to my mind. He will also open for me doors that I might have never considered.' In this vein, we have previously given an example to make the meaning more accessible. Thus, we said: 'assume that someone walks on a road and has only one pound in his pocket; he then loses this one pound while having naught else in his house. He gets depressed about losing that one pound. But the one who loses a pound yet he has other five pounds at home, will be less depressed and his calamity would be less distressing. That is why the one who does not have the means to handle his life, has to take it easy and never despair. Why should he kill himself? Allah *the Exalted* says in a Divine Hadith: 'My servant has himself forestalled Me; I have forbidden him Paradise.' (1)

Are you the one who bestowed life upon yourself? No. For this reason, the One Who bestowed life is the only One Who is entitled to take it back. Thus, whoever commits suicide is not admitted to Heaven because he did not remember that Allah existed. Let us remember the stance of the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when they made their exodus out of Egypt and were pursued by the people of the Pharaoh; what did the people of Musa (Moses) say? They said that they would definitely be caught by the people of Pharaoh. (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) This was true since the sea was ahead of them and the army of the Pharaoh was behind them. They said so based on the means available to them and their human conception. But what did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* say? 'By no means' is a negation. But how could Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* say: 'By no means'? Also, what are the things that will support him? He did not say it because of his physical humanity. Rather, he, depending on his firm belief in Allah, strongly declared that Allah would support him and guide him. (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62)

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in (Al-Jana'iz)*

Almighty Allah orders us not to kill ourselves. (*an-Nisa':* 29) This means that none of us should kill ourselves due to losing the means to find a solution for our sufferings. This implies that you made yourself out of the Mercy of your Lord, yet if you still believe in your Creator, your distress will be relieved, and in case of facing such situations, you will say 'indeed the Almighty Allah is with me.'

Faith gives you strength and power to confront such difficulties. The saying of Allah '…and do not kill yourselves' (or one another) may refer to another meaning which is to prevent being killed by not throwing yourself into destruction. Since Muslims are only a unit of faith, the Lawgiver issued that 'if you kill someone, you will be killed. So, do not lead your soul to death,' since the legal retribution is admitted. His saying: '…and do not kill yourselves (or one another) ' signifies that you should not do what may lead you to death.

Thus, Allah *the Exalted* let the people endear themselves to their own souls and not only that of the others; rather, He did not say: 'do not kill in order not to be killed' because He previously told us about the existence of retaliation. (*al-Baqara:* 179) When the murderer knows that he will be killed, he will keep himself away from doing so.

We also notice that Allah *the Exalted* orders us to greet one another upon entering houses. (*an-Nur:* 61) Will I greet myself or the people who are in the house upon my entry? It is already known that a man greets people when he says: 'peace be upon you.' This means peace is granted to them, and then they will reply: 'peace be upon you,' as if you have greeted yourself. It is clear now that Allah *the Exalted* has regarded the believers as one unit, which means whatsoever happens to a single part will affect the whole.

Therefore, His saying, ‘do not kill yourselves or one another’ means that you should not kill yourselves. Thus, the previous verse may refer to some denotations; firstly, do not lead yourself to commit suicide; secondly, do not throw yourself into destruction by your own free will; thirdly, do not lead yourself to death due to legal retribution; and fourthly, do not kill others since you are one unit of faith; all of you bear the same command; not only one is commanded. Hence, no one is allowed to kill the other. Then, Allah *the Exalted* concludes the verse by telling us that He is Ever-Merciful to us; it is by virtue of His Ultimate Mercy that we are ordered not to kill one another.

وَمَن يَفۡعَلۡ ذَٰلِكَ عُدۡوَٰنٗا وَظُلۡمٗا فَسَوۡفَ نُصۡلِيهِ نَارٗاۚ
وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرًا ٣٠

If any of you does these things, out of hostility and injustice, We shall make him suffer Fire: that is easy for God [30] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 30)

The word *dhalik* (this) is an Arabic demonstrative pronoun translated as ‘this.’ In the singular form, it means that the discourse is addressed from the Almighty Allah to His Messenger Muhammad, and the believers are addressed implicitly. In another instance, He *the Almighty* says *dhalikum* (plural form); it indicates that His discourse is directed towards us. (*al-Baqara:* 232) The word *dhalika* (that) refers to the preceding verse that prohibits killing oneself or others also refers to the verse dealing with devouring wealth wrongfully. Some other scholars said that this demonstrative pronoun may even refer to the previous verses of the Quran, beginning from the verse that prohibits the son from marrying the women previously married by his father. (*an-Nisa’:* 22) While others said that it refers to all commands and proscriptions mentioned from the beginning of the chapter until this verse. All these opinions are correct.

Allah *the Almighty* then speaks about those who do injustice to themselves (*an-Nisa’:* 30). The Arabic word *‘udwan* (transgression) means transcending the limits; this may happen either out of oblivion or wrongfulness. The one who transgresses wrongfully will take others’ rights deliberately. But the one who does so obliviously and without being aware should reconsider his attitude; why so? The reason is that the punishment is severe. Allah *the Exalted* says that whoever does that aggressively will be cast into the fire. (*an-Nisa’:* 30) The verb depends on the power of its subject. Thus, when someone says to you: ‘If you do such a thing, my little son will slap you severely’, this will be different from threatening you that a strong youth will do so; why? The reason is that the action derived its strength from the doer himself. Then, who will cause the transgressor to receive the punishment of the hellfire? It is Allah *the Exalted* Who will make him suffer severely in it.

The Almighty Allah says that this is an easy matter to do because His Decree does not require processing; rather, it occurs immediately. We know that every action that requires processing needs time. Some actions may need an hour, and every minute of it is needed to accomplish part of the task. When the task is divided into sixty parts, such an action may be accomplished in sixty minutes. But, if it needs ten days, then we will tell the person who is entitled to undertake it, ‘Cancel your break times and vacations and divide the work on the time left.’ This is what we call processing because it is related to human beings. But the action of Allah *the Exalted* is something different. If Allah *the Exalted* orders something to happen, He would say: ‘be, and it is.’ Thus, every action of Allah is easy for Him because the order gets done by simply saying: ‘be, and it is.’ Allah *the Exalted* says that creating and resurrecting you is like one single soul (*Luqman:* 28). He *the Exalted* explains, ‘I do not create every human being like Adam *peace be upon him* whom I have created, shaped and then I will resurrect. No. All creatures are like a single soul.’

إِن تَجْتَنِبُوا۟ كَبَآئِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ عَنكُمْ
سَيِّـَٔاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُم مُّدْخَلًا كَرِيمًا ٣١

But if you avoid the great sins you have been forbidden, We shall wipe out your minor misdeeds and let you in through the entrance of honour [31] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 31)

This verse is one of the eight verses about which Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said: in this chapter of *an-Nisa’* there are eight verses that are more beneficial to this Islamic *ummah* (nation) than everything in the world.' We have said that the first of these verses is the saying of Allah *the Exalted* that He wants to make it clear for us (*an-Nisa':* 26); He wants to shower us with His mercy; (*an-Nisa':* 27) and He wants to lighten our burdens. (*an-Nisa':* 28) Then, Allah *the Exalted* says that if someone avoided the great sins, He *the Almighty* will wipe out his minor misdeeds. (*an-Nisa':* 31) Avoiding an action does not only mean not to do the action; rather, it means not even approaching any matter that is related to such action. By doing so, the believer would foreclose any possibility succumb to the desire of committing sins or even to imagine it.

These noble verses are considered the best thing for this Islamic *ummah* because they safeguard the human being against foolish choices that might exist in humans when they do not stick to the Path of Allah *the Almighty*. If a man was predetermined or preordained to do an action, he would have been relieved from the burden of choice. The difficulties from which humans are suffering are due to taking pride in the privilege Allah *the Exalted* has bestowed on them apart from all other creatures. This privilege is the mind that Allah bestowed on man to opt for different alternatives, while all other creatures have been content with being subjugated and subservient to do what Allah *the Exalted* has predetermined them to do, without having any choice of their own. We know that the Allah *the Exalted* says that the trust had been offered to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they failed to carry it, then man took it up out of his foolishness. (*al-Ahzab:* 72) Thus, man has wronged himself through the state of hesitation whether to follow his whims or to abide by Allah's Commandments, while other creatures which are subjugated and predetermined, do not have to deal with this issue; each one of these creatures undertakes its function automatically and relieve themselves from the burden of making a foolish choice. Therefore, these verses come to comfort man inasmuch as they assure that, if he makes a foolish choice, then Allah *the Exalted* wants to give him knowledge, forgive his sins and make it easy for him. Allah *the Exalted* also wants to remove man's bad deeds and forgive him in case of avoiding great sins. All of these are reassuring remarks for the human soul so that it would not despair due to the possibility of making a foolish choice. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* explains, 'I am your Creator and I know that you are powerless because you always have the choice between two enticing ways:

the way that Allah *the Exalted* assigns you to follow with the reward He has prepared for the obedient in the Hereafter, and the urgent whims and desires.'

As long as the issues fluctuate between two choices, weakness happens. Thus, Allah *the Most High* explains, 'I regard this situation in which you are because it is a product of your free choice and I am the One Who endowed you with such free choice.' Since Allah *the Exalted* bestowed man—who is the best among His creatures—with choice, he has to submit to his Lord in need and love.

There is a difference between the two cases: when something is predetermined to be subservient and so cannot escape what it has been preordained to do, and then it is actually Allah's Attribute of Omnipotence that works here. Yet, this does not give Allah the character of being beloved because being beloved means that the one who loves has the choice whether to obey or disobey; thus, if one offers obedience, he does so out of love. Therefore, Almighty Allah wants a man to prove his love for Him through his obedience. Despite the fact that everyone has the freedom to obey or to disobey his Lord, he will lean towards the side of obedience due to his love of Allah.

After Allah has finished expounding his obligations concerning matters of honours, possessions, blood issues, which include killing oneself etc., He explains to us, 'Do not ever receive the obligations in a way that may cause you to despair about being unable to do them. I will be pleased enough by you upon avoiding the great sins among the bad deeds you may possibly do.' Thus, the time span between two prayers is atonement for whatever bad deeds you may do in between, and if you pray two consecutive Friday Prayers, the period between them will be atonement for the sins you may commit in between. The same applies for the period stretching between two *Ramadan* months upon the condition that you should not insist on doing the minor bad deeds; why? It is because if you take that into consideration, you should also bear in mind that you may not live long enough to repent to Allah. Accordingly, do not say, 'I will commit the sin and repent later because you cannot guarantee that." It would also be as if you were ridiculing Allah *the Exalted.*

Allah *the Exalted* then states that He wipes out the minor misdeeds if the great ones are avoided. (*an-Nisa':* 31) I have said that the Arabic word *kufr* means (concealment). The meaning of concealment of the minor misdeeds is that Allah *the Exalted* will not punish the sinners for committing them; since concealing the misdeeds means waiving the punishment. Similarly, *al-ihbat* (nullifying) of a reward means making it be in vain. Thus, if someone does something punishable, but avoids great sins, Allah *the Exalted* will efface his misdeeds, that is, He waives the punishment prescribed for them. By contrast, one may do a good deed that Allah *the Exalted* does not accept, so it will amount to nothing. Therefore, *takfeer* (concealment) as I have already said—means waiving a punishment, while *ihbat* of a reward of someone is to bring it to nothing and it becomes worthless…. (*al-Baqara:* 217)

This means that they will receive no reward for doing these good deeds because they did it while being heedless about the One Who gives the reward, that is Allah *the Exalted.* Rather, they were heedful about the created beings, not the Creator. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘You have done these good deeds in vanity so that people may say that you have done this.’

You have done this good deed so that people would acclaim you, and they have indeed done so. They said that you are a great benevolent and charitable person. They said that you built a mosque and read the signboard that you have put on the mosque in the midst of a big celebration. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* will make these good deeds as dust dispersed. (*al-Furqan:* 23) You did such charitable things in order to rejoice in the approval and acclamation of other people and what you desired has happened. For this reason, those who did things for charity and then put marble signboard bearing their names should consider their attitude. If each of them is keen to receive a reward from of Allah, he should remove such signboard or hide it, and thus the problem would end. Allah *the Exalted* likes the one who pays alms to the poor, to the extent that he will be from among the seven kinds of people whom Allah will protect in His shade on the Day when there will be no shade. His Messenger Muhammad described them as, ‘…And a man who has given alms and hid it so that his left hand would not know what his right hand spends.’(1) If you give alms to the poor in charity, why should you reveal and expose the one who accepts such alms?

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, An-Nasa’i and At-Tirmidhi*

The word *ijtinab* (avoiding) means shunning something. That is why some people say: 'so and so avoided me,' which means that when this person met me, he shunned me and turned his back on me. What is intended in His saying, 'if you avoid', is keeping a distance from sins. When Allah *the Exalted* command you to refrain from something and also commands you, in another way, to avoid it, this indicates that avoidance is more eloquent since it means that you should not even be in the same place along with what Allah proscribed. Allah *the Exalted* commands us to shun the filth of idolatrous beliefs and practices and to shun false utterances. (*al-Hajj:* 30) To 'shun' in this context means to keep a distance; why so? The reason is that the sanctuary of Allah is His proscriptions.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'That which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honour, but he who falls into doubtful matters [eventually] falls into that which is unlawful, like the shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Truly every king has a sanctuary, and truly Allah's sanctuary is His prohibitions.'(1)

Allah *the Exalted* also commanded us to refrain from intoxicants, gambling, idolatrous practices and [fortune telling with] arrows. (*al-Ma'ida:* 90) 'Shunning', in this context, means that one should avoid being present in places where such sinful deeds are committed; lest such presence should distract, seduce or occur before him. Therefore, when you are in a place where intoxicants are consumed Allah *the Exalted* commands you to avoid it; that is, do not go to such places because when such intoxicants are present before you and you see people drinking them comfortably and happily, you may drink them yourself. But when you avoid these intoxicants and all the gatherings where they are consumed, you will not fall prey to their traps, nor will you give in to their allurements and seductions. For this reason, we have said, 'Avoidance is more eloquent than mere forbiddance.' There are people who justify drinking intoxicants for themselves upon the pretext that there is no text that explicitly prohibits drinking them. We say to each one of them, 'It suffices that drinking intoxicants is associated with the loathsome evil of idolatrous beliefs and practices.'

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i and Ibn Majah*

Allah *the Exalted* also commands us to shun false gods. (*an-Nahl:* 36) Shunning false gods does not only mean not to worship them, but it also means not to even try to see them. Accordingly, shunning intoxicants does not only mean not to drink them, but also you should not even be present in the place where they are consumed.

Al-kaba'ir (major sins) is the plural form of *kabira* (a major sin). As there is a 'major sin,' its opposite would be a 'minor sin' and 'smaller sin'; so what is lesser than the 'major sin' is not only the 'minor sin' because there is a 'minor sin' and there is what is smaller than the 'minor sin' which is the 'negligible sin.' Allah *the Exalted* states that He wipes out the minor misdeeds if the great ones are avoided. (*an-Nisa':* 31) 'Misdeeds' in this context refer to the minor and even the smaller sins. But this is a matter over which the scholars pondered and lingered. Thus, they have said that the meaning is that inasmuch as people have avoided committing "major sins", we will entice them to do bad deeds since they may do the minor sins. We say, no. Insisting on doing a minor sin is a major sin. For this reason, do not allow yourself to do minor sins; Allah *the Exalted* only forgives what you do spontaneously or out of ignorance. Therefore, He *the Exalted* only accepts repentance from those who committed misdeeds out of ignorance. (*an-Nisa':* 17) That is, He accepts repentance from those who do bad things without prior planning or reckoning. Afterwards, He *the Exalted* stated that He will not accept repentance of those who delay it until death overtakes them. (*an-Nisa':* 18)

Thus, if you insist on committing a minor sin and repeat it, you will turn it into a major sin. But what if we do not manage to avoid great sins and we slip into them? The scholars whom Allah *the Exalted* made kind and merciful to His creatures maintained that no sin is considered a major one if the sinner repents to Allah. Similarly, no sin is considered minor if one persists in committing it. So, if you want to accept the former statement, you should accept the latter as well—you will have to accept both. There will be no major sin if there is repentance; the opposite of this maxim is that there will be no minor sin if there is persistence in sinning.

When the scholars wanted to define the major sin, they said that the great sin is that for which Allah *the Exalted* prescribed a torment in the Hereafter. Similarly, it is the deed for which a punishment, such as a prescribed penalty, has been decreed. Thus, the sins for which no prescribed penalty was decreed are classified under those sins that could be forgiven via avoiding major, minor or even smaller sins.

'Amr ibn 'Ubayd *Allah be pleased with him* was one of the scholars and ascetics of Al-Basra about whom one of the caliphs said, 'All of them pursue a hunt and reward with the exception of 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd *Allah be pleased with him* ', meaning that all scholars go to the caliphs to take gifts and bounties with the exception of 'Amr ibn *'Ubayd Allah be pleased with him*. Hence, people have testified for his integrity and genuineness. That scholar wanted to know what was meant with the 'major sin' and insisted on doing so, not through what the scholars said previously about it. He said, 'I want to know it based on the text of the Quran; anyone who wants to talk to me about what a 'major sin' is should adduce for me a text from the Quran.' When Ibn 'Ubayd Al-Basri *Allah be pleased with him* went to Abu 'Abdullah Ja'far ibn Muhammad As-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* who was, as we know, the most worthy of being asked because he was the scholar of the household of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and also because he researched the treasures of the Quran, extracted from it a lot of secrets and lived amid the divine flux of wisdom. Thus, Ibn 'Ubayd *Allah be pleased with him* said to himself, 'This is the one that I should ask.' Accordingly, after he had greeted him and sat down, he read the saying of Allah *the Exalted* '…As for those who avoid grave sins and foul acts, though they may commit minor sins…' (*an-Najm:* 32) He then lapsed into silence. Abu 'Abdullah Ja'far ibn Muhammad As-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* asked him, 'What has silenced you, Ibn 'Ubayd?' He replied: 'I wanted to know the meaning of "major sins" based on the Book of Allah.' Just consider Abu 'Abdullah's confidence in knowing the treasures of the Quran when he said to him, 'I want to know the meaning of major sins based on the Book of Allah *the Exalted.* Abu 'Abdullah said: 'Indeed! You have come to one of the experts in it' meaning that you have come to someone who knows this definition. He then said: 'the first major sin is "Believing in another God beside Allah *the Exalted"* because He says that He does not grant forgiveness to the one who associates others in worshipping Him. (*al-Ma'ida:* 48) Allah *the Exalted* will also forbid him paradise. (*al-Ma'ida:* 72) He then added, 'Despairing of Allah's mercy, since only the disbelievers are the ones who despair of Allah's Mercy.' (*Yusuf:* 87)

Thus, Abu 'Abdullah Ja'far As-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* brought forth the ruling and adduced its evidence. He also added that one who would ever feel secure from the planning of Allah *the Exalted* because it is only the losing people who would do that. (*al-A'raf:* 99) The fourth great sin is disobeying and mistreating one's parents since Allah *the Exalted,* described the one who commits such a sin as being oppressive and bereft of grace. (*Maryam:* 32) He then added, 'killing a human soul,' as the one who kills another believer will be eternally punished in the Hellfire' (*an-Nisa':* 93).

In addition, those who accuse the chaste women who are unaware and believing women Allah *the Exalted* cursed them and prepared a great punishment for them. As for consuming usury Allah *the Exalted* says: 'But those who take usury rise up on the Day of Resurrection like someone tormented by Satan's touch. (*al-Baqara:* 275) He then added: 'retreating and escaping during battle.' This may happen when Muslims are attacked by their enemies and as they start marching to defend themselves. Allah *the Exalted* prepares severe punishment for those who turn their backs to the enemies during battle. There is also devouring the wealth of the orphan because Allah *the Exalted* stated that the one who devours the orphan's wealth is as if he is devouring fire, and the hellfire will be his abode. (*an-Nisa':* 10) Also, He mentions committing adultery, adding that fornicators will be punished in double on the Day of Resurrection, and they will be in a state of humiliation forever. (*al-Furqan:* 68-69) Further, concealing testimony about something one has witnessed; Allah describes those sin- doers as sinful at heart. (*al-Baqara:* 283) There is also the 'binding oath' which means that someone swears that he did something, while he did not or vice versa; that is, it is not related to something in the future. Those who ignore their pledges in return for little will have no respect in the Hereafter and on the Day of Judgement. Moreover, Allah neither speaks to them, nor will He look at them or purify them. Furthermore, they will have a painful punishment. (*Al-'Imran:* 77) There is also *ghulu* which means to deceive and misappropriate regarding spoils of war. Allah has warned the doers of this sin that they will come with what they had misappropriated on the Day of Resurrection. (*Al-'Imran:* 161) In addition, there is ingesting intoxicants as Allah has coupled it with idolatry. Allah *the Exalted* states that intoxicants, along with other misdeeds, are acts of Satan, so we must avoid such practices in order to achieve success. (*al-Ma'ida:* 90)

Furthermore, there is the major sin of abandoning the prayers, since Allah *the Exalted* clarified that abandoning prayer is a reason for being cast into the hellfire. (*al-Muddaththir:* 42-43) In addition, included under this category of major sins are breaking covenants and severing the relationships with kinsfolk with whom Allah *the Exalted* ordered us to maintain good connections. Allah stated that those who do these things will be 'the losers.' (*al-Baqara:* 47)

Thus, all these are the major sins, based on the explicit statement of the Quran. 'Umar Ibn 'Ubayd resorted to a great scholar who managed to reveal to us the wisdom associated with each great sin. Thus, we should consider the basis of deduction by which the son of Ja'far As-Sadiq responded to his question. He answered him in a very organized and courageous way that allowed him to answer Ibn 'Ubayd immediately: 'yes'; meaning that he had the answer he was seeking. Then, he gives him the answer in an organized manner without much reflection or deliberation. This indicates that the answer had already been fomented and crystallized in his mind since the verses he adduced are not consecutive. Rather, they are picked from here and there (i.e. from different positions in the Quran). This indicates that he lived with the secrets of the Quran. That man grew up in the house of Ja'far As-Sadiq who had set a methodology for the believer so that if anything bad should befall him, he would find its remedy in the Book of Allah *the Almighty*. He indeed discovered that his fears are the factors that blur man's vision in life; that is, if someone fears something, this often implies that this thing is limited and well known.

I may be afraid of a specific thing, but someone may suffer from anxiety and grief even though he does not know the cause underlying these feelings. He may tell you: 'I am anxious and anguished even though I do not know the reason.' He may have depression and not know the cause. Also, there may be someone against whom a number of people are conspiring and maliciously contriving. There may be a third person who likes the worldly life and wants to possess it all. All of these are the distractions of the human self; you may fear something, lament and grieve about something, and feel pity for yourself because of the cunningness and conspiracy being planned against you, or because you desire a worldly matter. Ja'far is the one who said, ‘I am surprised by the one who fears something and never seeks refuge in the Saying of Allah *the Exalted* that He is enough for us as a guardian.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 173)

Consider the method of deducing evidence when Ja'far said, ‘because I have heard Allah *the Exalted* subsequently say: “…and they returned [from the battle] with the Almighty Allah's blessings and bounty, without having been touched by evil….”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 174)

Just consider the accuracy and precision of his style and rhetoric. He said, ‘I have heard Allah,’ and he did not say, ‘I have read.’ It is as if when a man reads the Quran, he had to be sure that Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who speaks. The awe of Allah overwhelms whatever provisional accidents; that is, the one who reads the Quran is reading the words of Allah *the Exalted.* Thus, the awe and greatness of the Ever-Eternal overwhelms whatever accidental events one may be experiencing, no matter how grave and serious they are. Ja'far *Allah be pleased with him* added: ‘I am surprised by the one who grieves and is taken over by sorrow and does not seek refuge in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘there is no God save You, Glory is to glory! Verily, I have done wrong!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 87) Then, he said, ‘I have heard Allah subsequently stated that He answered his prayer and saved him.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 88) Ja'far then added, ‘I am surprised by the one against whom people conspired and contrived and did not seek refuge in the saying Allah *Glorified is He* ‘the one should put his trust in Him.’ (*Ghafir:* 44) He then added: ‘I have heard Allah *the Exalted* subsequently saying “He preserved him from the evil of their scheming…’ (*Ghafir:* 45) He then said, ‘I am also surprised by those who desire worldly gratification and yet do not seek refuge in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘there is no power except in Allah *the Almighty*.’ (*al-Kahf:* 39) Subsequently, he said, ‘I have heard Allah saying, ‘…Although, you see me less than you in wealth and children, it may be that my Lord will give me (something) better than your garden.’ (*al-Kahf:* 40)

These are deductions inspired by faith; the deductions here are similar to the ones there. If you consider the deductions that Ja’far made, you will realize that they cover the man’s desires that tend to trespass their limits because Allah's Obligations limit man’s pursuit of lusts and desires. These verses came forth to limit man's audacity and tendency to trespass limits. They start from transgressing the limits of monotheism and go down to severing one's own kinsfolk. These verses cover all aspects of audacity and tendency to trespass limits. The first of these is manifested in polytheism, since Allah *the Exalted* and says that polytheism is indeed a great injustice. (*Luqman:* 13) ‘Wronging’ and ‘being unjust’, as we know, both mean ‘to give someone a right he does not deserve or is not entitled to’, so by Allah, is it not the greatest injustice to say that Allah *the Exalted* has a partner? It is the most egregious, wrongful deed that one may ever commit against oneself. Do not ever think that you wrong Allah *the Exalted* because our Lord is the Most Sufficient and is in no need of partnership. He says in a Qudsi Hadith(1), ‘I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having an associate. Thus, he who does an action for someone else's sake as well as mine will have that action renounced by me to him whom he associated with me.’(2) When you ascribe partners to Allah, you do wrong to yourself because you would be exhausting yourself in a stupid way. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘the one owned by several partners, is not like the one owned by just one owner.’ (*az-Zumar:* 29) The state of the one who associates partners with Allah is like that of a slave who is simultaneously possessed by ten masters who are not in agreement with each other. Rather, one of them says to him: ‘Go’, while another says: ‘Come’ Consequently, he has exhausted himself. Thus, he wronged himself.

Allah *the Exalted* states that the people are indeed doing injustice to themselves. (*Yunus:* 44) Believing in One God makes you submit to only one destination. There will be no commands from any other party and, accordingly, you will have comforted yourself. This is a matter that is supported by actual evidence for Allah *the Exalted* revealed it in His Quran which is memorized, recited and read by all believers: ‘Indeed there is no deity except Allah.’ (*Ta Ha:* 14) In response to this statement, a believer would say, ‘These are true words’, while a disbeliever— Allah forbid—would say, ‘This is not a true statement.’ But this statement is conclusive, irrespective of the stance one may take. Let us assume that someone came and took over the universe. He then said, ‘There no deity but me’, so if the one from whom he took the universe were also a deity, the question would be: ‘did that deity know that the universe was taken from him or not?’ If he did not know, this would be a catastrophic deficiency on the part of such deity; and if he did know, what made him stay silently still? Thus, the issue is resolved; this is the problem of believing in more than one deity.

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(1) *Authenticated saying of Prophet Muhammad wherein he tells us something* Allah *himself said*

(2) *Related by Muslim and Ibn Majah based through Abu Hurayra*

Hence, believing in the Oneness of Allah comes to relieve and salvage the human being of the bafflement arising from believing in multiple gods. Allah *the Exalted* is the True Lord and He is the One Who is capable of benefiting and harming. Worshipping one God is analogous to being possessed by one owner. But when you worship multiple deities, you would be like a slave who is owned by a number of masters who are in disagreement.

The second worst great sin after associating gods beside Allah is losing hope of Allah's Mercy. *Rawh* (mercy) is an Arabic word derived from *ra'eha* (a breeze). It is as if you are distressed due to the hot weather and then you look around to find an oasis and then, you resort to its shade and its beautiful breeze and take refuge in it. Allah *the Exalted* bestows this comfort to those who do not lose hope in His Mercy. It thus gives him strength and robustness of faith whereby one can handle the different events of life, since life is a constant state of change, and its events are multifarious. Furthermore, the world and the universe follow various laws in so far as its causes and effects are concerned.

Assume that you have exhausted all means available in your attempt to deal with a particular difficulty, what would one, who does not believe in God Who alone can defy and change the laws of causality, do? He will commit suicide as we have already said.

Thus, loss of hope in Allah's Mercy is the thing that renders His Omnipotence which created the laws, equivalent to these laws themselves.

Hence, if one finds no means to handle a great difficulty, he will despair about resolving it. But we say to the believer, ‘Do not despair or lose hope because you believe in an Omnipotent God Who is greater than the laws themselves. Therefore, the one who loses hope in the Mercy of Allah *the Exalted* is like the one who denies and suspends the infinity of His Divine Power over universal laws. Allah *the Exalted* is indeed the Creator of these laws. When man loses hope in the Mercy of Allah, he thus equates Allah *the Exalted* with the infinity of His Power to the laws that He created. Even if the laws of nature refused things to happen, Allah *the Exalted* might cause them to happen.

Next, Ja’far has mentioned disobeying one's parents. Parents constitute the first cell in which we grow. Also, they represent the direct cause of your coming to being. Inasmuch as you disobey and mistreat the direct cause of your coming to being, you also disobey and mistreat the first cause of your being; that is Allah *the Exalted* whom you never saw. Accordingly, respecting your parents and treating them well is incumbent upon you not only because they are the cause of your existence, but also because they raised you when you were young. Thus, you have to obey and treat them well. This prompts and fosters you to return the favour of the one who is responsible for bringing you into being and raising you. When you try to trace the matter to its origin, you should start by raising a question, ‘Who created your father? It was your grandfather. But who created your grandfather?’ Where would you ultimately end up? You will only end at the one who does not have an end; it is Allah *the Exalted* who created Adam.

Ja'far then mentioned, ‘killing a human soul.’ Killing any being means to demolish and destroy its structure. In this respect, it differs from death which results from natural causes. Death means to die when your bodily structure is sound. But if someone receives a blow on the head, he will die as a result of this blow. This is what is meant by the destruction of a structure whether done through the use of stones, bullets or any other means. Let us read the Quran carefully. Allah *the Exalted* states that ‘Muhammad is only a Messenger preceded by many Messengers, so will the Muslims leave Islam if he died or was killed?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144).

Death is the deprivation of life without the destruction of the structure. This is only undertaken by Allah *the Exalted* while killing by destroying the physical structure could be done by anyone. In both cases, the soul only leaves the body upon the will of Allah *the Exalted.* Thus, if someone is killed, it does not mean that the killer has put an end to his life before he was due to die. No; killing is only a means of destruction of the physical structure created by Allah *the Exalted.* Accordingly, even if the killer did not destroy the body of the one killed, the latter would also have died. Therefore, the killer is punished because he undertook the act of killing, while knowing that the soul only dwells in a physical structure of certain characteristics—which requires the brain, heart and other parts of the body to be sound. But when someone is due to die, death occurs even if nobody destroys his physical structure.

We have given an example to make this matter more accessible, and Allah *the Exalted* is above all comparison. We may liken the soul to electricity. You do not know the soul and you have not seen, heard, smelt or tasted it; by which perceptual faculty would you know it? You know that it organizes the life of your entire body. The evidence is that when the soul is taken out of the body, the latter decays. Therefore Allah *the Exalted* made it a piece of self-evidence in the human psyche to demonstrate His Existence—Who cannot be perceived by any sight—though He perceives everything. You may say: ‘We do not see Allah.’ We say: ‘Yes. Allah *the Exalted* orders us to reflect upon our souls.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

Allah *the Exalted* does not want you to only observe and watch the signs in the universe around you. First and foremost, the evidence is all present in you. Where is your soul that runs your body? Where is it? What is its shape? What is its colour? What is its smell? Do you know? No, you do not. Although it dwells within, you do not perceive it, so how do you expect to see Allah *the Exalted* Who created something that you are incapable of seeing? You expect to see the Creator though you are incapable of seeing one of His creatures. It is part of the Greatness of Allah *the Exalted* that He is imperceptible through the senses. Allah *the Exalted* talks about the moment when the soul descends into the body when He formed Adam and breathed into him from His spirit, then He ordered the angels to prostrate. (*Sad:* 72)

The reason is that this creature will be a full human being. Thus, if we liken that soul to electricity—and Allah *the Exalted* is above all comparison—

Have you seen it? You have not. Has anyone else done so? Did those who discovered electricity know what it is? No, they did not. They came to know it through its effects. Thus, when we see a light on, we say, ‘Electricity is back.’ When we see a fan running, we also say the same thing. By contrast, when the motion of such machines starts to wane and abate, people say, ‘The thing has stopped moving.’ But if it stops completely, it is said to have died. But this is not the case with the hand because the hand may not move due to paralysis while the one whose hands are paralyzed is still alive. For this reason, bring a mirror and put it in front of the mouth or nose. If you notice vapour on the mirror, this implies that the person is still alive, and his soul still dwells in him. The same holds true for the light bulb when it is broken: the electric power will not serve its function and cause the light bulb to produce light. The reason is that for electricity to work, the light bulb has to be intact. It must be an empty container devoid of all air and is designed in a way that, if it breaks, the light stops shining.

Thus, when we demolish the body, the soul cannot find the proper vessel wherein it can dwell. The same holds true for the electrical lamp; if it breaks, the electricity would still be in the wires, but no light will be seen. However, when you get a new lamp light re-emerges. It is the same with the soul. It does not dwell in the body except if it has certain characteristics. Hence, killing is the evidence supporting the incapability of the killer because by killing his rival, he implicitly testifies that he was powerless before his rival. It is correct that he was capable of killing him, that he did beat him and put an end to his life; but this is a foolish facade of the application of human capability; in reality, it is impotence and powerlessness.

By killing and destroying one’s life, the perpetrator of the crime makes it clear that he is unable to handle or cope with seeing his rival alive, healthy and successful; that is why, (with heavy grudges filling his heart) he will not rest until he takes the life of his rival. Hence, when the killer kills, he provides enough evidence of his own impotence and incapability. If he had known that his killing of another soul is not evidence of capacity and power, but rather, of his powerlessness and impotence, and also his inability to confront the fact of his rival being alive, except by killing him, he would not have killed the latter.

But Allah, The True Lord *Glorified is He* lays down a system through which the human life is nourished and protected, and consequently safeguarded from wanton killing and destruction so that Allah's plan for man to be His vicegerent on earth would not be hindered or impeded.

We then come to another major sin: slandering married innocent women. We know that preserving and protecting the honour of innocent women is among the key pillars of a sound Muslim society so that the offspring and youth would not suffer from suspicions and disgrace. In any sound society, if no one is subject to unjustified suspicion and degradation, total freedom and happiness will reign. Because of that, anyone, who wants to spread and promulgate corruption and bad deeds, leading to unjustified slandering of innocent women, threatens the foundation of the society. Such act definitely threatens the lineage legitimacy of all individuals, and it also harms innocent people; children are harmed by it without having committed any sin. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: 'And no bearer of burdens shall be made to hear another's burden….' (*Fatir:* 18)

After this, Imam Ja'far *Allah be pleased with him* mentioned another form of major sins: consuming usury. As we know, usury causes an economic imbalance in society by making the rich getting richer at the expense of the needy.

Also, adultery is one of the major sins, as Allah, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And do not commit adultery – for, behold, it is an abomination and an evil way.' (*al-Isra':* 32) Adultery reduces the relation between a man and a woman to a level of mere sexual ravishment and the pursuit of gratification. And this certainly goes against the original relationship between Hawwa (Eve) and Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*, whom Allah designed and premised with the objective of making women a source of comfort for men, not just an instrument of pleasure or sexual gratification. Therefore, sexual pleasure is meant to be only a reason for achieving the higher purpose of preserving the human species. And man has to bear in mind that the effects of sexual pleasure are quite burdensome, as they involve raising children, whose childhood period is quite long and who are in need of care. If Allah *Glorified is He* had not associated these burdensome responsibilities with sexual pleasure, people would not be interested in having children.

Also, another major sin is escaping and turning your back to the enemy in battle. The reason is that such negative behaviour of running away in times of war creates an imbalance in the society of believers. Marching or going out for war implies that the enemies of Islam have already raided us; thus, it becomes compulsory for every Muslim to defend the borders of the Muslim land so that the enemies of Islam are not able to take over the lands of Islam, and the Word of Allah continues to be in the highest status therein. Therefore, for a Muslim, fleeing the battlefield is an example of the weakness of faith. For this reason, I would say that it is not a matter of boasting that a person is a believer because if a person were a true believer and deeply convinced of the ultimate goal which he was fighting for, he would not be afraid of fighting knowing that if he gets killed, he would become a martyr, and martyrs are promised tremendous rewards by Allah. Hence, fleeing the battlefield gives a bad example, not only as far as war is of relation, but also because it shakes man's faith and belief. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* explained that when a believer engages in war, he ought to desire either of two things, and both of them are good: victory or martyrdom. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has said: 'Say: "Are you, perchance, hopefully waiting for something [bad] to happen to us – [the while nothing can happen to us] save one of the two best things?"' (*at-Tawba:* 52)

But the believer should lurk and wait for the moment the following words of Allah would come to pass on disbelievers: 'But as far as you are concerned, we are hopefully waiting for Allah to inflict chastisement upon you, [either] from Himself or by our hands.' (*at-Tawba:* 52) Thereby, Allah, The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* wants the believer to prove the certitude and strength of his belief by sacrificing his or her own life; that is the grand cause behind his upholding to its different aspects because he believes he is going to a better life [in paradise]. However, it does not mean that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the believers to commit suicidal acts except when that becomes necessary for victory. The evidence is the saying of Allah *the Almighty:* 'For whoever on that day turns his back on them – unless it be in a battle manoeuvre or in an endeavour to join another troop [of the believers] – shall indeed have earned the burden of Allah's condemnation.' (*al-Anfal:* 16)

Thus, one should not engage in a battle if he is not prepared or if he does not think that he has a chance to win; otherwise, he would just be making a negative impact on the numerical strength of Muslims. So what benefit accrued to us from this? The believer should pursue martyrdom for the sake of two rewards: the first pertains to him, which is heaven; the second pertains to the Muslims and society, which is attainment of security and victory.

After that, Ja‘far *Allah be pleased with him* mentioned the issue of a ‘hell-bound false oath.’ This actually represents another issue related to the overall degradation of society. The reason is that, as the wording implies, a ‘hell-bound false oath’ dips the one who utters it into hellfire because he takes an oath and swears that something has happened, whereas, in fact, nothing happened, or swears that a particular thing has not happened, when it has. Due to that false oath, things get mixed up and truth gets distorted with lies, and part of its negative effect is that it may affect a judge and render him unable to arbitrate justly on the rights of people. That is why it is important to note that taking a false oath and telling lies—saying that something happened— may lead to harming another person. Further, this will also make it easy for anyone who wants to do injustice to find false witnesses to swear that what he falsely claims and alleges is true. In such a case, people will be filled with a sense of insecurity about life or personal interests.

Then, there comes another major sin, namely ‘misappropriating the spoils of war.’ This means that when the Muslims engage in battles and win, the take the spoils, which we call *as-salb* in Arabic — enemies’ weapons and possessions. For Allah’s sake, should a person who engages in battle with the sole purpose of collecting the spoils subsequently claim that he fights for the cause of Allah? Does it make sense? This definitely contradicts the essence of fighting for the cause of Allah. Fighting for the cause of Allah has been decreed so that the Word of Allah would be the highest and most exalted. For this reason, Allah, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And it is not conceivable that a prophet should deceive – since he who deceives shall be faced with his deceit on the Day of Resurrection…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 161).

We have previously said that whoever misappropriates a cow (a spoil of war), it will come to hunt him on the Day of Judgment, and it will produce a sound. Similarly, if one misappropriates cement, for instance, it will come to hunt him on the Day of Judgment; the same holds true for whoever misappropriates metals or imports bad meat or rotten fish. All of those will have their sinful deeds coming after them on the Day of Judgment.

Then, another major sin mentioned is perjury. This is also one of the main factors that lead to the corruption of society because it does not let the believer feel safe and secure about his rights.

As for practising magic, it is also another major sin that threatens the fabric of society in a way that weakens its strengthsince magic is about mystery, relying heavily on the power the unknown. The reason is that anyone whom magic befalls on never finds any direct or immediate enemy to confront; so this is not a kind of a battle he would know how to prepare for; such attack goes beyond any proper means of defence and protection. For this reason, The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says: ‘…Although they know, indeed, that he who acquires this [knowledge] shall have no share in the good of the life to come…’ (*al-Baqara:* 102).

This means that the person who practices magic will not have a share in the Hereafter. But someone may say: If such is the danger ensuing from the practice of magic in a way that it causes the destruction of society and weakens the sense of security, why does it exist? To this person, we respond: Everything is created by Allah, and each creature has a law that governs it. But this law may vary from one creature to another in different degrees and levels. Members of the same species are governed by the same law. When members of the same species are governed by one law that organizes their movement, this means that there will be equal opportunity for every one of them; so you will have an opportunity just like any other member of society in all aspect of life. But if you have an opportunity that another person does not have, this would be a defect and a flaw in the principle of equal opportunity for members of the same species.

Equal opportunity is one of the principles that protect the society because it provides everyone a chance to survive and progress. So what remains is just for everyone to labour and work hard in order to succeed and survive, but using the available means of survival and without tampering with the chances created for others. That is why equal opportunity is indeed a source of mercy for the entire humanity.

For example, the socialist Russia used to be the only super power, and it came from the East. Then, after its collapse, another super power emerged from the West, the United States of America. There are still other countries that are trying to emerge as powerful nations in order to adjust the balance of power; I mean countries like Japan, the united Germany and other countries in Europe are now seeking to form a union aiming to emerge as a superpower as well. All of these efforts are being made to adjust the balance of power, and to guarantee equal opportunity in making use of the God-given resources on earth. What protects the universe from destruction is the sense of control and deterrence. Before any nation thinks of launching a massive evil scheme, it will, first of all, consider what the reaction from other nations will be—and that will certainly deter it from carrying out its evil plan—because it knows the reaction might be even worse than the action. But if there were only one superpower, it might lead to chaos and destruction. Thus, protecting the human species is based on securing the principle of equal opportunity among its individuals. Nevertheless, man is one species and jinn is another. Yet both species have been created by Allah; hence, both have the ability to choose. For this reason, the Quran says: ‘Say: "It has been revealed to me that some of the unseen beings gave ear [to this Revelation], and thereupon said [unto their fellow-beings]: ‘Verily, we have heard a wondrous discourse, guiding towards consciousness of what is right; and so We have come to believe in it. And we shall never ascribe divinity to anyone beside our Lord.’ (*al-Jinn:* 1-2) When they swore, Allah has said: ‘Just as [we do not know how it happens] that some from among us are righteous, while some of us are [far] below that: we have always followed widely divergent paths.’ (*al-Jinn:* 11) Thus they (the jinn) are like us humans… But they have a law and we have a law: ’…Verily, he and his tribe are lying in wait for you where you cannot perceive them!’ (*al-A‘raf:* 27) So, the jinn, according to their laws, are able to see human beings, while the latter do not see them. This shows that their law is less strict than that of humans because the law of each species is based on the germ of how it was firstly composed and created. We, humans, are created from clay; so we have a sensible and dense matter. But the jinn are created from fire. Only plants and animals are created from clay like us. Let us think of an apple, for instance; it is from clay because all its nutrition and elements of its constitution are from the soil of the earth and its fertility. But let us assume you sit on one side of the wall and an apple is placed on the other side. Would you get its taste, smell or even perceive its colour from behind the wall? No, the object that stands between you and the apple, namely the wall, keeps you from availing yourself of it. But assume that there is a fire on the other side of the wall. After a while, you will start to feel the heat. This means that the heat has permeated the wall. Similarly, with regard to the jinn, they are naturally transparent and light, which is essential for their movement. Such transparency and lightness are not in the human nature. For this reason, notice that when the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* wanted to explain this fact to us, He gave us the example of our Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* to whom Allah *the Almighty* has subjugated the jinn. 'They made for him whatever he wished of sanctuaries, and statues, and basins as [large as] great watering troughs and cauldrons firmly anchored…' (*Saba':* 13) When Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* convened with his soldiers and the people around him, he said: '…How is it that I do not see the hoopoe? Or could he be among the absent?' (*an-Naml:* 20) After that, the hoopoe came to him and said: '…I have encompassed [with my knowledge] something that you have never yet encompassed – for I have come to you from Sheba with sure information!' (*an-Naml:* 22) 'Behold, I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given [abundance] of all [good] things, and hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 23)

All of this is not important. What is important is the statement of the hoopoe: 'And I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah…' (*an-Naml:* 24) This is what concerns Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*(1) as a prophet. We have to bear in mind that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was distinguished by the fact that he was both a king and a prophet. Accordingly, the hoopoe first addressed the issue of kingship: 'Behold, I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given [abundance] of all [good] things, and hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 23) These are the fundamentals of being a king. But the matter that concerns Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* '…And I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah…' (*an-Naml:* 24) As we can see, worshipping and adoring the sun instead of Allah upset the hoopoe even though he was just a bird. The anger of the hoopoe indicates that it is in a way conscious of the issues of monotheism and faith. Then, it says: 'Should they not worship Allah who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and earth and knows both what you conceal and what you make known?...' (*an-Naml:* 25). The hoopoe is thus mindful of Allah, the One Who deserves to be adored and worshipped. Also, notice that it (the hoopoe) mentioned 'what is hidden in the heavens and on earth' because its nourishment (as a bird) is always hidden under the surface of the earth, and it has to dig it out.

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(1) The story of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, and Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him.*

The story continued until Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said to those who were sitting with him: 'O you nobles! Which of you can bring me her throne before she and her followers come unto me in willing surrender to Allah?' (*an-Naml:* 38) This demonstrates that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* knew that the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) was on her way to see him. The meaning of his saying: '…Which of you can bring me her throne before she and her followers come unto me in willing surrender to Allah?' (*an-Naml:* 38), is that whoever carried this mission would have to travel from Jerusalem to Yemen, unchain the throne, carry it and then bring it to him before the Queen arrived.

By Allah, is there a human law that can make such a thing possible? Never! For this reason, we know that the response was not from a normal human being; rather, it was from a person who knew that the law governing his existence would allow him to undertake that mission. Consequently, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said: '…before she and her followers come unto me in willing surrender to Allah.' (*an-Naml:* 38) This statement gives indication that he knew that Bilqis and her people were on their way. So would a normal human being be capable of going, unchaining the throne and carrying it before the Queen's arrival? No; so, in this context, we can deduce and glean the rationale of the following words of Allah: 'And never concern yourself with anything of which you have no knowledge….' (*al-Isra':* 36)

In response to the request of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* one of the intelligent jinn said: 'A powerful and crafty jinn replied, "I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place. I am strong and trustworthy enough"' Whoever said so is not one of the ordinary jinn. They (jinn) are invisible intelligent beings, but among them there are also those who are powerless and of little of intelligence, like human beings. The one who made the offer made it clear that it was capable of bringing the throne of the Queen before Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* would rise from his seat. So, how much time would that mission take? We do not know. Does that mean Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* would have to linger with the people with whom he was sitting for two or three hours (until that mission was accomplished)? We do not know. All what we know is that it would take as much time as Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* needed to continue sitting with people, waiting for the Queen's throne to be brought to him. However, a man upon whom Allah had bestowed illuminations and knowledge from the Book responded: 'But one of them who had some knowledge of the Book said, "I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye…."'

Absolutely, this is not a word that an ordinary being would say, no! We have seen what a powerful demon from among the jinn said: '… "I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place...."' (*an-Naml:* 39) But listen to what the one on whom Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed some knowledge from the Book had said: 'I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye….' (*an-Naml:* 40) For this reason, you have to consider the rhetorical wisdom underling the immediacy with which the Quran described what happened after Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* made this statement: '…And when he saw it truly before him….'

Thus, the throne was immediately brought to him, in a twinkle of an eye. In this respect, what is important for us to heed is that the jinn said: '…I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place.' (*an-Naml:* 39) So, this means that it has a certain law that governs its movement and speed. The same applies to a man whom Allah has bestowed with knowledge of the book; he is also tied to a law that governs his capacity and movement. Hence, every species has a law that governs its nature and capacity.

Some people may pause and wonder here, just as some superficial thinkers do, posing this question: Who are the jinn, Angels and this entire hidden world we are talking about here? We say: ‘Do you believe only in what is perceivable? What would you make of microbes that were only discovered after the invention of microscopes? They were always there; but man (being unable to detect them) was completely unaware of their existence. So why cannot one consider that enough evidence of the existence of other (many) things that are not grasped by man’s senses or within his limited power of perception? Can you not see that as a reasonable illustration of (many) unidentified beings that are really in existence though you (man) are yet to have the tool for discovering them? Why? Why do you not take this evidence in support of the existence of species that you do not perceive? Why are you stunned and start to wonder when the Quran talks about these unperceivable species? What is the problem with this?

Later, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says in the honourable Hadith (tradition): ‘Verily, Satan flows through the (soul of) human beings like blood (i.e. as blood circulates the body through veins).’(1)

We may wonder: Does Satan flow through one’s body like blood? Does it take the form of fluid or what? We say that Satan is a subtle, invisible creature whose being is governed by special laws. By this, Our Lord *Glorified is He* exposes the ideologies of the atheists and those who do not believe in the Unseen that Allah mentions. For instance, we have made it clear that there are organisms, like microbes that are classified among material species created from clay, but at the same time they are microorganisms. But what does the microbe do? It infiltrates the body, and man is unaware of its presence in his body; subsequently, what does it do to your temperature? What does it do to your body? When Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* tells you that Satan flows in you just as the blood circulates in your body, this should not take you by surprise; should there be any contradiction? If there is something in your matter that is very minute, you do not know how it infiltrates your body, and you do not even feel it when it enters, but all of a sudden, you see changes in your temperature; it tampers with your body and stimulates the white blood cells to resist it and then excrete pus. What contradiction does this entail?

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah*

Our Lord *Glorified is He* left a lot of facts about His material universe unknown to us in order to prove the truth of His sayings about other unknown matters. Allah says: ‘But one of them who had some knowledge of the Book said, “I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye….” (*an-Naml:* 40) The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made the human being respond to the jinn so that he would not think that Allah reduced its lightness, transparency and speed from its constitutive elements; rather, Allah has made it clear to him that he acquired all these capabilities by the will of the Creator *Glorified is He*. Thus, ones capabilities and powers are not merely a function of the element that constitutes him or her; they are primarily based on and due to the will of Allah. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has explained that He can make a species that is strong due to the nature of its creation, namely the jinn, subservient to and be governed by humans; thus be subjugated to the latter and obeying his will. Allah *Glorified is He* did not make this an absolute power for all humans so that anyone who possessed it would not be tempted into vanity inasmuch as it will give him an opportunity that others do not have. This person may also abuse it through the practice of magic. We have explained this when we discussed the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘They pursued what the devils falsely attributed to the kingdom of Sulaiman (Solomon). Sulaiman (Solomon) was not an unbeliever; it is the devils who are unbelievers. They taught people witchcraft and that which was sent down to Harut and Marut, the two angels in Babylon. But these two taught no one until they had said, “We are but a trial, therefore, do not disbelieve [in Allah’s guidance].” (*al-Baqara:* 102)

A trial? But why is that? Why would magic be a temptation? The reason is that magic provides unequal opportunity in a sense that a person gains advantages over others. When this happens, there is no guarantee that such power will not be misused to bring harm and dangers unto others; yes, that may happen and will surely lead the perpetrator into hellfire. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So men learnt from them that by which they caused discord between a man and his wife; but they can harm none thereby save by the command of Allah; [on the contrary], these people learned that which would harm them and do them no good….’ (*al-Baqara:* 102)

By this, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* gives a portion of His Infinite Power to man, who happens to be relatively weaker (in comparison to jinn), and this power enables them to have jinn—which is, on the other hand, stronger than man—subdued and subject to his control. Jinn know this; for this reason, all those who see jinn only do so for a blink of an eye since the jinn cannot retain the form in which it manifests itself. If it embodies a human or an animal, it will be governed by this specific form, and if it is governed by a form and the one who sees it in such a form points a gun and shoots it, he may have it killed.

For this reason, jinn appear for a moment like a sparkling light and disappear. Such is a sign of the Infinite Power of Allah *Glorified is He* as He gives the lower species—human beings—a capacity to subdue the stronger species—jinn. But lo and behold, this is not in the interest of humans—with potential dangers that might befall them. For this reason, the believing jinn always say that they are contented in how they were created, with the law that governs their existence. The inequality of opportunities may lead us to become tyrants because those who possess an incomparably great power are prone to misuse and abuse this power against other people. The one who casts a charm to make a woman hate her husband or a man hate his wife is the one who has the power to dispel such a charm; however, he may not want to do that because it is in his interest that such situation continues (to boost his ego).

In that case, for one to be able to overcome such temptation—of thinking that he can manipulate others or that others cannot do any harm unto him—one has to always recall the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* '…but they can harm none thereby save by the command of Allah.' (*al-Baqara:* 102) Magic indeed exists, as the Quran has explicitly stated, but you have to know that such a power is not inbuilt in magicians, nor something peculiar to them. If Allah *Glorified is He* had not willed that harm might befell a man through magic, that magic would not work. Also, if knowledge of magic becomes rampant in a society, this will lead to a problem—in the sense that many would be tempted into doing bad things. But let us make this clear: whoever follows magicians gets himself adapted to resorting to them to unravel charms or to cast spells on rivals; that is, he has become so enchanted by magicians, that he will lead a very murky life full of sadness and grief as per the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Yet [it has always happened] that certain kinds of humans would seek refuge with certain kinds of jinn: but these only increased their confusion' (*al-Jinn:* 6).

It is true that the jinn are capable of practicing magic, but magic only increases the toil and burden of the one who practices it. That is why every believer should protect himself by the prayer: 'Allah you have made some of your creatures capable of magic. However, You have reserved for Yourself the permission to harm; may You forbid and protect me from those whom You have enabled by the power You have reserved for Yourself.' If the believer says this prayer, he will not fear magicians, and they will not have access to him. They only have power over the weak. Magic engenders inequality in opportunity, segregates people and leads to the disruption of the social balance.

Now let us turn to another major sin, which is refusal to pay obligatory alms (*zakat*). When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* asks us to pay alms, He draws our attention to the fact that we are not paying anything that actually belongs to us. Everything belongs to Allah. For instance, the 'intellect', used by man to plan, was created by Allah; the faculties, through which man performs different kinds of work, are created by Allah, and the land on which you work or the craft you practice is also created by Allah. Thus, everything comes from and returns to Allah. However, despite this fact, Allah made it clear that He will respect man's work, but he has to give to his poor fellow brothers (in charity) some of what Allah has conferred upon him.

Someone may say that since Allah is the Lord of all, why does He make someone poor? We respond that He does so in order to show that change is characteristic of our world, and also to remind the rich that poverty may one day befall them as well; it is also a reminder to the strong that weakness may befall them.

This issue gives a perfect illustration of the (divine) cosmic order through which the heart of the wealth gets imbued with mercy and compassion towards the needy, helping him with alms and charity. Hence, if the duty of alms-giving is not properly observed, its negative effect fills the entire universe in the form of economic disorder, in a way that we all see now. For this reason, all the forms of hunger and starvation around us are a reflection of people not observing their duty of paying alms; this also applies to other forms decadence and suffering we see in society; it shows that people do not abide or adhere to the Path of true teachings of Allah because our Lord fashioned the entire society on the basis of a divine system that guides equal opportunities so that any deficiency in a specific part should be made up by another part. By this, if what happens is a sweeping poverty here and there, then you know that it is a result of people not been true to the due right of Allah.

After this, Imam Ja'afar as-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* talked about the major sin of 'abandoning prayers.' As we know, prayers stand as a means of pronouncing of our permanent allegiance and loyalty to the One God, Allah. You, as a Muslim, profess that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger; and you do that only once in your life. The same applies to the duty of paying alms (to the needy), if you are financially capable; you also do that once a year. Further, you perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) once in your lifetime; and with regard to *Ramadan* fasting, you, as a Muslim, observe the fasting only one month of the year. It is worth mentioning that, if you are ill, you are exempted from fasting, and you may be relieved of this religious duty entirely if you suffer an ailment from which there is no hope of recovery. One may not fast either, if he is too old for it. Moreover, if you are poor, you do not pay the alms; you are exempt from it. Furthermore, you are exempt from performing pilgrimage if you are financially incapable.

Hence, here we have three pillars of Islam from which a Muslim is given exemption (once the necessary conditions are met). There remain two other pillars of Islam: professing that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger and prayers. It suffices for a Muslim to make the declaration of faith once in his entire life. What is then left of the pillars of Islam? It is prayers. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Prayers are the foundational pillar of Islam.'(1) Thus, abandoning prayers means rebellion against the aspect of showing servitude and loyalty to Allah *Glorified is He* as He ordained it five times a day and decreed performing it in group on Friday, every week. Why so? This is intended so that all servants of Allah see each other as true servants and His worshippers. Thus no one ought to worship Allah in secret, preventing others from seeing him. All of us prostrate to Allah and we have to pronounce our allegiance to Him. When we quit prayers, such declaration of allegiance to Allah ceases to exist.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Naimim Al-Fadl ibn Dikin based through 'Umar.* This Hadith is hasan (good). It is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in (Shu'ab Al-'Iman). However, the phrasing was *'imad* instead of *'amud*—the Arabic word in the above Hadith (prophetic tradition) translated as pillar. But his relation is also through 'Umar, and it is considered weak.

It may seem strange that Allah *Glorified is He* ordained prayers in a sense that you have to go to Him five times a day, by means of commands and assignments, and that if you fail to go to Him (observing prayers), you will be sinning. But the fact is that He does not close His door; go to Him at any time, at any place, and you will find Him giving you attention. Nevertheless, you ought to stand in front of Allah fully comprehending of His supreme Majesty and Honour. We have said before that, if you need to meet a person of high authority in this world, you will always have to write a request beforehand; then you set an appointment, and one of the person's aides asks you about the subject you want to discuss with his superior. After all this rigorous arrangement—and you have eventually managed to meet that person— he may pause and end the meeting and discussion at any time. But Allah *the Almighty* does not treat us this way. You may go to Him at any time and stay in His presence for as long as you wish, and He will never end the meeting unless you end it. For this reason, they say:

'It is enough glory for me that I am a servant to a Lord

Who entertain me (accept me in His presence) without any prefixed appointments

He is most Glorified in His sanctity

But I can meet Him whenever and wherever I like'

It is true that Allah *Glorified is He* commands a Muslim to meet Him (observing prayers) five times a day, but He never restricts His time of meeting with his servants, He leaves His door open for a servant to meet Him at any time. We have previously explained—and to Allah belongs the loftiest examples that we can think of—let us assume that a product is examined by its manufacturer five times a day; would such product have any defect? No.

Similarly, you are examined by your Creator and Manufacturer five times every day. Any ordinary product gets fixed by its manufacturer using a wire, a screw or a compass to adjust its components. But in your case, you are a creature fashioned by Allah *the Almighty* and your Lord is Unseen; thus, He fixes you in the way He thinks is most appropriate.

After all we have discussed about the major sins, there remains: dishonouring one's covenant and alienating his kinsfolk. Dishonouring one's covenant makes people lose trust and confidence in each other, and this makes doubt and mistrust widespread in the Muslim community, thus filling hearts with rancour and animosity. Promises may be enough to solve the problem of the needy. If a financially capable person tells someone who is incapable: 'I promise you', and then he honours that promise, the latter will trust him. But if a debtor promises to settle a debt with the creditor, and then fails to honour that promise, the other (the creditor) will not believe him anymore. However, if he honours his promise, and then keeps doing that, promising and honouring the promise again and again, he will be become a trustworthy person, and everything the people have will be his. For this reason, people say: 'One who takes and gives (loses nothing); he ultimately possesses everything.'

Then, we turn to the second part of the major sin, the alienation of one's kinsfolk. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* derives the Arabic name for kinsfolk (*ar-rahim*) from His own Name in Arabic (a*r-Rahman*), meaning the Most Compassionate. Allah *Glorified is He* said in the Qudsi Hadith: 'I am the Compassionate. I have created the womb and assigned it a name derived from My Own Name. Whoever relates to it, I relate to him, and whoever alienates it, I alienate him'(1)

We all know the story(2) of the Prophet's companion, Muʿawiyah *Allah be pleased with him*, when his aide-de-camp came to him and said: 'O Leader of the Faithful, there is someone at the door who says that he is your brother.' Muʿawiyah *Allah be pleased with him* then surprisingly asked his butler: 'Which of my brothers? Do not you know my brothers? The butler responded: 'He says that he is your brother.' When the man walked into the room, Muʿawiyah

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Al-Bukhari in (Al-Adab Al-Mufrad) and Abu Dawud, Al-Hakim based on a relation by 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf*

(2) The story of the man who claimed to be the brother of Muʿawiyah *Allah be pleased with him*

Allah be pleased with him asked him: Are you my brother? He said: ‘Yes.’ Muʿawiyah *Allah be pleased with him* then said: ‘Which of my brothers are you?’ The man replied: ‘I am your brother from Adam.’ Muʿawiyah *Allah be pleased with him* then said ‘This is a much severed bond of kinship of which I was not aware; indeed, I will be the first to honour and relate to it.’

These are the major sins that Imam Ja‘afar As-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* has mentioned. Each of them may cause the destruction of the entire society. Every major sin demolishes an aspect of society, and this something alien to the Islamic faith, which lays down a path that if we follow, we will all live in peace; and Islam caters for us to live in peace and prosperity. Thus, if you, Muslim, commits one of those major sins, you have to bear in mind that, in doing so, you are actually shaking one of the pillars of society, and that will definitely affect its state of security and peace. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If you avoid the great sins which you have been enjoined to shun…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 31). If we examine the phrase ’…which you have been enjoined to shun…’ we will be able to understand the basis of all virtues; i.e., removing deficiency and making way for perfection. Accordingly, before you enact perfection through the commands, you have to preclude deficiencies through proscriptions. For this reason, they say that purifying should precede beautifying.

‘If you avoid the great sins which you have been enjoined to shun, We shall efface your [minor] bad deeds…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 31). Here, the Arabic word *kufr* (which means ‘efface’ in English) refers to the act of ‘concealing and covering’ because the Arabic origin of the word ‘efface’ mentioned in the verse from Quran means ‘veil’ or ‘concealment.’ We have said before that the phrase ‘effacement of sins’ means ‘suspension and relief from punishment’, whereas its opposite can be inferred from the Arabic word *’Ihbat* which means ‘depression’ and leads to losing the reward, giving the connotation of a negative conduct that leads to a bad consequence. Allah says: ’…and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory’ (*an-Nisa’:* 31). This means that Allah is addressing His servants saying that He will not only exempt you from torture, but He will make you enter paradise which is qualified here as an ‘abode of glory.’ This can be further attested to by what Allah *Glorified is He* says in a different verse: ‘For those who persevere in doing the good there is the ultimate good in store, and more [than that]…’ (*Yunus:* 26).

Thus, we can understand from the previous verse that not only that Allah would save His believers from punishment (for keeping away from major sins), but He will also admit them into 'the abode of glory.' For you to comprehend what 'abode of glory' means, it is better to know that the nature of this abode of glory will be in par with the greatness and capability of the One Who admits people in there. So, imagine an abode of glory prepared by Allah *the Almighty;* how will it look like? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* quotes Allah *Glorified is He* in a Qudsi Hadith saying: 'I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what no heart has ever conceived. So recite if you wish: No person knows what is kept hidden from them of delights of the eye as a reward for what they used to do.' (*as-Sajda:* 17)(1)

Then, this picture is transformed into a new shape in which, according to Allah's Will, there is a design to make balance among the members of the human species, and the main goal is to provide protection for them from any harm or danger. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to establish a balance and faith-based harmony between the two kinds of humans; as we know, humans are of two kinds: male and female, and the species are only divided into homogeneous individuals when they share common traits and characteristics; otherwise, they would not be able to interrelate. Hence, it is clear that the aspect of homogeneity is what creates the bond in a single species that comprises two kinds, but since the same species has been divided into two kinds, then each must have a mission. Males and females are the two kinds of the human species. The male and female kinds share common sexual needs; however, they differ in other needs respectively. Each kind is then divided into individual members. Individual members are not replicas; rather, they share features that are common to all members. In addition, every individual may have his own talent, leadership and adeptness in a certain field. This is how integration is accomplished among members of the human species.

Since the human species is divided into two kinds, men have their own special characteristics and so does women. Allah *Glorified is He* did not make males and females equal, not even in their body structure. It is true that their general body structure is the same: head, trunk and legs. But Allah distinguishes each kind by certain characteristics: men have their own special shape and so do women. Therefore, to those who call for equality between men and women, we say that a woman has her own special structure and constitution just like the man has his own structure and special constitution. Thus, if you equate them, you will assign to women areas of specialty that belong to men, while men will not be able to share what naturally belongs to women. That is, the inherently female activities would not be completed, and nobody would perform them. Thus, you burden the woman with what she will not be able to endure; therefore, you will be wrongful because you would be causing her more suffering.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

In the process, Allah *Glorified is He* sometimes creates a new species; and in other instances, He divides a single species into two kinds. Hence, He wants us to pay attention: each kind has its own mission, but it shares a common feature with the other kinds. But what is it that is common among males and females? Both of them are humans; each is required to have belief and faith, and neither should dominate the other as far as his or her creed is concerned. Both are equal in this regard; no one should impose a creed on the other. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* gave us an example of the personal differences between females and males with regard to primary matters related to faith. Further, this plays a different role in secondary matters related to rulings. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For those who are bent on denying the truth Allah has propounded a parable in [the stories of] Noah's wife and Lot's wife: they were wedded to two of Our righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband; and neither of the two [husbands] will be of any avail to these two women before Allah when they are told [on Judgment Day], "Enter the fire with all those [other sinners] who enter it!' (*at-Tahrim:* 10)

Both were Messengers of Allah. However, they could not persuade their wives to follow the path of monotheism. This strengthens the fact that every human being is granted a right to the freedom of belief and thought, and this right is fundamentally inalienable. Allah, The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says: 'And for those who have attained faith, Allah has propounded a parable in [the story of] Pharaoh's wife as she prayed, "O my Lord! Build for me a mansion in the paradise [that is] in nearness to You, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from all evildoing folk!"' (*at-Tahrim:* 11)

The Pharaoh, who claimed to be a god, could not force his wife to abandon her faith. Allah, The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* has said about her: '…she prayed, "O my Lord! Build for me a mansion in the paradise [that is] in nearness to You, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings…' (*at-Tahrim:* 11).

Thus, being a male or female makes no difference in matters of faith since these matters involve reasoning and thinking. A woman may come up with a brilliant idea that a lot of men are not able to come up with. A good example is the wife of Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her*, and her stance on the Treaty of Hudaybya. Some of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were upset about the terms of the treaty which Prophet Muhammad wanted to conclude with the pagans of Mecca. Among those(1) Companions was 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* who said: 'How could we accept to be in an inferior position even though we have faith in Allah and embrace His religion?' But the Prophet's Companion, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* answered him: 'Watch your tongue 'Umar, do not forget that it is Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, you are addressing. At this point, the mind of Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* got filled up with a sense of discomfort by what he noticed—that his companions could not grasp the hidden meaning of his stance on the agreement, including 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* known for his fiery zeal and passion for his faith; he could not help giving vent to a strong agony in his heart—and the Prophet was very sure the Companions, out of their love for Islam, just did not want to stoop down to the pagans of Mecca. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went away —being troubled— and found Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* and said to her that the companions, being too depressed for how the treaty played out, failed to carry out his commands: 'See how the companions behave; do you not see the people, I commend them and they do not follow my orders, even though they hear my words clearly and look me in the face?' She then replied: 'Muhammad, Messenger of Allah, do not blame them for they are concerned about a great thing: the toil you have incurred in the reconciliation matter and their return without a victory. Go out to them but do not say a single word to any of them until you slaughter a sheep and offer it as sacrifice to Allah, and then call upon your barber to cut your hair.'

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(1) *The story of the deliberation between 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab and Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with both of them during the treaty of Hudaybya*

Yes, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had already signed the Hudaybya peace treaty and the matter was over, but Umm Salamah's stance *Allah be pleased with her* was a reflection of the mercy of Allah on the companions who protested against the terms of the treaty endorsed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; in the sense that she, in a very intelligent manner, calmed down the situation. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* approached the Companions and clarified to them his stance, saying: 'You may enter Mecca and find there people you do not know they are Muslims because many of them were hiding their faith from the disbelievers; [which means that] a house of a disbeliever may possibly be sheltering a Muslim [and you do not know]. [So if you go there armed to the teeth and ready for war,] You may end up killing Muslims inadvertently, and then be stricken with shame and disgust by how the outcome of the situation, something you will definitely hate and not be able to cope with, as Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has said: '…And had it not been for the believing men and believing women [in Mecca], whom you might have unwittingly trampled underfoot, and on whose account you might have become guilty, without knowing it, of a grievous wrong – [had it not been for this, you would have been allowed to fight your way into the city: but you were forbidden to fight] so that [in time] Allah might admit to His grace whomever He wills. Had they [who deserve Our Mercy and they whom We have condemned] been clearly discernible [to you], We would indeed have imposed grievous suffering [at your hands] on such of them as were bent on denying the truth.' (*al-Fath:* 25)

The phrase 'been clearly discernible [to you]' on which the Arabic word *tazayalu* means if the believers (new Muslims) were recognizable and could be distinguished (from among the disbelievers in Mecca), it would have been much easier for the Muslims to punish the disbelievers severely. Hence, that is how Allah explained to the Prophet Muhammad's Companions the wisdom (and some of the hidden objectives) behind the Prophet's stance on the treaty of Hudaybya, and then everybody was content. Now, back to the disposition of the Mother of Believers, Umm Salamah, on this matter, this is proof that Allah does not forbid or preclude that women may have reason and mature thinking. For this reason, we find that the Quran asserts in the story of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) what she thought about the man who was coming to shake the foundations of her kingdom, and whether or not he was seeking to be the ruler. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has related in the Quran that she said:

‘When the Queen had read Solomon’s letter, she said: ‘O you nobles! A truly distinguished letter has been conveyed unto me. Behold, it is from Solomon, and it says, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, and The Dispenser of Mercy. Do not put yourselves above me, and come to me in submission to Allah.’ She added: ‘O you nobles! Give me your opinion on the problem with which I am now faced; I would never make a [weighty] decision unless you are present with me.’ (*an-Naml:* 29-32) Now, what was the reply of her chieftains? They said: ‘No. This is your call.’ As the Quran has recounted their statement: They answered: ‘We are endowed with power and with mighty prowess in war – but the command is yours; consider, then, what you would command.’ (*an-Naml:* 33)

Men of war, as we know, always follow the chain of command when it comes to issue of waging wars. The final decision to engage in wars lies in the hands of heads of state, i.e. the commanders-in-chief (and high-ranking military commanders) who do not take the issue of war very lightly. No matter how powerful the nations are in regard to their military capabilities—soldiers and their commanders normally wait for a command to come from above their superiors— they are the sober politicians and statesmen who have to ponder over the ramifications and consequences of war. Therefore, in this context of the Queen of Sheba’s story, we hear the commanders of the army saying to Queen Bilqis: ‘…We are endowed with power and with mighty prowess in war – but the command is yours….’ (*an-Naml:* 33) So they left the whole matter (the final decision) to her, and (you know) she happened to be a woman! She deliberated over the issue and said: ‘I would try and examine him to see whether he is after taking over the throne or he is a man of religion.’ Then, she sent him a present. The Quran related to us what Prophet Sulaiman

(Solomon) *peace be upon him* said when he received the present: ‘Do you people mean to add to my wealth? But that which Allah has given me is [so much] better than all that He has given you! Nay, it is [only such as] you that would rejoice in this gift of yours!’ (*an-Naml:* 36)

The Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) then realized that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* did not want to usurp her power and kingship; rather, he wanted to relay a message to her. Accordingly, she said: ‘I will go to him and convert to Islam. Here you have to note the efficacy of the rhetoric of the statement of the Quran when it depicts the faith of a queen who said: ‘…I have surrendered myself, with Solomon, unto the Lord of all the worlds!’ (*an-Naml:* 44)

This means that she had completely submitted to the will of Allah and joined Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) in being a servant of Allah. This is an incredible moment of faith at its best—submission to Allah in sincere servitude takes away grudges from hearts. Another important point is that the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) was a woman whom Allah *Glorified is He* blessed with sound mind and intelligence. When she went and found that her throne, left in her country, had been brought to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* by one of his aides blessed with knowledge of the book of Allah—not only transported there, but also completely installed—she was taken by surprise and confusion. They said to her: ‘Is this how your throne is?’

‘And so, as soon as she arrived, she was asked: "Is your throne like this?’ (*an-Naml:* 42) She replied courteously and diplomatically saying:: "It is as though it were the same….’ (*an-Naml:* 42)

So despite the fact that she was a woman, Allah *Glorified is He* did not deprive her of having insightful thought. For this reason, we should not (indulge in any act of sexism and) claim that women do not have intellect (as if this blessing were confined only to men). The important thing for a woman is to know that she has certain limitations related to her gender. Thus, if she notices that she lacks something that a man has, she should not consider that a defect in her, for she has qualities that men lack; she is even physically different from men. For example, a man is naturally tough and strong, whereas the woman is, by nature, characterized by being soft, delicate and flexible; this is in addition to her being filled with immense passion and overflowing tenderness. In contrast, a man is inflexible, decisive and resolute; accordingly, each gender is set for the accomplishment of a certain mission. Thus, no one should say he is inadequate in a certain aspect (and get depressed for that); no, he should rather know that he is blessed in other areas where many people are deficient and inadequate.

Religion, then, comes forth to clarify to the believers that men are forbidden to wear silk, whereas women are allowed to; the latter are also allowed to wear gold, which is also forbidden for men. What a great sign of being pampered (for women)! So, as we have already said, Allah *Glorified is He* forbade men from wearing silk and gold, but He allowed all of that for women. Moreover, Islam requires (as the main objective of marriage) for women to be a source of comfort for men. The man is naturally created to toil and cater for his family; that takes him around to work and make ends meet. Then, he comes back home and is met by his wife with tender loving care. The one who sharpens the sword is as important as the courageous fighter who uses it to strike; each has a function and a role that complements the other's function and role. The same holds in the case when a man enters his house to find his life fully organized due to his wife's exertion and effort; he feels comfortable and thanks her for sharing the burdens of life.

Allah (The True Lord) *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا۟ مَا فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ
مِّمَّا ٱكْتَسَبُوا۟ ۖ وَلِلنِّسَآءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا ٱكْتَسَبْنَ ۚ وَسْـَٔلُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مِن
فَضْلِهِۦٓ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٣٢﴾

Do not covet what God has given to some of you more than others – men have the portion they have earned; and women the portion they have earned – you should rather ask God for some of His bounty: He has full knowledge of everything [32]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 32)

Consequently, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* created the universe and all the species it comprises; each genus encompasses two or more species, and each species includes individual members. Accordingly, if you know that a genus comprises two species, you have to know that they share the qualities that define the genus and differ in the specific requirements of each species, which makes each one of them distinctive; otherwise, if they were identical, there would not be two species in the first place. The same holds true for individuals. Let us take matter, for instance; matter is a general material divided into different elements, and each of those elements has its respective function. For example, if we want to construct a building, the construction will require sand, cement, steel and tools. That is, all those items are ingredients necessary for building; however, each has its own function: cement has a function, plaster has a function, sand has a function, stones and pebbles have functions and none of them can replace the other (considering an ordinary construction). The human species comprises of two kinds: the male, represented by men, and the female, represented by women. They share same characteristics of the human species; however, (in their own individual form) they are different inasmuch as they represent different kinds. Thus, it would be difficult for you to substitute one kind for the other (it may not be a perfect result).

So, since we know that Allah *Glorified is He* has created two kinds for the human species, it would be absurd if you said that one kind must be identical to the other kind. This is also true for time. Time is the condition for the possibility of any event or occurrence; it means that every event and accident must occur in a certain time; further, every time period has certain events that befit it. For instance, daytime is meant for an event that naturally occurs in it. Similarly, night is the period of time suitable for particular actions, events, etc. For instance, the night is the time for rest and relaxation. By contrast, daytime is the period of time suitable for things related to work and action. If you try to reverse this order, you will be disrupting the nature of things and attempting to put together two opposites.

We have explained that Allah *Glorified is He* uses some issues we agree on (that is, common among people and with no ambiguity) to explain to us about something we disagree on. It is as if He is telling us that the solution for our disagreement lies in what you agree upon. There is no disagreement, for example, on the fact that night is the time for seeking tranquillity, comfort, respite and quietness, and that daytime, by contrast, is for action and movement. All people do this. So Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* explains that time sets the condition and context for an activity because activities differ from each other. But does this mean that days and nights are opposites and antithetical poles or are they rather complementary?

They are indeed complementary; the reason is that the comfort one enjoys at night is intended to guarantee the correctness of the activity of the daytime. You sleep and rest to resume your activity and work anew. Thus, the night activity helps you to accomplish the daytime missions. If someone stays up all night, he will not be able to work the next day. Accordingly, what enables a person during the day? It is the rest he gets during the night. Thereby, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted*, has explained that any matter that people unanimously agree on, be it religious or not, is enough to help us solve the riddles of things we disagree on. For example, if you disagree about males and females and whether or not they should be perceived as equals with regard to work, activity and gender, we will respond: No, you should try to understand this (divine rule) through what we have said about (the law governing) time on which there is a general consent. Thus, take what you have agreed upon as evidence in support of—and for you to fully comprehend—what you disagree on. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* has given the example: 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth]…' (*al-Layl:* 1). When the night veils the earth with darkness, it brings about tranquillity and peace. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* has said: 'And the day as it rises bright!' (*al-Layl:* 2)

By contrast, when the sun rises, motion and activity start. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* brought forth an analogous—but different— pair of integrating opposites, and then He has said: 'By (the mystery of) the creation of male and female; -Verily, (the ends) ye strive for are diverse.' (*al-Layl:* 3-4). This means that every species has a mission to undertake. Thus, we know that the human species comprises two kinds: males and females, and both share common characteristics and functions. Each of them shares the attribute of being humans who enjoy the right to dignity and the freedom of belief. Hence, no man should force a woman to embrace a particular creed. We have given the example of the wife of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* the wife of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and the wife of the Pharaoh.

Thus, their shared attribute—between males and females—is the freedom of belief. No one should try to dominate the other. Also, each one enjoys the freedom of reasoning about different missions. We know how Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* advised Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Treaty of Al-Hudaybya, and how she managed to save all Muslims (the Prophet's companions) from a horrible situation —with Allah, through her counsel, granting them relief from division and depression. We also learnt the story of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis), who was able to undertake an issue for which all men abnegated responsibility. Thus, women can reason and have their own thought. Accordingly, even before the emergence of Islam, there were women who had authentic opinion and possessed the wisdom of admonition especially with regard to missions peculiar to their nature and characteristics.

For instance, history(1) tells us about the king of Kinda. He heard about the beauty of a woman called Umm Iyas bint 'Awf ibn Mahl Ash-Shaybani and wanted to marry her. So, He summoned a woman from Kinda, called Isam, who was characterized by politeness, eloquence and reasonableness. He told her to go and find out all she could about the Bint 'Awf; then she was sent to engage the young lady. When she went to the mother of Umm Iyas, whose name was Umama bint Al-Harith, and notified her of the mission she came to accomplish, the mother called upon the daughter from her tent and said to her: 'This is your aunt. She came to discuss an affair pertaining to you, so do not hide from her anything she would like to examine, whether related to your physical appearance or your manners, and speak to her about whatever she asks you.' When Isam sat alone with the girl, she did as her mother instructed her. She revealed to Isam all her good characteristics; so the woman uttered her famous statement: 'When eyes get naked, deception evaporates." This statement (in its original Arabic form) later became a famous adage, meaning that one gets plain truth, with no deception, whenever everything is revealed and can be discerned with naked eyes. Isam then returned to the king who asked her: 'What did you find about, 'Isam?' He was inquiring what news she brought from Um Iyas. She replied: 'The shaking process has yielded butter.' 'Shaking' in this context refers to what is commonly practiced in the countryside (famous in Arab culture) by shaking the milk inside the bottle in order to separate the butter from the milk; and this expression in Arabic means that her journey came to fruition. He said to her: ‘Tell me.’ She replied: ‘I will tell you honestly and truly.’ and she described her from her hair to her feet in an accurate manner that enticed the king. He then sent for her father to engage her; and he married her.

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(1) *The story of a king with 'Isam, the matchmaker*

On the wedding night, the wise mother advised her daughter about the field of her work, the field of her motherhood and femininity. The mother said to her daughter: ‘if one would give up advice for the sake of politeness, I would not have advised you’—this means that, as a mother, she trusted the manners of her daughter and thought that she might be in no need of advice in this respect—but counselling serves as an aid for a person who has become oblivious (it is always a wake-up call for the unmindful) and a reminder for the reasonable. Then, the mother continued to advise her daughter: ‘Tomorrow, you will go to a house that you do not know, and (will be living with) a companion with whom you have not been familiarized before. Be a slave to him, and he will be a slave to you. Learn from me ten attributes that would be a support and a wealth, and upon which you may depend.’

Let us reflect on the mother’s advice; the lessons she has derived from her experience and her mission. The word of the mother continues: ‘as for the first and second: your life with him should be based on listening, obeying and contentment. The third and fourth are: take care of the place upon which he casts his eyes and nose so that he may not lay his eye on any ugly thing from you, and does not smell except the sweetest scent when he approaches you. The fifth and sixth are: take care of his eating time and keep quiet while he is asleep; disturbing someone’s sleep is always a cause for enragement, and excitement of hunger is inflammable. The seventh and eighth are: manage his money and wealth carefully, caring for his honour and children. The ninth and tenth are: do not to divulge his secrets or disobey his orders; if you divulge his secrets, you will not be safe of his revenge, and if you disobey him, you will embitter and enrage him. Finally, avoid being happy if your husband is sad, and being sad if he is happy.’ Umm Iyas kept the advice in mind when she went to her husband. She bore boys and girls and lived happily with him as much as he lived happily with her.

This motherly advice reveals the ultimate reasonableness and wisdom, but regarding and concerning what? It concerns the field of the female's mission. Allah endows woman with a lot of gifts so that she would be reasonable and show her reasonableness in the mission to which she is destined. The reason is that the field of the man's activity requires decisiveness and toughness, but that of the woman requires kindness and tenderness. There are a lot of examples in our day-to-day life that attest the correctness of such claim. When a man walks into his house and wants to sleep, his child may run to him crying and shouting, and this may irritate the father (who is already exhausted and wants to rest) thus gets angry at the mother, and insults her and the child. He may also utter words like: 'keep him silent until I rest.' What happens in such situation is that the mother takes the child, and with just a gentle motherly soothing touch, she manages to keep him quiet; the child responds to her, and this should not be a surprise, since this is the mission of the mother. For this reason, we find that difficult historical events always indicate the proper status of man and woman respectively (in society).

For example, when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* left his wife Hagar *Allah be pleased with her* and his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* in an uncultivated valley, she asked him, 'How could you leave us in a place deprived of everything even of water? Did you come up with this judgment or did Allah *the Exalted* command you to bring us here?' He replied, 'Allah *the Exalted* has commanded me to come to this place.' She then said to him, 'Then, go as you will, for He would not abandon us.' This is the mission of the woman. Hajar *Allah be pleased with her* is with her child in a place deprived of the key element required for life, water. Therefore, if we reflect on her care and tenderness; what did she do? She ran between the two mountains of As-Safa and Al-Marwa and then ascended the mountain until she felt exhausted.

The one who sets out to perform pilgrimage, the minor or the major, and experiences running between the mountains of As-Safa and Al-Marwa for seven rounds, knows the utmost of what a woman can endure for the sake of her child, as was clear in Hajar's situation who went here and there searching for water for her son. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* has told her, 'You have run and exerted your effort, but I will give you your livelihood from where you did not expect it. You have run between As-Safa and Al-Marwa, but water has sprung out under the feet of your son.' Therefore, she was right when she said, 'Allah will not abandon us.' If her running and searching had led her to find water, we would have thought that her effort was the real cause. However, you should exert your effort without thinking that only your exertion is the cause of outcomes; rather, you should believe that Allah brings about the real cause as He is the Provider of sustenance, the Most Exalted. This idea is manifested in the story of Hajar *Allah be pleased with her.*

Later, when Ibrahim's (Abraham's) decisiveness, resoluteness and prophecy were tried and examined by ordering him to slay his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* Hajar Allah *be pleased with Her* disappeared from the scene. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* saw in a dream that he was slaying his son, so what is the role of his mother in this case? She totally disappeared from the scene because this situation is not in line with her passions and tenderness. Thus, each gender has a specific mission and his or her success is to the extent to which he or she fulfils the mission. Hence, Allah *the Exalted* commands us not to covet what He has bestowed on some people more than on others (*an-Nisa':* 32). Thus, when you see that a gender has a certain privilege and the other gender has a different privilege, you should not preoccupy yourself with coveting by saying, 'I want this or that.' Rather, you should ask Allah *the Exalted* to give you of His Bounty and Grace, as the order 'do not covet' is a prohibition of all coveting and craving for what Allah *the Exalted* has bestowed on some people more than others. That is why Allah *the Exalted* orders us to ask Him of His Bounty, and if you do so, there is a hope that He will give you all of what you want.

Some may see a problem here and they ask, 'How could Allah forbid us to covet what He has bestowed on some of us more than others even though the Bounty of Allah is bound to make some of us better than others? He has elevated people over each other by statuses. Not to mention that, we want to ask Allah so that He confers His Bounty on us since He has not commanded us to do so except to bestow His Grace on us.' We respond by saying, 'No, coveting is usually related to something impossible or not customary.' But asking and supplicating are always intended for something you may be able to obtain. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* explains that we must not approach the sphere of coveting. For this reason, they set an example of coveting by the following verse of poetry:

I wish youth would come back for only one day
So, that I may tell it about what the old age has done

The poet covets and wishes to restore his youth for one day. Would this youth truly come back? No, it would not. Similarly, someone may say, 'I wish that the planets would come near to me so that I would organize it the way I like.' Could this happen? No. But the statement indicates that this thing is desired even if it is not customary or even possible. Thus, the object asked for should fall within the ambit of what is possible for you. Allah *the Exalted* explains that we should not covet what He has given to some and not to others. So long as Allah *the Exalted* has made some of us better than others, one should not ask Him for what He has given to others so that he would take it to himself and deprive the others of it. Rather, He should ask Allah *the Exalted* for something that would allow him to manifest the grace and bounty that Allah has bestowed on him. For this reason, we find that Allah *the Exalted* states in the verses pertinent to preference that He has made some people to excel others in the means of subsistence. (*an-Nahl:* 71)

What is *al-rizq* (provision)? Is it confined to money? No. Provision is all what is useful and beneficial. Hence, patience, knowledge, and courage are all considered forms of provision. The saying of Allah *the Exalted* that He has made some people to excel others makes us wonder, 'Who has Allah made to excel, and more than whom has Allah made some to excel?' Allah *the Exalted* only says, 'some of you', but He did not expand on it. This means that Allah has made some to excel, but He has not made others.

Another question is, 'Which kind of people has Allah made to excel, and more than whom has He made some to excel?' Every human being excels in one aspect, but someone excels him in another. Thus, one may attain perfection in one aspect and another may lack the least of it; however, the latter may have another hidden gift. This implies the integration of gifts which is the gear of the activity of the society.

Let us pay attention to the movement of gears in a machine. The positive protruding part in one gear always fits in the negative empty space in another gear and thus motion becomes possible. If we put two positive protruding gears opposite to each other, no motion will be possible. Therefore, each of them must have a distinct feature for integration to take place. An illustration of this, as I have already said, is night and day. Resting at night assists in working during the day. I have also said that a knight may be able to strike and kill using his sword. However, if this sword had not been sharpened and refined by an expert blacksmith, it would have never fulfilled its purpose. An expert in making swords, in his own right, cannot take part in battles. He may even be afraid of striking and fighting with the sword. Yet, he gets as much credit as the swordsman.

Each one of us has a mission to accomplish, and fate endows people with integrating talents rather than identical, conflicting ones. As long as talents complement each other, I should not envy the one who excelled in a certain respect because I need him. Similarly, he should not envy me if I exceeded him in a talent or a specific kind of work because he also needs me; we reciprocally need each other to excel. This endears the gifts and talents of the people to others. I love the gift that Allah *the Exalted* has endowed someone with and he reciprocally loves the gift which Allah *the Exalted* has endowed on me.

For example, when we find a man who is skilful at sewing and tailoring clothes, everyone feels happy about him. This tailor needs a skilful carpenter to make him a door for his shop. Thus, it is in the interest of both that each one has a praiseworthy skill. For this reason Allah *the Exalted* has referred to us by ‘some’ and ‘others’ because the whole is composed of some and others. One is often talented in certain aspects, but he can never do everything. However, through the inclusion of the others’ talents, we all possess the talents of each other.

Allah *the Exalted* then declares that both men and women have a portion from what they have earned (*an-Nisa’:* 32). The success of the man and woman depends on the extent to which each of them is righteous and fit to undertake the mission for which he or she was created. Afterward, the reward and punishment that each receives will be according to their obligations.

Reward and punishment are commensurate with the effort that each creature exerts in fulfilling their mission in life.

The illustration of the difference between the mission of the man and the woman becomes clear when a man's wife falls sick or gets angry, while they have an infant; will he be able to suckle his infant? Of course, he will not. Each one of them has a mission. The reasonable person is the one who respects Allah's predestination concerning His creatures and respects the gifts that Allah bestows on people. As far as he is concerned, he should ask Allah *the Exalted* to give him of His Bounty, that is, of what Allah has made him to excel others so that Allah grants him His Blessings. When Allah *the Exalted* states that both men and woman have a portion of what they have earned, we notice that they are completely equally addressed.

Allah then commands us to ask him of His Bounty (*an-Nisa':* 32). It is a sign of His Omniscience that He has distributed gifts among His creatures so that society integrates with each other instead of being reluctant, as this reluctance is bound to create division in the society whereas its integration is bound to engender harmony. The reason for the revelation of the verse in question is that women said, '*Jihad* was not prescribed upon us and our Lord allotted to us half of the share of men in inheritance.' Allah *the Exalted* has previously explained to the woman that she was allotted half the share of the man because she is in the custody of someone else and will not spend any of her income on herself, rather, it is the man who is responsible for supporting her financially and for taking care of her expenses. Accordingly, the matter is fair. Similarly, the men said, 'If Allah *the Exalted* has given us a bigger share in the inheritance and allotted to us double the share of the women, He may prefer us to women in the Hereafter and give us double of their reward.' Thus, the man can do one good deed and expect a doubled reward.

Reflect on the intelligence of the woman when she said, 'As long as Allah *the Exalted* has given us half of the men's share of the inheritance, why would not He impose only half of the punishment on us'? Allah *the Exalted* has clarified to them that commanding them not to covet what He has given some more than the others means that each of you should be content with what Allah *the Exalted* has allotted to him or her. Subsequently Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَلِكُلّٖ جَعَلۡنَا مَوَٰلِيَ مِمَّا تَرَكَ ٱلۡوَٰلِدَانِ وَٱلۡأَقۡرَبُونَۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ عَقَدَتۡ
أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡ فَـَٔاتُوهُمۡ نَصِيبَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ شَهِيدًا ﴿٣٣﴾

We have appointed heirs for everything that parents and close relatives leave behind, including those to whom you have pledged your hands [in marriage], so give them their share: God is witness to everything [33] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 33)

Once you see the Arabic word *likul* (to everyone) with a double accent—as is in this verse—then bear in mind that it refers to something implied. The original phrasing is 'every human being' but the noun 'human being' was omitted and replaced with the accent. Similarly, the double accent in the Arabic word *hina'dhin* (while) which refers to the moment when the soul has reached the throat (*al-Waqi'a:* 83-84). The entire clause was omitted and replaced by the accent. Thus, the double accent substituted the omitted clause.

In this verse, the Arabic word *Mawali* (heir*)* is the plural of *mawla* (heirs). Before the revelation of the verses pertinent to inheritance, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had declared *Al-Muhajrun* (the emigrants) and *Al-Ansar* (Helpers) to be brothers. Thus, they used to inherit each other based on this brotherhood. There was something called the 'heirs of support and advocacy' which refers to two persons who trust each other and thus say to each other, 'I am your brother and you are my brother, if you go to war, I will go to war with you, and if you declare peace, I will do so with you, and my blood is yours; you can thus inherit me and I can inherit you, and you can bail me out if I commit a crime, and I will bail you out if you commit a crime.' Hence, it is a real brotherhood.

Based on this brotherhood, they were entitled to have a share of the inheritance in the deceased's wealth. Allah *the Exalted* explains that He has appointed the heirs- men and women who are entitled to inherit specific shares of what was left behind by the parents and near kin folk. This means that they are entitled to a share of this deceased's inheritance and the brothers of advocacy and support fall under this category, as well. Thus, beware of denying them their rights; you must give them the share that was allotted to them, which is a sixth.

However, did this ruling continue? No; it was abrogated when Allah has revealed a verse that confined the shares of inheritance to the close relatives (*al-Anfal:* 75). Allah *the Exalted* states that He appointed heirs for everything that the parents and the close relatives left behind which means that each of these heirs is entitled to a share. Thus, do not say, ‘They are gone and so we will give them nothing' No, give them their shares based on what they agreed upon and pledged their oaths in accordance with Allah's Commandment, as He is a Witness to everything. Thus Allah *the Exalted* is a Witness to whether you follow His Commands.

After this verse Allah *the Exalted* speaks about an issue related to the preferring of some people to ‘others.’ Allah says:

ٱلرِّجَالُ قَوَّٰمُونَ عَلَى ٱلنِّسَآءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بَعۡضَهُمۡ عَلَىٰ بَعۡضٖ وَبِمَآ أَنفَقُواْ
مِنۡ أَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡۚ فَٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتُ قَٰنِتَٰتٌ حَٰفِظَٰتٞ لِّلۡغَيۡبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَٱلَّٰتِي
تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَٱهۡجُرُوهُنَّ فِي ٱلۡمَضَاجِعِ وَٱضۡرِبُوهُنَّۖ فَإِنۡ
أَطَعۡنَكُمۡ فَلَا تَبۡغُواْ عَلَيۡهِنَّ سَبِيلًاۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيّٗا كَبِيرٗا ٣٤

Husbands should take good care of their wives, with [the bounties] God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands’ absence. If you fear high-handedness from your wives, remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them. If they obey you, you have no right to act against them: God is most high and great [34] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 34)

The first thing that attracts our attention in this verse is that some commentators only applied it to the man and his wife, whereas the verse speaks about men and women in a general sense. Thus, the verse is not limited to the relation between a man and his wife. The father is bound to take full care of his daughters and so is the brother with respect to his sisters. Let us first understand what the meaning of Allah’s statement (that men are in charge of women) is. Let us also see whether this verse gives women a higher status and precedence or cause their tiredness. Allah *the Exalted* commands us to respect a cosmic matter. He is the Creator Who has perfected everything He created, and then explained an issue related to faith; namely, that men are in charge of women. If someone has a different opinion, he needs clarify his reasons for this disagreement.

Even women, who are intimidated by this verse, get depressed when they do not bear a male child. When you ask them: 'Why are you depressed?' They say, 'We want a son to protect us.' But how would you say something like this and at the same time object to this verse?

Let us understand the Arabic word *qawwam* which means taking full care of something. This kind of care that Allah *the Exalted* mentions here involves toil and exhaustion. When you say that someone *yaqum* (takes care of) other people, this means that this person never rests. Therefore, why do some people consider men taking full care of women as a kind of suppression? Why do they take not it to mean that men will take care of women's interests? The man is assigned to the task of taking care of women which means that he should do what rectifies the matter. We find that Allah *the Exalted* uses the word 'men' in a generic manner and so He does in the word 'women.' Allah *the Exalted* only speaks about one thing after saying that He has given to some more than others. Thus, what is the aspect of preference and distinction?

It is that the man who must toil and labour on earth to earn the livelihood of his family so that he could provide the woman under his care all the means necessary for a decent life. We can find an illustrative example in the story of Adam *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Exalted* warned him and his wife from Satan who was called upon among the angels to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him,* but he refused. Therefore, we recognized the preceding antagonism between Satan and Adam *peace be upon him* and its reason, that is, Satan's arrogance that prevented him from prostration (*al-Isra':* 61).

Allah *the Exalted* has explained to Adam *peace be upon him* that if he descends to earth, he should remember this antagonism. Know that Satan will not leave you alone and he will continue to entice and tempt you because he does not want to be the only disobedient. Rather, he wants to attract more disobedient followers from the species to whose father he refused to prostrate by tempting them as much as he tried to tempt Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Exalted* warned Adam and Eve not to let Satan drive them out of paradise *(Ta Ha:* 117).

Does Allah *the Exalted* say afterward that both will be miserable or only Adam will be miserable? Allah mentions that only Adam *peace be upon him* will be miserable *(Ta Ha:* 117). Thus, when Allah *the Exalted* mentions toil and labour on earth, He addresses men and not women. This indicates that taking full care of women requires toil, effort and labour. Therefore, this mission is for the man.

We notice that when Allah *the Exalted* assigns the man a certain aspect of excelling in this verse, He uses the word 'some' to indicate that as much as He has made the man to excel the woman for taking full care of her, He has made the woman to excel the man in another respectwhich is being the source of repose and tranquillity for her husband when he returns to their dwelling to find comfort by undertaking her mission.

The respect in which Allah has made the man to excel the woman is then mentioned when Allah says that it is due to what men spend out of their own money (*an-Nisa':* 34). The property is always the fruit of work and labour. We call the man who labours to take care of the other party *qawwam.* Therefore, the woman should rejoice at this because Allah *the Exalted* has assigned toil and labour to the gender which is qualified for that. The mission of the woman, which is indeed a great one, is in line with her characterizing features including delicacy, tenderness, affection and kindness. Allah *the Exalted* did not give these qualities to the man because earning the livelihood does not require these characteristics. Rather, it requires strength, decisiveness and strictness. Thus, the Arabic word *qawwamun* means that men are taking full care of the matters related to women.

Hence Allah *the Exalted* explains to women that they should not think that this is confined to the relation between the husband and the wife, rather, they should keep in mind that it also includes taking full care of the daughters, sisters, and mothers. Thus, taking care of women does not mean domination because this mission involves toil and labour for the man. It is a difficult mission that the man must do his best to properly take full care of the women under his custody.

Allah says: 'That has made the men to excel women due to what they spend from their money.' (*an-Nisa':* 34) Marriage is a gratification for both the male and the female as they enjoy it and desire to preserve the kind through their posterity. Even though enjoyment and the desire for having posterity are common among both, their consequences are not suffered by both; rather, it is only suffered by the man. He must pay the dowry and take care of the living expenses. Even When the wife is rich, Islamic law does not obligate her to lend some money to her husband.

Thus, the duty of men to take full care of women is intended to give comfort to women and relieve them of toil and problems. Therefore, why would women be upset with it? The verse implies that taking full care of the woman is permanent because Allah *the Exalted* does not say *qaa'im*, which means that the man should undertake this mission for only one time; rather, He says *qawwam,* which means that he should continue to undertake this responsibility to the end of his life. As long as men toil and labour for the sake of the woman, she, in turn, must assume a parallel mission. That is, she must be a source of tranquillity for the man, a matter which involves preference, as well.

Allah *the Exalted* has put forward at the beginning of this verse a ruling to which all should adhere. It is the ruling of the Creator Who has perfected the creation of all His creatures. Allah *the Exalted* has explained an issue related to faith, that is, men should take care of women. Afterward, He has explained the respect in which this should be understood by saying that this is due to what he has given to some man more than some woman and due to what men spend out of their money. Allah then continues to talk about righteous women, describing them as devout ones who guard what Allah ordered them to guard in their husbands' absence (*an-Nisa':* 34). The righteous woman is the one who adheres to the path ordained by her Creator to her and her gender. She will be a devout woman as long as she is righteous. The Arabic word *qunut* (devotion) means continuous obedience to Allah *the Exalted.* It is derived from the Arabic phrase *qunut al-fajr* when we stand for a longer period in prayer in devotion, to supplicate to Allah.

The devout woman is continuously submissive to Allah *the Exalted.* As long as she is completely submissive to Him *the Exalted,* she must adhere to His path and commands in His ruling regarding men's mission of taking full care of women. Allah's description of women as guarding what He orders them to guard in their husbands' absence indicates the soundness of their chastity. When a woman's guardian and protector- whether he is a father, in the case of daughters; or a son, in the case of mothers; or a husband, in the case of wives- is absent, she must guard the sanctity of their intimate relation. For this reason, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specified the characteristics of the righteous woman, he said in a Hadith about the worldly life, 'The entire world is a form of gratification and the best of this gratification is the good woman.'(1)

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has enacted a law concerning the character of the righteous woman when he said, 'The best of all women is the one who pleases her husband whenever he glances at her, obeys him whenever he commands her and she does not go against his wishes regarding herself nor her wealth.'(2) What more can any man need? The phrase 'she delights her husband whenever he glances at her' should not be interpreted to mean only the physical beauty. No; it means that once you see her, you envision all aspects of goodness in her. You must not focus on the bad characteristics of you wife and ignore the good ones. The reason is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us from evaluating a woman based on only one of her characteristics or qualities because the woman should be evaluated in terms of the totality of her characteristics. He thus said, 'A woman may be married for four reasons: for her property, her status. her beauty and her religion, so try to get one who is religious, may your hand be besmeared with dust.'(3) Therefore, what is required of us is not to only consider one aspect of beauty, but to consider all other aspects. Indeed, if you consider the aspect of physical beauty, which often concerns most people, you will find that it is the least important aspect related to the constitution of the woman because it only lasts for the period of the honey moon—as people say—and then fades away. Afterward, the other more important factors start to surface. Indeed, you will be misguiding yourself if you only focus on the physical beauty of the one you want to marry. You may also think that you want her to be an aristocratic lady. We advise you that this is a short-term character; what is more lasting is her honesty, sincerity and being economical. For this reason, all men who build their marriages based on the criterion of physical beauty fail in their marital relations because this factor has a short life and it soon fades away and its sparkle glows out. Afterward, the man’s eye starts searching for the true aspects of beauty but never find them and so failure takes place. That is why you should consider all the aspects and beware of only considering one aspect. The best of these aspects is a woman's devotion to her religion. The same applies to the criterion of a woman's acceptance for a husband. The best of his aspects should be his devotion to his religion. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘When someone whose religion and character you are pleased with comes to you then marry (her to) him. If you do not do so, then there will be turmoil in the land and discord.’(1) When someone consulted Al-Hasan ibn Ali *Allah be pleased with them* about the person he should to choose as a husband for his daughter, he said, ‘Marry her to someone who adheres firmly to religion, for if he likes her, he will honour her and if he hates her, he will not wrong her.’

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(1) *Muslim*
(2) *Ahmad*
(3) *Al-Bukhari*

Thus, religion guides us to consider the long-term aspects in life. After that, if a woman wants to be successful, she should excel in the mission assigned to her based on her kind. It is possible for her to expand the sphere of her mission at home if she has time. If she has children, she should learn sewing and tailoring so that she can tailor her and her children’s clothes, to save money. She may also learn embroidery so that she would not pay money to someone to do it for her. She may also learn nursing skills so that if her child falls sick, she can nurse and take care of him. She should also seek knowledge so that she would not need to resort to private tutors who take money from the family's income. If she still has time, she should learn plumbing skills to save the fees of the plumber if the water tap breaks down. Alternatively, she may learn about electricity so that she may fix the light switch if it breaks down. While sitting at home, the woman can also undertake a lot of other tasks through which she can save a lot of the income to meet other needs she may not be able to afford. Thus, the woman would 'guard the intimacy' not through improvisation or voluntary conjectures. Rather, she would be so via adherence to the path that Allah *the Exalted* has set for her to guard such intimacy.

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(1) *At-Tirmidhi*

But what is the path that Allah has set for 'guarding intimacy'? It is that she must guard her honour and the property of her husband in his absence and look for the possible causes of problems and disputes and try to eliminate them. Thus, she should not go out of her house except for stringent needs or pressing necessity so that she would not be tempted by or tempt anyone. All of these are the preliminaries of 'guarding the intimacy.' Further, every woman should not mingle with crowds of people; otherwise, how can we ask her to guard the intimacy? Rather, every woman should always stick to what Allah *the Exalted* has explained in this regard. Accordingly, if she must go out, she should lower her gaze away from what Allah *the Exalted* has forbidden and be mindful of her chastity. (*an-Nur:* 31)

Thus, if the woman did not lower her gaze, an emotional attraction may occur. The reason is that every feeling that occurs inside the human being evolves in three stages: the stage of perception, the stage of inner affection and the stage of inclination, that is, the attempt to turn such an inclination into actual behaviour and action. Let us give an example, as always, by a rose. As you walk in a garden, you may see a rose and once you lay your eyes on it, this is called perception. If you admired this rose and liked it very much, this is called affection. If you then try to pick the rose, this is a process of inclination. How many stages do we have then? We have three stages: perception, affection and inclination.

When does Islamic law interfere? It always interferes in the process of inclination. It tells you that you have looked at the rose, but there was no objection, then you have liked and admired it and, Islamic law also did not say anything about this. But when you tried to reach out and pick it, the Islamic law told you, 'No; the rose is not yours.' Thus, you are free to perceive, free to find affection in yourself, but when you are inclined and want to pursue such an inclination, we must tell you, 'No; it is not yours. If you truly like it, go and plant a rose in your house or take the permission of its owner to pick it.'

Thus, Islamic legislation interferes to keep a feeling from turning into an inclination except in the case of women. The law interferes from the beginning of perception. The reason is that the One Who created us knows that if we perceive some type of beauty, we will look at it and it will cause an inclination and a desire. Once you have perception and desire, you cannot separate them from inclinations. As a man, you are chemically constituted so that if you see beauty and feel affection, you will feel a desire. Such a desire will not be calmed down unless you satisfy it. Thus, Islamic law shows that Allah *the Exalted* has Mercy upon you from the outset; that is why He has chosen to restrain you from the outset. All laws interfere and place restrictions on objects of desire at the stage when one starts to pursue the satisfaction of his desire, except in the case of the desire for women; Allah's law interferes as early as the stage of perception. For this reason Allah *the Exalted* commands both the man and the woman to lower their gaze. Why so? The reason is that if you perceive, you will find affection in your heart and, if this happens, you will be inclined. Such inclination and the pursuit to satisfy it is a kind of debauchery and infringement on the honour of other people. Further, if you are not inclined you will be suppressed. For all these reasons Allah *the Exalted* has decisively settled the matter from the outset and commanded the believing men and women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity. (*an-Nur:* 30-31)

Accordingly Allah *the Exalted* wants us to control our desires from the beginning. Why so? Because if I saw a rose and people tell me not to pick it as it is not mine, I would not suffer from any imbalance in my material. But when a man sees a beautiful woman and she touches his feelings, he will be inclined towards her because he has organs that are excited by such beauty. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* tells you, ‘I am your Creator and I will interfere in the matter from its beginning.’ His saying that women guard the intimacy, refers to the ones who do so through following the path that He has set for such preservation; namely, that the one should not expose himself to any perception that may cause an affection which may, in turn, lead to an inclination. For if you are inclined, you may slip into corruption; and if you are not, you will suffer a complex and so evil would always be incurred from such a practice. This is the meaning of guarding what Allah has ordained them to guard. It means that she should consider the path that has been laid down by

Allah *the Exalted* to respect the absence of her husband. Not per her own rules, but in accordance with the path that has been set by his and her Creator.

Allah *the Exalted* nurtures the sense of vigilance and attention in His servants as He explains the attitude towards women from whom one fears disobedience and ill-conduct. The disobedience has not happened; rather, there is fear that it may occur. Being attentive and vigilant, entails being observant from the very outset. Thus, you should not let the problem escalate until the disobedience is actualized. The Arabic word *nushuz* (woman's disobedience) is derived from the verb *nashaz*, which means to elevate to a higher position. The same word also means a high place. As long as Allah *the Exalted* has said that men shall take full care of women, the reference here is to the women who want to arrogantly rebel and be placed in a high status. For this reason, the word *nashaz* is used in the context of musical harmony; in this case, it refers to the sounds that deviate from the rules of music. People thus say this tone is *nashaz* meaning that it is not in harmony with the tone or tune that preceded it. A woman should be tranquil and humble; thus, if you sense that she is thinking about revolting and acting arrogantly, you should not let her ascend the hill of self-conceit. Rather, you should take an action once you start sensing the preludes of disobedience to prevent its occurrence. Allah has described woman's disobedience as something fearful and expected, even if it has not happened yet.

But, what would be an appropriate remedy? Allah *the Exalted* commands us to admonish them. This means that once you see her having such an intention, you should first admonish her. Admonition means gentle and delicate advice. People have said that advising gently would be better if you seize a moment when both of you are in good terms with each other. You should also advise your woman in the right situation so that such admonition and guidance would be acceptable. Thus, do not advise someone unless his heart is attached to you.

Let us assume that a son asked his father for something that his father did not bring. The mother afterward came to complain to the father about the behaviour of the son. The father then tries to fulfil the wish of his son and respond to his request. After that, he tells his son, 'Come here my son; Allah has helped me to obtain what you want.' When the son feels happy at getting what he wished, the father says to him, 'If I had remembered what your mother said about your misbehaviour, I would not have brought you what you requested.' Even if the father criticises the son at this moment, the son may laugh. Why so? The reason is that the father has taught his son the lesson and imparted to him the piece of advice in a moment when his heart and passion are attached to him. But we do not often do so. One often approaches his son in times when there is an aversion between them and tries to advise him. Such advice will never work. If we want the advice to be fruitful, we must change ourselves first and seize the opportunity of the times when the one we are advising is emotionally attached to us to impart our admonition to him. Thus, admonition means advising gently and delicately. It is of gentleness and delicacy to choose the appropriate time for giving your admonition and to know that the best time for doing so is when there is a relative agreement between you and the one you want to advise. If the advice did not work and you still see that the matter is going in the direction of arrogance and disobedience, you should pay attention. A woman often tends to be flirtatious with men because she senses his interest in and inclination towards her. Further, the woman may patiently endure the man more than the man would do with her. The reason is that a man by nature cannot calm down unless he takes an action towards the cause of his anger. By contrast, women are provoked slowly. Thus, when the organs of a man are excited, he may not forebear patience or waiting. By contrast, a woman is neither excited not provoked quickly. Therefore, when you see this disobedience, and she knows that you are a man who likes to see the results of feelings and wants to go on, give her a lesson in this respect and so abandon her in bed.

Just consider the precision of the Quran; you should neither abandon your wife alone in the house or even in your bedroom; rather, sleep on one side of the bed and leave her to sleep on the other side so that the anger and dispute between you may not be exposed to other people. You just leave her alone in bed because if you abandon her and all the members of the house know that you sleep in a separate room, or that you desert the house, you will provoke her stubbornness. But, when you leave her alone in bed, this will be something entirely between both of you. Afterward, she may experience an emotional condition and so overlook the whole thing. You may also go through any emotional situation that will lead you to forgive and forget about the dispute; further, both of you will wish to reconcile with the other.

Thus, if you follow Allah's teachings by forsaking her in bed, it will be as if you are telling her, 'If you will try to be disobedient, I can control myself.' Some may wonder, 'What does abandoning them in bed mean'? We say that if they share one bed, he should turn his back upon her on the condition that the matter would not be exposed. Thus, he should sleep in the same bed and in the same room so that no one would know anything about it. The reason is that if any disagreement between the husband and the wife stays between them, it will be resolved quite quickly. As soon as a man's yearning and desire for his wife flare up to an irresistible level, he could return to her and seek her reconciliation. She would also have similar feelings and the whole dispute gets resolved. The thing that destroys homes is the intervention of external parties. These elements or parties may make the man or the woman more adamant. For this reason, no man should reveal what happens between him and his wife to his parents or his brother; rather, disputes should always be confined to the man and the woman. There is indeed something between them that will make them forgive each other.

After the stage of admonishing the disobedient women comes beating. Scholars have said that beating should be conducted on the condition that it would not lead to any bleeding or bone-breaking. This means that it should be a light beating for the purpose of showing dissatisfaction. That is why the scholars say that the husband should beat his wife with a *miswak* (tooth brush). Allah *the Exalted* has taught us so, when He said to Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* when he took an oath to whip his wife a hundred whips. He commanded him to take a small bunch of grass and strike her with them so that he would not break his oath, (*Sad:* 44). The small bunch of grass consists of one hundred sticks. Thus, if he beats his wife with it, it would be as if he has beaten her one hundred times. When the woman finds that the beating is done with tenderness, she will obey of her own accord. At any rate, do not ever think that the One Who created us would ever decree any ruling that would be rejected by our instinctual passion. Allah's rulings are only rejected by the pride of our passions. The One Who has decreed and ordained these rulings knows that matters must be as such.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that as for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, you (O men!) shall admonish them, and then leave them alone in bed, and then beat them in a harmless manner. The meaning of harmless here is that it should not lead to bleeding or breaking bones. Allah *Glorified is He* resumes His discourse by saying if they follow you in your obedience, do not be unfair to them.

Accordingly, beating must not be used to humiliate the woman; rather, it is a process of rectification and reformation. Further, you should bear in mind that you should only judge your wife based on her apparent behaviour. So, you shall never say: ‘she obeys me, but her heart is not with me’, and so plunge into the realm of the unknown. We tell you, ‘You should not worry yourself with this because that which is judged in all circumstances is only what is apparent.’ So, you should not concern yourself with the essences of things. Allah *Glorified is He* says if they follow you in your obedience which means that if you sense that the entire matter has ended and there is no longer any ill-will that you may fear, you must not harm your wives. If you thus seek to harm her after she obeyed you, beware that the One Who allowed you to take your wife through a single word—the pledge of marriage—has more power over you than you have over her. This is a menace from Allah *Glorified is He*.

The meaning of Allah’s menace to us is that He explained that this is My creation and I am the One Who let you take her through the pledge ‘Marry me… I marry you.’ As long as you have maintained her by the authority of a word from Me, do not treat her condescendingly because I protect her right as much as I protect yours. No one of you is dearer to Me than the other; both of you are My creation and I want things to be settled. After this discourse addressed to the husbands, Allah *Glorified is He* brings forth a new verse by saying:

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَٱبْعَثُوا۟ حَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهِۦ وَحَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهَآ
إِن يُرِيدَآ إِصْلَٰحًا يُوَفِّقِ ٱللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَآ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا خَبِيرًا ﴿٣٥﴾

If you [believers] fear that a couple may break up, appoint one arbiter from his family and one from hers. Then, if the couple want to put things right, God will bring about a reconciliation between them: He is all knowing, all aware [35]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 35)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And if you fear dissension between the two’, means that the breach has not yet occurred. But, what is the ‘dissension’ intended in this context? *Ash-Shiqaq* (dissention) is derived from *shaqa*. *Shaqa* means to separate something from something else. Thus, if you say, '*Shaqaqt* the log.', this means that you have separated it into two halves. Accordingly, dissention between couples indicates that they have been united through marriage and become one thing. Therefore, anything that may keep them apart would be a *shiqaq (dispute)* since through marriage one is united with his/her spouse. This is what Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And how could you take it while you have gone unto each other and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?' (*an-Nisa':* 21) This means that the wife is interwoven with her husband and the husband is interwoven with his wife (*al-Baqara:* 187), a husband indeed shields his wife and she also shields him. Thus, if the matter goes beyond ability, Allah *Glorified is He* says that if you have reason to fear that dissention might occur between married couples, but who will fear such dissention? Would it be the guardian, the kinsfolk from either side? It is the people who are concerned with the matter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that if you fear that dissention might occur between a married couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people; it is the people within the immediate environment and familial realm of the couple; thus, we should not let things escalate to the level of dissention. It is as if Islam and the Quran pay our attention to the fact that the relatives within the same family should heed the changing of psychological states and moods of the family whether it be mother, father, brother or even a relative so that things would not escalate to the level of dissention. The evidence is that Allah *Glorified is He* says that if you have reason to fear that dissention might occur between married couples, the dissention has not yet happened and the issue should not be left to escalate to the level of dissention. Allah *Glorified is He* says that if you fear such a dissention, appoint an arbiter from among the two sides. This statement is generally addressed to the guardian too; if he keeps his eyes vigilant and observant to supervise the relation between households; however, this is rather unviable considering the scope of the responsibilities of the guardian in the modern age. Thus, it is obvious that those who can undertake this task are the prominent figures of the family. All those who have distinction in the family should thus heed all that is happening in it and say we observe such and such things.

We can then appoint an arbiter from here and another from there and consider the issue that may lead to a dispute between the couple before the conflict erupts. The defence of each spouse’s interest has thus been transferred from the couple to someone from the family of the husband and another from the family of the wife. Those arbiters, in turn, do not have a clear conception of the problem and the evidence in support of either side has not crystallized. Further, none of the arbiters have preconceived judgment. The judgment that is thereby passed by the family of the wife and that of the husband is not passed based on the bias and inclinations in their hearts, especially that the two are assigned the task of judging. They must agree on what they see so that if both saw that the only way out is divorce, then they should rule that the couple should get divorced. People may think that the arbiters are only intended to reconcile the two spouses so that if the latter did not like the former’s verdict, the two spouses would continue in their dissention. No, we choose an arbiter from this side and another from that side to put an end to the problem.

What the two arbiters rule should thereby be executed because the matter has been left up to them. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says that if the two arbiters want to set things right, Allah *the Exalted* may bring their reconciliation. It is as if the main mission is reconciliation and that the arbiters should embark on the matter with the intention of accomplishing reconciliation. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* did not then will the two couples to be reconciled through the intermediation of the arbiters, this may indicate that the two arbiters entered the situation with no intention to reconcile them.

Every arbiter should thus fear for himself and try to do his best to reconcile the couple because if he does not end the dispute, it will become a scandal for him. The One Who created everyone (the husband, the wife and the arbiter from the family of the husband and the arbiter from the family of the wife), says that if they both want to set things right, He may bring about their reconciliation. Thus, both arbiters should go with this intention and insist on reconciling between the two spouses because when Allah *Glorified is He*, talks about a global issue, everyone tries to act in accordance with His Discourse in this regard. Further, Allah *Glorified is He* may talk about general issues because

He is the All Knowing and the All Aware. For instance, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And [that] indeed Our soldiers will be those who overcome.’ (*as-Saffat:* 173)

Allah *Glorified is He* said so in order that each soldier ensures that he fights for the sake of Him *the Exalted* because if he is defeated, we will tell him you were not a proper soldier for Allah *Glorified is He*, and he would be afraid of this. Thus, the universal issue is put in a doctrinal scheme so that one would channel all his capacities for the sake of accomplishing the task. When Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘If they both want to set things right, Allah *Glorified is He* may bring about their reconciliation’, do not ever take pride in the decisiveness or the intelligence of the arbiters; all of these are causes. We thus continuously assert, ‘Do not take pride in the knowledge of causes because everything was originated from the Owner of all causes.’ Let us consider the precision and the wisdom of the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘may bring about their reconciliation.’ He thus did not say if they both want to set things right, they may bring about reconciliation. Rather, He *the Almighty* reserved to Himself the virtue of reconciling between the spouses.

Allah *Glorified is He* appends the verse by His saying: ‘He is indeed All Knowing All Aware’, this means that He is All knowing and All aware of the state of the husband and the wife and the arbiter from the side of the wife and the arbiter from the side of the husband. They are encompassed by His knowledge. Each of them should thus make sure that their behaviour is appropriate because they are responsible for every action related to this case; our Lord is All knowing and All-aware. But, what is the difference between all knowing and all-aware? The difference is that knowledge may be imparted to you by someone else but awareness is always yours.

After Allah *Glorified is He* had talked about the preceding rulings concerning marriage and the unlawful things from which we have also deduced what is lawful, about those who are incapable of marriage and about wealth and warned us not to devour it unrightfully and about the relation between man and woman, He thus chose to direct us and pay our attention to His exalted path. He says:

وَٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَلَا تُشۡرِكُواْ بِهِۦ شَيۡـٔٗاۖ وَبِٱلۡوَٰلِدَيۡنِ إِحۡسَٰنٗا وَبِذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ وَٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ
وَٱلۡمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱلۡجَارِ ذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ وَٱلۡجَارِ ٱلۡجُنُبِ وَٱلصَّاحِبِ بِٱلۡجَنۢبِ وَٱبۡنِ
ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ مُخۡتَالٗا فَخُورًا ﴿٣٦﴾

Worship God; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbors near and far, to travelers in need, and to your slaves. God does not like arrogant, boastful people [36] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to worship Him alone and not to ascribe divinity, in any way, beside Him. This means that you should not address or tackle any of the issues in a way that is disobedient to Allah *Glorified is He* or at odds with the course He prescribed. Worshipping is the obedience of the worshiper to the worshiped. So, do not think that it refers only to the acts or rituals of worshipping we do like praying, fasting, paying obligatory alms to the poor and performing pilgrimage because these are the pillars of Islam. They are the pillars and foundations upon which Islam was based, but Islam is not exclusively composed of these pillars; rather, these pillars are the foundations upon which Islam was based. Similarly, the foundations that support the house do not constitute the entire house. Islam is a complex structure. Thus, to those who want to apply classificatory or technical terms of science to Islam in order to argue that worshipping in Islam solely consists in prayers and what pertain to them, giving obligatory alms to the poor, fasting and performing pilgrimage because they are described as such in the Islamic jurisprudence books, we say, ‘This is just the term used to refer to them but whatever command revealed from Allah *Glorified is He* is an act of worship.’ For this reason, some people say, ‘We should worship Allah *Glorified is He* and quit working.’ To those, we say worshipping is obeying the commands of the One Who is worshipped so, do not understand the statement in terms of rituals only. Rituals are just the continuous declaration of allegiance to Allah *Glorified is He*. They give an impulse that allows us to deal with the events of life. But rituals are not all forms of offering worshipping to Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, dealing with people is a form of worship; the true concept of worshipping comprises maintaining the earth. Allah *the Exalted* says to the believers to pause their transactions at the time they hear the call for the Friday Prayer. (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) Allah *Glorified is He* wants them to quit commerce and hasten to prayers; it is not that He wants them to quit being idle and go to pray; rather, He wants them to quit their business activities. He mentioned 'worldly commerce' because it is a process that yields its immediate profit. When you cultivate a crop, you will have to wait for a long time to reap the fruits. But commerce yields its fruit immediately; you sell something and accrue profit immediately. Commerce—as we know—regulates all actions of life because commerce is mediation between a producer and a consumer. You sell a commodity that you acquired from a producer; the producer in turn always seeks a middleman to sell his product to the consumer. This consumer may be a producer in his own right; further, the producer may be in a different capacity than the consumer. Production and consumption are an exchange. Life could be explained in terms of selling and buying, and as long as there is selling there will be purchasing. This is a continuation of the cycle of life. The seller always wants to sell but the purchaser may not want to buy because the purchaser will spend money, whereas the seller will gain money. Allah *Glorified is He* thus explains: 'Give up this whole process that yields immediate profit and answer the call for the Friday prayer.' But what shall we do after the prayer? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah, and remember Allah often that you may succeed.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10)

This is also a command. If we obey the first one which is to proceed to the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* thus we are also obliged to abide by the second order which is to disperse freely in the land and seek Allah's Bounty. Thus, all of this is a form of worship; Life is a form of worship. Prayer is a form of worship and so is fasting, but do not prayers need the necessities of life to support them? You must secure the basics of life to be able to pray. What are these basics of life? It is eating, drinking, housing and proper clothing. What is considered as a prerequisite of something obligatory, it is obligatory. Thus, the totality of life is a series of acts of worship. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to worship Him *the Exalted* since we have no deity other than Him. He brought us into being out of the earth, and made us to maintain thereon. (*Hud:* 61)

Thus, everything that leads to the thriving of the earth, constructing it and deducing the secrets of Allah *Glorified is He* in the existence, is deemed an act of worship to Him *the Exalted.* The reason is that you extract and obtain from the treasure of Him *the Exalted* that He has placed on earth what will attract people's attention to the universal truth that was propounded by faith.

Thus, do not ever think that worship is merely what is included under the sections of 'acts of worship' and 'transactions' in the books of Islamic Jurisprudence. All actions are forms of worship. The only difference is that worshipping does not directly manifest itself in other worldly actions and associations because you always work for your own benefit. But in prayer you dedicate from your time; therefore, we have called prayer 'worshipping' in the proper sense of the word because the other processes are performed by others who do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* since he also goes out in life to cultivate and practice industry.

Why did they call these rituals 'acts of worship'? That is because they are performed by only the religious person. Other acts pertaining the inhabitancy of the universe and the pursuit of worldly interests are performed equally by the non-religious. Every command from Allah that we obey is an act of worship. This is the right concept of worship that we should all embrace, devote and channel all our intellectual and physical capacities that He created for us to shape the created matter, which is earth and its elements, to elevate existence to a level that would delight us, with which Allah would be content.

'Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him.' (*an-Nisa':* 36) After He had put forward all the above mentioned, Allah directed our attention to an issue that we always need to heed in all our behaviour, which is to abide by the commands of Allah and associate nothing alongside Him. The reason is that ascribing associating partners alongside Allah harms man's case in existence. Thus, do not devote your thoughts to the materialistic side of your work rather than to Allah. Be sincere to Allah in everything you do.

Allah gives an example of the comfort enjoyed by the monotheist who truly unifies Allah and the toil incurred by the polytheist. He says: 'Allah presents an example: a slave owned by quarreling partners and another belonging exclusively to one man - are they equal in comparison? Praise be to Allah! But most of them do not know.' (*az-Zumar:* 29)

The verse talks about a slave owned by a group, and the group has internal dispute. The slave does not know how to reconcile the conflicting commands that each gives to him. If he satisfies one, he may upset the other. He is thus a slave whose energy is divided, and whose attention is scattered. On the contrary, a slave owned by a single master only receives either a command or a prohibition from one master. Allah presents the case to his servant in an interrogative style; and He is All knowing of all things so that He makes the believer share with him the answer of, 'Would both be equal'? Here man examines it with his reason and would like to answer; so, what would he say? He will answer per his nature and the logic of Allah saying, 'No Lord, they are not equal.'

The believer himself has admitted the truth; Allah did not impose it upon you. Allah has posed it in a question form so that your answer would be decisive. If you, believing servant, think this way, you will live comfortably because your energy will be channelled towards following the commands and avoiding the prohibitions of Allah. At this point, you become a master in the universe, and none in the universe would be able to take away from you your servitude to the Creator. This is the comfort we procure because we follow the saying of Allah: 'And worship Allah [alone], and associate nothing with Him.' Associating others with Allah will cause one to suffer. Those who do so, seek the aid of whom they worship rather than Allah. The fact is that Allah abandons the polytheistsas stated in the Qudsi Hadith in which Allah says: 'I am the Self-sufficient; I am thus the One least in need of partnership. Whoever does any deed wherein he associates others beside Me, I shall abandon him to his polytheism.'(1)

Allah abandons the one who ascribes Divinity to anyone beside him. The one who does so is stripped of Allah's bounties because Allah is needless of any partner. This is how the polytheist lacks faith, and will live in toil. Allah *Glorified is He* followed His obedience with that of one's parents. He says: 'and do the good unto your parents.' Parents are the mother and the father; they are the immediate cause of your existence. Since worshiping Allah is the cause of your existence, then your mother and father who are two causes for your existence should direct your attention to the first cause. You should also pay attention to the One Who brought about the lineage of your ancestors that ultimately goes back to the first human being, namely, Adam *peace be upon him*.

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(1) *Muslim and Ibn Majah*

‘And do good unto your parents.’ Consider the status that Allah has assigned to the parents. The believer is the one addressed here so that he would worship Allah properly. Assignment of obligations upon the servant is a consequence of his existence. In other words, the statement [in the verse] can only be addressed to a legally competent individual, whose competence is a consequence of his existence. Your parents are the immediate cause of your existence. But if you pursued the chain of causes of your existence even further, how did your parents come to life? Obviously, their parents were the cause of their existenve and so on, until you reach Allah. It is Allah Who commanded us to ‘Worship Him and associate nothing with Him.’ After this, Allah says: ‘And do the good unto your parents.’ The command ‘do good’ indicates that one should provide care for his parent in excess. We call this giving in excess the state of *’ihsan*.

‘And do the good unto your parents.’ When the True Lord coupled the mention of the parents with His worship — as He is One Deity with whom we are not to associate anything — He did not address the question as to whether or not the parents are believers because there is another verse where He says: ‘But if they endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness and follow the way of those who turn back to Me [in repentance]. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do.’ (*Luqman:* 15)

It is true you should not obey them in this regard, yet it is incumbent upon you to respect them because they are the direct cause of your existence even if this cause is against the One Who created it and brought it into existence. Allah *exalted be His Power* ‘Accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness.’ But goodness is done to both the one whom one likes and the one whom one does not like. Accordingly, do not let your heart get attached to your parents if they are polytheists. Only make sure to bear them good company in this life with kindness. For this reason, Allah says: ‘Accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness.’ This means that you should look after their worldly interests by way of kindness. You can thus be kind and do good to the one whom you like as much as you can do so to the one whom you do not like.

Allah says: ‘And do the good unto your parents’, and He repeats it in several verses. He told us before in the chapter of *al-Baqarah*: ‘And [recall] when We took the covenant from the Children of Israel, [enjoining upon them], "Do not worship except Allah; and be good to your parents.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 83).

Then the verse we are discussing comes: ‘And worship Allah [alone], and do not associate anything with Him. And do the good unto your parents.’ In another similar instance: ‘Say: "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited you from: Join not anything in worship with Him; and be good and dutiful to your parents.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). Also In another similar instance, He says, ‘And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship and she brings him forth with hardship, and the bearing of him and the weaning of him is thirty months.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) In the chapter of *al-`Ankabut,* Allah also says: ‘And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8)

But if your parents endeavour to make you associate others alongside Me that you do not know, do not obey them. Accordingly, if the parents are polytheists, we still must treat them kindly. But as we said, you may do the good to those whom you like as much as you may do it to those whom you do not like. What is forbidden, in this situation, is affection. For this reason, Allah says: ‘You will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad).’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22)

There is no contradiction or semi-contradiction between the verse under study and the one just quoted from the chapter of *al-Mujadalah*. There are verses where Allah coupled His worship with being good towards one’s parents. There are two other verses which independently address treating parents well. This is in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) And the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And We have enjoined on man to be good and dutiful to his parents.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8)

The word ‘goodness’ in all the verses means to do more than what Allah has assigned to you, out of the belief that He sees you even though you do not see Him. The word involves pleasure of the servant with the obligations and even going beyond them. When one wants to do more than he is assigned to do, he may pray ten times a day instead of five, fast other months besides *Ramadan* or fast Monday and Thursday of every week. Instead of giving out only 2.5% of his wealth for *zakat* to the poor, he may give 10%; and perform pilgrimage twice in their lifetime instead of once. The point is therefore doing more than what Allah has enacted upon you. If you do so, Allah will admit you into the state of *al-ihsan.* You usually do so because you have tasted the sweetness of performing the enactments of Allah, and realized the grace of worshipping Allah in as much as He has endowed you with piety and other bounties, as per His saying: ‘So be ever-conscious of Allah; and Allah teaches you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 282)

You basically knew that Allah deserves from you to do more than what he has assigned you to do. For this reason, a good man said in one of his supplications, ‘ Allah, I am afraid that You would not reward me for obeying You because I have started to desire it.’ This means that worshiping Allah has become a self-desire for him. He is thus afraid that he may lose the sweetness of being assigned and the toil it involves. He says, ‘O Lord, I have loved worshipping You, and we are supposed to avoid the lusts of ourselves but it has become a lust; so, what should I do’?

This man has entered the state of *al-ihsan,* and his self has become tranquil and even his desires have become in accordance with what Allah has commanded and is content with.

For this reason, we should observe that when Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* talks about the pious, He says: ‘Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and springs. Accepting what their Lord has given them. Indeed, they were before those doers of good.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16) Why are they considered ‘doers of good’? The True Lord responds: ‘They used to sleep but little of the night.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17)

But did Allah enact upon me the assignment not to sleep except for a short period of the night? One prays the night prayers at the beginning of the night; one may then sleep afterwards. This is the assignment. But if prayers are endeared to the heart of the believer, faith increased in his heart and limbs, and he enjoys being close to Allah, the True Lord never turns this servant away. He rather receives and admits him into the state of *al-ihsan*: 'Indeed, they were before those doers of good. They used to sleep but little of the night. And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16-18)

Our Lord did not enact such self-obligations upon the doers of good. He only obligated five prayers. We know the story of the Arab Bedouin who said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Do I have to do anything else apart from praying?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* answered, 'No, unless you volunteer to do something else.' He then mentioned to him giving *zakat* to the poor. The man then asked, 'Do I have to do anything else?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'No unless you volunteer to do something else.' The man turned away and left while saying, 'I swear to Allah, I will not do anything than this.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'He would succeed were he true to what he pledged.'(1)

In this manner, the Arab Bedouin entered within the status of the successful. Allah admits whoever does more than what is enacted into the status of *ihsan*: 'They used to sleep but little of the night.' And in the hours before dawn, they would ask forgiveness. And from their properties was [given] the right of the [needy] petitioner and the deprived.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19)

We also notice the precision of style. The True Lord did not say that the deprived are entitled to a rightful share of the fortune of the doers of good; why? The reason is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave the doer of good the freedom to give out more than the legal proportion of the *zakat* that he is bound to give to the needy and the deprived. When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about a requirement of faith He says: 'And those in whose wealth there is a known right. For the petitioner and the deprived.' (*al-Ma'arej:* 24-25)

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(1) *Muslim*

Thus, whoever wants to give out more than what is required, elevates from the state of faith and enters the status of *`ihsan* (doing beyond the obligatory). It is as if Allah is telling you in the verse under study: Do not only do what is required and incumbent on you with your parents. Rather care for, obey and show mercy and leniency towards them as much as you can. Elevate yourself to the status of *ihsan*. In another verse, Allah guides us after He has introduced us to the status of *ihsan*. He describes that same status with something else, namely, beauty: ‘And We have enjoined upon man goodness to parents.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8).

What is the opposite of goodness? It is ugliness. The True Lord had introduced us to the status of goodness one time and the status of *ihsan* another time. There are several points that we should heed. First, we notice that parents, in most cases, raise their children. The exception is when a child becomes an orphan and others raise him. For this reason, one should notice the cause of bringing up after existence. Since your parents are the cause of your existence, you are required to give them their rights and even more, so you can enjoy being in the status of *ihsan*. Yet, He reasoned this in another verse: ‘And say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 24)

Raising children was the reason Allah used for the child to pray and obey them. But if other than your biological parents raise you, are you obliged to treat them as your parents? The True Lord says: ‘as they brought me up.’ If my parents are entitled to this right, so would anyone who brings me up even if they were not my biological parents. Allah mentioned parents when asking the child to take the status of *ihsan*. ‘My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small.’ We thus notice that He sometimes does not mention the issue of bringing up so that we know that the parents are the cause of our existence. In another instance, He pays our attention that whoever is responsible for raising someone is entitled to the same rights as the biological parents. There is also another issue. When the True Lord advises us to obey and do the good to our parents, He refers to mother-exclusive rationale, without including the father: ‘And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship and she brings him forth with hardship, and the bearing of him and the weaning of him is thirty months.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15).

Allah has listed here the reasons related to the mother without the father. This is the speech of the Lord, as the mother's role started from the moment the child is an embryo. She takes care of herself, behaves cautiously and pre-occupies herself with her child from the time he is an embryo. She tries to meet all his needs before he acquires reason and thought. The child's father may be away and never get to know his child before he grows up; and he, namely the father, starts preparing him for the struggles of life. During pregnancy, the mother takes care of her baby's needs before the latter even has a reason to recognize what she does for him. By contrast, by the time a child acquires reason, he recognizes the role of his father who lives, accompanies and takes care of him and whenever he needs anything, the mother tells him, 'ask your father and he will get it for you.' The child thus gets used to asking his father for all his needs. Over time, he forgets the role of his mother, and how she carried him during pregnancy, how she suckled him, nurtured and looked after him before he starts to understand anything. Of whose role, must we be reminded then? It is the mother's role. One recognizes the role of the father and the reasons for honouring him since he was a child because he is the one who delivers all his needs. For this reason, the True Lord says: 'And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship and she brings him forth with hardship, and the bearing of him, and the weaning of him is thirty months.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15)

The child is not aware of the pregnancy period. When he starts acquiring consciousness of the world around him, he realizes that his father is the one who delivers all his needs, and as long as his father is the one who seems to oversee taking care of his needs. All of this makes him aware of his father's role, whereas the mother's role slips through the cracks. For this reason, Allah reminds us of this less obvious rationale about the mother's role and skipped the father's due to his more obvious role.

In the narration by Abu Hurayrah *Allah be pleased with him,* he said said, 'A man came to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, "Who is the one who most deserves my best company? The Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, "Your mother." The man then asked, "Who is next"? The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, "Your mother." The man then asked, "Who is next"? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, "Your mother." The man asked, "Who is next"? The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'Your father."'[1]

If you think about it, you will find it obvious. Fatherhood is also connected to manhood, and manhood is a struggle and an unstoppable pursuit. Motherhood, by contrast, is sheltering and affection. A mother is thereby not required to go out, seek and deal with other people to meet her needs. Your father, on the contrary, goes out to work, which is an honour for him. However, for a woman to work is hard to swallow. The True Lord *Glorified is He* thus says: 'And do good unto your parents' (*an-Nisa': * 36), and 'We have enjoined on man goodness to parents' (*al-'Ankabut:* 8). Doing the good unto one's parents is reiterated three times, coupled with the worship of Allah without associating partners to Him. In addition, it is mentioned alone in two verses. It should be noted here that the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'But if they (both) strive with you to make you join in worship with Me others that of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not.' (*Luqman:* 15)

However, this is not in conflict with treating them nicely and delivering their needs. We notice that the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* has not mentioned asking for mercy for them, as they are upon disbelief and polytheism; as opposed to: 'And say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small."' (*al-Isra':* 24) Even though the parents raise the body of the child, they do not cultivate his heart and faith. For this reason, they do not deserve his prayer for mercy upon them. Irrespective of this, the True Lord wished for the child to bear his parents in this life even if they are disbelievers.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted* wants to spread kindness in the entire universe. For this purpose, He starts with those who are most akin; starting with family down to the neighbour. He says: 'And do the good unto your parents, and near of kin.' (*an-Nisa':* 36) Accordingly, there are multiple levels of kindness. If everyone does the good unto his parents, none will be

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(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

humiliated or disgraced in his old age. Therefore, Allah expands the limits of kindness to include the relatives. He mentioned the parents and followed them with the 'near of kin.' But who are the akin? It is everyone who has a relation to the person. This is the second level.

If every affluent treated his parents-the first level- kindly, and extended it to the relatives which is the second level, mutual kindness will overlap throughout the kin; and eventually no one will stand in need, as they will be looking after each other.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the orphans. The orphan—as we know—is the one who lost his father before reaching puberty. He misses the father's affection of childhood. But after he grows up and becomes a man, he is no longer considered an orphan. He has become independent. Further, the one whose mother dies is not called an orphan. Conversely, orphaned animals are those who lost their mother, not the father; even though an animal's infancy is short, in which the mother takes full care of the infant animal. In short, the animal orphan is the animal who lost the mother, while a human orphan is one who lost a father.

Humans have the longest childhood period among animals because they are being raised for a superior mission than that of an animal. We said before that when you plant certain crops like radishes, for instance, it ripens quite fast, and you may eat it after fifteen days. But when you plant a palm or a mango tree, it takes several years until it bears its fruits. The length of childhood depends on the mission assigned to the being in question; if it has an important mission, its childhood will be longer.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants you to expand the cycle of kindness. Do not limit yourself to the parents or kin only. Extend kindness to orphans because an orphan sees his friends enjoying the care of their fathers. Had the True Lord *Glorified is He* left the orphan uncared for, he will grow with a heart full of bitterness against society. The orphan may also revolt against Allah and wonder, 'Why do I not have a father just as my friends who enjoy the care of their fathers'? But if he finds, within an atmosphere of faith, multiple fathers after losing his biological father, he will not spite the fact that Allah caused his father to die.

Those who are afraid of dying and leaving behind weak offspring, should make sure to do good unto orphans. Indeed, if every one of us sees that orphans are nurtured and looked after in a community based on belief and faith, they would not be pre-occupied with anxiety, dying and leaving behind a weak child. They would rather feel trust in society. This way one will accept the fate of Allah with contentment, without any worries. This indeed is an issue that pre-occupies a lot of people. We thus say to every financially capable person, ‘If you live in a community of believers wherein the orphan feels emotionally secured under the care of multiple fathers who share Islamic faith, the orphan will grow up free of all bitterness and animosity.’ For this reason, the True Lord says: ‘And let those (executors and guardians) have the same fear in their minds as they would have for their own, if they had left weak offspring behind. So, let them fear Allah and speak right words.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 9)

Indeed, if you see that a faith-oriented society has provided care for the orphans left behind by others, you will be confident it will take care of your orphans as well. Hence, whether death comes or not, you should not worry yourself about it. But if one sees that an orphan is left unattended; he will be completely pre-occupied with securing the worldly means for his child. We tell this father: serve your son by putting what you save in the hands of Allah because the One Who created is more trustworthy than the one who is created. On the same lines, we related the story of Mu`awiyah and 'Amr ibn Al-`As earlier, when they were sitting together—sometime before they died-talking when 'Amr ibn Al-'As asked Mu`awiyah, ‘What do you still have of the worldly pleasures’? Mu`awiyah replied, ‘As for food, I have become bored of the best of it; and as for garments, I have become bored of its softest kinds. My sole pleasure of this world is to have a sip of cold water on hot day under the shade of a tree.’

These are words that inspire humans with some ambition. After Mu`awiyah had become the Caliph and leader of the believers, and every one seeks his accord and satisfaction, he said, ‘My share of the worldly pleasures comes down to a sip of cold water under the shade of a tree on a hot summer day.’ This is found among a lot of people. It is as if all worldly aspirations have come down to what anyone could have: a sip of cold water. Afterwards Mu`awiyah asked, ‘What about you 'Amr? What do you still find gratifying among worldly pleasures?' 'Amr replied, 'I still have land abundant with animals, and a well that overflows with water to irrigate the land. I would like to keep it for the rest of my life, and pass to my children upon my death.' There was a servant attending them named, Wirdan to whom the leader of the believers wanted to be courteous. He asked him, 'What about you, Wirdan? What do you still enjoy of worldly pleasures?' Now, consider the reply of the servant, to know that faith does not make a difference between a master and a slave. Wirdan replied, 'My share of worldly pleasure, O leader of the believers, is to do a favour to some noble person who would not repay it to me during my lifetime, and would continue to bear it for my children.'

He wants to explain to us that nothing is lost. As much as you extend your hands with aid and assistance to others, others will do the same for you. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us that same thing. He said, 'I and the guardian of the orphan are like this in heaven;' "and he pointed with two his adjacent fingers."'(1) What higher status can one ask for? Should not all of us search for an orphan to look after so that we would enjoy the company of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in heaven? This status was indeed the aim of all Companions.

A man from the *Ansar* came to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while looking sad. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him, 'What is wrong with you?' The man replied, 'Prophet of Allah, it is something that I have been thinking about.' So, the Prophet asked, 'What is it?' The man then replied, 'We frequent you, gaze at your face and sit with you, and soon you will return to Allah, and join the rest of the prophets, and we will not be able to reach you.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not respond. However, Gabriel *peace be upon him* then came to him with the following verse, 'And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger - they will be with the ones upon whom Allah has bestowed favour of the prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous. And excellent are those as companions.' (*an-Nisa':* 69) The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* then summoned the man and relayed to him the good news.(2)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*

(2) *Taken from Ibn Kathir's translation of The Quran*

The True Lord says to these people, ‘Do not be sad! If you love the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and rejoice in his company in the worldly life, do not worry about enjoying his company in heaven; Allah will resurrect you with him in heaven. One will accompany whom he loves. For this reason, I say to every Muslim; look for an orphan to look after in order that you may gain this high status of faith and its elevated counterpart in the hereafter. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I and the guardian of the orphan are like this in heaven, “and he pointed with his middle and index fingers together and then separated them.”’(1)

Tell me if you may; how would the state of society be if we dealt with orphans in the light of these instructions? Solidarity will prevail in society.

The True Lord subsequently says: ‘and the needy.’ We know that the needy and the poor have been defined by the jurists to be the ones in need. But does this mean that the needy and the poor are those who do not have their basic needs; or is it the poor who have nothing or have less than necessary? For instance, he may have ten pounds while he needs twenty to subsist. The word *faqir* (poor) is derived from *fiqar* which is used to refer to the disease that causes the back and waist to be broken. The word *faqir* is thus quite indicative of the state of the poor. *Miskin* (needy) is also quite an expressive word; it is derived from *al-maskana* which means free of all pride, and implies being vanquished and defeated. The word itself is thus indicative of its implication. The word *jar* (deviate)is one who lives nearby, but in what sense may we call the one who lives next to me a *jar*? The reason is that the one living beside you has been assigned this special place in the world. He thus left a wide range of places and came to this specific spot and became your neighbour. This means that, out of many alternatives, he chose to live beside you. Thus, the neighbour is called *jar* to imply that he left all places in the world and came to live beside you.

Allah *Glorified is He* advised us to take care of our neighbour as much as He advised us to take care of our kin, the orphan and the needy. The neighbour has several rights upon us. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There are three kinds of neighbours; a neighbour entitled to only one right. This is the lowest kind of neighbour. There is also a neighbour who is entitled to two rights and another who is entitled to three rights. As for the one who is entitled to only one right, he is the neighbour who associates partners alongside Allah and does not have any blood relation to you; he is thus only entitled to the right of neighbourhood. As for the one who is entitled to two rights, he is the Muslim neighbour who is entitled to both the right of Islam and the right of neighbourhood. As for the one who is entitled to three rights, he is the Muslim neighbour who is also a relative. He is thus entitled to the right of Islam, the right of neighbourhood and the right of kinship.'(1)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said concerning the right of the neighbour, 'Gabriel keeps on admonishing me to take care of the neighbour to the extent that I thought he would be one of the heirs.'(2) But what are the boundaries of defining the neighbour? The neighbour is the one whose door is closest to you within forty cubits away from your door. Scholars also said everyone who lives in the forty houses next to you is your neighbour.

Afterward the True Lord says: 'and the neighbour from among your own people.' Allah mentions the one who is entitled to both the right of kinship and the right of neighbourhood. He then said: 'and the neighbour who is a stranger.' This means the one distant to you. He then said: 'and the friend by your side.' This refers to the one who constantly accompanies you. Scholars said that this refers to the wife or the travel companion because travel companions are always together. He may also be the one who follows you in the hope that he may take something from the bounties of Allah that have been bestowed upon you whether in the form of money, knowledge or a craft that he would like to learn from you. He is thus the one who accompanies you. The servant also accompanies you. These connotations expand the cycle of kindness to others. Furthermore, if you think about them, you will realize how they overlap.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him*: 'Abu Dharr, if you cook soup, increase its water so that you may serve your neighbours a portion of it.'(3)

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(1) *[Al-Bazzar and Abu Ash-Sheikh]*

(2) *[Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*

(3) *[Muslim]*

In this respect, what is important is to always be in contact with your neighbour, especially if this neighbour is of your kin. A lot of neighbours may share affection and good relations. However, there may be a neighbour whose name you may not know. This is the neighbour who is a stranger. ‘And the friend by your side, and the way farer.’ He is typical of someone you know nothing about except that he is related to such and such a city. The word ‘wayfarer’ means that we do not know anything about him at all. Thus, once you see him, you say he is wayfarer travelling on the road; this implies that you cannot relate him to anything except the road or the way that brought him to you. You cannot relate him to a known father or mother let alone a clan. You know nothing about him.

‘And those whom your right hands possess.’ We have talked previously about those in this category. We said, Islam came not to legalize slavery but to abolish it and drain its sources that used to exist before its advent. Only one source remains; lawful war. But why did it not rule out this source as well? The reason is that a lawful war involves taking captives from both sides. The only way to release them is through exchange of captives. This comes down to equal treatment that the modern world has finally settled on under the rubric of ‘captive exchange protocols.’ Islam forbids us to call them slaves. Rather, he or she should be called a boy or girl. Thus, even titles were organized and disciplined by Allah so that servitude be reserved only to Him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* brought about Islam when slavery was present. Even though slavery at that time had more than twenty sources, it was organized in accordance with one criterion: the will of the master. Islam thus came to abolish slavery; and the first step in this abolition is blocking its sources. Further, instead of leaving slavery to be organized and governed only by the will of the master and his desire, Islam established multiple grounds for dealing with it. Accordingly, if we have eliminated all the sources to only one, we have diversified the governing criteria. You may thus atone for a sin that you have committed by freeing a slave. Alternatively, if you have made a false oath to the effect that you will divorce your wife, you may atone for it by freeing a slave. This is the wish of the one who wants to abolish slavery. Moreover, Islam guides the one who owns a slave, but does not have the means to free this slave, and the boy or girl was still under his ownership, the master should treat them well if they are still slaves. Feed him of the same food you eat, and give him clothes of the same kind you wear, and do not overburden him otherwise help him. However, it is rather difficult to find someone who eats of the same food of which his master eats and wears the same clothes as he does, and when his master assigns him a task that he cannot undertake on his own, his master aids him. Is this not the best recipe of kindness?

After this the True Lord *Glorified is He* seals this verse with a statement that totally crushes the pride any doer of good things may have. Beware lest the bounty you bestow or the exertion you make should cause you to be proud or self-conceited. Your self-conceit and arrogance would be false. Further, if you look down on others because of the means you have in your life, you may know that these means will eventually change. 'Change' here means that it will fade away and perish. Thus, the one who wants to take pride and be self-conceited should do so because of something inherent in him and that he essentially has. For this reason, pride is only possible for Allah, but constantly changing humans cannot claim it to themselves. We see strong people becoming weak, rich people becoming poor and knowledgeable people becoming ignorant: 'So that he knows nothing after having known.' (*al-Hajj:* 5)

No creature ought to have pride. Those who want to take pride and look down on others should do so owing to something that they have in themselves. In other words, they should do so based on something that cannot be taken away from them. But all creatures are in a constant change and human existence is always subject to fluctuation. Therefore, leave pride to the one who can rightfully claim it. Never think that when we told you to do so and be good unto your kin, orphans and the needy that it is an invitation for you to be proud. Pride spoils good deeds because they were given to you by Allah. You should rather be modest because the one who is self-conceited is the one who does not recognize any one greater than himself.

Find someone who takes pride in having a million pounds but shows off before someone who possesses more money; what would he do? He would be shy and belittled. One would not become arrogant unless he finds all people present smaller in rank compared to him. But if he continues to look at Allah, he would know that pride only belongs to Allah. When one acts arrogantly, he does so because he does not have Allah in his mind otherwise he would be ashamed. If you bore Him in mind, you would be too bashful to feel any arrogance. Allah is absent from the mind of the arrogant person. For this reason, the True Lord says at the end of this verse: ‘Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful.’ But what does it mean to be full self-conceited, and what does boastful mean?

The root of the word *mukhtal* (self-conceit) means moving with pride. For this reason, we call the horse in Arabic *khayl* because it walks boastfully. When someone rides it, it also walks boastfully. Self-conceit is a visual movement whereas acting in a boastful manner is an audible movement. The True Lord forbids us to walk proudly and snobbishly. He also forbids us to walk in a swayed manner. One should not consider himself the source of bounty so that the saying of Allah: ‘Turning away haughtily that he may lead (others) astray from the way of Allah; for him is disgrace in this world, and on the day of resurrection We will make him taste the punishment of burning.’ (*al-Hajj:* 9-10)

As for pride, it occurs when one verbally boasts about what he did as if he was the source of giving to all humans. Both self-conceit and boastfulness are forbidden. The Muslim should refrain from visual movement and verbal pride; but why did the True Lord mention this here? He mentioned it so that no servant of Allah would think that he is doing the good of his own initiative; rather, the good he does is from what Allah has endowed him with.

In addition, you should not exploit those to whom you did good things as slaves. If you do so, remember the mastery of the One Who bestowed you with your entire livelihood. If you do so, you would commit to respect Allah and keep away from self-conceit and boastfulness due to what you gave to others.

The True Lord says: ‘Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful.’

After the True Lord says: ‘And do the good unto your parents.’ He then said: ‘and near of kin, and unto orphans.’ Allah then talked about effort exertion, generosity and forgiveness. Afterwards Allah speaks of the opposite case:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَبۡخَلُونَ وَيَأۡمُرُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ بِٱلۡبُخۡلِ وَيَكۡتُمُونَ مَآ
ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضۡلِهِۦۗ وَأَعۡتَدۡنَا لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٗا مُّهِينٗا ﴿٣٧﴾

who are miserly and order other people to be the same, hiding the bounty God has given them. We have prepared a humiliating torment for such ungrateful people [37] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 37)

What does it mean to be miserly? It means the difficulty of giving. A miser always finds a great difficulty whenever he takes a sum of his own money to give to others, and sometime he is reluctant to give it. But the generous one is always at ease and willing to do this; he is always comfortable doing favours. In short, miserliness means finding difficulty in giving. This attitude extends even to things that neither harms him to give nor benefit him to retain, simply because he does not want to give. This is a trait of the self because he withheld to give himself anything before anyone; and since he is as such, would you expect him to give others?

A poet depicts a miser named `Isa and whom he wants to insult for being a miser. He thus portrays him to be a miser not only towards other people but also towards himself, even concerning things that will not harm him to give away or benefit him to retain. As long as he behaves like this towards himself, it would not be unexpected that he acts like this towards others:

‘Isa is being a miser towards himself

even though he is not immortal

Indeed, if he could breathe through one nostril, he would do so to satiate his miserly attitude.

He is miser to the extent that he thinks to breathe through one nostril to avoid breathing through both.

Another poet brings forwards an image that clarifies how the one who is being ungenerous denies himself comfortable and humane life. He says:

If your house, cousin of Muhammad, is full of needles that you do not need; and Yousef comes to you to borrow one to sew his garment; you would not lend him any.

The poet here says that if Yousef (Joseph) *peace be upon him* goes to this miser and asks him for a needle to sew his garment that was torn by Zuleikha, this miser would not lend him one even if he has a house full of needles.

Therefore, a miser is the one who does not like giving others. He even finds it burdensome and difficult to give something that will neither benefit him if he keeps it and nor does it harm him if he gives it away. The True Lord thus says about such a person: ‘And let not those who [out of miserliness] withhold what Allah has given them of His bounty ever think that it is better for them. Rather, it is worse for them. Their necks will be encircled by what they withheld on the Day of Resurrection. And to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth. And Allah, with what you do, is [fully] acquainted.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 180)

Allah will tie the neck of the miser with a ring made of the things he found difficulty giving away. Had he given some of them away, the ring around his neck would have been lighter on Judgment Day. But the more he withholds, the heavier the ring will be. The True Lord also speaks about those who amass gold and silver: ‘O you who have believed, indeed many of the scholars and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and avert [them] from the way of Allah. And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah - give them tidings of a painful punishment. The Day when it will be heated in the fire of Hell and seared therewith will be their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs, [it will be said], "This is what you hoarded for yourselves, so taste what you used to hoard."’ (*at-Tawba:* 34-35)

If misers were to amass huge quantities of silver and gold, these quantities will be used to ablaze the fire burning them in the hereafter. Thus, one should relieve himself of the torment and pain of burning. The misers do not only keep this ethical deficiency to themselves; they want others to become like them as if they fell in love with being ungenerous. It ails them to see generous people. A miser will tell you do not spend because he suffers when he sees a generous person, and wants all people to be just like him so that no one would be better than him.

He knows that generosity is better because he wants all people to be the same as him. Miserliness is to withhold that which you have been endowed from the one who has not been endowed. But is it only about money? No, it exists in virtually every skill you have, while others do not. Whenever you withheld to benefit people with it, you have become a miser yourself.

Miserliness subsumes the one who would not help the incapacitated and the one who does not share his knowledge with others. Further, failing to maintain patience in the face of the fool is also considered miserliness. Another instance: there may be a teacher who has ten students learning from him a craft. However, he may not want to share his knowledge with them; he would then be a miser as well.

‘Those who are miserly and enjoin miserliness on other men’ is a verse that encompasses all tangible and intangible aspects of miserliness. We can use this understanding to apply it to a superior meaning. The people of the Book knew the truth about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as much as they knew their children. However, when he came to them confirming what they knew was the truth, they disbelieved the message of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They hid away their recognition of his character and their recognition of the knowledge that he brought even though he is the most honest. This is the ultimate expression of miserliness. They continued to command people to be misers.

You knew that the *Ansar* were generous when the *Muhajirun* went to them and they shared with them their money and wealth. The *Ansar* even agreed to give them the bounty about which Allah has implanted a special love and jealousy, women; whom even if one hates, one would not be willing to give them to anyone else. *The Ansar* divorced some of their women (i.e. those who married more than one) so the *Muhajirun* can marry them.

Indeed, there were several men who were married to more than one woman, and who willingly divorced the second wife to marry her to one of the *Muhajirun*. The True Lord *the Glorified* nourished the generosity of the *Ansar* to the extent that one of them would go to a *Muhajir and* tell him, ‘Look at both of my wives and choose whomever you like, and I will divorce the one you choose and marry her to you immediately.’

Is there a more exalted and higher form of generosity than this? If you have a bounty from Allah and you are a believer, you would want to extend the grace of the bounty to others. Thus, if you have an elegant car, would you want to give it away?! However, you may be reluctant to do this with a woman. Nonetheless, this exalted form of generosity was manifested by the *Ansar*. They said to the *Muhajirun*, 'You are immigrants and you have left behind your families.' This was an elevation caused by the steadfast faith of the *Ansar*.

The *Muhajirun* were strong and energetic youth whom Quraysh had denied them their wives. Each of the *Ansar* thus said to himself: why I would not divorce one of my wives so that my immigrant brother could marry her to release his suppressed passions? At least, if I do so, I would be keeping him from casting his eyes on something prohibited by Allah. But the Jews, polytheists, and hypocrites urged them not to give anything to those who came with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Noble Quran says the following about this situation: 'They are the ones who say, "Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of Allah until they disband." And to Allah belongs the depositories of the heavens and the earth, but the hypocrites do not understand.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7)

They thought badly about those who believed in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. They thought that if they did not support them, they would revert on their faith. They forgot that the *Muhajrun* had left their wealth and country for the sake of Allah. Would the one who did so shun his belief in Allah if he finds nothing? Of course, he would not! The reason is that he left everything for the sake of Allah. For instance, Mus`ab ibn `Umayr, an affluent young man in Quraysh, who used to put on the finest perfumes and whose mother used to flood him with wealth, started to wear the skin of a goat when he went to Medina. When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him, he said to his Companions, 'Look what faith has done to your friend.'

Thus, when hypocrites, like `Abdullah ibn Ubayy, said to the *Ansar*, spend on those who are with the Prophet Muhammad so that they would disband. He thought that the immigrants were willing, after all the sacrifices they made, to sell their faith for a bite. It is as if he and his fellow hypocrites forgot that the one who sells his faith for a bite is the one who believes in false principles. However, the one who embraces faith in a true principle always finds a sweet taste in his soul due to this belief. He further knows well that the Lord has prepared a great reward for him.

A believer would thus never change his faith or compromise it. `Ali ibn Abu Taleb said, ‘One day, as I was walking into the mosque, I found Mus`ab ibn `Umayr dressed in a garment stitched with a piece of sheep fur, who previously used to be the richest and most luxuriously living young man in Mecca. When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw how he became after embracing Islam and recalled the affluence in which Mus`ab used to relish before embracing Islam in comparison with his current austere state, he cried in pity for him and said, “Which is better; your current state or your state if someone attends you and serves you bread and meat? We replied, We would be better off that day, for if we have enough livelihood, we would be able to devote ourselves to prayers and worship.” So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “No, your state today is better than your state in that day.”(1)

We have previously said that you ought to remember that the sweetness of faith and belief prompts the believer to sacrifice everything for the cause of exalting his faith. But those who adhere to false principles and values do not admit others into it unless they pay a price in advance. In other words, they buy them. Thus, if you ever see people being paid or bribed to embrace or support a certain principle or doctrine, you must know that this principle or doctrine is false. If this principle or doctrine was original, one would have expended all his fortune for its sake; one would even sacrifice his own life for its sake.

Among the wonders of Islam is that when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wrote the covenant for himself at `Aqaba. The *Ansar* asked him, ‘If we fulfilled this covenant, what is our gain’? It is as if they were asking; you have taken your share, so what about us?

Consider the Prophet Muhammad’s exalted faith in Allah and his absolute certainty that faith, in itself, is a prize. So, did he relay to them the good news that they would rule over the earth? Did he tell those who were weak and helpless at that time that they would be empowered by Allah? No, he rather told them that 'your prize is paradise.' Had he told them that your prize is the mastery over the world, this would have required deliberation. It is true that they took over the world, yet some of them died before this happened. So, how could Prophet Muhammad's prophecy be true in such a case? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke to them about a guaranteed thing; the thing that the believer could find once he dies. He told them, 'you would have paradise.'

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(1) *At-Tirmidhi*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to a group of his Companions, 'I bid that you, and pledge to me that you would never believe in any god but Allah, and that you would not commit adultery, kill your children, promote a lie amongst yourselves or disobey me in any good deed. Whoever of you continues to be true to this covenant will be rewarded by Allah; whoever adheres partly to it and is then punished for it in the worldly life, such punishment would be an atonement for him; and whoever adheres partly to it and Allah conceals the reality of his belief, his fate will be left to Allah to either punish or forgive him if He wills.'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not encourage them by promising superiority, wealth or domination in the world. Rather, he motivated them by the ultimate, matchless and doubtless reward of Allah: Paradise. It was on this basis that they pledged allegiance to him, and that is why the *Ansar* (the Helpers [Muslims from Medina]) were especially dear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In the Battle of Hunayn, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* distributed the battle spoils among the *Muhajirun* (the Immigrants [Meccan Muslims]), but nothing was left for the *Ansar*, which was rather hard on their hearts. To soothe them, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Are you not contented, O *Ansar*, that others will go back to their homes with sheep and camels and you will go back with the Messenger of Allah? By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, if it had not been for the immigration (that He was one of the *Muhajirun*), I would have counted myself as one of the *Ansar*! If all people took a path and the *Ansar* chose another, I would go with the *Ansar*! May Allah have mercy on the *Ansar*, their children and their grandchildren?'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had barely finished his speech when the beards of the *Ansar* became wet with tears, and they replied, 'We are content with the Messenger of Allah as our share!' How firm and sublime their faith was! The hypocrites told the *Ansar*, as Allah quotes them in the Quran: 'Give nothing to those who follow God's Messenger, until they abandon him.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). However, those who believed in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never abandoned him. They immigrated with him to Medina, leaving behind wealth and family. They were not after any transient gains; they were more than content with the comfort and joy they were promised in the Afterlife. They knew through their faith that all the pleasures of this worldly life would come to an end by death or loss. They aspired and strove for eternal bliss that will never come to an end.

Allah *the Exalted* then says: '… and conceal whatever Allah has bestowed upon them out of His Bounty…' (*an-Nisa':* 37) An act of concealment means trying to keep from people a thing that should naturally manifest itself. It is as if wealth and knowledge were struggling to manifest themselves, to be delivered to everyone, but those who possess them deliberately block their way to the light. A sound disposition dictates whatever material or nonmaterial blessings Allah grants a person, out of His Bounty, should not be withheld from people, but should reach out to help others, for every blessing of Allah is essentially intended to be in the service of His servants. Concealment in this case is an act of transgression, for it means keeping those blessings of Allah from performing their role of serving humankind. This transgression also goes against the nature that Allah has created in those concealed blessings. They too, are servants of Allah created for a mission; so when they are forcefully prevented from fulfilling that mission, frustration prevents them from functioning in the best manner. Even inanimate things feel frustrated: 'So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29)

The sky and earth have their own way of weeping. Such weeping is not by way of shedding tears; it is rather, in a manner that only Allah knows the reality of. The words of Allah: '… and conceal whatever Allah has bestowed upon them out of His Bounty…' (*an-Nisa':* 37), therefore mean that whatever Allah gives you out of His Grace is not exclusively yours. You have not attained it due to any power inherent in you, but Allah has bestowed His favours on to you out of His Bounty, so you may employ them to benefit His servants. Look at the universe around you and you will find it in a constant flux of change. Have you not ever come across or heard of an able man who later became disabled or a rich man who became poor? We witness such fluctuations in the world every day, so we should learn this lesson. Now, you are wealthy enough to give, but one day you may be the one in need. Through the good you do for others now; you are saving yourself when days turn around and you are in a need.

Moreover, you will save yourself from torment in the Hereafter: '[Nor] those who are stingy, and bid others to be stingy, and conceal whatever Allah has bestowed upon them out of His Bounty; and so We have readied a shameful suffering for all who deny the truth.' (*an-Nisa':* 37) Look what stinginess brings on to those who insist on it. Allah describes them as 'deniers of truth' in the sense that they deny His favours on them and show ungratefulness through concealment of these favours. Let them receive their recompense in full, then: '… and so We have readied a shameful suffering for all who deny the truth.' (*an-Nisa':* 37) Their punishment has already been prepared: Hell. Fire is already in a state of completion and preparedness to receive its dwellers just as paradise is. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Paradise was shown to me, and if I had stretched out my hand, I would have picked some of its fruits.'(1)

The promised reward is already prepared, and who prepared it? It is Allah, the All-Powerful and Almighty Creator, and He has prepared that reward in accordance with His Limitless Power. Someone may arrogantly argue that he can bear torment, as a poet once said, addressing his own self,

Stick to patience so those rejoicing at your misfortune will be surprised!

Show them that you will never be broken by life's suffering and plights!

This does not apply to torment in the Hereafter. Allah Who has prepared it, describes it as 'shameful suffering.' It is not like any shame or any suffering we may ever face in this life. When it comes to the unseen Afterlife, words do not denote the same degree of the quality. The scope and nature of things in the Hereafter are totally unpredictable.

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(1) *An-Nisa`i, Ahmad and Al-Muttaqi Al Hindi from the book Kanz Al-`Ummal*

After talking about the stingy, Allah mentions another category of people about spending:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ رِئَآءَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ
وَلَا بِٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ ۗ وَمَن يَكُنِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ لَهُۥ قَرِينًا فَسَآءَ قَرِينًا ﴿٣٨﴾

[Nor does He like those] who spend their wealth to show off, who do not believe in Him or the Last Day. Whoever has Satan as his companion has an evil companion! [38]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 38)

Unlike the miserly, this noble verse is addressed to a category of people who do spend generously, but they miss the purpose for such spending. Instead of directing his intention to pleasing Allah, he spends his money, or better say, ‘wastes his money’, to earn people’s recognition and praise. Those who know the truth about the Grace and Bounty of Allah say, when you give, choose Him who will reward you most generously for your giving. When you give a thing to someone, your reward will be in line with his capacity; it may be just a word of praise. When your reward is from Allah however, how great do you think it will be? Doubtless, reward from Allah is matchless.

It befits a person of sound judgment then to be careful who he gives his money to. We have a great example in the Companion ‘Uthman ibn `Affan*, Allah be pleased with him*. Merchants competed to buy his new merchandise so they would re-sell it and make profit. ‘Uthman told them, ‘I have received for it more than what you offer me… I have sold it to Allah.’ He gave his merchandise to charity for the cause of Allah; he knew He is the One Who will best appreciate it and reward for it. Let whoever spends his money to gain people’s praise know that he thus throws away his wealth for a trivial price. What good can people ever do you? They may even envy you for what you have and wish they could take it away from you. Why do you show off your deeds for their sake then? This is a profitless deal and all what you spend will be effaced. Allah says: ‘Behold, Allah has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them Paradise in return…’ (*at-Tawba:* 111).

As long as Allah is the One Who buys them, the price must be high; the price is eternal comfort and joy that will never change or come to an end. In paradise, all pleasures are ever abundant and ever ready for a believer to enjoy; no wish a believer will entertain but that will come true in the blink of an eye. What loss and what weakness of judgment it is then to sacrifice such matchless, abundant reward for a profitless bargain with people whose praise can do more harm than good, if any good at all! Only those who have not tasted the sweetness of trading with Allah would do this. In another verse of the Quran, Allah says about them: '… like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in Allah and the Last Day. Such a person is like a *safwan* (rock) with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare…' (*al-Baqara:* 264)

The Arabic word *safwan* refers to a white, shiny, smooth stone with pores that dust can fill. Being so smooth, even a few droplets of water can remove the dust off it. He who gives to charity to be praised by people will gain no reward in the end; whatever he spends will be effaced, just as water removes dust off a smooth rock and leaves its surface empty; they too will be left in the end with no reward. No one would do so if faith was firmly rooted in their hearts. When one is offered a high price for his commodity, why should he sell it for less?! Is it plausible to bring loss on to oneself?! To throw away the wealth Allah has given you for other than Him, contradicts true faith and no fruits will be reaped from such a losing business. Therefore, be careful as to why and to whom you give charity. If it is for the cause of Allah, prepare for an ample reward. Direct your intention to Him *the Almighty* and do not boast about what you give. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has told about seven categories of people whom Allah will protect in His Shade on Judgment Day, when there is no shade except His. One of these categories is '… a man who gives charity and conceals it so much that his left hand would not know what his right hand has given!'(1)

A righteous servant of Allah knows that giving confers on him a kind of superiority most felt by those he gives, so he would be anxious to hide his charity from people not to hurt their feelings and make them feel humiliated, as well as inferior. Still, Allah knows secrecy is not always possible and He does not want to limit the scope of giving, so He tells us: ‘If you do deeds of charity openly, it is well; but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds. And Allah is aware of all that you do.’ (*al-Baqara:* 271)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

There is no harm in giving to charity openly if the giver intends by so doing to offer an example for other people to follow. What is important is for him to purify his heart of all pride at the moment of giving and guard himself against false piety. In all cases, Allah would never deprive the needy of what a giver may be willing to spend, even if he does so just to show off. Rather, Allah deprives the insincere giver of reward, so he alone is the loser, yet society would benefit from his spending.

A Muslim who believes in Allah and that He is the Ultimate Giver should not spend except for His cause and to win His Good Pleasure. By giving to charity only to show off, he thus follows in the steps of the disbelievers, ‘…not believing in Allah and the Last Day…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 38). If they believed in Judgment Day or thought of the eternal reward, they would direct their intentions only to pleasing Allah. If you truly appreciate the blessings Allah has bestowed on you, then you should spend them in the way that makes them fruitful to yourself and others. Begrudging money, or spending it only to win people’s praise or admiration, is a waste of this blessing Allah has given you. By contrast, spending money for the cause of Allah means reaping abundant fruits both in this life (since Allah will bless one’s money) and in the Hereafter, by the reward for generosity extending there eternally.

The stingy are the enemies of their own wealth because they fail to make it fruitful. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘On Judgment Day, Almighty Allah will descend to resolve the cases of His servants, while every nation is humbled to their knees. Those who will be brought forth first are the ones who memorized the Quran, the next are who were martyred, and the third are those who had lots of money. Allah will ask the reciter of the Quran: “Did I not teach you what I revealed to My Messenger?” The reciter of the Quran will respond, “Yes, O Allah.” Allah will ask him, “What did you do to express gratitude for that knowledge?” He would say, “I have recited it in *salat* (prayer) during the night and day.” Allah will say, “You are lying”, and the angels will also say, “You are lying.’” Allah will say, “You recited the Quran so it would be said, “He is an able reciter [of the Quran]”, and so was it said.” Then, the man who possesses wealth will be brought forth and asked….’(1) Allah makes him spend his money for the service and benefit of those in need then make him lament his spending on the Day of Judgment when he finds his deeds obliterated and no reward is prepared for him.

A miserly person continues throughout his life to pile heaps of money, thinking he is achieving happiness in this way. In fact, he is only depriving himself and saving for an heir who would gain them effortlessly. An Egyptian proverb says, ‘Money of the miserly goes to squanderers.’ So, Allah punishes him in both lives. Indeed, no one can deceive the Almighty Creator. Allah has granted him a blessing that he begrudges others, so Allah makes this money a punishment to him and allows others to benefit from it despite his miserliness. He will only pay for it in the end. If he spent his money in the manner Allah ordains, Allah would bless it and reward him with ample compensation: ‘…and whatever it be that you spend on others, He [always] replaces it…’ (*Saba’:* 39) However, since he acts at variance with what Allah likes, he is denied the fruits of this money in both lives, and it will all be left for the heirs to enjoy it. Further, when the miserly withhold their money from those in need, they thus only make room for the generous who want to give and help others.

How is that? Let us assume that a generous person, who never shunned anyone who sought his help, experienced a decrease in his income that he cannot even provide sufficiently for himself. Suppose he had two acres of land and wanted to sell one of them to ease the asperities of the needy who were used to pin hope on him. Who would want to buy that acre but a miserly who amasses wealth? In this manner, the miserly person facilitated spending for the generous one, by thus providing the latter with money in the course of his piling lands and riches! Let no one think that he can deceive the One Who has created him and the entire universe and given him that wealth. This case bears subtle resemblance to that of a sinner who repents; perhaps he would think he had enjoyed that sin and indulged himself in the pleasure he craved and then it would come to nothing. It is true that repentance means Allah will forgive him, but his sins would spur him to struggle in doing good deeds to make amends for his former disobedience. Allah says: '…for, verily, good deeds drive away evil deeds….' (*Hud:* 114)

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(1) *Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn-Khuzayma*

Your past sins, even though forgiven, would continue to prick your conscience and drive you to spare no effort in doing good deeds to make up for the past. Allah thus makes those sins a means that pushes one to be of service to others through doing good to them. Similarly, Allah uses the stingy to pave way for the generous and thus be of service to others despite themselves. Allah concludes the verse by summing up the reason that pushes the stingy to persist in their attitude: '…Whoever has Satan as his companion has an evil companion.' (*an-Nisa':* 38) Several reasons may drive one to be stingy, but they can only be concluded in one word: Satan. He is the one who prevents you from following the right path. He is present in all that makes disobedience tempting, in every desire you crave and every instance when you have been heedless of the right path. He is the bad companion who makes every atrocious sin dazzling and every unlawful pleasure luring. Still, devils are not only jinn, but there are devils among human beings as well. Your own self may play the role of the devil when it tempts you into deviating from the right path to quench a desire. The self that entices you to think only of transient pleasures and forget about the reward Allah has prepared for the righteous is the devil in disguise. So, it is Satan who insinuates them to act in a stingy manner and command others to do the same. They have taken Satan as a *qarin* (companion). Another derivative of the same root is *qirn* (opponent) which suggests that a sinner has for his companionship, the very one he should fight as an opponent.

A third derivative is the word *qarn* (century). It is taken from the same root that denotes companionship since it refers to a period when generations are connected with each other, which conveys the same meaning of 'companionship' or 'closeness.' So, Satan is the constant companion of him who yields to his temptations. Allah says: '… Whoever has Satan as his companion has an evil companion.' (*an-Nisa':* 38) An evil companion he is indeed, who neither advises one to do good nor cautions him to avoid evildoing.

One may love his companions who share unlawful pleasures with him in this worldly life, but how would such people feel toward each other in the

Afterlife? Allah answers us in the Quran: ‘On that Day, friends will become each other’s enemies, except for the righteous.’ (*az-Zukhruf:*67)

The righteous help each other in being obedient to Allah, so each of them in the Afterlife will tell his companion, ‘You have been my sincere companion who advised me to be obedient to Allah and reminded me whenever I was heedless of my duty to Him.’ Thus, love between them will increase. By contrast, those who were involved together in evildoing will curse one another, and the first that will be cursed on Judgment Day is Satan. He too will disown those he dragged into sinning. Thus will Satan argue against those whom he tempted and misguided, as Allah foretells us: ‘And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So, do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid; nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I deny your association of me [with Allah] before. Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment."’ (*Ibrahim:* 22)

The Arabic word *sultan* means a compelling power that compels those who are subjected to it. As for the human being, his physical form only can be made to submit by such a power, but as for his beliefs, they can only be governed and defeated by strong evidence. Material power, however great, can only subjugate the physical form, but not the heart of the human being. With a whip in your hand, you may force a person to prostrate himself to you. You have only subdued this person’s body, but not his heart. The latter may only be influenced by potent proofs and the power of persuasion, which is also a kind of *sultan* (compelling power).

There are thus two kinds of dominating powers: a power that subdues the physical form and a power that subjugates the heart through logic. The former makes one submit against his will, whereas the power of logic and persuasion makes one yield and act of his own accord. Satan will say to his followers: you who made me your companion, you are foolish, for I did not have any power over you, neither material power to force you to commit sins, nor any logical arguments to persuade you to commit sins. You were only heedless of the right path, so I just insinuated you to deviate, and you obeyed me. I did not have any power to exercise over your bodies or minds. ‘…I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me.…’ (*Ibrahim:* 22)

They were the architects of their own destruction, so Satan will tell them on Judgment Day, as Allah foretells us in the Quran: ‘… I cannot be called to your aid; nor can you be called to my aid.’ (*Ibrahim:* 22)

What does this verse convey? It depicts a hard situation, a real predicament that one cannot handle by any means. Desperate for help, he resorts to others for help and cries out for someone to respond with quickness and give him a helping hand. Satan says to those he misguided in the worldly life, ‘No matter how desperately you cry out for help, I will never save you, nor will you ever be able to save me.’ Each party will then realize their offence; each will realize how helpless, how devoid of power they are. Almighty Allah says: ‘And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We will bring forth to him, on the Day of Resurrection, a book which he will find wide open.’ (*al-Isra’:* 13)

Whoever chooses Satan as a companion has indeed chosen a bad companion. Satan has vowed before Allah that he will tempt all humankind into deviation except those who are truly devout to Him *the Almighty*. Whoever obeys Satan is therefore disobedient to Allah.

Ponder again the words of Allah: ‘[Nor does He like those] who spend their wealth to show off, who do not believe in Him or the Last Day. Whoever has Satan as his companion has an evil companion.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 38). This verse discusses a type of spending that Allah will not accept. When one gives to charity only to earn admiration and praise, his money benefits others but not himself. He thus throws away his money, so he neither benefits from it in this life, nor will that money yield any fruits with his Lord in the Hereafter.

Allah directs our attention to the fact that such deviation is attributed to the impediments of one’s faith that require to be resisted for one to be able to be adherent in every single deed to the path of his Lord. Such impediments manifest themselves in human desire that makes transient pleasures dazzling, human heedlessness that tempts one into forsaking the commands of Allah, thinking it a little thing, and the devil who insinuates one to obey his whims. The Arabic word *shaitan* does not only refer to Satan and his soldiers-(sinners from among the jinn) but also to all those who rebel against the ordinance of Allah from among humans, as Allah says: ‘And thus did We make for every prophet an enemy, the *shaitans* [devils] from among men and jinn, some of them suggesting to others varnished falsehood to deceive (them)…’ (*al-An‘am:* 112). Now, how can one tell whether insinuation emanates from his own self or from the devil? To know the answer, look at the sin you crave: is it a sin that you feel inclined to do every now and then, or is it that when you fail to attain an unlawful pleasure, you just pursue another? The difference lies here.

One would covet a certain thing Allah has forbidden; the desire to do that one thing would persist and no other desires would interfere. In such a case, desire stems from your own self. By contrast, if, upon realizing that you cannot attain a certain unlawful pleasure and you just start thinking of another, know then that you are insinuated by the devil. He does not care what sin you commit; he just tries to drag you into error any way he can. If he fails to tempt you into committing a specific sin, he immediately tries another sin toward which he may find a weakness in you.

This way, one can identify the source of insinuation and know whether the impediment emanates from his own self or from the devil. If a certain desire persists so much that you cannot stop craving it however you can, know the temptation originates from your own self. The devil, on the other hand, does not care whether you commit this sin or that sin; rather, he wants you to be disobedient to Allah, whatever the sins you commit may be.

We know Satan has old harboured animosity against humankind. He refused to prostrate himself to Adam *peace be upon him* believing he is better than him. Allah warmed Adam against him and Adam *peace be upon him* must have communicated this warning to his offspring and told them that Satan is their enemy. Still, when heedlessness overcomes the heart, it makes room for the devil to penetrate it and lead it astray. Satan would not bother to tempt someone who is already swayed by his own self. Rather, he comes to the obedient to spoil their devotion. Allah quotes him in the Quran as saying: ‘…I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 16). You will not find Satan in a bar, but he will wait for you at the door of the mosque to spoil the worship you intend to observe. This is the meaning of, ‘…I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) Some would say non-Muslim minorities in any Muslim country live (at least apparently) in peace and harmony, whereas hatred and fights are rife among the Muslim majority. This is true. Satan has guaranteed that those have already strayed far from the straight path by committing the grave sin of disbelief, so he is in no need to misguide them any further. As for Muslims, he knows they are the adherents of the true religion, so he focuses on them to distract them from the straight path. Satan lies in wait on the straight path of Allah since he wants to tempt those who adhere to righteousness. He does not concern himself with those already swayed by their own selves especially those who disbelieve in Allah since they have already committed a sin far greater than what Satan could possibly wish to tempt them into!

So, what is it that makes one decrease his money by spending it on the poor and get nothing in the end but vanity gratified?! The reason is that they have made Satan their companion. Even though giving charity is a good deed in itself, Satan would not let them enjoy the reward for it. He would interfere to spoil that act of worship. Such is the worst companion a human being may ever have; that is why Allah says: '…Whoever has Satan as his companion has an evil companion.' (*an-Nisa':* 38) Evil indeed is a companion who dissuades you from the right path, and lets you throw away your money by spending it for other than Allah and lets transient praise and admiration be your only reward. What a meagre recompense!

In the next verse Allah says:

وَمَاذَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ لَوۡ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِ وَأَنفَقُواْ
مِمَّا رَزَقَهُمُ ٱللَّهُۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِمۡ عَلِيمًا ٣٩

**What harm would it do them to believe in God
and the Last Day, and give charitably from the
sustenance God has given them? God knows
them well [39] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 39)**

By this interrogation, 'What harm would it do them to believe in Allah…', Allah does not mean to inquire of them about the trouble or harm they may possibly incur if they embrace faith and spend their money for His cause. Rather, Allah uses the interrogative form to condemn them and rebuke them for their ignorance and mindlessness of what is best for them.

Such a manner of reproach is common in language. We would say to an idle student who has failed in his exams, ‘What harm would it do you if you studied’? Such an interrogative expression is used rhetorically when the stated failure or deficiency results from negligence on the part of the one addressed by the reproach. In the above example, the failing student would have passed had he studied. However, it may not be used when the imperfection is out of the person’s control. We would not tell someone who is rather short, a quality that is not up to him to change, ‘What harm would it do you if you were tall’? This is a completely nonsensical proposition!

Therefore, this rhetorical question can only be addressed to him who has within his voluntary power, the capacity to correct the stated blameworthy conduct. We say this to refute the allegation of the *Jabriya*, a school of theology that claims man has no power or choice and all his actions are predetermined. They claim that a disbeliever, having no free will of his own, is therefore bound to continue his life as a disbeliever. However, Allah says: ‘What harm would it do them to believe in Allah and the Last Day…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 39). This verse confirms that man has the choice and free will to believe or disbelieve, but then he will be held accountable for his actions; this demolishes the extreme ideas of the *Jabriya*. The human being is not brought to this life to mechanically to do a series of predetermined actions regarding which he has no choice or free will. He is not a feather swayed by the blowing wind, or as a poet once said:

He threw him in the sea, both his hands shackled,
and strictly warned of being wet or drowned!

We say to all who make such allegations, ‘You have attributed an injustice to Allah *the Exalted* above what you ascribe to Him! Allah would not enjoin on humankind to believe in Him unless He endowed them with the capacity to choose. This is a mistaken understanding of the issue of fate and predestination. The fact that Allah has foreordained everything from eternity does not mean He cancels the will of man and strips him of the power to choose. Rather, it means His Omnipotent Knowledge encompasses all the choices His servants would make. He is our Creator; He knows fully what we would harbour in our hearts and what choices we would make and, based on this Knowledge, He has predetermined our final destinies. Predestination is only a manifestation of the all-encompassing Knowledge of Allah, and not any form of compulsion exercised over His servants.

The Attributes of Allah fall under two categories; one concerned with revelation and the other with action. Knowledge falls under the first, while Might is an example of the second category. Let me give you an illustrating example. A college dean may ask one of the teachers to run an exam to assess students and give a prize to the best. The teacher may reply that there is no need for an exam and he just names the best student since, by experience, the teacher can classify the students in order of excellence. The dean, however, would insist on holding the exam. The results would come out, and the expectations of the teacher would turn out to be true.

This poses the question: when the winning student, already named by his teacher beforehand, was answering the questions, was there anyone who compelled him to write the correct answers so he would win the prize? No. What do we understand then from his teachers foretelling of the result? Simply, the teacher foresaw that result based on his knowledge. He passed his judgment because he had prior knowledge of this student. This example is only by way of clarification, for Allah is far Exalted above all comparison. Allah has granted people the power of choice between alternatives. However, He has known beforehand what choices His servants would make. Thus, predestination is a manifestation of His Omnipotent Knowledge and it does not mean Allah has imposed on us by His Might everything we do in our lives. Might is an Attribute denoting action and effect, but the Attribute of Knowledge does neither influence nor impose anything. Accordingly, the decision to embrace or forsake faith is attributed to man, and therefore Allah says reproachfully: 'What harm would it do them to believe in Allah and the Last Day…' (*an-Nisa':* 39) On the other hand, Allah describes another group of His servants, saying: 'Who know that they will meet their Lord and that it is to Him they will return.' (*al-Baqara:* 46)

Even though they have not seen Allah, they believe that the day will come when they meet Him, and this is enough to urge them to do good deeds for His cause. What if they saw Allah, then? This reminds me of Abul-`Ala` Al-Ma`arri. He was accused of denying resurrection, but I believe he may be acquitted of this charge. It is true that at the beginning of his life he said,

‘Days destroy us like fragments of glass
and what power can bring us again together?’

People claimed that his words, ‘and what power can bring us again together?’ mean he denied the Ability of Allah to resurrect us anew. However, this same verse could be construed to mean that we cannot be resurrected in this lifetime. Indeed, we do not see anyone who had died coming back to this life. Furthermore, he later said,

‘The astronomer and physician both claim that bodies cannot be resurrected.
If you are right, I have nothing to lose; otherwise, the losers are they!’

He was hushing those who were trying to instil doubt in the minds of people. Assume that he believed that there is no resurrection. We say to him, if resurrection takes place, the one who denied it will be the loser, but if there comes no resurrection, the one who believed in resurrection would not be harmed and would not lose anything. So, a believer will lose nothing any way, and the one who is bound to lose is the one who denies resurrection.

Thus, indeed, ‘What harm would it do them to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and give charitably from the sustenance Allah has given them…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 39). The one who gives to charity for the cause of Allah, thus invests his money with Him until he reaps the fruits on Judgment Day. Contrarily, when he does so to gain the praise of people, he only benefits those he gives his money to and he himself reaps no fruits for his charity. This is throwing away their money in this life and losing the reward in the Hereafter. Allah closes the verse by saying: ‘…Allah knows them well.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 39) The Knowledge of Allah is all-encompassing; He *the Almighty* is the Creator Who knows all hidden secrets. In the following verse Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَظۡلِمُ مِثۡقَالَ ذَرَّةٖۖ وَإِن تَكُ حَسَنَةٗ يُضَٰعِفۡهَا وَيُؤۡتِ مِن لَّدُنۡهُ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمٗا ﴿٤٠﴾

He does not wrong anyone by as much as the weight of a speck of dust: He doubles any good deed and gives a tremendous reward of His own [40] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 40)

Wronging or injustice consists in the desire to appropriate and enjoy the fruits of the efforts of someone else. When you are said to have wronged someone, this means that you have effortlessly taken something to which he was rightfully entitled and which he earned through his efforts and labour. But what is said about one who wrongs someone else for the interest of a third party? He does not even benefit from such an act of wronging while someone else does. This is even more evil than the first kind. It has been narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah *Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Hurry to do good deeds before there come trials like pieces of a dark night, amid which a person would be a believer in the morning and become a disbeliever by night, or a believer at night and become a disbeliever the following morning! He would forsake faith for a transient pleasure of this world.’(1)

Such is a person who would wrong someone else for the sake of another person, so he does not even gain anything himself by the injustice he has committed. Thus, wronging is intended for enjoying the fruits of someone else’s effort, or making someone else enjoy the fruits of the effort and toil of another. Allah is the All-Powerful, Almighty Creator and Lord of all things. What if He wanted to wrong someone- *the Exalted* above injustice? What would then be the scope of injustice?

Oppression is proportional to the power of the oppressor. Therefore, if Allah the All-Powerful uses His Power to wrong someone, His would be intolerable. Now, why would Allah wrong anyone?! What would He want to take from a creature He has made and already given everything? Allah is the Self-Sufficient and does not need to take anything from someone to give it to another. All people are equal before Him. He never had a female companion nor did He ever have a son, so all humans are equal before Him and He has guaranteed sustenance for all. Why then would He wrong any of His servants?! Logically, it is impossible to ascribe to Allah that He may want or need to wrong any of His creatures. Allah does not let any single good deed go unrewarded for, nor does He exaggerate punishment for a bad deed. He is far Exalted above doing both. Allah is the Generous Creator Who bestows His favours and blessings on people. To Him belong the treasures of the heavens and earth, so, it goes without saying that He does not need to benefit from the effects of His own bounties on His creatures. Allah states that He would never do the least act of injustice to His servants, saying: '…Your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.' (*Fussilat:* 46)

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(1) *[Muslim, Ahmad and At-Tirmidhi]*

The Arabic word *zhallam* (unjust) is a derivative that denotes recurrence of injustice, so one who is *zhallam* is one who is used to committing injustices. He has not committed a single act of injustice, but has repeated it so many times. It is a word that conveys exaggeration, either by committing each single act in an overdone manner, or by excessively repeating that act. So, we may use the intensive form *zhallam* to either refer to a single act of injustice that has been committed in an exaggerated way, or to refer to excessive repetition of injustices by the same doer. Therefore, Allah says about Himself: "…your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.' (*Fussilat:* 46) If Allah were to wrong His creatures, the injustice would be proportionate to His Might, so it would be immense. Were He unjust, His injustice would encompass all His creatures, but Allah says: 'surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom….' (*an-Nisa':* 40) If His servant commits one sin, it is written as one sin in his records, yet a good deed is multiplied. Now, what is the 'weight' of a thing? Weight is the amount of force exercised by gravity on a thing. If you let something light fall from a high point, it will fall slowly. By contrast, if you let something heavy fall from the same height, it will fall fast since the force on it due to gravity is stronger. Imagine then what the weight of an atom is.

First, what is an atom? Some say an atom is as small as the head of a small ant which cannot be seen with the naked eye, or it is like the ant itself. When Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* was asked about the meaning of an 'atom' in the context of the above mentioned verse, he took a handful of earth from the ground and blew it. When the dust was dispensed in the air, Ibn Abbas said: 'Each speck of dust is an atom.' Look at the air; we cannot see the atoms swimming in it. However, look at any spot penetrated by a beam of light and you will immediately notice the specks of dust floating in the air. You may only see these specks in sunlight even though they are always there and we inhale them along with the air we breathe. What then kept us from seeing these specks? They are just too minute for the eyes to see. An atom is one such a speck.

Everything is weighed even if it is as tiny as an atom that we do not see except through a penetrating beam of light. Allah says: 'surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom…' (*an-Nisa':* 40) The word 'atom' here is meant to represent the tiniest possible weight. An atom is not the smallest unit of the material world, for anything that can be enlarged can also be split. Allah revealed this verse at a time when people did not have any tools to measure or split an atom. Later, science succeeded in achieving that breakthrough. After the First World War, Germany manufactured cylinders that broke down atoms, or 'the indivisible particles' as ancient philosophers called it, for they thought there was nothing smaller than it. They did not realize that anything that has matter can become smaller just as it can become larger. Any mass can be split to smaller parts only if we have the tools required to do that.

When satellites were launched and a picture of New York City was taken, that picture came out quite small. Sufficiently magnified, the picture showed the license plate numbers of the cars that appeared in it. How did they do so? The small picture included more minute details that could not be seen with the naked eye. When these details were magnified, everything became clear, even the license plate numbers of the cars in the picture. Likewise, a concentrated light beam can reveal the specks of the dust that you cannot see otherwise.

A light beam sent by *the Almighty* Creator has shown atoms of dust clearly in the air, so how would an atom be hidden from Him? No atom can be hidden away from the Knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He*. He has created the light and the atom and all that is on earth and nothing can ever be hidden from Him.

I believe the atomic fission machine was at first very much like the traditional sugarcane squeezer we know. It was based on two cylindrical iron rods. An atom was placed in between, and the space separating the two rods was narrow enough so that an atom would be split as it passed through. The narrower that space was, the more effectively the fission process was conducted. The two rods were right adjacent to each other and operating in opposite directions, with a quite narrow space between them. German scientists tried to decrease that space further to do atomic fission and they succeeded. The outcome was something smaller than an atom. Some wrongly believe the Quran to be inaccurate because of verses like the abovementioned. It implies that the atom is the smallest constituent of matter even though that has scientifically been proven to be wrong. To them we respond, ‘The misconception is the outcome of looking at some verses while ignoring others.’ The Quran was revealed as a miracle to address various communities during the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until Judgment Day. Therefore, it includes what can forever satiate the minds of people belonging to all times and places. The Quran is a timeless miracle that will continue to quench pursuers of the truth until the end of time. Numerous discoveries have been made that accord with what the Noble Quran tells, and much is yet to be found out to prove its grandeur and magnificence. Allah has revealed in the Quran profound truths in a manner able to be comprehended by people at all times.

Discovering the secrets of the universe does not add new commands to what Allah has already ordained. Rather, they only afford us a better understanding of the Noble Quran, like fission of the atom, for example. The commands of Allah are clear; whoever obeys them is rewarded and whoever violates them is punished. In this respect, all people are treated the same, ever since the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until Judgment Day. Allah has made His commands equally clear for people of all times and places.

With every generation, new breakthroughs in science are made, and the more we discover in the universe, the more we see and appreciate the miracles of the Quran. Still, such discoveries do not have any effect on the juristic rulings of Islam. The ordinance of Allah is clear irrespective of scientific discoveries. For example, if we did not know that the earth rotates around itself, would that prevent us from continuing to live on it? No. Humankind has always lived here regardless of that discovery, even though scientific breakthroughs do contribute to our well-being. When Allah sent down the Quran, He addressed the minds that received it in the manner they could comprehend. As the scope of the human mind is widened through scientific discoveries, it still finds in the Quran what satisfies it and copes with the time. The scientific allusions the Quran contains do not encompass all scientific discoveries and marvels of the universe. It is meant to present signs that address minds and hearts to believe in the Almighty Creator; still, even though it does not mention them all, the Quran does not oppose the facts of the universe that we learn more about every day.

So, when science proved that an atom is not the smallest constituent of matter, some sceptics said that in several verses the Quran uses the expression 'an atom's weight' which suggests that nothing is smaller than the atom. However, it has been scientifically proven that the atom can be split to smaller parts. This faulty understanding has resulted from the fact that they have considered some verses of the Quran and neglected others. It is true the atom was split into a nucleus, electrons, neutrons etc., but the words of Allah revealed over fourteen centuries ago had to be comprehensible to the minds that did not know then that the atom would be split into smaller parts: 'Surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom….' (*an-Nisa':* 40) Still, Allah says in another verse of the Quran: 'And you are not (engaged) in any affair, nor do you recite concerning it any portion of the Quran, nor do you do any work but We are witnesses over you when you enter it, and there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor anything less than that nor greater, but it is in a clear book.' (*Yunus:* 61)

Therefore, the Quran acknowledges that there can be something 'less than' the atom. So, let people split the atom into its smaller constituents and later split those constituents into even smaller parts. No contradiction will emerge; the Quran already expresses all those stages in the aforementioned verse by mentioning the weight of an atom as well as 'anything less than that.' The Quran outstrips the innovativeness of our minds. Its context affords sufficient allusions to fission and fusion of the atom. Since Allah says: '…nor anything less than that nor greater…' (*Yunus:* 61), some would wonder: so long as the smallest thing in the universe cannot escape the Knowledge of Allah, what is the need then for mentioning things that are 'greater'? Logically, that too cannot escape the Knowledge of Allah.

Let me give an example to explain this. Something may not be encompassed by one’s perception either for its minuteness that makes it unnoticeable by the naked eye or its hugeness that makes it too for the eye to encompass all its dimensions. When a giant mountain is two or three kilometres away, you would not perceive it because it is too big to be encompassed by your vision. For Allah, nothing is too small for Him to notice or too large to encompass. Hence comes the significance of the assertion: ‘… nor anything less than that nor greater…’ (*Yunus:* 61). In another verse, Allah says: ‘He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it; He knows all that comes down from the heavens and all that goes up to them. He is the Merciful, the Forgiving.’ (*Saba’:* 2)

Ponder the precision of the Quran in replying to those who deny Judgment Day even though it is a universal issue that deals with humankind at all times. Allah says: ‘But those who disbelieve say, "The Hour will not come to us." Say, "Yes, by my Lord, it will surely come to you. Allah is the Knower of the unseen." Not absent from Him is an atom's weight within the heavens or within the earth or [what is] smaller than that or greater, except that it is in a clear book.’ (*Saba’:* 3)

Why do they deny arrival of the Last Hour? Their denial is expressive of a wish that there will be no resurrection, for they have done nothing to prepare for the Hour. Those who do not work for that Day wish the issue of the last hour would be false; otherwise, they know they will be recompensed for their wrongdoing. They have done things for which they are afraid of being held accountable. Their deeds are the cause of their denial, so Allah addresses both their claim and the motive behind it. Every statement has a motive. The motive behind their denial of Judgment Day is their overstepping the limits set by Allah. They have not done any good deeds to show obedience to Him, so it would be best for them if the Hour never came; they do not want to be punished for their transgression. Since Allah has eternally known all that, He responds to their claim as well as the intellectual motive behind it. He explains to them that He is the All-Knower of all things and none of their deeds escapes His Knowledge.

Allah then says: ‘… and if it is a good deed He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 40) If one does an atom’s weight of good, or anything less than that, Allah multiplies it and grants His servant ample reward for it. Since Allah does not mention bad deeds, this indicates that only a good deed is multiplied, but a bad deed is counted only as one. Allah speaks about multiplying good deeds in several verses: ‘Those who spend their wealth in God’s cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. Allah gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes….’ (*al-Baqara:* 261)

Out of His Grace, a good deed is multiplied many folds and the reward for it is far greater than its scope whereas a bad deed is recorded with Allah as only one deed. The Creator of this system gives as much as He wants to whoever He wills. An employer would shower privileges on an employee who is diligent and sincere at work; how about the Lord of the worlds *Glorified is He*? He grants matchless rewards to those of His servants who are devout to Him, as He says: ‘…and if it is a good deed He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 40) This is the favour of Allah He bestows on those who believe and do good. He does not just offer them a reward proportionate to their devoutness, but also an excess in reward out of His Bounty. This is only for the devout, so if one does not do good as Allah commands, no reward will be given him, let alone an excess in reward.

Allah draws parables for people to understand the meanings He intends to convey. Whatever Allah says is true, but He gives us familiar examples from our world to let us have a clearer image of the truth presented. Let us discuss the parable set in the verse we are dealing with. Suppose you planted a seed in a piece of land; it would yield seven ears each bearing a hundred grains. How much then do you think the Creator of the seed, land and all things gives? He gives limitlessly.

The prepositional phrase ‘from Himself’ is a promise of immense bounties from Allah in whose Hand are the treasures of the heavens and earth. In this worldly life, the gain attained is proportional to the effort made. By that parable, Allah wants us to understand; If a thing that He created; namely, the land and the seed, yield seven hundred folds the effort and labour invested in them, even if the investor is a disbeliever; Allah does not begrudge him His Bounty. What matchless, endless reward then will the One Who has created everything grant to the believer? Allah puts forward illustrative examples to make remote meanings accessible to the mind that would otherwise have difficulty understanding them. Each one of us is made up of a body and soul. What happens when the soul is taken from the body? The body rots and decomposes into its primary elements, and all aspects of life vanish.

The soul is the cause of motion. Once the soul is united with the body, every system of the body starts to carry out its assigned function in the growth process. But when the soul is withdrawn from the body, the life of the body comes to an end. The soul governs and moves the body; it does not have colour and nobody sees or smells it. So how can we perceive it?

What proves that the soul exists? We say that the soul is the essence that enters your body and imparts motion to it. You do not see or sense it. Its nature is unknown to you, yet its existence is felt through endless miraculous manifestations. No wonder then that we believe in Allah; we do not see Him, but we see signs of His Majesty and Mercy everywhere. He is not limited by the laws of time and place, and: ‘No human vision can encompass Him….’ (*al-An‘am:* 103) If a creature of Allah; namely, the soul, is so extraordinary that it cannot be comprehended by the mind or encompassed by the eyes, why wonder then that the Creator Himself is beyond our imagination or perception? Allah is too great to be encompassed by our limited senses.

Allah *Almighty is He* says: ‘…will bestow out of His grace a mighty reward….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 40) Reflecting upon the phrase ‘…out of His grace…’ as we are aware that there is a difference between man-made laws and Divine enactment decrees directly revealed to us by Allah. When He says: ‘…out of His grace…’ He means that intermediaries are of out of question here. We know the story of Musa (Moses) when he went to meet the good and knowledgeable servant of Allah. Allah described the servant as follows: ‘…We had taught knowledge from Ourselves.’ (*al-Kahf:* 65) This means that the good and knowledgeable servant was educated by none but by Allah directly. The evidence is that the one who came to learn from him; Musa (Moses), already had learnt and supported him in matters, yet Musa (Moses) started to argue some issues that go at odds with conventional laws and customs. Therefore, the word ‘…out of His grace…’ means that such knowledge goes beyond the limitation of the conventional means and codes.

Allah respects the value of your work and calls his endowment to you a reward; He gives you more than the reward due to you out of His grace; after He gives to you what is appropriate with your effort. This reward is described as ‘mighty’ since it is proportionate to The Bestower, rather than the bestowed. Allah then says:

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جِئْنَا مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ بِشَهِيدٍ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ عَلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ شَهِيدًا ﴿٤١﴾

What will they do when We bring a witness from each community, with you [Muhammad] as a witness against these people? [41] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 41)

Once you hear the interrogative word *kayf* (how*,* the interrogative word in the above verse), then know that it introduces something peculiar. We may for instance say, ‘You have insulted the sultan; so how would you behave if you were confronted with him’? It is as if the confrontation is only a hypothetical matter that transcends all imagination. Every exclamatory and peculiar matter that causes wonder is introduced or qualified by using the interrogative word *kayf* (how). A good example is the saying of Allah: ‘How can you refuse to acknowledge God…’ (*al-Baqara:* 28)?

This is an exclamation of the disaster and calamity of disbelieving in Allah. Tell us, how could anyone possibly have committed this sin? It is indeed a peculiar matter. We wonder: how would the disbeliever fare on Judgment Day? What would be the state of those sinners on Judgment Day?’ How, then, will the sinners fare on Judgment Day, when We shall bring forward witnesses from within every community….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 41)

Shahid (witness) is the one who attests to the truth; we know that Allah tells us: ‘…for there never was any community, but a warner has lived and passed away in its midst.’ (*Fatir:* 24) The warner in this context is a witness to the fact that the Book has been revealed to this *ummah* (followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is a witness to the fact that he had conveyed the message of Allah to his *ummah*; or else to whom does ‘them’ in Allah’s saying: ‘…and bring you [O Prophet] as a witness against them’ (*an-Nisa’:* 41) refer? Let us consider Allah’s saying: ‘How, then, will the sinners fare on Judgment

Day when We shall bring forward witnesses from within every community…' (*an-Nisa':* 41)? It is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is the one who conveyed the guidance of Allah to his followers. But how would the situation look like if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'I have delivered to them the methodology and they have no excuse since I apprised them of all of its details'? And '…bring thee [O Prophet]…' means bringing you Muhammad as a witness on what these people did. But does 'them' in '…witness against them' refer to the witnesses who are the Messengers or does the pronoun refer to the disbelievers in Allah? Does this mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* would be a witness against what those messengers did in as much as he is a witness against his followers? Both interpretations are plausible; why? The reason is that Allah revealed His Book as a miracle to prove that the messengers conveyed their messages to their nations. By mentioning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in the miraculous Quran which contains the Divine Methodology, there is an implicit notification that he *peace and blessing be upon him* would witness that the messengers of Allah delivered their messages to their people. The evidence is that our Lord conveyed this to me, in His Book that is both a miracle and a methodology to be followed. Our messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* would be, as well a witness against those disbelievers from amongst the community to which he was sent. This meaning is thereby as valid as the other one. There is not a correct meaning that rules out another equally correct one in the Book of Allah; here lies the greatness of the Quran. The greatness of the Quran consists in giving illuminations like the bezels of diamonds. Diamonds are expensive and rare because they are rigid and can be used for cutting. Further each atom in the diamond has radiance; other elements may have a single radiance but each atom of a diamond has radiance. For this reason, they say that it shines and glows since all its atoms radiate.

Allah *Almighty is He* illustrates that those disbelievers would be doomed on the Day of Judgment. As the messengers, would attest to the conveyance of the message of Allah. Allah made this message clear to the messengers and their followers on the one side and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*, and his followers on the other. We, as followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace* *and blessing be upon him* assumingly would be witnesses likewise '…so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you….' (*al-Baqara:* 143)

However, this is a privilege granted to no one except the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. They are the ones which Allah entrusted with the Methodology till the Day of Judgment. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is the seal of the prophets; he would be followed by none. Allah says: '…so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you….' (*al-Baqara:* 143) In accordance with this verse we have been entrusted to be a continuation for this message.

It has been related that 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* asked him once, 'Recite the Quran for me.' so I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, how should I recite for you to whom it has originally been revealed?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Yes, but I like to hear others reciting it.' So, I recited the chapter of *an-Nisa`* until I reached the verse, 'How, then, will the sinners fare on Judgment Day, when We shall bring forward witnesses from within every community, and bring you [O Prophet] as a witness against them?' (*an-Nisa':* 41) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* then said, 'Enough', and he started to shed tears.(1)

How solemn! The witness was taken by the solemnity of this verse, so how would be the state of those against whom he will testify? The witness who is going to testify cried because of this verse. You should know why he did so since you know very well that the heart of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* abounds in mercy towards his followers. For this reason, we said that the concern and care on the part of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* about the well-being of his followers was the main reason underlying Allah's choice of him to oversee his followers. After Allah, has learnt about that Prophet Muhammad's fervent concern about his followers, He *Almighty is He* said: 'Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was very concerned about his followers although the Allah explained to him; you are only obliged to deliver the message to your people and not to make them guided by it. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* knows this very well. His concern for and mercy upon his followers made him want them to believe. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was worried about testifying against his followers among those against whom he will testify on Judgment Day. When Allah *the Almighty* noticed how His messenger was concerned about his followers, He told him; if you desire, I can entrust you with the whole responsibility of your followers.

Consider the greatness of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and his understanding of and courtesy towards the Creator. He said: No Allah, you are more merciful towards them than I would ever be. It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is asking Allah, ‘Are you entrusting me with the whole responsibility while I am only their brother and you are our Lord? How would I be more merciful towards them’? It was expected that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* would say: yes, let me oversee my followers, but he *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘Lord you are more merciful towards them than anyone would ever be.’ But how was Allah’s reply to him? Allah *the Almighty* said: ‘I would not fail you concerning them ever.’ Allah knows the mercy of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* the master of all humans, towards his people.

It has been related that `Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al- 'As said, ‘The Prophet Muhammad recited the words of Allah: “for, verily, O my Lord, these [false objects of worship] have led many people astray! Hence, [only] he who follows me [in this my faith] is truly of me….” (*Ibrahim:* 36) He then recited the saying of Isa (Jesus), “If you cause them to suffer – verily, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them – verily, You alone are Almighty, truly Wise!” (*al-Ma‘ida:* 118). At this point the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* raised his hand and said, “Allah! my followers, my followers!”, and he started crying. So, Allah said: “Gabriel go to Muhammad, and know that your God knows best, and ask him what has made him cry?” Gabriel then went to Prophet Muhammad and asked him so he told him the reason. So, Allah said: "Gabriel, go to Muhammad and tell him we will make you content regarding your followers and will never displease you.'[1] 'How, then, will the sinners fare on Judgment Day, when We shall bring forward…' (*an-Nisa':* 41). This means what the state of those sinning liars would be. '…We shall bring forward witnesses from within every community…' (*an-Nisa':* 41) means that this messenger has performed his role and delivered the message of Allah about the purpose He has set for His creation. '…and bring you [O Prophet] as witness against them?' (*an-Nisa':* 41) Then, Allah says:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَوَدُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَعَصَوُا۟ ٱلرَّسُولَ لَوْ تُسَوَّىٰ بِهِمُ ٱلْأَرْضُ وَلَا يَكْتُمُونَ ٱللَّهَ حَدِيثًا ﴿٤٢﴾

On that day, those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Prophet will wish that the earth could swallow them up: they will not be able to hide anything from God [42] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 42)

Once you come across the phrase '…on that Day…' (*an-Nisa':* 42), especially if there is a double accent on its last syllable, then know that it replaces something that has been omitted. What is omitted here is more than a sentence. The meaning would thus be, 'On that day we will bring forth a witness from amongst every nation and you will be a witness against them.' On that day: 'Those who were bent on denying the truth and paid no heed to the Apostle will, on that Day, wish that the earth would swallow them…' (*an-Nisa':* 42). The reason is that they were surprised by the truth of something that they had denied before. They did not think that the divine narrative was true. They thought that the discourse of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* were just empty words. So, what would they do when they are confronted with the Day of Judgment? They would wish that the earth would swallow them. But what is the meaning of the 'the earth swallowing them'? It means that they would be levelled to the ground; as you usually mean when you say that you have run over someone. This usually means that you have run over him in a way that levelled him to the ground. '…but they shall not be able to conceal from God anything that has happened.' (*an-Nisa':* 42) How would they conceal anything from Him if Allah has already said in another verse?'[But]

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(1) *Muslim*

He will say: "Away with you into this [dishonour]! And speak no more unto Me!"' (*al-Mu'minun:* 108)

Allah has said so about them because the matter has stages: in one instance, they talk and in another they lie. For instance, they lie when they say: 'Then their excuse would be nothing but that they would say, "By Allah, our Lord, we were not polytheists."' (*al-An'am:* 23) They will also say about the idols that they worshipped: '…We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah.…' (*az-Zumar:* 3)

Thus, Allah's saying '…But they shall not be able to conceal from God anything that has happened' (*an-Nisa':* 42) is evidence that the articulation of words is too forceful to be suppressed; no one can thus conceal it. Concealing means precluding something from actualizing its natural tendency to manifest and reveal itself. Each of them, on the Day of Judgment, cannot conceal anything from Allah because the vocalization is spontaneous; it is no longer governed only by the speech organs, as is the case in the worldly life. They will rather find that they have put forward acknowledgments of their sins with their tongues and other organs. Articulation of words would no longer be confined to the movement of the tongue; rather, the tongue, skin, hands and all other organs will testify against their transgressions.

The whole matter is not under the control of any single person; why? The reason is that there is a term known as the sovereignty rule; it means designating a superior power over an inferior power. To make the matter clearer; suppose there is an army battalion led by a certain commander. The laws state that the commander is in charge and must be obeyed by the soldiers; they are not entitled to violate the martial's commands. In any mission, should the commander issue a command that resulted in their defeat, the soldiers must report it to a higher authority. They are not held accountable and the commander is the only one to be questioned, for they are only following his orders.

I am giving this example to put forward a clearer depiction of the situation of standing before Allah *the Almighty* as He created man and made his organs subject to his will which is in turn governed by his passions and subjective choices. The will of the obedient is prone to obedience to commands and avoidance of prohibitions. On the contrary, the will of the sinner consists in not obeying the command or avoiding the prohibitions. If one wanted to drink wine; his legs help him to walk to a bar; his tongue orders the bartender to serve him the wine and he reaches out with his hands to pick the glass and drink. All the organs operating are subject to his subjective will, they are created for this. Afterwards when the organs return to Allah who created and set them in this manner they would tell Him, ‘Our Lord he used us to do so and so’, why? The reason is that the sovereignty rule of man on the Day of Judgement will be suspended for Allah is the Supreme Sovereign. Allah says: ‘…To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing!’ (*Ghafir:* 16)

No one would have any will in the Hereafter. Since the function of the subjective will of man is suspended, the hand will talk and confess saying, ‘O Allah! he (man) used me to do so and so and I was forced by this man subjective sovereignty granted by You Lord to him, to have control over me; I have no freedom of choice; once he wills anything, I have to obey; when he wants to beat someone, I cannot refrain from obeying.’ Similarly, the tongue will also confess everything about the affronts and approbations that he paid to others. Thus, all actions spring out from the sovereignty of man's subjective will over the objects exemplified in organs that Allah had made subservient to you. But once these organs return to the One Who granted the sovereignty to the will, no one will have any will but Allah. It is as if when the organs act contrary to the rulings of Allah, as they are subservient to the passion of the one who sins, they would be acting unwillingly and grudgingly. In other words, they would be grudgingly following the orders of their owner. Thus, once the control of man’s will is taken away, the organs start confessing what has happened. Allah says: ‘And they will ask their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?", and they will reply, "Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]…”’ (*Fussilat:* 21). ‘Those who were bent on denying the truth and paid no heed to the Apostle will on that Day wish that the earth would swallow them…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 42) The reason is that the disbeliever would say, ‘Oh, I wish that I were dust!’ (*an-Naba’:* 40) After that Allah says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَقْرَبُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَـٰرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا۟ مَا تَقُولُونَ وَلَا
جُنُبًا إِلَّا عَابِرِى سَبِيلٍ حَتَّىٰ تَغْتَسِلُوا۟ ۚ وَإِن كُنتُم مَّرْضَىٰٓ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَآءَ أَحَدٌ
مِّنكُم مِّنَ ٱلْغَآئِطِ أَوْ لَـٰمَسْتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا۟ مَآءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا۟ صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا
فَٱمْسَحُوا۟ بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُوًّا غَفُورًا ﴿٤٣﴾

You who believe, do not come anywhere near the prayer if you are intoxicated, not until you know what you are saying; nor if you are in a state of major ritual impurity – though you may pass through the mosque – not until you have bathed; if you are ill, on a journey, have relieved yourselves, or had intercourse, and cannot find water, then find some clean sand and wipe your faces and hands with it. God is always ready to pardon and forgive [43] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 43)

Here Allah *the Almighty* moves from stating the commands to the acts of worship. He also warns us against associating partners with Him or engaging in charitable acts for the sake of eliciting people's praise and approval; and that He does not do wrong to anyone and that we will all be summoned before him on the day when there will be no shade but His. Afterwards He *Almighty is He* wanted us to be linked with him through acts of worship in so much as they make you declare your submission to Him by praying five times a day, for He motivates you to be wholeheartedly and passionately dedicated to His worship.

Allah says: '…Do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated…' (*an-Nisa':* 43), and did not say, 'Do not pray while you are in a state of drunkenness.' This means that you should not even approach prayers or set out to perform them but rather avoid them. This indicates that all intoxicants should be stopped. What is the meaning of '…Do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated…'? (*an-Nisa':* 43) The order that they ought not to approach prayers while they are intoxicated implies that the ordinance of the prohibition of intoxicants at that time was not enacted. It was gradual; for Islam was called for in an interval witnessing the break of series of the messengers sent; in other words, people at that time had not been confronted with the divine command for a prolonged lapse of time. Yet when the ordinances are related to the tenants of the creed, they are decisively addressed, i.e. the belief in the unity of Allah and not associating partners with Him. However, issues related to customs and habits have been revealed fractionally so that they are not to be forced or prevented in an abrupt manner, as change can be affected by time

Allah is Merciful enough to reveal His enactment regarding matters of habit in stages. This is one of the stages: '…Do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). In Islam, prayer is defined as the sayings and acts that start with saying, ' Allah is the Greatest' and ends with the greeting of 'peace and mercy be upon you'; linguistically all this refers to all acts of praying and supplicating to Allah.

Sukara (intoxicated) is the plural of *sakran*. *Sakran* is the one who drinks what obscures his mind. The word is derived from *as-sakr* (barrier used to block rivers). When water floods, people construct dams; this dam keeps water from pouring in. The same holds for intoxicants. Whenever you consume them, you impede your reason and the regular flow of your consciousness. From this sense, the meaning of '…Do not approach prayer, while you are intoxicated…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) has been derived. What is meant is that prayers take you to the presence of Allah five times a day. But intoxication and whatever intoxicants precipitate in the blood deter you from praying even during the day, due to these residues. He thus pushed them to stop a habit.

If they succeeded in accustoming themselves to give up this habit during the day and until night fall, each one of them will perform the night prayers, drink and then go to bed. Thus, enduring the entire day without drinking is one of the stages. Allah allocated the process of quitting drinking in terms of stages to make it easy enough for one's self to accept it. When He started to talk about intoxicants, He says: 'And We grant you nourishment from the fruits of date-palms and vines; from it you derive intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance; in this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who use their reason!' (*an-Nahl:* 67)

It should be noted that 'intoxicants' were mentioned before the 'wholesome sustenance'; it thus includes intoxicants and sustenance. It is as if when they used to eat date-palms and vines, this was sustenance that Allah described as wholesome. But they also used to make wine from grapes. Therefore, Allah mentioned the intoxicants first because this is what they usually made from grapes; however, he did not describe it as good or wholesome. Rather, He said: '…from it you derive intoxicants…' (*an-Nahl:* 67) and restricted the qualification of wholesome only to the sustenance.

By Allah, should we not, upon hearing '…intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance…' (*an-Nahl:* 67) understand that being an intoxicant implies that it is not good or wholesome? We should infer the opposite of wholesome and good namely bad and unwholesome. It is as if he said, 'from the fruits of grapes and date-palms you derive an intoxicating drink, i.e. an unwholesome drink, and at the same time a good and wholesome sustenance.' Due to your interest in the intoxicant Allah has it. After this, what happens? When Allah introduces a ruling, the prelude to it often assumes the form of a warning. The warning is not, yet, a legal enactment; it rather demonstrates a truth to you and you then have the freedom to choose. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say, "In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man; but the evil which they cause is greater than the benefit which they bring"…' (*al-Baqara:* 219).

Allah has just explained the issue and you are free to voluntarily choose. So, He has said: '…Say, "In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man…"' (*al-Baqara:* 219). But the great evil ensuing from them outweighs the benefit. Yet did he tell us what to do or how we should behave? No, he did not. The reason is that he wants to endear the minds to the rationale of not consuming intoxicants and abiding by the ruling. He wants each one of us to grasp the ruling and its necessity on his own. Allah says: '…Say: "In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man…"' (*al-Baqara:* 219). As long as the evil outstrips the benefit what alternative would be greater? We usually identify the greater alternative when we compare it to the others, among which we are choosing to determine which of them is less evil than the other and which is better.

When Allah says: '…Say: "In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man…"' (*al-Baqara:* 219), we must realize that this is just a warning. As long as it is a warning and it enjoins good, then one should follow it and trust the advice of Allah. But there is no binding enactment decreed at this point; there were still people who were drinking while others were not. After this, the following incident took place; an intoxicated man wanted to pray and read the chapter of *al-Kafirun* from the Quran. Because that man's reason and consciousness were swayed by the intoxicants he mistakenly recited, 'Say: O disbelievers! I worship that which you worship', instead of 'Say: O disbelievers! I worship not that which you worship.' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-2) It became clear how drunkenness could lead to unacceptable extremes. Thus, the ruling was revealed. We do not interfere with your personal affairs whether you are drunk or not. However, your drunkenness should not lead you to avow your disbelief in Allah while you are praying. Accordingly, do not approach the prayers while you are intoxicated. This is a prohibition, an order and an assignment. 'O you who believe! Do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). If we cannot pray while we are intoxicated, we must abstain from drinking for some time. This abstaining accustoms one to quit. Subsequently, an incident happened when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked to give his ruling about intoxication. Prophet Muhammad's companions asked him to clarify the ruling of drinking alcohol. They said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Clarify to us the ruling of Islam regarding intoxicants and alcohol. Allah then revealed His saying: 'O you who believe, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, sacrificing on stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it, that you may be successful.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90)

Therefore, His saying: 'O you who believe! Do not approach prayer while you are in a state of drunkenness…' (*an-Nisa':* 43), was an eloquent introductory stage towards forbidding intoxicants and alcohol. He thus prohibited it for some time; this time is the period in which one meets his Lord i.e. prayers. He explained to you: drink it away from me; but when you come to me you must have total consciousness and reason. '… but wait until you know what you are saying…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). It is as if this statement has imparted to us an implicit ruling. The one who drinks is not conscious of what he is saying; this is one aspect of the issue. If one does not know what one is saying about ordinary matters one may rave. But when it comes to worshipping and reading the Quran it is unacceptable for one to be in such a state. When one declines to this extreme state, our Lord interferes to say: 'O you who believe! Do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated…' (*an-Nisa':* 43).

Allah thus decreed another ruling: '…nor while you are in a state of major ritual impurity, until you have bathed (except if you are travelling).' 'O you who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying, or while you are in a state of major ritual impurity, until you have bathed (except if you are travelling). And if you are ill or on a journey, or one of you comes from a place of relieving himself or you have cohabited with women and find no water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]. Indeed, Allah is ever pardoning and forgiving.' (*an-Nisa':* 43)

The state of major ritual impurity is well known; it results from intercourse between a male and a female. The ravishment and gratification ensuing from this intercourse makes one distracted a bit from worship; therefore, sexual pleasure is called the epitome of all gratifications and pleasures because it induces the body to tremble because it consumes all its nutrients and distracts one's thought from his Creator. For this reason, it has been said that it is the light of your eyes and the mind of your legs; so, either do it excessively or cut back on it. This means that I give you this power and you are free to use it as you wish. We wash to restore the energy of the human psyche. No one should be concerned about these matters if they are done in accordance with lawful restrictions. So, we should follow the commands of our Lord and wash ourselves whether we understand the wisdom underlying the order'…nor while you are in a state of major ritual impurity, until you have bathed (except if you are travelling)…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). If what is meant by prayers in this context is the daily prayers, this means that you should not attempt to pray while you are intoxicated, or when you are stained with the effects of sexual intercourse. Allah did not say, 'Do not pray.' The mosque is the place of prayers. His saying '…Do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) means do not attempt to pray. Attempting may mean even going to the mosque; it is as if He is saying: do not go unless the mosque is the only means to reach water—needed for washing.

'…And if you are ill, or are on a journey…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) means if you have an excuse that prevents you from using water. '…or one of you comes from a place of relieving himself…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). *Al-gha`it*—the Arabic word here translated as 'want of nature', means a low land. At that time people used to satisfy their wants of nature in low lands; the word thus became a sign of this activity. However, we may refer to this activity using different expressions. One may say that he is going to the ‘water circle’; others may wonder where the W. C. is. This is a way of inexplicitly inquiring about something repulsive and repugnant. For this reason, we may even say in informal Egyptian Arabic, ‘I am going to do as other people do.’ This means that it is not strange that I am going to go to the restroom; for, everyone does this.

Allah *Almighty is He* says: ‘…or one of you comes from a place of relieving himself or you have cohabited with women and find no water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 43) It is due to the mercy of Allah towards the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and due to the kindness of Allah that the enactment was phrased in a way endearing to the human being. But it is a decree; so, do not say for instance, ‘I perform my ablution to clean myself’ because we will wonder, ‘How come you just perform ablution for the sake of cleanliness and then when you fail to find water you bring dust and earth and put it on your face?’ So, do not tell me that I am performing ablution merely for cleanliness purposes. It is rather making prayers admissible in accordance with the enactments of Allah. He told me, perform your ablution and if you do not find water then use dust and pass it lightly over your face and hands. Yes; the matter is a command from Allah whether you understand the rationale behind it or not. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I have been given five things that no other prophet before me has been given. Allah has supported me to the extent that He caused my enemies to fear me even when I was one month’s journey away from them, the entire earth has been made a clean mosque for me so that whenever prayers are due any one of my followers may pray, I have been permitted to enjoy the spoils of the war though they were not previously allowed to any prophet, I was also granted the right to intercede and I was not sent to any specific people but to all mankind.(1) ‘…then seek clean earth…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 43) means that you must make sure that it is pure and clean. '…wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 43). The issue involves uncleanliness and taking resort to pure dust. '…wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) does not mean that it is a substitute for ablution. In performing ablution, I must rinse my mouth with water and clean my nose by sniffing some water into it. I also must wash my face, my hands and pass water on my forehead and into my ears. I am here talking about the pillars and the traditions adopted after the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this verse Allah explains that if you are using pure dust and earth you can clean both minor and major impurities. Thus, it is enough to pass it over your face and your hands. '…wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) some have wondered whether this ought to be done by striking the earth once or twice. We say Allah says: '…wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). Some scholars said one strike, while others said two strikes; this is all intended for facilitation and making things easier. This facilitation is consistent with the word 'forgiveness.' Allah says: Indeed, Allah is ever Pardoning and Forgiving (*an-Nisa':* 43). But why did Allah mention the absolution of sins? The reason is that He forgave and spared us the effort of toiling in search for water and licensed us to attain cleanness by passing dust. Afterwards Allah says:

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Muslim and An-Nisa`i*

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ نَصِيبًا مِّنَ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ يَشْتَرُونَ
ٱلضَّلَـٰلَةَ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن تَضِلُّوا۟ ٱلسَّبِيلَ ﴿٤٤﴾

[Prophet], have you not considered how those who were given a share of the Scripture purchase misguidance and want you [believers], too, to lose the right path? [44] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 44)

When Allah wants to assert a cosmological truth as a prelude to a question related to creed that guards the system of the universe, he immediately addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: '[O Prophet], have you not considered…'? The insight here is usually associated with visual perception. The function of the eye relates to the events to which it is exposed; the visual thing is always associated with its evidence, whereas the evidence of the truth of the audible is taken from the fact of the one who utters it and such a fact is a questionable issue. However, what is seen is self-evident. For this reason, people have said, with the act of seeing, there is no room for asking 'where.' This means that if you see something, do not ask where it is;likewise hearing about news is not like witnessing it. So, the news that you hear is never as trustworthy as what you witness with your own eyes. Thus, witnessing is self-evident. It should not thereby be said, prove that such a person is wearing a white gown if you have already seen this person.

Accordingly, when Allah wants to assert the truth of a matter He says: '[O Prophet], have you not considered…'? When you claim that someone is corrupt before a third person, this person may or may not believe you. But when you see someone gambling or consuming an intoxicant, and you tell the same person with whom you talked before, 'Have you not considered the evidence against the person I told you about'? This is evidence that you have seen that person doing such and such. But when Allah addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* by saying: '[O Prophet], have you not considered…', we should wonder whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is witnessing the matter at stake or not. If so, then the question is intended as Allah once told him: 'Have you seen the man who forbids [Our] servant to pray?' (*al-'Alaq:* 9-10)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did witness this person. But is 'Have you seen' intended in the actual literal sense, or not? Why would Allah use the interrogative form even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw the one who 'forbade' people from praying? Why did He not simply say: 'You have seen the one who forbids a slave when he prays'? No, Allah wanted to affirm that piece of news in stages. Therefore, in some instances the piece of news may be audible and in others it may be visual. In other instances, Allah does not say: 'you have seen'; rather, He inquires: 'have you seen' because He wants to elicit an answer from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this manner, the answer will be initiated by the addressee rather than the addresser. This is the most forceful form of expression and ascertainment. When Allah addresses his prophet with His saying: 'Have you not considered' we investigate whether this event was witnessed by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself, then the vision is actualised. However, when the event in question did not take place at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Allah addresses him using the same interrogative form as in the following case: ‘Have you [O Prophet] not seen how your Lord dealt with the army of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) The event of the ‘Elephant’ took place in the same year that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born. When Allah *Almighty is He* asks his prophet: ‘Have you not seen…’ (*al-Fil:* 1) about an incident he did not witness, He means, ‘Have not you heard or learnt about it’? Why did Allah *Almighty is He* not simply say ‘Have you learnt or known about such and such incident’ instead of, ‘Have you not seen…’ (*al-Fil:* 1)? We can infer that that when Allah addresses his messenger regarding a command, He meant to emphasise to him that, ‘Be aware Prophet Muhammad, that when I inform you of something, you must have faith in Me more than your own eyes.’ Hence when He says, ‘…Have you not seen…’ (*al-Fil:* 1), this implies that you have been informed by the Truth. His informing is unequalled to any of His creations because the credibility of the created is questioned, yet that of the Creator is nothing but absolute truth. Your eyes may fail you as you may not be totally aware of the whole truth; however, when Allah briefs you on a certain thing, you are certain that it is the comprehensive truth. Allah’s revelation is more trustworthy than you witnessing something. When Allah says: ‘Have you seen the man who forbids [Our] servant to pray?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 9-10), this was like the case we just discussed above. However, when Allah says, ‘Have you [O Prophet] not seen how your Lord dealt with the army of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1), it is as if you are seeing them now. So, ‘Have you not seen…?’ (*al-Fil:* 1), in this context, implies that it is as if you are witnessing the scene in front of you.

In conclusion, the methods of ascertaining a claim, whether it is a piece of news or a relation, are as follows: it is based on the testimony of the created which is questionable, let alone that the vision of the created may be minor to comprehend the entire scene, or alternatively, it may be based on the narrative and statement of the Creator whose knowledge is absolute and encompasses everything. Accordingly, that which is proven and ascertained by the Creator should be the most plausible and trustworthy of all.

‘[O Prophet] Have you not considered those to whom a portion of the Book…’, (*an-Nisa’:* 44). This verse was revealed while there were several

Jews living around Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *peace and blessings be upon him* had seen that they were granted a share of the Scripture; they were people of the Book. Nonetheless they bartered what Allah had granted them with misguidance and refrained from saying the truth. This matter was thereby witnessed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.When Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He made him the seal of all prophets and concluded with him the lineage of prophethood. This means that prophethood had a certain course. In every age, a prophet was sent in proportion to the pervasive worldview at that historical moment. The basis of communication between beings in life is commensurate with the ailments and diseases in the society. But Allah pre-eternally knows that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would come in an age and that his message and the path he set would suffice to encompass and regulate all issues and matters from his time until Judgment Day. Allah knows that all communicational barriers and impediments of territorial boundaries would dissolve; so, an event may happen in the far east and you may hear about it in the far west and vice versa. An illness may break out in the United States and after a day or two it spreads to another country.

The factor of distance has been overcome with the emergence of modern means of communication that turned the world into one village. In olden times, social ailments were regional; confined or whatever was problematic in a certain community would not reach other ones. For this reason, Allah used to send a messenger to every community and human gathering to treat its ailments and remedy its problems. Since the world came together through means of communication, one messenger must be sent to all mankind as human problems would be the same. In the present time whenever an incident takes place anywhere, it reverberates everywhere.

Accordingly, the message of Allah must be universal. Since the message is united, no further messenger is needed to complete it. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came as a seal. For this reason, Allah pledged every messenger to herald the coming of a messenger who would be the seal of all prophets and messengers to assure them of the creditability of the final prophet, of whose arrival they had been promised. Thus, they would say, 'Our messengers told us about him.' For this reason, Allah says: 'And when Allah made a covenant through the prophets: Certainly, what I have given you of Book and wisdom- then a messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 81). After this Allah says: 'He said, "Do you affirm and accept My compact in this (matter)?" They said, "We do affirm." He said, "Then bear witness, and I (too) am a bearer of witness with you."' (*Al-'Imran:* 81)

All messengers attest to the verity and truth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger of Allah, likewise confirmed the verity of the religions revealed to other messengers. The religion he called for, i.e. Islam, is the umbrella that encompasses all the previous religions of all other prophets because they share with him the same methodology that he was sent to reveal to the people. As for those who had been guided to believe in Allah via the call of the previous messengers and heard about the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* they may be dissuaded from following him based on their own dogmatic bigotry. Therefore, Allah pre-emptively informed and emphasised the coming of the final prophet: a messenger will be sent by Allah as a seal of all prophets. Beware that whenever he is sent, you should immediately believe in him. They had sufficient evidences and notifications in their books. Allah granted them a share of the scripture. Consider also the precision of the performance of the Quran: '[O Prophet] Have you not considered those to whom a portion of the Book?…' (*an-Nisa':* 44) This statement came forth excusing them in case they miss something of the Scripture. The reason is that Allah will mention in another verse: '…And they have forgotten much of what they had been told to bear in mind…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13).

If they have forgotten they are exempt from blame. But those who have sufficient knowledge among those who have been given a share of the Scripture should have had their ears attentive to the sealing voice of truth. This was known to them beforehand. For this reason, our Lord tells us: '…And bear in mind that, not a long time ago, they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the truth…' (*al-Baqara:* 89). They used to say to the idol worshippers among the Arabs, 'We are waiting for the final prophet whom Allah would send to outrace you to believe in him. If we believe in him and you do not, we will use him to kill you as the people of `Ad and Iram.' They thus adhered to their beliefs in what was revealed to them from the Heavens. If that is the case, could you tell me why they disbelieved in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even though they were known as the people of the Book? The disbelievers of Quraysh did not say, 'We are from the People of the Book.' They were at a lapse of break in the series of messengers sent. Accordingly, it was expected that the people of the Book would rush to believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once he came because they had threatened the Arabs against the consequences of not following him. Allah had granted them a lofty status, but their malice precluded them from benefiting from it. Allah says: 'And if they, who are bent on denying the truth, say unto you O Prophet, "They say, you have not been sent." Say, " Allah is sufficient as a witness between me and you; all knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him..." (*ar-Ra'd:* 43).

Allah has graciously made you witnesses to the truth and actuality of the message. But He is also a witness as much as you are. This is a great status and honour. But they did not heed this status and honour, and were adamant in their stubbornness: '…whenever there came unto them something which they recognized as the truth, they would deny it…' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

However, we notice that when Allah reveals a matter pertaining to creed and faith and it is denied by one who opposes it or a disbeliever, this person may think that he is doing some harm to Allah. We tell him, 'No. You are just motivated by a malicious desire in yourself. Allah will bolster the final religion and you will, in turn, be nothing but ignorant throughout the whole situation. So, do not think that you can impede the will of Allah when you disbelieve in Him and the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah made you proclaim your denial to the polytheists of Quraysh. So, consider what this word will do in order that you know what your denial has contributed to faith. You think that you have opposed faith and belief; on the contrary, you have rather supported it while being totally oblivious and sinful.'

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came and declared the message relayed to him by his Lord, the disbelieving idol-worshipping Arabs said, 'This is the prophet about whom the Jews warned and foretold us, so let us rush to have faith in him before they outrace us.'

Did they or did they not serve the cause of faith? Certainly, they did. So, no disobedient person should think that he can extinguish the light of Allah (i.e. guidance as Allah will consummate his light even if the disbelievers do not like it). A good illustration of this point is what happened when our Lord changed the *qibla* (direction of prayer). He then explained: Muhammad you are passionate and eager to orient yourself towards the *Ka`ba* in Mecca. But I have directed you towards Jerusalem for a specific purpose. Now I will re-orient your prayers towards Mecca and you must bear in mind that when I do this, some of the weak-minded—the Jews—would say: '…What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which they have previously observed…' (*al-Baqara:* 142). They wondered about the reason that made Muslims change the direction of their prayers. If the direction of the prayers of Ibrahim (Abraham) was already the *Ka`ba* in Mecca, why did they not orient themselves towards it from the beginning? They will say this; the Quran was revealed asserting it and people will continue to recite it. It is due to their lame, feeble and narrow mindedness that they said the same thing when the direction of the prayers was changed. They did not heed what Allah had said before: 'The weak-minded among the people will say, "What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which they have previously observed..."' (*al-Baqara:* 142). Despite their intelligence, they said such things. This indicates that disbelieving in Allah is nothing but darkness, which the disbeliever blunders in and finds no way out of himself. Allah *the Almighty* has made their infidelity a means for establishing faith. If they had been truly intelligent and insightful they would, once the Quran relates: 'The weak-minded among the people will say, 'What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which they have previously observed…' (*al-Baqara:* 142), they should have said the Quran foretold that we would say such and such. So, let us not say that to discredit the Quran, yet they were incapable of doing so. Thus, the disbeliever is always in a narrow state of mind. They thought that, in their disbelief, they would eradicate the faith in Allah. But they did not because Allah made disbelief a means for faith. The *Sunnah* of the Prophet says, ' Allah would support this religion even with an immoral man.(1)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*

Allah explains that those people were granted a share of the Scripture and it was expected that they would be the first to believe in Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah. But they did not believe; this was the first stage of fallacy. But they did not suffice themselves with this share of evil. They were pursuing misguidance not only for themselves, but they also wanted to lead others astray. This is the second stage of fallacy. Once one is misguided, he is to shoulder the responsibility of his own faults, yet the venture lies in his incessant attempt to insinuate and misguide others as well. The hazard here is fortified as the gravity of his disbelief is doubled. You have gone astray, but why do you want to lead me astray as well? The reason is that the one who went astray or the deviant who does not adhere to the righteous path quite knows it, although the difficulty lies in his inability to get himself to adhere to this path. Accordingly, he feels belittled when he wonders why the other believes, whereas I could not.

The misguided painstakingly endeavours to lead others astray so as not to be notoriously singled out. The deviant feels obnoxiously horrid before the righteous and they enviously attempt to pull them to the same mire. They will say, 'Why is he upright? We must drag him towards recklessness. For this reason, the upright have to be very attentive and cautious because the devils among the humans will not let them be obedient without nuisance. They will rather laboriously attempt to sway them because they cannot bear getting themselves to obey the commands of Allah and it hurts them to find other people capable of disciplining themselves, and are guided to the righteous path. For this reason, they say, 'Let us all stumble together so that no one would feel better off than the other. Let us all be dishonest to be disavowed from being stigmatized and disgraced.' The traitor is vehemently agitated by dealing with the honest as if he has been stabbed with a dagger in his heart. He attempts to discredit, just like himself. This is the meaning of '...They buy error...' (*an-Nisa':* 44).

Allah tells them, you are free to barter faith for error and you would be held accountable for your misdeeds in the hell fire. But why do you then want to misguide people and lead them astray? The obedient should be rather heedful of this matter; when someone ridicules them for being obedient to Allah, they must be attentive when Allah *Almighty is He* says: 'Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. And when they passed by them, they winked at one another.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-30) This is what happens when some of the prodigals and deviants see someone going to the mosque to pray. They tell him, 'Take us on your wings.' They ridicule him and make fun of him because when they see him eager to be obedient to Allah, while they are incapable of being that submissive to Allah, they shamefully develop low self-esteem. For this reason, they want everyone to be as disobedient as they are. This is the shame that we witness these days. When these disobedient and deviant meet their people they victoriously feel rejoiced succeeding to annoy the believers. They say we have met a believer and we made fun of him. Allah continues: 'And when they returned to their people, they would return jesting; and when they saw them, they would say, "Indeed, they are truly lost."' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31-32)

Allah explains that those mockers accuse the religiously-committed of being astray. So, do not ever despair because of their mischievousness. Do not be defeated before those malicious people because you will openly take your revenge upon them. After Allah orders their torture and humiliation to those deviants on the Day of Judgment He will say: 'Have the disbelievers not been rewarded, this Day, for what they used to do?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36) Allah's interrogatives pose the question so that He may elicit the answer from us. The question is, 'Have We been capable of commensurately recompensing them for what they did to you'? So, ridicule and laugh at them as much as they did to you in the worldly life.

In the verse, Allah says: '[O Prophet] Have you not considered those to whom a portion of the Book?…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) This characterization refers to the Jews. '…to whom a portion of the Book has been given…' (*an-Nisa':* 43); it implies that they did not embrace the wholeness of the book Allah revealed to them. The evidence is that they had forgotten some of what they were told and reminded of. '…They buy error and desire that you should go astray from the way.' (*an-Nisa':* 43) Once you come across the word 'buy' you should know that there is a kind of bargain: a commodity and a price paid in exchange for it. They purchase error but by what? What will they pay for it? Allah in another verse says: 'For it is they who have taken error in exchange for guidance…'

(*al-Baqara:* 16). This means that they paid guidance as a price and accepted error as a commodity in exchange. In any barter, we yield what we pay or give in exchange for what we purchase. So, when we buy a commodity for a pound, the pound is lost after it was in our possession. When Allah says: '…they who have taken error in exchange for guidance…' (*al-Baqara:* 16), one wonders what the nature of the guidance is. If they had any that they gave away in exchange for error, certainly, they did have the instinctive guidance; the intuitional disposition; the internal guidance compass.

Your subconscious is needless of waiting for a messenger to guide you to Allah; rather, it needs a messenger to inform it of the will and ordinances of Allah. Belief in Allah is purely instinctive. When one consciously realizes that things in the universe are subservient to him in a steady and regular manner, the sun rises every day, the air blows and the land yields crops when you cultivate it, one immediately wonders if all this was due to his efforts or if any other human being could claim that he had the power to make all these beings subservient to you. To the contrary, we are thrown in the world amongst other beings and not the other way around.

When one is born, and sees these bounties around him, would he not believe that this is an endowment from his Creator? When one is born, one is astounded and captivated by the existence of all these bounties. Similarly, when Adam *peace be upon him* was created, he was overwhelmed by the bounties he found; human beings hence came about, while these bounties were already there. Given that he came into being after all of this was created, should one, by Allah, not pause and ponder about the ultimate creator? He had to think about who created these bounties for him. We have previously given the example of the one who exhausted all means of survival while being cast adrift in the desert. He could find neither water nor food. Desperate as he was, this man fell asleep. He then woke up to find a table that abounded with the most exquisite dishes of food; Should he not pause and ask himself who set this banquet? You were then brought about into a universe that abounds with numerous bounties. No one told you: I created these things; further, your father and grandfather never laid that claim. So, you should be attentive to the fact that there is a Creator.

Had those who exchanged guidance for error, have any guidance to exchange for that error? Yes, they had the guidance furnished to them by their natural disposition. For this reason, when the Companion `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'Did you know your Lord through Muhammad or did you know Muhammad through your Lord?' He replied, 'Had I known Muhammad through my Lord, I would not have needed a messenger.' But it is also inappropriate to say to someone that you have known your Lord through Muhammad. For this reason, Ali *may Allah be pleased with him*, said 'I have known my Lord through my Lord and Muhammad came to inform me of what my Lord's Ordinance.' Accordingly, His saying: '…they who have taken error in exchange for guidance…' (*al-Baqara:* 16) refers to those who sold out the guidance of their natural disposition and bought error in exchange. Allah says: '[O Prophet] Have you not considered those to whom a portion of the Book has been given? They buy error and desire…' (*an-Nisa':* 44). Allah did not mention guidance in this context because natural instinct had already been distorted in these people's hearts to the extent that they could not even offer it as a price for error '…and desire that you should go astray from the way.' (*an-Nisa':* 44)

Wanting or willing involves preferring a choice to another. Here is an example. You may have two pairs of socks in front of you; you may thus choose whichever of them. But if there was only one pair you would not have much choice. The will prefers one alternative to the other. What is the meaning of '...go astray from the way'? (*an-Nisa':* 44) Loss of the way could be interpreted in different ways. However, the point of these possible interpretations is that there is a command from Allah that you did not heed. So, did this happen because you were oblivious to it, or did you deliberately abandon it? The forgetful one is excused. But there may be another who knows the command but he deliberately abandoned it. Thus, error may refer to oblivion as in the saying: '…So that if one of them should make a mistake, the other could remind her….' (*al-Baqara:* 282)

Here the error consists in forgetting and being oblivious. By contrast some may err because they do not know the righteous path, but yearn for it as Allah says: 'And He found you lost, and guided you.' (*ad-Duha:* 7) This means that things are intricate and have a lot of ramifications. So, one may see this or that aspect of it. Allah explained to you; do not exhaust yourself because I will lead you to the righteous path. Thus, error has multiple senses and the point of these senses is that they do not lead you to a purpose. When Allah addresses an abstract issue connected with faith and creed He uses terms that people often employ to refer to stellar matters. For this reason, we wonder: what is the 'way'? The way for us, is the road. All of us, even if we were not believers, know that the road is made to lead you to a goal. But you must know the goal and destination first. Subsequently, you may pave and tread the road towards it. There is thereby a difference between motive and actuality.

Before we pave the road, we must know where it leads to, a destination should be determined first, and then the way that leads to it. When we discover the shortest way to the desired destination, we pave it so that it would not exhaust people. Thus, the path is the way leading to a destination or a goal. Therefore, Allah clarifies that that path leading to faith is straight and short, as it is well-known that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. We should know the goal before we know the path that leads to it. The problem with people in the worldly life is that they live in it while being unaware of their final ends. They only know their partial ends. The student knows that he needs to study to get a job, get married and establish a family. Merchants trade to reach a certain goal. But all these are temporary and secondary ends. The intelligent person is the one who does not seek these finite and short-term ends; rather, he should seek the final and long-term end because one may live for fifty years, another for sixty years and a third for only one year. Therefore, people should consider the end of all creatures. The problem with people is that they work for the worldly life, i.e. the short-term, finite, and transient ends, even though the word *ad-dunya* (worldly life) means that which is trivial and less important. So long as there is something called *ad-dunya,* there is something that is called *al-'ulyah* (more important and sublime).

People get exhausted because they consistently work for worldly ends. However, every human being should consider the sublime end which will be shared, and inevitably reached by all people. If we manage to identify this sublime end, we will save ourselves from short-sightedness and absorption in finite and transient ends. For instance, a person may send their son to learn from kindergarten to the primary stage, then to the preparatory stage, then secondary stage and then college. Afterwards the son specializes in a field, and at around the age of twenty, he graduates and gets employed to start supporting himself by means of his efforts and labours. The father works for the sake of achieving this goal and reaching this end, but sometimes the son fails to get employed, or he may also cause troubles to his father and may drop out of his education. In this case, the son will miss the goal; people should seek the end which will not be missed, as they benefit from the means that Allah has harnessed for them during their life. Therefore, they should follow His Commands.

In the world, people benefit from the means which Allah has created, but in the Afterlife, they will be with Allah himself. During their lives, people utilize and live on the means, which have been harnessed by Allah, but in the Hereafter, they will live close to the One Who has harnessed these means. Irrespective of whichever high-tech means, a person may have in this world, he will never attain the luxury of the Hereafter during the worldly life. A person may lead a luxurious life in the world, as he may press a button in a room and have a cup of coffee or food served to him, but this luxury will never reach the level in the Hereafter in which a person will attain what anything that may come across their mind. Therefore, the Hereafter is the best and most sublime end. In this world, people utilize the means of living which Allah has granted us, but in the Hereafter, we will live in the Company of Allah. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He has given the believer and the disbeliever the means to survive in the world. When a disbeliever plants the land, it yields crops; and when he contemplates the universe around him, its secrets unfold for him. The reason is that Allah has created the means for whoever wants to make use of them, be him a believer or a disbeliever. However, the One Who makes these means available is sought only by the believer, but the disbeliever has faith only in the means that lead him to his goals which Allah has not held back from him: ‘If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it, but in the Hereafter, he will have no share.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20)

Everyone should consider whether he is more concerned with the means of living which Allah has provided, or with the One Who has provided these means. As for the transient and short-term ends of the worldly life, they may vanish before one can reach them, losing all efforts in vein. Therefore, Allah has concealed the time of death and its causes in order for Him to examine the human being. Some people achieve all what they aim for, and then their entire endeavour in life ends with death; in such a case they take nothing from the world because he did not believe in the One Who provides all the means of living. Even if a person has attained all worldly pleasures, he will eventually die. This means that either a person will part away from the worldly bounties or these bounties will part away from them, but in the Hereafter, the bounties are permanent. Therefore, it is the real aim that should be sought by the rational. Worldly pleasures are commensurate with the means a person has used, but pleasures in the Hereafter fit the One Who provides all means. Allah's Giving and Actions cannot be matched. The reasonable person is the one who considers their final end. In conclusion, the path would be devoid of its meaning if the desired end has not been set.

In addition, people toil and live in asperity in the world because they do consider only the short-term and transient ends. Therefore, the worldly life is called *ad-dunya* which means the most inferior. This name also implies that the worldly life is temporal and bound to perish in contrast with the Hereafter, which is eternal and lasting. Accordingly, a person should determine his end and goal before he determines the path he will take. There is a difference between reality and motive; the later refers to determination of the goal. For instance, the student studies diligently to succeed and to enjoy a good share in this life. He should keep this goal in his mind before embarking on the education process. When he imagines success and how it is enjoyable, he starts studying, and then he reaches his goal: success. There are two types of goals: a motivating goal and an actual goal; the motivating goal precedes the determination of the path that will be taken, and the actual goal comes after determining the path. Who determines the goal?

The goal and purpose of anything is determined by the person who had made it. People determine their worldly transient ends, but the sublime ends are determined by Allah. As long as Allah *Glorified is He* determines the sublime ends because He is the Creator, people ask Him to guide them to these ends. Therefore, faith is a must for the person who wants to live in the company of

Allah. The way is to follow the path of Allah: ‘This is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it….’ (*al-An‘am:* 153)

This means that the ways people choose will not lead to Allah because they have determined them in accordance with their transient ends, but He has determined His Path based on the purposes He has set. So, whoever wants to draw closer to Allah should take His Path. The words ‘path’ and ‘way’ refer to perceptible objects which are used by Allah to depict abstract meanings related to faith and creed. Allah *Glorified is He* uses definite examples to clarify abstract meanings. When there is a crossroad and a person wants to reach a destination, his deviation even by a few millimetres upon setting out on the road distances him from his destinations. The more he walks, the more his journey will be extended, and it is more likely for this person to get lost. This point may be illustrated using the following example: All people ride trains which run on straight railways. If the course of a train needs to be redirected, the train will not be raised and placed on a new railway; rather, a railway switch that may not exceed two millimetres is used and placed very close to the original railway. This is considered the task of the switchman. Upon doing so, the train changes its course to reach the desired destination.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* got our attention to this fact in the Hadith which was narrated by Hudhayfah *Allah be pleased with him* as he said, ‘Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related to us two prophetic narrations, one of which I have seen fulfilled and I am waiting for the fulfillment of the other. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that the virtue of honesty descended in the roots of men's hearts (from Allah) and then they learned it from the Quran and *Sunnah* (the Prophet's traditions). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* further told us how honesty will be taken away, saying, “Man will go to sleep during which honesty will be taken away from his heart and only its trace will remain in his heart like the trace of a dark spot. Then he will go to sleep during which honesty will decrease further still so that its trace will resemble the trace of a blister; as when an ember is dropped on one's foot which would make it swell, and one would see it swollen but there would be nothing inside. People would be carrying out their trade, but hardly will there be a trustworthy person. It will be said, "in such-and-such tribe there is an honest man." No doubt, there came upon me a time when I did not mind dealing (bargaining) with anyone of you, for if he was a Muslim his Islam would compel him to pay me what is due to me, and if he was a Christian, the Muslim official would compel him to pay me what is due to me, but today I do not deal except with such-and-such people.'

Faith is rooted in the innate pure nature which reveals to people that this vast universe is accurately organized and managed by a Great Power. It is also organized in a manner that is not subject to anyone's control. Furthermore, this universe which follows a perfect system has been created and controlled by the Supreme Power, which is marked by Omnipotence, Knowledge, Wisdom and all other attributes of perfection.

The human mind cannot name this Power or its intentions without a messenger that reveals and conveys its message. When a messenger comes, and says that the Power that people seek, and they have generally believed in, is called Allah, they should believe him. People's minds cannot name this Supreme Power by themselves, but they know it as well as its intentions via the Message which is conveyed by Allah's messengers. This is the shortest path to Allah away from the complications of philosophy, intricacies of logic and the sophistries of argumentation. This path proves that whoever worships any god other than Allah is not entitled to this kind of worship.

For instance, could the one who worships the sun tell us the guidance the sun has set for the human being? Furthermore, what did the sun set as a reward for good deeds and punishment for bad deeds? Or what could the sun do to the one who does not worship it? It is not capable of either rewarding or punishing, and has no guidance. But a deity who does not prescribe a specific course or guidance for those who believe in him cannot be ascribed with this name. A true god must have a specific course that guides people to proper action, proscribe bad deeds and can reward and punish people. In contrast, the sun does not possess a path that it can convey to people nor do rocks or the moon. All these things are created by the Creator and cannot be taken as gods. The existence of messengers who conveyed Allah's Message is evidence in support of the truth of the Message. Allah *the*

Glorified and Exalted makes us believe in His Existence through the guidance He has revealed. Before the revelation of the Message, people recognized the existence of the Creating Power Whose name and Intentions are not known to them. Therefore, sending messengers to convey Allah's Message indicates that Allah is Merciful to His creatures. Thus, the one who attempts to plan his life using his own reason without the guidance of the Messenger, burdens himself, and his efforts will go in vain. The following example illustrates this point well – and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection. If a group of people are sitting in a room and the door is closed, and then someone knocks on the door, all people will agree that there is someone knocking at the door. But if they want to identify the one who is knocking, they will have different opinions regarding whether he is a man, woman, child, a person carrying good tidings or a warning, a person serving coffee, or a person that is charged with arresting them.

The group agrees that someone is knocking on the door, but they will disagree concerning identity of the person who is knocking. The same applies to the universe. Underlying the universe is a Great Power Whose Name and Intentions may cause disagreement among people when they try to reach them by everyone's reason. But when this Power sends a messenger to convey Its Name and Intentions, the disagreement gets settled.

The matter that has exhausted philosophers and led some of them into misguidance is that some of them were not content with merely rationalizing the Supreme Power that has created the universe. Rather, they wanted to envisage this Power, Its Entity and Intentions. The philosophers' view about the Creator is incorrect, and they will remain astray due to this view. However, when a messenger conveys the message, this matter becomes settled. The Hadith that was related by Hudhayfah about honesty depicts the mission of faith, how the believer should learn from the Quran and *Sunnah*, and what happens when this knowledge is neglected.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* depicted the stages of the loss of honesty with which Allah has entrusted to Muslims. He warned them against the phases of deviation which increase gradually. This point has been explained giving the example of the switch of trains.

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…purchase misguidance and want you [believers], too, to lose the right path.' (*an-Nisa':* 44) This implies that they do not want to be the only deluded people. Allah *Glorified is He* safeguards and immunizes us against their sayings, as they were given a share of the Book of Allah; a matter which makes the Muslims expect good from them because they received a Divine Book, and followed messengers. But Allah *Glorified is He* explains that those people want the Muslims to lose the right path, using the share they have of the Book of Allah as a way to misguide them.

In our time, we find that the worst enemies of any creed are not its apparent adversaries, but the false followers of this creed because the disbeliever's enmity is apparent and explicit, and the Muslim is sure that the disbeliever wants to distort his religion and fabricate lies about it. However, when a Muslim says the same, his words are believed and considered true. This implies that the adversaries of Islam despaired of confronting Islam in an overt manner; therefore, the west lost interest in orientalism, and orientalists' studies, which are found currently, are old. Those orientalist thinkers used to write books, when read by a Muslim, he may say that the author of this book works for serving knowledge, culture, and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This author may just infiltrate one corrupt idea in the book to make the reader trust him.

When the orientalists have realized that we have discovered their plan, they have introduced the occidentalists who are Muslims that travelled to the West, adopted its ailing ideas and came back to spread them in our educational curricula, media and press. These occidentalists are Muslims; so people trust them, and the West has found that it is easier for them to penetrate Muslim societies through some of the Muslims who were granted a share of the Book of Allah because Muslims will always feel comfortable that these occidentalists are Muslims like them. Therefore, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* explains that the apparent enemies are easier to handle than the ones who are allegedly religious because the later will be trusted as they are also Muslims. Therefore, our Lord explains the matter because it may disturb the believers and cause suffering to them. He says when describing deceiving people: '…those who were given a share of the Book of Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 44). Those people regard this point as their main source of credibility. Then, Allah says:

وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِأَعۡدَآئِكُمۡۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَلِيّٗا وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ نَصِيرٗا ﴿٤٥﴾

God knows your enemies best: God is enough to protect and to help you [45] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 45)

The Muslims may know their enemies, but Allah knows all enemies because a person may have enemies such as himself, his wife or children, but not all forms of enmity will be clear to a person. However, Allah knows what people hide in their hearts, so He says: 'Allah knows your enemies best…' (*an-Nisa':* 45).

Allah has mentioned this verse after His saying: '…and want you [believers], too, to lose the right path' (*an-Nisa':* 44) because some people may say that those people are people of the Book or Muslims like them. So long as Allah is the One Who knows our enemies best, He will not deceive or delude us; therefore, we should pay attention to Allah's saying about them, describing them as our enemies. Then, He says: '…Allah is enough to protect and to help you.' (*an-Nisa':* 45) This saying suggests that as Allah is enough to protect the believers, they do not need any other person to protect them. A person may say about someone that he is enough for him because he makes him in need of no one else, and suffices him about the different aspects of life.

'… Allah is enough to protect and to help you.' (*an-Nisa':* 45). Certainly, Allah is enough as a Supporter because other humans may possess means to do things, but Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is the One Who has created these means, and those beyond them. Therefore, He comforts us, saying: '… Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, and will provide for them from an unexpected source….' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3)

The word *wali*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to an intimate person. '…Allah is enough to protect and to help you.' (*an-Nisa':* 45) This means that sometimes the intimate person cannot be a helper or supporter, but Allah is close to the believers as well as a helper and supporter. As long as the matter is one of a continuous conflict, Allah says: ' Allah knows your enemies best. Allah is enough to protect and to help you.' (*an-Nisa':* 45)

Allah warns the believers against seeking support and advocacy from anyone except Him; they should spare no effort, and entrust what is beyond their abilities to Allah. In addition, Allah explains that the believers should not consider their enemies as supporters, or seek help from them. Allah will support the believers by throwing fear in the hearts of their enemies so that they will be defeated even if they are more powerful and more equipped. If the believers do not have weapons, Allah will advocate them by throwing fear and terror in the hearts of their enemies. As long as Allah supports the believers by terrifying their enemies, this should suffice because once He does so, the enemies will lay down their weapons that will be taken by the believers. Allah commands the believers to spare no possible effort, and did not say command them to prepare what they need to achieve victory over their enemies because He knows that He can make us triumph by throwing fear in the hearts of our enemies, ‘We will strike fear into the disbelievers’ hearts because they attribute partners to Allah although He has sent no authority for this…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 151). As long as Allah has struck fear in the hearts of the disbelievers, their means of combat will eventually become in the hands of the believers, and the whole conflict will get settled. Then, Allah says:

مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُوا۟ يُحَرِّفُونَ ٱلْكَلِمَ عَن مَّوَاضِعِهِۦ وَيَقُولُونَ سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَٱسْمَعْ غَيْرَ
مُسْمَعٍ وَرَٰعِنَا لَيًّۢا بِأَلْسِنَتِهِمْ وَطَعْنًا فِى ٱلدِّينِ ۚ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا۟ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا وَٱسْمَعْ وَٱنظُرْنَا
لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ وَأَقْوَمَ وَلَٰكِن لَّعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

Some Jews distort the meaning of [revealed] words: they say, ‘We hear and disobey,’ and ‘Listen,’ [adding the insult] ‘May you not hear,’ and ‘Ra' ina [Look at us],’ twisting it abusively with their tongues so as to disparage religion. If they had said, ‘We hear and obey,’ ‘Listen,’ and ‘Unzhurna [Look at us],’ that would have been better and more proper for them. But God has spurned them for their defiance; they believe very little [46] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 46)

In the chapter of *an-Nisa',* Allah has tackled the first creation and explained that He has created mankind from one soul, Adam *peace be upon him*, then He has created his spouse from him, and then He has created a lot of men and women so that man’s succession on earth can continue. Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified that He wants a strong society wherein the rights of the orphan will not be lost. In so far as Allah wants this succession to continue, the orphans must take their due rights. Then, Allah has tackled the inherited fortune, and the feeble-minded people who cannot be entrusted with their money. Subsequently, He has tackled marriage and its protocols.

Therefore, the whole process of creation is intended to build an integrated system of life for mankind because the succession of man on earth requires continuous reproduction. This reproduction cannot bear its fruits unless it leads to the creation of strong people, as the reproduction of weak people will not serve the purpose. Accordingly, Allah instructs the Muslims that if there are orphans among them, they must take care and watch over them; and if there are feeble-minded people who cannot manage their wealth, other sound-minded people should take care of their wealth on their behalf. In addition, people should do their best to leave some of the fruits of their labour to their offspring until they become strong enough and able to take care of their own affairs. Then, Allah has explained the system of inheritance, and has allowed the people to marry, but He has set conditions for marriage, and has revealed the general guidance: ‘Worship Allah; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 36) He has explained all these rulings.

But why does Allah *Glorified is He* revert to the issue of the Jews after explaining all these rulings? Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the rulings in full, and then urges the people to abide by them. He explains that there are some people who know the rulings but cannot force themselves to abide by them; thus, He warns the Muslims from doing this. The Muslims should also know that there are people who have been granted a share of the Book and know the rulings as they do, but they have bartered this knowledge for delusion. Allah explains that this is the reality, and He does not bring about sayings just to give information, but He presents what happened, and warns the Muslims against adopting the same line. Therefore, Allah says: ‘Of those who are Jews (there are those who) distort the meaning of [revealed] words…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 46). The meaning of distortion is to use a word that bears more than two meanings, one of which is good and the other is evil, but the person who says it intends the evil sense. For example, same people may say, ‘*as-samu `alykum*’ which resembles ‘*as-salamu `alaykum*’ in the way it is written and pronounced, but the word *‘sam*’ means death. Therefore, some words may be said to make people think that it is said with a good intention, but the real intention of these words is evil.

Another example of this attitude is when some people said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him ra`ina* (take care of us). While the apparent meaning is 'taking care of', they intended *ru`unah* (rashness and recklessness). Thus, Allah has commanded the Muslims to leave aside the word that bears dual meanings because the speaker may intend either good or bad it. For example,(1) a person went to a tailor to have a garment made. The tailor had only one eye, and this person did not like the garment he made. The person thought that if the tailor made his appearance bad by the garment which he tailored for him, he would write a poem that will scandalise him in front of all people. Thus, he said,

'Amr tailored for me a garment

I wish his two eyes were the same.

But what does the poet's saying, 'I wish his two eyes were the same' mean? Does it mean that he wished the defective eye to be like the one which is intact? Or does he wish that the healthy eye to be like the defective one? Thus, the saying bears a good and a bad intention. It was narrated that one of the rulers asked a preacher to insult and curse the Companion 'Ali *Allah honours his face and family on the pulpit*. The preacher asked the ruler to excuse him from this mission, but the ruler insisted on his order. Then, the preacher told him that if he wants him to obey this order, he would ascend the pulpit and say that the ruler asked him to curse `Ali, so repeat your curses upon him. Then the ruler told him not to say anything, as he understood the preacher's intention and ability to use words in a double sense.

Allah speaks: 'Of those who are Jews (there are those who) distort the meaning of [revealed] words…' (*an-Nisa':* 46). The Muslims should heed the style of the Quran because sometimes it uses the same words in different meanings, a matter which may cause the shallow-minded to think that this is repetition, but this is not true. For instance, Allah in one instance says: 'They have bought error in exchange for guidance…' (*al-Baqara:* 16). In another instance, He does not mention guidance as a price for error; rather, He says, 'bought misguidance.' They did not pay attention to the fact that the guidance derived from *fitrah* (innate natural disposition) has been effaced in them. Another example is the saying of Allah raising the question about who: '…distort the meanings of [revealed] words….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41)

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(1) *The story of the tailor `Amr who tailored a cape for a gentleman*

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Some Jews distort the meaning of [revealed] words….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41) This means that Allah's saying was initially received and interpreted correctly, then those people distorted and replaced it with other words in the manner they did with stoning and replacing it with *Had* (ordained punishment for violating Allah's Law).

As for Allah's saying: '…who distort the meanings of [revealed] words and say [to each other]…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41), it means that they have removed the Sacred Words of Allah from their true context, and placed them in a false context, distorting their meanings in accordance with their desires. In so doing, the words had no context. In one instance, they have replaced the words of Allah with their own words, and in another they have distorted the words of Allah by interpreting them per their interests and desires.

And '…say, "We hear and disobey"…' (*an-Nisa':* 46). They said openly, 'we hear' then said in secret, 'we disobey', which reflects their intention to disobey. Thus, the word 'hear' implies that their ears hear the words, but in fact they 'disobey' Allah's ordainment. They indeed explicitly and openly said 'we hear'; however, they said 'we disobey' in secret. They thus said 'we have heard' while bearing the intention to disobey. May '…you not be made to hear!' (*an-Nisa':* 46) But the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the person who caused them to hear, and the evidence is that they said, 'we heard.' So, what did they intend by saying '*`isma`*'? Did they ask the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to listen to them because he was saying something that they did not like, and they planned to respond to him, or did they want to use an ambivalent word and turn it into an inappropriate meaning like *ghayr musma* ('may you not hear anything that pleases you' or 'may you not hear' - Allah forbid)? It may also be an insult on their part. All of these are probable interpretations.

'Listen, may you not be made to hear! and; 'Raina, (distorting the word with their tongues and taunting about religion)…' (*an-Nisa':* 46). They did not intend 'giving care' by the word *ra`ina* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, but they intended recklessness and heedlessness. Allah commanded to avoid this term because people may interpret it in a manner that is insulting to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Arabic word '*lay*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means twisting and twining things together into a pattern. For instance, it may be used to mean interweaving and binding two threads together. Such twisting and interweaving give strength to a rope. But why did they use to do such practices? They did so because they knew well that such practices would give them strength.

By '…distorting the word with their tongues and taunting about religion…' (*an-Nisa':* 46) they intended evil by twisting and distorting the words of Allah as the intention of religion is causing uprightness which they did not intend. Therefore, when a person twists and distorts the meanings of religion, he intends to disparage it. They should have said, 'We have listened to what has been revealed.' Instead of concealing disobedience, they should have also said, 'We hear and obey, Listen, and *unzhurna* (look at us) ',” instead of *ra`ina*. This would have been better*,* since *unzhurna'* does not bear any negative implication.

Thus, this means that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to inform the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the enemies of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might use words to insult him. Therefore, He explains that they should beware of not uttering their words because they intended negative implications, and they had to avoid all words that could be used in an evil manner. '…and if they had said instead, “We have heard and we obey and listen and wait for us to understand”, it would have been better for them and more upright…' (*an-Nisa':* 46). The word *lakin* mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse suggests that what had actually happened contradicted with what the Legislator intended..'..but Allah has cursed them because for their disbelief, so they do not believe but a little.' (*an-Nisa':* 46) The word *la`n* stated in the Arabic text of the verse, means expulsion and dismissal, i.e. Allah spurned and expelled them because of their disbelief',...but Allah has cursed them because their unbelief, so they do not believe but a little.' (*an-Nisa':* 46)

Once negation of a particular act is followed by an exception, this implies that the exception proves some of this act or event. For instance, when someone does not eat except for a little bit, this means that the first part of the sentence negated eating, but ‘except for a little bit’ came to prove that he still does have some food. Allah says: ‘they do not believe but a little.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 46) The act of believing requires suggesting the person who believed. Thus, there is the act and the one who undertakes and performs such an act. Accordingly, exception may apply to the action or the person who performed the action. The saying: ‘they do not believe but a little’ (*an-Nisa’:* 46) means that they only had faith in a few things, i.e. they had little faith in prayers, and they did not work on Saturdays. However, they did not pay heed to the rest of the prerequisites of faith. In addition, this statement may mean that only a few of them believed, and this opinion is more likely because some of them actually believed. It is also true that they believed in some parts of the Book and disbelieved in other parts. Thus, their faith was little due to the act itself.

Some of them embraced Islam after the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent and recited the Quran; and they were assured that he perfectly fit the description mentioned in their Divine Book. However, only a few number of the Jews believed like `Abdullah ibn Salam and Ka`b Al-Ahbar, but other Jews like `Abdullah ibn Suriyyah, Ka`b ibn Asad and Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf, did not believe.

Therefore, if ‘they do not believe but a little.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 46) refers to those who believed it, this will be a probable interpretation. It will also be possible to interpret it as the disbelievers used to believe in certain parts of the Book and disbelieve in the other parts. The expression which Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has used is called ‘probability consideration’ because when the Quran was revealed with such a saying, some Jews were thinking of declaring their faith in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Had Allah said, ‘they do not believe’, it would have been difficult for them to declare their faith. But when He has said, 'they do not believe but a little’ the one who was considering embracing Islam knew that the One Who has said such a saying knows all things hidden in the soul. Therefore, Allah has considered the probability that those few people might declare faith. Subsequently, Allah says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ ءَامِنُواْ بِمَا نَزَّلۡنَا مُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا مَعَكُم مِّن قَبۡلِ أَن نَّطۡمِسَ
وُجُوهٗا فَنَرُدَّهَا عَلَىٰٓ أَدۡبَارِهَآ أَوۡ نَلۡعَنَهُمۡ كَمَا لَعَنَّآ أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلسَّبۡتِۚ وَكَانَ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ مَفۡعُولًا ﴿٤٧﴾

People of the Book, believe in what We have sent down
to confirm what you already have before We wipe out
[your sense of] direction, turning you back, or reject
you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath:
God's will is always done [47] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 47)

All people know that the divine legislations do not involve any contradictions, since they were revealed by the same Legislator. He will not decree legislation one day, and then send another messenger to enact another new contradictory legislation. The fundamentals of all religions that were revealed through different messages are the same. They only differ in certain rulings required by the conditions of different ages. Even the rulings of the same legislation may develop especially those related to habits. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* the Merciful to His slaves would never bring about an issue concerning a habit to which people have been accustomed, and then abrogate it. Religious texts pertaining matters of creed were decisive. As for the matters that need habituation, Allah sets the rulings relevant to them gradually and gently. In other words, He sets these rulings in phases to avoid the transitional gap.

This transitional gap could be likened to the case of the person who smokes 100 cigarettes a day. If he reduces the number of cigarettes he consumes to only fifty cigarettes then thirty and so on, he will get rid of this habit overtime. Thus, the time lag between one cigarette and another will be an hour instead of ten minutes or half an hour. Accordingly, this person will get rid of this habit gradually. The same also applies to social affairs pertaining to habits.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'O you who have been given the Book! Believe that which We have revealed…' (*an-Nisa':* 47). He clarifies that this Book does not contain different rulings. Someone may say: As long as this Book contains the rulings they have in their Book, why did Allah reveal it'? That is because new issues have emerged during this age that did not exist at the time when their Book was revealed. The Quran includes treatment of new issues that arose as well as the issues pertaining to faith, miracles, monotheism, creed, and all other indisputable matters.

‘O you who have been given the Book! Believe that which We have revealed…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 47). The phrase ‘… have been given the Book…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 47), suggests that this Book is evidence against them, as Allah has not presented to them sayings they did not know, as He says: ‘…We have revealed, verifying what you have (*an-Nisa’:* 47). This means that they know very well what they have. Therefore, they should have compared what was revealed to them at the hands of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to what they already had. If they have found it confirming what they already had, then the whole matter would have been settled.

Subsequently, the threat included in the following verse should be considered: ‘…before We obliterate faces then turn them on their backs, or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath, and the command of Allah shall be executed’ (*an-Nisa’:* 47) is intended to warn those people and urge them to believe in Muhammad’s *da`wah* (call to Allah). The word *‘tams*’ which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse) means obliteration, and if an object has experienced ‘*tams*’, it has been obliterated after being distinct. In addition, the word *wujuh* is used in the Quran in different senses. In some instances, it is literally used to refer to the face, as a part of the body, as in His saying: ‘On the Day when some faces brighten and others darken…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 106). In other instances, it is used to refer to intention and orientation as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to Allah’ (*al-Baqara:* 112).

The words *aslam wajhahu* which are mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse mean directing oneself wholly. Thus, the word is sometimes used in reference to the face with which we face people, and in other instances it is used to refer to the intention and objective, but what is the relation between the intention, objective and face? The relation is envisaged in the fact that when someone intends to do something, he directs his face towards it. Therefore, the word *wajh* refers to the part of the body with which we encounter things, and also refers to the intention and purpose one may have.

The use of the saying *natmis wujuhan* suggests that Allah has honoured the humans, and has given them distinct features, such as their eyes, eyebrows, nose and mouth, which cannot be created by any person. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* declares that He can efface these facial features that characterize those people in a manner that their faces would become like the back of their necks. This is the meaning of the verse if *wujuh* refers to the face as a part of the body.

The explanation of the verse when *wujuh* refers to intention and hope: The people who purchased misguidance and wanted the believers to go astray, distorted the sayings of Allah, and said *ra`ina* and 'May you not hear' absolutely had a certain intention. What is their objective and intention? Their intention is to keep themselves and other people away from following Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah urges those people to believe in Muhammad's *da'wah* (call to Allah) before He obliterates their intention, and prevents it from reaching its end; keeping people away from believing in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah urges them to save themselves before this happens and He curses and dismisses them out of His Mercy. Therefore, when `Abdullah ibn Salam heard this verse, he went to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* placing his hands on his face and said, 'I have feared that Allah may efface my face before I convert to Islam.'

This proves that he believed that the One Who said these sayings can execute his warning. During the caliphate of `'Umar ibn Al- Khattab *Allah be pleased with him,* Ka`b Al-`Ahbar used to go to him not knowing that this verse was revealed, but when he knew about it, he went to `'Umar ibn Al- Khattab covering his face with his hand lest his face be effaced before he embraces Islam. This proves that he truly believes that the One Who said these words can execute His Warning.

Someone may say that among the Jews are people who have not believed, but Allah did not efface their faces. We say in response, 'Did He say that He will only efface the faces'? No, He also said, '…or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath…' (*an-Nisa':* 47). It suffices that some people among their rabbis and religious figures believed that effacement might happen. In addition, the Jews who believed the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew about the intrigues of the Jews, as `Abdullah ibn Salam said to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before embracing Islam, 'I would like to embrace Islam, but I am afraid that if I embrace Islam, the Jews would bad mouth me, so ask them about me before I convert to

Islam.’ The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the rabbis about him, ‘What do you think of `Abdullah ibn Salam?’ They answered, ‘He is the best of us, and the son of the best of us and the most knowledgeable person amongst us’; and went on glorifying him. When Ibn Salam heard this, he testified that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Consequently, they insulted and offended him. Then, Ibn Salam said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, did I not tell you that they are not trustworthy people.’

When the news of the arrival of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Medina reached `Abdullah ibn Salam, he went to him to ask him about certain things. He said, ‘I am going to ask you about three things which only a Prophet can answer. What is the first sign of the Hour? What is the first food that the people of paradise will eat? And why does a child attract the similarity to his father or to his mother?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘Gabriel has just now informed me of that.’ Ibn Salam said, ‘Gabriel is the enemy of the Jews amongst the angels.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘As for the first sign of the Hour, it will be a fire that will collect the people from the East to the West. As for the first meal, which the people of paradise will eat, it will be the caudate (extra) lobe of the fish-liver. As for the child, if the man's discharge precedes the woman's discharge, the child attracts the similarity to the man, and if the woman's discharge precedes the man's, then the child attracts the similarity to the woman.’ Then, `Abdullah ibn Salam said, ‘I testify that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah, and that you are the Messenger of Allah.’ and added, ‘O Allah's Messenger, the Jews invent lies as to make one astonished, so please ask them about me before they know about my conversion to Islam.’ The Jews came, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked, ‘What kind of man is `Abdullah ibn Salam among you?’ They replied, "The best of us and the son of the best of us, and the most superior among us and the son of the most superior among us.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked, ‘What would you think if `Abdullah ibn Salam should embrace Islam?’ They said, ‘May Allah protect him from that.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated his question and they gave the same answer. Then ‘Abdullah came out to them and said, ‘I testify that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah and that Muhammad is the

Messenger of Allah!' Then, the Jews said, 'He is the wicked among us and the son of the wicked among us.' and so they degraded him. Thus, `Abdullah ibn Salam said, `That is what I was afraid of, O Allah's Messenger.' Sa`d ibn Abu Waqqas said, 'I have not heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say to someone walking on the earth that he will be among the inhabitants of Heaven, except `Abdullah ibn Salam. The following verse was revealed about him: 'Say, "Have you thought: what if this Quran is from Allah and you reject it? What if one of the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity [to earlier scriptures]…"'? (*al-Ahqaf:* 10) (1)

Allah says,'…before We obliterate faces then turn them on their backs…' (*an-Nisa':* 47). If the intended meaning of the word *wujuh* is actual effacement of the face, then this is what scared `Abdullah ibn Salam and Ka`b Al-Ahbar. The former went to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the later went to ``'Umar, covering their faces, lest it should be effaced. Therefore, the words *natmis wujuhan,* which are mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, mean either the actual effacement of the face, making the face without any distinctive features, or prevention of those people from reaching their goal, which is keeping people away from believing in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*'…before We obliterate faces then turn them on their backs, or reject them…' (*an-Nisa':* 47). This means expelling them from Allah's Mercy. Allah says: ' Allah has sealed their hearts…' (*al-Baqara:* 7). As long as the disbelievers renounce faith, Allah will not only increase the seal on their hearts, but He will also assist them in this matter; Allah says: 'There is a disease in their hearts, to which Allah has added more…' (*al-Baqara:* 10).

As long as those people wanted to disbelieve in Prophet Muhammad's *da'wah* (call to Allah), He fulfilled their demand, saying: '…or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath…' (*an-Nisa':* 47). In this verse, Allah addresses the Jews, who know the story of the Sabbath in which Allah banished, destroyed, rejected them and prepared for them a great torment. Thus, Allah does not give them a baseless warning, as this warning has a history and background that Jews know well; believe and remember its date: '…or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath…' (*an-Nisa':* 47). The story of the people who broke the Sabbath is known even though it will be mentioned in another chapter of the Quran. The word 'Sabbath' means comfort and peace, from which the word *subat* (sleep) is derived. The Arabic words *sabat* and *yasbu* mean to repose and rest.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Muslim and an-Nisa`i*

'…or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath…' (*an-Nisa':* 47). The word *la'n,* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of verse means banishment, insult and ruin. Those who want to doubt the meanings of the verses say that the exegetes of the Quran do not restrict themselves to one meaning for a single word, as they say different meanings for a word. We reply that they do not master Arabic, and their knowledge of it is limited to what is needed for their career, and not a talent. Learning language just for the sake of a career enables a person to command its basic rules, but not the ability to use the word in its actual proper sense or to clarify its intention. If the word *la'n* means dismissal, we should infer that this requires someone to perform the act of dismissing, someone to be dismissed, and a place out of which the latter will be dismissed.

So who dismisses?

Who is dismissed?

And out of where is he dismissed?

If the verse is interpreted in this sense, people will not have problems with the diverse implications and meanings of rejection and dismissal. For example, if a person is sitting and eating, and his dog that safeguards his house comes and goes around your table, what will this person do? He will drive it away from the table, an act which is considered as a form of dismissal. Another example is: if a person's son did something wrong in the presence of guests, this person will drive him out of the room, telling him to go to his mother, an act which is considered also as dismissal and expulsion. Further, if the son's misdeed is great, and the father has control over the son, he may drive the son out of the house, and preclude him from staying at home. Furthermore, if the son's misdeed is more serious, the father may dismiss him from the village or town wherein he lives. Sometimes a person who has perpetrated is driven out of life by another person who has influence; an act which is considered a dismissal. The word *la'n* is used when disgrace and humiliation are intended. If the intended meaning is ruin, this meaning is proved by the fact that a lot of the children of Israel have already been ruined in battles, and suffered disgrace and humiliation because the Muslims captured their women and their daughters, subdued them and destroyed them. In addition, the Muslims drove them out of their homes towards the Levant and Daraa where Allah caused them to die. Thus, all meanings of dismissal can apply to them, and can be understood in connection with all that happened to them; however, it semantically differs per the one who dismisses the one who is dismissed, and the place out of which a person is dismissed.

When Allah says: '…or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath…' (*an-Nisa':* 47), this indicates that rejection may take different forms, among which the rejection of those who broke the Sabbath. The word 'Sabbath' refers to Saturday which is one of days of the week; therefore, it is a temporal unit of the week. It is noticed that the names of the rest of the seven days of the week have numerical connotations. *Al-ahad* (Sunday) refers to number one, the word *al-ithnayn* (Monday) refers to number two, and the same applies for the Arabic names of the days of the week except *jumu`a* and *sabt* (Friday and Saturday), as they have no numerical connotations. They rather take numerical significances from the names of the days of the week which precede or follow them. For instance, al-*khamis* (Thursday) refers to number five, so it is implied that *al-jumu`a* (Friday) is the sixth day of the week even if number six is not literally implied by the word. Similarly, *al-Sabt* (Saturday) is the seventh day, so the numbers to which *al-jumu`a* (Friday) and *al-sabt* (Saturday) refer to can be suggested by the number to which the preceding day refers because these two words have semantic implications that override their numerical reference. For instance, the word *al-jumu`a* (Friday) refers to gathering; therefore, the numerical connotation of the word has been overridden by the reference to gathering. *Al-sabt* (Saturday) refers to tranquillity, as it is derived from the Arabic root *sabata* which means being stable without any motion. This meaning is suggested by the saying of Allah: 'Give you sleep for rest.' (*an-Naba':* 9) The word 'rest' stands for the word s*ubata* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse.

When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wills to examine some of His creatures to assess their degree of faith and obedience to the Commands of Allah, He forbids an act during a particular time and permits it in other times. For instance, Allah proscribed hunting on a certain day, although He allowed people to hunt on all days. Those people used to catch fish from the sea for livelihood, but He chose this day in particular, and commanded them not to go fishing on this day, intending to any type of activity on this day. This is the meaning of Sabbath in terms of rest and peace. The people who broke the Sabbath are the group who took part in an event in violation of the peace and rest on Saturdays. The story of this group is explained and tackled in general in the chapter of *al-Baqara:* ‘You know about those of you who broke the Sabbath…’ (*al-Baqara:* 65).

In this verse, Allah says, ‘…or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 47). He *the Glorified and Exalted* has mentioned their story in detail before. Allah commands the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask those who were concerned with the story of the Sabbath, i.e. the Jews. When Allah puts forward a confirmed story, He presents it as a statement which the people who have faith believe. But sometime He puts forward the topic in an interrogative form because He is certain that the questioned people will not give any answer other than that which Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* intends. When our Lord says to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘[O Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea; how its people broke the Sabbath when their fish surfaced for them only on that day; never on weekdays. We tested them in this way because of their disobedience.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 163) They cannot deny this incident; Allah would have put it forward, but He wants to assert it in a way that does not leave room for any denial or dispute. Thus, He explains that He will not put forward the incident; but He commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them about it. Their answer would match with what has happened because it is a clear and undeniable issue.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And ask them about the town which stood by the sea...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 163). The Arabic word *qariya* in the verse, translated as 'town', is derived from the word *al-qira* which means generosity and providing hospitality for guests. A host is not expected to accommodate his guest for long periods of time and provide hospitality to him for many months. Rather, he is required to offer his guest one *qariya, or* meal (the minimum hospitality to be offered to guests). If a passer-by comes at your door seeking your hospitality, you should serve him one meal (since a Muslim is enjoined to be hospitable to guests). *Umm Al-Qura* is given this name since it tends to many people's needs or because it the greatest town. The *qariyah* mentioned in the chapter of *al-A'raf* is described as 'by the sea', meaning that it was close to the sea. Something that is described as *hadir* implies that you find therein whatever you aspire to. This meaning is similar to the words of what the Arab poet Ahmad Shawqi said,

When my beloved Layla stands by my side, I have everything I need.(1)

The word *al-hadar* in the poetic verse refers to the place where everyone's possible needs could be found. However, *al-badiyah* is the place where people have only what suffices concerning some of their needs. *Al-badiya* contrasts *hadar*; *al-badiya* is the desert land in which there is no permanent settlements (*hadar*). The word *hawadir*, plural form of *hadira*, is used to refer to big cities, towns and capitals. Thus, the reference to the 'town stood by the sea' (*al-A'raf:* 163) should be understood as a reference to a big town overlooking the sea or that which abounds in all kinds of sea goods. In this verse, the city in reference is the city of (*'aylah*) which lies between Midyan and at-Tawr.

The story of the people of this town proceeds as follows: Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to test them. He prohibited fishing on a specific day, Saturday, or the Sabbath. The town stood by the sea; its people mostly depended on it for their livelihood. They were commanded to abstain from fishing on Saturdays as a test for their obedience. One may wonder why Allah *Glorified is He* would prohibit such an activity on this particular day. We should bear in mind that not all things and activities that are deemed prohibited by Allah *Glorified is He* must be harmful. The prohibition may be merely intended as a trial and test for people's compliance with the commands of their Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before, for having frequently debarred others from Allah’s path' (*an-Nisa’:* 160).

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(1) *Poet Majnun Layla (literally 'He Who Was Driven Crazy by Love for Layla')*

The reference to 'good things' in the verse means that what was deemed temporary prohibited for them was originally lawful. These people disobeyed their Lord and accordingly incurred His punishment. They transgressed the limits of Allah, took that to which they were not entitled and made lawful what Allah had deemed prohibited for them. Their punishment was the outcome of their action. Why did they transgress the limits of Allah and make lawful what He had deemed prohibited? When they refused to abide by the commands and prohibitions of their Lord, they were denied some of what was deemed lawful to them as punishment.

It should be noted that not all unlawful things are deemed prohibited because they are harmful. Rather, Allah requires our absolute compliance with His prohibitions whether the forbidden things and acts apparently seem harmful or not; He wants our faith to be based on unwavering conviction. For this reason, He says: 'And among men is he who serves Allah (standing) on the verge so that if good befalls him he is satisfied therewith, but if a trial afflicts him, he turns back headlong; he loses this world as well as the Hereafter. That is a manifest loss.' (*al-Hajj:* 11)

Allah does not want the people to worship Him on edge, worshipping Him to achieve worldly gains. People are confident when they are prosperous, but when they face hardships, they turn away from worship. Rather, He wants people to be moderate and steadfast in faith. Worshipping Allah on edge reflects disturbance, doubt and confusion of such a person who does so, which is unbecoming of a believer who should, instead, relish tranquillity in his religion. This is similar to an army commander who fights only when victory is expected possible, aspiring for the spoils of war; otherwise, he would flee and withdraw his men. Allah wants us to attain genuine faith. Some people may say, 'I will pay *zakat* in order to have my wealth blessed and increased.' To this person we say, 'You should not pay *zakat* in order to have your wealth blessed and increased. Rather, you should pay it because Allah has commanded you to do so. Having your wealth blessed and increased is a bonus. Allah may test your faith by denying you this bonus in order to see if you are abiding by

His commands He has ordered, or if you are doing so merely because you aspire to the bonus. When Allah blesses you with increasing your wealth, you are required to pay *zakat* on it as well. He wants to know those who will readily abide by the Divine Command merely because He is the One Who has ordered it and not because they aspire for worldly gains.

As underlined above, it was deemed prohibited for them to fish on Saturdays as a punishment for their disobedience and transgressions. It could have been possible that they would not have to face any enticements urging them to violate the Divine Command, but it is a trial for them. They were commanded to refrain from fishing on the Sabbath day (Saturday), and fish were made to appear on the surface only on the Sabbath, never on weekdays. They began using deceitful means to avoid adhering to the command of their Lord (and refrain from fishing on Saturdays) by placing their nets for the purpose of fishing before the Sabbath. When the fish came in abundance on Saturday as usual, they were caught in the nets for the rest of Saturday. During the night, they collected the fish after the Sabbath ended. Their faith was tested by making the fish become very easy to catch on Saturdays; they were tempted by the easy of the catches made on Saturday, and they thought of this plan to get around the Divine restriction. Had fish not appeared on the surface, becoming easy to catch on Saturdays, the adherence to the Divine Command would have been easy. However, they could not resist the temptations. Allah says: '…when their fish came to them on the day of their Sabbath, appearing on the surface of the water, and on the day on which they did not keep the Sabbath, they did not come to them.' (*al-A'raf:* 163)

Their trial had two dimensions: the fish came to them on Saturday, appearing on the surface of the water easy to catch and did not come to them on any other day. This made them more anxious. Had they been genuinely confident in their Lord and believed in Him as due, they would have abided by His command.

It was a trial and test for the purpose of spiritual purification. What did they do? They wanted to abide by the command of their Lord, but their material greed was too overwhelming, and they could not resist the temptations to catch the fish that came to them on Saturday. Had they savoured faith in the bounties and grace of Allah, they would have passed the test. Sometimes deprivation is, in essence, giving, while restriction is liberation in disguise. However, who is heedful to this fact?

They should have reminded themselves that Allah had prepared for them what was better than fish that were easy to catch. Tempted by the easy catch to be made on Saturday, the fishermen cunningly devised their plan to get around the Divine restriction. They set up trenches and canals to divert the fish and nets and ropes to catch them. On Saturdays, the canals, nets and ropes were set up, and the fish would swim into them in large numbers. At night, before the fish could return to the sea, the canals were dammed. Then on Sundays, the fishermen would easily catch all the trapped fish. They thought that by means of such a plan, they would deceive Allah. In fact, they failed to grasp the essence of the Divine Command. They were forbidden from fishing on Saturdays; fishing, in essence, means to take possession of the fish. Therefore, as long as they had exerted efforts on Saturdays to catch fish, they violated the Divine Command. Allah says: ‘[Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea; how its people broke the Sabbath when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays. We tested them in this way because of their disobedience.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 163)

They disobeyed the command of their Lord and made lawful what He had deemed prohibited. As a punishment, Allah deemed forbidden what was originally lawful for them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘How, when some of them asked [their preachers], "Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely? " [The preachers] answered, "In order to be free from your Lord’s blame, and so that they may perhaps take heed."' (*al-A‘raf:* 164)

This proves that there were good people among such a community. These good people admonished the disobedient ones and urged them to be mindful of their Lord and abide by the Divine Command. A party of them exclaimed, 'Why do you admonish us with a severe punishment?’ Those who advised the evildoers said, 'To be free from blame before your Lord, and that haply they may guard (against evil).' This means that there were three groups: those who violated the command of Allah, those who wanted to advise the evildoers and forbade them from such a prohibited act and those who blamed the ones who wanted to admonish the evildoers. The third group exclaimed, 'Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely?’ Those who wanted to admonish the evildoers replied, 'In order to be free from your Lord’s blame, and so that they may perhaps take heed.' They wanted the admonition to be an excuse before Allah that they did not stand still and could not at least forbid the evil from being committed before them. They said, 'To be free from blame before your Lord, and that haply they may guard (against evil).' They hoped that these evildoers would be admonished and deter when reminded of Allah. What happened next? Allah says: 'When they ignored [the warning] they were given, We saved those who forbade evil and punished the wrongdoers severely because of their disobedience.' (*al-A‘raf:* 165)

The verse states that those who forbade evil were saved; this means that other groups were punished and destroyed (the wrongdoers and those who refused to forbid them from violating the Divine Command).

Back to our main verse; it is concluded with the statement, 'Allah's Will is always done.' (*an-Nisa’:* 47) This is true, indeed. There is nothing to be classified as difficult or impossible for Allah *Glorified is He*. His Power is infinite, and none can repel His Will. If Allah promises or commands anything, it will undoubtedly occur. Divine Promises are different from human ones. The promises and warnings made by human beings may be fulfilled or not. You may promise someone that you will do something good for him in the future; however, you may become unable to fulfil your promise later. Similarly, you may threaten to harm someone in a given way in the future, but you may fall ill later and become unable to fulfil your promise.

This is because human ability is limited and changes; one day you may be able to fulfil your promise, and other days you may be unable to do so. However, this is not the case with Allah. When He promises or threatens to do something, it will surely take place. He may pardon evildoers, out of His Mercy and Grace, the disbelief in Him and associating partners with Him in worship.

We know that the Will of Allah is not bound by time since He controls it. However, human being's actions are constricted by time. We describe the events according to time on which they occur; the past events are described in the past tense, the current ones are described in the present tense and the future events are described in the future tense. When you say that a future event will take place, your statement may or may not be believed due to the fact that you have no control over the future. However, when Allah, describing a future event using the past tense, as is the case in many verses of the Quran, this means that it will surely happen because the Will of Allah is not constricted by time.

Allah says: 'Allah’s Judgment is [bound to] come.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) The Arabic verb *’ata*, translated as 'is bound to come', is used in the past tense. The literal meaning of the verse is that the (Day of) Judgment has already taken place before making this statement. The verse continues: 'So, do not ask to bring it on sooner.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) This indicates that it had not happened yet! Those who criticise the Quran may say, 'Why does the Quran say that something has already happened even though it will actually take place in the future?’ This is a recurrent style in the Quran; the actions and decrees of Allah are described in the past tense, indicating that they will surely happen (as if they had already happened).Verily, none can repel His Decrees or hinder His Will.

Allah says: 'Allah’s Judgment is [bound to] come.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) The verse reads as follows: 'Or reject you, as We rejected those who broke the Sabbath.' (*an-Nisa’:* 47). It may be said that the wording of the verse suggests that Allah may or may not reject them. In fact, this is refutable since Allah’s Will is surely bound to happen. He is not bound by time unlike human beings who are constricted by it. This is due to the fact that human beings have no control over their future. A person may say that he will do such-and-such tomorrow, but he may die, or he may change his mind; and his situation may change. The same goes for threatening; one may threaten to take revenge on someone, but changes his mind later. This means that human beings have no control over their own future affairs. It is, therefore, foolish to argue with Allah's statement in reference. He teaches us to be polite with Him and consider the universal order and decrees set by Him in order to avoid falling into the abyss of lying. He tells his Messenger: 'And do not say of anything: "Surely, I will do it tomorrow", without adding, "God willing." Remember your Lord when you forget and say, "Maybe my Lord will guide me to a nearer course to the right than this."' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24)

Allah teaches us to avoid falling into the abyss of lying by conditioning all future events to His Will. If someone says, 'I will do such-and-such tomorrow", and does not do it, he would be considered a liar because he tacitly assumed that he would be alive tomorrow and able to carry out this action.

We have previously underlined that every event requires a doer, subject matter, time, reason and power to materialise it. Do human beings have full control over these factors? In fact, you do not have control over any of these factors. You do not even have control over your own existence in this worldly life! Therefore, a believer is enjoined to condition all future events to the ‘Be polite to the Will of Allah by adding the phrase 'Insha' Allah' (meaning, 'if Allah wills'). Thus, he who does so spares himself the trouble of being considered a liar. Accordingly, ' Allah’s Will is always done' (*an-Nisa’:* 47) when He says: 'or We reject them…' in the verse in reference means that they will certainly be cursed, and none should question the promise of Allah. Similarly, as we read the verse: '…and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful' (*al-Ahzab:* 5), we should know that it means that He has been, is still and will always be Forgiving and Merciful. His Mercy and Forgiveness are pre-eternal (existing without any prior nonexistence and without any beginning). He is ever Forgiving and Merciful before the existence of whom He bestows His Mercy and Forgiveness upon, and His Attributes do not change. His Attributes are equally pre-eternal and post-eternal even before there is one to whom He manifests His Forgiveness and Mercy. None can repel or challenge His Will and Decrees. He may decree that things should exist with no causes because He is the Creator of the causes.

Then, He addresses a fundamental doctrinal issue pertaining to the relation between Man and his Lord, and so Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَغۡفِرُ أَن يُشۡرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغۡفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن
يَشَآءُۚ وَمَن يُشۡرِكۡ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدِ ٱفۡتَرَىٰٓ إِثۡمًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٤٨﴾

God does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that He forgives to whoever He will, but anyone who joins partners with God has concocted a tremendous sin [48] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 48)

It should be noted that this verse is one of the most hope inspiring verses in the Quran. This is why: when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was once asked, 'What are the requirements of faith in Allah?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'He who proclaims that none is worthy of worship but Allah (genuinely believes in it, fulfilling its conditions and acts upon its implications), will be admitted to Paradise.'(1)

Moreover, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'He who dies while knowing that none is worthy of worship but Allah will be admitted to Paradise.'(2)

He who associates partners with Allah in worship is committing the ultimate and gravest sin of all. It may be described as the creed-related high treason, in law terminology. The purpose of manmade laws is not to emphasise religious matters, although they should. Suppose that a group of people formed a movement. Afterward, the president of the movement exploited his position to serve his own interests, and another one tried to topple the president of the movement. The action of the second person will be perceived as 'high treason' by the president. By contrast, the one is opposing this president due to his injustice without the intention of toppling him. The concept of high treason as a capital crime exists in human systems of law, and it is punishable by the severest penalty as compared to other offences. The punishment of a certain crime should be in proportion to its gravity.

Back to our verse, Allah underlines the fundamental belief in the Islamic creed, namely the belief in Allah *Glorified is He* as the One and Only God worthy of worship and has no partners. He wants us to acknowledge that none is worthy of worship but Him. When a person recognises and professes that He is the One and Only God with no partner in divinity, he enters the realm of security and deliverance. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I bear testimony to the fact that there is no god but Allah, and I am His messenger. He who would meet Allah without entertaining any doubt about these (two fundamental beliefs) would enter Paradise.'(3)

In another Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Nobody proclaims, "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah", and then later dies while believing in it, except that he will enter paradise.' Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* asked, "Even if he had committed illegal sexual intercourse and theft? " Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Even if he had committed illegal sexual intercourse and theft." Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* exclaimed, "Even if he had committed illegal sexual intercourse and theft?" Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Even if he had committed illegal sexual intercourse and theft." Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* said, "Even if he had committed illegal sexual intercourse and theft? " He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Even if he had committed illegal sexual intercourse and theft, in spite of the Abu Dharr's dislike."'(1)

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(1) *Abu Ya'la in his Musnad*

(2) *Muslim*

(3) *Muslim*

Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* was 'jealous' that some people may transgress the limits of Allah. He was not upset when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'In spite of Abu Dharr's dislike!' This is why he was not annoyed when relating this Hadith. Rather, he *Allah be pleased with him* was happy that Muslims were blessed with the Mercy of Allah as such. If this were not the case, what would be the criterion to distinguish between the one who believes and professes it and the one who does not do so? There has to be criterion to distinguish between the two persons. Some Muslims may fall into the abyss of any of the crimes and offences that are punishable by the Islamic Shari'a. Concerning this, Allah says: 'And (as for) the man who steals and the woman who steals, cut off their hands as a punishment for what they have earned….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38)

This means that it is possible that a believer could steal and fall into the abyss of adultery and immorality while being in a state of oblivion. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that the five daily prayers and that from one Friday Prayer to the next serve as expiation of the sins committed in between their intervals, as long as major sins are not committed. Hajj and fasting expiate a person's sins as well.

It has been related on the authority of Abu Hurayrah *Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The five daily prayers and from one Friday Prayer to (the next) Friday Prayer are expiations

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(1) *Muslim*

(of the sins committed in between their intervals), as long as major sins are not committed.'(1)

Therefore, we have come to realise that Allah set up several venues for forgiveness and mercy. He says: 'Certainly, Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases…' (*an-Nisa':* 48). You should bear in mind that believing in Allah as the One and Only God and refraining from associating partners with Him in worship is for the benefit of human beings. Worshipping diverse deities overwhelms humans who would be required to submit to diverse entities having power over them. Allah spared us such trouble by requiring us to submit only to Him. Worshipping Allah alone is, thus, a source of tranquillity and comfort for a believer.

The belief in Allah as the One and Only God of the universe teaches us genuine nobility and dignity. Instead of submitting to every powerful created being, you should solely submit yourself to the Creator of the universe Who caused it to come into existence by His Perfect Power. Thus, He has created us in the most perfect shape and form and has control over the whole universe. He stands not in need of the worship of His creation. When a person believes in the unique Oneness of Allah, i.e. being the One and Only God of the universe, it is for his own benefit.

For this reason, we have previously underscored that Allah commands His servants to gather once every week, i.e. on Friday. Throughout the week, every Muslim performs the daily prayers in his house, workplace or anywhere else, but on Fridays, He commands all Muslims to gather in the mosque and perform the Friday Prayer in congregation. He shows humbleness to his Lord by crying and imploring Him when he observes the prayer (*salat*) in solitude. Allah has decreed that all Muslims of different social standings, the strong and the weak, the powerful and influential and the weak, the rulers and the ruled should gather and recognise that they are all equal and that they all submit themselves to One and Only God. The same concept is realised in *Hajj*. These collective acts of worship emphasise unity and brotherhood in Islam, as well as equality. All worshippers stand shoulder-to-shoulder and prostrate in submission to Allah together, regardless of wealth, race or social status.

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(1) *Muslim and At-Tirmithi*

Thus, we come to understand that the fact that Allah does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to other than Him and solely worshipping Allah is, actually, for the benefit of people. Had He forgiven such an act, people would have been lost in worshipping diverse deities and submitting to many powers.

However, He has decreed that there should be no deity worthy of worship save Him so that all humankind would submit exclusively to Him and relish the genuine dignity in the servitude to Allah alone. The verse continues: '…anything less than that He forgives to whomever He wills.' (*an-Nisa':* 48)

Ibn Jurayh narrated on the authority of 'Ata' *Allah be pleased with them* that Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Wahshi, who brutally killed Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* the uncle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Battle of Uhud, came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, "Oh Muhammad, Oh Muhammad, I came to you seeking protection, so grant me safety so I may listen to the Words of Allah." Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accepted his attendance, despite his (Wahshi's) killing and mutilating his uncle, Hamza. He (Wahshi) (then) said, "I used to associate partners with Allah, killed a soul He forbade and fornicated. Would Allah accept my repentance?" Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* abstained from responding until the following verses were revealed. Allah *Glorified is He* says: "And those who do not invoke with Allah another deity or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed], except by right, and do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse. And whoever should do that will meet a penalty. Multiplied for him is the punishment on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein humiliated except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful. "(*al-Furqan:* 68-70) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited them to him (Wahshi), who replied, "I see conditions I might not fulfil. So, I am at your side (waiting) to listen to the Words of Allah. The following verse was revealed: "Certainly, Allah does not forgive the joining of partners with Him. Anything less than that He forgives to whomever He wills,but anyone who joins partners with Allah has concocted a tremendous sin."(*an-Nisa':*48) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called Wahshi and recited the verse to him. Therefore, Wahshi said, "Maybe I am from those whom He does not wish to forgive! I shall be by your side until I hear the Words of Allah. Upon this, the following verse was revealed, "Say: O, my servants who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the Mercy of Allah. Surely, Allah forgives the faults altogether. Surely, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful." (*az-Zumar:* 53) Wahshi said, "Yes, now I do not see any conditions!" He declared Islam as his religion and was a good Muslim.'

Back to our verse, Allah forgives all sins except for disbelief in Him out of His Mercy and Kindness. He considers the people's actions done out of oblivion as accidental. If someone commits an act of disobedience and then repents to Allah, people should not be reminded of their past sins. If someone commits a sin openly such as giving a false testimony and then repents to Allah, he must not be reminded of his sin. Upon repentance, the repentent's past sins are cancelled, and he must not be reminded of them since he has already repented to the Most Forgiving and Merciful. The One Who has full control over all matters absolved him of his sins. Why does Allah decree such a thing? The objective is that the repenting would not be humiliated due to the sins he has committed in the past. The sinners who indulge in sin are often looked down upon and abhorred by others. For this reason, when a person sins, repents to Allah and regrets what he has done, he earns a reward. Despite tasting the sin, he chose to repent and give it up. This is the reason why Allah substitutes sins of the repenting with good deeds. Upon knowing that our Lord substitutes their sins with good deeds, we learn that we must not detest or abominate the repenting. Rather, we should be happy with their repentance and refrain from judging them according to their past sins.

Allah says: '… but anyone who joins partners with Allah has concocted a tremendous sin.' (*an-Nisa':* 48) The Arabic word *Al-'Iftira'* used in the verse originally means telling a lie deliberately. This is different from the case of someone telling something false because he mistakenly thought it was true. For instance, someone may tell you, 'This person visited so-and-so yesterday.' He may have told you that because someone else had told him this or because he had seen some indications of this visit. However, this visit may have never had happened. Ascribing divinity to anyone but Allah means to lie about Him deliberately and such an act is regarded as a tremendous sin. Allah says: '…but anyone who joins partners with Allah has concocted a tremendous sin.' (*an-Nisa':* 48) This is due to the fact that it contradicts the affective nature of a human's inclination wanting a person to speak of what he actually knows only. Therefore, one should not go against the dictates of his sound human inclination by deliberately ascribing a false partner to Allah. When Allah proclaims that none is worthy of worship but Him, it should be accepted as an established fact and truthful statement. Had there been any other partner with Allah, why would he not have responded to that? If he had not heard the statement, he would have been an oblivious god, and if he had heard, but had not responded to it, why would he not have objected and brought forth a more persuasive miracle than the one brought forth by Allah? This proves that when Allah proclaims His unique Oneness and sends His Messenger to communicate this message to mankind, and none could or dared to object to it, and that, it should be accepted as an established truth that should be indisputably and intuitively embraced.

Lying means making a false statement or an action intended to mislead others or speaking or acting untruthfully with intent to mislead or deceive others. It may also mean holding false beliefs. Such a deed is considered 'a tremendous sin', and this implies that minor sins are those that do not violate the Islamic monotheistic creed, namely, the unique Oneness of Allah. The following verse related to the Jews, reads as follows:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يُزَكُّونَ أَنفُسَهُمۚ بَلِ ٱللَّهُ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَآءُ وَلَا يُظۡلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا ﴿٤٩﴾

[Prophet], have you considered those who claim purity for themselves? No! God purifies whoever He will: no one will be wronged by as much as the husk of a date stone [49] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 49)

We have previously emphasised that the Arabic expression used in the verse, *'Alam Tara'* (meaning have you not seen?) does not necessarily mean actual vision; rather, it may mean, 'Have you not considered or known?' This indicates that when Allah informs us of anything, it is as truthful as the truth established by actual vision. In fact, sometimes vision is deceptive and turns out to be a mere illusion. The verse says: 'Have you considered those who claim purity for themselves?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 49)

Purification in this context denotes purity from all defects and flaws. This means negating all deficiencies and asserting all aspects of perfection. They thought highly of themselves. Allah says: 'And the Jews and the Christians say, "We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones."' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 18)

Allah *Glorified is He* responded to their claim when He says: 'Say, "Why does He then chastise you for your faults? Nay, you are mortals from among those whom He has created..."' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 18). This means that if they had truly been the sons and beloved ones of Allah as they claimed, why were they punished? It proves the falseness of their claim. What is the point of informing us of such information? Why would you lie to us? We cannot benefit you. They praised and credited themselves falsely claiming that they were purified from all defects and argued that they were the sons and beloved ones of Allah. Another example of their false claims was related in the verse saying: 'And they say, "None shall enter the garden (or paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian." These are their vain desires. Say, "Bring your proof if you are truthful."' (*al-Baqara:* 111)

This is a false allegation as well. The following question arises 'If someone praised himself, and it were true, would it be accepted?’ In fact, we need to answer another question first, 'What is the purpose of this praise?’ If its purpose were arrogance and boasting, it would be false. However, it should be noted that self-praise may be obligatory in certain situations necessitating it. For instance, when a group of people board a boat, and the captain, or the one in charge of running the boat, turns out to be incompetent, and then a storm breaks out and the incompetent captain is unable to steer the boat through the storm. In this case, a competent and more talented person should step forward to steer the boat through the storm and tell the incompetent captain, 'Give up your position. I am more capable of steering the boat.' This involves self-praise, but it is commendable and even required because at such times we cannot afford mistakes. Moreover, this competent person is truthful in what he is saying; he is actually more competent than this captain. There is thereby a difference between self-praise on a false basis and self-praise on a truthful basis.

We know well the story of our Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. One day, the king of Egypt dreamt that seven thin cows ate seven fat cows, and he saw seven fresh and healthy ears of corn and seven others that were withered. It would have made more sense that the thin cows would eat the fat ones. The interpretation of visions is not a craft or science. Rather, it is a given talent bestowed upon those whom Allah chooses, enabling them to read the symbols in the visions and deduce their meanings. This is evidenced by the fact that when the king wished to understand the interpretation of this strange dream, he consulted his advisors and soothsayers. Everyone was puzzled because no one could really say what it meant. Some of them thought that it was a passing dream. They were honest enough to admit that they did not have the ability to interpret dreams. Allah says: ' They said, "These are confused dreams, and we do not know the interpretation of confused dreams."' (*Yusuf:* 44)

They were fair and honest with the king. This is an important lesson for all of us. When someone is asked about something he does not know, he should simply confess his lack of knowledge. When a scholar is asked about a matter of which he has no knowledge, he should simply say, 'I have no knowledge of this matter.' This way the person would simply consult another scholar. On the contrary, when a scholar gives a questioner a wrong answer, he would settle for it and the scholar would bear the sin.

Allah underlines, in previous verses of the same chapter, Prophet Yusuf's (Joesph's) *peace be upon him* gift of interpreting dreams. He says: 'And two youths entered the prison with him. One of them said, "I saw myself pressing wine." And the other said, "I saw myself carrying bread on my head, of which birds ate. Inform us of its interpretation. Surely, we see you to be of the doers of good."' (*Yusuf:* 36)

Why did these two young men think that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was able to interpret dreams? They clearly stated the reason as related in the verse that says: '"Inform us of its interpretation. Surely, we see you to be of the doers of good."' (*Yusuf:* 36) This means that they observed his noble manners and kindness and concluded that he was a good man. When they were troubled and needed help, they said to themselves we will not find anyone better than him to ask for help. It should be emphasised that good manners speak for themselves and making the person displaying them deserving of respect; even liars will always respect an honest and truthful person.

Can someone judge another person to be a doer of good unless he has criterion to distinguish good from evil? Upon hearing their question, Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* could have answered them directly and interpreted their visions right away. However, he seized the opportunity to invite them to Allah. He *peace be upon him* was a Prophet of Allah and a descendant of a family of Prophets of Allah. He said, as related in the verse, saying:, 'He said, "There shall not come to you the food with which you are fed, but I will inform you both of its interpretation before it comes to you."' (*Yusuf:* 37). He praised himself because he wanted to invite them to Allah. The verse continues: '"…This is what my Lord has taught me."' (*Yusuf:* 37) It was important for him to praise himself in this context to establish his creditability and earn their trust before inviting them to Allah. He, then, emphasised that it was not a unique gift for him and that anyone could be endowed with it. Allah says: 'Surely, I have forsaken the religion of a people who do not believe in Allah, and they are deniers of the Hereafter.' (*Yusuf:* 37)

Then, the following verse says: '"And I follow the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham), and Ishaq (Issac) and Ya'qoub (Jacob)."' (*Yusuf:* 38)

His statement meant that they could have been like him had they chosen to follow the path leading to truth. Then, Allah says: '"O, my two mates of the prison! Are sundry lords better or Allah, the One, the Supreme?"' (*Yusuf:* 39)

He, then, appealed to common sense, asking them, 'Is having numerous deities better or one God?' They were polytheists, yet when they wanted help, they turned to the one worshipping one God. The verse says: '"O, my two mates of the prison! Are sundry lords better or Allah, the One, the Supreme?"' (*Yusuf:* 39)

Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* praised himself in order to invite them to Allah. When the king knew of his gift and aptitudes, he requested that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* should be brought to him to be in his close entourage. After the seven years of abundance, foretold by Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in the interpretation of the vision, came the seven years of drought. He had advised them to save part of their grains for the following years. He *peace be upon him* informed them of a future event yet to come. When it happened as foretold by Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* they learned that his knowledge was given to him by Allah.

He *peace be upon him* said (to the king): 'He said: "Place me (in authority) over the treasures of the land. Surely I am a good keeper, knowing well."' (*Yusuf:* 55). Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* praised himself and clearly stated the reason why the king should appoint him in this position. Allah says: "… Surely, I am a good keeper, knowing well." (*Yusuf:* 55) The task required honesty and knowledge; there was no room for error.

Therefore, there are two conditions for self-praise to be allowed. First, it has to be based on true reasons. Second, it has to have a purpose so that the one who praised you does so for the right reason. This is why Allah says: '…Therefore, do not attribute purity to your souls; He knows him best who guards (against evil).' (*an-Najm:* 32)

This is because when you praise and attribute purity to yourself, you should bear in mind that Allah, Who shall judge your deeds, knows your real character. It is foolish that a person would praise himself in the wrong situations and fail to do so in the right ones; self-praise is allowed when it is for the benefit of Muslims rather than a person's own interests.

Allah says: '[Prophet], have you considered those who claim purity for themselves? No! Allah purifies whomever He wills. No one will be wronged by as much as the husk of a date stone.' (*an-Nisa':* 49)

Indeed, nothing escapes the knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He*. His knowledge encompasses all things, hidden and apparent. It is possible that someone may pretend to be good for a period of time, and people would not be able to realise his true nature and may even praise him. However, when Allah praises someone, it is based on true Knowledge and Wisdom. When they praised themselves, were their good deeds cancelled? Despite the fact that these people praised themselves, Allah will not praise them; their good deeds shall be cancelled, but they will not be wronged. '…No one will be wronged by as much as the husk of a date stone.' (*an-Nisa':* 49) This is the ultimate justice.

We know that the Quran was revealed in the Arabic language, communicated to an Arab Messenger of Allah and that the first ones who believed in it were Arabs. We also know that most of its meanings were in harmony with the environment into which it was revealed. Arabs believed palm trees to be the best of all trees because of their abundant benefits.

'Abdullah ibn '‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that one day Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Amongst the trees, there is a tree, the leaves of which do not fall and is like a Muslim. Tell me the name of that tree.' Everybody started thinking about the trees of the desert areas. And I ('Abdullah ibn '‘Umar) thought of the date palm tree but felt shy to answer. Then, the others asked, 'What is that tree, O, Messenger of Allah?’ He replied, 'It is the date palm tree.'(1)

Palm trees have many benefits. In fact, the benefits of a palm tree are present in all of its parts and under all conditions. Since it grows until it dries, it is eaten, then all of its parts are used: its seeds are given to animals, its fibre is used in for making ropes, besides other benefits. The fibre that grows around the palm tree is used to make sweepers, washing-brushes and sometimes chairs. The Quran uses examples and references suitable for the Arabian environment then continues to illustrate and express abstract meanings perfectly. Allah says:.’.. no one will be wronged by as much as the husk of a date stone.' (*an-Nisa’:* 49) The Quran mentions three parts of dates; *Al-fatil* is the Arabic word translated as 'husk of a date stone.’ The nucleus of dates is characterised by the three hidden small parts: The first one is known as (*Al-fatil*) which is in the long slit of a date-stone, the second one is (*Al-naqir*) which is a speck on the back of a date-stone and the last one is (*Al-qitmir*) which is the thin membrane over the date-stone. Allah says: '…Do they have any share of what He possesses? If they did, they would not give away so much as the groove of a date stone.' (*an-Nisa’:* 53).

Allah also gives examples of the heavens like the crescent. He says about the small crescent: '…And (as for) the moon, We have ordained for it stages till it becomes again as an old dry palm branch.' (*Ya Sin:* 39) Date palms have branches, along with stalks that support these branches. The date stalk is upright and straight when young, but as it grows older, it bends. Allah likens the crescent in the sky to a tangible thing on earth:, '…as an old dry palm branch…' (*Ya Sin:* 39). Arabs used to use many metaphors derived from their environment that not all people might have noticed. For instance, an Arab poet said:

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*

The light of a small moon I was observing vanished,

As if it was my clipped fingernail that I cut.

Thus, Allah illustrates abstract ideas by referring to material examples from the environment to make the meaning both more meaningful and more accessible. When you eat a date, you do not notice *Al-fatil* which indicates that it is a negligible thing. The same holds true for an-naqir and *Al-qitmir*.

Therefore, our Lord adduces examples from the seed of the date; in a different context, He cites examples from palm trees and their life cycle to make another meaning clearer and more meaningful to us: '… and none shall be wronged as much as the husk of a date stone.' (*an-Nisa’:* 49) Then, Allah says:

ٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ يَفۡتَرُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡكَذِبَۖ وَكَفَىٰ بِهِۦٓ إِثۡمٗا مُّبِينًا ٥٠

See how they invent lies about God, this in itself is
a flagrant sin! [50] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 50)

The command 'see' in the verse is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well as to his followers. We explained previously that Jews praised themselves and deliberately lied when they said, 'We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones.' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 18) And 'None shall enter the garden (or paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian.' (*al-Baqara:* 111)

The verse says: 'See how they invent lies about Allah. This in itself is a flagrant sin!' (*an-Nisa’:* 50) The sin is described as 'flagrant' because a person may lie to another person, and the person may believe it; however, lying to Allah is utter impudence! This is why Allah says: '…This in itself is a flagrant sin!' (*an-Nisa’:* 50)

Lying in general is a sin, but lying to Allah is a flagrant sin; and it does not avail the person in the slightest. The following verse says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ نَصِيبٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡجِبۡتِ وَٱلطَّٰغُوتِ
وَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ أَهۡدَىٰ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ سَبِيلًا ٥١

Do you not see how those given a share of the Scripture, [evidently] now believe in idols and evil powers? They say of the disbelievers, ‘They are more rightly guided than the believers’ [51] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 51)

The verse explains that they were given the Scripture which indicates a connection to the heavens, the Messengers of Allah and the divine Books revealed to the messengers who were commissioned to relay the divinely revealed way of life to mankind. If they did not have such a connection, their claim would have been plausible due to the absence of the Divine Revelation for a while. However, they were given Scripture, and one of the fundamental functions of Heavenly Books is to connect the Creator with His creation. This bond between the creation and Creator fosters the aptitudes and abilities of the created beings because without this bond they are without the means and needed help for matters over which one has no control. If one does not have a God, to whom he can resort when he exhausts all available means, he will collapse and may even commit suicide! On the other hand, a believer cares less about causes since he is bonded with the Creator of causes.

The belief in Allah gives person strength and provides a firm basis for a believer so that no matter how much he fails to control the different factors in his life, he remembers the Creator of all factors and causes. When one remembers the Creator of all the causes, he will find the horizons expand before him. People who commit suicide have been lost in their sufferings. A believer, on the other hand, turns to Allah during harsh times, and He, thus, grants him relief.

When a person turns to the Creator of all causes at the time he loses control over the worldly causes, he relishes the strength of belief from an unexpected source. Once one invokes his Lord, he will find tranquillity because you he has connected his existence to his creator. He has control over some aspects of his existence and does not have control over others. The person's body will testify against him on the Day of Judgment. A person's legs, skin and all other faculties will testify against him since he has control over them in the worldly life, and they were subservient to his will. I may tell my hand to do something, and my leg to do something, and my tongue to offend this person. Allah has subdued all faculties to a person's will in the worldly life. However, on the Day of Judgment, they will testify against him. Allah says: 'And they shall say to their skin, ‘Why have you borne witness against us?’ They shall say, ‘Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak, and He created you at first, and to Him you shall be brought back.’ (*Fussilat:* 21)

Our faculties will tell us on the Day of Judgment, 'You had control over us in the worldly life and forced us to do things we hated. Now we shall testify against you.' The faculties disclose their secrets because on the Day of Judgment all sovereignty belongs to Allah, the One, the Prevailing. He says: 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16)

The Scripture is the first bond between the Creator and created beings. When a created being is bonded to His Creator, he will face every event in his life confidently, and Allah will endow him with happiness and joy. We have to reflect on the creed-related scenarios when we read the Quran. For instance, we know that when Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* tried to save the Israelites from the Pharaoh and flee out of Egypt, the Pharaoh and his soldiers found out and pursued them. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his followers reached the sea. The enemy was behind them, and the sea before them. The followers of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* evaluated the situation based on worldly criterion. Allah says: 'So, when the two hosts saw each other, the companions of Musa (Moses) cried out, "Most surely we are being overtaken!"' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 61) Can anyone question this statement? No, it seemed to be the plain truth for such a situation. Why did Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* remark differently? Allah says: 'He said, "By no means. Surely, my Lord is with me. He will show me a way out."' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62) He considered his firm faith in the Creator of all causes.

Can any one question the truth of his statement? No, no one can because he did not make this statement based on worldly criterion. It was the fruit of his faith. He asserted, 'No, by no means. Surely, my Lord is with me.' Then, what did Allah say? He says: 'Strike the sea with your staff…' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 63). Allah did not command Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to turn back, but to attack them and try to defeat them. Rather, He commanded him to strike the sea with his staff! Allah assisted him with a miracle beyond human abilities to teach us that He can cause action and its opposite, and none of the creation is capable of that. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew the liquid nature of water, but obeyed his Lord and struck the sea with his staff. The verse continues: 'Thereupon it parted and every part looked like a huge mound.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63) The mound is solid, whereas water is fluid. How could water become a mound? When Allah commanded Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to strike the sea with his staff, He wanted him to utilise the available means so that he would be reassured from a human standpoint. Allah says: 'And leave the sea intervening. Surely they are a host that who shall be drowned.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24) Allah commanded him to leave the sea while it was still because He intended to drown and destroy them with the very means He used to save Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his followers.

Back to our main verse; Allah says: 'Do you not see how those given a share of the Scripture [evidently] now believe in idols and evil powers? They say of the disbelievers, "They are more rightly guided than the believers."' (*an-Nisa':* 51)

After the battle of Uhud, Huyayy ibn Akhtab, Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf, Ibn Abu Al-Haqiq and Abu Rafi', who were the chief leaders of the Jews at that time, took seventy other Jews, and went to the people of Mecca and violated the covenant they had forged with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Their leader Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf went to Abu Sufyan and said to him, 'We want to make an agreement to stand against Muhammad.' Abu Sufyan said, 'You are among the People of the Book and you have your scripture. You believe in God, and a Prophet of Allah had been sent to you, but we experienced none of that. Muhammad says that he is a Messenger of Allah, communicating a Divine Message and Scripture. You are connected. How could we not be sure that you are siding by him and trying to trick us! We do not trust you unless you come before our deities, practise our rituals and prostrate yourselves before them.'

Al-Jibt and *At-Taghut*, translated as idols and false gods respectively, were two idols of Quraysh. The Jews who had the Torah and had been granted a share of the Book went to them in submission. Furthermore, *Al-Jibt* is everyone who preaches for a god other than Allah, whether he is a devil, a priest or a magician. *At-Taghut* refers to everyone who transgresses; in Arabic language, it is an intensive form in such a degree that the one who is so described is not just a transgressor, but a tyrant as well. The more you unrightfully obey *At-Taghut*, the more cruel and oppressive he becomes. Whether *Al-Jibt* and *At-Taghut* were two idols or two deities worshipped by people or not, we should learn that a delegation of Jews prostrated before them so that the Quraysh would believe that they were doing so to antagonise Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In this regard, Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf asked Abu Sufyan, 'For what do you blame Muhammad?’ He answered, 'He abandoned the religion of his ancestors, cut off the ties of kinship and fled to Medina. And we follow quite an opposite path. We provide pilgrims with water, serve our guests generously, set captives free, uphold the ties of kinship, tend to the Sacred Mosque and perform the *Tawaf* (walking around the *Ka'ba).*' Abu Sufyan continued to exalt the deeds of the Quraysh. Driven by their enmity to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* those who were granted a share of the Book said to Abu Sufyan and his people, 'You are more righteous and more rightly guided than Muhammad.'

Our Lord *Glorified is He* explains this point to this effect: O, Muhammad, be leery of their inconsistent and contradictory acts. Despite that they were granted a share of the Book, their enmity to you, their opposition to your religion and the light that you have brought forth has made them forget this share of the Book and believe in *Al-Jibt* and *At-Taghut* (idols and false gods). It is those same people who, in the past, used to tell Arab nomads, 'There will come a prophet, and we will follow him. We together will kill you just like the people of 'Ad and the City of Iram.' Astonishingly enough, they tended to believe in idols and false gods. Hence, do such people really maintain true religion and faith?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* intends to comfort and assure Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they have been deprived from the Support of Heaven (Allah's Help). Thus, if he experiences a conflict or disagreement with them, he should be reassured that Allah *Glorified is He* has rejected them since they have renounced the share of the Book they have been granted. So, he should not even think that they truly belong to the Book.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* further assures His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He *Glorified is He* has given up on these people, saying to the effect that He will surely support him (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*). Therefore, he must not be deceived by their possessions, wealth or knowledge. All of these things will eventually vanish. They no longer enjoy their high status as they have been separated from Heaven. Their association of partners with Allah *Glorified is He* has controlled and misguided them. They have thus antagonised the prophet and joined the side of the infidels against whom they used to beseech Allah *Glorified is He* for victory with the coming of Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* Message. They have sacrificed all this to follow their own desires and abandoned their faith. The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* then says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُۖ وَمَن يَلۡعَنِ ٱللَّهُ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُۥ نَصِيرًا ﴿٥٢﴾

Those are the ones God has rejected: you
[Prophet] will not find anyone to help those God
has rejected [52] (The Quran, *an-Nisa': 52*)

The word *ulaa'ika* is an Arabic demonstrative pronoun translated in this verse as 'those', and it is composed of *ulaa*, which is used in the plural form and the letter *kaf*, which is another pronoun intended to address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We, Muslims, are included in this pronoun originally related to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, 'those' refers to the people who have been granted a share of the Book and, nevertheless, have believed in idols and false gods along with saying to infidels that they are more righteous and better guided than those who believe. Alternatively, 'those' may refer to Jews and those who associate partners with Allah, or it could be taken as a reference to all of them in this verse: 'Those are the ones Allah [God] has rejected…' (*an-Nisa':* 52). Rejection can take the form of 'driving out', 'shaming' or 'destroying.'

But how does Allah *Glorified is He* disgrace and demean infidels? This is evident when you see that nowadays Islam spreads more and more in the world, while they (infidels) are losing both momentum and land. 'Do they [who deny the Truth] not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?…' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41)

'Those are the ones Allah [God] has rejected…' (*an-Nisa’:* 52). Thus, the one who rejects is Allah. When the one who rejects is equal to the one who is rejected, the latter may find someone else to help him mitigate the effects of this rejection. But when the one who rejects is Allah *Glorified is He,* the one who is rejected will never find anyone who can support him. And '…he whom Allah rejects…' (*an-Nisa’:* 52) means that the one whom our Lord *Glorified is He* drives away,’...never will you [Muhammad] find for him a helper.' (*an-Nisa’:* 52) Since the True Lord *Glorified is He* has driven him away, He will make everyone abandon him for whatever reasons so that no one would support him: 'Those are the ones Allah [God] has rejected, and he whom Allah rejects never will you [Muhammad] find for him a helper.' (*an-Nisa’:* 52) Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَمْ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِّنَ ٱلْمُلْكِ فَإِذًا لَّا يُؤْتُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ نَقِيرًا ﴿٥٣﴾

Do they have any share of what He possesses? If they
did they would not give away so much as the groove
of a date stone [53] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 53)

What is the meaning of this verse: 'Do they have any share of what He possesses? If they did, they would not give away so much as the groove of a date stone.'? (*an-Nisa’:* 53)

Allah describes these people as being extremely stingy. This means that they in fact do not possess the world, and nor do they possess what Allah *Glorified is He* has. Dominion, in reality, belongs solely to Allah *Glorified is He;* He gives it to whomever He wills and removes it from whomever He wills. However, if they were granted the possessions of the world and the Dominion of Allah *Glorified is He* they would keep it to themselves and share it with no one. Allah *Glorified is He* elucidates this when He says in the following verse: 'Say [to the disbelievers], "If you possessed the very stores of my Lord’s Bounty, you would hold them back for fear of spending. Man is ever stingy.' (*al-Isra’:* 100) They are addressed in this verse to the effect that they are so afraid of spending lest their wealth would decrease. If they thus take possession of the stores of our Lord *Glorified is He* they will believe that when they give away some of them to others, they will diminish. What I want to say here is that these people, whether they are the infidels of the Quraysh or the chiefs of the Jews, were most keen to maintain their status and safeguard their fortunes, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to treat all people on equal terms. So, who would be grieved and disappointed due to the coming of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*? Certainly, it is those who used to have mastery over others since they did not want people to be equal. Furthermore, they did no good to their followers through their mastery. If they had possession of fortunes and dominion, they would not have given people the groove of a date stone as man, by nature, does not give up tyranny since this tyranny is the source of his mastery and ascendancy over others. As long as he enjoys this high status and has authority over others, man will not pay attention to the essence of faith. It is not enough to enjoy prosperity and authority for some time; more importantly, they must maintain this prosperity and authority all the time. One can attain the pleasures of life as long as he lives in this world, but he is destined to live for only a certain period of time. Moreover, the whole life will come to end. Hence, the true prosperity and bliss exists in the Afterlife: 'Neither failing, nor forbidden' (*al-Waqi'a:* 33). They are further addressed, 'While you are keen to preserve this dominion, fortunes and social distinction, are you prepared to give others some of your pleasures and bounty so that you would have an excuse for your desire to retain wealth and status?' Why do they then want our Lord *Glorified is He* to continue conferring His Bounty upon them even though they are so stingy? Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* will never grant such a bounty to them forever.

In this context, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says in the chapter of *al-Fajr*: [The nature of] man is that, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, "My Lord has honoured me", but when He tries him through the restriction of his provisions, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me.' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16)

Thus, the one who enjoys Allah's Blessings says, 'My Lord has honoured me', while the one who has not been endowed with any of Allah's Blessings says, 'My Lord has humiliated me.' The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* comments on the two cases by saying: 'No, indeed!' (*al-Fajr:* 17) This means that both parties are liars. The former is a liar because he says that the blessings given to him by Allah is proof of his being honoured, while the latter is a liar too because he says that his denial of blessings by Allah *Glorified is He* is an indication of his being disgraced. This is a totally false and groundless conception. Allah's Bestowal of fortune to His slaves is not a sign of honouring or disgracing. Regarding this, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'No, indeed! You [people] do not honour orphans.' (*al-Fajr:* 17) This means that you are in possession of wealth, but you are not generous towards orphans. This money will thus be evidence against you. It is not an issue of honour to you; rather, Allah will punish you for not using your money for good deeds. He *the Glorified and Exalted* adds: 'You do not urge one another to feed the poor.' (*al-Fajr:* 18)

How would fortune then be deemed as a sign of honouring, while it would bring you disaster? No; possession of such fortune, in this sense, is much better. When man has wealth and does not donate a part of it to the weak and the needy as decreed by Allah, this fortune becomes evil and a plague. In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…Whatever they meanly withhold will be hung around their necks on the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 180).

If you greedily withhold what Allah has given you, your neck will be encircled with what you withhold on Doomsday. Hence, when the chains are tightly encircled around your neck, you will wish that you had not been stingy so as to stop the punishment. The True Lord *Glorified is He* in effect, puts forth the following questions in this verse: 'Why do they align themselves with the camp of infidelity and abandon a portion of the Book they have been granted? Why do they go to infidels and say, "You are better guided and more righteous than Muhammad", even though they know well through their portion of the Book that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is truly the Messenger of Allah?

They were protecting their dominion in the same manner as the camp of infidels. We may learn that Jews in Medina were forming an affluent community, and they mainly depended on usury for their livelihood. They possessed castles and farms and possessed a vast amount of knowledge. They thus enjoyed all facets of mastery. However, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by Allah, all the pillars of dominion and mastery were shaken; so, they were grieved and disappointed. Similarly, the infidels of Quraysh were the masters of the entire Arabian Peninsula. People of all tribes did not dare attack any of their trade caravans lest they would be punished by the Quraysh when they went to their land during the season of *Hajj* (pilgrimage). Hence, the Quraysh were used to this immense glory they experienced from being hosts of the Sacred House (*Al-Ka'ba*); this is the same house that Allah protected and caused defeat to all of those who tried to harm it by destroying their malicious plans. Regarding this, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* tells us: 'Do you [Muhammad] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? Did He not utterly confound their plans? He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay. He made them [like] cropped stubble.' (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

The following verses explains why Allah destroyed that army. He *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys…' (*Quraysh:* 1-2). Had not Allah *Glorified is He* consecrated this House for people to worship Him, it would not have had any importance. Moreover, the Quraysh would not have had any power, and nor would they have been able to secure its winter and summer trade journeys. So, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'So, let them worship the Lord of this House…' (*Quraysh:* 3).

Allah is the One Who granted them mastery and power. He is the One Who provides as stated in the following verse: 'Who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.' (*Quraysh:* 4) Allah *Glorified is He* is also the One Who endowed them with the fruits of different plants and saved them from danger when their trade caravans went on journeys whether they were bound north or south.

'Do they have any share of what He possesses?...' (*an-Nisa':* 53) If they had this share, then 'they would not give people even the groove of a date stone.' That is to say that they would not give people even a tiny bit of what they own. Then, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says:

أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ عَلَىٰ مَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ ۖ فَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَآ
ءَالَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُم مُّلْكًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٥٤﴾

Do they envy [other] people for the bounty God has granted them? We gave the descendants of Abraham the Scripture and wisdom, and We gave them a great kingdom [54] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 54)

Envy in this verse is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since our Lord *Glorified is He* had chosen him for His Message. Some people at the time of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did likewise and said, as narrated by the Quran: ‘Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man from either of the two cities? [Mecca and Ta'if]’ (*az-Zukhruf:*31)

Thus, the Quran was acceptable from their perspective, but what grieved them was that it had been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We can say that these people are quite ignorant. They are very similar to those who once said, as related by the Quran: '… "Allah [God], if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens"...' (*al-Anfal:* 32).

They wished to die, being killed by stones raining hard from the sky since they did not want to follow the Truth. This is complete idiocy and ignorance based on unfounded bigotry. The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* giving them the following response: 'Are they the ones who share out your Lord’s Grace? We are the Ones Who give them their share of livelihood…' (*az-Zukhruf:*32) .

Allah asserts that He chooses to bestow His Grace on whomever He wills. Why then do they envy others? They envy people because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come for their guidance. Had they fairly and justly received what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought forth, they would have found that his teachings aim to help man achieve happiness and that whoever follows them will lead a good life. Those who had been given knowledge of the Book by Allah *Glorified is He* were supposed to foretell the good news about the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. What had been revealed to them made it incumbent for them to be the first to believe in him, but they did not. Rather, they denied the Truth and barred others from his path, siding with the infidel idolaters and claiming that they were more righteous and better guided than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* confers special privileges upon some of His creatures, He intends the fruits of these special privileges to benefit other created beings. We know that every created being has certain unique talents. If every created being shares his talents with others, they will treat him on equal footing. Thus, they exchange talents for the interest of all.

These people were granted a share of knowledge by Allah, but they kept it for themselves, refusing to benefit others. This might have been acceptable if this knowledge had pertained only to their own lives, but it was associated with their relationship with Allah *Glorified is He*. That is to say that they represent the people of the Book who know quite well the Path of Allah and are well acquainted with the procession of His Messengers. The True Lord *Glorified is He* in effect, intends to tell them these words, 'You have been granted a share of the Book, but you have not behaved in a good way reflecting this share. Furthermore, if you were in possession of My Dominion, you would not duly care for it, nor would you give anyone the tiniest part of it, even if it were the groove of a date stone.' Therefore, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'Do they have any share of what He possesses? If they did, they would not give away so much as the groove of a date stone.' (*an-Nisa':* 53)

Thus, they are not open-handed either concerning morals and values or material objects. Since they are too stingy to transfer their values to others, it is only common sense for them to be so stingy as far as material things are concerned. Hence, they have become devoid of any goodness.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* in effect, further explains this point, 'Since these people have been given a share of the Book that enables them to recognise the attributes of the coming Messenger (Muhammad) who is the seal of the prophets, what has then precluded them from believing in and supporting him? Undoubtedly, it is envy that has pushed them to do so even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come to confirm what they have been given. They have certainly envied Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Envy always comes from an unkind heart that is not pleased with the shares given by Allah *Glorified is He* to His slaves. Envy, as said, means to wish that a bounty given to someone would vanish. The opposite of envy is the desire to be given the same bounty that was granted to someone so that both of you can enjoy the same bounty. If you want a similar bounty from Allah *Glorified is He* you have to ask Him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'What you have is bound to come to an end, whereas what Allah [God] has is everlasting…' (*an-Nahl:* 96)

So, people must not envy the bounties of others that Allah has given them. However, some people may envy and bear a grudge against others since rich people give them some of whatever they have. These enviers behave this way since they want to have the endowments of the rich people exclusively for themselves. If you have much money and you give some of it to people in need, others, who want to be the only recipients of your endowments and charity, may tell you, 'You are decreasing your fortune by giving these people a portion of it since what you have is ultimately limited. In contrast, the Bounty and Grace of the One Who grants all creatures is infinite and everlasting. He can thus give to you and others without His possessions decreasing.

Thus, a believer can wish to be granted with a bounty similar to one given to others without wishing them any harm or loss since he knows that Allah's Gifts are not restricted to certain people. If Allah *Glorified is He* gives everyone what he asks for, this will not decrease what He possesses even as much as what decreases an ocean when a needle is dipped into it. Regarding this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* narrates in a Qudsi Hadith that Allah *Glorified and Exalted* says: '…O, My servants, even if the first among you and the last among you and the whole human race of yours and that of jinn all stand in one plain ground and you were to ask Me and I confer upon every person what he asks for, it will not, in any way, cause any loss to Me (even less) than that which is caused to an ocean by dipping a needle in it…"(1)

'Do they envy [other] people for the bounty [prophethood given to Muhammad] Allah [God] has granted them?' (*an-Nisa':* 54) Envy as we have learnt means wishing that a bounty given to someone comes to an end and vanishes. This wishing means that you hate that someone be granted with a blessing. You would hate that someone else be granted with a blessing when you are rebellious against the One Who confers such a blessing upon this person.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in the section of the proscription of injustice. It is also related by Ahmad*

The main error the envious person commits is to reject the fate ordained by Allah *Glorified is He* for His creatures. Then, he has got a heart burning with grudges, even before doing any harm to the envied person. For this reason, it is said that envy is the sin or crime whose punishment comes first, whereas punishments usually follow other crimes. Before the envious person embarks on envying others, he receives the punishment since his heart burns with spite and grudges. Someone may wonder what the fault is of the one who is envied. We may answer that by saying that Allah *Glorified is He* plagues some people with diseases that may harm others; envy harms people's health and fortune. Similarly, what is the fault or sin of a murdered person when the murderer points his gun at him and kills him? The gun, for instance, could be considered a gift given to man so as to defend himself and not to be used for aggression.

Suppose that Allah *Glorified is He* has created in man something that makes him hate the blessings granted to others. Why does man not say the following relieving words whenever he sees a person enjoy good things, 'This is Allah's Will. There is no power but with Allah' (*al-Kahf:* 39). Thus, if you combine the gifts granted to other people with such words, you will safeguard your heart from envy and spite. Once you utter this phrase when seeing the blessings gifted to some people, you immediately recall that those people have not granted these blessings to themselves, but it is our Lord *Glorified is He* Who has conferred such blessings upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of giving whatever bounty He wills. Envying others could be practised by some people, but the one who feels envy in his heart and wants to eliminate it must feel certain that Allah *Glorified is He* controls everything. Once this person is convinced that Allah *Glorified is He* controls everything, he protects himself from being an envier and protects the bounty given to others as well. In this context, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'and from the evil of the envier when he envies.' (*al-Falaq:* 5)

Thus, it is possible that the heart of anyone of us may bear a grudge against someone else due to the blessings he enjoys. This may accordingly cause envy. Therefore, every one of us must keep himself away from grudges and protect his heart from succumbing to the temptation of envy. We may come to realise that envy causes a chemical change in the structure of man. This chemical change is behind man's suffering. One may think that such chemical tensions caused by jealousy regarding others' possessions could result in reactions that might release radiation striking the envied person and killing him. (This hypothesis is a mere attempt to understand this verse): 'And from the evil of the envier when he envies.' (*al-Falaq:* 5)

Though you may ask Allah to protect you from the harm of an envier, you may ultimately be hurt. Your supplication to Allah *Glorified is He* to safeguard you from this man's evil means that it has already hurt you. In such a case, you must voice the following words which are again a part of a verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'We belong to Allah and unto Him we shall return.' (*al-Baqara:* 156) You must be assured that it is intended for your good. Thus, if envy causes harm to a blessing you possess, be certain that there is something good in this calamity. Furthermore, if an envious person harms you regarding a gift given to you by Allah *Glorified is He* know then for certain that the real harm that may befall you is to be deprived from Allah's Reward in event that you suffer depression at the loss of such a gift. Hence, when someone is stricken with a misfortune, he should say, 'We belong to Allah, and unto Him we shall return. O, Allah, you are my Lord and you intend to grant me good things since you have created me to lead a good life. However, sometimes I cannot comprehend the goodness in everything happening to me.'

If a Muslim deals with this situation like this, Allah afterwards demonstrates to him that such a misfortune would turn to be in his interest. For instance, this misfortune may be the death of one of his children. In this case, he may in effect say, 'I know nothing about the unseen. Could it have been possible that the child who has passed away was going to lure me into losing my faith, stealing or accepting a personal bribe? It may have been that Allah *Glorified is He* has taken him away from me and protected me from such an evil. Instead, the misfortune may be the removal of a blessing such as wealth or power, etc. 'in which case, the inflicted Muslim may say, 'Such a blessing could have caused me to be a wrongdoer, a transgressor or a tyrant. My Lord says to me that if I were to fall sick, I might be more modest.' Accordingly, the one who suffers a calamity must expect good things and put his trust in Allah *Glorified is He* by saying, and something good must come from this calamity.' However, someone may say that we should always recite these verses: 'Say, I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn, from the evil of that which He has created, and from the evil of darkness when it overspreads, and from the evil of those who blow upon the knots of mutual relationships to undo them, and from the evil of the envier when he envies.' (*al-Falaq:* 1-5)

Why then does Allah not protect us from the evil of enviers who continue to harm us with their envy? We may respond to such a question by saying that you did not understand the meaning of this verse: 'and from the evil of the envier when he envies.' (*al-Falaq:* 5). You think it means that the envy of the jealous person will not harm you if you repeat this verse. No, this is not the case since his envy may still harm you, but you have to know that Allah has decreed such harm for a certain purpose. You must accordingly say, 'My Lord, you have ordained that this misfortune to happen to me since you intend to grant me a good thing.' If you treat the situation this way, then you will definitely be protected from evils.

Nowadays, in our world, we see that the more humanity progresses in knowledge and science, the more Allah reveals to us His signs in the universe, and the more He uncovers to us the secrets of existence which provide us with many explanations. For instance, consider those who manufacture weapons of mass destruction. We may know that the smaller and subtler weapons are, even to the extent of becoming invisible, the more violent and destructive they tend to be. Modern weapons are extensively different from older ones. During earlier times, man used to use stones to hit his enemies, and then guns until we reached the stage of the atomic bomb which is much more destructive than all of the old weapons combined and whose tiniest part that may equal a pin head, could easily kill anyone. We also see that most of the new weapons function by means of radiation which does not have mass, but it has radioparency. We may hear physicians saying that they perform operations via radiation, without spilling a drop of blood. A good example of this is the use of laser rays. Therefore, the subtler the tool is, the more effective it tends to be.

The following example illustrates the following point. Suppose you want to build a palace in the wilderness, and a friend passed by you and asked, 'Why have you not made iron bars for the windows of the first floor?' You may reply, 'Why should I do so?' He may then answer: 'Because there are wolves and lions in the area. So you should use iron bars to keep them out.' Afterwards, another friend may pass by and say: 'The spaces between the iron bars are too wide, and there are many snakes around here.' In which case, you may narrow the spaces between the bars. A third visitor may pass by and say: 'There are many gnats that bite and carry microbes.' Hearing this, you may place screens in front of the windows.

Thus, we see that the subtler the enemy is, the more destructive it tends to be, and the more cautious you need to be. We may realise that since microbes are minute and cannot be seen by the naked eye, they are capable of destroying people. If these organisms had been larger, it may have been easier for man to protect himself against them. However, when they reach this level of minuteness, man fails to protect himself from them. The most lethal microbes are the ones that are too minute to be identified. Physicians sometimes admit that they know nothing about the viruses that cause certain diseases; this means that these viruses are too minute to be examined by microscopes. Why should then we rule out the possibility that there may be a speck of a microbe coming from an envious person who is jealous of anyone enjoying bounties granted by Allah. Their envy may be like laser beams that destroy whatever they hit. Why can we not assume that this may happen? We do the same thing nowadays when we focus laser rays on anything we target since we are well aware that laser beams are among the most destructive weapons of our time. So, why cannot we believe that chemical reactions agitated in an envier's heart could result in radiation that might hit the envied person and destroy him? We can say that radiation is a blessing that must be used for doing good things instead of using it to harm others. We may cite a similar example of someone who owns some money, but he becomes green with envy and holds grudges towards his opponents. Therefore, he may buy a pistol or a gun to kill one or some of them. He thus converts this thing which is a blessing into a tool of revenge. Such acts result from the agitation of the various instincts that control man's reactions.

Then, what kept Jews from believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even though he came confirming what they had been given by Allah *Glorified is He*? There is no doubt that they envied him for having such a bounty and looked at the Grace of delivering the Message of Allah *Glorified is He* as a privilege granted to the Messengers of Allah *peace be upon them*. Is this true? It is truly a privilege for the Messengers of Allah *peace be upon them* but it is at the same time a burdensome mission. People of all nations leave fortunes for their children as legacies, whereas prophets are not allowed to leave any possessions for their children (as they spend all of them for the Cause of Allah).

The prophets *peace be upon them,* were not sent by Allah *Glorified is He* to obtain social distinction or to be arrogant. Rather, they were given troublesome assignments. Jews wrongly viewed the power of religion given to them by Allah and used it as a tool for luxury and arrogance. What was their reaction when a messenger came to teach and guide them to the straight path? They grieved and felt disappointed because they had established for themselves a temporal authority and had not adhered to values. They were only interested in having authority and power. Thus, when a Messenger of God came to relieve them of this power, they said that they would not follow him. They envied Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for delivering the Message of Allah *Glorified is He* believing that it was a privilege and a source of power granted to him. Why did they then envy Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whereas Allah *Glorified is He* had given dominion and control to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), Prophet Dawud (David), Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) and Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon them*? Why did they also feel envious solely due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* intended to honour the other branch of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) posterity, namely, Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* with prophethood?

Allah honoured the first branch that descended from Ishaq (Isaac) who was the father of Ya’qub (Jacob) who was the father of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon them*. Afterwards, Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them* followed in the same lineage. All these descendants of Ishaq *peace be upon him* were honoured with prophethood. Why were they grieved and disappointed just because Allah *Glorified is He* honoured the second branch of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) posterity, namely Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* and sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a messenger?

Why did they not admit that Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* and his descendants came from the posterity of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*? Why did they further deem the Message and prophethood a privilege? Why did they not take into consideration how difficult and burdensome this task is for any of the Messengers of Allah *peace be upon them*? A messenger and his family must always be positive role models for the entire community. None of the members of a messenger's family gains benefits from such a mission. To further this point, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'We, prophets, bequeath nothing (to our offspring).'(1)

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* barred his family from taking *zakat* (alms) from others. Furthermore, he says: '*Sadqa* (mandatory charity) is not lawful for the family of Muhammad. These charities are but the impurities of people (which they wash off themselves).'(2) We thus see that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not work for the benefit of himself or his children.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says: 'We gave the descendants of Ibrahim [Abraham] the Book and wisdom, and We gave them a great kingdom.' (*an-Nisa':* 54) *Al-Kitab* is translated to mean 'the Book' which is the Religion sent down from Heaven by Allah *Glorified is He*. *Al-Ḥikma* is translated to mean 'wisdom' which is the sayings voiced by a messenger that are intended to explain the Religion of Allah *Glorified is He*. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon them a mighty dominion. Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was in charge of the storehouses of Egypt and became the nation's governor. Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them*, were granted dominion in addition to prophethood. Therefore, there is dominion, and there is prophethood. Our Lord *Glorified is He* has granted Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only prophethood, and not dominion. So, why did they envy him? Furthermore, what was their stance towards their prophets whom Allah *Glorified is He* granted both prophethood and dominion? The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* answers this question by saying:

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(1) *Related by Ahmad*

(2) *Related by Muslim*

فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ ءَامَنَ بِهِۦ وَمِنْهُم مَّن صَدَّ عَنْهُۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِجَهَنَّمَ سَعِيرًا ﴿٥٥﴾

but some of them believed in it and some turned away from it. Hell blazes fiercely enough [55] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 55)

If we consider Allah's Words: 'But some of them believed in it (or him)…' (*an-Nisa':* 55), we find that the pronoun 'it' in this verse may refer to the belief in the principles of the religions of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the messengers who followed him, whom Allah *Glorified is He* granted prophethood and kingdoms. 'Some of them' means that some of the people of the Book believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as referred to by the pronoun 'him' in this verse like 'Abdullah ibn Salam and Ka'b Al-Ahbaar *Allah be pleased with them* for instance. 'And some turned away from it…' (*an-Nisa':* 55) means that among them are those who disbelieved in the Path of Allah *Glorified is He*. As a result, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says afterwards: 'Hell blazes fiercely enough.' (*an-Nisa':* 55) This means that the result of turning away from the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* is the blazing and burning fire as a punishment for what they have done.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* shows us the procession of messengers He sent to people at intervals, He reminds people of His Guidance. This Guidance is indeed the main core of the mission of Adam *peace be upon him* and his posterity as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Whoever follows My Guidance, when it comes to you [people], will not go astray nor fall into misery.' (*Ta Ha:* 123)

Adam *peace be upon him* conveyed his knowledge about life, about the Truth and about the Guidance of Allah to his offspring. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that sometimes His human creatures would be oblivious to his Guidance. The Guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* always disagrees with the absurd and transient desires of the human self. Yet, if you consider the reality of the Divine Guidance, you will realise that it allows man to satiate his desires but in a decent and exalted way. Allah *Glorified is He* illustrates this point when he says: '…They (the helpers in Medina) give them (the emigrants from Mecca) preference over themselves, even if they too are poor….' (*al-Hashr:* 9)

Everyone possesses a set of things that he needs. However, he may find a fellow believer who desperately needs some of these things. So, does he give preference over himself? Does he want him to be better than himself? No, he would rather give these small worldly things that have a short duration in this life so that he may be rewarded by Allah in the everlasting hereafter. In such a manner, this person satisfies his desire in an exalted way. Another example is the one who is ordered by Allah, *Glorified is He* to avert his eyes from what is unlawful. Apparently, it seems that a man's desire is suppressed, but in fact, man is prevented from having *haram* (impermissible) desires in this mortal life to be compensated by *halal* (permissible) desires in the everlasting hereafter. Then, which of these two is fond of beauty: the one who examines a beautiful woman's body with his eyes while she is walking or the one who turns his eyes away from her? The one who really appreciates beauty is the one who keeps his eyes away from women who are *haram* (impermissible) to him.

Religion only opposes the inclinations of the foolish self that craves and covets the immediate, passing desires even if they were trivial. Rather, religion encourages man to work for what follows wordly life, i.e. the Afterlife since it lasts forever and never perishes. As for worldly desires, you bear in mind that you either miss them by death or forcibly lose them in your lifetime. In the life to come, this will never happen.

Righteous people know quite well how to avail themselves of such an opportunity, while others are foolish enough to miss this offer. The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains to us that the one who indulges himself in the pursuit of instant passing pleasures is bound to regret it when he faces eternal torment in the Hereafter. This is the true failure. This world is a place of changes and inconstant factors. In this life, man is exposed to the fortunes of time; there is nothing immortal in this world because it is always in a state of great flux. As long as the world is in great flux, everything in it changes constantly. Since everything is bound to change, harm may one day befall the one who enjoys a pleasure or blessing today. Similarly, the one who is strong may become weak, whereas the one who is weak may become strong. Indeed, if the strong and the weak were to stay in the same state, no change would take place in this world.

Thus, people sometimes say to be wary of asking Allah to perfect His blessings on you. If blessings are perfected for someone in this life of great flux, this means that he may be awaiting death. The ultimate realisation of bounty is to rise to the highest point in this life, while you are still in this world of change. Will the blessings granted to man remain at the highest level forever? No, they will not. They have to decline. Therefore, do not be delighted when all your wishes are fulfilled since Allah *Glorified is He* explains that we have to think of this life as a temporary stay. People toil and suffer when they fail to determine their ultimate destination and focus on immediate goals.

It is not useful at all to grieve overly so the loss of beloved relatives and friends. Think about this matter from a logical standpoint. What is our ultimate destination? It is death and the return to our Creator *Glorified is He*. Should we be extremely sad when we return to the Creator *Glorified is He*? Rather, we should be immensely delighted since we are in this world always concerned with means and ways, whereas we will be in the Hereafter with the Creator of all means and ways. In this life, we enjoy blessings, but in the Afterlife we will be in the company of the Donor of these blessings *Glorified is He*. Then, what grieves you? You should only be grieved if you enjoy a blessing, but do not remember the Donor of this blessing *Glorified is He*. However, if you enjoy a blessing, along with remembering the Donor of this blessing *Glorified is He*, you will surely be pleased when ultimately returning to Him.

Since the ultimate purpose of human existence is to go back to the True Donor Who bestows blessings on His creation and to be in the company of His Majesty, why should anyone grieve then? It is sheer folly that some people do not treat Allah *Glorified is He* in the same way they treat each other.

Suppose that someone’s goal is to travel from Aswan to Cairo. Thus, Cairo is his final destination. Afterwards, someone comes and tells him, 'We will go on foot.' Another one suggests, 'I will find some good riding animals that we may use.' A third person says, 'I will bring a car.' A fourth person suggests, 'We should travel by plane.' A fifth one says, 'Let us travel by space shuttle.' Every means of transport that gets you to your destination is thus favourable and commendable. Since our ultimate destination is to go back to the True Lord *Glorified is He,* why should we be grieved if someone amongst us dies?

You should only feel sorry and grieve for yourself. When man dies after he has lived a life obeying Allah *Glorified is He,* he will be pleased with the Presence of the True Lord Who confers bounty upon His creation. Meanwhile, you are still attached to these temporary blessings. This person would indeed laugh at you for feeling sorry for him and would say, 'Look at this oblivious, naïve man. He wants me to stay in this world of means and ways and not to go back to the Creator of all means and ways.

We find that people who lament their beloved ones never see them in their sound dreams because the soul of the deceased person never visits the one who mourns his return to the Donor of blessings *Glorified is He*. People have to realise that the ultimate goal of existence is to live according to the means and ways created by the True Lord *Glorified is He* in this world, then to return to the True Lord in the Hereafter. Death is the vehicle that takes you from the means and ways of this life to the Creator of these means and ways. So, what is the cause of your grief then?

Allah *Glorified is He* always intends to give man all good things. Sometimes, He *Glorified is He* relieves man of the hardships of life and the sufferings that accompany success and failure. Some people may say, 'This person died when he was still young and did not fully enjoy the pleasures of life.' To such people we may say, 'Will the enjoyment of life pleasures be a good thing for him? You, man, have grown up, and you may have committed sins, while Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed to take this young person to protect him from being exposed to such a bitter experience.' Think carefully of this significant point.

Companion Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari *Allah be pleased by him* narrated that he once passed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who asked him, 'How have you found yourself when you woke up today, Harith?' Al-Harith replied, 'I have found myself a true believer.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'Do you know the meaning of your words? There should be evidence for such claims. What is the evidence of your being a true believer?' Al-Harith replied, 'My soul has lost interest in the pleasures of this life. Thus, I stay up most of the night (in worship) and fast for the whole day (as an act of worship too) as if I am seeing the Throne of my Lord prominent before me. I also feel as if I look at the people of paradise exchanging visits and the people of the fire crying and suffering.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* then concluded, 'Harith, you have definitely learned the essence of faith. So, adhere to it.' He repeated this statement three times.(1)

We should also follow the example of Companion Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once asked him, 'How are you today?' (That is to say, 'how is your faith today?') Hudhayfa replied, 'Messenger of Allah, my soul has lost interest in the pleasures of this life. Thus, gold and stone have become equal to me.' (That is to say, 'this is how I see the world now.') Hudhayfa then added, 'I feel as if the people of paradise are enjoying (their rewards) and the people of the fire being punished (because of their disbelief and sins).'

Therefore, we find that the Companion Harith *Allah be pleased with him* always remembered the image of the Hereafter. When he led his life in a good way, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'You definitely have learned the essence of Faith. So, adhere to it.'

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions various (religious) rulings, He also tells us about those who revolt and rebel against these rulings. He *Glorified is He* then reminds us of paradise and the fire. He *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا سَوۡفَ نُصۡلِيهِمۡ نَارٗا كُلَّمَا نَضِجَتۡ جُلُودُهُم بَدَّلۡنَٰهُمۡ
جُلُودًا غَيۡرَهَا لِيَذُوقُواْ ٱلۡعَذَابَۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمٗا ٥٦

We shall send those who reject Our revelations to the Fire. When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain: God is mighty and wise [56] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 56)

The Arabic verb *nuslihim is* translated in this verse as 'burn (them) in the Fire' and is derived from *'istila'*, or sending to the fire. Someone may say that when man is exposed to the fire of this world, he actually burns and turns into nothing. All pain will then come to end. We should note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says regarding this: '…When their skin has been burnt away,

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(1) *Related by At-Tabrani*

We shall replace it with a new one so that they may continue to feel the pain…' (*an-Nisa':* 56). Therefore, suffering and torment in the fire of the Hereafter is not like that experienced by the worldly fire because fire in our world burns for a while, and then it is over. By contrast, the fire of the Hereafter is an eternal suffering and torment that never stops. Hence, once the skin is burnt, a new one replaces it. However, is this skin identical to the original one or different from it? Consider this part of the verse once again: '…When their skin has been burnt away, We shall replace it with a new one so that they may continue to feel the pain…' (*an-Nisa':* 56) Is the new skin identical to the first one? Yes, they are of the same kind. Let me clarify this point by saying if you have a ring and you say that you are going to make another one from this same ring. This means that the material of the two rings is the same. Then, is the torment intended for the skin and body organs? Torment and suffering is always directed towards the conscious self. The evidence is as follows: when a man suffers from a tumour with oozing pus (an abscess for instance), he may not be able to endure pain. Then, once he sleeps, he will feel no pain. However, as soon as he wakes up, pain will start anew.

Thus, pain is not felt by the body organs themselves, but by the conscious self. This is quite true since modern medicine shows us that we can anaesthetize the conscious self so that when pain may occur, man does not feel it. Hence, the abscess can be opened with a lancet, while the person undergoing the operation does not feel any pain. So, torture has nothing to do with the skin and body organs. They are only conductors of pain and suffering, whereas the receiver of torture is the conscious self. This is why skin and organs will testify against us on the Day of Judgment. On this Day, skin and body organs will testify against man and be instruments for transmitting pain and suffering. Moreover, they will take pleasure in meting out pain to sinful souls.

These are Divine Procedures. Thus, do not be amazed at what the Quran tells us. The more knowledge and science progresses, the more it guides us to the signs of Allah in the universe. Nowadays we are capable of anaesthetizing the conscious self and splitting the body with lancets, while man feels no pain. Again, we learn that pain does not pertain to an organ itself, but rather to the conscious self. Thus, all the organs are instruments that communicate torturing pain to the conscious self, and they rejoice in undertaking such a role. This is similar to someone who has an abrasion. However, when he scratches his skin, he may bleed and be pleased with such rubbing.

Hence, this part of the verse: '…When their skin has been burnt away, We shall replace it with a new one so that they may continue to feel the pain…' (*an-Nisa':* 56) means that the skins is recurrently replaced by other skin that evolves from the same material and transmits pain and suffering to the conscious self.

'We shall send those who reject Our Revelations to the Fire. When their skin has been burnt away, We shall replace it with a new one so that they may continue to feel the pain...' (*an-Nisa':* 56). We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed a Book, namely the Quran, and made it a miracle and a way of life for people to follow. This is the key attribute of Islam (as compared with other religions). The way of life in Islam is the real miracle. Before Islam, every messenger had a way of life that differed from his miracle.

For instance, the way of life preached by Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is the Torah, whereas his miracle was the staff. As for 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him,* his way of life is the Gospel, whereas his miracle was healing the blind and the lepers and bringing the dead back to life by Allah's Permission. Meanwhile, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is the Quran because his religion is the final word from Allah *Glorified is He* to His creation till the end of this world. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* has made the Way of Life preached by Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* his miracle too; therefore, it proves the truthfulness of the Way of Life at any given time. Thus, none of the followers of the previous messengers could say, 'The miracle of the messenger I follow is his way of life since all the miracles of the previous messengers were immense workings that came to an end as much as a burning matchstick turns into ashes.' So, some people witnessed these miracles at the time and that was it. However, a Muslim should take pride and boast that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah, that he is true and that this (the Quran) is his miracle. The miracle of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is, indeed, eternal, whereas the miracles of other messengers *peace be upon them*, who came before him were experienced by those who witnessed them. Thus, the miracle of every messenger before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was distinct from his way of life.

We realise that The Way of Life actualised by the Quran includes (religious) rulings. Rulings mean doing some things, while not doing others. These rulings have been quite clear since Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* till the Day of the Hour arrives (Doomsday). Whoever obeys and follows these rulings will be rewarded, while those who do not will be punished. All people are equal as far as adherence to these rulings is concerned till the Day of Judgment.

As for the signs of Allah in the universe, they do not change as time moves forward. People at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have benefited if they had known these universal signs. Allah *Glorified is He* has concealed these signs in the Quran, giving only allusions here and there. The reason is that Arab minds were incapable of assimilating them at the time when the Message was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If the Quran had included, for example, a verse that explicitly states that the earth is round, rotates and revolves around the sun, what, by Allah *Glorified is He* would the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have said? Some people nowadays are questioning this fact. So, imagine the reaction of the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* if he had told them such a thing. They would have wholeheartedly disbelieved what he was preaching.

They used to benefit from the fact that the earth is round as much as a peasant or a nomad benefits from it presently. Similarly, those who have not studied electricity are now benefiting from this field through watching TV and using electric lights along with other applications without knowing the technical functioning details. Consider another example. When the sun shines over the world, water evaporates from the oceans, rivers and seas to form clouds. Then, rain falls from these clouds. All these phenomena are universal signs whose secrets have not been revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* except to the extent that human mind can comprehend them. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* has left in his Book (the Quran) what always satisfies the aspirations of scientific research.

When we as Muslims learn about a new scientific discovery in the universe, we often say that the Quran has told us about such a thing. However, we should not say that the Quran has mentioned a certain fact before it is scientifically proved so that people would not question the verities of this miraculous Book. For example, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'But they are denying what they cannot comprehend– its prophecy has yet to be fulfilled for them...' (*Yunus:* 39)

Had the Quran said that everything in the universe multiplies and has a positive and a negative part, a male and a female, would they have believed it? No, and the reason is that they learned about males and females among humans, animals and some plants such as palm trees. They did not know anything about procreation in many plants like wheat and corn and nor did they realise that the male part in corn is located in the corncob spike that is moved by the air so that pollen grains may drop and seeds may sprout. For this reason, we notice that intelligent farmers open corn plants a bit from above so that pollen grains can reach their targeted place. A farmer may open a corncob to find amid the lines of seeds a dead seed that does not have a thread. This means that this seed was not fertilised by pollen grains. Such a seed is called in the country, 'an aged tooth.’

Thus, all forms of multiplication must have male and female parts. So, our Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'Glory be to Him Who created all the pairs of things that the earth produces, as well as themselves and other things they do not know about.' (*Ya Sin:* 36) We first learned about males and females in humans and animals, and then we recognised them in plants. The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* mentions’..and other things they do not know about' (*Ya Sin:* 36) to include everything, like positive and negative charges in electricity. We have thus come to realise that every living organism has two parts: a male and a female. The more science makes progress, the more it becomes capable of explaining cosmic signs.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is so Merciful to the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He has not willed to make His Laws in the universe clear and explicit so that the human mind would not stand incapable of working them out, particularly the Book (the Quran) that initially addressed an illiterate *ummah* (Nation) that did not have any culture. Suppose that this

Book is intended to address the contemporary world; there will be universal issues that our contemporary world knows nothing about. Had the Quran addressed these issues in an explicit manner, it would have turned people away from the religion. The Quran came as a Way of Life, whereas miracles came to support this Way of Life. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has not intended to turn miracles into an impediment that may keep people from pursuing His Way of Life. Nonetheless, He *Glorified is He* has left much room in His universe for the ambitions of the human mind, created by Him, to look into this vast universe created by Him too. Every single day, the human mind makes new discoveries. Such discoveries do not come from nowhere; rather, they are based on things that actually exist.

If you investigate the origin of the most subtle discoveries of science achieved by the contemporary mind and their size in comparison to the whole universe, you will ultimately get back to the basic facts. Intellects have created or invented nothing new. They have just thought of something which already exists and deduced a non-existing proposition from the premises of this existing thing. The non-existing proposition then becomes an existing premise so that someone else may come and use it to deduce and infer something new. Thus, scientists tend to be well-behaved and modest when they say they have discovered a given thing since it already exists.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us examples to help us understand matters. When we learned geometry, for instance, we knew that geometry is composed of theories from number one to infinity. When a teacher tries to prove theory number one hundred, for example, he refers to theory number ninety nine. In turn, when a teacher proves theory number ninety nine, he refers to the one that came before it.

So, the proof of every theory depends on the preceding one. A conscious thinking mind that is capable of deduction and inference is the one who arranges the premises to make conclusions. People participate in everything in the universe. However, the mind that arranges and deduces thinks, and so do people, and one may think he has brought something new even though he has not actually done so. Rather, he has generated something new from what already exists. A good example is when a child is born to two parents. Have they created their child from nothing? No, the child has come through copulation. When we go back in sequence, we ultimately arrive to Adam *peace be upon him*. However, who created Adam? It is Allah *Glorified is He*.

Hence, axioms in the universe are the basis for all scientific progress, and they have been created by Allah Who has perfected everything. Every theory, no matter how complicated it is, originates based on an axiom. A good example of this is steam. How had steam been discovered before it was used as a source of energy to operate machines? One day someone noticed that the steam produced by the boiling water in a container caused the lid of a container to move upwards and downwards. Searching the secret behind this phenomenon, he found out that steam could be used as a driving force. This is how the age of steam power started. This person is quite intelligent in as much as he bases his discovery on an intuitive observation present in the universe. Therefore, do not be full of conceit and say that man via his intellect is the one who creates. Rather, you should say that man uses his intellect and makes earnest, organised efforts to discover Allah’s secrets in the universe.

Thus, when the human mind invents something new, we may tell this mind that it has not really invented something new, but it has only discovered such a thing. The True Lord *Glorified is He* lets people discover the secrets of the universe from time to time. This is evidenced when he says: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (*Fussilat:* 53).

So, when humanity makes a new discovery, we tell them that this discovery is already mentioned in the Quran. Consequently, they will ask, 'How is it that the Quran, which was revealed fourteen centuries ago, refer to this discovery since it was addressed an illiterate *ummah* and was communicated through an unlettered Messenger?’ We say to such people, 'Yes, it is true that the Noble Quran refers to the recently discovered scientific facts fourteen centuries ago.' This point is even supported and proved definitively by the verse this very discussion, that is, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… When their skin has been burned away, We shall replace them with a new one…'.

We have previously explained how skin and sensations function. Regarding this, it is important to note that scientists had exerted great efforts to understand how humans' senses work. Some of them mistakenly believe that the human brain is the source of sensation since these are matters the brain is not involved with even though we are able to still sense them. This is proved by the fact that when someone approaches the front of someone's eyes and points his finger to poke any of them, that person will close his eyes before his finger even reaches it. This clearly means that man can feel things and matters without the intervention of the brain. Other groups of scholars yet hold the position that sensation occurs through the spinal cord and reflexive movement, in general, and the nervous endings under the skin, in particular. This is proved by the fact that when a person is given an injection, the pain of penetrating the skin will look like the sting of a bug, and there will be no pain at all.

Thus, the centre of sensation is the sensory nerve endings scattered on a human's skin. This fact is proved by this particular verse of the Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* explains clearly that when the skin burns completely, there will be no sensation at all after that. That is why He *the Almighty* replaces their burnt skin with a new one so that they would continue to feel the severe punishment. Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…When their skin has been burned away…' means that when their skins are burnt completely and entirely cease to feel pain, Allah *the Almighty* will replace them with new skin to perpetuate their torment since skin is the medium through which pain is transmitted to the conscious self. As such, the verse sheds light on a practical scientific topic. As a matter of fact, had the Quran addressed this topic directly and said: 'O, Children of Adam! Skin is the source of sensation. People would have understood naught.' That is why it the Quran left the matter for the human intellect to infer and deduce as it progresses and matures.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… When their skin has been burnt away, We shall replace them with a new one so that they may continue to feel the pain…' clearly indicates that the chief purpose for replacing the skin that was burnt with a new one is to perpetuate the torment. He *Glorified is He* and then concludes the verse with His saying, '… Surely, Allah is Almighty and All-Wise.' The word Al-'Aziz, or *the Almighty* means the One Who is invincible and Who can defeat the entire creation, irrespective of what meticulous preparations they may have made. It is at this point that a disbeliever may say, 'We have taken pleasure in committing the sin for five minutes and in another instance for two hours. So, I can endure the pain until my skin burns away and then I will suffer nothing at all.' To this person, we give the following reply, 'The One Who tortures you is invincible, and thus He *Glorified is He* will perpetuate the torment for you by replacing your burnt skin with a new one. As well, He *the Almighty* is All-Wise and thus He *Glorified is He* does not want to torture you only for the sake of displaying or showing off His Might and Power. Rather, He *the Almighty* uses His Might in the light of His Justice.'

Having told us about the punishment and torture prepared for those who refused to have faith in all the Divine instructions and teachings, He *Glorified is He* did not forget to discuss the opposite case so that His Discourse would have addressed both purposes: that of those who are religiously committed and that of those who are deviant. He *the Almighty* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ سَنُدۡخِلُهُمۡ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدٗاۖ لَّهُمۡ فِيهَآ أَزۡوَٰجٞ مُّطَهَّرَةٞۖ وَنُدۡخِلُهُمۡ ظِلّٗا ظَلِيلٗا ٥٧

As for those who believe and do good deeds, We shall admit them into Gardens graced with flowing streams and there they will remain forever. They will have pure spouses there, and we shall admit them into cool refreshing shade [57] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 57)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* sheds light on the reward prepared for those who, contrary to those mentioned in the previous verse, believe in Allah and all what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them about. We know for certain that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the last and seal of all the Prophets and Messengers and his *ummah* (followers of Islam) is thus the closest to the Day of Resurrection. Previous nations and people, since the creation of Adam, lived for long periods of time. Yet, we, Muslims, are the closest to the Day of Resurrection. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I and the Last Hour have been sent like this.' He joined the forefinger with the middle finger (to illustrate his point).(1)

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(1) *Muslim, Sahih*

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* did not use *Sawfa*, or will, which is an Arabic particle implying the existence of a time lag between two events, when describing the reward prepared for believers. On the other hand, He *Glorified is He* used it to refer to the punishment prepared for disbelievers. This is due to the fact that this particle refers to an action which is intended to take place after a long period of time. In addition, it may be viewed as an indication from Allah *Glorified is He* that He does not immediately afflict His punishment on disbelievers so as to give them time to repent. In truth, when Allah *the Almighty* informs us that the distance between doing good deeds and receiving the reward for Him in return is really short; this clearly points out that He *Glorified is He* wants to strongly encourage us to firmly adhere to His Obedience. The distance between you (O, Muslims) and the Garden is not remote; it is close. This is why He *the Almighty* says: '…We shall admit them into Gardens graced with flowing streams…'

The word *jannah* is the Arabic word that means 'Garden', and it is derived from *Al-Jinn* and *As-Sitr* which mean hiding and concealing. *Al-Jannah* is the garden whose trees veil and cover one who walks within. It is completely different from earthly gardens of flowers whose short flower plants can bring enjoyment only for man’s eyes. As for the heavenly Garden, it includes ever so tall and massive trees, to the extent that they hide the person who walks amongst them. In the same respect, it contains various and different kinds of sustenance. Therefore, it prevents you from looking at any other garden since it contains what is completely sufficient for you. Generally, if someone does not have what suffices his needs, he will long for whatever will meet them. However, the one who has what totally suffices his needs is not in need of anything else in the world. As a matter of fact, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of something that is unknown to us now, but that we shall, due to His Will, witness it in the near future. We know full well that the Garden encompasses everything that a soul may ever wish for. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* narrates for us the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the Divine Hadith, 'I have prepared for My pious worshippers such things as no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of and nobody has ever thought of. All that is reserved as well as all that you have seen is nothing.' Then he recited: "No soul knows what is kept hidden (in reserve) for them of joy as a reward for what they used to do." (*as-Sajda:* 17)'(1)

Due to the fact man knows about the universe in relation to his ability, Allah *the Almighty* upon describing the great reward prepared for believers in the Garden, says that it includes such things that eyes have never seen. It is taken for granted that a human's sight is limited. This is contrary to the sense of hearing which is wider in range than sight. This is because he will hear news from a particular person who sees it. As such, the series of a human's perception may be ordered as follows: sight comes in first place, and then hearing follows. Naturally, a human hears much more than what he sees. For example, one may visit Aswan and see it, but he might hear about the USA, and, thus, the range of hearing is broader and wider than that of seeing.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the Qudsi Hadith narrated to us by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* '…and nobody has ever thought of…' means that no one can actually imagine the reward prepared for believers in the Garden. This naturally leads us to the following question, 'How many descriptions are there for the Paradise?' The first is that it includes such things that eyes have never seen; the second is that in includes such things that no ear has ever heard of, which indicates that one is able to hear much more than he can see; the third is that it includes such things that nobody had ever thought of, which means that even imagination could not vividly catch the essence of the Garden. So, the question to be asked here is as long as Allah *the Almighty* will give us all this reward in the Garden, which words in the Arabic language would truly communicate the clear and exact meanings of this reward.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us that no words can fulfil this task since the meaning has to be initially known before a word is coined for it. In truth, every word in the language has a particular meaning, or even various meanings. However, as long as paradise has not been seen, heard or even comprehended by any mind, there are no words that could express it. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not give full and complete descriptions for paradise; rather, he said that it would be such and such since there are no words in our language that could express these meanings both exactly and precisely. As a matter of fact, due to the fact that this Divine reward in paradise was not seen by any eye, heard by any ear, or even comprehended any mind, there are no words in human language that could depict or portray it for us. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a striking example for the unimaginable reward He *Glorified is He* prepared for believers. In this example, He *the Almighty* chooses to draw a comparison between earthly rivers and those in Paradise. He *Glorified is He* states clearly that paradise includes rivers of water that do not alter, rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change and rivers of a delicious drink for those who partake of it, along with rivers of honey clarified and for them therein are every kind of fruit and protection from their Lord. (*Muhammad:* 15)

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(1) *Muslim, Sahih*

We see rivers in this worldly life, but Allah *the Almighty* assures us that rivers in paradise will be completely different; He *Glorified is He* tells us that He will remove purities from it. The water of a given river may naturally stop moving and thus become still and corrupt. This is why He *Glorified is He* created the rivers of paradise in such a way that does not render their water corrupt. As such, He *Glorified is He* gives us an example with something known to us, but He explains that He will remove all impurities that we witness in the worldly life's rivers. Furthermore, the rivers of this world flow and run in cracks between two banks, and thus, they are totally different from the rivers in Paradise that flow, due to the Will of Allah, between no banks. You will also find rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters.

The Arabs used to take milk from camels and store it in leather canteens. Camels would then travel to grazing fields or to any other place. So, when an Arab nomad needed milk, he might not find any to drink except what he had previously stored in these canteens and whose taste has been altered and changed. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that the milk in the rivers of paradise will never change or alter since they are not like ones in this worldly life. He *Glorified is He* also states that paradise will contain rivers of wine which are completely different from those in this worldly life. These various points are definitively proved by the fact that He *the Almighty* in this aforementioned verse in the chapter of '*Muhammad'* provides us with examples of how paradise will look. This is why He *the Almighty* describes the wine of the paradise, for example, in this particular verse of the chapter of '*Muhammad*' as 'being delicious to those who drink.' As a matter of fact, many people do not delightfully drink wine in this world, which is a point proven by the fact that when someone drinks it in this world, he usually pours it in his mouth all at once. This is, of course, entirely different from the scenario of someone who tremendously enjoys drinking a glass of mango juice. The person drinking wine often drinks it in one shot to reduce the time he has to taste it due to its being bitter and acidic. In addition, wine of this worldly life covers and corrupts people's minds; therefore, it is completely different from that of the Hereafter, which never corrupts minds.

Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* gives a parable of paradise, He *Glorified is He* simultaneously explains that it has no impurities. In the same manner of speaking, we find that there are various parables in this respect. For example, when an Arab nomad would find any small jujube tree in the desert, he used to consider it an oasis under which he could rest and enjoy its fruits. He thus used to reach out and avoid the thorns to pick the fruits. In certain cases, a thorn might hurt him. When he did not find any thorns in the tree, he would say that this tree was free of thorns. In the same way, Allah *the Almighty* emphatically and firmly affirms that paradise does not contain any of the impurities this world experiences.

He *Glorified is He* and then tells that there are rivers of purified honey in paradise. The Arabs used to gather honey from the mountains because bees used to make their hives in the cracks of mountains. Upon gathering it, they used to find sand and pebbles mixed with it. This is why Allah *the Almighty* tells us that He purified the honey of the paradise from all the impurities that could corrupt it. Having said that, the question to ask is the following: ' Allah *the Almighty* had already purified the honey of the Hereafter, so why did He *Glorified is He* clearly state that this is just a parable even though He confirmed doing so?' The main reason is that since no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no human mind has ever thought of the reward prepared for believers in paradise; all the words in the dictionaries of all human languages would fail to express or describe such a great blessing. However, Allah *Glorified is He* uses familiar examples, and gives us a vivid picture so as to enable us understand the reward He prepared for believers in paradise, exactly as He did when He gave us a striking example for how His Light illuminates the universe. In this respect, He *Glorified is He* clearly states that He is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass and the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree. (*an-Nur:* 35)

Therefore, He gives us a familiar example to more closely fathom the meaning in our minds since human languages do not include any words that could lend an adequate and sufficient explanation for this high and great reward prepared by Allah *the Almighty* for believers in paradise. This is why He *Glorified is He* when describing paradise, sometimes says that it includes trees 'from beneath which rivers flow', while other times He says that it includes trees 'beneath which rivers flow.' So, what is the difference between the two sentences? The difference is that the second sentence may mean that the rivers flow from another place and that they may be owned by another person who might prevent one from their water. This is why He *Glorified is He* wants in the first sentence to assure believers that their rivers in paradise flow directly from beneath their trees.

Allah *the Almighty* then states clearly that the dwellers of paradise will live therein forever. Concerning this point, He *Glorified is He* is addressing those who already enjoyed some of His Bounties in this worldly life and who also knew perfectly well that the pleasure of this world will definitively and surely come to an end. That is why He *the Almighty* clearly and plainly states that the blessings prepared for the believers in paradise are eternal and never ending.

In the same manner of speaking, He *the Almighty* gives us another example of one of the temporary pleasures of this worldly life, namely, wives. He *Glorified is He* plainly states that the believers in paradise will have *Azwajun Mutahharah* (pure spouses). Therefore, it is of great importance to know that when Allah *the Almighty* describes a plural noun, He uses the adjective in the form of plural, as well. This is clear in the following example when He *the Almighty* says that He ordered the jinn to obey Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be* *upon him* and thus they made for him many items including *Qudur Rasyat*, or cooking-pots. (*Saba':* 13). However, concerning the state of wives in paradise, He *Glorified is He* did not put the adjective in the plural form; rather, He used it in the singular. What does this mean? This means that there may be discord and disagreement among man's various wives in this worldly life, but the matter will be completely different in paradise where a man's wives will be in total agreement with each other, along with it that in paradise there is no form of discord and disagreement. If someone asks, 'How could a woman accept that her husband would be married to another wife in the Hereafter?' The answer is quite evident in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* will remove any traces of ill-feeling in the breasts of the dwellers of Paradise. (*al-A'raf:* 43)

As such, this clearly means that even though a man will be married to various women in paradise, his wives will never cause him any annoyance. He will really like each one's extraordinary beauty and good manners. His wives in paradise will not suffer from any defects. Allah *the Almighty* as such, gives us a clear summary for all the pleasure that could possibly be attained with his wives in paradise.

He *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying: '… and We shall admit them into cool refreshing shade.' In Arabic, when one wants to emphasise a particular meaning, he uses a derivative from the same word repeatedly. For instance, a native Arabic speaker may say, *'Hadha Laylun A'lyaj'*, which means it is a very dark night. Similarly, when someone wants to lay emphasis on the range and value of a shade, he may describe it as *Zhalieel*, or dense. Therefore, what is definition of the term 'shade'? It is the withdrawal of sunlight from a particular place. It may also refer to the same place which sunlight never reaches, such as a cave.

People who live in the desert know perfectly well the expression *Zhillan Zhaliala*, or dense shade. Once one sees a tree in the desert, he hastens to sit under it and enjoy its shade. Truthfully speaking, the shade itself may be abounding like the air-conditioned tents people manufacture and use nowadays and are often made of two layers; the first is exposed to sunlight in such a way that enables it to absorb heat; the second layer, on the other hand, keeps the heat from penetrating into the tent. This particular design is called 'the double ceiling.' It is often found in high places since apartments in middle floors are naturally protected. However, apartments found on upper floors of a building, especially in warmer climates, are often swelteringly hot. For this reason, a two-layered ceiling is made for such apartments. In this manner, a shade may exist within another one.

However, this raises a question: 'Why does one enjoy sitting under the shade of a tree more than he would enjoy sitting under the shade of a wall?' The reason is that the shade of the wall is often composed of one layer. It is true that it protects us from the sunlight. However, it, unfortunately, blocks air. The case is completely different when one sits under the shade of a tree. It is taken for granted that the leaves of a tree are neatly organised, one above another, to the extent that one can see each of them lying under the shade of the one above it. Due to the fact that leaves are light and can easily be moved by air, they can protect one from the hot sunlight while allowing him to simultaneously enjoy the gentle and soft breeze. This is actually the precise meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty 'Zhillan Zhaliala',* or dense shade.

For this reason, when a poet once wanted to describe *Ar-Rawadah*, the place between Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* pulpit and his grave, he said:

A valley abounding with trees protected
us from the sweltering heat of the sun.
We sat under a tree and it was tender and kind to us
as much as a mother is tender and kind towards her children.
The taste of its abounding shade is tastier
than any drink a server could serve you.
It blocked the sunlight if it faced us and
still allowed the breeze to reach us

The poet describes the situation of a man walking in the desert who then finds a garden of trees that kindly and lavishly provides him with abounding shade that prevents sunlight from hitting. Furthermore, he describes delicious water to drink and a soft breeze, as well as different kinds of fruit; in much the same way a mother does with her children when trying to wean them. This is actually how we should understand the expression *Zhillan Zhaliala*, or dense shade, for it is the shade of paradise that is even covered and shaded with another shade.

Having shed light on the destiny awaiting the two categories of His creation, i.e. disbelievers who disobey Him *the Almighty* and deviate from His Path and believers who obey Him and firmly adhere to His Path. To further illustrate this point, Allah *Glorified is He* says that the people of the first category will be admitted to the Fire, and whenever their skin is burnt away, He *the Almighty* shall replace it with a new one so that they will continue to feel the pain. On the other hand, He *the Almighty* says that He prepared paradise with all the descriptions we explained previously for believers. Having thus clarified the punishment and the reward prepared for the two categories respectively, He *Glorified is He* directs our attention to a new ruling. This is due to the fact that the human psyche at this particular time (after talking about the Fire and Paradise) will be quite afraid of the fire and, meanwhile, will be longing for paradise. Under these conditions, it will be easier for man to accept this ruling and even readily apply it. In addition, one will be properly prepared for receiving any new rulings. Consequently, one will be able to know perfectly well about the reward prepared for those who firmly adhere to the Path of Allah and the punishment prepared for the disobedient and the misguided.

As a matter of fact, in the event one is fully prepared for receiving a particular ruling, and in the event, the wisdom and the purpose behind this ruling are crystal clear, man will receive it wholeheartedly. This is due to the fact that the human soul knows many things and understands many matters. From the Mercy of Allah, man’s brain includes a memory and an imaginative power that are incapable of comprehending and encompassing excessive information all at once. This is why one cannot entertain a new thought unless his mind is fairly empty of any particular thought that may be occupying his mind at the same moment of receiving the new one. Indeed, if the old meaning is retained in the mind, one will not be able to receive a new one.

Accordingly, a human's consciousness is especially interested in what is taking place right now, and thus, thoughts and ideas have no place to be in intermixed with each other. For this reason, when someone wants to recall something from his mind, he finds that meanings swiftly flow in such a way that enables the hidden ideas and thoughts to come to the conscious mind. Once this happens, the first thought completely vanishes.

As such, we should not think that the human mind can store every piece of information in its conscious part all at once; this is completely wrong. Truthfully speaking, it is due to the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty* that He created minds in such a way that enables them to store information. For this reason, one may remember something that happened ten years ago. Therefore, if this incident had been already removed and erased from one's mind, he would not have been capable of remembering it! This clearly indicates that it already exists in the subconscious. When different ideas and thoughts intermix with each other, this particular incident comes to the conscious mind where it performs its function and vanishes.

Therefore, this clearly indicates that the human mind has the power and energy necessary to enable it to store events and incidents. Despite this, people's capacities for storing events may vary. There may be someone who needs to study a poem ten times before he can learn it by heart, whereas another may be capable of memorising it after just two times, or even three times. In reality, the human mind is like a camera; it may be capable of shooting an excellent picture upon first trial. What really matters is that one’s consciousness should be free at the time of thinking. If the consciousness is free of any other thoughts, one will be able to receive a new one.

You may read a poem, a verse or a word repeatedly in order to memorise it. However, if you manage to focus all your consciousness on the text you are studying, you may be able to memorise it immediately from the first reading. You only fail to memorise the text when ideas dart across your mind continuously, thus distracting you and causing you to lose your concentration. As such, your consciousness gets distracted, causing you to fail to memorise new pieces of information. You then repeat the studying process until you are capable of assimilating each part of the poem or the verse you are trying to memorise. For this reason, they say that there are students who memorise slowly and others who do so quickly. The entire process may be explained as follows: if the person pays particular attention to what he is studying, he will be able to memorise it from the first time; otherwise, he will take a longer time to memorise it.

I will give a striking example to illustrate this point. I believe that most of us, especially students, have undergone such a situation. If we assume that there is a student who was about to take an exam, and before the bell rang, heralding as he was about to enter the examination room. Then, one of his colleagues came to him and said, 'There will be a question about such and such part from this particular text.' However, the student had not studied this particular part. So, he immediately grabbed the book and read it carefully. Would he at this moment be thinking of what he will have for lunch? Would he even be thinking of the one who was with him yesterday? No, he would never think of any of these things because he did not have much time before taking the exam, and thus, he had been paying special attention to this particular text. As such, he might be faced with a question from this text and would be able to answer it even though another student, who studied the same text a month ago, was unable to answer it, for he was distracted while studying. As for this particular student, he studied it while using his total concentration, thus making him able to answer it correctly.

Another example to illustrate this point is a student who complains about his inability to understand the lectures of a particular professor. However, another student may fully comprehend the lectures from the same professor. As for the student who does not understand, he was distracted by other topics, which have nothing to do with the main and prime theme of the lecture. Thus, when he attends a new class, he will be surprised by new pieces of information that could not be assimilated unless he fully understood the previous pieces of information. Accordingly, when the teacher explained the new lesson, this student who was unable to understand said, 'What is this teacher saying?’ As for the other student who fully understood the teacher, he perfectly comprehends all the new pieces of information delivered by the teacher. For this reason, a good teacher must attract the attention of his students by capturing their attention and maintaining throughout the lecture. He may, for instance, explain a particular theme of a lesson under discussion and then may tell a student, 'Stand up and recount what I have just said.' In this manner, students will remain alert the entire time for fear that they may be embarrassed if the teacher asks them and they fail to answer. Thus, they will pay attention to the lecture and automatically keep their focus on him.

Having shed light on the Fire and Paradise, to the extent that this matter became firmly implanted in people's minds, He *Glorified is He* started to reveal new rulings. As matter of fact, every time Allah *the Almighty* sheds light on the Fire and Paradise, He follows this by the most important legal rulings which, if people firmly adhere to, they will be admitted into paradise and keep away from the fire. Having prepared and qualified people's minds by telling them about the appalling destiny, the fire, and the attractive one, He *the Almighty* reveals the ruling in the following verse:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأۡمُرُكُمۡ أَن تُؤَدُّواْ ٱلۡأَمَٰنَٰتِ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمۡتُم بَيۡنَ ٱلنَّاسِ
أَن تَحۡكُمُواْ بِٱلۡعَدۡلِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُم بِهِۦٓۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعَۢا بَصِيرٗا ٥٨

God commands you [people] to return things entrusted to
you to their rightful owners, and, if you judge between
people, to do so with justice: God's instructions to you
are excellent, for He hears and sees everything [58]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 58)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…to return things entrusted to you to their rightful owners…' succinctly summarises and encapsulates all the Divine Rulings and Commands to people on earth. This is due to the fact that trust is of three kinds: the most supreme trust manifested clearly by believing in Allah, trust that exists between people themselves and the one which pertains to all other creatures in the universe.

Al-A'manah, or trust, means that people's things are entrusted to you for the sake of preserving and keeping them, and you are the custodian of these things and items. Therefore, you may or may not return these things entrusted to you. It must be said that if you ask someone to keep something for you, and you have officially documented that matter, this action will not fall under the category of the 'trust' since there are witnesses and evidence. Yet, in the case of 'trust', there shall be no witnesses since the act of 'trust' entails that you entrust a person to keepsomething for you while allowing his conscience to finally decide whether to return the 'trust' back to you or not.

In the chapter of *al-Ahzab*, Allah *the Almighty* clearly says: 'Verily, We have offered the trust of the Divine Law to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it. But man bore it. Indeed, he is capable of being unjust to, and neglectful of, himself.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72). Therefore, this raises the question, 'What is this particular trust referred to in the aforementioned verse of *al-Ahzab*?' We know perfectly well that the universe has different creatures including the inanimate things which represent the lowest rank in the chain of creatures; plants would be considered in the middle rank, while animals would be of higher rank than plants. Finally, man would top all of the previous ranks since all of them are subjected to his service. One point to be made is that it is of great importance to realise that inanimate things, plants and animals do not have freedom of choice to do whatever they want; rather, each of them has been created to perform a certain function and cannot choose to refrain from performing it.

The heavens, the earth and the mountains, as such, refused to have freedom of choice or to bear the trust. This clearly means that they did not want to have free will by means of which they would decide whether to do an act or not to do it. They all were afraid of assuming the burden of this trust due to the lack of confidence in themselves at the time of fulfilling the trust. This means that one of these created beings may have the intention to return a trust to its owners; however, it may, out of self's enticement, fail to do so at the time of delivering. That is why the heavens, the earth and the mountains, out of their fear, said, 'We do not want to assume this trust, and we do not want to have the freedom to do things or not do them, or to obey or disobey. Rather, we want to be subservient to what you (O, Allah), without any choice on our part.' This clearly and plainly means that the heavens, the earth and the mountains have chosen to willingly submit to the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. Man, on the other hand, out of his ability to reason, chose to assume the trust and said, 'I will assume the trust, and my reasoning will enable me to deliver it.' Therefore, man failed to consider the difference between the act of shouldering the trust and his state at the time of actually delivering it.

For example, someone may entrust you with a sum of money. You may then take this money while being certain that you will deliver it when this person asks you to give it back. Nonetheless, at the time of actually delivering the trust, you may not be able to control yourself. For instance, you may be going through bad financial circumstances and spend some of this money. Your integrity may even, Allah forbid, have been destroyed.

Therefore, it is not guaranteed that one would be in full control of himself at the time of delivering the trust even though he may be so at the time of taking it. This is why those who are cautious may say, 'Keep us away from assuming trusts. We do not want to keep anything for you.' But, due to the fact that man was unjust to himself and ignorant about his state at the time of actually delivering the trust, he accepted to shoulder it. Thus, now it becomes quite clear the trust referred to in the chapter of *al-Ahzab* is none but that of the freedom of choice upon which all Allah's Legal Obligations are based.

As a matter of fact, *At-Taklif*, or a legal obligation, is restricted to the two following commands, i.e. 'Dos' and 'Don'ts.' Thus, if one has the will to do a particular act, he is able to do it, and vice versa. This means that the trust in this context is restricted to what Allah *the Almighty* asked human beings to do. However, it did not tackle the other kinds of trusts that exist between mankind. The 'trust', in fact, may also refer to the rights of others you have in your custody. For this reason, when a person gives another one (person) something for him to keep, the former is considered to be entrusted with the thing he took, for/he may then will to deliver back what he took or not.

However, there are other trusts that were not given by a person to another one (person). Rather, they were given by the Lord of the Worlds to all humans. The list of this particular kind of trusts includes the knowledge that Allah *the Almighty* grants man. Truthfully speaking, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who taught you and enabled you to understand a particular field of knowledge. Then, He *Glorified is He* asks you to deliver the trust of knowledge He gave you, in the exact same manner one is asked to return the trust of money he is entrusted with.

We say to every scientist and knowledgeable person, 'Your knowledge did not emanate from yourself so that you may give it to someone else and expect him to give you something in return. This is totally wrong since Allah *the Exalated* will reward you for delivering this trust of knowledge to others.' The same equally applies for the virtues of patience and courage. As far as relationships or transactions among mankind are concerned, the virtue of keeping the trust often manifests itself in material affairs. However, as for other kinds of trusts, they are between Allah *Glorified is He* and His Servants. He *the Almighty* may entrust you with a certain field of knowledge so that you can deliver it to those who do not know. In the same respect, He *the Almighty* may entrust you with great strength and command you to assist those who are incapable, or need assistance.

Accordingly, the question to be asked here is 'Who gave you this trust?' It is Allah *the Almighty*. It is thereby not necessary that you should return the trust to the same one who gave it to you. This is due to the fact that the trust is that with which you have been entrusted is either from the creation, or mankind, or the Creator *Glorified is He*. Therefore, you are obligated to deliver it in all cases. The meaning of trust in this sense is thus broad; the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the Only One Who deserves to be worshipped is a trust; your ability to carry out legal obligations is a trust as is your ability to use given talents Allah *the Almighty* bestowed upon you. So, everyone who has a talent is entrusted with it and has to deliver it and transmit its effects to the one who lacks it. In this regard, it is important to know that our Lord *the Almighty* may give a particular person muscle power. Similarly, He *Glorified is He* may give another person sound reasoning. He *the Almighty* furthermore, may give a third person the ability to show forbearance, while giving a fourth the ability to acquire knowledge. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* has endowed His creation with all different kinds of trusts so that they would complement each other. As such, when every man delivers his trust to others, all the members of the society will certainly enjoy each other's talents.

When Allah *the Almighty* says, ' Allah commands you [people] to return things entrusted to you to their owners…', we should immediately recall that the most important thing with which we have been entrusted is to worship Him *the Almighty* alone and not to ascribe others with Him *the Almighty* in worship. We should also take into account the other kinds of trusts He *the Almighty* entrusted you with, for just as you are obligated to deliver and return other's trusts to them, they are also obligated to deliver and return your trusts to you. This is why, when He *Glorified is He* forbids you from stealing, it means that He *the Almighty* is obligating everyone else not to steal you in return.

In truth, just as you keep trusts for other members of the society, they, in turn, should keep trusts for you. If you, thus, fulfil the requirements of that with which you have been entrusted, the society around you will deliver the trust it possesses for you. The trust then transpires to be the deliverance of another person's right that you have in your custody.

It is narrated that the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Allah commands you [people] to return things to their owners…' had been revealed concerning ‘Uthman ibn Abi Talhaibn Abi Talhah who was the servant of the Sacred House in Mecca. When Allah *the Almighty* opened Mecca for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he wanted to enter the *Ka‘ba*, but ‘Uthman ibn Abi Talhah refused to give him the keys, closed its doors, ascended to its roof and said, 'Had I known that he was the Messenger of Allah, I would not have prevented him from entering the *Ka‘ba*.' Then, ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* fiercely took the keys from him and opened the doors of the *Ka‘ba* for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who entered into it and offered two units or prayer. Upon getting out of it, his uncle Al-‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to give him the keys and to appoint him as the new servant of the *Ka‘ba*, but this particular verse was revealed. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* consequently ordered ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* to return the keys to ‘Uthman ibn Abi Talhah and to apologise to him. When ‘Ali went to him, ‘Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'After you hurt me, you returned to apologise and speak leniently to me.' ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* then told him that Allah *the Almighty* had sent down this verse and he recited it for him, whereupon ‘Uthman embraced Islam. Finally, the archangel Jibril descended and told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the family of ‘Uthamn ibn Abi Talhah are rightfully entitled to the service of the Sacred House until the end of time.

What should be mentioned is that we must certainly know that the non-deliverance of trusts necessarily entails that the fulfilment of justice becomes a must. As a matter of fact, if every one of us were to deliver the right he owes to its owner, there will be no need at all for justice. Justice naturally emerges due to antagonism and hostility. Truthfully speaking, the act of litigation indicates that someone has denied the right he owes to someone else. Thus, if everyone were to deliver the rights of others that are in his custody, there will be no need for litigation since there would be no antagonism amongst people. Indeed, there will also be no need for the application of justice at this time.

However, due to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who knows perfectly well His creation and their flaws, He *Glorified is He* is fully aware of the fact that some people would be heedless and may not give back the trusts to their owners. This is why He *the Almighty* laid down another principle through which people could have their due rights once again, that is, justice. However, if people made sure to give back the trusts to their owners, there would be no need at all for the application of such justice.

Therefore, it becomes clear that justice was revealed to overcome the flaws and defects of the human soul when it rejects to return things to their owners. This is why He *the Almighty* says: '… And if you judge between people, you should do so with justice…' Here, we must take into account a very important point, that is, He *the Almighty* did not say if you are entrusted with a trust, return it to their owners; rather, He *Glorified is He* says: ' Allah commands you to return things entrusted to you to their rightful owners…' So, in case you refuse to give back things to their rightful owners, what will be the solution then? This is where the role of justice applies which means to give back a right to the custody of someone to someone else. This means that this right is not in your custody since you arbitrate so that you could settle an issue or resolve a dispute.

In this manner, we know that there is a difference between *Al-Amanah*, or trust, and *Al-'Adl*, or justice; the first entails that you have something in your own custody and that you must give it back to its rightful owner, whereas the latter entails returning things which are not in the custody of oneself to their rightful owners. That is why He *the Almighty* says: '…And if you judge between people, you should do so with justice…' Just as the order of giving the trusts to their rightful owners addresses all of mankind, the order of maintaining justice also addresses all of mankind. Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… And if you judge between people, you should do so with justice…' is not restricted to rulers alone; rather, everyone is required to maintain and achieve justice. If you have been appointed by others as an arbitrator, and they agreed to accept your judgment, you have to judge justly even if such arbitration concerns something pertaining to sensitive matters like ennoblement, honour and talent. It is not realistic that arbitration should always pertain to material matters. This point is proved by the story of 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* when he saw two boys seeking the judgment of his son Al-Hasan *Allah be pleased with him* concerning their handwriting. Both boys wanted to know which of their handwritings was better than the other. Even though this issue may not be of great importance, it occupied the minds of the two boys and thus it was a must that Al-Hasan judged justly between them. For this reason, 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said to his son, 'O, Be careful how to judge, for Allah will hold you to account for your judgment son On the Day of Resurrection.'

This gives a striking example of how the judge must be extremely precise in his judgements even if the matter seems of no great importance. Even in football matches, the referee who judges the match must be properly qualified to perform his job. That is because his decisions will lead to the winning of one of the two teams and the defeat of the other. The fact of the matter is that one gets enraged when he watches a football match and notices that the referee did not take into account a particular violation.

I wonder at this point, why people are so earnest and serious about applying the rules of justice in a game while paying them no attention at all in real life. This is what happens often, for we tend to take the application of justice in games seriously and leave out many of the important matters without a governing law. Had we cared for these matters as much as we cared for the games, all our disputes and conflicts would have been settled. Justice is thereby a right that someone owes to another even if it were in matters pertaining to a match. Likewise, as long as a matter concerns two parties involved and caused them to have a dispute and disagreement amongst themselves, you have to put an end to such dispute in a just manner.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…Allah's Instructions to you are excellent…' This means that there is nothing greater than such an admonition, namely delivering the trusts to their rightful owners and judging justly amongst people. Accordingly, the movement of life will be in its correct path. If people deliver that with which they have been entrusted, there will not be any dispute or disagreement amongst them. Furthermore, if they judge justly amongst each other, all disputes will certainly come to an end. Regarding this, scholars say, 'If the people in a particular society knew that they are governed by a just ruler who maintains justice, no wrongdoer would dare to do any injustice anymore.' The opposite naturally occurs when there is an unjust ruler since people will say, 'This person has committed wrong and injustice, but he was not held accountable for his actions.' The absence of justice thus entices and emboldens the wrongdoer to do more injustice. But when people see that a ruler deters and punishes the one who usurps someone else's right and gives back the right to its rightful owner, no one will dare to wrong another.

O, People! You must know that your obedience never benefits Allah *the Almighty* and nor does your disobedience harm Him *Glorified is He*. Thus, your obedience is for your own benefit, while your disobedience is against you. The best form of command is the one that does not bring any benefit to a commander because if the command involves a benefit accruing to a commander, its purpose and value may be dubitable. Thus, to enjoin a command from which you expect no benefit and in which you have no interest, is the apex of justice. Yet there may be a person who has no vast knowledge or deep wisdom, yet he commands doing acts from which there is no personal benefit. The matter in this context is quite different than with Allah *the Almighty* since He does not have any interest in the command. In addition, He *the Almighty* is All Knowing and All-Wise. For this reason, this Divine Admonition is quite conceivable. Furthermore, it is a bounty conferred by Allah *the Almighty* on mankind and what is at odds with it is a bad admonition since no benefit accrues to Him *the Almighty* from His Command, and He is entrusted with all His servants. In addition, there may be someone who commands something from which he may not have any benefit. However, this person may be deficient in knowledge and flawed in wisdom and so his admonition and command would not be acceptable. Therefore, the saying of Allah, '…Allah's Instructions are excellent to you…' means that He *the Almighty* exhorts you to deliver that with which you have been entrusted and to judge justly among people.

We should also notice the rhetorical expression of the Quran when He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah instructs you to return…' This rhetorical style indicates clearly that He *Glorified is He* addresses all mankind, which plainly means that all people are required to firmly adhere to and follow this Divine Command of delivering the trusts to their rightful owners. The same applies to judging amongst people with justice, that is, all members of the society are also required by virtue of the Divine Command to judge amongst people with justice. As matter of fact, these two Divine Commands point out that Muslims are not only ordered to protect their own rights amongst themselves, but also they are obligated to protect the rights of others even if they are not Muslims.

In the same respect, His saying, '…Allah’s Instructions to you are excellent…' must be interpreted to mean that He *the Almighty* orders us to protect the rights of those who believe in Islam and those who do not believe in it; a point which is obviously indicated by the fact that He *the Almighty* addresses all mankind with this particular command. As a matter of fact, He *Glorified is He* does not appoint any particular group with this command, whether they are believers or disbelievers.

The word 'people' indicates the justice of the command enacted by Allah *the Almighty* the Lord of the Worlds. He is the One Who created a person to be either a believer or a disbeliever. However, no one, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever, is excluded from His Divinity. He *the Almighty* supplies all His creation with their provisions. Yet, it is of cardinal importance here to know that Allah *the Almighty* provides those who make use of reasons and means for attaining provision, whether they are believers or disbelievers. This clearly indicates the Divine Justice. He *the Almighty* provided man with sustenance and made everything in the world subservient to him. The truth of the matter is that He did not make the universe subservient only to believers. Rather, He made it equally subservient to all mankind, whether they are believers or disbelievers. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* commands us to deliver trusts to their rightful owners whether they are believers or disbelievers. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* commands us to judge justly amongst all mankind, whether they are believers or disbelievers.

This previously mentioned point is even proven by the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is narrated that a Muslim man called Tu‘mah ibn U’bayriq had stolen armour from his Muslim neighbour Qatadat ibn an-Nu‘man*, Allah be pleased with him*. Tu‘mah was in a state of complete confusion since he did not know where to hide the stolen armour. This is why he hid it in a sack of flour, but there was a hole in the sack and thus the flour leaked and made a mark on the road. Tu‘mah finally hid the armour at the house of a Jew named Zayd ibn As-Samin. When Qatadat discovered that the armour had been stolen, he shouted loudly, and people came and followed the marks of the flour on the road till they reached the house of Tu‘mah ibn U’bayriq, but he swore to Allah that he did not steal it. Therefore, they traced the marks of flour once again till they reached the house of Zayd ibn As-Samin who told them that Tu‘mah was the one who brought it to him. There were some Jews who witnessed to this. The case was thus referred to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. At that time, people of Banu Zhufar came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him to defend their man by saying, 'O, Prophet Muhammad! If you did not defend him, he would be exposed, and the Jew would be acquitted.' It is at this point that Allah *the Almighty* sent down some verses of the chapter of *an-Nisa'* in which He *the Almighty* states clearly that He revealed the Book to him *peace and blessings be upon him* with the truth that he may judge between people by means of that which Allah has taught him. He *the Almighty* also ordered him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be an advocate on behalf of the treacherous and to ask Him *the Almighty* for forgiveness. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* further ordered him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to plead on behalf of those who act unfaithfully to their souls, for He *Glorified is He* does not love those who are treacherous and sinful. (*an-Nisa':* 105-107)

These verses of the chapter of *an-Nisa'* clearly indicate that Muslims must not support their fellow brothers and sisters in committing injustice even against non-Muslims. This is why He *Glorified is He* follows these three aforementioned verses on the story of Banu Zhufar with His Saying in which He clarifies that if they plotted in secret, but He *the Almighty* is All-Acquainted with everything and that He is with them when they meditate by night words which do not please Him. He *Glorified is He* furthermore, gives warning to the believers not to defend the wrongdoers even if they are Muslims. He says that if you (O, Muslims) plead for the treacherous in this worldly life, no one will be able to plead for them on the Day of Resurrection. (*an-Nisa’:* 108-109)

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… and whenever you judge between people, to judge with justice…' clearly means that Allah *the Almighty* addresses all of mankind and orders them everyone to judge justly whenever any one of us is appointed as a judge amongst people for any given case. This Divine Command is not restricted to believers only; rather, it includes disbelievers’ relations with Muslims, as well. It furthermore includes the disbelievers’ relations with each other, in the event that they accept the *Sharia* of Islam to settle their disputes and disagreements.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '… Allah’s Instructions to you are excellent, for He hears and sees everything.' When we notice a verse ending with Two Divine Attributes or Two of the Most Beautiful Names of Allah *the Almighty* we must realise that there is a relation between these Attributes or Names and the content of the verse. In this verse, He *the Almighty* having ordered us to return trusts to their rightful owners and to judge justly among people, tells us that He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this matter when he ordered the one assuming a judicial position to treat both parties equally in both attention and discourse. This means that a judge should not be biased towards one of the two parties, and nor is he allowed to pay special attention to one of them while neglecting the other. He must thereby treat them both equally paying the same attention to both parties, while addressing both of them in the same way.

It has been narrated that there was a dispute between a Jew and ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb, *Allah be pleased with him*. The dispute was thus referred to the “Umar ibn Al-Khattab, the Commander of Believers, *Allah be pleased with him*. When ‘Ali and the Jew were before ‘‘Umar, he called upon ‘Ali and said, 'Stand up, O, father of Al-Hasan!' However, ‘Ali was angry. ‘‘Umar then asked him, 'O, ‘Ali, do you hate the fact that I treat you and your litigant equally in the court?’ Whereupon ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'No, but I disliked that you called upon me with my title while not doing the same with my Jewish litigant.'

Accordingly, when ‘‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* advised Abu Musa Al-A’sha‘ry *Allah be pleased with him* upon being appointed as a judge, he said to him, 'Treat everyone who attends your court equally even in the way you sit with each of them and the way you look at each of them.’ This clearly indicates that arbitrators and judges must give equal treatment to the two litigating parties. They, arbitrators and judges, are not allowed to pay special attention to one of the two parties, while neglecting the other, and nor are they allowed to give preference to one of them over the other.

Al-Lahzh, or seeing, is the function of the eye, and it requires someone who can see, whereas *Al-Lafzh*, or utterance, requires an ear to hear it or someone capable of hearing. However, the question to be asked here is 'Why did Allah *the Almighty* give precedence to the Most Beautiful Name of “All-Hearing” over that of “All-Seeing”?’ The reason is that what is heard involves a clear expression, but the act of seeing is only recognised by the one who looks at others tenderly and respectfully. However, did the Divine Attribute of being 'All-Hearing' evolve in Allah after He came across what He could hear? Also, did the Divine Attribute of being 'All-Seeing' evolve after He identified what He could see? The answer is that all the Divine Attributes of Allah including these two ones mentioned are eternal. He *Glorified is He* is Eternal, and He is the Creator of the existing universe. Furthermore, His Attributes are as eternal as He is.

Therefore, there is a difference between the following words, Sami‘, or All-Hearing, and Sami‘, the one who could hear, and *Basir*, the All-Seeing, and *Mubsir*, and the one who has the ability to see. Truthfully speaking, one is described as 'hearing' if he actually comes across someone or something that could be heard, and he hears it. However, what does the word 'All-Hearing' mean? It means that the One Who acquires this attribute of 'All-Hearing' is always capable of hearing regardless of whether or not that which could be heard exists. The same holds true for the attribute of 'All-Seeing.’

Let me give you an example to illustrate this point for you. When a poet composes a poem, this does not mean that he was not a poet before doing so; rather, this means he was originally a poet and that he composed it out of his potential capacity to write poetry. Similarly, when we say that Allah *the Almighty* is All-Forgiving, this means that He was so even before He created any creature. It also indicates that this Divine Attribute of 'All-Forgiving' is eternal and that He *the Almighty* had it even before the creation committed any given sin. The same equally applies to the Two Divine Attributes of 'All-Hearing' and 'All-Seeing.’ This means that they are eternal and that He *the Almighty* had them even before creating what would be seen or heard. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِ
مِنكُمۡۖ فَإِن تَنَٰزَعۡتُمۡ فِي شَيۡءٖ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمۡ
تُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞ وَأَحۡسَنُ تَأۡوِيلًا ﴿٥٩﴾

You who believe, obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you. If you are in dispute over any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day: that is better and fairer in the end [59] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 59)

We have extensively discussed this verse and mentioned it in almost all occasions. However, we have to briefly recount what we have previously mentioned about it. Why should we obey Allah and His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? The answer is that this order is viewed as the legal justification for either the Divine Reward or Punishment. Similarly, when a judge passes a verdict, he puts forward the legal justification for the judgement. For instance, the judge may say, 'Since the person has committed such and such violation, then according to such and such article, such and such penalty should be meted out to him.' These are the justifications of the verdict. The Arabic word *Al-Haythiyyat* (to refer to justifications or grounds of the verdict) is derived from the conjunction *Haythu* which gives the meaning of 'since' or 'because', that is, since so and so happened, then our verdict is such and such, or since so and so did not happen, then our verdict is such and such. Accordingly, the grounds and fundamentals of the verdict mean the legal justification that supports the rationale of the judge who passed the verdict.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…obey Allah and obey His Messenger…' It is noticeable that He *the Almighty* does not address all of mankind in this particular verse; rather, He addresses believers only. This means that as long as you (O, believers) have true faith in Allah as the All-Wise, the Creator, the All Knowing and the One Who has the right to command and enact legal obligations upon you, then you have to listen to and obey what He orders you to do. As such, it is clear that He *the Almighty* does not order all of mankind to obey Him; rather, He orders all of them to believe in Him since obedience follows faith.

Thus, the justification for obeying Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* naturally evolves from faith in Him *the Almighty* and in His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is the perfect form of justice since Allah *the Almighty* does not assign anyone to do anything unless he has already attained faith in Him, to the extent that he shall believe that He *the Almighty* is the Only One entitled to command and enact legal obligations upon him. As for those who do not believe in Him, He *Glorified is He* does not order them to 'do' or 'not to do' anything. Rather, He asks them first and foremost to believe in Him and then that will naturally lead to obedience of His Orders and Commands. For this reason, you will notice that all legal obligations enacted by Him *the Almighty* are preceded by His saying, 'O, you who believe.’

Having faith in Allah and His Messenger is the main reason behind obeying Him and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is the most important reason in this regard. Furthermore, it is completely different from enquiring into the wisdom and rationale behind the enactment of this or that particular legal obligation. For this reason, I would like to direct your attention to a very important point, that is, it is wrong to approach the Divine Rulings and Commands by way of investigating and examining so that as long as you are convinced with them, you adopt and follow them, and if you do not, you will not adopt or follow them. As a matter of fact, such behaviour indicates that you have doubts about these rulings and commands.

This is why we have to obey and follow Divine Rulings and Commands since He *the Almighty* addresses you who have believed in Him as the All-Wise. Having said that, does this preclude your mind from inquiring into the wisdom underlying the Divine Ruling or Command? To this question, we respond, 'You may understand some of the deep wisdom, but not all of it. The reason is that it is impossible to restrict the Wisdom of Allah to one particular aspect, so, you may realise an aspect of this Wisdom, while another person realises a different one. For this reason, it is said that the key difference between Allah's Commands to people and people's commands to each other is something very simple, i.e. Allah's Commands to humans are preceded with the underlying cause, namely having faith in Him *the Almighty*. As for humans, when one of them is asked to carry out a particular command, he may respond, 'Why should I do so? Please, give me a reason to.' The main reason behind this human response is that one usually believes that the mind of others is not better than his. Accordingly, he should not do anything unless he is completely convinced of its validity and unless experience has proved the authenticity of the opinion of the one commanding you and that he is not a deceiver.

Therefore, we see that our obedience to Allah is entirely different from our obedience to another created being. We obey Allah since we have faith in Him *the Almighty*. Accordingly, when He asks us to obey Him, we should not inquire into whether this obedience will benefit us or not. If we trust that He created us due to all of His Attributes of Perfection, then we must be certain that He does not want to acquire a new attribute to Himself through this legal obligation. Allah is in no way obligated to create you, yet He *the Almighty* created you by His Power and provided you with the means to support and sustain your existence. Accordingly, when He *the Almighty* commands you to do something, He does so since it is in your interest, exactly in the same way a manufacturer deeply and genuinely cares about his manufactured item. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* wants to boast about His creation, not by forcing and compelling them to obey His Commands but by making them follow them out of their love for Him. He wants us to declare through our behaviour that we love Him as much as He is our Lord. As a matter of fact, man might have chosen to be disobedient to Allah. So, as long as you have the choice to disobey and violate His Commands but you choose, instead, to obey Him *the Almighty* this definitively proves your love for Him *the Almighty*. In fact, there is a big difference between someone who compels you to obey him and another who, despite being capable of subjugating you, gives you the freedom to choose to obey him or not so that you may do so willingly and lovingly. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* orders us to obey Him, this indicates that He does not ask you to do something that is strange or odd.

However, how can we carry out the Divine Command of being obedient to Allah *the Almighty*? We do so by obeying all His Commands. This raises a very important question, 'Did Allah *the Almighty* issue His Commands to only certain individuals?' No, His Commands are directed to all of mankind, whether they are individuals or groups. In addition, He provided them with a natural inclination towards faith that definitively proves that there is a supreme force running the creation of the universe. No one knows the essence of this force, nor does anyone know its attributes or how it will reward those who obey it. Thus, the existence of Messengers and Prophets to inform mankind was an absolute necessity. For this reason, I believe that some philosophers were wrong when they claimed that the human mind alone can realise the essence of religion. To these philosophers, I say, 'No, this is not correct, in spite of the fact that the mind can know about the One we ought to worship, it cannot tell anything about the methodology of religion.'

This is why sending Messengers and Prophets was an absolute necessity, for it is these Messengers and Prophets who would convey the Divine Commands to mankind. We thus say to those philosophers, 'Even though the mind is able to identify this power running the universe, it is meanwhile unable to tell anything about its essence, name and requirements. For this reason, Messengers and Prophets were sent, meaning that they were sent to tell us about this ultimate power. Therefore, this means that this particular and ultimate power in which you believe in due to your natural inclination must have sent to you (O, mankind) someone to tell you of His Names and Commands. This clearly implies that obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is necessary for owing Allah *the Almighty* our absolute obedience to Him.

He *Glorified is He* then says: 'and those in authority among you' We notice that He *Glorified is He* did not repeat the verb 'obey' when He mentioned those who have been entrusted with authority so that we may understand that we are supposed to obey those in authority only in so far as our obedience to them is in harmony with our obedience to Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Reflecting upon the meanings of Quranic verses clearly indicates that the Divine Command to obey Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has taken three different forms as stated throughout its pages, and they proceed as follows: 1) obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is included in with Allah since both use the same imperative verb 'obey Allah and the Messenger'; 2) the imperative verb is repeated twice, one time with Allah and the other with Prophet Muhammad 'obey Allah and obey His Messenger'; and 3) some verses indicate the order to obey Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* without including it with a statement commanding obedience to Allah, simply 'obey the Messenger.’

As for the first form, 'obey Allah and the Messenger', we notice that it includes only one imperative verb of showing obedience to Allah and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for the second form, the imperative verb of showing obedience is repeated twice: one to Allah *Glorified is He* and the other to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Concerning the third form, the imperative verb is confined to showing obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only.

There are differences amongst these three forms. As a matter of fact, the first form indicates that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who issued Commands, which were thus confirmed by Prophet Muhammad’s sayings, actions or tacit approval. As for the second form, it points out that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had explained in detail the general Divine Commands. Regarding the third form, it informs us that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained something to us, for which Allah *the Almighty* did not issue a Divine Command. Truthfully speaking, the fact that obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is indispensable from that to Allah *the Almighty* and is certainly mentioned in the chapter of *an-Nisa’* in which He *Glorified is He* clearly states that whoever obeys Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* indeed obeys Allah *the Almighty*. (*an-Nisa’:* 80). Also, in the chapter of *al-Hashr*, He *the Almighty* orders us to accept willingly whatever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us and to refrain from doing anything he prohibited us: 'And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain from it. And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is Severe in retribution.' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

Based on the discussion justmentioned, it becomes clear to us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* contributes to Islamic Legislation in three ways: he decreed and legislated by way of asserting what Allah *the Almighty* decrees; he also legislates by way of spelling out the details of what Allah has already decreed. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed upon Muslims the performance of five daily prayers. He also obligated Muslims to pay *zakat*, or alms to the poor. Yet, He *the Almighty* did not explain in detail these particular obligations, thus it was the role of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to give the minute details of these general Divine Commands. Accordingly, he told us about *an-Nisab*, or the minimum amount of property or wealth that must be owned by a Muslim before he is obligated to pay *zakat*, and how to correctly perform the five daily prayers. Therefore, we obey Allah's Commands which are further explained to us by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad, out of Allah's Authorisation to him, issues a particular command, for which Allah *the Almighty* did not directly address. For this reason, if someone tells you to support your viewpoint with some verses of the Quran, and you were unable to show him this evidence, you can tell him that there is ample evidence for all the legitimacy of what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Hashr* in which He *Glorified is He* orders us to accept whatever Prophet Muhammad gives us and to refrain from what he prohibits us.

In fact, this is conclusive and persuasive evidence fervently supporting the legitimacy of all the commands and orders given by him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Someone may still say, 'There is a difference between the *Sunnah*, or the recommended act of worship, and *Al-Fard*, or the legal obligation.' We give the following reply to this person, 'You should make a distinction, for there is a difference between a supererogatory act of worship which, if performed, one is rewarded for and if not, one is not punished, (and a mandatory act of worship which one must observe and which, if one neglects, he will be held accountable and punished for it).' As a matter of fact, this obligation is commanded by Allah *the Almighty* and is proven by Prophet Muhammad's *Sunnah*. In addition, the legitimacy of different obligations is proven by Prophet Muhammad's *Sunnah.* Therefore, it becomes quite clear nowadays that there is a difference between the obligatory act of worship and the recommended one. So, naturally, this is different from the explanations provided for these obligatory acts of worship in Prophet Muhammad's *Sunnah* and are considered as practical applications that must be followed by Muslims.

As for the command to obey those who have been entrusted with authority, it was associated in conjunction with those to be obeyed (namely Allah and His Messenger Muhammad) without an explicit command related exclusively to this case. This indicates that obeying those who are entrusted with authority is only binding as long as the obedience is in harmony with obedience to Allah and His Messenger. This, in fact, safeguards society against tyrannical rulers who try to humiliate and dominate people by misconstruing the saying of Allah *the Almighty;* they are 'those who have been entrusted with authority', alleging that obeying them is a must. Thus, they would say in response, 'Are we not those who have been entrusted with authority?' Scholars should reply by saying, 'Yes, but you are entitled to be obeyed as long as this obedience is in line with obedience to Allah and His Messenger. So, if obeying those who have been entrusted with authority contradicts obeying Allah and His Messenger, then no obedience is due to them.' This is based on the following rule which states, 'No created being should be obeyed if his commands would lead to disobeying the Creator.' This is actually the same response given by Abu Hazim to Maslamat ibn 'Abd Al-Malik when he (Maslamat) said to him, 'Are we not those who have been entrusted with authority?' In addition, we should take into account the fact that this obedience to those in authority has been abolished by virtue of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger…' Thus, a Muslim ruler is first required to deliver that with which he has been entrusted to their rightful owners, to judge justly amongst people and to always make people's obedience to him in complete harmony with their obedience to Allah and His Messenger. If a ruler fails to fulfil these conditions, he would be judged as a tyrannical ruler.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… If you are in dispute over any matter, refer it to Allah and the Messenger…', it means that variance and dispute must be about a matter pertaining to complying to the obedience of Allah *the Almighty*. Furthermore, it must have a proper frame of reference to settle it, which means if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day, you must refer all of your disputes to Allah and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

As a matter of fact, those who know these rulings perfectly well are the well-versed religious scholars. Thus, in case there is a dispute between rulers and their subjects, we should refer the matter to well-versed scholars to inform us of the Divine Ruling concerning this issue. Therefore, if someone argues that 'those who have been entrusted with authority' refers to rulers, we reply to him: 'The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: "refer it (the dispute) to Allah and the Messenger" indicates plainly that a ruler has an obligation to follow the Path and Course set by Allah and His Messenger Muhammad.' Naturally, it is the opinions of well-versed scholars that must exclusively and entirely be relied upon. Scholars are the ones who closely and strictly observe, based on their knowledge of religion, the implementation and adherence to the Rulings made by Allah *the Almighty*. Undoubtedly, Allah *Glorified is He* asks us to refer matters of dispute between rulers and their subjects to Him and His Messenger because He wants to settle disputed issues since disputes cause turbulence and unrest in life. Someone may claim that so and so is correct, while another may refute this and claim or stand by a contradictory view. Thus, issues of dispute must be referred to a supreme authority, i.e. Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Regarding this, He *the Almighty* tells us that if Muslims at times of disputes refer their problems to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to those in authority from amongst themselves, those among them who can search out the knowledge of it would have known it. (*an-Nisa':* 83) This verse explains that 'those in authority' in this context refers to well-versed religious scholars.

Based on what was mentioned, we can clearly state that the meaning of the first verse is general by saying that it associates the obedience due to the ones who have been entrusted with authority to be obedient to Allah and His

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for the second verse which sheds light on *Al-Istinbat*, or legal deduction, it refers to well-versed religious scholars.

Therefore, it becomes clear that what is meant by 'those who have been granted authority' in the first verse are the ones who oversee the implementation of the Rulings of Allah, which is the executive authority, while the same phrase in the second verse refers specifically to well-established religious scholars, which is the legislative authority.

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… (If you are in dispute over any matter,) refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day…' (*an-Nisa’:* 59) indicates clearly that the one who does not refer issues of dispute to Allah and His Messenger Muhammad may cause himself to fall under the category of those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day. We say to such people, 'Review your faith and belief in Allah and the Last Day starting from the way you receive the Divine Rulings and obligations and down to your faith in the fact that you will be punished for violating such rulings on the Last Day. This is due to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* did not make the worldly life a place for punishment.'

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, 'That is better and fairer in the end.' (*an-Nisa’:* 59) This means that the act of obeying Allah and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by referring disputed issues to Him *the Almighty* and to Prophet Muhammad is best for both the rulers and the ruled. This is due to the fact that the good stems mainly from man’s determination to do and pursue what benefits him both in this worldly life and the Hereafter. As a matter of fact, if we consider the benefits to be obtained from any of the worldly desires, we will fully realise that satiating any or all of them only pleases you for a moment and then evil ensues.

Ta’wil is the Arabic word that translates to 'in the end' and means to refer the matter to its actual and original ruling. It is derived from *al/Ya’ul*, which means to return. In this respect, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'better in the end' means the best return and consequence because in the event of one only caring about achieving his worldly interests, his final destination will undoubtedly be evil and bad. It is therefore better for one to do what will lead him to be admitted into paradise. The phrase "*Wa Ahsanu Ta'wila*" in this context may also refer to the deduction of judgments and rulings since scholars do so based on their understanding of the sayings of Allah and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, you may understand the Divine Commands in respect to your own interests and whims. Therefore, it goes without saying that the proper understanding of the meanings of the Divine Commands and Obligations will keep you from erring and deviating from the righteous path.

Therefore, if you really pursue goodness, you should do so in all times and under all circumstances. One should not consider goodness that only satisfies his interests and serves his desires. Rather, he should pursue the kinds of goodness that results in no evil. If we consider the history of many rulers, we may find that some of them escaped criticism and punishment for what they did due to the oppression and coercion they exercised. However, when they died, their evil doings started to be exposed, and the campaigns against them started to emerge. It is thus the duty of every ruler to consider and learn from the examples of those who ruled before him, those who silenced the mouths and broke the pens of writers. However, after they died, the tongues and pens of their people started to curse them. Therefore, we must make sure to keep in mind the best end we want for ourselves and act accordingly. Whoever is capable of protecting himself during his life through his power and influence may fail to protect his reputation and history, posthumously. After his influence came to an end, people would start to condemn and belittle him even while we are still in this worldly life and before making our transition to the Hereafter. If this is the punishment meted out by the creation, imagine what would be the punishment meted out by Allah *the Almighty*?!

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'that is better and fairer in the end' (*an-Nisa':* 59) means that this is the best destiny one should aspire to. He *the Almighty* then says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يَزۡعُمُونَ أَنَّهُمۡ ءَامَنُواْ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ مِن
قَبۡلِكَ يُرِيدُونَ أَن يَتَحَاكَمُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱلطَّٰغُوتِ وَقَدۡ أُمِرُوٓاْ أَن يَكۡفُرُواْ بِهِۦ
وَيُرِيدُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ أَن يُضِلَّهُمۡ ضَلَٰلَۢا بَعِيدٗا ٦٠

Do you [Prophet] not see those who claim to believe in what has been sent down to you, and in what was sent down before you, yet still want to turn to unjust tyrants for judgement, although they have been ordered to reject them? Satan wants to lead them far astray [60] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 60)

We explained previously that the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Do you [Prophet] not see…?' is an interrogative expression that basically means 'Have not you learnt or known?' It is usually used if what is known was previously discussed or what is known was obvious enough for you to notice or to understand it. We also know that He *Glorified is He* used this particular expression of 'Do you [Prophet] not see…?' in the reference to addressing issues which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* - the addressed person- was not aware of. He *the Almighty* did so to indicate to us that we have to firmly believe in what He *Glorified is He* says even if it was an act of informing about what had happened in the past. We must truly believe in this in the same way we believe in the actual and real existence of objects upon seeing them with our own eyes. That is due to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is more trustworthy than our own eyes. Without a doubt, your eyes may deceive you, but Allah *the Almighty* would never deceive any of us.

The saying of Allah, 'Do you [Prophet] not see those who claim to believe in what has been sent down to you, and in what was sent down before you…' refers specifically to the hypocrites and some of the people of the Book who purported to have faith in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. *Az-z'am*, or claiming, is the pretext for lying. The hypocrites and some of the people of the Book claim that they believed in what has been sent down to him (Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, which is the Quran. They also claim that they believed in what has been sent down before him which are the Torah and the Gospel. Having falsely claimed belief, they ironically want to turn to unjust tyrants for judgment.

At-Tahakum ila As-Shay', or turning to something for judgment, means to seek the help and adjudication of a particular thing to settle and putting an end to the issue of dispute. When we say, 'We have turned to the rule of so and so', this means that we have become fed up with disputes and discord and want to come to a consensus by turning to the rule of someone. As a matter of fact, any two litigating parties would not agree to turn to the rule of a particular system or person unless they are really tired of disputes and arguments. This means that they must be in disagreement on a particular matter or issue, and they are exhausted of arguing about it.

We previously explained that the word *At-Taghut* refers to a person who is enticed and lured into becoming more unjust and tyrannical; the more people submit to and obey him. There are indeed tyrants who immensely enjoy wronging people so much so that they realise others fear them. This point is definitively proven by the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *az-Zukhruf* in which He *Glorified is He* explains that when Pharaoh incited his people to levity, they obeyed him. (*az-Zukhruf:* 54)

The one who does so is thus called *Taghut*, or an unjust tyrant, to show how extreme his injustice is. This word in question, *Taghut*, is used mainly to refer to the one who does injustice frequently. It also refers to those who are falsely worshipped beside Allah and who have enacted legislations including commands and prohibitions; it may refer to Satan who tempts people or even to a tyrannical ruler whom people greatly fear his tyranny. Any of these forms squarely falls under the category of *At-Taghut.* Arab grammarians still hold the position that this particular Arabic word *At-Taghut* is used to indicate the singular and the plural forms of the noun; this point is proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which He *Glorified is He* plainly clarifies that He is the guardian of those who believe and that He brings them out of the darkness into the light; and (as to) those who disbelieve, their guardians are *At-Taghut* who take them out of the light into the darkness. (*al-Baqara:* 257). In this aforementioned verse of *Al-Baqara*, the word *Taghut* is used to indicate the plural even though it is in the singular form. The same word in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *an-Nisa'*: '… though they were commanded to deny him' is used to refer to the singular.

Thus, it is quite clear now that this particular word, *At-Taghut,* may be used either in reference to a singular or a plural noun. Undoubtedly, all the rulings of the Quran may have particular causes of revelation; thus, it is not right to confine or restrict the ruling to a particular case for which it was revealed. Rather, we can apply it and extend it to other matters if they share the same condition and reasons. This is based on the following maxim which states, 'It is the generality of the subject matter of the ruling that should be taken into account, and not the specificity of the situation wherein it was revealed.'

This verse was revealed in connection with an incident that occurred with a hypocrite called Bishr. A dispute flared up between him and a Jew, and the Jew wanted to defer to the rule of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, the hypocrite wanted Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf to arbitrate. The Jew, from his perspective, was certain that he would be entitled to win the dispute, so he did not ask for the judgment of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of love for him, but rather, out of love for his justice. For this reason, he preferred the one whom he thought would judge justly. He thus asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to arbitrate their dispute, while the hypocrite who allegedly declared to be a Muslim, while concealing his hatred towards Islam, asked to refer the dispute to Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf. This proves the verity of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in delivering and carrying out the Divine Order to judge amongst people justly.

In fact, the fact that the Jew wanted to defer to the rule of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly indicates the Jew’s absolute confidence that the Prophet would never dissipate his right. He did not even ask to defer to the rule of one of the leaders of the Jews the like of Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf since he knew that Ibnul Ashraf used to take bribes.

Allah *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying, '… Satan wants to lead them far astray?’ As a matter of fact, if they deferred to the rule of an unjust tyrant, like in this case Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf, and he judged in favour of the one who had no right, such a judgment would entice everyone who wanted to commit injustice to go to this unjust judge and to defer to his rule. Allah *the Almighty* describes this act as leading them far astray since injustice will subsequently ensue. Thus, the unjust judge would bear the sin of every case in which he passes a false judgment. This is actually the true meaning of *Ad-Dalal Al-Ba'id*, or leading them far astray. He *Glorified is He* then says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمۡ تَعَالَوۡاْ إِلَىٰ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ وَإِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ رَأَيۡتَ
ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنكَ صُدُودٗا ﴿٦١﴾

When they are told, 'Turn to God's revelations and the Messenger [for judgement],' you see the hypocrites turn right away from you [Prophet] [61] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 61)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Turn to…' infers the meaning of calling upon them to come to Him. It is noteworthy to mention that He *the Almighty* did not use the verb *A'qbilu* since it means that one is going to someone who is equal to him. However, the word *Ta'alaw* means 'to go to someone who is of higher rank and who is more exalted.' To further this point, it is of great importance to note that laws enacted and made by human mind are lower in rank than those enacted by Him *the Almighty*. It is taken for granted that such laws made by human mind and those which pertain to the protection and preservation of societies assume legislators' good intentions and sincerity are clearly shown and are always commensurate with their level and capacity to deduce conclusions and correctly reading the circumstances surrounding them.

However, laws enacted by Allah *the Almighty* are naturally more superior to those made by humans since He *Glorified is He* does not miss any particular aspect no matter how small it is. Human legislation, on the other hand, is always associated with a particular situation which may change as events develop. Human laws thereby fall short of assimilating and dealing with what is new. This is due to the emergence of new developments and events that were not taken into consideration by the one who enacted the laws and who, at that time, assumed that they were capable of preserving society. In other words, the mind of the one who enacted the law was thus incapable of conceiving such new developments or anticipating them at that particular of time of making them. Furthermore, most laws are amended only after the legislator fully realises their bad effects on society, the effects which result from the original state of the law made by him. Thus, when new events came into existence and such a law became unable to address their situation, there was a dire need to amend it.

As for Allah's Legislation, it fully protects society by precluding these events from happening from the very beginning. This is the difference between human legislation and laws that are often introduced to save us from provisional and transient events and the Divine Legislation that is intended to safeguard us against the very possibility of such events. Therefore, we can clearly state that laws made by humans look like treatment given to a patient, whereas Divine Legislation is like protective medicine. It is taken for granted that protection is always better than treatment.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* revealed a number of legislations that protect us from and immunise us against the evil that may evolve from the occurrence of certain events. Thus, He *the Almighty* by virtue of these Divine Laws fully safeguards man from being afflicted with any harm. Therefore, the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty* decrees that some people will surely be kept away from being inflicted with any harm. Manmade laws, on the other hand, always leave behind victims. Only upon seeing these victims, do the hearts of legislators feel compassionate and sympathetic and decide to change the law they have previously set.

Regarding laws of a positive nature, some people are often obligated to bear the brunt of injustice more than others since these laws are incapable of protecting and preserving man from a comprehensive perspective. By the passage of time, legislators find themselves forced to interfere by amending their previously set laws. Thus, certain group of people will have to suffer from injustice till these laws are modified and amended. As for the Creator *Glorified is He* He knows His creation quite well. For this reason, He *the Almighty* did not commit any injustice to anyone of His creation at the expense of the other. He laid down His Divine Legislations in a just manner. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* strongly stresses the point that He *Glorified is He* reveals of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers. (*al-Isra': 82*)

The Quran gives us healing for diseases that may afflict and befall us due to carelessness. Furthermore, it is viewed as a mercy, thus fully preventing afflictions and disease. Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'When they are told, “Turn to Allah’s Revelations and the Messenger [for judgement]", you see the hypocrites turn right away from you [Prophet]' completely exposes and unveils the acts committed by hypocrites, and, as a result, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the entire society will be fully aware of them.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…you see the hypocrites turn right away from you [Prophet]' means that they turn their backs right away from you, Prophet Muhammad because they are hypocrites. In truth, every hypocrite suffers from two main problems: a problem related to his tongue and another related to his heart. Verbally, using his tongue, he declares his faith in Allah and His Messenger, Muhammad. However, his heart, meanwhile, is full of contradictory and ambivalent attitudes. This is entirely different from the case of a true believer and even one of a disbeliever. As for a true believer, his faculties are in harmony with each other since his heart has decided to believe and guide him towards the righteous path. Similarly is the case of a disbeliever who is led to the way of destruction and not in harmony with his faculties. The hypocrite, on the other side, disperses his energy and faculties. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* states clearly that hypocrites will be in the lowest level of the fire. A disbeliever is consistent with himself; he does not declare faith since his heart is not convinced. He could have pretended to have faith, but he did not verbally claim what his heart opposes. His antagonism towards Islam is thus obvious. However, a hypocrite apparently claims to have faith in public only to attain his goals or in order to take advantage of the rulings of Islam. Yet, he would eagerly seize any opportunity to give up or attack Islam; this point is strongly stressed by Allah *the Almighty* in the following verse in which He *Glorified is He* states:

فَكَيۡفَ إِذَآ أَصَٰبَتۡهُم مُّصِيبَةُۢ بِمَا قَدَّمَتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ ثُمَّ
جَآءُوكَ يَحۡلِفُونَ بِٱللَّهِ إِنۡ أَرَدۡنَآ إِلَّآ إِحۡسَٰنٗا وَتَوۡفِيقًا ﴿٦٢﴾

If disaster strikes them because of what they them- selves
have done, then they will come to you, swearing by God,
‘We only wanted to do good and achieve harmony' [62]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 62)

Thus, the hypocrites are faced with the following question: 'Why did you defer to the rule of unjust tyrants instead of resorting to Prophet

Muhammad?' The answer they are expected to give is the following: 'O, Prophet Muhammad! We only wanted to do well and not to burden you with our problems. Furthermore, we wanted to settle our problems and disputes not involving you so that you would not worry yourself about our problems. As a matter of fact, we never intended by acting as such to disobey you, nor were we disappointed with your judgement.' Truthfully speaking, they claim so after they had been exposed before people by Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'If disaster strikes them…' the word *Musibah*, or calamity is the disaster that causes harm to a person. Since they are hypocrites, they wanted to keep their hypocrisy secret. Thus, when an event results in revealing this secret, it is considered a calamity even though the event itself is not a disaster. As a matter of fact, when we identify hypocrites and expose them before themselves and others, we thus protect ourselves from their evil. However, this exposure is a calamity for them since they wanted to use such hypocrisy to attain personal goals

Thus, revealing their hypocrisy is a disaster for them. They believe that hypocrisy is useful for them as they benefit from the rulings of Islam and its implementation. However, when their hypocrisy is revealed, they are struck with a calamity, exactly like someone who went out to steal and was surprised upon entering the site of his crime to see the police waiting to arrest him Undoubtedly, when the police arrested this thief, this would be considered something good for him since the act of arresting prevented him from committing the crime of theft. Yet, the thief himself would think that he had been struck with a disaster.

When hypocrites are struck with a disaster, they make false oaths in the Name of Allah, and then try to apologise for what they did. They actually do so since they want to remain in permanent hypocrisy. Therefore, they swear to Allah that they deferred to the rule of unjust tyrants since they only wanted to settle their disputes and to achieve harmony with their adversaries. However, Allah *the Almighty* stresses this fact in the following verse in which He states:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَعۡلَمُ ٱللَّهُ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمۡ فَأَعۡرِضۡ عَنۡهُمۡ
وَعِظۡهُمۡ وَقُل لَّهُمۡ فِيٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ قَوۡلَۢا بَلِيغٗا ٦٣

God knows well what is in the hearts of these people,
so ignore what they say, instruct them, and speak to
them about themselves using penetrating words [63]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 63)

How great is the Knowledge of Allah *the Almighty*! He *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him that* had He so willed, He would have made him know them so that he would certainly recognise them by their marks, and most certainly he can recognise them by the intent of (their) speech. (*Muhammad:* 30)

This means that had Allah *the Almighty* so willed, He could have informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* of the hypocrites so that he could easily and clearly identify them. However, He *Glorified is He* concealed them in the hope that they would repent. He *the Almighty* then told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he would be able to identify them through their style and discourse.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Allah knows well what is in the hearts of these people…' The hypocrites resorted to unjust tyrants for arbitration. They did so because they knew that they were not right. In addition, they knew that if they referred the dispute to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he would judge justly. However, these hypocrites are really annoyed with the application of justice. So, the question to be asked here is the following: 'Did they really want to do well and to bring about harmony? Or did they not want to seek the truth and Justice?' They sought false judgment.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ignore what they say since he (Prophet Muhammad) punished them, which means that he took revenge on them. However, Allah did not want him to do so since He *the Almighty* wanted to retaliate on his behalf. In addition, he (Prophet Muhammad) did so since He *Glorified is He* wanted their true intentions to be gradually revealed and exposed to the society of believers. This way, believers would know that there were people who infused themselves subtly into their community. For this reason, you (O, Muslims) have to be careful and cautious. Furthermore, if you leave them alone and turn away from them, you will no longer occupy your mind with calling them to Islam.

He *the Almighty* then tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to 'instruct them.' This means the following: 'Tell them (O, Prophet Muhammad) to be ashamed of their deeds.' He *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying, '…and speak to them about themselves using penetrating words.' This part of the verse implies an order to Prophet Muhammad to call them in such a way that would reveal to them the ultimate objective and purpose of the human soul and which, meanwhile, would achieve the goals of admonition.

In other words, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to warn them (hypocrites) in a way that terrifies, deters them (from the evil consequences of hypocrisy) or even exposes what they have concealed in their hearts so that they would know that Allah has revealed to him (Prophet Muhammad) what they hide and veil in the hope that they might be ashamed of what they do and thus refrain from doing it. Their intentions should be exposed to them, but not publicly because if he were not exposing them in public, they may feel shy enough to quit their hypocrisy. Furthermore, he should do as such since any admonition will achieve a good effect if the admonisher puts forward his admonition privately. In reality, exposing the one to be admonished in public may provoke his stubbornness. But if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* admonishes him privately, he would realise that he is still merciful towards him, by dealing with him in a good and lenient manner.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'instruct them, and speak to them about themselves using penetrating words' thus indicates that if he (Prophet Muhammad) were to do so (expose them) in public, he will set this as an example for others to follow. Allah has already revealed solely to him the disbelief in the hearts of disbelievers. Indeed, He *the Almighty* did not reveal such secrets to anyone but him (Prophet Muhammad). As a matter of fact, there are some people who are falsely accused of disbelief. This happens in spite of the fact that our *Shari'a* tells us to ward off legal punishments when there is doubt and uncertainty involved.

A case in point is when a thief is caught, but there is still doubt as to whether or not he was the perpetrator of the crime in question. This doubt consequently should be interpreted in the interest of the defendant. Thus, we should avoid the administration of the penalty due to the existence of doubt. It is indeed not in the interest of Muslims to say daily that the hand of a thief has been cut off or that an adulteress has been stoned to death. However, if a crime is discovered and there is no doubt about the identity of its perpetrator, then the proper penalty should be administered and imposed. We avoid administering penalties so that we avoid harming an innocent person. Yet, we administer the penalties to deter everyone whose inner self may feel tempted to do something prohibited by Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, when a penalty is administered in a given community, it is only carried out for a short period of time until the rate of crimes shrinks, to the extent that there are no longer thefts or fornications being committed.

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'instruct them, and speak to them about themselves using penetrating words' carries an order to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to seriously threaten them so that they would be deterred from doing wrong. It may also indicate that he (Prophet Muhammad) is supposed to reveal and expose to them their concealed flaws and mistakes, yet he should do so privately since this is more likely to make them accept his admonition and refrain from being stubborn.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (5)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (5)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (5)

The Chapter of

an-Nisa’

Continued

He *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذ
ظَّلَمُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ جَآءُوكَ فَٱسْتَغْفَرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ
ٱلرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٦٤﴾

All the messengers We sent were meant to be obeyed, by God's leave. If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves, and begged God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found that God accepts repentance and is most merciful [64] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 64)

The main purpose of sending the truth to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to teach people the *Shari'a* laid down by Him *the Almighty* as manifested in the course He *Glorified is He* set and to guide them to the true religion. This course involves a set of rules in the form of 'dos' and 'don'ts.' Yet, whatever matter for which there is no explicit commands as to whether or not one should do it, one is thus free to choose whatever suits his case. Indeed, no Prophet brought about legal obligations from his own mind; rather, all legal obligations are decreed by Him *the Almighty*. Thus, a Messenger is only obeyed due to the authorisation granted to him by Allah. Therefore, obedience to Allah is clearly manifested by obeying Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Likewise, he may be authorised by Allah in other matters. This is quite clear in the Divine Order in the chapter of *al-Hashr* in which Allah orders us to accept willingly whatever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us and to refrain from what he prohibits us: 'whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain from it.' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

This clearly indicates that those who truly believe in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have to obey him in light of the authorisation given to him by Allah *the Almighty* to enact laws.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves, and begged Allah's Forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would be found that Allah accepts repentance and is most Merciful', *Zhulm an-Nafs*, or sinning against oneself, happens when one hastens to satiate a desire without carefully considering the suffering he will afflict himself with. Undoubtedly, 'sinning against oneself' is the most egregious form of injustice one could commit. It is plausible that one may wrong another person, but to intentionally wrong oneself seems rather implausible. Any sinner, who does not fulfil an enacted legal obligation and pursues something prohibited by Allah *the Almighty* may be under the false impression that he has achieved a gratification when, in fact, what he is really doing, is a great injustice to himself. This is why we say to the one who commits sins like refraining from offering prayers and being lazy about performing them, drinking wine or committing any other form of sin: 'You have wronged yourself since you have mistakenly thought that you were gratifying and enjoying it, when in fact, you have incurred by doing it severe and eternal suffering. You cannot thereby be entrusted with yourself.'

The 'self', as we know, refers to the union of the soul with physical form. This union is what causes the human self to be either *Nafsun Mutma'innah*, or a tranquil self, or *Nafsun Ammarah bi As-Su'*, or a self that incites one to do wrong, or *Nafsun Lawwamah*, or a reproaching self. Once the soul is united with its physical form, the human self comes into existence. Before being unified with its physical form, the soul is good by nature, and so is its physical form prior to being united with the soul. In fact, the physical form is subservient and subdued to the Will of Allah *the Almighty* and thus acts according to His Commands. Thus, we shall never differentiate between the soul and its physical form by calling them as follows: 'the material life is such and such, while the spiritual life is such and such.' This is completely wrong.

The physical form is good in an absolute sense, obedient and subservient to Allah *the Almighty* and so is the soul. So, when does corruption ensue? Undoubtedly, when the soul is unified with its physical form and this integration between both of them occurs, we say, 'O, man, who is legally charged! Are you going to eagerly obey the Commands of Allah *the Almighty* and thus acquire a reassured soul? Or will you choose for your soul to be a reproaching one? Or will you choose to show disobedience to Allah and, as a result, acquire a soul which is a persistent enjoiner of evil?

This raises a question, 'Who wrongs whom?' It is your human desire when violating the Rules of Allah that it wrongs the unity of the soul and matter. As a matter of fact, when one commits a sin, he mistakenly thinks that he has satiated his, yet he did not taken into consideration the fact that by doing this crime, he has caused himself much trouble. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves… Let us then distinguish that there is a difference between someone committing a sin to satisfy his lust and another who wrongs himself. This difference is quite clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Al-'Imran* in which He *Glorified is He* encourages those who commit an act of indecency or an injustice against their souls to remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their souls: 'And those who, when they commit a foul deed or wrong themselves, remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins…' (*Al-'Imran:* 135).

Therefore, this indicates clearly that committing a shameful deed and sinning against oneself are two different things. By committing a shameful deed, one marginally gratifies himself. However, the one who sinned against himself did not do so; he neither gratified himself nor left it alone, and he did not satiate his lusts in this worldly life, nor did he mercifully protect it from torment in the Hereafter. A (false) witness who gives false testimony so that someone may take the right of another is committing an egregious sin against himself. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is reported to have said, 'Hasten to do good deeds before you are overtaken by tribulations which would be like a part of the dark night. A man would be a believer in the morning and become a disbeliever in the evening, or he would be a believer in the evening and become a disbeliever in the morning. He would sell his Faith for worldly goods.'(1)

In addition, one may sin against himself by deferring to the rule of the powers of evil or unjust tyrants. However, when one defers to the rule of a ruler or a judge, he, while doing so, does not know for certain whether the ruler or judge will pass the verdict or the judgement correctly or not.

Therefore, Allah's saying, '…If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves…' indicates that they refrained from going to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, the first step of their repentance is to retract what they have committed, and then they should seek Allah's forgiveness for their sins. Truly, the sin they committed by not going to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* plainly means sinning against the One Who sent him *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, people say, 'Insulting Prophet Muhammad means insulting the One Who sent him.' It is true that their refraining from going to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a matter that concerns him, but if you carefully reflect on the matter, you will fully realise that it is concerns the One Who sent him, or, namely, Allah *the Almighty*. This is due to the fact that he did not do anything of his own accord. After Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sufficiently conciliated, he will ask Allah to forgive them. Thus, they must first go to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; second, they must ask Allah for forgiveness and third, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would then ask Allah to forgive them.

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(1) *Muslim, Sahih*

He *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying, '…they would have found that Allah accepts repentance and is most merciful.' This part of the verse clearly indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* will not accept their repentance, nor will He show Mercy to them unless they return to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instead of turning their backs to him. Then, they are supposed to ask Allah for forgiveness since He *the Almighty* did not send any Messenger or Prophet but to be obeyed by His Leave. Thus, if you ever disagree with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you should take into account the fact that you have actually disagreed with the One Who sent him, namely, Allah *the Almighty*. Actually, if you have asked Allah *the Almighty* for forgiveness without conciliating Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* He will not accept your repentance. No one can strengthen his relation with Allah *Glorified is He* without improving his relation with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the first place.

When they fulfil all these requirements, which include going to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asking Allah and him for their forgiveness, they will find that Allah accepts their repentance and is most Merciful. The word *Tawwab*, or acceptor of repentance, indicates that their sin was great and major.

Allah *the Almighty* created His creation knowing that their thoughts and desires are subject to change and that desires might flare up in their selves at any given moment, causing them to slip into sinning. Since our Lord is the Most Merciful, He explained to us the remedy to such forgetfulness. It is inconceivable that He *the Almighty* would abandon His sinful servants. This is why He allowed His sinful servants to return to Him because He *Glorified is He* likes His servants to repent and take refuge in Him even if they sinfrequently.

Therefore, He *the Almighty* teaches us how to remove the effects of sins. He thus said: '…If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves…' The remedy for a given sin is to return to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since they were forgetful and careless of the fact that Allah's Commands and His message, along with His Legislation and Rulings, was conveyed to them by Prophet Muhammad and is revealed from Allah. After submitting and returning to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they should ask Allah for forgiveness, along with asking him to beseech Allah for their forgiveness and to support their repentance. If they do so, they will find that Allah accepts their repentance and that He is Most Merciful. He *Glorified is He* and then says:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ
لَا يَجِدُوا۟ فِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا۟ تَسْلِيمًا (٦٥)

By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute, and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them totally [65] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 65)

Thus, we should support our faith by accepting and embracing all what has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, just as much as the hypocrites asked someone else to adjudicate amongst them, despite their ostensibly embracing of Islam, they were banished out of sphere of faith. All believers should heed this example.

We must note that the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'By your Lord, they will not believe…' contains the Arabic particle *La* which indicates negation. It also clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* had sworn by Himself. We know that that hypocrites had deferred to the rule of someone other than Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even though they had professed that he is the Messenger of Allah. So, is it conceivable for them to admit such a testimony, and then seek another judge and refuse to accept his *peace and blessings be upon him* judgment? Allah passed His Judgment on this matter. He *Glorified is He* plainly states that hypocrites, by doing so, can no longer be called Muslims. Thus, if it is confirmed that they testified that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and at the same time, they resorted to another arbitrator beside him, then, they should know that Allah's Judgment on the matter is that they do not merit the honour of professing that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Allah *the Almighty* then swore by Himself. As a matter of fact, we, human beings, are not allowed to swear except in the in the Name of Allah, but Allah *Glorified is He* may swear in the name of whatever thing He likes and about whatever thing He wills. That is why we find Him *the Almighty* in many verses in the Quran swearing by Mount Sinai (*at-Tur:* 1), *adh-Dhariat*, or winds that scatter the dust far and wide (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1), *at-Tin* and *az-Zaytun*, or figs and olives (*at-Tin:* 1) and the angels (*as-Saffat:* 1).

However, as far as humans are concerned, we find that He *the Almighty* did not swear by anyone except His Messenger Muhammad. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* swears by the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. (*al-Hijr:* 72)

In this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Hijr,* He *the Almighty* swears by the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they were blindly wandering, intoxicated. This means that they are astray inasmuch as they continue in their state of being misguided, and thus, they can never be guided to the truth. He *Glorified is He* also swears by Himself as plainly stated in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat* in which he *the Almighty* swore by being the Lord of the heavens and the earth. (*adh-Dhariyat:* 23) As a matter of fact, when He *the Almighty* swears by the heavens and earth, this clearly indicates how great these two creatures are, which is a point that is strongly stressed by the verse in which He *the Almighty* states that the creation of the heavens and the earth is indeed greater than that of man. (*Ghafir:* 57) This means that if you, human being, draw a comparison between the creation of the heavens and the earth and your creation, you will fully realise that their creation is greater than yours.

The verse under discussion plainly indicates Allah's Honouring Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, it definitively proves the high status and superiority of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, do not think (O, mankind) that when Allah *the Almighty* states that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of man that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is included amongst the men referred to in this verse. He *the Almighty* explains that this is not the case by swearing in the name of the life of Prophet Muhammad in the same way He *Glorified is He* swore in the name of the heavens and the earth. Undoubtedly, swearing by the fact of being the Lord of the heavens and the earth points out the Absolute and the Ultimate Power of Allah *the Almighty;* He is the Creator, the Lord, the Protector and the Lord.

The cosmic law suffices for the purpose of creating the heavens and the earth and running their affairs properly. However, the creation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can be interpreted as a supreme goal, meaning that He *the Almighty* wanted to bring him up in a way that encompasses all the graces of prophecy. He *Glorified is He* thus told him: 'By your Lord Who created, fashioned, brought up and qualified you to be the best of His Creation and the seal of His Prophets and to be a Mercy to His entire Creation, they will not truly believe until they let you decide between them in all matters of disputes.' Is it inconceivable after all of this not to let Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* decide in all matters of disputes among you?!

Hakkam is an Arabic verb that is translated by the verbal clause 'to let you decide between them in all the matters of dispute'; it shares the same linguistic root with judgment, arbitration, wisdom and control. All these semantic references are derived from the word *Al-Hakamah,* which is the iron-brace, placed in the mouth of the horse to keep it from going astray and is used by the owner or rider of the horse to direct him to the right or to the left. Similarly, *Al-Hikmah*, or wisdom, is to keep everyone from going astray and appropriating other people's rights. Thus, arbitration, judgment and wisdom are all words that refer to the importance of placing things in their right and due positions.

The verb *Shajara*, which means disagree, is derived from the root composed of the three letters: *Ash-Shin*, *Al-Jim* and *Ar-Ra'*. If you see these three letters in any given word, then you shall know that it is derived from the word *Shajarah*, or tree, with which you are familiar. In fact, there are certain plants that do not stick to each other. Yet, there are others that stick closely to each other and interweave together. For instance, we see certain kinds of trees that are often intertwined with each other and that have branches closely interlaced to the extent that the beholder will not be able to distinguish which leaves belong to which tree. Furthermore, if the two trees were of the same kind and they bore their fruits, you would not even be able to tell which fruits came from which tree. This means that things have become mixed with each other.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty Shajara Baynahum*, translated as 'disagree among themselves' means that a dispute has flared up, and things have become so intricate and confused with each other. When you try to separate between two intertwined trees of the same kind or distinguish their fruits from each other, you will not be able to do so since you will find that their identical branches have been interlaced with each other. However, if you are mainly interested in reaping the fruits of both trees, it will not make a difference which fruits come from which tree. You will just reap the fruits wherever they are, irrespective of the tree that bore it. Similarly, if you wanted to spend some time under the shade of a tree, you would not mind which tree is casting the shade you enjoy. This is the benefit of blending two equals with each other. However, if one wants a specific leaf, he will carefully choose it because he needs it for a specific purpose.

Naturally, the entire creation of Allah *the Almighty* is equal before Him. Thus, they were supposed to share property equally among themselves when they started to mingle and deal with each other. However, due to the fact that the human soul tends to be stingy by nature, people started to fight over property. For this reason, an intelligent judge must say to disputants, 'Do you want me to judge amongst you fairly and justly or based on what is better than justice?’ The two may then be taken aback and wonder, 'Is there anything better than justice?’ The judge may then answer, 'Yes, grace is better than justice, for as long as the subject matter of dispute is amongst brothers, then the interest of each party cannot be at odds with the interest of the other. Accordingly, there should be no dispute.' However, if there is disagreement, someone has to decisively arbitrate between the two altercating parties.

Who, then, can undertake this mission of judging disputes? It is undoubtedly our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is based and proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in which He swore by Himself that they would not be true believers unless they let him (Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* decide in all matters of dispute amongst them. Faith is not merely a verbal utterance; rather, one must meet the requirements of faith to achieve this particular function. You, while embracing Islam, must say, 'I profess that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' However, in order for this utterance to be indicative of true faith, it has to be conjoined with action and the performance of action. Furthermore, one's life must be governed by this saying. Consequently, one must firmly believe that there is no one deserving to be worshipped except Allah *the Almighty*. Allah is the Only One Who issues (Divine) Commands. There is no benefactor except Him, and no one is capable of causing harm except Him *the Almighty*. Also, there is no legislator besides Him. Therefore, professing that there is no god but Allah is not merely a verbal utterance that you may completely ignore when you actually face a situation that calls for the application of the principle of faith. For example, Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that hypocrites will not believe in the religion of Islam until they wholeheartedly let him (Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) be the one to decide amongst them in all matters of dispute. Furthermore, they must find no resistance in their souls to his judgment. Moreover, they must completely accept the judgements and verdicts given by him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Thus, faith is not a mere verbal utterance. Rather, it entails the practical application of such statement by resorting and referring to it for day-to-day life chores and activities. This means that hypocrites do not really believe unless they turn their faith into actual practice, undoubtedly, Allah has chosen the most critical time in the experience of the human soul, namely, the moment of rivalry and disagreement that causes enmity and abets one to deviate from the truth. Then, Allah *the Almighty* emphasises the fact that hypocrites must completely accept the judgement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *the Almighty* thus says: 'By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute, and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them completely.'

If we reflect carefully upon the three conditions: the first is 'If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves'; the second is 'and (they) begged Allah’s Forgiveness', while the third condition is 'and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them', we will find that these three represent the remedy for expiating sins. In the same respect, you are also admitted into the realm of faith upon meeting the following three conditions: the first is 'By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute'; the second is 'and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions'; while the third is 'accepting them completely.’ Thus, the two statements are about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: one pertaining to the removal of sins, while the other is concerned with faith.

I thus do not exaggerate if I say that I pondered on this saying of Allah for more than ten years, namely, 'If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves, and begged Allah’s Forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would be found that Allah accepts repentance and is most merciful.' This statement is an admonition and recipe for salvation that You, Allah, gave to the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, what about those who were not contemporaries of him *peace and blessings be upon him*? What admonition and recipe for salvation would You give them? In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all of mankind. So, how is it conceivable that there is an admonition that this addressed exclusively to only those who were contemporaries of him *peace and blessings be upon him* and of which those who have not seen and lived with him would be deprived?!

This question preoccupied my mind for a long time without reaching any decisive answer. However, I have reached the same conclusion of some scholars before me that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said the following Hadith as a means of comforting and conciliating believers during all times, 'My life is good for you. You will do things and things will be done to you. When I die, my death will also be good for you. Your deeds will be shown to me. If I see that you do good deeds, I will thank Allah for that, and if I see that you do evil deeds, I will ask Him *the Almighty* to forgive you.'(1) Consider the conciliating tone in the following saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* '…Your deeds will be shown to me (after my death). If I see that you do good deeds, I will be pleased, and if I see that you do evil deeds, I will ask Allah *the Almighty* to forgive you.'(2)

The fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will ask Allah *the Almighty* to forgive us is thus guaranteed. All what we have to do is to ask Allah *Glorified is He* for forgiveness. In other words, what remains for them is to return to him, or in other words, to adhere firmly to his *Sunnah*. Regarding this, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is reported to have said, 'I have left two matters with you. As long as you hold to them, you will not go astray. They are the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Prophet.'(3)

As much as the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to rely to him, we rely on his rulings, tradition and legislation. He thus asks forgiveness for all of us. What is left for us is to ask Allah for forgiveness by saying, 'We seek forgiveness from Allah, the Magnificent, whom there is none worthy of worship but Him, the Ever-Living, the Lord of all existence, and we repent to Him.' We will do so if Allah wills.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them completely'; means that they would not find any resentment or hesitancy in their heart when they accept and submit to any obligation or ruling decreed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Legal obligations, as we know, often assume the form of 'dos' or 'don'ts.' However, verdicts differ in that they are passed when people disagree with each other on a particular matter. This requires us to accept the verdict in any given dispute if it is issued by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, we have to submit completely to what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* decrees, whether it be a legal obligation or a verdict. He *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *As-Suyuti, Sahih*

(2) *Ibn Sa'd, Good*

(3) *Muawtta', Good*

وَلَوْ أَنَّا كَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَنِ ٱقْتُلُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ أَوِ ٱخْرُجُوا۟ مِن دِيَـٰرِكُم مَّا فَعَلُوهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ
مِّنْهُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ فَعَلُوا۟ مَا يُوعَظُونَ بِهِۦ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ تَثْبِيتًا ﴿٦٦﴾

if We had ordered, ‘Lay down your lives’ or ‘Leave your homes,’ they would not have done so, except for a few – it would have been far better for them and stronger confirmation of their faith, if they had done as they were told [66] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 66)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* equates the command of killing oneself to the command of forsaking one’s homeland. Killing signifies the departure of the soul from the body by a coercive force other than natural death. Similarly, the command to forsake one’s homeland is a coercive evacuation from one’s homeland. Therefore, the process of killing is described as being akin to, or as bad as, the process of being driven out of one’s homeland. Both cause suffering; both are difficult experiences for human beings.

The True Lord *the Most High* also mentions these two rulings that were imposed, at one time, upon the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and (remember) when Musa (Moses) said to his people, ‘O, my people! Verily, you have wronged yourselves by worshipping the calf. So turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves…’ (*al-Baqara:* 54).

It was narrated that when the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* heard this ruling, seventy thousands of them killed themselves. We also know that the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were driven out of their homes and wandered around in the desert. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Therefore, it (this holy land) is forbidden to them for forty years; in distraction they will wander through the land.' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 26) This means that they were forbidden to either enter or possess the holy land. In this respect, the True Lord *the Most High* clarifies that Islam, unlike the ordinances of previous Divine messages, did not rule that repentance should involve killing oneself. These laws were based on the threat of inevitable ruin of the person whose inner self tempts to violate Allah’s Law. It is out of Allah’s Kindness that He *the Most High* did not impose any such ruling on us. For this reason, our masters, 'Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud, ‘Ammar ibn Yassir and Thabit ibn Qays *Allah be pleased with them* collectively responded to this verse by saying, 'By Allah, if we were commanded to do so, we would have done it.' Our leader 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* also said, 'By Allah, if we were commanded to do so, we would have done it, but, praise be to Allah, He did not decree this upon us. This is due to Allah's Kindness. He *the Most High* explains to them that 'If We (Allah) had ordered them (saying), "Kill yourselves" or "Leave your homes"...' (*an-Nisa':* 66), as He had commanded the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* what would they have done then? Instead, our Lord accepted their supplication, 'Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which You did lay on those before us. Our Lord! Put not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear....' (*al-Baqara:* 286)

Allah *the Most High* answered their supplication. So, the question that arises is the following: 'What would you do if Allah had decreed such a ruling for you?' The reason underlying this story was that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a cousin named Az-Zubayr ibn Al-'Awwam *Allah be pleased with him* who was one of the Ten Given the Glad Tidings of Paradise. He and another man named Hatib ibn Abu Balt'a *Allah be pleased with him* used to live in Medina. Anyone who visits Medina knows that there is an area there called Al-Harrah where the ground is covered by black stones with a burnt-like appearance. There are also many *Hitan*, or gardens, in this area. People there used to call a garden *Ha'it,* which means wall; it had gotten this name due to the fear of the destruction of their land by floods, they used to build a wall around cultivated lands that would protect it from floods and delineate its borders. Hatib ibn Abu Balt'a *Allah be pleased with him* owned a piece of land that was lower than the land that was owned by Az-Zubayr*, Allah be pleased with him*. So the flood would flow downwards from the land of Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* to the land of Hatib *Allah be pleased with him*. We know that rain falls over a place in a scattered manner; subsequently, water from different directions converges into a rivulet which the Arabs called *Shiraj* and used to irrigate their lands.

When a flood occurred, both Az-Zubayr and Hatib *Allah be pleased with them* wanted to irrigate their lands, which resulted in a dispute between them. The land of Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* was higher than that of Hatib *Allah be pleased with him* who wanted the water to pass through his land first, and then have Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* start irrigating his land. When they asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to arbitrate between them, he passed a verdict in favour of Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* since justice was on his side. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would never infringe on someone else's right for the sake of kinship. Indeed, there are instances where, in order to gain fame for being just and fair, certain people make erroneous judgements. For example, someone's son may have a dispute with another person, and just for the sake of avoiding people thinking that he is biased towards his son, he may pass a judgment against him. This is unjust. Justice requires that you judge justly, and then ask your son to waive his right by way of favour. True courage consists in judging fairly, even if this judgment is against yourself since truth and justice should be dearer to you than your own self.

This incident is related by Imam Al-Bukhari *Allah be pleased with him* in his *Sahih* as follows: Abu Al-Yaman narrated on the authority of Shu‘aib, and he on the authority of Az-Zuhari, who narrated that ‘Urwa ibn Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* said that (his father) Az-Zubayr once disputed with an *Ansari* man, who was a participant in (the battle of) Badr, over a stream in Al-Harrah from which they both used to water their date palm trees. They brought their dispute before the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Az-Zubayr, 'O Zubayr, irrigate (your garden) first, and then let the water flow to your neighbour.' However, the *Ansari* man became angry and said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, is it because he (Az-Zubayr) is your cousin?' On that, the face of Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* changed colour (due to anger), and he said (to Az-Zubayr), 'Irrigate (your garden), and then hold the water till it rises up to the walls (the pits surrounding the palms).' Thus, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed Az-Zubayr to take his right in full, although before that he had suggested to Az-Zubair a middle course of action that suited them both. However, when the *Ansari* man made the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* angry, he gave Az-Zubair his right in full, as stated clearly in his ruling. `Urwah then added that Az-Zubayr said, 'By Allah, I think the following verse was revealed concerning this case: "But no, by your Lord, they can have no faith, until they make you (O, Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them."' (*an-Nisa': 65*) (1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the Book of Sulh (Reconciliation); Muslim in the Book of Fada'il (Merits), At-Tirmidhi in the Book of Ahkam (Legal Rulings), An-Nasa'i in the Book of Qudah (Judges) and Ibn Majah in Al-Muqadimah (Introduction)*

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ruled in favour of allowing Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* to irrigate his land and then to let the water flow down to his neighbour, Hatib ibn Abu Balt'a *Allah be pleased with him* disliked this verdict. He objected to it, saying that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ruled this way since Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* was his cousin. It was customary for Arabs to drop a subtle word only and leave the rest of the meaning to the insight of the listener to figure out. It was as if Hatib ibn Abu Balt'a *Allah be pleased with him* meant to say that he ruled in his favour because he is his cousin. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* therefore, became angry on realising that Ibn Abu Balt'a *Allah be pleased with him* did not appreciate the justice of a true verdict. Many of the people who searched for a way to attack Islam claimed that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* initially ruled that Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* should water his land and then let the water flow down to Hatib. However, when Hatib *Allah be pleased with him* was infuriated with the verdict, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* to water his land and to take his right in full, along with taking as much water as his land required, and then letting the water flow down to his neighbour. Therefore, they ask: Why did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* change his verdict?

Such people do not pay attention to the fact that the land that belonged to Az-Zubayr was high, whereas the land of Hatib was low. If you look at any valley, you will notice that fertility and greenness is often concentrated in the centre of the valley, and not at its periphery. Water always flows from a high ground to low ground. Accordingly, if you allow the owner of the lower land to irrigate his land first, the owner of the higher land will have nothing left for him.

This shows that the first ruling was based on facilitating matters and building tolerance on the part of Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him*. As for the second ruling, it was based entirely on justice and fair dealing. By the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* allowing Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* to exercise his full right and take as much water as he needed, it was as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying to Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with him* that he would deal with him justly without bias or considerations. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'But no, by your Lord, they can have no faith, until they make you (O, Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission.' (*an-Nisa':* 65)

If this was the order received from Allah, how would you react if such rulings, revealed to the prophets of previous nations, became binding upon you? In fact, when they were ordered to kill themselves or forsake their homelands, only a few, who had a firm and unwavering faith, fulfilled these orders. From this we can learn that Allah never leaves a nation completely devoid of those who adhere to His Laws and Commands and fulfil them as they ought to be fulfilled.

Concerning '…if they had done what they were told, it would have been better for them…' (*an-Nisa':* 66), assume that Allah ordered you 'Kill yourself' or 'Forsake your homeland' and people complied with His Order, they would find that their compliance with Allah's Order would bring them much more good than what they expected as opposed to refraining from what they were ordered. People should ask themselves, 'What is the purpose of having faith in Allah, and what is the use of such faith?'

Through out your worldly journey, you are experiencing and utilising the means and causes that Allah created for you. Why should you be upset about proceeding to live with the One Who initiates the cause of all causes? Why should you be upset if Allah said, 'Kill yourself'? He told you so because through death you are transferred back to the One Who initiates the cause of all causes and shall live forever without labour or toil.

The Rulings of Allah are always intended for the elevation of mankind. During our worldly lives, we see people who are given their food, ready to eat, just by ringing a bell. However, no matter how improved and advanced worldly life gets, it cannot reach the extent of having what one desires merely by thinking of it without even going through the trouble of ringing a bell or exerting any effort. So, why should any human who lives depending on means and causes and is about to proceed to live with the One Who initiates the cause of all causes be upset? On the contrary, they should be happy since they will find much more goodness. By comparing your worldly life to the Afterlife, you will discover that your stay in this world is uncertain and finite, along with the pleasure you experience in it being restricted by the limits of your own capacity. However, when you proceed to meet with Allah, you will cease to be finite, neither in terms of lifetime nor capacity. Rather, you will live eternally and the delights which you will have, will not be by human standards, but according to Allah’s Grace and Generosity.

Also, concerning '…if they had done what they were told, it would have been better for them and more strengthening (to faith) ' (*an-Nisa’:* 66), the goodness brought about will, indeed, be more strengthening to the faith of others since they who see them adhering to the Commands of Allah will learn with certainty that these commands would surely lead them to a much better end than their status quo. Thus, their obedience to Allah strengthens the faith of those who follow them. Or this verse could mean that if they abide by the Command of Allah, which entails following and obeying and complying with Prophet Muhammad's rulings, since he never says anything out of personal bias or interest, this would be for their own good both in this life and the Hereafter and would effectively strengthen and stabilise the faith in their hearts.

وَإِذٗا لَّأٓتَيۡنَٰهُم مِّن لَّدُنَّآ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمٗا ﴿٦٧﴾

And We would have given them a rich reward
of Our own [67] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 67)

If they had done what they were advised to do, then 'indeed We (Allah) should then have bestowed upon them a great reward from Ourselves' (*an-Nisa’:* 67). Once you hear 'from Ourselves' (*an-Nisa’:* 67) know that what follows is outside the power or action of any created being and is purely a bounty from Allah. The True Lord *the Most High* reveals to us His Path and Law through His Messengers, yet He *the Most High* explains that He has singled out some people for special bounties and gifted them with special knowledge out of His Grace. He is the One Who says: 'Then they found one of Our servants, unto whom We had bestowed mercy from Us, and whom We had taught knowledge from Us.' (*al-Kahf:* 65)

The previous noble verse signifies that the knowledge that Allah *the Most High* gave to this servant was unknown to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Allah’s bestowal of knowledge is determined by His Will, and we already know that good deeds and the rewards for them follow a specific system. Anyone who does a good deed is granted a tenfold reward in return, but there are certain good deeds that are rewarded without limit. Allah repays such deeds according to His Grace. We encounter instances of this in many of our life's dealings. Let me give you this simple example, and for Allah is the highest and loftiest description. For example, you may ask your son, 'How much will the payment be for this work?' He may answer, 'A hundred pounds.' You may then say, 'Here is a hundred for the work you are doing and an extra fifty pounds from me.' What does 'from me' mean in this context? It means that the extra fifty pounds do not have anything to do with the payment for the work he had done.

Based on what we have previously discussed concerning the part of the verse: '…if We (Allah) had ordered them (saying), "Kill yourselves"…' (*an-Nisa':* 66), there is a difference between killing and death. It is true that both of them involve the termination of life, but death is a termination of life without the destruction of the body. On the other hand, killing is a termination of life through the destruction of the body, as when someone breaks the head of someone else or shoots him with a bullet in the heart. This is a destruction of the biological functioning of the body. The soul cannot dwell except in a body with certain characteristics intact. In the latter case, the soul does not depart from the body first; rather, the body has been destroyed first. Once the body is destroyed, it no longer becomes fit to contain the soul. The well-known example is that of an electric bulb. If you throw a small pebble at it, it will shatter into pieces, and the light will go out even though electricity is still available. It can only generate light if it is contained in a vessel with specific characteristics intact. If these specific characteristics are eliminated, the light will go off as well. We thus need to get a new a bulb that has the proper specifications so as to get the light back.

The same holds for the soul; it can only dwell in a body of certain characteristics. If you damage these specific characteristics, the most important of which is the brain, by inflicting a severe blow to it, you will destroy the entire structure of the body. In this case, the soul departs from the body since it is no longer a proper dwelling for it. By contrast, death is a termination of life without bodily damage. The following saying of the True Lord *the Most High* establishes this point: 'Muhammad is no more than a Messenger and indeed (many) Messengers have passed away before him. If he dies or is killed, will you then turn back on your heels (as disbelievers)?' (*Al-'Imran:* 144)

Accordingly, there are two ways in which life may be terminated: either death by natural causes or by killing. Death is a deprivation of life, and so is killing. However, killing is a deprivation of life through the destruction of the physical container of the soul. It differs from death in that the soul departs from the body without killing. For this reason, we may hear people say, 'This person died on his bed even though nothing had happened to him.'

Our Lord says about the one who dies as a martyr for His Cause: 'Think not of those who are killed in the Way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are alive, with their Lord, and they have provision.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 169) If those who fight for the Cause of Allah will receive great bounties from Allah for having obeyed His Command, what would be the reward of those who kill themselves in compliance with His Order? The true examination of the self is always through the self itself, and not through its enemy.

What is distinctive about our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*? Did the True Lord *the Most High* tell him that He will cause his son to die? Or Did He *the Most High* inform him that another person would kill his son? No. Rather, Allah *the Most High* told him, 'Slay him yourself.' This is exaltation and purification of the human soul. Afterwards, Allah *the Most High* sent a great ram to be sacrificed instead of his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*. This signifies that the command to kill oneself must have been for a higher good: '…if they had done what they were told, it would have been better for them and more strengthening (to faith). And indeed We (Allah) should then have bestowed upon them a great reward from Ourselves.' (*an-Nisa’:* 66-67) The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَلَهَدَيْنَٰهُمْ صِرَٰطًا مُّسْتَقِيمًا ﴿٦٨﴾

And guided them to a straight path [68]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 68)

This passage proposes two options for us: either they should kill themselves or forsake their homeland. But to whom does the following saying of Allah apply: 'And indeed We (Allah) should have guided them to a Straight Way' (*an-Nisa’:* 68)? Is it addressed to those who were killed or to those who have forsaken their homeland? Rather, it is addressed to those who have forsaken their homeland because they are the ones who are still alive. Afterwards, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلرَّسُولَ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ
وَٱلصِّدِّيقِينَ وَٱلشُّهَدَآءِ وَٱلصَّٰلِحِينَۚ وَحَسُنَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ رَفِيقٗا ٦٩

Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth, and the righteous – what excellent companions these are! [69] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 69)

The command here is to 'obey', and the one who should be obeyed is Allah and His Messenger. This means that it is a Decree of Allah implemented by His Messenger, meaning, according to the Book of Allah *the Most High* and the *Sunnah*. When you see the word 'Messenger of Allah' associated with Allah through a conjunction without repeating the verb referring to each of them know that the matter at hand is one issue. In other words, it is not that each of them has a separate command. Rather, it is one command. It is an utterance and a decree by Allah and an application by the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* since he is the example to be followed. This is the reason why the True Lord *the Most High* says in another verse: '… they had said the word of disbelief and disbelieved after their (pretense of) Islam and planned that which they were not to attain. And they were not resentful except (for the fact) that Allah and His Messenger had enriched them of His bounty. So if they repent, it is better for them…' (*at-Tawba:* 74).

What this verse says is that it is not that Allah *the Most High* has enriched them in a way appropriate to Him and that the Messenger enriched them in a way that is appropriate to him. Enrichment in this context is from both Allah and His Messenger since everything Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did was in full compliance with the Command of His Lord. It is thus the same matter.

There is another matter which the Book of Allah addressed that preoccupied many contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

No one was denied sitting and convening with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Anyone who came to the Prophet was allowed to sit at any available place. The one who wanted to stay in the company of the Prophet continued to sit, whereas the one who wanted to see him every now and then was allowed to come whenever he wished. Thawban, the freed slave of Prophet Muhammad, loved the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* greatly and had no patience to stay away from him. He once came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* with his face pale and his body emaciated. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw the grief on his face, he asked him, 'What is wrong with you, O, Thawban?' He replied, 'I do not suffer from any sickness or ailment. I simply love and miss you. I know that I can see you in this world whenever I want, but in the Hereafter you will be in the highest level of paradise with the Prophets. If I am admitted to paradise, I will be in a lower degree than yours. And, if I am not admitted, I will not see you at all.'

Following is the text of the Hadith as it was related by Ibn Jarir, according to his chain of transmission, on the authority of Sa‘id ibn Jubayr: 'An *Ansari* man came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* while feeling sad. The Prophet asked him, "Why do I see you sad? " The man replied, "O, Prophet of Allah! It is due to something that I thought about." The Prophet asked, "What is it? " The *Ansari* man said, "We come to you day and night, looking at your face and sitting with you. Tomorrow, you will be elevated to the highest level of paradise along with the prophets and we will not be able to reach you." The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say anything, but later Jibril (Angel Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came down to him with the following verse, "And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad) shall be in the company of those upon whom Allah has bestowed His Grace – the Prophets…." (*an-Nisa': * 69) So the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sent someone to the man to give him the glad tidings.'(1) But how does one come to think so highly? This is a man who was so preoccupied with his love for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and was simply wondering if this bounty of being in the company of Prophet Muhammad *peace*

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Jarir.*

and blessings be upon him would last. He thought of the different degrees of Paradise and realised how the status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in paradise would be higher than that of anyone else. Thawban *Allah be pleased with him* only wanted to be assured that the bliss of seeing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not end. He was used to seeing him in this life, but then he thought about what might happen to him in the Afterlife. He might either be admitted to paradise or not. If he would not be admitted to Paradise, he would never see him. And, if he would enter paradise, the Prophet's level would be too high for him to reach. So what should he do?

Just consider how one ought to love the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Most High* is Kind and Merciful towards such a preoccupying love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that is scarcely experienced by most people. In this regard, the True Lord *the Most High* says by way of assurance to those who strongly love the Prophet: 'And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad)…' (*an-Nisa':* 69). This saying refers to those who are obedient to Allah *the Most High* and His Messenger and asserts that they '…shall be in the company of those upon whom Allah has bestowed His Grace – the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous. And how excellent these companions are!' (*an-Nisa':* 69)

This issue was related to Thawban *Allah be pleased with him* after having drawn the attention to an issue that may preoccupy the minds of those who strongly love Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He was comforted and assured that he will end up with the one whom he loved. However, the discourse is not limited to Thawban. The inquiry of Thawban was a cause for comforting and assuring all steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous. These categories encompass all believers. For instance, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was surnamed As-Siddiq, the epitome of being ever so truthful. Why? It was for his unwavering belief in and affirmation of everything that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said. He never questioned any of the Prophet's actions or sayings. When people once asked Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* 'How come your companion, Muhammad, claims that he visited Jerusalem and returned (to Arabia) in the same night, whereas it takes an onerous journey on camels to get there?' Thus, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* simply responded, 'If he said so, it must be true.' He wholeheartedly justified the honesty and truthfulness of the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by the conditional antecedent, 'If he said so,' a conditional meaning that if he said so, it must be true. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* believed whatever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* did not wait until Quranic verses were revealed to vindicate the claim of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Also, as soon as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declared, 'I am a Messenger', he responded affirmatively and immediately embraced Islam. Therefore, he was known As-Siddiq, or the epitome of being ever so truthful.

There were preludes in support of the truth of the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the early faith of those who first embraced Islam. The evidence upon which they based their faith preceded the Prophet's reception of Divine Revelation. They had personally experienced the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and knew him. So, when he started to communicate the Message of Islam, they immediately believed in him on the strength of the previous knowledge of and experiences with him, which indicated to them that he was truly a Messenger of Allah. A good illustrative example of this point was the response of Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told her, 'I fear for myself.' That is, he felt that something bad might happen to him, such as having a false vision or experiencing some evil from the devil. Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* said, 'Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones.'(1) This was the first legal inference in the history of Islam.

This is the meaning of '…shall be in the company of those upon whom Allah has bestowed His Grace – the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous…' (*an-Nisa':* 69) The martyrs are the ones who died in the Cause of Allah. However, when a believer fights for the cause of Allah, he should not say, 'I want to die as a martyr' and immediately jeopardises his life. Do not ever interpret the meaning of dying for the cause of Allah in this manner. You are defending a Divine message and should fight your enemy without giving him a chance to kill you. If you let him kill you, you will make the Muslims lose one who truly strives in His Path. Just as martyrs enjoy a special status and reward, those who fight for the cause of Allah and survive the battle also enjoy a special status and reward. Islam wants to put forward evidence in support of the truth of its message; this evidence is only furnished by martyrs.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

But could we all become martyrs? If so, who will communicate the Message of Allah to the rest of the people? We, therefore, want some people to stay and some to engage in striving and dying for the cause of Allah; each group has its own mission. For this reason, *At-Taqiya* which means concealing or disguising beliefs, feelings, opinions and/or strategies to save oneself from punishment, has been decreed as a legitimate practice. According to the principle of *At-Taqiya*, one may pretend to turn his back on Islam and outwardly show allegiance with disbelievers in order to preserve his life and to continue defending and fighting for the cause of Allah, on the condition that he hates and antagonises disbelieving warriors deep down in his heart. The reason why such a practice was decreed as permissible is that Islam wants to confirm through some believers the certainty of going to a better life if one were to die for the cause of Allah. Such truth is established by the martyrs. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* allows martyrs to see their blissful destination when their souls are about to depart their bodies. Martyrs then utter words heard by those who have not been granted martyrdom. For instance, some of them may say, 'Blow wind of Paradise, blow!' Or a martyr may utter a sentence indicating that he is actually looking at paradise so that those around him may hear him. The singular of *Shuhada'*, which isthe Arabic word meaning those who with their lives bore witness to the truth, is *Shaheed* which is the Arabic word meaning the one who is killed for a specific cause or principle; alternatively, *Shuhada'* could be the plural of *Shaheed* which is the Arabic word for witness. Thus, *As-Shuhada'* are the ones who bear witness before Allah that they conveyed to their successors the Message of Allah as much as the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* testified that he conveyed the Message of Allah to them.

All these meanings revolve around bearing witness about something that a martyr asserts. Thus, we thus realise that we need two categories of people: those who are killed for the Cause of Allah and those who survive death, also for the Cause of Allah. The former confirms the certainty of the blissful end and reward awaiting the martyr, and the latter sustains the communication of the Message of Allah; therefore, they are also bearing witness: '… so that (with your lives) you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind…' (*al-Baqara:* 143).

The last category speaks of 'the righteous.' (*an-Nisa':* 69) A righteous person is the one qualified to undertake the mission of being Allah's vicegerent on earth. The righteous leave everything that is useful and beneficial as it is, and sometimes they increase the benefit that could accrue from it. For instance, water falls from the sky in the form of rain drops. After this, it forms rivers and runs through valleys and is absorbed by the earth to form wells. Were a righteous person to see a well of water, he would leave it and not try to fill it up with earth. The righteous thus leave useful things as they are. However, there may be another righteous person who may try to increase the benefit accruing from this bounty. He may erect a wall around the well to preserve it. This is more righteous since he increased the benefit of what is already useful and beneficial. Another righteous person may think that instead of people becoming exhausted due to having to walk from their homes to obtain water from the well and carry it in containers on top of their heads, he may use his reasoning to enhance the benefit people accrue from the well and devise a way to transport the water directly to them in their homes. He may build high reservoirs and connect them with pipes to deliver water to whoever needs it by simply opening the tap. Whoever does so enhances and eases the lives of people. He becomes a reformer through increasing the benefit of what is already useful and beneficial.

The True Lord *the Most High* closes this noble verse by saying: 'And how excellent these companions are!' (*an-Nisa':* 69) 'These' in this verse refers to the Prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous. Indeed, there can be no better company. A companion is someone who permanently keeps you company, whether in your travels or visits. This is why people recommend that you choose a good companion before you choose your way. You may run into trouble and impediments on your way since you are going to unknown and unfamiliar places. Therefore, you must choose your companion before you chose your way. We know that abstract matters are often copied from sensible, tangible counterparts. There is a companion to our hands which is the elbow. The word for elbow in Arabic is *mirfaq*, which is derived from the same root as *rafeeq*, the Arabic word for companion. The True Lord *the Most High* says: '… wash your face and your hands (forearms) up to the elbows….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6)

Usually when people are feeling exhausted and their head is weary, they rest their head on their elbow. Also, if they want to sleep and cannot find a pillow, they rest on their elbow. As we can see, all the meanings of these derivatives come from the root *ar-rifq*, or companion, and *rafeeq* is derived from it and *al-marafiq*, or elbows, is also derived from it since it accompanies the body and comforts it. Furthermore, there is *marafiq*, which is the Arabic word for utilities found in every house and often refers to the places designated for food preparation, as well as bathrooms. In addition to these facilities found in a house, rural houses may have a place specifically to accommodate farm animals that serve peasants. The houses of the poor may consist of one room that has a place for dining and another for sleeping. A poor person may tie his donkey to a corner in his house. However if one was affluent, he would supply his house with all the facilities and utilities he would need. This means that his house would have an independent kitchen, a bathroom and a separate barn for animals. He may also have a separate storage room. All these are called utilities or annexed amenities since they are intended to comfort people.

Accordingly, the saying of Allah, 'And how excellent these companions are! (*an-Nisa':* 69) is derived from the root *rifq* which means providing comfort, company and easiness. Those who obey Allah and His Messenger in this sense shall attain all these good qualities by being in the company of the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous.

However, someone may ask, 'How could these different categories of believers share the same the status despite their different deeds in this worldly life? Is not Allah the One Who says: "And that there is not for man except that for which he strives"?' (*an-Najm:* 39) I say to this person by saying, is not a believer's obedience to Allah and His Messenger part of his striving and effort in this world? Obedience and love for Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is indeed part of the action and exertion of any servant of Allah. Accordingly, there is no contradiction between the two glorious verses because the action of a person is no different than his pursuit. He then becomes entitled to the company of the Prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous. To be among such company may be an honour bestowed upon them all so that they may enjoy being together. This interpretation can further explain the saying of Allah: 'And We (Allah) shall remove whatever of ill-feeling is in their breasts….' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

Never think that upon seeing one's status in the Hereafter higher than that of others, one would say: 'My status is higher than theirs.' Since one has given up all worldly causes and means and has chosen to live in the company of the One Who initiates all cause of causes, out of love for Allah, one will love anyone who has listened to and obeyed the Words of our Lord. They would also say to anyone who loves Allah, 'You deserve your status.' They would rejoice if they see others enjoying a higher status than theirs.

Let me give the following example, and for Allah is the highest and loftiest description. Assume that there is a classroom that contains many students. Some of these students just want to pass the course, while others love knowledge for the sake of knowledge. When the students who love knowledge for its sake come across a new, clever student, would they like or dislike him? Surely, they would like him, and seek his help and rejoice in his presence. They would say, 'This student is going to be the top of our class because he does not love himself, but he loves others.' The same holds true for a believer who sees someone else enjoying a higher status in paradise. Do not begin to think that he would feel any jealousy towards others - absolutely not. Rather, due to his love and appreciation for his Lord, he loves whoever obeys Him. He is like the student who attains a high status through his excellence and wants others to excel like him without any envy. We thus realise that the noble verse at hand does not contradict the Saying of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'And that there is not for man except that for which he strives.' (*an-Najm:* 39). The saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He* in this verse could be read in a different way. As a preposition *al-lam* which means 'for', indicates possession and entitlement. It is like saying, 'I do not owe you except such and such sum.' This means that this is the right to which you are entitled. Accordingly, His saying, 'And that there is not for man except that for which he strives' (*an-Najm:* 39) means that this is the right to which a believer is entitled. It defined justice in terms of giving everyone that to which they are entitled, and not in terms of generous giving. This is the reason why Allah *the Most High* says in another verse:

ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَضْلُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ عَلِيمًا ﴿٧٠﴾

That is God’s favor. No one knows better than Him [70]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 70)

Allah’s Bounties are obtained through, and in proportion to, the action and effort everyone exerts in this world. Allah’s saying, 'And that there is not for man except that for which he strives' (*an-Najm:* 39) defines the right to which you are justly entitled in accordance with the assignments Allah has given you. However, our Lord did not call this bestowal from Him an entitled right and just compensation. Rather, He describes it as a bounty from Him, and definitely Allah’s Bounty is the ultimate aim and delight for any believer. No matter how well you do an assignment from Allah, you will never perform it sufficiently proper for Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* explains this further by saying: 'Say: "In the Bounty of Allah and in His Mercy, therein let them rejoice. That is better than what they amass.’" (*Yunus:* 58) In other words: Pay attention, for Allah has assigned a role for you that you may work and exert much effort to perform it, but refrain from rejoicing in the rewards this work will allow you to amass. Rather, rejoice in the bounties your Lord will bestow upon you.

Such bountiful gifts from Allah *the Most High* give an answer to the question on why Thawban, or someone who enjoys a lower status than his, may accompany the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous. To whomever who wonders about this issue, the response is to ask if his status were lower than theirs, would there not be any bounty from Allah involved in the whole matter? He is receiving this bounty from Allah since his obedience to Allah and His Messenger was superior to all other kinds of obedience. As for his Love for Allah and His Messenger, this is due to his work, exertion and Allah’s Support. This generous giving is the highly sought-after joy of any believer: 'Such is the bounty from Allah, and sufficient is Allah as the Knower.' (*an-Nisa’:* 70) We should rejoice in and be content with the Knowledge of Allah *the Most High*. He *Glorified is He* bases His Laws on comprehensive, all-encompassing Knowledge of all things. Allah knows the truth of the love in everyone's heart, the sincerity of their affection and the veracity of every believer's appreciation for those who enjoy a higher status than theirs. Through the principles stated, the True Lord *the Most High* secured the fundamentals of the Islamic community and the internal relations amongst Muslims. First, we must deliver that with which we have been entrusted, for if we do so, we will not need to litigate. However, if someone becomes forgetful or careless and he fails to deliver that with which he is entrusted, thus a dispute flares, and the judgment will be fair. Subsequently, we are required to refer to the Judgment of Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and never to seek the verdict of evil powers. If the members of every society of believers deliver that with which they have been entrusted to the ones entitled to it, tranquillity shall prevail.

We know that the following phrase, 'that with which you are entrusted', basically refers to the right(s) of others in your custody that you are obligated to fulfil. Everything other than you is someone or something else. Conversely, you are someone else relative to everyone other than you. Accordingly, delivering that with which one is entrusted secures the overall good of the entire society. However, if one fails to deliver that with which they are entrusted, justice must be administered. However, justice requires a judge; and if we should resort to a judge, we should refer to Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and not to evil powers. At the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Ka'b ibn Al-Ashraf represented evil powers. Nowadays, there are some people who are like Ka'b ibn Al-Ashraf. There are indeed many evil powers. If you spot a problem in the Muslim world, you should know that it is due to a deficiency in applying Islamic obligations. How can matters proceed correctly if we stray from the teachings and laws of Islam? If matters did not go amiss, this would attest that an Islamic course is not necessary. However, if matters go wrong, this proves the truth and reality of Islamic principles and obligations.

After Allah *Glorified is He* has assured us about the destiny that awaits believers in the Afterlife with the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous, He emphasises the particular role of every Divine message sent from heaven to earth in combating corruption and eradicating its spread on the earth. The human soul must practise self-restraint against errors. For example, it may intend to commit a sin, but instead reproaches itself and returns to the Path of Allah, in which case it develops an immunity (from the effects of evilness) that is self-generated. Or the immunity of the human soul may evolve from the surrounding environment rather than being self-motivated. For instance, we may find someone who is incapable of controlling himself. Nonetheless, there may be someone else who tells him, 'What you are doing is wrong and inappropriate.' This means that the surrounding environment is still good. The previous nations became totally devoid of immunity and became a single form that followed a single path. This is what the True Lord *the Most High* depicts in His saying: 'They used not to prevent one another from the wrongs they used to commit….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 79)

In the previously mentioned case, self-immunity was corrupted, and the society became void of any immunity towards evilness. Thus, the Lord of the Heavens had to intervene. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* privileged the followers of Islam over other nations with its immunity always being consistently found in its individuals. Therefore, if it is no longer in the individuals making up the society, then it is in the community. This way, any society based on faith will never lack someone who does not say, 'No' (to evils). This is the reason why no messenger will come after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If a disaster should happen that would lead to the corruption of the entire society, and we would no longer find anyone who would say, 'No,' then it would be time for a messenger to be sent. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Final Prophet, and Allah *Glorified is He* distinguished the followers of Islam by making the restraint against evil and the desire to do good always existent either in the individuals themselves so that everyone exercises self-restraint against evil and spontaneously turns to self-reproach, or in the society itself so that everyone would recommend the good for everyone else. Read the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'By the time! Verily, mankind is in loss, except those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and exhort one another to the truth and exhort one another to patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3)

However, why should humans exhort one another to hold fast to truth and patience? This is due to the fact that the human soul is always in a state of flux. For example, my own self may, at one time, be tempted to deviate from the Path of Allah, and then someone may admonish me to refrain when I am about to commit a given sin. I may, in return, do the same for him and try to guide him to the righteous path, or I may guide another person who committed a mistake. Therefore, the saying of Allah: '…exhort one another to the truth…' (*al-'Asr:* 3) means that every one of you should admonish others and, likewise, accept admonition from others. Each and every one of us observes and watches over others. This way anyone who has a weakness in a particular aspect will find someone who can help straighten him up. There will never be a time where there is no one in the followers of Islam who do not admonish others to do good or there being one who is being admonished to do good. It may also happen that the same person, under some situation or circumstance, admonishes others, and under some situation or circumstance is one being admonished by others. Therefore, one should not be too arrogant to accept admonition from others because under certain situations, he could have admonished others, and they may not have found it debasing or demeaning to accept his admonition. As people often say, 'May Allah have mercy upon the one who guides me to my defects.'

After having completed the construction of the faith-based environment through the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and you being the last of nations, the True Lord *the Most High* assures us that evil will never completely prevail or take over our communities since there is a faith-inspired immunity in our societies. Thus, even if not everyone adheres to the Path of Allah in their behaviour, at least some will. Accordingly, if the Lord of the Heavens did not intervene to introduce a righteous system, the world would fall into troubles and ailments. However, how can the world suffer troubles and ailments? The world must ail if the laws set by Allah Who established us as His vicegerents on earth, were suspended. Consequently, all sorts of evil and tyranny would prevail over the different aspects of life, and everyone would be under the control of their desires.

In our contemporary world, we notice that even countries that do not believe in God do not leave its peoples to be governed by their own discretion and inclinations. Rather, they organise life according to laws and legislations which may eventually lead to their suffering. Non-religious countries have devised for themselves a system that allows them to control the inclinations and desires of the human self. However, we must tell them that their policies are commensurate with their knowledge and conception of the characteristics of human nature. They are making laws for something that they have not created, and so they have overstepped their bounds since they are not completely aware of the nature of the soul.

The fundamental principle for decreeing and enacting any law is to make it for something you have created. As we have said before, the one who ought to develop a maintenance program for any machine is the one who manufactured it. The one who made a television set should not let a butcher devise the system of its maintenance. Only the one who made the television set should be the one who devises its maintenance system. We can imagine, by analogy, the case with our Creator? He is the One Who puts the laws and rules for my maintenance through a guide of 'dos' and 'don’ts' that He provides for me. We, humans, control things according to the inclinations of some of us; then, we say do so or do not do so. On what basis do we find our knowledge of the evils that may ensue from the violation of these laws and rules? Did we ourselves create the human soul, and do we know full well its powers and capacities? No, certainly we did not. The evidence is that we always amend our laws, and such amendments happen—as we said—because the lawmaker or legislator recognises a mistake, and thus, he tries to fix it. The human lawmaker or legislator commits mistakes since he tries to put laws and rules for something that he did not create. Accordingly, if we do not want any mistakes, we should leave legislation and law-making to the One Who created us, namely, Allah.

Human history demonstrates that corruption prevails when the law revealed to us from the Heaven is suspended and is no longer followed. The Lord of the Heavens affects our lives through the revelation of a Divine message. Every message that came was opposed by adversaries, namely, the controllers and manipulators of mankind. Such people will never allow the Law of Allah to prevail and will strip them of their personal dominion by dictatorship, tyranny and despotism, and will profit from evil. They, therefore, fight the Divine messages. Our True Lord *Glorified is He* directs our attention to the fact that evildoers, non-followers of the Divine Law, and irreligious people will cause us troubles. Thus, after you have firmly ground yourselves in the principles of faith, you should pay attention to the enemies and adversaries of Allah. The True Lord *the Most High* says regarding this issue:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ خُذُواْ حِذۡرَكُمۡ فَٱنفِرُواْ ثُبَاتٍ أَوِ ٱنفِرُواْ جَمِيعٗا ﴿٧١﴾

You who believe, be on your guard. March [to battle] in small groups or as one body[71] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 71)

‘Take your precautions’ would not be said unless there was an enemy waiting to attack you. Therefore, the call to 'take your precautions' (*an-Nisa’:* 71) indicates that such preparation is like arming oneself, like when someone tells you to take your weapon or your staff. In other words, you should use these tools to confront your enemies and protect yourself against their plots. You should not wait until you are caught up in their ambushes and mischief. Rather, you should prepare yourself beforehand in case there is a chance of inattentiveness or heedlessness on your part. This is the gist of the warning ‘take your precautions.’ It is also the reason why the True Lord *the Most High* says in another verse: 'And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allah and your enemy…' (*al-Anfal:* 60). This instruction means that you should not wait until they transform their feelings of enmity into actual aggression against you since they may attack you unexpectedly, in which case you will not have any time to confront them. So, believers should take precautions and be fully prepared since he has enemies who do not want to see the Law of Allah obeyed and prevailing on the earth. Therefore, if the Law of Allah is supreme and in control, they will not have any chance to tamper with the destinies of people. Furthermore, those who take advantage of their authority and enforce their interests to exploit mankind would not have a chance to impose their control over others.

The part of the verse that says '…either go forth (on an expedition) in parties, or go forth all together' (*an-Nisa’:* 71) means that the act of setting forth should be proportionate to your level of preparedness and caution. ‘Parties’ in this verse means group after group and expedition after expedition, and ‘all together’ means the case when all of you proceed to confront the enemy.

Accordingly, we should be prepared in proportion to the evil we may confront. So, if we are attacked by a small group, we should do as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to do when he sent forces based on the level of the confronting danger. By contrast, if the situation is graver than this and needs public mobilisation, all of us must go forth to meet the enemy. Notice that the True Lord *the Most High* addresses believers and knows that they experience fluctuating emotions even though they are believers. The soul may weaken when facing a difficult situation and dealing with it, in spite of faith and belief in Allah.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says in the chapter *al-Baqara*: 'Have you not thought about the group of the Children of Israel after (the time of) Musa (Moses)? When they said to a Prophet of theirs, "Appoint for us a king and we will fight in Allah's Way." (*al-Baqara:* 246) The children of Israel used to ask Allah *Glorified is He* to allow them to fight in His Cause. Since they asked for it, they should rejoice when the command of fighting comes from Allah *Glorified is He*. However, Allah knows His servants best. Therefore, He further says to them: '…would you, perhaps, refrain from fighting if fighting were prescribed for you?' (*al-Baqara:* 246)

The True Lord *the Most High* clarified to them that they should remember well that they were the ones who asked to fight in His Cause; therefore, they should not refrain from fighting when Allah decrees that they should fight. After all, He did not originally decree it upon them; rather, they were the ones who asked for it. Since the discourse was still on the theoretical level, they wondered as follows: '…and why should we not fight in the Cause of Allah when we have been driven out from our homes and from our children?' (*al-Baqara:* 246)

The children of Israel deplored not being able to fight in the Cause of Allah, especially in the respect that they had all the reasons for fighting, specifically being driven from their homeland and abandoning their children. But what happened when Allah decreed fighting upon them? The answer is the following: '…but when fighting was ordered for them, they turned away, all except a few of them. And Allah is All-Aware of the wrongdoers.' (*al-Baqara:* 246) The majority escaped, and only a few believers remained. Also, this was the initial excuse put forth by those who escaped fighting in response to their Prophet when he told them that Allah had sent Talut (Saul) as their king: 'They said, "How can he be a king over us when we are better fit than him for the kingdom, and he has not been given enough wealth? "' (*al-Baqara:* 247). This was the first sign of wavering from accepting Allah’s Decree. The True Lord *the Most High* then explained to them the wisdom underlying the selection of Talut (Saul): he was a man of physical strength, and winning a struggle requires strength. Furthermore, he was knowledgeable, and administering a struggle requires someone capable of accurate planning. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, Allah has chosen him above you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature….' (*al-Baqara:* 247)

When they were about to start fighting, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to test them to sort out the weak from the strong. Thus, Talut (Saul) said to them, "'Verily! Allah will try you by a river. So whoever drinks thereof, he is not of me, and whoever tastes it not, he is of me, except him who takes (thereof) in the hollow of his hand." Yet, they all drank thereof, except a few of them. So, when he had crossed it (the river), he and those who believed with him said, "We have no power this day against Jalut (Goliath) and his hosts." (*al-Baqara:* 249)

This test was intended to make evident those who were capable of controlling themselves and the endurance power that each striving one had to possess. Each was only allowed to scoop and drink a single handful of water from the river. Nonetheless, all except for a few of them drank their fill of it. Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to further sift them. When they saw the army of Talut (Saul), they said, 'We have no power this day against Jalut (Goliath) and his hosts.' (*al-Baqara:* 249)

However, what was the point of this selection and sifting processes? Obviously, Allah wanted only the true believers to undertake the defence of the law and path He set on earth. These were the ones who said, 'How often a small host has overcome a mighty host by Allah’s leave!' (*al-Baqara:* 249) Allah *the Most High* says: 'So, they defeated them by Allah’s Leave.' (*al-Baqara:* 251)

Why does our Lord give us such glimpses into this process of sifting and selection? This is in order to understand that the human psyche may take a different stance when confronted with a ruling on the theoretical level than when it is faced with it on the practical level. Anyway, just a select few among a few people were granted triumph by Allah. Thus, Allah *the Most High* wants to ingrain in our psyches the truth that He *Glorified is He* is the One Who is capable of causing defeat or triumph. Indeed, this is in line with what the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Fight against them! Allah will punish them by your hands….' (*at-Tawba:* 14)

Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains that He gave them the order to go forth to struggle either in small groups or collectively and that the nature of the human soul is the same; it will always be susceptible to fluctuations when it tries to implement rulings in real life situations. This is the reason why the True Lord *the Most High* also says:

وَإِنَّ مِنكُمْ لَمَن لَّيُبَطِّئَنَّ فَإِنْ أَصَٰبَتْكُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالَ قَدْ أَنْعَمَ ٱللَّهُ
عَلَىَّ إِذْ لَمْ أَكُن مَّعَهُمْ شَهِيدًا ﴿٧٢﴾

Among you there is the sort of person who is sure to lag behind: if a calamity befalls you, he says, 'God has been gracious to me that I was not there with them' [72] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 72)

Some men, when called upon to participate in a battle, would be lazy and linger behind. Allah *the Most High* says in another verse: 'O, you who believe! What is the matter with you, that when you are asked to march forth in the Cause of Allah you cling heavily to the earth?' (*at-Tawba:* 38) The part of the verse saying 'you cling heavily to the earth' (*at-Tawba:* 38) indicates that there are some who pull themselves downwards to the earth entirely of their own accord and will. We must distinguish between the one who drops down just due to gravity and the one who lets gravity pull him down. 'Cling heavily to the earth' means that the person intended to intentionally show sluggishness and inaction, which is evidence that he did not want to take the initiative and fight. Furthermore, not only were they sluggish, but they also swore to act like this. Some of them used to dissuade others and discourage them from fighting as the hypocrite 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy used to do.

The part of the verse saying 'And indeed, there is among you he who lingers behind…' (*an-Nisa':* 72) means that we must understand the situation and safeguard against those who may impede the spread of the message before the battle even begins. If we do so before the battle should start, we will have an accurate assessment of our power and be able to prepare ourselves based on the number of the truly strong ones who earnestly strive, not those who tend to lag behind and show inaction. There are some people who even rejoiced in surviving by not joining the battle, especially if Muslims were defeated and some were killed. The True Lord *the Most High* gives us an example of this attitude, saying: '…and if disaster strikes you, he says, " Allah has favoured me in that I was not present with them."' (*an-Nisa':* 72) The person referred to by this verse lingered and stayed behind, and also, if calamities such as defeat or killing should befall Muslims, such a person would say, “I thank Allah that I was not with them.” This shows that tardiness and inaction with regards to joining the battle was deliberate and intentional on the part of such a person. This is utmost insolence. For although he disobeyed the Command of our Lord, he said, 'Allah has favoured me.' (*an-Nisa':* 72) When making such a statement, he is acting like a thief who steals and then says, ‘Allah protected me and did not expose my deed.’ Such is the language of those who fail to comprehend the principles of faith. These types of people would say: '…if disaster strikes you, he says, " Allah has favoured me in that I was not present with them."' (*an-Nisa':* 72) They thus considered not taking part in the battle and staying alive as a bounty from Allah. For this reason, some knowledgeable people say, 'By making a statement like this, one would be ascribing partners to Allah since calamity to them is either getting killed or defeated.' Yet what would be the stance of the one lagging behind upon collecting the spoils of war and at the time of victory? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَئِنْ أَصَـٰبَكُمْ فَضْلٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لَيَقُولَنَّ كَأَن لَّمْ تَكُنۢ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُۥ
مَوَدَّةٌ يَـٰلَيْتَنِى كُنتُ مَعَهُمْ فَأَفُوزَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٧٣﴾

yet he is sure to say, if you are favoured by God, ‘If only I had been with them, I could have made great gains,’ as if there had been no ties of affection between you and him [73] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 73)

The reason behind His saying ‘If only I had been with them’ (*an-Nisa':* 73) is not that the person is retracting and recoiling from his original intent; it is rather an expression of regret over missing the spoils of war. In this verse, the True Lord puts forwards a parenthetical phrase in order to provide us with a glimpse of faith: ‘But if good fortune comes to you from Allah, such a person is sure to say, just as if there had been no ties of affection between you and him, "If only I had been with them, and thus had a [share in their] mighty triumph!”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 73)

The parenthetical phrase is when He says: ‘just as if there had been no ties of affection between you and him.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 73) It is as if affection on the basis of faith were worthless to him. Indeed, had he had the slightest appreciation for it, he would not have said previously: ‘Allah has been Gracious to me that I was not there with them’ (*an-Nisa’:* 72), and he would have accompanied the Muslim fighters. So, he is only interested in material gain and the spoils of war, but if defeat befell Muslims or if a huge number of them were killed as martyrs, he would have detached himself from them.

Thus, the True Lord exposes to us the stance of those who lag behind, explaining that to bee aware not to be influenced by those when you march to battle in small groups or together, Also, know that there are people amongst you who dissuade their peers from fighting in the cause of Allah—laggards and those who cling heavily to this worldly life. All what they care for is to reap their share of the spoils of war. For this reason, they would thank Allah that they were not with you, if you were defeated, and would crave for their share of the spoils of war, if you achieved any victory, even if they were not present by your side in battle. Therefore, do not be influenced after having been granted such immunity so that you would not be taken aback by their stance towards you, and so that you would always be aware of their real intentions. Immunizations are but a kind of education directed to the body, whether it is material or in an abstract and moral sense. If something wrong happens, you will have the background upon which to build your response.

When we are attacked by a particular microbe, we use the same microbe, but in a latent state, to make a vaccine to immunize people against it. In this manner, the body becomes aware and develops immunity within itself. Accordingly, if a microbe actively attacks the body, the defence forces inside the body immediately fight back and engulf the microbe. It is as if giving immunizations were like training and activating the body resistance, which Allah has put in your blood so that it carried out its protective mission. The same holds true for moral immunization. The True Lord explains that there will be those among you who will do wrong things; hence, you should be prepared to deal with these attacks and you should not be surprised by them because if you got surprised, you might collapse completely. So, do not be influenced by such wrong attitudes. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

فَلۡيُقَٰتِلۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَشۡرُونَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۚ
وَمَن يُقَٰتِلۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَيُقۡتَلۡ أَوۡ يَغۡلِبۡ فَسَوۡفَ نُؤۡتِيهِ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمٗا ﴿٧٤﴾

Let those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come, fight in God's way. To anyone who fights in God's way, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward [74]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 74)

The root *shara* and the verb *ishtara* [translated as 'trade' in this verse] refer to exchanging and bartering. You may say: 'I have bought this dress for a *dirham*,' this means that you have bought the dress and paid a *dirham* for it. Further, *shara'* may be used in the sense of selling, as when the True Lord says: 'And they sold him for a reduced price—a few *dirhams*—so little did they value him.' (*Yusuf:* 20)

The group of travellers who found Yusuf (Joseph) *Allah be pleased with him* in the pit considered him to be of little value. Subsequently, they sold him for a reduced price. Thus *shara* is among the verbs that could be used both in the sense of buying and in the sense of selling because what is bought and what is sold have the same value. In the old days, people used to depend on bartering to exchange commodities. There was no money at that time. For instance, someone may give you some grains in exchange for some dates. Thus, someone buys dates and another buys grains. What makes the process take the form of buying and selling is the existence of goods that are bought and sold.

What is the difference between commodities and money? The former are a direct form of livelihood, whereas the latter is an indirect form. For instance, you may eat a loaf of bread that costs five piasters (Egyptian currency). However, if you have a mountain of gold, and the loaf of bread you need is not available, will the mountain of gold feed you? Thus, the loaf of bread is a direct form of livelihood because you will eat it, whereas gold is an indirect form of livelihood, as one uses it to purchase what he needs. In this manner, we can distinguish between the different forms of livelihood. The thing from which immediate benefit may accrue is a direct form of livelihood; we pay its price using something from which we do not get any immediate benefit. The True Lord wants to strike a bargain with the believers; you know that a seller sells the goods at a price, and the purchaser pays the price for them. Similarly, the True Lord says: ‘Hence, let them fight in Allah’s cause—those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 74) In this verse, the believer gives up this world in exchange for the hereafter, as it is represented in the reward of heaven and the special status intended for the martyrs. For this reason, the True Lord says in another verse: ‘Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties, [in exchange] for that, they will have Paradise.’ (*at-Tawba:* 111)

Subsequently, the True Lord says: ‘Rejoice, then, in the bargain which you have made with Him.’ (*at-Tawba:* 111) This is the deal that the True Lord makes with the believers. Allah wants to provide us with a clue to help us recognise profitable bargains. Everyone in their life wants to conclude a profitable deal by giving away something and taking something bigger in return. For this reason, The True Lord says in another verse: ‘…may hope for a trade that will never decline.’ (*Fatir:* 29) Trading is involved here as well. When you strike a deal, you have to compare the thing that you give up with the thing that you take in return to see the difference between them and decide which one is worth being sacrificed for the other.

The True Lord describes our life ‘*dunya*’ as the lowest form of life. There is not a more inferior description. He, then, explains that you give up the lowest form of life in this world in exchange for the afterlife. If what you take is more than what you give away, be sure that the deal is profitable. Indeed, no matter how life in this world may last, it has to come to an end. Accordingly, do not ever ask about the length of the present life because it should not concern you if the length of the present life were, for instance, one thousand centuries. The length of life for every human being is the amount of time he spends living; because even if the world lasted longer for someone else, how would that be of any benefit to me?

Thus, the true value of the present life lies in the amount of time you spend in it, and this amount is uncertain. Despite the fact that the average life expectancy has risen in the twentieth century—for instance, in the USA, the average life expectancy is between sixty and seventy— this does not prevent death from taking anyone's life, be it a child, an adult or an old man. The length of the present life for any human being is measured in terms of the span of his own life; that is, how many years he has lived. Accordingly, do not ever measure it in terms of others' existence in it. Rather, measure it in terms of your own existence. Further, even if you assume that you are bound to live for seventy years—no matter how great your enjoyment and gratification is—it will still be limited.

Every one of us is brought up until they reach puberty. Once they reach puberty and start to have a personal life, they will cease to be subordinated to their parents, even though they used to be totally dependent on them. Their parents used to buy clothes and food they needed, in addition to giving them the proper upbringing. However, once they start to be independent, they may say to their parents: 'I do not like this colour,' 'this kind of food does not appeal to me,' or 'I won't enrol in this college.' Man does not develop a personality unless he reaches a stage in his life at which he can reproduce. At that stage, we will tell him that he has reached maturity, and it is maturity that gives him personal worth.

If you grow a watermelon plant, you will have to nurture, irrigate, fertilize and trim it when it is still young so that it does not grow up twisted. Once the fruit ripens your concern and interest immediately shifts from the tree to the fruit, that is, the watermelon itself—which has acquired its own identity. The reason is that if you, by now, cut and eat it, you will find seeds which will sprout and grow into a new plant (if you plant them in the soil). However, if you pick the watermelon before it is ripe, the white seeds inside will not be mature enough to be planted and cultivated. If the seeds inside the watermelon are half white half black, it indicates that this watermelon is not fully ripe, whereas, if the seeds are completely black, then, they are ready to be planted. You will also find that the sweetness of the watermelon is commensurate with how ripe the seeds are. Thus, had the nature of the fruits been such that they would ripen before their seeds, Allah would have prompted us to eat the fruits before their seeds would grow. Were it the case, such species of plants would be doomed to extinction. For this reason, our Lord has decreed that the plant will not be sweet unless its seeds are mature. The same holds true for human beings. The True Lord says: ‘When your children reach puberty, they should [always] ask your permission to enter, like their elders do.’ (*an-Nur:* 59) We often let children play and wander around any part of the house freely. However, once they grow up and reach puberty—which indicates that their bodies are fully ready for reproduction—they have to ask for permission before they walk into any closed room. At this age, the person’s independence forms. Let us assume that a person would live fifty five years of age after reaching puberty, being capable of reproducing and acquiring an independent personality. That person would have spent his teen years learning, until he becomes capable of earning his own livelihood and enjoying his life. At this point, we may wonder how long he will actually enjoy living. We will discover that there are only a few years to enjoy life. Life is therefore finite, and its gratification and pleasure depend on the person’s means—one may live in a two bedroom flat, a three bedroom flat or even in a big house or castle; also, one may drive a car or walk to move around. In brief, everyone enjoys life based on their own capacity and available means, whereas, in the Afterlife, it is totally different; one submits to a life of infinite length. If we compare between the finite and the infinite, we will find out that the Afterlife is bound to outweigh the present life because it is certain, and its pleasures are proportional to Allah’s Grace and His capability. Therefore, it is better for us to sell the present life in exchange for the Hereafter. This is indeed the profitable, never-failing deal.

Why does Allah want His servant to engage in this transaction? The reason is that before the True Lord offers you to participate in this transaction that exhausts you—that if you did not either kill or get killed in the cause of Allah—He has to explain to you how to attain the gratification and reward of the afterlife. You will not attain such gain just by uttering words. You have to understand the path and purpose for which you are fighting; in essence, your goal as a believer consists in establishing a society wherein each will perform his task and deliver what he has been entrusted. This should only disappoint those who want to exploit others and build their success on the toil and exhaustion of others. Find a society that does not have faith in Allah and tell its people: ‘we want each of you to deliver that with which he has been entrusted; we want each of you to judge justly.’ If you do so, rest assured that these people will rejoice in relief. Any people of sound disposition and good understanding would not reject the religion of Allah, for it only enjoins on everyone to fulfil the mission, he is brought to life for and calls for justice to be established on earth. We are commanded to submit to the One God worthy of worship. In this way, we would not be confused and torn apart trying to submit to the will of more than one god. Subsequently, Allah has admonished us to treat well our parents, our kinsfolk, the orphans and the needy. By Allah, tell me: were not this religion a Heavenly revelation, rather a human legislation, would it be possible to find anything more perfect and just?

Man ought to defend the implementation of such a path that ensures safety for everybody. Before Allah has enacted upon us to fight in His cause, Allah clarified that this was the model of society for which we would fight. Therefore, you should realize that when you go fighting in the cause of Allah, the furthest ahead that could happen to you would be to get killed and then enjoy the benefit of a profitable transaction—the reward of the Afterlife. This way, the distance between you and your ultimate purpose would diminish—since everything is measured in terms of the time required to achieve the final destination. Thus, if you got killed, the time you need to achieve your purpose would diminish, so you would reach paradise. Foolishness befalls people when a dear one is killed and they get lost in grief. We tell them: If we are all bound to the same destiny, why would we be lost in grief?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* rewards the one who fights in the cause of Allah with life and livelihood in the Hereafter. Some people think that if they open the grave of a martyr, they will find him alive and enjoying the livelihood Allah has promised him. To these people, we say that the True Lord does not say that martyrs will be alive among you, but with Allah in the world of the unseen. The True Lord asks those who endorse Islam to spread it and to judge justly among themselves so that their conditions would improve and so that they would confront the evil people who only know the outer surface of this present life.

Allah has not decreed fighting before the advent of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The messenger mentioned here was one of the messengers *peace be upon them* who were sent before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and was only required to deliver the Message of

Allah to his own people. The Messengers have been sent down to their own people to deliver the Message of Allah: whoever believed was rewarded, and those who did not believe were punished by Allah; such punishment was in the form of a fierce wind, an earthquake, a shriek, being swallowed by the earth or being drowned. Fighting was only decreed when the people themselves suggested it, like the people of Israel. The True Lord says: '[Prophet], consider the leaders of the Children of Israel who came after Moses, when they said to one of their prophets, "Set up a king for us and we shall fight in God's cause."' (*al-Baqara:* 246) They were the ones who suggested that Allah should enact fighting upon them. But the fighting—that is truly intended to establish the principles and spread the religion in order to exalt the word of Allah and establish the dominion of the caliphate (rule) based on ensuring security as well as faith on earth—was only decreed at the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah has entrusted Muslims with the mission of calling all other nations to the true religion—a mission to which He has assigned no other nation. It is as if Allah did not entrust any nation with other nations except the Muslims; that is, Allah chose the Islamic ummah to be a guardian and a trustee. Allah has entrusted you with the responsibility of disciplining and rectifying violators. Thus, you have been granted a high status as far as the religion and the message are concerned. Allah ennobled His prophet as He says: 'But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst' (*al-Anfal:* 33) Thus, fighting was decreed, and the Muslims—even when they were weak—fought in the cause of Allah against other strong but corrupt societies. The poet says:

Those who are strong and aberrant are settled in the land they occupy.

And a herd of weak ones are following and siding with them.

If fighting did not come through religion, would faithless nations not set out for war in order to reform their affairs? Indeed, they do fight. So why is it legitimate for all nations to fight for the sake of establishing their principles, and when religion decrees fighting, they say 'No. This is a religion that was spread by the sword!' To these people, we ask: by Allah, why then do nations fight? We see nations that fight each other, and tyrants who fight each other. Yet, when justice is there to eradicate injustice, why do we stand in its way?

No! This should not be the case. So, we should know for certain that fighting here is a Heavenly message, not the oppression of some tyrants who gathered and conspired to bring about a revolt through which they can dominate people.

When Islam came about, the weak ones who did not have the means to fight, embraced it. They were not even capable of defending themselves. This is to prove to us that when truth manifests, it comes about, not by the hands of the strong, but rather by the hands of the weak ones who struggle and persevere to spread the faith and establish it firmly on earth. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called for Islam in Mecca, but it did not prevail as a religion except in Medina. Mecca is the home town of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and his tribe, the Quraysh—a tribe accustomed to sovereignty over all the peninsula, which no one could threaten and no power would dare to intercept its trade caravans in the north or south.

All tribes went to the Quraysh during the pilgrimage season. They feared attacking Quraysh caravans lest the Quraysh would take revenge. Accordingly, if the religion of Islam, that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called for, had triumphed in Mecca, people might have said that the Quraysh was a tribe that loved ascendancy, and the Arab nation submitted to its command, so what would stop it from aiming to dominate the entire world?

The True Lord wanted the Quraysh to be the first party to oppose and persecute the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and decreed that the weak were the first to follow him. Then, the victory for Allah's religion came from a distant place, far from Mecca—Medina—so that the entire world would testify that people believed in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because of the Message he had brought and not because of ties of kinship and love for a fellow tribesman. The Prophet's Companion 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was listening to the words of Allah *the Exalted*: 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee' (*al-Qamar:* 45). He, then, said: 'What forces would be defeated by us, if we are even incapable of defending ourselves?' The True Lord says: 'We shall brand him on the snout' (*al-Qalam:* 16). 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* then exclaimed: 'How could this be possible if we cannot defend ourselves?' Afterwards, the battle of Badr took place and vindicated the truthfulness of that statement for

‘Umar. It is indeed astounding that the verse was revealed at a time when Muslims were incapable of defending themselves. Thus, no one can say that there were preludes that made it easy to predict the end result of the battle. The preludes did not suggest that any victory was forthcoming; it was only that our Lord foretold its occurrence, and people did see that Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira was hit on his nose, and the strike left a mark on it. This was because the One said so is capable of bringing about what He said, and no force is capable of precluding Him from fulfilling what He promised. This was an indication that adhering to the basics is put to the test.

You will always find that those who truly believe in the basics are those who are most willing to make sacrifices for their cause. They may sacrifice their wealth, their homes (by forsaking them) or even sacrifice their lives and get killed. All of this is done for the sake of the basics in which they believe. But this is different when it comes to false principles; those who choose to embrace them collect the price before they do. Those who promote such principles tell those whom they try to delude: take this money, live your life, enjoy it and wear the best of clothes.

By contrast, those who embrace the principles of the truth are often the poor who pay the cost dearly. Yet, they are justified in paying a dear cost because the One who set the price is Dear. However, those who embrace falsehood have no knowledge of the One Who set the price. Anyone who considers the destructive principles will realize how their leaders live, while their subjects languish in misery. Every one of them says to himself: I have to take the reward in advance. The case of the believers is totally different; they are the ones who pay the cost so that they enjoy the reward in the hereafter.

When the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* enacted fighting on the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, He did so for the purpose of defence at first. People used to ask the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘O Messenger of Allah, allow us to fight as much as we can afford.’ The Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, would then answer: ‘Be patient; I have not been commanded to fight as of yet.’(1)

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(1) *Al-Kafi Ash-Shafi fi Takhrij Ahadith Al-Kashshaf by Ibn Hajar*

Subsequently, fighting was decreed so that the community of believers could defend itself after Muslims had immigrated to Medina. We know that fighting is a necessity of life. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'If Allah did not drive some back by means of others the earth would be completely corrupt.' (*al-Baqara:* 251)

Further, He is the One Who also says: 'If Allah did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. Allah is sure to help those who help His cause— Allah is Strong and Mighty.' (*al-Hajj:* 40)

Thus, Allah repels some people by means of others because this is a necessity entailed by the reality of human life. When Islam is criticised for the decree of fighting, we should say: The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* decreed fighting to confront the forces of injustice that consistently tried to preclude the implementation of one of the well-known paths of justice, which no one could question. If justice did not come from the Heavens, there would be no appropriate system to rule people. Accordingly, if Allah wants to establish justice through a path that He reveals, why should someone try to impede the implementation of this path and say to the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'you have come to force people to believe in your religion'? True Lord clarifies the purpose of the path of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: he was sent to assert the dignity of the human being as the master of everything else in the world; all inanimate objects are subservient to him, and so are all the plants and animals. None of these of beings have the freedom of choice to say: 'I will do this and not do that.' No other species is granted will and choice except for humans. The True Lord says about the responsibility of having a choice: 'but they refused to bear it...' (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

But what is it that distinguishes human beings from other species? It is reason. Reason means to choose and distinguish between alternatives. However, if there is a situation that has no alternative, reason will be useless.

A good illustration of this point is the following: you may want to go someplace. Then, someone may explain that there is no route to the place you want to go except a particular one, so would you even think of taking another way? Of course you would not. Thus, reason does not have any other function except choosing among different alternatives. Were there no alternatives, reason would not have any function. If reason main purpose is to choose among different alternatives, should it be granted freedom or should its freedom be restricted? If you restrict reason's freedom of choice by coercion, you would be taking away the bounty you have granted it, and you would be making it subjugated, subservient and coerced. For this reason, we say that the one who is forced to do something does not have independent judgment; he is rather subjugated and coerced.

As long as you say that reason is the faculty that chooses among alternatives, the right to choose freely must be secured for every rational being; reason and free choice entail each other. Thus, if one suffers a deficiency in his reason, like being insane, he may not be able to choose. Further, if reason exists, but has not yet matured, we would also say that this person does not have any choice. Thus, reason must be both sound and mature in order for it to properly choose from among several alternatives, enabling the human being to choose freely. If reason is not sound, this means that the person is mentally ill and, subsequently, is incompetent to be entrusted with assignments from Allah—Allah has divested the insane of the dearest and most valuable distinguishing feature he has given to humans that is reason. However, Allah has also absolved the insane of all responsibility; so no one should hold him accountable for anything. Thus, the insane may do anything unaccountably. Divine assignments are only enacted upon those who have sound, mature minds; similarly, there is no fulfilling of obligations before reaching puberty.

Therefore, Islam came about to preserve the dignity of the human being and his right to freedom of choice; similarly, it gives you the choice to either believe or not. Those who carried swords and fought did not do so to force anyone to embrace Islam. They rather did it to combat the conspiracy and the sedition of those who wanted to coerce people. The *jizya* (the amount of money non-Muslims pay as taxes in Muslim countries) was decreed to absolve non-Muslims of the responsibility to fight. If Islam were to impose belief on people in the countries it took over, we would not find followers of any other religions in such countries. This is an attestation in favour of Muslims. Islam did not come about to impose itself as a religion; rather, it came to protect man's freedom to choose his religion. To those who claim that Islam was spread by the sword, we say that they need to understand things properly; early Muslims were weak and continued to be so for a long time. The countries conquered by Muslims still include non-Muslims. This is evidence that Islam came to protect freedom of faith: 'Say, "Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so."' (*al-Kahf:* 29)

We now turn to another point, namely that Islam only decreed the *jizya*, because the non-Muslims would enjoy all the good of the Muslim countries, when the Muslims who undertake the mission of defending the country pay *zakat*—the obligatory alms: annual payment on certain kinds of property used for charitable and religious purposes and one of the Five Pillars of Islam—and *kharaj*—type of individual Islamic tax on agricultural land and its produce. Thus, it is thereby a matter of justice; the justice of the path of Allah. Against this background, one ought to understand the saying of the True Lord: 'Hence, let them fight in Allah's cause – those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come. To anyone who fights in Allah's cause, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward.' (*an-Nisa':* 74)

Fighting was decreed so that the courses set by Allah may dominate. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Hence, let them fight in Allah's cause…' (*an-Nisa':* 74) indicating that fighting could be for causes other than Allah's. For instance, one may fight out of prejudice or to show off his courage. So, fighting always depends on its intention. For this reason, some people wondered: who is a true martyr? To this question, scholars responded that he is the one who fought so that the word of Allah would be the greatest and most exalted. Thus, fighting could either be for the cause of Allah or for the cause of self, or even for the cause of Satan. The True Lord says: 'Hence, let them fight in Allah's cause – those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come. To anyone who fights in Allah's cause, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward.' (*an-Nisa':* 74)

Accordingly, the one who engages in fighting has one of two choices: he may either be killed by enemies or he may triumph. This is the dialectical issue that is often in dispute between the camp of faith and camp of disbelief. The fighter from the camp of faith says to his counterparts in the camp of disbelief: I fight to attain one of the two best things: I may either be killed, become a martyr and enjoy a life better than the one I used to lead in this world, or triumph. So why are you even lurking for us, you disbelievers?

The believer has faith that he is the winner in all cases. If he is killed, he will go to paradise, to a better life than worldly life. Alternatively, he may live and triumph. Both cases are equally good.

Allah has ordained matters to be like that in order to demonstrate that His divine course deserves shedding blood for it. Further, it is a testimony that this religion is correct. Otherwise, no one would fight unless he is truly convinced of the rightness of this religion. Every one ultimately works and toils for his life and interests. Man assesses everything in terms of its advantageous value, even religion. For this reason, they say: do not choose bad selfishness, which is concerned with what is low and cheap; rather, choose good selfishness, which is concerned with what is high and worthy. Religion is a practice of an exalted form of good selfishness.

Let us give an example to illustrate this point—and to Allah pertains the highest and most exalted example. Assume that someone has only one pound of which he is in need; upon seeing that another person is in dire need of money, the true believer would say to himself: ‘I have eaten and it could be the case that person has not eaten yet.’ Then, he may give the other person the only pound he has. By Allah, does he love the one to whom he gave the pound more than himself? No. He loves himself, but it is a refined and exalted form of selfishness. We have previously said that the one who sees a beautiful woman and still shies away from looking at her is different from another who stares at her. Which of the two men likes beauty more? It is the one who keeps away from looking at the beautiful woman because he does not want her provisionally; he wants her permanently.

Not to mention the one who sells the worldly life and gets killed in the cause of Allah in exchange for the hereafter; that does not involve any killing or anything that may cause vexation. This is form of selfishness. The True Lord also deals with us according to a pragmatic law. However, it is a refined form of pragmatism and not a cheap short-term one. He thus bids us to sell what is cheap in exchange for what is dear and more exalted.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw, on the night of '*Isra'a* and *Mi'raj'*, those who died fighting for the cause of Allah and witnessed their status—the night when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was elevated to the heavens. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw a group of people cultivating and harvesting the fruits immediately after sowing the seeds because the one who gets killed in the cause of Allah did so for the elevation and ennoblement of the word of Allah. Therefore, he will never cease to harvest the fruits of the effort he exerted; and his life will extend through the lives of millions of people. Allah says: 'To anyone who fights in God's way, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward.' (*an-Nisa':* 74) We know that every believer who fights in the cause of Allah says to the camp of disbelievers what the True Lord has revealed in His saying: 'Say, "Do you expect something other than one of the two best things to happen to us? Well, we expect God to inflict punishment on you, either from Himself or at our hands. So wait; we too are waiting."' (*at-Tawba:* 52) The believer knows that he will either be killed—and become a martyr—or he will defeat the camp of disbelief. Hence, he waits for Allah to inflict chastisement upon the disbelievers from Himself or by the hands of the believers. Thereby, the believers are bound to win, and the disbelievers are bound to lose in all cases.

Al-Ma'arri (a great medieval Arab poet and philosopher) said, before Allah guided him to His path, when he used to be an agnostic sceptic:

Days shatter us asunder as if we were glass

Though, unlike glass, we can never be reassembled.

Some interpreted this verse to be a denial of resurrection because he likened humans to broken glass that no one can return it to its former condition. He said that when his life was full of vanity, on the days when he was self-absorbed. However, the events developed in a way that altered him and strongly changed his way of thinking, until he ended up being a believer. But was he sure that he would live until he believed? Why had he not ridded himself of the bitterness of doubt? Yet, after he had believed, he said: 'Here I am dying a follower of the creed of the old people of Nysabur. Our Lord is the Truth and He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing. Then, he added:

The astrologist and the physician both claimed
That bodies cannot be resurrected;
To them I respond: were your statement true, I would not be a looser,
And were my stance true, you are the losers.'

This means that even if you were you right in claiming that there is no resurrection, and I still did good deeds, what loss would I have incurred in this case? I would not have lost anything. By contrast, were my claim true, and you were surprised by the Hereafter and resurrection, I would be the one who won, whereas loss and torment would be for you. Therefore, if my faith does not benefit me, it will not harm me. Your claims whether they were correct or not correct, they would not harm me.

The True Lord says: 'To anyone who fights in Allah's cause, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward.' (*an-Nisa':* 74) Here, Allah prolongs the time of giving. Consider the precise articulation of the Quran due to the fact that the One speaking is Allah; let us look at how an action depends on another. When I say for instance: come to me and I will treat you generously and once you come, generous treatment ought to happen. But if you say: if you come, I will treat you generously in a while, this means that there may be a time lag between your arrival and the occurrence of the generous treatment. You will not be treated generously as soon as you come. You have to come to me first, and after a short while, you enjoy my generous treatment. Further, if I want to extend the time a little more, I may say: 'If you come to me, I will treat you generously after a while.' Thus, there are three stages of extending a reward based on an act: a reward that follows immediately once the condition is fulfilled, a reward that follows a short time after the condition is fulfilled and a reward that follows after a longer time.

The True Lord does not say to anyone who fights in Allah's cause: 'we shall immediately give a great reward.' Further, He does not say: 'we shall, after a while, give a great reward.' Rather, He says: 'we shall, in time, give a great reward.' This indicates that the complete fulfilment of this promise will take place on the Judgment Day. For this reason, the future (indicated by *sawfa*) had to be used in this context. This is evidence that it is a continuous reward that is neither disturbed nor forbidden.

Thus, we notice the precision of the phrasing of the Quran, when the True Lord talks about Himself using various styles. He once uses the plural form because, as we learnt in Arabic grammar, the letter *nun* is for majesty as in His saying: ‘We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it...’ (*al-Hijr:* 9). Allah does not say ‘I sent down’, for everything is ultimately due to an action taken by Allah. Rather, He uses the plural form for majesty and glorification because when Allah does something for His creation, whether in the form of bounty or gratification, He intends to manifest a manifold of His attributes including accentuating His power and His knowledge in arranging and organizing His Bounty and His Wisdom. Thus, He says, ‘We shall give a great reward’ (*an-Nisa’:* 74) because different divine attributes cooperate to create the good.

But when He talks about himself apart from His actions, Allah uses the ‘I’ that refers to His Oneness, as in the saying of the True Lord: ‘Indeed, I am Allah. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me.’ *(Ta Ha:* 14) This style also recurs in the saying of the True Lord: ‘And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed [to you].’ *(Ta Ha:* 13) When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about Himself, He uses His Oneness; we do not say individual or singular form, out of politeness and courtesy towards Allah, for He does not have a partner or a counterpart.

When Allah talks about His actions, He uses ‘We.’ This style of address solved a lot of problems for us because it happened when we read the saying of the Tue Lord: ‘Have you [Prophet] not considered how Allah sends water down from the sky and that We produce with it fruits of varied colours; that there are in the mountains layers of white and red of various hues, and jet black.’ (*Fatir:* 27) Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘…Allah sends water down…’ It would have been (seemingly) suitable to follow this with ‘and produce with it…’. But He says ‘We produce with it fruits of varied colours’ (*Fatir:* 27); then, why does He use ‘Allah sends’ in the first case and ‘We produce’ in the second? The reason is that when He says: ‘We send water down from the sky’ (*Luqman:* 10), none of his creatures, with or without means, has anything to do with it. But once the rain fell, someone may plough the land, another may sow the seeds and a third may irrigate the land. All of these are causes and means Allah has created for His creatures. Accordingly Allah does not marginalize or ignore the efforts of His creatures. He thus says: ‘Allah sends water down from the sky.’ (*Fatir:* 27) Afterwards, He says ‘I and my creatures, through what I have supplied and provided them, bring forth fruits: “produce with it fruits of varied colours”.’ (*Fatir:* 27) Therefore, we ought to pay attention to the significance of the ‘I’ form versus the significance when it is used the ‘We’ form. The words of Allah: ‘We shall give a great reward’ (*an-Nisa’:* 74) draws our attention to the fact that every action is an event commensurate with the one who undertakes it in terms of both its potential and influence. When a child slaps one of his classmates, his slap might not be as strong as that of a youth or a grown up man. Accordingly, if the one who dispenses the reward had a counterpart, he would give in proportion to the amount his counterpart may give. But if the dispenser is our Lord, He gives in proportion to His Worth. Hence, the reward must be great; the reward is what one receives in return for a service.

There is a difference between a reward and a price. A price is the specific value paid in return for goods or service. By contrast, a reward is what is given in return for a particular benefit or service. When I say: ‘I have bought this’, this means that I have paid its price. But if I rent something, it is still the property of the owner, and I just enjoy its benefit. In this vein, would Allah’s reward for the one who gets killed for His cause be deemed as a reward or a price? We notice here that the True Lord explains that He does not set a value for the one who dies for His cause; rather, He considers his action. He, thereby, reckons the effect of his action and grants him, in return, a ‘mighty reward.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 74) Subsequently, the True Lord says:

وَمَا لَكُمۡ لَا تُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡمُسۡتَضۡعَفِينَ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ وَٱلنِّسَآءِ
وَٱلۡوِلۡدَٰنِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ أَخۡرِجۡنَا مِنۡ هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡقَرۡيَةِ ٱلظَّالِمِ أَهۡلُهَا وَٱجۡعَل
لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ وَلِيّٗا وَٱجۡعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ نَصِيرًا ﴿٧٥﴾

Why should you not fight in God’s cause and for those oppressed men, women, and children who cry out, ‘Lord, rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors! By Your grace, give us a protector and give us a helper!’? [75] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 75)

The verse starts with an exclamatory expression. The reason is that, after clarifying the kind of compensation granted for fighting and dying for the cause of Allah, He had to show how this fighting is in line with humans’ natural inclination. In our day-to-day lives, we say: ‘Why do you not do such and such?' It is as if we are wondering about the reason behind refraining from doing something that matches the person's nature and mindset. Accordingly, if one does not do so, it is considered weird and strange. After Allah has explained the marvellous outcome of fighting for His cause, He goes on to say that whoever refuses to fight when it is demanded by Allah, his refusal will be regarded peculiar and strange. For this reason, the True Lord says: 'Why should you not fight in Allah's cause…' (*an-Nisa':* 75) which means, 'How could you not fight for the cause of elevating the word of Allah?' On certain occasions, the believer may fight to support the weak ones who have been hurt and harmed due to their religion. This is also another form of elevating and exalting the word of Allah.

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Why should you not fight in Allah's cause and for those oppressed men…' (*an-Nisa':* 75) meaning that fighting can be in the cause of Allah as well as in the cause of saving the oppressed. This is a way of arousing and exciting human zeal and ardour so that one would be resolute in fighting, even on humanitarian grounds, for the cause of relieving the weak of the torment and pain to which they have been subjected—because, as long as they tolerate pain, while still keeping their faith, they will be demonstrating the strength of their faith. Therefore, they are the ones who deserve the most to be defended and rescued from pain and torture. Allah *Glorified is He* uses an exclamatory style to express this point: 'Why should you not fight in God's cause and for those oppressed men' (*an-Nisa':* 75). Reason, passion and religion all dictate that fighting is necessary, so refraining from fighting is what should arouse suspicion and wonder. When our Lord poses this issue, He does so based on the fact that everyone will be equally astounded and surprised by it. It is like the saying of the True Lord: 'How can you disbelieve in Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 28) This means: how can you abjure your faith in our Lord, you disbelievers? This is a strange stance that no reasonable person could easily conceive; for this reason, the verse says: 'How can you disbelieve in Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 28).

'Why should you not fight in God's cause and for those oppressed men…?' (*an-Nisa':* 75) The word 'oppressed' is followed by 'men', but men are supposed to be strong. This draws our attention to the condition that would make a man helpless, and make those who followed, 'women and children', even more helpless. '…For those oppressed men, women and children who cry out, "Lord, rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors! Give us, out of Your grace, a protector and give us one who will bring us succour!'" (*an-Nisa': 75*) The disbelievers persecuted the believers to the extent that it made the latter invoke Allah to lead them forth to freedom, out of the land the people of which are oppressors. The land of oppression they refer to here is Mecca.

The story here is about a group of believers who were incapable of migrating out of Mecca after the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, had emigrated. They were forbidden to emigrate; yet, they kept their faith, so they became utterly helpless men, women and children. The persecution to which they were subjected by the disbelievers was too fierce to exempt even young children. In this vein, the True Lord says to the believers: 'Why should you not fight in God's cause and for those oppressed men, women, and children…' (*an-Nisa':* 75).

What did these people say when they became utterly helpless? They said: "'Lord, rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors! Give us, out of Your grace, a protector and give us one who will bring us succour!'" (*an-Nisa':* 75) The articulation of the supplication itself indicates that they will not go out. Rather, some of them trusted that a believer from the Muslims would come and rule over them. It is as if this part of the verse suggested that the Muslims would conquer Mecca, which came true.

Allah raised for them, out of His grace, a protector and a Sustainer: Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who took charge of them in the best way and led them to the greatest victory.

Maslama ibn Hisham(1) was in the group of the utterly helpless who could not emigrate along with Al-Walid ibn Al-Walid, Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi'a, Abu Jandal ibn Suhayl ibn 'Amr and our Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* who said: 'My mother and I were among the oppressed women and children, and they used to restrict our movement so that we could not leave Mecca.' Thus, they needed to be supported and helped. For this reason, Allah made their believing brethren feel pity and sympathy in order to motivate them to fight for their cause since the disbelievers' injustice towards them was ferocious and did not distinguish among men, women or children in the torture they inflicted.

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(1) *The story of Maslama ibn Hisham and the group of poor people who could not emigrate*

‘Who cry out, “Lord, rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors! Give us, out of Your grace, a protector and give us one who will bring us succour!”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 75) The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Muslim followers were their succour. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ
ٱلطَّٰغُوتِ فَقَٰتِلُوٓا۟ أَوْلِيَآءَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ۖ إِنَّ كَيْدَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ كَانَ ضَعِيفًا ﴿٧٦﴾

The believers fight for God’s cause, while those who reject faith fight for an unjust cause. Fight the allies of Satan: Satan’s strategies are truly weak [76] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 76)

We have previously learnt that the powers of evil refer to those who do injustice and wrong others in an extreme way. It can be used to refer to singular, dual or plural nouns. Thus you may say *taghut*—evil power—in reference to one, two or more than two men who wrong others in an extreme way. The True Lord says: ‘ Allah is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are the powers of evil.’ (*al-Baqara:* 257)

Thus, the word *taghut*—powers of evil—may refer to singular, dual and plural nouns. But could the evil power be the devil? Yes, it could be. Could it also refer to the despotic tyrant who is enticed to do more injustice through people’s submission to him? Yes, it could also assume this meaning. Could it also refer to the one who impose evil on people to the extent that people would fear his evil? Yes, the word could also refer to this person. All of these are possible meanings of the word *taghut*. The style of the Quran varies significantly. Thus, it may in one instance say: ‘You have already had a sign in the two armies that met in battle, one fighting for Allah’s cause and the other made up of disbelievers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 13) Consider the contrast in this context: ‘The believers fight for Allah’s cause, while those who reject faith fight for the cause of the powers of evil’ (*an-Nisa’:* 76). On the one hand, there is the contrast between ‘the believers’ and ‘those who reject faith’; on the other hand, there is the contrast between the ‘ Allah’s cause and the ‘cause of the powers of evil.’ This is to let us grasp the significance of the phrasing of the statements that our Lord intersperses throughout the Quran. We have to realize the miraculous dimension they involve. In this verse, He says: 'The believers fight for Allah's cause, while those who reject faith…' (*an-Nisa':* 76). The reason is that it can be easily inferred that the disbelievers are powers of evil and will fight for this cause. But if in the verse cited from the chapter of *Al-'Imran*, Allah mentions an opposite to an already omitted, but inferrable party in the verse from the chapter of *an-Nisa'* or vice versa; this method is called *ihtibak* in the science of Arabic rhetoric. But how does it function?

Consider the saying of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*: 'You have already had a sign in the two armies that met in battle, one fighting for Allah's cause and the other made up of disbelievers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 13) The word 'disbelievers' here indicates that they fight for the cause of *taghut* (the powers of evil); this group is contrasted with the opposite group —that fights for the cause of Allah—who certainly consist of believers.

Thus, the entire discourse is harmonious. Allah says: 'You have already had a sign in the two armies that met in battle, one…' (*Al-'Imran:* 13). Here, He just says 'one' and we immediately infer that this army that fights in the cause of Allah are believers, though this is not mentioned in words. Our Lord provokes our minds by avoiding stating everything explicitly so that we put our mind to work, and so that there would be no redundancy. This way, we also realize that if Allah says: 'in Allah's cause', He refers to the believers, and if He says for the 'cause of the powers of evil' (*an-Nisa':* 76) He refers to the disbelievers. The True Lord then resumes: 'Fight the allies of Satan' (*an-Nisa':* 76). This verse refers to the advocates and proponents of the devil who promote his principles and endorse his temptations with their hearts in order to spread them among other people. These are the allies of Satan; for, Satan, as we know, said in the following conversation that took place between Satan and his Creator: 'Satan said, "I swear by Your might! I will most certainly tempt them all."' (*Sad:* 82) Satan, then, realized his limits and constrained his claim accordingly: '(All) save such of them as are true servants!' (*Sad:* 83)

This means that I (i.e. Satan) will not be able to tempt or sway whoever Allah wills to be on His path. This indicates that the struggle is not between Satan and Allah. Allah is too Exalted to go into struggles with anyone. The struggle, then, is between Satan and the losers among the creatures. Inasmuch as He said: 'I swear by Your might! I will most certainly tempt them all.' (*Sad:* 82), this indicates that Satan knew how to take oaths and swear because if our Lord wills that all people adhere to His path and become believers, Satan would not be able to approach anyone. But our Lord is Mighty and All-Sufficient and is in no need of His creation. Thus, whoever wills, may believe and whoever does not, may not. This is how Satan insinuated himself into the picture. Satan made his way due to the fact that Allah is Almighty and in no need of His creation because if Allah wants all people to adhere to his path, Satan will not be able to do anything about it. The evidence is Allah's saying: '(All) save such of them as are true servants' (*Sad:* 83) which indicates that he will not be able to approach any of them. The oath of Satan also indicates that he has studied and is aware of how to approach the servants of Allah. He thus said: 'I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along your straight path.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) Satan will not try to sway those who already stray on the path of error because those do not need Satan to sway them. They are comfort to him. They are his allies who help him accomplish his mission. The allies of Satan are thereby the ones who oppose the path of Allah and by doing so they become his advocates.

The True Lord commands us: 'Fight the allies of Satan' (*an-Nisa':* 76). Those are the ones who ally themselves with Satan. Each of them supports the other. Allah then comforts us in this regard and says: 'Satan's strategies are truly weak.' (*an-Nisa':* 76) The reason is that when Satan forges a guile, his guile will be against his Lord. Thus, it has to be weak in comparison to that of Allah. Satan does not have dominion and power over the human body, so he cannot overpower humans to do anything. He cannot force you to do anything and he does not have any justification with which he can convince you. You are said to be physically coerced if someone forces you to do something unwillingly and grudgingly. For instance, a person may threaten and menace you, point a gun at your head or command you to prostrate to him. But can anyone coerce or overpower your heart and command you to say, 'love me'? No, it is impossible. Thus, a tyrant can overpower your body, but can never overpower your heart. The things that overpower the heart are justification and evidence; these are the powers that may convince you, but not force you to pursue a specific course of action. Hence, the means of overpowering the body is force and that of overpowering the heart is justification.

The True Lord explains this point to us: know well that Satan is very weak. He does not have the power to force you to do anything. So if he tries to tempt you, you should say to him: ‘I will not do so.’ Further, he cannot come to your head and say: ‘You should do this’ and force you do a particular thing against your will. He does not have any justification with which he can convince you to do such things; he is weak. Why do you obey him then? You obey him due to your oblivion and your love for your lusts and desires. Satan is incapable of overpowering your heart or your body; he just entices you. For this reason, Satan would defend himself on the Day of Judgment by saying: ‘I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call.’ (*Ibrahim:* 22) This means that he did not have any power or force to compel your bodies to do anything, and nor did he have any power of justification to convince your hearts to do anything. You are the ones who are faulty and sinful, and Satan does not have anything to do with it. Therefore, the guile of the devil is weak. The ‘guile’—as we know—is an attempt to corrupt something or a state of being through mischief and knavery; for there are some who corrupt without using any tricks and there are some, by contrast, who want to corrupt things so that if you catch them, they would say: ‘We did not do anything,’ because they commit mistakes secretly and corrupt using mischief and knavery. However, guile can only attract the weak. The strong person is the one who is capable of confronting the one who conspires against him. For instance, if someone is trying to poison another, he would be classified among those who try to corrupt things using tricks because he is afraid of confrontation. By contrast, a strong person is the one who refuses to do so even to the one who kills by way of confrontation, we say to him: you are afraid. You have proven through your audacity to kill another person that you cannot stand his life; but true manhood and courage necessitates that you let him live and see what he can do.

Therefore, the guile of Satan has transpired to be weak because Satan does not command power, whereby he can coerce or force your body, and he does not have the justification with which he can overpower your heart and persuade you. He, cunningly, points and tempts you using tricks, and you come to him. He does not play his ticks except on the weak person. The weaker the person, the graver Satan’s guile will be. For this reason, people used to say that a woman is stronger than a man because our Lord says: ‘Verily, your guile is great.’ (*Yusuf:* 28) To these people we say: ‘A woman's use of guile is proof of her weakness.’ Otherwise, why would they resort to forging guiles? An Arab poet emphasizes this by saying:

A woman is weak till she seizes an opportunity
Only then she would kill. This is what the power of the weak looks like

This is because, once a weak person has power over his opponent, and life gives him mastery over him, he says: ‘I will not let him go, for if I do, he will harm me more and do this and that’; whereas a strong person if put in the same situation, will say: ‘I will let him go, and if he wrongs me again, I will get hold of him and hit him on the head.’ So, when the guile is great, the weakness behind it is greater. The True Lord, then, says: ‘[Prophet], do you not see those who were told, “Restrain yourselves from fighting, perform the prayer and pay the prescribed alms”? When fighting was ‘ordained for them, they evaded the command. The reason is that when the weak seizes his enemy and has control over him, he will say, ‘I will not leave him because if I do that, he will do so and so to me.’ But when the strong seizes his enemy, he will say, ‘I will let him go, but if he does something else, I will catch him and hit and punish him.’ Thus, the greater the person's guile is, the greater his weakness tends to be. Subsequently Allah *the Exalted* says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ قِيلَ لَهُمۡ كُفُّوٓاْ أَيۡدِيَكُمۡ وَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ فَلَمَّا كُتِبَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡقِتَالُ إِذَا
فَرِيقٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ يَخۡشَوۡنَ ٱلنَّاسَ كَخَشۡيَةِ ٱللَّهِ أَوۡ أَشَدَّ خَشۡيَةٗۚ وَقَالُواْ رَبَّنَا لِمَ كَتَبۡتَ عَلَيۡنَا ٱلۡقِتَالَ لَوۡلَآ
أَخَّرۡتَنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ قَرِيبٖۗ قُلۡ مَتَٰعُ ٱلدُّنۡيَا قَلِيلٞ وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةُ خَيۡرٞ لِّمَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰ وَلَا تُظۡلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا ٧٧

[Prophet], do you not see those who were told, ‘Restrain your- selves from fighting, perform the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms’? When fighting was ordained for them, some of them feared men as much as, or even more than, they feared God, saying, ‘Lord, why have You ordained fighting for us? If only You would give us just a little more time.’ Say to them, ‘Little is the enjoyment in this world, the Hereafter is far better for those who are mindful of God: you will not be wronged by as much as the fibre in a date stone [77] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 77)

We know that when Allah *the Exalted* uses the interrogative clause ‘do you not see,’ He means that if you witnessed the matter at the time it happened, you could meditate on the actual event. By contrast, if the event has not been witnessed, then it means, ‘do not you know?’ However, the knowledge informed by Allah is more authentic than whatever you may witness with your own eyes. When Allah says, ‘Constrain your hands,’ this entails the intention to extend and use the hands; that is, no one would order someone who did not extend his hands to constrain them. The discourse here in the verse is about fighting. Thus, constraining hands, in this context, refers to abstaining from fighting. The evidence is that Allah says later in the verse, ‘When fighting was ordained for them...’ Hence, they were commanded to constrain their hands because they had manifested the intention to engage in fighting, either verbally by saying, ‘O Muhammad, give us the permission to fight,’ or action by preparing themselves for fight. Inasmuch as Allah says in the Quran, ‘...But when fighting was ordained for them,...’ this indicates the existence of two temporal contexts in this verse: the first is when they were asked to constrain their hands, and the second is when fighting was prescribed for them. We, thereby, understand that there were intentions on their part to extend their hands in the sense of fighting before it was ordained for them. Those who asked for the permission to fight were Ibn ‘Awf and some of his friends. If the command to fight had been left to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, he would have commanded them to do so once they asked him. It has been related that Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said that ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf and some of his companions came to Prophet Muhammad in Mecca and said, ‘O Muhammad! We were respected when we were idolaters, and when we believed, we were humiliated.’ He said, ‘I have been commanded to pardon, so do not fight.’(1) Then, when Allah caused us to move to Medina, He commanded us to fight, but they refrained. Then Allah *the Almighty* has revealed: ‘Have you not seen those who were told to constrain their hands (from fighting)?’This is proof that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was waiting for the Command of Allah. Subsequently, Allah has prescribed fighting upon them; yet, some of them evaded the command. This is in line with Allah’s words that, when fighting was prescribed, some of them feared the enemy as they feared Allah or even more. (*an-Nisa’:* 77) So, how can one explain this fear even though they are supposedly believers? Does this mean that they were afraid of their enemies, or that they reneged on their faith, as some of the children of Israel did after they had asked Allah to prescribe fighting upon them? The children of Israel asked a Prophet of theirs to raise a king for them to fight in Allah's cause. Yet, when fighting was ordained for them, they turned their backs, save for a few of them. (*al-Baqara:* 246)

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(1) *Abu Dawud, authentic*

Accordingly, when matters reached the stage of actual application, fear and weakness befell on some of them. Allah *the Exalted* has not ignored the possibility that any believer's faith can increase and decrease. Since the person is neither a Messenger and nor infallible, we should not say that someone did so and so. The reason is that the person did not claim to be infallible. Thus, he may err, fall prey to the inclinations or temptations of his own self and he may be in a weak position. For this reason, when someone tells you that this woman did this, and that man did that, ask him, 'Did anyone claim to be infallible? Since they are not infallible, they may err.'

Allah says that only some of the group took this stance, and this means that they were not equal; some of them were weak, and some of them preserved the strength and robustness of their faith so that no weakness or atrophy befell them. In addition, consider Allah's courtesy when addressing people. Allah has not referred to a specific person; rather, He only says that some of them wanted to evade fighting which necessitated that everyone should check into himself. Allah has intended to avoid naming anyone in order to preserve the privacy of His Servants. Since preserving the privacy of His servants emanates from Him *the Exalted* then know that our Lord is more jealous about His Servant than the servant himself. For this reason, we always say that Allah's concealment of people's secrets from others is an honour for all mankind.

Assume that Allah has revealed to you the secrets of other people; would you like them to know yours? No; therefore, when you see that Allah has concealed your secrets and that of other people, know that it is a bounty and a form of Mercy because man is always in a flux of change. Thus, someone may offend you deep down in his heart, but he may not want you to know about this offense. You may also hate him and want to get rid of him. If Allah revealed to him what you conceal in your heart and revealed to you what he conceals in his heart, a dispute may flare up wherein each of you may lose his dignity. But Allah has concealed the secrets of His creation due to His mercy to them.

You are the servant of Allah who may disobey Him, but He likes to conceal your sins and also commands others not to look into them. By Allah, is there another Lord like this Lord? This is wondrous. You may be sinful, but He still conceals your sins, and He also commands others not to reveal other people's faults. That is because some people may be ashamed of their faults, so they use their reputations and clothes in order to conceal their shortcomings. Why has Allah decreed this? He has decreed this so that people would not lose control or hope of the way of repentance to Allah.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* dispenses His mercy to society, but the failure is on part of the people who always insist on knowing the unseen and seeking those who can foretell the future. We say, to whoever pursues such practises, that Allah has concealed the unseen as a bounty that He has bestowed upon you, so leave it as Allah has willed.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says that when fighting has been ordained for them, a group stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of Allah. Everyone who belonged to this group was afraid of fighting, getting killed and death because it would lead him to be recompensed for what he has done in the worldly life. For this reason, one companion once said, ‘I hate the truth.’ So, another companion wondered, ‘How come you hate the truth?’ He replied, ‘I hate the truth of death and who among us likes it.’

Why do people hate fighting and death? The reason is that Allah takes a soul without the destruction of the body. In contrast, enemies at war may cut bodies into pieces or even mutilate them. But if the servant of Allah recalls the reward which he will be granted for this sacrifice, the whole matter will become easy for him.

When fighting was prescribed for those people, they asked why Allah has done so. It is as if they forgot that they were the ones who had asked Allah to prescribe fighting for them. But this is the nature of the human psyche; it always craves what is remote and out of reach, but once the object of desire is attained, it loses interest.

Then, they said, 'Lord, why have You ordained fighting for us? If only You would give us just a little more time.' Was this discourse really intended as an interrogative? Allah explains that they said, 'Lord! Why have you examined us in such a tough way? We may not be able to endure it at the time of fear in battles.' For this reason, they asked Allah to postpone the prescription of fighting and cause them to die naturally, not at the hands of their enemies. The phrase '…for a little while…' shows that each and every one of them was completely aware that he would inevitably die, but none of them wanted his life to end by getting killed. Why do you ask Allah to postpone the time of prescribing fighting? Is it out of your love for the worldly life and its pleasures? Allah's answer immediately follows: '…Say, "little is the enjoyment of this worldly life…"' It is very inappropriate of you, believers, to be so concerned about your lives that you do not go to fight. All of you will ultimately die and everyone will be recompensed according to his or her deeds. However, the one who gets killed while fighting for the cause of Allah, will immediately be rewarded and granted a life in lieu of his death in this worldly life, as he attained martyrdom. For this reason, Allah commands His Prophet Muhammad to declare the littleness of the enjoyment of this worldly life when compared to the great reward that someone attains if he is killed for the Cause of Allah. Then, some of them said, 'If death is inevitable, why do we not go and fight for Allah's cause. If we get killed, let it be for a price that exceeds the value of our deed.' Hence, this is raising the value of the benefit. For this reason, a wise man once said:

If any human being were immortal

We would deem the courageous the most erroneous among us.

This means that if life lasted for someone, the most misled people among us would be the courageous ones—who get killed in battles; however, this is not the case. The Arab poet says:

O you who deter me from fighting let the uproar of battle begin

And watch me take pleasure in dying, for will you make me immortal

And the poet Al-Mutanabbi says:

I see that all of us desire the life

Each keen on his life as if he were in love with it
The love of the coward for himself made him cautious
And the love of the courageous for himself led him to war.

Thus, both of them love their own selves; but there is a difference between the foolish love and the deep love.

When we look at the overall context of the verse, we will realize that Allah *the Exalted* is educating the believing group in the early times of Islam. This education regarding their faith is not subject to the party spirit of the pre-Islamic era or to the pride of the soul. A group of the believers in Mecca who experienced persecution wanted to fight, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed them that he has not been commanded to fight yet. Then, he commanded them to pray, pay alms to the poor, and endure what they were going through until Allah permitted them to fight. This is the first stage of education which the believers went through because Islam came about at a time when Arabs were full of pride, tribal prejudices, haughtiness and arrogance. Whenever one of them was provoked about something, he would rush to his sword and tribe and wage a war. Thereby Allah *the Exalted* wants to uproot the believers' anger for the sake of themselves, tribal prejudices and pride; rather, He *the Exalted* wants to make their anger for the sake of Allah only.

When the permission to fight was revealed, it did not come to impose Islam as a creed on people or to force them to embrace it as a religion. Rather, it came to protect the people from the domination of the stronger one, who wants to subordinate the weak to him. When Allah *the Exalted* wants to free the choice of the human being, He prescribed fighting to preserve the dignity of the human being and to keep them from being subordinate to anyone else in their creed. Afterwards, Islam should be presented rationally so that whoever accepts it is welcomed, and whoever does not, he can retain his religion. This indicates that Islam is a religion that prohibited encroaching upon other people's faiths and guaranteed for them the freedom to choose whatever creed they wanted—after clarifying to them what is guidance and what is error.

When Allah enjoined fighting on the believers, He made it solely for His cause so as to clear the believers' intentions from any other purposes or aims. He wants the believers to fight only for His cause and not for anger, prejudice, pride or any other personal motive. For this reason, we find that some of those who were craving to fight feared it when it was decreed as they fear Allah or even more.

Accordingly, there is a difference between fighting in theory and actually engaging in it. For this reason, we saw that some of them even feared to engage in fighting in order not to get killed. Killing, as you know, is the destruction of the body; it is different from the natural death in which Allah severs the soul from the body without destroying the latter. In addition, fighting excites one's fear of death, and the fear of fighting emanates from one's desire to live longer. That is due to the fact that getting killed in battle makes the fighter confronts death closely, whereas natural death is only known by Allah. For this reason, they said, Our Lord! Why have you ordained fighting for us? Was their request for fighting intended to satisfy their pride and haughtiness? Allah wants to acquit the believer of any suspicion of fighting for the sake of pride because He *the Exalted* wants the battle to be only for the cause of faith so that the Word of Allah is the highest, even if the one opposing its prevalence shares familial, blood or friendship relations with the believers.

Allah *the Exalted* wants to teach us this principle because the Muslim *Ummah* will face fierce violence in its attempt to affirm the basis of creedal choice among mankind. In this vein Allah *the Exalted* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that 'If they say to you that they want Allah to postpone the prescription of fighting, tell them that the enjoyment of this world is little.' Thus, the keener the believer is to preserve his life—to make it longer—the bigger the share he wants to take from this life. Similarly, Allah commands us to abandon this idea and to establish a criterion whereby we can gauge the worth and value of our life; 'for He promises the believers to be admitted into Paradise in return for their lives and property' (*at-Tawba:* 111).

It is a transaction of selling and buying. Furthermore, Allah *the Exalted* says concerning the bargain of faith that He says 'Shall I show you to a bargain that will save you from a grievous punishment.' (*as-Saff:* 10)

Accordingly, Allah regards the human interest in His dealing with us. A courteous and intelligent person would choose to engage in the profitable and guaranteed deal whose return exceeds every other deal. If we compare this world to the Afterlife, we will immediately realize that no matter how long the former lasts, this will not affect or increase the age of the individual. That is due to the fact that, even if the age of the world were extended, its actual lifetime, which is relative to everyone, is measured in terms of the individual's lifetime and not in terms of the lifetime of the world's population. Even if the worldly life lasted longer for others, what benefit would accrue to the individual in return?

Therefore, the worldly life for any individual is defined. Allah gives glad tidings to the believer who fights for His cause by assuring him that He will gain an infinite lifetime from this deal. Moreover, the length of our stay in this world, without being killed and dying naturally, is dubitable and not certain. Indeed, we see people who die as infants, and others who die in their youth or early adulthood. By contrast, the Afterlife is infinite and certain.

Indeed, on the one hand, pleasure and gratification in this world are commensurate with the vision and capacity of each individual to achieve them. On the other hand, pleasure in the Afterlife is commensurate with what Allah has prepared for His servants through His infinite power and abundant Mercy. Thus, if we compared the exchange of the worldly life for the Afterlife, we will realize that the worldly pleasure, assuming that it is a pleasure in the first place, is quite short-lived and limited.

Accordingly, Allah raises our awareness to value the bargain of faith. He knows that everyone loves to achieve his benefit. So, no one should think that religion came about to divest him of his freedom or to humiliate him because religion was revealed to refine and develop the interest of the believer.

A good example is when religion forbids the person to steal from others, it also forbids all other people to steal from that person; therefore, everyone gains the protection of religion. As much as religion prevents one from encroaching upon others' rights, it similarly prevents others, who are numbered in millions, from encroaching upon the individual's rights. Similarly, when religion forbids you from casting your eyes upon what is only permitted to others; it restricts others from casting their eyes upon what is only permitted to you. The greatest gain thereby accrues to the individual.

Allah's statement concerning the littleness of this world enjoyment reflects the greatness of the bargain of faith. Subsequently, Allah assures us of His

Justice saying that none will be wronged by even as much as the fibre in a date stone. The Arabic word *al-fatil* often refers to the threads of dirt that get formed as one rubs his plums together. Also, *al-fatil* may refer to the small thread inside the date stone. All of these semantic connotations indicate that you will not be wronged even regarding the most trivial matters. Allah has also set conditions for justice as He explains that whoever commits a sin will be commensurately recompensed for it. However, the one who does a good deed will be rewarded ten times its worth or more.

In this manner, justice will not exhaust any believer because it comes with its grace as the good deed is worth ten times its value or more. The good deed is further weighed for Allah on the scale of justice based on the Grace the one has received. So, no one should say that Allah dispenses Justice without Grace.

Thus, the saying of Allah that says that none will be wronged by as much as the fibre in a date stone associates grace with justice. For this reason, we supplicate to Allah to treat us in accordance with His Grace and not with His Justice, since Justice alone may exhaust us. We also ask Allah to give us gracefully and favourably and not according to the measure of the scale, because the latter may exhaust us. Further, we supplicate to Allah to treat us generously and not according to strict calculative measures. Thereby, we see that Allah's statement informs us that He will treat us justly and gracefully so that the sin would be counted as one, and the good deed would be worth ten times its value or more.

Allah's statement refers to what He has decreed in accordance with both His Grace and Justice. Further Allah *the Exalted* wants to reassure us that the issues of faith are preserved. Accordingly, we should not think that your deeds are the cause of your granted reward. Rather, the true cause is the Grace of Allah as He says that the believers should rejoice at the Bounty of Allah and His Grace. (*Yunus:* 58)

It is Allah's Grace which delights the heart of the believer. Afterwards, Allah responds to an issue that the hypocrites raised when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out to war in Uhud and a large number of Muslims were killed. The hypocrites said that if the Muslims had remained with them, they would not have been killed. (*Al-'Imran:* 156) They thought that staying in their homes would protect them from death and that going to war, conversely, brought about death. We know that every event has its temporal and spatial context to which we usually refer as the condition of the event. Those who grammatically studied the meaning of *azh-zharf* (the spatial and temporal conditions) know that it is the part of speech which classifies the conditions into either time or space. Every event must have a certain place and it at a certain point in time. However, the time and place of death are ambiguous; it is spatially and temporally vague. When Allah conceals something, He does not do so to make it unknown to us; rather, to clear its nature abundantly. Thus, when Allah conceals something, it becomes abundantly clear, but how so?

When Allah *the Exalted* conceals the time of death and makes it unknown to us, man ought to expect death at any moment. Thus, is there clarity better than this? When He has made us unaware of the time of death, He has not prevented us from determining the time it happens; however, He has raised our awareness that death may happen at any point in our lives; therefore, no one is thus capable of taking precautions to avoid the time or the place of death. Thus, Allah says:

أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا۟ يُدْرِككُّمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنتُمْ فِى بُرُوجٍ مُّشَيَّدَةٍ ۗ وَإِن تُصِبْهُمْ حَسَنَةٌ
يَقُولُوا۟ هَٰذِهِۦ مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَإِن تُصِبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَقُولُوا۟ هَٰذِهِۦ مِنْ عِندِكَ ۚ قُلْ كُلٌّ
مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَمَالِ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ٱلْقَوْمِ لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا ﴿٧٨﴾

Death will overtake you no matter where you may be, even inside high towers.' When good fortune comes their way, they say, 'This is from God,' but when harm befalls them, they say, 'This is from you [Prophet].' Say to them, 'Both come from God.' What is the matter with these people that they can barely understand what they are told? [78] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 78)

In this verse, Allah addresses the question of death from the perspective of the place, when He says that death overtakes the person wherever he might be, even inside high towers. The human mind—which imagines that it could take precautions against death by avoiding the place where it is supposed to happen—should realize that it is incapable of doing so. The presence of a person in a particular place does not protect or prevent him from death.

Irrespective of whether he is in the camp of belief or that of disbelief, nothing will keep death from reaching him.

The location, as we know, defines the spatial condition of the event. The subtlety of death penetrates any place or time as long as Allah has decreed it to happen. The enemies of man, as far as his health and life are concerned, are numerous. But if we consider enemies in terms of their violence, we will find that it suits their subtlety. The subtler the enemy is, the more violent it tends to be; the greater and larger in size it is, the less violent it tends to be. The powerful enemy may terrify and horrify a man, but one can always protect himself against it. But when is the enemy really difficult to confront? It is when the enemy is really small in number, subtle and imperceptible so that it manages to insinuate itself into a man.

Here is an example that may illustrate this point; assume that someone is building a house in the wilderness, and another person passes by to congratulate him for laying the foundation of the house. The latter may tell the house owner, 'You did not take the necessary precautions for building a house in this location, where wolves and foxes abound; you should install iron bars on the ground floor windows so that wild animals do not attack you. ' Upon listening to this piece of advice, the owner of the house installs iron bars. Another person may come and tell him, 'You have overlooked the fact that in this place snakes also abound. So, you should make the spaces between the iron bars narrower.' The owner of the house then accedes to the advice to prevent snakes from entering the house. Then, a third person may come to visit the owner of the house and tell him, 'I wonder how you safeguard your house against snakes, wolves and foxes and forget to protect yourself from the flies in this region, even though the flies here are poisonous.' The owner of the house may then install a screen to shut out the flies. Afterwards, a fourth person may tell the owner of the house that there are even smaller yet more ferocious and dangerous insects in the area. Upon this warning, the owner of the house may replace the screen he had already installed with another that with a finer mesh. Accordingly, we may draw the conclusion that the subtler and more imperceptible your enemy is, the more aggressive and dangerous it will tend to be.

For this reason, the most dangerous microbes that penetrate the human body—without one's awareness of how they infringed his skin and contaminated his body— are quite minute and subtle. Thus, one does not become aware of his infection except after the incubation period, when the symptoms start to surface. Those microbes enter the body, even though we can never know when it does so or where it dwells in the body.

Allah drives our attention to the fact that the subtler and more minute the thing is, the more aggressive it tends to be—and the less likely that any defence mechanism would be capable of deterring its offense. So, imagine the case of death, which is subtler than anything? Can anyone take any precautions against it?

What is the opposite of death? It is life; the period within which the soul dwells in the body. But what is the essence of the soul? No one knows the essence of the soul despite the fact that every person bears a soul within. Further, no one knows the dwelling place of the soul or its shape; moreover, no one knows who has seen, heard or touched it. When Allah takes the soul away, life ends. Allah is the One Who confers the soul upon any living being; when He breathes this soul into it, He brings life into it.

Allah draws our attention and alerts us to the fact that He has willed that some truths about our material existence would remain concealed and hidden away from physicians and microscopes. For instance, until today we do not know which viruses cause certain diseases.

If Allah *the Exalted* has given man a soul that is the cause of his life, why can we not believe that there is an actual, concrete cause underlying death that deprives the man of his soul as soon as it happens?! In this vein, we may understand the saying of Allah (chapter of *al-Mulk*) that He is *Glorified is He* Who holds all control and is Powerful over all things. He has created death and life in order to test people. (*al-Mulk:* 2)

Accordingly, death is not a negative process as some people may mistakenly think. It is rather a positive one; man has been created with accurateness and exactness like that of a manufacturer. The Almighty Allah described the process of life and death in the chapter of *al-Mulk*, and even gave priority to death over life; despite the fact that we factually experience life before death, death is mentioned before life. Life gives everyone his identity and capabilities—and using them, he employs the means and causes Allah has created for him to fulfil his mission in life. One may plough the land or trade in things; whichever befits his life, and entertain one's hearing and seeing. For that reason, man may think that life has been created first. The Almighty Allah calls our attention and explains to us that we should not think of life without thinking of its opposite. He says about himself that He is the only One who created death and life (*al-Mulk:* 2). This facilitates the comprehension of the Qudsi Hadith that explains the state of the inhabitants of Paradise versus that of the inhabitants of Hellfire. The Almighty Allah will bring death represented as a ram that He slays.

Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that 'Death will be brought on the Day of Resurrection and made to stand on the *sirat* (the bridge over hell). It will be said: "O people of Paradise!" And they will look anxious and afraid lest they be brought out of the place they are in. Then, it will be said: "O people of Hell!" and they will look, hoping that they will be brought out of the place they are in. Then, it will be said: "Do you know what this is?" They will say: "Yes, it is death." Then, the command will be given for it to be slaughtered on the *sirat*, and it will be said to both groups: "It is eternal wherever you are, and there will never be any death therein."'(1)

The depiction of death as a ram indicates that death is an actual entity. The Almighty Allah informs us that He will annihilate death so that we can have immortality without any fear of death. Further the Almighty Allah alarms and warns those who abjured their faith and mistakenly thought that, if the people who were killed for the sake of Allah had stayed behind, they would not have died or been killed; we say that staying behind would not have avoided death. If someone's demise is due, wherever he may be, death will overtake him, even if he were inside fortified towers.

The discourse of the Quran varies according to different contexts. Sometimes, the meaning of its discourse is immediately grasped through the literal analysis of the words. In other contexts, the discourse is understood based on the guidance of the style of the Quran because it is the discourse of the Almighty Allah. Humans generally forge their discourse in line with their linguistic and mental aptitudes. But when the Almighty Allah addresses His creatures, He addresses their psyche. For this reason, when a child—who is happy because he memorized the Quran—is asked by an elder person: ‘What is so delightful about memorizing the Quran?’ The child responds: ‘Memorizing the Quran gives me peace and harmony, and this suffices me as an enjoyment.’ He does not know that memorizing or listening to the Quran fills him with such harmony—because the speaker is the Almighty Allah, and through His Capability and the Beauty of His Majesty, He addresses the psyche.

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(1) *Musnad, Ahmad*

The Almighty Allah says that wherever you may be, death will overtake you; the word ‘overtake you’ indicates that once the soul is breathed into the body, death starts pursuing it (the soul) until it overtakes the latter at the time appointed by Allah. The word ‘overtake’ shows that death pursues the soul until it overtakes it. It is often said that death pursues life until death overtakes it; indeed, none of you can ever escape from death. For this reason, people who got deep knowledge from the Almighty Allah say: ‘Death is an arrow shot at you; your life is measured in terms of its journey towards you.’

Thus, we learn that the saying of the Almighty Allah ‘overtakes’ indicates that death pursues the life of the human being until it concludes and brings it to its demise.

Almighty Allah says that death will come to you even if you dwell in a lofty tower. Tracing the etymological root of the word *buruj*—the Arabic word for towers—we can grasp its general sense. The etymological root of this word consists of three letters: *al-ba'*, *ar-ra'* and *al-jim*. All of these letters semantically indicate salience and height.

Some people may say about a particular woman: ‘This woman has *baraj*.’ This often means that her eyes are wide and occupy a considerable portion of her face. Accordingly, *al-baraj* refers to salience, conspicuousness and wideness.

Towers were often tall buildings, like the fortresses we build nowadays with concrete and steel. The word *mushayyad* means that it is well-constructed. This qualification is important because some buildings may be tall, yet frail and faltering. A building that is *mushayyad*—the Arabic word, here translated as *raised* which is derived from *ash-shayd* referring to either height or clay.

What is intended is that the bricks used to build the tower are bound using clay, and thus it stands strong and tall.

If there is a number that is divisible by another number, this means that the division process yields units. Once a teacher walks into a class room, he says to his students: ‘Take out your books;’ that is, each student must take out his book. The same holds true in the analogy.

The word *‘towers*’ was used in a plural form to indicate that even if all of you take refuge in a tower surrounded by another, that one by a third and a fourth, and if there were a perfectly fortified fortress, such tower would not be of any avail to you. As a matter of fact, sometimes fortresses are built as a point surrounded by bigger concentric circles. Thus, the fortress would assume the shape of a centre point surrounded by a number of other fortresses. Death overtakes humans even if they are hiding in a tower surrounded by other fortresses. Both meanings reflect the Capability of the Almighty Allah to cause death to happen whenever He wills.

When The Almighty Allah speaks about life and death in a context of *jihad* (fighting in Allah’s Cause), so He wants to lead people out of darkness into light because religion is essentially light that dispels darkness. But those who live in darkness for a while get used to it and to the anarchy and corruption that accompany it. When religion comes about, some of them are bound to avoid it because light will deprive them of the pleasures they enjoy in their misguided life—as light dispels darkness. For this reason the Almighty Allah explains that He created death to serve two functions; the first is to be a reminder for the believer of his encounter with his Lord. Whoever believes has to always recall death because he knows well that his reward will only come forth upon death. When a believer hears the word death, he ought to start looking forward to this end and the reception of His reward.

The other function of death is that the non-believer always fears and dreads death and consistently fails to prepare himself for that reckoning. Thus, the word death inspires both desire and fear. When the one who truly has faith hears the word death, he immediately tells himself: ‘The hardships of this world will not last; I really want to go to Paradise.’

For this reason, those who have faith in the Almighty Allah must always bear this issue in mind. Doing so will alleviate the effect of any calamity that befalls them. As long as one has faith, he would immediately ask himself whenever he lost anyone dear to him: ‘was this person a believer or not?’ Were he a believer, he would be happy for him because the Almighty Allah brought him forth to what is good to him. Indeed, if you grieve over losing a relative who is a believer, then you should know that you are grieving over yourself. If the one who died is not a believer, then the believer would be relieved of his evil. Therefore, death is a comfort in all cases. The one who did good deeds ought to look forward to it—this is the ‘desire’ aspect—while the disbeliever should be afraid—this is the fear aspect.

For this reason, it is foolish to grieve over the deceased. One should rather consider the saying of the Almighty Allah that wherever you may be, death will overtake you even though you are in towers raised tall.

The Almighty Allah then follows, ‘Yet, when a good thing happens to them, some people say, “This is from the Almighty Allah,” whereas when evil befalls them, they say, ‘This is from you, O Muhammad!” Say: “All things come from the Almighty Allah.” What, then, is amiss with these people that they are in no wise near to grasp the truth of what they are told?’ But who is most likely to propose such a discourse?

The one who says that the *hasanah* (good deed) comes from the Almighty Allah truly believes in Him; he says so based on a true belief and conviction in his mind. However, the verse at stake does not address such a strain of people; it is rather intended to address those who tend to separate between Muhammad and his Lord. That is, they attribute the good things that happen to them to the Almighty Allah and the bad things to Muhammad. Accordingly, those who say such things are either hypocrites who only allegedly declared their conversion to Islam and allegiance to Prophet Muhammad, while still bearing infidelity in their hearts, or some people of the Book who believe in the Almighty Allah but do not recognize Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah. The latter group attributes all good things to the Almighty Allah and falsely accuses His Messenger of being responsible for all evils that befall them. In doing so, they separate between Muhammad and his Lord.

Therefore the Almighty Allah would not allow them to do as such. He revealed to them the Quran to be recited until the end of time, and there He says 'whoever pays heed to Prophet Muhammad pays heed to the Almighty Allah thereby; and as for those who turn away – We have not sent you to be their keeper' (*an-Nisa':* 80) The Almighty Allah also says: 'O Muhammad, tell them, 'If you love Allah, follow me and Allah will love you.' (*Al-'Imran:* 31) No one can cause a dispute or cleavage between Muhammad and his Lord because Muhammad is a Messenger from Allah *the Almighty* to relay His Message and the course He set to mankind. Allah *the Almighty* says that they could not find any fault [with the faith] save that Allah has enriched them and caused His Apostle to enrich them. (*at-Tawba:* 74)

The Almighty Allah is not content with any servant who asks Him only for forgiveness. Rather, His good servant ought to go to the Messenger of Allah and ask him to ask the Almighty Allah to forgive him on his behalf. No one can have a proper relation with the Almighty Allah away from Muhammad—His Messenger; so do not separate between the Command of the Almighty Allah and that of His Messenger. Therefore, the one who wants to fabricate and claim a difference between the Almighty Allah and His Prophet Muhammad by attributing good things to Him and bad things to His Messenger is erroneous and will ultimately be a loser.

But in what context was this verse revealed? People used to go to war; if they triumphed and collected the spoils of war, they would say: 'The Almighty Allah has privileged us with these winnings and gains.' Were they defeated, they would say that Muhammad is the one who caused us to be defeated as if Muhammad causes things to happen in a way other than that which the Almighty Allah intends. So, do not be misled and deceived by anyone who tries to distinguish between the will of the Messenger of Allah and that of his Lord. The Almighty Allah is the One Who sent Muhammad and revealed to him the Quran.

When the Message of Islam was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, he was hoping that people of the Book would believe in him as they have already believed in Allah. They were closer to his heart than those who do not have any faith or belief in one God, namely those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah. At that time, there were two main global powers: the Persians and the Romans. The Persians used to worship fire— Allah forbid!—while the Romans used to believe in Allah and the Books He had revealed before sending Prophet Muhammad, but they abjured the Message of Muhammad.

Those who believed in Allah *the Almighty* were closer to the heart of Muhammad than those who disbelieved in Him. This evidence refers to the inclination of Muhammad towards the latter group; a matter which stemmed from his faith and belief in the Almighty Allah. Such inclination also applied to the Jews. When Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina, their harvest accidentally yielded less than usual. The Jews said: ‘Our ranches and harvest have been decreasing since the arrival of this man.’ But was this really a sheer coincidence or was there a material explanation for it?

When Prophet Muhammad arrived in Medina, the Jews refused to recognize him even though they used to take pride in him and foretell his advent to the infidels. However, his advent divested them of their temporary power because they used to dominate wealth by dealing in usury and provoking enmity and animosity among people. Further, they dominated the movement of trade so that they would achieve mastery over others. They also knew the Almighty Allah’s Book, yet they tried to turn such knowledge into a trade. Hence, they had mastery in terms of three aspects: knowledge, money and the system of life they followed.

In the early times of Islam, the Aws and the Khazraj tribes went through one path under the power of Islam; the Jews thus failed to sell the weapons they used to make. This ultimately led them to lose the power and dominion they used to enjoy due to the disputes and differences they originally created and fomented. Further, they lost their financial dominion because Islam proscribed usury. In addition, they lost the mastery and dominion they enjoyed due to their knowledge of the path of Allah *the Almighty* because Islam exposed the way in which they paraphrased the Book of Allah.

Therefore, their means of dominion came to an end. For this reason, they grieved at the advent of the Prophet Muhammad to the extent that if any Jew met another one, he would not talk to him about anything except the issue of Muhammad. In so far as they were distracted by the matter to that extent, they neglected agriculture. They were distracted from the pursuit of the proper means of growing a good harvest and so they did not get one. Nonetheless, they tried to impute the problem to Prophet Muhammad since it was difficult for them to understand what was happening. However, it could also be the case that the Almighty Allah wanted to punish them because they cunningly conspired against His Messenger instead of taking care of their land and crops and pursuing the proper means to nurture their harvest. It could also be that this was a heavenly curse; the question is: 'Why did they not turn to the religion of Muhammad to rescue themselves from such hardship?' They used to take pride in Islam and foretell about its advent, but when Islam was revealed, they did not believe in it, and when it came unto them that which they knew (to be the truth), they disbelieve therein. Accordingly, more than a punishment was meted out to them. Those who used to deal with Jews in usury refrained from such practice. Further, the harvest of their land diminished.

Thus, Islam was a cause of the diminishment of their wealth. Allah *the Almighty* has related what they said: 'Yet, when a good thing happens to them, some people say, "This is from Allah," whereas when evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you, O Muhammad!" Say: "All is from Allah." (*an-Nisa':* 78) This means that good and evil things are both from Allah. But what is the '*good thing*' and what is the '*evil thing*'? The 'good thing' in this context refers to victory, gain, affluence, prosperity and fertility. The 'evil thing' refers to defeat, murder, misery, harm and aridity. This is their conception. But we—the believers—understand the meaning of the 'good thing' in a more precise way. The good thing from the perspective of the Islamic law is what Allah *the Almighty* commands, and the evil thing is what He proscribes. The evidence in support of this is that a believer may lose someone dear to him, or harm may befall the one who is dear to him, and at the same time, he takes a stance based on faith in receiving and dealing with such a calamity. Thus, this person may say: 'My grief will not bring back this dear person to me; I should seize the opportunity of such a calamity to gain admittance into Heaven.' He may add to this: 'it is enough condolence that the Almighty Allah may reward me for enduring the loss of someone who was dear to me; I would not receive in my entire life as big a reward as that which I would take for enduring the calamity of losing this dear person.'

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warns us against thinking that the ‘good deed’ is what is favourable to ourselves, and that the ‘evil deed’ is what is distasteful. No; from the perspective of the Islamic law, the one whom evil befalls is the one who has been deprived of the reward of Allah. For this reason, the Quran says that everything is from Allah, which means that good and evil deeds are all from Allah.

But does Allah cause evil deeds to happen? We must seek forgiveness of Allah should we think so. What is evil and what is good are only so from the relative perspective of man; all is ultimately from Allah. But if we ascribe every act to Allah, we will realize that everything that He has decreed is good. It is the absence of correct criteria that causes tiredness and toil. Indeed, if we tried to measure these things around us as accurately as a computer does, all our results would be correct.

Here is an example to illustrate this point. Assume that a student neglected his studies and attending his classes. Subsequently, he would fail at the end of the year. He may consider this failure to be an evil that befell him, but it is a good thing from the divine perspective. The success of such a negligent student would be an infringement of the universal law that whoever works hard should be rewarded for his efforts. It would also lead to the negligence of studying by all the students which would, in turn, cause the decline of knowledge and sciences. When Allah *the Exalted* has set the law that whoever does not work or exert any effort should fail, He has revived this universal law as a standard for thousands of humans. The failing person would become a clear, sufficient and practical example of this universal law. Similarly, the one who did not cultivate his land or was too lazy to plough or irrigate should not expect that it yields a good harvest which is something bad for him. This universal truth, in its essence, is good because it teaches everyone not to neglect the pursuit of proper means for attaining success. In conclusion, the one who suffers the result of his negligence often tends to interpret such a calamity as an evil thing that befell him because it involves harm and detriment. But if he considered the result commensurately with the effort he exerted, he would realize that this is Allah’s permanent law; it will never change.

Allah *the Exalted* sets His laws in His universe so that He will reward whoever pursues the proper means for success and divest of the reward whoever does not. When we weigh things according to this standard, we can easily discern that the one who works assiduously is bound to be successful, and that, conversely, the one who is neglectful and lazy is bound to fail. Both ramifications are results of the universal law set by Allah.

Whenever Allah *the Exalted* puts forward the sayings of any party without commenting on them, this implies that He approves such sayings. In contrast, if the opinion is false, Allah puts forward the proper evidence to refute it and demonstrate its falsity. This shows us that Allah *the Exalted* does not want us to neglect the false claims of our adversaries so that we do not know them. Rather, Allah elucidates these claims, and then criticizes them to protect our faith and creed against any disbelievers' claims—so that their claims do not harm our faith and creed. Therefore, Allah expounds the rationale and arguments of the disbelievers and explains to us that they are bound to argue, and that you believers, should respond to them by arguing in a certain manner.

A good example of this point is when some alleged that Allah has had a son; He has responded that their claim were nothing but falsehood. (*al-Kahf:* 5) Allah has exposed the arguments of the believers' adversaries because some believers may be taken aback by such arguments. However, when Allah presents these arguments, He draws the attention of the listener to the way in which He can refute it by showing its weak points.

Those—who said that what is good is from Allah, whereas what is evil is from Prophet Muhammad—wanted to cause dissension and a chasm between Allah and His Messenger. Thus, in order to explain that matter, Allah has commanded Prophet Muhammad to say to them that everything ultimately emanates from Allah. Further, the precision of Allah *the Exalted* is manifested in the fact that He has chosen prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver His Message to them, even though He could have put forward the matter without saying, 'Say…' as a command to Prophet Muhammad.

However, Allah wants Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be the intermediary. Hence, He has commanded him to say that all is from Allah. All, in this context, means both the good and evil things. Allah *the Exalted* wants to explain to us that the ontological realities of the world are consistent with the human natural inclination to have faith.

For a long time, scholars have disagreed about the ultimate origin and cause of the deeds of the servants of Allah. In this vein, they posed the following questions: is the deed of a servant of Allah undertaken by himself, or does Allah cause all actions to happen through the agency of His servants? If every servant of Allah is the ultimate cause of his deeds, it is fair that Allah will either punish or reward him for what he has done. However, if Allah were the ultimate cause and the Originator of all deeds, then why would He punish His servants? Subsequently, scholars plunged into a huge maze in pursuing the answer to this question.

Here, we say that we have to understand that Allah has created the universe and set laws to govern it. Further, these laws, to our utter surprise, regulate and encompass the acts and deeds of both the believers and the disbelievers. This indicates that no one in Allah's universe is worthier of worship than Him. Allah has admitted even those who do not believe in Him in the realm of His Lordship. Moreover, He has ordered all means and causes in His universe to respond to whoever labours and exerts effort, whether he is a believer or disbeliever because Allah is the One Who created him and brought him to the universe. In so far as this is the case, Allah thereby provides him with what is needed to sustain his life. Afterwards, Allah reveals His path to His servants saying that He likes a certain act and dislikes another; so whoever believes in Him, will be assigned a different status—he will be a true servant of Allah.

Therefore, recognition of the Divinity of Allah is the cause of His assigned obligations for all those who believe in Him. However, Allah is the Lord of all, and His Lordship encompasses everyone. In this vein, He sustains and provides all with their livelihood. That is, cosmic laws serve all. Some of Allah's creatures—whom He has made subservient to humankind and governed by His laws and norms wanted to revolt against man, to stop serving man because of his ingratitude to Allah.

Cosmic laws are like the soldiers of Allah. They revolt against the man when he fails to thank Allah for what He endowed him. But Allah explains to the subservient creatures that those disbelievers are still His creatures and He is the One Who brought them into existence. Thus, Allah has set universal laws that regulate the life of both believers and disbelievers. Afterwards, Allah has revealed His assigned obligations through the agency of His messengers. In this vein, He explained to mankind that He likes one act and dislikes the other; so whoever loves Him should adhere to His assignments. Accordingly, the purpose of Allah's Lordship is different from those of Divinity.

The purpose of Lordship is creation and supporting the needy, whereas the purpose of Divinity is to establish obedience to Allah. Such obedience consists in following commands and avoiding proscriptions. Every ruling that involves a command or a proscription, which is Allah's obligation, is related to the requirements of Allah's Divinity and not His Lordship.

By contrast, everything related to the universal laws is connected with the purpose of Lordship. Universal laws never change. For instance, someone who wants to succeed in a subject at school may need to score fifty per cent or more; another may need to score only forty per cent to pass a different subject. The question is: if a student managed to meet the condition of success, would it imply that the student has succeeded due to his efforts or, rather, that such rules gave him success on him?

The latter is true. It was the law that conferred on the student his success. It is true that the law did not tell the student that his exam answers would guarantee his success. Thus, if the student applies himself and studies according to this standard, his effort will give him a level of success that is commensurate with the level of excellence such effort supposedly accomplishes. The law does not make anyone successful, nor does it cause anyone to fail; rather, the student who exerts effort succeeds, and the one who does not do so fails. Accordingly, everything in the universe functions according to a specific law.

Let us consider the following example: if we consider the movement of the hand created by Allah, we will not be able to completely know the way it functions. When one lifts something from the ground, none of us usually knows which muscles move to carry such object. In reality, the One Who has acted is Allah. By analogy, the hand, whether one used it to do a good deed or used to perpetrate an evil thing, is ultimately used by Allah, Who is the Ultimate Doer; indeed, every act is ultimately the act of Allah. The man only directs the energy to either shaking hands with someone or slapping another person on the face; the hand can perform both functions. When one directs his hand to slap someone on his face, he deserves a punishment, and when he directs it to shake hands with someone, he merits a reward.

The man is thus responsible for directing the effort required for undertaking a particular act, not for the deed itself. Therefore, punishment and reward are the compensations for the direction of the energy spent, and not for the act itself. Let us take another example: consider a knife; one may use it knife to slaughter a chicken; alternatively, one can use the same knife to stab a person. The knife itself is incapable of disobeying the one who uses it to slaughter a chicken as much as it cannot disobey if he decides to use it to stab another person.

Allah has created the knife to serve the function of slaughtering. However, one may use this tool to slaughter in different ways—whether such slaughtering is lawful or proscribed by Allah. Therefore, Allah is the ultimate Doer of all deeds. As long as the deed is within the realm of the commands of the One Who has assigned the commands, and He is the Originator of the universal laws, then He is the ultimate Doer of all deeds and actions.

When we meditate on the matters carefully, we realize that all deeds ultimately emanate from Allah. The man is only capable of channelling his energy to actually bring about the act. A young man dwelling upon studying his lessons did not create his mind or his eyes with which he reads. However, his mind is fit for thinking about the good things and the bad ones. Further, he can use his eyes to read a comic or use them to read a useful book.

Accordingly, irrespective of one’s deeds, he can never hide anything he does from his Lord. In fact, all what one does is to channel the energy that Allah has given him to act.

Your reward or punishment is based on the way in which you channel your energy and power to do good or evil things. Thus, when our Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘All is from Allah,’ we immediately say that this true. Practically, whoever neglects his land and fails to fertilize and irrigate it, and then suffers through a drought, should know that such a calamity is a result of his failure to correctly direct the energy that Allah has created for him.

By contrast, when there is no rain, one is absolutely left idle. Universal laws have been created by Allah; whoever follows these laws gains, but whoever suffers an evil thing should know that he failed to pursue the proper means to succeed in whichever endeavour he undertook. This holds true for both individuals and groups. Whoever gambles and afterwards suffers destruction and loss of wealth or property should know that he was the cause of such misfortune because he had already received orders from the True Lord *Glorified is He* not to practice such activities. Any nation that complained about the lack of agricultural land or proper livelihood should realize that they are the cause of such a problem because those in charge amongst them should have worked on developing the nation's resources in proportion to the increase in population.

What often exhausts and drains us is the fact that we have to endure the oblivion of other previous generations; thus, a single generation may find itself faced with all the problems that its predecessors should have addressed and resolved in the first place. If a previous generation took its responsibility in resolving its own problems, the mission of the present generation would be less exhausting. As long as we have a fertile land that is suitable for cultivation, we should prepare and use spring water to cultivate it. If there is a problem, it is therefore the problem of the laziness of the previous generations. As long as there is a buffer of underground water, we have to use our reason to extract the secrets Allah has concealed in His universe. It is not necessary that rain should fall in order for agriculture to happen. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky and makes it flow as springs [and rivers] in the earth' (*az-Zumar:* 21).

Allah *Glorified is He* has created outlets for water inside the soil so that people in tropical countries could reach down to underground water as well as the water would not evaporate. Thus, Allah has hidden some of the water inside the earth for the benefit of man. In tropical countries, we notice how salt precipitates on the soil. This is clear evidence that Allah has set the law for distilling fresh water so that it can be used for both drinking and cultivation.

We are all aware of the law of evaporation. For instance, we may pour a glass of water and spread it over the floor of a 25 square meter area room. Then, we will notice that the water evaporates quickly. However, if we leave the same amount of water in the glass, only very little of it will be lost through evaporation. Accordingly, the greater the area or surface over which the water is spread, the greater the evaporation will be. The True Lord *Glorified is He* intended that three quarters of the earth's surface should be water because water is the origin of life. Further, Allah made some of this water salty so that its taste would not change or decay. In addition, saltwater is always spread over vast areas in order for it to evaporate, condense and then fall again in the form of rain. As rain falls, water runs into valleys, and the remaining of this water gets stored in outlets inside the earth as fresh water so that man can use the intelligence Allah has endowed him to extract it from the earth. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has created for us all the means we need to earn our livelihood.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, 'Do you indeed disbelieve in He who has created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds.' (9) And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance in four days without distinction – for [the information] of those who ask. (10)' (*Fussilat:* 9-10)

Accordingly, do not ever say that the human population will outweigh the livelihood and sustenance available on earth. Rather, admit that your creative and deductive capacities have waned. As long as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance,' we should know that no saying is truer than His. Consider the following example—and Allah has the supreme and most exalted parables. Assume that an employee bought all his monthly needs and stored it in the attic of the house in the beginning of the month. One day, he walks into his house and finds out that his wife did not prepare lunch; what would happen? He would be angry.

Allah has stored all the livelihood and sustenance we need inside the earth. Yet, we do not exert enough effort to benefit from it. Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that if man did not avail himself of the laws Allah has set for him and failed to follow Allah's assigned commands and proscriptions, he would toil and would live in murk and misery.

Allah *Glorified is He* thus says: 'and Allah presents an example: a city which was safe and secure; its provision coming to it in abundance from every location, but it denied the favours of Allah. So, Allah made it taste the envelopment of hunger and fear for what they had been doing.' (*an-Nahl:* 112) This town enjoyed security and tranquillity, but it refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings. When you examine closely the connection between cause and effect, between the universe and its laws, the human and what is created for him, you will notice a peculiar thing. This town was secure and tranquil and abounded with sustenance that came to it from everywhere. Thus, the town was the place of inhabitancy. Further, the place of inhabitancy is not the only place where there is sustenance; rather, sustenance used to flood it from everywhere else. It is as if every dweller of a particular place has other places serving it. However, this town refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings.

The apparent meaning of ingratitude is concealment. Therefore, the town that showed ingratitude to Allah's blessings is the town that concealed these blessings. The blessings of Allah were present, but the humans in this town concealed these blessings through their laziness and failure to extract such blessings from the earth.

Alternatively, it could be that the people in that town managed to extract Allah's bounty to them, yet they hid it away from others. The evil in the universe is always due to one of these two matters: The people of several nations were too lazy to channel their efforts to extract Allah's blessings from the earth. Further, other nations possessed wealth that they threw in the sea lest it would go to other nations. The corruption we see in the relation between different parts of the world, indicates that the world is the town that Allah *Glorified is He* used as a parable, 'And Allah presents an example: a city which was safe and secure; its provision coming to it in abundance from every location, but it denied the favours of Allah. So, Allah made it taste the envelopment of hunger and fear for what they had been doing.'

Consider the precision of the style of the Quran in Allah's saying: ' Allah made it taste the envelopment of hunger.' We know that food is the thing that is often experienced through taste. Further, we know that the tongue is the organ that tastes. In contrast, *al-libas*—the Arabic word here translated as 'envelopment'—encompasses the entire body. The organ that tastes is not only the tongue but the entire body. The mouth ultimately eats for the benefit of the rest of the body. When the nutrients needed to sustain life do not reach the rest of the body, all the body experiences hunger as well.

The universe is created by Allah according to an accurate system of laws so that universal phenomena would follow the path set for it by Allah. When these laws function regularly, they yield the expected results to man—even after a while—to the extent that some of the commentators on the Quran and some theologians argue that hereditary illnesses and diseases are transmitted from the preceding generations to the succeeding ones due to the negligence of the ancestors and their tendency to encroach upon and breach the path set by Allah. Thus, if Allah *Glorified is He* sets a universal law for the human being, but the latter violates it, he must experience bad results to ensue from his action. The same holds true for groups and nations.

Nevertheless, reason tends to be preoccupied with calamities and evil things that befall people unknowingly and unexpectedly. Philosophy should have investigated this domain; however, religion teaches us the causes of these phenomena. Religion teaches us that if a human being fails to pursue the means and proper causes for securing success in whichever endeavour he undertakes, and then suffers a disaster, he should know that such a disaster is the consequences of his own actions.

Consider earthquakes, volcanoes, sweeping avalanches or ferocious storms. Man cannot interfere with or prevent any of these phenomena. All of them relay one message to man: if everything in the universe could be monotonously and consistently explained in terms of causal relations, we would not need to assume a connection with an unknown concealed force to which we must consistently submit.

Some philosophical schools in Germany, for instance, argued that the existence of evil in the universe is evidence that there is no god. Were there a wise god, all of these evils would not have happened, and no one would have been born with a single eye, stumbling leg or mutilated body. Another school in the same period of time argued: No, the monotony of the cosmic order is evidence suggesting that there is no god. If there were a god, He would break that order and cause certain events to happen in violation of the cosmic laws. Thus, we may realize that these people seek infidelity for its own sake. The evidence is that one school took the order of the universe as grounds for its infidelity, whereas the other school took the exceptional anomalies in the universe as evidence to substantiate its argument for disbelieving in God.

To both schools we say: you are immature. Whichever wants to seek order as evidence of the existence of a Wise God, and whichever wants to take the universal anomalies as an indication of the existence of an All-Capable God should realize that both aspects are present in the universe, and both are evidence of the existence of an All-Wise and All-Capable God if we are fair in judgement.

Consider the order of the higher universe. If a minor thing is amiss in this order, the entire edifice of the universe would collapse. Also, consider the sun, rain, planets and stars; they all follow a strict order. So, whoever wants to take order and regularity as evidence of the existence of the wisdom of a creator, would find what he seeks. By contrast, whoever wants to take anomalies as evidence of the existence of a dominating God—Who transcends the mechanical nature of the universe—would also find those clues; but anomalies are always individual cases. Accordingly, if there is a corrupt individual event or member in a system, this does not imply that the system is defective. The percentage of those born with a single eye to those born with perfect eyes is almost negligible.

However, when anomalies occur in the system of the universe and in the movement of celestial bodies, the destruction of the world may ensue. Thus, whoever wants to see that an ultimate order governs the universe and indicates the existence of a higher creative wisdom should consider and examine the higher celestial bodies. By contrast, whoever wants to take anomalies and aberrant incidents as an indication of the existence of a power that controls the mechanical structure of the world should know that such things are also present. However, anomalies are individual cases; thus, if there are one or two anomalous individuals within a system, the entire system would not fall apart.

We also know that the monotony of the blessings may distract man from thinking about the ultimate Giver and Lord. For instance, if one of us enjoys healthy teeth for a long time, he will never recall how painful bad teeth tend to be. However, if a tooth starts to decay, one remembers the bounty of having good teeth. The same thing holds true for the kidneys and eyes; if one feels pain in any of these organs, he immediately rushes to a physician. All of these matters are alarms intended to disrupt the monotony of the blessings one enjoys so that one may recall the value of these blessings. When we see a man whom Allah deprived of sight, each one of us immediately says, ‘thank Allah for His bounty’ and becomes protective of his eyes lest he should lose them.

The same attitude recurs when one sees a stumbling or mutilated man. All of these are direct and clear cosmic messages so that people would not be distracted by the blessings away from the One Who conferred such blessings.

If we consider the things that may befall an individual or a nation as a whole, we will always find that these are well deserved punishments for opposing Allah's instructions. If there is anything beyond man's capacity, we say that this is the wisdom of the Creator so that He may call our attention to the fact that He is the Ultimate Lord. For this reason, we notice that people who suffer from congenital mutilations are only a few. In addition, Allah compensates those who suffer from such anomalies with other permanent bounties. A poet said:

My eye was born blind yet blindness is often associated with intelligence
Indeed I peculiarly acquired a lot of knowledge
The absence of the light of the eye opened a space for a river of knowledge
To follow within me… a river that no one else could comprehend.

I once used the famous composer Ludwig Van Beethoven as an example. Even though he was deaf, he managed to compose symphonies that struck the entire world. For this reason, there is a common saying that states: 'everyone who suffers from a disability has great powers.' Inasmuch as Allah uses that person as a means to remind people of His bounties and blessings, Allah *Glorified is He* compensates the disabled by endowing him with another talent which attracts people's attention so that they may see Allah's Grace upon him. Therefore, we should ponder on the calamities that abruptly befall man and without him having to do with the cause. Those are part of the Divine Wisdom so that one may realize that the universe is not left without leadership and guidance.

Allah has created the universe and its universal laws to prove to us that He exists and that He controls the cosmos. If something happens, we ought to seek the wisdom underlying its occurrence. Wisdom is a violation of the universal laws intended to call our attention to the existence of a higher power that surpasses the mechanical nature of the world—a power that is capable of suspending this mechanical order.

Hence, the miracles of the Messengers of Allah assumed this nature. For instance, the nature of the fire is to burn; nonetheless, it did not burn Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Was the intention of the True Lord *Glorified is He* only to rescue Ibrahim (Abraham) from the fire? If His intention had only been to rescue Ibrahim (Abraham), Allah *Glorified is He* would not have allowed his adversaries to get hold of him. After the adversaries of Ibrahim (Abraham) apprehended him and lit up a fire to burn him alive, the True Lord *Glorified is He* could still have brought about a cloud, that the adversaries of Ibrahim (Abraham) would not be able to control, and caused rain to fall and extinguish the fire. No; Allah intended that the adversaries of Ibrahim (Abraham) would capture him, light up a ferocious fire and nothing would extinguish that fire; then, they would ultimately throw Ibrahim (Abraham) in the fire. Subsequently, the True lord explains: I exercise my dominion and mastery over the universal laws because I am the Creator of such laws, and I can suspend them whenever I will: 'We (Allah) said: 'O fire! Be you coolness and safety for Ibrahim (Abraham)!'' (*al-Anbiya':* 69) By contrast, had the other scenario taken place, and the fire had been extinguished by rain, people would have asked: what if rain had not fallen and had not extinguished the fire? The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to refute all the possible claims Ibrahim's (Abraham's) adversaries might come up with. When events not determined by man happen, we say: attribute these events to the wisdom of the Creator because He wants to direct the attention of His creation to the fact that He is the One controlling and dominating the universe. The mechanical nature of the universe baffles the minds due to its precision; nonetheless, it does not escape the control of our Lord. For this reason, wind sometimes blows so vigorously that one cannot see anything at all. This means that specks of dust have accumulated until they created some kind of a barring wall. Such phenomenon takes place no matter how much modern scientific equipment may try to control or prevent it from happening.

It is peculiar that Allah *Glorified is He* left us a sign that says: I have ennobled you, human being, with reason. However, I have not endowed you with an infinite power of understanding. There may be an instinct-driven creature that is still more capable of understanding things than human beings.

When an earthquake happens in a particular region, the first animals to sense it and flee are often the donkeys. This was intended by Allah *Glorified is He* so that man would not take pride in his knowledge and reason. ‘No! [But] indeed, man transgresses (6) because he sees himself self-sufficient. (7)’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7)

Accordingly, if you see a cosmic phenomenon that is not up to man or to any nation or group of people to control, know that Allah *Glorified is He* intends that it happens for a wise reason so that He can direct our attention to the existence of the Highest Creator, and so that no one would think that the mechanical nature of the universe is monotonously autonomous, but rather, it is a system that Allah has implemented in accordance with His Power, Will and Wisdom.

Some people proudly say: the electronic mind does not err. They do not know that the fact that it is infallible is in itself problematic because inasmuch as you feed it with data, it produces information. It does not have a choice about anything. By contrast, the human mind is capable of deduction and discovery. Further, it can discard harmful data. This is indicative of the greatness of their Creator.

Others use a different example, namely, the fact that artificial flowers do not wither. To those who think this way, we say: it is the defect and flaw of artificial flowers that they do not wither; it indicates that they are lifeless and completely inanimate.

The Quran puts forward a glimpse of these issues—issues that were you to subject them to reason, you would not accept. However, when the One Who caused it to happen interprets it, we would find that it makes perfect sense. A good example to illustrate the point is when Moses went to the righteous servant. What happened? The righteous servant said: ‘Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience.’ (*al-Kahf:* 67) The righteous servant then tried to give an excuse to Moses; he thus said: ‘And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge?’ (*al-Kahf:* 68) Moses, who was among the most resolute Messengers of Allah, replied: ‘You will find me, if Allah wills, patient, and I will not disobey you in [any] order.’ (*al-Kahf:* 69)

Afterwards, the righteous servant [Al-Khidhr] made a hole in the ship which they boarded together. To the superficial, immediate understanding, making a hole in a ship is an evil act. Although Moses promised the righteous servant not to disobey his order and to be patient, he could not stand what happened. He thus said to him: ‘So they set out, until when they had embarked on the ship, Al-Khidhr tore it open. [Moses] said, ‘Have you torn it open to drown its people? You have certainly done a grave thing.'' (*al-Kahf:* 71) Moses suspected the act of the righteous servant on an apparent level. But when he understood the wisdom underlying the act, he found that it was the best course of action to take. Had not the righteous servant made a hole in the ship, the unjust king would have usurped a good and sound ship by force because: 'As for the ship, it belonged to poor people working at sea. So I intended to cause defect in it as there was after them a king who seized every [good] ship by force.' (*al-Kahf:* 79) Had the righteous servant not made a hole in the ship, its true owners would not have been able to keep it. The hole guaranteed that its owners would keep it because they could always fix that defect later. Accordingly, one should always bear in mind that anything that happens at odds with the superficiality of human understanding is caused by Allah for an underlying wisdom as long as no creature has caused it.

Is there anything more atrocious than murder? The righteous servant murdered a young boy. So what was the wisdom underlying such an act? If any one of us has a boy, he always thinks of him as the ravishment of his eye and his ultimate support in life. However, this son may be the cause of the corruption of his father's religion. He may also incite him to lie, take bribes or even to steal. This son may lead his father to Hellfire. It is thereby better that Allah removes this son from the life of the father so that he would not lead him to wrongdoing.

Someone may wonder what sin or wrong deed the young boy committed to deserve death. We answer: you do not understand matters properly; the death of the boy was better for him because he returned to the True Lord without having to go through the experience of having to choose whether to obey or disobey Allah; he was sent directly to the mercy of Allah, and this is better for him. Accordingly, killing the boy was a mercy for his parents. If something happens to one's self due to a violation of Allah's law, one ought to know that he is the cause of the detriment. The same thing holds true when a nation violates a cosmic or a religious law. By contrast, if matters are beyond the sphere of people's power and control then one should know that Allah caused them to happen for a wise reason. The story of the righteous servant with Moses abounds with wisdom. Both of them went to a village and asked its people for food. 'So they set out, until when they came to the people of a village, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality.' (*al-Kahf:* 77) Neither of them asked for money so that they would not arouse suspicion. They rather asked for food, which is the basic necessity of human life. However, the people from the village refused to offer them food as they were vile—despite the fact that the righteous servant erected and supported a wall that was on the brink of collapsing on the village. Then, Moses asked the righteous servant: why did not you ask the people of the village to pay you for your work? The righteous servant eventually explained to Moses the reason underlying his actions: 'And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous. So, your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience.' (*al-Kahf:* 82)

The mean village people who refused to give food to their guests when they asked for it were definitely incapable of undertaking the responsibility of keeping the treasure of the two orphan boys. Hence, Allah commanded the righteous servant to hide the treasure away from the village people. This way, if bad things happen to a man due to something he did, he should realize he is the one who did wrong and harmed himself. In contrast, if one did not have a hand in what happened to him, he should have faith in the wisdom of the One Who caused it. In such a manner, man can always be at ease whenever anything befalls him.

The one who has faith receives whatever evil thing that may happen to him strongly and patiently. If such things are due to things he did, he should adjust his behaviour. In contrast, if such things come from his Lord, he should have faith in the wisdom of his Lord: 'Say: All is from Allah.' This is an admonition for you, human being so that you could know that any deed is ultimately caused by Allah. Man does not have a hand in the energy with which Allah has endowed him. However, man channels and directs the energy and faculties Allah created for him towards obedience or disobedience.

Since all is from Allah, He wants us to feel astonished by the attitude of those people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So what is [the matter] with those people that they can hardly understand any statement?' (*an-Nisa':* 78). It is as if the logic of reason and thought must lead to proper understanding. We should be rather astounded when people do not understand things properly. We should not be surprised unless the thing offered to them is a matter that could be comprehended by the mind. When one says that a particular person does not 'understand any statement,' this means that the latter's mind is incapable of understanding. Yet, when you put it with 'hardly,' this means that such person cannot even begin to understand. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

مَّآ أَصَابَكَ مِنۡ حَسَنَةٖ فَمِنَ ٱللَّهِۖ وَمَآ أَصَابَكَ مِن سَيِّئَةٖ فَمِن نَّفۡسِكَۚ
وَأَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ لِلنَّاسِ رَسُولٗاۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيدٗا ﴿٧٩﴾

Anything good that happens to you [Prophet] is from God; anything bad is [ultimately] from yourself. We have sent you as a messenger to people; God is sufficient witness [79] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 79)

If someone is subjected to a universal law, then it is from Allah. However, if some evil befalls you, then know that as much as you have done wrong, it is from you. It is as if the matter is divided into parts: a part for which you are responsible and a part for which you bear no responsibility. However, you should always consider anything that happens to you as a good thing because it ultimately contributes to spreading faith in the universe.

A believer should be in a state of alternation between self-reproach for the calamities for which he bears responsibility and faith in the wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* concerning the calamities for which he bears no responsibility. 'What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil, [O man], is from yourself. And We have sent you, [O Muhammad], to the people as a messenger, and sufficient is Allah as Witness.' But who is the Messenger? The Messenger is the one who conveys the message of the One who sent him to whom he was sent. As long as the Messenger relays and delivers the Message of Allah, then whatever he causes to happen is ultimately caused by Allah.

When the True Lord says: 'sufficient is Allah as Witness,' this means that it will not harm you, Muhammad, if they say that whatever evil that befalls them is from you because it suffices that Allah is on your side. Further, they are powerless to hold anyone accountable. Your Lord is the One Who is capable of holding people accountable. He testifies that you are honest in delivering His message and that you did not cause any evil to anyone as they alleged. Next, the True Lord says:

مَّن يُطِعِ ٱلرَّسُولَ فَقَدۡ أَطَاعَ ٱللَّهَۖ وَمَن تَوَلَّىٰ فَمَآ
أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ حَفِيظٗا ٨٠

Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys God.
If some pay no heed, We have not
sent you to be their keeper [80]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 80)

Obedience to Prophet Muhammad is a form of obedience to Allah. Whoever obeys Prophet Muhammad is also obeying Allah because the Messenger only delivers Allah's message.

For this reason, in personal affairs, Prophet Muhammad used to act like an ordinary human being, and he put it forth as such. When these matters were proven incorrect, Prophet Muhammad gave us an example of his honesty.

Anas *Allah be pleased with him* related that the Prophet passed by some people who were pollinating their palm trees. He then said: 'If you were not to do it, it might be good for you. (So they abandoned this practice) and there was a decline in the yield. He (the Prophet) happened to pass by them (and said): 'What has gone wrong with your trees?' They said: 'you said so and so.' Thereupon he said: 'You have better knowledge (of a technical skill) in the affairs of the world.'(1)

This indicates that the Heavens do not have anything to do with the empirical issues that are, for instance, subject to experimentation in the lab. As for the issues that are subject to universal cosmic laws, they cannot be left to the servants of Allah. It is quite peculiar that when Prophet Muhammad deals with something about which Allah has not enacted any prior decree, but later changes it, he is the one who communicates to us such change so that we would testify that he is most honest and sincere in delivering Allah's message even if it is against his own interest. This noble verse comes after the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'And We have sent you, [O Muhammad], to the people as a messenger and sufficient is Allah as Witness.'

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(1) *Related by Ahmad, Ibn Majah and Muslim (who narrated this version of the Hadith)*

A Messenger of Allah—as we know—is the one who delivered the law that Allah has intended to govern the life of His vicegerent on earth. Further, if we consider the letters which compose the etymological root of the word *risala* ('message' in Arabic): *ar-ra'*, *as-sin* and *al-lam*, we will notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in a different verse: 'And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet.' (*al-Hajj:* 52)

The messenger may be a messenger in the sense we understand or may be a prophet; however, both are sent by Allah. The difference is that a messenger brings forth a law—which he is commanded to deliver and communicate to the people so that they apply it. By contrast, the prophet is sent by Allah *Glorified is He* to give an ideal example of following the path and code of conduct set by the religion that preceded him; thus, he is sent to serve as a behavioural example. But, technically, a messenger is the one who brings forth a new path that could differ in some of its branches from the one that preceded it. Both of them are messengers; the messenger brings forth a new path and course of life to implement, whereas the prophet only sets his attitude as an example for the implementation and adherence to the path of Allah that the messenger before him has already relayed.

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* has sent the messengers and made Prophet Muhammad the seal of all of them, this means that his Message will be complete—with no subsequent Message. If that is so, how could it be possible that a human mind would try to second-guess it?

Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen Muhammad to be the seal of all messengers and revealed to him the saying: 'This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30) Therefore, there will be no subsequent message. So, how come a contemporary or a non-contemporary person dares to say, 'No, we want to include new additions to certain parts of this religion'? Or alternatively, that one may claim that a particular ruling does not befit the age. If Allah has not willed for the existence of any subsequent message because He has perfected it, what gives humans the right to second-guess it?!

Messenger Muhammad, when mentioned, follows either format: Messenger of Allah or Messenger to the people, as he is the middle man between Allah and creation.

Revealed messages are necessary for humans because, if man examines and traces existence with only his natural disposition and his sound reason, without the aid of a messenger, he may still discover that the universe must have a Creator whose power is commensurate with the wisdom and perfection of such universe. Further, he may discover that such Creator must be a Lord because He provides us with whatever we need. However, could reason reveal to us what this great power and capability wants from us? We can only conclude that a great power underlies this universe, and this power has enough capability, wisdom, knowledge, will and attributes of perfection to create this amazing universe in such perfect form and with such precise engineering. In addition, the universe has a purpose. However, can the mind assign a name to this power? The fact that it is a great power implies that it has capability and wisdom but does not reveal the name to us. Accordingly, a messenger has to be sent to provide the people with the answers to the questions that engross them namely, what the powerthat created this universe with such amazingly perfect form.

Here, reason should pause and wonder. When a messenger is sent from Allah to say: ‘I will lead you to the name and essence of this creative power,’ the creatures ought to listen because this messenger would solve the riddle that puzzles them. Both the believers and the disbelievers believe it because both find themselves in a universe wherein species that are more powerful than they are serve them involuntarily.

In addition, man finds that there are innumerable species that do not fall within the realm of his power or dominion. Further, the human mind falls short of understanding the functioning mechanism of a lot of tasks these species perform in fulfilling the purpose of being subservient to him. Therefore, man ought to have believed on his own.

We have already given an example to illustrate this point. We said: assume that a man survived a plane crash, and then lost his way in the desert without food or water. Afterwards, he sat down and fell asleep. Upon waking up, he found a table abounding with different kinds of food and tasty drinks. By Allah, would his mind not be preoccupied with the question as to who brought this food and these drinks, even before he touched them? For this reason, and before we avail ourselves of any of these blessings, we ought to pose the question: ‘who creates all these blessings?’ Despite that, Allah *Glorified is He* gave us a some time to think so that we would immediately believe, once a messenger comes forth to teach us that the power for which we search is called a particular name, asks us to do certain things and informs us that, since we have been created by such power, we are bound to eventually return to it.

The epitome of this whole argument is that Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared what may be called the bountiful table of the universe for His creatures before He even created them. Further, He has created all the species that man needs to sustain his life. As we have said before, the chain of species and the services they provide to mankind make us wonder: how is it possible that creatures which are more powerful and stronger than us serve us?

We also may wonder: how is it possible that the sun—that is far beyond the realm of my power and dominion, the moon—that I cannot reach, the wind—that I cannot control, and the earth—with which I cannot communicate, serve me? There must be something more powerful than me and all these creatures, which in turn subdued them to my service. Further, have you ever noticed that any of those creatures performed its service to you in a deficient manner? This may never happen because all of these creatures are, by nature, compelled to perform the function of being subservient to you. Thus, if a messenger comes to solve for us the riddle concerning nature and the origin of life and to guide us to its Creator, we must open our ears and listen to him. Accordingly, I should believe the Messenger of Allah if he tells me that the One Who created the universe is Allah, and that Allah is my Creator; He sent him [the messenger] with a particular path and code for living so that I can accomplish my mission in life by doing certain acts and avoiding others; and everyone will be judged by Allah for his acts in his worldly sojourn—such path is the epitome of all religions. For this reason, it is necessary that Allah *Glorified is He* sends a messenger and then supports him with a miracle that proves his honesty and the truth of the message he delivers Since Allah has sent a messenger to deliver the path that comprises His dos and don’ts; this means that one must obey this messenger. Our Lord says in a different verse: ‘And We did not send any messenger except to be obeyed by Allah’s permission.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 64) This means that obedience to the Messengers of Allah is a must, not because such obedience is due to the

Messengers themselves, but because this obedience is part of being obedient to Allah. What sets apart Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from other messengers is the fact that the miracle that vindicates the truth of his message is the Book itself that was revealed to Him by Allah, and puts forward the path He has set for mankind. Other messengers were different. Every messenger of Allah used to be supported by a miracle in addition to the Book that set the way of life of the religion he preached. For instance, the stick of Moses, and his white hand were his miracles; however, his path was set in the Torah. Accordingly, the miracle supportive of every religion was different from the Book that set the path of life such religion delineated.

The miracle of ‘Isa (Jesus) was his capacity to cure the mute and mutilated. However, the Book that set the course of his religion—the Bible—was different. Nevertheless, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad was identical to the Book that set the path for his people because Allah intended that the miracle of the seal of all religions would not be separate from the course of life it defined.

Whoever witnessed the miracles of the previous messengers of Allah would believe in them. The one who had not witnessed such miracles only heard about them; if he trusted the person communicating the news of such miracle, he would believe him; if he did not, he would not believe him. Indeed, if Allah had not told us about those miracles in the Quran, we may have very well doubted them.

Yet, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will last as long as the path of life he has set for his followers lasts. Every Muslim is capable of asserting until the end of days that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and that this is his miracle. Followers of others messengers are incapable of such assertion. None of them can assertively say: this person is the Messenger of Allah, and this is his miracle because such miracle has already happened and ended. In contrast, the Quran will stay and survive as long as the message and the universe last.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to deliver the message of Allah. The True Lord explains to us that I have sent the Messenger so that he would be obeyed. Thus, it logically makes perfect sense that the Quran would say: ‘He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah,’ because the

Messenger was sent to relay the message of Allah; we are thus more connected to the Messenger of Allah. We have learnt before that if the command to obey Allah is coupled with that of obeying His messenger, we must obey both. If Allah *Glorified is He* discusses a general issue like *zakat* (obligatory alms) or performing pilgrimage, and the Messenger of Allah then comes forth to explain the details and specifics pertaining to these matters; we have to obey Allah by following the general command and obey His messenger by adhering to the specifics and details he explained. If Allah *Glorified is He* puts forward neither a general issue nor a specific one, then know that the legislation will be decreed by Prophet Muhammad in accordance with the authorization Allah *Glorified is He* gave to His messenger in His saying: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you–take; and what he has forbidden you- refrain from.' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

The only Prophet whom Allah *Glorified is He* gave an authorization to decree and legislate is Muhammad. All other prophets only delivered the message of Allah, and none of them brought about anything pertaining to the religion he preached on his own except for Prophet Muhammad. Allah *Glorified is He* authorized him to legislate in His saying: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from.' Thus, Prophet Muhammad also has a mission that is directly related to the domain of the Quran. We find analogous examples in our day to day lives. For instance, someone may say to an employee that the state law decrees that if an employee is absent for more than 15 days from his work, he must be fired. This employee may then refer to the state constitution and then retort: 'I have read the constitution of the state, but I did not find this law. Accordingly, what you are telling me about firing the employee who is absent from work for more than fifteen days is an unconstitutional claim.' To this person we say the following: the constitution states that in such a case a committee must be empanelled to regulate and organize the affairs of the employees in this regard. Through authorization, an authority or a committee could formulate and decree a law to be applied to all employees; if this happened, such a law would be constitutional. All the articles of the law concerning employees are included in the authorization the constitution grants to the committees and authorities that decree secondary and subordinate laws and regulations. Similarly, if someone probes you to adduce an evidence from the Quran that *al-maghrib* (evening) Prayer is three rak'as, *Al-fajr* (morning) Prayer is two rak'as, both *Azh-zhuhr* (noon) and 'Isha' (night) Prayers are four rak'as, you should say here 'is the evidence from the Quran: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from.'' In order to protect the safety of his path against such distortions, Prophet Muhammad says: 'Let me not find one of you reclining on his couch when he hears something regarding me which I have commanded or forbidden and saying: We do not know. What we found in Allah's Book we have followed.'

In a different narration, Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Yaqrib relates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Soon a Hadith from me will be conveyed to a man, while he is reclining on his couch, and he says: 'Between us and you is Allah's Book. So whatever we find in it that is lawful, we consider lawful, and whatever we find in it that is unlawful, we consider it unlawful.' Indeed whatever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made unlawful, it is the same as what Allah made unlawful.'(1)

I am relating this Hadith of Prophet Muhammad so that you would realize the stupidity of those who say so, and to tell them that your saying is evidence of the truth and honesty of Prophet Muhammad. In the Name of Allah, if someone claimed, as you do, that the only source of legislation is the Quran, what would we say to the narrators who relate the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad? Even if they had not said so, we would still respond that Prophet Muhammad said: the man lies on his couch, talks, and no one said anything opposing it. Therefore, the existence of these people is evidence of the truth and validity of the discourse of Prophet Muhammad. The very nature of assigning a mission to a Prophet automatically involves obedience. Obedience means acceding and responding to a demand. Rhetoricians and grammarians identify various kinds of demands. For instance, one can wish for something impossible, like the saying of the poet

I wish the stars would approach me so that I could reorganize them into

Necklaces of praise; my words would never satisfy you in describing them

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(1) *Related by At-Tirmidhi in Al-'Ilm; it was also related by Ahmad and Ibn Majah*

Stars will never approach or come close. This is also similar to the saying of the poet:

I wish youth would one day come back so
I could tell it about what old age did to me.

This is a kind of demand wherein the thing demanded, though desirable, is not likely or may never happen. An interrogative structure is a kind of request because we use it to request for information. This is like when you ask someone you are visiting, 'Who of the family is home?' In contrast, to command is to tell someone to do something; or you may even ask someone to avoid something—then it is a prohibition. In short, obedience is to respond to the demand placed on you by someone else. The one placing the demand on you either requests or forbids you to do certain things. Obedience in an absolute, general sense only applies to the obedience of the servant to his Lord. You may also say, yet in a less absolute sense, that the son obeyed his father, the student obeyed his teacher, or the worker obeyed his mentor. All of these are examples of relating obedience to the one obeyed. However, if you use the word obedience in an absolute sense, it refers to the obedience of the servant to Allah. This is the safest and soundest form of obedience, why? The reason is that whenever anyone commands or forbids you from doing anything, it invites a doubt of whether that command would benefit him or not. However, if the one who asked you to do or refrain from a specific act is the All-Sufficient Who stands in no need of the fruit of your work, then know that the value of such a demand is indubitable. What arouses one's doubts about obeying a particular command or proscription is the fear that the commander has made the order for a benefit that will accrue to him or, in case of a proscription, that the proscription will either benefit or fend harm off the one commanding. But if the commander enjoys the attributes of absolute power before you have even come into existence, you must know that your entire existence, your work or your abstinence from work will not accrue anything to Him. Obedience to such a commander is thus the safest and most trusted kind of obedience.

Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whoever obeys me, obeys Allah; whoever disobeys me, disobeys Allah.'(1)

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(1) *Related by Ibn Abu Hatim; it was also related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The hypocrites are the ones who cannot endure light because they are accustomed to living in darkness. They are also disturbed by the presence of justice because they are endeared to the life of injustice. For this reason, they try to find any pretext to inhibit this religion. Hence, they said: ‘Did not you hear your friend; he is on the vicinity of polytheism. He tells us not to worship anyone but Allah, but at the same time, he is making himself a lord to whom love and obedience are due.’

Therefore, the True Lord revealed to His Prophet Muhammad: ‘He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah.’ Obedience here is not attributed to the person of Prophet Muhammad because it is either due to His mission in communicating Allah’s message in partial texts or communicating Allah’s message through the general authorization he was granted. Since it is a delivery of Allah’s message through a general authorization to legislate, this implies that Allah *Glorified is He* has entrusted him with decreeing religious laws.

What is the opposite of obedience? It is disobedience and refusal. We have seen that people are divided into two groups in terms of their attitude towards Prophet Muhammad. There is a group that obeys him in all that he instructs. As for the matters about which no commands or proscriptions have been revealed, they are considered among the permissible. In other words, you have the choice of doing or not doing. Those who properly respond to Prophet Muhammad, in the sense of obeying him in all the dos and don’ts, are the ones who embrace the path that Allah has revealed to him. Those who do not obey Prophet Muhammadare the ones who turn their back upon this path and try to inhibit its application.

Consider how the True Lord *Glorified is He* protects Prophet Muhammad. Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘but those who turn away - We have not sent you over them as a guardian.’ Concerning the one who turns away and refuses to obey the Prophet, know Muhammad that the True Lord has not sent you to force them to believe in Him. There is a difference between ‘sent you,’ ‘sent you to them’ and ‘sent over them.’ The first means that your mission is only to communicate Allah’s message to them. In contrast, ‘sent over them’ means to force them to do so and so. This means that you should always bear in mind, Muhammad, that we have sent you to the people to communicate to them Allah’s message, and not be their keeper; thus, whoever wants may obey, and whoever does not may not. Therefore, do not overstrain yourself and think that we have sent you to force them to believe, and assign to yourself a task that Allah has not assigned you. 'Not upon you, [O Muhammad], is [responsibility for] their guidance, but Allah guides whom He wills.' (*al-Baqara:* 272)

The True Lord also says: 'So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. (21) You are not over them a controller. (22)' (*al-Ghashiya:* 21-22) In another verse, He also says: 'and you are not over them a tyrant.' (*Qaf:* 45) Know, Muhammad, that you cannot force them to obey Allah. Coercion contradicts with the essence of the individual accountability. It also contradicts with the idea of embracing faith voluntarily. 'We have not sent you over them as a guardian.' The word 'guardian' reflects how far concerned Prophet Muhammad was.

The True Lord asserts this matter in the interest of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* because Allah *Glorified is He* has explained to us to what extent Prophet Muhammad was preoccupied with the well-being of his followers, and how he wanted all of them to be observing, obedient believers. For this reason, the True Lord says: 'Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) They refused to believe; therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* explains to Prophet Muhammad: Be comforted; all what you are required to do is to deliver My message to the people. This alleviated the burden of Prophet Muhammad's mission.

We also notice that all the reproach Allah addressed to His messenger is not because he violated His commands, but because he has taken upon himself a responsibility that the message of Allah has not required him to do. This is similar to those who raise the story of Ibn Umm Maktum. They claim that Allah reproached the Prophet because he committed a mistake. To those who make such an allegation, we say: Prophet Muhammad wanted the most honourable and courageous men of the Quraysh to believe in him. Ibn Umm Maktum embraced Islam and came to him to inquire about a number of questions. It was easier for the Prophet to deal with Ibn Umm Maktum rather than the elite who opposed and antagonized him. But the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* preferred the more difficult alternative to the easier one. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says: Why do you torment yourself, Muhammad? It is not up to you whether or not they choose to purify themselves. This means: Why do you overburden yourself? Allah *Glorified is He* reproached Prophet Muhammad for his own advantage, not because he violated His commands.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* told His Prophet: ‘We have not sent you over them as a guardian’ because He wanted to alleviate the burden of Prophet Muhammad. The guardian is the one who takes care of the one to whom he delivers the commands of Allah and adheres to His path. If the latter deviates, He will straighten him. Allah *Glorified is He* thus explains that He has sent Prophet Muhammad to deliver His message to them. Afterwards, people are then free to embrace it or not.

Therefore, the guardian assumes a dominating and prevailing role, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse; the dominating or the mighty is the one who forces people to believe. The discourse here is concerned with the proper obedience to Allah. It means that your faculties should act in accordance with the commands of Allah *Glorified is He*. Obedience is not merely to say: ‘O Prophet Muhammad, we are obedient,’ but then try to breach such obedience. Obedience is not a mere verbal claim; it is carried out by all the limbs. The obedience of only the tongue, without the rest of the limbs, is not deemed a sign of faith. For this reason, the True Lord subsequently says:

وَيَقُولُونَ طَاعَةٌ فَإِذَا بَرَزُوا۟ مِنْ عِندِكَ بَيَّتَ طَآئِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ غَيْرَ ٱلَّذِى تَقُولُ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ
يَكْتُبُ مَا يُبَيِّتُونَ ۖ فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿٨١﴾

They say, ‘We obey you,’ but as soon as they leave your presence, some of them scheme by night to do other than what you said. God records what they scheme, so leave them alone, and put your trust in God: He is sufficient protector [81]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 81)

In this verse, the True Lord explains to His Prophet, Muhammad: you will deal with a faction of the nation to whom you are sent to preach Islam; however, the people that respond to you are the people that actually believe in Allah and His Prophet, Muhammad. When you command or demand something of the latter, they will say: ‘We obey you.’ This means that they are always in a state of obedience to your commands. 'But when they leave you, a group of them spend the night determining to do other than what you say.' *Baraza*—the Arabic word here translated as 'leave'—means going to *al-baraz*; *al-baraz* means a vast piece of land. For this reason, a warrior may say to a rival challenging him: *'ubruz* meaning come out of your fortification. In the past, the Arabs did not use to have restrooms in their own houses. Whenever they needed to go to the restroom, they used to go out in the wilderness. This is why the word *buraz* is the root of the word indicating excreting in the wilderness.

The verse means that when they leave you, they ponder over the command to obey and realize how onerous and exhausting it is. They thus conceal their intention to violate your commands. We know that the word *bayt* means the dwelling and shelter wherein one lives and to which one resorts for comfort and rest. The best time for rest and respite is at night. Thus, they called the house where we live *mabit,* because we often spend the night in a place composed of a number of rooms and covered by a ceiling. Does this imply that no one can conceal anything during the day? No; it is rather that it is customary that people conceal and hide things at night. They do so to be away from an eye that could witness them; hence, they plan well. The verse may either mean that they were concealing their contrived plans at night, or that they were contriving in secret.

Etymologically, therefore, the Arabic word *bayyt* (conceal) is often associated with being at home, and the concealment is often associated with night time. Further, the root of the word *bayyt* (conceal) revolves around the meanings of concealment and covering. Thus, if someone is said to have *bayyat* (concealed) something, this means that he has concealed something at night or that he has contrived it in secret. Those people declared their obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but as soon as they left him, some of them schemed by night to do other than what he has said. This means that after leaving him, they contrived something at odds with what he has said. They declare in public that they are obedient, whereas their behaviour is contrary to such declaration. Their attitude reflects disobedience to Prophet Muhammad's commands or obedience to other than what he orders. Thus, if he ordered them to something, they would not do it, and if he ordered them not to do a certain thing, they would do the opposite of his command; they only obeyed their desires and devils. This part of the verse means that a group of them purported that they would always obey Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in all their affairs; yet, they concealed something contrary to what they revealed; that is why they were declared disobedient. Allah then says that He records what they have schemed; that is, He records that according to His Knowledge. The Arabic word *yaktubu* (record/write) was used in order to tell them that all their deeds are recorded so that they will be able to read what has been written when they examine their own records. If anything had not been recorded, they would have alleged that it had not happened. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to take his precautions against this group because they were bound to dissuade others from accepting the call of Islam. For this reason, Allah explains to His Prophet: 'Those to whom you were sent will not give you victory; rather, it is the One Who sent you who will grant it to you, viz. Allah. Therefore, do not let these deeds dissuade you or impinge on your determination to preach Islam. Should any group do so, leave them; that is, do not talk to them about any of these issues and leave Retribution to Allah because He will grant you triumph and victory despite their violation of your orders. Just make sure that you follow the commands of Allah, Who sent you.

We know that the interest of all Messages is always with the one who dispatches the Message. However, the new message which one receives may exhaust him because it may force him to go against his whims and desires. Therefore, know, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, that the One Who sent you is the guarantee to make you succeed in your preaching of Islam. So, leave them and put your trust in Allah for He is a sufficient Protector for you. Why has Allah prescribed such command upon you, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? The reason is that the believers have a very limited capability and lack in both the means and the ability to plan. However, the One Who sent you is capable of turning the number of your enemies as well as their weapons into soldiers for you, and He is also capable of granting you victory in a way that you would never expect. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* has intended that only a few people embraced Islam upon its advent. Had a lot of people embraced it at the very beginning, some could have said that if a lot of people support injustice, it will prevail. However, if only a few people manage to make a religion successful, this would be a good omen and an indication that you, Messenger Muhammad, did not triumph due to the support of your followers; rather, it was due to the Support of Allah. Subsequently, Allah says:

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَۚ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِندِ غَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا۟ فِيهِ ٱخْتِلَٰفًا كَثِيرًا ﴿٨٢﴾

Will they not think about this Quran? If it had been from anyone other than God, they would have found much inconsistency in it [82] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 82)

Whenever you encounter the expression ‘Will they not…’ in the Quran, know that it is intended to blame and reproach the one who does not heed the thing that will follow this expression. This verse implies that they ought to have tried to understand the Quran. As far as the Quran is concerned, there are levels of comprehension including thinking, contemplation, remembrance, knowledge and reasoning. All of these words were used in the Quran: ‘Will they not try to know…’ (*al-Baqara:* 77), ‘Will they not try to reason…’ (*Ya Sin:* 68), ‘Will they not try to remember…’ (*al-An‘am:* 80), ‘Will they not try to contemplate…’ (*al-An‘am:* 50)? Therefore, there is a distinction among thinking, contemplation, remembrance, reasoning or knowledge.

When someone addressing you asks you to try to understand something, this means that he is confident that were you to exert yourself intellectually, you would reach the desired truth. But if someone wants to deceive you, he will not induce your cognitive abilities. For example, when you walk into the store of a textiles merchant to buy a piece of fabric, the merchant will offer his goods to you. In order to convince you that the fabric that he is trying to sell you is natural and not synthetic, he wets it and tries to tear it to demonstrate how resistant it really is. By doing so, the merchant excites you and alerts your cognitive abilities. Inasmuch as he does so, this indicates that he is confident that critically examining his claim is in his own interest. If examining the cloth had not been in his interest, he would have tried to deceive you, but he told you to look closely and test his claim.

Allah commands us to think about the Quran which means to examine every thought-provoking matter that your reason comes across to discover the evidence of its truth; this is the first stage. Then, if you discover the evidence of its truth, you should also heed what result would ensue if you did not follow what you have verified. Accordingly, the Arabic word *tadabbur* (thinking) means to consider the consequences and ramification of things. Therefore, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tells you that Allah is One, you should use your reason to investigate the truth of this message. If you reach such conclusion, you should immediately believe that there is only One God. Do not ever say that this is a sophisticated or luxurious matter because the fire will be your punishment if you do not believe in the Only God. Thus, *tadabbur* (thinking) in this context means to investigate the ramifications of things and to try to envision the consequences that may ensue from them—this is a stage that follows contemplation (*tafakkur).* Contemplation requires that you recall what you have previously known concerning an object in case you have forgotten anything about it. Contemplation comes first and then understanding follows. For instance, you may say to your son 'In order to have a bright future and become an engineer or a medical doctor, he has to study and work assiduously.' Accordingly, the child contemplates being in the high status that the distinguished people in every vocation in the society enjoy; and thus he works hard.

Thus, the first stage is to contemplate over the matter you are considering and the second is thinking about it. If you slip into oblivion, we immediately tell you to recall what you have pondered over, and the results you have reached; also, think about the consequences that may follow from the matter you are considering. These are all mental processes. Reason starts with contemplating and it then tries to consider the consequences of the matter which it has contemplated. Afterwards, the memory enables you to recall what you have missed and what was once the focus of your consciousness and then was marginalised. So, if you reason about something on your own, it is then said that you perceive it rationally. If you understand what someone else has rationally conceived, this means that you know what that other person has rationally perceived.

Therefore, it is not necessary that you have reached every piece of knowledge using your own reason; rather, you may have taken the fruit of the reasoning that others had developed. That is why when Allah denies that someone may encompass the entire knowledge; this implies that the latter is basically incapable of all rational conception. The reason is that knowledge indicates one’s capacity to perceive what others reached using their capabilities without necessarily understanding the laws, rules and fundamentals that others employed to acquire such knowledge. He only knows how to benefit from and utilise it. In our daily lives, we notice that the illiterate may use technology and electricity; thus, they avail themselves of the knowledge of others; however, they cannot rationally conceive of the capacity of the scientist. Hence, the realm of knowledge is vaster than that of reasoning because it does not depend merely on the fruits of your reason. In the realm of knowledge, you may know and apprehend what others have rationally conceived. For this reason, when Allah addresses this issue, He reproaches some people because when they are commanded to follow what Allah has revealed, they reject it, saying that they would follow the faith of their forefathers, even if the latter had not used their intellectual capacity and had been devoid of guidance (*al-Baqara:* 170). In the same vein, Allah, in another verse, condemns some people for following the faith of their forefathers, even though they knew nothing, and were devoid of all guidance. (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104)

In the first verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states that they did not use their reason as they said that they would follow what their forefathers believed, without stating that it was sufficient for them. In the second verse, however, they said that it was enough for them to follow what their forefathers believed in. Thus, they insisted on rejecting and adamantly refused to submit to anything apart from their forefathers’ beliefs. Accordingly, Allah has reproached them for following their forefathers even though they knew nothing and were devoid of all guidance. Here, Allah has negated that their forefathers possessed any knowledge, which is more general than negating their capability of reasoning because negating the latter would mean a negation of their capability to deduce, but it does not preclude their capacity of availing themselves of what others have deduced.

When Allah *Glorified is He* encourages the listeners, especially those who violate His Path, to reflect upon the Quran, this means that He wants them to work out their minds in order to apprehend what they listen to. The reason is that Allah knows that if they use their minds to understand what they hear, they will indisputably arrive at the conclusion that He has put forward. However, their public declaration of obedience to Allah and covert scheming—to do other than what the Prophet had ordered—is evidence that they did not think about the Quran. The saying of the Allah, 'will they not think..,' follows after the verse, as if the latter serves as its evidence. If they thought about the Quran, they would know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was honest when communicating Allah's Message, and that his discourse was true. By Allah, who told Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they concealed in their hearts or secretly hid at night something other than what they have avowed in his presence? Therefore, had they tried to ponder upon things, they would have realised that Allah is the One Who divulged their secrets, cunning contrivances and what they tried to hide from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, he was honest in delivering the Message of Allah, and as long as he remained so, that would support the other verse that stated that whoever obeyed Messenger Muhammad obeyed Allah.

Therefore, all verses support each other. When the Quran was revealed in Arabic, Allah has willed that not every Arab who listened to it would embrace it because had all the Arabs embraced Islam, people would have said that their belief in the Quran made them overlook the challenges that the Quran posed to them. However, some Arabs who encountered with the Quran insisted on their disbelief. The disbelievers should be argued with and, therefore, the Quran challenged them to bring forth something the like of the Quran. In another instance, He *Glorified is He* asked them to bring forth only ten of its chapters, and in a third instance, to bring forth the like of the shortest of its chapter—all of these were challenges posed to them. Would such challenges not provoke their stubbornness? None of them uttered a word; what does this mean? It means that they were convinced of their incapacity to meet the challenges, but they, nevertheless, maintained their disbelief and continued to offend Islam and say what they used to say. In spite of all that, they could not find a response to the Quran. They could have possibly said that Messenger

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* claimed that the Quran is miraculous and exceptionally eloquent, yet he is mistaken in this and that point. Had they been believers, they would have concealed their claims, but they were disbelievers who always tried to spread rumours about mistakes in the Quran. There are also people who do not master the Arabic language and are not well-versed in its eloquence, and yet they try to claim that there are contradictions in the Quran. How can they lay down such claim even though they do not master the Arabic language or its eloquence, and they are not native Arabic speakers? How can they say that the Quran contains contradictions? The disbelieving Arabs were more worthy of such claims because they were well-versed in the Arabic language and they also witnessed the revelation of the Quran. Although they rejected Muhammad's Message, they have never alleged that the Quran contained contradictions. This proves that the allegations of the orientalists were mainly due to their deficient knowledge of the Arabic language.

To those orientalists, we say that the Quran addressed numerous issues to prove its eloquence and rhetorical miracle for those to whom it was originally revealed—since some of them were going to undertake the mission of preaching Islam. The Quran then bore other miracles to non-Arab nations. Therefore, the miracle of the Quran does not only consist in its eloquence; otherwise, someone may say that the Quran is only miraculous for the Arabs and that it has nothing to do with non-Arabs or Romans, for instance? To such person, we respond by asking: does the Quranic miracle consist solely of its rhetorical style? No; its miracle extended to matters that all people, irrespective of their languages, would assent to. For instance, it demonstrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, in accordance with the testimony of his rivals, never left the Arabian Peninsula except with the trade caravans to Syria. Further, no one could prove that he learned anything from a teacher. All his contemporaries were aware of these facts. Allah has even used the mistake they committed against them by stating that their claim that a person has taught him is totally false because the language of such person would be foreign while this revelation is in clear Arabic. (*an-Nahl:* 103)

The person that the disbelievers referred to was either a slave boy who was owned by Huwytib ibn 'Abd Al-'Uzza who converted to Islam and became a good Muslim, to another Roman slave boy or to Salman Al-Farisi

Allah be pleased with him. Hence, Allah explains that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not attended by any tutors and did not go on journeys. Afterwards, the Quran posed another challenge not using logic, language, eloquence or explanation, but rather, through a comprehensive matter for all minds; that is, the Book of the universe, events and incidents that all humans share.

Universal events, as we know, are covered by temporal veils. Events that took place in the past are veiled by the past time—whoever was living in those days knew about them, and whoever was not living in those days would not know about them. Thus, events of the past are veiled by the past time. Similarly, the events of the future are veiled by the future time as they have not happened yet. Even the present time that stretches ahead of us, Allah veils it through the spatial dimension. However, the Quran manages to penetrate all these veils through its diverse techniques. For instance, it poses a challenge by saying that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not present on the western side of the mountain when Allah has given His Command to Musa (Moses) (*al-Qasas:* 44). Allah also says that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not live among the people of *Madyan* or recite His Revelation to them. (*al-Qasas:* 45) In addition, He *Glorified is He* says that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had never recited any scripture before revealing the Quran, and nor had he written any scripture down, lest those who follow falsehood might have had cause to doubt (*al-'Ankabut:* 48).

The expression '…you were not present…' is used in the Quran to relate events that took place in the past. By Allah, had they suspected that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had some kind of knowledge or that he was attended by a tutor, would they have kept silent? Definitely, they would not; the reason is that the disbelievers wanted to exploit any gap that they could find to assail Islam. Afterwards, the Quran penetrates the veil of the future time when Muslims were incapable of protecting themselves. Allah says, 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar:* 45) When this verse was revealed, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* inquired about the forces which would be routed. The verses of the Quran then continued to be revealed, recited and memorized. Eventually, the battle of Badr took place and the forces of the disbelievers were routed. Another verse was revealed about Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira who was cruel and a tyrant. Allah says that He will brand him on the snout (*al-Qalam:* 16). When this verse was revealed, some Muslims wondered whether they were capable of reaching and laying their hands on this tyrant. After that, in the battle of Badr, they found that he was struck on his nose by a sword, and that the sword left an indelible mark on it. So, who penetrated the veil of the future? It is Allah and not Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you deliberated matters and tried to understand them properly, you would realise that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only delivered the Message of Allah as put forward by the Quran. You would also realise that the Quran is the discourse of Allah to Whom eternity, past, present and future are irrelevant, for He is Timeless. In this context, the Quran revealed that they say inwardly, 'Why does Allah not punish us for what we are saying?' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) They said this inwardly, and no one heard them. But the Quran was revealed to divulge what they have only said inwardly. What should they have said then? If they had thought about the Quran, they would have known that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who informed His Messenger Muhammad of what they said inwardly. Thus, the verse that is asking them to think about the Quran is followed by the verse that reveals their secret scheming to do other than what the prophet told them to do. Had they deliberated and tried to understand the Quran, they would have known that Allah, Who sent Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with guidance and the religion of the truth, is the One Who apprised him of what they concealed. Those who do not have a proper comprehension of the language may rejoice at a seeming contradiction that they thought existed in the Quran. They may say that a single verb attributed to a single agent cannot simultaneously be negated and affirmed; if you negate it, you cannot affirm it, and if you affirm it, you cannot negate it. However, the Quran contains similar cases.

They thought that the following saying of Allah involves such contradiction: '…when you [Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but Allah's…' (*al-Anfal:* 17). The verse negates that Prophet Muhammad threw and simultaneously affirms the same act. The Quran uses the same verb which is ‘throw’, and the subject of the verb is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; so, how come the Quran affirms and negates a verb attributed to a single subject in one verse? To those who think in this manner, we say that you only thought so because you do not master the Arabic language. However, those who master the Arabic language, and are fluent in it, naturally and spontaneously did not think the same way when they heard such discourse, indicating that they properly understood its meaning.

But why should we revert back to the pre-Islamic era to understand the meaning intended in this verse? Let us adduce an example from our daily lives. For instance, if you tell your son, ‘Study! The exams are impending; I will stay to watch you and ensure whether or not you will study well.’ Your son may then pick up a book, turn its pages and nod his head constantly. After a while, he may call you and say, ‘Come and see what I have studied so far.’ You may then grab the book and ask your son a couple of questions about the material he claims to have covered, but he may fail to answer. Upon noticing such failure, you may tell him, ‘You have studied and, at the same time, you have not studied.’ This means that you have formally studied; however, the result of your studying is nil. Your statement, ‘You have studied,’ is an affirmation of the action of studying on his part. In contrast, your statement: ‘You have not studied,’ is a simultaneous negation of the same act. If a verb attributed to a single subject is simultaneously affirmed and negated in an eloquent discourse, know that the context in which it is negated is different from the context in which it is affirmed.

The saying of Allah in such verse means that when Messenger Muhammad engaged in war, he grabbed a handful of pebbles and then threw it at the enemy’s army. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* undertook the formal aspect of the process, but was he capable of causing the pebbles to reach every individual in the enemy’s army? This matter is definitely beyond his capability. Thus, the saying of Allah means that he performed the act of throwing on the formal level, but on the objective level, the ultimate effect of such act of throwing is due to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Further, in another verse, Allah says that ‘most people do not know’ (*ar-Rum:* 6) which indicates negation. However, Allah immediately says afterwards that they know but the outer surface of this present life (*ar-Rum:* 7). The opponents of Islam might wonder: how is it possible that Allah says that most people do not know and then says that they know immediately afterwards? We reply by affirming that people do not have beneficial knowledge. His saying that they know only the 'outer surface of this present life' means that they do not know the essence of things or their ramifications. Therefore, if a verb is affirmed at one time and negated another time, it must be that the aspects, about which the negation and affirmation are made, differ.

Another good example is the saying of Allah that on the Day of Judgment neither mankind nor the jinn will be asked about their sins (*ar-Rahman:* 39). The Quran says in another instance that they will be halted for questioning (*as-Saffat:* 24) which means that they will be asked. To those sceptics, we say that they should first acquire a good knowledge of the Arabic language. Do teachers not ask their students? Thus, a knowledgeable person may ask the learner to evaluate what the latter knows and to make him acknowledge something—and not because the knowledgeable wants to know what the learner already knows. When Allah says that they will be questioned, do not ever think that He is asking because He does not know. He is rather asking so that you would acknowledge; indeed, the proof based on acknowledgment is more powerful than that based on examination and inquiry. Accordingly, if you notice that something is being negated and affirmed simultaneously, know that the aspects—to which the negation and affirmation are attributed—are different. Here is another example: we may adduce in demonstration of the miraculous nature of the Quran; Allah says, '…do not kill your children in fear of poverty'— We will provide for you and for them…' (*al-An'am:* 151). In another verse Allah says, '…We shall provide for them and for you…' (*al-Isra':* 31).

The one who is not well-versed in the Arabic language may wonder, 'Which is more eloquent? If the first one is more eloquent, the second would not be, and if the second is, the first is not.' To this person, we respond that you have considered the end of each verse only. You should consider the end of every verse along with its beginning. It is true that the end of each verse is different because Allah says in the first verse that He provides for you as well as for them, while in the second verse He says that He provides for them as well as for you. But is the beginning of each verse the same? No; the beginning of each verse is different because Allah commands us in the first one not to kill our children in fear of poverty. It is as if poverty already exists. For this reason, the one addressed was concerned with his livelihood before he was concerned with the sustenance of his child. Thus, He is afraid lest he should beget a child, he might not be able to feed that child because he is poor. Therefore, Allah first assures him about his livelihood and then assures him about the sustenance of his child, saying that He shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them. By contrast, Allah has not mentioned the same thing in the second verse. He rather says, ‘Hence, do not kill your children for fear of poverty…’, as if the father is afraid of losing his wealth and becoming poor upon begetting a child. Since He has said, ‘…for fear of poverty,’ this means that poverty does not exist. Rather, the father is afraid lest poverty may befall him upon begetting a child. Thus, Allah has explained to him that he should not be afraid, for Allah will bring about the sustenance of the child (*al-Isra’:* 31). Thus, if you consider both the beginning and the end of each verse, you will notice that the relation between them is integral and harmonious. Some of them try to find a way to question and cast suspicions on the eloquence of the Quran.

Further, one may wonder why Allah commands us in a verse to bear anything that happens steadfastly (*Luqman:* 17) and in another verse He says that if one is patient in adversity and forgives—this is one of the greatest things (*ash-Shura:* 43). To those who argue, we say that you did not understand the truth of these verses. In the first verse, Allah commands us to bear in patience whatever may befall us, which implies bearing the calamities wherein you face no rival. As long as you do not have a rival, what should you do? If you have a rival, you may be tempted to avenge yourself. For this reason, heed the first verse because it obviously befits a situation wherein you do not face a rival or adversary. In the second verse, Allah says that this is indeed one of the greatest things. This formulation better fits a situation wherein you face a rival or an adversary because you will endure both the calamity and the rival who caused it, for whenever you see him you will get provoked and enraged. For this reason, the verse strongly stresses the importance of patience and forgiveness.

This is the rationale of the orientalists who want to cast doubts about the Quran. They tell us, 'Look at the Quran from a sanctifying perspective. However, if you consider the Quran more scrupulously, you will identify numerous contradictions in it.' We ask these orientalists to mention to us these contradictions; we have already refuted them in the context of our reflections on the Quran. Some of them may, for instance, say that when the Quran addressed the issue of the creation of the heavens and the earth, all the verses dealing with this matter asserted that Allah has created them in six days. However, they claim that one finds a discrepancy upon examining the verses that address the details of creation. In those verses, Allah states that He has created the earth in two days. He then placed solid mountains on it, blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them—all in four days. Then, He turned to the sky, which was smoke—He said to it and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not,' and they said, 'We come willingly'—and in two days He formed the seven heavens, and assigned an order to each. (*Fussilat:* 9-12). Upon examining these verses, the orientalists remarked that creation took a total of eight days and, therefore, claimed that the Quran entails a contradiction. To these orientalists, we say that you did not understand the meaning of these verses. When Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has created the earth in two days, has He talked about what would sustain life on earth? When He has talked about the earth, He only said that He has created the earth in two days and that He then placed solid mountains on it. This refers to the completion of the creation of the earth because He is talking about the earth. Then, Allah says that He has placed solid mountains on it, blessed it and measured out its varied provisions. All of these pertain to the earth. Thus, the second stage is that of the completion of earth's creation. Initially, Allah created the earth as a planet; afterwards, He placed on it solid mountains and dispensed the means of subsistence to everyone on earth and blessed all of this. But, how many days did it take Him to accomplish this task? It took Him four days; it is as if the first two days were included in the four because this is the completion of the earth's creation.

To Allah pertains the supreme and most exalted parables. You may, for instance, say that you have travelled from here to Isma'ilia [an Egyptian city] in one hour and to Port Said [another Egyptian city] in two hours. Your statement that you travelled to Port Said in two hours means that the first hour was counted. Thus, those orientalists did not understand the Quran. For this reason, Allah says, ‘Will they not think about the Quran?’ If you encounter something in the Quran that on a superficial reading arouses your suspicion, you will have to work it out in your mind and ponder over it until you realise that, if there is any contradiction, it is due to your own understanding and not to the Quran itself. The reason is that the Quran is the discourse of the One Who would always truly recount whichever story He tells; the One from Whom nothing is concealed; the One Who is not veiled by the past, present or the place. Allah admonishes them to think about Quran, for if it had been from anyone other than Allah, they would have found much inconsistency in it. The Quran is a big Book that encompasses one hundred and fourteen chapters. By Allah, find a novelist or writer who is capable of writing something like it? If you consider the eloquence of any writer, you will find that such a writer will be strong in certain aspects and weak in others. Afterwards, you may notice that he did not properly express the meaning of something; he may, for instance, say something and contradict it a few lines later as what Abu Al-‘Ala Al-Ma‘aryy did when he said:

Days shatter us as if we were
Like glass that cannot be fixed.

When he composed this verse, he did not believe in Resurrection.

However, upon restoring his sanity, he said:

Both the astrologist and the physician claimed
Those bodies are not going to be resurrected

So I say to both: if your claims turn out to be true, I will not be a loser; and if my claim turns out to be true, you are the ones to incur the loss.

Thus, contradictions emerge from the one whose opinions are liable to change; the one who may have an opinion and then modify it based on his experience or the reality. But Allah does not change, and His Knowledge also does not change; He is the True Lord. Thus, contradiction emanates either from someone who lies because he did not restrict his opinion to what is real, or from someone who is constantly changing. He may maintain a particular opinion and then change his stance towards it. But, Allah never changes. He says about this truism, 'Will they not think about this Quran? If it had been from anyone other than Allah, they would have found much inconsistency'

In fact, we find that all issues discussed in the Quran are essentially presented as texts that He has revealed to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, these issues are concerned with the nature of the cosmos that is constantly changing. Some of the changes are caused by those who believe in the Quran and some by those who do not believe. But have you ever come across any matter discussed in the Quran that was nullified or contradicted by a cosmic discovery even if the latter was made by a non-believer? No, there is nothing of this sort. For instance, in the west, they invented after the First World War a cylinder that was capable of fragmenting individual substances and atoms. This was the first stage in the process of fragmenting the atom. But the Quran uses the atom as an example of the smallest entity; the saying of Allah *the Almighty* indicates that he who will make a good deed, even if it is like an atom, will be rewarded. (*az-Zalzala:* 7)

When the atom was fragmented, some Muslim scholars were taken aback. They were afraid that something smaller than the atom was going to be discovered. Thus, some claimed that the Quran was revealed in an age wherein the smallest particle for the old Arabs was the atom. However, the Almighty Allah eternally knows that science aspires to progress to the point at which it can break down the atom. Thus the Almighty Allah says that He is the only one who knows the unseen so nothing would be out of His knowledge, even if it is a thing smaller or bigger than a weight of an atom, wherever it will be, since everything had been written in a clear Book. (*Saba':* 3)

Those who said so pondered over the Quran and understood the discourse of the Almighty Allah for whom all times are equal: the future is like the past, and His knowledge is not function of or bound to the differences among the future, the past or the present. Further the Almighty Allah explained to us that there may be something smaller than the atom. Accordingly, if they break down what has resulted from breaking down the atom, the result of this process will also be mentioned in the Quran. For instance, let us reflect upon social issues. You will find that the adversaries of Islam are trying to find a way to exploit them to assail Islam. You will also find that those who do not understand Islam follow in their footsteps and babble that the views propounded in the Quran no longer befit the age. The Almighty Allah says that those people do not even ponder over the Quran; if it had been from anyone other than Him, they would have found much contradiction.(*an-Nisa':* 82)

Here is another example. Some people say that there are differences in the readings of the Quran as in the case of the saying of the Almighty Allah, 'Lord of the Day of Judgment!' (*al-Fatiha:* 4) Someone may say: Some people may read it as *malik* instead of *maalik*—the Arabic word in the verse translated as Lord. However, this person did not notice that there is something that we call the order of priority. The meaning of *maalik* is identical to that of *malik*. But can someone claim that the Quran was not issued by the Almighty Allah? So, He replies that if the Quran had been from anyone other than Him, it would have contained much contradiction. That is, 'had the Quran been issued from anyone other than Allah, could any other than the Almighty Allah bring about the Quran?' No, no one can. The Quran can only come from the Almighty Allah; were it issued from any but the Almighty Allah, they would surely have found much contradiction in it.

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* that 'why do they not ponder over the Quran?' is regarded to be an ennoblement and honouring of the human being. It is as if the Almighty Allah created man and endowed him with a faculty that, if used properly, enables him to arrive at the essence and realities that lead to the best understanding of the commandments of the Almighty Allah. This is a testimony in favour of the human being; it is as if man is equipped with a thinking tool. If man uses such tool, he will be able to arrive at the essence of things. The Almighty Allah only wants us to use this tool—such as in case of pondering over the Quran, reaching the conclusion that it cannot be possible for it to have been issued from any source other than the Almighty Allah. The Quran is the discourse of the Almighty Allah, and thus it is indicative of His Character and Attributes. Further, the Character of the Perfect Being is perfect, whereas contradiction is contrary to perfection. The meaning of contradiction, in this context, is to find a verse that contradicts another; this is impossible to take place in the Quran because this indicates that the one who said the first verse forgot about what he meant by it when he uttered the other. That is, He put forward a verse that negates the previous. Accordingly, if the one who is speaking were perfect, he would surely keep in mind what he had initially said to avoid contradictions in any of his following statements. Therefore, there is no contradiction or conflict in the Quran simply because it has been made by the Almighty Allah. Subsequently the Almighty Allah says:

وَإِذَا جَآءَهُمۡ أَمۡرٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَمۡنِ أَوِ ٱلۡخَوۡفِ أَذَاعُواْ بِهِۦۖ وَلَوۡ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ
وَإِلَىٰٓ أُوْلِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِ مِنۡهُمۡ لَعَلِمَهُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَسۡتَنۢبِطُونَهُۥ مِنۡهُمۡۗ وَلَوۡلَا فَضۡلُ ٱللَّهِ
عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَرَحۡمَتُهُۥ لَٱتَّبَعۡتُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنَ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا ﴿٨٣﴾

Whenever news of any matter comes to them, whether concerning peace or war, they spread it about; if they referred it to the Messenger and those in authority among them, those seeking its meaning would have found it out from them. If it were not for God’s bounty and mercy towards you, you would almost all have followed Satan [83]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 83)

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches the faithful a method and a style that would guarantee and secure for them the secrecy of their intentions and actions—especially when they are approaching a severe conflict and have fierce enemies. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* trains them to deal with their problems wisely to be able to confront spies. This verse refers to the case when a piece of news about any matter pertaining to the believers or their rivals reaches the believers. For instance, they may hear that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will depart secretly towards certain destinations, and that such tribe is waiting to join him. When this piece of news reaches the weak hypocrites, they may spread it to others. As a result, the rivals of the Prophet may engulf the tribe—that promised to fight on Allah’s Messenger’s side—to keep it from going out and meeting Prophet Muhammad. They may also say that Prophet Muhammad is about to leave Medina to do something; that is how they spread the news. Thus the Almighty Allah explains to them: do not do this, especially in case of issues related to your interest as a group—that embraced a certain course of life, and you want it to prevail against its enemies.

So, do not divulge or spread any matter that you hear about before discussing it with your leader or with those whom your leader deems worthy—in this case the Almighty Allah means any [secret] matter pertaining to security—indicating that this admonition is in their interest. By contrast, fear refers to their enemy—indicating a matter that jeopardises their interest. However, the Quran states that they spread words about matters irrespective of its nature.

The verb *'dha'hu* has a different meaning than the verb *'dha'bihi* when it is followed by the prepositional phrase *bihi*—the verb and preposition here translated as to spread it broadly or publicly. The former means to say something in a general sense, whereas the latter indicates that the subject [of the sentence] talks about the object [of the sentence] to everyone he encounters. It is as if the piece of news is announcing itself—on its own. It is as if you tell other people about something, and they do not spread it further. However, *'dha' bihi* indicates that the spreading of the news accompanies the news, from a limited sphere to an unlimited one, or from ears that respect its privacy to ears that are consistently trying to pursue and expose it. The Almighty Allah then says that if they had consulted the Prophet (Muhammad) concerning such matter, the Apostle—or those he appointed—were the ones entitled to decide whether or not the matter should have been divulged. Then the Almighty Allah says about the entitled ones who can draw correct conclusions from it—would have known about it *(istinbat)* —the Arabic verb here translated as deduction derived from *an-nabt* which means the appearance of something after being hidden and concealed; *istinbat* means to work assiduously to extract water. The word *an-nabt* means the first amount of water to come out, while the well is being dug. Thus, instead of using the word to refer to tangible things—as in the case of water—it is here used to refer to intangible things; that is, the news. We also started to use the word in sciences. For instance, you may give a student a geometry problem and provide the given. Next, the student will deliberate on the given information and draw a conclusion from it in order to solve the geometry problem. This process is called the process of inferring or deducing something from nothing or *istinbat*.

In this context the Almighty Allah explains to them: 'If you hear news about any secret matter pertaining to security or fear, do not spread it broadly before discussing it with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* or those whom the Messenger of Allah has given authority because they are the ones who can intelligently make the right judgment on the matter and decide on whether or not you should spread the matter publicly.

The Almighty Allah then says that if He had not bestowed His favour and mercy upon you, you would have followed Satan—except for a few. This statement indicates that they may have broadly spread some events that took place; yet, they were saved from the consequences of their deeds due to the bounty and grace of Allah *Glorified is He*. Among the secret matters they divulged were the news about the intention of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to conquer Mecca. They did so even though the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* used to conceal the identity of he city he intended to conquer whenever he launched an expedition by claiming that he was setting out to conquer another city; he thus hid his actual destination so that he could surprise his enemies and defeat them—without giving them a chance to prepare to confront him, sabotaging their ability to resist.

Consider the mercy involved in the battle of *al-Fath*. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded the Muslims to prepare to conquer Mecca. When the people of Mecca realised that Messenger Muhammad had mobilised an army that they could not confront, they decided to give in and surrender; this was an act of mercy towards them. Hatib ibn Abu Balta'ah heard about this incident and sent a message to the Quraysh. The message was picked up by a woman who mounted on her camel and headed out. Then, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard about the news and summoned 'Ali and his Companions, telling them: there is a woman crossing the meadow of Khakh who carries a letter from Hatib ibn Abu Balta'ah informing the Quraysh of our impending attack. They went, caught the woman and asked her about the message, but she denied it. Our master 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* then threatened her and managed to get the letter out of her hair. They discovered the letter from Hatib ibn Abu Balta'ah to Quraysh. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then summoned Hatib and asked him: 'Is this your letter?' Hatib replied: 'Yes, O Messenger of Allah.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'What induced you to do so?' Hatib answered: 'By Allah, O Messenger of the Almighty Allah, I knew that the Almighty Allah would grant you victory, and that my letter would not change anything about the course of the battle. Further, I am not from the Quraysh; I am only associated with them and I do not bear any bias or prejudice towards them. I have a child and a family living among them. Thus, I wanted to do something that would make them think favourably of me lest they cause harm to my family. I did not do so due to my infidelity or because I have abjured my religion and relapsed into infidelity after embracing Islam.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said to him: 'I know you have spoken the truth.'

Accordingly the Almighty Allah *Glorified is He* wants to base issues concerning faith—especially that which was connected to the relationship between the believers and their enemies—on truth. Thus, matters would not be straightened if everyone divulged and publicly spread whatever he heard. Rather, people should always refer the matter to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or to those with whom the Messenger of Allah has given authority because they are the ones capable of taking the right decision considering their conditions. Then, they may even give you permission to divulge the matter broadly and reveal the news or they may even tell you to say other things about the same matter—in case there is a way and there is need for misleading the enemies. This indicates that even though Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed victory to the believers and told them not to fear their enemies because He is their advocate and the One Who grants victory, Allah wants the believers to pursue the proper means to achieve victory—even if they depend on Him as the ultimate source of their victory.

Allah *the Almighty* then says that if it were not for His favour and mercy, they would have followed Satan except for a few. This statement indicates that they were the ones responsible for what happened, but the Almighty Allah's Grace supported and protected them. Thus, despite their deeds, He *Glorified is He* did not rule that they should suffer the repercussions or negative consequences that could harm them. We also know that, once an exceptional form follows a verb, we ought to immediately inquire as to whether the exception refers to the subject of the verb or the verb itself. In this verse, we immediately notice the saying of the Almighty Allah: 'you would have followed Satan, except for a few.' Thus, we wonder: Was it the case that a few followed Satan whereas the majority did not? Does 'a few' in this context refer to the event, the cause or the subject of the event? If we consider that 'a few' referred to the event, the verse would mean that they mainly followed Satan, except for a few things, wherein they followed the natural inclination that Allah has given them. By contrast, if ‘a few’ referred to the subject of the event, the verse means that all of them—but a few of them have a sound instinct—would follow Satan.

It has been authenticated that, before the Messenger of Allah’s mission with the Message of Islam, some people gathered and deliberated about the condition of *jahiliyah* (ignorance) they were living before Islam: including worshiping idols and totems. Then, they decided that it did not make sense to them. Accordingly, some of them quit such practices completely, while others set out to seek true knowledge of religion in other countries. For example, Zayd Ibn ‘Amr ibn Nufayl, Abi As-Salt and Qus ibn Sa‘idah were all led by their instinct that the idolatry of the Arabs in the Pre-Islamic period was not correct, and that the Arabs should not continue to practice it. Those few people who were enlightened were called *Al-Hunafa’*; some of them, however, continued to worship idols until the Almighty Allah enlightened them with the Message of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Thus, when the Almighty Allah says that if not for His Favour upon you and His Mercy, you would have followed Satan, except for a few—this means that the Almighty Allah will not, due to His Grace and Mercy, leave any room for the devil to insinuate itself in certain matters. Rather, the Almighty Allah will expose the alliance of Satan with the hypocrites. In doing so, He *Glorified is He* instructs you how to keep away from the Satan’s way to be on the way of the truth. Such process is only due to the Almighty Allah’s Grace and Mercy. Subsequently the Almighty Allah addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying:

فَقَٰتِلۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ لَا تُكَلَّفُ إِلَّا نَفۡسَكَۚ وَحَرِّضِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۖ عَسَى ٱللَّهُ
أَن يَكُفَّ بَأۡسَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْۚ وَٱللَّهُ أَشَدُّ بَأۡسٗا وَأَشَدُّ تَنكِيلٗا ﴿٨٤﴾

So [Prophet] fight in God’s way. You are accountable only for yourself. Urge the believers on. God may well curb the power of the disbelievers, for He is stronger in might and more terrible in punishment [84] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’*: 84)

When you encounter a sentence commencing with the *fa’* particle, you are to know that it is an effect of the cause that precedes it. For example, consider the saying of the Almighty Allah: 'and in the end He causes him to die and brings him to the grave.' The meaning of this verse is that the grave follows death. Thus, if you encounter the particle *fa',* you should bear in mind that what precedes it is the cause of what follows it. For this reason, they call it the *fa' Sababiiah (causal Fa').*

So, what precedent could possibly be the cause for Allah's saying to his Messenger (Muhammad), directing him to fight for His cause holding no responsibility except for himself? In this respect, we say that, as long as the command was *fight,* we have to look for the previous verses that addressed the question of fighting. the Almighty Allah has said before, 'Therefore let those fight in the way of Allah, who sell this world's life for the hereafter; and whoever fights in the way of Allah, then be the slain or be the victorious, We shall grant him a mighty reward.' (*an-Nisa':* 75) In another verse, He encouraged the believers by asking them, 'why do you not fight for the sake of Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 76)

Thus, He addresses the command to fight to Messenger Muhammad who, in turn, delivered it to the believers. He *peace and blessings be upon him* only needs to hear Allah's Command once and so as to carry it out immediately. He thus urges the believers to fight for Allah's cause. (*an-Nisa':* 74) So, whoever is a true believer must believe in Messenger Muhammad since he *peace and blessings be upon him* was the first one to receive this order of encouraging the believers to fight for Allah's cause [in both verses]. (*an-Nisa':* 74- 75)

As he *peace and blessings upon him* was the first to abide by Allah's Commands and Enactments, he, therefore, should be the first to adhere to them even if no one else listened to him. This is evidence of his complete faith in the One Who ordered him to fight the disbelievers. Before commanding the believers to fight, he has to fight alone. For this reason, when our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* assumed the Caliphate after the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, he insisted on fighting the disbelievers among the Arabs and said: 'If they do not give me what they used to give to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, even if it is little, I will fight them with the sword.' Some of the companions tried to dissuade Abu Bakr from pursuing his intention to fight, but he responded: 'By the Almighty

Allah, if my right hand disobeyed my order to fight them, I would fight them using my left hand.'

Thus, the order came from Allah to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight for His sake —calling our attention to the difference between delivering the Almighty Allah's Commands on one hand, and adhering to and executing these commands on the other. Since the Messenger of Allah has received Allah's Commands, he is committed and bound to implementing them first. Subsequently he *peace and blessings be upon him* should deliver such commands and decrees to the believer—whoever listens to him and believes in him should follow in his footsteps.

Allah *the Almighty* informs His Prophet Muhammad that he bears no responsibility except for himself; it is an assignment to the Prophet that he should execute and implement Allah's commands and not just deliver them to the people. As far as the latter mission is concerned, Messenger Muhammad is only responsible for delivering Allah's Message to the believers; whether or not they follow and adhere to what he communicates to them is not up to him, and he will not be held accountable for it. However, Messenger Muhammad should commit to fighting for the cause of the Almighty Allah, irrespective of their actions.

Does this mean Prophet Muhammad should leave those who have believed to themselves? No, Allah asked His Messenger to urge them to fight and not leave them to follow their own interests and desires: '…*harred* (urge) the believers on. Allah may well curb the power of the disbelievers…' (*an-Nisa':* 84) The Arabic verb *harred* is derived from *al-hurd* which refers to a substance that cleanses hands or clothes by removing impurities. It is a command to Prophet Muhammad to understand what it was that could probably keep his companions from fighting and seek to remove from their souls any factors that prevented them from fighting in the cause of Allah. Ponder the words of Allah: '… (Urge) the believers on. Allah may well curb the *ba's* (power) of the disbelievers…' (*an-Nisa':* 84). Allah wants to tell His Messenger in this verse that he would not achieve victory due to the greatness of the number of believers with him; rather, the believers are only the means Allah uses to support His Messenger, and triumph comes from Him only: '…victory is only from Allah, the Mighty, the Wise' (*Al-'Imran:* 126).

The word *ba's* in the verse we are dealing with encompasses the meanings of power, robustness in fighting wars, cunning plotting and the capacity to defeat enemies. It is a word with multiple connotations. Allah informs His Messenger that he would not be held accountable for those who have known His command and refused to obey it, and nor would victory be achieved through material power or support of the believers who fought with him; rather, Allah executes His Will through to those who fight for His cause and victory comes from Him alone: 'Fight them: Allah will punish them at your hands…' (*at-Tawba:* 14)

Why does Allah not directly grant victory to the believers without getting them to fight against the disbelievers and idolaters? Were victory to be granted due to some unknown cause without the believers having to fight, this would offer people no sign or proof of the truth, but rather would give them a pretext to persist in disbelief. Furthermore, Allah has willed that victory should be achieved by the hands of the believing minority to teach them that they have to pursue the proper means for attaining ends, meanwhile never forgetting that means and causes are powerless in themselves—and victory is only from Allah. In the Battle of Hunayn, pride crept into the hearts of some Muslims due to their large numbers; they thought they were too many to be defeated; they became full of themselves and their material power. To teach them a lesson, Allah made them experience defeat at the beginning before He granted them victory at the end. About this battle, Allah says: '… on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers, and they proved of no avail whatever to you…' (*at-Tawba:* 25). This was intended to call attention of the believers that, while they exhaust all possible means to attain victory, they must always bear in mind that success comes from Allah alone. Allah creates means and causes to show through them His assistance to His believing servants. Were victory to be granted without any effort on the part of the believers, this would not afford sufficient evidence for their enemies to see that they are supported by Allah. Let me give you an example that illustrates the difference from the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Allah did not want to just save him from fire; had this been the case, he would not have let his enemies catch him in the first place. If Allah had prevented them from getting him, they would have said: 'Had we caught Ibrahim (Abraham), we would have done such-and-such to him.' Such would have been a chance for them to believe they were right, and they would have found a justification to persist in disbelief. However, Allah let them catch Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and throw him in their kindled fire. Then, He miraculously suspended the burning power of the fire: 'But We said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham)."' (*al-Anbiya':* 69) This was real frustration and enragement to them. If Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) had been saved by any unknown cause, other than such a tangible one, his adversaries would have found pretexts to justify their defeat.

Allah sent His Messenger, Muhammad, to all humankind and would not make him rely for support and victory on those who believe with him. Allah alone is Sufficient for His Messenger as Supporter and Protector. Were it just for granting Prophet Muhammad triumph over his enemies, Allah would have done that directly. However, He has willed that the believers enjoy the honour of fighting for Allah's Cause and earn the matchless reward He has prepared for those who strive and those who are martyred. Allah has willed to let victory be achieved through the hands of the believers to grant them superiority over other nations and to elevate their status. If it were only a matter of supporting Prophet Muhammad and assuring his victory, Allah would have done that directly without war or fighting.

Ponder the words of Allah: '… Allah may well curb the power of the disbelievers, for He is stronger in might and more terrible in punishment.' (*an-Nisa':* 84) The verse refers to the endless Power of Allah Who is capable of deterring the disbelievers and aborting their conspiracies. This Divine Power manifested itself later in the events. Consider what happened after the Battle of Uhud. The battle ended in a rather indeterminate manner; no one can tell which camp won and which camp lost. Muslims triumphed at first, but when the archers violated the command of Prophet Muhammad, and imbalance befell the Muslim forces. However, the warriors of Quraysh did not stay in the place of the battle and did not go into the city. For this reason, the Battle of Uhud did not end with a decisive victory for either party. They threatened to have their revenge in the following year and gave the promised battle the name: Badr *As-Sughra* (Badr Minor).

A year passed and the appointed time for the battle came. Prophet Muhammad called people to join him for the battle, but only seventy men obeyed him and set out for the specified location. They demonstrated courage and proved they were not afraid of confronting the disbelievers of Quraysh who certainly outnumbered them. Allah threw dread and fear in the heart of Abu Sufyan who ordered his forces to return to Mecca even before they reached the appointed place. Thus did Allah abort their plot; they appointed the time and place for the battle, spent a year preparing for it and even sent spies to spread rumours and fear among Muslims. Still, Allah has made fear overcome them and they did not dare confront the believers. Muslims stayed for days in that place, sold the goods they had, returned to Medina with immense profits and decided victory over their coward enemies.

Allah has fulfilled His promise to Prophet Muhammad: '…Allah '*asa* (may well) curb the power of the disbelievers, for He is stronger in might and more terrible in punishment' (*an-Nisa':* 84). The Arabic word '*asa* (translated in the verse as 'may well') bears the connotation of hope: ''*Asa* (I hope) you will receive good news soon.' Good news may or may not come, but the speaker expresses hope that it will.

This example is a little different: ''*Asa* (I hope) I will bring you some good news.' Here hope is stronger. In the first example, actualising hope is not in the least in the hand of the speaker, unlike the second example where the speaker seems to have the means to fulfil the stated hope. Nevertheless, the latter still does not guarantee that he will live and have the capability to bring about the good news he hopes he can bring. He may have a real intention, but he cannot guarantee to have the power to fulfil such intention.

If someone says: *'Asa* (I hope) Allah will bring you happiness', the sentence expresses an even stronger hope, since hope, in this case, is pinned on the Almighty Lord. Still, can the speaker be completely sure Allah will answer his hope? Allah may or may not fulfil that hope, based on His Will and Wisdom; we have our own calculations, but Allah alone knows what is best for each of us. Unlike the aforesaid examples, it is Allah Who says about Himself: '…Allah *'asa* (may well) curb the power of the disbelievers, for He is stronger in might and more terrible in punishment' (*an-Nisa':* 84). This is the most actual and concrete of all hopes. Nothing can prevent Allah from actualising it.

We have thus learnt the different semantic levels on which the word *'asa* may be used. It may indicate a kind of hope expressed by someone and pinned on another. This is lowest form of hope. One may also use it to express his hope that he himself will do something. This is a stronger and more assertive kind of hope. In both cases, however, circumstances may stand in the face of actualising the thing hoped for. The strongest form of hope expressed by the word *'asa* is the one pinned on Allah. The reason is that the fulfilment of such hope is attributed to the Supreme Power, and it is for Him to make it come true or not based on His Knowledge and Wisdom.

Unlike all three cases, *'asa* may be used to express a kind of hope that will certainly be fulfilled. An example is expressed in the verse that we are dealing with: '…Allah *'asa* (may well) curb the power of the disbelievers, for He is stronger in might and more terrible in punishment' (*an-Nisa':* 84). When the word *'asa* is used by Allah, it refers to hope that must be achieved, and it is meant as an encouragement and good news to those concerned with fulfilment of the hope. It implies an urge to ask Allah for His Grace because He is the Most-Generous Who will make the desired thing come true. Those who possess power among the creatures of Allah are likely to lose that power. Weakness and fear may strike the most powerful on earth. However, the One Who confers power and capacity to act on His creatures is the One forever capable of truly acting; He is the One, the Most-Powerful and Most Capable of deterring wrongdoers, '… For He is stronger in might and *ashaddu tankila* (more terrible in punishment)' (*an-Nisa': *84). The word *tankil* (terrible punishment) is derived from the root *nikl* which denotes restraint. When a ruler administers punishment to someone who has perpetrated a crime, this act deters anyone who thinks of committing a similar crime. Thus, the punishment imposes a non-material restraint on others and prevents them from pursuing the same course of action. This is what it means to make a criminal an example; it is to administer adequate punishment to him so that everyone else is deterred from committing a similar crime for fear of suffering the same punishment. Thus, the word tankil denotes a non-material restraint that prevents one from committing a crime, or deters him from returning to a crime he had perpetrated before. This restraint consists of the fact that the punishment administered to the perpetrator of the crime would present itself in everyone's mind as a standing warning against slipping into wrongdoing.

When Allah created humankind, He distributed different talents among them. There is no single person who possesses all talents because Allah has willed that each person's thought and powers should vary. When He allots to every one of His servants only a specific share of talent, He means that different talents complement and integrate with each other. If every person had the same talents and gifts others have, everyone would dispense with the others. However, Allah wants us to form a community based on coherence and integration, with each individual or group possessing a power that distinguishes them on one level and integrates with the powers of others on the other level—all cooperating for the public well-being. With each endowed with a different talent, each will have a role to play for others, and a need to ask of them meanwhile. An adept engineer would build houses and establish roads and bridges. If he gets sick, he cannot cure himself, though, and would have to see a doctor. Both of them would need to consult a lawyer when they want to enter into a contract. Craftsmen are not less important; with their hands, ideas are put into action. Thus, there is not a single individual capable of doing everything on his own. If such a person existed, no one would need another, and society would eventually fall apart. For this reason, Allah says: '… We have raised some of them above others in rank so that some may take others into service…' (*az-Zukhruf:*32).

When people consider how Allah privileges some over others, they think only in terms of wealth. This is a narrow understanding. Allah may bestow His favours on His servants in the form of physical strength, useful knowledge, a forbearing temperament, etc. Thus, each and every one of us is privileged one way or another. Therefore, when Allah says: '…We have raised some of them above others in rank…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32), some may wonder who are raised, and above whom are they raised? Everyone is raised through his talent, and others are raised above him through their talents. You are privileged, while others are privileged over you.

As we have said, we cannot sum up all the bounties of Allah in the single aspect of wealth. Let us consider all other perspectives in which one may be privileged; we will realize that every person is elevated above others in terms of certain privileges, and that others are raised above him in terms of other privileges. Each and every one is in a way in service of the others. This is the variation Allah has willed among His servants. Our duty is to cooperate to make the best use of our powers collectively. No one in the community of the believers should be left alone and helpless. Rather, each one of us should give others a helping hand with the powers Allah has given to some and deprived others from. Such is the meaning of solidarity and the essence of power. Individuals of the Muslim community are like the bricks of a wall in assisting one another: none of them is abandoned, and each of them is equally indispensable. When you allow the effect of your talent to be extended to another, each can be a part of a strong whole. To this, the following verse alludes:

مَّن يَشْفَعْ شَفَٰعَةً حَسَنَةً يَكُن لَّهُۥ نَصِيبٌ مِّنْهَا ۖ وَمَن يَشْفَعْ شَفَٰعَةً
سَيِّئَةً يَكُن لَّهُۥ كِفْلٌ مِّنْهَا ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ مُّقِيتًا ﴿٨٥﴾

Whoever speaks for a good cause will share in its benefits
and whoever speaks for a bad cause will share in its burden:
God controls everything [85] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 85)

Joining oneself to another in a good cause is to intercede for someone by offering good arguments in their favour to further an interest belonging to them. In this sense, extending the fruits of one’s talent to others is a no less honourable form of assistance, and the one who offers it is entitled to a share of its outcomes.

The aforesaid verse talks mainly about intercession. It is to act as an intermediary to help someone secure an interest he desires or, alternatively, to salvage this person from a detriment without asking him for anything in return in both cases. Likewise, everyone who has a specific talent has to extend his aid to those who lack this particular talent. Communities thus become stronger, instead of being composed of a number of weak individuals. Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith, addressing Prophet Dawud (David): ‘A particular good deed will cause its doer to be granted the privilege of allotting places for the dwellers of Paradise.’ It is as if that person were made a deputy of Allah in paradise! He is not only granted a place there, but Allah assigns through him the places for the other dwellers of paradise. ‘… Prophet Dawud (David) wondered: “Who will this person be?” Allah answered: ‘A believer who helps another with a need and is keen to fulfil it for him, whether or not he succeeds.’

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘If a believer assists another with a need until he fulfils it, this is better [more rewarding] for him than locking himself up for ten years to observe solitary worship, and [know that] locking oneself up for one day to observe solitary worship for Allah draws him away from the fire by a distance equal to three trenches; the breadth of each is bigger than the distance between the east and west.’ (1)

The reason is that in offering others the help they need, one thus shows gratitude for the bounties Allah bestows on him by employing them in a manner that pleases Him. Among the immediate effects of such generous attitude is that no one will envy or bear grudge to the possessor of any specific power or ability, since the latter employs that power to help those who do not possess it. Instead of envying him, therefore, others will wish him an excess of that benefit so long as he uses it to fulfil their needs. Allah says: ‘Whoever joins himself (to another) in a good cause shall have a *nasib* (share) of it…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 85). The Quran is not sent down for the good and righteous only, but as it promises reward for goodness, it also admonishes those who do wrong: ‘…and whoever joins himself (to another) in an evil cause shall have *kefl* [here meaning responsibility] of it…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 85).

Let us now consider the difference between the two Arabic words: *nasib* and *kefl.* Both linguistically mean ‘a share’, but the former has a positive connotation, the latter a negative one. The word *nasib* often refers to a share of a good thing, like wealth, for example. Contrarily, the word *kefl* often refers to a share of a bad thing. The aforesaid verse shows the Grace and Bounty of Allah; whoever does a good deed will be rewarded several folds for it—and this is a great share—and whoever does a bad deed will be recompensed only in proportion of it.

This verse follows after the one in which Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to urge the believer to fight for His cause which promises the believers who respond to the call and fight for the cause of Allah an ample share of His Bounty, a matchless reward.

Allah says: ‘… and whoever joins himself (to another) in an evil cause shall have *kefl* [here meaning: responsibility] of it…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 85). This means whoever contributes to an evil cause will suffer part of the repercussions of such evildoing; the undesirable outcomes of his involvement must befall him as well. By contrast, contributing to a good cause brings on reward to the contributor. This should urge people to spread the fruits of their talents to others by helping them with matters above their capabilities. As long as every member of society benefits from the talents granted to some, the result will be a united, strong society with individuals supportive of each other rather than conflicting and bearing grudge for each other. Everyone will be cooperative and live free of envy and hatred towards others since he knows whatever bounty any of his fellow believers enjoys will have its effect on him as well.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Bayhaqi*

Accordingly, whoever wants to share in the bounties Allah has granted to others should learn to love the fact that they have these bounties. If you, believer, love to see others enjoy the bounties Allah has conferred on them, you will reap the fruits of these bounties. On the other hand, if you find yourself deprived of such fruits, then examine your heart and see whether or not you harbour any feelings of envy, jealousy or hatred. If that is the case, how can the effect of those bounties reach you? It is as if they felt angry on the account of their possessor and would not let the one who bears him a grudge ever taste any of their fruits!

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…and Allah is *Muqit* over (controls) all things' (*an-Nisa':* 85). After promising contributors to good causes a share of their fruit, and to those who get involved in bad causes also their due share of responsibility, Allah makes this assertion for all His servants to take heed: nothing, no matter how small and negligible, may escape the reckoning of Allah; neither a good nor a bad deed will escape Him, for He holds absolute control over all things. Quran exegetes have extensively investigated the meaning of the Arabic word *Muqit*. Some have maintained that it means Allah is the Witness over everything; others have seen that it means 'the One who reckons everything.' Another interpretation says *Muqit* means Allah is the One Who dispenses livelihood to all His creatures; a fourth interpretation says the word conveys that Allah is the Guardian—and some say it means 'the Watcher.' I see all these interpretations, however, correlated and complementary, as not conflicting. Each word has a number of semantic references associated with it, so it can have several connotations based on the context, yet the basic sense of the word is that derived directly from its etymological root. The word *Muqit* is derived from the verb *qat* which means providing someone with livelihood. Why does Allah provide us with provisions? The reason is that He wants to preserve our lives. The fact that Allah provides for every one of His creatures to keep life going necessarily entails that He watches over His creatures and never lets any one of them escape His attention. Furthermore, since Allah gives each one his livelihood based on his needs, then He must keep account of everything. He is also the Witness Who is Ever-Watchful over His servants; He knows what everyone does and recompenses each for his deeds.

Thus, all these meanings and connotations are perfectly correlated. For this reason, we should not say that scholars have disagreed on the meaning of this word. We should rather say that each of them noted a semantic dimension of the word based on the context. Allah is the *Muqit* Who provides sustenance for His creatures and Who constantly watches over them. He is also the Witness Who has Knowledge of and Control over everything. He is also the One Who keeps account of everything since He is the Lord of all creatures Who knows all they do and provides them with the requirements of life, so He keeps account of everything. It is not only for people that Allah provides for, but He gives sustenance to animals and inspires them to choose a specific diet rather than others.

So we know that even though Quran exegetes have reflected on the meaning of *Muqit* from different angles, they were all right in their interpretations of the word. Every one of the several aforementioned meanings represents a single semantic aspect of the word. Allah watches over and provides sustenance for all His creatures: humankind, animals, plants and even inanimate things.

Botanists explain this fact. We grow plants by putting seeds in the soil; seeds are split into halves and absorb nutrients from the soil; then, the plant starts to develop roots that both fix it in the soil and absorb nutrients. As the roots grow, the two halves of the seed sprout into leaves. Who watches over this process and makes the plant prosper? It is Allah, the *Muqit*, Who provides for all and watches over all. Scientists explain that plants are capable of absorbing nutrients through capillary motion. This means that plants absorb nutrition from the soil through very thin roots that absorb water in which nutrients are dissolved.

Capillary tubes put in a vessel full of coloured water would be seen all turning into the colour of the water rising in them all; the water does not rise without the colour, for example. The thin roots of the plant, however, absorb from the soil only useful material and leave out harmful ones. Who inspires the plant to make such choice? A choice requires a mind capable of thinking, deliberating and choosing one alternative over another. The plant does not have a mind. Nature does not have reason, but everything is governed and managed by the All-Wise Allah Who has absolute Knowledge and Wisdom and Who is indeed All-Sustaining. Exalted is Allah! In this regard, Allah says: ‘…all watered with the same water, yet We make some of them taste better than others: there truly are signs in this for people who reason’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 4). The seeds of peppers, molasses, pomegranates, etc. are all planted in the same earth and watered with the same water, but they develop into wonderfully different plants and fruits with different shapes, colours, tastes, smells, etc. This is the Might of Allah *Glorified is He*.

In the original Arabic text of the verse, this part, ‘…Allah controls all things’ (*an-Nisa’:* 85) the Arabic verb used is in the simple past tense. Use of the past tense in Arabic is different from its usage in English. In the former, present or even future events may be expressed by past verb forms and it is only meant for emphasis. Allah has been, is, and will forever hold control over all things. When the past is used in reference to humans, it means the state expressed was and is no more: Zayd *kan* (was) rich. This means that Zayd, who is subject to change like all other mortals, used to have a fortune and that his fortune is now gone. However, when we say Allah *kan*, even though it literally means ‘was’, it does not confine the description ascribed to Him to the past; all creatures are subject to change, but He is the Creator Who has eternally existed with no beginning and no end. Allah is the One Who causes all things to change and He never changes.In the following verse, Allah says:

وَإِذَا حُيِّيتُم بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا۟ بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَآ أَوْ رُدُّوهَآ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ حَسِيبًا ﴿٨٦﴾

**But [even in battle] when you [believers] are offered a greeting,
respond with a better one, or at least return it: God keeps
account of everything [86] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 86)**

Allah wants our lives to prosper. What is the meaning of ‘…when you are greeted…’ At first sight, anyone would say it means when we receive the greeting of ‘peace be with you’, we have to return the greeting. Prior to the advent of Islam, Arabs used to say ‘ Allah greet you’, or ‘Greetings from Allah.’ After the advent of Islam, Allah has made ours a greeting of peace: ‘On the Day when they meet Him, they will be welcomed with the greeting, ‘Peace’…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 44), or as Allah says in another verse: ‘…greet one another with a blessed, goodly greeting, as enjoined by Allah…’ (*an-Nur:* 61). That is the greeting of peace.

However, let us examine the Arabic word for ‘greet’: *hayya*. It is derived from the root *h-y-y* from which the word *hayah* (life) is also derived. What is life? Most of us would say it is the motion of a living thing that testifies to the existence of a soul in him. We sum up life in the concept of motion that we perceive by our senses since this is the most immediate experience we have of the world around us. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding would allow us to see the notion of life even in inanimate objects. We are used to associate life with perceptible motion, but everything has its own befitting kind of life.

We have learnt at school about magnetic force and attraction. We used to bring a magnetic rod and move it in a certain direction above a handful of iron filings. As we do that, the iron filings are arranged in line with the direction of the motion of the magnetic rod. The magnetic rod is an inanimate object according to our understanding of the concept of life. Nonetheless, its charged particles can demonstrate a specific motion that we cannot capture the nature of. Thus, the magnetic rod has its own motion which we cannot perceive because we do not have the abilities required to do so.

Consider another example. On a certain moderate height, someone on a plane can perceive motion on land below. If the plane flies higher, everything below seems motionless as if there were no life. The motion becomes too subtle to be perceived. Therefore, I believe everything has a life that befits its nature and a motion that we perhaps cannot perceive. It is worthy of notice that Allah addresses this issue when He says: ‘… Everything will perish except His Face…’ (*al-Qasas:* 88). What is the meaning of ‘perishing’? It is the depravation of life. As long as everything is bound to lose its life, this implies that everything has a life until Allah orders life to be taken away from it. Some may wonder: does perishing truly mean deprivation of life? Verses of the Quran explain each other. One verse of the Quran may afford an explanation of another verse so that we may understand the Quran as a whole. Allah says: '… that he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth…' (*al-Anfal:* 42). Therefore, perishing is the opposite of life.

A plastic vessel is bright and soft when still new and unused; however, after using it for a while, its brightness fades away and it becomes rather worn-out; so what happens to it? It has changed. What is the cause of the change? People say it is the normal wear and tear or the effect of sunlight. I believe the change indicates some kind of motion in this material. The same holds true for valuable gems and stones like amber and marble. The age of some is estimated to be thousands of years, and the colour and features of a gem changes through time.

Hold a leave and put it under a microscope, and you will see an immense number of small compartments that we cannot count. Seeing the wondrous creation of Allah, a believer should say: '…glory is to Allah, the best of creators' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14).

Everything that exists has a kind of life that befits its nature. If we investigate such forms of life and trace their details using tools that help detect their natures, we may be able to perceive them.

Then, there is the life of the noblest species; namely, the human being for whom Allah has made subservient all other forms of life on earth. This life ends in a time unknown to the human being but known to Allah. After this worldly life comes an eternal life. Allah has sent down His ordinance for people to abide by, so whoever obeys Him will be granted bliss in the eternal life. Thus, which is worthier of the two: the worldly life or the eternal one? It is the eternal Afterlife that never ends. For this reason, Allah says: '… the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64). That is the true life. What is the worth of this worldly life where you are constantly threatened by afflictions, pains, disturbances and ailments? It is a life that knows no pure happiness and must one day come to an end. Allah offers us a life that will not be disrupted or come to an end. This worldly life is not the true life Allah has created us for; it is only a passage to the eternal life. Ponder these words of Allah: 'Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.…' (*al-Anfal:* 24) Here, Allah addresses the believers. We have already been given life, but just according to biological laws. However, if we do not respond to what Allah and Prophet Muhammad call us for, this life will inevitably end and we will be deprived from the life that never ends, the true life where there are no threats, afflictions, burdens, diseases or any kind of suffering whatsoever.

Ar-rouh (the spirit) is the name Allah gives to the secret of life—the force that gives motion and sense to the human body, even if such a life comes to an end: 'And when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit…' (*Sad:* 72). This is the first stage of our existence; the temporary life given to both those who believe in Allah and those who do not.

Allah gives the same name also to the Message He has sent down to Prophet Muhammad: 'So We have revealed *rouhan* (a spirit) to you [Prophet] by Our command…' (*ash-Shura:* 52). Allah here refers to the Message by the same name he has given to the secret of life—the spirit—since this Message is what can lead one to the true life if he sincerely acts upon it. Thus, *rouh* is the secret that gives a temporary life and it is also the Message to which obedience gives one an eternal life free of pain and toil. Thus, the words of Allah: 'Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24) are an invitation to pursue the true life of the Hereafter, a command to abide by the ordinance of Allah in this worldly life to win eternal bliss in the Afterlife.

We have previously referred to the fact that the two words *tahiyya* (greeting) and *hayah* (life) are derived from the same root *h-y-y*. What do they have in common? When someone meets you and gives you the greeting of peace: 'Peace be with you', it is an invocation that Allah will give you security and tranquillity—what is the value of life without peace? Hence originates the similarity.

So the verb *yuhayyi* (the Arabic for 'greets'), or giving the greeting of peace, denotes a wish for the one addressed by the greeting that he will enjoy security and tranquillity. It is an endearing form of greeting that puts peace in the heart of whomever you meet and makes him feel happy to receive you. Thus, when Allah says: 'And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it…' (*an-Nisa':* 86), it means if you are addressed with a greeting of peace—which brings you a feeling of security and tranquillity—you have to respond with a similar greeting. It is as if you pour life into the heart of your addressee through this greeting. Life without peace is nothing. That reminds me of an Arab poet who once said:

Do not call him who has gone to rest 'dead'!

Death is the gloom that overtakes the alive!

Therefore, he who greets you with the greeting of peace is actually adding life to your heart through his greeting, so Allah commands you to return it or even give a better greeting. If someone addresses you with: 'Peace be with you', reply with: 'Allah's peace and mercy be with you.' This is an even better greeting.

It has been narrated on the authority of Salman Al-Farisi that a man told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allah', so the Prophet answered him back: 'Allah's peace and mercy be with you.' Another man went to him and said: 'Allah's peace and mercy be with you, O Messenger of Allah, so the Prophet answered: ' Allah's peace, mercy and blessings be with you.' A third went to him and said: 'Allah's peace, mercy and blessings be with you, O Messenger of Allah', so the Prophet answered: 'The same to you.' The man said: 'O Messenger of Allah, dearer you are to me than my father and mother; such-and-such persons greeted you and you answered them with better greetings than you have answered mine.' Prophet Muhammad then replied: 'You did not leave room for me to add anything. Allah says: "And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it…", and I have returned your greeting to you.'(1)

Scholars have explicated the rulings regarding who should start with greeting first. They said a passer-by should give it to those sitting down as he passes. A rider should offer greeting to a walker. The young should greet the elder. He who has eyesight should greet him who is blind, and the few should greet the many.

As we know, juristic rulings in Islam are addressed to all the believers, males and females, unless a distinction is clearly made between both. This is a case where women have a special ruling. A woman is permitted to greet other women, her husband, or her unmarriageable relatives. Only an old woman who is no longer a temptation to men may be the one who offers a greeting first. As for a young woman, she may not start a man with greeting nor reply when a man greets her unless she is accompanied by women like her. People traditionally say: a woman can guard another woman better than a thousand men! When a young woman is among her peers, they take care of her and protect her. A young woman by herself is forbidden from being the one who starts offering a greeting to a man or replying to him if he offers her any, and it is *makruh* (discouraged) for a man to reply to her if she greets him or offers her a greeting himself. Why is that? When a young woman greets a particular man, this may arouse interest or desire of that man towards her; for the same reason, therefore, if a man greets her, she does not have to answer him back. Nevertheless, if she is accompanied by another woman or a group of women, there is no harm in her answering him back.

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(1) *Cited by Ibn Jarir*

Scholars have also dealt with the following questions: How should a Muslim answer if the one greeting him is a non-Muslim? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained that the disbelievers may twist words. They would replace *salaam* (the Arabic for ‘peace’) by *saam* (the Arabic for ‘perishing’). Therefore, if a disbeliever greets you, reply with: ‘The same to you.’ This way, whatever they say by way of greeting will be returned to them, and they will not have the chance to indulge themselves in ridiculing a believer. Based on these grounds, some scholars hold that: ‘…greet with a better (greeting) than it…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 86) applies to fellow believers when they greet one another, and ‘…or return it…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 86) applies to the disbelievers when they greet the believers; we should return to them whatever they say.

It is true that the greeting of peace expresses the speaker’s wish that his addressee will have security and tranquillity. However, some would say it by way of hypocrisy. They would say ‘Peace’ with their tongues, but their hearts harbour nothing but hatred and malice and their intention is to do harm. By commanding us to return a greeting as it is or with an even better one, Allah means to teach His servants the concept of spreading goodness in general, which is not confined to verbal greeting. Returning greetings in the manner Allah prescribes is meant to promote respect and friendliness in the Muslim community. On a larger scale, this is an invitation to offer good in return to or in excess of any good done to you.

To increase goodness in society, Allah urges people to give more than they take and, by acting on this principle, whatever good one does will be returned to him in excess, which causes society to be righteous and coherent. At one time, a Saudi citizen would invite King ‘Abdul-‘Aziz Al Su’ud for a cup of Arabian coffee. How do you think the king would return the invitation? The return would be at the level of a king’s capacity which may be imagined. This and returning verbal greetings, all originate from the general concept of returning goodness.

Through abidance by that divine command, a believer would be sure that whatever respect or friendliness he offers his fellow believers would be returned at least equally. After giving that command, Allah reassures the obedient that when they show respect and benevolence to one another, they are sure to receive their reward in abundance since He watches over them and takes account of all they do. Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘… surely Allah takes account of all things’ (*an-Nisa’:* 86). So, the reward is not just for returning what your fellow believer has offered you, but if your intention is sincerely directed to pleasing Allah, He has a far greater reward for you, a matchless reward.

Spreading the greeting of peace, as Prophet Muhammad has taught us, by saying to everyone you meet, ‘peace be with you’, ‘ Allah’s peace and mercy be with you’ or ‘ Allah’s peace, mercy and blessings be with you’ is an act of benevolence that promotes harmony and friendliness in the Muslim community. Healthy and noble relationships can be developed with everyone wishing and praying for his fellow believers to live in security and calm; everyone offering whatever good in his hand to others, and even going beyond this by praying to Allah to send His blessings to them.

In uttering the greeting of peace, ‘ Allah’s peace, mercy and blessings be with you’, there is a reminder to everyone who gives or receives it that faith is what binds them to Allah on the one hand and to each other on the other hand. It is at once a greeting and a message: we are all servants of Allah. By promoting goodness and benevolence among ourselves, by spreading peace and mercy, Allah will also bestow His Mercy and Favours on us. So, Allah says: ‘and when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it; surely Allah takes account of all things' (*an-Nisa':* 86). It is natural for us to understand that answering a greeting means that we should reply with a greeting exactly like the one we have received. Rather, answering a greeting means to put forward a similar greeting. The third person pronoun in the original Arabic text of the verse—translated into the aforementioned English version as 'it'—'… or return it…'—does not refer to the 'greeting', but its reference includes anything of the same sort of the noun 'greeting' it is associated with.

Third person pronouns in Arabic do not necessarily refer to the very noun they are associated with in a sentence, but their reference is identified through that noun. For example, when we say: 'I have given to charity a *dirham* and *nisfa-hu* (its half)', the third person pronoun *hu* sure does not refer to the self-same '*dirham*' mentioned in the sentence, but to a value that equals it. By applying this to the verse we are dealing with, we then understand that Allah does not command us to offer exactly the same greeting in return to that we have been offered, but a greeting equivalent to it.

The fact that Allah has created us and given us free will to choose our faith and actions does not mean He will not hold us accountable for our choices. Allah does not compel us to accept faith, but He will certainly reward those who accept it and punish those who reject it. Allah does not command us anything that is beyond our capacity to observe, and nor does He forbid us anything that is beyond our capacity to abstain from. He has created us and He knows what is best for us in this life and the Afterlife.

When Allah decrees a command, He has already eternally known that we are able to execute such a command. He does not enjoin on us anything that is beyond our capacity. What then makes us violate the laws of Allah and disobey His commands? Disobedience comes as a result of letting one's own desire to prevail over the commands of Allah—so he does what he likes, even if Allah forbids it, and refrains from what he sees as a heavy duty even if Allah enjoins it. A prudent person, however, would not take advantage of the free will Allah has granted us to give free rein to his desires. Rather, reason calls on everyone to remember that, even though he is given the freedom to choose, he will inevitably be returned to the One Who has given him this freedom and Who will give him his fair recompense. Therefore, disobedience to Allah is the outcome of irrationality. A rational person who believes in Allah and in the Day of Judgment, when he meets Him and receives his due reward, would not waste his life pursuing whims and desires. Indulging in a thing Allah has made unlawful gives one a transient pleasure, but the price must be paid then at length. A believer would not sacrifice eternal happiness for a temporary joy. Rather, he would be mindful of Allah now in order to have rest and bliss forever in his eternal abode. In the following verse, Allah says:

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَۚ لَيَجۡمَعَنَّكُمۡ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ لَا
رَيۡبَ فِيهِۗ وَمَنۡ أَصۡدَقُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ حَدِيثٗا ﴿٨٧﴾

He is God: there is no god but Him. He will gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection, about which there is no doubt. Whose word can be truer than God's? [87] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 87)

This means that there is no deity other than Allah -the Creator of all things- will interfere to put an end to the existence of the world. He is the One Lord of the worlds and His is the only ordinance that offers the right guidance to humankind, and it is to Him alone that all creatures will return. There are no multiple Allahs who may give contrary decrees to humankind other than what Allah has prescribed. Only His ordinance is the best that furthers the interests of His servants, and only His prohibitions should be avoided; otherwise, we are only thus doing harm to ourselves. Allah refers to this Truth in His words: 'Say [Prophet], "Disbelievers: I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship; I will never worship what you worship; you will never worship what I worship: (if you keep to your present Allahs) you have your religion and I have mine."' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-6)

In the aforementioned chapter of the Noble Quran, Allah explains that we are not facing a case where there are two competing religions: a religion for the believers and another for the disbelievers. No, there is only one religion that befits humankind; it is the straight path of monotheism that all the Messengers of Allah called for, and that Islam has come to conclude and perfect; therefore, Islam is the final and timeless Message addressed to all humankind until the end of time. Since this is the true religion, Allah has assisted His Prophet and granted him victory against his enemies for the Message of Allah to prevail over all other alleged and distorted religions. Allah refers to this meaning in the chapter following the one mentioned above: ‘When Allah’s help comes and He opens up(1) your way [Prophet], when you see people embracing Allah’s faith in crowds, celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance.’ (*an-Nasr:* 1-3)

The aforesaid two chapters are followed by the chapter of *al-Masad*: ‘May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: he will burn in the Flaming Fire –(2) and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier,(3) with a palm-fibre rope around her neck.’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5)

Could Abu Lahab not have professed belief that there is no Allah but Allah and that Muhammad was His Messenger after this chapter of the Quran was revealed? Yes, he could have done so, and had he made such a profession, he would have cast doubts about this revelation or even proved it to be false altogether. However, and even though he had the choice, Allah did not guide him to make such a profession even by way of hypocrisy; why? He had defied Allah and declared enmity to His Prophet, so Allah decreed that he will never attain faith or be admitted to paradise. Whatever Allah decrees must happen, since there is no other Allahs that defy His Will, a truth which Allah presents clearly in the chapter of the Quran following the aforementioned three: ‘Say: ‘He is the One Allah’ ‘ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1).

There is no other Allah that may contradict or suspend any of the decrees of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘He is Allah: there is no Allah but Him. He will gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 87). The word ‘gather’ may be meant to denote the fact that Allah will bring all of us into His Presence, all of us with no exceptions, and no one will escape Him. It may generally also refer to the Day of the Gathering, when Allah will resurrect His servants from their graves to be recompensed for their deeds.

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(1) ‘This sura [chapter of the Quran] is mainly understood by interpreters to refer to the surrender of Mecca to the Prophet [Muhammad]’. Abdel Haleem, *The Quran, A New Translation* (translation adopted and adapted).

(2) ‘Abu Lahab means ‘Flame Man’ and this verse contains a pun on this name’, Abdel Haleem, *The Quran, A New Translation*

(3) ‘She used to tie bunches of thorns with ropes of twisted palm fibre and throw them into the Prophet’s path’. Abdel Haleem, *The Quran, A New Translation.*

Why does Allah make this statement? It is a reminder to those of understanding: Before you disobey Allah, think of the punishment awaiting you. To act without thinking of the outcomes of one's action is foolishness.

Those who persist in sinning never actually recall or think of the punishment they will receive for their deviation. Crimes are committed, while the perpetrator is heedless of the punishment. A criminal commits his crime assuming that he will escape its punishment. A thief steals assuming that he will get away with his theft; however, if he bears in mind that he may be caught and penalized for his crime, he will never commit it.

That Allah has granted us freedom of choice is not meant to let us deviate from His Path and violate His commands with impunity. Rather, this freedom is meant to differentiate the devout from the depraved. In order not to misuse this freedom, ask yourself how much benefit you will receive from a sin, and how much grace and bounty Allah will bestow on you if you obey Him, then choose the alternative that will lead you to the highest good and most fulfilling status. A rational person would not let desire drag him into evildoing and suffering.

We will all be gathered on the Day of Resurrection about which Allah says: 'A Day when everyone will stand before the Lord of the Worlds' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 6). Death is like long sleep; this is the closest parable by which we can identify the nature of death. Allah has called it the Day of Resurrection, for it is when all creatures will be made to rise from their graves, as Allah Almighty tells us in the Noble Quran: 'He is Allah: there is no Allah but Him. He will gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection…' (*an-Nisa':* 87).

The way to deliverance is to have firm belief in the Day of Resurrection. When one believes that Allah has created the world, given His servants free will to do good or evil, sent them guidance through His Messengers and will sure gather them all on the Day of Resurrection, he will never persist in disobeying His commands.

Consider the following example. When we use examples to explain things about Allah, it is not meant to hold a comparison—Exalted is Allah above all comparison—but to make the point clearer and more accessible to the limited human mind. Now, suppose a father gave his son a pound and told him: ‘Go buy something with this money, but bear in mind that I will reward you if you buy something useful, whereas if you buy something bad, like playing cards, I will punish you.’ The father has given his son the freedom to buy what he chooses. The question is: if the son chose to buy a pack of playing cards, would such a purchase happen against the will of the father? Or would we say that the father imposed a choice on his son? No, the father is the one who has given him the freedom to buy what he chooses, yet the son has not taken his father’s warning into consideration and disobeyed him.

If a father has been given the right to punish or reward his son based on the latter’s use of the freedom he allowed him, would Allah not be entitled to do the same with His servants in as much as He grants them the right to freely choose their actions? If Allah wanted everyone to be rightly guided and obedient, He would have made people like angels and no one would have dared to commit a sin or an act of disobedience. When a sinner commits an offence, he only does it because Allah *Glorified is He* has granted him the freedom of choice. For this reason if someone says that acts are created by Allah *Glorified is He* he is correct and honest. But why is the perpetrator of the sin afflicted if he only used the power of freedom he was given to suit his convenience? To this we respond as follows: the sinner used his freedom in a manner that was contrary to the way Allah *Glorified is He* had intended for it to be used. The knife, for example, is used for slaughtering, if one was to slaughter a chicken, he would not be susceptible to any kind of punishment. However, if it was used as a tool for manslaughter, then it would fall into the domain of committing a grave sin, so much that the Truth likens it to the killing of the whole of humanity. For this reason we cannot say to someone who bought a knife for domestic reasons, that he brought a criminal tool. He only brought a tool that could be used for both permissible and forbidden acts. So even the one who has the freedom of choice, his actions emanate from him being granted such a bounty from Allah *Glorified is He*. But has The True One *Glorified is He* obliged such a sinner to commit a sin? No, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified what He likes, i.e. that which is permissible and impermissible. However, the one who has been forbidden from these acts ultimately has the choice to do that which will bring him benefit or that which will bring him harm.

'He is Allah: there is no god but Him. He will gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection…' (*an-Nisa':* 87); this is a statement made by Almighty Allah. The human credibility of statements is likely to be questioned; however the divine statement is upright. Yet, likely is still the correctness of the discourse in general. For this reason the Truth appends the verse as follows: '….and whose word could be truer than the word of Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 87) But is truth gradable? There are no degrees or levels in truth; the truth is the correspondence between discourse and objective reality. Being a rational creature, before man speaks he ponders over that which he plans to talk about, and then verbalises it as a result. Thus discourse has three dimensions: the mental dimension, the wording and phrasing of the discourse and finally the relation between the discourse and the actuality to which it refers. When someone says: *Zayd* is a hard worker, the thought of *Zayd* being a hard worker must have occurred to his mind; this is the mental and intellectual dimension of the discourse. The person then utters the statement; this is the wording and phrasing of it. Yet the question remains: is there really a person whose name is Zayd who is a hard worker? If actuality corresponds to both the wording of the discourse and the mental or ideal dimension of it, then the discourse is deemed true. In contrast if there is no one by the name Zayd who is not a hard worker, then there is not objective actuality that corresponds to the ideal thought and wording of the discourse. So the discourse is said to be untrue and is deemed false. Truth implies an identical correspondence between the thinking-phrasing of the discourse and the objective actuality with which it is claimed to correspond to.

Why does the liar, lie then? He lies so that a certain benefit is attained or harm eschewed, seemingly, by not saying the truth. Here is an example: A child may break something in the house such as a table. When this happens, the father may ask his son: 'Have you broken the table?' At this point, the son may reply: 'No; I have not.' In saying so, the child thinks that he is attaining a benefit or avoiding a harm and loss, namely, the punishment because he knows that saying the truth may cause him to be punished. Hence his interest in avoiding a detriment that might befall him if he says the truth, is the main cause for lying. He resorts to wording that contradicts reality.

Needless to say, a man chooses to lie because he wants to achieve a particular benefit or alternatively safeguard himself against an impending harm. The thing that benefits man has to be stronger than him; the same holds for that which may harm him. But no entity is capable of either benefiting or harming Allah. If Allah *Glorified is He* is to speak, then it is an absolute truth. Allah is Most Exalted and Transcendent to all reasons that may cause one to lie.

Since Allah is the sole key speaker who tactfully briefs us on the reality of life, who gives detailed accounts of what goes beyond the actuality of our lives and clarifies to us the unknown that does not fall within the ambit of what we experience and see, this means that he speaks to us frequently. When Allah says: '…and whose word could be truer than the word of Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 87) We accept His account as a non-negotiable fact. The comparative form—in truer—is not used to actually distinguish between a true and much truer discourse. It is rather functionally intended to show us that Allah's discourse to us is plentiful; the intensification in this context is used to refer to the frequency and amount of discourse instead of referring to a distinction between a true and a much truer discourse.

The disparity may be related to the degree of truth as well; how? Let us assume that someone witnessed an accident wherein someone killed another. He may then be a witness, and testify that he saw the victim bleeding due to the fight he had with the killer. However, another witness may relate all the details that preceded the beginning of the altercation between the murderer and victim until the former actually killed the latter. Consequently we realise that the second witness was more comprehensive in his account of the truth than the first witness. It is true that the first witness provided a true testimony nevertheless the testimony of the second witness was more detailed.

Therefore the verse: '…and whose word could be truer than the word of Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 87) means that Allah is truest in the sense that His statements are the most comprehensive. It is an absolute truth with no gradations. The comparative form was thereby used to indicate that the amount of the truth that emanates from Allah is infinite and that Allah knows things in themselves in the most comprehensive way possible. The creations, by contrast, may at one point say the truth and at another lie; for instance you may say something thinking that it is true when in fact it is not.

Here is an illustrative example. Someone may for instance say: so and so person visited such and such person last night. The person who made such a statement so thought because he saw the light on in the guest room of that person. Upon inquiring about the identity of the visitor he was told that it was so and so. He thus relates the news of the visit based on what he thought. In this case he cannot be called a liar, even if his inference transpires to be false.

We have to distinguish between a statement and the one who communicates it: the informant; how? If someone says Zayd is a hard worker, we should inquire: is there really someone called Zayd and is he really a hard worker? This is called investigating the objective reality of the statement. Furthermore we should inquire into whether or not the informant actually thinks so. Thus we need to ascertain and verify two things: the certainty of the existence of the subject matter of the statement and its inference. Accordingly the statement would be true and the informant, nonetheless, in both cases is honest as well.

Supposedly you have stated that Zayd is a hard worker based on somebody's account even though Zayd is not really like this. In such a situation you may be considered truthful based on your inference, but the statement you made is not true in reality. So one could infer that there is a kind of disparity between the truth of a statement and that of the informant.' If the inference underlying a statement actually corresponds to reality then the statement would be true and so would the informant. If a statement corresponds to the objective reality to which it refers and is at odds with the inference, then only the statement would be rendered true. This is exemplified in the stance of the hypocrites about whom Allah says: 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet Muhammad], they say, 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of God....' (*al-Munafiqun*: 1) Their statement is true as they testified the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad, yet Allah Almighty adds: '...and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars'.

The statement is true but the hypocrites, i.e. the informants are liars because they were not convinced of its truth when they admitted it; they were therefore liars. Accordingly, the scrupulous examination of the statement reflects the difference between the truth of the content of the statement and the falsity of the inner contention of the informants. In this manner the truth of any speaker means that his/her discourse corresponds with his/her inner belief and conviction.

What they lied about is their statement: '…we bear witness…' and not their statement: '…We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah…' (*al-Munafiqun*: 1). True testimony necessitates the correspondence between the statement made by the tongue and the contention residing in the heart.

For this reason when some people read the Quran without a proper understanding of the Arabic language, they may superficially understand the following verse in a mistaken way: 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet Muhammad], they say, 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah.' Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.' (*al-Munafiqun*: 1)

But how could Allah Almighty bear witness that the hypocrites are liars even though Allah Almighty knows the truth of what the hypocrites have testified for? To this we reply: the statement was not false; Allah *Glorified is He* did not say anything to falsify it. But He pointed out that although the statement was true, the hypocrites lied in their testimony because they manifested something other than what they concealed in their hearts and truly believed. Allah *Glorified is He* falsifies their testimony and not the statement about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* being the Messenger of Allah.

'He is Allah: there is no god but Him. He will gather you all together on the on the Day of Resurrection [the coming of] which is beyond all doubt: and whose word could be truer than Allah's?' (*an-Nisa':* 87) A believer has an unquestionable faith in the Day of Resurrection; indeed logic necessitates the advent of the Day of Resurrection. If there were any doubts or suspicions about whether or not there is a Day of Resurrection, those who have deviated in their worldly life and offended the honour of other people and usurped their money and spread corruption on earth would be the lucky winners. By contrast the good and the few straight people would be the ones who lived their lives in naivety. Accordingly, logic necessitates that inasmuch as there are people who have wronged others and committed acts of aggression and others who have been wronged, that there must be some kind of reckoning for their accountability. There would not be any reckoning unless death is to be followed by resurrection and summoning in the presence of Almighty Allah on the Day of Judgement. The evidence of this is furnished by those who deny the bounty of Almighty Allah, i.e. atheists themselves. As top lawmakers of non-religious societies are the ones who enact the laws that guarantee the protection of social mobility, they enact these laws so that whoever violates them would be accountable and consequently punished. Since receiving punishment is the only deterrent for people from overtly committing a crime, what would be the situation then? The adept and clever would be the one who succeeds in escaping and avoiding the punishment of the leaders of the society and manages to hide away from them so that they would not be able to penalise him.

Such atheistic societies forge laws to protect themselves. But what would these societies do with those who err and hide? According to their laws, they should have been punished and penalised for their deeds. These societies should thus have said that there is another place for reckoning and punishment even if one escapes the worldly place for it. As an atheist, you have decreed a punishment for anyone who violates your laws. However, you can only apply these laws to those whom you can spot and catch. But what about those whom you could not actually spot violating the law and could not apprehend by your own hands? We, people of faith, thereby say to atheists that our logic complements your inadequate thinking. We also say to all creatures: if you have managed to escape the worldly justice, you will not be able to escape the heavenly one that misses nothing. Accordingly, we deduce the evidence in support of the truth and necessity of the Methodology of Allah Almighty from the disbelievers who as a matter of fact, should be grateful to the people of faith for we have made up for the inadequacy in human legislation. This is a protection of the society against crime, violation and escaping the penalty of the man-made laws.

And '…whose word could be truer than the word of Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 87) This means that no one puts forward a truer discourse than Allah. As a comparative form '…truer…' is used not because there are different degrees of truth; truth as a quality is non-gradable because truth is one and the same thing; truth is the correspondence between what is said and the objective reality about which it is said. Rather, '…truer…' is used to indicate the amount of truth that Allah *Glorified is He* imparts to us about both what we witness in our world and what we are unaware of from the Unknown World. Humans can only make claims in their discourse about the world they perceive with their senses. However, when Allah speaks to us, His discourse also refers to the unknown world. The word of Allah is much truer than any other entity because Allah *the Almighty* is the one who advanced the greatest amount of true discourses. Subsequently, Allah *Almighty is He* says:

فَمَا لَكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ فِئَتَيۡنِ وَٱللَّهُ أَرۡكَسَهُم بِمَا كَسَبُوٓاْۚ أَتُرِيدُونَ أَن
تَهۡدُواْ مَنۡ أَضَلَّ ٱللَّهُۖ وَمَن يُضۡلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُۥ سَبِيلٗا ﴿٨٨﴾

[Believers], why are you divided in two about the hypocrites, when God Himself has rejected them because of what they have done? Do you want to guide those God has left to stray? If God leaves anyone to stray, you [Prophet] will never find the way for him [88] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 88)

Allah *Glorified is He* always relates cause to effect, and the premise to the result. He *the Almighty* discussed the reasons justifying the legitimacy of calling the believers for fighting only for a specific goal that is, imparting the Methodology of Allah *the Almighty* to the people. Beyond this—meaning after receiving the Methodology of Allah —people have the freedom of choice. Thus fighting was not decreed to impose the Methodology of Allah Almighty. Rather, fighting was legislated to impose the freedom to choose the Methodology of Almighty Allah. The evidence is the saying of Allah *Glorified is He:* 'There shall be no coercion in matters of faith…' (*al-Baqara:* 256).

Accordingly, Islam does not impose itself as a religion. Rather, Islam came to enact and enforce the freedom of belief and right to choose one's religion. Islam combats the forces that impede one's freedom to choose his/her religion; Islam also stands against all these forces until they cease to coercively dominate their subjects; when the believers take over they would allow them to freely embrace whichever belief they wish. The evidence is that people continue to retain their dogmas and beliefs in the countries conquered by Muslims by force. If fighting was decreed to impose Islam as a religion, we would not have found a single non-Muslim religion in any of the countries that Islam conquered by the sword.

After Allah Almighty had talked about fighting in several places in the chapter of *an-Nisa'* and said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

'So [Prophet] fight in the way of Allah. You are accountable only for yourself. And encourage the believers on. It may well be that Allah curbs the power of the disbelievers, for He is stronger in might and more terrible in punishment.' (*an-Nisa':* 84)

Allah *Glorified is He* puts forward an interrogative issue; it involves both a sense of disapproval as well as condemnation and chastisement. This is quite widespread in all similar styles in the Noble Quran. If you encounter the form: 'How, then, could you be…' indicates that the rational reckoning implies that you should do what follows this form and that it would be strange if you acted otherwise. This style is not used unless it is intended to deplore and condemn something that you ought not to do or something that you ought to have done and you did not.

For instance, a father may say to his son: how, then, could you not be studying even though your exams are approaching? It is as if the logic of reason necessitates that if the son had neglected studying throughout the academic year, he should not have neglected studying before the exam. This is a rationally intuitive matter. It is as if Islamic legislation and the Quran are telling the believers not to initiate an action unless they thoroughly detect its correctness; No believer should take any course of action irrationally. The same applies to quitting an action without a plausible reason. A similar expression to '…how, then, could you be…' was also used by the children of Prophet Jacob—the Arabic word here translated as minds—means group. A group is a number of individuals who have come together despite their differences in interests and passions. Yet when it comes to the expression of faith in religion, they have to unanimously fall under the right methodological course of faith and interest. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'None of you will be a true believer unless his passion goes in conformity with the message I brought about.'(1)

The cause of difference among people is that their interests and passions are not the same; they are not gathered around the tenants of religion and nor the order of Allah of holding fast to His rope all together. But what about the hypocrites and why were the believers divided in their stance towards them?

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(1) *Related by Al-Baghawi (Sharh As-Sunnan), Ibn Abu 'Asim in (As-Sunna), Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in (Kanz Al-'Ummal) and Al-Khatib Al-Bafhdadi in (Tarikh Baghdad)*

The word *(Fi'a)* —as we learnt—means a group but not in an absolute or generic sense. For instance, you would not call a group of people who sporadically amble down a street without a common purpose or destination a *(fi'a).* The word *(fi'a)* more aptly refers to a group of people who unite in their pursuit of a single goal because the word *(fi'a)* implies that they refer and resort to each other in pursuing and deliberating the matter that unites them. The same holds for the word *(ta'ifa)* —which also means group—yet it refers to a group of people who orbit and go around the same thing. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'How, then, could you be of two minds about the hypocrites…' (*an-Nisa':* 88). This is an alert and alarm from Allah so that we keep our minds from being divided on the same issue especially if we agree upon our belief one God and one path. The hypocrites as we know are the ones who apparently purport to be believers and covertly hide their disbelief.

We know that all abstract meanings are referred to by words derived from sensible things. The reason is that sense perception is the first means for conceptualisation and cognition. Meanings follow afterwards. If we trace the etymological root of the word *(munafiqun)*—the Arabic word for hypocrites—we will realize that it is derived from a sensible phenomenon that the Arabs used to experience in their environment. An animal called *(al-yarbu')* which looked like the mouse or the lizard and which used to live in the Arabian desert. *(Al-yarbu')* was known for its cunningness and capacity to dodge things. In order to safeguard itself against the animals that may attack it, it used to dig two or more holes for itself. Thus once it gets attacked it flees away from the predator to one of the holes. The predator then waits for it at the opening of the hole so *(al-yarbu')* quits that hole to another one. It is as if this animal has planned and prepared for itself outlets to enhance its capacity for manoeuvring. It makes an opening through which it enters the hole in addition to a second and a third one in order that it may escape out of any of these. The same holds for hypocrites.

We know that there are three ways or modes in which one may believe or disbelieve in Islam: one may be a believer who avows faith verbally and believes with his heart; thus his/her organs are completely in harmony. Secondly, one may be a disbeliever who does not believe in Islam and does not verbally avow otherwise; his/her organs are also harmonious with each other even though punishment awaits him/her in the afterlife. His/Her organs are harmonious; yet, they are channelled towards a detrimental purpose, i.e. disbelief. In contrast with these two kinds, a hypocrite is the one who is unswervingly a disbeliever yet his tongue avows the opposite of what his heart believes. That is to say his faculties are not in harmony with each other; his tongue utters things at odds with what maliciously lurks in his heart. For this reason he lives torn apart and constantly in anxiety. He wants to enjoy the benefits of both belief and disbelief. This is the case of the hypocrite.

There is a group in the history of Islam who upon witnessing the victory of the Muslims in the battle of Badr, said to themselves: 'fortune favours the Muslims; however we cannot be certain that after their triumph in Badr and their killing of the fiercest veterans of Quraysh and the spoils of wars they earned, they would still come back to us.' This group of people resorted to hypocrisy and purported to be Muslims while they were in Mecca in order to protect themselves when the Muslims conquer Mecca. Alternatively they may be the group that went to Medina as emigrants and could not stand the bitterness of living in exile and away from their homes, families and wealth and so, upon deliberating matters, decided to abjure Islam in order to be able to go back to Mecca. They thereby said to the believers in Medina: 'we have fortunes and wealth in Mecca and we will go to take it and come back.'

The news then reached the Muslims who were divided between two groups: a group of them contended that they should fight the hypocrites while another group argued that they should not. Those who contended that they should fight the hypocrites were mainly driven by their passion to defend faith. Those who argued against fighting maintained that the hypocrites are a group of people which purported to have faith yet we cannot tell what is hidden in their hearts. They may have said so out of sympathy towards the hypocrites as some of the hypocrites may have been their relatives.

Consequently the Quran came forth to put an end to the division of Muslims and decisively overcome the dispute amongst them. Considering that the Quran interferes to decisively conclude a matter, it indicates that the Lord of the Quran is the One Who fashioned and guided the believers; therefore once He spots a defect in them, He *the Almighty* decides to put an end to this matter. In this vein Almighty Allah says: ‘How, then, could you be of two minds about the hypocrites…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 88).

The speech is addressed to the Muslim camp. His saying: ‘How, then, could you…’ means that you are united in pursuing the same goal. His saying ‘two minds’ indicates that there is a difference among them. The expression ‘…two minds…’ is in opposition to the ‘…how then could you be…’ with which the True Lord *the Exalted* commenced His discourse. It is as if Allah Almighty wants the one who is receiving the Quran to understand the meaning as follows: how could you then divide into groups on your stance towards the hypocrites? This is in a sense a chastising and threatening style; it also indicates that such a thing should not have happened. But does this discourse apply to all those who are addressed by it? Let us investigate the matter. Is the Quran on the side of those who maintain that they ought to fight the hypocrites or is it rather, on the side of those who argue otherwise? If the Quran is on the side of the former it will not blame this group; it will rather ennoble and honour it. The Quran advocates those who call for fighting the hypocrites and not the second group. For this reason it blames and chastises the latter. When the style of the Quran blames and chastises a group that holds a specific opinion, it subliminally honours those who hold the opposite stance. In this manner, we must immediately consider the latter, namely the one who holds the opposite, honoured point of view, excluded from blame because the fact that he/she aligns himself with the truth gives him/her a reason to be proud.

Allah Almighty says: ‘How, then, could you be of two minds about the hypocrites…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 88). This means that He is saying: what reason do you have to dispute and disagree amongst yourselves on the issue of the hypocrites. Logic and analogy requires that we study the matter both from the perspective of reason and faith. If you do so, you will arrive at the conclusion that you must be of the same mind. Chastisement and condemnation is intended to imply that you believers have no ground to be divided in disagreement.

Allah Almighty then says: ‘…seeing that Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 88). Once you encounter the word

'…disown…' what should we infer even if we are not sure about its meaning in the context? We ought to infer that Allah *the Exalted* has doomed them to an inappropriate status. The style makes us feel that Allah *the Almighty* has doomed them and made their front their back and vice versa in the sense that they have turned against each other. Even if we do not understand the exact meaning of the word or its etymological root, we can infer the overall meaning from the suggestions of the style of the Quran or its words or even the harmony among the letters constituting the word'…seeing that Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt...' (*an-Nisa':* 88).

(Arkasahum) —the Arabic root here translated as disowned—is derived from *(rakasahum)* which means that Allah Almighty has returned them to a past state. It is as if they were in one particular state, quitted it and then Allah Almighty returned them to that original state. They were originally disbelievers, then they believed and then Almighty Allah caused them to relapse back into disbelief. But did Almighty Allah do so indiscriminately or coercively? No; Allah *Glorified is He* did so because of their guilt. This is the case so that no one would push us into confusion and wonder: why does Allah *the Almighty* punish and chastise them if He is the One Who did so to them? For this reason Allah *the Almighty* says: '…seeing that Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt?...' (*an-Nisa':* 88) *(Raqasahum)* is etymologically derived from the word *(rakas)* —with a high accented *(ra').* This means reversing something. From the same root, the word *(riks)* —with a lower accent *(ra')* —is also derived; this word denotes the secretions produced by the stomach of the human being before it receives food. We may say that someone is feeling sick or that someone vomited.

Upon considering this process we notice that the food man enjoys, desires, eats, for which his eyes yearn, his hands cut and his teeth chew joyfully, once chewed, it goes down to the stomach where it is mixed with digestive juices secreted by the stomach, and takes a completely different form. If one throws up what is in his stomach, one cannot stand the food or its smell in such a form. Rather, man digests the food in order to extract the useful materials and excretes the rest; indeed the smell of natural wastes is not worse than the smell of food if it is thrown up. If one sees someone throwing up food and another excreting food out of his stomach, one will be more disgusted and abominated by the scene of the one who is throwing up more than by the sight of the one who is excreting the food. The reason is that vomiting causes food that has moved from the stage wherein it is desired, enjoyably chewed and has not as of yet been utilised.

For this reason there is a proverb that says: ‘whatever departs from the tongue becomes rotten.’ *(Riks)* is the vomit that one throws up before he avails himself of it. Food after it is consumed and excreted through the proper outlet becomes organic excrement and waste. In this fashion Allah *the Almighty* used the word that best befits them: ‘ Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 88). This means that they committed apostasy before they could even avail themselves of faith.

This is the expression of the Quran that uses the most suitable word for conveying the meaning. Furthermore this expression makes us stay away from them; hence *(riks)* is repelling and rejecting; but is it so in an absolute sense or in a qualified manner? It is so by way of humiliation; how? Here is an example; if something is supposed to stand uprightly in a vertical position, *(riks)* in this case would mean to keep him upside down, i.e to reverse his position. For this reason, the rejection is not ordinary; it is a rejection that humiliates the one that is being rejected and disowned.

As much as any object must be placed in a horizontal position on its base in order to be upright, *(riks)* is to place what ought to be in the front in the back and vice versa. That is to say we change the structure of the thing and its original state. The Quran describes both the disbelievers and the hypocrites; ‘But then they relapsed into their former way of thinking…’ (*al-Anbiya’*: 65). The Arabic word here translated as relapsed is *(nukisu)* which means to invert upside down. This word is used because the head is naturally erected on the body. However, such inversion makes the head in place of the feet and the feet in place of the head. Thus His saying: ‘… Allah [Himself] has disowned them...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 88) means that Allah *the Almighty* did not merely disown and repudiate them; rather, He did so in a humiliating manner that subverts their state.

‘…Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 88). Accordingly no one may say: if Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who disowned them what sin did they commit? Allah Almighty has disowned them only because of their guilt. They were active subjects rather than passive objects.

Here is an example-and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection. Schools and universities set a grading scale to determine the criterion of success and failure in each subject; for instance in a particular subject a student may need to score at least sixty percent in order to pass, while in a different subject a student may need to score at least seventy percent in order to pass. When students, then, sit for an exam and one of them fails, no one should say that the school was the cause of his/her failure. It is true that the school failed this student, but it did so according to the rules it has set and of which the student was aware before taking the exam. The real cause of the student's failure is that he/she did not exert enough effort; in such a manner the student is the one responsible for his/her own failure.

In the same realm, Allah *the Exalted* did not arbitrarily disown the hypocrites. Rather, it was the hypocrites who acted in a way that made the universal laws lead them to *(riks)* —disowning by Allah *Glorified is He*. They are like the student who did not study and so could not answer the questions in the exam. We are not to assume that the school failed the student, rather, the student is the one who caused his own failure.

For this reason if someone says: ' Allah is the One Who misled them; so what sin did they commit?' Strangely enough this very same person tends to follow the mainstream version of those who went astray due to their excessive self-indulgence. Consequently the following verse puts an end to their argument for '… Allah [Himself] disowned them because of their guilt...' (*an-Nisa':* 88). Allah Almighty misleads those who went astray due to their own sin; but how does Allah do so?

We learnt before that guidance may imply one of two meanings: either Allah *Glorified is He* revealed guidance through prophets, messengers and books or Allah *Glorified is He* revealed guidance exclusively to those He selected through extending His own aid and support. But those who indulge themselves in sinning wish that the religion would—God forbid—transpire to be false. This is because if the religion turns out to be true, this will imply that they are doomed to a terrible demise and a destiny which they will not be able to endure. For this reason they tend to discredit the religion through engaging in criticism brought about by their superficial understanding of the religion. This is why their arguments are always like the arguments of those who indulge themselves in sinning: they say as long as God has decreed and preordained everything I do; why would He torture me if He is the One Who decreed sinning upon me?

To those who promote such a flimsy argument, we pose the following question: why did you choose to believe that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who enacts everything specifically only in this particular situation? As long as Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who decreed everything, why do you not believe in and accept the rulings of the Methodology He prescribed for life? Nonetheless, they take an irrational stance; the rational standpoint requires that one considers the opposite question, that is to say: why would Allah reward a servant of His for his disobedience if he has decreed that he should be obedient? Why did they overlook the case of obedience and the reward for it? The reason is that they know in such a case that the end is good; they therefore only focus on the other scenario that leads to an evil end. Only the one who indulges himself in sinning would say such a thing; no one who truly adheres to the Methodology of Allah *Glorified is He* would ever say it. A believer will always want things to happen in accordance with the prescription of Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason—till today—I wonder about the scholars of the past who turned this question into a matter of dispute and divided into *Mu'tazilites* and *Sunnites* thereupon.

Upon addressing any matter one must always bear in the back of his mind that Islam was revealed to address the instinctive natural human disposition in general. It was not exclusively revealed to philosophers; rather, it was revealed to be understood by any mind driven by common sense. Islam is based on egalitarianism; the shepherd is equal to the philosopher; the sweeper of the streets or shoe polisher is viewed and treated equally to the philosopher or lawyer. Religion is not revealed exclusively to a special sect or group. Rather, the Methodology of Allah *the Almighty* was revealed to all; so the evidence in support of its truth and veracity has to be clear to everyone. In addition, when informed that Allah *the Almighty* knows best of all, the believers have to humanely submit for He *the Almighty* says to you: 'How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Of course, He alone is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware!' (*al-Mulk:* 14)

The craftsman who made a chair and Allah *Glorified is He* to Whom belongs the utmost example of perfection, knows that it is made of wood. Furthermore, he knows what kind of wood it was made from—whether it is beech, arrow or mahogany. He knows what kind of nails and bolts connect between the different parts of the chair and of what metal they are made of. In addition, the chair maker knows the type of adhesive he used to glue together the different parts of the chair as well as the paint used.

Therefore interpreting the verse: 'How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Of course, He alone is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware!' (*al-Mulk:* 14) should not spur any arguments. Similarly, a carpenter who wants to show his skill and craft to his customers often says to the latter: 'I will make you a chair of so and so kind of wood; but you will have to pass by me regularly to see the different stages of production.' He then starts to produce the chair under the supervision of the customer.

Similarly, a nomad would know how to travel in the desert and what should be furnished on the back of the camel he rides in order to be able to ride it properly. Furthermore an Arab would know how to make *Fustat*, a house of hair. Allah *the Almighty* has put forward a statement that refutes all disputes and eliminates the need to plunge into any sophistry or polemics with premises and conclusions. Allah *Glorified is He* advanced the following decisive statement: 'How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Of course, He alone is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware!' (*al-Mulk:* 14) He knows and this is an easy matter for Him. For this reason I wonder why those old scholars went adrift in such a philosophical maze for Islam is the religion of natural disposition.

For this reason, scholars who debated this matter—may Allah *Glorified is He* reward them well for their deeds—ultimately said:

Daring minds are doomed

Perishing through the inquisitive seekers

Lifelong laborious quests

Waning of nothing but
The tales of so and so

I wonder what good theoretical philosophy did bring about to the world. Material and physical philosophy was sprung out of it and led to variegated innovations and inventions of which creations of Allah Almighty availed themselves; the question is: what did theoretical philosophy accomplish? The answer is nothing. We say Islam brought about a creed based on common sense; this implies that all people are equal according to this creed. Rational evidence and clues must be clear and evident for both the educated and the non-educated.

Philosophers are the ones who distinguished among proofs of purpose, proofs of providence and proofs of intention. However, a simple nomad wandering in the desert may conclude upon finding some droppings of a camel and some footsteps in the sand that indicate that a camel passed and someone was walking in this area; does all of this not indicate that one can infer the existence of The Subtle and The Aware. The nomad did not need to forge himself in the entanglement of philosophy or its debates as some philosophers were cast adrift in rational argumentation that the nomad solved in one sentence. Accordingly when a man once asked one of those who was well guided by Allah *Glorified is He*: do you not long for meeting Allah *Glorified is He*? The latter answered: one misses the one who is absent. But when was Allah *Glorified is He* ever absent?

This is why we say to those who disputed whether or not it was just on the part of Allah *the Almighty* to disown and reject the hypocrites: we want to respect your minds and see why you disagreed on this matter although Allah *the Almighty* says: '… Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt...' (*an-Nisa':* 88).

Presumingly those disagreeing parties were well intentioned; each of them was still in favour of one attribute of Allah *Glorified is He*. For instance one of them claimed that: Allah *Glorified is He* is the creator of everything. To such a person we say: you are biased towards the attribute of capability and the infinite possession of it by The True Lord. Another person claimed: Allah *Glorified is He* is the All-Just. Accordingly, Allah *the Almighty* would not create or preordain that someone would be a disbeliever and then torture that person for being a disbeliever. This person is in favour of the attribute of justice. That is to say each of these two people is thinking of only one attribute of the True Lord. Both of them forgot that these are attributes of His own essence—Allah *Glorified is He* is both The All Capable and The All-Just. The existence of one of these attributes does not rule out the other.

We say to the one who says that Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of everything and every action; what is an action? It is essentially the orientation of an organ to perform a specific task. For instance the one who rubs his face with his hands directs his hands towards his face. Such an act of directing or orienting may not be performed by the one to whom the final action is ascribed. The evidence in support of this is the case of the robot; we may press more than one button in order for a robot to carry out a specific activity. By contrast if a human being wills to rub his face with his hands he may do so immediately. No one who wants to rub his face would press a button in order to perform such an activity.

Once a human being wills for an action to happen, he/she can immediately execute it. A driver of a loader may need to move a number of iron sticks in order to move the loader downwards. He may then need to move them again in order to let the dust out. Furthermore, he needs to move the sticks another time in order to hold together the dust pebbles and another time in order to lift them. All of these procedures are thus needed to move the sand and dust from one place to another whereas when one wants to rub his face he does so even if he does not know what muscles he needs to move. So who did all of this on behalf of the human being? It is Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*.

Therefore we say the following to anyone who is biased towards and thinks of Allah *Glorified is He* only in terms of His Capability. Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who actually performed the action, while the servant of Allah *the Almighty* is the one who channelled the energy that was originally created by Allah *Glorified is He*. If the servant of Allah *Glorified is He* navigates his power in a course that goes at odds with the prescriptions of Allah *Glorified is He*, he would be sinful, yet steering it in the righteous direction of the divine guidance, he would be obedient and pious; similarly he is to be rewarded. For instance, a murderer is not the ultimate cause of the act of killing and murder for he did not tell the one he murdered: be dead and so he died. A killer plans for his misdeed; he brings a knife, a sword or a gun and uses any of which to perpetrate the crime. The tool used is in this manner the actual agent that accomplished the act of murder. The murderer only took the appropriate tool required for performing the act of killing and directed it towards the task. Accurately enough for the just seeker to realise the fact that what Allah *the Almighty* torments a person for, is the sin itself since he used a tool that can be used for many actions. However, such a sinner chose to use such a tool for an action that goes at odds to what Allah *the Almighty* intended and would not like. Despite this Allah *the Exalted* is still the Ultimate Doer of everything.

Let us revert to the verse about which we are putting forward out thoughts: ‘How, then, could you be of two minds about the hypocrites, seeing that Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 88). As long Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who disowned them because of their guilt and as long as you believe in Allah, you must hold the same opinion about the hypocrites. For this reason Allah *the Almighty* wonders: '…Do you, perchance, seek to guide those whom Allah has let go astray…' (*an-Nisa’:* 88). Allah *Glorified is He* does not want to give them an excuse; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to show them His guidance which they are incapable of reaching on their own. Indeed had Allah *Glorified is He* misguided them they would have been able to find guidance; but why do some of the believers support them? When Allah Almighty wills, He guides whomever He wants to the righteous path and leads astray whomever He wills according to the rules He has set for guidance and misguidance.

When we encounter the expression ‘Allah has guided’; we may understand it in two senses. The first is in the sense that He led and showed the way to a specific end; the second is that He enabled and supported. Thus ‘to guide’ may either mean lead or show the path or it may mean provide support and assistance to the guided one. We have previously given the following example. Assume that someone is walking in the street and wants to head to Alexandria and does not know the way. He may ask a traffic man for directions and the traffic man may direct him to the road leading to Alexandria. The traffic man guided the man and directed him towards the road to Alexandria; however, he did not force this man to choose the road. So if the traveller believed what the traffic officer told him he would tell him: 'thank you; may Allah *Glorified is He* make a lot of people like you; I am elated that I found you otherwise I would have suffered.' The traffic officer must respond as follows: He should say you are a good man, but you need to bear in mind that there is a bump and an obstacle on the road to Alexandria; I will thereby ride with you in order to direct you to the place of such an obstacle. In this manner the role of the traffic officer transcends the stage of guidance to that of support. Allah *Glorified is He* explained: I will guide all people, lead and support them; hence I will support whoever takes the initiative and believes in Me.

For this reason Allah Almighty says: 'and as for [the tribe of] Thamud, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance…' (*Fussilat:* 17) Guidance in this context is meant only in the sense of leading to and showing the way. Those who were guided in this sense have the choice to either pursue the path of guidance or not. Guidance in this manner may occur in the sense of leading and directing someone to the way to his destination or in the sense of supporting and providing assistance to someone. But who does the True Lord support and assist? He supports those who believe in Him; conversely, Allah *the Almighty* does not support those who abjure faith in Him, '…since Allah does not grace with His guidance people who refuse to acknowledge the truth.' (*at-Tawba:* 37) In addition Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and [know that] Allah does not grace iniquitous folk with His guidance.' (*at-Tawba:* 24)

Conclusively Allah *Glorified is He* provides two kinds of guidance: a guidance that He conferred upon all people, namely, guidance by way of leading to the righteous Methodology and the guidance with which He singled out those who believe in him, namely the guidance of support. For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love....' (*al-Qasas:* 56) This statement negates the capability of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* to guide whomever he wishes. However, Allah Almighty also said: '…and, verily, [on the strength thereof] you, too, shall guide [men] onto the straightway–' (*ash-Shura:* 52). It is inconceivable that Allah Almighty would deny that His Messenger is capable of extending guidance to whoever he wants and then affirms this capability in another place. We infer that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* may guide people to the truth by way of leading people and directing them to the way. However, he *peace and blessings be upon him* cannot guide by way of providing assistance and support. Allah *Glorified is He* has guided all people and led them to the path towards the good; in this vein Allah *the Almighty* makes things easier for whoever believes in and orients himself towards Him.

Hence we can fully comprehend the meaning of the verse: '…Allah [Himself] has disowned them because of their guilt. Do you, perchance, seek to guide those whom Allah has let go astray – when for him whom Allah lets go astray you can never find any way?' (*an-Nisa':* 88) Allah *the Almighty* only lets go astray the one who deserves it due to his guilt; therefore, you will not be able to find any way to guide him/her. Allah *the Almighty* could have said: do you want to guide the one whom Allah lets go astray? You cannot guide those who Allah has let go astray. But it is more eloquent when Allah *the Almighty* explains to us: you can not guide the one who earned and deserved to be led astray. The reason is that there is no way to which you can guide him/her. Thus what is impossible is the avenue of guidance and not only guidance itself.

The way to guide someone is only through the path of knowledge. Consequently you cannot guide anyone unless you know the way. You will not find any way out for the one whom Allah *Glorified is He* has let astray because it is impossible to reverse or even suspend the decree of Allah Almighty to let him/her go astray. This means that there will not be a pretext or ground at all upon which he/she can suspend the will of Allah Almighty. For this reason we have taken those concerned here. The hypocrites keep up their faith pretence for a period of time and then give it up to disbelief for another. Deep inside their hearts, they deny belief even though they avow their faith in Islam with their tongues, as for true faith, it never took a strong grip of their hearts.

What is dearer to man? What resides in his heart or what does he verbally utters with his tongue? That which is dearer is whatever takes a strong grip deep in the heart. As long as they do not wholeheartedly believe and they just verbally purport to have faith, their creed is essentially disbelief. As long as their creed is disbelief, they would not want to side with faith. Rather, they want to push and drag the believers towards the camp of the disbelievers. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَدُّواْ لَوۡ تَكۡفُرُونَ كَمَا كَفَرُواْ فَتَكُونُونَ سَوَآءٗۖ فَلَا تَتَّخِذُواْ مِنۡهُمۡ
أَوۡلِيَآءَ حَتَّىٰ يُهَاجِرُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِۚ فَإِن تَوَلَّوۡاْ فَخُذُوهُمۡ وَٱقۡتُلُوهُمۡ
حَيۡثُ وَجَدتُّمُوهُمۡۖ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُواْ مِنۡهُمۡ وَلِيّٗا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ٨٩

They would dearly like you to reject faith, as they themselves have done, to be like them. So do not take them as allies until they migrate [to Medina] for God's cause. If they turn [on you], then seize and kill them wherever you encounter them. Take none of them as an ally or supporter [89] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 89)

The pronoun 'They…' in 'They would love to…' refers to the hypocrites about whom the Muslims disagreed. Allah Almighty then ruled in favour of the group that wanted to take a strict and punitive stance towards them. He therefore revealed the verse (*an-Nisa':* 89) —disbelief here translated as 'denying the truth'—means a cover; further the verb *(kafra)* means to cover up. Allah Almighty can never be effaced by his enemies due to the greatness of the faith in Islam and the Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* Himself. In this manner the term that was used to determine the opposite of the presence of Allah Almighty is itself the evidence in support of veracity of having faith and belief in the presence of Allah *Glorified is He*. When someone says 'I deny the truth' in the sense of veiling and concealing its existence, this means that what he covered up was already there before he denied its being. For this reason the word *(kufr)* —denying the truth—is itself evidence in support of having faith in the presence of Allah *Glorified is He*. The word *(kufr)* itself means that faith already exists and that the one who has it is forcing himself to veil and conceal it.

'They would love to see you deny the truth even as they have denied it…' (*an-Nisa':* 89). This saying followed after Allah Almighty had said: 'How, then, could you be of two minds about the hypocrites?…' (*an-Nisa':* 88) This indicates that they are described in one instance as hypocrites and in another as disbelievers. Allah Almighty called them hypocrites in a verse and described them in this verse as disbelievers: ‘They would love to see you deny the truth even as they have denied it…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 89).

Disbelief or the denial of truth in this context reveals what they hide in their hearts. Their hypocrisy caused them to only conform to the superficial aspects of Islam; but they failed to embrace the essential fundamentals of the religions. For this reason they are doomed to the lowest part of hell in the Hereafter even if they are treated as Muslims owing to their false profession that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger. By contrast Allah Almighty will treat them in the Hereafter as disbelievers and will add to their suffering a condemnation to the lowest part of hell.

In addition, if the proponents of falsehood are strong enough, they will align their hearts with their tongues and explicitly reveal the falsehood in which they believe. However, if they are weak, they will hide their falsehood in their hearts and profess the truth with their tongues. Yet both processes are uncomfortable to them. What will truly give them peace is the annihilation of the believers. For this reason Allah Almighty says: ‘They would love to see you deny the truth even as they have denied it so that you should be like them…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 89). They wish to eradicate and uproot the proponents and advocates of the truth so that no one would be better than another as we say in colloquial Arabic: ‘no one is better than another.’

Here is an example. Think of a group of employees in a governmental department. There may be a deceiver or someone who does not work properly among them. For this reason, he does not want his colleagues to do their work carefully and wish they would be corrupt like him. He thereby entices them to be corrupt so that they would be equal to each other; in such a case he would not feel ashamed or abhor himself. Furthermore, he would not feel like odd among them.

It is quite astounding to find those dishonest people respectful of the honest. We often hear that when a thief learns that he is spotted or so, he looks for an honest man to entrust him with his loot. So Allah *the Almighty* says that the hearts of the hypocritical disbelievers wish that the believers would be like them so that they would all be equal. This is a testimony that teaches us that the proponents of falsehood always want the proponents of the truth to join them in advocating and adopting falsehood. The reason is that when the former find the latter adopting the truth they despise and feel belittled before themselves. In this vein, a lot of strange things happened to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; people denied the truth of his message and abjured it. In addition, they tortured his companions. Despite all this they all acknowledged that he was the most honest amongst them. Indeed when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated from Mecca he left behind 'Ali to return the things and deposits with which people entrusted him to keep.

Although they denied his message, they all recognized that he was the most honest among them. For this reason they entrusted him with their property and belongings. As a matter of fact, the moral and virtuous person is respected even by the non-virtuous and immoral one. In order to fully apprehend this principle let us consider the following example. Assume that someone is in trouble. He verbally affronted another person and the latter sued him. The defendant then calls upon a dear friend of his and asks him to testify before court. This friend of his then goes to court and says: my friend would not ever utter such an offence. In this case, the friend of the defendant has given a false testimony about him. Let us also assume that the defendant repented and regretted what he did and became pious. People then start asking him to arbitrate among them. Subsequently, his friend who put forward a false testimony in his favour came to testify before him. Do you think they would accept the testimony of the former? No; of course they would not.

The virtuous are thereby always respected even by the immoral. When an immoral person wants to drag another virtuous person into sin, he tries to misguide him. This applies to the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'They would dearly like you to reject faith, as they themselves have done, to be like them...' (*an-Nisa':* 89). Their constant aim and target is to stand in the way of the believers and their faith in order to drag them right into the camp of the disbelievers. In so doing, they are like hypocrites, who are disbelievers in their hearts and are thus disloyal to the camp of the believers.

They do not maintain a neutral stance towards faith; rather, their stance is more likely one of stubbornness and antagonism against faith. Allah Almighty says: 'They would dearly like you to reject faith, as they themselves have done, to be like them...' (*an-Nisa':* 89) which is a direct warning to all believers should they entrust the hypocrites with anything related to their interests or faith. Allah *Glorified is He* clearly passes His ruling on this matter: '…So do not take them as allies…' (*an-Nisa':* 89) meaning not to take the hypocrites as advocates or confidants because Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to you what they concealed within their hearts. However, this should not be taken as an ultimate or personal stance towards the hypocrites. If any of them repents and regrets his sins and reverts to the camp of faith, then Allah *Glorified is He* will never reject his repentance. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* does not persecute anyone because of a sin; as the True Lord *Glorified is He* is All-Merciful and All-Forgiving. As long as they return to the True Lord and shun falsehood, the believers are obliged to accept the ones who have sincerely reverted. No one should be antagonised simply because he sinned; hatred ought to be directed at the wrong deed rather than the "person" who was created to worship Allah. Once sinners quit sinning and wrongdoing, they should to be accepted by the believers.

Within this context, when the murderer of Zayd ibn Al-Khattab passed in front of ''Umar ibn Al-Khattab, *Allah be pleased with him*, some people said to ''Umar: "Here is the murderer of your brother Zayd." So ''Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* answered: "What do you expect me to do to him when Allah *the Exalted* has guided him to Islam?!"

Thus, we learn that hatred must not extend outside the circle of the action committed to reach the doer. Rather, hatred must be channelled towards the action itself. Accordingly, if someone quits committing sinful acts, people should start adjusting their attitude towards him, since the "being" supersedes the deed. For this reason our Lord decrees His ruling: '…So do not take them as allies until they emigrate for Allah's cause…'(*an-Nisa':* 89).

Emigration for the cause of Allah Almighty enlisted people to sacrifice portions of their wealth and to abandon their homes and families in return for pursuing severe life of toil and exertion. In this manner, it would be a sort of repentance for their sins and the believers would be confident that they returned to Allah *Glorified is He* and repented and that Allah Almighty accepted their repentance and it was time for them to re-enter the realm of faith. So, if a believer does this he is back on the track of faith and belief. For this reason, people must learn to distinguish between the doer of a sin as a person and the deed that was committed; why? That is because the person, in himself, deserves no hatred. Rather, we should condemn the actions only if they were repugnant and bad.

In reading the Quran we notice that it addresses this matter. When the command of Allah *Glorified is He* was revealed to Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to build a ship and he started to construct it, people used to pass by and ridicule him. Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* would then answer them: I will mock you tomorrow as much as you mock me today. Afterwards, Nuh *peace be upon him* had a son who did not follow his path. Thereupon, Nuh called upon his son to follow the path of Allah *Glorified is He* but his son refused and said: No. Nuh then embarked upon the ship saying to Allah Almighty: You have promised to save me along with my family. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: Yes; I did promise to save you and your family but who told you to consider your son as a part of your family? The posterity of Prophets is not defined in terms of people or bloodlines; rather, the posterity of Prophets is defined in terms of who follows their path of teachings and actions. As for those who do not follow the path of the Prophets, Allah Almighty describes them as people whose work is “anything but righteous” (*Hud:* 46).

It is only the deeds which are evaluated and assessed. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…So do not take them as allies until they emigrate for the cause of Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 89) The word *(Al-Hijra)* is etymologically derived from the noun *(hajr)* which is the root of *(yuhajiru)* —the Arabic word literally meaning “abandon or desert” which means moving from one place to another, or from a valley to another, or changing one character attribute to another. The one who deserts or abandons something often attributes false accusations to whatever he abandoned. We ought to notice that Allah *Glorified is He* discusses the act itself *(hajar)* not the outcome *(hajr).* Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not abandon Mecca; rather, he imigrated from it. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says in the Hadith: ‘Mecca! By Allah you are the most endeared land of Allah to my heart and you are indeed the most beloved land of Allah to Allah. By Allah, had I not been expelled from you, I would never have left.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated in Sunan Ibn Majah*

Accordingly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* imigrated because the people of Mecca initially abandoned and deserted him; so he had no option but to emigrate. Furthermore, the word *(hajar)* incorporates movement—following the grammatical scale *(fa'il),* which often indicates the subject rather than the object of the verb. In this vein Al-Mutanabby—a great Abbasid poet— says:

If you depart a land whose people are capable of hosting you,

Then know that they are in fact the ones who departed; not you.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned the word "emigration" as an object or effect rather than a subject or cause. The people of Mecca hated what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* advocated and to that he responded by emigrating from Mecca.

Allah *Glorified is He* explains that the thing which can absolve the hypocrites from the ruling and condemnation of Allah Almighty, (which is not to take them as allies or supporters), is if the believers would let them emigrate for the cause of Allah *Glorified is He*. Emigration will be a stark proof to the truth and honesty of their faith because the emigrant pursues a difficult and harsh life. The believers know well how they lived off the sustenance Allah Almighty provided them through the aid and bounties of the *Ansar*—the Muslims from Medina; they could hardly lead a proper life. Hence, any hypocrite joining the believers in this endeavour would be exchanging his hypocrisy for faith and atoning for what he did in the past. Accordingly, emigration is not just a matter of abandoning one place and relocating in another; it must be for the Cause of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Against this background, we may understand the axiom of faith set by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the renowned Hadith: 'The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So, whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

This is the principle that guides how the believers should deal with the hypocrites once they proclaim that they will renounce disbelief and return to the path of faith. But what should the believers do if the hypocrites regressed to their enmity? Allah *Glorified is He* answers: '…If they turn on you, then seize and kill them wherever you encounter them. Take none of them as an ally or supporter.'(*an-Nisa':* 89) When "seize" comes within the context of conflict, then it means to capture and captivate. Furthermore, the verse makes it clear that killing the hypocrites upon confronting them in the battlefield is a must. In addition, believers must never take the hypocrites as allies or supporters; for there is always the likelihood that a hypocrite may infiltrate the ranks of the believers to spy on them and expose their secrets to the enemies of Islam so they can breach the defences of the Muslims. Obviously, a hypocrite infiltrating the ranks of the Muslims will most likely try to know what the Muslims are plotting against the infidels.

Taking someone, whom we know does not like faith and does not follow the doctrine of Islam, as an ally or supporter brings much suspicion on the character of such a person who chose to ally himself with a hypocrite rather than a sincere Muslim. When someone who does not like and maliciously conspires against you sees that you trust and treat him well, he will immediately take you for a person who does not have any sort of shrewdness. He would say: If he knew what I harbour for him, he would not trust me that way. Accordingly, if the believers take the hypocrites as allies or supporters even though the hypocrites continue to adhere to their hypocritical ways, the hypocrites would say: these Muslims are not really astute or sharp; they do not know what we harbour in our hearts for them. For this reason the True Lord *Glorified is He* triggers the vision of the believers lest they should follow an opinion put forward by any of the hypocrites and harm themselves.

The hypocrites may also say: those Muslims do not have a Lord to guide and warn them. So why do they claim that they have a God? If they had a God, He would alert them on what we harbour in our hearts. In this vein, the True Lord *Glorified is He* exposes their innermost intentions and tells us what they try to conceal so much within their hearts: Why is God not punishing us for what we say?' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

The fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not punish them when they committed their disbelief conceals within it a big benefit and mercy, which they will recognise later. Some of them will use their fighting skills, one day, to serve Islam and promote it after they had been using it to fight against it. Allah *Glorified is He* thus spared some of them because He knew that their swords would serve Islam. For instance figures like Khalid ibn Al-Walid, ‘Amr ibn Al-‘Aas and ‘Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with them* all embraced Islam after they fought against it. Hence, let none of you think that he can conceal a secret from Allah *Glorified is He* and remember that He knows what you whisper to yourself deep within your heart. (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

This saying addresses two issues: the first is that there is a Lord Who knows what the eye strays to in secret and what the bosoms of men harbour. The second is that Allah *Glorified is He* did not punish them because He knew that faith will dominate the hearts of some of them and that they will use their swords to serve Islam. He also knew that from among their offspring there will be leaders who will undertake the call of spreading Islam. For this reason, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him: Allah has heard the response of your people to you, and what they have replied to you, Allah has sent the Angel of the Mountains to you so that you may order him to do whatever you wish to these people. The Angel of the Mountains called and greeted Prophet Muhammad, and then said: O Muhammad! Order what you wish. If you like, I will let Al-Akh-Shabain (i.e. two huge mountains) fall on them. The Prophet said: No but I hope that Allah will let them beget children who will worship Him Alone, and will worship None besides Him.(1)

This was actually what happened later on! Allah Almighty thus determines the method of dealing with the hypocrites in this verse as follows: disbelief dwells in the hearts of these people even though they overtly claim to be Muslims and wish that the believers would be like them. For this reason, a Muslim should not take a hypocrite as an ally or supporter.

But if a hypocrite emigrates, then the vastness of faith will surely embrace him. However, if a hypocrite objects to obey this clear and overt order, then

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* ordains that the method of treatment ought to be as follows: '…If they turn on you, then seize and kill them wherever you encounter them. Take none of them as an ally or supporter.” (*an-Nisa':* 89) Yet, after issuing this decree, there remains a significant hurdle towards implementing it, namely, the alliances, vows and covenants which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pledged to some of the tribes. These covenants, in brief, comprised all the terms of agreement that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had settled with some tribes to the effect that they would not assault the Muslims if the Muslims do not assault them. Thus, the True Lord respects theses covenants and alliances.

Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us: do not take this as an absolute decree, Muslims. The reason is that Islam is essentially a religion that calls for keeping and honouring promises. You have pledged to some tribes that if any of you took refuge in them, then they must grant you their protection and that if any of them took refuge in the Muslims then they must grant them their protection and stand in the way of any persecution intended against them. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings afterwards the following exception:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ إِلَىٰ قَوۡمِۭ بَيۡنَكُمۡ وَبَيۡنَهُم مِّيثَٰقٌ أَوۡ جَآءُوكُمۡ حَصِرَتۡ صُدُورُهُمۡ أَن
يُقَٰتِلُوكُمۡ أَوۡ يُقَٰتِلُواْ قَوۡمَهُمۡۚ وَلَوۡ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَسَلَّطَهُمۡ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فَلَقَٰتَلُوكُمۡۚ فَإِنِ ٱعۡتَزَلُوكُمۡ فَلَمۡ
يُقَٰتِلُوكُمۡ وَأَلۡقَوۡاْ إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلسَّلَمَ فَمَا جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡ سَبِيلٗا ٩٠

But as for those who seek refuge with people with whom you have a treaty, or who come over to you because their hearts shrink from fighting against you or against their own people, God could have given them power over you, and they would have fought you. So if they withdraw and do not fight you, and offer you peace, then God gives you no way against them [90] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 90)

The verse starts with a conditional statement not to enrage those with whom Islam and the Muslims have concluded agreements and covenants. The seizing and killing mentioned in the verse which precedes this one does not apply to those who have concluded covenants or alliances with the Muslims.

What happened between the Muslims and Hilal ibn ‘Uwaymir Al-Aslami serves as a good example to illustrate this point? The Muslims pledged not to advocate either him or his enemies in battle and that whoever resorts to Hilal and takes refuge in him is entitled to the right of neighbourhood; same as Hilal. The exception also includes those who take refuge in the Muslims. Whoever among the hypocrites then takes refuge in those who have concluded covenants with the Muslims is entitled to sanctuary. In addition, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives protection to whoever takes refuge in him from among the hypocrites. Thus, despite their disbelief, Islam secures and protects the hypocrites. '…or (those) who come over to you because their hearts shrink from fighting against you or against their own people…' (*an-Nisa':* 90) This is the case similar to when one of them for instance says: I cannot fight you or my own people; so forgive me and accept me among you. Those who do so are accepted by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because they acknowledged their own distress. They can neither declare their faith, nor join the Muslims nor can they join the camp of the disbelievers. They cannot take a decisive stance either towards the Muslims or the disbelievers. In other words, they acknowledge their weakness and admit it.

'… Allah could have given them power over you and they would have fought you…' (*an-Nisa':* 90) what then occasions them to take refuge in a people who ally themselves with Muslims based on a covenant so that the Muslims would protect them? Either that or they acknowledge that they were incapable of handling this kind of pressure, declaring outright: we can neither fight you nor our people! The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains: It is I Who has done this and thrown fear and awe in their hearts. If I willed, I would have made them stronger and emboldened them to fight you. Thus, through dread and awe, Allah *the Almighty* granted us victory and kept them from fighting us; '…So, if they withdraw and do not fight you and offer you peace, then Allah gives you no way against them.' (*an-Nisa':* 90) If they let you be, offer you peace and admit that they are unable to choose between fighting Muslims and fighting their own people then you, Muslims, do not have any reason to attack them. In which case, Allah Almighty forbids you from attacking them.

The Eye of the True Lord *Glorified is He* sees far beyond what our knowledge can encompass; it transcends the latter's fetters to comprise the subtlest details. It is an eye that does not only see what we know, but uncovers all what obscures the things which we are not aware. Allah *Glorified is He* thereby says:

سَتَجِدُونَ ءَاخَرِينَ يُرِيدُونَ أَن يَأۡمَنُوكُمۡ وَيَأۡمَنُواْ قَوۡمَهُمۡ كُلَّ مَا رُدُّوٓاْ إِلَى ٱلۡفِتۡنَةِ
أُرۡكِسُواْ فِيهَاۚ فَإِن لَّمۡ يَعۡتَزِلُوكُمۡ وَيُلۡقُوٓاْ إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلسَّلَمَ وَيَكُفُّوٓاْ أَيۡدِيَهُمۡ فَخُذُوهُمۡ
وَٱقۡتُلُوهُمۡ حَيۡثُ ثَقِفۡتُمُوهُمۡۚ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكُمۡ جَعَلۡنَا لَكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡ سُلۡطَٰنٗا مُّبِينٗا ﴿٩١﴾

You will find others who wish to be safe from you, and from their own people, but whenever they are back in a situation where they are tempted [to fight you], they succumb to it. So if they neither withdraw, nor offer you peace, nor restrain themselves from fighting you, seize and kill them wherever you encounter them: We give you clear authority against such people [91] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 91)

This verse starts with a verb in the future tense. 'You will find [that there are] others who would like to be safe from you as well as safe from their own folk…' (*an-Nisa':* 91) which indicates that, by the time this verse was revealed, the Muslims had not yet found or identified the people about whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* was speaking. But what would those who witnessed the revelation of the Quran, say about such news if they could not find the people it pin-points? Surely, they would have suspected the integrity and authenticity of the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He has one Eye watching over the believers' reality and another watching over what is yet to come: I have told you about what happened in the past and used to be a subject of dispute among you. I have also told you about what your knowledge or minds did not see coming yet so you would not dispute over it. This is stark evidence that you are within My care and safekeeping.

'You will find [that there are] others who would like to be safe from you as well as safe from their own folk…' (*an-Nisa':* 91). These other people were the tribes of Banu S'ad and Ghatafan that used to live on the outskirts of Medina. Whenever they met Muslims, they used to say: we are with you and whenever they met the disbelievers they used to say: we are with you. The truth was that they were incapable of confronting any of the two camps. For this reason, the Quran describes them as follows: 'You will find [that there are] others who would like to be safe from you as well as safe from their own folk, [but who,] whenever they are faced anew with temptation to evil, plunge into it headlong…' (*an-Nisa':* 91). When these people were put to the test of temptation they would plunge into sinning headlong. This means that they flunked their tests because the groundwork of their faith was not yet solid enough and they are still drifting in their perplexity. Upon facing temptations, they unravelled their deep, innermost convictions and inclinations; as a result their perplexity increased. Having the capacity to be tempted is not in itself a deplorable thing. When it is said that someone is being put to the test of temptation, the believers should pray for this person to pass the test successfully. Temptation is not in itself a calamity that befalls man; rather, calamity befalls man if he fails to overcome this temptation.

We know that the word *(fitna)* —the Arabic word for trial/temptation(1) — originally has a sensory and material connotation. An inflection of the very same word, in Arabic, is also used to denote other meanings like "molten" gold or iron. Molten gold is what we get when we melt the ore in blast furnaces to allow all the impurities to surface. The same goes with iron; it is melted to the point where all its atoms are disintegrated and the impurities surface to the top.

We know that there are different kinds of iron: cast iron, for instance, is an alloy of iron ore that is high in various impurities which makes it rather brittle. By contrast, steel iron is free from impurities which makes it so tough. So molten iron and gold (in this sense; *fitna*) expel the impurities mixed with them. Thus, the word *(fitna)* —temptation—was used to refer to abstract rather than concrete things. Temptation is hence the main test in which one may succeed or fail; it is not harmful in itself. It is only harmful to the one who falls as its victim.

This was how the Quran foretold the Muslims about the intention of a group of people who lived on their borders. Temptations made them incapable of embracing faith. So, whenever their people called them to polytheism and to fight the Muslims, they quickly regressed in the most abject and abysmal way and became the worst of all their enemies. The Quran describes the attitude of the believers towards those who plunge into evil headlong and fail to overcome it as: '…Hence, if they do not let you be and do not offer you peace and do not restrain their hands, seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them… ' (*an-Nisa':* 91). We notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed that those who resort to either the Muslims or the allies of Muslims for protection due to their weakness, should be secured even if they were hypocrites. This is obvious in the previous verse: '…then Allah gives you no way against them.' (*an-Nisa':* 90) This is a divine and fair alert as much as it is a form of advocacy from the True Lord *Glorified is He* lest someone succumbs to his inclinations and usurps the weak. As for those who try to rebel and succumb to the voice of disbelief to harm the Muslims and those who do not greet the Muslims nor keep their hands off them, the divine command came forth to state: '…seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them…' (*an-Nisa':* 91). Allah *Glorified is He* has granted the believers a salient dominance over those hypocrites. Dominance as we know is power. Power, in turn, may assume one of two forms: it may be coercived in forcing a man to act in a certain way as when someone powerful orders a weak person to stand up or orders him to prostrate to him and so the weaker person obeys. This is the hegemonic kind of power that subjugates the matter or the body but can never subdue the heart or the spirit. The other form of power is the power of reason and the capacity to convince and persuade. Under this form of power, we may also subsume presentational abilities and the usage of irrefutable evidences to convince man to act.

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(1) Among other meanings for the same word (and within the same context), we also have: strife and adversity.

The difference between the dominance of power and the dominance of reason is that the former may coerce one to prostrate, but the latter is what will make him prostrate out of conviction and belief. The outstanding power and dominance that Allah *Glorified is He* granted to the believers over those who fight them empowers you, Muslims, to do what you want with those hypocrites, so long as they have tried to hurt and kill you. Prudence and justice necessitate being severe and rigorous with them.

If we want to properly understand the meaning of dominance and power, then let us contemplate the dispute that will take place in the afterlife between Satan and his followers. We will find Satan telling his followers: 'I have tempted you; this is true. You have also chosen to follow me. So, you bear full responsibility for your actions. I did not have either the power of coercion or the power of reason and persuasion over you. I only called you and you responded to my call.' (*Ibrahim:* 22)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* had talked about fighting and its legitimacy, especially fighting the hypocrites and others, the divine discourse moves to the issue of murder. Allah Almighty explains to His servants: In brief, I create this human body; I further grant life to all beings. It is thereby not reasonable for the One Who created an entity to entice others to destroy it! I only incite you to destroy those who fight you to safeguard the unity of humanity. So, do not dare to assault others; whoever destroys the creation of Allah *Glorified is He* is cursed. Do not touch this "body" that Allah Almighty created except under the conditions ordained by Allah *Glorified is He* such as, if this person transgressed the limits ordained by Allah Almighty. The reason is that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who creates life and hence is the One Who takes it. The lives of other people are thus not ours; even our very own lives are not ours to destroy or give away. For this reason, we prescribe a punishment on whoever kills another person by way of transgression and without a rightful cause. Yet, if someone kills another by mistake (manslaughter), he is only obliged to pay the prescribed blood money "*diya*." By contrast, the one who kills himself is denied admittance to paradise.

Therefore, before Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us not to kill others, He teaches us not to kill ourselves. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* is not only concerned about the harm you may cause to others, but He is also concerned about the harm you may cause to yourself. For this reason, you need to bear in mind that when Allah Almighty decreed retribution in the case of murder, He did so to protect you and not to assist or embolden you to kill someone else. But when Allah Almighty decrees that, "whoever kills should also be killed'", He does so to establish justice and fairness. The purpose of this is the preservation of two lives; if you meditated to kill someone and then realised that if you killed them then, you would be killed, you might likely refrain from committing this murder. Once you refrain from killing, you have preserved two lives: the life of the one you were planning to kill and your own life by saving it from punitive retribution. This is how "the law of just retribution" ensues "life" (*al-Baqara:* 179).

Thus, whoever tries to lecture you about how retribution is an atrocity or an abominable thing, just tell him this: How can the one decreeing retribution be seeking your death? In fact, he wants to save your life because if a killer knew beforehand that he would be killed, were he to commit murder he would abstain from killing. This way he ends up preserving two lives; his life and the life of the one he could have killed. So, when Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the “law of just retribution” ensues “life” (*al-Baqara:* 179), we realize how truthful this statement is.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about fighting and killing, he draws our attention to an important concept: never be pre-emptive in destroying lives or spilling blood whatever the pretext is. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* talks about the forbidden-killing based on the basics of Islam and faith. He says:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ أَن يَقْتُلَ مُؤْمِنًا إِلَّا خَطَـًٔا ۚ وَمَن قَتَلَ مُؤْمِنًا خَطَـًٔا فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ
مُّؤْمِنَةٍ وَدِيَةٌ مُّسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰٓ أَهْلِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ أَن يَصَّدَّقُوا۟ ۚ فَإِن كَانَ مِن قَوْمٍ عَدُوٍّ لَّكُمْ وَهُوَ
مُؤْمِنٌ فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مُّؤْمِنَةٍ ۖ وَإِن كَانَ مِن قَوْمٍۭ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُم مِّيثَٰقٌ
فَدِيَةٌ مُّسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰٓ أَهْلِهِۦ وَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مُّؤْمِنَةٍ ۖ فَمَن لَّمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ
شَهْرَيْنِ مُتَتَابِعَيْنِ تَوْبَةً مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿٩٢﴾

Never should a believer kill another believer, except by mistake. If anyone kills a believer by mistake he must free one Muslim slave and pay compensation to the victim’s relatives, unless they charitably forgo it; if the victim belonged to a people at war with you but is a believer, then the compensation is only to free a believing slave; if he belonged to a people with whom you have a treaty, then compensation should be handed over to his relatives, and a believing slave set free. Anyone who lacks the means to do this must fast for two consecutive months by way of repentance to God: God is all knowing, all wise [92] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 92)

This verse comes after Allah *Glorified is He* had talked about fighting for the cause of defending and instilling Islam. Since such type of fighting entails the killing of an infidel soul at the hands of a faithful one, the True Lord *Glorified is He* aptly put forward a discourse about murder. Murder—as we know—is the attempt to put an end to the life of someone alive by destroying his body. But any soul is bound to die when its time has come, whether someone attempts to put an end to its life or not. Thus, the destruction of the human body is an act intended to end human life. So, let no one think that the killer who destroys the body of the killed is the one who actually controls either ending or extending his life. If someone kills another, we should know that the timing of the murder only coincided with the timing preordained for this person’s death. The One Who truly ends lives is the True Lord *Glorified is He*. For this reason, we said that a killer deserves to be punished not because he caused the death of someone but because he was trying to be pre-emptive in an act that only Allah Almighty decides; the victim would have died any way in his preordained time. We know from the Quran that the True Lord *Glorified is He* chose man as His vicegerent in this Universe, and He ordained that the role of man is to “inhabit it” (*Hud:* 61).

Allah *Glorified is He* made man His vicegerent on earth to inhabit it and thrive thereon. Inhabiting the earth is accomplished through realising all what is good in the universe and bettering and improving all what is bad. As for the good, we either leave it as it is or we can further improve it as we should do.

For instance, plants sprout from the earth; they grow even if man did not plant or care for them. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants man to add to this potentiality in the earth; through seeding, ploughing, sowing and growing crops. This makes the earth even better and is a fundamental part of life itself.

Thus, inasmuch as man is the vicegerent of Allah Almighty on earth, every human being must respect and preserve the life of other fellow humans. As far as maintaining life is a necessity, no human being, especially a vicegerent of Allah Almighty, should kill another and so obstruct the capacity of the latter to revive the earth and inhabit it. Fighting has been permitted for the believers against the disbelievers because the actions and deeds of the disbelievers are corruptive and we know that deterring corruption always takes precedence over bringing benefit. Hence, the believers must fight those who corrupt life to end their evil and rid life from this impediment to it.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants this life for the man who makes it his life’s mission to promote life and make it liveable. Yet, the disbelievers spread corruption on earth and do not live in accordance with the path set by Allah Almighty; they usurp the fruits of labour of the weak to make themselves stronger. Allah Almighty thus decreed fighting them either to make them believe and submit to His path or to rid life entirely from their evil. Conversely, if someone tries to kill a believer who is apt to inhabit the earth and improve life on it he would be wronging life at large. Furthermore, if a man kills himself, he would also be committing an act of injustice against life at large; why? Because he incurred a loss on life; he could have inhabited earth and improved life through his contribution to it. So, if someone has the audacity to impinge on his life or the life of another, we should discipline and straighten him; and that is why Allah Almighty tells us that those who commit evil deeds, their punishment shall be in proportion. (*Yunus:* 27)

Islamic legislation has decreed that the one who deliberately meditates and commits murder should be punished by death. In this manner, Islamic legislation protects life and discourages murder instead of fostering it. Thus, the Islamic penal code has been enacted to expand and enhance the fundamentals of life and not the other way around. When the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* talked about legitimate fighting, He wanted to explain to us that we should not exploit the legitimacy of fighting as a pretext for transgression and doing things that Allah Almighty did not permit. So, what should be the case if someone chooses to end his life in a context other than that of a legitimate struggle for the cause of faith? Islamic legislation rules that such a person should be put to death. He should have borne in mind not to end someone else's life unless by mistake. But what if you do something and the result was manslaughter? This means causing someone to die even though you did not intend to kill him. There are two aspects involved here: first, not intending to kill someone and second, the death of someone by mistake.

In this respect, Islamic legislation hinges on the fact that a man "unintentionally" ended the life of another and that the life of the dead person was intricately and in manifold connected within the circle of believers in general and his family specifically. He may, for instance, be the breadwinner of the family or the closest to it or its main member. How many circles of relations and ties got affected here? We have the circle of the community of believers in general, the circle of the big family at large and the circle of the family-tree on a more intimate level in terms of ancestors and offspring. When the life of a human being comes to an end in the context of the general community of believers, this circle will be affected by the loss of a believer who submitted to the path of Allah Almighty and benefited others in his life. The reason is that the members of the community of believers always try to be beneficial to themselves and others.

However, the family circle is concerned with a more specific form of benefit; the closeness and value of anyone to this particular circle is in a way more special than his closeness to the community of believers. If we proceed further, we will notice that one's closeness to his family, especially when it comes to direct relatives or offspring, is even more important and special. Thus, the death of such a person is a terrorisation of several circles; the general, the big family and the smaller more direct family. For this reason, I would like you to note something which we often miss, though it happens frequently in our day-to-day life. Sometimes, as a group of people sit together, they find someone saying: so and so person died. Among the attendants there may be someone who knew the person who died remotely, on the level of acquaintance and another who knew him in a special and more intimate way. There may also be members of his family, like his father or his son. So, consider the different impact on each of these people's faces! Each one will show an effect proportionate to the relation he had with the deceased. One may say, "May Allah have mercy on his soul", and another may retort frantically, "how did this happen?" A third person may sob bitterly and a fourth may just cry and rush to see the deceased. Here we witness one single piece of news and a whole set of different reactions; so why did the reactions vary in this flagrant way? Why were the reactions not identical?

We say: reactions vary randomly and instinctively in accordance with the degree of closeness the deceased represents to each person manifesting these reactions. The one who used to meet him intermittently may be the one who said, "may Allah have mercy on his soul." By contrast the one who used to meet him on every good occasion will reminisce over the memories they shared together. If we turn to his children, we will see that the reactions will also vary; the one who has a family will have a reaction different from the one who recently graduated or the one who is still studying, whether boy or girl. Each of the children will receive the sad news and react towards it in a different way. The son who has a family and a house will receive the news in a way different from the one who still goes to school. Similarly, the reaction of the married daughter who has a family will differ from that of her sister who still needed her father to provide her with the requirements she needed to get married.

Therefore, the reaction of anyone to the loss of another is always proportionate to the level of the latter's closeness to each person. For this reason, we may mourn and grieve for the loss of a friend more than we would for the loss of a brother. If people thus ponder who is dearer to you: your brother or your friend, the true answer ought to be: the more beneficial, the dearer he will be. This is how a single piece of news about the death of someone could produce different reactions; you mourn and grieve proportionately with the benefit and goodness the deceased used to have in the society.

If you find the entire society grieving for the loss of someone, then know that such a person was useful and beneficial to all members of the society, whereas the one who is only mourned and missed by his family was most likely only useful to his family and offspring; and others might die without anyone missing or mourning them. That is why they say that everyone has a homeland and that your homeland is proportionate to your usefulness to others. Someone's homeland may thus only be his own ego thinking that everything was made for him and that he was made for nothing or anyone, even his very own children. Another person's homeland may only be his big family that benefits from his work. Another person's homeland may be his family and village; another's homeland may be his nation and another's may be the whole world. So, when the death of a single person grips the entire society, this indicates the size and scope of his actual homeland.

As for the issue of manslaughter, when we get the shocking news of someone being killed by mistake, the killer should be excused. Yet, being excused does not mean that he did not commit an act of transgression and that another person got killed because of such transgression. The effect of his action has already taken place and the aftermath has befallen those who are closest to him in terms of closeness. However, because the murder happened by mistake, the killer will not be subject to retribution. Still, he should pay what we call "blood money" -in Arabic "*diya*." This blood money is divided between those who were seriously affected by the death of the victim. This is in accordance with the following simple principle: spreading benefit and containing harm.

Once you see something that you think may benefit you, you rejoice. When you see something that may potentially harm you, you feel taken aback and uncomfortable. When the news of the death of a dear one reaches another, he immediately grieves and mourns the death of his beloved on. By contrast, we try to alleviate the effect of this bad news by telling this person that he will get the prescribed blood-money wherein he finds some relief and comfort. This way, the effect ensuing from manslaughter is remedied.

The blood money for manslaughter according to the rulings of Islamic law, must be paid by the distantly related kin "*aqila-usba*" and on the condition that it is not to be paid by the direct or closest kin of the killer. The reason is that Islamic law does not want the family to suffer the calamity of having one of their own kill someone by mistake—which is something dreadful—and at the same time having to go through the pain of paying an indemnity for such an atrocity. It is as if Islamic legislation wants to remedy the shock caused by deviation from the righteous path using an antidote against any negative reactions that could result from the loss of someone dear; in doing so it achieves stability and order in the society. Thus, the society should not seek retribution from the one who commits manslaughter; suffice for him to pay the proper blood money. To share the responsibility, the killer is not the only one who pays the indemnity; the extended kinship all participate in it. So, inasmuch as every family knows that if any of its members kills by mistake, it will incur a considerable fine by way of sharing responsibility, it will instil in its members the perception of protecting the rights of others. Thus, if every member of the family knows that he will bear some of the responsibility by being obliged to share in the blood money, stability and balance will be maintained in the society.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us to dismiss the possibility of a believer killing another except by mistake; it is inconceivable that such a thing could happen deliberately. Thus Allah, Glorified be He says: 'Never should a believer kill another believer, except by mistake...' (*an-Nisa':* 92). The meaning of this is that no one can conceive of such an act because the intimacy of the relation between the believers precludes this possibility. But what would be the proper remedy if something like this happens?' Never should a believer kill another believer, except by mistake. If anyone kills a believer by mistake, he must free one Muslim slave and pay compensation to the victim's relatives…' (*an-Nisa':* 92). Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention retribution in this context because He speaks about retribution in an earlier chapter telling us that retribution (in case of premeditated crime) is to kill a free man in retribution for killing a free man, a slave for killing a slave and a woman for killing a woman… (*al-Baqara:* 178).

Only the guardian or custodian is entitled to judge on the issue of blood money; he reserves the right to either pardon the killer or accept the blood money. He may thus say to the killer that he accepted the blood money as retribution. We have also to distinguish between the prohibitions *"hudud"* set by Allah Almighty and retribution. The guardian or the one in charge may surrender his right to retribution, but no one may surrender or compromise the prohibitions of Allah Almighty because this is only the exclusive right of Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says about manslaughter: '…then the compensation is only to free a believing slave…' (*an-Nisa':* 92). However, someone may wonder: what benefit will accrue to the family of the victim from freeing a believing slave from slavery? Will such an act benefit the family of the victim? Freeing a believing slave from slavery may not directly benefit them in anything, yet it may benefit the society because the one in slavery is owned exclusively by one person, his master. This limits and restricts the impact of the slave, but if he becomes free, his impact on life will be unrestricted and his freedom from slavery will put his motion under the direct service of the society.

Thus, the constriction that was caused by killing a person by mistake will be nullified by an opposite act of "release" accomplished by setting another person free. As if we are saying to the person in slavery: you are now free to work and benefit the entire society. In so doing the True Lord *Glorified is He* sets another venue for freeing slaves besides the various other venues Islam decreed. After putting forward this statement, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and pay compensation to the victim's relatives, unless they charitably forgo it;…' (*an-Nisa':* 92) Such a statement bears a release and comfort to the family following the constriction they suffered with the news of the murder of a beloved one. So, if a family suffered the calamity of losing one of their own due to an accident and lived in grief for days, they should then use the proper documents to obtain the blood money or compensation for their loss. This shows that Islam guarantees at least a decent and practical sort of conciliation and if this was something people usually had no need for, they would have simply declined it; but this never happens.

When someone loses a beloved person and permanently dwells on his grief, he could lose his own life out of agony; but this is not the norm of life. Each person mourns the deceased proportionately with the benefit he lost due to his death. The one in grief grieves because the victim used to add to his life. Thus, with the victim's death, this person lost all the enrichment the victim used to add to his life.

But, just imagine someone grieving over the loss of a beloved one and we tell him something like: keep the corpse with you for a week or so until you settle your longing to the one who died; afterwards we will take the corpse to bury it. Would this person accept? Certainly no! Who can accept something like that? Now, suppose we tell the same person: We will not give you any food for a week or so because sad and grieving people have no appetite to eat. No one will accept something like that! We see wives crying floods over their husband, but still, at the end of the day, they eat, drink and partake to all other necessities of life. Bottom line is: life has to go on and for that to happen our basic needs must be secured regardless of our grief which will heel by time.

This issue must be clear in order to properly and openly accept the fate preordained by the True Lord *Glorified is He*. Such preordained fate never violates the universal laws of Allah Almighty. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to spread sympathy among people. Assume the family of the victim says to the family of the killer: we do not want any blood money because the loss that befell you due to this act is no less drastic than ours and we are all brothers in faith. What would then happen in the society? This act will accrue exponential benefit compared to what will be accrued from paying the blood money. This is even an improvement to the indemnity. If a child knows that his family was bound to pay blood money because his father committed manslaughter and that the family of the victim forgave his family and gave up their right to take the blood money, this child will know when he grows up and becomes capable of reasoning that every good thing his family has or enjoys was due to this act of forgiveness and generosity. If this same act is repeated, amiability and affection will prevail in the society.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* thereby wants to spread and propagate affection, amiability and mutual benefit in the society. So, if someone grieves for losing a dear person in manslaughter, he may avail himself of the blood money. Alternatively, if he does not take it, he would benefit even more. For this reason, the True Lord says: '…and pay compensation to the victim's relatives, unless they charitably forgo it…' (*an-Nisa’:* 92).

This is what happens when a believer kills another believer by mistake within a solid and competent community of believers. But what should be the right course of action if a believer kills someone who belongs with a people whom he is at war with and it so happened that the victim was a believer living among the disbelievers? Here, we also see clearly the justice of divine legislation and we become more confident that Allah Almighty is the True Lord of all. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…if the victim belonged to a people at war with you but is a believer, then the compensation is only to free a believing slave…' (*an-Nisa’:* 92). This means that if the victim was living among people who antagonise Muslims he would not deserve blood money because he chose to live among the disbelievers.

Thus, we have three criteria for the rulings set forth by Islamic legislation: 1) the case of the victim being a member of the community of believers, 2) the victim being a believer living among and fighting beside a group of people who antagonise the believers or 3) the victim being a member of a group of people who have a treaty with the Muslims. Each case has its specific ruling; if the victim is a believer living among a group at war with the Muslims, the indemnity is freeing a believing soul from slavery. This is intended as a sort of compensation with the purpose of promoting faith and for the benefit of the community of believers. This action sets the movement of another believer free to make up for the one who met his demise and whose deeds and endeavours in life ended abruptly. In other words, it compensates the society for the loss of one of its believing members. But should blood money be paid in this case? No; people among whom the deceased used to live are not entitled to take any blood money since it will be conveyed through inheritance and these people are disbelievers. The Muslims and the disbelievers cannot share inheritance amongst each other. Hence, no blood money is to be paid in this case.

When we consider the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '…if the victim belonged to a people at war with you but is a believer…' (*an-Nisa': 92*). We notice that the word *('adw)* —the Arabic expression literally means (*an enemy*) at war with you. The word is in the singular form though it denotes all people who share the characteristic of animosity with the Muslims because when the sources of enmity are united they become a single enemy. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…if the victim belonged to a people at war with you but is a believer, then the compensation is only to free a believing slave…' (*an-Nisa':* 92). He did not mention blood money in this context because the enemies of Islam are not entitled to blood money since they are prohibited from inheriting the Muslims.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says: '…if he belonged to a people with whom you have a treaty then compensation should be handed over to his relatives and a believing slave set free.…' (*an-Nisa':* 92). If Muslims have a treaty with any other people, then they must abide by it. This abidance calls for delivering the blood money to the people of the victim in respect to the treaty. The blood money as we know is paid by the extended kinship. In explaining the proper course of action in case of manslaughter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…and a believing slave set free. Anyone who lacks the means to do this, must fast for two consecutive months…' (*an-Nisa':* 92). This means that whoever could not find or afford freeing a believing slave ought to fast for two consecutive months without any breaks in between unless there is a legitimate cause such as sickness or travelling. But once he recovers from his sickness or reaches his destination, he must resume fasting.

Why were these rulings presented in this sequential order? The reason is that the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted be He* wants the killer to be fixated on his action and to ponder on it the entire time. For this to happen, the fasting must be consecutive and without breaks. Had the fasting been intermittent, the killer would be out of focus: '…Anyone who lacks the means to do this must fast for two consecutive months by way of repentance to Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 92).

Why did the True Lord, *Glorified is He* say: 'by way of repentance to Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 92)? Repentance—as we know—emanates from the servant to Allah *Glorified is He*. We thus say: a servant of Allah repented to Him. Yet, when repentance is ascribed to the True Lord *Glorified is He*, it means that Allah Almighty has "forgiven" his servant. Hence, repentance involves three phases: First, Allah Almighty ordains it; we thus say that Allah *Glorified is He* absolved His servant and allowed him to repent. No one repents unless Allah *Glorified is He* ordains his repentance. If Allah *Glorified is He* does not ordain that a person's repentance is legitimate, his sins and bad deeds would amass on his shoulders. Ordaining repentance restrains the lowly whims and inclinations; otherwise anyone who commits a sin would have spread corruption on earth. Since Allah *Glorified is He* ordains repentance, He thus accepts the repentance of those who repent to Him and this is the first phase. The second phase is established when the person himself repents (subsequent to the first phase). So, Allah Almighty ordains repentance, the believer repents and then Allah Almighty accepts his repentance, which is the third phase.

We thus realise the precision of the Quranic discourse when we are told that Allah *Glorified is He* turns to the believers in mercy so that they might repent… (*at-Tawba:* 118), and after they repent, Allah *Glorified is He* accepts their repentance. Hence, the first phase of the forgiveness of Allah Almighty and accepting repentance is ordaining repentance as such. The third and final phase is accepting the repentance and between these two phases the human being repents.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then appends the verse as follows: '…by way of repentance to Allah: Allah is all knowing, all wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 92) Allah *Glorified is He* decrees legislations that let the human soul live in a sound environment and in accordance with its natural constitution. Indeed, if we imagine that someone was killed by mistake and his family was left without any compensation, then the society of believers would not benefit from his death.

Owing to the knowledge of Allah Almighty of the human psyche, victims of manslaughter will accrue benefit and closeness to the community of believers inasmuch as they become a cause of freeing a believing soul from slavery to making sure that something good is done after all. The one to be freed should not be a disbeliever. In fact, when a disbeliever is owned by a master, his evil is contained and freeing him might spread this evil. In addition to freeing a believer there is also the blood money which will reach everyone impaired by the vacuum of benefit left behind by the victim. As we said before, the blood money is to be paid only by the extended relatives of the killer. This is intended in order not to double the suffering endured by the killer's family—the distress which will fill them because of the murder committed by one of their members—and the calamity of paying blood money to atone for what the killer did; and this is the wisdom beyond the decree. Since the Creator is in fact the One Who sets the proper rules of conduct, then no other rules or principles could possibly govern and regulate these matters better than the ones considered here.

Let us look at a machine—for instance—that is made up of fifty parts and each part is joined to the other using bolts, screws or other joints. As long as each part stays in its proper place, the machine functions well. But, if the machine dysfunctions, we get a mechanic to restore each part to its proper place. With everything set in its proper place, the machine will function again. This in many ways is similar to the realm of human beings. Every kind of movement based on wisdom should not undergo any form of degeneration. Degeneration only occurs when things are not based on wisdom or knowledge. Furthermore, wisdom is not absolute; it is questionable. That is why some people are wiser than others. In the past—for instance—electric wires did not have any insulation and because of that short circuits used to happen. Later, when insulators were discovered, we modified our methods of producing electric wires. The next problem we had was that the colours of the wires (like in cars for instance) used to all be the same; which caused a lot of confusion when attempting to fix cars. But when each wire was assigned a different colour, the repair process became much easier. Hence, we see the wisdom beyond assigning everything to its proper place. So how about when the One Who puts things in their proper place is in fact our Creator? There could be nothing better than this.

Consequently, if we spot any defect in the society, we must realise that something is done at odds with the wisdom Allah Almighty intended. In such a case, we will find the defect if we followed exactly the course we use to identify a defect in any machine then find a mechanic to fix it. Likewise, we must refer everything to the Creator and search for the remedy of our social problems in the rulings of Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* admonished us to refer any subject of dispute to Himself and His messenger in order to end our suffering.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about premeditated murder. Someone may wonder: should Allah have talked about premeditated murder first? To this question, we respond as follows: Had the True Lord *Glorified is He* talked about premeditated murder first, this might have suggested that such form of murder is bound to have precedence in the sequence of the believer’s thought. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains that this should not occur to the mind or imagination of the believer.

Someone may also wonder: Why did Allah not start the verse with, “Never should a Muslim…” —instead of “…a believer…”? To this question, we respond by saying: we must realise that the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses the believers because faith is an act of the heart. For this reason, the discourse addresses the believers in particular rather than the Muslims in general because Islam can be solely an ostensible appearance. Someone who purports to be a Muslim may thus kill a believer. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the discourse that encompasses both the outer appearance and the essence such as faith. But when the True Lord *Glorified is He* legislates, He put forward the proper requital for the one who deliberately perpetrates murder. In this vein, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن يَقْتُلْ مُؤْمِنًا مُّتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَآؤُهُۥ جَهَنَّمُ خَٰلِدًا فِيهَا
وَغَضِبَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَلَعَنَهُۥ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُۥ عَذَابًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٩٣﴾

If anyone kills a believer deliberately, the punishment for him is Hell, and there he will remain: God is angry with him, and rejects him, and has prepared a tremendous torment for him [93] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 93)

Murder in this context refers to the act of deliberately killing a believer. This is a diametrically different case than that of killing by mistake wherein the killer realises that he killed only after the act of killing actually took place. The requital for deliberately killing a believer is damnation to hell; there is no atonement for such an atrocity. This way, Allah Almighty reveals how abominable and despicable the crime of deliberately murdering a believer is. The reason is that deliberate murder means that the murderer dwelt upon the thought of killing and murdering another. In legal jargon this is called: a premeditated crime. This means that the killer or murderer planned the murder in his imagination and then committed it. While planning and plotting the murder, the killer's religious commitment was supposed to have deterred him from the atrocity he was about to commit. Thus, committing a deliberate murder demonstrates that the trait of "fearing Allah" was absent from the mind of the murderer throughout the period in which he planned the crime. Indeed, had Allah Almighty occurred to him, he would have desisted from committing the crime? But since Allah did not occur to the mind of the murderer, likewise he will not "occur" in Allah's mercy.

Scholars suggested that the following incident was the reason for the revelation of this verse. The man named Maqis ibn Dababah who had a brother called Hisham, found his brother murdered in the region of Banu *an*-Najjar who belonged to *Al-Ansar* (Medinan Helpers). Thereupon, Maqis went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him about this incident. Then, Prophet Muhammad sent with him a person from Banu Fehr and instructed them to bring the murderer of Maqis' brother to Maqis. However, Banu An-Najjar claimed that they did not know who had murdered Hisham and expressed their willingness to pay *Diyah* (blood money) which was a hundred camels and went back to Medina. Then, Maqis killed the person who belonged to Banu Fehr to avenge his brother's murder, took the camels and headed to Mecca, abjuring Islam. During his journey to Mecca, he chanted the following verses:

I have killed in revenge a man from Fehr and have taken his *Diyah* (blood money),

And let Banu Al-Najjar bear the responsibility of paying his *Diyah* (blood money),

I have taken revenge by killing him and vented my rage,

And I have converted to worshipping idols.

When the news reached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* he declared that killing Maqis was permissible; this means that whoever killed Maqis would not be punished. On the day of the Liberation of Mecca, Maqis was found clinging to the curtains of the *Ka'ba* seeking refuge in it, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered that he must be killed. 'If anyone kills a believer deliberately, the punishment for him is hell and there he will remain: Allah is angry with him and rejects him and has prepared a tremendous torment for him.' (*an-Nisa':* 93)

In this context, we notice that there are multiple levels of torment: the fire of hell, eternal suffering in hell, the Wrath and Rejection of Allah Almighty and Allah's preparation of tremendous torment. This means that torment is not only limited to hell, as there are the aforementioned forms of torment from which we seek refuge with Allah Almighty. Some people think that hell is the only form of torment; however, torment has many other forms. For instance, when someone is imprisoned, we may think that imprisonment is the only suffering he has to endure, but after knowing what happens inside prisons, we have realised that there are other things that are more evil than imprisonment.

Scholars have pondered over the following question: Is it possible for such a murderer to repent? Scholars were not of the same opinion in this regard; some scholars have said that it is not possible for such a murderer to repent, whereas other scholars have said that it is possible for him to repent. Ibn Al-'Abbas was once sitting with a group of people and someone asked him: Is it permissible for the one who deliberately killed another believer to repent? Ibn Al-Abbas said: No. After a period of time a person asked Ibn Al-'Abbas: Is it permissible for the one who deliberately killed another believer to repent? Ibn Al-'Abbas said: Yes. Then, the attendants wondered: Why did you answer yes now when you previously said no? Ibn Al-'Abbas said: the one who asked me first wanted to deliberately commit a murder, but the one who asked me in the second time had already killed someone deliberately. Therefore, I was terrified and deterred the first and did not let the second lose hope in the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He*. But how did Ibn Al-'Abbas distinguish between the two cases? He did so by means of the faith-inspired acuity and insight that Allah *Glorified is He* bestows upon the *Mufti* (a Muslim scholar qualified to issue legal opinions). Once a person asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, while he was sitting among his Companions: ‘What (sort of) deeds in Islam are the best?’ He replied, ‘To feed (the poor) and greet those whom you know and those whom you do not know.’(1) Another person asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the same question and he answered: ‘A (true) Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe.’ Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to answer whoever asked him in a manner that was most suitable and useful for him. When 'Abdullah ibn Mas’ud *may Allah be pleased with him* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Which is the best deed?’ He answered, ‘Offering Prayers on time. Then, 'Abdullah ibn Mas’ud *may Allah be pleased with him* asked, ‘What is next, O Messenger of Allah?’ He said, ‘To avoid harming people with his tongue.’(2)

But the text of the verse concerning deliberate killing requires further reflection, as Allah Almighty says: '…the punishment for him is Hell and there he will remain…' (*an-Nisa’:* 93). Does the word ‘*Khalidan*’ mentioned in the Arabic text of the Verse indicate dwelling in hell for a long time or remaining in it eternally? If the word had indicated remaining eternally, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have said: '“And so they will remain…' (*Al-‘Imran:* 88) and then in another verse, He says: '… Hell, where they will remain for ever…' (*an-Nisa’:* 169) This saying indicates that the word ‘*Abada*’ which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse adds the meaning of eternity to mere remaining in hell. If the word ‘Khalidin’ (remaining) and ‘*Abada*’ (forever) have the same meaning, then the word ‘*Abada*’ (forever) will not add anything to the meaning. But the Quran is the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* which is free of any redundancy or absurdity. Thus, if we reflect on this verse, we will find that the word ‘*Khalidin*’ means remaining for a long time and ‘*Khalidin Abada*’ means remaining forever. Each word of the Quran is precise and has a specific meaning. Furthermore, the word ‘*Khalidin*’ is mentioned in the following sense when it refers to remaining in hell. Allah Almighty says: 'The Day it comes no soul will speak except by His permission. And among them will be the wretched and the prosperous. As for those who were [destined to be] wretched, they will be in Hell. For them therein is [violent] exhaling and inhaling. [They will be] abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except what your Lord should will. Indeed, your Lord is an effector of what He intends.' (*Hud:* 105-107)

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(1) *Related by Muslim*

(2) *Related by Al-Tabarani*

This means that Allah Almighty has excluded whomever He wills from abiding in hell. But such exclusion is bound to a specific time and the word *'Khulud'* does not mean infinite perpetuation; rather, it refers to a long period of time. Allah Almighty uses the same meaning of *'Khulud'* when He refers to abiding in heaven when He says: 'And as for those who were [destined to be] prosperous, they will be in paradise, abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except what your Lord should will – a bestowal uninterrupted.' (*Hud:* 108)

The saying of Allah Almighty: '…except what your Lord should will…' (*Hud:* 107) indicates that the Arabic word *'Khalidin'* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means that this abidance is not eternal. In addition, the exception mentioned in the verse must be limited to a time constraint. But time is finite, whereas eternity is infinite; therefore, '*Khulud'* does not mean abiding eternally.

We have to tackle the verses in this sense. In this regard, we should consider the approach of one of the key scholars of Islamic creed during the Abbasid era: 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd. He was among the scholars who were well-known for their keenness to maintain the dignity of knowledge and scholars to the extent that the caliph of this era said about him in the presence of some people who purported to be scholars, 'All of these alleged scholars are hunting after their own interests except for 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd.' He enjoyed a high scientific status and had faith-based dignity that enabled him to rise above all minor things in life. He was also specific and subtle in his opinions. Qays ibn Anas relates the following story about him: Once I was attending the gathering of 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd and heard him saying, 'I will be brought forth on the Day of Judgement and will be asked, 'Why did you say that the one who deliberately commits murder cannot repent? So I recited the verse, '…wherein he will abide eternally….' (*an-Nisa':* 93) 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd should have noticed that the person who deliberately kills is permitted to repent from the inspiration or the vision that Allah Almighty caused him to see which states that on the Day of Judgement he would be asked why he gave a legal opinion to the effect that the one who kills deliberately cannot repent. This is because being questioned on the Day of Judgement about this matter involves reproach for issuing this legal opinion.

This indicates that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has willed that over every possessor of knowledge does one [more] know…. ‘Amr mentioned the saying of Allah Almighty: '…his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally…' (*an-Nisa’:* 93). At this moment, Qays ibn Anas who was the youngest among the attendants said to him, ‘If I were with you, I would say as you said: '…his recompense is Hell, wherein he will abide eternally…' (*an-Nisa’:* 93). I would also say Allah Almighty's saying: 'Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills….' (*an-Nisa’:* 48) Qays then said, ‘By Allah, ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd did not reject what I said.’ This means that ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd agreed to Qays’ opinion.

The story indicates that the words ‘*Khalidin fiha*’ (wherein they will abide) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse does not mean infinite perpetuation because Allah Almighty has made an exception to such abidance in another verse.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has given the ruling on deliberate murder and involuntary murder and the scholars found that there is another type of murder called quasi-deliberate murder as it is neither deliberate nor involuntary. For instance, someone may hit another person with a tool that does not normally cause death. In such a case there is a deliberate intention since the hitter actually picked the tool and hit the other person and accidentally the tool caused death although it does not normally kill. In such a case, scholars say that death accompanied such an action and did not cause it. Accordingly, no *Qisas* (just retaliation) is due, but *Diyah* (blood money) must be paid.

Allah Almighty has clarified all the cases in which someone may kill another, such as permissible murder when a Muslim kills a disbeliever in a battle, the deliberate murder, involuntary murder, and quasi-deliberate. Therefore, He *the Glorified and Exalted* draws the Muslims’ attention to the fact that they should be careful in this regard to ensure that their swords are not going to be used against your brothers. In relation, Allah Almighty says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا ضَرَبۡتُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَتَبَيَّنُواْ وَلَا تَقُولُواْ لِمَنۡ أَلۡقَىٰٓ
إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلسَّلَٰمَ لَسۡتَ مُؤۡمِنٗا تَبۡتَغُونَ عَرَضَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا فَعِندَ
ٱللَّهِ مَغَانِمُ كَثِيرَةٞۚ كَذَٰلِكَ كُنتُم مِّن قَبۡلُ فَمَنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ
فَتَبَيَّنُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٗا ﴿٩٤﴾

So, you who believe, be careful when you go to fight in God’s way, and do not say to someone who offers you a greeting of peace, ‘You are not a believer,’ out of desire for the chance gains of this life – God has plenty of gains for you. You yourself were in the same position [once], but God was gracious to you, so be careful: God is fully aware of what you do [94] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 94)

Allah Almighty commands the believers who go forth to fight in His cause to investigate and not to use their swords, spears or arrows before investigating and checking against whom they use them. He *the Exalted* also commands them '…and do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace ‘You are not a believer,’ aspiring for the goods of worldly life; for with Allah are many acquisitions. You [yourselves] were like that before; then Allah conferred His favor upon you, so investigate. Indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.' (*an-Nisa’:* 94)

It is an all-inclusive verse, as it encompasses the ruling, its reason and purpose. Allah *Glorified is He* starts the verse with His saying: '‘O you who have believed…' (*an-Nisa’:* 94). The fact that the discourse is addressed to the believers indicates its binding nature; Allah Almighty does not address all the people in this verse. Rather, He says: 'O you who have believed, when you go forth [to fight] in the cause of Allah, investigate…' (*an-Nisa’:* 94) Allah Almighty orders the believers to abide by His Command as they have believed in Him and should obey Him and follow His Commands. The reason for abiding by every ruling is that the believer has faith in the One Who has enacted this ruling. Accordingly, the believer should not inquire about the wisdom or reason for a certain ruling in order to avoid perplexity and confusion. This matter should be stressed because it frequently occurs to the minds of people to ask about the rationale and wisdom underlying every matter in religion. Therefore, they should know that if they know the rationale underlying a certain ruling, they will abide by it not in obedience to the One Who enacted it, but due to being convinced of the wisdom itself.

There is an attitude among those who have transgressed against themselves by disbelief or those who believe in Allah *Glorified is He* but commit major sins like perjury, usury or drinking intoxicants. When physicians examine the liver of someone who drinks intoxicants – for instance – they often find them suffering from cirrhosis and any extra dosage of intoxicants may lead to this person's death. In this case, this person may abstain from drinking intoxicants because he has realised the rationale and wisdom behind preventing it. Furthermore, the one who asked him to do so may be a Magus; therefore, in such a case abstention from drinking intoxicants is not in obedience to a Divine Command. However, the believer should refrain from drinking intoxicants because Allah *Glorified is He* forbids it. Also, the believer should carry out all the commands of Allah Almighty even with regards to harmless matters; Allah Almighty does not forbid only harmful matters as He may forbid things in order to discipline man. As an example – and to Allah Almighty belongs the utmost example of perfection – a husband may ask his wife not to give their son any of the sweets that he brought. In this case, he prevents his son from taking sweets not because it is harmful; rather, he wants to discipline his son.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We made unlawful for them [certain] good foods which had been lawful to them…' (*an-Nisa':* 160). A person should follow the commands of Allah Almighty out of obedience to Him, not because the rationale underlying the command is useful to him because if one follows a Divine Command due to the benefit, he expects to gain or the harm it may enable him to avoid, his faith will be deficient. It is frequently noticed that Allah Almighty imparts His Wisdom in the rulings He enjoins in order for man to realise one of the infinite aspects of His Wisdom that have been concealed. A person may think about the wisdom underlying any incident, but by the passage of time, he realises the truth and usefulness of the Rulings of Allah *Glorified is He*. This encourages man to take the Rulings of Allah Almighty for granted.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have believed….' (*an-Nisa':* 94) Faith is the reason which will cause the people to obey the commands of Allah Almighty: 'O you who have believed, when you go forth [to fight] in the cause of Allah….' (*an-Nisa':* 94) '*Al-Darb*', the Arabic root of the word '*Darabtum*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means a violent reaction against another something. Allah Almighty's saying: 'When you go forth [to fight]…' (*an-Nisa':* 101) indicates that life abounds of actions and reactions and Allah Almighty says, '*Darabtum fil Ard'* because *Al-Ard'* (land) is where He has placed the sustenance of all His creatures. When humans want to take out its wealth and goodness, they plough the land, sow the seeds, irrigate the land and then fruits sprout. Through this process, the soil yields crops. Therefore, every kind of motion needs effort and strife. Allah Almighty also says: '…and others who travel in the land seeking of the bounty of Allah…' (*al-Muzzammil*: 20).

The verse suggests that in order to gain the bounties of Allah Almighty that are placed in the land, people should work hard and diligently. Therefore, it is said that the land needs digging and ploughing. The more man exerts effort in handling the land, the more bounties it will yield. The Arabic words '*Al-Darb fi Sabil Allah*' means fighting for the cause of Allah Almighty or preparing the requirements needed for fighting for the cause of Allah Almighty. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war…' (*al-Anfal:* 60).

Battles should be preceded by making preparations which are carried out by physical preparation of the bodies that require the basic needs and necessities of life. Furthermore, fighters should also prepare the necessary tools and instruments require excavation and search for different elements needed and examination of different industries in order to choose the most suitable among them. All preparation processes require research and craft; therefore, the following is mentioned in the *Athar* (narrations from the Companions), 'Allah may forgive four people for the sake of a single arrow unsheathed in His cause.' The reason for this saying is that there is a person who cut the wood of which the arrow is made, a person who installed the tools that enable the arrow to fly forward, a person who placed the darts, and finally a person who uses the bow to shoot the arrows.

Allah Almighty wants the believers to be strong in order for them to be able to strive hard throughout the land. Allah Almighty says: '…O you who have believed, when you go forth [to fight] in the cause of Allah, investigate….' (*an-Nisa':* 94) We know that going forth in the Cause of Allah *the Almighty* is not only concerned with *Jihad* (striving in the Cause of Allah), but it is also concerned with all aspects of life because whatever is required for an obligation to be fulfilled is also considered as an obligation. The word '*Tabayyanu*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means to check matters and investigate thoroughly so that the believers do not harm or wrong other people.

There is an incident relevant to this command pertaining to a man called Muhallim ibn Jathamah who bore animosity towards another person called 'Amer ibn Al-Adbat Al-Ashga'i. Muhallim then joined a brigade that consisted of a small number of soldiers and coincidentally met Amer ibn Al-Adbat Al-Ashga'i who had embraced Islam. Therefore, 'Amer greeted Muhallim who thought that 'Amer converted to Islam in order to escape from him, so Muhallim killed 'Amer. Then, he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who asked him, 'Why did you not try to investigate the matter? Did he not greet you with the greeting of Islam? On what basis do you claim that he said, 'Peace be upon you' just to save himself from getting killed?' Muhallim then said, 'O Messenger of Allah, please ask Allah to forgive me.' When someone asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask Allah Almighty to forgive him, he immediately recognised the status of the person asking for forgiveness by his faith-inspired insight. He used to say, 'May Allah forgive you,' when he knew that the person seeking forgiveness is exempt from blame, but if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say so, the one asking him to ask Allah to forgive him, knew that he was sinful. Due to the fact that Muhallim and 'Amer bore animosities and antagonism towards each other, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Muhallim, 'May Allah not forgive you' because he realised that the animosity and antagonism which he bore towards 'Amer was the reason why he did not investigate his matter.

Narrators said that Muhallim died seven days after this incident; and when he was buried, the earth threw his body out. So they went to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him about what happened.

Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The earth admits inside it those who are more evil than your companion, but Allah wanted to admonish you.' The Companions then threw the corpse of Muhallim between two edges of a mountain and covered it with stones.(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want people to be deluded into false inferences when an event that contradicts the universal laws known to people takes place. For example, when Ibrahim, the son of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* died, a solar eclipse happened. People then said that the sun eclipsed for the sake of the son of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. But as the matter pertains to the essence of creed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained the truth about it in the following Hadith: 'Al-Mughirah ibn Shu'bah narrated that the sun eclipsed in the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the day when Ibrahim (his son) died. So the people said that the sun had eclipsed because of the death of Ibrahim. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The sun and the moon do not eclipse because of the death or life (i.e. birth) of anyone. When you see the eclipse, pray and invoke Allah.'(2) They said so to honour Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his son Ibrahim, but he wanted to rectify the people's concepts and creeds. Similarly, when the earth expelled the body of Muhallim, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained the matter for the people for them not to be tempted or to conclude that anyone who is not thrown out by earth is a pious person, as there were a lot of disbelievers who were not thrown out by the earth when they were buried. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The earth admitted people who were more evil than Muhallim, but Allah Almighty wills to admonish the people for them not to do what he did. Had he not said that, a little confusion would have occurred and people would have thought that if the earth did not throw a person's body out, this would indicate the righteousness of this person. This would also imply that Abu Jahl and Walid ibn Al-Mughirah are in a good status, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to explain these matters clearly. Therefore, he said, ‘The earth admits into it people who are more evil than Muhallim, but Allah wants to teach the people a lesson and warn them against following his footsteps.(1)

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(1) *Exegesis of the Noble Quran by Imam Ibn Kathir*

(2) *Related by Al-Bukhari*

'O you who believe! when you go to war in Allah's way, make investigation, and do not say to anyone who offers you peace: You are not a believer...' (*an-Nisa’:* 94) .In this regard, I recall that an honourable brother once told me that he was listening to a radio broadcast and the reciter made a mistake during the recitation of the following verse as he said*, ‘Fatathabbatu*’ (investigate) instead of *‘Fatabayyanu’* (investigate*)*: '…if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate…' (*al-Hujurat:* 6). In response to this complaint, I would like to remark that the recitation he listened to is one of the recitation styles of the Quran which always suggest the same meanings. The Arabic verb ‘*Tabayyan*’ means to investigate and check something which is also the same meaning of the Arabic verb of ‘*Tathabbat.*’ It is well-known that the Quran has seven different recitation styles and was written without dots or vocalisation. However, this is not our case, as now the words of the Quran are vocalised with *Fat-ha* (vowel point that sounds like ‘a’), *Kasrah* (vowel point that sounds like ‘i’), and *Dammah* (vowel point that sounds like ‘u’).

It is also well-known that some Arabic letters are similar to each other like *‘Ba’’*, *‘Nun’*, *‘Ta’’*, and *‘Tha’’*, and the dots and vocalisation did not exist before the time of Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf Ath-Thaqafi. People used to recite the Quran depending on their talent for Arabic Language and the teachings of the Revelation. Therefore, the Arabic word ‘*Fatabayyanu*’ is composed of the Arabic letter *‘Fa’’* which did not cause any disagreement on the way it is read without dots in the word, and letters *‘Ta’’, ‘Ba’’’, Ya’’, and ‘Nun.’* These letters make it possible for us to read the word as either ‘*Tathabbatu*’ or *‘Tabayyanu’* depending on the position of the dots. If the dots are omitted, words can be read in different ways, but we must always follow what was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, when someone who did not memorise the Quran was given a *Mus-haf* (copy of the Noble Quran) in order to recite it, he recited a verse as,

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(1) *Related by Ahmad and Ibn Jarir*

'San`atu Allah *waman Ahsanu min* Allah *San'ah.*' There was no disagreement over the Arabic letter '*Sad*' in the Arabic word '*Sibghah*' which is mentioned in the Arabic verse, but there was disagreement over the reading of '*Ba*'' in the same word, as it could be read as '*Ba*'' or '*Nun.*' The same holds for the letter '*Ghin*' which can also be read as ''*Ayn*' if the dots marking the words are not written. According to Hafs recitation style, the verse is read as '*Sibghata Allah waman Ahsanu mina Allah Sibghah.*' '[Ours is] the religion of Allah. And who is better than Allah in [ordaining] religion?' (*al-Baqara:* 138) But when a person who did not properly memorise the Quran read it, he pronounced the Arabic word '*San'ah*' instead of '*Sibghah*' and the verse in both cases has the same meaning.

Yet, it should be borne in mind that the recitation of the Quran is bound by a religious text and not amenable to personal opinion, and must be read in line with the revelation that Jibril (Gabriel) conveyed from Allah Almighty to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, no one should read the Quran according to his personal opinion even if the morphological form allows such recitation. Accordingly, it is said that there are three pillars of any correct recitation of the Quran:

1. It should be in line with the rules of Arabic Language.
2. It should be in line with the *'Uthmany* calligraphy.
3. It should be narrated from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through an authentic chain of narrators whose agreement upon a lie is impossible, and in a manner that does not include any doubt.

These rules were put in poetic form by the person who composed *Tayyibat-un Nashr poem.* He said,

Everything that conforms to the rules of Arabic grammar,
And includes a form of the 'Uthmany calligraphy,
And is narrated from Prophet Muhammad through an authentic chain of narrators,
These are the three pillars of accepted recitation style of the Quran.

The following is Hafs' recitation style of Allah's saying (which means): '... [Allah] said, 'My punishment – I afflict with it whom I will...' (*al-A'raf:* 156).

However, Al-Hasan’s recitation style of the same verse differs from the former one in the word ‘*Asha”* (will), which is mentioned in Hafs’ recitation style, while it is replaced by *Asa’* (commits misdeeds) in Al-Hasan’s recitation style.

Actually, the meaning of the word *Asa’’ which derived from ‘Al-Isa’ah’ differs from the meaning of the word ‘Asha’, but the two recitation styles of the same verse do not differ in the overall meaning. Also, the word ‘Fatabayyanu’ stated in one recitation style is read as ‘Fatathabbatu’ in another recitation style whether in the verse under explanation or in the verse in which* Allah *Almighty says,* '…if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate…' (*al-Hujurat:* 6)

The Arabic word *‘Al-Tabayyun’* means investigation and checking and requires intelligence and acuity so that one can recognise the signs of faith in the one who greets him with the Islamic greeting of peace: '…and do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace ‘You are not a believer...' (*an-Nisa’:* 94).

Every Muslim should be discerning enough in order not to judge anyone according to mere suspicions. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* acted decisively with Usamah ibn Zayd who killed someone after he declared to be a Muslim. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘What about his declaration that there is no god but Allah? Did you not cut his heart open to find out whether he had done so sincerely or not?’ Usamah replied to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘This person said the Testimony of faith only to escape death. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Did you not cut his heart open to find out whether he had done so sincerely or not? Did you kill him in spite of his professing *La ilaha ill Allah* (there is no god but Allah)?’ This Testimony of Faith has sanctity, as it is forbidden to kill anyone who utters it.

Some narrators related that this verse was revealed about Muhallim ibn Jathamah, while others said that it is about Usamah ibn Zayd and others said it is about someone else. Ibn ‘Abbas may *Allah be pleased with them both* also recited a part of the verse, '…and do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace ‘You are not a believer...' (*an-Nisa’:* 94) He said, ‘A person who had just collected the spoils of a battle was once caught by the Muslims, then he greeted them with the Islamic greeting of peace. However, the Muslims killed him and took his spoils. Then, Allah Almighty revealed the following verse about this incident: '…and do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace 'You are not a believer...' (*an-Nisa':* 94).(1)

Scholars who have profound religious knowledge say, 'Survival of a thousand disbelievers is better than killing a single believer wrongfully.' Other narrations state that this verse was revealed about Al-Miqdad ibn Al-Aswad. Al-Bazzar related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas *may Allah be pleased with them* both, that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent a group of Muslim fighter including Al-Miqdad ibn Al-Aswad. When they reached the place in which they would fight a group of people, the latter were dispersed and left the place and none remained except a person who possessed a lot of money and declared *La ilah illa Allah* (there is no god but Allah). However, Al-Miqdad killed him, then one of his Companions said, 'Did you kill a person who declared *La ilah illa Allah* (there is no god but Allah). By Allah, I will mention that to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.' Upon their return to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they said, 'Al-Miqdad killed a person who declared *La ilah illa* Allah (there is no god but Allah).' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Bring forth Al-Miqdad.' Then, he asked Al-Miqdad, 'Did you kill a man who professed *La ilah illa* Allah (there is no god but Allah)? What would you do with regard to (the utterance): *La ilaha illa* Allah (there is no god but Allah) when it comes (before you) on the Day of Resurrection? Then, Allah Almighty revealed: 'O you who have believed, when you go forth [to fight] in the cause of Allah, investigate…'(2) (*an-Nisa':* 94).

'O you who have believed, when you go forth [to fight] in the cause of Allah, investigate; and do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace 'You are not a believer,' aspiring for the goods of worldly life…' (*an-Nisa':* 94).

The saying '*Alqa Ilaykum As-Salam*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to the one who surrendered to the believers or uttered the Islamic greeting of peace. The verse reveals that no one has the right to make accusation of disbelief against any person who has surrendered to him or extended to him the greeting of peace.

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(1) *[Related by Al-Bukhari]*

(2) *[Related by Al-Bazzar]*

The word *A'rad* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to everything that is transitory and temporary. Humans in this sense are also considered as *A'rad* (plural of *A'rad*) because they do not exist permanently. It is also said that man is considered as *A'rad* (having temporary existence) in relation to the universe because it does not depend on human existence. In addition, the universe itself is considered as *A'rad* (having temporary existence) because on day it will perish.

Man can be considered as *A'rad* (having temporary existence) in terms of health conditions which may change from healthiness to sickness. The same holds for body shape (slimness and fatness), complexion as it may change from fairness to darkness by exposure to sunlight and economic status which may change from richness to poverty. Everything relevant to the human being is transitory and temporary and the human being becomes a more stable core than it. Also, if the human being is compared to something more permanent than him, the human being will become *A'rad* (having temporary existence). Accordingly, this is a relative matter and everything but Allah Almighty can be considered as *A'rad* (having temporary existence), and will perish one day as Allah Almighty says: 'And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honour.' (*ar-Rahman:* 27)

And '… do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace 'You are not a believer' aspiring for the goods of worldly life…' (*an-Nisa':* 94) '…aspiring for the goods of worldly life…' (*an-Nisa':* 94) refers to the status of the killer who covets the properties of the person who greets him with the Islamic greeting of peace. The word *A'rad* in the Arabic text of this verse may also refer to the human pride felt when taking revenge from a person towards whom one bears hatred and animosity.

Therefore, when the word *A'rad* (having temporary existence) is associated with the worldly life, it suggests that seeking a valueless and transitory object. Therefore, a poet wrote the following verse in which he expresses the feelings of a person who grieves for losing a worldly possession even though he himself as a human being is bound to die and perish from the worldly life:

The soul that possesses things is bound to perish,
So how come I grieve for something that is lost.

The same holds for the transitory matters relevant to the worldly life. The word *'Dunya'* (i.e. worldly life) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is derived from the root *'Dunuw' (*inferiority) whose opposite is *''Uluw'* (sublimity); thus, the opposite of '*Dunya' (*inferior) is ''*Ulya'* (sublime). The one who properly evaluates the worldly gains is intelligent, wise and discerning. Therefore, he will not take the properties of the person he wants to kill when he greets him with the Islamic greeting of peace because he uses his faith-inspired insight and receives the worldly gains from the One Who has created the whole world. When the rational person desires the worldly gains, he should ask the One Who possesses the whole world rather than seeking them from a human being. Actually, the worldly life itself will not avail him since he may be killed at any time.

'…aspiring for the goods of worldly life; for with Allah are many acquisitions…' (*an-Nisa':* 94). As Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* addresses the human soul that He has created, He knows how it is inclined to the things that have long-term benefits. For example, a person may feel happy if he has the food he needs for lunch and will be happier if he has the food he needs for both lunch and dinner. His happiness will further increase if he has the food he needs for his sustenance for a month or a year. He will even be happier if he owns a piece of land from which he obtains his livelihood and which his children may inherit.

Man loves his life and likes his remembrance to be extended after his death by his offspring. Therefore, man grieves when he does not have children because he knows well that he will inevitably die, so he wishes that his life would be extended and continued through the life of his son. In addition, when he has a son who has his grandson, he rejoices even more because he will be remembered by two generations (his son and grandson). The person who thinks in this manner should understand that even if his name may last for a thousand of generations, he should give attention to his status in the afterlife. In addition, he should bring up his son to be a righteous person in order to supplicate for him after his death.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* confronts the human soul that craves for worldly acquisitions and exposes its reality when He reveals the thoughts and reflections of humans in His Ruling. When Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to forbid the polytheists from entering the Sacred House of Allah, He has known the people's inner thoughts and secrets and has known that the polytheists used to enter Mecca and the Sacred House of Allah Almighty in order to sell their commodities during the commercial season, as their yields will sustain them for the rest of the year. He has known that forbidding the polytheists from entering Mecca would cause the inhabitants of Mecca to worry about the profits that accrued from their trade. He *Glorified is He* says: '…indeed the polytheists are unclean, so let them not approach Al-Masjid Al-Haram after this year…' (*at-Tawba:* 28).

Before the inhabitants of Mecca even wondered how they would live and sell goods, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed: '…and if you fear poverty then Allah will enrich you out of His grace…' (*at-Tawba:* 28). Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* reveals to people their inner thoughts and reflections, as He knows best the thoughts that will be stirred up in the mind of those who listen to the ruling. He is their Creator; therefore, no one can say any further comment.

The saying of Allah Almighty: '…aspiring for the goods of worldly life; for with Allah are many acquisitions…' (*an-Nisa':* 94) applies to every age. Subsequently, He says: '…for with Allah are many acquisitions…' (*an-Nisa':* 94). Glorified is Allah the All-Sustainer, the All-Giver. Therefore, I like seeing people adorning their houses with artistic arrangements upon which the following verse is written: '…and if you fear poverty then Allah will enrich you out of His grace if He please…' (*at-Tawba:* 28). The same holds for the saying of Allah Almighty: '…aspiring for the goods of worldly life; for with Allah are many acquisitions…' (*an-Nisa':* 94).

This may touch the hearts of responsible officials and cause them to turn to Allah Almighty. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…You [yourselves] were like that before; then Allah conferred His favour upon you, so investigate. Indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.' (*an-Nisa':* 94) This is a call for those who witnessed the revelation of the Quran to reconsider and recall their recent past. They should not have accused other Muslim brothers - who greeted them with the Islamic greeting of peace - of disbelief because they might conceal the matter of their conversion to Islam from their families because they were disbelievers. This was the case at the advent of Islam, as earlier Muslims used to hide their acceptance of Islam from their families who were disbelievers, as they were a despised minority that hid their faith. However, Allah Almighty did not send to them anyone to inspect the sincerity of their intentions. Therefore, Allah Almighty instructs the believers concerned with this verse to consider that those people – who greeted them with the Islamic greetings of peace - may undergo the same experience they underwent previously.

'…You [yourselves] were like that before; then Allah has conferred His favour upon you…' (*an-Nisa':* 94). Allah *Glorified is He* has conferred upon them the favour of causing them to become exalted and distinguished when they embraced Islam and a Muslim has become dignified and no one can despise him due to embracing Islam. Allah Almighty mentions again the word '*Fatabayyanu*' (investigate) in the Arabic text of the verse after He used it at the beginning of the verse. It means that a Muslim should not kill any person who greeted him with the Islamic greeting of peace merely because of a material gain. Allah Almighty has mentioned the word '*Fatabayyanu'* (investigate) again; when it is mentioned for the first time, it is used as a preparation for the reason why some believers regarded the person who greeted them with the Islamic greeting of peace as a disbeliever which is expressed in His saying: '…aspiring for the goods of worldly life; for with Allah are many acquisitions…' (*an-Nisa':* 94). Then the word is mentioned again in order to suggest the result following from such an attitude: '…so investigate. Indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.' (*an-Nisa':* 94)

The Legislation of Allah *Glorified is He* has certain grounds, as He knows best that which rectifies the human soul. No one should think that Allah Almighty created and guided us to faith in order to let us down in the system of life; rather, He created and bestowed upon us the righteous path in order for them to be a model for others and so that all people would notice that the worldly life and gains submit to those who follow the path set by Allah *Glorified is He*. '…Indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.' (*an-Nisa':* 94)

Allah Almighty instructs the believers to beware of concealing their bad intentions behind false pretension because the One Who sought for reward is the One Who judges and watches over people and knows everything about them. The person who killed another one who greeted him with the Islamic greeting of peace did not do so because the latter did not convert to Islam. Rather, he did so because he and the one whom he killed bore animosity and hatred towards each other. He should have known that Allah Almighty knows the inner thoughts and intentions.

Allah Almighty commands the believer to investigate the matter when he goes forth to fight in His cause before killing someone whom he suspects his belief, especially when the suspected person greets him with the Islamic greeting of peace. Allah *Glorified is He* reminds the believers that they too used to conceal their faith from people.

If the earlier believers underwent the same experience when they converted to Islam, they had to consider that other Muslims might also resort to concealing their faith. They had to be sure that Allah is Ever-Acquainted with what they do. The hatred and animosity that may cause a Muslim to kill another Muslim is not hidden from Him *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* has tackled in the previous verses the fights taking place between the Muslims and disbelievers, and has enjoined that a Muslim is prevented from killing another believer so that the Muslims do not lose a member of the believer’s community. The intention of Allah Almighty behind this ruling is also that the life of each believer involves goodness to faith on earth. Therefore, we should preserve the life of every believer because he will help spread faith on earth. If a believer kills another believer involuntarily, he should follow the ruling which Allah Almighty has clarified in verse number 92 of the chapter of *an-Nisa’*.

Subsequently, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has willed to clarify the difference between those who hold back from striving in the cause of Allah Almighty and those who fought in His Cause. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّا يَسْتَوِى ٱلْقَٰعِدُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُو۟لِى ٱلضَّرَرِ وَٱلْمُجَٰهِدُونَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ ۚ فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُجَٰهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ عَلَى ٱلْقَٰعِدِينَ دَرَجَةً ۚ
وَكُلًّا وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ وَفَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُجَٰهِدِينَ عَلَى ٱلْقَٰعِدِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٩٥﴾

Those believers who stay at home, apart from those with an incapacity, are not equal to those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in God’s way. God has raised such people to a rank above those who stay at home – although He has promised all believers a good reward, those who strive are favoured with a tremendous reward above those who stay at home [95] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 95)

There is an incident relevant to this verse. Deducing reflections from this story requires vigilance and acuity that ought to teach us the manner in which Allah Almighty addresses His creation. Zayd ibn Thabit was entrusted with writing the Quran revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, he was entrusted with collecting the Quran from a certain type of white stones, bones and from what the Companions had memorised. Zayd related: ‘I was once sitting beside Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when peace and tranquillity suddenly descended upon him, a state which he often experiences before the descent of the Revelation. At this instant his thigh lent heavily on mine to the extent that I was afraid it would break it. In other words, this means that the thigh of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was heavy.’

When the Revelation descended to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it may have had a material effect on his status to the extent that if he was riding an animal, people would notice that he was receiving the Revelation because the animal he rode would kneel down underneath him. Therefore, if the thigh of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lent on that of Zayd ibn Thabit, he must feel the weight of the thigh of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was receiving the Revelation. Zayd said, ‘I was afraid that his thigh would bend or break my leg. When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was relieved, he told me to write: 'Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled - and the *Mujahidin…*' (*an-Nisa':* 95) Then, Ibn Umm Maktum who was - as known - blind said, 'O Messenger of Allah, what about those who are incapable of striving in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He*?' The faith-inspired alertness and vigilance of Ibn Umm Maktum made him understand the extent to which the verse was relevant to him, that he was incapable of striving or fighting in the cause of Allah Almighty. He knew that if this was the end of the verse, he would not be equal to those who strive in His cause. Therefore, his attentiveness made him ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; 'What about those who are incapable of striving in Allah's Cause? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered into a state of tranquillity again and then was relieved. He asked Zayd ibn Thabit, to write: 'Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled - and the *Mujahidin*, [who strive and fight] in the cause of Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 95). This part of the verse was revealed as a comforting response to those who are incapable of fighting like Ibn Umm Maktum. But someone may say, 'Would the completion of the verse depend on Ibn Umm Maktum's question?

Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to draw the attention of every believer that once he receives a verse of Allah Almighty, he should ponder on its meaning and think of his status being relevant to any issue mentioned it. This is clarified by the manner in which Ibn Umm Maktum reacted when he heard the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveying the verse Allah Almighty revealed to him. Allah *Glorified is He* instructs us to ponder on our status pertaining to any ruling or issue mentioned in any verse. When Ibn Umm Maktum heard the verse, he thought of his status in its light, an action which Allah Almighty wants His slaves to adopt when they receive His verses.

Zayd ibn Thabit said, 'I wrote it.' The accurate performance of Zayd ibn Thabit indicates the truth of the narration. If he first wrote: 'Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] and the *Mujahidin...*' (*an-Nisa':* 95), would there be a space for him to add '…other than the disabled…' which Allah Almighty has revealed? So where would he write it? This implies that Zayd ibn Thabit had to decrease the font in order to be able to write: '…other than the disabled…' in between. Zayd ibn Thabit said: '…other than the disabled…' was revealed alone and I was looking at the place to write it at the crack of the shoulder bone (at this time the Arabs used to write on the shoulder bones of animals). The shoulder bone on which Zayd ibn Thabit was writing was cracked, which served as a sign on it.

Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to instruct the believers to receive the verses He has revealed with faith-inspired attentiveness so that their ears would hear only what their minds reflect on, in order for them to understand their status in relation to the verses. The believers should reflect on the verses again with their hearts so that the creed becomes instilled in their souls.

This is the story of Zayd ibn Thabit, Ibn Umm Maktum, and the Revelation with regard to this verse: 'Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled – and the *Mujahidin…*' (*an-Nisa':* 95)

There are instances in language when a single verb requires two subjects rather than a single one. For example, Zayd and 'Amr shared so and so. The same holds for the case when we describe football players, we find that players pass the ball to each other. We say, 'The players pass the ball to each other, one after another.'

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Not equal', this indicates that there are two unequal things. Therefore, both of them are grammatically the subjects of the verb '*Yastawy*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse. Thus, '*Al-Mujahidun*' (those who strive in the cause of Allah) cannot be deemed equal to '*Al-Qa'idin*' (those who remain at home and hold back from this striving) yet both words are subject and object of the verb '*Yastawi*' respectively.

'Not equal are those believers remaining [at home]…' (*an-Nisa':* 95), i.e. the '*Al-Qa'idin*' (believers remaining at home and holding back from strife). The opposite in the verse is '*Al-Mujahidin'* (those who strive in the cause of Allah). However, the opposite of the word *'Al-Qa'idin'* (those who are sitting - in colloquial language) is '*Al-Qa'imin*' (those who are standing up) and the opposite of the Arabic word *'Al-Mujahidin'* (those who strive in the cause of Allah) is *'Ghayr Al-Mujahidin' (*those who do not strive in the cause of Allah). Thus, it is possible to say that '*Al-Qa'idin*' (those who are standing up) are not equal to '*Al-Qa'imin*' (those who are standing up), or that *'Al-Mujahidin'* (those who strive in the cause of Allah) are not equal to

‘Ghayr Mujahidin’ (those who do not strive in the Cause of Allah). So what is the reason for using the word *‘Al-Qa’idin’* (those who remain at home and hold back from fighting) – in the context of this verse) and *Al-Mujahidin’* (those who strive in the Cause of Allah)?

Allah *Glorified is He* reveals that with the advent of Islam every believer regarded himself a soldier in a state of readiness to fight. The early Muslims were never in a relaxed state; rather, they were prepared to fight as if each of them was constantly standing to respond to the call of duty whenever it came. This also implies that the one who passively sits down should not actually be counted among the believers. This point is further elucidated by the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘The best of people is a man who is holding his horse's rein in the cause of Allah (in *Jihad*) and is galloping towards the place whenever he hears a call for war or detects a note of danger; he goes on proceeding, seeking martyrdom wherever it is expected. And a man who retires with some sheep in at the top of a mountain or a valley. He performs prayer regularly and pays the *zakat*, continues worshiping his Lord till death overtakes him. He does not interfere in the affairs of the people except for betterment.’ (1)

The believer who is not in a state of readiness to fight is considered ‘*Qa’id’* (sitting and remaining at home), where as the opposite is ‘*Qa’im*’ (standing up) as known. Allah Almighty says in another verse: '…remember Allah standing, sitting…' (*an-Nisa’:* 103).

This verse indicates that the opposite of ‘*Qiyam*’ (standing up) is ‘Qu’ud’ (sitting down). It should be taken into consideration that each word has a specific meaning; some people think that the Arabic word ‘*Qu’ud’* is the same as ‘*Julus*’ since both mean (sitting). But if the semantics of the two words are considered more scrupulously, it will be noted that the word ‘*Qu’ud’* is always used as the opposite of ‘*Qiyam*’ (standing upor standing), whereas ‘*Julus*’ is the opposite of ‘*Idtija*’’ (reclining). Thus, people say that a person was

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(1) *[Related by Muslim in the chapter on Government, Ibn Majah in the chapter on Tribulations, and Ahmad]…* The word “*Hi`ah*” which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the Hadith, means the sound heard as the enemy comes, “*Faz`ah*” means proceeding to encounter the enemy and “*Sha`fah*” means at the top of a mountain.

'*Mudtaji*'' (reclining) then '*Jalis*' (sitting up), or a person was '*Qa'im*' (standing up) then *'Qa'id'* (sitting down). Allah Almighty says: 'Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled…' (*an-Nisa':* 95).

Qu'ud' is always used as the opposite of '*Qiyam*' (standing up). This indicates that the *'Mujahidun'* (those who strive in Allah's Cause) are constantly standing prepared and attentive, waiting for the call to strive in the cause of Allah. The Hadith cited above expands the sphere of responsibility of the *Mujahid* (the person who strives in the cause of Allah), as it depicts him as being constantly ready, on the back of his horse and holding its bridle in order that nothing may surprise him.

Is the inequality of the one who holds back from fighting in the cause of Allah and the one who strives in His cause a questionable matter? No; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to clarify a hidden matter concerning faith in a manner lucid enough for everyone to understand.

Some people may say to a student, 'Whoever studies succeeds and whoever does not study fails.' Although this is a self-evident matter, people may say it to clarify this point to the student so that he keeps attentive to his responsibilities. Similarly, when Allah Almighty says: 'Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled - and the *Mujahidin*, [who strive and fight] in the cause of Allah…'' (*an-Nisa':* 95), this does not mean that a single mind at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would ever think that that those who strive in Allah's Cause were equal to those who remain at home and hold back from fighting. However, Allah Almighty puts it forward as a matter pertinent to faith within the context of a statement on faith. Subsequently, Allah Almighty draws the believers' attention to those who hold back from fighting and cannot be deemed equal to those who strive in His cause. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…other than the disabled…' (*an-Nisa':* 95). The word '*Darar*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means the harm that afflicts something, such as illness which harms a person's health. Allah Almighty clarifies this point when He says: 'There is not upon the weak or upon the ill or upon those who do not find anything to spend any discomfort when they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger. There is not upon the doers of good any cause [for blame]. And Allah is

Forgiving and Merciful. Nor [is there blame] upon those who, when they came to you that you might give them mounts, you said, 'I can find nothing for you to ride upon.' They turned back while their eyes overflowed with tears out of grief that they could not find something to spend [for the cause of Allah].' (*at-Tawba:* 91-92)

The Arabic word '*Da'f*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means weakness that harms the person's health and well-being. Illness is considered as a type of harm. By the same token, the verse refers to the believers who are not to be blamed for not striving in the cause of Allah Almighty, such as those who did not have enough money to spend and those who went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to join the battle, but there were not enough riding animals to carry them. Consequently, they turned back, while their eyes overflowed with tears out of grief that they could not find something to spend for the cause of Allah Almighty. The believers among them would grieve that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not have enough horses or any other riding animals to transport them to the battle field.

'Nor in those who when they came to you that you might carry them, you said: I cannot find that on which to carry you; they went back while their eyes overflowed with tears on account of grief for not finding that which they should spend.' (*at-Tawba:* 92) They went back, while their eyes were overflowing with tears. The word *tawalaw* (went back) has a considerable significance. So the True Lord does not say that their eyes overflow with tears and stops without adding "went back"; they do not shed tears in the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Rather, their tears were while they were going back. There emotional response was due to the excessive grief they felt as a result of not being able to participate in fighting. The word *tafeed* (overflowed) indicates that tears deluged the entire eye. Thus, they were not faking grief; rather, they were overwhelmed by their emotions. The one who fakes crying squeezes his eyes and exerts a lot of effort to attract attention. By contrast, the grief of the believers who failed to participate overwhelmed them and so tears flooded from their eyes.

There is another verse in which Allah Almighty specified the cases in which a believer is not required to fight: 'There is no harm in the blind, nor is there any harm in the lame, nor is there any harm in the sick (if they do not go forth); and whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, He will cause him to enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, and whoever turns back, He will punish him with a painful punishment.' (*al-Fath:* 17) Those then are the disabled ones. "'The holders back from among the believers, not having any injury, and those who strive hard in Allah's way with their property and their persons are not equal' (*an-Nisa’:* 95). As long as they cannot be deemed equal, one wonders who is better. This is explained in the rest of the verse that encompasses the clear, faith-based statement: ' Allah has made those who strive with their property and their persons to excel the holders back a (high) degree and to each (class) Allah has promised the ultimate good.' (*an-Nisa’:* 95)

Allah Almighty has promised the ultimate good unto both groups because both of them are believers. But the one who strives hard in Allah’s Cause is exalted a degree above those who remain passive. If someone wonders: why did Allah Almighty promise the ultimate good unto both? To this person I respond: We have to be attentive and properly understand and deliberate the Quran upon reading it. Would Allah not reward the one whom He destined to suffer an ailment that kept him from fighting yet tolerated His decree? Such a person is bound to reap a reward for his deed. The True Lord must therefore give a chance to the one who did not receive such a reward to earn another one so that everyone would have equal opportunity in their religious pursuit. For this reason Allah Almighty says: 'and to each (class) Allah has promised the ultimate good.' (*an-Nisa’:* 95) The ultimate good for the disabled is the reward they receive for their patience and endurance for the calamity that befell them, whereas the one who was not befallen by a detriment takes a reward for fighting in the cause of Allah Almighty. In this manner, everyone receives the ultimate good from Allah *Glorified is He*: '…and to each (class) Allah has promised the ultimate good.' (*an-Nisa’:* 95)

Nonetheless, Allah Almighty sets an additional reward for the one who strives in His cause in distinction from the one who holds back. At the beginning of the verse He assigns a “high degree” of exaltation to the one who strives in His cause, then, He speaks about a mighty reward that awaits him. So, what is the meaning of this mighty reward? The following verses respond to this question:

دَرَجَٰتٖ مِّنۡهُ وَمَغۡفِرَةٗ وَرَحۡمَةٗۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٩٦﴾

high ranks conferred by Him, as well as forgiveness, and mercy: God is most forgiving and merciful [96]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 96)

Allah *Glorified is He* assigned a degree to those who are disabled, yet, He privileged those who strive in His cause over the disabled by a number of degrees. When we encounter or hear the word *daraja* (degree) we should know that it refers to status; but status, of itself, is not enough for a comprehensive elucidation of the meaning; it is rather, an ascending status; a status of elevation and exaltation. By contrast, if we want to indicate a change to a lower or more inferior status we use the word '*darakat*' (descending degrees) and not *darajat* (degrees). But are these degrees exclusively for those who strive in the cause of Allah Almighty? No, we must notice the difference between departing from one's home-land and abandoning one's family for the sake of striving and fighting in the cause of Allah Almighty on one hand, and the process of fighting in itself on the other hand. '*Jihad'* (fighting in the cause of Allah) itself requires a faith-inspired will. For this reason, The True Lord puts forward the following saying in the chapter of *at-Tawba*: 'It did not seem the people of Medina and those around about them of the dwellers of the desert to remain behind the Messenger of Allah, nor should they desire (anything) for themselves in preference to him; this is because there afflicts them not thirst or fatigue or hunger in the way of Allah, nor do they tread a path which enrages the disbelievers, nor do they attain from the enemy what they attain, but a good work is written down to them on account of it; surely Allah does not waste the reward of the doers of good;* Nor do they spend anything that may be spent, small or great, nor do they traverse a valley, but it is written down to their credit, that Allah may reward them with the best of what they have done.' (*at-Tawba:* 120-121)

In this verse, the True Lord explains that it is inappropriate for the people of Medina and the nomads living around them to fall behind and not participate in striving in His cause along with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They should not be content with relaxation, comfort and luxury, while the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is in asperity. Inasmuch as he went forth to fight in the cause of Allah Almighty, they must also go because the reward is enormous. They will be rewarded for any pain or suffering they may endure in doing a good deed. Similarly, they will be rewarded for any hunger they may suffer or any trouble they go through. They will be rewarded for any step they take that angers the disbelievers, (by taking over a place that the disbelievers wanted to dominate). Allah Almighty will also reward them whenever they defeat an enemy; for Allah Almighty rewards people for more than they actually do.

Scholars have subsumed these divine endowments under seven degrees. Someone may achieve all of the degrees. Another who has only endured thirst gets the reward for such endurance. Another who has suffered exhaustion will only receive the reward for enduring exhaustion. A third may have only suffered a dire necessity; a fourth may have achieved three degrees and a fifth may have attained all these degrees.

The seven degrees could be enumerated as follows: suffering thirst, exhaustion, hunger, stepping in a place that infuriates the disbelievers (taking over a place or a well-defended fortification of theirs), defeating and punishing the enemy, small or big expenses and crossing any valley in the cause of Allah Almighty. These, as scholars explained, are the seven strata deeds for which Allah Almighty rewards its doers more than they did. Whoever attains these seven degrees has attained a great status. Every *'mujahid'* (striver) in the cause of Allah Almighty gets rewarded in proportion to the effort and work he exerted. Some striver may attain one degree; others may attain two, three, four, five, six or all of the seven. Let us read the two foregoing verses together:

'The holders back from among the believers, not having any injury and those who strive hard in Allah's way with their property and their persons are not equal; Allah has made the strivers with their property and their persons to excel the holders back a (high) degree, and to each (class) Allah has promised good; and Allah shall grant to the strivers above the holders back a mighty reward: *(High) degrees from Him and protection and mercy, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*an-Nisa':* 95-96)

Reading these verses, we realise that Allah Almighty wants the believers to strive in His cause and exert effort until His word becomes the highest of all. Thus, if man believes, he should never fall behind and stray from the faith-based unity. As long as he has availed himself of faith why would he not become one of those who benefit others with their faith? Allah Almighty wants to call up everyone whose heart has been touched by faith, even if he were in a place dominated by disbelievers, to rid himself of being surrounded by them and alternatively join his brothers in faith. Allah Almighty also induces every believer to spread faith to others and to practically demonstrate that he loves people and desires for them what he desires for himself. But there were some who said: ‘we are weak and incapable of either emigrating or fighting in Allah's Cause. Here the Quran clearly states that no one has an excuse not to participate in fighting in Allah’s Cause and for the cause of advocating the religion of Allah *Glorified is He*. The True Lord thus says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ تَوَفَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ ظَالِمِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا۟ فِيمَ كُنتُمْ ۖ قَالُوا۟ كُنَّا مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ
قَالُوٓا۟ أَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَرْضُ ٱللَّهِ وَٰسِعَةً فَتُهَاجِرُوا۟ فِيهَا ۚ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَسَآءَتْ مَصِيرًا ﴿٩٧﴾

When the angels take the souls of those who have wronged themselves, they ask them, ‘What circumstances were you in?’ They reply, ‘We were oppressed in this land,’ and the angels say, ‘But was God’s earth not spacious enough for you to migrate to some other place?’ These people will have Hell as their refuge, an evil destination [97] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 97)

Those are the ones who wrong themselves inasmuch as they do not take part in fighting in Allah’s Cause. This is what happens to them when the angels ‘*tawaffahumu’* (seize their souls in death). ‘*At-Tawaffi’* means *‘qabd’* (an Arabic word that has several meanings: (grab – get hold of – collect money). For instance, one may say in Arabic: *‘tawfaytu dayni’* meaning I have completely collected or taken back the loan I lent to so and so person. One may also say Allah *Glorified is He* has collected, to death, this human being, meaning that Allah Almighty fully seized the soul of the human being and took it away. Collecting to death happens upon the orders of higher commander such as the True Lord’s deputy, the Angel of death; it is widely assumed that the Angel of Death whose name is Azra’il follows. After Azra’il comes, the angels then assist him. Death may thereby be attributed to either Allah (Almighty as the higher commander or to the angels as in His saying: "‘…until, when death approaches any of you, Our messengers cause him to die...' (*al-An'am:* 61). Or it may be attributed to the angel of death: 'Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall cause you to die…' (*as-Sajda:* 11).

When the True Lord employs these three styles in describing the process of death, would this be considered a difference and contradiction in the Quranic style? No; it is rather a clarification of the hierarchy of assignment set by Allah Almighty. He is the highest commander who issues the order to the Angel of death and then the Angel of death orders his assistants. There are analogous examples in our day to day life -and to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the supreme and most exalted parables. A student may go to his school after the final examination, then turns back home and say: I have found that I failed and the cause of my failure is the teachers who deliberately caused my failure. His father may then answer him and say: your teachers had no hand in this. Rather, the laws set for grading exams by the ministry of education caused your failure. The student may then say: the headmaster of the school is the one who caused me to fail. This is a true statement because the headmaster of the school applies the laws according to which he makes decisions concerning the passing or failure of students. The student may also claim that the minister of education is the cause of his failure. This is also a true statement because the minister along with his assistants, are all the ones who set the main guidelines according to which the grades of each student are calculated. Accordingly, if the student says: the state has caused me to fail, this would be a true statement too because he understood the hierarchy of law enactment and enforcement from bottom to top. He also realised that any of these levels or echelons may be deemed the actor or cause of his failure. We may thus understand that when the True Lord says: ' Allah takes the souls at the time of their death…' (*az-Zumar:* 42), this statement is equally true to the following saying: 'Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall cause you to die…' (*as-Sajda:* 11). This is similar to the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Our messengers cause him to die....' (*al-An'am:* 61) All these sayings are true because they related to the hierarchy set by the commander.

'Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves...' (*an-Nisa':* 97). Wronging is to give someone, who has no right, something which you have taken from the one who has the right to this thing. Wronging requires or involves someone who acts as a wrong-doer, another who is wronged and an issue or matter in connection with which the wronging takes place. But how may the angels collect in death a human being in a state of wronging himself? This human being must have done something to deserve such a death. The human being develops the moral of a believing soul after he believes in Allah Almighty and His path; however, his self may tempt him to violate and deviate from the path of Allah Almighty. In such a case, there rises a conflict between two issues: the sense of responsibility inspired by his believing soul with which he accepted the path of Allah *Glorified is He* and the temptation of the self that pushes him to deviate from that same path. In this vein, a dialogue ensues between the responsibility inspired by the believing soul and the temptation of the self that pushes one to deviate from the path of Allah Almighty. If the believing soul triumphs and wins, one knows that his self has become tranquil and happy. He thus says to himself: ‘had you yielded and succumbed to the temptation to deviate, you would have satisfied a transient desire that would ultimately lead you to be tortured by the fire in the Hereafter. By resisting this desire you did justice and salvaged yourself. Had you succumbed to your transient desire you would have sinned against yourself.’

Analogous things take place in our day-to-day life: If a mother pampers and spoils her son while his father is asking him to study and deters him in order to undertake his responsibility to study, such a mother would be wronging her son. The True Lord gives us an idea about the conflict between the believing soul and the deviant self that only wants to pursue its interest. He therefore says(1): 'And relate to them the story of the two sons of Adam with truth when they both offered an offering, but it was accepted from one of them and was not accepted from the other. He said: I will most certainly slay you. (The other) said: Allah only accepts from those who guard (against evil).' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 27)

Here Abel says to Caine (the two sons of Adam mentioned in this verse): But why would you kill me? I am not the one who accepted the sacrifice; it is rather, Allah Almighty is the One Who did. What sin did I then commit? Afterwards this dialogue follows: 'If you will stretch forth your hand towards me to slay me, I am not one to stretch forth my hand towards you to slay you surely I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds' (*al-Ma'ida:* 28).

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(1) The story of Abel and Caine (Adam’s son)

Let us pay attention to the following wise saying of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*: 'Then his mind facilitated to him the slaying of his brother…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30). It is as if there is a conflict inside Caine between two commands 'kill' and 'do not kill.' The believing soul is telling him: 'do not kill' and the temptation-driven self is saying: 'you have to kill' him. His temptation-driven self ultimately triumphed, led him to kill his brother and facilitated such an atrocity to him. Then, after he had killed his brother, his flaming anger calmed down and he became of the regretful. Then, the signs of such loss started to reveal themselves and become evident. Allah *Glorified is He* then sent forth a raven to scratch and dig the earth in order to bury another raven. Upon witnessing such a scene, Caine said: "'Woe me, do I lack the strength that I should be like this crow and cover the dead body of my brother?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31)

We thus realise that wronging oneself is to violate and oppose what Allah Almighty has decreed for the self to benefit in a complete and eternal manner. Nevertheless, the self may haste after its love for temptations and its desire for immediate benefit and utility that does not last for eternity. When man fulfils this immediate, transient need for an immediate benefit, he is actually wronging himself. 'Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves - [the angels] will say, "In what [condition] were you?' (*an-Nisa':* 97). Thus the angels ask those who sin against themselves: in what condition were you, by reference to your faith. In this context, the interrogative form is used for rebuking and censuring, in the sense of why or how come you wronged yourselves? Why did you not do as your brothers did? Why did you not emigrate and join the parade of faith and the parade of *'jihad'* (fighting in Allah's Cause)? Why did you stay in your places, locked up, engulfed and incapable of either moving or escaping? The answer of those who wronged themselves is: '…We were oppressed in the land.' (*an-Nisa':* 97) By Allah (when Allah Almighty clarifies what happens on the Day of Judgement in such illustration, would we have time to avail ourselves of what Allah Almighty will do) when this day comes? We will definitely not be able to do so. The reason is that we will not be able to reverse our deeds and mistakes at this point. The True Lord depicts to us this scene due to His Subtlety and Kindness. It is also a warning to all of us: beware lest the time comes and what I have already foretold and warned you against happens. In such instance, none of you will be able to redeem his life in order to do good deeds. Rather, each of you should now consider his state.

'Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves - [the angels] will say, "In what [condition] were you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land.' (*an-Nisa':* 97) The statement: '…"We were oppressed in the land"…' (*an-Nisa':* 97) indicates that other people caused them to be weak; this means that they were not capable of going out and emigrating and did not even know the means of doing so. Furthermore, they were worried about their wealth and their homes. Those who caused them to be weak told them: if you go out and depart from your cities do not take anything of your wealth with you. These are some of the aspects of causing someone to be weak. In this context, the angels reply that this discourse is inappropriate and futile. The angels say: '"Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?" (*an-Nisa':* 97) 'It is as if this is another warning and a declaration that this kind of statement and such kind of pretext is valueless because the one who is concerned about his/her position and wealth more than he is about obeying Allah Almighty, has connected his belief to worldly means. By contrast, the one who places Allah Almighty over and above his position, offspring and everything else is the one who has confidence in Allah *Glorified is He* because He is the giver and granter of all means.

'Was the earth of Allah not spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?…' (*an-Nisa':* 97) This saying by the angles comes from the higher law. The True Lord created all the creation and made them inhabit the earth. This earth is thus not for someone or some group exclusive of others. Whoever thinks that a place is not wide enough for him to forsake the domain of evil should go to another place.

If a man, due to his injustice, arrogance, and tyranny, has limited and imposed restrictions on places, to the effect that no one is capable of moving from one place to another except after a long series of complications that precludes the transportation from one place to the other, this is something contradictory to the essence of Allah *Glorified is He* choosing man to be his caliphate (representative) on earth. The reason is that this mission did not distribute people and assign them to certain pieces of land. Rather, every human being is the vicegerent of Allah Almighty on earth in accordance with the saying of the True Lord: 'And the earth, He has set it for living creatures;' (*ar-Rahman:* 10)

Allah *Glorified is He* made the earth subservient to man. "The earth" in this context, refers to any part of the earth and "creatures" refers to the totality of terrestrial creatures. If the people do not heed this matter and recognise it as a social and universal principle, the entire world will lapse into corruption and hardship. The thing that really corrupts life on earth is the promulgation of such statements as: the population density prevents so and so country from securing sufficient food for its people. People say so even though there might be other pieces of land that needs labour force to be reclaimed. This is why humanity faces a paradoxical situation: there is land in certain countries that needs labour power and there may be people in a certain country who just need a piece of land.

The earth should be open for roaming so that the land that needs labour may find enough labourers in the countries that have no enough land. All of this fuss spreading in the universe is because there is land without labour and labour without land. If a human being finds that there is a place which is not wide enough for his needs, he should thereby move to another place. If this was the case all of mankind would be in a state of happiness and contentment. Furthermore, whoever breaches this rule ought to know that he does not follow the conditions of being the vicegerent of Allah Almighty on earth. The cause of corruption on earth is that man, the caliphate of Allah Almighty on earth, has become oblivious to the finite bound of his capacity as the vicegerent of Allah Almighty and deemed himself an original, abiding element in the universe. Insofar, as man thinks so of himself, this constitutes corruption on earth: 'Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves - [the angels] will say, "In what [condition] were you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land." The angels will say, "Was the earth of Allah not spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?" For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination.' (*an-Nisa':* 97)

Thus, if one stays content with injustice and does not apply his thought and reason to reflect upon the universe, realise how the earth is wide enough to contain him, one should know that he risks facing an evil destiny. The reason is that Allah *Glorified is He* has created the entire universe for man in order for him to serve as His vicegerent in it. As for those who escape punishment and the scolding of the angels, they ought to know that they are bound to reach a moment of death. They are the ones that the True Lord describes in the following verse:

إِلَّا ٱلۡمُسۡتَضۡعَفِينَ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ وَٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلۡوِلۡدَٰنِ لَا
يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ حِيلَةٗ وَلَا يَهۡتَدُونَ سَبِيلٗا (٩٨)

but not so the truly helpless men, women, and children
who have no means in their power nor any way to
leave [98] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 98)

We ought to discern the difference between someone who claims to be weak and another who really is weak. There is someone who may have accepted to be weak even before anyone may have caused him to be so and thus turned himself into a weak person. This is the one who claims and alleges to be weak. As for the one who really is weak, he must be among those whom the True Lord specified: 'Except the weak from among the men and the children who have not, in their power, the means, nor can they find a way (to escape) ' (*an-Nisa':* 98) Those are the men, women or children who are truly weak due to the nature of their incapacity.

Would a boy among boys be considered weak? The answer is yes; the reason is that weakness may either be accidentally caused by external factors or self-caused and induced. For instance, someone may be weak because they are possessed by others and are incapable of acting or moving around on their own. The same holds for women; a woman ought not to walk alone and be asked to protect herself. Rather, someone must accompany and protect her, whether it be her husband or one of the men whom she is forbidden to marry. The same holds for children because, by nature, they are not obligated to any assignments from Allah Almighty. They are thus excluded from the scope of the angels' scolding because they do not have, in their power, the means nor can they find a way (to escape).

This is the precise articulation of the Quran. Man has been assigned by Allah *Glorified is He* to depart from the place wherein he is wronged by others even by manoeuvring. Manoeuvring is the application of thought in a way that gives man a bigger opportunity than what is actually available for him. Thus, man may have little or impaired strength; but by manoeuvring one may expand the opportunities of strength. Here is an illustrative example. Someone may try to carry a rock. However he may not be capable of doing so with his own hands. He thus brings forth an iron bar of which he makes a lever under which he places a wheel to roll down the rock. This is a trick or manoeuvre. The same holds for the podiums that we use for construction; they are also a product of mental manoeuvring.

One wonders how the one who built the pyramids placed the last rock on its top. He did so by manoeuvring. The same holds for the one who sculpts from granite an obelisk, that is more than ten meters tall, then moved and erected. He must have done so by way of manoeuvring. Thus, intellectual manoeuvring is a way of thinking that adds to man’s capacity and power over what he needs to achieve. The same applies to knowing the right way to migration. Knowing the immigration roads from Mecca to Medina at the time of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* required expertise so that one may avoid wastelands and intertwined paths. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* immigrated to Medina he used a guide for the road, though this guide was a disbeliever because travelling down this land was not possible without a guide. Let us consider the saying of the True Lord:

فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن يَعۡفُوَ عَنۡهُمۡۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَفُوًّا غَفُورٗا ﴿٩٩﴾

God may well pardon these, for He is most pardoning
and most forgiving [99] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 99)

The word “these” refers to those who have been mentioned in the verse preceding this one: 'Except the weak from among the men and the children who have not, in their power, the means, nor can they find a way (to escape) ' (*an-Nisa’:* 98). Despite this, when Allah *Glorified is He* refers to those who are truly weak in the fullest sense He says: 'So these, it may be, Allah will pardon them.' (*an-Nisa':* 99) It would have sufficed had the True Lord said: 'so these, Allah pardoned them,' but the True Lord uses, "it may be", to urge them to hope for Allah's forgiveness. Hoping may either be a possibility or impossibility. We know that *('asa)* —the Arabic word here translated as "it may be"— expresses hope and that it is often used when what follows is something desirable to us and we would like it to happen. You may indeed hope for something from another person and say: May you well do so and so thing. One may say: May I well do such and such thing. In this context, the speaker is the one who has the power to undertake the action at stake. This is a little bit stronger. But man's power may fail him; for this reason one should better say: May Allah *Glorified is He* well do so and so; this is a reliance on absolute power. If Allah *Glorified is He* Himself is the One Who says: 'it may be, Allah will pardon them,' (*an-Nisa': 99*). This is an enticement and encouragement put forward by the All-Generous and All-Capable.

The True Lord describes for us the condition of the one who dies and the angels collect him to death, when he was wronging him/herself, by staying in a land where he/she suffers injustice, though it was in his/her hands to immigrate to another Muslim land wherein belief and faith prevail. Nevertheless, whoever does so but still takes it upon himself to achieve something for the cause of faith, Allah *Glorified is He* would support him/her. Allah Almighty says:

وَمَن يُهَاجِرْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ يَجِدْ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ مُرَٰغَمًا كَثِيرًا وَسَعَةً ۚ وَمَن يَخْرُجْ مِنۢ بَيْتِهِۦ مُهَاجِرًا
إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكْهُ ٱلْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُۥ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

Anyone who migrates for God's cause will find many a refuge and great plenty in the earth and if anyone leaves home as a migrant towards God and His Messenger and is then overtaken by death, his reward from God is sure. God is most forgiving and most merciful [100] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 100)

Whoever forsakes the domain of evil and immigrates for the sake of Allah Almighty will find abundant life, if he/she faith purifies his intention. At the beginning, the Muslims immigrated to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) because they did not feel secure about their religion in Mecca. For this reason, it was said that Allah *Glorified is He* has stretched the universe before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and introduced the issue of migrating in the universe. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* then refused to let the migrants head anywhere except for Abyssinia (Ethiopia). The True Lord must have informed him that Abyssinia at that time was a land free of any injustice or turmoil.

But someone may wonder: why did the Prophet Muhammad not decide to let the migrants immigrate to any other Arab tribe, whether in the northern or the southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula? The reason is that Quraysh dominated the entire Arabian Peninsula and all its tribes. All tribes used to perform pilgrimage at Quraysh main headquarters. There was not any other Arabian environment capable of opposing the interest of Quraysh. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* surveyed all other countries and then ordered his companions to immigrate to Abyssinia. The reason for choosing and going to Abyssinia is that the reigning king there did not wrong anyone. Justice was thus the advantage and merit of this king. This is why the believers called Abyssinia the land of security even though it was not a land of faith. As for immigration to Medina it was to a land of faith. We who live in this age must know that there is no immigration after the conquest of Mecca, unless the one who immigrates intends to do so to support and promote obedience to Allah *Glorified is He*. This is what the saying of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarifies: "The Muslim is the one who spares his other fellow Muslims the evil of his tongue and hand, and the immigrant is the one who emigrates from what Allah forbids."(1)

However, there is still a form of immigration that we may, as Muslims, undertake; it is the pilgrimage or immigrating for the cause of acquiring knowledge or immigrating to a land where there is more room for obedience to Allah Almighty. Let us assume that there is a place where the rulers prohibit people from going to the mosque. People of faith should abandon this place and go to another one wherein man may enjoy the freedom of performing religious enactments; all these are examples of immigration for the sake of Allah Almighty. Intention in immigration cannot be limited to the pursuit of abundance in livelihood; otherwise it cannot be deemed for the sake of Allah

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud, and An-Nasa'i*

Almighty. For this reason, people, in these days, should not -as actually is the case- be merely concerned with pursuing abundance in livelihood.

Imam Ali *may* Allah *honour his face* said: ‘I am astonished at those people who relentlessly pursue what is already guaranteed to them and abandon what they have been asked to do. All people constantly strive for and pursue is their livelihood even though their Creator guaranteed it for them: 'And whoever emigrates in Allah's way, he will find in the earth many a place of refuge and abundant resources, and whoever goes forth from his house flying to Allah and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with Allah and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*an-Nisa':* 100)

The migrant who forsakes the land of evil for the sake of Allah Almighty, will find abundance except from Allah Almighty. In this respect, a poet says:

I may indeed swear that land is never too small for its people;

Rather, the conduct and morals of the people becomes too narrow.

Someone may say: I am seeking abundance in livelihood via emigration. We say: you are in fact seeking a job that seemingly assumes the form of serious work, while its essence is laziness because in the course of life where you live, you encounter a lot of suitable jobs.

We also come across some who seek abundance in livelihood but insist on accepting only idle office jobs and vainly taking a salary for it. They do so even though the society is direly searching for technical workers. It is as if those who seek abundance in livelihood want to enjoy such abundance despite their laziness and without exerting effort.

'And whoever emigrates in Allah's way, he will find in the earth many a place of refuge and abundant resources.' (*an-Nisa':* 100) Upon reading “many a place of refuge”, one ought to realise that it is intended to open up a path before the weak people who have been subjugated by the tyrants. The root of the Arabic word ‘*muragham'* translated as “many a place of refuge” is composed of the letters ‘*r*’, ‘*gh'* and *‘m'* and it refers to ‘*al-rugham'* (soil/earth). It is customary to say: I will do so and cause the nose of so and so person to be ‘*raghim*’—meaning let the nose of so and so person be buried under earth and soil—I will thus do what I insist on doing. As long as someone is going to do something against the will of another, this means that the latter wanted to subjugate the former and force him to do something, but he refused and did what he wanted.

When one encounters a tyrant, one should preserve his pride and challenge their arrogance. One must thus try to be stubborn, do things against the will of this tyrant and make him feel as if his nose were buried under earth and soil. Popular proverbs say: I want to break the nose of so and so person.

Someone may be weak and humiliated in his own country; however upon immigrating to a different country he may find people or resources that enable him to break, overpower and challenge his enemy. His enemy may then say: though I have impinged on his life he fled to a place better than I could expect. He thus managed to challenge and break the injustice of the tyrant who used to inflict injustice upon him, by emigrating.

The grammatical form of the word '*muragham'* is that of the object position in the sentence; it refers to a place that if you reach, you would challenge and break the pride of the one who used to humiliate you. Is there anything better than this?' He who emigrates (from his home) in the cause of Allah will find on earth many dwelling places and plenty to live by.' (*an-Nisa':* 100). This means that Allah endows the emigrant by making the one who used to make him feel subordinate and humiliated, feel ashamed as if his nose were smeared with mud. The one who is weak in a particular land is often constrained by someone else. However, when he emigrates from this land for the sake of Allah, he will find ease and abundance concerning his livelihood. The True Lord continues: 'And whoever leaves his home as an emigrant to Allah and His Messenger and then death overtakes him - his reward has already become incumbent upon Allah. And Allah is ever forgiving and Merciful.' (*an-Nisa':* 100) No one knows the time of his death. Accordingly, someone may leave his land for the cause of Allah but does not meet 'those who humiliated him' since death may take him. If this happens, this person will still receive his reward from Allah *the Exalted.* Allah promised to guide the sincere emigrant to a place where he can take retribution from those who humiliated him, which is a cause. However, dying before reaching this place would mean that he went to the Creator of the Cause Whose Bounty is limitless. We thus realise that an emigrant will profit, whether living or dead.

It is as if the True Lord *the Exalted* says to His servant, ‘If you emigrate to any one of Allah's vast pieces of land on earth and die before reaching the many lonely roads and the abundant life that I have made available for you, rest assured that you will return to me.’ The lonely roads are one of Allah's Causes, and He is the Cause of all causes.

In order to understand the meaning of 'his reward has already become incumbent upon Allah', we have to contemplate the saying of the True Lord: 'And when the word befalls them' (*an-Naml:* 82). Interestingly, Allah *Glorified is He* does so to draw our attention to an important matter. The reward is keener to reach its recipient than the latter is to gain and receive it. If a servant of Allah *the Almighty* dies, his reward will seek him while he is with his Lord. The reward knows the one to whom it is going to quite well. This is how we ought to understand the meaning of the saying of the True Lord: 'He who emigrates (from his home) in the cause of Allah, will find on earth many dwelling places and plenty to live by. And whoever leaves his home as an emigrant to Allah and His Messenger and then death overtakes him - his reward has already become incumbent upon Allah. And Allah is ever forgiving and Merciful.' (*an-Nisa’:* 100)

Allah is Most Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy towards the one who is careful and patient. In other words, Allah is Most Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy so that the one who is careful and patient may meet up with the caravan of faith and make up for what he missed since Allah *Glorified is He* forgives a servant's past mistakes and sins if he tries to correct them. Emigration requires setting forth on the earth and striving hard in Allah's Cause.

After Allah *the Exalted* had set the pillars of Islam, He identified what a Muslim must do of these pillars. The pillars of Islam are the following: professing of faith, praying, fasting, giving *zakat* (obligatory alms) to the poor and pilgrimage to the House, for those who are able. Any Muslim may profess the testimonies of faith and may pray. However, a Muslim may not have any money and for this reason, the True Lord exempts him from the obligation to pay *zakat* (obligatory charity) to the poor. Another may suffer from an endemic illness that keeps him from fasting and in this case, Allah, the Merciful, exempts him from the obligation of fasting. A third person may not be capable of performing the pilgrimage and in this case Allah *the Exalted* similarly exempts him from the obligation of performing pilgrimage. In contrast, a Muslim may only profess that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger once in his life. As for the remaining pillar, prayer, man is never exempted from doing it except if he is no longer fit to perform it. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The most important thing is Islam, and its pillar is praying.'(1) The reason is that prayer is the pillar of which no one is ever exempted since Allah *Glorified is He* and has incorporated all the other pillars in prayers. During prayer, a Muslim professes that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger. During prayer, one refrains from eating and drinking. In addition, one fasts and abstains from speaking while praying. Thus, we find that praying is more comprehensive in abstinence than the pillar of fasting itself. When one prays, he abstains from doing many things that he may do while fasting. For instance, fasting does not prevent one from moving from one place to another. In contrast, praying precludes all forms of action and motion except for standing before Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, praying involves a more encompassing form of abstinence and a refraining from mundane worldly activities than the abstinence and refraining involved in fasting. Giving *zakat* (obligatory charity) to the poor consists in giving away some of one’s wealth which he acquires through his labour and work. Such labour and work consumes time. Praying is giving away one’s time which is for the other activities he does (but he gives them up to pray). To sum it up, prayer involves a more encompassing form of worship than paying *zakat* (obligatory charity).

Performing pilgrimage to the Sacred House, or *Al-Ka‘ba,* is also more involved than praying since a Muslim must direct himself towards the Sacred House while praying, and so forth. For this reason, prayer has a different status than that of the rest of the Islamic pillars. It was not enacted through revelation. It was rather decreed in an immediate encounter between the Lord of Muhammad and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself.

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(1) *Related by Ahmad and At-Tirmidhi*

Prayer has such a high status that the True Lord warns us against striving and labouring on earth distracting us from it. Allah *Glorified is He* even legislated special kind of prayer, called the ‘prayer of war' and the 'prayer of fear’ so that no one could claim that war or fear kept him from praying. During war, a Muslim ought to adhere to the Path of his Lord. The same holds for travelling, The True Lord ordained a shorter prayer:

وَإِذَا ضَرَبۡتُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَلَيۡسَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ جُنَاحٌ أَن تَقۡصُرُواْ مِنَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ إِنۡ
خِفۡتُمۡ أَن يَفۡتِنَكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ كَانُواْ لَكُمۡ عَدُوّٗا مُّبِينٗا ﴿١٠١﴾

When you [believers] are travelling in the land,
you will not be blamed for shortening your
prayers, if you fear the disbelievers may harm
you: they are your sworn enemies [101]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 101)

The phrase ‘Travel throughout the land’ means that a believer walks firmly, resolutely and strongly on the earth. Shortness in prayers refers to the reduction of the number of *rak‘a*s for each prayer. Linguistically, there is a distinction between *ikhtisar* and *iqtisar.* The latter refers to taking parts out of something and leaving the rest, whereas the former refers restructuring all parts of this thing in a summarising manner. A good example of the latter is when summarising a book, where we encapsulate its meaning in the smallest possible number of words.

Someone may consider writing a letter. He may then say to himself, in lieu of writing of letter, I shall send a telegraph about the same matter. In such case, one must reduce the number of words in a way that would make a small number of words bear much meaning. Elaboration, however, does not take as much time as a brief summary does. When one wants to summarise, one has to squeeze his mind for a long time until he manages to express all the meanings he wants via a smaller number of words. It is said that Sa‘d Zaghlul, the leader of the 1919 revolution in Egypt, wrote quite a lengthy letter to one of his friends which he sealed with the following words: ‘I apologise for the length. I did not have enough time to summarise.’ Similarly, history tells us about a Muslim Caliphate who wanted to threaten a Roman leader. He thus wrote to him: ‘After extending my greetings, be informed that I will dispatch against you an army whose beginning will reach you while its end still did not depart from my city.’ In this sentence, the Caliphate managed to summarise the size of the impending danger which the King of the Romans would face in case he confronted a gigantic army that could fill the entire earth.

History also records that an Arab leader who was enmeshed in a difficult position in Dwamat Al-Jandal wrote to Khalid ibn Al-Walid only these words: ‘It is you I need.’ He did not say more in order to fully express using this short sentence the extent of painful suffering which he was experiencing.

Shortening the prayers means that a believer performs the noon, afternoon and evening prayers offering two *rak‘a*s instead of four. As for the sunrise and sunset prayers, one performs them as they are: the sunrise prayers consisting of two *rak‘a*s and the sunset consisting of three. The rationale underlying shortening of prayers is that Muslims should not be distracted away from watching the enemies while at war. Similarly, they should not be distracted away from prayer as per the saying of the True Lord: 'Verily, the prayer is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours.' (*an-Nisa’:* 103).

The fact that Allah *Glorified is He* decreed a special kind of prayer for fear and another for war means that under no circumstance is a believing slave of Allah supposed to forego praying. If praying is obligatory during battle times, one should realise how important prayer since lives are at stake and prayer is still incumbent during war and fighting. The prayers of war or the prayers of fear were decreed in the Quran. The concession to shorten the prayers when one is travelling was enacted in the *Sunnah* as well. A believer is thus permitted to shorten his prayers while travelling. If disbelievers were to see believers aligned in prayer, they would immediately attack them. For this reason, the True Lord decreed that prayers should be shorter at this time.

The next verse addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

وَإِذَا كُنتَ فِيهِمْ فَأَقَمْتَ لَهُمُ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ فَلْتَقُمْ طَآئِفَةٌ مِّنْهُم مَّعَكَ وَلْيَأْخُذُوٓا۟ أَسْلِحَتَهُمْ فَإِذَا
سَجَدُوا۟ فَلْيَكُونُوا۟ مِن وَرَآئِكُمْ وَلْتَأْتِ طَآئِفَةٌ أُخْرَىٰ لَمْ يُصَلُّوا۟ فَلْيُصَلُّوا۟ مَعَكَ
وَلْيَأْخُذُوا۟ حِذْرَهُمْ وَأَسْلِحَتَهُمْ ۗ وَدَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَوْ تَغْفُلُونَ عَنْ أَسْلِحَتِكُمْ وَأَمْتِعَتِكُمْ
فَيَمِيلُونَ عَلَيْكُم مَّيْلَةً وَٰحِدَةً ۚ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِن كَانَ بِكُمْ أَذًى مِّن مَّطَرٍ أَوْ كُنتُم
مَّرْضَىٰٓ أَن تَضَعُوٓا۟ أَسْلِحَتَكُمْ ۖ وَخُذُوا۟ حِذْرَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَعَدَّ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا ﴿١٠٢﴾

When you [Prophet] are with the believers, leading them in prayer, let a group of them stand up in prayer with you, taking their weapons with them, and when they have finished their prostration, let them take up their positions at the back. Then let the other group, who have not yet prayed, pray with you, also on their guard and armed with their weapons: the disbelievers would dearly like you to be heedless of your weapons and baggage, in order for them to take you in a single assault. You will not be blamed if you lay aside your arms when you are overtaken by heavy rain or illness, but be on your guard. Indeed, God has prepared a humiliating punishment for the disbelievers [102] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 102)

When the True Lord says: 'let a group of them stand [in prayer]', this implies that believers should be divided into two groups: a group praying with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and another keeping guard watching the enemy. However, how may a group pray behind the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, while another does not, even though all of them are believers seeking the honour of praying with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? The True Lord commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him to* lead each group in prayers once so that each fighter would enjoy the honour of praying behind the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Shortening prayers, as we know applies to the four *rak'as* prayers, namely, *Zhuhr, 'Asr* and *Al-'Ishaa* Prayers. As for *Maghrib* and *Fajr* Prayers, they are not shortened, for it is inconceivable that someone prays a *rak'a* and half. Furthermore, mathematically, we estimate, or round fractions to the highest number.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed the prayer of fear in different forms. There is nothing wrong with quickly describing these ways since teaching how to perform this prayer is the duty of leaders and scholars who lead the armies at battle times. There are several methods and ways for performing the prayer of fear. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to divide the armies into groups: a group praying with him and another in charge of watching the enemy. He then led each of the groups separately in prayers of two *rak‘as* each.

There is an alternative way of praying, namely, that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would lead a group in prayers consisting of only one *rak‘a.* Afterwards, the other group which protected the first joins in the middle of the prayer to pray a *rak‘a* with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Afterwards, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ends the prayer.

Subsequently, the first group prays the second *rak‘a* that it missed and then ends the prayer. Next, the second group prays the *rak’a* that it missed due to the shortening of prayer and then ends the prayer.

There is a third manner, viz., the first group prays with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* a *rak‘a*. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* then does not pray the second *rak‘a*; rather, he continues to stand until this group ends the prayer and calls upon the second group that was confronting the enemy to pray behind him, the ongoing *rak‘a*, which is the second for Prophet Muhammad, but the first for the second group. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* remains sitting until the second group finishes the second *rak‘a*, and then he terminates the prayer. In this manner, the first group enjoys the honour of starting the prayer with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, while the second enjoys the honour of terminating the prayer with him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In this context, one cannot help but wonder if prayers in such a manner are limited only to the era of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since praying with him is in itself an honour. If this were to be the case, how should Muslim fighters pray after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Scholars said, ‘If you consider Muslim leader’s successors of

Prophet Muhammad in ruling Muslims, the prayer of fear should be performed just as it is legislated in the Quran. However, if every group has its own leader, then each group should pray the shortened version of the prayer fully behind such leader.'

The word ‘arms’ in this context refers to actual weapons like swords, spears or guns. A fighter should take them along with him. As for the one who uses a heavy weapon, naturally he would not take it with him while praying.

'And when they have prostrated, let them be [in position] behind you and have the other group come forward which has not [yet] prayed and let them pray with you, taking precaution and carrying their arms.' (*an-Nisa’:* 102) The Quranic statement is not composed of words that are merely uttered. It rather consists of words that the Lord of Mankind addresses to His entire creation which bear special significance for them. Those who initially joined the prayers left behind those who will protect them.

However, the second group that will leave its positions to pray behind the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is in charge of protecting both themselves and those who are praying, lest that proceeding to pray with Prophet Muhammad may distract them from the task of protection. For this reason Allah *the Exalted* said: 'taking precaution and carrying their arms.’ It is clear now the first group is only required to retain its arms, whereas the second is required to take its arms and be fully prepared against danger.

Someone might ask, 'It is true that the weapons could be taken, but how may one take precautions even though it is an intangible process?’ Regarding this, we say that Allah depicts the intangible matters and embodies them as physical so that man would not be oblivious to them. It is as if being on guard and prepared is a tool of warfare. Thus, beware as a fighter lest you miss it. This is matter quite widespread in the styles of the Noble Quran: 'And [also for] those who were settled in Medina and [adopted] the faith before them ' (*al-Hashr:* 9)

The house, or dwelling, is a place that man can inhabit and reside in. For example, Allah describes *Al-Ansar* who honoured the arrival of the *Al-Muhajirun.* A house is a place to which one resorts. Analogously, faith is the framework to which one refers in regards to all matters.

The True Lord described faith as a place in which one dwells. 'And [also for] those who were settled in Medina and [adopted] the faith before them. They love those who emigrated to them and find not any want in their breasts of what the emigrants were given but give [them] preference over themselves, even though they are in privation. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul - it is those who will be the successful.' (*al-Hashr:* 9).

The True Lord gives physical presence to the abstract ideas in order for us to understand. This is exactly like the saying of the True Lord: 'let them pray with you, taking precaution and carrying their arms. Those who disbelieve wish that you would become neglectful of your weapon and your baggage so they could come down upon you in one [single] attack.' (*an-Nisa':* 102).

This explains to us why Allah *Glorified is He* commanded Muslims to retain their arms and be fully prepared against danger. The reason is that a fighter must worry about his arms and equipment. If a fighter loses them, this means that he lost his fighting tool, and losing his fighting tools will become a source of power for his enemies. Indeed, when a fighter takes away a weapon from his enemy, such a weapon turns into a source of power against that enemy.

Allah *the Exalted* warned them against losing their arms and equipment lest the power of their arms and equipment become an advantage to the force of their enemy. This would be an impairment of a believer and an empowerment of his enemy. Enemies of Islam want Muslims to be careless with their arms and equipment. Every believer ought to be completely immersed in and preoccupied with his presence before Allah *the Almighty* while praying. However, during battles, one should not become heedless and mindless of his confinements while praying. Thus, one should not forget his arms if prays during battle. Fighting in itself is a kind of standing before Allah, so he should not separate between fighting in Allah's Cause and praying to Allah. 'Those who disbelieve wish that you would become neglectful of your weapons and your baggage.' (*an-Nisa':* 102) Carelessness, or neglecting, is an accidental forgetting of something that one should not to forget. This involves a clear warning. The reason is that carelessness, or neglecting, during war and at a time of battle is the dream of disbelievers, or something that they want to happen in order to achieve their goal as mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Exalted* 'so they could come down upon you in one [single] attack.' (*an-Nisa':* 102). The camp of disbelievers wishes to wage a sudden and quick attack on believers.

Let us subsequently consider the saying of the True Lord: 'But there is no blame upon you, if you are troubled by rain or are ill, for putting down your arms, but take precautions. Indeed, Allah has prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment. 'We notice that 'take precautions' recurred several times. Allah *Glorified is He* with the might of His Power, readied humiliating punishment for disbelievers. This is a good sign from Allah *the Almighty* that disbelievers will not be able to destroy believers. However, if this is the case, why did Allah command us to be take precautions? Taking precautions does not mean that Allah has abandoned believers. Rather, it is meant to draw the attention of believers so that they may exhaust all means to achieve victory without being careless to the cause of all these means since Allah *the Exalted* prepared a humiliating punishment for disbelievers.

This is the way we ought to understand it, and furthermore, one should from understanding it any other way like by deluding himself into believing that the fact that Allah *the Almighty* stressed the importance of taking precautions means that He has abandoned us. This is not true. Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that we ought to pursue all means and causes of attaining victory without neglecting any of them.

Subsequently, the True Lord says:

فَإِذَا قَضَيۡتُمُ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ فَٱذۡكُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ قِيَٰمٗا وَقُعُودٗا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمۡۚ فَإِذَا
ٱطۡمَأۡنَنتُمۡ فَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَۚ إِنَّ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ كَانَتۡ عَلَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ كِتَٰبٗا مَّوۡقُوتٗا ﴿١٠٣﴾

After performing the ritual prayer, continue to remember God – standing, sitting, and lying on your sides – and once you are safe, keep up regular prayer, for prayer is obligatory for the believers at prescribed times [103] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 103)

This saying indicates that a believer must not delay or postpone performing prayers after their time and that every believer should remember Allah *Glorified is He* while sitting, standing and lying down. The purpose of this saying is to constantly keep the prayers at the centre of every believer's consciousness. A believer is even required to remember Allah *the Exalted* while engaged in fighting the enemy. Indeed, every believer should continue to wet his tongue with the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* while bearing his sword and saying, 'How perfect Allah is. All praise is for Allah. There is no God worthy of worship but Allah. Allah is great. There is neither might nor power except with Allah.'

When a man exalts Allah *the Almighty*, even while he is engaged in a battle with the enemy, Allah *Glorified is He* never forgets him. A believer may be delayed in performing his prayers while he is engaged in a battle with an enemy. However, even in this case, a believer must push his heart and self towards remembering Allah. While praying, a believer should have an attentive heart [standing before] his Lord; he should thus remember him while sitting, standing, lying down and in every state. Once a Muslim is assured about his position in battle, he should perform his prayers. In this manner, a believer never ceases to be in the presence of his Lord even at war. Indeed, a believer must be closest to his Lord at war since he so dearly needs Allah *the Exalted* in this situation. If a Muslim knows that Allah *Glorified is He* manifests His Grace and Power in various instances, no one should deprive himself of these manifestations at any time. Remembering Allah renders a servant closer to his Lord. Allah *the Almighty* is present with His servant in so far as the latter remembers Him. If man is full of tranquillity in time of fear and battle, he should remember Allah *Glorified is He* in order to establish his stance and support him by the Highest Power.

The saying of the True Lord, 'But when you become secure, re-establish [regular] prayer', (*an-Nisa':* 103) means that once the engagement in fighting ends, a believer must move from remembering Allah *the Exalted* while engaging in battle to prayers the time of which occur during fighting. The purpose of remembering Allah *Glorified is He* while fighting is to ensure that the time of prayers would not pass without ennoblement and exaltation, and furthermore, that the servant of Allah would not be deprived of the honour of being in the presence of his Lord. However, what is the point of all this? The decisive statement comes forth: 'Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon believers a decree of specified times.' (*an-Nisa':* 103) The True Lord explained to us the prayer of fear. Allah *the Almighty* also decreed that we should remember him when a prayer commences during the time of fighting. Furthermore, if a prayer is due when one is travelling, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* explained to us how we ought to shorten our prayers in such a case, but what is the reason underlying all these details? The reason is that prayers are an absolutely indispensable enactment: 'Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon believers a decree of specified times.' (*an-Nisa':* 103) This means that prayers have specific times at which they must be performed.

No one should understand the meaning of this saying, as some actually do, to mean that the time of *Zhuhr* Prayer extends from noon through afternoon. It is true that one is relieved of his responsibility for performing the *Zhuhr* Prayer if he performs it before the afternoon. However, what if one dies after he had a sufficient span of time to perform it? In such a case, this person would be sinful; no one guarantees that he would live long enough to perform a late prayer.

Someone may say, 'Sometimes, I hear the call for prayer, while I am involved in a task or job that I cannot leave. For instance, I might be performing a medical operation or boarding a plane.' I say, 'By Allah, if you were taking care of task or job that you do not think you can interrupt and you felt you wanted to use the restroom, what would you do? Would you not go to the restroom? If this is the case, why did you detract some of your time in order to go to the restroom?'

However, when people see you praying, you will see signs of happiness on their faces because of their instinctual servitude to Allah *Glorified is He*. You may find that amongst them are those who may facilitate things for you and bring you a prayer mat on which you may pray. You may also find amongst them someone who trembles due to his instinctual servitude to Allah *the Exalted.* So do not ever say that there is not enough time for prayer since Allah *the Almighty* never enacts anything upon His servant if it surpasses his capacity. The True Lord made the prayer incumbent upon His servants and provided enough time for performing it.

To Allah belong the supreme and most exalted parables. Sometimes we see a head of a number of workers distributing work amongst the members of his team according to the available time each of them has. What about the Lord and Creator of the World? For this reason, the True Lord says: 'And whosoever fears Allah and keeps his duty to Him, He will make a way for him to get out (from every difficulty). And He will provide for him from where he does not expect.' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3)

Prayers are a bounty to the servant of Allah that liberates you from any fear. Its grace and value is infinite because its enactor is the Creator Who created all of us. So how come you keep yourself from being connected to your Lord? Subsequently, the True Lord says:

وَلَا تَهِنُوا۟ فِى ٱبْتِغَآءِ ٱلْقَوْمِ ۖ إِن تَكُونُوا۟ تَأْلَمُونَ فَإِنَّهُمْ يَأْلَمُونَ كَمَا
تَأْلَمُونَ ۖ وَتَرْجُونَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَرْجُونَ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

Do not be faint-hearted in pursuing the enemy: if you are suffering hardship, so are they, but you hope to receive something from God for which they cannot hope. God is all knowing and wise [104] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 104)

This verse reminds us of how we may respond to those who claim to be liberal and try to demonstrate that Islam would befit the age in which we live if we were to interpret it in a way that suits the demands of the age. In doing so, they overlook the requirements of Islam. They might say that Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed war in Islam for the purpose of combating aggression against Muslims. To them we say that it is true that war in Islam has been decreed to combat aggression, but war in Islam is also intended to expand the realm of freedom of belief.

The idea that fighting is an obligation in Islam frightens some because Muslims would find that they need to resist injustice everywhere. This is an attempt on the part of the enemies of Islam to distract Muslims so that they would not resist the coercion and injustice exercised over them. The reason is that the enemies of Islam know very well the strength abiding in Islam and that Islam imparts to anyone who embraces it as a religion. However, some Muslims are deceived by the allegation of the enemies of Islam who claim that Islam only decreed war to combat aggression against Muslims. For this reason, we say to those who promote such claims and to the Muslims who are deluded into believing them, 'No, Islam decreed fighting in order to liberate man's right to believe.'

It is the duty of every Muslim to declare the word of Allah *Glorified is He* and to confront anyone who resists such declaration. However, this does not mean that Islam imposes its creed by the power and menace of the sword. Rather, it uses the sword to protect the freedom of a believer. The True Lord says: 'And do not weaken in pursuit of the enemy.' (*an-Nisa':* 104) This means that one should not be weak nor wane in seeking those who antagonise and fight Islam. The word 'pursuit' implies a clear target that one dedicates all his plans and energy towards achieving. It is as if a Muslim is not only required to push back and combat disbelievers when they attack Muslim land, but also he must pursue fighting them in accordance with the saying of Allah: 'If you should be suffering, so are they suffering, just as you are.' Therefore, Muslims should work to elevate and raise the Word of Allah and preach faith in Allah to everyone. Their preaching should not impose the Word of Allah *the Almighty;* rather, they should raise their swords in the face of tyranny that denies man his freedom to believe. Muslims should work to relieve all forms of injustice on mankind even if this involves an onerous burden on them because the True Lordsaid: 'Fighting is ordained for you, even though it is hateful to you.' (*al-Baqara:* 216)

Allah *Glorified is He* has created in every believer the capacity to seek the enemy of Islam to alleviate the injustices that other humans suffer. It is true that humans generally dislike war which is not an easy thought or endeavour, yet it is sometimes necessary. Those who witnessed the Second World War know that Churchill succeeded Chamberlain who was known to be a man of peace during his tenure as the prime minister of England. The latter tried to procrastinate and forge peace with Germany, while England was preparing itself for war. When England became ready, Chamberlain declared that his policy was inept and fruitless, so Churchill took over and steered his country into and through the war. Churchill said to his people, 'Expect black days and expect hunger.' Churchill said that to the British so that if the reality turned out to be better and less severe, they would rejoice and be delighted.

War exhausts the enemy as much as it exhausts you. However, as a believer, you are privileged over disbelievers in terms of the following: 'But you expect from Allah that which they expect not. And Allah is All Knowing and Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 104) You are equal in terms of the pain each of you incur. However, the difference is that you hope for what disbelievers do not hope for. Believers know that once they engage in war, Allah *the Almighty* is on their side and supports them. Whoever dies of them goes to a heaven whose breadth is equivalent to that of the heavens and earth. This is a hope to which disbelievers can never aspire.

The True Lord requires the believing group who chose to have faith in Him as the One Allah Who created them, to Whom they are destined to return and Who made such faith the principle that governs their lives. He *the Exalted* demanded them to undertake the requisites of such faith. He demands them to defend this creed that proves to all people that there is no one to be worshiped—meaning that there is no one to be obeyed—in any matter or aspect except for the True Lord, Allah *Glorified is He*.

When such a principle governs people, it unifies their inclinations and prevents their actions from being contradictory. They all become cooperative, supportive and collaborative of each other. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* made the believing group the best *ummah*, or followers of Islam, to ever emerge in human history since its Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is the best messenger that had ever been sent to mankind. The True Lord required the people of faith to fight disbelievers and hypocrites so that the land of faith would be purified of any element that may disrupt its serenity of life. The True Lord addresses His creation through their humanity. He created them and knows their qualities and tendencies. He does not address them as being angels; rather, He addresses them as humans who constantly change. Due to this changing nature of humans, faith may guide them in certain instances, whereas in other instances their desires, or tendencies may disrupt the purity and harmony of such faith. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* assures them that were they to pursue the path of creed, they should bear in mind that such a path is not furnished with roses and flowers. It is rather full of thorns so that only those who can tolerate calamities and crises may bear the message of truth on earth. If having faith was easy to handle with no difficulty in attaining it or any pain or trouble involved in achieving it, every one may allege to having faith. If this happens frequently, those who are not trustworthy may falsely bear the responsibility of creed.

For this reason Allah *the Exalted* did not grant victory to Islam in its early stages. Rather Allah decreed that Muslims would be weak and persecuted at the beginning. He made its followers defenceless so that only those who tasted the sweetness of faith could tolerate such persecution. The sweetness of faith protects the one who tastes it from feeling the bitter pain of persecution and the severity of torture. The order, 'And do not weaken in pursuit of the enemy' indicates that the Muslim *Ummah*, or the followers of Islam are not only required to defend themselves against aggression but are required to seek out and pursue those who impede the path of Islamic preaching by disciplining them so that they would let people freely choose their creed.

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* demands the following: do not be faint of heart or wane when you seek out and pursue those who impede the path of Islamic preaching. Allah *the Almighty* then said: 'If you should be suffering, so are they suffering, just as you are.' This means that if you incurred and suffered pain when you engage in war, or while preparing for it, you ought to bear in mind that you are fighting people who also suffer the pain experienced in war and the preparation for it. You are both equal in terms of the pain, difficulty and exhaustion incurred. However, you should not be blinded to the importance of estimating your power; do not neglect this important matter because it is the force that will give you dominance over your enemies. You have an advantage over them inasmuch as you hope for things from Allah *the Exalted* which disbelievers cannot hope for. Matters should be evaluated in terms of their purposes and the reward one gets for doing them. No one should say this is equal to that; no one should neglect the reward he gets for undertaking a particular action or task. For this reason, the True Lord says the following in the course of explaining this equation so that the minds of people would be clear about the reward that awaits believers for incurring and enduring the pains involved in preparing for and engaging in war: 'Say: "Do you wait for us (anything) except one of the two best things (martyrdom or victory).”'

(*at-Tawba:* 52) Disbelievers must know that either of the two best results awaits the believers: either triumph and or dying as a martyr. Winning is the ultimate achievement in the Hereafter. However, what are believers hoping that Allah would do to disbelievers? This is the answer: 'While we wait for you either that Allah will afflict you with a punishment from Himself or at our hands. So wait, we too are waiting with you.' (*at-Tawba:* 52) Whose side, then, is weightier according to the above equation? It is the side of the believers.

The True Lord ends His encouraging believers to seek out disbelievers and how they are privileged over disbelievers inasmuch as they hope from Allah for what the latter do not hope for by saying: 'And Allah is indeed All Knowing, All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 102) Allah is the All Knowing since He is ever aware of the pain that befalls believers. So do not think, as a believer, that you will miss a reward; you will be rewarded for every pain that incurs to you, even if it is little as the one a thorn causes when it pricks you. Allah *Glorified is He* lets you suffer pain as much a disbeliever does for a simple reason, namely so that you go to battle having confidence that your faith will enable you to endure the consequences of embracing and defending religion.

It is related that A'isha *Allah be pleased with her* said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A believer does not receive (the trouble) of being pricked by a thorn or more than that, but Allah elevates him in rank or erases his sins due to that.'(1)

After the True Lord talked about fighting for the cause of advocating His religion, He gave believers instructions that would support them in life. Why did He do this? The reason is that Allah *Glorified is He* knows that there are people who believe in Him and follow Islam under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore Allah *the Exalted* explains that embracing Islam and advocating it entails a number of consequences. You will be the first upon whom Allah's rulings are applied. So do not think that the simple declaration of believing in Islam and following Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you have acquired something that gives you privileges over the rest of Allah's creation. As much as We have commanded you to fight disbelievers and hypocrites, We command that you fight and resist the temptations of your inner selves since someone may embrace Islam by thinking that doing so that he will acquire a privilege over others. To such a person we say that this will not happen. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying:

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(1) *Related by Muslim*

إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ لِتَحۡكُمَ بَيۡنَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِمَآ
أَرَىٰكَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَلَا تَكُن لِّلۡخَآئِنِينَ خَصِيمٗا ﴿١٠٥﴾

We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet]
with the truth so that you can judge between people
in accordance with what God has shown you. Do not
be an advocate for those who betray trust [105]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 105)

When the True Lord talks about Himself, He uses a glorifying, plural form to refer to His actions. A good example is the following: 'We have revealed to you.' Here, the plural form is used because the bestowal of the Quran requires several powers that are only in the possession of the One Who rules over the entire universe. Let us give an example, and to Allah belongs the supreme and most exalted parables. In issuing an edict, a president or a king may say, ‘we have decreed the such and such edict.' The president or king knows well that he is not the only one who issues the edict; rather, it is all those who collaborate with him and work as his subordinates that participate in issuing the edict with him. However, how should we analogously think of the same situation as it pertains to the True Lord, the Sublime Allah? For example, when the True Lord talks about Himself as far as His Self is concerned He uses a singular pronoun. He thus says: 'Indeed, I am Allah. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance.' (*Ta Ha:* 14) The plural pronoun is never used in such a context, and nor is the *nun* particle intended for glorification ever used. However, in this verse, the True Lord says: 'We have revealed the book unto you in truth.' (*an-Nisa':* 104) The use of the glorifying *We* is obvious. The Quran is the speech of Allah *the Exalted.* The revelation of the Quran requires different collaborating attributes. Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'And thus We have sent down to you the Quran.'

(*al-’Ankabut:* 47). In another instance, He says: 'That We revealed to you the Book which is recited to them.' (*al-’Ankabut:* 51).In a third instance, He says: 'We have certainly sent down to you a Book in which is your mention. Then will you not reason?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 10)

What is the purpose of bestowing the Quran? The purpose is to make available on earth a path and system that governs life. The Quran was bestowed upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and for those who embraced his Message. When the True Lord says: 'We have revealed to you.' (*an-Nisa’:* 104) This means that Allah's assignment has been bestowed. When we encounter the expression ‘revealed’, we must know that everything that comes from the True Lord descends to us from Allah *Glorified is He*. It gives the feeling that it is coming down from high above, unequal to which it is sent, yet not lower than it. It involves a sender who is Allah, a receiver who is Prophet Muhammad and his *ummah* or the followers of Islam, and an item which is the Book. However, did Allah bestow the Book only, or did He bestow from above everything related to the factors of life beforehand? When we read this noble saying: 'O, children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness, that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember.' (*al-A‘raf:* 26)

It is clothing that came from high above. For this reason, the True Lord used the word 'bestow.’ Furthermore, it is not merely clothing, but it also adorns the person wearing it because it is made of bird feathers which in turn covers and adorns the bird. It not only covers a person's nakedness, but it is also beautiful. What is more beautiful is that it is the clothing of piety. The True Lord brought forth what is necessary for covering nakedness in life. Subsequently, He bestowed piety. The first kind of clothing covers material nakedness, whereas the second covers the nakedness of values and spirit. All of this is a kind of bestowal from above. In another verse, the True Lord says: 'We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice. And We sent down iron, wherein is great might.' (*al-Hadid:* 25)

The phrasal verb ‘sent down' indicates that everything which came down to us from the True Lord *the Sublime* is bestowed upon us to treat either our material being or our spirit and values.

The True Lord says in the verse at hand: 'We have revealed unto you the Book.' (*an-Nisa’:* 104) When the word ‘Book’ is used in a generic manner, this means that it refers to the all-embracing and comprehensive Book that dominates all the rest of the divine books, viz. The Quran, even though the word ‘Book’ may be used to refer to any book revealed to any messenger sent by Allah *the Exalted.*

When the True Lord says, 'in truth', it means that He is eternal and never changes; no other reality may contradict or refute His Essence or Attributes. In day-to-day life, you may recount a true story about something that happened. However, no matter how many times you may recount this story, even if recounted over and over for twenty years, it will never change since your narration is in line with reality. Every time you recount this story, you recollect the real events that took place before you. However, if someone tells a false story that is not substantiated by reality, what would his stance be? He will tell the story in a certain way in one instance, then after a week, he may forget some of what he said in the first instance and thus fabricate new things. The reason is that what he recounts did not really happen. For this reason, he says different things than what he did for the first time. In such a case, the listener would realise that it is a false story.

Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the Book setting forth the truth. This means that the Book Allah revealed encompasses principles and statements that no falsity may every infiltrate. It is thus a fixed, unchanging Book that no reality may contradict or refute. In our day-to-day life, teachers say to their successful students, 'We have truthfully rated you above all your colleagues.' This means that the student took his right because he deserves this status. The saying of the True Lord, 'We have revealed the Book unto you in truth' (*an-Nisa’:* 104) means that the bestowal of the Book on the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was inextricably connected and essentially bound to the Will of the True Lord. This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deserves the bestowal of the Book. The juxtaposition of different meanings beside each other in the Quran is one of the essences of its elegance and the eloquence of the Words of the Quran; never do they contradict. Rather, they are juxtaposed beside each other due to the Wisdom of the Creator so as to elucidate for us the meanings of His statements.

The same verse shows us that the government of Islam headed by the first Muslim ruler, namely, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not set forth to judge solely and exclusively amongst believers. Rather, it was set forth to judge amongst all mankind. The condition of judging amongst people is to justly adjudicate on the subject matter of their disputes. No believer may thereby say that one is a believer, and another is a disbeliever so that if a disbeliever is the rightful claimant he may be denied his right, and if a Muslim is the rightful claimant, he may be given him his right. You are not only required to judge and establish justice amongst believers, but you are required to do so amongst all mankind. If you judge amongst people in accordance with facts and truth, the one judged will attest to the truth of your religion. If a disbeliever is the rightful claimant in a dispute with a believer, and you arbitrate impartially between them even if this involves meting out punishment to the believer, the disbeliever would regret not being a subscriber to the religion that recognises truth and judges according to it, even if it is against one of its own people. In addition, if a Muslim sees that a judgment has been decreed against him in favour of a non-Muslim, he will realise that being a Muslim is not merely a formal relation, but it is an objective one. No one should think that Islam came about to partially support Muslims at the expense of other people. In contrast, Islam came about to judge everyone in accordance with the logic of truth, to apply justice and truth to all and to teach every Muslim to always adhere to the side of truth.

Allah puts forward this matter in correspondence with an actual event that took place at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Events contemporary to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were a sort of an elicitation and procurement of the rulings of the Heavens. Events took place, and its ruling was sent down accordingly. If rulings were arrayed together and revealed at the same time, an incident may take place, and believers would still search for the proper ruling even though they have it already at hand. In contrast, if a ruling is revealed when the correspondent incident or event takes place, its application is applied immediately. In such case, people will be more likely to comply with a ruling and submit to it since it has been confirmed, constructed and codified through an applied incident. The ruling that was revealed is the following: 'Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth so you may judge between the people by that which Allah has taught you. And do not be for the deceitful an advocate.' (*an-Nisa':* 104)

One should realise that Allah's instruction and teaching is truer than one's human vision. Thus, you should be certain about the existence of whatever Allah *the Exalted* teaches you, as you would be if you could see it physically with your own eyes. If you were to see something with your eyes, you will not ask where it is.

There was an event that took place long ago. There was a man in Banu Zhafar called Tu'ma ibn Ubayriq. He stole a shield which belonged to Qutada ibn An-Nu'man. Tu'ma was afraid of keeping the shield since he was known to be a thief. He then went to a Jew and left the shield with him. The shield was kept in a bag of flour. When Tu'ma carried it, the flour kept pouring out from a hole in the bag; the dropped flour left a trace on the ground that pointed to the house of the Jew who was called Zayd ibn As-Samin. When they followed the traces of flour, it led them back to Tu'ma's house. However, Tu'ma swore that he did not take it or have any idea about its place. People then left him and followed the flour traces until it led them to the house of the Jew. They then found the shield and declared that Ibn as-Samin was the thief. Thus, Ibn As-Samin said, 'I did not steal the shield. Rather, it was Tu'ma ibn Ubayriq who left it with me.' People then went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'If you punish a Muslim in favour of a Jew, the matter will be taken against Muslims and shame will be spread amongst them.'

We know that the True Lord sent His Messenger to set straight the course of human desires. Human desire, due to its rashness and short-sightedness may think that a sentence that involves a decree against a Muslim and an acquittal of a Jew translates to mean an impairment of Muslims. In contrast, the True Lord wills to establish justice irrespective of any relative factor. He thus revealed the following saying to His Messenger: 'Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth so you may judge between the people by that which Allah has taught you. And do not be for the deceitful an advocate.' (*an-Nisa':* 104)

So do not ever say, 'This is a Muslim, so we should not accuse him of a crime that he actually committed lest it should smear him.' Also, do not even fear standing up for a Jew against a thief who emerged amongst Muslims. It is due to the honour of Islam that it punishes anyone who commits a mistake because as long as this person has affiliated himself with Islam, he should ennoble such affiliation. Punishing a Muslim for committing a mistake is a testimony that Islam was not set forth to favour anyone. Every Muslim must know that he embraced Islam for the truth itself.

About the saying of the True Lord: 'do not be for the deceitful an advocate.' (*an-Nisa':* 104) a number of superficial people said the following: if there is a thief, a traitor or someone who abuses his power, you should leave him alone, do not look at him nor pay him any attention so that he would not cause you any trouble. To such people who would say as such, we give the following reply, 'No, Allah says, '…do not be for the deceitful advocates.' This means that the True Lord commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to stand on the side of the one who is a traitor to his trust. Rather, he should fight whoever betrays the trust for the interest of the truth.

Scholars tried to make things approachable. Thus, they said, 'Some may think that a Muslim is proscribed to take a stance that is beneficial and useful to the one who is traitor to his trust. Rather, the Muslim should be against the one who betrayed his trust, and not be on his side.' The purpose of defending a rival is to support his case, and not to be against him. No Muslim should benefit someone who betrayed his trust just so that the latter would be defeated or humiliated by defeat. For this reason, the Messenger would not support the one who betrayed his trust and would never bring about something that would benefit him. Some people may ask why Allah does not use the most explicit word that enables us to immediately recognise the meaning. To this query, we respond by saying that it was important to do so in order for us to know on which side the Quran and the Messenger who delivers the Message of His Lord stand. An example of this is the saying of the True Lord: 'And when our verses are recited to them as clear evidences, they say, "This is not but a man who wishes to avert you from that which your fathers were worshipping." And they say, "This is not except a lie invented." And those who disbelieve say of the truth when it has come to them, "This is not but obvious magic."' (*Saba':* 43)

The interlocutor in the above verse is the disbelievers, and the party addressed is the believers. Some people using logic would assume that disbelievers would say, 'You are obvious magic.' It is as if it reads: 'And those who disbelieve say of the truth when it has come to them, "You are but obvious magic."' However, we notice that they did not address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as much as he was the one who brought forth the truth to them. Rather, they have a contention against the Message of the truth he brought forth. Further, they did not say so to him, rather, they said as such to each other. Thus, truth, in this context, refers to the truth of the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and not his person. Therefore, they said that the truth that was brought forth by Prophet Muhammad was the following, 'This is not but obvious magic.' There is another verse in which the True Lord says: 'And those who disbelieve say of those who believe, "If it had [truly] been good, they would not have preceded us to it." And when they are not guided by it, they will say, "this is an ancient falsehood.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 11)

The interlocutor in this verse is the disbelievers, and the party addressed is the believers. The intended meaning is that the disbelievers said to the believers, 'If Islam were any good, you would not have beaten us to embrace it prior to us.' However, the True Lord *the Most High* relates their words by saying: '…If this (message) were any good, these (weak and poor people) would not have preceded us to it!' (*al-Ahqaf:* 11) This indicates that they exchanged these words amongst themselves, and not in the presence of believers. Otherwise, if the discourse was addressed by disbelievers directly to believers, the wording would have been, 'If Islam were any good, you would not have preceded us to it.' Afterwards, the True Lord, *the Glorious and Exalted* says:

وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرِ ٱللَّهَۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمٗا ﴿١٠٦﴾

Ask God for forgiveness: He is most forgiving and merciful [106] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 106)

This command is asking Allah's Forgiveness for even a merely momentary, hesitating thought concerning supporting a Muslim against a Jew, and vice versa. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had not yet supported the position of one party against the other. However, the mere possibility of such a thought requires asking Allah for forgiveness. The One issuing this command is the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted*. There is nothing objectionable or hurtful about our Lord setting right for us a certain issue.

Alternatively, this discourse is addressed to everyone who used Islam as a means of blackmail and bargaining with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. A similar case occurred with the tribe of Banu Zhafar who wanted to use their affiliation with Islam as a pretext to obstruct Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from meting out a penalty on a person who committed theft amongst them. This is the reason why the True Lord commands those who approached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* about this matter to ask Him for forgiveness or to beg Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask Him for forgiveness on their behalf since they only said so under the pretext of avoiding a scandal that might affect the image of Muslims. Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَا تُجَٰدِلۡ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخۡتَانُونَ أَنفُسَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا
يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ خَوَّانًا أَثِيمٗا ﴿١٠٧﴾

Do not argue for those who betray their own souls: God does not love anyone given to treachery and sin [107] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 107)

Allah *the Most High* wants to thoroughly lay out this issue. The previous statement from Allah would have sufficed. However, Allah wants to settle these matters decisively; there can be no argument with those who are false to their own selves. *Al-Jadal*, the Arabic word for argument and dispute, means, as we know, to intertwine threads together to make a rope. When someone intertwines things together, such as some hair or threads of wool or fibre to make a rope, this person does so in order to strengthen the material he is intertwining so as to keep it from being frail and rendering it more amenable to pulling and stretching. For this reason, people usually describe this intertwining process as 'a way of giving strength to the rope.’ The same holds for any two disputants. Each of them wants to strengthen his position. They may attempt to corroborate it by twisting or embellishing their words or using an eloquent style. Hence, the Divine Command descended to Prophet Muhammad: Do not back the position of any person who is habitually false to himself.

By the Quran using *yakhatanun* (persistently betray themselves), instead of *yakhunun*, (betray themselves), it clearly stresses a more significant meaning. Betrayal is to take something unrightfully or possibly unlawfully. Although it is possible that a person betrays another, how is it conceivable that a person should betray himself? This must involve a great deal of pretension. When a person betrays another for the sake of personal interests, to satiate a desire or commit a punishable sin, this constitutes a betrayal of oneself. Since, in such a case, transient pleasures distract a person from future punishment. We thus can see that those who betray people betray themselves simultaneously. It is not easy for a person to betray himself; this involves pretension and artifice. This is the reason why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And argue not on behalf of those who persistently betray themselves. Verily, Allah does not like anyone who is habitually treacherous and sinful.' (*an-Nisa’:* 107).

The previous noble verse that addressed this situation did not use the plural form *khwwanin*; rather, it used the plural form *kha’in*. There is a difference between *kha’in* and *khawwan*; the former betrays only once, whereas the latter betrays several times. Alternatively, the meaning could also be as follows: *kha’in* is the one who betrays in a small, minor matter, while *khawwan* betrays in a major, capital matter. The intensive form is sometimes used to indicate the recurrence of the action or, in other times, to magnify the action. It is out of Allah’s Graciousness and Mercy that He did not use *khawwan*. The word *kha’in* is used to describe a person who has betrayed only once and never again. Allah does not expose a person’s sin unless it grows into a trait, habit, or profession. A woman came to Caliph ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* because her son was caught stealing, and he wanted to carry out the prescribed penalty for theft on him. His mother, crying, said, 'O, ‘Amir of the Believers, my son stole this time only.' ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'You have told a lie. By Allah, Allah would never punish a servant for the first time he sins.'

Due to this, some people say that if a person’s misdeed is exposed and it becomes known to people, then it must have antecedents. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* would not expose a person’s sin committed the first time only. Allah *the Most High* loves to cover up and conceal the wrongdoing of His servants. Allah may conceal a sin of His servant once and twice, but if he persists in committing that particular sin, Allah exposes him. 'Verily, Allah does not like anyone who is habitually treacherous and sinful.' (*an-Nisa’:* 107) Sin is the worst form of disobedience. However, why did the clansmen of Tu`ma ibn Ubayriq go to intercede with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on his behalf, hoping that he would pass a judgment in his favour against the Jew? They did this since they found it scandalous that a Muslim litigant should be exposed and a Jewish litigant be acquitted. They felt ashamed that something like that might happen. Therefore, the Quran directly addressed this issue, bringing to the surface the underlying cause that made them act accordingly in order to banish and uproot such conduct forever. The Quran says:

يَسۡتَخۡفُونَ مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَا يَسۡتَخۡفُونَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ مَعَهُمۡ إِذۡ
يُبَيِّتُونَ مَا لَا يَرۡضَىٰ مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡلِۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا يَعۡمَلُونَ مُحِيطًا ﴿١٠٨﴾

They try to hide them- selves from people, but
they cannot hide from God. He is with them when
they plot at night, saying things that do not please
Him: He is fully aware of everything they do [108]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 108)

They wanted to acquit Tu'ma of the theft charge in front of the people, especially in front of non-Muslims. However, who should they have been more concerned: Allah or the people? Doubtlessly, they ought to have feared Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* more than they feared people. You may try to mislead those who judge you in this world, but be certain that you cannot mislead the judgment of Heaven. This principle must govern the life and actions of every believer. If someone who is affiliated to Islam tends to do something that may anger Allah, they should remember that by doing so, they disgrace themselves, their children, their family, or Muslims. A Muslim should not fear people's opinions when a fellow Muslim does something that may smear the image of Muslims. Rather, a Muslim should blame and turn him away from what he is doing. We need to say to those who hide their wrongdoing from the public, 'You may conceal yourself from the people, but you cannot conceal yourself from Allah. This makes you unworthy of trust.'

'They may hide (their crimes) from the people, but they cannot hide (them) from Allah, for He is with them (by His Knowledge)…' (*an-Nisa':* 108). The word *m`ahum,* the Arabic prepositional phrase that means 'with them' is intended to assure believers that nothing whatsoever can be concealed or hidden from Allah. A person may hide from people, but they cannot hide from Allah. Indeed, Allah is with every human being, whether they are alone or in a crowd, and whether they are doing something secretly or publicly. So, if a person manages to conceal a wrongdoing from people, he can conceal nothing from Allah. 'They may hide (their crimes) from the people, but they cannot hide (them) from Allah, for He is with them (by His Knowledge), when they plot by night in words…' (*an-Nisa':* 108). The word *yubayyit*, the Arabic verb translated as 'plot by night', means to undertake something at night since people used to retire to their houses at night. The central meaning of *yubayyit* is to devise a scheme or plot at one's house in the dark of night. Any secret and devious planning is called *tabyit*, even if it is done in the middle of the day. It would not be done secretly unless the person concerned wants to divert eyes away from him. Yet, he must know that he may only divert mortal eyes away from himself. He can never divert the Ever-Watching Eyes of Allah. 'They may hide (their crimes) from the people, but they cannot hide (them) from God, for He is with them (by His Knowledge), when they plot by night in words that He does not approve. And God ever encompasses what they do.' (*an-Nisa':* 108)

When hearing the word *muhit*, we should envision the encompassed thing all surrounded by the One Who encompasses in a perfect way that does not allow any escape from the One Who encompasses Knowledge or Power. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* encompasses everything with His Knowledge; nothing is concealed from Him. He also encompasses everything with His Power; nothing is beyond the realm of His Sovereignty. Allah *the Most High* encompasses with His Knowledge all the parts and details of the universe and has power over all things. Accordingly, if the word *muhit* is associated with Allah, we should know that it means that the True Lord *the Most High* completely encompasses everything with His Knowledge. Not a single detail, no matter how great or small, exists beyond Allah’s reach or knowledge. Furthermore, it means that Allah *the Most High* encompasses everything with His Power – no one can elude or evade Allah’s Just Retribution. Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

هَٰٓأَنتُمْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ جَٰدَلْتُمْ عَنْهُمْ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا فَمَن يُجَٰدِلُ
ٱللَّهَ عَنْهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ أَم مَّن يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا ﴿١٠٩﴾

There you [believers] are, arguing on their behalf in this life, but who will argue on their behalf with God on the Day of Resurrection? Who will be their defender? [109] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 109)

Those who argued on behalf of Ibn Ubayriq wanted to vindicate him before the people and convict the Jew. However, would humans arguing for one another and vindicating one another before other humans easily end matters at this point? The answer is a definitive no since the life of this world is not the place of just recompense. Let us assume that Ibn Ubayriq escaped human punishment. Would he escape Allah’s Punishment in the Hereafter? No. Those who argued on behalf of Ibn Ubayriq wanted to blind and blur the perspective of earthly judgment, but he will not be able to blind the Judgment of the True Lord. A person you defend will find no one to argue in defence of his crime on the Day of Judgment. Not only this, but the True Lord *the Most High* also closes this verse by saying: '…or who will be their defender?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 109). In other words, who, on the Day of Judgment, can defend those who escaped earthly justice by way of falsehood? We know that a defender could be an eloquent speaker chosen by some people to talk persuasively with individuals in a given situation. Who is capable of undertaking this task before Allah? No one is able to, of course. Afterwards, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says:

وَمَن يَعْمَلْ سُوٓءًا أَوْ يَظْلِمْ نَفْسَهُۥ ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرِ ٱللَّهَ يَجِدِ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١١٠﴾

Yet anyone who does evil or wrongs his own soul and then asks God for forgiveness will find Him most forgiving and merciful [110] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 110)

When Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* created the creation, He made them all subject to change and alteration. For this reason, Allah does not remove a sinner, due to his sin, from the realm of His Sovereign Power and Mercy. Rather, Allah *the Most High* allows repentance in order to protect society from the spread of his evil. If everyone who commits a sin is expelled from Allah's Mercy, society will continue to suffer from the evils of the sinners. All of a sinner's deeds will eventually become a curse of widespread evil afflicting society. Therefore, repentance has been decreed as allowable and acceptable by Allah to protect mankind from the ferocity of the one who commits the first sin. Repentance leads to the wiping out of one's sins, so it gives him hope and makes him eager to do good so as to make up for the evil previously done. Were it not for repentance, a sinner would be driven by despair of ever being forgiven to immerse himself more into evildoing, and thus the world would suffer the consequences of his increasing sinfulness.

Those who attempted to acquit Ibn Ubayriq were divided into two groups: the first group was intent on vindicating Ibn Ubayriq, while the second was more concerned with not exposing a Muslim. Each of the two groups sinned. However, does their sin expel them from Allah's Mercy? No. Rather, Allah promises sinners that they '…shall find Allah Much-Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (*an-Nisa':* 110) The two groups became required to do something good after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained the matter to them, and they understood the purpose of Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* which was to keep them within faith. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* convicted Ibn Ubayriq and exonerated the Jew. Following this incident, Ibn Ubayriq renounced Islam, went to Mecca and continued the habit of betraying others. He then pierced and hollowed out a man's wall in order to steal his possessions, but the wall ultimately fell on him, causing his death.

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* sets the criteria. Anyone who commits a sin, or wrongs himself by doing a bad deed, and then asks Allah for forgiveness will find Allah Most Forgiving and Merciful. We notice that some people do not adequately comprehend the saying of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'Yet, whoever does evil or wrongs himself but afterwards seeks Allah’s Forgiveness shall find Allah Much-Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (*an-Nisa’:* 110) So, they ask, 'Does the one who commits a bad deed not wrong himself?’ The answer is that the precision of word usage in the Quran clarifies this meaning. ‘Doing evil’ means to do a bad deed that harms others; it is different from the one who sins against himself. Stealing, killing, or assailing any person via verbal or physical abuse are examples of doing evil. The Arabic word *Sau’*, translated in the verse at hand as evil or bad actions, is any deed that people hate. When *Sau’* is used to describe a person, it means that he is evil or has a bad character, and, as such, he does hateful things to people.

A person who drinks alcohol may do so in isolation without causing harm to anyone. However, in doing so, he is indeed wronging himself since every Muslim is required to take responsibility of himself. Allah’s Law protects Muslims even from themselves. It also protects every soul from itself. The evidence is that any human who kills another human must be punished (according to the Islamic law); similarly, Allah deprives the one who commits suicide of paradise.

Thus, we see how Allah’s Law protects humanity and carefully surrounds it from all directions. The human being is part of Allah’s universe. The True Lord obligates every human being to protect himself. If a human does a bad thing that harms another person, this is called *Sau’*, or evil. On the other hand, when a human being does something that harms only himself, such a deed is called wronging oneself. 'And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves, remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins, for who but Allah can forgive sins? And do not knowingly persist in doing whatever (wrong) they may have done.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 135)

However, is committing a *Fahishah* which means an immoral act or shameful deed, any different from wronging or sinning against oneself? *Fahishah* also constitutes an evil deed whose consequences have harmful effects to the person doing it, along with others, as well. By contrast, wronging or sinning against oneself is the act that harms the person who does it only. For example, someone may do a bad deed to satisfy their passion and enjoy themselves, while completely forgetting the severe punishment that may follow in the Afterlife. Someone else may commit an offence for the sole interest of another, as in the case of perjury in which a person’s right to something may be wasted and assigned to someone else without the person committing perjury having any personal interest or gain. Rather, such a false testimony comprises his faith solely for the worldly benefit of others. To this person, the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* applies, 'Hasten to do good works before the advent of tribulations like fragments of a pitch-black night. A person would wake up a believer in the morning and end the day as a disbeliever, or end his day a believer and wake up as a disbeliever the next morning. He would barter his religion for a worldly gain.'(1)

'Yet, whoever does evil or wrongs himself but afterwards seeks Allah’s Forgiveness shall find Allah Much-Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (*an-Nisa’:* 110) Allah is eternally and continuously Forgiving and Merciful. A repentant servant of Allah recognises and experiences His Forgiveness and Mercy. Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن يَكْسِبْ إِثْمًا فَإِنَّمَا يَكْسِبُهُۥ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِۦ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١١١﴾

He who commits sin does so against his own soul. God is All Knowing, All-Wise[111] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 111)

The True Lord *the Exalted* uses the verb 'earn', which is translated from the Arabic origin *kasaba* and refers to the beneficial earnings obtained by doing good. By contrast, Allah uses the word *iktasaba* to describe bad or sinful earnings. Why does He do so? This is due to the fact that doing good is a natural instinctive act of which a human can never feel ashamed. Evil is always a shameful experience for humans; therefore, they must do it secretly. It is unnatural, so it requires extra effort and artifice.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Ahmad*

Let us give an example to illustrate this point, and to Allah belongs the supreme and most exalted description. Take the example of the relationship between a husband and wife. A husband can gaze freely at the beauty of his wife; however, if he wants to steal a look at a woman who is unlawful for him, he must deceive the inward faculties of his soul in order to sneak a look at this woman. This man resorts to trickery and manoeuvring to sneak a gaze at that to which he is not entitled to by his rights. This is the reason why *kasab* is used in the Quran to describe lawful earnings, while *iktasab* is used to describe unlawful ones. However, when the Quran uses *kasab* to describe a sin committed, the verb in the verse is translated to mean 'earn.’ This usage requires more attention. Someone may commit a sin and regret it as soon as he has done it, if he is a good person. Such a person will also castigate himself for his sin and resolutely decide not to do it again. Another person may commit a sin and enjoy his sin, as if it has brought him some benefit. He boasts of his sin, while being oblivious to the immense danger and the bleak end he will face on the Day of Judgment. Taking pride in committing a sin is a manifestation of the corruption of a human’s natural disposition and the deep infiltration of vice into the heart. This type of person is different from the one who falls into a sin only once, and then whenever he remembers it, his body shivers and he asks Allah for forgiveness. 'And whoever earns sin, he earns it only against himself. And Allah is Ever All Knowing, All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa’:* 111). Therefore, human beings should beware since wronging someone by word or deed does not mean you have won the world. Indeed, if an oppressor were to know what Allah has prepared for the person whom he is oppressing, he would begrudge him such support and refrain from harming him. I will give the following example to elucidate the matter, and to Allah belongs the supreme and most exalted description. Let us assume that a man has two boys. One of them hit his brother and took away something he possessed from him. Their father saw the incident. To which son would the father’s heart be inclined? The father would support his wronged son and try to compensate him. If, for example, the brother who was committing the wrong took from him ten piasters, the father would give the brother who was wronged something worth one hundred piasters, by way of compensation. Surely, the brother who committed the wrong would lament over what he had done. Had he known that his father would compensate his brother whom he had wronged so generously, he would not have ever wronged him. Without doubt, injustice is the epitome of stupidity.

One of the paradoxical sayings regarding this is the following: 'If it is inevitable that you backbite someone, backbite your own parents.' Anyone who would hear this will certainly ask, 'But why would I backbite my own father and mother?' The one who makes this paradoxical statement would say, 'Your parents are more deserving of your good deeds than others. Instead of giving the reward of your good deeds to people whom you dislike, search for those whom you love and give them such a merit and reward.' The underlying viewpoint is that a backbiter should not act so foolishly; one backbites out of enmity. So how come one would hand over the reward for his good deeds to his adversary?

We know well what our master Al-Hasan Al-Basri *Allah be pleased with him* did on hearing that someone had backbitten him. Al-Hasan Al-Basri *Allah be pleased with him* sent off his courier with a present of a plate full of dates to his backbiter and the following message: 'It came to the knowledge of my master that you had backbitten him yesterday, and by doing so, you have granted him the reward for your good deeds. Definitely, your good deeds are more precious than these dates.' This sufficiently emphasises the reprehensibility of backbiting.

'And whoever earns sin, he earns it only against himself. And Allah is Ever All Knowing, All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 111). We already know that when an attribute of the True Lord is preceded with *kana* which is the past tense of the Arabic verb 'to be', it should not mistakenly be thought that such a tense describes an event in the past. Rather, its connection to the past is for continuity since it means that the event was and still is. How so? Since Allah is Eternal; He is Forgiving and Merciful prior to the coming into being of any of His creation to which He may dispense His Mercy or Forgiveness. Allah *Glorified is He* is not subject to time and its vicissitudes. His attributes are constant and unchanging. Only constantly changing beings are subject to the vicissitudes of time and circumstance. For instance, a human being may be healthy at a particular time and sick during another.

Therefore, the transitions of time from the future to the past and from the future to the present are only applicable to beings that are subject to change. Since Allah is the One Who changes all things, but He never changes; time cannot affect Allah or apply to Him. He is Forgiving and Merciful since the beginning of time and until the end of time - now and forever. Similarly, Allah's Knowledge is ever eternal, and His Wisdom is boundless. Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَن يَكْسِبْ خَطِيٓـَٔةً أَوْ إِثْمًا ثُمَّ يَرْمِ بِهِۦ بَرِيٓـًٔا فَقَدِ ٱحْتَمَلَ بُهْتَٰنًا وَإِثْمًا مُّبِينًا ﴿١١٢﴾

and anyone who commits an offence or a sin, and then throws the blame on to some innocent person, has burdened himself with deceit as well as flagrant sin [112] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 112)

Some scholars argue that *khati'ah* which means 'fault' in the aforementioned verse, is an unintentional error. An example of this is when we teach a student a certain grammatical rule, and then ask him to apply it to some text. We then notice that the student has mistakenly placed the subject of the sentence in the accusative instead of the nominative case, or vice versa. We may then point out his mistake to him because he has not done it deliberately. Rather, he has just forgotten the rule. We continue to correct his mistake until he memorises the grammatical rule. Through training, applying the rules of Arabic grammar becomes an acquired ability of the student, and he no longer makes the mistake. Hence *khati'ah* is an unintentional error, while sin is an intentional error. However, what is Allah's Judgment on the one who commits a fault or a sin, and then imputes it to someone else?' And whoever earns a fault or a sin and then throws it on to someone innocent, he has indeed burdened himself with astounding falsehood and a manifest sin.' (*an-Nisa':* 112) Not only did the person involved commit a sin or fault, but he further aggravated his crime by adding another one to it, namely, blaming his sin or fault on an innocent person. In such a case, his sin becomes more complex. Therefore, the True Lord says: '… he has indeed burdened himself with astounding falsehood and a manifest sin.' (*an-Nisa':* 112)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* uses the word *ihtamal,* which is the Arabic word that means 'burdens himself.' Allah does not use *hamala* which means to carry or bear something; by using the above word instead, He stresses the hardship and suffering that must accompany bearing such a burdensome sin. His crime is twofold: committing a sin and then imputing it to an innocent person. This twofold sin evokes regret for both committing the sin and throwing the blame for it on an innocent person. It thus places a twofold burden on the perpetrator. We know that when one gets pulled into a frenzy of hatred, a sin becomes easy and done without thought. However, once this frenzy dies down, regret ensues. In the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*: 27, the True Lord *the Exalted* relates the story of the two brothers Habil (Abel) and Qabil (Cain) saying the following: 'And recite (O, Muhammad) to them the story of Adam's two sons, in truth, when they both offered a sacrifice (to Allah), and it was accepted from one of them but was not accepted from the other. "I will surely kill you," said one. "Allah accepts only from the righteous (who fear Him)," said the other.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27)

Habil (Abel) asked Qabil (Cain), 'Why should I be blamed for this. After all, Allah is the One Who accepts sacrifices, not me. So why do you want to kill me?' The True Lord *the Most High* continues the narrative concerning Habil (Abel) and Qabil (Cain) by saying: 'If you do stretch your hand against me to kill me, I shall never stretch my hand against you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 28) The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* then says: 'So his *Nafs* (self) encouraged him and made fair-seeming to him the murder of his brother. He murdered him and became one of the losers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30)

The previous noble verse indicates that the murdering process was difficult and involved, for the killer persuaded himself into committing the crime. For this reason, the Arabic verb *taw`at* which means 'to make pliant and flexible' is used, but it istranslated in the aforementioned verse as 'encouraged him and made fair-seeming to him.' No one would say, 'I have made the rope pliable or flexible.' However, one may say, 'I have made the iron pliable.' At the time of perpetrating his crime, Qabil (Cain) swept into the madness of anger, became oblivious to all moral scruples. Then, after the crime happened, and the flare of anger that veiled moral and ethical values subsided, these values appeared clearly again before his soul.

Therefore, we sometimes hear of people who commit a crime and then hand themselves in to the police. They may do so because the fury that drove them to commit the crime abated, and the light of moral and ethical values started to emerge brightly. In light of this, we may understand the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '…he has indeed burdened himself with astounding falsehood and a manifest sin.' (*an-Nisa':* 112)

This indicates that whoever commits a crime, and then accuses an innocent person of it weighs himself down with a heavy sin. His soul will be torn apart between regret for committing his crime and guilt about throwing the blame for it on an innocent person. This is the reason why the True Lord *the Exalted* says: '…he has indeed burdened himself with astounding falsehood and a manifest sin.' (*an-Nisa':* 112) The word *buhtan* is derived from the root *bahata*. *Buhtan*, translated in the previous verse as astounding falsehood, is the deed, which, due to its enormity, astounds even the one who does it. An example of such a deed is found in the following verse in which the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* relates the encounter between Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and Nimrod: '…Ibrahim said: "Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise from the east, so you cause it to rise from the west"…' (*al-Baqara:* 258). So what was the reaction of Nimrod?'…At this, the disbeliever was overwhelmed by astonishment…' (*al-Baqara:* 258). This means that the answer that Nimrod heard from Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was so overwhelming that it rendered him speechless. Our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* faced him with an astounding fact that never crossed his mind and was inescapably compelling. It emphasises that matters which contradict logical truth and moral demands that strike people as odd, constitute *buhtan*. Evidence of this is the fact that these matters are always concealed and furtive.

If we now consider the circumstances associated with the revelation of the Quranic verse at hand, we will find that it relates to a theft incident. A thief stole and wanted to vindicate himself by implicating an innocent person in the theft crime and imputing it to him. Commission of a crime incurs sin, and responsibility for that crime, while shifting the responsibility for one's crime to an innocent person, indicates the existence of another level of evil that makes that person bear what he has done, which is normally unbearable to the human soul. Someone who would hear this would not be astonished unless what he is hearing is odd and unfamiliar. There is clear and luminous evidence in the dialogue that took place between Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and Nimrod.

When Nimrod said, 'I (too) give life and cause death.' (*al-Baqara:* 258) By this statement, Nimrod meant his ability to kill or refrain from killing a human being. Our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* quickly responded with an answer that left him dumbfounded and gave no room for any verbal games or disputes. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…Ibrahim said: "Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise from the east, so you cause it to rise from the west." At this the disbeliever was overwhelmed by astonishment…' (*al-Baqara:* 258).

This means that Nimrod heard a wondrous statement and did not possess enough intelligence to answer it back. Similarly, the man who commits a crime and ascribes it to another person needs a capacity to bear such an act. This indicates that sound human instinct abhors such an ugly act. When someone commits such a sin, he burdens himself with the guilt of calumny by going to the extent of imputing his sin unto an innocent person. This denotes that such an act requires an unusual capacity to commit evil.

Accordingly, the saying of the True Lord *the Exalted* '…he has indeed burdened himself with astounding falsehood and a manifest sin' (*an-Nisa':* 112) means that anyone who does this burdens himself with an egregious deed that renders those who hear it dumbfounded and leads them to wonder how can this happen. The perpetrator may even wonder how he dared to commit this.

As we have learned, *ithim* (sin) is a bad deed done deliberately. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* explains this issue clearly as follows: Allah *the Most High* surrounds you, O, Muhammad, with His Care, Support, and Grace. Some people who have little faith may try to distract you from this truth and convince you into acquitting a guilty person and convicting an innocent one using the argument that the former is a Muslim, whereas the latter is a non-Muslim. However Allah *the Exalted* did not send Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to judge between believers only. The beginning of this noble verse makes it clear for us that Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* sent His Messenger to judge justly: '… so that you may judge between the people in accordance with what Allah has taught you…' (*an-Nisa':* 105). That is, to judge justly and fairly between all people without exception. So when you judge never use the argument that this one is a Muslim, while this one is a non-Muslim. Nor should you say that this one is a Muslim, while this one is a Christian or a Jew. Rather, all people should be provided with equal justice.

This incident provided Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the boost of faith needed later to give the verdict concerning the woman from the tribe of Makhzum who committed theft. Usama ibn Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* the most beloved to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* interceded on her behalf. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who resolved to administer the proper Islamic penalty to her, said as narrated in the following Hadith: 'It was narrated by Mother of the Believers, 'Aishah *Allah be pleased with her* that the Quraysh were much concerned about the case of the woman from Makhzum who committed theft and wondered who could intercede for her with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. They said, "Who would dare speak to him about such a matter other than Usama ibn Zayd, his beloved one?" Usama then spoke to him about that matter. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, "Do you intercede regarding a punishment prescribed by Allah?" He then stood up and addressed the people, saying, "Verily, the people before you were ruined because when a noble person among them committed theft, they would leave him. However, if a weak person among them were to commit theft, they would execute the prescribed punishment on him. By Allah, were Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, to commit the theft, I would have cut off her hand."'(1) His statement was derived from the previous case. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says:

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُۥ لَهَمَّت طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ أَن يُضِلُّوكَ وَمَا
يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّآ أَنفُسَهُمْ ۖ وَمَا يَضُرُّونَكَ مِن شَىْءٍ ۚ وَأَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُن تَعْلَمُ ۚ وَكَانَ فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا ﴿١١٣﴾

If it were not for the grace of God and His mercy to you [Prophet],
a party of them would have tried to lead you astray; they only lead
themselves astray, and cannot harm you in any way, since God
has sent down the Scripture and Wisdom to you, and taught you
what you did not know. God's bounty to you is great indeed [113]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 113)

We might wonder if anyone intended to misguide Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We should understand that *hamm* which literally means to intend or plan and is translated in the aforementioned verse as 'made a decision', is of two kinds. One of them is in the sense of actually executing something, and the other is in the sense of trying to embellish and justify something in order to have it executed. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused to execute what they had planned for him to do. Allah warded it off from him since He surrounds His Messenger with His Grace and Mercy. He brought forth events to teach him new rulings. Allah's Grace and Mercy upon His Messenger rendered their endeavour merely an attempt to embellish injustice from which Allah also protected His Messenger. Once learnt, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* started to pass judgments on the cases of everyone according to the new ruling. The sending down of a ruling which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not know before, that specifically dealt with an occurring event, is indeed a favour from Allah. For, through it, Allah expanded the education and edification of His Messenger: '… and taught you that which you knew not…' (*an-Nisa':* 113).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Those who defended Ibn Ubayriq wanted to embellish their arguments in order to convince Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to exempt him from punishment. Their endeavours were limited to this extent, without ever getting to actual execution. The purpose behind such embellishment and justification was to harm and mislead Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* - Allah forbid. They wanted to pull him to a path other than that of truth and righteous guidance. This could have harmed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* acquitted the person who knew himself to be guilty, this would have instilled into him the thought that religious rulings were not serious at all. As for the innocent person, whom they wanted Prophet Muhammad to convict, he would have thought that the religion of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was untrue since it punished an innocent person. Thus, their endeavours to beautify their case would have harmed the image and credibility of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in front of both the guilty person, whom they tried to falsely acquit, as well as the innocent person, whom they tried to falsely convict.

Yet Allah, through His Grace and Mercy, protected His Messenger Muhammad also from this harm: '…a party of them would certainly have made a decision to mislead you, but (in fact) they mislead none except their own selves, and no harm can they do to you in the least. Allah has sent down to you the Book (the Quran) and wisdom…' (*an-Nisa':* 113).

Allah *Glorified is He* sent down Quranic verses to decide this matter. The revelation of a specific ruling following a particular incident highlights, among other things, the secret underlying the gradual revelation of the Quran in portions (over the course of twenty-three years). The Quran deals with actual subject matters, and so it lets the events occur naturally. Then, the Ruling of Allah, directly concerned with the current events, is revealed from the heaven at the time of their occurrence. Otherwise, how would the Quran address different incidents if it had been revealed all at one time before the actual occurrence of such events? Allah, therefore, decreed that the events should take place first, and then the rulings pertaining to them should be revealed. Furthermore, disbelievers are quoted in the Quran as saying: 'Why is the Quran not revealed to him (Muhammad) all at once?' (*al-Furqan:* 32) No, for Allah wanted that the Quran to be revealed gradually, in stages and on separate occasions. Why did He choose so?'… Thus, (it is sent down in parts), that We may strengthen your heart thereby. And We have revealed it to you gradually, in stages.' (*al-Furqan:* 32)

Therefore, Quranic verses were revealed whenever the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be shaken due to bitter quarrels, animosity and stubbornness shown on the part of disbelievers and their resistance to truth, although they recognised him to be the Messenger of Allah just as they recognised their own children. Also, whenever the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be shaken due to the tumult and troubles stirred up by the people around him, the Mercy from Heaven would descend to anchor and support his heart. The noble Quranic verses connected Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with Heaven and relieved him of this suffering. Throughout the mission of preaching Islam, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced hardships daily, which required him to be in need of continuous support and comfort from Allah *Glorified is He*. The revelation of the Quran following the difficulties he faced at the hands of his opponents along with the soothing beauty of Allah's Words had an alleviating effect on him. This made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* await the sweetness of the Divine Words to be bestowed upon him whenever a distressful event occurred. This is the meaning of the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '…Thus (it is sent down in parts) that We may strengthen your heart thereby…' (*al-Furqan:* 32). This means that Allah revealed the Quran little by little, in portions, to provide you, O, Muhammad, with constant steadfastness. If the Quran had been revealed all at once, the times of communication with Heaven would have been few. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to be in continuous contact with the Lord of the Heavens. The evidence is that when the revelation paused for some time, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* started to gaze yearningly at the sky. Why did he do this? The reason is that at its beginning, receiving Divine Revelation exhausted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, he said, 'He [Angel Jibril (Gabriel)] seized me and pressed me until I could no longer bear it.'(1) The Mother of the believers, Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* saw him during the descent of Divine Revelation and said, 'His forehead was intensely sweating.' Thus, the contact between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a human being, and Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* an angel, had to cause a chemical change in the soul of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In this regard, A'isha, the Mother of the believers *Allah be pleased with her* narrated that Al-Harith ibn Hisham *Allah be pleased with him* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O, Messenger of Allah, how does the revelation come to you?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Sometimes, it comes to me like the ringing of a bell, and that is the hardest for me. When it leaves me, I remember what it has said. Sometimes, the angel appears to me in the likeness of a man and talks to me, and I remember what he says.' A'isha *Allah be pleased with her* added, 'I saw the

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Bid' Al-Wahy (The Beginning of Receiving Divine Revelation)*

Messenger of Allah while the revelation was descending upon him on an extremely cold day. When it ceased, his forehead was flooded with sweat.'(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced hardships. Allah *the Exalted* intended by the pause of revelation to make Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* feel the sweetness of the revelation that was bestowed upon him and long for it. Such longing helped Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* endure the difficulty he experienced while receiving Divine Revelations. Therefore, this sweating experience did not last for long because the True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'And indeed the Hereafter is better for you than the present (life of this world).' (*ad-Duha:* 4) This shows that the True Lord *the Exalted* explained to His Messenger that he would feel sweetness, yearning and enjoyment in receiving Divine Revelations '…Thus (it is sent down in parts) so that We may strengthen your heart thereby…' (*al-Furqan:* 32).

The Quran was sent down in portions over different periods of time. The Companions used to hear a number of Quranic verses, memorise them, and then the scribes of the revelations would write them down. Then another miracle of the Quran would descend in support of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and an entire chapter of the Quran would be revealed to him. After being relieved of the exhausting state experienced while receiving Divine Revelation, he would command the writers of it to record it. Afterwards, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would arrange the Quranic verses in their proper places within each chapter. Then, he would recite the chapter that was revealed to him during prayers, and those praying behind him would hear his recitation of each verse in its proper order. This evidently indicates that the manner in which the Quran was revealed had been accurately planned, and that whatever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stated or narrated must be true. Otherwise, I bid you tell me how an entire chapter of the Quran could be revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who would then dictate it to his scribes, recite it in the prayers exactly in the form and order in which it was revealed to him and have his Companions write it down, unless what was revealed to him was the truth from Allah. Sometimes, a person may talk non-stop for a quarter of an hour; we may then ask him to repeat what he said. However, this person would never be able to repeat the exact words he uttered. By contrast, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was capable of repeating the Quranic verses exactly as they were originally revealed to him. This indicates that he was reciting Allah’s Preserved Book which falsehood cannot approach, neither from before it or behind it. It is sent down by the All-Wise, worthy of all praise. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And no example or similitude do they bring (to oppose or to find fault in you or in this Quran), but We reveal to you the truth (against that similitude or example) and the better explanation thereof.' (*al-Furqan:* 33) This means that Allah would always reveal to you, O Muhammad, the truth about any event or incident that deniers might mention to you.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Bid' Al-Wahy (The Beginning of Receiving Divine Revelation)*

Accordingly, the Quran was gradually revealed to constantly strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and safeguard it against the tribulations that it would experience. Allah willed that communication between His Messenger Muhammad and Heaven should extend over the twenty-three years of preaching and delivering the Message of Islam.

The Arabic word *tartil* signifies the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* descended in parts, and not all at once. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would then recite what was revealed to him in the prayers without any change or omission. Regarding this, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* also says: 'We will make you recite (the Quran), so you shall not forget.' (*al-A‘la:* 6)

Each and every part of the Quran was revealed at the time most relevant to the events taking place, as with the incident of the theft committed by Ibn Ubaryq. A ruling was revealed about it in which the True Lord *the Exalted* says: '… and taught you that which you knew not. And Ever Great is the Grace of Allah unto you.' (*an-Nisa’:* 113)

If Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* has imparted knowledge to you, O, Prophet Muhammad, through sending down the Quran to you, does this imply that only you are authorised to enact and implement the rulings and legislations already revealed to you in Allah’s Book? No, this is not the case since the

Book is a miracle in itself, and it contains the principles of faith. However, Allah has also authorised His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to legislate and decree rulings. This is a privilege and honour that was not granted to any Messenger before him. The evidence is the saying of the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted*: '…whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad) gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it)...' (*al-Hashr:* 7). The Messengers before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only delivered to the people and judged between them based on what was revealed to them by Allah. Allah *the Most High* endowed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the special privilege of having the authorisation to pass rulings and legislations. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* explained that he taught His Messenger both the Book and Wisdom. Wisdom refers to the *Sunnah*. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'And remember that which is recited in your houses of the Verses of Allah and the wisdom…' (*al-Ahzab:* 34).

Allah is the Bestower of grace and bounties on His Messenger Muhammad and all His creation: '… Allah has sent down to you the Book (the Quran), wisdom and taught you that which you knew not. And Ever Great is the Grace of Allah unto you (O, Muhammad).' (*an-Nisa':* 113) We should notice that Allah's Grace and Favour occurred twice in this glorious verse. Allah's first favour in this verse is the protection of His Messenger Muhammad from any sect or group that may misguide and lead him away from the truth. The second favour that Allah conferred upon His Messenger Muhammad was that He revealed to him His Book which contained all the rulings and bestowed upon him wisdom, namely, the authorisation by Allah to legislate. Thus, Allah made the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an extension to His Revelations. Therefore, some people who cast doubts on the authority and authenticity of the *Sunnah* can be responded to by asking them where in the Quran it mentions the description of the five daily obligatory prayers. For example, we may ask one of them, 'Do you perform your daily prayers or not?' One of them may answer, 'Yes, I do. 'We may then respond to him: 'How many times do you pray?' He may then say, 'Five times.' We may then ask him to locate the place in the Quran where the five obligatory prayers are described. At this point, he will get pale and confused while trying to find the verse that states that one must perform two *rak`as* (units of prayer) in the Morning Prayer, four *rak`as* in the Noon and Afternoon Prayers, three *rak`as* in the Sunset Prayer and four *Rak`as* in the Evening Prayer. Eventually, he will admit that he prays in accordance with the saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Pray as you have seen me praying.'⑴ This is part of the *Sunnah*.

Regarding the part of the verse saying: '… and taught you that which you knew not. And Ever Great is the Grace of Allah unto you (O, Muhammad) ' (*an-Nisa':* 113), some of those who tend to argue may say, 'The Quran repeats the same words in different places. Why does it mention Allah's Grace and Favour upon Prophet Muhammad at the beginning and end of the same verse?' We answer this by saying, 'You did not grasp the meaning of Allah's Favour in the first part. In this context, it meant that Allah protected His Messenger from being affected by false representation of facts with the intent of convicting an innocent Jew. The second occurrence of Allah's Grace and Favour upon His Messenger Muhammad refers to Allah's bestowal of Knowledge and Wisdom upon His Messenger which, on its own, is a truly great bounty.

Furthermore, did those people who went to talk to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding Tu`ma ibn Ubayriq, not sit together and deliberate the way in which they could let Tu`ma ibn Ubayriq escape punishment for his crime? They deliberated the case of Tu`ma amongst themselves and agreed to go to Prophet Muhammad. This deliberation was a secret and confidential conversation. For this reason, Islamic manners and code of conduct are keen to respect the dignity of any third party sitting with two persons. It is thus considered inappropriate for any two people to talk confidentially or secretly with each other in the presence of a third person since this causes feelings of annoyance and alienation.

However, a private conversation between two people is permissible when four people are sitting together. In this case, two may have a confidential conversation, while the other two may talk to each other. Thus, *najwa* means a private, secret conversation or discourse. Such discourse is often about a matter which the interlocutors do not wish to share or divulge. These people

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Al-Bayhaqi in As-Sunnan Al-Kubra*

had done so before they went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to talk about the situation of Tu`ma ibn Ubayriq. The True Lord *the Most High* exposed their secret conversation. The following saying of the True Lord was revealed in association with this incident:

لَّا خَيۡرَ فِي كَثِيرٖ مِّن نَّجۡوَىٰهُمۡ إِلَّا مَنۡ أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوۡ مَعۡرُوفٍ أَوۡ إِصۡلَٰحِۭ بَيۡنَ
ٱلنَّاسِۚ وَمَن يَفۡعَلۡ ذَٰلِكَ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ مَرۡضَاتِ ٱللَّهِ فَسَوۡفَ نُؤۡتِيهِ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمٗا ﴿١١٤﴾

There is no good in most of their secret talk, only in
commanding charity, or good, or reconciliation between people.
To anyone who does these things, seeking to please God, We
shall give a rich reward [114] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 114)

Allah *the Most High* exposes the secret plan behind their private conversation that harboured the ill intention of misleading the judgement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, what would be the ruling if secret conversations were intended to help achieve a truthful cause? Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* excluded this kind of secret conversations from blame; therefore, Allah did not pronounce an absolute judgement against all kinds of private conversations. Furthermore, not only does Allah exclude private conversations intended to encourage charity, doing good works or conciliating between people, but He also greatly rewards those who engage in them for such purposes. Therefore, Allah says: 'And whoever does this, seeking the good Pleasure of Allah, We shall in time grant him a great reward.' (*an-Nisa’:* 114) In this context, the True Lord *the Most High* uses the Arabic future tense *sawfa* which is in the previous verse and means 'shall in time', even though He could have said, ‘We shall immediately grant him a great reward.’ However, due to the perfect precision of the Quran, the word *sawfa* was used to indicate the furthest possible future.

When the time span, separating the action in the subordinate clause and its result in the main clause is relatively short, the verb in the main clause is affixed by the letter 's' (a prefix that denotes the future), and if this time span is longer, the verb is preceded by *sawfa* (which means 'will'). However, if there is a time lag between the former and the latter, the word *sawfa* is used in place of the particle *(sin).* In this verse, the True Lord *the Exalted* uses the word *sawfa* since the place of reward is the Afterlife. Therefore, no believing servant of Allah should say, 'Why has Allah not rewarded me for my good deed in the worldly life?’ The reason is that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* did not say, ‘We shall immediately grant him a great reward’, instead He said: '… We shall in time grant him a great reward.' (*an-Nisa’:* 114) This indicates that all favours and bounties are from Allah. However, if they were bestowed immediately, this would not be the true reward for such good deeds since the reward which the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* shall give to his believing servants will be quite great. The only word that can indicate that such reward will follow in the Afterlife is *sawfa*. In this connection, we also know that whenever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* promised his followers something, he would always refer to the Afterlife. Let us consider, for example, Al-‘Aqaba Pledge, which was when the *Ansar* came from Medina to pledge their allegiance and loyalty to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* surrounded by a group of his Companions on the night of the `Aqabah Pledge, said, 'Give me your pledge of allegiance that you will not associate anything with Allah, that you will not steal, that you will not commit *zina* (sexual intercourse outside marriage), that you will not kill your children, that you will not bring forth a slander you fabricate by lying about who has fathered your children and that you will not disobey what is right. Whoever among you fulfills this (pledge), his reward is due from Allah. Whoever commits anything of this and is punished in this world, it shall be considered expiation for him. And whoever commits anything of this, and Allah shields him (i.e. covers his sin), his matter will rest with Allah. If He so wills, He will pardon him; and if He so wills, He will punish him.'(1)

The people replied, 'O, Messenger of Allah, you have asked for yourself, and we want to ask for ourselves. What shall we have if we fulfil this pledge?’ Let us hear the great, divinely inspired reply that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave, 'You shall have Paradise.'

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the Book of Iman (Faith)*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could have told them that they would triumph and prevail over the earth, from the east to the west, and that they would enjoy the bounties of all the countries that would convert to Islam. However, due to his wisdom, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never promised them such things since some of them might be killed while fighting in support of the Religion of Allah. In such case, some might wonder what reward did he get in the worldly life? He would not get his share of honour in the worldly life, but he would be rewarded in the Afterlife. This is the reason why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned the reward that applies to all, namely, entering paradise, in order to make Muslims realise that this world is too immaterial for Allah to limit the reward He promised to those who obey Him to only it, rather, he encourages believers to seek Allah’s Reward in the Afterlife. We all know the following story. A man once said to his friend, 'Do you love me?’ His friend replied, 'Yes, I love you.' He asked, 'How much?’ His friend replied, 'I love you as much as I love this worldly life.' The man said, 'How insignificant I must be to you!'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And whoever does this, seeking the good Pleasure of Allah, We shall in time grant him a great reward.' (*an-Nisa’:* 114). However, to whom does the pronoun 'We' in this verse refer? Who will grant such a great reward? It is the True Lord *the Most High* ho described His Reward as great. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling us, 'O, believers, adhere to the path of Prophet Muhammad and cling to it until your life becomes unified to it. Beware of having any opinion different from his law. He is the one who speaks on behalf of Allah. Thus, whoever believes in him must adhere to his path. When our master Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was told about the story of *Isra'* (Night Journey) and *Mi`raj* (Ascension to Heaven), he just asked those who told him, ‘Did the Messenger of Allah say what you are telling me now?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ So, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* answered, ‘If he said so, it must be true.’ Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* did not need evidence to verify the truth of what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said. The True Lord *the Exalted* then puts forward the opposite case:

وَمَن يُشَاقِقِ ٱلرَّسُولَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ ٱلۡهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعۡ غَيۡرَ سَبِيلِ
ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ نُوَلِّهِۦ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ وَنُصۡلِهِۦ جَهَنَّمَۖ وَسَآءَتۡ مَصِيرًا ﴿١١٥﴾

if anyone opposes the Messenger, after guidance has been made clear to him, and follows a path other than that of the believers, We shall leave him on his chosen path – We shall burn him in Hell, an evil destination [115] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 115)

The word *yushaqiq* which is the Arabic word in the previous verse that translates as 'contradicts and opposes', indicates that a cleavage or chasm has been engendered in something that used to be cohesively held together as one unit. This is analogous to the case when we cut a piece of wood into two. Similarly, if believers adhere to and have faith in the path set by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and recognise him as the Messenger conveying the true Message of Allah, they do not ever break such unity with and adherence to the path of Allah’s Messenger. Thus, if a ruling was decreed and a believer tried to violate it, in doing so this person would, Allah forbid, be inciting disobedience against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Alternatively, the verse at hand might be referring to those who pursue a path other than that of Prophet Muhammad, and thus, end up following a path other than that set by Allah’s Law: 'And whoever contradicts and opposes the Messenger (Muhammad) after the right path has been shown clearly to him…' (*an-Nisa’:* 115). Guidance has indeed become clear to every Muslim once they believe in Allah as their Creator and Lord and believe in Prophet Muhammad as the conveyor of Allah’s Message. By doing so, they are submitting themselves to Allah. As we have previously stated, the function of reason is to contemplate the signs and evidence of the existence of the Supreme Creator. After one believes in the existence of the One Supreme Lord, another step must follow: belief in the Messenger of God as the conveyer of God’s Message and Words. The reason is that the ultimate piece of evidence that one's logic seeks as a ground to believe in the existence of God is the one proving the existence of an Able, All-Wise and All Knowing Power that underlies the existence of humanity along with this entire universe.

However, human reason cannot, on its own, identify the name of such a power. Furthermore, human reason cannot know the demands of such a power from its created beings. Therefore, human reason must be informed of the nature of this power. Once compelling evidence of the existence of a Higher Being is revealed to humans, with a message sent from Him through a messenger, the humans must adhere to the path preached by this Messenger. The humans must then fulfil the obligations that this Supreme Power has placed on them since they are God's Commands that the Messenger of God delivered them, performed them himself or ordered that they be performed. However, to those who want to engage in contentious arguments we say, 'First, reconsider your faith in Allah, and second, reconsider your belief in the Messenger of Allah. This is the reason why the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'And whoever contradicts and opposes the Messenger (Muhammad) after the right path has been shown clearly to him, and follows other than the believers' way. We shall keep him in the path he has chosen, and burn him in Hell - what an evil destination' (*an-Nisa':* 115).

Guidance, as we know, is the path leading to a specific aim and purpose. Every action of a human being must have a purpose. Society considers anyone who does a purposeless act as inept and lacking direction. By contrast, if one has an aim for his actions, then he knows well the importance and significance of his aim and will search for the shortest way to accomplish it. This way is what we call guidance. Thus, whoever learns the way of guidance and then pursues a path other than that of the believers has opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has dissociated himself from the path of faith and has proceeded contrary to it. Furthermore, whoever opposes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has, in fact, renounced his faith.

Thus, we know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has set a particular way and path and that believers follow him closely, adhering to this path. Furthermore, we also recognise that whoever deviates from the path set by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dissociates himself from him as well as from the believers. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to follow His Path and not to follow other ways: 'And say, "This is my straight path. So follow it; and follow no other ways, lest they lead you away from His way. That is what He enjoins upon you, that you may be able to guard against evils. '(*al-An'am:* 153)

Allah *Glorified is He* has set only one Path. However, what happens to the one who deviates from it? Allah *Glorified is He* answers that question by stating that He will leave such a person on his chosen path and burn him in Hell, an evil destination. Sometimes the Arabic word *mn*, meaning 'whoever', could be used as a conditional particle or as a relative pronoun. For instance, when we say that whoever studies succeeds, the last syllable of the two verbs following *mn*, or 'however', are pronounced with a u-sound accent, and in that case it is a relative pronoun. The sentence would mean that the one who studies is the one who succeeds. However, if the last syllable of the two verbs has a silent accent, *nm*, or 'however', would be a conditional particle. If the word *mn*, or 'whoever', is a relative pronoun, we find that the sentence proceeds normally with two verbs pronounced with u sound accent. However, if it is a conditional particle, the last syllable of the two verbs is pronounced with a silent accent, and the second verb would be the outcome of the condition. The Arabic word *mn* (whoever) can be either a relative pronoun or a conditional particle; this is normally known from what follows it. We have an illustrative example in this verse when Allah *Glorified is He* says, '*Yattabi'* (to follow).' Thus, we notice that the verb *yattabi'* (to follow) has a silent accent. This means that *mn* (whoever) is conditional in this context. The recitation would be different if we deem *mn* (whoever) a relative pronoun because in such a case the verb *yushaqiq* (to oppose), as well as the verb *yattabi'* (to follow), will be both considered normal present tense verbs with u-sounding accents on the last syllable of each. In such a case, the rest of the verse would be recited as *nuwallihi ma tawalla wanuslihi.* By contrast, if *mn* (whoever) is considered a conditional particle, as it actually is in this verse, this implies that the last syllable of the verb *yushaqiq* (to oppose) must have a silent accent; in such a case this verse is to be recited normally. Subsequently, the last syllable of the verb connected with the verb *yushaqiq* (to oppose) via the conjunction, viz. *yattabi'* (to follow) must also have a silent accent. The same also applies to *nuwallihi* (to leave) and *nuslihi* (to burn) since both of them are connected with *yattabi'* (to follow) via a conjunction. However, in the case of the two latter verbs, adding a silent accent to their last syllable assumes the form of omitting the vowel *Al-Yaa'* (i) at the end of each. Another semantic point to consider is the meaning of *tawalla* which is to come close to someone.

Thus, when we say that so and so *tawalla* (to come closer to) so and so, this means that this person has become close to that other person. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want whoever does not follow the path of the believers, and thus He abandons him to the disbelievers. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'I am the One, One Who does not stand in need of a partner. If anyone does anything in which he associates anyone else with Me, I shall abandon him with one whom he associates with Allah.'(1)

The one who needs a partner is the one who suffers a point of weakness that makes him in need of another partner for support. To Allah *Glorified is He* belong the supreme and most Glorified parables. An example illustrating the above point is that no one would ever have a business partner unless he does not have enough money to manage his business or lacks the ability to manage it. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us, 'I am the One, One Who does not stand in need of a partner. If anyone does anything in which he associates anyone else with Me, I shall abandon him with one whom he associates with Allah.'(2)

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has the absolute, effective Power that is not in need of any support or partnership, as partnership primarily indicates that one of the partners is weak and, therefore, needs the support of another partner. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* punishes whoever opposes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding any religious matter by making him closer to disbelievers, and also closer to his aim. Allah *Glorified is He* knows that no benefit will accrue to anyone who opposes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Rather, the punishment of the one who opposes him and follows other than the way of the believers is that Allah *Glorified is He* brings him closer to the disbelievers and the sinners by making him join their side and resurrecting him among their group. This does not mean that Allah *Glorified is He* deprives this servant of his provision, instead, He grants provisions to both believers and disbelievers. He has also commanded all worldly causes to serve His servants if they pursue them. Indeed, it is due to the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* that He does not deprive such a disobedient servant of His Bounties; His sun provides him with light and warmth, the air continues to blow for him and the earth continues to supply him with his sustenance. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He increases the harvest of whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter and gives whoever desires the harvest of this worldly life a share of it, but he will have no share in the Hereafter: 'Who so desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We give him increase in his harvest; and whoso desires the harvest of this world, We give him his portion thereof, but in the Hereafter, he will have no share.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

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(1) *[Narrated by Muslim]*
(2) *[Narrated by Muslim]*

In this respect, He also states that to each category He gives from His Bounty which never has been restricted: 'To all We render aid - to those as well as to these - a gift from your Lord. And the gift of your Lord is not restricted.' (*al-Isra':* 20) Thus, Divine Grace and Bounty are not exclusively restricted to believers; rather, they are equally bestowed upon both believers and disbelievers. Indeed, if this had been the only sign of Allah's Compassion and Mercy, it would have sufficed to make us all love Him and follow His Path. Allah *Glorified is He* states that whoever follows a path other than that of the believers, He will leave such a person on his chosen path and burn him in hell, an evil destination. The path leading to hell must indeed be extremely evil. Subsequently, the discourse of Allah's addresses the capital form of treason one could ever commit against faith; it is Allah's saying:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَغۡفِرُ أَن يُشۡرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغۡفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن
يَشَآءُۚ وَمَن يُشۡرِكۡ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدۡ ضَلَّ ضَلَٰلَۢا بَعِيدًا ﴿١١٦﴾

God does not forgive the worship of others beside
Him – though He does forgive whoever He will for
lesser sins – for who- ever does this has gone far,
far astray [116] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 116)

In this context, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the person who did not repent from his act of associating others in divinity with Allah *Glorified is He* so he can not be a believer. Believing in Islam wipes out what precedes it, which means that it wipes out all acts of disbelief and the sins that preceded it, provided that such acts and sins were not related to the rights of others as is the case of one of Allah's servants wronging another. A sign of the greatness of believing in Islam is that if someone who devoutly embraced faith in Allah

Glorified is He with a pure intention and then dies, He rewards this person with satisfaction and pleasure more than the one who lives for a long time as a believer and yet commits a number of sins for which he deserves to be punished.

The story of Mukhayriq *Allah be pleased with him* illustrates this point. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* departed from Medina on his way to the battle of 'Uhud, Mukhayriq *Allah be pleased with him* asked the Jews, 'Why do you not advocate Muhammad's cause and support him even though you know that it is incumbent on you to do so?' The Jews then answered, 'Today is a Saturday.' Mukhayriq *Allah be pleased with him* then said, 'No Saturday will keep me from fulfilling my obligation.' He then picked up his sword and set out to join Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*. He then fought until he was injured and his injury was too severe for him to continue fighting. When he was about to die, he said, 'I give my wealth to Muhammad to do with it as he wishes.' Thus, even though Mukhayriq *Allah be pleased with him* did not pray even a single unit of prayer to Allah *Glorified is He* during his life, he attained the status of a martyr. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said, 'Mukhayriq is the good leader of the Jews, Salman is the good leader of the Persians and Bilal is the good leader of the Abyssinians.'

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us here that he does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. To Allah *Glorified is He* belong the supreme and most Glorified parables – and an example of the above point in everyday life is that we may come across a society wherein a revolution or a coup erupts. We may then notice that the leaders of this revolution or coup let someone do as he wills until the point when he starts to criticise the revolution or try to incite another coup. Upon doing so, they may take him to court and try him for high treason. So what should be the punishment of the one who completely gets out of the fold of faith and associates anyone with Allah? Allah *Glorified is He* never forgives such a major sin; however, He forgives all acts and deeds other than it. It is indeed due to Allah's Mercy towards His creation that He has reserved the will to forgive exclusively to Himself so that people would not consider it easy to commit a given sin. However, any servant of Allah *Glorified is He* who commits a sin should first repent in order for Allah *Glorified is He* to forgive him. In this respect, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* never excludes any of His servants from the realm of His Mercy simply because he has committed a sin. We know that there is a difference between a servant of Allah *Glorified is He* who commits a sin while recognising that it is a sin, acknowledging his sinfulness and realising that His Ruling is correct, but he was too weak to resist the temptation; while another servant may simply reject His Ruling. In this respect, we sometimes come across a servant who seeks to find an aspect of permissibility to commit a sin as is the case when one says that usury is not unlawful. This is a form of rejecting Allah's Ruling. By contrast, the servant who says, 'I know that usury is unlawful, but I am undergoing difficult conditions, and I have pressing needs to meet. Therefore, I slipped into eating usury' is only a disobedient one since he does not reject Allah's Ruling. Whoever rejects Allah's Ruling is, Allah forbid, a disbeliever.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomever He wills. We should also bear in mind that some orientalists who want to spread corruption on earth, ultimately spread the virtues of Islam. Their case is similar to what a poet described in the following verses:

Whenever Allah wills to spread a virtue that has disappeared,

He appoints for this mission the tongue of an envious person.

When the orientalists talk about certain matters, they drive those who have faith to seek answers using the miraculous aspects of the Quran and its eloquence. The orientalists say, 'Muhammad told his people that Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whomever He wills. However, it seems that he was quite unaware of this when he said in another verse that Allah forgives all the sins of His servants who transgressed against themselves by their very sinning.' Allah says: 'Say, `O, my servants who have sinned against their souls, despair not of the mercy of Allah. Surely, Allah forgives all sins. Verily, He is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful.' (*az-Zumar:* 53) They try to attribute the discourse of the Quran to Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* instead of Allah *Glorified is He* and to find a contradiction between the two noble verses. We say to orientalists that they are all ignorant, along with lacking the mastery of the Arabic language.

Had they mastered the Arabic language and grasped it naturally, they would have understood the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* that He forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He Who is 'Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful.' (*az-Zumar:* 53)

These orientalists should have understood that associating anyone with Allah *Glorified is He* is much more severe than sinning. Sinning occurs when someone recognises a religious ruling but then violates it. However, the one who associates anyone with Allah *Glorified is He* does not fall under the category of people whom Allah *Glorified is He* may forgive all kinds of their sins, as he is a disbeliever in the first place. For this reason, there is no contradiction or discrepancy between the two noble verses. Thus, it is evident that orientalists do not understand the real meanings of the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* states that He does not forgive the worship of others beside Him, but forgives what is lesser than that, as the one who worships others beside Him has gone far astray. No matter how satisfying a life a polytheist may enjoy, he will ultimately live for a limited time. Therefore, even if all such pleasure and satisfaction remain, he will leave them when he dies. Alternatively, pleasure and satisfaction may abandon and leave him during his life. Therefore, he will either abandon all pleasures upon dying, or all pleasures and satisfaction will abandon him inasmuch as everything in this worldly life is susceptible to change. Thus, as far as pleasure and satisfaction in life are concerned, one has either of two conditions: he may either abandon them upon dying, or the pleasures and satisfaction will themselves abandon him during his life. Furthermore, a polytheist will ultimately return to Allah *Glorified is He* to be judged in the Afterlife, and since it is eternal, his suffering due to his crime(s) will be infinitely long. Committing such an act is thereby an extreme form of drifting far astray. By contrast, the one who drifts astray a little bit may restore his senses and return to the righteous path. Accordingly, polytheists may be classified into two group: one group who deny the Divinity of Allah and these are disbelievers, and a group who believe in Allah, but associate partners with Him in Divinity.

For this reason, we find the polytheists at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said that they only worship idols, believing that they may bring them nearer to Allah: 'And those who take as protectors others beside Him say, "We serve them only that they may bring us near to Allah in station.' (*az-Zumar:* 3)

For instance, had they said that they only sacrifice to them to bring them nearer to Allah, it would have been possible for them to fall among the sphere of those who worship Him *Glorified is He*. However, they admitted that they worship the idols; for this reason, they definitely fall within the realm of polytheism. In this respect, our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* says that the idols are enemies to him, but not (to) the Lord of the worlds: 'They are all enemies to me...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77).

He specifies the exception in his declaration so that he may decisively and clearly tell his people that all the idols that they worship are his enemies, but Allah is not his enemy. It is as if the people of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* used to believe in Allah *Glorified is He,* but associated partners with Him. For this reason, he said that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who created him and guided him, and it is He Who gave him food and drink: '(It is Allah) Who has created me, and it is He Who guides me and Who gives me food and gives me drink.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78,79)

Accordingly, polytheism may assume the form of denying the existence of Allah, or it may take the form of associating others in Divinity with Him. Let us then see who the polytheists worship and pray to when calamities befall them:

إِن يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ إِنَٰثًا وَإِن يَدْعُونَ إِلَّا شَيْطَٰنًا مَّرِيدًا ﴿١١٧﴾

In His place the idolaters invoke only females, and Satan, the rebel [117] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 117)

The Arabic word *'in* (not) in this context means 'not.' In some instances, the word *'in* is used as a conditional particle, and in others instances, it is used as a negative article as is the case of His saying in another verse that their mothers are none but those who gave birth to them: 'Those among you who put away their wives by calling them mothers - they do not thereby become their mothers; their mothers are only those who gave birth to them.' (*al-Mujadala:* 2)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* means that their mothers are only those who gave birth to them. The same applies to the word *'in* (not) when Allah

Glorified is He says that they call only upon female deities instead of Him. The Arabs before Islam used to attribute everything that is base and weak to women. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says that they are brought up wearing adornments and during arguments are unable to speak plainly: 'Do they assign to Allah one who is brought up in adornments and who is not able to give clear expression to an argument in disputation?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 18) Women in the Arabic tradition are incapable of achieving victory or defending themselves. For this reason, an Arab poet said:

I do not know and I do not imagine I would know
If the tribe of Hisnis truly a people or merely women

The word 'people' in the above line refers to men since they are the ones who always handle confronting problems. So why do you claim that there are female partners with Allah *Glorified is He*? Is it because females are weak? Or is it because you claim that the angels are the daughters of Allah and so you used to worship them? If this is the case, why do you attribute the females to Allah *Glorified is He* even though He has created both males and females? For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'That, indeed is an unfair division.' (*an-Najm:* 22). This means that it is an unfair division and distribution, wherein justice was not observed.

In this respect, when we consider the idols, we notice that they all have female names like al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat (*an-Najm:* 19-20). Similarly, there is an idol called 'Isaf, and another called Na'ila. Accordingly, are these idols really females? If so, how come that you worship females even though you consider them incapable of supporting and benefiting anyone? Furthermore, the idols that you worship besides Allah and that have female names, are they women or angels?

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* that they worship instead of Him only female false deities is a style used to imply exclusion. This means that they do not worship apart from Allah except females, or another way to say it is that they worship only females and not Allah. This style of saying it this way is similar to the statement that only Zayd was treated generously. This is a negation of anybody being generous to anyone besides Zayd, and it is an affirmation of its occurrence to Zayd. Therefore, once Allah *Glorified is He* says that they call upon instead of Him none but female false deities, we should understand that they do not worship or invoke anyone except females. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* conjoins it with: '…They do not call on anything but a rebellious Satan.'

At the beginning of the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* has used a style for exclusion. This style indicates that the action is limited to the one who carried it out and is not extended to anyone else. Their worshipping of females only is the first exclusion in the verse. The other one is the saying of Allah that they do not call on anything but a rebellious Satan. The servants of the idols used to allege that there it is something inside every idol that speaks to them. For this reason, they also alleged that there was a Satan in every idol that spoke to them. This was a kind of deception since devils could either be humans or Jinn.

Therefore, there were servants who used to take care of these false deities and wanted to attribute power to them so that people would make sacrifices and bring gifts to these deities, and these servants would relish that chance. For this reason, they used to hire someone who had a rough voice to stand behind the idols and tell people, 'Sacrifice such and such for me or bring me such and such thing.' Such practice is identical to what the modern magicians do in order to convince people of their power. Therefore, the entity that used to talk from inside these idols is either a Satan from among humans or a Satan from among genies. Etymologically, the Arabic word *shaytan* (Satan) is derived from *shatan* which means distance and remoteness.

In order to understand why Satan is described as *marid* (rebellious), we toned to understand the meaning of the words *mared* and *marid*. To do so, we have to bear in mind that abstract things are explained in terms of tangible things. The linguistic root of both words is constituted of three Arabic letters: *al-mim*, *ar-ra'* and *ad-dal*. From this root, several words are derived like the following: *'amrad*, *mumarad, marda*' and *marid.* All the words derived from this root refer to a kind of smooth texture, as *'amrad* means smooth. Thus, when it is used to describe a specific kind of hair, it means that the roots of this hair are smooth. Furthermore, if a palace is described as being *mumarad* (smooth) as in the case of the palace of Sulaiman (Solomon), this means that such palace has been polished in a way that made it so smooth that Bilqis, the queen of Sheba, mistakenly mistook it for water. For this reason, the queen raised her dress fearing it could become wet. Similarly, if a tree is described as being *marda',* this implies that it is too smooth for one to climb, like the palm tree since it does not have any branches on it, which explains why people hammer big nails in the stem of this tree to help them climb it.

Similarly, Satan is described as being *marid* (rebellious) to indicate that he is constantly rebelling and revolting to such an extent that one cannot catch him or control him. Thus, *'amrad*, *mumarad*, *marda'* and *marid* all refer to the smoothness of texture. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says that they actually call upon none but a rebellious Satan.

When a sinful person tries to blame Satan in the Afterlife, the latter will tell them that he had no authority over them except that he called them, and they responded to his call: 'I had no power over you, except that I called you and you obeyed me. So blame me not, but blame your ownselves.' (*Ibrahim:* 22)

Thus, he evades and betrays those who followed him because he did not solely possess the power to either persuade or coerce them. He only called upon, abetted and distracted some of Allah's created beings. Thus, they followed him due to their stupidity. Allah *Glorified is He* then says that Satan has been banished from His Mercy. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّعَنَهُ ٱللَّهُ وَقَالَ لَأَتَّخِذَنَّ مِنْ عِبَادِكَ نَصِيبًا مَّفْرُوضًا ﴿١١٨﴾

God rejected, who said, I will certainly take my due share of Your servants [118] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 118)

But why was he cursed? Satan sinned and disobeyed Allah *Glorified is He*. Similarly, Adam *peace be upon him* sinned and disobeyed Allah *Glorified is He*. So, why has Allah *Glorified is He* cursed Satan but forgiven Adam? We find the answer in the Quran when it says that Adam received from Allah *Glorified is He* some words of prayer and He accepted his repentance: 'Then Adam learnt from his Lord certain words of prayer. So He turned towards him with Mercy. Surely He is Oft-Returning with compassion and is Merciful.' (*al-Baqara:* 37) Based on this statement, we know that there is a difference between created beings of Allah *Glorified is He* that rejects one of His Rulings, and another who obliviously commits a sin. When Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Satan to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him,* Satan answered that he was better than Adam since Allah *Glorified is He* had created him from fire, whereas He created Adam from clay: '…He said, "I am better than he. You have created me from fire while him you have created from clay."' (*al-A'raf:* 12)

This is a rejection of Allah's Ruling. This is different from the case of Adam and Hawwa (Eve) who admitted wronging themselves by committing a sin: `"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You forgive us not and have not mercy on us, we shall surely be of the losers."' (*al-A'raf:* 23)

Thus, Adam *peace be upon him* recognised Allah's Ruling and admitted that he was too weak to resist the temptation. For this reason, every one of us should beware of approaching anything that Allah *Glorified is He* has made unlawful and furthering saying that it is not unlawful. Rather, if one is incapable of controlling himself, he should acknowledge his incapacity and say, 'Whatever Allah has made unlawful is proscribed, but I am not able to control himself.' By doing so, he avoids slipping into disbelief and is merely considered a disobedient believer. In such a case, repentance and asking Allah *Glorified is He* for forgiveness may remove the sins he incurred due to his deeds. However, the one who claims that what Allah *Glorified is He* has proscribed is lawful is the one who insists on disbelief. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* has veiled and blurred his insight due to what he did.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes Satan as accursed which means He has banished him from the realm of His Mercy, which is one reason why man should beware of giving in to the enticements of Satan.

If our master Adam *peace be upon him* had exerted his mind, he would have discerned the intention of Satan and his plot, for the plot of Satan is weak. However, Adam *peace be upon him* did not imagine that anyone one could falsely swear by Allah's Name, which is what Satan did when he swore that he was a sincere advisor to Adam and Hawwa (Eve): '… Surely I am a sincere counsellor unto you.' (*al-A'raf:* 21)

The carelessness of Adam *peace be upon him* was intended for a purpose that Allah *Glorified is He* has willed. The purpose was to make Adam His vicegerent in the world. This is why it was easy for Satan to entice Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife in order to expose their nakedness. He said to them that Allah had forbidden them that tree to prevent them from becoming angels or immortal:… "Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree, lest you become angels or lest you become of the immortals."' (*al-A'raf:* 20) Satan tempted Adam and Hawwa (Eve) when he told them that Allah *Glorified is He* kept them from eating from the tree so that they would not become angels or immortal. Had Adam *peace be upon him* carefully deliberated the matter, he could have told Satan that he should eat from the tree in order to become an eternal angel since he is the one who fearfully asked Allah *Glorified is He* to reprieve him until the Day of Resurrection: 'He said, "My Lord, then grant me respite till the day when they shall be raised."' (*al-Hijr:* 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to learn from the carelessness of Adam *peace be upon him;* for this reason, a believer should always be attentive and vigilant. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has cursed the Satan, for he had said that he would take from among Allah's servants an appointed portion.

When the noble Quran addresses a certain issue, this means that such an issue merits our deliberation and careful consideration. We notice that Satan talked about the matter at the time when there were only two human beings: Adam and Hawwa (Eve). However, how did he know that he will have more human followers in the future? Furthermore, on what basis did he say that he would surely take from among Allah's servants an appointed portion?

He knew that since he was capable of tempting Adam and Hawwa (Eve), he would be capable of tempting some of their posterity and winning them to his side. Thus, he made such an assertion based on the fact that he was able to tempt Adam and Hawwa (Eve). Those who follow Satan from amongst humans have, therefore, vindicated his claim to take from amongst Allah's servants an appointed portion.

Satan thereby made this hypothetical claim because he was able to tempt Adam and Hawwa (Eve), even though they received their assignments directly from Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, he thought that it would be easier to tempt their posterity who did not receive their assignments directly from Allah *Glorified is He* but through messengers. Thus, the line of thinking of Satan was based on a piece of evidence. A supposition is, as we know, a probability and an uncertain claim. Its antithesis is an illusion, which is based on a less likely possibility. Allah *Glorified is He* says that Satan had already confirmed through them his assumption: 'And Iblis (Satan), indeed, found true his judgment concerning them, so they followed him, all except a party of true believers.' (*Saba':* 20) For this reason, Satan also said that if Allah *Glorified is He* delayed his death until the Day of Resurrection, he would surely destroy Adam's descendants, except for a few: 'If You will grant me respite till the Day of Resurrection, I will most surely bring his descendants under my sway except a few.' (*al-Isra':* 62) He also swore by Allah's Might to mislead them all: `So by Your Might, I will surely lead them all astray' (*Sad:* 82). The pledge of Satan to take from amongst Allah's servants an appointed portion is a confession on his part that he will not be able to tempt all the children of Adam and Hawwa (Eve). The Arabic word *Al-fard* (an appointed portion), as we know, is a certain matter. Thus, it is what is certain and indisputable. However, what are the means whereby Satan would take an appointed portion of the posterity of Adam? Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us the means of Satan through his own words:

وَلَأُضِلَّنَّهُمْ وَلَأُمَنِّيَنَّهُمْ وَلَآمُرَنَّهُمْ فَلَيُبَتِّكُنَّ ءَاذَانَ ٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ
وَلَآمُرَنَّهُمْ فَلَيُغَيِّرُنَّ خَلْقَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَمَن يَتَّخِذِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنَ وَلِيًّا مِّن
دُونِ ٱللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا مُّبِينًا ﴿١١٩﴾

I will mislead them and incite vain desires in them; I will command them to slit the ears of cattle; I will command them to tamper with God's creation.' Whoever chooses Satan as a patron instead of God is utterly ruined [119] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 119)

In this verse, there is a detailed account of the means whereby Satan would tempt and take an appointed portion of the posterity of Adam *peace be upon him*. Satan, as the Quran recounts, said: 'I will assuredly lie in wait for them on Your straight path.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) We learnt before that Satan only intends and tries to tempt those who pursue the path of righteousness. The reason is that the one who chose an evil path does not need Satan to tempt him since he is already a Satan. For this reason, Satan would not go, for instance, to a bar in order to tempt people. Rather, he waits in front of mosques to identify the people who do good things and tries to tempt them by whispering to them. This answers those who complain that they suffer from whispering while praying. Praying, as we know, is the noblest activity that any servant of Allah *Glorified is He* does; while praying, he stands before Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, Satan tries to distract him in order to preclude him from reaping the reward for his prayers. These temptations are thereby a healthy phenomenon since they are an indication of faith; however, those with faith should perform cautiously. When Satan prompts a person to do something, he should recall the saying of Allah that if the Satan prompts the person, he should seek refuge with Allah. He is All-Hearing and All Knowing: 'And if an evil suggestion of Satan assails thee, then seek refuge in Allah; surely, He is All-Hearing, All Knowing.' (*al-A'raf:* 200)

When we seek refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* Satan realises that we are aware of his existence. Therefore, if Satan tries to tempt you, you must immediately seek refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* even if you are reciting the Quran while praying. Subsequently, you may resume reciting the Quran during your prayer. When Satan realises that you are aware of his temptations once, twice and thrice, he will keep away from you and will never seek to approach you unless he feels that you are in a state of carelessness.

Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us the means whereby Satan takes a specific portion from amongst His servants. He says that Satan will mislead them, which means that he takes the man to a path that does not lead to a good end. If someone chooses the shortest path leading to the targeted end, this means that he is guided. However, if one drifts away from the path leading to the end that he has set, this means that one is misguided. By setting the path of righteous guidance, Allah *Glorified is He* directs us to the shortest way to our proper end and purpose in life. Therefore, if we deviate from it, here or there, such deviation will expand until we eventually fail to reach the proper end.

Previously, we have given an example to illustrate this point. We said that at the middle of each circle, there is a point that we call the centre. If someone aiming at this point deviates from the straight line that connects him with it by one thousandth of a millimetre, the distance between him and the point would increase proportionally as he proceeds, even though this person assumes that every step he takes brings him closer to his destination.

We have also put forth another illustrative example. Consider the control booth located before every train station. The worker in the booth regulates the directions of all trains running on the different railways and allows each train to stop at a specific platform so that it would not collide with other trains. In order for him to undertake his job successfully, the control-booth worker moves a stick shift whose thickness does not often sometimes exceed a few millimetres. Moving this stick enables the worker to align two railways over each other and so allows the wheels of the train to move from one of them to the other.

Going astray thereby means that one pursues a path that does not lead one to the end and purpose he has set. Every step one takes on this path distances him from his destination and end instead of bringing him closer to it. Such drifting away is the most extreme form of going and straying farther away. Satan is the one who leads man astray inasmuch as he beautifies committing evil and ugly deeds to divert one off the path leading to goodness and virtue.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says that Satan pledged to rouse in man sinful desires. Objects of desire are the goals that one sets and enjoys in his imagination but never takes an actual step to approach the stage of achieving them. For instance, a person may be sitting down and wishing that he would have such and such things even though he does not take any actual step towards acquiring what he wishes to have. In this respect a poet says the following couplet to amuse himself:

The best wishes are those that come true
Otherwise, they make us enjoy our lives

The poet means that one takes pleasure in his wishes by daydreaming regardless if these dreams were about possessing a palace, a car or something else. Every wish that does not motivate one to actually do something to fulfil it is a false wish. For this reason, it is said that wishes are the commodities of the fools. Satan tempts man with the wish that there is no resurrection or recompensing for one’s deeds.

Subsequently, Satan says, that he will command people to slit the ears of the cattle. *Al-batk* (to cut) means to slit, and *Al-an'am* (the cattle) are the camels, cows and sheep. In this context, *Al-batk* means slitting the ears of these animals. The Quran says that *Al-An'am* (the cattle) are eight *azwaj* (mates): two of the sheep, two of goats, two of camels and two of cows: 'And of the cattle He has created eight mates - of the sheep two, and of the goats two. Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Inform me with knowledge if you are truthful." And of the camels two, and of the oxen two. Say, "Is it the two males that He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Were you present when Allah enjoined this on you? "' (*al-An'am:* 143, 144) Had the Arabic word *zawj* (mate) referred to two, this would have meant that the aforementioned verses refer to four only. But the expression of the Quran demonstrates that we ought to use our discretion to understand that the word *zawj* (mate) does not refer to two things. Rather, it refers to one member of certain species that is always associated with a like member of its species. For instance, we refer to one part of the pair of shoes as *zawj* (mate) because it must have another one to complement it. Another example is the Arabic word *taw'am (*twin) which we commonly think that it refers to each set of twins, while it really refers to only one of them. Therefore, if we want to refer to both of them, we ought to use the dual form *taw'aman* (twins).

There is a story underlying why Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned that one among the plans of Satan is to order of people to slit the ears of the cattle. We know that those who take advantage of the ways in which people go astray attribute false temporal powers to themselves in order to keep others dependent on them only. In this respect, those who took care of idols used to serve them; however, no one noticed that it is quite asinine to accept the idea that humans take care of gods. The 'God' by definition sustains his creatures, looks after them and provides them with the means required to support their existence. Thus, the people who laid such a claim took advantage of the carelessness of other humans; they only served these idols to take advantage of this position. Normally, devils from amongst humans and Jinn also took advantage of the carelessness of people; they, therefore, used to sit inside idols and speak so that these servants may use such an incident as proof to promote idol-worshipping. Accordingly, the fools would then bring camels, cows and sheep to sacrifice them not knowing that these servants ultimately eat their sacrifices. This is why those servants were mostly fat and had big bellies. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Allah hates the fat rabbi.'(1) Such a rabbi finds it easy to usurp and take advantage of the wealth of other people. Thus, he takes advantage of the misled people, and furthermore, he wants this state of carelessness in the people to continue and perpetuates it into continuing. He is similar to the drug dealer who wants as many people as possible to take drugs and gets upset whenever the police wage campaigns against the drug dealing trade.

The same applies to any trader in the black market; he would be upset if the supply of commodities suffices the need of the people. There are always people who benefit from a given form of corruption. This is why those who take advantage of corruption panic and get upset when they see any kind of a reformation initiative and do their best to make corruption persist. For this reason, the servants of idols used to stand behind the idols and produce sounds so that they can make the fools who believe them acquiesce to their demands. Similarly, magicians sometimes say to the family of a patient that the patient is possessed by a genie and this genie wants them to sacrifice a she camel, or any other animal, and spill its blood.

The servants of the *ka'ba* used to do the same thing. They used every mean of deception and trickery to take camels, cows and sheep from the oblivious and naïve people. At that time when an owner of a camel, cow or sheep cut the ear of any of his animals, this meant that he had dedicated such a sacrifice to the idols even though only the servants of the idols, and not the idols themselves, ate the meat he sacrificed.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says that in time He bestows upon us sustenance we randomly divide it into two kinds lawful and unlawful: 'Say, "Have you ever considered that Allah has sent down provision for you, then you make some of it unlawful and some lawful?" Say, "Has Allah permitted you that, or do you invent lies against Allah?"' (*Yunus:* 59) Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* also says the following: 'And of the cattle He has created eight mates - of the sheep two, and of the goats two. Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Inform me with knowledge if you are truthful."' (*al-An'am:* 143)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Wahidi -weak Hadith*

So what is proscribed: will it be either pair of males, or pair of females or what the wombs of a pair of females contain?

None of the foregoing is proscribed; they are all created by the Almighty Allah and provided by Him as an admissible form of livelihood. Furthermore, every bounty of Allah *the Almighty* knows its function and benefits that come from it. For instance, in the Egyptian countryside, we observe that when a cow, a buffalo or a sheep is strangled with a rope or gets sick, the animal sleeps and extends its neck. When the animal does so, people say, 'It asks to serve the admissible purpose for which the Almighty Allah created it.' It is as if the animal is telling its owner, 'Go ahead and slaughter me so that you may benefit yourself from my meat.' For instance, we may wonder why a donkey would not do the same thing. Is it not because its meat is not permissible to eat. By contrast, a cow knows the uses it represents for human beings; it thus extends forwards its neck as demanding to be slaughtered. We also know that it serves man during its lifetime by carrying heavy weights or producing milk, fibre, wool and hair. Therefore, once it senses an impending danger, it extends its neck forwards as if it is asking to be slaughtered so that man can benefit himself from its meat. It is subservient to man; the animal knows this fact by nature and through inspiration.

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* has made all these beings subservient to us, why then should we proscribe what Allah *the Almighty* did not proscribe and consider inadmissible what He proscribed? However, the servants of the *Ka'ba* used to do everything they could to control people. In this regard, if a she-camel had given birth to four generations and then its fifth infant were male, the servants would say that was enough and they would then cut its ear. If someone subsequently found such a she-camel, he would, according to custom, know that such an animal should not be used for any purpose whether suckling, carrying weight or producing milk. However, such an animal is not kept from drinking water or eating grass. This animal is called *Al-bahira* and could then be taken by the servants of the *Ka'ba* at any time for the latter did not want to store meat. Rather, they wanted to keep the animal alive so that they can slaughter at any time they wish. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has not appointed such innovations *bahira, sa'ibah*, *wasilah* or *ham*. (*al-Ma'ida:* 103)

Al-bahira then is the she-camel whose ear has been slit. This means that it has given birth to four generations and then a male at the fifth. Her owner then presents her as a gift to the idols. *Al-bahira* is a kind of *sa'iba*, yet there could also be a *sa'iba,* or a she-camel that did not give birth neither to four generations nor a male on the fifth time, but her owner chose to give her as a vow or a gift to the one of the idols. Such an animal is also called *sa'iba* since no one is allowed to take care of it. Nonetheless, it is allowed to graze in any land it likes and to drink from any source of water it desires. Furthermore, no one is allowed to take the milk it produces or even to ride it. Only the servants of the *Ka'ba* are allowed to take it and slaughter it whenever they need fresh meat. In addition, in case of the animal being a sheep, if it gives birth to a female, they take it to themselves, and if it gives birth to a male, they give it as a gift to their gods. However, if the sheep gives birth to both a male and a female, they do not slaughter the male; in such a case they say that such a female sheep has been good to its brother. Thus, they call her *Al-wasilah* since people used to keep the female animals for reproduction. It was therefore easier to give the male rather than the female as a gift to the servants of the *Ka'ba*. In this respect, a poet once said:

The mothers of people are self-renewing containing vessel
Whereas the fathers only provide the family lineage

We notice that the female cattle in ranches only need one male. Similarly, there may only be one or two male animals that impregnate all the females of the same species in a certain village. Children in the countryside often rejoice when cattle give birth to a male because they know that he will be fed for a little while, and then slaughtered and eaten. By contrast, children are disappointed upon learning that the offspring is a female because they know that it will be nurtured and bred, and they will not get to eat its meat.

In the past, when a cow or buffalo gave birth to both a male and a female at the same time, they used not to slaughter the male and would say that the newly born female has redeemed its brother. Thus, the male guarantees his life and is afterwards used to impregnate the rest of the females. The female that redeems its brother is called *Al-wasilah*.

We thus learn that *Al-bahira* is the she-camel that gives birth five times with the last being a male offspring, while *As-sa'iba* is the animal that has been given as a vow to the idols from its owner's own accord from the very beginning. *Al-wasilah* is the female animal that was born at the same time with a male brother; it is said to have redeemed its brother since it provided it with protection. *Al-ham* is the male animal that begot ten generations; no one is allowed to ride it or use it for carrying weight. Furthermore, it cannot be kept from any source of water or eating from any grazing field. Thus, people say that this animal's back has become protected.

In our age some presumptuously claim that they are vegetarians and do not eat meat even though they may be willing to slaughter a human being and purport to be anguished when a chicken is slaughtered. To these people we say the following: 'Beware. Allah *the Almighty* has created these animals to be subservient to man. These animals, by their very nature, like people to utilise them.'

Among the several means of temptation that Satan uses is what Allah *Glorified is He* states that Satan shall say: "And assuredly I will lead them astray and assuredly I will arouse in them vain desires, and assuredly I will incite them and they will cut the ears of cattle; and assuredly I will incite them and they will alter Allah's creation." And whoever takes Satan for a friend instead of Allah, he certainly suffers a manifest loss.' (*an-Nisa':* 119) We have learnt that the old Arabs used to do so to please the servants of the idols. These servants had a vested interest in retaining these idols and continuing to make people sacrifice to them. For this reason, I always say, 'The worst thing that could happen to a religious man is for him to get attached to worldly interests. In such a case, there is fear that he would forge religion to serve his interests.'

Among the other means of temptation that Satan employs is what the Almighty Allah *Glorified is He* states that Satan shall say: 'I will incite them and they will alter Allah's creation.' (*an-Nisa':* 119) Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed to us the way in which Satan acquired power over these people despite the fact that all power is exclusively Allah's. However, we still wonder how they changed Allah's creation even though He created everything.

Creation, as we know, is bringing something into existence out of nothing. The Almighty Allah created everything and assigned a specific function to every being since He undertook such a creation for a wise purpose. This purpose eternally exists in the knowledge of Allah *the Almighty*, and to Him belongs the highest attribute. We may come across new industrial innovations in the market like washing machines. We know that the one who designed them did so for the purpose of comforting people. In all likelihood, he thought about this goal before he designed and manufactured the machine that could fulfil the task of sparing people the effort of manually washing their laundry. The same holds for the one who invented the loudspeaker. He aimed at a specific target at the beginning, viz. to make the sound reach those standing at a distance from the source that emitted it. Afterwards he embarked on his research and experiments in order to attain his purpose and goal. Allah *Glorified is He* created every creature of His for a specific purpose. If we thus use every creature to fulfil the purpose for which it has been created, we will not slip into the hazard of changing Allah's creation. By contrast, if we use a creature for a purpose other than that for which Allah created it, we will be changing His creation. To further understand what Allah means by creation in this verse; let us seek the analogous uses of the same word in the Quran. We may indeed realise that the Quran is self-explanatory. Allah *Glorified is He* here says that Satan shall say: 'Assuredly I will incite them and they will alter Allah's creation.' (*an-Nisa':* 119) However, He says the following in a different place: '… verily, His is all creation and all command…' (*al-A'raf:* 54).

We see the process of creation in all beings around us, but there are other forms of creation that we do not see. The command in the previously mentioned verse refers to the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…"Be" – and it is."' (*Ya Sin:* 82)

Another verse further elucidates this point Allah *the Almighty* says that it is a *fitrah* (natural inclination) upon which He has created all people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah: 'So set your face to the service of religion with single-minded devotion. And follow the nature made by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah. That is the right religion - but most men know not.' (*ar-Rum:* 30)

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has endowed all creation with *fitrah*, or a natural inclination. If someone tries to change this inclination, he would be changing Allah's creation. So what is natural inclination? It is the primordial purity of the human nature and soul. For instance, if someone grows up in an environment that does not lie, this person will never know what lying is. Similarly, if someone is raised in an environment wherein no one steals, this person will not know what stealing is. Man learns misdemeanours from social deficiency and corruption. The evidence of this is that the phenomenon of stealing vanished in the countries that implemented the Islamic law since cutting the hands of those who stole was carried out. This made a new generation that did not know stealing emerged in these countries. Thus, if you are in any of these countries and you leave something, you will come back and find it where you left it. This is a sign of sound natural inclination. The proof that natural inclination is originally good is that we find that those who do something and are at odds with it, they always try to hide it and secretly sneak to do it since they know that this is not right.

I have set the example of a man who gazes at his wife. This man may allow all his desires to rejoice at the view of his wife. However, Allah forbid, if this same man wants to sneak a glance at a woman that Allah forbade him to look at, he shies away from other people. Thus, man always tends to be pretentious whenever he commits a deed that he is at odds with and one that is contrary to his natural inclination. Pretension is to do something outside the realm of natural inclination; altering anything related to natural inclination is in its own right an alteration of Allah's creation.

This is often the cause of corruption. How is this so? We see that Allah *Glorified is He* created male and female pairs. Some men behave like women, which means that one tries to be like a woman. He thus acts like a woman and puts on women's makeup. Such a person wants to change Allah's creation. Similarly, a woman may want to become a man. This woman also wants to change Allah's creation. For this reason, a great scientist who is both a poet and colleague of mine, Dr. Hassan Gad *may Allah the Almighty endow him good* *health* noted the phenomenon of those who try to change Allah's creation and composed a famous poem in which he said:

The effeminate men have caused me so much confusion
That I can no longer distinguish between a girl and a boy

In this verse, the poet declares his confusion because he cannot identify the difference between a boy and a girl. Both of them pass for either a woman or an effeminate man; the cause of such confusion is that boys act like girls, and vice versa, even though each of them possesses the characteristics typical of his gender and sets him apart from the other kind. Some women have operations to change the way they look, like pulling out some of the eyebrow hair and re-drawing it using a coloured pen. However, this attempt is often ruined when new hair grows. As much as she does this, such a woman turns herself into an ugly creature, completely forgetting that beauty consists in the harmony of the facial features. For instance, the secret of a woman's beauty may reside in the thickness of her eyebrow. Alternatively, the secret of her beauty may consist in the width of her mouth or the length of her nose.

We have indeed heard that if the nose of Cleopatra had been short, history would have changed. Allah *Glorified is He* has endowed his servants with diverse tastes in proportion to the difference in creation. In daily life, we may come across a young man who proposes to a girl, and then either he does not find her appealing or he does not appeal to her. Subsequently, another young man may propose to the same girl, and both of them may like each other. Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who creates the flux of emotional harmony and makes it a cause for attraction among people. Thus in trying to change the way Allah created her, a girl may disturb the emotional harmony that He created. A woman may want the colour of her cheeks to be like that of roses; thus, she puts on a number of makeup powders to achieve this purpose. However, does not this woman realise that her husband and relatives are fully aware that she acquired such a colour through the use of external materials? What would be her stance when her husband finds out in the morning that the colours she used have ruined the colour of her complexion? Furthermore, why did not she consider the way she would look as she grows older and how these powders continue to block the pores on her skin, keeping them from breathing? Such a woman gradually starts to look like a monkey due to her bad actions, Allah forbid! This is her punishment because she changed Allah's creation through her bad actions.

The same holds for the women who coat their nails with layers of coloured plastic they add on them. However, does any of these women really think that any man would possibly think that this is the natural colour of her fingernails? Since Allah created them, fingernails have had a certain colour that He decreed due to His wisdom. Therefore, these fingernails follow a specific order. So, why would a woman deprive her own fingernails from natural life and from breathing since nails also breathe. Someone may claim that it is permissible for women to perform ablution after polishing their nails. To such a person I say to fear Allah for these are not dyes. If they were dyes, they would have permeated the skin or the fingernail. Furthermore, such colour would not be removed unless the skin or the fingernail is itself removed, as in the case of *henna*. In such cases, water can reach the skin. By contrast, polish forms a plastic layer on the fingernail that cannot be removed except with a chemical substance. Therefore, polish is a kind of painting and not merely a dye. Using it keeps water from reaching the skin while washing or performing ablution.

The woman who does so deceives herself and the one who may admire or is attracted to her. We have to know that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to adjust people's temperament in the world by giving man both shelter and pleasure in an emotionally and rationally balanced way. If Allah *the Almighty* wanted the cheeks of females to be aflame with redness to rouse the desires of men, He would have created them this way. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted cheeks to look natural so that it would rouse the desire of men in proportion to the strength they possess. Furthermore, when a woman grows old, her beauty starts to fade away in proportion to the diminishing of the power of man. Allah gives each person what is commensurate with his capacity so that the matter would not degenerate into a mere process of rousing desires.

There is a difference between creating an outlet for desires and exciting and kindling these desires. Makeup and all other accessories are aimed at changing Allah's creation. This also holds true for the woman or the man who makes a tattoo; he or she changes the creation of Allah. If Allah *Glorified is He* knew that such things would increase beauty, he would have done them. So, they will change the creation of Allah just like what Satan says in (*an-Nisa':* 119). Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says that he who takes Satan as supporter instead of Allah, has certainly sustained a clear loss: 'And whoever takes Satan for a friend instead of Allah, he certainly suffers a manifest loss.' (*an-Nisa':* 119) The one who takes Satan as his master is the one who follows him and tries to get closer to him. However, whoever does so chooses the weaker over and above the better one, even though the former leads him to perdition and makes him inevitably incur a clear and comprehensive loss from all levels. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَعِدُهُمْ وَيُمَنِّيهِمْ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا ﴿١٢٠﴾

he makes them promises and raises false hopes, but
Satan's promises are nothing but delusion [120]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 120)

This means that Satan pledges false promises to his allies by telling those things that make them happy. A promise, by definition, is telling someone something that he would be pleased to find.

We can find an example illustrative of this in day-to-day life. Each one of us cherishes the wealth he accumulates through his labour and exertion. On the apparent level, giving alms to the poor detracts from this wealth. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says that Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty: 'Satan threatens you with poverty and enjoins upon you what is foul, whereas Allah promises you forgiveness from Himself and bounty…' (*al-Baqara:* 268). Why is this so? The reason is that Satan whispers to the owner of the wealth by saying, 'If you give part of your wealth as alms to the poor, your wealth will be diminished.' However, whoever succumbs to the whispers of Satan is doomed because the latter leads him to perdition. In addition Satan whispers to man with false wishes and fills them with vain desires: 'Satan promises them and rouses desire in them. But Satan does not promise them except delusion.' (*an-Nisa':* 120) A good example is what a proud man once sarcastically said to his brother, Allah forbid, 'I do not think that the Hour will occur. And even if

I should be brought back to my Lord, I will surely find better than this as a return.' (*al-Kahf:* 36)

The boastful man says, ‘If Allah has chosen to give me in this worldly life, and if Allah’s mission is to give constantly, then, He, my Lord, will certainly multiply what He has given me in this world many times over in the Afterlife.’ The underlying rationale is that the one who is happy in the worldly life will surely be happy in the Afterlife. So how did Allah recompense this man?

The boastful man witnessed the collapse of his garden and realised the dismal fate that arrogance can ultimately lead to. This is due to the fact that he acceded to the false promises of Satan. The promises of Satan are all delusive: 'But Satan does not promise them except delusion.' (*an-Nisa’:* 120) However, what is *Al-ghurur* (deluding the mind) in this context? There are two morphologically similar words: *ghurur* and *gharur*. The former is the thing that is presented to you as if it were real even though it is, in fact, an illusion, while the latter refers to the one who actually presents an illusion as if it were real. For this reason *Al-ghurur* is Satan himself because he beautifies an illusion for man and misguides him as much as a mirage does. When man sees the phenomenon of light bending, he illusively thinks that he sees water on the horizon. In this respect, the True Lord says: 'like a mirage in a low land which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.' (*an-Nur:* 39)

The same holds for *Al-ghurur* when the devil beautifies something for man and deludes him into believing that he will take pleasure in it. However, when man pursues it, he realises that it is not true. He might actually discover that it is opposite of what he had expected. For this reason, the True Lord decisively explains to us the deeds of disbelievers when he says: 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.' (*an-Nur:* 39) The disbeliever is thus astounded by the real existence of Allah *Glorified is He* in whom he had no faith. In turn, he faces two calamities: the calamity of his disappointment after heading towards water that does not exist and the calamity of finding out that the One God, Allah, is real and will judge him for his denial and infidelity. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust.' (*al-Furqan:* 23)

Someone might claim to be a humanist and feel that he speaks logically, and he would say accordingly, ‘Is it possible that all those who contributed to humanity with such useful inventions are doomed to torment?’ To such a person we give the following reply, ‘They are going to be recompensed for their infidelity since each of them had lived and acted without bearing Allah in his mind. Each of them accomplished all these great feats using his mind, genius and creativity to serve humanity; he is thus honoured by humanity. He should thus seek his reward from the one for whom he worked, and no one else.' The following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* applies to them: It has been related by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* that he heard the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say, 'The first one to be tried on the Day of Judgment is a man who ostensibly died as a martyr. He will be brought forth and shown the bounties Allah conferred upon him, which he in turn recognises them. Allah will then ask him, "What did you do with Allah’s bounties? " He will answer, "I fought in Your cause until I died as a martyr." The True Lord will then tell him, "You lie. You fought so that people would say that you are bold, and so they did say this about you." The True Lord will then order him to be dragged on his face until he is thrown in the Fire. Afterwards, a man who acquired knowledge taught it and read the Quran will then be brought forth. He will be shown the bounties Allah bestowed upon him. Upon recognising these bounties, Allah will ask him, "What did you do with these bounties? "He will then answer, "I acquired knowledge, dispensed it and read the Quran for Allah’s cause." The True Lord will say, "You lie. You sought knowledge so that people would say that you are a scholar and that you read the Quran, and so they did say this about you." Allah will order him to be dragged on his face until he is thrown in the fire. Afterward, a man upon whom Allah generously dispensed his bounties and wealth will then be brought forth. He will then be shown all the bounties that Allah had bestowed upon him, which he in turn will recognise. He will be asked by Allah, "What did you do with these bounties? "He will answer, "I spent them in every possible way You like for Your cause." The True Lord will then say, "You lie. You spent this money so that people would say that you are generous, and so they did say this about you." The True Lord will then order him to be dragged on his face until he is thrown in the Fire.'(1)

Thus Allah *the Exalted* did not deny them the reward for what they did in the worldly life. They were honoured in this worldly life. Allah *Glorified is He* then distributed the fruits of their talents amongst those who are concerned with Allah. For this reason, one may find an illiterate Muslim taking a plane to perform pilgrimage to the House of Allah *the Almighty*. He also records speeches and talks on matters related to faith on tapes so that those who did not attend this event could listen to these speeches. Thus, disbelievers are subservient to believers since through their inventions, they allow believers to benefit from their scientific discoveries. Yet, believers are also required to pursue all worldly causes and means to deserve Allah’s generosity regarding specifically the bounty of gaining knowledge. Indeed, this is their duty, and they would be sinful if they do not undertake it so that they would not be dependent on others and as a result, be abjectly subordinate to them. 'But Satan does not promise them except delusion.' (*an-Nisa’:* 120) So what is the fate of those who are deluded by Satan in the Afterlife? Allah *the Exalted* says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ عَنْهَا مَحِيصًا ﴿١٢١﴾

Such people will have Hell for their home and will find no escape from it [121] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’*: 121)

The word *ma’wa* (abode) means the place to which one is compelled, or drawn to resort in. Will this compulsion be by way of pulling or pushing? Allah *Glorified is He* says that the Fire will say: 'Are there any more?’ (*Qaf:* 30). It is as if the fire will pull in its inhabitants, and they will find no way to escape from it. This means that there is no way to escape, avoid or bypass the fire. It is as though any of them, like in our world of change (everything in our worldly life is in a state of change), can escape from another created being.

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(1) *The Hadith is related by Imaam Muslim in his book on Jihad and is also related by An-Nasa’i, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah.*

However, when the matter is all up to Allah’s decree, this means that there is no escape: 'To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16)

The True Lord also describes the opposite of this case:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ سَنُدۡخِلُهُمۡ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا
ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدٗاۖ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقّٗاۚ وَمَنۡ أَصۡدَقُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ قِيلٗا ﴿١٢٢﴾

but We shall admit those who believe and do good deeds into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain for ever – a true promise from God. Who speaks more truly than God? [122]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 122)

When Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about disbelievers and their punishment, our minds prepare to learn about the opposite case. If the punishment of disbelievers repels man from becoming one, the soul of the listener is then attracted to the opposite case, viz. the reward of believers who do good things. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a previous verse: 'We will give him a mighty reward.' (*an-Nisa’:* 114)

In this context, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow.' (*an-Nisa’:* 122) The one who has faith and confidence in Allah knows that no distance can preclude him from His bounty. A good example of this is when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once asked one of the Companions named Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari *Allah be pleased with him* the following question, 'In what state do you find yourself when you woke up today?’ So Al-Harith *Allah be pleased with him* replied, ‘I have found myself to be a true believer.’ The companion thus made a strong claim, namely having true faith. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Think well over what you say then. Everything has a truth. So what is the truth of faith?’ The Companion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then answered, ‘My soul has become disinterested in the world. I thus stay awake to pray all night and keep thirsty all day (by fasting). It is as if I see the Throne of the Lord in front of me and that I actually see the dwellers of heaven visiting each other and those of fire clamouring in it.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'O, Harith, you have attained true knowledge so stick to it.' He repeated the statement three times.(1)

In some places, the True Lord uses *sa* (shall), and sometimes says *sawfa* (shall) before the verb. So, we have to recognise that each particle and proposition that qualifies a verb has a certain meaning and implication and that everything that Allah *the Exalted* gives is beautiful. In this verse, He uses *sa* in the word *sanudkhiluhum* (We will admit them to): 'But the ones who believe and do righteous deeds. We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow' (*an-Nisa':* 122).

When the word *janna* is used in a generic sense, this means, as we said before, that it refers to the heaven in the Afterlife, the true heaven. By contrast, the plants and trees of the worldly *janna*, or garden, may fade away and grow dry; furthermore, worldly gardens may be affected by droughts. However, the plants in paradise (the garden of the Afterlife) eternally bear fruits. Yet, if the word *janna* is not used in an absolute generic sense but was qualified and limited by some factor, then it means something else as is the case for the following saying of the True Lord: 'Indeed, We have tried them as We tried the owners of the garden, when they swore to cut its fruit in the [early] morning.' (*al-Qalam:* 17) The same holds for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '… is as the parable of a garden on an elevated ground, upon which heavy rain falls…' (*al-Baqara:* 265). The garden on an elevated ground is a garden located on higher land. It has certain qualities that go beyond the knowledge attained by modern science. The reason is that if the land on which the garden is located is high, underground water cannot ruin the roots of the plants grown in it. The plants in this garden thus continue to be green. Allah *Glorified is He* says the following about such a garden: '… and thereupon it brings forth its fruit twofold…' (*al-Baqara:* 265).

Furthermore, the True Lord adds that it is located on high land and that it is watered by rainstorms from above or from soft rain. Therefore, it takes the water it needs from the rain directly to the roots and uses water from soft rain to wash the leaves. All of this is said about such a garden.

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(1) *Related by At-Tabarani in (Al-kabir) and Abu Na'im in (al-hilya)... But the Hadith has been considered weak by Ad-Darqatni and Ibn Habban*

However, in this verse, the True Lord says: 'gardens beneath which rivers flow' (*an-Nisa':* 122). Allah *the Almighty* assures us that such a garden will keep its greenness and freshness, for the main factor that affects the greenness of a garden is the shortage of water that ultimately causes green plants to fade.

We find that in some instances the Quran says, 'gardens with flowing streams for them' (*at-Tawba:* 100) which indicates that the source of water is distant. In other instances, the Quran says, 'gardens beneath which rivers flow' (*an-Nisa':* 122) which indicates that no one is capable of blocking the source of water since rivers run and emanate underneath them. The True Lord promises eternity in heaven to believers who do good deeds; eternity exists for a long time. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'wherein they will abide forever' (*an-Nisa':* 122), this means that abiding in heaven is not only long but completely permanent.

Who pledges this promise?'[It is] the promise of Allah, [which is] truth, and who is more truthful than Allah in statement.' (*an-Nisa':* 122) When the True Lord promises you, bear in mind that you are pledged a promise by the One Who no one can prevent Him from keeping His promise. However, if a fellow human promises you something, this promise may not actually happen because the said person may change his mind when it is time for him to deliver his promise. Alternatively, the one who gives you a promise may not have the capacity, ability or affluence to keep the promise he pledged to you, or his feelings may change towards you. However, Allah *Glorified is He* is not subject to change, and nothing falls beyond the realm of His ability. Furthermore, there is no other god beside Him that may keep Him from doing what He wills. Thus, His promise is not subject to retraction or nullification; it is certain that it will be fulfilled. In this context when Allah *Glorified is He* says, '[It is] the promise of Allah, [which is] truth, and who is more truthful than Allah in statement' (*an-Nisa':* 122), He tells every one of us, 'I do not intend to ask you about anything.' The interrogative form was used in order to encourage the answer from Allah's creation by way of asserting the truth of what Allah *the Exalted* says; for ultimately whose word could be truer than that of His?

The answer elicited from Allah's creation will be, 'It is impossible. Allah is exalted over this.' No one's statement could be truer than Allah's since whoever lies does so in order to get something that he would not be able to receive were he to speak the truth. Alternatively, one may lie because he fears the one to whom he lies. However, Allah *Glorified is He* transcends all this. Thus, if He says anything, it must be true. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

لَّيْسَ بِأَمَانِيِّكُمْ وَلَآ أَمَانِيِّ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ۗ مَن يَعْمَلْ سُوٓءًا
يُجْزَ بِهِۦ وَلَا يَجِدْ لَهُۥ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿١٢٣﴾

It will not be according to your hopes or those of the People of the Book: anyone who does wrong will be requited for it and will find no one to protect or help him against God [123] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 123)

A wish, as we learnt, means that one aspires to something that is pleasurable and joyful without actually working for attaining it. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* appointed man as His vicegerent on earth, He commanded him to preserve every good aspect of being; accordingly, man must not corrupt what is actually already good. If someone aspires to something that brings him happiness, he must thereby make what is good even better.

Let us put forth an example to illustrate this point. Assume that there is a well of water whereof people drink. This well has sides, ends and edges. If someone approaches the well and throws the dust accumulated around the edges of it into it for the purpose of filling it up, it will be ruined. On the contrast, the one who wants the well to continue to be useful leaves it as it is. Thus, he lets what is useful continue to be so. However, if someone aspires to do something useful for both himself and others, he must make what is already useful even more so. For instance, he may erect walls of brick on the sides of the well to keep dust from falling into the water or at least cover the well. If someone aspires to do more good and is really concerned about the comfort of the people, he may try to save them the trip to the well for the purpose of filling their buckets with water. He may think of installing a pump to raise the water to a high tank. He may then extend pipes from this tank to deliver water to the houses. Every member of the community may then take his share of water in the comfort of his own home. The person who does any of these makes what is good even better.

However, if one aspires to accomplish something pleasurable without exerting any effort, then his wishes are delusive. Furthermore, if someone continues to dream about his wishes without actually devising a plan to achieve them, then the fruit of these wishes will only be disappointment and retrogression. So, a wish means to aspire to a pleasurable goal without actually working towards achieving such a goal. We know that the True Lord provided us with the means for achieving every goal we may pursue in our worldly life; we should also bear in mind that the True Lord says: 'So, he followed a course.' (*al-Kahf:* 85)

This means that man is required to make things that enable him to improve the conditions of his life on earth. Allah *the Almighty* guaranteed for man, His vicegerent on earth, all the necessities of life. Therefore, when man seeks luxury and pleasure, he should work for them. For instance, the True Lord lets rain fall from the sky, the water from the rain then flows in certain channels, which the rain has dug for itself. However, these channels may contain dust or mud; for this reason, man distils the water and then pumps it into tanks so that it reaches him in his home. Thus, instead of drinking water directly from a river, man prepares for himself a beautiful glass of water. First, man made this cup out of pottery and then out of other materials like copper and then glass. We thereby see that any form of luxury needs work that leads to it; wishing is never enough.

The same holds for the case of being affiliated with the religion. Being affiliated with the religion does not simply mean being so in a merely formal way. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to judge amongst all mankind. No one may merely affiliate himself just outwardly in Islam simply to enjoy its privileges and distinguish himself from the rest of Allah's creation who follow other religions. This is not the case, for man is controlled by the religion which he embraces, and a Muslim is the first to be controlled by his religion.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: '(This) shall not be in accordance with your vain desires…' (*an-Nisa':* 123). To whom is this statement addressing?

If this statement is addressing believers, the True Lord thus explains to them, 'Believers, do not think that every matter of your concern will be in accordance with your vain desires. Rather, you should work to realise your desires. Your affiliation with Islam does not exempt you from having to work.' Indeed, there are many people who go through life without doing a single good deed. When they are then asked, why they live without doing any work, they give the following reply, 'We think well of Allah.' To those who think like this, Al-Hasan Al-Basri *Allah be pleased with him* says, 'Faith does not consist of wishing and vain desires. Rather, faith is based on what is truly embraced by one's heart and vindicated through his actions. There are people who are indeed so deluded by the wish that Allah will forgive them to the extent that they left life without having a single good deed recorded for them. They just say, We think well of Allah, but they have lied about this claim, for if they had thought well of Allah, they would have worked well for His cause.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says about these people: '(This) shall not be in accordance with your vain desires…' (*an-Nisa':* 123). On the contrast, if this statement were addressing non-believers, then it would indicate that the True Lord did not deny the bounties of this world to those who exploit the causes and means to achieve their goals even if they do not have faith. Recompensing in the Afterlife is the promise by Allah *the Almighty* pledged to believers who do good deeds; it is a true promise to admit them into heaven. Qualifying for this promise cannot be achieved by mere wishing; rather, attaining will only be achieved through work and exertion.

Therefore, the audience addressed by the statement '(This) shall not be in accordance with your vain desires…' (*an-Nisa':* 123) could also encompass the disbelievers, the hypocrites and the people of the Book. The disbelievers used to have wishes as well. For example, those who denied resurrection used to say: 'And I do not think the hour will come, and even if I am returned to my Lord I will most certainly find a returning place better than this.' (*al-Kahf:* 36) These are the wishes of disbelievers. Furthermore, this promise of being admitted to heaven does not include the people of the Book. The True Lord informed us about their wishes: 'And they say: "None shall enter paradise except he who is a Jew or a Christian."' (*al-Baqara:* 111)

They also said: 'And they say: Fire shall not touch us but for a few days.' (*al-Baqara:* 80) All of these are vain desires since the path set by Allah *the Exalted* is one and applies to all people. Whoever is affiliated with Islam, the seal of all religions, must work. The principle according to which Allah *the Almighty* rules all His creation is clearly explained in His saying: 'whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it, and besides Allah he will find for himself neither a guardian nor a helper.' (*an-Nisa':* 123)

Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* says, 'When this verse was revealed, the Muslims found it rather burdensome. So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them, "Follow the right path strictly and do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately, for every affliction that befalls a Muslim is an expiation for him, even the pricking of a thorn or stumbling on the path."'(1)

Some scholars said that 'evil' in this aforementioned verse refers to ascribing divinity to others beside Allah because He has pledged to forgive some sins. They attributed their argument to the saying of the True Lord: 'Thus do we recompense every ungrateful one.' (*Fatir:* 36). It is as if painful punishment applies only for disbelievers, whereas believers are elevated by their faith to a high status so that Allah *the Almighty* accepts their repentance and forgives them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* made the time span between every two consecutive prayers an atonement for any sin committed during this time. Furthermore Allah *the Exalted* has also decreed that the time span between every two consecutive Friday Prayers would be a chance to atone for whatever sins committed during this period of time. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* made pilgrimage the atonement for all the sins committed prior to it. All of these are privileges that Allah *the Exalted* grants to believers. By contrast, the punishment of disbelievers is conveyed through the following: 'whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it, and besides Allah he will find for himself neither a guardian nor a helper.' (*an-Nisa':* 123) It is not said about someone who could not find something, unless he actually searched for it and then could not find it. No human is by himself self-sufficient. Therefore, let whoever does evil search for someone to succour or help him; he will find none.

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(1) *Related by Muslim, Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasa'i based on what was related by Sufyan ibn Ayina*

Al-waly, or guardian, is the one who is both close to a person and protects him; similarly, *an-nasir*, or helper, is the supporter or advocate of another person. No one gets close to person unless he loves him. When a strong person loves another who is weak, then he is capable of defending and supporting the latter.

However, why did the True Lord mention both *Al-waly* and *an-nasir*? *Al-waly*, as we learnt, is the one who is both close to another person and protects him. However, the word *nasir* indicates that there are fights and antagonism between those who believe and those who do not. Furthermore, it indicates that there is a grand power that man may think is not concerned for him as long as he lives in peace and prosperity; however, when such power knows that a believer has enemies, it comes forth to support him. On the other hand, a disbeliever will never find a supporter or an advocate, and he will not find anyone willing to come close to him or to support him even if events turn against him. When events turn against a person, people tend to sympathise with this person and hasten to support him. However, no one is capable of supporting another person against Allah *the Exalted.* Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن يَعۡمَلۡ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ مِن ذَكَرٍ أَوۡ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤۡمِنٞ
فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يَدۡخُلُونَ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظۡلَمُونَ نَقِيرٗا ﴿١٢٤﴾

**anyone, male or female, who does good deeds and is a believer,
will enter Paradise and will not be wronged by as much as the
dip in a date stone [124] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 124)**

The two words 'man' and 'woman' were used here so that no one would assume that since the verb assumed a male declension, then women would be exempt from it. In many cases, rulings that apply to women are subsumed under rulings decreed for men. This indicates that matters related to women are basically concealed.

Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* explicitly refers to women whenever there is a need for it: 'and whoever does [whatever he can] of righteous deeds, whether male or female…' (*an-Nisa':* 124). Allah *the Almighty* used the preposition *min,* or 'of', to indicate that it is a portion of the whole set of righteous deeds. Thus, He says, 'And whoever does [whatever he can] of righteous deeds…' (*an-Nisa':* 124) and did not say, 'who does righteous deeds' since He knows His creation well. No human being is capable of doing every righteous deed; each one does as many good deeds as he can. Every believer is thus required to do as many righteous deeds as his capabilities and talents would enable him to do.

The first of good deeds is to let the good things continue to be good. Letting a good continue to be good means that a believer must not corrupt anything good; this is the first rank of righteous deeds. Subsequently, one may elevate to higher levels of good deeds that go in accordance with his mission as Allah's vicegerent on earth. Every deed that positively assists man to undertake his mission as Allah's vicegerent on earth is a righteous deed. For instance, the one who paves a road to relieve people of exhaustion does a righteous, or good, deed. Preparing means of transportation that carry people to their destinations is also a good deed. Furthermore, those who work so that people's thought would not be constantly preoccupied with securing the necessities of life also do a good deed.

Everything that facilitates life is similarly a good deed. Man may thus do good deeds even if he does not have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* like many scientists of advanced countries who do not believe in one God, Allah. Similarly, atheistic scientists may do things that are beneficial for man like paving roads and manufacturing machines that benefit people. These scientists may have been driven to accomplish these feats out of their aspiration for scientific discovery; each of them of wants to prove that he has served humanity by making such and such discoveries and such and such inventions. Thus, they do good deeds even though they are not believers. For this reason, these scientists will be rewarded by the humanity they served, but they will not be rewarded by Allah.

In contrast, any believer who does a good deed is explicitly promised a reward which is stated by the following: 'And whoever does [whatever he can] of righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.' (*an-Nisa':* 124)

Some may say that ‘not wronging’, concerning the part of Allah, applies to those who do good deeds and those who do evil deeds. Therefore, there are some who argue that those who do evil deeds are the ones who deserve to be punished and punishment, in this case, does not evolve any wronging or injustice. The True Lord says: 'the punishment of an evil is the like of it.' (*Yunus:* 27)

Whoever does a good deed receives a tenfold reward for it. The reward may even be seven hundred folds; this is Allah’s Grace which is unconstrained and infinite. So, how come does Allah *Glorified is He* say in this context, 'and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed' (*an-Nisa’:* 124) when the good reward they were granted was multiplied and redoubled? In this respect, we say the following, 'Gracious giving is not incumbent on any of Allah’s created beings.' For example, someone may hire a worker and agree to give him a hundred pounds as a monthly salary. He may then give him fifty or hundred pounds as a bonus in addition to his salary in a certain month and then only give him his salary in another month. Giving such a bonus is a gracious endowment on the part of the employer. People may retract their endowments, but the case is diametrically different when it comes to Allah’s Grace, for it is unalterable. This is the meaning of 'and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.' (*an-Nisa’:* 124) Allah *Glorified is He* does not merely extend the reward in strict proportionality to the good deed performed; rather, He may multiply the reward tenfold or may even raise it to seven hundred fold. In addition Allah *the Exalted* never retracts His Grace; such a retraction, on His part, would be a form of wronging His servants. Therefore, Allah’s Grace and bounties cannot be compared to human's grace and bounties. Humans may retract or change their mind about what they were planning to generously give, but Allah *the Exalted* would not ever retract His Grace. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: In the grace of Allah and in His mercy- in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather.' (*Yunus:* 58)

Those who do righteous deeds while they believe, are admitted into heaven in accordance with the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.' (*an-Nisa’:* 124). *An-Naqir* is the speck in the back of a date-stone; it is something very small. There is another thing called *Al-fatil* which is a substance that looks like a thread and is located inside the groove in a date-stone. There is a third thing which looks like a paper that covers the date stone and is called *Al-qitmir*.

Allah *the Almighty* has put forth all these parables so that we would recognise the Grace that has been bestowed on believers by the Almighty. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُۥ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ
وَٱتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۗ وَٱتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ خَلِيلًا ﴿١٢٥﴾

Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith? God took Abraham as a friend [125] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 125)

When we encounter an interrogative form as in the saying of the True Lord, 'And who is better in religion than one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah while being a doer of good…' (*an-Nisa':* 125), proper inferring leads us to understand that whoever submits his face (or whole being) to Allah *the Almighty* is the one who has better faith. In our everyday conversations, we may sometimes say, 'Who could be more generous than Zayd (A male Arabic name)?' This interrogative form indicates that the interlocutor does not want to explicitly state that Zayd is the most generous person ever; he rather choses to let the listener derive this conclusion. Such an interrogative form is only used when the object of interrogation is well specified and determined. The interlocutor is thus assured that the one who hears his question will not be able to advance any other answer than the specific matter inquired about which is well specified and determined. It is as if people will only derive the answer specified by the interlocutor when they seek to answer his question. 'And who is better in religion than one who submits his entire self to Allah' (*an-Nisa':* 125). The answer to this query ought to be, 'No one has better faith than the one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah.' Thus, we see that Allah *Glorified is He* puts forth an assertive statement in the form of a question even though it would have been equally as true to use the affirmative form: '… and who is truer of word than Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 122) Allah *the Exalted* poses the question to let us answer freely. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I am posing the question to you, human, and leave you to answer based on your consciousness and judgment.' So tell me who has better faith than the one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah *the Exalted?* You may try to seek an answer, but you will not find one any better than the one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah *the Almighty*. We should thus respond: No one is better than he who submits his entire self to Allah *Glorified is He*. The answer of the one addressed by the question therefore assumes the form of both an acknowledgment and confession, and confession, as we know, is the master of all evidence.

'And who is better in religion than one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah' (*an-Nisa':* 125). We know that if a word is used in separate contexts then it does not convey a single meaning. Rather, the context of the discourse determines the meaning of the word in each instance. Therefore, if Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the Day [some] faces will turn white and [some] faces will turn black.' (*Al-'Imran:* 106)

He used face because it is the first organ encountered when a human is seen, and it contains the features that gives each person his unique appearance. Indeed, we do not recognise anyone from his shoulder or his leg; rather, we recognise a person by his facial features. When we hear the saying of the True Lord, 'Everything is bound to perish, save His face' (*al-Qasas:* 88), we immediately wonder what *Al-wajh* (face) refers to in this context? If we think that it means a face like our faces, then we have slipped into a forbidden realm. Anything related to Allah *Exalted and Glorified is He* should be understood in light of the principle 'there is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). We say this so that no one would use the following argument, 'If everything will perish on Judgment Day except His face, does this imply that His hand or anything similar of His would perish?' No, this is not implied, so therefore, not a correct assumption. When the True Lord says, '...Everything is bound to perish, save His face' (*al-Qasas:* 88), He means His Self; Allah *the Exalted* transcends all forms of semblance. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'and wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah.' (*al-Baqara:* 115)

In this verse, *wajh* (face) of Allah is the direction with which He is pleased. Man orients his face towards the *Ka'ba* when offering his prayer. However, do not ever think that in orienting your face towards the *Ka'ba*, you are orienting your face towards Allah's face or countenance. Allah *the Exalted* is omnipresent in all being. Thus, however man orients himself, he will find Allah *the Almighty*. The evidence is that when we pray around the *Ka'ba*, the face of each of us points in a different direction from the other: one points east, another west, a third north and a fourth south. People orient themselves towards all possible directions while going around the *Ka'ba* and during prayers. The *Ka'ba* has been put in this position so that we may circumambulate it and so that it becomes the destination we use to orient ourselves towards Allah *Glorified is He* from all directions. 'And wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah.' (*al-Baqara:* 115) Face refers to the orientation with which Allah *the Almighty* is pleased.

In this verse, we encounter Allah's saying: 'And who is better in religion than one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah' (*an-Nisa':* 125). Submitting one's face (entire self) to Allah *the Almighty* means orienting oneself; when someone pursues an aim, goal or purpose, he orients himself towards it since man does not walk backwards. Thus, *Al-wajh* in this context refers to this orientation. Why did the True Lord only use *Al-wajh* even though a believer orients all his faculties and extremities along with his face towards Allah *the Exalted?* The reason is that the face is the noblest of all organs. For this reason, Allah made prostration the noblest position any of his servants can assume. The reason is that in this position man makes both his upright back and face (that he is always keen to keep clean) prostrate to Allah *the Exalted.* Therefore, submitting one's face to Allah *Glorified is He* means orienting oneself towards Him while making Him his destination.

The verb *islam* is derived from '*Al-islam*; islam thus means relinquishing one's control of his matters over to another. When someone relinquishes control to another who is an equal to him, this is a testimony on part of the former that the latter knows better than he. One often does not relinquish control of his matters over to an equal of his unless he feels certain that the latter is a man who possesses more wisdom, knowledge and awareness than he. If one does not sense this, he will not relinquish control of his matters over to another. However, if this is the case, should not one surrender his whole being unto his Creator? Would this not be the best thing to do?

A human being may relinquish control of his own matters over to another human being whom he thinks is wise. However, is the former guaranteed that the latter will continue to be wise? Since the latter is human, he is subject to change and alteration; his heart may change or he may fail to solve an issue in which he was thought to have expertise. Relinquishing control of my own matters over to the One Who created me is the ultimate form of wisdom. For this reason, we say that Islam consists of surrendering control of your matters over to, as well as your whole being unto the One in Whom you believe to be the Strong, the fully Capable, the Wise and All Knowing Allah and Who is capable of giving sustenance at every time and place. When man submits his face to Allah *Glorified is He*, he will not do anything that is not oriented towards and devoted to Him: 'And who is better in religion than one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah while being a doer of good…' (*an-Nisa':* 125).

However, why is the word *muhsin* (doer of good) used in this context? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* talked about *ihsan* (doing good). We know that we believe in Allah *the Almighty*, while He is unseen to us; but the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us that when our faith elevates to the state of *ihsan*, then we have attained the level at which we worship Allah *Glorified is He* as if we see Him; however we do not see Him, yet we know that He sees us. The conversation between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and one of his Companions, Al-Harith illustrates the meaning of this point. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Al-Harith, 'In what state did you find yourself when you woke up?' Al-Harith answered, 'I woke up as a true believer.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'Think well about what you say. Everything has a truth so what is the truth of your belief?' Al-Harith answered, 'My soul has lost interest in the world. Thus, I stay awake praying at night and spend the day thirsty because of fasting for Allah. Furthermore, I constantly feel as if I look up to the Throne of our Lord and as if I watch the inhabitants of heaven visiting each other and the people of the fire clamouring in it.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'You know the truth, Harith, so adhere to it.' He repeated this statement three times.(1)

Any good person knows that he is perpetually in the presence of Allah. For this reason, he sets a programme for himself; the summary of this programme is that he knows that Allah *the Almighty* never ceases to see what he does: 'He is with you wherever you are.' (*al-Hadid:* 4) Accordingly, he constantly remembers that he is never absent from Allah's sight, not for even a blink of an eye, so he must, therefore, be shy and feel ashamed of disobeying Him. The subject is demonstrated in a Hadith that our master 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* related when Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Tell me about *ihsan*?' So, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'It means to worship Allah as if you see Him and know that if you cannot see Him, but He sees you.'(2) If you truly believe that Allah *Glorified is He* sees you, how could you disobey Him? You would not dare do so with another servant of Allah's who is equal to you. Then, how could you do it with Allah *the Almighty*?

Greatness is manifested when the True Lord says: 'And who is better in religion than one who submits his face (entire self) to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the creed of Ibrahim (Abraham), inclining towards truth? And Allah took Ibrahim (Abraham) as an intimate friend.' (*an-Nisa':* 125) Why does He mention the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) specifically? The reason is that Allah says the following about Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'Indeed, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a nation in himself, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining towards truth,' (*an-Nahl:* 120). The meaning of Ibrahim (Abraham) being an *ummah*, or 'a nation in himself' is that he was combined within himself all the good virtues that are rarely found altogether in one person; rather, such good qualities are often distributed amongst an entire nation. There is someone who is courageous, another who is temperate, a third who is knowledgeable and a fourth who is strong. All these qualities are rarely found in a single person; they often reflect the totality of virtues of a given nation. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to be a consolidation of much goodness. Therefore, He describes him with His saying: 'Indeed, in fact Ibrahim (Abraham) was a nation in himself, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining towards truth' (*an-Nahl:* 120).

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(1) *Related by At-Tabaraani in (Al-Kabir) and Abu Na'im in (Al-Hilya)... It has been considered weak by Ad-Darqatni.*

(2) *An excerpt from a long Hadith related by Imam Muslim.*

In this verse Allah *the Exalted* says the following about the creed of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'and follows the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham), inclining towards truth?' (*an-Nisa':* 125) Creed, in this context, means religion and *hanif* means that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was drawn away from all that is false and inclined towards the truth. The linguistic meaning of *hanif* is 'to be inclined.' Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was inclined, or drawn, away from all that is false. Messengers are always sent to nations when corruption spreads and prevails amongst them. When people's societies are capable of reforming their internal corruption, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives its members time and a chance to do good, but when corruption reaches its apex for a given society, the True Lord sends a messenger. When a Messenger is sent to a nation that is suffering from widespread corruption, the Messenger inclines, or draws, away from all that is false and inclines towards the truth. In such a case, being inclined itself becomes a way of being upright. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and follows the creed of Ibrahim (Abraham), inclining toward truth' (*an-Nisa':* 125). Subsequently, the True Lord puts forth the clear purpose of following Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'And Allah took Ibrahim (Abraham) as an intimate friend.' (*an-Nisa':* 125) What factors made Ibrahim (Abraham) deserve Allah's intimate friendship, then? It is due to the fact that he followed the best religion, submitted his face (surrendered his whole being) to Allah, was a doer of good, followed the religion and inclined, or was drawn, away from all that is false. These are the factors deserving of Allah's intimate friendship, and all of them were qualities of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

We are told that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when his people threw him in the fire. Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* said, 'Ibrahim (Abraham), do you need anything?' Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, 'If it is from you, then no, I do not need anything.’ Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* said, ‘Then, ask your Lord.’ So, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, ‘His knowledge of my state makes it unnecessary for me to ask Him for anything.’ So, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'O fire, be a means of coolness and safety for Ibrahim (Abraham).'(1) (*al-Anbiya’:* 69) This indicates that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* refused to ask Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* anything for himself; this is the highest form of surrendering one’s whole self-unto Allah *Glorified is He*.

We know that people love their children immensely. We also know that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was given Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* towards the end of his life. The True Lord made it clear to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that He would test and try him. The test was, nonetheless, very difficult. His son neither died nor did any one kill him. Rather, his father, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was ordered by Allah *the Almighty* to slay him. So how many stages of *ibtila* (testing) did Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* go through? Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* hastened and did not hesitate to execute the command of his Lord. For this reason, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, 'O, my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think.' (*as-Saffat:* 102)

Allah *Glorified is He* communicated this command to Ibrahim (Abraham) through a vision seen during his sleep, and not through direct revelation. Let us then consider what Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* said. He did not say, ‘O, father, do whatever you wish.’ Rather, he said: 'O, my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast.' (*as-Saffat:* 102) This means that Ismail (Ishmael) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*, both yielded to the command of Allah *the Almighty*. So what did Allah *the Exalted* then do?’ We called to him, "O, Ibrahim (Abraham), You have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice, And We left for him [favourable mention] among later generations: Peace upon Ibrahim (Abraham). Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants. And We gave him good tidings of Ishaq (Isaac), a prophet from among the righteous.' (*as-Saffat:* 104-112)

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(1) *Taken from (Al-Jami‘ Li-Ahkam Al-Quran) by Al-Qurtubi… Similar narrations in the commentary of Ibn Kathir and in (Al-Kashshaf) by Az-Zamakhshari*

The True Lord not only gave Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* and then ransomed him, but He also conferred upon Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* another son, Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him*. 'And Allah took Ibrahim (Abraham) as an intimate friend.' (*an-Nisa’:* 125)

Scholars dwelt upon investigating the meaning of the word *khalil* (intimate friend), mainly the qualities it implies and the expressions in which it is used. The root of the word is composed of the letters: *Al-kha*, *Al-lam* and another *lam*. The word *Al-khal* with a higher accent on *Al-kha* letter means a road dug in the sand; we commonly call such a road *maddaq* which is also usually narrow. Therefore, when two people walk on it, they do so shoulder to shoulder if they like each other very much. However, if they are not intimate, they walk in a line with one of them behind the other. For this reason, they call a couple who walk shoulder to shoulder *khalil* because they are in the sense infused or bound together. *Khalil* is also the one who completes the deficiency in his companion. Furthermore, the word *khalil* may also mean the one who unties and aligns himself with his friend’s characteristics, qualities and ethics. In addition, the word *khalil* is used to refer to the one who reveals his secrets to his friend, and conversely, his friend reveals his secrets to him. One may thus receive one of his friends in any room in his house whether in his study, salon or bedroom; such an intimate friend is called *khalil*. However, there may be another less intimate friend whom he would only receive in the salon or his study.

'And Allah took Ibrahim (Abraham) as an intimate friend.' (*an-Nisa’:* 125) This means that the True Lord eclectically selected him. Love could be shared; Allah *Glorified is He* loves someone, and then loves another, a third and a fourth and all the believers. He is the one who said: 'Indeed, Allah loves those who turn unto Him in repentance…' (*al-Baqara:* 222). Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, Allah loves those who are conscious of Him.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 76). He also teaches us: 'And Allah loves those who are patient in adversity.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 146) Furthermore, He tells us: 'And Allah loves the doers of good.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 148) Allah *the Exalted* also says: 'Indeed, Allah loves those who act equitably.' (*al-Mumtahana:* 8)

Yet Allah *the Exalted* has distinguished Ibrahim (Abraham) with His friendship; this means that no one shares with Ibrahim (Abraham) this exalted rank. Love could be shared, but *Al-Khilla* (intimate friendship) cannot be shared. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once went out to his people and said, 'Henceforth, know, O, people, that if I were to take a *khalil* (intimate friend) from among the inhabitants of the earth, I would take Abu Bakr ibn Abu Quhafa as one. Also know that your companion is the *khalil* of Allah.' Companion, in this text, refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself.(1)

Ismail Sabri*,* the Egyptian poet, who preceded the poet Ahmed Shawqi and was the head of judges in Egypt, derived this meaning from the Quran and from the words with which it was associated by saying:

When we met, longing did its best to bring into intimacy
Two friends who were increasingly craving for and blaming each other
It is as if there is a friend who permeated his friend,
Diffused and vanished in him as they hugged each other

Another poet says:

Longing made us hold each other so closely
In a way that makes us become one

Yet, Ismail Sabri said something that surpasses this meaning: we have permeated each other as if each one of us disappeared in the other.

Subsequently, the True Lord says:

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّحِيطًا ﴿١٢٦﴾

It is to God that everything in the heavens and earth belongs: God is fully aware of all things [126]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 126)

Allah *the Exalted* explained in a previous verse that disbelievers and hypocrites have no intercessors or supporters. He asserts this meaning in this context:

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(1) *Related by Muslim and Ahmad based on a narration by Ibn Mass'ud... Al-Bukhari related the same Hadith with a different wording: {If I were to take a friend (khalil) other than my Lord I would take Abu Bakr with whom I share affinity and brotherhood in Islam}.*

‘Do not think that there is a way out, a refuge, a retreat or an escapade. Allah *the Almighty* possesses everything in the heavens and the earth. Thus, no heaven will offer refuge to someone who tries to escape from Allah *the Exalted.* Furthermore, there is no one in the heavens who will help someone who tries to escape from Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses everything with His knowledge and is Capable of doing everything.

Afterward the True Lord says:

وَيَسْتَفْتُونَكَ فِى ٱلنِّسَآءِۖ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يُفْتِيكُمْ فِيهِنَّ وَمَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ
فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ فِى يَتَٰمَى ٱلنِّسَآءِ ٱلَّٰتِى لَا تُؤْتُونَهُنَّ مَا كُتِبَ لَهُنَّ وَتَرْغَبُونَ
أَن تَنكِحُوهُنَّ وَٱلْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ ٱلْوِلْدَٰنِ وَأَن تَقُومُواْ لِلْيَتَٰمَىٰ
بِٱلْقِسْطِۚ وَمَا تَفْعَلُواْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِهِۦ عَلِيمًا ﴿١٢٧﴾

They ask you [Prophet] for a ruling about women. Say, ‘God Himself gives you a ruling about them. You already have what has been recited to you in the Scripture about orphan girls [in your charge] from whom you withhold the prescribed shares [of their inheritance] and whom you wish to marry, and also about helpless children – God instructs you to treat orphans fairly: He is well aware of whatever good you do’ [127] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 127)

Yastaftunak means that they seek your legal opinion. We know that people’s reception of Islam went through a number of stages. One of these stages was marked and described by the saying of the True Lord, *yas’alunak* which is an expression indicating believers’ inquiries in several instances. There is a second stage marked by the word *yastaftunak.* What is the difference between the two?

They asked about intoxicants, new moons, women’s monthly courses and spending money. The question is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even though he said, 'Do not ask me about the matters I have chosen not to address. Those who preceded you were led to perdition due to their excessive questioning and disagreement with their prophets. If I command you to do something, you must do it as much as you are able, and if I forbid you to do something, abandon it.'[1] Prophet Muhammad *peace and*

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[1] *Related by Imam Muslim and others*

blessings be upon him asked them not to ask about or investigate matters that may bring upon them more assignments. Nonetheless, they asked him out of their desire to know any ruling that may determine man’s actions in life. Had they not wanted to determine their actions in life, why then would they ask him? Questioning was evidence that inquirers loved the path of Allah *the Exalted* and wanted to let it surpass all their deeds. Allah likes that His servants enquire about anything He mentions briefly or in general. In addition, Islam came upon a time that Arabs had their established habits and traditions, along with setting their own rules. Islam did not change any of these rules and traditions. The Arabs who accepted faith and became believers did not want to go on following the same traditions and rules just for the sake of following the example of their ancestors. Instead, they wanted that every action they did to undoubtedly conform to the core of the Islamic religion.

By contrast, *istifta’* is often a matter about which there is an ambiguous ruling. For this reason, one may say, ‘Let us seek the opinion of a scholar on this matter.’ Searching for an opinion reflects the inability of the seeker, whether an individual or a group of people, to deduce or derive a relevant ruling. For this reason, the inquirer refers the matter to the people of knowledge. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'whereas, if they had referred it back to the Messenger or to those of authority among them, then the ones who [can] draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it.' (*an-Nisa’:* 83)

Al-istifta’ is an inquiry about a ruling that already exists; yet the inquirer is unable to deduce it. For this reason, as Muslim societies, we often establish institutions for providing legal opinions since not every believer is required to encompass all the particulars of the religion. A believer may indeed live his entire life without ever coming across or having to deal with Islamic rulings that organise the use and distribution of the profits accruing from the property that has been donated by the rich for the Cause of Allah *Glorified is He*, the rulings pertaining to investments in the stock market or the rulings concerning inheritance. A believer typically resorts to scholars for advice when something new happens to him. A question is often about something monotonous and recurrent, whereas seeking opinions is often about something the knowledge of which is not required to be general. For this reason, the inquirer in the latter case often seeks the opinion of the people of knowledge.

The True Lord says: 'And they request from you, [O Muhammad], a [legal] ruling concerning women.' (*an-Nisa':* 127). It is as if they said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'We want to know Allah's ruling concerning women, i.e. what is admissible in connection with them, what is proscribed and how to deal with all of this. So what was the answer? The answer was the following: 'Say, "Allah gives you a ruling about them" (*an-Nisa':* 127). Allah *Glorified is He* did not delay enlightening them since He had already done so before. Notwithstanding this, He had enlightened them before on this matter; thus, Allah *Glorified is He* enlightened them anew. It may be that the ruling that was initially revealed did not occur to them, or they failed to recall it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And they request from you, [O Muhammad], a [legal] ruling concerning women. Say, " Allah gives you a ruling about them and [about] what has been recited to you in the Book concerning the orphan girls…"' (*an-Nisa':* 127). This means that the True Lord will enlighten them on the laws concerning women even though He has previously revealed in the Quran a verse in the same chapter of *an-Nisa'* wherein He says: 'And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four.' (*an-Nisa':* 3)

Verses on the laws concerning women followed afterwards. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, " Allah gives you a ruling about them and [about] what has been recited to you in the Book…"' (*an-Nisa':* 127). In this verse, Allah teaches man that he must not hasten to inquire about any matter unless he first reviews the knowledge he possesses, for he may find the answer that eliminates his need to ask.

However, though the inquiry was about women in general, whether young or elderly, orphans or not, the answer given focused on orphan women. The reason is that elderly women have the capacity to investigate their own matters and are not weak. On the other hand, orphan women are the weakest of the weak. We have learnt the meaning of being an orphan; one is considered an orphan until he reaches puberty and becomes independent. Thus no adult, whether man or woman, ought to be called an orphan. For this reason, the answer was specifically concerned with orphan women since they are the ones who are always under the custody of guardians. Nowadays, these types of guardians are called custodians.

There used to be two kinds of custodians. If a girl was beautiful and wealthy, her custodian would marry her to enjoy her beauty and usurp her wealth. If a girl was ugly, her custodian would not want to marry her. However, he would try to preclude her from getting married due to the fact that if she did, her husband would take over her money. The matter needed clear analysis. Our master ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was consistently insightful (he was known for his keen insights). One day someone asked him about a matter concerning a girl under his custody. Our master ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* then said, ‘If she were beautiful, let her take a better man than you as a husband, and were she ugly, take her as a wife and let her wealth make up for her ugliness.’

The True Lord says: '…and [about] what has been recited to you in the Book concerning the orphan girls to whom you do not give what is decreed for them…' (*an-Nisa’:* 127). The phrase '…what is decreed for them' (*an-Nisa’:* 127) refers to either their dowries or their inherited fortune. The saying of the All-Wise came forth to safeguard orphan women against the arbitrariness of their custodians. The command was brought down in this supreme style which indicates that it is the statement of an All-Generous Lord. The root *raghab* means 'to desire.’ Thus, if the situation is favourable, it should be described to be desired, or *rughaba fih*, and if it is unfavourable, then it should be described to be as 'not desired', or *rughaba anhu*. This is why the True Lord says: 'And who would be averse to the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) except one who makes a fool of himself.' (*al-Baqara:* 130)

Since *an* thus occurred in this verse *'wa man yarghabu an millati Ibrahima'*, 'And who would be averse to the religion of Abraham…' (*al-Baqara:* 130), then what follows is the thing that is undesired and consequently abandoned. If the statement contained *rughaba fih* (desired), then it is about something favourable. The preposition that indicates whether the word *targhabun* is favourable or not has been omitted since it refers to those involved. If the object of desire is women, it becomes *rughaba fih*, and if the woman is ugly and not desired, then it becomes *rughaba anhu*. No one other than Allah *the Exalted* can bring forth an expression that combines two contrary situations. The True Lord thus decrees laws for both situations.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of another type of vulnerable category, which is the young orphans: 'and concerning the oppressed among children and that you maintain for orphans [their rights] with equity. And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah has indeed full knowledge of it.' (*an-Nisa':* 127) When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about guardianship and custodianship over these vulnerable categories of people, His address comes in two different styles. If one is not qualified enough to understand the language and eloquence of the Quran, he may say that both styles are contradictory. However, if one is qualified enough to understand such language and eloquence, then he will be certain that such great style cannot be stated unless it is by the All-Generous Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not entrust your property to the feeble-minded…' (*an-Nisa':* 5). As stated, He *the Almighty* orders people not to give their property to the feeble-minded people even though they are the actual owners of the property. Yet, it shall not be given to them until they have sound judgment. Islam makes the brotherhood based on faith amongst Muslims the basis of cooperation and solidarity. Therefore, when Muslims discover that there is someone amongst them who has weak judgment; his guardian should take charge of his property in order to preserve it for him. Preservation of property is one of the purposes of *Shari'a*, and therefore, Allah entrusts a guardian with this responsibility.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* orders people to test young orphans since the feeble-minded or prodigal person should not be given the right to dispose of his property while in that state. Instead, this right is transferred to his guardian, and it is said that during this time it is the guardian's property. This does not mean that ownership is transferred to the guardian; rather, he becomes the one who has the right to dispose it. However, once a young person reaches puberty and is proven to be able to duly dispose, or take care, of his property, the guardian must hand over the property to him.

This Quranic verse under discussion sets out the rules which govern the treatment of the orphan women and helpless young children. It states that they should be treated with *Al-Qist*: 'and concerning the oppressed among children and that you maintain for orphans [their rights] with equity.' (*an-Nisa':* 127) However, what does treating orphans with *Al-Qist* mean? *Al-Qist* is an Arabic word that indicates the meaning of 'justice' or 'equity.' It differs from *Al-Qast* which means 'injustice.'

However, some who lack knowledge may criticise the usage of words in the Quran, saying that the Quran mentions *Al-Qist* meaning justice in several verses and afterwards states that *Al-Qasitun* are the fuel for the fire of Hell. (*al-Jinn:* 15)We say to these people that *Al-Qasitun* is the plural of *Al-Qasit* which is the verbal noun of the verb *Qasta*. In Arabic, this particular verb *Qasta* is used to refer to both 'justice' and 'injustice.' When it signifies justice, its verbal noun becomes *Muqsit* as Allah tells us that He *the Exalted* loves - *Al-Muqsiteen* meaning just people: 'Surely, Allah loves those who are just.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42) On the contrary, when it refers to injustice, its verbal noun is *Al-Qasit* as Allah tells us in the Quran that *Al-Qasitun* (the wrongdoing people) will be the fuel of Hellfire: 'And those who deviate from the right course, they are the fuel of Hell.' (*al-Jinn:* 15) In Arabic, there is another verb in the same context which is *'aqasta;* it means that there had been an injustice, but it has since been eliminated. Accordingly, we find that *Al-Qist* is to be just from the very beginning, while *Al-Muqsit* is the one who encounters injustice and eliminates it. It is among the merits of the Arabic language that a single word may be used to convey different meanings in different contexts. Therefore, one shall learn how to understand the language and eloquence of speech and to properly understand the sense of every word in light of the context in which it is used.

In the past, the style of writing was a talent, and not a craft, as is the case in our particular time. The early Arabs used not to use diacritical marks. If someone added such diacritical marks in a letter he sent to another person, the recipient would be enraged and send the letter back to the sender, telling him, 'Do you doubt my capacity to read your letter correctly without these diacritical marks?!' Placing such diacritical marks, during those eras, was thus perceived as a sign of having misgivings about the recipient of the letter. By contrast, in our age a recipient often asks the sender to place these marks to the letters so that he can pronounce it correctly.

Allah *Glorified is He* talks about orphans' dowries and property. He *the Almighty* makes the proper disposition of the property of the orphans an act of worship and faith. An orphan woman may neither have wealth nor beauty. In this case, no one will have a desire to marry her. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the guardian to look after her and observe Allah's Rulings in dealing with her.

In this verse, Allah commands believers to treat orphans justly. An orphan girl may be living with her guardian and his family, and she may be beautiful. The guardian may provide her with more care and tenderness than what he shows to his children. However, Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that looking after an orphan girl should be based on justice, and without extravagance. He tells us that one does not get rewarded or punished for merely undertaking an action, rather, it is the intention behind an action which determines the way one is recompensed for it. Thus, beware, O, believer, not to merely say, 'I did such and such', but should say instead, 'I did such and such with the following intention.' Allah, the All Knowing, knows all your deeds and intentions: 'And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah has indeed full knowledge of it.' (*an-Nisa':* 127)

The one who wipes an orphan's head is bound to have a huge reward. Similarly, the one who supports and provides for an orphan will join Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in paradise. The One Who decided to give such a reward is Allah Whose knowledge encompasses the deepest secrets of the intention of a person undertaking this particular good deed. For instance, someone may approach an orphan, support him and provide him with care and tenderness for the sole purpose of getting close to his mother. For this reason, reward and punishment are ultimately determined by the intention underlying and motivating the action. It is not enough for someone to just say, 'My intention is good' and then abstain from doing good deeds. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Actions are to be judged solely by intentions, and a man will have only what he intended. When one emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger, then his emigration is to Allah and His Messenger. However, when one emigrates for the sake of gaining a worldly benefit or marrying a woman, then his emigration is to that for which he emigrated.'(1) This indicates that intention must always be associated with and vindicated by actions. This is due to the fact that Allah encourages us to do good deeds in order to benefit others, as well. One's intention to do the good is not sufficient enough unless it is followed through with the action itself. However, when one carries out an action without having an intention, then he is benefitting others without gaining any personal benefit; he will only incur the exhaustion of undertaking it. Thus, if one wants to be rewarded, he should have a good intention when performing any good deed.

Allah *the Exalted* asserts that He knows all what we do even before the creation of the universe, as He is the Most Powerful and the Most Omnipotent: 'And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah has indeed full knowledge of it.' (*an-Nisa':* 127) Accordingly, He *the Almighty* does not need to wait until man carries out a deed in order to have knowledge of it. Rather, He has eternal knowledge of everything. Therefore, He says: 'And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah has indeed full knowledge of it.' (*an-Nisa':* 127) This is due to the fact that all that is happening in this world is known to Allah even before the creation of all that existed, exists and will exist.

Let us illustrate this by reference to an example from daily life. An owner of a piece of land may ask an engineer to build a house for him and tell him: Design a house for me on such and such area and have it be composed of the following number of rooms and bathrooms. The engineer then comes up with a design based on the instructions of the landowner. The landowner may be a person who leans towards accuracy and precision and so he, therefore, says the engineer, 'I want you to build a small scale replica of the house before we start building it so that I can see a small but realistic representation of the house. The replica should accurately show the rooms, their designs and colours.'

Similarly, the world with all its minute details and dimensions was known to its Creator, Allah, before it ever came to being. The replicas made by people may be deficient due to lack of raw materials. For instance, a carpenter may run out of rosewood, thus finding himself confined to resorting to a different kind of wood in order to finish constructing a bedroom. This defect is due to the incomprehensive knowledge and limited capacity of the carpenter. However, Allah’s Creation is highly perfect since He *Glorified is He* is the Best Creator. We should reflect over all these meanings when we read Allah’s saying: 'And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah has indeed full knowledge of it.' (*an-Nisa’:* 127) Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* discusses some issues relating to women. He says:

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhahri]*

وَإِنِ ٱمۡرَأَةٌ خَافَتۡ مِنۢ بَعۡلِهَا نُشُوزًا أَوۡ إِعۡرَاضٗا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡهِمَآ أَن
يُصۡلِحَا بَيۡنَهُمَا صُلۡحٗاۚ وَٱلصُّلۡحُ خَيۡرٞۗ وَأُحۡضِرَتِ ٱلۡأَنفُسُ ٱلشُّحَّۚ وَإِن
تُحۡسِنُواْ وَتَتَّقُواْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٗا ﴿١٢٨﴾

If a wife fears high-handedness or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best. Although human souls are prone to selfishness, if you do good and are mindful of God, He is well aware of all that you do [128] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 128)

When the Arabic article *’inna*, translated in this verse as 'if', is followed by a noun in the nominative case, we must note that it is followed with a hidden verb; this means that the original word order in this case should have been as such that the verb comes immediately after *’inna*. This applies to this verse along with many other verses such as the following: 'And if anyone of the idolaters seeks protection of thee, grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 6) However, what is the meaning of fear in the verse under discussion? Fear is the feeling you get when you are afraid or worried that something bad or sad might happen. This means that one fears when he expects that a difficult or troublesome matter might, or is going to happen. In this Quranic verse, high-handedness has not yet shown, but the woman fears or expects that it may happen. Allah *Glorified is He* bases the ruling on the mere fear of high-handedness or ill-treatment, and not on its actual occurrence. This is a note for every one of us not to wait until the things he fears actually happen. Instead, one must prevent the causes which may lead to their occurrence since, in the event that they may happen, handling them might be extremely difficult. In the same manner, if a woman senses signs of ill-treatment on the part of her husband, she must try to remedy the problem from the very beginning.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* talks here about *an-Noshouz*, or 'ill-treatment' on the part of the husband as He previously talked about ill-treatment on the part of the wife: 'And as for those on whose part you fear disobedience, admonish them and keep away from them in their beds and chastise them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely, Allah is high and great.' (*an-Nisa':* 34)

So, what is the meaning of *an-Nushouz?* When listening to music, someone may make the following comment: 'This tune is *Nashaz*.' This means that it does not resonate with the sequence of the melody and its rhythm. This word is originally derived from *an-nashz* which refers to the elevated place of a ground.

The ideal case of the matrimonial relationship is that a man-the husband-takes the woman-hiswife- to be his source of relief, affection and mercy and reveals to her all his secrets inasmuch as she does with him. Therefore, Muslim Jurists state that *Al-Kafaa'ah*, or 'equality' or the proximity between spouses, is a condition for marriage. Allah *Glorified is He* explains that corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men are for corrupt women, and likewise, good women are for good men and good men are for good women: 'Corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men are for corrupt women; good women are for good men and good men are for good women. The good are innocent of what has been said against them; they will have forgiveness and a generous provision.' (*an-Nur:* 26)

Equality should thus be observed even regarding such things as good character and bad character. A corrupt woman should not be married to a good man; otherwise she would make him suffer. Similarly, a corrupt man should not be married to a good woman, lest he should make her suffer. This is due to the fact that when a good man marries a good woman, they will comfort and appreciate each other. Likewise, when a corrupt man marries a corrupt woman, their behaviours and manners resonate with each other. This actually establishes a balance in their relationship. Both a corrupt man and a woman do not feel ashamed when they commit immoral acts. On the other hand, a good man and a good woman take care of each other's feelings and preserve each other's dignity. In the context of matrimonial life, if a woman fears that her husband might display ill-treatment towards her, abstain from spending over her, despise her or no longer love her, she should correct her behaviour and with the way she treats him. Similarly, when affection and compassion upon which the relationship between spouses ought to be based collapse, despite each of them pledging a solemn promise to the other, this is considered another form of *Nushuz*. Furthermore, when a woman fears that her husband looks down on or despises her because he financially supports her, then this is considered another form of *Nushuz*. An intelligent wife needs to pay attention to herself and remedy the causes that may lead to an escalation of the situation, i.e. she should work on her relationship with her husband. If the husband is the cause of the problem, she should try to regain his affection.

Turning away means that the husband has not yet started to display ill treatment towards her. However, he does not show affection towards his wife, talk to her or even approach her, even though he may give her all of her rights. An intelligent woman should also fix this problem. The problem is ultimately between a husband and wife about the relationship between them. Allah states that they, the married couple are very close to each other: 'And how can you take it when one of you may have consorted with the other, and they (women) have taken from you a strong covenant?' (*an-Nisa':* 21) Another example is the following verse: 'They are a sort of garment for you and you are a sort of garment for them.' (*al-Baqara:* 187) This means that every husband is both a shield and a cover for his wife, while every wife is both a shield and a cover for her husband. Indeed, we know that if a woman is sitting in her room and her brother or father walk in, she will quickly cover any exposed part of her body. On the other hand, if her husband walks in, she will not conceal or cover her body.

Every husband and wife knows that there is a very private and sensitive affair between both of them; Allah permits both a husband and wife to be exposed to the other in a way that they are not permitted to be exposed to any other one in the world. Therefore, a husband must not curse or disrespect his wife in any way. Similarly, every wife is required to take care of her husband. They both should remember that they have been exposed to each other in a very unique and special way.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to put an end to any dispute that may flare up between a husband and a wife. For this purpose, He encourages every wife to investigate the cause of her husband's ill-treatment and turning away from her; she may, for instance, have grown old or become ill while her husband is still at the prime of his life. Another woman may have enticed him or he may, for some reason, want to marry another woman. In this case, the wife must rationally treat the problem and concede some of her share in him. For example, if she is not very beautiful and her husband wants to marry another, she may allow him to do so. She may also give up some of her dowry to him. What matters is that they should reconcile. This is a duty of the husband as much as it is a duty of the wife.

In this verse, Allah asserts that reconciliation is the duty of both the husband and wife: 'If a wife fears high-handedness or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best.' (*an-Nisa':* 128) This is due to the fact that any problem, in which no one else interferes, except the husband and wife, can easily be solved. The resolution of such problems is made difficult by the people who interfere in the relationship between the two spouses. A man may have a dispute with his wife and leave the house, but afterwards he may calm down and return home. His wife may then say to him a word that ends the entire dispute. However, if a relative interferes in the problem, matters may be further complicated since the one who interferes may have neither the reason nor the motive to solve the problem.

This is why we should adhere to Allah's Order to seek reconciliation: 'neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best.' (*an-Nisa':* 128) The first stage of reconciliation between a husband and wife is that they both should fulfil their obligations and always remember that although they may hate something in the other partner, Allah decrees that this same thing is very good for them: 'it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you like a thing while it is bad for you. Allah knows and you know not.' (*al-Baqara:* 216) Another verse that illustrates these points is the following: 'if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing wherein Allah has placed much good.' (*an-Nisa':* 19)

No man should ever believer that there is a single woman who has extraordinary beauty and all good qualities. The good and various qualities required for leading a good marital life may not be available in a beautiful woman. However, such qualities may exist in a woman who is not very beautiful. This is for this is that an extraordinary attractive woman may mainly depend on her beauty and not develop other qualities. On the other hand, a woman who is not very beautiful tries to be honest, obedient, clean (keep house well) and well-behaved with her husband's family since she wants to create bridges with them in order to encourage her husband to keep her. For this reason, we find that the women who are not beautiful constitute the majority who seriously shoulder the responsibilities of supporting their families. Consequently, a man should not only consider the aspect of physical beauty. Rather, one should consider all aspects and aspects of beauty. Men's minds may be overwhelmed by physical beauty. However, every man should bear in mind that such form of beauty is short lived. There are many of other aspects of beauty that last to the end of one's life.

We were told of a good and righteous man who was married to a troublesome and authoritative woman. One day he told her, 'O, I wish you could see me while I am giving religious lectures with people leaning forwards to listen to me.' He thought that if she would see him giving a lecture, she would be change and start to treat him more kindly. His wife then went to attend his lectures. He thought that this scene would inspire deep reverence for him in her heart. When he returned to her at the end of the day, he said to her, 'You saw me today!' She replied, 'Yes, I saw you, and it was frustrating. I saw all the people sitting calmly except for you. You were the only one screaming.' It is said that Allah used to extend His Grace and Support to this man for tolerating the misbehaviour of his wife. His students used to see divine illumination in his actions. When his wife died, his students went to see him, but they could not sense any of the illumination they were used to experiencing with him before. They then asked him what had happened to cause this change. He said, 'The one for whom was responsible for Allah treating me gracefully has died.' Thus, as much as women are required to endure the misbehaviour of their husbands, men are also required to endure the misbehaviour of their wives. Allah rewards the one who endures ill-treatment from his wife. An interesting story has been related in this respect. ‘Imran ibn Hittann was one of the *Khawarij* [a group which claimed that both sides in the battle of Siffin (which occurred between ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb and Mu‘awiyyah ibn Abu Sufyan) were disbelievers] and was married to a beautiful woman even though he was ugly. His wife looked at him one day and said, 'Praise is be to Allah!' He asked her, 'Why are you praising Allah?’ She replied, 'Because both of us will be admitted into paradise.' He then asked, 'Why do you think so?’ She responded, 'Because you were blessed with me (a beautiful wife) and were grateful, and I was tested with you (an unattractive husband) and was patient, and the patient and thankful are both admitted to paradise.'

No one should think that he will find a woman that combines all aspects of beauty and goodness. He should know that if she ranks low in one aspect, she might be quite superior in another. Therefore, do not miss one clear advantage due to a deficiency she may have in another aspect of her character; in life, there are several aspects of character. We said before that Allah has no children. Rather, we are all His servants. Allah has equally given us the means to be graceful. Therefore, if someone was privileged in one aspect, another will have an advantage over him in a different one. The coexistence of excellence in one aspect and deficiency in another was intended by Allah to make the total result of the merits and qualities of every human being equal to their opposites, thus establishing a balance in the world.

Therefore, when one finds something that he does not like in his wife, and conversely, when a woman finds something that she does not like in her husband, the man should consider all the good aspects in his wife in order to have a more clear, integrated vision of her. Similarly, a woman should consider all the good aspects in her husband in order to have a clearer, integrated view of him. If a man considers all the aspects of his wife’s character, he will live contently with her because, from his perspective, the good aspects will always outnumber the bad. The one who is content is the one who looks at the positive aspects, while the discontent person is the one who only looks at the negative aspects. The one who is fair in both his anger and contentment is the one who considers the totality of all the positive aspects and negative aspects. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the family to be based on safe foundations.

He *Glorified is He* thus tells us that neither the husband nor the wife should wait until disputes erupt. Rather, each of them should try to resolve potential problems once they detect their signs. No one, apart from both husband and wife, is more capable of solving a given problem that may arise between them since the bonds and relationship common between a husband and wife do not exist between any other people. For this reason, Allah encourages both of them to seek reconciliation: 'neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best.' (*an-Nisa':* 128)

Sometimes, we find that people are more concerned with the formal aspect of reconciliation, without paying close attention to and trying to find a solution for the underlying causes of alienation and psychological animosities between the two spouses. Such focus on formalities without tackling the real causes of disputes which may lead to other problems, does not help to achiever true reconciliation. Therefore, reconciliation shall tackle the essential problems and their underlying causes so that spouses can become content, and thus, goodness can be achieved between both of them and in the whole community.

Afterward, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Although human souls are prone to selfishness, if you do the good and are mindful of Allah, He is well aware of all that you do.' (*an-Nisa':* 128) In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He is Our Creator so He knows our nature and dispositions; He also knows that it is very difficult for a wife to give up a portion of money that is rightfully hers, like her dowry, to give up an engagement present or to give up her right to a night with her husband to allow him to spend it with another wife, if he is married to more than one. Similarly, it is very difficult for a man to give up some of the standards he has set for his life. Therefore, Allah warns us against letting selfishness take control of our attitudes towards each other. In order to encourage both spouses to be lenient to each other, Allah reminds them of their special relationship: 'And how can you take it when one of you may have consorted with the other, and they (the women) have taken from you a strong covenant?' (*an-Nisa':* 21)

The verse being explored differentiates between the rights which any of the two spouses may stand up for and insist on and what either of them may relinquish out of benevolence towards the other. We are told of a fair judge who once said to two litigants, 'Should I judge amongst you based on justice or do you know something that is better than justice?’ One of them asked, 'Is there anything better than justice?’ The judge answered, 'Yes, it is benevolence. Justice only signifies giving one his due rights, while benevolence means that one benevolently relinquishes one’s due rights to the interest of the other.' In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to solve a psychological problem that many families may face, in which neither the husband nor the wife have strong faith or creed. Had these families had stronger faith and followed the Rulings of Allah, such a problem would not have occurred. This problem is that of polygamy.

A superficial investigation suggests that a polygamist is a fortunate person as he is allowed, in Islam, to marry up to four wives simultaneously. In the same respect, a woman is thought to be wronged because she is restricted to only one husband. However, careful investigation shows that not all wives are wronged; the second wife feels happy. Furthermore, a husband may tell his wife that he is going to have a second wife. She may, after investigating all alternatives, accept to preserve her matrimonial life with this husband and decide it being the best alternative for her.

It is related that a husband wanted to divorce his wife because he was no longer attracted to her. Since they had a son, she said to him, 'Do not divorce me and let me look after my son. All what I want is that you just give me my due share.' Her husband then said, ‘If this would work with you, it is more amenable to me.' Accordingly, we find that polygamy is not a source for frustration and distress to all women; as much as it causes the first wife frustration and distress, it pleases the second wife. However, women are justified in being frustrated since men took advantage of Allah’s Ruling that permits polygamy but failed to obey Allah’s Decree to treat their multiple wives justly. A man wrongs a woman when he follows only the ruling that is in his interest, namely, the allowance of polygamy, yet does not follow the Decree of Allah, the One Who allows him polygamy, in the sense that he should treat his wives fairly.

People used to deny polygamy because they noticed that when a man has a new wife, he only cares for her and completely neglects his first one along with his children from her. For this reason, women have their excuse for being angry at the legitimacy of polygamy. If men followed Allah’s Decree that a husband should treat his multiple wives justly as much as they took advantage of Allah’s Allowance of practicing polygamy, social balance would then be established. When the first wife knows that her rights, whether concerning herself, her house or looking after her children, would not be neglected by her husband, she would say, 'It is better for him to be publicly married instead of encroaching upon other people’s honour, meaning having illegal relationships with other women.'

Therefore, the cause of the problems associated with polygamy is that man partially follows some of the Divine Orders and ignores the rest of them. Those who take advantage of Allah’s license to practise polygamy must observe the principles that He has set out in order for such lifestyle to be undertaken within the framework of justice.

For example, when a man has two wives, each one is entitled to have her husband spend a night at her house; so each wife is entitled to spend the same number of nights with her husband as does the other wife. Mu‘adh Ibn Jabal *Allah be pleased with him* had two wives, and he was accustomed not to perform his ablution in a house of one of his wives if it was the other’s night even though ablution is an act of worship. What is more interesting is that when the two wives died of plague, he ordered them both to be buried in one grave.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created the creation and also commanded people to be just as much as they are able. Therefore, a husband has to be fair in everything: the time he spends with each wife, his expenditure, his smiles and his company. A man can observe justice in all these aspects. Yet, he cannot be fair as far as the inclination of his heart is concerned as it is related to one’s own feelings. Therefore, Allah tells us that we can not observe justice regarding love, even if we do our best. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* orders husband not to show his greater inclination to a certain wife.

وَلَن تَسْتَطِيعُوٓا۟ أَن تَعْدِلُوا۟ بَيْنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتُمْ ۖ فَلَا تَمِيلُوا۟ كُلَّ ٱلْمَيْلِ
فَتَذَرُوهَا كَٱلْمُعَلَّقَةِ ۚ وَإِن تُصْلِحُوا۟ وَتَتَّقُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١٢٩﴾

You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so, but do not ignore one wife altogether, leaving her suspended [between marriage and divorce]. If you make amends and remain conscious of God, He is most forgiving and merciful [129] (The Quran, *an-Nisa': 129)*

This proves that justice in love is impossible. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to make the following supplication to Allah, 'O, Allah, this is my division concerning what I control, so do not blame me concerning what You control, and I do not' (Meaning the heart). (1) Thus, there is a difference between a heart's inclination which signifies psychological affection and tendencies, and rational inclination. No one has control over his heart's inclinations. Therefore, there is not a legislation or law which orders someone to love so and so girl unless it refers to rational love, not the emotional one. Someone may, for instance, like a bitter medicine; he does so intellectually, not emotionally. Therefore, this person may rejoice when someone brings him the medicine because he knows that the medicine will cure him— Allah willing.

The Quranic verse speaks of *Al-Mayl,* or inclination. So, what does *Al-Mayl* mean? Allah *Glorified is He* clearly explains this when He orders us not to leave a wife in a state as if she is married and unmarried at the same time. This refers to a woman who is neither *'aym* which means she has no husband and seeks marriage, and nor married, but cannot take pleasure in having a husband. Instead, she is a woman kept by a man who does not fulfil his responsibilities towards her. Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrates that He does not want a husband of multiple wives to forcefully, or uncontrollably, incline his heart in one direction or another since he has no control over this matter. However, He wants him to observe justice in all his dealings with his wives. One should observe equality amongst one's wives regarding the time he spends in each wife's house, the money he spends on each, the amount of care he gives to his children and even the company he gives to one's wives. As for a heart's inclination, Allah does not enact any rulings concerning it.

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(1) *[Narrated by Ahmad]*

Allah *Glorified is He* decrees laws for His creation since He knows them best. Allah created passions for each of us that make us have inclinations. Furthermore, He created desires within us and gave us a variety of choices concerning our reactions. If Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to restrict our inclination, He would not have created it. However, He unleashes human inclinations so that they may achieve the combined interests of all mankind. Therefore Allah *the Exalted* allows a heart to love since He knows that inhabitancy of the universe is established on love. For example, if a scientist did not love discovering Allah' secrets in concerning the universe, he would not endure the effort involved in research, reading and experimentation along with all the toil involved in these tasks.

If people do not like perfecting their works, there will not be a single well-done piece of work. Similarly, if a man does not love his children, he will not take pains in bringing them up. Therefore, love has a mission. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want us to preclude love; instead, He wants us to exalt love by channelling it morally, rather than unscrupulously unleashing it in a way that may encroach upon the honour of others.

When you direct your love towards a good purpose, it will never make you or other people incur an evil result. Consider, for instance, the motive and desire for knowing; we will find that Allah created it for man to enable him to develop useful inventions in life. If the desire to know did not exist, no scientist would be able to innovate, invent or discover anything conducive to the comfort and enhancement of human life man, for example, would not have thought of using steam power to ease the toil of travelling and carrying heavy weight and thereby, would not have invented steam boats and trains.

However, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to exalt the desire for knowing and inventing by channelling it towards legitimate endeavours and keeping it from being a tool used to spy on other's people's secrets, for example. Similarly, He has implanted the desire for amassing wealth in man since it motivates him to work and benefit others by this work, whether his intention is to benefit others or not. The same also holds true for the desire for sex; Allah implanted it in man with its vigour to preserve the human species. He does not want us to unleash it to infringe on people's honour. Therefore, He created desires for special functions. Thus, religious laws have been decreed to maintain human desires to their respective functions and prevent them from declining away from the path of Allah.

Therefore, inclination is a human instinct. An interpretation of the words of The True Lord *Glorified is He* on this issue may be: 'I have created this inclination to serve the purpose of life on earth. However, I want you to exalt and elevate your inclinations. This principle should be observed when you acquire multiple wives. I do not want you to completely ignore your inclination since this is not something that is practical. However, I would like you to discipline this inclination and keep it within only your hearts' limits. It is not appropriate to let your inclination go beyond your hearts and affect your actions.

Therefore, you, believers, are free to love whomever you wish. However, do not let this love negatively affect your entire behaviour and thus unfairly give the one you love the good to which another person is entitled. Similarly, you are free to dislike whomever you want. No legislator can command your heart to love or dislike, but do not let your dislike extend beyond your heart, and influence your behaviour and cause you to wrong the one you dislike.

'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* set an ideal example concerning this issue. When the murderer of his brother passed by him, a man sitting with him said: 'This is the murderer of your brother.' 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Now that Allah has guided him to Islam, what could I do to him?' The killer's embracing of Islam ended the matter for 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*. When the killer came to 'Umar's session, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, 'When you attend my session, turn your face away from me for my heart is not comfortable in your presence.' The man then asked, 'Does the fact that you do not love me deny me any of my rights?' 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'No.' The man then said, 'Only women lament love.' 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was then the Caliphate and that man was one of his subjects. However, 'Umar the Caliphate feared committing an injustice. Thus, this man, though he was under the reign and command of the Caliphate 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* possessed the ability to reject

‘Umar's feelings of love and hatred as long as they did not preclude him from his rights as a citizen.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has created the heart's inclinations and set the following rule for them: Beware, believer, not to let your hearts inclinations influence your actions. Let your heart's inclination be as you wish. In this respect, if you marry one woman, and then marry another, the path of God does not require you to achieve absolute justice in treating your two wives, especially concerning your heart's inclination. For, if this were the case, this would imply that the path of God requires you to control something that is not under your control, viz. the inclination of your heart. Rather, the path of Allah sets for you the rules that your limb's actions should follow. You have to be fair in distributing your time for each of your wives, the clothes you buy for them, your smiles and the gentleness of your speech. Therefore, you should not to let your heart's inclination influence your actions; beyond this, you are free to have whatever feelings you desire in your heart.

We have noticed that some of those who pretend understanding the Quran and being *Mujadidin* (those who renew the Islamic faith) support the new campaign against polygamy. In this respect, we say that before joining this campaign against polygamy under the pretext of understanding the texts of the Quran, you should first investigate the causes of this resentment of polygamy; it is not a resentment of polygamy in itself. Rather, it is a resentment of a Muslim who takes advantage of Allah's allowance of polygamy and neglects his command to observe justice. If a Muslim observed equal justice while practising polygamy, such a crisis would not have existed. For this reason, they say, The True Lord *Glorified is He* has decreed that the man should restrict himself to one wife if he fears he cannot be just if he were married to have multiple wives. He thus says: '…but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then [only] one…' (*an-Nisa':* 3). He also says in a different verse: 'And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it…' (*an-Nisa':* 129). To these people, we say that if you really wanted to understand the Quran, you should know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not stop at His saying, '…however much you may desire it…' (*an-Nisa':* 129); rather, He supplemented a command to his statement on the incapacity of fair treatment. He thus says: '… and so, do not allow yourselves to incline towards one…' (*an-Nisa':* 129).

Allah *the Exalted* supplemented His statement mentioning the inability of fair treatment with the command not for a man to be inclined towards one of the wives. This manifests the Wisdom of the First Legislator Who knows His creation and knows how He created them. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not supplement 'And it will not be within your power…' (*an-Nisa':* 129), it may have given those who are against polygamy a right to say what they have said. For this reason, we tell them to pay attention to the fact the True Lord *the Almighty* explained that men's inability to observe justice between their wives is a matter that He knows. Therefore, He asks them not to be entirely inclined, and this is within their power. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has left the ruling as it is and did not negate it. 'And so, do not allow yourselves to incline towards one to the exclusion of the other leaving her in a state, as it were, of having and not having a husband…' (*an-Nisa':* 129). This statement involves a command for every man not to leave his wife in '… a state, as it were, of having and not having a husband…' (*an-Nisa':* 129). The destiny and path of life of such a woman would be undetermined. She is neither without a husband, making her eligible for marriage, and nor is she married; thus, she may take her due share from her husband in terms of living with her in their house, supporting her by expenditures, clothing her, along with giving her kind reception, smiles, intimacy and sympathy.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…But if you put things to right and are conscious of Him – behold, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy.' (*an-Nisa':* 129) His saying '…if you put things to right…' indicates that a form of corruption exists and that every Muslim man is required to investigate the causes that led him to corrupt his marital relation with the intention to fix them. Furthermore, every Muslim man should be conscious of Allah in dealing with his wife in the light of Allah's Laws. When a Muslim husband stops the corruption of leaving his wife in a state as if she were not yet having a husband by giving her due rights in terms of the time he spends in her house, expenditure support, taking care of her family and showing interest in her and her children in a good manner, Allah will forgive him and dispense His Grace upon him. Furthermore, a Muslim cannot correct what he corrupted unless he genuinely intends to do all actions being conscious of Allah. If he does so, he will find Allah immensely forgiving and a dispenser of mercy.

If a man is incapable of being just and a woman did not agree to give up a portion of her rights to satisfy him, then separation will be a must in such a situation. It is inconceivable to try to govern the marital and family life by force. We cannot force spouses to stay with each other if their hearts repel. Similarly, we cannot be certain that any woman could live safely under these conditions.

To the one who contends that it is not appropriate for us to separate spouses, we ask, 'do you want to keep marital life going by force?' The marriage bond is based on tranquillity, affection and compassion. If these basics are absent, how could a marriage possibly continue? How could you force a husband to live with a wife whom he does not like or accept? Similarly, how could you compel a wife to live with a husband whom she does not like? Separation, in such cases, is a means that Allah *Glorified is He* intended so that a husband may search to find another, more suitable wife, and the same applies for a wife.

We have frequently encountered examples of this in real life. A divorced husband may live happily with his new wife; similarly, a divorced wife may live happily with her new husband. As for those who took the idea of separating a married couple in the case where married life is impossible as a pretext to attack Islam, they basically repeat the western view that holds that no married couple should ever separate.

Nowadays, we see that the entire world, including Christians, Jews and others who belong to different religions and sects, resort to divorce since events and conditions force them to legitimize it. It is as if they are having recourse to Islam not in itself but as the only solution to their problem. Therefore, if it has been proved that those who attack a specific part of religion are ultimately compelled, under the pressure of events or conditions, to resort to it, we have to remind them not to rush to judge matters pertaining to Islam as invalid. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has compelled the non-Muslims to follow a Muslim principle. He is the One Who said:

وَإِن يَتَفَرَّقَا يُغْنِ ٱللَّهُ كُلًّا مِّن سَعَتِهِۦ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٣٠﴾

but if husband and wife do separate, God will provide for each out of His plenty: He is infinite in plenty, and all wise [130] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 130)

Allah *Glorified is He* has infinite grace. He is truly capable of conferring upon a divorced husband a good wife who satisfies his needs. Similarly, He is capable of conferring upon a divorced wife a husband who satisfies her needs and accepts her ugliness if she were ugly by making him see other aspects of beauty and goodness in her. A man may have been infatuated by the beauty of his wife even though she drove him crazy, made him confused and disturbed his thoughts. Subsequently, Allah may bestow upon him a woman who is fond of him. He may bless him with an honest woman whom he can trust; when he leaves her to go to work, he would have no misgivings about her in his heart since he has confidence in her even if she was not very beautiful. 'And if husband and wife do separate, Allah shall provide for each of them out of His abundance, for Allah is indeed Bountiful, Wise' (*an-Nisa':* 130). Do not begin to think that Allah does not possess what will comfort every person. Allah *Glorified is He* has what can comfort each person. The pharmacy of His path abounds with remedies. Some people just do not know how to use these remedies to treat their diseases.

It is due to His Wisdom that Allah *the Exalted* does not force a couple to continue living with each other since they dislike each other, especially if it were a case where affection and compassion no longer existed between them. Afterward, the True Lord puts forth the following verse:

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَلَقَدْ وَصَّيْنَا ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَنِ
ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۚ وَإِن تَكْفُرُوا۟ فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَنِيًّا حَمِيدًا ﴿١٣١﴾

Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to God. We have commanded those who were given the Scripture before you, and We command you, to be mindful of God. Even if you do ignore Him, everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him, and He is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise [131] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 131)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One who satisfies the man when he divorces his wife and similarly satisfies the woman if she separates from her husband. It is not difficult for Allah *Glorified is He* Who created the entire world to satisfy the needs of a man and a woman after they divorce. He possesses the heavens and the earth and is capable of bestowing upon a man a better woman than one he divorced and bestowing upon a woman a better man than that one she divorced or got a divorce from. Thus, nothing falls outside the reign of Allah Who gives abundantly and infinitely.

We frequently hear of a man who married a woman who does not have children and about whom rumours of being barren become widespread. The couple, thus, goes to medical labs to get tested. Sometimes, it is said that the woman is the cause of not having children, while other times, it is said that the man is the cause of not having children. Accordingly, they get divorced, and each of them acquires a new spouse. The woman may then have a child from her new husband; similarly, the man may have a child from his new wife. The reason behind this is Allah's Will. Things in life do not happen solely because all their causes took place as if they were autonomous and not ultimately caused by Allah; rather, He is always the cause leading to all causes. He is the One Who said: ' Allah's alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills. He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills], and causes to be barren whomever He wills, for, verily, He is All Knowing, infinite in His Power.' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

How many possible alternatives do we have? Allah may bestow upon whomever He wills female offspring. He may bestow upon whomever He wills male offspring. He may also bestow upon whomever He wills both male and female offspring. Finally, He may cause to be barren whomever He wills. There are four possible destinies for any married man and woman as far as the question of having children is concerned. When Allah bestows upon a family offspring consisting of only males, the wife will long to have a daughter. Conversely, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* bestows upon a family only female offspring, both the man and the woman would long to have a son. If Allah gives a family both male and female offspring, such a family often experiences feelings of contentment; but such a state of contentment came last.

Allah *Glorified is He* puts the blessings whom man would want the least firstly. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* first says: '…He creates whatever He wills…' (*ash-Shura:* 49). Subsequently, He *the Exalted* says: '… He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills…' (*ash-Shura:* 49). Afterwards, Allah mentions the bestowal of male offspring and then puts forth the state at which His bounty reaches its apex: 'or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills]…' (*ash-Shura:* 50). Finally Allah *the Exalted* mentions the fourth possible destiny which He may enjoin on some of His creatures: '…and causes to be barren whomever He wills...' (*ash-Shura:* 50).

However, why is one happy with Allah's fate when He bestows upon him either male or female offspring? And why does happiness increase when He bestows upon him both male and female offspring? Furthermore, why is man discontent with His fate when He causes him to be barren? Does man think that he will be destined to the fate he likes and avoid the fate he does not like? The four possibilities are all fates from Allah. If man considers each of the four possibilities, he would be content with them.

Allah *Glorified is He* creates whomever He wills and causes whomever He wills to be barren. If man says this statement while contently accepting Allah's fate, He may please him as much as He pleased others with a male offspring, a female offspring or both a male and a female offspring. I swear to you, if someone, or a married couple accepted Allah's fate of being barren contently as much as they do in other situations, He will not bestow upon them an offspring of boys and girls who will make them suffer in pregnancy and in raising them; rather, He will bestow upon them people who will serve them, but who have been raised by others.

The main reason why the spouses who do not have children live unhappily is that they do not accept the fate Allah decreed, Allah forbid. Therefore, He makes them live in grief. Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who said in a Qudsi Hadith that has been related by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* saying that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah says, "I always meet my servant’s expectation about me. I am with him if he remembers me. If he remembers me in his self, I remember him in Myself. If he remembers me in public, I also remember him in public.; if he gets closer to me by an inch more, I get closer to him by an arm's length; if he gets closer to me by an arm's length, I get closer to him by the span of an outstretched arm, and if he approaches me walking, I approach him running."'(1)

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and unto Allah belong all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth....' (*an-Nisa':* 131) So do not say that the universe of Allah will be too narrow to encompass the livelihood of a divorced man and a divorced woman. Just as much as Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed divorce as a solution to their inability to live peacefully together. He bestows upon every married couple infinite grace. As a Muslim, you have to follow the path of the True Lord as much as all that is in the heavens and that is on earth do. You should then ask yourself this question, 'Who takes care of all your interests?'

It is the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who made things beyond your power subservient to you. Have you forced the sun to rise and provide you with light and warmth? Have you forced water to evaporate and then fall again in the form of rain? Furthermore, have you forced the wind to blow? Also, have you forced the soil by commanding it to supply the seed you implanted therein with the necessary nutritive elements the plant needs to grow? All of this is not within the realm of your will; rather, it has been made subservient to you by Allah. If you want to be righteous, you should be subservient to Him in the matters that He has left up to you. Also, you should say, 'I love the path you have set my Lord. I will thus obey You as much as possible.' You should embrace the commands and proscription of the path of Allah with all your heart and every action. If you do so, the entire universe will be obedient and amenable to you as much as the subservient part of the universe is.

'And unto Allah belong all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth....' (*an-Nisa':* 131) This is a reminder for us that everything is owned by Allah and obeys Him. So, as Allah's vicegerent in the universe, you should not be an exception; everything in it serves you. You should also ask yourself, 'Do I live in the light of the path of Allah or not?' The universe is harmonious inasmuch as it is subservient to Allah; in this manner there is no defect in universal laws. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And the skies has He raised high, and has devised [for all things] a measure so that you [too, O men,] might never transgress the measure [of what is right]. Weigh, therefore, [your deeds] with equity, and cut not the measure short!' (*ar-Rahman:* 7-9)

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in (At-Tawhid) and Muslim in his (Sahih) based on three relations*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains that if you want the matters that can be controlled by your choice to be straightened then contemplate well the reality of the universe surrounding you. You will realise that the things that are subservient to man by nature are never the cause of any defect or problems; rather, man's voluntary choice is what is at odds with the path of Allah and is often the cause of all defects and problems.

'…And, indeed, We have enjoined upon those who were granted revelation before your time, as well as upon yourselves, to remain conscious of Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 131). Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He has enjoined upon those to whom He has revealed His path before us, the Muslims, as much as He has enjoined upon us, the sealing nation, to adhere to the commands and proscriptions of His path. Thus, we have to make our choices submissive to the Will of Allah in order to be in harmony with the universe in which we live. He says that if we do so, everything in our life will be well ordered. The True Lord *the Exalted* did not say that this statement is exclusively applied to Muslims; it is rather, a universal matter that every messenger called for: '…And, indeed, We have enjoined upon those who were granted revelation before your time, as well as upon yourselves, to remain conscious of God…' (*an-Nisa':* 131).

Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'We have legislated' to those who were granted revelation before your time, and nor did He say: 'We have enacted.' Rather, He said *wasyyna,* which is the Arabic word in the aforementioned verse translated as 'enjoined.' The word *wasyyna* makes the listener feel the love the one who enjoins bears for him. '… And, indeed, we have enjoined upon those who were granted revelation before your time, as well as upon yourselves, to remain conscious of Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 131). Being conscious of Allah means to follow His commands and avoid His prohibitions; we must govern our choices according to the path of Allah. If we govern our choices according to His path, we will get along and everything in our lives will be organized.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… And if you deny Him – behold, unto Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, and Allah is indeed Self-Sufficient, ever to be praised.' (*an-Nisa':* 131) The opposite of denying Allah is to have faith in Him. He is Self-Sufficient and is in no need of anyone who abjures His faith. So, do not ever think that Allah is in need of your faith because He has granted His path to you. Rather, He only wants you to be a healthy, happy society. Even if you deny Allah, all that is will still be His and even you, who rebelliously denied Him, will continue to be subject to the Will of your Lord.

You, who deny Allah, will never control the birth, death or destiny of anyone. The universe is constant and intact as it is. The Quran drew our attention to the order of the universe in the saying of the True Lord: 'Do they not look at the sky above them – how We have built it and made it beautiful and free of all faults? And the earth – We have spread it wide, and set upon it mountains firm, and caused it to bring forth plants of all beautiful kinds, thus offering an insight and a reminder unto every human being who willingly turns unto Allah. And We send down from the skies water rich in blessings, and cause thereby gardens to grow, and fields of grain, and tall palm-trees with their thickly-clustered dates, as sustenance apportioned to men; and by [all] this We bring dead land to life: [and] even so will be [man's] coming-forth from death.' (*Qaf:* 6-11)

At any moment, Allah may command one of the universes He has created to be unbalanced. The earth we see stable and firm may suddenly shake, and about that Allah says in the Quran: 'He has made mountains stand firm on the earth, to prevent it shaking under you…' (*an-Nahl:* 15). Allah is the Creator of the earth and the One Who holds control over it. By His Will and Might, the system of the earth may be troubled at any moment, occasioning an earthquake in part of it, and causing everything in it to lose balance or even collapse.

By such catastrophes, Allah means to let us understand that the world is not mechanically governed; rather, its system is maintained based on particular means and causes that Allah has made and that He can suspend at any time. He may order tiny particles of dust to accumulate, creating a huge storm sufficient to block vision, as if it swallowed the world in its whirl! Allah thus directs our attention to this truth: He has created the universe and set laws to govern it according to His Will, but He can suspend these laws since they are never beyond the reach of His Might.

A land may be wholly dependent on rain. With rain falling throughout the year, fertility, greenness and abundance can be seen everywhere. Is this system run mechanically? No, it is Allah, Who has created rain and orders it to fall by His Will and Might, and Who may stop it, turning greenery into aridity, making people, cattle and plants die of thirst. The world is not merely mechanical, but it functions according to the Will of the Creator.

On another part of the earth, we may find a quiet land on which a beautiful mountain stands still. Suddenly, the summit of the mountain turns into a volcano that throws lava and fire. The land that was once splendid scenery becomes a scary place from which any living thing wants to escape. The glory of the human mind is not in trying to defy the Creator, but in aligning his choices with the Will of Allah. The mind, as miraculous as it is, is limited.

'Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. We have commanded those who were given the Scripture before you, and We command you, to be mindful of Allah. Even if you do ignore Him, everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him, and He is Self-Sufficient, worthy of all praise' (*an-Nisa':* 131). As we see, Allah starts and concludes the verse with the same statement: '… Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah,' and each of the two occurrences has a different meaning to convey. The first implies a command that we must obey Allah in order to be in harmony with the universe that belongs to Him. The statement is then repeated another time at the end of the verse to emphasise that Allah is Self-Sufficient—He holds control over the heavens and earth; everyone is dependent on Him; and He is in need to no one. Now, does the repetition look like a redundancy? This is the Book of Allah *the Exalted* above all imperfections. He declares at the beginning of the verse that '…Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah,' which means we have to obey Him, and at the end, '…Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah…' which means that He is the Self-Sufficient Who is in no need of His servants— their belief does not benefit Him; their disbelief does not harm Him. Let whoever wishes embrace faith, and let whoever wishes reject it, and each will receive their fair recompense: 'Say, "Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so." We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers…' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

After making that declaration twice in the aforesaid verse, the same statement is repeated for a third time in the following verse:

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿١٣٢﴾

Yes, indeed, every- thing in the heavens and the earth
belongs to God, and He is enough for those who trust
in Him [132] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 132)

This time, it is a reassurance that Allah guarantees and protects the fundamentals of life for His servants. The sun, for instance, would never rebel and decide not to rise one day. The air would never decide not to blow. The earth would never cease to provide nutrients to living things. All of them function regularly by the Will of Allah Who has created humankind and nature and decreed that it has to contain our livelihood. By this, Allah means to explain to us that He is our Guardian Who takes care of our affairs and spares us the difficulty of disposing them. When any of us delegates a guardian to take care of some affairs, this spares him a lot of trouble, even though that guardian may commit a mistake, falter, accept bribes, commit an act of betrayal, etc. Allah *the Exalted* has infinite Power, so He assures His servants that the fundamentals of their existence are totally secured. Allah controls the sun and makes it in the service of His servants, so it will never deviate off the course of subservience. He controls water, wind and all the elements on earth. He is the Ultimate Sovereign and the Guardian over all creatures; He is the Best Guardian to Whom all praise is due and Who never cuts the means of life from His servants. Let us ponder this Hadith (saying of Prophet Muhammad): It has been reported that a Bedouin arrived at Medina, rested his camel and tied it, then stood up to observe the *salat* (the prayer) behind Prophet Muhammad. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* finished praying, the Bedouin untied his camel, embarked on it and then said: 'O Allah, have mercy on me and Muhammad and do not let anyone else have a share of Your mercy!' Hearing that, Prophet Muhammad commented: 'Who do you think is more ignorant of the truth, the man or his camel? Did you not hear what he said?’ People answered: ‘Yes.’ The Messenger of Allah explained to the man: ‘You have restricted something that is absolutely infinite! Allah’s Mercy is of a hundred parts. He has sent down to us one of them, and it is by this part that all creatures, including men, jinn and animals, have mercy on each other, and He kept with him ninety nine parts. Who do you think is more ignorant of the truth, the man or his camel?’(1)

Allah is indeed the Best Guardian. He is the Self-Sufficient, All-Sustaining Lord of all creation Who provides for them. You do your best and exhaust all possible means to earn your living, and when you are tired you just go to rest and sleep, and who disposes your affairs then? Who sends to you the outcomes of your struggle? It is Allah Who is never overtaken by sleep or slumber. So is there a better guardian than Allah?’… and He is enough for those who trust in Him’ (*an-Nisa’:* 132).

Allah does not only assure us that He is Self-Sufficient and in no need of His creatures. He does not just tell us that He has created all that is in the heavens and the earth, and that those who choose to disbelieve will be punished, and those who choose to believe will attain His Mercy. Allah also draws our attention to the fact that He possesses control over His creation and can replace them all with others. He says:

إِن يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ أَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ وَيَأْتِ بِـَٔاخَرِينَ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ قَدِيرًا ﴿١٣٣﴾

If He so willed, He could remove you altogether and replace you with new people: He has full power to do so [133] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 133)

Some philosophers claim that it is true there is a Creator, but once He created the universe, he left it operating by itself, and He does not interfere with the affairs of His creation! Besides being illogical, this is also refuted by the revelations of Allah Who emphasises that He has created us and has full control over us, and that He can even remove us from existence and create others instead.

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad and Abu Dawud*

The original Arabic text of the verse uses a past verb form in the last sentence: ‘… He has full power to do so’ (*an-Nisa’:* 133). When the past is used in reference to humans, it means that the state expressed was, but it is no more; however, when used by Allah, it does not confine the description ascribed to Him to the past; all creatures are subject to change, but He is the Creator Who has eternally existed with no beginning and no end and has eternally possessed all His Attributes. Allah is the One Who causes all things to change and He never changes. He has always been Fully Capable to do whatever He wills, even before the existence of all things. Allah has not started to have this Attribute when He created humankind; rather, He has created humankind out of His Might. He has always existed and has always been capable of all things. Allah says in the following verse:

مَّن كَانَ يُرِيدُ ثَوَابَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا فَعِندَ ٱللَّهِ ثَوَابُ ٱلدُّنۡيَا
وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ سَمِيعَۢا بَصِيرٗا ١٣٤

If some want the rewards of this world, the
rewards of this world and the next are both God’s
to give: He hears and sees everything [134]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 134)

But why do people persist in their heedlessness even though the Prophets of Allah have informed mankind that rewards both in this worldly life and in the Afterlife are in His Hand? Why do most people crave worldly gains and disregard the eternal good of the Hereafter? People act mindlessly of Allah even though if they obey Him, they will reap the rewards in this worldly life, like health, wealth, etc., for it is only in the Hand of Allah that our efforts and endeavours can be fruitful. Moreover, the obedient wins matchless rewards in the afterlife. Allah says: ‘If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share’ (*ash-Shura:* 20).

Allah teaches us that winning the Afterlife does not mean sacrificing this worldly life. It is a faulty understanding that whoever seeks the reward of this life will not get the reward of the afterlife or vice versa. Rather, Allah wants

His servants to win the reward of both lives. Do not deprive yourself from the pleasures of this life that Allah has made lawful to you, but meanwhile focus on the Afterlife; that is the true life we should aspire to. Now, what does ‘reward’ convey? There are things that are done for you even though you do not ask for them to be done; such is not really a ‘reward.’ Other things happen as a result of your action; if you take the necessary action and exhaust the possible means, you will eventually reap the fruit, and that is what ‘reward’ means.

A good example is farming. You must sow seeds for plants to grow. The differences among people in this world—in terms of their progress versus backwardness, civilization versus barbarism, strength versus weakness—are all dependent on their efforts to employ the components of the universe Allah has created for us, not on those things already made subservient to humankind and already functioning without our interference. Some nations have established great civilizations after achieving breakthroughs in science. All humans are equal in terms of the resources Allah has made for our service without any effort on our part. As for the progress that defines each nation and makes the difference, this requires actions.

A higher stage of progress is achieved when one thinks even how to make use of the resources that already function without our interference. For example, the sun already provides us with light and heat, but we can also use its rays with a convex lens to produce fire. Rain falls naturally from the sky and fills water bodies and valleys. People have not stopped there, but they thought how to use that water to operate huge turbines and produce electricity.

Therefore, civilization is made through three stages. The first stage is based on the natural benefits we effortlessly receive from the natural resources that are already made subservient to us. The second stage consists in utilizing the other components with which Allah has endowed the world—so humankind should discover them and devise ways to make use of them. The third stage is to think how to employ even the natural resources we already use and develop new ways to get extra benefits from them. A good example of the latter is the production of solar energy gathered using machines that have been invented through human labour. We could have stopped at the common benefits we naturally receive from the sun, but effort has been made and fruits have, therefore, been reaped.

Think of the laser technology that works miracles in the field of medicine nowadays. The word LASER stands for 'light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation.' Spontaneous emission of radiation through the sun is a natural source of energy made subservient to humankind; we receive light and heat from the sun without having to work for it. The stimulated emission, on the other hand, is produced when light is amplified when directed through a particular medium that scientists have designed to produce massive energy. The acronym LASER was then invented to sum up and stand for the innovative process.

Accordingly, prosperity is achieved when we are able—through diligent effort and work of the mind—to use what naturally offers benefits to generate more benefits other than that we receive spontaneously.

This is what 'harvest' is meant to convey in the words of Allah: 'If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come…' (*ash-Shura:* 20). It refers to the fruits, the recompense received for a deed that has been done. If you seek the harvest of this world, you have to work for it. No pain, no gain. Allah, out of His Bounty and Mercy, has made the rewards of this worldly life attainable for anyone who works for it, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever. As for the rewards of the Afterlife, Allah has restricted them to those who believe in Him.

Indeed, the life of this world is but a fleeting comfort compared with the Life to come. Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…with Allah are the rewards of [both] this world and the life to come: and Allah is indeed All-Hearing, All-Seeing' (*an-Nisa':* 134). Would it not be foolish then to limit one's efforts and aspirations to winning only the rewards of this life when Allah offers us prosperity and success both in this life and in the Hereafter?

It is also worth noting that when Allah mentions rewards, He tells us that effort is essential for us to win rewards of this life, but He does not particularly mention the reward of the Afterlife to tell us that a believer is already rewarded in the Hereafter for whatever he does in this life if his intention is to please Allah, so he wins both here and there as a result of his struggle. The life of this world is, in essence, a transition, a passage to the Hereafter. Seek to please Allah by your deeds, and you will see the fruits of your devotion in this life and the Life to come.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…and Allah is indeed All-Hearing, All-Seeing' (*an-Nisa':* 134). We understand from the verse that the rewards of this life and the Afterlife are only attained through working and striving and by doing righteous deeds. A deed is whatever ensues from employment of human faculties. In this sense, talking is also a deed for which one is rewarded or punished. Whatever one says is recorded, and he will be held accountable for every word uttered. So there is talking and there is acting. These are two categories under which human conduct usually falls. To clarify this point, let us ponder these words of Allah: 'No indeed! You [people] do not honour orphans, you do not urge one another to feed the poor, you consume inheritance(1) greedily' (*al-Fajr:* 17-19).

When hearing a noble verse calling for giving to charity, the rich would know what they have to do. The poor, however, would perhaps think to themselves: 'We do not have anything to give!' Allah *the Exalted* has left no room for such lamentation and guided those, who have nothing, to what they should do: it is by urging others who have money in excess to their needs to give to the poor and needy. Those who can afford should comply with that divine command by giving money to charity, and those who cannot should urge the wealthy to give. To 'urge' is only to 'speak', to say what encourages the wealthy to feed the needy, but they are rewarded for it, too. Thus, good deeds can be by acting or by speaking. Just as a good action is a good deed, a good word is also a good deed.

We find a similar example in the following verse about fighting for the cause of Allah: 'But there is no blame attached to the weak, the sick and those who have no means to spend, provided they are true to Allah and His Messenger– there is no reason to reproach those who do good: Allah is most Forgiving and Merciful' (*at-Tawba:* 91).

Allah exempts the weak, the sick and those who have no means to equip themselves from participating in battles against enemies, so they will not be held accountable for failure to join those who fight for His cause. Instead, they are commanded to sincerely call for the Straight Path of Allah and His

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(1) "This could refer to the inheritance of orphans or inheritance generally," Abdel Haleem, *The Quran, A New Translation*.

Messenger. Therefore, it suffices him, who is incapable of fighting, to spread the word of Allah and remind others of it. At the end of the verse, Allah says to whoever seeks His Good Pleasure, whether through acting or speaking: '…and Allah is indeed All-Hearing, All-Seeing' (*an-Nisa':* 134). Whatever good deed you do, whether by acting or by speaking, will not be effaced. Allah hears every word said and sees every act done. Therefore, attaining the rewards of this world requires work; that is, employing each faculty in the proper manner to perform its function. It is to let the tongue speak, the hands work and all the other faculties we are endowed with fulfil the purpose they are created for. The heart also has its work, and what is it? The work of the heart is neither heard nor seen. It harbours one's intentions behind everything he does. It is the place of sincerity. Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Sincerity is one of My secrets that I entrust with the hearts of those I love among My servants.' (1)

The heart bears one's intention behind every deed he does, and whether or not he is sincere to Allah, this knowledge is confined solely to Him *the Almighty*. Even *Raqib* and *'Atid*, the two angels in charge of recording one's deeds, cannot determine his intentions. For this reason, Allah describes himself in several verses of the Quran as the Knower of Subtleties, the Aware. He knows the deepest and most hidden details of all things and is Aware of everything. Nothing can be concealed from Him and He has Power and Control over all things. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Deeds are judged based on intentions, and everyone ultimately gets recompensed for his intention. Accordingly, whoever emigrates for the cause of Allah and His Messenger will be rewarded accordingly, and whoever emigrates for a worldly interest he pursues or for a woman he wants to marry will be recompensed according to what he has emigrated for.' (2)

As we have explained before, deeds fall under two categories: words and actions because each one employs the faculties Allah has given him. Allah Almighty says in the Quran: 'O you who have attained to faith! Why do you say one thing and do another?' (*as-Saff:* 2) Words and actions are both counted as deeds, but there is another kind of deeds for which one is held accountable too; namely, the intention that lies in the heart. Allah is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing, Knower of Subtleties and Aware, so He hears whatever we say, sees whatever we do and knows whatever is in our hearts. In the following verse, Allah says:

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(1) *Cited by Abu Al-Qasim Al-Qushayri in Ar-Resala on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb… Its chain of transmitters is weak (da'if), but several verses of the Quran and authentic Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad support its meaning.*

(2) *Cited by AlBukhari and Muslim*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ كُونُوا۟ قَوَّٰمِينَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ
ٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ ۚ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَٱللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا ۖ فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟
ٱلْهَوَىٰٓ أَن تَعْدِلُوا۟ ۚ وَإِن تَلْوُۥٓا۟ أَوْ تُعْرِضُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿١٣٥﴾

You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly–if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do [135] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 135)

When Allah addresses His believing servants saying: 'You, who believe…' know that He establishes the grounds for the ruling that follows this call. Before a judge issues a verdict, he first presents the grounds underlying it. To Allah belongs the Highest Example. The basis on which Allah gives a command is faith in Him, so He always addresses the believers on this basis before prescribing a ruling, as in this noble verse: 'You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you…' (*al-Baqara:* 183).

Faith establishes the grounds for the divine ordinance. If you are a believer, you must therefore obey the Lord you believe in. Allah honours by His commands only those who have faith in Him. In the verse we are dealing with, He says: 'You, who believe, uphold justice…' (*an-Nisa':* 135). Faith in Allah is the most sublime form of justice; justice consists in giving everyone the right to which he is entitled. Since it is our duty to believe in Allah as the Only Allah, a believer has already upheld justice in its highest form by embracing faith.

In the verse at hand, Allah commands the believers, who have established justice by attaining faith, to be just in all their deeds as well. Justice is not to be practiced once and abandoned later. No, but we always have to be steadfast in upholding justice, as Allah enjoins on us: 'You who believe, uphold justice…' (*an-Nisa':* 135).

The Arabic expression used in the original text of the verse is a hyperbole; it does not say 'be just', but 'uphold justice' and maintain this attitude constantly: 'You, who believe, be *qawwamina bi-al-qist* (uphold justice)…' (*an-Nisa':* 135). The Arabic word *qawwam* is an intensive form that denotes steadfastness in the stated action, which is establishing *qist* (justice). Thus, the divine command to every believer means: maintain justice as a lasting attitude and observe it in all aspects of your life.

The word *qist* has been subject to some debate among scholars. The matter can be simply resolved as *qasata* means to commit injustice, and to remove this injustice is *'aqsata*. The latter is prefixed by the letter *alef* (a–the first in Arabic alphabet) which denotes 'removal.' Hence, *qist* means to establish justice from the beginning, whereas *iqsat* (prefixed with the letter *alef*) means to establish justice by removing an injustice that took place at the beginning.

Assume that a first-instance court issued a judgment which it deemed to be just, so this would be *qist*. One of the litigants then appealed that judgment, and the court of appeal detected a mistake in the application of the law and cancelled the appealed judgment. Hence, the latter would be a case of 'removing' injustice; that is *iqsat*. This explication puts an end to the debate over the word *qist*. There are other examples of the aforementioned *alef* prefix which denotes 'removal.' The word *'ujmah* means ambiguity or obscurity in a text. From the same root, *'a'jama*- prefixed with the aforesaid *alef*- means removing that ambiguity or obscurity by offering clarification. The Arabic for 'lexicon' is *mu'jam* since a lexicon provides definitions and usages of words, removing any ambiguity about them. The same applies for *aqsata* that means establishing justice by undoing a wrong that had been committed.

So Allah commands the believers: 'You, who believe, uphold justice…' (*an-Nisa':* 135). As a believer, you have already achieved the noblest form of justice by devoting worship to the One Who is worthy of it; you have embraced faith in Allah, the Creator of the heavens and earth and you must observe justice constantly in everything you do. Still, it is not just about committing to justice because Allah also says: '… uphold justice and bear witness to Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 135) It is not enough to do the right thing; we have to do it for the sake of pleasing Allah.

You may find a man who establishes justice among people, yet he does not believe in Allah. A disbeliever being just does not qualify him to attain the reward Allah promises those who have faith in Him. To attain such reward, one must uphold justice while having Allah in mind; it must be done solely to please Him *Glorified is He*. It is only within the realm of faith that establishing justice would not be intended for any interest, inclination or purpose other than managing life and the universe in the way Allah has ordained. Otherwise, if everyone decided to live based on their own desires and serving only their interests, life on earth would be ruined. Allah says: 'But if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the heavens, the earth and everyone in them would disintegrate…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

So, a believer must uphold justice with his intention directed to pleasing Allah. A disbeliever or an atheist may be just, but will he receive reward in the Hereafter for his justice? He has established justice with only this worldly life in his mind, so he receives his reward in this life only. History may commemorate him or people may pay tribute to him, but since he has not thought of Allah, he has no right to attain His reward.

'You, who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to Allah, even if it is against yourselves…' (*an-Nisa':* 135). Normally, a witness is a person who testifies in favour of someone against another. When someone acknowledges a sin he has committed, he is thus testifying against himself. In this manner, a believer always gives testimony that provides evidence for the right judgment to be issued and justice to be established, even if this evidence is against his own self.

When a believer is required to bear witness to the truth, he should speak up and never conceal what should be revealed, even if that would bring afflictions and deleterious repercussions on him. Allah knows what fears or worries His servants may have and, in the Quran, He has presented reassurances to combat them. When a believer bears witness in favour of the truth, he should not fear any person of authority. He should entrust himself, his wealth, family and everything else with the One Who promises to protect them. Detriment has indeed befallen some people and their families just because they said the truth. Some despots even punished those who spoke the truth by torturing their families, knowing that such punishment would be much more painful. Hence, reassurance comes from the Almighty Allah: do not concern yourself with that; do not let the fear for your children or wealth withhold you from giving a just testimony. Rest assured that Allah is there for you and that He provides for His servants.

The frenzied pursuit of one's caprice and interests is often the reason why he prefers to support falsehood instead of the truth. One would refrain from standing up for a poor obscure person who has been wronged by a man of wealth or authority, just fearing that his testimony would cost him personal gains or interests furthered through the latter. This is forbidden in Islam. A true believer whose faith is firmly established in his heart, must comply with Allah's command and commit himself to justice and truth, even if it would bring on them or their families unfavourable outcomes. Richness or poverty of the ones involved in the case must not sway him from telling the truth. Rather, he should bear only Allah in his mind. Addressing such fears, Allah says—reassuring the believers after stating His command: '…Whether the person is rich or poor, Allah can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire so that you can act justly…' (*an-Nisa':* 135).

It is no wonder that one would give a false testimony in favour of a rich person, but Allah mentions both the rich and the poor, so what can induce someone to say other than the truth for the sake of a poor person? Just as greed would sway some, compassion and sympathy would sway others; a witness may think to himself: 'This man is poor and deserves mercy!' For this reason, Allah warns us against bias for anyone—rich or poor.

Testimony should be based only on the truth and not on any other considerations or implications, like richness or poverty of those concerned. We cannot be wiser than Allah or more caring than Him when it comes to the affairs and interests of His servants. He *the Exalted* says: '… Allah can best take care of both…' (*an-Nisa':* 135). You have created neither the rich nor the poor; Allah has created both and He is the best Disposer of their affairs. When you are required to give your testimony in any case, do not think of the richness or poverty of any parties concerned. Just say the truth in full, and Allah will take care of everything. He is the best Guardian and Protector.

Following desires and prejudices is the enemy of justice. An Arabic proverb says: ‘Desires and prejudices are the corruptors of judgment.’ Prejudices drive one astray from justice. Islamic history abounds in wonderful stories about justice, one of which is about a virtuous man who once went to the Caliph of his time and told him: ‘Discharge me of my position as a judge!’ The Caliph answered: ‘Who would then be fit for this position if you—whose justice everyone attests—want to leave it?!’ The judge explained: ‘People have learnt, O Prince of the believers, that I love eating dates. While I was in my house, my servant walked up to me with a plate full of dates, and we were still early in the season of dates and it is natural that I would be craving dates since I love them. I asked my servant: ‘Who brought these dates?’ Hearing the servant’s answer, I realized that the sender was someone involved in a dispute brought before me, so I rejected the dates. The day came when I was expected to pass my judgment. The dates’ sender and his opponent appeared before me, and, O Prince of the believers, I felt something in me that was trying to prevent me from looking at the cases of the two litigants on equal basis even though I had rejected the bribe!’ Based on such grounds, the Arab Muslim judge resigned his position.

Allah then says: ‘… if you distort or neglect justice, Allah is fully aware of what you do’ (*an-Nisa’:* 135). After Allah states His command, soothes any fears that are likely to hinder compliance, He warns the violators saying that if they give a testimony other than the truth, play with words to mislead the judge or refrain from giving testimony altogether, fearing the party against whom testimony should be given, know that Allah is Aware of all that you do.

Prejudices are rooted in the heart, and we have previously learnt that one’s deeds encompass what he says, what he does and what he harbours in his heart. Whatever you think or feel is known to Him Who is Aware of all things and Knower of Subtleties. Therefore, your distortion of the truth can never be concealed from Him.

Allah says in the following verse:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ ءَامِنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلَّذِى نَزَّلَ عَلَىٰ
رَسُولِهِۦ وَٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ مِن قَبۡلُۚ وَمَن يَكۡفُرۡ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ
وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِ فَقَدۡ ضَلَّ ضَلَٰلَۢا بَعِيدًا ١٣٦

You who believe, believe in God and His Messenger and in the Scripture He sent down to His Messenger, as well as what He sent down before. Anyone who does not believe in God, His angels, His Scriptures, His messengers, and the Last Day has gone far, far astray [136] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 136)

Someone may say: Allah starts this verse by addressing His servants: 'You who believe…' Then, He commands them to '… believe in Allah and His Messenger…' Are they not already believers, as He calls them, so what is the significance of this command? Let us explain this. One may well profess faith in Allah whereas the creed he holds in his heart contradicts what he professes. The testimony of faith constitutes truth in itself, but it is a lie when uttered by the tongues of those who do not believe in it, for it is completely at odds with what they conceal in their hearts. This is why Allah says: 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, "We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah." Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). The hypocrites have borne witness that Prophet Muhammad was the Messenger of Allah, which is actually the truth, but what makes them liars? They are liars in the sense that they only claimed to believe in that truth, but they did not really believe. However, Allah knows what they concealed in their hearts, so He exposed them to His Messenger: '… Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). They were not liars in the sense that what they told was itself falsehood, but they deserved the description since they only claimed to believe in that ultimate truth, while in fact they did not. Truthfulness is not confined to telling what is really true, but also holding it as truth yourself. If what one says is at odds with what he believes, he is a liar. Some wrongly believe that there are contradictions in the Quran. In fact, this misunderstanding arises from failure to realize the meanings of the Quranic verses and the messages they are intended to convey. In the verse we are dealing with, some do not realize that hypocrites' falsehood did not consist in their statement that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. He is indeed! Rather, they lied when they said: "We bear witness…", so their lie consists in declaring faith verbally with their tongues while their hearts do not believe.

By asking the believers to '…believe in Allah and His Messenger…' (*an-Nisa':* 136), Allah means to call the believers to remain steadfast in their faith. They have already embraced faith, so let them hold fast to it. Another example is found in the following verse where Allah addresses Prophet Muhammad: 'Prophet, be mindful of Allah and do not give in to the disbelievers and the hypocrites: Allah is All Knowing, All Wise' (*al-Ahzab:* 1). Is not Prophet Muhammad already mindful of Allah? Actually, He is the most mindful of Him among His servants, but Allah means by this command to urge him to remain steadfast in this mindfulness.

When Allah says, 'You, who believe, believe in Allah and His Messenger…' (*an-Nisa':* 136), He means to call the believers to remain steadfast in their faith, to hold fast to it after receiving this verse as they have been before the verse. He calls on them never to let the bond of faith be severed. O believers, hold fast to the honour bestowed on you from your Lord. When one is addressed by a description that already applies to him and is then asked to fulfil that description, it means maintain it and remain steadfast in it.

Besides the believers, this verse also invites hypocrites and people of the Scripture to embrace faith. As long as one believes in no Allah other than Allah, this necessarily entails that he should endeavour to find out what Allah wants from him. Allah has sent His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad, to deliver His ordinance to us. For this reason, having faith in Allah requires the believer to have faith in His Messenger, the final Messenger who delivered the final, timeless Message. Reason alone may lead one to believe in the existence of the One Allah Who has created the universe—and sustains it—but how do we know Allah? How do we understand what He wants from us? The answer to such questions can only be found when one accepts what the Messenger of Allah has delivered to us.

Allah has sent His Messenger to inform us of His ordinance—what to do, what to avoid, what reward is promised to believers and what punishment is for those who deny the truth? How can we know all these matters without embracing the Message His Prophet calls for? Therefore, your faith in Allah must be associated with your faith in His Messenger and the Book sent down to him—the Noble Quran. This Book tells you that there are creatures of Allah that you cannot see; namely, the angels, and one of these angels communicated the Allah's revelations to Prophet Muhammad. Faith means to believe in the Unseen since Allah tells us it exists. The people of the Scripture have already believed in Allah, His angels, His Messengers and Books, so they are commanded to believe in Prophet Muhammad as the final Messenger and what he communicated as the Book of Allah.

Allah has told us about the existence of creatures we do not see, like the angels. This suggests that we should ponder the creation of the universe and discover what we do not know. Allah leaves to humankind the task of discovering new beings and new aspects of the universe that were not known to them before. He has provided us with evidence that implies the existence of such unknown things and left us the mission of discovery. A good illustrative case is the discovery of microbes in the seventeenth century. Microbes have always been there, but we could not perceive them. With the invention of microscopes, people managed to see microbes and determine their characteristics, species and kinds; and researchers still seek to attain more knowledge about microbes. In this sense, microbes are relatively new to us even though they have existed for a long time.

If people in the dark ages had been told about the existence of microbes, they would not have believed in them. Microbes are living beings made of the same substance we are made of; yet, they are too small for the naked eye to see them. When scientists invented tools to magnify images of things hundreds of times, we managed to see those tiny creatures. Something being imperceptible does not mean it does not exist.

When Allah talks to us about the creation of angels, jinn and Satan, who runs in the human being the way blood runs through him, what prevents some from having faith in what He says?! A disbeliever or an atheist believes that a microbe unconsciously insinuates itself into the human body, and the symptoms of illness start to appear. We have learnt about this when the means of knowledge and perception became available. It is logical then to believe that Allah has created other beings from substances other than that from which He has created man: ‘You who believe, believe in Allah and His Messenger and in *Al-kitab* (the Scripture) He sent down to His Messenger, as well as *Al-kitab* (the Scriptures) He sent down before…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136).

In the first occurrence of the Arabic word, *Al-kitab* (the Scripture), in the aforesaid verse, the word is prefixed with *al* that functions here as a definite article, so the word is a definite Scripture; that is, the Noble Quran. In the second occurrence of the word in this verse, it is also prefixed with *al*, but it functions here as a generic article. The prefix *al* in Arabic may be added to a singular noun to refer to the entire kind the stated noun encompasses. Thus, the second occurrence of *Al-kitab* refers to all the Scriptures that had been sent to Allah’s Messengers before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

There is another example of the generic *al* in the following verses: ‘By the declining day, *al-insan* (humankind) is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds…’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3). The word *insan* is singular, yet it is prefixed with the generic article *al*, so it is understood to refer to all humankind. The words of Allah, ‘… except for those who believe, do good deeds…’ refer to an exception of the referent of the word *al-insan*, which means it refers to all humankind and not to a single person even though the word comes in its singular form. When an exception is made with reference to a word, it means this word has a generic quality.

The definite *al* also gives the meaning of uniqueness or prevalence. When it is prefixed to the word *kitab*, it refers to the Noble Quran—the *al* article here, plus being a definite article referring to particular book, also bears the connotations of perfection or distinction, so *al-kitab* is the perfect Book that has not been distorted. For instance, it is said: he is *ar-rajul*(1) (the one), which means that he is a man singled out for his distinctive qualities, manhood, magnanimity, courage, etc. So, when the word *al-kitab* is mentioned without any particular modifier or description, it is understood that it refers to the Noble Quran unless the context indicates otherwise.

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(1) This means *al-rajul*, but the /*l*/ of the definite article *al* is assimilated into the /*r*/ of the word *rajul* since it is a solar letter.

'…Anyone who does not believe in Allah, His angels, His Scriptures, His Messengers and the Last Day has gone far, far astray' (*an-Nisa':* 136). This means that whoever believes in Allah yet does not believe in all that is mentioned in this verse is also a disbeliever.

Some Jews, like 'Abdullah ibn Salam, his nephews Salam and Salama, Asad and Usayd, sons of Ka'b, Tha'laba ibn Qays and Yamin ibn Yamin went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said: 'We believe in you, the Book revealed to you, Prophet Musa (Moses), the Torah and 'Uzayr (Ezra), but we abjure all other books and messengers.' Prophet Muhammad told them: 'Rather, believe in Allah, His Messenger, Muhammad, His Book, the Quran, and every Book that was revealed before him.' They answered: 'No, we will not do so.' The verse we are dealing with was then revealed, so they all believed in what they had rejected before.(1)

The verse is also addressed to the hypocrites. Allah also calls them to truly embrace the faith that they have only professed with their tongues. He urges them to let the beliefs they harbour in their hearts align with the testimony they have declared. Thus, the verse is addressed to the believers calling them to remain steadfast in faith; it is also addressed to the people of the Scripture calling them to believe in all the Messengers and Books of Allah without any exceptions, and to the hypocrites as well so that they believe with their hearts in what they have professed with their tongues. Therefore, whoever rejects anything Allah mentions in this noble verse is considered a disbeliever, even if he believes in some of what Allah commands. To believe in some and reject some of what Allah commands means faith is not truly ingrained in the heart.

'… Anyone who does not believe in Allah, His angels, His Scriptures, His Messengers, and the Last Day has gone far, far astray' (*an-Nisa':* 136). Going astray is to proceed without guidance, to lose track of the intended goal. He who persists in disbelief after receiving Allah's admonition has not only gone astray, but very far astray to the extent of losing every sign that leads back to the Straight Path. Those who go astray and those who are rightly guided actually share the same starting point. However, one of them commits himself to the Straight Path Allah has guided us to, always bearing in mind his ultimate goal of pleasing Allah by obeying Him; the other continues to deviate from the way until he loses every clue that can guide him back to it. He gets lost in the whirl of disbelief. Allah says in the following verse:

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(1) *Cited in Al-Khashshaf, by Jarullah Az-Zamakhshari*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا۟ ثُمَّ ءَامَنُوا۟ ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا۟ ثُمَّ ٱزْدَادُوا۟
كُفْرًا لَّمْ يَكُنِ ٱللَّهُ لِيَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ وَلَا لِيَهْدِيَهُمْ سَبِيلًۢا ﴿١٣٧﴾

As for those who believe, then reject the faith, then believe again, then reject the faith again and become increasingly defiant, God will not forgive them, nor will He guide them on any path [137] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 137)

The verse describes the hypocrites who professed faith and concealed in their hearts rejection of it. Allah describes them in another verse, saying: 'Some of the People of the Book[1] say, 'At the beginning of the day, believe in what has been revealed to these believers [the Muslims], then at the end of the day reject it so that they too may turn back' (*Al-'Imran:* 72).

Hypocrites take the issue of faith lightly; to them it is only a word said, not a creed firmly established in their hearts. They would apparently perform the requirements of Islam, the rituals or acts of worship it enjoins on the believers so that no one would suspect them. In their hearts, however, they harbour disbelief and are more dangerous than the disbelievers who declare their enmity to faith and its adherents. Their way is deception, but Allah has exposed them in the Quran over fourteen centuries ago: 'The Bedouins say, "We have attained to faith." Say [to them, O Muhammad]: "You have not [yet] attained to faith; you should [rather] say, 'We have [outwardly] surrendered'– for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts."…' (*al-Hujurat:* 14)

Allah knows what is in the hearts of the hypocrites, so He has exposed those to their own selves and to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They used to be the first to rush to *salat* (the prayer). When Prophet Muhammad

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(1) Refers to Christianity, Judaism and their adherents

peace and blessings be upon him exposed them and explained that they did not really believe, but only outwardly surrendered to the commands of Islam; then, they realized that he could reveal what they concealed in their hearts.

They would have gone even more flagrantly astray and ascribed divinity to Prophet Muhammad for knowing these secrets. To give them no chance to do this, Allah commanded His Messenger to let them know that he was informed of their secret by Him *the Almighty* and he had no supernatural ability to see through their hearts: '… Say [to them, O Muhammad]: "You have not [yet] attained to faith..."…' (*al-Hujurat:* 14).

Thus, Prophet Muhammad acknowledged that he only knew their secret when Allah revealed it to him. This prevents anyone from going to the extreme of ascribing divinity to Prophet Muhammad instead of believing in him as the Messenger of Allah who received revelations from Him.

What Prophet Muhammad said should make everyone believe that he was a Messenger from Allah Who has sent down those revelations to him; otherwise, he would have never known them. This is absolutely clear in the context of the verse: 'The Bedouins say, "We have attained to faith." Say [to them, O Muhammad]: "You have not [yet] attained to faith; you should [rather] say, 'We have [outwardly] surrendered'– for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts."…' (*al-Hujurat:* 14)

This is an embarrassing yet logical exposure of what they concealed in their hearts. Some of the Bedouins who heard this verse commented: 'Thank Allah there is a hope that faith may enter our hearts.' They found this clause particularly expressive of this expectation: '…for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts.' (*al-Hujurat:* 14) It has not yet entered it, but may do afterwards, and indeed it did, and they became truly believers.

Allah says in the verse we are dealing with: 'As for those who believe, then reject the faith, then believe again, then reject the faith again and become increasingly defiant…' (*an-Nisa':* 137). This refers to those who died as disbelievers even after the Truth was revealed to them. It may be meant to allude to the Jews who had faith in Prophet Musa (Moses), but then disbelieved in Prophet 'Isa (Jesus); the Christians believed in Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus), but then stubbornly rejected belief in Prophet Muhammad.

Disbelief in Prophet Muhammad takes them out of the community of believers since they deny the Message Allah has sent His final Messenger to deliver in its most perfect form.

Allah informs us of their destiny: '… Allah will not forgive them, nor will He guide them on any path' (*an-Nisa':* 137). They deliberately intended to make the believers doubt their religion by rejecting faith after having embraced it. Some of the believers might think: 'They have embraced faith before, so what can make them reject it now? They must have detected some defects in the new religion which made them shun it!' Allah Almighty depicts this attitude in the Quran by saying: 'Some of the People of the Book say, 'At the beginning of the day, believe in what has been revealed to these believers [the Muslims], then at the end of the day reject it so that they too may turn back' (*Al-'Imran:* 72).

They wanted to incite doubt in the believers regarding faith by ostensibly embracing it and then declaring disbelief afterwards; they did so in the hope that Muslims would turn sceptical and forsake their faith. Allah reveals their intention in the Quran and also informs us and them of the punishment that awaits them: '… Allah will not forgive them, nor will He guide them on any path' (*an-Nisa':* 137). What they did was an act of great treachery against Allah and His Messenger, so they deserved the recompense Allah has prepared for them: ' Allah does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that He forgives to whomever He wills…' (*an-Nisa':* 48).

So Allah concludes the verse, saying: '… Allah will not forgive them, nor will He guide them on any path' (*an-Nisa':* 137). Guidance carries two meanings: the first is leading someone to the Straight Path by only showing them the way so they have the freedom to go along it or not; the second meaning is guidance through providing support and assistance. The first meaning applies to all humankind; that is, Allah guides them all by showing them His Way. The second is confined to those who accept faith, so Allah guides them to what pleases Him by offering assistance, so they would remain steadfast in the faith they have willingly chosen to embrace. See how Allah addresses this issue in the Quran: 'As for Thamud, We gave them guidance but they preferred blindness, so they were struck by a blast of humiliating punishment for their misdeeds' (*Fussilat:* 17).

Allah has showed them the path of guidance, but since they rejected it altogether and never moved a step in its direction, Allah deprived them of assistance and left them immersed in blindness. Through His Books and Messengers, Allah has made clear to all humankind the path that leads to goodness and righteousness. Only those who choose to follow this path receive help and support from Allah Who says in the Quran: '… They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more and more guidance' (*al-Kahf:* 13). Suppose you see someone who is lost, so you offer to guide him to the way that would lead to his destination. If he accepts your help with gratitude and shows willingness to listen to you, you would offer further assistance to help him reach his destination successfully. If he rejects your help upfront and refuses to listen, would you offer him more guidance or help? This is how Allah leads His servants to the Straight Path. Allah helps whoever accepts His ordinance and provides him with further assistance and guidance to facilitate the obedience to him. In this respect, Allah says about observing *salat* (the prayer): 'Seek help with steadfastness and prayer—though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble' (*al-Baqara:* 45). Compliance with the ordinance of Allah is hard except for those who are humbly submissive to Him and willing to receive His guidance.Guidance thus takes place in two phases: the first phase is that of leading to the Right Way, and the second is that of offering further assistance to those who accept faith.

Faith should not be subject to doubt or questioning. The essence of faith has been the same ever since Prophet Adam until Prophet Muhammad was sent with the final Message. They all called for the same creed, but were sent to different people at different times and places and with different circumstances. Islam came as the final, timeless Message that completes and perfects all the previous messages and is fit for all people at all times and places until the end of time. True faith means accepting and believing in all that Allah sends—without exceptions. To believe in some of the Messengers and books and shun others is disbelief in the One Who has sent them all. Those who believe in all the Messengers yet do not believe in Prophet Muhammad, or those who ascribe a son or spouse to Allah—*the Exalted* above this—have thus disbelieved in Allah. Islam is the final Message; so whoever denies the Truth it has brought will have no other chance to return to faith, for no other

Messengers will be sent to people. This is why Allah says at the beginning of the verse: ‘As for those who believe, then reject the faith, then believe again, then reject the faith again…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 137) and says at the end: ‘…and become increasingly defiant…’ Their defiance is manifested in their denial of the final Message sent down to Prophet Muhammad, so they will have no chance to attain faith anymore.

They will have their just recompense: ‘… Allah will not forgive them…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 137). Allah will not guide them to the Straight Path since they have deliberately turned away from Him. On the other hand, Allah will not reject those who accept faith and submit to Him; to them, He offers further guidance through assistance to remain steadfast in following the Straight Path. Allah is in no need of us; He does not benefit from our devoutness, but we are in need of Him to guide us, provide for us, dispose our affairs and reward us for our obedience. Whoever Allah rejects will find guidance nowhere else. He is the Lord and Creator and our hearts are in His Hand. Those He does not guide have actually deprived themselves from guidance since they do not pursue the way that can lead them there.

Allah says in other verses: ‘Allah will not forgive those who have disbelieved and do evil, nor will He guide them to any path except that of Hell, where they will remain for ever– this is easy for Allah’ (*an-Nisa’:* 168-169). The only way paved for them is that leading to eternal torment in Hell fire. Allah says in the following verse:

بَشِّرِ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ بِأَنَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٣٨﴾

[Prophet], tell such hypocrites that an agonizing torment awaits them[138] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 138)

Those whose faith is deeply rooted in their hearts will not show signs of doubt or hesitance between faith and disbelief. Such signs are always manifested by those who have twisted faith, so they always sway between faith and disbelief, and their hesitation is most conspicuous whenever they are tested. Allah has commanded Prophet Muhammad to give them this admonition: ‘[Prophet], tell such hypocrites that an agonizing torment awaits them’ (*an-Nisa’:* 138).

We know that the hypocrite is the one who overtly declares faith and conceals his infidelity. The word *ni* which refers to the holes a jerboa creates as a *faq* (the Arabic for 'hypocrisy') is originally derived from the expression *nafiqa'* camouflage. In order to deceive whoever wants to harm or catch it; a jerboa digs two openings, enters its hole through one of them and gets out through the other one which is concealed, so a hunter would lie in wait for it at the visible opening, unaware that it has actually sneaked out from another invisible one.

'Give glad tidings to the hypocrites.' promising tidings are meant to inform someone about a pleasant or good thing that will happen to him in the future. But are the hypocrites informed of something good that will happen to them? No, promising tidings is always about something good. For this reason, we expect that the hypocrites would be warned against what awaits them rather than being informed of the good that expects them. But Allah *Glorified is He* uses rhetorical styles to magnify the scale of torment. If He were to say: warn them against the grievous suffering that awaits them, the discourse would be probable. As hypocrites, they were prepared to hear evil. But the True Lord said: 'Give promising tidings to the hypocrites that there is for them a painful punishment.' This style is thus intended for the purpose of irony and humiliation; it serves as a tool to help the rhetorician perform his rhetorical task. Sometimes contradictions give us a truer picture than reality. For instance, if you approached a miser and told him: 'Welcome, Hatim,' what would be the stance of anyone attending this incident? You would have transformed him from the reality of the miser to an image of Hatim At-Ta'i, a well-known Arab figure of generosity. In doing so, you would have transformed the miser twice: you changed his status as a miser and then you ridiculed him. The reason is that inasmuch as you call a miser 'Hatim', you castigate, ridicule and humiliate him; for you have changed his mean and contemptible character into the opposite—an elevated, distinct and great character— in order to humiliate and loathe him.

The contrast is meant to reflect the radical difference. For instance, you may come across a tall man whom you call: 'Welcome, dwarf,' this is the contrast. Similarly, you may say to a short man: 'Welcome, giant'; this is also a contrast. If you meet a short man and then sit down to shake his hands, this is a form of ridiculing and sarcasm. The contrasts are used for rhetorical purposes to convey the meaning intended by the speaker. The saying of the True Lord: ‘Give glad tidings to the hypocrites,’ means that you hypocrites have accomplished what you desire through hypocrisy; it is as if you have been hypocritical because you like suffering. Since you have been hypocrites because you like suffering, I announce to you that you will suffer. Does the hypocrite not intend to achieve a purpose with his hypocrisy? He does. For this reason, the True Lord depicts his purpose for him as suffering.

When you want to escalate an issue, you shift your audience’s attention from something to its opposite. For instance, someone may be thirsty because he is either confined or imprisoned; when he wants to have a sip of water, his guard may deny him. This man may despair about the possibility that the guard brings him a cup of water. But if the guard wants to exacerbate the torture, he may fetch a glass of water and put it near the man. If the prisoner reaches out with his hands to grab the glass, the guard pours the water on the floor to increase the torture. When Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘glad tidings’, the one to whom it is addressed understands that the subject of the discourse is supposed to be a pleasant matter. If the True Lord then says: ‘that there is for them a painful punishment.’ this means that the anguish they feel is double. Allah *Glorified is He* has initiated it with an announcement of good news, but then He sealed it with a warning.

For instance—and to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the supreme and most exalted parables—a father may say to his son: ‘Study, my son, so that you do not fail.’ If the son continues to play, the father may then say: ‘Son, the exam is approaching and you have to study.’ The boy may not pay attention until the exam day comes. The father then finds out that his son has failed when the exam results are announced. The father may then say to his son: ‘I congratulate you on your failure in the exam.’ Inasmuch as he says ‘I congratulate you’ he pleases his son because he is expecting to hear good news. However, when the son later hears about his failure, he gets depressed.

The phrase ‘glad tidings’ gives an impression which shows on the face; were the impression sad, one’s face would appear sad and he would look depressed. By contrast, if the impression were happy, his face would look delighted and pleased. Thus, the face reflects the impressions of the human psyche, including happiness, delightfulness, illumination, frowning and grief. Therefore, the phrasemay introduce either a pleasant or a sad piece of news. However, it is mostly used with happy news, whereas a warning is used to convey sad news that causes depression.

In another verse, the True Lord depicts the suffering of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment and how He aggravates their torment: 'And if they call for relief, they will be relieved.' (*al-Kahf:* 29)

When we hear the word 'relief', we may infer that the disbelievers will be given something good and that mercy will be bestowed upon them, but the water given to them comes as 'water like murky oil.' The listener or reader of this verse may wonder: 'Is it a form of rescuing or torment?' This image is thereby intended to magnify the suffering. The water given to them is like murky oil; therefore, it foments their pain.

The severity of suffering—as we know—is proportional to the power of the one inflicting it. If the one inflicting suffering is a finite being, then suffering will be finite. If the one inflicting suffering is infinite, then suffering will also be infinite. How severe would the suffering be if it were proportional to the strength of the Powerful? Suffering is described as grievous in one instance, as humiliating in another and as enormous in a third. All those descriptions complement each other, and each one of them describes a specific aspect of suffering; grief is a feeling that the self- experiences due to what it suffers. Great suffering is the suffering that reached its apex; nevertheless, one may endure the suffering even though it has reached its apex. But if the suffering is inflicted by the True Lord, it will be too severe for anyone to conceal it. The endurance of any person, no matter how tolerant he may be, cannot handle such pain. This is an enormous and also grievous suffering in regard to the body, and although one may be patient and enduring at the beginning, he will ultimately collapse; at that point, the suffering becomes humiliation.

Because the hypocrites and the disbelievers are completely enmeshed in materialism, Allah *Glorified is He* describes their suffering as grievous because grievous suffering is only felt by the physical senses. Afterwards, the True Lord mentions some of the characteristics of the hypocrites:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ أَوۡلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۚ
أَيَبۡتَغُونَ عِندَهُمُ ٱلۡعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ ٱلۡعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعٗا ١٣٩

Do those who ally themselves with the disbelievers rather than the believers seek power through them? In reality all power is God's to give [139] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 139)

The first sign of hypocrisy is when the hypocrite takes a disbeliever as an ally, gets closer to him, treats him affectionately, elicits his advocacy and support, keeps his company and sits with him rather than with the believers. We know that all human actions must have a purpose; no action could be severed from the purpose for which it is intended. Only the insane do actions purposelessly. By contrast, the actions of any rational person are intended for a purpose and an end he wishes to accomplish. The hypocrites take the disbelievers as allies in preference to the believers; but what is their purpose in doing so? The True Lord exposes this matter and explains that, by doing so, the hypocrites seek to be honoured by the disbelievers. For this reason, they take them as allies in preference to the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* calls their attention to their ignorance because they pursued a path that leads to the exact opposite of the purpose they intended.

Since they seek honour, they ought to have inquired about the true meaning and significance of honour. Honour is robustness and strength. In the context of the verse, the meaning intended is advocacy and prevalence. When it is said that Allah *Glorified is He* is *'Aziz— the Almighty* —it means that Allah *Glorified is He* dominates everything and is too powerful for anyone to overcome His strength or resist His punishment. If it is said that someone is *'aziz,* it means that he is invincible. If it is said that something is *'aziz,* it means that it is rare, and since it is rare, it is precious. Precious metals are indeed rare and scarcely found.

Since the hypocrites seek honour, they ought to seek it from the one who has it. Is it possible that they may seek it from their likes? If you seek honour, it means that you do not have it in yourselves; if you were honourable, you would not have sought to be honoured by the disbelievers. That is evidence that they were devoid of any honour, since they sought to have it from those who are equally subject to vicissitudes and life changes like themselves. Both the hypocrites and the disbelievers are humans; and since all humans are subject to vicissitudes, they may be honourable today and abject tomorrow. The means to achieve honour are self-sufficiency, power and esteem, and all these factors are subject to vicissitudes.

Hypocrites have sought honour from those who are equal and subject to vicissitudes as much as you are. They did not seek it from the eternal Possessor of all honour, the True Lord. If you really desire honour, you should seek it from the One Who is not subject to vicissitudes—the True Lord. For this reason, the True Lord explained to them that if you want to learn how to pursue honour, you have to change the way you seek it. You take the disbelievers as allies in preference to the believers, and you seek honour from them as well as from others who are equally susceptible to vicissitudes. Those who are susceptible to vicissitudes are in a constant flux of change every day. If the disbelievers are rich one day, they may be poor the next. In human life, you have seen rich people becoming poor, and strong people becoming weak; therefore, seeking honour from those who are susceptible to vicissitudes means that you are not honourable; that is, you seek honour from the wrong source. If you want true honour, you will have to seek it from the One Whose Might does not change—The True Lord, Who says: 'All honour belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* [alone].' (*an-Nisa':* 139) This statement involves a correction of the way in which honour ought to be sought. Everyone must seek honour inasmuch as he believes in Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who confers honour and His Honour and Might never change. 'All' here indicates that there are different types of honour: the honour of being rich, the honour of being powerful and the honour of being esteemed. If one wants to know all these types and learn about them, he must know that all of them belong to the True Lord.

In order to properly fulfil their servitude to Allah *Glorified is He;* believers must be conscious that they are the servants of only One God. Since we are servants of Allah *Glorified is He*, He has obviated our need to be abjectly subservient to anyone else. Allah *Glorified is He* salvaged the believer by virtue of his faith and saved him the humiliation of being subservient to any other source of power. Allah *Glorified is He* saved the weak from being abjectly subservient to the strong, and likewise the poor from the rich, and saved the sick from the healthy.

Therefore, when the True Lord says: ‘All honour belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* [alone],’ this means that if you, human being, seeks a permanent honour that surpasses all other forms of honour, then you will have recourse to Allah *Glorified is He;* He has honoured us inasmuch as we are His creatures. For instance, the True Lorddid not let the poor borrow from the rich; rather, He has said: ‘Who is it that would loan Allah *Glorified is He* a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah *Glorified is He* who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned.’ (*al-Baqara:* 245)

Allah *Glorified is He* raises His poor servant to the highest level of honour. The poor servant of Allah *Glorified is He* does not borrow; rather, the loan is required by Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, someone said to a weak person: ‘You are asking people for help; are not you bashful enough not to ask?’ The poor man then answered: ‘I have asked people by the power of Allah’s command.’ Thus, the needy ask in the Name of Allah *Glorified is He;* this means that the poor take Allah *Glorified is He* as an advocate and ask for help in His name. When man seeks honour from his counterpart, he takes refuge in the power of this being though that power was bestowed upon him by Allah *Glorified is He* and Allah *Glorified is He* might as well take it away.

We should thereby consider the Infinite Power of Allah *Glorified is He* —every power in the world is given by Allah *Glorified is He;* He bestows wealth, esteem and honour. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا
وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَقْعُدُوا۟ مَعَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَخُوضُوا۟ فِى حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّكُمْ إِذًا
مِّثْلُهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ جَامِعُ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ وَٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ فِى جَهَنَّمَ جَمِيعًا ﴿١٤٠﴾

As He has already revealed to you [believers] in the Scripture, if you hear people denying and ridiculing God’s revelation, do not sit with them unless they start to talk of other things, or else you yourselves will become like them: God will gather all the hypocrites and disbelievers together into Hell [140]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 140)

The True Lord orders the believers to avoid the company of any of the disbelievers whenever they start mocking or denying the truth of Allah

Glorified is He 's Message until they start talking about a different subject. Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded the believers to do so in order that they may not be like the disbelievers, because Allah *Glorified is He* will gather the hypocrites and the disbelievers in the fire. In this manner, only Allah *Glorified is He* protects those who have faith, and He safeguards it against any attack. Those who are jealous about their faith are the true believers. As long as you have believed and accepted Islam as your religion, then do not ever indulge anyone who attacks the religion. If you do so, this implies that he is dearer to you than your faith. Since you have pursued faith as your path and creed, then you must protect your faith against anybody's attacks. If someone dares to censure, ridicule or make false claims about your faith, then your jealousy about it makes it incumbent upon you to give up this person's company.

At the beginning, the believers were a helpless few who were incapable of confronting the disbelievers and the hypocrites. But when the believers abandoned their company, when they badmouthed Allah's Messages, both the disbelievers and the hypocrites realized that honour of faith is dearer to Muslims than their company. By contrast, if a Muslim keeps the company of the disbelievers and the hypocrites while they are disparaging Islam, this would imply that the latter's company is dearer to him than his faith. The disbelievers may then turn that discourse into a continuous discussion to expose the status of faith in the Muslims' hearts. But when a disbeliever sees a believer getting repelled and turned off by any action entailing any ridiculing of Islam, he realizes that a believer's faith is dear to him.

This verse is not the first about this subject matter; it is a reference to a previous ruling. We know that this verse was revealed in Medina which means that there is a verse that was revealed before, while the Prophet was still in Mecca. The True Lord says: 'And when you see those who engage in [offensive] discourse concerning Our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversion. And if Satan should cause you to forget, then do not remain after the reminder with the wrongdoing people.' (*al-An'am:* 68)

Here the True Lord indicates that He has revealed a ruling related to this matter at the beginning; this was the ruling revealed about the disbelievers in Mecca where the disbelievers took advantage of the weakness of the believers.

Further, at that point, there was no ruling prohibiting the believers from keeping company of the disbelievers. Some of the believers were slaves of the disbelievers. In addition, some of the early Muslims had common interests with the disbelievers. The ruling then came along: if those disbelievers start imputing falsities to the religion, then abandon their company. Here in the chapter of *an-Nisa'*, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds the believers that the ruling commanding them to abandon the company of the disbelievers once they start disparaging faith, is a continuous one. It applies to the believers from the time when they were still living among the polytheists who worshipped idols in Mecca to the time when they live in Medina alongside some of the people of the Book. When Allah *Glorified is He* assigns something, it is always within the capacity of man. Therefore, if one forgets Allah's Command, he must immediately hasten to abandon the company of those who speak ill of Allah's Messages once he remembers it. It has been stated in the Quran that if the believers hear people denying or ridiculing Allah's Messages, they should leave that place. We notice that the condition in the earlier verse was not hearing people denying or ridiculing Allah's Messages but rather seeing them: By contrast, hearing is mentioned in the verse under consideration: 'And it has already come down to you in the Book that when you hear the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* [recited], they are denied [by them].' What matters here is the awareness of the fact that the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* is being offended, regardless of whether one learns about it through hearing or seeing.

Those who ascribe divinity to others beside Allah *Glorified is He* or others from amongst the enemies of Islam may offend the religion in a visible or audible way. Others may do so through winking or insinuating once they see a Muslim. The saying of the True Lord: 'so do not sit with them until they enter into another conversation,' indicates that if they embark on an action other than that of offending Allah's Messages, then the believers may keep their company. This was at the outset of Islam. At that time, the believers had common interests with those who ascribed divinity to others beside Allah *Glorified is He* and the people of the Book; the Muslim community could not stand on its own. If the True Lord had immediately told them through His Prophet Muhammad: 'you must not company either the disbelievers or those who ascribe divinity to others beside Me,' this would have impinged on the interests of the believers.

The word 'engage in [offensive] discourse' has a clear concrete implication. It is to engage in discussing something false or, in general, to engage in the discussion of subject about which no conclusion could be reached. The scholars assert that we should not engage in discussing the higher attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* and that it is improper to do so since discussions about these matters tend to be endless.

For this reason, the True Lord says in a different part of the Quran: 'and they did not appraise Allah *Glorified is He* with true appraisal when they said, "Allah *Glorified is He* did not reveal to a human being anything." Say, "Who revealed the Scripture that Moses brought as light and guidance to the people? You [Jews] make it into pages, disclosing [some of] it and concealing much. And you were taught that which you knew not—neither you, nor your fathers." Say, "Allah *Glorified is He* [revealed it]." Then, leave them in their [empty] discourse, amusing themselves.' (*al-An'am:* 91)

You, Muhammad, have informed them that the One Who revealed the Book to you is the True Lord; the same One Who revealed the Gospel of which they have hid some parts and shown some. Having informed them of these facts, you may then leave them to enjoy their vain talk.

In another place, the True Lord talks about vain talk: 'They, the hypocrites, are apprehensive lest a chapter be revealed about them, informing them of what is in their hearts. Say, "Mock [as you wish]; indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* will expose that which you fear." And if you ask them, they will surely say, "We were only conversing and playing." Say, "Is it Allah *Glorified is He* and His verses and His Messenger that you were mocking? "' (*at-Tawba:* 64-65)

'And it has already come down to you in the Book that when you hear the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* [recited], they are denied [by them] and ridiculed; so do not sit with them until they enter into another conversation.'

Afterwards, the words that terrify the believer and frighten him follow: 'Indeed, you would then be like them.' This means that if you stay in the company of those who mock or deny the truth of the Messages of Allah

Glorified is He you will be a disbeliever like them because you are willing to listen to them, while they attribute falsities to the religion. Whoever is content with a disbeliever is a disbeliever.

The verse thus refers to a preliminary phase in the history of Islam. If the believers constitute a self-sufficient society based on solidarity, not one of them is to keep the company of the disbelievers. Further, no one ought to befriend them unless they initiate it because keeping company with them while speaking ill of the religion is all the more reason for them to continue disrespecting it. Rather, a believer ought to castigate anyone who dares to mock the religion. Believers should also avoid those who deviate from the path of Allah *Glorified is He* or attack it. Unfortunately, though, contemporary societies tend to honour those who attribute falsities to religion. This practice entices people to disparage religion.

By contrast, if we turn our backs upon those who deviate from the path of Allah *Glorified is He*, they will seek another means of attacking the religions and attributing falsities to it and the course it sets. The corruption of the society emanates from the fact that a lot of those who attribute falsities to the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* are honoured and assigned a high status and distinction.

We learn from the saying of the True Lord: ‘And it has already come down to you in the Book that when you hear,’ the way in which man becomes aware of things; it is either through hearing or seeing. Therefore, if you, as a Muslim, sense an action that incites corruption, then you must realize that this is a kind of attributing falsities to the religion of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The saying of the True Lord: ‘avoid their company’ is a license to boycott those who do these things. If someone who mocks and denies the truth of Allah’s Messages, goes to a grocery store in the neighbourhood of his house, the shopkeeper in the grocery store ought to refuse to sell to him anything. Similarly, if this person goes to buy something to eat from the butcher, the latter ought to refuse to sell him anything; the same holds true for anyone whom this person may seek to fulfil an interest of his.

If this boycott takes place, this person will be disciplined. Further, everyone will know that the society is jealous about its religion, and that Allah *Glorified is He* is dearer to them than any form of reward they see in society. If each of those deviants and offenders see that society has boycotted and confined them within certain limits, he would re-embrace the correct path. They would also seek different means of earning their livelihood and feeding their children; that is admissible and deemed legitimate by Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord says: 'Indeed, you would then be like them. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* will gather the hypocrites and disbelievers in Hell all together.' Do not think that this life is too long and that the time when this happens is too far ahead. A Muslim must not measure things in terms of the criteria he uses to measure the history of the world, like a century, two centuries or even ten centuries. Rather, a Muslim should know that the world is measured in terms of his own life, and that his life can end at any time. Every Muslim must work not only for the good of his worldly life but in order to go back to Allah *Glorified is He* as a true Muslim in the Hereafter. A believer must also fear being resurrected on the Day of Judgment among the hypocrites and the disbelievers in the fire. This is the fate to which anyone who accepts the mockery or the humiliation of his religion is doomed. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَرَبَّصُونَ بِكُمۡ فَإِن كَانَ لَكُمۡ فَتۡحٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ قَالُوٓاْ أَلَمۡ نَكُن مَّعَكُمۡ وَإِن كَانَ
لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ نَصِيبٞ قَالُوٓاْ أَلَمۡ نَسۡتَحۡوِذۡ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَنَمۡنَعۡكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۚ فَٱللَّهُ يَحۡكُمُ
بَيۡنَكُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۗ وَلَن يَجۡعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَلَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٤١﴾

The [hypocrites] wait to see what happens to you and, if God brings you success, they say, 'Were we not on your side?' but if the disbelievers have some success, they say to them, 'Did we not have the upper hand over you, and [yet] protect you from the believers?' God will judge between you all on the Day of Resurrection, and He will give the disbelievers no means of overcoming the believers [141] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 141)

The saying of the True Lord: 'Those who wait [and watch] you' is a description of the hypocrites. When someone waits to see what happens with another person, this means that the former waits for the chance to find out about the latter's news in order to contrive his attitude and his demands of him in the light of such news. We learnt this meaning from the saying of the True Lord: ‘Say, "Do you wait for us except one of the two best things”’ (*at-Tawba:* 52).

The hypocrites lie in wait of the believers because, if they encounter something good, they want to avail themselves of it, but if something bad comes along, the hypocrites try to take advantage of it—if they apparently purport to be Muslims in order to conceal their disbelief. ‘But if the disbelievers have a success, they say [to them], "Did we not gain the advantage over you, but we protected you from the believers? ”’ If Allah *Glorified is He* bestows His victory upon the believers, and they succeed in collecting spoils of war, the hypocrites would say: ‘Did we not gain the advantage over you, but we protected you from the believers?’ They would thus argue that they are entitled to a share of the spoils of war. Conversely, if the disbelievers triumph, they hasten to them in accordance with the saying of the True Lord: ‘whereas, did we not gain the advantage over you, but we protected you from the believers?’

They try to take advantage of the disbelievers inasmuch as they claim that they have waited to see what would happen to the believers; upon this pretext, they assert that they are entitled to a share of their victory. The saying of the disbelievers: ‘whereas did we not gain the advantage over you,’ exposes their stance. When a battle breaks out between the camp of disbelief and that of faith, the hypocrites try to know all the details about the believers’ intentions. Once the hypocrites walk onto the battlefield, they pretend that they are capturing the disbelievers, but, in fact, they are protecting the disbelievers from the swords of the believers. Then, they tell the disbelievers: ‘we have taken possession of you;’ this means, ‘we have kept the believers from killing you.’ Later, they ask them for the price of what they have done.

Let us consider the eloquence of the Quran when it talks about the triumph of the believers: ‘victory.’ By contrast, when the Quran talks about the triumph of the disbelievers, it uses the word ‘success’ to indicate that their victory is only a transient kind of prevalence. Subsequently, the True Lord puts forwards a decisive statement about this matter: ‘Allah *Glorified is He* will judge between [all of] you on the Day of Resurrection, and never will Allah *Glorified is He* give the disbelievers over the believers a way [to overcome them].’

When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about the fate of the disbelievers and the believers, He does not refer to something too far ahead in the future for the listener to witness. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* refers to what is certain; He does not tell the believer that he will triumph, since the believer may die before he witnesses any triumph. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* refers to what is certain, namely, the fate and reward on the Day of Judgment, when the heaven becomes the actual abode of every believer. In addition, this life is too trivial to be the place of the reward for faith.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us not to seek the reward for faith in this life because all ends sought in this world are subject to change. Pleasure in life is transient; it will either abandon man or man will ultimately abandon it. By contrast, the reward for faith persists since the One in Whom you have faith persists. Therefore, the rule of faith states that whoever does good deeds is admitted into paradise. The True Lord says about the good: '[they will be] within the mercy of Allah *Glorified is He*. They will abide therein eternally.' (*Al-'Imran:* 107)

This means that paradise will continue to be as long as Allah *Glorified is He* sustains it, though He is capable of ceasing its existence. However, Allah's mercy never perishes because it is one of His attributes, and He is eternal. When the True Lord says: ' Allah *Glorified is He* will judge between [all of] you on the Day of Resurrection.' This means that this judgment is irrevocable because there is no god worthy of worship but Him; therefore, the judgment is final. The True Lord decreed some rulings on some of Muhammad's relatives. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* passed a verdict on Prophet Muhammad's uncle; He has said: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined and ruined is he. His wealth will not avail him or that which he gained. He will [enter to] burn in a Fire of [blazing] flame. And his wife [as well] - the carrier of firewood. Around her neck is a rope of [twisted] fibre.' (*al-Masad:* 1-5) The third verse indicates that Abu Lahab will die as a disbeliever, and that Allah *Glorified is He* would not guide him to faith, although a lot of those who had taken an antagonistic stance towards to Prophet Muhammad eventually attained faith in him *peace and blessings be upon him*. The camp of disbelievers has indeed lost a lot of its leaders to the camp of faith. For instance, ''Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Khalid ibn Al-Walid and ‘Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl among others embraced Islam. So what made Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* know that Abu Lahab would not be among those who convert to Islam? Further, why did Abu Lahab not say: ‘My nephew said that I shall endure a fire fiercely glowing; I thereby profess that there is no God worthy of worship but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad is His Messenger.’ But Abu Lahab did not say so; Allah *Glorified is He* Who doomed him to this bleak destiny, knew that he would not ever utter the words of faith. Were Abu Lahab and his wife not capable of saying together: ‘We testify that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad is His Messenger,’ and thus conclude the matter? But Allah *Glorified is He* Whose rulings are irrevocable, has ruled that they were disbelievers. After the True Lord reveals this decisive statement about Abu Lahab and his wife, He puts forward, in the sequential order of the Quran, what clarifies His statement: ‘Do not ever think that ruling could be revoked; Abu Lahab will endure a fire fiercely growing together with his wife, the carrier of evil tales. Thus, the True Lord says immediately after the previous verses: ‘Say, "He is Allah *Glorified is He* [who is] One," Allah *Glorified is He* the Eternal Refuge.’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-2)

No one will change Allah’s ruling. Therefore, the saying of the True Lord: ‘Allah *Glorified is He* will judge between [all of] you on the Day of Resurrection,’ means that Allah’s rulings are irrevocable since there is no other God but Him to revoke His decisions. ‘And never will Allah *Glorified is He* give the disbelievers over the believers a way [to overcome them].’ This is a result of Allah’s ruling; Allah *Glorified is He* will not favour the disbelievers over the believers. Further, the disbelievers will not have power to harm the believers. But is this rule valid for this life or the one to come? We know that in the Hereafter the True Lord will ultimately judge everyone according to his deeds after all worldly causes have been suspended. Laws of causality apply only to the worldly life; thus, whoever pursues the proper causes in this life will reach their corresponding effects. The reason is that the Lordship of Allah *Glorified is He* in this world rules that He compensates and rewards both the believers and the disbelievers in proportion to the effort they exert. Hence, if the disbelievers pursued the proper causes and means of achieving success and the believers did not, Allah *Glorified is He* will give the disbelievers power over the believers. The disbelievers may, in this case, defeat the believers.

An Arab adage teaches us 'not to think that erring is not a means of reaching what is right.' The underlying rationale of this statement is that when one errs, someone may correct his error. For instance, a teacher teaches his students that the last syllable of the word serving as a subject of a sentence should have a 'u' sound. A student may make a mistake and confuse the subject with the object which indicates that, though he learnt the rule, he was oblivious to it. His teacher may then correct his mistake. This correction helps engrave the rule in the student's mind. In this manner, erring may serve as a means of reaching what is right. Similarly, falsehood may be a path to attain the truth.

When falsities spread among people, a preacher of truth may emerge among them. Therefore, falsehood may serve as a cause for truth to emerge. The propagation of falsehood excites people's aversion towards the spread of corruption and causes them to cry out for help. Similarly, when pain befalls man, it drives him to seek a cure inasmuch as pain says to man: something not normal exists in this place, and without it, a man would not have realized he had to consult a physician.

Hence, we must know this rule: erring is a means of attaining what is right. Similarly, falsehood may be a means of attaining the truth, and pain may be a means of seeking cure. Every mistake spurs the one who made it to correct it; however, it does so with some provocation. The history of the Arabic language tells us an interesting story about the great master Sibawih, whom we remember whenever anyone makes a linguistic mistake by saying: 'The one who made mistake must have angered Sibawih.' The reason is that Sibawih is the one who laid down the foundations of Arabic grammar and its rules. Thus, whenever we say *Al-Kitab,* the Book, in reference to Arabic grammar, we often have in mind *Al-Kitab* of Sibawih.

But Sibawih was not originally a grammarian; he was a scholar of the Quran and its readings. One day, he was sitting in a symposium and people criticized him for a grammatical mistake that he made. He was infuriated and felt disappointed with himself. He then said: By Allah *Glorified is He* I will perfect my command of Arabic until I no longer make any grammatical mistakes. This is how he turned into a leading grammarian.

Another good example is Imam Ash-Shatibi, who was not a scholar of the Quran and its readings; he was a grammarian. He later faced a problem in the science of the Quran readings that he could not solve. As a result, he took an oath to dwell over the study of the Quran and its readings. He then became a leading scholar of this branch of Islamic sciences. Therefore, erring was the main reason for Sibawih becoming a grammarian; and a problem that Ash-Shatibi faced in the Quran and its readings induced him to become a leading scholar of Quran and its readings—although, the former was a scholar of Quran and its readings and the latter was a grammarian.

For this reason, I repeat what I said above: erring is a means of reaching what is right as much as falsehood is a means of reaching the truth, and pain is a means of reaching a cure.

Disbelievers may have apparently triumphed over the believers in some battles like the battle of Uhud; however, this was intended for the cause of edifying the believers. In Uhud, some fighters from amongst the believers violated the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They were then defeated as a prelude for the edification to follow; and it came in the battle of Hunayn, when the believers were too conceited with their numbers: ‘on the day of Hunayn, when your great numbers pleased you, but it did not avail you at all, and the earth was confining for you with its vastness; then, you turned back, fleeing.’ (*at-Tawba:* 25) An Arab poet described this scene in the following lines:

A defeat is only considered truly a defeat

If one fails to uproot its causes

Thus if you put a lot of effort in getting rid of such causes

then it would be foolish on part of anyone to censure your endeavour

When one uproots the causes of defeat, he turns his defeat into a victory. This happened in the battle of Uhud. At the beginning, the believers violated the commands of Prophet Muhammad, so they were defeated by their enemies.

However, they learnt from their mistake, so their defeat paved the way to achieve victory.

Therefore, if you, Muslim, see the disbelievers harming the believers, then know that faith has been shaken in the hearts of the Muslims. There is no effect without a cause; if the believers pursue the proper causes, they will achieve the desired effects. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster.' (*al-Anfal:* 60)

If the believers failed to make ready against the disbelievers whatever they are able to muster or if they felt pride in their numbers, then the just result would be their defeat. Every believer has to have faith in the saying of His Lord: 'Then, do they wait except the way of the former peoples? But you will never find in the way of Allah *Glorified is He* any change, and you will never find in the way of Allah *Glorified is He* any alteration.' (*Fatir:* 43)

The profession of faith is not the end; rather, it is the beginning. Every believer will be commensurately rewarded for his deeds. Likewise, He is unhappy with His servant when he errs. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* disciplines and edifies His servants—and Allah *Glorified is He* has the most supreme example. For instance, some of us may not be patient enough to review all the material his children study at school. He thus hires a private tutor to undertake this task. The reason is that the love the father bears for his children may provoke him whenever his boy errs; he may thus beat his child. By contrast, a teacher would not be that provoked. Rather, he will take things lightly. Thus sometimes affection may drive a person to cruelly treat someone that he likes and would otherwise treat mercifully. An Arab poet says:

One may treat someone he loves cruelly to straighten him; and whoever wants to be strict must sometimes be tough with the one who he treats mercifully.

There is another example—and to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the supreme and most exalted parables. If someone walks into a place to find his son, his neighbour's son and another unknown child gambling, he will slap his son on the face and command him to return to the house immediately. As for the other children, the man may only castigate his neighbour's son and may not even talk with the child he does not know. That is, punishment must be proportionate to the level of love and affection. Similarly, our interest in disciplining someone is commensurate with his status in our hearts; if we do not care about someone, we will not bother about his misbehaviour. Accordingly, if the disbelievers ever harm the believers, we ought to know that something is amiss with the faith of the latter. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the believers to stay like this; rather, the True Lord purifies them of their errors inasmuch as he is put through difficult circumstances. Therefore, beware of failing to heed Allah's Causes. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ يُخَٰدِعُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَٰدِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ
قَامُوا۟ كُسَالَىٰ يُرَآءُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٤٢﴾

The hypocrites try to deceive God, but it is He who causes them to be deceived. When they stand up to pray, they do so sluggishly, showing offin front of people, and remember God only a little [142] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 142)

We know that the hypocrites by nature purport to have faith while concealing disbelief. The True Lord explains: do not think that any creature can do anything that Allah *Glorified is He* does not know. Someone may contrive a plan against you, while he knows that you are aware of his cunning; so, is this cunning? No, the reason is that cunning takes place in secret; you know nothing about it while it is being contrived. In essence, the one, against whom cunning is being contrived, is supposed to be unsuspecting. The hypocrites—since they purport to have faith while concealing disbelief—try to deceive the One Who knows all the secrets concealed in men's bosoms. They should have learnt a lesson from the way Allah *Glorified is He* treated them due to the intermediation of the believers; for the believers spared the blood and wealth of the hypocrites. Further, the Muslims treated the hypocrites according to the rulings of Islam. But what punishment has Allah *Glorified is He* cunningly prepared for those disbelievers? Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for them the bottom part of the Fire. Then, who is more capable of cunning? The truly intelligent person is the one who does not deceive someone whom he knows is capable of discovering his deception. It involves displaying love while secretly plotting to deceive. Who then eventually wins in cunning? The one who conceals a more severe deception—to counteract the deception of his rival—is the winner.

The person deceived always tries to contrive a bigger deception. This means that he has overcome the deception of the one who tried to deceive him. Allah *Glorified is He* has treated them in the same way in which they treated the believers. The hypocrites purported to have faith at the beginning in order to conceal disbelief. Allah *Glorified is He* then treated them on the apparent level; that is, as if they were Muslims. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has secretly decreed to inflict upon them the same or even a more severe torment than that which He inflicts upon the disbelievers; the hypocrites will be thrown at the bottom of the fire.

Every Muslim should be careful enough not to think or mistakenly conclude that deception is an attribute of Allah; thus, no one should call Allah *Glorified is He* as *al-mukhadi'* because Allah*'s* names and attributes are only those which He uses to call and describe Himself. Allah *Glorified is He* may undertake whatever act He wills, but no one is allowed to derive a new attribute for Allah *Glorified is He* from that act. Here, the True Lord presents us with a problem to show that the hypocrites are cunning and contrive evil against the believers. As a Muslim, you must know that a human is only capable of contriving evil in proportion to his capacity which is finite compared to the Infinite nature of Allah's capacity. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* exposes the evil those hypocrites conceal. When they cunningly contrive, Allah *Glorified is He* by His Infinite capability, cunningly contrives against them as well, sabotaging their cunning and punishing them for the evil they do. But do not say that Allah *Glorified is He* is cunning; Allah *Glorified is He* may describe or qualify any act or deed of His in whatever way He wills, but we must not do the same.

The goal of any activity is the key factor that motivates one's faculties to do it. If you love an activity, then you will approach it ardently and eagerly. The degree of eagerness with which one approaches anything is always taken as a measure of how much he loves it. An Arab poet describes the event of two lovers meeting as follows:

The key to judge the meeting of any couple is
the way they crave each other and the time they spend together

The moment at which any two lovers meet is an indication of the affection they share. For instance, if the distance separating them is ten steps, they may hasten and cover it in three steps; this is an attempt to shorten the time in which they are distant. Similarly, the way in which they greet each other reflects the level of affection they share. One of them may shake the hand of another half-heartedly or coldly. By contrast, he may do so very affectionately and eagerly. He may also embrace the other. Further, the time a couple spends hugging each other whether it is a minute, two minutes or three minutes is also a measure of the affection they share. Thus, the factors that show the degree of affection a couple shares are: the eagerness with which one wants to see the other, the way in which they meet each other and the time they spend together. These factors have been used by poets to express affection and love among people. In the past, lovers used to hide their affection behind greetings. In the western civilization, in which religious values have vanished, men greet women by kissing them. In some countries, a man may shake hands with a woman, but does he do so eagerly? And does she shake his hand with the same eagerness? If you notice that the palm of the hand is straight and flat, then this is an ordinary greeting. But if one of them bent his thumb on the other's palm then you should see which person bent his finger to hold the other's entire hand. The one who does it is more eager than the other. If both of them did it, then both of them share the same eagerness. In addition, one should consider how much time each spent holding the hand of the other. In certain instances, a man and a woman may enjoy talking to each other to the extent that they forget that they are holding each other's hands.

Man approaches different events in correspondingly different ways. If the event is a happy one, we approach it with eagerness; by contrast, if the event is not a happy one, we approach it reluctantly. The hypocrites used to rise for prayer reluctantly and lazily: 'when they stand for prayer, they stand lazily.' It is as if they were performing the prayers as a veil to conceal their hypocrisy and hide it away from the eyes of Muslims. They did not rise to prayers out of their longing to meet Allah *Glorified is He* as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* whenever he asked him to call for prayers: 'Comfort us with the prayers, Bilal.'(1) A believer should feel comfortable when he prays. By contrast, prayers constitute an onerous task for the hypocrite because he only does it to hide his hypocrisy away from the eyes of the Muslims. For this reason, hypocrites rise reluctantly to prayers: ‘When they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing [themselves to] the people and not remembering Allah *Glorified is He* except a little.’

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(1) *Related by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad*

They purport to be rising to prayers in front of other people to deceive Muslims and so that others would see them praying. Inasmuch as they perform the prayers for the purpose of being seen and praised by other men, they do not say what is required of them to complete these prayers. They only say what they have to say aloud in public. For instance, they would recite the chapter *al-Fatiha* and some of the Quran, but they would not say *subhan Rabi Al-’Azhim*—’praise be unto my Lord, the Great’—while kneeling during prayers, and *subhan Rabi Al-’A’la*—’praise be unto my Lord, the High’—while prostrating.

Every believer has two contending façades; a façade that he puts on in the company of the believers, and another that he puts on when he is in the company of the disbelievers. The façade a hypocrite uses when he is in the company of the believers makes him perform the prayers and remember Allah *Glorified is He*. The façade he puts on when he is among the disbelievers makes him reluctant about praying and he seldom remembers Allah *Glorified is He*.

If we count how many words of remembrance are said aloud in prayers versus how many things are said secretly, we will find that the latter outnumber the former. While kneeling one says: *subhan Rabi Al-’Azhim* three times and while prostrating one says: *subhan Rabi Al-’A’la* three times. By contrast, a hypocrite remembers Allah *Glorified is He* only when he has to do it aloud which is very little. A hypocrite will only do what is seen and heard by others; this is the meaning of showing off. A hypocrite would not say or do anything that is not perceived by other people.

Societies are shaken and ruined by showing off because the True Lord wants every Muslim to do every deed while keeping Allah *Glorified is He* Who knows every secret, in his mind. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called our attention to this matter when he described the meaning of *al-’ihsan*: ‘to worship Allah *Glorified is He* as if you see Him and to always be aware that, although you do not see Him, He sees you.'(1) If one feels ashamed of deceiving another human being in an overt manner, how could he have the audacity to deceive Allah *Glorified is He* knowing that Allah *Glorified is He* sees him? Why does this servant consider his Lord the least important of his beholders?

If someone discovers that another deceived him, he punishes him; so would Allah *Glorified is He* not do the same with the one who deceives him? For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* describes the state of the one who is only concerned about people's praise and adulation; he *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'What I fear most is that you may one day slip into the minor polytheism. The companions then said: 'What is the minor polytheism?' Prophet Muhammad said: 'Showing off— When Allah *Glorified is He* commensurately recompenses His servants for their deeds on the Day of Judgment, He will tell them to go seek those about whose praise they were only concerned in the worldly life and see if they could reward you.'(2) In addition, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The one showing off will be called on Judgment Day: "You, wrong-doer; you, traitor; you, deceiver, your deeds have been discounted, and you have been denied any reward. So seek your reward from the one for whom you worked."(3) Therefore, the hypocrite ultimately deceives himself. He purports to be praying so that people would see him, and purports to be giving alms to the poor so that people would see him; that is, he does what Allah *Glorified is He* has enacted upon him, but he does not do it for Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah *Glorified is He* before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah *Glorified is He* is swift in account.' (*an-Nur:* 39) Further, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran about another form of their hypocrisy: 'His example is like that of a [large] smooth stone upon which is dust and is hit by a downpour that leaves it bare. They are unable [to keep] anything of what they have earned. And Allah *Glorified is He* does not guide the disbelieving people.' (*al-Baqara:* 264) Whoever does what Allah *Glorified is He* enacts so that the believers see him, let him seek his reward from the one for whom he has worked.

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(1) *Related by Muslim from the Hadith wherein Gabriel came forth to teach the prophets the fundamentals of faith*

(2) *Related by Ahmad, Al-Bayhaqi in (As-Shu'ab) and At-Tabarani based on a narration by Mahmud Ibn Lubayd based on a narration by Rafi' ibn Khadij*

(3) *A weak Hadith related by Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya*

The True Lord resumes the description of the psychological state of the hypocrites and says:

مُّذَبْذَبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ لَآ إِلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ وَلَآ إِلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِۚ
وَمَن يُضْلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُۥ سَبِيلًا (١٤٣)

wavering all the time between this and that,
belonging neither to one side nor the other. If God
leaves someone to stray, you [Prophet] will never
find a way for him [143] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 143)

'Wavering' means that it is like an object suspended from the end of a thread; the wind can move such an object in any direction because it is not fixed. The Arabic word translated as 'waver' shares the root with the Arabic word for 'flies'—whose habit is to come back again whenever man repels them. Part of the behaviour of flies is that they go back to the same place whenever they are purged out of it.

'Wavering between this and that, [true] neither to these nor those;' but did the hypocrites cause themselves to be in state of wavering or is it their nature? Let us ponder over the Greatness of the True Lord Who fashioned the human soul. There is a commander and a subordinate within the same self. The True Lord says: 'O you, who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6)

Then, he wards off the fire inasmuch as he lets the rational, commanding power of his soul direct its commands to the subordinate part—and make the latter obey the former. The evidence is the saying of the True Lord about Cain: 'And his soul permitted to him the murder of his brother.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30)

This means that part of Cain's soul drove the rest of it to kill Abel. Allah *Glorified is He* has created the human soul as a set of powers; one of them seeks comfort and pleasure, whereas the other likes and seeks austerity. The former seeks the praise of people, while the latter does so only to ensure that one has obtained what one needs. Both powers contend within the same soul. For this reason, the True Lord says: ‘protect yourselves.’ One’s soul can safeguard him from slipping into wrongdoing since it has multiple powers. Some powers like to achieve gratification and wealth and merely seek to satiate their desires, but the believing power of the soul consistently tells every one of us: ‘remember that all these are transient desires and that their improper satiation may bring upon you deleterious repercussions in the future.’

Hence, there is a conflict between the human powers. The True Lord explains to us this conflict in His saying: ‘And his soul permitted to him the murder of his brother.’ The desire for ascendancy was abetting Cain to kill Abel; however, fear of sinning was a force contending with this drive. The conflict between these two forces inside Cain flared up until the desire for ascendancy ultimately prevailed and drove his soul to commit murder. This shows that the human soul encompasses multiple powers, each of which seeks a distinct goal, but religion harmonises the powers of the soul.

Another example: sexual desire may vigorously overwhelm the soul, but one’s belief may deter him by ordering him not to encroach upon other people’s honours so that others would not violate his honour. It may also urge him to get married according to Allah’s Legislation so as not to have illegal children who may be brought up by other people. Allah has created sexual desire in people, but it should not control the soul. Therefore, the soul encompasses all powers and desires, and man should not let his desires trespass the boundaries Allah has set for them because if desires transgress their boundaries, the world will be corrupted.

For instance, we use electricity to generate light based on criteria fixed by the electrical engineers. They have set the positive and negative poles in specific places so we can generate the light we need or produce the sparkle required for operating a machine. However, if the positive pole is connected to the negative pole in a way other than the one designed by the engineer, an electric failure may take place and cause a fire or any other damage. The same holds true for the human self; if the male has intercourse with the female according to the laws decreed by Allah, this will lead to happiness; otherwise, social and psychological problems will flare up in the society causing infinitely detrimental effects. Accordingly, the self has multiple drives, not only one.

The desire to eat urges a person to eat, and religion responds to this desire but advises that eating should not turn into gluttony, as mentioned in the Hadith, 'A few morsels that keep his back upright are sufficient for him.'(1) Food is there only for the preservation of life.

Man has a desire to gain knowledge, and Islam rules that man must investigate Allah's signs in the universe in order to make the universe more convenient to live in. However, Islam proscribes the use of such desire as a justification for spying on people. Accordingly, the different human faculties are balanced by means of the guidance of Islam. Therefore, every Muslim should harmonize his faculties in the light of the guidance of Islam so that the human faculties become supportive to each other and the human self rather than contending with them. Subsequently, the human faculties will be in harmony with each other, and each body system will perform the task in the manner Allah has intended.

By contrast, a hypocrite lives in an indecisive state of purposely wavering between extremes. He has succumbed to some of his faculties at the expense of others: 'Wavering between them, [belonging] neither to the believers nor to the disbelievers…' (*an-Nisa':* 143). The disbeliever has an apparent privilege over the hypocrite, as there is harmony within his soul; he does not believe in Islam and overtly admits this fact, though actually this conflicts with his natural disposition, which urges him to believe in Allah.

Someone may wonder: how could we equate the one who apparently declares faith and conceals disbelief with the one who declares his disbelief? The answer is that the disbeliever does not deceive the believers and does not pretend to belong to the believers in the manner the hypocrite does. Rather, he explicitly states that he is a disbeliever, taking the side of the disbelievers, but the hypocrite is wavering and dishonest.

'Wavering between them; [belonging] neither to the believers nor to the disbelievers. And whoever Allah leaves astray - never will you find for him a way.' (*an-Nisa':* 143) Allah does not directly let any of His Servants go astray without offering guidance to him, as Allah *Glorified is He* teaches His creatures through His Messengers, and the guidance He reveals to them. However, when a person insists on not believing in Allah, He lets him go astray. Although He is Able to force him to have faith, He gives the person the choice to have faith in Him willingly. Allah supports and leads to guidance the person who draws closer to Him, but if he draws away from Allah, He will lead him astray, beautifying the worldly pleasures for him and giving him from its bounties. However, he will not find any way to guidance other than the one set by Allah.

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(1) *Excerpt from a Hadith related by At-Tirmidhi, Al-Nasa'i and Ibn Majah*

The following story is worth mentioning because it reveals the value of the path of Allah. Al-Asma'i, a great and valuable Arab author, who had a literary sense inclined to beautiful literary styles in poetry or prose, once found a person standing in front of Al-Multazam (the area between the *Hajar Al-Aswad* (the Black Stone) and the Door of the *Ka'ba*). The person was avidly supplicating to Allah saying, 'O Lord! I have disobeyed you; had not I been disobedient, I would not have come here to ask for Your Forgiveness. There is no god but You; I should have felt ashamed of disobeying You, but what can I do now?' Then, Al-Asma'i said, 'O You! Allah will forgive you because you have supplicated to Him in such a good way.' Then, Allah says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُواْ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ أَوۡلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِ
ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۚ أَتُرِيدُونَ أَن تَجۡعَلُواْ لِلَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ سُلۡطَٰنٗا مُّبِينًا ١٤٤

You who believe, do not take the disbelievers as allies and protectors instead of the believers: do you want to offer God clear proof against you? [144] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 144)

Allah blames the hypocrites for taking the disbelievers as their allies instead of Allah. Similarly, the believers blamed the hypocrites for taking the disbelievers as their allies instead of Allah and the believers. Therefore, the believers must not do this, and Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He has blamed the hypocrites as they took the disbelievers as their allies instead of Allah, so He warns the believers against doing the same:'O you, who have believed, do not take the disbelievers as allies instead of the believers. Do you wish to give Allah against yourselves a clear case?' (*an-Nisa':* 144)

This command is logically in line with the path of faith because if the believers take the disbelievers as allies instead of the believers, this will give Allah a clear case against them, showing that they deserve His torment. It is well-known that the hypocrite apparently declares to have faith but conceals disbelief in his heart. Therefore, the believer should not allow himself to deal with the disbeliever in the same way a hypocrite does; whoever does so presents a clear case to Allah to inflict His torment upon him.

Allah *Glorified is He* sent messengers, supporting them with miracles, and revealed comprehensive guidance to regulate man's actions in life in order not to give the people any proof to support their disbelief, and not to give them the chance to claim that He did not reveal to them how to adhere to this guidance. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has not let man depend only on his reason to reach the idea of the existence of Allah, Who has created the universe. Allah has not left the people to these suspicions, but He sent us messengers with clear guidance so that people would not have any pretext against Allah after that. Therefore, no one may claim that Allah has not warned him and clarified matters for him. Ignorance of a law does not exempt one from punishment if he commits a crime, but Allah does not punish people without giving them guidance. He is more generous towards His servants than they are towards themselves. Therefore, Allah has sent messengers with the guidance that distinguishes between the permissible and the proscribed matters: '…that those who perished [through disbelief] would perish upon evidence, and those who lived [in faith] would live upon evidence…' (*al-Anfal:* 42).

Thus, no one may claim that Allah has taken him by surprise. If the believers take the disbelievers as their allies, draw closer to them and advocate them instead of the believers, they will be more evil than the hypocrites because a hypocrite is wavering between faith and disbelief. By contrast, the proof against the believers is lucid; Allah has revealed the righteous path to them, and they have declared to have faith. Therefore, if they do anything at odds with the faith they have declared, they will give Allah proof that they deserve His Punishment. '…Do you wish to give Allah against yourselves a clear case?'

(*an-Nisa':* 144) The clear case is the comprehensive and unquestionable proof. In the human realm, one may refute a proof in our day-to-day life in the manner a lawyer does—but Allah's proof is a clear and irrefutable case.

Subsequently, Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ فِى ٱلدَّرْكِ ٱلْأَسْفَلِ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِ وَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا ﴿١٤٥﴾

The hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell, and you will find no one to help them [145] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 145)

Let us consider the precision of the manner in which Allah instructs the people to have faith. Allah has not collected everything relevant to the hypocrites in only one part in His Book, but He provides a glimpse about the hypocrites followed by another about the believers so that the listener may have aversion to the status of the hypocrite and like the qualities of the believer. In this context, Allah says, 'Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire - and never will you find for them a helper.' (*an-Nisa':* 145)

The word *al-dark* which is mentioned in the Arabic original verse, can be pronounced in this way or as *darak* like the way the Arabic word *nahr* is pronounced. *Al-dark* is always used in reference to the downward direction; as the righteous predecessors said, 'Fire has *darakat* (levels directed downwards), and paradise has *darajat* (levels directed upwards).'[1] Therefore, *al-darak* refers to descending to lower positions, and *al-daraj* refers to ascending to higher positions. In our age, we use the sea level as a reference for measuring height because the earth's surface is not flat, while the sea surface is even.

Similarly, we use water balance to make accurate measurements. For instance, rainfall shows us the work quality of the contractor who paved the street. We may also pour a bucket of water on a bathroom's floor in order to gauge the work quality of the worker. These examples suggest that things may be done to expose the truth of some matters. There is a famous Egyptian saying: 'The one who cements the building is the one who exposes the work quality of the builder.' If someone erects an uneven wall, the one who cements it will be forced to fill the gaps in the uneven parts so that the surface of the wall becomes even. Similarly, the painter can expose the quality of the work of the one who cements the wall because he may either find it easy to paint the wall or use a large quantity of materials to fill in the gaps and uneven parts on the wall. Subsequently, the work quality of the painter is exposed by natural elements such as dust. If a worker wants to cheat, he may deliver his work quickly because dust flies in a straight direction if a wall has been painted with a low quality material, dust will stick to it. Therefore, Allah has intended to expose the one who does not do his work properly. Everything ultimately returns to Allah until all creatures go back to Him exposed with their deeds with the exception of the believers, whose good deeds will protect them.

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[1] *Exegesis of Imam ibn Kathir*

'Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire - and never will you find for them a helper.' (*an-Nisa':* 145) Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has previously depicted the hypocrites as wavering and indecisive people who cannot maintain a fixed stance and can never earn the respect of the society wherein they live. Allah says about them: 'Wavering between them, [belonging] neither to the believers nor to the disbelievers....' (*an-Nisa':* 143) Wavering refers to indecisiveness and incapacity of a character to be independent. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* depicts them in this mutilated way in order to demonstrate that His punishment for them is commensurate with what they did.

Allah has prepared the human minds in a way that enables them to receive and accept the rulings that He reveals so that people may not pity for or sympathize with the hypocrites when He punishes them. When Allah *Glorified is He* enacts a ruling, He ensures that no one will dispute with Him as He is the Sustainer of existence and the One. Allah could have said that He will condemn the hypocrite to the lowest depth of the Fire; there is no other power capable of redeeming the hypocrite. Therefore, He has appended the ruling on the hypocrite with His saying, '…and never will you find for them a helper.' (*an-Nisa':* 145) This indicates that this ruling is bound to be executed, and that none of Allah's creatures may modify or alter it; to Him only *Glorified is He* sovereignty belongs. Allah also lets those who pursue the proper causes have possessions in the worldly life; however, in the Afterlife no one except Allah will have sovereignty or possess anything: '…To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah—the One, the Prevailing.' (*Ghafir:* 16)

Then, Allah declares that He will give a chance to the hypocrites to change their stance, declare their faith and repent what they did. Allah has allowed them to examine their situations and judge themselves, as He has not denied them the chance to repent. Rather, He says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُواْ وَأَصۡلَحُواْ وَٱعۡتَصَمُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَأَخۡلَصُواْ دِينَهُمۡ لِلَّهِ
فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مَعَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۖ وَسَوۡفَ يُؤۡتِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمٗا ١٤٦

Not so those who repent, mend their ways, hold
fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to
Him: these will be joined with the believers, and
God will give the believers a mighty reward [146]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 146)

There may be a glimmer of hope that urges one to repent so that no one ought to think that the ruling in this case is final and so makes one lose hope and get entangled in more evils. Therefore, He says, 'Except for those who repent…' (*an-Nisa':* 146); this refers to the one who repents of his hypocrisy. Further, if any corruption has resulted from his hypocrisy, he should fix it, hold fast to Allah and show sincere intentions and deeds. 'Except for those who repent, correct themselves, hold fast to Allah and are sincere in their religion for Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 146). This means that in order for a hypocrite to be redeemed from the lowest depths of the fire, he must repent, fix what he has ruined, hold fast to Allah and be sincere in his religion for Allah alone. Repentance in this context means quitting hypocrisy and fixing the corruption resulted from hypocrisy. But how may someone hold fast to Allah? It is well-known that the hypocrites used to hold fast to the disbelievers because they sought to be honoured by them, i.e., the hypocrites felt comfortable among the disbelievers, so they took refuge with them and their strength. Allah commands them to hold fast to Him only because none can protect against Him, and He is the only source of Honour and Refuge.

It should be noted that the one who repents, corrects himself and holds fast to Allah fulfils all the pillars of faith. But Allah also says, '…and are sincere in their religion for Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 146). So why has Allah stressed the importance of being sincere in this context? The reason is that hypocrisy originally stems from hearts. It is well-known that the heart may sin; any organ may sin by committing an act of transgression. For instance, the eye sins when it encroaches on the honour of others; similarly, the tongue sins when it assails and insults others. Therefore, every organ may sin in a certain manner. The sin of the heart is hypocrisy, so it is something hidden. The saying of Allah, '…and are sincere in their religion for Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 146) is mentioned to affirm that sincerity—which lies in the heart—is necessary for repenting of hypocrisy.

That is to say that the repentance of the heart is different from the repentance of the other organs which repent by abstaining from the sin they committed, but the heart repents of hypocrisy by having sincere faith. Accordingly, Allah has established the merit of the believers who did not fall into hypocrisy, and has associated the repenting hypocrites with the believers. Accordingly, the reason for receiving Allah's reward is to be associated with the believers: '…for those will be with the believers. And Allah is going to give the believers a great reward.' (*an-Nisa':* 146)

This indicates that Allah's great reward will be received only by the believers, and whoever joins the believers will receive the same reward. Allah has ruled that rewards depend on the kind of deed. The hypocrites practiced hypocrisy to benefit from the rights Islam has established for the Muslims in the society, like protection of private wealth and lives so that they would be ostensibly counted as Muslims. When they hypocritically dealt with Muslims, the Muslims gave them the same rights they enjoyed; and when they repented, corrected themselves and became sincere in their religion for Allah, Allah considered them as the believers to whom He has promised to grant great reward. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّا يَفْعَلُ ٱللَّهُ بِعَذَابِكُمْ إِن شَكَرْتُمْ وَءَامَنتُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ شَاكِرًا عَلِيمًا ﴿١٤٧﴾

Why should God make you suffer torment if you are thankful
and believe in Him? God always rewards gratitude and He
knows everything [147] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 147)

Allah has clarified that the hypocrites are doomed to the lowest depths of the fire, and then He excluded from them those who repent, correct themselves, hold fast to Allah and become sincere in their religion for Allah. In this verse, Allah tackles and clarifies the idea of punishment, saying: ‘What would Allah do with your punishment…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 147). The verse is in the interrogative form, which linguistically means a question that is put forward by an inquirer and requires an answer. When Allah puts forward a confirmed issue, He does not use the predicative form to express it, as He did not say that punishing people does not involve any benefit or harm for Him.

In the verse, Allah has not put forward this issue using a predicative form; rather, He asks the hypocrites a question so that they state the matter He wants to confirm. For instance—and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection—someone may say to another, ‘You have insulted me.’ The other person may respond by saying, ‘No, I did not insult you; I swear that I did not.’ He may also add, ‘bring forth a witness.’ Thus, this matter has gone through three stages: affirming that no insult was addressed, swearing that no insult took place and asking the claimant to bring a witness to prove that the alleged insult did take place.

Another person may respond to the one accusing him of insult, ‘I will leave the matter to you; what did I say that you may consider an insult?’ Whoever gives this response is sure that if the other person thinks well about his alleged accusation, he will not find a single offensive word.

By contrast, if one is certain that he has insulted the other person, he will be afraid lest the latter may find evidence that supports his accusation. Accordingly, if the accused person says to the accuser, ‘What insult did I say to you?’ This means that the accuser will search and not find anything. Accordingly, he will reach the truth and judge the matter himself.

When Allah says, ‘What would Allah do with your punishment…?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 147) He addresses a group of people who would be punished and who disobeyed Allah, but He has accepted their testimony against themselves. The verse indicates that the sinful deserves punishment, ‘What would Allah do with your punishment…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 147), and is prepared for it because he has disobeyed Allah. However, Allah is willing to accept the testimony of the sinful and his like. This demonstrates that faith is ingrained in the human self, and that whenever it faces troubles, it will resort only to the logic of faith.

Allah clarifies the matter to the hypocrites by asking them what He would do with their punishment, but the hypocrites will not find any reason relevant to Allah that may cause Him to punish them. This means that their natural disposition has been revived and will allow them to ponder the matter.

In day-to-day human life, man is often driven to punish another in order to give vent to his anger or to avenge himself because the latter has caused him some suffering, so he wants to react in the same way. He may also want to avoid the harm the latter may cause to him. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* cannot be in any of these positions. If the hypocrites ponder this matter using only their natural disposition, they will inevitably arrive at the following answer: Allah will benefit nothing from punishing them if they are grateful to and have faith in Him.

This means that when Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wills to discuss and confirm an issue, He prompts the sinful to admit it by putting it forward in the form of a question. Allah could possibly have used the predicative form, but in this way Allah would confirm the matter himself. However, when Allah uses the interrogative form, the answer provided to the question will confirm the matter, as they admit that they disobeyed and went against Allah’s Commands. This also indicates that Allah has entrusted them with the answer because it is based on logic and natural disposition. When a disbeliever tries to think ill of Allah, he will not logically be able to do so.

‘What would Allah do with your punishment if you are grateful and believe? And ever is Allah Appreciative and Knowing.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 147) What will Allah benefit from punishing the hypocrites if they were not grateful to Him and did not believe in Him? It is well-known that the Allah is so Exalted as to benefit from the obedience or disobedience of any person. However, the benefit and harm ensuing from obedience and disobedience respectively affect the creatures— Allah’s servants—not Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah wants us to be obedient in order to preserve the well-being of society and to protect people from the harm they may cause to each other. Thus, Allah wants the people to gain the benefits of obeying Him as, before creating the creatures, He has existed with all the attributes of perfection whereby He has created the creatures. Further, creating the creatures will not accrue anything to Him. Therefore, Allah says in the following Qudsi Hadith: ‘O My servants, if the first of you and the last of you, and the humans of you and the jinn of you, were all as pious as the most pious heart of any individual amongst you, then this would not increase My Kingdom an iota. O My servants, if the first of you and the last of you, and the humans of you and the jinn of you, were all as wicked as the most wicked heart of any individual amongst you, then this would not decrease My Kingdom an iota. O My servants, if the first of you and the last of you, and the humans of you and the jinn of you, were all to stand together in one place and ask of Me, and I were to give everyone what he requested, then that would not decrease what I possess, except what is decreased of the ocean when a needle is dipped into it.’(1)

Therefore, the result of obeying or disobeying Allah ultimately affects the servants of Allah, not Him. The Mercy of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is revealed in the fact that He has created the creatures and protected them from the harm they may cause to each other. Allah *Glorified is He* also considers the person who treats Allah’s creatures kindly as obedient to Him; thus, He loves him. ‘What would Allah do with your punishment if you are grateful and believe?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 147) If they are grateful to and have faith in Allah, why should He chastise them? They will not deserve to be punished.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to adjust societies and the interactions among its members so that societies would thrive and develop in an atmosphere of coexistence. Everyone has a specific attribute and a talent needed by the society.

Someone may have a piece of land upon which he wants to build. The landlord is not supposed to have studied engineering in order to design the building and its drawings. He is not supposed to be professional in the construction field in order to build a house, not even learn how to paint a building or become an electrician.

Similarly, the person who wants to wear a gown is not expected to learn how to obtain wool from sheep, spin and weave cotton and sew it afterwards. Everyone must have a useful job to benefit all the people; and since people are in need of each other, they have to peacefully coexist. Conflict must not be the foundation of things because it weakens the community and consumes its power in vain. Allah *Glorified is He* wants all the powers of society to support each other, not to conflict with each other. Therefore, Allah says, 'What would Allah do with your punishment if you are grateful and believe?' (*an-Nisa':* 147) Consequently, if they are not grateful and do not have faith in Allah, they will be punished, and Allah will not gain anything from their punishment.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim, Abu `Awanah, Ibn Hibban and Al-Hakim on the authority of Abu Dharr*

But why has Allah associated gratefulness with the attainment of faith? To answer this question, 'gratefulness' must be defined first. Gratefulness is a word of appreciation uttered by the person who has received a favour to the person who has done him a favour. Gratefulness involves saying to the person who has done you a favour, 'May you have plentiful bounties.' What is faith? Faith is to be certain that Allah is One. Which takes precedence over the other: gratitude or faith? Belief follows after taking advantage of the bounties of Allah. When man has been brought into the universe, he has found it well ordered, and he does not have any idea about religion or the Creator yet. Therefore, he will be eager to know who has created the universe for him.

Then, the messengers were sent to inform the people that the power that created the universe is Allah, Who orders them to follow a particular path. This is how faith is related to the bounties Allah has bestowed upon man. Thankfulness comes first, then faith. Thankfulness is a kind of general form of gratitude, whereas faith is a specific form of gratitude. Thankfulness is related to a specific bounty; whereas faith is addressed to the One Who has bestowed this bounty.

'What would Allah do with your punishment if you are grateful and believe? And ever is Allah Appreciative and Knowing.' (*an-Nisa':* 147) Allah *Glorified is He* informs the believers that He, Who bestows bounties, also thanks for them. How does this take place?

For example—and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection—a person may buy some toys for his son after providing him with all the necessities of life. No one will buy toys for his son if he has not provided him with food and clothes. Accordingly, a person may buy some toys for his son to fill his leisure time if he has already provided him with proper food and clothes and the necessities of life. Then, the father may tell his son that the toy is for playing only during leisure time, and he should put it in its proper place before he studies. This means that everything in the house has a specific task that it performs. This also indicates that the father wants to discipline his son, allowing him to play with his toy at the time allotted for that purpose, and disallowing him to play with anything else in the house because if he does, he will break something. For instance, he must not tamper with the TV, the clock, the fridge or the washing machine so as not to break them.

The father must point out to him the difference between the things with which he may play and things he must treat seriously. Things specified for serious purposes should only be used when required; for instance, a washing machine is used only when one wants to wash his clothes. Similarly, a watch may not be used except when one wants to know the time and a fridge is used only when one wants to get something out to eat or drink. House appliances must not be approached except for specific purposes. As for toys, the child may play with during the time allotted for playing; however, he must keep them well. When a father watches his son and sees that he adheres to his instructions, takes care of the house appliances and keeps his toys, he will be happy. Thus, if a father does not give his son instructions, his son may spoil his toys. When the son adheres to the instructions of his father, his father will be content and happy with him. He will also buy more toys for his son because he can trust him, as he knows the rules he ought to follow while playing and how to keep his toy. In addition, his son avoids damaging the house appliances. The father will be more content with his son and will buy for him more new toys. If this is the case in the relationship between the father and his son, who are among Allah’s creatures, how will the Creator *the Glorified and Exalted* Who has brought all creatures into being, treat them? If man follows the path of Allah in every aspect of his life, he will find Allah All-Appreciative and All Knowing because Allah is pleased with His servant who adheres to His path and gives him in excess. Allah is All-Appreciative in the sense that if His Servants handle His bounties properly according to the purposes specified for them, Allah will be satisfied with them.

Allah manifests His Contentment by giving His servants in excess of what they need for the necessities of life, as Allah *Glorified is He* provides the necessities of life to everyone, even the disbelievers. He may also give His servants more than what they necessarily need in order to make them happy.

Therefore, the meaning of 'Allah is All-Appreciative' is that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is Content with His servants, and will reward them accordingly. Furthermore, Allah may grant His servants rewards corresponding to what they did or even more, in accordance with His saying, '…If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour]…' (*Ibrahim:* 7).

Gratitude is shown by the servant towards his Lord and the Lord gives His servant in excess. A person must not pretend to do good deeds like the child who preserves his toy only when he sees his father, but once his father goes away, he damages it. However, Allah cannot be compared to any father, as any father has finite capability, but Allah is the Sublime Creator Who knows everything. He is All-Appreciative and All Knowing. Then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says:

لَّا يُحِبُّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْجَهْرَ بِٱلسُّوٓءِ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْلِ إِلَّا مَن ظُلِمَۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ سَمِيعًا عَلِيمًا ﴿١٤٨﴾

God does not like bad words to be made public unless someone has been wronged: He is all hearing and all knowing [148] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 148)

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to protect the believers from hearing evil sayings, i.e., offensive words. The words people use in their speech are often the words they most hear; if one's ear does not hear a certain word frequently, his tongue is not likely to use it. In this regard, if a child grows up in family observing good manners, he will most likely not utter any offensive words. If this child has started to say offensive words, it is realized that he has heard these words in the street because the child's permanent environment does not use such offensive words. When one investigates the source of these words, he may then find out that the child might spend some time in another environment from which these offensive words were transmitted to him.

Therefore, language is always transmitted through imitating the words uttered, and the tongue utters what the ear hears. It is well known that the acquisition of language is not relevant to one's nationality or lineage. For instance, if an English child grows up in an Arab environment, he will speak Arabic; and if an Arab child is brought up in an English environment, he will speak English.

Furthermore, within the sphere of a single language, there may be words that one would only use if one hears them; if one does not hear these words, he will not utter them. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to protect the society of the believers from evil sayings that may be heard by people, and transmit offensive language to them. If people utter evil sayings, the society will look weird and evil sayings will spread. However, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* instructs the people to avoid uttering the evil sayings which Allah does not like. One should not just utter any word he wishes to say, for the utterance of such a word may harm generations to come. Someone may hear him utter this word and repeat it, and the bad example will be transmitted from one generation to the other. But the one who ultimately bears the sin for such a problem is the one who first uttered the evil saying.

Evil sayings may be based either on truth or falsehood; if it is based on truth, no one will, for instance, say that all people are bad. Someone may start by offending another; and a person may claim that someone has offended him. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to protect the ears of the believers from hearing evil sayings. Therefore, Allah says, ‘Allah does not like the public mention of evil…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 148). The opposite of this saying is that Allah likes public mention of good. But does Allah treat any faculty in people at the expense of another when He protects the society of the believers in this manner? No, He does not.

We know that the human self has a desire for revenge, self-defence and retaliation, and is inclined towards what relieves and alleviates anger. There is an Arab proverb that says, ‘Whoever is provoked and does not get enraged is a fool’; the underlying rationale is that the one who is provoked and does not get angry is deficient. However, this does not mean that Allah prevents people from uttering an evil saying in order to give vent to one’s anger, as He stipulates a condition for the utterance of such a word, ‘…except by one who has been wronged...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 148). The reason is that wronging a person means to misappropriate his right. Everyone is ultimately keen to protect himself and his rights; therefore, if someone is subjected to any form of injustice, he gets enraged and infuriated. Then, he either gives vent to his rage or suppresses and conceals it.

Thus, had Allah only said, ‘Allah does not like the public mention of evil…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 148), this would have been a suppression of the human psyche. Even though this suppression is in obedience to Allah’s Command because He does not like the public mention of evil, one may fail to control himself when provoked. Therefore, Allah has stipulated the condition under which public mention of evil may be permissible, namely, the occurrence of injustice. Allah clarifies that He does not like the public mention of evil, but He only allows it as a means of giving vent to anger because He does not rectify a faculty at the expense of another. Hence, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* says, ‘Anger is an ember ignited in the heart of the son of Adam, as you see it in the redness of his eyes and the bulge of his jugular veins. So, whoever senses something, let him stand if he is sitting and lie down if he is sitting. If he is still angry, he should perform ablution with cold water or wash up, for fire is only put out by water.’(1)

This means that one should move once one feels angry, as he should either change his position or pray after he performs ablution or wash up. This is in order for him to give vent to his anger to alleviate his suppressed feelings in the same way one may open a valve of a machine to let out some steam.

Therefore, whoever suffers injustice is permitted to make public mention of evil, and action which has two benefits: first, it allows one to give vent to his anger. Second, it allows the wronged person to declare that a certain person is unjust so that people can take their precautions in dealing with him. In addition, no one would delusively think that he can escape from his evil deeds. If everyone conceals the injustice he suffers, injustice will spread in the society. However, the servants of Allah should not expand the connotation of the word ‘wronging’ because one may be wronged through either words or deeds. The Muslim should also measure things accurately and in proportion to the injustice he suffers.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bayhaqi in As-Shu’ab; At-Tirmidhi from the narration of Abu Sa’id, except for the word tuqad (ignited), which is mentioned in the original Arabic Hadith; Ahmad and Abu Dawud.*

'...So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you...' (*al-Baqara:* 194). Thus, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* allows us exceptions only as necessary. Allah enjoins that no one should go beyond the limits set for necessity; He knows who is wronged through words or deeds, as He is the All Knowing and All-Hearing Therefore, no one should trespass the limits of courtesy.

Accordingly, Allah sets psychological and faith-based constraints necessary for giving vent to the suppressed anger, and at the same time, He does not preclude the possibility for aspiring for a better reaction based on one's faith. Allah allows His servant to mention evil openly if he is wronged, but if he aspires to a higher status of faith, he may choose not to mention evil openly and forgive his offender. Therefore, there is a difference between a matter that Allah leaves up to man and another that He obliges him to do. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* has left the matter of mentioning evil openly up to man, but He also likes man to forgive; this shows how the principles mentioned in the Quran are coherent and firmly connected. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.' (*Fussilat:* 34)

As Allah allows a person to make public mention of evil if someone wrongs him, He also gives another alternative which is to forgive the offender. When the wronged person forgives the person who has wronged him, the latter will most probably feel ashamed as he knows that there are others who are ethically nobler than him. Nothing bothers a person more than seeing another better than him in a certain aspect. When a wrongdoer is forgiven by the one he has wronged, he may feel a strong urge to be better than him.

Therefore, Allah regards the faith-based principle: '...Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better...' (*Fussilat:* 34) preferable, and He does not make it compulsory because if someone is given a right and then is given the choice to take or concede it, this will be satisfactory for everyone. As this principle is not compulsory, it nourishes one's tendency to be generous and noble, but if it was compulsory, one faculty would be rectified at the expense of another. When someone assails another and the latter repels the evil of the former with a deed that is better, the assailant's character may be rectified. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend' (*Fussilat:* 34). If the assailant persists in his aggression, the one who is trying to repel his evil with something better must bear in mind that Allah never says anything false, and that there must be some deficiency in the latter's behaviour.

For instance, the one who wants to repel evil with a better deed might have told the wrongdoer condescendingly that he would forgive him; such an arrogant attitude does not make anyone become a devoted friend. By contrast, if the one who is wronged really repels evil with a better deed in a humble and tolerant manner, the situation must evolve in the way Allah describes in His saying: '…and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.' (*Fussilat:* 34) Furthermore, Allah puts the contending psychological reactions within clear frameworks; Allah says: '…So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you.…' (*al-Baqara:* 194) This ruling is intended to stop assailants from persisting in their wrongdoing. When certain people are not punished for wronging others, they tend to persist in their misdemeanour. However, if they are deterred, they may give up doing evil; thus, society will be protected from the spread of corruption. However, Allah still made the possibility of justly repelling the assault rather difficult.

A question may be raised: who is capable of achieving justice by attacking back just as he has been attacked? For instance, when someone slaps another person on his face, is it possible for the latter to slap the former with the same force and on the same part of the face? Therefore, repelling aggression with an equally aggressive attack is a difficult matter. Since Allah permits one to repel assault in the same way he was assaulted, and one may not be able to do this justly, as he may excessively attack back and become the offender instead of the offended, then forgiving the offender may be an easier and more accessible solution.

The feelings that overwhelm man as a result of having contending reactions towards a certain situation engender different motives that in turn lead to different inclinations. Inclinations are reactions to perceptions; if someone is hurt or attacked by another, the former exerts effort to control his anger, which means that he has difficulty in suppressing his anger. This implies that anger exists in the heart, and man is only required to control his inclinations. The angry person must prevent himself from being inclined towards evil retaliation, even if anger persists in the heart. '…who restrain anger…' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). This initial stage is followed by a second stage which is: '…and who pardon the people…' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

What is required in the initial stage is to prevent any retaliatory inclination, and it is better to forget about the cause of your anger. The most exalted stage a person may reach in controlling his anger and forgiving those who wronged him is to treat them kindly. The reason is that the wrongdoer's faith is deficient. When someone suffers from physical sickness, help may be extended to him from his enemy, forgetting about their antagonism. If it is possible to react in this manner in the case of physical sickness, then it is more proper to do the same with the one who has deficient values. He needs suppression of anger, forgiveness (which is a nobler action) and kind treatment (which is the noblest action in this case).

Thus, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* allows repelling attack in the same manner one was attacked, but He gives the option to control anger and avoid attacking back even if the cause of anger lingers in your heart. Then, He gives another option which involves a nobler action: forgiveness, which means forgetting about the cause of anger. Then, Allah allows people to elevate to even higher status in their reaction, as He says: '…and Allah loves the doers of good' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). In fact, all the Muslims desire that Allah loves them. Accordingly, Islam commands the believer to treat the person who maltreated him kindly.

One may wonder how he can treat the one who maltreated him kindly. The answer is that all people are watched by the Sustainer of all existence, Who is neither overtaken by drowsiness nor sleep, and sees everything. The assailant and the one who was assailed are created by Allah, Who protects, defends and takes the side of the one who was assailed. This renders whatever evil a person may suffer a gift for you. When we think deeply about the whole matter, we will find that when one forgives, he gains more benefits than in the case that he avenges himself. The rationale behind this is that when a person takes revenge, he uses his limited power, but when he forgives, he leaves the judgment up to Allah and His infinite Power. Then, Allah may respond to the offender’s attack or infinitely reward the one who has been offended. This is what Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* does when a wronged yet forgiving and righteous servant takes refuge in Him. Subsequently, Allah says:

إِن تُبۡدُواْ خَيۡرًا أَوۡ تُخۡفُوهُ أَوۡ تَعۡفُواْ عَن سُوٓءٖ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُوّٗا قَدِيرًا ١٤٩

If you do good, openly or in secret, or if you pardon something bad, then God is most forgiving and powerful [149] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 149)

It is well known that Allah does not permit anyone to make public mention of evil unless he has been wronged. This means that evil may either be concealed or explicitly mentioned. Thus, Allah says, ‘…If [instead] you show [some] good or conceal it or pardon an offense…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 149). This means that Allah knows whether a person does good deeds openly or secretly or pardons others for evil. Forgiveness is not considered a merit from the perspective of faith unless the one who forgives is in a position of power; otherwise, he would not forgive. Allah *Glorified is He* forgives while having power. If a person wants to forgive, he must act according to the ethics set by Allah’s Guidance, as it involves forgiveness while being able to retaliate. It should be taken into consideration that Allah does not want the Muslims to be humiliated; rather, he wants them powerful. The true merit is to forgive while being able to retaliate because if a person is not able to retaliate, he cannot be considered as pardoning. If a person who is not able to retaliate shows pardon, people considers him as a coward. However, if one wants to follow the ethical code set by Allah’s Guidance, he should utilize Allah’s bounties in the world for him to become competent and capable so that if he is wronged, he may forgive while being able to retaliate: ‘…Allah is ever pardoning and Competent.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 149)

As mentioned before, whenever the word *kana,* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, is associated with any of Allah’s Attributes, it indicates an infinite status and permanent attribute, as Allah’s Existence is Infinite. Subsequently, Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكۡفُرُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يُفَرِّقُواْ
بَيۡنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤۡمِنُ بِبَعۡضٖ وَنَكۡفُرُ بِبَعۡضٖ
وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يَتَّخِذُواْ بَيۡنَ ذَٰلِكَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٥٠﴾

As for those who ignore God and His messengers and
want to make a distinction between them, saying,
‘We believe in some but not in others,’ seeking a
middle way [150] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 150)

Allah *Glorified is He* makes faith a whole issue whose parts are inseparable. Declaring faith is not enough for someone to be called a believer because in order to have proper faith in Allah, one needs a messenger to teach him that the Creator is the One Who has made all the powers in the universe subservient to man and is named Allah. No one can know the Name of the Creator of the universe without a messenger sent by Allah.

We know that the human mind cannot identify the Name of the Creator of the universe by mere deductions, and man has been introduced to a well-ordered universe. Therefore, he must pay attention to the fact that there is the Power that has existed before the universe was created, and that man exists in an integrated universe. Someone may, for instance, hear his father say that the house was built by the father or the grandfather or the like. But no one has told this same person who erected the sky or created the sun, even though people allege to have done things that they have not actually done. It is thus quite peculiar that people do not inquire about the One Who created the universe.

It is worth-mentioning that people are interested in keeping record of the history of trivial or relatively important things in their lives. In this regard, we find a history of rocks and studies on the history of different industries; for instance, the history of the electric bulb that was invented by Edison who managed to generate electricity using limited resources. In summary, there are records of the history of almost everything in this world, which trace back the development of things to their respective origins. It is worth mentioning that each industry, no matter how trivial or important it is, has been passed from one person to another, and has not been invented in its present form by a single person.

Each inventor started from the point at which his predecessors had stopped and embarked on a new innovation until innovations have reached their present status. Who would possibly believe that a bulb—that one turns on and off so simply and disposes of when it is damaged—has a history? We may then consider the sun that never fades, wanes or is ever extinguished to draw an analogy. A lamp illuminates a small area, while the sun illuminates the entire universe—is the sun not worthy of inquiring about its history?

As mentioned previously, when man investigates the universe, apart from the idea of religion and what the Messengers conveyed about the Creator of the universe, the way He created it and the guidance, he may realize that people's criteria differ based on their positions and their strength. Someone may be sitting on a chair made of sycamore tree, another on a chair made of rosewood and a third may be sitting on a carpet on the floor.

Man depends on the crafts of other fellow humans based on his status and standing. For instance, a countryman or a nomad used to start a fire by rubbing a piece of iron against a stone; then, he might keep the fire lit to use it more than once. As man developed the methods of igniting fire, he used a lamp lit by oil. As civilization developed further, man used a glass gas-lamp that has a numerical meter indicating the level of light it produces.

For instance, there is a grade five lamp whose number indicates the intensity of the light it produces. Thus, the lamp's light intensity is increased according to the space required to be illuminated. As technology developed, man has used torches; with further technological advancement, man has used electricity, neon and recently solar energy to produce light. However, when the sun rises, people turn off the lights, as the sun light ultimately obviates our need for any other source of light. At night one ensures that the source of electricity in his house is intact to avoid any power failure and darkness. If this is the case with the lamp, what about the sun with which one does not face all these complications?

Throughout history, man has tried to understand Allah’s absolute Omnipotence even without messengers being sent. However, no one can know the Name of the Power that created the universe by reason alone, as it should be conveyed by messengers. The Name ‘ Allah’ is bound by a religious text and can only be known through Revelation. Therefore, how did some disbelievers say that they believed in Allah and disbeliever in His Messengers? How did they know that the Name of the Power in which they would believe is Allah? They must have learnt this name through an earlier messenger because having faith in Allah necessitates that one should have learnt His Name from an earlier messenger whom he believed.

Is it sufficient to have faith in Allah as a Great Power? It is obligatory for a person to think about what this Power expects him to fulfil? If this Power commands man to follow religious guidance, then who must convey it?

Therefore, a messenger must inform the people of the Name of the Power that created the universe, explain the path It requires them to follow, and how to obey this Power. Therefore, no one can separate having faith in Allah from having faith in His Messengers; otherwise, such faith would only be a mere belief in a hidden power. In this regard, the one who merely has faith in the Power that created the universe may not have the right to say that this Power is named ‘Allah’ because this Name must have been conveyed by a messenger.

Therefore, when someone says that he believes in Allah but does not believe in the Messengers, he should be regarded at fault because believing in Allah requires believing in a message transmitted by a messenger. Therefore, having faith in Allah is inseparable from having faith in the Messenger.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* created Adam after He had created the universe and the rest of the creatures. No one would possibly claim that Adam is the first creature to have existed in the world. A poet once said:

Adam cannot be - by logic - the first creature in the universe,
By inductive analogy, many creatures were created before him.

It can be said that many creatures were created before Adam, but Adam is the first human being. When Allah created him, He taught him all the names so that he may properly lead his life in the world; had not Allah taught him the names of beings, he would not have been able to converse with his children, and he would not have been able to identify the name of any object.

Therefore, Adam had to learn all the names from Allah because language is mainly transmitted through imitation, and no one can use a word unless he has heard it. Language is transmitted to people by their fathers who acquired it from the grandfathers. If we trace this line of transmission, we will ultimately end with Adam. But who transmitted language to Adam for him to utter the first word? It must have been Allah; this fact must be recognized by every rational human being. Thus, Allah's saying, 'And He taught Adam all the names…' (*al-Baqara:* 31), is logical and true from the perspective of inductive reasoning.

When one teaches his child how to speak, he first teaches him names of things, but no one knows how the child learns the verbs of action. For example, one may teach his child the names of some objects such as a glass, a table, a plate and food, but no one ever teaches his child what the verbs 'drink' or 'eat' means. Therefore, names are the basic parts of speech; subsequently man learns verbs through practice and experience.

Allah has placed in this universe formidable evidence of His Greatness as its Creator, and His Message is conveyed by the messengers who inform people that the Name of the Power who created the universe is Allah. They also tell people the Attributes of this Power, and that whoever obeys Him will be admitted into Heaven, and whoever disobeys Him will be condemned to fire. Had not there been any messengers, people would have continued living astray and would not have learnt the Name of the Power who created the universe. In addition, people would not have learnt what this Power expects from them. This is how we may respond to those who worship the sun, the moon or the stars. They may worship the sun because they consider it as the greatest power.

But there is a question to be asked in this respect, which is, 'What is worship?' Worship is to show obedience on the part of a servant to the One Who surely deserves to be worshipped. So, what did the sun command you

(O worshippers of the sun) to do? And what did it forbid you from? They, the worshippers of the sun, would confess that the sun did not ask them to do anything. Accordingly, their worship to the sun is totally groundless. This is based on the fact that the sun has never laid down a methodology for those misguided people—the sun worshippers—to adhere to, nor is it able to do so. In addition, it cannot provide any reward for the one who worships it. We thus reach the conclusion that worshipping any power other than Allah *the Almighty* can be definitively proved null and void. As a matter of fact, true belief in Allah *the Almighty* is absolutely inseparable from believing firmly in His Messengers and Prophets who conveyed the divine Message to humankind.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explains to us how Allah *Glorified is He* reveals to him by stating that He *the Almighty* impart His Revelation to His Messengers and Prophets through the archangel Jibril (Gabriel). The reason is that any Messenger is ultimately a human being, so he cannot be in direct contact with the Ultimate and Absolute Power in the universe. The same applies to our day-to-day life. We know that when someone wants to sleep, he does not want any light to bother him while sleeping, so he tends to sleep during the night to take advantage of the darkness. However, if he wakes up during the night, he fears walking in the house without light lest he may bump into something. For this reason, one may use a small torch even if the light it produces is as weak as what a candle emits.

In truth, such a small torch cannot be directly connected to the electrical power. It has to be attached to a transformer that receives high voltage power and converts it to the proper voltage this torch may take. If this is the relation between a small electrical instrument and the high voltage electrical power supplies, what would be the relation between Allah *the Almighty* and His Creatures?

As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* created other creatures—like the angels—to act as intermediaries between Him and His Messengers and Prophets. He *the Almighty* in turn fully prepared these angels to properly undertake this special mission. Therefore, we say to those who want to have faith in Allah while rejecting to belief in His Messengers: ‘No; your belief as such is not profound.’ In this regard, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* has used the word ‘Messengers’ in the plural form to avoid that a particular nation or people would mistakenly think that its Messenger was the only one sent by Allah *the Almighty* and then deny the others. Rather, every nation must have faith in all the Messengers and Prophets of Allah *the Almighty*. It is true that every Messenger was timely sent by Allah to respond to the needs of his contemporary society. However, all of them—Messengers and Prophets of Allah—were sent to call for one creed. None of them has been sent with a particular creed that is at odds with the others. This yet does not preclude the fact that they employed different methods and discussed different issues pertaining to life and the way of improving it, each according to his time. Confirming this fact: 'O People, be mindful of your Lord, Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God, in Whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship, Allah is always watching over you.' (*an-Nisa':* 1)

Adam and Eve lived together and gave birth to a number of children who, in turn, started to reproduce and make families. Every family was in need of a house to dwell in and a farm to produce their food. In fact, every individual needs at least half of an acre to produce the food he needs. In this vein, it is important to know that the more the offspring grow in number, the more they need to settle in other places; thus, they will make use of the different means of transportation. In other words, someone may depart from a region with limited natural resources to another where there is abundance in rain, thus getting the greatest benefit. He may also travel to places with more natural resources. It was in this way that people scattered here and there. In addition, each group of people started to develop its own customs and traditions, to the extent that it may be afflicted with certain kinds of diseases which do not afflict others. For this reason, He *the Almighty* sent each Messenger from among his own people to be fully able to address and tackle their own diseases and problems. Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* directed and enabled some minds to discover the secrets of the universe. Due to the progress of knowledge, the entire universe turned into a small village. For instance, we, in Egypt, became able to watch an event which is taking place right now in America. In addition, it is unfortunately due to this progress of knowledge that the entire world started to share the same bad habits. So, a bad practice or habit may emerge in America, and then it gets transferred to Germany, and ultimately infects our society. Thus, it becomes clear that these ambitious advancements turned the world into a small village with the same defects and the same customs and traditions.

That is why the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the seal of all the Prophets and Messengers, must have been universal to address all humankind and to fit all times and places. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that Muhammad is the best of all Messengers and Prophets, and that his followers, in case they firmly adhere to his guidance are the best of all peoples and nations. In addition, believing in him *peace and blessings be upon him* necessitates a firm belief in all the Messengers and Prophets that were sent by Allah before him. Consequently, those who want to distinguish among Messengers know nothing about religion. The Jews believed in Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him,* while some of them rejected to believe in 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Similarly, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a Messenger, some believed in him, while others did not. That is why Allah *the Almighty* refers to those who rejected to believe in him *peace and blessings be upon him* with His saying: '…They then increase in unbelief…' (*Al-'Imran:* 90). This clearly means that those who disbelieve in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have committed a sin which will never be forgiven because there will be no Prophets or Messengers after him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad is the seal of all the Prophets and Messengers.

Thus, the verse obviously indicates that the apex of faith entails that one must believe in the existence of a certain power whose name may not be known to him, and whose requirements and commands may be unclear as well. Furthermore, one may be unaware of the reward this power provides to the obedient or the punishment it afflicts upon the disobedient. That is why people are in a dire need of Messengers and Prophets. In addition, reason leads one to the necessity of having faith in Allah and His Messengers. As a matter of fact, He *the Almighty* uses the word 'Messengers' in the plural form to indicate that people must firmly believe that He *the Almighty* is the One Who deserves to be worshipped so that no one will be able to declare that he believes in certain Messengers and Prophets while rejecting others. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says in this verse, 'As for those who deny Allah and His Messengers and want to make a distinction between them, saying, 'We believe in some but not in others,' seeking a middle way.' (*an-Nisa':* 150)

We know that *kafar*—the Arabic word translated in the above verse as 'deny'—means to veil and conceal. It is taken for granted that one will hide and conceal an existing object. Thus, to disbelieve in Allah *the Almighty* means to deny and conceal His Existence. This obviously indicates that the Existence of Allah precedes denying Him *the Almighty*. As such, the word *kufr* (disbelief) plainly indicates the Existence of Allah. That is why when we ask the disbelievers, 'What do you conceal and hide with your disbelief?' The answer shall be, 'We conceal and deny the Existence of Allah;' a matter that obviously tells that he had been a believer before becoming a disbeliever.

Thus, Allah's words, 'As for those who deny Allah and His Messengers and want to make a distinction between them…' (*an-Nisa':* 150) indicate that those who want to do so are foolish as the ultimate goal behind the mission of all the Prophets and Messengers is to inform people about Allah *the Almighty* the One Who sent them. For this reason, we find that Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran says: 'O, Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be tough with them. Hell is their final home– an evil destination!' (*at-Tawba:* 74)

In truth, belief in Allah is ultimately inseparable from belief in His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, only fools would want to differentiate between having faith in Allah and having faith in His Messengers. To those who make such a distinction, we say: 'Faith is of one essence and all the Messengers and Prophets of Allah were sent to achieve one ultimate objective; that is, to call people for the Oneness of Allah.' This point is proved by Allah's words in the same chapter of *an-Nisa'* in which He *Glorified is He* plainly states that: 'Indeed, we have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as we revealed to Nuh (Noah) and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David we gave the book [of Psalms].' (*an-Nisa':* 163)

This clearly shows that all creeds are of the same origin and that they are, in essence, various forms of one single creed. So, what do they seek to achieve by believing in some Messengers and abjuring others? They undoubtedly seek temporary power and authority. In the past, those in charge of religion used to address all matters and issues, be they religious, judicial or even pertaining to engineering. For this reason, people trusted them because they truly believed that they were the ones who delivered the Message of Allah *the Almighty* to humankind. In addition, they thought of them as the heirs of the Prophets and Messengers of Allah. Furthermore, people believed that they were the only ones entitled to acquire knowledge from Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, we notice that most of the advanced sciences in ancient civilizations, like mummification in the ancient Egyptian civilization which is a riddle until today, were all practiced by priests of ancient Egypt. This implies that Allah is the origin of all the knowledge man attained on earth. The question to be asked here is, 'Why did humans then pass their own laws?' The reason is that clergymen usurped the temporary power and authority. But what does the term 'temporary power' mean? In truth, people used to resort to clergymen for advice in all matters, to the extent that they—the clergymen—fully realised that everyone wanted to make them content. People used to give them offerings and sacrifices just like they used to do with their so-called deities. Therefore, clergymen became extremely rich and lived in luxury to the point that they became very overweight due to the excessive amounts of food and the pleasures they used to indulge in. Therefore, when someone asked any of them about any matter, they used to give that person the opinion that would guarantee and assert their temporary power. This is why when a Messenger or a Prophet would come about and try to abolish these privileges, they (clergymen) would deny him so that they would continue to be at the top of the hierarchy of power and authority. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They have exchanged the signs of Allah for a small price and averted [people] from His way. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing.' (*at-Tawba:* 9) This means that they bartered away the Messages of Allah for a trifling gain of worldly pleasures; they gave up the Messages of Allah for a disdainful handful of worldly pleasures.

If we extensively investigate the history of law, we will find that the laws of the ancient clergymen accurately represented the early origins of the British, French and Roman Laws. As a matter of fact, the main reason that made people repel ancient clergymen is that they misused their temporary power.

Furthermore, people at that time noticed that each of those clergymen would pass different rulings for identical cases, and that they would be willing to change their verdicts for money. Consequently, people started to have suspicions about them and realised that they would twist their rulings to accommodate their interests. For this reason, people decided not to resort to clergymen for judgement anymore and started to make their own positive laws. Therefore, it becomes clear now that ‘temporary power’ was the main reason why some of the followers of the Messengers were biased towards them, to the extent that if another Messenger came about, they would fiercely resist his Message lest he should take away their temporary power. Thus, they would antagonise the new Messenger or Prophet. In fact, every new Messenger or Prophet is required to teach his followers and those who chose to believe in him that, if a Messenger of Allah comes forth, they should hasten to believe in him. This point is definitely proved by the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* clearly that says: ‘And [recall, O People of the Scripture], when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, [saying], "Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that my commitment? " They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 81)

Thus, He *the Almighty* accepted the previous Prophets’ solemn pledge to inform the people of the sequence of the divine Messages from the beginning until the seal of all the Prophets and Messengers—Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘As for those who deny Allah and His Messengers and want to make a distinction between them, saying, “We believe in some but not in others,” seeking a middle way,’ means that they try to draw distinction between Allah and His Messengers by passing judgment, which is primarily concerned with keeping their temporary power. In doing so, they were interested in creating an ‘in-between faith and infidelity’ situation. But there is no possibility for such a thing in religion; you either have faith or you are an unbeliever. If we reflect carefully on the structure of this verse, we will find that its meaning is perfected and fulfilled in the following verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ حَقّٗاۚ وَأَعۡتَدۡنَا لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٗا مُّهِينٗا ﴿١٥١﴾

they are really disbelievers: We have prepared a
humiliating punishment for those who disbelieve [151]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 151)

As a matter of fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘They are really disbelievers,’ clearly means that they are complete unbelievers. At that point, we may be faced with the following question, ‘Is there one who is a complete unbeliever and another who is not?’ The answer is ‘Yes.’ The one who does not believe in all the heavenly revealed Messages may have some excuse because no Messenger or Prophet had been sent to his people. However, unbelief would be egregious if it were committed by someone to whom a Messenger was sent. That is because this Messenger had informed such a person with the truth conveyed to him through revelation.

We notice that when Allah *the Almighty* talks about the disbelievers, He *Glorified is He* mentions the punishment prepared for them in the same verse. That is why we find Him *the Almighty* clearly stating this fact in His saying, ‘They are really disbelievers: We have prepared a humiliating punishment for those who disbelieve.’ This verse indicates clearly that Allah *the Almighty* has already mentioned the punishment prepared for the disbelievers in the Hereafter. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is reported to have said, ‘The paradise was shown to me. If I wished, I would bring you some of its fruits.’(1) Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* has created Paradise and Hellfire. In addition, He *Glorified is He* showed paradise to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, to the effect that if he wished, he would have brought his Companions some of its fruits. Therefore, do not think that He *the Almighty* would wait till Judgment Day to prepare the abode of the disbelievers—that is, hellfire. Similarly, He *the Almighty* would not wait to the Day of Judgment to prepare the abode of the believers—that is, paradise. In the Quran, Allah tells that: ‘Those are the inheritors’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 10-11).

As such, it becomes clear that Allah *Glorified is He* did not wait and postpone the matter until after surveying who believed and who did not so that He may prepare for each group, in proportion to its number, its proper abode, be it Paradise or Hellfire. Rather, He *the Almighty* considered that all of His creatures might be believers, and thus prepared an abode for all of them in paradise. Similarly, He *Glorified is He* considered that all His creatures might be unbelievers and thus created the fire in such a way that is spacious enough to include them all. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On the Day We will say to Hell, "Have you been filled?" and it will say, "Are there some more’ (*Qaf:* 30) The fire asks for more people to fill the places that were originally prepared for those who were not admitted into it as result of believing in Allah. As for those who disbelieved in Allah and His Messengers, who made a distinction between Allah and His Messengers and who believed in some Messengers and abjured others, Allah will allow the believers on the Day of Judgement to inherit the places originally prepared for them in paradise. Having shed light on the punishment prepared for the disbelievers, Allah *the Almighty* then cast light on the reward that will be provided for those who believed in Allah and His Messengers. In truth, this is logical and reasonable.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

Juxtaposing opposites helps the mind to assimilate them. For instance, a school headmaster may juxtapose two young men; each of them is a student in the last year at a high school. The headmaster may then say: ‘Look! This young man succeeded because he worked assiduously, whereas the second failed.’ This contrast prompts the listener to compare between the attitudes of each of the two students. Similarly, He *the Almighty* having shed light on the disbelievers and the punishment prepared for them, cast light on the believers and the reward to be provided for them. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَلَمۡ يُفَرِّقُواْ بَيۡنَ أَحَدٖ مِّنۡهُمۡ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ
سَوۡفَ يُؤۡتِيهِمۡ أُجُورَهُمۡۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمٗا ١٥٢

But God will give [due] rewards to those who believe in Him and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them. God is most forgiving and merciful [152] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 152)

Here Allah *the Almighty* asserts an obvious matter, that is, the believers make no distinction whatsoever among the Messengers of Allah. As a matter of fact, the word *ahad*—the Arabic word here translated as ‘any’—is sometimes used to refer to the masculine singular and sometimes to the feminine singular.

In addition, it sometimes refers to the dual masculine, the dual feminine, the feminine plural or the masculine plural. Thus, this particular word *ahad* refers to all the Messengers of Allah *Glorified is He*. The fact that this word may be used to refer to both the masculine and the feminine may be confirmed by the Quranic verse in which Allah *the Almighty* addresses the Mothers of the Believers and tells them that: ‘O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women. If you fear Allah, then do not be soft in speech [to men], lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech’ (*al-Ahzab:* 32) As such, it becomes clear that the word *ahad* is used in the Arabic language to equally refer to the masculine, the feminine, the dual and the plural. Having talked about the disbelievers who made distinction between Allah and His Messengers, and having told that He *the Almighty* had prepared for them a humiliating punishment, He *Glorified is He* similarly told that the believers who did not make distinction between Allah and His Messengers will receive a great reward. He *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse by telling that He is Most-Forgiving and Most-Merciful. He *the Almighty* then says:

يَسۡـَٔلُكَ أَهۡلُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ أَن تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ كِتَٰبٗا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِۚ فَقَدۡ سَأَلُواْ مُوسَىٰٓ أَكۡبَرَ مِن
ذَٰلِكَ فَقَالُوٓاْ أَرِنَا ٱللَّهَ جَهۡرَةٗ فَأَخَذَتۡهُمُ ٱلصَّٰعِقَةُ بِظُلۡمِهِمۡۚ ثُمَّ ٱتَّخَذُواْ ٱلۡعِجۡلَ مِنۢ
بَعۡدِ مَا جَآءَتۡهُمُ ٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتُ فَعَفَوۡنَا عَن ذَٰلِكَۚ وَءَاتَيۡنَا مُوسَىٰ سُلۡطَٰنٗا مُّبِينٗا ١٥٣

The People of the Book demand that you [Prophet] make a book physically come down to them from heaven, but they demanded even more than that of Moses when they said, ‘Show us God face to face,’ and were struck by the thunderbolt for their presumption. Even after clear revelations had come down to them, they took the calf as an object of worship, yet We pardoned this, and gave Moses clear authority [153] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 153)

The verse under discussion tells us clearly that the question asked by the people of the Book was wrong, for they were supposed to demand that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Allah *the Almighty* to make a book physically come down upon them form the heavens. In truth, the polytheists of Mecca who were masters of eloquence, elocution and fluency tried their best to find a flaw in the Quran, but they found nothing. Thus, they admitted the fact that the Quran was a great and a heavenly revealed Book, but the only problem for them was that they wished that the Quran had been revealed upon one of the masters of the two cities 'Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) They recognised the greatness of the Quran, yet they were angry at the fact that it had been revealed upon the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a matter that made them intellectually disturbed. As a matter of fact, the polytheists and disbelievers of Mecca believed that the Quran was some sort of magic; other times, they claimed that it was taught to Prophet Muhammad by another human being; they also thought of it as some kind of poetry. Furthermore, they said that it was part of ancient mythology and legends. Having closely scrutinised it, they firmly believed that it was a heavenly revealed Book. Yet, the only problem for them was that it has been revealed upon the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*! They wished it had been revealed upon one of the masters of the two cities. In truth, they did all of this out of envy; a point which is affirmed in the Quran where He *the Almighty* says: 'Or do they envy people for what Allah has given them of His bounty? But we had already given the family of Abraham the Scripture and wisdom and conferred upon them a great kingdom.' (*an-Nisa':* 54)

Hence, their statement was by no means objective; it was rather quite remote from truth and abounded with confusion. They once said the Quran was a work of magic, but they did not find any answer when people asked them: 'Why did the Quran not enchant you then? Because if it were actually a work of magic, it would have enchanted you, and you would not have a will independent of the will of the magician.' Then, they claimed that it was none but some sort of poetry; a point that aroused people's surprise, especially if we consider this false claim in the light of the fact that they—the Arabs—were masters of poetry, to the extent that they had hung seven of their most wonderful poems on the walls of the *Ka'ba*. Therefore, it becomes clear that the biggest issue for the disbelievers and polytheists of Mecca was that they had refused to embrace Islam to the extent that whenever their arguments were proved weak and spurious, they used to fabricate new ones.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* explains that if they were asking for a book to physically come down from heaven, a Book (the Quran) had already been revealed to you exactly as much as the Torah was previously revealed to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Since they believed that a Book was revealed to Musa (Moses) from heaven, why did they not believe in the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? As a matter of fact, there must be a special meaning in the saying of Allah *the Almighty,* 'The People of the Book demand that you [Prophet] make a book physically come down to them from heaven….' We know for certain that the Book, Torah, was revealed to Musa (Moses) all at once. Further, the Jews asked for the Quran to be revealed in the same a way as the Torah of Prophet Musa (Moses) was revealed. If we ponder carefully over this verse, we will find out that they were asking for a book to be revealed to them directly from the Heavens, as if they wanted to isolate Messenger Muhammad. In other words, it is as if they wanted Allah *the Almighty* to speak to them directly away from him *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is why He *the Almighty* rebukes them in another verse of the Quran and says 'Do they distribute the mercy of your Lord? It is we who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service. But the mercy of your Lord is better than whatever they accumulate.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 32)

This indicates clearly that Allah *the Almighty* distributed the means of livelihood to humankind in the worldly life including the topic of revelation which is an infinite, divine Mercy from Allah *the Almighty* so the disbelievers are in no way allowed to interfere in the affairs of the universe. When Allah *the Almighty* says, 'The People of the Book demand that you [Prophet] make a book physically come down to them from heaven…', it indicates that they, people of the Book, attributed the revelation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in spite of the fact that he *peace and blessings be upon him* never attributed the process of revelation to himself. In truth, all the time, he used to stress that fact by saying, ' Allah revealed so and so to me.'

It was narrated that Ka'ab ibn Al- Ashraf and others wanted Allah *the Almighty* to send down a book to each ordering them to believe in Prophet Muhammad. Thus, they—people of the Book —wanted a book to be revealed down to each of them in a personal way or that Allah *Glorified is He* would send them another book in addition to the Quran. But how could they make such demand even though they had the Torah?! At that point, Allah *the Almighty* wants to console Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so tells him not to be disappointed by the people of the Book's demands because they had previously asked Musa (Moses) for something which was even more than that when they said to Moses, 'Show us Allah *the Almighty* face to face.' As a matter of fact, by doing so, they committed injustice against Allah *the Almighty* Himself. As such, you (O Prophet Muhammad) should not be disappointed or even surprised by their demand to you to send down a book upon them from heaven. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The People of the Book demand that you [Prophet] make a book physically come down to them from heaven, but they demanded even more than that of Moses when they said, "Show us Allah face to face," and were struck by the thunderbolt for their presumption.'

In truth, once we see the word *as-sa'iqha*—the Arabic word translated here as 'thunderbolt'—we should first understand that it refers to something that comes from above and starts with a disturbing sound. While explaining that particular verse in the chapter *al-Baqara*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'or [it is] like a rainstorm from the sky within which is darkness, thunder and lightning. They put their fingers in their ears against the thunderclaps in dread of death. But Allah is encompassing of the disbelievers' (*al-Baqara:* 19) I pointed out that this act plainly indicates that the sound of the thunderbolts is so piercing that it may even damage the ear drums. Furthermore, the noise caused by the sound of thunderbolts may exceed the isolation provided by one finger because when one blocks his ears, he often does so with the end of his finger and not with all of them. Thus, the level of disturbance caused by the sound of the thunderbolts was so piercing and powerful that whenever they put their fingers into their ears, they failed to shut it out.

Obeying the Command of Allah, thunderbolts may destruct, burn or even come with a fierce wind that wipes out everything. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, '… and (they) were struck by thunderbolts for their injustice…'. *Azh-zhulm*—the Arabic word here translated as 'injustice'—means to give someone something to which he is not rightfully entitled. In fact, one would not be able to do so unless he usurped that particular thing from its rightful owner. As such, we should know that their question is a kind of wickedness and presumption because perception implies that the perceiver has comprehended what he perceived.

Thus, if you perceive something with your eyes, this means that your eyes have comprehended this object and encompassed its details. The same holds true for the ears when they hear, the nose when it smells, the sense of touch when it distinguishes between smoothness and roughness, and the sense of taste when tasting food. As such, it becomes clear that perception, regardless of the sense employed, means to fully comprehend the perceived object.

The people of the Book demanded to see Allah *the Almighty* face-to-face. This means that they wanted the instrument of perception—the eye—to realise the essence of Allah *the Almighty*. But when the perceiver is able to comprehend and realise the essence of the perceived object, it means that the former dominates the latter; a matter which is inconceivable to be achieved on the part of Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, this is the absolute and ultimate form of wickedness and presumption. It is possible that someone may see another; however, it is not right to think that one could do the same with Allah *the Almighty*. Why so? It is because He *Glorified is He* tells us in the Quran that 'Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted.' (*al-An'am:* 103) It is taken for granted that Allah is the fully capable and thus none may ever be capable of dominating or encompassing Him.

If we select someone to solve a problem, this indicates that his mind is capable of solving it and finding an answer to it. Yet, if he were handed a problem and he failed to solve it, it means that his mind was incapable of handling it. Likewise, anything that is perceived attests that the tool employed to perceive it could dominate it.

At that point, it is of great importance to stress the fact that Allah is fully capable and Most–Exalted, and thus no creature is ever capable of dominating or even encompassing Him. He *Glorified is He* says: '…and (they) were struck by the thunderbolt for their presumption. Even after clear revelations had come down to them, they took the calf as an object of worship…' As a matter of fact, they should have at least disciplined themselves and quit trespassing the Limits and Laws of Allah, especially after the thunderbolt of punishment struck them ‘And when the two companies saw one another, the companions of Moses said, "Indeed, we are to be overtaken!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) The sea was ahead of them and Pharaoh was behind them; logic tells that there was no way to escape Pharaoh’s punishment. Yet, Allah *the Almighty* inspired Moses. ‘[Moses] said, "No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) Musa (Moses), in fact, resorted to the Supreme Power of Allah *the Almighty* and thus He commanded him to strike the sea with his staff. The sea was then split into two halves; each like a great mountain. However, after they walked on the bottom of the sea and after they realised the drowning of Pharaoh, they worshipped a golden calf paying no attention at all to the fact that He *the Almighty* had saved them from being destructed by the Pharaoh and his soldiers. They repaid Allah’s Favour upon them with denial and disbelief. He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse by saying, ‘…Even after clear revelations had come down to them, they took the calf as an object of worship, yet We have pardoned this and given Moses clear authority.’ The clear proof and authority that Allah *the Almighty* vouchsafed unto Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the strict rule He imposed on them when He *Glorified is He* ordered them to kill themselves. Thus, they brought their swords to kill themselves because He *the Almighty* gave Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the power and authority, and thus no one dared to disobey his command. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَهُمُ ٱلطُّورَ بِمِيثَٰقِهِمْ وَقُلْنَا لَهُمُ ٱدْخُلُوا۟ ٱلْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُلْنَا
لَهُمْ لَا تَعْدُوا۟ فِى ٱلسَّبْتِ وَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُم مِّيثَٰقًا غَلِيظًا ﴿١٥٤﴾

We made the mountain tower high above them at their pledge;
We said to them, ‘Enter the gate humbly,’ and, ‘Do not break
the Sabbath,’ and took a solemn pledge from them [154]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 154)

As such, it becomes clear that the Jews transgressed the limits and laws when they asked to see Allah *the Almighty* face to face. Then, they transgressed for the second time when they worshipped a golden calf. Allah thereby decided to address them through such commands that have a material, sensible bearing. In this vein, He *the Almighty* caused Mount Sinai to quake over them;

a fact which is clearly mentioned in the chapter of *al-'Araf* in which He *Glorified is He* states that 'And [mention] when We raised the mountain above them as if it was a dark cloud and they were certain that it would fall upon them, [and Allah said], "Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.' (*al-A'raf:* 171)

Only material signs compelled the Jews, who transgressed the Limits of Allah, to carry out the divine orders and commands. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* caused Mount Sinai to quake above them. Thus, they should either embrace and obey what Allah revealed to them wholeheartedly or be killed—since Mount Sinai would fall upon them by Allah's permission. Hence, we can see that they were only persuaded by commands which bore material results. That is why we find that all the Divine Commands and Decrees enacted upon them were expressed in material terms. Allah's saying, '…We said to them, 'Enter the gate, humbly,' means that to enter the gate while prostrating; again, this form of subjugation is expressed in a material sense. The gate Musa (Moses) commanded them to enter humbly was the gate of the village of Ariha in Ash-Sham(1). Allah *the Almighty* then orders them not to break the Sabbath. As a matter of fact, this part of the verse may be explained in the light of another verse in the chapter of *al-'Araf* in which Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the Jews and how they used to break the law of Sabbath by fishing. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And ask them about the town that was by the sea - when they transgressed in [the matter of] the sabbath - when their fish came to them openly on their sabbath day, and the day they had no sabbath they did not come to them. Thus did we give them trial because they were defiantly disobedient.' (*al-A'raf:* 163)

The word *as-sabt*—Sabbath—is etymologically derived from *sabat* and *yasbutu* which means to calm down. This meaning is confirmed by another verse of the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And it is He who has made the night for you as clothing and sleep [a means for] rest and has made the day a resurrection.' (*al-Furqan:* 47) This means that sleep is intended to be a period of respite wherein you discontinue your work and rest your bodies. Allah *Glorified is He* forbade them to go fishing on Sabbath days. However, it was only on Sabbath when fish would come to their shores enticing them with their fins as they swam everywhere above the water surface. As a matter of fact, this was intended as a test for them because fish would not come to them on other than on Sabbath days. This means that they did not find any fish on the days when they were allowed to go fishing. For this reason, they started coming up with ways to violate Allah’s Law; they thus spread nets so that fish would enter on the Sabbath day and would not be able to go out of it afterwards.

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(1) Levantine coast

As such, the children of Israel disobeyed the command of Allah *the Almighty*. In such a way, Allah tells us about the deceit of the children of Israel. Allah *the Almighty* conferred a lot of favours upon them, yet they disobeyed His commands and violated His Laws. It is of great importance here to know that when Allah *the Almighty* postpones afflicting people with His punishments, He takes into consideration that He created them. In addition, He *Glorified is He* considers that because of their human instinct, they may not easily respond to the call to faith at first. Thus, He calls upon them to have faith, but their instincts refuse to respond, and so He forgives them. He calls upon them again, but they do not respond, and so He forgives them. Allah then calls upon them for the third time, but they do not respond and still He forgives them. Furthermore, even though He *the Almighty* took a solemn pledge from them that they must obey Him, they ultimately disobeyed and broke their covenant with Him. Therefore, Allah, being fully aware of the human nature, informs us of what happened with the children of Israel so that we would learn that if Allah is never bored of calling people to have faith, nor is He bored of constantly forgiving their sins. He *the Almighty* then says,

فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِم مِّيثَٰقَهُمْ وَكُفْرِهِم بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَقَتْلِهِمُ ٱلْأَنۢبِيَآءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَقَوْلِهِمْ
قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌۢ ۚ بَلْ طَبَعَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٥٥﴾

And so for breaking their pledge, for rejecting God’s revelations, for unjustly killing their prophets, for saying ‘Our minds are closed’ – No! God has sealed them in their disbelief, so they believe only a little [155] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 155)

The people of the Book broke all the aforementioned pledges and covenants. A pledge is a confirmed, clearly codified covenant. Breaking a covenant means it becomes no longer in practice; this actually is what made them entitled to be afflicted with the punishment He *the Almighty* threatened them with. They refused to acknowledge the signs that Allah sent to vindicate and advocate Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. In addition, they unjustly killed the Prophets of Allah. To justify their attitude, they claimed that their hearts were *ghulf*—the Arabic word here translated by the phrase ‘Our hearts are closed.’ This is why they could not respond to the calls to have faith. Describing their hearts as *ghulf* means that they are covered and sealed, to an effect that nothing may go into them or even out of them. In fact, they put forward this statement by way of emending what Allah said. That is, they said that no misguidance could be purged out of their hearts nor can any faith enter them. In truth, this is the ordinary nature of the disbelievers. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that the disbelievers will never have faith—whether they are warned or not. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe.’ (*al-Baqara:* 6-7)

In response to them, we wonder: Were your hearts created closed and sealed? In other words, were they created sealed, accepting no guidance and allowing no misguidance to be purged out of them? Or is it rather that you are the ones who made such a seal and stamped it on your hearts?

In the aforementioned two verses of the chapter of *al-Baqara,* Allah *the Almighty* explicitly tells that He is the One Who has sealed their hearts and cast a veil over their eyes. As for the hearts of the disbelievers, Allah *the Almighty* has sealed them so that they would not be able to recognise the path to guidance because the heart is the faculty through which one is able to recognise guidance, attain faith and embrace creeds. The veil on their hearing and eyes means that He *the Almighty* covered and closed the faculties whereby they may perceive the clear evidence that enables them to identify the Existence of Allah, *the Most High*. Thus, the heart, the abode of creed and faith, has been sealed and the ears and eyes have been veiled; but the question to be asked here is: Does this truly reflect their inborn nature? No; because if it were, we might wonder: Why did Allah specifically create them with this nature? We may also wonder: Why were those who were guided, not created with sealed hearts and veiled eyes and hearing either?’

However, each of the disbelievers justified his deviation and misguidance to himself and others by saying: ‘ Allah created me like this,’ which is sheer lying. Allah *the Almighty* —who is Self-Sufficient and in no need of an associate—will let the disbeliever adhering to his disbelief as long as he is content with it. Thus, their hearts were sealed as a result of their disbelief.

The aforementioned verses of the chapter of *al-Baqara* put forward the evidence in support of this divine law. They tell that when one turns into a disbeliever, his heart is consequently sealed. In addition, his hearing and eyes will be veiled and covered as a result of this disbelief. This point is definitely proved by the verse under discussion in the chapter of *an-Nisa'* in which Allah *the Almighty* makes clear this order, ‘…for saying “Our hearts are closed” - No! Allah has sealed them in their disbelief.’ This is a response to anyone who may say: ‘ Allah does not guide me.’ In saying so, this person does not pay heed to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* does not guide the one who abjures Him. The same holds true for the immoral and the wrongdoer. A striking example in this regard is Satan who first abjured Allah and thus Allah forsook and abandoned him.

Let us examine the wording of the Allah’s words, ‘And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge…’ In fact, the superficial understanding of the fundamental rules of the Arabic style may lead someone to wonder: Why was the particle *ma* used in this context? In response to this question, some claimed that *ma* was inessential in this context. To those who claim so, we say that it is totally wrong to say that there is a single letter or particle in the Quran that is inessential. If you say so, this would imply that the meaning of the sentence would be complete without it; such a letter or particle would thus be futile and excessive. Instead, you should say that you do not understand why this particle was used in this context; especially because now we live in an age in which our knowledge of Arabic rhetoric is rather artificial since we no longer possess natural fluency in Arabic. Indeed, if we do not learn Arabic, we will never be able to speak it. By contrast, the eloquent Arab, to whom the Quran was revealed, used to speak Arabic fluently with no need to learn from a teacher. This means that no one, for instance, taught him that the last syllable of the subject of any verbal sentence should have a ‘u’ sound accent on it, and that the last syllable of the object should have a higher accent on it. Rather, he spoke Arabic naturally and with spontaneous skill.

By contrast, we live in a different age in which foreign accents have dominated our language and filled our ears with linguistic mistakes. We have thus become in need of teaching ourselves the rules of the Arabic language in order to be able to speak it properly.

Most of the rules of Arabic grammar are inferred from the primordial sense of Arabic language that was inborn among Arabs without education. This is how the scholars of Arabic induced the rules of the language. In this vein, they discovered that there is always a ‘u’ sound accent on the last syllable on the subject of any verbal sentence; also, if the number of the subject of any sentence is dual, then the letter *’alif* replaces the ‘u’ sound accent; and that if the subject is a regular masculine plural, then the letter *waw* replaces the ‘u’ sound accent. The rules of Arabic grammar have thus been deduced from the discourse of those who spoke the language spontaneously, naturally and instinctually.

When the Quran was first revealed, the Arabs heard the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘and so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge…’ and no one of them said that it deviates from the rules of proper style. We know for certain that some of the Arabs did not believe in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and did not believe in the Quran. Therefore, if there had been a single word that deviated from the familiar rules in language, they would have pointed it out and made a huge fuss about it. The Quran, the everlasting miracle of Prophet Muhammad, challenged the Arabs, who were masters of eloquence and rhetoric, to produce even one verse similar to that of the Quran, but they were unable to do so.

It goes without saying that any deviant would always try to seize any opportunity to expose the mistakes of his enemy, but not a single Arab said that there is a single error in the Quran; a matter that definitively proves that the style of the Quran is in total agreement with the Arabic linguistic instinct.

Allah’ words, ‘and so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge…’ means ‘because they broke their pledge to Allah, We have caused them to suffer.’ But why was the particle *ma* used here? Some scholars said: ‘It was added in this context to stress the meaning.’ However, we repeat what we said before that it is totally wrong to say that there is an inessential particle or letter in the Quran; *ma* was used in this context for a specific purpose.

‘O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger to make clear to you [the religion] after a period [of suspension] of messengers, lest you say, "There came not to us any bringer of good tidings or a warner." But there has come to you a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And Allah is over all things competent. (*al-Ma‘ida:* 19) Some scholars have said that the sentence did not originally contain that preposition *min* and that it was added so that the syntax of the sentence would be coherent. In this vein, we say: ‘If the sentence did not contain the preposition *min,* it would be semantically inadequate.’ I will give the following example to illustrate this point—and Allah has the most supreme parable. Someone may say: ‘I have no money’; the word ‘no’ negates the statement that the speaker has money; however, it may be the case that he has too little a sum to be considered money. But if someone says, ‘I have no money at all,’ this means that he has absolutely no money, that he is completely bankrupt and that he does not have anything that could be considered money. Therefore, the meaning of the saying ‘…No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us or any warner…’ with the preposition *min* following the negation article is different from the meaning of the sentence without it. The meaning in the former case is that no Messenger whether in the form of a bearer of glad tiding or in the form of a Warner has ever been sent to them.

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge…’ it means that because they broke their pledge, Allah has done something to them. But if this is the case, why did scholars make all this fuss about the use of *ma* in this context? The reason is the placing of *ma* after the preposition *ba’* and before a verbal noun. This means that they have broken their pledge in every possible way. In fact, breaking a pledge or a covenant has different forms. The particle *ma* in this context is interrogative and is intended to make the statement an exclamation; that is, for what form of breaking and violating their pledge may We punish them?! We punished them because they broke a lot of covenants and pledges they gave to Us. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And so for breaking their pledge, for rejecting

Allah’s Revelations, for unjustly killing their Prophets, for saying ‘Our hearts are closed’- No! Allah has sealed them in their disbelief, so they believe only a little.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 155)

So, the question to be asked here is why did Allah *Glorified is He* frame this verse in the existing structure? In fact, the presence of the particle *bal,* the Arabic particle translated here as ‘No’, indicates that we missed an important point. For instance, when we say, ‘Zayd came to me. Oh, No! It is ‘Amr who came,’ this means that the speaker committed a mistake; initially, he said: ‘Zayd came’, he then corrected his statement: ‘Oh, No! It is ‘Amr who came.’ By saying so, the speaker negated the coming of Zayd and confirmed the coming of ‘Amr.

Allah *the Almighty* has said, ‘…No! Allah has sealed them in their disbelief, so they believe only a little.’ Normally, one would say, ‘and so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge, and their unjustly slaying of Prophets, Allah has sealed their hearts.’ But Allah *the Almighty* did not say so due to His Great and Profound Wisdom. In truth, in order to fully and perfectly understand this wisdom, we should consider the opposite of the statement ‘…Allah has sealed their hearts...,’ which is ‘Allah has opened their hearts to accept guidance.’ In fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* expressly reflected their stance. Hence, we see and fully realise the greatness of the Quran since it conveys every meaning in the most accurate way. This is why we have to ponder over and contemplate every word of it.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the reasons why He did those things to them, including their breaking of their pledges, their refusal to acknowledge Allah’s Messages and their killing the Prophets wrongfully; it is for all these reasons that Allah did not open their hearts to guidance. Therefore, Allah has sealed their hearts as a result of their denial of the truth. The existence of the particle *bal* obviously indicates that something has been negated, while another has been affirmed. The negation is clearly manifested in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has not opened their hearts to belief and guidance. As for what is affirmed, Allah *the Almighty* affirms that He has sealed their hearts as a result of their denial of the truth. This fact is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran, in the chapter of *al-Baqara,* ‘And they said, "Our hearts are wrapped."

But, [in fact], Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so little is it that they believe.' (*al-Baqara:* 88)

This verse indicates that it is not that their hearts were already sealed; it is rather that Allah has cursed, alienated, banished and dispensed with them. For this reason, He *the Almighty* has abandoned them to themselves and let desires dominate them. But why has He *Glorified is He* concluded the verse saying, 'So they believe only a little'? This statement indicates that the path to faith has not been completely denied to those people. Therefore, this sentence is put here by way of securing and allowing for a possible change. For instance, one of those may pronounce that he has attained faith and has been concealing it lest he may be afflicted with harm. But how would any of them have a chance to have faith in the light of the verse in which Allah states clearly that 'He had sealed their hearts'? Answering this question, we can say that this part of the verse obviously indicates that the door to belief is open to all humankind, yet the children of Israel who committed the atrocities mentioned in the verse, would be unable to enter that door. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَبِكُفۡرِهِمۡ وَقَوۡلِهِمۡ عَلَىٰ مَرۡيَمَ بُهۡتَٰنًا عَظِيمٗا (١٥٦)

And because they disbelieved and uttered a terrible slander against Mary [156] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 156)

Someone may wonder: Has not Allah *the Almighty* already said that their disbelief was one of the reasons why He has sealed their hearts? To this person, I say: Do not think that there is any repetition in the Quran, not even a single word because the Quran is the Speech of Allah *the Almighty* Who forgets nothing and repeats nothing without a reason. In this regard, it is important to know that disbelief is of various degrees; it may take the form of denying Allah; further, it may take the form of denying the Messages and Revelations of Allah; yet, other times it may assume the form of denying Messengers and Prophets; it may also assume the form of not believing in some of the Prophets and it may even be by abjuring some of the heavenly revealed Scriptures.

Thus, there are different forms of disbelief. The particular form of disbelief referred to in the previous verse has to do with denying the Revelations of

Allah *the Almighty* whereas the verse under discussion indicates clearly that their disbelief this time pertains to their denial of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and the terrible slander they made against Maryam (Mary). Hence, it is disbelief in Allah’s Revelations and in His Messenger.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘and for their refusal to acknowledge the truth…’is associated by the conjunction of ‘and’ with His sayings in the previous verse: ‘breaking their pledges’, ‘their refusal to acknowledge Allah’s Messages’, ‘their slaying of the Prophets against all right’ and ‘their boast: “...Our hearts are already sealed.”..’ But we notice here that Allah *the Almighty* did not use the particle *ba’* (preposition) as He did before in ‘And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge.’

This shows the infinite Mercy of Allah *the Almighty*. Any of the deeds they committed would have been sufficient reason for Allah to seal their hearts. Yet, they did not do just one deed, they committed all of them. This definitively proves that Allah is neither waiting for His servants to sin nor willing to lure them into slipping in disbelief. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* wants to endear faith to His Servants.

The children of Israel had indeed committed egregious deeds: they broke their pledge, refused to acknowledge Allah’s Messages, killed Prophets wrongfully and alleged that Allah had sealed their hearts. It is noteworthy to mention here that the fact He *the Almighty* considered all these deeds as a single crime is due to His Grace and Mercy.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells about another crime of theirs, that is, ‘And for their refusal to acknowledge the truth, and the awesome calumny which they utter against Mary.’ Here, we notice that Allah *Glorified is He* equated their utterance of a terrible calumny against Mary with all the foregoing evil deeds they committed. The reason is that they objected to the mission of ‘Isa (Jesus) even though he *peace be upon him* was one of the Messengers endowed with constancy. Indeed, their objection to his mission may have been among the reasons why some people rejected to believe in him.

The creation of ‘Isa (Jesus) is undoubtedly miraculous. It goes without saying that all human beings reproduced by mating. Yet, ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was created in a very special way, that is, not through the natural process of reproduction. So, how come they abjured him and accused his mother, the Virgin Mary *Allah be pleased with her*.

A woman may bear to be accused of, charged and described with any quality, like being a liar, a thief or even being ugly, but accusing a woman of something relating to her honour is the most unacceptable. Here Allah *the Almighty* shows that they have committed two acts of disbelief; namely, they uttered a terrible calumny against Mary, which is an act of disbelief. Then, they refused to acknowledge that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was a Messenger even though Allah has decreed that he would not be born in an ordinary way, in order to honour him and to vindicate his prophecy to the Jews who were completely enmeshed in materialism to the extent that they had said: '…Show us Allah face-to-face…'.

Allah *the Almighty* also bestowed upon them bounties for which they could not even account; He *Glorified is He* bestowed upon them manna and quails when they were lost adrift in the Sinai desert. The colour of manna is like that of cream, its taste is like honey and it often falls on tree leaves in certain environments. As for quails, they are birds that resemble *as-simman* birds(1). They used to obtain manna from trees, collect it and eat it without having to put effort into cultivating it. Notwithstanding, they said: 'And [recall] when you said, "O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions." [Moses] said, "Would you exchange what is better for what is less? Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked." And they were covered with humiliation and poverty and returned with anger from Allah [upon them]. That was because they [repeatedly] disbelieved in the signs of Allah and killed the prophets without right. That was because they disobeyed and were [habitually] transgressing.' (*al-Baqara:* 61)

They did not trust what is in the Hands of Allah; they wanted something material. For this reason He *the Almighty* drew their attention in a rather forceful way. He brought forth something at odds with all material laws; that is, the birth of 'Isa (Jesus) in a rather unusual way. Humans are born to a mother and a father. By contrast, He *the Almighty* created ‘Isa (Jesus) solely from a mother without a father. Hence, material laws have been broken. Their materialism made them oblivious to the way how Allah *the Almighty* created the first man without Father and Mother.

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(1) Quail

So, why then were people allured by the creation of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*? Since he was begotten by a mother without a father, the birth of Jesus has broken the material law that governs the birth of human beings, whether male or female. That is why ‘Isa (Jesus) irrefutably demonstrates the Absolute Capability of Allah *the Almighty* and that He is the One Who provides all causes and means of subsistence to humans. If humans want a certain effect, they should seek the causes that lead to it; but this does not apply to Allah because He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all means and causes, and He is fully able to do whatever He wills without recourse to any causes.

We know that there are four different ways to explain the creation of anything: either it came about from two existing things—this is the first explanation; it came about from the non-existence of two things—this is the second explanation; it came about from the existence of the first thing and the non-existence of the second—this is the third explanation; or it came about from the existence of the second thing and the non-existence of the first one—this is the fourth explanation. These are the four different ways to explain how things come to existence. Allah *the Almighty* did not want to make the creation of man—whom He ennobled and to whom He made everything in the universe subservient—to follow a single mechanical pattern, lest someone say that causality is the necessary condition for existence.

At that point, I stress once again that this does not apply to the Creator *Glorified is He*. This point is definitively proved by the fact that He *the Almighty* created Adam *peace be upon him* without either a father or a mother, created us all from a mother and a father, created ‘Isa (Jesus) from a mother without a father and created Eve from a father without a mother. This is the conclusion that sound reason should clearly accept—creation is not merely a function of causal relation among natural elements; it is rather, the product of the capability of the Creator. The capability of Allah is also manifest when the causes are already provided, yet there is no ability to give birth to children. A case in point is when there is a married couple, but they are unable to reproduce due to infertility. 'To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what he wills. He gives to whom He wills female [children], and He gives to whom He wills males.' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

Creation is thereby not a mere function of mechanical causes; it is rather the outcome of the Will of Allah *the Almighty* Who wants to create. Similarly, He *the Almighty* wanted 'Isa (Jesus) to be born in this way to draw the attention of the children of Israel so that they may give up the path into which materialism has misled them. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has created Jesus from a mother without a father; a point which definitively proves the Absolute Capability and Power of Allah. But the Jews did not receive this matter the way Allah wanted them to. They abjured Jesus even before he brought about his Gospel and violently opposed his Message. The evidence that they are liars is their desire to maintain their religious authority; they had a religious law stating that any adulteress has to be stoned. So, why did they not accuse Mary of adultery when she delivered Jesus? And why did they not punish her according to the law of the Torah? Why did they wait until 'Isa (Jesus) brought about his Gospel to say: 'You are a sinner and a son of a sinner'? As a matter of fact, all of this clearly indicates that the birth of 'Isa (Jesus) was an explicit sign from Allah that shocked, petrified and kept them from accusing Maryam (Mary) of committing such crime. Indeed, 'Isa (Jesus) spoke while he was an infant in the cradle, and even before Maryam (Mary) said anything about him; what had happened was too incredible for her to speak of. Furthermore, Allah has prepared her for that situation and has commanded her to stay silent when they asked her and to just point to the newly born infant in the cradle. 'Thereupon she pointed to him. They exclaimed: "How can we talk to one who [as yet] is a little boy in the cradle?" [But] he said: "Behold, I am a servant of Allah. He has vouchsafed unto me revelation and made me a prophet and made me blessed wherever I may be; and He has enjoined upon me prayer and charity as long as I live"' (*Maryam:* 29-31).

Thus, they were completely stunned in a way that even the strongest man collapsed. When antagonistic powers see this, they cannot help but become bewildered; for the truth has forcefully manifested itself and falsehood has been eclipsed. Although they had their own way, and it was decreed in their

Torah that whoever commits adultery must be stoned, they did not stone Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her.* The shock was so powerful that it even upset the balance of their envy. The stunning miracle is the discourse of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* while he was still an infant in the cradle: ‘… “Behold, I am a servant of Allah. He has vouchsafed unto me revelation and made me a prophet”…’ (*Maryam:* 30). The surprise made the strongest man collapse and his strength fade away.

This was the situation as far as the Jews were concerned, but what about the followers of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*? The fact that an infant boy was speaking in the cradle is, by all measures, a miracle. So how come that none of their books include the saying of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: ‘…“Behold, I am a servant of Allah”…’. This statement ought to have been studied carefully and should not have been overlooked. However, these words which assert the humanity of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* should have been preserved.

As a clarification, we do not intend to correct the beliefs or the creeds of others; rather, we only want the logic of faith to be clear in the minds of Muslims. The followers of other religions are free in their belief; however, it is important for us, Muslims, to properly understand our religion and the Quran so that no one will be able to distort our faith.

Allah says: ‘…And for their refusal to acknowledge the truth, and the awesome calumny which they uttered against Maryam (Mary) …’(*an-Nisa’:* 156). As Muslims, we denounce and would not even dare utter the terrible calumny about the Virgin Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her. Al-Buhtan*, the Arabic word translated as “calumny”, means a horrific lie. There may be a tolerable kind of lie; notwithstanding, it is intolerable if someone says that a pious man drank intoxicants; the one who said so knows that he is lying, and that is a horrific lie (*al-buhtan*), and anyone hearing it would be stunned. Even though the Jews were aware of a precedence of Maryam (Mary) the virgin - as decreed by the command of Allah - that demonstrated how good and upright she was, they were neither abashed, nor did they keep themselves from accusing her of this calumny. The life of Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* before giving birth to ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* had been pure and virtuous. She lived in a sanctuary completely devoted to praying for her

Creator. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* describes such calumny as terrible because it offended the chastity of Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her.* If they looked back at their history, before the birth of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*, they would know that every girl among the people of Israel was hoping to give birth to the prophet that would follow Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The people of Israel told their girls about the way in which the coming prophet would be born; thus, they knew that he would be delivered by a virgin girl. This is identical to the way they foretold the advent of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then denied him, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… But whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it. So Allah's curse is the due of all who deny the truth' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

It is due to Allah's mercy that He gave Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* preludes that would vindicate her, even in front of herself, and make her realize that the entire process happened inasmuch as Allah uttered the command: *kun* (be). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has not secretly decreed that she would deliver 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and hid this from her; rather, He *the Almighty* has provided her with physical signs—an angel came and breathed into her the pregnancy. Thus, she became aware of the material cause of her pregnancy since the angel came and breathed it into her. Allah *Glorified is He* intended this so that she would not accuse herself or suspect that something may have happened to her while she was sleeping.

Allah *the Almighty* has willed things to happen this way so that she would banish all doubts from her mind. Further, for her reassurance, she was previously foretold that she would give birth to 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* before she reached puberty. As Zakariyya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* who was her benefactor, brought her food, while she was in her sanctuary, he saw that she already had sustenance. Thus, he asked her: 'O Maryam (Mary), from where came this to you?' 'So she answered: "It is from Allah; behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning"…' (*Al-'Imran:* 37).

Logically, any woman must have a husband in order to give birth to a child. But, beyond all reckoning, Allah *Glorified is He* grants sustenance unto whom He wills. What is interesting here is that through this saying she attracted the attention of Zakariyya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* to a focal issue of his interest; that is, to have a good offspring. Concerning this issue, Allah says: ‘There and then, Zakariyya (Zechariah) prayed unto his Lord, saying: “O my Lord! Bestow upon me [too], out of Your grace, the gift of goodly offspring; indeed, You are the Hearer of all prayer” Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him: “ Allah sends you the glad tiding of [the birth of] Yahya (John), who shall verify a word from Allah, and [who shall be] honourable, utterly chaste and a prophet, from among the righteous” Zakariyya (Zechariah) exclaimed: “O my Lord! How can I have a son when old age has already overtaken me, and my wife is barren?” [The angel] answered: “Thus it is: Allah does what He wills”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 38-40).

Thereby, Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her* has encouraged Zakariyya (Zachariah) *peace be upon him* to pray to His Lord. This was a series of preludes to assure Maryam (Mary) that she gave birth to ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as a result of Allah’s Command—*kun*. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* brought the fruits of the summer to her in the winter. Once she told Zakariyya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* ‘… “Behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning”…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37), she drew his attention to the importance of praying unto his Lord to bestow upon him a child—even though he knew that his wife was barren and that he was overtaken by old age. It is well known that when a man says this about himself in this context, he means that he can no longer reproduce. Also, the subsequent Quranic verse gives us a biological precedence long before science discovered it: ‘He prayed: “O my Lord! Feeble have become my bones, and my head glistens with grey hair”…’ (*Maryam:* 4). These words are a detailed explanation of what he meant when he said that old age had overtaken him. Modern science proves that the bones are the last source for nutrition in the human body; if a man stops eating food, the fats in his body start to sustain him. Similarly, if man stops drinking water which constitutes about ninety percent(1) of his weight, the human body starts to absorb water from its own cells, muscles and flesh. There is an Arabic proverb on malnutrition saying: ‘A year burns off one’s fat; another year consumes one’s flesh; and a third year crushes one’s bones.’

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(1) This is scientifically inaccurate; the fact is, sixty to sixty five percent.

The body depends first for its nutrition on fats, then exhausts the nutrients in the flesh and afterwards gets them from the bones. Zakariyya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* implied this fact when he prayed in the verse: ‘… “O my Lord! Feeble have become my bones”…’ (*Maryam:* 4). Zakariyya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was astonished because he identified the fact that the last source for nutrition (bones) had no sufficient nutrients to supply him with the energy to beget a child.

But which part of the body do the bones supply with nutrients? It is the brain; the chief controller that governs all the faculties of the body. In the same way, as every faculty of the body is subservient to the brain, it also devotes its lifetime subservient to the body faculties; organizing their capabilities to work, think, feel and behave. As long as the brain is sound, any damage that may happen to the body could in theory be compensated.

Henceforth, they are trying nowadays to explain death clinically; that it does not happen as long as the cells of the brain are still alive; if they die, then death happens. It is quite distinctive that the chief controller of the human body—the brain— is located in the highest part of the body inside the skull.

It is as if Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her* had given Zakarriyya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* the impetus when she told him: ‘… “Behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning”…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37). Accordingly, heprayed unto his Lord to bestow upon him a child, so Allah conferred upon him what he asked for. Therefore, the fact that Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning, has been stated by Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her,* and then concretely experienced by Zakariryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*. Afterwards, the bearer of glad tidings conveyed to her the news that she would give birth to ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: ‘Lo! The angels said: “O Maryam (Mary)! Behold, Allah sends you the glad tiding, through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as ‘Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), shall have great honour in this world and in the hereafter, and [shall be] of those who are made near to Allah. And he shall speak to the people in his cradle, and in old age and (he shall be) of the righteous.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 45-46)

However, how could Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her* recognize that she would have a son without being married? Allah continues: ‘She said: “O my Lord! How can I have a son, though no man has ever touched me? ”…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 47)

The Virgin Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* grasped well the full implications of Allah’s words. When she heard that the name of her child to come is ‘Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), she realised that he will be related to her and that he will thus be fatherless. She also appreciated that Allah *Glorified is He* will only name her child after her, if he is fatherless. Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا ٱلْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا
صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فِيهِ لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ ۚ مَا لَهُم
بِهِۦ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا ٱتِّبَاعَ ٱلظَّنِّ ۚ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًۢا ﴿١٥٧﴾

And said, ‘We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’ (They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him [157] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 157)

We notice that the verse starts with the coordinating conjunction *waw* (and) to know that it is related to the previous ones, namely: ‘And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge, and their refusal to acknowledge Allah’s messages, and their killing of prophets against all right, and their boastful saying, “Our hearts are already full of knowledge” – nay, but Allah has sealed their hearts in result of their denial of the truth, and [now] they believe in but few things –and for their refusal to acknowledge the truth, and the awesome calumny which they utter against Maryam (Mary)’ (*an-Nisa’:* 155-156).

Allah *Glorified is He* enhances the crimes of the people of Israel by this new one: ‘and (for) their (boastful) saying, “Behold, we have killed, ‘Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), the messenger of Allah”…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 157). The most surprising in this saying is the phrase: ‘the messenger of Allah’; did they really say it or not? If they did say so, then this would be an evidence of their habitual stubbornness and denial of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Had they only said that they killed him (without stating that he is the messenger of Allah), their sin would be less horrific. However, if they knew that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was the Messenger of Allah and, despite this, they killed him, then this would have been a horrific sin. Otherwise, if the phrase 'the messenger of Allah' in this verse was not actually said by them, then it has been used here to indicate the sarcastic accent of their discourse.

Let me give an example to illustrate this point: if someone who is famous for his strength is beaten and defeated by another, the latter may then sarcastically tell the people: 'I have beaten the strongest person among you.' Similarly, the phrase 'the messenger of Allah' may be used here to indicate the sarcastic accent of their discourse. Otherwise, it may have been merely said by Allah to show how horrific and abysmal their deed was.

In this verse, notice that Allah *Glorified is He* only mentions the name of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* associated with 'the messenger of Allah' to show the reader how abysmal and horrific their deed was. Consequently, 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* is the messenger of Allah despite all their stubbornness; this point is specially highlighted in the context of Allah's discourse about their denial of His bounties and blessings. This association implies that Allah *Glorified is He* scorns them because He will not send a messenger to guide the people to the right path without protecting him before he fulfils his mission. Thus, Allah says: 'the messenger of Allah' as a prelude to draw our attention to their all-lying discourse. Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* tells us: '…However, they neither killed him, nor crucified him…' (*an-Nisa':* 157). The clause '…nor crucified him…' is intended to illustrate that no sooner had they assumed that they killed 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* than they declared his death to people. They did so even before they considered the idea of crucifixion. However, the truth was that they killed someone who resembled 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and crucified him afterwards. As soon as they killed this person, they spread the news that they had killed 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* even before they thought of the idea of crucifixion, but Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to decisively abort their sedition. He thus says: '… However, they neither killed him, nor crucified him…' (*an-Nisa': *157). Allah *Glorified is He* previously draws our attention to the fact that the people of Israel made a lot of fuss upon receiving the news of the advent of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Although, they knew that he would be fatherless and even told their daughters to always keep their eyes open lest any of them would be pregnant with 'Isa (Jesus); however, they uttered a terrible calumny against Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* who had been chosen for this mission by Allah *Glorified is He*. Typically, the same fuss was made at the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

The fact that there was fuss about both the birth and death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* show us that one has to be consistent in his explanations and interpretations. Once the mind considers the way 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was born, it will realize that it happened in a rather atypical manner. Similarly, when Allah informs us that He *the Almighty* rescued and lifted 'Isa (Jesus) up as the people of Israel contrived to kill him, the mind should also realize that this was also an extraordinary matter. It would be plausible if one's mind recalled that the birth of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was extraordinary, so why would not his death be extraordinary as well?

Overall, we should believe whatever Allah tells us. Just as we believe that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was born fatherless, we have to believe that Allah *Glorified is He* has lifted him up into the Heavens. The birth of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* would be rationally inconceivable if Allah had not told us about it. Similarly, the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* ought to be conceivable inasmuch as Allah tells us about it. They are one package—both his birth and death were peculiar. Thus, if we have accepted the first peculiarity about his birth, why would we not accept that his exit out of the scene was also peculiar? Therefore, we must not wonder because Allah tells us that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* exited out of life in a peculiar way; that is, whatever starts in extraordinary and peculiar ways, is bound to end in the same way.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…However, they neither killed him, nor crucified him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so…' (*an-Nisa': *157). The clause '… It only seemed to them [as if it had been] so…' is evidence that the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was an entirely extraordinary process since the killers were not sure whether they had actually killed 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. It is known that the disciples and followers of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* used to turn their heads away and hide their names. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… But it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so…' (*an-Nisa':* 157).

Narratives differed in explaining how '… It only seemed to them [as if it had been] so.' A narrative said that when people searched for 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* to kill him, he hid behind a small door *(khawkha).* In old houses, there used to be two kinds of doors; a door big enough for letting big objects into the house and a small door within this big door for the entrance of people *(khawkha).* Furthermore, there used to be big holes in the ceiling of the house called *rawzana* or *naruza*.

When they came looking for 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* (1) to kill him he went into the small door *(khawkha).* Then, another man called Tatianos went inside the door after him; but when 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* saw this, Allah inspired him to look up and he saw something lifting him up into the heaven. People outside the house felt that Tatianos took a long time; then, he went out and they perplexedly wondered if this was Tatianos or 'Isa (Jesus)? Things got mixed up especially due to the resemblance between Tatianos and 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* made Tatianos look like 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* so they killed Tatianos instead. Alternatively, another narrative says that when 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* knew that there was a conspiracy to kill him, he asked his disciples: 'Who would accept to look like me and enter paradise in return? What greater recompense the disciple could have?! Thus,'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* offered to whoever accepted this mission the greatest reward that a believer could ever ask for. It is said that one of the disciples named Sarkhas accepted the mission. Thus, Allah made him look like 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and so the Jews killed him instead.

Another narrative claims that when those who wanted to kill 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* knew that Allah has lifted him up to Heavens, they were afraid that the news would spread among people and make them believe in his message. Furthermore, they were afraid that people would try to take revenge upon those who tried to kill 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Hence, those killers brought someone who looked like ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and killed him. Afterwards, they declared that they had killed ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. A different narrative says that the one who was killed in lieu of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was one of those who betrayed ‘Isa (Jesus) for the sake of the Jews. This person followed those who contrived to kill ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. They walked into the place where he was sitting among his disciples and asked his disciples: ‘Which of you is ‘Isa (Jesus)?’ The desire to repent was then awakened inside the man, and his conscience reproached him for betraying the Messenger ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him;* the matter which led him to say: ‘I am ‘Isa (Jesus).’ None of those who planned to kill ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* imagined that anyone would respond that he was ‘Isa (Jesus) unless he was actually ‘Isa (Jesus) himself. It was quite obvious that they wanted to kill ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* thus they killed the one who admitted to be ‘Isa (Jesus), without ascertaining that it was really him. One other narrative says that someone who betrayed ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* for thirty dinars, looked like ‘Isa so they killed him instead. As Muslims, we should not pay much attention to any of these narratives. What matters is that the perpetrators actually confessed that they had killed and crucified ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

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(1) The entrance of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* in the shrine when the Jews wished to kill him.

The Quran, revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘… However, they neither killed him, nor crucified him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 157). Additionally, Allah *the Almighty* said that He has lifted ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* up to the Heavens; thus, the matter should be decisively settled for us because we, as believers, do not first examine detailed issues of belief to decide whether to have faith or not. On the contrary, we first believe in Allah the One Who revealed these specific issues and accordingly believe in everything that He *the Almighty* discloses afterwards. Since Allah settles this issue; thus, we must believe Him and the matter ends at this point.

Checking the details of this issue will not help us by any means. It is sufficient that Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…However, they neither killed him, nor crucified him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 157). This verse shows that the murderers were not sure about the identity of the one they killed. This uncertainty is expected when matters become confusing.

We often see such confusion arising in any accident that may happen in the presence of a big number of witnesses. Even if there are many people witnessing the accident, still the narratives about the event may differ. Sometimes, it may happen that narratives about an accident’s details differ, even if it was recorded on a tape. If this is the case, we should not wonder why there are different details and narratives about an event that took place in the past when there were none of the tools available in our time. Therefore, the disparity of opinions and narratives about the death of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is expected. Nonetheless, it is sufficient for us that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… However, they neither killed him, nor they crucified him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 157).

Thus, ’Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is actually alive since Allah did not inform us of his death. Additionally, we should admit that the truth is that Allah lifted ‘Isa (Jesus) up to Him as has been mentioned in the relevant verses. As Muslims, we must not think it quite farfetched that Allah *Glorified is He* has lifted ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* to the Heavens because the same idea has already happened to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that he was flown up to the Heavens, he met the Prophets and saw a lot of visions. Thus, the idea of the ascension of a human being to the Heavens while he is still physically alive is, in principle, possible. The disagreement may arise over the duration of this ascent for a few minutes, hours or even months; however, this does not contradict or negate the possibility of the ascent in principle. Therefore, if anyone casts doubts on this matter, we can answer by saying that every inconceivable matter is extensively addressed by Allah *the Almighty*. As Allah is the Merciful; He never imposes anything unless our reason can accept it. If there is a matter that our minds would find quite difficult to conceive, Allah gives us the freedom to either accept the text as is or, if found inconceivable, consider them ineffective; for these matters are never related to the essence of creed.

For instance, assume that someone said that ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was not lifted up to the Heavens and that he died. In what way will this distort the creed? This is ineffective; it neither rejects nor embraces the creed. The same holds true for the story of the night journey of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca to Jerusalem. In this concern, Allah says: ‘Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem] – the environs of which We had blessed – so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He Alone is the All-Hearing and the All-Seeing’ (*al-Isra’:* 1).

Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention anything about the ascent of Prophet Muhammad to the Heavens; only the night journey of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem was mentioned because the transportation is a terrestrial miracle. It is known that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never went to Jerusalem before this journey, as reflected in the sceptical questions delivered by the unbelievers of Mecca who wanted to embarrass the Messenger by asking him to describe Jerusalem, while they were quite sure that he has never been there before. However, he had seen the caravans owned by them on their way to Jerusalem. Thus, not only did he describe Jerusalem to them, but he also told them the news of their own caravans. When the caravans later arrived to Mecca, the travellers confirmed the verity of the narration of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, the transportation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca to Jerusalem was a terrestrial miracle that could be proved. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* explicitly mentions this: ‘Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem]…’ (*al-Isra’:* 1).

By contrast, Allah does not explicitly mention the ascent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the Heavens because no one in Quraysh, nor any of the inhabitants of the earth, saw the lote-tree that marks the end of the Seventh Heaven, the Furthest Boundary where no creation can pass. Furthermore, no inhabitant of the earth was capable of describing the path that the Prophet took in his ascent up to the Heavens.

Since the Quran is merciful towards human reason, it extensively addresses the issues that such mind would find difficult to assimilate. If there is a conceivable matter for our minds, we can possibly believe in. However, if found inconceivable, we consider them ineffective, but these matters are never related to the essence of creed or to the incumbent assignments ordained by Allah. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has authorized Prophet Muhammad to convey to us some inconceivable pieces of news, in the same way as He *the Almighty* has authorized him to inform us of the incumbent ordinances that, if obeyed, we will be rewarded, whereas if relinquished, we will be punished. As Allah says: '…Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Messenger gives you [thereof] and refrain from [demanding] anything that he withholds from you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

Abu Hurayrah *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'By the One in Whose Hands my soul is, surely 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) will soon descend among you and will judge mankind as a just ruler; according to which he will break the Cross, kill the pigs and abolish the *jizyah* (taxes imposed on non-Muslims). Money will be in abundance so that no one will accept it, and a single prostration to Allah (in prayer) will be better than the whole world and whatever it encompasses.' Abu Hurayrah *may Allah be pleased with him* then added: 'If you wish, you can recite (this verse of the Munificent Quran): "Yet, there is none of the people of the earlier Scriptures (Jews and Christians), before his death (at the time of the appearance of the angel of death), but must believe in him ['Isa (Jesus)]; and on the Day of Resurrection he ['Isa (Jesus)] will bear witness to the truth against them"' (*an-Nisa':* 159).(1)

These are matters about which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us. Thus, there is no creed-pertinent issue being rationally inconceivable, especially for Muslims. However, some people may try to disprove this issue by claiming that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'As Allah says: "O 'Isa (Jesus)! Indeed, I will cause you to die, will raise you up to Me and purify you of [the calumnies of] those who are bent on denying the truth"…' (*Al-'Imran:* 55).

This matter has been previously explained in full in the course of the reflection on the chapter of *Al-'Imran*. In this regard, we should pay attention to the role of the coordinating conjunction *waa* (and) that links the two Arabic verbs in the above verse; *mutawafeek*—cause you to die—and *rafau'uka*—raise you up.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Sometimes, it is claimed that the coordinating conjunction *waa* implies order and sequence. Yet, it only indicates connection and association; for instance, we may say that Zayd and 'Amr came. This sentence could mean that Zayd accompanied 'Amr or that Zayd came first or vice versa.

By contrast, if we say that Zayd came *fa* (and soon) did 'Amr. This sentence strictly means that Zayd is the one who came first and 'Amr followed him because *fa* implies order and sequence. Thus, *waa* may only imply association and company in a generic sense and does not qualify or describe such association. Hence, the association between causing 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* to die and raising him up to the Heavens does not indicate that death took place first. Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed a number of verses demonstrating the meaning of merely association of the coordinating conjunction *waa* such as: 'As We have taken a solemn pledge from all the Prophets; from you, [O Muhammad], *waa* (as well as) from Nuh (Noah), *waa* (and) Ibrahim (Abraham)…' (*al-Ahzab:* 7).

Allah *Glorified is He* has accepted a solemn pledge from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and He *the Almighty* associated him with Nuh (Noah) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* both. Yet, this association does not imply sequence or order as Nuh (Noah) was sent as a messenger many years before Prophet Muhammad. However, why has Allah *Glorified is He* associated the death of 'Isa (Jesus) to his ascension? Allah *the Almighty* willed that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* would know that death is inevitable and that being raised up to the Heavens is merely a transitional period.

Alternatively, there is another reflection on this verse: 'As Allah says: "O 'Isa (Jesus)! Indeed, I will cause you to die and will raise you up to Me"…' (*Al-'Imran:* 55). It is known that human is a mixture of body and soul. When Allah *Glorified is He* decrees to end the life of anyone, He immediately takes away his soul from his body without any normal physical reason or damage caused to his body. Correspondingly, a human will immediately die if someone hits him vigorously on his head because the soul cannot continue to abide in the body that has been severely damaged.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* tells 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* that He raises him up (body and soul) without causing damage to any part of his body. The Arabic verb *mutawafeek*—cause you to die—means to take you up as a whole, body and soul, to the Heavens without being killed.

As previously mentioned, 'death' and 'being killed' are clearly distinct from each other; the former happens when the soul is immediately taken out of the body, whereas, the latter is caused by the destruction of the body, leading to the separation of the soul from it. This distinction is clear in the verse: '… If he dies or is killed…' (*Al-'Imran:* 144).

When the People of Israel said that they had killed 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* has refuted their claim by saying: 'However, they neither killed, nor crucified him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so; and, verily, those who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of an absolute certainty, they did not kill him' (*an-Nisa':* 157). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* explains that they were not sure about killing the real 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. They were having doubts about the one they had killed; they were wondering whether they had killed 'Isa (Jesus), Tatianos or Sarkhas!

In this concern, Allah *Glorified is He* has described the attitude of the killers towards the reality of the identity of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as having two phases. After Allah *the Almighty* denied that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was killed, He says: '…And, verily, those who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture…' (*an-Nisa':* 157). The first phase mentioned is that of confusion and doubt, wherein the suspected alternatives about the authenticity of the identity of 'Isa (Jesus) were seen as equally plausible. The other phase is that of conjecture and presumption, wherein the killers were more inclined towards accepting the alternative of conjectures. This explains that they were doubtful at the beginning and then they started to have conjectures about the one they killed.

Ultimately, Allah *Glorified is He* denies this illusion with absolute certainty, '…For, of an absolute certainty, they did not kill him…' (*an-Nisa':* 157), that they had not killed 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. There are different levels of certainty— knowledge, eyewitness and absolute. It is well known that the absolute certainty is the confirmed matter or a fact about which one is deeply and profoundly sure and which may never be put into question by one's mind or may never change.

As an illustration, someone may describe Manhattan Island as a ten-million-population, skyscraper-city in New York. If the listener has not seen the city and but has taken this information from a trustworthy person, he may consider it as a certainty of knowledge. However, if the listener visits New York later on, the level of certainty will rise to eyewitness certainty. Furthermore, if someone takes this person on a tour all over the city, then the level of certainty will ultimately rise to absolute certainty.

Allah *the Almighty* presents two levels of certainty in the following verses: 'Nay, you will soon come to understand! And once again: Nay, you will soon come to understand! Nay, if you could but understand [it] with the certainty of knowledge you would indeed, most surely, behold the blazing fire [of hell]! In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eyewitness certainty' (*at-Takathur:* 3-7).

As mentioned in the previous verses, Allah *Glorified is He* explains two phases of certainty; firstly, Allah bestows upon us certain knowledge about the Afterlife in which believers have faith even before they see it. Secondly, when the believers are going to cross As-Sirat (the hair-narrow bridge) set over the Hellfire on their way to Paradise, they will behold the truth with eyewitness certainty. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not refer to the destiny of those who encounter the blazing fire of the hell because some of them will, afterwards, be admitted into Heaven, and others will be admitted into the hellfire. Likewise, the ones who deny and disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* will eternally be doomed to Hell and will never be admitted into Paradise. Those disbelievers are going to behold the blazing fire of Hell with the eyewitness certainty. Whereas, absolute certainty is mentioned in another context in the Munificent Quran: 'But if one happens to be of those who are wont to call the truth a lie [are used to deny the Resurrection], and [thus] go astray a welcome of burning despair [awaits him in the Afterlife] burning in Hellfire! Verily, this is indeed the absolute truth with certainty!' (*al-Waqi'a:* 92-95)

The fact that all those who are accustomed to call the truth a lie and accordingly go astray, will desperately suffer the torment of the blazing hellfire with an absolute certainty. Those people who did not witness the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* would have the certainty of knowledge that he was not killed because they have faith in Allah *the Almighty* who says: '… For, of an absolute certainty, they did not kill him' (*an-Nisa':* 157). Whereas, those people who witnessed the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* knew well that he was not killed; they only had doubts about it. By contrast, those people who killed the one who resembled 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* were absolutely certain that 'Isa (Jesus) was not killed at all, and that what happened for him was, as Allah says:

بَل رَّفَعَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيۡهِۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٥٨﴾

God raised him up to Himself. God is almighty and wise [158] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 158)

Allah, the Ever-Invincible, has risen 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* up to Himself. Thus, even though they were, unswervingly, intending on killing him, Allah has sabotaged their seditious plot, for He is, indeed *the Almighty* and the Wise. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن مِّنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِلَّا لَيُؤۡمِنَنَّ بِهِۦ قَبۡلَ مَوۡتِهِۦۖ وَيَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ يَكُونُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ شَهِيدًا ﴿١٥٩﴾

There is not one of the People of the Book who will not believe in [Jesus] before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them) [159] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 159)

The word 'none' is used in this context as a negating article and is used in another instance in the Quran; as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'As for those of you who [henceforth] separate themselves from their wives by saying, "You are as unlawful to me as my mother", [let them bear in mind that] they can never be [as] their mothers; none are their mothers save those who gave birth to them…' (*al-Mujadala:* 2).

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* corrects the mistake into which those, who separate themselves from their wives by saying: 'You are as unlawful to me as my mother's back. Consequently Allah *the Exalted* says: '…None are their mothers save those who gave birth to them. Thus, behold, they but utter an objectionable and irrational statement, and is [therefore] a falsehood…' (*al-Mujadala:* 2). In this verse, the pronoun 'none' functions as the negating word; thus, Allah *the Almighty* explains that their mothers are only those who gave birth to them.

Returning to the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions that it is decreed that none of the followers of earlier Revelations—the Jews and Christians—would fail to recognize or to attest to the truth refuting the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* at the time of his death. Another issue is that there are several pronouns in this verse; for instance, to whom does the third person pronoun 'him' in the Arabic prepositional phrase *bihi* ([believe] in him) refer? Further, to whom does the third person pronoun 'his' in the Arabic word *mawtihi* (his death) refer? Does it refer to the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* or the death of any of the followers of earlier Revelations? This confusion results from the fact that the meaning of every pronoun refers to both 'Isa (Jesus) and the followers of earlier Revelations previously mentioned in the verse. Thus, the verse may be interpreted to mean that none of the followers of earlier revelations will die unless he grasps and admits the truth, refuting the death of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Alternatively, the verse may also be interpreted to mean that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* will not die unless everyone from among the followers of earlier Revelations believe in him and grasp the truth about his death. Thus, all the nouns that precede the occurrence of a pronoun in the sentence are possible references for the pronoun. To know the reference of the pronoun, much elaboration is needed. In other cases, a pronoun may partially indicate its reference; for instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… And no long-lived has his life span lengthened, and nor is lessened, unless it is thus predestined [by Allah]…' (*Fatir:* 11).

The life of anyone who is pre-ordained to live long cannot be lessened unless Allah decrees this matter. The third person pronoun 'his' in Allah's saying *'umurehe* (his life span) partially refers to the reference because the Arabic word *mu'amir* (the long-lived) is a bi-conceptual word; one refers to the person who lives long, and the other refers to his age. However, the pronoun 'his' does not refer to the age of the man, but rather to the man himself. The meaning of the verse would be that no one could cause any human being to live a long or short life-span. In another case, the pronoun may have two possible references, as in the following verse: ' Allah is He Who has raised the Heavens without pillars, which you can see…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2).

In this verse, there are two possible references to which the relative pronoun 'which' may refer; it could either refer to the Heavens or to the pillars. Both possibilities are equally correct; the pronoun probably refers to the Heavens, and the sentence would mean that Allah, due to His Capability, raised the Heavens high without any pillars so that you can see them and recognise His Might. In an equally valid way, it can also refer to the pillars, and the sentence would mean that Allah raised the Heavens without any pillars as we know them; rather, Allah has raised the Heavens using special laws against gravity or even using unperceivable or unseen pillars. Thus, the single pronoun may have two plausible references.

Returning back to the verse under discussion (*an-Nisa'*: 159),it is noted that there are two plausible references for two consecutive pronouns. Do the pronouns refer to 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* or to the followers of earlier Revelations? Alternatively, could it be that one pronoun refers to 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and the other refers to the followers of earlier Revelations? Were this the case, which of them refers to 'Isa (Jesus) and which refers to the followers? Otherwise, could it be that there is a third implicit, indirect, contextualised reference for the pronouns in the verse? It could be indirectly understood from context that these pronouns may refer to a third reference; that is. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whose advent was foretold by 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Indeed, it has been related that Messenger Muhammad, used to say that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* will descend from the Heavens unto the earth to break the Cross and to kill the pigs. Moreover, Messenger Muhammad added that 'Isa (Jesus) will then pray behind a Muslim man.

Remarkably, why did both Christians and Jews admit the idea of killing and crucifixion of 'Isa (Jesus)? They can be excused for their thoughts since Allah *Glorified is He* did not explain the matter then, when it actually took place, as He says: 'However, they neither killed, nor crucified him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so…' (*an-Nisa':* 157). The verse indicates that they are exempted of blame for maintaining this conviction, yet they ought to have rejected the idea of crucifixion if they truly believed that 'Isa

(Jesus) *peace be upon him* was, even if partially, divine. Accordingly, Islam came forth to vindicate ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and establish the truth by refuting his death and providing proof to his alleged followers.

However, the followers of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* did not pay attention to Islam’s account of this issue, though they ought to have done so thoroughly. Inasmuch as Allah *the Almighty* recounts the story of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and the truth about his death, He sets a divine decree in the Quran: ‘Nay, Allah raised him up to Himself…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 158). The Christians do accept the fact that Allah raised him up to Himself; however, they allege that this happened after his crucifixion. On the other hand, we, as Muslims, believe that Allah *Glorified is He* has raised ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* up to Him, and that he was never crucified; we also believe in his descent back to earth. Never, before or after Christianity, did the followers of any religion go as far as imputing, even partial divinity to a messenger. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* will send him [‘Isa (Jesus)] down to earth again—after He had raised him—in order to dispel these false convictions. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* will cause him to die as any of His creatures. People should not excessively linger over this matter; they should consider the issue rationally. Just as we believe that the life of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* started with a miracle, since he was born fatherless, we ought to accept the miracle of his exit out of earth—that Allah *Glorified is He* has lifted him up to the Heavens.

If a Muslim says that ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* had died after he was raised up to the Heavens, we ask him,: what about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his similar ascension up to the Heavens in the night journey? He was indeed biologically alive when this happened. Although Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stayed for a short while in the Heavens and then returned down to the earth; however, the idea that Allah has raised a human alive up to the Heavens and then returned to the earth anew, should not sound peculiar in case one considers the infinite Power of Allah.

The dissimilarity between the ascension of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and that of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* merely arises from the difference in the period of time passed in the Heavens. However, this is not an essential difference because the principle is the same. The concern is that both of them ascended to the Heavens alive and descended down to earth also alive which is plausible and accepted according to the perspective of Islamic *Sharia*. In confirmation to this issue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Yet, there is none of the people of the earlier Scriptures (Jews and Christians), before his death (at the time of the appearance of the angel of death), but must believe in him ['Isa (Jesus)]; and on the Day of Resurrection he ['Isa (Jesus)] will bear witness to the truth against them' (*an-Nisa':* 159).

On the one hand, considering this verse superficially, someone may allege that the followers of earlier Scriptures must have already embraced faith in 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him.* On the other hand, considering this verse thoroughly, it is clear that they have believed in him only provided that he was in line with their whims and interests—rather than in the way Allah decrees them to have faith. They believed that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was perfectly or even partially divine—which encompasses the doctrine of trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). Allah *the Almighty* decrees them to believe in 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as one of His messengers, a human being and a servant of Allah. Thus, the verse under discussion means that each and every follower of earlier Scriptures, before he dies, will acknowledge that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was a messenger, a human being and a servant of Allah.

The third person pronoun (him) in the Arabic prepositional phrase *bihi* ([believe] in him) refers to 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. The other third person pronoun (his) in the Arabic word *mawtihi* (his death) could also refer to 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. In such a case, the verse would mean that every follower of earlier Revelations will believe in 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as a messenger, a human being and a servant of Allah *the Almighty* before the death of 'Isa (Jesus). This will not be achieved unless 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* returns back to the earth in flesh and blood and tells them that they have been mistaken in denying and disregarding the anticipation of the advent of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the seal of all Prophets; as much as they have been mistaken in falsely accusing his mother Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her.* To demonstrate the verity of his accounts, 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* will not bring forth a new divine *Sharia*; rather, he will pray behind a Muslim—follower of Messenger Muhammad, who has been sent to all mankind.

What will the follower of earlier Revelations say when they see ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* praying behind a Muslim? Certainly, they will declare their faith in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Alternatively, the verse could mean that every follower of earlier Revelations, who lives during the time of the ascension of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* until his return back to earth, will declare his faith in ‘Isa (Jesus) as a messenger, a human being and a servant of Allah. This will take place before the follower of earlier Revelations dies; even in the agony of death when his soul is being severed from the body.

The human worldly whims may preclude the soul from revealing certain truths, supress it from reaching absolute certainty and knowledge and turn it into arrogance and false pride. However, when the agony of death comes, everything that used to distract man from the truth or faith vanishes. At that moment, the human soul is awakened—as the reality and the truth of everything are unveiled and the delusional allure of worldly pleasures is dispelled. Then, the human starts to judge himself and then realises that he has been following his own whims and interests.

Nevertheless, such late profession of faith is of no avail such as the late faith of the Pharaoh of Musa (Moses), who said as he was on the brink of drowning: ‘… [And] when he was about to drown, [Pharaoh] exclaimed: “I believe that there is no deity save Him in Whom the People of Israel believe, and I am one of those (Muslims) who surrender themselves unto Him!”’ (*Yunus:* 90) Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Only now? When you had always been a rebel [against Us], and you were among those who spread corruption?’ (*Yunus:* 90) Thus, the late faith of the Pharaoh was of no avail at the time of his death, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘whereas repentance shall neither be accepted from those who continue to do evil deeds until their dying hour and then say: “Behold, I now repent”; nor from those who die as deniers of the truth. It is for whom that We have prepared a painful torment’ (*an-Nisa’:* 18).

Allah *Glorified is He* appends the verse under discussion by His saying: ‘…And on the Day of Resurrection he [‘Isa (Jesus)] will bear witness to the truth against them…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 159). This demonstrates that ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* will testify against those who witnessed his advent during his life span, as well as those who later ascribed divinity to him. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and when Allah says (on the Day of Resurrection): “O ‘Isa

(Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Did you say unto men, 'Worship me and my mother as deities beside Allah'?" ['Isa (Jesus)] answered: "Limitless are Your Glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [say]! Had I said this, You would indeed have known it! You know all that is within my inner-self, whereas I do not know what is in yours. Verily, You alone are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116). Allah *Glorified is He* then tells of other atrocities committed by the Jews:

فَبِظُلۡمٖ مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ حَرَّمۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ طَيِّبَٰتٍ أُحِلَّتۡ
لَهُمۡ وَبِصَدِّهِمۡ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَثِيرٗا ١٦٠

For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before: for having frequently debarred others from God's path [160] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 160)

Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He proscribed the people of Israel from enjoying a number of the good things of life because of the abysmal deeds they perpetrated and the false stances they took. They committed a lot of horrific sins, wronged themselves and others and turned away from the path of Allah; that is, they refused to embrace Islam when it was revealed. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* elaborates on the reasons for proscribing the People of Israel from enjoying certain good things in life:

وَأَخۡذِهِمُ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ وَقَدۡ نُهُواْ عَنۡهُ وَأَكۡلِهِمۡ أَمۡوَٰلَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلۡبَٰطِلِۚ
وَأَعۡتَدۡنَا لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ مِنۡهُمۡ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا ١٦١

for taking usury when they had been forbidden to do so; and for wrongfully devouring other people's property. For those of them that reject the truth we have prepared an agonizing torment [161] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 161)

What are the wrongdoings that Allah *the Almighty* refers to in His saying, 'Because of the wrongdoings of the Jews, We forbade them certain good things…'? (*an-Nisa':* 160) Wrongdoings in this context mean giving someone something to which he is not entitled and has no right. The ultimate wrongdoing is when someone associates others in worship with Allah. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…For, behold, associating others in worship with Allah is indeed an awesome wrong-doing!' (*Luqman:* 13)

Thus, there are several reasons why Allah *Glorified is He* proscribed the people of Israel from certain good things in life which were previously allowed to them. Allah always prohibits fewer things than his permitted bounties; proscriptions are indeed consistently fewer than what Allah allows. Further, whatever Allah does not explicitly proscribe is allowed and permitted. As Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say (O Muhammad): "Come, let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden you: Do not associate anything in worship with Him; be good and dutiful to your parents; do not kill your children for fear of poverty [for] it is We Who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them; refrain from committing any shameful sins, whether openly or secretly; and do not kill any human being [whose life] has been declared to be sacred by Allah, except in [the pursuit of] justice [according to Islamic *Sharia*]. That is what He has enjoined upon you so that you may use your reason and stay away from the property of an orphan, save to improve it, until he (or she) comes of age. And [in all your dealings,] give full measure and weight with justice; [however,] We do not charge any human being with more than he can bear; and when you voice your opinion (i.e. judge between men or give evidence, etc.), be just, even if it is [against] a near relative. And [always] fulfill the Covenant of Allah. These are what He has enjoined upon you so that you may remember"' (*al-An'am:* 151-152).

In these verses, Allah *Glorified is He* lists the proscriptions He has enacted; there are indeed few prohibitions if compared to the permissible bounties. This shows us how merciful Allah is towards His creatures! Allah has indeed bestowed upon us infinite and innumerable bounties and allowed us to pursue all of them with the exception of a few proscriptions, which were mainly enacted to keep man disciplined.

Some people may argue that Allah has proscribed something because it is harmful. This may very well be the case; however, we should bear in mind that Allah does not proscribe things exclusively because they are harmful. Allah may well proscribe something to discipline the people upon whom He enacts such a proscription. For instance, if someone is in charge of a family, he may forbid a child to eat a certain kind of food or may reduce his pocket money in order to punish him; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection.

But why did the children of Israel deserve to be punished through prohibitions? The underlying reason is that they used to go around the path of Allah and twist it to allow themselves to do what Allah has forbidden. Since they have gone astray and made lawful to themselves what Allah has forbidden, Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘You had the audacity to encroach on and pursue what I have prohibited you to do. I thereby have the right to forbid you to pursue some of what I used to allow you before.’ Allah intended this so that no one would mistakenly think that by pursuing something which Allah had forbidden; he took something against the will of Allah; for indeed no one can do something at odds with Allah’s will. Therefore, Allah may forbid some of what He used to allow him to do.

Forbidding may either be a prohibition of something granted through a prior divine law or a prohibition of a certain habit, natural inclination or something that one may be doing out of necessity. For instance, when someone excessively drinks intoxicants, like wine, he denies himself access to many good things in life that are permissible for them. A physician may tell them their liver has cirrhosis, and they may no longer eat or drink such and such. We thus see how man may wrong himself, and how this may preclude him from pursuing things that were originally permissible.

Similarly, whoever eats or drinks something excessively, like sugar, for instance, will have to suffer the repercussions of consuming more than their body needs of such substance. Allah’s law dictates that, when you consume more than your bodily need of sugar, you become sick and you may never consume any sweets again. We thus notice that all diabetic people crave sugar and sweets, and even though they can buy them, they are forbidden to eat them. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* tells them, ‘You have denied yourselves what Allah has allowed you through your injustice and wrong-doing.’

The same may hold for another man who has wealth, land and many servants. Those who work for him do the job of grinding wheat on his behalf; they then bake him white bread of the finest kinds of flour that is absolutely free of any kind of impurities. The man will then eat this fine bread while his servants eat lower quality bread which they also prepare for themselves. However, Allah's law will one day force him to eat brown bread; physicians will order him to eat this for the good of his intestines because he ate too much white bread that is made of the finest kinds of wheat. By contrast this man's servants will get a chance to enjoy eating this fine type of bread; it is thus due to this man's injustice that he was deprived of a good thing that he was once allowed.

Therefore, if you ever see that a man has been deprived of a bounty that he used to be allowed, you have to immediately realize that this man has pursued something that Allah has forbidden, or alternatively, abused a right that Allah had granted him. However, Allah watches over all of us and none of our deeds ever escape His reckoning. Thus, prohibition may be through an explicit law; in this case the punishment for violating this prohibition is decreed by The Legislator. In addition, something may be prohibited because it is repulsive to one's natural inclination or habits. This is often the case when the thing forbidden is something one may excessively use or abuse.

Therefore, we must carefully read this verse, 'So, then, for the wickedness committed by those who followed the Jewish faith did We deny unto them certain of the good things of life which [before] had been allowed to them; and [We did this] for their having so often turned away from the path of Allah.' (*an-Nisa':* 160)

The same holds for those who practise usury; they accept money in usury to increase their wealth. But do they want wealth and fortune for its own sake or do they want to achieve another goal? It is true that wealth or fortune is a form of livelihood. However, it is an indirect form of livelihood because it is used to acquire things of which man may avail himself, which constitutes the direct form of livelihood. We have said earlier; assume that someone who has a mountain of gold loses his way in the desert and runs out of food. Will his mountain of gold be of any avail to him in this case? Indeed, no. A loaf of bread and a glass of water will indeed be far more valuable to him than all his gold. Does the one who practise usury to increase his wealth do so to enjoy more pleasure in life? If he does so, Allah *Glorified is He* will punish him with many calamities and take away his wealth.

Whoever wants to continue enjoying what Allah has allowed him until he dies must not pursue anything Allah prohibited. If one does so, one will continue to enjoy Allah's bounties and blessings. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…and never does Allah do the least wrong to His creatures.' (*Fussilat:* 46) Man, thus does the most injustice to himself. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, Allah does not do the least wrong unto men, but it is men who wrong themselves.' (*Yunus:* 44)

In this manner, as the Jews wronged themselves, Allah deprived them of good things that they were originally allowed to enjoy. But who caused this to happen? It is humans' deeds. But what changed? Is it the essence of the good things that were prohibited or the ruling concerning them? It is the ruling concerning them; these good things became prohibited instead of being allowed. 'So, then, for the wickedness committed by those who followed the Jewish faith did We deny unto them certain of the good things of life which [before] had been allowed to them; and [We did this] for their having so often turned away from the path of Allah.' (*an-Nisa':* 160)

But how did they turn away from the path of Allah? They wronged themselves and practised usury. These are deeds that made this slip into the realm of error and falsehood. But they did not stop at this. They wanted to lead others astray and mislead them. This is the meaning of turning away from the path of Allah. Such an attitude made them incur another sin over and above their others sins. It was thus not enough for them to err, but they went further by leading others astray.

Upon hearing '…they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray; Oh, how evil the load with which they shall be burdened' (*an-Nahl:* 25) a sceptic may wonder: how could the Quran contradict itself? In one instance, it says: '…and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden…' (*al-An'am:* 164). In response to this claim, we say, every sin is reckoned in a different way. If one errs, he alone will bear the consequences of his deeds, if he does not sway others into erring. However, if one tries to lead others astray, he will bear the burden of the sin of abetting others to err.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us more about how the Jews wronged themselves: 'For taking usury when they had been forbidden to do so; and for wrongfully devouring other people's property. For those of them that reject the truth we have prepared an agonizing torment.' (*an-Nisa': 161*) We have addressed the question of usury before. They used to accept bribes; in doing so, they wrongfully devoured other people's possessions. The same holds for stealing and cheating; these are all forms of devouring other people's possessions. Whatever one takes without a due right, one takes wrongfully. Accordingly, Allah has prepared for whoever does so, a grievous suffering. Everyone has two possible places of which they may assume one in the afterlife: a place in Heaven if he believes and a place in hell if he disbelieves. Thus, no one ought to think that either Heaven or the Hellfire will be too small. Allah has created Heaven on the basis that all mankind may become believers and similarly created Hellfire on the basis that all mankind may become disbelievers.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'That will inherit paradise; They will abide therein eternally.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 11) When a believer takes his place in paradise, Allah grants him the place that was assigned for a disbeliever in the paradise if he had chosen faith.

The grievous suffering Allah readied is so painful and debasing, that it can vanquish anyone, no matter how resolute or strong they are; indeed no one can endure the suffering Allah has readied for the disbelievers in the Afterlife.

But did all the followers of earlier revelation take the same course of action? Was there not anyone among them who considered believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Was there not anyone who considered the signs and narratives that foretold the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Torah and the Bible? There were indeed some among them who did. The True Lord *Glorified is He* relates to us the true history of what happened. He thus tells us that those who are deeply rooted in knowledge among the followers of earlier revelations are an exception:

لَّٰكِنِ ٱلرَّٰسِخُونَ فِي ٱلۡعِلۡمِ مِنۡهُمۡ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ
مِن قَبۡلِكَۚ وَٱلۡمُقِيمِينَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَۚ وَٱلۡمُؤۡتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ
وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ سَنُؤۡتِيهِمۡ أَجۡرًا عَظِيمًا ١٦٢

But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you [Muhammad], and in what was revealed before you – those who perform the prayers, pay the pre- scribed alms, and believe in God and the Last Day – to them We shall give a great reward [162] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 162)

Allah *Glorified is He* did not generalize His statement that the followers of earlier revelations are disbelievers, wrong themselves and practise usury to all of them; rather, He mentioned an exception. A good example is `Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* who seriously considered following the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and knew well that the Jews tend to be corrupt and malicious. He thus said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'I will believe in you as a Messenger of Allah; I have recognized that you are Allah's Messenger with the same certainty I recognize my son; indeed, I am even more certain that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah than that my son is actually my son. 'The True Lord *Glorified is He* says the following about this situation: 'They unto whom We have given revelation to before know it as they know their own children…' (*al-Baqara:* 146). But no one will ever fail to recognize their own child. The same holds for those who are deeply rooted in knowledge; they know that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger from Allah to deliver His message. The one who is deeply rooted in knowledge is the one whose faith cannot be shaken and is never swayed by impulse or self-interests. He is indeed the one who has attained absolute certainty in his faith. 'But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you [Muhammad], and in what was revealed before you…' (*an-Nisa':* 162). The saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '…in what has been revealed to you…' (*an-Nisa':* 162) refers to the Quran. The Quran is thus the standard against which all previous scriptures ought to be measured. Accordingly, those who believe in what has been bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Allah, must believe in all that was mentioned in the previous scriptures.

A good observer of the rhetorical and stylistic scheme of the verse is bound to notice a change in the following part: '…those who perform prayer…' (*an-Nisa':* 162). The True Lord *Glorified is He* started the verse by saying: 'But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you [Muhammad], and in what was revealed before you; those who perform prayer…' (*an-Nisa':* 162).

We know well that when the regular masculine plural in Arabic is in a nominative position, its last syllable always contains a *waw* letter instead of a u-sound accent on its last letter. Further its last syllable would contain a *ya`* letter instead of a lower accent if it is either in an accusative or a dative position. Here *al-muqimin*—the Arabic word here translated as '…those who are [especially] constant in… (*an-Nisa':* 162) -is associated through a conjunction with a word in a nominative position; it should have thus been *al-muqimun*. Grammarians call this an anomalous case *kasr al-`i`rab* (an exception to the rules of parts of speech) because the word assumes a part of speech that requires a morphological form other than that which it has. This is thereby a case wherein the general rules of the parts of speech are broken. The Arabic linguistic acuity which first received the Quran noticed this grammatical anomaly.

Indeed, it used to be the case that whenever an Arab heard a linguistic mistake, he would panic. We may well remember the following illustrative story. An Arab(1) nomad once heard a Caliph giving a speech; the nomad noticed that the Caliph made a mistake, so he put his fingers behind his ears to twist and fold them to hear well what the Caliph was saying. Upon making another mistake, the Arab nomad stood up. When the Caliph made a third mistake, the Arab nomad said: I profess that you have assumed the high position of Caliph only by chance. In other words, he was telling the Caliph that he did not merit such a prestigious status.

But if a verse in The Book that is intended to challenge the eloquent contains an anomaly, the eloquent should have wondered: how come Muhammad *peace*

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(1) The Arab who heard the caliph erring in grammar while on the pulpit

and blessings be upon him said that he challenges our eloquence with this book even though it contains an anomaly that does not follow the proper rules of grammar. However, no one said this. This indicates that they realized the rationale underlying this linguistic anomaly. Allah *Glorified is He* intended it to attract the attention of every reader to the importance of the issue to follow: '…those who perform prayer…' (*an-Nisa':* 162).

But why is this matter so important? The reason is that prayers constitute the main pillar of Islam. All the other pillars relate to specific events and so happen only once or periodically. A Muslim may profess that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His messenger only once in his life time. Similarly, every Muslim is obliged to fast only one month every year. Also, one has a license not to fast if one is undergoing certain strenuous conditions. Further, one pays *zakat* (alms to the poor) every year or whenever they harvest their crops. Finally, one is only bound to do pilgrimage if he can financially and physically afford the journey. Thus, the only pillar of Islam that is practised continuously and daily is the prayer. In this respect, we may understand the following noble verses: 'What has brought you into hell-fire? They will answer, "We were not among those who prayed."' (*al-Muddaththir:* 42-43)

Islam encompasses five explicit pillars. It is possible that a Muslim may not be able to fulfil them all. For instance, a Muslim may only be able to fulfil the first two pillars; there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His messenger alongside praying constantly. Allah *Glorified is He* uses the expression: '…those who are [especially] constant in prayer…' (*an-Nisa':* 162), to show how the prayers sustain affection and closeness between Allah and every Muslim. One may worship Allah through fasting only in one month every year; similarly, one may demonstrate their obedience and love to Allah by paying *zakat* only when they receive the revenue of their land or wealth. Further, one may worship Allah through pilgrimage only if they are financially and physically capable of undertaking it. By contrast, when one prays five times a day every Muslim constantly pledges their loyalty to Allah.

We have previously said that the prayers encompass all the other pillars of Islam. In praying we profess that there is no deity worthy of worship except

Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His messenger. We also know that as much as *zakat* involves sacrificing a portion of one's fortune, prayers also involve sacrificing a portion of the time one could have otherwise devoted to work. Thus, praying involves paying *zakat* through the sacrifice of time. Similarly, in fasting one abstains from all the good of life which Allah allows them. But in prayers, one also does the same. Finally, one orients himself towards Mecca every time they pray. Thus, every time a Muslim prays, it is like performing pilgrimage.

In conclusion, Allah brought forth a grammatical anomaly in His saying: '…those who perform prayer…' (*an-Nisa':* 162) to pay our attention to the importance of this form of worship. In addition, some scholars argued that the True Lord *Glorified is He* used such an anomaly to praise those who are constant in prayer because they consistently declare their loyalty to Allah. Indeed, so long as a Muslim is sound, he should never cease to demonstrate such loyalty.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…and spend in charity, and all who believe in Allah and the Last Day…' (*an-Nisa':* 162). This asserts that all acts of worship are essentially intended to avow the servant's adherence and loyalty to their faith in Allah. Faith, as we know, is twofold. On one hand, the apex of faith is to believe in Allah; on the other hand, having faith also consists in believing in the afterlife. Allah *Glorified is He* says that the reward of those among the followers of earlier revelation who stick to this code of conduct and show this level of faith will be: '…these it is unto whom We shall grant a mighty reward' (*an-Nisa':* 162). It is a mighty reward because they chose not to blindly follow the general orientation of their people and took a resistant and resolute stance in rejecting their attempt to falsify and paraphrase Allah's religion. Further, they deserve a mighty reward because they attested to the truth of the Quran's assertion the arrival of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was foretold in the Torah. Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّآ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ كَمَآ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰ نُوحٖ وَٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦۚ وَأَوۡحَيۡنَآ
إِلَىٰٓ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسۡحَٰقَ وَيَعۡقُوبَ وَٱلۡأَسۡبَاطِ وَعِيسَىٰ
وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَٰرُونَ وَسُلَيۡمَٰنَۚ وَءَاتَيۡنَا دَاوُۥدَ زَبُورٗا ﴿١٦٣﴾

**We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Noah
and the prophets after him, to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac,
Jacob, and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and
Solomon – to Dawud We gave the book [of Psalms] [163]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 163)**

We know that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to directly attribute a discourse to Himself, He uses the first-person. The first-person pronoun has three facets. In certain instances, Allah uses *`inna*; in other instances, He uses *`innani* and in others he uses *nahnu*. In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did....' (*an-Nisa':* 163) In another place in the Noble Quran, we encounter the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'Verily, I, and I alone, am Allah; there is no deity save Me....' (*Ta Ha:* 14) In a third place, He says: 'Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 09)

Here Allah *Glorified is He* uses *`inna* because the bestowal and guarding of His reminder, i.e. The Quran, involves the manifestation of a diversified array of His attributes. When Allah addresses His creatures, He does so in a way that manifests the traces and effects of His attributes in the universe in which we live. The universe in which we live abounds with beings that serve man; these beings in turn needed a lot of might and greatness to constitute for man a proper environment in which he can live and thrive. Further, the preparation of the universe for the reception of man required much power and might. The perfection and infallibility of the universe in which we live reflects the perfection of the attributes of the Master Who fashioned it. It required infinite knowledge of things, wisdom of design and provenance to fit everything in its proper place, a capability to demonstrate that perfect harmony, and affluence and abundance to bestow different parts of the universe with different bounties. When discussing a work of His whose production involved the manifestation and the use of many of His attributes, Allah uses either *`inna* or *nahnu*. When, the

True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about Himself He says *'innani* meaning 'Behold I am Allah.' In such a case, *`ina* and *nahnu* are never used.

In the verse under consideration, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have sent revelation to you [Prophet]…' (*an-Nisa':* 163). This means that We have inspired for man, a path and course of life that enables him to properly exercise his mastery over the universe.

This means that Allah has inspired man with a path and a course of life that enables him to properly exercise his mastery over the universe and preserve his life and his world. The preservation of the universe requires knowledge, wisdom, capability and mercy. For this reason, revelation teaches us that a whole array of perfect attributes collaborated and manifested themselves in the creation of the universe. Due to Allah's mercy towards His creatures, He gave them venues to explore and recognize these attributes: 'Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby fruits of varying colors...' (*Fatir:* 27).

Allah *Glorified is He* sent down water from the sky. None of His creatures take part or have control over this process; it is only a few centuries ago that man discovered that water evaporates and then vapour forms clouds. Subsequently, cloudscondense and rain falls. Therefore, man does not interfere in the whole process. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky…' (*Fatir:* 27). Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* acknowledges the effort and role of His creatures. In this vein, He says: 'and We produce thereby fruits of varying colors...' (*Fatir:* 27). Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'I bring forth'; rather, He acknowledged that His creatures use the reason with which He endowed them to use His blessings. In this respect, Allah acknowledges and appreciates the role of His creatures in ploughing, sowing the seeds and irrigating the land to grow crops. Therefore, the Quran uses *`inni* to refer to the unity of the Essence of Allah. By contrast, it uses *`inna* to refer to an array or the totality of Allah's attributes because all of Allah's actions involve the employment and manifestation of a number or all of Allah's attributes including; His Will, Knowledge, Capability, Wisdom in addition to His Infinite Capacity to diminish or outspread things, His Exaltation, Humiliation and His Compassion. Therefore, in such contexts

Allah uses either *`inna* or *nahnu* because both have a glorifying tone. In this context, the True Lord *Glorified is He* glorifies Himself to manifest an array of His perfect attributes. For this reason, some spiritualists who tasted the greatness of Allah and the beauty of His attributes say:

Exalted be my Lord over any suspicion or doubt
He is indeed too great to be comprehended

Whenever He wants to celebrate His sanctified unity, He refers to Himself by 'inni. And whenever He wants to refer to the collective power of His attributes He refers to Himself by `inna. Upon considering this matter, we will realize that the True Lord *Glorified is He* does absolute justice toward His creatures because He made it possible for them to know Him. In this manner, Allah allowed His creatures to bring about and create things. When Allah *Glorified is He* addresses a matter that is the combined result of His Power and Capability alongside the capability of His creatures, He uses the particle *nun*—which implies glory and greatness because Allah is ultimately the One Who provided His creatures with these capabilities.

Allah *Glorified is He* created being out of nothing; however, He endowed His creatures with a creative capability to bring about and change things. But it should be kept in mind, that there is a difference between creating matter from nothing and creating something from matter that already exists. Allah *Glorified is He* created everything from nothing, yet, He endowed His creatures with the capability to use the things He created to make and innovate new tools and objects to promote the quality of their lives. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* continuously reminds His creatures of His grace and bounties. He thus says: '…so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14)

Allah *Glorified is He* thus endowed His creatures with a creative power. However, His creatures can never create anything out of nothing; they create things from the abundant elements Allah has made available for them on earth. Allah's creatures thereby create new objects from the elements Allah created. The one who created the glass which we use to drink water did not do so out of nothing. It is true that glass, as a substance, did not exist before man invented it. However, no one would contest the fact that all the elements, of which glass is made, are present in several environments, including sand and others. Reason used these elements to create a new substance from the damp sand; further, it designed tools to shape and fashion this glass. This is how man created glass from elements already available in nature. Therefore, the difference between what Allah creates and what His creatures create is that Allah creates from nothing, whereas His creatures create new things from what Allah created and made subservient to them. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* described Himself by saying: '…so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14)

Thus, humans are only capable of creating things from the elements Allah created and made available to them; you are completely incapable of creating out of nothing. Allah *Glorified is He* is indeed the best of the creators and no one's creation would ever compare to His. As much as Allah has bestowed upon His creatures a creative capability, Allah describes Himself as the best of the creators. Further, Allah's creation is as we have already said, (I am repeating this so that it would be anchored in people's minds) always soulless and inanimate. In other words, humans are incapable of creating a male cup and another female cup so that they may copulate and reproduce new small cups that may then grow into mature cups. By contrast, Allah breathes the secret of life into inanimate matter and enlivens it. For this reason, Allah is the best of creators.

If you investigate, all living beings in the universe, you will find that there is an active yet secret power present in all of them. If you consider what a human is made of, you will find that they have several senses including smell, taste and touch. Most of these senses function spontaneously and involuntarily. For instance, whenever you open your eyes, you will immediately see your surroundings, even if you do not deliberately will to see. Similarly, if you do not want to see you will simply close your eyes. But if you do not want to hear you cannot order your ears to stop receiving sounds. In the same manner, you voluntarily open your mouth to eat and taste but you do not order your nose to smell; your nose just senses whatever odours or scents are around you. Further you may voluntarily extend your hands to touch. But you cannot deliberately will to laugh; is there any organ you may order to laugh? You may come across things or events that stimulate your laughter, but you cannot order any organ in your body to laugh. Similarly, you cry when something stimulates you to cry; however, you cannot order any specific organ or sense in your body to cry. For this reason, Allah associated laughing and crying with life and associated nothingness with death. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And that it is He alone who causes [you] to laugh and to weep; And that it is He alone who deals death and grants life.' (*an-Najm:* 43-44)

Allah made certain organs in humans function spontaneously and involuntarily. No human being knows how they exactly happen or get excited. No one may keep their ear from hearing. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not command one not to hear a specific thing; however, one is commanded not to overhear or eavesdrop on others.

Our tradition did not require us to prevent ourselves from hearing anything because no one can possibly block his/her ears from hearing anything. However, one can voluntarily choose not to eavesdrop on others. Thus, Allah made His enactments in line with the capabilities of man and within the realm of what is up to him and can voluntarily choose. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when you see those who engage in [offensive] discourse concerning Our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversion…' (*al-An'am:* 68).

Here Allah *Glorified is He* used the word *ra`yt* (meet) which literally means to see; even though the context is related to the sense of hearing because no Muslim can prevent himself from hearing if other people around him indulge in blasphemous talk about Allah's messages. However, Allah ordered whoever hears such a discourse to turn their back upon those who promote it. Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us what is concealed and kept a secret. Indeed, even though a lot of things in the universe may seem to be acting agents, yet, in reality, all of them are completely submissive to the will of Allah. For this reason, spiritualists and those who have true knowledge of Allah say, 'It is due to Allah's goodness and generosity towards you, that He attributes certain actions to you, even though He is the Cause of all causes'.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator underlying everything and is indeed the Cause of all causes. The most that any of Allah's creatures may do is to orient and direct some of the active powers or energies that Allah created in the universe. It is indeed due to the greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* that the strong cannot give any of their strength to the weak. None who is strong may say to another who is weak, ‘Here! Take some of my power and strength so that you may endure life.’ By contrast, Allah invites the weak to resort to Him and promises them that if they do, He will give them strength to endure and do whatever they wish. Thus, no creature of Allah *Glorified is He* may voluntarily give their strength to another; rather, they may use the ramifications or effects of their strength to help the weak. A good illustration of this point is a situation wherein a strong person helps another weak person to carry something that is too heavy for the latter to carry. In such a situation, the strong use their strength to help the weak; however, they cannot transfer their strength or power to the weak so that they may carry that heavy object.

By contrast, Allah does not only use His Power to support His creatures; He rather, bestows some of it upon the weak whenever the latter resorts to Him. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who gracefully endowed affluence to whoever is rich or affluent and deprived whoever is poor of it; similarly, He is the One Who endows mercy to whoever is merciful, capability to whoever is capable and wisdom to whoever is wise. All these bounties are thus originally educed from the True Lord *Glorified is He*. This sums up our explanation of the use of *‘inna*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* put the verb *awhayna* (the Arabic word translated in the verse under study as inspired) in the plural form. But what is *al-wahy* (revelation)? Originally, the word means to inform or reveal to someone something secretly or in a concealed manner. But there are several ways in which one may reveal a secret or apprise another of it. Means of communications are tools used to transmit what a speaker says to a listener; alternatively, one may reveal something to another using certain signals that the others see. These signals are used explicitly and not implicitly. By *awhayna* Allah means that He informed and revealed to whoever He talks about in His discourse certain knowledge in a secret way. The word *wahy* has different meanings; every act of informing someone of something secret is a *wahy*. But who revealed secretly? Further to whom did he reveal secretly? And what was revealed secretly? To respond to these questions let us consider how Allah *Glorified is He* talked about the genre of beings. He said the following about the earth even though it is inanimate: ‘When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake. And the earth discharges its burdens. And man, says, "What is [wrong] with it? " That Day, it will report its news. Because your Lord has commanded it.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 1-5)

These verses indicate that Allah *Glorified is He* has set the lifetime of earth to end on Judgment Day. By analogy we sometimes—and to Allah belong the supreme and most exalted parables—try to estimate the life expectancy of products; we make or set them to collapse or stop functioning at a specific time. Similarly, Allah revealed to the earth, even though it is inanimate, to quake at a certain time, namely, on the Day of Judgment.

Accordingly, to help us know Him and understand His discourse, Allah *Glorified is He* left traces of His existence and power in the way He created His creatures. If one wants to wake up at 3 a.m., a time at which he is not used to waking up, he must set the alarm to go off at that time. The relation between this man and his clock is analogical to the relation between Allah and His creatures. Allah created the earth and set it to explode at a certain time in accordance to the laws of its constitution. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* set certain animals to follow specific courses of actions: ‘And your Lord inspired to the bee, "Take for yourself among the mountains houses, and among the trees and [in] that which they construct.’ (*an-Nahl:* 68) Allah *Glorified is He* has thus secretly inspired bees to behave in a certain manner and He made such behaviour part of its instinct. There is a difference between matters that a being instinctually does and matters that it voluntarily chooses to do. Instinctual matters are rather mechanical and cannot be changed; however voluntary decisions can be reversed and modified.

A good example of mechanical structures is that of computers which man uses to store data. This machine cannot say to the one who feeds it with data, ‘do not store in me such packs of data.’ Further, it cannot keep anyone from retrieving the data stored in it, if this person knows how to use it. Computers are incapable of choosing or making decisions.

By contrast, human reason is characterized by its capacity to select information and knows how to release this information in the relevant situations. Further it consciously determines what things should be kept as a secret and which could be revealed to others. Human reason may even go as far as choosing to lie or tampering with facts and changing them. However, a computer or an electronic mind is incapable of doing so; it is only capable of retrieving the data that was stored in it. Accordingly, man is more rationally developed.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the universe, He endowed every being with an instinctual structure that befits its functions and purpose in life. In this vein, He endowed man with the capacity to freely choose between different alternatives. By contrast, He ruled that all others beings would mechanically follow their instincts. A being that is wholly governed by its instinct cannot choose anything; thus, its life follows a fixed, unchanging law.

This mechanical nature is quite evident in the cosmological order: in the heavens and the celestial spheres, the earth and the planets. All these follow the laws that Allah has set for them. The same also holds for terrestrial beings like plants. One may plant a tree. As this tree grows, the capillaries of its roots may then spread downward in the land to absorb minerals and other nutrients. However, every plant, in accordance with the biological structure Allah set for it, absorbs only a specific assortment of nutrients; thus, a plant may benefit from a nutritive substance that is of no avail to another.

Botanical scientists discovered these facts through their study of the growth of plants. Some of them, whose faith is weak, or those who are not always conscious of Allah, may say, ‘plants can feed themselves due to the theory of fine capillary tubes.’ This theory—as we know—states that liquids rise in capillary tubes whose diameter does not exceed that of a hair; the liquid then rises above the surface of the container in which it is originally placed although, as we all know, liquids settle at the same level in any container in which they are placed. When we place these capillary tubes in a vessel that contains liquid, the liquid rises in them above the level at which they originally settled in the vessel. The reason is that the pressure on the water inside these tubes is way less than that on the water in the vessel; scientists thus assumed that plants nourish themselves in this manner.

We say to these scientists: but what about the fact that plants select certain nutrients from the soil and leave out others. Liquids rise in vein-tubes irrespective of the nutrients they may contain. It is because you are not conscious of Allah that you claim that nature does so; you thus overlook a very important fact; that our Lord caused each plant to selectively choose a different combination of nutrients from the same soil; if plants depended only on the phenomenon of capillarity they would all use the same set of nutrients indiscernibly. The True Lord *Glorified is He* thus rightly says: 'Glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*. Who creates, then makes complete. And Who makes (things) according to a measure, then guides (them to their goal).' (*al-A'la:* 1-3)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who determines the nature of all beings and guides every being to the fulfilment of its purpose. In this vein, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… [all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have, We favoured above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast] Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who use their reason!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* endows every plant with a specific instinct that is different from any other member of its species. In this respect, even though a peasant may plant paprika beside sugarcane and then plant pomegranate beside both, each of them will taste differently. Paprika would be chilly and spicy; sugarcane would be sweet and the taste of pomegranate would be a mixture of both sweetness and sourness; the last would be different from the first two. These different tastes would be there if plants exclusively depended in their nourishment on the physical phenomenon of capillary tubes. But another scientist may contend that this difference in taste is due to natural selection. At the stubbornness of such a scientist we wonder, why do you not admit that such selection is caused by Allah instead of going around in vicious circles?

To sum up *al-wahy* is to reveal something to someone in secret. But secret revelation does not always have to be through an agent; sometimes, certain characteristics or features stay latent in something and then reveal themselves at some point or when a specific event happens. This is analogous to the beep of an alarm that goes off at a set time. The following saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives an example of how He inspired animals: 'And your Lord inspired to the bee, "Take for yourself among the mountains houses, and among the trees and [in] that which they construct.' (*an-Nahl:* 68)

It is quite thought provoking that an American scientist who devoted his life to the study of the life cycle, species and environment of bees discovered that bees first inhabited and started producing honey in hives found in mountains. Subsequently, man started to discover beehives in high trees that he did not grow; finally, man managed to domesticate and breed bees and build special gardens, hives and farms for them. This scientist never read the Quran or learnt about the three kinds of beehives it describes. However, this scientist empirically studied the life cycle of bees in a robust manner and arrived at the same result the Quran had foretold centuries ago. Indeed, in almost every century and age a scientist discovers new facts that vindicates and attests to the truth of the Quran and its claims. However, Allah's revelation and inspiration to man assumes a different form; the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And so, [when he was born,] We inspired [thus] the mother of Musa (Moses), "Suckle him [for a time], and then, when thou hast cause to fear for him, cast him into the river…"' (*al-Qasas:* 7).

No messenger went to the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to advise her. However, she knew for certain that she had to cast her son into the river to save him. Muslim scholars have put a lot of effort to make the meaning of *al-wahy* more accessible to us; they said that revelation is a kind of certain knowledge about something that one suddenly acquires without knowing its source; such knowledge is always supported by evidence that it is inspired by Allah. For this reason, one does not seek rational clues to accept or believe in it. A good example of this form of revelation is Allah's discourse on the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* quoted above: 'And so, [when he was born,] We inspired [thus] the mother of Musa (Moses), "Suckle him [for a time], and then, when thou hast cause to fear for him, cast him into the river…"' (*al-Qasas:* 7). By Allah, would a woman in the whole world comply if we told her to throw her child if she is worried about him? Of course, she would not! But the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* followed the revelation of Allah and took it for granted. As soon as Allah's revelation entered her heart and He secretly inspired her, she believed it; further, since this revelation was from Allah, the human soul received and embraced it with certainty and faith and Satan was not capable of casting doubts in it about its truth. Thus, the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* cast her son into the river after she had suckled him. But Allah wanted to comfort her and assure her about the destiny of her son. He thus explained to her that He has issued His orders to the river to cast the child ashore and arranged that his enemy, namely the Pharaoh of Egypt, would pick and bring him up in his palace. Similarly, Allah inspired the disciples of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [remember] when I inspired to the disciples, "Believe in Me and in My messenger `Isa (Jesus". They said, "We have believed, so bear witness that indeed we are Muslims [in submission to Allah]."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 111) Allah also inspired the angels. For instance, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '[Remember] when your Lord inspired to the angels, "I am with you, so strengthen those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved…"' (*al-Anfal:* 12).

Allah's revelation encompasses all species whether these species are invisible like the angels or visible and perceptible like humans like, the disciples of `Isa (Jesus) and the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*. Allah *Glorified is He* says 'We inspired' to bring to our attention that Allah is not the only One Who inspires and reveals matters in secret. Satan and devils do the same with their followers: 'And indeed do the devils inspire their allies [among men] to dispute with you. And if you were to obey them, indeed, you shall most surely be polytheists.' (*al-An'am:* 121)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says the following about Satan and the devils: 'And thus, We have made for every prophet an enemy - devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion. But if your Lord had willed, they would not have done it, so leave them and that which they invent.' (*al-An'am:* 112)

Accordingly, *al-wahy* consists in secretly inspiring or revealing something to someone. It is not restricted to the True Lord *Glorified is He;* rather, revelation could be from Allah, Satan and the devils or from those who support and follow Satan. Further, revelation and inspiration may be directed to inanimate things, animals, angels or humans.

Thus, if we would like to put forward a comprehensive definition of revelation we would say, revelation in language is to reveal or inspire something to someone secretly. This revelation could be either from Allah or from the devils. It could also be directed to any being on earth whether animal or human being. Further the subject matter of this revelation could either be good or evil.

The word *wahy* can bear any of these senses. Accordingly, if it is used in a generic manner it can be construed to indicate any of them. But in Islamic Law, it is used in the context of only referencing Allah's secret revelation and inspiration to His messenger. The same holds for the meaning of *salat* (prayers). Linguistically, it may mean invoking Allah or asking Him for something; it may also mean blessing the name of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* whenever his name is mentioned; it could also refer to the prayers enacted on us whether these are deeds or sayings. However, the term has been coined by the scholars of Islamic Law to refer to the five daily prayers and the special movements and statements they involve, starting by saying, 'Allah is greater than all', to initiate one's prayers until one terminates their prayers by saying, and 'May Allah's peace and mercy be upon you.'

'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*(1) said the following about this comprehensive sense of *salat*. He once asked Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* 'How have you been today?' So Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* answered, 'I like allurements, hate the truth, pray without performing ablution and feel that what I have on earth is more than what Allah has in the heavens. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was infuriated. Indeed, if it had not been for `Ali, who suddenly entered, 'Umar could have taken a decision against Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with them*. 'Ali asked 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them* 'What is the cause of your anger, Commander of the Believers?' 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'I have asked Hudhayfa about how he has been today and he said such and such things.' So 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, "O Commander of the Believers, by liking allurements, he meant that he likes his wealth and his children, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…Your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation…' (*al-Anfal:* 28). By hating the truth, he meant that he hates death which is an uncontested truism; indeed, who among us likes it commander of the believers? By praying without performing ablution, he meant that he blesses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* whenever his name is mentioned. Finally, by claiming that he possesses on earth what Allah does not possess in the heavens, he meant that the he has a wife and a child on earth whereas Allah does not have either in the heavens.' Thus, Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* used allurements, death and prayers in a special sense. I have deliberately adduced this example to demonstrate the distinction between linguistic generic meanings of words and their specific meaning in the context of Islamic Law.

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(1) *'Umar Allah be pleased with him asking, 'How are you Hudhayfa'? and the strange answer of Hudhayfa which was then explained by `Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah be pleased with them*

This also shows the difference between *al-wahy* as a term and a concept in Islamic Law and its linguistic meaning. The linguistic meaning of *al-wahy* is to reveal or inspire something to someone secretly. However, as a religious term, *al-wahy* refers to the revelation of Allah to His messenger. All other forms of revelation and inspiration are educed from the generic linguistic sense.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are explaining: 'Behold, We have inspired thee [O Prophet] just as We inspired Nuh (Noah)…' (*an-Nisa':* 163). The word *awhyna* indicates that Allah made a secret revelation to a messenger of His. To understand why Allah's revelation was secret, we need to bear in mind that Allah's attributes are absolutely perfect and that all creatures are subordinate to the power of Allah *Glorified is He*. Accordingly, no one can be directly in contact with Allah because He is absolutely sublime. Even the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could not bear to be in such contact. For this reason, Allah used the angels, who are luminous creatures, as intermediaries to communicate His message to His messengers. Further, Allah prepares His messengers for the reception of His revelation even before He sends it down to them through angels.

There is an hierarchy of relation. The highest being, namely, Allah, initially communicates His discourse to the angels and then the latter reveal it to a selected set of His creatures. This selected set, i.e. the Messengers, have been fashioned by Allah to receive His revelation. Subsequently, those messengers deliver Allah's message to other humans. This chain is intended to alleviate the awe of being in direct contact with Allah; nonetheless, messengers are always shaken in awe when they receive revelation from the angels. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said the following about his first encounter with the angel of revelation, ‘The Truth was revealed to me when he was in the cave of Hira`. Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to me and said, ‘Read!’ So, I answered, ‘But I cannot read.’ Gabriel grabbed and held me so close to the extent that I was exhausted; he then let go of me and said, ‘Read!’ So, I replied, ‘But I cannot read.’ So, he grabbed and held me so close until I was exhausted again. He then let go of me and said, ‘Read!’ So, I answered, ‘But I cannot read.’ So, he grabbed and held me so close for the third time and then let go of me. He then said, ‘Read in the name of your Lord, who has created; created man from a clot. Recite and your Lord is the most Generous.’(1) (*al-‘Alaq:* 1-3)

After these events took place, the Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* returned to his wife Khadija bint Khuwaylid *Allah be pleased with her.* His forehead was soaking with sweat and his heart was pounding. He then said: wrap me with clothes, wrap me with clothes. They then covered and wrapped him with clothes until his fear was dispelled. However, what happened was natural. For Gabriel *peace be upon him* is an angel who encountered Muhammad ibn `Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him* who is a human being. This had to happen so that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would get used to receiving revelation from Gabriel *peace be upon him*.

However, did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* continuously receive revelation in this state of trembling and suffering? No; Allah’s revelation would sometimes stop for a while. In such cases, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would long for it. Further Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* became capable of enduring the exhaustion involved in receiving revelation. However, his forehead continued to soak with sweat whenever he received revelation. He also used to find difficulty in moving when this happened. In addition, if he received revelation while he was riding an animal, it would slow down and cry out in pain. Similarly, whenever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received revelation while he was leaning his thigh on the thigh of one of his Companions, the weight of Prophet Muhammad would increase to the extent that it would almost break the leg of his Companion. Prophet Muhammad used to bear all these hardships and forms of fatigue during the reception of revelation. The reason is that a chemical change used to happen in the body of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he would realize that what he was receiving was not an ordinary discourse but rather a discourse miraculously revealed by Allah.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*

When revelation descended upon the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* it used to have a jingle sound like that of a bell; this sound heralded that revelation was due and about to start so that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prepared himself for its reception. When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was initially enervated by the reception of revelation, Allah *Glorified is He* due to His mercy caused revelation to stop so that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would long for revelation due to the sweetness of what was revealed to him. This longing, in turn, made him prepared for and willing to go through the troubles entailed in receiving revelation. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ceased to receive revelation for a while, his adversaries said, 'The Lord of Muhammad abandoned and alienated him.' They only admitted that Muhammad has a Lord in this situation; they did so after they had denied the truth of the claims of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. They thus failed to be intelligent enough not to exploit this situation and express their view about it in a way that does not contradict with their prior stance. The truth was that the True Lord *Glorified is He* saw the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was exhausted and enervated upon receiving revelation; He thus suspended revelation for a while so that the Messenger of Allah would long for the sweetness he found in revelation and prepare himself for enduring the pain entailed in its reception.

The Prophet's longing for and love for revelation completely alleviated any pain he may have experienced in receiving revelations. Indeed, when one of us is on the way to visit someone they like, they may be willing and may not mind to walk through a valley of mud or on thorns until they reach this person. Accordingly, the fact that revelation stopped for a while was intended to make Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* long to and crave for revelation and so that every one of us would pay attention to the following saying of Allah *Glorified is He* when they read the Quran: ‘And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life].’ (*ad-Duha:* 4)

This means that the life to follow will please you. Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have we not opened up thy heart, and lifted from thee the burden that had weighed so heavily on your back? And [have We not] raised for you your reputation?’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1-4)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* thus addressed this matter. He wanted to tell the believers, not to think that the Lord of Muhammad—as they say—has alienated and abandoned him. No. Rather, He suspended revelation to him for a while to prepare him for the reception of more revelation. Allah thus gave them an example from the universal laws they observe every day to show that the change in the flow of revelation is quite normal; yet, their disbelieving ways blinded both their sight and insight. In this respect Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘By the morning brightness; and [by] the night when it covers with darkness; your Lord has not forsaken thee, nor has He become displeased with you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-3)

We need bear in mind that Allah *Glorified is He* chooses to swear by whatever He wills about whatever He wills. The morning brightness is at the beginning of the day; it is the time for working, labouring, effort exertion, earnest actions and exhaustion. By contrast, night and nocturnal hours are the time for comfort and rest.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains that if you consider the law governing the sequence of day and night, you will realize that Allah made daytime for working and night-time for resting. Similarly, the fact that revelation stopped for a while was intended as a period of respite so that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would restore his energy and prepare himself for the reception of new revelations. The True Lord *Glorified is He* swears: ‘By the morning brightness; and [by] the night when it covers with darkness; your Lord has not forsaken thee, nor has He become displeased with you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-3) Does the fact that the night follows the day, indicates that Allah has cursed mankind and deprived it of daytime? No; night is a bliss that Allah conferred upon mankind so that people may rest and prepare themselves for a new day.

Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the verse under consideration when a Jew once asked the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask Allah *Glorified is He* to reveal to them a book from the heavens: 'The People of the Scripture ask you to bring down to them a book from the heaven. But they had asked of Musa (Moses) [even] greater than that and said, "Show us Allah outright…" (*an-Nisa':* 153).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* ordered the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to explain to them that Allah has sent down revelation to him as much as he sent down revelation to previous messengers. Did you not suspect that Allah *Glorified is He* sent down revelation to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*? You have definitely suspected and cast doubt upon the fact that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* received revelation from Allah. However, let us set aside your suspicions and what you deny and consider instead what you believe in. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Nuh (Noah) and the prophets after him…' (*an-Nisa':* 163).

Thus, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not the first to receive revelation: 'We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Nuh (Noah) and the prophets after him…' (*an-Nisa':* 163). Scholars often bypass this matter rather quickly and inattentively. However, let us ponder over it for a while. We say this statement may falsely give the impression that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was the first to receive revelation. The truth is that Adam *peace be upon him* was the first to receive revelation long before Noah *peace be upon him* did. But there is a diametrical difference between the revelation Adam *peace be upon him* received and the revelation the Prophets received after him.

A good example is Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. Nuh (Noah) was sent to warn his people against Allah's punishment and to promise them His mighty reward should they obey Him. As for Adam *peace be upon him* his people came forth after him. For this reason, Allah did not advocate Adam with a miracle because he is the father of all mankind. Children always imitate their fathers; even the children of atheists mimic their fathers. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to Adam *peace be upon him* His saying: '…there shall most certainly come to you, guidance from Me: and those who follow My guidance need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 38) Sending guidance to Adam *peace be upon him* in this context, refers to the coming of revelation.

But why was Nuh (Noah) mentioned first in the verse? The reason is that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was sent to a nation that was already there. For this reason, he needed to be advocated by a miracle that confirms the truth of his message. Allah sent Nuh (Noah) to all mankind, as there was no one on earth except them. But Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all mankind, as Islam is the seal of all religions. There were other nations besides his own when he was missioned. ‘We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as we did to Nuh (Noah) and the prophets after him, to Ibrahim (Abraham)…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163), why did Allah say, ‘prophets after him’, (after Nuh [Noah])? And why did Allah name the Prophets after mentioning ‘…revealed to Abraham’?

Scholars reasoned that this style stresses the honour of those prophets. ‘…to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya`qub (Jacob), and the Tribes, to `Isa (Jesus)*, Ayyub* (Job), Yunu*s* (Jonah), Harun (Aaron), and Sulaiman (Solomon) — to Dawud (David) We gave the book [of Psalms].’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163). It is as if the True Lord is telling Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Jews ask you to have a book sent down to them from the Heavens, say to them, ‘ Allah inspired me as much as He inspired previous prophets; I am thus not a peculiarity.’ Still, ‘And even if we had sent down to you, [O Muhammad], a written scripture on a page and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, "This is not but obvious magic.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 7) Indeed, every denier insists on his denial. They were not arguing to reach the truth; they were just sophistically contending falsities.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted* thus lists the names of the Prophets whom He inspired: ‘…to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya`qub (Jacob), and the Tribes, to `Isa (Jesus), Ayyub (Job), Yunus (Jonah), Harun (Aaron), and Sulaiman (Solomon) — to Dawud (David) We gave the book [of Psalms].’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163) Here, we notice that Allah mentioned revelation in general. However, when He mentioned Dawud (David), He explicitly said that He named the revelation He sent upon him, the Book of Psalms even though He had not mentioned any of the names of the books that he revealed to the previous Prophets, like the Torah in the case of Musa (Moses), or the Bible in the case of ‘Isa (Jesus). The reason why He mentioned the book that was revealed to Dawud (David) was because itincluded all the universal laws common with the other laws, i.e. praising Allah and exalting Him. There were no legal rulings in the Book of Psalms.

But someone may argue that no legal rulings were enacted on `Isa (Jesus) in the Bible. We say this may be the case; but the Bible complements the Torah. It thus only addressed spiritual aspects because the Torah that existed before it contained all the legal rulings. Therefore, despite the major differences between the Jews and Christians on the issue of `Isa (Jesus) and his mother, they agree as much as they call the Torah and the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments respectively. They also consider them a single book calling it 'the sacred book.'

But what is the meaning of *az-zabur* (Book of Psalms). It is derived from the term *zabr al-bi`r* which refers to the following process. When people dug wells to obtain water, they were often afraid that dirt would fall back and shut the hole of the well. For this reason, they used to make walls on the sides coated with either stones or, as they do in the Egyptian countryside, with cement. The term *zabr al-bi`r* was then used in a generic sense to refer to any kind of repairs done to wells. The term later transcended this usage. For instance, they called reason *zabr* because it makes sense of matters. Likewise, walls on the side of a well keep dirt from falling inside the well, exactly as reason protects man from going astray. Reason bridles desires from leading man astray and misguiding him. Thus, those who think that the function of reason consists in haphazardly unleashing the mind to irresponsibly produce and pursue false ideas are mistaken. We tell them, you must first understand the meaning of the word reason for you to properly fathom its function. Subsequently, the True Lord says:

وَرُسُلًا قَدْ قَصَصْنَٰهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِن قَبْلُ وَرُسُلًا لَّمْ
نَقْصُصْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ ۚ وَكَلَّمَ ٱللَّهُ مُوسَىٰ تَكْلِيمًا ﴿١٦٤﴾

to other messengers We have already mentioned to you, and
also to some We have not. To Moses God spoke directly [164]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 164)

The prophets of Allah mentioned in the previous verse are not all the prophets in whom every Muslim is required to believe. We were taught at

Al-Azhar University that we have to believe in twenty-five prophets. One of the poets mentioned those prophets in the following verses,

‘We have proof that there are eight prophets.

After the ten we mentioned in addition to the seven remaining:

Idris (Enoch), Hud (Eber), Shu’aib (Jethro), Saleh (Shelah) as well as Dhul Kifl (Ezekiel), Adam and then the seal of all prophets, Muhammad.’

In the chapter of *al-An`am*, the True Lord says: ‘And that was our (conclusive) argument which we gave Ibrahim (Abraham) against his people. We raise by degrees whom We will. Indeed, your Lord is Wise and Knowing. And we gave to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Isaac) and Ya`qub (Jacob) - all of them We guided. And Nuh (Noah), we guided before; and among his descendants, Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) and Ayyub (Job) and Yousef (Joseph) and Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron). Thus, do we reward the doers of good. And Zakariyya (Zechariah) and Yahya (John) and `Isa (Jesus) and Ily*as* (Elias) - and all were of the righteous. And Ismail (Ishmael) and Alyasa` (Elisha) and Yunus (Jonah) and Lut (Lot) - and all of them we preferred over the worlds.’ (*al-An‘am:* 83-86)

Eighteen Prophets are listed in these verses. In addition to these, there are seven others; Idris (Enoch), Hud (Eber), Shu’aib (Jethro), Saleh (Shelah), Dhul Kifl (Ezekiel), Adam and Muhammad. Allah thus mentioned twenty-five Prophets in the Quran. However, the verse that precedes the verse under discussion has not provided the names of these twenty-five Prophets. Allah mentioned some of the names of the prophets in the chapter of *al-An`am* and others in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara.*’ Thus, the True Lord says: ‘and (We sent) messengers about whom we have related (their stories) to you before and messengers about whom we have not related to you. And Allah spoke to Musa (Moses) with (direct) speech.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 164) This verse indicates that there are more prophets than the twenty-five. The True Lord mentions in the Quran: ‘And there was no nation but that there had passed within it a warner’ (*Fatir:* 24).

This verse indicates that Allah only told us the names of the most prominent prophets whose nations were larger than those of the others, or exerted intensive effort in communicating their messages to them, For instance, Allah sent some prophets to nations whose population was more than a hundred thousand people like Yunus (Jonah): 'And We sent him to [his people of] a hundred thousand or more.' (*as-Saffat:* 147) The old world lived in isolation from each other. People did not possess the means whereby they could communicate. Thus, every nation suffered a specific set of ailments and was characterized by a special demeanour. For this reason, a different prophet had to be sent to every nation to treat the specific set of ailments it suffered. Every prophet was in turn required not to mention the ailments that plagued other societies so that they would not be transmitted, by example, to the nation to which he was sent. The True Lord knows through His eternal knowledge that His creation will use the capacity for thinking and innovation with which He has endowed them to investigate the universe and innovate means of communication, and turn the world into a single village. When this happens, whatever happens in the East will immediately be known in the West. Further, social and political ailments will be spread in the world. Hence, there will be a need to send a single Prophet who can deal with the totality of ailments and problems the world suffers; this was the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the seal of all prophets.

The True Lord aptly uses the verb 'related' in the context of telling us about the history of prophets for a good a reason. It indicates that the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* has nothing to do with the details of these stories; rather, the events involved in every prophet's story are put forward in context as they happened. Further, Allah eternally knows that His creation will innovate the art of storytelling.

It is quite peculiar that people call it the art of storytelling. The novelist often composes imaginary tales that do not have anything to do with reality. In real history writing, its authors add elements from their imagination to the actual events upon the assumption that these are the requirements of perfecting the art of storytelling. They thus lose sight of honest reporting. For this reason, the True Lord explains to us that the stories of the prophets besides all other stories in the Quran are all true, real and actually happened.

The stories of the Quran relate to us true events, as reported by the True Lord, not any of the creation. There is indeed a difference between the confidence one may have in the narrative of the True Lord Who only relates stories to His creation to bid them to stick to His path, and the confidence one may have in a narrative related by any of Allah's creation for any purpose, whether it is entertainment or anything else. Most of the stories written by man abound with things made up by human imagination like the novels of Georgie Zeidan about Islam and the prophets. When he was asked why He added things from his imagination to the actual stories, he answered in the traditional way and said, 'I did so to serve the plot of the stories.'

Accordingly, we must distinguish between the narratives relayed to us by fellow humans and those put forward by the True Lord**.** We must always keep this distinction in mind so that no one may ever dare to add something from his imagination to a narrative conveyed to us in the Quran. If this happens, someone may one day have the audacity to say that narratives are the same and that nothing sets apart the one found in the Quran from any others. The Quran is not written by an author; it is rather, the speech of the Sublime Creator, Who relates past stories to teach and guide us to the righteous path. We should always heed the fact that Allah eternally knows what happens and will happen in His universe. He said: 'We relate to you, [O Muhammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Quran although you were, before it, among the unaware.' (*Yusuf:* 3)

Allah related the best of stories in the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he is the one who will deal with all mankind including the nations to whom prior prophets were sent. In so far as this is the task of the Prophet Muhammad, Allah informed and explained to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his nation the story of every prophet with his nation, and the key events that happened during his life including the ailments of that society. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* —as we know— and his nation after him are tasked with preaching the path of Allah to all mankind. Hence, they must be aware of the truth about the prior prophets and their respective societies. Allah says: 'We relate to you, [O Muhammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Quran although you were, before it, among the unaware.' (*Yusuf:* 3)

Accordingly, those stories inform of the undertaking of every prophet. Historiography—as we know—is connecting events with the times when they happened. This may assume different forms. We may focus on the events and then mention the people who were involved in these historical events. Alternatively, we can write the history of a specific period by talking about the key figures who lived in that period and then mention the main events that took place in their lives. The word biography indicates a specific person is the centre of the story and the main events that occurred around him. In contrast, when we make a certain event the centre of the story, the focus is primarily directed to the event with less focus on the people involved in it.

Here is a good example; when we write the history of *Al-Hijra*, this event is the centre. In this wake, we talk about how the Prophet Muhammad travelled with Abu Bakr,’Umar ibn Al-Khattab and other Companions *Allah be pleased with them* imigrated with them. The event of imigration from Mecca to Medina and its details constitute the focus of all the historical narratives about *Al-Hijra*.

By contrast, when we write the biography of a specific person, like the biography of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the life of the Prophet Muhammad constitutes the centre of attention and discussions because we are primarily concerned with relating the events of his life.

The same holds for the stories of the prophets the Quran relates. They are the centre of the narrative, and then the events they lived through are mentioned. The messages sent from the heavens to mankind to relay to them the path of Allah consist of two main parts. Firstly, a theoretical part which The True Lord wants to impart to His creation through His Prophets. This part often consists in a body of knowledge that they should learn. Secondly, any message always has a practical side. The True Lord wants His servants to act and live their lives in accordance with the knowledge He imparts to them. Indeed, acquiring divine knowledge is not a luxury; rather, it is a responsibility to apply what one learns by adhering to the set of do’s and don’ts which Allah enacted. If one was only required to know what Allah wants to impart him without having to do anything based on such knowledge, the quest of life would be rather easy.

When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the disbelievers of Quraysh to profess that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah, they resisted because they knew that such a profession was not a mere verbal utterance. They knew well that such a profession involves a set of requirements. They also knew that if they make such a statement; they would be acknowledging that no one is entitled to absolute mastery or lordship except Allah. This in turn implies that all servants of Allah would be equal, the thing which they would never accept.

Every divine book revealed from the heavens was intended to be learnt and then acted upon. This means that acquiring divine knowledge necessarily implies acting upon it; for knowledge is worthless if it is not transformed into action. Every prophet was required to convey to his people the rulings of Allah and explain to them that they are required to live their lives per these rulings. Significantly, divine rulings always fall within the realm of human capability.

Allah tells the story of previous prophets so that we may learn that some people learnt and acted upon what they learnt. Indeed, actual stories give us an illustration of the practical application of divine knowledge. For this reason, the True Lord relayed to us the story of the prophets in the Quran. For instance, Allah told us the story of Nuh (Noah) when Allah commanded him to build a ship, and how his people used to ridicule him for executing the command of Allah. Allah also tells us about how He then commanded Nuh (Noah) to take on the ark he built, a pair of each kind of animal, one of each sex. The True Lord says: ‘And he constructed the ship, and whenever an assembly of the eminent of his people passed by him, they ridiculed him. He said, "If you ridicule us, then we will ridicule you just as you ridicule. And you are going to know who will get a punishment that will disgrace him on earth and upon whom will descend an enduring punishment in the Hereafter." So, it was, until when Our command came and water came forth from the valley, We said, "Load upon the ship of each creature, a male and a female, and your family, except those about whom the word has preceded, and include whoever has believed." But none had believed with him, except a few.’ (*Hud:* 38-40)

Nuh (Noah) should not have overlooked the saying of the True Lord: ‘…except those about whom the word has preceded.’ He should have realized that it indicated that some of his family will not believe. However, ‘Noah called to his son who was apart from them, ‘O my son, come aboard with us and be not with the disbelievers.' (*Hud:* 42) The response was: '[But] he said, "I will take refuge on a mountain to protect me from the water.' (*Hud:* 43) So, Nuh (Noah) replied: 'There is no protector today from the decree of Allah, except for whom He gives mercy.' (*Hud:* 43) After the son of Nuh (Noah) drowned and the water sank into the earth, Nuh (Noah) invoked Allah and said: 'My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges!' (*Hud:* 45)

This is one aspect from Nuh's (Noah's) story by which the True Lord informs us about those who rightly deserve to be considered by the children of the prophets. Allah's messages are essentially a paths and way of life; whoever adheres to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deserves to be from his lineage but whoever fails to follow him does not deserve such an honour. For this reason, the True Lord responded to Nuh (Noah): '…he was not one of your family.' (*Hud:* 46). Only those who follow the path of the prophets deserve to be related to them. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* indicated to us this principle when he said about Salman Al-Farisi *Allah be pleased with him* 'Salman is a member of the house of the Prophet.'(1)

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say that Salman is an Arab or that he is a Muslim. He rather said that he is a member of the house of the Prophet. In the same manner, but in a different sense, the True Lord explained to Nuh (Noah) in the context of talking about his son: 'Indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is one whose work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge.' (*Hud:* 46)

Some people put forward erroneous interpretations of the meaning of 'he was not of your family.' They said that that the mother of Nuh's (Noah's) son was the one who fornicated. To those who make such a claim, I say, ask your Lord for forgiveness and consider well the underlying fundamentals of the ruling: 'Indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is one whose work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge.' (*Hud:* 46)

Accordingly, the basis of ascribing the fatherhood of any of the prophets to anyone is not blood lineage, marriage or descent; it is rather the deeds of the latter and their degree of conformity to the path preached by the relevant prophet. Those who slurred the wife of Nuh (Noah) need to ask Allah for forgiveness. The True Lord is far removed from deceiving His prophet. Even if we assume that the mother of Nuh's (Noah's) son fornicated –God forbid–, what is the fault of the son? He would have nothing to do with his mother's sin. But the saying of Allah: '…he is [one whose] work was other than righteous…', indicates that only those who act upon the teachings and divine path imparted by the prophets merit the honour of being their sons.

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(1) *[Al-Hakim and Al-Tabarani]*

Let us consider the saying of the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to his tribe; Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* related when the verse: 'And warn, [O Muhammad], your closest kindred' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 214) was revealed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* started to tell the tribes of Quraysh one by one saying, 'O tribe such and such, spare yourself from the fire.' He then went to Fatima and said, 'O Fatima, daughter of Muhammad, spare yourself the fire; I do not have anything for you in respect to Allah except for the fact that you have ties of kinship.'(1)

Allah gives examples of wives. He says: 'Allah presents an example of those who disbelieved: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them, so those prophets did not avail them from Allah at all, and it was said, 'Enter the Fire with those who enter.' (*at-Tahrim:* 10)

Betrayal in the context of the foregoing verse is not infidelity. It is rather used to indicate that even a prophet cannot force his wife to have faith in Allah. Everyone is absolutely free to embrace any creed he wills. Thus, no man has the right to force or impel his wife in any matter related to her faith, even if he claims to be divine. For instance, the True Lord says the following about the wife of the Pharaoh: 'And Allah presents an example of those who believed; the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, 'My Lord, build for me near You a house in Paradise and save me from Pharaoh and his deeds and save me from the wrongdoing people.' (*at-Tahrim:* 11)

These glimpses demonstrate that everyone can voluntarily choose and will be judged for his faith irrespective of his kinsfolk or spouses. Nuh's (Noah's) son was the one whose conduct was unrighteous. This is shown by the saying of the True Lord: '…he is one whose work was other than righteous.' Allah thus did not mention the son of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* in person. He mentioned his conduct.

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(1) *[Al-Bukhari, Muslim, An-Nisa`i, Ahmad and At-Tirmadhi]*

Every prophet has a story that the Quran relays so that the path of Allah would become clear in people's minds. Allah uses the stories of the best of humans, whom He chose to guide humanity as found in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Allah tested him at the beginning of his life with the daunting experience of being thrown in a fire. At that time, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a young man full of hope. So how did Ibrahim (Abraham) react?

The True Lord willed to redeem Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from the fire. However, Allah let the disbelievers get a hold of him and threw him in the fire. He did not command the heavens to rain to extinguish the fire. All of this was intended so that Allah would establish an indisputable proof of His existence, and so that Allah's plot against those disbelievers would be tight. Abraham was not capable of escaping from them; further no rain fell. On the contrary, the fire continued to grow and glow. However, Allah ordered the fire not to burn Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he was thrown in it.

It has been related by 'Ubay ibn Ka`b *Allah be pleased with him* that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said that when they tied Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to throw him in the fire, he said: "There is no god worthy of worship but You, Allah, Lord of all things; may all exaltation and praise be unto you; no one shares Your absolute dominion over everything. They then put Ibrahim (Abraham) in a ballista and threw him from afar into the fire. Gabriel *peace be upon him* then received him and said, 'O Ibrahim (Abraham), do you need me to do anything for you?' So, Ibrahim (Abraham) answered, 'I do not need anything from you.' So, Gabriel said, 'Then ask your Lord for whatever you need.' So, Abraham said, 'It suffices that He is aware of my status. Allah then ordered the fire to cool and be a source of peace for Ibrahim (Abraham).'(1)

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(1) *Quoted from (At-Tafsir) of Al-Qurtubi… It was also mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) and Az-Zamkhshar in (Al-Kashshaf).*

This dispelled the plot of those who conspired against Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and infuriated them. Thus, Allah gives us examples from the lives of early prophets in the Quran so that we may learn and benefit from them. Because we learn from the experiences of prior prophets in forging the path of our lives, we will become the best nation ever.

The True Lord tested Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* at the beginning of his life. He also tested him towards the end of his life through his son. Ibrahim (Abraham) had succeeded in the first test, which was the most important thing for him at that time; but when one gets older he starts to dedicate his life to his offspring.

Allah chose to test Ibrahim (Abraham) through his son towards the end of his life. But Allah did not tell Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that his son would die, and that he had to endure this loss. Further, He did not tell him that someone will slay his son. Rather, Allah commanded Ibrahim (Abraham) to slay his son, and this is the ultimate form of trial. In addition, Allah did not reveal this command to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* through direct revelation. He did not impart this command to his heart, nor communicated it to him through a veil or through an angel. Instead, Allah communicated His command to Ibrahim (Abraham) through a dream: ‘O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you (offer you in sacrifice to Allah).’ (*as-Saffat:* 102) Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* told his son about the command of Allah to him as he exactly saw it in his dream; and we know that the dreams of the prophets are all true.

Someone may say, ‘Why did Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* not tell his father that this was just a dream? Further, why did Ibrahim (Abraham) not abruptly slay his son without telling him about the dream’?

We say, it is due to Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) *peace be upon him* concern, fear and great care for his son that he wanted him to be rewarded for getting killed and sacrificing his life for the cause of abiding by Allah’s Command. Thus, Abraham said: ‘O my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you (offer you in sacrifice to Allah).’ (*as-Saffat:* 102) Ismail (Ishmael) answered *peace be upon him*: ‘O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast.’ (*as-Saffat:* 102)

Notice that Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* did not ask his father to slay him but instead asked him to do what he was commanded. This demonstrates that Ismail (Ishmael) understood that it was not his father who wanted to slay him; it was rather Allah Who commanded his father to slay him. Further, had Ibrahim (Abraham) abruptly attacked Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*, he would have become furious and his heart would have been filled with hatred towards his father to the extent that he could have attacked him. Thus, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) care and pity for his son made him explicitly tell him that the command to slay him was decreed from the heavens. Ibrahim (Abraham) did thus as much as any other tries to ease things for his son.

However, Allah manifests His care for His creation by rewarding them after death. For this reason, Ibrahim (Abraham) did not want to deprive Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*, of the reward Allah bestows upon those who abide by His commands. Thus, both Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*, had the honour of obeying Allah's Commands. In this vein, we can easily see that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) course of action reflects his utmost care for Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them* in this world and in the hereafter. This teaches us that the True Lord only wants us to abide by the rulings of Allah and the fate He decrees. The True Lord says: 'And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead.' (*as-Saffat:* 103)

This is the honour one wins for obeying Allah's Commands. At the outset, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* abided by the command of Allah. He then discussed the matter with his son who in turn chose to submit to the will of Allah. Both won the honour of submitting to the will of Allah and abiding by his commands. Both succeeded in the divine test. The True Lord says: 'We called to him, "O Abraham, you have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good.' (*as-Saffat:* 104-105)

The True Lord spared both Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son *peace be upon them*, the difficulty of going through the slaying process. For this reason, we always say that Allah does not relieve anyone of something he enacted upon him unless he accepts Allah's will. Those who continue to suffer what Allah decreed on them are the ones who do not accept it. If Allah decree that someone suffers an illness, and that person accepts Allah's decree and considers his endurance of it a proof of his faith, Allah will relieve his suffering. Indeed, people say that in health one enjoys a bounty from Allah; but in sickness one lives in the company of Allah.

Abu Hurayrah related that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘On the Day of Judgment, Allah *Glorified and Exalted* will say to some of His servants, “I was sick and you never visited Me.” So, His servants would answer, ‘But how would You, Lord of everything, suffer any sickness?” Allah would then say, “Were you not aware that my servant was sick and you did not visit him? Did you not know that, had you visited him, you would have found me there?”’(1)

Who dares dispense with the company of Allah? If every patient knows that he is in the company of Allah while he is sick, he would be shy to cry out of pain or complain about it. However, we do not ask patients or those who are sick to do so. We only ask them to turn to Allah and supplicate to Him by saying, ‘O my Lord I am willing to endure any suffering or pain for the sake of meriting Your forgiveness.’

The True Lord says: ‘And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead.’ (*as-Saffat:* 103). This saying indicates that Allah’s decree is never relieved unless the one upon whom it has been enacted accepts and submits to it. If we see someone suffering from something that Allah decreed, we must infer that this person never accepted the ruling of Allah. However, Allah did not only relieve Ibrahim (Abraham) of obeying His command to slay his son and ransom Ismail (Ishmael) with a tremendous sacrifice, but He also foretold Ibrahim (Abraham) the news that he would have a new-born named Ishaq (Isaac). ‘And we gave him good tidings of Isaac, a prophet from among the righteous.’ (*as-Saffat*: 112)

Now let us consider another view from the Quran that gives us the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him so that* we may further learn of Allah’s reward for those who adhere to the path of faith. The events we are about to discuss took place at the time when Musa (Moses) was being prepared for receiving Allah’s message.

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(1) *[Muslim]*

Musa (Moses) was on his way to Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them*; at that time, he had not yet received the message of Allah. This shows that Musa (Moses) had a natural inclination to faith and that Allah had carefully fashioned and prepared him for the reception of His message. Reaching the well of Madyan, he found two girls trying to keep their cattle away from the water. The Quran gives us an account of the conversation that took place between Musa (Moses) and the two girls in their first encounter: ‘And when he came to the well of Madyan, he found there a crowd of people watering their flocks. And he found aside from them, two women driving back their flocks. He said, "What is your circumstance?" They said, "We do not water until the shepherds dispatch their flocks; and our father is an old man.’ (*al-Qasas:* 23)

The saying of the two women, ‘We do not water until the shepherds dispatch their flocks; and our father is an old man’ (*al-Qasas:* 23) indicates the principles and values on which they were brought up. They only went out of their house because their father was a very old man. Accordingly, even though they went out to work out of necessity, none of the two women forgot who they are, and that she must ensure not to trespass certain behavioural norms. They thus said, ‘We do not water until the shepherds dispatch their flocks…’ (*al-Qasas:* 23). This means that they would water their animals after the crowd around the well walked away. The daughters of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* only acted as far as necessity required. They did not take such necessity as a pretext to violate the norms and restrictions to which they should adhere as females and thus run the risk of getting stuck in the crowd of men around the well. So, what did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* do? He watered the animals on their behalf.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had a strong faith-inspired resolution even before he became a prophet. The True Lord explains to us this point so that no one would wonder, ‘How can I be like a prophet commissioned by Allah’?

The unique faith-inspired resolution depicted by this episode from the life of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ought to motivate every believer to adopt the same attitude. If a believer sees a woman going out of her house for any purpose, he should hasten to take care of her needs until she returns to her house without taking advantage of the situation in a way which contradicts the proper behaviour of any true believer. If this faith-inspired resolution were to spread among us, not a single woman would be cast on the street except for a pressing necessity. In addition, this part from the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* showed us the keenness every woman should have to protect herself and preserve her dignity. In this respect, one of them said to her father Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* after he invited Musa (Moses) to reward him: ‘One of the women said, "O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy.’ (*al-Qasas:* 26)

This statement indicates that no woman may go alone outside her house for a long time or beyond a certain distance. However, being wise, Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* realized that he could not hire a strange man and let him live among his two daughters. Thus, his faith led him to the right solution; he called upon Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and told him: ‘He said, ‘Indeed, I wish to wed you one of my two daughters, on the condition that you serve me for eight years.’ (*al-Qasas:* 27) In such a case, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would be married to one of the girls and would thus be prohibited to marry the other.

We need to carefully heed these stories so that we may learn how we can be religiously cautious in a constant manner. Now let us consider another aspect from the life of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when the True Lord invited him to become a prophet. Let us consider how he received this mission with a pure and devoted soul. Musa (Moses), was so keen to deliver Allah’s message in full that he asked the True Lord to send with him his brother Harun (Aaron). ‘And my brother Harun (Aaron) is more fluent than me in tongue, so send him with me as support, verifying me. Indeed, I fear that they will deny me.’ (*al-Qasas:* 34)

Musa (Moses) recommended Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* to participate with him in delivering the message of Allah because he was keen to succeed in his task. He knew that delivering the message of Allah required eloquence and articulation and he was worried that the lisping in pronunciation he used to suffer because of a piece of amber that burnt his tongue when he was young, might make him falter. Interestingly, he did not hesitate to invoke the help of his brother. This is in diametrical contrast with contemporary rulers who are often afraid to appoint competent prime ministers or deputies who have better capabilities than they do, lest they should eclipse them.

These scenes that the Quran depict teach us a lot. The True Lord wanted to prove to the followers of Muhammad the precision of the path it prescribed. Because Allah has revealed to us a path to learn, He requires us to implement it in our lives. Further, the requirement to apply the path of Allah is not something new; it is found in the stories of all the prophets who learnt the path of Allah and applied it in their lives. The biggest problem any recipient of the path of Allah may slip into is to learn it and yet fail to act upon it.

Recently a lot of people argued that religious education at schools does not help improve the behaviour of the students. To those who make such allegations we say: you do not understand the nature of religious education. It is not like teaching geography or geometry or any other science. To excel in geometry, a student needs to learn how to use the given to make correct inferences; this is the requirement for excellence in the field of geometry. However, geometrical theories do not require man to adjust his behaviour in life. It does not give any practical guidance or sets of do's and don'ts.

Geometrical theories are separate from the lives of the students. By contrast, when a student learns his religion, he learns to obey Allah's Commands and avoid his prohibitions. The challenge involved in achieving religious excellence thus consists in applying what one learns. If a student notices that those who teach him the religious rulings, whether at home or at school, hardly ever apply or adhere to these rulings, he will fail to properly learn his religion. For instance, a student may learn that lying is prohibited by Allah, but if this student finds that lying is quite widespread among those who teach him in the society, he will lie to others. Similarly, a student may learn that praying is the key pillar of Islam, and that it ought to safeguard every Muslim against committing sins and bad deeds; yet, if this student notices that no one around him prays or that prayers do not safeguard those who perform them against committing sins that Allah prohibited, he will not care to pray regularly. Thus, the failure of religious education to fulfil its purpose does not stem from the absence of good teachers; it is rather due to the absence of an exemplary practical application of the teachings of religion.

Now let us return to our discussion to the stories of the Quran. These stories were put forward to illustrate to us the practical application of the theoretical teachings of religion by demonstrating how the prophets of Allah implemented it in their own lives. You, followers of Muhammad, are not inferior to any of the preceding nations. On the contrary, you are the best nation ever. Accordingly, you must learn from and avail yourselves of the good examples that earlier nations who received Allah's messages passed on to you.

This is the meaning of the saying of the True Lord: 'and (We sent) messengers about whom We have related (their stories) to you before and messengers about whom We have not related to you. And Allah spoke to Musa (Moses) with (direct) speech.' (*an-Nisa':* 164) The Quran has relayed to us the main events that took place in the lives of the prophets so that we may learn the wisdom underlying them.

Scholars distinguish between a prophet and a messenger. Some of them argued that every messenger is by default a prophet but not vice versa. To those who maintain this view we say: if we carefully consider the linguistic sense of both words along with their terminological use, we will be comforted: The Quran says: 'And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet.' (*al-Hajj:* 52)

Thus, both prophets and messengers are sent by Allah. However, Allah sends a messenger to preach rulings and beliefs that were not revealed in earlier messages. By contrast, prophets are sent to implement what was revealed in earlier messages. Accordingly, Allah sends prophets to give through their lives a practical example of applying the messages of Allah. Accordingly, prophets only apply and adhere to the codes of the divine messages that preceded them; they do not bring forth any new divine laws. On the other hand, Allah sends messengers to deliver new laws and decrees to mankind and act upon them. This is the extra mission a messenger undertakes.

The True Lord sent the messengers to deliver His laws and apply them. But Allah sent the prophets to give an example of proper conduct; prophets apply what the law the messenger prior to them put forth and preached. Thus, prophets are often sent to nations that have a long history of defying and arguing with messengers.

Obstinacy made the children of Israel take pride in being the nation to whom the greatest number of prophets were sent. While this is true, we need to bear in mind that prophets and messengers are often sent to cure people from the ailments they suffer. Similarly, if someone goes to physicians frequently, this means that they suffered from several diseases. The same holds for the children of Israel; they suffered from a lot of ailments. Accordingly, the fact that the greatest number of messengers were sent to them is not an exaltation of their status as much as it is an indication of the numerous problems that plagued their vision and society.

Both the messengers and the prophets are sent by Allah. The difference between them consists in the fact that the messengers of Allah deliver new laws from the heavens, whereas the prophets only apply the laws the messengers had already delivered before them. So, technically speaking, a messenger is the one to whom a divine law is revealed to both deliver to the people and practically apply it among them. The True Lord then appends the verse by His saying: ‘And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 165) Undoubtedly Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was among the prophets to whom the following saying of the True Lord refers, ‘We have inspired.’ Someone may wonder: why did Allah specify Musa (Moses) by saying: ‘And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 165)

Here we need to note that the revelation whereby Allah communicates with his prophets is the revelation in the technical sense of Islamic law. This is different from the above explained generic meaning of revelation in language. The True Lord had explained the way whereby He addressed His selected prophets to deliver their message to His creation: ‘And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation, or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He wills. Indeed, He is Most High and Wise.’ (*ash-Shura:* 51)

The True Lord communicates with the prophets either through inspiration, or from behind a veil or by sending a messenger like the angel Gabriel *peace be upon him*. If we ponder over this verse, we will realize that there are three kinds of divine revelation: a special inspiration, a speech from behind a veil or a direct messenger sent by Allah. These three forms of communication are the kinds of revelation.

This means that Allah would never speak to a human being except through sudden inspiration, or from behind a veil, which is a divine speech that His prophets used to hear without seeing the one saying it, namely, Allah. Finally, revelation through a messenger refers to the descent of Gabriel *peace be upon him* to communicate Allah's revelation to His prophets.

The saying of the True Lord: 'And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech' (*an-Nisa':* 165) indicates that Allah revealed to Musa (Moses) His message in two ways. First, Allah revealed to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* His message in the same way in which He communicated His revelation to all others prophets. Second, Allah revealed His message to Musa (Moses) in a special way, namely, through a speech from behind a veil in the sacred valley.

The saying of the True Lord *tukaliman* (spoke) is the root of the Arabic word *kallam* in the verse under consideration. It makes us wonder why Allah used the root of the word? The reason is that revelation in general is a speech. Thus, secret inspiration, speaking from behind a veil as well as sending a messenger are all forms of the speech of Allah. Speech is what conveys the intention of the speaker to the one he addresses; the evidence is that Allah called the three forms of revelation *kalam*. The secrecy of revelation refers to the secret way of conveying it. This means that no one hears the revelation except the messenger. Further, Allah may reveal His message to His messenger by inspiring it to his heart. Both methods fulfil the function of speech since its purpose, as we have explained above, is to convey the intent of the interlocutor or speaker to the one he addresses.

The verb 'spoke' indicates that Allah spoke directly with Moses, and that His speech was overt rather than covert. Further, this indicates that the True Lord did not send any messenger to Moses to deliver to him His revelation. Accordingly, 'And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech' (*an-Nisa':* 165) draws our attention to the fact that His revelation to Moses was not of the kind that He explained in His saying: 'And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger.' (*ash-Shura:* 51) Therefore, Allah said: 'And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech.' (*an-Nisa':* 165)

Scholars asked themselves a rational question: how could Allah speak then? To those scholars we say: if a qualification that is used to described Allah's creation is used to describe Him, it needs be understood considering Allah's saying: '[but] there is nothing like unto Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) We thus need to bear in mind that existence is attributed to both Allah and man, the existence of man is different from that of Allah. Similarly, though knowledge is attributed to both Allah and man, the knowledge of Allah is different from the knowledge of man. Further, though capability is attributed to both Allah and man, the capability of Allah is different from the capability of man. Finally, though Allah says that He is established on His throne and a human being may say that he is established on his chair, the two cases are incomparably different. Thus, if an attribute that qualifies man is used to qualify Allah, the latter must be understood considering Allah's saying: '[but] there is nothing like unto Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) If scholars adhere to this principle, all disagreement among them regarding the attributes of Allah will come to an end.

Accordingly, while the True Lord says that He has two hands and a face, no one should think that the hand of Allah is like a human hand. Rather attributing a hand to Allah should be understood considering Allah's saying: '[but] there is nothing like unto Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) The same holds for Allah's face. As long as we agree that all of Allah's attributes should be understood in the light of the above verse, there is no need for scholars to ferociously fight with each other over the characterization of these attributes. Further there is no need for these scholars to fight over the interpretation of these attributes; they should not thus split into two groups: a group that calls for interpreting the attributes of Allah and another that calls for dogmatically accepting them without any interpretation. The latter argues that if Allah says that He has a hand, we should just accept what He says without any attempt on our part to interpret His statement. To the scholars who call for abstaining from interpreting the attributes of Allah, we say: why do not you say that attributing a hand to Allah falls within the realm of His saying: '[but] there is nothing like unto Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11)

Indeed, because we learnt through our experience in this world that the same thing or attribute may be ascribed differently to different people, we must acknowledge that Allah and whatever is attributed to Him is incomparable to anything we know.

For instance, someone may receive an invitation to dine with a mayor of a certain village. The latter may then serve the former an assortment of foods that reflects the status of the village and its leader. The same person may then receive an invitation to dine with a governor of a city; this governor may serve this man an assortment of foods that again reflects the status of the city and its leaders. Finally, the same person may receive an invitation to dine with the president of his country; the former will similarly serve him an assortment of food that reflects the status of the country and its president. Hence while the same person was invited to dine three times, the level and quality of the foods the mayor may serve him is different from that the governor may serve him; yet, both are different from what the president of the country may serve him. If it is thus the case that a single thing may be done in different ways by different humans based on their status and level of distinction, would not it be only logical to assert that the Creator and anything attributed to Him has an incomparable status?!

The True Lord told us that He spoke with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he was in the valley and sent him a fire to attract his attention. The True Lord says: ‘Indeed, I am your Lord, so remove your sandals. Indeed, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa. And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed to you. Indeed, I am Allah. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance. Indeed, the Hour is coming - I almost conceal it - so that every soul may be recompensed per that for which it strives. So, do not let one avert you from it who does not believe in it and follows his desire, for you then would perish.’ *(Ta Ha:* 12-16)

The True Lord said all this to him; further, Allah initiated the speech. Subsequently, Musa (Moses) received the revelation in the same way other prophets did.

Revelation was conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through inspiration, speech from behind a veil and through a messenger.

A good example of revelation through inspiration is the Qudsi Hadith, as well as the set of laws and decrees the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him* left for us. A good example of revelation through speech from behind a veil is the enactment of prayers. The prayers were not enacted through Gabriel *peace be upon him;* rather Allah directly enacted praying.

Here, I do not want to plunge into a vain discussion regarding whether the True Lord spoke with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the latter heard Him when He enacted prayers, or whether the Prophet *peace be upon him* saw Allah when He was addressing him or not. It is needless to over investigate issues that Allah did not teach us about. Indeed, courtesy with Allah requires us to avoid any such discussions or investigations. Allah said: 'And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.' (*al-Isra':* 36)

As for the Quran, it was completely revealed through the messenger of the angels, Gabriel *peace be upon him*. No part of the Quran was revealed through inspiration; only Qudsi Hadith was inspired. The reason is that one may think that inspiration is thought induced in him by a genie or a devil or such thing. Thus, all the verses of the Quran were revealed through Gabriel. Further, every time the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received revelation from Gabriel, his body used to undergo certain physical and chemical changes so that he would not doubt that Gabriel was the one speaking. Allah wanted the Quran to be revealed in an absolute way that no one may doubt.

Upon receiving revelation through Gabriel, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to hear a sound like the jingle of a bell. Subsequently, the forehead of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would soak in sweat, and his body would become heavier to the extent if he was on the back of riding animal, the animal would kneel and bend down until its stomach touches the ground. Also, if the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was leaning his thigh on the thigh of one of the Companions, the latter would feel that his thigh is about to collapse. All these were material, cosmic signs that no one could doubt.

For this reason, when some scholars literally interpreted the following saying of Allah, they argued that if the True Lord had not sent a prophet, people would have been justified in saying: 'And if We had destroyed them with a punishment before him, they would have said, "Our Lord, why did

You not send to us a messenger so we could have followed Your verses before we were humiliated and disgraced?"' *(Ta Ha:* 134)

We say to those scholars, if you properly examine this verse, you will realize that you disagree on an issue upon which no disagreement should have occurred. Does man know what Allah requires of him using reason alone? Or is reason only capable of leading man to the existence of a higher power that created and governs the universe? But can rational thought lead man to the name of this power or its requirements? Can reason identify the reward this power has prepared for those who follow the path of life it has set and the punishment it prepared for those who failed to do so? Reason cannot solve any of these questions. Reason can indeed furnish a proof of the existence of supreme power that created, organized and governed, but transcends this universe. However, a messenger is required to inform people of the name of this power and deliver to them the requirements of the path prescribed by this power and the decreed laws. There should thus be no contradiction between the role of reason and that of the prophets in guiding man to the existence and the worship of Allah.

Despite the fact there is no such contradiction, people are prone to acknowledge the importance of reason and rational knowledge more than they acknowledge the importance of prophecy and the kind knowledge it conveys. How was man capable of discovering electricity? No one does not know or would deny that human reason is the faculty that seeks to unveil Allah's secrets in the universe and enables man to achieve useful discoveries and inventions. If you ask anyone who is the founder of the theory of relativity, everyone will tell you Einstein. If you also ask anyone who is the first one who discovered gravity, everyone will immediately tell you Isaac Newton. We learn by heart almost all the names of the key inventors and discoverers. Do you know the name of the one who invented the way to generate electric power which we use to run factories, light our houses and made the generation of electricity a widespread industry with a wide range of products that suits all financial capabilities?

But by Allah, how come you know the name of the inventor of electric generators and electric bulbs but remain ignorant of the name of the Creator of the sun that illuminates half the earth every 12 hours. No one has claimed to be the manufacturer of the sun even though we know the inventors of almost every innovation in the universe. The bulb, for example, no matter how big it is, only illuminates a small perimeter; beyond the range of this perimeter, the light fades away and darkness prevails. This is nothing compared to the sun that illuminates half the terrestrial sphere every 12 hours.

The creation of the sun required a capability and wisdom proportional to its creation. Further, the sun does not have a glass cover that can be changed if it breaks as is the case with electric bulbs. Accordingly, human reason had to infer that a Creator must have fashioned all the beings in the universe and that this Creator cannot have renounced His Right of creating these wonderful beings. Sometimes we come across people who claim to the possession of something they do not actually own. But if the Creator informs through His messengers *peace be upon them* that He has created the universe and no one objected to Him, no one should wonder whether He is the Creator of these beings or not. He is their Creator until someone objects to that.

The role to be played by reason is to discover the power that creates and governs the universe; however, this role does not dispense or do away with the important role that the messengers of Allah play. Reason, however, can lead one to have faith in a supreme and indefinite power which is great enough to create a universe of such a great and wide scale before mankind even came to being. However, reason can never identify the requirements of that power whether in the form of commandments or prohibitions. Further, it does not know what rewards this power promises those who do good things in their lives and what punishment it has prepared for those who do bad deeds; for this reason, it was necessary to send messengers to mankind to inform them of the divine commands.

Accordingly, the proof of the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* evolves in two phases. The first phase is undertaken through believing in a supreme and indefinite power. The second phase is fulfilled through the role of the messengers of Allah *Glorified is He* who informed people of His Names, Attributes, requirements, reward and punishment. Thus, scholars should agree on the role of reason and that of prophets as there is no necessity for disagreement.

I am calling for this so that those who are always fishing for vulnerable points to attack the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* would not keep in doing that. Let me also add that scholars should find a common ground to agree on instead of confusing people through their disagreement. Simply, the messenger of Allah *Glorified is He* is the authority on issues with which reason has nothing to do.

Historically, we know that the biggest problem of philosophy is that it had set a narrow scope for searching. In the past, philosophy used to be the mother of all sciences; for instance, geometry was a branch of philosophy and so was mathematics. The same used to apply to natural sciences like chemistry, physics and the origin of languages.

However, when empirical scientists discovered that philosophers are always searching for theoretical abstractions and never focusing on applied experiments, they gave up on philosophy and established the modern empirical sciences that are separate from philosophy. Ever since, these sciences contributed numerous inventions and discoveries that have helped to make our lives easier and with which we still avail ourselves.

Nonetheless, philosophers continue to pursue their theoretical ventures and digressions and turn their back upon applied and experimental sciences. Therefore, we find no philosophical school agree with the other because they all want to know the unseen which is essentially unknowable through reason and which is only known through prophets.

I have always given an example that I tend to repeat frequently to illustrate this point. Let us assume that we are sitting in a room and the doorbell suddenly rings. We will rationally agree that someone must be at the door and that they have rung the bell. However, if we try to imagine or make surmises about the identity of the visitor, someone may say that the visitor is a man whereas another may guess that it is a woman. Further, someone may think that the one who rang the bell is a policeman, whereas another may say that they are a friend. Another may say that it is someone who came to give us glad tidings or even to warn us about something. Our surmises tend to differ because we delved into the process of imagination. Thereby, matters and questions of this sort should not be investigated by reason. Indeed, it would be more reasonable to agree that there is a visitor who rang the doorbell and then let the visitor reveal their identity and tell us their name, characteristics, and the reason for their coming. Once this happens, no disagreement may take place among us.

However, philosophers slipped into the mistake of confusing what is imaginable with what is rational. We can never identify the Name of the Creator and His Commandments through reason alone. The Creator must tell us about Himself. Indeed, since our reason leads to having faith in a supreme power that created this great universe, we must believe that such a power must tell us about itself. Thus, if a messenger comes forth to solve the riddle of the creation and tells us that the power that created the universe is called Allah *Glorified is He* we should follow him. Sending messengers, therefore, comforts the human soul and satisfies its desire for knowledge. Every rational person should be happy that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent messengers to enlighten mankind and should also yearn to hear and learn from them because they come about to solve the key riddle regarding the origin and the creation of the universe in such a precise way that has for long preoccupied the human mind. Further, messengers told us about the commandments of this power.

Messengers settle the disagreement and resolve this riddle and satisfy the desire of the human mind. For this reason, the companion `Ali ibn Abu-Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was once asked, 'Did you recognise that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He* because you knew your Lord? Or did you know your Lord based on what Muhammad told you?'

`Ali (who was described by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the gate to knowledge) replied, 'If I had known my Lord based on what Muhammad taught me, I would have been more certain about Muhammad than I am about my Lord. Further, if I had known that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He* because I knew my Lord, I would not have needed a messenger from Allah *Glorified is He*. The reality is that I had rationally recognised the existence of my Lord and then Muhammad came along and informed me of what my Lord required of me.'

Thus, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* settled the matter. Reason instinctually arrives at the necessity of having faith in an indefinite power that underlies the universe. This power created it and continued to confer the livelihood upon all the creatures, sustain and support them. Afterwards, Allah’s messengers came to inform us of His Name and what He requires us to do and not to do.

Those who disagree about the great role played by reason versus that played by the messengers of Allah *Glorified is He* and in proving and informing mankind about the Existence of Allah may dispense with all these vain arguments. Reason alone cannot prove or inform mankind about Allah *Glorified is He* and His Commandments. Therefore, a messenger is needed to inform us about this power. However, someone may sophistically argue that every messenger may need another messenger to explain and verify what he said and that this will go on forever.

We must know that Allah *Glorified is He* has fashioned all the messengers to be infallible to undertake the task of delivering His Messages. For instance, our Prophet Muhammad ibn `Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to establish an entire *ummah* (the followers of Islam) in twenty-three years whose goodness will remain until the Day of Judgment. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did so because he delivered to his people the Message of Allah *Glorified is He* to guide them to the way of doing well and avoiding evil deeds. But he *peace and blessings be upon him* was only capable of doing all that because Allah *Glorified is He* has fashioned him to be of great moral character. We thus learn that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent messengers to relieve the mind of the necessary task of searching for the name of the power that created the universe and its requirements.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رُّسُلًا مُّبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ حُجَّةُۢ
بَعْدَ ٱلرُّسُلِۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٦٥﴾

They were messengers bearing good news and warning, so that mankind would have no excuse before God, once the messengers had been sent: God is almighty and all wise [165] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 165)

We know that the Arabic word *al-bishara* means to tell someone about a good matter that will happen in the future. By contrast, the word *an-nidhara* is to tell someone about a bad or evil thing that will take place in the future. Allah *the Almighty* is the Invincible and the All Wise Who has placed everything in proper order; why? Because His messengers were sent to promise those who do good deeds with admittance into heaven and to warn those who go astray about being doomed to the fire. So, do not think that those who disbelieved in Allah *Glorified is He* will be able to do anything to save themselves from His Punishment; for He is Mighty and is not in need for His creations.

We know that Allah *Glorified is He* does not forbid any behavior except through an explicit text. Similarly, He does set the laws that no one should violate. So, He informed us that He is Ever Exalted in Might and All Wise. His Mighty and Wisdom allowed and enabled us to know His Guidance. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّٰكِنِ ٱللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ إِلَيْكَ ۖ أَنزَلَهُۥ بِعِلْمِهِۦ ۖ
وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَشْهَدُونَ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ﴿١٦٦﴾

But God Himself bears witness to what He has sent down to you — He sent it down with His full knowledge – the angels too bear witness, though God is sufficient witness [166] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 166)

The word *lakin* (but) indicates that what follows is a supplementary modification of and an addition to what preceded it. We can deduce the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* that He 'bears witness' indicates that what will follow is a statement made by Him. The adversaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* do not bear witness that He deserves to receive this Message. But Allah *Glorified is He* corrects what they said and explained to them that He has created man and He knows best the law of his preservation. Thus, the Path that Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to His messengers is the law that preserves mankind.

Even though the people of the Book(1) do not bear witness to the truth of what Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon Muhammad *peace and blessings be*

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(1) (Jews and Christians)

upon him and denied what their books foretell about the arrival of the seal of all messengers and prophets, but Allah *Glorified is He* does bear witness to this truth and He is sufficient as a witness.

Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed the Quran with His Knowledge and nothing, no matter how secret or small, escapes His Knowledge. Further, He has created everything and He knows—and He is the All Knowing—the laws that best fit and govern them. Per our human experience and conventions, the one who manufactures something is often the one who sets the rules of its operation and maintenance so that it may properly serve its functions. Similarly, because Allah *Glorified is He* created man, He has set for him the law of his preservation through His Commandments and prohibitions. For this reason, how could Allah *Glorified is He* who has created, not know His Own Creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware.

If a watch breaks down, we will immediately take it to a specialized technician to examine it and identify the damage that occurred to it. The same holds for the Creator of man. All absurdities and falsehood in the world are because man tries to decree laws for his own preservation beyond what Allah *Glorified is He* decrees in His Guidance even though man avails himself of Allah's Creation and would not claim that he created himself or any other creature.

We advise those who want to maintain themselves to let Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created all mankind to set for them, through His commandments and prohibitions, the law required for their preservation. If they then want to develop and pass new laws, they should do so considering the Path of Allah *Glorified is He*. If any defect emerges in human life, we must seek its remedy in the first law of the Creator, i.e. The Quran. Indeed, troubles often ensue from man's oblivion to the fact that he is the creation of Allah *Glorified is He*. Further, man always tries to set laws for himself apart from the Path set by Allah *Glorified is He*. These sufferings and asperities mankind suffers will come to an end once they return to the law of the Creator.

Not only does Allah *Glorified is He* bear witness but also the angels do because they merited the honour that one of them, namely Gabriel *Allah be pleased with him* delivered revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition, the angels record the good and bad deeds of man;

further they carry what was written on the Preserved Tablet and deliver that with which they have been entrusted. However, even though the angels know a lot, Allah *Glorified is He* said that He is sufficient to bear witness. But why has not Allah *Glorified is He* said that He is sufficient to bear witness and the angels also? The reason is that Allah *Glorified is He* does not need the testimony of the angels to substantiate whatever He attests to.

Also, we must not seek the testimony of the angels to substantiate the testimony of Allah *Glorified is He*. If we do so, this would mean that we trust in the angels more than we trust in Allah *Glorified is He* since He alone dates a testimony of mankind and that of the angels. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should know that Allah *Glorified is He* is sufficient as a witness.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَصَدُّوا۟ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ قَدْ ضَلُّوا۟ ضَلَـٰلًۢا بَعِيدًا ﴿١٦٧﴾

Those who have disbelieved and barred others
from God's path have gone far astray [167]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 167)

The result of disbelief will return only to the disbeliever; any disbeliever has the freedom to choose whether to disbelieve or to believe. And it will be more harmful if they misguide others; they went far astray and tried to misguide others. Therefore, they bear not only their burdens, but also that of those whom they have misguided in full scale.

But, how may they turn others away from the Way of Allah *Glorified is He*? They may do so when those who have been led astray try to keep signs of guidance from reaching people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And those who disbelieve say, "Do not listen to this Quran and speak noisily during the recitation of it that perhaps you will overcome."' (*Fussilat:* 26)

Had they understood the meaning of this verse, they would not have said what was mentioned in it, namely, making noise that would keep people from hearing the Quran. Therefore, they acknowledge that the Quran guides to the righteous Path if it reaches people. If the Quran did not have such an immediate and powerful effect on people, they would not have said so. They thus conceded that they would be defeated if the Quran reached other people who are called for guidance.

If Allah *Glorified is He* has said that they have indeed gone astray, this would be sufficient. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has used the root of the verb to add strength and assertion to the sentence. This indicates that what they did was the ultimate form of going astray which is worse than going far astray.

When we consider the word *ba`id* (far), we know that if something is described as far, this indicates that it is quite temporally distant from its source. Similarly, if someone goes astray, the worst thing they can do is to live their entire life this way. However, if the one who goes astray tries to lead others astray, they would be trying to extend the state of being astray; for, in this case, it will extend beyond their lifetime because new generations would continue to be led astray.

In mundane terms, going astray, may, for instance, assume the form of taking a wrong path instead of a right one and losing one’s way. In this manner, the ultimate form of going astray would be losing one’s way in a desert without food and water until one dies. But the one who goes and leads others astray as well as spread misguidance in their life and after their death. They have thus prolonged the span of misguidance.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَظَلَمُواْ لَمۡ يَكُنِ ٱللَّهُ لِيَغۡفِرَ لَهُمۡ وَلَا لِيَهۡدِيَهُمۡ طَرِيقًا ١٦٨
إِلَّا طَرِيقَ جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدٗاۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرٗا ١٦٩

God will not forgive those who have disbelieved and do evil,
nor will He guide them to any path [168] Eexcept that of Hell,
where they will remain for everthis is easy for God [169]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 168 - 169)

The discourse in these verses starts with a discussion of disbelieving and wrongdoing. As for disbelieving, it means to veil the existence of the Supreme Being, while wrongdoing means to live per a human order that does not lead to any pleasure or happiness in life; whoever leads their life in such a manner wrongs themselves. Further, this human order and way of life ultimately lead those who follow it to torment in the Hereafter. The one who becomes a disbeliever is the one who veils the Existence of Allah *Glorified is He* and in doing so deprives themselves of the Path that Allah *Glorified is He* reveals to mankind in order not to go far astray. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…then whoever follows my guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy…' (*Ta Ha:* 123). In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…whoever follows My guidance there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve…' (*al-Baqara:* 38)

Those who follow whims and out of interest stick to ways and paths of life that were conjectured by humans live a miserable and harsh life. No one ought to think that those who only follow their interests would lead an infinitely comfortable and liberal life. No; those who do so may transiently satisfy their immediate desires but in the long run, they suffer a lot and live in abiding misery. Accordingly, whoever pursues this path wrongs oneself.

Someone may wonder how come they are described as they have wronged themselves. There must be someone who wronged and another party who was wronged; so, who is wronged and who is the wrongdoer? Every one of them is both the wrongdoer and the wronged. The human being is composed of several various abilities. The power of desire wants to limitlessly pursue the satisfaction of its whims. By contrast, man's values and norms restrain him and try to keep him on the righteous Path.

Those who commit disbelieving and refuse to follow the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* let the power of desire dominate and overrule their values and norms. Islam, came about to establish a balance among the powers of the human soul so that none of them may prevail over the other.

Allah *Glorified is He* will not forgive those who have disbelieved and do evil, nor will He guide them to any path except that of hell, where they will remain forever. This is the Ruling of Allah *Glorified is He* regarding those who deny the truth and wrong themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* will never forgive them and He will not guide them to any path except that which leads to hell to eternally abide therein. Next, the Almighty Allah says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ قَدۡ جَآءَكُمُ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِٱلۡحَقِّ مِن رَّبِّكُمۡ فَـَٔامِنُواْ خَيۡرٗا لَّكُمۡۚ
وَإِن تَكۡفُرُواْ فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمٗا ١٧٠

The Messenger has come to you [people] with the truth from your Lord, so believe – that is best for you – for even if you disbelieve, all that is in the heavens and the earth still belongs to God, and He is all knowing and all wise [170]
(The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 170)

After Allah *Glorified is He* succinctly has given us an account of the series of battles that ensued between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Jews on the one hand and the polytheists on the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses all mankind to accentuate the place of the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* on earth. In this manner, Allah *Glorified is He* alerts all people that the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the synopsis of all the messages that preceded it. All mankind must, therefore, discern the value and merit of this new Faith since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has indeed been sent with the Light and Guidance from Allah *Glorified is He*. Further, he has enough proof to demonstrate that he is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and that he can guide people to the righteous Path instead of that which they are.

Before the arrival of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* people used to follow disparate doctrines, dogmas and creeds. However, since Islam came about, it proved to everyone that it supersedes all religions.

The proof furnished by Islam in support of its correctness and truth consists in its own teachings and the evidence of their validity. This proof leaves no excuse for anyone to stick to his past creed. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought forth the light that guides man to the righteous path. The arrival of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was thus like a comprehensive process of purifying the creeds of mankind. It gave every human the chance to rid themselves of any impurities in their creed and belief, and to start a new phase of faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* admonishes and encourages people to follow Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with whom the truth was revealed.

The truth in this context refers to the absolute truisms that never change no matter how conditions or circumstances may change. The reason is that truth cannot assume different forms or colours. For instance, if a group of people witnessed an accident and then another person came along and attested to what they all saw, no one among them would disagree with him. However, if each one in this group followed their interests, they may be inclined to add things to what they witnessed and may thus give contending testimonies. Indeed, some of them may follow their wildest imagination and fabricate a set of lies that does not have anything to do with what happened.

Thus, this is the truth which never changes and to which any group of honest people, no matter how big it is, would attest. However, people are sometimes tempted to change the truth and twist it so their testimonies differ; this is how groundless lies and delusions are propagated. Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought forth the truth that never changes no matter how circumstances or conditions may alter irrespective of whether it is of creed, worshipping, moral or ethical side. You will find that whatever he says is consistently the same and never changes because it is true.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of this truth that He sends water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflow, each per its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools: in this way Allah *Glorified is He* illustrates truth and falsehood. Every valley receives an amount of water proportionate to its size. But, in time water coming down from the mountains carries along with it dust or straw or other needless objects; these things are what we call scum on the surface. The same holds for the process of melting metals like iron, copper or gold of which we make jewelry or other useful tools. When we melt these metals in the fire, some impurities are bound to float up to the surface of these melted metals; these impurities are called scum. Allah *Glorified is He* and then shows us how He lets truth overcome and prevail over falsehood saying that the froth disappears, but what is the benefit if man stays behind.

No matter how many impurities may smear or mix with the truth, the truth ultimately repels the scum and pushes it aside. Thus, if falsehood ever prevails over the truth, we ought to know that this is the scum that sometimes rises to the surface and then gets pushed away. However, the truth will continue to be what it is no matter how things change. Allah *Glorified is He* says that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come to the people with the Truth from Him and He advises them to believe in Him as it is better for them. Believing in this context means to embrace faith in the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* in the fact that His Messages were delivered by His messengers, in the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has angels and that resurrection and reckoning will follow after death. Such faith, in turn, requires us to act and behave per certain principles and maxims it sets; accordingly, having faith involves the recognition that our beliefs cannot be severed from our actions.

But, what would happen if people did not believe? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that if the people deny the truth. behold, to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, and Allah *Glorified is He* is indeed All Knowing, All-Wise; He is Self-Sufficient. He never changes and He constantly governs His universe which, in turn, is completely subservient to Him. Thus, nothing in the universe will change due to the disbelief of any disbeliever except for its discontentment with the latter. The entire universe belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* and neither the heavens, stars, moon and nor rain will ever change due to any disbeliever.

Consider this. Look around you in this world; if you find any disturbances in it, you should know that what man did is at odds with the Path that Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed for man to follow. By contrast, everything that was not susceptible to tampering by man has remained sound and intact. For instance, the sun never failed to rise or set. The same applies to the moon whose motion was never disrupted. Similarly, the stars never deviate from their celestial orbits and the wind blows according to the command of its Creator. Accordingly, the motion of every being in the universe is perfectly organized except for the things with which man interferes and tampers. Indeed, whenever man approaches nature and the beings around him per the Path set for him by Allah *Glorified is He* things continue to be in harmony. By contrast, whenever man approaches them in a manner out of the Path that Allah *Glorified is He* has set, they will become disrupted and corrupted. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 11).

Corruption often results from the works and whims of the human soul when it deviates from the Path of Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, we wonder whether people ever complain about the unavailability of light! No; the reason is that the sun is not under our control. Similarly, people never complained about the unavailability of air. People do complain about the unavailability of food because food grows out of the land which requires labour. Man, thus has the choice between sitting lazily and not working or working and growing fruits. However, even though man may labour and work, some people tend to appropriate the yield of the land and deprive others of it. This a reason underlying the corruption spread in the universe.

Allah *Glorified is He* brought forth to them an illumination that can lead them to having faith in the Path preached by the seal of all messengers, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Further, Allah *Glorified is He* gave them a chance to atone for the mistakes they committed against their prophets and against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لَا تَغۡلُواْ فِي دِينِكُمۡ وَلَا تَقُولُواْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ إِلَّا ٱلۡحَقَّۚ إِنَّمَا
ٱلۡمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ٱبۡنُ مَرۡيَمَ رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُۥٓ أَلۡقَىٰهَآ إِلَىٰ مَرۡيَمَ وَرُوحٞ مِّنۡهُۖ فَـَٔامِنُواْ
بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦۖ وَلَا تَقُولُواْ ثَلَٰثَةٌۚ ٱنتَهُواْ خَيۡرٗا لَّكُمۡۚ إِنَّمَا ٱللَّهُ إِلَٰهٞ وَٰحِدٞۖ سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥٓ أَن
يَكُونَ لَهُۥ وَلَدٞۘ لَّهُۥ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَكِيلٗا ﴿١٧١﴾

People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’– stop [this], that is better for you – God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust [171] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 171)

Allah *Glorified is He* starts the verse with a command directed to the People of the Book not to commit excess concerning their religion. Exceeding the bounds means crossing and trespassing the limits of justice. As a logical base, everything has a middle and two extremes; we always require people not to incline towards any of the extremes by way of being overly strict or excessively lose. The people of the Book slipped into this dilemma. They failed to be moderate and fair in their judgments. For instance, the Jews abjured `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and accused *Maryam* (Mary) of fornication; this was an excess of hatred on their part. By contrast, Christians excessively loved `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him;* they thus said that he is a God or the son of God or a third of three (Trinity doctrine). This was also a form of exceeding the bounds of truth. Allah *Glorified is He* thus asks them to take a moderate and fair stance on issues pertaining to religious faith.

Following the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* does not require exceeding the bound of truth. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by Allah *Glorified is He* to preach a moderate religion that puts everything in its proper order. In this manner, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* foretold us about what will happen to `Ali, *Allah be pleased with him*. What Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* predicted ultimately happened. The *Khawarij* ultimately declared that 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was a disbeliever; further, the extreme *Shi`ites* claimed that he was a prophet and some of them went as far as claiming that he is God. In this respect, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to 'Ali, ‘You are like 'Isa (Jesus). The Jews hated him to the extent that they falsely accused his mother of fornication and the Christians loved him to the extent that they attributed to him a status that is not his.’ `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Two groups of people will be doomed because of their relation to me. The first is the group of those whose love to me would make them excessively praise and attribute to me what is not actually for me and the second group is the group of those whose hatred of me would drive them to falsely accuse me of things I did not do. Let everyone be advised that I am not a prophet and that I do not receive revelation. Rather, I follow The Book of Allah *Glorified is He* and the *Sunnah* of His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* as much as I can. Thereby you are only bound to obey me in things that you love or hate in so far as I order you to obey Allah *Glorified is He*.’ (1)

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(1) *[Ahmad]*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had informed `Ali that those who excessively love him and those who excessively hate him would not be gathered with him in paradise. Those who would excessively love him would allege that he was a messenger or even a God and those who would excessively hate him would allege that he was a disbeliever. Similarly, the Christians did this with `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him;* they overstepped the bounds of truth in their love for him, made him a God, or a son of God, or a third of three (Trinity doctrine). Allah *Glorified is He* thus tells them not to have excess in religion since `Isa (Jesus) is nothing but a messenger of Him. Allah's saying that `Isa (Jesus) is a Messenger of Him is a response to the Jews whose excessive hatred for `Isa (Jesus) made them refuse to believe in him and even drove them to falsely accuse him and his mother in an egregious way.

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* that `Isa (Jesus) is nothing but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to *Maryam* (Mary) and a soul created by Him, is a response to the fact that the Christians exceeded the bounds of truth because they attributed divinity to `Isa (Jesus). They claimed that he is the son of God and espoused the doctrine of trinity. But he was the son of *Maryam* (Mary) whom Allah *Glorified is He* foretold that she would give birth to him: ‘She said, "My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me? " The angel said, "Such is Allah; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 47)

Maryam (Mary) said so with the intelligence of a woman who has absolute faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. He knows that no man touched her and as long as He has attributed the boy to her this indicates that the boy will be born fatherless. `Isa (Jesus) will be born even though no man has touched *Maryam* (Mary). Then Allah *Glorified is He* explains this point when He said that The Messiah is a soul created by Him. In another verse, He indicated to this reality that `Isa (Jesus) is indeed a soul created by Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah says: ‘And mention the one who guarded her chastity, so We blew into her [garment] through Our angel [Gabriel], and We made her and her son a sign for the worlds.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 91)

What is the meaning of `Isa (Jesus) being Allah's Word? This statement indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* has breathed of His spirit into *Maryam*

(Mary) and then His order 'Be!' for `Isa (Jesus) to grow in her womb followed. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this kind of order in another verse; when He decrees a matter, He only says: '… "Be," and it is…' (*Al-'Imran:* 47).

The coming of `Isa (Jesus) required two prerequisites, a spirit or soul and the Word of Allah *Glorified is He* which underlies all creation. The Christians' misunderstanding is that `Isa (Jesus) is the son of God since *Maryam* (Mary) never got married. They, thus, said as long as Allah *Glorified is He* said that `Isa (Jesus) has been created of His spirit then he may be a part of Allah *Glorified is He*. However, in saying so, they overlooked the simple fact that all things come from Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, He says: 'And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all, from Himself; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.' (*al-Jathiya:* 13)

Does this mean that the earth and the sun are actual parts of Allah? The simple answer is no. If they have suspected that `Isa (Jesus) is the son of Allah *Glorified is He* only because his mother *Maryam* (Mary) was not touched by any human male and he was born fatherless, they should have also had suspicions about the divinity of Adam. No male or female copulated to bring about Adam. He was born fatherless and motherless. Allah says: 'Indeed, the example of `Isa (Jesus) to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was.' (*Al-'Imran:* 59)

No one has then the right to restrict or impose constraints on the Grace of Allah *Glorified is He* and His Capability. Indeed, the creation of Adam was much more sophisticated. But, Allah *Glorified is He* gracefully likened the creation of Adam to that of `Isa (Jesus). Further, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us that Adam, like `Isa (Jesus), came into being due to a command of His Will. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit…' (*al-Hijr:* 29)

Thus, to come to being, Adam needed two prerequisites just like `Isa (Jesus); the order to 'Be!' and the breathing by Allah *Glorified is He* of His Spirit into him. We need to focus a little bit on the creation of Adam to understand the chain of creation ensued whether this was the creation of Adam or the creation of Eve or the creation of the angels or any other creature including `Isa (Jesus). Adam did not know how he was created; neither Adam nor anyone after him has the right to question the way he was created. This is a matter that which no one has anything to do with. Allah *Glorified is He* thus, warns us against listening to those who make groundless and vacuous claims about creations. He says: 'I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken those who lead others astray as assistants.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

Therefore, we must not listen to those who claimed that man was originally an ape or anything of this sort. The reason is that those who talk about the first creation of man groundlessly lay claims about something they did not witness. The first creation is something that cannot be examined or investigated using the tools of empirical science because experimental labs only investigate things and objects that already exist. Thus, passing verdicts on such matters at odds with what Allah *Glorified is He* tells us is false. No one was there with Allah *Glorified is He* when He created the creation to tell us how such a creation took place. We only learned about these matters through what Allah *Glorified is He* told us about them. The Creator told us that we were created from water, dust, mud, altered black mud and from clay like that of pottery; He told us about this in several verses. Those who want to falsify or cast doubts on what the Quran says in this regard claim that the Quran makes contradictory statements about the process of creations: in one instance, it claims that man was created from water, in another from earth, in a third instance from mud and in a fourth instance from pottery clay.

We simply ask those who make such claims whether there any contradictions entailed in the fact that the Quran talks about the phases of creation? The primal matter of creation was water; Allah *Glorified is He* then mixed water with dust. When the two elements were blended together the resultant mixture was mud. Then the mud was then left to ferment which in turn became transmuted dark slime. After this, it turned into clay which was subsequently used to create Adam. Thus, everything that Allah *Glorified is He* said in all the verses that addressed the creation of Adam is consistent and in harmony with each other. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…I have made him complete and breathed into him of my spirit…' (*al-Hijr:* 29).

After Allah *Glorified is He* has created a soulless, motionless mold of clay, He breathed into it of His own spirit through the command *kun* (Be). Our being required two main elements: a soul and a Word of Allah. The soul is what gives existence. Life comes about through the unity of soul and body. Afterward, the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* to bring His creature into being is manifested and executed through the command *kun* (Be). Indeed, even though man can prepare the same chemical mixture, but he is never capable of creating a new human being because the order to bring about a new human being is missing.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the creation of Adam, which we did not see, He shows His Mercy to us. Allah *Glorified is He* then has left on earth an evidence of truth concerning the creation of Adam. Though we have not witnessed the creation of life, we witness the reverse process, i.e. death. In death, the soul is first severed from the body; after this, the body expands like transmuted dark slime then the water inside the body evaporates and the body starts to decompose back into the earth. These are the stages of death that begin with the separation of the soul from the body, the petrifying of the body leads to its rotting, then the water of the body begins to evaporate and the body begins to decay back into the earth.

Even though we do not know how life started we eye witness how it ends in our day to day experiences. Allah *Glorified is He* has intended that we concretely experience the end of life to demonstrate for us the verity of His Statements about the beginning of life and creation because death or the termination of life is the opposite of life and the opposite of anything is its own negation. The last component required for bringing the body of man into life is the soul which is alternatively the first thing that left the body. After the soul is severed from the body it petrifies, starts to rot and become like transmuted dark slime. Subsequently, the water evaporates and the entire body decays back into dust.

Human body has recently been analysed and then they discovered that it is composed of several elements. Upon analyzing the soil of fertile land that yields to man the food that sustains him they discovered that it is composed of the same elements. It is quite peculiar that the elements of which man is composed are identical to the elements of which the soil of fertile land is composed. This indicates the verity of the statement that Allah *Glorified is He* has created man from clay. Further, it demonstrates why the sustenance of life depends on the yield of land so that each component element of clay may support the corresponding element in the human body. When they analysed the human body in comparison with the analysis of the soil, they discovered that it is mainly composed of oxygen and that it constitutes around 67% of the human body, followed by carbon which constitutes around 19% of the body. In addition, they found that magnesium constitutes less than 1% of both the human body and the soil.

Further, scientists discovered that the most important elements constitutive of the human body are oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, chloride, sulfur, calcium, phosphor, potassium, sodium, iron, iodine, cellulose and magnesium. These are the most important constitutive elements of the human body. Some of these elements form organic compounds whose function is constant and well known and some do not. However, whoever wants to expand his knowledge on these matters should ask experts in these fields.

Those who analysed the components of the soil and the human body were not scholars of religion. Thus, they were not intent on establishing evidence in support of the verity of the statements Allah *Glorified is He* makes in the Quran. Rather, some of them do not know anything about the Quran or the scientific facts it mentions. But Allah *Glorified is He* has made Prophet Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* explain for us evidence that proves the correctness of these facts. In this manner, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah may support this religion (i.e. Islam) even with a disobedient man.’ (1)

Allah *Glorified is He* sometimes wills to support His religion through the statements or deeds of the disbelievers. He has made them discover facts and reach conclusions that if they knew could guide people to the righteous Path, they would not proclaim it. It is indeed due to Allah's Wisdom that He has made the disbelievers incapable of escaping the advocacy of religion, i.e.,

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(1) *[Al-Bukhari & Muslim]*

Islam. Allah *Glorified is He* made some of them serve His religion against their will. We must try to understand this matter in a profound, tolerant and subtle manner. Allah *Glorified is He* has created the first human being from clay. There is another verse wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has formed Adam fully and breathed into him of His Spirit (*al-Hijr*: 29). Further, a third verse, He says that Creating Adam was through ordering him to 'Be!' and He is (*Al-'Imran*: 47).

Accordingly, the creation of Adam required two prerequisites: the first, the breathing of the Spirit of Allah *Glorified is He* into the body of clay, and the second, the command *kun* (Be)! These are the two factors that were required for the creation of `Isa (Jesus), a Spirit from Allah *Glorified is He* and a Word that He addressed to *Maryam* (Mary). This is clear evidence in support of the verity of the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* concerning the likeness of the creation of 'Isa (Jesus) to that of Adam (*Al-'Imran*: 59).

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us the story of creating Adam from clay, moulding and fashioning him with His hands. Allah says: 'Allah said, "O Iblis (Satan), what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My hands? Were you arrogant then, or were you already among the haughty? "He said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay."' (*Sad:* 75-76)

Allah *Glorified is He* has created a body from clay and breathed into it of His Spirit; since He did so, a man came into being and started to reproduce and will continue to do so until the Day of Judgment. Should we then wonder about the way in which `Isa (Jesus) was created? No. When Adam begot his first offspring through the regular reproduction process; a sperm of his fertilized an ovum in the womb of Eve. Thus, the first human offspring was born. The sperm of Adam was a living part of him; its motion, in turn, allowed it to fertilize the ovum of Eve. Thus, the sperm is created from Adam and the life it has is inspired by the soul of Adam, but Adam is originally created by Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, this is evidence that the sperm has been created by Allah *Glorified is He* because He has created Adam. The sperm is alive because Allah *Glorified is He* breathed into it of His Spirit. It then moved to the womb of Eve and fertilized an ovum which then turned into a baby which she delivered. The reproduction of living sperm capable of fertilizing then continued so that more generations would evolve.

The offspring and descendants of Adam, until the Day of Judgment, will continue to bear characteristics of the original mold of Adam that Allah *Glorified is He* initially had created. Further, the Spirit that Allah *Glorified is He* breathed into this mould never dies. Indeed, if the soul died or perished, reproduction would not have continued. We thus learn that each one of us bears some of the characteristics of the physical mould Allah *Glorified is He* had fashioned with His own hands as well as part of the Spirit He had breathed into this mould.

Let me repeat the example I always give in the wake of discussing this matter so that the facts about it would be anchored in the minds of the youth. If we add a cubic centimetre of a concentrated coloured liquid to a litre of water and then take a drop of this water, we will discover that this drop of water contains only very little of this coloured cubic centimetre. If we then put this drop of water in a big container of water, the entire container will only contain a small portion of the cubic centimetre of this coloured solution. If we then pour the water in this container into the sea, the entire sea will contain the same small portion of a cubic centimetre of this coloured solution. Similarly, the posterity of Adam, until the Day of Judgment, will continue to bear a constantly diminishing portion of the physical constitution of Adam.

We notice that a lot of thinkers and intellectuals in the West avoid any discussions about the idea that `Isa (Jesus) is a son of God. When they are forced into discussions about this matter they say, ' Allah was only father to `Isa (Jesus) through His Love for him.' But, if this were the case, one may well argue that Allah *Glorified is He* loves all His Servants and that all of them, by the same token, share the same status with the Messiah. For Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'All of the creation is Allah's dependants, and those who are most beloved to Him are those who are the most beneficial towards their own dependants.'(1)

If we understand this statement in a rigorous, empirical and experimental sense we will find that it is both right and true. All of us came to being due to the capability of Allah *Glorified is He* and His will; further, all of us have been fashioned by Allah *Glorified is He* since the time Adam had been created. The only difference between us and Adam is that the Heavens selected him to become a Messenger. However, some still believe in the doctrine of the trinity. In this respect, some argue that the trinity is only a trinity of attributes. But could there be a trinity of divine attributes that is composed of secondary qualities? For instance, they maintain the divinity of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit (trinity). In this vein, they maintain that there would not be a father unless there is a son and there would not be a son unless there is a father.

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(1) *[Muslim]*

We know that there are primary and secondary facts. A person may be both a father and a son; he is son relative to his father and a father relative to his son. These are secondary qualities. However, the Attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* must be essential and not secondary qualities. Their belief in the divinity of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit (trinity) refers to secondary and not primary or essential qualities that befit Allah's Majesty. Some Christian scholars argued that *al-Fatiha* in the Quran refers to Allah *Glorified is He* through a trinity of attributes since it starts with saying ‘Allah, the Most Merciful, and the Most Gracious.’ They took this verse as a clue to claim that the Quran starts by referring to Allah *Glorified is He* in terms of three attributes. In response to those who make such groundless arguments, I say that we recite it as such, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, and the Most Gracious' without using the conjunction particle 'and.’

Further, why did Allah *Glorified is He* choose to beget a son more than one thousand and nine hundred years ago, although He has deprived the generations prior to the birth of the Messiah of the honour of receiving a son of His? Why did Allah *Glorified is He* not beget a son throughout the ages and only chose to beget one around twenty centuries ago? Further, what is the time that Allah *Glorified is He* has honoured with the presence of His son?

Would thirty-three years, which is the life of the Messiah, suffice to honour mankind with the presence of the son of Allah? Further, why has Allah *Glorified is He* deprive all generations of the beginning of creation until the Day of Judgment of such an honour?

We further wonder why does any creature beget a son? It is because this creature wants to guarantee the survival of its species and the continuity of life. Every human being knows that he is bound to die. But Allah *Glorified is He* has created life and death and He will eternally continue to be. He is thus in no need of assuring the continuity of His life through any human being. Allah *Glorified is He* asserts this fact in the chapter of *al-Ikhlas* by saying: 'Say, "He is Allah, who is One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He begets not, nor is He begotten. Nor is there to Him any equivalent."' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4)

Some may argue that Muslims sometimes say that Allah *Glorified is He* is *Wahid* (One) and sometimes say Allah *Glorified is He* is *Ahad* (the One). We know that both statements are not semantically identical. Logicians and linguists distinguish between the whole and its parts; they also differentiate between genre and species on the one hand and the members of genre or species on the other.

The word genus is used to qualify what consists of several members or individuals like the human species. There may be a man named Khalid, another named Mohammad and a third called `Ali. By contrast, the whole is composed of parts like a chair which is made of different components like wood, glue, nails and other substances. The chair is, thus, a whole that is composed of several components. But the essence of wood is different from that of nails. Thus, the chair is composed of several components whose essence is completely different. Further, we cannot call any of the components of a chair as a chair. For instance, we cannot call nails a chair or wood alone a chair. The word chair is used in reference to the totality of wood, nails, glue and paint when they are arranged per a specific form and order.

By contrast, the word human is used to qualify a vast sense of beings, namely, mankind because the essence of all these human beings is the same. We say the human designates an entire genre of beings.

We may, thus, describe any being that has the essential qualities of a human being as human. Thus, we can correctly call a man by the name Mohammad a human being as much as we may correctly call another one by the name Zayd a human being and a third of the name `Ali also a human being. The whole has parts whereas the generic name refers to class of individuals which share the same essential attributes. Further, the whole may be only one thing that is composed of several parts. Thus, each individual chair is composed of several parts.

Here a question arises: ‘Is Allah *Glorified is He* a whole or could He be described as a genus’? Neither of these qualifications can be used to describe Allah *Glorified is He*. It is not a name that is used to qualify a class of individual beings or substances because He is One; further Allah *Glorified is He* is not composed of parts because He is the One. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* can neither be described as a whole part, nor as a genus or member or species belonging to a genus. Indeed, if the word 'Allah' designated a genus this would imply that it is composed of several individual members. Further, if the word Allah had referred to a whole, such a whole would have been composed of parts. But Allah *Glorified is He* is One and no other individuals share with Him the same essence; also, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One and is, thus, not composed of parts.

For this reason, the Quran responds to anyone who may argue otherwise by saying that Allah is the One (*al-Baqara:* 16). Allah also says: ‘And your god is one God. There is no deity worthy of worship except Him, the Beneficent, the Merciful.’ (*al-Baqara:* 163)

I have adduced all this evidence so that we may properly understand the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* through admonishing the followers of the Gospel not to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, `Isa (Jesus), son of *Maryam* (Mary), was nothing more than a Messenger of Allah, His word, directed to *Maryam* (Mary), a spirit from Him. So, they should believe in Allah and His Messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’; stopping that is better for them. The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* to ‘desist that it is better for you’ means to give up saying these void claims and stick to the orders of the Allah *Glorified is He*.

It is intended to disclaim and denounce all false statements and celebrate and praise the truth and all true statements. We can infer this from the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* previously explained.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says that He is but One. This means that no other individuals participate with Allah *Glorified is He* in His Divine Essence. Once we encounter the word *subhanu Glorified is He*, we need to understand that it is intended to glorify and exalt Allah, the Creator.

For this reason, the word *subhanu Glorified is He* is often used while discussing peculiar matters that tend to confuse and baffle human reason. Further, although there are disbelievers in this world in addition to those who have the audacity to disparage Allah *Glorified is He* and attribute divinity to humans, no human being has previously had the audacity to qualify another human being by the word *subhanak Glorified are you*. For this reason, we praise Allah by saying *Glorified is He* over and above any exaltation and glorification we may attribute to Him. In addition, no one, no matter what his religion, creed or faith is, ever called himself Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* challenges even the disbelievers to have the audacity to call themselves Allah. Indeed, have you ever come across any audacious disbeliever who named his son Allah?

Even such a level of audacity cannot be found among disbelievers. The reason is that the disbeliever can never be sure that he is right. Thus, even if he does so, a disaster may befall him. If there was a single disbeliever who truly believed in his claims that there is no God in this universe they would name his son Allah. But no one has the audacity to do so. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, so worship Him and have patience for His worship. Do you know of any similarity to Him?’ (*Maryam:* 65)

This challenge was there long before this verse was revealed. But what happened after it had been revealed? Did anyone have the audacity to name his son with the name of Allah? No one did even though people call their children all sorts of names. In the village where I was born a man called his daughter a long, weird name. He named her 'flowers that flourished in a blooming season and a kingdom whose subjects are all loyal.’ Man, is free to do what he wishes. But, no one has ever had the audacity to call a child of his Allah. The fact that this never happened demonstrates that the claims of the atheists and the disbelievers are false because no one among them has the boldness to do so. Allah *Glorified is He* challenges all of them with describing Himself with glorification and also challenges them with Himself. Accordingly, every one of us may comfortably and confidently call Allah *Glorified is He subhanak* because it is used to qualify naught beside Allah. Indeed, if you examine all the poems of praise and adoration that were ever composed in celebration of other human beings you will find none that qualifies a human being as *subhanak Glorified is He*.

No one has used this qualification to describe a fellow human being. In this manner, Allah *Glorified is He* controls a matter which is essentially up to man. For no human being, would dare call another human being Allah. ‘Indeed, Allah is but one God. *the Exalted* above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 171)

Only beings that live on earth or in the heavens beget children; it does not make sense that Allah *Glorified is He* would follow the model of his creatures. This claim is incoherent and self-contradictory. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 171)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّن يَسۡتَنكِفَ ٱلۡمَسِيحُ أَن يَكُونَ عَبۡدٗا لِّلَّهِ وَلَا ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ ٱلۡمُقَرَّبُونَۚ وَمَن
يَسۡتَنكِفۡ عَنۡ عِبَادَتِهِۦ وَيَسۡتَكۡبِرۡ فَسَيَحۡشُرُهُمۡ إِلَيۡهِ جَمِيعٗا ١٧٢

The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God, nor would the angels who are close to Him. He will gather before Him all those who disdain His worship and are arrogant [172] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 172)

The source of honour for any human being ought to be his servitude to Allah *Glorified is He*. He has wanted to manifest His Lordship to the seal of all prophets, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and make him fully acknowledge his servitude to Him. He thus took him at night to Al 'Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem by saying: ‘The Exalted who took His servant by night from Masjid Al-Haram (the *Ka`ba* in Mecca) to Masjid Al- 'Aqsa (sacred mosque in Jerusalem), whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the seeing.’ (*al-Isra’:* 1)

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* did not use ‘His messenger’, but rather used ‘His servant’ when He spoke about the event of Prophet Muhammad’s *peace and blessings be upon him* midnight journey and his ascension to the seventh sky. This is because servitude is a gift and bounty from Allah. It is as if the servitude of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Allah is as infinite as the Goodness of Allah. If this is the case with the best of all humans, i.e. Muhammad, so then how can others be too proud to admit their servitude to Allah? Neither `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* nor the angels were too proud to be servants of Allah. '…nor would the angels who are close to Him…' (*an-Nisa':* 172). The reference to the angels is intended to exalt and add importance to the negations. For instance, a proud peasant may say, 'The head of the mayor's police force cannot challenge me; not even the mayor himself would dare to do so.'

Since the angels are higher and more exalted than human beings, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of Allah, nor would the angels who are close to Him.…' (*an-Nisa':* 172) Some scholars argued that the 'select few' of humans are better than the select few of angels, whereas the 'masses' of the angels are better than the masses of the humans. However, the terms of any language are first assigned to tangible objects, then to the intangible ideas. The reason beyond this is that man starts out his life journey perceiving only the tangible objects. Allah says: 'And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

Since, Allah says that we knew nothing, this means that whatever followed afterwards, followed as a 'means' towards acquiring knowledge; namely our various senses, like hearing, seeing and the capacity to attain experiences. A good example that illustrates this point is the issue of *al-ghasb* in Islamic law. *Al-ghasb* means to appropriate or usurp the right of someone else publicly and by coercion. This is different from stealing secretly; it is also different from mugging. Mugging means snatching something from its owner and running away. By contrast *al-ghasb* means to take something by force.

Al-ghasb, stealing and mugging are all forms of unrightfully appropriating that to which one is not entitled. The word *ghasb* originally refers to a tangible process namely, the skinning of a goat. Coercively appropriating or usurping someone else’s right is thus called *ghasb* because it is like skinning the one whose possessions are appropriated. Thus, a word that originally refers to something concrete and tangible is used to refer to something abstract. In the verse under consideration the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of Allah, nor would the angels who are close to Him.…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 172). The word *yastankif* (feel too proud), like the words *yastafhim* and *yastakhrij,* all originally have tangible connotations and were hence used to refer to abstract ideas.

The root of the word *yastankif* is *nakaf* which refers to a tangible action; which is wiping off tears using one’s fingers. Let us assume that the son or the wife of a man of dignity saw him weeping; the latter will immediately try to wipe off their tears with their fingers. *Istankaf* means to remove *an-nakf* which in turn means to wipe off one’s tears. Wiping off the tears indicates that one is too proud to be seen weeping and shedding tears due to something that impacted them. This process only happens when one wants to hide their tears away from others.

Accordingly, the reference of the word has been extended beyond the tangible connotation to include a moral one, namely, pride and arrogance. In this manner, it is said that a person is too proud to walk in the way of another person, sit with another person or sit on a lesser seat than another. In this sense, Allah says that the Messiah was never too proud to be a servant of Allah; on the contrary he felt honoured by such servitude. Similarly, the angels near to Allah are honoured by their servitude to Him; indeed, they do not have any knowledge of this world and do not do anything except glorifying and exalting Allah because all they know is that they are His servants. This servitude does not humiliate the one who practises it; but rather honours them. Further, servitude is an honour that only those who are willing to give and sacrifice can merit. Those who are too proud to do so, do not appreciate the value of servitude to Allah. For this reason, neither the Messiah nor the angels near to Allah were ever too proud to be servants of Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then adds: ‘…He will gather before Him all those who disdain His worship and are arrogant.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 172) All those who are too proud to serve Allah in addition to those who abet them to maintain such false course are doomed to hellfire.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَيَزِيدُهُم مِّن
فَضْلِهِۦ ۖ وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَنكَفُوا۟ وَٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ فَيُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا
أَلِيمًا وَلَا يَجِدُونَ لَهُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿١٧٣﴾

to those who believe and do good works He will give due rewards and more of His bounty; to those who are disdainful and arrogant He will give an agonizing torment, and they will find no one besides God to protect or help them [173] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 173)

Why did Allah not put forward the part where He talks about those who were too arrogant to serve Him before the first part to make it a continuation of the previous verse? Why did Allah not resume the discourse He started in the previous verse on those who were too arrogant and proud to serve Him and show that they are fated to suffer and that they shall find none to protect them from Allah and none to bring them relief? Afterwards, He could have told us about the rewards that await those who attain to faith and do good!

The reason is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about a group of people that deviated from the righteous path and to whom He will never extend the reward of those who adhered to the righteous path. Allah thus chose to talk first about the reward that awaits the obedient so that the disobedient would know what they will miss. Allah will then, if they insist on their disobedience, deprive them of this reward so they would lament on their loss. For, as people say, the opposite of the good, best manifests its goodness.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'To those who believe and do good works He will give due rewards and more of His bounty…' (*an-Nisa':* 173). We know that the reward is proportionate to the deeds for which it is granted. So why did Allah *Glorified is He* mention His bounty? Let us recall what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about the value of one's deeds and actions in this life. 'No one will be admitted into heaven due to their deeds or actions.' The Companions then wondered, 'Not even you, messenger of Allah?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Not even me, unless

Allah confers His bounty and mercy upon me. I thereby advise you to always aim at doing what is good and to always try to be closer to good through good deeds. Further, none of you should ever demand dying; for if he is obedient and good he may do more good deeds and if he is sinful and bad he may repent.'(1)

'Say: "In the grace of Allah and in His mercy, in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather."' (*Yunus:* 58) People recognized this truth and they started to supplicate to Allah by saying, 'Allah treat us with Your grace and mercy and not Your justice.' For only His grace and mercy can aid us to a better status, whereas His justice may send us to oblivion.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says the following about those who are too arrogant and proud to serve Him: '…to those who are disdainful and arrogant He will give an agonizing torment, and they will find no one besides Allah to protect or help them.' (*an-Nisa':* 173) This means that they will not find anyone to appeal to Allah on their behalf; further no one will either advocate them or protect them from their deserved torment. Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ قَدۡ جَآءَكُم بُرۡهَٰنٞ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ وَأَنزَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكُمۡ نُورٗا مُّبِينٗا ﴿١٧٤﴾

People, convincing proof has come to you from your Lord and We have sent a clear light down to you [174] (The Quran, *an-Nisa':* 174)

Al-burhan (a manifestation of the truth) is the miracle that proves the truth of the seal of prophets, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it also means a stark compelling proof. But someone may wonder, what is the difference between the manifestation of the truth and the clear light? We know that every messenger is supported by a miracle that vindicates the truth of the message he conveys from His Lord. Miracles can be different from the teachings the messengers were sent to deliver, then Allah would reveal to them His books and teachings so they can convey them to their people. For instance, the miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was his staff, but the teachings he was commanded to deliver to his people were in the

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(1) *[Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Majah]*

Torah. Hence, miracles were the ‘manifestation of the truth’ to what the messengers of Allah conveyed from their Lord. As we said, miracles might have little to do with the teachings revealed to the messenger; like the miracle of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* for instance. His miracle was to heel the blind, the leper and bring the dead back to life by Allah’s will, but the teachings he was commanded to deliver to his people were in the Bible.

By contrast to all the messengers prior to him, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the seal of all prophets was, in itself, the very Book that contained the teachings he was commanded to deliver to mankind. His miracle and Book are one and the same; the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* intended this because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a messenger to all mankind and no messenger would follow him until the Day of Judgment. This is *al-burhan* or the manifestation of truth that Allah *Glorified is He* sent to Muhammad. The clear light here is a metaphor taken from the material world; light keeps one from stumbling in the dark, taking wrong turns or bumping into harmful objects. Similarly, the light of the Quran refers to the values it propounds. As for the material light that Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon us, it is well known to everyone.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱعْتَصَمُواْ بِهِۦ فَسَيُدْخِلُهُمْ فِي
رَحْمَةٍ مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلٍ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَيْهِ صِرَٰطًا مُّسْتَقِيمًا ﴿١٧٥﴾

God will admit those who believe in Him and hold fast to Him
into His mercy and favour; He will guide them towards Him
on a straight path [175] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 175)

Here Allah *Glorified is He* talks about those who have attained faith in Him and held fast unto Him, but what is the meaning of holding fast unto Allah? In the past when a man fell in a pit he used to shout till someone would come to pull him out of it. This is the original meaning of the word *i'tisam* (holding fast unto; i.e. clinging to the one who rescues and saves you from a disaster or an abyss). The True Lord *Glorified is He* provides us with the needed ‘means.’ So, when the sun shines above our heads and we walk under its blazing heat, Allah provides us with trees so we can protect ourselves from the heat under their shade. When it rains, He provides us with umbrellas to protect ourselves from being drenched and when we get thirsty he provides us with a ‘means’ so we could drink a cup of water. However, only the wise remember, at the time of every cause, the real One who provided such causes and means in the first place.

So, as being a believer you must never think that these material means are the ultimate causes of your sustenance. If you always keep in mind that Allah is the cause of all these causes you will never be too proud to serve Him. Even when your experience seems apparently evil, so long as you keep in mind that Allah is the One Who caused you to go through it, you will know that it is intended for your ultimate good.

Man’s knowledge often misleads him in so many ways; he may think that something is good for him and it turns out to be bad or the opposite. Indeed, every one of us, at least once in a lifetime, must have thought that a certain thing was good and then realized that it was evil and likewise thought that another was bad but then it turned out to be good. Evil is only what is brought upon man due to his own actions. As for the things that befall us despite our actions or planning, they are all based on Allah’s will and His knowledge; not on our own will or knowledge.

Someone might say, ‘I pray to Allah to give me such and such and He does not answer my prayers.’ We say, ‘You ask Allah for things that you think may be good; but Allah’s knowledge is different from yours.’ For this reason, Allah does not answer your every beck and call. If you truly believe in Allah and hold fast unto Him you will need to ask yourself a simple question, ‘Do my actions underlie the fact that I did not get what I asked for’? If yes, then only blame yourself. If not, then this is just what Allah willed for you, so rest assured it is ultimately good for you and that a divine wisdom underlies what happened.

My fortune in this life is always good to me,
Because I am content with Allah’s decree be it good or bad,
If it turns out to be good I feel redeemed and rewarded,
And if it turns out not, then I know my reward will be for my patience

‘And as for those who have attained to faith in Allah and hold fast unto Him – He will enfold them within His grace and bounty, and guide them unto Himself by a straight way.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 175) So long as they attain to faith in Allah and hold fast unto Him, Allah will guide them unto Himself by a straight way. The fruit of being righteously guided is explained and pointed out in another verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and those who are guided; He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness’ (*Muhammad:* 17). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also tells us,‘Whoever acts upon what he knows, Allah will cause him to learn more than he had previously known.’[1]

This means that Allah will entrust whoever acts upon what he knows with more knowledge because he availed himself of the knowledge he had in serving others and did not suspend or keep it. The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* closes the chapter of *an-Nisa`* with His saying:

يَسۡتَفۡتُونَكَ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يُفۡتِيكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡكَلَٰلَةِۚ إِنِ ٱمۡرُؤٌاْ هَلَكَ لَيۡسَ لَهُۥ وَلَدٞ وَلَهُۥٓ
أُخۡتٞ فَلَهَا نِصۡفُ مَا تَرَكَۚ وَهُوَ يَرِثُهَآ إِن لَّمۡ يَكُن لَّهَا وَلَدٞۚ فَإِن كَانَتَا
ٱثۡنَتَيۡنِ فَلَهُمَا ٱلثُّلُثَانِ مِمَّا تَرَكَۚ وَإِن كَانُوٓاْ إِخۡوَةٗ رِّجَالٗا وَنِسَآءٗ فَلِلذَّكَرِ مِثۡلُ
حَظِّ ٱلۡأُنثَيَيۡنِۗ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡ أَن تَضِلُّواْۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمُۢ ١٧٦

They ask you [Prophet] for a ruling. Say, ‘God gives you a ruling about inheritance from someone who dies childless with no surviving parents. If a man leaves a sister, she is entitled to half of the inheritance; if she has no child her brother is her sole heir; if there are two sisters, they are entitled to two-thirds of the inheritance between them, but if there are surviving brothers and sisters, the male is entitled to twice the share of the female. God makes this clear to you so that you do not make mistakes: He has full knowledge of everything’ [176] (The Quran, *an-Nisa’:* 176)

Al-istifta’—the root of the Arabic word *yastaftunak*, means they ask for a ruling seeking the legal opinion on a particular issue or question about

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(1) *Related by Abu An-Na`im in (Al-Hilya), Az-Zubaydi in (`Ithaf As-Sada Al-Mutaqini), As-Suyuti in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur), Al-Qurtubi in (At-Tafsir) and Ash-Shawkani in (Al-Fawa`id Al-Majmu`a).*

which the inquirer has no knowledge. The Companions used to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to enlighten them even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them, ‘Do not ask me about the matters on which I have not enlightened you. People before you were doomed to perdition due to their excessive inquiries and their disagreement with their prophets. Accordingly, if I command you to do something then follow my command as much as you can and if I forbid you from doing something then make sure to consistently abstain from doing it.(1)

The Quran used the word *yas`alunak* (they ask you) in several verses. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to teach us that the companions wanted to prove that their love for the path of Allah by basing all their lives and actions on it. Indeed, had they disliked the path of Allah they would not have asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to enlighten them. They realized that upon its advent, Islam acknowledged and let certain practises continue but abolished others. The Companions did not want to just go on doing whatever they have been doing from their days of pre-Islamic ignorance as if in continuity with it (namely, the practises which were not admonished by the Quran). They rather wanted to do any practises in continuity with their new point of reference; the Quran. So, they used to excessively ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about everything. A legal opinion is sought in a ruling, but a question can be sought in a ruling and or in a matter not related to any ruling. In the verse under consideration the Companions wanted the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to enlighten them on a ruling about inheritance from those who leave no heirs in their direct kin. However, the Quran was quite eloquent since it succinctly phrased their question: ‘They request from you a legal ruling. Say, “Allah gives you a ruling concerning one having neither descendants nor ascendants as heirs…”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 176). In an earlier part of this same chapter, Allah says: ‘And you shall have half of what your wives leave if they have no child…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 12).

This verse however, addresses the maternal kin, but Jabir ibn `Abdullah’s inquiry *Allah be pleased with him* was about the paternal kin. Jabir ibn `Abdullah

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(1) *[Muslim, Ahmad, Ibn Maja and An-Nasa`i]*

Allah be pleased with him related that, ‘I once became quite sick and lost my consciousness in the middle of the road. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who were walking around, saw me. So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* performed ablution and then poured on me the water he used for ablution. I then awoke and asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* “What should I do with my wealth? How should I distribute it?” But Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not answer me until the verse concerning inheritance was revealed.’(1)

In another version of the above Hadith related by Imam Ahmad *Allah rest his soul,* Jabir *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘No heir in direct kin will inherit me, so how will my wealth be distributed upon my death?’ So, Allah revealed the verse at hand. Some scholars said that the word *kalala* (those who have no heirs in their direct line) is derived from *kilal at-ta`ab* (exhaustion) because *kalala* in Islamic law means the one who has neither a child nor a father. But any human being goes through two main phases throughout his life. In the first phase, he is supported by his father. When one grows up and his strength fades away, his son then starts to support him. Thus, the one has neither a father nor a son lives in toil and labour, with neither a father nor a son to care for him when he grows old. For this reason, such a person is described as *kalala*.

Some people say that the word *kalala* is derived from *iklil* which is a sheath of flowers worn on the head. In this sense *kalala* would refer to the relatives who surround one but are not related to him as fathers or sons.

‘If a man dies, leaving no child but only a sister, she will have half of what he left. And he inherits from her if she dies and has no child.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 176) *Al-Kalala* thus refers to the case when one dies and has a sister (or a half-sister from his father’s side); in such a case his sister is entitled to inherit half of his wealth. If this sister dies, her brother can inherit her whether he is her brother or half-brother from her father’s side. If a man, who does not have an heir in the direct line, has two sisters, they are entitled to two thirds of his wealth. But if such a man has brothers and sisters, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *[Al-Bukhari]*

‘If there are both brothers and sisters, the male will have the share of two females.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 176) This means that every brother is entitled to double the share of every sister.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* seals the verse with His saying: ‘Allah makes clear to you His law, lest you go astray. And Allah knows of all things.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 176) This means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains His rulings lest people should go astray. Allah *Glorified is He* pre-eternally knows every deed every man will commit and any secret he will try to conceal. Further, Allah knows what is best for people. We hereby conclude our reflection on the chapter of *an-Nisa’*.

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REFLECTIONS

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الشعراوي

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المجلد [6]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (6)

The Chapter of

al-Ma’ida

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

We now begin the chapter titled *al-Ma'ida* which comes after *an-Nisa'* in the arrangement of the Quran. We know that the Quran has two arrangements; the arrangement of the chronological order of its revelation, and the arrangement of the entire text in its written form. Those people who wish to criticise Islam might like to say, 'Why is the Quran not arranged in accordance with its chronological order of revelation so that it starts with the first verse that was revealed and ends with the last one revealed'? We say that the Quran was not only revealed as a book of divine guidance, but as both a methodology and a miracle. Prophet Muhammad's message is all-inclusive for every nation and every age until the Last Hour because no other messenger will ever come after him. Hence, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is unique in that it will remain as long as his message remains until the Last Hour, with a way of guidance which will cover all walks of life until the end of time.

Prophets used to be sent to specific nations in specific locations and for specific times because the world was like a series of disconnected peoples due to the absence of any means of communication that could make it easy for people to come together. Allah *Glorified is He* willed to complete the series of messages with the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that it would complement the progress of the human conscience through uniting the whole world. This means that if an ailment breaks out in the East, it will be immediately transferred to the West; calling for a single cure and a single curer.

As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* he was uniquely given a persisting miracle which will last side by side with the methodology so that everyone who follows Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can say, ‘The methodology of Islam is in the Quran, and the miracle of the Prophet of Islam is the Quran’. Had the miracle been of the same nature, mode and form of the previous miracles which were given to his fellow messengers, it would have ended the moment its time ended; just a piece of information and an event in history. We know that the sea was parted for *Musa* (Moses) *peace be upon him* as a piece of information, but we did not see it for ourselves, and we know that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* healed the blind, the leper and raised the dead by Allah’s will, but we are only aware of this now as a piece of information. Were it not for the fact that we believe in the Quran which has told us the stories of such events, we would have had our reservations about them.

There are those who say that the miraculous nature of the Quran lies in its rhetoric, eloquence, manner of discourse and its unmatched articulacy, since the Arabs were a people of rhetoric. But we say that not only did this miraculous Quran outdo all the articulacy and eloquence of the Arabs and utterly incapacitate them, but even when we conveyed its teachings to the English, French, Germans, Italians or any other people in the world, the teachings remained miraculous.

Thus, we see that Allah *Glorified is He* wanted an aspect of the Quran to remain miraculous for all peoples, namely those miracles upon which the languages would not differ, nor the nations. So, we are talking about intellectual miracles which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would tell about to his unlettered community (he himself being unlettered and without any tuition in science or culture); and these things would come true centuries later, and they would even be acknowledged by those who do not believe that such things were revealed by a deity.

Some people tried to raise Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the level of divinity because he said things, fourteen centuries ago, which are coming true only now, and no one could say such things except someone with an unparalleled knowledge. But they knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had affirmed that he is human, and that he was sent with a method which is in line with the path of ongoing events. The Quran reveals universal miracles that fall within a common ground with all other nations, and are not limited to one culture at the expense of others.

This method was sent down so that the world would be ruled by an unlettered nation which had never advanced far enough to establish laws or constitutions, and which had no experience of any sophisticated knowledge. It was a nation of nomads and desert-dwellers who had never agreed on a single law; each tribe, clan, kinfolk and family had its very own law. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by Allah to this unlettered nation to establish in their midst a methodology which would cover all of life's issues until the Last Hour. And when people get impacted by a certain issue in their society, they will not find a solution for it except a one which, by considering our own teachings, either agrees with what Islam revealed, or does not deviate from the bounds of Islam's teachings and guidelines.

The Quran's rulings were revealed per the events and circumstances of the times because it is the True Lord's will to do what is best for those who lived at the time and place of the Quran's revelation. We find that The Quran makes mention of questions which would be posed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and these many questions he would be asked indicate that people's state of faith was fit. Those who asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to give them rulings on certain issues thereby wanted – as we said before – to live their lives in view of the method they loved. They were not like the Israelites about whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said,

'They were commanded to sacrifice the most common type of cows; but when they made things difficult, Allah made it difficult for them. By Allah, had they not restricted their guidance to the will of Allah, this issue would never have been made clear to them until the end of times.'(1) This means that, had they not said '…if Allah so wills, we shall truly be guided aright,' (*al-Baqara:* 70) they would not have been guided to the right cow to sacrifice.

There are things that Islam accepted just as they were in the time of pre-Islamic ignorance because they were rational and logical; Islam did not come to get rid of any regimes contemporary to its revelation, but it came to get rid of the corruption of these regimes. So anything that was sound by nature was left as it is. Whatever it is they were not guided to naturally; Islam would explain it for them. So a Quranic text had to be revealed for every significant matter in their lives. In the instances when verses were revealed after particular events necessitated them, this made them stick fast in people’s hearts. We gave an example of this before by saying, ‘Suppose a man has a medicine cabinet in his house and a member of his family is ill, and needs a particular medicine. Since the man does not know where this medicine is, he needs to search through all the contents of the cabinet in order to find the medicine he needs, and a lot of time might pass before he can find what he wants. But if this man does not have any medicine in the cabinet, and his son gets a headache he will go directly to the pharmacy to buy him some aspirin: this tablet of aspirin will treat that headache…a specific cure for a specific ailment’.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir*

When the solution comes after the event occurs, this bolsters one’s certitude. And the solution might have been present in the Quran, yet they were unable to discern it. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* let things happen to them first which made them turn to the Heavens for a solution, and the solution was given right after the event to avoid any misguidance or difficulty. Hence, the Quran had to be revealed according to events; and once the events occurred and the entire methodology had been revealed twenty-three years after the advent of the Quran’s revelation, Allah *Glorified is He* willed that it be arranged in a particular order in its written form.

Both the written and the revealed orders constitute miracles for the Quran and for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Quran contains long chapters with many verses, and Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* taught Prophet Muhammad to place certain verses in certain spots, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would recite these verses in the communal prayer along with the new verses, which were attached to them by revelation. The greatness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be clearly shown when he prayed with these verses and then added the new ones which had been revealed to him, and this was all done on purpose. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would stand in prayer fully confident in the fact that the One Who revealed the Quran had said to him: ‘We will make you recite, (O Muhammad), and you will not forget.’ (*al-A’la:* 6)

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited, he would recite what had been revealed to him that very day alongside that which had been revealed to him a year before. This was a miracle by all standards because when an ordinary person speaks about something for ten minutes and then an hour later someone asks him to repeat what he said, he would not be able to remember the exact expressions and ideas he spoke. But here we are faced with a messenger who instructed his companions to write, and instructed those who could memorise the Quran to do so, and then stood in prayer and recited the verses which had been revealed to him a year before, alongside verses which had been revealed six months later, alongside verses which had been revealed a month later, alongside verses which had been revealed only a day before which proves that none of this was within the control of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but it was rather, under the full command of the Lord of Muhammad, who arranged the letters of the Quran so that Prophet Muhammad would recite it without forgetting a single letter from it: 'We will make you recite, (O Muhammad), and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6)

Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* would come every year in the month of Ramadan to arrange the Quran with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and verify his memorization of it. In *Ramadan* of the final year of Prophet Muhammad's life Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* verified the Quran with him twice.

So we are not just talking about the revelation of the Quran, but there is also the arrangement of the Quran in a way which differed from the original way as it was revealed. Had the Quran been arranged in the same order as it was revealed in, some people would have said that it was only a verbal reaction to specific situations; but the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to rearrange the Quran so that it would be an everlasting miracle. The Quran was not revealed at the behest of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and every letter of it was revealed in this order intentionally to affirm that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly sent to convey the Quran, and that it was not within the capacity of any human mind to arrange it as thus, but rather, it was arranged by the One Who revealed it to Prophet Muhammad, namely Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*.

So, the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* (1) comes after *an-Nisa'* in the written arrangement of the Quran. When we consider *al-Ma'ida*, we must first ask, what does *Ma'ida* mean? It means a table laden with food and drink, or a feast; and the chapter was given this name because it contains mention of how 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* asked his Lord to send a table laden with food down from Heaven after the Apostles urged him to ask Allah to do so. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Isa (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary) said, "O Allah, our Lord, send down to us a table spread with food from Heaven to be for us a festival for the first of us and the last of us and a sign from You. And provide for us, and you are the best of providers."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 114)

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*, chooses a beautiful cause as a prelude for this chapter, saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَوۡفُواْ بِٱلۡعُقُودِۚ أُحِلَّتۡ لَكُم بَهِيمَةُ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ إِلَّا
مَا يُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡكُمۡ غَيۡرَ مُحِلِّي ٱلصَّيۡدِ وَأَنتُمۡ حُرُمٌۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَحۡكُمُ مَا يُرِيدُ ١

You who believe, fulfil your obligations. Livestock animals are lawful as food for you, with the exception of what is about to be announced to you. You are forbidden to kill game while you are on pilgrimage – God commands what He will [1] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 1)

It begins, then, with the importance of fulfilling obligations and vows, and the lawfulness of consuming livestock as food. As we know, *al-Ma'ida* comes in the written Quran after *an-Nisa'* which comprised various vows and obligations intrinsic to faith like; marriage, dowries, bequests, debts and inheritance, all of which are rulings related to agreements and contracts. It is as though after *an-Nisa*', the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*, were saying to us, 'You are aware of all the pledges which were mentioned in *an-Nisa*', so honour them and be true to them'.

We also observe that *al-Baqara* comes before *Al-'Imran*, both of which speak about the materialistic Jews. So, *an-Nisa'* and *al-Ma'ida* both address the civil society of Medina, after the Quranic verses revealed in Mecca had dealt with educating the society and instilling the doctrines of Divinity

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(1) The story of the table of `Isa *peace be upon him*

(monotheism) and Prophethood. The chapters of *al-Baqara* and *Al-'Imran* dealt with the matter of practical doctrine and the prophets; and the chapter of *an-Nisa'* was concerned with the decisive doctrines of Sacred Law.

Now we come to *al-Ma'ida* in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe, fulfil your obligations...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). The True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses the believers with a relative pronoun, and does not say, 'O believers'! This shows that faith is not a temporary state through which a man passes occasionally, but that it is renewed through renewing our actions every time we obey the laws which our covenant of faith compels us to do. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* directs His discourse to those who have attained to faith, this emphasises that He does not invade anyone's life to command them, even though, as Lord of the worlds, He created man and brought all things into existence and subdued them to serve man.

Yet Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* did not use this to compel all mankind into believing, He rather invited all people to faith first, and those who believed He honoured them with moral responsibility. Hence, they would rightfully deserve to be addressed as, 'O you who believe…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1), i.e. 'O you who believe in Allah as the One Deity'; and the Deity must have attributes which reflect His Divinity; such as Omnipotent Power, Glory, Wisdom and Might. Allah does not issue commands to those who do not believe in Him, He rather invites those who do not believe first. Hence, we find that all the verses which reveal rulings start with the words 'O you who believe, (such-and-such) has been ordained for you' because with belief, comes responsibility.

'O you, who believe, fulfil your obligations...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). We know that Arabic is a root-based language, meaning that each root has a 'family' of words derived from it. Hence, the word *awfa* (to be true) for example, is derived from the root verb *wafa*/*yafi*, and there is also *awfa* and *waffa*, all of which mean' to be true', but each expresses a different level of strength and weakness, or abundance and scarcity. For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* used the word *waffa* to describe Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'And Abraham, who fulfilled his obligations.' (*an-Najm:* 37)

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did much to show his loyalty when Allah tried him and fulfilled his trial to the level of excellence. 'Allah says:

And (mention, O Muhammad), when Ibrahim (Abraham) was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them…' (*al-Baqara:* 124).

So, the True Lord used the word *waffa* as an explanation of what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did in the face of the trials he underwent; and to' be true' is to' fulfil'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe, fulfil your obligations...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). That is, you must, if you believe in Allah, fulfil your covenants. Fulfilment either addresses individuals, meaning that no one must be neglected, or it refers to the approach itself, meaning that the approach must not be defective. A person might read every chapter of a book which means he has been true in reading every section, but The True Lord wants us to put every detail of the Book within the practise of moral responsibility.

Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to testify that there is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah, to perform the prayer, to pay the *zakat* (mandatory almsgiving), to fast *Ramadan* and to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca if we are able. A person might do all these things and thereby perform his moral responsibilities; but there are others who fulfil them while being dutiful to every detail in its entirety without neglecting any, and they stay true to them without any negligence.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses the believers here: 'O you, who believe, fulfil your obligations...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). So, we are faced here with the concepts of 'belief' and 'fulfilling obligations'. We have explained the meaning of belief; as for obligations they are a binding connection between two parties, and each party must adhere to their responsibility and take their due. An obligation is called in Arabic *'aqd* because the word '*aqd* means a 'knot', i.e. something which does not become unfastened. Therefore, we call the convictions which take firm root in people's hearts and minds *'aqida* (creed) because they are tied as a knot; they are not temporary fantasies which are here today and gone tomorrow. From the perspective of jurisprudence, creed is something instilled in the heart and does not resurface in the mind to be reassessed thereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to be true to our *`uqud* (obligations (singular *'aqd*)), and as we know there are many obligations in Islam, starting with the first vow, which we made when we were mere seeds in which case, Allah tells us how He took the seeds of the children of Adam from their loins and made them bear witness that He is their Sustainer. Allah says: 'And mention when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, saying to them, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." This - lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were unaware of this."' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to be true to this primordial obligation so that no man tries to evade it when the time comes to fulfil it. Next, we come to the obligation of being a vicegerent on earth which was assigned to Adam *peace be upon him* and all his offspring after him. Never assume that you are the original element in this universe simply because material means are subdued to your service and are allotted to you for a specific span of time. Never think that these things have been allotted to you because of your skills alone. When you plant seeds in the earth and water them, know that the crops grow only because Allah has subdued the earth for you.

Never imagine, when you mount a horse, that you are the skilled equestrian who has broken it in; no, it was the True Lord *Glorified is He* who subdued the horses for you. Do you not see that sometimes horses buck and throw skilled riders off their backs? This should keep us conscious of an inescapable fact; had Allah not subdued horses for us, we would have never been able to ride them.

Allah also tells us, in the Quran, how He created for us even the things our hands have wrought and the domestic animals which we own; and how He subdued them to our will so that some of them may be used for riding and others for our food. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not see that We have created for them from what Our hands have made, grazing livestock, and then they are their owners? And We have tamed them for them, so some of them they ride, and some of them they eat.' (*Ya Sin:* 71-72) The believer must also bear in mind that the True Lord *Glorified is He* subdued the camel for its owner and made it so that even a small child can command it to sit on the ground to be loaded with heavy cargo, and then he orders it to stand up again, and all through the way the camel obeys. But when we come across a serpent or a snake, naturally we would not want to domesticate it. This is how the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds mankind of His Omnipotent Power. He subdued large creatures for them, and at the same time instilled much fear in them from smaller creatures like snakes. He subdued them to our will so that some of them may be used for riding and others for our food.

This subduing made it possible for man to domesticate many creatures. The farmer's donkey carries fertilizer made of waste, and it does not object to this; and then the farmer advances in life and becomes the leader of his tribe, and he has the donkey washed and buys it a saddle so he can ride it to go and meet the local commissioner. The donkey does not object to any of these things because Allah has subdued it.

Never assume that it was your skills alone, as a man, which have subjected these creatures to your will. Were it a matter of skill alone, man would have subdued the tiny flea which may attack him any time; bugging him the whole night, that a whole family might stay up all night to kill a single flea. Allah says: 'O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create as much as a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a tiny thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued.' (*al-Hajj:* 73)

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us to say 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' before partaking to any action. Beware of embarking on anything using your power alone because your task will only take effect when Allah *Glorified is He* subdues it for you. You start an action in Allah's Name because He is The One Who made you His vicegerent and subdued all creatures to your will.

Then we have the obligation about which the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to Adam *peace be upon him* that whoever follows Allah's guidance will not go astray, and nor will he be unhappy. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…then whoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy.' (*Ta Ha:* 123) He also says: '…then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 38) This is an obligation made to all mankind. And the Muslims had an obligation towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they partook to the covenant of Al-'Aqaba, pledging to aid and protect him from all that they would protect themselves from, and they also had a similar covenant with him, at Al-Hudaybiyya.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* commands the believers to be true to all vows intrinsic to the supreme dogma, namely belief in Allah; everything that comes from The Lord in whom you believe is considered a pledge of honour; for a pledge is always made between two parties. Allah did not force anyone to believe in Him, but man believes in Allah by free will; and as long as the believer has attained to faith in Allah by free will, he must follow Allah's way of guidance.

The one who believes thereby goes to the True Lord *Glorified is He* saying, 'Lord, I shall do whatever You command'; and this is an acknowledgement of the pledge he has made. And whenever any religious pledge is made, this is part of honouring our primal testimony of faith which we made to Allah; making it a 'shared' pledge with Allah, since the servant's faith in Allah makes him a party in this pledge. Allah legislates for man, and the servant obeys this legislation so that he may receive the amplest reward. So, an obligation might be 'a contract' between the servant and his Lord or between the servant and another of Allah's creatures who is equal to him, or between the servant and himself. In the case of obligations made between man and himself, we call them 'vows', like when a servant vows to perform a certain amount of fasting or praying; and he is obliged to fulfil what he has vowed, since he vowed it to Allah. As for the 'contract' between the servant and his fellow man, and the vows he makes with himself, they both hinge on the founding and primal testimony of faith to Allah.

So, the True Lord's words: '…fulfil your obligations...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1), mean: do what Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained to be lawful, and keep awayfrom what He has made unlawful. Do not debate or differ about what 'an obligation' means. Do not ask whether it is between the servants and his Lord, between the servant and his fellow man, or between the servant and himself; for everything which stems from the supreme pledge constitutes an obligation for the believer to which he must be true.

'O you who believe, fulfil your obligations. Livestock animals are lawful as food for you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). He begins the chapter by commanding us to fulfil our obligations, and then by announcing that livestock animals are lawful to eat. We know that man was brought into the universe, and that Allah *Glorified is He* first created the universe and then created man and descended him on it. This was a mercy from Allah to man in that He did not create man first, but rather, He first created the sun for him, and prepared the whole universe before creating man; and when man was brought into the universe, he found all the constituents of life; minerals, plants and animals.

The highest level of subdual to mankind comes in the form of animals because minerals and plants serve the animals, and animals and mankind are alike in that they each comprise life, blood, and organs. The True Lord *Glorified is He* here gives an announcement about the highest level of servitude to man, namely livestock animals, saying: '…Livestock animals are lawful as food for you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). And He commands us to fulfil our obligation; and He has every right to do so since He has already given us the value of this by creating the universe and subduing it for us; and the epitome of subdual comes in the form of livestock. It is as though '…Livestock animals are lawful as food for you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1) is a prior justification for the command that Allah *Glorified is He* issued before it. We notice here that the word *uhillat* (has been made lawful) is a verb in the passive voice. This is because faith has qualified us as partners deserving the lawfulness of eating livestock animals. The scholars have spoken much about the words *bahimat al-an`am* (livestock animals). In Arabic, the noun form *fa`il* can either have the meaning of an active participle or a passive participle. For example, when we say that Allah is *Rahim*, this means He is' merciful', so this is an active participle; and when we say that a person is *qatil*, this means he has been 'murdered', so this is a passive participle. So, what does the word *bahima* (beast) mean here? Is it active, or passive? If we take the word *bahima* to mean the same as *mubhama* which means 'vague' or 'unintelligible' because its affairs are unknown to us and difficult to understand, and we do not know what its motions or gestures mean, nor do we understand the language by which it communicates with its own kind, then in this case, the word is passive in meaning. It might also be active in meaning because the beast does not understand and we are unintelligible to it.

We say that cattle are governed and subdued by their instincts, and that man did not invent their fodder until he first saw them freely going to eat it, which means that they were the ones that taught man what they eat. No one should therefore say that these are mere beasts with no understanding since we should know that cattle were not created to understand human affairs, and that they were subdued and subjected to man's will, and still man might learn from them.

Our proof for this is that Allah blessed some of His creatures, whom He selected, and educated them about the speech of birds; for it perturbed the hoopoe to see the Queen of Sheba and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah. Although a mere bird, it knew that prostration must only be offered to Allah, the Invincible One, not to the sun. Thus, we see how man can learn many things from the traits and habits of animals; and thus, we see that those who love to breed animals learn about their diets by following them and observing what they eat and what they set aside. Farmers give clover to buffalos rather than mint because they observed that buffalos, when let loose, do not eat mint but rather, clover. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also tells us: 'Until when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said, "O ants enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not."' (*an-Naml:* 18)

So, it is we who do not understand the language of the ants; we see the beasts being governed by their instincts, whilst man possesses intelligence – yet his passion overrules his intelligence.

Allah's words '…are lawful as food for you…' indicate that the One Who made this food lawful connected its lawfulness to the subdual of animals. Our proof for this is that when we place a rope around the neck of a buffalo or a sheep, and the rope tightens we find it stretching out its neck as if seeking to answer its calling as being 'lawful food', and the people say, 'It wants to be made lawful!' which means a butcher should be brought. Even though it is an animal, yet it seems to seek its very own slaughtering to benefit man. As though it were conscious of the loss which will be incurred if its meat got wasted for nothing; and this is proof that it was subjugated to man's will. As for animals which are unlawful to eat, it is amazing that when this rope-procedure is done to them, they do not stretch out their necks.

The *an`am* or livestock animals which Allah mentions in the Quran are four kinds of cattle of either sex: sheep, goats and both sexes of camels and cattle. This makes eight pairs; and then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him* added to this the gazelles and zebras, and he only prohibited the canines which have fangs like lions, and birds of prey which have talons. Had Allah not specified this lawfulness, there would have been no limits and we would have found ourselves eating carrion, butted animals or animals which died from falling off high places, etc., but the True Lord *Glorified is He* saved us from this ill fate and made these harmful things unlawful to us.

‘O, you who believe, fulfil your obligations...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 1)! So, it is Allah’s right upon us, as believers, to stay true to our vows because He offered the universe to us, with all its flora and fauna to be at our service. He also made lawful to man the species which are closest to his type because of the life form they possess. He then says: ‘…with the exception of what is about to be announced to you. You are forbidden to kill game while you are on pilgrimage - Allah commands what He wills.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 1) Had the True Lord *Glorified is He* not made this law, people would have eaten cattle, whilst they were in the state of pilgrimage; but Allah *Glorified is He* forbade hunting during the pilgrimage and within the Sanctuary of Mecca or while in the state of consecration for pilgrimage (*ihram*). The Sanctuary, as we know, is centred around the *Ka`ba* which is enclosed by the Sacred Mosque.

The land-zone wherein one enters the state of consecration for the pilgrimage is set by landmarks that differ according to the direction from which one approaches. Those coming from Medina enter consecration at Dhul-Hulayfa or Abar `Ali; those coming from Egypt, the Levant or the Islamic West enter consecration at Al-Juhfa (now known as Rabigh); those coming from Tuhama enter consecration at Yalamlam; those coming from the plains of Yemen or Hijaz enter consecration at Qarn Al-Manazil; and those coming from Iraq and other eastern places enter consecration at Dhat ‘Irq.

As for those who live in Mecca, they enter consecration for the pilgrimage simply by being in Mecca itself. As for *`umra* (the lesser pilgrimage) for those who live within the Sanctuary, they enter consecration when they go outside to the first point out of the Sanctuary; namely Al-Ju`rana, then At-Tan`im then Al-Hudaybiyya.

As for the time zone of the pilgrimage, it is within the months of *Shawal*, *Dhul-Qa`da*, and the first ten nights of *Dhul-Hijja*. As for the time zone of the lesser pilgrimage, it is the whole year, unless one is already performing the greater pilgrimage or making another lesser pilgrimage, or if it is before he finishes the greater pilgrimage in case he is still stoning the pillars or spending the night at Muzdalifa, wherein he cannot begin another consecration. Al-Ju`rana, At-Tan`im and Al-Hudaybiyya are the limits of the Sanctuary, and to engage in hunting within the Sanctuary is forbidden at all times for all people. As for hunting outside the Sanctuary, it is only forbidden to those in a state of consecration for the pilgrimage. All others have the right to hunt.

This way the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* teaches His creatures to be always vigilant about His method of guidance. In one place, He tells them, 'Hunting is forbidden here, and food and drink are forbidden during this time', such as during the fasting of *Ramadan.* We Muslims have twelve months, four of which are sacred: *Dhul-Qa`da, Dhul-Hijja, Muharram and Rajab.*

At the points of consecration hunting is forbidden only to the pilgrims, and this is just a disciplinary commandment of faith. When one arrives at the consecration landmark he enters consecration, i.e. he changes his attire and wears the special attire prescribed for pilgrimage which everyone wears so that all are equal. People are only distinct from one another because of their outward attire, so Allah *Glorified is He* commands man to abandon this distinction as soon as he enters consecration. The things which a Muslim can do before entering consecration become forbidden to him after he enters consecration at the appointed landmark.

Before entering consecration, a Muslim can have a haircut, wear perfume, hunt and pick vegetation; but once he consecrates himself, he must abstain from all this so that he can prepare to refuel the depths of his soul with the presence of the Giver of blessings rather than the blessings themselves. This is the proper state in which one must be to enter the House of the Giver of blessings. Hence, Muslims lay aside the blessings to remain in the presence of Him who provides them. It is also forbidden for anyone to hunt in the Sanctuary whether he is in a state of consecration or not, so that all become conscious that the Sanctuary is for Allah alone, and to prepare for answering the calling of Allah with awe. From the moment of consecration, one is forbidden from many things, starting with hunting and marital relations; and then he enters the land-zone where hunting is forbidden to all people as a symbol of awe.

Muslims are to perform pilgrimage once in a lifetime as a religious obligation; and every time we make pilgrimage heading to our Lord's House, He tells us, 'Do not distract yourself with the blessings, for you are heading to the Giver of blessings; and He will expiate all sins by means of the pilgrimage' '…With the exception of what is about to be announced to you. You are forbidden to kill game while you are on pilgrimage...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). If we take this to mean the state of consecration, it is correct; and if we take it to mean one's presence in the Sanctuary, it is also correct; for hunting is forbidden in the Sanctuary for pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the verse saying: '…Allah commands what He wills' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1) after having started it with: 'O You who believes...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). Thus, we see that the end of the verse logically matches the rest of it, for when Allah addresses the believers who believe in Him, one of the necessary ramifications of this belief is to obey the decrees of The Lord in whom they believe. As long as the believer believes in Allah, he must turn to the rulings which Allah has ordained and adhere to them. But the general meaning of the verse might urge some to separate its rear from its main body, giving way to one of the allegations directed at Islam. These people claim that if Allah says that He commands what He wills, and some people believe while others do not, so how come Allah '…commands what He wills' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1) when He does not simply command all to believe?'

We say, 'Do not separate the rear of the verse from its main body because Allah is only addressing here those who believe in Him as their Lord'. Those who believe in Allah, as their Deity endeavour to adhere to the rulings that He ordains, to apply them. Yet, no one should think that the disbelievers are beyond Allah's will when He says ,'…Allah commands what He wills' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1) because those who disobey the ordinance of Allah are logically bound to persist on their disobedience to whatever He ordains. But the one who rebels against the legal obligations which Allah ordains is not reasonable, and he refuses the fact that he is weak. The Angel of Death may take the rebel's soul when he is not even sick; so, what will he do to ward off death?

Therefore, there are matters in which all people must submit to Allah's Ordinance; and the disbeliever submits to Allah's Ordinance in certain matters more coercively than the believer because, for example, the believer accepts death as Allah’s Ordinance but the rebel, who does not pray or perform any religious obligation, faces all vicissitudes of life including death with great suffering that exceeds the hardship experienced by the believer while facing the vicissitudes of life including death.

Hence, Allah’s saying: ‘…Allah ordains what He intends.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 1) refers to a general issue because the one who rebels against Allah’s Ordinance in matters in which he has free will thinks logically and rebels against the ordinance which Allah forces him to do. This is in contrast with many man-made laws which are not strong enough to resist this rebellion, but Allah’s Ordinance is more coercive, as the rebel cannot ward it off. No one should think that Allah has made His servant’s free will absolute. He as a person who can rebel against faith, but there are many things that he cannot rebel against; so Allah ordains whatever He intends. Then, Allah says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تُحِلُّوا۟ شَعَٰٓئِرَ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا ٱلشَّهْرَ ٱلْحَرَامَ وَلَا ٱلْهَدْىَ وَلَا ٱلْقَلَٰٓئِدَ وَلَآ
ءَآمِّينَ ٱلْبَيْتَ ٱلْحَرَامَ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرِضْوَٰنًا ۚ وَإِذَا حَلَلْتُمْ فَٱصْطَادُوا۟ ۚ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ
شَنَـَٔانُ قَوْمٍ أَن صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ أَن تَعْتَدُوا۟ ۘ وَتَعَاوَنُوا۟ عَلَى ٱلْبِرِّ
وَٱلتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا۟ عَلَى ٱلْإِثْمِ وَٱلْعُدْوَٰنِ ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿٢﴾

So, you who believe, do not violate the sanctity of God’s rites, the Sacred Month, the offerings, their garlands, nor those going to the Sacred House to seek the bounty and pleasure of their Lord — but when you have completed the rites of pilgrimage you may hunt. Do not let your hatred for the people who barred you from the Sacred Mosque induce you to break the law: help one another to do what is right and good; do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be mindful of God, for His punishment is severe [2] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 2)

The verse starts with, ‘O you who have believed, do not violate the rites of Allah...’ which comes after the verse in which Allah has declared certain things lawful. This indicates that Allah clarifies to His servants that He gives them certain things and withholds other things, and He does the same with his others. Therefore, a person should not only consider what is withdrawn from him; rather, he should consider things withdrawn from others for his sake.

For example, when Allah commands a person not to steal, He restricts his freedom with this commandment, and at the same time, He restricts the freedom of all other people in this regard for his sake. When this person judges the matter according to how it affects him, he will find that he is the main beneficiary because everyone else will obey Allah’s law by refraining from stealing from him. Accordingly, everyone will benefit from this command, and even if a person steals something, he cannot steal from everyone; but if a thousand people steal from one person, what will be left with him?

When Allah commands His servant not to look at the kinswomen of others, this seems to restrict his freedom, but in fact He also restricts the freedom of everyone else for the sake of this person, commanding them all not to look at the kinswomen of others.

Therefore, when a Muslim knows that Allah has prohibited a certain matter, he should not consider this prohibition only on his part, but he should also consider that the same matter is prohibited for all people in his favour. Allah says, ‘…do not violate the rites of Allah...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2) which means that the believers should not profane the inviolability of the rites set up by Allah. The word *sha’a`ir* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means all the rituals of the religion. If we say that a country’s symbol is the eagle, this means that whenever we see the symbol we recognise the country. The same applies to the different flags of nations and even governorates as in Egypt, for example, every governorate has its own symbol and flag. Therefore, the symbol is a marker that identifies something, and Allah’s rites are the rules of His religion that are commandments, prohibitions, creed and rulings.

But the word *sha’a`ir* commonly refers to the rites of *Hajj,* the first of which is to enter a state of ihram (ritual state for *Hajj* or ‘Umra) that should not be neglected. Other rites of *Hajj* are *tawaf* (circumambulation of the *Ka`ba*), *sa`y* (going between Safa and Marwah during *Hajj* and *‘Umra*), standing on Mount `Arafat and the stoning of the pillars marking the pebble-throwing area. They are Allah’s rites which He has commanded the believers not to violate or neglect because they provide religious regulations. Allah’s Command to all those who perform *Hajj* or *‘Umra* to enter a state of *ihram* (ritual state for *Hajj* or *‘Umra*) should be considered as a command to separate themselves for a period of time from the bounties they usually enjoy, as the journey of *Hajj* is considered as a journey towards the Giver of all bounties. Allah orders the believers who perform *Hajj* or *'Umra* to wear unified clothing, so that no one is better than another; in everyday life, people's clothing highlight the difference between them and indicate their social status. Therefore, when they remove their ordinary clothes and wear unified clothing, the distinctive mark they have in common is their profession of allegiance to Allah.

Likewise, when the pilgrims or the people who perform *'Umra* are commanded not to cut a single hair, no matter if they are rich or poor, they find that they are equal despite their different social positions and status, and that they equally submit to Allah's Command. This self-discipline caused by belief is not related to people only, but the self-discipline appears in the way a person deals with all creatures. The trees around the Sanctuary are inviolable, and no person is permitted to cut them down or cut anything of them, so the plants inside the Sanctuary are protected and safe. Likewise, the pigeons, and other animals and people are safe inside the Sanctuary; for they are all inside the Sanctuary of the Lord of all creatures. This status instils awe in the human soul caused by faith. Therefore, the period of *Hajj* is a time of spiritual regulation and self-discipline in which all types of existence live in harmony. All people become equal and animals and plants are safe. Inanimate objects serve all other types of existence; animals serve man, plants serve animals and inanimate objects serve them all but is not served. In addition, Allah protects an inanimate object in the *Ka`ba*, commanding people to greet the Black Stone, kiss it if they are able or at least point to it.

The master of creatures honours and lauds an inanimate object, as the one that is unable to kiss the Black Stone must at least greet it by pointing to it, for his *Hajj* to be accepted. Therefore, crowds of people struggle to reach the Black Stone, and even the inanimate objects within Allah's Sacred House of Worship are protected, as Allah has made it one of the rituals of *Hajj* and has commanded the people to kiss this inanimate thing - the lowest genus of beings - although they do not kiss animals or plants. Therefore, this is the ultimate balance in the universe. Man, who is superior to all creatures, goes humbly to kiss or greet the Black Stone, in submission to Allah's Command.

People also throw pebbles at another stone that symbolises Satan for them to know that stones are not inherently objects of value; rather, the matter depends on the commandments of the Supreme Commander, so that they do not think that stones in general are to be honoured. Hence, the pilgrim kisses one stone, and throws pebbles at another stone.

‘O you who have believed, do not violate the rites of Allah...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2), Allah has made these rites in order to achieve spiritual regulation, and to keep in mind the commands of Allah so that no one would claim that he is an integral and essential part of the universe; rather, all the creatures are Allah’s Servant. All of existence shows a chain of servitude; man serves man, animals serve man, plants serve man and animals and inanimate objects serve all creatures. However, no one is better than another; even inanimate objects declare Allah’s Glory with His Praise, whilst man might not do that.

‘Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man, undertook to bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

This commandment not to violate the rites of Allah means that every rite takes its share of esteem and respect; and no one should imagine that any of these rites may have any kind of intrinsic holiness; rather, Allah gives them this holiness and can remove it if He wishes.

‘O you who have believed, do not violate the rites of Allah or the sanctity of the sacred month...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2). It means that people should not violate the inviolability of the sacred month, as Allah has commanded them to do so for their own good. Allah *Glorified is He* protects man’s dignity from humiliation before his enemy, and protects the weak from yielding to the strong. In addition, even the strong person who can fight may wish to cease fighting for a period of time to rest, but if he declares so publicly, he will appear to be publicly yielding to his enemy. Therefore, Allah specifies a period of time in which He forbids fighting; the sacred months. Accordingly, a warrior realises that Allah has forbidden fighting during the sacred months to protect man, and give him an opportunity to experience the pleasure of safety, peace and tranquillity so that the strong might yearn for peace thereafter.

Why has Allah mentioned the sacred month (in the singular form) though we know there are four sacred months? If we consider the sacred months as a category, then this term can apply to all the sacred months. In addition, if we consider the sacred months as the months of the pilgrimage, which are *Shawwal, Dhul-Qa`dah* and the first ten nights of *Dhul-Hijjah*, the meaning will be also correct. We know that there are four sacred months, three of which are consecutive, namely *Dhul-Qa`dah, Dhul-Ḥijjah* and *Muharram*, and one is separate, namely *Rajab*. Allah *Glorified is He* knows that every action must have a time and a place; if there is no action, time or place will be considered, as they did not come into existence until Allah created His universe. No one should ask, 'Where was Allah, and when did Allah exist?' because these questions refer to time and place which are created by Allah Who has given every action a time and a place. Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*, protects people's pride and His merciful legislation act as a shield that protects the weak among them. In addition, Allah's legislation helps the strong among His servants to refrain from transgression and oppression. Therefore, He has made certain places and times sacred; the sacred places are those at the Sanctuary: '…And whoever enters it shall be safe.…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) Therefore, one must ensure safety for people when he enters the Sanctuary. As for the times that Allah has made Sacred, they are the sacred months.

Allah deals with events from the perspectives of both time and place. In ancient times, the stronger party would fight and come close to victory, and once the sacred month began, he would continue to fight and claim that the sacred month would come after the end of the war. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* prohibits changing the time of the sacred months because He wants to offend the war.

Then Allah says: '... or (neglect the marking of) the sacrificial animals...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2). The word *al-hady* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means the sacrificial animals which are offered to the Sanctuary; this word also is the plural of the word *hadiyyah* (offering or gift). Some people would offer sacrificial animals to the *Ka`ba* which are called in Arabic *hady*. Allah has decreed that these sacrificial animals should be offered to the Sanctuary only, as in the past, the Sanctuary was a barren valley that did not contain many animals. People would bring sacrificial animals with them when they came to perform *Hajj*, so Allah has forbidden approaching these sacrificial animals because they are intended to be offered to the Sanctuary. The pilgrims come in great throngs, and when many people assemble in such a barren valley, they need food. Therefore, it is not permissible for a believer to use the sacrificial animals for anything other than for the purpose for which they should be offered. Therefore, it is not permissible for the one who takes a sacrificial animal with him to be offered to the Sanctuary to slaughter and eat it while travelling. One should ensure that the other pilgrims' offerings are protected and secured for the Sanctuary, '…and garlanding (them)...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2). The word *qala`id* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means a garland. In the past, the pilgrims feared that their sacrificial animals would stray, so they put garlands around the animals' necks so that those who saw them would know that they were offered to the Sanctuary. The Arabic word *al-hady* refers to sacrificial animals in general which wear no garlands around their necks, and the word *al-qala`id* means the sacrificial animals which had garlands around their necks to mark them as offerings for the Sanctuary. The prohibition here may even include taking the garlands that mark the sacrificial animals so that they would not be lost. Allah *Glorified is He* expresses meanings in an eloquent way.

In the past, when the pilgrims did not have any collars, they would cut pieces of the bark from trees and hang them around the necks of their sacrificial animals, so that people would know they were intended to be offered for the Sanctuary. Accordingly, Allah provides sustenance that includes meat for the pilgrims coming to the Sanctuary and He ordains that the provision of *hady* (sacrificial animals) becomes one of the rites of *Hajj*. Allah is the One Who calls the people to perform *Hajj*, and they are the guests of the Most Merciful.

A person may slaughter a sacrificial animal to feed his guests, so what about Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*? Therefore, He has intended that the *hady* (sacrificial animals) to be food for His guests. People gather at Mina and *Arafat* in countless numbers, so Allah honours them with the finest and most delicious foods. The poor go to the slaughterhouse in Mecca and take the finest of meat and then may dry it in the open air and the sun and store it for them to eat it over a long period of time; this type of meat is called' jerked meat'. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* expresses the commandment in a highly eloquent way.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…(the sanctity of) the sacred month or (neglect the marking of) the sacrificial animals and garlanding (them) or (violate the safety of) those coming to the Sacred House seeking bounty from their Lord and (His) approval.…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2) This means that people should not be prevented from going to Allah's Sacred House, or diverted from the way to it, as they are the guests of Allah. These words were revealed before Allah's saying: '…indeed the polytheists are unclean…' (*at-Tawba:* 28).

Before this verse was revealed, the disbelievers used to perform *Hajj* to Allah's Sacred House. We may ask: Do the disbelievers seek favour from Allah? Yes, as Allah bestows His bounties upon all people even the disbeliever, but His Great Pleasure is not attained by the disbeliever. The bounties which Allah bestowed on the disbelievers are represented in their prosperous. Now, Allah also bestows His bounties upon the disbelievers.

But how could the disbelievers attain Allah's Great Pleasure? The disbelievers imagine that all that they do is intended to please Allah. The precision of the Quran is manifested in Allah's saying, '…seeking bounty from their Lord and (His) approval…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2), and does not say, 'seeking bounty from Allah and (His) approval', as the believer is the one who carries out the religious obligations.

Allah has two types of bestowals; Lordly bestowal and divine bestowal. Lordly bestowal refers to that which He gives to the believers and disbelievers as Lord and Sustainer; He subdues the means of living for them all. For example, the sun rises and benefits the believer and disbeliever and the means of living are given to both the believer and the disbeliever. As for divine bestowal, it is represented in Allah's Commands and Prohibitions. In this verse, Allah says: '…seeking bounty from their Lord and (His) approval…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2). This means that they did not pay heed to the basic two elements of religion: commands and prohibitions. Then Allah says, '…But when you come out of ihram, then (you may) hunt…' (*al-Ma'ida:* . 2). This means that when the pilgrim removes the ritual state for *Hajj* and comes out of the Sanctuary, he may hunt.

‘... And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram...*’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2). Before the idolaters had been banned from entering the Sacred House of Allah, the believers were commanded not to attack the disbelievers who visited the Sacred House of Allah in revenge for the suffering which they experienced at the hands of the disbelievers. Therefore, Allah has commanded the believers not to take revenge from the disbelievers, as they prevented them from entering the Sacred House of Allah at the time of the Truce of Al-Hudaybiyya. Rather, the believers have been given the responsibility of upholding Allah’s legislation on earth, so they should abstain from selfishness or tribal and familial prejudices because Allah’s legislation has been revealed to lead the whole world, and it is not suitable for the believer to take revenge on the disbeliever when he comes to the House of Allah, and this is not consistent with the duty of upholding Allah’s legislation.

Therefore, Allah said to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Indeed, We have revealed to you, (O Muhammad), the Book in truth so you may judge between the people by that which Allah has shown you. And do not be an advocate for the deceitful.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 105). When Allah commanded the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to judge between people, this judgement must not discriminate between the believers and disbelievers because the Muslims are the upholders of Allah’s legislation and are the best nation which Allah has raised up for the benefit of all mankind. If people understood that Islam was for their own good, they would not wage war against them.

Muslims are not only good for themselves; rather, they bring goodness to all mankind. Therefore, Allah says, ‘... And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* lead you to transgress...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2). This means that Muslims should not allow the anger they feel towards certain people to make them transgress because they prevented the Muslims from entering the Sacred House of Allah in the year of Al-Hudaybiyya. When the disbelievers know that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* commands the believers to treat them properly, they will be aware of the Lord’s Mercy and will feel ashamed for not believing; but if the believer transgressed against the disbeliever in revenge for the past aggression, the disbeliever would realise that the believer took revenge for the aggression.

However, if the disbeliever sees that the believer does not transgress in obedience to Allah's Commands, he will see that Islam reforms its followers in a way which gives them psychological loftiness rising above spite, hatred, and blind support. The Quran expresses this meaning in an accurate manner, as the religion did not come to suppress emotions or instinct, or to make people' platonic', as they claim. It does not ask the people to suppress their hatred, but it instructs them not to let their hatred make them transgress against the people they hate. Allah does not forbid hatred, for it is relevant to emotions.

When 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* saw the killer of his brother, Zayd ibn Al-Khattab, passing by him, someone said, 'This is Zayd's killer! 'Umar replied, 'What should I do with him, when Allah has guided him to Islam? If Islam expiates disbelief, shall it not also expiate the killing of 'Umar's brother?' However, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said to his brother's killer, 'When you see me, turn your face away from me.' He said this because he knew the effect of emotion and that he did not love his brother's killer. So, the killer of Umar's brother said to him, 'Will your hatred for me lead you to deny me one of my rights? 'Umar said, 'No, rather you will get all your rights.' His brother's killer replied, 'No matter, then. Only women cry over love.' Therefore, it was faith that prevented Umar from avenging his brother's death.

'... And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* lead you to transgress...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2). Allah *Glorified is He* does not prohibit the feelings of hatred and aversion because He knows that this is beyond man's capacity, as it is a matter of emotion. Emotion cannot be governed by law, but it should not give you the right to transgress.

Islam intervenes in human actions, urging a person to do something and abstain from another; Islam does not intervene in human craving which is an expression of a phase that succeeds the initial perception which causes a person to love or hate. Then, he expresses this feeling by displaying a certain tendency. There are three aspects of sensation; perception, sentiment and tendency.(1) When a person walks in a garden full of flowers and sees a flower, this is called perception, and Islam does not forbid this perception. Then the person has the free will to admire and like the flower, but he should no pick this flower.

Islamic legislation only intervenes in the human tendency in matters relevant to women. In this case, Islam intervenes from the first stage of perception: when a man sees a beautiful woman, this refers to perception; when his heart loves her, this refers to sentiment, but approaching her refers to tendency.

Allah is merciful with men as He commands them to lower their gazes from the beginning because they are completely unable to make a clear distinction between perception, sentiment, and tendency. Both perception and sentiment interact in man's mind, and he takes the decision either to keep himself chaste and repress his feelings, or not to do so and spoil people's honour. Therefore, Islamic Law serves men from the very beginning when it commands them to lower their gaze: 'Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts…' (*an-Nur:* 30-31).

In this case, Islamic Law intervenes from the first phase of perception because tendency cannot be separated from sentiments in this case; seeing a woman causes chemical reactions in a man's soul and seeing a man causes chemical reactions in a woman's soul. However, when one sees a flower, this does not lead to any chemical reaction, and one can have a vase of flowers. The verse means that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* does not prevent the believer from feeling the human emotions of hatred and detestation because faith requires feelings. Some of the enemies of Islam say that the verses of the Quran contradict one another because Allah says, 'You will not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers…' (*al-Mujadala:* 22). And the criterion of faith does not allow this, and the Quran says in another verse, '…but if they endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them…' (*Luqman:* 15).

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh As-Sha`rawy *may Allah rest his soul,* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

The one who reflects deeply on this will recognise that a person may be kind to those he loves and to those he does not love. As for the intimate feeling which is relevant to the heart, Allah forbids the believers to direct them towards the idolaters.'... And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram...*' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2). Allah does not forbid hatred, but He forbids the reactions which spring from hatred even if they are justified, as was the case with the Treaty of Al-Hudaybiyya. Then, Allah says, '... And cooperate in righteousness and piety...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2). This verse turns the issue of faith into a global issue. The word *ta`awanu* (cooperate) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse has the morphological form *tafa`al*, which implies the notion of reciprocity between two parties, like the Arabic word *tasharak* (share) which implies the participation of two parties on equal basis. For example, '*Tasharak `Amr wa Zayd*', '*Sharak Zayd `Amr*' or *'Sharak* `Amr Zayd' mean that `Amr and Zayd participated with each other on equal basis, the only difference in the second and third examples is that 'Zayd' is the subject in the second example and the object in the third example, and '`Amr' is the object in the second example and the subject in the third example.

For example, '*Qatal fulan fulanan*' means that someone fought another. When two people are involved in the same verb, there is a subject and an object. There is a difference between this, the previous examples and the following example '*A`en fulanan*' (help someone), which is an order to only one person to help another person. This example is different from '*Ta`awan ma`a fulan*' which is an instruction to one person to help another.

Life's undertakings are varied to the extent that they cannot be covered by a single talent. When you build a house, you need someone to dig the ground for setting the foundations and build the walls, someone to make the bricks, someone to make the cement, and someone to make the iron. One person cannot learn all these talents and build a house by himself, but cooperation involves assigning a particular task to each person. There is a specialist in every field which man requires such as; sewing, medicine, pharmaceuticals and other life needs. Allah commands the believers to cooperate so that life goes on, and each person will benefit from the skills of another exchange for him doing his own work diligently. The word *ta`awanu* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means cooperating and helping one another. This word involves the existence of the person who helps and the person who is helped. However, the helper does not always give help, but one day he will be helped; and the one who is helped will not always be helped, but one day he will give help. This is the cooperation required for the life affairs which Allah has willed for His vicegerents on earth who are required to worship Allah alone without partners. It cannot be done by the efforts of only one person, but it needs different efforts and talents that must complement one another in order to be done.

When we build a single apartment building, we use many instruments which require much energy, starting with the architect who draws up plans for the plot of land. Then, he may produce a three-dimensional model of the building he wishes to construct if he wants to be more skilful in his craft. Then the piece of land will be dug by the person responsible for this task who will be followed by the person who also sets the foundation of the building and places the iron rods. This is followed by the persons who make the reinforced concrete, the persons who construct the building, the persons who install the sanitation and water supply systems and the persons who make the electrical connections. This involves the cooperation of different capabilities in order to construct a single building, and one person cannot do all these tasks.

Therefore, cooperation is essential for man in order to be a vicegerent. Being a vicegerent requires that he should reconstruct the earth, a task which requires him to avoid spoiling good elements, rather he should improve them, Allah says, '…And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2) This means that He wants the world to be reconstructed, not ruined, and He wants what is intrinsically sound to remain sound. Therefore, in order to reconstruct the earth, we must cooperate in good, not in evil.

The word *bir* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means the matters towards which the soul feels comfortable, while the word *al-ithm* means the matters which trouble the soul and what a person fears that it may be discovered by others. If you proceed to do something but fear that people will see you doing it, this is considered a sin because if it was not a sin, you will like people to see you doing it. Therefore, Allah's saying, '... And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2) is a commandment for every group of people to cooperate in doing good, and it is appropriate to say to every group: Cooperate with one another, as long as you do not allow your organisation to engage in any activities which contradict your religion, such as the Rotary Club and the Masons, whose activities are said to be benevolent. Any charitable organisation is welcome, but it should not imitate the West; rather, it should do benevolent activities in the name of Islam so that the world will know that these benevolent activities are done in a Muslim country. It is most preferable not to give Islamic organisations foreign names so that no one thinks that the benevolent activities are done by non-Muslims. If any Muslim can do benevolent activities, he should do them in the name of Islam. Every person should know Islam instructs the Muslims to devote their lives to benevolence and goodness. Accordingly, the beneficiaries of charitable organisations should not imagine, mistakenly, that benevolent and good activities are done apart from Islam. We are instructed to ascribe the benevolent deeds we do for our religion because our religion commanded and encouraged us to do them. Every Muslim must know that his religion is not devoid of values so that he needs to acquire them from non-Muslim countries, but Islam makes the Muslims free of any need for anything other than it. If we do benevolent deeds and offer social services to the people, we should not ascribe these deeds to other than Muslims. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allah and does righteousness and says, "Indeed, I am of the Muslims."' (*Fussilat:* 33)

Therefore, each Muslim should do good deeds while declaring that Islam commands them to do so, and should not ascribe these good deeds to any other organisation. It is forbidden for the Muslim to ascribe his good deeds to non-Muslim organisations because this cooperation would not be for the sake of Allah. Allah says: '... And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression....' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2) He wants us to do good and prevent it from being demolished; and everyone must be aware that he cannot do all forms of goodness alone.

If a poor man who has only one garment is asked from where he got his loaf of bread, he may say that the grocer gave him this loaf of bread. This indicates that Allah willed that this grocer to sell bread for people and to give away some bread as charity. As for the bakery, the flour came to the baker from the mill where dozens of workers and engineers work to grind the flour for them to deliver it to the bakery where someone makes dough from it, someone bakes it and someone sells it.

We must realise Allah’s Omnipotence which allowed investors, who were thinking of their own benefit, to buy these huge machines for grinding and baking. It is difficult for a single person to buy such machines because of their high price. In addition, these machines must be imported from foreign nations which have laboratories and scientists that study motion and energy in order to design these machines so that a man can eat bread.

This is how the will of Allah causes all actions of life to be organised. The grocer sells the bread which the baker makes, and the grinder, kneader, machine importer, and designer participate in making bread. In addition, the school which teaches the engineer who designs the machine also participate in making the bread. Many people cooperate to make a loaf of bread even though most of them only think about bread when we are hungry.

Accordingly, all the actions of life rely on cooperation, but if people cooperate in doing evil, they will destroy good deeds because cooperation in evil begins with assisting in an action which contradicts Allah’s instructions that consist of commands and prohibitions, while the matters which are not regulated by commands and prohibitions are permissible; one may do them or not as he wishes.

The one who commits himself to Allah’s Commands and prohibitions cooperates in righteousness and piety, while the one who does the opposite cooperates in evil and aggression. This is because he turns the commands into prohibitions and vice versa.

Allah’s saying: ‘... And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2), ensures the reconstruction of the earth and prevention of corruption. The one who takes bribes, and the one who facilitates bribery by acting as a mediator between the briber and the bribe, the one who delivers intoxicants, and the one who cheats are considered as cooperating in evil and aggression. Even the doorman of an apartment building who knows that suspicious activities take place in one of the apartments and takes a compensation for this, cooperates in sin.

All these people should beware of being tempted by the benefit which these sinful acts yield because Allah will cause these people to have a tragic end. In addition, the woman who tempts people with her beauty, her life will end with suffering and with no aid except from those kind people who were not seduced by her beauty and did not enjoy it unlawfully. This is because when a man sees a woman with whom he engaged in sinful acts, he will remember all the calamities which befall him because of her and will hate her for it.

Allah wants justice to prevail in the world for it to be balanced, and so anyone who gains something through sin will suffer due to this sin in his life. A person may count all the money which he has earned lawfully by hard work and the money he has earned by unlawful means, and then consider the calamities which have befallen him and the costs they have incurred upon him. This person will find that the calamities have taken all the money he earned by unlawful means and even the money he earned lawfully. This matter always occurs in this way; Allah does not postpone it to the Hereafter, as He wants to establish justice in this world, otherwise, how could those who do not believe in the Day of Reckoning witness Allah's Ability to maintain the balance of His universe? Allah has willed that there should be reckoning in this world so that those who do not believe in the Day of Reckoning do not cause corruption in the universe. Everyone who causes corruption will realise the bad destiny of another one who also caused corruption. Therefore, those who enjoy the yields of sinful acts in this worldly life should beware of their deeds before it is too late. The only people who are excused are children who are immature and unable to perceive the fact that they live on ill-gotten money. However, once the boy or girl grows up and realises that the money is earned from unlawful sources, she must be ashamed to buy a dress with this money, or even eat a single piece of bread earned by unlawful money. A person must be aware that Allah has allowed him to ask about the source of the money he receives, so that he does not use this ill-gotten money. A person may pay this ill-gotten money for charity rather than spending it on himself, and Allah will never leave such a person in need of money.

Everyone must consider deeply Allah’s saying: ‘...And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2), and make it a criterion by which he judges the people he sees in the world. The same also applies to the taxi driver who puts a veil over a man and woman committing unlawful acts in the taxi and takes an extra charge for that. This man should consider the money which he gains in this way and the money he spends on treating his illness, or that of the children he supports.

‘... And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2). There are different forms of aggression from which society suffers. Aggression against time takes place when a person takes compensation for work which he does not carry out, aggression against people by usurping their rights or taking bribes from them. In order to maintain faith in society, being a vicegerent on earth must be preserved. This necessitates reconstruction of the earth and prevention of corruption in it.

‘…but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 2) This means that these transgressions result from the lack of cooperation in righteousness and from cooperation in sin and aggression, and there will be severe retribution for these transgressions. Piety means to follow Allah’s Commands and to refrain from His prohibitions so that we do not turn the commands into prohibitions or vice versa. Accordingly, we will be protected from the punishment of the Compeller.

Some shallow-minded people might say that there is contradiction in some of the verses of the Quran, as some of the verses state, ‘...fear the Fire...’ (*al-Baqara:* 24), while others state’... And fear Allah...’ (*al-Baqara:* 194). They wonder if it is possible for a person to protect himself from the fire and from Allah. These people do not understand the meaning of the Arabic word *ittaqu* (place a protective shield between someone and that which may harm him). Therefore, *ittaqu* Allah means (protect yourself from Allah’s punishment by following His commands and avoiding His prohibitions).

When a person places a protective shield between himself and Allah, he places a protective shield between himself and Allah’s Wrath. Therefore, to protect oneself from Allah’s Wrath means protecting oneself from fire.

Allah ends the verse by saying: '... indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2) People neglect cooperating in righteousness and commit sins because they do not find any deterrent in their societies; otherwise, society would protect its members from committing sins. If there was faith-based awareness in society, it would ostracise the transgressors and make them feel that they were abandoned. Accordingly, they would come back to the right path.

People are only tempted to commit serious crimes because society does not show enough concern for small crimes. Therefore, Allah draws our attention to the fact that He will not ignore the matter as some of His slaves do, as people may be complementary and may not try to prevent the sins which some of them commit. However, Allah is severe in retribution that will take place at a time when the individual has no influence, wealth, position, or lineage to protect him from Allah. If the weakness of society encourages you to cooperate in sin, you must fear Allah, for He is severe in retribution.

How will the sinner be punished? We do not know because we are not Allah. We may find that the retribution creeps into the sinner in the form of a painful illness that not only compels him to spend all the money he has, but also to ask others to help with his treatment or the treatment of someone he loves. The means of Allah's retribution may not wait until the Hereafter, but may befall the sinner without him realising that; and this is known as severe retribution.

Allah declares certain things to be unlawful after having made other things lawful by saying, '…Lawful for you are the animals of grazing livestock…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1). Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*, gives further specification for the cattle which are made lawful. He has made lawful each pair of sheep, goat, camel, and cow, to which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* added gazelles and wild cattle, and every sea creature. Allah's saying, '...except for that which is recited to you (in this Quran)...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1) indicates that there will be a prohibition; Allah states in the Quran the cattle He forbids:

حُرِّمَتۡ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡمَيۡتَةُ وَٱلدَّمُ وَلَحۡمُ ٱلۡخِنزِيرِ وَمَآ أُهِلَّ لِغَيۡرِ ٱللَّهِ بِهِۦ وَٱلۡمُنۡخَنِقَةُ وَٱلۡمَوۡقُوذَةُ
وَٱلۡمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَٱلنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَآ أَكَلَ ٱلسَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَّيۡتُمۡ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى ٱلنُّصُبِ وَأَن
تَسۡتَقۡسِمُواْ بِٱلۡأَزۡلَٰمِۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ فِسۡقٌۗ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ يَئِسَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن دِينِكُمۡ فَلَا تَخۡشَوۡهُمۡ
وَٱخۡشَوۡنِۚ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ أَكۡمَلۡتُ لَكُمۡ دِينَكُمۡ وَأَتۡمَمۡتُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ نِعۡمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ ٱلۡإِسۡلَٰمَ دِينٗاۚ
فَمَنِ ٱضۡطُرَّ فِي مَخۡمَصَةٍ غَيۡرَ مُتَجَانِفٖ لِّإِثۡمٖ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿٣﴾

You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; any animal strangled, or victim of a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you still slaughter it [in the correct manner]; or anything sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares [of meat] by drawing marked arrows — a heinous practice – today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them: fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion *islam*: [total devotion to God]; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no intention of doing wrong, then God is most forgiving and merciful [3] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 3)

The verse begins with His words, 'Prohibited to you are dead animals...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). We may observe that the first word of the verse is a passive verb, despite the one who forbids is obviously known: Allah. He does not force this upon anyone, for the addressee here participated in the covenant of faith with their Lord, so He Commands them and they have agreed to adhere to His commands. Therefore, Allah says, 'Prohibited'. Allah forbids and the faithful believer submits to this prohibition.

The word *al-maytah* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means the dead animal whose spirit left the body without the body being damaged, i.e., the animal died of natural causes. Life ends in one of two ways: either by natural death that occurs without the body being damaged, or by the body being damaged beyond repair. When a man strangles another living being and prevents it from breathing, the spirit leaves the body because a part of the body is irreparably damaged, as breathing is essential. A person may also kill another by shooting him with bullets because the spirit can only remain within a body that has certain attributes.

But there are certain body parts in whose absence the soul can remain in the body, such as the hand; severing it does not entail death. If a person's heart stops, it may be massaged so that it beats again, as long as the brain is still alive; and the longest time the brain can remain alive without oxygen is seven minutes only in rare instances. (1) If the brain ceases to function, the person dies, so doctors have defined clinical death as the moment in which the brain ceases to function. Accordingly, there are two cases in which the soul leaves the body: natural death and killing.

In case of death, the spirit leaves the body without the body being damaged; as for killing, the spirit leaves the body because the body is damaged. It is out of Allah's Mercy that He forbade the eating of dead animals because it has died for a reason that cannot be recognized, lest the people eat it along with its disease.

Likewise, He forbade the consumption of blood, which is the liquid which flows in veins and arteries, gives the body heat and warmth, and transports nutrients. Blood has two different roles as it flows: it carries waste from the kidneys and lungs, and there is also oxygenated blood which carries nutrients. If people consume this blood, it could be the oxygenated kind or it could also be the kind of blood that has not yet been rid of the impurities of the kidneys and lungs. It is also called' spilled blood', i.e. flowing blood. In the past, people used to fill the intestines of the slaughtered animal with this blood, cook it and eat it.

There is also blood which is not impure such as the liver, which is a single piece, and the spleen; and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Two kinds of dead meat and two kinds of blood have been permitted to us. The two kinds of dead meat are fish and locusts, and the two kinds of blood are the liver and spleen.'(2)

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawy *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

(2) (*Ahmad*, *Ibn Majah and Daraqatny*)

So, the liver and the spleen are exempted from the general ruling of blood, but the blood which spills upon slaughtering is prohibited. The reason fish and locusts are lawful to eat is that their flesh does not contain flowing blood; and when you cut a large fish, no blood flows from it, but rather, it is only found inside the flaps of the head, and not in the capillaries. Therefore, when a fish dies, there is no harm in eating it, and the same is true for locusts.

Then, Allah states the prohibition of 'the flesh of swine' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). No believer should ask about the reason for the prohibition of the flesh of swine. Scientists has made all kinds of researches to know why Allah has prohibited dead animals and blood, and they have realised that Allah does not want a disease to be conveyed from a dead animal to man, and He has forbidden blood because it contains toxic wastes like urea and other substances.

Every prohibition has a reason, which may be obvious or hidden. The Quran was revealed to an unlettered messenger who did not know about complex scientific matters, and the earlier Muslims implemented the teachings of the Quran because it was revealed by Allah, in Whom they believed as All-Wise. They also knew that Allah wants the best for His Creation. Every handicraft sets rules for protecting his craft. We do not find a furniture maker, for example, smashing up the wardrobe he has made; rather, he does his utmost to beautify the furniture he has made. As long as Allah is the One Who has created us and we believe in Him, we must obey His commands and refrain from all His prohibitions. This does not prevent us from utilising knowledge for the sake of strengthening faith, and to respond to any argumentative, probing person although no one has the right to raise arguments about Allah's religion. If he wants to argue, he must first argue about the existence of Allah and the Revelation Allah imparts to man by means of His messengers; if he is convinced, he must obey Allah's Commands. The religion should be studied from the top. The believers obey Allah's Commands, so when giving the ruling, Allah has not directed His instructions to all people, but He has directed them to the believers saying, 'O you who have believe…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 2) because the believers believe in Allah, so they must obey Him and follow His rulings.

The most valuable thing a man possesses is his health, so when his health declines, he searches for the causes. If food is the problem, he chooses a doctor who is specialised in the digestive system and who prescribes medicine for him. The sick person does not say to the doctor that he will not take this medicine unless he clarifies the reason for prescribing this medicine and its effect. So, the role of the mind here is to lead the person to a doctor whom he trusts, and he must then obey the instructions which this doctor gives for him. As long as one believes in Allah, he must obey His commands and avoid His prohibitions. The patient does not debate with the doctor, so how could any man argue with his Lord concerning a certain ruling?

A doctor may make a mistake, as any human being does, and he might even cause the death of his patient; when we have doubts about the instructions of a given doctor, we can seek the consultancy of other doctors, and then we obey their instructions. No one should argue concerning Allah's rulings, but we should obey all His commands.

Man puts his trust in human beings who are prone to error, so his trust in Allah should be above his trust in any other person. Therefore, the reasonable person should obey and follow Allah's Commandments and obey them without any debate, as the mind is the means to reflect on the signs of Allah's existence, but it should not lead a person to argue Allah's Commands which he should obey. 'Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). Analyses have confirmed that the flesh of swine contains tapeworm, ringworm and several other worms which cannot be treated.

The next forbidden item is: '... and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). This means uttering a name other than Allah when slaughtering an animal, such as saying, 'In the name of al-Lat and al-`Uzza' and not saying, 'In the Name of Allah, Allah is the Greatest.' This is because man benefits from the genera which existed in this universe when he was created and these genera waiting to serve him because he is Allah's vicegerent on earth. Animals have souls, but they are inferior to man because he has the ability to think; plants are inferior to animals, and inanimate bodies are inferior to plants. Every time man is served by beings, he must remember the Bounteous Creator; when man slaughters an animal; he does so by the leave of the Great Creator Who is greater than man, animals and the universe. Therefore, he must slaughter it in the Name of the Creator.

Some people do not eat meat out of sympathy and compassion towards animals, while they eat plants. However, if they know that plants also have life, will they refuse to eat them, too? It has been confirmed in this age that plants have life, and even inanimate bodies have life; if you split open a piece of stone or any kind of rock, you disturb with every tap of the hammer the cohesion of the particles of the rock which cling together, and you might do this without being aware of the life within it.

'…And there is not a thing except that it exalts (Allah) by His praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44). Allah's righteous servants know this fact and they deal with all the other creatures around them – whether animal or inanimate bodies – keeping in mind that they glorify Allah. Therefore, they do not belittle or despise things no matter how small they are; rather, they treat them gently. Even when they slaughter an animal, they have mercy on it, so they do not sharpen the knife in front of it or slaughter one animal in front of another. Moreover, they give food and water to the animal they wish to slaughter, because they know that it glorifies Allah. They slaughter the animals only because Allah has permitted them to eat it. They are held accountable for their deeds by Allah; as for the other beings around them, they are subdued by Allah.

These words of Allah convey a message: '... any animal over which any name other than Allah's has been invoked...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). Almighty Allah is the One Who has allowed us to eat living beings which have faculties of sensation and movement. He has created those animals and made them subservient to us so we can slaughter and eat them. Therefore, we must acknowledge the favour of the One Who has bestowed this on us and show gratitude to Him by reciting His Name upon slaughtering, 'In the Name of Allah, Allah is the Greatest'. This is an acknowledgment that we only slaughter that animal in the Name of Him Who has permitted us to do so.

'Can they not see how, among the things made by Our Hands, We have created livestock they control? And We have made them obedient, so some can be used for riding, some for food' (*Ya Sin:* 71-72). Allah has subjected these animals to our will, and being able to slaughter and eat them is a manifestation of this favour. Hence, when we slaughter an animal, we must remember the One Who has subjected it to our will and made it lawful for us to eat. Also, Almighty Allah forbids eating strangled animals. Strangling entails depriving a living being from one of the three elements Allah has made indispensable for life: food, water, and air. The All-Wise Creator has created these elements and placed them in a particular order of importance. A man can live for thirty days without food, for Allah has allowed for any crisis that may result in food being inaccessible. He has equipped your body with the ability to store nutrients which can be used when no food supply is available. He has created in us the desire for food since we need not just to satisfy hunger, but also to enjoy food, and He has also equipped our bodies with the mechanisms necessary to answer this instinct.

Allah does not command us to combat all desires. He does not command us to shun food and despise lawful needs. Rather, Allah permits us to eat to provide our bodies with the essential strength and energy we need, and also to enjoy the pleasure of eating. Anything more than what is directly consumed to generate energy is stored in the body as fats and flesh; and if a day comes when you cannot find any food, you can derive energy from the stored fat. This is one aspect of the absolute precision of Allah's creation. A car, once it runs out of fuel, immediately stops working. The physical form Allah has created for you, however, does not immediately stop operating when food runs out, but it keeps going for thirty days–a sufficient time to receive help or find a way to provide yourself with food.

Arab women in the past used to describe penury by saying' One year melted the fat away, another year did away with the flesh, and another year reduced the bones to nothing!' This sums up the different degrees of hunger; at times of hunger, fats are the first to be used up. Then, if hunger persists, it starts to eat into the flesh and bones. As for water, a human being can do without water for three to ten days according to the amount of water stored in his body. Air is the most essential of all. A person cannot do without air for more than the period of a single breath.(1) If air is withheld for a longer time, death is the inevitable outcome. Breathing is the most important of life's essential needs. Out of His Wisdom and Mercy, Allah does not allow anyone to control air, unlike food and sometimes water because if anyone can control air, it will be fatal for the life of all living beings.

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(1) This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawy *may Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

The Arabic language boasts great vastness and precision that manifests itself in numerous ways, like in the formation of its words. Consider, for example, the three words: *nafs* (soul), *nafas* (breath) and *nafis* (precious) that are all derived from the same root *n-f-s*. The word *nafs* refers to the union of spirit and material which causes life with all its manifestations; motion, thinking, etc. The word *nafas* refers to the air which constitutes one of the most essential requirements of life. Life is a precious gift, and therefore from the name of its basic constituent, *nafs* (soul), a word for ‘precious’ is derived, namely *nafis*. Consequently, this gift must not be wasted doing nothing or seeking unworthy gains or transient pleasures. Rather, life must be devoted to striving for a goal which is precious; and what is more precious than faith? Living for the cause of your Creator, Almighty Allah is the most sublime goal.

The Arabic language contains many examples of what is called *jinas*, or paronomasia that means the use of homonymous words to create a rhetorical effect. Sometimes the words are not homonymous but share the same root, which suggests that they share a common subtle meaning. A poet said, for example:

I left my lands and came to you asiru (walking)!

Love has made my heart to you asiru (a captive)!

The word *asiru* in the first line is a verb meaning ‘walking’, and in the second line it is a noun meaning ‘a captive’.

A strangled animal is one that has been choked to death, so why does Allah mention it after already mentioning ‘carrion’ since the latter includes all animals that have been killed or have died by any means? The reason is that a strangled animal should be included in another category, since it may be rescued before breathing its last. If a person catches an animal that has been strangled and slaughters it before it loses its life, and blood flows from it when it is slaughtered and its eye flutters or its tail wags, it is lawful to eat it. However, if a strangled animal, when slaughtered, does not emit any blood, it is unlawful to eat. This is because it means that it had already died before being slaughtered. In the verse, Allah also forbids eating an animal that has been beaten to death; that is, an animal that has lost its life because of severe damage. It is also forbidden to eat an animal which has fallen from a height and dies as a result, an animal that has been gored to death by another animal, or the animal which has been '…savaged by a beast of prey…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3), meaning the flesh left over by a predator from an animal which it has hunted and killed. This part of the verse, '…except that which you slaughter (in the correct manner before it dies)...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3) refers to animals which have been strangled, beaten severely, thrown or have fallen off a high place, or have been gored by another animal but are caught while they are still alive and slaughtered, so blood flows from them and their bodies twitch. These are lawful to eat.

Such was the opinion of the Companion Ali ibn Abu Taleb as well as the Companion Ibn Abbas, two of the most prominent Islamic scholars and exegetes in the history of Islam. They said this part of the verse, '…except that which you slaughter (in the correct manner before it dies)...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3) is an exception to all the aforementioned cases (animals which have been strangled, beaten severely, thrown or have fallen off a high place, or have been gored by another animal), excluding carrion, blood and swine-flesh. Some edible animals are too wild to be handled, but the abovementioned exception means one may confine an animal with ropes or strike it with an object to make it lose its balance and weaken for a moment, allowing the butcher to slaughter it in the way Islam has made lawful.

Allah does not specify which part of the animal's body may be beaten, whether it is the belly, the head or the back; an animal may be beaten by stones being flung at it, and these stones might strike it on the head, the belly or the back. This means it is permissible for us to strike a wild animal to be able to control and slaughter it; however, it may not be killed by any other means but the lawful slaughtering Allah has ordained.

The criteria which tell us whether the flesh is lawful or unlawful are ascertained by asking, 'Does blood flow from the animal when it is slaughtered? Does its body twitch or even just its eye flutter?' If these criteria are met when an animal is slaughtered, then it is permissible to eat it. Finally, the Name of Allah must be invoked upon slaughtering, otherwise the slaughtering process is unlawful and the flesh of the slaughtered animal may not be eaten; for even though the animal may be physically sound, the creed based on which it is slaughtered is un-Islamic.

‘…savaged by a beast of prey, except that which you slaughter (in the correct manner before it dies); or anything sacrificed on idolatrous altars…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 3). Allah forbids one from eating that which a beast of prey has savaged, unless the prey is still alive and can still be slaughtered according to the way Islamic Law prescribes. He *the Exalted* generally forbids whatever is not slaughtered according to the proper Islamic method. Hence, an animal may not be slaughtered using a bone or a tooth (as a weapon or tool for slaying), or slaughtered on an idolatrous altar, i.e. on stones set up for idols. The latter is prohibited because it bears resemblance to the slaughtering of offerings for idols. Again, even though the animal is physically sound, the manner of slaughtering is un-Islamic.

‘Idolatrous altars’ refers to the stones that used to be placed around the *Ka’ba* upon which the idolaters would slaughter offerings to express devotion to their gods. This manner of slaughtering is at variance with the monotheistic creed and this is why it is forbidden. This is also the reason why it is forbidden to slaughter an animal without invoking the Name of Allah or by mentioning the name of any false god. To invoke a name other than Allah’s on slaughtering an animal is a form of polytheism that is associating partners with Allah. He *the Exalted and Almighty* has made these animals subservient to man’s will and has made them lawful to be eaten even though they are living beings that have faculties of motion and sensation. The so-called gods for which offerings used to be made on altars never had and never will have any power over any creature, or any ability to bestow or withhold anything. We must direct our devotion to the One Who has created all things and the Bestower of all favours on His servants.

‘…You are also forbidden ‘*an tastaqsimu* (to allot shares) (of meat) by *al-azlam* (drawing marked arrows)…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 3). The Arabic word *tastaqsimu* means ‘to determine one’s fate/share’. At that time, distributing shares of a slaughtered animal was a troublesome job. As a result, whoever did it sought to release himself from the responsibility by claiming that ‘*al-azlam* commanded him'. These were wooden arrows with either 'My lord commands me to do it' or 'My lord forbids me to do it' written on them, but some arrows had nothing written on them. If an idolater wanted to travel, he would go to the custodian of the *Ka'ba* or a soothsayer, and either of the latter would take the arrows out of a bag and then move them around. The idolater would choose an arrow; if it said, 'My lord commands me to do it', he would travel for the purpose he wanted, and if there was nothing written on the arrow he would return it and choose another. If the chosen arrow said, 'My lord forbids me to do it', he would not travel.

This poses many questions, 'Who is the lord who commanded or forbade them? Did they mean Allah, the True Lord, or the false gods they worshipped? And if this is the case, then which one of them commanded or forbade them? If they meant Allah, then who told them that He commanded such-and-such a journey or forbade it?' That was nothing but telling lies about Allah regarding things of which no knowledge had been revealed to them. On the other hand, if they meant to refer to the false gods they worshipped, then in such a case the creed and the practice were both totally false at the very roots. Drawing arrows was also employed for making decisions about whether to marry or not. The verse we are dealing with particularly mentions drawing arrows for distributing shares of meat.

In the pre-Islamic era of ignorance, pagans had ten arrows, each of which had a name written on it. The arrow picked up by each person determined his share of the flesh of a slaughtered animal based on that name. The arrow named *al-fadh* corresponded to a single share. The one with *at-taw'am* written on it gave the one who drew it two shares. The one called *ar-raqib* meant that three shares will be given. The one with *al-hels* allotted four shares for whoever picked it. The arrow named *an-nafer* gave five shares. The one with the name *al-musbel* corresponded to six shares and *al-mu'alla* to seven shares. The remaining three arrows were: *al-manih*, *as-safih* and *al-waghd*. A slaughtered animal was divided into twenty-eight portions which were distributed among those who drew one of the first seven of the aforementioned arrows. As for the three arrows mentioned at the end, those who drew them received no share and had to pay for the slaughtered animal.

So, Allah commands us: '…You are also forbidden' *an tastaqsimu* (to allot shares) (of meat) by *al-azlam* (drawing marked arrows)…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). Distributing shares by drawing marked arrows is forbidden and is a kind of gambling. The outcome results in allotting undeserved shares to some, while wronging others. This is different from casting lots to make random selections; in the latter case, lots are cast to make an unbiased decision where no personal desire or caprice interferes.

Suppose two people owned a house and wanted to share it equally. They divided it into two equal shares, wrote their names on pieces of paper, and let a young child draw one of the two pieces of paper out of a jar. This way, each received a share of the house equal to that of the other based on the lot drawn for him.

Consider this example as well. If a man has more than one wife, he has to cast lots to decide who of them will accompany him on a journey. The purpose of casting lots in this case is to ensure that none of the wives became angry for not being chosen. Since desire of the husband plays no part in making the decision, he is not to blame for whoever of his wife is not chosen for his company in the journey.

This reminds me of Prophet Muhammad's arrival at Medina. We have an excellent example in him to follow *peace and blessings be upon him*. When he reached Medina, he did not want to offend any of *Al-Ansar* (the Helpers: Medinan Muslims), knowing that each of them was hoping that he would choose to stay in his house. Everyone tried to take hold of the reins of the Prophet's she-camel to make it stop before his house, but the Prophet said to them, 'Let her go her way, for she is commanded by Allah (regarding where to stop).'(1)

As the choice depended on where the she-camel stopped, there was no room for anyone to say or feel that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* favoured one person over another. The decision was in the Hand of Him Who cannot be contradicted by anyone.

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(1) *Cited by Ibn Hisham in his As-Sira An-Nabawiyyah, Ibn Kathir in his Al-Bidayah wa An-Nihayah, and Ibn Sa'd in At-Tabaqat Al-Kubrah*

It is clear that casting lots in such cases is not any form of gambling, which Islam forbids. Allah has also prescribed for us *istikharah* (a prayer observed to ask Allah for guidance) when we want to make a decision regarding any matter. As for gambling in order to allot shares or determine future actions, this is forbidden by the Sacred Law of Allah because it is improper and unfair.

After stating those unlawful practices and the food which is forbidden to eat, He says that whoever commits any of these has thus done '…*fisq* (a heinous practice)…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). The word *fisq* means 'refraining from obedience'. We have previously pointed out that the Quran sometimes uses tangible things to explain abstract notions. We perceive physical things through the senses, and then from such perceptions we infer and comprehend intellectual matters.

The basic sense of the word *fisq* indicates a ripened date breaking free from its skin. When the fresh date softens, it shrinks inside the skin and then breaks out of it. This is the process originally described as *fisq* (coming out/breaking free). When a date leaves its skin, flies swarm around it and dust taints it. Consequently, it becomes unfit for a human being to eat. Likewise, the Law ordained by Allah is a form of protection for people from corruption, and whoever discards it or forsakes it will become a vulnerable prey to evil insinuations and misguidance; hence the correlation between these two denotations of the word *fisq*.

The Law Allah has ordained constitutes religion. It establishes the creed pertaining to divinity and monotheism, the divine Revelations imparted to people through Allah's Messenger–Prophet Muhammad–and the rulings regulating society, with regards to acts of worship, transactions, relationships, and all aspects of life. All these rulings built the general structure of Islam in two stages: the Meccan stage when the purpose of the revealed verses were to focus on the essence of faith, monotheism, prophethood and divine Revelation, and the Medinan stage when the verses of the Quran started to focus on and outline the rulings regulating life.

By sending down the Book–the Noble Quran–that teaches people the creed and rulings of Islam, the religion was completed, and this is why Allah says: '…this day the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). The disbelievers had some hope that the Muslims would distort or abandon their religion. People of the Book wished the Muslims would do to the Quran what they had done to their own books, forgetting, abandoning and falsifying them, as Allah tells us about them: '…They have forgotten some of what they were told to remember…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13).

Their hopes, however, were all destroyed. The Companions learnt every verse of the Quran by heart and wrote it down directly after hearing it from Prophet Muhammad. The previous scriptures were not recorded until three or four centuries after they were revealed. With the Quran, the case was completely different: the verses were immediately recorded and arranged as Prophet Muhammad ordered his Companions.

The people of the Book did not only forget much of what they had been told to remember, but they also distorted much and concealed much: 'As for those who conceal the Scripture that Allah has sent down and sell it for a small price, they only fill their bellies with Fire…' (*al-Baqara:* 174).

Allah sent down certain verses that abrogated other verses which had been sent down before them. Prophet Muhammad could have been reluctant to tell people that a ruling he had told them before had been changed by Allah. Allah knew best what suited the believers at every stage following the advent of His Message, and can anyone deny Him the right to change anything He wills? This was proof that Prophet Muhammad was completely honest in delivering all that Allah had revealed to Him. This, too, stripped the disbelievers of every hope that Islam may ever be forgotten, distorted, or concealed by its adherents.

Some of the disbelievers of Quraysh imagined that the Quran would meet the same destiny as the Torah; for despite the fact that the Jews had a remainder of the Truth in the Torah, they did not follow it. They wished Muslims would likewise ignore what had been revealed to them in the Quran, but Muslims were very steadfast and Allah reassured them: '…This day the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3).

The word 'this day' refers to the time which has passed as well as to the future. The Quran is a timeless Message that will continue to be recited and will continue to be evidence for the Truth. The words 'this day' will continue to refer to every time when it is recited until Allah brings time to an end. Allah has completed the religion of Islam and willed it to be the religion of

His servants. He has sent down the Quran and has undertaken to preserve it against distortions or concealment ever since it was revealed over fourteen centuries, and He will continue to do so until the end of time. All this deepens and confirms the disbelievers' despair that the Quran would ever be forgotten or concealed. Prophet Muhammad delivered every word. Even when Allah reproached him, he did not conceal anything and recited every verse to His Companions, who wrote and memorized what they had heard from him. For example, on one occasion the hearts of the Muslims inclined to acquitting a Muslim who had committed theft and condemning an innocent Jew for the crime; hence Allah revealed to His Prophet Muhammad: 'We have sent down the Scripture to you (Prophet) with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray their trust'(1) (*an-Nisa':* 105).

In this verse, there is a command to Prophet Muhammad to judge justly, even if that judgement was against a Muslim. It also implies a call for repentance and imploring forgiveness for inclining to judge in favour of the guilty Muslim against the innocent Jew. Such is the tolerance of Islam!

People of the Book distorted the truth that was stated in their books by replacing it with other than the words of Allah and alleging they were revealed by Him. This was their crime, and they wished Muslims would do the same, but they lost all hope when they saw that the Muslims did not stray into such deviations as the adherents of the previous Books had.

'…This day the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). They hoped Islam would be defeated, but they saw it was triumphant at the hands of the believers. They wanted to extinguish Allah's Light with their mouths, but Allah lets His light be completed even though the disbelievers may hate it.

After thus reassuring Muslims, Allah tells them: '…Do not fear them, but fear Me…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). Allah has decreed that nothing will allow the enemies of Islam to demean or destroy Islam. Consequently, there is no reason for Muslims to fear their enemies so long as they fear Allah and are mindful of their duty to Him. Allah has promised to grant victory to the believers if they remain steadfast in faith and fear none but Him.

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(1) 'A man from Medina stole a suit of armour and accused a Jew of stealing it. He brought his family to ask Prophet Muhammad to rule against the Jew and he was about to do this when these verses were revealed (Razi)', Abdel Haleem, *The Quran*, *A New Translation.*

Being Muslims, however, is not a guarantee that victory will be their share; Allah does not change the state of a people until they first change what is within themselves. Muslims receive victory only when they abide by the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* (teachings) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When they act at variance with this guidance, Allah will not help them, just as He caused the believers to be defeated at the Battle of Uhud by the idolaters because they disobeyed the commands of Prophet Muhammad. It did not avail them at all that they were Muslims as long as they did not comply with what Islam enjoined on them. To continue, they (the disbelievers) are not enemies that should be feared; a believer should fear none but Allah. It is only Him we should be mindful of and only His guidance to which should be adhered. He has sown despair in the hearts of your enemies, and as a result they have lost all hope that you, the Muslims, will forget what you have been guided to or attempt to distort or conceal it. Allah has guarded His religion against the like of this; the fault its adherents may commit only entails straying from its Straight Path by disobeying or neglecting what Islam prescribes.

'…This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen for you Islam (total devotion to Allah) as your religion. But if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no intention of doing wrong, then Allah is most Forgiving and Merciful' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). When we say that a thing is perfect, it means all its parts are in the correct place and each part does what it is supposed to do. Allah has bestowed His blessings fully on us by sending down to us the perfect religion that fits all times, places, and conditions of life, and prescribes rulings regulating every aspect of life: spiritual, social, economic, etc.

Allah has willed that Islam should be the religion of His servants until the end of time. Therefore, claiming that Islam is no longer fit to be applied here or now is a claim that Allah needs to be corrected! However Allah says: '…I have perfected your religion…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3), that is, nothing is defective in it, and He says '…I have…completed My blessing…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3), that is, nothing is missing. To think that Islam was appropriate only for the past implies a belief that there are matters that escaped the Knowledge of Allah, and hence His ordinance does not include or suit every time or place. Allah says: '…I have…chosen for you Islam as your religion…', so anyone who questions or defies this actually gives preference to his own choice above that of his Lord and Creator.

Knowledge of the Creator encompasses all His creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* knows that people are subject to vicissitudes and that situations may arise which make it difficult or impossible for some to adhere strictly to every ruling. Consequently, He does not leave them to invent their own dispensations, but rather, He makes dispensations for them. No one, therefore, can give an excuse by saying' We are unable to act on such-and-such ruling', for when Allah knows there is a thing that His servants may not be able to do, He already ordains an alternative lenient ruling to make things easier for them. As long as we are subject to variations in circumstances that take one from strength to weakness, from wealth to poverty, or from dignity and domination to humiliation, Allah *the Exalted* has allowed for the fact that some of those who believe in His religion may be prevented by causes out of their control from adhering to any of His commands because of illness or dire necessity; He says: '…But if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no intention of doing wrong, then Allah is most Forgiving and Merciful' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3).

Sustenance is essential to preserve life. Consequently, in case of severe hunger which is likely to cause death, Allah allows a person to eat the flesh of a dead animal or the like of what is normally prohibited–as long as his life depends on it. No one can say, for example, 'I am driven by necessity to take a usurious loan from a bank because I want to trade with a large capital of a hundred thousand and I have only one thousand'! Many people believe this is what' necessity' means. No, you must invest only the one thousand you possess, and there is no necessity in this case to deal with usury. 'Necessity' means a case where one's life, or the lives of those under his care or guardianship, is at stake. Islam permits a person who has no money at all to take a usurious loan–if he cannot find anyone to give him a fair loan–to buy medicine, food or something he disparately needs to save his life or that of his dependants. In this case, the usurious creditor is the one who bears the sin of the transaction, not the debtor because he acted in a case of necessity.

The verse we are dealing with refers to a person driven by extreme need to eat what is otherwise unlawful while he hates having to do it, not a person who enjoys doing a sin and indulges himself in it. It is about resorting to unlawful food after all other means have failed and consuming of it only according to the extent of one's need. Scholars of jurisprudence even say that a man in such a situation–lost in a desert, for example–must eat only as much carrion or the like as is necessary to keep himself alive, not until he is full, as long as he cannot find anything else to sustain himself.

A person may resort to this choice only when driven by dire necessity, not by any inclination towards sin. It follows that he must only take as much as is essentially needed to preserve his life. To be in dire necessity means to grow bereft of all means. Allah has created means and causes, dispersed them in the world and commanded them to respond to whoever does the necessary effort to make use of them, be they a believer or a disbeliever. Whoever ploughs a land, sows seeds in it and irrigates it will receive its yield, and a clever trader will make money and prosper, whether he is a believer or not.

'If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it…' (*ash-Shura:* 20).

People employ all the possible means in order to achieve the outcomes expected of them. Desperate need or dire necessity is when a person has no access to any means; this is why Allah says: 'Who is it that answers *al-mudtarr* (the distressed) when they call upon Him? Who removes their suffering?' (*an-Naml:* 62). The word *mudtarr* means someone who is bereft of all possible means, i.e. there is nothing he can do to fulfil his need. Someone might say, 'I pray to Allah, but He does not answer my prayers'. Perhaps you are not in a real need. Maybe you ask Him to give you a palace to live in instead of your apartment, a luxury car instead of the ordinary one you have. Such are not cases of extreme necessity.

Ponder this example–which is only for clarification, for Allah is far Exalted above any comparison. A foreman seeing one of his workers carrying a large box that is too heavy for him would rise and help the worker with that box. Such is the kind of help to be expected of one another in times of need. Likewise, Allah assists those who do their best. As for those who do not make use of the means Allah grants them and then implore His help, they are not likely to receive it. So long as Allah has made the means available to you, you have to employ them and work while praying to Allah for assistance. Only when you are short of the possible means and are therefore unable to take any action will you be excused. When this is the case, invoke Him and He will relieve your distress and compensate you for your want of means and causes.

After making this dispensation, Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…But if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no intention of doing wrong, then Allah is most Forgiving and Merciful' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). Allah has made this dispensation for us, but why does He end the verse with a statement confirming His Forgiveness and Mercy? Allah bestows His Forgiveness on His servants in two ways: either by excusing His servant from being punished for a sin, or by guarding him against committing a sin. This explains to us why Allah says to Prophet Muhammad: 'so that Allah may forgive you your past and future sins…' (*al-Fath:* 2). Such is the kind of Forgiveness Allah bestows on His servant to prevent him from committing the sin in the first place. In the following verse, Allah says:

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ مَاذَآ أُحِلَّ لَهُمْ ۖ قُلْ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتُ ۙ وَمَا عَلَّمْتُم مِّنَ
ٱلْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلِّبِينَ تُعَلِّمُونَهُنَّ مِمَّا عَلَّمَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۖ فَكُلُوا۟ مِمَّآ أَمْسَكْنَ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱسْمَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ ۖ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٤﴾

They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, 'All good things are lawful for you.' [This includes] what you have taught your birds and beasts of prey to catch, teaching them as God has taught you, so eat what they catch for you, but first pronounce God's name over it. Be mindful of God: He is swift to take account [4] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 4)

After Allah has made clear what He has made lawful and unlawful, we find that lawful things are unlimited, for when Allah mentions ten things that are unlawful, these ten things, needless to say, do not constitute everything in existence. When Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* and made him procreate to fulfil his role as a vicegerent on earth, He placed within this earth enough sustenance to preserve the life of humankind.

Allah has made preservation of human life in two ways: protection of an individual's life and preservation of mankind as a whole. The former is fulfilled through the basic needs of life: air, water and food, and the latter through marriage and procreation. For these two essential goals to be achieved, certain factors must exist to serve humankind and provide them with power.

Accordingly, Allah Almighty reassures us that what we need for life to continue is already guaranteed by Him: 'Say, "How can you disregard the One Who created the earth in two Days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!" He placed solid mountains on it, bestowed abundant blessing in it, measured out all its varied provisions for all who seek them—all in four Days. Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke—and He said to it and the earth, "Come into being, willingly or not," and they said, "We come willingly"' (*Fussilat:* 9-11).

Allah informs us that He has created on the earth its means of subsistence and made them subservient to humankind for this life to continue. Whoever tries to count the blessings with which Allah has favoured humankind, he would find they are too many to comprehend. Since the dawn of human history, no one has ever tried to count the blessings Allah has created on earth. People have always known that the favours of Allah are beyond calculation. Allah says: '…If you tried to count the blessings of Allah, you could never calculate them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

This is why Allah specifies in the Noble Quran the things that are unlawful for humankind, since the lawful things are countless. In the preceding verse, He tells us about ten unlawful things to bear in mind and avoid. (Are they) only ten? Yes, just this small number of things compared to the endless number of His blessings. It is also worthy of notice that Allah says in one verse: '…If you tried to count the blessings of Allah, you could never calculate them: man is truly unjust and ungrateful' (*Ibrahim:* 34). And in another verse, He says: 'If you tried to count the blessings of Allah, you could never calculate them: He is truly Most Forgiving and Most Merciful' (*an-Nahl:* 18).

Some may think we have before us a case of redundancy, but let us examine the two verses to see if this is true. We have the Giver of blessings, the recipients and the blessings themselves. As for the blessings, they are countless. As for the Giver of blessings, He is Forgiving and Merciful, and as for the recipients of blessings, they are unjust and ungrateful. Why does Allah tell us these truths in the Quran?

If Allah treated us in the way we deserve for our ingratitude and wrongdoing, He would withhold His blessings from us, but He continuously bestows His favours on us, all due to His Mercy and Grace. Each of these two verses conveys an important truth; Allah is Forgiving and Merciful, and He showers His countless blessings on humankind even though they are ungrateful and sinful. Thus, when one commits a sin, he should not despair; your Lord is always He Who is Forgiving and Merciful, irrespective of who you are. Do not despair, but keep imploring your Lord's Pardon and blessings despite your sins.

Allah has created the means of sustenance on earth and created with them the factors that make them fit for the service of humankind. For example, we sift wheat grains to make flour and bake bread. For wheat to grow, other factors are required: regular irrigation, ploughing, etc. Allah has created this for us and guaranteed for us our means of sustenance. He is our Lord and Provider and we must, therefore, obey His ordinance. He has told us what is lawful and what is unlawful for us; not everything He has created is lawful for us. There are things on earth which have been made to perform other functions but are not fit to be consumed by human beings. Some may wonder, 'Since Allah has created these things, why does He forbid them?'

Consider this example. Suppose an inventor made a machine to run on diesel but we used petrol instead, what would happen to it? It would break down. Allah has created humankind, so should we not believe Him when He tells us what is most suitable for us? Allah knows best what is good for our well being, and hence we should abide by what He commands; otherwise, life will become ruined. When electric wires are connected in the right manner, they give us light and power. When they are not, power will be cut off or a fire may even be caused.

What I want to say by these examples is that obedience to the Law set by Allah is the only way to set life right. In the realm of relationships, Allah has prescribed marriage for the preservation of humankind. If men and women seek any form of relationship other than lawful marriage, the world will be immersed in corruption.

A wedding party is a pleasant scene. The bride's father is seen happily smiling to everyone as he celebrates the unique occasion of his daughter's marriage to her suitor. He welcomes everyone attending the wedding, orders food and desserts to be served to them, and his heart is full of pride and elation on the pleasant occasion. Suppose, on the contrary, the same young man, instead of proposing to her by lawful means, tried to sneak into the house to see the daughter; how would her father feel about that? He would be enraged and would kill that intruder if he could! Such is the great difference between seeking lawful means and daring to slide into unlawful ones. As the saying goes, 'When lawful ways are sought, there will be no room for jealousy (on the part of the woman's family).'

What takes the father from protective jealousy to joyful happiness? It is abidance by the Law of Allah. A daughter's marriage is a source of happiness and satisfaction to both her parents, whereas it enrages them if a stranger seeks to have her by any other means. Consequently, no one should question why Allah has made things lawful or unlawful.

Allah says in reply to the question that the believers asked Prophet Muhammad: 'They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, "All good things are lawful for you."…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4) However, 'all good things are lawful' does not mean it is for us to decide whether a thing is good and useful, and therefore lawful. Rather, we should know that whatever is lawful is therefore good and useful, not vice versa. The Creator of all things is the One Who best knows what is good and what is harmful. Our knowledge cannot encompass all the good or harm hidden in everything. Harmful things may appear good to us, and judging whether things are useful or otherwise cannot be based merely on how we feel about consuming or practicing them, or else drugs and alcohol would be considered good things. A thing may appear good, but we may not know what harm or evil lies in it. Since this is the case, we should listen to the Creator of the heavens and earth when He tells us what to enjoy and what to avoid of the things He has created in the world. Know that whatever Allah makes lawful is good and whatever He forbids is for our own good. He has created everything in due measure and His Knowledge encompasses all things. He is the All-Wise.

A doctor prescribes medication and the patient just follows his instructions. He tells a diabetic to reduce starchy and sugary foods to a minimum, and the patient listens without questioning anything. We listen to doctors as we know they are experts. We trust them, even though they are subject to error like any human being. Should we not, then, be humble before our Creator? Sometimes we have the audacity to question why Allah has made such-and-such a thing unlawful to us. Allah is our Trusted Lord; whatever He commands is wise and it is our duty to comply. Some try to avoid performing some of their duties to Allah by twisting the meaning of His words: 'Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear…' (*al-Baqara:* 286).

One may say that his job takes up so much of his time that he has no time left to observe *salat* (the Daily Prayers). As a result, he abandons this essential worship on the pretext that Allah does not burden anyone with more than he can bear! We say, 'Are you able to ascertain your capability and assess your moral responsibility based on your own evaluation?' No. So long as Allah has made *salat* mandatory, then He knows every person is capable of complying. This is the meaning of the aforementioned verse. Since Allah has enjoined something on His servants, then we all have the capacity to perform it, for He does not burden a soul with more than what it can bear. To continue, Allah says: 'They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, "All good things are lawful for you."…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4) Thus, we understand that' all good things' mean whatever Allah has made lawful. Perhaps the believers meant to ask Prophet Muhammad about a particular thing, whether it is lawful or not, but Allah has given this answer to be appropriate for any similar question about what is lawful and what is unlawful.

Then comes the question of hunting with dogs. This was something well known to Arabs during the pre-Islamic era of ignorance, and they used to also hunt with birds of prey. In this respect, Allah says: '…Say, "All good things are lawful for you." (This includes) prey of your hunting birds and beasts you have taught to catch…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4). This is the general ruling and it is explicated afterwards.

The verses of the Quran were sent down to Prophet Muhammad on particular occasions to teach the Companions and the entire community of Muslims about the rulings of their religion. Such was the best way for them to comprehend the Message and pass it down to the following generations. Allah revealed this verse to the Prophet when Companion Adi ibn Hatem *may Allah be pleased with him* asked about hunting with dogs and birds. Let us examine the verse. Allah says: '…Say, "All good things are lawful for you." (This includes) prey of *al-jawarih* (your hunting birds and beasts) you have taught to catch' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4). Allah makes a general statement that all good things are lawful for us, and then He highlights that what we train animals and birds to hunt is among the good lawful things. The word *jawarih* is the plural of *jarih*, which literally means 'gainer': someone or something that gains. This is why we also use this word to refer to parts of the body, such as hands, eyes, ears, nose, etc. because we gain perception through them: we acquire vision through the eyes, hearing through the ears, smell through the nose and we feel things by touching them with the skin. Also, Allah says: 'It is He who calls your souls back by night, knowing what you have *jarahtum* (done) by day…' (*al-An'am:* 60).

The verb *jaraha* is another derivative of the same root and it denotes 'acquire', 'gain' or 'do'. This verb also means 'to wound'. Hence, the word *jawarih* in the verse we are dealing with may either mean 'gainers/acquirers' since the trained hunting birds and beasts are a means of gaining preys through hunting, or it may denote' wounding' since when these animals hunt preys, they injure them in order to catch them; both of these meanings are sound and appropriate.

Dogs are mainly used for hunting, and leopards, cheetahs or hawks may be used as well. Allah says: '…(This includes) prey of your hunting birds and beasts you have taught to catch, teaching them as Allah has taught you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4). That is, it is lawful for us to eat the catches we gain by the effort we expend in training these animals to hunt. One does not simply release the dog or the hawk to hunt, but rather, he first must train the animal to do this.

A monkey can be trained to perform amazing tricks. A circus performer can train a huge elephant to stand on all fours on a platform whose diameter does not exceed one metre. All this is possible because of the training imparted to them by human beings whom Allah has endowed with this skill and intelligence.

A person can train an animal to do various tricks and tasks, but that animal cannot train its own offspring to do the same tricks. This is a difference between humankind and animals: a human child learns and acquires skills from his parent, but animal training can only be given to the individual animal, which cannot pass on its acquired skills to other animals of its kind or to its offspring.

The original Arabic verse makes a particular mention of the word *mukallibin* (plural), which is a person who trains dogs to hunt. Some say that *mukalleib* (singular) means a dog breeder; however, a man may breed dogs but not train them to do any special skills. Hence, the word means someone who trains dogs professionally. He is like a stableman who trains horses, since a horse must be trained before it can be ridden or used to pull coaches. Allah mentions dog trainers in particular since hunting with dogs is more common, perhaps because some species are less fierce and easier to tame compared to other beasts of prey. A trained dog is tempted when its attention is called to a target prey. It obeys its master when he sends it to catch the animal, stops and turn backs when he calls it, and brings the quarry to its master unspoiled, without eating any of it. If a dog eats part of the quarry, then it is not well trained yet; in such a case it has caught it for itself, not for its master. This is why Allah defines the activity of hunting by saying about the hunting animals: '…so eat what they catch for you...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4).

Part of the process of hunting is also connected with faith: it involves mentioning the Name of Allah over the quarry: '…but first pronounce Allah's name over it…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4). This is what makes the hunted animal lawful to eat, and also makes it not belong to the category of '…any animal over which any name other than Allah's has been invoked...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). If a dog attacks the quarry and kills it, the quarry is lawful to eat as long as the dog's master said, 'In the Name of Allah, Allah is the Greatest' before he unleashed the dog against the prey. If he does not mention Allah's Name at this point but the hunted animal is still alive, he must slaughter it and mention Allah's Name over it. However, if it dies before he can do this, it is unlawful for him to eat it. The same applies when one hunts with a gun: the hunter has to mention the Name of Allah before he fires the bullet, and only then may he eat the hunted prey.

Mentioning the Name of Allah is a prerequisite for making the hunted animal permissible to eat. It is a form of acknowledgement of the favour of Him Who has made that animal subservient to our will. It is ingratitude to enjoy a blessing without acknowledging the favour of Him Who has bestowed it.(1)

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…And be mindful of Allah: He is swift to take account' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4). A believer must be mindful of Allah by obeying His commands sincerely and thoroughly because He is swift in reckoning, in many ways. However long your worldly life may last, it will inevitably end indicating that it is but a short life. No one knows when death will come to him; it may be sooner than one expects. As long as this is the case, every believer must bear in mind what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'When one of you dies, this is his day of reckoning.'(2) This is one way to interpret the verse '…He is swift to take account' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4). Death is also like sleep; no one can tell how many hours he has slept unless he is told the time. The Quran tells us that the People of the Cave asked one another: 'In time We woke them, and they began to question one another. One of them asked, "How long have you been here?" and (some) answered, "A day or part of a day", but then (others) said, "Your Lord knows best how long you have been here…"' (*al-Kahf:* 19). They had no idea they had slept for three hundred and nine years. Likewise, when we are resurrected, no one will have an idea how long he had been dead. Since no one feels the passage of time after death, when Judgment Day comes, we will feel we had been dead for but a little time. Another way to interpret: '…He is swift to take account' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4) is that Allah also recompenses His servants for their deeds in this worldly life before the reckoning in the Hereafter. When we commit sins, Allah may punish us in this life through afflictions: illness, gloom, etc. Thus, the verse may refer to reckoning in this worldly life.

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(1) Some scholars of jurisprudence say it is permissible to eat the slaughtered or hunted animal over which the Name of Allah was not mentioned on condition that we mention His Name before we eat it, as long as no name other than Allah's was mentioned on slaughtering or hunting it.

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya in Al-Mawt*, *Al-Hindi in Kanzul-' Ummal and Az-Zubaydi in It-haf As-Sada Al-Muttaqin*

It may also refer to the reckoning in the Afterlife. Allah is swift in reckoning in that He can reckon all mankind in the blink of an eye. When Companion ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb was asked how humankind can all be called to account at one time, he replied, ‘Just as He provides for them all at one time, He can call them all to account at one time’.

People stand up in a queue to be given sustenance! We are all provided with air to breathe, food to eat, and means to work and seek through our efforts the endless bounties and blessings Allah has created in the world; however, Allah Almighty is not subject to the boundaries of time. We need time to perform actions since our abilities are limited; but He is *the Almighty* and All-Powerful Who, when He wills anything, only says to it, ‘Be’, and it is.

When we move a medium-sized stone from its place, this requires a strong man to use only part of his strength, but for a little child, it takes a long time; so what should we think about the Creator of man and the universe, the One Who has Absolute and Ultimate Power? Indeed, the laws of time do not apply to Him *Glorified is He*. Thus He *the Almighty* is swift in reckoning, in the broadest sense of the word. He *Glorified is He* and then says:

ٱلۡيَوۡمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتُۖ وَطَعَامُ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ حِلّٞ لَّكُمۡ وَطَعَامُكُمۡ حِلّٞ لَّهُمۡۖ
وَٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتُ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ وَٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتُ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ إِذَآ
ءَاتَيۡتُمُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ مُحۡصِنِينَ غَيۡرَ مُسَٰفِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِيٓ أَخۡدَانٖۗ وَمَن
يَكۡفُرۡ بِٱلۡإِيمَٰنِ فَقَدۡ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُۥ وَهُوَ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ مِنَ ٱلۡخَٰسِرِينَ ٥

Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste, believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bride-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers [5] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 5)

Allah *the Almighty* begins this verse by repeating what He says before in the previous verse, that is: ‘All the good things of life have been made lawful to you (O mankind!)'. In fact, He *the Almighty* does this in order to direct the attention of people to the fact that one may only deem something to be good if it has been made lawful by Him *the Almighty*.

After He *Glorified is He* sheds light on the way how lawful foods are to be procured and how hunting is to be conducted, we come now to another important point which is that He *the Almighty* says: '…The food of the people of the Book is lawful for you…', but there is a very important question to be asked in this respect, that is, does this saying of Allah really mean that all the food of the people of the Book is lawful for us, even if this food contains something unlawful like pork?! The answer is definitely' No'. In fact, this verse makes it lawful for Muslims to eat only the lawful food of the people of the Book which is of the same kind as that which Allah has made lawful for them, i.e. Muslims. In this regard, it is important to know that it is not right for one to disdain from eating such a food of the people of the Book because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to establish connections between the followers of the heavenly revealed religions, irrespective of the fact that they may have different conceptions about Him *the Almighty*. In other words, He *the Almighty* wants them, i.e. followers of the heavenly revealed religions, to interact with each other in such a way which reflects their belief. As a result, you (O Muslims!) are by no means supposed to shun the people of the Book; rather, you are allowed to eat their food if it belongs to the same kind of lawful food Islam allows you to consume. In this vein, it is not right for you to refuse to give any of the people of the Book your food because Allah *the Almighty* wants to make amity among the followers of the heavenly revealed religions who believe in Him *the Almighty* even if, as we said before, they have different conceptions about Him *Glorified is He*.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a striking example to illustrate this point for us. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to people, Islam was faced and challenged by two Empires; one of them was atheistic as they worshipped fire and did not believe in Allah, namely the Persian Empire; while the second was the Roman Empire which, contrary to the first, believed in Him *the Almighty*. These two Empires represented the only two powers in the world, east and west, at that time. So, when Prophet

Muhammad came to guide people to the Way of Allah, his heart and the hearts of the believers inclined to the Empire that believed in Allah and the heavenly revealed religion, and not to those atheists who worshipped fire.

We can fully realise the greatness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as he preferred for those who believed in Allah, i.e. the Romans, to be granted victory over those who did not, i.e. the Persians, even though the former did not believe in him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Consequently, when the war broke out between the Persians and the Byzantines and the first victory went to the Persians, the sympathies of Prophet Muhammad and the believers were with the Byzantines because they were closer to the new religion. Even though they did not believe in him *peace and blessings be upon him*, they believed in Allah, their heavenly revealed religion and the Day of Resurrection. As such, it is now clear to us that Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that Muslims must incline to those who have some kind of faith, even if only a little. This incident is manifestly clear in the chapter of *ar-Rum* in which Allah *the Almighty* says that the believers, i.e. Prophet Muhammad and his followers, will rejoice over the succour Allah *the Almighty* grants to the Byzantines over the Persians (*ar-Rum:* 1-5).

These aforementioned verses of *ar-Rum* begin by recounting news on the Byzantines' defeat, and they then tell us about a prophecy made by Allah *the Almighty* that they, i.e. the Byzantines would be victorious within a few years. They furthermore state clearly that on that particular day when the Byzantines gain victory over the Persians, the believers will rejoice in Allah's Succour. If we reflect carefully on the position of the Muslims regarding that war between these two most advanced powers at that time, we will realise that the sympathy of the Muslims was with the Romans to the extent that they grieved over their defeat. At that point, Allah *the Almighty* announces the sure news that the Byzantines would be victorious over the Persians.

Can anyone, by any means, predict the final outcome of a battle between two great powers? As a matter of fact, such a prediction could not be confirmed within just a single day, even if the one who made it knew that reinforcements were on their way to aid and support the side which would gain victory according to his/her expectation. As for the prediction made regarding the victory of the Byzantines, these verses of *ar-Rum* clearly say that it will be fulfilled within a few years. Who can predict the outcome of a battle which will take place after the passing of several years?! Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself could not possibly have dared to make this prediction, especially if we take into account the fact that he did not know how well each side was equipped or what the size of their forces was. All of this tells us undoubtedly that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who made and confirmed this prediction about the defeat of the Persians at the hands of the Romans.

It goes without saying that this prediction in question will actually take place because it was recorded in the Quran whose recitation is an act of worship. That is why when Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* heard this verse, he said, 'I lay a wager that the Byzantines shall be victorious in three years', yet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told him to extend the period mentioned in the wager because Allah *the Almighty* says that they will be victorious within a few years. In fact, he *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered Abu-Bakr to do so because the word *Bida'* (few) in Arabic refers to the period of time from three to nine years. As a result, Abu-Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* firmly believing in what Prophet Muhammad told him, increased the wager to one hundred she-camels and the time limit to nine years. Actually, this clearly means that the believers were completely certain of the fulfilment of this divine prophecy made by Allah *Glorified is He*.

We have mentioned the interpretation of these verses here to show that the sympathies of Prophet Muhammad were with those who believed in a heavenly revealed Scripture and in a Messenger. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* makes lawful for us the food of the people of the Book in order that there will be a connection between us and those who believe Allah *the Almighty,* and in a heavenly revealed religion. This is proved by the saying of Allah: 'The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them'.

In the same vein, Allah *Glorified is He* instructs Muslims how to deal with the people of the Book. In the chapter of *al-Mumtahana*, He *the Almighty* tells us that believers are allowed to show kindness and to behave with full equity with the people of the Book as long as they do not fight against the Muslims or drive them out of their houses. Yet, if they, i.e. the people of the Book, do any of this, Muslims are then not allowed to deal with them or even show them kindness (*al-Mumtahana:* 8-9). As such, Allah *the Almighty* wants us to establish balanced relationships with non-Muslims in our daily life. Furthermore, we, Muslims, should not deal with the atheistic polytheist in the same way we deal with those who believe in Allah even if these believers in Allah deny the Message of Prophet Muhammad. In other words, He *Glorified is He* wants a connection to be established between Muslims and the people of the Book. Thus, Muslims are allowed to eat the lawful food of the people of the Book as long as it is judged lawful in Islam. In this respect, Muslims must be fully aware of the fact that some of the food of the people of the Book contains alcohol, and that they must refrain from everything that is forbidden in Islam; they, i.e. Muslims, are not allowed to drink alcohol or eat pork.

We know for certain that food is a means for preserving and maintaining life. Having shed light on the permissibly of eating the lawful food of the people of the Book as long as it is judged lawful in Islam, He *Glorified is He* directs our attention to another lawful act that we are allowed to do with the people of the Book, that is, marrying their women. He *the Almighty* says: 'Moreover (lawful for you in matrimony) are chaste, believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bridal gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses' (*al-Ma'ida:* 5).

The word *Muhsana* (translated here as' chaste') have two other meanings: it may refer to a free woman, i.e. not slave-women, or it may refer to' a woman who is married.' The Arabic word *Ihsan* means 'protecting oneself from unlawful relationships'. It is historically recorded that free women shunned committing unlawful relationships to the effect that it is said that prostitution was only committed by slave-women because they had no father and no brother to protect them. In addition, people believed that they, i.e. slave-women, were not as honourable as free women. Hence, when *Hind bint 'Uttbah*, wife of *Abu Sufyan*, heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* telling people about the impermissibility of adultery, she said, 'O Prophet Muhammad, would free women commit adultery?!' This statement of *Hind* tells us clearly that free women in the pre-Islamic period did not commit adultery because they were able to restrain themselves from committing such a crime, unlike others.

The word *Muhsana*, as we previously explained, also refers to ‘a woman who is married’. It is of great importance here to know that Allah *the Almighty* declares the free, chaste women from among the believers and their counterparts from among the women of the people of the Book to be on equal footing with each other with regards to marriage to Muslim men. If a chaste Muslim man wants to marry any of these free, chaste women, be they Muslim or from the people of the Book, he is obliged to pay the dowry for her. Some scholars even opine that when one wants to marry a Muslim woman, it is sufficient for the husband to specify the dowry for the wife, that is, he does not have to pay it at the time of the marriage due to the close connections between the followers of the one religion, but the case is different when one wants to marry a woman from the people of the Book. In this regard, Islam sets conditions that the Muslim man must specify the dowry and have a witness present when it is given. He is not allowed to betray the trust at all. This is actually the true meaning to be understood from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…give them their dowers....’

Allah *the Almighty* then tells Muslim men that they are not allowed to marry any but chaste women from the people of the Book; those who are not taken as mistresses.

The word *Safh* literally means (‘pouring’ or ‘passion’); the prostitute woman is the one who allows any man to have sex with her. As for the word *Khadn* or (secret love-companion), it means a girlfriend or lover to whom one is not married, and it can be used to refer to a man as well as a woman. Furthermore, Muslims must pay attention to the ruling that they are not allowed to engage in a ‘temporary marriage’; rather, when one decides to marry, his intention should be to remain married forever, and not only to remain married long enough to take his pleasure.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying: ‘The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers’. This is because the believer fully realises that the essence of faith is to accept the Laws enacted by Allah *the Almighty* and to carry them out. Thus, whoever denies any of these divine laws will be denying faith. People must remember the fact that Allah *the Almighty* will not be afflicted with any harm if all the people turn disbelievers. This is because He *Glorified is He* is the One Who created man. In addition, He *the Almighty* possesses all Attributes of Power and Perfection.

Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* does not need any help from any being. In this regard, we must know that He *the Almighty* possesses all the Attributes of Perfection and Power–even before He has created mankind and the whole world. Thus, it becomes clear that man is the only one who enjoys all the fruits of his/her obedience, worship, and faith. However, if a man denies any of the Laws laid down by Allah *the Almighty* it is as though s/he has rejected all aspects of faith; but if man denies any aspect of faith, s/he is viewed as committing a kind of unbelief. I wish a person who does this would simply say, 'This aspect of faith is correct, but I cannot control myself'.

In fact, concerning this particular case in which the person confesses his/her mistake, s/he would be judged a sinful believer who may seek Allah's Forgiveness or even show repentance; two results that do not take place with disbelief. Disbelief undoubtedly causes all one's works and deeds to be in vain. This plainly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* in this verse addresses those who obey Him in some matters but not in others. As such, He *Glorified is He* clarifies and illustrates the situation to people as follows, 'The reward of the good deeds you do in this worldly life will be in vain and come to nothing as a result of your refusal to carry out and obey the Laws of Allah *the Almighty*'. As a matter of fact, the word *Habita* (the Arabic word translated here as' come to nothing') used in this verse indicates that the reward of the act is nullified and comes to nothing. This meaning may yet be examined in the light of the fact that when grazing animals eat food which is not ripe, even if it is the same kind of food it normally eats, such as unripe clover, the bellies of the animals swell to the extent that they die. Arabs call this malady *al-Hubat*, which means the swelling of the belly of the animal when it eats something that is not good for it to the extent that its owner mistakenly thinks it has become fat when really it is dying.

The same ruling of frustrating the reward of the good deeds applies to those actions that are not in accordance with divine ordinance. Directing the attention of the believers to the great importance of faith, He *the Almighty* starts this chapter by His saying: 'O you, who believe, be true to your covenants!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1) Actually, this clearly tells us that all the obligations under Islam have to do with the Oneness of Allah *the Almighty* and with conveying His Message. This applies to all the covenants made between the believers themselves, and even between man and himself. All of these covenants must be honoured and fulfilled. Whoever denies these obligations and ordinances, his/her works and deeds will all be in vain. In fact, the reward of man's deeds comes to nothing if s/he ends her/his life with this kind of unbelief, even if she believes s/he has done good. The reward of the deeds of such a person will surely come to nothing, just like when the animal grazes on something that is not good for it; its belly swells to the extent that the one who sees it imagines that it is full of food and healthy, yet it is really dying. This is the same for the deeds of those who reject faith; such people think they have done something good, while, in fact, their deeds are entirely wasted. This ruling under discussion has been mentioned very many times in the Quran. In the chapter of *an-Nur*, He *the Almighty* tells us that the good deeds of the disbeliever are like a mirage in the desert which the thirsty person supposes to be water, but when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing (*an-Nur:* 39).

We know that' mirage' is an effect caused by hot air in the desert which makes the traveller think that s/he can see water, yet on reaching it, s/he finds nothing. The same is true of the deeds of those who disbelieve in Allah's Revelations; they mistakenly think their deeds will benefit them. The saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *an-Nur* that this thirsty person, upon reaching the place where he expected to find water, will find nothing but Allah *Glorified is He* points out that this man is astonished at finding Allah there, as though he never before imagined that Allah really exists. It is taken for granted that a man only takes his reward from the one for whom he works. Hence, the question to be asked here is, 'Did any of these people work for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* in order to receive a reward from Him?' No, they did not. At this point, we should correct a common misconception aroused by some orientalists who do not understand Islam properly. They say, 'Why would Allah not generously reward those scientists who discovered cures for diseases, and those scientists who invented things which benefit mankind?

Why would He not fully reward them in the Hereafter?' We say, 'Those scientists did all of this seeking the pleasure of the people and not the Pleasure of Allah *the Almighty*. In addition, people praised them highly for this, to tan extent that they immortalised their memories, built statues for them, gave them medals and wrote books in praise of their efforts.' In this way, such scientists sought the pleasure of the people and they received it. Ironically, Allah *the Almighty* enables the believers to benefit from all the inventions and discoveries made by the disbelievers. For example, Muslims make use of electricity to read the Quran, acquire knowledge, etc. In the same connection, planes, which were invented by non-Muslims, carry Muslims to Mecca to perform pilgrimage and to Medina to visit Prophet Muhammad's grave. In addition, Muslims achieve considerable benefit from planes with regards to worldly affairs. However, the believers should utilise the means at their disposal in order not to become meek and dependant on others. To continue, it becomes clear that Allah *Glorified is He* allows the believers to benefit from the disbelievers' advancement and progress, yet Allah *Glorified is He* will not reward them (the disbelievers) for these deeds and acts. This fact is clearly explained in a number of positions in the Quran. For example, He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *an-Nur* that the good deeds of the disbeliever are like a mirage in the desert which the thirsty person supposes to be water–but when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing (*an-Nur:* 39).

In the chapter of *Ibrahim*, He *Glorified is He* clearly tells us that the actions of the disbelievers are like ashes on which the wind blows hard on a stormy day; they shall not have power over anything of what they have earned (*Ibrahim:* 18). In the chapter of *Al-Kahf*, He *the Almighty* tells us about the characteristics of the great losers with regards to their deeds. Then He *Glorified is He* counts these characteristics as follows: the labour of such people is lost in this worldly life although they think that they are doing commendable work; they disbelieve in the communications of their Lord and His Meeting; their deeds are rendered null; and no balance will be set up for them on the Day of Resurrection. (*al-Kahf:* 103-105)

From the above it becomes clear that the deeds of such a person who denies part of the faith or any of it will come to nothing. As well, such a person will be one of the losers in the Hereafter. Success in the Hereafter is mainly based on a person's deeds in this life. Thus, as long as a person's deeds in this life do not have the intention to seek the Pleasure of Allah, s/he will inevitably lose in the Hereafter.

In the same vein, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers' explains to us how important it is that we do not allow ourselves to be deceived and deluded by the fame, wealth and glory of those disbelieving scientists; for the pleasures of this life will not last forever. The final Reckoning will surely take place in the Hereafter, and hence it is important here to stress a very important fact; that is, even though the disbeliever may have gained some benefit in this worldly life, s/he will certainly lose in the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then sheds light on the importance of establishing a close connection between all the worldly affairs. Thus, having told us about the essential constituents of life and how to maintain the human race by showing the importance of lawful marriage, He *the Almighty* clarifies that He bestows all these blessings upon us so that we will become close to Him *the Almighty*. For this reason, He *the Almighty* wants us not to be distracted by the pleasures of this worldly life. Hence, we must not occupy our minds with anything that may prevent us from meeting Him *the Almighty*. Such a meeting is, in fact, not a spontaneous matter but rather something which requires spiritual, physical, spatial, and temporal preparation. It is important to realise that this special meeting between Allah *the Almighty* and the slave is nothing but 'Prayer'. Islam tells us that Muslims must meet a number of conditions and requirements for their Prayer, i.e. their meeting with Allah, to be valid. First of all, they must be physically pure. Second, they must perform the obligatory Prayers in their due time. Third, prayer must be performed in a clean and purified place. They, furthermore, must direct their faces to the *Ka'ba* in Mecca. All of these requirements undoubtedly serve to prepare the human soul to stand before Allah *the Almighty* Who bestows all these blessings upon man. That is why we all the time state clearly that 'prayer is a declaration of one's constant full allegiance and absolute loyalty to the Bounteous Creator, Who creates out of nothing and provides out of nothing'. Muslims under Islam are obliged to offer five daily prayers; He *the Almighty* wants them not to be fully distracted by the pleasures of this life. Yet, for man to 'meet with' (be close to) Allah in the times between the prescribed prayers and to exhibit constant faith, s/he must remember Him *Glorified is He*. This is actually based on the *Sharia* maxim stating 'That which is essential for the fulfilling of an obligation is itself obligatory'.

Let us illustrate this aforementioned maxim by offering the following example: man needs energy to perform prayers and fulfil the other acts of worship. But it is taken for granted that food is the main source of man's energy and power; thus, Islam views the process of manufacturing food, during all its different stages, as an obligation. Consequently, when someone says, 'I want to devote myself solely to worship and to live in isolation', we say to him, 'You may do this on condition that you do not benefit from the work of a single person who is involved in the motions of life and thus you should not eat any food, for the bread you eat, for example, is the outcome of a lot of people's efforts'. Similarly, we say to such a person, 'You should also not wear garments which are the result of many people's labour: someone grew the cotton; another ginned it while a third spun it; a fourth stitched it while a fifth tailored it, not to mention all the machines which were used to do this. Consequently, you must not benefit from the work of a single person who is involved with the means of life as long as you have decided to withdraw from life's motions and live in isolation'.

As a matter of fact, utilising the means is an act of worship because worship cannot be fulfilled and perfected without it. We have just explained, 'That which is essential for the fulfilling of an obligation is itself obligatory'. Hence, Muslim scholars opine that learning such skills which benefit man's life is a communal obligation. In Islam, there are two kinds of obligations: the first is the individual obligation which every individual is responsible for fulfilling and no one else can do it on his behalf, such as prayer; the second is the communal obligation which is what is needed in order to fulfil an obligation and is therefore itself obligatory.

Undoubtedly, each one of us needs food. The work must be divided among people: one person should learn how to farm, while another should learn how to manufacture goods and products. Wheat must be farmed and thus, mills must be established to grind it. In addition, ovens must be made to bake bread. Furthermore, there must be engineers to make these machines. All of these actions make it possible for a man to have the necessary energy to pray and to stand before Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, all these actions fall under the category of communal obligations. That is, they are obligations that, if fulfilled by some, the rest will not be asked to perform them. Yet, if none fulfils them, we are all sinful.

Another example of a communal obligation is the Funeral Prayer; the person who prays over the dead man fulfils this obligation for the rest of us, but if no one prays over the dead person, every single Muslim is guilty of sin. Once again, every action that is essential for the fulfilment of an obligation is itself obligatory. And scholars believe that offering the Funeral Prayer is a communal obligation; if fulfilled by some, the rest will not be blamed for not performing it, but if no one fulfils it, everyone sins.

But what is the position of the ruler or those in authority regarding communal obligations? They must ensure that someone fulfils each communal obligation; otherwise a number of religious obligations will go unfulfilled. In fact, when the Muslim goes to the market and finds no bread to eat, s/he becomes weak and unable to satisfy her/his hunger. As a result, s/he will be unable to pray, work or even save money to perform pilgrimage. That is why we find Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran calling upon the believers to leave all worldly commerce for the sake of performing the Friday Prayer (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). In this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Jumu'a*, He *Glorified is He* orders us to leave all worldly commerce for the sake of performing the Friday Prayer; He does not order us to move from inactivity to prayer. If we carefully reflect upon the meaning of this verse, we will fully realise the accuracy of the style used in the Quran. He *the Almighty* orders Muslims to forsake all practises of selling; an order that clearly also implies forsaking the process of buying. As a matter of fact, buying and selling are two sides of the same transaction; the only difference is that the buyer might be reluctant to buy the item because s/he has to spend her/his money to buy it, whereas the seller always wants to receive the price for her/his commodities immediately. The seller usually makes profit from this, and this is actually the best way to earn money. That is because the earnings of the farmer, for example, only come after several months of farming. This is also the case for the employee who receives his/her salary at the end of every month. As for the case under discussion, the seller receives his/her earning straight away. That is why He *the Almighty* orders us to leave all worldly commerce once we hear the call for the Friday Prayer. But what shall Muslims do after performing the prayer? He *the Almighty* tells us that the believers, having finished their Friday Prayer, must disperse freely on the earth and seek some of Allah's Bounties. As well, they must remember Allah much (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

From the above, it is now clear that no one should say, 'I will devote every moment of my life to prayer', for no one can pray unless s/he possesses her/his life's basic needs; and it goes without saying that man must disperse in the earth to attain her/his life's basic needs. In addition, s/he must seek the Bounties of Allah. Consequently, dispersing in the earth to gain livelihood is itself an act of worship because that which is essential for the fulfilment of an obligation is itself obligatory. In this vein, He *the Almighty* does not want to separate the essential constituents of life, like food and marriage, from the topic of prayer, and hence He casts light on the conditions of ablution which must be fulfilled before the performance of prayer directly after clarifying the rulings on eating the food of the people of the Book and marriage to the women from the people of the Book. This is for us to know that all the topics and articles of faith are closely correlated to each other and thus, it is not right to divide acts into acts of worship and others that have nothing to do with worship.

Yet, when scholars write books of jurisprudence, we see them dividing the sections of their books into 'Acts of Worship' and 'Transactions'. This is, in fact, only a literary classification concerned with the arrangement of the material in the book. But I reiterate that every action which is required for the good of the world is judged as an act of worship to the Creator of this world. This is borne out by the two consecutive divine orders in the chapter of *al-Jumu'a* in which Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to hasten to the Remembrance of Allah, i.e. prayer, and to leave all worldly commerce, and then to disperse in the earth to seek out the Bounties of Allah after prayer has ended (*al-Jumu'a:* 9-10)

In Islam, one cannot obey one divine command and ignore another, but rather, people, out of faith, are obliged to carry them both out; if a person is remiss in either one of them, s/he is at fault. That is why, having told us about the Blessings He bestows upon us which include making cattle lawful to us and after informing us of our right to marry chaste women from the people of the Book, He *the Almighty* welcomes us into His Presence by telling us how to prepare to offer prayer to Him. He commands us all to prepare for prayer. As a matter of fact, this preparation makes man fully qualified to meet Him *the Almighty*. But how shall man prepare himself for such a meeting with Allah? He *the Almighty* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا قُمۡتُمۡ إِلَى ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ فَٱغۡسِلُواْ وُجُوهَكُمۡ وَأَيۡدِيَكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلۡمَرَافِقِ
وَٱمۡسَحُواْ بِرُءُوسِكُمۡ وَأَرۡجُلَكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلۡكَعۡبَيۡنِۚ وَإِن كُنتُمۡ جُنُبٗا فَٱطَّهَّرُواْۚ وَإِن كُنتُم
مَّرۡضَىٰٓ أَوۡ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوۡ جَآءَ أَحَدٞ مِّنكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡغَآئِطِ أَوۡ لَٰمَسۡتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَلَمۡ تَجِدُواْ مَآءٗ فَتَيَمَّمُواْ
صَعِيدٗا طَيِّبٗا فَٱمۡسَحُواْ بِوُجُوهِكُمۡ وَأَيۡدِيكُم مِّنۡهُۚ مَا يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ لِيَجۡعَلَ عَلَيۡكُم مِّنۡ
حَرَجٖ وَلَٰكِن يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمۡ وَلِيُتِمَّ نِعۡمَتَهُۥ عَلَيۡكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَشۡكُرُونَ ٦

You who believe, when you are about to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles and, if required, wash your whole body. If any of you is sick or on a journey, or has just relieved himself, or had intimate contact with a woman, and can find no water, then take some clean sand and wipe your face and hands with it. God does not wish to place any burden on you: He only wishes to cleanse you and perfect His blessing on you, so that you may be thankful [6] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 6)

This verse indicates clearly that if Muslims are about to perform prayer, they must make ablution. The verse sheds light on the main pillars of the ritual act of ablution. In reality, some people may be unable to distinguish between the pillars and the recommended acts of ablution. The list of the recommended acts of ablution includes, but is not limited to washing one's hands, mouth and nose, etc. These are recommended acts which complement the essential pillars of ablution. Allah *Glorified is He* starts counting the essential pillars of ablution in the following order: 1) Wash the face; 'wash' means to make the water flow over the body part so that it then drips from it, while' wipe' means to touch the body part with wet hands so that water touches it but does not drip from it because it is only slightly dampened. At this point, it is of great importance to know that Allah *the Almighty* differentiates between two particular acts in ablution, namely, washing and wiping. That is, there are certain body parts that must be washed and there others that must be wiped. The list of the body parts that must be washed includes the face, the arms up to the elbows and the feet up to the ankles. As for the list of the body parts that must be wiped, it is restricted to some part of the head. The washing may be repeated twice or thrice to ensure that it has been done properly, but if one has only a little amount of water, it is enough for him/her to wash the required parts once and to make sure that one has washed the required area properly. To wash more than once, up to three times, is a recommended *Sunna* act and not an obligation.

Washing the face is something known to everyone. The face is that part of the head by means of which we directly confront objects. Boundaries of the face start from the hairline to the chin, that is, the lower side of the edge of the jawbone–the bone from which the lower teeth grow. This is regarding the length of the face. As for the breadth, it extends from ear to ear. No one differs about the definition of the face, and therefore He *the Almighty* simply says: 'wash your face' without specifying its limits. He does not say, 'wash your face from here to here', but simply commands us to wash the face since no one differs about the meaning of the word 'face'; people unanimously agree on this point. This is the first of the obligatory actions of ablution, but if we begin with the *Sunna* (recommended actions), we will first wash the hands up to the wrists, and then rinse the mouth and nose.

Commenting on these recommended acts of ablution, one of the most pious Muslims opine that they were not enacted haphazardly. He said that' water' is defined as the liquid which has no colour, taste, or smell. In fact, if any of these attributes change, the liquid is no longer considered pure water. And when you take water in your hands, you can see for yourself that it has no colour. Also, when you put it into your mouth, you can be sure that it has no taste. Furthermore, when you rinse your nose with it, you can be sure that it has no smell. In this way, you can be sure that the water you are using for ablution meets all the necessary criteria before you begin performing the pillars of ablution Allah ordains. As such, it is of great importance here to know that the *Sunnah* (recommended acts) of ablution is performed before the pillars in order for man to be able to recognise the eligibility of the water to be used in ablution.

Having washed their faces in ablution, Muslims are then asked by Allah *the Almighty* to 'wash your hands to the elbows'. Clarifying the matter on this particular pillar of 'washing the hands', He *Glorified is He* specifies the area of the arms which must be washed stating that they must be washed up to the elbows; He thereby provides details which He does not make while speaking about the face. As a matter of fact, He *the Almighty* defines that the arms must be washed up to the elbows because the Arabic word *Yadd* may be understood as the word 'hand'; a point which is proved by the Quran, particularly in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* where Allah *the Almighty* orders the hands of the thief to be cut off. (*al-Ma'ida:* 38)

In the same connection, the word *Yadd* can also be used to give the meaning of the hand and the arm up to the elbow. It can furthermore be used to refer to the entire arm up to the shoulder. Consequently, it is clear that the word *Yadd* may indicate three different meanings. Had Allah *the Almighty* simply commanded that the *Yadd* be washed without providing any further details, some people would have only washed their hands while others would have washed their arms up to the elbows; and still a third group would have washed their entire arms up to the shoulders. Due to the fact that He *the Almighty* wants all people to do the same act, Allah *Glorified is He* specifies the washing of the hands to be up to the elbows.

Actually, when Allah *the Almighty* wills to ordain a particular command with specific features, Allah *Glorified is He* puts it forward in such a way which eliminates the need for further personal reasoning. As for the proposition *Ila* (to) used in this context, it indicates the end of something. This is actually opposite to the preposition *Min* (from) which indicates the beginning of an activity. The question that can be asked here is: 'Should elbows be included in the washing of the hands or not?' Here it is of great importance to know that *Ila* can sometimes be used to indicate the inclusion of something within the activity, while other times it does not.

These two cases have already been mentioned in the Quran. Concerning the first case, i.e. the use of *Ila* to indicate the inclusion of something within the activity, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been transported by night from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. (*al-Isra':* 1) The question to be asked here is, 'Did Allah *the Almighty* transport His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem but he (Prophet Muhammad) did not enter it?' The answer is definitely 'No', for no one could seriously suggest this. This example indicates clearly how *Ila* is used to indicate the inclusion of something within the activity. In fact, Prophet Muhammad was taken to *Al-Aqsa* Mosque which he entered and wherein he prayed.

As for the second case where *Ila* indicates until the beginning of an activity, Allah *the Almighty* orders us in the Quran to complete fasting until night (*al-Baqara:* 187)

Does this truly mean that we must continue fasting through the night?! No, because if the fast continued through the night, this would mean that we do not break our fast, i.e. we would have to fast day and night. This means the action of fasting through the night is not implied in this divine order. As a result, it is now clear that *Ila* can be used to indicate either of the two cases. Based on the above, some scholars differ as to whether the elbows are included in the order of 'washing the hands' or not. There is a general agreement among them all that the elbows should be included as a way of avoiding doubt because no one can be certain whether the elbow is included in this divine order or not. We know for certain that we must be cautious while deciding on *Sharia* matters, either by widening the scope of the order or by restricting its sphere.

An example of this concerns praying in the Sacred Mosque. We all know very well that the *Ka'ba* is a building whose walls are clearly visible. Next to one of the walls of the *Ka'ba* lies a semi-circular wall which marks the spot called Hijr Isma'il which is considered to be an original part of the *Ka'ba*. But when a person prays near the *Ka'ba*, should s/he direct her/his face to Hijr Isma'il or to the building of the *Ka'ba* itself? Muslim scholars opine that one must intend to direct his/her face to the tall building of the *Ka'ba* and not to Hijr Isma'il, even though circumambulation around the *Ka'ba* while performing pilgrimage or even minor pilgrimage, i.e.'' *Umra*, is not valid if the Hijr is not included in it. This shows how Muslim scholars widen the scope of the divine order and command as a way of avoiding doubt.

It is now clear that avoiding doubt may be fulfilled by either widening the scope of the divine command or by restricting its scope. As for washing the elbows in ablution, it is viewed as a way of avoiding doubt by widening the scope of the divine order. He *Glorified is He* then orders us to wipe our heads. The divine command here is different, for He *the Almighty* does not order us to wash the heads, but rather to wipe them. In the very beginning of ablution, He *the Almighty* orders us to wash the face and He *Glorified is He* does not specify which part of the face has to be washed because there is no difference over the definition of the face. Then came the washing of the hands and arms up to the elbows; we explained that Muslim scholars have agreed that the elbows must be included in the order to wash the hands and the arms, and thus there is no room for personal reasoning or even controversy. As a matter of fact, if He *Glorified is He* orders us to wipe our heads in the same way He orders us to wash our faces, then, there will be no difference at all. Yet, had He *the Almighty* said, ‘Wipe part of your heads’, would there have been any difference or disagreement among scholars in this regard? Yes, scholars would have differed concerning specifying what particular part of the head is to be wiped. Similarly, they would have differed if He *the Almighty* had ordered us to wipe a quarter of the head because accurately and exactly defining this quarter is exceedingly difficult.

We may ask here, ‘What is the divine wisdom behind using this particular style in this verse’ even though several different word patterns are used in the verse, some of which do not specify the exact area to be washed since there is no difference whatsoever concerning its definition, while others do? That is why we are supposed to search for the wisdom behind using the particle *Bi* in this particular pattern.

As a matter of fact, the particle *Bi* has many different meanings in Arabic. The great grammarian *Ibn Malik* said in his *Al-Fiyya*: *Bi* can be used to mean aiding, or to designate a direct object, or to mean compensation, adjoining, and to mean the same as with, of and about.

In this way, the use of this particle *Bi* here in this verse under discussion plainly indicates that the Lawgiver *Glorified is He* wants to widen the area and the scope of permissibility with regards to this particular divine command of 'wiping the head'. As a matter of fact, the particle *bi* can indicate various meanings, as follows: aiding, for example, 'I wrote with (*bi*) a pen'; to designate a direct object, for example, 'I took the patient to the hospital' (where the particle *bi* appears before the patient–this cannot be rendered into English); compensation, for example, 'I bought the pen for (*bi*) twenty pounds'; adjoining, for example, 'I passed by (*bi*) Khalid'; with, for example, 'I sold you the house with (*bi*) its furniture'; of,. for example, 'I drank the water of (*bi*) the Nile'; about, for example, when Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran: 'A questioner asked (mockingly) about (*bi*) the suffering which (in the hereafter) is bound to befall'; (*al-Ma'arij:* 1) during, for example, 'I visited so-and-so during (*bi*) the night'; because of, for example, 'Mohamed won the prize because of (*bi*) his hard work'; and accompanying something/body, for example, when it is said, 'Glorify your Lord and (*bi*) celebrate His Praises', this means that glorifying Him *the Almighty* must be accompanied by celebrating His Praise.

Thus, if a group of scholar opine that wiping a single hair will fulfil the divine command in this verse under discussion, their opinion, based on the various meanings indicated by the particle *Bi*, is judged valid and true. In fact, to wipe means to adjoin and the hand is the organ that will be used in fulfilling this divine command. Yet, if another group hold the position that wiping the head should be done with the palm of the hand and not less than this, their opinion will also be judged valid and correct.

Consequently, it becomes clear that each of these scholarly opinions may be eligible in order to properly carry out this divine command of 'wiping the head' in ablution. In truth, had He *the Almighty* willed it, i.e. washing of the head to be done in one specific way, He would have specified it to us. Had He *Glorified is He* meant wiping of the entire head, He would have said explicitly' Wipe your head' without using the particle *Bi*, in the same way He orders us to wash our faces without specifying the definition of the face. In addition, had He *the Almighty* wanted a specific area of the head to be wiped, He would have specified it just as He specified that the hands and arms have to be washed up to the elbows. Yet, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* uses the particle *Bi* in this context, which has many different meanings, it is enough for anyone to understand it according to one of these meanings as any one of the possible meanings in the light of the presence of the particle *Bi* must be correct.

In fact, the most important and essential point to be deduced from this topic is that we must accept other's opinions which may be different from ours; that is, if one understands something in a certain way, s/he must not think that all those who understand it differently are wrong–rather, s/he should admit, 'This is my personal reasoning with regards to Allah's Ruling'. This is logically deduced from the fact that He *the Almighty* uses the particle *Bi* in this context even though it indicates different valid meanings. As a matter of fact, man has no choice with regard to the movements of her/his body parts. This is to mean that a person does not have the authority to ask the heart to stop pumping the blood for a while, nor can s/he choose the place in which to die.

However, a person still has the free will to do certain acts and practices. It is because of this free will that He *the Almighty* legally charges man with divine commands and legislations. That is why Muslim scholars believe that all the legal obligations and ordinances are viewed in the light of the two commands: 'Do's' and 'Don'ts'; yet, they also believe that there are other acts which man is allowed to deal with based on his/her free will. For this reason, *At-Taklif*, i.e. legal obligation, is in line with human nature. The conduct of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whom Allah has commissioned to explain the religious obligations to us, offers us the best and most striking example in this regard. He *the Almighty* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* that He has revealed the Quran to him so that he will clarify it to people (*an-Nahl:* 44).

To continue, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was with the believers in the battle of *al-Ahzab*, referring to which Allah *the Almighty* describes the believers as being shaken with a severe shock (*al-Ahzab:* 11). This battle was so fierce that the believers thought they would be defeated, yet Allah *the Almighty* has granted them victory by sending a strong wind that caused the enemies of Islam to flee. Upon the end of the battle, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to Medina along with his Companions. The believers were now supposed to relax, yet the Archangel Gabriel went down to Prophet Muhammad and ordered him not to sheathe his sword because Allah wants him to head for the Jews of Banu Qurayzhah to take revenge from them as a result of their betrayal of Prophet Muhammad and the group of believers. Gabriel also told Prophet Muhammad that he will go to them to cast fear into their hearts. That is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered someone to call to the people, 'Whoever believes in Allah and His Messenger, let him not offer the Afternoon Prayer, i.e. *A'sr*, except in the territory of the Jews of Banu Qurayzhah'. Yet, when it was the time of the Afternoon Prayer, some of the Companions, thinking that he peace and blessings be upon him just wanted to urge them to hasten to Banu Qurayzhah, performed the '*Asr* Prayer before they reached their destination. However, the other group thought that they had to literally carry out the order of Prophet Muhammad and thus they did not pray '*Asr* until they reached the territory of Banu Qurayzhah. When he *peace and blessings be upon him* was later informed of what had happened, he accepted both views and did not censure any of them.(1)

This incident is very important in the history of Islamic Legislation. In fulfilment of Prophet Muhammad's command, the Companions went out to fight against the Jews of Banu Qurayzhah, but the sun drew close to setting, while they were still on the way. The Companions divided into two groups: one saying, 'The sun will soon set and we have not prayed the Afternoon Prayer yet, and therefore we must pray it now before the sun sets'; the other group saying, 'Prophet Muhammad commanded us not to pray the Afternoon Prayer until we reach the territory of Banu Qurayzhah, and therefore we will not pray it until we get there, even if the sun sets.' Consequently, the first group prayed, while the second did not.

When they went to their legislator Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him what had happened, he did not censure either side and declared that both were correct. This situation obviously indicates hissagacity and intelligence, for he *peace and blessings be upon him* knew perfectly well that every event requires a due time and a due place. Those who performed the '*Asr* before their arrival at Banu Qurayzhah took into account the importance of the time and feared that the sun would set before they offered the Prayer. However, those who did not pray until they had already arrived in Banu Qurayzhah took into consideration the importance of performing the prayer in the place defined to them by Prophet Muhammad, and therefore they did not offer their Prayer until they reached the territory of Banu Qurayzhah. But Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* approved both positions.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

This clearly shows us that there are some divine commands which Allah *the Almighty* deliberately leaves without any definitive specification, i.e. He leaves them up to man's personal reasoning, because He *Glorified is He* is pleased when they are carried out any way. For example, scholars view that wiping a quarter of one's head in ablution is correct, and also wiping the entire head. This is indicated by the fact that He *the Almighty* uses the particle *Bi* that could suggest any of these forms of wiping the head.

This rule applies to all topics and matters subject to reasoning. As for the legal principle stating' No reasoning can be applied to a text', this only applies to those texts which are so clear and decisive that they cannot possibly be subjected to reasoning.

In reality, it is of great importance to realise that not every matter in the Islamic *Shari'a* is subject to personal reasoning, for Allah *the Almighty*; makes clear those things which cannot be subjected to personal reasoning and those which can. In the same vein, when He *the Almighty* assigns legal obligations and ordinances to man, He *Glorified is He* takes into consideration his/her nature. In the light of the fact that man has the free will to do certain acts, while other times s/he is compelled to do other acts, different opinions deduced from personal reasoning are to be judged true and valid. As such, the scholar has to view the conclusion of his reasoning as being true and correct with the possibility that it may be wrong. In addition, he has to view the conclusion of his counterpart as being wrong with the possibility that it may be correct. As a matter of fact, if the process of personal reasoning is conducted properly in the light of its due conditions and requirements, then all the opinions inferred from this process will be valid. This is mainly based on his *peace and blessings be upon him* approval of both actions of the Companions in the incident of Banu Qurayzhah.

Having ordered us to wipe the head, He *Glorified is He* commands us to wash our feet. The order of the wording of the text might cause one to assume that the feet are connected to the head and hence should be wiped, but the fact that the word 'feet', syntactically is in the accusative case and not the genitive, tells us that it is essentially connected to the face and hands, and not to the words 'your head' (which are in the genitive case because of the preposition *Bi*); this clearly means that the feet are not meant to be wiped, but rather washed.

In this regard, there is a very important point that we must take into consideration, that is, He *the Almighty* does not mention the body parts to be washed consecutively under a particular list, nor does He *the Almighty* mentions the parts to be wiped in a similar manner; this is to tell us that ablution is an act of worship that must be performed as ordained by Allah. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* specifies and ordains that the feet must be washed up to the ankles; He *the Almighty* says: '…and (wash) your feet up to the ankles….' This is because the word *Rijl* in Arabic can mean either the foot by itself or the foot and the shin up to the thigh. Thus, He *Glorified is He* wants us to wash our feet up to the ankles.

Once again, we assure you that ablution is a pure act of worship. It is not subject to any kind of reasoning or analogy. This is based on the fact that Allah *the Almighty* ordains and specifies that hands must be washed up to the elbows even though one's hand starts from the fingertips and continues to the shoulder. In the same connection, He *Glorified is He* ordains that feet must be washed up to the ankles even though one's feet (*Rijl*) includes the shin and the thigh.

He *the Almighty* makes clear to us here that if He wants something in a precise way, He specifies it for us in order for there to be no different opinions about it. On the other hand, if He *the Almighty* gives us the order in a general way, this means that He gives us permission to apply our own personal reasoning to that order, in order for us to feel that we have some kind of choice in defining some of the acts of worship we offer Him *the Almighty*. All of this is undoubtedly part of Allah's Will because He *the Almighty* is the One Who carefully phrases the structure of this order in such a way which makes it indicate these various meanings.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Wash your face, and your hands and arms up to the elbows, and pass your (wet) hands lightly over your head, and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. And if you are in a state of sexual impurity, purify yourselves…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6) plainly indicates that ablution is not sufficient in the state of sexual impurity. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* legislates ablution to purify oneself from minor impurity. In fact, there is a difference between this bodily emission that causes one to be in a state of minor ritual impurity and thus nullifies his/her ablution, and that emission which is discharged due to pleasure. Ejaculation or sexual intercourse requires total ablution (*Ghusl*). We know that when one enjoys food or perfume and the like, the process of enjoyment itself is limited to the organ which experiences pleasure. However, for the enjoyment attained from sexual intercourse, no one knows for certain which specific part of the body experiences pleasure, to the extent that today's scholars are unable to provide further details about this point; a matter that obviously indicates that every cell of the human body participates in enjoying this pleasure. As a result, if a person wants to purify him/herself from sexual impurity, s/he must wash every part of his body.

Concerning the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…And if you are in a state of sexual impurity, purify yourselves. But if you are ill or are travelling, or have just satisfied a want of nature or have cohabited with a woman, and can find no water–then take resort to pure dust, lightly passing over your face and your hands with it…', someone might say, 'Does the saying of Allah: '…or have cohabited with a woman…' not simply repeat what was just said about being in a state sexual impurity?'

We say that He *the Almighty* refers in this context to another ruling which tells us how to purify ourselves in preparation for the prayer in the absence of water. This is viewed in the light of the fact that He *the Almighty* teaches Muslims how to prepare themselves for such an act of worship that is never waived and thus He *the Almighty* will not hold a person responsible for something that s/he might not find. So, when one is unable to find any water, a person is allowed to perform dry ablution (*Tayammum*) because prayer is an act of worship, as we have just explained, which is never waived for those who are legally charged to perform it, even when the person is so ill that s/he cannot move any part of her/his body, Allah *the Almighty* allows such a person to pray seated or reclining, or to pray by gesturing with the head or even with the eyes. In this regard, we stress once again that even the paralysed person must perform prayer by imagining its motions in his/her head.

We know for certain that 'prayer' is the only pillar of Islam which must be offered at all times. In fact, it is enough for one to declare the Testimony of

Faith just once in his/her life and a permanently ill man is excused from the obligation of fasting and may compensate for this by feeding the poor. However, if the illness is temporary or one is on a journey, a person may make up the days s/he broke her/his fast. In the same connection, one might not pay out *zakat*, i.e. the obligatory charity to the poor, and also for pilgrimage because he himself is poor; one is not obliged to perform it as long as s/he cannot afford it or does not have the power to do it. However, as for prayer, man is not allowed to leave it at any time.

The greatness of prayer is clearly manifested by the way it was legislated. As a matter of fact, all the pillars of Islam were legislated by revelation, whereas prayer is the only pillar that is given directly by Allah *the Almighty* to Prophet Muhammad. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* does not say to Gabriel, 'Deliver this obligation of prayer to Prophet Muhammad', but rather, He *the Almighty* has called him *peace and blessings be upon him* to Himself to deliver him the obligation of prayer Himself.

We previously explained that when an employer wants to tell his employees something the information might reach them by means of the daily memos which are sent to them from him; but if the issue is important, he telephones the supervisor and tells him how important it is. And if the matter is of great important, the boss sends for the supervisor and tells him about it in person. Similarly, legal obligations are revealed in a manner which is commensurate with its level of importance–so what do we think about an obligation that was delivered directly from Allah *the Almighty* to Prophet Muhammad in the Heavens?

We have previously learnt that some commandments were delivered to Prophet Muhammad by inspiration, while others came to him *peace and blessings be upon him* by revelation through the Archangel Gabriel. As for prayer, Allah *the Almighty* has made it obligatory upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Heavens. Consequently, Muslims must offer five prayers a day. Due to the fact that man is never excused for not performing prayer, Allah *the Almighty* has made it the dividing line between the believer and the disbeliever. When the Muslim hears the call to prayer, s/he hastens to offer it. In reality, prayer is a summons from the Creator to those whom He has created to enter into His

Presence five times a day. Having fulfilled the obligation of performing the Daily Prayers, one is free to meet her/his Lord whenever s/he wills. Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* never becomes tired of giving rewards till you become tired of doing good deeds.

Beware of allotting certain times for mentioning the Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* saying, ‘This is the time for work, and that is for the Remembrance of Allah’. In fact, when you work to seek Allah’s Bounty, you must not forget Allah at all because His *Glorified is He* Remembrance must be continuous during all of man’s actions. Bringing us into existence, He *the Almighty* wants us to worship Him alone without ascribing any partner to Him. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* tells us that He has sent Prophet Saleh to the people of the Thamud. Allah *peace be upon him* ordered them to worship Allah alone, for He *the Almighty* is the One Who has brought them into being from the earth. He *peace be upon him* also ordered them to ask Allah for forgiveness and to show repentance to Him *the Almighty*. (*Hud:* 61)

Consequently, everything that leads to thriving and making progress in the world is viewed as an act of worship. This is based on the fact that He *the Almighty* extends the jurisprudential term ‘worship’ to apply to all the different motions of life. This point has been previously explained in the chapter of *al-Baqara* when He *the Almighty* tells Muslims that they, i.e. men, will incur no sin if they divorce women, while they have not yet touched them nor determined a dowry for them; but (even in such a case) they must make provision for them–the affluent according to his means, and the straitened according to his means–a provision in an equitable manner: this is a duty upon all who do good. He *the Almighty* then states that if they divorce them before having touched them, but after having determined a dowry for them, then they must (give them) half of what they have already determined–unless it be that they forgo their claim or he in whose hand is the marriage-tie forgoes his claim (to half of the dowry). He *the Almighty* then clarifies that to forgo what is due to you is more in accord with Allah-consciousness, demanding them at the same time not to forget (that you are to act with) grace towards one another (*al-Baqara:* 236-237).

This verse discusses one of the worldly matters concerning family affairs. Having shed light on this affair, He *the Almighty* immediately speaks of an act of worship; a matter which indicates the correlation between acts of worship and worldly affairs. Allah *Glorified is He* orders Muslims to be ever mindful of the prayers, and of the midmost prayer in particular; and to stand before Him in devout obedience. He *Glorified is He* then states that if they, i.e. Muslims, are in danger, they can (pray) walking or riding, adding that when they are again secure, they must remember Allah–since it is He Who teaches them what they did not previously know (*al-Baqara:* 238-239).

After that, He *the Almighty* returns to shed more light on family affairs, saying that if any of the Muslim men die and leave wives behind, they bequeath thereby to their widows (the right to) one year's sustenance without their being obliged to leave (the dead husband's home)…(*al-Baqara:* 240).

And He *the Almighty* does the same again here in this chapter of *al-Ma'ida;* having shed light on the blessings He *Glorified is He* bestows upon us, He then takes us in to His Presence; a matter that requires man to purify himself/ herself before entering into this meeting with Him *the Almighty*. He tells us that certain parts of the body must be purified. This obligation of purification is called *wudu'* (ablution) in which man is supposed to wash the face and the two hands up to the elbows, wipe the head and finally wash the feet up to the ankles. Concerning this particular process of purification, i.e. ablution, it is important to know that Allah *Glorified is He* has defined the exact area to be washed for some parts of the body while leaving the others subject to personal reasoning. He gave explicit instructions for three things: the washing of the face, the washing of the hands and arms up to the elbows, and the washing of the feet up to the ankles. Concerning the wiping of the head, He *Glorified is He* does not specify the exact area to be wiped. In other words, He does not order us to wipe the entire head, and nor does He order us to wipe a quarter of the head. This matter clearly indicates that the scholar who exercises his personal reasoning on this particular matter, i.e. wiping of the head, may understand the particle *bi* here according to any possibly acceptable lexical meanings. To sum up, it is clear that He *the Almighty* gave us explicit instructions for some rulings and left others up to our personal reasoning. Having finished speaking about ablution, He *Glorified is He* and then moves to tell us that we must purify ourselves from sexual impurity before being in His Presence.

At that point, careful reflection upon the aforementioned two verses reveals that Allah *the Almighty* casts light on different topics, including' the kinds of cattle we are permitted to eat' and 'marriage'. As for the second topic, i.e. marriage, He *Glorified is He* widened the scope of permissibility, to allow a Muslim to marry women from among the people of the Book.

Due to the fact that the food we eat results in our excretion of urine and faeces, while sexual intercourse causes chemical changes in the body, He *the Almighty* therefore ordains us to purify ourselves from the minor body impurity, i.e. urine and faeces by performing ablution and to purify ourselves from the major body impurity, i.e. sexual impurity by performing total ablution. He *Glorified is He* says: '…And if you are in a state of sexual impurity, purify yourselves….'

Due to the fact that He *the Almighty* wants us to be constantly connected to Him, He does not limit the means of preparation and purification for prayer to water alone because we sometimes may not have any water or we may have it but are unable to use it. As such, He *the Almighty* does not want to break the connection between man and Him by limiting the means of purification for prayer to water alone. Hence, He makes it lawful for us to make purification by another means, that is, *Tayammum* or dry ablution. That is, if you do not have any water to purify yourself for prayer, you can purify yourself by another lawful means of purification; namely, dry ablution (*Tayammum*) with dust. It goes without saying that dust exists everywhere on the surface of the earth and that one will be able to find it at all times. He *Glorified is He* says in this regard: '…But if you are ill or you are travelling, or have just satisfied a want of nature or have cohabited with a woman, and can find no water–then take resort to pure dust….' Hence, if one is ill and unable to use water, or if s/he is on a journey and can find no water, or if s/he satisfies a call of nature by going to *Al-Gha'it*–the word '*Al-Gha'it'* means a place which is low and concealed; Arabs, men and women, used to go to such places for the particular purpose of answering the call of nature so that no one would see them–and even after cohabiting with women, and one does not find water after these things, the alternative is dry ablution. As a matter of fact, those who think that water is the only means of purification are wrong, for Allah *the Almighty* has provided a substitute for it, i.e. dust which is more prevalent than water. This plainly indicates that He *the Almighty* wants us to be in constant contact with Him all the time; and this is achieved by Him allowing us to purify ourselves with dust in the absence of water or when one is unable to use it.

In this respect, I do not want to exhaustively discuss scholars' different opinions concerning the difference between 'touching' (*Lams*) and 'cohabitation' (*Mulamasa*); it suffices to say that the word *Lams* does not imply any interaction, while the word *Mulamasa* does. In other words, this means that *Mulamasa* indicates that there are two parties involved in a particular action, which means that it refers to more than the process of touching, i.e. it refers to sexual intercourse. When one is in a state of sexual impurity and there is no water available, s/he is allowed to perform dry ablution with dust. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Take resort to pure dust (*Sa'id*).' The word *Sa'id* means what lies on the surface of the earth; it is made of the same material as the earth and is unadulterated by man-made substances. Examples of *Sa'id* are dust and rock. As for the red bricks we make, they are not appropriate for dry ablution since they are adulterated by man-made substances.

It is obligatory to purify four parts of the body in ablution; for total ablution, the entire body has to be purified. With regards to dry ablution, He *the Almighty* allows us to wipe only the face and the hands. The same also applies for purification from sexual impurity. We may observe here that Allah *Glorified is He* includes the wiping of the head in the ablution in order for us to be familiar with the action of wiping when we come to make dry ablution.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…Passing lightly over your face and your hands with it. Allah does not want to impose any hardship on you….' This verse clearly indicates that He *the Almighty* does not want to impose any hardship upon us and because of this He allows us to purify ourselves with water or with dust when water is not found or when one is unable to use it. It goes without saying that the person who does not find water to purify herself/himself with will indeed undergoes hardship because s/he does not find a means with which to purify himself. Consider the case of having only a little water to drink; would a person use it for ablution or keep himself/herself alive by drinking it? Allah *the Almighty* does not want to make things difficult for His Creatures or impose hardship on them, and therefore He made things easy for them by making dust a good and satisfactory substitute for water. He *the Almighty* says: '…but (He) wants to make you pure….'

Indeed, those who think that cleanliness is the ultimate purpose of ablution are wrong; if ablution were only meant for cleanliness, then it would only be possible to do it with water. Furthermore, we are faced with the following question: 'Why do we wipe our faces with dust?' This clarifies that cleanliness is not the ultimate objective of performing ablution. Moreover, if someone says, 'I will clean myself with cologne', we say, 'This is not what you are legally obliged to do. Allah does not want you to clean yourself this way, but rather, He wants you to purify yourself. It is taken for granted that the conditions for purification are set by the One with whom you wish to meet, i.e. Allah *the Almighty*. He *Glorified is He* has made two ways in which this process of purification can be done, either with water or with dry ablution with dust'. And it is clear that purification makes one worthy to be received by his Lord in the way He has ordained. Once again, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who lays down these rules and not you (O man!). Ordering man to purify himself/herself with either water or dust indicates that Allah *the Almighty* wants man to remember these elements from which s/he has been created, which will make him/her constantly humble to Him.

He *Glorified is He* then says: '…and to complete His blessings on you….' In truth, man is surrounded by many blessings. But suppose that a person's father is far from him/her, and news of his/her father comes to him/her every day in the form of money, food, drink and other comforts. In this way, the person takes all the blessings which a father is meant to give her/him, yet s/he yearns to be with this absent father whose blessings s/he enjoys. Clearly, being with his father is the complete and perfect blessing from the father to his son–and if this is the case with Allah's creatures, then you can imagine how great the favour is when Allah bestows His Complete and Perfect Blessings on His servants.

In fact, the pious servant hopes to see the One Who bestows all of these blessings upon him/her. And He *the Almighty* conditions purification as a necessary prerequisite for meeting with Him. When one comes to prayer and says, 'Allah is the Greatest', this means that s/he enters the Presence of His Lord. If we take into account how happy man is with the material blessings including food, drink and clothes, bestowed upon him/her by another creature, such as a father, a brother, or a relative, what do we really think of the Blessing He *the Almighty* bestows upon man while in His Presence? These blessings in actuality will be unknown but to the person who is in His Presence.

So, when He *the Almighty* says: '…and to complete His blessings on you…', this means that His Blessings are completed on you (O believers!) by calling you to meet Him *Glorified is He* and to be in His Presence. To fully illustrate this point, let us refer to the previous example of the son and the absent father. It is in this example that we find that the son looks at the gifts his absent father sends and says, 'I do not want these things; I just want my father!'

The complete and perfect blessing–on the human level–is for a person to see the one who bestows his/her blessings upon him/her, and he is a human being just like him/her. As for the complete and perfect blessing from the Creator to the creature, it requires that one must purify himself/herself in the way He *the Almighty* has ordained, and then enter the prayer and thus meet Him and be in His Presence.

He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…and to complete His blessings on you, so that you may have a reason to be grateful'. When we hear Allah *the Almighty* saying, 'I did this for you to have a reason to be grateful', this means, 'If you do what I tell you, you will get something wonderful in return, for which you will naturally be grateful'. This indicates that man must be deeply thankful for Him *the Almighty* for the Blessings He *Glorified is He* bestows upon him/her. Similarly, He *the Almighty* tells us that man must be grateful to Him *the Almighty* for the blessings of hearing, sight and intellect which He endows him/her (*an-Nahl:* 78). Hearing, sight and intellect are undoubtedly the channels of perception. Consequently, He *the Almighty* orders us to be grateful for the fact that He *the Almighty* has created us, and we had no knowledge, and then has given us means of perception.

وَٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَةَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَمِيثَٰقَهُ ٱلَّذِى وَاثَقَكُم بِهِۦٓ إِذۡ قُلۡتُمۡ
سَمِعۡنَا وَأَطَعۡنَاۖ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمُۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ٧

Remember God's blessing on you and the pledge with which you were bound when you said, 'We hear and we obey.' Be mindful of God: God has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart [7] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 7)

A person may ask, 'What does "remembrance" (*Ad-Dhikr*) mean?' It means to memorise something, or to bring it to mind. As a matter of fact, the process of memorisation entails that only the object itself should be kept in the mind, just as it is. As for the word '*Istihdar*', it refers to recalling the actual meaning of what one has in the mind. Consequently, there is a difference between memorising something and bringing it to mind. This is actually the true meaning of remembrance. Moreover, 'remembrance' may indicate the act of 'mentioning' something, because you do not mention something unless you first bring it to your mind. Actually, we find that the brain performs the functions of remembering, memorising, and imagining facts.

One of the wonders of the creation of the human being is that a person may be unable to remember particular events that took place decades ago, but then may suddenly remember them due to the occurrence of a particular incident that reminds him/her of them. Consequently, it is clear that man does not totally forget an event that s/he experienced twenty years ago; rather, this particular event was just absent from her/his mind for twenty years or more, and then certain things happened that reminded her/him of it. This means that this information was stored by the person even though s/he forgot about it for a long period of time.

And 'remembrance' means to call to memory such information that was previously stored in the mind so that it comes to the forefront of the consciousness. For example, two people might have experienced something twenty years ago and then forgot it, but when they meet one another and sit and speak about the past, they remember the event which they experienced more than twenty years ago. This indicates clearly that the event did not leave the memory forever but was stored somewhere in the subconscious of the mind, to the extent that the more time passed, the more it seemed that the person had forgotten about the incident. Yet, when s/he undergoes certain circumstances, s/he will be able to recall it to the subconscious of the mind where one is able to remember past memories. This actually tells us how Great and Powerful Allah *the Almighty* is.

To elaborate, one of us might record some speech on a cassette, but when s/he wants to record something else on the same cassette, s/he has to erase what has been previously recorded; however, human memory does not function like this. As a matter of fact, when events are in the conscious part of the mind, one is able to remember them, yet if another event will be stored in the mind, the previously stored incident will have to move to the subconscious mind to give room for the new one, and so on. This is because the conscious part of the mind can only accommodate one thought at a time; if it is occupied with another thought, the previously stored event will leave to the subconscious mind. It is important here to realise that thoughts are not erased by one another within the human mind. As a result, one is able to recall past events whenever s/he wishes. This actually indicates the great difference between Allah's Creation and the production of man.

Moreover, it is of great importance to realise that human minds store nothing but abstractions and that physical objects can never be stored in man's memory; otherwise, the brain would not be able to contain them, i.e. all these physical objects. Consequently, these abstractions do not jostle for space in the mind, but rather, they build up within it so that if a person searches through the abstractions in her/his mind, s/he can recall minding what s/he wants to remember. This could not be the case if the brain were not created by *the Almighty* Creator. As long as abstractions do not take up any physical space, man can easily store them in his/her memory.

A person might sit down and revise the names of the world's mountains, saying, 'The world's mountains include Mount Everest, the Himalayas, Mount Uhud, and Mount Thawr'. In fact, when the person mentions these names, s/he indeed pictures what they mean. In other words, what exists in her/his mind at the time of uttering these words are their meanings and not the physical realities they designate. Consequently, these abstract meanings never jostle or expel one another, but rather they remain stored in the memory and the subconscious of the mind.

In truth, those who think that people have different levels of intelligence are wrong. Unfortunately, people may mistakenly think that someone has high intelligence and is thus able to memorise things from the first glance, while another who has less intelligence, as they think, will not be able to memorise it except after reading it twice or thrice. This is wrong because every man has a mind that functions like a camera which can take a photo from the first shot. But if a man takes a picture with a camera and something clouds over the lens of the camera, s/he takes the picture again. The same is true for the human mind: if a person wants to memorise something while her/his mind is occupied with something else, information will not perfectly settle in the conscious part of the mind and therefore s/he will have to repeat the action of reading to confirm the information therein in order for it to be imprinted in the conscious part of the mind.

The following is an illustrative example of this point: a student may enter the school’s examination hall, and five minutes before the bell rings to start the exam, one of his colleagues may say to him, ‘Did you revise such-and-such a topic?’ The student replies, ‘No, I did not’, and his friend says, ‘There will be a question about this topic in the exam’. As a result, the student opens a book and reads about this topic just once. At this moment, the student will not think about what he will eat for lunch today, or whom he will meet, but rather, he will be well aware that his chance is slim, which will force him to concentrate fully on what he is reading. For this reason, he is able to memorise the subject at the first glance, to the extent that he will be fully able to answer a question on this particular topic. On the other hand, we may find another student who studies the same topic for several days but is still unable to answer questions on it. As such, it becomes clear that the mind can imbibe something in a single moment as long as the person does not receive the information while his/her mind is occupied with something else. This point is proved by the fact that man might hear a poem or a speech only one time and yet memorise more than just one verse of the poem or more than just one sentence of the speech. Why is this?! It is because at that particular moment her/his mind was not occupied with anything, and as a result s/he was able to memorise very easily. As for the rest of the poem or speech, her/his mind might have been occupied with other topics at that time, and thus was unable to store the information it received. Hence, one tries to repeat the process of listening or that of reading more than once in order to prepare her/his conscious mind to easily memorise all what s/he wants to store.

Based on the above, it is clear that the mind can imbibe something in one moment. As for the memory, it evokes the notions which are stored deep in the mind. Concerning that point, we stress that nothing is ever lost from the memory and therefore man is able to recall minding all that s/he wants. It is as though these impressions of Allah's Blessings are painstakingly recorded in man; s/he just has to evoke them from the stores in the memory and seek them out.

Careful reflection on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And (always) remember the blessings which Allah has bestowed upon you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 7) indicates that He *Glorified is He* uses the word *Ni'ma* here, which literally means 'a blessing' in the singular, even though His Blessings are countless. Why is this? This shows man that s/he should remember every single blessing which is bestowed upon her/him by Allah *the Almighty* in every aspect of life. Allah's Blessings are indeed manifold, but man must remember every single blessing in itself in order to fully express gratitude to Him *the Almighty*; a person is thus supposed to remember the blessing of being created out of nothing, the blessing of sight, and that of hearing. In reality, each one of these blessings should always be remembered by man. Moreover, we should know very well that no one divine blessing cancels out any other. If man gives consideration to every blessing, s/he will find that s/he has to remember them all the time. Another possible interpretation for this word is that it, i.e. the word 'blessings', is a generic noun that includes all that can be referred to as a blessing. For example, the word 'man' may refer to any human being; it may refer to Khalid, Mohammed, 'Ali, etc.

Moreover, this particular word '*Ni'ma'* could be attributed to its cause. For example, a blessing caused by the chivalry of a single human being may be attributed to him/her. Here, it is of great importance to know that the effect of these blessings provided by mankind is in relation to their limited human abilities. The matter is totally different when it has to do with those Blessings which are provided by Allah *the Almighty* since they, i.e. such divine Blessings, must also be in correlation with His *Glorified is He* Infinite and Unchallenged Power.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And (always) remember the blessings which Allah has bestowed upon you, and the solemn pledge by which He has bound you to Himself….’ The word ‘to bind’ entails the interaction between two particular parties: man and Allah *the Almighty*. Man is in constant need for the sustenance provided to him/her by Allah *the Almighty*; however, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Absolute Sustainer. It is a relationship between the Lord and His slaves. In another position in the Quran, He *the Almighty* tells us to fulfil our promise to Him so that, in return, He will keep His Promise to us (*an-Nisa’:* 20).

Again, it is clear that the phrase *wathaqkum* (He has bound you to Himself) indicates that there is interaction by two parties; a point of view which is supported by the fact that the verb *wathaqa* (has bound) is in the morphological form (*fa’ala*), which implies the interaction of two parties, just like the verb *sharaka* (to participate), which indicates that two or more people work together, or *qatala*, which means ‘to fight one another.’ As such, when He *the Almighty* says that He ‘has bound’ (*wathaqa*) His slaves, this means that He participated with them in this pledge and accepted it from them. But what pledge is this?

We should know that there are a number of pledges which have been given by man to Allah *the Almighty*; the first of which was taken from the children of Adam, while they were still in his (Adam’s) loin. The text of this particular pledge is mentioned by Allah in the chapter of *al-’Araf* in which He *Glorified is He* states that He has brought forth the descendants of Adam from their fathers’ backs, and has made them bear witness against their own souls: ‘“Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes! We bear witness (to this).” Lest you should say on the day of resurrection, “Surely, we were heedless of this”’ (*al-A’raf:* 172).

As a matter of fact, this is the pledge of natural disposition which was taken before the soul and its passions existed. There is also another pledge known as’ the pledge of the intellect’. It is by means of this pledge that man ponders over the universe and is thus able to adduce that the universe has been created in a very precise way, which clearly indicates the Existence of Allah *the Almighty*. There comes after this the pledge which has to do with faith in Allah. When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* presented the teachings of Islam, some people believed in them, that is, he took from them a pledge that they will follow Allah’s Directions and Commands.

This point is definitively proven by the fact that he *peace and blessings be upon him* took a pledge from the people of Medina at Al-'Aqaba when they said to him, 'Take whatever pledge you want for yourself and your Lord'. As a result, Prophet Muhammad spoke, recited the Quran to them, called them to Allah and Islam and then said, 'I take a pledge from you that you will protect me like you protect your womenfolk and your children', whereupon Al-Barra' ibn Ma'rur took his hand and said, 'Surely, I swear by Him Who has sent you with the Truth that we will protect you like we protect our kin. Indeed, we pledge this, O Prophet Muhammad, for we are men of war, having arms that have been handed down from father to son.'(1)

The same also occurred at the Pledge of Allah's Pleasure (*Bai'at Ar-Ridwan*) which took place under the tree. To conclude, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the solemn pledge by which He has bound you to Himself…' may refer either to the general pledge of faith made at the time of the seed or to the pledges of faith which were made by the intermediation of the Messengers and Prophets.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…The solemn pledge by which He has bound you to Himself when you said, "We hear, and we obey…."' In fact, when a person has faith, s/he says, 'I have heard the Commands of Allah and I obey them', and in this way her/his pledge to Allah *the Almighty* is completely fulfilled. He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…So, be mindful of Allah: verily, Allah has full knowledge of what is in the hearts'. To be mindful of Allah (*At-Taqwa*) means to place a protective barrier between Allah's Attributes of Majesty and ourselves. In other words, even though we are all required to strictly adhere to Allah's Way of Guidance, we must also place a protective barrier between His Anger and ourselves. We have previously explained that the meaning understood from being mindful of Allah *the Almighty* is the same as that understood from His Order to be mindful of the fire. Yet, someone may ask, 'Does the hellfire issue commandments and prohibitions?' We say to such a questioner, 'You do not understand this point properly. Our statement means that you should place a protective barrier between yourself and Allah's Wrath because the hellfire is one of Allah's soldiers'. That is why He *the Almighty* tells us to be cautious and to' place a protective barrier between ourselves and His Attributes of Majesty'. In relation to this, we should know that Allah's Attributes are of two kinds: Attributes of Majesty and Attributes of Beauty. The list of His Attributes of Majesty includes Absolute Power, Vengeance, and Compulsion, whereas the list of the Attributes of Beauty includes Mercy, Forgiveness, Sustaining His Creatures, and Wisdom, etc. To conclude, we must place a protective barrier between ourselves and His Attributes of Majesty to protect ourselves from the soldiers through which Allah's Attributes of Majesty are exhibited, one of which is the hellfire.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad*

We previously explained that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that Allah, the All-Compelling, showers His slaves with His Mercy in the last night of *Ramadan*. Concerning this, someone may ask, 'Why did he no the use the word "the All-Forgiving" instead of the word "the All-Compelling"?' This is because this Most Beautiful Name, i.e. 'the All-Compelling' indicates one of Allah's Attributes of Majesty, which implies that the sinner will be punished. As a matter of fact, sins are closely related to the Attributes of Majesty and not to those of Mercy. Logic dictates that the sinner shall stand before Him *the Almighty* whose Vengeance is severe because the situation corresponds more closely to the Attributes of Majesty. But we must take into account the undeniable fact that He *the Almighty* postpones the infliction of His punishment to allow the sinner to show repentance. In addition, we should bear in mind that He rejoices in His slave's repentance and that His Mercy overcomes His wrath.

He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying: '…verily, Allah has full knowledge of what is in the hearts'. Allah-consciousness, as we know, does not only apply to physical actions, but it also applies to inner states of consciousness. Good intentions and bad intentions are best examples in this regard. As a matter of fact, envy, hatred, plotting, and scheming are all bad attributes which have to do with man's inner consciousness. Hence, you should not think that Allah-consciousness only applies to physical actions, for it also applies to feelings. In the same connection, the deeds of the heart also fall under the category of Allah-consciousness. He *the Almighty* then says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ كُونُوا۟ قَوَّٰمِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَآءَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ ۖ وَلَا
يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَـَٔانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا۟ ۚ ٱعْدِلُوا۟ هُوَ أَقْرَبُ
لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from justice, but adhere to justice, for that is closer to awareness of God. Be mindful of God: God is well aware of all that you do [8] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 8)

We know perfectly well that when Allah *the Almighty* wants to issue an order to the group of believers, He *the Almighty* does this with His saying: 'O you who believe….' He *the Almighty* does not deny people their free will by forcing them to follow His Way, but rather, He issues commandments and obligations to those who believe in Him. He is telling us' O you who believe in Me as the All-Wise and All-Powerful, follow My Way of Guidance'. In fact, when He *the Almighty* wants to address mankind, He calls upon them with His saying: 'O Mankind'. This means that He wants to direct the attention of all humanity to His Existence. As for those who believe in Him, they are included in His words: 'O you who believe….' Having heard this particular call from Allah *the Almighty* to the group of believers, they must carry out His commands and orders.

We know for certain that there is a great difference between being Allah's slaves and being Allah's Worshippers. We can state that all mankind are Allah's slaves but not all are His *the Almighty* Worshippers. The difference between being 'slaves' (*'Abid*) and being 'worshippers' (*'Ibad*) is that the former indicates that people are compelled in certain matters of their lives and that they cannot apply their free will to these particular matters. A rebel may say, 'I do not believe in Allah', but can s/he rebel against Allah's fate upon her/him! If such a person falls ill and then claims that s/he is not actually ill, what will happen to her/him?! Could any of these rebels dare to refuse to die?! Definitely, no one could; no one can do such a thing. As such, it is clear that Allah's slaves are naturally compelled by Allah and thus we all are slaves to Him *the Almighty*. Hence, He *the Almighty* can summon us whenever He wants. In addition, He *Glorified is He* can afflict us with any punishment that we are not able to ward off. As for Allah's Worshippers (*'Ibad*), they are the ones who say to Allah, 'We relinquish our own free will and are happy with whatever you may command us with, either to "Do" or "Do not"'. This is actually the difference between the two terms.' Allah's slaves' are compelled to submit to His Will, whereas 'Allah's Worshippers' are those who are pleased to relinquish their free will in favour of what He *the Almighty* loves and chooses for them; they surrender themselves to Him. That is, they are compelled by free choice, while the slaves are compelled by force.

He *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to Allah….' The Arabic word *Qawwam* (steadfast) is an intensive adjectival form of the word *Qa'im*, which means 'one who stands'. If a person stands frequently for long periods of time, he is called *Qawwam*. Similarly, when a man who is not skilled in carpentry takes a plank of wood and uses it to cover a hole in his door, we do not call him *Najjar* (carpenter), but rather, we call him *Najir*, i.e. the one who performs an act of carpentry even though he is not specialised in it. However, the word *Najjar* refers only to that person who makes his living out of carpentry. Likewise, we call the one who goes out to sea in his boat and catches a couple of fish '*Sa'id*', i.e. the one whose hobby is to catch fish. And of course, we do not call him *Sayyad* (fisherman) because fishing is not his profession.

Here, the verse under discussion indicates clearly that Allah *the Almighty* does not want every believer to just' stand up' for Him; rather, He *Glorified is He* wants them to be steadfast, i.e. to be especially diligent in their devotion to Him *the Almighty*. The opposite of 'standing' (*Qiyam*) is 'sitting'. Naturally, sitting is followed by reclining, that is, to place one's side on the floor, and after that comes lying down which is eventually followed by sleeping; Man's body can undergo different positions, as follows: standing up, sitting, reclining and sleeping. In Islam, a person who is asleep is not responsible for her/his actions; s/he is not held accountable for legal obligations and ordinances while sleeping. As a matter of fact, these different positions are mentioned by Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *an-Nisa'* in which He *Glorified is He* orders us to remember Him–standing, sitting and lying down (*an-Nisa':* 103).

That is, (O believers!) you must constantly remember Allah *the Almighty*. A man's natural state involves actions, that is, s/he may stand and sit, etc.

As a matter of fact, when Arabs say, '*Qam fulanun bi Amr al-Qawm* (so-and-so was steadfast in fulfilling the needs of the people), this means that he exerts his utmost efforts to run the affairs of the people, which is viewed as the most difficult thing that is undertaken. In this regard, it is important to know that He *the Almighty* does not want us to just stand before Him, but rather, He wants us to be steadfast and therefore always devoted to Him. However, we should fully realise the fact that our obedience to Him *Glorified is He* never means that He attains benefit from it, for He *the Almighty* created His Creatures due to His Attributes of Perfection. Moreover, we must know for certain that the creation of His Creatures never produced any new Attribute of Beauty or Perfection for Him. To continue, when man carries out Allah's Commands, s/he does this so as to be obedient and devoted to Him. Indeed, He *the Almighty* wants the believers to be steadfast in their devotion to Him, because all the actions of the Muslim society must be devout, complementary, and constructive. In truth, if these are really the actions of the Muslim society, they will bring about the happiness of mankind; for if this is really the case, man with his/her steadfastness will benefit him/herself along with the entire society. This means that all Muslims must always be devotedly obedient to Allah's Commands. Thus, we must realise that all legally charged Muslims must submit to and carry out the divine orders and commands by means of which rights of all the members of the society are protected. In fact, if you are required to be honest, everyone else in the Muslim society is also required to be honest. In the same connection, when He *the Almighty* forbids you from being treacherous, He similarly commands everyone else to refrain from being treacherous to you.

Hence, if we carefully reflect upon the divine obligations, we will find that they serve one's own interests. No one should thus think that s/he is the only one asked to carry out the religious obligations and commands. As a matter of fact, all people are asked to carry out these divine obligations and commands, in the same way as one person is ordered to do them. Consequently, when Allah commands you not to take the possessions of others, He *the Almighty* also prohibits them from taking your possessions unlawfully. This plainly indicates that the divine obligations serve the interests of the entire society and not just the individual. That is why one is asked to be steadfast in devotion to Him *the Almighty*. Concerning this, we stress the fact that the one who intends to show off with his/her deeds will be deprived of the reward, but one who sincerely works for the sake of Allah will be continuously provided with blessings. As an example, someone may say, ‘I did all these things for so-and-so, yet s/he does not acknowledge them!’ We say to him, ‘This is a natural result, since you did not do them for the sake of Allah. But had you done them for the sake of Him *the Almighty* He will recompense you for it in full’. Referring to those who seek the pleasure of Allah with their deeds, He *the Almighty* orders us in the Quran to remember the Day of Judgement in which every human being will find himself faced with all the good that he has done (*Al-’Imran:* 30).

It is now clear that the believer must seek the pleasure of Allah *the Almighty* by dedicating all his/her actions to Him *the Almighty*. In fact, if one’s actions are intended for the sake of Allah, then He *Glorified is He* does not squander the reward of those who do good deeds. In the same connection, losers are those who act for the sake of people even though people cannot benefit them in any way. They might even desert them or harbour hatred and bitterness towards those who treat them kindly. They, i.e. people, might even become their enemies. For example, if one confers favour upon another who might then be given a prestigious position by Allah, when this particular person meets the one who did him a favour, he might feel embarrassed and ashamed, to the extent that he may wish if this meeting had not taken place. Similarly, if he encounters him afterwards in the street, he turns his face away from him to avoid him. This is because the one who did him a favour makes him feel ashamed and weak, but he himself wants to act proudly with the people. To conclude, He *the Almighty* wants us to seek His Pleasure alone, because nothing is ever lost with Him. In addition, we must fully realise that Allah is watching over you and no action of yours escapes Him.

At this point, it is important to know how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* defined *Ihsan* (‘perfection’ or ‘benevolence’). He said, ‘*Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, then (know that) Allah sees you’ (1). Could you, as a human being, do an ill deed to someone in front of his eyes? In fact, you cannot do any ill deed to anyone except behind their backs. Hence, why do you do evil deeds and disobey Him *the Almighty* when He is watching you all the time?!

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

Consequently, as He *the Almighty* wants you to treat yourself and others well, this means that you must take into account that all of your deeds and actions must be intended for the sake of Allah *the Almighty*. Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* has made all of the creatures subservient to mankind. In addition, He *the Almighty* has given us all the constituents of life, and as a result He asks us all to be steadfast in devotion to Him. In truth, man is required to be steadfast (*Qawwam*) in devotion to Him *the Almighty* all the time. This means that as long as you are healthy enough to work, then work; and do not only work as much as you need to, but also work as much as you are able to because if you only worked as much as you needed to, then those who are unable to work would not have anything to live on.

As such, it is clear that one must work as much as s/he is able to for her/his work to be of benefit to all the people. In fact, when He *the Almighty* says: '…Be ever steadfast in your devotion to Allah, bearing witness to the truth in all equity….' this means that He *Glorified is He* teaches us not to render our deeds as scattered floating dust, but rather to entirely devote our deeds to Allah, because He *the Almighty* never forgets to reward His slave and He returns every favour; in the Quran, He *the Almighty* tells us that the reward of good must be good (*ar-Rahman:* 60). And in another position, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He does not fail to requite the doers of good (*at-Tawba:* 120).

When one of us is steadfast in devotion to Allah, s/he uses the motions of her/his life for the good of Allah's Creatures. In fact, man is required to do so. In addition, it is not enough for you to do only this, but rather, you must also be a just witness to the truth and guide those who incline towards deviancy back to the path of justice. When you are steadfastly devoted to Allah, this is a good thing. In the same connection, you must try to convince others to be steadfastly devoted to Allah by bearing witness to the truth in all equity and justice. When this is actually done, i.e. bearing witness to the truth in all equity and justice, the wrongdoer will not continue his/her wrongdoing. It goes without saying that the main reason that makes a wrongdoer continue her/his wrongdoing even more is that s/he sees people circumventing justice, concealing faults and cheating people.

But if there are people who work hard to maintain justice, there will be no wrongdoing. In fact, the wrongdoer loves to see people circumvent justice; he thinks, ‘So-and-so committed the same crime as me and got away scot-free!’ It goes without saying that an unjust testimony leads to the breakdown of the society. If a society sees that the testimony given within it is just and equitable, all its members who wanted to commit a wrongdoing will restrain themselves from doing so. In addition, in such a society, the wrongdoers are punished, and in this way, others will be deterred from committing wrongdoings. The believer is first required to be steadfastly devoted to Allah by rectifying her/himself. S/he is then required to be an equitable and just witness for the truth in order to rectify others.

The Arabic word for ‘equity’ is (*Qist*), from which many other words are derived. Surprisingly, this word may be used to refer to both ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’. It is one of those Arabic words which can give the meaning of the word and its opposite. This is actually one of the interesting phenomena of the Arabic language. Such words of this special phenomenon require the listener to examine them and deduce their meanings based on the context. The verb *Qasata/Yaqsitu* means ‘to be just’, and the verbal noun is either *Qist* or *Qusut*. As a matter of fact, it is the verbal noun that indicates the exact meaning of the word in question, that is, whether’ justice’ or ‘injustice’ is meant: the verbal noun *Qist* means ‘justice’, while the verbal noun *Qusut* indicates ‘injustice’. As such, we see that this verb may indicate a particular meaning and its opposite which means that the listener must be fully attentive to know how to determine the correct meaning of the word based on the context, that is, whether it indicates ‘justice’ or ‘injustice’.

As for the verb *Aqsata*, it means ‘s/he made justice’. With regard to this, we must fully realise that there is a great difference between’ being just at the outset’ which is *Qist*, and ‘being just after injustice had been committed’ which is *Aqsata* that means ‘to remove injustice’.

Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran that the wrongdoers (*al-Qasitun)* will be the fuel of the hellfire (*al-Jinn:* 15). But back to this particular verse under discussion from the chapter of *al-Ma’ida*, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…bearing witness to the truth in all equity….’ This means that we all must bear witness for justice. As a matter of fact, the listener to or the reader of the Quran must be fully attentive to be able to determine the correct meaning of the word based on the context. In other words, s/he must have enough fluency in the Arabic language to be able to distinguish between the synonym and the antonym. Hence, it is clear there is difference between *Qist* which means 'justice', *Aqsata* which means 's/he maintained justice after removing injustice', and *al-Qusut* which means 'injustice'.

In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that He loves those who act equitably, i.e. *Al-Muqsitun* (*al-Ma'ida:* 42). The word '*Muqsitun'* is the plural of '*Muqsit'* and is derived from the verb '*Aqsata'* which means 'to remove injustice'. Once again, it is the context and the verbal noun of a word that indicates its exact meaning. Incidentally, the verbal noun may be used in place of an adjective. For example, the word '*Adl* (justice), which is a verbal noun can also be used as an adjective to refer to 'someone who is just', in which case it is always written and pronounced '*Adl* and never changes, irrespective of the fact that it refers to a masculine or feminine, or to a singular, dual or plural noun (although an ordinary adjective would change its form in these cases). In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that He shall set up just (*al-Qist*-singular form) balance-scales on the Day of Resurrection (*al-Anbiya'*: 47). In another position, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to weigh with true (*al-Qistas-singular form*) scales (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 182).

In the Egyptian countryside, the merchant makes his own weights out of stones, gauging a certain stone to weigh one kilogram and gauging other stones to weigh certain fractions of a kilogram. Due to the frequent use of these stones, the merchant knows that they will wear down. To allow for this, he reweighs them every now and then; it is said that he 're-gauges his weights'. This is actually called *al-Qistas*. That is, *al-Qistas* is the standard against which the weights are gauged. If a person makes weights out of material that wears down or is affected by being touched, he has to re-gauge them every now and then in order not to wrong anyone in the least. He *the Almighty* says: '…this is more equitable (*Aqsatu*) in the sight of Allah….' Here, the word *Aqsatu* means 'being more equitable'. In truth, Allah's Standards of judgement are not as those of man, for man's standards may be subject to differences of opinions. In addition, we see that some merchants decrease their measures by putting something under one of the balances to trick people. As for Allah *the Almighty* He is the All-Just and His Standards of measure are the most just.

This particular verse (in the chapter of *al-Ahzab*) was revealed because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made a judgement which was correct and just according to human standards, yet Allah *the Almighty* tells him that there is another judgement which is even more equitable than his. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants to say to him ‘It is true, O Prophet Muhammad, that your judgment cannot be subject to human caprice, interest or desire, but Allah’s Justice is even more precise and exacting’. He *peace and blessings be upon him* made this judgement according to human equity; it concerned Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* who was the freed slave of Prophet Muhammad. The Mother of the believers Khadija bint Khuwayled *Allah be pleased with her* had gifted Zayd to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Zayd’s family knew that he had been captured and sold as a slave, and that he was finally owned by Prophet Muhammad, so they went to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked for their son. But Zayd refused to go with them and preferred to stay with Prophet Muhammad. That is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to honour Zayd who preferred him to his own father and family. He *peace and blessings be upon him* did this due to the point mentioned clearly in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* states plainly that Prophet Muhammad has a higher claim on the believers than (they have on) their own selves (*al-Ahzab:* 6).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* naturally had a high esteem for Zayd ibn Haritha, to the extent that he freed him and named him ‘Zayd, son of Muhammad’ as a way of honouring him. This was actually the usual practice of the Arabs at that time. But Allah *the Almighty* wanted to abolish the practice of adoption telling the believers that their adopted sons will never be like sons from their loins (*al-Ahzab:* 4).

In this regard, He *the Almighty* ran the affairs very precisely to abolish this act forever. Allah *Glorified is He* started with Prophet Muhammad; He ordered him to call Zayd by the name of his real father. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* orders the believers to call their adopted sons by their (real) fathers' names since this is more equitable in the sight of Allah (*al-Ahzab:* 5).

Allah *the Almighty* did not deny that Prophet Muhammad was equitable, but rather, He *Glorified is He* wanted to tell us that His Verdict is even more equitable. Allah *the Almighty* having ordered Prophet Muhammad to call Zayd by the name of his real father, He consoled Zayd by mentioning his name in the Quran. As a matter of fact, Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* is the only Companion whose name is explicitly mentioned in the Quran. In the chapter of *al-Ahzab*, He *the Almighty* states that when Zayd had come to the end of his union with Zaynab, He *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad to marry her (*al-Ahzab:* 37). In this way, Zayd's name was recorded in the Quran, and as a result Muslims will recite it to the end of time. In fact, this was more than enough to remove his sadness. As such, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…more equitable in the sight of Allah…' is used in its proper place. Furthermore, if Allah *the Almighty* asks us to be as steadfast as we can in devotion to Him, i.e. to let no opportunity to do good without taking full advantage of it as best as we can, and asks us to be just in the society by being witnesses to the truth in all equity, this will mean that everyone can claim his/her rights. In addition, the strong will not be able to wrong the weak because the weak will find people to, truthfully, bear witness for him.

He *the Almighty* then warns Muslims not to let caprice negatively affect their standards of justice. Even if the matter has to do with your enemies or rivals, justice is more important and more essential. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: '…And never let hatred of anyone make you deviate from justice….' That is, do not let the hatred you feel for people prevent you from treating them equitably and do not let it cause you to transgress against them; for everyone has his/her rights. We know perfectly well the story that happened when a Muslim stole a shield from another Muslim but accused a Jew of committing this crime. Concerning this incident, He *Glorified is He* has revealed verses of the Quran in which He says that He reveals the Quran upon the heart of Prophet Muhammad for him to judge among the people with what Allah has taught him. In addition, He *the Almighty* orders him not to contend with those who are false to their trust (*an-Nisa':* 105).

Moreover, He *the Almighty* orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to support those who are treacherous against those who are innocent. In the same connection, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and never let hatred of anyone make you deviate from justice…' means that Muslims must not let their hatred for people cause them to be unjust; otherwise this hatred will be for the good of their enemy. This is because when Muslims allow their hatred to make them follow their caprice, Allah will punish them for the injustice committed against this enemy. In this way, it is clear that basing one's judgment on hatred, enmity, and caprice only helps the enemy of Islam. That is why He *the Almighty* orders the believers not to let their hatred for enemies cause them to deviate from justice.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…Be just: this is closest to having Allah-consciousness….' In fact, when an enemy is treated justly, this actually rebukes and reproaches this enemy for going against the Faith to the effect that s/he will surely wonder: 'This Muslim is too just to say anything but the truth; his/her belief must make him/her strong. Furthermore, the religion which commands him/her to act as such must be the best of religions!'

As a result, when you, as a believer, judge your enemy justly, you thereby rebuke him/her for being an unbeliever. But if your enemy were to see you act unjustly and go against the truth, you will only encourage her/him to remain a disbeliever because s/he will know that you were only following your caprice. If, on the other hand, s/he sees you taking such a stance which pleases Allah even though it benefits the enemy, s/he will reach the conclusion that the creed in which you believe must be true, and that you uphold the truth even if it benefits your enemies. Consequently, this person will rebuke himself to an extent that s/he might convert to Islam.

He *the Almighty* says: '…Be just: this is closest to having Allah-consciousness….' But the question to be asked here is: 'Which kind of Allah-consciousness will the person be closer to? Is it the enemy that will be closer to attaining piety when s/he sees that the believer upholds justice and truth?!' As a matter of fact, this may happen; the enemy may come to her/his senses and say, 'Faith has allowed this believer to overcome her/his hatred and to judge according to the truth even though s/he knows for certain that I am her/his enemy'.

The story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) offers us the best example in this regard when a stranger came to him and asked for food or lodgings, yet he *peace be upon him* did not give him what he asked for because this stranger was a disbeliever. The man went away. At that point, Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Abraham *peace be upon him* 'I know perfectly well that he is a disbeliever, yet I do not withhold My Blessings from him; however, he asked you for something to eat or a place to stay the night, but you did not give any to him!' Upon hearing this, Abraham *peace be upon him* went running after the man until he caught up with him. The man was surprised and asked Abraham, 'Why did you change your mind?', whereupon he *peace be upon him* replied, 'My Lord censured me for what I did'. The man then replied, 'Indeed, great is that Lord Who censures His beloved on behalf of His enemies!' He then became a believer. This story actually illustrates to us the meaning of His saying: '…closest to having Allah-consciousness….' It clarifies that the disbelieving man came closer to Allah-consciousness. To sum up, the psychological impact exerted on your rival or the one who hates you or is at odds with you when s/he sees you giving precedence to the truth over your hatred for her/him will make such a person become closer to attaining the faith which instructs its followers to give precedence to the truth over caprice. S/he will therefore become closer to Allah-consciousness, and in this way s/he is the one who bears witness to the truth with equity.

Allah *Glorified is He* finally concludes the verse with His saying: '…So be mindful of Allah: verily, Allah is aware of all that you do'. This indicates that He *the Almighty* is fully aware of all that we do. Here, it is of great importance for the believers to take into consideration the fact that their deeds must be intended for the sake of Allah *the Almighty*. In other words, they must not show off with their good deeds.

In fact, many people judge unjustly in order to become famous for being just, but how does this happen? Suppose a dispute arises between your son and your neighbour's son: it might seem courageous for you to rule in favour of your neighbour's son even though he is not in the right, but in reality, it is more courageous for you to rule in favour of your own son if he indeed is in the right. If you rule in favour of your neighbour's son even though he is not in the right, you thereby rule unjustly simply in order to become famous amongst the people for being just!

That is, the truth must be dearer to you than both your son and your neighbour's son. Consequently, you (O Muslims!) must be wary of doing things which apparently seem to be just when really they are intended to show off. And we know that every part of the body has a particular role to play: the tongue's role is to speak; the ear's role is to hear and the role of the nose is to smell. Indeed, an action can be done by either word or deed; in the Quran, He *the Almighty* orders the believers to say what they do (*as-Saff:* 2-3). Consequently, it is clear that speech is performed by the tongue and deeds are performed by other body parts, and together these two make action. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٩﴾

God has promised forgiveness and a rich reward to those who have faith and do good works [9] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 9)

When we carefully reflect on the word *Wa'ada* (to promise), we find that another word in Arabic is similar to it, which is *Aw'ada*. If the thing which is promised is not mentioned, *Wa'ada* means a promise of good tidings, but *Aw'ada* indicates a warning of something bad. But if the thing promised is explicitly mentioned, the meanings of the two words are equivalent. As a result, you can use the word *Wa'ada* to mean either 'promise' or 'warning'. But if you do not explicitly state what the thing being promised is, *Wa'ada* means a promise of glad tidings and *Aw'ada* means a warning of something bad. In this regard, a poet says:

If I threaten (aw'ada) him or promise (wa'ada) him,

I break my threat but keep my promise.

When He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah has promised (*wa'ada*)…', this is an unassailably firm promise which cannot be broken, for the one who breaks promises is man who is subject to vicissitudes; the time might come to fulfil the trust, but man finds him/herself unable or no longer willing to fulfil it. However, when Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who promises, He cannot be affected by vicissitudes, for He is the One Who causes vicissitudes to occur, and therefore His Promise is absolutely true and no power can prevent it from being fulfilled. As for human promises, any other power may cause them to be unfulfilled.

He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah has promised to those who believe and do good works (that) for them there is forgiveness of sins….' In this verse, He *the Almighty* makes it clear that His Forgiveness covers and includes all His servants, not only the especially pious and virtuous among them; rather, He *the Almighty* is directing His speech here to those who commit sins, telling them that if they repent, they will be forgiven. This is because preventing what is bad is given priority over gaining what is good. For example, if you are sitting somewhere and someone comes from the right and offers you an apple, and just as you are reaching out for the apple you see that another person is about to strike you, what action will you be more likely to take? Of course you will first defend yourself against the one who wishes to strike you. The same applies here; He *the Almighty* tells us that He effaces sins first by forgiving them and then admits people into His paradise. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* tells us that the prosperous in the Hereafter will be those who shall be drawn away from the Fire first and then admitted into Paradise. (*Al-'Imran:* 185)

Clearly, the first step of gaining the attained object is to be drawn away from the Hellfire, and then to be admitted into Paradise. That is, Allah *Glorified is He* gives precedence to the prevention of what is bad over the gaining of what is good. Accordingly, He *the Almighty* states in this verse under discussion that He will first grant them forgiveness. As a matter of fact, the human mind always thinks of what it fears first: it fears harm; it fears that its hopes will not be fulfilled. Hence, preventing what is bad has a higher priority than attaining what is good.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse by His saying: '…for them there is forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward'. In truth, every worldly reward for an action lasts for a defined period of time. That is why we reiterate that man's rewards for his/her work in this worldly life always come to an end because even the man him/herself comes to an end by dying. As for the reward of the Hereafter, it lasts forever. In addition, it never leaves man, nor does s/he leave it–and this is the truly mighty reward.

Of course, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about a concept pertaining to faith and good deeds, the soul is actually fully prepared for it; that is, there are ways that encourage what is good and others that cast fear about what is bad.

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَكَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ﴿١٠﴾

those who reject faith and deny Our revelations will inhabit the blazing Fire [10] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 10)

In the verse, we hear the saying of Allah: '…they will be companions of the Blazing Fire', and our souls are moved with dread at this 'companionship' in which we would never wish to partake; for the word 'companionship' indicates closeness and a connection, and that one of the companions never leaves the other. It is as though the blazing fire will never leave them, and nor will they be able to leave it; it even indicates that the blazing fire will yearn for them. On the Day of Resurrection, the hellfire will have two functions to perform: the first will be the 'companionship' from which the disbeliever will not be able to extricate him/herself, while the second is that it will not give the disbeliever any opportunity to escape. Speaking about the hellfire, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that He will ask it on the Day of Resurrection whether or not it is full and it will reply by asking for more (people) to torture (*Qaf:* 30). He *Glorified is He* then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱذۡكُرُواْ نِعۡمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ إِذۡ هَمَّ قَوۡمٌ أَن يَبۡسُطُوٓاْ إِلَيۡكُمۡ
أَيۡدِيَهُمۡ فَكَفَّ أَيۡدِيَهُمۡ عَنكُمۡۖ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَۚ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلۡيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾

You who believe, remember God's blessing on you when a certain people were about to raise their hands against you and He restrained them. Be mindful of God: let the believers put their trust in Him [11] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 11)

Remembrance, as we have previously explained, means to call something to mind. As a matter of fact, man is liable to be afflicted with heedlessness, yet s/he must not continue in this state. On the other hand, some people may yet play with people's emotions and say, 'Allah knows that I do not remember Him'. When someone hears these words, s/he might bitterly rebuke and censure the one who said them; but then the person explains what s/he meant by completing the statement, saying, 'For how could I remember Him, when I never forget Him?' Upon hearing this, one is calmed.

Once again, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…the blessings which Allah has bestowed…' using the singular word *Ni'ma* (a blessing) rather than the plural *Ni'am* because He deserves to be thanked for every single blessing He gives, and every single blessing is great enough to merit thanks. It also means that Allah's Blessing refers to every grace He sends to His creatures, the greatest of these blessings being that He is our Lord. He *the Almighty* says: '…Remember the blessings which Allah has bestowed upon you when (hostile) people were about to lay hands on you, but He withheld their hands from you….' As long as the word 'when' is used, this means that a specific blessing is being referred to here. Allah *the Almighty* is clarifying the matter to us, to 'Remember how Allah blessed you at the time this event occurred' because He mentions a specific time, and told us to remember His Blessing on that occasion. In fact, He *the Almighty* is reminding us of the blessing which occurred when people were about to lay their hands on us.

That is, there is a flexing of the hand (*qabd*) which is a gesture of stillness and immobility, and an extension of the hand (*bast*) which is an indication of activity. The true blessing we obtain in this life from Allah is to be able to recognise His Bounties. The blessing mentioned in this verse is how Allah prevented further harm from the disbelievers from reaching the believers, after the disbelieving hands had been outstretched with evil and wrongdoings. If we choose to pause at this point in the verse mentioning the disbelievers' extending their hands in evil, some of us may mistakenly think that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the material means of His creatures as a channel for His decrees to reach us. Some of us may incorrectly assume that Allah's Blessings reach us by material means through the physical bodies of His Creation. However, this is not the meaning of these noble words. When we continue to read the rest of the verse, we clearly see that the Divine Blessing granted by Allah was that He arrested their hands from continuing to do wrong. In Arabic, the word '*bast'* (to stretch out) is commonly used to refer to a tongue uttering obscene language, and this verb '*bast'* is similarly used when describing a hand that commits mischief.

We can see that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the phrases ‘on you’ and ‘from you’ in these verses, both of which refer to the believers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The believers closely adhered to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, and any harm reaching Prophet Muhammad also harms those who believe in him. It is possible that these verses are referring to the events of the tribe of Banu An-Nadir. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had signed a treaty with Banu An-Nadir stating that they would not aid the enemies of Islam in any way, and that if one of the Muslims mistakenly killed a man from outside Medina, Banu An-Nadir would help to pay the compensation. Prophet Muhammad had sent a Muslim on a raiding party, and two men who had a treaty with the Muslims were inadvertently killed. Indemnities were demanded for the two men, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not have the money to pay them, so he went to Banu An-Nadir to ask for help in paying them. They welcomed him and said they would give him food and drink before giving him what he asked for. Then, they sent one of them to climb a wall in order to drop a boulder onto Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as he sat next to one of their houses. However, Allah *Glorified is He* told His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of* Allah *be upon him* what they had planned, and therefore he stood up and left without delay.(1)

‘When (hostile) people intended to stretch out their hands *(yabsuto)* against you and He (Allah) withheld their hands from (harming) you’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 11). The Arabic word used here for ‘intended’ is’ ‘*hamma*’, which means ‘to consider doing something’. If the idea then moves on to the next stage of action, it becomes a ‘purpose’ (*qasd*). The Arabic word ‘*hamm’* (insistent thought) can be identified as something that overwhelms a person’s hidden thoughts, and is accompanied by’ anxiety and apprehension’ (*ghamm*). We often hear people saying that they are weighed down by an insistent thought (*hamm*) and apprehension (*ghamm*), or ‘concern and anxiety’ because an idea that does not leave the mind alone will cause anxiety. An insistent thought is an enemy which no one can conquer because it infiltrates the heart, whereas the mind might be able to repel any other enemy. We know that Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb (Abu Al-Hassan) *Allah be pleased with him* was well known for his clear rulings in religious jurisprudence[1], and that he had sufficient knowledge to answer whatever question he was asked. The extent of his knowledge led 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* to say about a particular matter, 'Indeed, this is a vexing problem in the absence of Abu Al-Hassan! 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* considered complicated problems worrisome if Abu Al-Hassan *Allah be pleased with him* was not there to solve them. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* would even seek refuge (from Allah) from a place where 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was not present. When people came to know this about the breadth of his knowledge, they started wondering, 'Where does he get these answers from?' They came up with a puzzle to observe how he would solve it. They started by posing the question among themselves, 'The universe is immense and contains some objects that are stronger than others. Certain powers in our world can certainly defeat all other powers'. Then, they tried to think of a particular force that is stronger than everything else. One of them said, 'The mountain is the strongest creation', but another replied, 'Yet we can cut stones from it with an axe made of iron'. As they continued to try to select the strongest object in creation, 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* came along. They directed their problem towards him, 'O Abu Al-Hassan, what is the strongest force in Allah's creation?' Imam Ali *Allah be pleased with him* answered as though he was reading from a book, showing that he had thought of the matter beforehand. He specified the strongest force, stating a number of forces that were the strongest. He said, 'The strongest of Allah's created forces are ten in number': 'The firm mountains are strong, but iron can break through these mountains. Fire melts iron, but water puts out fire. The clouds that are suspended between the sky and the earth carry water, but the wind breaks up these clouds. The Son of Adam can deter the wind and keep moving in order to carry out his worldly affairs, but drunkenness overpowers the Son of Adam. Sleep overpowers drunkenness, but concern and grief (*hamm*) can overpower sleep. Consequently, the strongest of Allah's forces are concern and grief'.

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(1) The story of Banu An-Nadir throwing a stone at the Prophet *peace and blessings* of Allah *be upon him*

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(1) The story of Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* about the strongest soldiers of Allah

We cannot pass by the word ‘*hamm’* in the Quran without mentioning the other instances in which it is mentioned in Allah’s Book. One of these occasions is found in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and people frequently ask about it in public meetings and in letters.(1) In the following verses, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the attempt of Al-’Aziz’s wife (Zulaykha) to seduce Yusuf (Joseph): ‘And, indeed, she desired him (*hammat bihi*). And he would have desired her (*hamma biha*), if he had not been shown the proof of his Lord. But We turned him away from evil and abomination, for he was one of Our sincere worshippers’. (*Yusuf:* 24)

Let us examine this matter. Some people find it hard to believe that Prophet *Yusuf* (Joseph) *peace be upon him* could ever think of such a thing. However, we can primarily argue that a thought running in the mind is not an actual action and that it can be possible. Indeed, to think of something and then correct oneself might even require more power than not thinking of it at all. Resistance requires one to fight the soul’s impulse, and fighting temptation is hard. We can also add the fact that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had not yet received any revelation, and was not yet an actual Messenger at that time. Here, the verse says: ‘And, indeed, she desired him (*hammat bihi*). He would have desired her (*hamma biha*), if he had not been shown the proof of his Lord’ (*Yusuf:* 24). Thus, we can see that the wife of Al-’Aziz (Zulaykha) was the one who initiated the attempt to seduce Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. Did this lead to any action? No. This would have required the assent of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. So: ‘she desired him’ means that she would have liked to move on to the stage of action, but Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* refused to allow that. Regarding the one who was being seduced, namely Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He would have desired her (*hamma biha*), if he had not been shown the proof of his Lord’. (*Yusuf:* 24)

Let us give an example to make this easier to understand. If someone says to you, ‘I would visit you, but only if that person was not with you’, this means that the speaker will actually not visit you. In the same way, we find that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* saw the evidence of the truth from his

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(1) The story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and the nobleman’s wife (Zulaykha)

Lord, and therefore did not desire her. This distinction can be used to confirm the argument that chooses to absolve Yusuf (Joseph) of even thinking in that way. She desired him, but in order for the act to be carried out, there had to be acceptance from the other party. Thus, the action did not occur, not because she refused it, but because he refused to comply. He would have desired her, had he not seen an evidence of the truth from his Lord.

Why does Allah say that Yusuf (Joseph) would have desired her had he not seen an evidence of the truth from his Lord? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us this story to show us the reason why Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* refused the seduction. This refusal was not due to physical impairment on his part. In fact, were it not for the revelation he received from His Lord, the misdeed could have continued. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to tell us that Yusuf's masculinity was sound and that his virility was unimpaired. It was devout abstinence, and not a biological restraint. This is how we understand the nature of the account between the nobleman's wife (Zulaykha) and Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*.

Let us return to the verse we are currently examining: 'When (hostile) people were about to stretch out their hands against you' (*al-Ma'ida:* 11). The word '*qawm'* (people) is derived from the word '*qiyam'* that means 'to stand'. Standing is a position of activity and fervour. As we clarified before, a man's levels of activity can include standing, sitting, reclining, being recumbent or sleeping. These levels are in ascending order of comfort. Standing is the most exhausting level because the weight of the body is carried by the feet over a small area. Sitting distributes the weight over a larger area, and when a person reclines, the area which bears his weight is even larger. Consequently, the word '*qawm'* is used to mean 'a group of men' because it is a man's nature to stand to attention, whilst a woman's nature tends to be calm and concealing. As such, '*qawm'* means 'men' in contrast to the word '*nisa'* which means 'women', for it is not in the nature of women to rise vigorously. An Arab poet said, 'I do not know, nor am I close to knowing, if the tribe of Hisn are men (qawm) or women (nisa')!'

When the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'When (hostile) people (*qawm*) were about to stretch out their hands against you' (*al-Ma'ida:* 11), this means that no women thought about harming Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this incident. We also find that the Arabic word' *bast'* (to stretch out) raises a question. Does '*bast*' mean 'to extend the hand to harm others' or 'to extend the hand to provide for others'? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For if Allah were to grant (*yabsut*, the verb of *bast*) (in this world) abundant sustenance to (all of) His servants, they would behave on earth with wanton insolence' (*ash-Shura:* 27). In this case, the Arabic word '*bast*' means 'to give'. As for the opposite meaning of the word '*bast*' (i.e. 'to harm'), Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that Abel said to Cain: 'Even if you stretch out your hand (*basat*) against me to slay me, I will not stretch out my hand against you (*basit*) to slay you' (*al-Ma'ida:* 28).

'Stretching out a hand' is a phrase that refers to physical action. This active physical movement is the tangible expression of an intangible thought that had already passed through the mind; to stretch out one's hand requires prior planning and deliberation. Thus, we learn from these verses that these people stretched out their hands (to harm) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers.

And when we look at the experiences of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with his enemies, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And remember (O Prophet Muhammad), how those who were bent on denying the Truth schemed against you in order to restrain you (from preaching), to slay you or to drive you away. They plotted and planned and Allah too had planned, but Allah is the Best of planners' (*al-Anfal:* 30). They sat together and made schemes and plots, but how can witnesses ever be able to see such schemes until the scheming hands have become stretched out to carry out their plans? In their evil plans, this group of disbelievers wanted to restrain Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by any of several methods. These included restricting him to his home, imprisoning him, inflicting injuries to incapacitate him from moving, killing him or banishing him from his land. But what was the outcome of their schemes?

For anyone to harm Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was an offence to all the believers because the believers could not be guided without their Prophet. Consequently, because harming Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was like harming all the believers, Allah stopped the disbelievers' hands and turned their plans against them.

The word '*makr*' (translated as 'to plot and plan') in Arabic literally refers to a tree whose branches are intertwined in a manner that conceals which leaf grows from which branch. Metaphorically, '*makr*' means to plot secretly. It is evidence of weakness and not strength. Strong people face their obstacles directly and do not choose to plot. Therefore, it is said that only weak people plot against others. Moreover, some people think that women's weakness motivates them to plot cunningly. They find evidence for these views from two Quranic verses. The first are Allah's words about Satan: 'Verily, Satan's plot is always weak' (*an-Nisa':* 76). The second verse narrates how a man described the plot of Zulaykha (to seduce Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*): 'Verily, your plot is great!' (*Yusuf:* 28)

To sum up, only weak people choose to plot schemes, as they are unable to face problems directly. However, even if human beings conceal their plots from others, they cannot conceal them from Allah, for He knows all that hearts conceal. The Lord's planning is more powerful than that of any human being, which is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'They plotted and planned and Allah too had planned, but Allah is the Best of planners' (*al-Anfal:* 30).

We notice that Allah's plans are always good. The Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to let the enemies of Islam know that despite all their plotting, they could not harm Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by any means, either by persecuting his people or by plotting against him. Despite their never-ending schemes, the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left his house in Mecca and set out for Medina as they lay sleeping.' And We have enveiled them, so they cannot see.' (*Ya Sin:* 9)

We are amazed by all the ways in which Allah kept the hands of the disbelievers from harming Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah protected His Messenger, Muhammad, by mobilizing inanimate objects, plants, animals, and human beings to guard him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* threw dust (1) and covered the sight of the disbelievers, and thus dust became one of Allah's soldiers. Asma' (1), the daughter of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with them* carried food to Prophet Muhammad and her father in the cave(2) as she tended her flock and the sheep ate the grass, thereby covering the tracks made by the caravan of Prophet Muhammad. As a result, plants also joined this troop protecting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the disbelievers' harm, as did this herd of sheep. The hooves of a horse (belonging to Suraqa ibn Malik(3) sank into the ground, doves built a nest outside Prophet Muhammad's cave and a spider spun its web over the cave's entrance(4). All of Allah's soldiers responded to His Divine Command and participated in guarding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the disbelievers' grasp.

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(1) The story of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* throwing dust over the heads of the disbelievers.

Even more remarkable than that, Allah *Glorified is He* arrested the disbelievers' hands by using other disbelievers; we find that Prophet Muhammad, who came to guide mankind from the glooms of darkness into light, was shown the way to his abode of immigration (Medina) by a disbeliever. Consequently, we can see that spiritual guides can utilize worldly, material guides; here, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the bearer of the spiritual light for mankind, made use of material assistance provided by a disbeliever. We know that another group of Allah's soldiers in the city he immigrated to (Medina) were Jews despite their obstinacy. Did they not previously taunt the Aws and Al-Khazraj tribes, even before Prophet Muhammad had been sent by Allah? They would say to the Aws and Al-Khazraj tribes, 'A prophet will arise amongst you (the Arab tribes). We shall follow him and slay you as 'Ad and Iram were slain'.

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(1) The story of Asma' carrying food to her father and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while they were in the cave

(2) Reference is to the Cave of Hira'.

(3) The story of Suraqa ibn Malik and his horse while pursuing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*

(4) From the proofreader: The scholars have differed concerning the Hadith about the spider spinning a web over the entrance of the cave. It was classified as hasan (good) by Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar in Fath Al-Bari and by Ibn Katheer in Al-Bidayah wa'Al-Nihayah (3/222), but it was classified as weak by Al-Albani in Al-Silsilah Al-Da'eefah. Ahmad Shakir said in Tahqeeq Al-Musnad (3251), 'There is some dispute concerning it'. The commentators on Al-Musnad said (3251), 'It is classified as weak'. Concerning the Hadith about the doves, it was similarly classified as weak by the commentators on Al-Musnad.

When the Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj heard that a prophet had appeared in Mecca, they said, 'This is the prophet of whom the Jews warned us, so we must not let them reach him first!' Hence, they went to him first, embraced Islam, and swore allegiance to him. However, the Jews disbelieved in his message and denied what they had said before he was sent by Allah. So, Mu'adh ibn Al-Jabal, Bishr ibn Al-Barra' ibn Ma'rur and Dawud ibn Salama *Allah be pleased with them* said to them, 'O Jews, fear Allah and embrace Islam, for you used to predict your victory over us by means of a prophet when we were an idolatrous people, and you told us he would appear and described him just as we see him now!' Salam ibn Al-Mashkam, one of the tribe of Banu An-Nadir, said, 'He has not brought us anything we recognise, and he is not the one of whom we used to speak to you.'(1) After that, Medina became the destination of the Muslims' Emigration.

Thus, we can see that falsehood may serve truth, and unbelief may serve faith. 'Abdullah ibn 'Urayqat who was a disbeliever offered himself as a guide for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accompanied him on the Emigration, and he did not seek the bounty which Quraysh had offered to anyone who delivered Prophet Muhammad to them. Consequently, we see that their hands were turned away in many different ways.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was involved in incidents that the Companions witnessed wherein Allah *Glorified is He* gave him extraordinary wonders that verified his truthfulness. We do not consider them miracles as such because the Noble Book (the Quran) is the miracle of Islam until the end of time. However, Prophet Muhammad's life contained physical miracles, like the ones which were offered to other Messengers before him. The Lord *Glorified is He* did not want these extraordinary incidents to be witnessed by all the Muslims, but some of the Muslims and disbelievers of that time witnessed them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* needed wonders that could verify that he was indeed a Messenger. The Prophet's

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(1) *Ibn Kathir*, *(Tafsir)*, *narrated on the authority of Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him*

Companion Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him*(1) said, ‘There was a Jew in Medina who used to give me a loan of dates that I would repay at harvest time’. (Jabir *Allah be pleased with him* owned land which was on the road to Ruma).’ The harvest failed one particular year,(2) and when the Jew came to me at harvest-time I had nothing for him, so I began to ask him for a year’s extension. He refused. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was informed of this, and therefore he said to his Companions, “Let us go and ask the Jew to give Jabir more time.” They came to me at my orchard, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* began to speak to the Jew, who said, “O Abu Qasim. I will not give him more time.” When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw this he stood up and walked around the palms, and then he returned and asked him again, but he refused. I brought a few soft dates and placed them before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad ate from them and then said, “Where is your hut, Jabir?” I told him where it was and he said, “Spread out a blanket for me in it.” I did so and he went in and took a nap. When he woke up, I brought him some more dates, and he ate them. Then he got up and spoke to the Jew again. The Jewish man again refused to give him more time. Hence, he got up and walked around the fresh date palms a second time, and then said, “O Jabir, harvest and pay (your debt).” He stood in the harvesting area and I picked enough from the trees to pay my debt, still having more than I needed. I went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him this good news, and he said, “I testify that I am the Messenger of Allah!”’(3)

In another instance, some of the Companions did not have enough water for their needs (4), and therefore Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dipped his hands in the water they had and it became ample for all the people to drink from it. Could any of those who witnessed this miracle deny it? Of course no one could! But is this miracle meant for us? If we trust the one who narrated it to us, we will not find it implausible that Allah could have blessed the water for His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, we also know that Allah *Glorified is He* preserved the Quran to be his lasting miracle, as Allah said: 'Behold, it is We who sent down the Quran, and indeed We will be its Guardian (from all corruption).' (*al-Hijr:* 9) Allah, *Glorified be He,* also said: 'Falsehood cannot approach it (the Quran) from before it or from behind it; (it is) a revelation from a (Lord who is) Wise and Praiseworthy'. (*Fussilat:* 42)

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(1) The story of the loan of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* to the Jew and the miracle of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when he reached the wall

(2) In another narration, he said, ‘One year the harvest was different than usual’.

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

(4) The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* placing his noble hand in the water to make it suffice all his Companions

It was reliably narrated (1) that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took little provisions on one journey, but he prayed to Allah as He decreed and then fed an entire army with the food. Those who live after the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can either believe in these miracles or choose not to believe in them, but every believer who knows the rank and position of Prophet Muhammad in his Lord's sight should believe in these wonders when they are reliably narrated with a chain of transmission that is, without doubt, they are sound. Consequently, there is no need to argue with those people who do not believe in the physical miracles, and we say to them, 'None of you are obliged to believe in these miracles, but you are obliged to believe in the miracle of the Quran'. The wonders which occurred were either meant to strengthen Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or to strengthen the faith of his Companions on occasions when they were overwhelmed by grievous events that shook them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So that We might strengthen your heart,' (*al-Furqan:* 32) and He says:' (For) there and then the believers were tried and they were shaken with a dreadful fear.' (*al-Ahzab:* 11) Clearly, the believers were in need of signs from Heaven to make their faith firm. The conclusion is that all the physical wonders which were given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were not meant for all the Muslims in general, but were rather meant for those who witnessed them. As a result, these wonders do not need to be debated because the only miracle which was meant for all the people was the Book of Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) The story of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* feeding all the Muslim army with very little food

Many of the enemies of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were determined to harm him. Did a Jewish woman(1) not want to poison him, but Allah stopped her hand (from doing this)? There was also the incident of Banu An-Nadir(2), when they wanted to drop a boulder on Prophet Muhammad, but the Prophet moved away before the assassin dropped it on him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Also, Safwan ibn Ummayya(3) wanted to take revenge on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after the battle of Badr. He hired ‘Umayr ibn Wahb Al-Jumahi and said to him, ‘Go to Medina and kill Muhammad, and I will pay your debts and care for your family as though they were mine for as long as they live’. As a result, ‘Umayr went to Medina and approached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Prophet said to him, ‘What has brought you here, O ‘Umayr? ‘Umayr replied, ‘I have come due to the prisoner you are holding, so treat him well; ‘Umayr’s son was being held as a prisoner of war by the Muslims. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked, ‘Then why is that sword hanging from your neck?’ ‘Umayr answered, ‘Fie upon swords! Have they done us any good?’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Tell me the truth. Why have you come here?’ ‘Umayr said, ‘I have come for no other reason than that’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘No, for you sat with Safwan ibn Ummayya in the Hijr and spoke of those men of Quraysh whose dead bodies were in the wells (of Badr). Then you said, “Were it not for my debts and my family, I would set out to slay Muhammad.” Consequently, Safwan took it upon himself to care for your debts and sustain your family so that you would slay me. But Allah is the One Who protected me from you’. ‘Umayr said, ‘I testify that you are the Messenger of Allah! O Messenger of Allah; we used to call you a liar when you brought us tidings from Heaven and the Revelation which was sent down to you. There was no one present in that place except Safwan and myself. By Allah, I know that no one but Allah could have told you of it. Praise be to Allah, who has guided me to Islam!'(1)

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(1) The story of the Jewish lady who put poison in the food of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

(2) The story of Banu An-Nadir throwing a stone at Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

(3) The story of Safwan ibn Umayya hiring ‘Umayr ibn Wahb Al-Jumahi to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

Jabir *Allah be pleased with him* related another example(2) which was about the battle of Dhat Ar-Riqa'. He narrated that a man named Ghawrath ibn Al-Harith approached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'Who shall save you from me?' The Prophet replied, 'Allah'. The sword fell from the man's hand and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* picked it up and said, 'And who will save you from me?' The man said, 'Be the better one of those who took the sword!' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Do you bear witness that there is no deity but Allah?' The man said, 'No! But I pledge to you that I will not fight you or join any people who fight you'. Jabir *Allah be pleased with him* said about that incident, 'We slept for a while, and then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called us. We found a Bedouin man sitting with him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "This man took my sword as I slept, and I woke as he held it unsheathed in his hand. He asked me, 'Who will save you from me?' and I said to him, 'Allah'. And here he now sits' ". Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* let him go and did not punish him. (3) And when the Bedouin man went to his companions, he said, "I come to you from the best of people!"'(4)

When the man heard the first time that Allah will save Prophet Muhammad from him, the sword fell from his hand as his body trembled and it returned to his natural instinctive faith. And when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* picked up the sword and asked the man who could save him, he did not say' Hubal', 'al-Lat' or 'al-'Uzza' (idols in Arabia). The man knew that idol-worship was nothing but a string of lies; had he truly believed in his idols, he would have said one of their names. Even if a man lies to all the people in the world, he will not be able to lie to himself. The word ‘Allah’ is what shook the man’s disbelief and returned him to the Truth.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham, (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya)*

(2) *The story of Ghawrath ibn Al-Harith who wanted to kill the Prophet may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him*

(3) *(Narrated by Al-Bukhari) / Ibn Ishaq added that Angel Gabriel peace be upon him, struck the man on his chest, and he dropped the sword. The Prophet picked it up and then said, 'And who will save you from me?' to which the man replied, 'No one.' Al-Waqidi added that the man embraced Islam and then returned to his people and guided many souls.*

(4) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Bidaya, iv.* 84

At the battle of Badr(1), we find that the Companion of Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was on the side fighting with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, whilst his son, 'Abd Ar-Rahman, was on the side fighting with the disbelievers. Sometime after his son had embraced Islam, the son was sitting with his father and reminiscing. The son said, ‘I saw you on the day of Badr and avoided you’. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* replied, ‘But had I seen you, I would not have avoided you.’(2) Abu Bakr’s son saw his father, but did not kill him, and there is no doubt that a struggle ensued in his mind and soul between his love for his father and his allegiance to Hubal or those other idols; he realised that his father was worth much more to him than those statues. When Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Had I seen you, I would have killed you’, the inner decision was between his faith in Allah and the love for his son, and faith was dearer to the soul of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*. Both Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and his son were logical with themselves in this regard.

These actions occur because if innate human nature is not interfered with by anyone, it will shine forth with faith. We can see this clearly in the early days of Islam when the Companions were persecuted in Mecca and made their first emigration to Abyssinia. Did they go there randomly, or did they follow (in faith) a noble plan of Prophet Muhammad? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first searched for a land where they could go and be accepted by the people as emigrants. He looked at the Arab Peninsula and found that Quraysh were able to control all the tribes of Arabia during the pilgrimage season, and therefore no tribe could protect the emigrants. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, ‘If you went to the land of the Abyssinians, there is a king there under whom no one is oppressed, and it is a land of sincerity. Stay there until a time when Allah shall give you relief from what you are now suffering.’(3)

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(1) *The story of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him with his son Abd Ar-Rahman*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba and Al-Hakim on the authority of Ayyub*

(3) *Ibn Hisham, (As-Sira An-nabawiyya)*

Indeed, the Muslims travelled to Abyssinia(1) as emigrants. Quraysh attempted to bring the Muslims out of the land of Negus (King of Abyssinia). They even sent an envoy to bring them back, but Negus refused. Negus heard about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and realised that he was the Prophet the *Injeel* (Gospel) foretold about. It is certain that Negus embraced Islam because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for him when he died. His embracement of Islam was indeed a great reward from Allah for protecting the believers. It was a great blessing for Negus to die as a Muslim and for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to lead his Funeral Prayer.

These were all incidents in which Allah protected Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers from harm to verify the Truth for all who witnessed these incidents. Thus, the believers were able to affirm they were on the right path and that Allah was not going to desert them. They should not think their enemy was stronger than they were, for Allah is more powerful than all His creatures. '…And He withheld their hands from (harming) you….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 11) Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to prepare the believers for the task of conveying His guidance to mankind. Therefore, the believers have to persevere in obeying Allah's Commandments and remain conscious of Him for Allah to protect them from harm. A disbeliever can only defeat a believer who is negligent in adhering to Allah's Guidance, for the Lord *Glorified is He* does not state Quranic principles and then let physical laws of nature over-ride such principles. He said, 'And that, verily, Our soldiers will indeed (in the end) be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 173)

Consequently, if you see an army of Muslims being defeated, then know that they have abandoned Allah's way so Allah abandoned them. When some Muslims disobeyed the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the disbelievers defeated them. Allah does not change His physical laws of nature for the sake of people who attribute themselves to Him, but they do not obey His commandments and Guidance. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…If you help (the Cause of) Allah, He will help you and will make your steps firm' (*Muhammad:* 7). And He *Glorified is He* says: 'So remember Me, and I will remember you…' (*al-Baqara:* 152).

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(1) *The story of Negus (the king of Abyssynia) with the Muslims*

If you attribute yourself to Islam, you must truly adhere to its teachings. If you see believers go to battle and be defeated, be sure that they had abandoned Allah's Way of guidance. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And how many a prophet fought (in Allah's Cause), and with them (fought) many Allah-devoted men. They did not lose heart because of what they had to suffer in Allah's Cause, and they neither did weaken, and nor did they abase themselves (before the enemy). Allah loves those who are patient in adversity; All that they said was, "Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and our extravagances in our affairs! Make firm our steps and help us against those who deny the Truth!" Whereupon Allah granted them the rewards of this world, as well as the good rewards of the life to come: for Allah loves those who do good' (*Al-'Imran:* 146-148).

Those who fought alongside Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had to endure some sufferings. They did not weaken, but rather were patient and asked the Lord *Glorified is He* to forgive their sins. They knew what the source of their weakness was, and they sought Allah's aid against it. Thereafter, what did Allah do for them? He *the Almighty* granted them rewards in this worldly life and the amplest rewards of the Hereafter, for Allah loves the doers of good. This is the faithful conduct that guards one against being defeated and deceived by the enemy; it is a result of being pious and constantly aware of Allah's Existence and Company. When a Muslim is in Allah's Company, none of Allah's Creatures is able to touch him.

We have an illustration of that principle in the story of Prophet Muhammad's Emigration. The Prophet's Companion, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was eager to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* related that on the night they were in the cave, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'O Messenger of Allah, let me enter the cave before you, so if there is a snake I can deal with it before you enter'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* agreed to this, and therefore Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* entered the cave and began to search for any holes there. Every time he found a hole, he would tear a part of his cloak to fill the hole with it, until he used his entire cloak for this purpose.

There was one hole remaining, so he used his feet to cover it and then asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to enter.

When morning came, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Where is your cloak, Abu Bakr?' Abu Bakr told him what he had done, and as a result Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised his hands and said, 'O Allah, place Abu Bakr with me on the Day of Resurrection!' Allah *Glorified is He* then revealed to him, 'Verily, Allah has granted your request'(1) Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* saw the disbelievers as they passed in front of the cave, and said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*' If one of them looks beneath his feet, he will see us!' To that, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O Abu Bakr, what do you think (of the protection) of two men when Allah is their third Companion?'(2)

This was a perfect response because they were both in Allah's Company. If a believer is in the Company of Allah, whom no sight can encompass, then no harm will be able to encompass the believer either. We may not know how, as we do not know all of Allah's Secrets, but He is the All-Powerful and Almighty.

With regard to people, we find that if a young child goes out by himself he may be harmed by other children, but if he goes out with one of his guardians, such as a father or an older brother, the other children are not able to harm him. Similarly, we should consider ourselves under the Guardianship of Allah, and seek refuge in His Company. When a believer does that, Allah's soldiers will provide protection if anyone seeks to harm him. Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verse by saying: 'And in Allah let the believers place their trust'. (*al-Ma'ida:* 11) Consequently, do not say, 'Our numbers and resources are few'. You are responsible for preparing whatever you are able to, and then you must leave success to Allah's aid.

'Hence, make ready for their confrontation whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster.' (*al-Anfal:* 60) The history of faith shows us many instances in which small forces have defeated larger gatherings by Allah's Will. Someone might say, 'This is a material matter which requires great numbers and resources' to which we reply, 'The Lord *Glorified is He* told us to make ready whatever we are able to, not more than we are able to; and He *Glorified is He* possesses subtle soldiers which cannot be seen'.

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(1) *Abu Na'im, (Hilyat Al-Awliya')*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

'…I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the Truth…' (*al-Anfal:* 12). As long as Allah has cast terror into the hearts of the enemies, the matter will be settled, regardless of the numbers and resources involved. One must first prepare whatever he can, and then place his trust in Allah. This is the way of actively ensuring victory.

However, we should be aware that placing our trust in Allah is not the same as being slothfully dependant on Him. The one who places his trust in Allah must be aware that every physical part of his body has a spiritual role; it has to implement Allah's Law. The ear hears the commandments of the Lord *Glorified is He* and as a result, you should obey these orders. If you hear people mocking Allah's signs, you have to turn away from them. The tongue speaks, so do not use it for anything other than good speech. Every part of the body has its function, and the function of the heart is to have certitude and to trust in Him. Let us remember that the feet are for walking, the hands are for acting, and the heart is for trusting. Therefore, do not assign the work of the heart to the feet or the hands, because to truly trust Allah means to act with your body and trust with your heart.

There are many who work in their lives without trusting Allah, until their actions become all in vain. We find that if a farmer does not place his trust in Allah, his crops grow very well until a storm, or a change in weather suddenly destroys his harvest, driving all is work in vain.

However, beware of neglecting the means because if you neglect the means, then you are not placing your trust in Allah. Some people choose to sluggishly depend on Allah's Assistance by assigning the function of the heart to the limbs. If someone claims, 'I do not work because I simply place my trust in Allah', challenge their argument. Tell them, 'Alright, let us see how you truly trust Allah'. Bring before him a plate of his favourite food, and when he stretches out his hand to bring the food closer, stop him, and say, 'No! Let the food jump from the plate into your mouth'.

Allah *Glorified is He* told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stories of the other Messengers in order to strengthen his faith and provide him with educational examples. Allah did not want the Prophet’s heart to be aggrieved by the actions of the Jews or the idolaters: ‘If you experience, O Muhammad, any denial and abuse, much of that was directed to the Messengers who came before you’. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِيثَٰقَ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ وَبَعَثْنَا مِنْهُمُ ٱثْنَىْ عَشَرَ نَقِيبًا ۖ وَقَالَ ٱللَّهُ إِنِّى
مَعَكُمْ ۖ لَئِنْ أَقَمْتُمُ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَيْتُمُ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَءَامَنتُم بِرُسُلِى وَعَزَّرْتُمُوهُمْ
وَأَقْرَضْتُمُ ٱللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا لَّأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنكُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتِكُمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّكُمْ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى
مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ ۚ فَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ مِنكُمْ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَآءَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ﴿١٢﴾

God took a pledge from the Children of Israel. We made twelve leaders arise among them, and God said, ‘I am with you: if you keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan, I will wipe out your sins and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams. Any of you who now ignore this [pledge] will be far from the right path’ [12] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 12)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of the pledge which was taken from the children of Israel. This might mean the pledge of the seed of Adam *peace be upon him* the pledge concerning which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And behold, Allah took a solemn pledge from the prophets’ (*Al-’Imran:* 81), or the pledge concerning which He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Hold fast with (all your) strength to what We have given you’ (*al-Baqara:* 63).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘When we appointed from among them twelve leaders’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 12). Let us consider the religious rule that Allah *Glorified is He* decreed here. He did not represent the different tribes of people with a single delegate (from only one of the tribes) as this could have caused tribal disputes to arise. Hence, He chose twelve leaders to represent the number of the tribes of Israel. In this way, none of the tribes felt estranged and they did not ask, ‘Why was a leader not chosen from our tribe?’ This’ leader’ was an individual who managed the tribe’s social and religious affairs. The Arabic word for ‘leader’ is ‘*naqeeb*’, which is derived from the root letters (*nun-qaf-ba*) from which comes the word '*naqb*' which means 'crevice', i.e. a deep split in any solid mass.

The fact that the Lord *Glorified is He* chose the word '*naqeeb*' indicates that the true leader must be vigilant and alert when he assigns appropriate roles to each individual. The leader must focus on assigning the work in a way that best serves the collective effort of the group. Therefore, in the tribe, every member should have an appropriate duty and position. This can only be achieved by an insightful, unearthing, and investigative (*tanqeeb*) procedure. Therefore, the leader should look into the condition of each individual and his inclinations, and then place each person in the right position. He should not stop at the superficial aspects of matters, but rather investigate everything in depth to discover the roots as well as the means of every individual. Consequently, choosing a leader from each tribe prevented the tribal conflicts that could have arisen if a single leader had been chosen for all the tribes. Also, a leader chosen from each tribe will be thoroughly informed about his own people.

In our daily lives we often hear the word '*manaqib*' (depths) which is derived from the same root as '*naqeeb*' (leader). It is used to refer to the 'virtues' of an individual; if a person is described as having 'depths', it means that he has many virtues of which other people are aware. In fact, the word indicates that a virtuous person should not boast of his virtues himself, but rather leave the people to discover (*yanqubu*) his virtues on their own accord. Likewise, the treasures of the earth and those of lost civilisations are under the ground and we must dig (*nanqub*) to find them. On the other hand, remains above the surface of the earth are blown away by the wind and worn down by weathering until nothing is left for anyone to see. The same root gives us the word '*niqab*' which means the veil with which a woman covers her face.

The Lord's words: 'Behold, I am with you,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12) offers the believers a further aspect of faith, so none of them will imagine they have to face the enemies of Allah on their own. Each believer will realise that they are aided by Allah, and as a result s/he will not weaken or falter as long as they are believers. This is similar to Allah's saying: 'Hence, make ready (for their confrontation) with them any force and war mounts you are able to muster' (*al-Anfal:* 60). Once the believers have gathered all that they can, they should leave the rest up to Allah. His words: 'Behold, I am with you' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12) also mean that the leaders of the tribes were not free to do whatever they wanted. Allah informs them that he will accompany their individual actions and witness how each of them manages their tribal matters.

After this, Allah said: 'If (Arabic: *la'in*) you establish prayer, pay *zakat*, believe in My Messengers and assist them, and offer to Allah a beautiful loan, I will surely efface your bad deeds.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12) The Arabic compound word' *la'in'* ('if') comprises both a condition and a vow, as though Allah *Glorified is He* is saying, 'By My Might, I vow that if you are constant in prayer, and you do such-and-such, your reward will be that I will erase your bad deeds'. The Arabic word '*la'* indicates a vow and the Arabic word '*in'* indicates a condition. Signifying a condition is one of the functions of the Arabic word '*in*'.

A vow, as we know, requires a main clause, and a conditional phrase also requires a main clause. One might say to a student, 'If you study, you will succeed', which a conditional statement is. Another person might say, 'By Allah, I will surely do such and such', which is a statement containing a vow. The words 'By Allah' are the vow, and the phrase 'I will surely do such and such' is the main clause of the vow which is emphasised by the word 'surely'. When a vow is found in a sentence on its own, its main clause comes after it, and the same is true for a conditional statement.

However, what if we have a sentence that contains both a vow and a condition? Are there now two main clauses, one for the vow and the other for the conditional phrase? When you have a vow and a condition in the same sentence, look at which one comes first. The one which comes first is the more important element. Thus, its main clause is the phrase which is given later in the sentence, and there is no need for a separate main clause for the other element.

Consequently, in this verse the element which comes first is the vow which lies in the first part of the word (*la'in*); '*la'* is the vow, while '*in'* is the condition. This is similar to a person saying, 'I vow that if Zayd stands, I will surely stand'. In this case the main clause belongs to the vow. On the other hand, if we had said, 'If Zayd stands, I vow by Allah to treat him well', the conditional statement comes before the vow.

All of this is proper if there is no element in the sentence that requires a predicate, such as a subject or another component following similar grammatical rules as subjects. But if such an element exists, then the conditional phrase is the more important one, meaning that we should consider the main clause as part of the conditional phrase and not a part of the vow; this is because the conditional phrase is now essential in the sentence, while the vow is only meant for emphasis. The grammarian Ibn Malik states this rule in his *Alfiyya* as follows: 'When a condition and a vow come together, leave out the main clause for whichever of them comes second, since it is included in the main clause of the other; this is unless they both follow something which requires a predicate, in which case the conditional clause should be considered the more important, whatever order they happen to be in'.

In this verse of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* of the Quran, the vow comes before the conditional clause (as is clearly shown by the use of the Arabic compound word '*la'in*'), and as a result the main clause refers to the vow. This main clause states: 'I will surely efface your bad deeds' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12).

Allah's words: 'If you establish prayer', refer to the fact that to be constant in prayer necitates two requirements. The first requirement is that the obligatory units of prayer should be completed. The second is that each unit must take its due right and form. Then, the verse says: 'and pay *zakat*' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12). In the books of jurisprudence, the obligations of prayers and almsgiving (*zakat*) are placed in the section of 'acts of worship' (*'ibadat*). Although this traditional division used in conventional jurisprudence is meant to make it easier for a Muslim to understand their basic obligations, in reality, everything which Allah commands is an act of worship. Worshipping means to obey all the commands you receive from the One you worship and to refrain from everything He forbids. Consequently, every Divine Commandment is an act of worship.

We said before that the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'When the call to prayer is proclaimed on Friday (the day of assembly), hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave all worldly commerce'. (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) And He *Glorified is He* continues: 'and when the prayer has finished, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain (some) of Allah's Bounties' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

In these verses, we find the first commandment of worship telling us to leave our businesses and commerce to pray in congregation. Then, the next commandment of worship tells us that, after finishing the prayers, it is obligatory for us to disperse freely on earth and seek out Allah's Bounties (in worldly dealings). There is no conflict between the two commandments, for they are both connected to worship. You are commanded to work on earth as much as you can, both to meet your needs and to provide for others.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'And believe in My Messengers and assist them.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12) This means that faith must become firmly set in the heart so that no further deliberation will shake it. The following order to aid the Messengers means to support them and help them. The Arabic word '*azr* (to assist) also literally means 'to prevent harm', and in this verse it refers to preventing other people from harming any of the Messengers of Allah in any way.

In your daily life, if anyone tries to harm a loved one who lives in a distant land, you will wish to be able to reach that loved one and protect him from the potential injury. And if the enemy is right in front of you, you will actually prevent him from approaching the one you love. The word '*azr'* means to prevent the enemy from reaching the one you want to protect. Believers consider a Messenger's life more precious than their own lives. While protecting a Messenger from harm, one of the believers might be injured or harmed, but this is a believer's way of honouring, assisting, and revering the Messenger.

We are saying all this in order to respond to those who say, 'Muslim scholars do not agree on lexical definitions. Sometimes they say that '*azzartumuhum* means 'to assist the Messengers', while at other times they define it as 'preventing the Messengers from being harmed'. Our answer is that both meanings are closely related because the word '*azr*' means to both repel and prevent. Consequently, it can be used to indicate the effort to prevent the enemy from reaching a Messenger or the act of preventing a Messenger from being harmed by the enemy. It can also indicate both meanings at the same time. We can also understand the word '*azzartumuhum*' to mean 'Honour them' because honour and reverence are the reasons why people assist the Messengers in the first place.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And offer to Allah a beautiful loan.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12) The Lord *Glorified is He* arranges the financial policy for all the believers. This includes those who are financially able and those who are in need. To those who have money, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do not work only as much as you need to, but work as much as you are able to. Use what you need to provide for yourself and your dependants and give the rest to those who cannot work for themselves’. If everyone only worked as much as they needed for their personal sustenance, those unable to work will not find any provisions to live on. We should never forget that the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Truly, the believers have already prospered. They are the ones who are submissive in their prayer, and the ones who turn away from idle talk and the ones who unstintingly give the poor-dues (*zakat*).’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 1-4)

When He *Glorified is He* says about those ‘…who unstintingly give the poor-dues’, this does not mean that they only give their due alms to the poor, but rather, they work with the intention of earning extra wealth from which to pay the poor more otherwise, what would the difference be between the believer and the disbeliever? The disbeliever works to provide for himself and his dependants without thinking of Allah. On the other hand, the believer works to support himself and his dependants, and additionally intends to earn excess wealth to give to the weak. The thought of giving to the weak is a driving thought in his mind when he initiated work. This is the meaning of Allah’s words: ‘and the ones who unstintingly give the poor-dues.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 4)

There is also another right that should be duly spent, aside from the obligatory poor-dues (*zakat*). The ruler should use this to meet the needs of the believing society as long as he upholds all of Allah’s Laws (while doing so). *Zakat* means to give a specifically appointed amount of one’s wealth. On the other hand, *Sadaqah* (voluntary charity) is not included in the poor-dues but are an addition to it. Following these two payments are loans you give to those in need. A loan is a sum of money which the soul is still attached to. This is because the loaner gave the money on condition that the person will return it after a given time. For this reason, some say that the reward for giving loans may surpass giving charity because one does not ask for a loan unless he has a genuine need for the money, while a person who takes charity might not really need it. Moreover, the soul of the one who gives charity ceases to be attached to what he gives as soon as he gives it, whilst the soul of one who gives a loan remains attached to what he lends, and every time he is patient about it he earns a good deed. Every time he postpones its collection, he earns a good deed. In this way, to lend money to those in need may be better than giving charity.

Consequently, the Lord *Glorified is He* wants our worldly work to earn ample and surplus wealth. However, how could He *Glorified is He* say: 'And offer to Allah a beautiful loan' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12) when He is the Giver of all blessings and the One Who ordains them all? How could the Lordgive blessings to man and then say, 'Loan them to me'? Allah *Glorified is He* values man's efforts and toil as long as he works and strives on earth. A man's wealth is his, but his fellow man might need some of it. As a result, he should lend it to others, and Allah *Glorified is He* considers this as a loan from the servant to Him. We find that the provider for a family might say to one of his sons, 'Take some of the pocket-money you have saved and give your brother what he needs, and I will consider this as a loan to me'. The provider for the family gave the money to his dependant in the first place, but he can still consider it a loan to make sure all his dependants are provided for. (If this is the reply of the father), then what do you think (about the reply from) the Lord *Glorified is He* who created us all? He gave to every one of us the fruits of his efforts, and considered these fruits to be the property of their owners. And if they then choose to lend some of these fruits to the needy, He considers this to be a loan to Him.

The Lord *Glorified is He* calls this loan 'beautiful'. This means that the lender should not exhibit any pride while giving it away. Similarly, he should not gain any worldly benefit from this transaction; otherwise, it would entail usury. We have the best example(1) of this in the story of Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah be pleased with him* while he was sitting one day in the shade of his friend's house, when this friend borrowed some money from him. The next day, Abu Hanifa *Allah be pleased with him* sat at a distance from the shade of the house, and therefore his friend asked him why he was sitting away from the shade. He replied, 'I feared that (enjoying the shade of your house) would count as usury'. The friend replied, 'But you used to sit there before you gave me the loan'. Abu Hanifa *Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'When I sat there before today, you were the favourable one as you gave me the shade. Now, it may be a repayment for my favour of lending the money'.

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(1) The story of Abu Hanifa's loan to one of the Muslims, and his abstaining from sitting in the shade of his house afterwards

Consequently, a beautiful loan is one that is not marred by flaunting of favour, insult, or benefit. As this loan creates debt, Allah *Glorified is He* established rules for recording it: 'O you who believe! Whenever you give or take credit for a stated term, set it down in writing' (*al-Baqara:* 282).

The Lord *Glorified is He* thereby protects the borrower from his own self because if he knows that the debt is recorded, he will try his best to work and pay it back, and then society will also benefit from his work. When the loan is written down, this provides motivation and encouragement for it to be repaid. However, if it is not written down, then circumstances might arise that cause it to go unanswered. If this happens to someone, then no one else will help him out of any crisis thereafter. Clearly, the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to preserve the means by which the fruits of labour are circulated. A popular expression summarizes this concept, 'The one who takes money and gives it back will come to own the world's wealth'. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And do not be weary from writing down every contractual provision' (*al-Baqara:* 282).

This is a way of protecting the soul from vicissitudes; but the Lord *the Exalted* did not forbid a person from trusting those who are faithful (by not writing any agreement): '…if one of you entrust the other, let the one who is entrusted discharge his trust (faithfully), and let him be afraid of Allah, his Lord' (*al-Baqara:* 283).

In this manner, the Lord *Glorified is He* protects economic dealings. We also find that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was full of mercy towards the believers, heard that a man had died while owing debts, he said to his Companions, 'Offer Funeral Prayer over your Companion'; he did not pray over the deceased man himself. The people then wondered why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not pray over him and what sin he had committed to deserve this. It was as though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to teach the people about the importance of repaying debts. He did not prevent them from praying over the indebted deceased, but he did not pray over them himself in order to encourage them and incite them to fulfil their obligations and clear their conscience by paying off their debts. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was narrated to have said, 'Whoever takes people's money with the intention of repaying it, Allah will help him to repay it; and whoever takes people's money with the intention of spoiling it, Allah will spoil him'.(1)

This is because it is possible that the person who died while he was in debt, with nothing in his possession to repay his debt, could have lacked the intention to pay off his debt and his soul might have tempted him not to repay it.

By approaching this matter from a psychological perspective, we may find that sometimes a borrower takes a large amount which he could not possibly ignore or forget, but the lender might not even think of it, or the lender might be so sensitive that he deliberately avoids the debtor in order not to embarrass him. In such a case, it is likely that Allah caused the lender to think and behave this way because the borrower truly intended to repay the loan. On the other hand, if the mind of the lender is occupied with thoughts of the borrower, and he constantly thinks about the amount that he has lent him, this could mean that the borrower has enough to repay the loan. In other words, the borrower has the means to repay all or some of the loan. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* would not embarrass anyone who strives and struggles to repay his debt.

Regarding the part of the noble verse that says: '…and offer to Allah a beautiful loan…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12), someone might say that the lexical context suggests that the word '*iqrad'* be used for 'loan' rather than '*qard*' since the verb is '*aqrada*' and the gerund of this verb is '*iqrad* ' (and a verb usually takes its gerund, if the noun needs to be referred to). But in this context, the Lord *Glorified is He* is speaking of the beautiful loan (*qard hasan*) itself; however, the word (*iqrad*) describes the transaction occurring between the one who asks for a loan and the one who gives it to him. Allah *Glorified is He* places the beautiful loan in His Hand, and it up to us to imagine how great a recompense Allah's Hand can give (for this beautiful loan). An example of this lexical usage is also found in Allah's Words: 'And Allah has caused you to grow from the earth a (progressive) growth' (*Nuh:* 17).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

The verb ‘*anbatakum’* (caused you to grow) expresses the process of causing growth (*inbat*). However, the earth does not cause the process of growth; rather, it produces growth itself. Therefore, the word ‘*nabat’* (‘growth’ or ‘crops’) is used in this verse, and not the gerund ‘*inbat*’ (the process of causing to grow) –sometimes Allah *Glorified is He* uses a verb but then uses its gerund because He wants to refer to its noun. The verb ‘*anbata*’ here in the verse means that Allah causes crops to grow from the earth for mankind.

Similarly, Allah *the Exalted* says of this loan: ‘…and offer to Allah a beautiful loan. I will surely efface your bad deeds…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 12) which is the main clause of the aforementioned vow. After this He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and admit you into Gardens beneath which rivers flow (in Heaven)…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 12). We have already spoken much about these gardens. The Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the noble verse by saying: ‘…but if any of you, after this, denies the Truth, he will indeed have strayed from the right path!’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 12) Yet, has the one who denies the Truth not already strayed from the right path before this? Indeed he has, but the one who denies the Truth after all these bounties and rewards that were mentioned, will be even further astray. The word for ‘right’ here is (*sawa*’) which occurs often in the Quran with various lexical meanings. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Not all of them are alike (*sawa*’)…’ (*Al-’Imran:* 113). Also, (*sawa*’) can mean ‘middling’ or ‘equal’, and these meanings are closely related because when there is a middle, there are also two sides. And if the divider is in the middle, then the two sides are equal; when we say ‘middle’, this means that this point is positioned at an equal distance from each side. Therefore, we must be aware that there are many words which have more than one meaning. They are termed ‘homographs’ which means that the form of the word is the same, but the meaning is different.

Another example is found in Allah’s Words: ‘…turn your faces (in prayer) in the direction (*shatrah*)…’ (*al-Baqara:* 144). The word ‘*shatr*’ means ‘direction’ and also ‘half’; the half can be said to be the direction which, when a person is facing the *Ka’ba*, requires that he be standing at a point on the horizon which forms a line that cuts directly through the middle of the circle of the horizon as he sees it. Therefore, if you say that (*shatr*) means ‘direction’, this is correct; and if you say it means ‘half’, this is also correct.

Concerning the part of the verse saying: '…he will indeed have strayed from the right path' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12), the Quran was revealed to a community who lived in the desert and whose roads passed between mountains. The road might have been smooth at certain points or might have passed between two valleys or two mountains; and in order to be on the cautious side, a person walks in the centre of the road. In fact, Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Both right and left cause you to stray; the best way is always the middle course'. This is because one might go to the right and slip, or to the left and slip, or a rock might fall upon him. We find that a father counsels his son, saying, 'Start moving and do not look right or left, but go straight to your goal'. We also find that the Lord *Glorified is He* describes the path on which the believer will walk on the Day of Resurrection by saying: 'And he will look and see him in the midst (*sawa*') of the Hellfire' (*as-Saffat:* 55). The midst of the hellfire means the very centre of it, without any possibility of escaping to the right or the left. Allah *the Exalted* says:

فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِم مِّيثَٰقَهُمْ لَعَنَّٰهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَٰسِيَةً ۖ يُحَرِّفُونَ
ٱلْكَلِمَ عَن مَّوَاضِعِهِۦ ۙ وَنَسُوا۟ حَظًّا مِّمَّا ذُكِّرُوا۟ بِهِۦ ۚ وَلَا تَزَالُ تَطَّلِعُ عَلَىٰ خَآئِنَةٍ
مِّنْهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ۖ فَٱعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَٱصْفَحْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

But they broke their pledge, so We distanced them [from Us] and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember: you [Prophet] will always find treachery in all but a few of them. Overlook this and pardon them: God loves those who do good [13] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 13)

When Allah *the Exalted* refers to the 'covenant', this entails the obligation of honouring and fulfilling the covenant; and did they (the children of Israel) honour their covenant? No, they broke it, so Allah cursed them. Cursing or damnation (*la'n*) means to be expelled and banished. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But because of their breaking of their covenant, we cursed them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13), that is, the curse was a consequence of them breaching their solemn covenant with Allah. The use of the Arabic particle '*ma*' here (which cannot be translated, but which occurs in the Arabic before the words 'their breaking') has been explained in various ways. Some of the scholars say that it is an addition which has no meaning (*za'ida*), while others say that it is meant as a connector. However, only human beings use extra insignificant words, not Allah. Nothing in the Quran could be a superfluous addition. Every word in the Quran is used precisely and exactly. The Lord *Glorified is He* tells us of how Luqman advised his son: '…and bear with patience whatever befalls you. Indeed, (all) that is of the matters requiring determination' (*Luqman:* 17). And in another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: 'And whoever shows patience and forgives–indeed, that is certainly among the foremost Commandments of Allah that require diligent resolve' (*ash-Shura:* 43).

In the first verse, the word 'certainly' (*la* in Arabic) is not present, while in the second verse it is present. This is not simply a matter of rhetorical flourish; for when Allah says: '…and bear with patience whatever befalls you. Indeed, (all) that is of the foremost Commandments of Allah that require diligent resolve' (*Luqman:* 17), this is a call for patience amid calamities that do not involve an adversary such as illness or death of beloved ones. Asking for patience here is meant to give consolation and comfort. As for the saying of the Lord *Glorified is He*: 'And whoever shows patience and forgives–indeed, that is certainly of the foremost commandments of Allah that require diligent resolve' (*ash-Shura:* 43), this is a call for patience and also forgiveness which indicates the involvement of an adversary who has inflicted this harm or calamity.

Here, Allah asks the believers to forgive those who harm them and to bear this patiently. Since there is an adversary involved, the soul wants to take vengeance, and therefore such a situation requires that more emphasis be placed on exercising strength of character than that mentioned in the previous verse. In the first verse, there is no clear adversary from whom vengeance can be taken. But the presence of an adversary stirs the desire of revenge within the soul. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* stresses this patient response by saying: '…that is certainly of the foremost Commandments of Allah that require diligent resolve' (*Luqman:* 17).

In another place in the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…lest you say, "There came to us no bringer of good tidings"…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19). Before the word '*bashir'* (translated in the above verse as' bringer of glad tidings'), there is the preposition' *min'* which literally means 'of'; the grammarians consider the word '*bashir*' to be the subject of the verb 'come', and they deem the preposition '*min*' to be a superfluous addition which does not change the meaning but only changes the grammar of the sentence. In fact, there is no superfluous addition here because in Arabic the word '*min*' can be used to mean 'at all' to emphasise a negation. Accordingly, if a person says, 'I have no money', he may well have some small sum which he has not counted. But if he says, 'I have no money at all' by using the preposition '*min*' before the word '*mal*' (money), this means that he possesses absolutely no money of any kind. Consequently, the preposition '*min*' here is not a superfluous addition, but rather, it imparts a meaning to the sentence. Hence, '…lest you say, "There came to us no bringer of good tidings"…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19) (*ma ja'ana min bashir*) literally means 'no kind of bearer of glad tidings at all ever came to us'.

Allah *the Exalted* also says: 'So, due to mercy from Allah, you (O Muhammad) dealt gently with them….' (*Al-'Imran:* 159) Here, the word '*ma*' occurs before the word '*rahma*' (mercy). Some people may think that this too is a superfluous addition; but we say, 'What is the root of the derivation of all Arabic words?' It is the gerund (*masdar*). Sometimes the gerund is used to mean the verb; it can be used as an imperative, such as when you use the gerund *darb* to mean 'strike' rather than the usual imperative '*idrib*'. The same is true of Allah's Words: '*fa bi ma naqdihim mithaqahum*' which is literally translated as: 'So, because of their breaking their covenant…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13).

Since here the word '*naqd* ' ('breaking' or 'breaching') is a gerund, it may be functioning as a verb; and as long as a gerund is functioning as a verb, it is possible to use another verb with it, and therefore the meaning becomes: 'Then, for having broken their covenant, We cursed them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13), (i.e. referring to the act of breaking their covenant). Hence, the word '*ma'* here indicates that the gerund is functioning as a verb, and the '*ma'* also indicates that the gerund is standing in for an elided verb. Or, it may be that '*ma'* here is used to express an exclamatory question, such as, 'How many were the times that they broke their covenant, and so we cursed them?' This would imply that they broke their pledges constantly in many ways.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But because of their breaking their covenant, we cursed them…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 13). The word ‘*naqd*’ (translated in the verse at hand as ‘to break’) is the opposite of ‘to conclude’ or ‘to settle’ (*ibram*). *Ibram* signifies settling and adjudicating a case based on evidence, while ‘*naqd*’ (‘to unbind’ or ‘break apart’) a case means to unravel its components. It is as though they broke the solemn pledge that Allah took from them. The Arabic word ‘*aqida*’ (‘doctrinal belief’ or ‘creed’) literally originates from the word ‘*`aqd* ’ (which means ‘to tie’ or ‘to knot’, and also means ‘a solemn pledge’). Why? That is because it is derived from the concept of tying something securely in order for it not to resurface in the mind to be thought about again. The same is true of a solemn covenant (‘*mithaq*’): it is confirmed and established. When they broke it, they unravelled it; that is, they released themselves from the obligations of this covenant. And because they broke their covenant with Allah, they brought a curse upon themselves.

The part of the verse saying: ‘…and made their hearts grow hard…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 13) signifies that when they broke their covenant, Allah set a seal upon their hearts. He did not seal their hearts to begin with, but rather, they disbelieved first. After disbelieving, Allah left them in their error and delusion and sealed their hearts so that, neither the disbelief within them leaves, and nor could anything enter them from without. The Arabic word ‘*qasiya*’ means ‘rigid and hard’; although hardness is blameworthy, when it affects the heart, it is not like this when employed in defence of the Truth. We should judge everything according to its function. When everything performs its proper function, the entire world becomes beautiful. For example, we do not criticise a hook for being crooked. A hook must be crooked; its crookedness is what allows it to perform its function. The crookedness of a hook is what makes it proper. Likewise, hardness is not blameworthy if it is shown in the right situations; it is blameworthy only if it is in the wrong place. Hard hearts are blameworthy because the Lord *the Exalted* wants the hearts to be soft: ‘…then their skins and their hearts soften at the Remembrance of Allah…’ (*az-Zumar:* 23).

The Arabic word ‘*qaswa’* (hardness) is derived from the word ‘*qasiy*’, which means a hard solid. We know that *dinars* used to be made of gold and *dirhams* of silver. A cashier, while examining them, might take one of them and declare it to be fake because he listened to the chiming sound it made, and checked if it was hard or not. Also, when a coin is truly hard, it is described as being '*qasiya*'.

Gold is a soft metal, as is silver. When we say that some gold is 24 carat (99. 99 percent pure), this means that it is not alloyed with other metals that enable it to be shaped. Gold in its pure form cannot be moulded into jewellery, and therefore the goldsmith mixes it with another metal to harden it and enable it to be fashioned into jewellery. The level of hardness of gold or silver varies according to the carat value or, in other words, its purity. Items made from high-carat gold, such as gold ingots, are not suitable for use as jewellery.

When another metal is mixed with gold or silver, it makes them hard. Hardness, therefore, is praiseworthy when used in the proper place and blameworthy when used in the improper place, such as is the case with the hardness and cruelty of hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…They changed the words from their (correct) places…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). An example of this is when Allah commanded the children of Israel to say '*hitta*' (forgive our sins), but instead they said '*hinta*' (wheat). '…and have forgotten a good share of the Message that was sent to them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). Abrogation of previous Divine Scriptures before the Quran took place by people forgetting a good share of the Message that was sent to them. Forgetfulness, in this case, may indicate people's failure to adequately understand or comprehend the Message, but it also implies that Allah's Teachings did not really occupy their minds. Had the scriptures been on their minds, they would have continued to remember them. Moreover, they concealed the parts which they did not forget, and distorted and twisted those parts which they neither concealed nor forgot. It would have been bad enough if this was all they did, but they also invented teachings and statements of their own and attributed them to Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands and then say, "This is from Allah", to purchase with it a little price! Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for that they earn thereby' (*al-Baqara*: 79). Thus, four kinds of methods of tampering were applied to the original scriptures: forgetting, concealing, distorting and inserting personal statements and then attributing them to Allah.

Now let us reflect on the beauty of these wise Divine Words: '…and have forgotten a good share of the Message that was sent to them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13) Their wickedness was so immense that they forgot that which could have brought them a great deal of good fortune '*hazh*' (translated as good share in the verse) literally means good fortune in Arabic) such as their forgetting and concealing the glad tidings that heralded the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Had they believed in them, their fortune will have been great. This is because they forgot something which could have brought them a great reward, and therefore they wronged themselves. Islam will have profited nothing if they had believed in it and followed its guidance; but rather, the loss was all theirs. Still, Allah *the Most High* aided them with regards to their forgetfulness, which also holds as a proof against themselves, by reminding them of what they had forgotten. This should have caused them to be just to themselves and return to true faith. The Lord *Glorified is He* reminded them of what they had forgotten in order that they will attain, for themselves, good fortune. This may also suggest that they forgot the Teachings of Allah deliberately, ignoring and turning away from them on purpose.

Allah *the Exalted* then says: '…And you will not cease to discover treachery in them, except a few of them. But forgive them and overlook (their misdeeds). Verily, Allah loves those who do good' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). That is their treachery to you, O Prophet Muhammad, to your followers and to Allah's Law of guidance on the earth will continue. Nothing can testify more clearly to this than their crimes against their own Messengers, although they were from their own people and tribe. They were, like them, from the children of Israel, so what do you think they will do to a Prophet who came from another race to withdraw from them their temporal power?

Therefore, their treachery to Allah *Glorified is He* was expected. The word '*kha'ina'* ('treachery'; the word '*kha'ina'* is usually a feminine active participle which means 'she who is treacherous') here means the same as '*khiyana*' (treachery), just like the word '*qa'ila'* (also in a feminine active participle form) means the same as '*qaylula'* (siesta). The word '*kha'ina'* can also mean 'a treacherous soul' or 'a treacherous woman', it might be an emphatic adjectival form which seems feminine although it is used for a male, or it might mean 'a treacherous group'.

Consequently, the single word here comprises all the different sources of treachery, whether man, woman, group, or all of them together. The speaker here is the Lord of the worlds. He is speaking to the Arabs, a people of eloquence; hence, the discourse is very lofty in tone.

Owing to the perfect precision and fairness of the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…except a few of them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13), in line with the principle of 'allowing for possibilities'. When Allah addressed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to clarify to him the position of the Jews regarding him, was it not possible that some Jews, endowed with deep understanding, considered believing in this Messenger and so calm down and stop the wild assumptions they had made about him? In fact, some of them thought this way and embraced Islam.

If these people had heard Allah passing a non-exclusive judgement over all the Jews, they will have said, 'Why should we be judged the same as the rest when we are thinking of embracing the true faith?' It is as though His Words: '…except a few of them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13) allowed for the possibility that some of them might have thought about believing. Those who indeed were thinking about believing will hear the Lord's Words: 'except a few of them' and thus would realize that the Quran was truly a revelation and light from Allah. This actually happened and a few of them did embrace Islam.

On the other hand, what was the position of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Lord *the Exalted* informed him that he will experience treachery from the Jews in the future? This certainly could have affected the attitude of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers towards the Jews, and any act of betrayal by the Jews will have been retaliated against according to the basic law of self-defence. But Allah *Glorified is He* did not want to leave the matter up to the emotions of any human being, and hence He says: '…forgive them, and overlook (their misdeeds). Verily, Allah loves those who do good' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13).

The Arabic word '*afw*' ('pardon' and 'forgiveness') literally means 'effacement of traces'; i.e. your tracks are noticeable on the ground, and then the wind comes and brushes away all traces and marks of them. Consequently, the commandment to pardon the disbelievers means: remove from yourself any effects and vestiges of the sins or wrongs they had committed against you and act as though they never happened. But would the impact of such wrongdoings have remained with Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah? No, because there is a command for forbearance and an overlooking of faults. There is a difference between erasing the ill deed of others utterly, and allowing the impact of such an ill deed to remain in your soul so that you continue to feel rage and bitterness.

Allah *Glorified is He* here commands that '*Afw*' (forgiveness) be shown, which means to wipe off the traces that the misdeed has left, and also to practice forbearance and an overlooking of faults, which means to expel any effects of the misdeed from the mind. In such an experience, every human being goes through several stages: the first stage is when someone sins against him and he controls himself from returning the aggression; this is forgiveness. The second stage is when he does not allow the effect of the sin to continue to work on his heart, but rather, he practices forbearance and overlooks the fault. This frees the believer's heart from being preoccupied with something which he has already forgiven. The third stage provides the opportunity for those who wish to acquire a higher level of moral perfection or excellence (*ihsan*) and increase their certitude and faith by doing good to the one who wronged them. These three stages are made clear in the saying of the Lord *Glorified is He*: '…and those who suppress their anger, and who pardon people; verily, Allah loves those who do good' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

Yet, is the act of being good to those who abuse or wrong us logical to the human soul? It might be considered illogical, but human beings do not make their own laws for themselves. Rather, their laws are made by One Who is above and beyond the human soul. The Creator says to you, 'If you knew the good that the one who wronged you has done to you, you will be grateful to him. This is because when you wrong one of Allah's creatures, the retribution for and the restoration of the right of this creature is claimed by the Lord of this creature Himself. Allah is always on the side of those who suffer wrong or injustice'.

When your enemy wrongs you, he, in fact, places Allah on your side; hence, does he not deserve to be thanked for this? You should remember the well known saying, 'Should you not be good to the one who puts Allah on your side?' This is Allah's Standard: '…verily, Allah loves those who do good'. (*al-Ma'ida:* 13) And to do good here means for one's faith to rise above the level of: '…whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you. And fear Allah, and know that Allah is with those who fear Him' (*al-Baqara:* 194).

Ihsan or moral excellence means to do more than what Allah has obliged you to do, but of the same kind of action that Allah has enjoined on you. The one who does good (*Muhsin*), who reaches the station of moral excellence or perfection (*ihsan*) is the one who worships Allah as if he sees Him–for although he cannot see Him, Allah *Glorified is He* surely sees all His creatures. We know that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, the righteous will be in the midst of Gardens and springs (in Heaven) Taking joy in the things which their Lord has given them. Verily, they were before this those who do the good'. (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16) What is it that constituted their moral excellence according to the previous verse? The answer is, 'They used to sleep but little by night (invoking and praying to Allah with humility).' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17) Does Allah enjoin His servants to sleep only a small part of the night? No. Allah has enjoined on Muslims to offer prayers and told them that after the Evening Prayer they are free and can sleep until the Dawn Prayer. Then, on hearing the call for the Dawn Prayer, they should wake up and pray. Here the doers of good, who want to take their faith to a higher level, sleep little to offer extra supererogatory prayers during night. In addition, the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions another attribute of these doers of good: 'And in the hours before dawn they ask forgiveness.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 18)

Does Allah enjoin all people to ask for forgiveness during the pre-dawn hours? No, rather, when a man asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the obligatory acts of worship he was required to do, he told him about the five pillars of Islam, including the five obligatory daily prayers to which the man replied, 'By Allah, I shall do no more and no less than this!' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'He will be successful, if he proves truthful (concerning what he has just said).'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the Book of Iman (Faith)*

Allah *the Exalted* then adds, completing His description of the doers of good: ‘And in their property is a portion due to him who begs and to him who is deprived.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) We may observe here that Allah *Glorified is He* does not say ‘a known right’, but rather: ‘…a portion due to him who begs and to him who is deprived.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) The ‘known right’ is the obligatory charity; as for those who do the good, they give a share of their wealth to the poor and needy beyond what is obligatory. In this way Allah *the Most High* widens the arena for spiritual aspiration. Those who give more shall be recompensed more by Allah. To continue, the Lord teaches us, saying: ‘…forgive them and overlook (their misdeeds). Verily, Allah loves those who do good’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 13) because being good to these opponents will evoke in them the instinctive feelings of gratefulness. Consequently, this goodness will remove the bitterness from their hearts and open up their ears and hearts to the words of Truth.

‘…Then verily, he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend!’ (*Fussilat:* 34) This is because enmity only grows severer if it is reciprocated in some way. But when you treat your enemy in the best way instead of returning his enmity, how long will he remain your enemy? He transgresses against you once, and you do not respond to him, and then he transgresses again and you still do not respond to him; at this point, he will surely calm down. So enmity does not continue unless it is returned. We learned what happened in the confrontation between Pharaoh and our master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*, when Allah willed that the enmity should be on both sides, not only one, for the struggle to be intense because if the enmity only came from one side, the attacking side would soon calm down.

‘And the family of Pharaoh picked him up (out of the river) so that he will become for them an enemy and a (cause of) grief.’ (*al-Qasas:* 8) Did they take Musa *peace be upon him* for him to become their enemy? No, they took him so that he would be a source of joy for them, but Allah had already decreed otherwise. The hope was that Musa *peace be upon him* would become a source of joy for Pharaoh’s household, but Allah willed that he be raised by them and then afterwards become an enemy to them. Thus, it becomes clear to us that the plans of Heaven have precedence over the plans of earth. Musa, the Samaritan, for example, was raised by Heaven through Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him*. His mother gave birth to him in the midst of the desert, and Gabriel *peace be upon him* came down with food for him until he reached manhood. However, Musa, the son of `Imran (Amram) *peace be upon him* was raised by Pharaoh. Yet Musa the Samaritan, who was raised by Gabriel *peace be upon him* became a disbeliever, while Musa, the son of `Imran, who was raised by Pharaoh became a Messenger to the children of Israel. Both of these destinies were willed by Allah. In this regard, a poet once said:

If it does not coincide with fate,
Then no hope or wish can be fulfilled:
The Moses whom Gabriel raised was a disbeliever,
Yet the Moses whom Pharaoh raised was a prophet.

It was as though the household of Pharaoh raised Musa, the son of `Imran, to be an enemy to them, not a source of joy; and that enmity became mutual between Musa and Pharaoh, as Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Put him (the child) into the chest and put it into the river (Nile), then the river shall cast it up on the bank, and there, an enemy of Mine and an enemy of his shall take him.' (*Ta Ha:* 39)

Therefore, enmity was on both sides. The Lord *Glorified is He* commanded His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to show forbearance in the face of the treachery from the children of Israel, that perhaps this would help awaken in them the instinct of belief and they would say, 'He did not treat us as we treated him'. It could lead them to recognise Prophet Muhammad as a merciful, compassionate, and kind prophet of Allah, and as a result they will no longer stand in the way of his mission. But is pardon and forbearance the only instructions that the Lord *Glorified is He* gives to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? No, for the Divine Commandments passed through many stages; as Prophet Muhammad draws the human soul by winning it over with kindness, but if it is not won over by kindness then the Prophet must roll up his sleeves and do as Allah commands him. Let us read the following saying of Allah: 'Many of the People of the Scripture wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of envy from themselves (even) after the Truth has become clear to them. So pardon and overlook this until Allah delivers His command.' (*al-Baqara:* 109)

There is a subtle matter here, expressed by the words: '…until Allah delivers His command…' (*al-Baqara:* 109). Allah *Glorified is He* commands His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to leave them and show pardon and forbearance until another stage comes, in which he will be commanded to chastise them. This is a natural human process which was known to the pre-Islamic Arabs. The Arab was kind to his enemy once, twice and thrice, but when this kindness availed nothing, he fought the enemy. The poet said:

Patience, and it if avails not, then a threat;
And if this, too, avails not, this is the end
Of forbearance, and rigour must be employed instead
For rigour comes when forbearance fails.

And another poet said:

We made peace with Banu Dhahl,
And held them as our brothers:
Perhaps in good time they shall
Become as they once were.
But when evil came forth
And showed itself plainly,
We became as lions,
And furious lions, what is more!
With a widow-making blow,
Terror and boisterous clamour,
And stabs like the pecks of a bird –
A bird that is well fed!
For evil brings relief,
When kindness relieves naught,
And there are times when forbearance
Brings nothing but disgrace!

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had the same kind of experiences with the Christians that he had with the Jews, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا نَصَٰرَىٰٓ أَخَذۡنَا مِيثَٰقَهُمۡ فَنَسُواْ
حَظّٗا مِّمَّا ذُكِّرُواْ بِهِۦ فَأَغۡرَيۡنَا بَيۡنَهُمُ ٱلۡعَدَاوَةَ وَٱلۡبَغۡضَآءَ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ
ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۚ وَسَوۡفَ يُنَبِّئُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَصۡنَعُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

We also took a pledge from those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done [14] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 14)

They said that they were Christians, and the Lord *Glorified is He* took a solemn pledge from them; this could either mean the pledge taken from all the descendants of Adam *peace be upon him* when Allah drew the progeny of the children of Adam from their loins and made them bear witness to His Divinity and Lordship; or this could be referring to the pledge they made to their Prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*, the son of Maryam (Mary) Allah *be pleased with her*. Yet, they forgot much of what they had been taught, abandoned what the *Injil* (Gospel) had commanded them, and broke their pledge, and as a result they were divided into many hostile sects. After this verse comes reference to what Allah destined, as He had promised beforehand:

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ قَدۡ جَآءَكُمۡ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمۡ
كَثِيرٗا مِّمَّا كُنتُمۡ تُخۡفُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَيَعۡفُواْ عَن
كَثِيرٖۚ قَدۡ جَآءَكُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ نُورٞ وَكِتَٰبٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿١٥﴾

People of the Book, Our Messenger has come to make clear to you much of what you have kept hidden of the Scripture, and to overlook much [you have done]. A light has now come to you from God, and a Scripture making things clear [15] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 15)

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is giving them the opportunity (to return to Him) as well as proof against them, so that none of them will say that no Message from the Messengers of Allah ever reached him/her, and there was a time during which no Messenger came. But here the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came bearing a complete Message of guidance. The coming of a new Messenger gives them the opportunity to renew their solemn pledge of faith. They concealed some of the laws contained in their scriptures, such as those that prescribed stoning and prohibited usury. As the Quran tells us, some of the children of Israel said about usury: 'There is no blame on us if we betray and take the properties of the illiterate people (Arabs).' (*Al-'Imran:* 75) That is, they claimed that it was lawful to engage in usurious transactions with those who did not follow their religion, but not with those who did follow it. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to gather the children of Israel together and join their hands to his hand; he was the prophet they had been awaiting for and whose tidings were foretold in their scriptures. He wanted all the believers to stand united against the forces of godlessness on earth in order for the Law of Heaven to rule the life on the earth. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…There has come to you from Allah a light….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15) This signifies that their concealing some of Allah's Teachings created darkness in the world. As long as darkness had come into the world, especially moral darkness, the world was in need of a light to show it the way. We know that light is what makes things bright and clear.

When the Lord *the Exalted* speaks to us of material light, He wants to guide us using the concept of material light to that of spiritual light. Material light dispels the darkness from the path in order for us not to collide with obstructions, fall into holes, or break things. When a person carries a light, he can see where he is going. Material light prevents creatures from colliding as they move, and in this way energy is not wasted because when it is wasted, the world is ruined and nothing is achieved.

During the day, the sun lights up the world. The moon comes after the sun and reflects some light. People are also guided by the stars in the darkness of the land and sea. Allah caused these creatures to exist to prevent collision in the motion of physical beings. Just as Allah has made a material light in order for creatures not to collide with one another, He is also capable of providing light for morals and spiritual values. That is, the Lord *the Exalted* created the light of morality to guide mankind to the right path. Both the disbeliever and atheist equally benefit like the believer from the material light which secures physical motion on the earth. No one ever says, 'I do no need to benefit from physical light'. Consequently, we need to say to the disbelievers and atheists, 'Since you benefit from physical light, you should know that Allah has also provided a moral light which you must follow, too. Allah's System of Guidance condenses this moral light into the principles: 'Do' and 'Do not do'.

The Law of Allah, then, is a light from Him. Let us read the following Words of Allah: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth…' (*an-Nur:* 35). Allah takes our hands and guides us along the way with the material light from which everyone benefits, whether believer or disbeliever.

In the following verse, He *the Most High* gives us a similitude of this light: '…The example of His Light is like a niche within which is a lamp…' (*an-Nur:* 35). A *Mishkah* (translated in the previous verse as 'niche') is an aperture in a wall. It is different from a window. It is a hollow in the wall where an oil or kerosene lamp can be placed. It used to be found in primitive houses before the invention of electric lamps and chandeliers. The hollow was not more than thirty centimetres in breadth, forty centimetres in height, and fifteen centimetres in depth, while the room it lit was in the range of three metres wide, long, and high.

The Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about the hollow here, not the room itself; and any lamp which was placed in the hollow lit up the whole room. We should pay attention that this is no ordinary lamp, but rather, it is enclosed in glass. We know that the glass-enclosed lamp is one of the great achievements of human ingenuity. In the past, lamps had no glass and their flames would throw up smoke which blackened the walls and the space around them with soot. The lamp was also easily extinguished by wind. Then man began to place glass around the lamp which protected the flame, concentrated the light, and reflected the beams, and the fire could still draw the air it needed through the glass.

'…The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp; the lamp is enclosed in glass…' (*an-Nur:* 35). That is, the light of this lamp is especially bright because the glass reflects its rays and spreads the light everywhere. The glass in which this lamp is enclosed is not ordinary either: '…The glass as if it were a pearly (white) star…' (*an-Nur:* 35). A star itself produces light, and the glass is shining like a bright radiant star. As for the kind of fuel with which the lamp is lit, it is described as: '…lit from (the oil of) a blessed olive tree…' (*an-Nur:* 35). This increases and intensifies the lamp's light for it is lit from the oil of an olive tree; and it is no ordinary tree. It is: '…neither of the east nor of the west…' (*an-Nur:* 35). Consequently, it is a tree which is distinguished by being totally balanced.

'…Light upon light...' (*an-Nur:* 35), this is an aspect of Allah's omnipotent power concerning the light of the material world; hence, it would be inconceivable for Him to leave spiritual and moral values bereft of light. Just as mankind is guided in material affairs, s/he must be aware that the Lord *the Exalted* has the power to guide her/him in spiritual affairs as well. Evidence of this is the saying of Allah: '…Allah guides to His light whom He wills…' (*an-Nur:* 35).

Allah gives spiritual and moral guidance to those who want it. An atheist might be guided by the light of the sun, but his sight is blind to the light of the Divine Law and moral values. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that there is a Divine Light, which is His Way and Law, and He puts forth this similitude to illustrate metaphysical concepts by means of material concepts. We all seek light according to our means: a poor man or a country-dweller seeks the light of a small gas-lamp, and a wealthier person may buy an electric generator. Everyone seeks light according to his means, but when the sun rises in the morning, what happens? Everyone puts out these lights, for the sun is a light which Allah has provided for all mankind and to the entire world.

Likewise, if we use our minds to think of something that will give light to our lives, each one of us will think according to the ability of his mind. But when a light comes down from Allah, it eliminates the need for any other light. And we should do the same thing spiritually as we do materially.'…Light upon light. Allah guides to His Light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for mankind, for Allah is All Knowing of all things…' (*an-Nur:* 35).

What indicates to us that the second light is the light of ethical and moral values, which are contained in the rules of 'Do' and 'Do not do', is that Allah *the Exalted* says after this: 'In houses (mosques) which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified in the mornings and in the evenings' (*an-Nur:* 36).

If you look for the noun connected with the *Jarr wa Majrur* (Arabic technical term for the genitive case) 'in houses', you will find that it can only refer back to the words 'light upon light'. This is to signify that the light upon light comes from seeking guidance in mosques; for they are the Houses of Allah to which we come to experience the light which the Lord *the Exalted* bestows upon His creation.

'In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised; in them His Name is glorified in the mornings and in the evenings. Men whom neither trade nor sale diverts them from the Remembrance of Allah' (*an-Nur:* 36-37). The words '…neither trade nor sale diverts them…' (*an-Nur:* 37) do not mean that commerce is forbidden, but rather, it stresses that an honest man is not distracted by commerce from the Remembrance of Allah. Allah must be constantly on a believer's mind. When a person remembers Allah, He extends His grace to him.

This brings us back to the point in question. Consequently, O people of the Book, this light has come to you, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has explained to you many of the matters over which you have differed and has overlooked many of your misdeeds. He offers you full conciliation and purification; hence, you must wake up, heed his call, and change your attitude towards this new Message. Search for what Allah intends by these teachings, which Allah illustrates using the parable of light. This light guides by means of 'Do' and 'Do not do'. But who can tell us that this light comes from Allah? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does. And what can indicate to us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is truly sent by Allah? The indication of this is Allah's saying: 'O mankind! Verily, there has come to you a convincing proof (Prophet Muhammad) from your Lord, and we have sent down to you a manifest light (this Quran)' (*an-Nisa':* 174).

Consequently, what your Lord sent first was the firm proof that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly sent by Allah to deliver to us the Book containing His Message of guidance. The Quran is distinguished by the fact that it constitutes both the proof of the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad and the luminous, enlightening Divine Message itself. *Burhan* (translated as' proof 'in the verse at hand) means the strongest evidence or argument that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly sent by Allah.

In education, we encounter proofs when we study geometry. When confronted with a geometrical problem, we consider the data that we are provided with and see what we have to prove. After this, we consider the given information once more and use it to derive the proof. If the information does not supply that proof, we then take a further step to attempt to reach it. This universe is filled with data and information. It is an exact, ordered universe. We can witness its perfect order in the natural world over which we have no control: 'It is not possible for the sun to reach the moon, or for the night to overtake the day, for each, in an orbit, is swimming.…' (*Ya Sin:* 40)

The universe is perfectly balanced by the interplay of the sky, the earth, the wind movement, and all other natural components. We find that the laws governing these systems in which humans play no role function perfectly, efficiently and consistently. In fact, if humans wish to appreciate the information and design of the universe, they should observe the matters over which humans exercise influence. They will find that they are subject to corruption because they are subject to human caprice. But the Creator is far above and beyond any such influences; He *the Exalted* says: 'And the heaven He has raised high, and He has set up the Balance' (*ar-Rahman:* 7).

It is a perfect balance that does not allow either the sky to fall upon the earth or the stars to collide with one another. Allah *Glorified is He* then shows us how to live in conformity with the orderly system of the universe: '…that you may not transgress the (just) balance' (*ar-Rahman:* 8). If you want your life to be orderly, observe the matters over which you have power and handle them as Allah handles the matters over which you have no power.

'And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance'. (*ar-Rahman:* 9) You can admire the balance of the greater universe because it was made according to a precise system. Since the Lord *the Exalted* has given us a precise system of guidance contained in the code of 'Do' and 'Do not do', it follows that if you adopt this guidance and live your life according to Allah's Way, you will not corrupt your freely-willed actions and you will maintain an upright balance. The Lord *Glorified is He* has supplied us with information which, when contemplated naturally and spontaneously, without predispositions or inclinations, will lead the person to belief. These balanced beings must surely have a creator because humans were brought into being after them; many creatures appeared before mankind, and no human could ever claim that he made this universe.

We must search for the One Who created this precisely ordered universe. When a certain claim is free of any weak points, is it true or false? It is absolutely true. Allah has declared that He created the heavens, the earth, and the entire universe, and no one else has come forward to claim that he created them. Consequently, it is confirmed that this matter (the creation) is from Allah until another claimant comes forth. But no matter how much time passes, no one will ever claim this.

The role of the human mind is to think and use reason to know the One Who created this universe, and it has to show gratitude to the one who came and solved this mystery for him/her. The Messengers came to solve this riddle and to guide us for what pure innate minds search. If we were to follow the chain of existence, we will find that the human is the master of this existence because every other creature works and strives to serve humankind. As we know, the classes of organisms that are made subservient to humankind include animals, above which humans are distinguished by reason and intellect. Next in the chain comes the plant kingdom which exhibits the characteristic of growth, and finally, inanimate creation. All these creatures are made to serve humankind. The class of inanimate beings does not simply refer to motionless entities, but rather includes the air, the sun, the soil, and so on. They all perform their function in existence in order to serve the genera which are higher than them; and humankind benefits from them all. Plants benefit from inanimate beings, animals benefit from both plants and inanimate beings, and the totality of all beings serves humankind.

Is it not appropriate and necessary, then, for humans to ask themselves who placed them in this distinguished position? And, if a Messenger came to answer this question for us, and he also told us that humankind was created by Allah; moreover, he then explained to us Allah's Attributes and informed us of His Message whose truth was strengthened and supported by a miraculous sign, this miraculous sign being proof for us that he and his Message were from Allah as it is a sign and miracle which no human can duplicate even though this Messenger challenged all humankind to produce the like of this miraculous sign–if all this was the case, all humans will certainly believe in him, provided they are honest and sincere in their understanding and intention.

So, what constituted this firm proof? The firm proof was the sign that attested to the Messenger being truly sent by Allah to convey and deliver His Message on His behalf. Conveyance of the Creator's Message is what a pure innate mind demands and searches for, and such a person believes that a Creator must exist even if the name of the Creator–Allah–is yet unknown to that mind. The Messenger is the one with the authority to tell people the name and nature of their Creator and present to them His Message.

Accordingly, the coming of Messengers is a logical issue necessitated by natural human instinct and reason. As a result, the Lord *the Exalted* sent down the doctrinal light and the code of guidance which protects society from chaos, because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if the Truth was in accordance with their desires, verily, the heavens and the earth and all those who are in them will have been corrupted…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

Religion came from Allah to govern all issues in which human inclinations and desires differ and clash. Allah conclusively settled all possible conflicts arising from different inclinations and desires by establishing Himself as the Sole Lawmaker and revealing a law that would resolve and unify these differences. Consequently, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you (truly) believes until his desires (or inclinations) are in line with what I have brought.'(1)

That is, all inclinations and desires must be united under the banner of a single law. For, if every human being followed his own personal caprice, we would inevitably fall into conflict. Let us repeat: human conflicts, whether on the level of the family, the community, the nation, or the entire world, are the result of conflicting inclinations and desires. As for the issues in which human tendencies play no part, the whole world is in agreement on them. This is proved by the fact that we can say that the former Eastern power and the current Western power differed because of two political ideologies, one called 'communism' and the other called 'capitalism'.

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Daylami*

There is no laboratory in which we can analyse communism or capitalism and see which of them is good for us. These are matters of caprice, which is why they have been constantly in conflict. Communism was defeated, although its effects still remain. However, people do not differ about physical issues. As the famous saying goes, there is no Russian or American electricity, or Russian or American physics. There is an agreement concerning all issues which can be empirically verified; differences only occur regarding those issues in which inclinations and desires differ and clash.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* has left open for us all that is in the earth for us to freely interact with it using the minds, abilities, and perceptions which He has endowed us with for this purpose. He made it clear to us that empirical and material aspects will not divide us; rather, we will agree upon them, and each group will even try to obtain the results of the other group's experiments, and some will even attempt to access such information through espionage or theft. But what really brings harm to us and our societies are the differences that arise because of conflicting inclinations and interests. It would have been bad enough if that was where it stopped: material agreement and capricious conflict; but no, humans have even used the things they agreed upon, which were derived from experimentation, invention and discovery as a way of forcing upon others the ideologies by which their inclinations and desires were governed. It is as though we have corrupted matters entirely: we use what we agree on to forcefully impose ideas we differ on.

The Lord *Glorified is He* gave us all this for life to proceed properly. Life cannot proceed properly unless the final judgement concerning matters involving desires belong solely to the Lord *Glorified is He*. For this reason, in the countryside people say, 'If the Law of Allah cuts a person's finger (for having committed a crime), it will not bleed'. This signifies the people's belief. That is, when a ruling comes from Heaven, it is received with no hurtful feelings; since it is the judgement of the One Who created us and created this entire universe. Heaven intervenes in matters in which inclinations and desires differ by giving Allah's Way of guidance in the form of 'Do' and 'Do not do'. As for the matters in which inclinations and desires play no part, Allah makes it clear, 'You shall agree on these matters in spite of yourselves–and you will even steal them from one another–so they are not dangerous'.

The danger lies in capricious and whimsical exercise of judgement and decisions; and remember that concerning highly important matters which maintain the balance of society in accordance with Allah's Criteria, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave the example himself by going through the experiences himself. He did not pass this burden to one of the believers. For example, when our Lord wanted to bring an end to the practise of adoption so that no one will call anyone else his son unless he truly was his father, Allah first ended it for His own Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…so that (in future) there may be no difficulty for the believers in respect of (marriage to) the wives of their adopted sons when the latter have no desire to keep them (i.e. they have divorced them)….' (*al-Ahzab:* 37)

In the context of speaking about material issues versus those involving desires, we may mention here the Hadith narrated by Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* which states that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* happened to pass by some people who were busy cross-pollinating date-palms (as they usually did), and he said, 'If you were not to do it, it would be good for you'. (Therefore, they abandoned the practice), but the crop did not grow and yield properly. He *peace and blessings be upon him* later happened to pass by them again, and he said, 'What has gone wrong with your date-palms?' They said, 'You told us such-and-such', to which he replied, 'You know better about your worldly affairs.'(1) Clearly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left them to exercise their own discretion for their worldly affairs.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*, *Ahmad and Ibn Hagar*

Heaven, then, does not intervene in empirical matters because Allah *the Most High* has endowed us with minds and provided us with matter that can be subject to experimentation. We have seen how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* revised his opinion after he saw that another opinion was better. He did this to affirm an important issue which is that physical, empirical, and experimental matters are outside the scope of religion, and therefore we should not attempt to apply religion to them. For example, we should not say, 'The earth is not spherical', or 'The earth does not revolve'. This has nothing to do with the religion, since religion has absolutely nothing to do with such matters that require experimentation, laboratory testing, inference and the formulation of theories. The purpose of religion is to protect us from the conflicts that result from different inclinations and desires. When we differ on something, religion decisively says to us: 'Do this, and do not do that', and therefore settles the matter. However, if something is not included within the order' Do this and do not do that', this means that whether we do it or not, the world will not become corrupted because of it. We are free in matters which are not covered by 'Do' and 'Do not do'. We are free to differ about them; for differences in views belong to the sphere of natural instinct and disposition.

In this regard, Allah says: '…There has come to you from Allah a Light and a clear Book' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15). Does this' light' refer to the Divine Revelation or something else? In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O mankind! Verily, there has come to you a convincing proof (Prophet Muhammad) from your Lord, and we sent down to you a manifest Light (this Quran).' (*an-Nisa':* 174)

These Quranic statements indicate that the 'Light' here refers to the Quran; it combines in itself two characteristics: being a sign, i.e. a miracle, and being a light that shows us our way to live.' Therefore, believe in Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad) and in the Light (this Quran) which we have sent down...' (*at-Taghabun:* 8). Belief in Allah is a process which is fulfilled in stages; 'Allah' is the pinnacle of faith and 'His Messenger' is the one who delivers Allah's Message on His Behalf. He brought us light. But some people who tend to overstate realities say that the word 'Light' stands for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We answer by saying that we do not object to him being light because it is also possible that the conjunction 'and' in the text is meant to explain what came before it, not add something to it. We do not wish to enter a labyrinth of arguments with those who say, ‘No, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was not light, but rather, he was a physical being’; and those who respond to them with the Hadith on the authority of Jabir *Allah be pleased with him* when he said, ‘What was the first thing that Allah created, O Messenger of Allah?’ To which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘The light of your Prophet, O Jabir.’(1)

The Hadith goes as follows: It was narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah that he said, ‘O Prophet Muhammad, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you, tell me about the first thing Allah Almighty created before everything else’. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘O Jabir, before all other things Allah created the light of your Prophet from His own Light, and He made this light roam wherever He willed by His Power; and there was not, at that time, a Tablet, a Pen, a Paradise, a Fire, an angel, a heaven, an earth, a sun, a moon, a jinn or a human.’(2) (3)

In order to avoid delving into a matter of the unseen which not all minds can grasp and some will be misguided by and leading to vain arguments, we say, ‘If it appears to anyone that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is light, then he should keep this knowledge to himself; he should not try to convince anyone else of it as he should avoid causing tumults and disagreements. If the Hadith of Jabir is to be examined, we wonder, ‘Did Prophet Muhammad assume that the first thing Allah *Glorified is He* created was “your Prophet,” or “the *light* of your Prophet”?’ The Hadith said ‘The light of your Prophet’, not the Prophet himself, a man made of flesh and blood; Muhammad came from Adam, and Adam came from dust. Therefore, we need not delve into issues which can only be understood by those of outstanding spiritual excellence, or else tumults will occur. As a result, if someone says, ‘Do you say that "light" here means Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?' we say, 'Indeed yes, Prophet Muhammad most certainly is light, for light prevents us from colliding, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought us guidance to light up our way; the Quran is the theoretical Methodology, while Prophet Muhammad provided the applied Methodology. If you use light to avoid collisions, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example…' (*al-Ahzab:* 21). To sum up, the theoretical and applied Methodologies should both be followed.

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(1) From the proofreader: This is a fabricated Hadith (Fataawa Al-Lajnah Al-Daa’imah, 1/464).

(2) *Narrated by’ Abd Ar-Razzaq on the authority of Jabir as mentioned in Kashf Al-Khafa’*

(3) From the proofreader: With regard to the narration that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was created from the light of Allah, this is a fabricated Hadith (Fataawa Al-Lajnah Al-Daa’imah, 1/464*)*. Some people claim that’ Abd Ar-Razzaq narrated this in his book Al-Musanna, but this is not true.

'…There has come to you from Allah a Light and a clear Book' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15). 'Clear' means that it covers every issue and matter, as Allah says: '…No single thing have we neglected in our decree…' (*al-An'am:* 38). That is, of those matters for which your desires and inclinations might vary. Imam Muhammad 'Abdu (1) was once asked in Paris, 'you say: "…No single thing have We neglected in Our decree…" (*al-An'am:* 38): do you mean even the number of loaves of bread that can be made from an Ardab (a certain weight measure) of flour?' He asked them to wait a moment, and he found a baker and asked him about the number, and then told them the answer. They said, 'No, you say it is in the Quran'. He replied, 'Indeed, the Quran told me: "…Ask those who know, if you know not" (*an-Nahl:* 43)'.

As such, Allah's words '…No single thing have we neglected in our decree…' (*al-An'am:* 38) mean those things wherein mankind's desires and inclinations might vary, or by which the motions of life on earth are corrupted. Our Lord *the Exalted* has made people have different preferences and like different fields.

'…There has come to you from Allah a Light and a clear Book' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15). That is, O people of the Book, be aware that this is your opportunity to settle the question of doctrine on earth, end the conflict between the two earlier religions, and return to one universal religion for all people, so that this partisanship will no longer remain on earth and the motions of man's life will be complementary, not conflicting. Furthermore, Allah says: 'Muhammad is Allah's Messenger; and those who are (truly) with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the Truth, (yet) full of mercy towards one another…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

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(1) The story of Imam Muhammad Abdu being asked in Paris about the number of loaves of bread made from one 'ardab' of wheat

Look at how Islam brings together two opposing things: Islam did not come to make mankind hard and unyielding because there are many situations which require mercy, and it did not make the person always merciful either because there are situations which require firmness. Islam did not come to cast man in one single mould; rather, it allowed the believer to react to the vicissitudes of life.

And Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…people who are humble towards the believers, firm with the disbelievers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). That is, Islam did not cast the believer in a mould of humility, nor a mould of pride, but rather, a believer is adaptable and adjustable to the changes of affairs and situations; he is humble and lenient towards the believer, firm towards the unbeliever. And Islam tells us: 'and thus have we willed you to be a community of the middle way (just community)…' (*al-Baqara:* 143).

That is, you must first know the two extremes and then mark them; for the middle cannot be known unless the two extremes are marked. The Jews went too far in their materialism, and the Christians went too far in their spirituality and monasticism: '…But as for monastic asceticism–We did not enjoin it upon them: they invented it themselves…' (*al-Hadid:* 27).

When Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was asked about a matter of inheritance, he said, 'I was not sent to teach inheritance' because his purpose was to recharge the religious and spiritual battery. Despite the grave disparity between the Jews and Christians, their scholars decided to compile the Old and New Testaments in one single Book. And there are some who assume that Islam is their arch-foe, but Islam was revealed to give people the freedom of choice. When we examine the materialistic approach together with the spiritual one, we see that the Jews went too far in materialism; they said: '…O Musa (Moses), indeed we shall not believe you until we see Allah face to face…' (*al-Baqara:* 55).

They took their materialism to the point that when they were straying in the wilderness and their provisions came straight from our Lord as manna and quails–and as we know, 'manna' is a food like white discs which came down from the sky, settled on trees or stones and then dried, and which was sweet-tasting like honey; and Allah sent them quails(1), which are birds similar to chickens–they said: '…We cannot endure but one kind of food…' (*al-Baqara:* 61).

They wanted the crops which grow from the earth instead. The thing which caused these materialistic impulses to be more apparent is that they started to doubt the unseen: they said, 'Perhaps the manna will not come, or perhaps we will not be able to catch the birds; we want our food to be secure'. Hence, metaphysical matters were far beyond them, and they were excessively materialistic; Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to redress this extremist materialistic outlook, and therefore He sent down spiritual teachings in the form of the message of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and reinvigorated them with purely religious sentiments which contained no material laws so that they would adopt these elements and the balance would be restored. But dispute broke out between them, and therefore a new religion had to come in order to combine rational and composed materialism with sound spirituality which was neither lax nor excessive: it was a spirituality taken directly from Heaven meaning that there was no need for man to contrive a religion which combined the two elements into one. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* said to us: 'Muhammad is Allah's Messenger; and those who are (truly) with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the Truth, (yet) full of mercy towards one another. You can see them bowing down, prostrating themselves (in prayer), seeking favour with Allah and (His) Good Pleasure: their marks are on their faces, from the traces of prostration…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

These are all matters of worship. In fact, adherents to Islam follow both a materialistic and spiritual lifestyle at the same time. And Allah *the Almighty* continues: '…This is their likeness in the Torah…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

It is as though Allah described the followers of Muhammad in the Torah, 'O you who have gone too far with your materialism! A Messenger will come to redress the balance of beliefs and laws, and his community will be completely different to you. You are materialists, but Muhammad's followers will bow and prostrate seeking the favour and Good Pleasure of Allah, and there are marks on their faces from the traces of prostration. That is what your way lacks and will be found in the Methodology of the adherents of Islam'. Allah then says: 'and their likeness in the Injil (Gospel) is: (they are) like a seed that brings forth its shoot, and then strengthens it so that it grows stout, and (in the end it) stands upright upon its stem, delighting the sowers…' (*al-Fath:* 29). Hence, their likeness in the Torah was what the Jews were lacking, and their likeness in the Injil (Gospel) was what the Christians were lacking. That is, the religion of Prophet Muhammad combined material and spiritual values, and as a result it was a middle way between the other two. Further, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'There has come to you from Allah a Light and a clear Book…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15), that is, take the opportunity to correct your mistakes and start afresh a new life which will link you to Heaven in a way that combines the values of worldly life with those of the life of the Hereafter.

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(1) *(Salwa), i.e. kind of birds*

Allah then says:

يَهۡدِى بِهِ ٱللَّهُ مَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ رِضۡوَٰنَهُۥ سُبُلَ ٱلسَّلَٰمِ وَيُخۡرِجُهُم مِّنَ
ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ بِإِذۡنِهِۦ وَيَهۡدِيهِمۡ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ﴿١٦﴾

with which God guides to the ways of peace those
who follow what pleases Him, bringing them from
darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them
to a straight path [16] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 16)

As long as Allah is the One Who guides, He *Glorified is He* is free of the desires to which they are attached, and therefore, we can be sure that Islam is not governed by desires and personal inclinations. The cause of any lawmaker's failure is that he is prone to include enactments by which he achieves some personal preferences and gains, while a truly just lawmaker must not benefit from the law he enacts; and this is not true of anyone but Allah *Glorified is He* because He enacts the decrees and ordinances for everyone and He is greater than everyone.

'There has come to you from Allah a Light and a clear Book through which Allah shows to all who seek His Good Pleasure…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15-16).

Allah guides those who seek His Good Pleasure to the paths of salvation (*'salam*' which means 'peace'); there is good pleasure which is sought, and paths of salvation which are given as recompense. Are there paths and venues for peace and salvation? Yes, because a soul can be at peace with itself, with its family, with its community, with its nation, with the world, with the whole universe or with Allah; peace can be found with all of these. Clearly, the paths of peace and salvation are manifold; and one attains peace with Allah by exalting Him, O slave of Allah, and not worshipping other gods along with Him, or attaching any other being to Him; that is, by not associating anything with him, or by saying that there is no god at all.

Therefore, we find that Islam takes the middle ground even in the matter of doctrine: it came in the midst of those who claim that there is no god, which is a negation, and others who said, 'There are many gods: evil has a god and goodness has a god, darkness has a god and light has a god, even the air and the earth have gods!'

Those who advocated atheism based this conviction on their material senses, all of them forgetting that man is made of both matter and spirit, and when the spirit departs, the body becomes a mere corpse. Yet none of them have asked himself, 'Where is the spirit which controls both your soul and your body? Have you ever seen it? Where is it? Is it in your nose, or your ear, or your stomach, or where? What shape is it? What colour is it? What taste is it?' You cannot perceive it, yet it exists. One of Allah's creations dwells within you, yet you cannot perceive it; so could you possibly perceive the Being of your Creator? This is a manifest error, for if a god could be perceived by the senses it would no longer be a god because if you perceive something, this means you can limit it with your vision, and as long as you can limit it, this means your vision has in a sense overpowered it–and the Supreme Power cannot be overpowered by that which is lower than it. When Allah *Glorified is He* wants to indicate this, He says: 'and also (there are signs) within your own selves: will you not then see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

The other misguided team have claimed that there are many gods as this universe is vast, and everything in it must require its own private god. Hence, Islam came with the Truth and stated: There is only One God because if there were many gods, as you claim; one for the sun, another for the sky, another for the earth, another for water and another for air, then each of these gods would be incapable of accomplishing any other task besides that which fell under the limited authority of his godhood, and disputes and conflicts would arise amidst them, as is made clear by Allah's words: '…Each deity would surely have gone off (away from the others) with what he had created, and they would surely have (tried to) overcome one another…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91).

So the sun-god might remove the sun from the universe, and the water-god might deny water to all other beings; but Allah gives the final judgement on the matter by saying: 'Say, "If there were–as some people assert–(other) deities with Him (Allah), surely (even) they would have to strive to find a way to submit to the Lord of the Throne"' (*al-Isra':* 42). And in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than Allah, both (these realms) would surely have fallen into ruin!' (*al-Anbiya'*: 22) The natural laws which you observe are also governed by the One God. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come to you to tell you that there is One God, and he *peace and blessings be upon him* adds, 'There is no god but Allah'; the confirmation' there is no god' negates that there are any gods at all, and then he says 'but Allah'; and this is for man's own good so that he does not remain in humble subservience to the 'sun-god', the 'air-god' or the 'water-god'. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Allah sets forth a parable: A man belonging to several partners, (all of them) at variance with one another, and a man belonging totally to one person; can these two conditions be deemed equal?' (*az-Zumar:* 29)

Clearly, our Lord *Glorified is He* wants to spare us delusion, fancy and doubt: Allah *Glorified is He* is One God, and when He enacts a decree, no one can contradict it, as He *the Almighty* guides us by the laws He makes for us because He has neither desires nor preferences that can affect His laws. The meaning of desire is that you do something to serve your own interest, yet Allah *the Exalted* does not need anyone because He created all existence before He created mankind, and none of His creatures–no matter how much knowledge or intelligence he has been given–has any power or influence over the act or arrangement of creation' Through which Allah shows to all who seek His Good Pleasure…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 16). As long as one seeks His Good Pleasure, Allah *Glorified is He* will guide him to the ways of salvation. There are two forms of guidance: Allah *Glorified is He* guides those who seek His Good Pleasure to the paths of salvation, and He *the Exalted* said in another verse: 'But for those who are (willing to be) guided, He (Allah) increases their (ability to follow His) guidance and causes them to grow in piety' (*Muhammad:* 17).

Beware of thinking that the reward and recompense of Allah-consciousness only comes in the Hereafter for every time you do something, you find that it has an effect on you: when you pray, you find that your concerns are eased, and if you refrain from committing sin when no one can see, your heart will not be weighed down; and in this way, the believer lives in peace with his own self. The paths of peace and salvation are manifold. These are, the way to be at peace with Allah, the way to be at peace with the whole universe, the way to be at peace with society, the way to be at peace with one's family, and the way to be at peace with one's self. Allah says: 'And (know) that this is My Way leading straight (to Me): follow it, then, and do not follow other ways lest they cause you to deviate from His Way…' (*al-An'am:* 153). That is, there are ways of peace and salvation, and also ways of error.

Allah says in the following verse in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida:* '…and, by His grace, brings them out of the depths of darkness into light and guides them to a straight way' (*al-Ma'ida:* 16). The depths of darkness are where collisions occur; and when Allah takes them out of the depths of darkness into light, they see the right path that leads to goodness, and also the path which leads elsewhere. After they come out of the depths of darkness into the light, their motions are complimentary and not conflicting; they do not collide with one another, and no hatred or enmity arises amidst them. Or it may mean that Allah *Glorified is He* guides them to the Straight Path which leads to Heaven.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

لَّقَدْ كَفَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْمَسِيحُ ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ ۚ قُلْ فَمَن
يَمْلِكُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا إِنْ أَرَادَ أَن يُهْلِكَ ٱلْمَسِيحَ ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ
وَأُمَّهُۥ وَمَن فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ۗ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا
بَيْنَهُمَا ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٧﴾

Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, the son of Mary,’ are defying the truth. Say, ‘If it had been God’s will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth? Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to God: He creates whatever He will. God has power over everything’ [17] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 17)

And Allah says earlier: ‘So, We planted among them enmity….’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 14) Consequently, the Jacobites said one thing, the Nazarenes said another thing, and the Melkites said another. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* addressed the most important issue: ‘Truly, they have disbelieved who say, “Indeed, Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary…”‘ (*al-Ma’ida:* 17).

And Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Say’, replying to them: ‘…And who could have any power against Allah…’? (*al-Ma’ida:* 17) That is, who could prevent Allah *Glorified is He* from doing as He willed with the one whom you call a god, ‘…if He willed to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, his mother, and everyone who is on earth–all of them...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 17)?

They claimed that Allah is ‘Isa (Jesus) the Messiah, son of Mary; and this was a calumny against the status of divinity, which is too great to be compared and too great to indwell in anything. These noble words tell these people that no one could have prevented Allah from destroying ‘Isa, his mother and everyone on earth, for Allah is the Truth, the Sovereign Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that dwells within them, and He creates what He wills as He wills. If Allah *Glorified is He* created the Messiah with no father, we have been told before that He created Adam with neither father nor mother and created Eve with no mother; in His Awesome Power and Might, nothing is beyond His Ability. ‘Isa *peace be upon him* was a mortal man like any other.

'…For to Allah belong the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them; He creates what He wills….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 17) Allah mentions the heavens here to represent all that is high, and the earth to represent all that is low, and He says: 'He creates what He wills' to respond to this confusing matter with precise brevity: 'He creates what He wills' because the confusion arose from the fact that 'Isa *peace be upon him* was created in a unique manner which was not the usual way people are created. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified, 'Do not think that when I create men I am obliged to do this by means of male and female parents; for were this the case, then this confusion should already have arisen before 'Isa *peace be upon him* being directed, rather, at the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* for he was created with neither father nor mother'. That is, those who were afflicted by doubt and consequently misguided by the fact that 'Isa (Jesus) was born from a mother without any father should have been taken aback more by the creation of Adam, for he had neither father nor mother. Allah clarifies to them, 'Allah creates what He wills; it is not completely necessary for there to be two parents, or only one father, or only one mother.'

Our Lord *Glorified is He* has the absolute power to create what He wills, and He has created men in all the four logically possible ways: Either from both father and mother as in the normal case for all of us, or with neither as in the case of Adam *peace be upon him* or from a male but not a female as in the case of Eve, or from a female but not a male as in the case of 'Isa *peace be upon him*. That is, Allah created men in all the four logically possible ways so that you would not think that our Lord *Glorified is He* has to create in certain ways; rather, He creates what He wills. The proof of this is that both potential parents may be present together, yet they might not conceive a child–and is there any further possibility aside from all these?

'Allah's alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female (to whomever He wills), and causes to be barren whomever He wills…' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50).

Clearly, our Lord *Glorified is He* is not compelled to create by means of certain elements; the Will of the Creator, not the elements of the creation, is what matters: ‘…He creates what He wills…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 17), and Allah’s Will is absolute and His Power is unlimited; for this reason, it is inevitable that He then says: ‘…and Allah has power over all things!’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 17)

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَقَالَتِ ٱلْيَهُودُ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ نَحْنُ أَبْنَٰٓؤُا۟ ٱللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّٰٓؤُهُۥ ۚ قُلْ فَلِمَ يُعَذِّبُكُم
بِذُنُوبِكُم ۖ بَلْ أَنتُم بَشَرٌ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقَ ۚ يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَلِلَّهِ
مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا ۖ وَإِلَيْهِ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٨﴾

The Jews and the Christians say, ‘We are the children of God and His beloved ones.’ Say, ‘Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation: He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: all journeys lead to Him’ [18] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 18)

Did all the Jews say, ‘We are Allah’s children’? Or did all the Christians say, ‘We are Allah’s children’? No; some of the Jews said that’ Uzair (Ezra) was the son of Allah, and some of the Christians said that ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was the son of Allah; and Musaylima the Liar claimed to be a prophet, and all of his family claimed to be prophets as well, meaning that prophethood was in their stock; even the followers of ‘Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr Abu Khabib called themselves the ‘Khubaybites’ ascribing themselves to Ibn Az-Zubayr who was the father of Khabib; they would all ascribe to themselves something which was an attribute of someone else. As such, the meaning of: ‘We are Allah’s children ‘is’ We are the devotees of ‘Uzair (Ezra), who was the son of Allah’, and ‘We are the devotees of ‘Isa, who was the son of Allah’. We can derive evidence for this from the Quran; we know the story(1) of the believer from the family of Pharaoh: ‘At that, a believing man of Pharaoh’s family, who (until then) had concealed his faith, exclaimed, “Would you slay a man because he says, ‘Allah is my Lord’ –when he has indeed brought you clear (signs) from your Lord? And if he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him; but if he is a man of truth, something (of the punishment) of which he warns you is bound to befall you: for, verily, Allah will not grace with His guidance one who has wasted his own self by lying. O my people! Yours is the kingdom this day, (and) you have the upper hand in the land…'" (*Ghafir:* 28-29).

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(1) The story of the believer of the people of Pharaoh

Were all the people of Pharaoh Kings? No, only Pharaoh was king. But as long as Pharaoh was king, all those who followed him and supported him were also kings because they all lived under the care and patronage of the king. And Allah *Glorified is He* also said to the Jews that He: '…made you your own masters (*muluk*)…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 20) ('*muluk*', singular '*malik*', which literally means 'king'). The scholars have tried to determine what the meaning of the word '*malik*' is here: some say it means the man who owns a large house through which water flows; others say it means the man whose life is orderly and has servants to attend to him so that he does not have to serve himself in his own house, but when he is outside his house he serves himself; others say it means the one who is wealthy and does not need to work. And Sheikh' Abd Al-Jalil' Isa said about this, 'Do not find this strange, for even illiterate people say in their dialect that so-and-so is the "king of his time", meaning that he is a wealthy man of means who does not need to undertake hard work'. Consequently: 'Allah's children' does not necessarily mean that they are all His children, and therefore Allah told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say in response to them: '…Why, then, does He cause you to suffer for your sins? Nay, you are but human beings of His creating…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 18); and your forgiveness is subject to His Will: '…He forgives whom He wills, and He causes to suffer whom He wills…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 18). And you will always be subject to His Will to either forgive or punish: '…for to Allah belongs the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and to Him is the final end' (*al-Ma'ida:* 18).

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* proclaimed the true doctrine He intends for man:

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ قَدۡ جَآءَكُمۡ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمۡ عَلَىٰ فَتۡرَةٖ مِّنَ ٱلرُّسُلِ أَن تَقُولُواْ مَا جَآءَنَا
مِنۢ بَشِيرٖ وَلَا نَذِيرٖۖ فَقَدۡ جَآءَكُم بَشِيرٞ وَنَذِيرٞۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ١٩

People of the Book, Our Messenger comes to you now, after a break in the sequence of messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, 'No one has come to give us good news or to warn us.' So someone has come to you, to give you good news and warn you: God has the power to do all things [19] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 19)

'Our Messenger' here means Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who has come first of all, O people of the Book, to tell you the truth about those things wherein you differ, and secondly those things which you must agree on; and as for those teachings which Islam added, it only added them because they were appropriate for the matters of life which man will face until the end of time. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent after a long period in which no Messengers appeared, meaning a time when the connection with heaven was suspended since no Divine Messages were revealed; this was the time between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his fellow Messenger, 'Isa *peace be upon him*. People have estimated this span to be six hundred years, or five hundred and sixty years; but the number of years is not important; what is of paramount importance is that there was a lapse of time during which no Messengers were sent. There is, however, a question concerning Allah's words: 'And set forth to them a parable–(the story of how) the people of a township (behaved) when (Our) Messengers came to them. Lo! We sent to them two (Messengers), but they disbelieved in them; and so we strengthened (the two) with a third. Then they said, "Indeed, we are Messengers (sent) to you (by Allah)!" (The others) answered, "You are nothing but mortal men like ourselves; moreover, the Most Gracious never sends any (type of revelation). You do nothing but lie!" Said (the Messengers), "Our Lord knows that indeed we are most surely Messengers (sent) to you"' (*Ya Sin:* 13-16).

Were these Messengers sent by Allah between Prophet 'Isa and Prophet Muhammad? Were they sent before 'Isa *peace be upon him* to the people of Antioch? At first, the people disbelieved these two Messengers, and therefore Allah supported them with a third.

And the people said to them: 'You are nothing but mortal men like ourselves; moreover, the Most Gracious never sends any (type of revelation). You do nothing but lie!' (*Ya Sin:* 15)The Messengers replied: '…Our Lord knows that indeed we are most surely Messengers (sent) to you' (*Ya Sin:* 16).

What is the difference between '…Indeed, we are Messengers (sent) to you…' (*Ya Sin:* 14) and: '…Our Lord knows that indeed we are most surely Messengers (sent) to you' (*Ya Sin:* 16)? Words are spoken in order to deliver a statement, and if the hearer is not acquainted with the topic, he can be addressed without any emphasis, but if he harbours a trace of doubt, he must be addressed with emphatic words, and the more his doubt increases the more emphatic the language must be. Allah *Glorified is He* sent two Messengers to the townspeople and they disbelieved them, and as a result, He strengthened them with a third, which was meant to add strength to their Message; after they had been two Messengers, Allah *Glorified is He* made them three, whereupon they said: '…Indeed, we are Messengers (sent) to you (by Allah)!' (*Ya Sin:* 14)

It is true that there is emphasis here because the sentence begins with 'Indeed', which is emphatic. And when they gave them the lie and said: '…You are nothing but mortal men like ourselves; moreover, the Most Gracious never sends any (type of revelation)…' (*Ya Sin:* 15), which was even more persistent denial on their part, what did the Messengers say? Would they say: '…Indeed, we are Messengers (sent) to you' (*Ya Sin:* 14), as they did the first time? No, for the denial had become even more pronounced and flagrant, and for this reason Allah placed an even more emphatic phrase into the mouths of the Messengers: '…Our Lord knows…' (*Ya Sin:* 16) which is akin to an oath, and is the first emphasis, while the second emphasis is: '…that indeed we are mostly surely Messengers (sent) to you' (*Ya Sin:* 16).

As we know, the Arabic particle' *inna'* (translated here as' indeed') is emphatic, and then the letter '*lam*' (translated here as 'most surely') in front of the word '*mursalun*' (Messengers) gives further emphasis.

We continue by saying when a word has many meanings, the meaning which links them all is the root meaning. In the case of the word '*fatra'* (a long time), it basically means 'ending' or 'ceasing'. Here, (*fatra*) means 'ceasing'; and there was a time when revelation ceased to come and no Messengers were sent. This meant that the period of heedlessness was lengthened, and Allah's

Way was not clear for a long time and the people of goodness lived in dire need and longing for the revelation of a new Divine Way. Hence, when a Messenger finally did come, the people should have hastened to hear what he had to say. This is why Allah *the Exalted* tells us that He sent a Messenger after a long time during which no Messengers came; so if you are truly people of goodness, you should follow the way of guidance Allah *Glorified is He* brings and hasten to listen to what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has to say in order to hear his Message and his Mission.

Allah *Glorified is He* sent them Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after a long suspension of Messengers in order that they will no longer be able to argue and proffer the excuse: '…No bearer of glad tidings has come to us, nor any warner…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19); for now, indeed, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner had come to them. The bearer of glad tidings is the one who brings news of something which will come in the future; and as long as the one who comes is a bearer of glad tidings, he encourages the people to follow Allah's Way of life in order that they might attain goodness. There must be a period of time in which the people can practise the guided codes of Allah's Methodology; and there must likewise be a period of time wherein the misguided can drown more in there malicious unorthodox ways and thus bring evil to themselves.

This is like the teacher saying, 'Give those who study the glad tiding that they will succeed', whereupon those students who wish to succeed will study; that is, there must be a period of time for the glad tidings to be attained. And likewise, when a warning is given, there must be a period of time wherein one can avoid all that will bring him evil.

'…Now, after a long time during which no Messengers have appeared, there has come to you Our Messenger to make (the Truth) clear to you, lest you say, "No bearer of glad tidings has come to us, nor any warner…"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19). The words 'lest you say' show that there is no longer any opportunity to offer the excuse: '…No bearer of glad tidings has come to us, or any warner…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for now there has come to you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner–since Allah has the power over all things' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19). Allah *Glorified is He* is All-Powerful. He brought mankind into a universe which was precisely ordered and contained all the means to goodness and life in the best possible and organised way before man came to it. And once man had come into all this goodness, would his Creator leave him without any guidance? No; for He *Glorified is He* was well able to bring all His creatures into existence and give them all that preserves their life and their species. Furthermore, would Allah *Glorified is He*, not also give them all that preserves their moral values?

He *the Exalted* is well able to provide us with both material as well as moral sustenance and to give generously to His creatures in every way; and sending the Messengers was one of the techniques by which *the Almighty* provided for mankind for them to preserve their values.

Allah *Glorified is He* then turns again to the people of Musa (Moses), but this time Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* was the speaker:

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِۦ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَةَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَعَلَ فِيكُمْ
أَنۢبِيَآءَ وَجَعَلَكُم مُّلُوكًا وَءَاتَىٰكُم مَّا لَمْ يُؤْتِ أَحَدًا مِّنَ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Moses said to his people, 'My people, remember God's blessing on you: how He raised prophets among you and appointed kings for you and gave you what he had not given to any other people [20] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 20)

When you hear the Arabic word '*idh'* (take heed and remember), know that it implies an adverb of time meaning 'when', as though Allah is saying, 'Take heed and remember when Musa (Moses) said to his people: "…Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you…"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 20) Allah *Glorified is He* said this to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a reminder to aid Prophet Muhammad to endure the hardships he incurred in communicating the Divine Message, whether from the atheists or from the people of the Book.

When Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Take heed and remember (that), Musa (Moses) said to his people…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 20), it is a reminder to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* his followers or whoever reads the Quran, that Musa *peace be upon him* said to his people: '…O my people!

Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 20) And Musa *peace be upon him* would not have said: '…O my people! Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 20) had he not seen them act in a way that does not match the blessings bestowed on them. Allah is far Exalted above any comparison, but an example to illustrate this point, which is only for clarification, is when one of us scolds an ungrateful son, 'Remember all that your father has done for you'. No one says this unless the son has committed inapposite acts that are not suitable for the large amount of favours given by his father. It is as though Musa's people had subjected him to much toil and woe to the point that he said this to them in order to rebuke them and make them come to their senses and remember the blessings Allah *Glorified is He* had given them; and to remember blessings means to follow Allah's Methodology by obeying His commandments and steering clear of all that He forbids.

'Take heed and remember (that) Musa (Moses) said to his people, "O my people! Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you…" (*al-Ma'ida:* 20). We know that the word '*ni'ma'* (literally' blessing', in the singular) means 'blessings' as a class, meaning all blessings in total; or it may be that each individual blessing in itself was worthy and deserving of remembrance and gratitude. The proof that the word '*ni'ma'* can mean all blessings in total is that Allah says: '…and should you try to count Allah's blessings (*ni'ma*), you will never be able to count them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34). As long as the blessings are countless, this must mean that they are many, which means that the word '*ni'ma*' here means all blessings as a class. 'Take heed and remember (that) Musa (Moses) said to his people, "O my people! Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you…" (*al-Ma'ida:* 20). To remember blessings means to be grateful to the Bestower, and also to be ashamed to disobey Him or make use of any of these blessings in a prohibited way that will bring about Allah's wrath. 'Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you', and there are many blessings which you enjoy. Did Allah not part the sea for them: 'Strike the sea with your staff' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63). And when he struck the water with the staff: '…it parted, and each part appeared like a huge mountain' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63).

The flowing water became like a mountain. And he struck the rock for them and, by Allah's Command, water flowed from it: '"…Strike the rock with your staff!"–whereupon twelve springs gushed forth from it…' (*al-Baqara:* 60).

There were many miracles which manifested the Powerful Ability of the Supreme Creator, and this Powerful Ability is illustrated in many different ways. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea and it parted, each side becoming like a great mountain, as though the water were rock; and Musa *peace be upon him* struck the rock and water gushed forth from it. These were wonders that resulted from Allah's Powerful Ability. And did He *Glorified is He* not shade you with clouds? Did He not send down to you manna and quails in the midst of the wilderness? And do these blessings not behove that you remember Allah and give thanks to Him, and be ashamed to disobey Him or persecute Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who has come to guide you?

All of these blessings merited gratitude, and gratitude means remembrance. '…Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you when he raised up prophets among you, and made you your own masters…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 20). Whenever they were overcome by heedlessness, Allah sent them a prophet as a role model. He *Glorified is He* did not get infuriated with them and say: 'I sent them a Messenger, and then two, three, and four, but they have chosen not to be guided'. Rather, every time they disobeyed Allah *the Exalted* and their ailments aggravated, He sent another Messenger to guide them. They are like the sick person whose family does not suffice with one, two, three, or four doctors, but rather, every time they see something wrong, they call another doctor for him. This was a great blessing, for Allah *Glorified is He* sent them many Messengers, but they should have realised that their ailments had become manifold and that their disease was terminal; for had it not been terminal, they did not need all those doctors and prophets.

Interestingly enough Allah *the Exalted* did not only raise prophets from among them, but as He *Glorified is He* says He also: 'made you your own masters' ('*muluk*', which literally means 'kings'). This does not mean that they all became kings, but rather that, some of them were kings. The word '*malik'* has come to have the political meaning of a 'king': but generally speaking, every man is the owner (*maalik*) of what is in his possession; the owner of his clothes, the morsel of food he eats, and the house in which he sleeps–and the '*malik'* (master) is the one who possesses (*yamlik*) and rules (also '*yamlik*') over others who possess as well.

So everyone who has the ability to possess something and to rule over others who possess things is considered a 'master'. A man who has shepherds working for him to tend his livestock, people who serve him in his house, people who farm his land, more than one driver, many people who obey his orders and only come to him when he permits, but when meeting them, he does not experience any trouble or exert any effort–such a man is certainly a 'master'. Allah, indeed, bestowed them in abundance.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specified what it means to possess abundance according to the standards of a true believer, saying, 'If one wakes in the morning to find himself safe, healthy and having enough provisions for his day, it is as though he has been given the entire world.'

As long as he has been given the entire world by possessing these things, he is a master; and since Allah *the Most High* gave them these things, He made them masters.'…And (Allah) granted to you (favours) such as He had not granted to anyone else in the world' (*al-Ma'ida:* 20). That is, Allah *the Exalted* gave them that which none of their contemporaries were given, and continued to give it to them. Did He not give His prophet Solomon, who was of the children of Israel, dominion which was never given to anyone else after him? Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not mention this fact here, since it did not happen until ten generations after his time.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

يَٰقَوۡمِ ٱدۡخُلُواْ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ ٱلۡمُقَدَّسَةَ ٱلَّتِي كَتَبَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡ وَلَا
تَرۡتَدُّواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَدۡبَارِكُمۡ فَتَنقَلِبُواْ خَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٢١﴾

My people, go into the holy land which God has ordained
for you — do not turn back or you will be the losers' [21]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 21)

Musa *peace be upon him* was conveying here what Allah had revealed to him; and when did this take place? We know that the children of Israel had

had a connection with Egypt since the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and that Yusuf *peace be upon him* brought his father and brothers to live in Egypt, and from them were formed the Tribe of Israel. Allah *the Exalted* miraculously extended Yusuf's hegemony over the land so that they dwelled there for a time. It is amazing how precisely the Quran relates these historic events even though we did not come to learn about them until the French military campaign came to Egypt. The French came with a scientific delegation, and this delegation uncovered archaeological information which briefed them much on the ancient Egyptian civilisation and the advances which the Arabs had made many centuries before Europe; and Europe gained many sciences and arts from this at the very time the Arab world was falling into decline and ignorance.

The Muslim Arabs had invented things which astonished the Western world; history tells us how one of the Arab kings(1) sent the French king Charlemagne a gift of a clock, and the French people thought that there was a demon in the clock. The way the clock worked was amazing as the scientist who invented it placed a tube of water inside it which had a small hole from which drops fell onto something resembling the hand of a clock, which caused the clock to advance by a single minute. The clock was thus powered by water droplets and it was extremely accurate, and when the people in Charlemagne's court saw it, they thought it had demons inside it. This is one single example from many other examples which are beyond counting, all of which manifest Allah's words:

'In time we shall show them our signs (through what they see) in the utmost horizons (of the universe) and within themselves, until it becomes quite clear to them that this (Revelation) is indeed the Truth…' (*Fussilat*: 53).

And when the French came to Cairo, they brought with them this scientific delegation together with a printing press. Those scientists gave a presentation of a magic lantern and made simple people marvel at their scientific advancement; but this campaign was hidden behind displays which were more like' acrobatics'. The job of the scientists was to investigate the secret of the Egyptian and Islamic civilisations; for they knew that the Islamic civilisation had been transferred to Egypt and the ancient Egyptian civilisation was also once established there.

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(1) The story of the clock offered by the Arab king to the French king, Charlemagne

They would exhibit their scientific displays and conjuring tricks at Darb Al-Gamamiz, with the intention of causing the people to marvel at the French civilisation. At the very same time, their scientists were unravelling what was carved on the Rosetta stone, a stone which was inscribed with hieroglyphics and whose mysteries were uncovered by a young Frenchman named Champollion. Champollion was able to identify the names in the hieroglyphic text and thus to decipher the alphabet of the language; it is as though Allah wanted to use those who disbelieve in His religion to serve His religion.

In language, the pronunciation of proper nouns is fixed; that is, if a man or a prince has a name, this name is composed of unchangeable letters. Let us consider an example in the English language: there was once an English prime minister named' Churchill', but if we were to translate this name literally into Arabic it would no longer refer to this man and would not indicate his identity to us; what we actually do is leave the name as it is and transliterate it by writing it with Arabic letters instead of Roman ones. To conclude, the pronunciation of proper names is fixed.

Champollion discovered that there were unchanged letters on the Stone. In this way he was able to decipher the hieroglyphic alphabet and thus to read what was written on the Rosetta Stone, and then present to us the first discoveries of the history of ancient Egypt by reading what was written on the Stone.

Moreover, we can see the magnificence of the Quran when it relates the stories of historic figures: it relates the civilisations of ‘Ad, Thamud, and Pharaoh in the chapter of *al-Fajr*; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘I swear by the daybreak, and the ten nights! By all that is even and all that is odd! And by the night as it runs its course! Is there (not) in all this evidence for those endowed with reason (that Allah is able to punish the ungodly)? Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with (the tribe of) ‘Ad, (the people of) Iram, the nation of lofty pillars’ (*al-Fajr:* 1-7).

Iram, the nation of lofty pillars, dwelled in the Arab Peninsula. They have still not been discovered, and until now we know nothing about them; Allah *the Exalted* says about the pillars: 'the like of which has never been created in all the lands' (*al-Fajr:* 8). And Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of Pharaoh: 'and with Pharaoh (lord) of (many) stakes' (*al-Fajr:* 10). The pyramids indeed were built with the use of stakes, as were the ancient Egyptian obelisks and temples, and the other wonders which have amazed people across the ages. 'The like of which has never been created in all the lands' (*al-Fajr:* 8).

And Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of the civilisation of Thamud: 'and with (the tribe of) Thamud, who hollowed out (huge) rocks in the valley' (*al-Fajr:* 9). We have seen this civilisation wherein the people hewed their dwellings out of solid rock, just as we have seen the civilisation of Egypt. The civilisation of 'Ad is the one which, to this day, we have not seen; it must lie buried beneath the earth.(1) We know that in these places a single sandstorm can bury an entire caravan, so we can imagine what the long centuries which have passed, and the thousands of sandstorms which have blown, must have done. We will surely have to dig very deep to unravel the civilisation of 'Ad. Allah called the ancient Egyptian civilisation: '…Pharaoh (lord) of (many) stakes' (*al-Fajr:* 10); and when Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* He also spoke about his contemporaries, among whom were the Pharaohs. And He *the Exalted* said to Musa and his brother Aaron *peace be upon them*: 'Go forth, both of you, to Pharaoh: for, verily, he has transgressed all bounds!' (*Ta Ha:* 43)

As a result, Musa *peace be upon him* went to Pharaoh to free the children of Israel from his tyranny; but why did Pharaoh wreak tyranny upon them? We know that every new regime tries to annihilate the one which ruled before it and punish those who supported the old regime, and this is clear to us when we look at the world. The matter becomes clear to us when we remember the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* who became a minister to the ruler of Egypt and who brought his parents and his tribe to settle there; and the story of Pharaoh was not mentioned in the chapter of Yusuf.

When the Quran speaks of the ruler of Egypt at the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*, it says: 'And the King said, "Bring him to me…"'

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(1) From the proofreader: The location of the city of 'Ad has since been discovered by photographs taken from the NASA Space Shuttle in 1990.

(*Yusuf:* 54). Allah *Glorified is He* does not call the ruler ‘Pharaoh’: even though He used the word ‘Pharaoh’ to refer to the ruler at the time of Musa. In the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* does not say ‘Pharaoh’, but rather, He mentions’ King’. When the Rosetta Stone was discovered, we found out that at the time when Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* was in Egypt, the land was ruled by the so-called ‘Shepherd-Kings’, the Hyksos who invaded Egypt and seized it from the Egyptians and became their kings; and their dynasty was called the ‘Dynasty of Kings’.

The Quran relates, ‘the King said, “Bring him to me”’ (*Yusuf:* 54), and does not call the ruler ‘Pharaoh’. For this reason, when the Pharaohs reclaimed their rule and expelled the Shepherd Kings from the land, the Pharaohs sought to exterminate those who had served the kings, namely the children of Israel. The precision of the Quran can be clearly seen by how it calls the ruler at the time of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him’* Pharaoh’, yet calls the ruler at the time of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* ‘King’. These are things which have only recently been discovered, but the Quran told us of them; such matters needed to be discovered, and they are some of the innumerable signs of which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘In time We shall show them Our signs (through what they see) in the utmost horizons (of the universe) and within themselves…’ (*Fussilat:* 53).

Then, after He *Glorified is He* aided Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with His signs and drowned Pharaoh, Musa *peace be upon him* said to them: ‘O my people! Enter the holy land which Allah has promised you; but do not turn back (on your faith), for then you turn back as losers!’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 21)

The mission to free the children of Israel from Pharaoh had been accomplished, and the Egyptian people got rid of Pharaoh; and now the children of Israel were bidden to enter the Holy Land. The word for ‘land’ in Arabic is ‘*al-ard*’, and if this word is used in a general sense it means ‘the earth’, as in the name for the entire planet earth. The word ‘*al-ard*’ is used many times in the story of the children of Israel, in many different circumstances.

Allah *Glorified is He* says at the end of the chapter of *al-Isra’:* ‘and after that we said to the children of Israel, “Dwell now securely on earth…”’ (*al-Isra’:* 104).

Is it possible to dwell anywhere but on earth? No one says 'Dwell here' unless he is referring to a specific place on earth because all dwelling takes place on earth; so how could Allah *Glorified is He* say: '…Dwell now securely on earth…' (*al-Isra'*: 104)? The usual thing is to say, 'Dwell in such-and-such a place', such as Al-Mansura, Jericho or Jerusalem. Allah's Command: 'Dwell now securely on earth' is a subtle eloquent point that Allah uses in the Quran; and as long as Allah *Glorified is He* did not specify a particular place on earth, it is as though He is saying, 'Disperse on earth, for you have no homeland; wander the earth and settle nowhere', that is, never settle in one place, but rather wander the earth, dispersed. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And we dispersed them as (separate) communities throughout the earth…' (*al-A'raf:* 168).

When the Quran states a certain point, we should investigate its conformity to worldly matters. What the Quran states here is that the children of Israel would disperse throughout the earth in separate communities, i.e. they would be divided and scattered. Allah *Glorified is He* did not say 'We integrated them (with other societies)' but rather: 'We dispersed them', i.e. He kept them connected to one another, but in groups dispersed through the lands. When we look at any place where they have settled, we find that they always have their own quarters, that they never integrate with the inhabitants of the land, and that they have their own independent means of living. It is as though they are dispersed and scattered throughout the earth; they are still communities, and there are' ghettos' or special places for Jews in every land.

This happened after the time of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* but what were they commanded to do at the time of Musa? Allah *the Exalted* said to them: '…Enter the holy land which Allah has promised you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21) That is, now that you have escaped from Pharaoh, go to the land which Allah has appointed for you. We may observe here that the words 'the holy land' serve to specify and identify the land in question.

But what does 'holy' mean? The word in Arabic is '*muqaddasa*' the root of which is (*q-d-s*) is connected to the notion of purity and purification. The verb '*qaddasa*' means 'to clean and purify', and '*muqaddasa'* means 'cleansed'. When words are derived from a single root, they all have interconnected meanings; and when we say '*muqaddasa*', this means 'purified'.

One of Allah’s names is *Al-Quddus* (The All-Holy), and the phrase ‘*quddisa Allah*’ means ‘Allah is beyond all likeness’: Allah’s Being is not like man’s being, and His attributes are beyond any resemblance to your attributes; He *Glorified is He* has actions, but in His holiness and purity His actions are beyond any resemblance to your actions. Allah’s Being is Necessary, while man’s being is only possible because man’s being was preceded by non-existence and will be followed by non-existence; Allah’s Being is Necessary in Itself, while man’s being is only necessary because Allah *the Exalted* has made it like this, and He is well able to end it. Allah has life and man has life, but is your life like Allah’s? Certainly not!

Allah’s life is beyond any resemblance, and His Being is not like yours, and nor are His attributes. You have limited power, while Allah *Glorified is He* has Omnipotent Power; He hears, and His slave hears, but man’s hearing is limited, while His hearing is unlimited.

His Attributes are holy, and when you hear that Allah *Glorified is He* hears and knows, His Hearing is not like our hearing, and His Actions are not like our actions. When Allah says that He acts, His Action is beyond any resemblance to human action; for man is Allah’s Creation, and human actions require time and effort, having a beginning, middle, and end and taking up a certain amount of time. We carry things over periods of time, and those who carry them must have strength; but Allah’s Actions are unique, for He acts by saying ‘Be!’ He *the Most High* says: ‘And we have indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six periods, and no weariness ever touched Us’ (*Qaf:* 38).

That is, Allah *Glorified is He* is absolved of ever experiencing tiredness, for He needs only say ‘Be!’ –and it is. Therefore, when we give the account of the Night Journey, we must ascribe this event to Allah, not to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order for it to be clear that those who disbelieved Prophet Muhammad concerning the matter of the Night Journey were wrong. They said, ‘We flog our camels for a month to reach it, and you claim to have gone there in a single night!’

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not claim this for himself, and he did not say, ‘I went from Mecca to Jerusalem’ which would have given them cause to say' We flog our camels for a month to reach it, and you claim to have gone there in a single night!' Rather, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I was taken'. That is, he was not the one who made it happen, but rather, Allah *Glorified is He* made it happen. And as long as it was Allah's Action, it did not require any time at all, and therefore they should have understood exactly to what they were objecting. But we know that Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to understand it like this because certain so-called intellectuals have emerged in our times who say, 'The Night Journey was only in spirit'. To them, we say, 'By Allah had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to the Arabs, 'I went in spirit alone', would they have disbelieved him? It is just like when someone says, 'I was in New York last night: I saw it in my dreams'. Would anyone disbelieve him? No. The Arabs did not believe him because they understood that he was claiming to have been 'taken' according to the complete meaning of the word: by body and spirit together. This is proved by the fact that they compared one action to another and one event to another and one journey to another, and they said what we have just quoted. Consequently, this matter served to aid Islam.

So the word (*Quddus*) means 'purified and far removed from any imperfections'. Whenever you see something which seems unbelievable, judge it according to Allah's action *Glorified is He* not your own action as a human being; for actions are proportionate with the power of the one who performs them. If the one who performs the action possesses great power, then it will take less time. For example, consider moving a certain amount of wheat from one place to another: if the one who lifts the wheat is a child, he will have to move it one sheaf at a time, whilst if he is a full grown man, he will move it one bale at a time and if he is especially capable, he might carry it all in one trip. So the time an action takes is inversely proportionate to the power of the one who does it: the greater the power, the less time is needed. So if an action is performed by Allah Almighty's Omnipotent Power, it will take no time at all.

So Allah *Glorified is He* is Sacred in every way; and this was what the True Lord willed, just as He willed that a certain place on earth be the Inviolable Sanctuary, wherein it is forbidden to hunt, cut trees, or harm people. The point is to determine whether this is a natural law or a legislative law? ‘Have they not seen that we made (Mecca) a safe sanctuary?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 67) If it were a natural law, then it would have never been violated and no one would ever have harmed anyone else. So what is the difference between a natural law and a legislative law? Natural laws exist because nothing can stop the inevitable. The True Lord might want one person to be tall, and this is a natural law in which the person plays no part; but if the True Lord wants you to be obedient and to pray, this is a legislative law. The legislative law of Allah *Glorified is He* covers those things wherein man has free will and can choose whether to obey or not. Natural law, on the contrary, covers those things wherein man has no free will and which inevitably befall him whether he likes it or not.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants the Sanctuary to be secure, which is a legislative law because there have been occasions when people have been attacked therein and their security has been violated. Had it been a natural law, this would have never happened. Therefore, it is a sacred law, and if we obey our Lord we will make the Sanctuary secure, but if we do not obey Him, those who disobey will assault people therein and terrorise them. Allah’s Will, as a commandment of legislative law, is that the Sanctuary be made secure.

‘O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has assigned to you’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 21). So the question is, did Allah *Glorified is He* promise this land to them as a natural law or as a legislative law? If it was a natural law, then they would have inevitably entered it; but He said: ‘it is forbidden to them.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 26)

So it was a commandment of legislative law, not a declaration of natural law. If they were to obey the commandment of Allah Almighty, find their courage to enter the holy land, then they would take it, otherwise it would be forbidden. So there is no contradiction between His promise to give them the land and making it forbidden to them. He promised it to them as a commandment of legislative law which would have been achievable had they entered it boldly without fear of those within it, trusting that they had the support of Allah *the Almighty*; but since they had not done so, it has been made forbidden to them.

'O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has assigned to you and do not turn back (from fighting in Allah's Cause) and (thus) become losers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21) That land is mentioned more than once: 'And We said after Pharaoh to the children of Israel, 'Dwell in the land.' (*al-Isra':* 104)

We have already seen what these words meant. The precision here is that He *Glorified is He* commanded the children of Israel to dwell anywhere on earth and it was their destiny to be scattered and dispersed. 'And when there comes the promise of the Hereafter, We will bring you forth in (one) gathering' (*al-Isra':* 104) That is, He will gather them from every land, after which the second promise will be fulfilled, as it was stated at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra':* 'And We conveyed to the children of Israel in the Scripture that, 'You will surely cause corruption on the earth twice, and you will surely reach (a degree of) great haughtiness.' (*al-Isra':* 4)

For when the True Lord said: 'Glorified is He who took His Servant by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* to *Al-Masjid Al- Aqsa*, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.' (*al-Isra':* 1) This entails that by this verse, He *Glorified is He* includes the Aqsa Mosque among the holy sites of Islam. And the True Lord clarified to them: 'O Jews, you shall live in a certain place and make a treaty with My Messenger, but you will corrupt the place in which you live and the people will bear you once or twice, after which Allah shall unleash His servants upon you; and they shall go amongst your houses and banish you from this land.'

And the True Lord tells us that He informed the children of Israel in their scriptures of what would happen to them when Islam came: 'And We conveyed to the children of Israel in the Scripture that, 'You will surely cause corruption on the earth twice, and you will surely reach (a degree of) great haughtiness. (4) So when the (time of) promise came for the first of them, We sent against you servants of Ours – those of great military might, and they probed (even) into the homes, and it was a promise fulfilled. (5)' (*al-Isra':* 4-5)

Some people say that this refers to the days of Nebuchadnezzar, but we say to them: You must understand the words of The True Lord when He says: 'So when the (time of) promise came for the first of them' correctly. The word 'promise' does not refer to something which happened before one spoke, but rather, it refers to something which will happen after speaking. So this does not refer to the time of Nebuchadnezzar and the 'time' at the start of the sentence refers to something which will happen in the future, i.e. after these words are spoken. Moreover, was Nebuchadnezzar one of the servants of Allah *Almighty*? The words of The True Lord 'servants of Ours' mean the forces of faith, and Nebuchadnezzar was a Persian Zoroastrian.

These wise words actually refer to the first troubles the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced when they broke the treaty he had made with them, so he banished them. And was this the end of the matter?

We might ask: Did the children of Israel only spread corruption on earth twice? No, compared to what they actually did, two is only the least. The corruption they spread on earth which is mentioned here must refer to what they did in the land ruled by Islam. And He *Glorified is He* says: '…We sent against you servants of Ours – those of great military might,' so as long as there are Allah's 'servants' who have true faith and make proper preparations, the promise of Allah *the Almighty* will inevitably come true; but if the people fall short of this description, then those who suffer the corruption of the children of Israel will encounter the truth of Allah's words: 'Then We gave back to you a return victory over them.' (*al-Isra':* 6)

So they will not be allowed to prevail once again unless the believers do not live up to their faith. And if some people ask, 'Why, O Allah, would You allow the children of Israel to prevail once again?' The answer is: because you people have fallen short of the requirements of true service to Allah *Glorified is He*. As long as we are not true servants to Allah *the Almighty*, we will inevitably have to experience the long history of transgression of the children of Israel with which we are all familiar. Now we are facing the Jews in the midst of the manifestation of Allah's words 'Then We gave back to you a return victory over them.' And if we are true servants to Allah *the Almighty,* they will not be able to harm us. And also for pilgrimage and also for pilgrimage Were life to continue without the Jews being allowed to have the upper hand over us, even though we had lost our way and all started following our desires, this would mean that what the Quran said was not correct. But of course, life's continuum inevitably came to show that the Quran indeed is correct. This is why when the news that the Jews had entered Jerusalem reached one of those who has sound knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* and whom we hold to be close to Allah Almighty, he prostrated to Allah Almighty. We said, 'Are you prostrating to Allah *Glorified is He* because the Jews have taken Jerusalem?' He said: 'Yes, for our Lord spoke the truth when He said: 'to enter the temple in Jerusalem, as they entered it the first time.' (*al-Isra':* 7) Could they enter it a second time if they had not been expelled from it a first time? This man who had sound knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* praised our Lord because real-life events confirmed the truth of the Quran.

Allah Almighty says: 'and made you more numerous (than ever).' They (the Jews) are rich because they control most of the economic movement in the modern world. All of them are military reserves. This is what' and made you more numerous (than ever)' means. The Jews are not powerful because of their state alone, but because they are supported by the most powerful nation in the modern world. In short, what Allah Almighty said: 'Then We gave back to you a return victory over them. And We reinforced you with wealth and sons and made you more numerous in manpower,' proved true.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* pronounces His final verdict and says to the Jews: (And said), 'If you do good, you do good for yourselves' (*al-'Isra'*: 7) And will they continue to prevail, O' Lord? No, because the True Lord says: 'and if you do evil, (you do it) to yourselves. Then when the final promise came, (We sent your enemies) to sadden your faces.' (*al-Isra':* 7) It is as though the True Lord is giving us the glad tidings that we shall be victorious, as long as we fulfil Allah's requirement that we be true servants to Him, whereupon He will ease the fulfilment of His promise to the Jews: 'to sadden your faces.'

The noblest part of a man is his face. When we are true servants to Allah Almighty, we shall 'mar their faces'. There is even more: 'and to enter the temple in Jerusalem, as they entered it the first time and to destroy what they had taken over with (total) destruction.'

The True Lord had not mentioned the Temple up to this point, but rather, this is what He said: 'And We conveyed to the children of Israel in the Scripture that, 'You will surely cause corruption on the earth twice and you will surely reach (a degree of) great haughtiness. (4) So when the (time of) promise came for the first of them, We sent against you servants of Ours – those of great military might and they probed (even) into the homes and it was a promise fulfilled. (5)' (*al-Isra':* 4-5)

So the True Lord did not mention the Temple here at first; so how will we enter it? We entered the Aqsa Mosque for the first time when Islam spread under the rule of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab. During his caliphate, the Aqsa Mosque was not under Jewish control, but rather, under Byzantine control; so the first time we entered the mosque, they were totally out of the picture. But here the True Lord speaks of the second time now that the Mosque is under the control of the children of Israel. So we shall be true servants to Allah Almighty, of great prowess in war and we shall enter the Aqsa Mosque as we entered it before. The True Lord speaks of the Mosque here because the first time we entered the Mosque it was not an abasement of the Jews, but rather as we said, it was under the control of the Byzantine Empire. The True Lord then adds: 'and to destroy what they had taken over with (total) destruction.' In order to destroy what they raised, there must first pass some time for them to build giant buildings.

In the verses of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* which we are currently examining, the True Lord tells us some of what He told *Musa* (Moses) to tell his people after they came out of Egypt: 'O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has assigned to you and do not turn back (from fighting in Allah's Cause) and (thus) become losers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21)

The True Lord's words 'but do not turn back' explain to us the natural human impulse which comes into effect when one must face the enemy. When a man faces his enemy, he must turn his face towards theirs. When the enemy flees, he turns his back. A man turns his back in battle for one of two reasons: either to go and join another troop to boost their strength and aid them in defeating the enemy; or to make some kind of ruse with the intention of returning to fight the enemy; or else he turns his back to flee, which is blameworthy and considered one of the deadly sins. Concerning this, the True Lord says: 'And whoever turns his back to them on such a day, unless swerving (as a strategy) for war or joining (another) company, has certainly returned with anger (upon him) from Allah and his refuge is Hell – and wretched is the destination.' (*al-Anfal:* 16)

To turn one's back in battle is not blameworthy if one intends thereby to make a ruse or to ambush the enemy. If this is the case, there is nothing wrong with turning one's back – but otherwise, it is blameworthy. Does turning one's back mean to move backwards, whilst still keeping one's face turned towards the enemy? Or does it mean to turn oneself around and flee from the enemy? Both are possible. The children of Israel were commended not to flee and to enter the land. How was their response given that this promise was a legislative law?

قَالُواْ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِنَّ فِيهَا قَوۡمٗا جَبَّارِينَ وَإِنَّا لَن نَّدۡخُلَهَا حَتَّىٰ يَخۡرُجُواْ
مِنۡهَا فَإِن يَخۡرُجُواْ مِنۡهَا فَإِنَّا دَٰخِلُونَ ٢٢

They said, 'Moses, there is a fearsome people in this land.
We will not go there until they leave. If they leave, then we
will enter' [22] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 22)

How could they openly rebel against the commandment of the True Lord in this way? And how did they know that ferocious people dwelt in this land? We should remember that the True Lord said before: 'We delegated from among them twelve leaders.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 12)

So the leaders went first, scouted, spied, and learned information about this holy land. They learned it and contained the huge giants (Amalekites) of Canaan; and when they saw these people, they said to themselves: 'Could we possibly fight these people? This is impossible; we shall not enter the land as long as they are there.' So they capitulated and turned their back and fled.' They said, 'O Musa (Moses), indeed within it is a people of tyrannical strength' (*al-Ma'ida:* 22).

The Arabic word for 'tyrannical' is (*jabbar*) and this is an abstract concept derived from a concrete root. The root word (*jabbara*) means a date palm the fruits of which are too high for a person to pick with his hand stretched out, when the palm's fruits are within the reach of one's hand, whilst when they are too high to reach, it is called (*jabbara*). This word (*jabbar*) was then taken to refer someone who cannot be defeated. It can also mean someone who practices coercion but for a good cause. For example, the Egyptian title for the person who sets broken bones is (*mujbirati*) because he forces the bones to go back to their normal places; and this might cause the patient pain, but it is good for him.

And (*al-Jabbar*) ('The All-Compelling') is a Name of Allah Almighty because He conquers all and cannot be conquered and He might force us to do something for our own good. He tests us with trials in order to purify us and give our lives balance. So (*al-Jabbar*) is one of the True Lord's attributes of perfection because He uses His power of compulsion for good and vanquishes the evildoers, the haughty, and the arrogant, which benefits those who are good and righteous. And He *Glorified is He* cannot be vanquished; so those on his side cannot be defeated by anyone. But if a human being is a (*jabbar*) (tyrant), this is blameworthy because his claim of invincibility has nothing to back it up, like a hollow building. The one who makes a show of invincibility might get something as small as a headache and be forced to lie down because of the pain. We see examples of this in our lives. We find that a person who acts as though he is invincible might have a heart attack and be taken to hospital. Another might get a stomachache and runs off holding his belly so that even children laugh at him. They might say to him: 'Go away, you are not invincible or strong or anything for that matter!' If someone really wants to be invincible, he should be so at all times so that you never see him act in any other way; and endless strength and invincibility belong to none but Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord continues: 'we will never enter it until they leave it.' When you hear the word 'never' coming before a verb, you know that this is forever, at which case they have decided that they will never enter that land. Yet, when attached with' until' it becomes conditional, at which case their entrance is happening provided that the tyrannical people leave.' But if they leave it, then we will enter.' If a nation inclines towards evil and indulges in it, does this mean there cannot be any good in it? No, because the True Lord preserves some elements of goodness so that it cannot be completely snuffed out; and the True Lord makes it clear that this was the case with the children of Israel, for when they said this to Musa (Moses), two men among them demurred:

قَالَ رَجُلَانِ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ أَنْعَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمَا ٱدْخُلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْبَابَ
فَإِذَا دَخَلْتُمُوهُ فَإِنَّكُمْ غَٰلِبُونَ ۚ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوٓا۟ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Yet two men whom God had blessed among those who were afraid said, 'Go in to them through the gate and when you go in you will overcome them. If you are true believers, put your trust in God' [23] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 23)

They were two men who feared to disobey Allah *Glorified is He*, whilst the rest of the children of Israel, as a group, did not understand Allah Almighty properly. Had they obeyed the commandment of Allah *Glorified is He* to them in the Holy Land without disobeying it, Allah Almighty would have allowed them to enter successfully. But none of them understood the will of Allah Almighty properly except for two men, who were named Caleb and Joshua, son of Nun. One of them was from the tribe of Judah and the other from the tribe of Ephraim, both of whom were sons of Joseph *peace be upon him*. These two men said: 'As long as Allah Almighty has promised us that you will enter, He is only asking us to strive a little.'

When Allah Almighty commands one to do something, it is enough for him to begin this work with a sound intention and then Allah Almighty will help him with it. Allah *Glorified is He* says to His servant: 'I am as my servant thinks of me, and I am with him when he invokes me. If he invokes Me to himself, I invoke him to Myself; and if he invokes Me in a gathering, I invoke him in a better gathering; and if he draws a hand's span nearer to Me, I draw an arm's length nearer to Him; and if he draws an arm's length nearer to me, I draw a fathom's length nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.'(1)

So, if it is tiresome to walk, Allah Almighty does not want those who walk for His sake to become weary. He sends His grace and mercy to them at speed; for the first priority is that the deed be yours, O servant of Allah. One of the wonders of Allah Almighty's grace is that He does the deed and then ascribes it to you and He rejoices to see His servant come to Him. Let me give an example to illustrate this – and Allah Almighty is beyond compare –

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.*

suppose you want to hold a sword: why do you not analyse the matter? The sword which you grasp is made of iron and you got this iron from within the earth. The True Lord said: ‘And we sent down iron, wherein is great military might and benefits for the people’ (*al-Hadid:* 25).

The True Lord is the One who sent down iron. He is the One who taught us how to melt it and shape it with fire: ‘And we taught him the fashioning of coats of armour to protect you from your (enemy in) battle.’ (*al-Anbiya’*: 80)

I would like the physiologists to tell us: when a man grasps something, say a sword, what muscles does he use to do this? And how does he tell his muscles to do this? And how many muscles and nerves are involved in this action? Despite all this, all a man has to do to grasp something is to make the intention and desire to grasp it and he will do so. And when a man takes a single step, which muscles initiate this step?

When a person moves a mechanical arm on a machine, tonnes of cables, tools, and electric circuits are required to move this mechanical arm. So how many muscles move in a person’s body when he takes a single step? A great many parts of the human body act when it takes a single step – indeed, a great many parts of the human body react simply because he wills them to do so! So if a man’s mere will causes action, whether his will is to grasp a sword, take a step, or hold a pen in his fingers and write, he should be aware that his will is a gift from Allah *Glorified is He*; and if a human being cannot specify the part of his body which contains his will, then what do we think about the True Lord when He wills something?

Let us return to the verse which we are currently examining. Allah *Glorified is He* blessed these two men with sound understanding of His will, so they said to the children of Israel: ‘Help yourselves by entering this land and Allah will succour you.’ These two men were like the mother whose son asks her to pray for his success, so she says to him: ‘I will pray for you, but you must help the prayer by studying hard.’ It is as though fear of disobeying Allah Almighty was a blessing for these two men and as though it is a blessing to understand the words of Allah Almighty properly.

‘Enter upon them through the gate, for when you have entered it, you will be predominant’. (*al-Ma’ida*: 23) It is as though as soon as they enter the gate, they would defeat the giant Amalekites; Allah Almighty did not ask them to fight the Amalekites, but rather as soon as these ferocious men saw them enter the gate, they would suddenly be filled with dread.

Regarding this story, one of the legends says that a giant Amalekite named ‘Awj ibn ‘Inaq went out to his orchard outside the city to gather some fruits for his chief and took two of these people and hid them in his sleeve. He then threw them down before his chief as he gave him the fruits, saying: ‘These are two of the people who wish to enter our city.’ Such was the level of exaggeration that their fear of the Amalekites had aroused in them, despite the fact that two men among them had understood the intentions of Allah Almighty correctly and thus said, ‘Enter upon them through the gate.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 23) This was the will of Allah Almighty, which would have guaranteed victory for them had they followed it.

Some of the exegete’s have said that the two men in this verse were not actually from the children of Israel because they understand that’ two men from among those who feared’ means ‘two men from amongst those whom the children of Israel feared’. And they said to the children of Israel: ‘Do not be struck with fear and dread because of the size of these people’s bodies, for Allah’s forces will grant you victory’: ‘And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31).

The True Lord ends this verse by saying: ‘And upon Allah rely, if you should be believers.’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 23) Do not put all your faith in calculations of numbers versus numbers and resources versus resources, but rather judge the matter according to faith, for Allah Almighty is with you: If you help (the cause of) Allah, He will help you’ (*Muhammad*: 7). And He says: ‘And (that) indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome.’ (*as-Saffat*: 173) The one who believes in Allah *Glorified is He* must draw strength from this belief; and if those children of Israel who were commanded to enter the land were true believers, they would have placed their trust in Allah Almighty. So how did they respond?

قَالُواْ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِنَّا لَن نَّدۡخُلَهَآ أَبَدٗا مَّا دَامُواْ فِيهَاۖ فَٱذۡهَبۡ
أَنتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَٰتِلَآ إِنَّا هَٰهُنَا قَٰعِدُونَ ٢٤

They said, ‘Moses, we will never enter while they are still there, so you and your Lord go in and fight, and we will stay here’ [24] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 24)

It is as though the core of what they said to Musa (Moses) was: ‘Do not bother with us and save your efforts; for we shall never enter this land as long as these giant Amalekites are there. And if you insist on us entering the land, then you go first with your Lord and fight and we shall stay here and wait for you.’ Their fear was so strong that they went as far as to mock Musa (Moses) and his Lord; their mockery reached such a despicable level. And this was not even new on their part, for they had said before: ‘Make us see Allah face to face.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 153) Before that, they had worshipped the golden calf. So what did Musa (Moses) say?

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي لَآ أَمۡلِكُ إِلَّا نَفۡسِي وَأَخِيۖ فَٱفۡرُقۡ بَيۡنَنَا وَبَيۡنَ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡفَٰسِقِينَ ٢٥

He said, ‘Lord, I have authority over no one except myself and my brother: judge between the two of us and these disobedient people’ [25] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 25)

Aaron was Musa’s (Moses’s) brother and a fellow messenger. So it is as though Musa (Moses) was announcing that he had no trust in those people to whom Allah Almighty had sent him as a messenger, as well as Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. But did he have mastery over his brother’s soul? Or did he mean: ‘I am master of none but myself and likewise my brother is master of none but himself, but You have heard, Lord, how the rest of them say that they will not enter the land as long as the Amalekites are there. My brother and I are on one side and the rest of the people are on the other. So draw a dividing-line between us and these disobedient folk!’

The True Lord put these words into the mouth of Musa (Moses) that perchance the heart of one of Musa (Moses)’ followers might incline to him. He says to Musa (Moses), ‘I am with you!’ Therefore, Musa (Moses) said: ‘so part us from the defiantly disobedient people.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 25) As we know, the meaning of 'disobedient' is' outside faith', just as the fresh date breaks free from its shell when it ripens. It is as though faith is like a skin or a shell which covers a man. When he breaks free of his faith, he removes himself from the rules which guarantee his proper maintenance. Likewise, the children of Israel broke free of their faith and therefore the True Lord said:

قَالَ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡۛ أَرۡبَعِينَ سَنَةٗۛ يَتِيهُونَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ
فَلَا تَأۡسَ عَلَى ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

God said, 'The land is forbidden to them for forty years: they will wander the earth aimlessly. Do not grieve over those who disobey' [26] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 26)

Was the period of prohibition meant to last for forty years? Or did He say 'it is forbidden to them' without any further discussion because they firstly refused to enter it? Therefore, none of those who said: 'we will not enter it, ever, as long as they are within it' (*al-Ma'ida*: 24) would live to enter this land; and after this, the following was decreed: 'or forty years (in which) they will wander throughout the land.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 26) Are these two parts interconnected or are they separate?

Both meanings are possible. 'Wander' means to travel without any guidance, so one does not know where he is from or where he is going. When a person enters a place where there are many different paths and roads leading different ways and does not know how to get out of it, this is the meaning of 'wandering.' But how wide was the wilderness in which they wandered? The scholars say that it was only eighteen miles; but how could they get lost in such a small area of land?

Allah *Glorified is He* willed that every time they became weary of travel and slept, they would awaken in the morning to find themselves back where they started; and they would set up markers to show the way and every morning they would find that the markers were gone. They continued to wander like this for as long as forty years of wandering. When Allah Almighty wishes to chastise a sinner, He makes sure he has the provision and sustenance he needs to stay alive, even if he is a disbeliever; for He is the One

Who called them into existence. He did not abandon them in the wilderness forever just as He does not abandon those who do not believe in Him.

So the preservation of life is essential. When someone commits a grave sin against society, we put him in jail, but we give him food and drink. When society advances, it gives convicts jobs which allow them to use their talents while still preventing them from moving freely in society. The convicted prisoner remains in jail, but he eats, drinks, sleeps, and works. The difference is found in the most important aspect of life, which is freedom of movement. So what do we think Allah Almighty did when He imprisoned them in the wilderness? Allah *Glorified is He* gave them food and drink and sent down to them manna and quails.

Someone might say: 'Did Allah Almighty send manna and quails down to them so that they could live a life of laziness, arrogance, and delusion?' We say: No, the wisdom behind this divine decree was that it made the period of their wandering lengthy; for had He made them farm for their food, they would have been occupied with the affairs of daily life. But the True Lord wanted them to be well aware of how long they spent wandering. There is not only food and drink, but there is also the matter of dignity, which is more important than food and drink.

We can see this when we consider the example of some of those who were jailed for crimes against society and whom the authorities permitted to have food brought to them from their homes. This made these convicts ever more aware of the discomfort of having their freedom taken from them. So the True Lord wanted to punish them severely during their period of wandering; and therefore we find that some people calculate the period of time they spent wandering and then recall that the True Lord said: 'And We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for thirty nights and perfected them by (the addition of) ten; so the term of his Lord was completed as forty nights. And Musa (Moses) said to his brother Aaron, 'Take my place among my people' (*al-A'raf:* 142)

And after Musa (Moses) had left the people, they worshipped the golden calf which Musa, the Samaritan, made for them. When Musa (Moses) returned to them, he rebuked his brother Aaron harshly; and their Lord punished them for their unbelief for forty years. It is as though every day they spent worshipping the golden calf was punished by one year of wandering. Because He is a Merciful Lord, He did not leave them without giving them the sustenance they needed to stay alive. Was Musa (Moses) with them in the wilderness or not? Did he die with them whilst they were wandering, or not? These are questions which do not concern us, even though some of the scholars have occupied themselves with them; for these are matters which bring neither benefit nor harm. What is important is that the children of Israel had not entered Jericho until forty years later, under the command of Joshua son of Nun.

It is possible for us to read the verse in the following way:' (Allah) said: 'Then indeed, it is forbidden to them.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 26) If we pause here, this would mean that the land was forbidden to them forever, after which Allah Almighty decreed that their punishment would be to wander for forty years: 'for forty years (in which) they will wander throughout the land. So do not grieve over the defiantly disobedient people.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 26)

But if we read it so it is all connected as follows:' (Allah) said, 'then indeed, it is forbidden to them for forty years (in which) they will wander throughout the land. So do not grieve over the defiantly disobedient people.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 26) This would mean that the punishment of these disobedient folk would last for forty years wandering, after which they would enter Jericho.

And the True Lord commanded *Musa* (Moses) not to grieve for these disobedient folk; for when Musa (Moses) prayed to Allah to' so part us from the defiantly,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24) he felt somewhat uncomfortable after making this supplication and said to himself: 'Why did not I pray for their guidance instead of praying for their separation?' Therefore, the True Lord said to him: 'do not grieve over the defiantly disobedient people.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 26) Do not grieve for them because they deserve to be punished for their iniquity and disobedience.

The True Lord then says:

وَٱتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ ٱبْنَىْ ءَادَمَ بِٱلْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا فَتُقُبِّلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمَا وَلَمْ
يُتَقَبَّلْ مِنَ ٱلْءَاخَرِ قَالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

[Prophet], tell them the truth about the story of Adam’s two sons: each of them offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one and not the other. One said, ‘I will kill you,’ but the other said, ‘God only accepts the sacrifice of those who are mindful of Him [27] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 27)

A story is an important piece of information. It is not just for any piece of information, but also for those which are particularly noteworthy. When we hear the words ‘in truth, ‘we should be aware that this is something which has been revealed from on high by the True Lord and which cannot be altered or replaced. Therefore, He said: ‘And with the truth we have sent the Quran down and with the truth it has descended.’ (*al-Isra’:* 105)

That is, what Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down has not been adulterated by any other speech. It has been sent down with the fullness of truth, commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil. When Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘And recite to them the story of Adam’s two sons, in truth,’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 27) He is telling a factual story that relates a true incident. And as long as Allah Almighty is the One telling this story, He will tell it in a way which most perfectly imparts its truth and its beneficial lessons; this is why He calls it ‘the true narration’: ‘Indeed, this is the true narration.’ (*Al-’Imran:* 62) And He says: ‘We relate to you, (O Muhammad), the best of stories.’ (*Yusuf:* 3)

We know that Adam was the first human being. The exegetes tell us that the sons of Adam were named Cain and Abel. Each of them offered a sacrifice (whose aim is to draw nearer to Allah *Glorified is He*. Did the two offer one joint sacrifice or did each of them offer their own individual sacrifice? As long as the True Lord accepted from one of them and not from the other, this means that each of them must have offered his own individual sacrifice.

We know that Adam was the first human being and Eve was made for him in order to allow procreation to take place because procreation needs the presence of both male and female: ‘And of all things we created two mates.’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 49)

So when the True Lord wishes for a being to procreate, He creates it in pairs.' *Glorified is He* who created all pairs – from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.' (*Ya Sin:* 36)

We see this when we cross-pollinate female date palms with males. There are some creatures in which we do not observe male and female elements; this may be because the male is not visible to our eyes, but exists at a distance and is transported by the wind, such as pollen: 'And We have sent the fertilising winds and sent down water from the sky and given you drink from it. And you are not its retainers.' (*al-Hijr:* 22) So the wind transports pollen from place to place so that plants are fertilised. Or otherwise, it is because the male and female elements exist together in the same place such as is the case with maize stalks wherein the male and female elements exists alongside one another. The top of the stalk contains the male elements and from the cob protrude delicate silk fibres which are the female elements. The wind causes the male pollen to fall from the top of the stalk onto the female silk fibres and every fibre takes enough pollen to allow the seed to germinate. When the leaves of the cob stick together and do not allow the female silk fibres to protrude from the ear, the pollen cannot reach them and so the cob does not germinate and no seeds grow on it. And when you take a corncob and open it, you may find that some of its seeds are dead; these are the ones which no pollen reached because they did not have silken fibres to catch the pollen as it fell, and if a maize seed does not have a silken fibre protruding from it to catch the pollen, it will not germinate. So everything has its male and female elements. And He says: 'And it is He who creates the two kinds – the male and the female.' (*an-Najm:* 45)

Everything which can be called a 'thing' has its male and female elements. Even rain must be seeded and if it is not seeded with atoms, then rain does not fall. And even stones contain positive and negative atoms. And when we discovered that electricity has positive and negative charges, we were able to harness it. The True Lord says: 'And of all things we created two mates; perhaps you will remember.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49)

And this was the first knowledge ever to come to the Arabs for until the Quran was revealed, they had no knowledge; and the Quran imparted such knowledge to the Arabs that they surpassed all others when they utilised the means Allah *Glorified is He* gave them. But when they became lax and others began to utilise the means in their stead, many discoveries were made. Now we find that all of these discoveries were alluded to in the Quran: ‘Glorified is He who created all pairs – from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36) So whenever new things are discovered which contain positive and negative (or male and female), they are included in the words: ‘and from that which they do not know.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36)

Man, the master of existence, must be composed of male and female, not in order to exist, but in order to procreate. As for the existence of man, he was made by Allah Almighty who creates everything from nothing. When Adam and Eve were made and procreation began, the population of the earth began to grow; and if we were to follow the chain of procreation in the whole world back to its origins, we would find that the population would get smaller every generation until we reached Adam and Eve. For example, if we travelled one hundred years back, we would find that the population of Egypt was no greater than five million at most, and if we went further centuries back, we would find the population smaller still, all the way back until we arrived at the first man whom Allah Almighty created, Adam from whom He created Eve. So man as a species did not come into existence by means of procreation.

When we count the population of the earth, and then follow it back in time, we will eventually come to the first man. Everything procreates, whether animal or plant. And when we follow the population count forward in time, we see that it increases and the steps it traverses are huge. And when the True Lord tells us that He created us from a single soul from which He made its mate and that from these two He caused many men and women to arise; statistics bear this out. Increase can only come by procreation and Adam and Eve were the first to procreate. The True Lord willed to give Adam twins so that each twin would pair with a twin of the opposite sex from another set of twins born separately; that is, the male would mate with the female who was not his own twin.

Our Lord told us this story to impart unto us the origin of procreation in a symbolic way. He made it clear that there was still distance between the partners, but it was a relative distance. It is true that the partners were brother and sister, but because the girl was born with a male twin and then the boy was born separately with a female twin, there was a relative distance between them. The girl from one set of twins would mate with the boy from another set and vice versa. This was the only relative distance which was possible at that time because the human race was still in its infancy.

We can see this concept at work in the countryside when one farmer says to another, 'Your maize crop has failed.' He replies: 'I take the seeds from the land where the maize grows and give the seeds to the crop: I sowed a field of maize from which I took a few bales to use as seeds to sow, but the crops come up weak.' So the experienced farmer says to him: 'Take some seed from your neighbour.' This is because there is some distance between my crops and my neighbour's crops; and once the two crops have become too closely related, the experienced farmer says: 'Take some seed from the next town' and so on and so forth. How did breeding and reproduction develop? And from where do we get the seeds? Every time we get them from outside, the result is stronger.

The same is true of human procreation so that it will result in more diverse talents. An Arab poet became aware of this in ancient times and it is amazing that this uncultured nomadic Arab, who knew nothing of education or learning, was guided to this fact in such a way that he presented it as a matter of innate natural disposition. He wanted to praise a man for his chivalry, so he said:

He was not born by his father's cousin,
For inbred youths may be scrawny;

How did this poet know this fact? And after this, he said:

I gave up my uncle's daughter, though I loved her,
For I feared that any child we had would be scrawny.

That is, he loved her but let her go lest their children are born weak.

And another poet said about this:

I advise those who have high aspirations:

Wed not your sons to their cousins,

For they will not evade weakness and sickness.

How did the Arab poet who did not belong to a cultured community and who knew nothing of breeding or anything else, know this? He either was guided to it by experience, seeing that the marriage of relatives produces weak offspring or else this was a leftover fragment of the ancient religions and admonitions of which man had still retained some vestiges. When Allah *Glorified is He* first willed that procreation begins, brothers had to marry their sisters; but He wanted us to have some distance, and hence He decreed that twins could not marry each other. So when they came to study the story of Adam’s sons Cain and Abel, they differed in some aspects. For example, there is the book of Genesis; and we can accept things from the book of Genesis despite the changes made to it because no changes about this matter would have been mad, since the only changes that were made were those relating to things such as references to the Prophethood of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Other things were not important to them, yet they likely changed much of them too.

They say that Abel was the first victim of murder in human history, and that Cain murdered him. Some stories say that he did not know how to kill him or make him die, so Satan showed him how by taking a bird and crushing its head between two rocks to kill it. Thus he taught him how to kill; and this is similar to how the raven later showed him how to dig. We are not told how he killed him, but we are told how he buried him: Then Allah sent a crow searching in the ground to show him how to hide the disgrace of his brother. He said, ‘O woe to me! Have I failed to be like this crow and hide the body of my brother?’ And he became of the regretful.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 31)

This was the first person to kill and cause death; but why do they say that he did not know how to kill until Satan came and taught him how to kill his brother? We say that they did not pay close enough attention; for the True Lord says:

لَئِنۢ بَسَطتَ إِلَيَّ يَدَكَ لِتَقۡتُلَنِي مَآ أَنَا۠ بِبَاسِطٖ يَدِيَ
إِلَيۡكَ لِأَقۡتُلَكَۖ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ ٱللَّهَ رَبَّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine
to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of all worlds [28]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 28)

So Cain knew about killing. It is not true that he had to be taught how to do it; although it is true that the matter of burial was new to him. This story came to tell us how procreation began, and how Allah *Glorified is He* brought spouses together who had a relative amount of distance from one another because nothing more than a relative distance was possible at that time. According to their standards, the male of one set of twins and the female of another set of twins were not close kin and this remained the case until there were more people, whereupon the law was decreed that brothers and sisters of any kind were completely forbidden to wed. After this, things became even more comprehensive and the laws about unmarriageable kin by blood and suckling were fully developed. This story had an origin: they decided to offer a sacrifice, but why?' When they both offered a sacrifice (to Allah), and it was accepted from one of them but was not accepted from the other.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27)

Why did they want to offer a sacrifice? They say it was because Cain's twin sister was very beautiful, whilst Abel's twin was not and because of the law of distance in marriage, Abel was obliged to marry Cain's sister and Cain was obliged to marry Abel's sister. But Cain envied his brother and said: 'Why should he take the beautiful one? I have more right to my sister than he does.' Adam had only recently begun to receive revelation, so he said: 'Each of you offer a sacrifice and see.' This is because he knew well that the sacrifice would be offered in a way which preserved the necessary distance of matrimony. Some of the exegetes say: 'By Allah we do not know how it was accepted'; and we say to them: Let us look for the word 'sacrifice' in the Quran and determine exactly what it means. This word appears in the Quran more than once.' (They are) those who said, 'Indeed, Allah has taken our promise not to believe any messenger until he brings us an offering which fire (from heaven) will consume. (*Al-'Imran:* 183) And the True Lord responded to them: 'Say, 'There have already come to you messengers before me with clear proofs and (even) that of which you speak.' (*Al-'Imran:* 183) And what exactly was 'that of which you speak'? (*Al-'Imran*: 183) It was an offering which fire consumes. So the concept of an offering or sacrifice was known and if fire came and consumed the offering, this was a sign that the Heavens had accepted it and that the one who offered it had succeeded in drawing nearer to Allah *Glorified is He*. The reason Cain and Abel offered a sacrifice was to determine which of them would marry the beautiful woman; and Allah Almighty accepted Abel's offering. But was the loser content with this? No;

rather, he was envious and this was the first time anyone had objected to the True Lord's Will and His commandments. 'I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 28) We are told that Abel kept livestock and so possessed milk, cheese and butter, whilst Cain was a farmer. It is said that Cain offered the worst of his yield, whilst Abel offered the best of his livestock for the offering. An offering was accepted, as Allah *Glorified is He* says 'one of them' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27) without specifying whose offering. Then one said: 'I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 28) Who said this? It was the one whose offering was not accepted because he has not achieved his purpose.

'He (Cain) said: 'I will surely slay you.' The other (Abel) said: 'Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous (who fear Him).' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27) Is this an appropriate response to: 'I will surely slay you'? (*al-Ma'ida:* 27) Yes it is, because the reason he wanted to kill him was: 'The offering you sacrificed was accepted, whilst mine was not.' So he responded: 'And what did I have to do with that? I have no say in whether an offering is accepted or not, but it is up to Allah *Glorified is He*'. The Lord did not accept yours because He only accepts from those who are conscious of Him and He knows that you are not conscious of Him. The offering you sacrificed will never be accepted as long as you rebel against the law of Allah *Glorified is He* which was to intermarry between twins of separate births. 'This was the first rebellion against Allah's Way and His decree. Therefore, Abel said: ''Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous (who fear Him)'. (*al-Ma'ida:* 27) And: 'If you will stretch forth your hand towards me to kill me, I shall not stretch forth my hand towards you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds' (*al-Ma'ida*: 28).

The word '*basata'* (to stretch forth) is the opposite of '*qabada*', (to contract). The word '*basata'* can be used with the preposition '*li*' (to) or (for) to mean: one thing and with '*ila*' (towards) to mean another. When it is used with '*li*', it means that the stretching of the hand is for the welfare of someone, as in the following verse: 'And if Allah had extended (excessively) provision for His servants….' (*ash-Shura:* 27) Here we notice '*basata*' (extended (excessively)) and '*li*' (for). He did not say 'towards His servants', but rather 'for His servants' (*ash-Shura:* 27) which means that this use of '*basata*' implies something good coming from the subject to the object of the verb. The Lord, in this verse, does not say '*ila*' (towards) which is only used to indicate something bad, as we have seen before when the True Lord says: 'when a people determined to extend their hands (in aggression) against you….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 11)

So the one who stretches out his hand to you gives you benefit and the one who stretches it towards you intends to take benefit from you for himself. 'If you will stretch forth your hand towards me to kill me, I shall not stretch forth my hand towards you to kill you….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 28) The words 'to kill me' explain the intention behind 'towards me' and the reason he did not respond was not that he lacked the power to do so, but rather that he feared Allah Almighty; it was not that he was remiss in defending himself, but rather that he wanted to cause his brother's heart to soften so that he would come to his senses. When someone shows that he intends to kill another and that other responds by saying, 'By Allah Almighty, I shall not fight you because I fear our Lord', he thereby made it plain that his fear of Allah *Glorified is He* was so firmly established in his consciousness that it overrode even his instinct of self-preservation. He may have also recognised this in his heart because his brother was well able to defend himself powerfully. He referred the matter back to the Supreme Truth, Allah *Glorified is He*. So, do not say that Abel was passive. No, he consigned the matter to *the Almighty*.

The True Lord then, says:

إِنِّىٓ أُرِيدُ أَن تَبُوٓأَ بِإِثْمِى وَإِثْمِكَ فَتَكُونَ مِنْ أَصْحَٰبِ ٱلنَّارِ ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ جَزَٰٓؤُا۟ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

and I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the Fire: such is the evildoers' reward' [29] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 29)

The word '*tabu'a*' (here means: to bear) literally means: I want you to return from the bargain of killing me with bearing the sin of such a deed and obtaining its punishment. 'And your sin…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 29), i.e. and likewise the sin for which you committed this murder; for you rebelled against Allah's Way when our Lord did not accept your offering and you sinned by not accepting the distance of kinship which is obligatory for marriage. So you have committed two sins: the first is that you refused to accept Allah’s decree, for reason of which Allah *the Exalted* did not accept your offering and the second is that you murdered me. And I have nothing to do with this, for the evildoer must take his requital.’

When Abel said, ‘Indeed I want you to bear (thereby) my sin and your sin…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 29), he was not wishing for his brother to sin, but rather, he was saying that if he were to sin, he would bear the burden of this sin and its punishment. He wished that he would be punished if he committed the sin and he wanted him to refrain from doing it. ‘Indeed I want you to bear (thereby) my sin and your sin so you will be among the inmates of the Fire. And that is the recompense of wrongdoers.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 29) The recompense of wrongdoers is a prompt punishment which prevents their tyranny from continuing; for were the True Lord to leave them until the Hereafter, evil would become prevalent and those who do not believe in the Hereafter would excessively engage in evildoing. Therefore, we said before, that the True Lord propounds a parable for us in the chapter *al-Kahf* when He tells us the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn, whom Allah Almighty granted means of access to everything and so he followed a course and utilised those means. Then, the True Lord showed us what the purpose is of those who are given and made use of the right means and told us how He placed them on earth in order to make the world thrive, to rectify it and to give security to society. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘(And he marched westwards) until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it (as if) setting into a black sea…’ (*al-Kahf:* 86). This is how it seemed to his eye; for, when you are at sea, the sun appears to set in the water. Of course it does not actually do so, but it seems to do so because the water is as far as you can see. ‘(And he marched westwards) until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it (as if) setting into a black sea and he found near it a people. Allah said, “O Dhu Al-Qarnayn, either you punish (them) or else adopt among them (a way of) goodness.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 86)

So the Lord gave him the choice: do this, or do that. ‘He said, “As for one who wrongs, we will punish him. Then he will be returned to his Lord, and He will punish him with a terrible punishment.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 87) This is the rule by which society must be run: so that those who do not believe in Allah Almighty or the Hereafter are not left to continue unabated into evildoing, they must be punished in this world. ‘And indeed, for those who are bent on doing evil, there is suffering in store (even) closer at hand than that, but most of them do not know.’ (*at-Tur:* 47) That is, they will be punished before the Hereafter. Therefore, when the people see an evildoer die or meet with misfortune and failure, they take admonition from this. And our generation has seen a great many evildoers who have been one another’s downfall; and even if those they oppressed were allowed to have vengeance on them, they would not have done as much to them as they did to one another. The True Lord wanted their punishment to take place before our eyes so that things would be made clear.

‘He said, “As for one who wrongs, we will punish him....”’ (*al-Kahf:* 87) And this is not all; for to whom would he be referred after this? To Allah Almighty, ‘Then he will be returned to his Lord, and He will punish him with a terrible punishment.’ (*al-Kahf:* 87) The first suffering here is that of this worldly life which will be bearable because it is inflicted by the power of temporal incapable beings; as for the suffering of the Hereafter, it is inflicted by the power of the All-Powerful.

‘But as for one who believes and does righteousness, he will have a reward of Paradise and we will speak to him from our command with ease.’ (*al-Kahf:* 88) This is the task which Allah the Strong and Steadfast has appointed to Himself: He deters those who do evil and gives incentives to those who do righteous deeds. And the True Lord says in the verse which we come to next:

فَطَوَّعَتْ لَهُۥ نَفْسُهُۥ قَتْلَ أَخِيهِ فَقَتَلَهُۥ فَأَصْبَحَ مِنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ٣٠

But his soul prompted him to kill his brother: he killed him and became one of the losers [30] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 30)

You do not say that you’ facilitate’ something unless this thing is resistant to what you want to do with it; you do not facilitate twisting water, but you might facilitate twisting iron.’ And his soul facilitated to him the murder of his brother’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 30). So, will his soul perform the killing in addition to facilitating such a deed? We should be aware here that within a man there are two dispositions: a natural disposition which loves truth and goodness and a disposition which inclines to desires; and these two dispositions are in a constant struggle.' And his soul facilitated to him the murder of his brother' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30). It is as though the evil and passionate side of the soul overwhelmed the good side and it is as though they pulled back and forth, struggled and jostled, For a man does not like to have evil done unto him though he might well consent to do evil unto others.

'And his soul facilitated to him…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30). There was still a remnant of Prophethood in his soul because he was Adam's kin and there was still an inner struggle within his soul. Evil wanes in good people and deepens in evil people; if you rile a good man, he says, 'If I see him, I will shoot him, or strike him, or scold him', whilst an evil man will say, 'By Allah Almighty, if I find him, I will spit in his face, or strike him, or shoot him.' So evil deepens in an evil person and he finds that the first response is not enough to slake his anger so he must increase its severity. The good man's soul, on the other hand, vents his anger and relinquishes it with a simple word. Therefore we may observe that the story of our master Joseph *peace be upon him* says: 'When they said, 'Joseph and his brother are more beloved to our father than we, though we are a (stronger) company. Indeed, our father is in clear error.' (*Yusuf:* 8) It is curious that their argument was actually against them, which shows you that passion, anger, hatred and envy upset a person's judgement. They said 'though we are a (stronger) company' (*Yusuf*: 8), which shows that they were strong; and this is exactly what made their father, Jacob's heart incline towards young Joseph *peace be upon him*. You say that 'Joseph and his brother (Benjamin) are more beloved to our father than we are' (*Yusuf:* 8); yes, indeed this is the case because he is the youngest. An Arab was once asked, 'Why do you love your youngest son?', and he replied: 'Because he has spent fewer days with me. My first born has been with me for a long time, so I am compensating the youngest with love and affection for the days which he has missed.' So when they said 'though we are a (stronger) company' (*Yusuf:* 8), this was actually an argument against them. This shows that when a man's moral standards of judgement are impaired he will make an argument which is against him and imagine that it helps him! After this, they said:

'Indeed, our father is in clear error.' (*Yusuf:* 8) They agreed on this argument and then started to suggest: 'Kill Joseph." (*Yusuf:* 9) Then they said: 'or cast him out to (another) land….' (*Yusuf:* 9)

And because they were the sons of Jacob *peace be upon him* and descended from a household of Prophethood, they relented from the ideas of killing or banishing and one of them said: 'Do not kill Joseph but throw him into the bottom of the well; some travelers will pick him up – if you would do (something).' (*Yusuf:* 10)

Does anyone plan for the rescue of someone he hates? It is as though there was still goodness in their souls. At first they said, 'Kill Joseph,' (*Yusuf*: 9) and this was at the height of their anger; then they said 'or cast him out to (another) land;' (*Yusuf*: 9) where he might be eaten by wild predators; and then one of them said 'but throw him into the bottom of the well; some travelers will pick him up – if you would do (something).' (*Yusuf*: 10) So, good people relent.' And his soul facilitated to him the murder of his brother, so he killed him and became among the losers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30)

We know well what loosing means in terms of business wherein there is profit and loss: profit means you have made back your capital and more and loss means: your capital has decreased. Why did Cain slay his brother, when his brother was the only person in the world with whom he could find solace? This all happened because of his desire for the girl and when they both offered sacrifices and his was not accepted his enmity deepened and he killed his brother. So he lost his capital after intending to make profit: 'and became among the losers.' (*al-Ma'ida*: 30) The True Lord then says:

فَبَعَثَ ٱللَّهُ غُرَابًا يَبْحَثُ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ لِيُرِيَهُۥ كَيْفَ يُوَٰرِى سَوْءَةَ أَخِيهِ ۚ قَالَ يَٰوَيْلَتَىٰٓ
أَعَجَزْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِثْلَ هَٰذَا ٱلْغُرَابِ فَأُوَٰرِىَ سَوْءَةَ أَخِى ۖ فَأَصْبَحَ مِنَ ٱلنَّٰدِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

God sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse and he said, 'Woe is me! Could I not have been like this raven and covered up my brother's body?' He became remorseful [31] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 31)

The word 'saw'a' (here translated as dead body), which literally means 'what the soul abhors', is derived from the verb 'sa'a' which means (abhor);

and we call the private parts of the body ‘saw’a ‘because revealing it is abhorred.’ Then Allah sent a crow digging up the earth…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 31). Did Allah Almighty send the crow so that He could show Cain how to bury Abel’s body or was the crow the one that will say this to Cain? It is the same either way since our Lord is the One Who sent it. If you focus on the direct means, it was the crow; and if you focus on the means of the sender, it was Allah *Glorified is He*. So it all goes back to Allah *Glorified is He* and when you try to attribute the means to an entity, you will find out that they are all provided by Allah Almighty.

‘He (Cain) said, ‘O woe to me!’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 31) When you hear the words *‘ya waylata’* (O woe to me), know that this expression is used for two different meanings. The basic meaning of ‘wayl’ is (perishing) and if we want to make it more intense, we add the suffix -*(ah)* so it becomes *(waylah),* since the suffix *‘ah’* can often add emphasis to a noun in Arabic. - So *‘wayl’* means ‘perishing’ and so does *‘waylah’;* and what does *‘ya waylata’* mean?

We know that *‘ya’,* in Arabic, expresses a call; so why would one call woe and death upon himself? And can other than a sensible being be called? Yes, it can, because as long as ‘woe’ means ‘perishing’, it is as though you are saying, ‘I cannot take this discomfort and anguish any longer and nothing can rid me of it save death; O death, now is your time to come to me!’ So ‘O, woe to me’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 31) means ‘O death, come to me’. The poet Al-Mutanabbi said of this:

It is sufficient ailment for you to see in death a cure
And it is enough of deaths to be wished for desires

What a grave ailment it is to which one says, ‘O Lord, give me peace and let me die!’ The person who wishes for death must be experiencing something even worse than death. So the first meaning of ‘O, woe to me’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 31) is that you call for death to come and therefore the True Lord says: ‘And the record (of deeds) will be placed (open) and you will see the criminals fearful of that within it and they will say, “Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?” And they will find what they did present (before them). And your Lord does injustice to no one.' (*al-Kahf:* 49) They wish for death; and likewise Cain said, 'O, woe to me!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31) Did death come to him when he called for it? No, for the deed was already done and he had murdered his brother.

The second possible meaning of 'O, woe to me' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31) is to express amazement at something which could not possibly have been caused by means. There is a difference between what means give and what the Supreme Causer gives. If what means give is the sole governor of natural law, this would mean that the True Lord had practised his authority over His dominion only once, and it is as if He created the means and natural laws and left them to govern on their own. But we say no: He created the means with His omnipotent power and they exist to manifest the independent and all-encompassing nature of His power – but the True Lord can command means to cease functioning whenever He wills.

So there are means and there is the Supreme Causer; and amazing events cannot be given by the means. When means do not affect, man is amazed and he therefore refers the matter back to the Origin, for which nothing is amazing. When the guests came to our master Abraham *peace be upon him* and he offered them food and saw that their hands did not stretch out to it, he was distrusted them and felt from them apprehension and was filled with disquiet and fear of them. The True Lord says of this: 'And he felt from them apprehension. They said, "Fear not" and gave him good tidings of a boy who would be endowed with deep knowledge. Thereupon, his wife approached with a cry (of alarm) and struck her face and said,' (I am) a barren old woman!' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 28-29)

And the True Lord also says about this: 'And his Wife was standing and she smiled. Then We gave her good tidings of Isaac and after Isaac, Jacob.' (*Hud:* 71) The wife of our master Abraham *peace be upon him* said: 'Woe to me! Shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old man? Indeed, this is an amazing thing!' (*Hud:* 72) That is, there were no means that could give such a thing.' They said, 'Are you amazed at the decree of Allah' (*Hud:* 73) You might well be amazed at the means when they were defied, but when you remember that means come from Allah Almighty, there is nothing strange at all.

Our master Zechariah *peace be upon him* said something similar to this. He had taken custody of our Lady Mary *peace be upon her* and would bring her all her life's needs; and he was amazed to see that she had with her provisions of food and fruit and asked her: 'He said, 'O Mary, from where is this (coming) to you?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Why did he say this? He must have seen that she had something which he did not bring her; and she responded to his amazement and alerted him to the eternal truth: 'She said, 'It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account.' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

The True Lord willed that our Lady Mary *peace be upon him* say this, whilst she was still young; as we said before, it was as though she was saying this as a foreshadowing of how she would later experience something which only The Supreme Cause could make happen. She would bear a child without a father and this is an amazing thing and therefore she would surely have understood it and applied to it her own words: 'It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account.' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) It is as though the True Lord wanted to implicitly tell her that should remember that she herself was the one who said these words because in the future something would happen to her which would require her to remember them; and she herself reminded our master Zechariah *peace be upon him* of this truth. Let us observe the precision of the Quranic allusion to the circumstance wherein Mary *peace be upon him* reminded him of this truth: 'There, Zechariah called upon his Lord, saying, 'My Lord, grant me from Yourself a good offspring.' (*Al-'Imran:* 38)

It is as though when he heard this, he decided to make his supplication to Allah *Glorified is He* right there in the sanctuary. And was our master Zechariah *peace be upon him* unaware of this fact? He was aware of it, but there is a difference between a notion which lies in the margins of the consciousness and one which lies at the forefront of the consciousness. And when Mary said to Zechariah *peace be upon them* 'It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account' (*Al-'Imran:* 37), this truth moved from the margins to the forefront of his consciousness.

'There, Zechariah called upon his Lord' (*Al-'Imran:* 38). Why did he not pray unto his Lord in the first place? Our master Zechariah *peace be upon him* was going on his life amidst the means and the monotony of the means may distract from the Supreme Cause; and when he heard Mary *peace be upon her* say: 'Allah provides for whom He wills without account' (*Al-'Imran:* 37), he wanted to experience this for himself, so he prayed unto his Lord. And the True Lord gave him tidings that He would grant him a child, whereupon Zechariah was amazed once again, describing his condition: He said, "My Lord, how will I have a boy when I have reached old age and my wife is barren?" (*Al-'Imran:* 40)

As long as you have prayed to Allah Almighty, O Zechariah, to give you a child and you have moved the matter of Allah Almighty's provision from the margins of your consciousness to its forefront, then Allah Almighty has made His decree: 'Thus (it will be); your Lord says' (*Maryam:* 9). So do not investigate means and causes, for it is a matter of Allah's will. And Allah Almighty explains the findings on which the following saying is based: 'Allah provides for whom He wills without account' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) and can grant you a son, when he says: 'It is easy for Me, for I created you before, while you were nothing'. (*Maryam:* 9)

These were all portents for our Lady Mary *peace be upon her* and our master Zechariah *peace be upon him* her guardian, for our master Zechariah *peace be upon him* would be a witness when she bore a child without any father and as her guardian, he would be involved in this matter.

But why was all this foreshadowing necessary? It was necessary because usually when natural laws and conventions are broken, it does not threaten anyone's reputation, but in Mary's case *peace be upon her* her reputation would be threatened and reputation is the most sacred thing a woman possesses. Therefore, all this foreshadowing was necessary and although it was a strange thing, it was not strange for Allah *Glorified is He*.

Here, Cain says: 'O woe to me! Have I failed to be like this crow…?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31) Cain only said this after becoming aware of a harsh psychological reality which disturbed his emotions greatly. It is as though the crow's actions showed Cain that he did not know something which the bird before him did know: here is something that even a crow can do, but you, Cain, cannot do it. You had the power to murder your brother, but you cannot even conceal his dead body like what this crow did. So, Cain became filled with remorse: ‘And he became of the regretful.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 31)

We should be aware that there are different kinds of remorse. For example, suppose that a man violates Allah’s law by drinking wine which he buys with the money he should have used to buy food for his family. When he gets home and finds his family waiting for their food, he regrets that he drank the wine – Does he feel remorse for disobeying Allah *Glorified is He* or for not buying food for his family? He feels remorse for not buying food for his family and this remorse is unacceptable because it is not true repentance. This wine-drinker might put on his best clothes, go off to drink wine and then fall on the ground, and thus feel remorse because the wine he has drunk has led him to this situation. Does he feel remorse for disobeying Allah *the Almighty*? Or does he feel remorse because he looks silly in front of other people? This was the nature of Cain’s remorse: he felt remorse because of his failure as he did not know what the crow knew. The True Lord then says:

مِنۡ أَجۡلِ ذَٰلِكَ كَتَبۡنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ أَنَّهُۥ مَن قَتَلَ نَفۡسَۢا بِغَيۡرِ نَفۡسٍ
أَوۡ فَسَادٖ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ ٱلنَّاسَ جَمِيعٗا وَمَنۡ أَحۡيَاهَا
فَكَأَنَّمَآ أَحۡيَا ٱلنَّاسَ جَمِيعٗاۚ وَلَقَدۡ جَآءَتۡهُمۡ رُسُلُنَا بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ ثُمَّ
إِنَّ كَثِيرٗا مِّنۡهُم بَعۡدَ ذَٰلِكَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ لَمُسۡرِفُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

On account of [his deed], We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land [32] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 32)

The True Lord says that He ordained all that this verse states as a plain law, because the words ‘*min ajl*’ mean ‘because of’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 32); and the word ‘*ajl’* can be derived from ‘*ajal’* which means to cause evil for someone, meaning ‘to commit a crime’, in which case it means ‘because of this crime…’ It could also mean, ‘On account of this crime’, we decreed this law:

'Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption (done) in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32) So, when you hear the words (*min ajl*), know that they mean' because of' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32) or 'on account of' or 'because of this crime'.

Was this decree for the children of Israel alone? Some of the scholars say that the two' sons of Adam' here do not mean literally the sons of Adam *peace be upon him*, but rather, the descendants of Adam *peace be upon him* from the children of Israel. To this, we reply: First of all, who is this' Israel' to whom the children of Israel are ascribed? He is Jacob son of Isaac, son of Abraham *peace be upon him*, who descended ten generations from Noah *peace be upon him*, who descended from Seth, the son of Adam *peace be upon him*. Was it possible that all these generations had no knowledge of how to bury their dead until the children of Israel's time? Of course, it was not, and as long as the True Lord states that He sent a crow to dig in the earth to show Cain how to bury his brother's body, this proves that Abel was the first human being to be buried. It is therefore unacceptable to say that humanity did not know how to bury their dead until the time of the children of Israel and that they were the ones to teach this to humanity!

So, why does the True Lord mention the children of Israel here? It is because the children of Israel did not only dare to take lives, but they even dared to take the lives of those who were sent to guide them, meaning those who were sent as prophets and messengers – and this is why they were singled out for mention here. They slew the Messengers who were sent to them bearing Allah's Way of guidance in its practical form; for prophets come as role models who put Allah's Guidance into practice to show people the true way to follow it. Prophets, then, do not bring new divine laws, but they follow the laws of those who came before them. And why did the children of Israel kill some of their prophets? It was because they bore a grudge against those prophets.

We know that when a good person does something good and is seen by an evil person who is incapable of doing good, the evil person comes to bear a grudge against the good person and hates and envies him; and the more good the good person does, the more the evil person feels offended. And so the evil person tries to get rid of the good person. The Messengers were role models of good conduct; and the True Lord says of the children of Israel: ‘Then why did you kill the prophets of Allah before, if you are (indeed) believers?’ (*al-Baqara:* 91)

The True Lord says ‘before’ (*al-Baqara:* 91) here for a wise reason: The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was at odds with the Jews and they would conjure evil plots to assassinate him and indeed they made attempts to do so. For example, they tried to drop a boulder onto him and to poison him. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said ‘before’ (*al-Baqara:* 91) as if to say: Your ability to slay the Messengers was from the past; as for Prophet Muhammad, the chosen one *peace and blessings be upon him*, you will never get him. Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘Because of that, we decreed upon the children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption (done) in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 32) This manifests the True Lord’s will to establish a union of faith which would make a firm bond in faithful society, as the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* elucidated when he said, as Abu Musa Al-Ash’ari *may Allah be pleased with him* narrates: ‘A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other.’

Beware of seeing someone wrongfully harm someone else without doing anything to prevent him, for the unity of faith makes the believers like a single body: when one part of it aches, the whole body responds to it with sleeplessness and fever. If one man kills another and the faithful society stands idle, this will cause corruption on earth; and so society must treat this action not as the slaying of one individual, but as though it is the slaying of all mankind – unless his killing of that person is a punishment for murder or for spreading corruption on earth.

And the True Lord then gives the other half of this doctrine: ‘And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 32) This is the unity of faith; if someone transgresses against an innocent life it is as though he has transgressed against all humanity and if someone saves a life in peril it is as though he has saved all humanity. And when Allah *Glorified is He* ordains a regulation of this nature, there is always a practical application for it. The one who takes an innocent life incurs the curse and wrath of Allah Almighty and He will punish him, and it will be as though he has killed all humanity; and if we consider it from the perspective of the requital, he will be requited with the same requital as would be given for this: 'And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32) The Almighty wants a faithful society to stand in the way of the one who dares to behave unjustly as one united society and not to leave the victim to stand alone; for the thing that encourages evildoers is that some people say, 'What does it have to do with me?' These words 'what does it have to do with me' provide encouragement to evildoers and therefore you should read the story (1) of the three bulls: There was a black bull, a red bull and a white bull. A lion made a deal with the red and black bulls, who allowed him to eat the white bull. Then, the lion made a deal with the black bull, who allowed him to eat the red bull. Then the lion came for the black bull who said to the lion: 'I was doomed to be eaten the day you ate the white bull!' It is as though the black bull realised in the end that his' what does it have to do with me' attitude caused his demise, but had the three bulls stuck together in the beginning, they could have killed the lion.

And the Noble Hadith (Prophetic saying) gives us a parable of the one who upholds Allah's boundaries and the one who transgresses them: An-Nu'man ibn Bashir *may Allah be pleased with him* related that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The likeness of the man who observes the limits prescribed by Allah and that of the man who transgresses them is like the people who get on board a ship after casting lots. Some of them are in its lower deck and some of them in its upper (deck). Those who are in its lower (deck), when they require water, go to the occupants of the upper deck and say to them: 'If we make a hole in the bottom of the ship, we shall not harm you.' If they (the occupants of the upper deck) leave them to carry out their design they all will be drowned. But if they do not let them go ahead (with their plan), all of them will remain safe.'(2)

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(1) The story of the three bulls

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*, *At-Tirmidhi and Ahmad*

This is the parable of the one who upholds Allah's boundaries and the one who transgresses them. It is as though the True Lord is says to us: Do not consider that one person has wrongfully killed another, but consider that he has killed all humanity; for all people have an equal right to life. And as long as the killer has dared to kill one person, he might dare to kill anyone, or his action might be an example for others; and as long as this behaviour has been established, you will find that whenever someone becomes angry with someone else he will kill him and other murders will follow in succession. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'He who introduced some good practice in Islam which was followed after him (by people) he would be assured of reward like one who followed it, without their rewards being diminished in any respect. And he who introduced some evil practice in Islam which had been followed subsequently (by others), he would be required to bear the burden like that of one who followed this (evil practice) without theirs being diminished in any respect.'

Circumspection, precision, and restraint are manifested in the words, 'whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption (done) in the land…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32); for had this been a human legislation and had these caveats been left out, they might have been amended later with a commentary or alteration; but the Supreme Lawgiver cannot be corrected.

'Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption (done) in the land…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32) imply that those who kill others in retaliation for murder or the spreading of corruption on earth are not deemed to have slain all of mankind, but rather to have saved all mankind. This is because when an action is criminalised, this means that there must be a text which clearly announces that this act is a crime, after which we assign a punishment to it. You cannot say to someone who has committed an action, 'I shall detain you and punish you for this' if there is no text which states this action to be criminal. Therefore, there is a legal principle which states that' there can be no criminalisation without a text and no punishment without criminalisation.' That is, we assign punishments to crimes, or when an act is criminalised the punishment for it is specified at the same time. Is the purpose of this to punish criminals? No, the purpose is to deter the crime by making the prospective criminal think of the punishment before he commits it; the purpose is to prevent the crime. Therefore, the common aphorism says: 'The best way to prevent killing is killing.' And of course this aphorism is not as sublime as the True Lords' words: 'And there is for you in legal retribution (saving of) life, O you (people) of understanding…' (*al-Baqara:* 179).

We might ask: What kind of killing prevents killing? We see that the meaning of the aphorism is not aggressive acts of murder, but rather, the just retribution of the death penalty. Thus, we see that the human expression falls short of the sublime exhortation against murder which is found in the True Lord's words: 'Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption (done) in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32) The word 'saves' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32) (ahya) here has more than one meaning and specifically it has two meanings: The first meaning is to preserve the spirit which controls the body and the second meaning is to give life to the faithful spirit, as is the case when the True Lord says: 'respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life.' (*al-Anfal:* 24)

We may observe here that the True Lord also declares that spreading corruption on earth also deserves the death penalty. 'To corrupt' means to disrupt the soundness of what is sound, whilst our faith requires us to preserve the soundness of what is already sound; if we are able to make it better, then we should and if we cannot, then we should at least leave it as it is.

So why does the True Lord state that this is a punishment for spreading corruption on earth? The meaning of 'land' (earth) is the place wherein the True Lord made man His vicegerent. And when the True Lord says; 'or for corruption (done) in the land…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32), this means that all corruption affects everything which the earth contains; and the primary thing which earth contains or earth's master, is man. And to corrupt man is to kill him.

So, this 'corruption' must refer to other things, namely other beings or species: animals, plants, and minerals. To corrupt these things is to remove them from the property of those who possess them, such as if a group of people seize the goods of another man or if someone steals someone else's crops or if someone steals the steel of a factory or iron products or the like.

There are two kinds of corruption. Corruption on earth is related to the things which the earth contains, which primarily is man, the master of the earth; and to corrupt man is to kill him or threaten his personal safety and causing him to feel panic and fear. We can observe that the True Lord told Quraysh of how He blessed them by giving them food against hunger and making them safe from danger.

So it is a kind of corruption to frighten people and terrorise them and this takes two forms: you might frighten someone with whom you are at odds and with whom you hold a mutual grudge; or you might frighten someone with whom you have no connection and who have not done anything to you. If someone transgresses against someone when there is a history of hatred and enmity between them, we do not say that this person violates the Sacred Law by claiming his rights; but he cannot take the law into his own hands. Rather, this must be done by the authorities so that it is carried out properly and fairly. He only violates the Sacred Law when he transgresses. But if he transgresses against people without any provocation, this is called *hiraba* (robbery with violence and sometimes translated as warmongering). An example of this is the one who commits highway robbery and strikes fear into everyone he meets, causing them to feel panic and terror for their lives and their belongings; and their belongings could be animals, plants, or minerals. This is what the Sacred Laws calls *hiraba*, and there will presently come a verse devoted to it.

So, to spread corruption on earth means to disrupt the soundness of what is sound on earth, which primarily means manthe master of the earth and to corrupt him means either to kill him, attack him, or terrorise him, or to transgress against the things he owns of the lower species such as crops, plants or animals. So it is as though those who spread corruption on earth deserved to be killed.

‘Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption (done) in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 32) That is, killing someone who has not spread corruption on earth is an offence which must be punished, but to kill someone who is guilty of spreading corruption on earth is another matter; for to kill someone in order to exact lawful retribution for murder or in order to carry out Allah Almighty's law, is a different matter. And even if the family of the victim forgive the murderous warmonger or highwayman, this does not avail him or excuse the punishment for his crime because his crime has been committed against all of society. Allah *the Exalted* continues: 'And our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proofs. Then indeed many of them, (even) after that, throughout the land, were transgressors.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 32) A transgressor is the one who goes too far, the one who does not act within the confines of his own status and position in existence but rather attempts to violate the bounds of his capabilities in the universe.

An example of this is the man who tries to usurp the rights of other people, going beyond the limits of fairness and not being content with his own rights alone. This is like highway robbers and thieves who steal the fruits of other people's labours and become accustomed to and comfortable with living like this. This problem does not affect the highwayman alone, but it also affects society, and it is said, 'So-and-so sits in his house all day in comfort and one hour a night spent in robbing people is enough for him.'

The matter is not limited only to that one person, but it affects others as well. All those who own wealth live in fear and when they have their excess wealth stolen from them they will lose the desire to do enough work to earn extra wealth because they will not feel safe and secure. When this happens, those who are unable to work in society will lose the aid and support of those who used to work and earn a lot. So it was in His mercy that Allah *Glorified is He* gave mankind the opportunity of ownership, as long as it is sought in lawful ways.

Let us give an example to illustrate this – and Allah Almighty is beyond compare: if a man gives a needy person a usurious loan of one hundred pounds, how can he ask for an increase from someone who cannot even meet his life's basic needs? In doing this, he is forced to give the wealthy person more than he took from him, despite his poverty and incapacity. This is the very essence of transgression.

The True Lord then says:

إِنَّمَا جَزَٰٓؤُاْ ٱلَّذِينَ يُحَارِبُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَيَسۡعَوۡنَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَسَادًا أَن يُقَتَّلُوٓاْ
أَوۡ يُصَلَّبُوٓاْ أَوۡ تُقَطَّعَ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَأَرۡجُلُهُم مِّنۡ خِلَٰفٍ أَوۡ يُنفَوۡاْ مِنَ
ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ ذَٰلِكَ لَهُمۡ خِزۡيٞ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَاۖ وَلَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

Those who wage war against God and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, or banishment from the land: a disgrace for them in this world, and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter [33] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 33)

The primary motive of war is appropriation; when a people wage war on another, its aim is to take over the riches or possessions of the other side. So how could anyone make war on Allah Almighty when He is beyond perception? The first way in which people wage war on Allah *the Almighty* is to attempt to usurp His authority, meaning His Law. When man tries to make laws which are contrary to the way of Allah *Glorified is He*, he thereby desires to usurp Allah's Right as Lawgiver; and this is the first way in which people wage war on Allah Almighty.

Do those who make war on Allah Almighty desire to usurp His domination? No, because Allah's dominion over everything is timeless and will last forever and He *Glorified is He* will never relinquish it to any of His servants. So what exactly do they wish to usurp? They wish to alter Allah's laws and regulations, although Allah Alone is truly the Lawgiver. As we said before, laws are like rules for the maintenance of a product. Why then, should we not leave it for the Creator of man to set the regulations which maintain man? So the first mistake people make is to make laws for themselves because the rules for man's maintenance can only be set by his Creator. If anyone comes along with the intention of making rules of maintenance for mankind – of which he himself is a member – we say to him: You seek to usurp Allah's Right.

And how do they wage war on the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*? We know that the Messenger, *peace and blessings be upon him,* has two different positions: Allah *Glorified is He* is unseen to us (beyond perception), but the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* dwelled among us in plain sight for a period of time, wherein people waged war on him with the sword. And when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* passed on to the Supreme Companion, the war waged on him became like the war waged on Allah *the Almighty,* meaning that they attempted to usurp his lawgiving authority, the second source of law and they said, 'We shall set laws for ourselves and we do not need this messenger.' Or, those of a particular system said, 'we shall only base our laws on Allah's Book' and this notion has spread in certain lands. If we ask every one of these people if they pray, they will say yes; and if we ask them how many cycles there are in the sunset prayer, they will say three; and if we ask them how they know this, even though the Noble Quran does not state it, they will have no answer.

If we ask them how to calculate '*zakat*' (the poor-due alms), they will say it should be 2.5% on money and trade, for example. But how do they know this? And how do they know how to perform the pilgrimage? So the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had a mission and to wage war on him *peace and blessings be upon him* is to abstain from following his instructions whether it is a saying, a deed or a resolution.

An example of this is those who say that there are too many Hadiths (Prophetic sayings) for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. To them, we say: The message of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* lasted twenty-three years and everything He *peace and blessings be upon him* said was a Hadith. Every word which came from his lips was a noble Hadith; and if we were to only count the words he spoke, it would still fill countless volumes. And then everything he *peace and blessings be upon him* heard someone else say and approved is also a Hadith and everything anyone ever did in front of him to which he did not object is also a Hadith; so how many Hadiths of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* must there be? And how can some people object to the number of Hadiths which have been related to us, even after their authenticity has been so rigorously ascertained? They explain this by saying, 'It is better to deny something that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* actually said than to claim he said something which he did not.' They claim that what they are doing serves to protect Islam, but they forget that Allah *Glorified is He* protects His own religion and that the

Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* ordained the rules for screening and classifying Hadiths when he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Whosoever deliberately tells a lie about me, let him take his seat in the Hell-fire.’(1)

Imam Al-Bukhari *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated from those who both lived at the same time as the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and were known to have met him, whilst Imam Muslim considered that to have lived at the same time as the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sufficient because it makes it likely that a meeting took place; and each one of them was extremely precise in his investigations. If a person had a defect in his behaviour, they would not accept his narrations. Therefore when some people try to attack the Prophetic Hadiths by saying, ‘It is enough for me to say there is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He*’, I wondered why they do not also remember that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah Almighty? How do such people make the call to prayer? And how do they perform the prayer itself? And how does he understand the True Lord’s words: ‘And whatever the Messenger has given you – take; and what he has forbidden you – refrain from’ (*al-Hashr:* 7)? This is a clear declaration that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is authorised by Allah *Glorified is He* to legislate.

The same is true of those who impropriety attempt to discredit the great Imams; first they dared to criticise the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, then, they tried to bring the entire religion crashing down. The True Lord says about them: ‘The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His messenger and strive to make mischief in the land…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 33) meaning that they take what is inherently sound and try to make it unsound, thus corrupting it. The recompense is that they be killed or crucified and the phrasing of the words ‘they should be murdered or crucified’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 33) is meant to give emphasis and strengthening so that the entire faithful society works to apply this commandment and the legal authorities implement it on behalf of all people. The public prosecutor acts on behalf of the people when he prosecutes; this prevents people from taking matters into their own hands and executing others without understanding the law properly.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi and Al-Hakim on the authority of ‘Ali*

'They should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides that they be exiled from the land.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 33) Is the use of the word 'or' the words of the verse (*al-Ma'ida:* 33) here meant to imply choice or do these words apply respectively to the words which preceded them? In Arabic rhetoric there is something called (*laff* and *nashr*), which mean 'furling and unfurling', i.e. 'contraction and expansion'. For example, a poet said:

My heart, my eyelid, my tongue and my Creator…

He mentioned several nouns all at once, but no description of any of them; this is called (*laff*) or 'furling' because all the subjects are drawn together without any of their predicates being mentioned. The (*nashr*) or 'unfurling' is when the predicates are given together in the same order when the poet continues:

Are content, weeping, grateful and forgiving

So when we read the two lines together, they say:

My heart, my eye, my tongue, and my Creator

Are content, weeping, grateful and forgiving

And the True Lord says: 'And out of His mercy He made for you the night and the day that you may rest therein and (by day) seek from His bounty and (that) perhaps you will be grateful.' (*al-Qasas:* 73)

His words "that you may rest" therein refer to "night" and His words "and (by day) seek from His bounty" (*al-Qasas:* 73) refer to "day". So first comes the furling, and then the unfurling.

Corruption, as we know, has many forms. To corrupt a man might mean to kill him, or to kill him and take his possessions or to usurp his possessions without killing him or to terrorise him without killing him or taking his possessions. It is as though the word "corruption" incorporates all the different modes of corruption: killing and stealing, stealing without killing, terrorising and intimidating.

The True Lord says: 'or that they be exiled from the land' (*al-Ma'ida:* 33). To exile means to expel and cast out; and only someone who is settled somewhere can be banished and only someone who is resident can be cast out. We call this a ‘residence’ or a ‘homeland’ meaning a place where a person lives and settles. The meaning of his being ‘settled’ there is that he moves within its circles but has a place to which he always returns to on a regular basis. Therefore it is called a ‘residence’ because he resides there after having moved in various circles. The meaning of ‘banishment’ is to take a person out of his residence and the place he calls home and the place wherein he spread corruption. But where do we send the person whom we banish? Someone might say that if you take him out of one place wherein he has spread corruption and send him somewhere else, he will continue his corruption there! No, because banishment does not give him the opportunity to indulge in this corruption because in his original homeland he was familiar with the geography and with those whom he terrorised and he knew the behaviour of his neighbours and knew how to frighten certain people, how to steal the goods of others and so on. But when he is banished to an unfamiliar place, he will need a lot of time to become familiar with the geography of the place, the people’s positions there and their weak spots. Because of this, banishment is an effective way to bring an end to the corrupt person’s corruption.

When Allah Almighty says; ‘or that they be exiled from the land’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 33), we know that we use the word ‘land ‘*ard’* nowadays to mean planet Earth. In the past, they understood this to mean the dry land and the water which covers the planet; once we became aware of the atmosphere, the earth’s atmosphere became considered part of the earth. Therefore, we said that in the case of sacred sites, the atmosphere above a sacred site is considered to be part of it and to share its sanctity. The air above the *Ka’ba* is part of it. This is proved by the fact that, if someone prays on the third level of the Sacred Mosque, he is still facing the *Ka’ba*, even though he is higher than its building because he faces the air above it. And if someone on a plane wants to pray, he can face towards the air above the *Ka’ba*. And when more and more people began to perform pilgrimage and the area between Al-Safa and Al-Marwah became too small to accommodate them all, they made a second level so that people could pass between them there. So the ground between the two sites is not the only place where the rite can be performed, but the air above it is also sacred; and however many levels we build, they will still be fit for the ritual.

So the earth's atmosphere is part of the earth in every way. Because of this, and before there were Muslim pilots, they would not allow any non-Muslim plane to fly above the Sacred Mosque because a non-Muslim pilot would not be permitted to enter the *Ka'ba* and the Sacred Mosque; and as long as he would not be allowed to enter the *Ka'ba*, he should not be allowed to fly over it either.

This is because the air above a sacred object shares in its sanctity and the air is part of the earth; and we know that the atmosphere turns as the earth turns. From this, we can recognise the wonders of the Quran which were placed in it by its Speaker, the Creator of the universe. As long as the Quran is the speech of the Creator of this universe, there cannot be any contradiction between scientific facts and Quranic facts. Contradictions can only occur in two instances: we either consider a mere theory to be fact even though it has not actually been proven fact or else we erroneously attribute something to the Quran which it does not actually say. If something is truly a scientific fact and truly a Quranic fact, there will be absolutely no contradiction. A proof of this, for example, is that the True Lord says: 'and knows what is in the wombs.' (*Luqman:* 34)

And now modern science has come up with ways of investigating and analysing so that some superficial people say, 'No, science can tell us what is in the womb and whether it is male or female.' To this, we say: We do not dispute that because it is a scientific fact; yet it does not contradict a correct understanding of the Quranic fact given here. But let us ask: when do the scientists know this? They do not know it until a certain amount of time has passed, but the True Lord knows it before any time passes at all. And anyway, who said that by 'what is in the wombs' (*Luqman:* 34) The True Lord meant the gender of the baby only? Do these words only mean one thing? No, they mean many things: no one knows whether what is in the womb will grow to be tall or short, intelligent or not, happy or sad, forbearing or quick-tempered or whether its life will be long or short. Why should we take the word 'what' to refer to the gender of the baby alone?

He *the Exalted* knew the future from pre-eternity before any scientist knew it and before the scientist can take any sample. Moreover, does every pregnant woman go to a doctor to be examined to see what she is carrying in her womb? Of course, she does not, and we do not know what her womb contains; but the Supreme Creator knows. Moreover, do all the pregnant women in the world go to the same doctor? Of course, they do not, but the Supreme Creator knows what is in every womb.

Therefore, there is no Quranic fact that contradicts any scientific fact; the contradiction only occurs when we erroneously understand the Quranic fact on Allah's Knowledge of what is hidden in the womb. (*Luqman:* 34) We misunderstood this verse thinking that it refers only to the question of gender.

There is another instance which is misinterpreted by people, that is, when Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has spread the earth out wide (*al-Hijr:* 19). Some people, wrongly and incorrectly, understand these Words of Allah *Glorified is He* and think that they mean that the earth upon which man dwells is flat. It has been proved as a scientific fact that the earth is spherical by some evidence as the voyage of Magellan, the special rules for building pillars and the fact that the upper parts of things appear first as you move towards them and so on; in our age, satellites have allowed us to witness such evidence by our own eyes. So this is a scientific fact which does not need further discussion; therefore, the mistake was made through misunderstanding the meaning of the Quranic facts as a result of the false assumption that the earth should be flat. Accordingly, the correct meaning of this Quranic fact is that wherever we go, the earth is there before us, without an end or edge. Allah *Glorified is He* spread out the earth before man so that wherever he goes, he will find the earth expanded before him and this could only be the case if the earth was spherical. So we see that the mistake was made in the understanding of the Quranic fact because contradictions only occur if something is believed to be a scientific fact, while actually it is not or when a Quranic fact is misunderstood. They can never truly be contradictory, for the one speaking is the Creator Himself. Therefore, we have recently learned that the atmosphere is part of the earth and that it turns with the earth's orbit. We used to say that we travel 'on' the earth, but Allah *Glorified is He* says; 'Say, Travel throughout the earth' (*al-An'am:* 11).

He previously knows that the atmosphere is part of the earth; so however far a man travels on land, the atmosphere remains above him which means that he travels *in* the earth, not *on* the earth. Only when he goes above the atmosphere does man go above the earth.

Now we return to Allah's saying '…or banishment from the land...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 33). We know that banishment means expulsion and exile from land, but from which land are they banished and to which land are they sent? No one can be banished except someone who is currently settled. Thus, we sensitively have to differentiate between two opposite words; *Nafi* (Negation) which is equal to banishment and (Affirmation) which is equal to settlement. When we take water from a well, we lower a pail on a rope to collect it. And when we bring the pail back up from the well, it carries as much water as it can hold according to its size and volume. But is there a stable process by which we can ensure that the pail is filled up exactly to its brim so that water does not spill? Of course, this is not possible and a little water always spills from the brim of the pail and in Arabic, this spilled water is called (*Nafi*). We cannot get the pail out of the well when it is filled to the brim with such stable motion that no water spills from it at all.

Water, as we know, flows very easily with only the subtlest of inclines so that people use spirit levels devices that measure how perfectly horizontal a surface is. Many other words are derived from the root word (*Nafi*), such as (*Nifaya*) which means 'excess'. So, how can someone be banished (*Nafi*) from the land? Should we understand the word 'land 'in its general or specific meaning? Does it refer to the land wherein the highwaymen operate?

If we understand it according to its specific meaning, then it means that they are to be banished to any other land; and if we understand the word 'earth 'according to its general meaning, then how can they be banished? We may observe the meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* has intended in light of another verse of the Quran whereby Allah *Glorified is He* ordered the children of Israel to dwell in the land after Pharaoh had died. (*al-Isra':* 104)

Of course, they would dwell on the land, but these words are used to impart a particular meaning. We know that we only speak of habitation when we specify a particular place on earth in which we dwell, such as if someone says, "Dwell in the US," or "Dwell in the UN." Therefore, the meaning intended here is that Allah *Glorified is He* is telling us that He would disperse them throughout the earth in such a way that they would never settle together in one place. This affirms what Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere that He has ordained on the children of Israel to disperse on the earth as separate communities. (*al-A'raf:* 168) So, they had no homeland of their own and were to be dispersed on the earth and this was what actually happened.

Did the children of Israel ever settle together in one homeland? No. Allah *Glorified is He* never changes His Decree even in the case of the country they were established in because of the Balfour Declaration; Allah *Glorified is He* has fulfilled His promise to the believers that they will enter the Mosque as soon as they made their best effort to restore it. Furthermore, the Jews actually remain, according to their nature, dispersed all over the earth and in every country they have their own special quarters and every group of them preserves its own identity and does not integrate with those amongst whom they live. Allah *Glorified is He* informs us concerning the last stance of the children of Israel that when the promise of the Hereafter shall come to pass, they would be gathered in one place after their dispersing in the land. (*al-Isra':* 104)

When Allah *Glorified is He* brings them forth at the onset of the Last Day, they will be gathered together because when Allah *Glorified is He* gives the community of the believers the strength to deal the final blow to those people, they must all be gathered together. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wants them to have this 'nation-state 'so that they would gather therein and thereupon He will rain down His final blow upon them, having gathered them to the assembly of all people. So, we should not grieve because they have a state, for He has brought them to the assembly of all people.

Now, we return to the verse under discussion; how is this banishment from the earth to be undertaken? When Allah *Glorified is He* wants to specify a place, He says for example: '…Enter the holy land…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21). In doing so, He has negated all other places. And He also says that' He means to drive you out of your land!' (*al-A'raf:* 110) Here, Egypt is meant.

If we consider the word "earth" in its general meaning, it will share the same meaning with the following verse '...Dwell on earth…'. Banishment is one of the punishments for spreading corruption and there are four kinds of spreading corruption on earth: murder, theft and frightening and the

Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* also added something which can be learned from his biography, wherein he alerted us to another form of corruption of which the scholars should be aware. The first banishment which took place in Islam occurred when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* banished Al-Hakam ibn Abu Al-'As from Medina to At-Ta'if because Al-Hakam had – Allah forbid – imitated ironically the way in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to walk. When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to walk, he would stride as though he were descending a steep hill and thus, he had a unique way of walking. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* learned that Al-Hakam had been mockingly imitating the way he walked; when he noticed this suddenly one day, he banished him from Medina to At-Ta'if. Al-Hakam remained there until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away and then when Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* became the caliph, Al-Hakam's family went to him to ask him to allow Al-Hakam to return to Medina, so Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* said: ''I would never remove a decree which the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* issued." So they went to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab after he became the caliph and likewise he refused. Also when 'Uthman ibn Affan *may Allah be pleased with him* who was a shy and coy man, became the caliph, he said: ''I heard something from the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* which may have indicated that Al- Hakam should be pardoned"; so 'Uthman *may Allah be pleased with him* pardoned and permitted him to return to Medina.

During the lifetime of Al-Hakam in At-Ta'if, he owned a few sheep and goat which he would tend to foster in the hills of the city; and this matter had repercussions that will affect thereafter. As you know, Mu'awiya's son Yazid became a caliph after him and after Yazid, the caliphate passed on to the family of Marwan, the son of Al-Hakam.

Khalid ibn Yazid, the one who passed the caliphate on to Marwan, was a great chemist, and had a brother named 'Abdullah, who owned horses for racing. One of 'Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan's sons also owned horses, which he raced against 'Abdullah's. And when 'Abdullah's horses were about to win the race, a dispute broke out between him and 'Abd Al-Malik's son and

‘Abd Al-Malik’s son chided ‘Abdullah harshly. So, ‘Abdullah went and complained to his brother Khalid who went to 'Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan and said, ‘‘A dispute has arisen between your son and my brother.”

At that time, Abd Al-Malik was known amongst the Arabs for his eloquence, and they had never heard him make a grammatical error and he had raised his children to never make mistakes in their Arabic. However, he had a son named Al-Walid who was incapable of speaking the language correctly without any grammatical mistakes. So, when Khalid went to ‘Abd Al-Malik, he wanted to find a way to criticise him, but ‘Abd Al-Malik said to Khalid, ‘‘Do you dare to speak to me about ‘Abdullah when he came to me just now and spoke without grammar?”

So, Khalid said to ‘Abd Al-Malik, referring to Al-Walid: ‘‘By Allah’s eloquence impresses me! ‘Abd Al-Malik replied: ‘‘If Al-Walid makes mistakes in his speech, then his brother Sulaiman never does!” So, Khalid said: ‘‘And if ‘Abdullah makes mistakes in his speech, then his brother Khalid never does!” “Be quiet, man!” ‘Abd Al-Malik said, ‘‘for you were not part of the Caravan or the troop!”

Now ‘the Caravan’ originally meant the caravan of goods which Abu Sufyan was bringing from the Levant when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to seize it, but Abu Sufyan escaped. And ‘the troop’ originally meant the people whom Abu Sufyan called forth from Mecca for support because he feared the Muslims. The ‘Caravan’ was led by Abu Sufyan and the ‘the troop’ was led by ‘Utba ibn Rabi’a; ‘Utba was Khalid’s maternal grandfather, while Abu Sufyan was his paternal grandfather. So Khalid replied: ‘‘and who is more closely connected to the Caravan and the troop than me? My grandfather, Abu Sufyan, was the leader of the Caravan and my grandfather *‘Utba* was the leader of the troop. Mockingly Khalid said, “But perhaps you had better spoken about the little flocks of sheep and goats and hills of At-Ta’if in which your grandfather was confined – and may Allah *Glorified is He* have mercy on ‘Uthman who let him free! And with these words his opponent fell silent.”

So, banishment was the first punishment that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* carried out, but was what Al-Hakam did a form of corruption?

We say that all corruption is lesser than that which is directed against the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and Al-Hakam was mocking the way the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* walked.

A lawmaker might say that prison fulfils the same function of banishment, but we say: No, for today, the prison has many comforts and in the past prison was much harder than it is today. The purpose of prison is to remove the criminal from society so that his/her evils are prevented, even if he/she is not actually taken from the land in which he/she lives. This is up to the discretion of the ruler who can apply it however he/she wishes, especially if there were no longer several Islamic lands so that he/she could banish the criminal from one land to another.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '…A disgrace for them in this world and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter.' These words refer to the aforementioned prescribed punishment for those who spread corruption in earth and wage war against Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* which should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, or banishment from the land and these punishments are a disgrace for them.

The Arabic word *khizi* (disgrace) has two meanings; it may refer to 'scandal'; the verb with the verbal noun (*khizi*) means 'to be exposed', whereas the verb with a verbal noun (*khazaya*) and (*khaza*) mean 'to feel ashamed'. These two meanings are related to each other, for when a person's secrets are exposed, he/she feels ashamed. These actions are ignominious, such as the one who commits highway robbery; and we say to those who do such deeds: "Your power is not intrinsic, but rather ephemeral; for if it were intrinsic, you would be able to escape when they came to kill you, crucify you or cut off your hand and foot. And you chose to assault those who were unarmed and thus, unable to defend themselves and this is also ignominious and disgraceful for you, especially when you see those who used to fear you, while you are being punished. Furthermore the ignominy you suffer now is but a prelude to another great suffering in the Hereafter, wherein you shall undergo a yet more a painful and great punishment." Allah *Glorified is He* says that there will be disgrace for them in this world and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter. Requital in this worldly life is limited to man’s power to punish; but what will happen when they are given over to the ultimate Power of Allah *the Almighty?*

Then, the Justice of Allah *Glorified is He* is manifested, for He gives those who commit sins and act wrongly against themselves the chance; first to repent, for if Allah *Glorified is He the Dispenser of Mercy* to His servants were to punish every man for a single crime or sin he/she committed without any possibility of forgiveness, the world would be filled with the corruption of everyone who commits sins because they would despair of Allah’s Forgiveness and sink further into sin and iniquity. Allah *Glorified is He* has opened the door of repentance for all those who act wrongly against themselves and if there were no repentance, then every sinner would lose hope. So, suppose that one of the people guilty of these crimes regained his/her conscience: if he repents before you catch him, then there is a ruling for this situation; but if he/she repents after society catches him/her, then his/her repentance is worthless. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُوا۟ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تَقْدِرُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ فَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ (٣٤)

unless they repent before you overpower them – in that case bear in mind that God is forgiving and merciful [34] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 34)

As long as the one who deserves such penalties repents and turns himself/herself in before he/she is caught by society, he/she has the right for his/her repentance to be accepted. We must understand that Allah’s Forgiveness and Mercy are related to His Right; but the families of the victims are entitled to demand the punishment of the assaulter.

If they repent before the society overpowers them, then Allah *Glorified is He* will accept their repentance. The Quran combines all the different aspects of the way of faith into a single unit and divides different matters into different sections, in the way that human legislation is arranged into chapters. Therefore, we find that the Quran treats issues as though they are opportunities for the soul to wake up and come to its senses, so Allah *Glorified is He* directs the soul methodologically to follow instructions, and finally becomes obedient.

We gave an example before on how the Quran speaks about family issues in the chapter *al-Baqara* where Allah *Glorified is He* says that the husband should give half of the bride-gift to the wife if he divorces her before consummating the marriage yet after fixing a Bride-a gift for her, unless they waive their right, or unless the one who holds the marriage tie waives his right. (*al-Baqara:* 237)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* turns to the issue of prayer in the two verses that follow the previous verse when He commands us to take care when offering the prayers and to do them in the best way by standing before Him in devotion. If we are in danger, we can pray when we are out walking or riding, but when you are safe again, we should remember Allah *Glorified is He* for He has taught us what we did not know. (*al-Baqara:* 238-239)

Allah *Glorified is He* placed the issue of prayer in between two issues related to the family, since after speaking of the importance of being mindful of the prayers, even in times of war, He said that those who may die and leave wives should make a bequest for them: a year's maintenance and no expulsion from their homes during that time. But if they leave of their own accord, they will not be blamed. (*al-Baqara:* 240)

He mentioned the issue of prayer between two issues of familial relations in order to show that the religion is a single unit and also because the soul which is filled with hatred and the woes of the contentious issues of marriage; inheritance and divorce is calmed when it performs the prayer. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is an excellent example for us: when something occupied him and seemed difficult to him, he would pray.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* does not present the different facets of the religion in separate chapters; one chapter for prayer, another for fasting, and a third for *zakat*, the poor-due; no, rather, He mixes all this together into a single blend. Therefore, when He has decreed that spreaders of corruption and those who wage war against Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* are to be killed, crucified, amputated or banished, this was meant to inspire awe and dread in the human soul; and once that dread was awakened in the human soul, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱبْتَغُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِ ٱلْوَسِيلَةَ
وَجَـٰهِدُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

You who believe, be mindful of God, seek ways to come closer to Him and strive for His cause, so that you may prosper [35] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 35)

We now come out of a stern atmosphere and talk of punishments and penalties and turn to having piety and being mindful of Allah *Glorified is He*. Piety -as we have come to know- means to place a protective barrier between oneself and all that might harm one.

We know that Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to be mindful of Him and also to be mindful of fire. (*al-Baqara:* 24) Furthermore, we know that fearing Allah *Glorified is He* and piety mean that we must place a protective barrier between Allah's Punishment and ourselves. And when someone says that Allah *Glorified is He* tells us to adhere to His Path and to always be under His Care, we should place a protective barrier between Allah's punishment and ourselves, one of which is the fire of hell.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* commands the believers to be mindful to Him, which means that we should have awe of His Attributes of Majesty; and hell-fire is one of the creations of Allah *the Exalted* and one of His soldiers.

He *Glorified is He* then commands us to seek ways to come closer to Him, that is, we should search for the intermediary means which will bring us closer to His obedience, pleasure and love. And is there any way of drawing closer to Allah *Glorified is He* other than doing what He has ordained? Can a man draw closer to any being except by those things which he knows that this being loves?

On the human level, we find that someone might ask, 'What does so-and-so like? 'When they tell him that so-and-so likes neck ties, he gives him a gift of some ties. And if they tell him that so-and-so likes good quality rosaries, he gives him a lovely rosary. So people always draw near to others by means of what they love – so how do we think we should draw closer to Allah *Glorified is He*? He explains to us what He loves in a Qudsi Hadith: The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah said, 'I will declare war against he who shows hostility to a pious worshipper of Mine; and the most beloved things with which My slave comes nearer to Me, is what I have enjoined upon him; and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *Nawafil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, his sense of sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grips and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him and if he asks My protection (Refuge), I will protect him, (i.e. give him My Refuge).'(1)

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* shows His servant the right way saying in this a Qudsi Hadith; '…and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *Nawafil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory)….' That means the servant seeks closeness to Allah *Glorified is He* with those things which He has not obliged him to do, yet which are from the same type of actions as those which He has made obligatory; for it is not correct to invent new ways of worshipping. So to seek to come closer to Allah *Glorified is He* means to obey Him and adhere to His Path, manifested by His words 'Do' and 'Do not do.'

The word (*Al-Wasila*) is also the name of one of the levels of paradise. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* advised us to call Allah *Glorified is He* to give him (*al-Wasila*) virtue when he says: 'When you hear the *Adhan* (the call to prayer), repeat what the *Mu'adhdhin* (the one doing the call to prayer) says. Then ask Allah to exalt my mention because everyone who does so will receive in return ten rewards from Allah. Then beseech Allah to grant me *al-Wasilah*, which is a high rank in paradise, fitting for only one of Allah's slaves; and I hope that I will be that man. If any one asks *al-Wasilah* for me, it becomes incumbent upon me to intercede for him….' (2)

We do not wish to enter here into a discussion of the practice of taking the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* or the pious worshippers of Allah (*'Awliya'*) as intermediaries between us and Allah *Glorified is He* because it is not something which should cause any dispute. Some people have even declared that those who do such a practice are unbelievers; and to those who say this, we say:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim*

You must subject this statement to a little refinement because statements such as this are the result of the lack of understanding. Those who take the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* or *a Wali* of Allah *the Exalted* as an intermediary between them and Allah *Glorified is He* do so because they see that he has a high rank in Allah's sight. Does anyone believe that the *Awliya'* could flatter him by giving him something which is not one of his rights? Of course not, and there are people who say, ''It is fine to use living people as intermediaries, but not dead people." To them, we say: You are restricting something which is broad because a person's being alive does not have anything to do with their being taken as an intermediary. If you seek to take the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as an intermediary between you and Allah *Glorified is He* the basis of your endeavour is the love you feel for one whom you know to be closer to Allah *Glorified is He* than you are; your love for him is what intercedes. Also do not think that this will get you anything you do not deserve.

To those who say, ''We cannot seek to use the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* as an intermediary between us and Allah *Glorified is He* because he has passed away", then we say: Wait a moment, and think about what 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* said: ''At the time of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when the rains failed, we would seek his intermediation and pray for rain. But after the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, we would seek the intermediation of his uncle Al-'Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him*. 'So they will ground their proof by saying,' if seeking the intermediation of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* after his passing were permissible, then 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him* would not have stopped seeking his intermediation after he passed away and would have sought the intermediation of his uncle instead. But we ask: Did 'Umar supplicate to Allah *the Exalted* saying, ''We used to seek the intermediation of Your Prophet, but now we seek the intermediation of Al-'Abbas to draw closer to You?" Or, did he say: ''We seek to draw closer to You by the intermediation of Your Prophet's uncle?" So those who declare this to be forbidden only serve to restrict themselves even further because we are not only able to seek the intermediation of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, but we can also seek the intermediation of anyone who has a connection with him. When you seek the intermediation of someone to draw closer to someone else, this means that you believe that the one whose intermediation you seek cannot do anything for you; the reason you seek his intermediation is that you know that he alone cannot meet your need. So let us distance the concept of 'associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He'* from this matter, so we say: We seek his intermediation because we know that the One to Whom we seek intermediation is All-Powerful, whilst the one by whom we seek intermediation is powerless – and this is the very ultimate degree of certitude and faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

But the one whose intermediation is sought might benefit or might not. When 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* sought the intermediation of Al-'Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, he did this to seek rain and in such a circumstance, rain would not have benefited the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. So it is as though 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* brought forth one of the Prophetic family and said, ''O, Lord, Your Prophet's uncle is thirsty, so for his sake, we seek rain.'

So the intermediation which 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* sought from the Prophet's uncle is evidence against those who say that it became forbidden to seek the intermediation of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when he passed away. In order for us to avoid dispute, we say that the good deeds embodied by 'Do' and 'Do not do' are the purest form of intermediary; and in this way, we will avoid getting caught up in disputes.

Allah *Glorified is He* commands the believers to be mindful of Him, to seek ways to come closer to Him and to strive for His cause. So that they may prosper, we consider the faithful altruism through which Allah *Glorified is He* wants to instil fear in the soul of the believer by means of Allah *Glorified is He,* which means to steer clear of what He forbids and by his seeking to come closer to Allah *Glorified is He* by following His Commandments.

The religion did not come only for your own sake, but rather, your faith is not complete until you love for your brother what you love for yourself. And if you love for yourself to be guided on the right way, then you should do your best to ensure the same for your fellow men. And your fellow believers are not the only people who live with you now, but also the people who might come afterwards; therefore you must strive in Allah's Cause to establish His religion. In this way, the aspiration of faith widens; it does not only apply to the believer or his contemporaries. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* makes a straight Path for us and shows us where it leads.

The beginning of the Path was that when the believer was convinced that Allah *Glorified is He* will give him a pleasure and reward in the Hereafter better than what he seeks in the worldly life, he sacrificed his life and was martyred for His cause. Therefore a great Companion said, 'Does nothing lie between me and paradise except that I enter this battle, and either kill the enemy or die at their hands?' The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Indeed, this is so.' So the Companion threw down the dates which he had been eating and entered the battle.

He must, therefore, have known that the life which awaited him was better than the life which he was living. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* has not made struggling in His cause a means of drawing closer to Him in the beginning; rather, He kept commanding them to wait and have patience until He had moulded those who would bear His Message. He did not want to make it a suicide mission.

And after that, we see that as the Islamic Mission continued on its journey, a Companion might grieve because during a battle 'Amr ibn Al-'As and Khalid ibn Al-Walid escaped from him so that he was not able to kill them. Yet the passing of time confirmed that the people had been unaware that Allah *Glorified is He* saved Khalid and spared him from the blade of the Companion in order to later make Islam victorious by means of Khalid *Allah be pleased with him*. And likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* saved 'Amr ibn Al-'As *may Allah be pleased with him* so that he too would give succour to Islam.

So the struggle in Allah's Cause assures the believer that the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* in which he believes will continue until the end of time and this can only be attained if the Message is allowed to be spread to the whole world. Furthermore, when the believing soul is prepared to struggle in Allah's Cause, this means that the altruism of faith must be placed in it and that it knows that it has chosen the best faith. It loves to pass it over to others and it does not accept that it takes the goodness of faith and deprives those who live alongside it in the non-Islamic lands from its goodness and that it is keen that the whole world embraces faith. If we consider this matter, we find that it represents a deep understanding of the meaning of life. If people are good, then man will benefit from all their goodness; and if they are evil, then man will suffer from their evil.

So it is in the interest of the good person to pass his goodness on to others, because if his goodness spreads then he will expect to benefit from this goodness in turn; for people trust the good man and no evil comes to them from him because he loves for all people to be good and to be on the side of faith; for if they are on the side of faith the good man will benefit from their goodness. But if people continue to do evil, whilst the good man continues to be good, then they will continue to benefit from his goodness, whilst he suffers from their evil. So it is part of the wisdom of faith for one to pass on his good to others. And if the believer wishes to call to Allah's Cause and spread His Path, he must be prepared for this before he meets the enemy in battle. So before meeting the enemy on the battlefield, one must be prepared; and when the believer prepares himself, he finds that all the motions of life are with him. To call to Allah *Glorified is He* requires good conduct and good conduct spreads among people and when this happens, the forces of faith become stronger and improve both in conduct and in action. And when the forces of faith become stronger, they can extract the treasures of the earth and defend the abode of faith by means of industrial, scientific, and military progress. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has sent Iron on earth with both; mighty strength and benefits for mankind. (*al-Hadid:* 25)

He sent down the Quran and He also sent down iron. He also continues to say that He makes evident those who support Him and His messengers though they cannot see Him. This refers to the attribute of 'great might' and this is the second means concerning which Allah *Glorified is He* counselled us: Do not consider that the way of Allah *Glorified is He* is confined to Do's and Don't's, but also consider Allah's *Glorified is He* Path to incorporate everything that protects Allah's way such as scientific progress, through extracting the treasures of the earth like iron and using them in manufacturing. Just as Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down the Quran to convey His Path of guidance, He also sent down iron and it is man's job to utilise iron and the other raw materials to manufacture scientific apparatus and build factories in which we make steel out of the iron and make armature out of the steel and produce the precise instruments which give the soldier the chance to attain victory. And we must also store up enough foodstuff to suffice us during wartime.

So all the motions of life are part of the struggle and you must not think of striving in His cause as applying only to the battlefield. Rather, you must prepare yourself for battle. Now if you are well prepared and your enemy sees that you have done so, he might refrain from attacking you. In our times, what prevents the world from entering into a vicious battle which would ultimately destroy it is the fear of the evenly matched forces, for each nation has prepared itself for war and were there only one power in the world everything would be destroyed.

We understand the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* 'strife (*jihad*) in His Cause' to refer to striving in the cause of Allah's Path that we must study and understand it and then strive in its Cause with words and if necessary, with arms, by the book and by the troops.

So Allah's Command to strive in His cause is meant to form a faithful and civilized so that we do not give the disbeliever the chance to utilise the means and secrets which Allah *Glorified is He* has placed in the universe. Those who worship Allah *Glorified is He* alone are entitled to the secrets He has placed in the universe more than others; and even if we suppose that war will not take place, but we still possess factories which produce and farms which suffice everyone, then we will truly have attained sufficiency, for what is not used in war can be used in the time of peace. You must understand that all of the inventions of modern life are first meant to be used in war and afterwards when people calm down, humanity uses these inventions for the good of peace.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَوۡ أَنَّ لَهُم مَّا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ جَمِيعٗا وَمِثۡلَهُۥ مَعَهُۥ
لِيَفۡتَدُواْ بِهِۦ مِنۡ عَذَابِ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ مَا تُقُبِّلَ مِنۡهُمۡۖ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ٣٦

If the disbelievers possessed all that is in the earth and twice as much again and offered it to ransom themselves from torment on the Day of Resurrection, it would not be accepted from them – they will have a painful torment [36]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* spoke before about punishments, retribution, killing and amputation; then He moved us from this topic and exhorted us to have Fear of Allah *Glorified is He* and to seek to draw closer to Him, and to strive in His Cause in order to attain to a happy state. It was, therefore, inevitable that Allah *Glorified is He* would then remind us of the contrary state. The punishments mentioned before, such as retribution and execution, are confined to this world; but what will come in the Hereafter, which is referred to in this verse, is even more severe and bitter.

We can imagine the disbelievers who hold themselves so lofty in this worldly life and wreak tyranny on account of their haughtiness –what will happen to them on the Day of Judgement? They used their power to oppress others, but this power will leave and desert them on that Day. They had power in this worldly life because of the means which Allah *Glorified is He* gave to them, and the natural order which Allah *Glorified is He* established did not prevent them from progressing. Allah *Glorified is He* has created this natural order and anyone who seeks to utilise Allah's means, will get the results of his effort. But on the Day of Judgement they will learn that these means were not intrinsically theirs and that their strength was only a gift from Allah *Glorified is He*. They will face this living reality and if they possessed all that the world contained, or even twice as much and sought to offer it as a ransom to save them from the torment of hell, Allah *Glorified is He* would not accept it. This is the ultimate disgrace and they will not be able to save themselves from the torment of hell.

This reality makes the soul conscious and well aware of the fact that this is not all a game or an amusement, but that it is as serious as can be. A man must consider the punishment before he enjoys the crime; what makes people steep themselves in sin is that they separate the punishment from the crime. If before wronging himself, a man thought of the punishment for this crime, he would not commit it. The same is true of the one who is too lazy to obey Allah *Glorified is He*; if he considered what the reward for obedience is, he would be eager to obey. Let us give an example to illustrate this matter– and Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond comparison: Suppose that a man in a desert sees a tree above the highest mountain and realises it is an apple-tree when he sees a rotten apple fall from it onto the ground. He says to himself, ‘‘I can see how people could die here: one might fall from the mountainside, another might be attacked by wolves, and a third might lose the way – all this because of their hope that the tree has fruit. I must, therefore, choose the safest way to the fruit.” The road which leads to the fruits of this world is that of obeying Allah *Glorified is He* – and it is also the road to the fruits of the Hereafter.

Another example is: A hard-working student gets up early and makes ablution and prays and then goes out to school in the cold weather to attend his lessons. He comes home to eat the food his mother has prepared for him, but his mind is engrossed in his studies. This young man bears in the mind what the result of this effort will be and therefore, all the hard work he does for his education is easy for him. Had he been neglectful and slept late, not getting up early for school but instead, going out to hang around in the street with others like him, he would not be thinking of the end to which this loafing was taking him. The problem with people is that they separate actions from their results, crimes from their punishments and obedience from its reward. If we were to consider consequences along with actions, no one would ever commit a sin, or fail to obey Allah *Glorified is He*.

We can imagine how the tyrants of this world will look in hell in the Hereafter. In this world they tyrannised and usurped; and even if we suppose that one of them owned everything in the whole world – even though this is impossible – and owned it twice over and then offered it as a ransom to save himself from the suffering of hell, Allah *Glorified is He* will reject it from him, and he will suffer a severe punishment. This is the ultimate disgrace which anyone must be at pains to avoid. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يُرِيدُونَ أَن يَخْرُجُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِ وَمَا هُم بِخَٰرِجِينَ مِنْهَا ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ ﴿٣٧﴾

They will wish to come out of the Fire but they will be unable to do so: theirs will be a lasting torment [37]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 37)

Every time the flames of the fire touch them, they will wish to come out of it. But how will they get the idea of coming out of the fire? It must be that as the Fire touches them and pushes them here and there, the flames will push them towards the exit so that they will imagine that their suffering is over. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a perfect image of the ferocity of hell when He says that if the wrongdoers ask for relief they will be relieved. (*al-Kahf*: 29)

This seems to suggest that mercy will be extended to them, but what comes next depicts the pure horror of the reality that they will be relieved with water like murky oil which scalds faces. This is the ultimate horror, imparted by the contrast between the early hope and the final despair.

For example, a thirsty prisoner might ask for a cup of water. The guard could simply say, 'No, there is no water'; but if he wants to torment the prisoner more than this, he would say, 'I will bring you water' and brings a cup of cool water and as the prisoner reaches out to take the water the guard throws it onto the floor. This is an example of early hope and final despair. The same applies to their desire to leave the hell; they would only have the desire to leave if they had thought that it is possible, as the flames will toss them here and there. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* also commands the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to give them glad tidings. (*Al-'Imran:* 21)

The notions of the "glad tidings" gives the soul hope of mercy, so they will rejoice, but what comes next which is a glad tiding of severe punishment. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* wants them to be shocked by the pain of disappointment after having entertained with some hope. He says that they will wish to come out of the fire but they will be unable to do so and they will suffer a lasting torment. Afterwards Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلسَّارِقُ وَٱلسَّارِقَةُ فَٱقۡطَعُوٓاْ أَيۡدِيَهُمَا جَزَآءَۢ بِمَا
كَسَبَا نَكَٰلٗا مِّنَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ﴿٣٨﴾

Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are man or woman, as punishment for what they have done – a deterrent from God: God is almighty and wise [38] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 38)

Allah *Glorified is He* previously speaks of the punishment for the highway robbers and spreaders of corruption and here He speaks of another matter by which He wishes to protect the fruits of the believer's work in his society; for faith wants the believer to work and if a person is to work, he must be sure that the fruits of his labour are secure. But if a man works and earns the fruits of his labour and then someone else seizes them, this will cause him to be averse to labour. Subsequently, the progress of the world comes to a halt. Therefore, it is in our interest that the motions of life continue, and the motions of life will not continue unless man feels secure about the fruits of his labour and unless his labour is compatible with Allah's *Glorified is He* Law. And when a man works in something which Allah *Glorified is He* has permitted and has a lawful source of income, no one has the right to interfere with this because this man's work benefits society whether he intends this or not.

We said before that the man who has a lot of wealth saved up, finds that Allah *Glorified is He* commands him to invest this wealth, as He commands the doors of goodness to open for the one who is wealthy; so He casts the idea of constructing a large residential building into the wealthy man's heart and the man says to himself: 'I have plenty of wealth saved up, so why do I not build an apartment for myself?' Allah *Glorified is He* beautifies this idea to the man and he thinks about building a ten-storey apartment block with four apartments on each floor and charging one hundred pounds a month rent for each apartment – and this is a fine monthly income. The man thinks about this without realising that Allah *Glorified is He* cast these thoughts into his mind and he eagerly buys some land, then brings an architect to design the building and construct it and spends the wealth he saved. Thus, we see that before the wealthy man benefits from his apartment, other people benefit from his wealth, even those from the poorest sectors of society – and all this happened because of a thought. Everyone has his thoughts: the miser will have thoughts that make him spend some money and the generous man will have thoughts that make him save some money. Do not think that there is any motion in the world which is outside the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*.

He says, 'Except for those who repent after that and correct themselves….' (*Al-'Imran:* 89) They do this because they have sinned before, so they seek to expiate these sins by putting their deeds right. Therefore we find that much good comes from those who have sinned against themselves and now wish to put themselves to right and there is no one who can take anything from Allah *Glorified is He* without His permission. He clarifies this issue by saying that good deeds do away with evil ones. (*Hud:* 114)

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* drives people to do what He wants by mere passing thoughts. Indeed, He is the Unseen Sustainer of all existence and therefore, the way He manages the universe is also unseen. In our villages, they reserve one day for the market and on the morning of this reserved day we look at the marketplace and reflect on it and marvel at the wondrous creativity of the One Who moves the universe. In the morning, some men go to the marketplace carrying their canes and nothing else: they are going to buy what they need and others come driving cows or donkeys: they are going to sell their goods. We see women carrying different kinds of vegetables, so we know they are going to sell them at the market and we see others carrying empty baskets, so we know they are going to buy. At the end of the day, we see the reverse issue: those who were carrying things in the morning now are not and others are carrying what others brought. Who was it that cast the thought of selling into the minds of those who went to the market to sell? And who inspired the others to buy? It was Allah *Glorified is He* who provides those who wished to sell with people to buy from them and those who wished to buy with people to whom they sell. This is the arrangement of the Ever-Living and All-Sustaining. We hear people say, ''We have brought twenty tons of tomatoes to market today and forty tons of zucchinis," and so on and as the day ends, we find that it has all been sold. These are the notions which Allah *Glorified is He* inspires in people to give balance to society. So Allah *Glorified is He* wants to protect the labour of those who work and He also does not want people to take nourishment or amusement without any effort; for those who steal usurp the effort of others, and this makes others averse to working at all.

There is a principle in Islam which states that when unemployment is rife, do not give charity to people from your own money, but instead make a project, even if you do not really need it – for example, dig a well and then fill it again afterwards – and pay the workers their wages. People should not become accustomed to inactivity, but rather, you must make them accustomed to working; and those who are unable to work must be provided for. A man's provision is primarily assured by his labour and if he is unable to work, then he must be provided for by his family and relatives and if he has no family, then the people of his neighbourhood are responsible for him and if the people of his neighbourhood or village are unable to support him, then the treasury of the state must provide for the poor.

So the ground of faith urges us to make sure that people have work or to provide for their needs if they are incapable of working. The problem is that some people love certain jobs, and they want to be employed in jobs which involve no real work. To such people, we say: ‘‘The modern world has the crisis of unemployment; so learn a skill, for life and never deprive someone who wishes to earn a living of having work.”

We have the excellent example in the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when he held the first auction in Islam: ‘‘A man of the *Ansari* (Helpers) came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and begged from him. He (the Prophet) asked: “Have you anything in your house?” He replied: “Yes, a piece of cloth, a part of which we wear and a part of which we spread (on the ground) and a wooden bowl from which we drink water.” He said: “Bring them to me.” He then brought these articles to him and He (the Prophet) took them in his hands and asked: “Who will buy these?” A man said: “I shall buy them for one *dirham*.” He repeated twice or thrice: “Who will offer more than one *dirham*?” A man said: “I shall buy them for two *dirhams*.” He gave these to him and took the two *dirhams* and giving them to the *Ansari*, he said: “Buy food with one of them and hand it to your family and buy an axe and bring it to me."[1] The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the man to bring the piece of cloth he spread on the ground and a wooden bowl from which we drink water in order to tell him that he is trading with his property, not with what the people may give him. He then brought them to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* who fixed a handle on it with his own hands and said: "Go, gather firewood and sell it and do not let me see you for fifteen days."[2] The man went away and gathered firewood and sold it. When the fifteen days ended he had earned ten *dirhams,* then he came to him and bought a garment with some of them and food with the others. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* then said: "This is better for you lest that begging should come as a spot on your face on the Day of Judgement" [3].This is true education.

Therefore, it is a fundamental goal of Islam to protect the affairs of the members of society. If someone does not make a living, then we help him with advice, education, power and strength, for the best thing is for us to teach them to work for themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn which is full of lessons for us. Allah *Glorified is He* says that when he reached a place between two mountain barriers, he found beside them people who could barely understand him. (*al-Kahf:* 93) That is, he could barely communicate with them. But they subsequently said to him that Gog and Magog are ruining this land, and they asked him to build a barrier between them and Gog and Magog. They offered a tribute to him if he did so. (*al-Kahf:* 94) So Dhu Al-Qarnayn made it clear that he was not in need of them, but nevertheless, he would give them tasks to ensure that their aim was fulfilled: he asked them to bring him lumps of Iron and when he had filled the gap between the two mountainsides, he ordered them to work their bellows. When he had made it glow like fire, he ordered them to bring molten metal for him to pour over it. (*al-Kahf:* 96)

It is noteworthy that when the Quran tells a story, it only does so for a particular reason. They asked Dhu Al-Qarnayn to build a barrier, but he suggested that he will make a rampart for them. What is the difference? Modern science

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(1) *Narrated by Abu-Dawud*

(2) *Narrated by Abu-Dawud*

(3) *Narratedby Ahmad and Abu Dawud*

has proved that a barrier can be destroyed by being afflicted by a jolt on any part of it; whilst a rampart (*radm*) is jolted, and actually becomes firmer. Furthermore, Dhu Al-Qarnayn did not do the work for them; he taught them how to build the rampart so that they would not live with the feeling of impotence.

Thus, the Quran teaches us that a man must work – but what would happen if he steals? First of all, what does steal (*sariqa*) mean? It is to take the valuable property of another with stealth. If stealth is not employed, then it is usurpation (*ightisab*); and in Arabic, there are also the words (*khatf*) (snatching) and (*ikhtilas*) (embezzlement).

So there are different ways in which property can be taken. If a merchant is standing in his shop selling his goods and a child comes and snatches some candy and runs and the shopkeeper cannot catch him, this is (*khatf*) or 'snatching'. As for usurpation (*ightisab*), it means to forcibly seize something from its rightful owner; and embezzlement (*ikhtilas*) means that a person is given the responsibility of looking after some money, but he takes some of it for himself. As for stealing (*sariqa*) it means to take the valuable property of another with stealth from a secure place, i.e. from a place which by rights no one but the owner can enter unless they have his permission. But if someone leaves his door wide open or leaves his good son the street, he is at fault. Just as the Islamic Law commands us not to steal from one another, it also commands us not to be negligent; a person must first lock up his things and then trust in Allah *Glorified is He*; as a Just Lawgiver, Allah *Glorified is He* demands that both sides be aware of their duties. The Islamic Law defines the penalty for stealing in legal terms as applying to objects of one quarter-*dinar* (a gold coin) or more; and in those days, a quarter-*dinar* would be more than enough for a man to feed himself and his dependants; indeed even a *dirham* (a silver coin) would be enough to provide for family for one day at that time.

So how should we estimate the parallel value of a quarter-din*ar* in our time? If it is not enough to live on, then we must raise the minimum value to that which is enough to live on; and as long as in those days a *dinar* was made of gold, then the value of a quarer-*dinar* will have risen since then. In the past, a golden pound coin was worth ninety-seven and one-half Egyptian piaster, but today a single golden pound coin is worth more than two hundred and seventy Egyptian pounds. A person might also steal because he is needy or hungry and therefore, the Islamic Law established a value beyond which a needy person would not need to go in order to provide for himself and his family, namely one *dirham*. To steal a *dirham* has no fixed punishment, nor is it a sin, as long as all the lawful means of earning a living are unavailable. We have just seen that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* gave the dirham to a man and said: 'Buy food with one *dirham* and hand it to your family' which means that, as we said, a *dirham* was enough in those days. Traditionally, a dirham is worth one-twelfth of *a dinar*, so one quarter-dinar is equivalent to three *dirhams* – and this *dirham* is equivalent in our time to more than twenty Egyptian pounds.

Superficial people say, "Umar *Allah be pleased with him* abolished the punishment for stealing during the year of drought." To them, we say: No, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* did not abolish the punishment; the punishment remained, but he did not consider that the event which occurred was worthy of the punishment. The event which occurred in the year of drought or the year of famine was a matter of doubt and because of his sagacity as Commander of the Faithful, he did not consider that the event which occurred was worthy of the punishment. When 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Hatib Abu-Balta'ah's slave-boys stole from him; what happened? The slaves said to 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*: ''We were hungry, but the son of Abu Balta'ah did not give us any food. 'So 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* waived the punishment because of the doubt involved. So, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to protect the fruits of the worker's labour. Some superficial people might say as Abu Al-'Ala' Al-Ma'arri said:

A hand whose indemnity is five hundred golden pieces
wherefore cut off for stealing a quarter of a *dinar*
a contradiction that we have to keep silent about
and to take refuge with Allah from the hell-fire
So a faithful scholar replied to him:
Honesty made it valuable, betrayal made it cheap
So, mind the Wisdom of the Creator

We should be aware that these laws concerning crime and punishment are not human laws, but laws of its utmost precision. By Allah *Glorified is He*, if a mere lawmaker were to make laws for male and female thieves and male and female fornicators, what would the situation be?

The one speaking here is the Lord of the worlds, and He says: 'Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are man or woman, as punishment for what they have done– a deterrent from Allah Who is Almighty and Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38) Stealing is usually done out of need and it is mostly men who do it. When Allah *Glorified is He* proclaims His Laws, He does so with Wisdom. When He *Glorified is He* has enacted the issue of retribution, an occasion when the murdered victim's family tend to be enraged and emotional. He *Glorified is He* says: 'But if the culprit is pardoned by his aggrieved brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and the culprit shall pay what is due in a good way.' (*al-Baqara:* 178) Notice the compassion implied by the word 'his brother'. We never see any legislation marked by compassion in this way except the legislations of the Lord Who created man and knows him best.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are man or woman' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38). This is the final ordained punishment for stealing in Allah's *Glorified is He* Law; and in the days of Prophet Musa (Moses), a person who stole would have been slaved as punishment for his stealing. This is why we read the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph): Allah *Glorified is He* says that once he had given them their provisions, he placed the drinking-cup in his brother's pack. (*Yusuf:* 70)

The cup from which the king drank was known as 'The King's Chalice', and they would use it as a standard for measurement. After he put the cup in his brother's pack, what happened? An announcer called out, 'O, caravan, indeed, you are thieves.' They said while approaching them, 'What are you missing?' They said, 'We are missing the measurement cup of the king. For he who produces it is (the reward of) a camel's load, and I am responsible for it.' (*Yusuf:* 70-72) Then, the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) claimed that they had not come to spread corruption on earth, and so Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* let them decide how they should be punished if they were found to be guilty, and he did not apply the King's laws to them. The brothers said, 'Its recompense is that he in whose bag it is found - he (himself) will be its recompense. Thus do we recompense the wrongdoers?' (*Yusuf:* 75)

He made them confess to this and treated them according to their own law since the law of the King stated that whoever steals something shall be fined double the stolen object's value.

This explains the meaning of the True Lord's Words: 'We thus planned for Joseph…' (*Yusuf:* 76). That is, it was a plan contrived to keep Yusuf's (Joseph's) brother with him. Had the Egyptian law of the time been applied, he would not have been able to keep his brother with him. So, this plan was for the good of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* which is what the word 'for 'here implies. Also, Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers added: 'They said, "If he steals - a brother of his has stolen before." But Joseph kept it within himself and did not reveal it to them…' (*Yusuf:* 77).

Why did they say this? The origin of this issue was that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* used to stay with his paternal aunt. When he grew up and they wanted to take him, his aunt wished to keep him with her so she concealed in his pack a statue or a belt which she had inherited from her father Ishaq (*Isaac*) *peace be upon him*. Then, she claimed that she had found it to be missing. So, they searched the boy and found that he had the thing his aunt had claimed to have been stolen, so she kept him with her according to Israelite law. The Sacred Law's punishment for stealing used to be enslavement, and then this law was abrogated and the verse giving the punishment for stealing was revealed to affirm this abrogation. If it had not been abrogated already, then this verse heralded its abrogation:' (As for) the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands in recompense for what they committed as a deterrent (punishment) from Allah. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38)

The Prophetic practice (*Sunnah*) is what prescribes for us the mode of this amputation: the right hand is the one to be cut since it is usually the hand used for this activity. During one of my trips to America(1), a Muslim member of the audience at one of my lectures said to me, ‘we are supposed to use our right hand for everything, so why is it that some people eat with their left hands?’ I replied that this is a natural phenomenon, which is proved by the fact that some people’s organs are different; it is not a mechanical issue. Moreover, I added that one of the weaknesses of human inventions is that they do not make errors, such as the calculator. If they were able to evaluate and choose, then they would make errors. As for the mind, it knows how to evaluate. Then, I asked the questioner to stand up and walk towards me, and when he did so, he stepped with his right foot first. I commented that this is a natural phenomenon; and therefore if you have a son and his right hand does not work well, then you must not force him to use it, for the Creator wanted this to occasionally occur in man, in order to show His Power.

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(1) The story of the American Muslim who asked Sheikh As-Sha'rawy about those who are born leftists.

So there is no need to force a child to use his right hand if it does not function naturally since scientists say that the control centre is not in the hand but in the brain. The True Lord *Glorified is He* brought these things into existence in order that we understand that He did not create the universe and then left it to follow its natural laws. This is not the case since; He can break these natural laws whenever He wills. However, if someone were to refuse to use his right hand for eating, for example, when he is quite capable of doing so, he is thereby going against the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and violating man’s natural disposition.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…amputate their hands in recompense for what they committed as a deterrent (punishment) from Allah…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 38). The word for ‘wrought’ in this verse is *kasaba*, which literally means ‘to earn’, and to earn means to receive more than the capital you expend; the thief ‘earns’ his sin because he takes more than he needs. Also, the word *nakal* (deterrent) literally means a punishment or an admonition which deters the crime’s occurrence, whether for those who commit the crime or for those who witness it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* orders us elsewhere to let a group of the believers witness their punishment: ‘And let a party of the believers witness their punishment. (*an-Nur:* 2)

It is necessary to make the punishment of criminals in public in order to stand as an admonition and a warning. This law does not come from one human being to another, but from the Creator to His creation. The Creator is the One Who made the product, so do not hold yourself to be more knowledgeable than He of the product. The *Shar'i* Law does not proclaim this punishment out of a desire to cut hands, but out of a desire to prevent hands from being cut.

Furthermore, if the law remains only on paper without being implemented, then it will not deter anyone. Also, to those who say that cutting off hands is 'brutal', we give the following reply, 'A single hand was amputated in Saudi Arabia, and all stealing crimes ceased. Also, if an execution prevents murder, then cutting hands prevents hands from being cut. As for the "mutilation" which they clamour about, a single car accident mutilates people, and a single gas explosion does even worse. Do not isolate the punishment from the crime which would spread through society otherwise.' The way that the judiciary slows down the process of punishment causes society to forget about the vileness of the crime so that by the time the villain goes to trial people feel mercy for him.

However, if a punishment was meted out immediately after the crime was committed, the issue would be stopped. Furthermore, when thieves hear that we are cutting hands, they will think well before they steal and will refrain from the crime. The purpose of the punishment is to act as a deterrent and an admonition, and is a way of educating and reminding man of what Allah requires of him when the heedlessness of life's affairs overcomes him. So, requital here is a *nakal* (deterrent) which means a punishment, and the word *nukul* means to be deterred from committing a sin. So, it is an admonition which deters the occurrence of a crime. It is as though the intention of the punishment for people to see those whose hands that have been cut off since they are deterred from doing anything that would cause them to suffer the same fate.

Or, it is a way to make the one whose hand has been cut off eager to preserve his remaining limbs since if after his right hand has been cut off, he may steal again, and then he will lose his left hand. Thus, it is a deterrent both to the one who sees the punishment implemented on a thief and to the thief himself when he sees that he has lost one of his limbs, making him eager to keep the others. The True Lord *Glorified is He* treats His Creation according to a natural law of the universe which is that those who take the rights of others, their own rights must be denied. For example, when some of the children of Israel made lawful what Allah had forbidden, Allah punished them by removing some of their freedoms and forbidding them what He had previously allowed them: ‘So, because of the transgression of the Jews, We forbade them pure things which had been allowed to them, and also because of their hindering many men from Allah’s Way.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160)

Therefore, no one can deceive Allah or take what is not rightfully his. If someone takes too much, then Allah will deny him other things, and the time will come when He will deny him things which He had allowed him before. For example, when someone goes to excess by drinking alcohol or taking intoxicating drugs, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will subject him to trial by denying him other pleasures which He used to allow him. Also, if a man eats sweet things excessively, he will become ill, and Allah will prevent him from many things.

Likewise, if the one who commits sins against himself were to compare what he has been allowed to what Allah has prohibited for him, he will find that he has lost out. The person who indulges in unlawful excess by usurping the wealth of others will see his own wealth squandered before his eyes, and we have seen examples of this. In the old times, the wealthy men of the countryside would sift flour to a high degree until it became especially free of chaff, and they would call this kind of flour’ superior grade flour’. They would consume this kind of flour and leave the rest, adulterated with chaff, for the servants and the poor to consume. Then, a time came when physicians forbade them from eating this white flour, and they were only allowed to eat the inferior flour which they had disdained in the past. So, we should understand that this is an overriding natural law, and we should always be aware of Allah’s Words that for wrongdoing on the part of the Jews: ‘We forbade them pure things which had been allowed to them.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160)

Therefore, if you steal what another hand has earned, the True Lord *Glorified is He* prevents you from your hand, not your income. Also, if you steal again, Allah prevents you from another limb, and so on. This is a natural law which causes man’s life to be balanced, especially in the case of those who see the punishment of the Hereafter as being far-off and those who are tempted and deluded by how forbearing Allah is with them.

Also, if you look closely at the geographical area in which you live: your family, your neighbourhood, your town, or your community, you will find people who have prevented themselves from things with no prevention from others. One person might suffer – Allah forbid – from uraemia so that he is unable to eat even a piece of meat, while another might have diabetes so that he cannot eat a single sweet or a spoonful of honey. This is due to the fact that no one can take anything without Allah knowing about it, and He made it this way because He is *the Almighty* and the Invincible. So, do not think that you can take anything without Allah's Knowledge or that you can get around His Law, for He is the Almighty and the Invincible. In our lives, we see those who take wealth unrightfully in the form of bribes, theft or embezzlement, and we see that they spend these ill-gotten gains on things which bring them woe and misery. We find that what they take unlawfully ends up marring and spoiling what they earn lawfully. I would like all those who commit sins against themselves to make an account of their earnings, recording all their ill-gotten gains in one place and all their lawful income in another, and then bear in mind the trials with which Allah has afflicted them because of this. Invariably, they will find that in order to escape from these misfortunes, they should have neither earned nor spent their ill-gotten gains and even some of their lawful income. Therefore, the Hadith goes: 'When a man makes money by snatching it out of mouths, Allah will cause him to lose it in abysses.'

I used to know two men who each had a son in school, and I used to see one of them giving his son five pence, whereupon the son would say to his father, 'I still have my pocket-money from yesterday.' The other man would give his son ten pence, whereupon he would say, 'It is not enough to buy anything!' Allah willed that the three of us met together in the office of the Irrigation Ministry in Zaqaziq, and just as we were leaving, the president of that office came with a large yellow envelope stuffed full of things and gave it to one of these men. I asked him what it was, and he said it was some white paper, blotting paper, and pens for the children to do their homework. I said to him, 'This explains why your children are failing at their studies, why they are so profligate, why you are buying them private lessons, which you cannot afford and why your son says to you, "Ten pence is not enough to buy anything!"' As for the other man, his son would say to him, 'I do not need my pocket-money today because I still have my five pence from yesterday, and I do not want to take private studies because I prefer to rely on myself.'

Furthermore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* the Ever-Living and All-Sustaining, Who is overcome neither by slumber and nor by sleep, tells us of this. Abu Al-Jalad said that Allah Almighty revealed to one of the Prophets, 'Tell your people, "What is wrong with you, that you hide your sins from My creation but show them to Me? If you deem that I cannot see you, then you are guilty of associating partners to Me. Likewise, if you deem that I can see you, then why do you make Me the most trifling of all who can see you?"

So, the True Lord's Words '...in recompense for what they committed as a deterrent (punishment) from Allah…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38) are completely clear, and He follows them with the words: 'And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.' He *the Almighty* cannot be defeated by anyone, including the thief when he steals, for he is only stealing the provision which has been ordained for him. The scholars agree that stolen items are also deemed to be provision because they are benefitted from, so by Allah, had the thief simply been patient this provision would have come to him. Beware of trying to play games with Allah's Decree, for He is Wise in all that He ordains.

The word 'wise' has meaning for me in my own life. When I was still in my formal education, I loved literature and poetry. Once when I was reading the poet Al-Ma'arri, I found some verses which seemed almost atheistic, so I lost interest in him. In particular there were the lines:

The days destroy us, as though we are glass;
Yet once we are broken we cannot be remoulded.

I understood from this that he was denying the Resurrection, so I said, 'Allah suffices us of need for him!' However, my friend Sheikh Fahmi 'Abd Al-Latif *Allah rest his soul* saw Al-Ma'arri in a dream, and he loved his poetry. The next morning he came to see me in Zaqaziq and he said to me, 'O, Sheikh, I saw Al-Ma'arri in a dream last night, and he was angry with you because you rejected him.' I said, 'I rejected him for (such-and-such), and you know why.' So, Sheikh Fahmi' Abd Al-Latif said, 'In any case that is what happened.' I said to myself, 'Perhaps, I should re-evaluate Al-Ma'arri', so I got copies of his books *Saqt Az-zand* and *Luzum ma la yalzim*, and I found that the man had excuses for the things he might be blamed for. The problem with the people who record the sayings of great thinkers is that they pick these sayings out of their historical context. Al-Ma'arri composed the verses which I disliked when he was still an immature young man, and when he had matured, he retracted it. Many great thinkers go through this kind of thing, such as Taha Hussayn and Al-'Aqqad, both of whom made statements during their youth which could be taken as being atheistic, but after they matured, they wrote poetry which bore the scent of true faith. Therefore, one should not judge them by their earlier writings, which they made when they still harboured doubts, for they later came to full certitude. So, I looked into the work of Al-Ma'arri, who said:

The days destroy us, as though we are glass;
Yet once we are broken we cannot be remoulded.

And I found that he was the same man who said, once his unstable ideas were behind him:

The doctor and the astrologer both claim
There is no resurrection; but I say:
If you are right, then I lose nothing,
But if I am right, then you are the losers!

It is as though he had returned to faith. And Al-Ma'arri also said:

If a hand is cut unlawfully, its penalty is five hundred,
But if it steals a quarter-*dinar* it is amputated:

And he followed these lines by saying:

This is a contradiction, for which we can only be silent,
And seek refuge in our Lord from the fire of hell.

I said to Sheikh Fahmi ‘Abd Al-Latif, ‘I think Al-Mu’arri had the right to object, so I shall try to revise his poetry and amend the lines which I find problematic.’ When I came to this line, I said that it would have been better – with his permission – to say:

There is wisdom in this that we must accept,
And seek refuge in our Lord from the fire of hell.

Everything has its wisdom. When we see a doctor restraining a child whose heart cannot bear the anaesthetic during an operation, does anyone think that this doctor is exacting revenge on the child? Of course, he is not. No one thinks that. So, everything has its wisdom, and when we look at things, we must link them to their wisdom. Allah is Almighty, meaning He cannot be defeated or fooled by anyone, and He is Wise in the punishments He allots to crimes since He is allowing society to restore its balance thereby.

Furthermore, after this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* opens the door of repentance out of mercy for both of them, the sinner, and society, by saying:

فَمَن تَابَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ظُلۡمِهِۦ وَأَصۡلَحَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَتُوبُ
عَلَيۡهِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٌ ٣٩

But if anyone repents after his wrongdoing and
makes amends, God will accept his repentance:
God is most forgiving, most merciful [39]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 39)

A thief is a wrongdoer since he takes what rightfully belongs to others. However, if he repents, meaning that he regrets what he has done and intends never to do it again and his repentance is not merely verbal, but he actually makes amends for what he did, then his repentance will be accepted. So, how does he do this? If he still has what he stole, then he must return it to its rightful owner. If he has spent it, then he must go to its owner, seeking to make amends by saying, ‘I was heedless and tempted by Satan, and I did such-and-such.’ I believe that if someone steals from someone else, and then after some time has passed, he confesses what he has done to him and seeks his pardon, I swear by Allah that he will pardon him gladly. Therefore, the thing he stole will be excused. What about the case when the thief does not know who the owner of what he has stolen is, such as those who steal from people on buses, for example? If he steals a wallet from someone and finds his address within, he can return the stolen money by sending an anonymous postal order for the amount he stole and ask the owner to forgive him. Yet, if he does not know from whom he stole, he must say, 'Allah knows best to whom it belongs; I will give it in charity for Allah's Cause and say, "Lord, give the reward of this deed to the rightful owner."'

Thus, there are many ways to make amends. In the case that he is too ashamed to return the stolen property, he should say, 'To be exposed in this world is better than to be exposed in the Hereafter.' There are many verses in the Quran concerning repentance, such as Allah's saying that He turned to them so they could repent: '…then He turned to them with mercy that they might turn to Him. Surely it is Allah Who is Oft-Returning with compassion and is Merciful.' (*at-Tawba:* 118) It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is first ordains repentance, and then the servant repents. He *Glorified is He* also says: 'But indeed, I am the Perpetual Forgiver of whoever repents…' (*Ta Ha:* 82).

As we know, repentance has three stages. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* established repentance, He first gave leave for it, thus, the servant repents, and then secondly, He accepts his repentance and erases his sin, and finally, He forgives when He accepts repentance. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* then says in this verse: '…indeed, Allah will turn to him in forgiveness. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 39)

Forgiveness and mercy in their absolute forms are possessed solely by Allah, and they are manifested by the criminal's repentance and the victim's mercy. The Words '...Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful' (*al-Ma'ida:* 39) explain to us that He *the Exalted* possesses the Absolute Power to forgive and show mercy. So, one should not say, 'So-and-so does not deserve forgiveness and mercy' since Allah *Glorified is He* possesses dominion over the heavens and the earth. Also, He gives human beings what they deserve because of the justice He has ordained for Himself, and He has absolute Power over everything in existence.

Therefore He *Glorified is He* then says:

أَلَمۡ تَعۡلَمۡ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُۥ مُلۡكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ يُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُ
وَيَغۡفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Do you [Prophet] not know that control of the heavens and earth belongs solely to God? He punishes whoever He will and forgives whoever He will: God has power over everything [40] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 40)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses rhetorical styles to bring us out of our heedlessness. He did not say, 'Allah has dominion over the heavens and the earth;' had He said that, it would have been a statement on the part of the speaker here, who is Allah. However, He wanted the statement to come from of the one being addressed, as an acknowledgement from the servant himself. People do not form statements as questions unless they are completely sure that the answer will be to their advantage. For example, if someone were to come to you and says, 'You have ignored me,' you might reply, 'I have been kind to you.' However, if you intended to draw the statement from him, you would say, 'Have I not been kind to you?' You pose it to him as a question, and questions demand answers. It is as though when the one you ask thinks about this question, he will have no option but to say, 'Yes, you have been kind to me.' If you had simply said it yourself, it would be a claim, but when the latter is the one who says it, it is an acknowledgement.

Another example of this is found when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that not expand for you, (O Muhammad), your breast: 'In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful, have we not opened for you your breast.' (*ash-Sharh:* 1)

This is a statement on the part of the speaker and an acknowledgement on the part of the one being addressed. Someone might ask why Allah *the Almighty* did not say, 'Have We opened up your heart?' The True Lord *Glorified is He* could have said this, but He did not so that the question would not contain any hint of a positive response, rather it comes in a negative wording. Also, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth?

He punishes whom He wills and forgives whom He wills, and Allah has power over all things.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 40) We find that the wording of this verse is not a claim made by the True Lord *Glorified is He* but a question posed to mankind for which they may think of an answer; they will not find any answer except to affirm that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: 'To Allah belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth and whatever is in them, and He has power over all things.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 120). This is a rhetorical style meant to provoke affirmation and acknowledgment from the servant, not a statement from the True Lord *Glorified is He*. 'Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 40) Someone might say, 'There are certain areas of the earth which are owned by human beings.' Our reply is that indeed, this is true that there are certain areas of the earth which are owned by human beings, but there is a difference between Allah's Dominion and man's dominion; man's dominion is over something which he cannot preserve, such as the ownership of his house or an allotment of land. In Arabic language, the word *milk* means the limited ownership of man, and *mulk* means the absolute Dominion of Allah Who is the Sovereign, *Al-Malik*. In this worldly life, everyone has some kind of ownership, but the earthly owner has dominion over all the possessions of his ownership. This is true in this worldly life where Allah has created means and causes, but in the Hereafter, all those means and causes will be annulled since power will be held only by Allah.' To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all)' (*Ghafir:* 16).

Therefore, no one will possess anything on the Day of Resurrection. 'Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth? He punishes whom He wills and forgives whom He wills…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 40). The one who reads carefully the Quran will find that it contains expressions that are the combination of two expressions: one of which comes first and the other comes later. In some cases, the two expressions are mentioned adversely. However, this is the sole case in the Quran wherein these two expressions come in this order, whereas in other cases of the Quran, forgiveness comes before torment, for as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith: 'My Mercy supercedes My Wrath.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad*

So, why did He mention torment before mercy in this verse? '...He punishes whom He wills and forgives whom He wills…" (*al-Ma'ida:* 40). Is it merely a matter of artistic style? The answer is no since the majority of verses mention forgiveness first and then give the warning of tormentfor those whom He *Glorified is He* wills. Let us consider the context of this verse. First of all, He spoke of those who steal, be they male or female, and then He spoke of those who repent. Therefore, stealing deserves torment, whereas repentance deserves forgiveness; thus, the order here is logical.

We may also notice that these words follow a verse concerning stealing, and then a declaration of which Allah has dominion over the heavens and the earth. Therefore, the verse needed to be concluded with something that served both of these expressions, in order to affirm the supremacy of the Divine Power. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to have mercy on someone, this person who is subject to this mercy cannot say, 'I do not want mercy.' Likewise, when He punishes someone, this person who is subject to this punishment cannot say, 'There is no need for torment.' The supremacy of the Divine Power means that no one has the power to avoid the due punishment or mercy. This verse, then, serves several purposes that if we were to weigh it in the scale of events, then all Power belongs to the True Lord *Glorified is He*. However, what if we were to weigh it in the scale of time?

We know that the punishment for stealing has two parts: application of *Al-Had* (the legally prescribed punishment), and then the forgiveness in the Hereafter. So, the statement is logical and appropriate to its context. I always say that you should not be deceived by the claim that disbelievers and sinners do what they do without suffering punishment, for those who become accustomed to violating Allah's Way by disbelieving or sinning will assuredly be punished. They rebel against His Way, but in no way they can rebel against Allah Himself.

A man might rebel against the Way of Allah not by negligence of belief or prayer, for no one has the power to rebel against Allah Himself. Furthermore, no one can stand in defiance of death, for it is one aspect of Allah's Power. Allah *Glorified is He* ordains whatever He wills, and He willed that man be free in some things, while being compelled in others. So, those who have chosen to live in rebellion against Allah's Way of Guidance, they may also feel challenged to rebel against the owner of this way: Allah Himself. Yet, they have no power to do so, whether regarding their shape, colour, health or the time of their death. Therefore, everyone who used to rebel should listen carefully to these words and know fully that he can never rebel against the Owner of the Way: Allah Himself. Therefore, He *the Exalted* spoke the truth when He says: 'Allah has power over all things.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 40)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* and then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلرَّسُولُ لَا يَحۡزُنكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُسَٰرِعُونَ فِي ٱلۡكُفۡرِ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِأَفۡوَٰهِهِمۡ
وَلَمۡ تُؤۡمِن قُلُوبُهُمۡۛ وَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْۛ سَمَّٰعُونَ لِلۡكَذِبِ سَمَّٰعُونَ لِقَوۡمٍ
ءَاخَرِينَ لَمۡ يَأۡتُوكَۖ يُحَرِّفُونَ ٱلۡكَلِمَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَوَاضِعِهِۦۖ يَقُولُونَ إِنۡ أُوتِيتُمۡ هَٰذَا فَخُذُوهُ وَإِن
لَّمۡ تُؤۡتَوۡهُ فَٱحۡذَرُواْۚ وَمَن يُرِدِ ٱللَّهُ فِتۡنَتَهُۥ فَلَن تَمۡلِكَ لَهُۥ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيۡـًٔاۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمۡ
يُرِدِ ٱللَّهُ أَن يُطَهِّرَ قُلُوبَهُمۡۚ لَهُمۡ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا خِزۡيٞۖ وَلَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ٤١

Messenger, do not be grieved by those who race to surpass one another in disbelief – those who say with their mouths, 'We believe,' but have no faith in their hearts, and the Jews who listen eagerly to lies and to those who have not even met you, who distort the meanings of [revealed] words and say [to each other], 'If you are given this ruling, accept it, but if you are not, then beware!' — if God intends some people to be so misguided, you will be powerless against God on their behalf. These are the ones whose hearts God does not intend to cleanse – a disgrace for them in this world, and then a heavy punishment in the Hereafter [41] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 41)

When we call someone, we use the word 'O!' starting with it before calling the name of the one we want in order to attract his attention so that he will come to us. Do we merely call him to only come to us, or do we have another reason for calling him? For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you.' (*al-An'am:* 151) Therefore, the purpose of this call was to convey the religious responsibility to them. So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls the noblest of all those He calls, His messengers, we find that He called all of them by their given names, as in ‘O, Adam!’ A given name is one which only describes a person’s identity, not his attributes.

Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* by that ‘O, Abraham, You have fulfilled the vision.’ (*as-Saffat:* 104-105) The True Lord *Glorified is He* addressed Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: ‘O, Nuh (Noah)! Disembark in peace.’ (*Hud:* 48) Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* called Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saying: ‘…O, Musa (Moses)! Verily, I am Allah.’ (*al-Qasas:* 30) As for Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* the True Lord *Glorified is He* to 'Isa (Jesus), called him saying: ‘…“O, 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), did you say to the people...’? (*al-Ma’ida:* 116).

Allah *the Almighty* calls all the messengers by their given names which gave only their identity. However, as for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Seal of the Messengers, Allah never calls him by his first name, rather, He calls him by his attributes, which gives extra meaning to his name. He says, ‘O, Messenger’ or ‘O, Prophet!’

Of course, they are all messengers of Allah *Glorified is He* but He wants to inform and confirm with us that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Messenger who came to replace all other messengers and who believed in all of them. Therefore, he deserved to be called by an attribute which gave extra meaning to his personal name: ‘O, Messenger!’ Furthermore, he would be the Messenger whose message would last until the coming of the Day of Judgment, and this is why we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* would always address His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, ‘O, Messenger!’ or ‘O, Prophet!’; this was a form of honouring.

Also, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in this verse: ‘O, Messenger, let them not grieve you who hasten into disbelief…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 41). What this really means is this: ‘O, Messenger of Allah, do not be grieved by those who hasten into disbelief.’ When the True Lord *the Exalted* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not to grieve, we should be note the cause of this grief. He *Glorified is He* clarified to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘Do not be grieved, for I am with you, and your enemies shall not harm you. Also, I would not choose you to be My Messenger and then leave you. They shall never harm you in any way.’

Or, the grief of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* might have been of a different kind; it might have been a compassionate grief of which the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes: 'So it may be you will grieve yourself to death sorrowing after them if they believe not in this Discourse.' (*al-Kahf:* 6)

Had the True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed that they all be believers, He would not have given them the ability to disbelieve.' If we willed, we could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain humbled.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4) However, does Allah *Glorified is He* really want necks? No, He truly wants hearts, for He has the power to do whatever He wills which is proved by having the sky, the earth, the mountains and all other created beings being subservient to Him, their Creator. Nothing in the creation can rebel against its Creator, and His Omnipotent Power means that He has authority, control, and domination over all His creation. However, Allah wants His servants to come by their free will to Him, their Master, with faith, for the first kind of faith is developed and built by compulsion and power, whereas the second kind of faith is developed and built by love.

Previously, we gave a clear and clarifying example of two hypothetical servants, one of which must be kept chained because if he were unchained, he would flee; when one wants him, he must pull his chain, and when he comes, he only does so because of the power one has over him that compels him to do so. As for the other servant, if one were to leave him free, he would come as soon as being called. Which one of them would one love more? One would undoubtedly love the one who comes out of conviction, not compulsion. Every being in the universe is subdued by Divine Power, but the True Lord *the Almighty* chooses to make man free. Therefore, He says: 'Verily, We have offered the trust of the Divine Law to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it. But man bore it. Indeed, he is capable of being unjust to and neglectful of himself.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

Therefore, every other being refused to bear the trust, out of their fear and worry that they would not be able to carry out the responsibility for it. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* 'not be grieved'; but if he is grieved due to his fear of being harmed adhering to Allah's Way, in which case the True Lord *Glorified is He* would support him so they would not be able to harm him. Also, if he is grieved due to his fear concerning them, in which case he needed not be so since Allah *the Exalted* created man with free will, not forcing him to obey the teachings of His Way; He *the Almighty* wants to see who will come to Him out of love and goodness.

Also, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O, Messenger, let them not grieve you who hasten into disbelief…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). This is a divinely worded expression because it uses the words 'into', even though we generally know that in Arabic we say *ila* (to), not *fi* (into). For example, the True Lord says: 'And hasten to forgiveness…' (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

However, in this verse, we find that He says: '…who hasten into (*fi*) disbelief…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). Had He said, 'who hasten to disbelief', this would mean that first they had faith, but then they turned to disbelief. This is not the case, for the True Lord *the Almighty* wants to clarify for us that they are hastening within the confines of disbelief, and that they started out in a state of disbelief and now they are hastening with one another in indulging further into it. We know that volumes could be written about the use of the Arabic preposition *fi* (generally it means 'in') in the Quran. We saw before that Allah *Glorified is He* says:' (O Muhammad) travel through the land' (*Al-'Imran:* 137) and not 'travel, then, on the earth'. Also, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And give not to those weak of understanding your property which Allah has made for you a means of support…' (*an-Nisa':* 5). Then Allah says to provide for them: 'but feed them therewith and clothe them and speak to them words of kind advice.' (*an-Nisa':* 5)

The properties mentioned in this verse are not the possessions of those who are being addressed, but they actually belong to those who have weak judgment. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling us that those who have weak judgment cannot be trusted to look after their own property, and therefore, He commands the guardians and trustees of this property to consider it as though it is their own property so that they will guard it well. Likewise, He commands them not to hoard the money, but to allow its weak-minded owners to live off it; at the same time, the guardian should be careful that the property not run out as the weak-minded people consume it and pay the poor-due on it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And give not to those weak of understanding your property which Allah has made for you a means of support (*an-Nisa': 5*).

He did not say *minha*, which literally meanst 'herefrom' since He *the Almighty* wants to tell us that the provision is contained within the capital, which must be circulated or invested so that it does not decrease as it is spent on provisions and the poor-due, and furthermore, when the weak-minded person reaches maturity, he should find that his wealth has increased. These are just some of the meanings we can derive from the word *fi*.

Likewise, there is also the verse which speaks of crucifixion: '…and I will crucify you on the trunks of palm trees…' (*Ta Ha:* 71). Some of scholars interpret this verse as 'I shall most certainly crucify on ('*ala*) trunks of palm trees', but we say that those who say this have not really explained this verse. What they should have said is this, 'I shall most certainly crucify you on trunks of palm-trees so firmly that your bodies will enter the wood itself.' For example, if you take a matchstick and tie it firmly to your finger with a fine thread; if it is tied very tightly, then the matchstick will be pressed so it will seem to be inside it. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…I shall most certainly crucify you in great numbers on (*fi*) trunks of palm trees…' (*Ta Ha:* 71), we should only understand this to mean that the crucifixion would be so severe that the crucified body would seem to actually enter the wood. This is why the word *fi* (in) is used, and not '*ala* (on).

The True Lord *the Exalted* says in this verse: '…O, Messenger, let them not grieve you who hasten into disbelief…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). Those who hasten with one another either do so 'to' something or 'in' something. If they hasten 'to', this mean they move towards something which they were not in before they began to hasten, whereas if they hasten 'in', this means they go even deeper into something which they were already in before they began to hasten.

'…O, Messenger, let them not grieve you who hasten into disbelief of those who say, "We believe" with their mouths, but their hearts believe not…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). The seat of belief, or *iman*, is the heart, and the seat of self-surrender, or *Islam*, is the body. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Arabs of the desert say, "We believe." Say, "You have not truly believed yet, "but rather say, "We have submitted" (*al-Hujurat:* 14).

They rush to join the first row of the communal prayer, and this is *Islam* (self-surrender), whereas *Iman* (faith) resides in the heart. So, those who say with their mouths, ‘We believe’ should know that faith does not dwell in the mouth but in the heart; they speak with their mouths about what is not in their hearts. Furthermore, as long as they claim to have faith with their mouths, but it is not in their hearts, they are hypocrites. This means that every day they would demonstrate things which would bring them deeper into disbelief, for, from the onset, they conceal their disbelief, and then they hasten with one another to indulge deeper into it.

‘…Those who vie with one another in denying the truth, such as those who say with their mouths, “We believe,” while their hearts do not believe; and such of the Jewish faith…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 41). Therefore, there are two kinds of people who vie with one another in disbelief: the hypocrites who say, ‘We believe’ with their mouths, and the Jews, whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes by saying that they are those who say, ‘"We believe" with their mouths, but their hearts believe not and from among the Jews.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 41) Then, they are two classes who hasten into disbelief; the hypocrites who say we are believers by their mouths and the Jews. The True Lord says that they are avid listeners to falsehood’. (*al-Ma’ida:* 41) The Arabic root *s-m-’* means that the ear hears a sound made by someone; and if a person is speaking words of truth, then the faithful ear will listen attentively, and this listening will be followed by acceptance. When a believer says: ‘I listened *istama’a* to so-and-so’, he does not only mean that he heard *sami’a* him, but that he intentionally listened to him and accepted what he said.

We know that many pious people hear lies, but the important point is whether these lies are accepted or rejected. What matters is not that a person hears, but if he believes what he hears. In our daily lives, we might see a person who wants to fix an item of his furniture, so he gets the necessary tools to do it. Such person is said to have ‘engaged in carpentry’, or *najir*, but we do not call him a ‘carpenter’ or *najjar* since a carpenter means someone whose profession is carpentry.

Thus, if one says that someone ‘hears’ (*sami’*) falsehood, it does not matter. However, if one says that he ‘eagerly listens’ (*samma’*), this gives the full meaning, which is that he intentionally and wilfully listens. Also, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that they '... (They are) avid listeners to falsehood, listening to another people who have not come to you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41), this means that they became accustomed to accepting falsehood. Also, how will the mood of someone who accepts falsehood be? It will surely be sick and abnormal.

What is meant by 'falsehood' in this verse, and who are those who 'eagerly listen' to it? It may mean rabbis and monks who told their followers things with no basis in reality in order to support their positions; otherwise, they eagerly listened to falsehood which does not benefit them; rather, it benefitted others such as the case of someone engaged in spying. Spying, as we know, is done with the eye or the ear; and in our times, these means have been advanced to the point that spying is conducted by means of sounds and images. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to tell us that they eagerly listened to falsehood for the benefit of other people; and those for whom they listened were those who were too arrogant and haughty to attend the gatherings of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, they could not bear to wait and wanted to know what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying. Thus, they would send spies to the Prophet's *peace and blessings be upon him* gatherings to convey unto them what he said.

Therefore, those who eagerly listened to falsehood would also listen on behalf of those who were too arrogant to come to Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* gatherings. Likewise, these arrogant people were the leaders of the Jews, who would not go to Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* gatherings lest they lose their status with their followers. Also, when their spies passed on what was said at these gatherings to them, they would try to depict it in a way which served their own ends, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* said of them that they '...They distort words beyond their (proper) usages…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). What this means is that after the words had been set in their proper places, they would remove them from there, neglecting and erasing them after Allah had put them there by changing His Laws. Furthermore, the True Lord *the Exalted* also said about them earlier: '…They distort words from their (proper) usages…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). What this means is that they would distort the words before they had even settled in their proper places. Allah says: '…(They are) avid listeners to falsehood, listening to another people who have not come to you. They distort words beyond their (proper) usages, saying "If you are given this, take it…"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). They are those who say to their followers, who spied for them by listening to Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* gatherings: '…saying, "If you are given this, take it; but if you are not given it, then beware."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41) It is as they came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* after having been given those instructions so that if they could take any of his words and were able distort them, they would do so, and if they could not find anything to distort, they had to be on their guard.

By studying the history of manmade laws, we discover the meaning of temporal power. The laws, which people concocted to govern the order of life only appeared after the priestly system, wherein priests would claim they had a direct connection with Heaven and so they ruled. That is to say, the basis of law-making is the mandate of Heaven, and what made people resort to making their own laws is that their experience of the priests' rule was the following: they would make a ruling on a given issue and then give a different ruling on a similar issue. The priests' words were accepted when they claimed to have a direct link to Heaven, but when they have contradictory rulings, people stopped following them and rejected their rulings. Thus, they resorted to making their own laws for themselves.

Historical narrative(1) makes this clear to us. During ancient times, it was narrated that one of a kings' followers committed adultery, and they wanted to punish him as the Torah prescribes, but the king said to the priests, 'I do not want this man to be stoned, so seek out another ruling.' The priests obeyed the king and said, 'Let us blacken the adulterer's face with charcoal, and make him ride on a donkey facing backwards for all to see, instead of stoning him.' Thus, the temporal power gave the political power the command to change the law.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, they tried to take advantage of his presence by making laws which were flexible and lenient. Also, with this aim in mind, they presented certain issues to him. If his ruling was lenient, they accepted it, but if it was hard, they refused it. Likewise, the matter of adultery came up, and they tried to get a more lenient ruling from our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but he gave them the ruling which was mandated from Heaven: stoning. However, they refused stoning by saying that it was enough to give the guilty party forty lashes, blacken his face, and make him ride around on a donkey facing backwards. After this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked, 'Do you not have among you a righteous man who has knowledge of the scripture?' They were silent, so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Do you not know a white-faced, one-eyed, beardless young man who lives in Fadak, named Ibn Suriyya? 'Yes, 'they said, 'he is the most learned Jew on the face of the earth.' So the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* called for him to be summoned to declare the punishment for adultery prescribed by the Torah. The man came forth, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* encouraged him by saying, 'He besides whom there is no God, and by the truth of Him who sent forth Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and revealed to him the Torah, and by the truth of Him who cleaved the sea, drowned Pharaoh and shaded them with clouds (i.e. Allah).' He *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to disturb any falsehood that dwelt within the man, and incite him to obey Allah and speak the truth. Thus, Ibn Suriyya said, 'Indeed, we find that the adulterer must be stoned.' Upon hearing this, the Jews began to revile this righteous man.

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(1) The story of the Jew who committed adultery

They wanted to get a lenient ruling from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to save the adulterer of high social standing and the adulteress of noble lineage. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that they would say, 'If you are given this, take it…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41) which means that the lenience you seek, 'accept it'; but if you find the punishment to be severe, then beware of it and do not accept it. So, they did not go to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in search of the truth, rather, they went to him in search of lenience. Also, if the ruling matched their desire, they would say, 'Muhammad is the one who gave the ruling!' It is strange that they were enemies to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and did not believe in him, yet despite that they sought his judgment.

Imam Muslim *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked to judge a Jewish man and woman who had committed adultery, so he went to a Jew and said, ‘What does the Torah say about those who commit adultery?’ They said, ‘We must blacken their faces with charcoal, set them back-to-back on a mount and lead them around on it.’ He said, ‘…O Muhammad, “So bring the Torah and recite it, if you should be truthful. "’ (*Al-’Imran:* 39) Therefore, they brought it forth and recited it. However, when they came to the verse about stoning, the boy who was reading covered the verse with his hand and read what came before and after it. So, ‘Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* who was with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at that time, said, ‘Tell him to move his hand’, so he moved his hand and the verse of stoning was there beneath it. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded that the two guilty parties be stoned, and it was done.’ Abdullah ibn ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘I was among those who stoned them, and I saw him protecting her from the stones with his own body.’(1)

They wanted a lax and lenient ruling. Some say that the circumstance behind the revelation of this verse was the story(2) of the retaliation meaning the lawful retribution. However, the story is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud and others on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* is that two groups of Jews, Banu An-Nadir and Banu Qurayzha, had waged war against one another during the pre-Islamic days of ignorance. Banu An-Nadir had been victorious. After that, whenever a member of Banu An-Nadir, the stronger tribe, murdered a member of Banu Qurayzha, the weaker tribe, they would not allow them to exact retaliation by giving up the killer to be executed; rather, they would only give them blood money as restitution. Yet, if a member of Qurayzha killed a member of Banu An-Nadir, they would accept nothing less than retaliation. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, they asked him to rule on this matter, and he ruled that they would henceforth be treated equally. However, this ruling displeased them, and they did not accept it. Both of these stories affirm the meaning of this verse.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

(2) The story of paying uncommercial ransom money among the Jews in war

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…But he for whom Allah intends *fitnah* – never will you possess (power to do) for him a thing against Allah...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). The word *fitnah* (which can mean 'temptation', 'test', 'trial', etc.) can mean the torment of hell, as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, `It will be the day when they will be tormented with the torment of the Fire.'' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 13)

Ftina can also mean 'trial' and 'test', and *fitnat ad-dhahab* means smelting gold by placing it in a melting point and subjecting it to high temperatures so that it melts into liquid and is purified from the base metals with which it is intermixed. In its own right, a trial is not a bad thing; what is bad about it are the ends to which it may lead, depending on whether one passes the trial or fails it. The tests which a man must go through are all trials, and for the one who succeeds a trial is a good thing, but for the one who fails, a trial is a bad thing. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* wants to try or test someone, it is to see whether they will come to Him in obedience of their own free will or not. As long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given man the power to choose in order to prove his love for Him, this was His Will, and no one can take man's free will from him. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted him to have free will and to be tried and tested, so as to see whether he will succeed or fail, and whether he will be a believer or a disbeliever.

However, he for whom Allah intends *fitnah*: 'never will you possess (power to do) for him a thing against Allah...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). He *the Exalted* made this a law for His creation with the utmost clarity; and one side of man is compelled, while the other side is free. However, he for whom Allah intends *fitnah* 'never will you possess (power to do) for him a thing against Allah...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41). This means that no one could possibly alter the laws of the universe, nor will Allah ever alter these laws for anyone; for the natural laws of the universe must proceed as He intended, even for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We know what happened at Uhud when the archers disobeyed by not heeding the command of their high commander, our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, did Allah change His immutable laws because His beloved was among them? No, they were defeated despite the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* among them. This was due to the fact that Allah wanted the laws of nature to proceed as they were so that things would turn out for the best. Had they been given victory for the Prophet's sake, then what would they have thought of hiscommandments thereafter? One of them might have said, 'We disobeyed him yet, we were victorious.' So the immutable laws of Allah must come to pass.

'…But he for whom Allah intends *fitnah* – never will you possess (power to do) for him a thing against Allah. Those are the ones for whom Allah does not intend to purify their hearts. For them in this world is disgrace, and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41).

Why has Allah not wished to purify their hearts? This was due to the fact that they were hypocrites, and the heart of the hypocrite is diseased. For example, when good events which benefit the believers happen, a hypocrite's hatred and disease increases since his heart is filled with grudge. Allah wishes not to purify one's heart unless he comes to Him first, that is why He says this verse: 'O, you who believe, render not vain your alms by reproach and injury like him who spends his wealth to be seen by men, and he believes not in Allah and the Last Day. His case is like the case of a smooth rock covered with earth, on which heavy rainfalls, leaving it bare and hard. They shall not secure aught of what they earn. And Allah guides not the disbelieving people.' (*al-Baqara:* 264)

And Allah says this verse: 'How shall Allah guide a people who have disbelieved after believing and who had borne witness that the messenger was true and to whom clear proofs had come? And Allah guides not the wrongdoing people.' (*Al-'Imran:* 86) The question to ask is the following, 'Did Allah never guide them first, then they disbelieved; or did their disbelief come first so that He did not guide them?' We know that the reason why they were not guided is that they were evildoers or disbelievers. As stated previously, there are cosmological will and legal will. The cosmological will applies to everything that happens in the universe of Allah, and nothing ever happened in the universe of Allah against His Will. Allah has created free will in man in order to have the choice to believe or disbelieve. Also, as long as the True Lord created man with free will to choose this or that, He wills, cosmologically speaking, all actions of man that happen voluntarily whether he believes or disbelieves. Does He will this legally? No, He does not.

The *Shar'i* Law is a Divine Command which man can either obey or disobey, and we know that certain things are allowed cosmologically, while others are allowed legally. Cosmological things happen, but as for man, Allah has created him with free will. The one who steals does not do so in defiance of Allah, rather he uses his free will and strength which He has given him, which he can use either to do good or to do evil.

When we look at a wristwatch whose maker made it so that one can set it to the time of any place, is this done in defiance of the maker? The answer is no. and the same is true of the television. If we wish to show religious programmes on it, it can do this. Likewise, if we wish to show a dance party on it, it can do this, too. The one who made the television made it able to do this and that; what is important is how the power is directed or used – and man is the same. Allah's cosmological will is all that exists in Allah's Dominion, and His legal will is all that exists in His Law of 'Dos' and 'Do nots'. As long as there are cosmological commandments and legal commandments, Allah created the universe to serve believers, disbelievers and sinners, but His legal commandments are for believers alone. Having said that, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* wanted believers to rely on His Way of Guidance and the *Shari'a* in order to attain faith. As for disbelievers, his disbelief is not against the Will of Allah *the Almighty*; rather, it is due to the free will that man has, yet, it is important to know that the act of disbelief is against the *Shari'a*. Therefore, if Allah's cosmological will is that someone should be subjected to trial and temptation, no one can impede His Will. Likewise, if he does not obey the Sacred Law, it is due to the fact that he was created with the ability to obey and the ability to disobey.

Let me give an example to illustrate this point. A father gives his son a pound and says, 'You are free to spend this as you wish. If you buy a religious book or something for you and your brothers to eat, I will reward you and trust you with many other things, but if you use it to buy playing cards, I will be angry with you.'

If the boy then buys the playing cards, does this mean that he does this against his father's will? No, it does not mean that he does this against his father's will, but the result is that he becomes unloved by his father. This is the difference between something which is willed both naturally and legally: something which is willed naturally but not legally and something which is willed legally but not naturally.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Those are the ones for whom Allah does not intend to purify their hearts' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41), it indicates that He *the Almighty* created them in such a way that makes their hearts eligible to be purified or not, and thus, all their actions will not be beyond Allah's Will. This is why He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying, 'For them in this world is disgrace, and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment'. This indicates clearly that there is something in their hearts which prevents them from being purified, and therefore, they shall experience disgrace in this world. The word *Khizy* or 'disgrace' is used in Arabic to give the meaning of both 'scandal' and 'shame'. In fact, these two meanings are related to each other. Yet, what is meant by 'disgrace' and *fitnah* mentioned in this verse? We should know that this verse refers basically to two groups, namely hypocrites and Jews. As for hypocrites, Allah *the Almighty* used to expose and reveal all of their conspiracies against believers. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that had He so willed, He would have shown them clearly to him so that he would know them for sure as by a visible mark. He *the Almighty* then tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will most certainly recognise them by the tone of their voice: 'And if We pleased, We could show them to you so that you should know them by their marks. And you shall, surely, recognise them by the tone of their speech. And Allah knows your deeds.' (*Muhammad:* 30)

The same ruling applied to Jews who would also be afflicted with disgrace, i.e. scandal and exposure; this means they would be despised after having been held in esteem. We know that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, the Jews were the leaders of that area; they were the most knowledgeable because they were people of the Book, whereas the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Kha*zraj* were unlettered and had no knowledge. Also, the economy of Medina was run by the Jews in terms of wealth, production, and farming, and thus, they were haughty and proud. Yet, upon the arrival of

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina, their conspiracies and lies were exposed, and they were banished, to the extent that their womenfolk were taken prisoner, while some of them were even killed in retribution for their treachery. As a matter of fact, whenever the Jews plotted against him *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers, Allah *the Almighty* would expose their plots. In fact, disgrace is not their only requital, but they would also endure painful suffering in the Hereafter. He *the Almighty* then says:

سَمَّٰعُونَ لِلۡكَذِبِ أَكَّٰلُونَ لِلسُّحۡتِۚ فَإِن جَآءُوكَ فَٱحۡكُم بَيۡنَهُمۡ
أَوۡ أَعۡرِضۡ عَنۡهُمۡۖ وَإِن تُعۡرِضۡ عَنۡهُمۡ فَلَن يَضُرُّوكَ شَيۡـٔٗاۖ وَإِنۡ
حَكَمۡتَ فَٱحۡكُم بَيۡنَهُم بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُقۡسِطِينَ ٤٢

they listen eagerly to lies and consume what is unlawful. If they come to you [Prophet] for judgment, you can either judge between them, or decline – if you decline, they will not harm you in any way, but if you do judge between them, judge justly: God loves the just [42] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 42)

Before explaining this verse, we should shed light on a very important point, that is, how dictionaries give the abstract meaning of a word out of the context. For example, the word *Sajanjal*, when one looks it up at the dictionary, he finds that it means 'diamond', and so are the two words 'As-Safa' and 'Al-Marwah'. If one looks up the word Al-Marwah in the dictionary, he gets the abstract meaning of the word without any kind of attribution. Thus, the first and foremost thing one must understand about Arabic words is to know their abstract meanings, that is, out of their contexts; this is actually the role of dictionaries. For example, if one looks up the word 'weather' in the dictionary, he will find that it means 'the air and other atmospheric conditions which surround a person', but the dictionary does not tell whether the weather is overcast, clear, or cold.

Yet, if one attaches a relative attribution to a given word, then its meanings will be understood within context. For example, when we say, 'The weather is bright.' we thus move from simply understanding the meaning of the word 'weather' to ascribing brightness to it. Meaningful speech is made by the use of ascriptions, which can only be made after the meanings of words are known in the beginning. ‘Ascription’ means that we ascribe something to something else. For example, when we say, ‘Mohamed is hard-working’, we thus have ascribed the quality of hard working to Mohamed, and we could only do this after first knowing about the meanings of the words used in the sentence.

Therefore, it is clear that meaningful speech is made by the use of ascriptions, and the meaning might be more clearly understood by attaching a word to what came before it. For example, when someone asks you, ‘Who is with you?’ you give a short answer by saying, ‘Mohamed.’ The questioner, relying on the context of the speech, will understand that ‘Mohamed’ is the person with you.

Therefore, ascription means to ascribe a particular meaning to something, which may be either positive or negative. In truth, ascriptions are of two kinds: real and unreal. If an ascription is real and has been proven, then it is ‘*Ilm*, or ‘knowledge’. If it is real and one believes in it but cannot prove it, then it is *Taqlid*, or ‘imitation’ such as a child who imitates his father by saying, ‘Allah is One’ when the child is unable, at this point, to give proof that this ascription is true.

Undoubtedly, knowledge is the highest level of ascription because it is believed, real and proven. On the other hand, if an ascription is believed but not actually real, this is *Al-Jahl*, or ‘ignorance’ since the ignorant person is the one who ‘knows’ something in a way which is incorrect; the unlearned man, or *Al-Ummi*, by contrast, is the one who does not know anything at all. We find it difficult to explain things to someone who is ignorant such as the one who holds that the earth is flat and defends this position. He speaks of an ascription in which he believes but which is not real since the earth is actually spherical. Ignorance, then, means to believe in an ascription which is not real. Indeed, it is the ignorant, not the unlearned, who cause trouble in the world because the unlearned man’s mind is empty, and all you have to do is to tell him the truth and he will believe it. As for the ignorant, we first must remove the false notion from his mind and then replace it with the true one.

If an ascription is still unconfirmed and unachievable, there is no difference whatsoever between denial and affirmation; this is *Ash-Shakk*, or ‘doubt’. If an ascription has something that is likely to take place, this is *Azh- Zhann*, or 'supposition'. If an ascription is something that is unlikely to take place, this is *Al-Wahm*, or a 'fancy'. So, ascriptions are of several kinds: knowledge, blind imitation, ignorance, doubt, supposition, and fancy. Based on this, we can say that falsehood is an unreal ascription, and if one believes in it, he is ignorant. The opposite of falsehood is truth. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They listen eagerly to lies…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42), this indicates that the ascription in this verse has no basis in reality.

Adversaries of Islam attempt to take advantage of some of the ascriptions in passages of the Quran to declare that it, i.e. the Quran, has some imprecise passages. These adversaries support their opinion by relying on the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Al-Munafiqun* in which He *Glorified is He* states that when the hypocrites came to Prophet Muhammad, they said: 'We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of Allah', and Allah knows that Prophet Muhammad is truly His Messenger: 'In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. When the hypocrites come to you, they say, "We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah." 'And Allah knows that you are indeed His Messenger' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). At this point, the speech of the hypocrites is in conformity with what Allah *the Almighty* says. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this particular verse of the chapter of *al-Munafiqun* by stating that He bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars: 'but Allah also bears witness that the hypocrites certainly are liars.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1)

It is clear the ascription is the same, but Allah declares the hypocrites to be liars. But if we carefully reflect on the statement of the hypocrites that they bear witness that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah, we will realise that they are bad liars since they did not truly believe in him. As such, the true meaning of 'testimony' is for the sayings to conform to what the heart believes in.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'They listen eagerly to lies and consume what is lawful' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42) means that their job was to listen to lies and to consume all that is evil, as though they despised to eat what is lawful. The word *Akkal* (the one who swallows greedily) is an intensive adjective; these kinds of adjectives are used to imply either the intensity or the repetition of the act. Arabs say, '*Akkal'* and '*Akul*' to refer to someone who *Akala*, or eats, ravenously or eats a lot. Thus, he nature of the intensity applies either to the mode of the action or to its frequency.

As for His saying,' (They) consume what is lawful…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42), the *Sahata* means 'to wipe out' or 'to erase', yet it is more intensive than this and means to utterly annihilate something so that no trace is left behind of both the thing itself and also its container. For example, if you have an oil or food stain on your clothes, you could remove the stain, or you could go so far in removing it as to rip the stained material right off the clothing. Accordingly, the word *As-Suht* means to remove something so completely that even the thing from which it is being removed is damaged somewhat. This means that it is the act of removing the foreign object and also part of the original object with it. Therefore, the scholars recall this concept when they comment on the verse of the Quran in which Allah states that He deprives usurious gains of all blessing: 'Allah will blot out interest and will cause charity to increase. And Allah loves not anyone who is a confirmed disbeliever and an arch-sinner.' (*al-Baqara:* 276)

People mistakenly believe that usury is some kind of achieving gain and interest, but Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear to us that it is not really a gain since it intermixes with capital and then erases and annihilates it completely. On the surface, usury appears to be a gain, but it is actually a cause of loss and destruction of one's capital.

Zakat, on the other hand, seems to be a loss of money, but really it is a cause of growth. Thus, it is clear that there is a big difference between human standards and divine ones. Let us offer the following example to illustrate this point. Human beings are always concerned with making more and more money. This is actually known as *Rizq Al-Ijab*, but they rarely pay attention to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* may protect them from spending much money, which is known *Rizq As-Salb*. In fact, one man may earn five hundred pounds, while another earns only one hundred. However, Allah might place the first in circumstances in which he must spend thousands of pounds, while He *Glorified is He* might protect the second from these circumstances so that he does not even need to spend all of his earnings, but may even save ten pounds of it. So, it is clear that *Rizq Al-Ijab* means that Allah will provide the person with much more money, whereas *Rizq As-Salb* means that Allah protects and saves one from having to spend on misfortunes and calamities, even placing blessing in what He gives.

As for the word *As-Suht*, it means everything which one earns by unlawful means such as bribes, usury, theft, embezzlement, or filching. As such, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'They listen eagerly to lies and consume what is lawful' indicates clearly that their ears are used to hearing falsehood and accepting it. By the same token, when we say in our prayer, 'Allah hears those who praise Him', this means that we call upon Him and He *the Almighty* accepts our praise and supplications. Therefore, when He *the Exalted* says that they, i.e. Jews, eagerly listen to falsehood, this obviously means that they accept it. Listening is undoubtedly an act which is performed by one of the body parts. It is taken for granted that man's body parts are built by food through the process of eating. We know for certain that one eats to grow, and once he is full-grown, he eats to preserve his energy and strength. To grow, then, means for more to enter the body than what leaves it; yet after a certain period of time, the same amount leaves the body in the same way it enters it. When man is old, more leaves the body than what enters it.

Indeed, as long as they eagerly listened to falsehood and greedily swallowed all that is evil and unlawful, they would always be in the same miserable state. Their consumption of evil was a cause of their listening gullibly to falsehood since they built the cells of their body on unlawfully gained sustenance; so how should their ears then reject falsehood?! Indeed, their ears are accustomed to falsehood, and their tongues composed it. Their eyes invited unlawful gazes, and their hands invited theft, for they built these limbs of theirs with ill-gotten provisions.

In this regard, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* did not say that they just 'listen to' falsehood; rather, they 'eagerly listened' to it. This means that these people, or spies, made it their business to eagerly listen to falsehood. Otherwise, if this were not the case, then anyone who ever hears a lie would be included amongst these people. As such, it is clear that these words refer mainly to those who make it their business to eagerly listen to falsehood. It goes without saying that a person does not make this particular act of listening eagerly to falsehood his business unless he is a spy for someone else. It is certainly well known that spies violate the trust of the gatherings they attend. Every gathering has its secrets, and if someone attends a gathering, he does not have the right to convey all that he hears therein to others – unless he makes it his business to do so, to the extent that they intentionally attend these gatherings for this purpose.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They listen eagerly to lies and consume what is lawful.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 42) In fact, this part of the verse imposes a very important question, which is the following: ‘Is the eager listening to falsehood caused mainly by the greedy consumption of what is evil and unlawful, or vice versa?’

When Allah *the Exalted* created Adam from the clay of the earth, He blew His Spirit into him. Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* placed all of his life’s needs into the natural products of the earth’s clay. So, if man takes something lawfully, the cells of his body are restored in accordance with the balance set by Allah *the Almighty*. Yet, if he introduces ill-gotten provisions into them, he causes the makeup of his cells to become imbalanced, causing him who greedily consumes evil to listen eagerly to falsehood. Were it not for this imbalance in his bodily makeup, which he himself caused, he would never have listened to falsehood.

The meaning may also be that the person began to listen eagerly to falsehood after his initial greedy consumption of what is evil and unlawful, or on the other hand, his greedy consumption of what is evil and unlawful began after his initial eagerly listening to falsehood. We may observe that Allah *the Almighty* did not say ‘eating evil’ or ‘hearing falsehood’; rather, He *the Exalted* said: ‘They listen eagerly to lies and consume what is lawful.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 42) That is, they became accustomed to hearing falsehood and consuming what is evil and unlawful. One of them might have taken unlawful things from the onset, and when he became a greedy consumer and an eager listener to falsehood at the same time, the cells of his bodily makeup were thrown out of balance, thus he no longer possessed the light in the depths of his soul to reject falsehood, but instead accepted it. Falsehood then tempts him into consuming what is evil. So, the matter revolves mainly about listening to what is false and consuming what is evil.

The issue of deceit is undoubtedly part of the issue of the struggle between falsehood and truth. As long as deceit contradicts a cosmological fact or a religious truth, it causes imbalance in the universe. This is why Allah *the Almighty* offers us a striking example with something tangible so that we can fully realise the matter. He *Glorified is He* says*:* 'He sends down water from the sky so that the valleys flow according to their measure' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17). This means that every river carries as much water as it can. Allah *the Almighty* then says that the stream carries scum on its surface: 'and the flood bears on its surface swelling foam.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17) Therefore, this means that before the rainwater flows from the mountains to the valleys, it picks up things which the winds leave upon the mountains and the leaves of trees, and then carries them down to the valleys; these things cause scum to form on the water.

The Arabic word *Rabian*, or 'on the surface' means that the scum rises and sits on top of the water. Why does it do this? It does this because it contains bubbles of air, which cause its surface area to be greater than its weight; it is less dense than the water and so floats upon it. However, what really happens after that? Continuing His Speech on this topic in the chapter of *ar-Ra'd*, Allah *the Almighty* says that the stream carries scum on its surface; and likewise, from metal which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, there rises scum: 'And from that which they heat in the fire, seeking to make ornaments or utensils, comes out a foam similar to it.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

Amazingly, Allah *the Almighty* draws this parable with both water and its opposite, fire. Water carries scum and dross on its surface, and the same happens when metals are placed in fire. If one watches a blacksmith blowing his bellows on a piece of metal, he will see the dross and the foreign materials which are mixed with the iron, which are later separated from it during the smelting process so that it becomes pure. Thus, there is scum within iron, which fire removes when it is smelted, and similarly, there is scum which floats on the surface of water. This is why we see that falsehood sometimes prevails over the truth in the same way dross rises and sits atop the pure iron. However, the question to be asked here is, 'Will falsehood remain permanently like this?' The answer is definitely no, for Allah *the Almighty* says next that as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as does all dross, but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth: ‘Thus does Allah illustrate truth and falsehood. Now, as to the foam it goes away as rubbish and perishes but as to that which benefits men, it stays in the earth.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 17)

In fact, when we see scum rising to the surface, we are surprised after a while to see that it disappears, and the water becomes pure. Likewise, the scum which rises atop the iron is expelled so that it remains pure. So, if we ever see falsehood prevailing over the truth, we should know for certain that this ascendancy cannot last since Allah *the Almighty* destines that only that which is beneficial to man will remain on earth. This raises another question: ‘Why does truth give the opportunity to falsehood to prevail from the onset?’ Allah *the Almighty* willed that it be this way so that falsehood would cause the forces of truth to arise, for if falsehood did not disturb people and vex them, would they turn to seeking out the truth? No, they would not, and therefore, falsehood must inevitably come and vex them, so that they seek out the truth. Thus, we see that even falsehood itself is one of the forces of truth. We gave an example to illustrate this point before in which we said that the pain of the sick person is one of the matters leading basically to healing, for if there were no pain, the disease would spread without the ill person feeling it. It is as though the pain alerts him to the presence of the disease and encourages him to seek medical treatment. In this way, he becomes aware of the great importance of health.

Therefore, it is clear right now that falsehood is one of the forces of truth, just as pain is one of the ways leading to healing. As a matter of fact, if the affairs of this life were always the same, man would not know anything about its different facets and aspects. If no pain came to the sick, the disease would destroy him. Thus, just as pain is a way leading to healing, likewise disbelief is a way leading to faith since when we see disbelief and its corrupting influences on society, we ask ourselves, ‘What can save us from this?’ We know for certain that only faith can free us from such corruption.

In this respect, I would like to stress that the very word *Kufr*, or ‘disbelief’, is the first proof of faith. This particular word *Kufr* means ‘to cover’; so as long as ‘to disbelieve’ means ‘to cover’, then a disbeliever covers faith, and thus, the appearance of disbelief on the surface definitively proves the existence of faith before it.

As long as Allah *the Almighty* says that they eagerly listen to any falsehood and greedily swallowing all that is evil, it was inevitable that He *the Almighty* would tell His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* how to deal with these people. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If they come to you (Prophet) for judgment, you can either judge between them or decline.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42) This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has the choice to judge between them or to leave them if they come to him for judgment. In addition, He *the Almighty* told him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he had no obligation towards them, for they are people who eagerly listen to any falsehood and greedily swallow all that is evil and unlawful. It was so bad to the extent that when they came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to seek his judgment about something, they did not do this with the intention of finding out the truth or seeking justice, but they only came to him, expecting to find a way to allow themselves to follow falsehood and consume what is evil. They sought judgment in the matter of adultery, even though the Torah told them that the punishment for adultery is stoning.

They went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because they wanted to conceal the legal punishment mentioned in the Torah about adultery and thus fabricated another one, that is, lashing the adulterer, blackening his face and parading him on a donkey facing backwards all around the town. When the judgment given by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not in accordance with their whims, they went away from him. This incident clearly indicates that they only sought lenience since they used to eagerly listen to any falsehood and greedily swallow all that is evil. In addition, they wanted to ingratiate this nobleman who committed this crime of adultery by lessening his punishment.

However, is there any contradiction whatsoever between this verse under discussion and the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what Allah has bestowed from above…?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48)

Undoubtedly, there is no contradiction whatsoever. Some scholars conclude that the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what Allah has bestowed from above…' indicates an obligation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he must judge amongst them. However, the most authentic opinion is that Allah *the Almighty* allows him to choose whatever he wants to do, meaning to judge amongst them or not. Yet, in the event, he chooses to judge amongst them, he has to do so according to what Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed. If we carefully reflect upon the style of this Quranic verse, we will fully realise that the Quran was revealed down by the All-Wise. The order mentioned in this verse clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* left the matter to Prophet Muhammad to decide whether to judge or not to judge them since they wanted him to judge between them according to their own whims and desires. Thus, He *the Almighty* assured him that He would protect him from their evil if he had left them alone. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wanted to assure His Messenger Muhammad that the Jews would never be able to do him any harm if he had chosen to turn away from them. He *the Almighty* says: '…you can either judge between them or decline.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42) In addition, He *Glorified is He* tells him not to let the threat of potential harm from them force him into judging for them, for he has the choice either to judge or not to judge them.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…but if you do judge between them, judge justly. Allah loves the just.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42) This part of the verse indicates that in the case Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* chooses to judge among them, he must judge justly in accordance with what Allah has revealed, and not by his whims or desires. In addition, it says that Allah *the Almighty* loves those who remove injustice. As long as judging with equity means to remove all injustice, it is as if this law the Jews used to rely upon was unjust. Therefore, the meaning of the word *Aqsata* is to remove an unjust law and restore the balance so that man lives in harmony with all creation. Undoubtedly, the entire universe is run by due measure; the earth revolves around the sun, while the sun does its duty, and planets do not collide with one another. Allah *the Almighty* mentions this undeniable fact in the Quran where He *the Almighty* says: 'It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day. All of them float smoothly in an orbit.' (*Ya Sin:* 40)

So, if you (O mankind!) want your affairs to go well for you, you should then carefully consider the balanced laws, which regulate the universe around you and maintain its fair order. You have to manage your own affairs in a balanced way and with justice so that you can have harmony, exactly just as the universe has. When just balance is referred to it means of which the affairs of the universe are perfectly run. Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'The sun and the moon run their courses according to a fixed reckoning. And the stemless plants and the trees humbly submit to His Will. And the heaven He has raised high and set up the measure that you may not exceed it.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5-8)

Therefore, He *the Almighty* encourages mankind to run their affairs justly as the affairs of the universe are run by due measure. So, if you see that the universe around you is free of disturbance and conflict and that it goes through its motions without any contradiction or collision, then it should be understood that it is governed and run by Allah's Measure. By the same token, He *the Almighty* has made a measure for you as to the affairs and decisions of your free will, which is contained in the laws and rulings He ordained upon you. So, if you really want the affairs of your free will to go well, then you should base them on the measure defined by Him *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَكَيۡفَ يُحَكِّمُونَكَ وَعِندَهُمُ ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةُ فِيهَا حُكۡمُ ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّوۡنَ
مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ذَٰلِكَۚ وَمَآ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ بِٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

But why do they come to you for judgment, when
they have the Torah with God's judgment, and even
then still turn away? These are not believers [43]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 43)

He *the Almighty* clarifies, 'How is it that Jews come to you asking for your judgment when they already have the Torah? Likewise, they do not even believe that you, O, Prophet Muhammad, are a Messenger from Allah. So, how could those who do not believe in you be content to have you pass a judgment for them?' Indeed, their intentions in doing so must be to find something which contradicts what the Torah teaches and instructs them to do, for if this were not the case, they would simply apply the ruling they already have in their Scripture. They only come to you, O, Prophet Muhammad, in the hope that you will give them some kind of dispensation, and they imagine (Allah forbid!) that you will allow them to continue eagerly listening to falsehood and greedily swallowing all that is evil and unlawful.

Indeed, their coming to Prophet Muhammad to pass a judgment for them is something curious, to which attention should be paid, for they already had the Torah containing Allah's Injunctions and Rulings. Were they to seek his judgment about something which is not mentioned in the Torah, this might be acceptable; but they asked him about something for which the Torah gives a judgment, and then Allah informed him of this so that he would reveal it. Having been informed by Allah *the Almighty* of their plot, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'Where is Ibn Suriyya so that he may give you the ruling from the Torah on adultery?' The man attended and acknowledged that the Torah prescribes stoning to death as the legal punishment to adultery. So, they wanted to deceive him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Also, there is a very important point that should be taken into account, which is that the Jews knew for certain that Prophet Muhammad was unlettered and thus unable to read or write – so, who told him that the ruling was in the Torah? The One Who sent him is undoubtedly the One Who told him. As such, if they wanted to find a lenient ruling, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted this to be a means of bringing disgrace to them.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '... and even then still turn away? These are not believers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 43) shows that when the Prophet gave them a judgment which was not to their whims and desires, they turned away from this judgment. Had they truly been looking for a judgment in the first place, they would have accepted the one of stoning which he *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them, but they did not even believe in their own Torah.

He *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَا ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةَ فِيهَا هُدٗى وَنُورٞۚ يَحۡكُمُ بِهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّونَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسۡلَمُواْ
لِلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَٱلرَّبَّٰنِيُّونَ وَٱلۡأَحۡبَارُ بِمَا ٱسۡتُحۡفِظُواْ مِن كِتَٰبِ ٱللَّهِ
وَكَانُواْ عَلَيۡهِ شُهَدَآءَۚ فَلَا تَخۡشَوُاْ ٱلنَّاسَ وَٱخۡشَوۡنِ وَلَا تَشۡتَرُواْ
بِـَٔايَٰتِي ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلٗاۚ وَمَن لَّمۡ يَحۡكُم بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

We revealed the Torah with guidance and light, and the prophets, who had submitted to God, judged according to it for the Jews. So did the rabbis and the scholars in accordance with that part of God’s Scripture which they were entrusted to preserve, and to which they were witnesses. So [rabbis and scholars] do not fear people, fear Me; do not barter away My messages for a small price; those who do not judge according to what God has sent down are rejecting [God’s teachings] [44]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 44)

The word *Al-Huda* (Guidance) means the road or the path which leads to a destination. The safety of paths is naturally subject to changes of day and night and other conditions.(1) The path is dark at night, and the traveller might encounter obstacles, or he might not walk in the middle of the path and thus fall into holes or collide with rocks.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* states essentially in this verse: ‘I have made the path (of guidance) clear for you and lit it up so that you do not collide with anything or encounter any obstacles’, a matter which is embodied by the way of guidance which was brought by all of Allah’s Messengers and Prophets. In the past, the world was divided and communities were dispersed all over, and there were no means of transport or communication between them. Every community lived in isolation with a kind of autonomy, and thus, if social ailments broke out in one place, they would remain contained in that place until someone came to treat them; so were the roles to be performed by Allah’s Messengers and Prophets. One Messenger treated the problem of idol-worship; another dealt with the matter of scales and balances, while a third handled the affairs of the Jewish system of matrimonial life, and so on.

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(1) This is a figurative speech which means that the way of guidance is not all the time an easy one.

These ailments were as countless as the number of communities. So, Allah *the Almighty* willed to unveil the secrets of His Universe to people, so that they would utilise them to narrow distances and make it easier for different nations to come together. When nations began to come together, there were no longer barriers between social ailments: a single ailment could break out in the East and spread to the West. What added to this is that, it seemed that the ailments of the world began to become homogenous.

Due to all of these matters, there was a dire need for one Messenger who could treat all these ailments, so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to unify and protect mankind. So, when Allah *the Almighty* says that He revealed the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light, the same applies to the Gospel, which means that it also contained guidance and light; yet all the guidance and light in any revealed scripture was only meant to treat the specific ailments which existed in such isolated communities for which this Messenger or Prophet was sent. For example, Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* lived at the very same time as Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and so is the case as to Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. All these prophets lived during the same time. So, it is clear that some of Allah's Messengers would sometimes be contemporaries since each of them was meant to treat a specific ailment, and thus, their Messages were limited to certain times and certain places.

As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* sent him to all mankind, irrespective of their different races; and his religion will last until the end of time. Therefore, people became no longer in need of any other Messenger or Prophet.

He *the Almighty* then says: 'Verily, it is We Who bestowed from above the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the Prophets, who had surrendered themselves to Allah, deliver judgment…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44). However, this raises a question: 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* speak here of the self-surrender (*Islam*) of all the Prophets sent before Muhammad?' As a matter of fact, Allah *Glorified is He* does so by way of honouring Islam and showing its prestigious status since it is the essence of every Prophetic Message.

In this respect, we find that some poets eloquently expressed this concept. One of them once said:

I praise not Muhammad with my words,
But my words are praised by Muhammad.

Yet, another one said:

They say that Abu As-Saqr is from Shayban, but I say:
Nay, by my life, Shayban is from him!

So, if the entire tribe is to be ascribed to *Abu Sahyban* and not vice versa.

He then added:

Many a father is exalted by his noble son,
Just as 'Adnan was exalted by Messenger Muhammad.

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* describes Prophets as having surrendered themselves, He *Glorified is He* wanted to honour Islam by stating how they surrendered to Him since they found that this was best for them. In fact, the self-surrender of Prophets was done in its fullest meaning: they were completely and utterly obedient to Allah's Commands and Orders. If ever one of these Prophets thought that he might be afflicted with harm because of his mission, or that someone might persecute him or that someone might enjoy abusing him, he surrendered his affair to Allah *the Almighty*; for all the Messengers of Allah spoke the truth and did not worry what might happen on account of it.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…On its strength did the Prophets, who had surrendered themselves to Allah, deliver judgment to those who followed the Jewish faith…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44). They judged according to the Torah amongst those who followed the Jewish faith, and likewise, *Ar-Rabbaniyyun* (the early men of Allah) and *Al-Ahbar* (the rabbis) judged by it. The word *Ar-Rabbani* is derived from the word *Rabb* (Lord), so it means someone whose actions are all devoted to Allah. As for rabbis, they are the scholars who are well versed in knowledge, irrespective of the fact whether they implement it or not. It is true that every scholar has vast of knowledge, but he may or may not benefit from his knowledge; yet he may, nevertheless, pass on his knowledge to one who does benefit from it. Therefore, one of the scholars said:

Take my knowledge, and heed not my actions:
Pick the fruit, and leave the wood for the fire!

Therefore, one should not say, ‘This scholar tells us to do this and that, but we see him doing the opposite’ because you should take the fruits of knowledge and leave the wood for the fire. Nevertheless, the scholar should be the first and foremost person to hasten to practise what he preaches, so that he does not go to hell and become one of those about whom Allah blames for not doing what they are saying: ‘O, you who believe! Why do you say what you do not? It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not.’ (*as-Saff:* 2-3)

He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘…And so did the (early) men of Allah and the rabbis, inasmuch as some of Allah’s Book had been entrusted to their care…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 44). We have previously explained that the Torah contains light and guidance by which the Prophets, early men of Allah and the rabbis delivered judgments by the means which Allah entrusted to their care and by the Torah, which their Messengers encouraged them to preserve. In this regard, it is important to note that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘that which had been entrusted to their care’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 44) and not that they ‘preserved’ it, thus showing us the difference between the Quran and all the heavenly scriptures revealed before it.

We know perfectly well that every Messenger brought a miracle that proved that he was truly sent by Allah, yet these miracles have nothing, in essence, to do with their Messages. For example, the miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the staff and the cleaving of the sea, while his Message was the Torah; and the miracle of Prophet Isa (Jesus) was to heal the lame and the leprous, while his Message was the Gospel. As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* his miracle and his Message were one and the same, namely the Quran. In the same respect, every Messenger’s mission was linked and restricted to his time and his people, and thus, he required an appropriate miracle and an appropriate Message. However, when Allah *the Exalted* decreed to send a Messenger to all humanity and made him the Seal of the Prophets, his miracle and his Message had to remain one and the same, so that any Muslim could forever say: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and here is his miracle, which is also his Message.'

In fact, the Quran will remain a clear miracle until the end of time since Allah *the Almighty* wanted it to be different from all the other messages and miracles. Previous miracles were like a matchstick which can only be lit once, which means that those who witnessed the occurrence of these miracles would believe in them, yet those who did not witness them will not believe that they had occurred unless someone they trust informs them. Allah *Glorified is He* entrusted the care of the Torah to the men of Allah and the rabbis, which is to say that He told them to take care of it and to preserve it. As a matter of fact, this Divine Command to them was a legal obligation, which could either be obeyed or disobeyed. Even though He *the Almighty* entrusted the care of the Torah and the Gospel to them, they, too, have forgotten much of what they had been told to bear in mind. Therefore, the message was forgotten and no longer inhabited their minds as much due to the fact that when something occupies one's thoughts and settles always in the forefront of his consciousness, it remains unforgettable. Truthfully speaking, forgetfulness occurs when something is far from one's thoughts.

Allah *the Almighty* told them to preserve the message, i.e. the Torah and the Gospel, but all of them, except for the Prophets, did not do so. As a matter of fact, man has free will by means of which he can decide whether or not to obey Divine Commands. This is why we find that the men of Allah and the rabbis forgot, even concealing what they did not forget. The first stage contributing to the lack of preservation was actually that they forgot the Divine Command; the second stage was that they concealed what they did not forget, while the third was that they corrupted what they did not conceal and altered it with their tongues. Furthermore, it would have been bad enough had they stopped with these stages, yet they also brought other things and claimed that they were from Allah when really they were not. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran that severe punishment in the hell-fire is prepared for those who attribute what they write down by their own hands to Allah: 'Woe, therefore, to those who write the Book with their own hands and then say, “This is from Allah." That they may take it for a paltry price Woe, then, to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn.’ (*al-Baqara:* 79)

Thus, they did not preserve the scriptures as they were ordered. This is why Allah *the Almighty* did not leave the Quran to be preserved in the same way which means by virtue of legal obligation, for He *the Almighty* had already tested mankind. In addition, out of the fact that He wanted the Quran to be the everlasting miracle, He *the Almighty* did not assign the task of its preservation to mankind; rather, He took it upon Himself to preserve it. This fact is mentioned clearly in the chapter of *al-Hijr*: ‘Verily, it is We Who has sent down this Exhortation and most surely we are its Guardians.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9)

This particular verse of the chapter of *al-Hijr* is proved absolutely correct, especially if we consider it in the light of the fact that some Muslims who wrong themselves by straying from the guidance of Islam and the Quran preserve the physical Quran itself; they write it in different ways and sizes. For example, there are golden copies of the Quran which women wear on pendants round their necks; there are yet small copies which can fit into the hand; and even disbelievers have invented a way to print the entire Quran on a single page.

In such a way, Allah *the Almighty* protects the Quran even by means of non-Muslims. Every day we see people whose conduct is far from the teachings of the religion, yet they spend money to preserve the Quran, to the extent that we find it protected in countless ways: one man keeps a copy in his car and another in his bedroom. A woman might have her hair uncovered and her chest bare, yet have a golden copy of the Quran hung around her neck. This confirms to us that the preservation of the Quran is not a commandment of moral responsibility; rather, it is protected by the Will of Allah.

If it were a matter of moral responsibility, the Quran might have been forgotten. Since Muslims have deviated from some of its teachings, it seems likely that they would have failed to preserve its letter, too. Actually, the opposite has occurred, which essentially means that despite the fact that Muslims have strayed from the message, the Quran itself has never failed to be preserved. Surprisingly, if many of those who sin against themselves hear that the printed Quran has been insulted in any way, they will turn the world upside down in their outrage. As a matter of fact, such people do so out of the Divine Will, as Allah took the pledge that He would keep the Quran intact till the end of time. By the same token, if the enemies of Islam attempt to corrupt the Quran in any way, we find that all Muslims stand in their way. Some of them who seek to distort the Quran suggest adding the following prayer, i.e. "Allah's peace and blessings be upon him" after the name of Prophet Muhammad in the chapter of *al-Fath* and particularly to the verse in which Allah describes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with him as firm and unyielding towards all the deniers of truth: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. And those who are with him are hard against the disbelievers but tender among themselves.' (*al-Fath:* 29)

It as though they wanted to give extra honour to Prophet Muhammad. Yet, when Muslims discovered this, clamour broke out and all the copies of that version of the Quran were burned. As such, it is clear that Muslims do not allow any kind of alteration to be made, whatever its motive may be.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…Therefore, (O children of Israel), hold not men in awe, but stand in awe of Me…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44). The word *Al-Khashiya* (awe) means the fear that one feels towards someone he thinks could potentially harm him. It is certain that Allah *the Almighty* is the Only One Who is able to cause harm and benefit, and therefore, a man should not fear anyone but Him. This is why it is incorrect to think that rulers or authority figures can cause harm to you in any way. Therefore, we must all stand in awe of Allah *the Almighty* Who advises us to stand in awe for Him, and Him Alone.

Yet, if anyone changes the laws of Allah's Guidance for the sake of a ruler or his cronies or friends, which, in fact, is the very essence of corruption, this, in turn, leads to the existence of all evils and ills. Indeed, one of a ruler's cronies might, without his knowledge, order scholars to change certain elements of the religion's teachings, but none of them will capitulate to his demands except those who are weak. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was fully aware of this fact when he said: 'Corruption may not come from a ruler himself, but it may come from those around him.'

Such a thing, i.e. being submissive to the will of a ruler in corrupting the teachings of the religion, only happens when people stand in awe for other than Allah *the Almighty*. This is why ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* used to gather his relatives and those who were close to him and say to them, ‘I have reached a resolution concerning this ruling, and by Him in whose hand s my soul is, if any of you defy me therein, I shall punish him severely!’ This is the manner of the one who wishes to serve and rule without incurring sins thereby. We see that many forms of corruption arise simply due to the defiance of the following wise principle: ‘hold not men in awe, but stand in awe of Me’.

He *the Almighty* then orders us not to trade His Messages for a trifling gain. This is because the material value of the price taken in exchange for the Messages will never last longer than this worldly life, for, as we have explained before, this world is not measured by its true life span, i.e. until Allah decides to bring an end to mankind. Truthfully speaking, everyone’s life span in this world is measured by how long he lives within it.

Suppose that life lasted for millions of years. How could any individual person benefit from these millions of years with his limited life span? Therefore, the life span of any man lasts only as long as he is alive in it; a matter which is known only to Allah *the Almighty* for, indeed, every term is recorded. This is why we find that one person may live a life of seventy years, while another might die at the age of sixty; a third might yet die at forty; a fourth might die at the age of one hundred; and a fifth might die whilst still a baby. Therefore, the life span of an individual might only be a moment. Furthermore, as long as life and death are not determined by times and causes, then it is part of the unseen which is determined only by the Will of Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah has spread out death over all times, to the effect that we can never claim that it will not afflict a person; the exception is birth which means a person will die only after he has been born, but a human being might die in the womb while still a foetus. In fact, miscarriages may take place after an hour of pregnancy, some after a month, while some after several months, and so on. In doing this, He *the Almighty* has allowed us to learn from the microscopic matter of the foetus in the womb the stages of its development. He *Glorified is He* shows us the form of the foetus after half an hour of development, after one hour, and so on. Life and death can occur at any moment. Yet, when we analyse these forms, we discover and have a better understanding about all the stages of the foetus's development along with all the stages of life, lest anyone were to imagine that his life in this world is guaranteed to be such-and-such exact period of time.

The price that corrupts men take in exchange for altering Allah's Messages and laws will only benefit them in this worldly life, and they should remember that their lives in this world are limited. They should also remember that their individual lives are short compared to the life span of this world. In order for a man to make a sound economic transaction, he must be aware that his life span is limited to an unknown number of years, no matter how long he lives. In addition, if he compares this life to the life of the life to come, he will find that his life is temporal. Therefore, if he can exchange it for an eternal life, or the life of the Hereafter, this would be a supreme triumph. Truly, a man's life may come to an end at any moment, while his life in the Hereafter is everlasting. Also, the pleasures which a person enjoys in this worldly life are only commensurate with his possibilities, while the delights and pleasures of the Hereafter are ascribed to the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty*.

So, which trade is more advantageous: something limited in exchange for something unlimited; something presumed in exchange for something certain; delight commensurate with one's position and power in exchange for delight ascribed to the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty?* Which trade is more advantageous? It is completely clear that the gain of this worldly life is paltry compared to what Allah *the Exalted* has prepared for those who are conscious of Him.

He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…for they who do not judge in accordance with what Allah has bestowed from above are, indeed, deniers of the truth!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44) What does it mean to judge in accordance with what Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed on mankind from above?

We know that Allah *the Almighty* has ordained a judgment for every matter of dispute in existence. Thus, if you, as a human being, wish to pass judgment about something, you must seek out its nature, or crux, by looking back into its history. We will thus find that creed that pertains to the Existence of Allah *the Almighty* represents the apex of these rulings; if one judges that He *the Almighty* does not exist, he is ruled to be a disbeliever. In the same respect, if a man believes in Allah but rejects some of His Laws, he is ruled as committing a form of disbelief. However, if a person believes in the authenticity, or validity, of a ruling but is unable to help himself, is this regarded as disbelief or wrongdoing? It is not disbelief, or *Kufr*, but it is evildoing or *azh-zhulm* (if the ruling concerns two parties). Yet, it is iniquity or *fisq* (if it is between a man and himself because he, in essence, breaks away from the ruling just as a fresh date breaks away, or *Tafsuq*, from its shell.

The unjust man is the one who lives within a sphere of moral responsibilities, and then comes out of this sphere just like a fresh date that comes out of its shell. Once the date comes out of its shell, it is in danger of rotting.

Therefore, when He *the Almighty* says: '…For they who do not judge in accordance with what Allah has bestowed from above are, indeed, deniers of the truth' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44); '…And they who do not judge in accordance with what Allah has revealed – they, they are the evildoers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45); and '...For they who do not judge in the light of what Allah has bestowed from on high – it is they, they who are truly unjust' (*al-Ma'ida:* 47), we should heed Allah's Laws and try to control ourselves, lest we fall into destruction.

Some scholars conclude that the first verse, or (*al-Ma'ida:* 44) refers to Jews since Allah *the Almighty* said before: 'Verily, it is We Who bestowed from above the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44). As for the second verse, or (*al-Ma'ida:* 45), they conclude that it refers to Christians who did not judge and rule according to the Gospel.

In reply to these claims, we say, 'Is it possible that this would apply to the religions which came before Islam, and not to exist in Islam, too?' This is neither rational nor logical, and thus, the meanings of these verses are general. If man judges against the truth that is in accordance to the creed, which represents the apex of rulings, this is viewed as the essence of disbelief or a denial of the truth. Furthermore, if he rejects a judgment, or ruling, of the Supreme Truth, this is form of disbelief. In addition, if he believes in both the ruling and Allah, but his soul overpowers him, this is viewed as injustice. Furthermore, if he judges between two parties and allows his bias to lead him away from Allah's Ruling, this is evildoing.

Thus, the use of the words 'deniers of the truth', 'evildoers' and 'unjust' tells us that the words differ according to the nature of a judgment. No one, therefore, should say that the first verse was revealed in reference to such-and-such sect, the second in reference to such-and-such sect, and the third in reference to such-and-such sect; rather, these are general principles which refer to all aspects of moral responsibility. At the beginning of each pronouncement, He *the Almighty* says: 'for they who…', and as we know, these words are general in their applicability. This is proved by the fact that whoever judges according to other than what Allah has revealed thereby trades Allah's signs and Messages for a trifling price along with rejecting His Judgment. In addition, He *the Almighty* says in the next verse: 'And We ordained for them in that (Torah): A life for a life…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45).

In fact, these are laws concerning crimes and their legal punishments, in which case to judge according to other than that which Allah revealed is evildoing; so the situation differs according to the nature of the judgment.

When we discussed the matter of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and how Allah instructed the angels who are in charge of running the affairs of the creation on earth to prostrate themselves before him (Adam), we said that this prostration was a symbol of how they would serve him *peace be upon him*. As a matter of fact, every manifestation of power in the universe is run by an angel whom we cannot see. These angels are known as the managers of affairs. When He *the Almighty* informed them of the new creation which would come into the universe, i.e. Adam, and informed them that they would serve him, He commanded them to prostrate before him. This is why angels who are not in charge with managing the affairs of earth were not included in this Divine Command. Yet, when the Satan refused to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* asked him: `O Iblis, what hindered you from submitting to what I had created with my two hands? Is it that you are too proud, or are you really above obeying my command?' (*Sad:* 75)

The word *Al-'Alin* or 'those who are above' refers to the angels who glorify Allah *the Almighty* night and day without stopping and have no knowledge of the existence of Adam, and therefore He *the Almighty* asked Satan: 'Are you too proud to prostrate, or do you think yourself one of the most honoured angels who were not commanded to prostrate?' And we said before that Satan himself was not an angel since the Quran clearly says he was from the jinn: 'He was one of the jinn' (*al-Kahf:* 50).

Therefore, there is no reason to dispute as to whether Satan is an angel or not, for he was not an angel and the Quran explicitly states that Satan is a jinni. He was a being of free will, with the ability to choose whether to obey or disobey, for jinns are also beings of free will. If one of them chooses to adhere to Allah's Way of Guidance to such an extent that he becomes equal to the angels, he must live up to this, but Satan did not. Satan should have also obeyed the Divine Command to prostrate, for as long He *the Almighty* issued the order to do so, then as a lower being Satan should have done so since we know ranks must be respected. The ministers obey the orders of a president, and if some of the ministers' aides are also present, they will obey his orders too, since they are included in them a fortiori. Even if Satan were a higher being than the angels were, he would still have had to obey the Command of the Supreme Creator and not to disobey or decline. However, as a lower being than the angels, it was even more imperative that he had to yield to Allah's Command. However, Satan attempted to justify his refusal to prostrate by saying that he is better than Adam *peace be upon him* for Allah created him out of fire, whereas Adam was created out of clay: 'He (Satan) said, "I am better than he. You have created me out of fire while him you have created out of clay. "' (*al-A'raf:* 12) In another verse, he justifies his disobedience by saying he cannot prostrate himself before such creature who has been created out of clay: 'He said, "Shall I submit to one whom You have created of clay?"' (*al-Isra':* 61)

This raises an important question, 'When a created being refuses to obey a ruling, does he refuse the ruling in and of itself without considering the one who issues it, or does he refuse the issuer of the ruling, which in this case is *the Most High*?' Satan rebelled against the One Who issued the ruling, and therefore, He *the Almighty* cast him out of the paradise, and he became accursed. Adam, on the other hand, disobeyed his Lord by approaching the forbidden tree. Out of His Mercy, Allah *Glorified is He* gives His commands precursors which apply to the state of the one He commands. Thus, He *the Almighty* did not say to Adam *peace be upon him*: 'Do not eat from the tree', but rather ordered him not to approach it: 'We said "O, Adam, you and your wife dwell in the garden and eat therefrom plentifully where ever you will, but approach not this tree, least you be of the wrongdoers."' (*al-Baqara:* 35)

This is because He *the Almighty* knew that Adam *peace be upon him* was a man, and thus, he is subject to fluctuations. In addition, He *the Almighty* knew that if he saw the tree and its fruits, he might not be able to restrain himself. Therefore, it was best that he not to approach it at all. Allah *Glorified is He* truly wants to protect man since He does not waive or excuse the legal responsibilities He has ordained unless something happens which is beyond man's free will. Therefore, He wanted to protect Adam *peace be upon him* from even approaching that tree lest he be tempted. He *the Almighty* applied the same methodology as the prohibition of drinking wine; He did not say, 'Do not drink wine', rather, He said that intoxicants, games of chance, idolatrous practices and the divining of the future are loathsome evils of Satan's doing, so shun them: 'O, you who believe! Wine and the game of chance and idols and divining arrows are only the abomination of Satan's handiwork. So shun each one of them that you may prosper.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90)

The reason for this is if a man sits in a place where wine is drunk and sees the drunken people laughing and cajoling, he might be tempted to drink. Therefore, the command to' shun' in this verse is even more explicit than 'Do not drink it.' In this respect, we know that Allah's Orders only apply to practical actions which mean the instances where a person actually moves and acts. As for perceptions, it is permissible for a man to perceive things, and Allah *the Almighty* has left us free to love whom we will and to hate whom we will. However, this love must not lead us to immoral actions such as giving unjust favours. Likewise, although we are not commanded or forbidden to hate, hatred of someone can lead a person to wronging him. What is forbidden is evildoing and injustice, and therefore Allah *Glorified is He* orders us not to let hatred of anyone lead us into the sin of deviating from justice: '…let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just. This is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is Aware of what you do.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 8)

That is, you (O, Muslims), You should not let your hatred of people cause you to be unjust. Therefore, it becomes clear that Allah *the Almighty* does not forbid the feeling of hatred; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* forbids anything that may result in infringing upon the justice of others even with ones for whom one may have hatred. One must firmly believe that if someone wrongs him, he must not respond to such injustice committed against him except in the light of being obedient to Him *the Almighty*.

Adam *peace be upon him* ate from the forbidden tree. By doing so, he had committed both two sins: one of getting close to the tree and the second of eating from it. So, he *peace be upon him* fell into sin, yet He asked Allah for forgiveness. The Quran recorded that Adam and his wife Hawwa (Eve) *peace be upon them* confessed that they have sinned against themselves: `Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves and if Thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, we shall surely be of the losers.' (*al-A'raf:* 23)

Truthfully speaking, this confession of Adam and Hawwa (Eve) indicates plainly that the Judgment of Allah *the Almighty* is absolutely right. In addition, it tells that both of them were responsible for this sin since they were unable to control the evil of their souls. So, they did not reject Allah's Ruling, but confessed that they were unable to adhere to it. This is why Allah *the Almighty* taught them words by means of which they could show repentance to Him and have their sins forgiven. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who taught Adam and Hawwa (Eve) *peace be upon them* how to repent. Thus, we see that Adam is not like Satan, who completely rejected Allah's Ruling. The big difference between Adam *peace be upon him* and Satan is that Adam confessed his inability to control his soul, while the latter rejected the Ruling of Allah.

So, he who does not judge by what Allah has revealed because he rejects His Judgment outright and finds fault with it – Glory be to Him! – is a disbeliever and a denier of the truth. By the same token, if this person was to make a judgment between two parties, and he does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, he is an evildoer. Yet, if one makes a judgment out of his whims, he is judged to be immoral. Each attribute is thus appropriate to its designation. There is no need then to debate and differ over the interpretation of these verses by ascribing one of them to Jews and the other to Christians. In addition, falsehood should not be made attractive to people thus leading them away from adhering to the *Shari'a* of Allah. This is because one must firmly and strictly adhere to what Allah has revealed in Islam. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَكَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فِيهَآ أَنَّ ٱلنَّفْسَ بِٱلنَّفْسِ وَٱلْعَيْنَ بِٱلْعَيْنِ وَٱلْأَنفَ بِٱلْأَنفِ
وَٱلْأُذُنَ بِٱلْأُذُنِ وَٱلسِّنَّ بِٱلسِّنِّ وَٱلْجُرُوحَ قِصَاصٌۚ فَمَن تَصَدَّقَ بِهِۦ
فَهُوَ كَفَّارَةٌ لَّهُۥۚ وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكُم بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

In the Torah We prescribed for them a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, an equal wound for a wound: if anyone forgoes this out of charity, it will serve as atonement for his bad deeds. Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are doing grave wrong [45] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 45)

In the Torah which has been just described by Allah *the Almighty* as being a light and a guidance, He *Glorified is He* ordained for and obligated Jews the law of 'A life for a life…', that is, how to retaliate. Yet, we must understand each item of this list according to its appropriate action, that is, if one unlawfully takes the life of another, he has to be killed. However, when Allah *the Almighty* says 'an eye for an eye', does this mean that an eye is to be killed when retaliation is brought? No, it does not, rather, it means that an eye is to be removed in retribution for an eye, and likewise for His saying, 'a nose for a nose'; it means that a nose is to be cut off in retribution for a nose. The same applies to His saying, 'an ear for an ear' since it means that the penalty for cutting an ear is to have one's own ear cut. So, each item has its appropriate action: a life is taken for a life; an eye is plucked for an eye; a nose is cut for a nose; and an ear is deafened for an ear.

In fact, the expressions of the Arabic language are idiomatic and can accurately and precisely describe an action. A man might be hungry, for example, but hungry for what?! If he is hungry for food, he is called *Jaw'an* (hungry), yet if he has a desire for a particular kind of food such as meat, we do not say that he is' hungry', rather, he is *Qarim*. As for that man who desires milk, Arabs call him '*Ayman*, but if he needs water instead, he is said to be 'thirsty', or '*Atshan*. Regarding that person who is hungry for sex, he is said to be 'lustful', or *Shabiq*.

This shows us that humans do different actions with each having its own name and expression. For example, Arabic language differentiates between the words *Jalasa* and *Qa'ada*, both of which basically mean 'to sit'. Yet, the two words indicate two different literal meanings, as follows: *Jalasa* means literally to 'sit up', i.e. to move from a reclining position to sitting up with a straight back, whereas *Qa'ada* means 'to sit down', i.e. to go from standing to sitting. This is why Allah *the Almighty* mentions these two words consecutively in the same verse in the chapter of *Al-'Imran*: 'Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth' (*Al-'Imran:* 191).

Another example to clearly illustrate this point is for the words 'to look', 'to glance' and 'to glimpse'. As a matter of fact, each of these three words indicates a meaning which differs from the other two, e.g. 'to look' means to behold with both eyes, while 'to glance' means to behold for a short moment. As for the meaning indicated by 'to glimpse', it means to behold very briefly.

Likewise, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* under discussion will indicate that He ordained for them that the penalty for taking life is the killing of the murderer; the penalty for plucking an eye is to have one's eye plucked; the penalty for cutting off a nose is to have one's nose cut off; the penalty for cutting an ear is to have one's ear cut, and the penalty for breaking a tooth is to have one's tooth pulled. Then, He *the Almighty* tells that a similar retribution for wounds must be made. We should take into account that one can be wounded anywhere on one's body, in which case retribution must be equal to the wound. Literally, the word *Qisas* (retribution) is derived from the word *Qassa* which means to tail someone by following their tracks in the sand without straying from their path. Due to the fact that retribution demands equal injury which is a difficult thing to achieve exactly, so how can we carry out retribution in the case of wounds?! In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* allows us to assault whoever assaults us in the same way he has assaulted us: 'So whoso transgresses against you, punish him for his transgression to the extent to which he has transgressed against you' (*al-Baqara:* 194). Yet, the question is still not answered, that is, how can we exactly carry out retribution, especially if we take into account the fact that the punch given by a strong man will not be as powerful as that given by a weak person?

Truthfully speaking, Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who offers us an answer to this question. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that we can forgo retribution out of charity and decline to claim it. We know the story of 'The Merchant of Venice', the Jewish usurer who lent money in exchange for a pound of the debtor's flesh to which the two agreed by contract in the presence of witnesses. The man was unable to repay the loan when the deadline came, but the judge was so intelligent that he said, 'Take the pound of flesh, but if you take an ounce too much or too little, we shall take it from you.' So, the usurer declined to take it.

Even though Allah *the Almighty* legislated for different crimes, He did not bar the way of spiritual ambition; a point which is quite clear in His saying, '…but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45). The word 'charity' means to give others something by way of seeking out the Pleasure of Allah *the Almighty* even though one is not obligated to do so, nor does that particular thing rightfully belong to those to whom it is given. As a matter of fact, the main reason behind all the problems people face today concerning their legal processes is that they spend far too long a time in the litigation process; when a crime is committed, the investigation conducted by the courts might take over a year. Moreover, *Wali Ad-Dam* (the victim's closest male relative who has the right of retribution) should have a say in the matter since when this authority is given to him, he may be so content with enabling him to exercise his right of taking retribution, to the extent that he may well forgo it, due to the fact that the decision is given to him, giving him the ability to exact retribution; however, it is more likely that he will have mercy.

If this were to happen, that is, if *Wali Ad-Dam* forgoes retribution, the one who is pardoned for out of charity will, for the rest of his life, owe his life to the one who gave up his right to retribution – this will cause bonds of affection and love to be created between them. Thus, when the Supreme Lawgiver *the All-Wise* legislates, He wants us to take into account the fact that we will not be always sinned against; rather, we may one day sin against someone else, so if this is the case, would we not like the *Wali Ad-Dam* to forgo his right to exact retribution upon us? So, if governments wish to bring an end to cycles of revenge, let them fully implement the Supreme Divine Law.

The following example actually takes place in Upper Egypt. When someone is murdered, the guilty party goes to the family of the victim, carrying his burial shroud with him so that they can exact revenge upon him. As a matter of fact, when this happens, guardians of the murdered victim are cleansed of the desire for revenge and thus let him live. As such, this murderer owes his life to them, i.e. the guardians of the murdered victim who forgo retribution out of charity. The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45) indicates that *Wali Ad-Dam* is the only one who has the right to forgo retribution out of charity. The verb *Tasaddaqa* which literally means 'to give charity', requires the existence of a subject and an object, i.e. the one who gives the charity and the one who receives it. In this regard, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* erases the sins of the one who forgoes retribution out of charity in proportion to the forgiveness he extends towards his fellow man. As such, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* wants to spread love amongst mankind.

He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…And they who do not judge in accordance with what Allah revealed – they are the evildoers!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45) We have already explained the absolute necessity of judging by what Allah has revealed. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰٓ ءَاثَٰرِهِم بِعِيسَى ٱبْنِ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةِ ۖ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ ٱلْإِنجِيلَ فِيهِ
هُدًى وَنُورٌ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirming the Torah that had been sent before him: We gave him the Gospel with guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah already revealed – a guide and lesson for those who take heed of God [46] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 46)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'we caused…to follow', or *Qaffayna* which means 'We caused someone to come after another', for 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* came after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. In fact, when one man walks behind another, the back, or *Qafa*, of the leader is directed towards the face of the follower. Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'And We caused 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), to follow in the footsteps of those (earlier prophets), confirming the truth of whatever there still remained…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45) indicates clearly that 'Isa (Jesus) was sent in confirmation of the truth of which Musa (Moses) was sent, i.e. the Torah. He *the Almighty* then says: '…And we revealed to him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45). We previously explained that this' guidance and light' was appropriate for the environment wherein it was revealed.

In Arabic language, there are expressions which are said to be of 'relatively close' meanings. For example, if a man in a village tells his son to turn on the light, the boy will light a kerosene lamp, but if a man in a city tells his son to turn on the light, the boy will press the button so that the electric light comes on. These relative aspects could thus make a word indicate two meanings. Another example to clearly illustrate this point is a man living in an apartment who considers his ceiling high, yet this high ceiling is the floor for those living above him. Therefore, the word 'ceiling' in this case indicates both the meanings of 'height' and 'floor'. This is actually what we call 'relative concept'.

Likewise, a man might be a son, but this does not mean 'he cannot also be a father to his own son'. So, the words 'guidance and light' in this context are relative concepts. It is assumed that every 'guidance and light' was appropriate to the environment wherein it was revealed. For example, Jews were materialistic people, and thus, the Torah was revealed to them since it was most appropriate for them during that particular period of time. This materialistic environment was afterwards in need of spiritual energy, and thus, the Gospel was revealed with all the required spirituality. This is why when 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him* was asked a question about inheritance, he said, 'I was not sent to apportion inheritance.' This statement of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* indicates that he knew for certain that he had come bearing a spiritual rejuvenation comprised of emotional exhortations and counsels.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَلۡيَحۡكُمۡ أَهۡلُ ٱلۡإِنجِيلِ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ فِيهِۚ وَمَن لَّمۡ يَحۡكُم
بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

So let the followers of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down in it. Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are lawbreakers [47] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 47)

This verse indicates clearly that the followers of the Gospel should adhere to the laws and rulings mentioned in it, namely the Gospel. If we understand this verse in the light of the previously mentioned one, we will fully realise that alongside its spiritual dimensions, the Gospel adopts the fundamentals of the laws found in the Torah. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* made it clear that he who does not judge in the light of what Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed is iniquitous, that is, he has become disobedient. As a matter of fact, if someone does not obey Allah's Orders and Commands pertaining to His Divinity and Lordship, then he is judged to be a disbeliever and denier of the truth. In the same respect, if he does not obey Allah's Divine Rulings relating to how correctly judge amongst people, he is an evildoer. So, all of these concepts are closely related to each other.

Having shed light on the Torah and the Gospel, He *the Almighty* moves to speak about what He revealed to the Seal of all the Prophets and Messengers, namely, the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنزَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ مُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا بَيۡنَ يَدَيۡهِ مِنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَمُهَيۡمِنًا عَلَيۡهِۖ
فَٱحۡكُم بَيۡنَهُم بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُۖ وَلَا تَتَّبِعۡ أَهۡوَآءَهُمۡ عَمَّا جَآءَكَ مِنَ ٱلۡحَقِّۚ لِكُلّٖ جَعَلۡنَا
مِنكُمۡ شِرۡعَةٗ وَمِنۡهَاجٗاۚ وَلَوۡ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمۡ أُمَّةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَبۡلُوَكُمۡ فِي مَآ ءَاتَىٰكُمۡۖ
فَٱسۡتَبِقُواْ ٱلۡخَيۡرَٰتِۚ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ مَرۡجِعُكُمۡ جَمِيعٗا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ فِيهِ تَخۡتَلِفُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law

and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about [48] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 48)

When we read the phrase 'We sent', or *Anzalna*, we know for certain that is Allah *the Almighty,* the Supreme Lawgiver is the One Who has legislated. Some people yet wish to foist their foolish beliefs onto people by claiming that Islam is a 'progressive religion', while others will describe it as a 'reactionary religion'; both of these kinds of people are actually seeking to ascribe something to Islam which has nothing to do with it. We say to these people to not say that, but say instead that Islam is a 'heavenly religion' since it has been sent down from Allah *the Almighty*. Islam possesses all the benefits and advantages of different aspects and ideologies of life, whether materialistic or spiritual. Islam actually brought forth true social advancement and scientific progress since the meaning of 'progress' is for man to keep on refining himself until all people are equal.

Islam benefits man in this worldly life and the life to come, as well. People with these ideologies do not really understand their own ideas, whether they are progressive, reactionary, right wing, or even left wing. In this regard, it is of great importance to know that the contemporary ideologies and thoughts which have caused all this conflict in the world from East to West are capitalism, communism, socialism, existentialism and so on.

For example, when we consider those who instigated the Communist Revolution of 1917, we find that they claimed to have started on the road to true communism via the route of socialism. In fact, they should have headed towards what they claimed, but instead we actually find that the more time elapses, the more they deviate away from their original ideas until finally they turned on themselves. This definitively proves that the ideology they chose for themselves was false.

In this respect, the following question shall be asked, 'Did capitalism remain intact?' The answer is a definitive 'No', since events forced capitalism to give workers their entitled rights, and thus, capital no longer has its great impact. Furthermore, socialism became highly affected by capitalism, and so did capitalism became affected by socialism since it adopted more and more socialistic methodologies; so much intermixing of the two happened to the extent that both of them want to come to a common ground with each other. However, Islam created this common ground from the very beginning, respecting both capital and labour. In addition, it obligates everyone to firmly adhere to performing his due role in life and thus guarantee that the course of life will continue to the end of time. This is why we find capitalists speaking of the need for job creation and incentives. In the same respect, socialism did not achieve its goals, but rather ended up with destroying human rights. Furthermore, what about communities that were never touched by socialism, before it existed, and wherein there were people who exploited others?

Logic says that it was absolutely necessary for socialism to believe in the existence of the Hereafter wherein those who previously exploited people would be punished. As such, they, namely socialists, had to be religious. Likewise, in these communities that adopted capitalism, which centres on material profit, people were bereft of spirituality.

Once again, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'We sent' or *Anzalna* implies that a message of guidance came down, or *nazala*, from a higher source. If we reflect carefully upon the statements of the Quran, we find that Allah *the Almighty* wants to elevate our rank through revelation by asking us to come to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to listen to the Divine Orders and Commands. As a result, we will be closely connected to heaven and not the earth.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We sent to you (Muhammad) the Scripture with the truth…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). We observe that the verses of the Quran are in correlation with each other. Yet, the fact that the Quran came down from a higher source with the truth requires that all the laws included in it must be in conformity with life. In another position of the Quran, He *the Almighty* says that He has sent down the Quran with the truth and with the truth it, namely the Quran, has descended: 'And, in accordance with the requirements of truth and wisdom We have sent it down, and with truth and wisdom has it descended…' (*al-Isra':* 105). This means that the Quran was really sent down from Allah *the Almighty* and not a human invention. In addition, it clearly indicates that it has come down bearing the way of guidance from Allah by means of which justice will be maintained everywhere and by everyone. In addition, all the laws under which the course of life runs normally will be guaranteed and protected by virtue of this Divine Guidance mentioned in the Quran.

Careful reflection upon the aforementioned verse indicates that it is comprehensive which means it tells clearly that the Quran confirms the truth of the earlier heavenly revealed Scriptures. Yet, there is a good question to be asked in this respect, 'The word *Al-Kitab* has been mentioned twice in this verse, so, is there any difference between them?'

We know well that the definite article 'the', or '*Al*', can be used in Arabic language to refer to either 'classes' or 'specifics'. For example, when you say, 'I met a man, and I honoured the man', the word 'the 'refers specifically to a particular man whom you knew before, and not one you met. Accordingly, the word *Al-Kitab* mentioned first refers specifically to the Quran, while the second one refers to all the heavenly scriptures before it. As such, we can deduce that the Quran is a guardian and an overseer over all these previously revealed Scriptures since they had been marred by corruption and alteration.

So, the word 'truth' mentioned in this verse clearly means that the Quran, the seal of all the Divine Scriptures, was sent down bearing the absolute truth for all the affairs of the world and the needs of human life. In addition, it means that no alteration or distortion shall affect or change it. Therefore, it is clear that the meaning of the words 'with the truth' in this verse extends to the content of the Quran and to the process of its revelation, as well. The Quran was revealed after all other heavenly revealed Scriptures which were appropriate for the times in which they were revealed. Indeed, He *the Almighty* created man in order that they could bear witness that He is the only One Who deserves to be worshipped and that they could thrive in and build this world by means of the thinking, energy, and adaptable material He gave them. So, if they wanted to live a basic life without any advancement or comfort, they could find all they needed in the constituents of the earth; yet if they wanted to advance, then they had to make use of their minds and energies to benefit from the material created by Him *the Almighty* and thus, they would be able to uncover the Secrets of Allah in the universe.

The Secrets of Allah *the Almighty* in the universe are too many, and they certainly serve us even if we do not know how. For example, we recently knew about the force of gravity which holds the planets and the celestial bodies in their due positions. In addition, we knew nothing about the positive and negative electrical charges which flow through the universe until recently.

As a matter of fact, when He *the Almighty* wants people to reveal a new secret in the universe, He provides mankind with the means for discovering it. In this respect, we should know that every secret of this universe, which has been subdued for man, will be uncovered in a defined and fixed period of time set by Allah *the Almighty*. This discovery of the secrets of the universe may be the result of the work of the human mind, which may rely on pieces of information to reach such conclusions about these secrets, just like a geometry exercise a student solves after having been given certain information by a teacher in which he uses this information to prove the conclusion his teacher wants him to prove. Thus, if it happens that man's mind studies the matter scientifically and empirically, the secret may be revealed along with the study; yet if the time comes for the secret to be discovered in the universe, but man has not studied the clues which would lead to it, and Allah nevertheless wills for the secret to be revealed, what happens then?! Will Allah *the Almighty* prevent its disclosure? The answer is 'No'. In fact, He *the Almighty* allows this secret to be accidentally discovered by a researcher who was actually looking for something else. In this case, we say that the secret comes into the open coincidentally.

As a matter of fact, if we carefully consider today's inventions, innovations and discoveries, we will find that the most crucial ones belong to the second kind, that is, universal secrets which are disclosed coincidentally. As a matter of fact, when Allah *the Almighty* allows every secret in the universe to be disclosed in a defined period of time, this means that this revelation of this particular secret is one of Allah's Countless Bounties upon mankind. It is certainly well known that He *the Almighty* out of His Favour, granted life to man, gave him power to do things and imparted some of His Knowledge to him: 'Then they found a servant of Ours, upon whom We had bestowed Mercy from Us, and whom We had taught Knowledge from Ourselves.' (*al-Kahf:* 65) Furthermore, He gave him wisdom by means of which he can gain his livelihood: 'He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant good; and none would take heed except those endowed with understanding.' (*al-Baqara:* 269) In this way, He *the Almighty* wants His creation to interact with the universe in order to discover things. In this respect, if Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to have this interaction, He will surely give us a way of guidance which protects our energies and our ideas from what damages them.

Truthfully speaking, conflict of people's caprices and whims is the main reason behind the corruption of man's ideas and energies; one's whims may be in conflict with another's, and the same applies for ideas; they may oppose each other. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wanted us to follow one way of guidance, so that all our actions would stem from one main source, that is, that which was sent down from a higher source, the Supreme Creator, Who can never be changed by anything. As for those things over which there is no difference, He *the Almighty* left us to study them for ourselves since we would be compelled to agree on them. This is why we always say that there are no conflicts whatsoever in matters of experimental sciences. In fact, we never find scholars classifying electricity into Russian, or American, etc. This is based on the fact that the laboratory does not take sides, and lifeless material has no bias. Therefore, results obtained in laboratories have only one meaning. In other words, they are conclusive.

We see that the scientists of the east and west agree concerning the results of practical experiments, and each nation tries to steal the results of the others in order to use them to help its own advancement and progress. However, when it comes to human whims, the matter is completely different since each nation tries to keep the whims of others outside its borders; for whims never reach a common ground. That is why we find all the Divine Commands fall under the following two categories: 'Dos' and 'Don'ts'. By this, He *the Almighty* ensures our unity and prevents our energies from working against each other. This point is affirmed in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* explains that if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them (would long ago have perished). 'And if the truth had followed their desires, verily the heavens and the earth and whosoever is therein would have been corrupted. Nay, We have brought them their admonition, but from their own admonition they now turn aside.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71)

As a result, it is clear that Allah's Way of Guidance in His Universe only came to give order to man's behaviours in those matters wherein whims differ. As for those behaviours of life wherein whims do not differ, He *the Almighty* left them free and unrestricted since people are compelled to agree on them, for material does not take sides and the laboratory has no bias.

This is why we previously explained that when Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the Seal of all the Prophets and Messengers, He *Glorified is He* gave him His commands under the two imperative forms of 'Do' and 'Do not'. As for the matter of experimental and material science, He *the Almighty* conveyed His Ruling on it to us by using Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself as an example. When he came to Medina, he found the people cross-pollinating date palms as they planted them, and when he saw some people doing this, he said to them, 'Were you not to do so, it would be good.' So, they did not cross-pollinate the date palms, and so the harvest was poor and the dates failed. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed by them and said, 'What is wrong with your date-palms?' They said, 'O, Prophet Muhammad! You told us such-and-such.' He said, 'If there is any use of it, then they should do it, for it was just a personal opinion of mine, and do not strictly follow my personal opinion. However, when I say to you anything on behalf of Allah, then do accept and follow it, for I do not attribute lie to Him *the Exalted and Glorious*.' Another narration recounts that he said, 'I am but a human being. If I command you something to do with your religion, and then hold firmly to it, but if I command you something of my own opinion, then I am but a human being.' In a third narration, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said very clearly, 'You have better knowledge (of a technical skill) in the affairs of the world.'(1)

This Hadith indicates clearly that Prophet Muhammad left it to his community to look after their practical and worldly affairs. These words of

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not yet give people carte blanche with the teachings of the religion, for he made a clear distinction between that which Divine Guidance must be followed and that which is left up to man. As we know, man undergoes different stages throughout his life: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and advanced maturity. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* ordains laws in such a way that is appropriate for each of these life stages. Due to the fact that the period of infancy requires material support, He *the Almighty* first gives it to an infant. Yet, when a child attains the age of puberty, He *the Almighty* bestows upon him the ability of perception. Furthermore, when it is the age of adulthood, He passes the reins on to him so he can live in the world according to the teachings of His Way of Guidance. The Message of Islam thus was appropriate for the time in which it was revealed. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* entrusted the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to defend and protect the course of life from human desires and whims. Regarding this, it is of great importance to know that Messengers would be sent by Allah to convey His Guidance to their own peoples and nations, yet when they disobeyed their Messengers, the heaven itself would afflict punishment upon them when needed; but when humanity matured, Allah ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to convey the Message and allowed him to punish them if they contradict Divine Guidance in the affairs pertaining to the smooth running of the course of life since he *peace and blessings be upon him* had become capable of being trusted to do so.

If you look at how the world was in the past, you will find that people lived in isolation from each other, to the extent that each community in one place knew nothing about other communities. In addition, each community had its own system, course of life, customs, and traditions. Yet, Islam came for all humanity since Allah always knew for certain that Islam would come at a time when the barriers of time and space would be broken and when a social ailment that emerged in the east would spread immediately to the west, and likewise from west to east. What that means is that Islam is a universal religion which takes into account the fact that the world has become a small village in which information and news travel from east to west in the blink of an eye.

Islam came at a time when the world started to share the same ailments and problems, and therefore, a comprehensive cure needed to be sent down that would be suitable to apply for all mankind at all times and all places. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with the final Message since no other Prophets will follow. It is the timeless Message that no other Messengers will be sent to complete or perfect, so Allah has undertaken to preserve and protect that Message from distortion or alteration. Divine Scriptures that were revealed prior to the Quran contained the Ordinances of Allah that were directed to certain people at specific times. Allah, therefore, assigned preservation of these Scriptures to the people they were sent down to. Instead of submitting to Allah and obeying His command, they manipulated His Scriptures and abandoned His guidance. Any command is subject to being obeyed or rejected based on the attitude of those commanded. Adherents of the former Abrahamic religions distorted their Scriptures which started by forgetting some of them, as Allah says: '…and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13).

Moreover, they concealed part of what they did not forget, as Allah says: 'As for those who hide the proofs and guidance We send down, after We have made them clear to people in the Scripture, Allah rejects them…' (*al-Baqara:* 159). Thus, they forgot some of what Allah revealed to them; they concealed and altered some of it, and even, distorting it with their tongues: 'There are some who twist the Scripture with their tongues…' (*Al-'Imran:* 78).

They did not stop at doing just that; they invented words of their own and said they were from Allah. The responsibility of preserving the previous Scriptures had been appointed to them: '…Allah's Scripture which they were entrusted to preserve…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44).

Since the previous nations deviated from the Straight Path and disobeyed Allah's Guidance, He has undertaken to preserve His Final Book and has not assigned this responsibility to human beings who were tested several times, yet failed to comply with His Ordinance. Also, the Quran is the final Revelation which will never be followed by another Book, so Allah has undertaken to guard it against distortion: 'Surely, We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9) Therefore, the Quran prevails over the previous Books in the sense that it reveals the truth that has been concealed in them while correcting what has been distorted. Allah has guaranteed that it will never be manipulated, so when the word *Al-kitab* ('Allah's Book', 'the Book', 'the Scripture', etc.) is mentioned without any particular reference, it means the Noble Quran: 'We sent to you (Muhammad) *Al-kitab* (the Scripture) with the truth…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48), so this refers to the Quran; then He says in the same verse: '…confirming *Al-kitab* (the Scriptures) that came before it…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48) where *Al-kitab* refers to the Psalms, Torah, Bible and the Scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses). The Quran was sent down '... with final authority over them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48), which means to tell both what is true and what has been distorted in them.

Whenever Allah describes Himself with a word that is also used to describe His servants, it does not mean any form of similarity whatsoever, for an adjective becomes completely different in quality and degree when attributed to Him. For example, Allah is All Hearing, and human beings also have the sense of hearing. This does not mean that the stated attribute is somehow' shared' by the servants and their Lord; rather, Allah uses a word that is familiar with the intent to bring the meaning closer to our minds. Therefore, we must always understand the words used to describe His Attributes in the light of the fact that '…There is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

When the word *Al-ghani* (wealthy) is used with Allah, it means the Self-Sufficient Who controls the treasures of the heavens and earth and Who is in need of no one and on Whom everyone is dependent. Thus, the scope of the word is completely different when it is used with Him unlike its meaning when it describes any of His servants. When the word *Al-Muhaymin* is used to describe the Quran, it means the following: '…with final authority over them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Meanwhile, it refers to an Attribute of Allah which can be interpreted in several ways. The word *muhaymin* has multiple connotations. It denotes' Protector', 'Guardian', 'Overseer', and 'Witness'. It means the Dominant One Who takes care of all things. All these meanings are related and apply to Allah *the Exalted and Almighty*. He takes care of all things and disposes all affairs, which absolutely implies that He watches over everything and is Witness over all His creation. In this sense, He is also the Guardian and Protector of His servants.

As we have also pointed out, the word *Muhaymin* is used to describe the Quran, and in this case, it further means that the Book is sent with final authority over all previous Books to confirm the truth of what they contain and unveil the falsehood invented by those to whom they were sent down. The 'Scriptures' mentioned in the verse refers to the original Books revealed by Allah, so whatever truth they still contain is confirmed by the Quran, while whatever truth was distorted is corrected by the Quran. The Quran cleanses Allah's Message from human prejudices, and it is in this sense that the Quran is sent as a final authority over previous Scriptures. Allah then says: '…so judge between them according to what Allah has sent down…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). The Arabic word *yahkum* (judge) is derived from the root *h-k-m* from which the word *hakamah*, or 'bit' which is the metal mouthpiece connected to the bridle of a horse so that it can be controlled. Allah's Guidance, likewise, is the authority that keeps creation from evading the Will of the Creator.

This command of Allah: '…so judge between them according to what Allah has sent down…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48) applies to disbelievers as well which is also confirmed by the verse: 'If they come to you (Prophet) for judgement, you can either judge between them, or decline– if you decline, they will not harm you in any way, but if you do judge between them, judge justly. Allah loves the just' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42). This is the rule on which judgments of all cases should be based. However, why would they seek Prophet Muhammad's judgment, while they do not believe in him? The disbelievers sought through Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to sanction their own whims. They wanted him to resolve problems between them in the way they desired, and thus obtain approval for the judgment that pleased them. They already defied the Law of Allah and did not intend to submit to His Guidance by asking His Messenger to resolve between them. For example, they wanted to evade the punishment of stoning and replace it by a lighter one, so they went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Had he sanctioned a lighter punishment, they would have taken it; otherwise, they would reject his judgment. They went to him seeking an easier punishment in order to please themselves, not to please Allah by complying to His Ordinance. Since they were people of power and influence, they told Prophet Muhammad *peace* *and blessings be upon him* that if he judged between them in the way they desired, they would believe in his Message and call their people to embrace Islam, too. Such was their design.

However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused to yield to their will by obeying the words of Allah Almighty: '…so judge between them according to what Allah has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). If they had a copy of the Torah which was free of distortion, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have told them to follow the judgment of the Torah. When the Prophet asked the most learned among them to recite the ruling stated in the Torah, one of them tried to conceal the lines containing the ruling of stoning with his hand as the verses of the Torah were recited. Since the truth in the Torah had been altered, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had to judge according to the Quran, for it was on the basis of it that the truth of previous Scriptures could be assessed: '…So judge between them according to what Allah has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). As the verse cites, they were tempted to forsake what Allah has enjoined on them in order to further their temporal power, a behaviour which Allah *the Almighty* describes by saying: 'They have sold Allah's message for a trifling gain…' (*at-Tawba:* 9). They only wanted to falsify Allah's Law for their own advantage by seeking Prophet Muhammad's judgment, and this is why Allah warned His Messenger against following them: '…Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Suppose that some of the rulings in the Torah were not distorted, but Islam was sent down with new rulings that abrogate those of the Torah. Then which should be followed? The Quran should be followed then because it has been sent down with final authority over previous Revelations so as to correct as well as to perfect what they contained.

The essence of creed is one and unchanging in all religions. Only juristic rulings that govern the various aspects of people's lives vary from one religion to another.

This was due to the fact that it was based on the time, place, and condition of the people to whom the message was sent. When Allah sent Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) to the children of Israel, he told them, as the Quran quotes: ‘…and to make some things lawful to you which used to be forbidden…’ (*Al-’Imran:* 50). Things were forbidden in the Jewish religion which Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) came to make lawful again. Allah made certain things forbidden to the children of Israel as a punishment to them: ‘For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160). Allah forbids His servants certain things since they would harm them, and He may also forbid them things that had been lawful to discipline them. The children of Israel were forbidden certain good things as a punishment for allowing themselves other things which Allah had forbidden. ‘... We have assigned a law and a path to each of you…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 48). The verse uses the word *shari’a*, Arabic for ‘law’, and *manhaj*, Arabic for ‘path’. The former literally means a ‘waterway’, while the latter literally refers to a ‘dry land path’. These meanings allude to the essential requirements of life, namely water and land. The Rulings of Allah are essential for the prosperity and well-being of mankind, and thus the similarity. Allah has assigned a law to each, but He says: ‘In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Nuh (Noah)…’ (*ash-Shura:* 13).

Therefore, the fundamentals of faith never change throughout time. During the first stage of its advent, Islam focused on establishing these fundamentals unequivocally by declaring the Oneness of Allah, His absolute Perfection and the falsehood of polytheism. After having ingrained faith in the hearts of believers, Allah established the juristic laws that govern the affairs of human lives, and this was during the second stage of the Revelation.

Rulings were ordained gradually to make compliance easier for believers. Juristic rulings were enjoined at the time of Prophet Nuh (Noah) that suited his people. Then, Allah prescribed in Islam, the Final Message, other rulings that fit all subsequent times and places after its advent until the end of time. Thus, He sent down His guidance to mankind across time in several stages to suit their lives. All these laws came from the same source, and therefore, we believe in all of them since we believe in Him Who has sent them down to us.

Allah then says in the verse: '…If Allah had so willed, He would have made you one community…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Had He willed, Allah could have ordained the same rulings, the same obligations and prohibitions for all mankind, but this would not have been appropriate for the different times and various, quite isolated, communities that had lived before the coming of Islam. Such communities were isolated in the sense that each had a quite different nature and way of life, along with suffering from different social ailments, which makes it logical that different rulings had to be ordained for them to deal with their quite different lives and problems. '...If Allah had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good. You will all return to Allah…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48).

Let me present to you some of the insights I have about this verse. Had we all been made a single community, worship would have perhaps been more of a habit than a manifestation of devotion. We would perform worship without experiencing the joy and feeling the honour of being in a state of obedience to Allah. I believe this is one important reason why all mankind was not just one community with the same characteristics and the same religious duties. We get tired of monotony. For example, we eat, drink, and have intercourse with our spouses, so perhaps the pleasure associated with that may fade away as we get used to it. During *Ramadan*, we are commanded to observe *sawm* (fasting), so we abstain from all that from dawn to sunset. When it is time to break our fasts, we then feel the pleasure of what we had been deprived of during the day, and we feel rewarded for our patience, carrying out our duty and devoting ourselves to Allah, let alone the matchless reward in the Hereafter.

More importantly, as the verse cites, we have been made into different communities as a test for mankind: '…but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Tests are not bad in themselves, but they are considered bad when we fail in them. If we are wise enough to persevere and pass them successfully, the outcomes are rewarding and prove that they were indeed worth the time, effort, and determination. Therefore, so long as Allah has willed to test us through His messages, we should strive to succeed by racing to do righteous deeds that please Him: '…but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good. You will all return to Allah and He will make clear to you the matters about which you differed' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Success in a test requires perseverance, for otherwise, the outcomes will be most unwelcome. Acting heedless of Allah may secure transient pleasures, and perhaps devotion is rather hard for the human soul. However, reward for doing righteous deeds is uncomprehending joy, that is matchless, and through obedience, the pleasure that would be actually attained is above all in comparison to worldly pleasures. Satan and our own selves make temptations alluring so that we indulge in passing desires which begin and end in this fleeting life as they die with our death, after which lasting suffering awaits in the Hereafter. Is it wise to sell eternal happiness for such a paltry price? This is indeed a loss, and the real triumph is to succeed in the tests to which Allah subjects us.

Racing to do good may be tiring, but the outcome is worth the struggle. Allah has not forbidden you some of the desires of this world because He wants to deprive or torture you; He does so since He knows they will only bring suffering and harm if you approach them. Moreover, these prohibitions are only for the short span of time in this worldly life, and the reward is unconditional happiness that will never come to an end in the Afterlife. Such is the fruit of devotion; so it is wise to commit ourselves to it even though it is hard for the human soul.

Allah says: '…you will all return to Allah…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Everyone returns to Allah, both the pious and the wicked, '…and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). As long as people differ, there must be some in the right and others in the wrong. On the Day of Judgement, Allah will resolve between His servants, and everyone will see to which of the two groups they belong.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَأَنِ ٱحۡكُم بَيۡنَهُم بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعۡ أَهۡوَآءَهُمۡ وَٱحۡذَرۡهُمۡ أَن
يَفۡتِنُوكَ عَنۢ بَعۡضِ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيۡكَۖ فَإِن تَوَلَّوۡاْ فَٱعۡلَمۡ أَنَّمَا يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ أَن
يُصِيبَهُم بِبَعۡضِ ذُنُوبِهِمۡۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرٗا مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

So [Prophet] judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, and take good care that they do not tempt you away from any of what God has sent down to you. If they turn away, remember that God intends to punish them for some of the sins they have committed: a great many people are lawbreakers [49] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 49)

Someone might say that Allah said right in the previous verse: ‘We sent to you (Muhammad) the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it and with final authority over them…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 48). The answer to this question may be manifested clearly in the fact that the Quran was revealed to determine what was true from previous revelations, and thus Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was obligated to implement it. This is why He *the Almighty* says next: ‘So (Prophet) judge between them according to what Allah has sent down.’ Allah *the Almighty* thus tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He sent down the Quran to him with the truth so that it would confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and likewise determine what is true within them. Then, He *the Almighty* orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* to judge amongst them in accordance with what has been revealed in the Quran, even if people bring him anything that contradicts what is revealed in the Quran. In this connection, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* to beware of them, lest they tempt him: ‘Do not follow their whims, and take good care that they do not tempt you away from any of what Allah has sent down to you.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 49) To beware means to be cautious and vigilant about someone who wishes to harm you. Truthfully speaking, the one who wants to harm may mistakenly believe that what he is doing is truly good, yet his actions are, indeed, truly evil. Therefore, it is clear that the meaning of *Al-Hadhru* mentioned in this verse is that one must practise utmost caution so that he would not be afflicted with harm from anyone who may claim to be benefiting him. For example, your adversary might come to you to offer to do you a favour or to give you a hand in something; if this is the case, you should completely reject this help.

In essence, caution requires one to be very attentive at all times. This is why people used to make a connection between the crow and caution, to the extent that they used to narrate this story on the crow that teaches its chick how to be cautious by saying, ‘Beware of man, for when he stoops to pick something up from the ground, he is picking up a stone to throw at you.’ So, the young crow said to his father, ‘What should I do then if this man is already hiding the stone in his pocket?’ This story shows how the crow is naturally cautious.

Another striking example regarding this is that of a usurer who makes it seem attractive to people to give their money to him in return for an interest rate of twenty percent; this may seem to be beneficial, but in all actuality it is harmful. Although it may seem to increase one’s wealth, it is actually subjecting one who gives in to Allah’s Wrath since He *the Almighty* tells us clearly that He will deprive usurious gains of all blessing: ‘Allah will blot out interest yet will cause charity to increase.’ (*al-Baqara:* 276)

As a matter of fact, usury is a harmful act, for which the adversary embellishes it to make it seem beneficial. This is why Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be cautious. Therefore, what is required of his *peace and blessings be upon him* followers in the light of this Divine Warning? They must also be cautious or beware since even the best of all mankind was instructed by Allah to be so: ‘take good care that they do not tempt you away from any of what Allah has sent down to you.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 49) In fact, these types of people planned to deceive Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying to him, ‘We have come to you so that you might judge between us, and if you judge in our favour, we will follow you.’ As a matter of fact, this saying of these said people might seem on the surface to be beneficial, but Allah *the Almighty* gave His Final and Decisive Ruling on the matter by ordering Prophet Muhammad to beware of them, lest they tempt him away from that which Allah has bestowed upon him from above. (*al-Ma’ida:* 49) Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘If they turn away, remember that Allah intends to punish them for some of the sins they have committed. A great many people are lawbreakers.' What is meant here is that if they turn away, then you should know (O, Prophet Muhammad) that Allah is protecting you from slipping into any suspicion of falsehood. These people, who do not want you (O, Prophet Muhammad!) to judge amongst them in accordance with what Allah has revealed down, have chosen to remain disbelievers and have distanced themselves from Allah's Way of Guidance. Therefore, He *the Almighty* will afflict them with His Punishment in return for their sins. In this regard, it is of great importance to know that Allah *Glorified is He* never commits injustice against them; rather, He only afflicts them with punishment because of their sins, and He knows them best, for He is All-Knowing of all of mankind.

He *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying; '…a great many people are lawbreakers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 49) This part of the verse indicates clearly that such people are treated as lawbreakers because they disobey the teachings of their Prophets and Messengers. In addition, they rejected what has been revealed in their Scriptures. In fact, had they followed the teachings of their heavenly Scriptures, they would have believed in the truth of which Prophet Muhammad, the unlettered Prophet, came. In the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet, and the nations whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel which are with them. He enjoins on them good and forbids them evil and makes lawful for them the good things and forbids them the bad things and remove from them their burdens and shackles that were upon them. So those who shall believe in him and honour and support him and help him and follow the light that has been sent down with him - these shall prosper.' (*al-A'raf:* 157)

So, the way to happiness and prosperity was written and recorded in the Torah and the Gospel; the Divine Command to believe in Prophet Muhammad, the unlettered Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was given in previous Scriptures revealed before the Quran. In fact, the Torah and the Gospel contained glad tidings that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be sent to enjoin all that is good and forbid all that is evil, to make lawful for mankind all things man's natural predisposition sees as good and to forbid them from changing or corrupting the Divine Way of Guidance with which he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent. In the same respect, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was to exhort them not to give in to stubbornness, for he came to lift the punishment to be afflicted upon them due to their corruption of Allah's Way of Guidance. So, all who followed the light and guidance of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would feel salvation and triumph. As for those who did not follow this light of Prophet Muhammad, they would thereby be judged as breakers of Divine Laws. In fact, any attempt to deny the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is doomed to failure, for those who truly know and understand the Torah and Gospel are fully acquainted with the description of him (Prophet Muhammad). In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that the people of the Book know Prophet Muhammad as they know their children, yet some of them knowingly suppress the truth: 'Those to whom We have given the Book recognise it even as they recognise their sons, but surely some of them hide the truth knowingly.' (*al-Baqara:* 146)

We all know what 'Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* did when he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to announce that he had embraced Islam. He said, 'Indeed, I know Prophet Muhammad better than I know my own son.' 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* then said to him: 'How can this be, O, Ibn Salam? 'Abdullah ibn Salam replied, 'Because I testify with complete truth and certitude that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, but I cannot testify with such certainty about my own son, for I do not know what women might do.' To this, 'Umar said, 'May Allah grant you all success, O, Ibn Salam!'

However, some of the scholars and rabbis of the children of Israel concealed the glad tidings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, for they desired leadership and the gifts which people would bring them, and therefore, they sought out the descriptions of Prophet Muhammad, yet concealed them. Indeed, as long as they did this, we should know that Allah wanted to afflict them with punishment for some of their sins.

We may observe that whenever Allah *the Almighty* instructed His Messenger to address the Jews, He *the Almighty* never pronounced an accusation against all of them, but only to some, even if this 'some' comprised a great deal of them. This is what we might call 'allowing for the possibility' which means that some of the Jews had embraced Islam in secret. It is true that many of them were iniquitous, but some of them were not. This point is supported by what has been narrated by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* who said, 'A Jewish man and woman committed adultery, and one of the Jews said, "Let us go to this Prophet, (Muhammad) for he is sent with lenient laws; and if he gives us any ruling which is less harsh than stoning to death, we will accept it and use it as an argument before Allah, saying, 'One of Your Prophets gave us this ruling.' So, they went to the *masjid* (mosque) where Prophet Muhammad sat with his Companions and said, "O, father of Al-Qasim, what do you say about a man and woman who commit adultery?" He *peace and blessings be upon him* did not answer them until he first went to their school. When he got there, Prophet Muhammad asked a young man who despised speaking untruthful words that his people would speak, and he said, "The Torah tells us that the punishment is stoning." So, Prophet Muhammad judged that the punishment should be stoning.'

In this same respect, Al-Baraa' ibn 'Azib *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad passed by a Jew with a blackened face due to being flogged. He called them and asked, 'Is this the punishment for the adulterer that you find in your Book?' They replied, 'Yes.' Then, he called one of their scholars and said, 'I adjure you, by Allah Who sent down the Torah to Moses, to tell me if this is the punishment for the adulterer that you find in your Book?' He said, 'No, if you had not adjured me by Allah, I would not have told you. The punishment for the adulterer that we find in our Book is stoning, but many of our nobles were being stoned (because of the prevalence of adultery among them) so that if we caught one of our nobles (committing adultery), we would let him go. However, if we caught one of the weak amongst us, we would carry out the punishment on him. We said, "Come, let us agree upon something that we may impose on both noble and weak alike." So, we agreed to blacken the face and whip them instead of stoning.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said 'O, Allah, I am the first of those who revive Your Command which they had killed off.' Thus, he issued orders that he (the man) be stoned. (1)

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(1) Narrated by *Muslim*

So, many of them were iniquitous, and a few of them were not iniquitous since they were contemplating about believing in Prophet Muhammad. In fact, had the charge here been that every single one of them was iniquitous, those who were considering believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have sensed the light and guidance he brought. When Allah *Glorified is He* says that many of them are lawbreakers, this means that those who were thinking about believing in him *peace and blessings be upon him* would perceive and realise the clear presence of light and guidance in his words.

We might ask why they wanted to distort Allah's laws merely to gain temporal power and a paltry sum from the matters in which they sought. Why did they do this? The True Lord gives us the answer:

أَفَحُكۡمَ ٱلۡجَٰهِلِيَّةِ يَبۡغُونَۚ وَمَنۡ أَحۡسَنُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ حُكۡمٗا لِّقَوۡمٖ يُوقِنُونَ ٥٠

Do they want judgment according to the time of pagan ignorance? Is there any better judge than God for those of firm faith? [50] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 50)

In order for us to know the precise meaning of 'ignorance', we must call to mind the divisions of attribution of which we have previously mentioned. We know that every word we speak has meaning, and when we hear a word, a meaning comes to mind based on its context. For example, when we hear the word 'mountain', an image of a mountain comes to the mind, but the exact state of the mountain does not since the word lacks precise context. So a word has a meaning, but this meaning does not give any real benefit on its own. If we say 'Cairo is overpopulated', or 'its facilities are in poor condition', we are giving a description which clarifies what we mean when we say 'Cairo'.

There is a difference between an expression which has a single meaning without any connotation, and an expression which has a connotation with it. When an ancient Arab heard an expression that had no connotation or implied meaning, he would not accept it. An Arab once said, 'I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', as though 'Messenger' is an adjective describing 'Muhammad' that has no connotation or implied meaning; so another Arab, who heard him, said, 'What about Muhammad?' He did so in order to alert the first speaker to the fact that he had not given a complete thought. So every word has a meaning, but this meaning is isolated and is in need of an attribution. For example, if you say to your friend, 'Muhammad', and your friend knows who this Muhammad is, he will ask you, 'What about Muhammad?' When he says this, he is asking for the implied or exact meaning so he can know what Muhammad did or what happened to him. Therefore, if you say, 'Muhammad visited me yesterday,' and the speech then becomes meaningful.

So every individual word has its own meaning in isolation, and when a connotation or an implied meaning is added to it, it gives the meaning shape. If this attribution is factual, and the one who says it believes it and can prove it, this attribution is called 'knowledge'; since knowledge means an attribution which is held to be true, is actually true and can be proven true. For example, when we say, 'The earth is spherical', these words first evoke an image of the earth, and then add an attribution to it, namely 'spherical'. Therefore, we believe it to be spherical, and reality affirms that it is. When we give proof for it, it becomes 'knowledge'.

If the attribution is factual and believed, but we cannot prove it, this is 'blind following' or 'imitation'. It is similar to a child who repeats certain facts, which his father tells him, but he cannot prove them to be true. He follows someone whom he trusts. The stage below 'knowledge' is 'imitation'. If one believes that an attribution is factual, but in actuality it is not, then this is 'ignorance'. Ignorance does not mean that you do not know; it means that you think you know something which is actually contrary to reality. Being ignorant is different from being uneducated since an uneducated person simply does not know, whilst the ignorant person 'knows' something which is contrary to reality, and he clings to this false knowledge: 'Then is it the judgment of (the time of) ignorance they desire?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 50)

The True Lord in the verse asks if they wish to continue in their false, ignorant beliefs. As we know, dealing with an uneducated person is different from dealing with an ignorant person since you can tell an uneducated person the information you want to teach him, and he will accept it. As for the ignorant person, you must do two things with him: 1) you must help him to cast the false idea from his mind; 2) you must convince him of the true idea. The people who cause problems for those who preach religion are the ignorant people who not only harbour erroneous beliefs but also adhere and hold to false concepts.

However, what if an attribution is open to being both affirmed and negated? If affirmation is equal to negation, this is *doubt*; and if affirmation is stronger, this is *supposition*; and if negation is stronger, this is *delusion*. Thus, it becomes clear to us that dealing with the ignorant person is difficult, and the people who cause problems in this world are the ignorant since they harbour false beliefs. Also, if Allah has given His judgment, then why are they not satisfied by this? Do they desire to be ruled by the law of pagan ignorance? The people of the Book themselves also used to despise the laws of pagan ignorance.

Yet, we should notice this disdain, or despising, existed at a time when the confrontation existed between the pagans and the people of the Book, and they predicted that they would attain a victory over the people of Mecca and Medina They even said many times, 'The time is ripe for the coming of a prophet whom we shall follow, and alongside whom we shall slay you as' Ad and Iram were slain.' However, no sooner did the Messenger of Allah come that they began to say the opposite. What did they say to the ignorant people? The True Lord tells us the answer: 'Have you not seen those who were given a portion of the Scripture, who believe in superstition and false objects of worship and say about the disbelievers, "These are better guided than the believers as to the way"?' (*an-Nisa':* 51)

Some of the Jewish rabbis went to the Quraysh, and some of the leaders of the Quraysh asked them, 'You are people of the Book and possessors of ancient knowledge. Tell us what should think about Muhammad.' The rabbis asked, 'What is Muhammad to you?' The Qurayshi leaders said, 'We slaughter great camels, give people milk and water, release prisoners of war, keep our family ties, provide water for the pilgrims and our religion is ancient, while Muhammad's religion is new.' The rabbis replied, 'You are better than him and most certainly more rightly guided.' This was the extent of their deception. Narrators tell another story which is relevant to this subject. A rabbi said to Abu Sufyan, 'By Allah, you are certainly more rightly guided than he is.' The reason they said this was that they were envious of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, were the people of the Book content to be ruled by the laws of pagan ignorance? No, it was really a matter of contradiction and inner conflict, and as long as they were at conflict with their own selves, it was easy for them to be at conflict with the scripture which had been revealed to them. Therefore, the True Lord asked: 'Then is it the judgement of (the time of) ignorance they desire? (*al-Ma'ida:* 50) Then He gives the contrasting side of the matter: 'But who is better than Allah in judgment?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 50) He did not say that the best lawgivers are Muslims since it is possible that some could go astray. Therefore, He referred the matter back to that which never alters, namely the Law of Allah. Also, when He *the Exalted* affirmed this, He always knew that one day some Muslims would come along and stray from His Way of Guidance.

We sometimes see a Muslim acting in an impious way, but do we attribute his behaviour to Islam? No, we look instead to see the ruling Allah affirmed in His Book. When we see that Allah's Law declares a certain action to be illegal and prescribes punishment for it, the punishment also applies to impious Muslim. For example, the True Lord says:' (As for) the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38) This law applies to both Muslims and non-Muslims. We do not maintain that this is the law of Muslims, and that is the law of pagan ignorance, rather, we say, 'This is the law of the Revealer of religion, Allah Himself.'

We may observe that the True Lord's Words 'But who is better than Allah in judgment?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 50) are in the form of a question. Naturally, a question is a way of conveying an image of something to the mind, not its reality. When a speaker asks a listener to tell him the answer, we wonder whether the questioner knows the answer or not. In normal life, this might be the case. We see it when someone says to another, 'Who visited you yesterday?' This is a question about the identity of a visitor, and it is a true question. However, what if the One speaking and asking the question has knowledge of everything so that nothing escapes Him? He is asking us to answer His question, 'Who is better than Allah in judgment?' This is an elevated form of rhetorical question.

Let me give another example, and Allah is beyond compare. If someone comes to you and claims you have not treated him well, even though he was in jail and you were the one who got him released. You say to him, ‘Who was it that went and paid the bail to get you out of jail?’ You are the one who did this, but you do not want to say it to him. You want him to be the one who admits what you did for him. So, you only say this because you are certain that he will have no answer other than to admit that you were the one who did all this for him. In this way, it becomes an admission, not an assertion.

The True Lord knows that when they think of an answer, they will only be able to say, ‘O Lord, you are the best lawgiver.’ This is an admission and a declaration on their part. For a believer, on the other hand, it is completely different since he acknowledges and recognises how Allah *Glorified is He* has favoured him: ‘But who is better than Allah in judgment for a people who are certain (in faith)?’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 50) Those who understand that Allah’s Law is the best are those who have reached the level of inner certainty. We know that certainty has different levels: when an honest person tells you something, you gain knowledge of this thing. For example, if he says to you, ‘I went to New York, and this city is composed of several islands and contains many huge buildings. Violence is rife there, and the people look as though they are possessed by a mad urge for wealth.’ When you hear this honest person say this, you take him seriously and consider his words to be certain, or truthful. This is ‘the knowledge of certainty’ that means it is a report from a person whose honesty you trust. Later, this person invites you to come with him, so you board a plane with him that takes off and rises to an altitude of forty thousand feet. After eleven hours, its altitude lowers a little so that you can see the lights of a huge city, and your friend tells you, ‘That is New York, and there are the skyscrapers.’ Now, the ‘knowledge of certainty’ has become an ‘eye of certainty’. When you go out together into the streets of New York, to the island of Manhattan and up the Empire State Building, the tallest skyscraper in New York, you now have’ definite certainty’.

The stages of certainty are three: 1) certain knowledge: which you acquire when an honest person tells you something; 2) eye of certainty: which you get when you see the thing itself; 3) definite certainty: which you acquire when you deal directly with whatever it is yourself. I once gave my students a specific example to explain the difference between the different kinds of certainty. I said to them, 'In Indonesia, I saw a kind of banana that was half a metre long.' Of course, the students believed me because they trusted my words, and I had given them an image based on my knowledge, so they arrived at certain knowledge. After this, I came into the room and opened a bag and took out of it a banana which was half a metre long; their certain knowledge transformed to become an eye of certainty. Then, I took a knife, peeled the banana, and put a piece of it in each one of their hands; thus, they came to acquire definite certainty. When the True Lord uses the word 'certainty' by itself, it means both what is known and what direct experience confirms to be true.

One of those who believe in Allah might say, 'I am completely convinced by the mere certain knowledge I possess, and I do not need to await an experience of true certainty since I would never entertain any doubt.' Therefore, we find that 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Were the veil to be lifted from me, my certainty would not be any greater.' Also, the True Lord illustrates this for us when He says: 'Competition in (worldly) increase diverts you. Until you visit the graveyards. No! You are going to know. Then no! You are going to know. No! If you only knew with knowledge of certainty, You will surely see the Hellfire. Then you will surely see it with the eye of certainty.' (*at-Takathur:* 1-7)

At first, there is certain knowledge; and then when we see hell as we pass over the Bridge, it will become eye of certainty. Allah, out of His Mercy, does not make us Muslims experience it with definitive certainty, rather, He says: 'And there is none of you except he will come to it.' (*Maryam:* 71) So, He gives us the image of hell. However, when the True Lord wants to give us an image of definitive certainty, He did that by saying: 'Then I swear by the setting of the stars, And indeed, it is an oath - if you could know - (most) great. Indeed, it is a noble Quran. In a Register well protected; None touches it except the purified. (It is) a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. Then is it to this statement that you are indifferent' (*al-Waqi'a:* 75-81). And all of this is a precursor to the True Lord's saying: 'Indeed, this is the true certainty.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 95)

Allah states here that the abode of the faithful believer will be paradise which the believer will see with an eye of certainty. As for the faithless disbeliever, his abode will be in hell. Therefore, all the people will see hell with an eye of certainty, but only those whom the True Lord places therein – we seek His refuge – will suffer it as definitive certainty, whilst the believers will enjoy the bliss of paradise with definitive certainty. And after this, the True Lord says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُواْ ٱلۡيَهُودَ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰٓ أَوۡلِيَآءَۘ بَعۡضُهُمۡ أَوۡلِيَآءُ بَعۡضٖۚ
وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُم مِّنكُمۡ فَإِنَّهُۥ مِنۡهُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِي ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٥١

You who believe, do not take the Jews and
Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other.
Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of
them – God does not guide such wrongdoers [51]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 51)

The address here is made to the faithful who are prohibited from befriending Jews and Christians. What does befriending include? It includes helping and aiding. The meaning of this is the following: 'O, you who believe, be well aware that you are entrusted with a mission, which is to remove errors and false beliefs from mankind. These errors were represented as distortions in religion that turned to sources of misguidance after having been sources of guidance. So beware of placing your hands in their hands by seeking aid and support from them.'

The True Lord's words 'Do not take Jews and Christians as friends' (*al-Ma'ida:* 51) constitute a commandment of moral responsibility and a requirement of faith in Allah. As long as you have faith in Allah, if you were to see that someone's faith is compromised because of how he disobeys his Lord's Guidance, you should not trust him to help you. This person has proved that he cannot even be trusted with his own responsibilities, so do you imagine that he can be trusted to help you with your responsibilities? The answer is no due to the fact that he has proved that he could not be trusted with the religious guidance which was revealed to him. Alliance means support, and support means to actively come to the aid of another. Do you think that they are really acting to give you support, or that they are only pretending to help you? You should know that they will do just what the True

Lord says they will do: 'Had they gone forth with you, they would not have increased you except in confusion.' (*at-Tawba:* 47)

Were they to join your ranks, they would do just what the hypocrites do to you. What else can you expect from those who betrayed the trust of the scriptures which were revealed to them? So alliance, support, and aid can only come from someone who is united with you in the same supreme goal; and as long as there are people who differ with Islam concerning the supreme goal, namely faith, then a Muslim should not trust them. Also, He says: 'they are but allies of one another.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 51)

Someone might ask how the True Lord could say of them: 'The Jews say, "The Christians have nothing (true) to stand on", and the Christians say, "The Jews have nothing to stand on", although they (both) recite the scripture. Thus, the polytheists speak the same as their words.' (*al-Baqara:* 113)

So we have three divisions here: Jews, Christians and polytheists. The polytheists of Quraysh said the same ignoble thing the people of the Book said, despite the fact that they were in constant mutual conflict with them, and each one of them denied the other; as Allah says: 'So, We caused among them animosity and hatred.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 14) So, how could He then say' they are but allies of one another'? (*al-Ma'ida:* 51) This requires a moment of contemplation so that we can see the full picture. We know that those who go against the True Lord's Way of Guidance could be at odds with one another over the issue of temporal power, but when they confront a great power that has the ability to bring ruin to all their houses of lies, they stand together against it. This is what we see in real life: Eastern powers used to be at conflict with Western powers, but no sooner did anything emerge connected to Islam that they then joined forces, even though Eastern powers had been defeated. The teachings of Islam are a threat to the authority of both sides, even though, in reality, Islam is a mercy for them which would take them out of darkness and into light. Therefore, they indeed act in accordance with the True Lord's Words: 'they are but allies of one another.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 51)

Also, when they are alone with each other, the True Lord says this about them: 'We caused among them animosity and hatred.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 14) Thus, we understand the nature of the relationships amongst the enemies of Islam.

The True Lord says: ‘whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is (one) of them.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 51) This means that whoever takes them as allies and helpers will assuredly fall into the idolatry of hypocrisy for he will be with the Muslims in his words, but with the enemies of Islam in his heart. The True Lord ends the verse by saying: ‘Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 51) The worst of all wrongdoing is to associate partners with Allah, which is most evil of all, as the True Lord says: ‘Polytheism is great injustice.’ (*Luqman:* 13) This is because when one man wrongs another by taking something that is rightfully his and giving it to another, is this man able to take anything from Allah? No, it is not possible, for man cannot wrong Allah. Nevertheless, he will be punished for his polytheism, and this is an evil that brings nothing but loss to the human soul. The one who associates partners with Allah takes nothing but loss; and this is the ultimate failure.

When evildoing brings some kind of benefit to an evildoer, it is a trifling evil, for the ugliest of evils is for a man to associate partners with Allah and gain nothing from this except grievous punishment. If a polytheist rebels against certain points of Allah’s Way of Guidance, can he dare to rebel against the Decrees of Allah which are beyond his free will, such as death?

The True Lord commands man to have faith, and the requirements of faith are the testimony of Allah’s Oneness, faith in His messengers, scriptures and in the Last Day, the performance of prayer, giving *zakat*, the fasting of *Ramadan* and the pilgrimage to Allah’s House, for those who are able to do so. The idolater who refuses to have faith and fails to fulfil his responsibilities, can he dare to refuse to fall ill or die? No, and hence he does a great evil to himself, which brings himself nothing but loss. The True Lord will not guide him since the meaning of guidance is for a man to find someone who will lead him to the road, which leads to a goal. ‘To guide’ means to show someone the way to a goal. Allah does not treat His creation unfairly by refusing to guide them; rather, those who wrong themselves by refusing to have faith thereby forgo their True Lord’s care simply by their own free choice. The True Lord then says:

فَتَرَى ٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٞ يُسَٰرِعُونَ فِيهِمۡ يَقُولُونَ نَخۡشَىٰٓ أَن تُصِيبَنَا دَآئِرَةٞۚ فَعَسَى
ٱللَّهُ أَن يَأۡتِيَ بِٱلۡفَتۡحِ أَوۡ أَمۡرٖ مِّنۡ عِندِهِۦ فَيُصۡبِحُواْ عَلَىٰ مَآ أَسَرُّواْ فِيٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ نَٰدِمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

And you [Prophet] will see the perverse at heart rushing to them for protection, saying, ‘We are afraid fortune may turn against us.’ But God may well bring about a triumph or some other event of His own making: then they will rue the secrets they harboured in their hearts [52] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 52)

What is meant in this verse is that there is a prohibition of taking the people of the Book as allies instead of Allah, and whoever hears this prohibition and has faith in his heart will heed it. However, as for he who conceals disease of hypocrisy in his heart will not only take them as allies but will hurry to do so, which requires reaching one’s goal in the shortest time possible. Compare ‘hurry into’ with Allah’s statement: ‘And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord.’ (*Al-’Imran:* 133)

The goal here is Allah’s forgiveness which believers must vie with one another to acquire it. When referring to ‘hurry into’, it means that he was already steeped in this thing from the beginning. So, when the True Lord says, ‘they hurry into their friendship’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 52), this suggests that they were already with these disbelievers from the onset, along with competing to befriend them. The general reason for this was the presence of a disease in their hearts that made them seek out any means possible; and these means were embodied in their words: ‘We fear lest some misfortune of a disaster may befall us.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 52)

So, they forged alliances in fear that good fortune would turn against them, ‘We need them because they have wealth and weapons.’ This was the position of the hypocrite ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy who said, ‘I am a man who fears the turns of fortune.’ He feared misfortunes and calamities. The opposite of this is what ‘Ubada ibn As-Samit *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘I shall seek the alliance of the Messenger of Allah and the believers and break my alliance with Jews and Christians.’ Allah says: ‘Perhaps Allah may bring a victory.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 52) We should be aware that one of the meanings of the Arabic word *Fath* which is commonly translated as ‘victory’ means ‘to judge’, as in the verse: ‘Our Lord! Judge between us and our people in truth’ (*al-A’raf:* 89).

So, when the True Lord says, ‘Perhaps Allah may bring a victory or a decision according to His Will’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 52), this means that He will ordain a judgment which will set the terms of alliance with the people of the Book and those who have no knowledge.

‘A decision according to His Will’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 52) means a judgment with which He will address believers. The one who believes in Allah performs actions which cause certain effects, while other things might come to believers without any effort on their part, but as pure Graces from Allah. So, Allah might bring about good fortune, which could mean the means with which you may utilise to make the best preparations possible to assault them, as He says in another verse: ‘for which you made no expedition with either horses or camels.’ (*al-Hashr:* 6)

An example of this is what happened at Banu An-Nadir, when the exile took place, and the believers claimed the land of Banu Qurayzha, which was a gift of truly good fortune from Allah. So Allah *the Exalted* treats believers in two different ways: the first is that they make preparations which lead to results: ‘Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands.’ (*at-Tawba:* 14). In this verse, the True Lord made the fighting of believers a means. As for the second way, it is that an event of His devising that brings about victory by His Lordly protection and power.

The words ’may’ and ’perhaps’ are expressions of hope, so that a speaker hopes that what follows the modal verb ‘may’ will happen. For example, if we were to say, ‘You may treat Zayd generously.’ The one who says this wants the one to whom he speaks to treat Zayd generously; and this means that the one who is speaking is not able to treat Zayd generously himself. If someone says, ‘It may be that Allah will treat Zayd generously’, this shifts the hope from man to Allah. The one who says this is a human being, and he is speaking about another human being, while hoping for something from Allah *Glorified is He*. His Power is greater than any other power. This means that the breadth of hope increases. So what if Allah Himself expresses hope? If He does, this hope will be realised beyond any doubt.

Therefore, we see different levels of hope: ‘one when a person hopes for something from another person and one when a person addresses a hope to

Allah for someone else. The highest level is when Allah expresses a hope for a person which He is the one to bring it. Also, since the final hope is between the Supreme Lord and Himself, then He would assure that '...Perhaps Allah may bring a victory or a decision according to His Will,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 52) and this was indeed realised. When they said, 'We fear that fortune may turn against us, so we will preserve our relations with the people of the Book for the sake of alliance and support.' After this, the victory by means of good fortune and Allah's devising has come – so what did they do then?

What they did was revealed in the following verse: 'Then they will become regretful for what they have been keeping as a secret in themselves.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 52) They felt remorse. Their statement revealed the disease of hypocrisy in their hearts. It is as though what they harboured within themselves was hatred for this religion, and its way of guidance and a dislike of seeing it become victorious over anything else. Therefore, the True Lord *the Exalted* tells us that their words were not the direct cause; rather, the direct cause was the disease that dwelt in their hearts; and this disease was their dislike to see the Islamic way gain victory since they lived off the wealth of those who opposed the religion. However, once Islam became dominant, they would lose their wealth. Likewise, before the coming of Islam, the people of the Book in Medina were people of knowledge, wealth, and prestige, and the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj would take usurious loans from them, buy weapons, and take their learning from them. However, when Islam came, Jews lost all of this, so their hearts became diseased, for Islam had taken their temporal power from them, the power which had made them distort Allah's Scriptures. Since they were prepared to oppose Allah by distorting His Scriptures, would not they also direct their enmity towards you, O, Muslims, and act as though they were aiding you when in reality they were plotting to betray you?! Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Then they will become regretful for what they have been keeping as a secret in themselves.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 52) When they hear this Divine Speech in the Quran which is repeated regularly everywhere they go, this was before there had been any victory or any event of Allah's devising. So, when they heard Allah *Glorified is He* telling them of their fate, it means that He had recorded what their souls had concealed, just as He had said before: 'and they say to themselves.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 52) This means that they said it to themselves, and the Creator heard it. When they heard all this, they would have announced that they had never said, as if they had not truly said it to themselves. However, they were amazed when the True Lord exposed them, recorded what they said, and then revealed it. They should have acknowledged that indeed they did say it which should have caused them to embrace faith, but they did not do so. Thus, they were doomed to remorse. The True Lord then says:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَهَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ٱلَّذِينَ أَقۡسَمُواْ بِٱللَّهِ جَهۡدَ أَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡۙ
إِنَّهُمۡ لَمَعَكُمۡۚ حَبِطَتۡ أَعۡمَٰلُهُمۡ فَأَصۡبَحُواْ خَٰسِرِينَ ٥٣

And the believers will say, ‘Are these the men who swore by God using their strongest oaths that they were with you?’ All they did was in vain: they have lost everything [53]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 53)

In this verse, believers will see the remorse of these people with their own eyes. Remorse is a woe felt presently that fills the heart for a previous action, such as when a person does something regrettable, and then its consequences become clear later. So, he says: ‘If only I had not done that!’ He feels down and sorry about what he did in the past, and the woe of his soul is also expressed on his face. However, when good fortune comes, the hypocrites and the people of the Book will be severely and grievously disappointed, so much so that they will not be able to deny it nor pretend to be cheerful. It will be so severe that it appears on their faces.

When this happens, believers will become aware of it and will say: ‘Are these the ones who swore by Allah their strongest oaths that indeed they were with you.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 53) If hypocrites were truly honest, then, they would be happy and their joy would appear on their faces; their pleasure would be obvious, but the opposite was the case, and they were filled with regret and disappointment.’ Their deeds have become worthless.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 53) This means that their deeds and their saying, ‘We are with you’ were all in vain. Allah says: ‘And they have become losers.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 53) The basic meaning of ‘loss’ is that one’s capital has diminished. The hypocrites did what they did in order to hide behind the Muslims, but they failed and were exposed. The True Lord then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَن يَرۡتَدَّ مِنكُمۡ عَن دِينِهِۦ فَسَوۡفَ يَأۡتِي ٱللَّهُ بِقَوۡمٖ يُحِبُّهُمۡ
وَيُحِبُّونَهُۥٓ أَذِلَّةٍ عَلَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٍ عَلَى ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ يُجَٰهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا
يَخَافُونَ لَوۡمَةَ لَآئِمٖۚ ذَٰلِكَ فَضۡلُ ٱللَّهِ يُؤۡتِيهِ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٥٤

You who believe, if any of you go back on your faith, God will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him, people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who strive in God's way without fearing anyone's reproach. Such is God's favour. He grants it to whoever He will. God has endless bounty and knowledge [54]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 54)

These words are addressed to believers, and every call of this kind is probably followed with a commandment, a glad tiding, or a warning to those who disobey. The only case which might seem problematic, though actually it is not, is if this expression is used and then followed by an exhortation to have faith, such as when Allah says: 'O you who have attained to faith! Believe.' (*an-Nisa':* 136) Why would the True Lord say this? To answer this, we have to ask ourselves, 'What is faith?' Faith is a deep belief of the creed in the heart so that it does not resurface to the mind to be debated again. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* addresses a believer and tells him to believe, this means that He is saying, 'You believed before I called you, and it was because of your faith that I called you. So, always protect this faith and renew it constantly, for I called you because of the faith I knew you possessed.' The True Lord is saying, 'O, you who believe, be constant in your faith and let every moment of the rest of your lives be filled with it which is a sign of loftiness and strength. You came to believe before I addressed you as believers, so hold onto this, and be firm in your faith.'

Also, the meaning of His Words 'whoever of you should revert from his religion' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) is that if anyone leaves Islam, Allah will replace them and will bring forth those who will not be like these apostates. So, those who apostatise should be made aware that they are not a loss of Allah's soldiers in the slightest since the One Who ordained His Law to be revealed to a final Prophet and Messenger would not place this messenger and this religion at the mercy of human vicissitudes. If people leave the religion, Allah *the Almighty* will replace them with others.

This verse differs slightly in its grammatical usage from a similar phrase in a verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* wherein Allah says: 'They ask you about the sacred month - about fighting therein. Say, "Fighting therein is great (sin), but averting (people) from the way of Allah and disbelief in Him and (preventing access to) *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* and the expulsion of its people therefrom are greater (evil) in the sight of Allah. And *Fitnah* is greater than killing." And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able. And whoever of you reverts from his religion (to disbelief) and dies while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the companions of the Fire, they will abide therein eternally.' (*al-Baqara:* 217)

So what is the reason for the True Lord using one grammatical version of the verb in one verse and another version of the verb in a different verse? We know that the Quran was revealed in the dialect of the Quraysh who were the leaders of the Arabs, and no other tribe could match them. We all know that no one dared to disturb the journeys the Quraysh undertook to Yemen and to the Levant. This was due to the fact that the Quraysh's homeland was the location of the Inviolable House of Allah, to which all the Arabs made pilgrimage, and if anyone were to disturb the caravan of the Quraysh, he would bring down punishment upon himself or his tribe. Therefore, it was the Inviolable House of Allah which gave this gift to the Quraysh, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* reminded them of this in the chapter of *al-Fil:* 'Have you not considered, (O Muhammad), how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan into misguidance? And He sent against them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of hard clay, and He made them like eaten straw.' (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

Allah's warning was carried out upon the Army of the Elephant since they intended to destroy Allah's Inviolable House. Then, the True Lord followed the chapter of *al-Fil* with the chapter of *Quraysh*, wherein He said: 'For the accustomed security of the Quraysh; Their accustomed security (in) the caravan of winter and summer.' (*Quraysh:* 1-2)

He thereby made it clear to them that as part of the protection He afforded His Inviolable House, Allah kept the Quraysh safe during their winter and summer journeys. Furthermore, had the Temple which gave the Quraysh their ascendancy been destroyed, the people would have attacked them from all sides. The evidence of this is when He says of those who intended to destroy Allah's Inviolable House: 'And He made them like eaten straw' (*al-Fil:* 5) and 'Their accustomed security (in) the caravan of winter and summer'. (*Quraysh:* 2)

Since this is what Allah did for the Quraysh, they should have worshipped Him: 'Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them, (saving them) from hunger and made them safe from fear.' (*Quraysh:* 3-4) So, the Quraysh derived their leadership of the Arabs from the location of the Inviolable House, and their dialect also became superior. All of the great markets of the Arabs that were held there, the most famous were the one of 'Ukazh. On these occasions, all the beautiful examples of language from the different tribes were presented to the Quraysh, so that their dialect was especially refined and pure. Every poet would offer the best poetry he could muster, and every orator would give the best speeches he could compose. As a result of this, the Quraysh would hear the finest examples of language. This meant that their dialect of Arabic was the highest, and when the time came to record the Quran in writing, the counsel given was the following, 'If you differ amongst yourselves on anything, then write it in the dialect of the Quraysh.' This was due to the fact that the dialect of the Quraysh had adopted the best features of all the other dialects. The Arabs of Tamim and Hijaz differed on certain points. It is as though Allah *the Exalted* gave one verse in the dialect of Hijaz and another in the dialect of Tamim, which is further evidence that the Quran has not come to bolster Quraysh dominance, rather, it came for all of mankind. Therefore, we find each dialect represented by one of its words in order to make it clear that the Quran is meant for all people.

When we read the True Lord's Words, 'whoever of you should revert from his religion – Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54), we know that He is telling us that He is able to bring forth people of faith if others apostatise, just as He told us before: 'And whoever of you reverts from his religion (to disbelief) and dies while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the companions of the Fire, they will abide therein eternally.' (*al-Baqara:* 217) This tells us that an apostate is destined for hell after the coming of the Last Hour. However, the Words, 'Whoever of you should revert from his religion – Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) tell us that something else will happen even before the Resurrection comes. Who could imagine that Allah would send down a Quran which challenges the world, and then declare unequivocally in this Quran that something will happen that is still unknown to man, if it were not truly going to happen? The phrase 'will love' infers something which will happen in the future. We ask, in this respect that who could declare what choice people will make about faith? No one can, but Allah can do so, and He is declaring that He will bring forth people who believe to replace those who apostatise.

Also, if people had apostatised and then waited to see who would replace them, but no one did, then what would have happened? Everyone would have certainly left the religion. Allah *the Exalted* would not have unequivocally stated and placed in the mouth of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that some people would apostatise unless He knew that people indeed would do so; the knowledge in this verse, as in the rest of the Quran, came from Allah, Exalted and Glorified, and the True Lord stated it as true fact. Also, are there any people whom Allah loves, and yet who love Him not? We say that this does not happen with Allah, but it does happen in human life, as the Arab poet said:

You are my beloved, but I seek refuge
Lest I be one who loves, but is not loved

The misery of those who love occurs when one loves someone, but the love is not reciprocated so that the one who loves spends his life weeping. We may observe that Allah's Love is mentioned first in this verse: 'He will love and who will love Him.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) This is due to the fact that it is the way in which knowledge is revealed: The True Lord knew that they would turn to Him, so He loved them; and when they came forth, they did what made them beloved to Allah. Furthermore, what is 'love'? It is the affection of the heart, and we have spoken much already about this. We know that there is a kind of love which is determined by reason, while another is determined not by reason, but by emotion.

For example, when we go to a doctor, he prescribes medicine for us which is bitter and tastes unpleasant. We find that the one for whom this medicine is prescribed goes to the pharmacy to ask for it, and if he does not find it there, he goes around asking every pharmacy in town. If he does not find it, he asks someone who is travelling abroad to bring it back for him. If his friend brings him this medicine, he is filled with joy and happiness. Does this sick person accept this bitter medicine with his emotion or his reason? He accepts it and loves it with his reason. Rational love, as we said, means to prefer what is beneficial. For example, we find that the father of an unintelligent child loves the intelligent child of another man. He loves his own unintelligent son with his emotion, but he loves the other man's son because of the intelligence he possesses. Therefore, there is rational love, and there is emotional love. This is what happens on the human level, but it does not happen with Allah *Glorified is He*.

They love Allah *the Exalted* with their reason, and their love might increase until it becomes emotional love. This might be tested when Allah sends people something which seems to be evil on the outside, but they continue to feel love for Him. This means that their love for Allah has gone from being merely rational to being emotional as well. A story about 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* explains this point for us. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you (fully) believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self.'(1) Some people might have told the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was more beloved to them than their wealth and children, but 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'You are more beloved to me than my wealth and my son, but not my own self.' So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated his words, 'None of you (fully) believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self.' Upon this, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* realised that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* meant rational love. Since 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* knew that no one is held responsible for emotional love, he replied, 'I now love you more than my own self.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'Now, O 'Umar!' It was as though at that moment 'Umar's faith was perfected. So do not ask, O, believer, whether Allah's Love is rational or emotional, for the meaning of 'Allah's love' is the continuous Grace He shows to those whom He loves in this life. In the Hereafter, the True Lord will receive them into His blessings and grant them the Grace of the beautiful vision of Him: 'For them who have done good is the ultimate (reward) and extra.' (*Yunus:* 26) The 'ultimate reward' is paradise, and scholars say that 'extra' means the beautiful vision of the One Who bestows all this good.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (iv. 336) and As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-mManthur (iii. 223)*

Allah says: 'Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) When the True Lord says, 'will bring', we should know that what comes after these words is one of the signs of prophethood which came upon the tongue of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Allah's Quran, for all of this indeed happened just as the Quran said it would, and certain people apostatised. Those who apostatised were of two kinds: those who apostatised during the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who apostatised during the reign of Abu Bakr and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them.* The words 'will bring' indicate that a certain amount of time would pass before what followed would occur.

The first apostasies were in Yemen after the Farewell Pilgrimage and before the passing of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* There was a deceitful soothsayer in Yemen named 'Abhala ibn Ka'b who was known as Dhu Al-Khimar, or Dhu Al-Himar according to another narration. In the books of Islamic history, he is known as Al-Aswad Al-Anasi. He was one of the two liars of whom the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke when he said, 'While I was sleeping, I was given the treasures of the earth and two gold bangles were put in my hands. I did not like that, but

I received the inspiration that I should blow on them, and I did so, and both of them vanished. I interpreted it as referring to the two liars between whom I am present: the ruler of San'a and the ruler of Yamaha.'(1)

This soothsayer owned a donkey which he had trained in a special way just as monkeys are trained. It would stop when he told it to stop and go when he told it to go, and this soothsayer considered his command over the donkey to be miraculous. Or according to the narration which calls him 'Dhu Al-Khimar' as he used to wear a veil over his face. It is strange that no apostate was ever asked for any sign to prove his prophethood by those who followed him.

The first thing which must be done to confirm a man's claim to be a prophet is for the people to ask him for a sign to prove it and a miracle which they can recognise, but we never find this to be the case with any apostate. How could those who follow the apostate not bother to ask him about himself and his claim to be a prophet? Also, the miracle which proves his message needs to be genuine, for this is what happens with any messenger. How could the people believe in someone when he does not bring miracle?

We must consider this matter psychologically and say that religiousness is a natural instinct of man, and even the man who is irreligious gets angry and sad when we call him 'irreligious'. Therefore, we find that every imbecile amongst such people considers himself to have a religion and does not imagine himself to be an imbecile with no religion or morality. This is why the True Lord said: 'For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.' (*al-Kafirun:* 6)

It is as though the basic truth of natural disposition is that religion is essential for man; and as long as this is the case, then why is everyone not religious? It is due to the fact that religion is not only a name or an attribute, but is also a matter of adherence to moral responsibilities. What makes people fear religions is that they do not want to endure the hardships of its responsibilities. This is why when a man comes along and says, 'I am a prophet, and my miracle is that I excuse you from praying and paying the poor-due. Also, I allow you to look at each other's womenfolk.' The people who follow their desires and are devoid of insight will be attracted by this, along with saying, ‘This is a wonderful religion!’ They will surrender to it and further deceive themselves into thinking that they are religious, even though, in fact, they are excusing themselves from religious observance. It is a strange thing that when people claimed to be prophets in the pasts – and when they continue to do it in our times – we do not find any educated people going to such people and asking them what their miracle is, but everyone asks them what their teachings are!

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and Ahmad*

Furthermore, when the people of Yemen asked Dhu Al-Khimar what his teachings were, his response was to excuse them from some religious obligations beginning by lessening the number of prayers, lowering the poor-due alms, and allowing them to mix with the womenfolk of others. Some of the people found these teachings agreeable and were fooled by them, so consequently they forgot all about asking for a miracle. All who falsely claimed to be prophets were of this type, which is why we find that everyone who falsely claims to be a prophet tries to make the teachings of the religion easier. One tried to decrease the poor-due alms, and a woman named Sujah tried to decrease the prayer, while a third tried to lighten the issue of usury by permitting it, but none of them ever brought a miracle. Some people, nevertheless, followed them simply because they made the religion easier. False prophets only seek to please souls that are too weak to bear the burden of Allah’s religion by adhering to it faithfully and devotedly.

An example(1) of this is what happened in Alexandria when a false prophet appeared and made lawful an insidious evil. Some of the educated people who wanted a religion that would satisfy their whims followed him. It was like this in old times too. Historians have described how Dhu Al-Khimar (the one with the veil) or Dhu Al-Himar (the owner of the donkey – it was said that he had a trained donkey who would bow on hearing his injunction), who as we said was an illusionist, enchanted the hearts of those who heard his words. He showed them wonders and was thus able to claim the rule of Yemen after which he announced his apostasy. He took control of Sana’ and all that lies between At-Ta’if and Bahrain, and his malice spread like wildfire.

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(1) The story of the Alexandria man who claimed to be prophet

Our master Mu'adh ibn Jabal *Allah be pleased with him* had been appointed governor of Yemen by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and he told of what had happened, saying that a soothsayer named Dhu Al-Khimar (or Dhu Al-Himar) had apostatised. Our master Mu'adh ibn Jabal *Allah be pleased with him* went to Hadramaut, where a message reached him from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him to send men to fight Dhu Al-Khimar, and the Muslims planned the best way to carry out the Prophet's command. After this, a man of the Daylami tribe named Fayruz went in where Dhu Al-Khimar was sleeping and killed him in his bed.

Despite the distance between Yemen and Medina, that very night the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Al-Aswad Al-'Anasi has been slain this night.'(1) By the end of that month, news came that the false prophet had been killed. And this was one of the miracles of prophethood.

During the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* some people's beliefs were shaken by this incident of Dhu Al-Khimar (or Dhu Al-Himar), but at the same time, this event was like a shot of vaccine because it caused immunity to develop. Allah *the Exalted* told them about it first: 'whoever from among you turns back from his religion, Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54).

The True Lord said this in order to give believers spiritual immunity. It is as though He said to believers: 'Do not think that you will not encounter any challenges to your religion and belief. Indeed you will encounter them.' It is as though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'People might think that as long as I am alive, I will administer Allah's Way of Guidance on Earth. However, when I die, perhaps they will abandon their faith.'

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed the words of Allah *the Almighty* to believers, the intention behind it was to impart spiritual immunity. Had the Muslims been caught unaware by the apostasy, along with Allah having not warned them of it beforehand, they would not have had the necessary immunising cautio, which is the first step towards protection. We know that modern science has found a way of isolating the microbes or viruses which cause infectious diseases, and scientists can weaken these microbes or viruses, and then place a little of them into the human body, so that the body's defence mechanisms fight the microbe or virus and defeat it. Once this is done, the body possesses the power to defend itself against this disease. This is the True Lord's aim when He says these Noble Words: 'whoever from among you turns back from his religion, Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). Therefore, when apostasy occurs, the Muslims would not be caught unaware by it, and they would trust that this apostasy would be a means of the fruition of Allah's promise: 'Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). Thus, believers have no need to panic when apostasy occurs, along with their souls not being disturbed. When apostasy occurs, believers should say, 'The One speaks truthfully when He says there will be apostasy also speaks truthfully when He says: "Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) When the Arabic particle *sa* (will) precedes a verb, this means that the event will occur in the near future, such as when the True Lord says: 'The foolish among the people will say…' (*al-Baqara:* 142). He says, '*sayaqulu*' (will say). When the particle *sawfa* (will - in time) is used, this means that a larger amount of time will pass before the event occurs. This is why we see that apostasy extended during the rule of Abu Bakr and 'Umar Allah *be pleased with them*.

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(1) *Kanz Al-'Ummal*

What will be the attributes of the people whom Allah *the Almighty* will bring forth in the verse: 'Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him (who are) humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers; they strive in the cause of Allah and do not fear the blame of a critic.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) There are six attributes here: Allah *Glorified is He* loves them, they love Him, they are humble towards the believers, they are powerful against disbelievers, they strive hard in Allah's Cause, and they do not fear to be the blame of someone who might criticise them.

How can a believing man be humble and powerful at the same time? It can happen because the True Lord does not want us to have the same attitude all the time; rather, He wants us to react to our circumstances. When a situation requires a believer to be kind hearted, he must deal with it with kind-heartedness. When a situation requires a believer to be tough, he must deal with it with toughness. When a situation requires generosity, he must be generous. A Muslim must react appropriately to every situation and must not react the same way to everything. Were a believer to be humble at all times, a circumstance requiring power might arise that he would be unable to deal with. On the other hand, if he were powerful all the time, a situation requiring humility might arise which he would be unable to deal with. Therefore, the True Lord has made a believer's heart flexible and able to deal with each situation appropriately.

A believer must be powerful and undefeatable in the face of his enemy. He must meet him with strength. He must be humble and tender towards his parents as the True Lord commands: 'And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion…' (*al-Isra':* 24). If a believer is humble and tender towards his parents, does this negatively affect his powerfulness? No, this is something which rather increases a man's powerfulness. Allah speaks of them as those:' (who are) humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). In Arabic, '*adhillatun ala al-mu'minin*' literally says 'humble toward the believers'. It uses the proposition *ala* which means 'on or upon', rather than the more usual *li* which means 'to or towards'. Why does the True Lord say it this way (when the word *ala* (upon), or in this verse translated as towards) implies that something is above, whilst humility means for something to be below)? This expression is worded this way for a wise reason which is that as long as a believer loves Allah, He loves him, and he humbles himself before his fellow believers, this raises his status. It is not humility in the ordinary sense of the word; rather, it is kindness, affection, and mercy. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'humble towards' (*ala* (literally upon)) 'the believers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54), this means that believers have affection for one another, so this affection appears to be humility. The root of the word *adhilla* (humble) contains the letters *dh* and *l*, which scholars say has two opposing meanings. For example, the True Lord says: 'And we have subjected them to them' (*Ya Sin:* 72). He says, '*dhallalnaha*', or 'We subjected them'. This means that we have made them subject to man's control. This subjugation is not the result of man's overpowering of animals; rather, it is the result of Allah's subdual of them; they are meant to serve man. Another example is found when the True Lord says: 'and follow the ways of your Lord submissively' (*an-Nahl:* 69). He says, '*dhulula*', or 'submissively'.

This means to do so calmly and yieldingly; and this is the humbleness of tenderness. Also, there is *dhull* which means 'humbleness' or 'the opposite of pride', whereas *dhill* which means 'tenderness' or 'the opposite of hardness'. Therefore, if we consider the word in its meaning of 'tenderness', then a believer's tenderness towards his fellow believer is *dhill*, whereas if we consider the word in its meaning of the opposite of pride, then it is *dhull*, or 'humbleness'. When a believer is humble towards his fellow believers, this means that he is humble in his tenderness and affection. Also, when the True Lord wants to describe how something is within the reach of a believer so he does not have to exert effort to get it, He says: 'Its (fruit) to be picked are hanging near.' (*al-Haqqa:* 23)

In another verse, He says: 'And low will hang, down its clusters of fruit, most easy to reach.' (*al-Insan:* 14) He says '*dhullilat*', or 'low will hang' and '*tadhlila*', or 'most easy to reach'. This means that its fruit will hang low and within reach, and it will fall in the place where a believer will be. If a believer stands, he will be able to pick it by stretching out his hand, and even if he reclines, he will be able to reach the fruit because it will hang low for him. Even if he lies down, the branches of fruit will come down to him. Thus, he will be able to eat them at any time and in any position.

In this verse, the True Lord says, 'humble towards the believers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) which means that the humbleness of a believer towards his fellow believer elevates his rank since he is blessed by being loving and being loved by Allah, *the Exalted*. There is no exaltation higher than this. Therefore, the Hadith that reiterates this is the following: 'When a man humbles himself to Allah, He raises him.' This means that when he humbles himself, while remembering Allah *Glorified is He* and doing so for His sake, Allah raises him.

Allah says, '…powerful against the disbelievers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). This is the fourth attribute of believers in this verse, after the True Lord says: 'Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him (who are) humble toward the believers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). A believer is powerful towards disbelievers in that he is invincible, and as long as he realises this, he will be happy to join fighting in Allah's Cause: 'they strive in the cause of Allah' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). The phrase *Al-jihadu fi sabil* Allah (strive in the cause of Allah) refers to a particular kind of striving: a man might strive to protect or defend his nationality or some other allegiance. However, as far as the religion is concerned, all these allegiances are worthless unless they spring from allegiance to Allah's Way of Guidance so that His Word is supreme.

The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was once asked about the best kind of fighting: Abu Musa *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that a man came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'A man fights for booty, he fights for fame and he fights to be seen by others. So who fights in Allah's cause?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'The one who fights to make the Word of Allah supreme fights in His cause.'(1)

As long as a believer is beloved to Allah, and loves Him, is humble towards believers and is powerful against disbelievers –as long as this is the case, when he is given a position of authority over other believers, none of them should despise to be under his command. In this way, a believer stays away from having arrogance and conceit since he is striving in Allah's cause. Also, should anyone criticise him for doing so, he does not allow this. It is as though Allah clarifies this point: 'Be well aware that you should not imagine that those whom Allah loves, who love Him, who are humble towards believers, who are powerful against disbelievers and who strive in Allah's Cause will not be exposed to mocking, scorn and condemnation from those who wish to dissuade them from this striving in the cause of Allah *the Exalted*.

Therefore, the True Lord says: 'do not fear the blame of a critic.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) This has been clearly manifested throughout the history of Islam, and the True Lord did indeed bring forth people whom He loved, who loved Him, who were humble towards believers, who were powerful against disbelievers, who strove hard in Allah's cause and who did not fear the blame of someone who criticised them.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*, *Muslim and Ahmad*

Also, when we examine this verse closely, we see that the indication of the words that contain *sawfa* (will in time) first began to be manifested during the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When he *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about those whom Allah loves, who love Him and who have these attributes, he pointed towards Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari *Allah be pleased with him* and said, 'They shall come from this man.'(1)

When Allah revealed His words: 'And (to) others of them who have not yet joined them' (*al-Jumu'a:* 3), Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* asked the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*' Who are these people, O, Messenger of Allah?' So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* placed his hand on Salman *Allah be pleased with him* and said, 'Even were faith as far-flung as Pleiades, a man of these people would attain it.'(2)

The first apostasy happened in Yemen, among the people of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari *Allah be pleased with him*. As we said, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wrote a message to Mu'adh ibn Jabal *Allah be pleased with him* then Fayruz Ad-Daylami volunteered to assassinate the false prophet Dhu Al-Khimar (or Dhu Al-Himar) and succeeded. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* informed the people of what happened that very night even though the news of the assassination did not reach Medina until after Muhammad returned to the Most Exalted Companion, and this was one of the miraculous signs of his prophethood.

Also, it occurred during the Prophet's time that Musaylama, the Liar(3) claimed to be a prophet and wrote a letter to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* which said: 'From Musaylama, the messenger of Allah to Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah'. Therefore, he was unable to deny that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly a Prophet of Allah *Glorified is He*. Musaylama's letter continued: 'Then, half of the earth shall be mine, and the other half will be yours.' It seems that he believed that it was important to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the earth should be divided. So, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* wrote a reply to him with words filled with the gifts of true prophethood: "From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to Musaylama, the Liar. Peace be upon him who follows guidance! The earth belongs to Allah. He causes it to be inherited from whomever He wills of His servants. The (best) outcome is for the righteous.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim and At-Tabari in (At-Tafsir)*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad*

(3) *The story of Musaylama, the Liar, alleging to be a prophet*

However, Musaylama did not heed the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a campaign was prepared to deal with him. The battle finally took place during the rule of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and it was severely brutal. Wahshey, the man who had killed Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* at the battle of Uhud, wanted to expiate his sins, so he went to kill Musaylama. He, thus, uttered his famous words: 'As an ignorant pagan, I killed the best of men (meaning Hamza), and as a Muslim, I killed the worst of men (Musaylama).' This was the end of Musaylama.

There was a third false prophet during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* named Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid(2) of the tribe of Banu Asad. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* to deal with this false prophet. When the imposter learned that Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* was coming to fight him, he fled. However, later he embraced Islam sincerely and became a true Muslim.

We should note that the Arabic word *ridda* (apostasy) is used to describe the events, which we have just described and which met these responses. We do not call them *radd* which simply means return; the reason for this is that *radd* might mean a return to the truth, while *ridda* always means a return to falsehood. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'refer it to Allah and the Messenger' (*an-Nisa':* 59). He says, '*rudduh*' (refer it to). As for the one who apostatises, he returns to falsehood. It is curious that the word *ridda* (apostasy) which Islam uses to refer to abandoning faith to disbelief is also used by the enemies of Islam who do not believe in any religion. When a follower of communism abandons it, they call this *ridda*. If they were truly people of principle, they should have used another word, but there is no word which describes the return to falsehood except *ridda*. Likewise, the word *minbar* only exists in Islam where it means the pulpit on which a preacher stands to give the Friday sermon. Therefore, when they establish a left-wing organisation, they speak of the '*minbar* of the left'. So, that raises the question, 'Why did you take this word from us?'

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Hanifa in his (Musnad) and Ibn Sa'd in (At-Tabaqat A-Kubra)*

(2) *The story of Ṭulayha ibn Khuwaylid alleging to be a prophet*

Another example is when a writer writes: 'This dancer worships at the *"mihrab"* (prayer-niche) of art (or in English, we might say, 'worships at the altar of art'), we ask, 'Why is he using the word *"mihrab"?'* You should look for another word. All of this indicates that religious language is the richest language, which is why they resort to using it.

Islam is often superficially criticised because its law states that an apostate must be executed. We rhetorically ask: 'Does anyone really think that this is to Islam's detriment?' No, it is a credit to Islam since when a man embraces Islam, he embraces the complete religion. Those who leave it forfeit their lives, while those who are thinking about embracing Islam must therefore be cautious with their lives. Islam, therefore, cannot be embraced lightly; rather, it must be embraced seriously. Everyone should be aware of this before they embrace it, for they are entering a complete religion, not a game or vain amusement.

All those who wish to embrace Islam must think hard and find their way to the truth since their life will be the price of leaving Islam. This proves the seriousness of this religion and how unforgivable it is to enter it frivolously. Since it is a serious matter to embrace Islam, this gives the opportunity of choice. Therefore, those who would choose to embrace Islam must understand that the price for leaving it, after having entering it, is one's life. When a religion asks a person to think seriously before embracing it, is this deception or sincere advice? It is sincere advice, and therefore, it is a credit to Islam. It is a matter of public knowledge so that everyone who enters it knows that this is the precondition. Had Islam wanted to make things trivially easy, it would have said, 'Come and join Islam, and you can renounce it whenever you want.' Rather, the true religion does not deceive anyone, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'that those who perished (through disbelief) would perish upon evidence and those who lived (in faith) would live upon evidence' (*al-Anfal:* 42).

We have previously spoken about the apostasies that occurred during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*, but the words *sawfa* (will - in time) that occur in Allah's Speech: 'Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) indicate that the affair would be protracted. Apostasies also occurred during the rule of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and seven men appeared claiming to be prophets, such as Banu Fazara, the people of 'Uyayna ibn Hisn, who apostatised and to whom Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* sent troops to fight; the people of Ghatfan apostatised as well. There were also the people of Qurra ibn Habidah ibn Salama, and Banu Salim, the people of Al-Fuja'a ibn 'Abd Yalil to whom Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* sent armies to chastise them; and there was also Yarbu', the people of Malik ibn Nuwayra, and some of the tribe of Banu Tamim, amongst whom Sujah bint Al-Mundhir, the wife of Musaylama claimed to be a prophetess. There was also kinda, the people of Al-Ash'ath ibn Qays, and the people of Al-Hutyam ibn Dabi'a who were named Banu Bakr ibn Wa'il and resided in Bahrain. Our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* abolished all of them which made many people say that the people whom Allah loves, who love Him and who have the attributes which this verse mentions, were Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and his companions. However, does this discount the possibility that any other group of people amongst them might have the likes of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*? No, it does not, and an example of this is 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* because of what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said on the day of Khaybar: Salama ibn Al-Akwa' *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was late for the Prophet at Khaybar due to an infection in his eye, so he said, 'Shall I stay behind when Muhammad has gone out to fight?' So, 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* went out and set out to catch up with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. On the eve of battle, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I shall surely give…', or he said, 'he shall surely take the banner tomorrow to a man whom Allah and His Messenger love.' – Or he said, '... a man who loves Allah and His Messenger' – 'and Allah will give us victory by his hands.' Then, came 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* whom the people had not expected to attend. Then, the people said, 'Here comes 'Ali!' So, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* gave the banner to ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* and Allah *the Exalted* gave the Muslims victory by his hands.’ (1)

During the rule of our master ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab only one apostasy took place. It came from Al-Ghasasinah, led by Jabala ibn Al-Ayham(2), a Levantine tribe who were allies to the Byzantines. Jabala was their chief, and he embraced Islam and came to circumambulate in the Sacred Mosque, bringing much wealth with him as the chief of the tribe of Ghassan. They were renowned for their horsemanship and fine clothing, and Jabala was wearing a long cloak. Someone stepped on Jabala’s cloak and caused him to fall down, so Jabala slapped the man, who informed ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* of this. ‘Umar declared that the man had the right to exact retribution, and the Ghassanite chief said, ‘I shall purchase this slap for one thousand *Dinars*’, but the man refused, so Jabala increased his offer to two thousand *dinars,* but the man refused this, too; so he increased his offer to ten thousand *dinars,* but the man refused this, too. So, Jabala said to ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* ‘Give me some time to think about this.’ When ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* gave him some time, Jabala fled to the Levant and became Christian. Thus, we see the extent of the words *sawfa* (will -in time) and how much time they covered; and indeed they extend even to the present day. In our time, apostasy came from Persia in the form of Baha’ism and Babism.

The goal of the apostate is to gain superficial prestige in this worldly life if he has the desire to rule; and the modus operandi of the apostate is to make religious obligations lighter for those who follow him. Those who claim to be prophets usually make up their own sacred laws are only seeking prestige for themselves in this world, and those who follow these false prophets are only trying to make their religious responsibilities lighter. Why do they wish to make their religious responsibilities lighter? It is due to the fact that man is instinctively religious which is proved by the fact that if we call a disbeliever ‘irreligious’ or ‘immoral’, he will become angry and fly into a rage. The reason he does so is that he does not like the idea that anyone else should deny that he is religious and moral in some form or other. We might see a

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*, *Muslim*, *At-Tirmidhi*, *Ibn Majah*, *and Ahmad*

(2) The story of the palm of Jabala ibn Al-Ayham

Muslim who has sinned numerous times, thus he wronged himself, but when he hears someone insult Islam, he becomes enraged and begins to defend Allah's religion. This is the faith-based natural of which Allah *Glorified is He* has placed within all people; and what makes religion difficult for the human soul is not religious disposition, rather, religious responsibilities are what most consider difficult since they are a matter of free will. The True Lord has placed all the responsibilities of religion inside the realm of human free will, and He did not wish to make them a matter of compulsion. Had He willed to make all people believers, no one would have been able to disbelieve: 'Perhaps, (O Muhammad), you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain humbled.' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 3-4)

Therefore, no one has the ability to defy Allah, but He willed to make the responsibilities of faith subject to free will. Man is free to fulfil or not to fulfil the responsibilities of faith, and either way he will be requited. An example of this is the tongue: Allah *the Almighty* created it with the ability to say, 'There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is his Messenger.' This tongue is also able to say – Allah forbid – 'I do not believe in Allah.'

The tongue does not disobey its owner, for Allah *Glorified is He* created it with the ability to express the secrets of man's heart, along with making it subject to man's will. Another example drawn from our own inventions during this time is the television which man made to be a device compelled to show whatever programmes he decides to broadcast on it. If man uses television to broadcast religious and scientific films and programmes which reveal the secrets of Allah's creation and strengthen man's spiritual values; this is a faith-based decision. On the other hand, if he broadcasts depraved films that specialise in buffoonery and iniquity, this is a decision that places him amongst those who spread corruption on the earth.

So, the True Lord created man with the ability to adhere to the responsibilities of faith and also the ability to flout them. When Allah *the Exalted* commands His servants to implement or adhere to a responsibility of faith, He knows that man is more than capable to do this, for He has complete knowledge of His servants. Likewise, if it were not within their power to adhere to the responsibility, He would not have ordained it for them. We all know the difference between *ibad* (worshippers or servants) and *abid* (slaves): all beings are Allah's slaves, and a man remains His slave even if he despises his responsibilities. If he does not live up to his responsibilities, he is, nevertheless, compelled in many ways which he cannot evade. For example, no one can stop breathing by their own free will, for as we know this is something which occurs whether one likes it or not. Likewise, no one can continue to breathe once his time to die comes, and no one can resist illness when it comes to him. Therefore, man's haughtiness and his disobedience of Allah *Glorified is He* in certain matters does not mean that he has completely freed himself from Him in every way, for the True Lord does what He wills. No one can control his beginning when he is born, and nor can he control his end when he dies; and many things occur between the brackets of birth and death which no one has the ability to control. Free will only applies to some things, and everything else is a matter of compulsion, and we are all Allah's slaves therein. However, the True Lord has given us the freedom to choose for the rest of life's affairs.

The truly intelligent person is the one who asks his Lord, 'you have created me with free will, O Lord. What would You like me to do?' The person then finds himself faced with Allah's Commandments and Prohibitions, along with His Way of Guidance and its requirements. This Way of Guidance sets out the guidelines to what a believer may do and what he must not do. A believer then says, 'I relinquish my free will in favour of Your Will, O Lord.' The servant who relinquishes his free will in favour of his Creator's Will becomes one of those servants whom the True Lord calls' The (true) servants of the Most Merciful.' (*al-Furqan:* 63)

In our daily lives, we see examples of what takes place between the head of a family and its members. The head of the family says to his children, 'You want to go on an outing. So, where would you like to go?' One of the family members says, 'Let us go to such-and-such place', while another says, 'Take us wherever you like as long as we are together.' It is certain that the one who says the latter to the head of the family will earn a special place in his affections. If this happens amongst human beings, then what do we think of the favour which will be earned by the servant who says this to his Most Generous Creator? He will certainly attain to a high rank since he moves from the level of slave to the level of worshipper, of whom the True Lord says: 'And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them (harshly), they say (words of) peace, and those who spend (part of) the night to their Lord prostrating and standing (in prayer). And those who say, 'Our Lord, avert from us the punishment of Hell. Indeed, its punishment is ever adhering. Indeed, it is evil as a settlement and residence.' (*al-Furqan:* 63-66)

These are the true servants of the Most Gracious whom He loves and who love Him. As for the one who rebels against Allah's Way of Guidance, he should be aware that he cannot rebel against His decrees of fate. The True Lord wants to give us spiritual immunity when He says 'O, you who believe, whoever of you should revert from his religion, Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) This immunity is manifested in the fact that a believer must be careful of those who rebel against Allah's religion by claiming to be prophets sent after Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This verse explains to us the gravity of what these apostates do. One such apostate says, 'I am a prophet sent by Allah.' Then, this false prophet finds people to listen to him, believe him and follow him. Also, he may not find anyone who asks him, 'If you are indeed a prophet then, what is your miracle?' He only finds those who believe his lies due to the whims of their souls. These whims can be summarised by saying that this false prophet brings an easy religious message which deceives his followers, who in turn deceive themselves into imagining that they are devoutly religious, when in fact they are following a false message. Many people have claimed to be prophets or have claimed to be the awaited Mahdi (He is the prophesied redeemer of Islam who will rule for five, seven, nine, or nineteen years according to differing interpretations before the Day of Judgment. He will rid the world of evil); however, no one had ever asked them for a miracle to prove their prophethood since the false prophet lures people by offering to lighten their religious responsibilities.

We find that some well-educated people, who claim to use their intelligence in all matters, follow these charlatans. For example, a few years ago we saw incredible scenes when someone claimed to be a prophet, and several men and women believed in him and followed him. A married woman would go to this false prophet and kiss him, and even let him kiss her on the lips right in front of her husband. What has happened to men's honour to allow such things to happen? This is the nature of these misguided swindlers who claim that they have guidance; indeed, it is guidance that leads to hell.

Do these movements spring from Islam? No, they come from people who hate Islam. For example, someone entraps a man of special talent and vision, and then convinces him that he can play the role of a false prophet. An example of this is the Indian Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who founded the Qadiani movement. We know that the English colonised India for many years and considered it the jewel in the British crown. We also know that the enemies of Islam, led by the colonising force, attempted to undermine it since they saw that religious adherence had allowed Muslims to conquer whole empires, not by the sword but by protecting people's right of choosing religion.

Although the message of Islam began in Arabia, it spread throughout the world, and the Persians and Byzantines had capitulated before those who carried the banner of 'There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Messenger.' After this, we find that it was Muslims who defeated the Tatars, and likewise the Wars of the Crusades were waged in successive campaigns, but those who fought for Islam resoundingly defeated them.

The occupation of India was made difficult by Islam due to the power of the faith and the willingness of the faithful to fight in its cause. Therefore, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad came along and tried to weaken Muslims' power to fight in Allah's cause. He said, 'I have come to you to abrogate the principle of the struggle in Allah's Cause"*jihad*" from Islamic doctrine.' Mirza Ghulam Ahmad dared to announce that fighting was abrogated, although the True Lord says in His Noble Book, the Holy Quran: 'Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you.' (*al-Baqara:* 216)

With His infinite Power, Allah *the Almighty* respites but never neglects. Thus, the cholera epidemic came to India in 1908 to deal with Ghulam

Ahmad and brought his existence to an end, just as the True Lord says: 'Allah will bring forth (in place of them) a people He will love and who will love Him' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54).

In Persia, as well, the homeland of Salman Al-Farisi *Allah be pleased with him* a man emerged and claimed to be a prophet, and he was clever enough to attempt to associate himself with Islam only to turn against it later. The man said, 'I am the Door *(Al-Bab),* and after me the Mahdi will come.' When the people asked him what his teachings were, he said, 'I have come to make your religious responsibilities easier since Islam's responsibilities are no longer fitting for these times.' Some people followed him, and others rose up against him. Those who followed him did so because they wanted to make their religion easier, while those who opposed him were those whom Allah *the Exalted* loved and who loved Him. Scholars were brought to him to debate and argue with him, and he admitted that he was wrong and made public repentance in the Grand Mosque, whereupon his followers deserted him.

Then, others came and tempted this man to return to his misguidance and deception. A Russian consul in Paris took him in, gave him refuge, and convinced him to announce that his public repentance was only made to save him from execution. So, this 'Bab', whose real name was' 'Ali Muhammad Ash-Shirazi,(1) was able to disperse a great deal of propaganda, especially after a girl named Qurrat Al-'Ayn, who was known as 'The Pure One', joined his movement by giving a public speech. Anyone who reads this speech will recognise the profligacy which this 'Bab' preached. This woman announced that Islam's period as a religion had ended and that the Bab had gone into occultation for a while because he was awaiting a new sacred law. She also said that the world was going through a period of transformation. The new religion began to be 'revealed' to the Bab, and this assuming 'Pure One' said that the new law concerning women which had been revealed to the Bab was as follows:

Woman is a flower, created to be smelled and embraced,
So there is no punishment for the one who smells and embraces her.

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(1) The story of 'Ali Muhammad Ash-Shirazi who claimed to be a prophet

And as long as woman is a flower, she can also be plucked, picked, and given to one's friends. At the end of the speech, she said, 'Do not veil your women from your friends!'

Those who wish to learn of the series of the moral outrages which Qurrat Al-'Ayn's speech contained may read the book '*Nuqtat Al-Kaf*' by Al-Bab Al-Kashani, London, page 154. This is what the Bab brought after annulling Islam: 'Do not veil your women from your friends, for now there are no barriers or punishments. Take all that you can from life, for there is nothing after death.' This is the summary of the profligacy, which this so-called Bab (Door) brought. He declared that there shall be no Reckoning or Last Day and that the purpose of a woman is to be exposed, embraced, and smelled. It is beyond belief that some married couples followed him and called themselves 'religious'. They looked at the affair and considered that the licentiousness which the Bab brought was a religion, although his teachings facilitated corruption to it. They replaced responsibilities with profligacy, and then called it 'religion'!

This is what the enemies of Islam wanted to do to it, and the Russian imperial consul was the one who encouraged this man and protected him in the year 1261 AH. Despite this, the people of Persia sentenced him to death after a wave of fierce condemnation. No one could save him, so he was executed. Those who read the accounts of what he said before his execution will see how he abased himself, pleaded and wept. Had he truly been sent by the True Lord he would not have abased himself and pleaded for his life. Rather, he would have been filled with contentment and joy because he was on his way to Allah *Glorified is He*.

This charlatan knew the punishment for which he was heading, so he wept and begged for mercy. Once the Bab was killed, one of his followers, Mirza Husayn, announced that the 'scripture' which the Bab had brought and had called 'The Message' *(Al-Bayan)* was false. Also, Mirza Husayn Ali said that he had brought a scripture called 'The Most Holy' (Al-Aqdas), as though the whole thing were simply a matter of deceiving people, and then justifying this deception.

If we take a look at a book they call *'Bahjat As-Sudur'* (The Heart's Delight) by Haydar ibn Ali Al-Baha'i, we will find that it contains every imaginable deviation. Al-Baha' said, 'Conceal your gold, your destination, and your religion.' This means you should not let people know how much wealth you possess, nor where you are going, nor that you are a Baha'i, otherwise, you might be killed. The Baha'is believe that the time of the Quran has ended and that 'The Most Holy' is a superior scripture to the Quran. This book 'The Most Holy' states that Jerusalem is the rightful home of Jews and solely for them and that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is the master of all prophets. This shows us that this man was a tool of the Zionist occupation. They held a party in Britain to honour him and gave him knighthood for his services to the colonial power.

Sheikh Rashid Rida, who documented the biography of Imam Mohammad Abdu, has mentioned a meeting with Baha'ullah in Beirut. As reported by Sheikh Rida, on the authority of Imam Mohammad Abdu, Baha'ullah used to perform the five daily prayers and attend the Friday Prayer like Muslims. When he was asked about the Baha'i movement, he said that it was an attempt to bring *Shiites* and *Sunnis* closer, to establish a common ground between them. The Ottoman State was about to bring Baha'ullah to trial, but a Russian consul intervened, and it was agreed that the man would only be exiled to Baghdad. He lived there for some time and then died; his son 'Abbas, who was known as 'Abd Al-Baha', presided over the Baha'i movement.

The movement started with a man who called himself the Bab. He wrote a book where he said, 'Anyone who claims to bring a new religion after my religion before a thousand years have passed will be cursed and deprived of mercy!' Only seven years had passed before a second man appeared; he called himself Baha'ullah and preached what he referred to as 'a new religion'. His son, 'Abd Al-Baha', was his vicegerent. 'Abd Al-Baha' was then succeeded by his son, Shawqi Effendi, who lived in Akko. Thus, their lies were exposed; and the current head of the Baha'i movement is a Jew named Peterson.

Modern apostasy from Islam does not spring from among Muslims; rather, it is instigated by anti-Islamic individuals who use people with atheistic tendencies and cunning thought to misrepresent the message of Islam. Centres have been established to call for such anti-Islamic beliefs in Belgium, America, and England. They have tried to infiltrate into Islamic societies to drag them into accepting their erroneous calls. Their ever-preferred trick has often been the issue of women, using it to attack and present Islam in the most untrue light. They accuse Islam of restricting the freedom of women, imprisoning them in their homes, and they make other similar accusations, all aiming to conceal the clear fact that Islam honours women. Ironically, I have heard a young Western woman saying, ‘I wish I were a Muslim woman and had a Muslim son.’

Let no Muslim be deceived by all this hype intended only to destroy the values of Islam which protect people and respect their feelings. These movements which creep into our societies are meant to distort the values of our religion. It is incumbent on our governments to deter those who conspire against Islam and not let anyone who can merely put sentences together speak about religion. Every Muslim is required—however he can—to refute and contest any beliefs alien to Allah’s religion. May Allah reward the judges of Egypt well for how they barred the way for such attacks and took an uncompromising stance to defend Islam! The country’s constitution states that Egypt is a Muslim country even though some laws are still to be issued or amended. Egypt’s judges, through their attitudes, gave an example worthy of emulation to prove that faith is what should govern the life and conduct of true Muslims even though some of the laws do not conform to the Islamic Law.

Whenever any of those malicious movements appears, we should remember the words of Allah: ‘You who believe, if any of you go back on your faith, Allah will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 54). All of such movements which intend to defy Islam come to an end; Islam remains strong because of its followers whom Allah loves and who love Him. Allah makes Islam victorious by their hands, and He describes them as: ‘people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who strive in Allah’s way without fearing anyone’s reproach’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 54).

Allah ends this noble verse by saying: ‘Such is Allah’s favour. He grants it to whomever He wills. Allah has endless bounty and knowledge’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 54). Indeed, it is a favour from Allah; He loves them and has made them love Him, and they are humble towards the believers and hard towards the disbelievers. Thus, Allah has made them the bearers of the banner of His religion, and this is a great favour from Him. We should be aware that regardless of what or how many our good deeds are, Allah does not gain any benefit from them, for He *the Exalted* is the Giver of all that is good. He has brought us into this world that is so abundant in provision. The earth is so rich in minerals, metals, and sustenance; the sky is adorned with stars, the sun, sending warmth and heat, and the moon. All these are favours *the Almighty* Creator has bestowed upon His creatures.

Allah *Glorified is He* grants His favours to whomever He wills, and His Power is limitless—He is able to do anything. Therefore, a believer does not do Allah any favours by believing in Him, nor does it harm Allah in any way that some people do not believe in Him. He is absolutely able to bring forth people who will bear His Message. When falsehood rears its head, it means that the time when it will be uprooted is imminent, for scum and dross are always washed away, while that which benefits people remains on earth.

When Allah assigns a spiritual mission to the believers, the honour is from Him, not from the believers for accepting the mission; Allah bestows a favour on the believers when He chooses them for the mission of bearing His Message; all the benefits of such honour pass to the believers, and they are amply rewarded for their obedience. We know that 'favour' (*fadl*) means that something is given in excess to what is due and fair; Allah says: 'Say (Prophet), "In Allah's *fadl* (grace) and mercy let them rejoice; these are better than all they accumulate"' (*Yunus:* 58).

Every moral responsibility Allah gives to people constitutes a favour from Him, for He enjoins such responsibilities on us only for our own good, to set life to rights. So long as the Ordinance of Allah is for our own benefit, then it would be logical to think that we need not be rewarded for living up to its responsibilities. However, Allah does not want to charge His creatures with responsibilities, which they carry out with obedience and love, and then not reward them for that with the best of rewards. This is why He says: '…Say, "Do not consider your submission a favour to me; it is Allah Who has done you a favour, by guiding you to faith…"' (*al-Hujurat:* 17). So the favour is all His; He has guided us to faith and obedience and rewards us for that by making us lead good lives and granting us eternal happiness in the Hereafter.

'Say (Prophet), "In Allah's *fadl* (grace) and mercy let them rejoice; these are better than all they accumulate."' (*Yunus:* 58) Allah's bounty and grace know no bounds. Some might wonder, 'How come you say Allah's bounty has no bounds, whereas He says, 'that man will only have what he has worked towards; that his labour will be seen.' (*an-Najm:* 39-40)

Ponder this example: when a Muslim dies, we should observe the Funeral Prayer for him and implore Allah to grant him mercy and forgiveness. Those invocations earn well for the deceased, for Allah grants him mercy for his brothers' entreaties; and his brothers are also rewarded for doing good things to the deceased fellow Muslim as Allah commands them.

Now, the noble verse says, 'that man will only have what he has worked towards' (*an-Najm:* 39-40), so, has the deceased person worked for this reward he is given because of his brothers' invocations? Are such invocations his good deeds so that he may be rewarded for it? No. The fact that 'man will only have what he has worked towards' actually refers to justice, to the rightful reward one directly receives because of his deeds. However, this is not all that Allah gives His devoted servants; He does not treat them with justice, but with His grace and bounty. For example—and Allah is above all comparison—an employee may be told that he will be paid one hundred pounds, 'but then, at the end of the month, he receives one hundred and fifty. Justice consists in the fact that he receives his rightful wage of one hundred pounds, but the fifty pounds he is given in excess to the promised wage represent a token of generosity from his employer.

When Allah commands us to pray for a dead Muslim, this is a favour from Allah to the deceased person and to us as well; it is one of the ways He grants His favours to His servants. He *the Exalted* rewards everyone for his good deeds, not in proportion to such good deeds, but in excess. Through the prayers He commands us to offer for a deceased Muslim, He showers His mercy on that person and on those who pray as well. This is one of the meanings implied in His words: 'Say (Prophet), "In Allah's *fadl* (grace) and mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate."' (*Yunus:* 58)

In fact, Allah's reward to His servant is always far greater than his good deed. What makes a believer offer prayers and invocations for a deceased believer is the bond of their faith in Islam, so a believer continues to belong to Islam and receive Allah's mercy on its account even after death: '…Such is Allah's favour. He grants it to whomever He wills. Allah has endless bounty and knowledge.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54)

That is a favour from Allah extended to every believer, for Allah is Limitless and All Knowing. He says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'O My servants, if the earliest and latest of you and the human and jinn of you were to rise in one place and ask Me whatever they want, and I were to give to everyone what they ask, that would not decrease what I have any more than a needle decreases the sea when dipped into it. O My servants, it is only your deeds that I reckon for you and then recompense you for: so whoever finds the outcomes of his deeds good should be grateful to Allah, and whoever finds them otherwise should blame no one but himself.'(1)

Allah's stores are full and they never empty. His Power is infinite. He blesses whatever you do for Him, and for whatever you give, He gives you abundant reward. This applies to love. When your love for anyone stems from your love for Allah, He blesses this love and increases it. On the other hand, when love originates from a temporal cause, it will diminish one day when that cause is no more.

When love is for the sake of Allah, when one's love for others is out of his love for Him, it will last, for it stems from a cause that never ends. When love is based on desire or interest, it soon disappears when the desire is extinguished or the interest is fulfilled. Such worldly love is apt to increase so long as it receives the expected return from the loved ones. If no such return is received anymore, the relationship is seen as a loss by the one who offers this transient love. However, love that is only for the sake of Allah originates from an unending source, so it never decreases, for Allah blesses those whose love for each other is out of their love for Him. He is the All Knowing and Almighty who gives every one of His servants what he deserves. Allah says in the following verse:

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(1) *Cited by Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ
ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُؤۡتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَهُمۡ رَٰكِعُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

Your true allies are God, His Messenger, and the
believers – those who keep up the prayer, pay the
prescribed alms, and bow down in worship [55]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 55)

Allah forbids us from taking the Jews and Christians as allies, which necessarily implies that this prohibition extends to all those who harbour enmity to Islam. Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* is Sufficient for us. He, His Messenger (Muhammad), and the believers are our allies. Not only because they are enemies, but rather, assistance should not be sought from those who are helpless—and such are all mortals; rather, we should take refuge with the One Who is Omnipotent. Our enemy might pretend hypocritically to offer us help. Allah has forbidden us from making His enemies our allies to free us from depending on their limited help; He calls us to rely on Him whose Power never comes to an end.

The original Arabic text of the verse uses the word *innama* (only) which denotes 'restriction' or 'limitation'. For example, if someone says, 'The only generous one is Zayd', it is like saying 'Zayd is generous, and no one but Zayd is generous,' and the two clauses have been made into a single clause. This is a statement that affirms that Zayd possesses generosity and negates that anyone else does. If we only say, 'Zayd is generous,' this does not exclude the possibility that other people might be generous, too.

Allah makes it clear where the believers should seek assistance: 'Your true allies are Allah, His Messenger, and the believers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55). He reassures the believers before forbidding them from taking the people of the Book as allies. If the disbelievers had affection for the believers and eagerness to help them fulfil their spiritual mission, they would not remain disbelievers then! They would be ready then to embrace faith since they are ready to assist its people.

The fact that a disbeliever remains a disbeliever proves that his heart has not received guidance, so how can he help a believer with regard to his faith?

The people of the Book cannot be trusted since they have distorted the Scriptures which were revealed to their Prophets and concealed whatever news they contained of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. How, then, can they give aid to a Muslim? He cannot give assistance to the people of faith because he has not accepted faith himself. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'neither trust the people of the Book (in what they say regarding religion) nor accuse them of lying (in everything they say; some of it might be true). (Only) say, "We believe in Allah, what He has sent down to us and what He has sent down to you." This is because the one who cannot guide himself certainly cannot guide others.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade us from trusting what the people of the Book say; he knew they strayed into deviation and misguidance. They mixed the truth with falsehood and harboured fierce hatred against those who had attained faith. This is why Prophet Muhammad forbade us from asking them about religion. They might give a truthful answer, which we deny as falsehood, or they may lie, and we believe what they say is true. Therefore, it is not right or appropriate for a Muslim to ask the people of the Book about religion because the result is either one of these two: he may believe a lie or deny a truth. The people of the Book actually argued with one another, as Allah tells us: 'The Jews say, "The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on", and the Christians say, "The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on"…' (*al-Baqara:* 113).

Whom of the two should we believe? Should we believe what the Jews say about the Christians or what the Christians say about the Jews? We can neither believe nor deny what either of them says. We should understand that when Allah has forbidden us from taking any allies but Him, He would never leave us, as believers, without any helper. He only forbade us from seeking alliance from those who cannot possibly be sincere in helping us.

In the English translation of the verse, the plural noun' allies' is used, but the original Arabic text uses the word *wali* (ally) which is the singular form. Why does Allah use a singular word when it refers to Allah, His Messenger and the believers? Here is the answer. Is the help that Prophet Muhammad gives separate from the help of Allah? Is the help that the believers give separate from what is given by Allah and His Messenger? No, because all help comes from Allah; the Messenger's assistance is not separated from his Lord's, nor is the believers' assistance separated from the Messenger's *peace and blessings be upon him*. All are comprised in one thing. Allah says, addressing the believers: 'Your true allies are Allah, His Messenger and the believers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55). This means that Allah is the Helper of Prophet Muhammad and the believers; Prophet Muhammad is the helper of the believers and the believers are helpers of one another, as Allah says: 'The believers, both men and women, support each other…' (*at-Tawba:* 71). Such is the protection and support Allah grants to the believers, who should also offer protection and support to one another.

People are subject to vicissitudes, so a believer is not always in a position where he can give advice. Sometimes you can give advice, but other times you are the one who needs it. You may falter in a certain aspect of religion; therefore your fellow believer offers you advice so that you may correct yourself. That fellow believer may falter in a certain aspect of religion, too, and then it will be your turn to offer advice so that he too may correct himself. The One Who has created humankind knows them best; He knows they are subject to change, and each has his weaknesses and strengths. Therefore, He commands the believers: '…urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness' (*al-'Asr:* 3). Why does Allah command us to urge one another to the truth? The path of the truth is difficult to follow; those who commit to it encounter difficulties caused by people of falsehood. Therefore, people who follow the truth must support and urge one another to remain steadfast and be ready to sacrifice every precious thing for the cause of Allah. Whatever we do and say must spell the truth. The believers have to seek a reminder through what happened to others and see how they were patient. This is how the believers should support one another. This is what this verse means: 'The believers, both men and women, support each other…' (*at-Tawba:* 71). Therefore, the verse we are dealing with teaches us to seek protection and assistance from Allah Who possesses absolute Power. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If anyone (of you, o believers) relieves a distress of a believer in this world, Allah will relieve for him a distress in the Afterlife. If anyone protects a believer from being exposed (due to a slip he has done or an affliction that has befallen him), Allah will protect him from being exposed both in this life and the Afterlife. Allah helps His servant as long as he helps his brother.'(1)

And how can you help your brother? It is through offering him assistance, support, and advice, and through spending of your time, energy, power, and wealth to help him. Do not begrudge him your time; do not think you have wasted your time while you were helping him and you could have accomplished more for yourself if you had not helped. All your time, wealth, and energy have been given by Allah, and you do not do anything by your own power, but by His. When you dedicate some of your limited power to others, He, Who possesses unlimited Power, will compensate you. He will help you as you have helped your brother. If you want Allah to be on your side, extend help to others. In doing so, a believer ascends to the highest level of sagacity.

So Allah says: 'Your true allies are Allah, His Messenger and the believers– those who keep up the prayer...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55). He *the Exalted and Almighty* wants to show us the qualities of the believers, for when we become acquainted with the nature of faith and attributes of its followers, we can distinguish the believers from the disbelievers. The most prominent attribute of those who have faith in Allah is their constant observance of *salat* (prayer) which constitutes a renewed declaration of one's allegiance to Allah five times every day. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Islam is based on five tenets: the testimony that there is no deity, but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, observance of *salat* (prayer), paying *zakat* (obligatory alms), Fasting in *Ramadan* and performing Pilgrimage to the House (of Mecca) for whoever can afford the journey.'(2)

These five tenets form the foundation on which Islam is built—but a house is not built with foundations alone. Other elements are required to make the building stand firmly. A believer is required only once in his life to testify that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger. Mandatory *salat* is observed five times daily, which takes but a little portion of the day. Obligatory Alms are paid only by the able, and even those who are enjoined to give it only have to do so once a year. Mandatory fasting is enjoined only in the month of *Ramadan,* but even a sick person, a traveller or anyone who has one of the prescribed excuses, is permitted not to fast then and make up for that later, when the excuse is no more. Furthermore, a sick person who does not expect to be cured may give charity in lieu of fasting, and so may the elderly who could be put at risk by fasting. As to *hajj* (Pilgrimage to the Sacred House of Mecca), it is enjoined only once in one's life and only on those who can afford to make the journey (in terms of expenses, physical strength, etc.).

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(1) *Cited by At-Tirmidhi in Al-Hudud, Abu Dawud in Al-Adab, Ibn Majah in Al-Muqaddimah, and Ahmad 2/252, 414*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in Al-Iman, Ahmad 2/26, 93, Al-Hamidi and At-Tabarani*

Those are the tenets of Islam, and there are particular circumstances where the believer may be excused from observing them, but the exception is the *salat* (prayer); no one may be excused from observing it regularly. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The head (the most important part) of the matter is Islam, and *salat* (prayer) is its pillar.'(1) He also said, 'What is between a person and disbelief is the abandonment of *salat* (prayer).'(2) He also said, 'the pact between me and them is the *salat* (prayer): whoever abandons it has thus forsaken faith.'(3)

No Muslim is excused from abandoning *salat*. Whoever cannot stand up may observe it while sitting; if he cannot, he may observe it while lying down. One may even observe *salat* by nodding; he may perform the prescribed movements with his head only. If one is unable even to move his head, he may observe *salat* with his eyes. In case of total paralysis that one cannot even move his eyes to perform the movements of *salat*, he may observe *salat* in his mind. Only if one loses consciousness, is he excused from observing *salat* (prayer).

Allah further describes the attributes of the believers by saying: '…the believers– those who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55). Paying *zakat*, or the obligatory alms, is the act of using the fruits of your work to help others, to share your gains with the weak and needy. This exertion is a sign of your faith, since you give a portion of the fruits of your effort for the sake of complying with Allah's Commands. Allah ends the verse by saying: '…and bow down in worship' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55). Does this mean the physical act of bowing that we perform in the *salat* (prayer)? Is the word *raki'un* (bowing down) only used figuratively as the submission to Allah? Were these words revealed in a specific event and therefore carry a specific meaning? It has been narrated that 'Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'The people of Qurayzha and An-Nadir have abandoned us and sworn that they will never even sit with us, and we cannot reach your Companions as we live so far from them. 'Abdullah complained about the way the Jews treated him(1), so Allah revealed this verse to His Messenger: 'Your true allies are Allah, His Messenger and the believers–those who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms and bow down in worship.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55) Ibn Salam hence said, 'We are content to have Allah, His Messenger and the believers as our helpers.' Another version of this narration adds that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to his mosque as people were bowing and prostrating in salat (prayer). Then, a man went into the mosque and asked for charity but no one gave him anything. The man said, 'O Allah, bear witness that I have come to the mosque of the Messenger of Allah and asked for charity, but no one gave me anything!' Companion 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* heard him say that as he was observing salat (prayer), so he stretched out his hand where the man could see it and then take the ring he was wearing from his hand as charity, so the man took it. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the man if anyone had given him anything, and the man said, 'Yes, a ring', and pointed to 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb. As related, it was on that occasion that the verse was revealed: 'Your true allies are Allah, His Messenger and the believers– those who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow down in worship.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55) (The Arabic text of the verse can also be rendered as '... who…pay the obligatory alms as they bow down in worship', which is appropriate for this version of the narration.)

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(1) *Cited by At-Tirmidhi in Al-Iman, and Ahmad*

(2) *Cited by Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah on the authority of Jabir*

(3) *Cited by At-Tirmidhi and Ahmad on the authority of Hudhayfah*

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(1) Companion Abdullah ibn Salam had been a Jew from Banu Qaynuqa' before converting to Islam (reviewer's note)

Usually, *yarka'* (bow down) means to submit. In the verse, it refers to submission to Allah by obeying His commands. If we say, 'So-and-so *raka'a* (literally, 'bowed down') to that person', this is a figurative usage of the word which here means 'to surrender'. Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* says:

وَمَن يَتَوَلَّ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ فَإِنَّ حِزۡبَ ٱللَّهِ هُمُ ٱلۡغَٰلِبُونَ ٥٦

Those who turn for protection to God, His Messenger, and the believers [are God's party]: God's party is sure to triumph [56] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 56)

In the previous verse, Allah says, 'Your allies are Allah, His Messenger and the believers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 55), and in this verse, 'And whosoever takes Allah, His Messenger, and those who have believed, as Protectors…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 56) Thus, on the one hand, Allah grants His protection and support to the believers, and on the other hand, the believers should seek protection and support from Allah. This lays the general rule that Allah protects those who take Him as a Protector, just as He loves those who love Him, '…people whom He loves and who love Him…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). This makes clear the issue of Allah's support. To Him belongs the omnipotent Power that has no limits; He can bestow it on all His servants, but He assists with it those who struggle for His cause, as He says: '…If you help (the cause of) Allah, He will help you…' (*Muhammad:* 7).

The two verses together explain how Allah helps His servant. He is the Ally of those who ally themselves with Him, His Messenger, Muhammad, and the believers, and He ends the verse by the general statement: '…the *hizb* (party) of Allah will be the victorious.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 56)

The word *hizb* means a group of people who come together for a particular cause. People would not unite their powers and thoughts for a cause unless they have agreed that it is a good thing. What about a group of people who unite for the cause of Allah? They must be the victorious party. It was the custom of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that, 'If anything *hazabahu* (occupied his thought), he would hasten to observe *salat* (prayer).'(1)

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad and Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfah*

Prophet Muhammad thus taught us that whenever a matter concerns us, we should turn to Allah and seek Him as an Ally and Protector, while we exhaust all the possible means we have in our hands. We should take our guidance from the teachings of the Prophet; he was never concerned for transient worldly matters, but his main concern was delivering the Message of Allah to people. He turned to Him at times of hardship to implore His support. He stood before Allah to observe *salat* (Prayer) whenever he faced a difficult matter and declare that his means were exhausted and that he could not face that difficulty without His assistance. Thus, Allah always granted him victory over all difficulties. If we do the same whenever something is hard on us, we will find Him there.

When the believer's means do not avail him, and he has expended all his effort on something but in vain, he should hasten to observe *salat* (prayer), and Allah will dispose his affairs in the best way. When you have exhausted all means and get no result, turn to the Creator of all means: Allah *the Exalted and Almighty*. However, it does not befit a believer to sit back, do nothing and just implore Allah does everything for him. Allah has created means and causes; these are His Hand outstretched for His servants and we are commanded to employ them for achieving our ends. If you do not use those means and causes, then you have rejected Allah's Hand, so how then can you implore His help and expect to be answered? While you exhaust all possible means, turn to the Creator of all means: 'Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him? Who removes their suffering? Who makes you successors in the earth? Is it another god beside Allah? Little notice you take!' (*an-Naml:* 62) Glory is to Him who relieves the distressed and has no partners in His dominion; He says: 'Say, "No one in the heavens or on earth knows the unseen except Allah." They do not know when they will be raised from the dead.' (*an-Naml:* 65)

Someone may say, 'I call on Allah, but He does not answer me.' Perhaps you have not yet used all the means at your disposal. You must struggle and persevere first; you must do your best, while you pray to Allah to help you. Only when there is nothing you can do you can just pray to Him, and He will respond to you.

So long as Allah tells us that His party will be the victorious, we should take it as an unquestionable fact. This verse makes a plain statement of fact: ‘And whosoever takes Allah, His Messenger, and those who have believed, as Protectors, then the party of Allah will be the victorious.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 56) Allah *Glorified is He* knows all that exists in His creation, and no Quranic statement of fact can ever contradict an actual fact of the universe. Why then do we see the believers sometimes defeated? If you see people who are apparently’ the party of Allah’, yet they are not victorious, know that they have deceived themselves and deceived people into thinking that they are on the Straight Path when actually they are not, for Allah says: ‘And the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.’ (*as-Saffat:* 173)

This is a statement of fact Allah makes in the Quran. Muslims are granted victory against the enemies of religion when they truly take Allah as their Ally. If they are afflicted with defeat, it means they are not truly ‘the party of Allah’. We have a clear example of this from the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. At the Battle of Uhud, he commanded the archers to stay in a particular position. Seeing that the believers were on the cusp of defeating the disbelievers and were starting to claim the battle spoils, the archers went down to get their share. They thus disobeyed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who had commanded them, ‘Even if you see the birds snatch us up, do not move until I send for you. Even if you see that we have defeated our enemy, do not move until I send for you.’(1) When they disobeyed the command of Prophet Muhammad, were they truly the party of Allah who fought for His cause? No; they were heedless then; they were distracted from their sublime end by worldly gains. The fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was with them did not suspend Allah’s practice with His servants. Had they been victorious despite their disobedience of Prophet Muhammad, they would not have taken his commands seriously ever after. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to experience the pain of temporary defeat in order to discipline them and teach them to always hold fast to the commands of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. That temporary defeat was for the good of all Muslims: victory on that occasion would tempt all into persisting in disobedience. Allah says in the following verse:

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(1) *Cited by Ibn Ishaq in As-Sirah*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُواْ دِينَكُمۡ هُزُوٗا وَلَعِبٗا مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ
أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ وَٱلۡكُفَّارَ أَوۡلِيَآءَۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

You who believe, do not take as allies those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it – whether people who were given the Scripture before you, or disbelievers – and be mindful of God if you are true believers [57] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 57)

The way in which the people of the Book mocked the people of truth was a kind of antithetical reaction. When irreligious people see a devout person who observes *salat* (prayer), transcends mundane desires like chasing women, displaying high morality, etc., they may laugh at him to mislead him into thinking he is in the wrong. They would love to dissuade him from the Straight Path so that he would follow them.

Suppose a man, even though persistent in evildoing himself, had an impious friend, and that friend asked his sister's hand in marriage, would he marry her off to him? Even though they are friends and equally corrupt, he would reject the proposal and would rather give his sister in marriage to a righteous man. He would not deceive himself. He would not trust his impious friend with his own sister; he must know his friend too well for that!

Moral values remain the same. When a person who adheres to the truth meets with people who follow falsehood, they would spare no effort to mislead him. Desirous to persist in their own corrupt ways, they would at least mock him to shake his faith and lead him astray. Wrongdoers like to entice others into the same trap; a drug addict would like all people to be like him and have nobody to tell him he was in the wrong. The Creator of all beings, the One Who knows them best, tells us about this in the Quran: 'The wicked used to laugh at the believers— they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own People' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-31). They would not only mock the believers, but they would accuse them of being misguided: 'and say, when they saw them, “These people are misguided,” though they were not sent to be their keepers.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 32-33) What will be their requital on the Day of Resurrection? Allah says: ‘So, today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers (not) been repaid for their deeds?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36) Will Allah not claim for the believers their right? Yes, He will. So beware of trusting those who mock religion, make a jest of those who act upon it, and hypocritically claim to have faith. Allah has already warned us: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies: they are but allies of one another…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 51).

In the verse we are dealing with, He warns us against taking as ally whoever mocks Allah’s religion, and He ends the verse by saying: ‘…be mindful of Allah if you are true believers’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 57). Faith should make its followers alert. Do not take the Jews and Christians as allies, or those who falsely claim to be believers, seeking to gain the benefits Islam offers, and the rights it guarantees, whereas faith has not entered their hearts. Mindfulness of Allah is to embrace His religion and guard it against the cunningness of its enemies who try to deceive the believers by affecting their faith. Allah says in the following verse:

وَإِذَا نَادَيْتُمْ إِلَى ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ ٱتَّخَذُوهَا هُزُوًا وَلَعِبًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَّا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and
make fun of it: this is because they are people who do
not reason [58] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida*: 58)

It is worthy of mention that this noble verse proves that the practice of *adhan* (the Call to Prayer) has been legislated by the Quran. This is an argument against those who say that *adhan* was legislated by Prophet Muhammad and that this verse only endorses the legislation.’ When you make the call to prayer (salat), they ridicule it and make fun of it...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 58). When they heard the *adhan*, they would say, ‘They are crying out like donkeys!’ Allah says, describing their conduct: ‘…this is because they are people who do not reason’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 58). Reason is what makes one choose between alternatives; it is the process of weighing pros and cons and making the best choice.

Caprice is what spoils reason and dazzles it into making a wrong choice. It is what leads a person astray. Therefore, a true believer must let the check of reason withhold the reckless impulse of caprice. The Arabic word for 'reason' is '*aql* which is derived from the same root of '*iqal* which means the cord used for tying a camel's feet so it cannot bolt. Reason should be employed to restrain caprice, not to justify it. When one's thoughts are devoid of reason, they only allow caprice to dominate behaviour. It is through reason that one realizes that serving caprices is only a waste of one's life. Death comes suddenly, and what benefit can one have then by pursuing desires and whims? Most people now do not live longer than a hundred years. The end of the world is, to you, the day when death comes. Allah conceals the time when each will meet his end so that everyone may continue to persevere in worship, so long as he does not know when he meets his Lord. It can be at any moment. Those who use their reason thus sacrifice transient worldly pleasures for the sake of the Hereafter. If the disbelievers use their reason, they will realise that by taking this stance against faith and submission to Allah, they are only sacrificing eternal peace by their defiance of their Creator. Allah then says:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ هَلْ تَنقِمُونَ مِنَّآ إِلَّآ أَنْ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ
أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَآ أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلُ وَأَنَّ أَكْثَرَكُمْ فَٰسِقُونَ ٥٩

Say [Prophet], 'People of the Book, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, in what has been sent down to us, and in what was sent before us, while most of you are disobedient?' [59]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 59)

The word 'Say' here is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When Allah addresses His Messenger, He is also addressing all the believers, so we must also say: '…People of the Book, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in Allah, in what has been sent down to us, and in what was sent before us, while most of you are disobedient?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 59) Why do the people of the Book resent the believers? Is faith something to be hated by followers of the previous messages which actually came from the same source?! Here, Allah *Glorified is He* poses a question which they are unable to answer. We, Muslims, believe in Allah, His Messengers, what He has revealed to us and what He had revealed before, so what is in all that to arouse resentment? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told the Jews that he and those who follow him believe in Allah and His Messengers—including Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* son of Maryam (Mary) Allah *be pleased with her*—so they were severely enraged! Why do the people of the Book hate the fact that Muslims believe in Allah?

An example of this is when someone invites you to do something impious or to go an obscene place, and then you refuse, so he hates you for it. So you say to him, ‘Do you hate that I am upright in my behaviour?’ We know that an honest man is a treasure to those who know him. A harmful thing is what deserves to be hated. As for faith in Allah, it is a praiseworthy thing because it teaches one how to have good conduct with all of creatures. Religion commands us to protect the dignity of others, not to transgress against their property and lives, not to backbite them, to reject bribery, to be sincere in one’s work, to keep one’s promises, etc. What is it about religion that deserves to be hated?! When one’s hatred of another stems from the fact that the latter is good and righteous, this is illogical and unjustifiable since what causes his hatred should actually have inspired his love. Imagine someone telling you, ‘There is nothing to fault in such person except that he is chivalrous’; is this a flaw?! It is as though the speaker searched his mind to find fault with the person he were speaking about yet it was in vain, so he would criticize his merits. In fact, this is only praising that person! That reminds me of a mechanism in Arabic rhetoric where one praises someone or something through apparent dispraise. Someone might say, ‘There is nothing to fault in such person except that…’, and when you hear this you expect that what comes next will be an unpleasant attribute, and then you are surprised to hear a praiseworthy trait. This is real praise.

So Allah says: ‘Say (Prophet), “People of the Book, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in Allah, in what has been sent down to us, and in what was sent before us, while most of you are disobedient?”’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 59) You say, O people of the Book that you believe in the Torah;

then you should be aware of how faith disciplines souls and protects them from evil, for you have experienced faith. You have believed in Allah and His Messengers until Musa (Moses), but you rejected 'Isa (Jesus); Muslims believe in Allah, what He has revealed to them (the Quran) and all His Messengers, including Musa, 'Isa and Muhammad, so what is there to hate in that?! Hating the believers only on account of their faith only proves that the issue of faith is unclear in their minds. It means faith is not truly established in their consciousness. They not only hate the believers, but they show disrespect for Allah by ascribing to Him attributes of imperfection, saying: '…Until we see Allah face to face…' (*al-Baqara:* 55), '…Allah is poor while we are rich…' (*Al-'Imran:* 181) and: '…Allah's hand is shackled…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 64).

This tells they only hate the fact that Muslims believe in Allah in the way that befits His perfection, for they failed to attain correct faith in Him. Besides, if they truly believed in the Scriptures revealed to them, they would not have distorted them; if they truly believed in Allah, they would have believed in every Messenger He sent, including 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. No one of sound disposition would hate true faith which proves that their dispositions have been corrupted. O people of the Book, if you hate the followers of faith, what power do you have over them? You do not have the power to harm them, but if Allah hates you, He has absolute Power to avenge us against you. So your hatred of us is worthless, and what business of yours is it that we are believers?

For argument's sake, we say to the people of the Book: Even supposing that your hatred of us could avail you anything, and you had the ability to harm us, you will incur a worse outcome for your attitude anyway; namely, Allah's punishment. We do not need to mind your hatred of us, but you should consider what you will face when Allah hates you, for He is Able to do everything. Thus, even if you could do us any harm, the harm you do to yourselves by incurring Allah's hatred is much greater, so it is a losing bargain you are making.

This is why Allah says in the following verse:

قُلْ هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكُم بِشَرٍّ مِّن ذَٰلِكَ مَثُوبَةً عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ مَن لَّعَنَهُ ٱللَّهُ وَغَضِبَ عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهُمُ
ٱلْقِرَدَةَ وَٱلْخَنَازِيرَ وَعَبَدَ ٱلطَّٰغُوتَ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ شَرٌّ مَّكَانًا وَأَضَلُّ عَن سَوَآءِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ﴿٦٠﴾

Say, 'Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from God than (The one you wish upon] us? Those God distanced from Himself, was angry with, and condemned as apes and pigs, and those who worship idols: they are worse in rank and have strayed further from the right path [60] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 60)

For argument's sake, let us suppose that your plot against us, O people of the Book, could bring on us evil consequences. Know then that what awaits you is far worse: the punishment which Allah has in store for you. This supposition, furthermore, is only for argument's sake; it is like when Allah commanded Prophet Muhammad to tell his opponents: '…either we (who believe in Him) or you (who deny His Oneness) are on the right path or have clearly gone astray!' (*Saba'*: 24) Allah's Messenger is undoubtedly on the right path, and his opponents have undoubtedly gone astray, but Allah commanded him to say so just for argument's sake; it is meant to call his opponents to reflect on the Message which if they do, they will find that Islam is the right path and that they are the party that has gone astray. Thus, this is not an implicit acknowledgement that those who have rejected the call of Prophet Muhammad may be rightly guided. It is only a call on which to reflect. Allah ended the previous verse by saying: '…while most of you are disobedient' (*al-Ma'ida:* 59). This is a reference to the fact that few of them probably consider accepting Islam. Therefore, Allah would never make a generalization that all of the people of the Book are disobedient; He gives an opportunity to those who probably think of embracing true faith.

In the verse, the news of their punishment comes: 'Say, "Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from Allah than (the one you wish upon) us…"'? (*al-Ma'ida:* 60) So there is something even more harmful in store for you; namely, Allah's rejection, for it was not right for you to hate us on account of our faith '... Those Allah distanced from Himself, was angry with, and condemned as apes and pigs…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 60). Is that all? Is this all the punishment they get? No. This is apparently meant to give them hope of receiving Allah's

Mercy—after incurring those punishments. However, Allah deprives them of this false hope of deliverance, as when He says about them: '…announce to them a painful torment.' (*Al-'Imran:* 21) In this manner, Allah means to let them entertain a false hope of being forgiven, and then gives them news of what they should actually expect, which makes the admonition more painful.

This is like a prisoner who asks for a cup of water, so the guard brings him a cup of water and moves it close to his mouth then pours the water on the ground. His action first instils hope in the soul of the prisoner that he would drink, so when he pours the water on the ground, this torments and devastates the prisoner. If the guard simply refused his request for water, the prisoner would simply despair which is 'one of the two reliefs. We notice the same thing when a man waits for the verdict of his execution or acquittal, and this period of waiting is filled with anxiety. And when they weigh this man, they find that he is losing weight; but once he has been sentenced to death, he begins to gain weight because despair is one of the two reliefs. So the expansion and contraction of the soul is the toughest and cruellest thing it can experience; this is why the True Lord says: 'Give them tidings of a painful punishment.' (*Al-'Imran:* 21) Mention of glad tidings causes the soul to expand, but then it is followed by contraction.

Another example is found when the True Lord says: 'And if they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like murky oil, which scalds (their) faces.' (*al-Kahf:* 29) That is, they will be tormented in such a way as will make them beg for water, and then they will be given water which, instead of saving them, will make their torment even worse. And here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Shall I inform you of (what is) worse than that as penalty from Allah?"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 60)

The word *worse* here is a comparative; yet this does not mean that the believers are in a bad state as well; rather, it is a case of going along with the rival and supposing that what he says is correct, just for argument's sake. Yet, the thing which is 'worse' is expressed in Allah's saying: '(It is that of) those whom Allah has cursed and with whom He became angry and made of them apes and pigs and slaves of *Taghut*. Those are worse in position and further astray from the sound way.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 60)

Why is the fate of those people so bad? Because they hate the conduct of the believers and could not give vent to the rancour in their hearts by punishing the believers; but Allah hates them, and He is very much able to punish them. Their fate will be as the True Lord describes: ‘those whom Allah has cursed and with whom He became angry and made of them apes and pigs.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 60) Rejection means that Allah dismissed them from His mercy, and this means that they were denied anything that is good.

An example to illustrate this—and Allah is beyond compare—When a servant works for a man who pays for his lodgings, food and clothing, yet this servant does not fulfil the rights of service properly, his master will not *be pleased with him* and will dismiss him from his job. And when the employer dismisses his servant, he will tell everyone that this servant did not do his job properly, and no one will ever hire him again. This is ‘condemnation’, and thus we see the difference between being dismissed from mercy alone without being punished, as opposed to the condemnation continuing so that the reason for the dismissal is announced publicly. This means that after dismissing them, Allah sent His condemnation and wrath upon them, so that His rejection of them would never be revoked.

Allah *the Exalted* announces to the people of the Book: ‘My dismissal of you from My mercy, and My continued condemnation of you, is a mighty evil.’ As we know, Allah’s condemnation has consequences in every aspect of life. He would prevent guidance from finding their hearts by sealing them so that faith cannot enter and disbelief cannot leave; or He would turn them into apes and pigs. And if we ask where their descendants are, the answer is that they did not procreate after they were transformed, but rather, they were transformed and made to be seen in their transformed state, and then they were caused to die.

Are we to suppose they were the ones who violated the Sabbath, or who worshipped the golden calf or those who disbelieved after the table of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was sent down? They are all of those. Or the meaning of ‘apes’ here is that they have the attributes of apes, such as frivolity, quick movements and nakedness; or their characters and natures are like that of pigs, for they are as filthy and malodorous as a pig; and one notable character of a pig is that it does not jealously guard its female, this is also the case with some of them; it has become prevalent amongst them to send their daughters into prostitution, besides other evil acts.

Given this understanding, it would either entail a literal transformation took place, which would not have continued to exist but would have been confined to a specific time so that people would see them transformed after which they would die and it would be over; or their conduct is like the conduct of apes and pigs.

The True Lord continues: ‘and slaves of *Taghut.*’ Worship means obedience to what is worshipped in all that it commands and forbids; and the ‘*Taghut*’ refers to those who beautify evil, hypocrisy, and the consumption of foulness and sin. And their fate is, as the True Lord says: ‘those are worse in position and further astray from the sound way.’ And indeed this is the reality in which they live, which is pure evil, and they do not even consider crossing over to the right path.

And when we read the verse in full, we know that they are in a state of heedlessness of the way of true guidance because’ sound way’ means the paved way which leads directly to the goal. The roads of the Arabs would lead either across sand or between mountains, and they would always walk in the middle of the road so that they would not be harmed by unstable sands which could cause them to slip and fall down steep banks, or by rocks falling from mountains which could land on them. That is why the True Lord said: ‘A speaker among them will say, Indeed, I had a companion (on earth), Who would say, Are you indeed of those who believe That when we have died and become dust and bones, we will indeed be recompensed? He will say, would you (care to) look? And he will look and see him in the midst of the Hellfire.’ (*as-Saffat:* 51-55) That is, he will be in the middle of the fire.

And the True Lord then says, about those who have incurred His wrath:

وَإِذَا جَآءُوكُمۡ قَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا وَقَد دَّخَلُواْ بِٱلۡكُفۡرِ وَهُمۡ قَدۡ خَرَجُواْ بِهِۦۚ وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكۡتُمُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

When they come to you [believers], they say, ‘We believe,’ but they come disbelieving and leave disbelieving – God knows best what they are hiding [61] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 61)

These are the ones who mock the religion and make a jest of it. When they come to the believers, they harbour disbelief; and when they sat with the

Messenger of Allah, they would depart the gathering with the same disbelief. That is, disbelief remained with them when they came and when they left, and it is as though the time they spent with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* did not avail them anything. It was possible that a man could go to Him as a disbeliever and sit with him, and later be touched by guidance in the course of sitting with him, and so leave as a believer.

An example of this is Fudala ibn ‘Umayr Al-Layth who came to assassinate the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in the year of the Conquest of Mecca. When the Messenger of Allah passed by Fudala, he said: ‘What were you thinking to yourself?’ He said, ‘Nothing, I was invoking Allah.’ So the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* smiled and said: ‘I ask Allah to forgive you.’ And He placed his hand on Fudala’s chest; and later on, Fudala said: ‘By Allah, by the time he removed his hand from my chest, there was no one on the face of the earth more beloved to me than him.’(1)

He was touched by guidance, and thus he came with disbelief but left with the deepest of faith. These people, on the contrary, came with disbelief and left with the same, as though they only came out of hypocrisy—this is indicated by the True Lord’s words: ‘And Allah is most knowing of what they were concealing.’ This indicates that they were hypocrites in claiming to have faith when actually they harboured disbelief all along. What ‘they would conceal’ was that their coming to the Messenger of Allah was out of pure hypocrisy. This was a specific trait of those who said that they had attained faith, when actually they only entered Islam hypocritically because their disbelief was settled firmly in their hearts and could not be shaken. The repetition of the pronoun’ they’ in the words of the True Lord is to refer specifically to their disbelieving nature. In other words, it is as though their action of coming in a state of disbelief and leaving in the same state was something inevitable; therefore, the True Lord exposes them: ‘Allah is most knowing of what they were concealing.’ The superlative form ‘most knowing,’ implies that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew they were hypocrites because of the illuminations and insights Allah has given him. But the Messenger of Allah’s knowledge did not reach the level of the True Lord’s, for Allah’s knowledge is intrinsic, whereas His Messenger's knowledge was a grace from Him. So the True Lord's words 'most knowing' do not deny that some people might have known that they were hypocrites. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was well aware that they were hypocrites, and Allah was fully aware of what they were concealing. To conceal means to suppress one's true emotions so that they are not visible to others. And to attempt to conceal is not a natural thing to do because it requires force. Their disbelief was close to revealing itself, so they would try to conceal it by doing their best not to be exposed; but nothing can escape Allah's knowledge.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn ‘Abd Al-Barr in (Ad-Durar) and Ibn Hajar in (Al-Isaba)*

The True Lord then says:

وَتَرَىٰ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُمْ يُسَٰرِعُونَ فِي ٱلْإِثْمِ وَٱلْعُدْوَٰنِ
وَأَكْلِهِمُ ٱلسُّحْتَ ۚ لَبِئْسَ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

You [Prophet] see many of them rushing into sin and hostility and consuming what is unlawful. How evil their practices are! [62] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 62)

Hastening into sin means that they were already sinners to begin with. Hastening would therefore imply that they were in the first stages of sin and then they raced to the final stages of it. So their misguidance was plain from the onset, and it is as though their disbelieving nature exposed them despite their efforts to conceal it. They found themselves vying with one another to commit sin – that is, their conduct tended towards disbelief. The True Lord *Glorified is He* made them lax in concealing it, so they did things which exposed them even more clearly than their speech did because sin has different stages: the stage of speech and the stage of action—and action reveals more than speech.

The term 'many of them' means it is likely that there may have been faith in the hearts of a few of them, and this absolved any of them who were thinking about embracing true faith. They also vied with one another in aggression. If sin covers any kind of crime, whatever it may be, then aggression means a sin in which one person violates the right of another. An example of this is the person who harbours jealous hatred: he sins against himself, and therefore he suffers from internal conflict until he is completely consumed.

As we know, jealousy is a personal sin which is not subject to any legal punishment. It is said that it is' the one crime whose punishment precedes it, 'which is the opposite of other crimes. All crimes occur before their punishments except hatred and envy, for the one who hates is punished for his hatred before it even begins because the only reason he hates is that his heart and emotions are pained when he sees the one he hates progressing in life. This is why the Hadith goes, 'If someone hates you, it is enough a consolation for you to know that he is miserable when you are happy.' So the person who sins against himself does not harm anyone else with his sin; but the one who is guilty of aggression, on the other hand, violates the rights of others. This can occur in two ways: those who commit aggression by giving the right of one person to another, and those who commit aggression by being silent when they see someone else's evildoing. The evildoer is consumed by his lust for evil, but if someone sees him doing evil and remains silent instead of reproaching the evildoer, it is also a kind of aggression; for the evildoer has a personal motive for committing evil, while he who remains silent does not have any personal motivation for being silent. So who is more evil? It is the one who remains silent instead of telling the evildoer that he is guilty of evil.' And you see many of them hastening into sin and aggression. 'Notice that the word 'hasten' is as the same as the word 'compete' in the sense that there are people racing one another in sin and aggression, as though sin and aggression are goals upon which their hearts and minds are set.

'And the devouring of (what is) unlawful. How wretched is what they have been doing.' The word 'unlawful' here means all wealth which is unlawfully earned, whether through bribery, usury, theft, embezzlement, robbery, or plundering. All of these things and their likes are forms of the unlawful. They involve taking the rights of others. If done secretly, this is theft; if done hurriedly aiming to snatch another's goods, this is robbery; and if the owner of the item follows him and argues with him and tries to get it back, this goes from robbery to forcible seizure; and if someone is entrusted with looking after something but then takes it, this is embezzlement –and all of these are forms of 'devouring of (what is) unlawful'; and this is vile conduct indeed.

The True Lord then says:

لَوۡلَا يَنۡهَىٰهُمُ ٱلرَّبَّٰنِيُّونَ وَٱلۡأَحۡبَارُ عَن قَوۡلِهِمُ ٱلۡإِثۡمَ وَأَكۡلِهِمُ
ٱلسُّحۡتَۚ لَبِئۡسَ مَا كَانُواْ يَصۡنَعُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Why do their rabbis and scholars not forbid them to speak sinfully and consume what is unlawful? How evil their deeds are! [63] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 63)

The ‘godly scholars’ are those whose every action is ascribed to Allah, and the ‘rabbis’ are those who are schooled in religious matters; yet, neither one of such groups forbids those amongst the people of the Book to commit sin and perpetrate evil. So, how could these men of Allah and rabbis appoint themselves spiritual leaders without doing their duty by advising the people? This confirms the fact that the godly scholars and rabbis desire nothing more than the power of having authority over people.

The godly scholars are the leaders of the Christians, and the rabbis are the leaders of the Jews; and amongst the Christians and Jews, there were people overcome by the desire to consume all that is evil, commit tyranny, and make sinful accusations. So why did not those who ascribed themselves to Allah do anything to forbid this, though they have made their livings from being appointed the task of protecting Allah’s way of guidance from human deviations? Was it not their duty to forbid evildoers and sinners from evil and sin?

The evildoer has a desire to profit from his evil; but as for godly scholars and rabbis, why do they not do anything to prevent this? It must be that they were glad with sin, tyranny, and devouring all that is evil. The cause of their gladness was that if one of these people was righteous in his conduct and his judgements, he would have been jealously protective of the religion, yet none of them objected to these deviations because no one would blame him when everybody deviates. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the words ‘Why do not’ at the beginning of this verse as an exhortation; that is, He is encouraging the correct action. The godly scholars and rabbis should have forbidden them from devouring all that are evil making sinful assertions and committing tyranny. And then the precision of the Quranic expression – as always – is manifested when the True Lord says: ‘How wretched is what they have been practising!’

In the previous verse, the True Lord spoke about the conduct of the majority of the people of the Book, saying: ‘How wretched is what they have been doing!’ So the True Lord makes a distinction between what they practise and what they do. The former is concerned with the godly scholars and rabbis. We know that every part of the human body has its own function: the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand touches and performs actions, the foot walks and the tongue speaks. Moreover, the parts of the body are of two kinds: there is the tongue the function of which is speech, and the rest of the body parts the functions of which are actions. This is shown when the True Lord says: ‘Grave is hatred in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do.’ (*as-Saff:* 3)

So speech is contrasted to action, and both speech and action are kinds of deeds. Since the things which the majority of the people of the Book do in this regard are comprised of both speech and action, the True Lord therefore says: ‘How wretched is what they have been doing!’

Concerning the godly scholars and rabbis, He said: ‘How wretched is what they have been practising.’ There is a difference between the one who does something and the one who practises it: if a man’s robe gets torn, he gets a needle and thread and sews it, which is merely engaging in the act of tailoring. On the contrary, only the one who does this professionally is called a ‘tailor.’ The one who does something professionally is named after his profession because he does it well; as for the one who only does it once, it is clear by the way he does it that he is not a professional.

The godly scholars and rabbis had adopted the matters of religion and priesthood as a contrived profession and became adept in it; and this is what made all the legislative bodies in the world turn away from the Law of Heaven to the law of earth. When we study the history of law, we find that the original sources of law were the priests who ascribed themselves to Allah and Revelation. They would judge between people, but they became corrupt, and society saw that they would give one judgement for a particular case but then give the opposite judgement for an identical case, taking bribes for it and privileging certain people over others. Therefore, people saw that the priests could not be trusted, so they abandoned the priests and began to make laws for themselves which were very different to what the priests gave them. Thus, this marks the transformation from the laws of the priests to a society which no longer adhered to any religion because of how the priests' judgements deviated from justice and how they sold their judgements to the highest bidder, or judged in favour of people of influence. In this way, it became a matter of their contrivance, and vile indeed was what they contrived. The True Lord then says:

وَقَالَتِ ٱلۡيَهُودُ يَدُ ٱللَّهِ مَغۡلُولَةٌۚ غُلَّتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَلُعِنُواْ بِمَا قَالُواْۘ بَلۡ يَدَاهُ مَبۡسُوطَتَانِ
يُنفِقُ كَيۡفَ يَشَآءُۚ وَلَيَزِيدَنَّ كَثِيرٗا مِّنۡهُم مَّآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ طُغۡيَٰنٗا وَكُفۡرٗاۚ
وَأَلۡقَيۡنَا بَيۡنَهُمُ ٱلۡعَدَٰوَةَ وَٱلۡبَغۡضَآءَ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۚ كُلَّمَآ أَوۡقَدُواْ نَارٗا لِّلۡحَرۡبِ
أَطۡفَأَهَا ٱللَّهُۚ وَيَسۡعَوۡنَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَسَادٗاۚ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُفۡسِدِينَ ٦٤

The Jews have said, 'God is tight-fisted,' but it is they who are tight-fisted, and they are rejected for what they have said. Truly, God's hands are open wide: He gives as He pleases. What has been sent down to you from your Lord is sure to increase insolence and defiance in many of them. We have sown enmity and hatred amongst them till the Day of Resurrection. Whenever they kindle the fire of war, God will put it out. They try to spread corruption in the land, but God does not love those who corrupt [64] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 64)

We know that the hand is a free-moving limb which can be moved right, left, up and down. It has fingers which each have their own Allah-appointed duty. If each one of us watches his finger as he does anything, he will see how they come closer to or go further from one another in a harmonious controlled motion which gets the task done. The fingers were created with joints and knuckles, each one a different size, in order to fulfil their function harmoniously. When you prevent this limb from doing what it is meant to do, you' shackle' it. So the meaning of 'The hand of Allah is chained' is that Allah's hand – Allah forbid – is unable to move. They said this before the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and before Islam had come to destroy all of their falsehood. Jews spent their efforts in making the weapons of war, building fortresses yet, they were distracted from farming so their yields were poor in quality; and when harvest time came, they found they had nothing. So a Jew named Finhas (Pinhas) said, ‘Why has Allah withheld His hand from giving us? Allah’s hand is chained.’ We can observe that this was only a single person, yet the True Lord says here: ‘the Jews say, “The hand of Allah is chained.”’ This means that when Finhas said this, they heard him, and not only were they pleased by what he said, but also agreed with it. Or it may be that when they saw the Messenger of Allah, at the beginning of the Emigration, forging bonds of brotherhood between the Emigrants and the *Ansar*; and there were nights when the Muslims had no food to eat, the Jews saw this and made fun of this by saying: ‘Allah’s hand is chained withholding sustenance from Muhammad and his people.’

Or it may be that they said: ‘Allah’s hand shall be chained in the Hereafter from punishing us because He will only punish us for a few days.’ The one who allows himself to say that Allah *Glorified is He* can be affected by the actions of His creatures thereby disbelieves in Allah because he attempts to remove Allah from His due place. If Allah’s Hand were chained, this restriction would have to have been performed by one of Allah’s creatures; yet how could any of Allah’s creatures tie Allah’s Hand? They dared to speak so boldly about the Divine, and this was disrespectful of them, just as it was when they said: ‘Indeed, Allah is poor, while we are rich.’ (*Al-’Imran:* 181)

When they said ‘Allah’s Hand is chained, ‘and the True Lord *Glorified is He* responded to them: ‘rather, both His hands are extended.’ and said before this: ‘chained are their hands;’ does this mean the True Lord was supplicating against them? Of course, He was not, for He is the source to which all mankind turn with their supplications, and He is able to do what He wills with His creatures. But when the True Lord quoted their words, He was alerting the faithful mind who receives His words to the fact that whenever one finds an unfitting attribution describing Allah *Glorified is He*, he must dismiss these words before he even sees the response to them.

This teaches us that when we hear an attribution which is inappropriate, we must utterly negate it; for Allah *Glorified is He* does not supplicate against His servants because supplication is made by the weak who raises his request to the strong hoping that he will fulfil it for him. So if the True Lord says it, this either means it is a simple factual statement or a lesson for us. If it is a factual statement, we should observe that Allah *Glorified is He* ordained miserliness for them when they said this from the very moment they said it; and if it is meant as a lesson to us, then it teaches us the conduct of faith, that is, we must rebut any attribution which does not befit Allah's Majesty.

There is another Quranic statement which raises a similar issue. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* acknowledged the longing of Prophet Muhammad and the believers to go to the *Al-Masjid Al-Haram*, He said to him: 'You will surely enter *Al-Masjid Al-Haram*, if Allah wills.' (*al-Fath:* 27) Was this a factual statement from Allah or a lesson to us? It was a lesson to us that we should do this whenever we yearn for something. Likewise, when He says here' and the Jews say: Allah's hand is chained, 'He *the Exalted* teaches us to say: 'chained are their hands, 'just as He taught us to say: 'if Allah so wills;' so that we attribute everything to Allah's power. Philosophers tried to define the power of divine will saying that Allah *Glorified is He* created the universe with natural laws which govern everything. Did the True Lord relinquish His authority when He created these natural laws and leave things to their own devices? No, and this is why He has ordained miracles which broke the natural laws to show us that those laws do not have the final word, but rather that Allah's Hand is still involved in His creation. For example, we find that He commanded fire which usually burns: 'O fire, be coolness and safety' (*al-Anbiya'*: 69). And He commanded water, which usually drowns: 'Then We inspired to Moses, "Strike with your staff the sea," and it parted, and each portion was like a great towering mountain.' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63)

And He said: 'and We had inspired to Moses, "Travel by night with My servants and strike for them a dry path through the sea; you will not fear being overtaken (by Pharaoh) nor be afraid (of drowning). (77) So Pharaoh pursued them with his soldiers, and there covered them from the sea that which covered them. (78)"' (*Ta Ha:* 77-78).

The staff which was created from a dry tree branch was transformed into a snake, meaning that it was turned into something of completely different nature, from a plant into an animal. This is how the laws of nature are broken.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about those who claimed that His hand is chained: 'Chained are their hands, and cursed are they for what they say.'

They have been expelled from Allah’s Mercy because they brought this on themselves by saying that Allah’s Hand is chained, and He is able to refrain from giving them. Allah continues: ‘Rather, both His hands are extended; He spends however He wills.’ He gives to whom He wills. The word ‘Hand’, linguistically speaking, can mean both the body part and also ‘favour’. When someone says, ‘So-and-so gave me a hand which I will never forget’, he means that someone did him a favour he will not forget. The reason why the word ‘hand ‘is used in this way is that the hand is always used to give and take things. The word ‘hand ‘is also used to indicate the concept of possession, as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘unless they forego the right or the one in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it.’ (*al-Baqara:* 237) That is, the one who possesses the right to marry the woman forgoes his claim. And in the context of fighting, we find that Allah says: ‘Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands.’ (*at-Tawba:* 14)

Of the word, ‘hand ‘can be used to refer to someone who had the role of performing a certain action, such as when the True Lord says: ‘O Iblis (Satan), what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My Hands?’ (*Sad:* 75) Adam *peace be upon him* was the first man to be created, and all of us who came after him were created by means of human reproduction. Allah *Glorified is He* has honoured man by creating him with His Hands, and He has created everything with the word ‘Be!’ So the word ‘hand ‘has many different meanings, and the Messenger of Allah said: ‘The blood of all Muslims is equal in their law, and if the least of them promises protection they all honour his promise, and they are (as) a single hand above all others.’(1) That is, when all hands come together, theirs is the most powerful hand; and when we read the words ‘Allah’s Hand’, do we take it to mean His favour, or His possession?’ Blessed is He in whose Hand is dominion, and He is over all things competent.’ (*al-Mulk:* 1)

Allah *Glorified is He* knows His Own Self best, so let us stop at the attribution itself and go no further. Yes, He has a Hand, and He has two Hands, but do not imagine that everything connected to Allah is the same as everything connected to you; for it is true that you have existence now, and Allah *Glorified is He* has existence, but your existence is not the same as Allah's existence. Likewise, His Hand is not like your hand; and in order that we do not fall into anthropomorphism by saying that He has a hand like our hands, let us say that the meaning of 'hand 'here is 'power' or 'favour'; and the supreme goal of this is to exalt the True Lord above all comparison. There are those who say that Allah *Glorified is He* has a Hand, but it is not like our hands because we must view every description of Allah in the light of the fact that' There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11), and interpretation is possible, just as it is when the True Lord said that He created Moses 'under His eyes.'

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, Al-Bayhaqi (in Al-Kubra), Al-Hakim (in Al-Mustadrak), Al-Hindi (in Kanz Al-‘Ummal) and Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir*

It is possible to accept every description Allah *Glorified is He* gives Himself just as it is given, by saying that He has a hand but it is not like our hands; He has existence, but it is not like human existence; He has an eye but it is not like other eyes. In short, every description of Allah *Glorified is He* must be viewed in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him.' It is also possible for us to interpret the attribution by saying that it means 'favour' or 'power'. The True Lord says: 'Rather, both His Hands are extended.' What is meant here is His favour. He did not simply reply by saying that He has one hand which gives, but He gave the strongest rebuttal possible which is that He gives with both of His Hands. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'and amply bestowed upon you His favours, (both) apparent and unapparent?' (*Luqman:* 20)

He gives in an obvious way and He gives in a hidden way. Do not say that one of these means His right hand and the other means His left, for both of Allah's Hands are right hands.' Rather, both His hands are extended; He spends however He wills.' That is, He *the Exalted* could not be miserly. Even when the True Lord withholds, this is another form of giving and dispensing because the one who misuses a favour might thereby be led into trial and a bad end; therefore, Allah *the Exalted* withholds this favour from him to protect him from being led astray by it. This is why we find that the True Lord says, in the chapter *al-Fajr*: 'And as for man, when his Lord tries him and (thus) is generous to him and favours him, he says, 'My Lord has honoured me. (15) But when He tries him and restricts his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me. (16)"' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16). And then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* responds: 'No.'

So, giving is not a sign of honour, nor is withholding a sign of disgrace; and how could giving be a sign of honour when Allah might give unto you, but you might not fulfil the rights of this favour? How could withholding be a sign of disgrace when it might prevent you from going astray? Hence, sometimes when He withholds from you, He gives you something much more lasting, which is guidance. Thus, we see that His withholding is also a kind of giving.

People always think that Allah's bestowal only consists of what is positive, but they forget that there is also a negative bestowal (i.e. preventative). The True Lord spares you from misfortunes. Before, I have given the example of the man who makes sure that all his income is lawful, and is conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* in his work, and takes his pay and arranges his life's affairs within the bounds of this pay, this man might go home and find that his son has a slightly high temperature and because his income is lawfully earned and the cells of his body know this, he deals with the situation calmly and takes his son to a doctor at a charity clinic for a few pennies. The doctor prescribes a medicine costing only few pennies, and the boy is cured.

This man's situation is different from that of another man whose wealth is unlawfully-earned and who, when he sees that his son's temperature is high, finds a thousand bad thoughts running through his mind, and takes his son from doctor to another without believing what any of them say. Allah *the Exalted* granted the first man peace of mind by preventing paranoid notions from entering his heart and thoughts, whereas the second man ended up spending far more than what he had earned from his unlawful work. This means there is also such thing as a negative gift; and the gift which a man loves to receive is that of wealth which ultimately dwindles away to nothing. As for withholding, it prevents a man from committing sin, after which he receives his bliss in the Hereafter. We find that many people ask things from Allah, but they are not aware that Allah also gives by withholding. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*, says: 'And man supplicates for evil as he supplicates for good, and man is ever hasty.' (*al-Isra':* 11) This is why sometimes the True Lord gives His servant things for which he had been imploring Him, and then he finds out that they are actually bad for him. It is as though when the

True Lord has denied him what he wanted for a while, He was actually doing this to protect him.

Therefore, He is always dispensing His bounty, and He dispenses it as He wills. Allah *Glorified is He* has never been miserly, even when He withholds, because withholding at the right time is the same as dispensing. Thus, Allah's bestowal is always a blessing whether it is outward or inward. Also, if the meaning of 'Hand 'is 'power', then Allah's hands are stretched out with reward for some and punishment for others; and He gives spiritual immunity to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against all those who rebel against him and against every opponent and arrogant rival whether from the disbelievers or the people of the Book.

It is as though He *Exalted and Glorified is He* were saying: 'Prepare yourself, Muhammad, and have your community prepare themselves because those disbelievers will not be content to only hate you a little; rather, every time Allah favours you with additional guidance, they will envy you and hate you; and their opposition and rancour towards you will increase – so prepare yourself for that.' This imparts spiritual immunity, silences all the negative thoughts of the soul, and readies the soul to deal with anything which might happen, even if it is bad.

Let us make this easier to understand, not by way of comparison but simply to make it easier for the mind to grasp – for Allah is beyond compare. Let us consider what happened in Europe during the Second World War when Britain fought against the Nazis. Terrible destruction wreaked the British cities by the German bombers. Churchill stepped up to lead the British war effort saying to them: 'Terror and difficulty await you, so prepare yourselves to face these perils.'

If this happened in a war between two countries, then what do we think about the True Lord *Glorified is He* who knows how essential it is to test His community who would bear the banner of His perfect way of guidance? Therefore, He had to prepare Prophet Muhammad's soul and the souls of the believers who followed him to face up the envy, hatred, malice, plots and schemes of their enemies.

The True Lord says: ‘And that which has been revealed to you from your Lord will surely increase many of them in transgression and disbelief. And We have cast among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection.’ The True Lord *Glorified is He* would not have said ‘among’ unless there were more than one party here. The referral is either among the different Jewish sects, among the different Christian sects or among the Jews and Christians, especially since this group of verses began with the words: ‘O, People of the Book.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 59) So if the Jews are meant here, then enmity and hatred indeed exist among their different sects; and if the Christians are meant, then enmity and hatred also exist among their various sects. If it is taken to mean between the Jews as one group and the Christians as another, and this could also be the case—this enmity and hatred will never end and will remain among them until the Day of Resurrection.

Then, the True Lord says: ‘Every time they kindled the fire of war (against you), Allah extinguished it.’ This statement addresses what happened in the Islamic territories such as when the Jewish tribe of Banu Qaynuqa’ broke their treaty after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had gathered them in the marketplace of Qaynuqa’ and said to them: ‘O Jews! Surrender yourselves, before Allah afflicts you just as He afflicted Quraysh!’(1) But they refused, saying: ‘O Muhammad, do not be deluded by how you killed a horde of Quraysh who were greenhorns with no knowledge of warfare. By Allah, were you to fight us, you would learn that we are true men, and that you have never before encountered the like of us.’ So the True Lord revealed His words concerning them: ‘Say to those who disbelieve, “You will be overcome and gathered together to Hell, and wretched is the resting place.”’ (*Al-’Imran:* 12) So, the tribe of Banu Qaynuqa’ was the first of the Jews to break their treaty with Prophet Muhammad, and they were fought against during the time between the battles of Badr and Uhud.

The reason for this was that an Arab woman took her wares to the market of Banu Qaynuqa’ and sat next to a Jewish goldsmith in the market. The Jew tried to force her to unveil her face, but she refused. Then, the goldsmith knotted her clothing at the back without her noticing, so when she stood up, the whole dress came off and left her naked. They laughed at her, and she cried out. A Muslim man answered her cry and killed the goldsmith, but the Jews took hold of the Muslim and killed him too. This event caused civil strife to erupt, but Allah *Glorified is He* has extinguished the fires of this strife and exiled Banu Qaynuqa', and then exiled the tribe of Banu An-Nadir, who had the power in Medina because of their wealth and knowledge. The Muslims fought the tribe of Banu Qurayzha, and exiled the people of Khaybar, and the Muslims were able to take control of the valley of Al-Qura. All of this happened within the Islamic territories; so what happened outside it?

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Kathir*

We have seen how they were destroyed by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar (Bakhtansar), and then by the Roman, Titus. We know that they were dispersed throughout the earth in every place and time. Someone might say: 'If the True Lord says, 'every time they kindled the fire of war (against you), Allah extinguished it, 'why is the war between them and us still happening?' We say that the one who extinguishes the fires of war must be one of Allah's true soldiers; and when we really become Allah's true soldiers, this war will be extinguished.

The nearest example to us is our victory on the tenth of *Ramadan*. Our victory came when we fought under the banner of 'Allah is the Greatest!' Allah *Glorified is He* has rewarded those generals and soldiers who knew that the enemy was better equipped than we were, yet victory went our way because we entered with' Allah is the Greatest' as our guide.

As for those who claim that it was a victory of civilisation, we ask: Which civilisation about which are you speaking? Islam is the wellspring of balanced civilisation, and one cannot make claims about 'civilisation', whilst outside the confines of Allah's religion. If we adhere to the principle of 'Allah is the Greatest', not just as a slogan, but also as a practical guide, then Allah *Glorified is He* would extinguish the fires of any war.

Allah *the Exalted* has established cosmological ways in His universe which give practical experience to those who harbour doubts about faith. An example of this is what happened when some of those who fought at the battle of Uhud disobeyed the orders of Prophet Muhammad and were almost routed as a result. At the battle of Hunayn, they said, 'We shall not be defeated today because of our small numbers!' And so Allah said: 'Allah has already given you victory in many regions and (even) on the day of Hunayn, when your great number pleased you, but it did not avail you at all, and the earth was confining for you with its vastness; then you turned back, fleeing.' (*at-Tawba:* 25)

Allah *Glorified is He* has created these cosmological ways to alert anyone who is heedless of religion to that fact that the enemy will be able to defeat him in this state; for heedlessness leads to deviation, and deviation can never lead to victory. This is why the True Lord warns the forces of faith. As for the forces of disbelief, the True Lord wants them to be debased, so He sometimes allows them to defeat the believers when the believers are heedless; and all the believers have to do is to wake from their heedlessness, and they will be able to defeat the forces of disbelief. That will happen at a time when the forces of disbelief are in a state of arrogance and excess. There is a rustic proverb which explains it: 'The believer cannot fall from a reed mat.'

The meaning is that humbleness protects one from delusions of grandeur and arrogance because the one who falls is the one who imagines that he has a high status on earth and, therefore, Allah *the Exalted* makes him blind to caution, as He says: 'and to destroy with utter destruction all that fell in their hands.' (*al-Isra':* 7)

That is, to make everything come to ruin. When crafty politicians want to punish their enemies, they try to raise their enemies by being patient with them and giving them time until the enemy's status rises high, and surprisingly, they expose them and reveal their bad conduct so that people no longer respect them. Therefore, we find that the Quran is completely direct about this matter: 'So when they forgot that by which they had been reminded, We opened to them the doors of every (good) thing until, when they rejoiced in that which they were given, We seized them suddenly, and they were (then) in despair.' (*al-An'am:* 44) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* gave them time and left them be so that they could amass wealth, build, prosper and rejoice in what they had gained; He has opened the doors of all good things to them; and life has shown us many examples of that.

We have seen powerful nations aiding our enemies, and the forces of East and West agreed for many years to aid the enemy, and we said to them: You are now at the stage of 'when they forgot that by which they had been reminded; 'your enemies will soon move onto the stage of 'when they rejoiced in that which they were given, 'and after that, you will move on to the stage of 'we seized them suddenly, and they were (then) in despair.'

Later, the Soviet Union collapsed, and Allah *Glorified is He* took them to task all of a sudden by the hands of people from within, and many calamities befell those who had persecuted the people of faith. Hence, there is no need for anyone to be deluded by whatever he has attained. And the True Lord says: 'And that which has been revealed to you from your Lord will surely increase many of them in transgression and disbelief. And We have cast among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection. Every time they kindled the fire of war (against you), Allah extinguished it. And they strive throughout the land (causing) corruption, and Allah does not like corrupters.'

They are always dejected because the True Lord does not allow them to satisfy all of their desires, and therefore they labour to spread corruption on earth by means of stealth. Whoever reads *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* will see that they were the creators of the theories which spearhead false ideas such as Marxism, Existentialism and Darwinism which were ideas formulated before so that their harmful effects would appear in non-Jewish peoples; as for the Jews themselves, they were pre-warned about such corrupt principles. They wanted to plot against the world, and this is how they labour hard to spread corruption amongst people. If we look at all the current deviations in the world, we will find that they are behind them all.

The unbridled capitalism came from the Jews, as did communism. All of those who claimed to be prophets after Prophet Muhammad only did so because of the actions of the Jews. Likewise, the organisations which hide behind names such as 'Masons', 'Rotary Club' and 'Lions' all come from the Jews. Yet, despite this, we see people who claim to be civilised and proud to be members of the Rotary Club. And when we ask them what they do at these clubs, they say that they engage in charitable activities and good works. So we say to them: 'Why do you not do good works in the name of Islam? Do you think that any good comes from outside of Islam?'

Every now and again, the world discovers that all its corruption has been caused by these people and their plots; and this is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* afflicts them with calamities from time to time because of how they labour hard to spread corruption on earth. This labouring to spread corruption takes many forms; sometimes it takes the form of scientific theories, sometimes it takes the form of extremism in political ideologies, such as unbridled capitalism and communism. All of those destroy people's lives. When people try a new ideology, they judge its success or failure by the good or the evil it brings them.

Russia, for example, used to supply the world with wheat from Siberia, but then it suffered from agricultural deficit and looks for others to sell it wheat. In countries where the unbridled capitalism rules, people lead an irresponsible lifestyle in the name of freedom. In Germany, on the other hand, we saw its capital Berlin divided into two halves, each half with its own life, but it was then united with consequent problems.

Some societies might place themselves in the hands of people who are even more malicious, such as the ruling parties in every country that does not follow a balanced system. We find that the members of such parties are like an organisation that embraces an ideology and its opposite so that no one can rebel against them. They have the workers under their control, and the factory of the capitalist is in their hands, and they live princely lives without anyone daring to question them.

Another example is the 'existentialist' philosophy which calls every man to affirm his own existence and was accompanied by a wave of pure liberalism and irresponsibility—for he did not understand the affirmation of existence as being founded on the responsibility of doing good deeds in life. They understood existence to mean the complete freedom of instincts—despite the fact that it is required of any man that if he wishes to stretch out his hand, he must stop his hand before it gets to the point where it would strike another man. Those people treated people like children, just like when the father gives his son a toy telephone, giving it to him so that he can take advantage of his energy before he becomes morally responsible; but the father would not let his son play with a real telephone. Yet, those people encourage adults to play and amuse themselves so that they do not get involved in serious matters.

An example of that is football: they hold championships for it, and apply serious rules to a mere game. Three hours before the match, you find that the security forces close the roads to the stadium which will host the match. If the referee makes a simple mistake, people become incensed and outraged, but when leaders and governments make thousands of mistakes, no one says anything. Why not? Because you have transferred your serious laws to games and sports and left what is truly serious without any laws at all.

Another example is the sporting attire young people wear; it covers the bodies of the men, but they do not cover the women's bodies. Why do they not also cover the women's bodies when playing sports? The goal is, naturally, to titillate people; and all of this is corruption on earth. 'And they strive throughout the land (causing) corruption.' What is curious is that their efforts to spread corruption on earth is disguised in truth, progress and civilisation, and certain Muslims come along and actually encourage this kind of corruption forgetting that the fundamental truth is: 'Allah does not like corrupters.' He created the universe in a state of soundness, and if you receive Allah's goodness according to the soundness of the world which you were brought into, you will make the best of your life and your work; and if you do not wish to increase the soundness of the world, you, at least, must not cause it to be corrupted.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* created the world in a precise order. You can observe this in those things wherein man plays no part, which we find to be of the utmost precision and soundness such as the sun, the stars, the seasons, and the wind. Corruption comes, however, when man interferes with things without the guidance of Allah's religion. So, corruption is what draws people away from Allah's guidance, and we find that some people follow their whims rashly and believe that their actions is what makes things better, and thus the True Lord's words apply to them: 'And when it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption on earth," they say, "We are but reformers." Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive (it) not.' (*al-Baqara:* 11-12)

This is the True Lord's judgement of them. They claim to be making things better, but they must cease their actions at once and stop spreading corruption. And after this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱتَّقَوْا۟ لَكَفَّرْنَا عَنْهُمْ
سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمْ وَلَأَدْخَلْنَٰهُمْ جَنَّٰتِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ﴿٦٥﴾

If only the People of the Book would believe and be mindful of God, We would take away their sins and bring them into the Gardens of Delight [65] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 65)

These words indicate that all of the people of the Book are outside the confines of faith, and it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: Your corruption took place before the coming of Islam, and therefore Islam came to free people from corruption. You were given a way of guidance from Allah, but you have altered it, Allah *Glorified is He* has sent messengers to you but you dishonoured them and you contrived your own religious customs. Islam did not only come to guide atheists; it also came to guide those who were led astray by the leaders of the people of the Book. After Islam came, they fought it with orientalism, writing books to criticise Islam, but they found that people are turning away from them. Hence, they brought people who praised Islam, whilst involving in this praise what would corrupt the doctrine of the Muslims.

We find that some books speaking of Islam's greatness come from the West, but they attempt to criticise it surreptitiously. They might say, for example, 'Muhammad was a rare genius in human history', basing everything they say on the notion that what Muhammad brought was a product of human genius, not Divine Revelation. For example, there was a European man who wrote a book about the one hundred greatest men in the world and placed Muhammad at number one in the list. We say to him: Thanks, but why do you not believe in the Message of Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah? Your statement does not concern us in the least.

They have explicitly attacked us before, and now, they are trying to conceal their assaults. In addition, they have arranged for the young people from the Islamic countries to be educated at schools and universities in the West. Their intention was to make them spokespeople for their efforts to corrupt Muslims, although they only succeeded with a few of them. Therefore, we say to our youth, 'Beware of being spreaders of corruption while claiming to be reformers. Do not judge these actions by their cover, but look at what their depths conceal.' Remember that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "shall we inform you of the most miserable people, who will not gain in whatever they may do? (It is) they whose labour has gone astray in (the pursuit of no more than) this world's life, and who none the less think that they are doing good deeds."' (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

If we pay attention to the instances of corruption in this world, we will find that the enemies of Islam have made a great deal of impact in that direction. The impudence of the Zionists has even led some of them to confess, 'Allah's chosen people can rest easy, since eighty per cent of the world's media is under our control and cannot report anything without our approval.'

Allah says: 'If the People of the Book would but attain to (true) faith and conscious piety, We should indeed efface their (previous) bad deeds, and bring them into gardens of bliss.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 65) With this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is presenting a chance for these people to enter the boundaries of faith if they ask Allah's forgiveness for their past sins. They are encouraged to begin a better life of purity and virtue instead of a life of corruption and misguidance so that they can truly recognise what Allah said to Prophet Muhammad, 'and (thus, O Prophet Muhammad), We have sent you as (an evidence of Our) grace towards all the worlds.' (*al-Anbiya'*: 107) We call on both Muslims and non-Muslims to follow these words to be granted this grace. Indeed, they will find in these words the revival of their spirits and the first steps to advancing themselves in the right path.

When Allah says: 'If the People of the Book would but attain to (true) faith and conscious piety,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 65) Allah is only calling them to heartily conviction and devoutness. The heart is the seat of our beliefs and sincerity. This means that the belief in the existence of the Supreme Deity, Allah *Glorified is He* settles in our hearts, and the belief in the message of this Supreme Deity is conveyed unto us by His messengers. Believing the teachings that the Messengers brought, with the clear understanding that we shall all return to Allah, should be reflected in our actions on earth. Faith and piety should inspire a man to perform good deeds and to steer clear of impious deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Consider the flight of time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself, unless he be of those (group of believers) who attain to faith and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3)

One of the righteous Arab scholars said, 'Faith is like the stakes of a tent, and deeds are like its ropes.' Just as every house has a foundation of pillars and stakes to make it steady, the Arab tent is made of thick pieces of fabric held up by wooden stakes and fastened to pegs by ropes. The Arab Bedouins used to untie these tents and load them on the backs of camels to move them from place to place. They would also choose fabrics that prevented rainwater from collecting inside the tent.

In the same manner, just like building a house, Allah *Glorified is He* has called upon the people of the Book to have faith and piety, so that He would efface their bad deeds. The Arabic word *kaffara* (efface) means to cover and conceal, and the Arabic word '*afw* (pardon) means to wipe away a mark. Hence, upon their belief, Allah *Glorified is He* will conceal and erase their bad deeds by pardoning them. They must utilize the message of mercy that Islam came with so that Allah *Glorified is He* may grant them forgiveness for their bad deeds in leading their followers astray.

They should have recognised that the coming of Prophet Muhammad was an opportunity for them to desist from their disbelief and falsehood. Prophet Muhammad came to grant this world spiritual enlightenment. He was sent to guide atheists to believe in the Creator of this universe and to direct those who strayed (from Allah's way of guidance) to His straight path. This is the definition of complete spiritual enlightenment. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوۡ أَنَّهُمۡ أَقَامُواْ ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةَ وَٱلۡإِنجِيلَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡهِم مِّن رَّبِّهِمۡ لَأَكَلُواْ مِن فَوۡقِهِمۡ
وَمِن تَحۡتِ أَرۡجُلِهِمۚ مِّنۡهُمۡ أُمَّةٞ مُّقۡتَصِدَةٞۖ وَكَثِيرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ سَآءَ مَا يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

If they had upheld the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down
to them from their Lord, they would have been given abundance from
above and from below: some of them are on the right course, but
many of them do evil [66] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 66)

If they had adhered to their unaltered Torah and Gospel and had faith in the Quran, it would have been better for them. The Torah was the Scripture of the Jews, while the Gospel was the Scripture of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. After these scriptures (or books), Allah sent down the final and all-encompassing book, the Noble Quran. Allah wanted them to have faith in the glad tidings mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel that informed them of the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*. The faith in the unaltered former scriptures would lead to their faith in Prophet Muhammad and what Allah has revealed to him.

The Jews themselves had warned the Arabs that Prophet Muhammad would arise one day. They warned that that they would follow him and reign over the Arabs with his message. However, when Prophet Muhammad was sent, the Arabs believed in his message before the Jews. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '…and (bear in mind that) that they (the Jews) used to pray for (and foresee) victory over the disbelieving (pagan Arabs). Then, when there came unto them that which they recognized (the truth and Prophet Muhammad), they denied it.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

The natural path of the people of the Book, who had faith in the unaltered Torah and Gospel, was to believe in the Quran because their earlier Scriptures entailed descriptions of Prophet Muhammad. 'Abdullah ibn Salam had been a Jewish rabbi before embracing Islam. He said about Islam, 'I knew that Prophet Muhammad was the prophet we were waiting for, the moment I saw him, just as I knew my own son. Nay, my acquaintance of Muhammad's character was even more solid.'

Allah *Glorified is He* has promised the people of the Book that having faith and observing piety would not only erase their sins and grant them salvation from the hellfire, but would allow them to enter the Gardens of bliss. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* knew that many of them were pure materialists who cared only for this worldly life. Thus, He has informed them that their faith would bring them material bounties in this world as well. Allah says: 'And if they would but truly observe the Torah and the Gospel and all (the revelation) that have been bestowed from their Lord upon them, they would indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 66) Allah *Glorified is He* has offered them the material means of this worldly life. The believer is the one who works hard to utilise the means of this worldly life as well as he can, with the aim of gaining the bliss of this world and the Hereafter. As for the disbeliever, he utilises these means only having this worldly life in mind, without thanking the Creator for providing them.

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted the people of the Book to have proper faith in the unaltered Torah and Gospel because this would facilitate their faith in the Quran. This was the way for their sins to be forgiven, and their path to paradise in the Hereafter. In addition, their faith would grant them worldly bounties because Allah *Glorified is He* does not hold His bounties from those who utilise the proper means.

Allah says: ‘To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires (only) a harvest in this world, We (may) give something thereof – but he will have no share in (the blessings of) the life to come.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20) Therefore, those who adhere to disbelief will only benefit from the means of this world, and will never receive any blessings in the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the disbelievers: ‘For We shall (in the Hereafter) turn towards all the (supposedly good) deeds they ever wrought, and shall transform them into scattered dust.’ (*al-Furqan:* 23) In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified the fate of the disbelievers in the Hereafter. He stated what their fate will be in this ephemeral worldly life. If they utilise the worldly instruments, Allah will (justly) give them the results of their efforts.

Allah *Glorified is He* alone possesses omnipotent Power. He (alone) is able to prevent the physical laws from working, and to remove all the natural characteristics of matter. The farmer might utilise all his available resources, ploughing the earth, fertilising it and breeding the best strains of seed. However, a great storm might uproot his plants, a flood might drown his soil, or a swarm of lethal insects might consume his crops. The Creator, who possesses omnipotent Power, controls all these resources. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* who has established the laws of nature is also able to annul them. As a human being, you are a master in the universe by Allah’s will, but you are also compelled to follow his laws in many ways. For instance, in this physical realm, illness might cause death to human beings, as might sudden accidents. Those decrees under the will of Allah can make man helpless and devoid of physical ability.

Allah *Glorified is He* has showed us that areas of land which have received rain for ages are sometimes struck by droughts. What does that teach us? Some people become deluded by the constant regularity of Allah's blessings; therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* occasionally holds some bounties back from people. Those events wherein He withholds His means occur so that man is not deluded in thinking that the forces of this material world have any sovereignty.

There are many examples of that in our lives. A farmer who owns many acres of land may find them infested with insects consuming his harvest, while his farming neighbour who owns a smaller piece of land may be graced with ampler harvest. The cause for that may be that his poorer neighbour is more righteous and pays regularly the purifying dues and alms from his harvest. Some farming people call these dues 'the land's shield'. In this scenario, the insects are among Allah's forces that consume the ill-gotten property, while leaving the lawful harvest without harm.

'And none can comprehend the forces of your Lord (Allah) except Him alone.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* gives worldly means to everyone who strives appropriately, and gives additional support to the believers. 'And if they would but truly observe the Torah and the Gospel and all (the revelation) that have been bestowed from their Lord, they would indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 66)

Provisions, as we know, are of two kinds. The first kind is the direct provision and sustenance, and the second kind is the indirect instrument that delivers the direct provision. Direct provisions bring immediate benefit, such as the food we eat or the water we drink. On the other hand, the instruments include the money with which we buy our direct provisions. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of worldly matters here so that we understand that His way of guidance only came to regulate man's motions in this life. The Hereafter is the reward for one's good actions here on earth.

After promising them paradise as a reward for their faith, Allah *Glorified is He* now extends to them the provisions of worldly life that give ease, comfort and happiness. The verse literally says: 'They would indeed eat from above them and below them.' Someone might ask, 'And how can they eat from above them?' Eating is the essential phenomenon of man's life because all the work a man does can only be achieved following his basic existence. This existence depends on three constituents of sustenance which are food, water, and air. If we want to preserve this life, we must ensure the continuous delivery of these three factors. When we consider these three in order of importance, we find that a man might go without food for a month and may persevere without water for three to ten days. However, he cannot survive in the absence of air for a few minutes.

Allah *Glorified is He* in His compassion to humankind made human ownership of these essential constituents related to their levels of importance. Thus, we find that some people own the sources of food and have control over them. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has placed sufficient food stores in the human body that allow the body's systems to survive for a month without external nutrition.

Then, concerning water, we find the ability of humans to control the sources of water is less than their ability to control those of food. Allah *Glorified is He* has reduced human control over water because a man can only survive without water for a few days. As for air, Allah *Glorified is He* has not allowed anyone at all to have ownership over it because all humans needs air in all their breaths, as their bodies cannot store much air in their lungs. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not entrust other human beings to control the air we breathe.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... they would indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 65) This means that if humans properly adhered to Allah's way of guidance, life's material means would yield to their wills. On the other hand, if man rebels against Allah's way, He will only grant him the low and worldly bounties of this life. Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* will resurrect him on the Day of Reckoning. These natural laws of the physical world certainly do not lie outside Allah's supreme control.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses all humankind with these words. If they respond to these verses, He will make it easy for them to utilise the materials He has granted them in this world. However, if they do not respond, He will withhold these material means. He is able to break their laws and neither the earth and the air, and nor any other force in His creation will be able to disobey His rules. If an entire community rebels against Allah's blessings, or against Allah's orders, Allah will set their punishment as an example to others by withholding their worldly means.

Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed man to be the master of all the beings in the universe. However, man is also subject to Allah's physical decrees. For example, humans are subject to illness and mortality. A human might fracture a bone or drown in water. Thus, if human beings, the masters to all the other creatures in the universe (by Allah's will) are subject to the Divine word, 'Be!' spoken by their Lord, other subordinate creatures follow the same rules as well.

Allah *Glorified is He* is able to command the earth, 'Be barren,' and to stop the rain from falling. He is the One Who created the habitual processes of nature that are regularly observed. Did Allah not speak to all humankind saying, 'As your Lord will have inspired it (the earth) to do'? (*az-Zalzala:* 5) If Allah *Glorified is He* inspired the earth to reveal its treasures or erupt in earthquakes, then what should we deduce about His control of everything else? Everything runs according to Allah's Command, and they all sing their praises to Allah; however, man does not understand the language of the other beings. Allah says: 'But you (O men) fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!' (*al-Isra':* 44)

Allah's orders are understood by every being that is subject to His decrees—whatever the form or genus it might be. If Allah *Glorified is He* were to teach you about the response of everything in nature, you would understand the languages of all the other beings. An example of this is the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* who heard an ant say to its fellow ants: 'Get into your dwellings, for I fear that Solomon and his soldiers might crush you.' (*an-Naml:* 18) How did Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* respond to this ant's request? He said: 'O my Lord (Allah)! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of You with which You hast graced me.' (*an-Naml:* 19)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…And We caused the mountains to join (our Prophet) David in extolling Our limitless Glory, and likewise the birds.' (*al-Anbiya'*: 79) The Quran also tells us that the hoopoe bird said to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon): 'For should not they (the tribe of disbelievers) come to adore Allah, (although it is He) who brings forth all that is hidden in the heavens and on earth.' (*an-Naml:* 25) So every creature in existence knows about faith and Allah's Oneness. Everything in existence responds to its Lord, as does everything which sustains man's life.

What about those who rebel against Allah *Glorified is He*? Allah commands the worldly means to be withheld from assisting the disbelievers, and we see various manifestations of that in different nations and lands. A land might be known for its abundant rain, and then Allah alters the nature of its environment so that it suffers from drought. Another land that has sufficient technology to visit outer space might be unable to withstand a hurricane. All of this confirms to us that the Hand of the Creator *Glorified is He* controls the means of this world.

Therefore, Allah says: 'And if they would but truly observe the Torah and the Gospel and all (the revelation) that have been bestowed from their Lord (Allah), they would indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 66) The last sentence in the verse literally says that Allah will grant them sustenance 'to eat' from above their heads and below their feet. That is, bounties will be granted to them from every side.

If what is meant by the word 'eat' here is direct sustenance, then it means that rain will pour from the skies to water the earth and grow crops for them. It could also refer to the trees, like the date palms as well as apple and orange trees that tower over us and provide their fruits from above. Furthermore, below our feet we will find vegetables and fruits that grow without having stalks above the earth, such as melons, cantaloupes and others. The fruits fallen from tree branches above us after they ripened should represent a profound message to us. If provision is sufficiently satisfying, it will fall to your feet, even if you do not seek it out.

If we understand Allah's words, '…they would indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 66) in a broader sense, we will perceive how Allah has placed secrets of provision above us, in the sky, and other secret blessings below us, under the ground. Do we not extract from the earth treasures that enrich our lives, by mining iron and copper or drilling petroleum? Thus, we find that everything known in our existence serves the preservation of the human species, and that this life is a gift from Allah *Glorified is He*.

If the people of the Book truly observed the Torah, the Gospel, and The Quran and followed their guidance, Allah *Glorified is He* would grant varied forms of blessings to them. Allah *Glorified is He* affirms this in another verse when He says: 'Yet if the people of those communities had but believed and observed piety (being consciousness of Us), We would indeed have opened up for them blessings out of the heaven and the earth.' (*al-A'raf:* 96)

We can observe how Allah *Glorified is He* has given certain people ample blessings, but they use such blessings with extravagance and tyranny. Then, our Lord leaves them in their inebriety until they rise to great heights before striking them with a punishment that only *the Almighty* can deliver. Our modern life is the best witness to this intoxication and lavishness of some people. Every nation that has used Allah's blessings to refuse His commands and act against His guidance ended up sinking into corruption. Its inhabitants became fierce enemies to one another and destroyed their provisions with their own hands. The experiences of real life confirm the truth of this fact, as if Allah *Glorified is He* is telling us to take heed, if we possess insight!

Allah says: 'And Allah propounds (presents to you) a parable: (Imagine) a town which was (once) secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings.' (*an-Nahl:* 112) The meaning of the Arabic word *qarya* (town) here is not merely the little village in the countryside which we know today. For the ancient Arabs, a town meant a place akin to a capital of a nation. The ancient Arabs were nomadic people, mostly roaming the wilderness without fixed homes. Their capital was a town that contained a small number of houses. This is why the Quran calls Mecca *Ummul-Qura* (the 'Mother of Towns').

Here in this verse, Allah gave a parable of a town which was secure and at ease. Its sustenance arrived abundantly from several places. This meant that its provisions were not intrinsic or self-provided, but was collected from foreign lands. In the times in which we live, we find that all the riches of the world pour into certain towns. When the people of such town refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings, what happened? 'Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear.' (*an-Nahl:* 112)

We can observe this phenomenon in several lands that received Allah's blessings and then responded to them with ingratitude. Their own inhabitants opened the doors of ruin upon themselves, and Allah *Glorified is He* caused these towns to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear.

Now, the literal meaning of the Arabic words used in these verses is, ‘He (Allah) clothed them in the garment of hunger and fear.’ When we consider the Arabic word *libas* (garment) used here, we can see how the pains of hunger and fear are pictured as garment that enveloped these towns, just as garments envelop the body. That is, Allah *Glorified is He* unleashed hunger upon them so that they could not find any means of sustenance, and then fear was sent upon them. The fear could be a result of the enmity they showed towards one another, for their mutual enmity was severe. It could also mean their fear from foreign enemies. This is very similar to the events actually happening in our times.

How does a person show ingratitude towards Allah’s blessings? It may be by concealing these blessings and using them to disobey Allah *Glorified is He*. In that form, it is similar to *kufr* (disbelief) in Allah *Glorified is He* which means ‘To conceal Allah’s existence.’ Ingratitude may also be when a person is being lazy and indolent in deriving these blessings from the places where they are thought to be.

The corruption which exists in the world today has mostly been caused by these two types of people. The first type of people is those who are slothful to seek out the blessings which Allah has placed in His universe. The second group are the people who work hard to extract these blessings, but then assign the credit to their own selves, without giving anything to the weak. They also use these blessings to commit sin.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Yet if the people of those communities had but believed and observed piety (being consciousness of Us), We would indeed have opened up for them blessings out of the heaven and the earth. However, they disbelieved, and so We punished them with what they (themselves) had been doing.’ (*al-A’raf:* 96)

He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘…And if they would but truly observe the Torah and the Gospel and all (the revelation) that have been bestowed from their Lord upon them, they would indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 66) This is a general judgement, but were there people who actually fulfilled it? Indeed, there were, and some of them acknowledged the truth of that and followed the right path. Allah *Glorified is He* describes these righteous people: ‘Some of them do pursue a right course.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 66)

The right course is a purposeful linear path that leads directly to a particular goal without straying.

So, Allah's true words, 'Some of them do pursue a right course,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 66) indicates that a group of the people of the Book followed the right path, while others did not. These words also indicate that Allah *Glorified is He* always leaves in His universe and creation a modicum of good.

This tiny amount of integrity might exist in the weakest of people who have no influence, prestige, or power in this world. Were it not for those people, Allah would destroy the world and all those in it. Prophet Muhammad explained this matter when he said, 'Were it not for servants of Allah who bow to him in prayer, babies who suckle and wild beasts that roam (on the earth), torment would have been poured upon you copiously and pressed tightly.'(1) Allah allows the seeds that preserve the good to persevere in His creation.

Therefore we find that there are those who say, 'As humankind increases its disbelief and aberration, Allah *Glorified is He* increases His aid to (the good in) them.' There might be a nation of atheists, except a single believer who is truly devoted to his Lord. For this devout servant, Allah may preserve the air and water of this land. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Some of them do pursue a right course; but as for most of them – vile indeed is what they do!' Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلرَّسُولُ بَلِّغۡ مَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ مِن رَّبِّكَۖ وَإِن لَّمۡ تَفۡعَلۡ فَمَا بَلَّغۡتَ رِسَالَتَهُۥۚ
وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡصِمُكَ مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِى ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ٦٧

Messenger, proclaim everything that has been sent down to you from your Lord – if you do not, then you will not have communicated His message – and God will protect you from people. God does not guide those who defy Him [67]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 67)

This verse begins with a command from Allah to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*. One of the aspects of the greatness of the chosen one, Prophet Muhammad, and the high rank he holds in Allah's sight, is that Allah has addressed all the messengers by their names alone, except for Prophet Muhammad. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'O Adam, convey unto them the names of these (objects of creation),' (*al-Baqara:* 33) and said: 'O Moses! Verily, I am Allah.' (*al-Qasas:* 30) He also spoke to other prophets saying, 'O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116), or saying: 'O Noah! Disembark in peace.' (*Hud:* 48) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* called every messenger by his name without attaching any attribute to it. However, He did not call Prophet Muhammad by his name, but rather called him by an attribute: 'O Messenger, 'O Apostle' or 'O Prophet.'

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in (Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir) and Al-Bayhaqi in (As-Sunnan Al-Kubra)*

It is as though this meant: 'O Messenger of Allah, all the teachings of the divine Messages have been combined in your message because you are the bringer of the religion which will last until the end of time. After your message, there will be no more messages sent to the earth except the understanding of the Book of Allah which might be granted by Allah to certain people.'

Another aspect of the greatness of Prophet Muhammad is that Allah vowed by Prophet Muhammad's life, and Allah *Glorified is He* never vowed by the life of any other human being except Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* can vow in whatever manner He decrees. However, we notice that He vowed by the wind, the brightness of morning, the night, the angels, but He had never vowed by the life of any human being except when He said: 'By your life (O Prophet), they are truly blindly stumbling in their delirium (of desire)!' (*al-Hijr:* 72) That is, by your life, O Prophet Muhammad, they (the people who disobeyed Prophet Lut (Lot)) are bewildered and confused.

Similarly, to indicate Prophet Muhammad's glorified standing in Allah's sight, Allah *Glorified is He* addressed Prophet Muhammad here as 'O Messenger'. Since Prophet Muhammad is the final messenger who came to confirm what the previous Scriptures had revealed, this means that all the bounties presented in the Scriptures before the Quran are encompassed in the Quran. In addition, the Quran also imparts more bounties that are required for the benefit of contemporary life.

Allah's Command in this verse is initiated with the words 'O Messenger'. This means that he is sent by Allah with a way of guidance for His creatures.

However, Allah continued His command with these words: 'Announce all that has been bestowed (and revealed) unto thee by your Lord.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) So why did Allah order His Messenger to announce the message, when the task is clear in the initial words 'O Messenger'. Is the whole purpose of a messenger not to announce a message by the One Who has sent him?'

In saying this, Allah *Glorified is He* knows that His Messenger will not hold back any part of the message. This verse means that Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to give an excuse to His Prophet in front of the people. He wanted to inform the followers that, if Prophet Muhammad announced unto them something which some of them disliked, he was only doing so in obedience to Allah's Command. Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was not constructing this message by himself. In addition, Prophet Muhammad does not benefit from this message. They must receive his rulings attentively as if they had received it directly from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad: 'For unless you reveal it (the message) fully, you will not have delivered His message (at all).' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) Thus, he is obliged to deliver the message as it is, without even minor changes, as Allah *Glorified is He* wants His perfect religion to be delivered without fault.

The structure of faith requires these words to be spoken so that the message is delivered without fail. Therefore, it must also be completely implemented to mend the faults of this world and repair the corruption caused by man's ways. Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed His religion and its laws so that the world is operated in the way that He has ordained without any imbalance. Therefore, Allah says: 'For unless you reveal it fully, you will not have delivered His message (at all).' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* gives His Messenger Prophet Muhammad complete immunity. Allah has only sent forth the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*, for the best of people.

Allah *Glorified is He* created Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* and gave him His way of guidance. Prophet Adam was obliged to convey this guidance to his progeny. However, some generations of the children of Adam did not heed to this guidance. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has sent messengers to remind them of it. A messenger would only come after corruption had widely spread among the people. Allah *Glorified is He* had placed within the human mind three aspects of consciousness. The first aspect is that of self-reproach and conscience that refuses evil deeds (*an-nafs al-lawama*). The second aspect is that of evil and misguidance that incite us to commit misdeeds (*an-nafs al-amara bil-sou'*). The third aspect enjoys constant peace and serenity (*an-nafs al-mutma'ina*).

The purpose of the conscientious self-reproaching mind is to refuse all the allusions made by the misguided part of our mind. If the self-reproaching mind does not admonish this misguided mind, its evil will be encouraged and will persist unchecked. As for the third, the peaceful mind, it is the part of our minds that desires to follow Allah's way of guidance.

An example of the three aspects of the mind is a man who has passionate urges to commit a sin. He may commit the sin and then, later, regret it, reproach himself, and repent from the sin. If he does that, this man will have acted as his own deterrent. However, if the soul which enjoins evil gains control over him, there will be no deterrent in his mind from further misguidance.

What if corrupt thinking gains control of the general public and the people no longer forbid one another from committing evil? Because of that, Allah *Glorified is He* has sent a succession of messengers with new miracles to bring the world back to righteousness and His way of guidance.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not send any messenger without letting them know that their job is to convey His message. In the verse we are currently examining, Allah is giving His Messenger an excuse when conveying commands that his people might dislike, for the Messenger's role is only to announce Allah's orders. Allah says, 'For unless you reveal it fully, you will not have delivered His message (at all).' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67)

A message requires a sender Who here is Allah *Glorified is He*. It also requires a recipient who here is humankind, and a messenger who here is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. The message's content is then revealed for the Messenger to announce.

In similar Arabic lexical structures, we find that the word *arsala* (to send), as in 'I sent a messenger to a receiver', has two objects. The first object is the messenger or the person who is sent. The second object is the receiver or the person to whom the message is meant. One object is direct and the other is indirect. The indirect object is joined to the verb with a preposition. The Arabic preposition used here is *ila* (to). Indeed, the messenger knows that he has been sent from Allah *Glorified is He* to the people for their own benefit. Certainly, no part of this message gives any benefit to Allah *Glorified is He*. If you see this verb followed by the preposition 'to' (*ila*), know that it is specifying the destination to which the message is being sent. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and (He will make him) a messenger to the children of Israel.' (*Al-'Imran:* 49) This clarifies that Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) was sent with a message of guidance to the children of Israel that was meant for their own benefit. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have sent you (O Muhammad) as an apostle unto all humankind.' (*an-Nisa':* 79) That is to say, 'You have been sent for the benefit of humankind.' The proposition *li* (unto) here implies both meanings: benefit and destination. '... For unless you reveal it fully, you will not have delivered His message (at all)' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has prevented the delivery of Prophet Muhammad's message to be incomplete in any way, just as His way of guidance is comprehensive and faultless.

Someone might say that people might not adhere to all the obligations that Allah requires of them at their proper times and places, such as prayers, for example. This is a result from our failure to organise our lives in accordance with Allah's way of guidance. It is a duty of society to organise people's daily jobs in the time between dawn and the Midday Prayers. This time can efficiently be made sufficient for compulsory activity and work. Most labour should end at midday. In this way, people's work will not clash with Allah's orders, and their activities will not be hindered or interrupted.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And Allah will protect you from the (disbelieving) men.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) These words in the Quran are unavoidable because messengers are only sent after evil and corruption have become rampant and widespread. Had corruption not become the norm, Allah *Glorified is He* would have left society to restrain itself. He would have left the 'self-reproaching souls' to restrain the 'souls which enjoin evil' so that the 'souls at peace' would regain control of human behaviour. However, when corruption fills the world, Allah sends a messenger with divine guidance to amend the human state. Thus, it follows that the evil members of society will not simply leave the Messenger alone, but they will resist his endeavours. Such a society desires the scales of existence to be unbalanced because its leading members benefit from corruption and evil. Therefore, they seek to defend corruption, and if someone comes along to give justice to the weak and the oppressed, he will certainly encounter difficulties caused by the powerful and the corrupt.

These evil schemes will be primarily directed to the messenger's person. Since the messenger enjoys direct revelation from Allah, he will be able to bear this resistance as Allah *Glorified is He* had prepared him for this mission. Then, these difficulties will start to overcome the followers of the messenger, so Allah *Glorified is He* extends His spiritual aid to them so that they too are able to bear such hardships.

Allah has protected Prophet Muhammad's safety in all those events, as Allah has said: 'And Allah will protect you from the (disbelieving) men.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to His Messenger: 'Be at peace, O Muhammad, for the One Who sent you to guide humankind will not allow anyone to harm you. I will extend your life until your message is complete. You might experience pain and hardship or encounter difficulties in the course of your mission, but you are divinely protected.'

The extent of some of these difficulties that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* encountered were narrated to us. Were his teeth not broken at the battle of Uhud and his face injured? When his finger bled in an injury, he said: 'You are but a finger that bleeds, and all you have encountered is for Allah's cause!'(1)

When Allah *Glorified is He* has said to Prophet Muhammad: 'And Allah will protect you from the (disbelieving) men,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67), this did not mean that Prophet Muhammad would not struggle and suffer in Allah's Cause to spread His message. Allah *Glorified is He* was telling His Messenger that, despite the hardships, his life would be protected. Allah *Glorified is He* did not prevent His Noble Messenger, Prophet Muhammad, from suffering so that no one who later called to Allah's way would ever suffer more than the pains suffered by Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa*

Let us listen well to what 'Aisha, the Mother of Believers, *may Allah be pleased with her*, is narrated to have said about this verse. She said: 'Prophet Muhammad stayed up late one night, and I was by his side. I said, "O Messenger of Allah, what ails you?" He said: "Would (it happen) that a good man from my companions guards me at night."' At that moment, she continues, 'I heard the sound of a sword, and Prophet Muhammad said, "Who is that?" A voice replied, "It is Sa'd and Hudhayfa. We came to guard you." So, Prophet Muhammad slept until I heard his breathing. Then, this verse was revealed. Prophet Muhammad raised his head at *Qubbat* Adam and said, "You can leave, those who are standing in guard, for Allah *Glorified is He* has protected me."'(1)

A Belgian researcher spent a great deal of time studying the biography of Prophet Muhammad. When she reached this point, she stopped and said, 'Even if this man was deceiving all the people, he would not have deceived himself about his own life. Had he not been convinced that his Lord would indeed protect him, he would not have done that.' So this was a practical application of the trust he had in his Creator *Glorified is He*. The Belgian scholar added, 'Therefore, I can say with complete certainty: There is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He* and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' The woman embraced Islam because of her reflection on one single moment from the life of Prophet Muhammad.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Behold, Allah *Glorified is He* does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the truth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) We know that guidance means taking a direction that leads to the desired destination. Guidance is also any aid that helps a person who seeks direction to reach their destination. The disbelievers plotted against Prophet Muhammad and constructed schemes against him. Allah *Glorified is He* banned every way to them and aided His Messenger against them. Allah's succour of the believers at the Battle of Badr was a practical manifestation of His divine words: ‘How often a small soldier has overcome a great soldier by Allah’s leave (and will)!’ (*al-Baqara:* 249)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Qurtubi, and Muslim narrated the likes of it*

Indeed, despite their plots to get to Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, there was no evil plan or scheme which could result in killing him. Another manifestation was on the day when Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Mecca, and Allah *Glorified is He* blinded the sight of the young men who intended to kill Prophet Muhammad. They wanted to kill him together so that his blood indemnity would fall on all the tribes, but they could not see him as Allah *Glorified is He* cast a veil over their sights. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* made them unable to carry out their plans. It is as though He were saying to them: ‘You will never be able to stop Muhammad from delivering his message, neither openly, secretly or covertly. In fact, you are serving the message even as you attempt to destroy it.’

Their actions against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the onset of his mission affirmed the strength of his message. Then, Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Mecca. His guide on his emigration journey was a disbeliever named ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Urayqit. This showed us that one person’s disbelief was transformed by Allah to guide Prophet Muhammad to safety.

Although he was a disbeliever, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Urayqit was not tempted by the bounty offered to betray Prophet Muhammad, and he did not deliver news of the Prophet to the idolaters of Quraysh. However, the disbelievers still did not take admonition from any of these events. Likewise, sheep covered the tracks of the Prophet and his Companion. Also, the hooves of Suraqa’s horse sank in the ground as he attempted to harm the Prophet’s procession.

Allah’s forces were on the side of Prophet Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah. Thus, we saw how Allah *Glorified is He* did not guide the disbelieving folk to the goal which they sought which was to kill Prophet Muhammad, and nor did He guide them to the right path. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَسْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَىْءٍ حَتَّىٰ تُقِيمُوا۟ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةَ وَٱلْإِنجِيلَ
وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۗ وَلَيَزِيدَنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُم مَّآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِن
رَّبِّكَ طُغْيَٰنًا وَكُفْرًا ۖ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ٦٨

Say, ‘People of the Book, you have no true basis [for your religion] unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and that which has been sent down to you from your Lord,’ but what has been sent down to you [Prophet] from your Lord is sure to increase many of them in their insolence and defiance: do not worry about those who defy [God] [68] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 68)

As we know, ‘Say’ is a directive given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*. An announcement follows this directive from Allah *Glorified is He* to the people of the Book. It tells them that they are bereft of guidance because they have not properly observed the Torah and Gospel. Instead, they have corrupted their Scriptures and have not believed in the Quran, the perfected message of Divine Guidance revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ibn ‘Abdullah).

Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘You have no valid ground for your beliefs…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 68). The Arabic words literally mean, ‘You have nothing of solid ground (that holds your belief).’ The word *shay’* (thing) means the least important object of any class of materials. For instance, a piece of straw is a ‘thing’ and a leaf is a ‘thing’. That which is called a *shay’* (in Arabic) is the flimsiest of beings.

Thus, Allah’s words: ‘You have no valid ground for your beliefs,’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 68) mean, ‘Do not think that when you apply some particular element of the Torah or Gospel’s teachings, while concealing and ignoring the remaining commands, that you have thereby attained some kind of guidance. You have no guidance at all until you truly observe the Torah and the Gospel, and then believe in the Book which has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad. You cannot simply take the parts of Allah’s way of guidance that please you, and leave aside the portions that do not please your desires.’

Furthermore, knowing that a *shay’* (thing) is the lowest level of existence, these verses explain to them that they have sunk to the lowest level of existence because they have no guidance.

Allah *Glorified is He* adds: ‘Yet, all that has been bestowed upon you (O Prophet Muhammad) by your Lord is bound to make many of them more stubborn in their arrogance and in their denial of the truth.’ (*al-An’am:* 68) This means that they will not remain on a certain steady level of arrogance and disbelief. In fact, every time that Allah *Glorified is He* reveals a verse of guidance unto His Prophet, and every time He protects him, they will become even more obstinate in their misguidance. Their stubbornness should have been weakened, and their hearts softened by further guidance, but their hatred and abhorrence for the religion of Islam only intensified.

Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with him* who had once led the pagans in their military expeditions against Islam, one day said to ‘Amr ibn Al-’As *may Allah be pleased with him*: ‘It is clear (now) that the matters of power are now on Muhammad’s side.’ Then, they both embraced Islam despite the power and status they enjoyed amongst their people. When Khalid and ‘Amr saw the calamities which befell anyone who opposed Prophet Muhammad, irrespective of status and rank, they embraced Islam. This is the natural position of a logical mind that contemplates matters without any hatred or prejudice.

As for the disbelieving minds that are bent on hatred and prejudice, every verse that is revealed to support the believers will only serve to agitate rage and bitterness. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*, had to prepare himself to face these disbelievers.

O Messenger of Allah, you are not facing a limited force, but a growing force of evil. Every revealed verse guides those who have any goodness in their depths, while increasing the resentment of those who are utterly bereft of any goodness. Their evil increases with their sins and crimes, while the good people lessen their crime and relinquish their pasts.

We have the best example of this in the story (1) of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* told us that Prophet Yusuf’s brothers said: ‘Truly, Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother (Binyamin (Benjamin)) are dearer to our father than we are, even though we are so many in number. Behold, our father is surely suffering from an aberration!’ (*Yusuf:* 8)

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(1) The story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph)

After that, they said to their father: 'Why will you not trust us with Yusuf (Joseph)?' (*Yusuf:* 11) Then, they began to plot and plan against their brother. They said: 'Let him go out with us tomorrow that he may enjoy himself and play.' (*Yusuf:* 12) The first plan that they had, as Allah *Glorified is He* tells us was: 'Slay Joseph.' (*Yusuf:* 9)

To slay means to force the soul out of the body, and this is the worst level of evil. However, they backed down from this first plan and said, 'Or drive him away to some (faraway) land '(*Yusuf:* 9) for they did not want to slay him. Thus, they were satisfied with the idea of leaving him in a faraway place, imagining that a caravan would pick him up, and thus they would separate Joseph from his father. So, their first plan was to kill him, and then they ended up thinking of a way that confirmed his survival: 'One of them said: "Slay Joseph, or else drive him away to some (faraway) land, so that your father's regard may be for you alone."' (*Yusuf:* 9) The third stage of planning was when they said: 'Cast him into the dark depths of this well.' (*Yusuf:* 10) A well contains water, and so many people will pass by this source of water. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* showed us how goodness came from the depths of evil plots.

Thus, Allah's true words, 'but what has been sent down to you (Prophet) from your Lord is sure to increase many of them in their insolence and defiance' (*al-Ma'ida:* 68) mean that many of them will sink deeper into evil (O Prophet Muhammad). So prepare yourself (Prophet) for this.

We may observe here that Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed for the possibility that a minority of them might eventually embrace the true faith. He spoke only about the majority of the disbelievers and not all of them. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Nay, feel no sorrow for the people who deny the truth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 68) Thus, do not grieve over them, O Messenger of Allah.

Nevertheless, despite the animosity and hatred of the disbelievers to his mission and all their attempts to harm him, Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*, never ceased to supplicate for their guidance. He used to constantly say, 'O Allah, guide my people, for they know not!'(1) He also never ceased to say: ‘Perhaps Allah *Glorified is He* will produce from their progeny those who will worship Allah alone.’(1) Indeed, this proved to be the case.

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(1) *Narrated by Az-Zabidi and As-Suyuti*

After the first battles between the Muslims and the disbelievers, some companions would say to one another: ‘I am sad that ‘Amr escaped from me and I did not kill him.’ Another would say, ‘I am sad that ‘Ikrima escaped from my grip,’ and a third would say, ‘I do not know how Khalid ibn Al-Walid managed to escape.’

Allah *Glorified is He* did not allow the early Companions to kill those fierce warriors because He was saving them for Islam, and the inability of the Muslims to harm these men allowed them to aid Islam later on, by carrying the sword to defend it and spread its message. When 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl(2) *may Allah be pleased with him* finally received the injury which ended his life, he laid his head and asked Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with both of them* ‘Is this a death which would make the Messenger of Allah (Prophet Muhammad) pleased with me?’

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* prevented the early Muslims from killing them in the earlier battles because in the later battles, they would become forces that fought for Islam’s cause with their military prowess. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* kept them alive to serve His message. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَٱلصَّٰبِـُٔونَ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ
وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

For the [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Sabiun, and the Christians – those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds – there is no fear: they will not grieve[69] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 69)

There are four kinds of people who do not believe in the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*. This verse is one of the three verses in the Quran which share a similar structure. The first verse is in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, the second verse is here in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* and the third verse is in the chapter of *al-Hajj*.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

(2) The story of the martyrdom of ‘Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, those who have embraced (testified) faith (in this Divine Book), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians and the Sabi'un – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Lord; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 62) We can observe here that in the original Arabic of this verse, the word for Sabi'un is *as-sabi'een* in the Arabic accusative case.

Here in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For, verily, those who have embraced (testified) faith (in this Divine Book), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the *Sabi'un* and the Christians – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 69) Here, the word for *Sabi'un* is *as-sabi'un*, in the nominative case, and is mentioned before the words 'the Christians'.

In the chapter of *al-Hajj,* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, as for those who have embraced (testified) faith (in this Divine Book), and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabi'un, and the Christians and the Magians (on the one hand), and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to others but Allah (on the other hand) – verily, Allah will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, Allah is a witness unto everything.' (*al-Hajj:* 17)

Here, four groups of people are mentioned in all the verses. In the verse of the chapter of *al-Hajj*, Allah *Glorified is He* adds two more groups. We can see that the information given in each verse is different as is the wording. In one case, the Christians are mentioned before the Sabi'un, whilst in another the Sabi'un followers are mentioned before the Christians. Additionally, in one case, the word Sabi'un is in the Arabic nominative case (Sabi'un), whilst in the other it is in the accusative case (*Sabi'een*).

As for the different information given, the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* tells us: 'All who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Lord; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 62) In the verse of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: 'All who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 69) The verse in the chapter of *al-Hajj* says: 'Verily, Allah will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, Allah is a witness unto everything.' (*al-Hajj:* 17)

All three verses are presenting the same concept in diverse ways for different purposes. We may observe here that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…embraced (testified) faith.' The word faith in the verse refers to the spoken faith and does not refer to the genuine belief of the heart. These verses speak of many groups and faiths. The verses mention the hypocrites as well as those who follow the Jewish faith (the followers of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*) and the Christians (the followers of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*). The verses also mention the Sabi'un. Those were not followers of any prophet. They probably used to follow Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*, but then broke away from Noah's faith and began to worship the stars, or they were people who broke away from Judaism and Christianity and began to worship the angels. Finally, there are the 'Magians' who are fire-worshippers.

So Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make a spiritual renewal in the world. All those who rush to embrace this Islam will be saved from the evil they did before the coming of Islam. Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive their past efforts that led people astray and ruled them unjustly.

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *Glorified is He* says '… (they) shall have their reward with their Lord,' (*al-Baqara:* 62) which means that after forgiving them for the sins they had done, He will additionally reward them for the good deeds which were not annulled by evil. This was the explanation of the first two verses: those of the chapter *of al-Baqara* and that of *al-Ma'ida*.

We may observe that in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, Allah *Glorified is He* did not say: '…shall have their reward with their Lord.' (*al-Baqara:* 62) Perhaps, this is because this was already stated in the verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara*. There are many examples of this in the Noble Quran, as when a general statement is explained in the light of a specific statement elsewhere.

As for the verse in the chapter of *al-Hajj*, Allah *Glorified is He* pronounces therein: 'Verily, Allah, will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, Allah, is a witness unto everything.' (*al-Hajj:* 17) It appears that (many of them) will never embrace the true faith or do righteous deeds. Thus, these verses were revealed as novel and clarifying contracts of creed in this world.

Prophet Muhammad came to renew the religious affairs on earth. Allah *Glorified is He* says about those who testify faith only with their tongues, namely the hypocrites: 'For, verily, those who have embraced (testified) faith,' (*al-Baqara:* 69).' Those who have embraced faith' is the subject of the sentence, and it is in the Arabic accusative case because of the use of the particle (*inna*) ('verily') which always makes the noun following it accusative. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* follows the particle *inna* by mentioning the noun *As-Sabi'un* in the nominative state instead of the grammatically traditional accusative state *As-Sabi'een*. Why did Allah place the nominative noun instead of an accusative noun, when this breaks the usual rule of Arabic grammar?' Verily, those who have embraced (testified) faith (in this Divine Book), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians and the *Sabi'un...*' (*al-Baqara:* 62).

In this occurrence of the word Sabians, it is put in the accusative case – *sabina* – without breaking the rule of *I'rab* (desinential inflection). In one instance, we find the word 'Sabians', preceding the word 'Christians,' while in another instance it follows it. Here, we must become acquainted with the period in which the Sabians lived. They existed before the coming of the Christians. So, if we want to know their chronological position, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions them before the Christians; and if we want to know their rank, we read elsewhere in the Quran that they come after the Christians. It follows that, when chronologically viewed, the True Lord mentions them before the Christians; and when categorised in terms of their numbers and size as a nation, He places them after the Christians. This is due to the fact that their numbers were less, and they did not represent as large a community as the Christians did.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the Sabians once in the accusative case and another in the nominative case to make us pay attention to this group of people and recognise them. Breaking the usual rule of grammar is a way of drawing attention to what is being said. The Sabians were a people who worshipped the stars and the angels, which is a form of misguidance and error.

So, there were the Jews, who acknowledged the existence of One True Lord (Allah), and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* conveyed Allah's Message to them. And then there were the Christians who also acknowledged the existence of One True Lord, and `Isa (Jesus, son of Mary) *peace be upon him* conveyed Allah's Message to them. Last, there were the hypocrites who declared belief only with their tongues, although belief had not entered their hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to draw our attentions to the fact that the *Sabians* were a people who stepped outside the scope of belief regarding the existence of an Unseen Creator, yet the True Lord is telling us that He will forgive them if they have correct faith and do righteous deeds. Faith in Allah constitutes an essential condition to acceptance and reward of righteous deeds. Here, Allah mentions them before the Christians to dismiss any doubt that He will not pardon them if they believe and do righteous deeds.

We may also observe that they are mentioned in a context where Allah ranks them alongside those who worship Allah's creation instead of Allah. Anyone who attributes divinity to anything other than Allah is akin to those who worship stars and go beyond the precincts of monotheism.

Allah *the Exalted* allows every human being to enter the arena of faith and begin a purification of their creeds by means of which everyone can attain to true faith and dissociate themselves from all forms of joining false gods with Allah. If the hypocrites, Jews, Christians and Sabians embrace true faith and do righteous deeds, they will receive recompense and reward from Allah. They shall have no fear of any punishment in the Hereafter or grief over what they have lost in this worldly life. Evidently, faith is coupled with righteous action because faith unsupported by righteous words puts it in the jeopardy of being lost – Allah forbid. Such faith is worthless. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* wants faith to rule all acts of life through righteous deeds. He commands every believer to act righteously so that they can be rewarded by their Lord and have no fear or grief.

As for those groups who persist in their position of disbelief, Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. For Allah is the Witness to everything. The word 'judge' indicates to us that Allah will give a judgement that separates the holders of right and truth from false ones. We know that the one who passes judgement only does so based on strong, irrefutable evidence. Evidence consists of confession, known as 'the queen of all proofs' in legal language, or the testimony of witnesses or the swearing of an oath. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* will pass judgement between diverse parties and positions; to' judge' or 'decide' here means to pronounce judgement. When the one who judges is also the one who has been witness to the case, his verdict will be just. Therefore, the True Lord says: 'Allah witnesses all things.' (*al-Hajj:* 17) The True Lord then says:

لَقَدۡ أَخَذۡنَا مِيثَٰقَ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ وَأَرۡسَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡهِمۡ رُسُلٗاۖ كُلَّمَا جَآءَهُمۡ
رَسُولُۢ بِمَا لَا تَهۡوَىٰٓ أَنفُسُهُمۡ فَرِيقٗا كَذَّبُواْ وَفَرِيقٗا يَقۡتُلُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

We took a pledge from the Children of Israel, and sent messengers to them. Whenever a messenger brought them anything they did not like, they accused some of lying and put others to death [70] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 70)

The Arabic word *mithaq* (covenant, pledge) means a seriously binding commitment. Pledges are only declared to be solemn if there is fear that they may be disregarded and breached. Many covenants of faith have been made. The first was that taken from all the descendants of Adam *peace be upon him* when Allah drew from the loins of the children of Adam their progeny and made them bear witness to His Godhead and Lordship.

'When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, And (mention) when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, (saying to them), "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." (This) - Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware." (*al-A'raf:* 172)

Or the firm pledge of support for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah took from all previous Prophets *peace be upon them all*:

“And (recall, O People of the Scripture), when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, (saying), “Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you (must) believe in him and support him.” (Allah) said, “Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment?” They said, “We have acknowledged it.” He said, “Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses” (*Al-’Imran:* 81).

Or the special pledge that was taken from every community to which a prophet or a messenger was sent. Also, every element of the religion entails a pledge. In Islam, we are committed to many pledges. Likewise, we also know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked to be pledged allegiance at Al-`Aqaba. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw that many ties linked him to the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj; just as the many ties that linked him to every people who longed for unity under the banner of a single faith.

On their part, the Jews considered the Arabs of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj to be mere barbarians and servants who worked for them. They deemed leadership as belonging entirely to them. Every time they differed with the Arabs, they would threaten them with the imminent coming of a messenger in whom they would believe, and then they would slay them all.

Both tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj tried to win the Jews to their side. Al-Aws made a treaty with Banu Qurayzha, and Al-Khazraj made treaties with Banu An-Nadir and Banu Qaynuqa`. Still both of them were threatened by the Jews with the coming of this new Prophet. Therefore, both Arab tribes were eager to meet and get to know Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It happened that during the pilgrimage season, a delegation of six men arrived, and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invited them to embrace Islam. They announced their belief in him saying: ‘We have left our people and there is not worse enmity and evil between any people than that between them. We hope that Allah unites them through you. We shall go to them and invite them to your cause, and present to them this religion which we have accepted from you. If Allah unites them through it, no man shall be dearer than you’

The delegation revisited Mecca during the pilgrimage season of the following year. Their number increased to twelve men. The pledge they made was that none of them should associate anything with Allah, or steal, or commit unlawful sexual intercourse (adultery or fornication), or kill his children, or commit slander or disobey the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in any of the good things he enjoined. They returned to Medina accompanied by Mus`ab ibn `Umayr *Allah be pleased with him* who went to teach them the Quran. In the third year, seventy-three men came along with two women, Nusaiba bint Ka`b, known as Umm `Umarah, and Asma' bint `Amr ibn `Adi. They all pledged allegiance to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which heightened the apprehension of the Quraysh. In this pledge, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them: 'I covenant with you on the condition that you protect me from anything you protect your women and children from.' At response, Al-Barra' ibn Ma`rur took hold of his hand and said: 'Indeed yes, we swear by Him who has sent you with the Truth, we shall protect you from whatever we protect our kindred from. So, accept the pledge of our allegiance, O Messenger of Allah. For by Allah, we are men of battle and arms.' Abu Al-Haytham ibn At-Tayyihan interrupted and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, there are ties between us and certain men (meaning the Jewish tribes) which we shall sever. But if we do this and then Allah grants you victory, will you return to your own people (meaning the Quraysh) and leave us?' Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* smiled and said: 'No! Rather, blood for blood, and forgiving of blood for forgiving of blood. You are of me and I am from you. I will fight whom you fight and I will make peace with those with whom you make peace.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* then stretched out his hand and they pledged allegiance to him. The second Pledge of `Aqaba comprised a promise of Paradise to all who made this pledge and honoured it – and they all did honour it.

These were some types of covenants and pledges. When the True Lord tells us in the verse under discussion that He took a solemn pledge from the children of Israel, this means that it was a firm and binding covenant: 'Verily, we took the covenant of the children of Israel and sent them Messengers. Whenever there came to them a Messenger with what they themselves desired not- a group of them they called liars and others among them they kill.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 70)

The True Lord received a solemn pledge from the children of Israel and sent messengers to convey His Law and Message to them. However, every time a messenger came to them, they would first debate to decide whether the law of guidance that he brought from Allah was to their liking or not. If they did not find it to their liking, they would kill the Messenger of Allah or deny him. They did this, even though they were bound by a solemn pledge to follow any Messenger of Allah once he produced a miraculous sign of his prophethood and brought Allah's Law that would give guidance and direction to their lives.

But the children of Israel rebelled over and over against the teachings of the Messengers because they did not find them to their liking. The first form of rebellion was denial, which was the first step in the course of violating their solemn pledge. They did not stop at merely rejecting and denying the Messengers of Allah, but they tried to isolate the Messenger so that his teachings would not get through to the people and guide them. Therefore, their rejection did not stop at denial, but went as far as killing the Messenger for bringing a message that did not conform to their likings and disliking.

First, what is the meaning of the Arabic word *hawa* (vain or egotistical desires, inclinations, likings)? It derives from the three-letter root' *ha-waw-ya*'. This root has three derivatives: *hawa*, *hawa'* (air) or *huwiyy* (falling down). All these pronunciations signify 'permeation' and 'inclination'. The word *hawa* means a liking and inclination of the soul to a thing. You may feel passionate about something in your soul, associated with strong cravings, even though the thing you want may be disagreeable, unacceptable, or unlawful.

But does *hawa* only signify negative desires? No, because there are positive kinds of desires, as those motivated by faith, which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us when he said: 'None of you (truly) believes until his desires (or inclinations) are in line with what I have brought.'(1) So it is possible that desires are towards good things; in this case, the desire becomes the motivator and director of the soul towards the truth. As for the word *hawa'* (air), it means the gas mixture that is inhaled and exhaled to provide vital oxygen to nourish the body and keep it alive. A popular saying expresses it this way: 'I approached as a breath subtly moves in and out, 'which denotes that the approach was subtle and unnoticed. We know that when we eat something we like, we enjoy its taste. Also, when we drink something we like, we taste its flavour. But breathing is involuntary and imperceptible; so when we breathe in something we like, it produces a subtle sensation.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Baghawi in Sharh Al-Sunnah*, *At-Tabrizi in Mishkat Al-Masabih and Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in Kanz Al-`Ummal*

There is a third derivative from the same root *ha-waw-ya',* and it is pronounced as *huwiyy*. The verbal form of the word is *hawa/yahwi* means 'to fall down' or 'drop'; such as lowering a bucket into a well. So, what kind of *hawa* about which is this verse talking?

The True Lord says: '…whenever there came to them a Messenger with what they themselves desired not - a group of them they called liars and others among them they kill.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 70) Accordingly, the *hawa* being referred to here is the desire of the soul, devoid of guidance from Allah. It establishes itself as the power that controls the behaviour of this soul and leads it into disobedience of Allah. But did the True Lord *Glorified is He* leave the human soul without any means of protection? No, because He sent Messengers who conveyed His law, summarised in the commandants of 'Do' and 'Do not do'. In this way, guidance can watch over and direct the soul's inclinations.

Yet, if the True Lord willed that His Law should be a guardian over the soul's inclinations, why did He create the soul at all? The answer is that Allah *Glorified is He* created the soul because, through its existence, the human beings shall have desire towards truthful and lawful aims which result in the perpetuation of their species and the earning of honest livelihood and gains. So instinct exists; Allah created it to perform a certain function in life; and, by means of His Law, He keeps it protected from deviating from its proper purpose.

Some people may suggest that since Allah *Glorified is He* created the sexual instinct, why should it not be left it to freely express itself? Our answer is that one has to be conscious of Allah and learn that the sexual instinct is meant to ensure the perpetuation of human life. To use it in ways that anger Allah causes ruin to the human species. It is a deviation from Allah's Way of guidance and it has punishable consequences.

This is similar to the instinct for food. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has created it to preserve human life. He did not give it to us so that we consume ourselves with gluttony and greed. Likewise, He did not give us the instinct for curiosity to spy on one another, but rather to discover the secrets of the universe and develop new techniques for the benefit of humankind. Every instinct exists for a specific purpose; and the moment it swerves from its original purpose defined by Allah *Glorified is He* the Divine Law intervenes and objects. Every instinct should be used within a certain sphere. The Divine Law has not come to eliminate instincts, but rather to elevate them so that people use them to bring benefit, not harm, themselves, and others.

An Arabic proverb says: ‘Vain desire is the bane of reason.’ When two people, an oppressor and an oppressed, stand before a judge to present their case, a fair judge is the one who lifts the injustice off the oppressed, even if he favours or is inclined towards the oppressor. Therefore, we find that the True Lord made His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* infallible; for He says: ‘He (Muhammad) does not speak from his own desire.’ (*an-Najm:* 3)

People who do not look deeply into the previous Quranic words will fail to notice the perfect usage of diction, so they may ask: ‘Since the True Lord corrected Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then how could he not have spoken out of desire?’ Our answer to this is that you do not understand Allah or His Messenger well enough. When Allah corrected His Messenger, this was not because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went against a judgement that Allah had placed, nor did he change a Judgement of Allah to make it suit his own personal opinion. Rather, he used to exert his human capacity to reach a ruling on a certain issue according to what he saw as right. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* would amend this ruling, so Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would pronounce the amendment just as Allah had sent it down to him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never went against any of his Lord’s Judgements. All the amendments that Allah gave were associated with cases without precedents. Every amendment came as an improvement to a legal decision that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived at by his independent human reasoning. Private inclinations played no part in the issue.

The saying of the True Lord, ‘He does not speak from his own desire’ (*an-Najm:* 3) informs us that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never received a ruling from Allah which he contradicted deliberately by his own desire. All the corrections or amendments that Allah made were concerning cases that had no precedent or pertinent guidelines from Allah to rule on. Therefore, we notice the kind tone that the True Lord uses to correct the decision of His Messenger such as when He says: 'Allah forgives you (Prophet)! Why did you give them permission to stay at home before it had become clear to you which of them spoke the truth and which were liars?' (*at-Tawba:* 43)

The pardon in the previous situation was not due to a contravention of a divine ruling, but it was a kind pardon; because Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exercised his independent human reasoning to determine the ruling on issues that had no precedents in the divine law. Another example is found in the saying of the True Lord: 'O Prophet! Why do you ban (for yourself) that which Allah has made lawful to you…?' (*at-Tahrim:* 1)

The Messenger of Allah, in this particular situation, forbade himself certain things that he did not forbid the people. Here, the True Lord told him not to forbid himself the things which He has permitted him. Thus, this admonition was in the favour of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When Zayd ibn Haritha *may Allah be pleased with him* was asked to choose between remaining with Messenger Muhammad as his slave or to return to his family, he preferred to stay with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* who rewarded him by taking him as his own son. Adoption was a known practice among the Arabs, so the people started calling him Zayd, the son of Muhammad. When Allah wanted to annul adoption, He said: 'Name your adopted sons after their real fathers; this is more equitable in Allah's sight…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5).

The word *aqsat* (more equitable) means 'more just' which indicates that equity is interrelated with justice. When someone is described as equitable, it means he is just. Equity was thoroughly administered by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and indeed Allah's Judgement was even more equitable. This means that what Messenger Muhammad did was equitable by human standards, but Allah wanted him to follow the most equitable course.

Accordingly, the saying of the True Lord, 'He does not speak from his own desire' (*an-Najm:* 3) cannot be objected by someone who opposes the teachings of Islam. To an opponent of Islam who asks, ‘Allah would correct Muhammad, so how could it be said that Muhammad did not speak out of his own desire?’ We answer him first by asking: Do you know what ‘judging by desire’ denotes? To judge by desire would mean that a person knew well Allah’s Ruling and went contrary to it by his own will and desire. This was something our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never did. Any correction from Allah *Glorified is He* was reported by no one other than the Messenger of Allah himself. This shows how absolutely honest he was in conveying Allah’s Message.

The True Lord *the Exalted* says about the children of Israel: ‘…whenever there came to them a Messenger with what they themselves desired not-a group of them they called liars and others among them they kill.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 70) So there were two groups: the first group consisted of those who were unwilling to have faith in Allah’s Law because of their private inclinations which resulted in their denying the Messengers. The second group consisted of those whose souls were filled with fierce opposition and strong enmity towards the Messengers of Allah. They feared that if the Messenger lived, he would convey his message to other people. Therefore, they attempted to kill the Messenger.

Denial is the first stage of opposition. There were those who dropped down into deeper levels of opposition and feared that the message might reach and convince other people, so they tried to kill the Messenger. Denial is to disaffirm a statement or an action. As for killing, it is to bring an end to life; the one who commits it adopts the most severe stance of opposition.

The precision of the Quran language emerges in Allah’s use of the past tense in referring to one group and the present tense to refer to the other group: ‘…whenever there came to them a Messenger with what they themselves desired not - a group of them they called liars and others among them they kill.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 70) This is because denial is an arrogant refusal to listen to the Messenger, while killing is an arrogant refusal to allow the very existence of the Messenger on the part of the deaneries. Killing is more heinous because it aims at obliterating any trace of the existence of the victim. Therefore, the act of denial is framed in the past tense, while the act of killing is framed in the present tense.

Killing, repugnant as it is, may cool down after a while. This is what makes society react angrily when a heinous crime is committed, but after the elapse of ten years and the execution verdict is finally issued, the people do not show any reaction. Some of them may even sympathize with the criminal. The True Lord, therefore, warns us that we should not wipe out from our minds the image of their killing of Messengers of Allah. Rather, we must always recall the atrocity of their crime and never feel sympathy for those who killed the Messengers. The scholars of the Arabic language say that the present tense can be used to evoke the image of an act in the mind.

The moment a fair judge rules that a man guilty of murder must be executed, he does not consider the murder a forgotten event just because it has been committed in the past, but rather, he brings it to his mind as though the blood is still flowing and the wound is still open. He is not judging something chronicled in the past, but something real in the present. It is as though the True Lord is commanding us to keep alive in our minds what has been committed. Another example of evoking vivid images in the mind is found in the saying of the True Lord: 'Have you (Prophet) not considered how Allah sends water down from the sky...?' (*al-Hajj:* 63) Allah sends down the rain and as a result: '…the next morning, the earth becomes green…' (*al-Hajj:* 63). Thus, Allah uses the present tense to keep the images vivid and fresh in our minds through a circumstantial and continuous description. The True Lord says, '…whenever there came to them a Messenger with what they themselves desired not-a group of them they called liars and others among them they kill.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 70) Yet, since Allah wills the Messengers to have enough life to completely deliver His Message, how could the True Lord say that these people killed their Messengers, when the Messengers of Allah cannot be killed, and only the Prophets can be killed? Our answer to this is that the Prophets are also Messengers, as proved by the following Words of the True Lord: 'We have never sent any messenger or prophet before you (Muhammad)…' (*al-Hajj:* 52).

Both the Messenger and the Prophet are sent by Allah. The difference is that the Messenger brings new religious teachings, while the Prophet is sent forth as a role model of guidance for an already revealed message. The True Lord *the Exalted* and then says:

وَحَسِبُوٓاْ أَلَّا تَكُونَ فِتۡنَةٞ فَعَمُواْ وَصَمُّواْ ثُمَّ تَابَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ
ثُمَّ عَمُواْ وَصَمُّواْ كَثِيرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرُۢ بِمَا يَعۡمَلُونَ ٧١

they thought no harm could come to them and so became blind and deaf [to God]. God turned to them in mercy but many of them again became blind and deaf: God is fully aware of their actions [71]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 71)

The Arabic word *hasiba* means 'to think', 'suppose,' 'deem' or 'consider'; but it means 'to calculate', 'reckon' or 'count' when it is pronounced *hasaba*. As for the noun *husban*, it means to think or suppose something is true. The people from whom Allah received the solemn pledge—the children of Israel—thought that denying and killing the Messengers would not bring trials upon them. This denotes that they did not have proper knowledge, but they thought it was likely that no trial and testing would ensue. The root meaning of the word *fitna* (trial or test), as we have said before, is to place gold in the fire to cleanse it from impurities. The word *fitna* also means 'test' or 'trial,' in which a human may either pass or fail. So, why did they think that they would not be tested in consequence of their behaviour? They were led into this assumption because of the mistake they made when they said: '…We are the children of Allah and His beloved ones…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 18).

Also, the mistake they made when they said: '…The Fire will only touch us for a few days...' (*al-Baqara:* 80). They thought that Allah *Glorified is He* would only punish them for worshipping the golden calf and nothing else. This was an incorrect assumption. Religion has not come into the world simply to deliver a certain people no matter what they do, but rather, it has come so that every human can be judged and recompensed for their actions during this life. It is strange that they made this mistaken assumption and misjudged matters, even though they were experts in calculation and reckoning. Just calculation and reckoning is what determines whether something is true or false. The amazing point that can be made here that emphasizes Allah's Mercy is that when the True Lord *the Most High* judges humankind. He says: 'This is for you, and this is against you', but when He provides for them, He does so without measure or account. But they did not pay attention to this; the True Lord says of them: 'and they thought there would be no resulting trial (or punishment)…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 71). That is, they thought that the matter would involve no testing or accountability for anyone of them.

Concerning the part of the verse, '*wahasibu an-la takuna fit'natun'* (they thought there would be no resulting trial), we know that the Arabic particle *an* (that) puts the following verb in the subjunctive mode. About this point, someone asked me about a Quran reciter whom he heard on the radio reading this verse and following it with the verb *takun* (to be) pronounced as *takunu* in the indicative mode, instead of *takuna* in the subjunctive mode.

I said to him: There were three prominent Quran reciters during the early eras of Islam, namely Abu `Amr, Hamza, and Al-Kisa'i. Each of them had his own distinctive style of recitation. Although we know that the particle *an* (that) makes the verb subjunctive, this rule only applies if the verb before this particle does not indicate knowledge, certainty, or assurance. The accusative particle (*an*) will not induce the following verb to take the subjunctive mode if it comes after a verb denoting certain knowledge, as in the saying of the True Lord, '*'alima an sayakunu minkum marda waakharuna yadribuna fil-ardi*,' translated as, 'He knows that there will be some among you sick, others travelling through the land...' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20).

The prominent grammarian Ibn Malik expressed this rule in a poetic line in his *Alfiya*: '*Subjunctives are made by the subjunctive particles lan*, *kay and anna – unless it comes after a verb denoting certainty*.' As for the particle *an* after verbs denoting doubt or probability, it can be followed by a verb in the subjunctive or indicative mode. Those who considered the verb as more indicative of uncertainty used the indicative mode, while those would did not view the assumption as closer to probability than certainty used the subjunctive mode. The methods of Quran recitation used by Al-Kisa'i, Abu 'Amr and Hamza applied the indicative mode here because they considered that the assumption at this point was close to being certain, in which case the particle *an* would be meant for emphasis, not to introduce the subjunctive (i.e. empathic rather than accusative). It is considered a shortened form of the emphatic particle *anna*, termed *an al-mukhaffafah*. As for the word '*fitna'* (punishment) in the part of the verse saying, “And they thought there would be no (resulting) punishment” (*al-Ma’ida:* 71), it is in the nominative case because it is the subject of the verb *takuna*, which is derived from the verb *kana* (to be).

The verb *kana* usually has a nominative subject and an accusative predicate, but here it has no predicate because this kind of *kana* corresponds to what is termed *kana at-tamma* (complete *kana*) rather than *kana an-naqisa* (incomplete *kana*). The reason we are mentioning all these details is because we need to have a precise understanding of the Quran. For example, when we read the True Lord’s Words: ‘*wa-in kana dhu‘us*’ *ratin fanadhiratun ila maysaratin*’ translated as: ‘and if (the debtor) is in a hard time (has no money), then grant him time till it is easy for him to repay…’ (*al-Baqara:* 280).

The verb *kana* (to be) here is a perfect tense verb; *dhu‘us*’ *ratin* is the subject of complete *kana* (*kana at-tamma*), so it needs no complement because the intended meaning is that if the debtor is found to be in straitened circumstances, then grant him time till it is easy for him to repay.

We should discern the meaning of ‘complete’ and ‘incomplete’ forms of verb *kana*. We know that every word we say is one of two things: either it is unused and unfamiliar or it is a used familiar word. A used word is that which, when said, has a distinctive, independent meaning that comes directly to the mind. If this word does not involve time, it is a noun, such as the words ‘earth,’ ‘sun’ and ‘moon.’ There are also words which do not have independent meanings like prepositions, such as *fi* (in). It is true that it indicates the notion of one thing being inside another, but still it does not have an independently understood meaning. Therefore, it must be attached to something else, such as when we say, ‘The water is in the cup’ or ‘the pupil is in the classroom’. On the other hand, if a word has an independent meaning, and includes the element of time, it is a verb.

For example, when we just say ‘sky’, the element of time is absent here - the sky existed in the past, it exists in the present and it will exist in the future. As for the word ‘eat’, we understand that it comes from the concept of eating. It has an independent meaning, and time is part of its meaning. As for the word ‘in’, it does not have an independent meaning, and it must be added to another word to make sense. So every word has a meaning which can either be independently understood or not. If it can be independently understood, we ask whether or not time is an integral part of its meaning; if it is, this means it is a verb (*fi'l*). But if time is not part of its meaning, this means it is a noun *ism*. Last, if the word does not have an independent meaning and needs something to be added to it to make sense, we call it a particle (*harf*).

This is how we can understand the different parts of speech. A verb is a meaning that includes time; for example, the word 'ate' means that someone consumed some food in the past. This is how we can understand the verb *kana* (to be); and if we use the word 'was' just to indicate that something happened in the past, such as saying, 'Zayd was travelling,' this means that the verb *kana* here is *naqis* (incomplete). In light of this, we can better understand the True Lord's Words: 'And if someone is in hardship, then (let there be) postponement until (a time of) ease.' (*al-Baqara:* 280)

If you want to express the concept of 'being' on its own without anything new added to it, the verb is 'complete'. If you want to express the concept of being with something added to it, then this verb is 'incomplete'. For example, when Allah says: '*wahasibu an-la takuna fit'natun*' (literally, 'they thought there would be no resulting trial'), this meant they thought that no trial would ensue, so the meaning is complete.

Here, the children of Israel acted as the pupils who went to school while unaware that there would be a test at the end of the year. So they spent the whole year without exerting any effort or studying. Instead, they just played around. This was a mistaken assumption, because religion did not come randomly or arbitrarily, but rather, it came to organise all the actions of life and to be applied by the believers. They should have accepted Allah's Religion and acted upon it according to its teachings. It is strange that they made this assumption and did not reckon things properly even though they were a people who mastered the knowledge of counting and calculation. They made assumptions *hasibu* (pronounced *ha-si-bu*), but they did not make any calculation or reckoning *hasabu* (pronounced *ha-sa-bu*). Examining and calculating matters properly are what determines and ensures their truthfulness.

For Allah, everything is based on just measurement and accounting; accounting for and against the servant.' And they thought there would be no resulting trial (or punishment),' (*al-Ma'ida:* 71) that is, they thought that they would not be tested. They thought that Divine Messages and laws did not present any test to them. Even when they learned the truth, they shut their eyes and closed their ears to it. We know that human perception abilities include hearing, sight, and mind: 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

So, the means of perception are hearing, sight, and mind. Seeing is a personal experience, whereas hearing is an act of receiving from others which makes hearing broader than seeing. Hearing is also the first sense that fully functions at birth. If we place something close to the eyes of a newborn, he does not move because he cannot see well. This may continue for ten days until he begins to see properly. But a newborn reacts to a sound that is close to his ear; hence, hearing is the first sense to come into being. Therefore, the True Lord first mentions the hearing, then the sight and the mind.

In this part of the Quranic verse, 'so they became blind and deaf' (*al-Ma'ida:* 71), Allah *Glorified is He* asks first about their personal act of seeing and does not ask about what they heard from other people.' So they became blind, 'that is, they even failed to see the things that concerned them and did not contemplate the signs of the cosmos, and nor did they listen to the glad tidings, warnings or guidance brought to them by Allah. They did not assent to follow them. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* rebukes them first for the things which they should have seen for themselves. The ear hears things from other sources; therefore, Allah first rebukes them for not using their eyes. Even if we suppose that they could not see for themselves the cosmic signs, what was wrong with them that they did not try to look, not even after a Messenger came to them and urged them to look at Allah's Universe and reflect upon it?

Suppose that they were heedless at first, and they did not care to look, why did they not wake up and listen attentively and positively when the bearer of glad tidings and warnings came to alert them? Thus, the words: '…so they became blind and deaf...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 71) are very logical here.

After that, Allah accepted their repentance, saved them from Pharaoh, and split the sea for them to cross. But as soon as they came out of the sea and saw some people serving and worshipping idols, they said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'Make for us a god as they have gods.' (*al-A'raf:* 138) Musa *peace be upon him* commanded them to repent, and Allah accepted their repentance despite their numerous sins. Then, Allah turned forgivingly and mercifully to them: '…Then Allah turned to them in forgiveness…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 71).

The Arabic word *tawbah* (repentance) means a fresh chance for sound souls to run back into goodness. Let us think; what would be the reaction of sinners if Allah had not allowed them to repent, leaving them without hope of forgiveness? They would have persisted in sin and felt that they were proceeding on the road to evil with no way of return. When Allah accepts the repentance of a sinner, it means that He wants to protect the society from his evil. Repentance has stages. The first step is Allah allowing forgiveness to be sought from Him, the second is the servant showing repentance, and the third is by Allah accepting his repentance. This can be found in the True Lord's words: '…He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return (to Him)…' (*at-Tawba:* 118).

What does it mean that Allah turned to them in mercy? He *the Glorious and Exalted* did not turn to them to accept their repentance until after they had repented. So, Allah's first turning to them was in the sense of first allowing them to repent, and then came their repentance, followed by the True Lord's acceptance of it. But although these people became blind and deaf in heart, Allah was still kind to them. So what did they do next? They turned blind and deaf once again: '…Then Allah turned to them in forgiveness; then (again) many of them became blind and deaf. And Allah is seeing of what they do.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 71)

The verb *fa'amu*, translated as 'became blind', is an action verb like 'ate', 'drank', or 'attended'; so where is its subject? The subject is *waw al-jama'ah* (plural masculine pronoun – which in Arabic comes after the verb in the form of the letter *u* attached to the end). Ibn Malik stated a rule for this issue: when an Arabic verb refers to two or more people, the pronouns referring to the plural or dual forms of the pronouns (*jama'* or *muthanna*) must be removed from the verb. You do not say *qamaa Zayd wa* 'Amr (Zayd and `Amr stood up), but rather *qama Zayd wa* 'Amr, without using the dual verb form *qamaa*. Similarly, you do not say, *qamu at-talamidh* (the pupils stood up) with the plural verb form *qamu*, but rather, you say *qama at-talamidh* with the singular verb because the word ‘pupils’ replaces the need for the attached pronoun. Ibn Malik said: *Remove all pronouns from the verb if it refers to two persons or a group* (*at least three persons*) *as the subject*, *such as faza ash-shuhada’* (*the martyrs attain salvation*), *wherein the verb faza is singular*, *not plural*.

That is, if the subject is dual or plural, all the verb dual and plural suffixes must be removed. As for the word *kathir* (many) here, it is either considered to be a substitute for the masculine plural suffix or a predicate of an omitted subject. The sentence would say if this subject is not omitted: ‘the deaf and blind are *kathir* (many); or it could be a subject of the preceding verbs, in which case the clause is worded in the dialect of an Arab clan named Banu Al-Harith ibn Ka’b who would use the plural or dual suffixes, when the verb was attached to an apparent noun subject in the dual or plural form, such as *qamu ar-rijal* (the men stood), instead of the more usual form *qama ar-rijal*, with the singular verb followed by the plural subject.

Some people consider this to be syntactically similar to Allah’s Words, ‘*wa-asarru an-najwa alladhina zalamu*,’ translated as: ‘... those who do wrong ‘conceal their private conversation…’ (*al-Anbiya’*: 3) in which the masculine plural suffix *u* (they) is attached to the end of the verb *asarru* (conceal).

Concerning the part of the verse saying, ‘…then (again) many of them became blind and deaf,’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 71) the True Lord says: ‘... many of them…’ rather than (all of them) to allow for the possibility that a few of them were contemplating embracing true faith. The word ‘many’ draws our attention to the fact that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* did not ignore the minority who were thinking about embracing faith. This also emphasises and affirms Allah’s previous statement: ‘…while most of you are disobedient.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 59)

‘…Then (again) many of them became blind and deaf. And Allah is seeing of what they do.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 71) The word *basir* (literally, ‘one who sees’) is like the word ‘*alim* (one who knows) meaning that Allah is witness over them – and the eye is the best witness.

The True Lord *the Exalted* then says:

لَقَدۡ كَفَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلۡمَسِيحُ ٱبۡنُ مَرۡيَمَۖ وَقَالَ ٱلۡمَسِيحُ
يَٰبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمۡۖ إِنَّهُۥ مَن يُشۡرِكۡ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدۡ حَرَّمَ ٱللَّهُ
عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ وَمَأۡوَىٰهُ ٱلنَّارُۖ وَمَا لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ مِنۡ أَنصَارٖ ٧٢

Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, son of Mary,’ have defied God. The Messiah himself said, ‘Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ If anyone associates others with God, God will forbid him from the Garden, and Hell will be his home. No one will help such evildoers [72] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 72)

There are three glorious verses that deal with this issue. The first is the verse saying: ‘They have certainly disbelieved who say, “Allah is the Messiah, the son of Mary”…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 72) The second is the verse saying, ‘They have certainly disbelieved who say, “Allah is the third of three…”’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 73) And the third is the verse saying, ‘and (beware the Day) when Allah will say, “‘O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people: Take me and my mother as two gods alongside Allah?” He will say, “Exalted are you! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, you would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is you who is Knower of the unseen.”‘ (*al-Ma’ida:* 116)

Accordingly, the dispute over this issue consisted of three main positions: one group held that the Messiah *peace be upon him* was Allah; another group believed that the Messiah was Allah along with two other gods; a third group said that the Messiah and his mother *peace be upon them* were both gods; and to each group a rebuttal is given. This rebuttal is based on the simplest of evidence present before our eyes in living beings. The human, as we know, is the master of the universe and is served by all lesser beings. The humans need animals for obtaining subsistence, and they also need plants and minerals. This master, the human being, needs creatures that are lower than him. Therefore, rebutting the claim that our Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and his mother, Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her*, were gods, the True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘…they both ate food (like other mortals)…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 75). This provides a proof of the clearest and most convincing character not only on the logical and philosophical level, but also on all other levels as well. Since they had to eat to sustain themselves, they had need for lesser beings. Anyone who has need for lesser beings cannot be the Supreme Being or the One and Only Creator God.

The followers of these three groups disagreed with one another. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…Say not: "Three (trinity)!"' Cease!…' (*an-Nisa':* 171) The expression 'the third of three' is used to imply that some item is one of three others, but unspecified. Whenever three things are grouped together, any of them can be referred to as 'the third of the three.' This expression is quite unobjectionable except in respect to God. We cannot say 'the third of three gods,' for there is only One God. It is possible to say, with respect to Allah, 'the third of two' because Allah says: '…There is no secret conversation between three people where He is not the fourth, neither between five where He is not the sixth, nor between less or more than that without Him being with them…' (*al-Mujadala:* 7).

So it is possible to say, 'Allah is the fourth of three', or 'the fifth of four', or 'the sixth of five', meaning that when He is present, the three becomes four, the four becomes five or the five becomes six. If we add an ordinal number to a cardinal number that is less than it is, this implies that it is the final addition to this group. So, if someone says: 'Allah is the fourth of three people, who sit together', this is correct. But if we say that they are all gods, this is unlawful and prohibited because God cannot be multiple; there is but One Sole God.

We may observe that the True Lord *the Exalted* did not say: 'There is no secret conversation between two people where He is not the third' because *najwa* (secret conversation) only involves three or more people. When two people sit together, they may speak with one another without secrecy. A confidential tone is only adopted to make sure that no one else hears. Hence, *najwa* means to impart or discuss matters in a confidential tone, and it takes place between a minimum of three people. Therefore, when mentioning it, the True Lord uses the lowest number to which it is applied. Thus, when you say, 'the third of three', this is correct as long as you do not mean three gods. The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to assert the falsity of the above claim through His Statement: '…they both ate food (like other mortals)…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 75). Food is one of life's basic necessities and provides the energy needed for life's activities. A man needs to preserve his life and to supply himself with the necessary energy. Food is a lesser entity than human beings are; it is at their service. Therefore, if both `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and Maryam (Mary) used to eat food, this means that they had need of lesser orders of creation. On the other hand, if they had not eaten, they would assuredly have experienced hunger and emaciation. This proves they were not gods. Some may say that, '…they both ate food (like other mortals)…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 75) is rather an allusion to excretion, but we say that expulsion of body waste is not essential since in paradise Allah will feed us, but we will not excrete any waste; hence, this is not a sound argument. The True Lord always elevates the argument. The Jews said inappropriate things about the Messiah *peace be upon him*, things that did not befit his status as a Prophet and Messenger. They also said inappropriate things about Maryam (Mary) that did not befit her status as a virtuous woman elected by the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

The Jews were the opponents of the Messiah *peace be upon him*, whereas his helpers were the Disciples. Since he was unable to cause harm to his enemies or to bring benefit to his Disciples, how could he be a god? The Quran also says of Maryam (Mary), 'Mary, be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself in worship, bow down with those who pray.' (*Al-'Imran:* 43)

The Messiah himself *peace be upon him* was always a devoted worshipper of Allah; a worshipper only worships that which is higher than him. God cannot worship Himself. If such a claim is made by those who attribute themselves to heavenly guidance and have faith in Allah and His Religion, what would the atheists—who have no connection with heavenly guidance and deny the existence of Allah—say?

It was the duty of those who claimed to be believers in Divine Guidance which was brought to them by Prophets in the form of law and teachings, to clear these ambiguities and agree among themselves on the truth. For example, the world already existed and was already being managed before the coming of Messiah *peace be upon him*. So, who was managing the world before he was born? Therefore, the True Lord wanted to settle this issue conclusively, forever; and the Glorious Quran teaches us to say: '…verily, (either) we or you are rightly guided or in a plain error.' (*Saba'*: 24) Could two contradictory positions be true simultaneously? No, because one of them must be right, while the other must be wrong. Therefore, we say that what you say does not bind us, and what we say does not bind you; we will refer the matter to the God in whom we believe. And to end this issue once and for all, let us recall the True Lord’s Instruction: ‘If anyone disputes this with you now that you have been given this knowledge, say, “Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, and let us pray earnestly and invoke Allah’s Curse on those of us who are lying.”’ (*Al-’Imran:* 61)

Let us ask Allah to send His Curse upon those who are lying to finally resolve this dispute between us, thus allowing neither of us to dominate the other. All matters are in Allah’s Hands. Here we are, presenting our womenfolk, our children, and ourselves and making a single call, ‘May Allah’s Curse be upon those of us who are lying!’ Inevitably, every time two contending parties mutually invoke Allah’s Curse on the lying party, Allah brings out the truth instantly; however, no one among the people of the Book agreed to engage in this mutual invocation of Allah’s curse on the lying party. The True Lord says:

لَّقَدۡ كَفَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَٰثَةٖۘ وَمَا مِنۡ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّآ إِلَٰهٞ وَٰحِدٞۚ وَإِن
لَّمۡ يَنتَهُواْ عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِنۡهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

Those people who say that God is the third of three are defying (The truth]: there is only One God. If they persist in what they are saying, a painful punishment will afflict those of them who persist [73] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 73)

Consequently, those who do not refrain from saying so and declare their repentance will fall into disbelief and be made to suffer a painful punishment. The True Lord then says:

أَفَلَا يَتُوبُونَ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَيَسۡتَغۡفِرُونَهُۥۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿٧٤﴾

Why do they not turn to God and ask His forgiveness, when God is most forgiving, most merciful? [74] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 74)

Thus, it becomes necessary for anyone who makes such a claim to repent and seek the True Lord’s Forgiveness. He *the Most High* then says:

مَّا ٱلۡمَسِيحُ ٱبۡنُ مَرۡيَمَ إِلَّا رَسُولٞ قَدۡ خَلَتۡ مِن قَبۡلِهِ ٱلرُّسُلُ وَأُمُّهُۥ
صِدِّيقَةٞۖ كَانَا يَأۡكُلَانِ ٱلطَّعَامَۗ ٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ نُبَيِّنُ لَهُمُ
ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ ثُمَّ ٱنظُرۡ أَنَّىٰ يُؤۡفَكُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; other messengers had come and gone before him; his mother was a virtuous woman; both ate food [like other mortals]. See how clear We make these signs for them; see how deluded they are [75] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 75)

The word *afaka* (to be deluded or tempted away) means to be astray or to be led astray by someone else’s influence. This signifies that Satan had insinuated this false idea about the Messiah into their minds because the Messiah *peace be upon him* was only a Messenger just like the other Messengers who had come and gone before him. His mother was described as a *siddiqah* (a confirmer and supporter of the truth) because she believed in the truth of what the Messiah brought from Allah. The proof of their humanity was that, just like all human beings, they needed to sustain themselves with food, drink, and clothing. The divinity which they claimed for them contradicts this fact. This is the very essence of *ifk* (delusion), where such beliefs make no sense to a mind that is free of passions. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ أَتَعۡبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَمۡلِكُ لَكُمۡ ضَرّٗا
وَلَا نَفۡعٗاۚ وَٱللَّهُ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ﴿٧٦﴾

Say, ‘How can you worship something other than God that has no power to do you harm or good? God alone is the All Hearing and All-Knowing’ [76] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 76)

The mind rejects acknowledging or worshipping anything other than the Creator because no one except Allah has the power to punish one’s enemies or to benefit oneself or one’s group and followers. This is proved by the fact that the enemies of the Messiah did what they did, and neither the Messiah nor his Disciples were able to cause them harm or do anything to help their own selves.

The True Lord concludes this verse by saying, '…But it is Allah who is the All-Hearer, All-Knower.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 76) 'All-Hearer' refers to speech, while 'All-Knower' refers to the thoughts that revolve in the mind. As for the thoughts in their minds, was it because of their avidity for temporal power—at any cost—that they said this? Allah knows best. If such words were uttered, He has heard them; and if such thoughts ran through their minds, He knew of them. A rational person deliberates his words before actually saying them, and there is intention behind every word. And Allah *the Exalted* is eternally Hearing and Knowing. The True Lord then says:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَا تَغْلُوا۟ فِى دِينِكُمْ غَيْرَ ٱلْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوٓا۟ أَهْوَآءَ قَوْمٍ
قَدْ ضَلُّوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ وَأَضَلُّوا۟ كَثِيرًا وَضَلُّوا۟ عَن سَوَآءِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ﴿٧٧﴾

Say, 'People of the Book, do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religion and do not follow the whims of those who went astray before you – they led many others astray and themselves continue to stray from the even path' [77] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 77)

When talking about a common issue to both Christians and Jews, Allah addresses them together by the vocative: 'O people of the Book!' In case it is something specific to one group, He addresses it individually. The Arabic word *ghulu* (exceeding proper limits) means going to extremes in opinions, whether positively or negatively, either by overestimating or depreciating the status of an individual. Therefore, immoderation always triggers contradictions. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his companion `Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* 'O' 'Ali, two kinds of people will be destroyed because of (how they see) you: one who loves you excessively, and one who hates you excessively.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* also said: 'O' 'Ali, no one loves you but a believer, and no one hates you but a hypocrite.'(1) He *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'O' 'Ali, the aggressing faction will fight you.'(2)

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Awsat*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Hindi in Kanz Al-`Ummal and by Al-Hawarazmi in Jami' Al-Masanid*

There are some people who exceed the bounds of proper love for 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* to the point of considering him a Prophet. Some even claimed that the revelation came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by mistake, and that 'Ali was the one supposed to receive the revelation. Some even deemed 'Ali a god! All these are instances of overstepping the bounds of proper love and veneration for 'Ali.

As for the *Kharijites*, they called 'Ali a disbeliever. So, both sides went to extremes. Those who loved him raised him to the status of a Prophet or even higher than that; thus, they fell into *shirk* (joining false gods with Allah). Those who hated him labelled him a disbeliever and considered him outside the fold of Islam. Therefore, we must not overstep the bounds in our religion. We must not love a person to the extent of elevating him above the status of human beings, nor hate anyone so much that we reduce him to the lowest of stations. Rather, we must give everyone their proper due according to the position in which Allah has placed them because this is the way Allah honours them. 'Say: "O people of the Book (Jews and Christians)! Exceed not the limits in your religion (by believing in something) other than the truth, and do not follow the vain desires of people who went astray in times gone by, and who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the Right Path."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 77) A similar statement occurred in another glorious verse: 'O People of the Book, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth…' (*an-Nisa':* 171). For us to understand that the excessiveness referred to here is that of deifying human beings, the True Lord then says: '…The Messiah, 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was no more than a Messenger of Allah and His Word, ('Be!' - and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam and a spirit created by Him…' (*an-Nisa':* 171). Veneration for Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* must not be carried beyond due and proper bounds by either ascribing divinity to him or claiming that he was part of a trinity. If you had questions that led to this doubtful view because of how the Messiah *peace be upon him* was conceived without a father, you should understand that all things came into being by Allah's Command 'Be!' If you were to trace back the chain of human existence, you would arrive at a first human who did not come into being by procreation. That was Adam *peace be upon him* who was created from dust. Further, this entire universe came into existence by a word - Be! Any physical causes for existence were embedded by Allah in this word which He spoke. Therefore, when we have another human being who was created by the same word ('Be!'), do not say: 'This is something incredible' because the entire universe was also created by this same word.' Verily, His Command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, 'Be!' and it is!' (*Ya Sin:* 82) If this perplexity was caused by the fact that the Messiah *peace be upon him* was born without a father, a matter which did not conform to the usual laws of procreation, this should not have been a cause of doubt because, at least, he was conceived by a mother – yet Adam *peace be upon him* was born without a father or mother. So, the logic is thatif there were any perplexity at all on the creation of `Isa (Jesus), then all the more so in respect to Adam. Indeed, a single word from Allah can bring life into existence. Life means the entry of the soul or essence into matter which endows it with movement, sensation, and essential characteristics of life. Hence, the word is spoken by Allah, and then the soul or essence comes and enters the matter. In the verse '... His Word, ('Be!' - and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit created by Him…' (*an-Nisa':* 171), the part that says, '…a spirit created by Him…' is similar to what Allah says about Adam: 'So, when I have fashioned him completely and breathed into him (Adam) the soul which I created for him, then fall (you) down prostrating yourselves unto him.' (*al-Hijr:* 29)

Adam *peace be upon him* was a soul created by the direct command from Allah and so was the Messiah *peace be upon him*. In either case, there is no room for misconception. The True Lord asks those who identify themselves as believers in the Divine Scriptures, '…Say not: "Three (trinity)!" Cease! It is better for you…' (*an-Nisa':* 171). If you claim a connection with heavenly messages, do not confuse people's thoughts with such misconceptions. You should have stopped yourselves at the honourable status that Allah has conferred on Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* the honour of being a good example for others. If he were anything other than human, he could not serve as a role model. An exemplar must be the same species as those who follow him. If he was a non-human, and people saw him worshipping Allah humbly, they would not feel themselves able to imitate his example.

I once said that, if a man saw a lion hunting in the forest and catching its prey, then would anyone who saw it think of making himself into a lion? No, but if he saw a brave knight at a battle hunting down his enemies, he would imitate him and try to be like him. Hence, a role model must be of the same species as his followers. Therefore, if a prophet was above human beings, he would not be appropriate as a messenger.

'Say: "O people of the Book (Jews and Christians)! Exceed not the limits in your religion (by believing in something) other than the truth…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 77). The True Lord is speaking here to all the followers of the Scriptures because each of them fell into one of two extremist positions. The Jews falsely accused the Pure Chosen Virgin Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her*, and the Christians overstepped the boundaries in the opposite extreme. The True Lord commands both sides not to overstep the proper bounds because the truth is irresistible; it remains firm without any alteration or contradiction. If a person sees something with his own eyes and is asked to describe it, he will describe it today the same way he will do tomorrow, or after one year. His account will remain factual because he has eye-witnessed it. This reality he has seen imposes itself upon him. But a liar does not remember what he has said earlier. He may fabricate a story and tell it differently the second time. It is a common saying: 'A liar should have a good memory.' Here, it is important to know that truth means that one's narration about something is absolutely identical to reality. In other words, it means that the speaker is evoking something which really happened. As for the liar, he does not tell about something which really happened, so he cannot remember what lie he told the first time. Let us offer the following example to illustrate this point. A liar once sat and said: 'Once we were travelling from the village to the city to get our requirements for the festival of *Eid Al-Fitr*, and the moon was as full as the midday sun.' This last statement of this man reveals that he is actually telling a lie, for how could there be a full moon on the night before *Eid* which occurs in the first day of the month of *Shawwal* when the crescent can barely be seen? So, the one who tells of a true event does not change his story, whereas the liar, out of the confusion of events in his mind, does. Therefore, one should not say anything untrue because his lie will be undoubtedly discovered as a result of the contradiction in his speech. Yet, if this confusion of statements concerns divinity, people will certainly have doubts about the religion they follow, and thus you will bear responsibility for leading them astray. Hence, those who bear the Divine Messages must be infallible so that they are not accused of confusion in the slightest. That is why we find in the Quran that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) asked Allah *the Almighty* not to make them—Prophets and Messengers—a plaything for those who are bent on denying the truth. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Our Lord, make us not (objects of) torment for the disbelievers and forgive us, our Lord. Indeed, it is you who is *the Exalted* in Might, the Wise.' (*al-Mumtahana:* 5) But why did Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* make this supplication to Allah *the Almighty?* Because if he had said one thing and then done another, his people might have imagined – Allah forbid – that he was a liar.

Back to the words of Allah *the Almighty* 'Say, "People of The Book, do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religion and do not follow the whims of those who went astray before you – they led many others astray, and themselves continue to stray from the even path,"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 77) They clearly indicate that even though they themselves were astray, they were not content with this, but rather tried to lead others astray. This is proved by Allah's verse in the chapter *al-Baqara*, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Many of the People of the Book wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of envy from themselves (even) after the truth has become clear to them. So pardon and overlook until Allah delivers His command. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.' (*al-Baqara:* 109) At this point, He *the Almighty* warns the people of the Book against that because if this is actually the case, they will be held accountable for their own misdeeds and for the misdeeds of those led astray by them. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'That they may bear their own burdens in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear.' (*an-Nahl:* 25)

Here, we should stress that there is no contradiction whatsoever between the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *an-Nahl* and that of *an-Najm* in which He *the Almighty* says: 'That no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another.' (*an-Najm:* 38) We have two kinds of burdens; one resulting from leading others astray and another resulting from man's own sins.

As for the saying of Allah, '…and do not follow the whims of those who went astray before you, 'it orders and instructs the people of the Book not to imitate those who followed their caprices before them. The Arabic word *Al-Hawa* (translated as whims), it refers to the strong inclination of the soul to do a particular act in an inappropriate way; this is why it is always used in the Quran to indicate the meaning of loss and error. For example, in the chapter of Sad, Allah orders Prophet Dawud (David) not to follow his own whim, lest it may lead him astray from His Way. Allah says: 'O David, indeed we have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow (your own) desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of Allah. Indeed, those who go astray from the way of Allah will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account.' (*Sad:* 26) In addition, He *the Almighty* in the chapter *Ta-Ha* orders Prophet Musa (Moses) and says: 'So do not let one avert you from it who does not believe in it and follows his desire, for you (then) would perish.' (*Ta Ha:* 16)

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is related to have said: 'None of you (truly) believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought.'(1) That is, one must force his desire and whim to yield to the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. As a matter of fact, if one does so, it means that he has actually managed to restrain his own personal desire and whim. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and do not follow the whims of those who went astray before you- they led many others astray and themselves continue to stray from the even path;' so He forbids the people of the Book from following the whim which leads them astray, which meanwhile causes others to be led away from the Right Path. He *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *Related by Al-Baghawi*

لُعِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِنۢ بَنِىٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ عَلَىٰ لِسَانِ دَاوُۥدَ
وَعِيسَى ٱبۡنِ مَرۡيَمَۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَواْ وَّكَانُواْ يَعۡتَدُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

Those Children of Israel who defied [God] were rejected through the words of David, and Jesus, son of Mary, because they disobeyed, they persistently overstepped the limits [78]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 78)

This particular verse under discussion is meant to comfort Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by telling him how the previous Prophets and Messengers were opposed and rejected by them. Thus, He *the Almighty* wants to tell him *peace and blessings be upon him* that the denial of the people of the Book and rejection to him and to his Message is not something new or strange; it is clearly shown throughout their long history; they had already opposed and rejected the Message of Prophet Dawud (David), and so did they with the Message of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*. So, you, O Messenger Muhammad, should learn from the examples of those Prophets and Messengers before you because the opposition and rejection of the people of the Book to Messengers and Prophets is not something which you alone have had to face, but rather, it is a part of their nature. Then, Allah *the Almighty* moves to a further level of offering comfort to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he would never feel any discomfort from them. Allah *Glorified is He* tells that He knows for certain that what they say certainly grieves Prophet Muhammad. Allah *the Almighty* states: 'We know that you, (O Muhammad), are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.' (*al-An'am:* 33) That is why we find the deniers of the truth entrusting Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with all their wealth and interests although they accused him of insanity, sorcery and telling lies. They even called him 'The Truthful and the Honest.' If they had the power of reason, they should have been dumbfounded by their own conduct and the way they barred people from attaining faith. Ironically, even though they accused him *peace and blessings be upon him* of all these false charges, and even though they stubbornly opposed him and his Message, they used to entrust him with their wealth and precious items. How strange and deviant behaviour theirs is! Even though they knew for certain that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truthful and had truly been sent forth by Allah *the Almighty* they, following their caprice and whim, persisted in their error in order to hold on to their worldly, temporal power. They knew well that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was 'The Honest' a point which is clear in the fact that he ordered '*Ali Allah be pleased with him* to stay in Mecca to return the trusts to their owners. Then, Allah *the Almighty* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* that the deniers of the truth knew for certain that he is truthful, honest and of the most perfect moral character that could be ever seen; however, they rejected his Message since they realised that it would make them lose their worldly, temporal power. Allah *the Almighty* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* that He *Glorified is He* also knew that those deniers of the truth had tried to tempt him away from delivering the Message by offering him power, authority and riches, confirming that if he *peace and blessings be upon him* had the desire for any of that, they would have given him all what he wanted, yet he *peace and blessings be upon him* chose to deliver the Divine Message honestly.

We know well that the disbelievers of Quraysh offered him kingship, wealth, authority and power on the condition that he *peace and blessings be upon him* detached himself from his Message; however, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* chose the Straight Path despite the difficulties he and his followers would encounter upon it—it is the True Path which has been revealed down to you from your Lord *Glorified is He*.

Having failed to seduce and tempt Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* away from his Message, the deniers of the truth placed an embargo on him and the believers to make them starve. Nevertheless he *peace and blessings be upon him* never abandoned his Message. If they had the human reason, they must have been aware that he *peace and blessings be upon him* desired nothing for himself; he neither asked for wealth, nor for authority or power. Not only that, but neither he, nor any of his family members, was allowed to take charity from anyone. At that point, they should have asked themselves why Muhammad would throw himself into this fierce battle, seeking neither fame, nor wealth, nor any worldly pleasures!

So, the deniers of the truth should have learned a lesson from that, for they offered him all these things, and yet he *peace and blessings be upon him* refused them all. He *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Seal of all the Prophets and Messengers *peace be upon them all*; therefore, he embodied all the goodness of the Prophets and Messengers who came before him. Further, we can say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* followed the example of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* when he replied to the gifts sent by the Queen of Sheba and said that what Allah had given him was so much better than all that He *the Almighty* had given them: 'So when they came to Sulaiman (Solomon), he said, "Do you provide me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. Rather, it is you who rejoice in your gift.' (*an-Naml:* 36)

Moreover, people were badly and gravely mistaken when they were unable to recognise that the major purpose of Divine Messages was to draw their attention to the Divine Guidance by means of which the course of life will run smoothly. In addition, they were mistaken when they were unable to be fully aware of the fact that they, first and foremost, were the only ones to benefit from this Divine Guidance. Notwithstanding, in case they disobey, they are the ones who will truly suffer from the results of their disobedience. That is why if anyone reflects this point objectively, he will fully realise that this Divine Guidance is for his own good. If we reflect on the example of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* we will find that he was given a kingdom the likes of which Allah would never give to anyone else again; He *the Almighty* subjected the wind and the jinn to his will; yet he would give the fine flour to his servants so that they could enjoy the best things and would keep the poorest flour for himself. This example actually offers a conclusive proof that Allah *the Almighty* sent down these religious Messages for the good and benefit of mankind, not Messengers and Prophets.

Back to the verse under discussion, the people of the Book fiercely resisted and stubbornly denied the Message of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*; so, when they violated the Sabbath, Prophet Dawud (David) invoked Allah's Imprecation upon them; thus, He *Glorified is He* made them into apes and cursed them in the Psalms. In the same way, when they slandered Maryam, the Virgin Mary Allah *be pleased with her* Allah cursed them in the Gospel. Here, it is important to know that they were afflicted with such divine punishments as a result of their transgression. That is why we find Him *the Almighty* concluding the verse saying, ‘…because they disobeyed, they persistently overstepped the limits.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 78) We should differentiate between ‘disobedience’ and ‘overstepping the limits’. Disobedience means that the person himself is the one who commits acts of disobedience; it does not affect anyone else. Overstepping the limits actually falls under the category of disobedience, but its impact reaches others. For example, the envious person only brings harm to himself, whereas the thief or the bribe-taker harms himself and others as well. This clearly shows the difference between ‘disobedience’ and ‘overstepping the limits’.

كَانُوا۟ لَا يَتَنَاهَوْنَ عَن مُّنكَرٍ فَعَلُوهُ ۚ
لَبِئْسَ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

they did not forbid each other to do wrong. How vile
their deeds were! [79] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 79)

We know well that the careful observance of the Divine Guidance offers the absolute guarantee through which the course of life will run smoothly. In this regard, we should know that Allah *the Almighty* created man in a manner that enables him to strongly resist evil. That is why when one wants to satisfy his desires of sex, money, authority, etc., we find him trying to do that in whatever way he can. However, there is only one thing that can prevent him from doing so, which is conscience; it forces one to be on the track. Scholars believe that conscience is the nucleus of faith, and that it is what reproaches man when he commits a sin. Of course, this is the case if that person is religiously committed. This very point is crystal clear in the chapter of *al-Ma’ida* where Allah *the Almighty* gives us a perfect description of the ever-changing human soul. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And his soul permitted to him the murder of his brother, so he killed him and became among the losers.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 30) This means that the son of Adam, Cain, killed his bother Abel. Yet, when the killer’s rage and rancour subsided and abated, he realised, as mentioned in the Quran, that he became one of the losers.

Here is another point in the story of the children of Adam; having killed his brother out of rage and hatred, Allah *the Almighty* sent a raven to show him how to hide his brother's body because he had no previous knowledge on how to do it. Thus, it is clear that the killer, Cain, went from a state of not respecting his brother's right to live to further wanting to honour his dead body. So, even though the human soul has its passions, it is balanced by the feeling of regret, which is shown when a person does something wrong or sinful. Therefore, we might find many people suffering hardships as a result of the sins and acts of disobedience they commit; meanwhile, we find them confessing these sins and misdeeds to anyone, irrespective of the fact that the one to whom they make their confession cannot do anything to remove the effects of these hardships because they have already occurred, and it is too late.

Here, a good question arises, that is, 'Why does man want to confess his sins to another?' As a matter of fact, he does so in order to relieve himself. We know for certain that any movement of the human soul has an effect which leads to a reaction. For example, when someone makes you angry, you react by taking revenge. That is why we find Islam instructing its followers to change position upon getting angry. That is to say, if someone angers you when you are standing, then sit down; and if you are already sitting, then recline, and if you are standing still, then take a few steps. In addition, Islam instructs them to make a special supplication, that is, 'Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector'. Then, one's anger will subside and gradually come to an end. It is clear now that Islam asks angry people to act like that to make the body get rid of the surplus energy which has provoked and given vent to anger; thus, one's anger subsides and fades away. That is why an Arab poet strongly advises all those who hear a complaint to be all ears to the complainer, saying:

Complaints must be made to those who are virtuous:
They will assist you, console you or commiserate with you.

In truth, when you show the complainant that you are willing to help, you put him at ease and help him to attain peace of mind. That is why the poet strongly advises the complainant to make his complaint to a virtuous person who will listen attentively and who is actually worthy of keeping secrets. We know well that secrets must be guarded and kept just as precious items are kept in a safe. Once again, when one confesses, he relieves himself by directing his surplus energies to something else. Here is an important point, that is, when the human soul keeps on doing evil, and no one blocks it or forbids it, evil will spread and become prevalent; it is actually at this point that the Heaven intervenes by sending Messengers.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that the reason for sending Messenger to these people is that they would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did. As a matter of fact, people's preventing one another from doing hateful and forbidden acts can only be accomplished by enjoining truth and patience upon one another. Furthermore, it is of great importance for the believer to be fully aware of the fact that he is safe from evil notions coming to his soul; we are all human beings and thus subject to continuous change of conditions. Out of Allah's Infinite Mercy, when an evil notion comes to the mind of a believer, he finds a fellow believer who does not have this notion and who will be able to offer him truth and patience. If this particular evil notion comes to the minds of both of them at the same time, both might agree to commit it; however, if it comes to the mind of only one of them and not the other, the latter will be able to enjoin truth and patience upon the first. In this way, believers will keep one another in check by mutual counsel; at one time, a person will forbid his fellow believer from committing evil, while, at some other time, he will be forbidden from doing the same act. This point is clear in the Quran in the chapter of *al-'Asr*, where Allah *Glorified is He* refers to this topic when He says: 'By time, indeed, mankind is in loss, Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3)

The aforementioned verses indicate that Allah *the Almighty* does not single out a certain group of people to forbid others from doing evil. Likewise, He *the Almighty* does not assign the others to be always forbidden without any reciprocal role on their part; rather, He *the Almighty* tells that each one of us can prevent his fellow believer from committing evil if he inclines towards that, and, in turn, be prevented by someone else if he inclines towards doing that. In this way, believers offer counsel and enjoin truth and patience upon one another. Linguistically, this particular act of offering mutual advice falls under the category of *al-mufa'lah* or 'reciprocity' which means a behaviour in which two people share the doing of the same act. That is to say that one of the two plays the role of the subject at a particular moment of time, while the other is the object and vice-versa. Arabs say: '*Zayd* cooperated with 'Amr in doing a particular act.' Now, this particular formula of *al-muf'alah* indicates that the act is done by two or more people. It is easy, then, for the believers to mutually prevent each other from doing evil. Another possible explanation for this point is that one's soul, out of the subtle instinctive power within, prevents one from doing evil. Hence, it is clear now that this particular act of enjoining truth and patience may take place either within the soul itself or within the society.

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'They did not forbid each other to do wrong' (*al-Ma'ida:* 79) tells us that the Jews had already committed evil acts and misdeeds; then, we should ask a very important question, 'How could they have prevented one another from doing the hateful things they had done?' A possible explanation for this particular part of the verse may be given in the light of the fact that they did not prevent one another from doing the hateful things they intended to do, meaning that one of them (the Jews) saw his fellow preparing to commit evil but did not prevent him. We have a similar case in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* orders the believers to wash their faces and hands when they are about to pray: 'O you, who have believed, when you rise to (perform) prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6) This aforementioned particular verse does not mean that a person should begin his ablution after he has already started praying, but rather that he should perform ablution by way of preparing to offer prayers; that is, when you, believers, wish to perform prayer, you should precede it with performing ablution.

In addition, this particular part of the verse, 'They did not forbid each other to do wrong,' urges us to be permanently in a state of spiritual alertness.

In addition, it directs us to carefully consider whether or not we are following the Divine Guidance. That is to say that we should restrain ourselves from committing evil, and that we should also prevent our fellow believers from doing so, lest the ruling of this particular part of the verse on the Jews would be applied to us, the believers; it is as though this verse instructs us to live in a state of spiritual alertness and never get close to evil. In the same connection, the Arabic word *la-bi'sa* (translated as 'How vile') indicates an oath which gives emphasis. Here, we shall ask the following question: is this divine emphasis given in the same way that we, human beings, do? The answer is definitely no because we know for certain that there is nothing resembling Him *the Almighty*. In this regard, it is important to know that truth is established either by confessions, testimony or oath. For this reason, judges base their verdicts only on one of those three; namely, the defendant's confession, the witnesses' testimony and an oath. Yet, Allah *the Almighty* out of His Knowledge of all His creatures gives this particular ruling on the Jews. The absence of mutual prevention of evil involves both action and speech. Here, there is a very important point; that is, even though Allah *the Almighty* does not phrase this particular part of the verse as follows, 'How vile their sayings were,' the meaning of the verse under discussion refers to both of them. We certainly know that 'saying' is the act of the tongue while 'deeds' are the acts of the rest of the body parts; yet, both fall under the category of 'doing'. This point is clearly illustrated in the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says: 'Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then (let him change it) with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith.'(1)

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'How vile their deeds were,' indicates that they had already committed evil, both in speech and in action.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

تَرَىٰ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتَوَلَّوْنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ۚ لَبِئْسَ مَا قَدَّمَتْ لَهُمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ أَن سَخِطَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَفِى ٱلْعَذَابِ هُمْ خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

You [Prophet] see many of them allying themselves with the disbelievers. How terrible is what their souls have stored up for them: God is angry with them and they will remain tormented [80] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 80)

This particular verse draws our attention to the main reason why Allah *the Almighty* told His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the acts of disobedience on part of the Jews, including the fact they had been cursed on the tongue of David and Jesus, son of Mary. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell him *peace and blessings be upon him* that if he considered their affairs with him, he would fully realise that their disbelief and rejection to the previous Messengers and Prophets were not a matter of whim, but rather, their disbelief was an intrinsic part of their nature.

Let us illustrate this point more clearly; we know for certain that when Islam came, it faced and countered several different forces that used to corrupt people's lives, a thing which is totally against the Divine Guidance. Allah *the Almighty* made all the creatures in the universe subservient to man so that he would set the affairs of the land in order. Accordingly, people are supposed not to let the evil exert its negative impact on the good. This obviously indicates the main reason behind the sending down of the Divine Guidance to man. In other words, Allah's Guidance is meant to protect man's course of life from getting out of order. Thus, it is clear that our adherence to the Divine Laws is always for our own good. Here, we should stress that Allah *the Almighty* will not get any benefit from our obedience, nor does our worship add something new to His Attributes of Perfection which He *Glorified is He* already had even before He has created us. We know that it is He *the Almighty,* the One Who created us out of nothing and supplied us with His Sustenance. That is why it goes without saying that our adherence to His Legal Obligations upon us will not benefit Him in anything at all, for He is in no need of any of His creatures.

So, it is obvious that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to counter a number of disbelieving forces, including the polytheists of Mecca, the Jews and the hypocrites. As for the Jews, they—based on the fact that previous Messengers were sent to them, that Divine Messages were already sent to them, that they were fully aware of the miracles of the previous Messengers and that they knew Prophet Muhammad's descriptions— were supposed to follow Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; yet, they did not. As for the hypocrites, they emerged when Islam became strong, thus they apparently declared their belief, while their hearts did not accept it.

Once again, the people of the Book were supposed to believe in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since his way of guidance re-established the connection between the Heavens and the earth. We should know that the people of the Book used to tell the people in Yathrib (pre-Islamic Medina) that they would seek the help of Prophet Muhammad to defeat them; for example, it is historically related that they had said to the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj: 'This is the time of a Prophet to be sent in confirmation of what has been revealed to us; when he comes, we shall surely follow him and kill you with him in the same way the people of 'Ad and Iram had been previously killed.' This point is clear in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but (then) when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89) Their heavenly revealed Scriptures told them that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would come forth in a land of palm-trees that truly indicates the place where he was destined to deliver and convey His Message. So, it is clear right now that the Jews knew well the place where he would deliver his Message, his descriptions in their Books, as well as the nature of people he would counter and fight against. Yet, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to them with the truth, they lost their worldly temporal power which they, through corrupting and distorting the Divine Guidance, tried to preserve intact. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came forth with such Divine Message to turn people back to belief.

In that particular period of time when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered Medina, the people of Yathrib (pre-Islamic Medina) were about to crown one of them king. As for the Jews, they exploited the disunity and divisionism among the two tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj to earn money, selling weapons and lending usurious loans. However, when Prophet Muhammad came, he united Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, andthus the Jews lost their power and authority, which is why they—lest this new religion would move to Medina—tried their best to destroy it in the cradle, inciting the enemies of Islam in Mecca to get rid of Prophet Muhammad and the believers with him. This is definitively proved by the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Indeed, those who exchange the covenant of Allah and their (own) oaths for a small price will have no share in the Hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment.’ (*Al-’Imran:* 77) That is, the Jews have bought the life of this world in exchange for the hereafter. Ironically, they were content with trifling gain, including pride, power and rule.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. Ka’b ibn Al-Ashraf, one of the leaders of the Jews who possessed wealth and influence, went to Quraysh to speak to them of the absolute necessity of uprooting the new religion and getting rid of it, whereupon the people of Quraysh asked him: ‘You are from the People of the Book and you have knowledge of the previous Books. Which of the two religions is more guided than the other—ours or that of Muhammad?’ Ka’ab then replied: ‘You are more rightly-guided than Muhammad!’ Amazingly enough, how could polytheists —idol-worshippers— be more rightly-guided than Prophet Muhammad?

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘You (Prophet) see many of them allying themselves with the disbelievers,’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 80) indicates clearly that the Jews had allied with the polytheists, their old enemies, against Prophet Muhammad, so that they would not lose their power and authority. Hence, they allied with each other to get rid of the new religion. Allah’s words, ‘*yatawallawan al-ladhin kafaru*’ (translated as ‘allying themselves’) mean that they gave them aid and succour over the believers. In addition, they falsely told them that they were on the right path, while Prophet Muhammad and his followers were not. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* swears and emphasises how terrible what their evil-enjoining souls had made alluring to them; a point which obviously indicates that they had no self-reproaching souls.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse with, ‘How terrible is what their souls have stored up for them: Allah is angry with them and they will remain tormented’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 80). This divine anger had led them to keep away from the path of guidance; thus, they will remain tormented in the Hereafter. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* was saying to them: ‘Although you, O Jews, have taken a little enjoyment from this worldly life, you have brought upon yourselves the eternal misery which awaits you in the Hereafter.’

He *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَلَوۡ كَانُواْ يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلنَّبِيِّ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡهِ مَا
ٱتَّخَذُوهُمۡ أَوۡلِيَآءَ وَلَٰكِنَّ كَثِيرٗا مِّنۡهُمۡ فَٰسِقُونَ (٨١)

If they had believed in God, in the Prophet, and in what was sent down to him, they would never have allied themselves with the disbelievers, but most of them are rebels [81] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 81)

This indicates that if the Jews had true faith in Allah *the Almighty* and in the Divine Guidance sent down to them, they would not have allied themselves with polytheists. Yet, most of those people, according to the verse under discussion, are rebels and iniquitous, whereas just the minority of them are not like this. He *the Almighty* then says:

لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ ٱلنَّاسِ عَدَٰوَةٗ لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱلۡيَهُودَ وَٱلَّذِينَ أَشۡرَكُواْۖ وَلَتَجِدَنَّ
أَقۡرَبَهُم مَّوَدَّةٗ لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا نَصَٰرَىٰۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنۡهُمۡ
قِسِّيسِينَ وَرُهۡبَانٗا وَأَنَّهُمۡ لَا يَسۡتَكۡبِرُونَ (٨٢)

You [Prophet] are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance [82] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 82)

In this verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* swears to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will be fully aware of the nature of both the Jews and Christians- —two groups that share the same goal of opposing and rejecting Islam, but whose emotions towards him and the believers are different from one another.

The Jews—because they held considerable power during that particular period of time, to the extent that they were viewed as leaders—were more hostile towards Prophet Muhammad and his followers. As for the Christians, they did not have any dominance or temporal power, but rather confined themselves to their cells and monasteries worshipping Allah, so they did not show any enmity to those who were sent to devolve the temporal power of such tyrants to those who would surely establish justice.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* shows us the logical and strong reason behind this ruling deduced from the verse, 'You are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, "We are Christians," for there are among them people who devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 82) The Arabic word *qissisun* is the plural of *qass* and it refers to someone who devotes himself to learning (a scholar), whilst *rahib* is that person who devotes himself to asceticism. As such, it is clear that the mission of the *'qass'* is to attain knowledge, whilst that of the *'rahib'* is to implement what this learning demands by devoting himself to ascetic worship.

In this regard, we find Allah *the Almighty* praising two qualities of Christians, that is, there are from among them people who devoted to learning and ascetics. It is by virtue of these two particular qualities that they became closer in affection towards the believers; yet, this is actually the ruling in case they keep those two qualities. This is based on the rule that states: 'The legal ruling is determined in the light of the presence or absence of the effective cause.' So, since the Christians, neither for positions of power, nor for their haughtiness or pride, are not given to arrogance which can be explained in light of the fact that their religion helps them attain a higher spiritual rank. Let us quote the following statement of theirs to illustrate this point−Christians say: 'If someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn your left cheek to him'.

In addition, it is important to know that the real events of life definitively proved the meaning of the verse. The Jews showed bitter and extreme hostility to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the extent that they plotted to kill him by dropping a rock on his head and by poisoning him. As a matter of fact, trying to kill your enemy thinking that this is the only way to get rid of him indicates clearly that you are not brave enough to face him alive; otherwise, you would not think of killing him. If someone does something like this, it actually proves that he is weaker than his enemy, for if he were strong, he would face him in the flesh instead of thinking about killing him. That is why it is said that the weak man is the one who believes that the life of his enemy causes hardship to him.

Jews at this particular period of time of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were so weak. We know well that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made his call public, some people followed him and believed in his Message, but their families persecuted and hurt them to the extent that people within the one house were divided into believers and disbelievers. Umm Habibah, daughter of Abu Sufyan, is a case in point; she attained faith, while her father was still a disbeliever. She then migrated with her husband to Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia). At this point, it is important to know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was extremely keen on the safety of those first believers because he knew that they would be the ones who would call to Islam later on. That is why he ordered them to migrate to Abyssinia to protect themselves—the first seeds of faith—so that they would shoulder the responsibility of disseminating the Message of Islam in the future; a spiritual mission indeed! Here, we can quote the great poet Ahmad Shawqi *may Allah rest his soul* who says in one of his collections known as *Aswaq Adh-Dhahab*: 'Courage might require one to be cowardly for a moment.' As a matter of fact, courage is supposed to be shown not only when facing one's enemy, but also when facing one's own soul. For example, if a group of strong people are all sitting together one evening when a drifter with a gun comes in and starts insulting them all, they will have to use artful means in order to seize him and eventually punish him.

Therefore, courage requires a person to be cowardly for a moment so that he is able defeat the enemy; this is actually the true meaning of cleverness and astuteness. We should affirm that faith does not mean suicide, but rather, it asks believers not to get involved in any battle unless they are confident, even not fully, that they will defeat their enemy. That is why we find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* calling Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with him*' The Unsheathed Sword of Allah, 'even though Khalid did not really win this particular battle, but he managed to withdraw the army of the believers, which is viewed as an act of victory. It goes without saying that ordering an army's retreat requires more strength than it does to be victorious since the victorious side has momentum with it, whilst the defeated side has the momentum against it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* stresses in the Quran that the acts of manoeuvres and plots are part of military skill because they give one the chance to face the enemy again afterwards. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Anfal*: 'And whoever turns his back to them on such a day, unless swerving (as a strategy) for war or joining (another) company, has certainly returned with anger (upon him) from Allah, and his refuge is Hell - and wretched is the destination.' (*al-Anfal:* 16)

Supported by the divine revelation and guidance, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* chose Abyssinia to be the destination of his migrating Companions. He did not command them to go to any of the Arab tribes because he knew well that all the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula feared Quraysh which was in full control over the pilgrimage season. That is why it was expected that none of those tribes would ever dare to oppose it. Because of this, Messenger Muhammad did not choose any of these tribes to be the destination of his companions. But why did he choose Abyssinia in particular? The answer to this question is clear in the following statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* where he says: 'Go to Abyssinia, for there is a king there who does not allow that anyone should be wronged in his presence, so stay in his land until such time as Allah shall make for you a means of relief from what you now are suffering.'(1)

Imam Az-Zuhari related another narration which reads: 'When the Muslims had increased in number and the idolaters' persecution had begun, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "Disperse in Allah's

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Ishaq*

Land, for He *the Almighty* shall bring you together again", whereupon they asked, "Where shall we go, O Messenger Muhammad?" He pointed his hand towards the land of Abyssinia and said: 'There!'(1)

Carrying out the order of Prophet Muhammad, the Companions crept out in the dead of night to set off to Abyssinia. When Quraysh heard about this, they tried to intercept them and bring them back to Mecca to continue their persecution against them, hoping that this would make them leave Islam. But because the Will of Allah *the Almighty* cannot be challenged, He made everything easy for the believers so that they arrived in Abyssinia and they were safe from the plots of the disbelievers.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the knowledge that Allah has given him, was fully aware of the affairs in the neighbouring territories; thus, he was perfectly able to distinguish just rulers from unjust ones; this is proven by the fact that when the Companions carried out his *peace and blessings be upon him* order and migrated to Abyssinia, they felt secure about their lives and religion. The Quraysh became enraged; they wanted to take the people back from the Negus, the king of Abyssinia, so they sent their leaders with gifts and presents for the king.

The delegation of Quraysh, including 'Amr ibn Al-'As, 'Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'a and 'Imarah ibn Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, travelled to Abyssinia and asked the Negus to give them the Muslims who had emigrated to his land, meanwhile accusing them of having forsaken the religion of their forefathers to adopt a new religion opposing all other religions. They also told the Negus that the Muslims were slandering Jesus and his Virgin mother, but the Negus refused to believe a word of them, which is why he asked to hear from the emigrants themselves; so, Ja'far ibn Abi Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* approached and said:

'O King, we were a people of ignorance who worshipped idols, ate carrion, committed indecencies, severed family ties, mistreated neighbours and the strong amongst us would exploit the weak. We did all this until Allah sent us a Messenger from amongst us whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness and chastity were known to us, and he called us to uphold Allah’s Oneness and to worship Him Alone, and to forsake the stones and idols which our forefathers worshipped alongside Him. And he commanded us to speak the truth, honour our trusts, keep our family ties, treat our neighbours well and abstain from the property and blood of others. He forbade us indecency, lying, usurping the orphan’s wealth and falsely accusing chaste women. He commanded us to worship Allah Alone and to associate nothing with Him. He commanded us to pray, to give alms to the needy and to fast. And we believed in him, had faith in him and followed him in all that he brought from Allah Alone, with whom we associate nothing; we deemed unlawful all that he made unlawful to us; we deemed lawful all that he made lawful for us. So, our people declared enmity against us, tortured and abused us to make us leave our religion and return to idolatry instead of worshipping Allah *the Almighty* and to indulge in all the foul things we used to. And when they dominated us and restrained us and came between us and our religion, we came to your land, and we chose you above anyone else, hoping that we would not be wronged in your court.’

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(1) *Narrated by 'Abd Ar-Razzaq*

The Negus was fully aware of the fact that the Quran attested that the Messiah *peace be upon him* was a pure and honourable Prophet, so he did not listen to the lies of the delegation of Quraysh. The heart of the Negus became filled with faith, and he was not too proud to believe even though he was a king; thus, he stood in the way of the attempts of Quraysh to get the companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* back to Mecca. When the Negus heard what had been revealed to Messenger Muhammad in the chapter of *Maryam*, he said: ‘Indeed, these words and those which Jesus brought shone forth from a single source!’

In this regard, it is important to know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* fully realised that faith had settled in the heart of the Negus; this is definitively proven by the fact that when the husband of Umm Habiba bint Abu Sufyan converted to Christianity, she remained Muslim even though she loved him dearly. At this point, she *may Allah be pleased with her* had to separate from him. As a matter of fact, Umm Habiba’s insistence on adhering to Islam indicates clearly that her immigration was made sincerely only for attaining the Pleasure of Allah *the Almighty*.

As a result, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to honour Umm Habiba and the Negus, so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the Negus to offer Umm Habiba his marriage proposal. This is actually based on the fact that the Negus was a 'man of trust' who did not deny the true information about Mary (Maryam) in the Gospel, bravely declared the veracity of the verses of the Quran on Mary *may Allah be pleased with her* and rejected to give the emigrants to the polytheists of Mecca. For all of these reasons, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the Negus to offer his marriage proposal to Umm Habiba after her husband had become Christian. As a matter of fact, this single incident offers a number of good and interesting lessons; it actually tells us that the emigration of Umm Habiba was made for the sake of attaining the pleasure of Allah *the Almighty*. Had she been following her husband, she would have converted to Christianity like him. It also draws attention to the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not speaking from his own desire when he had said before that the Negus would not allow anyone to be wronged in his presence. Here, we should know that when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was told about the death of the Negus, he prayed the Absentee Funeral Prayer for him.

Allah's words, 'You (Prophet) are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with Allah; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians, 'for there are among them people who devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance' (*al-Ma'ida:* 82), tell you that, out of Allah's Grace, He made scholars and ascetics from the Christians. We have previously explained the difference between these two terms and said that the 'scholar' (*qass*), in this context, is the one who attains knowledge, whereas the 'ascetic' is the one who acts upon knowledge. Here, we should distinguish between the kind of scholar who do not put their knowledge into practice, from whom only knowledge can be taken, and the other kind that, out of fear of Allah, put their knowledge into practice. Those scholars who do not act upon their knowledge will surely be held accountable before Allah *the Almighty;* nevertheless, we shall receive knowledge from them and then practice it ourselves. At that point, we can quote the following poet:

Take my knowledge, and look not at my action:
  Pick the fruit, and leave the wood for the fire!

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* says, '…for there are among them people who are devoted to learning and ascetics', it gives the reason why they are kinder to Muslims. However, we are faced with a good question: does this truly mean that Allah *the Almighty* hold monasticism to be praiseworthy? If this is true, why does He state, 'Which they innovated; we did not prescribe it for them except (that they did so) seeking the approval of Allah' (*al-Hadid:* 27)?

In the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Hadid*, Allah *Glorified is He* is telling us about the succession of Messengers until 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and the Gospel he brought. He *the Almighty* placed in the hearts of Jesus's followers great compassion, tenderness and kindness; and how they invented monasticism as a way of increasing their worship, meanwhile confirming that He did not enjoin it upon them, but they had adopted it out of a desire for Allah's goodly acceptance. He *the Almighty* then made it clear that some of them preserved it, whilst many other became iniquitous and forsook it. As a matter of fact, when Allah *the Almighty* issues a legal obligation, believers must perform it; as long as the believers keep on offering the recommended acts of worship which are not obligatory, Allah will increase the reward for them. We should know that if one really wishes to increase his reward from Allah, he must be insistent and persistent on offering acts of worship before Him *the Almighty*. Hence, it is clear that the Christians are not criticised and censured in this verse because they invented monasticism; rather, it is because some of them did not observe it properly.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…for there are among them people who devoted to learning and ascetics;' it indicates clearly that there are those of them (the Christians) who devote their lives to knowledge, and others, monks, who are good models of the application of this knowledge. He *the Almighty* concludes the verse by praising their moral conduct, saying that they are not given to arrogance or pride. So, as long as they keep such characteristics, it means that they do not seek temporal power, and thus they will continue to be closer in affection to us (Muslims). If they abandon those characteristics and seek temporal power, it means that they have forsaken those attributes by which Allah judged them as being closer to us in affection. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا۟ مَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰٓ أَعْيُنَهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ ٱلدَّمْعِ
مِمَّا عَرَفُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلْحَقِّ ۖ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ ءَامَنَّا فَٱكْتُبْنَا مَعَ ٱلشَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

and when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognize the Truth [in it]. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so count us amongst the witnesses [83] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 83)

This particular verse indicates the accuracy of the Quranic style; that is, the Quran has already mentioned scientific facts on the human soul and how the body parts react even before psychology scholars began to study these phenomena by means of research, investigation and experimentation. Science proves that every body part has a particular function to perform: the eye sees; the ear hears; the tongue tastes and speaks; the nose smells, and the hand touches. Scientists, out of caution, called these senses 'The Five Tangible Senses'. At this point, we should stress that there are other things such as hunger and thirst, a person perceives without knowing the mode or the source of sensation.

In this regard, it is important to know that scientists tried to discover how man differentiates between two weights, and they reached the conclusion that he does so by virtue of a particular sense called the 'muscle sense'. When a person lifts something, he uses his muscles to the point where he is able to distinguish different levels of effort. In the same connection, they found out that man has a further sense called the 'sense of dimension', which allows one to sense the level of fineness or thickness of cloth, even if its thickness is only one tenth of a millimetre.

Therefore, it is clear that man has numerous senses by means of which he can perceive things. In truth, there are certain senses which exert effect on the human soul, such as love, affection, hatred and disgust, called senses of emotion. The enjoyment of the taste of a certain food or the dislike for something else falls under this category. If a person likes something, he will surely try it again. This entire process may be explained as bringing a reaction to an emotion which follows perception.

Thus, there are three different processes that are, perception by means of which one senses, emotion by means of which one feels and action by means of which one reacts. For example, one might perceive a beautiful flower in a garden, a process which might inspire the heart to feel yearning and love which are emotions. Here, you should know that you are free to perceive what you like and to feel whatever emotion you like, but you do not have the right to reach out your hand and pick the flower because the *Shari'a* forbids that, and the guard working in the garden will also prevent you from doing that. But no one will prevent you from looking at the flower and enjoying its beauty; we can reach the conclusion that perception regarding that particular act is allowed and so is emotion.

Reaction is the particular area governed by *Shari'a*. Once again, we stress that perception and emotion are allowed – all apart from the perception of feminine beauty, which the *Shari'a* declared prohibited. You might perceive a woman's beauty and then feel inclination and love to her; yet, if you react, how will you control yourself? We know that after the perception and emotion, you might either react or suppress; if you react, you will sully people's honour; and if you suppress, you will be emotionally devastated and hurt. Therefore, the Islamic *Shari'a* addresses this topic from the very beginning; it prohibits you from even perceiving it (that is, the unlawful feminine beauty). In doing so, it expressly ordered its followers to lower their gazes. This is based on the fact that sex is a very complex process whose elements cannot be separated from each other. In the case of the flower, the three elements of the process— perception, emotion and reaction—can be separated from each other, a matter which is totally different in the topic of sex in which one is supposed to do one of two, that is, either to be chaste or to obey his whim—two matters that cause him considerable harm. That is why the Islamic *Shari'a* prohibits the matter from the very beginning, at the stage of perception (of a woman's beauty).

Hence, it becomes clear now that this verse under discussion has revealed psychological facts on the matters of perception, emotion and action, which psychologists have only discovered recently. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and when they listen to…' which means that they knew about what has been given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through the organ responsible for hearing, which is the ear. But what did they hear? The Quran gives us the answer and says that they (the Christians) listened to what had been sent down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which is the main reason behind the existence of emotion, shown clearly in the fact that their eyes overflowed with tears. But how was their reaction? They actually asked Allah *the Almighty* to count them amongst the witnesses since they had already attained faith. Thus, we find that the Quran, which was revealed fourteen centuries ago, gave the sequential order of perception, emotion and reaction, even before science spoke about it. The Quran tells that when the Christians heard with their ears, there was an emotional response, and the change in their emotions was manifested by the tears overflowing from their eyes.

Here, we should distinguish between two things: the first is the eye's filling with tears, without these tears actually falling. Arabs say: 'His eye filled with tears', meaning that his eyes became teary, but the tears did not fall. The second is when tears actually flow from the eyes; overflowing only occurs when the container is completely filled, overfilling; so it is as if tears filled the eyes beyond capacity and then fell down—just like when we fill a jug or a cup with water all the way to the top and then add more so that it overflows.

The verse shows that the main reason behind their reaction was that they had recognised that the Quran was true. We notice that the Arabic particle *min* has been used frequently (three times) in this Quranic verse, as follows: *min ad-dam'* (translated as 'with tears'), *mimma'arafau* (translated as 'because they recognised') and *min al-Haqq* (translated as '(they recognized) the Truth (in it)').

Therefore, the Arabic word *min* is used three times with a different contextual role, from which a particular meaning is understood. These different meanings, in turn, indicate the rhetorical compilation of the three phenomena of perception, emotion and reaction—an order which includes the three elements of the sensory phenomena which empirical science only discovered when it became acquainted with the anatomy of the body parts, their functions and how they are involved in the processes of perception, emotion and reaction.

What concerns us here is the reaction; the Christians asked Allah *the Almighty* to count them from the witnesses. This is very important because faith is something which concerns them personally, but being united with all those who bear witness to the truth is something which concerns others, too. As a matter of fact, this particular supplication of theirs indicates that believers will undoubtedly attain high ranks, for they will benefit from their own belief. In addition, they will shoulder the responsibility of disseminating the Divine Guidance to others and thus they will also get benefit; this point is proved by the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘You are the best nation produced (as an example) for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient’ (*Al-’Imran:* 110).

That is, Allah *the Almighty* calls upon the *ummah* (followers) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘You, O followers of Prophet Muhammad, are the best community which has ever been brought forth for the good of humankind not because of your race or lineage, but because of the way of guidance you follow; and whoever follows the guidance of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’, thereby gives practical proof of his faith in Allah.’ He *the Almighty* then adds, ‘There are those of the People of the Book who attain to faith and become Muslim, but yet many of them are also outside the bounds of faith.’ In another position of the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that He *Glorified is He* says: “And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you. And We did not make the *qiblah* which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom Allah has guided. And never would Allah have caused you to lose your faith. Indeed Allah is, to the people, Kind and Merciful” (*al-Baqara:* 143).

So, the *ummah* (followers) which follows the teachings of Islam –the way of moderation – is the rightly-guided *ummah* which follows the path of righteousness and really practices its faith, for it is the religion which abrogates and amends all that had come before it. In addition, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the seal of all Prophets and Messengers, thus his Message abrogates all the previous laws and methodologies. Furthermore, his life and the way he acted is an excellent model of spiritual behaviour that guides believers to the Straight Path. After reflection on the aforementioned verse from the chapter of *Al-'Imran*, we find that it sheds light on the topic of changing the direction of prayer from Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. The verse says that the first command to pray towards Jerusalem was a test that was only passed by those who defer all matters to the Highest Commander, Allah *Glorified is He*. The execution of this order was really a difficult thing for all except those whom Allah has graced with His Guidance. Then, He *the Almighty* has ordered them to direct their faces towards the Sacred House in Mecca, which is the first House ever to be appointed for people.

So, since we, Muslims, are witnesses, and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a witness over us, this means that he testifies that we have disseminated the Message of Islam after him, and thus our reward will be doubled. We will be rewarded for the fact that we received the Message from him and believed in it; in addition, we will be rewarded for disseminating the Message of Islam after him. As a matter of fact, the believer is not a witness unless his witnessing is drawn from the witnessing of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself; a point which is clear in the aforementioned verse of *Al-'Imran*.

This is, the *ummah* (followers) of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the best which Allah *the Almighty* has ever brought forth since its members firmly adhere to the Divine Guidance manifested clearly in the order' Do' and the prohibition 'Do not do'. By doing this, you, O Muslims, will have certainly applied the guidance in a manner that shows the sincerity of your faith in Allah. Yet, if the people of the Book were as true as you are in your faith, it would be better for them than what they are currently doing; but while some of them are reviewing the topic of belief in their hearts, most of them have iniquitously gone outside the confines of faith. So, Allah *the Almighty* has said, '…so count us amongst the witnesses; 'it is an admission that this particular group of Christians had already attained faith in Allah, while disseminating the Divine Guidance to others. Thus, it is clear that they became true Muslims and followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is narrated to have said: 'No one of you becomes a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself.'(1) Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran about the great reward prepared for those who disseminate His Message to others. In the chapter of *Ibrahim*, He *Glorified is He* says that the parable of a good word is like a good tree, firmly rooted, reaching out with its branches towards the sky and yielding its fruit at all times. Allah says: 'Have you not considered how Allah presents an example, (making) a good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed and its branches (high) in the sky?' (*Ibrahim:* 24-25)

This means that a good word is like a fruit-bearing tree which benefits the people; it gives comfort, it has firm roots in the earth and branches which stretch up towards the sky, and it yields its fruits at all times by its Creator's Will. In truth, Allah *the Almighty* gives this tangible example as a parable to the people so that they may know the value of high spiritual truths. In other words, the one who speaks the truth, conveying the Divine Guidance to people, will bear the fruits of this good word, as long as there is a believer alive until we all meet Allah *the Almighty*.

The word *ash-shahidin* (translated as 'witnesses') refers to the person who conveys a message. As a matter of fact, when the believer asks Allah *the Almighty* to make him with those who bear witness to the truth, this means that he is requesting for himself a place alongside the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous. We should know that 'martyrdom' does not only mean that a person shall die in war; rather, it conveys the meaning of giving testimony. The same actually applies to those martyrs who sacrifice their lives for the sake of belief, for they are also viewed as giving their testimony to the fact that the reward they are going to receive in the Hereafter is more precious than everything in life which is a practical testimony.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

وَمَا لَنَا لَا نُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَا جَآءَنَا مِنَ ٱلْحَقِّ وَنَطْمَعُ أَن يُدْخِلَنَا رَبُّنَا مَعَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

Why should we not believe in God and in the Truth that has come down to us, when we long for our Lord to include us in the company of the righteous?’ [84] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 84)

This particular verse under discussion includes a rhetorical exclamatory style which indicates that we must know for certain that attaining faith in Allah *the Almighty* is something which is for our own good because when we believe in Him *Glorified is He* He consequently confers His Favours, Graces, and Blessings upon us. That is why we should be fully aware of the important fact that belief is not meant to restrict our freedom or even prevent us from (lawfully) satisfying our desires, but rather, it is intended to make us enjoy freedom and satisfy our desires in a rational way which benefits us even after death.

So, it is clear that religion offers nothing but rational benefit. In this regard, it is important to know that a wise man shall benefit from his life in a manner that does not harm anyone; yet, in case this benefit does harm him or even others, Islam judges it unlawful and orders us to refrain from it. We should also take into account that one may not be destined to receive benefit or does not even desire it. In addition, the wise is the one who gives precedence to the benefit of others rather than his.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. A beggar may come to you asking for food because he has not eaten for two days. You have nothing but one pound in your pocket and you give it to him; this clearly means that you prefer him to yourself, thus you will fall under the saying of Allah in the chapter of *al-Hashr* in which Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘And (also for) those who were settled in Medina and (adopted) the faith before them. They love those who emigrated to them and find not any want in their breasts of what the emigrants were given but give (them) preference over themselves, even though they are in privation. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul - it is those who will be the successful’ (*al-Hashr:* 9).

By doing so, one follows the example of the Helpers (*Al-Ansar*, Medinan Muslims) who welcomed the Immigrants (*Al-Muhajirun*, Meccan Muslims) whose pure faith caused them to love all those who shared it and who harboured no envy or hatred for the things which were given to the Immigrants such as battle spoils and the like. As matter of fact, the Helpers' ultimate objective was to please the Immigrants. In doing so, they preferred the Immigrants to themselves, giving from their properties even though they were in dire need, meaning that the Helpers freely chose not to fall under the category of misers. That is why Allah *the Almighty* saved them from the evil of miserliness, thus they became counted among the triumphant. As for the one who spends a pound in charity, Allah *Glorified is He* will reward him tenfold which is a considerable benefit. In the same connection, we should be fully aware of the fact that when the Sacred Law commands us to lower our gazes from unlawfully looking at other people's female relatives, this clearly means that we, by doing so, are preventing others from doing the same with our female relatives, which is a considerable benefit as well. So, it is unreasonable to think that religion restricts freedom, which is entirely not true; religion is actually intended to make us enjoy freedom and satisfy our desires in a rational way which benefits us even after death, and it also prevents us from foolish benefit.

I always like to give this example: suppose that a man has two sons, one of whom rises early and does what his father taught him. He makes ablution and prays, then goes to school after breakfast. As for the other son, he gets up late and goes out from the house to the coffee shop. Both sons want to bring themselves benefit but in different forms—the first boy wants to get the benefit in the long run, while the other wants to obtain immediate benefit. Ten years later, the first son graduates, becomes successful and is happy in life, while the other son becomes a parasite and is unsuccessful. That is to say, both of them sought benefit but in different ways.

At this point, I would like to stress the fact that we all love ourselves but in different ways; some may show this love in such way that makes them attain a long-lasting benefit to the extent that they may gain the reward of martyrs—a matter that is only achieved by being righteous—yet, there are others who mistakenly express this love by showing that they are the most greedy for life; they do this even though they actually die a thousand times before their death in the midst of this cowardliness; and thus they lose their dignity, whilst striving to preserve a life which they are powerless to extend even a single day. Here, Al-Mutanabbi, an Abbasid poet, may be quoted,

We all love life for ourselves,
And are keen and eager to preserve it:
The coward's love for life makes him cautious,
And the brave man's love for life leads him to war.

Therefore, the one who properly understands the ultimate objective of religion shall follow this pattern and act like those Christians who say: 'Why should we not believe in Allah and in the Truth that has come down to us'. That is why believers exert their utmost efforts to attain the higher spiritual rank of true believers. As for the Allah's words, 'we long for our Lord to include us in the company of the righteous' it indicates plainly that one of the essential characteristics of the believer is that he aspires to attain the rank of the righteous. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَثَٰبَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا قَالُواْ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ وَذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ٨٥

For saying this, God has rewarded them with Gardens graced with flowing streams, and there they will stay: that is the reward of those who do good [85] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 85)

This verse casts light on the 'Word of the Truth' that must be declared every time and place. It is uttered and declared by the powerful Abyssinian Negus to the prestigious men of Quraysh, who were steeped in falsehood; therefore, it is weighty. When the Negus listened to what has been revealed in the Quran on Mary *peace be upon her* he stated clearly that both the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and those of Prophet Jesus had come from one source. That is to say, he loudly and firmly declared the word of truth. At that point, we should fully realise that Allah *the Almighty* rewards well those who support the truth, even with a word, for He *Glorified is He* is the All-Thankful Who gives much in return for little. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Generous Who multiplies the reward of the doers of good.

Then, we should know well that speech, out of the fact that it has to do with behaviour, is of considerable importance. The words of the Negus were great, but he did not live long enough to continue to practise what he had said and believed in. As a result of the truthful testimony he gave, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him to offer Umm Habiba *may Allah be pleased with her* his bid of marriage. The Negus then married her to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and even gave her dowry from his own property. Shortly after, he died. The rulings and teachings of Islam had not yet reached him so that he could practise them; therefore, it was enough for him to have said those words; a point which is proved by the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* offered the absentee funeral prayer for him when he died.

Let us offer another example to illustrate this point. Mukhayriq was a wealthy Jew whose heart was filled with Islam and belief, which is why he told the Jews that he would support Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with all his money and power. So, he went out to fight alongside Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he was martyred, although he had never offered a single Islamic prayer in his life. Thus, it is clear now that 'to speak the truth is to take the first step on the way of action'.

Back to the words of Allah *the Almighty* "For saying this, Allah has rewarded them with Gardens graced with flowing streams"; they indicate clearly that Allah *the Almighty* wants to strongly emphasise the fact that every matter of belief, even speech is judged perfect or not in the light of the circumstances surrounding their practise. For example, we know for certain that believers, while in Mecca, used to practise their faith with speech because most of the rulings were not revealed yet during that particular period, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* rewarded the believers simply for declaring the word of belief. This actually happened even though Allah *the Almighty* during that particular period of Mecca had not yet given the command to Prophet Muhammad to convey the Message to all the people of Quraysh; the command by virtue of which he *peace and blessings be upon him* was ordered to warn his nearest relations, 'And warn, (O Muhammad), your closest kindred' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 214).

Based on this, Allah *the Almighty* rewarded these people with the best of rewards and even called them *Muhsinin* (translated as 'doers of good'). This was also the case with the action of the Negus; he embraced the faith without even being called to it; he had done so even before Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent messages to the kings inviting them to belief, which is why Muslim scholars opine that the Negus was a doer of good because he embraced faith before he was even asked to do so. Here is a very important point, that is, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about one of the ranks of faith, He *Glorified is He* also presents the contrasting image so that the advice is useful and constructive. So, if He *the Almighty* speaks about the denizens of paradise, He follows this by speaking of the denizens of hell, and vice-versa. As a matter of fact, when He *the Almighty* does so, the human soul will be able to properly understand the idea and its opposite. He *the Almighty* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَكَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ﴿٨٦﴾

Those who reject the truth and deny Our messages will be the inhabitants of Hellfire [86] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 86)

In the Arabic language, the three words '*sahib*', '*suhbah*' and '*ashab*' all impart the meaning of the company of others, an act which is subject to man's free choice, for we have never heard that someone has been forced to become the friend of another.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Those who reject the truth and deny Our Messages will be the inhabitants of Hellfire,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 86), it indicates that there is a mutual affection between the fire and its denizens, but this is not the intended meaning. As a matter of fact, this particular part of the verse may indicate that Allah *the Almighty* mocks at them. Another possible interpretation is that those people who deny the Truth will live eternally in the hellfire.

Having shed light on the affairs of the polytheists, the Jews and the Christians, Allah *Glorified is He* moves to talk about the believers. In doing so, He first clears up our minds by removing from them all that is connected to the deniers of the truth and their deviant ways, and then He conveys His Rulings and Teachings to us. Allah *Glorified is He* has actually done this when He began this chapter by ordering us to fulfil our obligations, 'O you who have believed, fulfil (all) contracts. Lawful for you are the animals of grazing livestock except for that which is recited to you (in this Quran) - hunting not being permitted while you are in the state of *ihram* (ritual consecration). Indeed, Allah ordains what He intends' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1).

As for the covenant of faith in particular, it is wholly superior to the falsehood of the polytheists. In addition, it has nothing to do with false statements of the Jews and Christians. Having instructed the believers to fulfil their obligation, Allah *the Almighty* then commands them to keep to the way of guidance by means of which the course of life will run smoothly. It is taken for granted that life is first and foremost preserved by food and drink, which is why He *Glorified is He* then allowed the believers to only eat the flesh of every beast that feeds on plants: ‘Lawful for you are the animals of grazing livestock except for that which is recited to you (in this Quran)’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 1).

Having instructed man how to preserve his life, Allah *Glorified is He* moves to state that believers are not allowed to eat certain kinds of animals. Here arises a very important question, which is: ‘Why did Allah *the Almighty* create such animals which He declared unlawful?’ If we answer this question in the light of our daily life, we will find that every manufacturer specifies the characteristics of the thing he makes. For example, the manufacturer of a plane designs his plane and precisely specifies the particular kind of fuel it runs with, so it cannot run on the fuel specified for cars. As long as man-made machines themselves get out of order when we misuse them, it thus goes without saying that those who believe that Allah *the Almighty* has created anything in this life for no use are mistaken; such creatures must have been created to perform a particular role in the universe, although we might not know how they are beneficial to us. The venom of snakes is a case in point. Even though it can kill man, Allah *the Almighty* inspired them to use it in getting rid of some microbes.

Therefore, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* has created the universe by due measure. Let us offer another example to illustrate this point; we see crocodiles lying on the shores with birds in their mouths pecking at the food between their teeth, yet the crocodiles do not harm them in the slightest because these birds, out of the Great Wisdom of Allah alert the crocodile to the presence of hunters. That is to say that these particular birds obtain their sustenance and meanwhile protect the crocodile’s life. The same applies to electricity, which is highly beneficial to us, yet if we misuse it, it causes death and destruction.

Further, we should stress the point that one should not ask why Allah *Glorified is He* made certain things unlawful to man. That is because everything in this life is created by due measure and thus has a role to perform, although we might be unaware of that role. In the same connection, it is not right to use means in place of ends. By making things lawful or unlawful, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted man to get benefit from what is good for him. For example, the wisdom behind the prohibition of eating pork is that Allah *the Almighty* created pigs to consume and get rid of microbes, so man is in no way allowed to turn the means into ends. Here, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that modern scientific discoveries prove the truthfulness and veracity of Islam day after day.

Let us offer a striking example to illustrate this point; we find that diseases spread widely in those communities which eat pork and drink wine to the extent that there is a certain disease called 'cirrhosis of the liver' spreading in those lands. Here is a very good question, that is, 'were we to postpone obeying the Order of Allah *the Almighty* on the prohibition of eating pork until laboratories were built?! Or was it enough for us to keep ourselves from what He *Glorified is He* made unlawful?' It goes without saying that we must obey the Divine Orders for our own safety. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We will show them our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?' (*Fussilat:* 53) In this regard, it is important to know that every day reveals to us a sign which confirms the veracity and truthfulness of Islam. So, no one should ask, 'Why did Allah *the Almighty* create these creatures which He Himself declared forbidden?' Once again, we stress the fact that they were created to serve as means, not ends. For example, Allah *the Almighty* created petroleum for us to extract fuel from it, but can any of us drink petrol? Hence, it is clear that declaring things lawful or unlawful is intended to achieve the maximum benefit for mankind, which is why whoever disregards this has no one to blame but himself. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say, "Have you seen what Allah has sent down to you of provision of which you have made (some) lawful and (some) unlawful?"' 'Say, "Has Allah permitted you (to do so), or do you invent (something) about Allah?"' (*Yunus:* 59)

This aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Yunus* tells us that Allah *the Almighty* is rebuking people for declaring unlawful what He *Glorified is He* made lawful and for declaring lawful what He *the Almighty* made unlawful.

That is to say, that doing something like this is against the Will of Allah *the Almighty* who knows best what is beneficial for man and what is not beneficial for him. Let us offer an example of what the Arabs used to do with certain kinds of camels which are *al-bahir*, *as-sa'iba* and *al-wasila* to fully illustrate this point. For *al-bahira*, a she-camel whose ears would be clipped so that no one would harm it, especially after it gave birth to five litters, the final being male; the Arabs used to leave it to graze freely without being mounted or milked. In addition, it would not be denied either pasture or water. They furthermore used to offer it as sacrifice for the gods. If we think carefully about the beneficiaries of such acts, we would find out that they are the idolatrous priests. The same applies to *as-sa'iba*; they voluntarily used to let it roam free. In addition, no one was allowed to mount it or even milk it. Once again, it was the priests who benefitted from this act as well. As for *al-wasila*, it is a she-camel born alongside a male, so they believed that it was connected with the bull born with it, which is why they would not slaughter the male for their gods. Likewise, they used to set a bull free after it had sired ten litters, and they used to say about it: 'Its back is protected', so it would not be mounted, loaded or prevented from any pasture or water. That is why Allah *the Almighty* reproached all of those customs, since Allah *Glorified is He* did not instruct us to act likewise.

In this regard, we should take into account that Allah, out of His great wisdom, made blood and carrion unlawful because He is the One Who declares what is lawful and what is not. In addition, sometimes we are able to define the Divine Wisdom behind a particular legal obligation, while other times we find it difficult to do so with another obligation. That is why He *the Almighty* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تُحَرِّمُواْ طَيِّبَٰتِ مَآ أَحَلَّ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡ وَلَا
تَعۡتَدُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُعۡتَدِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

You who believe, do not forbid the good things God has made lawful to you – do not exceed the limits: God does not love those who exceed the limits [87] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 87)

So, it is crystal clear now that Allah *the Almighty* is the Only One Who has the right to declare things lawful or unlawful. That is to say that man has nothing at all to do in this regard; for man sometimes deviates the way by declaring lawful what Allah made unlawful or by declaring unlawful what He *Glorified is He* made lawful.

Therefore, we must beware of forbidding what Allah has permitted or permitting what He *the Almighty* has forbidden. This point is fully understood in the following: we should not believe that Allah has declared what is unlawful to be lawful; we also should not say that Allah has declared what is unlawful to be lawful; we should not refrain either from doing what Allah has permitted out of the suspicion that it is forbidden; we should not pass a verdict on the prohibition of something, although Allah has declared it lawful. Finally, we should not forbid ourselves that which Allah has made lawful for us. Hence, it is prohibited for one to make a vow not to eat mutton or oranges because it is not permitted to make such a vow. This is based on the *Shari'a* ruling that forbidding things which Allah has permitted by means of vows is itself forbidden, a point which is definitively proved by the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O Prophet, why do you prohibit (yourself from) what Allah has made lawful for you, seeking the approval of your wives? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). Thus, we must fully understand this point and then recognise its different stages, as follows: do not believe; do not say; do not refrain; do not give a verdict; and do not vow. Why not? That is because it is a kind of transgression.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'You who believe, do not forbid the good things Allah has made lawful to you- do not exceed the limits: Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 87) So, what is transgression? It is to go beyond the bounds of what Allah has forbidden or of what He *the Almighty* has permitted. That is to say, Allah *Glorified is He* loves those who stay within His bounds. That is why He *the Almighty* orders us in a particular position in the Quran not to go near to His limit: 'These are the limits (set by) Allah, so do not approach them' (*al-Baqara:* 187). Yet in another verse He *the Almighty* orders us not to exceed them: 'And whoever transgresses the limits of Allah - it is those who are the wrongdoers' (*al-Baqara:* 229). So, what is the difference between these two orders? The meaning of these two orders goes as follows: with respect to things which are forbidden, we must not approach them; yet, things which are permitted, we must not transgress them. This point is even evident in the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says: ‘What is lawful is clear and what is unlawful is clear, but between them are certain doubtful things which many people do not know. So, he who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and his honour blameless. But he who falls into doubtful things falls into that which is unlawful, just as a shepherd who grazes his cattle in the vicinity of a pasture declared prohibited (by the king); he is likely to stray into the pasture. Mind you, every king has a protected pasture and Allah’s involved limits are those which He has declared unlawful. Verily, there is a piece of flesh in the body, if it is healthy, the whole body is healthy, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily, it is the heart.’(1)

Thus, it is clear that every being in the universe has special qualities and a particular role to perform, which is why we must not turn the means into ends, for there are many creatures that are originally created to serve as means and thus should not be used as ends. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* commands us to take that from which we can directly benefit and leave aside those things which He has forbidden. Pigs are originally created to rid us of microbes, so we are not allowed to eat them. Yet, if people do so, it means that they turn the means into an end which is against the general maxim on using things in the light of the main reason behind their creation. Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who sets everything in order in the universe.

This is also proved by the fact that today’s modern scientific discoveries reveal day after day the veracity and truthfulness of the religion of Islam, to the extent that they incline to it. As a matter of fact, Allah’s judgement of things as lawful or unlawful suffices us, avoiding the hardships of attempting to reach the deep wisdom behind the permissibility or impermissibility of such things. That is why we, Muslims, firmly believe that Allah *the Almighty* based on His great wisdom, judged things lawful or unlawful; at a particular point in time, we will be fully aware of the deep and great wisdom behind such permissibility or impermissibility; a point which is proven by the words of Allah *the Almighty* in which He says that He shall make them fully understand His Messages through what they perceive in the utmost horizons of the universe and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this revelation is indeed the truth. He *the Almighty* then adds that He is witness to everything 'But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?' (*Fussilat:* 53)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

So, we reach the conclusion that we should not believe in the permissibility of what Allah has forbidden, neither should we say something like that, nor should we refrain from it or even issue verdicts based on it. Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His words, '…do not exceed the limits: Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 87) We have previously explained the meaning of the word *al-i'tida'* (translated as 'exceeding the limits') and said that it means to go beyond and violate the bounds in matters of permissibility and impermissibility. We should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* loves those who do not exceed His bounds. So, one should not even approach that which is unlawful, lest his soul incites him to commit sin. Moreover, by keeping oneself away from approaching what is unlawful, the believer guards himself against doubtful matters.

Once again, it is Allah *the Creator* Who has the absolute right to judge things lawful or unlawful, which is why we, the creatures, must obey His orders so that the course of life runs smoothly. This is exactly akin to what we do when we invent a machine which helps us make products with less effort. But when the manufacturer makes this machine, he also precisely defines the kind of fuel it runs on, which is why when someone uses a different kind of fuel, the machine breaks down. So, how do we think the Law of the All-Wise will look like?

As a matter of fact, when He *Glorified is He* tells us that the course of life will run smoothly only by accepting what He has made lawful and by keeping away from that which is forbidden, this means that we must obey Him *Glorified is He* for He is the One Who created us and knows best what is beneficial or not to us. In addition, we should stress that no one in the universe has ever claimed to have created his own self, which is why we must entrust the affairs of sustenance and the preservation of our lives to Him *the Almighty and the Creator*. That is to say that we must adhere to what He has declared lawful and keep away from what is unlawful, for this actually achieves the maximum benefit for us in this life. Therefore, it is clear now that we are allowed to do particular things while not allowed to do other things. However, there are things which are not judged lawful or unlawful which is the *mubah* meaning that one will not be blamed for doing or not doing them. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that since He is our Creator, He knows best what is beneficial and unbeneficial for us, which is why if we go against His Rulings, we will be judged' transgressors'.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* in this verse under discussion addresses those who believe, saying to them that He created them and sustained them out of nothing, so that their lives will be preserved, which is why the believers must accept and act upon the Rulings of Allah *the Almighty*. That is to say that they are not allowed to deprive themselves of the good things of life which He has made lawful to them. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* says that we must act upon the instructions and teachings He gave us if we want the course of life to run smoothly. In this regard, if we carefully reflect upon the words of Allah *the Almighty* in which He tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with Allah; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians, ‘for there are among them people devoted to learning-(scholars) and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance (*al-Ma’ida:* 82). We find that He *Glorified is He* gives us the reasons why they are to be praised and why they are close in affection to us. He *the Almighty* says ‘among them are priests and monks and they are not arrogant’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 82) When the Companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this verse, they wept copiously to the extent that ten of them, including Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab, ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb, ‘Abdullah ibn Mas’ ud, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari, Salim (slave of Abu Hudhayfa), Al-Miqdad ibn Al-Aswad, Salman Al-Farisi and Ma’qil ibn Muqrin, gathered in the house of ‘Uthman ibn Madh’un Al-Jamhi, decided to fast and not to break their fast, to offer prayer all night without sleeping, not to eat meat and fat and to remain celibate all their lives, that is, they wanted to lead an ascetic life. Yet, when news of that reached Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, he called upon them, praised Allah and then said: 'What is the matter with people who say such and such? But I pray and I sleep, I fast and I break my fast and I marry women. Whoever turns away from my *Sunnah* is not of me.'(1) This statement of Prophet Muhammad goes hand in hand with the verses of the Quran under discussion in which He *the Almighty* prompts: 'O you, who have believed, do not prohibit the good things which Allah has made lawful to you and do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 87)

Careful reflection on the statement of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly indicates that it is logical and reasonable because if those Companions who decided to act like that wanted to refrain from the good things that Allah has permitted to lead an ascetic life like those who came before them, does that mean they will not offer prayer? Indeed, they will pray. We know for certain that prayer requires doing certain actions, which is why we need energy to perform them. In addition, we are required to cover our private parts while offering prayer; an act which cannot be fulfilled except by clothes; but from where can one get clothes? If we carefully examine the way clothes are made, we will reach the conclusion that it is a complex process which go through different stages including raising animals from which the wool will be taken, spinning the wool so that it can be woven; sending it to factories to tailor it, etc., all things which require us to exert great efforts. However, one is not aware of this complex process unless he is in need of clothes. So, if you, O man, want to spend all your time in worship, then you must not benefit from the work of those who act upon the teachings of Islam and follow the Divine Guidance, seeking to earn their living. Wrong are those who think that life goes like this!

Moreover, does the one who devotes himself solely to worship not have to eat? Indeed he does so that he has the energy to be able to can pray. We all know perfectly well how a loaf of bread is made. It is true that one can go to the bakery and easily buy his bread, but the process of making bread is complex and lengthy and goes through different stages, including getting the flour from the mill, which, in turn, gets the wheat from the warehouse. As for wheat, it was planted, ploughed, and harvested by farmers who, in doing so, had to use machinery and fertilizers; that is, it is a process which requires exerting great efforts.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

Further, it is evident now that man needs to do all those activities so that he can offer his prayer. At that point, we should say to those who want to withdraw from life that you are in no allowed to get benefit from the work of those who participate in making the course of life run smoothly. Here, we should stress a very important *Usuli*(1) maxim which reads, 'That without which an obligation cannot be fulfilled is itself an obligation'. Therefore, if the ruler sees that there is a particular job which is essential for the preservation of the human existence and for attaining a higher spiritual rank, but people are not eager to take it, he has the absolute right to command some to do so. In truth, every field of industry is jurisprudentially judged as' a communal obligation', that is, if some do it, the rest of the community will not be blamed for not doing it, otherwise, the entire community will be blamed for not doing it.

Therefore, it is clear that we must exert our efforts so that the course of life runs smoothly. In this vein, I would like to stress the fact that all actions of life are integrated and complementary to each other. That is why Allah *the Almighty* orders the believers not to deprive themselves from the good things of life which He has made lawful for them because if they do so, it means that they take the role of the Lawgiver, thus transgressing His bounds by infringing His absolute and exclusive right to declare things lawful or unlawful.

Once again, out of Allah's great wisdom, Allah *Glorified is He* declares things lawful or unlawful for man's own good. Likewise, we should firmly believe that the existence of such forbidden things will help us get benefit, even if not directly. We have previously given the example of the snake and said that we can extract therapy from its venom. That is to say that the snake itself was, in essence, created to serve man. That is why we firmly believe that all the creatures in the universe are created to serve man. So, it is not right to ask Allah *the Almighty* why He has created such things, although He declared them prohibited.

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(1) The name *Usuli* derives from the term *Usoul al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence). In *Usuli* thought, there are four valid sources of law: the Quran, Hadith, *ijma'* and *'aql*. *Ijma'* refers to a unanimous consensus.

Thus, we should not exceed the limits by declaring lawful what Allah has made unlawful or by declaring unlawful what Allah has made lawful. It goes without saying that the course of life will run smoothly in case we do not transgress the limits. When we consider the jungle, we see that every animal has a particular role to play. This role aims mainly at improving man's life. Here, we should stress the fact that when Allah *Glorified is He* has judged something to be forbidden, it does not mean that man will not get benefit from it; rather, he will do so but not in a direct way. As for that kind of provision which man gets directly, it includes what he eats and wears. As a matter of fact, we can also get this kind of provision through indirect means. Likewise, those things which Allah has declared unlawful are viewed as means to achieving the good of man, but not in a direct way.

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'You who believe, do not forbid the good things Allah has made lawful to you-do not exceed the limits…'; it issues an order to the believers not to judge lawful what Allah judged unlawful or to judge unlawful what Allah made lawful. It also gives an order to the believers to eat, without any extravagance, from the good things which He made lawful to them—a point which is affirmed in another verse in the Quran in which He *the Almighty* says: 'O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid (mosque), and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.' (*al-A'raf:* 31) Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَكُلُوا۟ مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ حَلَٰلًا طَيِّبًا ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنتُم بِهِۦ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

But eat the lawful and good things that God provides for you. Be mindful of God, in whom you believe [88] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 88)

Before delving into the explanation of this verse, we shall first know what is meant by *ar-rizq* (translated as 'provision' or 'sustenance'). *Ar-rizq* is a term encompassing all what one benefits from including food, drink, clothes, education and moral characters of forbearance, bravery, etc. However, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'but eat the lawful and good things that Allah provides for you,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 88) refers mainly to food. That is to say, we must eat what is lawfully earned, which is the 'lawful provision'. This actually means that there is another kind of provision which is obtained through unlawful means—the ‘unlawful provision’. For instance, when a thief steals something, this means that he gets benefit through an unlawful way. Had he been patient, he would have obtained what he wanted without resorting to such unlawful act. Another possible definition for the term *ar-rizq* is that it refers to the provision which Allah has judged lawful. Here, scholars differed over which of the two aforementioned definitions is more accurate. In this verse, He *the Almighty* says, ‘but eat the lawful and good things that Allah provides for you.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 88) Now, it is of great importance to differentiate between the following two styles; that is, ‘eat what Allah grants you’ and ‘eat the lawful and good things that Allah provides for you’. The first sentence means that we are to eat all the provision given to us by Allah, which is not right; that is because reality tells that we cannot eat it all, for we eat only some and use the other to get more of it. We should take into account that food is of two kinds: that which can be used to make more of itself and that from which no more can be made. If we, for example, apply this to flour, we will find that it cannot produce an ear of wheat, so we cannot get more of it. Moreover, if we apply this to wheat itself, we will find that if man eats all the wheat he has, he will be no longer able to get more of it, which is why we must eat some of it while keeping some. In this verse, we are clearly ordered to eat some of the provision which Allah gives us so that we can save the sources of our sustenance. If man were to eat all the wheat he had, what would happen when he wanted to farm again? Therefore, the preservation of life necessitates that we save some of our provisions so that we can use them to make more and, thereby, sustain our lives.

We can deduce from the aforementioned example that’ lawful provision’ is of two kinds: that from which we can get more, and thus a portion of it must be kept to use it later; and that from which we cannot get more, such as flour. In the latter case, we can eat some and save some for our future use. Illustrating this fact, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the chapter of *Yusuf* about the King’s dream. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, I have seen (in a dream) seven fat cows being eaten by seven (that were) lean, and seven green spikes (of grain) and others (that were) dry. O eminent ones, explains to me my vision, if you should interpret visions.’ (*Yusuf:* 43) However, the dream interpreters were unable to do so and said to him: 'They said, "(It is but) a mixture of false dreams, and we are not learned in the interpretation of dreams."' (*Yusuf:* 44) As a matter of fact, the answer given by the king's dream interpreters indicates that they were very confused because if it was a confusing dream, then this would imply that it was meaningless, a point which was negated when they said that they had no deep knowledge of the real meaning of dreams. That is to say, the dream was eligible to be interpreted; yet, they were unable to do so. Here, we should stress a very important point that is, it is not a condition that the person who sees a dream must be righteous, a point which is proved by the fact that the one who sees the dream here is the king. A very good question arises: Why did Allah *the Almighty* inform the king of such topics? We say that Allah *Glorified is He* might allow a person to see a dream as a way of honouring him or as a way of honouring the person who interprets it. In our case, Allah wanted to honour Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* by enabling him to interpret the king's dream. What was unusual about the dream is that the emaciated cows ate the fat ones which was interpreted by Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* as an indication that they would sow for seven consecutive years as usual. He followed it by instructing them to store all that they reap, left in the ear apart from the little they would eat. 'Yusuf (Joseph) said, "You will plant for seven years consecutively; and what you harvest leave in its spikes, except a little from which you will eat."' (*Yusuf:* 47) That is to say that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* ordered them to eat a very little portion of the wheat, and not to take too much of it so that they would be able to benefit from it during the seven hard years, i.e. the years of drought. This interpretation from Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* instructed them that they should keep some of the wheat to get more of it in the future. By the way, today's scientific discoveries definitively prove that the best way to preserve wheat grains is to leave them in their ears—likewise, to leave the seeds in the pod. In truth, the interpretation given by Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was precise because he aimed at preserving people's and livestock's lives during the years of famine; people would eat the grain, whilst the livestock would eat the leftover straw. Allah *the Almighty* guided them through Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to the essential means through which their lives would be preserved. The verse indicates that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* instructed them to eat a very little amount of the wheat and to store the greater portion in their ears during the years of ease. However, what about the years of drought and hardship? Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* told them that, after the good years, seven years of hardship would come which would consume all but a little of what they stored up for them. ‘Then will come after that seven difficult (years) which will consume what you saved for them, except a little from which you will store’ (*Yusuf:* 48).

That is to say that the people of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) would eat during the seven years of famine a lot of the grain they had put in the stores and, meanwhile, keep a little so that they could use it in farming and, consequently, get more of it. Thus, the particle *min* (translated as ‘of’) in Allah’s words: ‘And eat *min* what Allah has provided for you (which is) lawful and good. And fear Allah, in whom you are believers’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 88) conveys the meaning of ‘some’; that is, that we are ordered to eat ‘some’ of the lawful things which Allah granted us. However, if these things are of the kind which can produce more of themselves, then their species will be preserved. Let us suppose that there is a man who has some melon seeds and he plants them. When the fruits come, he eats them all together with the seeds; then, what will he plant for the following year? As a matter of fact, this man should have saved some of the seeds to plant, and as well saved some of the melons to give to his neighbour or to the needy.

Therefore, this particular part of the verse could be explained to mean that we should consider the preservation of the species and that we should give the extra amount of our lawful provision to the needy. Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse, ‘Be mindful of Allah, in whom you believe.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 88) This means that one will not be blamed if he is conscious and fearful of Allah *the Almighty* in whom he firmly believes. That is because when one believes in Him, it means that he entrusts his affairs to a Powerful God. It is shameful to capitulate to the command of someone who is your equal, but to obey and yield to the command of the One Who is Higher than you is nothing to be ashamed of; rather, it is a source of honour and dignity.

This point is also explained clearly in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with the sorcerers. When Prophet Musa (Moses) cast down his staff, the sorcerers saw that it turned into a snake moving quickly. Here, we should stress a very important point that is, when a sorcerer practises sorcery, he is fully aware of the fact that the item he used in his practise, does not change; rather, it is people's sights that are deceived by that. So, when the sorcerers of Pharaoh saw that Prophet Musa's staff had actually turned into a snake, they fully realised that this matter was beyond human capacity. Consequently, they declared their belief in Allah, Lord of all the worlds, and Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron): 'They said, "We have believed in the Lord of the worlds"' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 47-48). That is to say they knew perfectly well that what Prophet Musa (Moses) did was beyond any human power. Finally, we reach the conclusion that all what the sorcerers of Pharaoh had done with people was an act of deceiving of their sights (an illusion). This point is proved by the saying of Allah in which He *the Almighty* says: 'He said, "Rather, you throw." And suddenly their ropes and staffs seemed to him from their magic that they were moving (like snakes)."' (*Ta Ha:* 66) In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He said, "Throw," and when they threw, they bewitched the eyes of the people and struck terror into them, and they presented a great (feat of) magic.' (*al-A'raf:* 116) As for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he threw down the staff for the first time, he was afraid when he realised that the staff has actually turned into a snake, moving quickly. When the sorcerers threw down their ropes and cords, they did not turn into real snake, but what they did was but an act of deceiving people's eyes.

Let us offer another example to illustrate this point. Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* sent a message to the Queen of Sheba, Bilqis, ordering her and her people not to exalt themselves before him and to come to him in submission, 'Be not haughty with me but come to me in submission (as Muslims).' (*an-Naml:* 31) The answer to this was: 'She said, "O eminent ones, advise me in my affair. I would not decide a matter until you witness (for) me."' (*an-Naml:* 32)

It is, at that point, that the leaders were fully aware of the fact that the issue was political in all. Then, Allah says: 'They said, "We are men of strength and of great military might, but the command is yours, so see what you will command."' (*an-Naml:* 33) The statement of those leaders indicates clearly that political opinions must be given by astute and experienced politicians who are able to take into account all the circumstances, including the action and the reaction. That is why we find that Bilqis handled the matter from a political perspective. Thus, she sent Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* a very precious gift to examine him, believing that if he accepted her gift, this would mean that he was a man who sought only the desires and finery of this worldly life. But when her messengers came to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* with the gift, he rejected it and said: 'Do you people mean to add to my wealth?' Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* added that what Allah has given him was so much better than all that Allah has given them adding that they rejoice in this gift of theirs. Then Sulaiman (Solomon) asked Bilqis's messengers to go back to the people who have sent them because he, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* would most certainly come upon them with forces which they would never be able to withstand and would, most certainly, cause them to be driven from that land of theirs disgraced and humbled. 'Return to them, for we will surely come to them with soldiers that they will be powerless to encounter, and we will surely expel them therefrom in humiliation, and they will be debased' (*an-Naml:* 36-37). At this point, Bilqis became fully aware that she had to surrender to Allah *the Almighty*.

Lastly, we reach the conclusion that one might feel humiliation if he receives the order from someone who is equal to him; however, if the order is from another who is of higher rank or authority, there will be no humiliation at all. Here, we should emphasise that Bilqis had turned to faith with dignity: 'She said, "My Lord, indeed I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, Lord of the worlds."' (*an-Naml:* 44)

We notice that she did not say that she had surrendered herself to Sulaiman (Solomon), but rather, she said that she had done so with Sulaiman, to Allah, Lord of all the worlds; there was no shame in her faith, so her people did not think that she had humiliated herself by allowing another human being to rule her; rather, both, she and Sulaiman (Solomon), were ruled by Allah, Lord of all the worlds which brings no shame at all.

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty,* 'But eat the lawful and good things that Allah provides for you. Be mindful of Allah, in whom you believe.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 88)

That is to say that you, believers, are supposed to accept all of the divine teachings and rulings by virtue of your belief. In other words, as long as you have faith and obey the command from Him, in whom you have faith, this means clearly that you are fully aware of the fact that you entrust your affairs to the Only One Who is worthy. We notice that this verse opens with highlighting the quality of belief in the believers. Also, it is concluded with casting light on the same attribute; what is the wisdom behind that? In the beginning of the verse, Allah addresses them with this quality as to encourage them to act upon the Divine Order given to them, whilst the conclusion of the verse bears witness to their firm belief. He *the Almighty* then says:

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِٱللَّغۡوِ فِيٓ أَيۡمَٰنِكُمۡ وَلَٰكِن يُؤَاخِذُكُم بِمَا عَقَّدتُّمُ ٱلۡأَيۡمَٰنَۖ
فَكَفَّٰرَتُهُۥٓ إِطۡعَامُ عَشَرَةِ مَسَٰكِينَ مِنۡ أَوۡسَطِ مَا تُطۡعِمُونَ أَهۡلِيكُمۡ أَوۡ كِسۡوَتُهُمۡ
أَوۡ تَحۡرِيرُ رَقَبَةٖۖ فَمَن لَّمۡ يَجِدۡ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَٰثَةِ أَيَّامٖۚ ذَٰلِكَ كَفَّٰرَةُ أَيۡمَٰنِكُمۡ إِذَا
حَلَفۡتُمۡۚ وَٱحۡفَظُوٓاْ أَيۡمَٰنَكُمۡۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَشۡكُرُونَ ٨٩

God does not take you [to task] for what is thoughtless in your oaths, only for your binding oaths: the atonement for breaking an oath is to feed ten poor people with food equivalent to what you would normally give your own families, or to clothe them, or to set free a slave – if a person cannot find the means, he should fast for three days. This is the atonement for breaking your oaths – keep your oaths. In this way God makes clear His revelations to you, so that you may be thankful [89] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 89)

Allah's verse Allah does not take you (to task) for what is thoughtless in your oaths…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89) indicates that the Arabic word *yu'akhidh* (translated as 'take to task') derives from the word *aakhadha* which means 'to take to task'. We should explain that there is a difference between *akhadha* and *aakhadha*. If you say, 'I took him to task,' using the word *akhadha*, this means that you punished him severely because he had not entered into any kind of good pact with you; but if you use the word *aakhadha*, this suggests that there is some kind of interaction, which is why Allah *the Almighty* takes the disbelievers to task severely. But the question to be asked here is why would Allah *the Almighty* take the believers to task? It is because the believers are part of the covenant, while the disbelievers are not; therefore, He *Glorified is He* takes them to task in the manner of a Mighty, Powerful One. Further, it is clear that there is a difference between the act of *al-mu'aakhadha* and that of *al-akhdh*. *Al-mu'aakhadha* means to punish someone for violating the pact between you and him by committing a crime which is forbidden under such pact; that is, he will not be punished unless he commits a crime which is forbidden under this pact. In addition, a prior warning must be issued before the meting out of the punishment. Therefore, the civil law states: 'There shall be no crime or penalty except by virtue of the law.' So, before issuing the punishment, there has to be a law which clearly states the crime and its punishment because to legally stipulate that an action is a crime, makes a person think twice about doing it. But if there is no law stating that the action is a crime, the person will be free to do it or not do it because it is permissible.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Allah does not take you (to task) for what is thoughtless in your oaths…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89) clearly indicates the covenant made between Allah and the believers. As for the Arabic word *al-laghw* (translated as 'thoughtless'), we find that it means to utter something with the tongue without the heart having firmly intended it. For example, people in Egypt, by virtue of their vernacular language, used to swear to Allah to do something or not. For example, if a person asks someone to have lunch with him, he might say: 'By Allah, you must come to have launch with us', and so on. This is the meaning of *al-laghaw*. That is speaking without the heart firmly intending what has been said. Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who created us, and thus He knows us best; He *Glorified is He* out of His Eternal Knowledge, knows that sometimes we say things we do not mean. This is also proved when a mother supplicates against her only son, but she does so only with her tongue, while her heart rejects it; that is why we say in a popular proverb: 'I might supplicate against my son, but I hate those who say, *Amen*!'

So, out of the fact that He *the Almighty* knows us best, He knows that sometimes the tongue utters words without the heart having intended them, which is why He *the Almighty* says, 'Allah does not take you (to task) for what is thoughtless in your oaths…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89). Yet, He *the Almighty* adds that He will take us to task for our binding oath. When we see the word 'yet', we know that it indicates *al-istidrak* which means the affirmation of what is suspected to be wrong or the negation of what is suspected to be right. As for the word '*aqqadtum* (translated as 'binding'), it indicates that the action is done with the firm resolve of the heart and that, before speaking the oath, the person has deliberated the matter in his mind and made the decision to take such position.

Hence, *al-laghaw* means to speak with your tongue what your heart dos not intend. We gave an example of the woman who supplicates against her only son. As a matter of fact, we, in our daily life, may thoughtlessly say words and statements which may apparently indicate disbelief, but Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us that the actions must be based on sincere intentions. That is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* when commenting about that man who said, 'O Allah, you are my slave and I am your Lord, 'said: 'He commits this mistake out of extreme joy.'(1)

Out of Allah's Infinite Mercy, He *Glorified is He* pardons our thoughtless oaths—point proved by the verse under discussion. As for the word '*aqqadtum* (translated as 'binding') it indicates that someone is utterly determined to do a particular act. When we want to exaggerate an action, we use a word which gives its perfect meaning very clearly. Bear in mind that we realise that the word '*aqqada* is not the same as '*aqada* (they both mean 'to swear', but (*'aqqada*) is stronger); the word '*aqqada* means that a person has sworn a firm, binding and solemn oath. Another example of this kind of linguistic emphasis is found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Yusuf,* wherein He *Glorified is He* says that she, Egypt's Chief's wife, *ghallaqat* (bolted) the doors.' She closed the doors and said, "Come, you."' (*Yusuf:* 23) Someone might ask, 'would it not have been enough for Allah *the Almighty* just to say *ghalaqat* instead of *ghallaqat*?' We say: No, because He *Glorified is He* used the verb which strongly emphasised how firmly the door was bolted, since a door could be bolted in several different ways; it could be simply closed with the latch or with a bolt. However, using this verb in this context, indicates plainly that Egypt's Chief's wife bolted the doors very firmly and securely. The same applies to the Allah's words in this context; that is, the use of the phrase' *aqqadtum al-ayman'* means that you made your oaths and you mean it sincerely in your hearts. The particular meaning given by this verse is identical to that in a verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* when Allah says: ‘Allah does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 225)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Concerning this particular verse of the chapter *of al-Baqara*, we notice that the hearts are said to have ‘conceived’ (*kasabat* which literally means ‘acquired’); so, what do hearts acquire in such a situation? We know that the word *al-kasb* may indicate several meanings; it may give the meaning of earning money and adding it to one’s capital and it may also indicate that someone has made a solemn and firm oath; that means he affirms with his heart what he swears. In other words, the oath is made by the tongue and the heart together.

As for the cause of revelation for this verse, it is narrated that when Allah’s words were revealed, ‘you, who believe, do not forbid the good things Allah has made lawful to you- do not exceed the limits: Allah does not love those who exceed the limits. But eat the lawful and good things that Allah provides for you. Be mindful of Allah, in whom you believe’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 87-88), those Companions of Messenger Muhammad, who forswore good food, clothing, as well as marriage, and swore oaths to that effect, wondered how they could expiate their oaths; thus, this verse was revealed. This verse indicates that the forswearing of what is lawful is a thoughtless oath which does not need to be expiated. Nevertheless, we stress that one is not allowed to swear to do or not do something while he does not have the right to make such oath. For example, if one says: ‘By Allah, I will not pray’, this kind of oath cannot be judged as binding and thus needs no expiation. But if he says: ‘By Allah, I will drink wine’, we tell him to follow what the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘When you swear an oath and consider something else to be better than it, make expiation for your oath and do the thing that is better.’(1) In this verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…but He will impose blame upon you for (breaking) what you intended of oaths…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 89). Therefore, the ruling on binding oaths is totally different from that on those made thoughtlessly. As for binding oaths, Allah

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

the Almighty states that He will take to task those who make them and do not keep them. Yet, here arises a very good question: how would Allah *the Almighty* take them to task, although He does not explicitly state the details of the punishment? We say that Allah *the Almighty* out of His Infinite Mercy has concealed the punishment. In addition, He *the Almighty* has given us a way to avoid punishment by means of expiation; a point which is clear in the saying of Allah, '…the atonement for breaking an oath is to feed ten poor people with food equivalent to what you would normally give your own families or to clothe them, or to set free a slave– if a person cannot find the means, he should fast for three days…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89). Thus, the atonement is a way of removing the punishment. Here, another good question arises which is: does this mean that one must make expiation as long as he has sworn an oath? The answer is definitely no, because the expiation is only required from those who break their oaths and fail to honour them. The expiation includes feeding ten needy persons with more or less the same food as you are wont to give to your own families, or clothing them, or freeing a slave or fasting three days for those who cannot afford to do the rest.

Scholars believe that defining the suitable kind of atonement for breaking an oath differs according to the condition of the one who breaks it. That is, it differs from one person to another. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. It is narrated that the caliph of Andalusia broke an oath and wanted to make expiation, so he went to the judge Mundhir ibn Sa'id and asked him how he could expiate it, whereupon the judge said to him: 'You must fast for three days.' Another man was sitting there at that particular time and gestured to the judge, but Mundhir ignored his gesture. When the session ended, the judge went out along with that man who asked him, 'O father of Sa'id, I have a problem with the judgement you gave. Why did not you tell the caliph that the expiation for an oath is to free a slave or to feed ten poor people?' In response to this question, Mundhir replied: 'Do you think that the Commander of the Faithful would be deterred by asking him to free a slave or feed ten poor people?'

This shows us that Judge Mundhir ibn Sa'id had thought hard to choose the expiation which would be the best deterrent; a matter which teaches us that the expiation is meant to rebuke the soul and, at the same time, efface the sin. That is why Judge Mundhir ibn Sa'id felt that the rebuke was more crucial than the effacement of the sin because the caliph would not have been inconvenienced by feeding or clothing ten poor people, or even by freeing even more than one slave. Here, we should stress that the majority of scholars are of the opinion that one can choose fasting only when either feeding, clothing or freeing slaves is not possible.

As for feeding ten needy people, with more or less the same food we usually give to our own families, someone might ask if the equivalence refers to the quantity or the kind or food. We say that it should be considered both the quantity and the kind; if a man eats a single piece of bread for a meal, but he knows that someone else in his family eats three pieces, the average here is two pieces of bread, along with whatever is eaten with the bread, such as meat and fat. The same is true for clothing; the man who expiates his oath must clothe ten needy people with clothes that cover their private parts and can be used for prayer, such as a sarong and robe, or a long shirt and turban, or any other clothes which cover them properly. Finally, we find that the expiation of freeing a slave comes in the second-to-last position. Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'If a person cannot find the means, he should fast for three days.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89) This obviously indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* did not arrange these means of expiation in order of preference, but rather, we should choose from among them that which well suit our conditions.

Allah *the Almighty* instructs us, '…keep our oaths.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89) Thus, we must not break our oaths; but how can we keep them? We say that, first of all, one should not let an oath pass his lips rashly; secondly, one must try his best to fulfil his oath. This means that one should not swear an oath with his tongue and affirm it with his heart unless he is sure that he will make every effort to fulfil what he has sworn to do; this is the meaning of Allah's words, 'and keep your oaths.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89)

Then, He *Glorified is He* concludes the verse with, 'In this way Allah makes clear His Revelations to you, so that you may be thankful.' To be grateful or thankful means that the one who receives blessings should praise the one who gave them to him. It is as though these rulings deserve thanks from us because they mean that thoughtless oaths are not punished. In addition, it allows the expiation for those oaths which are sworn in earnest; two matters for which we should be thankful to Allah *the Almighty* since they relieve our hardships. The True Lord *Glorified is He* and then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِنَّمَا ٱلۡخَمۡرُ وَٱلۡمَيۡسِرُ وَٱلۡأَنصَابُ وَٱلۡأَزۡلَٰمُ رِجۡسٞ
مِّنۡ عَمَلِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ فَٱجۡتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُفۡلِحُونَ ٩٠

You who believe intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and [divining with] arrows are repugnant acts – Satan’s doing – shun them so that you may prosper [90]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 90)

‘Restriction’, such as when we say, ‘Zayd is nothing but hard working.’ This means that we have restricted Zayd’s character to that of hard working. But if we say, ‘None but Zayd is hard-working’, this means that we have restricted the attribute of hard working to Zayd alone. When you restrict a person to a particular attribute, they call this ‘restricting the described to a description’. When you say ‘Zayd is nothing but a poet’, this means that Zayd is a poet only; he is not a writer or an orator. But if you say, ‘No one is a poet but Zayd’, this means that there are no poets except Zayd; it is as if you are denying that all the others are poets and saying that Zayd alone is a poet; and he might also be a writer, an orator and a scholar alongside being a poet. So, when you see the word *innama*, know that it is a way of expressing restriction.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, (sacrificing on) stone altars (to other than Allah), and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 90) This means that intoxicants, gambling, stone altars and the divining arrows are all —defilement, repugnant acts from the works of Satan, and a ‘loathsome thing’ is something which is vile, foul and impure. Foulness and impurity are things which can be physical, such as the intoxicants, or intangible, such as stone altars and the divining arrows. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* groups the two things together. He does not specify whether’ intoxicants’ means wine made of grapes or cider made of apples, but rather, He says ‘intoxicants’ to mean everything which intoxicates and clouds the mind. Some scholars are confused by how this verse was revealed in a place where grape wine did not exist because they imagined that only wine intoxicates the mind, but the True Lord *Glorified is He* here announces absolute prohibition of all that intoxicates the mind. Why, then, are intoxicants, gambling, stone altars and the divining arrows are all repugnant acts from the works of Satan?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* created man and made him His vicegerent on earth and subjected everything in existence to him; then, Allah asked him to exclusively worship Him and to thrive on this earth. He *Glorified is He* wanted to ensure the safety of several things for man: the safety of his life so that no one would violate it by killing him or anything else; the safety of his mind so that he would not veil the tool by which he chooses between alternatives; the safety of his dignity so that no one would damage his reputation, and the offspring that thrived on earth would be pure; and the safety of his wealth so the fruits of his labours would be preserved, and no one else would take them such that workers would not be discouraged from working, and others would not take without doing any work, then becoming lazy and reliant on others. If a man used to earn money without working, work will become hard for him. Therefore, the preservation of wealth ensures that energy is not wasted, nor are rights violated, and that no one claims the rights of others, lest artificial incapacity spread throughout the world. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned.’ (*al-Baqara:* 245) That is, although Allah *Glorified is He* is the Giver of all, He respects man’s labours, so no one may be happy to be unemployed. When unemployment spreads, Islam deals with the issue with great wisdom, asking the ruler to provide jobs for people so that they may not become accustomed to earning without working, lest society be harmed by this. With His magnanimous Sacred Law, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to protect man from everything that threatens his existence; hence, when He forbade intoxicants, prohibiting man from veiling his mind, this was because the intelligent mind is what makes man different from the animals.

Man is superior to animals in that he preserves his life with his mind, whereas animals preserve their lives with their instincts. Therefore, the animal only has one possible response if it is attacked—the dog bites the attacker, and the cat scratches the attacker, while man, on the other hand, can choose between many alternative ways of responding to the aggression; he might strike back, he might kill or he might forgive.

An example of this is what we see in the countryside when someone rides a donkey and tries to make it jump over a little stream, but the donkey refuses to do so, and no matter how much the rider beats it, it refuses to jump because its instinct prevents it from doing that. As for man, he might be filled with delusion and imagine that he can jump over the stream; so, he jumps, but he might end up falling in the water. Boldness is a human trait, but not an animal one because of its instinct.

Another example from the animal world: the male buffalo approaches the female to smell her, and if he finds that it is pregnant, it does not come any closer. This is true for animals, but not for man. When the donkey eats his clover, for example, it stops when it is full and does not eat more, no matter how much his owner beats it because it is ruled by instinct. As for man, he might eat more than what he can manage.

Thus, we find that instinct is what protects animals, and mind is what protects man. That is why animals do not possess the ability to choose, but their instinct-based judgement is flawless. As for man's instinct-based judgement, it might well be flawed.

Allah *Glorified is He* has given preference to man over animals by giving him the ability to choose between alternatives through using his intellect; therefore, it is not right or proper for man to impair this ability by using intoxicants. If he impairs his ability to choose, his instincts will be of no help to him because they are not fit to protect him. Therefore, we find that he one who impairs his mind puts himself in a lower position than animals because the animal is protected by instinct, while man is protected by his intellect and, in this situation, he has impaired and veiled it. Allah forbade intoxicants because they veil the mind, and everything which veils the mind is an intoxicant, even if it is made from something which is lawful; this is because intelligence is the anchor of moral responsibility.

Allah has also prohibited games of chance, so let us reflect on the precision of the word which Allah chose to name gambling: *maysir* which is derived from the word *yusr* which means ‘ease’. He did not call it *ma’sar* derived from ‘*usr* meaning ‘difficult’ because no one decides to gamble while realising that he will lose, and everyone who gambles does so because they hope to win. Therefore, He used the word which expresses the state of the gambler which is that he gambles because he dreams of winning; and if he does win, this will tempt him to gamble even more. Losing will also tempt the gambler to gamble more in the hope that he will win back what he has lost. The one who gambles might sell all that he owns to make up for his losses. Yet, despite this, the gains a gambler makes are trivial to him, and he spends them and fritters them away on things which bring no benefit; he might even spend them on things which cause him harm. So, what he wins does not count for him, and what he loses counts against him. Those who gamble with each other are not bonded by friendship or love, and each one of them is keen to get what is in the pocket of the other. In fact, this kind of game wastes energy which could be used to make a lawful income because to make a lawful income, one must work in life. Gambling wastes the energy of the one who wins because he does not have the desire to work; and loss wastes the energy of the loser because no matter how much he works in life, he is unable to pay back his debts.

So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to ensure that people receive no benefits from anything except the fruits of his hard work and labour; thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wants every person to support himself and his dependants by working in a lawful endeavour.

Allah *Glorified is He* also told us that *al-azlam* are repugnant acts —the work of Satan. *Al-azlam* were three arrows which the soothsayers possessed, one arrow with’ My Lord commanded me’ written on it, a second with’ My Lord forbade me’, and a third with nothing written on it. If a person wanted to travel, marry or conduct business, he would go to the soothsayer and ask him to draw these arrows for him; if the arrow came with’ My Lord commanded me’, he would go ahead with his plans. If’ My Lord forbade me’ arrow came out, he would not go ahead with his plans. If the unmarked arrow came out, he would draw the arrows again, until one of the two other arrows came out, either confirming the action or not confirming it. None of them could explain why, when’ the unmarked arrow’ came out; it was not considered a command beyond the bounds of prohibition and the permission for the individual to choose whether to go ahead with his plan or not. The True Lord *Glorified is He* made them forget this in order to show us that this was a false commandment, which the soothsayers had invented themselves. If anyone asked them, 'Who is the God that commands and forbids?' they would say, 'It is Allah who commands and forbids me.' Allah knew that they indeed were liars.

When Allah *Glorified is He* forbade us from these things, He wanted man to develop his ability to choose between alternatives. A man must deduce, solve, and study the information that he has in order to extract the conclusions; he must not neglect the power of perception which chooses between alternatives. Intoxicants veil the mind; gambling causes man to be ensnared in the clutches of delusion, while the stone altars impair the ability of a man to work and make him subjected to the soothsayers. If you ask a man who drinks alcohol why he does it, he will say, 'I want to drown my sorrows.' But to drown one's sorrows is not to end them; the only way to end them is to face these sorrows, using the means at one's disposal. If your means are not strong enough, then seek the assistance of the One Who created all means, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Is He (not best) who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil and makes you inheritors of the earth? Is there a deity with Allah? Little do you remember?' (*an-Naml:* 62)

Yet, when your means are exhausted and you turn to Allah, He aids you to overcome the difficulty which causes your woes. We have the best role model in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for when someone vexed him, he would stand and pray. When we say that something' vexes' us, this means that it is beyond the means at one's disposal; therefore, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would turn to the Lord of all means.

We find some people say, 'I often call upon Allah, but He does not answer me.' We would say to such a person that it must be either that you call upon Him for assistance in a matter which is not distressing or you have not tried to utilise the means at your disposal. When you decline to use the means, you thereby reject Allah's Outstretched Hand, which offers the means to you. I affirm that there will never be a distressed person who uses up all the means at his disposal, but then is not given a relief. When you supplicate for a need, but it is late in coming to you, then you have supplicated without being utterly distressed.

I always like to give this example – and Allah is beyond compare and has no likeness; suppose that a successful merchant sits by his warehouse when the trucks arrive carrying boxes full of his wares, and the workers carry the boxes into the warehouse; then, suddenly, he sees that one of his workers is about to fall under the weight of the box, he is carrying. At this moment, the merchant will automatically rush to aid the worker. So, what about the True Lord *Glorified is He* who created the means for us? If you have used up all your means, Allah will help you, as He says: ‘Is He (not best) who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil and makes you inheritors of the earth? Is there a deity with Allah? Little do you remember’ (*an-Naml:* 62).

So, intoxicants, gambling, stone altars and the divining of arrows are repugnant acts—Satan’s doing. Divining arrows (*al-azlam*) were a kind of gambling. They would take a male or female camel, slaughter it, and then divide it into twenty-eight portions. They would give a share to a person; two shares to another person; a third man took three shares; a fourth man took four shares; a fifth man took five shares; a sixth man took six shares, and a seventh man took seven shares. They would take seven arrows with different names: the one who drew the one named *al-fadh* would be given a single share; the one who drew the one named *at-taw’am* would be given two shares; the one who drew the one named *ar-raqib* would be given three shares; the one who drew the one named *al-hils* would be given four shares; the one who drew the one named *an-nafir* would be given five shares; the one who drew the one named *al-masbal* would be given give six shares, and the one who drew the one named *al-mu’alli* would be given seven shares. There were three more arrows named *al-munih*, *as-safih,* and *al-waghd*, and the ones who drew these three would get nothing, but they would have to pay for the slaughtered animal. This was a defilement—repugnant acts from the works of Satan.

The intelligent mind does not accept this kind of action, but rather, someone else must inspire and incite these kinds of desires. All sins come from two things, either from the soul or from Satan. The sin which comes from the soul is the one which satiates a particular desire so that if the soul is denied this desire, it continues to crave it. The sin which comes from Satan’s incitement is different, for Satan might incite a man to steal, but if he refuses, then Satan knows that this man has immunity against this particular sin, so he incites him to commit another sin; if he again finds immunity, he moves on to a third sin, and so on. This is because the whispered temptations of Satan aim to make a man sinful whatever the sin may be.

Therefore, if you have a desire to commit a particular sin, it means that the desire is coming from your own soul; and if your temptation moves away from a sin, which was difficult for Satan to tempt you with, to another, this means that the desire comes from Satan, not from your soul. The sane person, who restrains himself from all of these forbidden things, sees intoxicants, gambling, stone altars and the divining the arrows are matters which do not appeal to the soul unless it is under Satan's influence. True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, (sacrificing on) stone altars (to other than Allah) and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90) indicating that the sane person cannot do these things.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the verse by saying, 'so avoid it that you may be successful.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90) He *Glorified is He* commands us to avoid the defilement of intoxicants, gambling, stone altars and the divining the arrows; 'to avoid something' means to keep away from it, abstaining from the things which lead to it and closing all the doors which lead to it because if you do not avoid it, then by being close, you might be tempted to indulge. Some people may think that intoxicants were not clearly prohibited, but rather, we were only commanded to avoid them. We say to them that prohibition would be a law which stated that we must not imbibe them; as for avoiding, this is even stronger than prohibition because it commands us not to even be in the same place as them. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'So avoid the uncleanliness of idols and avoid false statement.' (*al-Hajj:* 30)

He told us here to avoid the defilement of intoxicants, gambling, stone altars, and the divining the arrows. The True Lord *Glorified is He* dealt with those customs which were prevalent before Islam in a way which uprooted those who were corrupt; and He did not do away with them all at once because souls were attached and accustomed to them, but rather, He prohibited them in gradual stages. Islam first pronounced a firm judgement on all doctrinal matters and then gradually prohibited those things which were a matter of custom.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that something is' defilement', this is the judgement of the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* which cannot be assailed by falsehood from any direction. We must accept this judgement, even if we do not exactly understand the meaning of 'defilement' or we have not yet ascertained on the empirical and material levels as to whether the prohibited thing is evil or not. It is enough that this is the judgement of Allah *Glorified is He* to whom the believing servant submits himself, accepting all the responsibilities which his Lord gives him because he trusts that his Lord knows what is best for him; as long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* declares that something is defilement, it is indisputably a loathsome evil. This is because some people keep on looking for an excuse to contrive for themselves, saying, 'How can that action, or that thing, be a defilement?' We say that we must submit to Allah's Judgement and obey His Commandments, for He knows what is best for His creatures; the passage of time is always affirming the truth about the things which the True Lord *Glorified is He* called' defilement' showing us that, indeed, they are evil. So, when He *Glorified is He* says to His creatures, 'Do this, 'we should not ask about the reason for this injunction. Rather, we must obey the True Lord's Commandment, and in our depths, we will find the fruits of this commandment.

When a human gives another a command, he may ask' Why?', and all humans must offer reasons for whatever they ask others to do. But we do not ask Allah for the reasons behind His orders for us to do things because we believe that He is the All-Wise; time will surely show us that what Allah has said was right. For example, we find that the man, who refrains from drinking alcohol solely because Allah forbade it, is a well-behaved person with pure intentions who does not cause trouble in the community, but the one who drinks alcohol is badly behaved, has impure intentions, and causes trouble in the community. Experience has proved that the one who drinks alcohol is prone to liver diseases and also suffers from confusion in leading his life and even in his speech. We read that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And fear Allah. And Allah teaches you. And Allah is Knowing of all things.' (*al-Baqara:* 282) Being conscious of Allah, as we know it, means placing a barrier between Allah's Wrath and ourselves; we do this by following all that He commands us to do. When we obey the commands of Allah *Glorified is He* we know about Allah's Wisdom in doing so.

For example, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45) We know how prayer restrains us from defilement and irrational deeds because we submit our souls and our hearts to Allah and do what He commands us. Likewise, we find that the obligatory alms are a source of increase and that the pilgrimage cleanses the soul from arrogance and washes away sins. For every action which the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us to do, we find that it exerts an effect on our souls after we do it. But if you only obey the command because of its rational purpose, you distance yourself from the attitude of true faith.

The doctor takes a picture of the liver of the one who drinks alcohol by use of ultrasound and finds that the liver is full of lacerations and has become prone to many serious illnesses; perhaps the liver might become inoperative at times, so the doctor tells the patient to stop drinking alcohol. If the patient stops drinking alcohol in such situation, does he do so for religious reasons or medical ones? He stops for medical reasons; thus, the sinful believer and the disbeliever are alike in this respect. But the believer who refrains from drinking alcohol from the beginning does not do so because of the reason behind the command, but because it is Allah's Command and he obeys it without asking about the reasons. The believer accepts Allah's Commandments without asking Him to explain the practical reason for them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has clarified, as aforementioned, that intoxicants, gambling, (sacrificing on) stone altars (to other than Allah) and divining arrows are but defilement— Satan's doing—so avoid them that you may be successful. Satan long ago declared his enmity to our father Adam *peace be upon him* as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And (mention) when we said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated, except for Satan. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 34) Satan was present with the angels, and it was fitting that he prostrated with them because if the command was given to the higher class of beings, the angels, it also applied to the lower class of beings (like Satan). But he disobeyed and said, 'Should I prostrate to one you created from clay?' (*al-Isra':* 61)

Thus, the enmity between Satan and Adam *peace be upon him* is from old times, so how could we, as sons of Adam, assent to listen to Satan's whispers?

How could we accept his insinuations? How could we accept his temptations? Therefore, we must avoid it all because it is a loathsome evil and the work of Satan; we must avoid it in order to escape from all evil and attain all success. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ أَن يُوقِعَ بَيۡنَكُمُ ٱلۡعَدَٰوَةَ وَٱلۡبَغۡضَآءَ فِي ٱلۡخَمۡرِ
وَٱلۡمَيۡسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمۡ عَن ذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ وَعَنِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِۖ فَهَلۡ أَنتُم مُّنتَهُونَ ٩١

With intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to incite enmity and hatred among you, and to stop you remembering God and prayer. Will you not give them up? [91] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 91)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not mention stone altars and the divining of the arrows here because the believers no longer believe in such things and have given them up, and such words are addressed to the believers. So, why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* link the ruling about intoxicants and gambling, (sacrificing on) stone altars (to other than Allah) and divining arrows before? He said this in order to show us how vile these things are; linking intoxicants and gambling, (sacrificing on) stone altars (to other than Allah) and divining arrows allow us to understand that the prohibition of intoxicants and gambling is just as firm as the prohibition of stone altars and the divining of the arrows; since they were believers, they had already forsaken stone altars and the divining of the arrows.

He *Glorified is He* says, '…Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91), and the word *yurid* (translated as 'seeks', but literally meaning 'wills') means to intend to do something which is possible, and it is linked to something which is willed; so, does he have the ability to do what he wills or not? If he has the ability to do what he seeks, then this ability comes after the will.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wills something, His omnipotent power causes His will to be manifested instantly; neither His will nor His power is ever held back because everything obeys His will. It is different for human beings and for Satan, though, because a man might will something, but does he have the power to do it? Sometimes he has the power to do what he wills, and sometimes he does not.

Satan also wills things, but does he have the power to do what he wills? He has this power as long as man obeys him, and this is the nature of Satan's will. He is happy when human beings sin, and he hopes for this and plans for it, but the action only comes into existence if the person agrees to obey Satan.

Hence, if something is willed by someone who has the power to compel and force it to occur, then it occurs instantly; and absolute power belongs to Allah; He ordains whatever He wills;, therefore, He says: 'His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, "Be," and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) But when His creatures will, things do not respond to them as they respond to their Creator because the will of the created beings is restricted by his power which is limited even if it is a big one. The will of Satan is to trick man into doing what he hopes him to do, and Satan cannot force man to do anything, but he makes certain actions seem alluring to him. Satan does not have the authority to force man to do something, and he does not have the power to convince or produce arguments. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you and you responded to me"' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

Thus, Satan will announce that he has no power over humankind, neither to compel them, nor to convince them; all he can do is make things seem alluring, and if someone has a desire, then Satan makes it alluring to him so that he commits sin. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid' (*Ibrahim:* 22) Satan will admit that however he cries for aid on the Day of Resurrection, no one will aid him; and likewise those who committed sins and followed him will cry out, but Satan will not help or save them from the suffering which awaits them. To respond to someone's cries means to go to them to stop their crying and aid them. So, the True Lord's words 'Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91) explain to us that Satan's will is only a will to make things seem alluring and not a will which is capable of compelling or convincing. When you hear the word 'cause' (*yuqi*') here, understand that there are two things which are usually connected, and someone wants to put something between them to break this connection. Therefore, the word *waqi'a* can be used to express the action of someone who tried to cause a split and division between two people who are usually very close.

The words 'between you' here indicate separation, and this separation is where the enmity can be sown; why? Because the believers are brothers and because the relationship of the believers is like that of a tightly packed building wherein each part holds up the other. Hence, Satan uses intoxicants and gambling to cause enmity between the believers. We find that this is the case in gatherings where intoxicants are imbibed, for fights often break out between drinkers, in addition to insulting one another. Furthermore, those who gamble take each another's money. In this way, they go from being united, like a single building, to being divided, and enmity and hatred are sown among them.

What is the difference between enmity and hatred? Enmity means that two close people are divided in such a way that they become enemies; hatred means the heart's aversion to something it dislikes. It is as if hatred develops in the hearts after enmity has arisen, and as if enmity is the middle point which has placed distance between these two people —after they fell into Satan's incitements—when, before that, they had been united by purity, affection, love, and spiritual brotherhood.

In such situation, enmity involves the emotions of both parties; if the enmity is one-sided, it does not last long; it lasts long if it involves both parties. Therefore, the battle becomes fierce between two people who bear enmity for each other, and it will be a prolonged and bitter enmity if no third party intervenes to resolve the conflict, opposing the side which is in the wrong and restoring the rights of the other side. When this happens, the side which is in the right will feel that someone is there to support him; thus, the enmity will be curbed and brought to an end. But if there is no one to rebut or restrain the two sides, then enmity will last long. Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And the family of Pharaoh picked him up (out of the river) so that he would become to them an enemy and a (cause of) grief. Indeed, Pharaoh and Haman and their soldiers were deliberate sinners.' (*al-Qasas:* 8)

Did they know from the start that he was their enemy? No, they took him in so that he would give them joy, but Allah spoiled their plans. So the word 'for 'in the expression '... For (We had willed) that he become…' (*al-Qasas:* 8) is meant to express the end result and the consequence, not the conscious intent of the action. Allah *Glorified is He* proved by this that Pharaoh was not a god and that his followers were ignorant, lacking in sagacity because if Pharaoh was a god, he would have known that the child whom he planned to raise would one day become his enemy.

Was the enmity here solely directed from Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to Pharaoh? No, it was an enmity between Allah *Glorified is He* and Moses *peace be upon him* on one side, and Pharaoh on the other side. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(Saying), "Cast him into the chest and cast it into the river, and the river will throw it onto the bank; there will take him an enemy to me and an enemy to him."' (*Ta Ha:* 39)

This enmity only came to an end when Pharaoh drowned. The True Lord *Glorified is He* warns us, 'Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91) The Arabic preposition *fi* here means 'through'; it is akin to the use of the same proposition in the Prophet Muhammad's words, 'A woman got into hellfire because of a cat whom she had tied, and thus it could not eat, and she did not let it free so that it could devour the vermin of the earth, until it died.'(1)

In our daily lives, we say, 'So-and-so was sent to prison for years for (*fi*) possessing drugs.' That is, he got himself into trouble because of what he did. Allah's words, 'Through intoxicants and gambling,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91) indicate that enmity and hatred are the concomitants of intoxicants and gambling. He says: 'Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91) To 'remember' something means to keep this thing in the forefront of one's consciousness; every fact which a person remembers is at the forefront of his consciousness, and then it moves to make way for another fact. When a person's mind is occupied by something, this thing is only moved from the forefront to the margins of the consciousness when something else comes to occupy the mind.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

Therefore, we say that you should know that the mind understands things from the first time, or the second time, or the third time; no, the mind understands things the first time like a camera, and what is important is that when it takes in the information it is empty of everything else. Therefore, we found that those of our blind fellow students were better at recalling information than those who could see because the one who could see would be in the middle of something and then be distracted by something he saw so that the forefront of his consciousness was muddled. The consciousness of the blind person, on the other hand, would only remember what he heard. So, this is what we understand 'remembrance' to mean. Intoxicants cloud and veil the mind, so how could one remember Allah in such case? The same is true for prayer which is the best form of remembrance—intoxicants veil us from it. The same is true of gambling in which the gambler is taken by the illusionary desire of winning—just like a mirage, and thus chases after it with the hope that he wins; and then, he loses his ability to remember Allah and to pray.

Since the enmity between Satan and man is long established, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that Satan said, 'By Your might, I will surely mislead them all.' (*Sad:* 82) Satan knew how to swear an oath, and he swore by Allah's might that he would beguile His creatures; and had Allah wanted His servants, then Satan could not have taken them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* brings an end to the matter of intoxicants and gambling by saying 'So will you not desist?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91) This is a question which means to seek to understand something; this is what we know about the questions which human beings ask. But when Allah directs a question to us, it is actually a command from Him *Glorified and Exalted is He*; in what way? A command can be given in a direct and binding way, and Allah can also give a command in such way that the one being commanded must command his own self; this is a sign that the Supreme Commander trusts the believer who receives this kind of command.

An example to illustrate this – and Allah is beyond any comparison – a father says to one of his sons, 'Your continued negligence of your studies will make me angry with you, make your classmates despise you and make you fall behind others. So, are you going to stop messing around or not?' He does not say, 'Stop messing around' because the father wants to give his son reasons to control himself so that he can weigh the options in his mind. He will find nothing to say but 'I will stop messing around from now on.'

The way it happens here is the same, since, instead of the ruling coming directly from Allah, it comes from the servant himself. This is the strongest way to impart a ruling because the speaker gives the command in the form of a question so that the one who is asked can think of every possible answer and find only the answer which the questioner wants to hear.

Another example of this was when the Revelation ceased to come to the Noble Prophet for a while, and the people of Quraysh said, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him, hated him, and scorned him!' The Revelation then returned to the Prophet, Allah says: 'Your Lord has not taken leave of you, (O Muhammad), nor has He detested (you).' (*ad-Duha:* 3) The Revelation continued: 'Did He not find you an orphan and give (you) refuge?' (*ad-Duha:* 6)

When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* thought about this, he would surely reply, 'Indeed yes, O Lord, You found me an orphan and gave me shelter.' This is what they call 'involving the commanded in the cause of the command', and it is the strongest form of command.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'So will you not desist?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91), those addressed know what Allah wants, so they say, 'Yes Lord, we will desist.' They were very emphatic in desisting, and 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Even if a drop of it fell into the sea, and the sea dried and herbage grew there, and my tongue was lolling from hunger, I would not go near it.' This is not actually what was commanded, but it is the most extreme way of desisting.

'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If a drop of it landed on my hand, I would deny myself it.' This was the reaction to the True Lord's words, '…Will you not, then, desist?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91) And this was the end of the issue of intoxicants. We know that the prohibition of intoxicants came in stages, and that spiritual responsibilities are only ordained on the tongue of messengers; messengers only come forth when corruption has overwhelmed both society and the souls of the people at the same time so that no one reproaches himself or prevents others from indulging in corruption. At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* intervenes by sending a messenger; and Allah does not send down all of its laws at once in the beginning, but rather, He uses the medium of the Messenger to call the people to faith in the One God so that they will then accept what He ordains. Faith in Allah's Oneness is the pinnacle of doctrine and can never be mitigated.

But in the case of legal rulings, they change social customs and traditions which are commonly shared by the people, and if Allah wills to change a custom with a ruling, He does so gradually because He *Glorified is He* is mercifully kind to His creatures. For example, in the past, a man did not leave any of his wealth to his parents, but only to his children because he knew that his father would die soon, while his son would live longer; therefore, the son would inherit everything. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* says no, you might die before your father, and so you should leave him something: 'if he leaves wealth (is that he should make) a bequest for the parents.' (*al-Baqara:* 180) He wanted them to stop leaving out the parents in the bequests they would leave. Once this ruling had settled, the True Lord *Glorified is He* chose to appoint a certain part of the legal inheritance to the parents. At first, the commandment was given in a partial way in order to bring an end to the usual custom and established practice, but in a way that they would not be made to end it in too abruptly. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want wealth to be passed around by the rich only and not by any others. Rather, He wants to make wealth circulate amongst all the people; therefore, He made laws for inheritance.

When we examine the laws of inheritance which apply to one thousand acre, we find that over three generations it shrinks and diminishes to acres; this is a change which takes place gradually over generations, not all at once, so that man can arrange the affairs of his life and the lives of his children and can leave his children inheritance and wealth which they can use to aid them in their own work. As for the one who does not own anything, he passes on a skill or a job to his children. In this way, the religion causes the affairs of finances and estates to be dispersed in a way which is not abrupt so that society is not marred by crises of envy or stress. If the person who earns his wealth by hard work and effort sees wealth going to someone who did not work or strive, he will feel envious. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '(This) worldly life is only amusement and diversion. And if you believe and fear Allah, He will give you your rewards and not ask you for your properties, If He should ask you for them and press you, you would withhold, and He would expose your unwillingness.' (Muhammad: 36-37) When the moral failing of jealousy emerges in society, all stability, and love comes to an end. So Allah *Glorified is He* deals with customs with the utmost delicacy. The taking of intoxicants, and the gatherings dedicated to it, was an Arab custom; it would have been difficult for them to leave it all at once; therefore, it was prohibited in stages. The sane person who hears the following verse will recognise that Allah had subtle plans for the outright ban of intoxicants. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And from the fruits of the palm trees and grapevines you take intoxicant and good provision. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who reason.' (*an-Nahl:* 67)

He *Glorified is He* said 'good provision', but He did not describe intoxicants as being 'good'; this implies that taking this provision, fermenting it and producing intoxicants mean to waste what is wholesome. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has said 'intoxicants' first to tell us that they would use the first part of the sustenance to make intoxicants. After that, Allah presents the issue as a piece of advice being given from an advisor—and advice is not an obligatory commandment—but only an opinion given by someone wise to someone else; this was the first stage of the subtle plan to prohibit intoxicants. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has said, 'They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, "In them is great sin and (yet, some) benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit." And they ask you what they should spend. Say, "The excess (beyond needs)." Thus Allah makes clear to you the verses (of revelation) that you might give thought.' (*al-Baqara:* 219)

So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* made it clear that the evil was more than the benefit. Then, He turned to the matter of prayer; at the time, there was no clear ruling which forbade the imbibing of intoxicants before prayer; and someone actually prayed while drunk and said – and we seek Allah's refuge from what he said – 'Say: O ye disbelievers, I worship that which you worship.' The intoxicants made him utter something which contradicted the very pinnacle of doctrine. Allah says: 'O you, who have believed, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 43)

We know that the Muslim prays five obligatory prayers every day; for a man not to pray when drunk, it would mean that he must spend the whole day sober, not drinking alcohol until after the night prayer. In this way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* extended the period of time wherein intoxicants could not be consumed, and this restricted the soul from doing what it was accustomed to doing so that the habituated person could become used to forsaking his habit. After that, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim His final verdict about intoxicants and revealed His words: ‘Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist? (*al-Ma’ida:* 91) It was this gradual approach which took them away from their customs and habits. By the time the prohibition came, it was almost as if they had proclaimed it themselves. After the True Lord *Glorified is He* issued this specific ruling concerning intoxicants and gambling; it was as if He has said to us: ‘As long as you are aware that I have declared these things to be defilement and a work of Satan, then do not help Satan to harm you, and sincerely worship the True Lord Alone.’

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَٱحْذَرُوا۟ ۚ فَإِن تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟
أَنَّمَا عَلَىٰ رَسُولِنَا ٱلْبَلَٰغُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿٩٢﴾

Obey God, obey the Messenger, and always be on your
guard: if you pay no heed, bear in mind that the sole duty
of Our Messenger is to deliver the message clearly [92]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida*: 92)

After declaring this specific rule, Allah *Glorified is He*, moves to a general rule which is the obedience to Allah and the obedience to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When you examine the way in which Allah commands us to obey Him, you find that He does so in several different ways; Allah says: ‘And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and beware.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 92) So, He repeats the command to pay heed to Allah and to the Messenger; obedience to Allah is the general rule, and obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* gives the details of this rule. Elsewhere, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, 'Obey Allah and the Messenger.' (*Al-'Imran:* 32) He does not repeat the command to obey here; there is a command to obey; there is one who is obeyed and there are those who obey, namely those who are addressed. So, He gives only one command to obey here, and the One to be obeyed is Allah; the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is then added to the Divine Name. Elsewhere, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…And obey the Messenger…' (*an-Nur:* 56).

Hence, we have several different forms of obedience: the first is, '…obey Allah and obey the Messenger…' (*an-Nur:* 92), the second is, '…obey Allah and the Messenger…' (*Al-'Imran:* 32) and the third is, '…obey the Messenger.' (*an-Nur:* 56) In just one other instance, He *the Almighty* says: 'O you, who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.' (*an-Nisa':* 59)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordered us to obey Allah and obey the Messenger, He repeats the command to obey Allah and then the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, but when He speaks of the people of authority, he does not say 'and obey' because to obey those who have been entrusted with authority is an aspect of the other two forms of obedience: obedience to Allah and obedience to the Messenger because it is never right to obey a creature if this means disobeying the Creator. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* orders us, 'obey Allah and obey the Messenger,' (*an-Nisa':* 59) obedience to Allah is a general rule and obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* gives the details of this rule.

For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And (due) to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House.' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) We obey Allah *Glorified is He* in the general rule here, and we obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in the details of the pilgrimage because these details are not given in the Quran; the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Learn your rites from me'. When the two commands are combined thus, '…obey Allah and the Messenger,' (*Al-'Imran:* 32), this means that there is a single command which has been issued by Allah; the proclamation and application of the action are given by the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* since he provides a model, an example and a confirmation of the ruling.

If Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded the general ruling, the Messenger commanded the specifics. He *Glorified is He* says, 'obey Allah and obey the Messenger…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 92), and if the commandment was given by the Messenger alone, and nothing came directly from Allah, this means it is a command for which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

Thus, we find that none of these forms of obedience confuse or contradict the other. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and beware.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 92) What is the purpose of this warning? Allah *Glorified is He* is teaching us that Satan will never leave us free to obey Allah and obey the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; he will try his best to confuse things for us. Whenever Satan sees that the human soul inclines to a particular passion, he tries to tempt him to sin; if a man blocks some of the paths of Satan so that he is unable, for example, to tempt him to steal or drink wine, he will not leave him alone, but rather, he will attempt to spoil his obedience. That is, Satan might come to a man as he performs the ablution and make him forget whether he washed this hand or whether he performed the ablution with enough water or not; or Satan might come to the believer as he prays and make him forget how many *rak'as* (units) he has prayed, or how many *sajdas* (prostrations) he has made. In this way, Satan tries to affect the believer at the times when he is obedient.

The meaning of His words 'and beware' is: beware lest Satan tricks you, for he will try to get to you by whatever means he can. He gets to the sinful person by means of sin, but the worst thing that Satan can do to the believers is to come to them when they are trying to obey Allah. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'beware'; and we often find that one of us forgets something, and then when he starts praying, he suddenly remembers that thing; Satan does not leave a man alone when he is in this kind of state—for Satan swore an oath, 'Satan said, "By Your might, I will surely mislead them all (*Sad:* 82). The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that Satan said, 'I will surely sit in wait for them on your straight path.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) He swore that he would sit in ambush on the straightway, not the crooked way; and this is manifested, for example, when a man gives charity and then announces it, saying, 'I gave more than so-and-so', thus his reward is squandered.

Satan tries to come to us at a time we would not expect, namely when we are being obedient to Allah. I shall tell you this story so that you see just how much Satan can interfere. It happened to Imam Abu Hanifa *may Allah be pleased with him*; a man came to him to ask his legal opinion about a strange matter. The questioner said: 'I lost my money. I buried it in a certain place, but then the rain came and washed away the stone I put down to mark the place where the money was. Imam Abu Hanifa said: 'Go tonight after the evening prayer and stand before your Lord in prayer until dawn, and then tell me what happens.' When the dawn prayer came, the man came joyously to Abu Hanifa and said, 'I found my money!' Abu Hanifa asked him how and he said: 'While I was standing in prayer, I remembered where my money was, how the rain has fallen and how the water had flowed; so I measured the distance and estimated it until I found my money.' The Imam laughed and said, 'By Allah, I knew that Satan would not let you spend all night with your Lord.'

Thus, you can see how Satan comes to a man while he is trying to obey Allah; therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and beware. And if you turn away, then know that upon Our Messenger is only (the responsibility for) clear notification.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 92) That is, 'If you turn away from what I have imparted unto you, know that by turning away and leaving, you do not harm the Messenger; for the Messenger was only commanded to clearly deliver the message. You only harm yourselves by turning away from what I have imparted unto you.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* knew from before eternity that some of His servants would say, 'This commandment was not mentioned in the Quran', and therefore He commanded us to obey the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; thus, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* must be obeyed in his own right, and Allah willed this in order to pre-emptively respond to those who ask about all the details of a ruling. Examples of this are the number of *rak'as* (units) in each prayer; they are not given in the Quran, but we learned the details of them from the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord

Glorified is He gave His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* permission to establish laws when He says: ‘Whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from’ (*al-Hashr:* 7)

He *Glorified is He* knew from before eternity that people would one day claim to follow nothing but the Quran; therefore, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Yet, the time is coming where a man reclining on his couch will say, “Keep to this Quran: what you find in it to be permissible treat as permissible; and what you find prohibited treat as prohibited.” But what Allah’s Messenger has prohibited is like what Allah has prohibited.’ That is, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* only conveys his Lord’s Message.

We must beware lest Satan comes to us when we are trying to obey Allah; but why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* say ‘and if you turn away’, and what is the thing that is turned away from? Allah *Glorified is He* said this to explain that a man has the freedom to choose to obey and the freedom to choose to disobey; if a man turns from obedience to disobedience and turns from faith in what the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought from Allah to continued disbelief, he should know that the Messenger has carried out his mission and fulfilled it; the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is required to convey the message, and, indeed, he conveyed it clearly, fully, plainly and in a way which covered all the aspects of life.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed unto us that it is our duty to believe in the One God Allah, Who is All-Powerful and All-Wise, and Who possesses all the attributes of perfection; this is the primary article of doctrine. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed unto us that we must avoid all the old Arab practices of paganism and idol-worship. Once Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed the message, we are required to have faith and act; action is of two kinds, positive and negative. Positive action is centred on Allah’s injunction, ‘Do this’, if you are not already doing it; as for negative action, it is to abstain from those things which Allah forbade you, and those things which the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade you. So, the first requirement of faith is to believe in the One God and stop worshipping idols and false gods. To request, as we know, means to speak words which express your desire for the one you address to do something which he was not doing before you requested it. Hence, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Do not worship idols, 'this is a request for action which is that we stop worshipping idols. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us to pray, fast, give the obligatory alms to the poor, and perform the pilgrimage, these are requests for actions. A request for action is called a 'commandment', and a request for the ceasing of an action is called a 'prohibition.'

When you look at all the responsibilities which Islam enjoins, you will find that they did not come all at once, but rather, they came over a period of twenty-three years. When Islam came, people believed in it, and they had not yet been told to implement any of the rulings which were subsequently revealed during the years in which the message was conveyed. All they were required to observe at that time were a few of these rulings, and they indeed observed them. Some of them only heard of the essential importance of having faith in One God (Allah), and they believed in this and then died, but still they earned paradise. There were others who lived longer and heard new rulings and obeyed them; thus, their submission to Allah was complete.

Complete surrender means that the Muslim obeys all the laws of which he is aware; even if the Muslim is only aware of one single law and obeys it, and then he will attain all that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has promised. An example of this is Mukhayriq *may Allah be pleased with him*, the Jew who embraced Islam and left all his possessions to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. When the battle of Uhud was near, he said to his people: 'O Jews, by Allah I know that it is your duty to support Muhammad', but they did not answer him, so he took up his sword and his battle array and said, 'If I am slain, then my wealth belongs to Muhammad to use as he pleases.' Then, he went out to the battle and fought until he was martyred; he had not yet implemented any of the laws of Islam. Yet, because he fought, he attained the rank of martyrdom. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about him: ''Mukhayriq(1) is the best of the Jews'(2).

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(1) Mukhayriq was a rabbi who lived in Medina and fought together with Muhammad in the Battle of Uhud on March 19, 625 (3rd of *Shawwal* in 3rd AH in the Islamic calendar) at the valley located in front of Mount Uhud, in what is now north-western Arabia.

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Sa'd in 'Major Classes' and Abu Nu`aym in' The Signs and Proofs of Prophet hood', Ibn Kathir in the 'The Beginning and the End' and finally Ibn Asakir in 'History of Damascus'*

We should always make the distinction between the ‘Pillars of Islam’ and the other things which are required of the Muslim. We all know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘(The superstructure of) Islam is raised on five (pillars), testifying the fact that there is no god but Allah, that Muhammad is His slave and messenger, the establishment of prayer, payment of *zakat*, Pilgrimage to the House (*Ka’ba*) and the fast of *Ramadan*.’(1) These are the Pillars of Islam, but what is required from a Muslim differs from one person to another. The Muslim is required to testify once in his life that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. He is required to always offer the prayer, no matter what his state is. Different from this is the obligation of paying obligatory alms to the needy which he might be excused from offering if he does not have enough money. Likewise, he might be excused from fasting if he cannot fast due to terminal illness or being old, in which case he must feed the needy instead. If a person is ill and likely to get better, or on a journey, then he must make up the fasting days he misses once his excuse is no more; the same is true for women at times of menstruation or post-natal discharge. A Muslim might be excused from the pilgrimage if he cannot afford to do it. Thus, we see that the Pillars of Islam differ from one Muslim to another; hence, we can see that those who lived in the early days of Islam and obeyed the few rulings which had been revealed thus far until they died or were martyred thereby fulfilled all that Islam required of them.

When the prohibition of intoxicants and gambling (engagement in games of chance or bets that have uncertain outcomes for financial gains) was revealed, people went to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask him about the fate of their fellow believers who died or were martyred before the law prohibiting intoxicants and gambling was revealed. The very fact that they would ask this question showed that they possessed the alertness of faith, for a man is not truly a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself. At that time, the True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed His noble words:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

لَيۡسَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ جُنَاحٞ فِيمَا طَعِمُوٓاْ إِذَا مَا ٱتَّقَواْ وَّءَامَنُواْ
وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ ثُمَّ ٱتَّقَواْ وَّءَامَنُواْ ثُمَّ ٱتَّقَواْ وَّأَحۡسَنُواْۚ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

Those who believe and do good deeds will not be blamed for what they may have consumed [in the past] as long as they are mindful of God, believe and do good deeds, then are mindful of God and believe, then are mindful of God and do good deeds: God loves those who do good deeds [93] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 93)

The True Lord revealed this verse to reassure those believers who asked about the fate of their fellow believers who died or were martyred and had drunk alcohol before it was prohibited. ‘There is not upon those who believe and do good deeds (any) blame for what they may have consumed (in the past)…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 93). The word *ta’amu* (consumed) does not only refer to food, but it refers to drink too; for, the True Lord says: ‘Allah will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me…’ (*al-Baqara:* 249). This means that water is also *ta’am* (food) because it is tasted in the mouth. So, the Muslims who asked about their brethren who died or were martyred discovered that their Islam was based only on those rulings which were revealed during their lives, and they did what was required of them by forsaking idol-worship. Some of them might have died before the prayer was made obligatory or before the laws concerning the obligatory alms or fasting were revealed, and so they did not do them. Therefore, their righteous deeds were that they implemented the teachings which were revealed to them. They were conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* and so lived up to all those requirements of faith which the True Lord had asked of them thus far: they believed in the Law-Giving Allah *Glorified is He* and placed a protective shield between themselves and Allah’s wrath, by doing all that He has asked of them, whether by commandments or prohibitions.

Faith has a pinnacle which is that man believes in Allah *Glorified is He*, His angels, His Scriptures and His Messengers *peace be upon them*, then, that he believes in the laws which were sent down from Heaven. The scholars have differed over the question of whether faith increases or decreases: some scholars say that it does not, and others say that it does. Those who say that faith does not increase or decrease see faith as being connected to the pinnacle of faith which is faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. Those who say that faith increases and decreases see faith as being connected to the laws which Allah *Glorified is He* revealed, and they base this on the True Lord's words: 'When a chapter is revealed, some (hypocrites) say, "Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?" It certainly does strengthen the faith of those who believe and they rejoice.' (*at-Tawba:* 124)

Hence, every verse which reveals a new ruling causes faith to increase. When the law of the obligatory alms was revealed, the Muslims believed in it and implemented it; and some of them did not have enough money, so they did not implement the law even though they believed in it.

A Muslim believes in the law, and he obeys it if he is able to do so, but if he is not able to do so, he does not. Therefore, early Muslims rejoiced in the new rulings which the verses conveyed; thus the disagreement of the scholars on this issue is a matter of perspective. We may observe that the True Lord says: 'There is not upon those who believe and do good deeds (any) blame for what they may have consumed (in the past) as long as they are mindful of Allah, believe and do good deeds, then are mindful of Allah and believe, then are mindful of Allah and persevere in doing good: Allah loves those who persevere in doing good.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 93)

Thence, there are three stages: there were those who were aware of a ruling and were conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* believed and did righteous deeds, then died and passed on to their Lord; therefore, they incurred no sin. Further, there were those who lived to see other rulings, believed in them and obeyed them. And then, there were those who lived to see even more rulings added, and who obeyed them, too. The first stage of faith is linked to righteous deeds, as is the second stage of faith mentioned in the verse; then, the third stage of faith is linked to *ihsan* (doing things with perseverance, proficiency).

Ihsan, as we know, has two aspects. The first is that the believer worships Allah *Glorified is He* as though he could see Him, and that every time a commandment is revealed, the believer performs it well as though he can see Allah *Glorified is He*; for if he cannot see Him, he can sense that He sees him. If the Muslim is aware of all the rulings of Allah which encompass all the aspects of life, he must adhere to them in a good way. The second aspect of *ihsan* (doing things with perseverance, proficiency) is that the believer does even more of these responsibilities than Allah *Glorified is He* has obliged him to do, meaning that he does supererogatory works. In this way, the believer does not only honour the rulings which have been revealed, but he actually does even more deeds of the same kind. The True Lord says: 'The righteous will be in Gardens with (flowing) springs. Taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that, the doers of good.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16) The True Lord explains why this is, saying: '…surely they were before that, the doers of good.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16) The nature of their *ihsan* (doing things with perseverance, proficiency) was that one of them would not only do that which Allah *Glorified is He* obliged him to do, but he would do even more of the same kind of deed. Allah *Glorified is He* has obliged the Muslim to offer five daily prayers, but a good doer is one who increases and draws nearer to Allah *Glorified is He* by offering extra supererogatory prayers. Allah *Glorified is He* has obliged the Muslim to fast *Ramadan*, but the doer of good is the one who fasts *Ramadan* properly, then fasts on other days of the year, too. Allah *Glorified is He* obliged the Muslim to give 2.5% (one fortieth) of his standing wealth as obligatory alms, and the doer of good gives even more than this. Allah *Glorified is He* obliged the Muslim to perform the pilgrimage once he is able, but the doer of good might do it several times.

Therefore, the good doer is the one who is devoted to performing Allah's obligations, who knows the credit in drawing close to Allah *Glorified is He* and has thus found that Allah has commanded him to do less than He actually deserves from us, and as a doer of good, he increases his performance of those actions which cause him to come nearer to Allah. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then, adds this description of the doers of good: 'They used to sleep but little in the night.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17) Allah *Glorified is He* did not command us to sleep only a little at night. He only commanded us to offer the evening prayer after which we may sleep until we rise to offer the dawn prayer. As for the doer of good who has tasted the sweetness of being alone with Allah, he sleeps only a little at night. The True Lord says of the doers of good: 'And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 18)

Allah *Glorified is He* did not command the believer to pray for forgiveness in the hours before dawn, but the doer of good does so. The True Lord, then, adds: ‘And from their properties was (given) the right of the (needy) petitioner and the deprived.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) In this verse, He does not call it a ‘known right’ because the known right is the obligatory alms. So, these three stages are what make the believer reach the status of *ihsan*. Therefore, we find that in the final stage of the verse which we are examining, the True Lord speaks about *ihsan* (doing things with perseverance, proficiency): ‘…then are mindful of Allah and persevere in doing good: Allah loves those who persevere in doing good.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 93) The word *Ahsanu* describes believers who offer extra deeds of the kind that Allah has obliged him to do. When the responsibilities of Islam were still being revealed, every new ruling which came was accepted by the believers with faith and action. As for those who lived to receive all of the responsibilities during the twenty-three years since the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, had started receiving revelations until he passed away; all of these responsibilities were equal to them, and when they wanted to reach the status of *ihsan* (doing things with perseverance, proficiency), they had to do more than that which they were obliged to do.

The True Lord, then, says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَيَبۡلُوَنَّكُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِشَيۡءٖ مِّنَ ٱلصَّيۡدِ تَنَالُهُۥٓ أَيۡدِيكُمۡ وَرِمَاحُكُمۡ
لِيَعۡلَمَ ٱللَّهُ مَن يَخَافُهُۥ بِٱلۡغَيۡبِۚ فَمَنِ ٱعۡتَدَىٰ بَعۡدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَهُۥ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ﴿٩٤﴾

You who believe, God is sure to test you with game within reach of your hands and spears, to find out who fears Him even though they cannot see Him: from now on, anyone who transgresses will have a painful punishment [94] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 94)

This leads to a new ruling; after the True Lord speaks about what He has made lawful in a previous verse: ‘…Lawful for you are the animals of grazing livestock…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 1), and after He mentions what He has made unlawful unto us, namely carrion, blood and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than Allah’s has been invoked, and the animal that has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beast of prey, save that which is slaughtered while it is still alive, and all that is slaughtered as a devotion to idols, all that is shared out by use of divining arrows and also intoxicants and gambling. Here, He mentions special kinds of things that are prohibited. In order for us to understand this, we must first be aware that there are some things which are forbidden at all times and in all places, such as intoxicants, games of chance, adultery and other firmly prohibited things such as idol-worship, divining the future, or the consumption of carrion, blood and pork. There are also things which are only forbidden at specific times or in specific places; and every action must have a time and a place.

We are commanded to pray at the appointed times in any place which is clean and suitable for prayer. Likewise, fasting has its appointed time; *Hajj* (the major pilgrimage) has both an appointed time and an appointed place, whilst '*Umra* (the minor pilgrimage) has an appointed place only because one may perform it at almost any time. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks here about a prohibition which refers to a specific place and a specific time; for hunting is only forbidden when a person is *hurum* (in a state of consecration).

We know that the word *hurum* (in a state of consecration) is the plural of the word *haram* (forbidden), and hunting becomes forbidden when a person reaches the place where *ihram* (the consecration) begins, such as the place called Rabigh, where the consecration begins for those coming from Egypt. When you get to this place and begin the rites of *Hajj* (the major pilgrimage) or '*Umra* (the minor pilgrimage), the first thing you do is to enter the state of consecration. From the moment you enter consecration, even if you do so in your own country or in your own house before setting out, hunting becomes unlawful to you. The word *haram* also applies to the area of the Sanctuary of the Sacred Mosque (in Mecca), even if a person is not on the pilgrimage. It is forbidden to hunt in the Sacred Mosque, and the limits of the Sanctuary have been set out by the Divine Law; to hunt therein is forbidden for both the pilgrim and the non-pilgrim.

We know that the True Lord made the entire earth a purified place and a mosque for the community of Muhammad, which means that we can pray in any place, read to gain knowledge, build a factory or farm. Therefore, any piece of land could be a *masjid* (mosque) because it is a place for *sujud* (prostration). The word ‘mosque’ in its technical sense means a place which is devoted solely to prayer. As for *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* (the Sacred Mosque) its centre is the *Ka’ba*, and the believers circumambulate it; the walls of *Al-Haram* (the Sanctuary) are around the *Ka’ba*. So, the Sacred Mosque lies within the Sanctuary which begins at the following points: At-Tan’im, Al-Ju’rana, Al-Hudaybiyya, Al-Jahfa, and others besides them. These are the boundaries of the Sanctuary. When a person arrives at a pilgrimage station such as Rabigh (in Egypt), he may not hunt from then on because he is now within the Sanctuary and hunting is forbidden unto him even if he is not performing the major or minor pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage, as we know, is a journey which Allah *Glorified is He* commands the Muslim to perform once in his lifetime; the Muslim who is surrounded by the favours of Allah where he lives, sets out to the pilgrimage and leaves behind all the favours which distinguish him and becomes equal with all of Allah’s creatures. The first thing which distinguishes a man from his peers is his clothes. Therefore, the pilgrims take off their regular clothes and wear an identical costume which makes them all equal in appearance. The Muslim leaves behind all the favours because he is going to the Giver of all favours and blessings; the Most Granter.

After that, the True Lord wants to give us a faith-based disciplinary lesson which applies to the whole of existence. Allah *Glorified is He* makes all this completely clear at the pilgrimage. All are equal, wearing clothes which are virtually identical, and all are dishevelled and dusty from travel and all say, ‘*labbayka Allahuma labbayk’* (At Your service, Lord, at Your service). In this way, the state of consecration eliminates all the inequalities among people.

Then, we consider the species which are lower than we are, namely animals; and the True Lord teaches us to behave respectfully towards them by forbidding hunting. He teaches us to respect crops which are below animals, by forbidding the Muslims from cutting down trees which grow in the Sanctuary. Thus, all distinctions are put aside, and a sense of worshipful reverence pervades throughout all.

During the pilgrimage, all matters of rank and title are dropped as soon as the pilgrims approach the *Ka'ba*, where a security guard might see a minister weeping, and all experience a sense of equality. The True Lord says: '…And whoever enters it is secure…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). Animals are secure as are plants, and this is what the True Lord ordains for everything that is inside the Sanctuary because this trains man to leave aside all favours and blessings and turn to the Giver of blessings. Then, he enters the Mosque and circumambulates the *Ka'ba*. We see that man – the master of the universe – takes a completely different position towards all those beings which serve him so that both animals and plants are given their dignity. Even inanimate objects are also given their dignity, for the seven circuits of the *Ka'ba* begin at the Black Stone.

At the pilgrimage, man puts aside all his pride and becomes equal to all people; and he also puts aside his pride towards those species which are lower than him and refrain from hunting animals and cutting plants which both nourish him. The True Lord also extinguishes man's pride towards inanimate objects which are the lowliest of beings, for the True Lord commands him to greet the Black Stone or to kiss it, and if the place is too crowded to allow him to reach it, he should at least gesture towards it. If someone is unable to greet the Black Stone or kiss it, he might feel as though he has not really made the pilgrimage; and this is because he is so attached to the rituals and is eager to perform them with the utmost care.

The reason for all this is so that Allah *Glorified is He* instils a sense of worshipful reverence in all; and we always find people who ask: 'Why should we kiss the Stone, when Allah *Glorified is He* forbade us from paganism and idolatry?' We say that the nature of the Stone has no value here, but rather, it is the Lord of man, animals, plants, and inanimate objects who commands us to do this—and this kind of obedience is confirmed by the fact that we throw pebbles at another stone which symbolizes Satan. When he carries out these sacred rituals, the servant goes from following his own will to following the will of his Lord, so he kisses one stone and honours it and pelts another stone. In this way, a sense of worshipful reverence pervades all the people and is passed down to animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

Prophet Muhammad's Companion, 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* taught us that when he said to the Black Stone: 'I know that you are but a stone and that you cannot cause benefit or harm; were it not that I saw the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* kiss you, I would not have kissed you.'

It is as though 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* was teaching us this so that no one would say that kissing the Stone is a pagan ritual; for paganism means to worship a stone by your own will, whilst we honour the Black Stone by Allah's will.

'O you who believe, Allah is sure to test you with game within reach of your hands and spears, that Allah may make evident those who fear Him even though they cannot see Him: from now on, anyone who transgresses will have a painful punishment.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 94) What is the difference between what the hands reach and what the spears reach? What the hands reach is the little chicks and things which are easy to catch, and what the spears reach are those things which must be hunted with effort, by the skilful use and aiming of spears. The True Lord says: 'Allah is sure to test you' (*al-Ma'ida:* 94) because there is a difference between a person being tempted to sin and thus sinning, and a person reaching a place where he is not tempted to sin, but where a sin might present itself to him; and if the sin indeed does present itself to him, he must not commit it.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* tests us at those times when we are not tempted to sin, and He wants to see how we will act if the sin actually comes to us, and whether we will do it or not. If faith is strong, no one will approach sin; so, Allah *Glorified is He* will try you by means of the game which is forbidden to you by placing it within your reach. This happened at Hudaybiyya where the game placed itself between the hands of the believers, yet they did not approach it; this was a test. We know that a trial is not a bad thing in itself, but what can be bad is its outcome because a trial is a test which one person might pass, whilst another might fail. It is as though the True Lord tested the believers by making the game appear before them in droves in order to strengthen the faith in their hearts so that they would not be keen to commit sin and so that they would gain immunity from it; this was so '...that Allah may make evident those who fear Him even though they cannot see Him…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 94).

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Knowing of everything even before it happens. There are different kinds of knowledge. Allah's knowledge is eternal, having neither beginning nor end, and it never errs. But this knowledge cannot be an argument against people because the argument against people must be based on what they actually do; that is why trials occur. Let me give an example – and Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond compare. A father might look at one of his sons and say, 'He plays all the year round, and it is best that we do not let him take the exam because he will only fail.' So, the son does not take the exam, but this son is so impudent that he says, 'If I had taken the exam, I would have passed it.' If his father had actually permitted him to take the exam and he had failed it, this failure would have been an argument against him.

So, the True Lord's knowledge is not an argument which binds us, but the practical manifestation of this knowledge is what binds us. These kinds of trials based on forbidden things occurred often. An example of this is the trial which the True Lord sent to the Jews by forbidding all hunting and fishing on the Sabbath; the fish came in great numbers on this day, as if tempting them to fish; on the other days, no fish came. So they devised a way to disobey the commandment by making nets to catch the fish which would remain alive and trapped until Sunday when they could take them. Yet, this ruse of theirs only proved their foolishness because the act of catching the fish was completed when the intention was made; the work was done and the preparations were made to catch them. The trial given in Islam was by means of the game which was within man's hands, so '... that Allah may make evident those who fear Him even though they cannot see Him: from now on, anyone who transgresses will have a painful punishment.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 94)

We saw in a former verse that the True Lord says: '…These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, transgress them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229). Thus, if something is enjoined, then we must do it; and if it is prohibited, then we must not come near it, lest we fall into it and then provide an argument against our own selves—because the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, said: 'That which is lawful is plain, and that which is unlawful is plain; between them are matters that are not clear, about which not many people know. Thus, he who guards against the unclear matters, he clears himself with regard to his religion and his honour, but he who falls into the unclear matters, he falls into that which is unlawful. Like the shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Every king has a sanctuary. And beware! Allah's sanctuary is His prohibitions.'(1) The True Lord then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَقْتُلُوا۟ ٱلصَّيْدَ وَأَنتُمْ حُرُمٌۚ وَمَن قَتَلَهُۥ مِنكُم مُّتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَآءٌ مِّثْلُ مَا قَتَلَ مِنَ ٱلنَّعَمِ
يَحْكُمُ بِهِۦ ذَوَا عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ هَدْيًۢا بَٰلِغَ ٱلْكَعْبَةِ أَوْ كَفَّٰرَةٌ طَعَامُ مَسَٰكِينَ أَوْ عَدْلُ ذَٰلِكَ صِيَامًا
لِّيَذُوقَ وَبَالَ أَمْرِهِۦۗ عَفَا ٱللَّهُ عَمَّا سَلَفَۚ وَمَنْ عَادَ فَيَنتَقِمُ ٱللَّهُ مِنْهُۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو ٱنتِقَامٍ ﴿٩٥﴾

You, who believe, do not kill game while you are in the state of consecration [for pilgrimage]. If some- one does so intentionally the penalty is an offering of a domestic animal brought to the *Ka'ba*, equivalent – as judged by two just men among you – to the one he has killed; alternatively, he may atone by feeding the needy or by fasting an equivalent number of days, so that he may taste the full gravity of his deed. God forgives what is past, but if anyone re-offends, God will exact the penalty from him: God is mighty and capable of exacting the penalty [95] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 95)

That is, do not kill game when you have entered consecration for either the major or the minor pilgrimages, or for both of them; and even if you are not on pilgrimage, then you are forbidden from hunting, whilst you are within the bounds of the Sanctuary. Allah has therefore made a sanctuary of time and a sanctuary of place; it is a place where people can go to escape being humiliated by others who have delusions of grandeur. In the past, they would fight wars against each other, so the True Lord made four months sacred, wherein no fighting was allowed; that gave a breather those who were tired of fighting, and gave a way out for those who were fearful of losing their dignity. It gave all a chance to taste the sweetness of peace and security which might cause them to prefer to continue to live in peace and security thereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* also made the Sanctuary a place of security, wherein no one was allowed to harm another. All of this was to preserve people's dignity, lest it might be harmed before others. For example, if two parties are in conflict, and each one desires to make peace with the other, if any neutral person intermediates, he will be successful because both sides want peace and both sides want to end the war, but their vainglorious delusions of grandeur make each of them too proud to be the first to ask the other for peace.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah on the authority of An-Nu' man ibn Al-Bashir*

The True Lord willed that these four sacred months give people an opportunity for truce and reconciliation. Thus, people headed for *Al-Bayt Al-Haram* (the Sacred Mosque), where they could relinquish their hatred and spend time away from fighting, so that things could be resolved in an atmosphere of tranquillity, balance and calm. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'O you, who believe, do not kill game while you are in the state of consecration (for pilgrimage). If some— one does so intentionally the penalty is an offering of a domestic animal brought to the *Ka'ba*, equivalent— as judged by two people of probity among you— to the one he has killed; alternatively, he may atone by feeding the needy or by fasting an equivalent number of days so that he may taste the full gravity of his deed. Allah forgives what is past, but if anyone re-offends, Allah will exact the penalty from him: Allah is mighty, and the Lord of Retribution.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 95)

A creature is not considered to be' game' unless it is something that can be eaten; as for hunted animals that cannot be eaten such as lions or the like, some of the scholars say that it is not forbidden to kill them. But we say that everything which is hunted should be considered' game' whether it can be eaten or not so that we may teach ourselves, our bodies and our limbs how to have good conduct, whilst we are in a state of consecration. The meaning of *hurum* is either in the consecrated state of the pilgrim or presence in the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary's boundaries are well known; the one who is inside it is not allowed to hunt anything from the moment he passes the appointed stations for the beginning of the major or minor pilgrimages.

Therefore, hunting is prohibited for everyone who enters the Blessed Sanctuary of Mecca, whether they are pilgrims or not; and for those who intend to make the major or minor pilgrimage, the prohibition against hunting is even broader because it begins from the moment they enter consecration, whether it is major, minor or both. But what is the ruling if a person breaks this law and hunts? '... If someone does so intentionally….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 95) Yet, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* added the case of accidental killing of animals to that of intentional killing; this is in order to let every Muslim know that he must pay close attention to what he does when he is in a state of consecration or when he is inside the Sanctuary.

Suppose you want to scratch your head with your fingernails whilst you are in a state of consecration, some of your hair might fall out, and if you are sure this has happened, you must make an offering (sacrificial animals) to the *Ka'ba*, fast or feed the needy. This is because the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants you to be fully aware, when you are on the pilgrimage that every move you make will be recorded and judged; therefore, you must have the utmost spiritual vigilance, and even the least error for which must be made amends. Therefore, those who kill game must make amends for indulging in something Allah *Glorified is He* forbade, and the True Lord specified what amends must be made when He says, '…the penalty is an offering of a domestic animal brought to the *Ka'ba*, equivalent….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 95) The scholars have made much discussion of the 'equivalence' meant here; does it mean equivalent value or equivalent form? Equivalent value means that the value of the animal must be ascertained, and then one must purchase any kind of cattle with this value and slaughter it. Equivalent form means that one must find a similar animal to the one killed, as close to its form as one can find. The proof of this is that when a Muslim killed a hyena, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded him to slaughter a sheep. Companions, including 'Ali, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them* commanded a man(1) who killed an ostrich to make amends for it by offering a male or female camel because they resemble ostriches in their height. When a man killed a male gazelle, he made amends by offering a ram; when someone killed a female gazelle, he was ordered to make amends by offering a goat. When someone killed a jerboa (a rodent somewhat larger than a mouse), he was ordered to make amends by offering a baby goat; that is, a young goat which has just begun to eat and do without its mother's milk.

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(1) The story of the Muslim man who killed an ostrich in the Haram

Here, the equivalence is of form, and Abu Hanifa said that equivalence of value can be used if no equivalent form of animal can be found. So, the person who hunts to feed himself must pay the price of this error by feeding other needy people; and if equivalence is based on value, then the value is determined by people of insight, specifically two people of probity: '…the penalty is an offering of a domestic animal brought to the *Ka'ba*, equivalent— as judged by two people of probity among you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 95). This means people who do not shy away from the truth and who observe the measure strictly and with justice.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us to be fair-minded so that we can be people of probity. That is, when a person deals with two rivals, he devotes half his attention to one rival and the other half to the other without capriciously inclining towards either one of them and without turning his face to one of them more than to the other. If someone asks how we get hold of these two people of probity, we tell him to look at how fair they are with themselves, look to see if their behaviour is upright or not, see whether they are wasteful or temperate in the way they eat or the way they deal with their anger, or any other aspect of their behaviour. If a person deals with himself in an honest way, he will deal with others in an honest way. Moreover, the person chosen should also have experience in these matters. People must be aware of these things because we see that there is a wave of hypocrisy running through the youth and overtaking some societies in a way that we hear voices saying, 'The youth must take control.'

We say to those who advance such ideas: Take a moment to examine these notions carefully because a young person must go about his work while he is still young, and we must observe him and see if he succeeds in his work; if he proves to be trustworthy in his actions, and treats himself justly and if he does not harm himself, and if this is the case, then, we nominate him to serve his people since he has proved that he can be trusted to treat himself fairly. It is not right for us to experimentally place our community in the hands of someone who does not have any previous experience to call on. It is not right for us to give authority in any sphere to those whom they call 'wunderkinds'. Those who wish to experiment should experiment on themselves and their possessions not on communities and people. A young person must begin his life with serious activity for his own sake so that he can derive immediate benefits from it, and he must not cheat. If he succeeds in doing so, then we may allow him to devote some or all of his time to serving his people once he has proved to us the following: he has sufficient mental maturity, he has adequate experience, he has lost the desire for personal ambition and small pleasures and he has attained the ability to devote all his attention to arbitrating between people.

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us to choose people of probity to make decisions about the slaughter of rams, then what about the decisions concerning the life of people and their interests? So, we are required to identify people of probity by watching how people behave towards themselves and towards their families. When we find that they can be trusted to deal with themselves fairly, we can trust them with the affairs of others through public service so that the community does not fail since communities only fail because of the poor decisions they make when choosing leaders for various positions of authority.

We may observe here the precision of the concepts which the Noble Quran puts forth because we are faced with the issue of a ram or other animal which must be decided by two persons of probity: '…the penalty is an offering of a domestic animal brought to the *Ka'ba*, equivalent— as judged by two people of probity among you— to the one he has killed…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 95). All that the persons of probity decree must be taken to the *Ka'ba* and there to be eaten by those who gather in the Sacred Mosque to worship the Most Merciful. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to secure the nourishment of those who live in a valley where no crops grew, even by means of the errors of those who disobeyed Allah's ban of hunting animals.

But what is to be done if the erring person does not have the ability to make an offering and bring it to the *Ka'ba*? The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not leave these kinds of matters unexplained. Thus, He set an alternative expiation by feeding the needy whose number is again determined by two persons of probity. The person who is unable to feed the needy must fast a number of days equal to the number of poor people whom he would have fed if he were able. 'Alternatively, he may atone by feeding the needy or by fasting an equivalent number of days so that he may taste the full gravity of his deed' (*al-Ma'ida:* 95). The word *wabal* (gravity) means weight and consequence. Why this gravity? Because when a person spends his money on an animal equal to that which he killed, it will be difficult for him to give up his wealth; and if he feeds needy people, he will have to buy food with money which is also difficult for him to give up; likewise, fasting will exhaust him. This kind of expiation makes a person taste the full gravity of what he has done; in doing so, the True Lord wants to make sure that this awareness was not a mere formality, and that the offence was not a mere formality. He *the Exalted* wants to link benefit to good deeds and harm to bad deeds so that the affairs of the world would be set straight. We have a clear example of this in the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn: 'And they ask you, (O Muhammad), about Dhul-Qarnayn. Say, "I will recite to you about him a report. (83) Indeed we established him upon the earth, and we gave him to everything a way (84)' (*al-Kahf:* 83-84).

The True Lord established Dhu Al-Qarnayn's power securely on earth and gave him the means to achieve anything; yet, he did not simply rely on what he had been given and was not idle or lazy, but rather, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us: 'With these he followed a road' (*al-Kahf:* 85).

Dhu Al-Qarnayn(1) made the most of the security which Allah *Glorified is He* had given him on earth; he made the most of the means which Allah gave him; he derived from them energy and a sense of responsibility to carry on executing his mission, 'Until when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it (as if) setting in a spring of dark mud, and he found near it a people. Allah said, "O Dhul-Qarnayn, either you punish (them) or else adopt among them (a way of) goodness." (*al-Kahf:* 86) He reached the place where, in his eyes, it appeared that the sun set because when a person stands in an empty place at sunset, he can see the sun setting before his eyes as though it is falling behind the horizon although the truth is that this is the range of vision. The assignment was given to Dhu Al-Qarnayn: either punish the people or adopt among them (a way of) goodness; and he had to judge the deeds of each of them and requite them accordingly. He did not do this capriciously because the Allah *Glorified is He* had established his power on earth. Therefore, the True Lord says: ‘He answered, “We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their Lord, He will punish them (even more) severely….”’ (*al-Kahf:* 87)

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(1) The story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn

When any man – even an opportunist – sees that those who do bad deeds are afflicted by woes and loss, he will abstain from them, even if he does not believe in the Last Day. As for those who believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Last Day, how will they be treated? The True Lord says: ‘while those who believed and did good deeds will have the best of rewards: we shall command them to do what is easy for them.’ (*al-Kahf:* 88)

They will attain honour and encouragement, which should only be attained by those who adhere to the truth not by hypocrites or licentious people; this is the constitution of all those who are firmly established on earth and how Allah’s Commandments and Prohibitions are observed. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* enjoins upon us the prohibition of hunting in the Sacred Mosque, or for those in the consecrated state, and ordained a punishment for those who err in this, He is just with us because there can be no punishment without a crime and no crime without a law. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Allah forgives what is past, but if anyone re-offends, Allah will exact the penalty from him: Allah is mighty, and the Lord of Retribution.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 95) So, He forgives all that is past, but all who again violate Allah’s prohibition in this regard will be punished for it by the True Lord Who will not accept any offering, feeding of the needy or fasting from them—because repeating a sin means to persist in it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* will inflict his retribution on them, for He is *the Almighty* Who cannot be overcome.

After speaking about hunting on land and its ruling, the True Lord wants to clarify that such ruling does not apply to all game. He has forbidden us the game of the land if we are pilgrims or within the Sanctuary, and He then says:

أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ صَيْدُ ٱلْبَحْرِ وَطَعَامُهُۥ مَتَـٰعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِلسَّيَّارَةِ ۖ وَحُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ
صَيْدُ ٱلْبَرِّ مَا دُمْتُمْ حُرُمًا ۗ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِىٓ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

It is permitted for you to catch and eat seafood – an enjoyment
for you and the traveller – but hunting game is forbidden while
you are in the state of consecration [for pilgrimage].
Be mindful of God to whom you will be gathered [96]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 96)

This is a precise statement which makes clear that all sea game and seafood are lawful, whilst the land game is forbidden for the pilgrim in consecration and for all those present in the Sanctuary whether pilgrims or not. That is, it is not a case of fixed allowance or fixed prohibition; rather, it is a matter of leaving the will of the self and embracing the will of Allah *Glorified is He*. *Sayd al-bahr* (sea game) is that which we catch by artifice and eat fresh. *Ta’aam al-bahr* (seafood) means what we prepare to be food by salting. So, the True Lord says: ‘…an enjoyment for you and the traveller…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 96). Therefore, the True Lord adds ‘its food’ to ‘sea game’ by the word ‘and’. Something cannot be added to itself; rather, when we add one thing to another, this means they are different.

So, a resident person in a town eats fresh fish, and the traveller takes fish and dries and salts it so he can take it with him to eat on his journey. This is what Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did with his fish. But there are some things which are fished from the sea but not eaten such as pearls, and the animals we take from the sea for their bones and teeth and so on. So, what about them? Allah has allowed us to enjoy everything which we take from the sea; and here this permission is given in the form of the Arabic rhetorical device known as *laff wa nashr* (involution and evolution) such as when the True Lord says: ‘And out of His mercy He made for you the night and the day that you may rest therein and (by day) seek from His bounty and (that) perhaps you will be grateful….’ (*al-Qasas:* 73)

We all know that night is for rest and day is for toil, and that night and day follow each other; so the rest here refers to night, and the seeking from his bounty through toil refers to day. Therefore, the statement is a form of 'involution and evolution.' I have mentioned this before with how the Arab poet did this when he said:

My heart, my eye, my tongue, and my Creator
Content, weeping, thankful, and forgiving

The heart is content, the eye weeps, the tongue gives thanks and the Creator is forgiving; but he unfolded each predicate after having gathered the four subjects together. That is, he gathered all the subjects together and then listed all their predicates afterwards. In our daily life, when we travel we buy gifts for our children; then, we organize them according to the sequence in which the children entered our lives. That is, we gather all the gifts together, and then we distribute them afterwards.

After declaring sea game lawful, the True Lord *Glorified is He* declares hunting on land unlawful for those who are pilgrims. This is a further affirmation of the unlawfulness of hunting on land when one is in consecration for the pilgrimage or presence in the Sanctuary.

The True Lord ends the verse by saying: '…Be mindful of Allah to whom you will be gathered.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 96) That is, place a shield between yourselves and Allah's punishment because you could not endure the suffering of hell. As we said before, the True Lord has attributes of beauty which bring ease and benefit such as Abundance of Provision, Forgiveness and Mercy; and He also has attributes of power, such as Compeller, Severe in punishment and so on. Each one of Allah's attributes has its purpose. Therefore, when a man sins, he has to take into consideration Allah's attributes of Majesty, and one of the hosts of the attributes of Majesty is hell.

So, beware of imagining that you can flee from Allah *Glorified is He* for the sphere of freedom which is given to every man has two boundaries: birth and death. No one can choose how he is born or how he dies. So, beware, O man, of becoming a prisoner of delusion because all your free will is hemmed in by two boundaries, and governed by two unavoidable facts: one is that He created you in the beginning, and the other is that you shall return to Him in the end.

The True Lord then says:

جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡكَعۡبَةَ ٱلۡبَيۡتَ ٱلۡحَرَامَ قِيَٰمٗا لِّلنَّاسِ وَٱلشَّهۡرَ ٱلۡحَرَامَ
وَٱلۡهَدۡيَ وَٱلۡقَلَٰٓئِدَۚ ذَٰلِكَ لِتَعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعۡلَمُ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا
فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٧﴾

God has made the *Ka'ba* – the Sacred House – a means of support for people, and the Sacred Months, the animals for sacrifice and their garlands: all this. Know that God has knowledge of all that is in the heavens and earth and that He is fully aware of all things [97] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 97)

Here, the verb 'has made' means 'made clear' and 'explained'. He says that the *Ka'ba* is inviolable and has a sanctity which decrees that the believer must be secure inside it; or *ja'ala* (has made) means to make attributes for things which already exist in material form such as when the True Lord says: '…He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful' (*an-Nahl:* 78), so *Ja'ala* means 'has endowed'. That is, He specified that a certain group of cells in man's body would form an eye, another group would form a nose and a third group would form a tongue. Here, the True Lord says: 'Allah has made the *Ka'ba*— the Sacred House— a means of support for people….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 97) We know that all abstract concepts are derived from concrete ones.

The word *ka'b* means something which rises from a flat surface; for example, the Arabic word for ankle is *ka'b* because of how it is raised from the foot; and when a young girl reaches physical maturity and develops breasts she is called *ka'ab* or *ka'ib*, meaning that her breasts have risen. The *Ka'ba* stands out; it is elevated, and this elevation is one of the signs of the Sacred House; it is an area of land, but its height is what determines its volume.

For example, when we want to measure an area of a land, we measure the length and breadth, and then multiply one by the other to work out the surface area. But if there is also height, this means we are dealing not with an area but with volume or size. The True Lord says: 'And (mention) when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and (with him) Ishmael…' (*al-Baqara:* 127).

That is, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* wanted to give the Sacred House height and volume, and this building indicates that a volume was being made for an area of land. So, the House became the *Ka'ba* after it was given height. The word for 'Temple' here is *bayt* which literally means 'house' or a dwelling place. When a person keeps moving to several places all day and wants to rest, he goes to his house.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* made the *Ka'ba* a house for people where they can rest from the toil of their lives and their woes; for it is the house of their Lord by their Lord's own choosing, not by their choosing. Every mosque is a house of Allah, but only by Allah's creatures' choice; as for the *Ka'ba*, it is the House of Allah *Glorified is He* by His choosing, and it is the focal point for all the houses of Allah *Glorified is He* which were chosen by His creatures.

'*Ja'al Allahu-l Ka'bata-l Baita-l Haraama qiyaama-l linnaasi*' (Allah has made the *Ka'ba*— the Sacred House— a mean of support for people…)' (*al-Ma'ida:* 97). The Arabic words *Al Baita-l Haraama*, 'the Sacred House, 'imply that there are many sacred laws of inviolability pertaining to it. Now, the word *qiyaama-l*, literally, means, in Arabic, 'to stand', and 'to stand 'can also mean' to be in charge of something', and to be in charge of something means to give it everything it needs to live and exist.

Thus, we understand that He wanted the *Ka'ba* to be the Inviolable House in order to preserve for man the essentials of life such as food, drink, the preservation of the species and the avoidance of harm; beyond those, his dominion, leadership, nobility, and stability. Faith gives man a more elevated life because life is something which believers and nonbelievers share, and it begins with the presence of the spirit in the body which makes the body move and have sensation; the believer is the one who elevates his life, allowing it to enjoy the benefits of faith, and keeps it from harm. By doing so, he attains leadership, and his worldly life is connected to his Afterlife in a way that his life never ends.

The True Lord made the *Ka'ba*, the Sacred House, the means for all mankind that is, a way to put their lives in order, whether in this world or in the Hereafter—in the material life which ends in death, and the next life which begins in the Hereafter. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about this: 'Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

Thus, we see that faith in Allah *Glorified is He* is a way to connect the two lives: the material life of this world and the life of the Hereafter. With this, the True Lord wants to ward off harm and bring the believers benefit, honour, and power. We know that the Inviolable House was the first temple ever set up for mankind: 'The first House (of worship) to be established for people was the one at Mecca. It is a blessed place; a source of guidance for all people.' (*Al-'Imran:* 96)

We also know that it was Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who raised the foundations of the Sacred House; as for the temple itself, it had already been established before that. As long as the True Lord says, '…established for people…' (*Al-'Imran:* 96), this means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not deny the people who lived before Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from having a temple as' people' means all human beings, from Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of time. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the Friend of the Most Merciful, built the third dimension—height—by raising the foundations of the Inviolable House. The True Lord says: 'We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of the House…' (*al-Hajj:* 26). That is, the True Lord showed the site of the Temple to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. We know that Ibrahim's son Ismael (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* helped his father to raise the foundations of the Sacred House, and we know that he first came to this place with his mother(1) when he was still a baby. After the foundations had been raised, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* made this supplication to his Lord, 'Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House…' (*Ibrahim:* 37). Ibrahim (Abraham) knew where the Sacred House was, and that it was in a valley bereft of arable land, without water or crops. Allah *Glorified is He* uses this description to tell us that there is no life without crops, and that crops need water. With this, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had responded to Allah's call by coming to a place which contained none of the blessings which life needs, but there was the Giver of all blessings. Therefore,(2) we see that when Hajar *may Allah be pleased with her* heard Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* tell her to go to that place with her son, she called to him, ‘O Ibrahim, with whom will you leave us?’ He replied, ‘With Allah’, and she said, ‘I am content with Allah.’ Then, Hajar let him go where he pleased, for she knew that Allah *Glorified is He* would not abandon her or her son because she had said, ‘I am content with Allah’.

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(1) Hajar *may Allah be pleased with her*

(2) The story of Hajar pacing back and forth

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, told us her story, and how she rushed between As-Safa and Al-Marwah, and that she trusted that the Supreme Creator would not abandon her or her son, but He would provide for them, and so she rushed between As-Safa and Al-Marwah in the hope that she would see a bird which would indicate the presence of water; she would return to Al-Marwah in the hopes of seeing a passing caravan. She utilised the means at her disposal, whilst also knowing that she was in the presence of Allah. She rushed back and forth seven times, although she was a female of advanced age all because of keenness to find water for her child to drink.

Running, as we know, is a tiring activity; and had Allah *Glorified is He* given her water at As-Safa or Al-Marwah, her words ‘Allah will not abandon us’ would not have been confirmed; but the True Lord gave her water at the very feet of her baby. By doing this, He alerted and guided us to two things: firstly, a person must strive as hard as he can; secondly, it is not striving alone which brings results, but rather, all results are given by Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* used the running between As-Safa and Al-Marwah to teach us the practical lesson that we must utilise the means, but not forget the Creator of all means because people fall into grave error when they become infatuated with material means.”No! (But) indeed, man transgresses (6) because he sees himself self-sufficient (7)” (*al-’Alaq:* 6-7)

The means must never isolate you from the Creator of all means, and neither must you say, ‘I shall remain with the Creator of means until the means come to me’; rather, you must always utilise the means and always remember their Creator. Therefore, we say, ‘Bodies work, but hearts trust in Allah *Glorified is He*.’ This is the importance of how the True Lord gave water to Hajar *may Allah be pleased with her* at the very feet of her son; thus, the prayer of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was answered after he had called unto

Allah, 'Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer. Make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful.' (*Ibrahim:* 37)

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* prayed for fruitful sustenance because the valley was bereft of arable land; therefore, the True Lord made people's hearts incline towards the *Ka'ba* and the Sacred House. He says, '…Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary where every kind of produce is brought, as a provision from Us?' (*al-Qasas:* 57)

The word 'established' tells us that the people would not bring these fruits to the Sacred House which Allah *Glorified is He* made as a source of life to all who dwelled within it, of their own free will, but rather, they would be compelled to bring them. There are people who own large farms and fruitful orchards in Ta'if and other cities. When someone wants to buy their produce they say to him, 'It is reserved for Mecca, so if you wish to buy it you must go to Mecca.'

The True Lord answered the prayer of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*, 'Make people's hearts turn to them...' (*Ibrahim:* 37), and here, the word *tahwi* (turn) literally means 'to fall from a great height.' It is as though the yearning for the *Ka'ba* makes a person throw himself at it; therefore, we find that some people are besotted with the pilgrimage, and their spirits yearn for it.

There is a difference between *yahwa* which means 'to love to go somewhere', and *yahwi* which means 'to reach a place by momentum.' If a person falls from a high place, he cannot say, 'I will stop here' when he reaches a particular spot halfway down—he is falling, he does not have the power to stop himself from moving. Therefore, the True Lord says: 'Make people's hearts turn to them...' (*Ibrahim:* 37).

This shows that it is not the body which inclines here, but the heart, and hearts are in the Hand of Allah *Glorified is He* and He causes them to incline. The *Ka'ba* is the Sacred House, and it is a means of support for man's life; Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…And whoever enters it is secure…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

So, the one who enters the *Ka'ba* is secure (safe) even if he is a murderer. A man could find the killer of his father in the *Ka'ba*, but he would not harm him. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave them all the beneficial constituents of life, and protected them against any harm.

And as for supremacy and honour, we know that Quraysh were the chiefs of the Arabs, and their men were custodians and servants of the House of Allah, and everyone would come to them; so no one would harm their caravans on their way to the Levant or Yemen. If anyone assaulted the caravans of Quraysh, its members could exact vengeance upon them when they came to them. And this was the pinnacle of supremacy. So, the constituents of life consist in benefits which are brought, and harm which is averted – and this was attained by the security which was afforded to all who entered it. And there was also the position of supremacy which Quraysh enjoyed over all the Arabs. And Allah *Glorified is He* gave an example to Quraysh of how He protected the *Ka'ba* when Abraha came to destroy it: 'Have you not considered, (O Muhammad), how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1)

And Allah *Glorified is He* thwarted the plans of the Army of the Elephant because had they destroyed the *Ka'ba*, the supremacy of Quraysh would have ended; and therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: 'And He made them like eaten straw.' (*al-Fil:* 5) 'For the protection of Quraysh; their protection during their trading caravans in the winter and the summer.' (*Quraysh:* 1-2)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* made the Army of the Elephant like eaten straw, i.e. which cattle have eaten and expelled as manure. Allah *Glorified is He* did this so that Quraysh would be assured and confident that the *Ka'ba* would never be harmed, and that their winter and summer journeys were protected because of how all the tribes needed to perform the pilgrimage. Allah *Glorified is He* then said: 'Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them, (saving them) from hunger and made them safe, (saving them) from fear. (*Quraysh:* 3-4)

That is, He bestowed upon them the blessing of food and protected them from the harm of fear, and preserved their supremacy and the prestige of serving the *Ka'ba* which Allah made as a source of support and security for mankind; for He *Glorified is He* expiates the sins of those who go on pilgrimage to the House, and their sins fall away and leave them as pure as they were the day their mothers bore them; and this fortifies their lives in the Hereafter, as well.

So Allah has made the Inviolable House a symbol of support for all aspects of life; and as we know, the Sacred House is a place. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* also has assigned the sacred months symbols of support for life. As we know, the sacred months are times. There are four sacred months, one of which stands alone, namely *Rajab* – which is why it is known as *'Rajab* the Solitary' – and the other three of which are connected and follow each other, namely *Dhul Qa`da*, *Dhul Hijja* and *Muharram*. And the meaning of 'the sacred month' is any one of the four sacred months.

We know that every action requires a doer, and the doer needs time in which to do the action, and a place to do it, and a motive for doing it, and the power to do it. Therefore, let us all remember that the True Lord *Glorified is He* said, 'Never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow," except (when adding), "If Allah wills."' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24) So, do not say, 'I shall do this tomorrow' without following it by saying *insha`allah* (if Allah wills). This does not prevent us from planning for our futures, for as long as we defer to Allah's will we have the right to plan for our lives, and say, 'If Allah wills'. For the components of an action are a subject, an object, a time, a place, a cause and the power to do the action; no one possesses any of these components. For as a man, you do not have the power to ensure that you will be alive tomorrow, nor that the object of your action will exist tomorrow, and you do not possess the time, or the place, or the cause because it might change; and you do not possess the power to do the action because this power might be taken from you before you do it.

So, you do not possess any of the components of the action, and therefore you must not be so bold as to say, 'I shall do this tomorrow.' Rather, you must defer it to the One Who possesses all these components, and say, 'If Allah wills'; and by doing this, you will not be lying.

In this verse, we find that there are two components: place and time. The place is the Sacred House, and the time is the sacred month. The thing in which an action occurs is called in Arabic the *maf`ul fih* (an object wherein action is done), and it can be either a place or a time. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to affirm to us those things which are a source of security to mankind, both in space and in time. And had Allah *Glorified is He* not done that for time by means of the sacred months, and for space by means of the Sacred House, then the wars of the Arab tribes would never have stopped. Therefore, He intended form legislating the sacred months to give an opportunity for reflection on the causes of the war, and to give all the Arabs a break from fighting. At that time, every Arab considered his preparations for war as having the same level of importance as his food and drink, and they were all taught riding, fighting, spear throwing, and sword fighting.

And when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to spread the call throughout earth, many of his Companions had no experience of warfare because almost everyone was already prepared to fight. It is as if Allah wanted Islam to bring an end to tribal animosities and cycles of violence, and also for Islam to benefit from the battle experience which every Arab had. And Islam also benefitted from the fact that the Arabs were generally a nomadic people who lived in the saddle, travelling and pitching their tents wherever they slept; for people only become attached to homelands when they build houses there, and when someone builds a house for himself somewhere, he grows to love what he has built.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* had prepared them to go out and spread Allah's word throughout the earth without being sad to leave one place for another; rather, each one of them would go somewhere and settle there to establish an Islamic presence, and they were all good examples for the communities to whom they went. One of them might go to the Levant and settle there, and he would not miss Arabia; and the same was true for those who went to Egypt, and everywhere else.

So, by defining the sacred months and the Sacred House, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted Arabs to have a respite from fighting instead of allowing war to destroy their civilisation; and the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted this to be a symbol of security and preservation for mankind.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* made 'the sacrificial animals and garlanding' inviolable. The sacrificial animals were the animals which were offered to the Sanctuary for the people there to eat because the Sanctuary existed in a place where there was no arable land. 'The sacrificial animal' (*hady*) is an animal which someone offers and places around its neck a garland of leaves or the like; and when people saw the garland, they knew that this animal had been offered to the Sanctuary, so no one would go near it, even its owner, even if he was sorely hungry. And this was a symbol of security for the people.

And the verse continues, 'that is so you may know that Allah knows what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and that Allah knows of all things.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 97). This refers to everything that has gone before, and that is so you may know that Allah knows what is in the heavens and what is in theearth. This means that Allah *Glorified is He* arranges for them all the things which protect their lives from all of life's vicissitudes. He arranged for them the preservation of their lives, and He protected them from hunger, and He gave them security, and He persevered for them their supremacy; and He did all this by His arrangement, and He is the All-Wise. He arranged everything from pre-eternity, and everything happened just as He had arranged it, in the best and most beneficial way; and if He *Glorified is He* did all of this, it is because He is the All Knowing and the All-Wise.

All of this happened according to His knowledge and His wisdom. We believe that there are other things unknown to us which He also did with this absolute wisdom and absolute knowledge. 'That is so you may know that Allah knows what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and that Allah knows of all things.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 97) He arranged people's lives in Arabia and around the Sacred House even though they worshipped idols before the message was sent to them; yet He guided them with the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. Therefore, He then says, 'Know that Allah is severe in penalty and that Allah is Forgiving and Merciful' (*al-Ma'ida:* 98); for He *Glorified is He* made the House secure and safe, and this was a sacred law, not a natural law.

The difference between a natural law and a sacred law is that the natural law will inevitably occur because it requires no human interference, but the sacred law, on the other hand, is a commandment which people must obey. So if they obey the commandment, Allah has revealed to them, they will make the House secure; and if they sin, they will make it unsecure.

Recently, when a young man named Juhayman(1) attacked the Sanctuary, people wondered, 'How could anyone attack the Sanctuary, when Allah wanted it to be secure?' Our reply is that when Allah ordained that the House be a secure Sanctuary, this was a commandment which the believer must obey, and if they do not obey it, then they will not be secure therein. To illustrate the difference between natural laws and sacred laws, consider that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…good women are for good men…' (*an-Nur:* 26). In life, we find that a corrupt man might marry a good woman, and that a good man might marry a corrupt woman; and this confirms for us that the True Lord's words '...good women are for good men…' (*an-Nur:* 26) is a sacred commandment that a good man should marry a good woman like him, as we must obey this if we truly believe in Allah's way of guidance, but if we reject this guidance, then we will allow good men to marry bad women, and bad men to marry good women, and this will throw the family structure out of balance, and societal life will become hellish. In order to preserve the balance of society, we must make sure that good men marry good women, and we must leave the corrupt men and women to each other so that our lives will not be ruined. And Allah *Glorified is He* alerts us to the essential importance of obeying His commandments of Sacred Law by saying:

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(1) The story of Jahyman's attacking the sacred house in recent time

ٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٩٨﴾

Know too that God is severe in punishment yet most forgiving and merciful [98] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 98)

That is, be fully aware of Allah's laws, and obey His will; and those who disobey Allah should be aware that He *Glorified is He* is severe in retribution, while those who obey Allah should know that He *Glorified is He* is forgiving and merciful. And He *Glorified is He* contrasts one attribute of majesty with two attributes of beauty: the attribute '...severe in penalty…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 98), is contrasted with the two attributes: '…Forgiving and Merciful.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 98) This is because not all people are good, and not all people are evil, and therefore, He refers to the good people with the forgiveness and grace which they merit, and to the evil people with the severe penalty they merit; and His forgiveness and merciful grace dominate His wrath and retribution which we can see by how He contrasts one single attribute of majesty, '…severe in penalty…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 98), with two attributes of beauty, '…Forgiving and Merciful.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 98) And the True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

مَّا عَلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ إِلَّا ٱلْبَلَٰغُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

The Messenger's duty is only to deliver the message: God knows what you reveal and what you conceal [99] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 99)

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by the True Lord *Glorified is He* to us. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the first and absolute doer whose deeds cannot be challenged by any other doer; and the first object of the message is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the second object of it is us. In Arabic grammar, there is also what is called the *mafʿul ma'ah* (object of accompaniment), the *mafʿul lah* (object of reason), the *mafʿul fih* (object of content), the *mafʿul bih* (through object) and the *mafʿul ilayhi* (indirect object); an example of an indirect object is found when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'By Allah, We did certainly send (messengers) to nations before you, but Satan made their deeds attractive to them. And he is the disbelievers' ally today (as well), and they will have a painful punishment.' (*an-Nahl:* 63). There is also the *mafʿul minh* (object of membership), such as when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And Moses chose from his people seventy men for our appointment…' (*al-A'raf:* 155).

The words 'his people' here is the 'within object' (in Arabic, the words 'out of' are not used because they are implied by this grammatical function which does not exist in English) because he chose seventy members of his people who had not worshipped the calf to pray for forgiveness for those who had worshipped it, and to ask Allah to give them relief from their trials.

The mission of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to deliver the message: 'Not upon the Messenger is (responsibility) except (for) notification.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 99) As for implementing the message, this is the role of those who believe in the message of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; if they do it, they will enter paradise, but if they do not, they will be punished. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted the message that His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered to be accompanied by the good example of His own conduct. So, the Messenger delivers and then implements what he delivers before our eyes, so that we can follow him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* said, ‘There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah, an excellent example...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 21). This nullifies any ascription of divinity to a human being; for if any messenger was a God, the people would have said, ‘How can we follow this messenger, whereas his attributes and characteristic are different from those of humans?’ The Messenger cannot be a God because he is the role model and example for those to whom he is sent: he prays, fasts, gives charity, makes pilgrimages, and he commands those to whom he is sent to follow his example. If he was a God, then those to whom he was sent – human beings – would not be able to do what he did, because – being a god– his nature would be different from theirs, and therefore, they would not be able to imitate him and follow him. The example cannot be made unless the Messenger is the same race as those to whom he is sent; that is, he must be of the human race, and be subject to all human vicissitudes. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And what prevented the people from believing when guidance came to them except that they said, “Has Allah sent a human messenger?” (*al-Isra’:* 94) That is, the people ignorantly wondered what kept Allah *Glorified is He* from sending them a messenger who was not human, and they wondered why He sent them a messenger from their own human race. Allah *Glorified is He* Himself gives the response saying: ‘If there were upon the earth angels walking securely, He would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel (as a) messenger.’ (*al-Isra’:* 95) In this way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* conveys unto His messenger the importance of telling the people that the messenger sent to them must be of the human race because the angels do not walk about on earth as their natural abode, and if an angel was sent as a messenger the people would have said, ‘We cannot follow what the angels have brought, because they cannot be role models for us since they are not from the human race’. Moreover, the angels are invisible beings, so how could Allah send invisible beings to men as messengers? Even if this were to happen, the True Lord *Glorified is He* would inevitably clothe the angel in human form, as He says in another verse, ‘If He had made him an angel, He would have made him appear as a man, and He would have covered them with that in which they cover themselves.’ (*al-An’am:* 9) They asked Allah to send them an angel, but if Allah had answered them and sent an angel as a messenger, the angel would have come in a human form, and they would have persisted in their disbelief and refused to believe; and then they would deserve nothing but Allah's punishment, so He would have destroyed them. The mission of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is to deliver the message and be a role model for us. The verse continues, 'Allah knows whatever you reveal and whatever you conceal.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 99)

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* warns us not to accept faith superficially without truly believing in it; for humans might be fooled by superficial things, but Allah can see us with His infinite self-sustaining Power, and He is not taken by slumber or sleep. And these words are a challenge to the hypocrites that Allah *Glorified is He* will judge them; and if a man conceals unbelief in his heart and displays superficial faith, he will be punished by Allah. In addition, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers who follow him must act according to appearances and leave the essence of the matter to Allah.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade us ascribing unbelief to anyone who claims to have faith, even if he is a hypocrite. He *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that he was a human being, and he knew that human beings have limited powers; and therefore, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Verily, I am only a human and the claimants bring to me their disputes. Some of them are more eloquent than others. I judge per what I hear from them. So, he whom I, by my judgment, (give the undue share) out of the right of a Muslim, I in fact give him a portion of (hell) fire.'(1) So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us not to imagine that he had super-human powers; and when a Companion killed a man who had claimed to have faith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'Why did you not cut open his belly and find out what was in his heart?' So, we must follow outward appearances, and consign knowledge of secret truths to Allah. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He knows whatever you reveal and whatever you conceal.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 99) We know that the act of hypocrisy gives the hypocrite the outward rights of a Muslim for as long as he lives in this temporal life; but his life in the Hereafter is long, and he will be requited therein for the unbelief he concealed. And to conceal is not the same as to suppress; to conceal an action means that it is actually done, but the one who does it conceals it from others; as for what is suppressed, this is what exists in the thoughts alone. And a person might be able to suppress something for a while, but as time passes, he will be unable to keep it suppressed, as the Arab poet said:

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(1) *Muslim*

> If a man has a trait, no matter how much
>
> he hides it from the people, it will be known anyway.

And it is said, ‘The secret almost shouts, here I am!’

Since the True Lord *Glorified is He* knows all that men do openly and all that they conceal, and He is severe in penalty as well as forgiving and merciful, and He rewards good deeds tenfold and punishes bad deeds as they merit, then what are we to do? The answer comes in the form of a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell us:

قُل لَّا يَسْتَوِى ٱلْخَبِيثُ وَٱلطَّيِّبُ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ كَثْرَةُ ٱلْخَبِيثِ ۚ
فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ يَـٰٓأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَـٰبِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Bad cannot be likened to good, though you may be dazzled by how abundant the bad is. Be mindful of God, people of understanding, so that you may prosper’ [100]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 100)

Therefore, bad things are never equal to good things, and this is shown by the way when one of us goes to buy something, he inspects the wares and chooses the good ones and leaves the bad ones. This is a natural phenomenon which is just like the lack of equality between those who are blind and those who can see, and between darkness and light. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of concrete concepts to explain abstract concepts to us, and thus He warns us not to be fooled by the quantities and sizes of things; for a little of something good is far more beneficial and better than a lot of something bad. And one might see the goodness of a good thing in this worldly life, but of course its goodness in the Hereafter is far greater than one can imagine, because the Hereafter lasts forever, while the life of this world is limited.

When many people attend any kind of division, each of them desires to take the biggest share for himself because people are deluded by quantity but this greed spoils everything that the greedy person takes. For example, the person who desires to take more wheat than he deserves, it will spoil his life with this bad thing that he has taken. It is like mixing pure water with filthy water so that all the water becomes filthy. So we should not judge things by their quantity and size, but rather, by their quality and kind, and by how long their goodness will last.

The example which I never tire of repeating is that of the pupil who works hard for twenty years, and finally graduates and becomes a person of good standing. As for the pupil who spends twenty years playing and fooling around, he ends up with a failed and painful future. So we must all judge benefit according to its endurance, and not be deluded by a large amount of a bad thing.

These examples are repeated in our daily lives, and we must place them before our eyes so we can keep Allah in mind and not go willingly to our own ruin as so many people do. Some people are not content with the division Allah ordained for their inheritance, and so they give everything to their male relatives and nothing to their female relatives, or they reduce the female relatives' share. We say to those who do this, 'You do not know what you are doing, and if your son knew that Allah's hand influences things, he would say to you, "Have mercy on me and do not harm me"!' The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…your parents or your children, you know not which of them are nearest to you in benefit...' (*an-Nisa':* 11).

Therefore, a man must know that Allah's distribution is the most just one; and beware of over giving of a son or a relative more than what Allah has allotted him because this is the very essence of injustice. If the one who leaves this inheritance does not come to realise this before he dies, then we say to the one who takes the inheritance, 'Beware, and do not take more than what Allah's Law gives you, and return all that you took beyond your right; do this with the chivalry of faith. And do not think that this unjust increase will protect your children, for this increase will only sever their family ties and plant the seeds of hatred and enmity'.

But if you decide to arrange this matter in the way Allah’s Law ordains, you will find that provision will come to you from all directions, as long as you respect Allah’s Right by adhering to the rules He has willed so that families are united and divine justice is fulfilled. Therefore, no one must dare to challenge Allah’s division, and I say to all those who read these words and still want to challenge Allah’s division; ‘Repent to Allah, and do not spoil your spiritual standing.’ No father should imagine that he can guarantee the success of his children in the future; for how often we have seen people leave their families rich, yet they have fallen into penury and destitution; and we have seen people leave their families poor, yet Allah showered them with His provision. And He *Glorified is He* says, ‘Let those executors and guardians fear injustice as if they themselves had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So, let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 9)

So, the believer must beware of the plenty if it contains bad things; and we may learn much from the story that happened to Abu Ja`far Al-Mansur when he assumed the Caliphate and the people went to congratulate him for becoming the Commander of the Faithful, and he was visited by Muqatil ibn Sulaiman who was a man of wise counsel. Abu Ja`far said to himself, ‘He has come to spoil our day! I will speak to him first before he speaks to me.’ So, he said to him, ‘Counsel us, Muqatil!’ Muqatil replied, ‘Shall I counsel you about something I have seen, or something I have heard?’ This is because hearing is more extensive than seeing, since seeing is limited to what the eye perceives, while hearing has many forms because a person can also hear the experiences of others. Abu Ja`far replied, ‘Speak to me of what you have seen.’ He replied, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Al- ‘Aziz died and left behind eleven children, and he left eighteen *dinars*, of which five were used to buy his burial shroud and four to buy his grave, and the rest was shared amongst his children. Hisham ibn ‘Abdul Malik died, and the inheritance of one of his four wives was eighty thousand *dinars*, in addition to some estates and palaces; and the total share of the four wives was three hundred and twenty thousand *dinars*, and this was only the value of the money he left. By Allah, O Commander of the Faithful, I saw with my own eye these two things in a single day. One of ‘Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz’s sons led one hundred cavalries in Allah’s Cause, and one of the sons of Hisham ibn’ ‘Abd Al-Malik begged in the street.’

So we should all be aware that none of us entered the world rich, and we must all have good etiquette with Allah and respect His Rights, and we must not interfere with Allah's ordained division.' Say, "Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you."So, fear Allah, O you of understanding, that you may be successful!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 100)

The Muslim, then, must utilise all his mental faculties in order to distinguish the bad from the good, and he must reject all that is bad because if we examine the matter with our intelligence we will conclude that Allah's law is the true and just law.

Allah says, '…so that you may be successful!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 100) The word for successful in Arabic is *falah* which, as we know, is derived from a concrete concept, namely' to farm (*falaha*) the earth.' A man takes a grain of wheat and plants it, and it gives him seven ears which each contains a hundred grains. The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls all the deeds of the Hereafter (*falah*) because the word has a beautiful origin. For if the earth, which is one of Allah's creations along with all the constituents essential for farming and for life which it contains, gives us seven ears in return for one grain, each ear containing one hundred grains, then how much will the Creator of the earth give us? So, fear Allah, O Muslim, and do not interfere with Allah's division, and keep in mind the wise advice given in the traditional saying, 'The worst of you is the one who leaves his dependants with good, and goes to meet Allah with evil'. And the sons who are tested with this should consider the matter with spiritual high-mindedness; for when a father loves one of his sons and gives him a share of more inheritance than he is due, this is the most foolish kind of love; and the son should respect the emotion of love and forgive the father for this and have mercy on him by returning his share and giving everyone their proper rights, so that his father is not tormented in hell for interfering with Allah's division for the benefit of his son.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَسۡـَٔلُواْ عَنۡ أَشۡيَآءَ إِن تُبۡدَ لَكُمۡ تَسُؤۡكُمۡ وَإِن تَسۡـَٔلُواْ
عَنۡهَا حِينَ يُنَزَّلُ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانُ تُبۡدَ لَكُمۡ عَفَا ٱللَّهُ عَنۡهَاۗ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٞ ١٠١

You who believe, do not ask about matters which, if made
known to you, might make things difficult for you – if you
ask about them while the Quran is being revealed, they
will be made known to you – for God has kept silent
about them: God is most forgiving and forbearing [101]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 101)

This is a prohibition against asking questions, and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave me as I have left you (Do not ask me the minor things that I have avoided to tell you). For those who came before you were doomed because of their questions and differences with their prophets. If I commanded you to do something, and then do as much of it as you can, and if I forbid you from doing something, then refrain from it.'(1)

We know that the children of Israel made things difficult for themselves when they kept procrastinating about slaughtering the cow and asking about its colour; they made things difficult for themselves that Allah made things difficult for them. And when the required cow was finally found, it was owned by an orphan boy, and this orphan's father was a righteous man who owned a cow which he took to a place full of verdure and pasture and said, 'O Allah, I ask You to look after it for my son until he grows up.' When they bargained with the orphan for the cow, he sold it to them for gold which would fill its hide.

Some people were excessive in their questioning of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as' 'Abdullah ibn Hudhayfa ibn Qays As-Sahmi who asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*' Who is my father?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Your father is Hudhayfa.' But if it had been the case that this questioner's father was actually someone else than what was thought, would this not have disgraced his mother? And his mother said to him, 'I never saw a worse son than you! Did you hope that your mother had been tempted to indulge in what the people of pagan ignorance indulged in, that you might expose her to the people?'

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(1) *Muslim*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make the people decrease their questioning about things which might cause them difficulty and woe and offend them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* accepted the questions the believers addressed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning Sacred Law such as their questions about intoxicants, new moons, menstruation, the sacred months and so on; as for other questions, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said about them that He has pardoned that which is past; and Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing.

This is because some people were wont to ask questions as though they were testing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and therefore the commandment was issued that the believers should not intentionally ask about things which Allah *Glorified is He* had hidden from them so that their honour would not be tarnished.' But if you ask about them while the Quran is being revealed, they will be shown to you' (*al-Ma'ida:* 101). Therefore, if the Quran revealed the answer, that would be well; and if no answer came, no one had the right to say, 'The Prophet does not know the answer.' Or, this refers to questions about the things they had invented which they claimed proved that someone was truly a prophet, of which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And they say, "We will not believe you until you break open for us from the ground a spring. Or (until) you have a garden of palm trees and grapes and make rivers gush forth within them in force (and abundance). Or you make the heaven fall upon us in fragments as you have claimed or you bring Allah and the angels before (us). Or you have a house of gold or you ascend into the sky. And (even then), we will not believe in your ascension until you bring down to us a book we may read. "Say, "Exalted is my Lord! Was I ever but a human messenger"' (*al-Isra':* 90-93).

These words betrayed their impure intention because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* does not bring signs, but rather, signs come to him to convey the laws he is obliged to convey; for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* does not choose the signs he brings, but rather, the True Lord *Glorified is He* sends the appropriate signs to him. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

قَدْ سَأَلَهَا قَوْمٌ مِّن قَبْلِكُمْ ثُمَّ أَصْبَحُوا۟ بِهَا كَـٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

Before you, some people asked about things, then ignored (The answers] [102] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 102)

The fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not send down these signs was a mercy to those who asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for them; for people asked for a she-camel and then they restricted it, so Allah annihilated them; and the people of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* asked for a laden table and it was sent down to them, then the True Lord *Glorified is He* warned them of what would happen if they did not believe after that. And the unchanging way of Allah with His creatures is that if they ask for a sign and then fail to believe in it, the True Lord *Glorified is He* destroys them or punishes them. And He *Glorified is He* gave the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a guarantee that He would not punish them, while he is among them, and He would not punish them, while they seek forgiveness. 'But Allah would not punish them while you, (O Muhammad), are among them, and Allah would not punish them while they seek forgiveness.' (*al-Anfal:* 33)

So, He did not answer the questions they had asked because Allah *Glorified is He* absolved them; and the word for absolution is (*`afw*) which, as we know, is derived from the word (*`affa*) that means to wipe away tracks so they are no longer visible; and Allah's absolution is an aspect of His forgiveness and mercy.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَا جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ مِنۢ بَحِيرَةٍ وَلَا سَآئِبَةٍ وَلَا وَصِيلَةٍ وَلَا حَامٍ ۙ وَلَـٰكِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا۟ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ ۖ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

God did not institute the dedication of such things as *bahira*, *sa' iba*, *wasila*, or *ham* to idols; but the disbelievers invent lies about God. Most of them do not use reason [103] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 103)

This verse comes in the chapter where Allah declares cattle to be lawful, apart from those exceptions which are unlawful. He is the One Who created man, and created the nourishment which sustains man's life and the means of procreation which sustain his species; and since the True Lord *Glorified is He* made man His vicegerent on earth, He prepared for him all these constituents of life before He created Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* prepared for His creatures the earth, sky, air, water and all the nutrients He stored and made on the earth which will last until the Day of Resurrection.

We should be aware of the difference between *khalaqa* (creating) and *ja`ala* (making) which could also be translated as ordaining or laying down. They denote different things. To create is to bring something into existence out of nothing, whilst to make is to direct a creation of Allah to its purpose in life. Allah's creatures cannot create anything, for only Allah *Glorified is He* can create and bring things into existence. Our role as created beings is to recognise everything's purpose in life which Allah intended for it; that is, we should leave making to Allah and not interfere with it. For example, this means that the Creator *Glorified is He* created pigs to eat waste and protect man from many illnesses and harms; and therefore, man must recognise that the pig has this purpose, and not turn it to another purpose by eating it; for to turn one of God's creatures into a purpose other than its own, is something which harms man whom Allah intended to be the vicegerent of the universe.

And Allah *Glorified is He* told the people that He permitted some things and forbade others, and man must yield to what Allah has permitted by taking it, and yield to what Allah has forbidden by abstaining from it. The Creator *Glorified is He* is the One who creates and the one who makes; and He says that He has made the *Ka'ba*, the Sacred House, maintenance for the people. He created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light. Further, the True Lord *Glorified is He* forbids us from ascribing partners to Him, whilst it is He Who created us and those before them, and made for us the earth a bed (spread out) and the sky a ceiling and sent down from the sky, rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision for us.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Ever-Present, and He is Indivisibly One and Unique, so it is not right to attribute rivals to Him since this is futile. And Allah *Glorified is He* affirms that corruption on earth occurs when people take Allah's creatures and presume to make them into a different state than that in which Allah created them.

In their daily lives, men are keen to use things for their proper purposes. For example, you buy a block of cheese from the cheese-maker and a block of soap from the soap-maker, and you take the cheese and the soap home and tell your family that the cheese is for eating and the soap is for washing, and everyone follows these instructions. Were someone to use the soap for eating and the cheese for washing, the health of the family would be damaged. In the same way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given us children from our own loins; so how can we take children who came from the loins of others and make them our own? This is a misapplication of *ja`l* (making).

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and He has not made your adopted sons your truesons…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). Your adopted son is really from the loins of another man, and your wife is not really his mother, so how can you make him your son and allow him to sit in the lap of a woman who is not his mother and grow up accustomed to this, and allow him to look at women who are not his unmarriageable kin as though this is perfectly lawful for him? This will cause him to lose the power to distinguish between the lawful and the unlawful; and therefore adoption is a form of corruption.

All the corruption in the world begins when we make one of Allah's Creatures do something which Allah did not mean for it to do. The True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us that He created man and created for him what nourishes him and what preserves his species; we must follow the commands of the True Lord *Glorified is He* by taking what is lawful and staying clear of what is unlawful. And if someone says, 'Why did Allah forbid some of the things He created?', we say that He created these things for a different purpose than that for which man wants to use them, and an example of this is the prohibition of eating pork.

If one of us sees how animals live in the forest, he will be amazed, for the waste excreted by some animals is food for other animals, and the poison of a snake can be used for protection and medicine. We know that people take the venom of snakes and extract from it cures for certain diseases, and to kill certain germs.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains, 'Say, "Have you seen what Allah has sent down to you of provision of which you have made (some) lawful and (some) unlawful?" Say, "Has Allah permitted you (to do so), or do you invent (something) about Allah?"' (*Yunus:* 59) How can we then make ourselves lawgivers by permitting the unlawful and forbidding the lawful? God who created all things did not give us leave to do this. We must accept that everything was created for a purpose, and that we do not have the right to direct it to any other purpose than its own. And directing things to purposes for which they were not made has had harmful consequences; an example of this is how we use pesticides on fields which not only killed what we felt to be harmful but killed what was beneficial, too. Therefore, man should be very careful, and should not see the lawful and the unlawful as being equal; and he should be very careful not to transgress against Allah's creations by altering their purpose.

The verse under discussion mentions several kinds of cattle by name as follows: *bahirah*, *sa`ibah*, *wasilah and hami*. The *bahira* was the she-camel whose ear was clipped as a sign that she was inviolable so that no one could harm her, turn her away from a pasture or from water, drink her milk, ride her or shear her wool; they did this because they said she gave birth to five litters, the last of which contained a male. The *sa`iba* was a she-camel which a man vowed to set free when he recovered from illness or returned from a journey, so he would not tie her up, and she would eat and drink what she liked and slept where she liked, and no one would ever harm her. The name *sa`iba* is derived from the verb *saba*, which means 'to flow' as water flows, and we know that the chief attribute of water is that it flows, and when rain falls onto a mountaintop it first fills the valley and then rises. This is how water flows as long as man does not intervene in any way by making dams, pumps, and water distribution networks. And the *wasila* was the she-camel which was born alongside a twin brother; when a she-camel bore its young, the owners of the camel would check the sex of the offspring, and if it was male they would eat it, whilst if it was female they would keep it for breeding, since a single stud is enough to breed with ten females. And if in a single litter a she-camel bore a male and a female, they would not slaughter either of them and would say, 'She came alongside *wasalat* (its brother)', and therefore made it inviolable to us.

In our Egyptian countryside, we find that the children hope that the offspring of a buffalo or cow will be male so that they can eat its meat and drink as much milk of the mother as they please. This is because children look to their immediate benefit. The adults, on the other hand, always hope that an animal will bear female offspring because females can be used to produce more stock. And the *hami* was the stud which was not allowed to be ridden and which they would leave to roam where he pleased after he had been bred with ten generations of females, or had sired ten litters of offspring. And one of the conditions of this process was to make sure that the stud's grandson – the son of his son – was fertile. Those, the *bahira*, the *sa`iba*, the *wasila* and the *hami*, were concoctions of the people of disbelief who invented lies about Allah; for the True Lord *Glorified is He* created these cattle so that people could enjoy eating them, drinking their milk, and employing them however they wished.

The meaning of 'inventing a lie' is to concoct a falsehood and then claim it in order to conceal something which is true; to lie is to cover over a truth which was previously established. And the established truth ever since Allah created man is that these cattle are all subdued to serve man. Allah *Glorified is He* conveyed His guidance to Adam *peace be upon him* and each generation was supposed to convey this guidance to the generation which followed it, but the passage of time and heedlessness caused people to forget certain laws. And therefore, Allah sent messengers to remind the people of His guidance and to uproot disbelief from their consciousness. So the disbelievers are people who have covered up Allah Guidance and His Message, and in doing this they attribute their own lying inventions to Allah.

An example of this is the story of how the idols were brought into the *Ka'ba*. A man named `Amr ibn Luhayy travelled to the Levant and found idols and statues there, so he brought a statue named Hubal to Mecca, and he was the first person ever to bring an idol to Mecca. And just as `Amr ibn Luhayy did that, other people made laws and rules which were not from Allah such as the *bahira*, the *sa`iba*, the *wasila* and the *hami*, and in doing so they attributed their own lying inventions to Allah's Guidance, and altered His Guidance. And even if no guidance had yet reached them from Allah, was it not nevertheless essential for them to consider these innovations and errors from a standpoint of logic and reason?! The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not prevent reason from deducing sound universal truths, but the mind might strive and toil through long experiences before arriving at a given truth. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to protect people from the woes of difficult experiences, and so He sent down His way of guidance to declare what is lawful and what is unlawful. And He *Glorified is He* clarifies that He sent down Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with guidance and the religion of truth to prevail over all false religions.

Someone might say, 'So why are there other religions in the world, such as Judaism and Christianity? And why are there atheists, so long as Allah decreed that there would be no other religion than Islam?' We say, the True Lord *Glorified is He* declares that the religion will prevail even if the idolaters hate it, and this means that there must be disbelievers, idolaters and followers of other religions over which Islam will prevail; and Allah will cause it to triumph by means of arguments and proofs, and by the testimony of the disbelievers, atheists and idolaters themselves because life's affairs will give them grief in every aspect of their lives and they will not find any solutions to these problems except by resorting to the teachings of Islam – not because it is Islam, but because the teachings and laws of Islam will offer solutions to their problems. Resorting to things which agree with Islam – even though they do not believe in Islam –is a strong testimony that Islam is the religion of natural disposition, and the religion of reason, and that everyone will come to need it whether they like it or not; and those who do not accept it as a religion, will find that they need to accept it as a system.

And the True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the noble verse by declaring, '…and most people do not understand.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 103) This is because Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to alert us to the fact that if they had applied reason to the matter, they would never have made the *bahira*, *sa`iba*, *wasila* and *hami* forbidden to themselves. We might ask, 'Did you make these things forbidden as a way of honouring them, or as a way of abstaining from them ascetically'? If it was a matter of asceticism this means that they took them away from the purpose for which Allah created them because He created them so we could eat their meat and benefit from them. And if it was meant to honour them, then is it an honour for a man to leave an animal which has served him without any protection from wolves, and without feeding it himself, and allowing it to eat from the land of others? This is disloyal to the animals which have served one, and this kind of behaviour does not preserve the life of this animal but rather exposes it to danger. Therefore, the sound mind rejects both this asceticism and this honouring. And if `Amr ibn Luhayy or anyone else brought ideas and traditions which Allah did not make, then we must give thanks to the True Lord *Glorified is He* for bringing Islam to amend these things.

And the one who examines the verses of the Quran closely finds that they represent a secure program for man's life on earth, as though they are a computer which programs man's motions on earth with a precision beyond that of any computer made by man. There is a divine' computer' which guides man so that he neither strays nor is led astray; for Allah corrects man's behaviour if he strays far from the straight path. And no one should say, 'I will only follow what my forefathers did', for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا۟ إِلَىٰ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ وَإِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ قَالُوا۟ حَسْبُنَا مَا
وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ ءَابَآءَنَآ ۚ أَوَلَوْ كَانَ ءَابَآؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

**when it is said to them, 'Come to what God has sent down,
and to the Messenger,' they say, 'What we inherited from our
forefathers is good enough for us,' even though their
forefathers knew nothing and were not guided [104]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 104)**

Rather a man must be aware that the first change made to Allah's way of guidance was the work of one of those of his forefathers who were overcome by heedlessness. And for a person to say, 'I will only follow what my forefathers did' is contradictory since clearly the first person who changed Allah's way of guidance did not say the same because he did not follow his father's example; and moreover, it is possible that the forefathers were not aware of the changes they made to Allah's Way of guidance, and were not guided to the truth. And elsewhere in the Quran Allah *Glorified is He* asserts the same fact of their adhering to the way of their forefathers in denunciation of Divine Guidance.

In the verse under discussion Allah does not say, 'follow', but rather 'come', which in Arabic is *ta'alow* derived from the word *`uluw* (height); it is as though they lowered themselves and went downwards when they said that it would suffice for them to follow that which their forefathers believed; for by saying this they rejected and denied everything which came to them in any way other than imitation of their forefathers, and therefore they barred and blocked themselves from the straight path.

As for the verse (170) in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, it indicates that it is possible that they could have added, 'and we shall also follow what the religion teaches'; and therefore, the condemnation is stronger for those who said that it is enough for them to follow their forefathers, as in verse (104) of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*. This shows us that the response from Allah in each of the two verses was appropriate for their positions. Why? Because the one who does not use his reason might learn from someone else who had engaged in thought and deliberation; if he does not use his own reason, he might still be able to learn from someone else. As for the person who knows nothing, he has nothing but ignorance, for he has not attained knowledge by his own accord, nor has he learned from anyone else. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the word 'why' as a way of censuring the practice of following forefathers instead of Allah's religion. And we may also observe that the True Lord *Glorified is He* refers to guidance in both verses because guidance comes from Allah; as for reason and knowledge, they are two human faculties. Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ عَلَيۡكُمۡ أَنفُسَكُمۡۖ لَا يَضُرُّكُم مَّن ضَلَّ إِذَا ٱهۡتَدَيۡتُمۡۚ
إِلَى ٱللَّهِ مَرۡجِعُكُمۡ جَمِيعٗا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ١٠٥

You who believe, you are responsible for your own souls; if anyone else goes astray it will not harm you so long as you follow the guidance; you will all return to God, and He will make you realize what you have done [105] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 105)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* said before: 'and when it is said to them, "Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger," they say, "Sufficient for us is that upon which we found our fathers." Even though their fathers knew nothing, nor were they guided.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104) These two verses indicate that there are two groups: One group which is astray, and another group which is guided; and a battle is raging between these two groups. Will this battle then last a long time? Indeed this battle will last for a long time because the people who are astray do not like to see the believer loving for his brother what he loves for himself, and they also benefit from the corruption in the world.

The believer loves obedience, and he tries to make his fellow believer love obedience too, and if he sees him doing something wrong, he tells him to stop and encourages him to do what is right. When good comes from a person, it benefits others, and the benefit it brings the one who does it might be delayed until the Hereafter. The believer's goodness, integrity, and honesty benefit society and harm those who are astray. And if all of society is corrupt, then the believer suffers from the corruption of this society. So it is in the interest of the believer to do good for others, so that goodness will spread and in turn benefit the believer as it moves through society. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…upon you is the responsibility for yourselves…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 105), that is, 'Take care of yourselves', as though the believers are a single unit. This expresses the essential importance of the spreading of mutual spiritual norms; and an example of this can be found in the instructions Allah gives for the management of the possessions of those who are weak of judgement. The True Lord *Glorified is He* directs us not to entrust the weak-minded with our property.

This is because the person who is not of sound mind, does not have the right to manage his wealth until he becomes sane; for this wealth belongs to all the Muslims, and they must manage it so that all the Muslims can benefit from it. And the first way this management is done is by advice; and if the person of weak judgement does not heed this advice, then whoever is closest to him must have him declared legally incompetent. This is because any evil caused by the incompetent person's management of his wealth, will harm society, and therefore the wealth must be considered as belonging to the people, and they must manage it until the incompetent person regains his sanity, whereupon he will be allowed to do what he wants with his wealth. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not say, 'Hand over to them your possessions' because the person of sound mind can now be trusted with his possessions; therefore, as soon as the weak-minded person becomes sane, his possessions are returned to him. And in the same way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states that upon us is the responsibility for ourselves, as mentioned in the verse, i.e. 'O believers, each one of you is responsible for himself and for the rest of the believers, and part of the responsibility of guidance is to rectify those who are corrupt; and no believer should say, "And what about me?"' And the verse further provides that those who go astray will do us no harm if we are guided, as in the verse. As long as you try to rectify corruption, you have done what you are responsible for doing.

As Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever observes an objectionable evil deed; he should change it with his hand, if he can. If he cannot, then he should change it with his tongue (by speaking out). If he cannot, then he should change it within his heart (by hating it and feeling that it is wrong) – and that is the weakest degree of faith.'(1)

How can the person change the evil within his heart? The believer should cut off those evildoers who went astray from Allah's right path. Changing evil within one's heart means that the believer should make the outward behaviour corresponding to the heart's feelings, so that the evildoer feels that others disapprove of him. If all believers cut off the strayed person even if they do not physically restrain him, he will surely be deterred. The believer should not greet the deviant person with a warm welcome or praise because he might trivialise evil when he is hypocritically favoured by others to win affection. As Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Whenever you come across people who speak with scorn about Our revelations, turn away from them until they move on to another topic…' (*al-An'am:* 68).

When all people turn their back on those who contravene the right path, this will hurt them. The root of all evil is the respect of society to evildoers; thus, this encourages them to increasingly sink into evil and do escalating irreparable harm. In villages, the person having a gun gains respect and favours. This matter leads him to be tyrannical with his weapon. If the people were to turn their backs on him, he would not be held in awe by the community and would be obliged to behave properly once again. However, what is the basis upon which is founded the principle of changing evil within the person's heart, i.e. discouraging and cutting off evildoers?

On being asked about this verse, '…It is (but) for your own souls that you are responsible…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 105), Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Rather, enjoin upon one another the good, and stay away from (and prohibit) the evil, until you see that avarice obeyed, lust followed, the worldly desires preferred and that everyone is amazed with his opinion. Then you should be worried about yourself and do not bother yourself of the common folk. Ahead of you are the days in which patience is like holding onto a burning ember, for the reward of righteous deeds during that time is like the reward of fifty men doing the same deeds.'(1) When you do not show love, mercy, or kindness towards the evildoer deviating from Allah's right path, you are, in this manner, bound to positivity.

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(1) *Muslim*, *Ahmad*, *Abu Dawud*, *At-Tirmidhi*, *An-Nisa'i and Ibn Majah*

When a believer asked the scholars, 'How should a man resist evil?' They answered, 'In a confrontation, the person who escapes from two people is guilty of fleeing, but the one who flees from three is not guilty'. In other words, if a man, in a battle, is faced by two enemies and runs off, he is guilty of desertion; but if he flees from three, he is considered to be reasonably protecting himself. The scholars derived this ruling from the promise that Allah makes to succour the believers if their enemies are double in number. He *the Almighty* says: 'But Allah has lightened your burden for now, knowing that there is weakness in you– a hundred steadfast of you will defeat two hundred and a thousand steadfast of you will defeat two thousand, by Allah's permission: Allah is with the steadfast.' (*al-Anfal:* 66)

Therefore, this is the admissible ratio of one to two; if the believer flees from two enemies in a battle, he thereby does not deserve Allah's promise of succour. Accordingly, he is considered a deserter who incurs Allah's wrath, and is condemned to the hell-fire. As per the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* promises the persevering faithful warrior facing two unbelievers with victory, whereas if the believer flees from facing three enemies, he will justifiably evade risks by saving his life. Islam does not ask people to throw themselves to suicide. Those who want to face the evils of this world should not cast themselves into destruction or fight an enemy who will surely defeat them due to superior strength in terms of numbers. Moreover, they should follow the tradition of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whose followers will continue in safety as long as they adhere to Allah's path.

As aforementioned, the concept of changing evil within one's heart means cutting off those who are deviant, echoed Allah's saying: 'You who believe, you are responsible for your own souls; if anyone else goes astray it will not harm you so long as you follow the guidance…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 105). The verse implies that everyone should look after and protect himself; the matter which represents a sort of guidance that is to know how to settle the issue with faithful belief. It should be taken into consideration the numbers of both the guided and the misguided; if they are equal, the former should confront the latter to resolve disputed matters. Correspondingly, if the number of the misguided people is as twice as the number of believers, the believers should still confront the, whereas, if the number of the misguided people is more than twice that of the believers, the believers are excused for protecting themselves by refusing to be engaged in confrontation, but rather they should cut off all sins and evildoers.

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(1) *Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi*

It is well known that every individual wants to enhance his stature amongst society. If he perceives that prestige and high standing are given to the righteous and the honest, he will endeavour to be alike. However, if he realises that good positions in society are granted to liars and deviants, he will endeavour to be the same. Therefore, the believers should only honour and highly regard the followers of the right path. Imam Ahmad Allah *rest his soul* narrated that Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* stood and praised and glorified Allah and then said, 'O people, although you recite this verse, "You who believe, you are responsible for your own souls; if anyone else goes astray it will not harm you so long as you follow the guidance…" (*al-Ma'ida:* 105); however, you inappropriately grasp its meaning. I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, "If people see an evil deed but do not change it, then Allah will soon send His punishment upon them all."

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures the believers that if they encounter any harm in their lives, they should recognise that this life is not the end, but there will be the Hereafter wherein we shall be granted the eternal bliss for being on Allah's path, whereas those who opposed His way will be tormented in the hell-fire. Allah *the Almighty* mentions this because the believer cannot be sure of his attitude in many situations; he might fight in a battle with a pure intention, but then he may go astray. Therefore, he will encounter penalty commensurate to his deviation.

Those who follow Allah's path should always keep this concept in the forefront of their consciousness. At the Battle of Uhud, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave the best example when he commanded the archers not to leave their positions even if they saw that the believers were victorious and that the enemies were routing. Nevertheless, the archers disremembered his command and went after the spoils as soon as they saw that the believers were winning. Accordingly, Allah denied them victory because they disobeyed the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the believers have been taught to duly obey Allah and His Messenger at all times.

But for Allah's saying: '…You will all return to Allah, and He will make you realise what you have done (in life)' (*al-Ma'ida:* 105), those who did not encounter Allah's victory during their lifetimes because they fought in the early battles and were martyred, they would not have known their eternal recompense. They primarily recognised that they would return to Allah and that He will reward and honour them in the Hereafter. As Allah *the Almighty* directs and manages the worldly life of the believer, He also directs his life in the Hereafter by rewarding him with eternal bliss in the paradise. Therefore, Allah says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ شَهَـٰدَةُ بَيْنِكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ حِينَ ٱلْوَصِيَّةِ ٱثْنَانِ ذَوَا
عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ أَوْ ءَاخَرَانِ مِنْ غَيْرِكُمْ إِنْ أَنتُمْ ضَرَبْتُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَأَصَـٰبَتْكُم مُّصِيبَةُ
ٱلْمَوْتِ ۚ تَحْبِسُونَهُمَا مِنۢ بَعْدِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ فَيُقْسِمَانِ بِٱللَّهِ إِنِ ٱرْتَبْتُمْ لَا نَشْتَرِى بِهِۦ ثَمَنًا
وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ ۙ وَلَا نَكْتُمُ شَهَـٰدَةَ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّآ إِذًا لَّمِنَ ٱلْـَٔاثِمِينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

You who believe, when death approaches any of you, let two just men from among you act as witnesses to the making of a bequest, or two men from another people if you are journeying in the land when death approaches. Keep the two witnesses back after prayer, if you have any doubts, and make them both swear by God, 'We will not sell our testimony for any price, even if a close relative is involved. We will not hide God's testimony, for then we should be doing wrong' [106]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 106)

Allah *the Exalted* notifies the believer to the fact that he should not only wait for the immediate recompense in this worldly life; but rather, he should also prepare himself for what awaits him in the Hereafter. In the agony of death, the believer should not disregard making bequests if he owes anyone or vice versa. Likewise, if a man travels abroad, he should also make bequests to reserve the rights of his heirs and to pay off any debts to discharge his obligation. He should appeal for two Muslims to act as witnesses to his bequest; however, if he is accompanied on his travels by non-Muslims, he should also appeal for them to act as witnesses to his bequest. Allah *the Almighty* has not given the believers any excuse in this concern, but the bequest should be testified by two witnesses. The verb'witness' as a word means that something is testified to as taking place at present. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…So any one of you who is present to witness that month, should fast…' (*al-Baqara:* 185). This means that if the month comes and the Muslim witnesses that it has begun, he should fast.' To witness' can also mean that someone takes the stand to eyewitness an event such as when Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Flog the adulteress and the adulterer one hundred stripes. Do not let compassion for them keep you from carrying out Allah's law—if you believe in Allah and the Last Day—and ensure that a group of believers witnesses their chastisement.' (*an-Nur:* 2) The verse indicates that a group of believers should witness the flogging.

Moreover, 'to witness' can also mean 'to reach judgement' as per Allah's saying: 'But he said, "She tried to seduce me." A member of her household reached a judgment (saying), "If his shirt is torn at the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying, but if it is torn at the back, then she is lying and he is telling the truth."' (*Yusuf:* 26-27) Hence, 'to witness' has many meanings; yet, the root meaning is 'to testify at present'.

It is known that 'bequest' means that the benefactor gives or bequeaths something good and important to someone else. The 'bequest' is granted to others who are not lawful heirs; that is, those who are assigned no lawful share of the inheritance, but to whom the benefactor might have cause to leave something of his. Nevertheless, the witness hearing the bequest should absolve himself of suspicion by telling the heirs what he has heard; for the bequest is the choice of the benefactor. It is probably that neither the witness nor the receiver of the bequest knows the reason behind it; only the benefactor does. Therefore, Allah mentions bequests before debts in His saying, '…After payment of any bequests or debts, with no harm done to anyone…' (*an-Nisa':* 12). Bequests are mentioned first even though debts must be settled before bequests are fulfilled because the debt is an obligatory right while the bequest is a donation. Allah decrees this because debts will always be sought by those to whom they are owed, whilst the receiver of the bequest might not have any right to claim, as being a gift, or his right to the bequest might not be confirmed by a written will or testimony. Therefore, Allah mentions bequests at first to draw the attention to the importance of bequests. Similarly, the benefactor may owe the receiver of the bequest educational, ethical, moral, or social favour; therefore, Allah stipulates on the benefactor to pay him back with gratitude for his good deeds influenced him in his life. This matter might not an issue of concern to the heirs; but rather, they might object to it; however, the benefactor is the one who knows the merits of the bequest.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wills to confirm the validity of bequests even if it is difficult to be confirmed; accordingly, He commanded the benefactor to make his bequest whether he is amongst his family or during his travels on feeling that death is close to him. In such case, he may call upon any two Muslims, if found, or even any two non-Muslim witnesses and declare the bequest to them. There is a story behind this: There was a Muslim man named Badil ibn Abu Maryam, the freed slave of Al-`As ibn Wa`il As-Sahmi who was travelling in the company of non-Muslims. He felt the pangs of death, so he wrote a note and placed it with his belongings, as a precautionary measure. Then, he called for two non-Muslims in his company named Tamim Ad-Dari and `Adi ibn Bada` and asked them, just before his death, to deliver the belongings to his family. But the two men opened his pack and found a valuable jug lined with silver and gold, so they sold it for one thousand dirhams shared between them. They handled the rest of the belongings to the deceased man's family who found the note, upon which was written all the details of the belongings, including the valuable jug. The family asked the two men about the jug, but they denied all knowledge of it and denied that they had seen the deceased selling it. After a while, the family found the jug on sale and acknowledged that it had been purchased from the two men who were present at the death of its original owner. So, the deceased family went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and complained that the bequest had been betrayed. In a little while, Allah's verse under discussion was then revealed, where He *the Almighty* sets His Commandment to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that these two betrayers should be summoned after having offered the prayers of their religion, and swear an oath by Allah to tell the truth. The family of the deceased was told to bring forth the paper and the Messenger unveiled the truth. Later, Tamim Ad-Dari embraced Islam and retold the true story, and paid the five-hundred-*dirham* share of the selling price and brought the share of `Adi, presenting then the whole price of the jug to the family of the deceased. Allah *Glorified is He* sets His Commandment to take hold of them after the prayer because as the person prays even if he is from another religion, as his soul is usually ready to say the truth after his stand before Allah. Moreover, Allah says: ‘You who believe, let two just men…act as witnesses…’ (*al-Ma’ida*: 106) because the testimonies differ from a person to another; thus, Allah obligates the testimonies sworn should be given by two separated individual witnesses.

The testimony requires the separation of the two points of view, and the person who determines this separation is the one who interviews the two persons of probity, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. This questioning should take place after the performance of prayer to verify truthfulness. If their testimonies clarify the bequest, it is effected, whereas if there is any doubt about their testimonies, then the two witnesses must swear that they will not sell the covenants of Allah for any price, fearing that they are counted among the evildoers. Afterwards, Allah says:

فَإِنْ عُثِرَ عَلَىٰٓ أَنَّهُمَا ٱسْتَحَقَّآ إِثْمًا فَـَٔاخَرَانِ يَقُومَانِ مَقَامَهُمَا مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱسْتَحَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْأَوْلَيَـٰنِ فَيُقْسِمَانِ بِٱللَّهِ لَشَهَـٰدَتُنَآ أَحَقُّ مِن
شَهَـٰدَتِهِمَا وَمَا ٱعْتَدَيْنَآ إِنَّآ إِذًا لَّمِنَ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

If it is discovered that these two are guilty [of perjury], two of those whose rights have been usurped have a better right to bear witness in their place. Let them swear by God, ‘Our testimony is truer than theirs. We have said nothing but the truth, for that would make us wrongdoers’ [107] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 107)

If it comes to light that the witnesses have forged the bequest of the deceased, or that they have dishonestly concealed some details; thus, two close relatives of the deceased may be summoned to swear by Allah that the two witnesses have lied, and that their accusation of lying is completely true. Additionally, they should swear that if it comes to light that their testimony is false, they deserve the punishment meted out to all evildoers. In this manner, Allah *the Exalted* gives ample means to enable people to establish justice by seeking out the truth as best as they can. Allah’s saying, ‘If it is discovered that’ means ‘if it incidentally comes to light without having been looked for’. If there is evidence that comes to light that the two witnesses who attended the death of the benefactor, are obviously lying, then two witnesses from the family of the deceased should be instead summoned to seek the truth.

In the event that reasoned the revelation of this verse, `Amr ibn Al-`As and Al-Muttalib ibn Wada`ah As-Sahmi *Allah be pleased with them* swore by Allah that the other two witnesses lied and that their own testimony was true and was not an unjust attack on the ones who gave the first testimony. The aim is to make sure that testimonies are given properly, as Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards:

ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰٓ أَن يَأْتُوا۟ بِٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهَآ أَوْ يَخَافُوٓا۟ أَن تُرَدَّ أَيْمَٰنٌۢ بَعْدَ
أَيْمَٰنِهِمْ ۗ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱسْمَعُوا۟ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلْفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

that will make it more likely they will give true and proper testimony, or fear that their oaths might be refuted by others afterwards. Be mindful of God and listen; God does not guide those who break His laws [108] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 108)

The first two witnesses, who testified the bequest of the deceased person at the time of his death, give their testimony after praying and after swearing that they say the truth. They should be careful to tell the truth for fear that their lies may be exposed later. As previously mentioned, the word ‘giving testimony’ or ‘be a witness’ can be used to refer to anything at which someone is present or attending; such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘(O Muhammad,) proclaim the Pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you on foot and on every kind of swift mount, emerging from every deep mountain pass; to be a witness for attaining benefits….’ (*al-Hajj:* 27-28) The verse indicates that when the people hear the call for the pilgrimage, they will come from every direction and by every means of transport, the matter which may be difficult. However, they will strive to witness attaining benefits. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). Allah's witness is a proclamation, whereas the angels' witness is recognition of His deity. Thus, the witness testifies attending an account at present.

If the witness, who is taking the stand in the courtroom, is interrogated by the prosecutor, the plaintiff's lawyer, or the defendant's lawyer, he would recount everything he has seen. As long as the witness is telling the truth, he is not afraid of which party examines him. No matter how many questions are asked and how many different approaches are used by the parties interrogating the witness, but as long as the event really happened, his testimony will be identically unchanged. The truthful witness is recounting an actual unchanged event; whereas, the dishonest witness will keep on making mistakes, getting confused and changing his testimony. Therefore, the skilful prosecutor stirs up the witness's memory for the most exact and meticulous details. As previously mentioned, the word 'witness' implies the notion of presence and attendance; but if the one who bears witness is the one who gives the verdict as well, then his testimony is a judgement in itself. This is the case when Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Allah bears witness…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

The story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* unfolds how Allah *Glorified is He* detained the step of brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) when they took his younger brother with them to Egypt, and how Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* arranged things so that he could keep his younger brother with him. As the story progressed, the stepbrothers of Yusuf (Joseph) discorded, as they were afraid of any harm might afflict their father on knowing the news that their younger brother is detained in Egypt. The Quran conveys that the elder stepbrother said: 'So go back to your father and say, "Your son stole. We can only tell you what we bear witness to. How could we guard against the unforeseen? Ask in the town where we have been; ask the people of the caravan we travelled with: we are telling the truth"' (*Yusuf:* 81-82).

The stepbrothers of Yusuf (Joseph) had firstly lied when they did their evil deed with him, but they told the truth the second time when the younger brother of Yusuf (Joseph) was detained. Thus, they told their father to ask either the people in the town where they were, or their companions in the caravan about the authenticity of their story. They were told that the cup used by the King for measurement had been found in their younger brother's pack. Therefore, their testimony this time was authentic and reflected what they had been told

In view of that, the testimony is the authentication that settles the dispute. For that reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed that a man should not give a testimony on something unless he saw it with his own eyes as clear as the sun, 'Give witness in a similar case (which is as clear as the sun), or leave it'.(1) Allah says: 'O People of the Book, why do you deny Allah's revelations when you bear witness they are true?' (*Al-'Imran:* 70).

Testimony has two requirements; the first is the presence of the witness as the incident occurs and the second is the authenticity in transmission of information. Therefore, Allah decrees that the testimony of two women, in certain rulings, is equal to that of one man. Someone might ask, 'How does Islam make the testimony of an ignorant or illiterate man equal to that of two women even if they are well-educated?' To answer this question, people should know that bearing witness is not an intellectual endeavour, but it is an issue of authenticity in transmission of information; the matter which has nothing to do with education. Testimony requires that the witness is present and rushes to the event, yet the woman cannot rush to the event due to her feminine features. Thus, she should be defended, protected from any danger that may harm her; accordingly, she should not mix with men or rush into any scene that may be full of men. If an incident takes place and a woman is present right there, she would not naturally get in on the act to ask about all the details, whereas, the man who witnesses the event will strive to find out all that has gone on. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* does not decree that the testimony should be taken from two women because they are less trustworthy or less educated than men are; but rather because bearing witness is a matter of being present at and involved in an event to accurately transmit information about the incident.

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(1) *It is narrated by Ad-Daylami and At-Tabarani on the authority of Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him. An-Najm said that Ar-Rafi`i related that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was asked about giving witness, he said, 'Do you see the sun?' The questioner replied, 'yes'. The Prophet said, 'Give witness in a similar case (which is as clear as the sun), or leave it.'*

Some people like to make a fuss about these issues and use them as a means of attacking those preachers who call to Allah's path. Yet, they should recognise that there is a difference between being at odds with someone who calls to Allah's right path and going so far to declare his enmity against Allah Himself as this does not merely reject the rule of the preacher, but it rejects the rule of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* sets His decree that the two witnesses should first offer the prayer and then be held back for a while, and summoned to give testimony. If the family of the deceased rejects their testimony about the bequest, then two of the family of the deceased should be summoned to testify about the bequest. All these measures are necessary so that the testimony can be authentically and properly given.

Allah *the Almighty* ends this noble verse by saying, '…Be mindful of Allah and listen; Allah does not guide those who break His laws.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108) This is directed to all believers in particular and all mankind in general because Allah only guides those people who are willing to follow His way of guidance, whereas He will not help disbelievers or evildoers to follow the right path.

It is noticeable that Allah *the Exalted* first recounts the events of the story and ends up with the ruling afterwards. When the ruling is given in an event upholding it, the person will be convinced with and cling to it more. Similarly, it is like the cup of water which is presented to a thirsty person, he drinks with desire and longing. The same as the medicine prescribed to a sick person during his worst throes of sickness, he accepts to swallow it longingly no matter how bitter it tastes. This is the reason that some rulings of the Quran followed the events which called for them so that the believer would be eager to apply them. Allah then says:

يَوْمَ يَجْمَعُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلرُّسُلَ فَيَقُولُ مَاذَآ أُجِبْتُمْ ۖ قَالُوا۟ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ عَلَّٰمُ ٱلْغُيُوبِ ١٠٩

On the Day when God assembles all the messengers and asks, 'What response did you receive?' they will say, 'We do not have that knowledge: You alone know things that cannot be seen' [109] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 109)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws the attention to the importance of getting ready for the Day of Resurrection when Allah gathers all the messengers to ask them, '…What response did you receive?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109) That is, 'how did the people respond to the way of guidance to which you called'? Thus, people should obey the responsibilities ordained by Allah in every aspect of their lives. This question implies an admonition to those who disobey the messengers; as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'What will they do when We bring a witness from each community, with you (Muhammad) as a witness against these people?' (*an-Nisa':* 41)

It is known that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will come, on the Day of Resurrection, as a witness for his followers and for all those messengers who preceded him. An example of this from our daily life, surely to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection, is the scene of a family waiting for the son outside the examination hall to ask him, 'What answers did you give'? The family here asks the son to describe how well he did in the exam in general; but if he is asked what responses did he give, this means that that he is requested to give the details of every answer. Allah's question to His messengers: '…What response did you receive?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109), superficially seems to be an interrogation to the messengers; but it is a question for those who disobeyed. This is an admonition for all disbelievers in the Divine Messages because the mission of the messengers is to deliver Allah's Message.

How will the messengers answer Allah on that Day? Their answer will precisely encapsulate all articles of faith, '…We do not have that knowledge. You alone know things that cannot be seen (that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception).' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109) However, how did the messengers say, 'We have no knowledge', even though they witnessed that some people indeed had faith, while others did not? The messengers only had knowledge of apparent matters such as people's words and conduct, but Allah *the All-Knower* Who knows best what hearts and souls conceal, reckons people per their intentions and conduct. Moreover, the messengers might have contemporarily known about the persons who believed in their teachings, but they did not know about who turned to be believers or disbelievers after their times. The answer which the messengers delivered expresses the utmost respect to Allah; they all know that Allah's knowledge is perfect and encompasses everything. Subsequently, Allah says:

إِذْ قَالَ ٱللَّهُ يَٰعِيسَى ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ ٱذْكُرْ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ وَٰلِدَتِكَ إِذْ أَيَّدتُّكَ بِرُوحِ ٱلْقُدُسِ
تُكَلِّمُ ٱلنَّاسَ فِي ٱلْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا ۖ وَإِذْ عَلَّمْتُكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَٱلتَّوْرَىٰةَ
وَٱلْإِنجِيلَ ۖ وَإِذْ تَخْلُقُ مِنَ ٱلطِّينِ كَهَيْـَٔةِ ٱلطَّيْرِ بِإِذْنِي فَتَنفُخُ فِيهَا فَتَكُونُ طَيْرًۢا بِإِذْنِي ۖ وَتُبْرِئُ
ٱلْأَكْمَهَ وَٱلْأَبْرَصَ بِإِذْنِي ۖ وَإِذْ تُخْرِجُ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِي ۖ وَإِذْ كَفَفْتُ بَنِيٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ
عَنكَ إِذْ جِئْتَهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ فَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١١٠﴾

Then God will say, ‘Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour to you and to your mother: how I strengthened you with the holy spirit, so that you spoke to people in your infancy and as a grown man; how I taught you the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; how, by My leave, you fashioned the shape of a bird out of clay, breathed into it, and it became, by My leave, a bird; how, by My leave, you healed the blind person and the leper; how, by My leave, you brought the dead back to life; how I restrained the Children of Israel from [harming] you when you brought them clear signs, and those of them who disbelieved said, “This is clearly nothing but sorcery” [110] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 110)

Allah *the Almighty* asks all messengers a general question; whereas, He asks `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* a specific question about a particular event. Allah *Glorified is He* intends to show us the politeness of the messengers with Him, and, on the other hand, the rebuked impoliteness of the disbelievers in rejecting His way of guidance. The specific question asked by Allah *the Almighty* to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is attributable to the fact that some followers believed in his divinity or partial divinity; the matter which is an affront to the absolute transcendence of Allah *the Exalted*. The utmost aberration done by previous nations was that some of which disbelieved in the messengers and others gave the lie to the messengers, but none of them ever assumed the divinity of the messenger. No one claimed this aberration except a certain sect of the Jews who alleged that `Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah; however, this sect had been vanished, and no Jew any longer claims this. Conclusively, Allah *the Almighty* declares that associating partners with Him is the utmost unforgivable sin.

Allah *Glorified is He* asks `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* this question after firstly reminding him of some blessings bestowed upon him and his mother

Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*. Allah *the Exalted* lists several blessings conferred upon `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* namely; the support of Allah to him with the holy inspiration of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* his miracle of speaking in the cradle to acquit Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* of the charges laid against her chastity. Moreover, Allah has taught `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* the Scripture, wisdom, the Torah and Gospel. Also, He bestows upon him the ability to make a clay bird and to blow into it to become a living being by His leave. As well as, He gives him the ability to restore the sight of the blind, to cure the leper and to bring the dead back to life again by His leave. Furthermore, Allah *the Exalted* protected `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from the conspiracies of the Jews who wanted to crucify and kill him even though he had brought them these miracles. Some of them believed, but still many others disbelieved, alleging that these miracles were only deceptive sorcery.

In considering a mere single miracle, the Might of Allah *the Exalted* is obviously clear. The discourse of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*, while he was a baby in the cradle is a miracle in itself. It is known that the cradle is a comfortable bed prepared for a new born that does not have the strength to protect itself from any un-comfortableness. Thus, the baby possesses sensations, but does not have the power to react to those sensations.

For example, the newborn cannot remove a pebble from under it, so the family makes a cradle and places the baby inside. It is merely a spirit within a tiny body with no strength at all, except having enough power to preserve its life by clinging to the breast of its mother. If a baby could speak in a cradle, then it possesses a will by which it could control its whole body to the extent that allowed it to speak; a matter which is impossible to take place. The only way that the baby can communicate is to cry, if a tiny insect, a gnat, or mosquito bites it, the baby will only be able to cry.

However, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* spoke in the cradle because Allah *the Almighty* gave him the power to do so. Allah made the baby speak as an adult. This contrasts the cradle wherein he sleeps. If he miraculously spoke in the cradle to absolve his virgin mother, he would further go on to speak as a grown man to convey the Message of Allah. `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* spoke in the cradle what Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in the Quran:' (But) he said: "I am a servant of Allah. He has granted me the Scripture, made me a prophet, and made me blessed wherever I may be. He commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as I live, and to cherish my mother. He did not make me domineering or graceless. Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again."' (*Maryam:* 30-33) The discourse of`Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* in his cradle aims to verify that his mother is virtuous and upright because as they offended her chastity, since nothing she could have said would have availed. Defending her chastity, Allah *the Almighty* reveals to her through Jibril (Gabriel) or `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* to convey unto the people, '…I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today.' (*Maryam:* 26) As Allah *Glorified is He* makes `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* a fatherless child born to a virgin woman outside the norms of creation, therefore, He has breached the norms of nature by the speaking of the new born child in his cradle to be a significant miracle.

Afterwards, Allah mentions that He *the Exalted* has taught him the Scripture and the Torah, and has revealed unto him the Gospel and has inspired him with wisdom: '…How I have taught you the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 110). 'Wisdom' means the perfect and exact speech per the inspiration of Allah – in Islam, this corresponds to Hadith (the sayings) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The precision of the Quranic discourse prevents any misapprehension that may arise that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was directly involved in any matter related to creation to prevent confusion in faith principles. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…How, by My leave, you fashioned the biomimicry of a bird out of clay, breathed into it, and it became, by My leave, a bird…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 110). Hence, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* did not create the bird, he only shaped a biomimicry of a bird out of clay because genuine real living beings are only created by Allah *the Exalted*.

This imitation is obvious in the statues carved by the sculptures from rocks, or in the clay mould having the shape of camels or birds; but they cannot breathe spirits into them. A man might make an inanimate object such as a cup of smelted sand, but it is impossible to have male and female cups being created and can then reproduce to give cup offspring! It is noticeable that when a man creates something, it always remains as it is; it does not reproduce, grow, or have sensations. Allah, the Supreme Creator, creates from nothing; whereas, man can only make things from existing matters originally created by Allah, buried either inside the earth or on its surface. Yet, Allah was not unkind to people; but rather, He let them allege that they have created something, but they must be aware that He *the Almighty* is the best of all creators.

The power of man, as a contingent being, differs from the power of the Lord, the Eternal, and the Omnipotent. When Allah decrees something with His Omnipotent Power, He can ascribe to one of His creatures to carry it out; yet, man cannot ascribe to another man something identical to what he makes.

An example to clarify this issue is that an infant cannot pick up a chair, yet a strong young man can easily pick the chair up for him. This young man does not provide the child with power or transfer it to him; but rather, he supplies him with the consequence of his power, and the child remains as weak as he was before. However, Allah *the Exalted* supplies whomever He wills to do whatever He wills; due to His awesome might, He may provide powerless people with some of His power to make them powerful. Therefore, Allah supplies `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* by His leave with His power to give life to the bird by blowing into the clay to be turned to a living being. Earlier, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did this when he requested from Allah *the Exalted* '…My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead…' (*al-Baqara:* 260). Hence, Allah asked him, '…Do you not believe, then?' (*al-Baqara:* 260). He replied, '…'Yes', said Abraham, 'but just to put my heart at rest...' (*al-Baqara:* 260).

This verse unveils a certain point of view because Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* indeed had faith, which means that his heart is at peace with a certain doctrine. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not ask Allah, 'Do you raise the dead to life?' He first acknowledged that Allah *the Almighty* has the power to raise the dead, but he wanted to be more certain by knowing the method of doing this. Asking about the method of doing something has nothing to do with faith, but it rather requires a practical application. Accordingly, Allah commanded him to take four birds, train them to come back to him so that he could become well acquainted with them, then to cut them up into pieces, place each piece on a hilltop and then call them back. When Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* called the pieces, they recollected to be the same four birds as they had been before and came back to him.

In the same way, Allah sets His will that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* makes a clay bird and then blows into it to become a living being by Allah's leave. Allah provides`Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* with the power of healing a man born blind. Some people might allege that, in modern times, corneal transplants have been developed, and some of those who were born blind have been allowed to see. This ophthalmological progress is based on scientific experimentation, whereas, the power that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was endowed to heal a man born blind represented a breaching of the laws of nature, and intended to be a miracle. Similarly, Allah *the Exalted* provides `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* with the power to cure the leper; i.e. the person whose skin has become paper-white due to this illness. Furthermore, Allah saved him from the conspiracies of the children of Israel as they wanted to harm and kill him. Witnessing all these miracles, some people believed, while others disbelieved and accused `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* of being a sorcerer. This represented a blatant lie against him, for he is a prophet sent with obvious miracles.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* enumerates the blessings granted to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* not to draw his attention to these blessings, for he knows them well; but rather, they represent a reproach to those who witness these miracles and yet still did not have faith in Allah afterwards. Allah *Glorified is He* has provided and supported `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* with all these blessings to strengthen the message. `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is primarily merited such blessings because he is elected, chosen and aided by Allah. It is observable that the miracles and blessings provided by Allah to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* are of two kinds; those targeting to convince people who possess sound minds, hearts and consciences, and those targeting to convince materialistic people who do not believe in the dominion of Allah over the unseen realm. The first kind represents the knowledge that Allah *the Almighty* provides him with; i.e. the Scripture, wisdom, the Torah and Gospel.

The second kind represents the materially and tangibly witnessed miracles that could not be the work of a human being. Examples on this kind are numerous, such as the biomimicry of a bird shaped out of clay and turned into a living being, the dead brought back to life, the healed blind and the cured leprous. As these miracles breached natural and material laws; therefore, Allah finishes each phrase speaking about one of them by saying, ‘by My leave’. This means that such miracles would not have happened but for Allah’s permission. Whereas, Allah *the Exalted* does not say ‘by My leave’ in other miracles because it is clear and obvious in other cases that they are done by Allah’s leave, but He specifically adds this phrase to such miracles to clarify to everyone who dignifies and raises `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* to a level higher than that of a prophet, that he is a mere messenger aided by Allah. Moreover, this phrase draws the attention of the followers of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* not to be misled by these signs or consider them as distinctions for him alone; but rather, they are nothing but miraculous signs to verify Allah’s Message.

All such miracles breached the materialistic laws of nature; accordingly, Allah repeats that these were done by His leave. This shows that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* did not have absolute use of Allah’s power; but rather, it was exclusively limited to those miracles for which Allah gave permission.

Every time natural law is breached by prophets, pious respected holy people or anyone whom Allah provides with illumination is only meant to honour them. Allah does not supply anyone with the power to have absolute knowledge of the unseen; but rather, He sometimes gifts some of His creatures with partial knowledge of certain secrets. Certainly, Allah has the complete ownership over the unseen, ‘He has the keys to the unseen, no one knows them but Him…’ (*al-An’am:* 59).

There is no person who has full knowledge of the unseen due to his own power; but rather, Allah teaches him the elements of His unseen knowledge. There are certain impermanent occasions when Allah manifests His grace to authenticate a matter, and then the venerated person goes back to live within the natural laws of Allah’s universe. The natural laws of the universe are the conditions and rules which Allah has established in His universe to serve the believer, the disbeliever, the righteous, and the sinful. Examples on such laws governing the universe are; the rising and the setting of the sun, the movement of rain-bearing clouds and the availability of the cultivable agrarian plots on earth. Natural laws are breached by Allah's leave to provide Messengers, Prophets and pious venerated men with miracles. These signs from Allah are meant to authenticate the conveyable message of the messenger. This authentication granted by Allah is conditioned by two stipulations. The first is that the authenticated people should have reached a high level of skill in the field wherein the miracle takes place; for example, Allah breaches the natural laws for the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which was originally a tree-branch, and orders him to cast it down, whereupon it turned into a slithering snake. What has been done to the staff was not an act of sorcery, but Allah *the Almighty* transformed it from one being into another at the time when people excelled in sorcery. It is noticeable that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* felt at peace and attracted to his Lord's company, so he elongated his speech to Him, using a lot of words to enumerate the uses of the staff to make this intimacy last longer, 'It is my staff,' he said, 'I lean on it, restrain my sheep with it…' (*Ta Ha:* 18). Afterwards, he consciously transferred to the style of paying due attention to reverence and respect, so he summarised his words, saying, '…I also have other uses for it.' (*Ta Ha:* 18) Subsequently, the command came to cast down the staff, '…Throw it down, Musa (Moses)!' (*Ta Ha:* 19) Upon this, the staff breached the governing natural laws known by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and was no longer an object used for leaning upon or restraining sheep, but transformed from its wooden state into the animal state and became a snake, 'He threw it down and– lo and behold! – it became a fast-moving snake.' (*Ta Ha:* 20)

Therefore, it was appropriate that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was astonished and stricken with fear; however, when he knew the secret of his staff, he became no longer terrified, but challenged the sorcerers brought forth by the Pharaoh on the day of the festival. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* acknowledged that he was not a sorcerer like them, but that he had a miracle granted by Allah which would also astonish the sorcerers. The sorcerers recognised that their magic was only an illusion, on the contrary to the miracle brought by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* where Allah *the Almighty* transforms things. Therefore, the sorcerers came forth on the day of the festival in obedience to the Pharaoh's command. The Quran alludes that the forced labour system was then applied; thus, the sorcerers asked for a reward if they win over Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'The sorcerers came to Pharaoh and said, "Shall we be rewarded if we win?"' (*al-A'raf:* 113)

Despite the different talents of the sorcerers and their skill in miscellaneous forms of sorcery, they all admitted the truth and fell prostrate to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* on casting down his staff. The Quran quoted their saying, '…"We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)."' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 47-48) Thus, they realised that what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did was not a result of human power; but rather, out of a supernatural power. This was one of the miracles that Allah provides His messengers with to authenticate their messages. Likewise, the people of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* excelled in medicine, but none of them could dare to claim that they could cure the blind and leprous with a single word, or to return the dead back to life. Allah *Glorified is He* makes miracles easy for His messengers; in Islam, the Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca to Jerusalem took place in the blink of an eye. In modern times, the technological and technical progress has led to inventing rockets traversing quickly a distance such as that between Mecca and Jerusalem; however, such progress has been achieved after painstaking experiments. Conversely, when Allah has ordained this, He only said a mere word and the miracle instantaneously occurred. It should be highlighted that the miracle is not a previously planned-for innovation; but rather, a divinely determined supernatural event. The miracle is a disruption of a natural cosmic law which is determined by Allah *the Almighty* rather than a result of any innovation, invention, or discovery.

Allah *the Almighty* consoles `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* by mentioning these miracles, but the disbelievers of his people alleged that they were only works of deceptive sorcery, '…Those of them who disbelieved said, "This is clearly nothing but sorcery."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 110) It is known that Allah *the Exalted* created the human being and made faith to be his natural disposition; thus, the more man becomes heedless, the more the faith is lost. This heedlessness led to the state of hardened encrusted hearts (not accepting guidance) due to recurrent committed sins: 'No indeed! Their hearts are encrusted with what they have done.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 14) It was narrated that Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* narrated to us two Hadiths (Prophetic sayings). I have seen one (become reality), and I am waiting for the other. He told us, "Trustworthiness descended in the innermost (root) of the hearts of people. Then the Quran was revealed and they learnt from the Quran and they learnt from the *Sunnah*." Then he *peace and blessings be upon him* told us about the removal of trustworthiness. He said, "Man would have a wink of sleep and trustworthiness would be taken away from his heart leaving the impression of a faint mark. He would again sleep and trustworthiness would be taken away from his heart leaving an impression of a blister, as if you rolled down an ember on your feet, it causes pain, and you see it swollen, while it contains nothing." He *peace and blessings be upon him* then took up a pebble and rolled it down over his foot and said, "The people would enter into transactions amongst one another and hardly a person would be left who would return things entrusted to him." And there would be a scarcity of honest people till it would be said, "In such and such tribe there is a trustworthy man." And they would also talk about how prudent a person he is, how broad-minded and intelligent he is, whereas in his heart there would not be faith even to the weight of a mustard seed. I have passed through a time in which I did not care with whom amongst you I entered a transaction, for if he were a Muslim his faith would compel him to discharge his obligations to me and if he was a Christian or a Jew, the ruler would compel him to discharge his obligations to me. But today I would not enter into a transaction with you except for so-and-so.'(1)

There is another Hadith narrated by Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* about the end of trust and the coming of tribulations and ordeals, in which he said, 'We were sitting in the company of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* and he said, "Who amongst you has heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* talking about turmoil?" Some people said, "It is we who heard it." Upon this he remarked, "Perhaps by turmoil you presume the unrest of man regarding his household or neighbour", they replied, "Yes". 'Umar observed and said, “Such (an unrest) would be done away with by prayer, fasting, and charity. But who amongst you has heard from the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* describing that turmoil which would come like the wave of the ocean?” The people hushed into silence, and I replied, “It is I.” He (‘Umar) said, “Ye, well, your father was also very pious. Hudhayfa said,” I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, Temptations will be presented to men’s hearts as reed mat is woven stick by stick, and any heart which is impregnated by them will have a black mark put into it, but any heart which rejects them will have a white mark put in it. The result is that there will become two types of hearts; one white like a white stone which will not be harmed by any turmoil or temptation so long as the heavens and the earth endure; and the other black and dust-coloured like a vessel which is upset, not recognizing what is good or rejecting what is abominable, but being impregnated with passion.” Hudhayfa said, “I narrated to him (‘Umar), “There is between you and that (turmoil) a closed door, but there is likelihood of its being broken.”’ Umar said, “Would it be broken? You have been rendered fatherless. Had it been opened; it would have been perhaps closed also.”(1)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*, *Muslim*, *At-Tirmidhi*, *Ibn Majah and Ahmad*

This is how Prophet Muhammad spoke about the ending of trustworthiness and the lack of spiritual immunity in the human soul. Allah *Glorified is He* wants His servants to have spiritual immunity constantly; therefore, Allah sent messengers to develop this immunity and to help the society restrain every individual’s tendency towards causing temptation.

When corruption spread on earth, we find that Allah sent a messenger to restore the self-reproaching soul and to revive society’s ability to harmonise the conduct of people in the light of Allah’s religion. Therefore, we find that those who resisted the messengers benefited from corruption and its effects. As Allah’s religion gives support to the oppressed, it incurs the wrath of the tyrannical oppressors causing them to attack and resist the messengers and the teachings they conveyed from Allah. The religious teachings would end this corruption which brought benefits and yields to tyrannical and deluded people that they considered tremendous.

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(1) *Muslim*

The leaders of Quraysh opposed Prophet Muhammad's *da`wah* (call to Allah) because he called for equality among people, and they knew that declaring that there is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah meant that they would lose their power to terrify people and the tribes. If the testimony of faith had been merely a matter of saying the words without any change, they would have said it, but this testimony changed life politically, economically and socially. In addition, no one would oppress any other person, as all people are equal. Therefore, the leaders of Quraysh resisted the Islamic *da`wah* (call to Allah). Hence, we see that whenever a messenger came, he was opposed and resisted by corrupt and tyrannical people who uphold corruption and tyranny on earth, just as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And thus We have made for every prophet an enemy - devils from mankind and jinn…' (*al-An'am:* 112). The evidence on this point is Allah's will to start the call to faith during the pre-Islamic era amidst the leaders of all the Arabs, Quraysh whom no one would dare to challenge. However, Muhammad's *da'wah* (call to Allah) did not gain victory when he was in Mecca, the centre of power. If victory had been gained in the first stage of the *da'wah* (call to Allah) while Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was still living among his people in Mecca, some people would have said that he gained it by means of people who were accustomed to mastery and desired to rule the whole world, not just the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, Quraysh helped Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only to keep hold of this power and to extend their influence on other people. However, Allah caused the victory of the *da`wah* (call to Allah) to be achieved in Medina. The earlier Islamic *da`wah* (call to Allah) was first received by the masters, then it was advocated by the weak and the downtrodden people who could not protect themselves, then they emigrated and Allah made them strong enough to face the powerful people.

We find that everyone who calls to Allah wants to preserve the goodness of prophetic teachings so that hearts do not become corroded; yet, this approach angers the tyrants and deviants who wish to rule the world with their ideas. If the one who calls to Allah does not have any enemies, this means that his share of the prophetic legacy is slight; while if he has many enemies, this means that he has inherited a large share of the prophetic legacy.

When those who disbelieved in `Isa (Jesus) realised the greatness of miracles that occurred to him, they said, '…This is not but obvious magic!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 110) This means that the miracles of `Isa (Jesus) angered and enraged them and filled them with woe. The saying mentioned in the previous verse was said by people who hated Allah's guidance, so disbelief of the disbelievers is a blessing by which Allah supports the one who calls to Him because this motivates him and encourages him to defend Allah's religion. Accordingly, objection to and resistance of faith highlights the believer's strong belief in the creed in which he believes. Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَإِذۡ أَوۡحَيۡتُ إِلَى ٱلۡحَوَارِيِّـۧنَ أَنۡ ءَامِنُواْ بِي وَبِرَسُولِي قَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا وَٱشۡهَدۡ بِأَنَّنَا مُسۡلِمُونَ ١١١

and how I inspired the disciples to believe in Me and My messengers – they said, "We believe and bear witness that we devote ourselves [to God]" [111] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 111)

The word *hawari* (literally, a person in white clothes) and the intended meaning is a disciple of Prophet `Isa (Jesus) is derived from a concrete concept, as it also literally means plain white flour. In addition, it refers to everything that is extremely pure, and in this verse, it means a sincere person who loves of the religion that enjoins goodness. Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse, 'And how I inspired…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 111). The word *awha'* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means to inspire and notify discretely, i.e. Allah inspired them to believe in the message which Prophet `Isa (Jesus) conveyed from Allah in the way He inspired Prophet Musa's mother to cast her son into the river so that it would bring him safely to shore. However, this inspiration differs from the revelation received by Allah's messengers, as this revelation is Jibril (Gabriel) who conveyed to the messengers Allah's Law. As for the inspiration received by the mother of Musa (Moses) and the disciples, it was a spiritual notion proven to be true by the person who received it. When the spiritual notion is not contradicted by reality and finds no objection in the human soul, this is a form of inspiration. An example of this case is when a person expects his friend to arrive from a journey or expects a certain kind of food he likes and then finds it on the table.

Inspiration that Allah gives to His living beings does not contradict with the soul or the real world, otherwise, it is not received from Allah, as devils from mankind, and jinn inspire to one another decorative speech in delusion.

Allah inspired the disciples to believe in the message of `Isa (Jesus); therefore, as soon as `Isa (Jesus) came with the message and they heard that he was a messenger from Allah, they declared their belief in him and became his devoted disciples. The Arabic word *idh* refers to the time of remembering the incident in which the disciples said that they believed in `Isa (Jesus) as a prophet sent by Allah and called him to bear witness that they surrendered themselves to Allah. Then Allah says:

إِذْ قَالَ ٱلْحَوَارِيُّونَ يَٰعِيسَى ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ هَلْ يَسْتَطِيعُ رَبُّكَ أَن يُنَزِّلَ
عَلَيْنَا مَآئِدَةً مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ ۖ قَالَ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١١٢﴾

When the disciples said, 'Jesus, son of Mary, can your Lord send down a feast to us from heaven?' he said, 'Beware of God if you are true believers' [112] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 112)

It seems that `Isa (Jesus) told them to fear Allah and not to ask Him for this sign because if they declared faith, they should not ask Allah to show them any sign to prove the truthfulness of His messenger. In addition, they should be satisfied with the signs, which Allah gave `Isa (Jesus) to prove that his message was truly from Him. They also must abide by the instructions of the message that they claimed to believe.

Scholars scrutinised the meaning of Allah's saying, '*hal yastati` rabbuka*' (*al-Ma'ida:* 112), as its apparent meaning is 'can your Lord', and wondered how the disciples could say this although they testified to `Isa (Jesus) that they surrendered to Allah. The scholars also said that if someone wishes to handle language, he must be aware of the words etymologies, different uses, and characteristics. The Arabic word *yastati`* in this context means *yuti`* (obey), just as the word *`istajaba* means *ajab* (respond). Therefore, they meant to ask, 'Will your Lord respond to us by sending down a feast from Heaven?' So, *yastati`* (obey) corresponds to *yastajib* (respond) in this verse. Allah *Glorified is He* can do all things, and all creatures obey Him and yield to

His decree; in addition, He does not request, rather, He commands, as He says, ‘His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, ‘Be, and it is.’ (*Ya Sin:* 82)

When Allah *Glorified is He* says to a thing ‘Be’, He knows that it will obey Him, and He will not command it to obey unless it is prepared to respond and come into existence as soon as it hears Allah say, ‘Be’. An example on this meaning is when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘When the sky has split (open, and has responded to its Lord and was obligated (to do so).’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2) It waits to hear Allah’s Command which it responds to and obeys. Everything in this universe obeys its Creator.

The meaning of *yastati`* in this verse may mean ‘will He do’ in which case the purpose is expressed by the means leading to it because ability is how an action is carried out. It was said that the meaning is, ‘Could you ask your Lord to do this without having any impediment?’ Al-Kasa`i and others read the verse as, ‘*hal tastati’ rabbaka*’ with the word ‘*rabbaka*’ in the accusative case, meaning ‘Can you ask your Lord’ omitting ‘*su`al*’ (ask) and putting the word ‘*rabbaka*’ (Lord) in the accusative case. Az-Zamakhshari said, Allah does not describe them as having sincere faith, but He says that they claim to do, as their saying, “…can your Lord…” (*al-Ma’ida:* 112), is not supposed to be uttered by any true believers who glorify their Lord.’

The disciples said, as the Quran tells us:

قَالُوا۟ نُرِيدُ أَن نَّأْكُلَ مِنْهَا وَتَطْمَئِنَّ قُلُوبُنَا وَنَعْلَمَ أَن قَدْ
صَدَقْتَنَا وَنَكُونَ عَلَيْهَا مِنَ ٱلشَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿١١٣﴾

They said, ‘We wish to eat from it; to have our hearts reassured; to know that you have told us the truth; and to be witnesses of it’ [113] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 113)

It seems that they wanted to imitate Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he asked Allah how He resurrects the dead to reassure his heart. Their faith was based on certain knowledge, but they now wanted to have certainty, so they asked for the feast, which afterwards became a plain reality. Accordingly, we have known that there is a difference between a person believing on his own and bearing witness to his faith before others, as the person who bears witness to faith before others needs deeper certainty.

Allah informs us about what the saying of `Isa (Jesus), which was different from what they said about this feast. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ ٱللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَآ أَنزِلْ عَلَيْنَا مَآئِدَةً مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ تَكُونُ لَنَا
عِيدًا لِّأَوَّلِنَا وَءَاخِرِنَا وَءَايَةً مِّنكَ ۖ وَٱرْزُقْنَا وَأَنتَ خَيْرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾

Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'Lord, send down to us a feast from heaven so that we can have a festival –the first and last of us– and a sign from You. Provide for us: You are the best provider' [114] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 114)

Allah's saying, '…a feast from heaven…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 114) means that Allah has given many feasts on earth, and certainly the whole world is like a table laden with many bounties which man can attain if he works and strives hard. When a person works and strives to harvest crops from the land and grazes livestock, he may bring his spouse an abundance of flour, rice, honey, sugar and oil which may provide for the family for a whole year and his wife may slaughter a fowl and cook it along with bread and vegetables.

Therefore, the whole world is considered a banqueting table prepared by Allah, from which every person can take per how much he works. The word *ma`idah*, which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, means a table spread with food. If it contains no food, it is called *khawan* in Arabic. The root of the word *ma`idah* is made up of the letters *mim*, *`alif* and *dal*. The verb *yamid* (shake due to the abundance of food on it) is derived from it. It also refers to the food which it serves, for the word *ma`id* means 'the person who is given something'. The saying of `Isa (Jesus) is full of worthy values, as he asked Allah to grant them a feast fit for a festival that delights the first and last of them, and to be considered a sign from Him. `Isa (Jesus) also asked the All-Provider to provide for them and he gratefully acknowledged that Allah is the best of providers.

When we compare the saying of `Isa (Jesus) to that of the disciples, we notice the difference between the faith of the person who delivers Allah's message and that of the people who received this message from `Isa (Jesus). The faith of `Isa (Jesus) was strong and mature, while the faith of the disciples was incomplete. The strength of `Isa's (Jesus's) faith came from the fact that he received the message directly from Allah, while this is not the case with the disciples although they believed in the message they received from Allah by means of their messenger. Therefore, the messenger's faith is stronger and greater than that of the believers. Therefore, `Isa (Jesus) corrected their request when he supplicated to his Lord.

`Isa (Jesus) is a chosen and elected messenger. Therefore, he adjusts matters appropriately, saying, '*allahumma rabbana*' (O our Lord). The Arabic word *allahumma* (O Allah) is derived from '*ya* Allah', but due to the frequent use of the vocative '*ya*', it is dropped and a letter *mim* is added at the end of the word, forming the word *allahumma*. This word prepares the human soul for silent supplication to Allah in reverence and confidence that He will answer it. This way of supplication comes from the servant's love for his Lord, as he does not place any vocative particle between himself and his Lord's Name.

We can observe that `Isa (Jesus) began his supplication to Allah by mentioning the attribute of divinity *allahumma*, as he was a prophet who knew well the manifestations of Allah's attributes, which are manifestations of worship from the worshipped deity to the worshipping person. As for the manifestations of the word *rabb* (Lord), they are manifestations of sustenance from the Lord to His servants. The difference between Allah's divine bestowal to the living beings and His lordly bestowal is that the divine bestowal is an obligation enjoined by the Worshipped Deity to the worshipping person who obeys all the commands of the Worshipped Deity and avoids all that He forbids. However, the lordly bestowal means that Lord undertakes to sustain bodies, minds, talents and hearts, and He is the Lord of both the believer and the disbeliever, as He sustains the disbelievers even though they deny His divinity; He provides them with the material things on which their lives depend.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says about these disbelievers: 'And if you asked them, "Who created the heavens and earth?" they would surely say, "Allah." Say, "All praise is due to Allah"; but most of them do not know.' (*Luqman:* 25)

Allah tells His prophet to ask the disbelievers who created the heavens and the earth, and they found no answer other than to say that Allah is the Creator, an answer which is given instinctively. There are many examples on this point in our daily life – to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection – when children ask who made something, the answers revert to Allah Who bestows in people all bounties. If a child asks his mother, 'What are we going to eat?' And the mother tells him that they are going to eat okra. The child asks' From where?', and the mother says, 'Your father bought it from the vender.' Then the child asks, 'Where did the vender get it from?' And the mother says, 'From the wholesaler.' The child asks, 'Where did the wholesaler get it from?' The mother replies, 'From the farmer who ploughed the earth and planted the okra seeds.' The child asks, 'And who created the earth and made the plants grow?' The mother replies, 'Allah, our Lord, who created everything.'

In her conversation with the child, the mother has reached the answer clarifying our Lord's bestowal which is gained by both the believer and disbeliever. However, the believer gains the divine bestowal in the form of his religious responsibilities, in addition to lordly bestowal. The divine bestowal gives the believers an additional grace which will never run out, as it grants them a time in which they will never die and will never leave the blessings. By adhering to religion, the believer attains the brightness of certainty and interest in doing righteous deeds in accordance with Allah's religion.

`Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), said, supplicating to Allah, '…send down to us a feast from heaven….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 114) He invoked Allah's divinity first, acknowledging that worship is owed to Allah, and abiding by the obligations He ordains. Then He invoked Allah as Lord, Who sends down religious obligations to them and undertakes their sustenance, to send down to them a feast from Heaven. His invocation dealt with the spiritual values first then the material ones, but the disciples gave precedence to material needs, as they asked for a feast full of different types of food, '…We wish to eat from it, to have our hearts reassured, to know that you have told us the truth and to be witnesses of it.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 113) Due to the spirituality of `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), represented in him being selected as a messenger, he gave precedence to spiritual values over food, saying, '…Lord, send down to us a feast from heaven so that we can have a festival – the first and last of us – and a sign from You. Provide for us; You are the best provider.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 114)

Actually, food represents part of provision, but provision is not only represented in food, as it includes everything one needs and benefits from, as food, drink, clothes, knowledge and forbearance are different types of provision. Therefore, `Isa (Jesus) used a general word which included both food and other things.

Allah answers the supplication of `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), saying:

قَالَ ٱللَّهُ إِنِّى مُنَزِّلُهَا عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَمَن يَكْفُرْ بَعْدُ مِنكُمْ فَإِنِّىٓ أُعَذِّبُهُۥ
عَذَابًا لَّآ أُعَذِّبُهُۥٓ أَحَدًا مِّنَ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾

God said, 'I will send it down to you, but anyone who disbelieves after this will be punished with a punishment that I will not inflict on anyone else in the world' [115] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 115)

When Allah uses the Arabic word *inny* (I), He uses what is called in Arabic *nun al-ifrad* (singular pronoun). We know that there are two ways in which Allah *Glorified is He* refers to Himself. When He speaks about His Oneness, He uses the singular pronoun, saying, '*innany ana* Allah (Verily, I am Allah)' (*Ta Ha:* 14).

When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about how His Infinite Power encompasses all the attributes of Perfection which are required to bring things into existence, He uses *nun al-ta`zhim* (plural pronoun), 'Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian…' (*al-Hijr:* 9).

Allah *Glorified is He* wants here to impart the notion of His Oneness; therefore, He says, '…I will send it down to you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 115). This means that the feast would come down from Heaven, an action which could not be done by anyone but Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then Allah says: but anyone who disbelieves after this will be punished with a punishment by which I have not punished anyone among the worlds." (*al-Ma'ida:* 115) He selects His messengers then sends them, and no servant should say that such-and-such messenger is superior to any other because Allah knows His messengers best: '…Allah is most knowing of where He places His message.…' (*al-An'am:* 124) And we must follow the messengers. The Noble Quran informs us that some of the people of the pre-Islamic era tried to express their wonder at the Quran which was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from (one of) the two cities?" Do they distribute the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees (of rank) that they may make use of one another for service. But the mercy of your Lord is better than whatever they accumulate.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 31-32)

The people of the pre-Islamic era wondered why the Quran was not revealed to a great man from Mecca or Ta'if with the intention of mocking Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* gave the final word to rebut this, as no one has the right to choose a messenger from among the people of power or prestige because the messenger is elected by Allah.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* gives each messenger the preparation he requires for his mission and the station of a prophet and messenger is the highest rank in both this life and the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* Who arranges the life affairs of His creatures, has divided talents among His servants out of His Mercy so that they support and aid one another and need the work done by each other. When Allah sent a messenger, He chose a sign appropriate for him and for the time when he was sent. Whenever a people asked for a sign and Allah gave it to them then they disbelieved, Allah inflicted on them painful torment. When the followers of a messenger ask him for specific signs, this implies that they attempt to evade adhering to Allah's religion. In addition, they insist on disbelieving in the messenger although they ask him for signs; therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And nothing has prevented Us from sending signs except that the former peoples denied them. And We gave Thamud the she-camel as a visible sign, but they wronged her. And We send not the signs except as a warning.' (*al-Isra':* 59)

Likewise, the people of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him to bring them signs apart from the verses of the Quran even though the verses of the Quran can convince anyone who has a sensible mind and a sensitive heart. Allah’s clear and constant method of dealing with those who ask for signs then disbelieve is to inflict grievous suffering on them. An example of this is the people of Thamud who asked for a she-camel to prove the veracity of the message of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* then disbelieved after the miracle occurred, so Allah punished them severely.

Some of the people around Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went too far in requesting strange signs: ‘And they say, “We will not believe you until you break open for us from the ground a spring. Or (until) you have a garden of palm trees and grapes and make rivers gush forth within them in force (and abundance). Or you make the heaven fall upon us in fragments as you have claimed or you bring Allah and the angels before us. Or you have a house of gold or you ascend into the sky. And (even then), we will not believe in your ascension until you bring down to us a book we may read.” Say, “Exalted is my Lord! Was I ever but a human messenger?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-93)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was merciful with his family and kinsfolk, so he did not ask Allah for any signs other than the ones which Allah sent to him. Prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* supplicated Allah in a polite manner appropriate for messengers to send a feast down. The scholars differ concerning whether Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* sent this feast down or not. Some of them stayed with Allah’s saying, ‘Allah said, “I will send it down to you…”’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 115), while others say that Allah *Glorified is He* set a condition for sending down the feast inflicting torment on them if they did not believe thereafter, so they retracted their request for the feast. Those who agree that the feast was sent down disagree regarding its description. Some of them say that the feast consisted of a grilled fish that had neither scales nor lateral line. Other scholars said that the feast consisted of five loaves of bread, on each of which there was something known to them; the fist had honey, the second had olives, the third had butter, the fourth had cheese and the fifth had dried meat.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ ٱللَّهُ يَٰعِيسَى ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ ءَأَنتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ ٱتَّخِذُونِى وَأُمِّىَ إِلَٰهَيْنِ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ
قَالَ سُبْحَٰنَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِىٓ أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِى بِحَقٍّ ۚ إِن كُنتُ قُلْتُهُۥ فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُۥ ۚ تَعْلَمُ مَا
فِى نَفْسِى وَلَآ أَعْلَمُ مَا فِى نَفْسِكَ ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ عَلَّٰمُ ٱلْغُيُوبِ ﴿١١٦﴾

When God says, 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God"?' he will say, 'May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say – if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen [116] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 116)

We know that this is the dialogue which will take place between Allah *Glorified is He* and `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary), on the day when Allah will gather all the messengers:' (Be warned of) the Day when Allah will assemble the messengers and say, "What was the response you received?" They will say, "We have no knowledge. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109)

Someone may ask why Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* speaks about this dialogue in the past tense, although it will take place in the future. 'And (beware the Day) when Allah will say, "O `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary), did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116)

We know that every event has a certain time and place, and the time of this event will be on the Day of Judgement and the place will be on the plain of which all creatures will be gathered. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all times and places, so He can speak about any event in any tense He likes, as He created the past, the present and the future, and everyone and everything He created is under His control. Allah is Eternal beyond the measure of time, and Self-Subsistent. However, the matter differs for them regarding time, since all our actions take place within one of three times. The past tense which means that the event ended before the time of speaking such as 'Zayd met me' means that the action is finished and completed. The second tense is the present which means that the action is still underway and happening now such as 'Zayd is meeting me' which means that the action is taking place now. This means that the eye is seeing Zayd right now; and the eye is the best witness. The third tense is the future which means that an action will happen, such as ‘Zayd will meet me’. In this case, a person cannot be completely sure that he will do the action, nor can he be sure that nothing will happen to the person he wants to meet preventing the meeting, and nor can he be sure that the reason for the meeting will continue to exist. Therefore, when the future is concerned, one cannot be certain of anything because he does not possess the necessary means to ensure that the action will occur, but only Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* possesses them. Accordingly, the Quran teaches us to be honest when we speak of the future, saying, ‘And never say of anything, “Indeed, I will do that tomorrow” Except (when adding), “If Allah wills…”’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

Man must consider his limited power and always remember the infinite power Allah has over him. This does not mean that Allah forbids us from planning for the future, rather, He orders us to plan and consider all the possibilities, and to say, ‘If Allah wills’ because by doing this, we defer to the will of the One Who has dominion over all things.

Some of the orientalists who oppose Islam have tried to arouse the Muslims ‘suspicions regarding their religion, asking why certain verbs in the verses of the Quran are not placed in the tenses which reflect their temporal occurrence, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah’s Judgement is coming, so do not ask to bring it on sooner. Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him.’ (*an-Nahl:* 1)

They say that this statement is about the Day of Resurrection, so why does Allah refer to it using the past tense (in the Arabic text of the verse), especially when He says afterwards, ‘…so do not ask to bring it on sooner…’ (*an-Nahl:* 1). Asking to bring something on sooner means that it has not happened yet. Therefore, they say that it seems that there is a contradiction in this verse. We say in response that this saying has been said by Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* not man whose actions are subject to certain tenses; the One speaking is the Master of all times and places. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘`*ata `amr Allah*’ (Allah’s Judgement is coming…) (*an-Nahl:* 1), this means that Allah’s judgement is bound to come without any doubt because there is no power which can prevent it from coming. Allah’s actions are free from the restraints of time and place. For example, in Allah's saying, '*kana* Allah *ghafuran rahima*' (And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful) (*an-Nisa':* 100), Allah uses the past tense, but this does not mean that the time of Allah's forgiveness and grace has elapsed, rather, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful in all times even before the existence of any person; therefore, He will remain Forgiving and Merciful after the creation of those who deserve forgiveness and mercy. Allah is Extermely Exalted to be subject to events or to be changed by them because time is created by Allah. Therefore, when Allah is concerned, we should not ask about the time or the place. Allah uses the past tense when referring to some events that have not occurred to affirm that they will happen because when Allah informs us that something will happen, it will inevitably take place.

Whenever Allah speaks about Prophet 'Isa, (Jesus) *peace be upon him* He emphasises that he is the son of Maryam (Mary). In this verse, Allah asks `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* saying, '…did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) We know that questions are always asked for one of two reasons: there are questions which one asks to learn something he does not know such as if he says, 'Did so-and-so meet you yesterday?' and there are questions which one does not ask to learn something, but rather to make the one he questions affirm something. For example – and the utmost example belongs to Allah – the pupil asks his teacher questions to learn from him so that the teacher gives him new information. The teacher also asks the pupil questions to induce the correct answer from him and to affirm that he is right so that the pupil retains the information. Allah's question to `Isa (Jesus) is of the latter kind; this may be proof against those who say that `Isa (Jesus) is a god or the son of Allah. Some of the orientalists tried to raise doubts about the Quran by saying it contains contradictions – we seek refuge with Allah – and they support their opinion by quoting Allah's saying, 'And stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned.' (*as-Saffat:* 24) In this verse, Allah affirms that everyone will be asked about his deeds and his beliefs. But in another verse in the Noble Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Then on that Day none will be asked about his sin among men or jinn.' (*ar-Rahman:* 39)

Does this mean that they will not be asked? No, they indeed will be asked so that they will acknowledge what they have done, not for Allah to know what they have done, as He knows all things. Those orientalists do not know that in Arabic a question may have one of two purposes: For the questioner to attain knowledge or for the one questioned to acknowledge a certain matter. When Allah asks the people on the Day of Resurrection, He intends to make them acknowledge and confess what they have done, as confession is the strongest evidence. Allah will not ask them to gain knowledge, as He is All Knowing. Every person must not trespass his limits regarding Allah, an action which was followed by `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary). Therefore, the question which Allah poses in this verse to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is meant as a rebuke and an admonition for those who fabricated lies and sayings which `Isa (Jesus) never told them.

`Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* never asked them to take him and his mother as gods beside Allah because `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) only conveyed what his Lord revealed to him. Therefore, `Isa's response will refute his followers, '…He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right...."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) The saying, '…Exalted are You…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) means that Allah is so Exalted as to resemble any of the created beings. Man should know that Allah's existence differs from his existence, as Allah's existence is intrinsic, while man is created by Allah Who has given everything to him. Therefore, Allah is Free of need and dispenses with all creatures in a manner unparalleled by man, and the source of man's richness and bounties is Allah. In addition, man's attributes do not resemble Allah's Attributes, as He has absolute Omnipotence; therefore, man must understand everything related to Allah in the light of the fact that He is Extremely Exalted and there is nothing like unto Him.

This is the nature of the exaltation which `Isa (Jesus) proclaims for his Lord and Creator. '...It was not for me to say that to which I have no right...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) as he knows that no messenger chosen by Allah has the right to call himself a deity and adds an undisputable fact, '…If I had said it, You would have known it…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) because everyone agrees that Allah knows all the words and deeds of His servants as in: 'He knows the most furtive of glances, and of all that hearts conceal.' (*Ghafir:* 19) Everyone knows that Allah is so highly Exalted to receive new information which he has not known before, and that He knows the secrets of the heart. Therefore, `Isa (Jesus) says, '…You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) affirming that Allah Who knows everything, knows that claiming that he and his mother are deities never crossed his mind; therefore, three different ideas are given in this verse. The first idea is found in His saying, '…Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) in which `Isa (Jesus) declares his Lord's exaltation. The second idea is found in `Isa's (Jesus's) words, '…If I had said it, You would have known it…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116). The third idea is, '…You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116). Therefore, Isa (Jesus) did not say the fabricated saying which his followers said. A person may ask, 'What is within the self'? It is the matters which are kept secret because sometimes the Arabic word *nafs* means the entire self, comprising both soul and body; when it is used to refer to Allah's Self, we regard it so highly Exalted to be divided into parts, and we know that His Self must be understood in the light of His Exaltation. For example, Allah says, '…He has decreed upon Himself mercy…' (*al-An'am:* 54).

When the word *nafs* (self) is used in connection with Allah, we should understand that it is so highly Exalted to be like that of human beings. In addition, Allah's Face is not like a human face, as we must understand it in the light of '...There is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11). The same is true of Allah's Hand and all His Attributes. We also know that Allah has Names, some of which He has taught us while He has taught some of His servants other Names and has not taught some of them to any of His servants. There are certain attributes which are applied to Allah simply for the sake of rhetoric, such as Allah's saying: 'Indeed, the hypocrites (think to) deceive Allah, but it is Allah Who causes them to be deceived…' (*an-Nisa':* 142). We can never say that Allah is a deceiver, but this attribute is used here in a rhetorical sense because it corresponds with the words, '…seek to deceive Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 142). Therefore, we cannot derive a Name of Allah from it; rather, it is only used to respond to what was done by the enemies of Allah.

`Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* ends his statement saying, '…it is You who is All Knowing of the unseen.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) The word *`allam* (All Knowing) is a hyperbolic adjective which implies the frequency of an action. Allah *Glorified is He* knows the hidden secrets of everyone and everything in His creation. The Quran tells us the response of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* which comprehensively denies the claims of those who said such fabrications.

The Quran continues to inform us about what `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said to refute the claims made by some of his followers, saying:

مَا قُلْتُ لَهُمْ إِلَّا مَآ أَمَرْتَنِى بِهِۦٓ أَنِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ رَبِّى وَرَبَّكُمْ ۚ وَكُنتُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا مَّا
دُمْتُ فِيهِمْ ۖ فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّيْتَنِى كُنتَ أَنتَ ٱلرَّقِيبَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ وَأَنتَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿١١٧﴾

I told them only what You commanded me to: "Worship God, my Lord and your Lord." I was a witness over them during my time among them. Ever since You took my soul, You alone have been the watcher over them: You are witness to all things [117] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 117)

While speaking to his Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*, `Isa (Jesus) presents the teachings which he brought to all people and fully conveyed; he informed them that he was the servant and messenger of Allah. Since Allah has full knowledge of all things, even that which one keeps secret within himself, this affirms that none of these thoughts ever crossed `Isa's (Jesus's) mind, as he announced that he only conveyed what Allah commanded him to convey.

'I said not to them except what You commanded me; to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 117) The witness is the one who sees something without influencing it in any way. `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* says, '…but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 117). We have already tackled how Allah took `Isa's (Jesus's) soul and raised him to Himself. However, I will add some more thoughts about this now because I view that anyone who reads or receives these thoughts has the right to find a sufficient summary that enables him to dispense of referring to what was said previously. Therefore, these notions can be connected in the reader's mind.

The way in which `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was born caused a lot of clamour, as did the way in which he died. Allah caused those who intended to kill `Isa (Jesus) to think that they actually killed him. When they wanted to kill him, he entered through a small door set into a larger one, which was the way the doors of houses were designed. There was a main door for bringing large things into the house, another smaller door set into the main door which was large enough for people to enter, and an opening in the ceiling of this house. When a man named Titianus entered the house in search of `Isa (Jesus), `Isa (Jesus) looked up and found himself being raised upward. The people felt Titianus delayed; when he came out they said, 'If this is Titianus, then where is `Isa (Jesus)? If this is `Isa (Jesus), then where is Titianus?'

They became confused when Allah made Titianus resemble `Isa (Jesus), or when those people went to get `Isa (Jesus), he was accompanied by his disciples to whom he said, 'Which of you will accept to resemble me and will be admitted to paradise?' Each of the disciples knew that they did not have a message to convey as `Isa (Jesus) did, and so what could any of them wish for himself more than paradise? Judas Iscariot came forward and the appearance of the Messiah was cast onto him, then the Jews killed him. Perhaps the people who wanted to kill `Isa (Jesus) knew that he had been raised up and feared that the story of how he was raised up would spread among the people and they would believe in him, so they got someone else and killed him. Another probable suggestion is that the one they killed was one of those who betrayed `Isa (Jesus), then he felt remorse at what he had done, so he sacrificed his own life for the messenger.

As we know, when Allah takes someone's soul, this means that He takes it as a whole without allowing his body to be destroyed by an act of killing. As Muslims, we know that Allah raised Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Night Journey and Ascension up to the heavens, then he returned afterwards to complete his message. Therefore, we can easily believe that Allah raised up `Isa (Jesus) and took his soul, i.e. He took him as a whole without causing his body to be destroyed, and he will return to pray behind a person who believes in Allah and Muhammad, His Messenger.

In Islam, the raising up of a person can be accepted and believed, as Allah raised up His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Ascension Journey. He conversed with Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*, Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*, Adam *peace be upon him* and other prophets. During this journey, Allah made the prayer obligatory for Muslims. Therefore, we completely accept and believe that a person may be raised wholly to the heavens; as for the question of whether he spends a long or short time up there, this does not contradict the principle.

As for the notion that Jesus's descent back to earth will be tied to the coming of the Last Hour, the texts of the Noble Quran regarding this matter suggest it without definite declaration. In addition, this matter is mentioned in the *Sunnah*, but it is not among the well-established and known Islamic principles, so we cannot say that those who refuse to understand it are regarded disbelievers. Allah is merciful with mankind. Therefore, if something is difficult for the mind to understand and does not add any new religious ruling, Allah presents it in a form which cannot cause any temptation. Believing that `Isa (Jesus) was raised up will not add or disprove any ruling. Therefore, Allah has tackled the event of the Night Journey with a decisive and clear Quranic text, while the Ascension Journey is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran as it is only alluded to when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And he certainly saw him in another descent. At the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary. Near it is the Garden of Refuge.' (*an-Najm:* 13-15)

The Night Journey took place on earth, whereas the Ascension Journey took place in the heavens. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could prove the Night Journey as it took place on earth, as he described Jerusalem for his people when he returned. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* to *Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing…' (*al-Isra':* 1). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described the caravans which he saw on the way back.

As for the raising up of `Isa (Jesus), it is alluded to in the Quran without a clear statement about the way it took place. Those who see that it was the work of Allah's Omnipotent Power believe it; as for those who find it hard to believe, this does not take them out of the fist of Islam and faith. When we reflect on literal meaning of the word *tawaffaitany* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, we will find that it means 'cause to die'. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Say, "The angel of death will take you who has been entrusted with you. Then to your Lord you will be returned.…"' (*as-Sajda:* 11) Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* also says, 'Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die (He takes) during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specified term…' (*az-Zumar:* 42). In this verse Allah calls sleep *wafah* and *mawt* (literally death), which involve releasing and withholding. Death in some aspects involves the absence of sensation, and the person who sleeps is absent from sensation; this means that *wafah* may refer to sleep. The same word means repaying a debt in full. As for the matter of the murder of `Isa (Jesus), Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*, gave the final word on the matter, '…and they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but (another) was made to resemble him to them….' (*an-Nisa':* 157)

We also know that death is different from killing, as Allah says, '…So if he was to die or be killed…' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). Death means the exit of the soul from the body, while the physical body remains intact; on the other hand, killing means destroying the body so that the soul leaves it. Allah mentions in the Quran that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said, '*falamma tawaffaytanti*' (when you took my soul) (*al-Ma'ida:* 117). This means that he was taken as a whole, a matter which does not contradict the fact that he was raised up. This matter will be discussed by `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) and Allah on the Day of Resurrection; and the Quran states it in this verse to affirm the sincerity of faith. `Isa (Jesus) says about himself that he was only a witness over his people during the time in which he lived among them, but after Allah raised him up to Himself, Allah is the only watcher over them, as He can constantly witness, watch, change and prevent matters, while `Isa (Jesus), as a human being, can only witness. Allah informs us what `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary), will say next:

إِن تُعَذِّبۡهُمۡ فَإِنَّهُمۡ عِبَادُكَۖ وَإِن تَغۡفِرۡ لَهُمۡ فَإِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ﴿١١٨﴾

and if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise' [118] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 118)

Someone may say that some of the followers of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* claimed that he had told them to take him and his mother as deities beside Allah, so how could `Isa (Jesus) ask Allah to forgive them in this verse? The answer is that `Isa (Jesus) does not say, 'O Lord, forgive them', but he says, 'If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them, indeed it is You who is *the Exalted* in Might, the Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) This means that `Isa (Jesus) leaves the matter up to the omnipotent Will of Allah; as a messenger of Allah, he knows that His Mercy has preceded His Wrath, and that He possesses Omnipotent Power which cannot be restrained because His Will is Omnipotent.

We know that all of Allah's creatures are His *`abid* (slaves) as they are compelled by His Omnipotence, but only those who obey and believe in Allah are His *`ibad* (servants). We also know that even the disbeliever does not disbelieve in Allah against Allah's Will, but he disbelieves by means of his freed will, that Allah gives him to choose whether to have faith or not. Allah can create living beings that never disobey His commands and do whatever He orders them to do; this is what He did when He created the angels.

But Allah's Omnipotence proves His attribute 'the All Compelling', but is not relevant to love, as love only comes when the creature is free to choose whether to believe or disbelieve, then chooses to believe. Accordingly, he believes out of love, not by compulsion; this is what Allah wants from His believing servants. Everything in the universe apart from man is compelled and cannot disobey Allah such as the sun, the moon, the rain, the wind, the clouds and everything else.

Therefore, if Allah wants creatures that are compelled to have faith in Him, none of His creatures will be able to disbelieve in him. However, Allah wants to prove His attribute of compulsion on all beings apart from man, while He has given man the freedom to choose between disbelief and faith so that some of His servants do what Allah loves and pleases Him by following

His religion. They know that Allah does not hold them responsible for anything which is beyond their capability such as death and sickness. He does not hold the one who has lost his mind accountable for his deeds, nor does He hold the person who has not yet reached adullthood accountable for his deeds. Religious obligations apply under three conditions: having a sound mind, having a mature mind which is attained after adulthood and the absence of any power that threatens his life and forces him to do a certain act. Thus, we know that there are three kinds of people who are not held legally accountable for their deeds: insane people, children who have not reached adulthood and those who are compelled to a certain action. Along with legal accountability, Allah has given rewards for obedience and punishment for disobedience; therefore, no one has the right to argue with Allah. Those who obey Allah and perform their religious obligations are *`ibad* (servants) of Allah and those who disobey Allah and do not perform their religious obligations are *`abid* (slaves) who are compelled to do all things except for the religious obligations for which they have been given choice.

The '*ibad* (servants) of Allah are those who give preponderance to faith over disbelief; i.e. they give preponderance to Allah's Commands. Therefore, why did `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) say, 'If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118), although He knows that they are disbelievers? The meanings of *`ibad* (servants) and *`abid*' (slaves), which we have just explained, applies to man's situation in this worldly life and his obligations therein, but the dialogue we are now tackling will take place between `Isa (Jesus) and Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* in the Hereafter in which all people will be servants obeying Allah.

The word *`ibad* (servants) refers to the elected elite who have preferred obedience to Allah's Commands to their own desire so that they have become completely submissive to Allah. For example, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, 'And the servants of the Beneficent Allah are they who walk on the earth in humbleness…' (*al-Furqan:* 63). In this verse, Allah states the praiseworthy characteristics of these elite servants that Satan himself announces his inablity to tempt the sincere servants, as the Noble Quran states: 'Except, among them, Your devoted servants.' (*Sad:* 83) However, in the Hereafter all people will be *`ibad* (servants). Allah will address those who led others astray saying, '…Did you mislead these, My servants…'? (*al-Furqan:* 17)

All people will be subject to Allah's will. No one will have any control even over his own body parts. The eye which was under the control of Allah's servant in the worldly life, obeying his will to look at what is lawful or unlawful, will not be subject to Allah's slave on the Day of Resurrection. The same is true of the hand, the tongue, the skin, the feet and the rest of the body. In this worldly life, man controls his body parts as they obey his commands whether good or evil and whether they involve obedience or disobedience. However, on the Day of Resurrection, these body parts will be set free to bear witness to all that their owner has done with them, and none will have any will except Allah: '…To whom belongs (all) sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the All-Compelling.' (*Ghafir:* 16)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah will persist; with this all men will become Allah's servants. Consequently, there is nothing strange about `Isa's (Jesus's) words: '…if You punish them, they are Your servants…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118). We also know that this 'slavery' signifies us all when associated with involuntary actions such as breathing, birth, and death. But the believers rise from this state of 'slavery' to a state of 'servant-hood' just by following Allah's path. On the other hand, the disbelievers and sinners disobey Allah using their 'free will', where they choose to willingly disobey Allah's path. Allah afflicts the disbelievers with illnesses, poverty and deep-seated psychological pains, and none of them have the least ability to contravene Allah's will in those things which afflict them; this proves that we are all nothing but 'helpless slaves' of Allah. That is why the believers thank the True Lord *Glorified is He* for their free choice since by means of this free choice, Allah safeguards our existence, our maturity and our freedom.

As we have said before, we need to be aware that on the Day of Resurrection, we shall all become servants of Allah, and none of us will have a will of his own, and Allah's will shall prevail. The True Lord *Glorified is He* conveys to us the words of `Isa (Jesus), son of Mary *peace be upon them* '…and if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) not as an apology from `Isa (Jesus), or as an attempt to ask mercy for those who disbelieved in Allah and ascribed partners to Him. Allah the Almighty and All-Wise is the One Who cannot be overcome, and whom no power can dominate, hence no power can protect these people from the All-Powerful and Almighty Allah. Likewise, if He wills to forgive them, nothing can forestall His will.

Some of the superficial people who look for mistakes in the Quran say, 'Would it not have been more appropriate for `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* to just say, 'If You forgive them, then You alone are forgiving and merciful?' To them we say; every word in the Quran has a specific meaning, and hence every meaning in the Quran recalls a specific word. Therefore, the closing part of the verse had to use words to highlight Allah's absolute power in choosing whether to punish them or forgive them; for if He chooses to punish them, then no other power could protect them from His punishment, and if He chooses to forgive them, then no power could question Him about forgiving them despite being disbelievers. Allah cannot be questioned about what He does because He is Almighty and Wise.

As for the claim that it would have been more appropriate to say, 'You alone are forgiving and merciful', we say that these attributes could well address '...and if You forgive them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118), but not 'and if You punish them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118). That is why the verse had to come with the attributes which address both, 'and if You punish them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) and '...and if You forgive them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالَ ٱللَّهُ هَٰذَا يَوْمُ يَنفَعُ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ صِدْقُهُمْ ۚ لَهُمْ جَنَّٰتٌ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا
ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۚ رَّضِىَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا۟ عَنْهُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿١١٩﴾

God will say, 'This is a Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. They will have Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain for ever. God is pleased with them and they with Him: that is the supreme triumph' [119] (The Quran, *al-Ma'ida:* 119)

We know that there will be two types of truthfulness on Judgment Day; a type which brings benefit since it comes in continuation to the truthfulness of this life; and a type which will bring no benefit like the type which *Iblis*, the accursed, describes as being' a false promise' by contrast with the 'truthful' promise Allah made. This latter type of truthfulness will not benefit anyone because the Hereafter is not an abode of moral responsibility. As for the truthfulness of this life, it is embodied by the words of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* '...if I had said such a thing You would have known it...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says of this kind of truthfulness, '…This is a Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 119) On Judgment Day, the truthfulness of those who have been true to their word during this mundane life, that is to say in the time of moral responsibility, will help them attain unto Allah's goodly acceptance where '...They will have gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain for ever. Allah is pleased with them and they with Him…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 119).

But someone might ask, 'How can the servant be well-pleased with his Lord'? We say that when the believing servants see the reward prepared for them in the Hereafter, they will be filled with joy and will send all due praise to Allah Who has made His promise to them come true, and Who has bestowed upon them all this bliss so that they may dwell in paradise as they please.

This verse describes the day in which the truthfulness shall benefit all who have been true to their word by saying, '…that is the supreme triumph.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 119) It is as though there is a superficial triumph, and a supreme triumph. The superficial triumph is the fleeting pleasure which a man gives to himself in the abode of moral responsibility. It makes him feel as though he has triumphed when in fact he has not. The supreme triumph is one that is not followed by regret because any pleasure followed by regret is not a triumph. All the delights of the world are measured per the scale of each person's potentials and imagination. Two things impend such joys: their loss – and we saw many people losing their joy that they used to enjoy – or the death of the one enjoying them, and we also see this the whole time. As for the joys associated with the supreme triumph, they persist perpetually without any interruption.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* by saying:

لِّلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا فِيهِنَّ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌۢ ﴿١٢٠﴾

Control of the heavens and earth and everything in them belongs to God: He has power over all things [120] (The Quran, *al-Ma’ida:* 120)

The heavens and the earth are the two containers of existence for all beings; constellations, planets, the sun, moons, stars, air, clouds, water, animals and men. The earth which is the lower dominion we see before us comprises all nourishment, and the heavens and all that they comprise is in the higher dominion. Allah has ownership and dominion over both since He has dominion over all things, and He has dominion over all those who own the things. The True Lord’s words, ‘Control of the heavens and earth and everything in them belongs to Allah…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 120) compliment the words which `Isa (Jesus) son of Mary *peace be upon them* spoke before, ‘and if you punish them, they are your servants; if you forgive them, you are the Almighty*,* the Wise.’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 118). This means that none of Allah’s creatures can escape His will. As for this life, Allah has placed its means in the hands of mankind so that the provision of one man can be in the hand of another; and He has placed the affairs of some of us in the possession of others; so some of us possess food and others possess clothes etc. But not every *maalik* (owner) is a sovereign *malik*, as the sovereign is the one who has dominion over those who own things, and such are the laws which Allah laid in the universe. In the Hereafter, there will be only one owner; the Owner of Judgement Day. So, it is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* ends this chapter by telling us about the end of life since He started it by telling us about His rulings: ‘…fulfil your obligations. Livestock animals are lawful as food for you…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 1).

He tells us first about the laws of hunting on land and in the sea, about the beasts which are lawful to eat, about marriage and about all that is connected to the affairs of life; and He placed the affairs of some of us in the possession of others. But on Judgement Day, everything will be different. He begins the chapter with a commandment, ‘…fulfil your obligations...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 1), and when a commandment is issued by the Supreme Commander, the one who receives this commandment can either obey it or disobey it, for there are people who believe and others who disbelieve. This means that those who receive the command have a free will, and had the commandment been intended to be obeyed without choice; the Commander would have created mankind with the natural disposition of obeying, thus compelling them. But the Supreme Commander left these commandments up to mankind's free will; they can obey and be true to their covenant, or they can disobey.

Allah *Glorified is He* starts the chapter in the context of the human race's free will, which Allah created giving way to moral responsibility. He then affirms that this free will has a limited life span and that it will come to an end, where Allah will gather all mankind on a Day when the truthfulness shall benefit all who have been true to their word; and hence all will belong to Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* ends the chapter by saying, 'Control of the heavens and earth and everything in them belongs to Allah...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 120). That is, He has dominion over the whole universe; and as we know, the universe is composed of several types of creations. The first type in the universe is the one which serves and is not served such as the elements or inanimate objects like water, mountains, iron, the sun, the moon, or the stars; these are all inanimate objects which have no senses. These inanimate objects mainly serve the plants, and the plants serve the animals and the animals serve man. Hence, all these beings which serve man have no free will and are all compelled to serve man. The sun has never refused to give mankind its heat despite their aggression, nor do the beasts which carry our burdens rebel against their masters.

Man, on the other hand, has two aspects. One aspect of him is compelled by the True Lord *Glorified is He*; so we can neither influence nor control this aspect such as our propensity to sickness or death which is something we have in common with plants and animals. Then there is the aspect in which man has a free will, namely whether to follow Allah's religion or not. If we consider the side wherein the True Lord *Glorified is He* compels man, we find that it is for man's own good. A person does not choose to breathe, nor drive the blood in his veins, and nor does he compel his kidneys to work. He is compelled when it comes to these things. It is an act of mercy from Allah to compel and control His creatures in these aspects, rather than grant them control over their own breathing or heartbeats. So, man is only free in matters related to moral responsibility. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* were reminding man that free will is a covenant between the believer and his Lord because the free will of man will be taken from him on Judgement Day, and all of Allah's servants will be compelled, and the 'will' of mankind will be reduced to that of plants and animals. There then 'Control of the heavens and earth and everything in them belongs to Allah: He has power over all things.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 120)

On Judgement Day, man will lose his free will. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic word *ma* (everything) here which literally means 'whatever' and is used for non-sentient beings that do not have free will. (In the case of sentient beings, it would mean 'whoever'.) It is as though intelligence has a role to play in this worldly life, namely the ability to choose between alternatives, but in the Hereafter all will be equal before the Creator. We spoke before about the difference between the words *mulk* and *malakut*; we can also read the words of Allah when He said that He gave Ibrahim (Abraham) insight into His mighty *malakut* (dominion) over the heavens and the earth: 'And thus did we show Ibrahim (Abraham) the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain (in faith).' (*al-An'am:* 75) It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* were alerting us to the fact that the world contains things which fall under the cognisance of sensory perception, and those which do not. All that falls under the cognisance of sensory perception is the dominion of *mulk*, whilst all that which does not is the dominion of *malakut*. We know nothing of the dominion of *malakut* save that which Allah tells us, and there are also things in the dominion of *mulk* which Allah conceals from us; and He Alone has the power to do all things. The True Lord *Glorified is He* asks us to reflect on the singularity of the hidden dominion, and He tells us that He has complete knowledge of it, i.e. the hidden things beyond the occult. Both the *mulk* and *malakut* exist in this life and the Hereafter, but the *mulk* is visible, whilst the *malakut* is occult.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* provides the means of domination and possession (also *mulk*)) in this life to some of His creatures, but still He maintains domination over all that is in our hands and all that is hidden from us. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also terminates any justification for man's status of vicegerent over man by saying, ‘Control of the heavens and earth and everything in them belongs to Allah...’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 120). So, Allah has the ultimate control, and the servants of Allah have been given some control which materializes in the ostensible attribution of things to their causes in this life. But on Judgement Day, everything will be in the Hands of Allah.

But why does the True Lord *Glorified is He* say, ‘and everything in them’ (using the word *ma* which literally means ‘whatever’ and not ‘whoever’) even though the True Lord *Glorified is He* made man His vicegerent on earth, and man is a sentient being who would usually therefore be given priority over non-sentient beings? Why did He not say ‘*wa man fihinna*’ (‘and whoever is in them’)? The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to affirm to us by this that everyone will lose their free will and become compelled to His will, and thus, all will become equal even if they used to be sentient in this life. So, He says to us: ‘…and everything in them belongs to Allah, He has power over all things’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 120).

With this verse, the chapter of *al-Ma’ida* comes to an end; this chapter was revealed in Medina, and was one of the final revelations of the Noble Quran. It contains legislations, moral responsibilities, and laws. As all the chapters revealed in Medina, it shows the deviation of the people of the Scripture.

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the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (7)

The Chapter of

al-An’am

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-An`am* which was revealed in Mecca comes right after a chapter revealed in Medina in the arrangement of the Quran per the instructions given on the final review of the Quran which took place during the last *Ramadan* in the life of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in the presence of Jibril. We know that the Quran has two arrangements; one which follows the chronological order of revelation, and another which follows the already existing written arrangement. The chronological order tells us whether a given chapter was revealed in Mecca or Medina. Someone might say, ‘The True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed these noble words on Mount ‘Arafat: ‘…Today I have perfected your religion for you, and completed My blessing upon you…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 3), so how could it be said that it is a revelation from Medina’? This question means that we need to properly understand the terms ‘Meccan’ and ‘Medinan’. There are certain verses of the Quran which were revealed in Medina and others which were revealed in Mecca, and there are others which were revealed between both locations, in addition to others which were revealed between the Heavens and Earth. The term ‘Meccan’ refers to the verses which were revealed before the emigration, and the term ‘Medinan’ refers to the verses which were revealed after the emigration, even if they were revealed in Mecca.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted the Quran to have a chronological order that follows the revelation and another for the written form. He wanted the Quran to restore the balance of human life after it went chaotic. The balance of human life went chaotic because of people who did not believe in Allah, or people who believed in Allah but associated partners with Him and worshipped idols with the pretext that they worshiped these idols so they would bring them nearer to the true God. Allah says, ‘…And those who take protectors besides Him [say], “We only worship them so that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position.”’ (*az-Zumar:* 3) Others worshipped fire, or followed a revealed religion after they altered it a bit or a lot.

The ones who were nearest to believing in Allah were those who believed in the messages which were revealed before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Their messengers came to them bearing miracles and scriptures of guidance; and logically such people would be closer to believing than others. Therefore, we first had to deal with the idolaters, and we only engage the people of the Scripture at a later stage, since the latter were familiar with revealed religions sent from a deity by means of messengers.

The parts of the Quran which were revealed first in Mecca came with the essential postulates of doctrine so prominent, namely establishing the existence of One Deity who resides over all existence. In Medina, however, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke with the people of the Scripture about all the affairs of religion, after the principle of monotheism had been firmly engrained.

This arrangement was therefore logical for there were two waves in the world at the time: a wave of atheism and a wave of distortion seeking to distort the way of Allah. Therefore, the believers as well as Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were, in essence, with the people of the Scripture because at least they believed in a Deity, and they believed that a Deity would send messengers bearing guidance and miracles to prove the truth of their messages. Even those of them who went astray continued to refer to the scriptures, which were revealed to them, even though they had altered them.

We know that prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was on the side of the Byzantines when they fought the Persians; and when the Byzantines were defeated, the believers grieved, whereas the disbelievers rejoiced. Being Christians, the Byzantines were People of the Scripture, and their defeat meant that the followers of the Divine revelation had been defeated by the followers of atheism. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to portray this for us, and He wanted to incline our hearts towards those who believed in Him, even if their image of Him and His message was flawed, or their understanding of what the messengers had brought was flawed as well. So, Allah revealed, 'Alif Lam Mim. The Byzantines have been defeated. In a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome within a few years. Allah's is the command before and after; and on that day, the believers shall rejoice, with the help of Allah…' (*ar-Rum:* 1-5). The believers rejoiced to see the Byzantines defeat the Persians because the Byzantines had a connection to Divinity, to messengers, to religious guidance and revelation. Allah clarified it as thus to show our position, and to make it a miracle for His Book and Messenger, bearing in mind that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was present at the headquarters of the call of Islam, Arabia, and he did not have embassies, spies or a 'war office' to give him news or tell him of the Byzantine preparations for the counter-attack.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* predicted the results of a battle which would take place (seven or nine years later) between the Byzantines and Persians, and in which the Byzantines would triumph, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* made a wager with the idolaters about this. He stated that the Byzantines would defeat Persia within five years, and he told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about this, so the Prophet said to him, 'A *bid`* (few) means something between three to nine, so increase the stakes and lengthen the time.' The wager was thus settled for one hundred camels with a nine-year deadline.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was speaking so confidently, for he was conveying Allah's message, and Allah had placed this news in the Quran which would be read and recited in prayer and preserved until the end of time; and the One Who spoke these words could not lie, for He has domination over the entire universe. No man of military expertise in our time can predict the exact result of any future battle, despite all the intelligence that can be gathered about the strength and preparations of its parties. But Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was conveying what Allah Himself said on the matter, and so he was fully confident.

Whilst Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was facing the atheist rivals, his heart was with the people of the Scripture; and we may also observe that the people of the Scripture used to predict the advent of a messenger. Did some of the people of the Scripture in Medina, namely the

Jews, not say to the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, ‘Time is nigh for the advent of a prophet whom we shall follow, and slay you (fighting by his side) as ‘Ad and Iram were slain’? But they disbelieved in him, once he came because he threatened their authority and historical power.

So, the revelation of the Quran began in Mecca and later moved to Medina. But in the written order of the Quran, as we know, the Medinan chapters came first, and then the Meccan. This is what Allah willed when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reviewed the Quran with Jibril *peace be upon him* in the last *Ramadan* in Prophet Muhammad’s life.

The concept of faith is always the same: believing in Allah, the revelation, the messengers and religion. The benefit of all of this is that it leads to the establishment of order in life, an order which is essential to life’s proper functioning, whether the people believe or disbelieve. This order which governs life was revealed first in the Medinan chapters, yet Allah did not completely leave it out of the Meccan chapters. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted His Messenger to capture the hearts of the believers first to face the forces of atheism; but some of them differed and rejected the route of the messengers.

So, this is all we have to say about the chapter of *al-Ma`ida*; and although it was revealed in Medina and the chapter of *al-An`am* in Mecca, yet the ending of *al-Ma`ida* is perfectly aligned with the beginning of *al-An`am*. Allah *Glorified is He* closes the chapter of *al-Ma`ida* saying, ‘Control of the heavens and earth and everything in them belongs to Allah; He has power over all things.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 120) And He opens the chapter of *al-An`am* saying, ‘Praise belongs to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light…’ (*al-An‘am:* 1).

Allah *Glorified is He* is All-powerful and has Domination over everything. He did not seize this domination from anyone nor did He stake a claim to it, but rather, He is the One Who created the heavens and the earth, and brought darkness and light into being.

Allah *Glorified is He* begins the chapter of *al-An`am* saying:

ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ
وَٱلنُّورَ ۖ ثُمَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِرَبِّهِمْ يَعْدِلُونَ ﴿١﴾

Praise belongs to God who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light; yet the disbelievers set up equals to their Lord! [1] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 1)

When you hear the word *al-hamd* (all praise), then you must understand that it is a word of praise, glorification and gratitude. Praise is present within one’s natural disposition and we direct it towards Allah because He has clarified and explained to us that praise is for Him so that we may not differ about where to direct it. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who has empowered every man with some of His means.

Ask about anything and the natural sequence of events will always lead to the sole doer; Allah. Hence, all praise must be directed towards Allah.

Let me give you an example. Imagine a man landing with a plane on some deserted place in which there are no means of sustenance whatsoever. He wants to eat, drink, and cover himself to sleep, but he cannot find anything to do any of these. He falls asleep for a while and then wakes up, and is surprised to find a table laid with the finest food and drinks. Next to it, he finds a tent with a bed, covers, and a tap for washing. When he sees all of this, he cannot help using any of it before wondering about its origin. He surely wants to thank whoever blessed him with all these abundant blessings. Just as with us when we first came face to face with the universe and we found things that benefit us without having anything to do about providing them, neither us and nor the ones who preceded us. This is because no one claimed this role for himself, so you find a sun rising, wind blowing, water flowing, land green with verdure and flora, all of which serve you. Now the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us that He is the One Who has granted us all of this, so should we not thank Him?

When humanity benefited from the electric lamp, they clamoured in honour of Edison, the inventor, so how about the Creator of the sun which illuminates the entire universe? Human inventions immortalize the inventors and we go through great lengths to honour them, but what about the Creator of the entire universe? Why do we honour the maker of the lamp which only illuminates limited parts of the earth, while some of us are heedless of the transcendence of the sun's Creator which illuminates the earth in the daytime and is hidden for half the day so that we can rest? This is because the earth is constantly moving, then when the sun sets for you, it rises over somewhere else; and thus, it stays in its orbit.

Therefore, all praise is for Allah when man came into existence, and found all the essentials of his life that cannot be subjected to human power, or to human claims. Indeed, praise is something that must exist, even if mankind differed over whom to praise. We direct it towards Allah because He is the One Who grants the blessings.

The chapters of the Quran in which the Creator begins with praise for Allah are five: *al-Fatiha*, *al-An`am*, *al-Kahf*, *Saba`*, and *Fatir*. They are focused on two things: concrete edification related to strengthening our bodies through nourishment, or procreation by means of marriage or the spiritual and value-based edification. Hence, Allah provides us with the heavenly method. In one instance, He says, 'Praise be to Allah, Lord of all the worlds' and the word *rabb* (Lord) means that He is educating humanity towards an objective and a mission, and this *tarbiyah* (education) requires abstract and concrete components; spiritual and systematic. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses it about the entire universe, as in the opening of the Quran, when He says that all praise is due to Him alone, the Lord of all words. 'All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.' (*al-Fatiha:* 2)

He is thus, the Master of all the worlds, and He is their Owner and their Educator. He is the One Who raises us in such a way that we can carry on our tasks in life with the help of our strong bodies, with procreation by means of marriage and with our set of solid values. In another instance the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings to focus the method only such as when He says that all praise is due to Him for sending down the Scripture to His servant and making it unerringly straight. 'All praise is due to Allah, who has sent down upon His servant the Book and has not made therein any deviance.' (*al-Kahf:* 1) In another instance, He uses it regarding the tangible or perceived things and says, 'Praise belongs to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light…' (*al-An'am:* 1). Here He is specifying tangible things which can be perceived like the heavens and the earth, darkness and light, and these are things that we can clearly see. Another instance the True Lord *Glorified is He* associates things that are unseen along with tangible things, as when He tells us, 'All praise is due to Allah, Creator of the heavens and the earth, who made the angel messengers having wings; two, three or four. He increases in creation what He wills. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.' (*Fatir:* 1)

He mentions all of it in its entirety in the opening chapter of the Quran (*al-Fatiha*), and He mentions the method only in *al-Kahf*, and mentions the perceived universe in *al-An`am,* and both the unseen and tangible in *Fatir*.

Therefore, praise is deserved and deserving, and it is directed towards Allah, even if it ostensibly seems to come from other than Allah because all means in the life of this universe go to Allah in the end. Here, in *al-An`am*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* singles out the praise of Allah, who created the heavens and the earth and everything that exists in them. After that, He mentions darkness and light. As you know, *khalq* (creation) is the bringing of something into existence from naught, while *ja`al* (making) is creating something then directing it towards its purpose. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* used 'made' with 'darkness and light'. Darkness is the default while light is created; light dispels darkness.

Therefore, the original state is that of darkness which has different shades, such as the darkness of a cave, the darkness of an ocean and the darkness of a well. In another verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us, 'Or like utter darkness in the deep sea: there covers it a wave above which is another wave, above which is a cloud, (layers of) utter darkness one above another; when he holds out his hand, he is almost unable to see it; and to whomsoever Allah does not give light, he has no light' (*an-Nur:* 40).

Even though we know the direction of our hand, yet from the layers of darkness, we cannot see it. Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* specifies praise here for the creation of the heavens and the earth because they are the vessels for all existence. The scholars say, 'Do not assume that this is a concrete darkness where things are just concealed, and nor assume that this is a concrete light where things can just be perceived! Rather, you should assume that the darkness and light are both concrete and abstract'. That is why, Allah *Glorified is He* brings darkness in the plural, and light in the singular because darkness has various causes, whereas light has only one cause.

In another verse Allah tells us, 'And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for you will be separated from His way. This He has instructed you so that you may become righteous.' (*al-An'am:* 153) The *subul* (other ways) come in the plural, while Allah's *Sabil* (way) comes in the singular because it is just one, as if the ways of Satan are numerous and the ways of people's whims are numerous. But the way that leads to Allah's path is one, and therefore, Allah caused light to be 'guidance' and *zhulumat* (darkness) to be misguidance. '...and made darkness and light; yet the disbelievers set up equals to their Lord!' (*al-An'am:* 1) We say – and to Allah belongs the highest similitude – that when Allah gives man in abundance and He bestows upon him that which he passes on in courtesy to someone else saying, 'I made such-and-such for so-and-so!' and he denies Allah's role.' So, the word *thumma* (yet) is used here to indicate time lapse. *Thumma* is a conjunction like *fa`* which is used to indicate two events without a time lapse between them. As when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Then He causes him to die, then assigns to him a grave.' (*'Abasa:* 21)

Whoever loves someone and this person dies, he buries him quickly before his body rots in front of him. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that after brining man to the grave, 'then' He will rise him again to life (for judgment), 'Then when He wills, He will resurrect him.' (*'Abasa:* 22)

This indicates the time lapse extended until the Day of Resurrection, where the True Lord *Glorified is He* will resurrect His creation. The time lapse could also be a gap in rank or status. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses *thumma* here as a separator between the creation of the heavens and earth and the making of darkness and light, and between those who disbelieve in their Lord, '...yet the disbelievers set up equals to their Lord!' (*al-An'am:* 1) These are the ones who equate Allah with others. We can regard, 'set up equals to their Lord' as their subject of disbelief, i.e. because of their disbelief they equate others with Allah. Or, it could mean that they turn away from the

True Lord to other than Him, or that they ascribe partners to Him. This statement applies to atheists or those who ascribe partners to Allah. He is indeed the One Who brought the heavens and earth into existence from naught and no one can dare ask Him, 'How did You create the heavens and earth'? This is because Allah tells us in another verse, 'I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken those who lead others astray as assistants.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

He brought the heavens and earth into existence from naught, and the heavens and earth became the vessel of the whole being. He created them before man and before the rest of creation. No one from His creation witnessed Him creating them. Thus, we cannot ask Allah 'how'. He created the heavens and earth; rather, we should take our information about the creation from the Creator, Allah. Some people have claimed that the earth was separated from the sun and then it cooled down, but this is just a mere hypothesis. We can never be sure because none of us saw the creation of the heavens and earth. To such people I say, '…I would not have taken those who lead others astray as assistants.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

The Quran provides the answer even before these people came to existence. It is as if Allah is telling us that these misleading people will come at some point in history even before they existed. They did not witness creation; they just 'happened unexpectedly' upon the heavens and earth, like all of us. So, they should not have made facts from mere guesses about things they neither know nor have witnessed. It is Just like the ones who claim that man was first created an ape, although they were not with Allah when He created the universe and man, and, nor were they His partners. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us to have etiquette with Him, and tells us not to follow blindly what we do not know to be true, for the ears, eyes, and heart will be questioned about all these: 'And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those, [one] will be questioned' (*al-Isra':* 36) It is upon us to learn about the creation from Allah *Glorified is He* who says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن طِينٍ ثُمَّ قَضَىٰٓ أَجَلًا ۖ وَأَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى عِندَهُۥ ۖ ثُمَّ أَنتُمْ تَمْتَرُونَ ﴿٢﴾

He is the one who created you from clay and specified a term [for you] and another fixed time, known only to Him; yet still you doubt! [2] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 2)

He brings before us the matter of creation and He has made it clear that He created us from clay after talking about the creation of the heavens and earth. Before that, He informed us that He created us from dust, moulded mud, and dry clay. These are all complementary and not contradictory elements. Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made it clear to us that He created everything from water. Thus, we understand that water was mixed with dust to become clay, then moulded mud and then dry clay, and all of them are complementary parts of a sequence. We did not witness the creation, but we have learned about the matter of creation from Allah *Glorified is He* and we know that clay is a substance for cultivation and fertilization.

When scientists analysed the earth, they found that clay is comprised of several elements, and the largest proportion of these elements is oxygen, then carbon, then hydrogen, then fluorine, then chlorine, then sodium, then magnesium, then potassium, then iron, then cellulose and then manganese and other elements.

The elements in the universe are more than one hundred, but not all of them are part of the composition of man. Man is only composed from those elements that benefit him in terms of structure, adornment and other things. Allah tells us that He shall show us His signs in every region of the earth and in ourselves until it becomes clear to us that this is the Truth. Allah says, ‘We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

The scientist disbelievers who analysed the earth mentioned the results which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of in conveying the inimitable and everlasting Quran that is preserved by Allah’s Command as a confirming proof. The True Lord *Glorified is He* kept this proof for us till a non-believing scientist came along to discover some of the realities that were revealed in the Quran.

None of us witnessed the moment of creation, but we witness death which is the demolition of life, and the demolition of something is the reverse of its formation. We see how building demolishers start their work by first demolishing the external parts – which were added last; they remove the glass sheets first, then the wood planks, then the bricks, much so like death in reverse of life. Man's *ruh* (spirit) departs first, and then his body dries till it becomes like dry clay. Then it becomes moulded mud, i.e. stinking and decaying. Then the remaining moisture evaporates and the body turns into dust. Therefore, we believe our Creator when He tells us about our creation and when He tells us about creating the heavens and earth. When someone says other than this, we tell him, 'I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken those who lead others astray as assistants.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us here of the decreed term, '…and specified a term [for you] and another fixed time, known only to Him; yet still you doubt!' (*al-An'am:* 2)

Not even one of us knows his decreed term, no matter how often he visits the doctor. The specified term is the decreed term that has been determined for each of us. The fixed term (known only to Allah) is our term in the interstice between the physical and spiritual worlds (*barzakh*) and our resurrection from the graves. Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'They ask you, [O Muhammad], about the Hour and when is its arrival. Say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him. It lies heavily upon the heavens and the earth. It will not come upon you except unexpectedly." They ask you as if you are familiar with it. Say, "Its knowledge is only with Allah, but most of the people do not know." (*al-A'raf:* 187)

The initial steps leading to someone's end and the approach of death could be revealed by way of what Allah unveils, i.e. by means of science. Yet, this is not of the occult because in some cases a person may regain health and recovers fully. People around him might even say that 'A miracle has happened'. As for the fixed term, it is known only to Him; we cannot know anything about it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* determines five things to be only known to Him. He is the One Who has the Knowledge of the Hour of

Resurrection; it is He Who sends down the relieving rain; He knows what is hidden in the wombs; no soul knows what it will reap tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die; it is Allah Who is All Knowing and All-Aware. Allah says, ‘Indeed, Allah [alone] has knowledge of the Hour and sends down the rain and knows what is in the wombs. And no soul perceives what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul perceives in what land it will die. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.’ (*Luqman:* 34)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has indeed spoken about the place but He has not spoken about the time. ‘...and specified a term [for you]...’ (*al-An‘am:* 2). He decreed a specified time for every individual, and then He decreed another fixed term for everything. The specified terms of individuals succeed one another until the fixed term of all comes which is Resurrection Day, ‘...yet still you doubt!’ (*al-An‘am:* 2) The proofs conveyed by Allah are enough to block any doubt, but still there are those who doubt after all these signs. After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱللَّهُ فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَفِي ٱلْأَرْضِ يَعْلَمُ سِرَّكُمْ وَجَهْرَكُمْ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تَكْسِبُونَ ③

He is God in the heavens and on earth, He knows
your secrets and what you reveal, and He knows
what you do [3] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 3)

The noun ‘Allah’ is a proper noun indicating the One Who is Necessarily Existent ‘*wajib al-wujud*’. It is the name that Allah has chosen for Himself and it comprises all the attributes of perfection. We call the other attributes the ‘beautiful names’ such as *al-Qadir* (The Fully Capable), *as-Sami`* (The All-Hearing), *al-Basir* (The All-Seeing), *al-Hayy* (The Ever-Living), *al-Qayyum* (The All-Sustaining), *al-Qahhar* (The All-Vanquisher). All of them are attributes that became names because they are absolute with respect to Allah. When these attributes are applied in their absolute sense then they belong to Allah, but when (some of them) are applied to other than Allah, they come in their relative sense. As for the name Allah, it can only apply to the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

Allah challenges the disbelievers, to name anything other than Him Allah, and He asks them if they know of anyone carrying the same name!

Allah says, 'Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them - so worship Him and have patience for His worship. Do you know of any similarity to Him?' (*Maryam:* 65)

The disbelievers heard this and none of them dared to call anything Allah, and this is the type of challenge that sustains until the Final Hour. No one dares to say its opposite or to give it to a thing or a being that is other than Allah. We do not know of anything that existed in its essence in pre-eternity before the universe came into existence besides Allah.

As for the lesser things in life which are considered non-essentials, they did not bring themselves in existence but required a maker. A cup of water, for example, does not perform an essential task in life because man can drink water with his hand or directly using his mouth. This cup requires the knowledge, capabilities, power, and wisdom of man. Knowledge comes to man with the power that Allah has granted him, so man searched the universe, found sand, and discovered a means for melting it and blowing it into a vessel. Then he discovered a way for clarifying the molten glass using chemicals and finally he managed to 'make' a cup.

The scientific and manufacturing process that the cup goes through at the hands of man is massive even though it is not one of the absolute necessities of life. It is a luxury. So, how about the necessities such as the sun, the moon, air, and water? These things too must have a maker! If the makers of non-essential things, apply for 'patents' for their inventions to reap their benefit, then how about the One Who made everything, not for His own benefit but solely for the benefit of His creation?

We all know the inventor of the lamp and his history, where he was born, where he lived, where he studied. So what about the One Who made the sun, the stars, the earth, and man? Out of His utter mercy, the True Lord *Glorified is He* informed us that He is the Creator, and no one challenged Him and claimed that they created the universe. Since there is nothing in existence that influences without an influencing factor, then we must know that because Allah said that He created and originated, and no one challenged Him, then surely what He says is true. If there is another maker of the universe, and he does not know what Allah has informed us then this forgetful, slumbering maker does not deserve to be a Deity. And if he knows what Allah has informed us, and yet he dares not speak out the truth about himself, then this imposter has no right to divinity.

As the True Lord *Glorified is He* has taught us and informed us with decisive proofs that He is the One Who created the universe, and so long as that is the case, then we must listen to Him. The practical implementation for this would be to obey Him in what He commanded and prohibited. Indeed, the world of the *malakut* that we do not see, worships Him and everything in existence carries out His command and glorifies and praises Him. The seven heavens and the earth and everyone in them glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though we do not understand their praise; He is most forbearing, most forgiving. Allah says, ‘The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving.’ (*al-Isra’:* 44)

The seven heavens and the earth and all the created things they contain indicate the precision to the Maker and His kingship. He is transcendent and sanctified above having any partner, and everything has a means of glorifying and affirming His transcendence, but we do not see it or comprehend it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us here that He is worshipped and existent in all of existence. ‘He is Allah in the heavens and on earth; He knows your secrets and what you reveal…’ (*al-An‘am:* 3). Since He is worshipped, then He must be obeyed in His commands and prohibitions; but some of us obey and some of us do not. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made a recompense for obedience: either bliss or punishment. There is a difference between the existence of something and its realisation, so never confuse realising existence and existence itself. Not being able to realise the existence of one thing, does not mean it is not in existence.

Examples of this can be seen throughout history. The Creator has left for His creation secrets in existence that they can deduce to unravel the benefits beyond them. These things were there carrying out their tasks in existence even before man knew about them, things like the force of gravity, for instance. It existed before man discovered it and it carried out its role before man knew of it. Such things are mentioned in the Quran in a way that did not cause confusion at the time of its revelation. Ponder Allah's saying, 'Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving.' (*Fatir:* 41)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* brought into existence gravity so that the heavens and earth can carry out their tasks, and from gravity, He has created a unique system that protects the universe from collapsing by His Power. Hence, gravity existed the whole time, but man did not know about it until recently; this is the difference between existence and the realisation of existence.

So, when Allah tells us, 'Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted' (*al-An'am:* 103), does this not affirm that the essence of the True Lord cannot be seen by the eyes whereas He knows everything that is hidden from our limited vision? In the universe, there are things that we might not encompass even though He created them and placed them at our service, and after we understand them they remain acting in our service. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* relates something to us that we do not comprehend, we cannot say, 'Since I cannot understand it, then it does not exist'. For example, we cannot fully fathom electricity or gravity or the epitome of life's secrets (*ruh* [the spirit]) that endows us with the secret of life, and keeps all our limbs under its influence. When the spirit departs, the body becomes a stiff corpse. No one knows where the spirit is and no one understands it. No one has ever heard it, smelt it, tasted it, or touched it. Indeed, the spirit is present in our essence and we do not realise it. So, that is how we truly are unable to realise only one thing that is created by Allah; so how can you realise the Creator, and that He is Allah? Indeed, even if you were to realise Him, you would not become a deity still. This is because, when you realise something, your extremities will have power over it, and it will be subordinated to your eyes, your hands and so on. But the All-Powerful, whose power is absolute, will never become realised or subordinated, and it is from His Utter Magnitude that He remains as such.

Another example is the dreams which we see when we sleep; are these dreams found inside our bodies, or what? *Hilm* (forbearance) is a type of restraint which you extend towards people to endure and show sympathy; it is an emotional reaction, but do you realise what this sentiment is? Indeed, it is one of the abstract emotions you have within you that keeps you in motion without you realizing them. Like the courage that you use to attack or evade, but you never see or touch. You do not know its shape, colour, or taste. Likewise, the Most Exalted Who conducts this universe is not grasped by human vision. What bears a lot on people is that they try to associate the realised with the existing; but if we looked profoundly into the universe, we will surely deduct that there is a difference between realisation and existence.

We know that the name Allah itself is an utterance that we articulate in full comprehension that He is the Creator *the Most Exalted* and that He claims it resolutely. By way of example – man invented the television, but before it was brought into existence it was non-existent and had no name. It came to have a name only from the time man brought it into existence, a name that suits its specific task. As for the name Allah, it is existent and eternal before our time and before the messengers informed us of it. Allah has a name in every language, and the existence of this name in all languages, in a different pronunciation, is a proof on the precedence of Allah's existence. Then disbelief came, and we know that disbelief is an attempt to conceal the First Existence. This means that the word 'disbelief' indicates faith, and what really bears on man is his attempt to put a shape for the Most Exalted Existence, a shape that is defined by the capacities and limitation of humanity. But no one can restrict His Existence in a specific shape because it is from His Magnitude that we cannot picture Him. Faith in Him is a proof of Him, and He says whatever He wills about Himself; and I would love for you to remember this following example and to say it to your young ones.

Let us suppose that a man is sitting with his family in an apartment, and there is a knock on the door. Everyone sitting in the apartment is confident that someone knocked on the door and none of them differ about this. One of the children says, 'The one knocking is Mohammad'. The second one says, 'It is Mahmoud'. The third one says, 'No, it is Ibrahim'. The wife says, 'I am sure it is a woman'. However, one of the children says, 'No, it is a man'. The father says, 'Maybe it is a police officer who came to ask me something'. The wife responds, 'Expect goodness. You only do goodness, so only goodness would come knocking at your door'. Here the family differed not over the existence of a knocker, but over realising his essence. The father says, 'Instead of all the confusion, let us ask him who he is'. The one knocking responds, 'I am so-and-so'.

The same goes for the universe. Man comes across it and asks who created it. This is because heedlessness overtook us after Adam *peace be upon him* knew his Lord and after the True Lord *Glorified is He* made Adam's offspring bear witness that He is their Lord. Then Allah sent messengers to convey to the creation His way, His name and His attributes. With that, Allah did not want to fatigue His creation, and by way of the messengers, mankind was informed that He is the Most Praiseworthy Creator.

The plight of the philosophers is that they were not content with rationalising Allah; they wanted to picture Him as well. This is an impossible matter. Therefore, we say that it is upon us to listen to the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He says whatever He wills about Himself ending any real need for conflict over the issue. He tells us, 'He is Allah in the heavens and on earth' (*al-An'am:* 3). Beware, O Muslim, of thinking that the heavens and the earth here are a finite vessel. If you do not know the place of your spirit in your body, then how can you know the place of Allah? (1) Allah wants to tell us that He is worshipped in the heavens and on earth.

We should keep in consideration that some of the verses of the Quran baffle us so that we would always be occupied with the words of Allah. Had the Quran been revealed with over-simplified ideas and words, the meanings of His Noble Book would not have been renewed with every age. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* had intended this so that the people could be reassured of their faith in every age. Some of the first people who tried to delve into the Quran wondered a lot about Allah's statement, 'And it is Allah who is [the only] deity in the heaven, and on the earth [the only] deity. And He is the Wise, the Knowing.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 84)

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

They questioned the repetition that He is Allah in the heaven and Allah on earth. Some superficial people thought the repetition meant that there is a God in the heavens and another God on earth. They did not understand that the intended meaning is; He is Allah who is worshipped in the heavens and Allah who is worshipped on earth, and He possesses absolute wisdom in all His actions and encompasses His entire universe. All that the True Lord *Glorified is He* intends by this statement is to grasp the human minds and keep them busy with His remembrance. To those who did not understand the meaning we say, ‘There is a rule in the language about the definite and indefinite’. When we say, ‘the man came to me’, this man is known to both the speaker and the listener. However, when we say ‘a man came to me’, this man is not known to the listener and might be known to the speaker. If we say ‘a man came to me and I honoured a man’, then the speaker is talking about two men; one of them came and the other was honoured. When the speaker says ‘a man came to me and then I honoured the man’, then the speech here is about one man. Therefore, when the indefinite is repeated as an indefinite, we are talking about two different entities, but when the indefinite is repeated as a definite, and then they are the same entity. So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And it is Allah who is [the only] deity in the heaven, and on the earth [the only] deity. And He is the Wise, the Knowing.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 84) Some people thought that ‘Allah’ is indefinite, and when it was repeated, this meant they are two different entities. Had this been the case, the whole being would have been ruined. But the dominant rule came from the scholars who realised the essence of the text. Scholars of monotheism said, ‘We must not forget that the word *alladhi* (it is He) here is a relative pronoun which indicates to us that the True Lord’s connection to the heaven and the earth is one’. Therefore, we say to the ones who reflect on this verse, ‘Do not stop at the repeated indefinite and forget about the relative pronoun because the relative pronoun is definite’.

‘He is Allah in the heavens and on earth, He knows your secrets and what you reveal …’ (*al-An‘am:* 3). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* is one God and He knows what you keep secret and what you do openly. So, Allah *Glorified is He* rewards and punishes you per your actions. Do not think then, O man, that you will escape being brought to task by your Lord *Glorified is He*. Since He knows what you keep secret, He knows with greater reason what you do openly. If Allah *Glorified is He* had said that He only knows what is kept secret, then some people would have thought that He only knows that which is concealed because He is unseen. We may say, 'No'. Though Allah *Glorified is He* is unseen, He knows what is unseen and what is witnessed. In other words, He *Glorified is He* has such Infinite Knowledge that He does not wait until something becomes manifest; He, with His Perfect Knowledge and His Absolute Awareness knows such a thing from the beginning when it is secret and He knows and encompasses it after it becomes existent and manifest. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* records the history of knowledge within the same person, '...He knows your secrets and what you reveal …' (*al-An'am:* 3).

Allah *Glorified is He* informs us that He does not stop at what is hidden: 'Whatever you may say aloud, He knows what you keep secret and what is even more hidden.' (*Ta Ha:* 7) Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* knows what is secret before it becomes secret. All matters are secret before they are known; and before matters become secret, they are even more hidden.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* concludes this verse by saying, '...and He knows that which you earn.' (*al-An'am:* 3) *Kasb* in Arabic originally means 'earning profits' which occurs when someone invests their capital. *Kasb* can be good or evil; the one who earns through evil means is the one who goes beyond what Allah *Glorified is He* has permitted. On the other hand, the one who earns it through good is the one who wins. So, if a man does one good deed, he earns the reward of ten good deeds. The speaker is Allah *Glorified is He* Who deserves all praise because He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and darkness and light. However, the disbelievers at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stood in opposition of the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*. Though they were told that the True Lord *Glorified is He* created man from clay and He knows what is secret and what is even more hidden as well as the good and evil deeds we earn, none of them came to believe in the Call of the Truth and the Straight Path and follow Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَمَا تَأۡتِيهِم مِّنۡ ءَايَةٖ مِّنۡ ءَايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمۡ إِلَّا كَانُواْ عَنۡهَا مُعۡرِضِينَ ﴿٤﴾

But every time revelation comes to them from their Lord, they turn their backs on it [4] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 4)

Those disbelievers were not convinced of the signs that proved the truth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Though he was truthful about what he conveyed from his Lord, they turned away and rejected faith. They must have listened to the guidance that showed them the reality of the worldly life. We still witness the same opposition and aversion in our time. We are now able to learn how longsome man-made things such as electric lamps and other devices can be used before they should be replaced with others. Meanwhile, we know nothing about the life span of the sun, for instance, which has never needed maintenance. We should ask ourselves, 'How do such wonders happen?'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to make it clear to us that the One Who created all creatures advises us of what He wants and shows us His signs in this universe; but man turns away and does not care for all this.

The first mistake committed by man is that he has turned away from the signs he has received from the Creator, which explain to him the facts of existence, how the universe was administered before the coming of man, and how man can make use of this universe to sustain his life and maintain his species. However, he turns away from hearing any of this. The disbelievers have not just turned away, but they have moved on to another stage: denial. They not only deserted faith, but also reached a more degrading stage outlined in the next verse. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

فَقَدۡ كَذَّبُواْ بِٱلۡحَقِّ لَمَّا جَآءَهُمۡۖ فَسَوۡفَ يَأۡتِيهِمۡ أَنۢبَـٰٓؤُاْ مَا كَانُواْ بِهِۦ يَسۡتَهۡزِءُونَ ﴿٥﴾

So they denied the truth when it came to them, but the very thing they laughed at will be brought home to them [5] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 5)

This is a shift from turning away to denial. Turning away is just a negative behaviour, while denial is aimed at strongly opposing and obstructing

Allah's Path. Then there comes the third stage which is ridicule. Thus, we have here three stages: turning away, denial, and ridicule. The disbelievers did all of this so that they could take people away from following guidance. An example of this is what the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says concerning Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: 'And build the Ark under Our [Watchful] Eyes and with Our Inspiration. Do not plead with Me for those who have done evil—they will be drowned. So, he began to build the Ark, and whenever the leaders of his people passed by, they laughed at him. He said, "You may scorn us now, but we will come to scorn you."' (*Hud:* 37-38)

Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* the most truthful words and commanded him to build the Ark under His Providence and not to intercede with Him on behalf of the wrongdoing disbelievers who had not responded to Allah's Call. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* embarked on constructing the Ark, but the disbelievers mocked him because of their ignorance and suspicions. In return, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* made fun of everyone who laughed at him.

Let us see another example during the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* showing how Islam emerged victorious after the people of disbelief had been powerful. The arrogant transgressors amongst them came to be humiliated. Some of them were killed, while others were captured and suffered the bitterness of humiliation. Those people who had been mocking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* included Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughirah, their chief who is mentioned in the True Lord's Statement: 'When Our Revelations are recited to him, he says, "These are just ancient fables." We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 15-16) Al-Walid was a man of great wealth, and power. He also had many children. Since he turned away from the Quran and made fun of it, Allah *Glorified is He* has made an example of him and branded his nose with a mark which exposed him; such a mark is regarded as a disgrace and shame that is never separated from him whenever he is mentioned.

These Quranic verses were revealed when the Muslims were weak. Such verses told the Muslims that that disbeliever will be struck on the nose which is the symbol of pride and arrogance. When the Battle of Badr occurred, the Muslims saw the reality of what the Quran had stated. Indeed, it is miraculous Divine Speech whose recitation is an act of worship. Thus, every issue revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* turns to be true. After that, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِن قَبْلِهِم مِّن قَرْنٍ مَّكَّنَّـٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مَا لَمْ
نُمَكِّن لَّكُمْ وَأَرْسَلْنَا ٱلسَّمَآءَ عَلَيْهِم مِّدْرَارًا وَجَعَلْنَا ٱلْأَنْهَـٰرَ تَجْرِى
مِن تَحْتِهِمْ فَأَهْلَكْنَـٰهُم بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَأَنشَأْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِمْ قَرْنًا ءَاخَرِينَ ﴿٦﴾

Do they not realize how many generations We destroyed before them? We established them in the earth more firmly than you, sent down abundant rain on them from the sky and made running rivers flow at their feet, yet We destroyed them for their misdeeds and raised other generations after them [6]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 6)

This is what Quraysh witnessed in its winter and summer trade journeys. They saw the ruins of `Ad, the people of Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* and the remnants of Thamud, the people of Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*. The power of `Ad and Thamud were much greater than that of Quraysh who got their supremacy only from the *Ka`ba*. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* had left Abraha to destroy the *Ka`ba*, they would not have been established on earth. The True Lord *Glorified is He* destroyed many nations with great civilizations as narrated clearly by the Quran, 'Have you [Prophet Muhammad] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of `Ad, of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land, and Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excesses in their lands, and spread corruption there: your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them.' (*al-Fajr:* 6-13) Indeed, they were great civilizations that acquired fame and status in this worldly life, such as the civilization of the Pharaohs. However, the power and glory of those nations could not protect any of them from Allah's Decree of Destruction. They were utterly ruined as if they never existed. Here are the Words of the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*: 'And We punished each one of them for their sins. Some We struck with a violent storm, some were overcome by a sudden blast, some We made the earth swallow and some We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* repays every disbeliever in full. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed his people of what happened to the previous nations, 'Do they not realize how many generations We destroyed before them...?' (*al-An'am:* 6) A *qarn* (generation) is usually governed by a fixed time or certain conditions. As for time, a *qarn* is equal, at maximum, to one hundred years. The members of a generation who live this period may see their grandchildren during the stage of manhood. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'We sent Nuh (Noah) out to his people. He lived among them for fifty years short of a thousand...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 14). Though long, Nuh's (Noah's) life is called *'qarn'*. Therefore, *qarn* is a generation that is determined by a time frame or an intangible frame. *Qarn* of time is a period of one hundred years as we have said, whereas an intangible *qarn* could be the life span of a message or a kingdom.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells the people of disbelief that He defeated and destroyed the previous nations after He had established them on earth in different ways, '...sent down abundant rain on them from the sky and made running rivers flow at their feet, yet We destroyed them for their misdeeds and raised other generations after them.' (*al-An'am:* 6) This news comes from Allah regarding what happened to the previous peoples such as the people of Sheba. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says about those people: 'There was a sign for the people of Sheba too, in their dwelling place; two gardens, one on the right and one on the left. Eat from what your Lord has provided for you and give Him thanks, for your land is good, and your Lord, Most Forgiving.' (*Saba':* 15)

The dwelling place of Sheba in Yemen is a sign of Allah's Power. Two flourishing gardens on the right and on the left, so that the people of Sheba can eat from Allah's Provision and thank Allah *Glorified is He* for His Blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* granted them the power to build the famous Marib Dam. They cut rugged mountains down to retain rainwater. Everything they did was only done because Allah *Glorified is He* had willed it. However, they turned away from the abundant provision that Allah *Glorified is He* had granted them since they wanted to rely on themselves just as Qarun (Korah) did when he said, '... "This wealth was given to me because the knowledge I possess...' (*an-Naml:* 28). They thought they were capable of providing for themselves; hence, they did not thank Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* let loose on them a flood from the dam. It was a punishment that matched their misdeeds. This is how punishment is inflicted on those who disbelieve in Allah's Blessings and turn away from His Path. Allah *Glorified is He* let one of the weakest and tiniest animals, the mouse, penetrate the dam, to have their wealth drowned and their houses buried.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about all these stories to draw the attention of his people who saw the ruins of the civilizations of `Ad and Thamud since vision has the greatest impact. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* informed them of those stories to realise the consequences of aversion, denial and ridicule. The True Lord *Glorified is He* asked His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to just convey the Message clearly since he is not responsible for the faith of his people. Those disbelievers were always in fear of the supremacy of 'there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah' because they were the ones who made gods from amongst themselves and put some of them in control of others. The strong played God for the weak; the rich played God for the poor and the learned played God for the ignorant. Meanwhile, 'there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah' makes all people equal, which was refused by those people since they wanted supremacy. Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of this when He says, 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

They did not dare defame the Quran; they rather demanded that supremacy be for a rich man from amongst the wealthy people of the two towns, Mecca and Ta'if. This statement contradicted their actions and conduct towards Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since they used to entrust their valuable belongings with him. If one of them had seen the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* doing anything bad or shameful, they would not have done such an act. He was the only one who gained their confidence despite their disbelief and denial of his Message. Thus, those people sought their own interests, even through those whom they disbelieved, and attacked.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that those people are quite wrong and oppressive in regards to their aversion, denial, and ridicule of the Prophet's noble Message and the Glorious Quran. They are only driven by stubbornness just like the people of Pharaoh who rejected Allah's Signs after seeing them with their own eyes, though they were sure that they had been sent by Him: 'They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true. See how those who spread corruption met their end!' (*an-Naml:* 14) The people of Pharaoh denied the message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* though they were certain of its truth; but they denied it out of arrogance, pride and oppression. Thus, they faced a most desperate end; this is the destiny of those who always deny Allah's signs.

Here, we are faced with new deniers of the Message of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Concerning those disbelievers, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَلَوْ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ كِتَٰبًا فِى قِرْطَاسٍ فَلَمَسُوهُ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ لَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧﴾

Even if We had sent down to you [Prophet] a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say, 'This is nothing but blatant sorcery'[7] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 7)

Had this Book–the Quran–been revealed to those deniers in a written form that can be felt and seen; and had they touched it with their own hands, they would have said what every disbeliever says, 'This is obvious magic'. As one of their conditions, the deniers demanded Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he send down to them a book from heaven to read it. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* outlines their rejection by saying: 'They say, "We will not believe you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us, or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them, or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face, or have a house made of gold or ascend into the sky– even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read.’ Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 90: 93)

After the inimitability of the Quran became clear to them, they made false demands and suggested that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bring to them one of the following signs in order that they could believe: break open a spring in the land of Mecca, the water of which would never be cut off; have a garden of palm trees and grapes in Mecca and make rivers gush forth within them; supplicate that the sky fall upon them in fragments as a severe punishment; bring Allah and the angels to be seen by them; have a house made of gold or ascend into the sky and bring them a book from Allah affirming the veracity of his Message. However, Allah the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate exalts His Essence above all His creatures that they can neither control Him, and nor can they have a share of His Omnipotence. So, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* commanded His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say in the Glorious Quran: ‘...Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 93) This is because the One Who sends signs, is the Lord of all the worlds. No one dares to impose signs upon Him. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who receives Allah’s Signs; he does not propose them. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knows well that whoever suggests a sign to be revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* and then denies it, he will be punished and destroyed. This is the Way that Allah *Glorified is He* has imposed. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* learns that he is the Seal of the Prophets; thus, he will never request a sign from Allah *Glorified is He* lest Allah’s Punishment befall them if they deny it. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* tells His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the insolence and arrogance of those disbelieving haughty people: ‘Even if We had sent down to you [Prophet Muhammad] a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say, “This is nothing but blatant sorcery.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 7)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* knows that the hearts of some of these deniers have indeed become heedless in regards to their faith. Allah *Glorified is He* wants such people to be believers. However, if Allah *Glorified is He* had sent down to them a book written on parchment and they had seen it with their eyes and touched it with their hands, they would not have believed. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions touching the book with hands because touching is a sense joined by everyone, even the blind; but they will deny this fact saying, 'This is nothing but blatant sorcery.' Such a response has nothing to do with reason, good thinking, or wisdom. Moreover, it does not come in harmony with those people who are known for rhetoric, eloquence and beautiful speech and composition. Sorcery is intended to change people's vision of reality. Since they accused Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of practising sorcery, why did he not bewitch them and why did they resist sorcery? We know that a sorcerer deprives his victims of their will and ability to act; and if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been a sorcerer, he would have used sorcery to make them believe.

Those deniers were known for their language and discourse skills that could distinguish between good and false statements, as well as their wide experience that could differentiate between the various forms of speech: oratory, writing, prose, poetry, rhymed speech, and non-rhymed speech. Nevertheless, it is astonishing that they stood fully bewildered and shackled before the inimitability of the Quran, saying, 'It is sorcery' at one time, 'It is the speech of a soothsayer' another time and 'It is the speech of mad person' at a third time.

The Quran is not sorcery because it has eloquence that cannot be matched by that of the Arab disbelievers. Though Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was one of the Arabs, he did not do anything to make them believe against their will. Likewise, the Quran is not the speech of soothsaying because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was raised amongst them and known as the most truthful and trustworthy person who did not get knowledge from others. In addition, the speech of soothsayers has a specific mode and rhyme scheme which has nothing to do with the Quran. Those disbelievers learned that it was the speech of a sane man since the speech of a madman is neither coherent nor cohesive. In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says the following words about His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Your Lord's Grace does not make you [Prophet Muhammad] a madman. You will have a never-ending reward—truly you have a great moral character' (*al-Qalam:* 24).

Allah *Glorified is He* prepared His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to receive prophecy with good thinking that is far away from foolishness of opinion. He will have a reward that is neither cut off, nor withheld for conveying the Message of his Lord. He is of a great moral character who wisely deals with events via compatible faculties that never conflict each other. Those old deniers themselves bore witness to the good character of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, how could this exalted character be attributed to a madman and how could such sound and good behaviour come from a madman? Thus, all their accusations levelled to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came because of their insistence on disbelief, not due to concrete facts. They learned well that they had seen and witnessed the very opposite of what they attributed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Insisting on disbelief, they started to demand another sign:

وَقَالُوا۟ لَوْلَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ ۖ وَلَوْ أَنزَلْنَا مَلَكًا لَّقُضِىَ ٱلْأَمْرُ ثُمَّ لَا يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٨﴾

They say, 'Why was no angel sent down to [support] him?' But had We sent down an angel, their judgement would have come at once with no respite given [8] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 8)

What are angels? Angels are a species that Allah *Glorified is He* has made a part of the unseen world. We believe in them because Allah *Glorified is He* Who we believe in, says that He has angels, just as He says that there are jinn. Angels belong to the unseen as we have said, and the jinn are concealed from us too. Those stubborn deniers demanded that an angel be sent down so that they could believe. Thus, they knew that there is an invisible world and that their original disposition has something in common with the heaven, but they continued to deny. Their mentioning of an angel is evidence that they still had traces of the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them* in the depths of their hearts. Those traces remained in their souls because they were not related to sovereignty. Had the True Lord

Glorified is He sent down an angel to them, they would not still have believed because they were deniers. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not want to apply His Established Practice to them by sending down the sign that they had demanded in order not to punish them in case they deny it. Had the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent down an angel to them as they had requested and had they disbelieved afterwards, the matter would have been decided and they would have been destroyed without any respite. Thus, if an angel had made himself apparent and manifest to them in its real state, their human nature would not have been able to tolerate such an experience.

Indeed, the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) that belongs to the invisible world came down in his overwhelming nature with Allah's Revelation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Though the coming down of this noble angel had a tremendous impact on the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* only traces remained in the wake of their meeting. In this context, the moment that Jibril (Gabriel) came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for the first time in the Cave of Hira` was related as follows: 'Jibril (Gabriel) came to me and told me to read. I replied, "I do not know how to read." Jibril (Gabriel) then held me (forcibly) and pressed me so hard that I felt distressed. Then he released me and again told me to read, and I replied, "I do not know how to read." Thereupon he held me again and pressed me for the second time till I felt distressed. He then released me and asked me to read, but I replied again, "I do not know how to read." Thereupon he held me for the third time and pressed me till I got distressed, and then he released me and said, "Read! In the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clinging clot. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One Who taught by [means of] the pen, Who taught man what he did not know." (*al-'Alaq:* 1-5) Then Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* returned with that experience; and his heart beating severely till he came upon Khadijah (his wife) *Allah be pleased with her* and said, "Wrap me up! Wrap me up!" She wrapped him, and when the state of fear was over, he said to Khadijah, "O Khadijah! What is wrong with me? I was afraid that something bad might happen to me." Then he told her the story. Khadijah said, "Never! But be glad with the good tidings! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you, for by Allah, you keep good relations with your relatives, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist those who are stricken with calamities.”’(1)

Thus, Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* was the first person to have faith immediately after she knew about the Revelation. Then, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* relieved to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet Muhammad], and remove the burden that weighed so heavily on your back, and raise your reputation high?’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1-4) Allah *Glorified is He* relieved the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to receive the Divine Secrets and Knowledge. Allah *Glorified is He* further removed from His Noble Messenger the burdens that had weighed heavily upon his back. Allah *Glorified is He* connected the name of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to the core of faith and religion to the extent that his name is joined to that of the Holy Essence in the Testimony, the first pillar of Islam: ‘I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’

We have seen how the situation was extremely difficult for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Jibril (Gabriel) was shown to him in his true form, but Allah *Glorified is He* helped His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to receive Jibril (Gabriel) in this form. We may know that there is a difference between the human physique and the angelic physique. The human physique is associated with material elements that suit its formation. So, if it is exposed to a higher power, it cannot bear it unless Allah *Glorified is He* prepares and shapes the Angel in a way that makes him qualified to be sent, and in the meantime, prepares the messenger to be qualified to receive the Revelation. This is the case when messengers receive angels, then what about their seeing the Holy Essence. We learn the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he came to meet his Lord. In this context, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘When Musa (Moses) came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, “My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!” He said, “You will never see Me, but look at that mountain: if it remains standing firm, you will see Me", and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble. Musa (Moses) fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said, "Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!"" (*al-A'raf:* 143)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*

What prevents man from seeing Allah *Glorified is He* is man's inability to visually encompass Him. When Allah *Glorified is He* appeared to the firm and solid mountain it was levelled to the ground and became dust. On his part, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* fell down unconscious because of the tremendous scene he had just witnessed. When he awoke, he repented to Allah *Glorified is He* and declared himself to be the first to believe in Him. Thus, if man is made unconscious by the True Lord *Glorified is He* showing Himself to the mountain, then how could he stand the True Lord *Glorified is He* showing Himself to him?

We may know that every creature has a certain capacity that qualifies it to get the elements it needs; we give an example of this from our everyday life —Allah has the highest image and He is Exalted above every likeness. When a person gets a house, he intends to provide it with the electricity required to obtain light as well as the power necessary to operate different devices. When this person goes to bed, he dispenses with light and seeks darkness. He turns the lights off and uses a small lamp that cannot take power directly from the main source of electricity. So, he brings a power transformer which reduces the high electric energy of the source to be suitable for the small lamp. Thus, he maintains a dim light at night so that he can benefit from darkness and get to sleep.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has indeed blessed us with the creation of light and darkness; each has its mission. While the creation of light, illumination, and electricity has allowed man to develop civilisations, darkness has allowed man to find rest and tranquillity so that he can regain his energy and vitality. We maintain little light that does not disturb us at night in order not to collide with things or break them when we get up to relieve ourselves.

Similarly, man, still a weak creature, is incapable of receiving the Revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* in a direct way. It is from the True Lord's Mercy towards His creation that He placed a link between Him and mankind. As a link, Jibril (Gabriel) learns the Revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* to convey it to the chosen messenger; and in turn the chosen messenger becomes another link. The disbelievers were foolish enough to demand that an angel be sent down as a messenger. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* responds to them in another verse in the Glorious Quran, saying: ‘The only thing that kept these people from believing, when Guidance came to them, was that they said, “How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?” Say, “If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 94-95)

Being ignorant people, they asked that an angel be sent down with Guidance as a messenger. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to answer them by saying that if there had been angels amongst human beings, i.e. if there had been angels walking on the earth, and then an angel would have been sent to them as a messenger. As this was not the case, then the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent a messenger from amongst human beings. A messenger must convey Allah's Message to his people and be an example for them by adopting as a person his religion's way of life. If an angel had been sent down as a messenger and adopted the religion's way of life in person, the human beings concerned would have said to him, ‘You are an angel and you can do things that we cannot do; so, you are not a good example for us’. For this reason, a messenger must be of the same species of the targeted people so that he can be an example and model for them.

Indeed, this nullifies the claims that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is God or son of God because 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* demanded his people to act as he did. The True Lord *Glorified is He* sent humans only as messengers to underscore that they are models and examples with their nations. Thus, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘...But had We sent down an angel’, their judgement would have come at once...’ (*al-An‘am:* 8) because humans cannot receive an angel’s rays of illumination and radiance since they are not prepared to have these rays of illumination and radiance. Therefore, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says:

وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَٰهُ مَلَكًا لَّجَعَلْنَٰهُ رَجُلًا وَلَلَبَسْنَا عَلَيْهِم مَّا يَلْبِسُونَ ﴿٩﴾

Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger, We would still have sent him in the form of a man, so increasing their confusion [9] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 9)

Hence, if Allah *Glorified is He* had intended to send a messenger from amongst the angels, He would have made him in the form of a human because of people's inability to see an angel in his original shape; they may even be destroyed when witnessing him, '...so increasing their confusion.' This means that We confuse them by making the angel resemble a man, thus adding to their original confusion. Encountering this situation, they would say, 'You are only a man, not an angel'. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* sent down an angel in the form of a man as in the case of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. In this regard, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Tell them too about Ibrahim's [Abraham's] guests; when they came to him and said, "Peace," he said, "We are afraid of you." "Do not be afraid", they said, "We bring you good news of a son who will have great knowledge."' (*al-Hijr:* 51-53)

When Allah *Glorified is He* sent angels as guests to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* he was afraid of them after he had seen them not eating from the calf he had served them. They told him to be at ease by telling him the good news sent from Allah *Glorified is He* that he would be granted a child named Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* from his wife Sarah after Allah *Glorified is He* had given him Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* from Hajar at an earlier time.

Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent an angel to the Virgin Maryam (Mary), *peace be upon her*; and he appeared before her in the form of a perfected man and informed her that she would get pregnant with 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Thus, an angel is embodied in the form of a man when Allah *Glorified is He* sends him on a mission to human beings because an angel does not come to humans in his original form. It is Allah's Grace towards His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He permitted him to see Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* in his original form once in the Cave of Hira` and another at the Lote Tree of the utmost boundary. Meanwhile, he saw Jibril (Gabriel) as a man when he appeared in the form of Dehyah Al-Kalbi and when he came as a traveller to Messenger

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask him about Islam and faith. This last incident was related to us by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar Allah *be pleased with him* who said, ‘My father, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* told me, “Once we were sitting in the company of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* when there appeared a man dressed in very white clothes and having extraordinary black hair. No signs of fatigue of a journey appeared on him and he was known to none of us. He sat down facing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* putting his knees against the knees of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and placing both of his palms over his two thighs and said, “O Muhammad! Tell me about Islam”. He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, “Islam is to testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; that you observe *salat* (prayers), give *zakat* (alms), observe *sawm* (fasting) of *Ramadan* and perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage) at the Sacred House (*Ka`ba*), provided you have resources of making a journey to it.” He replied, “You have spoken the truth.” We were surprised to see that he had asked him and confirmed the correctness of the answers. He then enquired, “Tell me about faith.” The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “It is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day and that you believe in preordainment (destiny), its bad and good consequences.” He said, “You have spoken the truth.” He then enquired, “Tell me about *ihsan* (doing the most perfect deed).” He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “It is to worship Allah as if you are seeing Him; and although you do not see Him, He sees you.” He enquired, “Inform me about the Hour (i.e., the Day of Resurrection).” He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, “I have no more knowledge thereof than you.” He said, “Inform me about some of its signs.” He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “They are that a slave will give birth to her own master, and that you will find the barefooted, naked, poor shepherds competing one another in the construction of higher buildings.” Then he departed. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* kept silent for a while, and then he said to me, “O ‘Umar! Do you know who the questioner was?” I replied, “Allah and His Messenger know best.” The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “He was Jibril (Gabriel); he came to you to teach you your religion.”’(1)

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(1) This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in the *Book of Faith* and was not mentioned in=

Thus, we as humans are incapable of seeing angels unless Allah *Glorified is He* sends them in the form of men. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, 'Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger, We would still have sent him in the form of a man, so increasing their confusion.' (*al-An'am:* 9) So, sending angels in the form of humans is there all the time as Allah *Glorified is He* sent angels as men to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* Maryam (Mary), the daughter of 'Imran *peace be upon her* and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was sitting among his people.

Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* comforts His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying:

وَلَقَدِ ٱسۡتُهۡزِئَ بِرُسُلٖ مِّن قَبۡلِكَ فَحَاقَ بِٱلَّذِينَ
سَخِرُواْ مِنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ بِهِۦ يَسۡتَهۡزِءُونَ ١٠

Messengers have been mocked before you [Muhammad], and those who mocked them were engulfed by the very punishment they had mocked [10] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 10)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* tells His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the people of disbelief always made fun of the previous messengers; so Allah *Glorified is He* humiliated them with the same punishment He prepares for the deniers of the messengers' guidance. Those who mock the news coming from the heavens will be severely punished by Allah *Glorified is He* because of their ridicule and mocking.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* then says:

= Al-Bukhari. Ibn Hibban also narrated the same Hadith in his *Sahih* (collection of Ahadith) based on the narration of Abu Hurayra Allah *be pleased with him* who said, 'One day The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was preaching to the people when a man came to him and said, "What is faith?" He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Faith is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers and believe in the resurrection…" Moreover, Ahmad narrated the Hadith in his *Musnad* (collection of Ahadith), while At-Tirmidhi narrated it, with the question about faith being the start of the Hadith.

قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ ٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١١﴾

Say, ‘Travel throughout the earth and see what fate befell those who rejected the truth’ [11]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 11)

You should know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* never says, ‘Travel *on* the earth’ because the earth is a container in which man can walk as he is placed within this container. Allah *Glorified is He* had told man about this piece of knowledge before science proved that the earth is spherical and hanging in the air, and that it is encompassed by the air which is considered the source of nourishment for man through oxygen and for plants through carbon dioxide. We may learn that man can live without food for weeks and without water for days; but he cannot live if the air is prevented from him for a few moments. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* never allows anyone to take possession of the air. Thus, we have learned that the air belongs to the earth. Wherever we go, we are surrounded by the air; so, we travel throughout the earth. This is a bit of the scientific inimitability manifested in the Quran. In another similar place, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘...So travel through the earth and see what was the fate of those who denied the Truth!’ (*an-Nahl:* 36)

Here in the chapter of *al-An`am* (Livestock), the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘Say, “Travel throughout the earth; *then* see what fate befell those who rejected the Truth.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 11)

What is the difference between the two verses? Per Arabic, both *fa'* (and) and *thumma* (then) are particles of conjunctions that indicate sequence. However, *fa’* denotes sequence with succession, i.e. without any delay or passing of time. For example, we may say, ‘We welcomed Zaid and (*fa’*) ‘Amr’, i.e. we welcomed ‘Amr after we welcomed Zaid without any delay. On the other hand, *thumma* refers to a long period of time separating two events. Hence, when the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘...So travel through the earth and see what was the fate of those who denied the Truth!’ (*an-Nahl:* 36), it is as if observation and contemplation are the goal of travelling; people travel through the land to learn lessons.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, 'Say, "Travel throughout the earth; then see what fate befell those who rejected the Truth."' (*al-An'am:* 11) This means that a man may go through the earth for the sake of trade, cultivation or any other business. During this journey, he must think and contemplate. So, travelling may be for drawing lessons or for doing business. When travelling for learning lessons, man gains experience directly, but when travelling for doing business, he derives lessons during conducting such business. When Quraysh went on their trade caravans to Syria and Yemen, they could see the ruins of the old deniers, whether they belonged to Thamud, `Ad or others. The travellers of Quraysh had to learn lessons during their journeys which were made for the sake of trade. Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

قُل لِّمَن مَّا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ قُل لِّلَّهِۚ كَتَبَ عَلَىٰ نَفۡسِهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَةَۚ لَيَجۡمَعَنَّكُمۡ
إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ لَا رَيۡبَ فِيهِۚ ٱلَّذِينَ خَسِرُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ فَهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١٢

Say, 'To whom belongs all that is in the heavens and earth?'
Say, 'To God. He has taken it upon Himself to be merciful.
He will certainly gather you on the Day of Resurrection,
which is beyond all doubt. Those who deceive themselves
will not believe [12] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 12)

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* how to ask and how to answer so that people learn through this dialogue that the entire Dominion is Allah's. Had people, including the deniers, searched for an owner of this universe, they would have found none except Allah. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says about those disbelievers: 'If you ask the disbelievers who created the heavens and the earth and who harnessed the sun and the moon, they are sure to say, "Allah." Then why do they turn away from Him?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 61)

Despite their associating of partners with Allah *Glorified is He* they cannot keep themselves from recognizing that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of everything. Man may be deluded by his will of choice; but when he finds himself forced to do certain things, he immediately acknowledges the Truth.

Man may have the choice to do some actions, while he has no choice concerning other events that may happen to him. This is because the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to alert His creation that He does whatever He wills and that He governs the entire universe. Allah *Glorified is He* grants man free will in order that he may test himself in regards to obeying Allah's Commands.

Generally speaking, events are of three kinds: an event that happens to you, an event that happens within yourself, and an event that comes from you. You have no choice regarding the events which occur to you as well as those occurring within yourself. All that is left for you is a third the events; that third which comes from you. You are thus placed inside two brackets in which you have no choice: the bracket of birth and the bracket of death. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* controls everything.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* comforts His creation when saying, '...He has taken it upon Himself to be Merciful...' (*al-An'am:* 12). The True Lord *Glorified is He* voices this statement to make His slaves feel secure so as not think that Allah *Glorified is He* will punish them without calling them to account. We must learn that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Forbearing and the Possessor of Great Bounty, Who says: 'Say [Prophet Muhammad], "In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice..."' (*Yunus:* 58).

Allah *Glorified is He* forgives much; the entrance to His Mercy and Grace is quite open and the way to repentance is paved before sinners. It is Allah's Bounty that He *Glorified is He* made some of the disbelievers stand in opposition to Muslims at the beginning of the Call, and afterwards they became like swords in defence of Islam. Allah, the Most Compassionate, gathers us for reckoning on the Day of Resurrection which is beyond doubt and uncertainty. We are all heading towards that day; the disbelievers will come there against their will, while the believers will be delighted for they are going to meet their Lord, being sure of Allah's Mercy and Grace.

The disbelievers lose themselves due to their evil deeds—we seek refuge in God—as confirmed by the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who says, '...Those who will lose themselves [that Day] do not believe.' (*al-An'am:* 12) Losing oneself is a consequence of losing faith. When we consider ends and means, we will find that one's means comes before their end; but in reality, the end becomes clear before the means. For example, a student keeps in mind the end of success; so, he exerts every effort to succeed. We should know that any conditional statement is situated between two responses: the motivating response and the actual response. Success is a motive for studying, whereas studying makes success a reality. Ibn Ar-Rumi, a poet, said,

Who can show me my end before my means?
How come? Indeed, ends come after means?

The poet's lines here do not speak the truth because man must be aware of the end first, then he must look for the means that will lead him to the end. When we find that man's ultimate end is to resort to Allah *Glorified is He* while the means is the religion's way of life, then why are people at a loss? Thus, we learn that those who have not believed in faith have lost themselves because they have not distinguished the motivating end which is to repent and submit to Allah *Glorified is He* from the existing end which is the means. Allah *Glorified is He* has made it easy for His slaves when He has given them the way of life they must follow.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَلَهُۥ مَا سَكَنَ فِى ٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِۚ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ﴿١٣﴾

All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him.
He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [13]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 13)

It is the Greatness of the Supreme Existent Whose Existence comes from His Self that He speaks about Himself in the third-person. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says at the beginning of some verses, 'Say: "He is Allah…"'.

'Say' is a command; as if when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says 'He', it only belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*. 'All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him...' (*al-An'am:* 13). The verb *sakana* (rest) is comprised of the Arabic letters *sin*, *kaf* and *nun* from which we can get several meanings. There is, for instance, the word *sakan* (settlement or dwelling) and the word *sukoon* (stillness or the opposite of movement). An example of dwelling is Allah's

Words for Adam *peace be upon him*: '...O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in this garden…' (*al-Baqara:* 35).

Again, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him...' (*al-An'am:* 13). It is as if night and day are a vessel and all of existence is contained within it. Night and day here refer to the dimension of place which is the earth. Every place on earth has night and day. If we want to refer to dwelling, the verb *sakana* refers to that, and if we want stillness —which is the opposite of movement —the meaning is still there. Everything in motion eventually becomes still. Man controls movement for some time, then he dies or becomes motionless inside the earth. Thus, the common feature that characterizes both night and day is 'All that rests...' (*ma sakana*). Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him. He is the All-Hearing, the All Knowing.' (*al-An'am:* 13)

When Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, 'All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him...' (*al-An'am:* 13), He talks about time as well as the events that occur within it. As we may know, man is an event, and everything that happens to him is an event too. Everything in the universe is also an event. All these events are originated by the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who gets His Existence from His Essence.

Since events are created, they must have time and place. The place of events is the heaven and the earth and what is between them, while the time of events is night and day. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about the creation of time after telling us that He is the Creator of place. 'Say, "To whom belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth?" Say, "To Allah"' (*al-An'am:* 12).

So, time and place were created when Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to bring this universe into existence. Never say, 'Where had Allah *Glorified is He* been before He created the universe?' This is because the word 'where?' is an inquiry about place, and 'when?' is an inquiry about time. Both were established following the existence of events in the universe. The universe is a fixed state, while time is not a fixed state because it can be in the past, the present, or the future.

When the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him...’ (*al-An‘am:* 13), it means that He controls the two states: the fixed and the unfixed, or what is stationary and what is moving in the universe. This is because everything that moves will eventually become stationary. Or, the True Lord’s statement, ‘All that rests by night or by day belongs to Him...’ (*al-An‘am:* 13), refers to what occurs during the night and the day. In other words, everything that occurs by night and day, whether it is moving or stationary is possessed by Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* concludes this verse by saying, ‘He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 13) Hearing is connected to something heard, i.e. that which is in motion, while knowledge is connected to something heard, seen, smelt and involving other forms of perception. Therefore, Allah’s statement, ‘He is the All-Hearing, the All Knowing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 13), is rendered to include both moving and stationary things, for nothing is concealed from him or escapes him.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes Himself with an attribute that is shared by humans, we should understand it within the context of ‘…There is nothing like Him…’ (*ash-Shura:* 11). You, O man, hear and can be described as ‘hearing’; you have knowledge and can be described as ‘knowing’; you have sight and can be described as ‘seeing’ and you have power and can be described as ‘powerful’. Further, you may possess wealth and you can be described as ‘rich’; you exist and you can be described as ‘existing’ and you are alive and you can be described as ‘living’.

However, are these attributes that you have the same as Allah’s? No, because Allah’s Attributes are only understood within the framework of ‘…There is nothing like Him…’ (*ash-Shura:* 11). We witness this in ourselves; man has a state of living and a state of death; the state of living is divided into two other states: the state of waking and the state of sleeping. In the state of waking, we see per the laws of vision which is ruled by the laws of light. Likewise, hearing is governed by laws concerned with sound and oscillating waves.

Nevertheless, man sleeps with closed eyes and he has dreams in which he sees different colours. So, what makes you perceive these colours while your eyes are closed? Since humans have dreams in which they can see without eyes, then do not say that Allah *Glorified is He* sees us with eyes that are like ours. Indeed, He *Glorified is He* sees within the context of '…There is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11). He *Glorified is He* is the All-Sustaining and He governs His slaves in both time and place when they are awake and when they are asleep.

To give you an example of our daily life, we find a man and his wife sleeping in the same bed. The man may see himself in his sleep facing enemies, while his wife sees herself surrounded by her joyful children and grandchildren. Then, they wake up and tell each other about what they have seen for more than an hour, even though the human brain is active for only seven seconds during sleep.(1)

Thus, the company of others, time and place are absent during sleep. Having learned about these laws that govern man's life, we must conclude that we cannot encompass the Attributes of the Creator of all laws, the True Lord *Glorified is He*. We must understand them within the framework of '…There is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* then says:

قُلْ أَغَيْرَ ٱللَّهِ أَتَّخِذُ وَلِيًّا فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ يُطْعِمُ وَلَا يُطْعَمُ ۗ قُلْ إِنِّيٓ
أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ ۖ وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

Say, 'Shall I take for myself a protector other than God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds but is not fed?' Say, 'I am commanded to be the first [of you] to devote myself [to Him].' Do not be one of the idolaters [14] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 14)

The Arabic letter *hamza* that equals the letter 'a' in English in the phrase '*aghaira*' translated here as 'is it other', is called the *hamza* of negation, just as we say in Arabic `*atasub* `*aback* translated here as 'Do you insult your father?' This *hamza* does not refer to a question as much as it indicates reproach and blame. '…Is it other than Allah I should take as a protector...'

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

(*al-An'am:* 14), i.e. the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* commands His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to reject the taking of other than Allah *Glorified is He* as a protector.

Indeed, taking Allah *Glorified is He* as a protector is a vital matter because the events occurring to man prove to him that he is weak and his circumstances are always changing. When feeling weak, man must seek refuge in the One Who is more powerful than him and Who does not change. The Power of the Protector —Allah *Glorified is He*–cannot become weaker, just as His Wealth cannot turn into poverty, and His Knowledge has nothing to do with ignorance. He is the One Who changes and is never changed. Therefore, it is Allah's Blessing towards His creation that He has made Himself a Protector for them since He *Glorified is He* controls the course of events.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches His creation how to be wise, act properly, and put their trust in Him. He *Glorified is He* is the Ever-Living who does not die. We notice in this verse that the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to convey His revelation to people. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed the revelation to the letter as stated in the inimitable Glorious Quran.

An example of this is the True Lord's statement, 'Say: "He is Allah the One."' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). Here, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* honestly conveys to us the exact words of his Lord *Glorified is He* as it was sent down to him, beginning with the word 'Say'. We see the same thing in this verse, 'Say [O Muhammad], 'Is it other than Allah I should take as a protector...' (*al-An'am:* 14). He is the One Whose Attributes of Perfection are mentioned in the previous verses; the One Who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light. Allah *Glorified is He* controls everything reposing by night and day. This True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One worthy of worship.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to extract the answer from people instead of saying, 'I do not take other than Allah as a protector'. Allah *Glorified is He* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask people, 'Say [O Muhammad], "Is it other than Allah I should take as a protector..."' (*al-An'am:* 14). Thus, the question is raised by the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as commanded by Allah *Glorified is He*. People are given freedom to come up with an answer which will eventually be the desired one.

When a man hears the like of this question, he must rack his brain and think carefully to find an answer to such a question. He will give no answer other than saying, 'I do not have a protector except Allah *Glorified is He*'. A protector is the one who is always here to help you in your weakness and save you when crying out to him for help.

A man does not cry out to anyone for help unless he is afflicted with calamities. The distressed person thus rests assured that the powerful one who comes to their help will save and assist them. It is quite normal for a man to seek a protector in this life, while it is quite despicable for him to seek a protector other than Allah *Glorified is He*. We —the believers — take one another as protectors within the framework of Allah's Protection in support of the True Lord's statement, 'The believers, both men and women, support each other. They order what is right and forbid what is wrong they keep up the prayers and pay the prescribed alms and they obey Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]. Allah will give His Mercy to such people; Allah is Almighty and Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 71)

The believing men and women exchange love and assistance in accordance with the mutual contract of faith that is between them and the True Lord *Exalted and Glorified is He*. They command one another with the commands of the right path. They prevent one another from the unlawful that Allah has prohibited and they connect themselves to the True Lord by establishing the prayer. They carry out Allah's right regarding their wealth by way of *zakat*. They obey Allah and follow the commands of His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Hence, they are bestowed with Allah's true promise of mercy and He is the One fully capable of taking care of them. He is Wise in maintaining them and He is Almighty; no one overcomes Him.

Therefore, you are seeking a protector in a moment of weakness, and a moment of adversity. A man is not created perfect, such that he is susceptible to weakness and poverty, not always strong nor rich. You know that man is subject to changes, so we do not see a strong person whose strength is permanently established, or a rich person whose wealth is permanently established. Man is 'the son of changes'. Circumstances that are beyond his capacity befall him, and therefore he asks others who can help him. The believer also loves to be strong so that he can help others because the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* has distributed His gifts amongst His creation in the universe so that He can guarantee the permanence of the protection and its continuation. Thus, you are in need of the work of another man because you are weak in some aspects, but someone else is strong at it. The doctor needs the engineer, and the engineer needs the doctor. The doctor and the engineer need the farmer, and the farmer needs the work of the engineer and the doctor. The doctor, the engineer, and the farmer need the work of the lawyer.

This is how Allah distributes His gifts in the universe, and He did not allow for one man to possess all the gifts. Thus, society does not support itself out of courtesy and generosity, but out of need. Every man is the master of his corner of life, and the other corners are mastered by other human beings. Therefore, the True Lord says, 'It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service. But the mercy of your Lord is better than whatever they accumulate.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

This is a declaration from Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* that He has distributed provision amongst humanity so that they can support one another and some would be made to work for others in fulfilling the needs of one another so that the matters of life follow smooth organization. In this distribution, there is mercy from the True Lord towards His creation. If all people were of equal intelligence, and all of them became geniuses, who would oversee regulating the streets? Who would work on and maintain buildings, or take care of and feed the animals, besides many other things without which life cannot be ordered.

Each one of us sees the man who digs wells for flowing streams and goes out the next morning saying, 'O Opener, O Omniscient, O All-Provider and O Bountiful'. He seeks a new well from the flowing streams so that he can leave it until he has acquired nourishment for himself and his dependents. Each one of us is in need of others, and this is the meaning of, ‘they may make use of one another for service.’

Therefore, taking a protector is a natural matter, and faith in Allah gives us the intelligence to choose a protector. It is upon the believing person to choose the protector that will be there when he needs him, and therefore he must choose the protection of Allah, not the protection of changing circumstances. Allah subjugates people to serve the believer, including his enemy. Therefore, the True Lord informs us on the tongue of His Messenger, ‘Say: “Am I to take for my protector anyone but Allah.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 14) Those who rebuke us for taking Allah as a protector and want us to take other than Him see in themselves an example. His hopes may be dashed, for the man from amongst them may take a man like him as a protector, and when he needs him he finds that he is sick, absent or his heart has changed towards him. However, the believer does choose Allah as his protector because He is the One who is never absent and will never change, and nor will He ever become weak. The Quran does not rebuke man for talking a protector from amongst human beings, but the True Lord indicates to us that He is the True Protector, and it is upon the believer to take his believing brothers as his protectors because it is a protection from Allah and unto Allah.

You, O Muslim, when you choose the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* as your protector, He is the One who will bring you all kinds of provision and prepare them and arrange them to be at your service. This is because Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘Say, “Is it other than Allah I should take as a protector, Creator of the heavens and the earth, while it is He who feeds and is not fed?”’ (*al-An‘am:* 14) Indeed, the True Lord created the heavens and the earth without using any prior example. He created this universe without using any previous model. When 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* wanted to confirm his miracle for his people, he brought some clay and formed it into the shape of a bird. Therefore, there is a prior example that he found and followed. 'Isa (Jesus) is a man from the creation. As for the Creator of the entire creation, He created the heavens and the earth without any prior example. You, O man, might not turn to the issue of the creation of the heavens and the earth because you see them in every moment in a monotonous fashion, and you may think that it is an easy matter, but the True Lord says, 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind, but most of the people do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57)

Allah *the Exalted* vows that the creation of the heavens and the earth is a matter that is greater and finer than the creation of mankind but most of mankind does not know this. Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, 'And the heaven We constructed with strength, and indeed, We are [its] expander.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47)

This refers to the creation of the seen and unseen universe because there are many celestial bodies and solar systems, and what is beyond that of this expansion of the universe that the intellect cannot grasp nor define. This baffling capacity is from Allah's power. We find the True Lord using the word Creator at one time meaning to put in order, but at another time to mean disorder. The example of putting something in order is the True Lord's saying, 'Creator of the heavens and the earth.' He created the heavens and the earth without any prior example and with a masterful efficiency.

The True Lord says in another place, 'When the sky breaks apart.' (*al-Infitar:* 1) The True Lord is drawing attention to the day of the greatest fright in which the sky will be split and in which the celestial bodies will fall. None of these things will be carrying out their task because Allah will cause them to dysfunction.

He also says: '[And] who created seven heavens in layers. You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency. So, return [your] vision [to the sky]; do you see any breaks?' (*al-Mulk:* 3) The True Lord is Capable of everything, and He is the creator of the seven heavens with precision, one over the other. The one looking cannot see any flaw in this creation, and let man look at the sky again and he will not find any flaw therein; no cracks or fissures.

The True Lord, with His complete power, gives everything attributes that make it suitable for carrying out what it was created for, so let no one thinks that he has exited from the power of his Creator– and He created the heavens and the earth with complete fashioning and precision, and He is fully capable of splitting them and making them unsuitable at any time that He wills. An example is the sun being rolled up, the stars being blotted out and the mountains being pulverised to dust.

One of the scholars said, 'the word creator was not understood until a Bedouin came and said, "So-and-so is arguing with me over a well that I created (i.e. dug)."' The Bedouin is the one who began the digging of the well. Therefore, the Creator of the heavens of the earth is the One Who created them without any prior example. He says, 'Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?' (*al-Anbiya':* 30) This wise saying was not understood deeply by those before us, but man in these modern times has understood it after scientists discovered that the heavens and the earth were one entity, and the True Lord separated them by His Will; and He made from water every living thing.

Therefore, He is fully capable of everything, and nothing exits from the domain of His power. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* before granting us the creation of life, warned us against being deluded by this life. Therefore, He said, 'Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion, and He is over all things competent. He who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2)

It is as if He is drawing man's attention to receive life, and to know that Allah *the Exalted* created death, so beware of assuming that life is that which gives you the power of motion, realisation and will in some monotony and eternity because there is death.

'Have you seen that which you emit? Is it you who creates it, or are We the Creator? We have decreed death among you, and We are not to be outdone. In that We will change your likenesses and produce you in that [form] which you do not know.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 58-61) Man does not see the semen that he discharges and which goes into the womb of his wife. No one can do so and observe it until it becomes an embryo and then a human being, but the True Lord is the Determiner and the Creator. He is fully capable of giving us life and determining when we will die, and no one overcomes Him. Indeed, He changes our outward forms when He wants to, and He creates other than us and brings us into being in outward forms that we do not know. He is the All-Bestowal of life and He is the One Who removes it with death.

He says to us, ‘And have you seen that [seed] which you sow? Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower? (*al-Waqi‘a:* 63-64) Here the True Lord draws our attention towards the crops that we eat and the fruits that we harvest from the earth, and all we need to do is plant the seeds. He is the One who placed in the seed accumulated wonders. In the seed is that which nourishes it until it has a small root that can suck up its nutrients from the earth, and then it grows a stem and then the roots become firm and the stem is strengthened. All man needs to do is plant the seeds and sow the earth. Still, the True Lord respects man’s work. He says, ‘and have you seen that [seed] which you sow?’

Regarding water, the True Lord says, ‘And have you seen the water that you drink? Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We Who bring it down? [If We willed, We could make it bitter, so why are you not grateful?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 68-70) This fresh water that we drink is only sent down by Allah from rainy clouds. This process of causing rain is an objective of gathering. The water flowing in the rivers only came from the rain that has come down from the sky. The True Lord has sent the sun’s rays to evaporate the seawater. It accumulates itself in a cloud and then Allah’s command comes to blow cold winds and thus it falls as rain.

When we filter a cup of water in a laboratory, we bring a stove, a container, and some fuel. We place the water that we want to filter and it evaporates. Then we uncover the drops of vapour by means of a draught of cold air. The like of this process burdens us greatly in terms of physical and mental work to build this kind of device that allows us to filter a cup of water. Thus, what do we think of the rain that is sent down pouring in abundance? Indeed, we find that three quarters of the earth’s surface is water. Allah *the Exalted* has spread it out over a vast area so that it can evaporate easily. Thus, if we sprinkle a glass of water over a vast surface in the coldest place, it will evaporate. This spreading of the surface area of water is what facilitates the process of evaporation. The water vapour ascends the oceans and the sea until it reaches the upper layers of the atmosphere, and then it becomes visible in the form of small water drops that fall as rain in disparity from one region to another. He is also Fully Capable of removing the usefulness of this water. The True Lord says to us: ‘And have you seen the fire that you ignite? Is it you who produced its tree, or are We the producer? We have made it a reminder and provision for the travellers.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 71-73) He reminds us that He is the One Who created the fire that we kindle. He brought the first source of fuel which is the wood that originally was dried green trees. In all of this, the True Lord’s power is made manifest to us, so we glorify His Most Great name.

‘So exalt the name of your Lord, the Most Great.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 74) Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is transcendent above having any partners in the matters of creation and the universe. Thus, the True Lord addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Say, “Is it other than Allah I should take as a protector?” This question forces us to reflect on the matter of choosing a protector, to employ our thoughts and to know that taking a protector is a necessary matter within the human soul. However, who deserves to be taken as a protector? We find in the way the True Lord raises us what helps us to extract sound thoughts and rightly guided opinions when He says to us: ‘Hence, place thy trust in the Living One who dies not.’ (*al-Furqan:* 58)

We know that taking a protector from a human being will not last. Thus, you feel that you are alone in this universe, but when you rely on Allah, He is the Ever Living Who never dies. He is the, ‘Creator of the heavens and the earth, while it is He who feeds and is not fed?’ He is the one who feeds us from the underground wells of the earth that He willed for our nourishment. Why does the True Lord mention the issue of food here? Food is a type of sustenance which – as you know – is directly consumable and beneficial to us. If a man were in the desert, and all he had was a mountain of pure gold with no sip of water or a piece of bread, then the mountain of gold is worth nothing. The mountain of gold is indeed sustenance, but it does not benefit us directly. The provision that we benefit from directly is food, drink, and clothing. We need food and drink every day, and we need clothes. Therefore, direct provision is the basic essential of life.

The protector who gives victory must have abundant power to feed; the one who provides us with the power that is the basis of life. It is the capacity for man to continue on earth. The mother feeds her child and she is also fed by the food that her husband gives her. The True Lord alone is the One Who feeds all creation and no one feeds Him. When we trace every gift in this life, we find that each one goes back to Allah.

Accordingly, do not use your protector for the means but use him for the ends, because all means go back to Allah. The command comes from the True Lord to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Say, [O Muhammad], "Indeed, I have been commanded to be the first [among you] who submit [to Allah] and [was commanded], to not ever be of the polytheists."' (*al-An'am:* 14)

This command is coming from the supreme commander, and He is Allah. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say that this command is from him because he is a human being like us. Allah informed that our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is the first to surrender unto Allah and the first to receive the honour of adhering to Islam. For example, every Muslim leader is an example for others such as Tariq ibn Zyad who conquered Andalusia which was a vast kingdom. He descended from the ships and said to his soldiers, 'I have not commanded you to do anything I would be safe from. Rather, I am with you. Know that I, when the two armies meet, shall set myself against the tyrant of the people of Luzuriq (Roderick), and I will fight him if Allah so wills.' He did not command anything that he did not apply to himself. He applied it to himself first, and the bane of leadership is commanding something one does not apply.

Before that there was `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* who governed himself and then governed the life of this world. He gathered his relatives first and said to them, 'I will lead the Muslims, and by the One in whose hand is my soul, whoever opposes me from amongst you, I will make him an exemplary punishment for the Muslims.' `Umar, *Allah be pleased with him*, wanted to govern his relatives first to provide a model for those entrusted with authority that they govern their relatives first, and to warn them against exploitations under his name so that the affairs amongst Muslims would be upright. Unfortunately, we see many people speaking of [idealistic practice of] Islam and they want everyone else to be [true] Muslims while they do not apply the principles of Islam on themselves. The True Lord revealed the command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Say, [O Muhammad], “Indeed, I have been commanded to be the first [among you] who submit [to Allah] and [was commanded], to not ever be of the polytheists.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 14)

The meaning of submission is that he is handing over the reins of his life to the One whose rule and justice he has confidence in, and He is the True Lord. When we were children, we handed over the reins of our affairs to those in charge of our upbringing, and we see fathers and mothers who are tired and burdened. We obey their commands until we reach adolescence and our personality grows within us. We find an adolescent who refuses, for example, to wear short trousers and instead wears long trousers, and he chooses what clothes to wear per the prevalent modern fashion. Then the young man begins to administer his own affairs.

The bane of our lives is that we neglect our children’s upbringing when they are very young. Then we come and say, ‘Come on! Let us raise the youth’ pretending to forget that youth is a phase filled with strength that can be used to the benefit of society. The time for a sound upbringing is early childhood. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* per the Lord’s words, is the first of the Muslims, and he received the command against associating partners with Allah.

Beware, O Muslims, of being arrogant towards the like of this command because Prophet Muhammad is the first one to be commanded to it by the True Lord. Beware, O Muslim, of finding any fault in receiving a command from your Creator because a fault may come to you when a command is issued to you from one of your equals, but if it is being directed from the True Lord, then it is a must that your soul is pleased with it and your heart finds tranquillity in it. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to exert himself when he came across an incident in which there was no ruling from Allah. He would give a ruling by himself, and if the ruling was correct the True Lord would reveal something from the Quran to confirm it. If the ruling needed some amendment, then the True Lord would reveal the necessary amendment for the ruling, and the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would convey the True Lord's amendment of it without finding any fault in that. He would convey it with a smile, veracity and trust that prove He is conveying from Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* favoured Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he did not amend a judgement out of respect for the Prophet's independent reasoning. He says: 'May Allah pardon you, [O Muhammad]; why did you give them permission [to remain behind]? You should not have until it was evident to you who were truthful and you knew [who were] the liars.' (*at-Tawba:* 43) The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had given permission to some of the hypocrites to stay behind from fighting before their matter had been clarified so that he would know who amongst them was truthful in his excuse and who was lying. The pardon came from Allah because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did all he could to arrive at a judgement and the Messenger informed us of what Allah revealed.

The True Lord says:

قُلۡ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ إِنۡ عَصَيۡتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٖ ١٥

Say, 'I fear the punishment of a dreadful Day if I disobey my Lord' [15] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 15)

He is the chosen Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the one selected and infallible declaring that he fears Allah because the destiny of Allah is not possessed by anyone. No one can change Allah's destiny other than Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. In the above verse, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* conditioned fear on disobeying Allah, but if he does not disobey his Lord, he has no reason to fear. The 'if' conditions fear on disobedience which would never come from the infallible Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he does not disobey Allah.

The True Lord wanted to clarify for us that the infallible one does not disobey Allah, but this statement comes on the tongue of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for us to know that there is a gruesome punishment with which Allah threatens those who disobey Him. It is a punishment that harasses the disobedient until it comes to him. This punishment has a particularity of an attraction between it and the disobedient one, just like a magnet's attraction for something else made of metal. For man to be saved from this punishment, he needs the one who will spare him from this severe kind of punishment. Then the True Lord says:

مَّن يُصْرَفْ عَنْهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ رَحِمَهُۥۚ وَذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿١٦﴾

God will have been truly merciful to whoever is spared on that Day: that is the clearest triumph [16] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 16)

It is as if the one who is not spared from this punishment is the one who will be attracted by the force of this punishment because the fire of hell attracts and drags towards itself those who will be punished. The True Lord says: 'And for those who disbelieved in their Lord is the punishment of Hell, and wretched is the destination. When they are thrown into it, they hear from it a [dreadful] inhaling while it boils up.' (*al-Mulk:* 6-7) Those who disbelieve in Allah have a punishment that begins with hearing hell inhaling, while it is boiling. Inhaling, as you know, is a force that attracts and draws air into the nose and chest. So, what do we think about the force of Hell inhaling as it draws in and attracts those whom it has been commanded to punish? This fire itself responds to the True Lord questioning it when it hears His statement, 'On the Day We will say to Hell, "Have you been filled?" and it will say, "Are there some more."' (*Qaf:* 30)

Therefore, the power of punishment that Allah has given it is a duty for Hell which prompts it and pushes it to ask for more disbelievers to punish. Allah *Glorified and Exalted* created everything to perform a duty, and the duty of the fire is to comply with the True Lord's command when He commands it to carry out its task. Therefore, it is prompted to demand those who will receive punishment. The fire never violates the command of Allah and His decree. If the True Lord spares one of His servants from punishment, then the fire obeys that command. 'He from whom it is averted that Day - [Allah] has granted him mercy.' (*al-An'am:* 16) He is the doer of whatever He wills. If He reckons us with justice, then every single one of us will be touched by some of hell's punishment, but it is Allah's mercy that prevents the fire from touching the believers. This is because Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* pardons much and because the fire inhales everyone who is destined for punishment. We know that inhaling is quicker than exhaling, and inhaling in life is for air.

The reason why inhaling is quicker than exhaling is that the former is tasked to prolong the primary life, which is to provide the body with air. Man, as you know, can only endure without air for the shortest amount of time possible, and it is from Allah's mercy that He has not allowed anyone to own air. This inhaling that gives life on earth also exists in the Hereafter, and it is attributed to the fire. It inhales in order to swallow up the disobedient. In doing so, it carries out the task is has been assigned with. We also know that the fire carries out its task in fury, in accordance with what Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* has said: 'It almost bursts with rage.' (*al-Mulk:* 8)

Does the fire carry out its task without pleasure? Does the fire differ from all of Allah's creations that carry out their tasks in happiness and harmony? The fire bursts with fury because the disbeliever from amongst these people did not know the value of faith, and the fire has feelings like all other created beings. The entire universe has feelings. The universe – as an example – rejoiced at the birth of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The earth, sky, stars, trees and the entire universe rejoiced at the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. This is because all these creations which are subjugated to man glorify Allah and obey Him by their nature just like the bringer of glad tidings, guides man to the Straight Path to make him obedient. Those creatures rejoice at the coming of this bringer of glad tidings.

We know that the place in which man exists, this universe, rejoices when those within it are obedient. This place also grieves when man is disobedient. The place cries out, i.e. any place, upon which there is a disobedient person. We can see this clearly in the True Lord's words regarding the people of Pharaoh, 'How much they left behind of gardens and springs, And crops and noble sites! And comfort wherein they were amused. Thus And We caused to inherit it another people. And the heaven and earth wept not for them, nor were they reprieved.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-29)

The land upon which Pharaoh and his people lived had feelings; the gardens, rivers, water-runnels and all other blessings that man is blessed with, have feelings and sentiments. They feel angry and upset, and they cry out when those who disbelieve in Allah's blessings live within them. This is why the sky and the earth do not cry over the disappearance and exemplary punishment of these disobedient disbelievers and idolaters, while they cry when a believer departs from them. We have in the statement of 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* a clarification of this. 'Ali, *Allah be pleased with him*, said, 'When a believer dies, two places cry over him; a place in the sky and another on Earth. As for the place in the sky, it is the points of ascent of his good actions while the place on earth, it is the place where he prayed.'

This is also evident in a Hadith: 'When one of you dies he is shown his place in the early morning and in the evening. If he is from the people of paradise, he is from the people of paradise; and if he is from the people of the fire, He is from the people of the fire. It is said to him, "This is your place until Allah resurrects you to stand before Him on the Day of Resurrection."'(1)

Therefore, the place in the sky where the deeds of man ascend grieves because there is a loss of righteous action that was passing through it. A man's place of prayer loses the man's prostration that was done out of humility before Allah. However, all creations that have been created by Allah have feelings, and everything in the universe carries out its task per the law of setting in motion and subjugation, not the law of options. Man is the only one who lives per the law of option in some of his states because he is capable of obedience as well as disobedience. This is why when we see prostration to Allah in the Quran, we indeed hear the True Lord's statement, 'Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified. And he whom Allah humiliates - for him there is no bestower of honor. Indeed, Allah does what He wills.' (*al-Hajj:* 18)

Therefore, all creations prostrate to Him except for certain individuals amongst mankind. Many of them prostate to Allah and many of them deserve punishment because they do not obey the True Lord. Whoever disobeys the way of Allah is not a believer, and Allah banishes him from His Mercy, and whomever Allah humiliates will never have any honouring. The universe unanimously prostrates to Allah except for man. Amongst mankind, there are those who are righteous and act in harmony with the submission of the universe to Allah, and the universe rejoices because of them. On the contrary, there, too, are those whom the universe is angry with because they disobey Allah.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

The True Lord says about those whom He spares from punishment due to the excess of His Mercy towards His servants because they obeyed Him; and at times their disobedience overwhelmed them, but they repented from it: 'He from whom it is averted that Day - [Allah] has granted him mercy. And that is the clear attainment.' (*al-An'am:* 16) We know that this particular attainment is the peek. Attainment of this world is like success or wealth besides other things that are liable to perish. It is contingent because it leaves man and man leaves it, but the attainment of the Hereafter is the lasting triumph that never ends.

This is the difference between the blessings of this life and the blessings of the Hereafter. Man lives in luxury in this life per his conception of luxury. For example, we find a peasant imagining luxury. For him it is an outdoor stone bench in front of his house that he sits on, and several jugs that he fills with clean water. If the peasant was to move to the city, he would imagine luxury to be a home that has splendid furniture and electronic appliances such as a refrigerator and other things. Therefore, the possibilities of luxury are different per how man imagines it. As for the felicity of the Hereafter, it is a felicity that man does not relinquish and it does not relinquish man. It is a felicity that the Infinitely Giving Creator has made. Indeed, in paradise there is that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being. Therefore, the triumph of the Hereafter's felicity is the manifest triumph.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* encompasses everything with knowledge and omnipotence, and says:

وَإِن يَمْسَسْكَ ٱللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُۥٓ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ
وَإِن يَمْسَسْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٧﴾

If God touches you [Prophet] with affliction, no one can remove it except Him, and if He touches you with good, He has power over all things [17] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 17)

Adversity is what afflicts a living being and disrupts the stability of his life. When man lives without any grievance or sickness and he feels completely healthy, he knows that he is of sound health. This is because he does not feel any pain in his eyes or any restriction in his breathing or anything else, but when one of the organs of his body causes him pain, he puts his hand on it, grieves and thinks about going to the doctor. Therefore, soundness of health in relation to man is the regular work of every organ in a way that does not attract one's attention.

The True Lord diverts the attention of those who possess blessings when they see a man from amongst them who has lost some blessing. When you walk in the street and you see a man who has lost a leg you say, 'Praise be to Allah' because both of your legs are sound. It is as if you do not realize Allah's blessing towards you until you see someone else who has been deprived of it. This makes us realize how pain and harm impart on us awareness of blessings. Furthermore, disturbances could afflict man's life so that he knows he lacks many of Allah's blessings, and thus he says regarding his fate, 'O Reliever of worries! O Lord!' Therefore, we find man saying 'O Lord!' whenever harm comes to him, and he takes refuge in Allah. Indeed, Allah has said about man: 'And when affliction touches man, he calls upon Us, whether lying on his side, sitting or standing; but when We remove from him his affliction, he continues [in disobedience] as if he had never called upon Us to [remove] an affliction that touched him. Thus, is made pleasing to the transgressors that which they have been doing.' (*Yunus:* 12)

When man senses weakness, if he is afflicted with some adversity, he does not tire of supplicating to Allah regardless of whether man is reclining, sitting, or standing. When the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* removes the harm from him, he may depart from Allah's side, and resume disobeying Allah as if he had not supplicated to Allah to remove the harm. This is the behaviour of those who waste their own selves by disobeying Allah. The soul or Satan, after the harm has been removed, makes it seem good for the disobedient to plunge deeper and deeper into the wells of disobedience and the mire of depravity.

Man may attribute the removal of harm to other than Allah, and attribute the uncovering of the harm to the skilfulness of the doctor whom he consulted forgetting that the skilfulness of the doctor is one of Allah's blessings. Or he may attribute the alleviation of distress to the wealth or knowledge that Allah has given him forgetting that Allah is the Bestower of everything. This is identical to what Qarun (Korah) did when he thought that his wealth was the result of his exertion, toil, work and skilfulness forgetting that the True Lord is the Original Cause of all causes, harmful or beneficial. He is the One Who causes harm just as He causes benefit.

Harm turns man's attention to the blessings of the True Lord in this life. When man is content and patient, Allah removes the harm from him, because harm does not continue for man unless he receives it with anger and lack of contentment with Allah's decree. The True Lord does not cease any divine decree in the creation unless the creation is content with what Allah has decreed. The one who does not accept afflictions is the one who will have his afflictions continue. As for the one who wants Allah to remove his affliction, let him then accept the divine decree.

The True Lord gives us examples of this matter. There is Ibrahim (Abraham) who received the command to slaughter his only son. This command came to him in a way that a non-believer in Allah's decree might see as severe, but it was obligatory for Ibrahim (Abraham) to slaughter his son by himself; and this is a test at a very high level. Ibrahim (Abraham), the friend of the Most-Merciful, has not looked for an excuse to flee from the test Allah had given him, nor did he say, 'It was only a dream, not revelation'. But it was true, and the command came to him with the easiest of means of inspiration, the dream, yet with the most difficult commandment which is to slaughter his son. We see the greatness of being a prophet in how the True Lord's Commands are received. Allah inspired to him to allow his son Ismail (Ishmael) to share him in receiving the reward of being content with the divine decree, 'And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, “O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think.” He said, “O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast.”’ (*as-Saffat:* 102)

Ismail (Ishmael) had become old enough to participate with his father in the demands of life when the command came to Ibrahim (Abraham) in his sleep to slaughter his son. Ismail’s (Ishmael’s) heart was filled with contentment with Allah’s decree, and he did not occupy himself with resentment towards his father, nor did he resist or struggle. Rather, He said, ‘O my father, do as you are commanded.’ (*as-Saffat:* 102) The two of them took the command of Allah with acceptance and contentment, and therefore the True Lord says about both: ‘And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead, We called to him, “O Ibrahim (Abraham). You have fulfilled the vision.” Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.’ (*as-Saffat:* 103-107)

The two of them took part in accepting Allah’s decree, and both surrendered to the command. Ibrahim (Abraham) surrendered as the doer and Ismail (Ishmael) surrendered as the one receiving the action. Allah knew of their sincerity in receiving Allah’s Command, and here the True Lord called Ibrahim (Abraham), ‘You and Ismail (Ishmael) have responded to the divine decree and this obedience has credited your account. This is why benevolence shall come to you and to your son, and that is by removing the test’. Then the ransom came with a tremendous sacrifice because it came by Allah’s Command. The True Lord did not stop there, but rather, he gave Ibrahim (Abraham) the good news of another son to be born: ‘And We gave him good tidings of Isaac (Ishaq), a prophet from among the righteous.’ (*as-Saffat:* 112)

Allah indeed removed the affliction from Ibrahim (Abraham) and gave him goodness which was another son. Thus, we, as human beings, prolong the time of affliction because of our lack of acceptance to it. However, if an affliction befalls man without any cause on his part, but he is pleased with his Lord, then the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* removes that affliction from him. If you see a man whose test is being prolonged, then know that he has lost contentment.

We notice that the True Lord says here, 'And if Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him. And if He touches you with good - then He is over all things competent.' (*al-An'am:* 17) Allah knows that no servant can endure the True Lord harming him; for the True Lord's Strength is infinite and therefore, one is only *touched* with harm, and likewise with goodness. In this world, man does not obtain only a touch of goodness, as all goodness is stored away for him in the Hereafter. We know about the goodness of this world that either it will leave man or man will leave it. As for all goodness, it is in the Hereafter.

Whatever progress in creativity and invention man makes, he will never arrive at all the goodness that is found in the Hereafter. This is because the goodness of this life requires production and effort from human beings. As for the goodness in the Hereafter, it is per the Greatest Giver, and He is Allah. No one removes harm except Allah, and the sick person is not cured by merely going to the doctor. Rather, the doctor treats with the skilfulness that Allah has granted him, and the one who cures is Allah. 'And when I am ill, it is He who cures me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 80)

This is because the True Lord created the illness and He created the medicine. He made doctors to be merely bridges from the illness to the medicine and then to the cure. Allah brings the means into existence so that His servants can rejoice and be happy, and thus He made skills a type of those means. If not, the matter is in His Hands *Glorified and Exalted is He*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Treat one another, O servants of Allah, for indeed Allah did not create an illness except that He created a treatment for it, except for one illness: old age.'(1)

We see that the distinguished doctor always states that the cure came with him and not because of him, and he acknowledges that Allah ennobled him by making the cure come at the time of his treatment. Thus, the True Lord is the One Who removes the harm, and He is the One capable of granting you and touching you with goodness, and His power has no limits. The True Lord says after that:

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(1) *Narrated by Aḥmad, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nisa'i, Ibn Majah, Ibn Hibban and Al-Hakim from Usama ibn Sharik*

وَهُوَ ٱلْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِۦ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ٱلْخَبِيرُ ﴿١٨﴾

He is the Supreme Master over His creatures, the All Wise, the All Aware [18] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 18)

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* has arranged the universe with causes and effects, and everything in existence is a medium between one thing and another. The earth is a medium for receiving plants. A father is a medium between his own father and the grandson, and we all know that the True Lord is over His servants, He is Dominant with His Power. He directs the universe with wisdom and encompassing knowledge, and He knows everything that is hidden and manifest. He says: 'Say, "He is the [one] able to send upon you affliction from above you or from beneath your feet or to confuse you [so you become] sects and make you taste the violence of one another." Look how We diversify the signs that they might understand.' (*al-An'am:* 65)

He has the absolute power to send punishment from the sky or from the depths of the earth. He can place enmity between the servants so that they fight one another to repel one another so that the earth is not ruined. 'And if it were not for Allah repelling [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted.' (*al-Baqara:* 251)

Beware of thinking that when the True Lord allows the creation to possess means that they own those means. No. The True Lord wanted to arrange the duties of the universe. That is why when we see someone being oppressive in the universe, we then find another oppressor disciplining the first oppressor. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* does not discipline the evil person at the hands of a good man, but rather, he disciplines him by way of another evil person worse than him: 'And thus will We make some of the wrongdoers' allies of others for what they used to earn.' (*al-An'am:* 129) It is because He frees the oppressed from the people of piety of having any role in disciplining the oppressor. Rather, Allah avenges the oppressor by way of another oppressor like him or stronger than him. This is what we notice throughout history, recently and in the distant past. When the righteous servant gains power over those who have done evil to him, he says what Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said when he entered Mecca, 'O Quraysh! What do you think I should do to you?' They said, "Good; the brother of a noble man and the nephew of a noble man." He said, 'Go, for you are free.'(1)

When Allah wants to avenge an evil person, He sends to him another evil person like him to crush his neck and cut off his nose, or he humiliates him so that corruption does not spread further and prevail. Allah is Dominant over His servants, yet it is dominance with wisdom and knowledge, not that of superiority, tyranny and control. To clarify this point, Allah may decree for one of His servants that his son breaks his arm. Then the man takes his son to a doctor who is not experienced to place a splint on the boy's arm, and he repairs the bones in the light of this splint in the wrong place. Then the man takes his son to a skilled doctor who breaks the boy's hand again so that he can put the bones back in their correct place. This breaking was done to straighten the bones and put them in the right place. The servants can never infuriate Allah, but the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted* takes justice for the one who is infuriated. We know that man chooses between faith and disbelief. If he disbelieves and disobeys, then he has nothing in the Hereafter but punishment. If not, Allah decrees for him an illness he is unable to rebel because He is Dominant over His servants. And the proof is that He controls things in which the servants have no choice. As long as man is governed by two brackets and he has no say when he is born and when he dies why then does he rebel against Allah's commands? The True Lord says after that:

قُلۡ أَيُّ شَيۡءٍ أَكۡبَرُ شَهَٰدَةٗۖ قُلِ ٱللَّهُۖ شَهِيدُۢ بَيۡنِي وَبَيۡنَكُمۡۚ وَأُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانُ لِأُنذِرَكُم بِهِۦ وَمَنۢ بَلَغَۚ أَئِنَّكُمۡ
لَتَشۡهَدُونَ أَنَّ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ ءَالِهَةً أُخۡرَىٰۚ قُل لَّآ أَشۡهَدُۚ قُلۡ إِنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَٰهٞ وَٰحِدٞ وَإِنَّنِي بَرِيٓءٞ مِّمَّا تُشۡرِكُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Say, 'What counts most as a witness?' Say, 'God is witness between you and me. This Quran was revealed for me to warn you [people] and everyone it reaches. Do you really bear witness that there are other gods beside God?' Say, 'I myself do not bear witness [to any such thing].' Say, 'He is only one God, and I disown whatever you join with Him' [19] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 19)

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* differed with the people who opposed him, and differing requires wisdom and a clear proof. The witnesses are one of the clear proofs, so what do we think when the witness is Allah? He is the witness, the Arbiter and the Executer Who makes no deception. His rule is void of any oppression, and His will does not oppress a servant even equal to an atom's weight. Therefore, there is no witnessing that is greater than the True Lord's witnessing that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is sent by Him. If Allah had wanted, he would have made everyone believers, but He wanted man to have choice. The compassion of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is what made him hope that they would believe, but the True Lord says to His Messenger: 'Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain humbled.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4) The True Lord commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to be compassionate towards himself first and not to kill himself out of grief because of their stubbornness and lack of faith. If the True Lord had wanted to make them all believers, He would have sent down a sign, for the duty of a messenger is only to convey the message. If He had wanted, the True Lord would have coerced the entire creation to have faith in Him just as He has subjugated the entire universe to serve man and the universe to glorify and praise Allah. However, He left the creation to choose so that their faith would confirm the attribute of Allah being loved; because voluntary faith is that which confirms this quality of being loved. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is only a warner and a giver of glad tidings with this Quran that has been sent down to him with revelation.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in his (Sunnan) [1/118) and in (Tarikh At-Tabari) [3/61)*

Given this setting of witnessing, warning serves just right because witnessing exists when there is a dispute. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called to faith, but those who oppose him call to disbelief and idolatry. Allah's witnessing is greater than any other witnessing. This is why the True Lord decides here that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* should warn with the Quran. This address is directed to inform the contemporaries of Allah's Messenger as well as whoever heard of anything of the Quran, because it is as if he has seen the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and received the conveyance from him. He indeed said, '…and whomever it reaches.' (*al-An'am:* 19) This means he warns you with it and warns whoever from humanity that the Quran reaches.

On the tongue of His Messenger, the True Lord directs a disapproving question to those who resist, saying, 'Do you [truly] testify that with Allah there are other deities?' (*al-An'am:* 19) It is a question from a questioner who is confident that whoever hears his question must negate the existence of another god besides Him. It is a question that extracts confirmation from the one who hears it. An example of this is what the True Lord put to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding a matter that had taken place in the year of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* where He says, 'Have you not seen, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1)

We know that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see what happened in the Year of the Elephant because it was the year of his birth, but when the True Lord informs him about it, one should conclude it is being conveyed from Allah, which makes the information more superior to seeing with the eyes and more reliable and certain. Here we have the disapproving question: 'Do you [truly] testify that with Allah there are other deities?' (*al-An'am:* 19) When this question incapacitated them in certain phases of the mission, some of them said, 'We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah.' (*az-Zumar:* 3) It is as if finally, they are acknowledging that the one they are drawing near to is Allah, but the True Lord severs the matter of idolatry and says on the tongue of His Messenger, 'Say, "I will not testify [with you]." Say, "Indeed, He is but one God, and indeed, I am free of what you associate [with Him]."' (*al-An'am:* 19) The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* does not bear witness to any god but Allah, and he presented them the disapproving question so that they might reflect and be guided to the correct answer that the True Lord stated succinctly for His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Indeed, He is but one God, and indeed, I am free of what you associate [with Him].' (*al-An'am:* 19)

The speech here is directed towards the group that opposes the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from amongst the idol-worshippers who are disbelievers in the Message of Allah's Messenger. The other portion is a portion from the people of the Book. These are the people who neglected the book that had been sent down to them. They no longer had the spirit of faith used to repel the disobedient from disobedience, and thus corruption had spread in the universe. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the disobedient did not find anyone to repel them. In that time, the reproachful self was hidden from society, and the self that commands to evil was predominant.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* did not leave human beings without messengers, for indeed there has been a messenger sent to every nation, who in return, prophesied and informed of the messenger that would follow him so that the people would be prepared to receive a warner and a giver of glad tidings. This is why all messages were informing of messengers to come so that they would not think that a pretender had violated the sanctity of their religion. Also, it is because Islam came as a universal religion, not only Muhammad's name was prophesized by the previous books, but also his exalted qualities and characteristics were clearly described therein.

Those who read about these qualities, had they removed themselves from temporal authority and immediately believed in the Message of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as 'Abdullah ibn Salam did when he said, 'When I saw him, I knew him as I know my own son, and my knowledge of Muhammad is stronger', these people forgot that they are the ones who had been given victory by Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* without them knowing. They used to seek victory through him over the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. They used to threaten them, 'It is about time a prophet will come from amongst you, whom we will believe in, follow and we and him will kill you [in the same manner] as `Ad and Iram were killed.' Al-Aws and Al- Khazraj rushed to believe in Allah's Messenger saying, 'Maybe this is the prophet that the Jews threatened us with. Let us believe in him first.'

Therefore, it was no surprise the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called to this religion. Everyone who had any connection to one of the Divine Books knew of his coming, mission, and his description. They knew that he was the seal of Prophets after which revelation from heaven to earth shall come to an end.

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ يَعْرِفُونَهُۥ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَآءَهُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ خَسِرُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Those to whom We have given the Scripture know this as well
as they know their own sons. Those who have lost their souls
will not believe [20] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 20)

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was known in advance by the people of the Book just as they know their own children, but some of them preferred temporal authority over faith and thus they lost their own selves. Loss, as we know, is the loss of capital or its decrease. They lost their own selves because they should have strived to fix the spirits that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to rectify. By doing so, they denied their souls any good, by preferring the authority of this life of this fleeting world to faith in Allah, which is a massive loss.

Allah teaches us that faith is only an advantage for one's self. One should not think that saying 'there is no god worthy of worship but Allah' is a support for Allah's throne. No, it is just for you because there is no god but He who created the universe and the creation with the attributes of Perfection, Power, Knowledge, and Wisdom. Recognising the Divinity of Allah alone does not increase Allah's Perfection, but it benefits the servants who have believed, and thus they are proficient in receiving the command to build this universe. Understanding this facilitates the movement of life in the light of Allah's way, and those believers will be in harmony with the entire universe that glorifies Allah.

'Those to whom We have given the Scripture recognize it as they recognize their [own] children. Those who will lose themselves [in the Hereafter] do not believe.' (*al-An'am:* 20) He informs the people of Mecca that the call to faith that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* called to them, did not come as a surprise to the universe. Rather, it is a cry that was given as glad tidings on the tongue of a messenger. The people of Mecca had distanced themselves from their connection to the messengers and prophets, and it had been a while since a messenger had come to them; their neighbours were the people of a Book in Medina who knew such reality of which their messengers had brought affirming the covenant that Allah had taken from them. It is because we know that when the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* created the creation and settled them in the earth, He wanted them to be gifted with power from His Power, to be wealthy from His Wealth, to have knowledge from His perfect Knowledge, to have wisdom from His absolute Wisdom, to have mercy from His complete Mercy, to be dominant from His Dominance because the universe cannot be sound unless these complementary factors exist, even if they are contradictory because every attribute has a parameter within which it is active.

For example, and Allah is beyond compare, when we prefer compassion when treating our children, we are spoiling them because a good father must be firm with them when raising them. Therefore, it is not possible for the master over creation to only be merciful. He also must be dominant because there may be a situation that requires dominance. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* does not want His creation to have a single type of nature, but rather, He wants to make them to react differently depending on situations. In a situation that requires mercy, they are to be merciful, and in a situation that requires severity and harshness, they are to be severe. The True Lord says about the believers: ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure.’ (*al-Fath:* 29)

The above verse shows the nature of the believers. Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* did not make severity their dominant nature because situations may require mercy. Severity, however, is required to confront the people of falsehood. The True Lord did not make gentleness their dominant nature, but gentleness is required between them because every one of them hopes for Allah’s mercy and His grace. This is why the True Lord also says about the believers: ‘Humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 54)

The True Lord did not make the believer humble in an absolute sense, just as He did not make him powerful in an absolute sense, but He made him humble, gracious, and magnanimous towards his believing brother, while He made him powerful towards the disbelievers who deny Allah.

Therefore, He wants His creation to follow the nature of the True Lord, and this is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says in what has been narrated by 'Ammar ibn Yasser *Allah be pleased with him*, 'The best of manners is that of Allah, the Most Great.'(1) And it is related, 'Be like Allah in your manners.'

As long as the True Lord wants the creation to inhabit this universe, then He must secure for them a sound way that is based on 'Do!' and 'Do not do!' If we follow the way of Allah, then we are taking what we can call in contemporary parlance 'the law of maintenance.' So, let us do what Allah tells us to do, and let us leave what Allah has told us not to do so that we can carry out our tasks in the way that Allah wants us to do so.

Significantly, corruption emerges when man does what he is ordered not to do, and conversely refrains from doing what he must do. If Allah has asked that we establish the prayer, how can we refrain from praying? If Allah has enacted upon us not to drink wine, then how can we drink it? The imbalance of faith that takes place in the universe is exclusively the result of this conflict between the commands and the prohibitions. Apart from the boundaries of these two categories, Allah has left us the choice, as it is permissible to do or not to do it because the universe will not be corrupted by anything from it.

If you consider carefully Allah's method in His command sand prohibitions, you will find that the True Lord has not put an end to your freedom, nor has He put an end to your choice. He has set limits for you whose purpose is to fight corruption in the universe. As for that which does not lead to corruption, it is a matter a personal choice. The True Lord has provided every human being with this way from Adam *peace and blessings be upon him* until the establishment of the Hour, and He has taken it upon Himself the promise not to punish a nation that has not been sent a messenger, and therefore, there was a successive procession of messengers. Why? Because heedlessness holds sway over man, for man may forget sometimes what restricts his movement, and he may forget again until he becomes heedless. The True Lord sent a messenger for every period of time to draw attention to the law preserving mankind, until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came. Allah has entrusted the nation of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be the one that conveys Allah's way until the Hour is established. Therefore, He took a covenant from the prophets that they would inform of the final Prophet's Message. 'And [recall, O People of the Scripture], when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, [saying], "Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment?" They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."' (*Al-'Imran:* 81)

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in (Al-Kabir) and (A-Awsat)*

Therefore, Allah indeed took the pledge from every prophet that they would tell their people to believe in the Message of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* whose call corresponds with their call. The True Lord took confirmation from every prophet that he would do so, and the prophets bore witness and Allah, too, bore witness upon them. They conveyed that to their people. Thus, the support of the final Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is present in every message that preceded Islam. It was obligatory for every messenger to give a clarification of this pledge to his people, and take from them a pledge to support the Messenger that is coming to them. They informed them that it was from the completion of faith that they would assist that Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* if they were to be present during his time.

The True Lord is singling out the people of the Book here, to whom the Torah and the Bible were sent down, and they are the adherents of the two great religions that preceded Islam, 'Those to whom We gave the Scripture know it as they know their own children. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it].' (*al-Baqara:* 146)

Thus, if the disbelievers of Quraysh have not had a messenger for a long time, they can ask the people of the Book. Al- Aws and Al-Khazraj tribes heard from the people of the Book that there would be an upcoming prophet and they would believe and follow him, and kill the Arabs with him just as `Ad and Iram were killed. Therefore, the cry of faith on the tongue of the

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not a surprise for the universe, even though it was concealed by those who disbelieved from the people of the Book. They are the ones about whom the True Lord said: 'And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

The bane that leads to denial of this conveyance from Allah befell some of the people of the Book, and they chose even though they had been informed by Allah, temporal authority because they saw therein fame, fortune, and felicity. Their ranks included the judges to whom the people turned to know the ruling in matters related to death. Likewise, they took charitable donations and they had become used to a life of leadership and felicity. The new call, if they adopted it, would strip them of this leadership even though they had been given glad tiding of this before. When the call came, it shook their temporal authority, and therefore they became enemies.

Therefore, the bane is to dress the temporal authority the guise of a Divine authority. When we investigate the history of religions, we find that the temporal authority of religions which preceded Islam is the authority that burdened the universe because the True Lord, when He created the universe, concealed within it secrets that work to serve man even if man is not aware of them. Man's scientific endeavours have led to these secrets, and He reveals the laws according to which we act. Examples of this would include the law of gravity and the law of negative and positive. All these laws are present in the universe, just as Allah has created the earth to take a spherical shape, and just as He has made the sun to be the source of heat and warmth as well as light and illumination.

Scientists utilize these preliminary steps so that they can discover the laws of these celestial bodies and the laws of this universe. When an intelligent scientist discovers some law, he says, 'I have discovered such and such'. This is a precise natural expression. He never says, 'I originated such and such'. This is because he knows that what he has discovered was already present in the universe, but he was not aware of it. Man's lack of awareness of a law that is present in the universe does not prevent benefit from reaching man even though being aware of the law increases the possibility of benefiting from it.

Thus, man enjoys the existence of the sun before becoming aware of its energy. However, when scientists specialised in studying the sun, they realised that man could benefit from this energy in a greater way than the traditional way. Therefore, some cities began to light their streets with solar energy. Some buildings began to warm their apartments with solar energy and to heat water as well with this energy. This discovery has not prevented the uneducated or the Bedouin in the desert from benefitting from the sun's light. The same goes for electricity and electrical home appliances that an ignorant person can benefit from just as much as an educated person would. It is true that an uneducated person does not know what happens in the factories that produce televisions, but he still benefits from watching the television. The television is nothing other than a transformational material of all the scientific laws that man has discovered and applied to manufacture this device that man benefits from.

For every secret of the universe, there is a birth just like the birth of man. If the appointed time for a secret's birth comes, but no one is searching for it, Allah *Glorified is He* unveils it coincidentally for any human being. We often hear that a scientist was doing research in some field, but he discovered a secret different from the target of his research. The True Lord says in verse of *Al-Kursi*: 'And they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills.' (*al-Baqara:* 255)

We cannot attain knowledge of the secrets of the universe unless Allah grants permission, and there are tens of thousands of examples of this, beginning with the Archimedes Screw upon which the propulsion of submarines and steamers is based, to the law of the earth's gravity that was discovered by Newton when an apple coincidentally fell in front of him, to the discovery of penicillin and other secrets of this universe. If there were sciences that had a marked inception, there are others who do not have any. The True Lord says: '[He is] Knower of the unseen and He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] unseen to anyone. Except whom He has approved of messengers, and indeed, He sends before each messenger and behind him observers.' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27)

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is the Knower of the unseen which is not manifested to anyone except a messenger whom the True Lord chooses to inform of some of the unseen. He protects safeguards and preserves him with the angels to intervene between him and the whisperings of the devils and their causing confusion so that he can convey what has been revealed to him. When the True Lord decides a matter, no one has any say therein, for indeed He sends a messenger with it to the creation to guide them with commands and prohibitions. This matter is not up for discussion but rather, it comes with permission from Allah so that our desires do not contradict one another. He knew that desires amongst human beings could easily contradict one another, so He sent messengers with the proper way to straighten the affairs of human beings.

The mental activities by which a human arrives at secrets contained therein are a luxury of life. They are secrets that are the result of experience and working in the laboratory whose production is not subjective. Thus, you do not find a Russian chemistry and another that is American. This is why we see countries competing, each one trying to steal what the other one has by means of spies. As for the social setting, countries establish barriers barring principles. Thus the West does not tolerate the entry of social theories from the east, and the East does not tolerate the opposite taking place. This matter differs in scientific research. Each side tries to take possession of the laws of scientific research into the secrets of the universe, and if they are unable, they try to take it from someone else.

The True Lord teaches us to explore all the signs of the universe without turning away from them. He says to us: 'And how many a sign within the heavens and earth do they pass over while they, therefrom, are turning away.' (*Yusuf:* 105) He is turning our attention to the fact that every sign and every phenomenon require from us that we consider them with wisdom and close examination because we might extract what will make life easier for us. An example of this is steam power which was discovered by a man, while it was developed by someone else until this steam power came to serve all humanity.

Likewise, the one who invented the wheel helped humanity because his invention is now used to transport things and reduce journey times. All of this only came about due to reflecting on Allah’s signs in the universe with close examination. The True Lord has indeed made research into the signs of the universe something well known amongst both believers and disbelievers, and it is the right of whoever looks for His secrets. This is the case with science. As for the case with religion, the matter is different because information in the case of religion comes from Allah by way of a messenger. As for research into the universe and its scientific secrets, the True Lord says regarding it: ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby fruits of varying colours? And in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] extremely black. And among people, and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colours similarly. Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving.’ (*Fatir:* 27-28)

O man, indeed the True Lord is turning your attention to the fact that He sent water down from the sky, and, thus plants, emerge and grow out of the earth that bear fruits of different colours and tastes. He made the mountains in different shapes and colours, some of them are weak, and some are strong. The colour of one mountain differs from another depending on the amount of subterranean material that it contains. All these mountains are from one source, but their branches differ widely to serve man.

The True Lord has indeed created grazing livestock with differing colours, shapes and sizes, and likewise people differ in colour and shape. The scholars are the ones who contemplate this and they fear Allah, the All Knowing Maker. Therefore, the matter of religion is decided by the True Lord, and the messengers convey from Allah, and likewise the people who have knowledge of the religion, who convey from Allah but they do not represent Allah because some human beings may mix their own desires with Allah’s words and say, ‘Indeed this is Allah’s speech’. This is a shameless mistake and an enormous sin.

Indeed, what happened in the Middle Ages –for example– was a confusion of scientific research and what the methodology the True Lord had sent down. When a scientist like Galileo came along to research the nature of celestial bodies, they wanted to burn him at the stake. When another scientist wanted to speak out about the nature of the earth, he hindered his freedom. When the Church governed the Western world in this manner, the entire world lagged and lived in ages of darkness. When these people encountered Muslims, they were freed from the superstitious stories of the Middle Ages. They learned the freedom of scientific research from the Arabs, and Europe advanced with that scientific method that Islam had brought and Muslim scientists cultivated.

The reason for Europe's past backwardness and ignorance was the clergymen and religion. Moreover, the Europeans avoiding religion was because of their knowledge that the clergy hated life and the advancement of civilisation, and this was to protect their influence and their temporal and spiritual authority. Some of the people of Europe wanted to take all religions to task because of the crimes of the clergy. Those who impute religion, all religion, forget that the clergy lied and claimed these things in the name of Christianity, and attributed them to it, but the Messiah did not say of this to them. However, it was the clergy that ruined life with their temporal authority, and the result was that some people took the corruption of the Church's authority as proof for the corruption of religion.

To these people I say, 'Religion does not interfere in any of the matters of scientific life and it never corrupts it'. Rather, you find that the True Lord has commanded us to research into His signs. Here is Allah's Messenger commanding us to do research into the affairs of this life under the light of experience. Allah wanted to differentiate between empirical knowledge and religion, and He wanted to protect His religion from the interference of any group saying it represents Allah and mixing their desires with the task of conveyance.

An example of this is what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said regarding pollinating date palms. We know that a date palm is pollinated when we take the spandex of the male and use it to pollinate the female of the date palm, and then the fruit emerges as ripe. If that does not happen, the date palm produces fruit that is not ripe. The secret behind the date palm producing fruit that is not ripe is that the pollination may be done by means of the wind transferring a few pollen seeds. However, it is manual pollination of the date palm that increases the quality of the fruits. Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* once said something to the Companions that could only be understood to mean that they pollinate the date palm, and what happened thus was that the date palm did not produce the expected fruits. They were unripe fruits. At that point, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* relied on the True Lord's words: 'And We have sent the fertilizing winds.' (*al-Hijr:* 22)These are true, accurate and wise words, and we find their effects in the clouds that turn into rain because of the positive encountering the negative. We find it in most plants, such as wheat, fruit, corn, and others. The spadix of the male is transferred by means of the wind to the components of the female in plants that are close to each other and they pollinate them, and likewise the wind transfers the light pollen. When pollen is heavy, it sometimes requires some effort on behalf of man to transfer the cells of the male to the cells of the female. An example of this is the date palm. This is why, when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* learned of how low the date palm had produced in the year in which some of the companions did not pollinate their date palms, He said to them, 'You know more about the affairs of your life in this world.'(1)

With this, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* settled the matter and the people of religion did not interfere again in any matter that requires practical experience for life to be benefitted. This is why it is said that Islam is a religion of science because it offers the men of science the opportunity to be released into reflecting on Allah's signs in this universe. Indeed, it calls them and commands them to discover the secrets of this universe. As for matters of human behaviour and social policy, the True Lord has sent down a way that prevents the control of some people over others and that keeps human behaviour in check with the teaching of this methodology of faith.

The methodology of faith indeed came with all the messages, and the final Message was that of Muhammad the son of `Abdullah. The good news of his coming was present in the Torah and the Bible. The True Lord says: 'Those to whom We gave the Scripture know it as they know their own children.' Does the action of the people of the Book require this knowledge? No; because some of them feared that their temporal authority would be taken from them, and the greatest example of this is `Abdullah ibn `Ubay who was the chief of hypocrisy in Islam, the one who was preparing himself to become the ruler of Medina before Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived there. There were also those from the people of the Book who acted per this prophecy; an example being `Abdullah ibn Salam. The Quran does not oppress anyone but rather, it says about some of the people of the Book: 'And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognized of the truth. They say, "Our Lord, we have believed, so register us among the witnesses."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 83)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim from Anas and `Aisha*

Therefore, the True Lord did not oppress those who believed from the people of the Book when they found that the way of Islam conformed with what had already come to them. However, some of the people of the Book disbelieved and showed enmity towards Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* out of fear that they would lose their temporal authority. When we look at history we find that temporal authority did, at one time, belong to the people of religion, such as what happened in Europe, but the men of religion took advantage of the people and the clergy sowed corruption on earth. The public rebelled against them and stopped obeying them to make their own laws. Because they were governing per their desires, as opposed to the revealed legislation, the law used to change amongst the men of religion regarding a single matter depending on the personality of whoever committed this matter. Whoever paid them was granted forgiveness, and whoever did not pay them was destined for punishment. They took the paltry pleasures of this world and they did not implement what Allah had commanded, so the people stopped recognising their authority.

Hence, some people do not recognise the message of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the glad tidings of whom had come to them and they knew him clearly and his description, but they denied him because he strips them of the benefits of wealth and authority that they had acquired. Thus, they squandered their own selves and remained in disbelief. The True

Lord says about them, ‘Those who will lose themselves [in the Hereafter] do not believe.’ They lost their own selves because they sold Allah’s signs for a paltry price, and the loss of the self is greater than the loss of wealth because the loss of wealth does not have to be permanent. Man can reacquire it after losing it. However, the loss of the self is a very weighty matter, indeed. We know that the transaction of faith does not detach the actions of this life from the reckoning of the Hereafter. The true believer is the one who connects this life to the Hereafter. However, some of the people of the Book loved this life more than the Hereafter. They distinguished between the two and took a paltry fortune of this world and lost the Hereafter. After that the True Lord says:

وَمَنۡ أَظۡلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفۡتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوۡ كَذَّبَ بِـَٔايَٰتِهِۦٓۗ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفۡلِحُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Who does greater wrong than someone who fabricates a lie against God or denies His revelation? Those who do such wrong will not prosper [21] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 21)

They attributed a lie to Allah when they did that; they had forgotten a portion of what they had been reminded of, and they had concealed some of the book that had been sent down to them. They had distorted the verses that had come down to them and had come with their own statements and attributed them to Allah. This is why we find the True Lord saying about them: ‘So woe to those who write the ‘scripture’ with their own hands, then say, “This is from Allah,” to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn.’ (*al-Baqara:* 79) The True Lord is threatening them with punishment because they have sold the religion in return for a paltry gain in this life, and they lied unto Allah and attributed to Him what He had not sent down. Therefore, woe to them, because they have descended to the lowest levels of oppression and deliberately denied everything that is required of them which is to have faith in Allah, the revealed books and the messengers.

Attributing a lie is a deliberate lie with the purpose of attributing to Allah what He has not said, and they indeed did that. This is why the oppressors are not successful, whether they oppress people by taking their wealth or by doing evil to them; or they oppress their own selves by associating partners with Allah which is the greatest oppression. Allah says: ‘Indeed, most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.’ (*Luqman:* 13) After that the True Lord says:

وَيَوْمَ نَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ نَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوٓا۟ أَيْنَ شُرَكَآؤُكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كُنتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

**When We gather them all together and say to the polytheists,
‘Where are those you claimed were partners with God?’ in their
utter dismay [22] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 22)**

The True Lord is reminding us of the Day of Gathering, the day when Allah will ask those who associated partners with Him, denied, and attributed lies to Allah, ‘Where are those whom you worshipped and whom you took as gods besides Me’? Indeed, Allah will never leave man with no purpose. Rather, every action that man does in this life is recorded and he will be asked about it on the Day of Resurrection. Allah will ask the idolaters about those whom they deceitfully worshipped besides Him, ‘Where are these gods that the disbelievers worshipped besides Allah? Why do they not step forward to save their worshippers from the punishment that Allah is warming up for them’? Allah *the Exalted* will scold the disbelievers sharply. He will gather them along with the idols and statues that they worshipped, and this is the peak of humiliation for them and for these gods.

The True Lord says after that:

ثُمَّ لَمْ تَكُن فِتْنَتُهُمْ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوا۟ وَٱللَّهِ رَبِّنَا مَا كُنَّا مُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

**They will only say, ‘By God, our Lord, we have not set up
partners beside Him!’ [23] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 23)**

The True Lord gathers the idolaters with their gods that they took as partners besides Allah and He asks them about these gods and they say, ‘By Allah, our Lord, we were not those who associated.’ (*al-An‘am:* 23) Outwardly they defend themselves but inwardly they are aware of the full reality which is that all sovereignty belongs to Allah, and on the Last Day, Allah has no partners. This is because man has no choice on the Last Day, but when man had a choice in this life, he could choose to either believe or disbelieve.

Choosing to have faith in this life is what the reckoning of the Last Day is based on. As for having faith under compulsion in the Last Day, there is no reward for it other than hell for the one who disbelieved or associated partners with Allah in this life. Had Allah wanted all of us to have faith under compulsion in this life, He would have forced us to obey Him as He did with the angels and the rest of His creation. The True Lord *the Exalted* subjugated all species of existence apart from man, and the subjugation of the species was to affirm His power, but man was honoured by being given the choice to go to Allah in love.

The True Lord surprises those who associate partners with Him on the Day of Resurrection because there is no Deity but Him, and they try to lie so as to escape punishment. They say, '…we were not those who associated.' (*al-An'am:* 23). They indeed lied to Allah through their actions in life and they want to lie against Allah on the Last Day with their words. But Allah is All Knowing of what the hearts conceal and how they were behaving in this life. In the Hereafter, He will clarify their actions for them and deal them a painful punishment.

When the True Lord says, 'Where are your 'partners'?' It is Allah, the All Knowing who is asking the question. The objective is not to acquire knowledge but rather to obtain affirmation from the one being questioned. In our daily lives, we may see a question from a student to his teacher so that the student can know what he was ignorant of, and we see the question being returned at times by the teacher to the student; but this is not so that the teacher can know what he did not know. Rather, it is for the student to affirm what he knows and learned from his teacher. Thus, if the True Lord *the Exalted* asks His creation a question, is He asking them to know something? Allah forbids that should be the case. The True Lord only asks His servants for the purpose of affirmation. Affirmation here also involves reproach since it is a question that has no answer. We seek refuge in Allah that He should have any partners. When the True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'Where are your 'partners'?' the meaning is that it is impossible for Him to have any partners. Allah asks them this question to censure and reproache them for associating with Allah that which does not exist. They associated partners with Allah in this life to free themselves from the requirements of faith, and here they are in the tremendous gathering place realizing the extent of their lying in this life. There is no dominion for anyone besides Allah, and none is to be truly worshipped but Him. Thus, they articulate what they are witnessing, 'We were not those who associated.'

Someone might say, 'but in another place in the Quran, we find Allah saying with regards to these people, 'Woe, that Day, to the deniers. This is a Day they will not speak; nor will it be permitted for them to make an excuse.' (*al-Mursalat:* 34-36)

They, on the day of the greatest horror, know that they denied in this life, and they will not utter anything that will benefit them. The True Lord will not allow them to offer any excuse or apology. In reality, they do not utter anything that will save them from the punishment that awaits them, and they will fall into profound bewilderment and confusion. Indeed, from amongst these people who deny Allah and the Last Day are those who made something that human beings benefited from, or the lives of people were enhanced because of it, and they think that this act will save them. These people may take their prosperity and their reward from the people whose sake they worked for and from humanity's honouring of them. However, they will receive the punishment on the Last Day because they associated partners with Allah. The True Lord was not in their thoughts for a single moment when they brought forward whatever inventions they had invented, the True Lord says, 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing, but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.' (*an-Nur:* 39) This is how we know that the True Lord rewards the deeds of the disbelievers and idolaters with His justice in this life by way of wealth and fame, but their actions are of no benefit in the Hereafter. Their actions are like the shining glitter that happens as a result of the sun's rays falling on a vast stretch of land in the desert, and the thirsty person thinks that it is water, but as he gets closer to it he finds that it has no benefit. Likewise, the disbelievers and idolaters will find that their deeds are worth nothing on the Day of Resurrection. The idolater from amongst these people will know the reality of his idolatry on the Day of Resurrection, and he will only find the One, the Unique the

All-Dominant in front of him. This is why each one of them will say, ‘By Allah, we were not those who associated’. The idolater from amongst these people denies his idolatry, and this denial is a type of lying.

Idolaters lie, and the True Lord says about them, ‘On the Day Allah will resurrect them all, and they will swear to Him as they swear to you and think that they are [standing] on something. Unquestionably, it is they who are the liars.’ (*al-Mujadala:* 18) When the True Lord revives them on the Day of Resurrection, they will swear to Him that they were believers just as they used to swear in this life, but Allah describes them as liars. They could deceive human beings in this life with false oaths, but what about Allah who cannot be deceived by anyone? This is how we see that the test of these people is a great test, ‘Then there will be no [excuse upon] examination except they will say, “By Allah, our Lord, we were not those who associated.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 23) After that the True Lord says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*:

ٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَذَبُواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡۚ وَضَلَّ عَنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَفۡتَرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

See how they lie against themselves and how those they invented have deserted them [24] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 24)

The True Lord turns His Messenger’s attention accurately towards the process that will take place on the Day of Resurrection, and when Allah will inform of some matter and we will verify that it became a reality as if we were seeing it literally and indisputably in front of us. He affirms that they have lied to themselves. We know that all actions are stripped of their temporality when they are attributed to Allah. For Allah time is one stream with no past, present, or future. An example of this is the True Lord’s statement: ‘The command of Allah is coming, so be not impatient for it. Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him.’ (*an-Nahl:* 1)

It is not appropriate for someone to say, ‘How can the True Lord say that His matter has come to pass and this is in the past tense, and then He forbids the servants from hastening it, but man does not hasten something unless it has not happened’. It is not appropriate for someone to say this because the speaker is the Sublime Power and nothing hinders Him from doing what He wants. As for us, the servants, we do not dare say about an action that we will do tomorrow that we have done it, and this is because tomorrow may never come, or tomorrow may come, but we might not be able to do anything that we promised to do or our means could change. With the understanding that circumstances have become facilitated, then what power does a servant from amongst us have over anything without Allah willing it? We, the believers, know this, and it is upon us to say as Allah has taught us, ‘And never say of anything, “Indeed, I will do that tomorrow”, except [when adding], “If Allah wills.” And remember your Lord when you forget [it] and say, “Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24)

In this way, the man from amongst us guarantees that he has left the circle of lying. When Allah says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Behold’, and it is for a matter the time for beholding it has not come, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believes His Lord as if he had already seen this matter. Indeed, the True Lord describes these people as having ‘lied to themselves’. Their lie that will take place on the Day of Resurrection is an actual, real matter. Man may lie for his own benefit in this life, but lying in front of Allah will count against man and not for him.

The True Lord continues, ‘And lost from them will be what they used to invent.’ (*al-An‘am:* 24) The meaning of this is that on the Last Day they look for those whom they associated as partners with Allah, but they are not able to specify these partners because they said in front of Allah, ‘By Allah, we were not those who associated.’ (*al-An‘am:* 23) These partners being absent from them is what clarifies and explains Allah’s statement, ‘And lost from them will be what they used to invent.’ (*al-An‘am:* 24) For the meaning of ‘lost’ is to be absent. Did they not say beforehand, ‘And they say, “When we are lost within the earth, will we indeed be [recreated] in a new creation?” Rather, they are, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, disbelievers.’ (*as-Sajda:* 10)

They are like those who deny the resurrection, asking themselves in bewilderment, ‘If they are concealed in the earth and mixed with its components, can their Lord resurrect them as new’? It is because they do not believe that the One Who brought them into being the first time can bring them back a second time. When Allah asks them, ‘Where, now, are your partners’, they lie and deny that they ever associated partners with Him. These partners now have forsaken them. Man worships the god that will benefit him on the Day of Gathering, and when these gods are absent on the Day of Gathering, this exposes the forsaking of these gods, and their absence at the time when they are most needed. Nothing remains but the countenance of Allah, who holds to account those who associate partners with Him.

There are those who do not know the path to their objective and can also be misguided, but here we have those who are misguided while knowing that path that leads to their objective and this is disbelief. When the True Lord talks about those who have disbelieved, He describes them as having already, most obviously, gone astray because the path to guidance was in front of them, but they did not take it, and this is the peak of misguidance. Man may be a believer but the essentials of faith within him are weak, so he disobeys his Lord. The True Lord says about the likes of this person: ‘Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly strayed into clear error.’ (*al-’Ahzab:* 36)

It is misguidance lesser in effect than the absolute misguidance and disbelief. But what about the one who is misguided because he does not know the path of guidance? This is what is apparent to us in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when the True Lord said to him and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* ‘Go to Pharaoh and say, “We are the messengers of the Lord of the worlds.” Commanded and say, “Send with us the Children of Israel.”’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 16-17) The True Lord issued the command to Musa (Musa (Moses)) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* to go to Pharaoh so that he can send the Children of Israel with them, but what about Pharaoh’s position? What did Pharaoh say? ‘Pharaoh said, “Did we not raise you among us as a child, and you remained among us for years of your life? And then you did your deed which you did, and you were of the ungrateful.”’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 18-19)

Pharaoh wants to remind Musa (Moses) of the former’s favour on the latter’s. He reminds him that he raised him in his palace and despite that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not respect it and he killed a man from amongst Pharaoh’s people. In Pharaoh’s opinion, that was a form of ingratitude for his favours. Yet, here he was, a second time, transgressing against Pharaoh's divinity by inviting him to have faith in The True God whom Pharaoh could not imagine, and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* gleaned the essential mistake in his behaviour at that moment. The mistake was not ingratitude to Pharaoh but rather the mistake was the killing, for He says, '[Musa (Moses)] said, "I did it, then, while I was one of those astray."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 20). This is how we know that Musa (Moses), in the moment that he killed a man who was his enemy, did not have with him the path of guidance. Rather, his straying from the right path was due to his lack of knowledge that there was another path to guidance. Here the True Lord addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'And He found you lost and guided [you].' (*ad-Duha:* 7)

O Prophet Muhammad, you did not have a clear path towards guidance before you assumed prophethood, and the meaning of *lost* here is not deviation but rather, it means that before revelation was sent down, he did not know which path he was supposed to take. *Lost* can also be forgetfulness, and as long as man has forgotten reality, he is lost. An example is the True Lord's statement: 'So that if one of the women lost [memory of the testimony], then the other can remind her.' (*al-Baqara:* 282). Here the True Lord establishes that the testimony of a woman requires a guarantee, and that is done by confirming it with another woman's testimony. Because of the way a woman is created, she is not able to poke her nose into all the details of what she sees. Rather, she hears things superficially and therefore she does not get the complete picture. When the testimony of one woman is supported by the testimony of another woman, then each of the women reminds one another of whatever details may have been missed. This is because the mentality of a woman and the way she is created are based on preservation and being on guard in a society that contains dispute.

When the True Lord describes these idolaters on the Day of Resurrection He says: 'And lost from them will be what they used to invent.' (*al-An'am:* 24). Those whom they were lying about and claiming that they were partners besides Allah have deserted them, and the idolaters are the ones who are censured and taken to account for assuming partners. It may be that some of them have assumed a partner for Allah, but this partner has no sin in the matter, such as some of them assuming 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* to be a partner besides Allah, and 'Isa (Jesus) is far removed from associating partners with Allah or making himself a partner in divinity. The True Lord has said, ‘And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, “O 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), did you say to the people, “Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?” He will say, “Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen.”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116)

The idols themselves that the idolaters took as lords say, ‘They worshipped us and we are more worshiping of Allah than those who stand praying at night. Therefore, the offense is thus committed by those who have associated partners with Allah, not the rocks that worship Allah and glorify Him because they are subjugated and prepared for what they have been created for. One of the poets imagined a dialogue taking place between the cave of Thawr and the cave of Hira`. The cave of Thawr says:

How we envied Hira` when the spirit came down

Trustworthy, assailing you with lights

When the True Lord permitted the emigration, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* hid himself in the cave of Thawr, and the other rocks said:

Thus, Hira` and Thawr became equals
Because of them the rocks were interceded for
They worshipped us and we are more worshipful of Allah
Than those who stand in the early morning
They took out silence as evidence against us
So for them we came to be fuel for the fire
Indeed, they have committed a crime of ignorance as they did
To the son of Maryam (Mary) and the disciples

The one who transgressed the bounds has his punishment and the one who is transgressed against

Therein is saved by the mercy of the All-Forgiving

Therefore, here are the rocks saying that they are free from associating partners with Allah, and that they are more worshiping of Allah than those who stand praying at night. The obvious silence of the rocks has been taken by some to be evidence that the rocks are pleased with being worshipped, but these same rocks will become the rocks of hell, prepared for those who disbelieved in Allah. The crime committed by the servants against the rocks is like the crime done to 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary). Those who exceed the bounds in worshipping rocks or human beings will be punished. As for rocks and human beings who have no sin in these matters, they only desire Allah’s forgiveness and mercy.

The True Lord says after that:

وَمِنۡهُم مَّن يَسۡتَمِعُ إِلَيۡكَۖ وَجَعَلۡنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمۡ أَكِنَّةً أَن يَفۡقَهُوهُ وَفِيٓ ءَاذَانِهِمۡ وَقۡرٗاۚ وَإِن يَرَوۡاْ كُلَّ
ءَايَةٖ لَّا يُؤۡمِنُواْ بِهَاۚ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءُوكَ يُجَٰدِلُونَكَ يَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ إِنۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّآ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Among them are some who [appear to] listen to you, but we have placed covers over their hearts – so they do not understand the Quran – and deafness in their ears. Even if they saw every sign they would not believe in them. So, when they come to you, they argue with you: the disbelievers say, ‘These are nothing but ancient fables’ [25] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 25)

Indeed, from amongst these people are those who listen to the Quran without the objective of understanding and being guided by it. Rather, it is with the objective of seeking all possible means to attack it. It is as if their hearts are locked from the ability to understand and properly derive the means to guidance. They argue with the objective of affirming their disbelief; not with a pure intention to know the horizons of the True Lord’s signs and to arrive at the straight path.

We know that this entire chapter came to confront the issue of idols, statues, and associating partners with Allah. We know that the miracle that came with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Quran, and it is a miracle of speech. It is different from the visual miracles that were witnessed by the contemporaries of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* such as the parting of the sea with the staff, or seeing the staff become a snake which snatched everything that the magicians had thrown down or the miracle of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* curing the blind and the leper. These are all visual miracles that are limited to a specific time. As for the miracle of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is a miracle that is heard repeatedly.

Indeed, hearing is the first tool of realisation of the human soul. It is the first instrument of realisation that alerts man. It is the only instrument of realisation that accompanies the time of sleep and carries out its task because its design includes the capacity to continue functioning during the time of sleep. We know that when the True Lord wanted to maintain the people of the Cave for a period of three hundred and nine years, He veiled their ears so that they would be in a deep slumber, as they were in a cave in a mountain, and the mountain was in a desert with winds, hurricanes and tornadoes blowing against it. Had their ears been in their normal state, they would not have been able to sleep peacefully as Allah had wanted them to; and this is why He veiled their ears. Allah *Exalted is He* said, ‘So We cast [a cover of sleep] over their ears within the cave for several years.’ (*al-Kahf:* 11)

Therefore, the miracle of Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came in an auditory fashion, but it can also be read, and when man receives a statement he receives it by hearing, and afterwards he can read this statement and tries to understand it. No one knows how to read unless they have heard the sounds of the letters first and then seen them afterwards. His miracle is distinguished by the master of evidences amongst the means of human realisation, which is hearing. The True Lord says, ‘And among them are those who listen to you.’

Indeed, there is a difference between hearing and listening. The one who hears is the one who hears unintentionally, while the one who listens hears intentionally. The one who hears without intention does not have a choice but to hear, unless his ears are blocked. As for the one listening, he is the one who intends to hear. They were listening to the Quran not with the objective of unveiling the horizons of guidance but with the objective of persisting in disbelief, and with the intention of launching attacks against the Quran.

The True Lord says, ‘…but We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness…’ (*al-An‘am:* 24). As if, because of their choice to disbelieve, Allah has prevented them from understanding the Quran, and we know that all the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard him; some believed and some persisted in disbelief. We know that for every action there is a receiver, and it is possible for the receiver to believe and with that the action has produced its benefit. Also, the receiver could persist with his previous position and thus not believe, and here in this case the action does not produce its benefit. The doer is one and the same, but the receiver differs. Some of the disbelievers heard the Quran and then left without faith, 'And among them, [O Muhammad], are those who listen to you, until when they depart from you, they say to those who were given knowledge, "What has he said just now?" Those are the ones of whom Allah has sealed over their hearts and who have followed their [own] desires.' (*Muhammad:* 16)

They are like the disbelievers who listen to the Quran and then leave so that they can mockingly say to the believers who have come to know and believed, 'What speech is this that Muhammad is saying'? These mockers are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed with disbelief, and they leave guidance and head for misguidance. The one speaking with Allah's speech is the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* conveying from Allah. The one hearing differs. There is the hearer who believes and is affected by what he hears, and there is the hearer who disbelieves because his ears cannot translate what he has heard into awareness and realisation. But the Quran is for those who have believed that it is guidance and a cure. As for those who do not believe in it, their ears are deaf to understanding with no insight, and this is why they do not understand anything Allah revealed. You find the soul of the believer to be far-sighted because it knows what is in the Quran. As for the one who wants to be a tyrant on the earth, he does not want to make himself adhere to the way.

To recognise the difference between these two types of humans, we find the believer contemplating about the universe and thus, realising that it must have a wise Maker. As for the disbeliever, his insight is blind from seeing this. When the believer listens to a statement from the Creator of the universe, he listens attentively while the disbeliever runs away from it.

The leaders of Quraysh such as Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, An-Nadar ibn al-Harith, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, `Utba ibn Rabi`a, Shayba ibn Rabi`a and Harb ibn Umayya, gathered, and one of them asked An-Nadar, ‘O Nadar! What is the story behind the speech that Muhammad says?’ An-Nadr was a narrator of stories that he gathered from all over the land, for he had travelled to the lands of Persia and Byzantium and traversed the length and breadth of the Arabian Peninsula. He said, ‘By Allah, I do not know what Muhammad is saying except that he says the fables of ancient times.’

An-Nadr, Abu Sufyan and Abu Jahl engaged in an argument with Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* Muhammad. This argument reflects a lack of understanding of the signs that the Quran has brought. Allah did not put deafness in their ears forcibly, but rather, primarily, because of their disbelief, and Allah sealed their hearts because of their disbelief. The disease of disbelief settled in their hearts and they preferred it to faith, so Allah worsens their disease. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them: ‘And if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it. Even when they come to you arguing with you, those who disbelieve say, “This is not but fables of the former generations.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 25)

Fables are something that are written down and addressed as something wondrous and fictional. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is exposing them in front of themselves, and they are trying to find a flaw in the Quran, but they will not be able to find it. Allah *Glorified is He* says the final word about them: ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31).

They know the greatness of the Quran; so how can they say that it is the fables of ancient times? They were amongst those who were astonished by the grandeur of the Noble Quran’s style even though they were an oratory nation. But they also know that the requirements of the Quran are difficult for their egos to bear. In addition, they wanted to remain in a position of leadership, might, and subjection over others, while the Quran came to establish equality between all human beings in front of the True Lord, the One and the Unique.

By the Will of Allah, compelling events came about to be a cause for faith, such as what happened with `Umar ibn A-Khattab when he learned that his sister (Fatima bint Al-Khattab) had accepted Islam. He went to her, beat her and made her bleed. The flow of blood evoked within him his brotherly compassion and it put an end to his stubborn conceit. Then he wanted to read the page which contained some verses from the Quran but his sister told him to purify himself. He did so and then sat and listened. After he forwent conceit and stubbornness, and by purifying himself, his ears became ready to understand what was in the Quran. Then he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and declared his faith in Allah as his Lord, and in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his final Message.

After that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُمۡ يَنۡهَوۡنَ عَنۡهُ وَيَنۡـَٔوۡنَ عَنۡهُۖ وَإِن يُهۡلِكُونَ إِلَّآ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَمَا يَشۡعُرُونَ ٢٦

And tell others not to listen [to the Quran], while they themselves keep away from it. But they ruin no one but themselves, though they fail to realize this [26] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 26)

The disbeliever from amongst these people only turns away from what Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* requires. He not only does not want to be guided but also bars others from faith, so it is as if he has committed two crimes: the crime of his own disbelief and the crime of baring others from faith.

Quraysh were indeed certain that whoever heard the Quran, would be guided by it, and for that reason, they advised one another against hearing the Quran. If they were to hear it, they had to distort it or make some noise that would come between the one hearing the Quran and him reflecting on it. 'And those who disbelieve say, "Do not listen to this Quran and speak noisily during [the recitation of] it that perhaps you will overcome."' (*Fussilat:* 26)

They were certain that the Quran would overwhelm them with proof and silence them with clear evidences. Had they listened to it, they would have found a sweetness and an elegance therein that would remove all stubbornness and denial from their hearts. Because of this, it is as if they are bearing witness that the Quran affects the natural disposition of man, without disregarding they have a gift for Arabic rhetoric. Nevertheless, the disbelievers persisted in their stubborn opposition despite their deep love for the style, eloquence, and rendering of the Quran. They were not content with their own misguidance, so they wanted to misguide others, which would double their sins to the addition of the sins of those they are misguiding. This had not affected, at the slightest, the progress of the call nor on the proclamation of faith coming from Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is because the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives him victory despite all this; for Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘And Our word has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers. That indeed, they would be those given victory. And that indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they prevent [others] from him and are [themselves] remote from him. And they do not destroy except themselves, but they perceive [it] not.’ (*al-An‘am:* 26) We know that the purport of this statement is that they oppose the call of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because it would strip them of their temporal authority with its grandeur, tyranny and exploitation of the weak. This is why they stood in denial towards it and disbelieved in it.

Since they took this position towards the call, they were never going to have faith, and because they turned away and distanced themselves from the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they had indeed lost. The others, however, had not turned away but sought refuge in Allah, Who gave them refuge.

These stubborn deniers of the call of Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* stood in front of his call and barred and forbade people from following it because this call would strip them of their temporal authority with its grandeur, tyranny and exploitation of the weak by subjugating them to serve them and exerting their authority over them. This, primarily, is what prompted them to prevent others and forbid them from following Islam. Secondly, they themselves turned away and distanced themselves from following the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, it was for their own benefit, primarily, that they forbid others before turning away themselves because had the people believed in Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him,* while they alone remained in disbelief, would they have benefitted at all from this process? They would not have benefitted, so, their desire was for no one to believe in Allah's Messenger so that their authority would remain.

The Quranic rendering came expressing the subtlest details of this state, saying, '…and they prevent [others] from him.' (*al-An'am:* 26) The beginning was to forbid others from having faith in the Message of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then, they distanced themselves from Allah's Messenger, and thus, their fate became such that they would remain in their disbelief, and the loss was theirs. Meanwhile, other people believed.

This is how we see that the Quranic rendering always expresses psychological states with the most accurate of expressions, for the True Lord's saying: 'And they prevent [others] from him…' (*al-An'am:* 26), is a logical statement expressing the position of those who oppose Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for The True Lord's saying, '…and are [themselves] remote from him…' (*al-An'am:* 26), this is an illustration of what they have done to themselves after preventing others from following Muhammad's call and the final Message. Given this picture, they are committing two sins. The first is the misguiding of others and the second is their own misguidance. Because of this, the True Lord's following statement applies to them: 'That they may bear their own burdens in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear.' (*an-Nahl:* 25)

No one should say, 'This verse contradicts the True Lord's *Glorified is He* statement," 'And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another.' (*al-Isra':* 15). This is because the two crimes; their crime and the crime of them misguiding others, is because of their action.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues, '…and they do not destroy except themselves, but they perceive [it] not.' (*al-An'am:* 26) We see that the one who stands in opposition to goodness and the True Lord's call is only doing so with the intention of benefitting himself and acquiring this life for his own sake, but they will never achieve that. Why? Because Allah *Glorified is He* is Dominant over His affairs: 'And Our word has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers. That indeed, they would be those given victory. And that indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome.' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* never allows His hosts to be defeated. He will certainly destroy the enemies of His call because of their disbelief and their barring of others from Allah's path. They are the ones who destroy themselves by themselves, and the Islamic call to faith shall remain in the ascent. They will see the lands of disbelief decreasing day by day. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41)

The lands of disbelief decrease, and when Allah judges, there is no power that can repel His judgement. Therefore, the Quran amply explains this matter towards the end of its revelatory order and teaches us to cut off every relation that we have with the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship."' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-5)

This is how we see that cutting relations is a required matter between two groups; one group sees that it is upon truth, while the second group is upon falsehood. The cutting of relations can be a temporary matter and circumstances and situations may put pressure on people to resume earthly relations once again, but cutting relations must be supported by a matter of creed, and there should be no dissimulation. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says it twice: 'I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship.' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-5)

The believer sees both the present and the future, and he is fully aware of the impossibility of him worshipping what the disbelievers worship as well as the impossibility of the disbelievers worshipping what he worships.

Someone might say that the Quran, in its revelatory order, must not contradict reality, but we see in His *Glorified is He* statement, 'I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship.' is repeated twice, which thereby closes the door in front of the disbelievers so that they will not believe even though some of them did enter Allah's religion. We say that indeed it is not a contradiction because the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not close the door in front of the disbelievers whom Allah willed to believe, and the evidence is that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* said: 'When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest. And you see the people entering the religion of Allah in multitudes. Then exalt Him with the praise of your Lord and ask forgiveness of Him. Indeed, He is ever accepting of repentance.' (*an-Nasr:* 1-3)

Therefore, the matter does not freeze at that point because the camp of faith will expand and it will confront the camp of the disbelievers, and the people well enter the religion of Allah in crowds. But there are those whom Allah has decreed to never believe so that they will remain upon their disbelief and enter the Fire. He *Glorified is He* says after that: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined and ruined is he. His wealth will not avail him or that which he gained. He will [enter to burn in a Fire of [blazing] flame; and his wife as well - the carrier of firewood. Around her neck is a rope of [twisted] fibre.' (*al-Masad:* 1-5). Abu Lahab, and those of his kind, will enter the Fire and he will never enter Allah's religion.

The True Lord's statement *Glorified is He* then comes: 'And you see the people entering the religion of Allah in multitudes.' This statement opens the door of hope because 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab, `Amr ibn Al-`As and `Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl entered Islam. The chapter of Al-Masad came after the chapter of *An-Nasr* in the order of the Quran, as Allah had willed. This teaches us that there are people who will never enter paradise because they are like Abu Lahab and his wife, Umm Jamil. Following this is the chapter of *al-Ikhlas*: 'Say, "He is Allah, who is One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He begets not, nor was He begotten. Nor is there to Him any equivalent."' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4) There is no god besides Allah that can nullify what Allah has judged, and no one can repel Allah's judgement. Therefore, whoever disbelieves and associates partners with Allah will be from those who have squandered themselves and destroyed themselves without perceiving it. After that, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰٓ إِذْ وُقِفُوا۟ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ فَقَالُوا۟ يَٰلَيْتَنَا نُرَدُّ وَلَا نُكَذِّبَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّنَا وَنَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

If you could only see, when they are made to stand before the Fire, how they will say, ‘If only we could be sent back, we would not reject the revelations of our Lord, but be among the believers’ [27] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 27)

When we look at the True Lord’s statement, ‘If you could but see when they are made to stand before the Fire…’ (*al-An‘am:* 27), we do not find an apodosis in the way that we would find when you say, ‘Had I seen so-and-so, I would have welcomed him’, or ‘Had I seen so-and-so, I would have punished him’. In both sentences there is an apodosis, but in this noble statement we do not find an apodosis, and this is part of the grandeur of the Quranic rendering. Thus, there are events which words cannot describe, and for that reason the True Lord *Glorified is He* omits them so that it fits the way every hearer sees it.

In our daily lives, we find a criminal in some land where his corruption and crimes are worsening amongst the population; killing, torture, theft, criminal attacks and no one is ever able to stop him. Then Allah enables the security forces to arrest him, and we see this denigrate turns from being a tyrant into a dastardly coward, almost kissing the hand of the police officer so that that he does not put the handcuffs on him. Someone sees this scene and he describes it to others by saying, ‘If you could have seen the moment the police arrested this criminal…’ This expression conveys all the meaning of humiliation imaginable. Therefore, the omission of the apodosis is beneficial so that every hearer can imagine the humiliation in whatever way he likes. This is because the witness, had he chosen to narrate what had happened in detail the moment the criminal was arrested, then he might have limited the humiliation to only what he saw, and this would have prevented those hearing from being able to imagine it and picture it. But if the witness suffices himself by saying, ‘If you could have seen the moment the police arrested this criminal…’ this statement generalises what was seen so that each person hearing can picture the humiliation in a way that suits the capacity of each person’s imagination to picture things. This is how the Quran wanted to illustrate the horror of standing before the Fire, as the True

Lord *Glorified is He* used the word ‘if’ without any apodosis when He said: ‘If you could but see when they are made to stand before the fire and will say, “Oh, would that we could be returned to life on earth and not deny the signs of our Lord and be among the believers.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 27)

Some people wanted to find fault with the Quran’s style, and some from amongst them would say, ‘How can you say the Quran is the peak of oration, eloquent in its style, inimitable in its presentation and it says what it says about az-*zaqum* (a tree in hell)? Indeed, the Noble Quran says about this tree: ‘Is Paradise a better accommodation or the tree of *zaqqum*? Indeed, We have made it a trial for the wrongdoers. Indeed, it is a tree issuing from the bottom of the Hellfire. The shoots of its fruit-stalks are like the heads of the devils.’ (*as-Saffat:* 62-65)

Every tree needs water and air, and the life going through it is manifested in the greenness of the leaves, so how can this tree emerge from the Fire? Is there not an anomaly in that? Then the illustration of the tree goes on, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes its fruits with the True Lord’s *Glorified is He* statement: ‘The shoots of its fruit-stalks are like the heads of the devils. And indeed, they will eat from it and fill with it their bellies.’ (*as-Saffat:* 65-66)

We have not seen the *zaqqum* tree, and we have not seen Satan’s head. Those who try to find fault in the Quran say mockingly, ‘Seeing as no human being has ever seen Satan’s head, or the *zaqqum* tree, how can Allah compare the unknown to something else that is unknown’? They clamour and ask each other, ‘How does the one hearing benefit from the comparison of something unknown with something else that is unknown’? We say in response to them ‘Indeed the foolishness of your hearts and the loss of your natural gift for Arabic are what make you incapable of understanding the rhetoric spread across this statement’.

To give an example we say imagine a man sets up a competition for ‘caricature’ artists from around the world, and he asks each of them to draw a picture of Satan. When the day comes to decide the winner, you will find more than one picture of Satan, and the ugliest picture will win. Winning here will not be because of beauty but rather, it will be for how skilful someone is in illustrating ugliness. In this way, we would have in front of us various illustrations of ugliness, so what do we think about the True Lord *Glorified is He* as He wanted to let the imagination unrestricted to picture the *zaqqum* tree and likewise Satan's head? With this rhetorical style, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make known the benefit of demonstrating the ugliness of the tree's appearance from which the people of disbelief will eat.

The same notion is used here in the True Lord's statement, 'If you could but see when they are made to stand before the Fire', and what will happen to these people standing before the Fire is not mentioned here. Rather, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is content with expressing for us that we will see them standing in such a position because the Last Day is the day of recompense; either to Paradise or to the Fire. Paradise, as we know from the statement of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* contains that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and what has never occurred to the heart of any human being. We know that what the eye sees is limited, but the range of hearing is broader. This is because the ear hears what you witness and what others witness, while the eyes only see what they can see. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not stop there, but rather He informs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that paradise contains what has never occurred to the heart of any human being. In other words, Paradise contains things that language is incapable of expressing because language expresses people's imaginations of things. The meaning exists first, and later a term is coined to express it.

This is how we know that Paradise contains blessings that have no terms with which any meaning can be conveyed to the believer. Likewise, we also know that there is a punishment in the fire for which there are no terms that can express it. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* had said, 'If you could but see when they are made to stand before the Fire', we would have seen a matter that is dreadful, frightening and humiliating besides the other common terms that describe the severity of the punishment, but this will not be as effective as the verse puts it.

When we read 'made to stand,' we know that it contains a structure and a present existence, and there are those who have been made to stand before the fire. They are the ones who denied the fire in this life, but then they found themselves amongst those whom Allah causes to stand before the fire, so that they can see the punishment that awaits them. In this way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes them stand before the fire that they denied in this life. They were informed of it in this life. A person, who believes in it, especially after it is conveyed by a truthful person, would make this knowledge of certainty. If man passes to the next stage of knowledge and sees a tangible representation of the information, then this is the eye of certainty. When the believer is informed by his Lord, he arrives at things with the knowledge of certainty from Allah because he believes his Lord. This is why `Ali Allah *be pleased with him* says, 'If the veil were to be lifted from me, I would not increase in certainty.' This is because he affirms what has been conveyed to him.

But what is it about the deniers? Man will see the knowledge of certainty on the Day of Resurrection when it becomes the eye of certainty. Both the believer and the disbeliever have a share in this. However, the disbeliever sees the Fire with the eye of certainty and they enter it so that he can be burned by it. Thus, he feels it and this is the 'true certainty'.

This is how we know that the fire is the 'eye of certainty', seen by both the believer and the disbeliever. The fire as the 'true certainty' is something that only the disbeliever suffers and is punished by. As for the believer in paradise, he feels the 'truth of certainty' because he abides therein and enjoys its blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* illustrates this in His statement: 'No! If you only knew with knowledge of certainty, you will surely see the Hellfire. Then you will surely see it with the eye of certainty.' (*at-Takathur:* 5-7) The truth of certainty is mentioned in His statement: 'And if the deceased was of those brought near to Allah. Then for him is rest and bounty and a garden of pleasure. And if he was of those of the right, then the angels will say, "Peace to you; you are from those of the right." But if he was of the deniers who were astray, then for him is an accommodation of scalding water and burning in Hellfire. Indeed, this is the true certainty.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 88-95)

What are these deniers going to do when they see the fire with the eye of certainty? They will fear having to suffer from it when they enter it. That is why they say, '...Oh, would that we could be returned to life on earth and not deny the signs of our Lord and be among the believers.' They will wish that they could return to this life so they can have a fresh start and accept faith. In some cases, a wish is a request for something impossible to inform that the one requesting it would love for it to be so, as someone once said,

If only youth would come back one day
And I would tell him what old age has done

Or someone else's statement,

If only the celestial bodies would come down to me, I would arrange them
In necklaces of praise, as my words aren't enough to praise you

They say, '…would that we could be returned…' If they are saying this as a wish, then it is an impossible request, and it also includes a promise not to deny Allah's signs. Are they able to do this? No, because the Noble Quran has said in the following verse:

بَلۡ بَدَا لَهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يُخۡفُونَ مِن قَبۡلُۖ وَلَوۡ رُدُّواْ لَعَادُواْ لِمَا نُهُواْ عَنۡهُ وَإِنَّهُمۡ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

No! The truth they used to hide will become all too clear to them. Even if they were brought back, they would only return to the very thing that was forbidden to them – they are such liars! [28]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 28)

They are requesting to be returned to this life but not to fulfil the promise in their impossible request because they will do what they did before: disbelief, denial and rejection. They seek refuge in this statement because of their excessive fear of what Allah has prepared for them, and this is after the disbelief and rejection they committed in this life is shown to them. It is said that the Day of Resurrection is 'the Day of Disgrace' because every person will find his book around his neck, and it will be said to him, 'Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as a reckoner.' (*al-Isra':* 14)

If we, in this life, record events with sounds and pictures, then what do we think about the True Lord *Glorified is He* recording us? Man will see a loathsome thing on the Day of Judgement in sound and picture, and he will see every action that he did in a way that he cannot deny. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified* *is He* is clarifying for every servant, 'I will not reckon you but rather, I will leave you to reckon yourself'. Man will be surprised to see his limbs speak to testify against him; his hands will speak of what he did, his tongue will speak of what he said, his feet will relate where they were taken. Thus, these limbs that respond to the will of their owner in this life have a different position in the Hereafter. They will not carry out man's will on the Last Day but rather, the will of the One Who gave man his will 'To whom belongs all sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing.' (*Ghafir:* 16)

An example of this – and Allah is beyond compare– is that we find a squadron or combat regiment that has a commander who gives orders to the soldiers. If he gives them erroneous commands, they still carry them out. After the battle has finished, the supreme commander asks them what happened, and they respond by mentioning the series of erroneous commands that were issued by their immediate commander.

Therefore, one should beware of thinking that one's parts will always act per your power. Your control over something is a matter that Allah granted you. He can strip it away from you in this life whenever He wants. The Day of Resurrection will come and your control over your parts will come to an end. In this life, you can see illustrations of this control over the parts of the body being stripped, and this is to remind you of the power of the Sublime All-Giver. You see the one who does not see, and the one who has lost control over one limb or more of his limbs. This is a reminder from Allah that man's control over his limbs is only a matter that has been bestowed by Allah. The True Lord's statement *Glorified is He* about the disbelievers, 'But what they concealed before has [now] appeared to them…' exposes their deceit in this life. Then Allah responds to their prior wish that is filled with humiliation and misery, the wish to be returned to this life. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And even if they were returned, they would return to that which they were forbidden; and indeed, they are liars.' Thus, they are lying when they promise that they would believe if they were to be returned to this life, and the True Lord's next statement *Glorified is He* clarifies this:

وَقَالُوٓاْ إِنۡ هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَمَا نَحۡنُ بِمَبۡعُوثِينَ ٢٩

They say, ‘There is nothing beyond our life in this world: we shall not be raised from the dead’ [29] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 29)

Throughout their lives, they had not taken faith as a result deduced from contemplating an organised and arranged universe that has been made perfect in its creation. They had not paid attention to this order, perfection, and arrangement that is present in human relationships, regardless of whether they are believers or non-believers; and we know that there are qualities that are commonly despised by all of mankind, believers, and non-believers alike. If a non-believer steals from his associate, is he not punished? Indeed, he receives a punishment from his society. In all societies, there are rewards and punishments, or rather there is a reward for the performance of good deeds, and faith does not prevent mankind from adopting anything that has to do with the performance of good deeds. As for those who are void of faith, events compel them to put laws in place to regulate reward and punishment.

We find that the criminalisation of whoever opposes goodness, beauty, and rectification of the universe is a matter that is inherent to man’s natural disposition and it is necessary for man. They criminalise evil actions after events have bitten them and they do not turn to the heavenly way that came with reward and punishment for every action to protect the honour of man. On the Day of Resurrection, they will stand in humility and under compulsion to see what they have done: ‘But what they concealed before has [now] appeared to them. And even if they were returned, they would return to that which they were forbidden; and indeed, they are liars.’ (*al-An‘am:* 28)

If they were to be returned to this life and given the choice again, they would still act as they had done before, and they would not say such a statement on the Last Day unless they were forced. Before that they were saying, ‘And they say, “There is none but our worldly life, and we will not be resurrected.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 29)

When they were in this life, they only believed in one life which was the worldly life. They did not pay attention to the fact that man enjoys life in this world in proportion to how strong he is, and woe to the weak in relation to the strong. The strong only fears a law that may punish him, or he fears a god that will punish him for his sins, no matter how much he has hidden them. We find the believing judge always saying, 'If you hide things from being judged on earth, you cannot hide them from being judged in the sky'.

It is from the foolishness of the people of disbelief that they call life on earth 'worldly life,' whereas it is inferior. As long as they judge and know that it is inferior, then it must be countered by a higher life. All of this will happen to them when they stand before the fire, and the fire is one of the soldiers of the All-Compeller; so what do you think of them when they shall stand before the Creator of the fire and the Lord of all the worlds?! The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰٓ إِذْ وُقِفُوا۟ عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ قَالَ أَلَيْسَ هَٰذَا بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ قَالُوا۟ بَلَىٰ
وَرَبِّنَا ۚ قَالَ فَذُوقُوا۟ ٱلْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

If you could only see, when they are made to stand before their Lord, how He will say, 'Is this not real?' They will say, 'Yes indeed, by our Lord.' He will say, 'Then taste the torment for having disbelieved' [30] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 30)

They, therefore, were scared and confused and they asked to be returned to this life because what they witnessed was a great horror; so what do you think about them standing before Allah? Indeed, it is a terrifying position. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* omitted the apodosis before when they were made to stand before the fire, then this situation is even more suited to omit the apodosis, so that the imagination is left unrestricted. It is certainly a greater horror.

Thus, we see them being reproached in the True Lord's statement to them, 'Is this not the truth?' They are surprised by the presence of Allah saying this to them, after witnessing the resurrection and standing before the Fire. Allah *Glorified is He* is not asking them a question but rather, He is affirming, and He willed for the affirmation to come from them. They affirm it because the situation requires no obstinacy.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* presents this matter in the form of negation so that no one supposes that there is any insinuation of the answer. The Lord's verdict is issued, ‘taste the punishments because you used to disbelieve.’ Thus, they taste the punishment that they used to deny. Tasting the punishment is not from any kind of force or tyranny because Allah does not oppress in the slightest, but because they brought forth that which necessitates their punishment.

After that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَدْ خَسِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِلِقَآءِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً قَالُوا۟ يَٰحَسْرَتَنَا
عَلَىٰ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِيهَا وَهُمْ يَحْمِلُونَ أَوْزَارَهُمْ عَلَىٰ ظُهُورِهِمْ ۚ أَلَا سَآءَ مَا يَزِرُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with their Lord until, when the Hour suddenly arrives, they say, ‘Alas for us that we disregarded this!’ They will bear their burdens on their backs. How terrible those burdens will be! [31] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 31)

Every capital needs work to increase it, but if the work has wasted the money, then this means that there is a double loss. The first loss is because the capital has gone, disappeared and been wasted. The second is because man’s own effort has been wasted along with the capital.

Therefore, those who denied meeting Allah have indeed lost because they sold the longer lasting future for the short-lived present. Each one of us wants to benefit from his work and we try to give a little to take much.

For example, a farmer appropriates a specific amount from a large quantity of wheat, which is in his storehouse so that he can sow it in the earth after it has been cultivated. This means a small decrease in this farmer’s storehouse, but it is a decrease for a future increase. When he places the seeds in the cultivated earth, we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* bringing forth vegetation for him that is doubled and multiplied many times over. In this way, the farmer sells that which is small, and in the present to take that which is great in the future.

This is how an intelligent person leads his life by weighing his steps carefully. If he wants to increase the benefits, then he must put in more effort. If he notices insufficient return, he would instantly cease that whichever is unproductive. Because the intelligent person does not like losing, we always find him weighing things and comparing between the effort he expends and what he will get in return. As for those who have disbelieved in meeting Allah, they have indeed squandered their own selves, because they did not compare between the two lives; a life that is presumed and life that is certain, because the length of our stay in this life is presumed and not certain. We do not know how long we will live therein, and the life of man on earth is seventy years on average, as an example. However, no one knows exactly how long they will be in this life, and our life spans are limited. We are vanishing, going, and dying, but the life of the Hereafter is certain and has no fixed term. It is permanent. We know that the blessings of this life with regards to man, are per his means that are found therein. As for the blessings of the Hereafter, they are per the absolute power of the Original Cause, and He is Allah. Given this understanding, the loss of those who have disbelieved is massive, heavy and bloody because they did not trade with Allah.

'Those will have lost who deny the meeting with Allah, until when the Hour [of resurrection] comes upon them unexpectedly, they will say, "Oh, how great is our regret over what we neglected concerning it…"' Those who have disbelieved, it is their disbelief and their denial that has brought them to loss. The coming of the Hour, all of a sudden, is not the end of the trip. It is only the arrival at the first loss because their loss does not end with the sudden coming of the Hour. It only begins the moment the Hour surprises them. They are surprised by the occurrence of that which they were denying, and they know that what they did in this life can only necessitate punishment. Here begins the loss which they are incapable of hiding. That is why they say: 'Oh, how great is our regret over what we neglected concerning it.' In other words, we disregarded and squandered ourselves, while we were in this life. With this, we know that commitment to this life and taking the means therein is something that is not blameworthy, but negligence while being in this life is blameworthy because it is wasting time and sowing corruption on earth.

I say this lest no one thinks that enjoyment in this life is blameworthy in and of itself, and so that no one thinks that the religion only addresses the Hereafter because it also addresses this life. Recompense in the Hereafter is only of a different type and manner to that of this life. Whoever has excellent behaviour in this life will obtain the reward of the Hereafter, and whoever does evil will obtain the punishment of the Hereafter. For this reason, it is totally incorrect to compare between this life and the religion.

We must be aware of the mistake of those who say ‘the religion and this life’, because the religion is not the opposite of this life. In fact, this life is the total focus of the religion. I say in refutation of those who think that the reason why some countries have become advanced in our age is that their people have neglected religion and become infatuated with the delights and pleasures of this life, and thus, they have worked to build civilizations.

We say that devotion to the religion with a spirit of understanding is what builds civilisations, and those who strive to improve in this life will be rewarded on the Day of Recompense. We must understand that the opposite of this life is the Hereafter, and the religion comprises both. It comprises this life as a subject, and the Hereafter as a reward. Those who are infatuated with this life and do not believe in the Hereafter are the ones who say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘Oh, how great is our regret over what we neglected concerning it.’ The immaterial burdens in this life (i.e. sins) will materialise as physical realities, and this is so that the humiliation can be public. Thus, whoever stole a sheep in this life, will be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection carrying it on his back. Whoever stole a cow will be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection carrying it on his shoulder and it will be mooing. Likewise, whoever stole a tonne of building iron will be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection carrying it on his back, and this is how Allah humiliates him on the Day of Resurrection.

This is then the situation of the people of the fire. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear.’ We know that they will not just be carrying the burdens of their own sins but they will also be carrying some of the sins of those who took them as an example, and this is the sin of misguiding others. They know that the burden will be materialised as physical, and these sins have lead them to the Hellfire. We know that the result of every action is what is sought from it; so whoever does acts of righteousness, will find the righteousness of his actions, and whoever does acts of evil, will find his evil actions.

We see practical examples of this in our daily lives. For example, two brothers working in agriculture; and each of them owns two pieces of land. The first one gets up at the crack of dawn to tend to his land and cultivate it. He brings fertilizers for it and pays attention to the times of irrigation. He strives with earnest and endeavour until the day of the harvest. The other, on the contrary, stays up at night watching television and does not get up from his sleep until midday. He only expends the minimum amount of effort in tending to his land. The day of the harvest comes and the first brother obtains the result of his labour with an abundant yield. The other only has a small yield in addition to the grief he must swallow because of his laziness and neglect. Therefore, the intelligent person is the one who anticipates the return of his actions in life and he chooses the type of activity that will guarantee him felicity in this life and the Hereafter, and bring peace to the soul in this life and the Hereafter.

The one who sleeps and does not go to work is a man who loves himself, and whoever gets up early in the morning to work also loves himself, but there is a difference between the love of an idiot that is followed by regret and the love of someone who deeply understands the meaning of life, and his love is followed by an abundant reward. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says to us:

وَمَا ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَآ إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ ۖ وَلَلدَّارُ ٱلْءَاخِرَةُ
خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ ۗ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ (٣٢)

The life of this world is nothing but a game and a distraction; the Home in the Hereafter is best for those who are aware of God. Why will you [people] not understand? [32] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 32)

This sums up life for the kind of people who stop in describing it as an amusement and play. Play is the pursuit of something and its destruction at the same time. For, example, a child who builds a sandcastle on the beach but then wrecks it: He only built a sandcastle so that he could wreck it. The purpose of play is to kill time in some endeavour that may be later wrecked. Thus, building and wrecking in this situation is playing which does not necessarily divert the person from his duties. As for amusement, it is to kill time in some useless endeavour besides distracting the person from his duties as well.

The small child, for example, receives some games from his father so that he can spend his time with them. He may wreck them and then build them again. The games of a child are also amusement at the same time because a child does not have any duties besides going to school. He will come to have more responsibilities and the family will teach him how to distinguish between playtime and the time for carrying out responsibilities. If he plays during the time he is supposed to be carrying out responsibilities, then the games become amusement because it is distracting him from a responsibility that is required of him.

Likewise, a life that lacks the methodology of the One Who created it and created man therein is both game and amusement. As for man taking life consistently with the specifications of the One Who created it, then this is a life that will bring about goodness in this life and in the Hereafter. The One Who created this life made it as a place for us to cultivate for the Hereafter. The believer, therefore, has two lives: one of righteousness in this life and another of felicity in the Hereafter because he lived this life per the Will of the One Who created it.

It is amazing that the One Who created us has not charged us with any responsibility until we reach the age of puberty. Responsibility comes with maturity and the completion of the intellect. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has allowed us to play in the years prior to maturity. However, these games must be played under the supervision of elders so that they can be turned into experience that will benefit us throughout the phases of life. It allows us to know how we arrived, in the modern age, at such a degree of progress in the manufacturing of games from which a child can learn. He can disassemble them and reassemble them again. Even the elders; we find them, in our time, learning how to drive a car while sitting at home in front of the television, as if they are on a real road on a real street crowded with cars. Whoever masters this practical training will be able to go out and drive cars. Thus, we find that training benefits man. Small children know games that will benefit them when they grow up, and likewise, training also benefits adults.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* advised us to teach our children horse riding, swimming and archery, horses were, at the time of the Message, one of the important weapons that were ridden by those calling to Allah and fighting for His sake. He recommended that we teach our children how to swim because this builds the body and strengthens it. It benefits the youth and teaches them how to confront difficulties. When he recommended archery, it was because defining a target, material or immaterial, and knowing how to achieve it is something required of every youth. These were all games, but they were not amusement. They are enjoyable and man can continue to practice them after reaching the age of responsibility. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Teach your children swimming and archery.'(1) So what do we say about the games of our age and our time?

Indeed, we find that football has drawn the interest of men and women, young and old, and it is a game that does not teach anyone anything. It is a game for the sake of gaming. It is a game that drains the time of most people, and that game has adopted all the rules of serious matters. It starts at a specific time. The spectators arrive two hours beforehand. The state must devote enough security forces for the sake of maintaining order, even though it is amusement that has no benefit for the spectator. It may also prevent, interfere with and interrupt some people's work, and for other people their prayer. All of this takes place, while we find that some fields that require seriousness have no rules. I say this so that people wake up and realise that this game does not benefit them at all. I state this opinion and I ask every head of a household to exert control over his family, and advise them with calmness and attentiveness until each member of the family becomes aware of his responsibilities and knows that it is just a form of amusement. It takes up a lot of one's time that should be used for working and carrying out the duties and responsibilities of life. If we do this, we will not complain and feel worn out because of a lack of production.

It is the duty of the state to consider these matters, and for us to treat every matter with proportionate measure. It is not sound to put seriousness into the rules of a game, but rather, so that seriousness has its rule, and games have their time. Also, we should not put games inside the sphere of amusement. This is because the meaning of amusement is that we devote ourselves to doing something that has no objective and no benefit at the outcome. If we look at life lacking Allah's methodology, then it is nothing but games and amusement.

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Daylami in (Musnad Al-Firdaus) and Abu Naʿim in (Al-Hilya)*

Here we turn our attention to the True Lord's precision in starting with play and then amusement. Then He says, 'but the home of the Hereafter' which clearly indicates that when man becomes detached in life from the methodology of the True Lord *Glorified is He* becomes surprised by events such that he treats sudden events with clear seriousness. Therefore, we must deal with life under the light of Allah's methodology. Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that He had created man from clay and shaped him and breathed into him from His spirit and gave him a first life; and both the believer and the disbeliever partake in it, the obedient, the disobedient and every person that has senses, movement, thoughts and will. Allah sent messengers with the methodology so that this life would be directed towards an objective, which is the second life, the abode of the Hereafter. It is the complete and everlasting life, and we hear the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.' (*al-Anfal:* 24)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is presenting to us a higher, permanent life that is different from the life that ends. The one who refrains from adopting Allah's methodology in his life has simply enjoyed life exactly as the animal. But the one who adopts Allah's methodology chooses the higher life, the life of goodness, beauty, happiness, and excellence. We know that beauty in life is the beauty that does not bequeath ugliness. True goodness is that which spreads Allah's goodness amongst the servants, for man does not take goodness for himself and leave his evils for others. Therefore, I advise you not to take goodness for yourself at the expense of giving evil to others because you would not like it if others acquired goodness at your expense. The one who loves to unleash his evils amongst people, will receive evil from someone else, and whoever loves to take goodness from people, then let him give people from his goodness so that existence can remain beautiful. Therefore, life without [applying] Allah's methodology is ugly because the strong causes havoc therein with his strength, and the weak retreats with feelings of humiliation and loss.

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the life of the believers to be in the light of His methodology, and when they apply his commandments of 'Do!' and 'Do not do', then they preserve life from corruption per the commands of the Sublime Creator of life, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who brought us into existence and laid down for us the laws of maintaining life. When He prevents one believer from doing evil, then He has indeed prevented and made it impermissible for every believing person to do evil towards his brother, which secures man against evil.

Allah only singled out the believers with calling and supplicating because they are the people who respond to Him and obey Him. As for those who are their enemies from the people of disbelief and idolatry, they have denied Allah, disobeyed Him and have not believed in Him. When Allah commands a believer to do goodness He is, in fact, commanding all believers to do goodness towards themselves and others. This is how they obtain a peaceful life. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.'

Those who do not respond to Allah or to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he calls them to what will give them life, remain in this life immersed in games and amusement. They are like the dead. We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the higher life for the believers. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has named the way that lays down for us commands and prohibitions, a spirit: 'And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command.' (*ash-Shura:* 52). The True Lord *Glorified is He* named this angel that was sent down with the revelation: 'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193)

Therefore, the life that gives man sense and movement is the first life in which he plays and amuses himself. This is not life that is intended for Allah because the life that is intended for Allah is the life of faith, and this is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* called it everlasting, and he called His methodology 'a spirit.' 'And the worldly life is not but amusement and diversion; but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah, so will you not reason?'

Indeed, sheer discernment gives man goodness. It is an attempt to understand the secrets of the universe in terms of causes and causers. We see the sun's light filling the daytime and spreading illumination and warmth, and the disappearance of the sun and emergence of the moon brings about the serenity of stillness and guides people in the darkness of the land and the sea. The flowing of water quenches man's thirst and irrigates crops. The movement of wind moves the clouds, guides ships, assists in navigation and aviation and it pollinates plants. These are all causes that Allah willed so that balance would be implemented in the universe. Man takes his share from life with means that he works with, and he cannot take means from anywhere else. It is true that there are people who live without means and they take from the labour of others, but it is upon them to be wary of Allah. Beware of feeding yourself and your children by exploiting others. This is because life, sooner or later, will overtake you and your strength will become weakness, and insuring man for his state of weakness can only be by giving obligatory *zakat* to the weak, and helping them and assisting them in everything that they need. We find that non-believers have taken the idea of insurance from *zakat*. You give your *zakat* to the poor to insure yourself as a believer. They took this idea and turned it into life insurance, and this is why they have interfered in Allah's preordainment.

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted, by way of *zakat*, to secure the entire society, not just secure the one who insures himself. We know that what scares man and makes him accumulate wealth is the fear of weakness, but had the rich given some of his wealth to the poor, reassurance would have filled his soul and the souls of the weak.

What makes people puff and pant in life to accumulate things for their children is their lack of conviction in the mutual responsibility of society that Islam has legislated. They see orphans and they are lost in society, but if people in the society had faith in the mutual responsibilities of society, every orphan would find the paternity of the entire society to be his.

The man who puffs and pants while earning his living in order to ensure the future of his children may turn his children into orphans because he has been preoccupied from their upbringing. This is why the prince of the poets, Shawqi *may Allah's Mercy be upon him* says:

The orphan is not the one whose parents
Are no longer living and have left him abject
But the orphan is the one whose mother has
Abandoned him, or his father is busy

Indeed it is the duty of the society to take the issue of goodness from the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He* when he says; 'O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life'. (al-*Anfal:* 24) Just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* brought the bodies to life with the spirit that He breathed into clay which came to have sense and motion, He is also the One Who sent down the Message to elevate human beings so that they do not become like grazing livestock or stray from the path as in the verse, ‘And the worldly life is not but amusement and diversion; but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah, so will you not reason?’ (*al-An‘am:* 32)

The abode of the Hereafter is goodness because the life of this world, no matter how long it lasts, will come to an end. But the Hereafter is eternal. We take our blessings in the life of this world via means, but we take the blessings of the Hereafter according to the vastness and abundance of Allah’s Power. The bane of the life of this world, even for those who have blessings and power and riches, is the fear of poverty or death, but in the Hereafter the people of the paradise will be in everlasting blessings. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

قَدْ نَعْلَمُ إِنَّهُۥ لَيَحْزُنُكَ ٱلَّذِى يَقُولُونَ ۖ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَا يُكَذِّبُونَكَ
وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ يَجْحَدُونَ ٣٣

We know well that what they say grieves you [Prophet].
It is not you they disbelieve: the evildoers reject God’s
revelation [33] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 33)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has explained the state of the disbelievers and their situation in the Hereafter when they will stand before the fire and before Allah Almighty. After that, the discussion turns to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was shouldering the great responsibility with its difficulty of conveying from Allah *the Exalted* to these disbelievers. He *peace and blessings be upon him* was grieved because his people did not taste the sweetness of faith and he is the Messenger of whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* says; 'there has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful.' (*at-Tawba:* 128)

He *peace and blessings be upon him* was very concerned for all people to be believers and he was hurt by the opposition of some people towards the call of faith. Indeed He *peace and blessings be upon him* was very concerned for the disbeliever to believe despite the fact that his duty as a Messenger was only to convey the Message. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* had wanted to make all of humanity believers, He would have sent down a sign to them that would have made them all believers. Allah tells The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to not kill himself with grief that they will not be believers.

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want the submission of necks; He wants the submissions of hearts. Indeed He *Glorified is He* wants that people come voluntarily and out of their own will to affirm their love for their Creator. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He knows well that he is saddened by what they say. And when He says *qad* (well), then you should know that what comes after it is an established matter. This particle may be inserted before a perfect verb and in this case, it comes to precede an established matter. Sometimes it indicates scarcity or abundance and this is when it is inserted before an imperfect verb that indicates the present or the future. If there is a cause connecting the agent and that which is acted upon, then this is abundance. If the outward purport of the matter is not clearly connected, then it indicates scarcity. An example of a connection that indicates abundance is someone saying that how often (*qad*) is the diligent person successful. This is because the diligent person and success are connected in a causal manner. However, there could still be a surprise incident that makes a diligent person unsuccessful, such as becoming sick on the day of the exam, but the likelihood of being healthy is greater than the likelihood of being sick and this is abundance.

An example of (*qad*) being used for scarcity is someone saying how rarely (*qad*) does the lazy person succeed. This refers to a lazy person being successful coincidentally, without any logical reason, as if he read a number of lessons the night before the exam and then took the exam and passed. Therefore, (*qad*) that is used with a perfect verb is for something established, and if it used with an imperfect verb, then it indicates frequency if there is a logical causal relationship, but yet it indicates scarcity if there is not a logical causal relationship. However, we all know that Allah's Knowledge is pre-eternal; no power and no matter is outside of what Allah *the Exalted* knows. Thus (*qad*) here is for an established matter even though it is being used with an imperfect verb. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to inform us that He knew from pre-eternity what was going to happen and He used (*qad*) so that we would think of the action.

In the concerned verse, grief occurs when the soul leaves the domain of its happiness. Thus, man has achieved the objective of rectitude and contentment when each one of his organs is carrying out its task. If any breakdown that disturbs the work of one of his organs happens, then this brings grief or it may be affected if something is obtained that was not sought.

What the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* sought was to turn everyone who heard the Message to belief. But some of them opposed faith. Some of them accused the Messenger of sorcery or madness or saying poetry. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* consoles His Messenger in the concerned verse and tells him that he must know that what they say does not belong to him because he, by consensus of their own opinions, is the truthful and trustworthy one. They are only denying the signs that were sent to him for them because they know him for being truthful and trustworthy. The proof is that any disbeliever from amongst them would not trust anyone with any portion of his wealth or his valuables except the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Man does not cheat himself in what is specific to him, so it is as if Allah *the Exalted* wanted to take responsibility for His Messenger, because whoever insults the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* only insults the One who sent him *the Almighty* Allah.

This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that He knows that he is saddened by what they say. He confirms to him that they do not call him untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* that the wrongdoers reject. He *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us that His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was concerned to the furthest extent possible for his nation to respond to the call of the True Lord *Glorified is He* until the believers would be convinced of the True Lord's statement *Glorified is He* regarding His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'there has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves; it is grievous to him what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful.' (*at-Tawba:* 128)

Concern has no meaning except that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loves that no one from among his people turns away from his way and from his religion. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* made the matter of religion optional so that He would know who was coming to Him voluntarily while being capable of not coming and who was not coming to Him while being capable of coming.

Indeed the True Lord *Glorified is He* has universal standard practices in the universe that He applies to the creation and the question may arise, what is it that makes the True Lord *Glorified is He* leave a scope for disbelief in the world, and why does He grant evil a scope in the life of this world? Does He not rule over it with a wise plan? We say: 'If there was no evil in the world, then harming and frightening people would not have truly known sweetness.' Therefore, the existence of evil, disbelief and the effects of disbelief compel people to conclude that they must have faith, and that goodness must exist. If evil had no place in the universe, then what would make people turn towards goodness? This is why you find that the believers' faith gets stronger when the enemies of faith are attacking the believers, harming and instigating against them. If the life of this world was to become monotonous, then maybe the matter of Islam would become lax in the souls of the Muslims. This is why we find that those who believe in Allah *the Exalted* are constantly vigilant; because there are those who disbelieve in Him. Thus He says to His Messenger: 'We certainly know that what such people say grieves you indeed...' (*al-An'am:* 33). It is as if He *Glorified is He* is informing us that He willed for the universe to contain both believers and disbelievers.

This is why, O Muslim, if you ask why there are disbelievers on earth, you should know that they are from Allah's creation and the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted them to choose disbelief. So they did not choose disbelief against His Will. Our master the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was grieved because there were people who did not believe, so the True Lord *Glorified is He* is consoling him because He knows that he is grieved by their statements of disbelief and the accusations that they make against him. Did they not say that he was a sorcerer? Did they not say that he was a madman? Did they not say that he was a liar? Did they not say that he was a soothsayer? Did they not say that he was a poet? He *Glorified is He* knows what they have said and He knows that these statements grieve The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to remove this grief and relieve His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of it, so He informs him that 'they are not denying you, O Messenger of Allah, for you know your rank with them and it is the rank of being the truthful and trustworthy one. No one dares to deny you, but they reject Allah's signs. Is there a greater distraction than this? It is not possible to find a distraction greater than this.'

We know that what the people of idolatry said about The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is to be rejected, because they were masters of rhetoric, eloquence and fluency, so how can they say that the Quran is poetry while they know the different styles; standard speech and rhymed prose as well as prose and verse?

Does it make sense for them to confuse the Quranic style with poetry? This is definitely not possible. They said that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was a sorcerer, but how could he have bewitched those who believed in him and not bewitch others? If he was a sorcerer, he would have bewitched them as well. The fact that they remained in disbelief nullifies this accusation. They said that he was a liar, but by saying this, they are denying themselves because they know that he is the truthful and trustworthy one. Here is the conversation(1) between Al-Akhnas ibn Shuraiq and Abu Jahl: Al-Akhnas said "O Abu Al-Hakam! What do you think about what you have heard from Muhammad?" Abu Jahl replied; "what have I heard! Here, we hear a statement of jealousy, envy, and hatred. We hear about those matters that are far from the subject of the luminous Muhammadan message.” Abu Jahl continued; “we have competed with Banu 'Abdul Manaf in nobility. They fed and we fed. They bore burdens and we bore burdens. They gave and we gave until we faced each other on horseback and were like racehorses. They said 'There is a prophet amongst us and revelation comes to him from the sky', how can we achieve something like this? By Allah, we will never believe in him and we will never affirm him.” Al-Akhnas then stood up and left him. Therefore, it is a matter of raging jealousy for positions of temporal authority. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* refutes them, saying: ‘How dared they distribute the mercy of the Lord? It is Allah who has apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and has raised some of them above others in degrees of rank in order for them to make use of one another for service. But the mercy of the Lord is better than whatever they accumulate’. (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) And this is the True Lord *Glorified is He* consoling His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying to him that He knows that he is saddened by what they say, but indeed, they do not call him untruthful, rather, it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We know that you, [O Muhammad], are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33)

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(1) The story of Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq debating with Abu Jahl

Indeed they are oppressors because oppression is removing a right from someone to another who does not deserve it. The most repulsive form of oppression is polytheism because the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who deserves to be worshipped. The least form of oppression is to move a right that has been earned or granted to other than the one to whom it belongs and this oppression exists amongst people. The polytheists moved the right of the Divine Essence to those who do not deserve it, i.e. the statues and idols. As for the believers, they acknowledge the right of the Divine Essence to be worshipped.

There is another type of oppression that I want to talk about, that is, when someone misuses his name. An example would be a father who gives his son a name of Mahdi, but he fills the life of this world with corruption by harming himself and harming others. We say to someone like this that it is an obligation for you to respect your father's hope in you, so do not oppress your name 'Mahdi'. There must be consistence between your behaviour and the name that your father has given you.

As for the case of a father calling his son 'Mahdi' but not instructing him in anything regarding guidance or the religion and the boy goes into the life of this world filling it with misery for himself and others, but is then guided afterwards is able to learn guidance, then his name has come to live up to its meaning.

In the 1930's, we used to hear warnings when we visited Cairo: 'Beware against ʿImad Ad-Din (pillar of the Religion) Street because all bad things are on this street.' I was astonished that a street called ʿImad Ad-Din was a place for crime, and I said in that regard:

The ugliest oppression after polytheism
Is to oppress a name by using it to name something that is the opposite in nature
For a street that is named ʿImad ad-Din
Has been made a street for opposing the religion

In life, there are many cases of names being misused by their owners, but the greatest and ugliest level of oppression is associating partners with Allah *the Exalted*. (*al-An'am:* 33) Denying (*jahd*) is the refusal of the tongue and its disdain and reluctance to articulate the word of truth. If the polytheists had isolated themselves and reviewed the issues of The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Message, they would have found their hearts content with him being truthful and a Messenger and that the way has only come with guidance. However, their tongues were not able to acknowledge this.

This is why the way of faith commands each one of us, when we want to discuss whether a matter is true or false, not to discuss it in a gathering of people, but rather to discuss it firstly amongst ourselves so that we can distinguish the truth therein from falsehood. This is why The True Lord says: 'Say, 'I only advise you of one [thing] - that you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually and then give thought. There is not in your companion any madness.' (*Saba':* 46)

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is guiding us to the manner of distinguishing; either we discuss the matter amongst ourselves or it is discussed by two people so that it is possible for one of them to be convinced by the other's opinion without a third person witnessing his defeat and thus making him stubborn and argumentative. With this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is advising those who have accused The Messenger, Prophet Muhammad – and we seek refuge in Allah – of having gone mad and madness is that you produce actions without any premise, reflection, or consideration of consequences. The one doing these actions is bereft of wisdom. The sane person, on the other hand, is the one who determines his actions with wisdom. He evaluates and examines allowing his intellect and wisdom to decide on the best course of action. He deals with people in an orderly manner and with excellent conduct. Have any one of the polytheists seen anything from the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that would indicate a lack of consistency in his actions?

This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '*Nun*. By the pen and what they inscribe, You are not, [O Muhammad], by the favour of your Lord, a madman. And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted. And indeed, you are of a great moral character.' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4)

A great moral character is incompatible with madness. All people have done this with their Messengers and accused them of madness and stupidity. Every time a Messenger has come to his people with a true way to eradicate falsehood, his people have confronted him in this manner. We know that the sky does not intervene with prophecies and miracles unless corruption is overflowing and the believing soul has been obliterated. Within the believer is a nucleus of goodness and he is thus prompted to do goodness. If his soul tells him to do an act of disobedience and he does it, then indeed his reproachful soul censures him for it. But, if his soul has been obliterated and it does not consider reproach, then his soul that enjoins evil takes control and you will not find anyone in the society saying: 'Do not do that!' This is because the entire society has become corrupted as in the verse: 'they used not to prevent one another from wrongdoing that they did. How wretched was that which they were doing.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 79)

Therefore, the sky does not intervene with a Message or a miracle or a way unless corruption is overflowing, and as long as corruption is overflowing, then there will be those who benefit from this corruption. When a Messenger comes for the sake of preventing corruption, this Messenger prevents those who sow corruption from exploiting people and he intervenes in their exploitation from people. This is why every Messenger was opposed by those who sow corruption and they used to say: 'We do not see you followed except by those who are the lowest of us.' (*Hud:* 27)

The followers of every Messenger are the oppressed who need someone to rescue them. As for the tyrants, they confront the Messenger and oppose him. These tyrants receive him with harm that is commensurate with his mission. If his mission is for the tribe, then the harm comes to him from this tribe. If his mission is broader than that, then he receives all kinds of suffering.

As long as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger sent to all of mankind, then he must come across all kinds of hardships and bear with them, and Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared him for this mission. The previous Messengers suffered from much harm in accordance with their call. As for The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he is for all of mankind. There is no message after him and this is why several people have gathered against this Messenger and against this Message.

For this reason the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ كُذِّبَتْ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَصَبَرُوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَا كُذِّبُوا۟ وَأُوذُوا۟ حَتَّىٰٓ أَتَىٰهُمْ
نَصْرُنَا ۚ وَلَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَلَقَدْ جَآءَكَ مِن نَّبَإِى۟ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Other messengers were disbelieved before you, and they bore their rejection and persecution steadfastly until Our aid arrived – no one can alter God's promises. You have already received accounts of these messengers (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 34) [34]

If the Messengers who preceded you were denied and were patient with it, and they were messengers only for their own people or for a specific nation in a specific time, then what about you, as you are The Seal of the Messengers for all of mankind and all time? Indeed you must bear this because the True Lord *Glorified is He* has chosen you for this mission and He is All Knowing that you are worthy of it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* guarantees the victory of His Messengers so it is not feasible for Him to leave evil and falsehood to overwhelm the Messengers. As long as He *Glorified is He* has sent the Messenger then He must give him victory, for He says: ‘And our word has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers, [That] indeed, they would be those given victory, and [that] indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

And as long as The Word of Allah *the Exalted* has preceded the Messengers, then nothing can change His Words *Glorified is He* and no one is capable of amending the principles that Allah *the Exalted* laid down in His Statement: ‘And none can alter the Words of Allah. And there has certainly come to you some information about the [previous] messengers.’ (*al-An‘am:* 34)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* narrated to His Messenger the stories of those sent before him and He did not stop at informing him that the Previous Messengers were denied by their people. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* conveyed to His Messenger what had happened to every Messenger from those mentioned in the Noble Quran and what happened to the Messenger – any messenger – in terms of being firm in the face of his enemies. Then He explains that The Word of The True Lord *Glorified is He* is always victorious and the True Lord *Glorified is He* has related the stories of some of the Messengers, for He said: ‘Among them are those [whose stories] We have related to you, and among them are those [whose stories] We have not related to you.’ (*Ghafir:* 78)

After that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن كَانَ كَبُرَ عَلَيۡكَ إِعۡرَاضُهُمۡ فَإِنِ ٱسۡتَطَعۡتَ أَن تَبۡتَغِيَ نَفَقٗا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ أَوۡ سُلَّمٗا فِي
ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَتَأۡتِيَهُم بِـَٔايَةٖۚ وَلَوۡ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَجَمَعَهُمۡ عَلَى ٱلۡهُدَىٰۚ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلۡجَٰهِلِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

If you find rejection by the disbelievers so hard to bear, then seek a tunnel into the ground or a ladder into the sky, if you can, and bring them a sign: God could bring them all to guidance if it were His will, so do not join the ignorant [35] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 35)

This verse means that indeed you, O Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are a Messenger from Allah *the Exalted* and you have a way which is your miracle that proves the veracity of what you have come with., Furthermore, if their opposition distresses you and it agonises you that they oppose you and turn away from you, and if you are able to make a hole for yourself in the ground in order to bring them a sign or build a ladder to climb into the sky and ask for this sign, then do so. However, you are unable to do so because it is beyond the limits of your capacity and the polytheists and hypocrites will receive the punishment because you came, O Messenger of Allah, to take away the force of their temporal authority and establish justice based on faith. This is why they tried to mock you and harm you.

The disbelievers asked the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make the earth open up a spring for them and they asked that he climb into the sky and make it send something down to destroy them. These things were not within the capacity or ability of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to him that which will lock the doors of his grief and put an end to his sorrow and distress that is due to their opposition, and so that he knows that mocking and opposition are perfectly normal for every one of the Messengers. You, O Messenger of Allah, have priority in this because your mission is bigger than those of all the Messengers. We notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings the example of what they say, when He says: 'Then if you are able to seek a tunnel into the earth or a stairway into the sky to bring them a sign, [then do so].' (*al-An'am:* 35)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say: 'Do that!' as if the matter is a reassurance for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because the apotheosis of a situation like this is known, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* does not force anyone to have faith. The opposition of these people is a matter intended by the One Who necessarily exists so that He can test them, and had He wanted to force them, He would have done so and no one would turn away from Allah *Glorified is He*. The entire universe is obedient to Allah *the Exalted*; the sun, the moon, the stars, the air, the water, the mountains, the earth and everything that is in the universe is obedient to Allah Almighty including the animals that are subjugated to serve man, but He *Glorified is He* gave man the choice to come to Him with love.

We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* left some of the subjugated creatures to be out of the control of man, to affirm for man that he does not control these things with his ability, but it is He *Glorified is He* who creates them and puts them under his control. This is why we see a huge camel being ridden by a small child, but we also see men, regardless of how strong they are, being very careful and cautious around a small snake as in the verse: ‘Do they not see that We have created for them from what Our hands have made, grazing livestock and [then] they are their owners? And We have tamed them for them, so some of them they ride, and some of them they eat.’ (*Ya Sin:* 71-72)

If Allah *Glorified is He* had not put them under our control then no one would be able to get close to them and I always give this example when someone says: ‘Why did Allah *the Exalted* create the fly?’ One of the people of brilliance said: ‘To humiliate the tyrants, for their authority does not include these insects. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given the man the might of leadership, but He has also taught him to be humble before the Creator'.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* informs His Messenger that if He *Glorified is He* had willed, He would have united them upon guidance. So, never be of the ignorant.

That is, had Allah *the Exalted* wanted He would have made all of mankind believers and to this someone might say: ‘How can Allah *the Exalted* address His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying to him to never be of the ignorant?' We say that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says this to His Messenger, He *Glorified is He* does not say this because He expects the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to do such a thing, as the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is divinely protected from ignorance. Rather, it is a statement that contains transcendence of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from above being amongst the ignorant ones.

After that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا يَسْتَجِيبُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَسْمَعُونَ وَٱلْمَوْتَىٰ يَبْعَثُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Only those who can hear will respond; as for the dead, God will raise them up, and to Him they will all be returned [36] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 36)

The meaning of the word *yastajib* (respond) is that they obey the command of the One Who commands and the prohibition of the One Who prohibits. There is a difference between *istijaba* (responding) and *ijaba* (answering) because responding means that the one you have asked for obeys you and carries out what you have asked him to do. Answering means that the one you ask, answers you, even if he rejects what you say, so the answer may be the opposite of what you were asking for. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says that only those who hear will be the ones who respond, i.e. indeed those who respond to the call of the True Lord *Glorified is He* are those who hear with their ears with their hearts in confirmation because there is a difference between hearing outwardly while deviating inwardly and obediently hearing outwardly while inwardly loving this obedience. We know that receiving something heard is one thing and the one who is affected by what is heard is something else.

When good listening is combined with the effect of love to carry out what man has heard, then this is what faith requires. The believers are those who listen to the words of Allah *the Exalted* with the effect of love and they are different from those who hear speech and it goes in one ear and get out through the other ear. They leave the words without applying them and the soul does not contain a single trace of that speech.

Thus, we see that Allah *Glorified is He* has made and created in man senses that guide and show him the way to either belief or disbelief. The believer’s ear hears, the heart confirms and the intellect examines and believes. As for the disbeliever, his ear hears but his heart opposes and the intellect looks for reasons to disbelieve as he desires disbelief and strives for it. Therefore, his senses do not carry out their task in an orderly manner and it is as if those who hear but do not respond are like the dead. The matter, therefore, is not restricted to hearing but what is sought is that there is hearing, which is meant to be affected by what is heard and is to obey it. Do not think that it is difficult for Allah Almighty to let the one who does not hear and obey, to be guided and become upright. Nothing can turn away from Allah Almighty because He *Glorified is He* revives the dead.

As long as He *Glorified is He* revives the dead then He does not demand faith that comes through compulsion. Rather, He demands faith that it out of one's own will and conviction. If He *Glorified is He* had wished, He would send a sign down from the sky and their necks would have remained in submission, but He *Glorified is He* demands hearts and not just the outward forms. Therefore, those who respond to the call of faith are those who are truly alive. As for those who do not respond, they are just like the dead. After they have died and their lives have ended, Allah *the Exalted* will resurrect them to ask them about their actions in the life of this world. When they go back to Allah Almighty, they will find the reckoning. We know that the final and permanent return is to Allah *Glorified is He* and whoever goes back to Allah *the Exalted* with his actions being pure hastens the pure reward and longs and looks forward to it. As for the one who goes back to Allah *the Exalted* under compulsion, he fears a painful reward.

After that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوا۟ لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ ۚ قُلْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَادِرٌ عَلَىٰٓ أَن
يُنَزِّلَ ءَايَةً وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

They also say, 'Why has no sign been sent down to him
from his Lord?' Say, 'God certainly has the power to
send down a sign,' though most of them do not know [37]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 37)

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us their continuous argumentation and their request for some sign; a sign is a wondrous matter that Allah *the Exalted* brings to the hands of a Prophet to confirm his truthfulness in conveying from Allah Almighty. It is as if they do not want to acknowledge that the Quran is a clear sign despite them acknowledging the honour of the Quran, for they said: 'Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

But they do not acknowledge the Quran to be a miraculous sign because they know that the previous Messengers were all sent with a miraculous sign that was separate from the Book that they brought. The miracle of Moses *peace be upon him Glorified is He* was the stick and his hand that he took out of his pocket which became white without any visible cause, and he parted the sea, but his Book was the Torah. Jesus' miracle was speaking in the cradle by Allah's leave, curing the blind and the leper and bringing the dead back to life by Allah's leave. He came with the Bible to spiritually balance with the materialism that had filled the souls of the Jews. After they said that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was inventing lies, the True Lord *Glorified is He* challenged them to bring something like the Quran and then He asked them to bring ten chapters like it. Then He asked them to bring something similar to the shortest chapters. Therefore, fabrication is possible for you if we suppose that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has fabricated it, so it is possible for you yourselves to fabricate in the rhetorical styles that you have distinction and superiority in. Indeed, the Quran has challenged them and as long as it has challenged them, it is a miracle because the basis of a miracle is a challenge. Allah Almighty challenges them to bring one chapter similar to the chapters of the Quran, but they are unable to do so. He is challenging them in the field of language and they are gifted masters of language. The Quran came to challenge them in the field of their expertise, but some of the Arabs asked the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a tangible, natural miracle that they could see. Stupidity blinded them from knowing that tangible knowledge only has a temporary affect; whoever sees it, says that it is a miracle and whoever does not see it, may believe, or deny it. We, as Muslims, do not affirm tangible miracles unless the Quran has related them. This is because the Quran has come to all of mankind and for this reason, it does not make sense for the final way to be detached from the Prophet's miracle that he came with.

Thus, the Quran came as a miracle for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it is a permanent immaterial sign with the rulings and organic structures that it contains, as well as the universal signs and scientific matters. However, people will always have disagreements in terms of language; and the miracles that the Quran contains, will never cease to be wondrous until the Day or Resurrection. Every day we extract new miracles from the signs of Allah *the Exalted* that silence every denier because they are universal miracles; and it is astonishing that some of the people who extract these miracles are not Muslims and do not believe in the Quran.

However, some of the polytheists were not content with the Quran as a sign and miracle that proves the truthfulness of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and so they asked for a tangible miracle. But is this request for a sign a real request with hope that they will obtain knowledge of the True Lord *Glorified is He* and have faith in Him, or is it just a reason so that they be excused to stay in their disbelief? If requesting a sign was truly coming from their hearts, then we would take them by the hand, show them the way, guide them and say to them: ‘Indeed the Messengers who came with miracles other than the Book of guidance, were Messengers who were sent to specific nations within specified times. They brought signs with them which were seen once, and then they were finished. But Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come for all time and places, and this is why it is not appropriate for his sign and his miracle to be tangible not to restrict it to a specific time and place. The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed that the miracle of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* be a permanent way. The treasures of the Quran manifest and reveal universal signs that are verified with knowledge and seen by human beings; and what is concealed, the humans will discover until the coming of the Hour. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

That is, indeed Allah Almighty will unveil His signs for human beings so that they are manifest and the truth becomes clear to them. If you demand a sign purely for the sake of argument, hesitating to declare your faith, then you should know that other people demanded signs and the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent down these signs to them, but they disbelieved. Further, it is stated in the Quran that nothing could have hindered Allah Almighty that He should send signs except that the people before them rejected them.

This what happened with the people of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* when they demanded that he should bring to them a she-camel, and yet they rejected this sign and even slaughtered her; therefore their Lord crushed them for their sin and leveled them with the ground. Thus, the nations before demanded signs and Allah *Glorified is He* is surely able to send down signs, but the disbelievers do not know, and will say the same as those who rejected Allah's signs, thereby hindering signs to be sent down as stated in the Quranic verse.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* indeed sent down the Quran to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and it contains many signs that are so majestic that we cannot count. If they had demanded a sign and Allah *the Exalted* had given them one and they still did not believe, then He *Glorified is He* would have had the right to destroy all of them. However, Allah *the Exalted* promised Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He would not destroy them as long as He *peace and blessings be upon him* was amongst them as stated in the verse.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* neglecting their demand by not sending to them a sign, is actually solicitous about them because amongst them are those who will believe and amongst them are those whose progeny will be believers and who will carry the Guidance and believe in it until the coming of the Hour because they are the followers and bearers of the Final Message.

Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* with the finest eloquence, states:

وَمَا مِن دَآبَّةٖ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا طَٰٓئِرٖ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيۡهِ إِلَّآ أُمَمٌ أَمۡثَالُكُمۚ
مَّا فَرَّطۡنَا فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ مِن شَيۡءٖۚ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمۡ يُحۡشَرُونَ ٣٨

All the creatures that crawl on the earth and those that fly with their wings are communities like yourselves. We have missed nothing out of the Record – in the end they will be gathered to their Lord [38] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 38)

Indeed, He *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us: I give signs that I know to be received and accepted by those of sound natural disposition. I sent the Quran down to you so that you would believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who bore it as a Guidance for reforming your lives. I have made you the masters of the universe, served by all beings because you are the children of Adam *peace be upon him*. It is more appropriate for you to realise that the animals are in your service and the plants are in the service of the animals and man. All beings in existence are made subservient to serve you. I made all creation subordinate to man, provided them with what benefits and maintains them and devised a system for them, and I gave them natural inclinations in such a way as befitting their purpose so as to offer you comfort; such being the case with those who serve you, how is it then with you? Indeed I have sent down the Guidance that reforms the life of man who is the vicegerent on earth.

It is stated in the verse under discussion that Allah *Glorified is He* has given every beast apart from man faith by way of a natural disposition and guided them to their provision by natural instincts. Of all beings, man is distinguished with intellect which he may use best so it leads him to faith, or use it incorrectly thereby straying from faith. Man is in doubt that he learned by imitating other creatures besides himself; Cain learnt from the raven how to bury his brother and the designers of aeroplanes learnt about flying by studying birds. Therefore, man must learn that he has a Creator who has made all creation serve him to advance his life and to care for his honour after death. An example is the ant who told the other ants to get into their dwellings in order not to be crushed by Prophet Solomon *peace be upon him* and his hosts, as stated in the Quran. In fact, the ants are a community that have guards and a guard from amongst them said this to warn the other ants.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* explains in the Quran that there is not a single thing except that it exalts His Glory and Praise, but we do not understand their glorification. Every community from this great number of communities that Allah Almighty has created in the universe glorify and praise Him, but no one understands the languages of these communities. Allah *the Exalted* has informed us that He taught Prophet Solomon *peace be upon him* the languages of all peoples and communities. This is why, when he heard what the ant had said, he smiled wondering at her words.

Such is how we know that Allah *Glorified is He* gave Solomon's ears the capacity to sense the frequencies of the voice of the ant and the capacity to understand what this frequency conveys. Thus, Prophet Solomon *peace be upon him* smiled as he heard her words, as Allah *the Exalted* had taught him the speech of these creatures. If Allah *Glorified is He* had taught us the speech of these creatures we would have understood their glorification of Him. However, we do not comprehend their glorification because we have not learned their language. An example of this – and to Allah Almighty belongs the highest similitude – is that an Arab may travel to a land in which English is spoken, but he does not know that language thus he is unable to understand what is being said. Therefore, if Allah *the Exalted* had taught you the speech of birds, inanimate objects and plants, you would have known their languages. Furthermore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states in the Quran that He caused the mountains to join Prophet David in glorifying and praising Him. Therefore inanimate objects – mountains – joined him in glorification; and so did the birds, for this hoopoe bird understood the Oneness of Allah Almighty and he felt uneasy from within when he saw the Queen of Sheba and her people prostrating themselves to the sun and not to Allah *Glorified is He* as stated in the Quran. The hoopoe understood the Oneness of Allah *the Exalted* and it knew that Satan has ways of getting through to a living creature. He also knew that prostration is for Allah *Glorified is He* alone, as stated in the Quran.

All living beings are divided into communities like us and someone might say: 'But there are living beings that are neither in the sky nor on the earth, such as the fish in the sea.' We say: 'Indeed water comprises three quarters of the earth's surface and fish swim in a part of water that is a part of the earth, therefore they swim in a part of the earth. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created beasts on earth, birds in the sky and He created what is less than these communities and guided them to their purpose and sustenance, for it is He *Glorified is He* Who Creates everything and then proportions it.

We see scientists nowadays trying to discover the language of fish and the secrets of the ant kingdom and its behaviour and find out how the nests of the ants become storehouses in the summer for the winter's food. They studied how ants deal with wheat germ and how they remove the germination cells from the grain of wheat, because if the germination cells go with the wheat germ inside the ants' food storehouse, it may grow destroying the ants' home. It is He Who creates everything and then proportions it, as stated in the Quran.

Scientists are interested in the ants' antennae because one ant, for example, can see a piece of sugar and not go near it. Instead, it goes and calls on an army of ants who are able to move the piece of sugar. Scientists have found that if the thing that the ant wants to eat weighs more than what the ant is capable of carrying, it calls on a number of other ants to carry out the task.

The scientists asked: Where does the ant acquire the ability to determine mass, weight and size? It is astounding that ants have the ability to determine the number required to carry a specific mass. What is even more astounding is the ant's ability to distinguish between two things that are of the same size but have a different mass, such as a cube of iron and a cube of sponge that is the same size? For the cube of iron, the ant calls for additional numbers to help carry it even though the sponge is of the same size. This is undoubtedly from the Omnipotence of the True Lord *Glorified is He* who creates everything and thereupon forms it in accordance with what it is meant to be and determines the nature of all that exists, and thereupon guides it towards its fulfilment.

Then you turn your attention towards animals and you find that there are the male and the female and that male animals are tremendously more beautiful than the females. The dominant majority are females and the minority are males. The male only approaches the female within a specific season when the impregnation time comes; the female goes to prepare the nest making it ready for whatever result that may come. This process is for a higher wisdom; maybe it is for the preservation of the species so that animals help man populate the earth.

In the world of birds, we find birds building beautiful nests to receive the young birds furnishing it with the best things. They do this in such a skilful way that maybe even man is incapable of imitating. You find in the life of animals and birds that as soon as a creature is capable of relying on itself, its mother cannot distinguish him from anyone else's son. Therefore, all creations are communities like us and they have provisions and life spans and duties, as stated in the Quran that Allah *Glorified is He* never neglects anything in His decree.

'The Book' here may refer to the Preserved Tablet, but we say that it refers to the Quran. Everything existing, mentioned, or is underground is in the Noble Quran. It mentions that such communities understand the Oneness of Allah *the Exalted* glorify and praise Him. Contemporary work discloses in exact detail the realities of this regulated universe. We find that the intellect guides us to invent things of benefit to our lives, but when we follow our passions, we corrupt this universe. Allah *Glorified is He* made for the subservient beasts of the earth a sphere for work, provision and a life span by virtue of natural instincts, and He did the same for birds and all living things.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the verse under discussion that all will be gathered unto Him. Thus everything is gathered on the Day of Resurrection. Moreover, Abu Hurayra, Allah *be pleased with him*, narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Rights are granted on the Day of Resurrection to whom they belong, such that the hornless sheep takes from the horned sheep.'(1) This means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* will avenge the horned sheep that rammed the hornless sheep to make up for the pain that it endured. After every being apart from men and jinn has taken its right, they are turned into ashes. As for those who hear but do not respond, they are the ones who deny the signs, and this is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا صُمٌّ وَبُكْمٌ فِى ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ ۗ مَن يَشَإِ
ٱللَّهُ يُضْلِلْهُ وَمَن يَشَأْ يَجْعَلْهُ عَلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٣٩﴾

Those who reject Our signs are deaf, dumb, and in total darkness. God leaves whoever He will to stray, and sets whoever He will on a straight path [39] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 39)

Deafness is a problem that afflicts the ears and thus they do not hear, and dumbness is a problem that afflicts the tongue and thus it does not speak. Dumbness is connected to deafness because man does not speak unless he hears and because language is the daughter of imitation. Thus man does not speak unless he hears.

Furthermore, human beings grow up in environments that differ in languages and they only speak the language of the environment that they have grown up in. This is because language is not a blood or a species. Rather, language is hearing and what the ear hears is related by the tongue. Man does not read unless he hears and knows the connection of what he hears with what he sees.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Ahmad ibn Hanbal*

This is how we know that hearing is the first portal of realisation and this is why deafness comes before dumbness.

However, is realisation related only to deafness and dumbness? No. Indeed man hears first, then he sees, then he tastes, then he smells and then he touches. Hence rational information comes to him. An example of this is that everyone knows that fire burns, but one will not realise this unless he finds that it touched a living being and burned it. Another example: People agree that the nightingale’s voice is beautiful and this agreement is the result of people hearing the nightingale’s voice. Therefore rational information comes as the result of tangible information.

They also have no capacity to recognise guidance in any way; they are deaf so they do not hear the word of truth, dumb so they do not speak and in deep darkness they are guided to the realisation of things and not to faith. All of this goes back to the Will of Allah *the Exalted* in that whoever He wills, He lets go astray or guides to the straight path as stated in the Quran. But does His Will intrude into the lives of people and force them? No, because the True Lord *Glorified is He* states in the Quran that He does not guide one who has wasted his own self by lying.

This is further stated in another Quranic verse. Therefore, their oppression, sinfulness, and disbelief were all done voluntarily so that sickness burgeoned and was firmly established in their hearts and Allah Almighty increased them in their sickness. He *Glorified is He* is not affected in the slightest by anyone associating partners with Him, for whoever associates anything as a partner with Allah Almighty only wrongs himself. Afterwards, a command comes for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتَكُمْ إِنْ أَتَىٰكُمْ عَذَابُ ٱللَّهِ أَوْ أَتَتْكُمُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ
أَغَيْرَ ٱللَّهِ تَدْعُونَ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

Say, ‘Think: if the punishment of God or the Hour should come to you, would you call on anyone other than God, if you are being truthful?’ [40] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 40)

The words ‘…have you considered...' in the verse under discussion comprised of a question, a verb and a pronoun which is the articulation of the letter (*ta'*) with a (*fatha*) which is for the second person, such as you saying: 'Have you seen so-and-so?' and as if you were saying to him: 'If you have seen him then tell me about him.' When you say this to the one being addressed (the second person) then you are asking about something he has seen and set eyes on and after that you use the letter (*kaf*) to indicate the second person, as if you are saying to him: 'Tell me about you.' And the meaning is 'Tell me about yourselves.' Thus the meaning of '…Have you considered... 'is 'Tell me about your state according to the one who sees.' The command is thus for The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the idolaters to inform him about what they do when harm comes to them or something that is beyond their means. Do they call on the gods (*al-Lat*) and (*al-'Uzza*)? No, because in the moment of sudden danger they are incapable of lying to themselves. Rather, they call on Allah *the Exalted* whom they do not declare their faith in. If they were truthful in their disbelief, they would not call on Allah *Glorified is He,* but rather, it would be obligatory for them to call on their gods. However, in the moment of danger they say: 'O Lord!' as if they know that no one can rescue them but Him *Glorified is He*. Thus, the falsehood of their disbelief and their associating partners with Allah Almighty is exposed right in front of them and no one cheats himself, even the impostor who claims to be able to cure people. If he is afflicted with an illness, we find him referring to a trained, specialist doctor. No one cheats himself and when a man is in danger, the truth comes out from the man himself.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is asking them: 'Who do you call on in the moment of danger?' Indeed they call on Allah Almighty, as if they have no confidence in their gods, as stated in the Quran that when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto Allah, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing.

But what happens when the heart's harshness returns? He goes on as though he had never invoked Allah *the Exalted* to save him from the affliction that befell him, as stated in the Quran. Therefore why do they ask Allah *the Exalted* to help them in the moment of danger when they do not follow the commandment? The command comes to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them who they call on in the moment of danger. The answer also comes from the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He states:

بَلۡ إِيَّاهُ تَدۡعُونَ فَيَكۡشِفُ مَا تَدۡعُونَ إِلَيۡهِ إِن شَآءَ وَتَنسَوۡنَ مَا تُشۡرِكُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

No indeed, it is on Him that you would call. If it were His will, He could remove whatever harm made you call on Him, and then you would forget what you now associate with Him [41] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 41)

Certainly, you, O idolaters, do not call on anyone besides Allah *Glorified is He* to remove harm from you and if He sees that it is wise to answer your supplication He answers it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أُمَمٖ مِّن قَبۡلِكَ فَأَخَذۡنَٰهُم بِٱلۡبَأۡسَآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَضَرَّعُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

We sent messengers before you [Prophet] to many communities and afflicted their people with suffering and hardships, so that they could learn humility [42] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 42)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* indeed sent Messengers to the previous nations with signs and Guidance, but their people rejected them, so Allah Almighty took them to task with calamities and events that harm either one's person, or wealth, with sickness, or poverty so that they might humble themselves before Him *Glorified is He*.

Thus when the True Lord *Glorified is He* causes misfortune to befall people, i.e. with calamities or adversity or something that harms and causes damage, He only intends to test man. If he believes in other than Allah *the Exalted* then let him go to the one whom he believes in, and he will not remove that misfortune, or harm unless he goes back to Allah *Glorified is He*. But when they humble themselves before Allah *the Exalted* He does not accept the like of this humility, as He *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَوۡلَآ إِذۡ جَآءَهُم بَأۡسُنَا تَضَرَّعُواْ وَلَٰكِن قَسَتۡ قُلُوبُهُمۡ وَزَيَّنَ
لَهُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

If only they had learned humility when suffering came from Us! But no, their hearts became hard and Satan made their foul deeds alluring to them [43] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 43)

Indeed He *Glorified is He* entices and urges them to humble and lower themselves before Him *Glorified is He* so that He removes what they have been afflicted with, but their hard hearts prevent them, even in the moment of danger when they are being afflicted with harm, from seeking refuge in Allah Almighty because they are scared of following His commands. In addition, their hearts are too harsh to let guidance penetrate it, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* states in the Quran that their hearts are corroded by all the evil that they were wont to do.

This means that their hearts became locked and sealed after Allah Almighty stamped and sealed them so they will not accept goodness and they will not incline towards it. Thus they will not believe. Afterwards, The True Lord *Glorified is He* states:

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا۟ مَا ذُكِّرُوا۟ بِهِۦ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَبْوَٰبَ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ
حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا فَرِحُوا۟ بِمَآ أُوتُوٓا۟ أَخَذْنَٰهُم بَغْتَةً فَإِذَا هُم مُّبْلِسُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, We opened the gates to everything for them. Then, as they revelled in what they had been given, We struck them suddenly and they were dumbfounded [44] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 44)

When they forgot the reminder that came to them from the True Lord *Glorified is He* through His Messengers to follow the way and submit to His Oneness, He *Glorified is He* afflicted them with a punishment that surprised them and they fell into confusion that took away their intellects, smashed their hearts and cut off their hope.

The Messengers only come to remind because faith is present in one's natural disposition, but it is heedlessness which conceals faith. Man lives in a universe that is filled with blessings that no one has anything to do with and no one has any hand in them and no one claims them for himself. Thus man must always live praising Allah *the Exalted* the Master of these blessings.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds His slaves with blessings or with Messengers who came with successive Messages. Imagine that a man had become heedless of the blessing of Allah Almighty in food, then the moment of hunger comes and so he sits longing for food and Allah *Glorified is He* then grants him that food, so how can he forget in the moment of desperation, the One Who gave him this food?

In the verse under discussion, reminding could occur either by means of the Messengers who remind people that the Bestower of blessings is Allah *the Exalted* and that He *Glorified is He* has sent down His Guidance so as to reform the universe with it, or it may be by means of the blessings enjoyed by man in each and every moment. This is because they alert man to the One Who gives them. An example of this is when man covers his nakedness and his body with beautiful clothes. Does he not ask about the One Who gave the manufacturer this gift with which he designs clothing? Therefore how can man take the blessing and not be reminded of the One Who bestows blessings? Indeed Allah *Glorified is He* does not deprive them of blessings when they abandon showing gratitude for them. Rather, He opens to them the gates of all good things, i.e. He gives them more and more blessings. Thus they live in luxury and they lead a life of honour, health, affluence, power and authority. Then what happens? He seizes them suddenly, and they are then left in despair, as mentioned in the verse in question.

In the Egyptian countryside there is a popular saying: ‘No one falls from the carpet.’, but Allah *Glorified is He* sometimes allows polytheists to attain high ranks in this worldly life and then suddenly takes them to task so that they would suffer a greater punishment in the Hereafter. Therefore, one should not be deceived by those disbelievers to whom Allah Almighty gives the luxuries of this life and thus should never wish to be in their place.

If we carefully reflect on the saying of Allah Almighty: ‘we opened the gates of everything to them’, we will be fully aware of the absolute accuracy of the style of the Quran. Allah Almighty says that He ‘opened … to them’, meaning that He caused them, i.e. the deniers of the truth, to be deceived by the finery of this life. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* grants them understanding by means of which they would realise that the provision of this world’s life compared with the hereafter is but little. This meaning here is totally different from the saying of Allah in the chapter of *al-Fath* in which He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Surely We have given to you a clear victory.’ (*al-Fath:* 1) This means that He *the Almighty* granted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a clear victory by allowing him to open Mecca. As such, it is crystal clear that there is a big difference between the two Arabic words, i.e. ‘*Fath Lak’* and ‘*Fath ‘Alyk’*, for the latter means to overtake someone by degrees from whence s/he does not perceive, whilst the former means to cause one to be prosperous and victorious, which is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Then, as they revelled in what they had been given, We struck them suddenly and they were dumbfounded.’ (*al-An‘am:* 44)

That is to say that the meting out of the punishment takes place in the moment of joy; a point which is frequently experienced in our daily life. For example, we know of many grooms and brides who were afflicted with disasters on their wedding days. At that point, the following poetic verse may be quoted:

Events walked in the rooms of the Alhambra
The announcer of death walked in the wedding house

This aforementioned verse of poetry can yet give a correct and proper understanding of the verse: ‘Then, as they revelled in what they had been given, We struck them suddenly and they were dumbfounded.’ (*al-An‘am:* 44) In the same connection, when we carefully reflect on the verse: ‘… what they had been given …,’ we realise that Allah *Glorified is He* by allowing them to get all of these blessings, He paves the way for suddenly taking them to task. That is to say that the divine punishment~~s~~ are afflicted without prior warning. In our daily life, if one is given a warning that a certain disaster would strike him/her, s/he would take all necessary precautions to protect him/herself. Here, we should stress that there is no contradiction whatsoever between the verse under discussion and the verse in which Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], ‘Think: if the Punishment of Allah should come to you, by surprise or openly, would anyone but the evildoers be destroyed?’ (*al-An‘am:* 47), for this latter verse shows clearly that the Punishment of Allah Almighty, out of His Great Wisdom, might befall the oppressors either surprisingly or openly, as follows: the oppressors may be suddenly and surpassingly afflicted with the divine torture by way of punishing them. They may also be openly afflicted with it, i.e. the divine punishment so that they would not say, ‘had not the punishment come to us suddenly, we would have taken precautions for it'. Allah Almighty then concludes the verse saying that they, i.e. the oppressors, will be struck with the divine punishment while being dumbfounded and disappointed since no one will help them or even save them.

Allah Almighty then says:

فَقُطِعَ دَابِرُ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ ۚ وَٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

The evildoers were wiped out: praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds! [45] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 45)

This verse draws our attention to a very important fact, that is, we must praise Allah Almighty for giving us these examples of those wrongdoers and the punishment that afflicted them to guide us to the Right Path. In addition, we must praise Him; *Glorified is He* for purifying the world from the foulness of the corrupters. This is clearly understood from the fact that even though Allah Almighty opened the gates of everything to those oppressors, they forgot what they were reminded of, which is why He *the Almighty* punished them suddenly when they were occupied with what they were given. We thus deduce that the act of wiping out those corrupters, although a disaster for them, is actually a blessing conferred by Allah Almighty on the believers. At this point, one may ask, 'How does the Quran view punishments as blessings?!' Let us illustrate this point more clearly; Allah Almighty says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'O assembly of the jinn and the men! If you are able to pass through the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass through; you cannot pass through except with authority, which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? The flames of fire and smoke will be sent on you two, then you will not be able to defend yourselves, Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 33-36) These particular verses here give examples of the types of divine punishments, which include the sending of flames of fire and smoke. Even though these are viewed as divine punishments to the disbelievers, they serve as a blessing and reminder to the believers, as we know for certain, that people are deterred by knowing the severity of punishments. That is to say that this divine warning to the disbelievers is, in essence, a blessing from Allah *the Exalted* to the believers.

As a matter of fact, when Allah Almighty confers His Grace upon the believers by wiping out the wrongdoers, the believers must praise His Glory, a point which is proved by the verse; ‘The evildoers will be wiped out: praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.’ (*al-An‘am:* 45)

He *the Almighty* subsequently interrogates them by saying:

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَخَذَ ٱللَّهُ سَمْعَكُمْ وَأَبْصَٰرَكُمْ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِكُم مَّنْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ ٱللَّهِ
يَأْتِيكُم بِهِ ۗ ٱنظُرْ كَيْفَ نُصَرِّفُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ ثُمَّ هُمْ يَصْدِفُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Think: if God were to take away your hearing and your sight and seal up your hearts, what god other than He could restore them?’ See how We explain Our revelations in various ways, yet still they turn away [46] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 46)

In this verse, Allah Almighty orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask those disbelievers what they would do if Allah Almighty took away their hearings and sight and if He *the Almighty* sealed up their hearts; do they think that there is another god other than He *the Almighty* that can restore them? The disbelievers actually exploited the Blessing of Allah *Glorified is He* to oppose Him; He endowed them with the blessing of hearing, yet they did not make use of it to listen to the divine guidance; He *the Almighty* granted them the blessing of sight, yet they did not utilise it to see His signs; and they were given hearts by means of which they could reason, yet they sealed them up and so were unable to receive goodness. So, how would they act if Allah Almighty took these blessings away from them? Is there any other god that can restore these blessings?!

In our daily life, we notice that Allah Almighty has deprived some people from certain blessings which have been given to others. In truth, this is viewed as a way of instructing us how to understand the way the affairs of the universe are run. At this point, we should stress that depriving someone of a particular blessing does not mean that Allah Almighty hates them. Rather, He *Glorified is He* wants to remind people of the fact that there is a Sublime Bestower of Blessings Who is the Only One Who deserves to be worshipped. That is why, if He *Glorified is He* takes these blessings away from the disbeliever, s/he will be unable to ward off any harm.

In this verse under discussion, Allah Almighty tells us that even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified matters for them, i.e. to the disbelievers with clear proofs, they turned away from Him *peace and blessings be upon him* and they did not occupy their minds through carefully reflecting on the truthfulness of the Divine Message that He *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered to them. This is why Allah Almighty described them as turning away from the Truth.

In this regard, when the believer sees someone with a physical disability, s/he should thank Allah Almighty for his Blessings. Yet, I would like to drive your attention to a very important point which is that when Allah *Glorified is He* causes someone to have a physical disability, He *the Exalted* out of His Infinite Mercy, causes him/her to be superior in another area. An example of this is illustrated in the following poetic verses in which the poet says:

I became blind in the womb but (my) intelligence is due to (my) blindness
I came to have amazing thought, as a refuge for knowledge
The illumination of the eye diminishes and becomes a support for the heart
For what man loses of knowledge can be gained again

In our daily life, we may see a blind person leading those who see to guidance. In addition, we may see a person who is deaf enchanting people with his/her music. Beethoven is a classic example. As such, it is clear that Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Grace and Bounty makes those with physical disabilities become superior in other fields of their life. In the same vein, there is no other god in the universe, if any, that could restore the disbeliever what Allah Almighty has taken from him/her. Allah Almighty says: ‘See how we explain Our Revelations in various ways, yet still they turn away.’ (*al-An‘am:* 46) In this particular part of the verse, Allah Almighty drives the attention of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the fact that even though He *the Almighty* made all the signs and His message clear to these people by all possible and impossible means, they turned away from His Way of Guidance as their hearts had been sealed and thus they were unable to understand or even reflect on the Truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

قُلۡ أَرَءَيۡتَكُمۡ إِنۡ أَتَىٰكُمۡ عَذَابُ ٱللَّهِ بَغۡتَةً أَوۡ جَهۡرَةً هَلۡ يُهۡلَكُ إِلَّا ٱلۡقَوۡمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Say, ‘Think: if the punishment of God should come to you, by surprise or openly, would anyone but the evildoers be destroyed?’ [47] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 47)

Grammatically, if we compare the verse under discussion to the following verse: ‘Say [Prophet], ‘Think: if Allah were to take away your hearing and your sight and seal up your hearts, what god other than He could restore them?’ See how We explain Our Revelations in various ways, yet still they turn away’ (*al-An‘am:* 46), we notice that Allah *Glorified is He* puts a *Fatha* (a short diagonal strike over the Arabic letter) on the second personal pronoun in the verse under explanation, whereas He puts a *Damma* (a little looped symbol like a small *waw* placed over the Arabic letter) on the second personal pronoun in the latter verse. In addition, we notice that Allah Almighty in the verse under discussion has used the Arabic pronoun *Al-Kaf* which is used to indicate the second person, a thing that He *the Almighty* did not do in the verse above. At this point, the fact should be stressed that every word in the Quran is used to impart a particular meaning and thus cannot be replaced with another, although they may be similar to each other. So how can we understand these grammatical nuances? Using the second personal pronouns in this verse, i.e. *At-Taa’* and *Al-Kaf,* clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* wants to highlight an absolutely crucial point, that is, He *the Almighty* wants to tell us that the disbelievers would be completely destroyed. As for the verse above, Allah *Glorified is He* interrogates the disbelievers to affirm the content of the question Allah Almighty gave to them in the verse.

In this vein, we should highlight a very important point; when we interrogate someone about a certain incident, it may happen that the person being asked might not have been an eyewitness. In the case where they are an eyewitness, their answer will be in the affirmative. That is to say they have actually seen the incident. Yet, in case they were not present at the time of its occurrence, they will answer in the negative. As a point of thought, this clearly highlights how people act with each other in this regard. Yet, the matter is totally different when Allah Almighty is the One Who asks about an incident that took place in the past which the believers did not see. As a matter of fact, the believers, out of their faith in Allah *Glorified is He* must give the answer in the affirmative despite not having seen the incident with their own eyes.

This point is further elucidated by the verse in which Allah Almighty asks Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him:* ‘Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) In the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Fil,* Allah Almighty asks The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the incident of the possessors of the elephant that took place in the same year of his birth *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is to say He *the Almighty* asked him this question even though he did not see this incident with his eyes. At that point, someone may ask, ‘Why does Allah ask Prophet Muhammad about something he did not see?’ As a matter of fact, this particular question here and similar indicates a very important point, where The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* must firmly believe in everything that Allah Almighty tells him of. In other words, when He *the Almighty* asks him *peace and blessings be upon him* here, ‘Have you not considered…?’ this means that He *Glorified is He* orders the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to have absolute certainty in all that he is told about. This is because Allah will never deceive him, or tell him a lie, while the Prophet’s perception out of the human nature, might sometimes do so.

As such, it is clear right now that this rhetorical style is intended to indicate certainty. Let us offer another example to illustrate this point more clearly; when you do a lot of favours for someone and then they deny it, you would not say to him, ‘I did a lot of favours for you’. Rather, you would ask him, ‘Have you not considered the favours I did for you on that day?’ As a matter of fact, you put your statement in the form of a question because you are absolutely sure that they, upon carefully reflecting on the matter, would answer you in the affirmative. That is to say, they would confess that you already did them good. By asking questions like this, the fact is yet proved by the person being interrogated rather than the questioner himself.

Having shed light on the disbelievers’ stubbornness regarding the rejection of the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and being unconvinced with the divine signs sent to them to establish the truthfulness of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him,* Allah *the Exalted* told us that disbelievers had exceeded the limits and asked for a number of particular signs. They even did so in a rude and unpleasant way. In the Quran, Allah Almighty tells us about the demands that the disbelievers made to The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'And they say: We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us). Or you should have a house of gold, or you should ascend into heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending until you bring down to us a book which we may read. Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal Messenger?' (*al-Isra':* 90-93)

If we carefully reflect upon these demands of the disbelievers, we will find that they are all presented as a challenge. We know for certain that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who chose the Quran to be the eternal miracle of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* knows that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* faithfully and sincerely delivers the Divine Message to his people. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* orders the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell those disbelievers that their belief will neither harm nor bring any benefit to Allah *the Exalted* rather, they will be the ones who will benefit as a result of it. Here, we should take into account the undeniable fact that Allah Almighty possessed the attributes of perfection even before He created the entire universe, and that He *the Almighty* will never lose them.

As a matter of fact, it is out of these divine attributes of perfection including knowledge, power, and wisdom and will that He *the Exalted* created the entire universe. As such, we human beings must be fully aware of the fact that our belief in *The Almighty* will never ever add to His Attributes of Perfection or Majesty. Instead, it is the human beings themselves who will get benefit as a result of their belief. So, if there are those amongst you who are arrogant and obstinate, then Allah *Glorified is He* will not leave them to corrupt His Way of Guidance. Rather, He *the Almighty* overtakes them as is clearly evident in the stories of the previous Messengers and Prophets with their peoples and how Allah Almighty severely and painfully punished them.

Indeed He *Glorified is He* could torture you, O disbelievers of Quraysh*,* in the same way He did with them. In addition, if you carefully reflect on the stories of the previous Messengers with the deniers of the Truth from among their people, you will know for certain that they were suddenly and surprisingly overtaken by the divine punishment. Let us offer a number of examples to illustrate this point; Allah *The Almighty*, tells us about the people of *‘Ad* (1), saying: ‘Then as to Ad, they were unjustly proud in the land, and they said: Who is mightier in strength than we? Did they not see that Allah Who created them was mightier than they are in strength, and they denied our communications? (15) So We sent on them a furious wind in unlucky days, that We may make them taste the chastisement of abasement in this world's life; and certainly the chastisement of the hereafter is much more abasing, and they shall not be helped. (16)’ (*Fussilat:* 15-16)

The people of *‘Ad* were given to arrogance and denied the Message of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*. They mistakenly believed that they were the mightiest people on the surface of the earth and thus hurt their Prophet and the believers with him. Yet, they did not take into account that Allah Almighty Who created them, is mightier than them. But, how did Allah *the Almighty* punish them? He sent on them a furious wind so that He could make them taste the punishment in the life of this world... Allah *Glorified is He* then adds that they will receive a more severe, painful and humiliating punishment in the Hereafter since they will find none to support them.

Moving to the people of Thamud(2), the Quran tells us that Allah Almighty showed them the way of guidance, yet they chose the way of misguidance and even preferred disbelief over belief. They denied and rejected the Message of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* and slew the she-camel. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* overtook them with the scourge of an abasing punishment for what they earned. In the Quran, Allah Almighty says: ‘And as for *Thamud*, We showed them the right way, but they chose error above guidance, so there overtook them the scourge of an abasing chastisement for what they earned.' (*Fussilat:* 17)

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(1) ‘Ad (Arabic: عاد , ʿAd) was an ancient tribe mentioned frequently in the Quran.[1] ‘Ad is usually placed in Southern Arabia, [2].

(2) The Thamūd (/ˈθɑːmʊd/; Arabic: ثمود) is the name of an ancient civilization in the Hadramaut known from the 1st millennium BC to near the time of prophet Muhammad.

The destruction of the possessors of the elephant is a third case in point. The people of Abraha, the Abyssinian, came to Mecca for the sake of destroying the Sacred House, but they were welcomed by flocks of birds that Allah Almighty sent down upon them casting against them stones of baked clay. In the Quran, Allah Almighty says: 'Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant? (1) Did He not cause their war to end in confusion, (2) And send down (to prey) upon them birds in flocks, (3) Casting against them stones of baked clay, (4) So He rendered them like straw eaten up? (5)' (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

According to the aforementioned examples, Allah *the Almighty* meted out His punishment upon those oppressive disbelievers suddenly and surprisingly, that is, they were surprised by the divine punishments which overtook them suddenly. Yet, the Quran tells that Allah Almighty has meted out His punishment upon some people openly and overtly. The drowning of Pharaoh and the destruction of Qarun (Korah) are two cases in point. As for Qarun, Allah Almighty tells us in the Quran how he was wiped out, saying, 'Surely Qarun was of the people of Moses, but he rebelled against them, and We had given him of the treasures so much so that his hoards of wealth would certainly weigh down a company of men possessed of great strength. When his people said to him: Do not exult, surely Allah does not love the exultant; (76) And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode, and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land, surely Allah does not love the mischief-makers. (77) He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have. Did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him of the generations those who were mightier in strength than he and greater in assemblage? And the guilty shall not be asked about their faults. (78) So he went forth to his people in his finery. Those who desire this world's life said: O would that we had the like of what Qaroun is given; most surely he is possessed of mighty good fortune. (79) And those who were given the knowledge said: Woe to you! Allah's reward is better for him who believes and does good, and none is made to receive this except the patient. (80) Thus we made the earth to swallow up him and his abode; so he had no body of helpers to assist him against Allah nor was he of those who can defend themselves.' (*al-Qasas:* 76-81)

Qarun arrogantly denied that Allah Almighty is the One Who supplied him with his riches. He even became enthralled with what he possessed to the extent that he was totally given to arrogance, yet how did Allah Almighty punish him? Allah *Glorified is He* made the earth swallow him up and his abode was placed before the eyes of those who wished to be in his place. As such, we reach the conclusion that the punishment of Allah Almighty may strike people either suddenly and surprisingly, or openly and overtly. Here arises a good question, 'Why did Allah *Glorified is He* sometimes afflict people with His punishment suddenly with some people and overtly with others?' As for the first kind of punishment which is the sudden one it proves to those who worship other than Allah *the Exalted* that they are deceived, for if those gods had been true, they would have at least warned their followers of the forthcoming punishment that would strike them. That is to say that this particular kind of punishment is intended to definitively prove the incapability of those false gods and the like to protect their followers. But in case someone claimed that they were suddenly struck with the punishment and thus were unable to ward it off, we say to them that the punishment of Allah *the Exalted* also comes openly and overtly, so why are you unable to ward it off?! In spite of the fact that the plea of those deniers of the Truth is null, they are still unable to attain faith. Allah *Glorified is He* acted with the disbelievers of Quraysh in the same way He did away with those people who denied the Messages of their previous Prophets and Messengers; He *the Almighty* sent them miraculous signs in order that they might think and reflect.

In this regard, we should know that the polytheists of Quraysh had plotted to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* which is why they stood at the door of his house, yet Allah *Glorified is He* saved him. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* managed to leave while they were still standing at the door, but they, out of Allah's Omnipotent Power, were unable to see him. In this way, their conspiracy against the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* failed and they were unable to hurt him.

The disbelievers of Quraysh had even previously sought the help of sorcerers to hurt him *peace and blessings be upon him,* but yet they failed to do so. That is to say, Allah *the Almighty* fully protected His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from the schemes of the disbelievers, for He *Glorified is He* is the best of planners.

Back to the chapter of *al-An'am,* Allah Almighty, says: 'Say [O Prophet Muhammad], 'Think: if the Punishment of Allah should come to you, by surprise or openly, would anyone but the evildoers be destroyed?' (*al-An'am:* 47) We notice that the concluding sentence in this verse takes the form a question which is used, as we showed previously, to affirm the meaning of a sentence, since the answer to the asked question is expected to be given by those who are being questioned and thus will secure confession on their part. We know perfectly well that confession is the best evidence.

Here arises a very good question; 'How does Allah *Glorified is He* save the believers at times of punishments?' We know full well that the divine punishments are only intended to torture the evildoers. We can illustrate this point as follows: destruction means 'to take away the life of a person who is indulged in the finery of this worldly life', which is why those who do not believe in the life after death will surely feel the bitterness of loss upon death. Yet, the believers, who know for certain that they shall return to Allah *the Exalted* and that they will be held accountable for their deeds before Him *the Almighty* fully realise that in case they are negatively affected by the punishments of the disbelievers, they will be admitted into paradise, which is a great blessing for them since they will eternally live therein.

As such, it is clear that destruction is only intended to torture the evildoers because it deprives them from the joy of this worldly life. In addition, upon death, they will have nothing in the Hereafter but perdition, loss and permanent punishment. As for the believers, Allah Almighty will confer His favour upon them by admitting them into paradise wherein they will eternally live in happiness. That is to say that the believers enjoy Allah Almighty's favour and grace at times of ease and hardships alike.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* highlights how the concept of faith must be deeply rooted in the minds of those who believe in the

Messengers and Prophets. It goes without saying that people with a sound *Fitra* (natural disposition), upon hearing the divine guidance, do not hesitate to accept it. That is because the *Fitra,* upon observing the deviation of people and upon realising that there is someone who is sent to guide people back on track, will have no choice but to believe in the bearer of the Message, i.e. a Messenger or a Prophet. In the same connection, when one's natural disposition sees that the entire universe has been prepared to serve man, it must then ask about the Creator of this universe and about the way that must be implemented so that this blessing of existence can be preserved.

Furthermore, man should be fully aware of the undeniable fact that s/he is one of the different creatures in the universe, which is full of provisions and endless resources. At that point, we should stress the fact that no one has ever claimed to be the creator of the heavens, the earth, water, or air. That is why people with a sound *Fitra* must wonder about this great Creator Who granted them the right of succession in the entire universe. Yet, when this great Creator sends a Messenger or a Prophet to clarify everything for and to tell us about the creation of the heavens and the earth and about the One Who supplies us with provision, this sound human *Fitra* must then accept and believe in this Messenger or Prophet. In addition, in case this Messenger or Prophet is supported with a divine miracle or sign, the human mind will immediately confess the truthfulness of him because it is at that point that the human mind has found its treasure.

In this vein, we should stress that it is prohibited for the believers and Messengers themselves, as well as the disbelievers to exceed the limit. In addition, they are not allowed to exaggerate in the praise of any Messenger or Prophet. We should be fully aware of the fact that Messengers are ordinary people who are chosen by Allah *Glorified is He* to serve a particular mission, that is, to convey His Message. In addition, we should take into account that the Messengers are unable to bring forth such miracles or signs demanded by their people. That is why Allah Almighty, in the following verse tells us about the ultimate objective behind the sending of Messengers and Prophets; He *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا نُرۡسِلُ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَۖ فَمَنۡ ءَامَنَ
وَأَصۡلَحَ فَلَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا هُمۡ يَحۡزَنُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

We send messengers only to give good news and to warn, so for those who believe and do good deeds there will be no fear, nor will they grieve[48] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 48)

This verse means clearly that Allah Almighty did not endow Messengers and Prophets with such great power by means of which they can act as they like. That is to say that the main reason behind sending them is to deliver the divine way of guidance to mankind. Thus, no one should demand signs or miracles from them because they are, without the Help of Allah *the Exalted* absolutely incapable of doing so. Here, we should stress that all the Messengers and Prophets know for certain that they are merely human beings receiving the divine revelation. This is how we should believe in Messengers and Prophets; we should accept them as bearers of glad tidings and warners.

We previously explained that *Al-Bishara* (glad tidings) means giving glad tidings of something pleasing before it actually happens. The reason behind giving glad tidings is to prepare and urge people to accept the divine way of guidance and thus the act of ‘giving glad tidings’ is viewed fruitfully as it has actually turned into reality. *Al-Indhar* (giving warning), on the other hand, means informing people of something evil or displeasing so that they would protect themselves.

In addition, the act of ‘giving glad tidings’ prompts people to do good, while the act of ‘giving warning’ deters people from doing bad and thus keeps them away from it. As such, it is clear that the ultimate objective of sending Messengers and Prophets is to give glad tidings and to warn people, which is why we should not exaggerate their role or associate divinity to them. So, we should not ask them to bring forth signs and miracles since Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who is fully able to do so. At this point, I would like to also stress that it is totally wrong to criticise the divine miracles sent with these Messengers and Prophets.

Once again, the verse, ‘We send Messengers only to give good news and to warn …’ exactly and precisely defines the ultimate objective behind the sending of Messengers and Prophets. That is to say, this is a role to be performed by Messengers and Prophets so what about the role that should be performed by those to whom those Messengers were sent? The answer is clearly given in the verse; '…so for those who believe and do good deeds there will be no fear, nor will they grieve.' (*al-An'am:* 48)

It is clear right now that people must accept faith upon hearing the Divine Message being delivered to them through the Messenger or Prophet sent to them. They should also be fully aware of the essence of the divine way of guidance and apply it. Thus, whoever from amongst them believes and acts righteously has no need to fear because they have indeed achieved a mighty success. In addition, they will not grieve, for they will, on the Day of Resurrection, enjoy the fruits of their good deeds, which are recorded in their book. As for the word *Iman* (belief/faith), it means that the heart becomes totally assured with a matter of creed, in such a way that it gives no room for any more doubt. That is why *Iman* is called *Aqida* (creed) meaning that there is a binding matter that is never dissolved.

In this regard, I would like to stress that believers should make use of all the signs and proofs by which their belief in Allah Almighty becomes firm and steadfast, a matter which can only be fulfilled by the heart. In addition, it is of great importance to know that only convincing the heart is insufficient to establish faith because the heart is not the only organ within. That is to say that man must surrender to the divine way of guidance with his/her entire body including the intellect. In other words, man is said to have true faith in case s/he correctly offers all acts of worship according to the divine way of guidance.

I lay strong emphasis on this point to avoid sayings such as; 'I have a believing and sound heart, yet I do not apply the divine way of guidance.' Wrong is this statement! The matter of belief does not go like this. It is true that your heart has attained faith, but why have all your body parts not carried out the requirements of faith?! Why do you not give your mind a chance to reflect, think, plan and be reminded?! Why do you not give your eye the chance to consider and benefit from the gifts that it sees?! The same applies to the rest of your body parts including the hand, the tongue, the ear, the foot, etc., why do you not give them the chance to do good?!

Regarding *Al-Islah* (doing righteousness), it is an act which is only fulfilled by the body parts; that is, man shall utilise his/her mind in producing ideas which are beneficial to mankind; s/he shall, upon hearing the speech, follow the best of it; and s/he shall utilise his/her hands to perfect all the works they do. Here, we should stress that believers know for certain that the affairs of the universe are run by due measure. In addition, they realise that there are some things in the universe with which they have nothing to do. Yet these things represent the highest ranks of proficiency. For instance, we view that rainfalls in its due seasons and so is the wind, which also blows in its due seasons and courses. In the same connection, we see no contradiction whatsoever between the movement of the sun and that of the earth, for each of them runs in a due course. That is to say that everything in the universe is run by due measure and thus gives clear indication of the absolute proficiency.

As a matter of fact, corruption only occurs as a result of the intervention of man in the affairs of this worldly life. Let us offer an example with air pollution; there are so many factors that led to the corruption and pollution of air including building houses close to each other, the lack of sufficient open green spaces and poisonous exhausts emitted from machines as a result of burning fuel. In actuality, when man made these machines, s/he did not take this into account and to get his/her comfort paid no attention at all things against which s/he had to take precaution. Exhaust fumes, which increase the pollution of the environment being an example. Despite the discovery of other means that can prevent this pollution, some people are reluctant to use them.

When we drive cars, believing that we have reached the peak of civilisation, why do we forget the main principle upon which civilisation is based, i.e. making use of the modern scientific discoveries to make machines in such a way which is beneficial to people? In other words, why should we not apply new techniques by means of which pollution of the environment is decreased? As such, it is clear that car exhausts corrupt the air in our environment and thus destroys man's lungs.

It is important that we know that it is out of the responsibility of faith that we, upon making new machines, should take into account the amount of harm that could result from them. Everyone who lives in a crowded city is harmed by the bad effects of car fumes despite the fact that not everyone has a car, so how can the driver of a car be satisfied with him/herself not to modify the parts of this machine which may exert harmful impact upon him/herself as well as others? This is why Muslims must not be deceived by the deceptive appearance of civilisation. Rather, they must derive the main reasons behind the progress of today’s civilisation from their main resources. In addition, Muslims must take into consideration how to avoid harm to not fall under the category of the greatest losers about whom Allah Almighty says: ‘Say [Prophet]: ‘Shall we tell you who are the greatest losers in whatever they may do? (103) ‘[It is] they whose labour has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this world’s life, and who none the less think that they are doing good works (104)’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-104).

In this regard, we should learn this great lesson from the universe around us and which Allah *Glorified is He* created in such a way that guarantees its permanent existence. If we carefully reflect upon the universe, we will fully realise that everything created by Him *the Almighty* is beneficial to mankind including the waste of animals which man uses to fertilise land. In truth, this is the true meaning of the verse: ‘…so for those who believe and do good deeds there will be no fear, nor will they grieve.’ (*al-An‘am:* 48)

It is clear right now that ‘faith’ is an action of the heart and ‘doing righteousness’ is an action of the body parts. For this reason, we must exert our utmost efforts to set the course of life in order. Here, we should stress the fact that the entire universe has been perfectly created; it runs by due measure and thus it suffers no flaws. Yet, due to the fact that we want to have a luxurious life, we should make use of our minds created by Allah Almighty to utilise the worldly materials and elements in such a way that secures us permanent joy.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point more clearly; primitive man used to drink from rivers when feeling thirsty. Then, when s/he realised that their thirst was not sufficiently quenched by stretching his/her hands to get a handful of water from the river, they made a vessel out of clay to use it in drinking. After that, people made vessels out of thin iron sheet to use for the same purpose. They finally managed to make vessels out of glass. So, the question to be asked here shall be ‘Are these things to fall under the category of necessities of life or that of luxuries of life?' Indeed they fall under the category of the luxuries of life, so if you, O mankind!, want to make your life luxurious, you should then use your intellect to reach the best potential on how to utilise the materials and substances placed by Allah *the Exalted* in the universe. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* enables you to reach the latest scientific discoveries. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; our grandmothers in the countryside used to fill vessels with water from wells and canals for drinking, yet they used to filter this water to make it potable. As time went by there were certain people who used to get water from canals and then sell it to people at homes. However, when scholars managed to discover the law of *Al-Istitraq* (balancing liquids), people were able to send water to tanks in upper floors and thus they managed to pump it into pipelines of different sizes. As such, people were able to get access to water directly to their homes. This example shows us clearly how man made use of his/her intellect benefit from the materials Allah Almighty placed in the universe.

However, in the past when water was not as easily accessible as it is today, there was less wastage. Previously a couple of vessels of water were sufficient for a family for a whole day; now that water is readily available there is more wastage.

That is why it is of great importance for Muslims to fear Allah Almighty in all their actions. If we fear Him *Glorified is He* in the use of water, we will fully realise that the large quantities of water we waste in vain, may be urgently needed by other people. So, when we put an end to the misuse of water, this will keep us as well as others away from harm.

Let each one of us calculate, for example, how much water s/he consumes when performing ablution. Indeed a man from amongst us opens the tap, washes his/her hands three times, rinses his/her mouth three times, cleans his/her nose three times, washes his/her face three times, washes his/her forearms three times, wipes his/her head and finally washes his/her feet, yet during this entire period of making ablution, a large quantity of water falls down from the tap and goes in vain. Had s/he carefully thought about using such water falling down from the tap properly, others would not have complained about the lack of water. So, why do Muslims not just take the amount of water that is necessary for ablution? It is narrated that people in the past used to make ablution with half a litre of water, so why do we not use the Blessings of Allah *the Exalted* in the best way?

At that point, we must take into account that just as we are ordered by virtue of Islam to offer prayers to perfect our souls, we are also required to cultivate our manners and perfect our moral conduct. That is to say, that we should not misuse our capabilities which Allah *the Almighty* granted us. In addition, we should pay great attention to know how to attain the highest ranks of righteousness. We should not yet exert our efforts to get comfort while neglecting the fact that this comfort will bring forth further hardships. Rather, we must carefully and thoroughly reflect upon matters so as not to fall under the category of those people mentioned in the verse; 'And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that.' (*al-Isra':* 36) In this aforementioned verse of *al-Isra',* Allah Almighty, explains that Muslims must take into account the fact that they are responsible for their hearing, sight and heart, and that they will be held accountable for them on the Day of Resurrection. For this reason, it is not right for them to languish in taking the best of knowledge so that they can perfect their speech and actions. By doing so, there will be no need for them to fear in the life of this world or the Hereafter because they have believed and lived righteously. In addition, they will not be afflicted with grief in the life of this world or the Hereafter; this is the true meaning of the verse; '… so for those who believe and do good deeds there will be no fear, nor will they grieve.' (*al-An'am:* 48)

It is clear right now that following these divine laws allows man to protect him/herself in this worldly life and in the Hereafter as well. If you see, O Muslim, that the affairs of people are not run perfectly, you then should know that one of the rules of Allah Almighty has been neglected. If you see a poor person suffering from hunger or without clothes, then you should know that one of his/her rights have been denied by someone else. Here, we should stress a very important fact which is that Allah, Creator of the universe, destined that the rich, whom He *Glorified is He* gave great provision, should give the poor from the extra amount of this provision so that they be relieved from their poverty, but the rich refuse to obey the divine order and thus deny them of this right. However, there are some people who used to practice it as a profession even though they are in no need. As such, we can deduce that corruption in this regard has two reasons as follows: man's deception of others by asking them for money, although s/he is in no need of that; and the rejection of the rich to carry out the divine order by giving obligatory alms to the poor.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا يَمَسُّهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

As for those who rejected Our signs, torment
will afflict them as a result of their defiance [49]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 49)

There are two possible explanations for this verse under discussion; it may refer to those who deny and reject the signs of Allah Almighty, which are sent with the Messengers and Prophets as a proof of their truthfulness. By doing so, those deniers of the Truth are thus judged as disbelievers. It may also refer to those who denied and rejected the divine way of guidance, that is, they did not act upon the divine teachings and instructions therefore deviating from the Right Path. In other words, they became immoral and disobedient. As for the Arabic word *Al-Fisq* (defiance), it refers to the date when it comes forth from its peel when its size, upon ripeness, becomes smaller than it was. Here, we stress that the one who deviates from the divine way of guidance is the one who is deemed a loser because Allah *Glorified is He* has laid down this way of guidance to protect people from falling prey to misguidance. The essence of this divine way is yet crystal clear in the two orders 'Do!' and 'Do not!'

Indeed man acts sinfully and defiantly when s/he does not obey the divine commands or when s/he does what He *Glorified is He* judged prohibited. Let us offer this example to illustrate this point; a man, fearing that his radio may stop working properly, will follow the rules regarding its proper use. An electronic device, for example, will not perform at a capacity that its manufacturer has not set for it. So, if the manufacturer says, 'Use 220 volts so as not to ruin the machine,' man should act accordingly. If we apply this to man, we will find that Allah *the Almighty* has created man and laid down for him/her rules by means of which they could protect themselves from the divine punishment. Therefore, whoever breaks these divine rules will be struck with His punishment. As for the verse: '… torment will afflict them as a result of their defiance,' it gives the impression that the punishment loves to descend upon the disobedient and the defiant. That is to say that torment has rushed towards him/her in order to afflict him/her; this point is yet proved by the verse in the chapter of *al-Mulk* in which He *Glorified is He* says: 'Well-nigh bursting with fury; [and] every time a host [of such sinners] is flung into it, its keepers will ask them, 'Has no warner ever come to you?' (*al-Mulk:* 8)

In another position in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the day that We will say to hell: Are you filled up? And it will say: Are there any more?' [*Qaf:* 30) That is to say that the punishment itself is keen to be applied to the one who has done evil which is why the suffering insists on afflicting those who have acted sinfully and defiantly. Here, we should stress that using the Arabic word *Al-Mass* in this context indicates a very important meaning which is that the human penalties are incomparable to those of Allah *the Almighty*.

As a matter of fact, if a man punishes his fellow man, he does so according to his own strength and power, and no creature's punishment can ever become severe and painful like that of Allah Almighty. That is because the severity of the punishment differs according to the power of the punisher. If we apply this principle to Allah *Glorified is He* we will find that His punishment is so severe and painful that no one can endure it. He *Glorified is He* and then says:

قُل لَّآ أَقُولُ لَكُمۡ عِندِي خَزَآئِنُ ٱللَّهِ وَلَآ أَعۡلَمُ ٱلۡغَيۡبَ وَلَآ أَقُولُ لَكُمۡ إِنِّي مَلَكٌۖ
إِنۡ أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَيَّۚ قُلۡ هَلۡ يَسۡتَوِي ٱلۡأَعۡمَىٰ وَٱلۡبَصِيرُۚ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Say, 'I do not have the treasures of God, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel. I only follow what is revealed to me.' Say, 'Is a blind person like one who can see? Why will you not reflect?' [50] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 50)

We previously explained that the Arabic verb 'say' gives a command to The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We know for certain that The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* delivers the divine message as it was revealed to him. Here, we stress that it was sufficient for him *peace and blessings be upon him* to just say: 'I do not have the Treasures of Allah', without the verb 'say' in the beginning of the speech. However, the existence of the verse as such clearly indicates the absolute accuracy of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in delivering the Message of Allah *the Exalted*. It is taken for granted that all the words of the Quran are *Tawqifi,* meaning that every word therein is sent down from Allah *Glorified is He*. In other words, the archangel Gabriel conveyed the Message to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exactly as he received it from Allah *the Exalted* and he *peace and blessings be upon him* in turn, conveyed and delivered it to us as it was revealed to him; an act which plainly indicates that no one has the right to change even one letter of the Divine Revelation.

In this vein, The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us that Allah *the Almighty* has sent him as a guide, a giver of glad tidings and a warner. In addition, He *Glorified is He* supported His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with a sign, i.e. the Quran, proving his truthfulness and accuracy in delivering the Message. It goes without saying that whoever listens to this guidance from him *peace and blessings be upon him* was not supposed to ask for anything except that which is consistent with his human nature. That is to say that no one is allowed to ask The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring forth any signs other than those sent down by Allah *Glorified is He*. That is because The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say except that he is a mere bearer of the Divine Message, which is why any discussion with him must be within the framework of this claim.

As a matter of fact, the disbelievers overstepped this when they asked The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring them forth other signs including a bursting spring of water from the earth, or that he should have an embellished house. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* to inform them that he does not possess the treasures of the heavens and the earth, so how can you, O disbelievers, demand him to have houses and palaces?. Furthermore, how can you ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* to inform you of the unseen so that you can accept that which is beneficial and avoid that which is harmful? Is the divine way of guidance which guides to everything beneficial and keeps you from all that is harmful, not suffice you? Moreover, The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never told them that he knew the unseen. In fact, they themselves gave this testimony about him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Yet they say: ‘What sort of Messenger is this [man] who eats food [like all other mortals] and goes about in the market-places? Why has not an angel [visibly] been sent down to him, to act as a warner together with him?’ (7) Or: ‘[Why has not] a treasure been granted to him [by Allah]?’ Or: ‘He should [at least] have a [bountiful] garden, so that he could eat thereof [without effort]!’And so these evildoers say [to one another], ‘If you were to follow [Muhammad, you would follow] but a man bewitched!’ (8)’ (*al-Furqan:* 7-8)

The disbelievers of Quraysh had indeed mocked The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him to bring forth other signs and miracles for them. They even wondered how it could be for this man who claims to be a Messenger, to eat food as they eat and to go to markets as they do! If he, i.e. Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* the disbelievers say, was truly a Messenger sent from Allah, He *Glorified is He* would have relieved him of the hardship of earning a living or would have sent down an angel to help him convey the divine way of guidance to people or would have sent down treasure from the sky with which he could spend out of or would have been granted a bountiful garden from the fruits of which he would eat.

These were the demands of the chief disbelievers of Mecca; those who oppressed their own selves with disbelief and wanted to turn people away from believing in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In pursuit of achieving their goal of turning people away from the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the disbelievers of Quraysh once accused him *peace and blessings be upon him* of being bewitched, another time of being mad, a third time of being delirious, a fourth time of being a liar and a fifth time of receiving the Quran from non-Arabs. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* refutes all of these false and unfounded allegations and fabrications with which they went astray and caused others to go astray. Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran: ‘And We have not sent before you any apostles but they most surely ate food and went about in the markets; and We have made some of you a trial for others; will you bear patiently? And your Lord is ever seeing.' (*al-Furqan:* 20) This verse clearly states that The Messengers and Prophets that were sent before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to eat food, earn a living, and frequent the marketplace. So, if the polytheists are faulting the Messenger for that and trying to lead people astray with all possible means, then Allah *the Exalted* is reassuring the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that He, Allah *the Almighty* will grant him victory. In addition, people will be held accountable before Him *Glorified is He* for their deeds, be they good or bad. Furthermore, all their demands from you, O Messenger Muhammad, clearly indicate their stubbornness. He *peace and blessings be upon him*, never ever said to them that he was a king, but rather, he told that that he was just a bearer of the Divine Message. So, how could they then ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring forth for them signs which have only to do with Allah's Ownership of the treasures of the heavens and the earth? In the same way, how could they ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* to inform them of the unseen? Furthermore, how could they criticise him *peace and blessings be upon him* for being a mortal Messenger that eats, marries, and walks in the marketplace?!

All of these statements by the polytheists of Mecca clearly indicate their obstinacy and insistence on disbelief because they have asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring forth for them signs which go beyond the fact that he *peace and blessings upon him* was just a bearer of the Divine Message. The disbelievers of Quraysh asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring them forth springs of water, gardens and palaces all of which are demands that cannot be met by a Messenger sent only to convey and deliver the Divine Message to people. It is taken for granted that Allah *the Almighty* Alone is the One Who is fully able to bring forth these signs.

As for the Arabic word *Khaza'in* (safes) which is the plural of *Khizana* (a safe) refers to that item in which every precious thing is stored so that it can be taken out at the time of need. You do not call something a *Khizana* unless you have made it as a container for something precious which you fear to be taken out at the wrong time. Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who possesses the treasures of the earth a point which is proved by the Quran in which He says: ‘And the earth – We have spread it out wide, and placed on it mountains firm, and caused [life] of every kind to grow on it in a balanced manner, (19) and provided thereon means of livelihood for you [O men] as well as for all [living beings] whose sustenance does not depend on you. (20) For no single thing exists that does not have its source with us; and nothing do we bestow from on high unless it be in accordance with a measure well defined. (21)’ (*al-Hijr:* 19-21) Allah tells us about the most essential point in this regard which is that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who knows the secrets of the universe, and that He *Glorified is He* manifests and discloses them at their appropriate time, but the question to be asked here right now is ‘How does Allah Almighty do so?’ Allah *Glorified is He* sheds light on the beginning of creation and on the creation of the heavens and the earth. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say: What! do you indeed disbelieve in Him Who created the earth in two periods, and do you set up equals with Him? That is the Lord of the Worlds. (9) And He made in it mountains above its surface and He blessed therein and made therein its foods, in four periods: alike for the seekers. (10) Then He directed Himself to the heaven and it is a vapour, so He said to it and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly. They both said: We come willingly. (11)’ (*Fussilat:* 9-11)

In these aforementioned verses, Allah *the Almighty* commands The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the polytheists of Mecca how they could disbelieve in Allah *the Exalted* in spite of the fact that He *Glorified is He* is the One Who created the heavens and the earth in two periods and how they could set up partners for Him in worship when He is the creator of the earth upon which they live and get the necessary materials and substances by means of which their lives are preserved until the end of time. We know for certain that man’s life is kept by virtue of the food placed in the earth out of the Divine Mercy. Yet, in case man wants to have a luxurious life, s/he had to be ambitious to do so. He *Glorified is He* then tells us that He placed towering, unshakable mountains in the earth, and that He blessed the earth and the towering, unshakable mountains altogether. Having told us about the creation of these mountains, He *Glorified is He* moves to tell us about the apportioning of nourishment; a point which indicates that mountains are, in reality, the storehouses of nourishment. At that point, someone may ask, ‘How is this?’

We say, 'Indeed the facts confirm this reality because if you reflect on the flowing rivers, you will find that they consist of the rain that fell down on the mountains. That is to say that rainwater which is made up of small, minute particles, falls on these mountains and thus breaks them down. As such, it becomes full of the different minerals which are of great benefit to the land. We call this mixture of rainwater and minerals as *Al-Ghrain* (alluvial mud). When water flows in rivers and streams, this alluvial mud is transported to the land and serves as natural fertilisers from which plants get the necessary minerals. Had Allah Almighty so willed, He would have made the entire surface of the earth flat and thus enjoys fertility which is beneficial to plants, However, His Wisdom destined that the nourishment of plants is done in this way. As a matter of fact, if we carefully examine plants, we will find that they differ in the way of absorbing minerals from the soil. There is a particular type of plants that take their nourishment from a depth of half a metre, whilst a second type of plants do so from a depth of one metre, and so forth. Also, if we do not add manure or fertilisers or alluvial mud to the cultivated land, it becomes weak. Out of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* wants the process of cultivation to be continued forever, He *the Almighty* created mountains in such a rigid form which makes them vulnerable to the factors of erosion, such as heat, cold and cracks. Yet, when rainwater falls down on them, it becomes full of the nourishing ingredients and minerals that the earth needs. These nourishing ingredients are thus transported via water to the earth. This is how the earth is constantly fertilised. As such, it is clear right now that those mountains are, in essence, the storehouses of Allah's Treasures.

But, is man's entire life based only on agriculture? The answer is definitely 'no' because if we look at a small model of the earth, we will find that it resembles a large melon. If we thus cut it into equal triangles, all of which are of the same distance as that from the exterior to the centre of the melon and made them all in the form of a pyramid, we would find that each piece contains an amount of provision which is equal to the other. Why? It is because life does not only depend on particular types of nourishment, but rather, we need different tools, materials and minerals to inhabit the earth, such as iron, petrol, manganese and the like from the other natural treasures of the earth upon which civilisation is established.

Indeed we find that these treasures are hidden either in the mountains or in the deserts, but each one of these treasures will not be disclosed but in an appointed time. Yet if we draw a comparison between the treasures found in a pyramidal section of the earth measuring from the centre to the perimeter and another, we would find that the treasures found of them are equal to each other. However, each type of these treasures has an appointed time to be disclosed to people. This goes in accordance with the Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘For no single thing exists that does not have its source with Us; and nothing do We bestow from on high unless it be in accordance with a measure well-defined.’ (*al-Hijr:* 21)

That is to say, there is not anything except that its storehouse is with Allah Almighty Who sends it down in accordance with a due measure. Let us examine this point in the light of intellect which is man’s greatest blessing. Indeed the intellect is something and thus has storehouses with Allah *Glorified is He*. This point is yet proved by the fact that the amounts of ideas man had ten centuries ago can in no way be comparable to those we have today. This is because every generation has benefited from the ideas of the previous ones to arrive at new conclusions. Therefore, it is clear that there are storehouses for ideas and thoughts and likewise everything in existence has storehouses with Allah *the Exalted* yet He *Glorified is He* does not send down from these treasures and storehouses except in accordance with a well-defined measure.

As a matter of fact, when Allah *Glorified is He* wants a particular secret to be disclosed, He *the Almighty* prepares the means for it. For example, in the past, we used to chop wood from trees in order to make fuel. After chopping the wood, out of fear that it might be spoilt, we transformed it into charcoal and thus secured a source of energy. These are all treasures that were hidden in the earth, yet man did not discover these sources of energy until after Allah *the Exalted* qualified them to receive this treasure. Here, we should stress that the Grace of Allah Almighty will surely remain until the end of time. Having managed to make charcoal, we entered the age of steam which led us to the age of electricity that has further allowed us to advance our knowledge and utilise the resources that Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon us which led us, in turn, to the age of the atom.

All these discoveries were created by Allah *Glorified is He* and deposited in earth. When the time is due, Allah *the Exalted* inspires a person to take all the necessary steps to reveal it. The following generation builds on the discoveries of the previous and thus the development is always growing.

Such discoveries were either Allah's totally hidden or deposited with a certain code. For example, it was Allah *the Exalted* who made manifest the discovery of radium at the necessary time, by Madame Curie. Before the discovery of radium, scientists knew that there was an element they had not yet identified which had a specific atomic composition. This is because the elements of the universe are made with great and majestic wisdom. Furthermore, something could be typically transformed into something else. An example would be that you pick a flower and enjoy its fragrance until it wilts. You may not be fully aware that the flower has a specific composition and that humidity allows the flower to bloom. A flower is composed of the elements found on earth and when it wilts, these elements return back to the earth after the water it contains evaporates, like other water, and forms clouds which are moved by the wind and falls as rain again.

In this way, the drops of water contained in the flower evaporate to form clouds and then return to the earth once again in the form of rain. The percentage of water in the universe is stable, without decrease or increase since Allah *Glorified is He* created the creation in this universe. When man makes use of an amount of water, it returns, according to certain processes designed by Allah *the Exalted* to the reserve of water in the universe. Someone may ask: How many tonnes of water have I drunk in my life? You will find that you have drunk and made use of hundreds or thousands of tonnes of water and you disposed it in the form of perspiration, urine, mucus or similar. Then, how much water remains in your body after disposal of such quantities of water? The proportion of water may be more than ninety per cent of one body's weight(1). After your death, this amount of water in your body will evaporate, join the clouds, and then come down again as rain. Thus, the amount of water in the universe does not decrease or increase. This is what we call stored and ever transformed provision. Just as the amount of water contained in the flower evaporates, its smell also evaporates into the air and likewise its coloured substance dissolves into the earth. When we plant a rose tree, each rose takes its colour from the coloured substance stored in the earth. Therefore everything is either stored in its essence or its elements are stored in a transformed form. This is one of the laws of the universe. Life is based on these two types of elements.

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(1) Not correct as a scientific fact, it is around 65 percent

For instance, man is certainly created of flesh and blood, and a cow is also created of flesh and blood. When man dies he returns to the earth and when man benefits from animals, then those animals also return to the earth. The elements composing the bodies of humans and animals enter into a new cycle. Therefore they are reserves designed by Allah *Glorified is He* which is either in a transformed or preserved form. The thing which is embedded into another thing and returns to its original state once again, is considered a transformed reserve.

It is out of the Mercy of Allah *the Exalted* that He does not allow anyone to own the reserves of the earth or heavens so they cannot be arrogant with others. Even The Messengers, being humans, were not authorised to dispose of these reserves. Allah *Glorified is He* has taken it upon himself to preserve the reserves of the earth and the heavens so that we are assured of our provisions. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that if we control His treasures of Mercy, then we would withhold them from fear of spending and man is ever stingy. Allah *Glorified is He* knows that man, by his very nature, can be very greedy or selfish, while He *Glorified is He* is The Rich, The Bountiful. Therefore, He sends down what He wills to His servants from His reserves so that they can take benefit from them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not claim that he owns the reserves of Allah *the Exalted* so how is it then that the idolaters ask him for that which is in the reserves of Allah *Glorified is He*? He *peace and blessings be upon him* made this clear to them and further clarified that he does not know the unseen as he is told in the Quran to inform people that he does not have the treasures of Allah Almighty nor does he know the unseen.

In this way, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* negates for himself having any Divine attributes because the universal reserves are in the hands of Allah Almighty. Likewise he negates for himself having knowledge of the unseen. It may be said: 'But what about the future incidents and events about which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us, are such incident of the unseen? We say: 'That certainly does not mean that he knew the unseen, but rather, he was informed of it'. That is Allah *Glorified is He* taught him these issues as He states in the Quran that such announcements relating to the unseen were revealed to him; otherwise he could not have known them. It is none but Allah *Glorified is He* Who told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the news of the unseen. To decisively settle the matter, Allah *Glorified is He* states in the Quran that He is the Knower of the unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to anyone except to those whom He chooses as a messenger; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him. Allah *the Exalted* alone is the Knower of the Unseen and He does not let anyone from the creation know about the Unseen except the Messengers whom He chooses to inform of it. Allah *Glorified is He* protects His Messengers in the meantime with angels who protect them from the interference of the jinn so that they do not eavesdrop what has been revealed to him of the unseen and communicate it to the soothsayers before it is conveyed to people. In addition, this is intended as a preservation of the revelation from the tampering and insanity of the jinn.

Therefore the Messenger is taught some of the unseen, but is not a knower of the unseen. The unseen – as we know – is that which is hidden from the senses and for which there are no premises. There are things hidden from you, but they have premises that if you follow from the outset, they will possibly lead you to the conclusion. For example, if you give a student a mathematical problem to solve, he will solve it, but this does not mean that he knows the unseen. Rather, he follows the premises and arranges the available information to figure out the answer.

The same applies to those who have discovered secrets in existence. Did they know the unseen? No, because they only used some of the premises available for them in the universe in order to arrive at new conclusions. It is true that these conclusions were concealed from us, but their premises were not. This also applies to all engineering theories; every theory is based on the one that preceded it and is an observation of a self-evident matter in the universe, however difficult and complex the theory is. Every science has premises that if a researcher looks into them, he will arrive at new conclusions. This is what we call 'relative unseen' (*ghayb idafi*), i.e. it was unseen at a certain time but comes to be seen at later time. Hence, this knowledge is always attributed to human beings, as stated in the Quran that none can comprehend anything out of the knowledge of Allah *the Exalted* except what He pleases.

The all-encompassing knowledge belongs to Allah *the Exalted* and He *Glorified is He* is the One Who allows some of His creation to encompass some of His Knowledge. None of the secrets in this universe are to be unearthed except by His permission. Allah *Glorified is He* guides scientists to scrutinise the premises that lead them to the conclusions, but what about the knowledge that does not have any premises? This is from the absolute unseen of which Allah *Glorified is He* informs no one but those whom He chooses from among His Prophets.

I underline this fact so that none of us mistakenly think that being informed of the whereabouts of your lost property is not related to the knowledge of the unseen. It may be unseen for the owner of the lost item, but it is not for the thief who steals neither it nor the one who conceals it. It is not also unseen for the jinn who accompany the thief. Thus, it is not an absolute unseen as it is known to some others. Therefore, the reserves of Allah *Glorified is He* are filled with all kinds of treasures that enable man to sustain his life on earth, providing him with necessities or luxuries.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...nor that I know the unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel'... (*al-An'am:* 50). Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as can be inferred from the verse, negates for himself three things: two of which negate his divinity, namely, ownership of the universe's reserves and knowledge of the unseen. The third thing is that he is not an angel. Does this mean that an angel is higher than a prophet? No, but they said that he walks in markets and earns a living by working. An angel does not do this. However, a Messenger is certainly of a higher rank than an angel because he guides the human beings and the jinn and follows what has been revealed to him from the absolute King, Allah *Glorified is He*.

'I do not follow aught save that which is revealed to me' (*al-An'am:* 50). Being perfectly honest in conveying what was revealed to him from Allah *the Exalted,* Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declares his reality as being merely a human. A human being is subject to changing circumstances. He knows one thing and is ignorant of something else. It is for the benefit of people that the Messengers follow and do not innovate, in that they convey to them the commandments of the Creator in their actual wordings and not the ideas of human beings that may change or be replaced. Had they innovated, they would have done so due to their human nature. Innovation in this regard would be a disadvantage. Exact following of the revelation in this respect is an elevation for human beings because Messengers follow what Allah *the Exalted* Who chose them to be Messengers, has revealed to them. Therefore the illiteracy of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an honour for him and for us. As regards a normal person, illiteracy is a shortcoming, but it is perfection Only for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*!

The word *ummi* (unlettered) –as we know– means that he is as uneducated as he was born. He has not received an education nor has he learnt from others. But his knowledge and education is entirely divine, being inspired by Allah *Glorified is He*. With him declaring himself unlettered, it means that everything in his mind is not taken from the creation of Allah Almighty. Rather, everything occurring to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was inspired by revelation.

That being the case, then his illiteracy is deemed as an honour for us, whilst illiteracy amongst us –i.e. Muslims– is considered an aspect of backwardness and we must all strive to put an end to it. Allah *the Exalted* orders His Prophet Muhammad to tell his people: '…I do not follow aught save that which is revealed to me…' (*al-An'am:* 50). Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* does not speak of his own desires but rather, he conveys the revelation that has come to him.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse stating: 'Say, 'Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Then will you not give thought?' (*al-An'am:* 50)

When Allah *Glorified is He* presents an issue as an example, it must be agreed upon even by those who disbelieve in Him. They know that the blind and seeing cannot be deemed equal, as is true of shade and heat or darkness and light. The natural disposition of man does not accept any disagreement in these matters. Blindness – as we know – is the lack of sight affecting someone who would normally see. So someone could not say about a rock: ‘This rock is blind’ because it is not normal for rocks to see. Therefore, the term ‘blindness’ can only be applied to the one who is normally supposed to see. What does the loss of sight do in regard to a tangible matter? The lack of sight definitely harms man because he is a being that moves. He might fall into a hole or collide with something causing harm to himself. We all agree and know that the blind person has trouble getting around and suffers many hardships. What protects him from this is either his sight or seeking help from a sighted person.

At old times, scholars thought that sight was the result of rays of light being emitted from the eyes and directed towards the visible object, but this theory was refuted by an Islamic scholar called Ibn Al-Haytham, who taught the scholars that the rays of light are, in fact, emitted from the visible object and directed towards the eye of the beholder, based on the proof that man cannot see the object in the dark. Blindness prevents the eye from receiving the rays of light and no one disagrees that blindness is destructive, harmful, and troublesome, whereas sight provides ease and comfort. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to the creation: Beware of assuming that your entire life depends on your tangible surroundings. No, there are some values that if man does not know, he stumbles, strays and is troubled.

Accordingly, Allah Almighty’s Guidance has come to guide the human soul to values, such as light guides man towards objects. The same as sight helps man to avoid obstacles, Allah’s Guidance helps man to avoid obstacles with regard to immaterial matters. Man lives by his values, considering that a blind person may find a sighted person to lead him, but he may not be led to guidance if it is provided to him. Therefore man can do without sight, but he cannot do without guidance. Without guidance, one will go astray. When one’s values are spoiled, this would be more severe and serious than misguidance in sensory matters.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...Say, ‘Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Then will you not give thought?’ (*al-An‘am:* 50)

There is thinking (*tafakkur*), remembering (*tadhakkur*) and reflecting (*tadabbur*). Thinking is to employ the intellect in something obvious from the outset, intending to infer something from it. When someone says to someone else: 'Think about this matter', it means to turn over in your mind everything related to this matter. It is as though the one urging thinking about the matter is confident that the one turning it over will arrive at the same opinion he has in mind. As for remembering, this is when someone arrives at a conclusion after reasoning, and then forgets it. Afterwards, someone draws his attention to this conclusion that he reasoned out. Hence, thought brings an initial, fresh conclusion, while remembering calls to mind a conclusion that was known to someone but he forgot about it. As for reflecting, it is not sufficient for man to only look at the outer aspects of matters, but he should look deeper into it. Everything has a surface which may conceal what is beneath it. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* demands that man should look into the depths of things and what is on the other side; that is, he reflects on the matter from every aspect and not to be satisfied with that which is merely on the surface. It is similar to someone buying something from a trustworthy merchant and the merchant honestly shows the buyer the specifications of the item and asks him to test the item as per its specifications. However, a cheating merchant will attempt to tamper with the specifications in order to deceive the buyer.

When Allah *Glorified is He* asks us to think, remember, and reflect, it is only to revive our rational abilities with which we come to the conclusion that Allah *the Exalted* desires. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنذِرْ بِهِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ أَن يُحْشَرُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ ۙ لَيْسَ
لَهُم مِّن دُونِهِۦ وَلِىٌّ وَلَا شَفِيعٌ لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

Use the Quran to warn those who fear being gathered before their Lord – they will have no one but Him to protect them and no one to intercede – so that they may beware [51] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 51)

This means to warn with the revelation – that you follow – those who fear the Day when they will be brought before Allah Almighty. To Warn – as we know – means to inform people of something dreadful before it happens so as to prevent it from happening, so who are those people whom Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* to warn with the revelation? In the early days of Islam, the interest of some believers in devotional faith was weak, but since their hearts had faith and they feared the day when they will be brought before Allah Almighty, then the revelation signifies a warning for them to take devotional faith seriously. Likewise, the people of the Book can also be warned by the revelation because they believe that they will meet Allah Almighty on the Last Day. Warning can also be for someone who believes in Resurrection but doubts the Prophets and their intercession. Alarming and warning may cause this category of people to re-examine the issue of faith and accept the true Message brought forth by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Warning by way of the revelation may be undertaken in one of the aforementioned ways, but does a believer fear being gathered unto Allah *the Exalted*? No, a believer only fears being gathered without a protector or helper and in reality, there is no one who can offer help or protection from Allah Almighty. No intercessor can rescue from Allah’s punishment unless He permits it, as stated in the Quran that no one can intercede with Him except by His permission ‘Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?’ (*al-Baqara:* 255) This is what is held by the believers in Allah *Glorified is He*. To define this, Allah *Glorified is He* states that: ‘There is no guardian for them, nor any intercessor besides Him- that they may guard (against evil)'. (*al-An‘am:* 51) Indeed they are the believers who have believed in Allah *the Exalted* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but they fell short in some of the requirements and commandments as provided in the Quranic statement ‘Whoever believes and acts aright'. (*al-An‘am:* 48)

When warning comes to these believers, they do righteous deeds out of fear that they will be brought before Allah Almighty without a protector or intercessor. Believers, therefore, hope to be under the Protection and Mercy of Allah *the Exalted* on the Day of Gathering. Such are those about whom Allah *Glorified is He* tells that have confessed their faults and mingled a good deed and an evil one; maybe Allah will turn to them mercifully; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [there are] others who have acknowledged their sins. They had mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. Perhaps Allah will turn to them in forgiveness. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*at-Tawba:* 102)

Even though the noble verse deals with and includes, in addition to the believers, the people of the Book and also those who believe in the Resurrection but do not follow Prophets. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَطْرُدِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِٱلْغَدَوٰةِ وَٱلْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُۥ ۖ مَا
عَلَيْكَ مِنْ حِسَابِهِم مِّن شَيْءٍ وَمَا مِنْ حِسَابِكَ عَلَيْهِم مِّن شَيْءٍ
فَتَطْرُدَهُمْ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Do not drive away those who call upon their Lord
morning and evening, seeking nothing but His Face.
You are in no way accountable for them, nor they for
you; if you drove the believers away, you would become
one of the evildoers [52] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 52)

We know that Allah *Glorified is He* created man and settled him in the earth and made his existence contingent in this universe in which He has placed all the essentials that are necessary for man's life and welfare.

Allah *Glorified is He* orders that there should be equality in worship between people such that there would be no one elevated over someone weak, no transgressor over someone oppressed. In this way, life's activity takes the right course in such a way as grants every individual certain gifts in accordance with what they are prepared for. If the balance of human equality were ever to be disturbed, Allah *Glorified is He* would refer them to undisputed proof; that is you, O humankind, were equal when you were all created originally from dust and you are equal because you return to dust. Then you are all equal when you are called to account on the Day of Resurrection, so why should you differ in the other matters? Equality must rather be established. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was keen to guide people and he burdened himself with more than what Allah *the Exalted* commanded him. Thus Allah Almighty reproved him for being hard on himself out of his keenness for his people to have faith. Some people think that Allah *Glorified is He* rebuked His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* because of a shortcoming, and we respond to these people saying that they should understand this kind of reproof in its true sense because there is a difference between reproving for the benefit of the one being rebuked in order to censure them because they contravened and disobeyed. For instance, if you were to find your son playing on a working day not going to school and neglecting his lessons, you would rebuke and censure him for disregarding what is expected of him. However, if you found your son putting all his energy and spending all his free time revising, you would ask him not to burden himself with all this trouble and would tell him to go and take a break. In this situation you are censuring him for his own benefit, so it is as if the censuring and reproving is for and not against him. Therefore the issue they keep raising regarding reproving Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been solved as we clarify that Allah *Glorified is He* reproves His Messenger for his credit and not against him. Finding it easy and simple to spread His message amongst the weak, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exerted himself and expended effort in the hope that the arrogant and proud would taste the sweetness of faith. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'He frowned and turned (his) back because there came to him the blind man. And what would make you know that he would purify himself, or become reminded so that the reminder should profit him? As for him who considers himself free from need (of you), to him do you address yourself and no blame is on you if he would not purify himself' (*'Abasa:* 1-7).

Therefore, reproving here is for the benefit of whom? It is reproving for the benefit of Allah's Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and when Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O Prophet! Why do you forbid (yourself) that which Allah has made lawful for you? you seek to please your wives; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-Mumtahana*: 1) This verse points to a matter that annoyed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then he abstained from some of that which the human soul desires and which Allah *the Exalted* has made permissible. Reproving here is also for the benefit of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Due to his deep concern for all his people to be guided, it was obligatory for him to treat the tyrants with gentleness in order to soften their hearts, but the tyrants did not want to be made equal with the weak. An assembly from the Quraysh passed and found Khabbab ibn Al-Aratt, Suhayb, Bilal, ʿAmmar and Salman al-Farisi, Allah *be pleased with them all*, with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* They were all from amongst the weak. They said: 'O Muhammad, are you pleased with those from amongst your people? Is it these whom Allah has favoured among us? Are we to follow these people? Send them away, for perhaps if you do, we will follow you.' It is as if they were saying to him: 'Surely, you have satisfied yourself with these weak people and left us while we are the powerful. We will not sit with you unless you tell these weak people to get away from you.' To that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by the disposition of faith, said: 'I am not one to repel believers.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* knows that there were people resembling them who said similar things to their prophets. The people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to him what is narrated in the Noble Quran that they did not see him but as a man like themselves, and that they do not see him followed except by those who were the lowest of them and at first suggestion. And they did not see in the believers over them any merit; rather, they thought they were liars.

'So the eminent among those who disbelieved from his people said, "We do not see you but as a man like ourselves, and we do not see you followed except by those who are the lowest of us [and] at first suggestion. And we do not see in you over us any merit; rather, we think you are liars.' (*Hud:* 27) Some of the disbelievers tried to invite The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to meet them halfway by saying: 'When we come then drive them away and when we leave then bring them back.' In his opinion the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* found a medium solution that could bring the differing points of view closer together. He *peace and blessings be upon him* consulted with ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab, *Allah be pleased with him*, who said: 'If you do it then we can see what they want.' The wealthy disbelievers of Quraysh asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to record this in a document. The inkwells and pens were brought, but before writing took place the following verse had been revealed: 'And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His favor; neither are you answerable for any reckoning of theirs, nor are they answerable for any reckoning of yours, so that you should drive them away and thus be of the unjust.' (*al-An'am:* 52)

Consequently, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* threw down the leaf brought to contain some words giving preference to the chiefs of the Quraysh as regards sitting with him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only inclined towards writing this document because he desired that they would accept Islam so that their people would follow Islam as well, out of his mercy and affection towards them. He *peace and blessings be upon him* saw that this would not take anything away from his Companions nor would it make them less esteemed, so he inclined towards it. Whereupon, Allah *the Exalted* sent down this verse to forbid him from inclining towards sending his weak companions away, but it does not mean that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had repulsed them and sent them away. Then, after that, he summoned the weak and they came to him.

Prior to this incident, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would sit with the weak and would leave the gathering if he *peace and blessings be upon him* wished, but, Allah Almighty wanted to honour those weak people after forbidding him from repulsing them and for what they underwent in His cause. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* sent down another command ordering Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to leave his gathering with the weak until they themselves leave. This is stated in the Quranic verse as Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to withhold himself with those who call on their Lord morning and evening desiring His goodwill, and not to let his eyes pass from them, desiring the beauties of this world's life; and not to follow him whose heart Allah Almighty has made unmindful to His remembrance, and he follows his low desires and his case is one in which due bounds are exceeded. When this verse was sent down, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Praise be to Allah who has made among my nation he with whom I am ordered to be patient.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Haythami in (Majma' Az-Zawa'id) and At-Tabarani. Al-Haythami declared its chain of narrators to be authentic*

With this noble statement Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to honour the weak and oppressed. Salman Al-Farisi and Khubbab ibn Al-Arratt Allah *be pleased with both of them* said: 'This verse was sent down regarding us, because he *peace and blessings be upon him* would sit with us and come so close to us that his knees would be touching our knees. He would stand up and leave when he wanted to and then this verse was sent down. Therefore, he would not stand up and leave us until we stood up. We knew this and we hastened him to stand'. This means that they were the ones who stood up first from the gathering of The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not drive away 'those who call upon their Lord Morning and evening, seeking nothing But His Face' (*al-An'am:* 52).

This is a divine order to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to all Muslims as well. This the highest honour for those who constantly remember Allah *the Exalted* from amongst the weak because they are the people who love faith and they were the first to believe in Islam.

It is narrated that some of the Arab noble people embraced Islam and went to meet one of the Muslim caliphs. They sought permission to enter. The caliph did not grant them permission until he had granted it to the weak of the Muslims. This angered them and they said: 'How comes that he gives permission to these people before us although we have become Muslims?' One of them, who knew and understood the religion, said: 'Are you all angered because he is granting permission to these people before you? They were called to believe in Islam and they responded, whereas you were called, but you hesitated to accept Islam. So what will be your response when they will be called to enter paradise before you?'

These weak people obey Allah *the Exalted* seeking *wajh Allah* (*lit.* Allah's Face) The Arabic expression *wajh Allah* indicates that their hearts are imbued with faith and that, for the sake of preserving their faith, they fled the oppression and tyranny of the disbelievers who wanted to force them to return to disbelief and misguidance again. They love faith and the Pleasure of Allah *the Exalted* and were pleased that Allah Almighty would reserve for them all their rewards to the hereafter. When we hear the verse: 'seeking His Face…'

(*al-An'am:* 52), we know that this is one of the attributes of Allah *Glorified is He*. Accordingly, we shall believe that the Attributes of Allah Almighty have no similar as there is nothing like unto Him *Glorified is He*.

The term (*wajh*) is used to refer to the essence because the face is the distinguishing characteristic of essence. If you were to meet a group of people and they would cover their faces with their clothes, you would not be able to distinguish between them. The word *wajh* may also refer to noble people. When one says, 'So and so met *wujuh al-Qawm,'* this means that he met the nobles among his people. Allah *Glorified is He* states that everything shall perish except for Him *Glorified is He*. When Allah says: 'You are in no way accountable for them' (*al-An'am:* 52), this communicates a sense of reverence for the dignity of the weak as someone might say, 'These weak people sought refuge in the Islam so that they could flee from the oppression and not out of love for the Islam. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear here that this, i.e. to judge peoples' intentions, is not the mission of anyone. People's actions shall be considered, whereas their intentions shall be judged by Allah Almighty alone. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You are in no way accountable for them, nor they for you; if you drove the believers away, you would become one of the evildoers.' (*al-An'am:* 52) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to His Messenger that if you were accountable for them in any way, it would have been permissible for you to drive them away, but you, Messenger of Allah, know that every individual is rewarded for his actions. If they are good then the reward is good and if they are evil, then the reward is evil. Allah *the Exalted* revealed to His Prophet Muhammad that no one shall bear the recompense of the bad actions committed by another: 'Say, "Is it other than Allah I should desire as a lord while He is the Lord of all things? And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. Then to your Lord is your return and He will inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.' (*al-An'am:* 164) Thus, every individual has his record of actions, according to which one shall be rewarded or punished. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ فَتَنَّا بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ لِّيَقُولُوٓاْ أَهَٰٓؤُلَآءِ مَنَّ ٱللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِم مِّنۢ بَيْنِنَآۗ أَلَيْسَ ٱللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

We have made some of them a test for others, to make the disbelievers say, ‘Is it these men that God has favoured among us?’ Does God not know best who are the grateful ones? [53]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 53)

Here Allah Almighty refers to two groups of people; the first group felt haughty to sit with the second group of weak people who were sitting with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Here, Allah *the Exalted* puts both groups to the test (*fitnah*). Some people think that *fitnah* is a blameworthy matter. In fact, it is not. It is not intrinsically blameworthy. Rather, it may be blameworthy because of its consequences. *Fitnah*, or test is designed to reveal a believers’ deep faith… Allah *the Exalted* points out that tests are meant to distinguish the true believers from the liars: ‘But we have certainly tried those before them and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful and He will surely make evident the liars.’ (*al-’Ankabut*: 2-3)

Allah *Glorified is He* tests the truthfulness of one’s faith, with either afflictions or blessings. Allah Almighty also put the previous nations to the test of blessings and afflictions. He *Glorified is He* had known the results of these tests even before their occurrences. Through these tests, the true believers are distinguished from the hypocrites. Whoever shows patience throughout trials and tribulations then he proves that he is a true believer. On the contrary, he who does not show patience then proves to Allah Almighty that his belief is not true; when he is granted goodness he is assuaged and pleased, and if he is afflicted with evil and tribulation, he turns away from worship. Thus, he loses both in this world and in the Hereafter.

Accordingly, tribulation is only a test for people. There are many differences in our universe. These differences are intrinsic features of life. It is obligatory to believe in the decree of Allah *Glorified is He* in His creation as He created people different; one is tall, another is short; one is white, another is black; one can see, another is blind; one is rich, another is poor; one is healthy, another is ill – each one is a test for the other.

A sick person, for example, is a test for the healthy one, and a healthy person is a test for the sick. A sick person shall accept the decree of Allah *the Exalted* and not be envious of the healthy person. Rather, he may observe whether the healthy person will disparage him or offer him help. Likewise, the poor person is a tribulation for the rich person. He looks towards the rich person to know if he will despise him, impede him, or take advantage of him. This rich person is a tribulation for the poor person. The rich person sees whether the poor person is looking at him with envy or he is pleased with what Allah *the Exalted* has given to someone else. This is how tribulations are.

Indeed amongst people are those who have been given some gifts and there are those who have been stripped of this gift. Both giving and stripping is a test for us so that we should believe that the Creator of this universe has distributed gifts amongst the creation and He did not allow for one person to have everything. This is intended so that every person would be in need of the gifts of someone else and that co-operation and social cohesion would be established amongst people.

When Allah *the Exalted* creates someone with some sort of disability, He *Glorified is He* compensates him with some other gift. Accordingly, one finds that all human beings are a test for each other. Likewise, the existence of believers is a test for the disbelievers. Disbelievers were a test for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and vice versa. The disbelievers of Quraysh used to say that they wished that the Quran would have been sent down on a great man of the two cities of Mecca and Ta'if; 'and they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf*: 31) Hence, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that these people were begrudging him because the Glorious Quran was being sent down to him. This statement was a trial for The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* but he was patient with this and proceeded until he completed his mission and conveyed the message, paying no attention to what they were saying. He *peace and blessings be upon him* considered their sayings evidence for the strength of the miracle that proved the truthfulness of his message.

The weak people were a trial for those haughty people who asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to drive away the weak, and so was the weak for them. Had those haughty people been true believers, they would not have been begrudging the weak believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* before them.

Therefore, we are all trials for one another. When anyone of us sees someone with a gift that he himself has not been granted, then he must know that it is a trial for him. He must accept and be pleased that someone is granted a gift. Allah Almighty is not worshipped with anything better than respecting His decree regarding how people are granted different blessings. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* puts all of us into tests. Accordingly, if one is true believer in Allah *the Exalted* then one shall fully accepts the blessings bestowed upon other people so that Allah *the Exalted* makes other people fully accept the blessings He bestows upon you.

In the verse under discussion, the test was that a group of people demanded that the weak be driven away saying, 'Is it these men that Allah has favoured among us?' It is as if they were belittling the social status of the weak believers. Allah Almighty then replies to their question: 'Does Allah not know best who the grateful ones are?' (*al-Ana'am*: 53) It is Allah *the Almighty* Who has eternal knowledge about human beings and no one shall suggest to Him what He decides. Those disbelievers used to object Allah's decrees previously asked why the Quran was not revealed to a great man of the two cities. But Allah Almighty replied to their question stating that He *Glorified is He* Alone Who decides who shall be granted His blessings and grace.

In this way, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* did not entrust the message to the polytheists or any other one, nor did He entrust them to distribute provisions and manage the peoples' affairs. Rather, it is He *Glorified is He* Alone Who is the One Who distributes provisions and blessings amongst human beings so that every individual has to rely on others to do things that he is incapable of. Others then shall rely on him also for things that they are incapable of. Prophethood is a divine choice that is great and more exalted than all other worldly affairs. The context thus shows that some of the influential Arabs asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to drive away some weak people, so Allah *the Exalted* wanted to assuage the weak with some worldly reward even though He reserved reward for the rest of the believers to the Hereafter. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* afterwards says:

وَإِذَا جَآءَكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَيْكُمْۖ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ ٱلرَّحْمَةَۖ
أَنَّهُۥ مَنْ عَمِلَ مِنكُمْ سُوٓءًۢا بِجَهَٰلَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُۥ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

When those who believe in Our revelations come to you [Prophet], say, 'Peace be upon you. Your Lord has taken it on Himself to be merciful: if any of you has foolishly done a bad deed, and afterwards repented and mended his ways, God is most forgiving and most merciful'[54] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 54)

The demand to drive away these weak people signified an attack against their honour and status because they were not wealthy or eminent amongst the people. But Allah *Glorified is He* assuaged them with peace from Him in this worldly life and He commanded His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to communicate this message of peace to them. Peace here signifies a state where one becomes free of both psychological and physical weaknesses. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to compensate them with peace coming from Him. The word *rahma* (mercy) is repeated several times in the Glorious Quran. For example, Allah *the Exalted* states that He reveals in the Quran what gives people health and mercy.

What is the difference then between mercy (*rahma*) and giving health (*shifa'*)? Mercy is that Allah Almighty does not test man with an illness. Indeed it is prevention. As for giving health, it is that Allah *Glorified is He* removes an illness that has afflicted man. This is the convalescence after the treatment.

Therefore, this verse clearly proves that in the Quran there is both mercy and giving health, i.e. prevention and treatment. The one who adheres to the way of the Quran will never be afflicted with social and psychological diseases, whereas the one who deviates from the guidance of the Quran will be afflicted with social and psychological diseases. If one returns to the guidance of the Quran then he will be cured of whatever disease he suffers from. When Allah *Glorified is He* commands His Messenger to say to these people who had been incensed by the demand for them to be repulsed, despite their faith in the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Peace be upon you. Your Lord has taken it on Himself to be merciful' (*al-An'am:* 54), it means that what happened to them in this case was the last of their tests. In return for this provocation, they had been granted everlasting peace. As long as Allah *the Exalted* has taken it upon Himself to be merciful, then He will protect them from what may harm others.

When you hear Allah's statement: 'Your Lord has taken it on Himself to be merciful' (*al-An'am*: 54), you shall be sure that no one obliges Allah Almighty to do anything because He is the Creator of the Universe. His Will is absolute over the universe, so no one can prescribe anything for him and obliges him to do it. However, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who obliges mercy upon himself. When we consider the word *nafsih* (upon himself), we should understand it in the light of the fact that 'there is nothing like unto Him'. This is because the self (*nafs*) with regards to human beings signifies that there is body, blood, movement, and life. Nevertheless, what does it mean when it is used in reference to Allah *the Exalted*? In such context it refers to the Divine Being. If you do not believe that it communicates this sense, then you will be trapped into many violations. May Allah Almighty protect us, and you from their evils.

I underline this meaning so that it settles in the mind of every believer. Indeed the (*nafs*) (self) in relation to living beings is different when attributed to Allah Almighty. We must consider anything that is attributed to Allah *the Exalted* in light of the Quranic verse 'there is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-shura*: 11) because the (*nafs*) with regards to living beings necessitates the existence of spirit mixed with material. The material is comprised of parts. If you do not consider the meaning of Allah's (*nafs*) in light of the Quranic statement that 'there is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-shura*: 11), then you –we seek refuge in Allah Almighty from this – negate the Oneness of Allah *the Exalted*.

We know that Allah *Glorified is He* has two descriptions which are derived from the same Arabic root: (*Wahid*) and (*Ahad*); those who have not deep understanding think that (*wahid*) and (*ahad*) have the same meaning. We say 'no'; rather, each word has its special sense. When we say: 'Indeed Allah Almighty is (*Wahid,*)*'* it means that there is no second individual of His kind and He does not have an equal, a counterpart, or anything that is similar to Him. When we say: 'Indeed Allah Almighty is (*Ahad*)*,*' it means that He is not comprised of constituent parts whose existence together is necessary for the making the whole. This is because something can be (*Wahid*) but not (*Ahad*). For this reason we clearly stress the difference between (*Wahid*) and

(*Ahad*); so that every believer knows it well. Allah *Glorified is He* is One (*Wahid*) with no similar or partner. He *Glorified is He* is also (*ahad*) which means that He does not have constituent parts that require one another. We clarified before that there is something called (*kulli*) totality and something else called (*kulli*) total. The totality is made up of parts and each of its parts does not have an independent reality. There is not a reality for the totality unless the parts are joined to one another.

An example of this would be a chair which is made of wood, nails and glue. But when they exist separately, we cannot call them a chair. However the thing that is manufactured from all of these things in a fixed shape is indeed a chair. Therefore the totality has parts that come together in order to form this total thing. The word *kulli* refers to a genre or genus who include many members. Accordingly, it may refer to human being.

Based on this Allah *Glorified is He* is not a *kull* (totality), i.e. He does not have parts because He is (*ahad*) and He is not a *kulli* (total) because there is nothing like unto Him. Therefore, we all shall understand that everything that is attributed to Allah Almighty must be understood in the context of that there is nothing like unto Him.

We should not understand the word (*nafs*) in relation to Allah *Glorified is He* as we understand it in relation to human beings because for Allah *the Exalted* it has a very different meaning unlike that of human beings. This is because Allah Almighty is independent and is not in need of anyone else. Allah *Glorified is He* is not comprised of parts, for He has all perfection and majesty in His oneness and uniqueness as well as in all of His Attributes and Actions.

One might ask about the significance of mercy in this context? The answer comes in the verse: ‘If any of you has foolishly done a bad deed, and afterwards repented and mended his ways, Allah is most forgiving and most merciful’. (*al-An‘am:* 54) When Allah Almighty revealed His Legislation, it included texts which prescribes punishments for adulterers, thieves and others who violate the rulings of the sharia. A punishment can only come after something is stated to be prohibited. For example, no one should be punished for committing bribery, slander or any violation to legislation unless it is clearly stated that this very act is a crime. Nothing can be considered a crime unless with clear text. Allah

Glorified is He Who created humankind knows that some of them may incline to disobedience as their very souls incite them to evil. Examples of these punishments include the punishment of theft, adultery, and fornication.

What is the meaning of sending down texts like these? The meaning of sending down texts like these is that Allah *Glorified is He* knows that man may be weak with regards to adherence to some obligations and thus falls into disobedience. Therefore, there must be a punishment for violating His commands. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* considers the very nature of man; as He gives him the right to choice, He lays down reward and punishment. Just as Allah Almighty lays down texts regarding crimes and their punishment, He *Glorified is He* also opens for people the door to repentance so that the one who disobeys Him once does not give up all hope. Doing so, Allah *the Exalted* protects society from the evil of those disobedient people and shows them mercy as long as they show repentance for their disobedience. Furthermore, Allah Almighty may show mercy to some of His creation by protect ting them from falling into disobedience. Allah *Glorified is He* states clearly in the Quran that He opens avenues for people to show repentance for their disobedience.

Allah *the Exalted* guides people to show repentance and pardons them. He shows great mercy toward the repentant believers. One of the aspects of His Mercy is that He *Glorified is He* accepts the repentance showed by those who commit bad deeds out of *jahala,* i.e. unintentional purpose.

A bad deed is something that Allah Almighty has prohibited. But is there anyone who does a bad deed out of (*jahala*)? Some of us think the word *jahala* stated means lack of knowledge. This is not the intended meaning here. The one who lacks knowledge is someone who is not preoccupied with something and thus has no knowledge about it. In Arabic, *jahl* and *jahala* have different meanings. *Jahl* means that someone believes in something of no real essence such as the case when someone believes in a false doctrine. In order to eliminate (*jahl*) in this case, we should convince him of the true doctrine in order that he should reject the false one.

What bring about hardship for mankind are ignorant people because the ignorant person firmly believes in something which has no ground at all. When Muslim scholars contemplated this verse: 'so that if any of you does a bad deed out of *jahala*' (*al-An'am:* 54), they said: '*jahala* is (foolishness) and thoughtlessness when the consequences of an action are not taken into consideration and man does not appreciate the reward he misses out on and the punishment that will overtake him'. Even a believer may commit a bad deed because he does not consider the reward and punishment. In this case, one commits whatever fulfils his immediate desires without carefully examining the consequences to come in the future. When one calls to mind the reward he will get or the punishment he will suffer, he will not commit bad deeds.

Moreover, *jahala* means that one commits a bad deed without contriving it. For example, a man may plan to travel to somewhere to acquire knowledge. Having settled there, a gorgeous woman may come to him and incite him to make love with her and he may fail to resist her incitement and, thus, commits the major sin. Falling in this sin is considered to be out of *jahala* because he did not intend to commit this bad deed and he would never boast about it.

There is a difference between this man and another man who looks up all the addresses for brothels in his new neighbourhood before travelling there. He is actually planning to do evil and commit indecency. He is resolved to commit a bad deed, he boasts about it and does not regret doing it. Allah Almighty does not forgive this one if he insists on doing evil and does not show repentance until he sees death. In this case, repentance has no value at all as Allah *the Exalted* indicates in the Quran.

This is because Allah *Glorified is He* only accepts the repentance of those who commit sin in a state of idiocy and thoughtlessness, who then hasten to show repentance for their sins. On the contrary, as for those who do not regret for doing until they see death, Allah Almighty does not accept their repentance and puts them into severe torment. This verse clearly states that Allah Almighty does not accept the repentance of those who do not turn in repentance immediately after committing sins, but who wait until they are in the agonies of death, nor does He accept the repentance of the disbelievers who die without embracing Islam.

Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states: 'If any of you has foolishly done a bad deed, and afterwards repented and mended his ways, Allah is most forgiving and most merciful.' (*al-An'am:* 54) This verse clearly indicates that repentance must be followed by reform and righteousness. This is because good deeds remove bad deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most-Forgiving and does not punish one for a sin for which one repents from. He is a dispenser of Mercy because He rewards the one who frequently repents from committing bad deeds. Furthermore, out of His great Mercy, Allah *the Exalted* replaces bad deeds with good deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ وَلِتَسْتَبِينَ سَبِيلُ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

In this way We explain the revelations, so that
the way for sinners may be made clear [55]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 55)

When we hear the verse: ‘In this way we explain the revelations...’ (*al-An‘am:* 55) we then know that the verse is going to give detailed elaboration of legal rulings which resembles a previous elaboration. In the previous Quranic verses, Allah *the Exalted* had already elaborated on several matters such as; the veracity of the Oneness of Allah, The Prophethood of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the divine destiny and decree. After all of that, Allah Almighty provides us with the evidence which affirm the realities that the people of falsehood deny. He elaborated for us on matters of creed and the activities of life and the acts of worship that we carry through the commandments of faith. Just as Allah *the Exalted* has elaborated for us the veracity of His Oneness and Prophethood of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the divine destiny and decree. In some modes of recitations, the word (*sabil*) is stated in the nominative case, i.e. the path of those who are lost in sin manifests itself and makes itself distinct and clear. In some other modes of recitations, it is stated in the accusative case, i.e. that you, O Muhammad, will come to know the path that those lost in sin will travel along. The word (*sabil*) is stated in the Quran in the feminine case in some verse and the masculine case in other verses.

With this, Allah Almighty wants to teach us that the Quran is sent down in a clear Arabic tongue that has been received and accepted by the Arab tribes. Some of them have supremacy, like the tribe of the Quraysh because they inhabit Mecca where the *Ka‘ba,* to which all tribes make pilgrimage, is located.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to put an end to this supremacy. This is why the Quran stated some words that the other tribes use. An example of this is the word (*sabil*), which is feminine in the language of the Hijaz. The Quran states it in the masculine form which is the language of the tribe of Tamim. Allah *Glorified is He* did not reveal all words of the Quran according to the style of the Quraysh so that the people of Quraysh should not think that the supremacy they had prior to Islam will continue even after the advent of Islam. The Quran was revealed for all people. That is, indeed Allah will judge every human being according to his certainty of faith. Those who stubbornly oppose will receive fair judgment, and so will those who persist in sin and prefer disobedience to submission. However, believers will receive an entirely different treatment; however, both believers and disbelievers fall within the framework of Divine Justice. Finally, everyone will receive justice corresponding to his position in terms of faith. Sinners will stand opposite of believers; if you identify the clear path of sinners, you will accordingly recognise the path of believers. When the Lord *the Most High* mentions the opposite of something and specifies a certain ruling for it, then the other ruling appropriate to its opposite is left to the understanding of readers and listeners. If the True Lord *the Most High* specifies a curse and rejection as the outcome of sin and crime, then mercy and honour are the distinct outcomes of believers. For example, if you say to a student who assiduously devotes himself to lessons and keeps revising during free time outside the school, 'You are on the path of success.' Whoever hears this statement knows that a student who does not assiduously devote himself to studies and revisions during free time will end up failing and suffering disappointment.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* leaves it to the perception of those hearing His speech to understand the implied meanings. He certainly knows the outcome of all. If the True Lord *the Almighty* says, ‘[We do it] so that the path of those who are lost in sin might be distinct [from that of the righteous].’ (*al-An‘am:* 55) It also indicates the path of honour and mercy awaiting believers. It is well known that the Quran presents the most rhetorical of styles which requires readers to know the semantics of every word and each letter to understand the implications of each situation and circumstance as in the example when Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘you have already had a sign in the two hosts that met in battle: one host fighting in Allah's cause and the other denying Him.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 13)

The Lord *the Most High* leaves it to readers' intelligence to know that the disbelieving hosts fight in Satan's cause, whereas the believing hosts fight in Allah's cause. Allah *the Most High* leaves it for us to understand that faith belongs to those who fight in the cause of Allah, which is opposite to the other disbelieving hosts who fight in the cause of Satan since it mentions that the first host is fighting in the cause of Allah. The same holds true for the verse in question. Allah *the Most High* says, ‘[We do it] so that the path of those who are lost in sin might be distinct [from that of the righteous]’ (*al-An‘am:* 55). Accordingly, we distinguish the path of those who are not lost in sin from that of believers.

قُلۡ إِنِّي نُهِيتُ أَنۡ أَعۡبُدَ ٱلَّذِينَ تَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِۚ قُل لَّآ أَتَّبِعُ
أَهۡوَآءَكُمۡ ۙ قَدۡ ضَلَلۡتُ إِذٗا وَمَآ أَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلۡمُهۡتَدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Say, ‘I am forbidden to worship those you call on other than God.’ Say, ‘I will not follow your vain desires, for if I did, I would stray from the path and cease to be rightly guided’ [56] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 56)

We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not worship any idol before Islam, following the convictions of his natural disposition. Why does then come this prohibition of such aberrant worship? This prohibition comes to clarify the difference between a matter of custom and a standard of worship. We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never worshipped idols due to the sound nature in which Allah *the Almighty* created him. In this verse, the habit is transferred to a commandment of worship: ‘Say [to the deniers of the truth], “Behold, I have been forbidden to worship those [beings] whom you invoke instead of Allah” (*al-An‘am:* 56)

They used to supplicate and worship idols instead of Allah *the Exalted*. If we discuss this issue as one of natural dispositions, we perceive the foolishness of this kind of thinking and acting. Why is this? Simply put, the idols are stones that the People of ignorance sculpted themselves and then worshipped. In other words, they created their gods, which goes against human common sense; a created being normally worships only the Creator. Furthermore, if anyone of them looked at the idols, he would question their essence of, or the truth of their, existence. They are inanimate objects and, as known, such objects are the lowest form of creation. A category is distinguished from another by something that either raises or lowers it. The peak of the creation is man, whom Allah *the Most High* has ennobled with sense, will, movement and thinking. After man come the animals that have senses and movement but no thought. Then come the plants that grow without movement or thought. When the natural inclination to grow is stripped from plants, they become inanimate objects. Therefore, the order of created matters from the highest to the lowest is as follows: man, animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

Each category has its particular characteristics, while each higher category has an additional superior characteristic. The lowest of all is inanimate objects that serve plants, while plants serve animals and man. Finally, animals serve man. Evidently, the highest of all is man, while the lowest is inanimate objects. How can the highest of all, man, worship the lowest of all, idols? Indeed, the judgment of human natural disposition clearly disregards the folly and illogicalness of this kind of thinking.

The nature of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even before his mission, guided him to reject this false notion. Then, the mission turned the habit of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* into an established worship for him and for all his followers. ‘Say [to the deniers of the truth], "Behold, I have been forbidden to worship those [beings] whom you invoke instead of Allah." Say, "I do not follow your errant views" (*al-An‘am:* 56)

The fact that idolaters worshipped idols proved that they followed no guidance, but clearly indicated human submission to *hawa* (delusive desires and aberrant views). To put it simply, guidance is a path leading to a desired objective, whereas *hawa* refers to personal thoughts that seek to fulfil desires and delusions. This is why we find some who want to lead humanity astray have started movements that have nothing to do with religion at all, such as Qadianism, Bahaism and Babism to name a few. These people claim religiosity but waive ethics and morality. Several examples came to the forefront concerning issues recently examined by courts, such as one who claims religiosity, but he kisses women. He does not establish a relationship between people and religious principles; rather, he lets loose their natural inclinations to follow their desires. People with large fortunes and certain degrees of education have followed them and have made themselves believe in a great deception. They think that they have assumed religiosity, while in reality they have followed many desires that go against the principles of religion.

'Say, "I do not follow your errant views – or else I should have gone astray, and should not be among those who have found the right path." (*al-An'am:* 56) In other words, the verse tells the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to inform idolaters that he is not following their desires that lead to misguidance. To put is simply, whoever follows his desires will deviate from the truth and never join the rightly guided.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

قُلۡ إِنِّي عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّي وَكَذَّبۡتُم بِهِۦۚ مَا عِندِي مَا تَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَ
بِهِۦٓۚ إِنِ ٱلۡحُكۡمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِۖ يَقُصُّ ٱلۡحَقَّۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡفَٰصِلِينَ ٥٧

Say, 'I stand on clear proof from my Lord, though you deny it. What you seek to hasten is not within my power. Judgment is for God alone: He tells the truth, and He is the best of judges'[57] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 57)

Allah *Glorified is He* informs His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that his abandonment of idolatry, even when he perceived it by his very sound reasoning and pure nature, has now become an obligation. The fact that Allah *the Most High* has chosen him for His mission qualifies him to receive obvious guidance in the clear Revealed Laws of commandments and prohibitions! Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the best example for mankind to follow. He carried out all actions in accordance with the Divine Law, and believers followed his example. For a contemporary example, the Quran declares alcohol forbidden, so believers abide by the prohibition in submission to the Lord, *the Most High*. Nowadays, doctors from every country prohibit the consumption of alcohol since it harms human organs such as the liver and the brain, along with the nervous and digestive systems. We also have films that show how one glass of alcohol affects man's health. When a non-Muslim sees a film like this, he refrains from alcohol for his own benefit aside from religious devotion. However, as Muslims, we must adhere to this restraint as a matter of faith. Therefore, the Lord, *the Most High* says: ‘who could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellows] unto Allah and does what is just and right, saying, "Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to Allah’ (*Fussilat:* 33).

In this verse, we realise that no one is better in speech than the one who obeys the Divine Laws and does good deeds that affirm his belief in monotheism: ‘Say: ‘Behold, I take my stand on a clear evidence from my Lord’ (*al-An‘am:* 57). Without clear evidence from Allah, we cannot identify the way. Only through clear Divine Evidence do we know that He is the Only God Who lays down laws: commands and prohibitions. In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* uses the word *rabbi* (my Lord) for us to know and realise that He is the Creator Who sustains us all. Since He is the Creator and Sustainer, we must obey His Laws. Allah has sent down commandments since He is the Only True Lord worthy of worship along with being the Creator and Sustainer, so we comply with His Laws. However, what about deniers? ‘…[So] it is to Him that you are giving the lie! Not in my power is that which [in your ignorance] you so hastily demand. Judgment rests with none but Allah. He shall declare the truth, since it is He who is the best judge between truth and falsehood’ (*al-An‘am:* 57).

The deniers of Allah take others besides Him as partners, along with not conforming to His Laws. Some went to extremes in disbelief and said, as Allah *the Most High* relates their claim: ‘O Allah! If this be indeed the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the skies or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!’ (*al-Anfal:* 32) When we discuss their claims, we find their vocative formula, ‘O, Allah!’ which is an acknowledgement of Allah to Whom they turn. Why do they turn away from His Law and Worship after acknowledgment? They do it out of arrogance and pride: ‘If this be indeed the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!’) (*al-Anfal:* 32) Was it not more appropriate for them to contemplate the truth and say, 'If this be the truth from you, guide us to it?'

It should be noted that they did not refer the truth to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, 'O, Allah! If this be the truth from Muhammad', rather, what was said was the following: 'O, Allah! If this be the truth from you.' They opposed Allah's command and anticipated punishment, being the worst example of arrogance and stubborn disbelief. In response, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them: '[so] it is to Him that you are giving the lie! Not in my power is that which [in your ignorance] you so hastily demand.' (*al-An'am:* 57) The word *isti'jal* (hastily demanded) refers to matters that are urgently and quickly requested. It is derived from *Al-'ajalah* (haste) which signifies actions done too quickly to attain a certain objective before its due time. As long as they seek for punishment to be hastened, then it will come to them, but it will come at the time that Allah *the Exalted* decides. Simply, everything in the universe only occurs when Allah so wills: 'Not in my power is that which [in your ignorance] you so hastily demand. Judgment rests with none but Allah. He shall declare the truth, since it is He who is the best judge between truth and falsehood' (*al-An'am:* 57).

Indeed, the judgment rests with none except Allah Who can, as He wills, either send down punishment against them in this world as certain people from the past suffered or delay it for a specific time or for the Hereafter, and none can change His Will. It is a sign of Divine Wisdom that He keeps those who oppose the way of faith in order to be indicative of the truthfulness of faith. We must understand that the evil taking place in the universe is not outside or against Allah's Will. The Lord *the Most High* created mankind, gave them freedom of choice and allowed them to make their own choices, whether they are good or evil. Therefore, nothing happens in the universe against Divine Will. He *the Almighty* is the Creator of human freedom. If He so willed, no one would do any evil in the universe. O believer, contemplating the Divine Philosophy of supporting truth and certainty reveals that the continuance of evil and disbelief supports the certitude of faith, but how? In response, presume that we live in a world devoid of evils, there would be no victims. If there are no victims, there would be no encouragement to do goodness. This is why you find that the spirit of faith becomes stronger when Islam is disturbed by enemies for it wakes up the human souls. If the harmful effects of evils do not exist, mankind would not mobilise for goodness.

Likewise, disbelief may be a way to certain faith when mankind see the evil tyranny and corruption of disbelievers in the earth. When this happens, people become armed with certainty and fortified with faith to win protection from many evils. In conclusion, the existence of evil and disbelief turns to be a means to certain faith: ‘Judgment rests with none but Allah. He shall declare the truth, since it is He Who is the best judge between truth and falsehood’ (*al-An‘am:* 57).

Yes, the judgment rests with none but Allah; He *the Exalted* judges all situations fairly and impartially, for He is All-Sufficient and free from needing anyone or anything. He created the universe, so He is independent of it. He has all Attributes of Perfection, and the creation adds nothing to Him. He only created the universe for the benefit of the creation. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* informs us:

قُل لَّوْ أَنَّ عِندِى مَا تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ بِهِۦ لَقُضِىَ ٱلْأَمْرُ
بَيْنِى وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

Say, ‘If what you seek to hasten were within my power, the matter would be settled between you and me, but God knows best who does wrong’ [58] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 58)

This is a message from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to the whole creation that the events of the universe occur only in conjunction with the Divine Will of the Creator at fixed times that only He knows. O, Prophet, tell them that if it was within my power and capacity, then the punishment that you so hastily demand would come and destroy you swiftly out of my anger for my Lord and wrath upon you, as you deny Him. However, the matter is not for me to decide; it only belongs to Allah, the Wise Who knows what oppressors deserve. In another context, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If We defer their suffering until a time-limit set [by Us], they are sure to say, "What is preventing it [from coming now]?" Oh, verily, on the Day when it befalls them there will be nothing to avert it from them; and they shall be overwhelmed by the very thing which they were wont to deride’ (*Hud:* 8). It is Divine Wisdom that decreed to delay punishment until a certain time as

Divinely determined. In turn, this wisdom allowed disbelievers to daringly violate Divine Laws and grow worse and worse in their disbelief to the point of saying, 'What is withholding the punishment from us?' Indeed, they do it as a way of mockery and do not know that punishment will inevitably come when they will have no escape from it. Allah is truthful in both His promises and His threats. Punishment will come to them because of their mockery, and there will be no refuge or way out for them.

In another context, the Lord *the Exalted* says: 'They challenge you to hasten the punishment. Indeed, had not a term been set [for it by Allah], that punishment will most certainly come upon them of a sudden, and they will be taken unawares! They challenge you to hasten the punishment. Hell will encompass all those who deny the truth on the Day when punishment overwhelms them from above and from below their very feet, and they will be told, 'Now taste the punishment for what you used to do.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 53-55)

In this verse, we see disbelievers, challenging Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring them punishment, but it only occurs following Divine Will, and it will inevitably take them by surprise. It will inundate them from above and from below when they will hear the angel in charge of punishing them saying: 'Taste the punishment that you denied and it is the reward of your actions.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَعِندَهُۥ مَفَاتِحُ ٱلْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَآ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِى ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ ۚ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِن
وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِى ظُلُمَٰتِ ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِى كِتَٰبٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٥٩﴾

He has the keys to the unseen: no one knows them but Him. He knows all that is in the land and sea. No leaf falls without His knowledge, nor is there a single grain in the darkness of the earth, or anything, fresh or withered, that is not written in a clear Record [59] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 59)

The *mafatih* is the plural of either *miftah* or *maftah.* The former refers to the instrument used for unlocking, i.e. the key. The latter refers to a safe to be unlocked. According to the meaning of the former, it means that Allah *the Almighty* has the keys to the unseen, whereas the latter implies that Allah has the safe of the unseen. Both meanings are timeless—unlimited by time, and the safe refers to a repository for storing valuables for their due times; each safe has a lock and key. The True Lord *the Most High* says about Qarun (Korah): 'Behold, Korah was one of the people of Musa (Moses), but he oppressed them. We had given him such treasures that even their keys would have weighed down a whole company of strong men. His people said to him, "Do not gloat, for Allah does not like people who gloat."' (*al-Qasas:* 76)

Evidently, only treasures are hoarded and kept in locked safes. Allah *the Most High* has the keys of the unseen. The unseen refers to everything that is hidden from you. It has two types: first, a matter hidden from you but known to someone else, and this is not absolutely, but relatively unseen. For example, when a pickpocket steals your wallet while you are on the street, and you do not know where your money is, it is the thief who knows exactly where your money is. This is a relative form of the unseen since it unknown to some and known to others. However, there is the special unseen that you and others do not know, for it has certain physical means, which if followed, man will win the knowledge of this unseen. Scientific discoveries that bring out their secrets when scientists take the means that Allah has placed in the universe are types of relative unseen. There is also the absolute unseen which no one knows but Allah, such as the exact time of the Last Day and other eschatological issues known only to Allah. This is why we say that the only Knower of the Unseen is Allah Who has the keys of the unseen. This unseen occurs beyond human senses and has no physical means to discover.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He has the keys to the unseen. No one knows them but Him. He knows all that is in the land and sea. No leaf falls but He knows it, nor is there a single grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything, living or dead, but it is written in a clear Record.' (*al-An'am:* 59) It is out of His kindness towards His creation that He explains to them matters falling outside their perception through other perceptible matters. There is the visible world that is heard, seen, tasted, or touched, and there is the world of the unseen. Therefore, Allah chooses some servants to receive gifts from His Graces and Bounties to explain these matters. For example, the righteous slave who was the travelling companion of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: ‘And I did not do [any of] this of my own accord. This is the real meaning of all [those events] that You were unable to bear with patience.’ (*al-Kahf:* 82)

A gift like this proves that the one who receives it, has a relationship with his Lord. The True Lord *the Most High* does not give these gifts so that they become a part of a person's nature or his job, whereby we refer to him in every matter to inform us of what to do. This is not the case. They are simply pure gifts that He *the Exalted* grants; He distributes or withholds them. He has the keys of the unseen, and He reveals some to us through the visible world.

‘He knows all that is in the land and sea’ (*al-An‘am:* 59). Allah *the Almighty* mentions land before sea, for land with all of its contents of inanimate objects, plants, trees, animals, mankind, towns, and roads are perceived by all human beings. Conversely, some countries are landlocked. This is why Allah *the Most High* mentions land before mentioning the sea, which is possible to see, but the sea world is more hidden than that of land. The sea world takes up a large part of the earth's surface, and every day we discover something new in it. After that, Allah *the Exalted* takes us back to the sea again and says: ‘No leaf falls but He knows it...’ (*al-An‘am:* 59).

Allah *the Most High* explains to us clearly His Omniscience since He knows everything including the things connected to a tree's leaf after it carried out its tasks of photosynthesis, nourishing the tree and ripening the fruits before it falls to the earth. Falling, as we know, is when something material drops. Later, scientists explained that it was the earth's gravitational pull. When a leaf falls from a tree, it has a very lightweight. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who does what He wills in the atmosphere surrounding the area in which it falls as well as the movement of the wind that puts it into motion. Why does the Lord mention the matter of a leaf? This example helps us know that when He concludes the previous verse saying: ‘But Allah knows best as to who is doing wrong’ (*al-An‘am:* 58), it implies that He knows the times in which every leaf moves. It is a sign of His Perfect and All-Encompassing Knowledge.

Clearly, these matters do not result in reward or punishment, so what about the matters that do result in reward and punishment? He certainly knows and judges them: ‘No leaf falls but He knows it, nor is there a single grain in the darkness of the earth’ (*al-An‘am:* 59). He *the Most High* also knows the seed that is hidden in the depths of the earth and its circumstances. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘nor anything living or dead, but it is written in a clear record’ (*al-An‘am:* 59) which means that He, indeed, knows the affair of every being in this world since every being in the life of this world is either living or dead. He not only knows that but also has everything written down and recorded. Angels are in charge of this process. When angels find that the movement of the universe continues precisely and exactly in accordance with the written Book, they keep glorifying Allah day and night: ‘For unto Him belong all [beings] that are in the heavens and on earth, and those that are with Him are never too proud to worship Him and never grow weary [thereof]. They extol His limitless Glory by night and by day, never flagging [therein].’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 19-20) The dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah, and He is the only one worthy of worship. Angels never become arrogant. They tirelessly worship Him and humbly submit to His Will. O slave, you are forced in some situations and free in others, whereas He knows what choices you will make at all times.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says,

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى يَتَوَفَّىٰكُم بِٱلَّيۡلِ وَيَعۡلَمُ مَا جَرَحۡتُم بِٱلنَّهَارِ ثُمَّ يَبۡعَثُكُمۡ فِيهِ
لِيُقۡضَىٰٓ أَجَلٞ مُّسَمّٗىۖ ثُمَّ إِلَيۡهِ مَرۡجِعُكُمۡ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ٦٠

It is He who calls your souls back by night, knowing what you have done by day, then raises you up again in the daytime until your fixed term is fulfilled. It is to Him that you will return in the end, and He will tell you what you have done [60]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 60)

We all know that sleep is not an optional process. Sometimes we see someone who suffers distress and fails to sleep. Sleep is a forced process that Allah creates in man to stop human activity after exhausting energy exerted by movement. Sleep is a type of self-inhibition. Why has Allah *the Exalted* made sleep similar to death? Some people understand that death signifies the spirit’s departure from the human body. Seemingly, the Lord tells us: 'Beware of thinking that the presence of a soul in a body gives life, motion and freedom of movement. No, it is I Who preserves the soul in the body, and I have not given man any choice concerning these actions.' Therefore, do not become infatuated by the soul; there are apparatuses that you have no control over, such as heartbeats, breathing and other physical activities of human bodies. Allah gave us the example of the People of the Cave whom He caused to sleep for three hundred and nine years: '… and [some people assert], "they remained in their cave three hundred years" and some have added nine [to that number].' (*al-Kahf:* 25)

To sum up, sleep is a Divine Blessing that Allah places in creation itself. For this reason, if you want to sleep, it is not within your capability; rather, it is controlled by Allah's Will. It is said that sleep is a guest: if you request it, it troubles you, i.e. it makes you tired, but if it requests you, it brings you ease. Sleep comes to the tired person even on pebbles, while it may not visit a person lying on a bed of silk. Allah *the Most High* says: 'And among His wonders is your sleep, at night or in daytime, as well as your [ability to go about in] quest of some of His bounties. In this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who [are willing to] listen!' (*ar-Rum:* 32) Sleep is a perfect sign itself. It does not only come at night, but also during daytime. Some jobs must be done at night. Night workers must sleep during the daytime. Allah causes us to be like the dead at night, and He knows what work we have done during the daytime. Then, He allows us to live until an appointed time only known to Him. He will resurrect us on the Day of Resurrection to show us the outcome of our deeds. Allah refers to sleep as death and calls waking up 'resurrection'. Simply put, people have no choice regarding their movements in both death and sleep.

When he declared his mission openly after three years of calling to faith secretly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Indeed I am warning you of a severe imminent punishment. You will certainly die just as you sleep, and you will be resurrected just as you wake up. For the good deeds, you will be rewarded with good and for evil there is punishment. Eventually, it is either everlasting Paradise or everlasting Hellfire.' Ibn 'Abbas, Allah *be pleased with him* and his father, said: 'The Prophet (*peace and blessings be upon him*) climbed Mount Safa one day and called out to the Meccans in a loud voice, "O, Community of Quraysh, come and gather here, I have important news for you!" The tribal fellows of Quraysh gathered around him and said, "What happened?" He responded, "If I were to tell you there were enemy horsemen on the other side of this mount who were about to attack you in the morning or towards the evening, would you believe me?" They said, "Yes, indeed." He said, "Then, I warn you against a severe punishment ahead." Abu Lahab said, "Woe to you! Is this why you gathered us?" Allah then revealed: "Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab" (*al-Masad:* 1)."(1)

During sleep, human consciousness is lost, or human conscious soul leaves the body by the Will of Allah. Therefore, man sleeps, but when Allah takes the soul and keeps it, death follows. This is why we must understand that sleep and waking up have their laws and so does death. Every law has its principles. Thus, the law of being awake is not like the law of sleep, and that of sleep is not like that of death.

Furthermore, the law of resurrection is not like the law of death. Thus, awakening, sleep, death, and resurrection exist independently. It would be wrong to take the law of one state and apply it to another state. Allah gives us a clear example regarding ourselves; when someone is awake, the spirit has control over human voluntary movement. When one sleeps, their voluntary movement is incapacitated, but the vital activity continues. When one sleeps, he may see dreams and visions in which he sees someone dressed in certain colourful clothes, so how can he perceive these colours while his eyes are closed? Simply, there are means of perception besides eyes.

Likewise, we feel the passage of time while awake, but during sleep one may see a dream in seven seconds and talks about it half an hour. Two people may share the same bed yet one meets friends and beloved ones, eating, drinking, and rejoicing, while the other meets enemies and experiences suffering and fight. Thus, the time is different, and so is the company. Evidently, the law of sleep differs from the law of wakefulness, and the law of death differs from the law of life: 'He it is Who causes you to be [like] dead at night, and knows what you work in daytime; and He brings you back to life each day in order that a term set [by Him] be fulfilled. In the end, unto Him you must return. Then, He will make you understand all that you were doing [in life].' (*al-An'am:* 60) In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us of all human states: wakefulness and work, sleep and death, and resurrection. Each state has its laws. We only know the laws of wakefulness and sleep since we consciously experience them. For the law of death, we compare it to them, and accordingly, we also believe in the law of resurrection. Allah *Glorified is He* then says,

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih; At-Tirmidhi, Sunan. Book: At-Tafsir; Al-Bayhaqi, Ad-Dala'il; Ahmad, Musnad; At-Tabari*

وَهُوَ ٱلْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِۦ ۖ وَيُرْسِلُ عَلَيْكُمْ حَفَظَةً حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَ
أَحَدَكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ تَوَفَّتْهُ رُسُلُنَا وَهُمْ لَا يُفَرِّطُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

He is the Supreme Master over His subjects. He sends out recorders to watch over you until, when death overtakes any of you, those sent by Us take his soul – they never fail in their duty[61] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 61)

Al-Qahir (one who is supreme) refers to the One Who dominates through His tremendous supreme power. One may say, 'As long as the True Lord. *The Most High* is Al-*Qahir*, then how can the disbeliever disbelieve or the sinner sin?' In reply, they do so since Allah *the Exalted* has given them free will to believe or disbelieve and to obey or disobey. However, as a sign of His Supreme Power, Allah *the Almighty* decrees various inevitable events and situations to take place beyond everyone's abilities. Not one who rebels against Allah dares to save himself from sickness or death. Rebels and disbelievers choose since Allah has endowed man with free will, but He is the One Who decides birth and death, and man has no say regarding them. Likewise, He *the Almighty* has the absolute control over the matters of wealth and poverty, and deniers cannot escape afflictions even though they deny the Divine Way. To put it simply, disobedience and rebellion fall within the capabilities created by Allah in man: 'And He is Supreme over His servants. And He sends forth heavenly forces to watch over you until, when death approaches any of you, Our messengers cause him to die, and they do not overlook [anyone].' (*al-An'am:* 61)

When Allah *the Exalted* talks about Himself, He may use the first person pronoun, such as: ‘Verily, I – I alone – am Allah.’ (*Ta Ha:* 14) He also uses the majestic plural: ‘Indeed it is We Who has sent down the Reminder [the Quran], and indeed it is We Who will preserve it.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9) Allah also talks about His Essence using the third person pronoun, such as in the verse in question: ‘And He is Supreme over His servants’ (*al-An‘am:* 61). The first person pronoun is evident as the speaker says, I, He addresses others by saying, 'You'. However, the third person pronoun designates a person other than the speaker. When the Lord *the Most High* uses the third person pronoun, He wants to make it clear to us that He is absolutely present and witnessing everything. When He says 'He', it only refers to His Exalted Essence. This is why He says: ‘Say: "He is Allah, the One God"’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). He *the Exalted* says 'He' before mentioning the reference, which is 'Allah' even though it is normal for the reference to come first. However, He says: ‘Say: "He is Allah, the One God."’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1)

If this pronoun is used, it refers to Himself. When He speaks in the first person pronoun, we see Him speaking about His Essence in the singular form: ‘Verily, I – I alone – am Allah.’ (*Ta Ha:* 14) He also says: ‘Indeed it is We Who have sent down the Reminder [the Quran], and indeed it is We Who will preserve it.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9). Why are there differences? When He talks about His actions, we find that each action requires all His Attributes of Perfection; it requires Knowledge for speech, Power for creation and Wisdom and several other necessary attributes to materialise perfectly. When He says, ‘Indeed, it is We Who have sent down the Reminder [the Quran], and indeed it is We Who will preserve it’ (*al-Hijr:* 9), the act of ‘sending down’ requires various attributes. Thus, the plural *majestatis* must be used; all Attributes of Perfection are manifested in sending down. However, if He talks about His Essence in the context of Monotheism, He never uses the plural pronoun since He wants to exclude all traces of plurality from His Essence. He is the One Who has no partner. When He talks about His Essence, He says: ‘Verily, I – I alone – am Allah.’ (*Ta Ha:* 14)

When He talks about the reminder, He says: ‘Indeed it is we who have sent down the Reminder [the Quran], and indeed it is We Who will preserve it.' (*al-Hijr:* 9). Thus, in the context of exaltation and sending down, which entails a number of His Attributes, He uses the plural pronoun; however, when presenting the Oneness of God to exclude all notions of polytheism, He uses the singular pronoun. In this verse, He *the Exalted* says: 'And He is Supreme over His servants...' (*al-An'am:* 61). Upon hearing the word *Al-Qahir,* it implies the controller and those who subject to control, or *Al-Maqhur*. Since there are two realms of *Al-Qahir* and *Al-Maqhur,* we have two measures and two domains. Truly, Allah is *Al-Qahir,* but what are the manifestations of this attribute? Actually, everything in the universe is held under God's Omnipotence and Power. He creates and ends creation, gives wealth and poverty and grants health and afflicts sickness.

Everything in the existence is under His Control, even the soul that He makes is a source of human perception and power. He is supreme over it. If a man kills another by hitting a vital human organ, life comes to an end, and the remaining parts of body fails, and then the soul is drawn out. Clearly, it is the soul that controls the body. However, whoever destroys the structure within which the soul resides, forces it to leave the body. Sometimes, He destroys the body by taking its soul without affecting the body with any affliction or malady, and then it turns into decayed bones. To sum up, He holds irresistible Power over souls and bodies, and nothing in existence can confront or resist His Power. 'And He is Supreme over His servants...' (*al-An'am:* 61).

Al-Qahir also signifies the One Who governs by means of his comprehensive power over others, or *Al-Maqhur*. Look at any set of opposites in life, and you find that it is subjected to the attribute of *Qahr*, or the Divine Irresistible Power.

'And He is Supreme over His servants' (*al-An'am:* 61). The word *fawqa* (over), necessitates a place but one with limits. Since having supremacy over others requires power; does it mean that the fully Capable must be in a high place? The answer is 'certainly, He must not'. For example, someone who places a bomb under a high building destroys it from beneath; it requires no high place. Thus, *fawqa* implies dominance and mastery. When we talk about the True Lord, bear in mind the rule that 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11) for His Essence is not like any other essence, and His

Attributes are not like any other attributes. The same holds true for His actions. His actions become true, or into being, following His saying ‘Be!’ So, the Supreme Power in His statement: ‘And He is Supreme over His servants...’ (*al-An‘am:* 61) refers to Divine Dominance. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then says, ‘Our Lord descends to the lowest sky every night in the last ten days of *Ramadan.*’ In which night does He descend? Is it the night befitting your place or the place of someone else in the other side of the world? Sunsets and sunrises successively follow one another around the different parts of the world, and every minute night begins and daybreak starts. This is how we know that Allah is with you and, meanwhile, with all others as well. His hand is stretched out to you and to others as well: ‘Nay, but wide are His hands stretched out’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 64).

When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Indeed, Allah stretches His hand out at night to receive repentance for the evil actions of the day, and He stretches His hand out in the day to receive repentance for the evil actions of the night until the sun rises from the place it sets,’(1) do not understand to mean that it refers to a specific night or day. Simply put it as: Divine Forgiveness is always there during all times and at all places, and there is nothing like unto Him. ‘And He is Supreme over His servants...’ (*al-An‘am:* 61).

In this verse, the word '*Ibadihi* means His slaves (singular '*abd*, or a servant/slave). The Arabic plural is either '*abeed or 'ibad* (slaves/servants). The '*ibad* are those over whom Allah is supreme, or in other words, they have no choice, and they submit to His ruling for which they do not have a choice. It is plainly clear that man is forced in some matters and has no say in them, e.g. breathing and heartbeats. Likewise, man has no say regarding the work of the stomach, intestines, ureters, kidneys, etc. In this aspect, believers and disbelievers are alike. It is Allah's Mercy that willed these matters to work beyond our powers and choices. If we did have a say in them, we would have to ask, 'How do we regulate the process of breathing while we sleep?'

It is Divine Mercy that He denies us any choice in some matters that affect our lives. Who can say to his stomach, 'Have you not digested the food yet?' Who can command a kidney to function? In these matters, man submits to Allah and has no choice. As for areas where man does have a choice, the scope of legal responsibility exists. Therefore, the Divine Law does not impose or prohibit anything unless man is able to undertake it. So, only matters that fall within human freedom and ability constitute the area of legal responsibility.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim from Abu Musa in (At-Tawba)... It is also narrated by An-Nasa'i in At-Tafsir.*

Whoever obeys the Lord in the area of legal responsibility submits to the law and admits himself to the category of *'Ibad*, or those who renounce their choices and wholeheartedly submit to Divine Laws. They say, 'O, Lord! We will not do except what Your Law wants us to do.' All of them carry out Allah's Ruling in that which they have a choice but not to carry out. Unlike the *'Ibad*, the *'Abid* rebel against legal responsibility. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* guides us: 'Say: 'O, you servants of mine who have transgressed against your own selves! Despair not of Allah's Mercy. Behold, Allah forgives all sins.' (*az-Zumar:* 53). Allah clarifies the characteristics of His *'Ibad* saying: 'For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace' (*al-Furqan:* 63). These *'Ibad* renounce their choices and accept the Divine Commands in obedience to Allah. In matters in which they have no choice, they are like the rest of the living. The entire creation are *ʿAbid* in areas which they have no choice, but only believers are *'Ibad* of Allah, as well.

However, there is a Quranic verse that stirs up debates over this meaning. The Lord talks about the events of the Hereafter saying: 'Was it you who led these creation (*'Ibadi*) astray.' (*al-Furqan:* 17) In this verse, the word *'Ibad* refers to those who have gone astray because the reason for this is that in the Hereafter everyone and everything is His *'Ibad*. No one has any choice there, but in this world, it is only believers who are the *'Ibad,* whereas disbelievers are *ʿAbeed* since they disobey when they possess the choice.

'And He is Supreme over His servants. And He sends forth heavenly forces to watch over you' (*al-An'am:* 61). In addition to dominating the world, Allah sends heavenly forces. If being supreme (*Qahr*) means dominance, mastery, control, and power, then He is All-Dominant over His slaves, and He also sends heavenly forces to watch over them. He also says: 'He has hosts of helpers – both such as can be perceived by him and such as are hidden from him – that could preserve him...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). This is how Allah is supreme over us, and it is for our benefit. When a weak person is under the power of a tyrant, he may say, 'Allah is the All-Dominant, the Sublime.' There is a reminder in this for the one who possesses relative power that there is the All-Dominant Lord over all living beings. For this reason, a strong person retrains their dominance and refrains from sins to avoid punishment.

It is a manifestation of Divine Mercy that 'He sends forth *hafazhah* to watch over you' (*al-An'am:* 61). *Hafazhah* (heavenly forces/keepers) may also record the speech of people: 'not even a word can he utter but there is a watcher with him, ever-present' (*Qaf:* 18). These angels who watch and are always present are also *Hafazhah*. They are the noble scribes who observe and keep count of and record human deeds.

Whenever science advances, it gives us better understandings of the hidden meanings even if the Quran and Sunnah are the only reliable evidence for eschatological issues. Therefore, we believe that angels record our deeds as the Lord said in submission to the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception' (*al-Baqara:* 3). To put it simply, if faith relies only on visible things, there would be no difference between people? Rather, faith, in its perfect sense, is the belief in the unseen. When Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Not even a word can he utter but there is a watcher with him, ever-present' (*Qaf:* 18), He informs us about angels that write down good deeds and bad deeds. When we look at human beings, we find them different; some exceed others in attributes and capabilities. As time progresses, man knows more of the Divine secrets, and then achieves better spiritual progress.

In the past, huge recording devices first appeared, and advancements followed, along with their size being reduced. As this industrial process progressed, the machine became smaller insomuch that they made recording devices that were the sizes of watches, ring stones and even small grains, which may be scattered in any place for the purpose of espionage by recording the secrets of gatherings and meetings. Whenever the power of a manufacturer develops, it grows more delicate and finer. Now compare these manufactured devices to the creative powers of Allah? If a human being can produce an invisible recording device, even though the human power, skills and wisdom are limited, and when the Lord says: 'Indeed there are angels that you will never see but they calculate your deeds', accept and believe in it. He *the Most High* also says: 'noble, recording [angels]' (*al-Infitar:* 11). In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And He sends forth heavenly forces to watch over you until, when death approaches any of you' (*al-An'am:* 61). In their definition of death, the scholars said, 'Death is the cessation of all life processes. Your lifetime depends on the time you spend before death reaches you. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'until, when death approaches any of you' (*al-An'am:* 61). He simply says that death will approach all of us without specifying its time, place, cause, or means. This kind of vagueness clearly implies a wonderful lesson—we must be ready to meet death at any given time, place and possible mean.

It is no surprise that it could happen at any age. Allah *the Exalted* keeps its time unknown for greater benefits. Now, if He *the Most High* were to inform us of its determined time, place, year, or cause, man will wait for it. However, the True Lord decreed it to be obscure to keep humans on guard for it as a most profound admonition. It draws humans' attention and prompts them to anticipate death at every moment and at every place, expecting by any cause. In this way, death stands clearly in front of all human beings. This is why we are scared of committing any sin lest our soul be taken while we are engaged in it. You do not like to meet Allah in a state of disobedience. When the call to prayer for *Zhuhr*, or noontime prayer, is called and you do not perform it, you may say, 'Its time is extended', and you may find someone who will tell you, 'Guarantee me that you will be alive when the time for *Zhuhr* ends.'

'Abdullah Ibn Masud Allah *be pleased with him* asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Which action is best?' He said, 'Praying on time.' 'Abdullah Ibn Masud Allah *be pleased with him* asked, 'Then what?' The Prophet said, 'Gratitude and benevolence to one's parents.' He asked, 'then what?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Striving in battle (*jihad*) for the sake of Allah.'(1) You certainly cannot guarantee that you will live until the end of a given prayer time. Then, believe the fact that obscurities are most profound in effects and clarification. Some people may ask, 'And why has Allah not made this clear to us?' I always say that, indeed, Allah has clarified what He has made obscure since keeping a thing hidden to expect it all times is more profound than specifying its time, place or cause. Have we not seen someone going to a doctor for treatment, but what happened is that death occurred and the doctor proved the cause of his death? We have definitely seen that. This person sought help from the means, but this very means does not prevent Allah from implementing His Decree. Shawqi *Allah's Mercy be upon him* said:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Like a lion, death is inevitably lethal,
Whether you face it early or at old age
When it overlooks you, then every medicine is beneficial
But when vigilant medicine can but help it.

Doctors may make a mistake with an injection bringing life to an end. We usually say that a doctor's mistake is a Divine Decree coming into effect. An affirmation of this fact, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Until, when death approaches any of you, our messengers cause him to die...' (*al-An'am:* 61). The Quranic word *tawaffahu* (cause to die) takes three forms:

- The first form is *yatawaffa* (Allah causes you to die). It occurs in Allah's statement: 'It is Allah [alone that has this power – He] who causes all human beings to die at the time of their [bodily] death' (*az-Zumar:* 42).
- The second is *yatawaffakum* (the angel of death causes you to die). Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall cause you to die' (*as-Sajda:* 11).
- The third form is *tawaffathu* (they caused him to die). Allah *the Most High* also says: '...Our messengers cause him/her to die...' (*al-An'am:* 61).

Sometimes Allah directly causes death to occur, while at other times, the angel of death or His messengers are in charge of this mission. The messengers of death obey the command of the angel of death. Finally, no one causes death without permission from Allah. Taking souls and holding them is a Divine Command. The angel of death is just a means, and his messengers are executors. ‘Our messengers cause him to die: and they do not overlook [anyone]’ (*al-An‘am:* 61).

However, how can overlooking appear? Two things are put forth in this verse: heavenly forces that watch over and observe human behaviour and deeds. They also take the soul. These angels do not overlook anything in their missions. When we look at the root letters *‘f - r - t’,* we find that they have two forms: *farrata* and *afrata*. It is amazing that the same letters convey two opposite meanings. For *farrata,* it means ‘to pay little or no attention’, while *afrata* is ‘to do something excessively beyond the moderate and acceptable limits’.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse of the Quran: ‘... and when [the end of] their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 34) He *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

ثُمَّ رُدُّوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ مَوْلَىٰهُمُ ٱلْحَقِّ ۚ أَلَا لَهُ ٱلْحُكْمُ وَهُوَ أَسْرَعُ ٱلْحَٰسِبِينَ ﴿٦٢﴾

Then they will all be returned to God, their true Lord. The Judgment truly belongs to Him, and He is the swiftest of reckoners [62] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 62)

Here is a very important point, which is that the Arabic phrase *Ruddu* (they will all be returned) clearly indicates that people had previously met Him, which is why they will all be then returned to Him, but how could this happen? The answer to this question is quite clear in the fact that He *Glorified is He* is the One Who created people in the very beginning out of nothing, and then they will all be returned to Him to be held accountable for their deeds. This point is proved by another verse of the Quran in which He *the Almighty* says: ‘From it we created you and into it We shall send you back…’ (*Ta Ha:* 55).

The Arabic word *Mawla* is translated in this verse as 'the True Lord' since it means that there is someone who is close to you, and thus he might help and support you during times of distress. Therefore, we find that the word *Mawla* has been used to give the meanings of ‘someone who is close to you’, ‘someone who supports you at hard times’ or ‘someone to whom you turn at times of hardships'. It is important here to understand that you might have a *Mawla* from among human beings, yet he might not give you support for some reason or another. In addition, you might be afflicted with a disaster, which is beyond his capacity, and so he is unable to help you. In the same respect, you might have a *Mawla* whom you implore and ask for help, yet he rejects to help you since he might have a strong relationship with your enemy, a relationship that might even be stronger than yours with him, and thus he supports your enemy instead of you, although he might deceive you by telling that he has your back.

We may experience all of the aforementioned situations in this worldly life, but in the Hereafter there is only One True *Mawla* (Lord), i.e. Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, we should know that there is a further possible explanation for the word *Mawla* which is ‘the master who frees his slave'. If we yet understand this particular part of the verse under discussion in the light of this meaning, we will find that saving us from the fire clearly indicates the truest meaning of Lordship. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* is the True Lord Whose Power cannot be challenged or defeated; He *Glorified is He* unlike His creation, does not change.

At this point, we should take into account that when Allah asks you to make use of your intellect, He does so because He wants you to benefit. In this regard, we find that if you rely on an immortal human being to give you help and support, he might not do so for you for some reason or another, which is why He *Glorified is He* the Ever-Living, asks you to depend only upon Him since He will never leave you alone.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Then they will all be returned to Allah, their true Lord. The Judgment truly belongs to Him …’ (*al-An‘am:* 62). This raises a good question, which is ‘Why does He *the Almighty* use the word "judgment" in this context?' It is due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* might entrust some human beings in this worldly life with making judgments in particular fields, which is why we find some people issuing rules or giving verdicts, etc. Yet, the matter is totally different in the Hereafter, for there will be none to judge except Allah *Glorified is He* a point which is quite clear in the Quran where Allah says: 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16)

In other words, you, in this worldly life, might have the ability to provide your children with sustenance. Also, you might have the ability to issue an order for the promotion of your employee to a higher rank. In the same respect, you might have the ability to sew clothes for others. This is to say that we, in this worldly life, have the ability to affect one another in one way or another. However, this matter is totally different in the Hereafter when Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who has absolute, sole sovereignty.

The Arabic particle *ala* may be translated as 'oh'; it is used to draw the attention of the listener to an important thing mentioned after it, but what is the wisdom of using such a particle in this context? It is because the topic mentioned after it is of great importance. We know for certain that speech goes to and fro between a speaker and a listener. As for the speaker, he transfers his ideas, thoughts and desires to the listener. Yet, before he utters a word, he carefully reflects on the matter and thus decides to say it or not. That is to say that the speaker, before saying what he wants, has to reflect and examine the main idea of the topic he wishes to covey to others. The listener, on the other hand, does not know about what the speaker is going to talk. This is why when one wants to convey a very important topic; he tries his best to attract the full attention of a speaker, to ensure that he misses nothing of his speech. In doing so, one may use the particle *ala.* It is thus clear that this particular particle is used in this context to attract the attention of people to what Allah is going to say after that.

Judgment is to decide on two matters, yet we should take into account the undeniable fact that it must be made fairly and justly. Unfortunately, we may find that some judges, driven by their whims, pass unfair judgments. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. We use two-container scales to determine the exact weight of a particular item. In doing so, the two containers of the scales must be equal to each other. In this case, we are able to establish equivalence. This is known as 'achieving balance,' which means we take a neutral position.

In the same respect, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'The judgment truly belongs to Him …' (*al-An'am:* 62) indicates plainly that Allah *the Almighty* will judge all people starting with Adam *peace be upon him* to the last human being born. Therefore, we should stress the fact that even though some of us have committed injustices against each other, Allah *Glorified is He* will judge us all in no time. Concerning this point, ‘Ali Allah *be pleased with him* was asked by some people, ‘How will Allah judge the entire mankind at the same time?’ He replied, ‘Just as He provides for them all at the same time.’ This matter is a very easy one for Allah *Glorified is He*. A long time ago, we used to illuminate the streets by lighting lamps here and there, and the stoker used to add fuel to each lamp alone. Yet, when mankind managed to produce electricity, they used it to illuminate the streets with the click of a button.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

قُلْ مَن يُنَجِّيكُم مِّن ظُلُمَٰتِ ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ تَدْعُونَهُۥ تَضَرُّعًا
وَخُفْيَةً لَّئِنْ أَنجَىٰنَا مِنْ هَٰذِهِۦ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Who is it that saves you from the dark depths of land and sea when you humbly and secretly call to Him [and say], “If He rescues us from this, We shall truly be thankful”?’ [63] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 63)

It is troublesome for the creation when darkness comes to produce light or when light comes to produce darkness. This is due to the fact that each of these two, darkness and light, has a particular role to perform in this life. This point is clearly mentioned in the first verse of this chapter under discussion in which Allah says: ‘[All] praise is [due] to Allah, who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light.’ (*al-An‘am:* 1) Concerning the aforementioned verse, some people mistakenly think that Allah *the Almighty* should have given precedence to the mention of 'light' over 'darkness'. Yet, if we carefully reflect on this matter, we will reach the correct conclusion that the roles to be performed by these two items are of equal importance to each other. But what is that important role to be performed by darkness? We all know for certain that ‘light’ enables us to walk in the slopes of the earth and to perform our due roles in this life, an act which cannot be fulfilled without energy. Therefore, we stress that we cannot get energy without rest, relaxation, and tranquillity, all of which cannot be obtained by man except in darkness. It is thus clear that darkness is one of the Blessings Allah *the Almighty* conferred upon mankind. Yet, what causes man to be overtaken by tiredness is to substitute ‘light’ for ‘darkness’, or vice versa, for this is viewed as a departure from the due role of each of these two opposites. At this point, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* created opposite items in such a way which makes them complementary to each other in every sense. That is to say that they are not antagonistic whatsoever to each other. This point is yet proven by the Quran in which Allah says: ‘Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it rises bright!’ (*al-Layl:* 1-2)

In these aforementioned verses, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the night time first and the day time second. As a matter of fact, each of them has a due role to perform, and thus none of them can perform the role of the other. Therefore, we should take into account that we, human beings, cannot perform properly roles which are due in the daytime unless our due roles at nighttime are performed properly. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point more clearly. If there is a man who does not sleep well at night for some reason or another, he will be half-asleep and unable to concentrate, in other words, he will be absent minded.

Therefore, it is clear right now that in order to be able to carry out our daily activities during the daytime, there must be darkness to provide rest and relaxation.

The nighttime and daytime are therefore both blessings, and they are both of equal importance to each other. Yet, we should take into account that they are not against each other, rather, they both complement each other in every sense. The True Lord *Glorified is He* and then says: ‘Consider the creation of the male and the female!’ (*al-Layl:* 3). He *the Almighty* again mentions another set of opposites, the male and the female. In the same way, we should firmly believe that there is no antagonism whatsoever between the roles to be performed by the male and the female, for He *the Almighty* has created both of them to complement each other. That is to say that in case one of them performs the role of the other, the course of life will not run perfectly. In the same respect, as long as the night has a particular role to perform and so has the day time, the male has a due role to perform and so has the female. Allah says: ‘Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it rises bright! Consider the creation of the male and the female! Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends!’ (*al-Layl:* 1-4)

Back to the chapter *al-An‘am;* Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Who is that saves you from the dark depths of land and sea when you humbly and secretly call to Him [and say], “If He rescues us from this, we shall truly be thankful?”' (*al-An‘am:* 63)

Darkness, therefore, is the absence of light. Thus, we notice that Allah *the Exalted* does not say that looking for safety is done only in one depth of darkness, rather, it is done in various ones of it. That is to say, we ask Him *the Almighty* to save us from such depths of darkness, which are accumulated over each other. We know that when a depth of darkness is veiled by a second, and this second is yet covered by a third, and so on, it is at that point that we have various depths of darkness one over another.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…the dark depths of land and sea…’, yet if we want to know whether He *the Almighty* intends the corporeal meaning of darkness or the incorporeal one, we should first give the definition of darkness in its corporeal meaning, stressing that it is that which leads to misguidance when looking for the path to safety. This means anything that leads to misguidance, be it corporeal or incorporeal, is judged as a depth of darkness. This is due to the fact that man, in this case, goes through matters without any guidance. In the same respect, events and catastrophes from which man cannot be saved are also considered depths of darkness.

Thus, we should know that Allah *Glorified is He* offers us examples with incorporeal matters so that we are able to correctly understand the corporeal ones. What is meant by the depths of darkness here is the events, catastrophes and calamities that strike man and from which they cannot be saved. We know fully well that man is always keen on benefitting himself, yet their actions, based on the fact that each of them views the essence of benefit from a certain perspective, are contradictory to each other. Let us offer this striking example to illustrate this point more clearly. If we suppose that there is a student who goes to his school early in the morning, pays attention to his teachers, and then goes home to do his homework, it is clear that this student has thus left the pleasure of laziness to enjoy that of hard work. That is to say that he loves himself and thus wants to do that which will benefit him and his life. On the other hand, we have another student who sleeps most of the day and spends his time in cafés. This student certainly loves himself but in a foolish way since he wants to enjoy immediate pleasures that will be followed by great suffering later. The future of such a lazy student will certainly not be prosperous. Of course, this will not be the case with the hard working student who will have a promising future.

Let us offer another clear example from the countryside to fully clarify this point. If we suppose that there is a farmer who spends his time in the cafe and stays up late, to the extent that he does not till his land or even pay attention to its irrigation and fertilising, it goes without saying that his land will never produce an amount of crop equal to that one produced by this particular land whose owner takes care of its irrigation, fertilisation, etc. Thus, we should stress that Allah *the Almighty* will undoubtedly give abundant provision to the one who makes use of the Divine means given to him by exerting his utmost efforts to achieve his goals. Yet, the case is completely different with the lazy one who neglects his work. If we draw a comparison between these two cases in question, we will find that the latter, i.e. the lazy person has loved him/self in a way that is short-sighted and not smart, while the former, the hard working one, has a deeper love for himself, for he conducts his life in a way that benefits him and others as well.

Indeed, every activity that man engages in is done with the objective of acquiring benefit, but the essence of benefit differs from person to person. At this point, we should stress that an intelligent person is the one who takes into consideration anything that will bring long-term benefits and thus works hard to achieve his goals, a point which is clear in the following poetic verses by Al-Mutanabbi:

I see that each one of us desires life for himself
Vigilant over it, aiming for it with ardent love
The love of the coward for himself is brought about by prudence
The love of the courageous person for himself led him to war

What this poem is saying is that the love of the courageous person for himself makes him eager for the eternal life, so he exerts his utmost efforts to die as a martyr in the cause of Allah. The coward's love for himself, on the other hand, makes him a prisoner of fear because of his inability to leave this non-eternal life. Furthermore, when the coward is struck by a calamity, he, driven by his personal interests, looks for the means of salvation from any given place. In doing so, he may use his own means or those who are close to him in such a situation. Yet, in case no human being is able to give him any help, while he was heedless of Allah, it is for certain that these bad events, afflictions and calamities will guide him back on the Right Path, by reminding him of Allah, the Creator. He thus seeks His Help by supplicating to Him *the Almighty* and beseeching him to save him from such distress. That is to say that he does not sell himself short. However, we should take into account the fact that in case man asks Allah *the Almighty* to save him from a hardship, and he then returns to his disbelief and defiance after his goal has been achieved, he will be viewed as deceiving himself and fall under the following Saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter *al-Isra'*: 'And when harm touches you on the sea, all of those whom you call upon, except Him, are lost to you. But when He brings you safe to land, you turn aside; and man is very ungrateful.' (*al-Isra':* 67)

We find those who come face to face with horrors, while their means are exhausted, do not lie to themselves. Rather, out of their natural disposition, they turn to Allah *Glorified is He* the Omnipotent, to save them. For example, the moment a ship is struck by strong lightning and storms, to the extent that it is about to go down, we find the entire crew and passengers, excluding no one, seeking the Help of Allah *the Almighty* and saying, 'O Lord, O Lord, O Lord!' Some of the people on the deck of this ship might yet recite some verses of the Quran with the intention of attaining safety. The same applies to the crew and passengers of a plane which is about to crash; we find them all humbly seeking the Help of Allah *the Almighty* to save them.

These two aforementioned examples fully clarify the meaning of the Saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'And when harm touches you on the sea, all of those whom you call upon, except Him, are lost to you.' (*al-Isra':* 67) As a matter of fact, man's invocation of his Lord and Protector is undoubtedly viewed as the first and foremost means of achieving certainty. We know fully well that one in this worldly life undergoes one of two matters, happiness or sadness. Happiness is yet achieved by realising beauty, blessings, rest and contentment. As for sadness which includes anything that displeases man and causes him suffering, he tries hard to get rid of it.

This previously mentioned fact is proved by the natural disposition that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed in man. Truthfully speaking, it is out of this natural disposition that man, upon observing what pleases him, will not find any expression to clearly indicate his praise and glorification of Allah but to say, 'Allah!' The same completely applies when man is at risk, for we will certainly find him saying, 'O Lord!' In other words, he wil be saying, 'No refuge is but with Allah.'

Back to the chapter *al-An'am*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say [Prophet], "Who is it that saves you from the dark depths of land and sea…"' (*al-An'am:* 63). This question actually indicates the reality that everyone who hears it shall confirm which is Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who saves man from the dark dangers and depths of both land and sea. Therefore, we should take into account the fact that when Allah *the Almighty* commands His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to present this question to disbelievers, He *Glorified is He* knew for certain that they, out of their natural disposition, would answer this question. In other words, they will frankly admit the undeniable fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who truly saves them from the dark depths of land and sea. At this point, someone might yet say that this verse under discussion restricts the calamities striking man to those of land and sea, although these days we suffer calamities striking us in the air, as well!

We say, 'We must understand that every air space takes the same ruling of its place which means that air over land is subject to the same ruling as land. Also, air over the sea takes the same ruling as the sea. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. It is possible for people offering their prayer in the Sacred Mosque to do so on the ground floor which means that they do so while surrounding the main building of the *Ka'ba*. They are also allowed to do so either in the first floor, or the second, or even the third, etc. of the buildings of the Sacred Mosques surrounding the *Ka'ba,* although the height of its main building does not exceed that of the first floor surrounding it. That is to say that these buildings surrounding the *Ka'ba* are judged sacred by virtue of the fact that they are in its vicinity*,* which is also sacred.

The same completely applies to going round As-Safa and Al-Marwa*;* pilgrims are allowed to do so on the ground floor which is between the two main symbols of these two items. They are also allowed to do so, while in the first floor of these two symbols. In other words, the first floor has been judged sacred due to the fact it is pertinent to these scared symbols. In the past, planes were not allowed to fly over Mecca and Medina. This was due to the fact that pilots at that particular time were not Muslims. In other words, the main reason why planes were not allowed to do so was not to allow non-Muslim pilots to fly over these scared places. Yet, when Muslims had pilots from among themselves, this prohibition was abolished. Therefore, it is clear that the air has the same ruling of its place, be it land or sea.

He *the Almighty* says: 'Say [Prophet], "Who is it that saves you from the dark depths of land and sea when you humbly and secretly call to Him…' (*al-An'am:* 63). It is taken for granted that man, out of his natural disposition, invokes Allah *the Almighty*. The Arabic word *Ad-Du'aa'* (supplication) means to request something from someone; in other words, any request necessitates the existence of three elements: the one who requests, the thing requested and the one to whom a request is addressed. Basically, we stress that 'request' is a type of command, but we cannot call it as such when it is made by someone of lower rank than the one being asked. As a matter of fact, in such case, we call it an act of supplication.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. When we ask students to do a grammatical analysis of the following statement 'My Lord, forgive me', we find the students who did not study their lessons very well saying that the word 'forgive' is an imperative verb. Yet, if the same question is given to students who correctly understood their lessons, we will find them, out of their good manners, saying that the word 'forgive' is a verb indicating 'supplication'. At this point, we should stress the following important facts: first, in case a request is made by someone who is of lower rank than the one being asked, it is called a *Du'aa'*; yet in case it is made by a person who is of equal rank to the one being asked, it is an 'appeal'; and in case it is made by someone who is of higher rank than the one being asked, then it is an 'order'.

When we look at the psychological state of the one who is struck by calamities and catastrophes, we find him, out of his natural disposition, humbly beseeching Allah *the Almighty* to save him, which is the true meaning of supplication. In this scenario, we stress that 'beseeching Allah humbly' is fulfilled by action and saying. In other words, it is an act which is associated with one's emotions and behaviours.

Wrong are those who think that 'beseeching Allah humbly' can be made in speech only, and without action! Let us illustrate this point more clearly. When you are in a position of power and authority and someone asks you to do him a favour, this person is thus viewed as humbly beseeching, or calling upon, you but in speech only. Yet, in case such a person asks you to do you yourself a favour, then this is viewed as humbly beseeching, or calling upon you in both speech and action. When man is at risk, he sincerely beseeches, or calls on His Lord to save him from distress, a point which is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…when you humbly and secretly call to Him…' (*al-An'am:* 63). We should take into account that the act of 'humbly calling to Allah' can also be fulfilled with the heart. This is due to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* the Creator is the Only One Who knows for certain what is in the hearts. 'Let us offer an example to clarify this point. A European woman once read the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then she came across the cause of revelation of the Saying of Allah, '…and Allah will protect you from the people…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67). She found out that this saying was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was asleep after staying up all night. It is narrated that 'A'isah Allah *be pleased with her* said to Prophet Muhammad, 'Is there not a righteous man to guard us this night?' Upon finishing her question, she *Allah be pleased with her* heard the clank of swords of the two companions Sa'd and Hudhayfa who came to guard him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* thus fell deeply asleep. The archangel Jibril (Gabriel) then came down to him with following saying of Allah, '…and Allah will protect you from the people…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to these two Companions who came to guard him, 'O, people, go away, for Allah shall protect me.'

'When this European woman read this narration and fully understood it, she embraced Islam and said, 'If he were deceiving everyone, he would not have deceived himself by doing something that would risk his own life.' As a matter of fact, this woman, out of her discernment, fully realised that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not order guards to leave him unless he was absolutely certain that Allah *the Almighty* would protect him and that He *Glorified is He* is fully Capable of preserving him. Once again, we stress that man at times of hardships humbly and secretly calls to Allah to save him. In addition, we explained that the act of supplication cannot be fulfilled without saying, action and emotions, three pillars shown clearly in the saying of Allah, '…you humbly and secretly call to Him [and say], "If He rescues us from this, we shall truly be thankful"' (*al-An'am:* 63).

The phrase *tad'unahu* (you call to Him) refers to speech, while *tadarr'uan* (humbly) refers to action which means that the act of supplication should include both speech and action. As for the word *Khufya* (secretly), it refers to the humility and fear of the heart, while the phrase *Anjana* (He rescues us from) indicates that the act of 'saving them' which frequently happened. This point is also understood from the saying of Allah, 'Say, "Allah rescues you…' (*al-An'am:* 64). That is to say He *Glorified is He* does not save them just once, but rather many times. In this respect, He *the Almighty* tells that His rescue of people may be done in several ways. In other words, it may be done either by repeating the act of rescue itself or by rescuing one from various disasters. As for the first case, which is repeating the act of rescue, it is done when there is a single disaster from which Allah saves many people, or when He *Glorified is He* repeatedly rescues only one person from several disasters. Thus, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who saves individuals and groups from different calamities. In the Quran, He *Glorified is He* says: 'For [thus it is:] when affliction befalls man, he cries out to Us, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing; but as soon as We have freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Us to save him from the affliction that befell him...!' (*Yunus:* 12)

This aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Yunus* clearly indicates that whenever an affliction befalls man, he identifies his weakness and thus invokes Allah *Glorified is He* to save him from this affliction. As a matter of fact, he does so in whatever state he may be in, whether he be lying on his side, sitting or even standing. Yet, when Allah answers his call, he forgets His Favour and Blessings upon him as if he did not supplicate to Him *the Almighty* to remove this affliction from him. This point is yet proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in which He says: 'And when harm touches you on the sea, all of those whom you call upon, except Him, are lost to you. But when He brings you safe to land, you turn aside; and man is very ungrateful.' (*al-Isra':* 67)

In this aforementioned verse of *al-Isra'*, He *the Almighty* reminds the polytheists of Mecca and all the deniers of the Truth that whenever they are afflicted by some harm at sea, they completely forget their idols and all what they used to worship beside Him *Glorified is He* which is a confirmation that polytheists, under this situation, turn to none but Him *the Almighty* to save them from drowning. Yet, He, meanwhile, stresses that after He removes affliction from them, they return to associating other partners with Him in worship and even denying His Blessings and Favours upon them.

The same meaning is also understood from this particular verse under discussion. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say [Prophet], "Who is that saves you from the dark depths of land and sea when you humbly and secretly call to Him [and say], "If He rescues us from this, we shall truly be thankful?"" (*al-An'am:* 63)

The verse indicates plainly that polytheists and the deniers of the Truth humbly called to Allah *the Almighty* to save them from the dark dangers and depths of land and sea, confirming that they would be from amongst the grateful, but how did they act after He *the Almighty* saved them? He *Glorified is He* gives the answer in the following verse,

قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يُنَجِّيكُم مِّنۡهَا وَمِن كُلِّ كَرۡبٖ ثُمَّ أَنتُمۡ تُشۡرِكُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Say, 'God rescues you from this and every distress;
yet still you worship others beside Him' [64]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 64)

The verse clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who saves them from the depths of dark in land and sea. Yet, it is at that point that we should take into consideration that He *Glorified is He* out of His Pre-Eternal Knowledge, knows for certain that these polytheists and deniers of the Truth would return to polytheism after being rescued. This point may be more clearly illustrated in the light of the fact that man, by nature, transgresses when he sees himself from want, a fact which is proved by the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Nay! Man, indeed, transgresses, Because he thinks himself to be independent.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7)

As a matter of fact, a man of great wealth may overstep his bounds and become arrogant towards those around him, and he may even become so towards His Lord. Therefore, we stress that nothing can protect man from falling prey to arrogance but attaining faith in Allah *the Almighty*. It goes without saying that man will certainly be prone to arrogance as long as he does not follow the Divine Way of Guidance; the matter is completely different as to those who are conscious of Him *the Almighty* in all what He *Glorified is He* provides them. As a matter of fact, it is righteous people who lend a hand to the needy and the poor. In this respect, we should take into consideration that whenever the word 'man' is used in general sense, it is always associated with 'loss'. We can see this point ever so clear in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'I swear by the time, most surely man is in loss' (*al-'Asr:* 1-2).

These previously mentioned verses indicate clearly that man will certainly be a loser if his guidance is left to himself. Yet, Allah *the Almighty* excludes those who believe, do good and enjoin truth and patience for each other. He *the Almighty* says: 'I swear by the time, most surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3)

It is quite clear that a person who is distant from the Divine Way of Guidance will certainly experiencing utter loss. Yet, the one who firmly adheres to His Way of Guidance, he will never experience utter loss. As a matter of fact, when man does not follow the Divine Way of Guidance, he falls under the category of those dispraised in the saying of Allah, 'So when harm afflicts a man he calls upon Us; then, when We give him a favour from Us, he says: I have been given it only by means of knowledge. Nay, it is a trial, but most of them do not know.' (*az-Zumar:* 49)

This aforementioned verse clearly indicates that in case one, who does not follow the Divine Way of Guidance, is afflicted with harm, and then Allah removes this harm from him, he will attribute that act of rescue to himself. In addition, when such person is provided with more and more blessings, he does not admit the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who provides him with them, rather, he claims that he has been given everything on account of his knowledge or cleverness. As a matter of fact, such people completely forget that Allah *the Almighty* gives them these blessings as a form of testing them.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

قُلۡ هُوَ ٱلۡقَادِرُ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يَبۡعَثَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ عَذَابٗا مِّن فَوۡقِكُمۡ أَوۡ مِن تَحۡتِ أَرۡجُلِكُمۡ أَوۡ يَلۡبِسَكُمۡ
شِيَعٗا وَيُذِيقَ بَعۡضَكُم بَأۡسَ بَعۡضٍۗ ٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ نُصَرِّفُ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَفۡقَهُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

Say, 'He has power to send punishment on you from above or from under your very feet, or to divide you into discordant factions and make some taste the violence of others.' See how We explain Our revelation in various ways, so that they may understand [65] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 65)

The Arabic word *Al-Qadir* is translated in this verse as 'He has the power' which means that Allah *the Almighty* is fully capable and that no power, no matter how enormous it may be, can defeat or even challenge His Omnipotent Power. Furthermore, we stress that He *the Almighty* gives respite to oppressors, but then He suddenly strikes them with punishment that might afflict them from above or even from under their feet. What follows is an example of a number of oppressors who were overtaken with Divine Punishment from above. The people of Abraha*,* the Abyssinian, went to Mecca to destroy the *Ka'ba,* but Allah *the Almighty* sent down upon them flocks of birds that were casting stones of baked clay against them, and so He rendered them like chewed straw. Yet, there is another example of people who were destroyed by a cry, while there were others who were destroyed by a roaring, violent blast.

Let us move now to give examples for some whom punishment struck from under their feet. Qarun and Pharaohs are cases in point. As for Qarun*,* Allah *the Almighty* made the earth swallow him and his abode up. Pharaoh, on the other hand, was drowned in the sea. It is thus clear that Divine Punishment can afflict people from above and from under their very feet. Furthermore, this can be done either physically or spiritually.

In the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…or to divide you into discordant factions and make some taste the violence of others…' (*al-An'am:* 65), the Arabic phrase *Labsu Al-A'mr* (division) means to confuse the matter in such a way that cannot be understood by people. As for the word *Shya'an*, it is translated as 'factions', and it is the plural of the word *Shi'a,* which basically refers to those who cooperate on doing something, even if it involves falsehood, and who gather together to achieve one goal. The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…or to divide you into discordant factions…' thus means that He *the Almighty* might divide them into discordant groups, each of which is led by a certain leader and has its own school of law. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* will be making them taste the violence of each other.

This raises a good question: 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* afflict people with all these trials?' The answer is quite clear in the fact that as long as they deviate from the Divine Way of Guidance, He *the Almighty* leaves them to taste the violence of each other. Furthermore, we should take into account that this act, people's deviation from the Divine Way of Guidance, never brings about any change in the world or its established laws, for we find the sky in its original state, as well as the earth, the sun, the moon, the rain and the stars; none of them has ever changed in one way or another.

In other words, Allah *the Almighty* leaves people to taste the violence of each other and thus become oppressors for one another when people deviate from the Divine Way of Guidance. That is to say that when we see people complaining about each other, we shall realise that they all are sinful and deviate from the Divine Way of Guidance, which is why they will not feel comfort unless they return to the Way of Allah. We know for certain that the Way of Allah prevents believers from showing off and being arrogant, for they all bow down before Allah *the Almighty* the Only One Who deserves to be worshipped. Confirming this point, we find Allah *the Almighty* commanding us to offer certain acts of worship in congregation so as to keep people of authority from thinking that they are of higher rank than those who are poor.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. Pilgrimage is a proof to the equality of human beings before Allah *the Almighty*; we see them all wearing the same clothes and going round the *Ka'aba* in the same way. We find no difference whatsoever between those of power and authority and those who are poor. In other words, people are all equal to each other, for they all humbly offer their acts of worship to Him *the Almighty* Alone. At this point, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to remove arrogance and conceit from among believers by prescribing such acts of worship, a point which definitively proves that they all are equal to each other.

In the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Say, "He has power to send punishment on you from above or from under your very feet, or to divide you into discordant factions and make some taste the violence of others." See how We explain Our Revelation in various ways, so that they may understand' (*al-An'am:* 65); nowadays, we see how Allah *the Almighty* divides people into discordant factions; we see so-called Muslims (those not heeding the laws of Islam) killing each other year after year. Even if we were to see two believing parties who are fighting against each other, where is the third group that will prevent them from doing so, as mentioned in the saying of Allah, 'And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them; but if one of them acts wrongfully towards the other, fight that which acts wrongfully until it returns to Allah's command; then if it returns, make peace between them with justice and act equitably. Surely, Allah loves those who act equitably.' (*al-Hujurat:* 9). Unfortunately, we currently watch the blood of so-called Muslims being shed and the number of victims increases day after day. Amazingly enough, other Muslims do nothing to prevent such destruction. Not only that, but we find them also providing opposing parties with weapons to kill each other; a matter that indicates that the *ummah* is under an awful and big disaster. Therefore, let us affirm once again that two forms of truth cannot be in conflict with each other. This is so because one issue does not accept but just one form of truth. In the same respect, a conflict between truth and falsehood will not take along period of time before the latter is defeated since it is always vanishing and fading. Yet, a conflict between two forms of falsehood may take a long period of time before it is settled since none of them deserves the support of Allah *the Almighty*.

The civil war in Lebanon is another case in point. It was due to this civil war that the Lebanese had discordantly divided into factions, all of which were led by their own whims and desires, thus tasting the violence of each other.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…See how we explain Our Revelation in various ways, so that they may understand.' (*al-An'am:* 65)

This particular part of the verse clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* offers them clear proofs and even afflicts them with trials so that they would understand that they would receive no comfort as long as they astray away from the Divine Way of Guidance. As for *Fiqh* (understanding), it means to properly and correctly understand a matter. That is to say that Allah *Glorified is He* sent them down all of these signs and miracles so that they might heed admonition and go back to the Divine Way of Guidance.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَكَذَّبَ بِهِۦ قَوۡمُكَ وَهُوَ ٱلۡحَقُّۚ قُل لَّسۡتُ عَلَيۡكُم بِوَكِيلٖ ﴿٦٦﴾

Yet your people still reject it even though it is the truth. Say, 'I have not been put in charge of you [66]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 66)

This raises a very important question: 'What is that thing which is denied by the people of Prophet Muhammad?' The answer is that they rejected the Quran or the Divine Way of Guidance which includes the Quran itself and with all what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent. We know for certain that the Quran is a miracle which contains the general pillars of the Islamic faith. The role of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was, in essence, to explain and lay down detailed rules. In this respect, we say to those who claim that they are not to abide by anything other than what has been mentioned in the Quran, The Quran is a miracle which contains the pillars of the religion. In addition, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to explain and lay down the rules, and so his *Shari'a* is perfect.' Let us offer an example to illustrate this point.

Allah orders us in the Quran to perform prayer, yet we do not know how many prayers nor how many units we are to offer except from the *Sunnah.* In this regard, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is related to have said, 'Offer your prayers in the same way you saw me offering my prayers.'(1)

In addition, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is entrusted by Allah *the Almighty* to lay down rules and legislations. This point is affirmed by the Quran itself in which Allah says: '...Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Messenger gives you [thereof], and refrain from everything that he forbids...' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

In this respect, we affirm that we offer all our acts of worship including prayer, almsgiving, pilgrimage, etc. in exactly the same way performed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, we emphasise that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was the first person ever to apply the teachings of the Quran and the *Sunnah.* Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them, and that haply they may reflect.' (*an-Nahl:* 44) This verse clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* has given Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the responsibility to explain and detail to believers what has been mentioned in general in the Quran. Therefore, we should be fully aware of the fact that we are obligated, under the Quran, to show obedience to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition, the Quran tells that being obedient to him *peace and blessings be upon him* is part of showing obedience to Allah *the Almighty*. This is proven by the Quran in which He *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: Obey Allah and the Messenger…' (*Al-'Imran:* 32). In this aforementioned verse of *Al-'Imran,* showing obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is included as part of being obedient to Allah *the Almighty*. Yet, in another verse of the Quran, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: Obey Allah and obey the Messenger…' (*an-Nur:* 54), showing separation between the two orders. Still yet a third verse in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and whatever the Apostle gives you, accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, abstain from it…' (*al-Hashr:* 7). As a matter of fact, all of these verse tell us to properly understand that the *Sunnah* has explained a number of topics that were generally mentioned, and not specifically explained, in the Quran. In the same respect, we emphasise that the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you…' (*an-Nisa':* 59) indicates that the showing obedience to those in authority is not independent, rather, it is included under the realm of obedience to Allah and obedience to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah says: 'Yet, your people still reject it even though it is the truth. Say, "I have not been put in charge of you."' (*al-An'am:* 66)

It is quite clear that to deny the Existence of Allah, along with the Quran, means to completely deny the Divine Way of Guidance. As a matter of fact, disbelievers and polytheists deny nothing but the Truth, which never ever changes. In our daily life, when an incident takes place, we find that all those who are called to bear witness to what happened narrate the same story since they are telling about something which actually took place. Yet, in the case of some eyewitnesses who did not see the incident, we would find them giving different and contradictory narrations, which is why a prosecutor tries hard to get information from a witness since the truth is destined to be established even after a substantial amount of time. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a similar example; He *Glorified is He* says: 'He sends down water from the cloud, then watercourses flow (with water) according to their measure, and the torrent bears along the swelling foam, and from what they melt in the fire for the sake of making ornaments or apparatus arises a scum like it. Thus does Allah compare truth and falsehood! Then, as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which profits the people, it stays in the earth. Thus does Allah set forth parables!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

This aforementioned verse of the chapter of *ar-Ra'd* tells that rainwater falls from the sky by the permission of Allah *the Almighty*. It is by this water that the lives of animals, plants, and man are preserved. The verse also tells that every valley takes the amount of water that suffices it. Yet, when this water flows down in these valleys, it is accompanied by bits of dirt that rise to its surface, exactly as the bits of dirt (dross) rise to the surface of gold when it is melted. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* assures us in this verse that falsehood is groundless, drawing a similarity between it and the useless scum that rises to the surface of water. In the same respect, He *the Almighty* plainly tells us that He *Glorified is He* kept in the earth what is beneficial for people. Therefore, it is clear that denying the Truth, the Quran, and the Divine Way of Guidance by anyone is nothing but falsehood. As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he has not been put in charge of those who deny the Truth. In other words, his mission, first and foremost, was only to deliver the Divine Message to them. Thus, we stress that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who has the Right to hold people accountable for their deeds, by rewarding the doers of good and punishing the doers of evil.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Yet your people still reject it even though it is the truth' (*al-An'am:* 66), the words 'your people' implies a sharp and stern rebuke for them since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent from among themselves, meaning that they knew with certainty that he never ever told a lie, which is why they must have wondered, 'Is it conceivable that he invented a lie against Allah, although he did not do so with us human beings?!' However, personal desires and whims blinded their insight and sealed their hearts, and this is why Allah *the Almighty* addresses this matter in the Quran: 'Say: If Allah had desired (otherwise), I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have taught it to you. Indeed, I have lived a lifetime among you before it. Do you not then understand?' (*Yunus:* 16) In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* to say to them, 'Had not Allah willed to send the Quran down upon me to teach and instruct you, I would not have recited it to you.' Therefore, we take into account the fact it is out of Allah's Favour and Bounty that He sent him *peace and blessings be upon him* from among themselves. This fact is recorded in the Quran in which He *the Almighty* says: 'Certainly, a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you. To the believers (he is) compassionate.' (*at-Tawba:* 128)

Despite the arrogance, stubbornness and disbelief of the polytheists of Mecca, he *peace and blessings be upon him* upon migrating to Medina, ordered 'Ali Allah *be pleased with him* to stay in Mecca to hand over trusts to their owners. This raises a good question: 'Do you, O, foolish polytheists, think that he *peace and blessings be upon him* shows you honesty, but in the meantime deceives Allah *Glorified is He*?!'

He *the Almighty* subsequently says:

لِّكُلِّ نَبَإٍ مُّسْتَقَرٌّ وَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

Every prophecy has its fixed time to be fulfilled: you will come to realize this' [67] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 67)

The Arabic word *An-Naba'* is translated as 'prophecy' which means an important piece of information. We should note that not every piece of information is considered *Naba'*. This is because there are other provocative pieces of information which man will benefit at all from knowing them or even ignoring them. Referring to an important piece of information, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Of what do they ask one another? About the great event, about which they differ?' (*an-Naba':* 1)

As for the main verse under discussion, it obviously explains that every prophecy will be fulfilled at a fixed time. As for the Arabic word *Al-Mustaqarr,* it is an adverb referring to the place wherein something is kept. It should be noted that adverbs are of two kinds, namely adverbs of time and adverbs of place. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* has fixed a particular time and place for every event to be fulfilled, yet man will fully realise these fixed times and places only when He wills.

It is quite clear that *An-Naba'* is an important piece of information, which is astonishing. Thus, we must emphasise that there is nothing which is more important than this universal Divine Way of Guidance that is intended to save humanity from the darkness of misguidance which is available during all times and places. In addition, this Divine Way of Guidance saves people from tyrants and oppressors along with driving people's attention to the fact that it is only abiding by it that they could be protected from falling prey to their destructive whims and desires. At this point, we should consider that there is nothing more harmful to humanity than to follow their own whims and desires since when they are under this situation, they will never agree upon a single opinion. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* took the responsibility of laying down this prefect way of guidance in such a manner that prevents man from following their desires. As for the other matters which may naturally be subjected to different opinions, including the disclosing of the secrets of the heavens and the earth, etc., Allah *Glorified is He* leaves them for the human intellect upon which to decide.

Real events of life affirm the accuracy and veracity of this point, for the human intellect has managed to uncover many of the world's secrets and to make many a scientific discovery. Thus, we must note that all the world's countries have reached similar conclusions concerning various fields of knowledge. For example, all the world's scientists, be they Russian, American, French, English, etc., have the same point of view concerning electricity. In other words, we find in our daily life that the world's different political and social systems agree on the same scientific discoveries, to the extent that some depend on previously made discoveries of other countries. Therefore, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* leaves the material matters for the human intellect to think over, reflect, and invent to discover the secrets of the universe in such a way that enables them to achieve a comfortable life.

However, we find people differing with each other restlessly on the way of guidance. As a matter of fact, this big conflict of opinions results to people falling prey to deviant whims and desires. In this regard, we find that capitalism is completely different from socialism and that there are huge differences between all ideologies that are the result of personal desires including communism, existentialism, socialism, capitalism, etc. Truthfully speaking, none of these ideologies have been examined in the light of experience or a laboratory which is why many do not have the same opinion on them at all. It is quite unfortunate to find human beings making use of scientific inventions and discoveries they have agreed upon to use them as a means to impose ideologies over which they actually differ.

Truthfully speaking, Allah *the Almighty* has made this matter clear to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah did this by leaving human intellects free in everything that is subject to experience, but He, on the other hand, organised the life of man on earth in the light of the His Way of Guidance. This is due to the fact that Islam came right after priests and monks tried to impose their influence on the human intellect regarding the secrets of the universe.

We can prove this point by real events from the human history. In the European Dark Ages, Muslims in the east, out of the fact that they firmly adhered to the Divine Way of Guidance, made great progress. This was due to Islam teaching them how to use the intellect in unveiling the secrets of the universe. He *the Almighty* thus sent us this religion, which is the greatest event or gift ever, to make everything clear to us. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to us, ‘Indeed, this religion was weak in its very beginning, and those who believed in it were also a weak minority that were incapable of protecting themselves to the extent that they sought protection from a foreign king in Abyssinia. Despite all of this, they were victorious because they embraced and firmly adhered to this religion.’

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* revealed to the disbelievers of Mecca this Saying of Allah being discussed, ‘every prophecy has its fixed time to be fulfilled. You will come to realise this.’ (*al-An‘am:* 67)

The Arabic word *Mustaqarr* means a fixed time in which this particular event will be fulfilled. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* orders believers neither to hasten the fulfilment of events nor to terminate them since He *Glorified is He* had destined that this religion of Islam will spread all over the world but at a fixed time and place. As for the time of the fulfilment of this prophecy on the spread of Islam, it is extended until the end of time. Concerning the place of this spreading of the religion, it is the entire earth. This is due to the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the seal of Prophets and Messengers, was sent to all of mankind.

In the same respect, this Quranic fact about the fulfilment of every event during a fixed time and place is confirmed by reality. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. At the very beginning of Islam, those who converted were weak; yet when the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]’ (*al-Qamar:* 45), ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Which hosts are these that shall be routed and turn their backs in flight when we cannot even protect ourselves?!’ Yet, during the battle of *Badr*, he saw the defeat of the polytheists of Mecca as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* previously told them. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*, said, 'True is the Speech of Allah! The hosts have been routed, along with turning their backs in flight.' In this regard, we find that every Quranic topic is preserved and recorded, so that mankind does not have an excuse against Allah *the Almighty* for He *Glorified is He* says: 'Every prophecy has its fixed time to be fulfilled. You will come to realise this.' (*al-An'am:* 67)

If reality did not confirm that every prophecy has a term set for its fulfilment, then what do the people who receive the Quran think of its veracity? This is why He *the Almighty* mentions every subject matter of the Quran along with its evidence. In the same respect, we should realise that He *the Almighty* does so in order that people would not have any excuse against Him *Glorified is He*.

The entire world has thus become fully aware of the victory of Islam, for Allah *the Almighty* had destined to teach Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions, Allah *be pleased with them*, how to cope with the events of life.

In this regard, we know for certain that He *the Almighty* used to send Messengers with religions over different periods of time, especially when corruption became widespread in the earth, He *Glorified is He* sent down His Way of Guidance to a particular Messenger or Prophet to guide mankind to the Straight Path. This is due to the fact that He *the Almighty* has created mankind in such a way in which they naturally achieve balance by themselves, so if one satisfied his unlawful lust in one way or another, we find that he falls under one of two categories: one, his soul might reproach and rebuke him for committing this sin, or two, he might not even view it as something unusual, and thus his soul does not reproach him anymore. Yet, we must stress that in case one's soul no longer reproaches him for committing a sin, this will certainly not be the case with the entire society. In this regard, we find amongst mankind those who bring society back to the Right Path by encouraging others to repent to Allah from their sins. Therefore, we are faced with a very important question: 'What will the situation be in the event the entire society, individuals, and groups are indulged in corruption?'

It goes without saying that it is at this point that Allah *the Almighty* must send a new Messenger with a new Message to get people back to the Right Path.

Thus, we emphasise that no one follows this new Messenger expect the weak minority and those who possess understanding from amongst the powerful. Thus, no one assumes that the weak seek refuge in the religion and incline towards it, due to their weakness. This is to say that Allah *the Almighty* warns believers and says to them, ‘Indeed, you are confronting a falsehood that has made mankind tired has along with oppressing and bringing hardships upon them. Truthfully speaking, when falsehood is wide spread in communities in such a detrimental way, none benefits from this but evildoers, whilst the doers of good feel tired. In other words, every act of corruption has a particular class that benefits from it. Yet, when those who benefit from the spread of corruption are found along with the Word of Truth, they take into account that they will certainly lose their authority and power in case this Word of Truth becomes dominant.

In other words, when the Truth is victorious, then corruption along with the authority of the evildoers must come to an end, which is why they, who benefit from the spread of corruption, stand in opposition to the new religion in order to maintain their position in the society.

Censuring non-Muslims while instructing Muslims how to cultivate their manners, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَإِذَا رَأَيۡتَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخُوضُونَ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا فَأَعۡرِضۡ عَنۡهُمۡ حَتَّىٰ يَخُوضُواْ فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيۡرِهِۦۚ
وَإِمَّا يُنسِيَنَّكَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ فَلَا تَقۡعُدۡ بَعۡدَ ٱلذِّكۡرَىٰ مَعَ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

When you come across people who speak with scorn about Our revelations, turn away from them until they move on to another topic. If Satan should make you forget, then, when you have remembered, do not sit with those who are doing wrong [68]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 68)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that disbelievers will certainly speak scornfully about the Divine Message with which he was sent. That is why we found the disbelievers of Mecca once alleging that the Divine Message was some kind of magic, while another time we found them alleging that it was nothing but poetry; yet a third time they claimed that it is some kind of soothsaying, and, finally, we found them accusing him *peace and blessings be upon him* of inventing lies. Therefore, we should note that no one will say something like this except those who benefit from the spread of corruption in the universe. So, whenever there is someone who wants to put people back on track, they will take him as an enemy. This is why you, O, Prophet Muhammad, must take into account two essential points: first, your followers are weak, and thus they may not be able to resist and confront oppressive people, so you should not burden them with more than they can bear; rather, you should be patient with them since every prophecy will be fulfilled at a fixed time; second, when you see those who indulge in blasphemous talk about Allah's signs, you should keep your distance from them, show them harshness, do not approach them, do not befriend them, do not listen to them and do not let your Companions hear them, either. Why is this? It is due to the fact that they are indulging in blasphemous talk about the signs of Allah. However, should they be kept at a distance always? No, they should only be kept at a distance while they are indulging in blasphemous talk and denying the signs of Allah. Yet, when they cease doing so, then you should convey to them the Words of Truth, since there will be a dire need for them to hear it. This is why you should seize the opportunity, when they are not talking blasphemously about your religion or about you, to teach them the glad tidings that you have, along with teaching them the warnings that you have. For if you were to leave them misguided, then they will know nothing about the essence of faith, and you were sent only to convey the Message to people, and Allah *Glorified is He* wants goodness for all of His Creation.

'When you come across people who *yakhudunna* (speak with scorn) about our revelations, turn away from them until they move on to another topic…' (*al-An'am:* 68). The word *yakhudunna* (literally wade) used in the original Arabic text of the verse has an important significance, for it denotes 'going through water or mud'. When one goes through deep water, he cannot see the bottom and, therefore, cannot watch his steps or know where he is placing his feet. His feet may well fall into a cavern, unlike him who moves along a clear path and knows exactly where he is going. He places his feet where they will be firm. Thus, we understand why Allah *the Almighty* describes frivolous or vain talk as *khawd* (wading; the stem of *yahkudun*), for it means talking without guidance, without having solid ground to stand upon in one's arguments. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '... leave them out, playing in their wading' (*al-An'am:* 91). 'Playing' refers to any vain occupations that go beyond one's duties. However, if playing is meant to promote skills in any one of life's field, then children should be trained for it over time before they reach puberty. An example of this is when we train our children on swimming, archery, and horseback riding. No sooner does someone reach puberty than he starts to have a mission in life and take on responsibility. He should not waste time playing or doing whatever will distract him from performing his essential duties.

So, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'When you come across people who *yakhudunna* (speak with scorn) about Our revelations, turn away from them until they move on to another topic…' (*al-An'am:* 68). The human soul is subject to change which can make it forget some of what it is supposed well to bear in mind. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been promised by his Lord that he would not forget anything of what is revealed to him: '[Prophet], We shall teach you [the Quran] and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6)

So long as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was guarded against forgetting what Allah taught him, then how should we understand these words of Allah: '…If Satan should make you forget, then, when you have remembered, do not sit with those who are doing wrong.' (*al-An'am:* 68) Sometimes, Allah *Glorified is He* directs to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a command by which He means to teach all the believers. Whenever a command comes down from Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should be the first to heed it, which explains why he is addressed by every command. Meanwhile, whenever any of the believers is overtaken by temporary heedlessness, he should do as Allah commands in this regard. When you remember, and then leave those who indulge in vain talk about Allah *the Almighty* until they start talking about another topic.

Allah *the Exalted* respects His servants, for He is the One Who has created them and Whose Omnipotent Knowledge encompasses all of them. He has created for every person an aptitude for preserving information, an aptitude for remembering and retrieving it and an aptitude for imagination. Each of these aptitudes carries out a particular task. Memory brings back old preserved information in order to make it the focal point of one's consciousness. One cannot make more than a single idea as the focus of his conscious mind, so for one idea to be focused on, another must be forgotten. This is why Allah has created forgetfulness. One idea has to be removed from the focal point of consciousness to the margin so that another may take its place. This is why one thought must be forgotten for another to be focused on. If one were to continue remembering a certain issue, it would be impossible for him to think of any other. Therefore, one idea remains the focus of one’s thought, and all other preserved information remains in the memory and can be retrievable. One may suddenly recall something that happened twenty years ago.

Thus, Allah says: ‘…If Satan should make you forget, then, when you have remembered, do not sit with those who are doing wrong.’ (*al-An‘am:* 68) Why does Allah associate forgetfulness with Satan? All the issues of faith are clear in the believer’s mind, and if any of them should be absent, this is due to Satan’s insinuations. Satan makes his way dazzling before man; he deceives him into thinking of what distracts him from the things that matter most. When Satan leads one to forget a matter related to his religion, and then he remembers what he has forgotten, he should seek refuge with Allah from Satan. When he has remembered, he should no longer sit with transgressing people.

By refusing to sit with them when they are wading in vain talk about Allah, a believer thus draws the attention of transgressing people that faith matters most to them; it is more important than their gatherings or whatever benefit may be taken from being with them. Thus, the believer himself benefits from remembering what Satan has made him forget, and transgressing people are also made aware of the importance of faith and how the believers prefer it to everything else. Allah did not enjoin on believers to totally separate from idolaters, while the believers were still in a state of weakness during the early days of Islam. The believers met in the Sacred Mosque of Mecca, and the idolaters would also go to the *Ka‘ba* - prior to the Conquest of Mecca - to perform their pilgrimage. It was not possible, therefore, for Muslims to abstain from meeting at the Sacred Mosque during the early days of the Islamic call. Allah permitted them to meet in the Sacred Mosque, and if those who indulged in blasphemous talk went there, they were commanded to keep their distance from them along with not taking into account what transgressing people said. No one bears the sin of another, as Allah says in the following verse:

وَمَا عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ مِنْ حِسَابِهِم مِّن شَىْءٍ وَلَٰكِن
ذِكْرَىٰ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ٦٩

The righteous are not in any way held accountable for the wrongdoers; their only duty is to remind them, so that they may be mindful of God [69] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 69)

This means that if you are with them and they indulge in vain talk about faith, you should leave their gathering so that you are not responsible for what they say. Even if you forget to leave them, but then remember and submit to the command of Allah by leaving their gathering, then you are drawing their attention to the fact that faith matters are far more to you than anything else. Indeed, this is showing respect to Allah's Commands by doing what He ordains and abstaining from what He forbids. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the righteous; those who are mindful of Him, will bear nothing of the sins or punishment of these transgressors. By leaving them when they overstep the limits set by Allah *the Exalted* a believer thus calls them to reflect so that they may fear Him and spare themselves His punishment and His Wrath. After that, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَذَرِ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُوا۟ دِينَهُمْ لَعِبًا وَلَهْوًا وَغَرَّتْهُمُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۚ
وَذَكِّرْ بِهِۦٓ أَن تُبْسَلَ نَفْسٌۢ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ لَيْسَ لَهَا مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِىٌّ
وَلَا شَفِيعٌ وَإِن تَعْدِلْ كُلَّ عَدْلٍ لَّا يُؤْخَذْ مِنْهَآ ۗ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُبْسِلُوا۟ بِمَا
كَسَبُوا۟ ۖ لَهُمْ شَرَابٌ مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ وَعَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْفُرُونَ ٧٠

Leave to themselves those who take their religion for a mere game and distraction and are deceived by the life of this world, but continue to remind them with the [Quran], lest any soul be damned by what it has done – it will have no one to protect it from God and no one to intercede; whatever ransom it may offer will not be accepted. Such are those who are damned by their own actions: they will have boiling water to drink and a painful punishment because they used to defy [God] [70] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 70)

We said before that 'playing' is a useless occupation one practises as a pastime. This is allowed during childhood before one reaches the age of puberty and therefore, becomes responsible. If playing distracts one from performing his duties, this is frivolity for it diverts him from something that is obligatory and immerses him in an activity that wisdom does not justify. The life of this world does not deceive except straying minds. People of understanding realise that life of this world does not deserve to be treated as an end in and of itself; rather, it is a means to an end. It is a place of work and sacrifice, a way that leads to the Hereafter.

A mature mind would not let this temporary life dissuade him from his mission. The problem with so many is that they treat means as ends, so instead of employing them to reach the ultimate goal, they make them goals in themselves. Allah has brought us to this life to worship Him and work for the prosperity of the earth. Whoever deviates from this path will be punished on the Day of Reckoning.

Mankind's objective in the life of this world is not to live a long life, nor is it to obtain ranks, luxuries, or power. All of these things are subject to change, and they differ from one person to another. These are transient goals, and our shares of them are very different. The ultimate goal, however, is one for all people. It is the life after death, and the success of every action is measured according to how close it brings us to this objective. This is why a true believer would see the way people receive death as foolish, for when a youth of twenty dies, some would lament, 'It is a pity he did not enjoy his youth!' However, this life is not for enjoyment. Enjoying this life is not the objective. The life of the Hereafter is what we should aspire to. Given this view of life and death, whoever dies before the age of puberty which is the time when he becomes responsible for his deeds, has actually been saved from reckoning, and paradise will be his abode where he will receive everlasting blessings. This creed does not support protracted grief. When one is truly focused on his ultimate goal, he will seek to reach it with both diligence and eagerness. Suppose someone wanted to go to Alexandria, for example, would he take a horse, a coach, or a plane to get there? Needless to say, whatever brings him closer to his objective is best.

If Allah orders death to overtake some of His creation while they are still in the wombs of their mothers, then this is His Will. Whoever goes from his mother's womb to the grave has thus gone closer to the ultimate objective. He has thus been spared the stages of this worldly life with all its trials and tribulations. He went to paradise straightaway. Someone may live to be a hundred years. If he remains upright, despite all trials and tribulations, Allah *the Almighty* will admit him to paradise by His Mercy. Therefore, we should resign ourselves, with love and patience, to everything Allah *the Exalted* decrees for us, whether death or life. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*Exalted is He* Who holds all control in His Hands; Who has power over all things; Who created death and life to test you [people] and reveal which of you does best — He is the Mighty, the Forgiving.' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2)

Allah does not say, '…Who created *life* and *death'*, but He mentions death first. This is to call our attention to the fact that receiving life does not mean forgetting about death, but thought of the latter, death that brings life to an end, should take precedence in the mind. This is the ultimate objective we all have in common and that we should all focus on. Any other goals or objectives pertaining to this life are temporary and subject to change and, therefore, must not dissuade one from the real goal.

People bring up their children, prepare them for school, encourage them to succeed with high scores, obtain high degrees, build remarkable careers, and become people of importance. This is right, but it must not be the goal in and of itself. This is not for which we are brought up to live. The objective is that after which nothing else comes. We are commanded to work for the prosperity of the world, but this should only be a means to the real objective which is pleasing Allah and succeeding in the Hereafter.

This is why Allah says: 'Bear in mind that the present life is just a game, a diversion, an attraction, a cause of boasting among you, of rivalry in wealth and children. It is like plants that spring up after the rain. Their growth at first delights the sowers, but then you see them wither away, turn yellow, and become stubble. There is terrible punishment in the next life as well as forgiveness and approval from Allah; the life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.' (*al-Hadid:* 20) This is the life of this world. It is not worth sacrificing the Afterlife. Our focus should therefore be on what can bring us deliverance in the life to come, which is the remembrance of Allah; He says: '…but continue to remind them [with the Quran], lest any soul be damned by what it has done– it will have no one to protect it from Allah and no one to intercede...' (*al-An'am:* 70). We are commanded to 'remind' them with the Quran, sent down from Allah and put into practice by His Messenger, and the Sunnah (Teachings) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. People need to be reminded of the punishment that awaits those who disobey the Ordinances of Allah *the Exalted*. Needless to say, Allah *Glorified is He* would not treat those who are conscious of Him in the life of this world in the same way that He treats those who deviate from His Way. One who slanders others, tarnishes their reputations, and oppresses them is by no means like him who adheres to the way of faith. A sound disposition understands that Allah rewards everyone for their actions, whether in the life of this world or in the Hereafter. It has been reported that Arabs used to say, 'A transgressor may not die until Allah has taken revenge from him.' However, some died, and people did not see them experience the revenge of Allah, so another saying goes, 'By Allah, behind this abode is an abode in which the doer of good is rewarded for his goodness and the doer of evil is rewarded for his evil.

Thus, Allah says: '…but continue to remind them [with the Quran], lest any soul *tubsala* (be damned) by what it has done...' (*al-An'am:* 70). The root of the Arabic word *tubsala* denotes 'prevention' as a punishment, which means either confinement of the punished person to a limited space in this life, i.e. restricting his freedom of movement or activity, or prevention of the source of life itself by causing this person to perish. Confinement – in human convention – is to detain someone in a particular place preventing him from oppressing others, i.e. to prevent an individual from inflicting evil on society by putting him in confinement. When Islam came, instead of confining the transgressing individual, it orders the entire society to abandon that individual in some cases so he may be allowed freedom of movement, but no one would talk to him, laugh with him or share happiness or grief with him. This is a far severer punishment. An example of this is what happened with the three who lagged behind the Muslim army and refrained from fighting in one of the battles alongside Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. One of them approached his wife, but she refused to let him touch her. A second greeted his cousin, but the latter did not return his greeting, so he sat down and wept! All Muslims abandoned them. The wrongdoers suffered punishment by being cut off from the entire society.

Therefore, Allah says: '…but continue to remind them [with the Quran], lest any soul be damned by what it *kasabat* (has done)...' (*al-An'am:* 70). The word *kasb* in the Arabic language means an increase on one's capital. The word has a second derivative, which is *iktisab* (acquisition). Sometimes the two words mean the same thing. Sometimes *kasb* refers to earning without using trickery or incurring unusual hardship. As for *iktisab*, it is to earn with trickery, manipulation, and difficulty. He who does something Allah has forbidden actually needs to go through difficulty and use more of his strength. So, *kasb* means earning lawfully while *iktisab* means earning unlawfully by using trickery and going through much difficulty to obtain something. Some earn what they have no right to and believe it is their right, which is the peak of evil.

This noble verse shows clearly the difference between the two words; Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for it is (the benefit of) what it *kasabat* (has earned) and upon it (the evil of) what it *iktasabat* (has wrought)…' (*al-Baqara:* 286). An example of this is when a man looks at his wife. It is his lawful right, and he is not to blame for seeking this enjoyment. However, if a man looks at any other woman who is not lawful for him to enjoy, he has to act stealthily in order to do so. He would not want anyone to see him while he is sneaking to look at her. This is unlawful. Another example is when the mistress of a house goes into her kitchen and takes something to eat. She feels safe on doing so as she eats of the lawful earning of her husband. As for the maid, when she wants to take a piece of meat from the kitchen without permission from the people of the house, she has to act stealthily. She would be in fear of being found out. She would wonder if the mistress of the house has counted the pieces of meat. She would try eating a tiny portion of every piece so as not to be discovered. This would sure exhaust her since attaining an unlawful enjoyment always involves difficulty and unusual hardship.

Allah says: '…but continue to remind them [with the Quran], lest any soul be damned by what it has done– it will have no one to protect it from Allah and no one to intercede; whatever ransom it may offer will not be accepted. Such are those who are damned by their own actions...' (*al-An'am:* 70). A soul that wrongs itself by committing evil will have no protector or intercessor besides Allah, and no ransom will be accepted from it. A protector is he who helps you if you are in a dilemma, and the dilemma of the Hereafter is indeed immense. Being with no protection then is severe punishment, indeed. Not only will Allah deprive evildoers from His Protection, but there will be no one to intercede for them with the One Who possesses all Power: Allah Exalted is He. Such is the reward of them who do not take heed and refuse to follow the way of faith. Furthermore, '…whatever ransom it may offer will not be accepted...' (*al-An'am:* 70). So they will be denied all ways of deliverance: Allah will not protect them, nor will He allow anyone to intercede for them, and no ransom will be accepted from them. Their destiny will be this: '…Such are those who are damned by their own actions...' (*al-An'am:* 70). They will be confined in Hellfire, never to be released: '…they will have boiling water to drink and a painful punishment because they used to defy [Allah].' (*al-An'am:* 70)

The original text of the noble verse literally translates as follows '…they will have for their drink boiling water…' (*al-An'am:* 70). When we read 'for their drink', we think they will have something that will quench their thirst. However, when the nature of what they will drink is revealed, which is 'boiling water', we understand that it is not meant to quench their thirst, but to torture them. When evildoers hear this and they are whom Allah is addressing concerning this admonition, they move immediately from hope to despair. When they read '…they will have for their drink…', they expect a form of mercy to be given them, yet by knowing that this drink is nothing but 'boiling water', their expectation is destroyed and replaced by despair. If this truth had come right at the beginning, those being warned would entertain no hopes at all, and fear and grief would directly ensue. However, Allah means to begin with a word that gives hope then destroy it by unveiling the truth for the pain to be twofold: once for the destroyed hope and another for the coming grief.

Here is another example concerning this point: '... and if they beg for water, they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces...' (*al-Kahf:* 29). When one reads, '... and if they beg for water, they will be given water...', the imagined good news will give hope, but this hope is then immediately crushed by the following words, '... [Hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces...'. Allah also says: '... *fabashsherhum* [give them the glad tidings] of grievous suffering.' (*at-Tawba:* 34) The Arabic word *fabashsherhum* gives the impression that what is coming is good news.

Then, the news turns out to be of 'grievous suffering'. To give hope of deliverance then unveiling punishment, is one of the disciplinary methods used in the Quran. An example of this is when a tyrant exceeds the limits in transgression. Allah does not take revenge upon him unless he attains unusual power to the extent of thinking he can never be defeated. This is why Allah says in the Quran: 'So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, we opened the gates to everything for them. Then, as they revelled in what they had been given, we struck them suddenly and they were dumbfounded.' (*al-An'am:* 44)

Allah has prepared for the wrongdoers a double torment: '…they will have boiling water to drink and a painful punishment because they used to defy [Allah].' (*al-An'am:* 70) In this verse, punishment is the just recompense for what they used to defy, and Allah *the Almighty* is never unjust to any of His servants. As for those who have chosen to follow the way of Allah, they will be rewarded with the best reward for what they have done. The natural disposition of human beings is capable of doing both good and evil, and Allah states clearly what one will get for what they do in this worldly life: 'Whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8)

Allah says after that:

قُلۡ أَنَدۡعُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنفَعُنَا وَلَا يَضُرُّنَا وَنُرَدُّ عَلَىٰٓ أَعۡقَابِنَا بَعۡدَ إِذۡ هَدَىٰنَا ٱللَّهُ
كَٱلَّذِى ٱسۡتَهۡوَتۡهُ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينُ فِى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ حَيۡرَانَ لَهُۥٓ أَصۡحَٰبٞ يَدۡعُونَهُۥٓ إِلَى ٱلۡهُدَى ٱئۡتِنَاۗ
قُلۡ إِنَّ هُدَى ٱللَّهِ هُوَ ٱلۡهُدَىٰۖ وَأُمِرۡنَا لِنُسۡلِمَ لِرَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

Say, 'Instead of God, are we to call on what neither profits nor harms us? [Are we to] turn on our heels after God has guided us, like someone bewildered, having been tempted by devils into a desert ravine, though his companions call him to guidance [saying], "Come to us"?' Say, 'God's guidance is the true guidance. We are commanded to devote ourselves to the Lord of the Worlds [71] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 71)

The verse begins with questioning idolatry. What do idols and other false deities do for those who worship them? What do they do to those who do not worship them? This is the first point of logic that negates ascription of divinity to anyone besides Allah. For example, what does the sun give to those who worship it? How does it punish those who do not? The sun rises over whoever worships it and whoever does not worship it. What do idols do for their worshippers? What harm can they inflict on those who reject them? Idols cannot send punishment upon those who do not worship them. Rather, those who disbelieve in them benefit by their disbelief, for they have employed their minds to know the True God, the Creator of this universe. Thus, benefit and harm come only from the One True God: Allah. What does these words of Allah: ‘... [Are we to] turn on our heels after Allah has guided us...’ (*al-An‘am:* 71) mean? A step forward decreases the distance that separates one from his destination. To turn back on one’s heels is to go backwards after proceeding forward along the way. A true believer would not go back on his heels, after proceeding on the way to Allah, by worshipping other than Him. He has already believed and taken several steps along the path of guidance. It is simply not logical for them to turn on their heels and become losers. Whoever does so is: ‘…like someone bewildered, having been tempted by devils into a desert ravine...’ (*al-An‘am:* 71). The word ‘devils’ refers to the disobedient jinns. Jinns are the counterpart species of humans. Just as there are obedient and disobedient people, there are also obedient and disobedient jinns. Allah says: ‘Say [Prophet], "It has been revealed to me that a group of jinns once listened in and said, ‘We have heard a wondrous Quran that gives guidance to the right path, and we have come to believe it — We shall never set up partners with our Lord.’"' (*al-Jinn:* 1-2) This noble verse proves that some of the jinns are believers and some are not. We do not see jinns, but of course they do exist. They are part of the unseen world, as Allah tells us in the Quran. There is a logical and philosophical difference between the existence of a thing and our ability to perceive that thing. We believe jinns exist because Allah tells us so. If we cannot see a thing, it does not mean it does not exist.

‘Say, "Instead of Allah, are we to call on what neither profits nor harms us? [Are we to] turn on our heels after Allah has guided us…"' (*al-An‘am:* 71). This concept comes in the form of a question posed by believers themselves. It is indeed worth wondering! When Allah has guided us to the Straight

Path, is it plausible to turn back on our heels and slide into deviation and misguidance after having been rightly guided?! Is it wise, after having been called to worship the One God, to call besides Him other deities that can neither benefit nor harm us? What a confusion this is! Indeed they are: '…like someone bewildered, *istahwathu* (having been tempted) by devils into a desert ravine...' (*al-An'am:* 71). The Arabic word *istahwathu* denotes 'enticement'. The Arabic prefix *ist-* means 'to seek'. Thus, *ist-* added to *huwiyy* (falling; ruins) makes up the word *istahwa* which means to seek to make someone fall or be ruined. It means to entice someone to make him go astray. It is to tempt someone into doing a thing without even having any argument that proves the logic of what you call him for. The root *h-w-a* has many meanings. One of its derivatives is *hawa'* which means 'the air we breathe'. Another derivative is *hawa* which is the inclination of the soul towards something; it denotes 'whim', 'caprice' or 'prejudice'. A third derivative is *huwiyy* which denotes 'falling' or 'devastation'. Thus, we understand that the word *istahwathu* mentioned in the verse means devils have taken advantage of his own desire and enticed him to his downfall. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Devote yourselves to Allah and assign Him no partners, for the person who does so is like someone who has been hurled down from the skies and snatched up by the birds or *tahwy* (flung) to a distant place by the wind.' (*al-Hajj:* 31) Such is the result of following one's *hawa* (desire; prejudice). It always drags one to error and causes him harm. Therefore, one should not submit to it unless it is in accordance with what Allah commands. Otherwise, if one follows his *hawa* (desires), they will inevitably lead him to *huwiyy* (falling).

Allah says: '…like someone bewildered, having been tempted by devils into a desert ravine…' (*al-An'am:* 71). Bewilderment denotes hesitation between one matter and its opposite. Such is the state of whoever turns back on his heels after having been rightly guided. However, he has companions who call him to guidance. Thus he is stuck between devils enticing him and pious companions calling him to the right way, and this is why he is confused. When something falls down, it has no stability or direction, which makes the image presented in the noble verse very expressive of the state of confusion of him who is hesitant between right guidance and deviation. After depicting this perplexity, Allah states the way out of it: '…"Allah's guidance is the true guidance…' (*al-An'am:* 71). Guidance is the way that leads to the desired objective. The maker of a machine is him who can set it right. It does not know how to maintain itself. Only its maker can make it function properly. Likewise, no one can dispose people's affairs except the One Who has created him. What sows corruption in the life of this world is that Allah has created mankind, but they want to govern their lives by their own laws, not those set by their Creator. Indeed, '…"Allah's guidance is the true guidance...' (*al-An'am:* 71). When we all act as servants of the One God, our personal desires would not interfere with the laws governing life since we all will then act on the sublime laws set by Him, and no conflicts can thus ensue. When we all submit to the law of Allah, none of us will be able to humiliate another, for we are all servants of Allah, and there is no servitude to any but Him. Legislators enslave people by the laws they make for them. Such manmade laws may be tailored solely to further the interest of a certain group and make all others subservient to it. This is why true guidance is when we all submit to the One God. Society can only be set to rights when desires of its individuals are directed towards pleasing Allah *the Exalted* by following His way.

'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71). This is why Allah sent down His Ordinance. His Law does not contain anything that is against mankind. We all remember the story of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) and Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* when she said: '…But [now] I have surrendered myself, with Sulaiman (Solomon)…' (*an-Naml:* 44). She did not say, 'I have surrendered myself *to* Sulaiman', but rather 'I have surrendered myself, *with* Sulaiman, to Allah...' (*an-Naml:* 44). It was not to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* but to Allah she has submitted herself. When laws come from Him, it befits us to comply with the Will of Him Who has created us. In being true servants of Allah *Glorified is He* no one can enslave us, for we all become equal in our servitude to Him. Right guidance is to have faith in Allah as the One God, and faith is attained when we employ our minds to ponder the signs Allah has created in the universe. So we attain faith through reflection, and once we believe in Him, we submit our affairs to Him since He knows best what is good for us: 'We are commanded to devote ourselves to the Lord of the Worlds.' (*al-An'am:* 71)

Allah says in the following verse:

وَأَنْ أَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَٱتَّقُوهُ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

to establish regular prayers and be mindful of
Him.' It is to Him that you will all be gathered [72]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 72)

In this verse, we find a command to do three things: to submit to the Lord of the worlds, be constant in *salat* (prayer) and be mindful of Him in whatever we do or say. Embracing faith comes first then all we do must be in accordance with this faith. It starts in the heart: if firm belief is established in there, all the body will comply to the commands of the One the heart believes in. Submitting to Allah means to do what He enjoins on us and abstain from what He forbids. So worship includes active and passive things. Performing what we should, like being constant in observing *salat*, is an active act of worship, and avoiding what we are commanded to avoid is a passive act of worship; in other words, we worship Him by doing certain things and not doing certain other things. This is what it means to be mindful of Allah *Exalted is He*. Right guidance is to submit to the Will of the Creator, do what He ordains and avoid what He prohibits, and this is the essence of faith and submission: 'We are commanded to devote ourselves to the Lord of the Worlds.' (*al-An'am:* 71)

When Allah enjoins or forbids something, He knows that all His commands fall within our capacity. We are capable of both doing and refraining from what He commands. Allah has created within us the ability to obey or disobey Him, and He has given us free will to choose. He has given us the ability to do right or wrong, or the notion of obligation would be utterly nonsensical. Allah would not enjoin or forbid anything unless we had the ability and freedom to do or not to do it. Allah has distinguished mankind by the freedom of choice which is not given to other created beings in the universe. The sun, for example, does not have the freedom to rise or not. The wind does not have the freedom to blow or not. The earth is not free to grant or withhold the elements and nutrients Allah *the Almighty* has created inside it. Mankind, on the contrary, is endowed with the ability to choose between alternatives. Error occurs when one commits what Allah forbids or neglects what He enjoins. A true believer is he whose deeds and words are in compliance with the Ordinance of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down guidance that perfectly fits the natural disposition of His servants and can perfectly set their affairs to right. He has created in us certain things that we share with inanimate objects, plants and animals, but we are superior to all of them due to our ability to choose and act based on our free will. This is how Allah *the Exalted* has made us unique. Consider this example: suppose someone fell off a high place, could he stop himself from falling? In this case, one becomes as helpless as an inanimate object. He has no freedom to choose to fall or float in the air! Take another example: it is that of growth. You grow up and your body changes through time without any control or interference on your part. You cannot say, 'Today, I want to increase in height by half a millimetre!' This is out of your scope. You do not know how your heart beats or your wormlike intestines function. You do not interfere with the activity of your stomach or liver. You do not control your breathing mechanism, which is an essential source of life. These are all matters that you cannot control. This is a Mercy from Allah *the Exalted*; were it in the hands of people to control such essential matters, they would kill each other! Allah *Glorified is He* has given us free will to choose in matters pertaining to His obligations and prohibitions. We will be held accountable for what we do, not what is done to us (like the aforementioned examples). We are responsible for the matters in which we have freedom to contemplate, and then decide to do or not to do. Since responsibility requires maturity and freedom, Allah *the Almighty* does not hold one accountable for his deeds unless he is mature (past the age of puberty), sane and free. As for him who is insane, he has no juristic responsibility since he has no power over his mind to think of what he says or does. The same goes for him who is not mature, or under the age of puberty since his capacity to understand is not yet complete. Likewise, one is not to be held accountable for what he is forced to do by a compelling power or authority.

After stating those three commands, Allah closes the verse by saying: 'It is to Him that you will all be gathered.' (*al-An'am:* 72) If faith were a superficial matter that has nothing to do with the reality of people, there would be no outcomes of embracing or forsaking it. However, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the sublime end of faith that we should reach for. Let me give you an example – just for illustration, for Allah *Glorified is He* is elevated above all comparison. What a student does in his studies shows in the results of his exams. Whether or not he attends his classes, listens attentively to his teachers, revises his lessons, etc. must be reflected in the results he gets in the end. Thus, one must be recompensed for what he does since Allah *the Almighty* has given us freedom of choice to do good or evil. This is how faith guides you to righteous deeds because it directs you to a particular objective. So long as one believes there is Allah before Whom he will stand and receive his reward for his deeds in this life, one will be mindful of Him and keen on avoiding what He forbids, for fear of being punished for it on the Day of Judgment.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بِٱلْحَقِّ ۖ وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ
كُن فَيَكُونُ ۚ قَوْلُهُ ٱلْحَقُّ ۚ وَلَهُ ٱلْمُلْكُ يَوْمَ يُنفَخُ فِى ٱلصُّورِ ۚ
عَـٰلِمُ ٱلْغَيْبِ وَٱلشَّهَـٰدَةِ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ٱلْخَبِيرُ ﴿٧٣﴾

It is He who created the heavens and the earth for a true purpose. On the Day when He says, 'Be,' it will be: His word is the truth. All control on the Day the Trumpet is blown belongs to Him. He knows the seen and the unseen: He is the All Wise, the All-Aware [73] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 73)

Allah is the One Who does not ever change. From Him comes the truth. He says about His creation of the heavens and earth: 'Allah keeps the heavens and earth from vanishing...' (*Fatir:* 41).

He raises the heavens '…with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). Such is the work of All-Capable God. The creation of man is just amazing, and what is even more amazing is the creation of the heavens and earth, as Allah says: 'Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth...' (*Ghafir:* 57). When we look at the formation of the human body, we find endless wonders, and to this Allah directs out attention in the

Quran: 'On earth there are signs for those with sure faith – and in yourselves too. Do you not see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

When you contemplate the sky and the earth, you find the wondrous precision of Allah's creation. Your own body is like a miniature of this amazing universe, a miniature of the wonders of Allah's work. Every day brings a new breakthrough in science and unveils new secrets in the miraculous creation of the human body, secrets that were unknown to those who lived in the past; those who will live after us will be guided to other secrets of which we know nothing.

Scientists have found out, for example, that a homogenous fluid reaches equal levels in communicating tubes, no matter how different in size or design the tubes are. We pour the liquid in, and it rises and reaches the same level in all of them. The law of thermal equilibrium was also amazing when it was first discovered. It is the secret why a stove sends warmth in all directions of a room in a cold winter night. However, this law is suspended in the bodies of the warm-blooded. The internal temperatures of our bodies remain thirty-seven degrees whether one is in the North Pole or the hottest spot on earth. How come your body temperature does not change with the weather? This is quite symbolic; it is one of the signs proving that Allah *the Exalted* has made the human being independent and unique in this vast universe. This is amazing. What is even more amazing is that the different parts of your body have different temperatures. If the temperature of the eyes were thirty-seven degrees, they would melt. This is why we find that the temperature of the eyes is only nine degrees. Temperature of the liver is forty degrees. The organs of your body have different temperatures, yet the overall temperature is the same. Allah's creation is miraculous indeed: 'On earth there are signs for those with sure faith– and in yourselves too. Do you not see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

What happens when a speck of dust enters the air passage? One involuntarily enters into a fit of coughing in order to force this speck out. Coughing then is not your own decision; it is an involuntary reaction that is part of the precise system made and governed by the All-Wise Creator. The liver is enclosed within successive layers in order to maintain its relatively high temperature of forty degrees. It can only carry out its function at this temperature. The ears are quite sensitive to cold, more than the other body parts because their temperature is low. The creation of *the Almighty* Lord is full of wonders we still know nothing of. ‘It is He who created the heavens and the earth for a true purpose…’ (*al-An‘am:* 73). He has created the heavens and earth according to fixed laws that do not change except by His will. He says: ‘The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day. Each floats in [its own] orbit.’ (*Ya Sin:* 40)

If you think order is a form of evidence for the existence of an All-Wise Creator, look then at the perfect order of the universe. If you think anomalies are forms of evidence for the existence of an All-Powerful Lord, look at the instances when norms are suspended or reversed. Allah maintains perfect order in the system of the universe since any disorder or anomaly in this system would lead to destruction. However, when there is one blind person out of a thousand, this does not represent an imperfection in the universe. What appears to us to be an anomaly is actually an alternative among others that Allah *the Exalted* has willed for a reason. In cases where there are no alternatives, order is constantly maintained; the sun must rise every day, for example, and Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... On the Day when He says, "Be", it will be: His word is the truth...’ (*al-An‘am:* 73). Allah has brought us into existence in truth, and when He demolishes the sky and the earth and brings life to an end, it is in truth, too. When the sky moves from side to side and celestial bodies are scattered about and fall down, it will be in truth. It is not just the act of creation and bringing people and things into existence that proves the Majesty and Power of the Creator. Rather, the obliteration of this creation and elimination of all existence also constitute a proof of His Majesty and Power. At the beginning, Allah *the Almighty* said to the universe, ‘Be’, and it was. In the end, He will say to the end, ‘Be!’, and all creation will come to an end so the doer of good can be rewarded for his goodness, and the doer of evil can be given his due. A righteous person may suffer because of his uprightness throughout his life, and an evildoer may never be truly recompensed in this life. In the Hereafter, reward and punishment await, and all will be recompensed in accordance with what they have done. Thus, when the world is brought to an end, this is also a proof of the Greatness and Wisdom of the Creator, for then the Day of Judgment will come, and everyone will be given their reward. So, when Allah brought us into existence, it was for a reason, and when he removes us from existence, it is for a reason too. All His actions are in truth, and He is the One Who has always existed with no beginning and no end.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…All control on the Day the Trumpet is blown belongs to Him. He knows the seen and the unseen. He is the All-Wise, the All-Aware.' (*al-An'am:* 73) Has control ever belonged to other than Allah? In the life of this world, Allah *the Almighty* has distributed properties among His servants, so each has control in his limited dominion. He has also granted authority and power to some of His servants, so they also have control over their subjects. Thus, Allah allows His servants to exercise some control in this life, but in the Hereafter, everyone will be stripped of whatever he possessed or controlled in this worldly life; this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…"Who has control today?" Allah, the One, the All Powerful.' (*Ghafir:* 16) In the life of this world, He grants us means to employ and reap the fruits of our work. He has created causes that, if we use, will yield the outcomes expected of them. He gives us the power and ability to have limited control over things. An employer has power over his employees whom he pays for their work. A cook has the ability to prepare food, a tailor to make clothes, and so on. However, in the Hereafter no one will be in a position to do anything for anyone; all power and control will belong to Him alone: '…All control on the Day the Trumpet is blown belongs to Him. He knows the seen and the unseen. He is the All-Wise, the All-Aware.' (*al-An'am:* 73) Control already belongs to Him in the life of this world, but He has given us means to employ and exercise control over so we can achieve the results we want, yet means do not work except by His Will and Permission. Allah *Glorified is He* has willed the earth to be a place for struggle in this worldly life, while the Hereafter is when we return to Him to receive our recompense. 'One Day– when the earth is turned into another earth...' (*Ibrahim:* 48).

The earth that we live on is created for us to settle in. We cultivate parts of it to get food, build houses on other parts, and exhaust the possible means Allah has created in it to make the world prosperous. In this life, Allah has created causes that we must make use of to gain desired outcomes. Land must be ploughed to grow plants. Mines must be built to extract iron. Special tools and machines must be used to find oil. These means and causes can never be in the hand of any one person, but Allah *the Exalted* has distributed them amongst His servants for each to be in control of a certain aspect of this life. When the means fall short, when there is nothing one can do to achieve the desired outcomes, the Creator of all means stretches out His Hand to His servants to assist them. He has made the means for you to work, and results and success come from Him only. He may also strip you of all the means so you resort to Him and ask Him for help. Thus, they are not the means and causes that lead to results by their own power, but they are all in the Hand of Allah and they work and yield results by His Power. Everything in the world points to Him and bears witness to His Majesty. A little child may believe that the small switch on the wall is responsible for producing light. An older child would know that it is the wire that connects the switch to the electricity box that brings light. Someone who has greater knowledge would understand that electricity is produced by generators powered by waterfalls. Therefore, behind every result, there is a series of causes that lead to it, and all the causes point to the Creator and spell His Might and Wisdom. He has honoured us by allowing us control of causes and means, but this control does not really belong to us, or no one would be able to strip us of it. This is all the manifestation of His Bounty, the One to whom all control belongs: 'Say, "Allah, Holder of all control…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). Whatever powers He has granted to us in this life will be returned to Him on that Day: '…All control on the Day the Trumpet is blown belongs to Him. He knows the seen and the unseen. He is the All-Wise, the All-Aware.' (*al-An'am:* 73) Blowing into the trumpet is an announcement that something is about to happen. After the first blow, whoever is alive will die, and after the second blow, the dead will rise. Allah says: '…He knows the seen and the unseen…' (*al-An'am:* 73). As long as He knows the unseen, then obviously He must know the seen as well. The expression in the verse implies emphasis. Since He knows everything, He grants rewards based on His Wisdom. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '... He is the All-Wise, the All-Aware.' (*al-An'am:* 73) The All-Wise is the One Who puts everything in place, and the All-Aware is the One Who knows everything and possesses Omnipotent Knowledge. He does not need to oppress anyone because the one who oppresses another only does so to benefit from something the oppressed person has. Allah is in no need of anyone;

rather, we all are in need of Him. He does not benefit from anyone, but it is He Who endows everyone with benefits. This is why servitude to Him is an honour. The word 'servitude' is hated by people, and wars have been fought for liberating human beings from being enslaved by other human beings. A master would always want to make as much profit as possible through his slave. It is He Who gives us everything and never wants anything from us, even though we are His servants. This is how servitude becomes an honour. Ponder this verse: 'Glory to Him Who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship [in Mecca] to the furthest place of worship [in Jerusalem], whose surroundings We have blessed...' (*al-Isra':* 1). By describing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as 'His servant', Allah means to praise and honour him. He *peace and blessings be upon him* was sincere in his servitude and devotion to Allah *Glorified is He* so He elevated him and bestowed on him abundant blessings.

Thus, there is a message for everyone: cast worries aside since you have a Lord Who is never overtaken by slumber or sleep and He is the Self-Sufficient Who protects and sustains all that exists. Whatever you need is in His Hand, so just call on Him, and He will be there for you and will respond to your invocations in the manner that best suits you. Is this not an honour?

Allah says in the following verse:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ ءَازَرَ أَتَتَّخِذُ أَصْنَامًا ءَالِهَةً ۖ إِنِّىٓ أَرَىٰكَ وَقَوْمَكَ فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٧٤﴾

Remember when Abraham said to his father, Azar, 'How can you take idols as gods? I see that you and your people have clearly gone astray' [74] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 74)

Allah *the Exalted* revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stories of previous Prophets to console him and give him patience to deal with the difficulties of calling to Islam. At the dawn of his call, the burden was really heavy for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions, Allah *be pleased with them*, so He told them what happened to previous Prophets to make their hearts stronger and firm their faith. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions some information regarding Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'Remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father, Azar, "How can you take idols as gods..."' (*al-An'am:* 74) The word *idh* (when and or thus) is an adverb denoting place or time, i.e. remember well the time when *Ibrahim* (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to his father Azar, 'How can you take idols as gods?' If you remember that, it will support you in your call to Islam.

Scholars have been disserting whether Azar is the actual father of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* or is it Tarikh [son of Nahour, grandson of Prophet Ismail (Ishmael)]. I have previously stated that fatherhood represents the forefathers of an individual; so the father, the grandfather, the great-grandfather, etc. are all considered fathers. Moreover 'fatherhood' (*ubuwwa*) can also apply to someone who is equal to the father, such as a paternal uncle. There is an example of this in the Quran where the Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Or were you witnesses when death approached Ya'qub (Jacob)? When he said unto his sons, "What will you worship after me?" They said, "We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers…"' (*al-Baqara:* 133).

'Fathers', or *abā'* ', in this verse, is in the plural form. Thus, if we count the 'fathers' in the rest of the verse, we find them to be Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*. Note that the verse is about Ya'qub (Jacob), whose father was Ishaq (Isaac), son of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*. Nevertheless, Ismail (Ishmael) is mentioned together with those 'fathers'. If you break it down, Ibrahim (Abraham) is the father, leaving us with two names, Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*. Since Ismail (Ishmael) is the brother of Ishaq (Isaac) and the Quran is articulating the word 'father' (*ab*), the relationship of paternal uncle can applied.

A Noble Hadith states: 'I came out of marriage, and I did not come out of fornication: from Adam until my father and mother gave birth to me. I was never affected in the slightest by the fornication of the Days of Ignorance (*jahiliyyah*).'(1)

It is like the Prophet *peace and blessings upon him* is saying that his entire lineage is free from idolaters.(2) Azar was an idol maker, and Allah *the Exalted* says in another verse: '...Those who ascribe partners to Allah are truly unclean...' Then, if Azar were the true father of Ibrahim (Abraham) then Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* would be from his progeny. I am of the opinion that he was his uncle because Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings upon him* also said, 'I have come from the loins of pure men and the wombs of pure women.' This is a statement showing that his lineage is noble and free from the impurity of idolatry on both the father's and mother's side. Therefore, it is not correct to believe that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father was Azar since he was an idolater. Then, how do we explain Allah's statement: '…Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father Azar' (*al-An'am:* 74)? We must check the use of the word *ubua*, or fatherhood, in the Quran and the Arabic language. The Quran is unequivocal that just as fatherhood applies to the actual father from whose loins the son comes; it also applies to the brother of the father or the uncle. As mentioned, the evidence is that the Quran, which states: '... to his father Azar...' also states: 'Were you [Jews] there to see when death came upon Ya'qub (Jacob)? When he said to his sons, "What will you worship after I am gone?" They replied, "We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), and Ishaq (Isaac), the one single God. We devote ourselves to Him."' (*al-Baqara:* 133)

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn 'Uday in (Al-Kamil) and narrated by At-Tabarani in (Al-Awsat) from 'Ali.*

(2) The Hadith clearly refers to purity of the reproduction in his lineage and not his ancestor's beliefs, and there are many authentic Hadiths where the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* mentions that his parents are going to hell-fire.

Fathers (*abāʾ*) is the plural of father (*ab*), and a plural in Arabic must be at least three: Ibrahim (Abraham) and then Ismail (Ishmael), the uncle, are both described as fathers, along with Ishaq (Isaac) who is the direct father of Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them*. They are the three fathers mentioned in this verse. Ismail's (Ishmael's) fatherhood in relation to Ya'qub (Jacob) is not that of an actual parent, but the paternal uncle since Ismail (Ishmael) was the brother of Ishaq (Isaac), who was Ya'qub's (Jacob's) parent. Therefore, the word *ab* can be used to refer to an uncle.

Another proof is in the statement of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings upon him.* When his uncle al-ʿAbbās was taken captive and he demanded: 'Return back my father to me.' In this statement, 'my father' meant his uncle Al-ʿAbbas, *Allah be pleased with him*.

Let us see how the word *ab* is conventionally used in the Arabic language we speak, which is one transmitted by hearing, fixed in our ears and articulated by our tongues. Although colloquial language has caused it to lose its eloquence, the roots of the pure language can still be traced back to our ancestors. It was known and accepted by them that whenever the real father was intended, he was referred to by ‘father’ only, without mentioning his name. If someone came up to you and asked, ‘Is your father here?’ and does not mention your father’s name, then he means your actual parent. However, suppose the questioner wanted your uncle, he would ask: ‘Is your father John here?’ When the proper noun is mentioned, you know that the uncle is intended due to the fact that if the real father was intended, his name would not need mentioning. Merely asking for the father would be sufficient. Therefore, if Allah had said: ‘when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father’ without mentioning the proper name, then we could have concluded that Azar was the father of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and not his uncle, which would also make him a great grandfather of our Messenger *peace and blessings upon him*. However, the Quran mentioned him by name and stated ‘his father Azar’ the first name excludes the actual father from the word *ab*, and with that, the controversy surrounding this issue is put to rest.

Now, why does Allah *the Almighty* ask his Messenger *peace and blessings upon him* to remember 'when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father Azar'? (*al-An‘am:* 74) The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came onto the Arab nation headed by Quraysh, the nation that confronted the call to Islam right at its beginning. Although Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* came after an interval of cessation of Messengers, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was still central to the creed of the Arabic people since all of his rituals were extant in Arabia. For example, the imminent slaughtering of his son and the ransom from the sky took place there along with Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) raising of the *Ka’ba’s* foundations was completed there. Allah *the Exalted* wants to make it clear to the Quraysh that the authority they assumed over the Arabs was only due to the *Ka’ba,* the House, being there. If this House, the *Ka’ba*, had not existed, you (Quraysh) would merely be a tribe amongst the other tribes. You would not have had any respect or domination, or special rank. However, you know that your merchandise goes to the north and south, and no one dares to intrude upon it. This is merely due to the fact that whoever would attack your merchants must come someday to the *Ka’ba* for pilgrimage, and you would have control over them during their stay in the House. In the chapter of *al-Fil*, we have seen how it was followed by the following verses: ‘For the protection of Quraysh; their protection during their trading caravans in the winter and the summer’ (*Quraysh:* 1-2). If the House had been destroyed by Abreha (Abraha)(1), the Abyssinian, the prestige of Quraysh would have vanished. Allah gave them victory so that their journeys would continue in the winter and the summer. Therefore, Allah said: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House who feeds them against hunger and gives them security against fear.’ (*Quraysh:* 3-4)

Indeed, the Lord of this House is the One Who honoured and protected the Quraysh by the very existence of this House, built by Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. So, despite their worship of idols, the people had a doctrinal link to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to touch their hearts with the mention of the man who was the cause of their dignity. Since their first doctrinal confrontation was also that of idol worshipping and Ibrahim (Abraham) also confronted the worshipping of idols, there was much social relevance.

'Remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father Azar, "‘How can you take idols as gods?"' Idols, or *asnam*, are stone-made images shaped like a living being, whereas a *wathan* is a sanctified raw piece of stone that has not been shaped, treated, or manufactured. This is the difference between *sanam* and *wathan*. However, from where did the idea of idols, or asnām, first come? People have always recognised causalities in life. Man needs light and sees the sun and then moon at night. He finds strength and rigidity in mountains; so he builds houses inside them. Thus, there are things in which man sees a causal quality, and then he starts believing they are immediate agents in producing effects. This leads to sanctifying objects such as the sun or the moon. People have worshipped celestial bodies before idols or *asnam*. In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘How can you take idols as gods?’ (*al-An‘am:* 75). Then, He mentions the history of idols in the discussion: ‘When the night grew dark over him he saw a star...’ (*al-An‘am:* 76). So, there is a connection between idols (*asnam*) and celestial bodies. It all starts when man sees something that benefits him, thus he attributes every other benefit to it. He starts thinking that it has some power that he should respect. Unaware of the fact that the Creator of all these objects is unseen, he starts worshipping that which is observable to him. When celestial bodies set, some people said: ‘Let us make idols (*asnam*) to remind us of them.' Then, there came to be an idol (*sanam*) resembling the sun, an idol (*sanam*) resembling the moon and another resembling some star. The idols (*asnam*) were made to remind people of the original celestial bodies. Therefore, I always give the following advice: ‘People must not be heedless of the Original Cause because He is behind all causes.’ If the mind goes through a causal sequence, it will eventually reach a cause for which there is no (observable) cause, and that is when the capacity of the creation ends and the submission to its Creator should begin. Those who are fascinated by the means are the ones who see them efficient in and of themselves.

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(1) **Abraha** (also spelled **Abreha**) (died after AD 553. 525—at least 553), also known as '**Abraha Al-Ashram** (Arabic: أبرهة الأشرم), was an Ethiopian general then the viceroy of southern Arabia for the Kingdom of Aksum, and later declared himself an independent King of Himyar. Abraha ruled much of present-day Yemen and Hijaz from at least 531 -547 AD to 555 - 565 AD.

When people started becoming heedless of religion, they started to worship any object they perceived as being beneficial around them. People used to make pilgrimage to the *Ka’ba*, and they loved it even before the Message (of Islam). On their journeys to other countries, it was a custom to take along a souvenir piece of stone that was the same type as that of the *Ka’ba*. It served as a comfort to them until with time, these souvenirs were themselves labelled as holy with disregard to their origin.

Ibrahim (Abraham), the close friend*,* or *khalil*, of the Most Merciful, was not only honoured by Arabs, but also by the people of the Book. They were honoured so much so that they claimed he was affiliated to them by saying, ‘Indeed, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a Jew’ or ‘He [Ibrahim (Abraham)] was a Christian.’ In confronting the Quraysh as well as the people of the Book, the Quran mentions the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to remind them of someone they already respected, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father

Azar, "How can you take idols as gods? I see that you and your people have clearly gone astray."' (*al-An'am:* 74)

To go astray (*dalal*) means to pursue a goal but stray off the path that leads to it. During those days, people had a 'goal' to sanctify, appreciate, and praise whoever grants them blessings. Unfortunately, they strayed off their path by failing to see the 'Efficient and Original Cause' behind all causes and falling into a vicious cycle of created causes. This is 'clearly going astray' (*dalal mubeen*) as it is the state of a created being deceived by another created being. The first man came into a world created for him, with the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars; the clouds send water down as rain, while the mountains provide food. He should have paid attention to the following issue: he did not create these things, nor has anyone claimed to have created them. Therefore, should it not have occurred to man that there is a Creator for all this? After all, even the most trivial of things have their maker. For example, no one ever observed a cup of water forming itself. In fact, there were many stages that led to its development. Someone must have discovered the suitable raw material, and another had to chemically change it; also, someone must have provided the funding until it finally became a cup. The same goes for a lamp. Just think of all that is involved in its making, whether financially or scientifically along with the elements of earth that have been used to make it. Even a lamp has been developing into different styles and shapes since the day it was first invented. Now consider the sun that illuminates half of the earth for a period of time and then the other half for another period of time. It does not require any technical support, nor has it ever failed in its task. Edison, the man who invented the lamp, studied in schools, and his story has gained much admiration by writers of his biography. However, has anyone related – with admiration and with faith – the story of the sun's creation that illuminates the whole universe? We need to stop being superficial and look deeper behind the observable causes to finally conclude there must be an Original Cause that has no cause behind it. We must also listen carefully and obey those (Messengers) who solved this mystery for us by the giving the following explanation: Allah *the Exalted* has created this universe for us. There is no resemblance to Him in His Attributes, nor in His power and absolute wisdom. What He wants from us is to follow His Way. Messengers were sent as a mercy to rescue us and to explain this mystery (of the creation). Allah *the Almighty* says through His Messengers: ‘I am the One Who created the heavens. I am the One Who created the earth. I am the One Who made you in control of everything in the universe.’ This is a claim that is either true or false. If true, then you must declare your faith in Him. On the other hand, if false, then we need to ask ourselves, ‘Who else, besides Allah, has created the universe? How come he has not told us of his attributes nor has he sent us any messages to tell us about him? Also, since no one else has done so, the divinity must be declared to the only One Who has informed us of His Essence, His Attributes and His creation via Messengers, and no one has ever opposed Him. Then, we believe His claim to be the sole Creator of the universe and the One Who has given us control over it. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to prevent us from stopping merely at the causes, from ‘clearly going astray.'

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُرِيٓ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُوقِنِينَ ٧٥

In this way We showed Abraham [God’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be a firm believer [75] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 75)

Because Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* could see that the worship of idols (*asnam*) was clearly a way to go astray, Allah showed him His dominion (*malakut*) over the heavens and the earth. Since he discovered that there is a True God; that True God revealed to him the secrets of the universe.

The word *malakut,* or ‘greater dominion', is hyperbolic for *mulk*, or dominion, just as *rahmut* is hyperbolic for *rahma*, or mercy. The expression ‘greater dominion’ (*malakut*) implies the unseen facts. Whoever follows only the senses, like seeing and touching, merely perceives the dominion, or *mulk*. However, the ‘gretaer dominion’, or *malakut*, includes everything that is unobservable. Hence, the difference between *mulk* and *malakut* is that *mulk*, or dominion is all that one observes in front of himself, while *malakut*, or ‘greater dominion’ is everything behind this dominion, or *mulk*. To clarify that, let us consider how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* negates Allah having any partners. ‘Ibrahim (Abraham) said, ‘Whatever you have worshipped, you and your forefathers, are my enemies, not so the Lord of the Worlds Who created me. It is He Who guides me and He Who gives me food and drink. And when I fall ill, it is He Who cures me, who will make me die and then give me life again.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77-81).

Note how the style changes in 'Who created me...' not 'He Who created me'. It is followed by 'It is He Who guides me'. Since no one ever claimed to have created man, it is a matter attributed solely to Allah *the Exalted* and does not need emphasis. On the other hand, some people claim to guide mankind, and whatever is claimed by humans is emphasised with the word 'He' (*huwa*). For any other matter that humans do not attribute to themselves, like creation, causing death and bringing back to life, 'He' is not mentioned. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* continues: 'He (*huwa*) Who gives me food and drink'. Then, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* again disregards all observable causes and defines an unseen reality: 'And when I fall ill, it is He (*huwa*) Who cures me'. Thus, he distinguishes between the means to a cure, provided by doctors and their prescriptions, and the Greatest Curer Who is Allah *Glorified is He*. People are often deceived by the means and think that the doctor is the one who cures. This is how Ibrahim (Abraham) disregards the observable means and focuses on the reality behind them. He disregards the observable (*mulk* or dominion) and focuses on the deep (*malakut* or greater dominion) to emphasise that indeed a doctor treats his patients, but he cannot cure them. In fact, there have been incidents where a patient goes to a doctor and dies of an injection given by the doctor. In such cases, the doctor turns into a cause of death instead of cure.

Glorified is He who inherits the doctor and his medicine
And lets the patient witness the death of those who gave up on him

Thus, 'it is He Who cures me', means the cure comes from Allah through the treatment by doctors. Furthermore, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* emphasises with 'He' (*huwa*) anything of which the cause might be deceiving.

When it comes to creed, Ibrahim (Abraham) has reached a high status acknowledged by all other Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to him by 'Ibrahim (Abrahim), who fulfilled his duty.' (*an-Najm:* 37). And He *the Exalted* says: 'When Ibrahim's (Abrahim's) Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, I will make you a leader of people…' (*al-Baqara:* 124).

You, Ibrahim (Abraham), are trusted to be a (religious) leader for people. Then, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked Allah *the Almighty* to make his descendants (religious) leaders as well. He asked for that because he was only human, and was still in the stage of looking only at the *mulk,* or dominion. 'Ibrahim (Abraham) asked, "And will You make leaders from my descendants too?" He answered, "My pledge does not hold for those who do evil."' (*al-Baqara:* 124) This is due to the fact that [religious] leadership is not an inheritable title. Only those who deserve it could obtain it.

Ibrahim (Abraham) migrated with Hajar and their son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them* to a barren valley next to the Sacred House where he left them to settle. The Quran relates Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* saying: 'Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer. Make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful.' (*Ibrahim:* 37)

Ibrahim (Abraham) grasped that Allah *Glorified is He* was teaching him the secrets of the *malakut*, or greater dominion, and his mind realised that (religious) leadership is not bestowed upon those who do evil. Then, Allah *the Exalted* made it clear to him that he must distinguish between the succession of prophethood (religious leadership) and the Lord's granting of various foods. This is clarified when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* supplicated: 'My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in Allah and the Last Day…' (*al-Baqara:* 126).

When Ibrahim (Abraham) was asking for the sustenance of produce to be given (only) to those who believed in Allah and the Last Day, he was not bearing in mind the difference between the covenant of prophethood and leadership and the necessities of life. Thus, '…He said, "As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while"…' (*al-Baqara:* 126). This means that He will indeed provide nourishment to those who believe as well as those who disbelieve.

Nourishment and the essentials of life are among the gifts of Lordship unlike (religious) methodologies which are among the gifts of Divinity. Allah is a Lord to all people since He is the One Who summoned them all: believers and disbelievers, obedient and disobedient. Furthermore, since He is the One Who summoned them all to existence, He will not deny them sustenance. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'In this way, we showed Ibrahim our greater dominion (*malakut*) over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be a firm believer.' (*al-An'am:* 75).

Whoever follows the footsteps of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* will end up being connected and attached to the True Lord's Essence *Glorified is He*. There is also a difference between being connected and attached to His Essence and being connected and attached to His Attributes. Those who worship Allah *the Exalted* because He is the All-Provider or because He is the Enricher are attached to His Attributes. On the other hand, those who are attached to Allah simply because He is God, and even if He made them poor, are attached to His Essence. When Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* purified his soul from all previous beliefs, then Allah entrusted him with universal secrets, along with granting him abundance as He grants anyone who is sincere in their attachment to their Creator; they are granted insight into universal secrets. Furthermore, there are many examples of that in the Quran, like: '... Be mindful of God and He will teach you...' (*al-Baqara:* 282).

As long as a person maintains the Trust of the Ordinance of the True Lord and follows His Rules, they are considered trustworthy with His Secrets (His Wisdom), and He gives them even more and more. 'Being mindful' (*tattaqi*) means to adhere to the True Lord's methodology, and this leads to receiving endless bounties from Him. When one is with Allah *the Almighty,* He certainly bestows gifts of His attributes upon them by bringing them closer and making them trust the more in Their Lord. An example of this is what happened during the emigration from Mecca to Medina. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings upon him* and his companion Abu Bakr Allah *be pleased with him* were hiding in the Cave of Hira, and Abu Bakr said, 'If any of them looks down at his feet, he will definitely see us.' This was certainly a logical conclusion, or an idea that made perfect sense. However, the Messenger *peace* *and blessings upon him* responded on a completely different level, away from the material universe to the pure world of the (*malakut*). He replied, ‘Abu Bakr, what do you think of two when Allah is their third?’[1]

What the Prophet is essentially saying is the following, ‘Be reassured. No one will see us because we are in Allah’s company, and He is invisible to sight.’ When someone weak is in the company of someone strong, then the law of energy is in effect and the weak is no longer weak. The same applies to a boy who may be bullied by children of his age, but when he is seen holding his father’s hand, not a single one of those children dares to approach him. People cannot be harmed by others unless they fail to be in Allah’s company since no one ever dares to harm someone who is in His Company.

Allah *Glorified is He* has also communicated a message about the dominion (*mulk*) and the greater dominion (*malakūt*) in the story of one of the great Messengers who was in the company of a righteous slave whom Allah bestowed His knowledge upon due to his being mindful of Him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And found one of Our servants – a man to whom We had granted Our Mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.’ (*al-Kahf:* 65) This pious man had obeyed the earlier Messenger of his time and completely implemented his methodology until he became attached to the True Lord Who gave him Knowledge of His own, or imparting some of His Divine Knowledge. It is truly amazing how Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is thinking within the laws of the dominion (*mulk*), whereas the one whom Allah has given Mercy and Knowledge from Him is thinking within the laws of the greater dominion (*malakut*), and each of them is excused since they are thinking within different realms. This is why the righteous slave explains later: ‘... I did not do [these things] of my own accord...’ (*al-Kahf:* 82). It was not his own doing; rather, he was commanded to do it. Both men could excuse one another, ‘The man said, "You will not be able to bear with me patiently."’ Thus, the righteous slave understood what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* was thinking, so he added: ‘How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ (*al-Kahf:* 68) The Noble

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Quran relates: 'Musa (Moses) said, "Allah willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way."' (*al-Kahf:* 69)

In these verses, a Messenger who has come to lead the way is now obeying a righteous man who has been truthfully following the way of a previous Messenger along with implementing his teachings as Allah *the Exalted* desires. This is Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* whom Allah is telling us about; he is one of the great Messengers and one of those most determined among the Messengers. He then receives the command from the righteous slave: 'The man said, "If you follow me, then do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself."' (*al-Kahf:* 70)

Why is this? The reason is that the righteous slave knows that Musa (Moses) will be talking from the perspective of the dominion (*mulk*), while he is talking from the perspective of the greater dominion (*malakut*). When they get on the boat, the righteous slave puts a hole in it, which is a visible damage from the perspective of the dominion (*mulk*); Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* points out that this act is a violation of the law. How could the righteous man do such a thing to the boat? 'He replied, "Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?"' (*al-Kahf:* 72) Musa (Moses) is reminded, and then there are the stories of the boy and of the wall.

These stories are showing how the *malakut* (greater dominion) corrects the anomalies of the *mulk* (dominion). Putting a hole in the ship was visible damage, but Musa (Moses) did not know there was a king who was forcefully taking away usable, seaworthy ships. This ship belonged to needy people who were working at sea, and the righteous slave wanted to preserve their ship for them so he put a hole in it that would cause the brutal king not to take it from them; when the brutal king sees a damaged ship instead of a seaworthy one, he would not take the damaged one. The owners would be able to fix their ship later. If Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had known that, would he not have been the one to have damaged the ship himself? He certainly would have damaged it. Therefore, if the one using laws of the *mulk* (dominion) had knowledge of the secrets of the *malakut* (greater dominion), he would have acted differently.

When it comes to killing a boy, one must ask, 'What did the boy do wrong?' The righteous slave explains: ‘The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and we feared he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief.’ (*al-Kahf:* 80). The parents might have spoiled this boy and feed him from unlawful wealth, so he would have become a tribulation for them. Thus, the boy was killed so that they would remain believers, and the Lord hastened the boy directly into paradise.

As for the wall, we also see the difference between the perspective of the *mulk* and that of the *malakut*. As it appears, the two of them came onto a village and asked its people for food. Asking for food is a sign of the veracity and extent of one’s need since it is not a request for money. Someone might ask for money to save it up, but someone asking, ‘Give me a loaf of bread to eat,’ this is a sign of his sincere need. The people of the village refused, however, to accommodate them, which means they were wicked and not good-natured. The righteous slave saw a wall that was on the point of tumbling down so he repaired it. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* became frustrated, and his frustration was justified. Why would the man voluntarily rebuild a wall for them when they would not even give them food? It would have been right for him to ask for something in return. Musa (Moses) was frustrated for a seemingly valid reason, but the righteous slave explained the situation. He rebuilt the wall because there was a treasure underneath it belonging to orphans. Since the people of the village were wicked and did not provide food, then if the wall had fallen, those wicked people would have stolen the treasure from its rightful owners who were still children. The righteous slave built the wall with faithful engineering that Allah *the Exalted* had inspired in him such that the wall would fall just as the boys attained maturity. Therefore, it was a temporary repair similar to setting an alarm to ring at a specific time. Likewise, the wall was set to fall when the boys had attained maturity so that they could take their treasure. This clarifies the contrast between the perspective of the *mulk* (dominion) and that of the *malakut* (greater dominion). The perspective of the *malakut* (greater dominion) sees the real causes hidden behind the outwardly causes. ‘In this way, we showed Ibrahim (Abraham) Our greater dominion over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be among the certain [in faith].’ (*al-An‘am:* 75).

Therefore, did he become certain or not? The word *muqinin,* meaning people who are certain in their faith, is the plural of *muqin* with the plural in the Arabic language indicating at least three. There are three successive levels of certainty (*yaqin*) that people can obtain: certainty of someone's knowledge whom you trust that would not lie (*'Ilm al-yaqin*), certainty of seeing something with your own eyes (*'Ayn al-yaqin*) and certainty of the truth of something or the certain truth (*Haq al-yaqin*). The True Lord presents this matter in the chapter of *at-Takathur*: 'Striving for more distracts you until you go into your graves.(1) No indeed! You will come to know. No indeed! In the end, you will come to know. No indeed! If only you knew for certain' (*at-Takathur:* 1-5).

What Allah is informing us is a statement out of His Own Knowledge, and we must be certain of the truth of His Knowledge. 'No indeed! If only you knew for certain you will most definitely see Hellfire, you will see it with the eye of certain.' (*at-Takathur:* 5-7). In the Hereafter, we will see hellfire with our own eyes (*'Ayn al-yaqin*).

The certain truth (*Haq al-yaqin*), however, is not mentioned here, but it is mentioned in the chapter of *al-Waqi'a*: 'If he is one of those on the Right, [he will hear], "Peace be on you" from his companions on the Right. However, if he is one of those who denied the truth and went astray, [he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in Hell. This is the certain truth.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 90-95).

Throughout his life, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was truly amongst the people who are certain in their faith (*muqinin*); this was due to the fact that early on Allah *the Almighty* gave him insight into what is behind the outwardly aspects of the dominion (*mulk*), in other words, what is behind the outwardly aspects of things and their consequences. For example, Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to him when he was about to be thrown in the fire by his people and asked him, 'Do you need anything?' Ibrahim (Abraham) replied, 'Not from you!'

He refused Angel Jibril's (Gabriel's) help although he knew well that fire burns, but this is an outwardly aspect of the dominion (*mulk*) or an outwardly aspect of fire. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was also aware that the One Who created fire is the One Who gave it its burning property. Therefore, He is also the Only One capable of making it stop burning. Ibrahim (Abraham) was certain of His Lord. That is why Allah *the Exalted* did not put out the fire as that would have been a visible cause; He rather used it to confuse his enemies. Thereby, He clarified, 'O, fire! I have created within you the power to burn and I am telling you now: Do not burn!' ‘But we said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham."’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69) Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* already knew such hidden truths behind the outwardly dominion (*mulk*) although this was one of the first tests in his life. He could have given another type of response to Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* when he offered him help before they threw him into the fire.

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(1) Literally 'until you visit the graves'… Their stay in the grave is like a short visit.

Then, towards the end of his life, he was tested with the command to slaughter his own son. Every person goes through phases of forming his personal identity, and at some point his own personal identity is the one controlling him. However, once he has children, their identity becomes more important than his own; in other words, he loves his children more than he loves himself. He wishes to offer his children everything he missed. At an old age, Allah *the Almighty* finally granted Ibrahim (Abraham) a son *peace be upon them*. Then there came the trial to slaughter this son when he was just a boy. This was a severe and harsh test, and it did not come through revelation, rather, it came through a dream. Furthermore, we all know that Prophets’ dreams are true. However, Ibrahim (Abraham) was aware that the True Lord does not want anything from His creation except their submission to His ordainment. Thus, when someone’s affliction has been extended upon him by his Lord, be it an illness or be it his wealth or in anything else, then be certain that he has not come to accept his affliction. For if he had come to accept it, the affliction then would end. An affliction is not lifted until one comes to accept it. No one is capable of pressuring his Creator. People are the ones who prolong their own afflictions. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* also knew that; he understood the perspective of the greater dominion (*malakut*). When it was said to him, ‘Slaughter your son’, he did not want his son to go through a period of rage against his father. Had he taken his son by one hand while holding a knife in the other, such a moment would have been filled with rage by his son causing him to miss the reward? Therefore, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* clarified the situation as the Quran relates: '…Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?"…' (*as-Saffat:* 102)

This proves Ibrahim's (Abraham's) love for his son since he is keen on him obtaining the reward of submission. Then, what was Ismail's (Ishmael's) response? '…He said, "Father, do as you are commanded and, Allah willing, you will find me steadfast."' (*as-Saffat:* 102) Then the Quran confirms Ismail (Ishmael) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* both accepting Allah's affliction: 'When they had both submitted to Allah, and he had laid his son down on the side of his face.' (*as-Saffat:* 103) This accepting of an affliction is what lifts it. The Quran continues: 'We called out to him, "Ibrahim (Abraham), you have fulfilled the dream." This is how we reward those who do the good.' (*as-Saffat:* 104-105)

Allah *the Exalted* ransomed Ismail (Ishmael) with a tremendous sacrifice. Not only that, but He also granted Ibrahim (Abraham) a second child since he understood the *malakut* (greater dominion) of the heavens and the earth, along with having great wisdom to know where everything is coming from.

So, whenever someone is afflicted, all they need to do is accept it and think: 'If I am afflicted with something out of my hands and there is nothing more I can do about it, and then I need to be reassured that My Creator has brought this upon me, and it is a test from Him. I must be reassured that no creator would destroy his own creation. There must be wisdom behind all this, and even if I do not understand it, I trust in His wisdom.' The way a believer can rid himself from any calamity is to accept it, and then it will end. If someone is afflicted with the death of his son and choses to keep his house gloomy and sad, with the mother crying whenever she sees a boy the same age as her deceased son, then the door will never be closed for that grief. If they want Allah *the Almighty* to remove this test and to ease the pain, they must close the door on grief by learning to accept whatever happened. Every believer must know that whatever is taken away from him, will be replaced with a great reward that is better than his loss. Also, those taken by death are in a much better place than they were in this life. The following saying applies: ‘The afflicted (*musab*) are not those with an affliction or whose loved one passed away, rather the (*musab*) are those who have been denied the reward for their affliction.'

فَلَمَّا جَنَّ عَلَيْهِ ٱلَّيْلُ رَءَا كَوْكَبًا ۖ قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّى ۖ فَلَمَّآ أَفَلَ قَالَ لَآ أُحِبُّ ٱلْءَافِلِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

When the night grew dark over him he saw a star and said, ‘This is my Lord,’ but when it set, he said, ‘I do not like things that set’ [76] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 76)

The word *janna* means covering or concealing; it is the root for *junun*, or insanity, since it is like having a covered intellect. *Janna Al-Layl* (the night covered you) means that it became dark and concealed the things around you; it was so much so that you could hardly see anyone else and they could hardly see you. The word *jannah*, or a garden, is given this name because it contains trees and other things that cover up the person who walks inside it. Thus, *janna* is a root from which all derivatives indicate any type of covering.

The word *kawkab,* or planet, indicates that it reflects light from a star. We understand from the verse that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was in pitch darkness so when a planet rose, he could immediately see it. Later, the planet changed its position, set, and then disappeared. During earlier days, people worshipped stars and celestial bodies, so Ibrahim (Abraham) was showing them an example of the same type of things they worshipped and said, ‘I do not like the things that set.’

فَلَمَّا رَءَا ٱلْقَمَرَ بَازِغًا قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّى ۖ فَلَمَّآ أَفَلَ قَالَ لَئِن لَّمْ
يَهْدِنِى رَبِّى لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

And when he saw the moon rising he said, ‘*This* is my Lord,’ but when it too set, he said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I shall be one of those who go astray’ [77] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 77)

In this verse, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was actually saying, ‘This is my Lord.’ Scholars have been confused and have wondered, ‘How could Ibrahim (Abraham) have said, ‘This is my Lord’ as a statement? How could Ibrahim (Abraham) have uttered a phrase of polytheism?' Scholars strove to rid Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* of this statement. I say, 'May Allah reward you for that, but there is a very simple explanation to what he said. The One Who told us Ibrahim (Abraham) said, 'This is my Lord' is also the One Who said about him: 'When Ibrahim's (Abraham's) Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, He said, "I will make you a leader of people…" (*al-Baqara:* 124).

Thus, his statement 'This is my Lord' does not affect the loyalty of his faith. There must be an explanation to it. As stated previously, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) people were worshipping celestial bodies, and he wanted to draw their attention to the falsehood of their beliefs. If he had started off by calling them names like 'O liars!', 'O, people of misguidance!' and kept insulting them, they surely would not have paid attention to him or listened to him. In fact, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* used a strategy in debates called 'siding with the opponent' to borrow their ears and touch their hearts. It is also a way to prove to them that he is not biased against them from the outset. He' is slowly taking them by the hand. An example from our daily lives can be a man who is presenting a potential spouse to his daughter. The candidate is very short, while the girl – Allah knows – is quite tall! When the candidate comes to see her, she says to her mother: 'This is my suitor?' This statement means that she is denying that this short man could be her partner. So, when Ibrahim (Abraham) said 'This is my Lord', he was refuting that anything like a star or the moon or the sun could possibly be the Lord. Also, note how he marks out to them the conclusion for those who worship such planets. 'He said, "If my Lord does not guide me, I shall be one of those who go astray."' (*al-An'am:* 77) This statement implies who is guided and who is going astray. Therefore, 'This is my Lord' is a form of mockery like when the Quran mentions them saying: '...Is this the one who speaks [so contemptuously] of your Gods...?' (*al-Anbiya':* 36)

Therefore, it is as though Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, 'Let us say that it is your lord, but it sets and disappears from you.' Furthermore, saying 'I do not like things that set' indicates that he is not biased against the people themselves.

Likewise, when Allah says:

فَلَمَّا رَءَا ٱلشَّمْسَ بَازِغَةً قَالَ هَٰذَا رَبِّي هَٰذَآ أَكْبَرُ ۖ
فَلَمَّآ أَفَلَتْ قَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيٓءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

Then he saw the sun rising and cried, '*This* is my Lord! This is greater.' But when the sun set, he said, 'My people, I disown all that you worship beside God [78] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 78)

Thus, he has proven that every celestial body – even the sun – ends up setting, so he logically concluded, as they watched, that the worship of celestial bodies is not valid. He used their own logic to have them listen as he finally negated this lordship.

Allah has accepted some cases as a justified reason to do many things, and we can compare some of them with others, such as when the True Lord says: '…those who reject Allah after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief…' (*an-Nahl:* 106). It comes after His statement: 'With the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith.' (*an-Nahl:* 106)

Allah *the Exalted* has permitted that a word of disbelief be uttered by a believer, who is firm in faith, to save his own life, and he is just an individual. Therefore, is it not acceptable for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to say in whatever manner, 'This is my Lord' to save an entire nation from worshipping idols?

Allah Himself says He will be asking sarcastically in the Hereafter: 'On the Day He asks them, "Where are my partners?"' (*Fussilat:* 47) Of course, Allah *the Almighty* knows He has no partners, but some people used to associate partners with Him. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings upon him* would call out among his people, 'O God of the Gods!' since he knew that people had deified some favourable natural phenomena, and he wanted to clarify to them that there is only One True God. The Quran describes how pointless it is to associate partners in worship: 'Allah has never had a child. Nor is there any God beside Him– if there were, each God would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91)

He also says: ‘Say, "If there were other Gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne."’ (*al-Isra’:* 42) The True Lord will also say to a disbeliever who used to take pride in his rank in this life: ‘It will be said, ‘‘Taste! Indeed, you are the honored, the noble!"’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) Is this an acknowledgement that a disbeliever is honourable and noble, or is it sarcasm? It is just sarcasm because if a disbeliever were really noble and had honoured himself, he would not have disbelieved, nor would he have ended up in Hellfire.

In the Arabic language, the sun is feminine noun, but in this verse, the masculine pronoun *hadha* has been used instead of *hadhihi*: ‘This (*hadha*) is my Lord’; it was also used in reference to the moon and other celestial bodies. The reason may be to keep the sentence uniform, or to avoid adding any suffixes to the word ‘Lord’ since in Arabic grammar nouns are originally masculine, and femininity is a branch. Also, the sun is grammatically feminine and not literally so. Taking this into consideration, scholars do not use the feminine form of any Attributes of Allah, even though it is sometimes the more hyperbolic form, as in the word *ʿallamah*. To give someone the attribute of knowledge, one says, ‘So-and-so is knowledgeable (*ʿalim*).’ If that person’s knowledge of things becomes like second nature, one says, ‘So-and-so all knows.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Above everyone who has knowledge, there is the One who is All Knowing (*ʿaleem*).’ (*Yusuf:* 76). If the knowledgeable becomes a master of his knowledge in a way that has never been perceived, we say ‘of full knowledge’ (*ʿallaam*), as the True Lord is described by ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: ‘…You alone have full knowledge (*ʿallaam*) of things unseen.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116). Although the word *ʿallaamah* is the most hyperbolic, it is never used to describe Allah since it is in the feminine case.

When the sun set, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said: ‘…My people, I disown all that you worship beside Allah.’ (*al-An‘am:* 78). He explicitly said that at that time since it had been preceded by a gradually built argument that any sensible person would agree with. When the mind is awakened by the gift of guidance from Allah, a true believer, just like Ibrahim (Abraham), ceases to fool himself and thus cannot fool his people.

One can begin to engage in righteous actions only after ridding himself of corruption. Therefore, after ridding himself from worshipping anything but Allah, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* can now declare.

إِنِّى وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِىَ لِلَّذِى فَطَرَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

I have turned my face as a true believer towards Him who created the heavens and the earth. I am not one of the polytheists' [79] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 79)

The heavens and the earth were the first scenery that man perceived when he came onto the world, where he then found out how Allah made him capable of controlling so much. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not want us to think He created mankind only, for He has also created the whole universe: 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though most people do not know it.' (*Ghafir:* 57)

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* presented his proven belief to his people, why he worshipped only Allah who created the heavens and the earth. Furthermore, he rejected all corrupt beliefs in the universe since he was *hanif*, meaning by nature upright and a true monotheist. The root *Hanaf* literally means clubfoot, which is a twist in one or both feet making the affected foot appear to have been rotated internally at the ankle. When corruption overflows in the universe, the Heaven intervenes by sending messages. A Messenger can be said to 'twist himself' away from corruption, thus the root of a twisted foot or clubfoot. Also, when one twists away from a corrupt path, he is walking on a straight, upright, and correct path.

وَحَآجَّهُۥ قَوْمُهُۥ ۚ قَالَ أَتُحَٰٓجُّوٓنِّى فِى ٱللَّهِ وَقَدْ هَدَىٰنِ ۚ وَلَآ أَخَافُ مَا تُشْرِكُونَ بِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ
أَن يَشَآءَ رَبِّى شَيْـًٔا ۗ وَسِعَ رَبِّى كُلَّ شَىْءٍ عِلْمًا ۗ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

His people argued with him, and he said, 'How can you argue with me about God when He has guided me? I do not fear anything you associate with Him: unless my Lord wills [nothing can happen]. My Lord encompasses everything in His knowledge. How can you not take heed? [80] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 80)

To argue, or *haajja,* is short for *hajaja* where the two *ja* have been joined together. It means one side throws an argument, or *hujjah*, at another, who throws his own argument to refute it. If a discussion ends up with people refuting one another's arguments, it is called a debate *hijaaj*, with opposing arguments. 'His people argued with him *haajja*, and he said, "How can you argue with me about Allah when He has guided me...?"' (*al-An'am:* 80); *Ibrahim* (Abraham) *peace be upon him* made it difficult for his opponents to argue against him since he was arguing with them by siding with them, and then proving them wrong. It is like the sole purpose of their debate was to turn Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* away from his monotheistic (*hanif*) religion, which he was led to through contemplation: 'I have turned my face as a true monotheist (or by nature upright) (*hanif*) towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth. I am not one of the polytheists.' (*al-An'am:* 79).

He responded, 'How can you argue with me about Allah when He has guided me?' (*al-An'am:* 80). In other words, the issue of faith has been finalised. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* believed in Allah *the Exalted* and was thus announcing to his people with courage: 'I do not fear anything you associate with Him: unless my Lord wills [nothing can happen].' This indicates that they threatened him since the word 'fear' was mentioned and he negated it. Ibrahim (Abraham) announced with strength: 'I do not fear anything you associate with Him...' (*al-An'am:* 80). I do not fear a celestial body that sets, be it a star, a moon, a sun, even idols (*asnam*) you worship. None of the idols can bring benefit or cause harm which are solely caused by Allah *Glorified is He*. Hence, the detailed exception in Ibrahim's (Abraham's) doctrine, '... I do not fear anything you associate with Him, unless my Lord wills [nothing can happen]. My Lord encompasses everything in His knowledge. Will you not remember?' (*al-An'am:* 80)

If the True Lord wills, He can send down upon a slave a celestial body that could strike or burn him. The celestial body is subject to the command of the One Who benefits and harms. It has no say and neither do those who worship it. If Allah wills, He sends down harm, and if He wills, he sends benefit. '...Unless my Lord wills...' (*al-An'am:* 80). There is a huge difference between the action and the one carrying it out. The instrument involved in the action is being operated by Allah *the Almighty*. If He wants to make a celestial body or a boulder fall on someone, it is not the celestial body or the boulder that makes itself fall. The doer is only Allah: 'My Lord encompasses everything in His Knowledge. Will you not remember?' (*al-An'am:* 80)

His statement 'Will you not remember?' shows that creedal teachings are a natural disposition, which is suppressed when a soul gives in to its passions. It is not required of man to come up with any doctrinal ideas. Rather, one only needs to be reminded which is an inherent ability in human nature. When Allah *the Exalted* brought Adam onto Earth and gave him the authority to rule it, He also taught him the theological doctrine with which he is supposed to rule. We all came from Adam who passed down the doctrine to his children who passed it down to their children. However, through time, people's personal desires interfered and doctrinal teachings were intentionally ignored because they demand people to take control of their desires and stay moral. Since doctrinal teachings can and are often forgotten, Allah *the Exalted* sent Messengers to remind people of the original teachings that were passed on to Adam. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* then declares:

وَكَيۡفَ أَخَافُ مَآ أَشۡرَكۡتُمۡ وَلَا تَخَافُونَ أَنَّكُمۡ أَشۡرَكۡتُم بِٱللَّهِ مَا لَمۡ يُنَزِّلۡ
بِهِۦ عَلَيۡكُمۡ سُلۡطَٰنٗاۚ فَأَيُّ ٱلۡفَرِيقَيۡنِ أَحَقُّ بِٱلۡأَمۡنِۖ إِن كُنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

Why should I fear what you associate with Him? Why do you not fear to associate with Him things for which He has sent you no authority? Tell me, if you know the answer, which side has more right to feel secure? [81] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 81)

Our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to them, 'I fear none but Allah, and I do not fear what you associate with Him, something that does not harm nor benefits.' The word *kayf* (why) is used to indicate astonishment since it is only logical that we fear solely Allah, the One Who harms and benefits. When an argument goes back and forth, the personality of the debater in each party begins to emerge, and there are those who scorn the truth not because it is true but due to fearing being defeated in front of someone equal to them. Whoever wants to arrive at truth without superiority will not give an opinion that will provoke his opponent's ego. For this reason, our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not say, 'Is it you or I that has more right to feel secure?' Rather, he said: '...Tell me, if you know the answer, which side has more right to feel secure?' (*al-An'am:* 81). A similar example of this expression is what the True Lord taught His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: '…And most surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error.' (*Saba':* 24)

This is the highest degree of impartiality in debate, for he did not declare that their way was misguidance and that his way was the correct and straight path; he trusted that when they examine his way and examine their way, they will conclude that he is upon guidance and that they are upon misguidance. This is a progressive debate. A similar example is what the True Lord taught His Messenger to say to his opponents: 'Say, "You will not be questioned about our sins, nor will we be questioned about what you do."' (*Saba':* 25)

Was it possible that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would commit a sin? Allah forbid, for he was a flawless person. It is as if the Messenger is saying to them, 'Ask about me if I have committed a sin.' He did not describe their actions and say to them, 'We will not be asked about the sins you have committed.' Rather, he said: '... nor will we be questioned about what you do.' (*Saba':* 25). He did not attribute sinning to them, but he attributed it to himself since he is certain that if they go back and study the matter thoughtfully, doctrinally, and devotedly, they will end up believing in his way. This is the highest degree of subtlety in debate. The subtlety of debate becomes clear in the True Lord's statement: '...Tell me, if you know the answer, which side has more right to feel secure?' (*al-An'am:* 81)

Knowledge is a factual issue that you believe in and can prove. If any condition of these is not fulfilled, then this is not knowledge. An example of this is the lexical items of a language. Every lexical item has a meaning, and when you hear a lexical item and you know the language, you understand the meaning. When I say 'the sun', you picture the sun in your head, and the same goes for the earth, water, mountains, etc. You know the meaning of these lexical items without them being related to something else. We know that there is a difference between the meaning of a single lexical item on its own and what it can mean if it is related to something else.

If the lexical item is related to something else, then there must be a point in question. If we say that the sun is covered by clouds, then this is a point in question. Or we say, ‘The sun is setting.’ This is another point in question, and in this case, we have related something to something else. However, before we mention relative points in question, the lexical item must have a meaning itself, and this is what is called the meanings of language. Through this, one lexical item is joined to another lexical item, and this is how a point in question or a reference is formed, on condition that we know the meaning of each single item or word. After that we know the relationships, so, we say that this is a subject and that is a predicate, or a subject doer and a verb, i.e. something is related to something else.

Knowledge is a factual issue, or point in question, that you believe in and can prove. If any condition of these is not fulfilled, then this is not knowledge. If you believe in something, but it is not real, then it is a lie. When I say, 'Indeed, there are those who believe that the earth is spherical', is it really like that or not? If you believe something that is real, but you are not able to prove it, then this is *taqlid* (imitation). If the thing you believe in is not certain and both parties are equal, then this is *shakk* (doubt). If one party is more likely than the other, then, this is *zhann* (conjecture). The party that is preferred over is called *wahm* (fancy). All relative issues fall within these categories.

Ibrahim's (Abraham’s) statement: ‘Tell me, if you know the answer…’ (*al-An‘am:* 81) means that if you are certain of a relative issue that is real, you will believe in it and be able to prove it.

The True Lord says after that:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوٓا۟ إِيمَـٰنَهُم بِظُلْمٍ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ لَهُمُ ٱلْأَمْنُ وَهُم مُّهْتَدُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

It is those who have faith, and do not mix their faith with idolatry, who will be secure, and it is they who are rightly guided’ [82]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 82)

When the Companions of Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this verse they were concerned about themselves since they examined their actions and found that they were not free of iniquity, so they feared that they would not be included in those ‘... who will be secure...’ (*al-An‘am:* 82). This troubled them, thus they took their concern to our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he reassuringly clarified, 'Indeed, Allah says the following about this iniquity: "Most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity"' (*Luqman:* 13).

This verse shows clearly that this iniquity is related to faith, and not to action. Furthermore, we know that man's relation with his Lord is conditioned primarily on the summit of one's faith, which is to bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Messenger. This means that none deserves to be worshipped except Allah. No one possesses any command in Allah's creation except Him. No one does any action from Allah's creation except from Him. No one provides power, knowledge, wisdom, constriction, or revealing of bounty except Allah, and this is the sphere of doctrinal faith.

The True Lord says: '... and do not mix their faith with iniquity...' (*al-An'am:* 82), so it is as if this matter is the scope of iniquity. As for action, He has differentiated for us between the faith which leads to action and the action which leads to potentials. He said: 'By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds...' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3). The phrase in His statement: 'except for those who believe and do good deeds...' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3) needs to be broken down. Belief is one thing, and good deeds are something else. Thus, faith is an action that stems from the heart, while action leads to adhering to that which faith has legislated. The believer must understand that Allah *the Exalted* is One in His Essence, One in His Attributes and One in His Actions. He *Glorified is He* has no equal or partner. If you find that Allah has an attribute and you have a similar attribute, then you must understand that Allah's attribute is within the range of '... there is nothing like unto Him...' Thus, there is no power like His Power, no entity like His Entity, no action like His Action, and if something is missing from one's certainty in this, then this is iniquity in one's faith. For example, you do things utilising the capabilities that have been granted to you by Allah *the Almighty*. Before you do any action, it has to be assessed in your mind before it develops into saying or deed. This is the work dependent on you, and it is required of you. As for the works that you do not consider in your mind, you will not be asked about them. For example, you walk down a road, and you see a hole into which you almost fall. Self-preservation is something innate within man, so his feet avoid the hole, while his mind is incapable of considering it. These actions are what we call instinctive, or natural or coercive. This is why the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Every matter of importance which is not begun with "In the Name of Allah, the Most-Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy" is devoid (of blessings).'(1) He also said, 'Every matter of importance which is not begun with "Praise be to Allah" remains defective.'(2)

The term *dhu bal* (of importance – literally goes through the mind) refers to everything considered in your mind before doing, and Allah's name must be mentioned therein. Many people are heedless of this matter, and we say to them, 'It makes sense that you must consider this matter in your mind since the actions that you do not consider are those which Allah has given to your natural inclinations – without you doing anything.' For example, if someone is eating and something goes down his windpipe, we see him coughing, without thinking, until this thing comes out. It is a coercive process. As for the matter that is *dhu bal*, you consider it in your mind before saying it if it is a statement or doing it if it is an action. What is required of you is that you begin with Allah's name; since the True Lord asks that we do not let the means preoccupy us from the Original cause.

For example, when you want to cultivate land, you plough it. Then, you plant a seed and cover it. After that you water it, and then crops grow. Do you have anything to do with this? You are doing nothing but bringing together the actions. The seed is created by Allah. The soil that you placed the seed in is created by Him. The elements in the earth that nourish the crops are created by Him *Glorified is He*. The nature of the seed allows it to suck up something that extends its roots, leading to the splitting of the seed; you will never have anything to do with these means. In spite of this, Allah *Glorified is He* considers what you do, for He says: 'Have you considered what you sow?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63). Then, He says: 'Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the causers of growth?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 64)

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(1) *Narrated by 'Abd al-Qadir Ar-Rahawi in (Al-'Arba'in), from Abu Hurayra*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Majah and Al-Bayhaqi in (As-Sunnan), from AbuHurayra*

It is a characteristic of faith that when you are about to do something after you ponder over it in your mind, you do not forget the One Who subjugated it for you. It is not within your power to do anything for yourself or with yourself without Allah's Will. If you do not do this and remember who subjugated this for you, then you have forgotten that the entire matter belongs to Him.

In our positive laws, when the judge presides in order to judge between people, there is an authority that enforces this ruling, so, he says, 'In the name of the people' or 'In the name of the law'. Thus, the people or the law is that which gives him the mandatory power to judge. Then, what is the power that enables you to judge whether things would respond to you or not? Therefore, you must say, 'In the Name of Allah Who subjugated this for me.' If you embark upon an action without saying this, you will be a ruiner, a fabricator and a claimer of something you are not capable of doing since it is not in your power to subjugate other created beings to you.

Indeed, the True Lord is the One Who has subjugated other created beings for you. You must remember the True Lord's name to compel other created beings to respond to you. Whoever is heedless of this has obscured their faith and mixed it with iniquity. If you see the fruits of your endeavour, beware of saying like what Qarun (Korah) said: 'I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have.' (*al-Qasas:* 78) Rather, you should remember Allah and say, 'It is as Allah has willed' (*al-Kahf:* 39) because the reason for this is that if you were to say, 'I was given it by virtue of the knowledge that I have', the True Lord could cause you to suffer the same fate as Qarun (Korah): 'Thus, We made the earth to swallow up him and his abode...' (*al-Qasas:* 81). What happened to Qarun's (Korah's) knowledge that he had mentioned?

Thus, every matter must be attributed to Allah *the Exalted*. If there is any fault in you concerning this, then you have been subjected to confusion and you have obscured your faith and have mixed it with iniquity. The True Lord requires this from us so that His favours become truly blessed, while we are seeking them or reaping their fruits. Nothing results from an action that is begun with 'In the Name of Allah' except that which will help you obey Allah, be righteous, do good deeds and utilise His favours while enjoying well-being. Afterwards, when all these things are gathered, this will qualify you, in all your activities and actions, to gain another kind of security that is more comprehensive, complete and perfect than the security of the this worldly life. Indeed, you will attain the security of the Hereafter when you enter paradise.

Thus, those '... who will be secure...' are people who have not obscured their faith with iniquity. The True Lord wants us to constantly stick to His Way since Allah's provisions are continuous, and His mercy as well as His manifestations for His creation is ceaseless. This is due to the fact that He is All-Sustaining, in other words, with His absolute Power, His comprehensive sustenance for all existence and His Wisdom, He takes care of the means of His creation. Thus, you should always be in the company of the All-Sustaining, so that He can manifest Himself to you with the attributes of His preservation, the attributes of His Power, the attributes of His Knowledge and the attributes of His Wisdom. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* 'Tell me about the best deed (i.e. one which you deem the most rewarding with Allah) you have done since your acceptance of Islam because I heard the sound of the steps of your shoes in front of me in *Jannah* (paradise).' Bilal said, 'I do not consider any deed better than that whenever I make ablution during day or night, I pray as much as was written for me after it.'(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'When a Muslim or a believer washes his face in ablution, every sin which he committed with his eyes will be washed away from his face with water, or with the last drop of water. When he washes his hands, every sin which is committed by his hands will be erased from them with the water, or with the last drop of water. Also, when he washes his feet, every sin his feet committed will be washed away with the water, or with the last drop of water; until he finally emerges cleansed of all his sins.'(2)

So, the True Lord wants us to be firmly attached to His Way, in order to give to us, not to take from us since the difference between the slavery of a human being to a human being and pure slavery to Allah is that the human being takes the good of his slave, whereas our slavery to Allah gives us His goodness from storehouses that are never exhausted. We take more from Him whenever we increase in our slavery to Him. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* always wants to make us connected to Him. The phrase 'who will be secure' (*al-An'am:* 82) means that some will have security in the life of this world along with security in the Hereafter.

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(1) *Agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim and the wording is that of Al-Bukhari*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim*

Someone might say that there are people who do not start their deeds with Allah's name, and the thought of Allah *the Almighty* does not even occur to them. Yet, they move about using and enjoying the powers and materials provided in the earth, along with happily enjoying what others invent by using these materials. We say that this is true, since, after exerting effort, there is a difference between enjoying a bounty and enjoying the blessing of a bounty. A disbeliever may exert effort and sow the earth, and thus, the earth gives him back. Yet, He reaps the bounty, but never will he enjoy the blessing of this bounty.

What is the blessing of a bounty? It is when the bounty you receive does not assist you in disobeying Allah *Glorified is He*. Rather, it consistently assists you in obeying Allah *the Exalted*. The status of many people is confirmed in His statement: '...You squandered the good things you were given in your earthly life, you took your fill of pleasure there...' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20). Therefore, beware of being misled or of saying, 'They do not say "In the Name of Allah, the Most-Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy", but despite that they enjoy the delights of this worldly life.' Indeed, when you consider the advancements of their civilisation along with the high aspirations of their research and their discoveries, you find that they are always directed towards evil. No invention do they have except that they use it for evil, till Allah *the Exalted* decrees to distract them by afflicting them with torture and calamities, then, in the Hereafter, they will be chastised for their polytheism and disbelief. 'It is those...who will be secure...' (*al-An'am:* 82) means that, indeed, these people are the ones who did not mix their faith with polytheism. They will be granted security for the smallest details of their deeds, and security for these details combined will qualify them to be given security in paradise. Then, He *Glorified is He* says: '... and it is they who are rightly guided.' (*al-An'am:* 82)

Hidayah (guidance) is the path that takes you to an objective. You would not agree with any sort of activity unless this activity was going to lead to an objective that was drawn up in your mind, and this objective is successful after study and hard work. Nothing that is created or manufactured determines its own objective. Thus, leave it to Allah *the Almighty* to determine your task, for He is the One Who created you. It is common to mankind that no manufacturing ever determines its own task. Rather, it is the manufacturer who determines its objective, and that objective exists before the manufacturing. As long as the objective exists before the manufacturing, then who is he who suffers through the experience?

In a lab, scientific inventions result from the interaction of materials. The scientist is the one who exerts effort and suffers while experimenting, whereas you only know about an experiment when it has a medical outcome. Theoretical matters which weary the scientist cause weariness since they are not connected, from the very beginning, to the set materials, the full knowledge of the objective or to the means of reaching this objective. Who, then, is he who is rightly guided? The one who is rightly guided is he who knows the objective that he is striving for, along with the means that will qualify him for reaching that objective. If any fault befalls his personal faculties, he seeks help to rectify this fault along with seeking refuge in the One Who created these faculties, who is Allah *the Almighty*, just as someone would return a broken machine to the manufacturer. Many poets let their imaginations roam freely and said:

> Is there anyone who could show me my destination before I start my journey?
>
> And how could this be done when destinations are only reached after journeying?
>
> We say to him, 'The One Who created you showed you the objective or destination.'

The True Lord says after that:

وَتِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَآ ءَاتَيْنَٰهَآ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ عَلَىٰ قَوْمِهِۦۚ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَٰتٍ
مَّن نَّشَآءُۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٨٣﴾

Such was the argument We gave to Abraham against his people – We raise in rank whoever We will – your Lord is all wise, all knowing [83] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 83)

Hujja (an argument) is strong evidence used for proving an issue that needs to be proved. It is as if the True Lord wants us, when we argue, to have an objective behind arguing. We know that if the objective behind arguing goes beyond the subject of the argument itself, in negation or affirmation, then it turns into jesting, and it becomes a matter of seeking victory over your opponent, and vice versa. However, whenever you participate in an argument, you must base it on its authentic objective. As it is said, define and clarify the object of controversy since the reason for this is that the truth must be dearer than you and your opponent. This is why the True Lord makes it clear: ‘Beware of arguing over a matter the way the masses argue.' Why is this? It is due to the fact that the voice of the masses mixes truth with falsehood, but Allah *Glorified is He* wants every person to be held accountable for his voice or what he says. An example of this is when there is a big rally and the people are shouting for the fall of someone, and no one knows who started the shouting.

What made the Arabs lose is that when they received the call for Islam, they held mass meetings, wherein they criticised the statements of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and thus, they lost the ability to judge objectively. This is why our Lord says: ‘Say [Prophet], "I advise you to do one thing only: stand before God, in pairs or singly, and think. There is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet]...’ (*Saba’:* 46). It means that you gather and make Allah *the Almighty* your goal. Then, whoever has the power let him debate, using firm arguments as well as the statements of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a subject, and according to history and logic. No two people meet together and look into a matter, with only Allah *Glorified is He* in their thoughts, except that they will end up having a unified opinion. This is why we have secret negotiations in the modern age, derived from this principle of faith. ‘Such was the argument We gave to Ibrahim (Abraham) against his people. We raise by degrees whoever We will. Indeed, your Lord is All Wise, All Knowing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 83) Ibrahim (Abraham) argued with his people – among which was his father Azar- about the stars, the moon, the sun and idols. He also gained victory, with an argument, over their leader, Nimrod, who was the king or the sultan, when he wanted to debate with him about the power of giving life and causing death.

The True Lord *Glorfied is He* wants us to learn from the wisdom of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. If you see your opponent going into that which will not bring an end to the debate, then take him to the level that he cannot escape from, and he will not get the better of you. King Nimrod(1) said to him, ‘I too give life and death’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). Our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* could have said, ‘You do not determine death. Rather, you kill, and killing is not since you are only destroying the structure, etc.’ However, he did not want to prolong the debate. He wanted to finish it. He, then, brought an argument that ended the debate as quickly as possible. Allah says: ‘... So Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "Allah brings the sun from the east. So bring it from the west"....’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). What was the conclusion of the debate? Allah says: ‘The disbeliever was dumbfounded.’ (*al-Baqara:* 258)

All of these are arguments that are clarified by Allah’s statement: ‘Such was the argument We gave to Ibrahim (Abraham) against his people. We raise by degrees whoever We will. Indeed, your Lord is All Wise, All Knowing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 83)

Allah *the Exalted* gave Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* an argument over his people; in other words, he had degrees, eminence and elevation over them since establishing an argument over someone else is a victory and a victory raises the degree of your subject, and it also raises the degree of your work. He *Glorified is He* does not will anything except out of Wisdom, and He does not will anything except out of Knowledge since if He were to leave the will for a human being, he would do things without wisdom and without knowledge. The True Lord informs us that His will comes out of Wisdom and Knowledge for the benefit of creation since it is not based on any personal desire or on benefitting from any other. Allah *the Almighty* had all the attributes of perfection, majesty, and beauty before He created the creation.

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(1) The story of the debate of Nimrod with our master Abraham

Indeed, creating the creation and their having faith does not increase Allah's sovereignty, and if they disobey, it does not decrease Allah's sovereignty at all. However, some people may lack wisdom, or they fail to gain it. When He imposes a command on His creation and they accept it without knowing its rationale, He shows them the wisdom behind it to make what is unacceptable to the human mind acceptable. This is because He created the creation, and He knows from pre-eternity that the creation has desires and wants. If every created being were given what he wanted, it would be at the expense of someone else, but the True Lord is Just and will not benefit an individual while tiring another.

The True Lord, the All-Wise, knows what improves the life of His creation. So, He does not respond to a slave's silly supplication. He knows that it will be of no benefit to the slave if He accedes to His request. This is why the True Lord says: 'Yet man prays for harm, just as he prays for good. Man is ever hasty.' (*al-Isra':* 11)

Indeed, the servant of Allah says, 'O, Lord! Do this for me. Make this easy for Me.', for, he believes that it is good for him, when it could actually be bad. Man is prone to be hasty. This is why the True Lord says: 'I will show you My signs soon, so do not ask Me to hasten them.' (*al-Anbiya':* 37)

Indeed, the True Lord checks the wants of mankind, and His are but for their benefit. 'We raise by degrees whoever We will. Indeed, your Lord is All Wise, All Knowing.' (*al-An'am:* 83)

Whenever the word *rabb* (Lord) is mentioned, it refers to creating as well as teaching mankind. When the word *uluhiyyah* (divinity) is mentioned, it refers to a commandment since Allah is the One Who is worshipped and obeyed when He commands and forbids. However, the Lord is the One Who creates, teaches, maintains, and provides you with the essentials of your life.

Therefore, the giving of *rububiyah* (Lordship) is one thing, and the giving of *uluhiyyah* (Divinity) is something else. The giving of Lordship is granted to the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the disobedient since Allah is the One Who summoned them into existence, and He subjugated the universe for them. However, the giving of Divinity is represented in ‘Do!’ and ‘Do not do!’, and this enters into the realm of choice. The one who disbelieves in Allah and does well in using the means gets the results of that, while the one who believes in Allah and does not do well in using the means does not take the results; the reason for this is the extracting of things from the universe is from the giving of Lordship.

The True Lord says:

وَوَهَبۡنَا لَهُۥٓ إِسۡحَٰقَ وَيَعۡقُوبَۚ كُلًّا هَدَيۡنَاۚ وَنُوحًا هَدَيۡنَا مِن
قَبۡلُۖ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِهِۦ دَاوُۥدَ وَسُلَيۡمَٰنَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَىٰ
وَهَٰرُونَۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِي ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

We gave him Isaac and Jacob, each of whom We guided, as We had guided Noah before, and among his descendants were David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron – in this way We reward those who do good [84] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 84)

We know that Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* is the second son of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) after Ismail (Ishmael), and Yaqub (Jacob) is the son of Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*. When you see the word *hiba* (bounty), understand that it is not a right. A bounty is a gift given by the Giver to someone who does not deserve it since when you give someone what they deserve, this is not a gift but a right.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear: ‘Beware of believing that any of my creation has the right on Me except what I make as a right for him, for everything is a bounty granted by me.’ The highest peak of His bounties and bestowals is, first, the highest degree of ascendancy of man over the universe. This is followed by the multiplication of his species, the male and the female, such that there is a progeny of boys and girls. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah has control of the heavens and the earth; He creates whatever He wills. He grants female offspring to whomever He wills, male to whomever He wills...' (*ash-Shura:* 49).

The bounty of having children does not only come from the fact that He created man and woman and that physical contact between them produces children. Rather, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…or both male and female, and He makes whomever He wills barren. He is All Knowing and All Powerful.' (*ash-Shura:* 50)

If it were nothing but a matter of mechanical procedure, children would just come, but that is not how it is. Whoever understands the *malakut* (greater dominion), he will be comforted by remembering that Allah's Wisdom is behind this bounty, for He is the All-Wise. Even being barren is a bounty. The one who receives it from Allah *the Exalted* as a bounty is pleased with it and does not look at other people's children with envy or resentment. Every child you see will become, by Allah's Will, like your child without the hardship of pregnancy and childbirth and without you having to look after them and take care of them your entire life. Whoever is pleased with Allah's bounty of having female offspring will find that they are a favour from Allah, and He will send males who will marry his daughters and will be more loyal to him than his own sons; this is all due to the fact that he has been content with what Allah *the Almighty* has given him. Therefore, you must contentedly take and accept the bounty in giving as well as the bounty in withholding.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies that He gave Ibrahim (Abraham) Ishaq (Isaac) and from Ishaq (Isaac) came Yaqub (Jacob) *peace be upon them*. We all know that man eventually dies, without a doubt, and when he grows old, he desires a son so that his name will live on, and it is as if he secures that. If he has a grandson, then the grandfather has secured himself another generation. However, we know the True Lord's statement: 'Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life, but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope…' (*al-Kahf:* 46). The continuation of a man's name (family name) in this worldly life is not a necessity for him if Allah *the Exalted* is going to reduce the value of man in the Hereafter! We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* tells about the supplication of

Zakariyya (Zechariah): '..so grant me from Yourself a successor, to be my heir and the heir of the family of Yaqub (Jacob). Lord, make him well pleasing [to You].' (*Mariam:* 5-6). Allah *the Exalted* favoured Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* with not only Ishaq (Isaac) but Yaqub (Jacob) too *peace be upon them*. Furthermore, He *Glorfied is He* says: '...We gave him Ishaq (Isaac) and Yaqub (Jacob), each of whom We guided...' which means that both of them were from the people of guidance. Also, He says: '...as We had guided Nuh (Noah) before...'; this means that the guidance did not begin with Ishaq (Isaac) and Yaqub (Jacob), rather, it started with Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them* before that: '...and among his descendants were Dawud (David), Sulaiman (Solomon), Ayyub (Job), Yusuf (Joseph), Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)— in this way We reward those who do good.' (*al-An'am:* 84)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحۡيَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَإِلۡيَاسَۖ كُلّٞ مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah – every one of them was righteous [85] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 85)

The True Lord did not mention eighteen prophets consecutively; rather, He separated them out of wisdom. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلَ وَٱلۡيَسَعَ وَيُونُسَ وَلُوطٗاۚ وَكُلّٗا فَضَّلۡنَا عَلَى ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot. We favoured each one of them over other people [86] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 86)

The matter is not restricted to these prophets. Rather, He *the Exalted* says:

وَمِنۡ ءَابَآئِهِمۡ وَذُرِّيَّٰتِهِمۡ وَإِخۡوَٰنِهِمۡۖ وَٱجۡتَبَيۡنَٰهُمۡ وَهَدَيۡنَٰهُمۡ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ﴿٨٧﴾

And also some of their forefathers, their offspring, and their brothers: We chose them and guided them on a straight path [87] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 87)

When you look at these eighteen prophets that are mentioned here, you find that they are from the eighteen messengers that we have been commanded to believe in by name, and they are gathered in the statement of an-Nazhim:

In our record there are from amongst them eight
After ten; the rest are seven, and they are
Enoch, Hud, Jethro and Salih, and likewise
Dhu al-Kifl, Adam and with the Chosen One they are sealed.

The True Lord did not make any of the prophets kings except for two: Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them* in order to give us the idea that if Allah *the Almighty* wants to coerce a created being to do something that no one can do, He sends a Messenger king, for a slave cannot do anything to a king since the power resides with the king. Furthermore, society at that time was in need of a king to manage and regulate affairs and Allah *Glorified is He* does not want faith to be imposed by force, fear, and fright. Rather, He wants it to be out of choice, and this is why He made the majority of the prophets other than kings.

It was mentioned in one of the Hadiths (prophetic sayings): 'Shall He make you a prophet king or a messenger slave?'(1) He *peace and blessings be upon him* thus chose to be a Messenger slave since a king has authority and wealth which may cause him to transgress.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted Sulaiman (Solomon) and Dawud (David) *peace be upon them* to be from amongst the prophets and to be kings, and He wanted power and the mark of sovereignty and authority to be exemplified in them. As for Ayyub (Job), he was chosen to represent a different aspect which was that of trial and patience along with prophethood. Every prophet had his portion of the shared characteristic of prophethood as well as his distinctive feature. Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* also experienced trials at first, but in the end he gained sovereignty and authority. Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* had fame and many followers, such that we almost know of no other religions besides Judaism and Christianity. As for Zakariyya (Zechariah), Yahya (John), 'Isa (Jesus) and Ilyas (Elijah) *peace be upon them*, they possessed the character trait of abstinence.

As for Ismail (Ishmael), Alyasa' (Elisha), Yunus (Jonah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* they took what their lives were overflowing with: exalted actions, noble qualities, upright manner, setting a good example and always being mentioned with excellence.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad 2/231*

Thus, there are various aspects which the prophets represented. When the scholars came across 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him,* they asked if he was from their progeny, and they found those who looked into the matter, and they came to the conclusion that he is from their progeny from his mother’s side.

The mothers of a people are only Vessels

That are novel, but lineage is mainly preserved by fathers

The human element in 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is his mother, and it was with this that Abu Ja῾far Mohamed Al-Baqir, the imam of debate, argued in the presence of Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf Ath-Thaqafi, when it was said to him, ‘You claim that you are from the family of Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad, and from his progeny, even though Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad does not have any offspring!’ Imam Al-Baqir Allah *be pleased with him* said to him, ‘It is as if you have not read the Quran.’ He replied, ‘Which part of the Quran?’ He said, ‘Read "... and among his descendants were..." until you get to "... 'Isa (Jesus)..." 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is thus from the offspring of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and is that from the father’s side or the mother’s side?’ He replied, ‘From the mother’s side.’ He then said, ‘Likewise, we are from the offspring of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

ذَٰلِكَ هُدَى ٱللَّهِ يَهۡدِى بِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنۡ عِبَادِهِۦۚ وَلَوۡ أَشۡرَكُواْ لَحَبِطَ عَنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

Such is God’s guidance, with which He guides whichever of His servants He will. If they had associated other gods with Him, all their deeds would have come to nothing [88]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 88)

Dhalik (such) is a demonstrative for that which follows it, and what is intended by it is the guidance by which He (Allah) guided the people. We find that the word *huda* (guidance) refers to an objective for which a short path, that leads to it, has been laid. Our Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who created, and He is the One Who set the objective. He sets, clarifies, and shows the path that leads to the objective. When guidance is attributed to Allah *the Exalted* then it is proof of the source and the origin, i.e. guidance is from Him. The word *huda* (guidance) is at one time attributed to *Al-Wahib* (the Giver), who is the True Lord, and in other times, it is attributed to the Prophets. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... Follow, then, their guidance...'.

This is alluding to the way that Allah revealed to His messengers *peace be upon them*. Therefore, the True Lord guides all of mankind by showing them what is good. The one who devotes himself to what Allah shows, out of respect for his faith, will be helped by Him, and He will increase him in guidance. He wants to confirm for man that He has given him the ability to choose, so if you choose something you are not choosing it because our Lord is forcing you. Rather, you chose it because of the One Who created you with the ability to choose. Nothing happens in the universe that is outside of Allah's will. So, if Allah *Glorified is He* had wanted all of mankind to be guided, no one would be able to disobey. Rather, He wanted them to have the ability to choose. Every action that any one of them does is willed by Allah *the Exalted*. Yet, what He wills is not always liked by His slaves. This is why the scholars have said that there is a will in the universe and a will in the Revealed Law. As long as something is in Allah's Sovereignty then it is Allah's Will. The will in the Revealed Law is what is commanded, and what differs from it is the will in the universe. This is due to the fact that He has created you with the ability to choose.

An example of this – and to Allah belongs the highest similitude – is when you give your son a pound, and with a pound one has the ability to buy something. He takes the pound, and then goes to the market, and he is free to do what he wants with it. You say to him, 'Listen. If you buy a copy of the Quran, or a good book, or some sweets for you to share with your brothers, then I will be happy with you, and I will reward you well. If you buy a packet of playing cards, or you spend the pound on something I am not pleased with, then I will be angry with you, and I will never give you money again.'

With this statement, you have given your son freedom of choice, and when he goes to the market and buys a packet of playing cards, he does not do it out of compulsion from you because you are the one who gave him the choice. However, you spoke to him and asked him to make a good choice.

Allah *Glorified is He* has given man the ability to choose. If he chooses guidance, then Allah gives to him generously and if he chooses misguidance, then He will punish him.

With regards to the prophets, guidance came to them from Allah, for they were chosen, and when they devoted themselves to what the True Lord wanted, He granted them another kind of guidance which was to make righteous action beloved and dear to them. After that, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear: ‘Beware of thinking that there is someone who slips away from Me’ since if they had associated partners with Him, their deeds would have all been in vain.

Thus, the True Lord did not create the creation and forced them into acts of obedience. Rather, He created them with the ability to choose, with regards to commandments, so they would enjoy the satisfaction of choosing Allah’s Way. If they had associated partners with Him, their deeds would have all been in vain. The word *laww* (had they) is a conditional particle for something that is impossible. This is proof that they did not associate partners with Him, and their deeds were not in vain. The word *lahabita* is derived from *al-habt,* which means the nullification of deeds.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡحُكۡمَ وَٱلنُّبُوَّةَۚ فَإِن يَكۡفُرۡ بِهَا
هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ فَقَدۡ وَكَّلۡنَا بِهَا قَوۡمٗا لَّيۡسُواْ بِهَا بِكَٰفِرِينَ ٨٩

Those are the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. Even if these people now disbelieve in them, We have entrusted them to others who do not disbelieve [89] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 89)

The Book is the way and *hukm* (authority) is the power and authority that Allah gave to some of them. *Alnubuwwah* (prophethood) means that He made them role models and exemplars for humanity. 'But if the disbelievers deny it, We have entrusted it to a people who do not disbelieve.’ (*al-An‘am:* 89) He *Glorified and Exalted is He* has given us exemplars from the righty-guided messengers, the prophets and those He has chosen from their ancestors, their descendants and their brothers. These people are the ones who have come to take them by the hand and lead them out of darkness and into light. If some people refuse to be guided, then Allah *Glorified is He* will entrust other people to carry His Ways so that they can be the element of good that remains until the hour is established.

Who are those ‘people’? Some say that it is Quraysh that are being alluded to, and what is meant by His statement: ‘... We have entrusted it to a people who do not disbelieve.’ (*al-An‘am:* 89) are those from Medina, i.e. the Helpers. Or, what is meant by this noble passage is that every denier and disbeliever and likewise anyone who devotes himself to Allah and obeying Him, which could be a group of people who disbelieve in this truth, then Allah *the Exalted* will entrust a people who establish, defend and protect it. The reason for this is that He does not send down something good to the creation and then wipe it out. Rather, He must preserve it as an argument upon the creation. ‘... But if the disbelievers deny it, We have entrusted it to a people who do not disbelieve.’ (*al-An‘am:* 89) This shows that the people who do good to others are always entrusted by Allah. An example of this is the one who extends his hand to assist a weak person from among His creation, and then this weak person has been summoned by Him into existence. Whoever extends his hand to help has made himself a trustee for our Lord since he is doing what Allah *Glorified is He* requires, by making himself a means of it. This is because Allah is the Lord of all. He teaches all, He takes care of all and He provides for all. In this way, the one who does goodness and makes himself a trustee in Allah’s behalf becomes certain that he is spreading goodness to His creation, in addition to being certain that He will reward Him many times more than what he gave. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَدَى ٱللَّهُۖ فَبِهُدَىٰهُمُ ٱقْتَدِهْۗ قُل لَّآ
أَسْـَٔلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًاۖ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

Those were the people God guided, ‘[Prophet], follow the guidance they received.’ Say, ‘I ask no reward for it from you: it is a lesson for all people’ [90] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 90)

‘Allah has guided...’ (*al-An‘am:* 90) also refers to the guidance of significance (that they are chosen), and the guidance of assistance. The proof is that He said: ‘Follow, then, their guidance...’ (*al-An‘am:* 90). Our master the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is being addressed since the first part of the word *ula’ika*, *ula’i* (those) is a demonstrative for that which follows it, while the other part *ka* is for addressing the Prophet. ‘Those were the people Allah has guided. Follow then their guidance...’ (*al-An‘am:* 90). When we read this noble statement, we say ‘*iqtadi*’, and we do not say ‘*iqtadih*’. You do not pronounce the *h* unless you are stopping, and they call it the '*h* of silence’. However, if you are not stopping, then you do not pronounce it. Each one of the messengers who was mentioned previously has a quality that distinguishes him. There are certain things that they all share, such as sincere slavery to Allah, faith in Him and the belief that He is One in His Essence, His Attributes and His Actions. All of them subscribe to these foundations. Each one of them is distinguished by a quality of goodness. Our masters Sulaiman (Solomon) and Dawud (David) *peace be upon them* had power, authority, and sovereignty. Ayyoub (Job) *peace be upon him* had the power to be patient with trials. Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had the power to be patient, and then he became a powerful ruler. Our master Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* had the power to submit to Allah *the Exalted* whilst in the belly of the whale, while Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was truthful in what he promised.

What is required, then, of Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is that he followed all of them, which means that he was like Sulaiman (Solomon), Dawud (David), Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqub (Jacob), Ayyub (Job), Yusuf (Joseph) and Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon them*. He was required to take the distinguishing quality of each of them and to share with them in that which is general, which is Allah’s Oneness. With this, all the distinguishing qualities of all the Prophets were gathered in our master Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was commanded by His Lord, we must then believe that he has carried out the command, and as long as the virtues of the Prophets were gathered in him, then it is right for him to be the seal of the Prophets and the Messengers. ‘... (And) Say, 'I ask no reward for it (this message) from you. It is a lesson for all people.’ (*al-An‘am:* 90)

Why would a reward be demanded? You do not ask for a reward from someone unless the work you did for him benefitted him somehow such that you would deserve to be given something. It is as if the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deserves to be rewarded for what he brought to his nation, but he conveys from His Lord: Say to them that, indeed, you have renounced this reward.

Compare between the one who brings some benefit to any one of you, something that does not take up more than half an hour of his time, and the one who does something for you that benefits you throughout your life in this world and beyond, in the Hereafter, then he says to you, 'I do not want any reward from you.'

Not asking for a reward can be said of all the Messengers except for two, and it is not found in the Quran that they said it. If you look in the chapter of *ash-Shura,* you find that the True Lord talks about Musa (Moses), and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*. Then, He talks about the remaining messengers. The word *ajr* (reward) is not mentioned in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) or the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*. However, reward is mentioned in regards to prophets other than them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Their brother Nuh (Noah) said to them, "Will you not be mindful of God? I am a faithful messenger sent to you. Be mindful of God and obey me. I ask no reward of you from it, for my reward is only with the Lord of the Worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 106-109) Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Shu'aib (Jethro) said to them, "Will you not be mindful of Allah? I am a faithful messenger to you. Be mindful of Allah and obey me. I ask no reward of you for it, for my reward is only with the Lord of the Worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 177-180)

When you examine the chapter of *ash-Shura*, you find all the prophets, and you find 'I ask no reward of you for it...' along with all of their statements except for our master Musa (Moses) and our Master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*. Why is this? We indeed say that the one who renounces the reward is the one who brings benefit to them.

With regards to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* we find that benefit was indeed directed towards him and brought to him by Pharaoh, who raised him. It is as if he took the reward beforehand, and this is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not say to Pharaoh, 'I do not ask you for a reward.' Also, the Quran mentions Pharaoh's statement: 'Pharaoh said, "Did we not bring you up as a child among us? Did you not stay with us for many years?"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18)

Likewise, the issue of reward is not mentioned in the story of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* because he addressed his father Azar, and it would not make sense for him to say, 'I do not ask you for a reward.' In this way, the issue of reward is blotted from the stories of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) and our master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* but remains with the rest. This shows that the Quran has wisdom in the subtlest of its details, and this is due to the fact that the One speaking is our Lord. Our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is also distinguished by saying, 'I ask no reward of you for it...' except for one verse that does not contain this renouncing of reward: 'I ask no reward from you for this, only the affection due to kin....' (*ash-Shura:* 23).

Love is an act of goodness that comes from the love of the heart. As for an act of goodness that does not stem from love in the heart, this is a *ma'ruf* (act of courtesy) since man acts with courtesy with those he loves and those he does not love. This is why our Lord says: 'If they strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet, keep their company in this life according to what is right...' (*Luqman:* 15).

Courtesy, therefore, is an act of superficial goodness, and when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asks that relatives be loved, is he referring to His own relatives, or the love of your relatives? It is relatives in an absolute sense and also the relatives of the one speaking, and he is the messenger who is conveying from Allah.

If we were to take '... only the affection due to kin...' (*ash-Shura:* 23) to mean the relatives of the speaker who is our master the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* then we would have never been able to properly reward him. However, if each one of us takes charge of showing goodness and courtesy to his people, then this is bringing together the spheres of goodness in all mankind.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '... it is a lesson for all people' (*al-An'am:* 90), and this is what gives us the combining of spheres, and everyone becomes concerned with his relatives, thus, competing and contending with one another to be good to them. Everyone is keen to expand his sphere of relatives. Here goodness becomes widespread, and love is made to last.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَمَا قَدَرُواْ ٱللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدۡرِهِۦٓ إِذۡ قَالُواْ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ بَشَرٖ مِّن شَيۡءٖۗ قُلۡ مَنۡ أَنزَلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ
ٱلَّذِي جَآءَ بِهِۦ مُوسَىٰ نُورٗا وَهُدٗى لِّلنَّاسِۖ تَجۡعَلُونَهُۥ قَرَاطِيسَ تُبۡدُونَهَا وَتُخۡفُونَ كَثِيرٗاۖ
وَعُلِّمۡتُم مَّا لَمۡ تَعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنتُمۡ وَلَآ ءَابَآؤُكُمۡۖ قُلِ ٱللَّهُۖ ثُمَّ ذَرۡهُمۡ فِي خَوۡضِهِمۡ يَلۡعَبُونَ ﴿٩١﴾

They have no grasp of God's true measure when they say, 'God has sent nothing down to a mere mortal.' Say, 'Who was it who sent down the Scripture, which Moses brought as a light and a guide to people, which you made into separate sheets, showing some but hiding many? You were taught things that neither you nor your forefathers had known.' Say, 'God [sent it down],' then leave them engrossed in their vain talk [91] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 91)

The discussion is about those who reject and refuse to have faith in Allah *the Exalted*. The command comes to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make it clear to them that they have not given Allah His true measure. The meaning of *qadr* (measure or rank) is knowledge of rank. His true measure cannot be fully understood by us human beings. Therefore, we understand Him according to our own ability and according to what has been asked of us, for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Glory be to You! We cannot enumerate Your praise! You are as You have praised Yourself!'(1)

When someone praises someone else, it shows that he has evaluated the extent that this person should be praised. When we evaluate Allah's rank, then we must know that He possesses all the attributes of perfection; they do not come to an end, and they cannot be enumerated. It is from the True Lord's

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in the Book of Prayer, Abu Dawud in the Book of Prayer and Witr, an-Nasa'i in the Book of Standing in the Night, At-Tirmidhi in the Book of Supplications, Ibn Majah in the Book of Supplications, Malik in the (Muwatta') in the Book of Touching the Quran and narrated by Ahmad in the Musnad 1:96,118*

Mercy that He taught us how to praise Him in order for us not to fall into difficulty. Man does not have the ability to fully encompass Allah's beauty and majesty such that he could praise Him as He deserves to be praised. If a slave could encompass this – and he never will – then from where would he get an expression to carry out this praise? There is no rhetorician or man of letters who is able to compose expressions that can sufficiently articulate Allah's praise. The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarified for us via His Messenger: I have taken this matter upon Myself, and relieved you of it, so that you can all be equal. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Glory be to You! We cannot enumerate Your praise! You are as You have praised Yourself!'

In the phrase 'All praise be to Allah' alone, all of mankind is made equal. It is from His Mercy that He made all of mankind equal in knowing how to praise Him. The True Lord mentions here the situation in which it is negated that they have truly understood Allah's measure. Why, O Lord, are they not able to truly understand your measure? The answer is: '…"Allah has sent nothing down to a mere mortal"' (*al-An'am:* 91). This means that they denied that Allah *the Almighty* had chosen some of His created being and made them worthy of receiving His Way in order to convey it to the rest of the creation. The response comes from the True Lord for His Messenger to refute them: 'Say, "Who was it who sent down the Scripture, which Musa (Moses) brought as a light and a guide to people...' (*al-An'am:* 91).

So, the ones who say this must believe that a book was sent down to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that the argument proves to be properly stated. The disbelievers of Mecca did not believe in any messenger, yet, they knew about the people of the Book which is proven by their statement: '... If only the Scripture had been sent down to us, we would have been better guided than them.' (*al-An'am:* 157)

We say that if you were to look closely at this verse of this chapter of the Quran, you will find that the matter applies to someone specific from those who were overcome by the argument. In the history of the Prophetic biography, we find that one of the rabbis was persistently saying things about Islam. His name was Malik ibn as-Saif(1), and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings*

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(1) *The story of Malik ibn As-Saif may Allah accurse him with The Messenger of Allah*

be upon him met him. A rabbi is a Jewish scholar, and he is supposed to be abstinent and detached for the sake of knowledge, but this man was fat. The normal habit of those who detached themselves for the sake of worship and knowledge was that they only took the provision that they needed, and this was because of a line in the Torah: 'Indeed, Allah hates the fat rabbi.' When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* learnt that Malik ibn As-Saif, who was one of the Jewish rabbis, was saying many things about Islam, he said to him, 'Does it say in your Torah "Indeed, Allah hates the fat rabbi?"' The man was dumbfounded and he said, 'Never has Allah revealed anything unto man', meaning Allah has never revealed anything the like of what you are saying unto man. This is how we know that a statement like this came from the people of the Book. When Malik made this remark some Jewish men stood up and said to him, 'How could you say, "Never has Allah revealed anything unto man"! He said, 'Muhammad made me angry, and the anger made me respond with falsehood.' Jews who heard him said, 'Therefore, it is not appropriate for you to be a rabbi since you have dishonoured us. They ostracised him, and then put Kaʿab ibn Al-Ashraf in his place.

'... Say, "Who was it who sent down the Scripture, which Musa (Moses) brought as a light and a guide to people, which you made into separate sheets, showing some but hiding many? You were taught things that neither you nor your forefathers had known." Say, "Allah [sent it down]." Then, leave them engrossed in their vain talk.' (*al-An'am:* 91)

So, the divine writ here is the book that was sent down to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is the Torah, and they treated it like mere leaves of paper or detached pages. What they wanted from them was made manifest, and what they did not want was hidden, such as what they did regarding the matter of stoning being a punishment for adultery. Therefore, they had previously hidden what Allah *the Exalted* had sent down to them, and the True Lord clarifies this in numerous verses: '... but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 14).

Those who did not forget it hid some of it and disclosed some of it. Those who did not hide it distorted it and corrupted it with their tongues. Thus, there are two kinds of forgetting: hiding and distorting. If only they had restricted themselves to this and stopped there. Instead, they came up with their own fabrications and said that they were from Allah. ‘Woe to those who write something down with their own hands and then claim, "This is from God,” in order to make some small gain....’ (*al-Baqara:* 79) The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues by saying: ‘…"You were taught things that neither you nor your forefathers had known." Say, "Allah [sent it down]." Then, leave them engrossed in their vain talk.’ (*al-An‘am:* 91)

If the discussion here is referring to the disbelievers of Mecca, then the Quran gave them what neither they nor their fathers knew since Islam came after a break in the sequence of messengers. If the discussion is referring to the people of the Book, then it is a true statement since when they hid things, the Quran exposed what they hid and what they distorted. The Quran came and straightened this out for them, for it is as if they had been confronted with the truth, and they had to abrogate it with the falsehood that they had changed and distorted. The True Lord’s statement: ‘Say: "Allah"...’ means that the One Who sent down the book is Allah *the Almighty*.

When the True Lord uses the form of a question, we know that for Him to really ask a question is impossible since He knows everything. He only uses the form of questioning known as ‘negating interrogative’ or ‘affirming interrogative’ since He wants a response of affirmation from those who stubbornly deny, and if they do not say anything or they are too confused or embarrassed to speak, then say to them, O, Muhammad: ‘Say: “Allah [has revealed that Divine Book]!”–and then leave them wading in vain discourse, amusing themselves’ (*al-An‘am:* 91).

The Arabic word ‘*khawd’* (wading) literally means ‘stepping in a large amount of water’; the eyes cannot clearly see where the feet are being placed and the person can easily fall in a hollow. The word ‘*khawd’* here is used to indicate the disbelievers’ delving into falsehood. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And then leave them wading in vain discourse, amusing themselves’ (*al-An‘am:* 91). Their actions are only jests of amusement on their part that cannot stand against the call to the Truth. Indeed, the call to the Truth will continue unscathed and they will remain unable to defeat it. All they are doing is delving into futile and frivolous falsehood.

However, does this mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* abandoned them? No, because every time he was able to get their attention, he informed and reminded them of his Message. Thereafter, after Islam had become predominant in the Arabian Peninsula and the Message had been made clear to all people there, they were given the choice of either accepting its presence or fighting its Message. The miracle of Prophet Muhammad came in the form of the Quran that the Arabs realized, was of a miraculous nature. Allah *Glorified is He* who had revealed the Torah and then revealed the Quran, rich in blessings, says after that:

وَهَٰذَا كِتَٰبٌ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ مُبَارَكٌ مُّصَدِّقُ ٱلَّذِى بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلِتُنذِرَ أُمَّ ٱلْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ
حَوْلَهَا ۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِۦ ۖ وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

This is a blessed Scripture that We have sent down to confirm what came before it and for you to warn the Mother of Cities and all around it. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in this Scripture, and do not neglect their prayers [92] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 92)

The Arabic word '*anzalna'* ('we have revealed') arises from the Arabic root letters (*nun*, *zay* and *lam*). They are used to indicate the revelation of the Quran in various ways. In one instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, We have revealed this [Divine Book] on the Night of Power' (*al-Qadr:* 1). In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...We have revealed it step by step' (*al-Isra':* 106).

In one verse, Allah *Glorified is He* attributed the Revelation (*nuzuul*) to the Quran itself: 'And as a guide towards the Truth have we revealed this [Quran]' (*al-Isra':* 105).

In another verse, He attributed it to the one who carried the Message to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* namely Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* by saying: 'The Trustworthy Spirit [Angel Gabriel] has come down (*nazala*) with it (as a revelation)' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193).

There are, therefore, several varied lexical expressions of the Arabic letters (*nun*, *zay* and *lam*). What are the reasons for their different lexical derivations in the verses mentioned above? We know that the Quran was not sent down as a whole to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but was rather revealed as a whole to the lowest heaven when it was transported from the Preserved Tablet to the world. From that point, the Quranic verses were revealed in instalments according to worldly events. The Arabic word ‘*anzala’* (have revealed) refers to the transfer of the Quran from the Preserved Tablet to the sky of this world. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Behold, we have revealed this [Divine Book] (*anzalnahu*) on the Night of Power’.

Thus, we can conclude that the Quran was revealed in its entirety during that first transfer from the Preserved Tablet to the sky of this world on the Night of Power. It was then sent down in instalments over the period of twenty-three years that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lived in this world after he first received the Revelation.

When Allah *Glorified is He* is referring to the Quran being revealed in its entirety from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest heavens, He uses the word ‘*anzalnahu’*, where the initial ‘*a*’ refers to the ‘*hamza* sign’ used to indicate transitive verbs. (In Arabic sentences, a transitive verb is a verb that acts upon one or more objects, as opposed to intransitive verbs that have no object.)

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the Quran being revealed successively from the sky of this world over 23 years corresponding to successive events. In this case, the word ‘*nazzala’* is used, because it indicates the succession of the revealed verses throughout the life of Prophet Muhammad’s prophethood.

A third verse refers to the one who carried the revelation down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that is Angel Gabriel. Here, the word ‘*nazala’* is used.

That is, when talking about the Quran, we can say *nazala*, *anzala* or even *nazzala*. The word ‘*nazala’* also indicates that the Quran was revealed from a higher power to be received by someone of lower status. When Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to listen to a ruling being sent down, He orders His Prophet: ‘Say: “Come (*ta’alu*), let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden to you’ (*al-An‘am:* 151).

The meaning of the word '*taʿalu'* (come) is: 'Ascend to a higher level' because we live on the earth, and we are warned of making universal laws that govern our earthly lives by ourselves; these worldly legislations must be constructed under the light of Allah's Way, otherwise we will enter into a state of decay. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the exalted legislation to rule us. Thus, we must receive our laws from the highest heaven in order not to deviate and go astray with false laws that oppose the framework of Allah's Way.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-An'am*: 'And this [Quran] is also a Divine Book which We have revealed–blessed…' (*al-Anʿam:* 92). This is a statement that only holds true for the Quran. It is true that all the previous Divine Books laid down a way of life for its followers, but the miracles of all the previous prophets were not related to their books. As we know, the miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the staff, and the book that laid down the rules for his followers was the Torah. The miracle of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was curing the blind and the leper and bringing the dead back to life by Allah's Will, while the book of commandments that was revealed to him was the Injil (Gospel). However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was distinguished because his miracle was his Book of commandments itself.

Each of the previous Messages was set for a limited time and place. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with the universal, invincible Religion, and thus his miracle came in the form of his Message. If Prophet Muhammad's miracle had been physical, i.e. material in form and similar in nature to the previous miracles, his miracle would have come to an end. In addition, we are only sure of the miracles of the previous Prophets because the Quran mentioned them. Each one of the previous miracles was suited to its set time and place, while Islam came for all times and places. This is why the miracle had to accompany the commandment itself. For this reason, people who embrace Islam after the time of Prophet Muhammad, even until the Hour is established, can say, 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and the Quran is his miracle'.

The Quran is blessed. When we speak in our local Arabic dialect, we use the words which have the most eloquent uses in the Arabic language. There are people who say: 'By Allah, this food was surely blessed. It was made for two people, yet four people ate from it and there is still more leftover'. In Arabic, something is said to be blessed when something gives more than its perceived volume.

The blessings of the Quran are predominant and clear. If we were to compare the size of the Quran to the size of many books, we would often find that the Quran is smaller in size. Despite that disparity, the Quran leads to righteousness and benefaction, and contains blessings, legislations, miracles, and secrets that would overwhelm its number of pages, a number which is smaller than many other books. Some people have tried to interpret the meanings of the Quranic verses in numerous books, yet not one of them was able to arrive at the total and absolute reality that Allah *Glorified is He* intended in His Verses. Had the Quran served all its gifts during the age in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lived, no other blessings would have been available for the new generations to receive and interpret. Thus, the newer generations have not lost interest in the Quran as they are presented with broader meanings.

Every concept has been clarified and every generation can take from the meanings of the Quran according to the understanding of their times. If Prophet Muhammad had completely interpreted its verses according to only his time, the Quranic meanings will have been limited to the early generations and no one after the Prophet will dare to offer any further interpretation. In fact, Prophet Muhammad knew that the Quran's gifts had no end, and he only clarified what the contemporary minds of his time were capable of understanding so that they will not deviate from it.

If the Quran had clearly said, 'Indeed, the earth is not flat and it revolves around the sun', would any mind (contemporary at that time) believe that fact? There are people nowadays who still falsely argue that the earth is a flat structure! Thus, we find that the Quran alluded to this fact subtly, so that minds can be slowly introduced to the idea. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He causes the night to wind around the day, and causes the day to wind around the night' (*az-Zumar:* 5).

As long as the night winds around the day, and the day winds around the night in a way that resembles a sphere, then, surely, that structure around which the day and night are revolving must be sphere-like. Allah *Glorified is He* gives a well-organised account in order for the minds of that time to become enlightened enough to understand this phenomenon.

Furthermore, the Quran says: 'Say (O Muhammad): "To Allah belongs the East and the West"' (*al-Baqara:* 142). This verse is a clear statement to all people because each one of us realizes the presence of these two directions for every specified point on earth. However, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '[He is] the Lord of the two farthest points of sunrise, and the Lord of the two farthest points of sunset' (*ar-Rahman:* 17). Now, did the minds living in Prophet Muhammad's time understand this? Yes, because he said at one point, 'Indeed, the sun rises from a certain place and it sets in another place'; when the sun is rising where you are, it is setting where I am, and when the sun is setting where you are, it is rising where I am. That is, for every moment of sunrise, there is a sunset beyond the horizon. Allah's statement is therefore confirmed: '[He is] the Lord of the two farthest points of sunrise, and the Lord of the two farthest points of sunset' (*ar-Rahman:* 17). Moreover, we know that the sun rises at a different angle every day, so there are many points on the horizon where the sun rises and sets throughout the year. Allah *Glorified is He* is Truthful when He says He is the Lord of all the points of sunrise and sunset.

Indeed, the Quran addresses us in a way that the minds of each generation can withstand. We find a reference in the Quran to new phenomena that were discovered in the present times. We also find that the new interpretation of any verse does not abrogate the previous interpretations, but actually builds on them.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not choose to give a complete commentary on the Quran because he had to interpret its verses by only referring to points that his contemporaries were able to contemplate which resulted in the interpretation being limited and not suitable for the later intellectuals. This is why Prophet Muhammad transmitted the Quranic verses regarding the matters concerned with of the universe which were subject to scientific reconsideration, without adding many words of explanation. But for the verses laying down commandments and rulings, his explanation was more profound as these matters were clear at that time. This is why Prophet Muhammad said about the Quran: 'Its wonders do not cease'.

The Quran gives us new wonders in every generation. Hence, the Quran is blessed due to the subtle references to the natural world that are mentioned in its verses, and will be blessed until the Last Hour is established.

‘And this [Quran] is also a Divine Book which We have revealed–blessed, confirming the truth of whatever still remains [of earlier revelations]’ (*al-An‘am:* 92). The earlier revelations are the books that were revealed ‘*bayna yadayhi*’ (literally ‘between the hands of it [the Quran]’ and translated as ‘confirming the truth of whatever still remains [of earlier revelations]’ in this verse). ‘Between the hands of something’, is an Arabic phrase that means ‘before this thing’. The books that were revealed ‘between the hands of the Quran’ are the well-known books, such as the Taurah and the Injil, since these are the two books that we still hear of today.

The Quran confirms the authenticity of the books revealed before it. This does not mean that it confirms the authenticity of what had been distorted, but rather, it confirms the integrity of the original texts. This is what 'Abdullah ibn Salam(1) and others, who were scholars of the older scriptures, acknowledged when they embraced Islam. 'Abdullah ibn Salam said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘My heart has been drawn to Islam, but I know that my people (the Jews) are a people who slander and who are arrogant. I want you (Prophet Muhammad) to ask them about me before I embrace Islam openly’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them (the Jews), ‘What do you say about 'Abdullah ibn Salam?’ They said, ‘He is our rabbi and the son of our rabbi, our chief and our leader’. They all mentioned his high status. ‘Abdullah ibnu Salam then said, ‘I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. At this point, they began insulting 'Abdullah. ‘Abdullah then said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Did I not tell you, O Messenger of Allah, that they are a people who slander?’

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Quran in the verse under discussion: ‘...confirming the truth of whatever still remains [of earlier revelations]’ (*al-An‘am:* 92). If you want an illustration of that principle, look for the Quranic ruling on any issue present in the Torah that the Jews previously had no reason to deny. You will find that the Quran agrees with the Torah on that issue.

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(1) *The story of the conversion of ‘Abdullah ibn Salam to Islam*

An example of this is when the Quran mentioned the punishment of stoning. The Jews attempted to mitigate the ruling for stoning because a married woman had committed adultery and they wanted to be courteous with her. They raised the issue with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'Indeed, the verdict not to stone is better for us and for her'. It is remarkable that although they did not believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they wanted a verdict from him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them, 'Bring the book (that you believe in)'. They brought the scriptures they had and found the verse regarding stoning. The Quran confirms that which came before it, without hiding, distorting or interpreting any concepts.

The fact that they hardly looked into the issues that they were addressing illustrates their corruption, deceit, and arrogance, but their falsehood does not blot out the traces of the Truth. The discussion of these issues requires a tactful investigator.

Furthermore, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned a parable in the Torah that describes the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* repeated this parable in the Quran, in the verse: 'Muhammad is Allah's Apostle; and those who are [truly] with him are firm and unyielding (*ashidda'*) towards all deniers of the Truth, [yet] merciful (*ruhama'*) towards one another' (*al-Fath:* 29).

When we look at the Arabic word *ashidda*ʾ (firm and unyielding) and the Arabic word *ruhama*ʾ (merciful), we might think these refer to contradictory temperaments; but in reality there is no contradiction here. An investigative person who examines the verse carefully will understand from this statement that Islam does not want Muslims to have a single, unchangeable temperament; rather, it wants them to have all kinds of normal temperaments. If their character was to be permanently firm and unyielding, they will not be able to be merciful when it is appropriate to show mercy. On the other hand, if their natural disposition and character was to be lenient at all times, they will not be able to be firm when it is appropriate to show firmness.

Moreover, Islam requires Muslims to adhere to both spiritual and material values in order for each value to safeguard its counterpart. If the Muslims were inclined only towards material laws, their civilization will become malicious. On the other hand, if they had only inclined towards intangible values, they will not have been able to establish a lasting and enduring civilization. Allah *Glorified is He* wants civilization to draw its culture from the spiritual and the material realms.

This is why Islam respects both spiritual and material values. In the Jewish understanding of life, the spiritual values were missing, while the Christian culture was immersed in spiritual matters but did not take care of the material world. The Quran confirmed part of what preceded it, and this is why the verse we are discussing informed us of the people of the book.

The verse also directs its warning to the people of Quraysh who reside in Mecca. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘In order that you may warn the foremost of all cities and all who dwell around it’. We know that the foremost of all cities is Mecca. Some people have tried to use this verse as a proof to say, ‘The Quran was only revealed to the Arabs, as they are the people who dwell around Mecca’. We respond by saying to these people, ‘You have not properly understood the verse’s expression. To start with, what does the word ‘around’ indicate? Around any specific point there is a circular area. The diameter of this area can be specified as twenty or one hundred kilometres, but it can also be an unspecified distance. Therefore, the word ’around’ includes everything that is around Mecca, and what is around any point can include every place in the world’.

Why was it called ‘*Umm al-qura’* in Arabic, a word that means ‘the foremost’ or ‘the Mother of all cities’? After Hajar *peace be upon her* the mother of Prophet Ismail (Ishmael), settled with her infant son in the valley that had no vegetation and the water of *Zamzam* came forth, the people multiplied in that valley, and it became the foremost of all cities. Additionally, the city of Mecca contains the Ka’ba and its people closely safeguard it. During the Pilgrimage (*Hajj*), people travel from every direction to visit this valley, just as children rush to take refuge with their mother.

‘In order that you may warn the foremost of all cities and all who dwell around it. And those who believe in the Hereafter believe in this [warning]’ (*al-An'am:* 92). Therefore, who are those who believe in this book that was sent down affirming that which came before it and also warning the foremost of all cities and those that dwell around it, and who are those who adherently believe in the Hereafter? And what is the connection between warning the Meccans and those who dwell around it, and believing in the Hereafter? The reason is that no one implements the Quranic teachings except after believing in the Hereafter.

For this reason, these people will flee from disobedience and desire obedience when they have knowledge of the rewards awaiting the good deeds and the punishments prepared for the grave sins. Those who do not believe in the Hereafter will not hear you or submit in obedience to any virtuous commands. They will not desist from theft, arrogance or any other grave sin because they have no fear of the consequences. Such a person may say, 'I am not required to do anything. Nothing can restrict my freedom'.

Such a person does not consider the matter properly or deeply. They are under the assumption that the commandments of Allah *Glorified is He* restrict only their freedom, when in fact, these laws justly restrict everyone's freedom. When religion forbids you from committing theft or glancing unlawfully at women, it is also ordering all of mankind not to steal your belongings or harm your female family members. Thus, your rights are only secured if you live under a system of equal obligations and rights.

The people who believe in the Hereafter want salvation from punishment and the security of good rewards. Ponder this example, which is only for clarification as Allah *Glorified is He* is far above any comparison. When you say to your child, 'Seek knowledge', he may respond, 'I do not want any certificate'. His father may then force him to study in his early years. But after a few years we find that young people themselves start working hard without being forced, as they now seek success and fear failure; if there was no exam at the end of the year, this hard work will be futile. Thus, the ones who are closer to the calls of justice and goodness are those who believe in the Hereafter.

'And those who believe in the life to come believe in this [warning]; and it is they who are ever-mindful of their prayer' (*al-An'am:* 92). Why is being mindful of prayers mentioned here? Prayers are the pillars of Islam, and whoever establishes their prayers fulfils the foundation of the Religion. When we analyse people's nature, we find that they flee from obedience because it takes up time that they like to spend in playing. When you say to someone, for example, 'Take a short break from your work to pray', he may respond by saying, 'No, because leaving my work will make me lose some profit'. If you sincerely obey Allah's orders, the blessings will make up for the time you assume you have lost.

Additionally, if you look at the pillars of Islam, you will find that they do not take up much time. The first pillar of Islam, which is to testify that there is no god but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, only requires you to say it once. Concerning the third pillar, which is obligatory charity (*Az-zakat*), it only takes a small amount of time to give to the poor on the day of harvest. There is also the obligatory charity on monetary savings that is paid at the end of the year and fasting the month of *Ramadan*. And although fasting takes up a part of your day, it only comes once a year. The Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) is obligatory only once in a lifetime if one is able. Therefore, apart from the second pillar of Islam, which is prayers, the remaining pillars of Islam are trouble-free for anyone who is interested in doing them.

Prayers are performed five times every day and it takes up more time than the other pillars. In order to perform our prayers correctly, a person must purify their self from both minor and major impurity. They must also purify their place of Prayer. This is why prayer is a deeply rooted pillar in Islam. You do not know if a person is a Muslim unless he gets up to pray after hearing the call to prayer. This is the distinguishing point between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. The prayer is different from the other pillars which are performed only at set times, but even though this is the case, they are still deeply rooted pillars as well.

Indeed, all of Islam's legislations, the pillars and the branches, were ordained through revelation, except for the prayer. It came as a direct order from Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad. Prayer is the act of worship where the Creator summons His creation into His presence. This is why it had to be legislated in a unique way in His Divine Presence.

Being the foundation of religion, the prayer gathers all of the other pillars of Islam together. The Muslim says while praying, 'I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. He also fasts by abstaining from the desires of the stomach and the flesh, and even abstains from every movement that is not included in the prayer. Praying also includes some *zakat* (obligatory charity) because wealth is a derivative of work and time. When you pray, you are learning to give up some of your time for Allah *Glorified is He*. You also face the Ka'ba during prayers, just as someone performing the major pilgrimage (*Hajj*) or the minor pilgrimage (*ʿUmra*) faces the *Ka'ba*. Therefore, all the other pillars of Islam are gathered in the pillar of prayer.

In addition to all the pillars of Islam being incorporated in it, social equality is also realised to reform the earth. Reformation of the earth requires various talents and various abilities. It is not possible for one reformer on earth to gather all these talents; rather, the skills needed for the world's reformation must be dispersed and distributed amongst all mankind. It is not possible for one person to be an engineer, doctor, lawyer, manufacturer, ploughman, farmer, and merchant at the same time. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* distributed the requirements for reforming the earth amongst the people. This would make their skills necessary for each other, and not merely a courtesy. Hence, you are in need of the skills that you do not have, and consequently you go to someone who has these skills, and that person needs your talents in the same manner.

If anyone wants to develop some skills that other people are capable of in order to be independent of them, they have to spend a lot of effort to reach this level. If plumbers charge higher wages than he can afford, and he tries to learn their trade, he has no choice but to learn it from a skilled worker. The same goes for all the other skills and professions. However, mankind only sees wealth as being the main aspect in which people differ.

Some people assume that gaining financial wealth or having wealth tied in fixed assets is the only necessary skill. For example, a student of religious jurisprudence may spend twenty years to earn and learn the necessary knowledge to become a scholar. If someone asks a scholar for his opinion on a particular issue of jurisprudence, and the scholar gives it to him for free, that answer will be the sum of the material hardships that this scholar went through for a long period of time, researching books, listening to teachers, and deriving rulings. The scholar subjugated himself for twenty years so that people can benefit from these legal opinions with ease.

If we look at someone who works polishing shoes, and we see the owner of the shoe stretching his leg while the shoe polisher works, you may say to yourself, ‘Why is there so much arrogance from the shoe owner, stretching his leg in the direction of the shoe polisher? Why does this shoe polisher accept this gloominess and misery?’ You have to realize that you are looking at the shoe owner while he is taking a break, and the shoe polisher is in his working attire. If you knew how the owner of the shoes earns his livelihood, you will know that he too had subjugated himself for a period of time to earn the money he needed to pay the shoe polisher. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘So that they might avail themselves of one another’s help’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

Some people only look at employment and subjugation in terms of being poor or wealthy. The truth is that every person on earth is employed by others due to the gift or talent he has, and that other people employ him due to the gifts and talents that they do not possess. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to connect mankind together by these compulsory means, and not by mere courtesy. When a man needs money to feed his family and the only job available is to empty out the sewers, he will get the necessary tools and do his job to provide for his dependents. However, people who are not bound by necessity may not choose to do this kind of work and provide that necessary skill to society. If all of humanity were living in opulence, will anyone regularly volunteer to empty out the sewers? That would never happen. A job is done out of necessity and not courtesy.

Reformation of the earth requires people to share their available energy, but this ability may not last for a long time. A man may have a particular strength at a particular time and then, later, may become weaker. Another may currently own wealth and riches and later declare bankruptcy. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us that He made the days alternate among mankind. This ensures that the world is set straight by these ties of necessity. It may appear to us that some of these gifts make some people distinguished. These gifts may be in the form of their appearance, their elegance, or their modes of transport. A doctor may need to work in more than one place. If he travels by foot or by public transport, he may arrive late and tired to his various shifts, and for this reason he buys a car. Someone may perceive the car as a unique gift forgetting the fact that this car is actually helping the doctor serve and save others.

Another example is your simple cup of tea. Presume that you give a pound to an office worker to buy tea from the grocery. The worker goes to buy a packet of tea, and finds a grocer who supplies him with one. You generally do not realize that this packet of tea took the time and effort of many people to reach you. Allah *Glorified is He* made some people responsible for growing the tea in another country. He also made other people responsible for importing it. Then the packet of tea comes to you in order for you to make a cup of tea to drink in comfort.

All matters of life are maintained by people being employed to each other. That is why there are social differences which our jobs define, but Allah *Glorified is He* dissolves these differences by making the prayer a means of equality for everyone. You notice that when the caller for prayer says, 'Allah is the Greatest' (*Allahu Akbar*), everyone is obligated to go to prayer. The rich people are obligated to attend just as much as the poor and the prince is obligated just as much as his guards. Everyone should leave their ranks outside the mosque so that they can stand in prayer as equals. Whoever has an arrogant boss can now see him prostrating to Allah *Glorified is He* in the same way as his employees. In this moment of equality, everyone is equal in their reformation of this world.

Let us assume that all of us pray the Daily Prayers by ourselves, but when the call to prayer is given for the Friday Prayer, Allah *Glorified is He* is commanding us to stop and leave everything we are doing in order to perform prayer together. The weak person sees the strong humbling himself before Allah just like he does; and the strong person sees the weak next to him in the line. And when we return to work, the mask of power and haughtiness has fallen off because we have all stood together in front of the One Creator and we are all equal. This is indeed the path for social equality.

If you wish to meet a person who has a very important position, you have to write a request. After this, he will either agree or refuse the request. If he agrees, he will ask you, ‘What do you want to talk about?’ He will set a time for you to come and sit with him. If you sit with him and lose track of time, he may stand up to indicate that the meeting has ended. However, our Lord says to us, ‘Come to Me at any time. Talk to Me about anything. I will not end the meeting until you have finished’. This is a huge gift, and Allah *Glorified is He* bountifully gives it to His servants.

There is no Lordship that is better than this. Consequently, if we look at the pillar of prayer, we will find that it gathers all the virtues of Islam and leads to a virtuous society. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* has made it the second pillar for the establishment of Islam.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِىَ إِلَىَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَىْءٌ وَمَن قَالَ
سَأُنزِلُ مِثْلَ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ ۗ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰٓ إِذِ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ فِى غَمَرَٰتِ ٱلْمَوْتِ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ
بَاسِطُوٓا۟ أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرِجُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمُ ۖ ٱلْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ ٱلْهُونِ بِمَا كُنتُمْ
تَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ غَيْرَ ٱلْحَقِّ وَكُنتُمْ عَنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

Who could be more wicked than someone who invents a lie against God, or claims, ‘A revelation has come to me,’ when no revelation has been sent to him, or says, ‘I too can reveal something equal to God’s revelation’? If you could only see the wicked in their death agonies, as the angels stretch out their hands [to them], saying, ‘Give up your souls. Today you will be repaid with a humiliating punishment for saying false things about God and for arrogantly rejecting His revelations’ [93] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 93)

When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks in the form of a question, the question is rhetorical and Allah, the Knower of everything, is not asking to receive an answer. The reason for this form of speech is that Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the answer to be clearly revealed by Him. Indeed, he could have said:

'The one who invents a lie is wicked'. However, He placed it in the form of a question to emphasise the wickedness of a person who invents a lie about Allah. He is asking every believer to reflect on the matter in his mind and come up with the answer himself. Indeed, we punish or admonish a person who invents a lie about one of his colleagues or peers, so what about the gravity of inventing a lie about Allah *Glorified is He*? When you hear these words: 'And who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about Allah', and you consider the matter thoroughly, you will find that no one is more wicked than such a person.

How can someone invent a lie about Allah *Glorified is He*? If someone claims that he is a Messenger from Allah and he is not, this is a lie about Allah *Glorified is He*. That false messenger is lying about Allah *Glorified is He* because He said that Allah had sent him when Allah had not.

The Arabic word '*iftira'* (inventing a lie) refers to an intentional purposeful lie. It applies to claimed false prophecies such as the examples of Musaylamah the Liar, Sujah, Talha Al-Asadi and Al-Aswad Al-ʿAnsi. Each one of these people claimed that they were prophets. However, no one asked them for miracles to prove their message! This was because each of them brought religious rulings that were easier for the people. One of them said, 'I lessen the Prayer and obligatory charity is not compulsory'. Thus, they were followed by anyone who wanted to be relieved of religious commands and prohibitions. These followers wanted to have a religion without adhering to the requirements of religiosity. Hence, they found many supporters from among the hypocrites. One of these followers may even be well educated, but he embraces the belief in an impostor Prophet. You should ask the follower of this impostor, 'Have you asked this person who claims that he is a prophet about their miracle?' If a miracle is the first condition for believing in a Prophet, why have so many people not asked for it? It is because although religiosity is a natural disposition in the soul, what makes adhering to a religion difficult are the requirements that the religious commandments impose. Those who follow impostors are people with weak souls because they see someone who makes religious requirements easier for them. Thereafter, the matters of religion for them decay into chaos.

‘And who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about Allah, or says, “This has been revealed unto me”, while nothing has been revealed to him?’ (*al-An‘am:* 93) A man claimed that he is a prophet and then said, ‘I will give you verses the like of these Quranic verses’. The Arabs were a nation whose ears enjoyed pleasant rhetoric and oration. What did this lying claimant who was called An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, say to his followers. This liar claimed that one of his verses said, ‘By the grinders that grind (wheat), and the dough makers that produce dough, and the bakers who bake’. This is an example of his ludicrous verses. He could have tried painting a better picture by adding, ‘By the farmers when they farm, and the ploughmen when they plough. By the meals when they are eaten, and the digestive organs when they digest’. Of course, this speech is an example of empty drivel.

Allah *Glorified is He* only sends down His speech in a well-organised way, having a meaning that attracts the listener and conveys information that is of value as well. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the verse: ‘And who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about Allah, or says, “This has been revealed unto me”, while nothing has been revealed to him?’ (*al-An‘am:* 93)

A man called 'Abdullah ibn Saʿad ibn Abu Sarh Al-Qurashi(1) was a foster brother of the Prophet’s Companion, 'Uthman ibn Affan, and a scribe of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He was sitting in the presence of Prophet Muhammad when this verse was revealed: ‘Now, indeed, We created man out of the essence of clay, and then caused him to remain as a drop of sperm in a well-established place (the womb). Then, we created out of the drop of sperm a clinging clot (germ-cell), and next we created out of the clinging clot an embryonic lump, and then we created within the embryonic lump bones, and after that we clothed the bones with flesh–and finally we brought [all] this into being as a new creation...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 12-14). He was dazzled by the stages in which Allah *Glorified is He* created man, and said, ‘Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of creators!’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘Write it down, for these words (you uttered) have also been revealed’. The man became deluded and said, ‘If Muhammad is truthful, verses have been revealed to me as they have been revealed to him. If he is a liar, I have said words similar to his words'. He then fled and joined the ranks of the disbelievers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deemed his blood violable.

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(1) *The story of the inspiration of ʿAbdullah ibn Saʿad ibn Abu Sarh Al-Qurashi*

In the year of the conquest (of Mecca) 'Uthman Allah *be pleased with him* brought him to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Pardon 'Abdullah'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was quiet. 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Pardon him'. Prophet Muhammad was again quiet, and when 'Uthman repeated it a third time, 'Pardon him, O Messenger of Allah', Prophet Muhammad said, 'Yes'. This is because 'Uthman had a special status with Prophet Muhammad.

When 'Uthman ibn 'Affan left with the pardoned man, Prophet Muhammad then said to his Companions, 'Did I not tell you that anyone who sees him should kill him?' Our leader, ʿIbad ibn Bishr, said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I looked towards you, waiting for a sign or hint from you to take him'. Prophet Muhammad said to ʿIbad ibn Bishr, 'It is not befitting for a Messenger (of Allah) to have deceitful eyes'. After that, Ibn Abu Sarh became a Muslim and his Islam became sound.

What is the punishment for those people who invent lies about Allah *Glorified is He* and claim that Allah has sent revelation down to them? Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...If you could but see [how it will be] when these evildoers find themselves in the agonies of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands [saying], "Give up your souls! Today you shall be requited with suffering and [extreme] humiliation for having attributed to Allah other than the Truth, and for having persistently scorned His Messages in your arrogance!"' (*al-An'am:* 93).

The Arabic particle '*laaw'* (if) in the phrase: 'If you could but see', is a conditional particle. For example, you can say that if a particular person visits you, you will honour him. When you read the Quran, you may find the particle *'law'* used several times without an apodosis (the clause expressing the consequence). Why is that? Mentioning a particular apodosis restricts the meaning in the reader's mind. But if you want an apodosis that is not restricting, you should not clearly articulate it, leaving it for the listener to imagine it instead. For example, if a criminal living in a neighbourhood is causing problems for the residents and ends up in the hands of the police, someone may describe the arrest by saying, ‘If you could have seen the face of that tough guy when the police grabbed him!’ Where is the apodosis here? It is not mentioned because it leaves the picture for it to be painted by the listener’s mind without the limitations of language. Allah *Glorified is He* is saying here: ‘…If you could see when these evildoers will find themselves in the agonies of death…’ (*al-An‘am:* 93). The word ‘*ghamarat*’ (Agonies) are severities that no one can free themselves from. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: ‘And the angels stretch out their hands [saying], “Give up your souls..!”’ (*al-An‘am:* 93). Are they the angels of death who say that as they take their souls from their bodies, or is this order spoken by the angels of punishment? The answer is that both the angels of death and the angels of punishment can be involved. The angels of death who will take their souls may ask them, ‘If you rejected and rebelled against many of Allah’s orders, know that Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to take your souls. Are you able to rebel against what Allah *Glorified is He* has willed for you?’ It could also be that the angels are ordering them to make their souls leave their bodies by their own hands. Finally, it could be a challenge for them to deliver themselves from the punishment which surrounds them.

The punishment of ‘*Al-Hawn’* (suffering and extreme humiliation) is a painful punishment that involves humiliation of the disbelievers. The forms of punishment mentioned in the Quran are various. Some verses describe a shameful suffering using the Arabic words ‘*al-muheen’* and ‘*muheena’*. Other verses show that the suffering is painful and grievous using the Arabic word ‘*aleem.’*

Thus, at one time the punishment is painful but contains no humiliation, and another time they have a punishment that is painful and humiliating. Why does Allah *Glorified is He* make them taste a shameful suffering? The answer comes from Allah’s words: ‘...for having attributed to Allah other than the Truth and for having persistently scorned His Messages in your arrogance!’ (*al-An‘am:* 93). The example of the lies that some of them said is claiming false prophecy. In addition to that, they arrogantly scorned the verses that the natural intellect can easily accept. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their Truth...’ (*an-Naml:* 14).

Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا فُرَٰدَىٰ كَمَا خَلَقْنَٰكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَتَرَكْتُم مَّا خَوَّلْنَٰكُمْ وَرَآءَ
ظُهُورِكُمْ ۖ وَمَا نَرَىٰ مَعَكُمْ شُفَعَآءَكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّهُمْ فِيكُمْ شُرَكَٰٓؤُا۟ ۚ
لَقَد تَّقَطَّعَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنكُم مَّا كُنتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

[God will say], 'Now you return to Us, alone, as We first created you: you have left behind everything We gave you, nor do We see those intercessors of yours that you claimed were partners of God. All the bonds between you have been severed, and those about whom you made such claims have deserted you' [94] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 94)

Allah's statement: 'And now, indeed, you have come to Us alone…' (*al-An'am:* 94) means that all of you will come before Allah *Glorified is He*. You will be separated from whatever you had in your worldly life such as wealth, children, and followers. They will all come before Allah *Glorified is He* without the idols they had worshiped with Him which they used to take as intercessors with Allah. The word '*furada*' (alone) is the plural of the word '*fardan*' or '*fareed',* just like '*sukara*' (intoxicated) is the plural of '*sakraan',* and '*usara*' (prisoners) is the plural of '*aseer*'. Indeed, they will come before Allah *Glorified is He* in groups and crowds, but each one of them will come detached from what they had in the life of this world; wealth, family, children and followers. The evidence for this is that Allah said: '...and you have left behind you all that we bestowed on you...' (*al-An'am:* 94). The words: '...bestowed on you…' (*al-An'am:* 94) refer to the followers and bounties Allah has bestowed on you to be of service to you such as the followers and devotees. Each one of them returns alone, detached from what they had in the life of this world. There, they will be in the same state in which Allah *Glorified is He* first created them, when they were delivered into the life of this world. 'And now, indeed, you have come to Us alone, just as we created you in the first instance...' (*al-An'am:* 94).

Allah's words: '...you have come to Us...' (*al-An'am:* 94) indicate that the person who sinned almost presents himself for punishment while admitting that he deserves it and acknowledging his sins. They will be expressing grief for what they had done and will reproach themselves for deviating from the Truth. ‘And you have left behind you all that we bestowed on you [in your lifetime]. And we do not see with you those intercessors of yours whom you thought to be partners with Allah regarding your affairs! Indeed, all the bonds between (*bayn*) you [and your earthly life] are now severed...’ (*al-An‘am:* 94).

‘Al-bayn’ (between) is something that either separates or joins two entities; when we find two people sitting and there is a *bayn* between them; this *bayn* separates them and also joins them together. This word indicates that they will be cut off and separated from their worldly bonds and gatherings after they used to connect themselves to the idols.

What was the connection of these people to the idols that they used to worship with Allah? They used to offer sacrifices and similar offerings to their idols. These idols and everything that they used to make partners with Allah *Glorified is He* (in this life) will flee from them on the Day of Resurrection. This is how Allah’s statement: ‘Indeed, all the bonds between you [and your earthly life] are now severed’ (*al-An‘am:* 94) will be realised in the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: ‘And all your former fancies have forsaken you!’ (*al-An‘am:* 94). The Arabic word used for ‘forsaken’ is ‘*dalla’* (be away from), which means that their idols and worldly supporters will go astray in the Hereafter and will not be able to aid them. You can look for them, but you will not find them, in accordance with Allah’s statement: ‘[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers’ (*al-Baqara:* 166). Allah *Glorified is He* says after this:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ فَالِقُ ٱلۡحَبِّ وَٱلنَّوَىٰۖ يُخۡرِجُ ٱلۡحَيَّ مِنَ ٱلۡمَيِّتِ وَمُخۡرِجُ
ٱلۡمَيِّتِ مِنَ ٱلۡحَيِّۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُۖ فَأَنَّىٰ تُؤۡفَكُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

It is God who splits open the seed and the fruit stone:
He brings out the living from the dead and the dead
from the living – that is God – so how can you turn
away from the truth? [95] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 95)

After Allah *Glorified is He* talks about His Oneness and the prophecies, and mentions the stories of those who opposed, resisted and denied these true prophecies, He *Glorified is He* wanted to turn the attention of His Creation towards what He has prepared for them to maintain their lives. He also wants to show them how He has subjugated the inanimate objects of the entire universe, plants and animals for their service. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is making it clear, 'If you still do not realise that

The Creator deserves your worship, look at the blessings and bounties He gives you. And if the created slave receives all these blessings from Allah, the Most Exalted Creator, why does he not listen to Allah's Commandments? O created being, you were raised on the sustenance of the Most-Merciful; you have to look, reflect and understand. 'Verily, Allah is the One who splits the grain and the fruit-kernel' (*al-An'am:* 95).

When you hear the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* realize that He is the One Who exists by necessity. His Glorified Name comprises all the specified and unspecified attributes of His Majesty and Beauty. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* created the entire universe and He is the One Who sustains it. This creation and sustenance requires the attributes of power, wisdom, vast knowledge, mercy, provision as well as withholding of sustenance, and also other attributes. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to all these attributes by His Name 'Allah' *Glorified is He*.

We say at the beginning of every action, 'In the Name of Allah', and this resembles requesting a license for whatever energy the action needs. With any action, you need power, and consequently you could say, 'In the Name of the fully Capable (*Al-Qadir*)'. Every action also requires knowledge, and therefore you could say, 'In the Name of the All Knowing (*Al-ʿAlim*)'. If it requires wisdom, you could say, 'In the Name of the All-Wise (*Al-Hakim*)'. If it requires might and ability, you could say, 'In the Name of *the Almighty* (*Al-ʿAziz*)'. It may require domination over your enemy, and for this reason you say, 'In the Name of the Dominant (*Al-Qahir*)'.

Every action requires a concentration of the Attributes of Perfection and Majesty of the Creator, Allah *Glorified is He* and you can refer to all these Attributes by saying, 'In the Name of Allah'.

'Verily, Allah is the One who splits the grain and the fruit-kernel' (*al-An'am:* 95). The One who breaks (*faliq*) means the One Who 'splits' (*shaqiq*) both the grain and the fruit-kernel into two halves. The grain (*al-habb*) is that which has no fruit kernel, such as barley, wheat and rice. There are other plants that have a fruit kernel, such as dates and peaches. And there is another type of plant that has seeds, such as melons, and every seed has something inside it. Allah *Glorified is He* makes His Might manifest in the creation of the grains and the fruit kernels.

There are grains that are split and ready to use, such as the grain of beans and the grain of lentils. If you look at the growth process, you will find it amazing. When you place the fruit kernel of a date or a barley seed in the earth in a suitable environment with a little bit of humidity, you will find that the plant will emerge from the two halves. The fruit kernel almost splits so that the weak shoot (*zaban*) can emerge between the two sides and the root can be formed.

The secret of life comes from these two halves, and if this root is removed, life comes to an end. Small, crumbled white pieces of seeds are found in ants' nests, and they discovered that these are the shoots (*zabanat*) of the seeds. If the ants had inserted whole seeds in their nests, this seed would grow if there was any humidity, develop into a tree and destroy the nest. Who guided the ants to do such a thing? Indeed it is Allah *Glorified is He*. We also find that ants split the seeds of the coriander plant into four pieces because if it is split into two parts it might grow. Who teaches them this? Indeed it is Allah *Glorified is He*: 'who creates [everything], and thereupon gave it a suitable form, and who determines the nature [of all that exists], and thereupon guides it [to its goal]' (*al-A'la:* 2-3).

It is amazing to see a fragile shoot, the future roots, which is weak and can be easily crumbled emerging into life, piercing the core of the hard earth. If you strike this hard earth with a knife, the knife may break or bend! Who gives the weak plant roots this ability? What power enables it to split the earth? Allah *Glorified is He* has indeed pierced the earth for the seed so that the plant's nourishment can be extracted from it. Indeed, it is the Power of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'The One who splits the grain' (*al-An'am:* 95) and who puts power into the two halves of a seed for it to grow roots when the environment is humid enough. The plants derive their nourishment from the two halves until they become firm and established in the earth, and then the two halves are transformed into two green leaves.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'Bringing forth the living out of the dead, and He is the One who brings forth the dead out of the living' (*al-An'am:* 95). When the scholars reflected on this verse, they wanted to make clear for us what the living and dead entities were. But everyone has failed to define what life is. The life of any being is what enables it to exist and engage in carrying out its tasks and functions. The life of man has movement, sensation, and progress. There is a second type of life in animals, a third type of life in plants and another type of life that has a different character in inanimate objects. An example of this type of life is what they taught us in schools when the teacher used a magnetic rod to attract iron fillings. Even solid iron fillings have a specific kind of life. In school, we all saw the glass tubes in which we put iron fillings and how they were affected by magnetic rods. They straighten out and become an even line; and this is how we know that life is an existing force in every being so that it can carry out its tasks. Even stones have a different variant of life. There is a stone that takes the form of marble (*rukham*), another that takes the form of alabaster (*marmar*), and every type of stone has some form of life.

We read in the Quran: '[And] that he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the Truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the Truth' (*al-Anfal:* 42). Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the opposite of perishing, which is life. That is, perishing is the opposite of life and life is the opposite of perishing. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Everything is bound to perish, except His (Allah's) [Eternal] Self...' (*al-Qasas:* 88).

Consequently, as long as everything is bound to perish, then everything must contain life. It is a mistake to think that all life must have sensation and motion in the same ways human life has. There is a form of life in everything according to the matter itself, and this will be the case until the Hour is established. Every living thing has a life that is suitable for it, and when we hear: 'And there is not a single thing but it extols His [Allah's] Limitless Glory and Praise: but you [O men] fail to understand how they glorify Him' (*al-Isra':* 44)., we say that everything praises Allah's Limitless Glory. These songs of praise are not metaphorical, but we do not understand the literal form of these praises. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘But you [O men] fail to understand how they glorify Him’ (*al-Isra’:* 44).

Consequently, none of us understand the language with which all the things in existence glorify Allah. We know that when Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* heard the statement of the ant, he smiled. We also know that he heard the hoopoe, and that the mountains used to glorify Allah along with David when he praised Him: ’Verily, Allah is the One who splits the grain and the fruit-kernel, bringing forth the living out of the dead, and He is the One who brings forth the dead out of the living. This is Allah: how, then, are you deluded away from the Truth?!’(*al-An‘am:* 95)

Indeed, every word has a specific indication and meaning. The word ‘knowledge’ (*‘ilm*) indicates that His Knowledge encompasses everything in existence, and the word ‘wisdom’ (*hikma*) indicates to us that everything is a result of His Wisdom. The word ‘The All-Provider’ (*Ar-Razzaq*) indicates that He provides us with everything in creation. There is no end to the perfection of His Essential Attributes. As long as His Essence is described with all the attributes of perfection, then every action that is issued by Allah’s Command *Glorified is He* is attributed with Absolute Power and Beauty.

Allah tells us this information to turn our attention to the fact that everything in existence has been created by Allah. Moreover, everything has a life which suits its job and function on earth; man has a life which suits its job on earth, animals have a life which suits their job on earth, plants have a life which suits their function on earth, and inanimate objects have a life which suits their function on earth. If we look at anything in this way we will see that all things have a form of life. But the most advanced life which is composed of all the necessary elements is present in the most developed form of created being, which is mankind. Allah created mankind with a physical life that has senses and movements. He also gave him another life by which his physical life becomes important and of value. Both the believer and the disbeliever enjoy the physical life which every man has, and the best thing about such a life is that Allah gives us senses and the ability to move throughout all our time on this world, but the other life, the life of faith which is based on the directions Allah sends through the Messengers, is a deeper and richer way of life, a life that lasts for eternity. This is the true life. For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life: if they but knew!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64)

This is the real life and the Lord's statement: 'Verily, Allah is the One Who splits the grain and the fruit-kernel' (*al-An'am:* 95) is the first introduction to life. Then He talks about life itself and states that He brings forth the living from the dead. Here He is addressing us according to our knowledge of things; something that does not have any motion or sense is what we would consider to be dead, but if we look at reality properly we find that everything in existence has life. This is affirmed by the Lord's statement: '...Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] self'. As long as everything is bound to perish, before it perishes it must contain life.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "O Allah, and Lord of all dominion! You grant dominion to whom you will, and take away dominion from which you will; you exalt whom you will, and abase whom you will. In Your hand is all good. Verily, you have the power to will anything. You make the night grow longer by shortening the day, and you make the day grow longer by shortening the night. You bring forth the living out of the dead, and you bring forth the dead out of the living. And you grant sustenance to whom you will, without measure"' (*Al-'Imran:* 26-27). Why has Allah mentioned in this verse '…You [Allah] bring forth…' (*Al-'Imran*: 27) and in the verse that we are currently discussing we have His statement: 'and He is the One who brings forth the dead out of the living' (*Al-'Imran:* 27) Indeed, those who have looked into the matter have only done so superficially, thinking that the phrase in the verse: 'You [Allah] bring forth the living out of the dead…' (*Al-'Imran:* 27) is just the opposite of the later phrase in the same verse: 'and He is the One who brings forth the dead out of the living' (*Al-'Imran:* 27), not considering that it has a special meaning of its own. They forgot that He *Glorified is He* says that He: '…brings forth the living out of the dead…' (*Al-'Imran:* 27) in order to make it clear that Allah is the One Who splits the grain and the fruit-kernel in order to bring forth the living out of the dead, i.e. Allah cleaves and splits the seed and the fruit kernel in order for the living to emerge from the dead.

Then He said: '...and He is the One who brings forth the dead out of the living...' (*Al-'Imran:* 17) This is the opposite of the cleaver, but do not assume it to be just the opposite of the earlier phrase in the verse and that it does not have any special meaning of its own. Comparing these two verses, we should realise that the noun indicates something that is firmly established, while the verb indicates something that is happening. Allah has attributes which are apparent in His Own Self, and He has attributes which are apparent in how they affect other beings. He is the All-Provider before anyone was present to provide for. He is the All-Provider and after He has created those who He provides for, His Attribute of being the Sustainer is apparent, because He is the Creator. 'The Creator' is an attribute which is apparent in His Own Self before anyone was created. And Allah is the One Who grants life before there is anyone to grant life to because granting life is an attribute which is apparent in His Own Self. Moreover, Allah is the One Who causes death before there is anyone to cause to die because causing death is an attribute that is apparent in Allah's Own Self. And Allah is the One Who has the attribute of splitting the grain and fruit-kernel before there is any grain and fruit-kernel for Him to split. Furthermore, the attribute of being the One Who brings the life out of the dead is a firmly-established characteristic which is apparent in His Own Self before there is any dead object from which life will be brought.

If Allah wants to indicate an attribute before anything is present upon which this attribute is apparent, He uses the noun '*Faliq*' (The One Who splits) and '*Makhraj*' (The One Who brings forth). And if Allah wants to indicate the attribute after something upon which the attribute is apparent is actually present, He uses the verb '*yakhruj*' (He brings forth). The Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '...This is (*dhalikum*) Allah: how, then, are you deluded away from the Truth!' (*al-An'am:* 95)

(*Dha*) in the word '*dhalikum*' (this is) is a demonstrative noun for that which precedes it. That is, the One Who splits the grain and the fruit-kernel, Who brings forth the living from the dead and Who brings forth the dead from the living is Allah *the Exalted*. The letter *'kaf'* in '*dhalikum'* (this is) is for those whom He is addressing, which is us. As for the letter *'lam'* in *'dhalikum'* it indicates distance, while the letter *'mim'* indicates plurality. When the Lord

Glorified is He wants to address His Messenger, He says: 'This (*dhalika*) book–let there be no doubt about it...' (*al-Baqara:* 2). But here He is addressing us by saying '*dhalikum*', a demonstrative indicating the Lord's statement, 'Allah', 'The One Who splits', and 'The One Who brings forth', and the address is for the great mass that the Quran addresses. If Allah has always had these Attributes, how can they turn away from having faith in Him and believing in His Oneness? He mentions to us what we need most to live, which are plants, and it is what we eat, and if the Lord *Glorified is He* is the One who created the grain and created the fruit kernel in order to bring forth the living from the dead, and He is the One Who brings forth the dead out of the living, then He is the One Who deserves to be worshipped. How can you turn away from Him? Who are you going to turn to? Who has attributes that are more exalted than these attributes? No one has attributes that are like these attributes or that are more exalted than these attributes.

When you hear the word '*anna'* (how), you should understand that it is being used to express astonishment. It is a way of demanding a verification of how anyone can turn away from Allah and His Oneness in spite of all the clear proofs and evidences, because, in reality, there is no such verification.

In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah...?' (*al-Baqara:* 28) He *Glorified is He* is addressing mankind and saying to them, 'How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah?' Allah, in His Essence, does not deserve to be denied because He created out of nothing and He provided out of nothing. No one has participated alongside Him or challenged Him in this matter, and to Him we shall all return. How can you not believe in Him? This is an amazing thing. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says here: '...how, then (*anna*), are you deluded away from the Truth?!' (*al-An'am:* 95), i.e. how can you turn away from the Truth and abandon it in favour of falsehood and worship, with Allah, another deity after knowing that these Attributes of His *Glorified is He* do not belong to anyone but Him? All of this great amazement is expressed in the word *'anna'*. Another example of the use of '*anna*' to express amazement is the saying of the disbelievers expressed in the Lord's statement: '... "How could (*anna*) Allah bring all this back to life after its death?"...' (*al-Baqara:* 259), i.e. how can Allah bring this back to life after its death?!

To sum up, the word (*anna*) expresses amazement. It is as if the Attributes that are mentioned prior to the phrase in the chapter of *al-An'am* are Attributes that necessitate belief in Allah as being the One, the Dominant, the One Who does what He wants, the All Knowing and All-Wise, and the One to Whom we will all return. Thus, Allah tells us: 'How can you disbelieve in this Deity? Who do you go to (for help etc.) if you disbelieve in this Deity? Is there something else that has claimed that it created and provided? If something had claimed that it had created and provided we would excuse you, but nothing in existence has claimed that it created or provided anything. A claim is accepted as true for the one who makes it as long as no one objects to it.

'How, then, are you deluded away from the Truth?!' The phrase: 'How, then, are you deluded away from the Truth (*tofakoon*)' means 'How can you turn away, lying?' because the word '*tofakoon*' refers to telling lies intentionally.

Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

فَالِقُ ٱلۡإِصۡبَاحِ وَجَعَلَ ٱلَّيۡلَ سَكَنٗا وَٱلشَّمۡسَ وَٱلۡقَمَرَ
حُسۡبَانٗاۚ ذَٰلِكَ تَقۡدِيرُ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡعَلِيمِ (٩٦)

He makes the dawn break; He makes the night for rest;
and He made the sun and the moon to a precise measure.
That is the design of the Almighty, the All Knowing [96]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 96)

He *Glorified is He* mentions more of His miraculous signs as He did in the first verse when He stated that He is the One Who created for us what we need for our lives.

'[He is] The One Who splits (*faliq*) the dawn; and He has made the night to be [a source of] stillness...' (*al-An'am:* 96). The meaning of '*faliq'* (causes to break) means that He makes something break into two halves. These are two complementary blessings as one cannot do without the other. Hence, there must be a dawn and there must be night-time that is a source of stillness. This is because dawn is a time in which things are seen clearly with the naked eye, and we know that darkness causes man to bump into things. If you are stronger than these objects you will break them and if these objects are stronger than you they will break you. Moving about in the dark, without light to guide us, could lead to things being destroyed.

In the morning we work and move throughout the earth, and our lives are full of activity. When we are afflicted with toil, fatigue and tiredness because of all this activity, the logic thing for the living being to do is to rest, calm down and be still–not just with regards to this activity but with regards to everything around him; all things near him need to be still as well. This is because if you are still, but light reaches you, it will affect your constitution. This is why they now say that the rays that reveal the details about the inside of man's body, leave effects on the body.

Allah *Glorified is He* protects you at night from the rays that come from the sun for the body to have a rest from everything, from every activity emanating from within it and from every activity coming to it, and this is how the blessing of stillness at night and its darkness is like the blessing of the dawn. Each of them complements the other, and we have already noticed that the Lord *Glorified is He* at the beginning of the chapter, mentions darkness before light: 'All praise is due to Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth, and brought into being deep darkness as well as light...' (*al-An'am:* 1).

This is because you cannot benefit from your activity in the light unless you feel energetic and rested after the night. If you have not rested, you feel exhausted and you will not be able to do your work properly in the day time. For this reason, darkness is meant to be in existence, and this is why advanced civilizations are those that regulate the life of man such that he can work in the daytime and rest at night, in order for him not to resume his work in the morning feeling worn out. Unfortunately, whoever visits the Egyptian countryside these days, will be surprised because the people of the countryside stay up all night playing with their luxury items, and then they go to work in the morning feeling exhausted and worn out.

We say, 'Let us take the good characteristics of any civilization but not the bad ones'; when you go to Europe, you find the people sleeping and resting at night. Whoever walks in the streets does not hear a sound and does not see anyone leaving their house. You do not hear the sound of a microphone in the street, thereby allowing everyone to have their fair share of calm. This is not the case in our countries. The streets are filled with noise. The sick person is unable to get any rest. Whoever is studying cannot get the necessary peace and quiet. Whoever is trying to engage in worship is distracted by the noise. And still there are those who describe this country as being a model civilization!

We say, 'Let us take each of Allah's blessings in existence in a way that benefits us. When night comes you must turn off the light to be able to sleep peacefully, and for the various parts of your body and constitution not to be disturbed.

He *Glorified is He* says: '[He is] The One Who splits (*faliq*) the dawn...' (*al-An'am:* 96), and *'faliq'*, as we said previously, means the 'splitter'. Is the dawn split into two? What splits it? We say that *'faliq'* is an active participle such as when we say 'the killer blow'; i.e the blow from his hand is a killer blow. '[He is] The One Who splits the dawn...' (*al-An'am:* 96). The phrase '*faliq al-isbah*' (the One Who splits the dawn) means that the dawn splits itself from the darkness because the darkness accumulates and when the dawn comes it is as if it breaks the darkness and splits it in order to allow the light to come forth. *'Faaliq al-isbahah'* can also mean that the splitting happens to the dawn, and then later, in the evening, darkness comes. This is one example of the Quran's subtle, rhetorical explanations because the One Who is speaking is Divine. Imr'u Al-Qayss, the poet, said:

Will you not, O long night, will you not vanish

With dawn (subh), although dawn (isbah) is not much better than you

The words *'Subh'* and *'isbah'* have nearly the same meaning. But is *'subh'* when the sun rises or is it the light that appears before the sun rises? *'Al-aisbah'* comes first; it is the peaceful light before the sun rises. We find ophthalmologists, after carrying out surgery on a person's eyes, start to undo the bandages that were placed to help the wound heal; they take the bandages off gradually for the light not to dazzle the eyes all at once. Similarly, it is due to Allah's Mercy that He made the period of dawn have a peaceful light first before the sun rises to give off all of its light at one time. It is as if the dawn comes to split the darkness of the night in a peaceful way. Then the sun comes and splits the dawn.

`Therefore, the dawn breaks (*faliq*) one time because it splits the darkness and breaks it, and another time the dawn itself is broken (*mafluq*) when the strong light of the sun begins to spread in the sky, and later the darkness comes after it. The active participle implies two actions. The first is when the dawn is broken; i.e. the peaceful light of the sun started to enter. If we said, 'Its dawn is breaking' it means that the first darkness of the night has been broken. Therefore the dawn breaks at one time and at another time it is broken. When He *Glorified is He* says: '[He is] The One Who splits the dawn; and He has made the night to be [a source of] stillness...' (*al-An'am:* 96), He wants to indicate two ideas; He Himself is the One Who causes the dawn to break, and that is why He uses a noun in order to show that it is an Established Attribute. But then He says: '...and He has made the night to be [a source of] stillness...' (*al-An'am:* 96) which indicates an Attribute acting upon something after that upon which it acts (i.e. the daytime) has actually come into existence. When He wants to indicate an Attribute that He Himself has, but that upon which the Attribute acts has not yet come into existence, He uses a noun, and if He wants to indicate an attribute after that upon which the attribute acts has come into existence, He uses a verb. This is why we find the Noble Quran illustrating a firmly established attribute in the Lord's statement: '...and their dog [lay] on the threshold, its forepaws outstretched (*basit*)...' (*al-Kahf:* 18). The dog here is established in this position and that is why a noun ('*basit*' meaning 'outstretched') is used, but when the Quran wants to mention an attribute that changes, it uses a verb: 'Are you not aware that it is Allah who sent down water from the skies, whereupon the earth becomes (*fatusbiho*) green...? (*al-Hajj:* 63). It is logical to say '...whereupon the earth became green...' because He said: 'sent down' in the past, but He is referring to the regeneration that takes place because of the water, and hence He uses the verb in the present tense: '...whereupon the earth becomes green...'.

The Lord *Glorified is He* continues: '...and the sun and the moon an [exact] reckoning (of time)...' (*al-An'am:* 96). We know the sun and the moon, and afterwards we have the word *'husbana'* (an exact reckoning of time) on the pattern *'fu'lan'*. This is what usually indicates a hyperbole, such as when you say: 'So-and-so' and I seek refuge in Allah from this, 'has disbelieved fiercely (*kafara kufrana*)'. Or you supplicate, 'Allah forgive you completely (*ghafara* *ghufrana*)'. Whenever you want to exaggerate something, use the pattern *'fu'lan'*. The Quran mentions the word *'husban'* in two places, both of which are connected to the sun and the moon. It is mentioned here in this verse that we are currently discussing '...and the sun and the moon an [exact] reckoning (of time)...' (*al-An'am:* 96), and also in the chapter of *ar-Rahman,* where the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '[At His behest] the sun and the moon follow their [exactly] computed courses' (*ar-Rahman:* 5).

What is the difference between these two expressions (the sun following its computed course and the moon following its computed course)? The word *'husban'* refers to calculating things. We calculate the year by the revolution of the sun every 365 and a quarter days, and during this period it passes through its different mansions. The moon passes through its mansions every month in just over 28 days, and we calculate the day using the sun and we also use it to calculate the year. However, we calculate the months with the moon. You are not able to calculate the months with the sun; rather, you calculate the months with the moon because at the beginning of the month, the moon appears small and then it grows bigger and bigger. Similarly, our month of *Ramadan* is determined by the moon and not by the sun, and we determine the day using the sun.

This is what we know about the sun and the moon, and they are both used in our calculations of the days and the months; both are means of calculation. The sun's course has an exact calculation and the moon's course has an exact calculation, and whenever we look at the word *'husban'* we understand that both the sun and the moon were created to calculate something because they were created according to an exact calculation, i.e. indeed, what was intended for them was for them to be used for very precise calculations because the sun was created according to an exact calculation and so was the moon.

Look at the clock that we use; is there not a hand for the hours, another for the minutes and a third for the seconds? This is the smallest fraction of time that we can make it count. If it was possible, we would divide the second into fractions as we have done in measuring lengths. There are metres, centimetres, millimetres, and after that we say micro millimetres. Whenever we make advances in scientific knowledge we are able to make more precise calculations, and the sun and the moon cannot be an exact calculation by which we calculate things unless they were created according to an exact calculation. Indeed, when you look at your watch you can see the movement of the second-hand, but you do not notice the movement of the minute hand. You also do not notice the movement of the hour hand. Each of the three hands is turned by a spring and a specific gear. If the movement in either the spring or the gear becomes defective, it is reflected in the remaining hands; the second-hand depends on the minute hand, and the minute hand depends on the hour hand.

If the clock is not made according to this exact calculation it does not work properly, and thus we only consider the clock to be a standard that is used to calculate our time if it has been created according to an exact calculation. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and the sun and the moon follow their (exactly) computed courses' (*ar-Rahman:* 5) i.e. we use them to calculate because they have been created according to a calculation, i.e. a precise calculation. Why did the Lord *Glorified is He* say '*husban*' (exact calculation) here and not *'hisab'* (calculation), and similarly in the verse in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*? It is because these calculations require great precision, and this great precision is not understood by the word *'hisab',* but is understood by the word *'husban'*.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '... [All] this is laid down by the Will of the Almighty, the All Knowing' (*al-An'am:* 96). The word Almighty (*Al-'Aziz*) indicates domination and subjection such that no one is able to overcome Him. These masses that you see are stronger than you are, and your hand cannot pass around them. Indeed, they carry out their task for you without you going anywhere near them; you do not approach the sun in order to regulate it as you would do to a clock that a man like you invented. The sun has a power that Allah has provided it with; He created it with this power, and there is nothing in His creation that can rebel against this power in the sun; this is the Will of the Almighty, the All Knowing. He *Glorified is He* reassures us that the sun and moon were created according to an exact calculation, enabling us to use them to calculate time. He *the Exalted* created them according to an Almighty Will that cannot be overcome. He is *the Almighty* that has Absolute Knowledge that is endless and has no limit. The Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلنُّجُومَ لِتَهْتَدُوا۟ بِهَا فِى ظُلُمَـٰتِ ٱلْبَرِّ
وَٱلْبَحْرِ ۗ قَدْ فَصَّلْنَا ٱلْـَٔايَـٰتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

It is He who made the stars, so that they can guide you when land and sea are dark: We have made the signs clear for those who have knowledge [97] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 97)

After clarifying that He *Glorified is He* created the sun and the moon as an exact reckoning to be used for calculations by His Will, and that He is the Almighty, the All Knowing, He *Glorified is He* describes for us the task of the stars, as He says: '...so that you might be guided by them in the midst of the deep darkness of land and sea...' (*al-An'am:* 97). The stars are luminous bodies that we see in the sky in order to be guided by them in the deep darkness of land and sea. It is due to His Mercy towards us and His Knowledge that some of His Creation will be forced by life's activity to travel on the earth, and to travel by night on land or at sea such as those who guard and spread security in the life of this world and are not able to sleep at night. Rather, they have to stay up in order to protect us. All of this is willed by Allah, according to the Will of the One Who is Almighty, Wise and All Knowing. This is why He has left the stars for us; in order for them to guide these people who stay up at night or travel on the earth or by sea in their ships, and they need a little light to guide them. This is why the Arabs were guided by the stars, and one of them would say to the other: 'Have such-and-such a star in front of you and go beyond such-and-such a neighbourhood. Have such-and-such a star on your left and keep going and you will find such-and-such, or have such-and-such a star behind you and keep going and you will find such-and-such'.

That is, had the darkness been made complete, movement by night will be impossible, and it is a movement that a living being may be compelled to do. The Lord *Glorified is He* has made the stars a means of guidance for those who are forced by life to move about at night.

However, the stars are not only there to be guided by them in the deep darkness of land and sea because if the intention behind them was merely to guide in the deep darkness of land and sea, they would all be equal in size, but instead we see big stars and small stars; and in reality the small star could be larger than the big star, but it is farther away. Hence, the wisdom behind the stars is not restricted to man's movement and being guided by them on land and at sea. This is not the entire wisdom. Rather, it is the wisdom that the intellect in its natural disposition realises first. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the stars in another noble statement to make it clear to us that we must not restrict the wisdom of the creation of the stars to being guided by them at night on land and at sea; He says: 'as well as [various other] landmarks: for [it is] by the stars that [men] find their way' (*an-Nahl*: 16). He *Glorified is He* does not say in this verse that they are guided in the deep darkness of land and sea. Clearly, the stars have another task. He also says: 'Nay, I swear by the places of the starts–and indeed, that is a tremendous oath if you only knew' (*al-Waqi'a:* 75-76). Every day as science advances, the Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies many things for us; there is the comet of which much is said and there are new stars that reveal and confirm Allah's statement: 'And it is We Who have built the universe with [Our Creative] Power; and, verily, it is We Who are steadily expanding it' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47), i.e. indeed He *Glorified is He* has created a massive universe, but you, O man, have taken from it only according to your perceptions and ranges of natural vision that are not assisted by visual aids and the vision that is assisted by the telescope, the microscope and other things such as satellites. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Nay, I swear by the places of the starts–and indeed, that is a tremendous oath if you only knew'. Some scholars say, 'Indeed, every man in existence has a star and his life is attached to this star; when the star sets, its companion on earth also sets'. There are some stars that are luminous and whose pulses we are able to notice, and other stars that are not luminous and are far from us. It is said that they are designated to people who are not known by anyone because of the minimal effect their actions have on life. Science advances every day and it connects certain things to other things for us. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is making it clear to us, 'Indeed, I have created things for you which you are able, with your intellects, to connect to some sort of wisdom therein, but do not say that this is the only wisdom for creating them'. Rather, behind it there are more profound wisdoms because He *Glorified is He* is the Wise, the fully Capable. Indeed, you may have grasped a simple aspect of Allah's Wisdoms, but you must know that Allah's Perfection is unlimited. In Allah's Dominion there are still things the wisdom of which we cannot and will not be able to grasp until Allah puts an end to the earth and all those who are on it.

The Lord *Glorified is He* says when concluding the verse: '…indeed, We have made the signs utterly distinct for people who know!' (*al-An'am:* 97) This verse or verbal sign is amazing, and this can also be said about the sign in the universe: 'Now, among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon...' (*Fussilat:* 37).

The word '*ayat*' ('signs' or 'verses') applies to the portion of the Quran that is separated from another portion. Therefore, there are Quranic signs or verses, and there are also signs in the universe; and the signs in the universe explain the Quranic signs, i.e. verses. Some of the intricate signs in the universe include what we see of various kinds, colours, wisdoms, and objects. The profound signs or verses in the Quran include what the Lord *Glorified is He* draws our attention to in His Quran which is the fact that the intricate signs in the universe and the amazing, well-organized creation can only belong to a Deity that is fully Capable and Wise Who deserves to be worshipped as the Only One Deity.

Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنشَأَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَٰحِدَةٍ فَمُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمُسْتَوْدَعٌ ۗ
قَدْ فَصَّلْنَا ٱلْـَٔايَـٰتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾

It is He who first produced you from a single soul, then gave you a place to stay [in life] and a resting place [after death]. We have made Our revelations clear to those who understand [98]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 98)

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to us at first about the signs that surround us and which we need in order to live such as splitting the grain and the fruit kernel. After that He speaks about the sun and the moon, and then He speaks about the stars; all of these signs are around us. Then He talks about something that is in our own selves for the proof to be stronger. Indeed, He *Glorified is He* brings the proof for you that is in your essence and in your own self, because this proof only needs you to focus your eyes towards what is directly around you. Indeed, the evidence is in your own self and in your soul.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'just as [there are signs thereof] within your own selves: can you not, then, see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) That is, it is sufficient to consider our bodies as a complete world within themselves, and in this world there is everything that establishes the Lord's Power and His Superior Right to be worshipped, and His Right to be worshipped as the One Deity.

'And He [Allah] it is who has brought you [all] into being out of one living entity...' (*al-An'am:* 98). It is true that this information is from Allah, and that it can also be extrapolated from facts we can see in the past because if you look at the world's population in this century and then look at what it was in the last century, you will find that it is half the number. If you look at the previous century, you will find the number to be a quarter of the current population. As you go further and further into the past, you find that the number decreases and decreases until you will arrive at 'one living entity'. This is what Allah is mentioning to us. Someone might say: How can there be one living entity when He says: 'And of every thing We have created pairs...' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49). We say, 'Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* created the one living entity, and He also clarified that He created from the one living entity its opposite, and then multiplication began'. Therefore, a statistical extrapolation into the past proves the veracity of this issue. Likewise, everything else in existence multiplies such as plants and animals, and you find continuous multiplication. On the other hand, if you look at statistics in the past, you will find the numbers decreasing and decreasing until you end up at one source from which the multiplication began, and this source needs two to start multiplying: 'Glory to Him Who has created pairs...' (*Ya Sin:* 36).

But why does Allah *Glorified is He* say here: '...out of one living entity...' and not 'two spouses'? The scholars have clarified that this is evidence of very intense cohesion because when we are from one living entity, then all of us–all of the creation–has parts of that one living entity within them. We said before, 'If we brought a square centimetre of a red dye, for example, and then put it in a small bottle and shook it, we will find that the square centimetre of red dye has spread throughout the bottle and a portion of it would be found in every drop in the bottle. Then imagine that we take the small bottle and put it in a barrel and then shake the barrel well. Again, we would find every drop in the barrel contains a portion of this dye. If we take the barrel and throw it into the sea, the dye will spread and every drop in the sea will contain a tiny atom of this dye.

Similarly, as long as Adam *peace be upon him* is the source, and as long as we come from Adam *peace be upon him* and as long as the Lord *Glorified is He* took Eve from Adam *peace be upon them* after he was brought to life and thus she became a living being, then our lives are bound to Adam *peace be upon him* and we each have a portion of Adam in us. Out of Adam *peace be upon him* and Eve, *peace be upon her*, came children that contained a living part of them both, and in this way Allah *Glorified is He* returns us to one source to stimulate and stir within us the feelings of mutual love, mercy and affection.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and [has appointed for each of you] a settled place [on earth for a set time] (*mustaqarr*) and a resting-place [after death] (*mustawda*)...' (*al-An'am:* 98). The word '*mustaqarr'* (a settled place) has numerous meanings and Allah *Glorified is He* explains them in His Quran. In the story of the throne of Bilqis, we find Prophet Solomon *peace be upon him* saying: '...Which of you can bring me her throne...?' (*an-Naml:* 38) A bold one from the jinn responded to our master Solomon *peace be upon him* as did the one who had knowledge of the Book. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...And when he saw it truly '*mustaqarr*' before him...' (*an-Naml:* 40). The word *'Mustaqarr'* here means that it is present because the throne was not present in the gathering at first, but rather, it was brought to him.

With regards to the vision that Allah *Glorified is He* wanted for Prophet (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '..."O my Lord! Show [Yourself] unto me so that I might behold You!" [Allah] said, "Never can You see Me. However, behold this mountain: if it remains firm (*istiqarra*) in its place, then–only then–will You see Me"...' (*al-A'raf:* 143). We know that the mountain was firm before the speech, and thus (*istiqarra*) has the meaning of being present and another time it has the meaning of being firm.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...having on earth your abode (*mustaqarr*) and livelihood for a while' (*al-A'raf:* 24). This is an expression of how long we will spend in the life of this world. Likewise, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...those who are destined for paradise will be graced with the best of abodes and the fairest place of repose (*mustaqarr*)' (*al-Furqan:* 24). The Paradise is also a *'mustaqarr',* and the Fire is a '*mustaqarr'* for the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Fire: 'verily, how evil an abode (*mustaqarr*) and a station!'' (*al-Furqan:* 66)

That is, *'mustaqarr'* is used to mean being present or being settled and firm, or it can be used to express a period of time in the life of this world. The paradise is also a *'mustaqarr'* as is the fire, and this is why scholars have differed over the use of this word, and each one of them has considered only one meaning. Some of them say that *'mustaqarr'* is in the loins and then Allah *Glorified is He* places us in the wombs. Others hold the opinion that *'mustaqarr'* refers to our remaining in the life of this world and then we are placed in our graves.

We say that the origin of the word *'istiqrar'* is *'qarar'* which means 'presence' or 'firmness', and everything has a certain level of '*istiqrar'* (remaining firm). There is *'istiqrar'* followed by *'istiqrar'* followed by the final *'istiqrar'*, and this is what the believers desire.

This final *'istiqrar'* is the one that is permanent. As for the first *'istiqrar'* in life, it involves changing from one state to another. We were present in the loins of Adam and after that Allah *Glorified is He* placed us in the wombs. We were present in the life of this world and then Allah *Glorified is He* places us in our graves until we come to be present in the Hereafter. Every scholar takes one of these meanings. The poet says:

Wealth and family are nothing but a trust
It is inevitable that one day the trust must be returned

We notice that there is the word *'mustaqarr'* (settled place) and the word *'mustawda''* (resting-place). The word *'mustawda''* refers to something that has been put in this place by someone else. However, the word *'mustaqarr'* indicates that the matter is not subject to the will of any man, as each and every one of us can become settled (*mustaqarr*) in ourselves, but how we reached this state is not indicated by this word.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...indeed, We have made the signs utterly distinct for people who understand!' (*al-An'am:* 98) The word '*fassalna*' (made utterly distinct) means that sometimes Allah brings the signs in an utterly distinct way and sometimes He brings them summarized. This is due to the fact that understandings differ, and the circumstances for accepting meanings also differ. What is meant by making the signs utterly distinct is that each detail coincides with a certain fact within the human soul. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* has not left any room for anyone not to understand and He has not left any room for anyone not to learn. We notice that the conclusions of the two consecutive verses are different. First, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...indeed, We have made the signs utterly distinct for people who know!' (*al-An'am:* 97)Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…indeed, We have made the signs utterly distinct for people who understand!' (*al-An'am:* 98) The word *'fiqh'* (understand) means that you have the ability to understand, i.e. you have the capacity to understand the knowledge that you are told. Thus, having the ability to understand is needed first before receiving knowledge.

What Allah *Glorified is He* means by making the signs utterly distinct in the first verse, in His statement: '...for people who know' (*al-An'am:* 97) is an invitation to look at the signs that are outside of man's inner self. But here, i.e. in Allah's statement: '...for people who understand' (*al-An'am:* 98), He wants us to look at and consider the signs that are within man's inner self.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِۦ نَبَاتَ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ فَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهُ خَضِرًا نُّخْرِجُ
مِنْهُ حَبًّا مُّتَرَاكِبًا وَمِنَ ٱلنَّخْلِ مِن طَلْعِهَا قِنْوَانٌ دَانِيَةٌ وَجَنَّٰتٍ مِّنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَٱلزَّيْتُونَ وَٱلرُّمَّانَ
مُشْتَبِهًا وَغَيْرَ مُتَشَٰبِهٍ ۗ ٱنظُرُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ ثَمَرِهِۦٓ إِذَآ أَثْمَرَ وَيَنْعِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكُمْ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

It is He who sends down water from the sky. With it We produce the shoots of each plant, then bring greenery from it, and from that We bring out grains, one riding on the other in close-packed rows. From the date palm come clusters of low-hanging dates, and there are gardens of vines, olives, and pomegranates, alike yet different. Watch their fruits as they grow and ripen! In all this there are signs for those who would believe [99] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 99)

The context requires that Allah *Glorified is He* says, '... He has caused waters to come down from the sky; and with this means He brings forth...'.

However, here Allah says: '...We bring forth...' (*al-An'am:* 99) because Allah does not have any semblance of a partner when He brings everything into existence. He is the only One Who brings everything into existence. No one can say that he brought forth vegetation because the earth is Allah's that has been created for man, and He also created the seeds. Human beings think with an intellect and with an ability that has been created for them. As you attribute all your needs to the One Who initially made them, as He is the One Who initially made everything, but He respects your efforts, He clearly says to you: '...and with this means We bring forth...'(*al-An'am:* 99), i.e. I and the means that I have granted you have brought forth all living growth; I created the means and you are the one who uses these means. If you consider the One Who creates all the means, He is the One Who truly makes everything happen. If you consider the outward appearance of matters, we notice the means with which man has direct contact. This is why He says: '...We bring forth...' (*al-An'am:* 99). Allah *Glorified is He* at certain times states and affirms that man carries out actions because man uses the means that Allah has granted him. However, Allah negates that man can do any action which he (man) has no say in whatsoever such as in the Lord's statement: 'Have you ever considered the seed which you put in the soil? Is it you who cause it to grow–or are We the cause of its growth?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64)

In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* attributes tillage (putting the seed in the soil) to us because we till but by using the means He *Glorified is He* gave us as He is the One Who sent down the iron from which the plough is made and He has guided us to shape it after making it pliable with fire that He has created for us and He gives us the ability to shape it. But for plants growing, none of us plays a part in this at all. And this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[For] were it Our Will, We could indeed turn it into chaff, and you will be left to wonder [and to lament]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 65).

Here Allah *Glorified is He* uses the letter *'lam'* in His statement '*laja'alnahu...*' (We could indeed turn it into...). This '*lam*' is used for emphasis because man partakes in this matter, that is he ploughs and takes care of what he has planted in the earth and he works hard to enable it to grow and bear fruit. However, it could be afflicted by some problem that ruins it. Thus, these means, even though they have been used, cannot guarantee that one will benefit from the fruits of this cultivation. This is because the means do not rebel or defy Allah, and they cannot escape from Him. They only carry out what Allah has willed for them, and He *Glorified is He* may destroy them. As for Allah's statement: 'Have you ever considered the water which you drink? Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds–or are We the cause of its coming down? [It comes down sweet–but] were it Our Will, We could make it salty and bitter' (*al-Waqi'a:* 68), Allah *Glorified is He* did not emphasise the phrase *'ja'alnahu'* (i.e. 'we could make it') because no one can partake in this matter and no one can effect it at all, and that is why He did not emphasise it with the letter *'lam'*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle? Is it you who have grown the tree that serves as its fuel–or are We the cause of it growing? It is We Who have made it a means to remind [you of Us], and a comfort for all who are lost and hungry in the wilderness' (*al-Waqi'a:* 71-73).

Indeed, everything that the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions is mentioned alongside something that nullifies it. This is for man not to be enthralled by the existence of these things. Rather, he must accept these things along with the possibility of them not existing at some time. Even though man is the one who ploughs, the Lord *Glorified is He* with His Absolute Power, may turn the plants into chaff. Before this, He says about the matter that is involved in the reproduction of life: 'Have you ever considered that [semen seed] which you emit? Is it you who create it–or are We the source of its creation?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 58-59)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* mentions that which nullifies it: 'We have decreed that death shall be [ever-present] among you...' (*al-Waqi'a:* 60). But for fire, Allah *Glorified is He* did not say that He would put an end to it or extinguish it and put it out. Indeed He *the Exalted* has caused it to remain to teach us and remind us of the fire of the Hereafter: 'It is We Who have made it a means to remind [you of Us]...' i.e. we must leave it in front of you so that the punishment of the Hereafter is not hidden from you. '...And a comfort for all who are lost and hungry in the wilderness' (*al-Waqi'a:* 73), i.e. We leave it, without nullifying it, and this is for another matter which is its benefit in the life of this world for those who live in places that are empty and arid or for those whose stomachs, vessels and provision bags are lacking food because the fire benefits them and helps them to prepare their food to maintain their lives: '...and with this means We bring forth all living things (growth)...' (*al-An'am:* 99).

Any 'thing' is that which one can experience; fine dust is a thing, the atom is a thing, every object is called a thing. The meaning of all living things is absolutely every object that resembles growth. We have seen stones of which the scientists say, 'This is granite, and this is marble, and that is another type of marble (*marmar*)'. If you look at the basic make-up of them all, you will find that they are stones of different life spans. If a stone has a certain life span it is coal. If it has another life span it is granite, and so forth. Every object has a life which affirms for us what we mentioned earlier, which is: '...Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self...' (*al-Qasas:* 88).

Growth is everything in which you see development and life. The intellect in its natural disposition understands it this way, but the sharp intellect understands many more things from it; such an intellect becomes immersed in the universe and the verse lives with him and he lives with the verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '...and out of this We bring forth green lush vegetation. Out of this do We bring forth close-growing grain...' (*al-An'am:* 99). If you say the word *'khadir',* (lush green vegetation), you could mean the colour that is known to us, i.e. green, but *'khadir'* means slightly more than '*akhdar'* (green). The word *'akhdar'* only means the green colour, the colour that is seen by the eye, whereas the word *'khadir'* refers to the colour and it also indicates the tenderness that we know through your senses, and when we touch it we find softness.

Clearly, *'khadir'* (lush green vegetation) has many qualities; the colour is for the eye while the tenderness is experienced through the senses, and it has a softness that is known by touching. This green colour is very dark, i.e. its greenness is very strong such that it is almost black. This is why we find people who say *'Sawad al-ʿIraq'* (the blackness of ʿIraq), i.e. the fertile land that is in ʿIraq, and it is called *'Sawad al-ʿIraq'* because it is so green that it is nearly black. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And besides those two are two [other] gardens; which, then, of your Lord's Favours do you deny? Two [gardens] of the deepest green' (*ar-Rahman:* 62-64).

The word *'Mudhama'* (deepest green) means that it is like the darkness of the night; that is, because of the intensity of its greenness it is as if it has become like the darkness of the night. The Lord *Glorified is He* continues: '...green lush vegetation. Out of this do We bring forth close-growing grain...' (*al-An'am:* 99). The grain is that which does not have a kernel such as the grains of barley, wheat, lentils, and beans. The word '*Mutarakiba'* (close growing) means that the grain is pressed together and supports itself. 'And out of the spathe of the palm tree, thick clusters of dates hanging low and near...' (*al-An'am:* 99). The palm tree has an exalted rank amongst the Arabs because it gives them constant nourishment, and this is why Allah reminds them of it: '...and out of the spathe of the palm tree, thick clusters of dates hanging low and near...' (*al-An'am:* 99). The spathe (*tal'*) is the first thing that appears of the palm tree. This is what we call *'al-kuz al-akdar'* (the green cob) in the countryside, and it is found in the male of the date palm which is called *'al-fahl'*. It is also found in the female. The first thing that appears from the fruits of the date palm is called the '*tal''* (spathe). Then the spathe splits and a bunch of dates emerges, or a root or a stem, which is the part that contains the date palm panicle from which the dates hang. The spathe is the first fruit of the palm tree before it splits and from which clusters of dates emerge, which is what we call *'as-subata'* in the countryside. '...thick clusters of dates hanging low and near...' (*qinwan daniyah*). Allah *Glorified is He* describes them as *'daniyah'* (hanging low and near) because when you see the spathe of the palm tree you see that it first emerges, splits and protects itself with the spikes of a stalk for insects not to eat it. And after that it moves and bends down and it almost touches the ground, such that it becomes close and near. If there is a rare cluster, you will find someone has to insert their hand between the spikes to be able to get to it and pick it. Allah *Glorified is He* leaves unexpected events for us so that we can appreciate Allah's blessing in making it hang down because if they were all close to us we might not appreciate this blessing. This is why Allah leaves just one between the thorns for man to exert effort in order to obtain it, and this is so that you can appreciate that Allah *Glorified is He* has brought the rest close for you and that this is a Blessing from Allah.

The word *'tal''* (spathe) sometimes refers to calyxes (*akmam*), and a calyx (*kimm*) is that which has fruits in its core, and sometimes it refers to the fruit itself. 'And tall palm-trees with their thickly-clustered dates (*tal'*)' (*Qaf:* 10).

You can see the dates hanging down from the panicles and each panicle has a number of dates, and then you can see the panicle connected to the main part of the plant. In this you can see how great the amazing engineering in the arrangement of the fruits is. Everything concerning this is calculated according to some form of amazing engineering. When we look at what we have learned in our lives when we design a grid for irrigation and a grid for sewers, we can see that the water grid that gives us the water that we use, and the grid for sewers that takes away the excess water and excrements. When we look at this or that grid, we find that the engineering used for them is very precise because any negligence in design causes problems. When you want to transfer some water to a small neighbourhood and you use a pipe the diameter of which is an inch or so, and in this small neighbourhood there are bends, for every bend you have to bring a pipe that has a slightly smaller diameter than the first. Then you bring a smaller pipe for the houses and an even smaller pipe for each apartment. In these matters the engineers have made very precise calculations.

If this is the engineering of human beings, then what should we think about the engineering of the Creator? You find the stalk and it holds moisture which it has taken from the palm tree, and each palm tree has clusters and every cluster has panicles. Then there are dates and every date takes a tiny seed to nourish itself. This is how we find everything to be calculated with profound precision. Indeed, it is engineering in the Universe which is amazing; engineering that has been made by Allah's word: 'Be!' Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the Truth when He said: '[The Lord] Who creates [everything], and thereupon forms it in accordance with what it is meant to be, and Who determines the nature [of all that exists], and thereupon guides it [towards its fulfilment]' (*al-A'la:* 2-3).

‘And He it is who has caused waters to come down from the sky...’ (*al-An‘am:* 99). The phrase: ‘And He it is who has caused waters to come down from the sky...’ means that we did not know what is behind it. We only knew that the sky is everything above you and thus it overshadows you, and that the water comes from the clouds. We all see the sky raining and we all know the common expression which states, ‘The sky was cloudy and then it rained’. There are those who say, ‘The earth laughed because the sky cried because it receives the water that irrigates the seeds it contains’. But what is behind this process of rain falling?

Indeed, there is another process that happens in the universe without us being aware of it. We only came to know of it when science advanced and when we started filtering water. We put a pot of water on top of a stove. When it reached boiling point, steam was let off and the steam entered some pipes. The pipes passed through cold areas and the water thus became condensed, resulting in filtered water coming down. This is similar to what happens with rain. Look at how much has to done to make one cup of filtered water that we buy from the pharmacy. Compare that to the sky that sends down water in torrents. We do not know how it is made, and this is why the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds–or are We the cause of its coming down?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 69) This is how water comes down from the sky, and we did not use to know how this happens. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse in the chapter of *al-An’am*: ‘...and out of the spathe of the palm tree, dates in thick clusters; and gardens of vines, and olive trees, and pomegranates: [all] so alike, and yet so different...’ (*al-An‘am:* 99).

When Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘... [all] so alike, and yet so different...’ an example would be the grain of a peach, and there is a grain from one type of peach we call *‘al-khawkh as-sultani’;* when we take one fruit, we split it for a clean seed to emerge. There is another grain that we spilt, uncovering a seed that has some flesh of the fruit and also some fibres. This one has a specific colour and the other one has a specific colour. This one has a certain taste and that one has a different taste. ‘... [all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them We make more excellent than others to eat...’ (*ar-Ra’d*: 4).

This is for man to know that due to Allah’s Absolute Power, He executes what He wants. After that we find that one plant can have many different varieties. There are navel oranges, and then there are clementine, blood oranges, and tangerines. Similarly, we will find in paradise what Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about when He says: '...Whenever they are granted fruits therefrom as a provision to enjoy, they will say, "This is what we were fed with before (in the life of the world) as our sustenance!"–for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]...' (*al-Baqara*: 25).

When the inhabitant of paradise eats from the food, he discovers that the fruits of paradise have a different taste. It is due to Allah's Absolute Power that, after the analyses that were carried out by scientists in the laboratories- may Allah reward them on our behalf- on the grain of the grape, they found that the skin that covers the grape is cold and dry. However, the flesh of the grape is different; it is moist and warm. And the seed is cold and dry. These are three states within one fruit. This is an amazing arrangement. Likewise, the citron is a fruit similar to a bitter orange that has a warm and dry peel while the flesh inside is cold and moist. The question is how can there be four states, i.e. cold and moist flesh and a seed that is warm and dry, in one thing? With what power is this possible?

Indeed, the scientists toiled until they found out its constitution to make the matter clear for us. You look and you find a fruit the external of which you eat and the inside of which is a seed. There is another fruit the inside of which you eat as walnuts and bananas, and you remove the peel and throw it away. With a peach, you eat its flesh and you leave its seed. This is for you to know that the matter is not the mechanics of the created, but the fashioning of a Creator. You find something that has a definite colour but no taste, and something else with a distinct smell. All of that is evidence of Allah's Absolute Power. When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about the fruits of paradise, this is the reason why he mentions fruits that are similar to those in the life of this world because if He had brought fruits that bore no resemblance to those in the life of this world, man would have said: 'Had these been found in the previous life they would have had a similar taste'. However, the fruits look similar but their tastes are different. Indeed, it is due to His Absolute Power.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Behold their fruit when it comes to fruition and ripens...!' (*al-An'am:* 99) The Lord *Glorified is He* does not just give to man in order for man to fill his stomach. Rather, He nourishes all the faculties within the human soul, even the faculties of luxury, the faculties of beauty, and the faculties of perfection. He makes it clear to you before you eat: Look at the fruit and its shape! Let your eyes be nourished by the beautiful sight when you see the fruit emerging, and keep your eye on it until it ripens. Indeed, these are amazing phases that prove that the Maker is All-Sustaining. And every day the fruits have a different shape and a different size. If you eat it today you will find that its taste is different compared to how it will taste if you ate it after today. This is proof that, as long as they have a specific shape, colour, taste and a different scent at every different moment, their Creator is sustaining them.

‘Look at [each of] its fruit when it begins to bear fruit and [when] it ripens’ (*al-An‘am:* 99). This means that the enjoyment of the blessings of the universe is spread to many others because looking at a fruit does not mean that I actually own it. I might see it in a neighbouring garden and I look at it and enjoy its shape. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to spread the benefit of His blessings even for those who do not actually grow them because no one will ever prevent another from just looking at a blessing.

A well-balanced personality requires nourishment for the different needs of the soul because the needs of the soul are not only hunger and thirst but there are also other needs. Every need has its own type of nourishment. This is why, before Allah says that horses and mules carry loads, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘and for you in them is [the enjoyment of their] beauty when you bring them in [for the evening] and when you send them out [to pasture in the morning]. And they carry your heavy loads to lands you could not have reached except with difficulty to yourselves. Indeed, your Lord is Most Kind and Most Merciful’ (*an-Nahl:* 6-7). These animals benefit me by carrying loads. But the one who does not own them sees the horse and enjoys its beauty, and thereby he becomes happy because of something he does not even own. This is how Allah’s Blessings are spread amongst His Creation.

The Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the noble verse by saying: ‘Indeed, in that are signs for a people who believe’ (*al-An‘am:* 99). These people believe that the Deity they believe in deserves to be characterized by the Attributes of

Majesty and Beauty and deserves to be believed in, and whenever man sees a beautiful creation, he says, ‘Allah’. If this is the case, my faith is sound and the signs in the universe affirm the veracity of my faith in the Deity Who created all of this. Every day something amazing appears before me, and it increases my faith, and the intellect that Allah granted me guides me to have faith in this Deity.

It is amazing that there are those who set up partners for Allah; a Deity who has all these Attributes: Who splits the grain and the fruit kernel, causes the dawn to break, makes the night a source of stillness, makes the sun and the moon a means of calculating time, creates the stars by which we are guided in the deep darkness of land and sea, sends down water to us from the sky, brings forth plants for us that are lush and green; all of these points must make man realise that Allah alone is the only Creator and the only One Who deserves to be worshipped, and thereby make man never worship or have faith in anyone else besides Him. Yet, there are those who set up partners with Allah, and He *Glorified is He* mentions them in order to make us angry and be warned about these people, for us to take care and be wary of them.

If we are angry towards them, this means we have to praise Allah as He guided us to have faith which makes us angry at such acts, and as a result we should say, ‘Praise be to Allah who guided us to have faith’.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَعَلُوا۟ لِلَّهِ شُرَكَآءَ ٱلْجِنَّ وَخَلَقَهُمْ ۖ وَخَرَقُوا۟ لَهُۥ بَنِينَ وَبَنَٰتٍۭ
بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۚ سُبْحَٰنَهُۥ وَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

Yet they made the jinn partners with God, though He created them, and without any true knowledge they attribute sons and daughters to Him. Glory be to Him! He is far higher than what they ascribe to Him [100] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 100)

The word ‘jinn’ indicates forms of covering, wrapping and enveloping. We cannot see jinn because they are covered, and the same goes for the angels. ‘But they have set up partners with Allah’. Jinn, as you know, are from Allah’s Creation because He *Glorified is He* created man and jinn, and He created the jinn, veiled as they are, in order for us not to believe that Allah's Creation of living beings must necessarily be material in form. Rather, He *Glorified is He* creates what He wants as He wants. He creates things that are veiled and not seen, and they have life and they procreate. He also creates things that are veiled but do not procreate. All of this is due to the Lord's Absolute Power, to make us understand this issue because our intellect may be confused by things that it does not comprehend or see; as we generally do not know the existence of something unless we notice it with one of our senses.

Indeed Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this point; beware of thinking that you are capable of comprehending everything that Allah has created. What you notice through one of your senses is not your only means of comprehension because how you notice things has rules that govern it. You indeed see but only by following some rules; if what you are looking at is far away from you and beyond your range of vision, you cannot see it. The same is the case for hearing. If the sound or the source of the sound is remote from you, the vibration does not reach you and you do not hear it. The same can be said for the intellect, as you understand some things and you do not understand others. But Allah gives us examples in our material existence to enable us to understand this hidden creation of the jinn and angels.

We have found that the human intellect has been guided by Allah who determines the nature of all that exists, and thereupon He guided it until it discovered something called a microbe, which is a very tiny living being the naked eye cannot see, but it does exist, and it affects people significantly. It enters their bodies without them noticing how it entered. It deteriorates their health and causes destruction and death, such as the plague, cholera and so on. Despite that, the microbe exists and its existence is similar to ours such that it has a physical existence, life, and action, and it affects humans.

This is how we realize how something hidden and unnoticeable may be threatening to man, who is comparatively large and noticeable. Also, discovering microbes does not mean that we brought it into existence. Its existence is one thing and realising that it exists is something else. When we analyse the microbe, we find that it is of the same substance as man, but it is so tiny that the naked eye cannot see it. When it was discovered under the microscope and we magnified it, we came to know it. This is a living being even though you could not see it. The fact that you could not see it before does not mean that it did not exist. It did exist but you did not notice it. Then man discovered a device that helped him to notice it. When Allah says to you, 'I have angels from amongst my creation and I have jinn from amongst my creation. You do not see them but they see you'; you should say, 'I have believe it my Lord' because at first we did not see something which has the same substance as us, and then we saw it. The things that we discover now prove the veracity of the Quranic Message in relation to matters of the unseen.

Should we be astonished at those who made the jinn partners with Allah, or at the principle of setting up partners itself, whether it be a jinn or other than a jinn? Indeed, our astonishment is because of the principle itself as we not only object to the jinn being set up as partners, but we also object to the principle of setting up any partners with Allah whether they are jinn, angels or anything else. This is why the word 'partners' precedes jinn, although the usual order in a sentence is the other way round. For example, normally, you say that you made the clay into a jug, meaning that the clay existed and then you used it to make something that did not exist, which is the jug. Thus, did the concept of partners exist first and then jinn were taken from them? Or did the jinn exist first and then they were taken as partners? In this second situation, people normally say that they made the jinn partners with Allah. But what is astounding is not the jinn being partners but rather, the principle of idolatry itself (so the word 'jinn' comes second). How do we remove this idea of having partners from their minds whether these partners are jinn or whatever else? This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'But they have set up partners with Allah';…when you hear this you say, 'I seek refuge in Allah. They have set up partners with Allah!' It does not concern you who these partners are because setting up any partner with Allah, no matter what it is, is astounding, regardless of whether it is a jinn or angel. Then, how can they set up the jinn as partners with Allah?! Did the Lord *Glorified is He* not relate in His Book that Ibrahim (Abraham) said: ''O my father, do not worship Satan. Indeed Satan has ever been, to the Most Merciful, disobedient' (*Maryam:* 44).

What is worship? Worship means that the worshipper obeys the one who is worshipped in what he commands him; and as long as they obey devils when they whisper to them, then it is as if they are worshipping them. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [mention] the Day when He will gather them all and then say to the angels, “Did these [people] use to worship you?”’ (*Saba’:* 40). The reply is: ‘they (the angels) will say: “Glorified be You! You are our Lord and Protector, not them. Rather, they used to worship the jinn; most of them were believers in them”’ (*Saba’:* 41).

How were they worshipping the jinn? They were obeying them in what they commanded them and in what they forbade them because worship is obedience. You, O worshipper, do not invent forms of worship but rather look at what you have been asked to do to draw closer to the One Who is worshipped. Consequently, ‘Do!’ and ‘Do not do’ are the essence of worship.

‘But they have set up partners with Allah’. Why do they set up partners with Allah? Why do they not just worship the partners alone without worshiping Allah at all? It is because the existence of a partner is a proof that Allah is acknowledged as well, but why did they set up partners with Him? Why do they not just disbelieve in Allah and deny that He exists, and that would be the end of the matter? No, they do not do that because they realise that the partners do not have any requirements attached to their worship, and when they worship them, they, for example, do not say to them, ‘Do this!’ and ‘Do not do that!’ There is nothing they have to follow. However, when events take place that are beyond their means, and they are unable to prevent them from happening, to whom do they supplicate? Is it the god that they falsely believe in and does not bring benefit or harm? This is the reason they maintain their acknowledgement of Allah, to seek refuge in Him when they are unable to repel something which neither themselves nor those whom they have set up as partners can repel. This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when affliction touches man, he calls upon Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove from him his affliction, he continues [in disobedience] as if he had never called upon Us to [remove] an affliction that had touched him.’ (*Yunus:* 12) It is as if they only worship Allah when it benefits them.

‘But they have set up partners with Allah–the jinn’. It is astonishing that they have set up partners with Allah, even though Allah is the One Who created the worshipper as well as that which is worshipped. The astonishment is due to two things: that they set up partners with Allah, either from the jinn or from the angels, and that 'He [Allah] has created them (the jinn), and they [falsely] attribute sons and daughters to Him, without [any true source of] knowledge' (*al-An'am:* 100). That is, they falsely attributed that to Him.

As for those who claim that Allah has sons, they are the people of the Book. Allah relates what they have said: 'The Jews say, "Ezra is the son of Allah"; and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah."' (*at-Tawba:* 30)

As for those who ascribe daughters to Allah, they are some of the Arabs who believed that the angels were Allah's daughters. 'Then, has your Lord chosen for you sons and taken for Himself daughters from among the angels?' (*al-Isra':* 40) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Has He (then) chosen daughters rather than sons? What is [wrong] with you? How do you judge?' (*as-Saffat:* 153-154) And Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'is the male for you and for Him the female?! That is an unjust division.' (*an-Najm:* 21-22)

Furthermore, there were from amongst the Arabs those who claimed that there was a lineage between Allah and the jinn, affirming the Lord's statement: 'and they have claimed [that there is] a kinship between Him and the jinns (*as-Saffat:* 158). They fabricated and claimed that there was a relationship between Allah and the jinn, and thereby the angels were created and born. 'But they have set up partners with Allah–the jinn, though He [Allah] has created them (the jinn), and they [falsely] attribute sons and daughters to Him without [any true source of] knowledge. Exalted is He and Most High, far above what they ascribe' (*al-Ma'ida:* 100).

Why does the Lord *Glorified is He* say: 'without knowledge'? It is because knowledge itself indicates the opposite of what they said. Knowledge is a matter that entails complicated investigative and realistic processes that rely on proofs. On the contrary, what they claimed is unrealistic and impossible to be proved which is therefore labelled ignorance; it is due to ignorance that they believe in something to be real when it is not, and such a belief is not based on any proof because it does not exist. Had they submitted to their natural disposition that accepts clear proofs and the proofs that are in the universe, they will recant what they believed and they will refuse to attribute partners with Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* has presented an issue that is based on confusing ideas as they took partners with Allah, and for this reason He said: ‘Exalted is He’; He is Transcendent and Most High, far above having a partner in His Being, His Attributes or His Actions because He Himself is not like any other being, His actions are not like any other being’s actions and His attributes are not like any other being’s attributes. This is why ‘Exalted is He’ is mentioned with regard to every matter that contradicts the laws that exist in the universe. The understanding of everything that is connected to the True God must be formed within the framework of ‘Exalted is He’. This is why, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went on his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and then ascended into the heavens on the same night, which was amazing incident, the Lord *Glorified is He* commanded us to believe in this fact within the framework of the Lord’s statement: ‘Exalted is He who took His Slave by night from Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing’ (*al-Isra’:* 1).

Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, ‘I travelled by night from Mecca to Jerusalem’, but rather, he said ‘I was transported’. As long as he was transported, then the law governing what happened on the night journey was the law concerning the Lord. Hence you should understand it within the framework of ‘Exalted is He’. Allah says: ‘Exalted is He who created all pairs–from what the earth grows and from themselves’ (*Ya Sin:* 36).

Then He continues mentioning that which is beyond your comprehension by saying: ‘and from that which they do not know’ (*Ya Sin:* 36). It is as if we will come to know afterwards of things that contain pairs. Scientific discovery in the twentieth century has brought some of this about. We learnt the positive and the negative in electricity and electrons etc., and His statement: ‘and from that which they do not know’ widens the scope for issues of the universe that will be uncovered due to the activities of inquisitive minds. Thus, ‘Exalted is He’ declares that Allah is too Transcendent and sanctified to be compared to any living being. His Name is Exalted, He Himself is Exalted, and His Attributes and Actions are Exalted: ‘Most High, far above what they ascribe’, i.e. any attributes that do not befit Him.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

بَدِيعُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لَهُۥ وَلَدٞ وَلَمۡ تَكُن لَّهُۥ
صَٰحِبَةٞۖ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيۡءٖۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٞ ١٠١

the Creator of the heavens and earth! How could He have children when He has no spouse, when He created all things, and has full knowledge of all things? [101] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 101)

Allah *Glorified is He* said in another verse: ‘The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind’ (*Ghafir:* 57).

If you witness several wonders within yourself, and every day physiology reveals a new secret, you should not be astonished because the heaven and the earth were brought into existence from absolutely nothing. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Originator’ which means that He *Glorified is He* created them without any previous example. There are those amongst mankind who create things based on previous models and experience, but the Lord is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. We know from science that the earth that we live on is a celestial body that orbits the sun, and we used to say in the past that the celestial bodies orbiting the sun are seven in number. Many scientists and thinkers were fooled into saying that these seven celestial bodies are the seven heavens, but the Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to abolish this matter after they had said seven. The scientists discovered an eighth celestial body orbiting the sun and then a ninth. Then the number became ten and increased further beyond our knowledge. Where is this solar system in relation to the heavens? All of it is merely ornamentation for the sky of this world. When satellites and devices used to bring the distant near were discovered, we saw the Milky Way, and we found a galaxy that contained unlimited solar systems. We found a million systems just like our solar system. This is just one galaxy and there are a million other galaxies, and you will find an astronomer who says, ‘If we had new devices, we would discover new galaxies’. Let us hear Allah’s statement: ‘With Might did We construct the heaven. Verily, We are extending the vastness of space’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47).

Consequently, you must understand that the creation of the heavens and the earth is more difficult than the creation of mankind. As long as Allah *Glorified is He* is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and He, with His Essential Superior Might, created the heavens and the earth-which is greater than the creation of mankind-then if He wants a child, He would make a son be born–because a son cannot be called a child unless he is actually born; but Allah *Glorified is He* is far above that. Furthermore, why would He want a son? Attributes of perfection are not increased by having a son, and the universe was not deficient before some people claimed that Allah *Glorified is He* had a son. The universe has been created by the Lord Himself *Glorified is He*. Mankind needs children in order for the parents to be remembered (after their death), but Allah *Glorified is He* does not die, confirming His statement: ‘Everything is bound to perish, except His [Eternal] Self’ (*al-Qasas:* 88).

Human beings need to give birth to children in order for their children to help them. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Mighty One Who created, and He is the Ever-Living One Who does not die. For this reason, there is no significance behind this claim about Him; besides, it is not correct rationally to even ponder about this allegation. However, Allah *Glorified is He* out of benevolence towards His Creation clarified and explained matters like this.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘when He [Allah] does not have a companion’. What would Allah *Glorified is He* want from a companion? Indeed, He does not want anything, so why is this insistence in the matter of His Divinity? No child and no mate will increase His Might to create; no wisdom will result and no knowledge will be brought about such relationships. There will be nothing of benefit from this. It is just a futile claim. If having partners is impossible–and the only purpose of such partners would be to assist Him in His sovereignty; one in charge of the sky, another in charge of the earth, a third in charge of darkness, and a fourth in charge of light, similar to what the ancients used to say when they set up a god for evil, a god for good, and so on and so forth– and the Lord *Glorified is He* is One and Unique Who does not have partners who assist Him, so what is the point of Him having a child and a companion? I seek refuge in Allah from this! Should these people not refrain and stop saying such a thing? ‘And He is, of all things, All Knowing’. He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the universe and He is the All Knowing of everything, and He is not in need of anyone’s assistance.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ ۖ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ خَٰلِقُ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ
فَٱعْبُدُوهُ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ وَكِيلٌ ﴿١٠٢﴾

This is God, your Lord, there is no God but Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him; He is in charge of everything [102] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 102)

Look at how the word ‘Lord’ comes before the phrase ‘none has the right to be worshipped but He’. The word ‘Lord’ is an introduction to ‘none has the right to be worshipped but He’ because worship involves someone being obeyed which means that there are commands and prohibitions. Why and for what reason? The reason is that He is the Lord in charge of bringing everything into existence and caring and guiding them, and it is necessary and logical that we listen to His speech. This is because He is the Lord, the Creator and the Provider. An evidence for this is that when we ask disbelievers whilst they are drunk in the heedlessness of their desires, ‘Who created the heavens and the earth?’ Their natural disposition speaks and says, ‘Allah is the One Who created the heavens and the earth’. However, if the question is posed in the middle of a heated argument, you will find deception and lies. When you want to extract from them the truth and disparage and negate their false claims, you should approach them when they are heedless and unprepared. At such a time, they will say that the creator is Allah.

We have seen the devices that have been designed to detect lying which illustrate the difficult mental process that a liar has to undergo. The truthful person does not need to exert any effort because he examines reality and articulates it, and he is not afflicted with fatigue. However, the one who lies strains himself, keeps hesitating between matters and is confused. He does not know what to say, and he gives contradictory answers to the same question.

‘That is Allah, your Lord; none has the right to be worshipped but He, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. And He is the Guardian [having charge and disposing (*wakil*)] over all things.’ As long as Allah is the Creator of everything and He is the Ever-Lasting One, then He is the One that most deserves to be worshipped. This is because worship, as we have said, means obeying the commands and refraining from the prohibitions. As long as Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created, He is the One Who lays down the law for preserving man and the universe. If the laws are contravened, the universe and man will become corrupted. And if the universe or man is corrupted, seek refuge by returning to the path the Creator laid down for you in order for both to return to their proper state. This is why He is the One most deserving of worship.

Such is the testimony Allah testified about Himself before He created everything, and before He created the angels. The angels bore witness to it as did those who are endowed with knowledge: ‘Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge–[and that He is] upholding justice [in the creation]’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

Allah bore witness to His Divinity from the outset, and one of His Names is ‘*Al-Mu᾽min’* (The Believer). We are believers in Allah and our Lord believes that He is the One God; Allah gives any order He wants and He knows that nothing can contravene Him. He gives the order by saying, ‘Be, and it is’. And because He is the One [True] God, He knows that no one and nothing can contravene Him. It is why He rules over His kingdom, and He knows that everything is subject to His Command and is incapable of going against His Will. We also say that ‘*Al-Mu’min*’ (The Believer) means that He has granted safety and security to what He created, for He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger, and made them safe, [saving them] from fear’ (*Quraysh:* 4). Allah *Glorified is He* has made it clear to us, ‘You are My Creation. If you adopt My Way, I will give you food to save you from hunger and make you safe from danger’.

Therefore, logic demands that we worship Him *Glorified is He* and the order to worship Him is in keeping with the beginning of the verse: there is none worthy of worship but Allah. He is the Creator of everything, and this is why worshipping Him is a necessity. This means we have to obey His Orders and avoid His Prohibitions. 'And He is a Guardian [having charge and disposing (*wakil*)] over all things'.

This is one of the Quran's subtle and eloquent expressions, for we customarily say, 'so-and-so is a guardian or proxy for so-and-so', meaning s/he does what is good for him according to what the person s/he represents wants. But Allah *Glorified is He* is not a *Wakil* for you but a *Wakil* over you because the *wakil* who is for you carries out your commands. Allah is a *'Wakil'* over you just as a guardian is a *wakil* over a minor. The guardian says 'Do this' and he does it. He *Glorified is He* is a *Wakil* over us, and this is why we ask from Him and He is the One Who responds to our supplications by giving us good. But He does not bring about our frivolous desires. We may find a fool saying, 'I supplicated to Allah and He did not answer me'. You understand answering to mean that Allah carries out whatever you request, while He *Glorified is He* knows best what is suitable for you because He is a *Wakil* over you and He regulates your behaviour. When you ask for something, if there is good in it, He will give it to you. However, if you thought what you asked for is good for you but it will actually bring about evil, He will not give it to you.

A person who supplicates should not expect that his request has to be answered quickly. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'He responds to you as long as you do not hastily say, "I supplicated to Him and He did not answer me"'.(1) 'And He is the Guardian [having charge and disposing (*wakil*)] over all things', whether this thing has been chosen (by a person) or not chosen, because one's choice may be an evil and because Allah is *wakil* over him He says to him, 'No'. That which is not yet legally responsible has no choice and is compelled by Allah's Will, such as fire. It is commanded to burn, but He commanded it not to burn Ibrahim (Abraham) and to make Ibrahim safe.

The following verse comes to confirm the facts that illustrate the Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He*. He says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah from Abu Hurayra*

لَّا تُدْرِكُهُ ٱلْأَبْصَٰرُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ ٱلْأَبْصَٰرَ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱللَّطِيفُ ٱلْخَبِيرُ ﴿١٠٣﴾

No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision. He is the All Subtle, the All Aware [103] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 103)

Why is it that no eye can perceive Allah? It is because the eye is a tool of perception which has its own law; rays are reflected from that which is seen to the one who is seeing the object, and it is thus defined. If the eye could perceive Allah, it would define and limit Him, and the one seeing Allah would have power over Him and Allah would become subject to you because He would have come within your perception. If you could perceive Allah, then Allah would be subject to your vision, and the All-Powerful can never become overpowered. That is because He is the Greatest, he cannot be perceived visually. Moreover, you may see the sun, but can you claim that you perceive it? No, because perceiving means that you fully visualize it. If human vision could perceive Allah, then human vision would become all-powerful and Allah would become overpowered. The One Who is All-Powerful in His Self, as we have already said, can never become overpowered by His Creation.

Everything besides Allah needs Him for their existence to continue, and His Existence is not in need of anyone. This is why: 'no eye can perceive Him, whereas He perceives all that the eyes see' because He has power over all sight as He Himself is All-Powerful. Everything else is subject to Him because it is created by Him. As long as it is created by Him, it is subjected and nothing new can happen to created beings that would make them all-powerful beings.

The scholars have deliberated and differed greatly here: Does man see his Lord or not whether in this world or the Hereafter? Some of them said, 'No one sees Allah according to what is written in the verse: "No eye can perceive Him"'. We say, 'But there are verses in the Quran which say: "[Some] faces that Day will be radiant, Looking at their Lord" (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)'.

The verb 'looking' includes seeing, and it also signifies that meaning. Furthermore, Allah punishes those who disbelieve in Him by veiling Himself from them because He says: 'No. Surely, they will be veiled from seeing their Lord that Day' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 15). The disbelievers are veiled from seeing Allah as a punishment for them. If we are also veiled along with the disbelievers, then what distinguishes us as believers? Why did the scholars not draw attention to the fact that there is a difference between what the Quran says and what they say? Those scholars try to argue that seeing Allah is impossible because our Lord *Glorified is He* said to Musa (Moses): 'You will not see Me, but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me' (*al-A'raf:* 143). But why did those scholars not look at the Lord's statement: 'But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Musa fell unconscious' (*al-A'raf:* 143)?

Clearly, Allah reveals Himself to some of His Creation. As for the creation seeing Him in this world, the answer is no because our current human constitution is not suited to see the Lord. As a proof, the mountain which is harder and stronger than us crumbled to dust when its Lord manifested Himself to it. When the mountain crumbled to dust, Musa fell unconscious. If Musa fell unconscious after seeing that which Allah revealed Himself to (i.e. the mountain), then how would it have been if he had seen Allah Himself? He was not prepared for it.

The scholars have differed over this verse in the chapter of *al-An'am*. Their differing has reached the farthest limit. There are those who say that seeing Allah is possible while others deny it. I think that their differing is not really something to differ over, because they are talking about 'seeing', while the discussion here is about negating 'perception'. Perception means to fully grasp something, while seeing is something general. It is only perception that is not possible, and even if we consider seeing and perception to be the same, we can still say, 'Why is there a difference regarding the Hereafter?' If the differing concerns seeing Allah in this world, then this is a friendly discussion, but they have made the discussion focus on the Hereafter.

Indeed, the verses of the Quran are clear regarding the fact that seeing the Lord *Glorified is He* is one of Allah's Blessings towards the believers, and it is in addition to the other blessings, and that Allah's veiling Himself from the disbelievers is a type of punishment for them. And we also say, 'Why do you not say that perception will exist in the Hereafter in a way that it does not exist in this life because anything we do in this world depends on the means available, while in the Hereafter anything we do will not depend on any means?

In this world, if you want to drink, you ask for some water or you go and fetch some water and then drink. When you want to eat something, you tell the people of the house to make something for you, or you buy whatever it is that you want. In the Hereafter, all you have to do is think about what you want and you will find it in front of you. This is a new law that is different from any law in this world. Then, why can it not be possible that the constitution of our body in the Hereafter be such that it allows us see Allah but within the framework of ‘there is nothing like unto Him’?

Concerning the Hereafter, everyone agrees that there are matters that contravene the laws of this world and the laws of the universe that are contemporary to us regarding food and drink and being free of excretion. We will eat and drink in the Hereafter but there will not be any excrement. Now you prepare food and then ingest it, and in the process of digestion, you take some food and you leave the rest as excrement which must come out. However, preparing food and ingesting it in the Hereafter are according to the command ‘Be!’ without any excrement. It is food by the Power of the All-Powerful. In paradise, you will obtain everything that you want without it running out. In this world, whatever you take from decreases, but in the Hereafter nothing decreases because it is provided by an everlasting source.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* continues by saying: ‘and He is the Subtle One, the Well-Acquainted’. The Name ‘The Subtle One’ is appropriate for: ‘No eye can perceive Him’, while ‘Well-Acquainted’ is appropriate for: ‘whereas He perceives all that the eye sees’. The Name ‘The Subtle One’ has a special meaning because it is necessary to be ‘subtle’ when creating something incredibly intricate. Ponder this example–which is only for clarification, for Allah is far Exalted above any comparison. We did not know about the microbe until recently because it is so subtle and tiny that it cannot be perceived by the naked eye. After we had invented the microscope, we could see it-but if the microbe was any smaller than what it is, we would never have seen it. We have discovered the virus and we are trying to know more about its characteristics. In short, whenever something is tiny, subtle and cannot be seen, it requires noble and sublime qualities to make it.

The first manifestation of Allah's Attribute of being the Subtle One is the management of humans' intricate affairs in a way that realises their benefits in their lives. When we just pass around a cup of water for everyone, it requires a lot of management, so what should we think about the management of the Subtle One towards His slaves?

Allah created the earth for, us and three quarters of it is water while the remaining quarter is dry. This is because He *Glorified is He* wants to expand the surface area of water because whenever the surface area of water is expanded, evaporation increases and becomes easier. However, when the water is deep and the surface area is small, the evaporation is only at the surface. If this were the case, the clouds would not bring sufficient water for the creation. Allah *Glorified is He* has expanded the surface area of the water in order for it to evaporate and then form clouds in the sky. They then pass through cold regions in order to send down fresh water for us that we can drink, our animals can drink, and from which our crops can be irrigated. All of this is the result of subtle and exact management.

Another of the manifestations of Allah's Attribute of being the Subtle One is that we find matters that cannot be described at all, and this is why each and every scholar explained one aspect of the Subtlety of Allah with His Creation. One of them says, 'One aspect of the Subtlety of Allah with His Creation is that He bestows abundant blessings on them'. Another says, 'Another aspect is that He manages everything in a subtle and precise way'. A third says, 'An aspect of the manifestations of the Lord being The Subtle One is that He regards His many blessings towards His creation as being negligible'. The blessings that Allah grants His creation are relatively few because His Storehouses are full. His Gifts are unlimited and will never be decreased. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'If you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly give you more' (*Ibrahim:* 7). His Countless Blessings towards His Slaves are in reality relatively few in number. In return, He considers the small amount of obedience from His Creation–out of His bounty–to be much because He is the One Who rewards one good deed tenfold.

The manifestations of the Subtle One have no limit. He is the Subtle One as when you call Him, He responds to you; if you seek Him, He accommodates you; if you love Him, He approaches you; if you obey Him, He suffices you; if you give and lend from the bounty and wealth that He has granted you, He will pardon you. And if you turn away from Him, He is the One Who says, 'O Son of Adam! If you remember Me within yourself, I will remember you within Myself. If you mention Me in a gathering, I will mention you in a gathering that is better than them. If you draw near to Me by one hand span, I will draw near to you by one cubit. If you draw near to Me by one cubit, I will draw near to you a fathoms length. If you come to Me walking, I will come to you rushing.'(1) These are manifestations of Allah being the Subtle One. He is the One Who calls: 'Turn to Allah in sincere repentance'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who says, 'Allah is more pleased with His Slave's repentance than when one of you finds the camel that you had lost in the middle of nowhere.'(2)

Another scholar mentioned another manifestation of Allah being the Subtle One by saying, 'The One Who recompenses you if you discharge your obligations and pardons you if you fall short'. Another scholar adds, 'Whoever takes pride in Him [Allah] He exalts, and whoever needs Him He enriches'. Another scholar says, 'His [Allah's] Blessings are good, and even His Withholding is a blessing'. If He denies His slave something, then indeed He stores it for him in the Hereafter. His Subtlety penetrates that which we cannot encompass. When you analyse any matter, you may arrive at an understanding of what the blessing is, and if you do arrive at an understanding, you will not be able to praise Him enough for this blessing.

As for the word 'Well-Acquainted'; in our lives we usually hear the word 'well-acquainted' when we are faced with some problem and we find someone saying, 'We want to hear the opinion of someone who is well-acquainted about this'. In judicial matters, we find the judge summoning an expert to write a report regarding a matter that needs someone who specialises and is well-acquainted in that matter. An expert in any field is the person who knows the details of the field, so what should we think of the Most Exalted, the Well-Acquainted, for

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad from Anas*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim from Anas*

Whom nothing in His kingdom eludes His Knowledge. He is the One Who perceives all that every eye sees.

Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

قَدْ جَآءَكُم بَصَآئِرُ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ
وَمَنْ عَمِىَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۚ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ عَلَيْكُم بِحَفِيظٍ ﴿١٠٤﴾

Now clear proof has come to you from your Lord: if anyone sees it, that will be to his advantage; if anyone is blind to it, that will be to his loss – [Say], ‘I am not your guardian’ [104] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 104)

Insight is related to abstract meanings and illuminations that come to the hearts just as sight is related to the eye. The universe gives you proofs for the physical sight, while the Quran gives you proofs to enable the person to have insight. Just as Allah has guided man and has warned him and forbidden him from being disobedient, He has also granted him light that makes things manifest for him, and thus he moves according to guidance and does not crash or collide. Likewise, He has made abstract meanings a form of light. The first light (i.e. the physical) is taken by the disbeliever and the believer, and we all have a share in it just as we do with provisions. However, the second light concerns insight, which is only grasped by the believer. This is why our Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘to lead you out of the deep darkness into the light’ (*al-Hadid:* 9).

It is the light of guidance to be able to capture abstract meanings. He makes it clear, ‘I created you and I laid down for you laws for your preservation. The laws for preservation regarding the material world are for both the believer and the disbeliever, while the laws for preservation regarding the abstract concepts of life are exclusively for the believer’. He says: ‘for one to whom Allah gives no light has no light whatsoever!’ (*an-Nur:* 40)

We know that insights are abstract while the verb ‘come’ in the verse is for a tangible matter, such as when a person says, ‘Zaid came’ or ‘‘Amr came’. Can you imagine ‘insight’ coming? Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Now, there has come to you from Allah a light’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 15). Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has given us a true and clear light and He brings it to us by His Will. ‘Now, there has come to you clear proofs and insight from your Lord'. Due to the formation of proofs and insights, they have become like something tangible that actually comes. It is incorrect to say that they have not reached you because they have come to us from the Lord Who created us with His Power and provided us with everything as He continuously sustains us. One of the necessary qualities of Lordship is that He gives that which guides. He has decreed that the means of insight come to us and He has decreed that His Messenger, Muhammad, has conveyed this to us. Thus, He gave to His Prophet Muhammad, and he (Prophet Muhammad), in return, served us. The Lord *Glorified is He* legislated and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed, and it remains for you to carry it out given that you have no excuse before the Most Exalted Legislator Who created everything and Who is the Lord. Likewise, you have no excuse before the infallible conveyor, who is Prophet Muhammad. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Whoever sees [them] does so for [the benefit of] his soul, but whoever is blind [to them does harm] against it'.

Ponder this example–which is only for clarification, for Allah is far Exalted above any comparison. A child enters the house and asks his mother, 'What food have you prepared for us?' She says, 'Nothing'. The child says, 'My father has given you meat, rice, and vegetables'. This last statement he made implies, 'Where's your work, mother?' Our Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear, 'I created you, I laid down for you a law of preservation and I sent to you a Messenger, Muhammad, whom you know to be truthful in what he conveys. He carried out the task of conveying the Message, and that is why the rest of the matter is left to you. Everyone must carry out whatever work he has. If he chooses to see, then he does so for his own good, but if he chooses to remain blind, then he does so to his own hurt. Beware of thinking that what I have commanded you benefits Me in any way, or that it increases Me at all in My Authority because these commands are for your benefit'. I do not worry about legislation if the one who legislates does not benefit from it; however, the one who benefits from any legislation is the one who legislates for his own benefit. For the Lord *Glorified is He* His legislation is trustworthy and safe because He does not benefit from it.

The Messenger's job is only to convey the Message, and the Lord *Glorified is He* has protected him and preserved him from disbelief. Allah has created every individual with the ability to choose whether to follow or disobey. He *Glorified is He* did not send the Messenger as a tyrant, but rather, He sent him as mercy. This is why Allah tells the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: ‘I am not a guardian over you’. Allah legislates in order to protect the creation and He wants it to be in the best and most excellent form. The Messenger is the one who conveys and the Lord *Glorified is He* says about him: ‘You are not domineering over them.’ (*Qaf:* 45)

Consequently, everyone is free to obey or disobey. The Messenger, Muhammad, waged war in order to protect this choice and the proof is that the countries that Islam liberated still have people among their populations that have remained in their disbelief without being forced to believe. Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُصَرِّفُ ٱلْـَٔايَٰتِ وَلِيَقُولُوا۟ دَرَسْتَ وَلِنُبَيِّنَهُۥ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ١٠٥

This is how We explain Our revelations in various ways – though they will say, ‘You [Muhammad] have been studying’– to make them clear for those who know [105] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 105)

‘And thus do we explain the signs in various ways’. He brings the signs to us one after another, and He repeats the process. An event takes places and He sends down the legislation regarding it. He makes their hearts incline to Him, and He brings examples from amongst the Messengers and mentions how their nations treated them; every time the sign is repeated we find one heart is ready to accept it. This repetition is needed because if Allah had sent His Signs just once and then was silent, there could have been people whose hearts remained in error.

However, when He diversifies the events and their respective legislations and warnings, their hearts may be prepared for faith and the hearts may comprehend the guidance. ‘So the disbelievers will say, “You have learnt this (from somebody)”’, what does this mean? We know that heaven intervenes when corruption overflows, but if the human himself has a reproachful soul, then the human protects the soul and guards it; if the person sins, his soul reproaches him and he returns. But if the reproachful soul is hidden and the soul begins to command to do evil, and commanding to do good and forbidding evil is impossible in the society, this means that corruption is overflowing. At this point, heaven intervenes and a new Message comes with a new miracle.

Indeed, corruption only comes about from the existence of classes of people who wear down other classes. Those who are being worn down by the corruption are the ones who eagerly receive the Message. However, those who benefit from the corruption are those who oppose the Message. Every group that waged war against the Messenger were those who used to oppress the people, while the oppressed wanted someone to rescue them.

Therefore, Allah set up an evil enemy for every individual who brought a heavenly call because heaven only intervenes when evil that cannot be stopped is present in the society. This is how Allah sets up an evil enemy for every prophet and Messenger. This enemy is a test for the people, but those who have weak faith incline towards him. The Lord *Glorified is He* reveals the signs in many different ways, one after another; but only the sincere believers remain steadfast with the caller to the Truth.

You find that Islam came and made clear many matters which were previously vague. For example, there was the Night Journey, and those whose faith was shaky denied the Night Journey. This was done in order to remove the froth and leave only those who carry the Message according to the way of Truth. As for those whose faith is weak, or those who worship Allah as if it were on an edge, then Islam does not want them. ‘Had they gone forth with you, they would not have increased you except in confusion.’ (*at-Tawba:* 47)

The Lord *Glorified is He* has revealed signs in many different ways to make things clear for the oppressed and to make them victorious. But when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related the signs from Allah, some responded by claiming that he had stayed secluded, studying in a mountain and learning from a non-Arab. This is why we find the Lord *Glorified is He* saying: ‘And We certainly know that they say, “It is only a human being who teaches the Prophet (Muhammad)”’ (*an-Nahl:* 103). The reply to their claim comes from the Lord: ‘The tongue of the one they refer to is foreign, and this Quran is [in] a clear Arabic language’ (*an-Nahl:* 103).

When ʿUmar Allah *be pleased with him* was circumambulating the *Ka’ba,* he came to the Black Stone and said, ‘By Allah, I kiss you and I know that you are a stone and that you do not bring harm or benefit. If I had not seen the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) *peace and blessings be upon him* kiss you, I would not have kissed you'. (1)

Our master ʿUmar did this is in order to teach us what to say if people come and ask us about the reason behind kissing the Black Stone. The immediate response should be, 'Indeed, the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) *peace and blessings be upon him* did this, and this has been legislated'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

ٱتَّبِعۡ مَآ أُوحِيَ إِلَيۡكَ مِن رَّبِّكَۖ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَۖ وَأَعۡرِضۡ عَنِ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ١٠٦

Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord, there is no God but Him. Turn away from those who join other gods with Him [106] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 106)

When someone is speaking with someone else regarding a matter that the one he is speaking to is already engaged in and carrying out, we must understand the reality of what is meant. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe!' (*an-Nisa':* 136). What is Allah calling His Believers to here? He called them because they believe and this faith requires them to be addressed about the responsibilities they have because of believing. Man is subject to change in circumstances, and therefore Allah makes it clear that the faith that you have accepted has responsibilities attached to it, and I am telling you to be persistent with this faith. The command here is to be persistent. In other words Allah is saying, 'Just as you have believed and your faith requires that you be addressed about the responsibilities you have, when I say to you: "O you who believe!" this is a command for you to cling to this belief and be persistent in your faith'. Furthermore, the Lord's statement: 'Follow [O Muhammad] what has been revealed to you from your Lord' is a statement for a Messenger who already follows the Revealed Message. Consequently, the command is understood as an order to be persistent in following it, and do not let what they say grieve you O Muhammad because your Lord is assisting you in this. He is in charge of defending you and He will dictate to you the proofs in reply to their arguments: ‘And they do not come to you with an argument except that We bring you the Truth and the best explanation.’ (*al-Furqan:* 33)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

The Lord *Glorified is He* then addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Follow [O Muhammad] what has been revealed to you from Your Lord–there is no deity worthy of worship except Him–and turn away from those who associate others with Him [Allah].’ (*al-An‘am:* 106)

We know that revelation (*wahi*) concerns informing without any third person hearing, and every revelation implies the giving of information in this way. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received revelation in various forms, but everything that is connected and specific to the Quran came via Gabriel *peace be upon him*; and the Lord’s statement: ‘Follow [O Muhammad] what has been revealed to you from your Lord–there is no deity except Him–and turn away from those who associate others with Allah’ means that there is no God but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not able to change the code of life that has come down to him from His Lord. It is as though Allah is saying to him *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘You must turn your back on those who ascribe divinity to anything besides Me. Do not sit with them, do not mix with them, and do not befriend them’. Indeed, such avoidance indicates acumen, results in guidance (of the disbelievers) and is also an order from Allah.

The Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَآ أَشْرَكُوا۟ ۗ وَمَا جَعَلْنَٰكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا ۖ وَمَآ أَنتَ عَلَيْهِم بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿١٠٧﴾

If it had been God’s will, they would not have done so,
but We have not made you their guardian, nor are you
their keeper [107] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 107)

The Lord *Glorified is He* sheds light on a very important point that we must bear in mind as long as we have faith, which is that no disbeliever disbelieves because Allah forces him to do so. Rather, he disbelieves because Allah has loosened the reins and given him the choice, i.e. He created him with the ability to choose. This is why the disbeliever only does what he does because of the choice that Allah has given him and not out of compulsion or coercion from Our Lord. The proof is that the universe we live in is subject to His

Command. It cannot choose other than what Allah has ordained for it, and everything in the universe moves according to what Allah wills.

To sum up, whoever disbelieves does not disbelieve because Allah forces him; but it is the result of the choice granted to him by Allah. When Allah distinguished man with the ability to choose, He showed man the way to follow in order to gain rewards and not be afflicted with punishment. This is why responsibility involves 'Do!' and 'Do not do!' If Allah *Glorified is He* wanted there to be coercion, He will have coerced all the species in the universe, He will have coerced them throughout all their lives, and they will only carry out the function that Allah wanted from them. Indeed, He coerces the sun, the moon, the stars, and the water. Everything in the universe is under His Coercion, and even the angels whom He created: 'who do not disobey Allah [in executing] the Commands they receive from Him' (*at-Tahrim:* 6).

That is, Allah's Attribute of Coercion (*qahr*) can affect anything, but does Allah want His creation to be coerced to do what He wants? No. Rather, He *Glorified is He* wants them to do what He loves and that they choose to do what He loves, although causing coercion in some species affirms His Absolute Power, and indeed it is not possible for any created being to deviate and act differently from what Allah wants from them. But man was left with the ability to choose to show that some people from His Creation choose to move towards Him *the Almighty*, while they are capable of not moving towards Him which affirms their attribute of love.

When the one who can choose, chooses obedience while he is capable of being disobedient, and he chooses faith while he is able to disbelieve, then He has come to Allah out of love, not coercion. This is why our Lord says to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'It may be that you will kill yourself with grief because they do not believe. If it is Our Will, We could have sent down unto them from the skies a sign to which their necks will be forced to bow down in humility' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4).

Allah orders Prophet Muhammad to have compassion on his soul and not to kill it out of grief and sorrow because his people refuse to have faith in what he has brought from Him. It is as if Allah is saying to him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Do you want Me, O Muhammad, to force them (to believe)? Do you want their necks or do you want hearts? Indeed, you know, O Muhammad, the way set for you that has come down to you from your Lord wants hearts, and the hearts come out of choice. If We want them to believe, we could have sent down a miracle that will have overcome their hearts, and then they will have been forced to believe'.

This is why if a person loses any of his facilities which are needed to make a free choice, he will become no longer responsible for his actions. The proof of this is that no responsibility is attached to the one who has lost his intellect because the organ we use to choose is the mind. Likewise, no responsibility is attached to whoever is not yet an adult. Rather, the Lord *Glorified is He* leaves him until he becomes an adult and is thus able to give birth to someone like him and the chemical make-up of his body is fully developed. Also, he has to be not forced by anyone stronger than him to do any act he does not want to do. If all the above is the case, he will be responsible for anything he does.

Therefore, the person is responsible for what he does if three points are present: presence of intellect, as no responsibility is attached to the insane; an intellect that is mature and discerning, as there is no responsibility before puberty and no compulsion so one can make sound choices. Why? The answer comes from the Lord *Glorified is He*: 'That he who perishes might perish with clear knowledge of the Truth, and that he who lives (believers) might live with clear knowledge of the Truth (*al-Anfal:* 42).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عَدْوًۢا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍۗ كَذَٰلِكَ
زَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِم مَّرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

[Believers], do not revile those they call on beside God in case they, in their hostility and ignorance, revile God. To each community We make their own actions seem alluring, but in the end they will return to their Lord and He will inform them of all they did [108] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 108)

This noble verse concerns one of the manners that are needed when calling others to Allah. This call is the same as that delivered by the previous

Messengers. The Lord *Glorified is He* sealed it with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and He *Glorified is He* made it the last connection between heaven and earth. This is why it was imperative for Islam to embrace all matters that are connected to calling others to Allah, and for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bear them as a trust which he had to deliver to the world. The followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* must also bear this trust; these followers have been honoured by Allah *Glorified is He* as those who bear the trust of delivering Allah's Message to all the creation have been placed amongst them, thereby they continue the work of Allah's Messenger Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Any Muslim who has knowledge of one of Allah's rulings is required to convey it to someone else. This is because the one who the ruling is conveyed to may understand it more than the one who heard it in the first place, even if Allah does not enable the one who conveys the ruling to act according to what he conveyed. He may convey what he has learnt to someone who has a deeper understanding than him. Even if the person who conveys the call does not act according to this information, the one who knows any matter in religion should, at least, not miss the chance of receiving the reward for conveying information from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the creation. But it is better if he acts on this information himself to be a model for others because of his good behaviour and for him not to belong to those about whom Allah says: 'Most loathsome is it in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not do' (*as-Saff:* 3). Some poets used to insist on this matter by saying:

Take my knowledge and do not rely on my action
have the fruits and use the rod to poke the fire

Thus, conveying from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a necessary matter as it is a continuation of his *peace and blessings be upon him* testimony. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed from the Lord *Glorified is He* what the Lord wants from the creation. It remains for those of mankind who follow the Messenger, Muhammad, to bear witness that they have conveyed to mankind what has come to them from him *peace and blessings be upon him*; 'Thus have We made you (true Muslims) a moderate midmost community to stand as witnesses to the Truth before all mankind, and for the Messenger [Prophet Muhammad] to be a witness before all of you' (*al-Baqara:* 143).

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad will bear witness that he conveyed the Message to us. And an essential part of the way of life Allah wants for us is that his followers will have to bear witness that they conveyed the Message to mankind. If there is any shortcoming in conveying the Message to mankind, then the guilt lies with those who follow Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* for they did not properly carry out the trust of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying the Message to all of mankind. The way of calling to Allah is difficult because it requires that the caller takes the hand of those who are deviating from the way of life that was revealed from the heavens and who are following their earthly passions which are always attractive for the creation because they are connected to the soul's immediate enjoyment. By following the religion–as they say–one realises a delayed benefit. This statement is not fair to the religion because before the religion makes people realise a deferred enjoyment, it also makes them realise an immediate enjoyment because the people who adhere to the way of 'Do!' and 'Do not do!' live a good life without malice, exploitation, ill will, envy, suppression and tyranny, and thus all of mankind lives in safety.

That is, do not say that the fruits of the religion are only in the Hereafter. Rather, say that the aim of the religion is not related only to the Hereafter but to the life of this world as well. The Hereafter is a reward for succeeding in fulfilling these goals because in the Hereafter Allah rewards only those who excelled in their actions in the life of this world. Whoever works righteousness, thereby following Allah's Way: 'We will surely cause him to live a good and pure life' (*an-Nahl:* 97); and whoever turns away from His way, then indeed he will have a wretched life, and this happens before the Hereafter. Then the Day of Resurrection comes for them to receive the punishment from Allah: 'And on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him up blind' (*Ta Ha:* 124).

If the aim of the religion is to take people away from their bad desires to the Path of Allah *the Almighty*, then the mission of the caller is going to be very difficult psychologically. This is why some have said, 'Indeed the one who advises others to goodness must be clever because he wants to make people leave the evil that they love and are accustomed to'. This is why the caller must not try to take them away from what they are used to with ways that they hate. Rather, he must influence their intellects and desires to make them follow the path of Allah, and this is why this verse says: 'And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus we have made the deeds of every community appear pleasing to them. Then to their Lord is their return and He will inform them about what they used to do' (*al-An'am:* 108).

The wise men have said, 'Advice is heavy, so do not make it like a mountain nor turn it into an argument. Reality is bitter, and therefore you should use gentle speech when guiding others. Using gentle speech when advising makes the heart of the one being advised soft. It is enough for you to only make him leave what he loves and is accustomed to (i.e. his desires) and turn towards that which he is not accustomed to (i.e. Allah's Way of life). This is why making him leave what he is used to should not be done with harshness'. For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us to be careful of this matter when we call antagonists who associate others with Allah in worship to have faith in Him; we must do this with leniency.

They wanted immediate pleasure by disregarding Allah's Way. But they kept their belief in Allah with their belief in these partners because they could find themselves in critical situations which earthly means are unable to repel, and it is for their own benefit that they have a Deity Who is able to save them from the situation in which they are. They are honest to themselves concerning this point. But Allah *Glorified is He* says about people like this who are resolute upon idolatry: 'Truly, you and all that you worship besides Allah are [but] fuel of Hell: To it you will surely come' (*al-Anbiya':* 98).

The fuel (*hasab*) of hell, therefore, is made-up of the idol-worshippers and the idols that they used to worship are with them, so they too will be fuel for the fire that is going to punish them all. Some superficial people think that this will be a punishment only for the stones. No. Rather, it (the punishment) is jealousy, vengeance, and anger on behalf of the stones that is directed at the idol-worshippers for leaving Allah's Way, which is to worship Allah alone. The stone will say, 'You were captivated by me and this is why I will be the means of burning you'. Indeed, we find for those who are captivated by supposed gods from amongst human beings, or from trees, or celestial bodies, or stones, Allah afflict them with punishment. The stones that they used to worship will say, as some have said in poetry:

They worshipped us while we are stronger worshipers
Of Allah than those who stand during the pre-dawn hours
They took our silence as proof against us
And for them we became fuel for the fire
The transgressor has his reward, and the one who is transgressed against
Will be saved by the Mercy of the All-Forgiving

For this reason, the command comes not to revile what is worshipped by those who associate partners with Allah because the idols have not committed any sin. Actually, we should be kind towards the stones because they incur no sin due to those who are captivated by them. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us and makes it clear to us that we should not be aggressive against that which has been taken as a god because it is excused. To revile (*sabb*) means to say something vile, or something of abuse, derision, or derogation. If you revile and deride (*tasubbu*) what they worship besides Allah then the one worshipping it, out of his foolishness, will deride Your God. You will have reviled a false god, while they will have reviled the True God, Allah. We would not gain anything from this, and therefore we should desist.

In the Lord's statement in the Quran, Allah warns us against falling into this: 'And do not insult (*tasubbu*) those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge' (*al-An'am:* 108). They will do this out of enmity, hostility and transgression without knowing the value of the Lord *Glorified is He* and His Sanctity. This is why we must guard our tongues against reviling their gods so that we do not encourage their tongues, in turn, to revile Allah.

Indeed Allah *Glorified is He* wants to teach us to be gentle when calling others to Him because you want to soften their hearts to make them incline towards faith, and that can only be achieved with good manners.

It is true that the believers are excused for their enthusiasm when they enter into a discussion with idol-worshippers, but the believer should bear in mind the ultimate aim which is achieving good for the call. He should ask Allah to grant him patience with the idol-worshippers. The Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us how to follow the correct method when calling others to Islam. For example, we find that Prophet Noah *peace be upon him* who remained with his people for nine hundred and fifty years, kept calling and he was tender in doing so, and even in the end they said to him, 'You invented this speech yourself'. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches him that he should say: 'If I have invented it, on me is this sin; but I am innocent of the sin you commit' (*Hud:* 35).

Teaching Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* orders him to say: 'Who is it that provides sustenance for you from the heavens and the earth?' (*Saba':* 24), i.e. who is it that gives you the sustenance you need for your life? When you ask them a question which proves the error of their ways and they begin to stutter, Allah supports His Messenger, Muhammad, clarifying and commanding him to say to them: 'It is Allah; And most surely, either we or you are on right guidance or in manifest error' (*Saba':* 24).

The pronoun 'We' refers to Allah's Messenger and those with him. And the phrase 'or you' refers to those who disbelieve in Allah. He did not say 'I alone am on the right path and you have clearly gone astray'. Rather, he said, 'Our way and your way do not agree. There must be one way on the right path and one way that has clearly gone astray. I will not say who is on the right path and who has clearly gone astray'. This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was certain that if they pondered over the matter in their minds and used their insight, they could only conclude that Allah's Messenger is on the right path and that they have clearly gone astray. Thus he left it for them to come to this conclusion.

Let us also contemplate this statement of the Lord *Glorified is He*: 'Say, "You shall not be called to account for what we committed, nor shall we be called to account for what you do"' (*Saba':* 25). Allah *Glorified is He* did not say that they are the ones who are guilty. Rather, he attributed crime–if there was any crime–to the believers. He attributed only doing things–even though their actions are wrong–to the disbelievers. The least matter that is required is that we shall not be called to account for the crimes you commit, in order for the two to be the same, but He did not say that. This is exalted etiquette and gentleness because the Lord *Glorified is He* does not want Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to leave any room for their natural inclinations to reject him or to find a means to flee from the call. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us this style by saying: ‘And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge’. (*al-Ana’m*: 108)

In this way we learn how to carry out a gentle debate. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Truly, all those who you call upon besides Allah are but created beings like yourselves’ (*al-A‘raf:* 194). If you want to unveil the reality of these idols, then they too are created by Allah and they worship Him. If you ask them for anything, they will not answer you. They do not have feet to walk with, they do not have hands to grasp with, they do not have eyes to see with, and they do not have ears with which to hear. And more than this: ‘Those who you call besides Allah cannot create [even] a fly though they all may combine together for that purpose’ (*al-Hajj:* 73). Is there anything smaller than a fly that you know of? Yes. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘And if the fly should snatch away anything from them, they cannot (even) release it from it [the fly]’ (*al-Hajj:* 73).

If a fly lands on what you are eating and takes from it, would you be able to get that food back from it? If you are a fearsome tyrant, then grab the fly and retrieve the food that it took; but you are not able to do that. This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘So weak are both the seeker and the sought!’ (*al-Hajj:* 73)

This is the kind of argument that makes the one arguing feel embarrassed. However, if you rage in his face and act like a bigot, then you will give him an excuse to bear a grudge against you, feel anger and hostility towards you, and turn away from Allah’s Way. We ask Allah to grant us vast patience and forbearance, and help us to debate gently. ‘And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus, ‘We have made the deeds of every community appear pleasing to them.

Then to their Lord is their return and He will inform them about what they used to do' (*al-An'am:* 108). When Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us to keep any debate gentle when calling others to Islam, this embellishes the call and makes it pleasing. The call itself is beautiful so it must be presented beautifully.

An example from our daily life is when you go to a merchant. He has some merchandise that could be of outstanding quality, but he does not arrange them properly and does not present them well. For this reason, you may leave him and go to another merchant who may have some merchandise that is not of the same quality but is presented well. This is embellishment, i.e. improving the beauty, making it pleasing. This is why jewellery and what women use to beautify themselves are called (*zinah*) embellishment. A woman may already have beautiful femininity and in addition to her beauty she adorns herself with jewellery, jewels, and fine clothes. When an Arab wanted to praise a woman for being beautiful, he used to say, 'She is (*ghaniyah*) (i.e. has natural beauty)', i.e. because of her beauty, she does not need to embellish herself because what you are concealing with the necklace is more beautiful than the necklace itself.

Embellishment and making something pleasing therefore refers to presenting something in a beautiful way in order to make people feel attracted and inclined towards it. When we adorn anything, we make it dignified and handsomeness, and we increase it in beauty: 'Thus, we have made the deeds of every community appear pleasing to them' (*al-An'am:* 108). A community (*ummah*) is a group whose characteristic of belonging brings its individuals together, such as the Arab community, i.e. those who belong to it are the Arabs. There is also the English community which the English people belong to. As for the community of Islam, it includes the Arabs, the non-Arabs, the black, the white, the yellow, and it covers a large amount of territory. If the previous communities were embellished and made to appear pleasing in order to suit a defined age, a defined time, and a defined place, then We [Allah] shall embellish you in a way that suits all tastes that are present in the life of this world because you will meet all these communities, and your call must make all types of people incline towards it.

In the beginning of the *Da'wah* (call)–and it was weak at that time–we find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* looking at his community;

Bilal Al-Habashi (the Abyssinian) Allah *be pleased with him* used to give the call to prayer. We find Prophet Muhammad saying about Salman *Allah be pleased with him* who was Persian, 'He is one of us; one of the Prophetic household'. (1) The Companion ʿUmar *Allah be pleased with him* says about Suhayb, who was a European (*Rumi*) Allah *be pleased with him* 'What an excellent slave Suhayb is. Even if he did not fear Allah, he will not disobey Him', i.e. his avoidance of disobedience was natural to him, even if he did not fear Allah's Punishment.

'If We [Allah] embellished the deeds of all the previous nations and make them appear pleasing, then embellishing your community must suit its task in terms of the time, place, race, colour, and language of the people. We must also embellish you with regards to how you should present the call. The presentation must suit the beauty of the call itself. Your embellishment is of the utmost importance because your community will deal with all the civilizations of the world and all the affiliations of the world. Thus, your embellishment must suit your task of spreading the Message to all these different types of people. 'Thus, We [Allah] have made the deeds of every community appear pleasing to them. Then to their Lord is their return and He will inform them about what they used to do' (*al-An'am:* 108), i.e. indeed He has clarified for them the way of conveying the call to others, and the reward that the obedient and the doers of good will obtain in the Hereafter. When the believers enjoy the blessings of the Hereafter, these blessings will be unlimited because they will be according to Allah's Absolute Power. And while the believers are enjoying all of these blessings, they also look forward to meeting the One Who is blessing them, and then Allah will manifest Himself to them.

Just as we have embellished the deeds of the previous nations and made them appear pleasing, we have also embellished you because you are the community that has accepted the responsibility of the call. This special embellishment nurtures those who call others to Allah's Way. If others are aware of the beauty that your way of life contains, they will have studied it and each one of them would have examined the signs that exist in front of them, behind them, on their right and on their left, and they will have realised that everything in existence has been created to do a particular task in this world, and they will also follow the life of worship: 'I only create jinn and men that they may worship Me' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56).

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Kabir and Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak*

'That they may worship Me' means that they obey Allah concerning the orders 'Do' and 'Do not do'. When the Lord *Glorified is He* said: 'Thus We have made the deeds of every community appear pleasing to them' (*al-An'am:* 108), it means that He *Glorified is He* has explained the deeds with the benefits they produce.

If you look at the people around you, you will find there are some who have been given special skills you do not have. This is because the Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to benefit you in particular. This is clear in all fields. The work of the skilled and proficient carpenter affects you. The best work of the expert clothes designer will affect you. It is very beneficial for every individual to find that someone else who is superior to him in his expertise, while he himself is superior to others in his work. And he praises the Lord because the benefit from his work will affect others as well. With this we will be able to live in a refined society that is made up of ideal communities and groups. As such, whoever is superior in something must not have rancour towards others in the society because his superiority will affect every individual therein, and it is beneficial for everyone to work to become superior in some skill.

When Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Thus We [Allah] have made the deeds of every community appear pleasing to them' (*al-An'am:* 108), this means that Allah has given each of us a task in life and we will inevitably benefit from it in the life of this world and in the Hereafter as well, and each of us will receive Allah's reward for it. The one who embellishes his work and makes it look pleasing is the one who exerts effort in his work, and the one who does not embellish his work sins. Everyone embellishes their work according to what he himself wishes to attain. We see examples of this in life; we find someone who has a limited income, but he excessively enjoys luxuries that are beyond his necessary needs. He does not set anything aside and he is only concerned about attaining immediate pleasures. You then find someone else who lives fulfilling only his necessities and he sets some of his wealth aside, and afterwards we find that he has improved his lifestyle with an appropriate accommodation and other pleasures of life. The first embellished his life with immediate luxuries, while the second embellished his life with permanent luxuries. Beware of looking at short-time desires. Instead, look at the long-time benefit that comes from your work: ‘Then to their Lord is their return and He will inform them about what they used to do’ (*al-An‘am:* 108).

As long as the return is to the One Who has set the methodology of ‘Do!’ and ‘Do not do!’, and it is to the One Who has also laid down the rule that we have to embellish our work so that you will want to follow this noble way of life from Him, you should follow it. And according to how much you follow Allah’s way, you yourself will be noble.

The Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَأَقۡسَمُواْ بِٱللَّهِ جَهۡدَ أَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡ لَئِن جَآءَتۡهُمۡ ءَايَةٞ لَّيُؤۡمِنُنَّ بِهَاۚ قُلۡ إِنَّمَا
ٱلۡأٓيَٰتُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِۖ وَمَا يُشۡعِرُكُمۡ أَنَّهَآ إِذَا جَآءَتۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١٠٩

They swear by God with their most solemn oaths that if a miraculous sign came to them they would believe in it. Say [Prophet], ‘Signs are in the power of God alone.’ What will make you [believers] realize that even if a sign came to them they still would not believe? [109] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 109)

Allah says, ‘And they swear by Allah their strongest oaths’; here there is an oath (*qasam*), something which is sworn by (*muqsam bih*), someone making an oath (*muqsim*), and something that is sworn about (*muqsam 'alaih*). That which is sworn by is Allah. Those making the oath are the group opposing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Why are they making an oath? They made an oath when the True Lord’s logic in debate overwhelmed them. They swore by Allah after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had already called them to worship Allah. ‘And they swear by Allah their strongest oaths’ (*al-An‘am:* 109) means that they had to expend great effort *‘jahd’* (strongest), which is difficult, meaning that they exaggerated in their oath to such an extent that it was difficult for them, and this was to make it clear to whoever they were swearing to that they were keen to carry out the oath. Thus they exhausted their efforts and their labour in making the oath, and this means that they declared that they were swearing an oath that was beloved to them and what is most beloved to them is to carry out this oath.

This outwardly shows their sincerity in making the oath. ‘And they swear by Allah their strongest oaths that if a sign came to them, they would surely believe in it. Say, “The signs are only with Allah.” And what will make you perceive that even if a sign came, they will not believe’. (*al-An‘am:* 109)

Has Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not come with a clear sign? He came to them with the greatest sign, which is the Quran. Their lack of acknowledgement of this sign is their first calamity. Did Prophet Muhammad not say to you, ‘I am a Messenger’ after he had declared the sign which is the revelation of the Quran, and you knew that he is truthful in conveying the Message from Allah? This is the peak of their petulance. They continued in this petulance when they asked for signs from Allah. Did they not say to Prophet Muhammad: ’We shall not believe in your Message till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or you have a garden of date-palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush, or cause the skies to fall down on us in pieces, as you claim [will happen], or you bring Allah and the angels before us face to face’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-92)?

Allah *Glorified is He* in this way wanted to make it clear to us that the oath that they swore is a coward’s oath. Their saying, ‘as you claimed’ (*al-Isra’:* 92), (*Za'm*) (you claim will happen)–as we know–refers to lying, and this is the first defect in their oath. The Lord *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘If We [Allah] will, we could cause the earth to swallow them, or cause fragments of the sky to fall down on them’ (*Saba’:* 9).

To sum up, they are not believers in the original sign which is the Quran, and that is why they challenged him to prove that this Quran is revelation. But the Lord *Glorified is He* warns us not to believe their claim (that they would believe after receiving a sign from heaven) by informing us: ‘Even if We [Allah] had sent down to them through the Prophet [Muhammad] a written [Message] on parchment so that they could touch it with their own hands–those who are bent on denying the Truth will indeed have said, “This is clearly nothing but a deception”’ (*al-An‘am:* 7).

Even if a sign was sent down, they will not believe in it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Even if We [Allah] open out to them a gateway to Heaven and they were to continue ascending it [on and on, up to Heaven], they will surely have said, “Our eyes are spellbound! Nay, we have been bewitched!”’ (*al-Hijr:* 14-15) But if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had bewitched you, how come he did not bewitch them to believe in Allah?

Thus, we see that the Lord *Glorified is He* has mentioned to us in His Book that everything they say about this matter is just a way to stray and flee from responding to the call. This is because there is no sign greater than that which came down to them, that is the Quran. All the signs that they suggested do not surpass this sign. Furthermore, they are a community who excelled in grammar, morphology, rhetoric, eloquence, and literature. He came to them with a miracle, but they disputed over it. They were not masters in the signs that they mentioned and suggested to be sent. We are bringing a miracle to them that is from the same field as that which they have mastery in. This is because miracles always come according to this principle. Allah brings a miraculous sign to every people that are masters in a particular field and this sign is superior to whatever they have accomplished in that field. This is in order to affirm the veracity of the Messenger in what he conveys from Allah.

We have already said that indeed the miracles come to violate the fixed laws of the universe because the laws of the universe have rules that are known to human beings, and they recur many times right in front of them. Whenever a matter comes to violate the law that is prevalent and acknowledged amongst them, it draws their attention and they start to ask one another how the law could be violated. This is for each one of them to realise that the One Who created the law is the One Who violated it, and to affirm the veracity of what is being conveyed from Him. A miracle has come to you that is in the field of your expertise. What proves this is that they did not talk about the miracle itself but rather about the way the miracle reached them and the person who brought it. Thus, Allah says that they ask: ‘Why has not an angel been sent down unto him?’ (*al-An‘am:* 8). The Quran makes it clear that the angel, by the very nature of its constitution, is not seen by you. He sees you and you do not see him. Hence, if We sent you an angel, how can you recognise him? Consequently, sending an angel requires that we make him like a human being. And if the Lord *Glorified is He* sends him down in the form of a man and if he comes down in the form of a man, you will say, ‘He is not a human being so we do not have to adhere to what he has brought’; Allah *Glorified is He* explains: ‘If We [Allah] had made him an angel, We will have made him [appear as] a man, but [by this] We will have caused confusion for them in a matter they already now make confusing for themselves’ (*al-An‘am:* 9).

The Angel Gabriel came down to Prophet Muhammad one time in the form of a man, who had arrived from a journey, and he sat and he spoke with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Gabriel *peace be upon him* therefore, did not come in his true form, but rather he came in the form of a man. There is another similar creation which is called the ‘*jinn’*. We are not able to see the *jinn*. We cannot, according to our human laws and the laws of the *jinn*, see them. However, if a demon from the jinn wants to show himself to us, he comes in the form of something material that can be seen. He takes on the form of an animal, a cat, a camel or a man, and so forth. If this matter was not well organized to maintain a balance between the two species–humans and jinn–mankind would suffer much hardship. This is because when a jinn reveals himself to a man, stands in front of him and then conceals himself, fear spreads amongst human beings despite the fact that the jinn are more scared of man than man is of the *jinn*. This is because the jinn know how to take on the form of a man or anything material. And when a jinn takes on the form of a man, he is governed by the laws of man. Hence, if he comes across a man with a revolver, for example, the man may shoot him with bullets and kill him. For this reason, jinn are scared of manifesting themselves to man for a long period of time. Rather, they appear like a flash of lighting and then vanish because they are scared, as we have said, of man. Hence, a balance exists between the jinn and humans. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A demon from amongst the (jinn) suddenly pounced on me yesterday in order to interrupt my prayer, but Allah gave me power over him. Consequently I seized him and intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque in order that you, all together [or all of you], might look at him, but then I remembered the supplication of my brother Solomon *peace be upon him* “My Lord, forgive me, and give me such a kingdom which will never be possible for anyone after me to have”. Hence Allah repelled him (the jinn) in disgrace’. In another narration, it is reported that he said, ‘By Allah, if it was not for the supplication of my brother Solomon, he will have been tied up and the children of Medina would have played with him’. (1)

This is how we know that whenever a people suggested a miraculous sign and as a result Allah brought a sign but they then denied it, they were seized in a way that only *the Almighty*, the One Who determines and overpowers all things, can seize, and it was not deferred until the Hereafter.

The Lord *Glorified is He* says: ’But Allah will not punish them while you [Prophet Muhammad] are still among them’ (*al-Anfal:* 33). Thus, even those who disbelieve in him obtain mercy because of him: ‘and they swear by Allah their strongest oaths that if a sign came to them, they would surely believe in it. Say, “The signs are only with Allah.” And what will make you perceive that, even if a sign came, they will not believe’ (*al-An‘am:* 109).

Here Allah *Glorified is He* conveys to His Messenger Muhammad to say to them, ‘I do not bring signs from myself and I do not bring them relying on my own ability; because what governs my ability is the same that governs yours. I am not superior to you in any way other than the fact that I receive revelation and I convey to you with what I have been sent. Indeed, Allah is the One Who gives me the signs of the Quran and no creation should suggest a miraculous sign for Allah to bring. This is due to the fact that what happened with previous Messages shows that when a people do not respond and do not believe in the sign that they asked for, the Lord *Glorified is He* destroys and annihilates them, drowns them, sends a violent wind against them or causes the earth to swallow them up. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘Nothing has prevented Us [Allah] from sending [this Message] with miraculous signs [in its wake, like the earlier Messages] save [Our knowledge] that the people of former generations [only too often] belied them’ (*al-Isra’:* 59).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim with this wording in the section on Prayer in the Book of Mosques..., narrated by Al-Bukhari in the section on Prayer and narrated by Ahmad... The meaning of ‘yaftaku’ is ‘to pounce on someone deceptively in a state of heedlessness’, and in one narration the word ‘tafallata’ (to bother) is used. The meaning of ‘fadhatuhu’ (I seized him) with a dotted ‘dhal’ and an undotted ‘ain’ means to choke him. In another narration it is ‘fada‘tuhu’ with an undotted ‘dal’, meaning ‘I pushed him away with force’. The meaning of ‘sariya’ is ‘pillar’.*

As such, some people of the earlier Messages suggested signs for Allah to bring, and Allah brought these signs for them. But they denied them. Clearly, denial is the usual response from this type of people.

The sign comes in the way Allah wants it to come and not according to anyone's suggestion. This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* commands His Messenger Muhammad to convey to them, 'The miraculous signs are only with Allah.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 50)

After this a new address comes for those of humanity who differ with the idol-worshippers, and they are the believers. The Lord *Glorified is He* says to them: 'And what will make you perceive that even if a sign came, they will not believe' (*al-An'am:* 109). When idolaters asked for a sign, it is as if the believers wanted to reduce the adversity the idol-worshippers caused Allah's Messenger, and that is why they said to him, 'O Prophet Muhammad! Ask Allah to send a miraculous sign to them in order for us to be relieved of their stubbornness'. Allah directs His response to those who suggested this question by clearly saying, 'You are believers and your thinking is good and your idea is fine in that you want to put an end to this adversity, but what will make you realise, i.e. what will make you understand clearly, that if I bring to them the sign that they are proposing, they will still not believe'. It is as if the believers supported the statement of these idol-worshippers in demanding a sign in order to prevent such idol-worshippers' stubbornness.

Regarding the following words of Allah *the Exalted* as mentioned in the Noble Quran, '...they still would not believe.' (*al-An'am:* 109) Muslim scholars, may Allah *the Exalted* reward them all abundantly, have differed on what is meant here because understanding differs when it comes to matters of religion (with scholars trying their best to properly comprehend the issue). We ask, 'What is the wisdom behind this Quranic style'? The answer, as we see it, is a form of expression that is used to get us immersed in the Quran. Allah *the Exalted* wants us to fully comprehend its meanings, not just merely pass over it in haste. The style in Allah's statement *the Exalted* '…What will make you [believers] realise that even if a sign came to them they still would not believe?' (*al-An'am:* 109), is proof that we human beings do not have any knowledge in terms of what Allah *the Exalted* allows us to know. We said that *shu`ur* (realisation) requires awareness along with passion and wishes, so it is as if the question being asked is, 'On what foundation do you base your claim of knowledge and perception?' It is easy for anyone to be deceived by the tone of their statement (if taken on its face value), but Allah *Glorified is He* would never be deceived by that and He knows and encompasses all what is hidden and concealed. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is making it clear that asking for a sign (here in this context) is nothing but wrangling. You do not know that if Allah *the Exalted* brought a sign to them they would not believe.

Some of the scholars of Quranic exegesis have said that the Arabic letter *la* used in the above verse, and meaning 'not', is additional, while other scholars maintained some kind of tactical approach, said that the letter *la* (*not*) is a conjunction because they do not want to consider it as 'additional'. Some of them have made similar statements and then retracted them, and to do so is better in terms of etiquette. This is because the one speaking is Allah *the Exalted* and it is unconceivable to assume an 'extra' letter in Allah's speech; that if it was omitted, we would still be having a complete sentence. No. The logic is that if a word is omitted in a sentence, then that statement becomes incomplete and thus lacks the capacity to convey the intended meaning. And because we know that Allah *the Exalted* always has purpose behind all His statements, and His purpose and Will have to come to pass. We can draw an example from our daily lives and how we use words when someone says to you, 'I do not have money'. Or 'I do not have any money'. The phrase 'any money' means that the person does not even have the least basic of what could be called money. As for saying 'I do not have money', this means that one does not have what would be considered a significant or considerable amount of money. Rather, that person may have with him a few coins, which are of course, insignificant when referring to money as compared to someone who has quite much more than that.

The Arabic letter *la* is used in this verse because Allah *the Exalted* wants to say to the believers, 'What makes you so sure that if I brought a sign (miracle) to them (the disbelievers), they would then believe'? It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is rebuking the believers for endorsing the request of the disbelievers. But we need to take note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* (in His statement) was very calm in the way He addressed the believers (as mentioned in the above verse), for He appreciated their good intention behind the kind of an 'implicit endorsement' they showed to the request made by the disbelievers because they did not do that out of love for the disbelievers, but rather out of love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and His message. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is saying to them, 'I excuse you because your reaction was based on the mere tone used by the disbelievers as they swore by Allah, that if Allah *the Exalted* would send some miracles as a sign they would believe in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*', '...Now they swear by Allah *the Exalted* with their most solemn oaths.' (*al-An'am:* 109), especially with the kind of emphasis used in this sentence. Furthermore, it is also as if Allah *the Exalted* was telling the disbelievers, 'I am not rebuking you for taking that solemn oath at face value because this is due to your limited knowledge; and how could you be so sure that if I did bring a sign to them they would believe'? Had Allah done that, they still would not have believed in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, the Arabic letter *la* used in the Quranic verse, 'they would not believe' is very essential and not extra. To assuage the believers, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to them (i.e. the Prophet's Companions) that with His vast knowledge He knows the reality of their affairs. He says:

وَنُقَلِّبُ أَفْـِٔدَتَهُمْ وَأَبْصَـٰرَهُمْ كَمَا لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِهِۦٓ أَوَّلَ
مَرَّةٍ وَنَذَرُهُمْ فِى طُغْيَـٰنِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

We would make their hearts and their eyes turn away, just as they did not believe the first time, and leave them to flounder in their obstinacy [110] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 110)

When you say *uqallib* ('I turn over the merchandise'), it means that you examine it. So in the same context, we can understand what Allah *the Exalted* wants to inform us that He was making it clear that with His Infinite Knowledge, He knows what is in all hearts, so nothing is hidden from Him. So, by this, the believers (and this applies to all believers of all time) should rest assured that Allah's judgement on everything is nothing but true because His judgement results from his precise and all-informed Knowledge.

There could be another meaning here, i.e. that the Arabic word *taqalub* could be referring to a kind of changing. It is possible that when the disbelievers swore by Allah *the Exalted* with their most solemn oaths that if Allah sent to them a miracle as a sign they would submit in faith, that, at that moment, their hearts were drawing closer to faith but in a shaky way (i.e. not fully inclined towards faith just like any hearts that are not established upon any creed; such hearts would remain weak). So, since the disbelievers were in that situation, then how could the believers take their swearing by Allah *the Exalted* as an indication of faith, or a sign of readiness to believe if a sign could be revealed to them? Was there someone amongst the disbelievers who could possibly control himself and get rid of his arrogance and stubbornness after seeing a miracle from Allah *Exalted is He*? Would he possibly remain steadfast in that state or would he quickly revert to disbelief? We need understand this fact; Allah *the Exalted* is the One who controls man's heart, turning it around the way He wants; that is why man's dispositions and behaviours are subject to constant switch and altercation. Allah *the Exalted* has made this clear in this verse, 'And We will turn away their hearts and their eyes…' (*al-An'am:* 110). So by this, it should be clear that Allah's judgement in that case was the result of His being All-Informed and having fully encompassing knowledge.

Indeed, faith requires a kind of visual perception of universal signs. And what comes after such perception of the signs that prove the mightiness of Allah *the Exalted* is belief with conviction and that makes faith settled in the heart. So Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear that He is the One Who turns people's hearts and eyes. And this should help us verify how people get conviction, or how they arrive at a state of certainty regarding the universal signs. It is by knowing whether people look at these signs with consideration and conviction or is it just a superficial glance in which they have no understanding and ability to draw conclusions. Also, it is by verifying whether their hearts (after perceiving these signs) succeed in absorbing faith or not, whether their eyes manage to feel the light or not. All this is very important in terms of verification and ascertaining truth. 'And We will turn away their hearts and their eyes just as they refused to believe in it the first time. And We will leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly.' (*al-An'am:* 110)

That is how Allah *the Exalted* made it clear to the believers that the pagans would not believe even if a sign were to be brought to them. They would just ignore it and move on as if they saw nothing. In this verse, we also draw from it that the believers were spared from blame for having such hope and desire that the disbelievers would surrender in faith and embrace Islam if a miracle could be revealed to them, (without knowing that those disbelievers were already stone-hearted and very stubborn). Why? Because the True Lord *Glorified is He* said, '…just as they refused to believe in it the first time' (*al-An'am:* 110), i.e. they did not change and for that reason the judgement is issued against them. 'And We will leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly.' (*al-An'am:* 110) The Arabic word *tughyan* (overweening arrogance) is to overstep the bounds, and the disbelievers did overstep the bounds in the way they reacted to the signs sent to them. The signs of the Quran came to them, but they refused to believe. Just as Allah *the Exalted* made it clear they could not even come up with ten verses, and not only that, they were incapable of bringing up just one verse. So, with all this 'incapacity', the least that was expected of them was not to transgress and overstep their bounds in asking to be convinced of the truth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

'And We will leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly.' (*al-An'am:* 110) The Arabic word *`amah* (blind) is confusion and indecision. It means that the disbelievers in their transgression waver because within them, there is a natural disposition that awakens in them a sense a belief, but at the same time, that spirit collides with another spirit that calls them to disbelief, and the latter keeps persisting, making them wonder whether to believe or not. The natural disposition that wakes up within them flashes like lightning, and so (with such a powerful ray of light) it should have been enough to sway them to the Right Path. Or 'And We will turn away their hearts and their eyes just as they refused to believe in it the first time. And We will leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly' (*al-An'am:* 110), refers to when they are thrown in the hell-fire because of their failure to use their senses as a means of pondering over the signs of Allah *Exalted is He*. The same is also with their hearts, rendering them stagnant, without using them to comprehend the words and wonders of Allah *the Exalted*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that,

وَلَوْ أَنَّنَا نَزَّلْنَآ إِلَيْهِمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ وَكَلَّمَهُمُ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ وَحَشَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ
قُبُلًا مَّا كَانُوا۟ لِيُؤْمِنُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَجْهَلُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

Even if We sent the angels down to them, and the dead spoke to them, and We gathered all things right in front of them, they still would not believe, unless God so willed, but most of them are ignorant [of this] [111] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 111)

Allah *the Exalted* expands more on this matter; making it clear that the disbelievers were not ready to believe. Allah *the Exalted* did not say, 'Indeed they will believe'. Rather, He said, 'And even if We sent the angels down to them...' (*al-An'am:* 111), as they had claimed or even if the dead were to speak to them as they had stated previously, 'so then, bring forth our forefathers [as witnesses], if what you claim is true!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 36)

Let us look carefully at this verse, '...and we gathered all things right in front of them…' (*al-An'am:* 111). The Arabic word *hashr* (gathering with difficulty) such as when you put some books on a shelf and there's one more book that cannot fit in, and you have to squeeze it in. Therefore, that Arabic word refers to grouping things together with difficulty. Here Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear: 'If I had brought the signs to them, you would find their hearts, despite all this clear signs, still resisting faith '…and We gathered all things right in front of them…' (*al-An'am:* 111). Take note of this Arabic word *qubula,* (in front of them) is the plural form of the Arabic word *qabil*, just like the Arabic word that refers to bed, both in its singular and plural forms.

"...and we gathered all things right in front of them…" (*al-An'am:* 111). This means that if the True Lord *Glorified is He* brought them all the signs they were asking for, and it was as if each and every sign was like a thread linked with the other (as if they formed a group) the disbelievers still would not have believed. Or, another explanation for *qubulan* is that the disbelievers see the signs with their own eyes, and this can be inferred from the Arabic word because for everything there are two sides, either the front or the back. And we refer to this in Arabic with the words *dubur* (the back) and *qubul* (at the front). Per this explanation, we can take the above verse as meaning that if we gather everything in front of them, in front of their own eyes, the disbelievers still will not believe. So in any of the two explanations, the outcome is the same. If we understand the verse per the first meaning, it indicates that (even) if Allah *Glorified is He* were to gather all the signs in this world for the disbelievers, more than what any ordinary person would need, they still would not believe (this is one explanation). If you understand it to mean that even if the disbelievers were to see the signs in front of them, with their own eyes, they still would not believe, is the other explanation. 'And even if We sent the angels down to them, and the dead spoke to them, and We gathered all things right in front of them, they still would not believe, unless Allah *the Exalted* so willed, but most of them are ignorant [of this].' (*al-An'am:* 111)

There is something else we must notice here. The True Lord *Glorified is He* used here a kind of 'soft' phrase that indicates a power of 'choice' given to mankind, i.e. instead of demonstrating His Absolute Power in making anything happens whenever He wills such that if He wanted to force anyone to believe in Him, no one would be able to repel that. Instead, Allah *the Exalted* used the expression that indicates a right or freedom to choose because forcing someone to have faith rules out the possibility of having a choice regarding matters of religious responsibility in the context of Islam. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[O' Muhammad], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe? If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4)

But as the previous verse shows, Allah *the Exalted* does not want subjugated necks but rather, He wants submissive hearts. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes that verse by saying, '...but most of them are ignorant [of this].' (*al-An'am:* 111) But let us be clear, *jahl* (ignorance) is different from lack of knowledge. Rather, ignorance is a lack of proper knowledge or information, i.e. on a given subject, an ignorant person knows what contradicts it. If one does not know the subject at all, then such a person is uneducated, and it suffices for that person to be properly lectured on that given topic so that he understands it promptly. However, to reform an ignorant person, there are two issues; first, we need to remove from his understanding the false information filling his mind; secondly, we need to replace it with the correct knowledge. So, the Quranic phrase in the above verse indicating, ‘But most of them are ignorant’ means that the disbelievers have followed misguidance.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا شَيَٰطِينَ ٱلْإِنسِ وَٱلْجِنِّ يُوحِى بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ
زُخْرُفَ ٱلْقَوْلِ غُرُورًا ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ رَبُّكَ مَا فَعَلُوهُ ۖ فَذَرْهُمْ وَمَا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

In the same way We assigned to each prophet an enemy, evil humans and evil jinn. They suggest alluring words to one another in order to deceive – if it had been your Lord’s will, [Prophet], they would not have done this: leave them to their inventions [112]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 112)

With the phrase ‘And thus it is...’, the True Lord *Glorified is He* referred to the previous messengers and prophets in order to give Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the example of his brothers who preceded him in the procession of prophethood and divine messages, in order to stress the fact that he is not unprecedented, i.e. he is on the same Straight Path brought forward by the previous messengers of Allah *the Exalted* and so also in the aspect of being subject to severe criticism and enmity; that is the norm for all the prophets of Allah.

But the question is, did these enemies of those previous messengers prevail and weaken the spirit and power of those people sent by Allah *the Exalted* for guidance? Did the enemies succeed in wearing out the messengers of Allah *the Exalted* sapping their strength and their determination and turning them away from their mission, or were the messengers able to withstand and resist all that with bravery and courage? Indeed, they were brave and defiant and Allah *the Exalted* helped them and gave them victory over their enemies. So Allah *the Exalted* wanted to make this clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the same good outcome would be his in the end, especially given the fact that he is the seal of all the prophets. He is the one given the honour of bringing the final Message of Allah *the Exalted* no other divine message will come after him. By this, Allah *the Exalted* wanted to make it clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that based on this, the enmity he would face would proportionally be on par with the magnitude of his great prophetic mission, and he should not be thinking that the intention behind this enmity was to let him down, or it was just for the sake of enmity. No. Rather, the opposition and enmity faced by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was for the benefit of strengthening his Message because whoever is on a right path and committed to righteousness should never be weakened or disturbed by any evil scheme; rather, he should be more active and emboldened to move on with his good deeds. Therefore, we normally see much of religious awakenings whenever believers are challenged by enemies (the real man always gathers strength from distress and grows brave). So, if it had not been for pressure from enemies, there would be no awakening and the faith would have remained stagnant. This is what we see when there are enemies of Islam of any kind, who challenge some matter of the religion; in this situation, we find that even those who do not adhere to the way of Islam are fiercely protective over their religion.

Therefore, enmity has benefit, so one must not indulge in thinking that there is something that can prevent Allah's will *the Exalted* and plan from taking effect as He wills. Thus, it must be clear that there is a divine wisdom behind evil, otherwise, there would not be any passion for goodness if evil and harm did not exist; and (part of) what makes people enthusiastic for doing good is to pose resistance against evil (per Allah's design *the Exalted* and plan for the universe). We have explained before that falsehood is one of the factors that bring about truth because when falsehood strikes and causes turmoil amongst people they ask one another, 'When will this falsehood disappear and be replaced with truth? We really need a saviour'! Whenever you see someone suffering from pain, do not ever think that the pain is without reason. Rather, the pain is an important factor that will trigger a rigorous search for a cure. In a metaphorical sense, it is if the pain says to its victim, 'O man, take note of a disease in this part of your body, and find a cure for it'. Therefore, we find that (in some cases), the most severe, vicious and malignant diseases are those that are not preceded by any pain, and the mystery behind that does not get unravelled until several medical efforts and examinations have been exhausted by experts who leave no stone unturned until they get treatment for such diseases. This is what I mean by saying that pain is an effective means of recovery.

When you have an enemy in the neighbourhood or in the town, and his sight is focused on you, you fear yourself slipping into some fault or mistake that would allow him to expose you. For this reason, you try to adopt a proper strategy to avoid falling prey to him. An ancient poet said, as he tries to enlighten you with his poetry on this subject,

My enemies do me a favour, and I admire their kindness
    For their benefit to me, I am really grateful to them
They are like medicine and the cure that is bitter
    And thanks to Allah (the Most-Merciful) not sparring me my enemies
They were looking for me to slip but I avoided it
    And I became free of having my dignity defiled
They made me expend great effort with their hatred
    They turned to foes against me, but victory was mine over them, as well as continuing success

For this reason, you must look at everything in terms of the wisdom behind it; everything has a certain purpose that Allah *the Supreme Wise* has for bringing it into existence, just like the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed that the Islamic Message will face severe challenges and resistance so that it fortified with strength that will pave way for its eternal victory. Hence the statement of Allah *the Exalted* in this verse, ‘And thus it is that, against every prophet We have set up [as enemies] the evil forces from among humans as well as from among invisible beings that whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind. But they could not do this unless thy Sustainer had so willed: stand, therefore, aloof from them and from all their false imagery!’ (*al-An‘am:* 112)

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* set up enemies for the prophets in a way that this created some disturbances for the prophets and their followers, and the wisdom behind this was to fill the mind of the believers with a strong power of resistance which would naturally strengthen their resolve to defend themselves, warding off any feeling or sense of letting up or defeat. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘And thus it is that against every prophet, We have set up against every prophet [as enemies]...’ (*al-An‘am:* 112), i.e. they did not volunteer to be enemies but rather, they were utilized to be enemies.

But how does Allah *the Exalted* set up an enemy for every prophet? Indeed, He does so by way of the choice that He places within mankind. So long as man has a right and ability to choose, whoever chooses to follow the divine guidance and Right Path would automatically feel inclined to supporting a prophet sent to them, and those who choose misguidance are, by that very fact, the enemies of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, the aspect of enmity here is not just something that happens by chance; rather, it is through the power of will and right to choose which Allah *the Exalted* has placed in every human being.

Since Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who gives man the ability to choose, then we should understand that the reason He does that is made clear in the following verse, ‘...[and] that he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth...’ (*al-Anfal:* 42).

If Allah *the Exalted* had wanted the prophets not to have enemies, He would have done so, that is quite easy and simple for Him because He has absolute power over everything, but this would have been tantamount to compulsion, i.e. subduing everything and everybody, thus erasing power of choosing. But Allah *the Exalted* does not want to force human beings. Rather, He wants them to go to Him purely out of their own will, i.e. while they are just as capable of not going to Him. The Arabic word *`aduw* (enemy) seems to be singular, but it is used for both singular and plural. Thus you can say, ‘This person (a male) is a *`aduw* of mine’, and for a female you can equally say, ‘This sister is a *`aduw* of mine’, the Arabic word does not have a feminine word (singular) on its own. It is also used for two people, ‘These two men are a *`aduw* of mine’, or ‘These two women are a *`aduw* of mine’ because the word *`aduw* can be used for both male and female and be used for the singular, the dual and the plural. Take for instance the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘They are enemies to me, except for the Lord of the worlds.’

(*ash-Shu'ara':* 77) Another example is the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘Go down, both of you, from here, as enemies to one another.’ (*Ta Ha:* 123) Also in another verse, Allah *the Exalted* says, “...Did I not forbid that tree unto you and tell you, “Verily, Satan is your open foe (*`aduw*)?”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 22)

Allah *the Exalted* did not say *`adaa`* which is the plural form of the word *`aduw*. So the word *`aduw* can be used for male/female singular, or for two persons, male and female, and for male and female plural.

However, some of those who love to think they can correct Allah’ Speech say to one another, ‘How can Allah *the Exalted* use the Arabic *`aduw* in its singular form in all the above-mentioned verses’? Satan is an enemy *`aduw* and they are an enemy *`aduw*, i.e. by using a singular form of *`aduw* in all these cases whereas after that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...And remember the blessings which Allah has bestowed upon you; how, when you were enemies (*`adaa`*), He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 103).

We say to those people, ‘You have forgotten that the one speaking is Allah *the Sublime*. Enmity is of two kinds. If there is a plurality of enemies and with a common interest in taking someone as enemy such that they are united in their enmity, then they are one enemy (*`aduw*) because they share a common purpose. However, if the reasons for enmity are varied, then the matter is different. Your good handsomeness may cause enmity between you and someone, while being intelligent can create enmity between you and someone else, and your wealth may be the reason why others take you as enemy and so on. If the reasons are varied then each one of them becomes an enemy in his own right, and thus gathered together they are considered enemies, thus the Arabic word *`adaa`* is properly applied here. ‘And thus it is that, against every prophet We have set up [as enemies] the jinn from among humans as well as from among invisible beings that whisper unto one another...’ (*al-An‘am:* 112).

Devils, human beings and jinn, as Arabic grammarians say, are a substitute for an enemy. And the Arabic word *shayatin,* (devils) is the plural of the Arabic word *shaytan* the accursed, rejected, and the loathsome, whether he is from the human beings or the jinn ‘...that whispers unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind...' (*al-An'am:* 112). The Arabic word *wahi* means to pass on information secretly, so why do they, the devils whisper unto one another? It is because the predominance of truth had not made them capable of speaking openly to one another. Therefore, they conspire with each other, but people who say truth have nothing to hide, so they move about it openly.

'...They whisper unto one another...' (*al-An'am:* 112). Who is the one whispering? Who are they whispering to? We do not have any say on this subject; the word *wahi* means to pass on information secretly, whether it is inspiration of the soul, by way of indication, by way of scheming, by way of whispering or through a messenger that we do not see. All these are means and mechanisms of what the word *wahi* stands for, for both good and evil purposes.

If the whispering is from the devils amongst the jinn*,* do not expect anything from their whispering except evil; that is a fact. Likewise, there are devils amongst human beings who are also evil whisperers, and this is confirmed by the True Lord in His statement, '...that whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind...' (*al-An'am:* 112). What is meant here is that the devils enter matters and try to change their form through adornment, and so they do to man by filling him with deceptive desires. That is why Allah *the Exalted* called what devils do 'whispering' (*waswasa* in Arabic). As we know, tangible words are used to have our expressions meaningful and clear, so part of the meaning of *waswasa* refers to the rustling sound of jewellery. And so Allah *the Exalted* chose that word to refer to what the devils from amongst man and jinn engage in; He deliberately chose that specific expression because with its rustling (*waswasa*) sound, jewellery also dazzles and entices people with its preciousness and its great value. *Waswasa* is also done secretly.

'...whisper unto one another...' (*al-An'am:* 112). This refers to the devils amongst man and jinn*,* as man whispers to man by embellishing sin and disobedience for him, as well as getting obsessed with deceptive desires, jinn whisper to jinn because they are also legally responsible. Likewise, jinn whisper to man: '...that whispers unto one another glittering half-truths...' (*al-An'am:* 112).

Zukhruf (glittering half-truth) is something that is outwardly embellished but is inwardly corrupt. *The Almighty*, said, “And gold ornament. But all that is not but the enjoyment of worldly life. And the Hereafter with your Lord is for the righteous.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 35), i.e. things that are outwardly embellished, but they do not have any profundity, or longevity or value.

‘...that whispers unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind...’ (*al-An‘am:* 112). This is to delude and deceive them into doing and saying things of disobedience, and if the devils did not present disobedience with adorning and embellishing words, their tricks would not work; they would never be able to get people to engage in it. They show and present charms of disobedience in a very deceptive fashion. For example, you will not find someone saying to another, ‘Drink wine so that you can get liver cirrhosis’. Rather, he will try to deceive him by saying, ‘Drink wine so that you can forget your worries, be happy, and enjoy yourself’.

‘...glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind...*’* (*al-Ana’m:* 112), i.e. the devils employ deception to delude their victims, making them believe that everything is fine, and there is no harm in committing disobedience and sinful acts.

Allah *the Exalted* then continues, ‘...But they could not do this unless thy Sustainer had so willed...’ (*al-An‘am:* 112). Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who has given His creatures the choice to be either believers or disbelievers, guided or misguided, to follow His light or be led astray by the devil (by wallowing in darkness); and there is day, i.e. the Day of Judgment when everybody will be called to account, and the outcome will either be a blissful reward from Allah *the Exalted* for whoever is righteous and faithful, or severe punishment for the disbelievers. That is why Allah *the Exalted* does not force people when it comes to the issue of faith because it would amount to injustice to force people to disbelieve and then punish them for that; no, that is not what Allah *the Exalted* does, He is the Supreme, the Just. But we find those who say, ‘Why is there punishment when nothing in the universe takes place without Allah’s will? We say, ‘Yes, everything is from Allah’s doing because the cause of choice is from Allah *the Exalted* the One Who created choice. Thus, it would be impossible for a person to turn a disbeliever without predestination (divine decree and afore-time knowledge of Allah), yet it is required of him to believe because his nature, as created by Allah *the Exalted* can choose either disbelief or faith.

Therefore, with the power of choice that Allah *the Exalted* created in man, he can choose between doing and not doing in certain matters. Thus, those who maintain an argument that every action is from Allah *the Exalted,* i.e. there is nothing man can do without the power of Allah *the Exalted* we say to them, ‘Your point of argument is correct’. And as for those who say that, ‘all of man’s actions (including belief and disbelief) are a product of his own doing not from Allah *the Exalted*’, we would also say to them, ‘Your position is correct’; but the truth is: it is the Almighty Allah, Our Lord Who created man with the ability to do certain things as if he was the one directing all the will and power to have them done. To prove this further, take note of the fact that every action comes from Allah *Exalted is He*. It is neither you, for example, that created the power that allows your hands to lift things, nor did you create the power that allows your hands to grasp. When you want to grasp with your hand, which muscles do you move to do so? You do not know. You grasp with your hand simply because of your will to do so. But take note that Allah *the Exalted* the One who filled you with this power commands you not to use them to subjugate others (or to be unjust to them). Rather, He wants you to use those powers for the benefit of mankind. The hand can strike and it is also able to do good work, and you neither have any control on the power that controls your hand (or muscles that move it), nor did you create the means for that power to be affected by your will.

‘...But they could not do this unless thy Sustainer had so willed...’ (*al-An‘am:* 112), i.e. if Allah *the Exalted* had wanted it (the devil’s whisper) not to be done, He would have done so because He has absolute power and no one is ever able to escape from His Will. We see that the sky, the earth and everything created, apart from human beings, is subjugated to the Will of Allah *Exalted is He*. So, why do we take examples from the sky, the earth, plants, inanimate objects, and animals? Take the example of yourself. You have things within your body over which you have no control and you have no choice regarding them. Can you choose, for instance, to be sick or remain healthy? No. If you are struck by a stone while walking, is that by your choice? Or if you get hit by a drunk driver, is that what you willed for yourself? Do you have any control in that?

And with regards to death, is that a matter of choice for you to die or not to die? So, what we need to understand clearly is that Allah *the Exalted* in His Absolute Power disposes His affairs on you in two ways: He subjects you, on some issues, to His absolute control so that you do such things instinctively, while at the same time He allows you have some kind of control over other things, and being able to choose here is a strong proof that man is responsible from the Islamic legal perspectives.

Allah *the Exalted* continues by concluding the above verse, '...therefore, aloof from them and from all their false imagery!' (*al-An'am:* 112). This shows that their false imagery, lies, and deceptions will never change the reality of the matter at all. Contrary to their belief, nothing of their evil scheme will hinder the Message. Rather, what will their false scheme, plotting and enmity to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* turn to? All this will turn to fuel that will ignite strong light of belief and passion for the message of Islam; and this will also purify the message from all defects and defilements, so that this will bring forth true and strong believers completely purified and filled with the attributes of goodness: '...for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17).

If it were not for such awakening, emanated from the above-mentioned process of indirect purification, the message of Islam would have been filled with useless and worthless people (for being ignorant about the religion), and Islam would have been high jacked by people with no sound knowledge about the value of faith and religion. So, it happens that (sometimes) Allah *the Exalted* uses Islam's enemies and antagonists as an indirect means of purification for the adherents of the religion in a way that the Message of Islam would be purged of people with weak belief and unsound faith, who would have been otherwise a burden to the religion, rather than being its supporters. So at the end of the day, what will remain are the true adherents of Islam. I mean the residual of this purification process will be those who are sincere in their truthfulness with Allah *the Exalted* and steadfastness in their belief. Allah *the Exalted* said, 'Had these [hypocrites] set out with you, [O believers,] they would have added nothing to you, save the evil of corruption...' (*at-Tawba:* 47).

It is from Divine Wisdom of Allah *the Exalted* that He frustrated the plan of the hypocrites and weakened their desire, so that they could not go out and fight with the believers. 'For, had they been [truly] desirous of setting out [with thee], they would surely have made some preparation therefore, but Allah was averse to their taking the field, and so He caused them to hold back when it was said, "You may stay at home with all [the others] who stay at home."' (*at-Tawba:* 46)

In the previous verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...whisper unto one another glittering half-truths…' (*al-An'am:* 112). The phrase 'glittering half-truths' (*zukhruf al-qawl*) is a form of deceptively sugar-coated talk that sways some listeners. One may get away with it at first instance without having any effect on the hearts or souls, but once it is repeated and it keeps recurring, it may have negative effects on people with weak belief and thus leading them astray. How do these people proceed?

وَلِتَصۡغَىٰٓ إِلَيۡهِ أَفۡـِٔدَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ
وَلِيَرۡضَوۡهُ وَلِيَقۡتَرِفُواْ مَا هُم مُّقۡتَرِفُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

So that the hearts of those who do not believe in the
Hereafter may incline towards their deceit, be pleased
with it, and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate [113]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 113)

This indicates that the people who believe in the Hereafter will never have anything to do with such deceptive talk and they will not get inclined towards it. Whenever they are exposed to such sinful atmosphere, no matter how exciting and alluring it is, they will never get deluded by it, as if they ask themselves, 'How long will the pleasure of this disobedience last, two minutes, an hour, a month? What will I do on the Day of Resurrection when I am subject to questioning in front of the Mighty Lord; and upon that my fate will either be Paradise or be thrown into the Hell-Fire'? Therefore, the ears and heart of the one who believes in the Hereafter do not accept such glittering half-truths. No one accepts them except one who does not believe in the Hereafter, and is only obsessed with the enjoyment of the worldly life; and tricks himself by getting indulged into the 'temporary enjoyment' of life'. So by this, if every Muslim could picture the kind horrifying punishment behind committing disobedience, they would not do it. It is just only then one is heedless of the punishment that Satan succeeds in leading one to sinful acts. But surprisingly, how come, that in this worldly life, we fear punishment from one another though our ability to punish is quite limited, and we take the incessant warning of punishment from the Mighty Allah *the Exalted* the One Who has All-Dominant Power to punish lightly? That is why we find those who remember the Hereafter remembering the punishment and thus stay away from it whenever disobedience is presented to them 'so that the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter may incline towards their deceit, be pleased with it, and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate' (*al-An'am:* 113).

The Arabic word *al-isgha`*, (inclining towards) refers to the act of paying attention, that is, the inclination of the ears towards someone speaking because you could hear someone speaking without paying attention to him. For instance, walking in the street, one hears lots of things, but he does not stop at everything he hears, and that is normal. Rather, one tends to pay attention only when the ears hear something very important. This is why it is called, in this case, *tasammu`* (listening) and not *sam`* (hearing), so, that is what is meant by *al-isgha`,* and this is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, in one of his Ahadith, 'Whoever listens to a woman who sings with moral depravity (*ghaniyah*)*...'* – he did not say, 'Whoever hears...' Another example is what happens whenever someone moves around and hears a song on the radio, He hears with his ears, a normal human tool for encompassing sound within a certain range, so it is not an open-ended tool. Thus, in such case, we do not refer to that person by saying, 'he lends his ear'. The same thing applies to the eyes, another tool for man encompassing sight. And as we know, the eye does not see when it is shut, it only sees when it is open. But the ears do not have lids, so they cannot be told to hear something and not hear something else.

Therefore, man has no choice with regards to hearing, but he does have a choice with regards to what he listens to so '…that the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter may incline towards their deceit, be pleased with it, and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate.’ (*al-An‘am:* 113) This verse also refers to something in the heart that makes one seek to hear, i.e. it resonates with one’s core. But at the same time, it happens that one passes by something else and does not look at it, one just passes by it with sheer disregard. The Arabic word *al-f'ida* refers to the hearts, and though it is true that with the ears, one pays attention, but it is the hearts that listen to what is said and perceive it. So, this verse strengthens the fact it is with the whole body (heart and soul) the disbeliever uses to pay attention to such words of deceit, thus disbelieving that there is a Hereafter and by being completely indulged in the pleasure of the worldly life; his heart and soul will never consider the Hereafter. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses this expression that refers to the flow of attentiveness from the ears to the heart, and this is perception.‘…so that the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter may incline towards their deceit…’ (*al-An‘am:* 113). Then the second and third phases are mentioned: ‘(so that the hearts)….be pleased with it, and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate.’ (*al-An‘am:* 113)

It is possible that someone might listen to something and, being alerted by his reproachful self, then becomes unable to respond. However, there are those who listen to something and feel happy and pleased with what they hear. Then they move towards action and committing sin. These are three phases. The first is, ‘…so that the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter may incline towards their deceit…’ Then the second phase is, ‘be pleased with it,’ and then the third phase is, ‘...and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate.’ (*al-An‘am:* 113), i.e. that they commit sin.

This matter has defined for us, the conscious phenomena studied by psychologists, i.e. the symptoms or levels of feeling. One of them is ‘aptitude’, i.e. having fondness for something, as expressed in the above verse, ‘...may incline towards’, the other one is, ‘strong feeling of joy’, also expressed in the verse, ‘be pleased with it’, and the last one is, ‘being emotionally drawn to it’ as the verse also clarifies, ‘…and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate.’ (*al-An‘am:* 113)

Look at how the Quran remarkably preceded psychology in describing the different phases of human nature namely, aptitude, strong feeling of joy and then acting upon those feelings. It is to be clarified that Islamic Law does not intervene when feelings manifest themselves, except when someone moves towards action, but this is only when it is possible to separate between acting upon the feeling, having feelings and realisation. This is one of the very critical areas, and the law intervenes right from the beginning, and this is what happens in the process of man staring at women because what normally follows a lustful gaze is an emotional attraction in the sense that the person feels attracted to the woman, feeling passionate about her and then captivated by her beauty, charm etc. But in Islamic Law, it is not permissible for the person to act upon those feelings in a sinful way. If you take a step towards her, the law says to you, 'No!' This is because the law realises the fact that all those steps are linked together normally, so this might automatically lead to a sinful act. So, given the fact that these emotional parts of human nature are normally interlinked; feelings follow perception, which also ultimately lead to actions. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded Muslims to keep away, taking precautionary steps right from the beginning: 'Tell the believing men to lower their gaze... And tell the believing women to lower their gaze...' (*an-Nur:* 30-31).

So we see from this verse, that lustful looks towards the opposite sex is categorically prohibited from the outset, and in Islamic Law, there is no waiting for the feelings to be acted upon, if the aim and objective behind that is unlawful. Why? It is because the outcome of perceiving beauty in everything is different from that of getting attracted to a woman's beauty, which, whenever it occurs, produces a kind of chemical process in the body of the person, and drives him under the impulse of emotion to act upon that feeling. As we have said, the process is completely inter-related and can never be broken down.

Allah says: 'So that the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter may incline towards their deceit, be pleased with it, and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate.' (*al-An'am:* 113)

Whenever we use the Arabic word *ma,* and followed by a sense that indicates vagueness, this shows that the sentence is about something great in number or magnitude. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says, '...and they were overwhelmed by the sea which was destined to overwhelm them' (*Ta Ha:* 78), i.e. it is a matter that cannot be defined in words, just like the words of Allah *the Exalted* in the above verse, '...and so perpetrate whatever they perpetrate', and the meaning of this is, everyone commits, earns, acts and perpetrates whatever their soul is inclined to; such as those who slander, or harbour grudges, envy, steal etc. and the verse strengthens the fact that passions of the soul are unlimited. Therefore, a term is used to indicate generality.

So, as long as the matter regards prophecy and challenges facing the act of adhering to the Divine Message preached by Allah's prophets and also considering the fact that satanic enemies, from man and the jinn, form evil schemes against this message, whispering unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude people's mind, then this is a serious matter, i.e. a very challenging situation which is expected to continue until there is a divine intervention from the Mighty Allah Who gives a verdict. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is making it clear to his Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'O Muhammad! I have sent you and you will have enemies that will plot against you, they will exert every conceivable effort to harm you and those who follow you. Thus, beware of seeking a verdict from other than Me, because I am the Legislator and I am the Most Just. I am the One who dispenses reward'.

Why? This is because the subject matter here is about what Allah *the Exalted* has legislated, and it is not right or correct for someone to come along and try to insinuate what is not intended by Allah *the Exalted*. It is inconceivable for man, with his limited faculty, to act as if he is able to outmanoeuvre Allah *the Exalted* in the matter of legislation, disregarding the fact that this is outside the scope of man-made law. No. This is a matter that falls exclusively in the jurisdiction of Allah *the Exalted* the Most-Wise and the One Who laid down the law, and He knows best what He intends by them. He knows what the clear truth is and He is the One Who is the best to judge. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am only a human being, and you people come to me with your cases; and it may be that one of you is able to present his case eloquently in a more convincing way than the other, and I give my verdict per what I hear. So, if ever I judge (by error) and give the right of a brother to his other (brother) then he (the latter) should not take it, for I am giving him only a piece of the Fire.'(1) So no one should take this as a basis for claiming that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave a judgment (so how come are we saying this is not within human's mental capacity?) No. What Prophet Muhammad did is to judge this case per what was presented to him, i.e. based on the evidence and proofs presented by the litigants, and as we know, one party may have a stronger case, while the other is not very good in expressing themselves. Therefore, even in this case, the real judge is Allah *the Exalted* (not the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*) because He is the One Who legislated. As long as He is the One Who legislated, then He is the One Who judges between us, so whoever has any case against someone should not have any panic about the verdict because he should have faith that the One Who will render the judgement is Allah *the Exalted* whose Judgment is of absolute Justice.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَغَيۡرَ ٱللَّهِ أَبۡتَغِي حَكَمٗا وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَنزَلَ إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مُفَصَّلٗاۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ
ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ يَعۡلَمُونَ أَنَّهُۥ مُنَزَّلٞ مِّن رَّبِّكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلۡمُمۡتَرِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾

[Say], 'Shall I seek any judge other than God, when it is He who has sent down for you [people] the Scripture, clearly explained?' Those to whom We gave the Scripture know that this [Quran] is revealed by your Lord [Prophet] with the truth, so do not be one of those who doubt [114] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 114)

This verse shows that Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who judges and He is the One Who legislated. He knows the law and He knows who follows the law and who contravenes the law. So the above verse, 'Say, "Am I, then, to look unto anyone but Allah for judgement...' shows that having strong belief in the meaning and connotation of that verse makes one confident in the divine support of Allah *the Exalted* because He never fails anyone who relies on Him, just as He orders us, 'Do not seek judgement from other than Allah *Exalted is He*', He will never fail you if you heed His instruction. This is why the matter is presented in the form of a question. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says conveying from his Lord, '...when it is He who has bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, clearly spelling out the truth...' (*al-An'am:* 114). Notice that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, 'He is the One Who has bestowed the Book upon me'. Rather, in conveying from the Mighty Lord, he said, '...when it is He who has bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, clearly spelling out the truth...'. The message here is that it is as if the enmity is not only directed towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but rather, the enmity is toward the entire Muslim community, and Allah's judgement. Even though the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* his mission was to convey the Divine Message to all mankind, and therein a great objective for the believers, all of them, to carry forth the message. This is how enmity directed at Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is enmity to all his followers. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed the above verse in the form of a question, and telling His Prophet to say to them, '…Am I, then, to look unto anyone but Allah *the Exalted* for judgement...' (*al-An'am:* 114), in line with His other remarkable message in the previous verse, 'And thus it is that against every prophet, We have set up [as enemies] the evil forces from among humans as well as from among invisible beings...' (*al-An'am:* 112).

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(1) *Narrated by Malik, Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nisa`i, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

Therefore, an enemy of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is also an enemy of those who believe and follow him, but the peak of enmity is the one directed against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is sent by Allah *the Exalted* '...And those unto whom We have given revelation a foretime know that this one, too, has been bestowed from on high, step by step, by thy Sustainer, setting forth the truth. Be not, then, among the doubters.' (*al-An'am:* 114)

The phrase '...by thy Sustainer, setting forth the truth...' is an impetus for the believers to realise that every matter behind this divine message comes back to them with benefit because the main objective of sending down the Book (the Glorious Quran) is for them to be guided; they are the first target (but from them and through them the light of message will beam throughout the universe). So, the believers should know that they have many benefits to gain behind the revelation of the Glorious Quran; it will not add anything to Allah *the Exalted* in His majesty and Glory. It will neither add anything to Allah *the Exalted* in His divinely beautiful attributes nor increase Him in His Sovereignty. Rather, you, the believer, should know that you are part of the main objective.

‘Say, “Am I, then, to look unto anyone but Allah *the Exalted* for judgment [as to what is right and wrong], when it is He who has bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ...’ (*al-An‘am:* 114). This indicates that Allah, *Glorified is He* did not send down the Quran without spelling out the truth, so there is no any cause for confusion whatsoever. ‘...And those unto whom We have given revelation a foretime know that this one, too, has been bestowed from on high, step by step, by thy Sustainer, setting forth the truth. Be not, then, among the doubters’ (*al-An‘am:* 114).

The phrase ‘those who were given revelation a foretime’ is referring to the Jews and Christians because they are supposedly equipped with knowledge about Prophet Muhammad’s *peace and blessings be upon him* attributes. They know your description and they know a lot about your Book (the Quran). Therefore, everything that is connected to you is not strange to them, but the bane is that they have adopted two different aspects of faith; they openly practice one of these two versions, forthcoming in any questions related to it, but the other one is hidden. In this form of faith (for them), they make secret everything hidden, and they forbid any questioning about it. They do not even accept any discussion about it. If you get a fact, a very undeniable fact, and try to convince them with it, they will not accept it. What is it that has made them so? It is because they have gone through two situations: first, when they were the bearers of the divine message brought to them by the previous messengers, they were opposed by those who disbelieved in heavenly revealed religions such as idol-worshippers and polytheists. Allah *the Exalted* has this to say about them, ‘...and [bear in mind that] a foretime they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the truth...’ (*al-Baqara:* 89). So, you can see per this verse, they took the disbelievers (the pagans and idol worshippers) as enemies and their main concern at that time was to achieve victory over these disbelievers. And they used to say, ‘Very soon a prophet will come and we will follow him, and with him we will destroy the disbelievers the way the People of `Ad and people of the city of Aram were destroyed.

But surprisingly, when what they knew (and were waiting for) came to them they disbelieved in it because 'They have exchanged the signs of Allah for a small price and averted [people] from His way. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing. (*at-Tawba:* 9)

The bargain they conducted was for having the prophethood remain in their own ancestry, but the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* drew the curtain down on their prophetic lineage, removing from them any kind of religious authority, especially given the fact that in Islam there is no authority for the priesthood or the clergy. They wanted to remain in their positions of leadership, but they bartered Allah's signs for a trifling gain. '...And those unto whom We have given revelation a foretime know that this one, too, has been bestowed from on high, step by step, by thy Sustainer, setting forth the truth. Be not, then, among the doubters.' (*al-An'am:* 114)

They (the Jews and the Christians) know that the Quran was sent down from Allah *the Exalted* setting forth the truth. They know that what they are divulging is false – therefore, as I have said above, there are clear facts they know about the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and this is a well-established fact among them, but rather than coming forth with this truth, they go out proclaiming falsehood, contrary to what they know is the truth. Hence, Allah *the Exalted* in the following statement, was alerting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* "…Be not, then, among the doubters' (*al-An'am:* 114), i.e. do not have doubt that the people of the Book know that the Quran is sent down from your Lord, setting out the truth. This is an address to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and we know, in grammatical terms, that in a communication between two people, when a second person tense is used to request something that is already being done, then what is meant is that such action needs persistence with no relenting efforts. The objective behind this is to ward off anything that might shake confidence and belief. So Allah *the Exalted* used that tense to strengthen Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* belief and steadfastness. Another meaning for the above verse might be that it is used to spur him up into taking further action, or it might also be a means of warning the believers from being distracted, as Allah *the Exalted* told them not to have any doubt or scepticism.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says after that:

وَتَمَّتۡ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ صِدۡقٗا وَعَدۡلٗاۚ لَّا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَٰتِهِۦۚ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ﴿١١٥﴾

The word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice.
No one can change His words: He is the All Hearing, the
All Knowing [115] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 115)

The phrase *tammat* (been fulfilled) indicates that the subject matter here has a beginning and an end. But let us pause and ask this question, ‘What is meant by the word *kalima* (word) has been fulfilled’? Is it Allah’s Exalted Promise to eventually give victory to Islam, and put an end to all this kind of antagonism posed against it, or is it referring to the complete fulfilment of the Message of Islam (i.e. being provided with all what it needs to be strong and solid), as this can be inferred from the words of Allah *the Exalted* when He said, ‘’This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion” (*al-Ma‘ida:* 3)? Or is it referring to the Quran? What we can say here is that the meaning of ‘been fulfilled’ encompasses all the issues of life, and this will remain a fact forever, i.e. nothing is beyond Allah’s control. And this also means that nobody will be able to amend any ruling stated and clarified in His Book (the Noble Quran) because the rulings cover all matters. Let us take note also that the Arabic word *kalima* here is singular, but it can have a plural meaning. When you hear someone saying, ‘So-and-so gave an excellent speech’, described in Arabic as *kalima tayyiba*, ‘and was received with approval and applause’, what is intended is that the person spoke words (*kalimat* in Arabic) but the normal and correct expression used for that is *kalima* in the singular to indicate that ‘he gave a speech’. Therefore, what is meant by ‘And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled…’ (*al-An‘am:* 115) is the way that comprises all of life. Read the words of Allah, ‘...Dreadful is the word that comes out of their mouths...’ (*al-Kahf:* 5).

Is it a word or words? It is indeed a statement that contains words; therefore the Arabic word *kalima* can be used and intended for a singular term and it can also be used and intended for speech (as we say in Arabic *kalaam*). Originally, *kalima* is a singular word, i.e. there is no other word with it, but it needs to give a meaningful sentence. If the meaning is not independently understood and it needs a supplement for us to understand it then is a particle. Take for instance, the Arabic letter *fi* which means 'in' in English. It indicates an adverbial of time or place, but it is not independently understood. This is because it is a preposition, and a preposition requires a deposition (*mazhruf*) and an adverbial complement (in Arabic, *mazhruf fi*). You say in a sentence, for instance, 'The water is in the cup', showing that the meaning can be independently understood. Likewise, when you hear a sentence where the preposition 'from' (*min*, in Arabic) you understand that this gives a sense of beginning, just as the preposition 'to' (*`ila* in Arabic) gives a sense of an end. If the word indicates a meaning that is independently understood, but it is not connected to time, then this is a noun, if time is part of its indication then it is a verb. As for the Arabic word *kalam* (speech), it refers to words that carry complete meaning.

When you hear the word 'sky' you understand the meaning, and the same goes for when you hear the word 'earth'; in such words, the intended meanings are independently understood. When you hear the phrase *kataba* (he wrote), it indicates a meaning that is independently understood, and time is a part of the verb. 'He wrote' indicates the past tense, 'he writes' indicates the present tense, while 'he will write' indicates an action of writing in the future. Therefore, *kalima* is a term that indicates a meaning. If it is not independently understood, it is a particle, and could also mean 'speech' (*kalam*).

So, the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled…' (*al-An'am:* 115) means many things. If it refers to the Quran, then what is meant is His word. We call Allah's speech (*kalam*) because what it indicates is one word, and this divine word is a complete expression of its own, with no discrepancy therein. So, if we understand the above verse as referring to the Quran, then we should understand that the noble Quran contains every matter and every issue in existence, and it is a complete expression of Allah's rulings and orders, with no letter to be omitted or altered in it. Rather, it has remained perfectly comprehensive, and will remain as such ever since it was revealed, unlike what happened to the previous heavenly revealed Books, they got distorted by the people sent to, as they tampered with them, concealing, and altering some of what was revealed in them. The people upon whom those books were revealed were entrusted with the task of preserving them; i.e. they were made religiously responsible to take care of these scriptures. And as is natural with any religious obligations, they are sometimes obeyed and sometimes disobeyed. So, what happened is that these people (followers of the previous prophets) were not consistent in observing the obligation of preserving these scriptures, and the proof is what Allah *the Exalted* said in the following: ‘Lo! We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the prophets who surrendered (unto Allah), judged the Jews, and the rabbis and the priests (judged) by such of Allah’s Scripture as they were bidden to observe...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 44).

Notice the phrase ‘…bidden to observe...’, it means that they were asked to preserve it (the scripture). So, there is a sense of being religiously responsible, and this obligation can be obeyed or disobeyed. However, the matter is different with regards to the Quran. The True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘Behold, it is We Ourselves who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this reminder: and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it [from all corruption].’ (*al-Hijr:* 9)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who preserves the Quran. So, this is not a duty for human beings because the Quran is a miracle and those who are religiously responsible never have anything to do with something of a divine magnitude and a miracle like the Quran.

Therefore, what is meant by the words of Allah *the Exalted* ‘And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled…’ (*al-An‘am:* 115) is that you should rest assured that the Quran is already divinely preserved, and that it is going to remain as a fact until the Day of Judgment; nothing is going to change that; it is not going to be tampered with, not even a word. The proof for that is the fact that one always gets amazed by the Quran. One of these amazing aspects is that when one finds a verse from the Quran, which is similar to another, one will quickly notice that the context is different. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘No! Indeed, the Quran is a reminder. Then whoever wills will remember it.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 54-55).

In another verse, He says: ‘Nay, verily, these [messages] are but a reminder and so, whoever is willing may remember Him.’ (*‘Abasa:* 11-12). And also in another verse, He says: ‘Indeed, this is a reminder, so he who wills may take to his Lord a way.’ (*al-Insan:* 29). This is a type and kind of similarity between some of the verses, but what are we requested to do to properly comprehend the Quran? Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘So when We have recited it [through Gabriel], then follow its recitation.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 18)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Truly, a happy state shall attain the believers. Those who humble themselves in their prayer and who turn away from all that is frivolous and who are intent on inner purity and who are mindful of their chastity, not giving way to their desires with any but their spouses – that is, those whom they rightfully possess [through wedlock]: for then, behold, they are free of all blame, whereas such as seek to go beyond that [limit] are truly transgressors; and who are faithful to their trusts and to their pledges, and who guard their prayers from all worldly intent…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 1-9). In another verse, He repeats same wording saying, ‘and who guard their prayers [from all worldly intent].’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 34) All of this shows you that every word has come to you as it was sent down, and this is how the promise of your Lord has been fulfilled.

Or, another meaning for the statement of Allah *the Exalted* ‘And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled…’ (*al-An‘am:* 115) is that it is directed at strengthening the fact that Allah’s word is supreme, but it is worth mentioning that the issue about the supremacy of Allah’s, words, as an ordinary statement (in the context of condemning the words of disbelievers as falsehood), but rather, it was mentioned as an established fact that should not be taken with a grain of salt. About the words of the disbelievers, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘...and brought utterly low the word of those who were bent on denying the truth...’ (*at-Tawba:* 40).

In the grammatical context, there is a brief deliberate departure from the norm here. If this statement would have been out the context of the Quran, it would have been put this way, ‘And He made the word of Allah supreme' (as if Allah *the Exalted* was trying to prove His words are supreme, no!) rather than that, He says, '…and brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah's cause remained supreme.' (*at-Tawba:* 40)

By this Allah *the Exalted* wants us to understand that His word is always supreme and dominant, and it is not something He has just done, nay; Allah's words have been perfectly supreme since the beginning of time, and so this will remain eternally, and this is a strong proof that His promise and decree will always come to pass, sooner or later.

We notice that the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled…' (*al-An'am:* 115), comes after, 'Say, "Am I, then, to look unto anyone but Allah for judgment [as to what is right and wrong]...' (*al-An'am:* 14). So, try to examine the procession of Allah's divine messages right from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* up to the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and look how Allah *the Exalted* judged between those who attempted to suppress the Message of Truth, and those who remained steadfast upholding the Truth, and how He judged between those who are guided and those who are misguided. Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'For every one of them did We take to task for his sin: and so, upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm wind...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

The Arabic word *al-hasib* refers to a blowing and strong wind that carries stones, and it was a punishment for the people of `Ad. Also Allah *the Exalted* says, '...and some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40). This is referring to the people of Thamud. One time Allah *the Exalted* calls it a *sayha* (blast) and another time He calls it *taghiya* (a violent upheaval): 'Now as for Thamud – they were destroyed by a violent upheaval [of the earth].' (*al-Haqqa:* 5)

And in another occasion, what happened is that the earth swallowed up the disbelievers such as what happened to Qarun (Korah), 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling…' (*al-Qasas:* 81). And likewise, '…and some of them We caused to drown…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40). And, in another instance, Allah *the Exalted* caused the people of Pharaoh to drown, and likewise He caused to drown – before them – the people of Noah *peace be upon him*. Therefore, considering the above, it is clear every people (who dared to stage antagonism and enmity against the Message of Truth) received their due judgment from the Mighty Allah *Exalted is He*. And in a context of directing this message to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, as if Allah *the Exalted* is telling him, 'But you O Muhammad, are different from them (from those people of the previous prophets', and so likewise the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who have become entrusted with the great task of carrying forth the light of the Divine Message. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Moreover, We would never chastise any community for the wrong they may do until We have sent an apostle [to them].' (*al-Isra':* 15)

After the True Lord sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He said, 'But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness.' (*al-Anfal:* 33) Therefore, 'And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in justice. None can alter His words, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.' (*al-An'am:* 115)

'And Our word has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers; that indeed, they would be those given victory and [that] indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome. (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) You are the ones who will gain victory because you belong to the dominant religion, and to attain victory as a dominant religion you are required to be faithful. If you support this religion by following it, then the One who sent it down will grant you victory, for Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, '...Allah has written, "I shall most certainly win, I and My Messengers…"' (*al-Mujadala:* 21). What Allah *Glorified is He* says becomes a reality and what we see as a reality conforms to His words.

'The Word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice. No one can change His Words: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.' (*al-An'am:* 115) This means that the real universe matches what Allah *Glorified is He* says. How can reality be true and just at the same time? Let us suppose that you have brought a tutor for your child, and this tutor is, by chance, your child's teacher at school. You told the teacher that you wanted your child to pass the exams.

The teacher promised you to fulfil this. When the exams came, the child passed. Thus, the teacher's promise came true, but is it just? The teacher could have prepared the questions of the exams and informed the child on them beforehand. In this case, it is unjust to have the child pass the exams. In contrast, Allah's Promise corresponds to what He says and the fulfilment of this promise on the ground conforms to what He says. This promise is also just because Allah *Glorified is He* makes recompense and punishment clear: 'The Word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice....' (*al-An'am:* 115) This is because there is no power that could alter Allah's Words and there is no other deity to oppose Him; thus, He has absolute power.

With regards to human beings, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches His servants to adhere to truth in their speech, advising them, 'Do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow," without adding, "Allah willing…"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24). Doing things tomorrow is a matter related to the future over which we have no control. Thus, protect yourself and say, 'Allah willing', if something does not happen, you should say that Our Lord has not willed what you have promised to do. You thus prove yourself truthful and safeguard yourself from being a liar. You should only speak per your potential and means because when you say that you will do something tomorrow, you do not guarantee that you are going to live until then in the light of changing events and circumstances. Meanwhile, if Allah *Glorified is He* says that He will do something, He has absolute power to do so.

'The Word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice. No one can change His Words: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.' (*al-An'am:* 115) Since words are fulfilled and judgements are issued, then this is evidence that Allah *Glorified is He* is All-hearing of what they have said in their enmity, and He is All Knowing of the plots that they have hatched. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is the One Who says in the same chapter, '...The evil ones incite their followers to argue with you...' (*al-An'am:* 121). This means that those devils teach their followers in secret. If their speech is clear, then it can be heard; and if it is in secret then it can be known.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says after that:

وَإِن تُطِعۡ أَكۡثَرَ مَن فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِۚ إِن
يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا ٱلظَّنَّ وَإِنۡ هُمۡ إِلَّا يَخۡرُصُونَ ١١٦

If you obeyed most of those on earth, they would lead you away from the path of God. They follow nothing but speculation; they are merely guessing [116]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 116)

“If you obeyed those on earth...” are those who are legally competent because they can choose and they have commands and prohibitions. Commands apply only to man. The opposite of *akthar* (most) does not necessarily mean ‘little’ or ‘lesser’. Mentioning of ‘most’ could mean, per Arabic, that the rest may be many (*katheer*). This latter adjective (*katheer*) indicates that a given thing has a quantity of its own and does not depend on another thing. In this regard, we have heard several people say that the following phrase was once written at the country’s main train station, airport or harbour, ‘O you visitor of Egypt, there are many like you’. This means that if you are a good man, you will find many like you; and if you are wicked, you will also find many like you.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘Do you not realise [Muhammad] that everything in the heavens and earth submitted to Allah; the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees and the animals? So do many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved....’ (*al-Hajj:* 18) All beings are subjected and subjugated. Concerning mankind, there is a difference as they are granted free will to choose. Some people obey and some people disobey. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘all human beings’, but He says, ‘*many* human beings’. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘though for a few others punishment is well deserved’ but He, says, ‘though for *many* others punishment is well deserved’. Thus, these are many and those are many too. If you look at each group of people, you will basically find them many. Why does the True Lord then say, ‘If you obeyed most of those on earth, they would lead you away from the Path of Allah…’? (*al-An‘am:* 116) ‘Obedience’ means responding to the command of ‘do’ and the prohibition of ‘do not do’. When the True Lord

Glorified is He orders man to do such and such, he has the choice to do or not to do. And when the True Lord *Glorified is He* orders man not to do such and such, he has the same choice. If there is something beyond your power, Allah *Glorified is He* will never order you to do it. Man is always commanded to do or not to do for his own benefit. Man can also benefit from those things that do not contradict the Divine Way of Life because Allah *Glorified is He* has given him the freedom to do or not do. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to tell us to this effect: It is from My Mercy that I have laid down legislation for you because if I had left people to their desires, powerful people would have commanded others to do whatever they desire. Therefore, we resolve this matter through the divine way of life so that human desires do not come into conflict and one's whims do not collide with another's. It is a real benefit to mankind to have only one God Who must be obeyed and Who has no desires. It is also a real benefit to have one way of life suitable to all humans which tells them to 'do and not do'. This is discussed in detail so that we can all best understand matters. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: "If you obeyed most of those on earth, they would lead you away from the path of Allah…' (*al-An'am:* 116).

There are people who believe in Allah *Glorified is He*; these are the ones who have good nature. Man is disposed to do good deeds by nature. Legislation has come to develop and enhance this good nature and rectify evil inclinations and put right deviating dispositions. What do people going astray from the path of Allah *Glorified is He* follow? The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, 'They follow nothing but speculation….' (*al-An'am:* 116)

Each one of them thinks that this misguidance benefits them at that moment, while they are unaware of the bad consequences that will come upon them afterwards.

Zhann (speculation), as we might know, is realisation of the most possible thing; and the opposite is disregard, which means realisation of the least possible thing. However, speculation is here motivated by desires.

'…they are merely guessing and falsifying (facts).' (*al-An'am:* 116) Those people either follow speculation or falsify facts by means of guessing. A *kharis* in Arabic is someone who falsifies facts; he always guesses and makes conjectures. It is as if someone asks another one at a market about the weight of a pile of wheat. The latter responds that it is about ten or twelve bushels. He just guesses without definite proof or strict standards; he utters inaccurate words.

If you follow the advice of most people, they will lead you astray because they do not have any tangible proof or hard facts. They rather follow speculation when things are most possible, while they guess and falsify facts when things are less possible.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* then says:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ مَن يَضِلُّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١١٧﴾

Your Lord knows best who strays from His path and
who is rightly guided [117] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 117)

Whenever you see 'He', be sure that it has a unique significance. You can judge someone through his behaviour and actions; but you learn nothing about his emotions and thoughts regardless of the information you have about him because your knowledge is limited as a human being. On the contrary, the True Lord *Glorified is He* knows best since He is the All Knowing of everything in this universe. He knows both what is open and what is hidden. In this verse, He says, 'knows *best*' which is different from 'know'. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dealt with people per how they acted, while leaving what they concealed to Allah *Glorified is He*. When a Muslim killed a man who had declared Islam, he *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him why. The Muslim replied that the man insincerely declared Islam. He, *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Have you cut his heart open?' Allah *Glorified is He* knows best because He knows what is open and what is hidden, and is aware of the most secretive of glances and of all that hearts conceal.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted* says:

فَكُلُوا۟ مِمَّا ذُكِرَ ٱسْمُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِن كُنتُم بِـَٔايَـٰتِهِۦ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾ وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَّا تَأْكُلُوا۟ مِمَّا
ذُكِرَ ٱسْمُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَقَدْ فَصَّلَ لَكُم مَّا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِلَّا مَا ٱضْطُرِرْتُمْ إِلَيْهِ ۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا
لَّيُضِلُّونَ بِأَهْوَآئِهِم بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾

So [believers] eat any [animal] over which God's name has been pronounced, if you believe in His revelations [118] Why should you not eat such animals when God has already fully explained what He has forbidden you, except when forced by hunger? But many lead others astray by their desires, without any true knowledge: your Lord knows best who oversteps the limit [119] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 118 - 119)

Why is this issue mentioned in this context? The True Lord *Glorified is He* shows that there are enemies for every prophet who always try to find faults with his religion so that they can attack him. This is their mission for which Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen them. When they raise suspicions, we find that this religion refutes them; thus, the call of this religion gets stronger until the Coming of the Hour.

An example of this is the group of people who opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding the Night Journey and Ascension, when he said to them, 'Indeed I was taken to Al-Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem) and I was made to ascend into the heavens in one night.' They tried to find faults with him to lead people astray. They said to him, 'Are you claiming that you have done this journey in one night, while we beat the livers of camels (meaning that they hasten and travel upon them) for one month?!!' Meanwhile, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If he said so, then he spoke the truth'; this is the kind of faith that is perfect about accepting matters that contravene physical laws. When this group argued with Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* he said, 'I believe that he receives revelations from the heavens, so how can I deny this? Since he has told of this, it is true.' This is a logical statement.

Again, the opponents of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Are you claiming that you have done this journey in one night while we strike the livers of our camels for one month?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* then gave them signs of the mosque and description of the trade caravans that he passed, as well as other evidences that decisively proved the event until the Day of Resurrection. If the issue of the Night Journey and Ascension had not been subject to such opposition from enemies, we would not have found such eagerness to affirm it.

Nowadays, we find people saying, 'Is it reasonable that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to Jerusalem and came back in one night? It must have been a dream'. If they had not said such words, we would not have known how to refute them in a way that can deter opponents from going ahead with their accusations until the Hour is established. We repeat that this is the mission that Allah *Glorified is He* has set for the enemies. If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said to them, 'Indeed I dreamt that I went to Jerusalem', would have there been anyone to object to his dreams, even if he said that he had gone to the remotest part of the world? No one would dare deny it. But since they considered him a liar and denied the Night Journey, then this is proof that they understood it to be a real journey, not a dream. They realised that he had been taken in person from Mecca to Jerusalem; and that is why they disbelieved the whole story. Their denial benefits us now as we use it to refute opponents today. Thus, the existence of enemies has always been a motivation for combatting doubts and suspicions.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says here, 'So [believers] eat any [animal] over which Allah's Name has been pronounced, if you believe in His revelations.' (*al-An'am:* 118) This verse has a story that clarifies how enemies try to find faults to attack the religion. Some of them once said, 'The Prophet says to you, 'Indeed dead animals are not permitted for you to eat, while what you slaughter with your hands you can eat from'. They threw doubt on this Hadith, claiming that slaughtering is a form of death. First, this is a misleading linguistic argument because dead animals are not slaughtered or killed. Meanwhile, animals are slaughtered to be purified of blood. When we discuss this issue from scientific and academic perspectives, those enemies are easily defeated because there is a difference between death and killing. Death is removal of life without destroying the physical constitution. Killing is the destruction of the physical constitution first, and then death follows with blood remaining in the body. After all, does the Legislator, Who is the Most High Lord, take wisdom from us or does wisdom belong to Him alone?

It has become clear in our time that non-believers have begun to realise that a dead animal or flesh contains many harmful wastes that must be removed before its meat can be eaten. This is because the body of an animal is like that of a man; animals eat, digest, and absorb the nourishing elements that constitute their blood and energy. It is well known that there are organs and systems inside the body which clean and purify it from harmful toxins. For example, the kidneys cleanse blood of urea and other harmful waste so that blood can flow easily to the lungs to get oxygen. Moreover, blood vessels in both man and animals contain healthy and spoilt blood. The spoilt blood is that which has not been purified yet. When an animal is slaughtered, the spoilt blood comes out along with other bad compounds. This means that we sacrifice healthy blood to protect ourselves from unhealthy blood. On the other hand, if an animal is not slaughtered, the traces of both kinds of blood as well as waste remain. We avoid all this when slaughtering animals. Thus, we must trust in our True Lord *Glorified is He* when we learn that a ruling is surely ordained by Him.

Again, those enemies argued to this effect, ‘You eat what you have killed while you do not eat what Allah has killed. Thus, you think that you are better than Allah’. This is a false statement. When an animal dies, the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* is not pronounced over it, while we pronounce the Name of Allah over a slaughtered animal. It is as if the True Lord puts it this way: Eat what the Name of Allah has been pronounced over, i.e. neither dead animals nor what has been slaughtered for idols.

‘So [believers] eat any [animal] over which Allah’s Name has been pronounced, if you believe in His revelations.’ (*al-An‘am:* 118) Whenever we receive a ruling from the True Lord *Glorified is He* we must never look for the wisdom behind it first and then believe in it. Rather, we must trust that it is from Allah *Glorified is He* Whom we believe in. Therefore, we must follow every ruling coming from Allah *Glorified is He*. ‘Why should you not eat such animals when Allah has already fully explained what He has forbidden upon you, except when forced by hunger? But many lead others astray by their desires, without any true knowledge: your Lord knows best who oversteps the limits.' (*al-An'am:* 119)

These two verses – as we have known – were sent down to expose the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who stood in denial of the call and strived to put an end to it. Those opponents spread rumours amongst the believers, which targeted their belief and faith. To raise doubts, they presented this issue that proved groundless. Let us look at it once again. Who is the one who has killed (such an animal)? They said, 'Indeed Allah has killed it'. So, is Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who has slit its throat? Has Allah *Glorified is He* struck its head and caused the brain to die? Has He directed something into its heart? Allah is Exalted above such human actions. So, how can they call death 'killing'? Referring to death as killing is wrong. They stick to faulty reasoning when they say, 'How can you legalize for yourselves what you have killed, i.e. what you have slaughtered, while not legalizing what Allah *Glorified is He* has killed, i.e. what He has caused to die'? Allah *Glorified is He* intends to grant the believers immunity from these suspicions raised by opponents. He said, 'So [believers] eat any [animal] over which Allah's Name has been pronounced, if you believe in His revelations.' (*al-An'am:* 118)

What is the meaning of 'pronouncement' or 'remembrance' (*dhikr* in Arabic)? There is a great deal of difference among scholars since they have not defined what is meant by (*dhikr*). Imam Malik Allah *rest his soul* is of the opinion that if you slaughter an animal and do not pronounce Allah's Name unmindfully or intentionally, it is not permissible for you to eat a slaughtered animal. Imam Abu Hanifah *Allah rest his soul* views that if you forget to pronounce Allah's Name, you can still eat a slaughtered animal, but if you intentionally do not pronounce it, then you cannot eat it. Imam Ash-Shafi`i *Allah rest his soul* says that as long as you are a believer and you are engaged in slaughtering in such a state of faith, then eat what Allah's Name has not been pronounced over, whether unmindfully or deliberately, because your faith includes pronouncement of the Name of Allah (*dhikr*).

We ask: What is *dhikr*? Is *dhikr* something which is said by the tongue, or is it something that occurs to one's mind? If you say that *dhikr* is something voiced through the tongue, then let us consider this Divine Hadith in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'I am near to the thought of My servant as he thinks about Me, and I am with him as he remembers Me. And if he remembers Me within himself, I also remember him within Myself, and if he remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in an assembly that is better than his.'(1) Therefore, our Lord, has called the thoughts within oneself *dhikr*, so, Imam Ash-Shafi`i *Allah rest his soul* was right in his statement.

Therefore, I believe that we must define the meaning of *dhikr* first so that we can put an end to the difference of opinion in this issue. It does not make sense to have an argument over the meaning of *dhikr* because *dhikr* is something that occurs to the mind and may be pronounced by the tongue at the same time; or it may occur to the mind only as mentioned in the aforesaid Hadith.

A believer may find among the things around them, that some of them are beautiful, while others are not related to beauty at all. For example, a buffalo may be less beautiful than some animals that Allah *Glorified is He* has declared impermissible to eat. However, we find believers keep slaughtering buffaloes to eat their meat, while we have never heard of a Muslim coming to an animal, which Allah *Glorified is He* has declared unlawful to eat, to slaughter it; why? The reason is that the believers only engage in what Allah *Glorified is He* has permitted; this is proof that they remember within themselves that the One Who declares things permissible or impermissible is Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, a Muslim's choice of an animal to slaughter is evidence that he remembers Allah *Glorified is He* within himself or by his tongue. Hence, we agree now that a believer's *dhikr* is in their heart, whether they say it or not; accordingly, the dispute of this issue is settled. As we have shown, Imam Ash-Shafi`i adopted this viewpoint because when Prophet Mohammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about a Muslim eating a slaughtered animal, while neither knowing who has slaughtered it nor whether Allah's Name was pronounced over it, he *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified, 'Say Allah's Name and eat.'

One cannot always be present at the time of slaughtering; so, it is enough for us to call to mind the One Who declares things permissible or impermissible when we eat the meat of a slaughtered animal. The True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us to 'mention Allah's Name over it'. Allah *Glorified is He* knows that you intend to do things; these things are divided into two categories: things that you think about before you do them and others that you do not think about, but you rather do them automatically without thinking, such as all reflexive actions. If someone tried to put their finger in another's eyes, this other person would automatically close their eyes. This is not the case in actions that one thinks about before doing. An action that is thought of before being done is an action which is important; that is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to save us trouble by saying, 'Every matter of importance that is not begun with "In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy" is devoid (of blessings).'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi*

An important matter is a one that you think about before doing or not doing it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* does not hold us accountable about any action so long as it does not occur to our minds because when you embark on an action, it responds to you the way you want to do it. This is from Allah's Bounty to you. When you slaughter a calf or a lamb, contemplate how Allah *Glorified is He* has granted you power over this living being and that you would not be able to do this unless Allah *Glorified is He* subjugated everything in existence for you. You slaughter such an animal in the Name of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, there are many important matters and actions that occur to your mind, which you must embark upon in Allah's Name as recommended by good manners and faith. Some people are mistaken when they think that when they slaughter animals, they do harm them. No, an animal concludes its mission in life by being slaughtered since it is created and subjugated for such a purpose.

We previously stated that there is a wonder found concerning practices in this regard: when you try to kill an animal that Allah *Glorified is He* has not made permissible for man, such as a donkey, for example, by tying a rope around its neck, it chokes to death without stretching its neck forward. On the other hand, the animals that Allah *Glorified is He* has declared permissible to eat, such as buffaloes, lambs, or calves, stretch their necks forward when they are strangled to death. People in the Egyptian countryside say, ‘It is seeking the lawful (*halal*) action’, i.e. to be slaughtered. So, having an animal slaughtered is not considered transgression against it because it is created for this mission. Thus, the meaning of ‘In the Name of Allah’ is that I dare not do such an act unless it is within the framework of the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* Who has allowed me to do so.

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(1) *Narrated by `Abd Al-Qadir Ar-Rahawi in Al-Arba`in from Abu Hurayra*

Afterwards, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says to the believers to this effect, ‘Do not listen to what the disbelievers say’ through this question for denial, ‘Why should you not eat such animals…’ (*al-An‘am:* 119) which means: what prevents you from eating the animals which Allah’s Name has been pronounced over when He has already fully explained what He has forbidden upon you. Thus, what Allah’s Name has been pronounced over is not included in what is prohibited by Allah *Glorified is He*. Our Lord is the One Who declares things permissible or impermissible. Some might say, ‘Why has Allah *Glorified is He* created things that He has declared impermissible for us?’ We answer as follows: Whoever thinks this way is oblivious of the fact that not every animal is created to be eaten. Every animal has a mission; when you slaughter an impermissible animal, you thus transgress its mission. The pig, for example, has been declared unlawful by our Lord *Glorified is He* because when you slaughter it, you violate its mission. This animal is created to collect dirt not easily seen by the naked eye; when you slaughter it, you take it away from its original job. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who has created man and He knows best what kind of nourishment suitable for him as far as energy and good health is concerned. So, Allah *Glorified is He* has declared some things permissible and others impermissible for us. Beware of saying: Allah *Glorified is He* only forbids the things that are harmful because He wants us to decently comply with the Commands of ‘do and not do’. This is why the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before....’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160)

In everyday life, do you say that those who harshly train our sons in the army are cruel to them? No, they actually prepare them to undertake difficult tasks and teach them good manners, obedience, and discipline. Likewise, The True Lord *Glorified is He* has permitted what He wants and has forbidden what He wills so that the universe can be kept in order with the Power of the Most Wise, the All-Capable. Allah *Glorified is He* has forbidden things such as drugs which we sometimes use to treat some illnesses. Thus, if a healthy person unjustifiably uses them, they will destroy their body and eliminate their health. If this person uses them afterwards for the sake of treatment, they will not have the desired effect. That is why we find doctors, before carrying out delicate surgeries, ask patients whether they have taken drugs, to determine anaesthetics appropriate for them.

Astonishingly enough, Allah *Glorified is He* has forbidden us from using such things that affect our minds, while we may need them at the time of suffering and illness.

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* has linked all rulings of *halal* and *haram* (lawful and unlawful things) to '...if you believe in His revelations...' which can be explained as follows: 'O you who have believed in Allah, the Most Wise Lord Who only commands you for your benefit, refrain from such actions'. If you embark upon anything that Allah *Glorified is He* has permitted for you, then embark upon it in the Name of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* has basically taught us some of His Names That He has sent down in His Book (the Quran) and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, while He has taught some of His servants other Names and kept other Names for Himself as unseen knowledge. These Names are Allah's Attributes of Perfection that only concerns Him. If we want to call to mind the Name that gathers all these Attributes of Perfection, we say: 'In the Name of Allah'. When scholars discussed the issue of forbidden and permitted things, some of them said, 'The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Ma`ida*: 'You are forbidden to eat dead animals [flesh]…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). And Here in the chapter of *al-An`am* Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '...when Allah has already fully explained what He has forbidden you...' (*al-An'am:* 119).

Scholars who showed more interest said that the chapter of *al-Ma`ida* is Medinan which means that it was sent down in Medina after the Meccan chapters; the chapter of *al-An`am* is Meccan. Does the True Lord *Glorified is He* say in this Meccan chapter '...Allah has already fully explained what He has forbidden you…' in Medinan chapters? Some scholars of inspired vision said that '…Allah has already fully explained…' in the chapter of *al-Ma`ida* as well as in this Meccan chapter of *al-An`am* when He says, '[Prophet Muhammad], say, "In all that has been revealed to me, I find nothing forbidden for people to eat, except for carrion [dead animals], flowing blood, pig's meat—it is loathsome—or a sinful offering over which any name other than Allah has been invoked." But if someone is forced by hunger, rather than desire or excess, then Allah is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.' (*al-An'am:* 145)

One of those who are hell-bent on making objections or one of the opponents of Islam might ask why this verse has not mentioned all the impermissible things. We answer that the Quran includes the guidelines of the religion, while the Sunnah has the details: '...so accept whatever the Messenger [Muhammad] gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you....' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says here: '...when Allah has already fully explained what He has forbidden upon you, except when forced by hunger....' (*al-An'am:* 119)

Compulsion is a state in which you are forced to resort to unlawful means. In such a condition, man is compelled to depend on impermissible things, just as when a person searches for anything to eat to stay alive; if he cannot find anything lawful, he is under compulsion. We advise such a person, saying, 'take from that which Allah has not permitted for you according to your dire need; so, eat from carrion if necessary and do not satisfy your appetite.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food....' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3) When people are forced to eat forbidden food, this means that they are facing a famine. You resort to impermissible means and alternatives when you are forced or compelled. Allah *Glorified is He* gives man permission to consume what is forbidden if they are under compulsion as in '...except when forced by hunger? But many lead others astray by their desires, without any true knowledge....' (*al-An'am:* 119) Those who lead others astray by their desires without any true knowledge are those who want to cast doubt in the hearts of Muslims. The meaning of leading others astray by desires means that one is fully aware of a given issue, but his passions drive him away from what the True Lord wants people to do concerning this issue. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'He does not speak from his own desire.' (*an-Najm*: 3)

When the True Lord says: '...But many lead others astray by their desires, without any true knowledge...' (*al-An'am:* 119), it means that there is a form of leading astray without desires; this is when man cannot get to reality because he does not know how to reach it. Meanwhile, leading astray with desires means that you learn reality quite well but you turn away from it.

'...But many lead others astray by their desires, without any true knowledge....' (*al-An'am:* 119) When you see the phrase '...by their desires...' coming after '... lead others astray...', you may say that there can be a form of leading astray without knowledge which is not blameworthy because the person in question does not know the ruling related to a given issue. This is different from the person who goes astray while he knows the ruling; this means that he goes astray by his desires. When we understand this matter this way, misunderstanding has no room. The phrase: '...without any true knowledge...' means that the people in question here, do not have knowledge of this given issue and its rulings. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* concludes this verse by saying: '...your Lord knows best who oversteps the limits.' (*al-An'am:* 119)

Allah *Glorified is He* shows us in many verses of the Glorious Quran that some of His Creation can discern the ones who are rightly guided and those who are not rightly guided. However, many people cannot distinguish the rightly guided people from the wrongly guided people. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* knows best.

After that, The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَذَرُوا۟ ظَـٰهِرَ ٱلْإِثْمِ وَبَاطِنَهُۥٓ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْسِبُونَ
ٱلْإِثْمَ سَيُجْزَوْنَ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَقْتَرِفُونَ ﴿١٢٠﴾

**Avoid committing sin, whether openly or in secret,
for those who commit sin will be repaid for what
they do [120] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 120)**

This is the Heavenly Legislation which provides the society with self-protection, so that one may not see violations committed by others. If you see violations committed by some people, be sure that these are some evident examples and do not constitute all instances of corruption in the society. The corruption of the society is caused by many motives of that we might not be aware. There are motives instilled in the deepest part of the human soul that controls desires. Before an outward sin is committed, there is surely an inward sin. This means that an inward sin precedes an outward one. All human laws protect us from outward sins, whereas the religion of Heaven protects us from the corruption of both open and secret sins.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* shows us the difference between human legislation and Allah's legislation. He observes your feelings, emotions, and secrets; so beware of committing inward sins. It is not enough to protect yourself from laws reaching you because the biggest thing a law can do is to prevent people from committing crimes in public. The difference between the Legislation of Heaven and the legislation of Earth is that the latter protects people from open sins, while the former protects people from both open sins and secret sins, which are the most dangerous.

Some of the people who are accustomed to doing evil find it so easy to do evil deeds; a daily routine.

The verb 'commit' in this verse is the translation of the Arabic verb *kasab* which is originally related to good deeds and easier when uttered in comparison with another Arabic verb of the same root *iktisab* which is used for evil deeds. Doing things that are permissible is a natural practice by all human faculties. When someone wants, for example, to buy something at a shop, all they need to do is to go to that shop in broad daylight and buy that thing. Meanwhile, when someone wants to steal a shop, they must make other abnormal arrangements.

However, such abnormal practices could become natural after getting accustomed to them and gaining experience, thus turning to easy jobs compatible with the verb *kasab* which indicates, per Arabic, that you get profits in addition to your capital. When man does good deeds, he grants himself the essentials of life and he gets the rewards of the Hereafter as extra. This is the highest yield.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us during our endeavours in life, to realise the benefits we need for ourselves. But we may be harmed when doing so. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* protects the believers by the religion’s way of life so that they can distinguish between that what fulfils them their present goal as well as permanent benefits with no harm on one hand, and what brings them instant benefits, disastrous consequences and real suffering on the other. We find around us that those who do evil and follow their desires, get temporary benefits for themselves, just like a student who does not care for his lessons and sleeps most of the time or goes out wandering in the streets. Outwardly, such a student finds some comfort for himself; in fact, he heads towards failure and regret. In contrast, a hardworking, diligent student fulfils himself great everlasting benefits.

‘...for those who commit sin will be repaid for what they do.’ (*al-An‘am:* 120). In this worldly life, we find humans reward and punish each other per their power, but what about the moment we stand before Allah *Glorified is He* the All Knowing of open and secret sins? Thus, what safeguards the society is the Legislation of Heaven. The religion’s way of life not only protects man from dangers but also sets laws for man’s movement on earth.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* then comes back to the issue of food, saying:

وَلَا تَأۡكُلُواْ مِمَّا لَمۡ يُذۡكَرِ ٱسۡمُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡهِ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَفِسۡقٞۗ وَإِنَّ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ
لَيُوحُونَ إِلَىٰٓ أَوۡلِيَآئِهِمۡ لِيُجَٰدِلُوكُمۡۖ وَإِنۡ أَطَعۡتُمُوهُمۡ إِنَّكُمۡ لَمُشۡرِكُونَ ١٢١

And do not eat anything over which God’s name has not been pronounced, for that is breaking the law. The evil ones incite their followers to argue with you: if you listen to them, you too will become idolaters [121] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 121)

Here, The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls what Allah’s Name has not been mentioned over *fisq* (sinful offering) which is explained in the following verse of the same chapter: '[Prophet Muhammad], say, "In all that has been revealed to me, I find nothing forbidden for people to eat, except for carrion [dead animals], flowing blood, pig's meat—it is loathsome—or a sinful offering over which any name other than Allah has been invoked." But if someone is forced by hunger, rather than desire or excess, then Allah is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.' (*al-An'am:* 145)

Thus, the word '*fisq'* (sinful offering) is conjoined to carrion, flowing blood and pig's meat, but Allah *Glorified is He* separates between the second conjunct (*ma`tuf* in Arabic), which is *fisq* and the first conjunct (*ma`tuf alaih* in Arabic) with a description that is specific to the first conjunct. This description is 'being loathsome' (*rijs*); thus these three impermissible things take the description of (*rijs*) and conjoined to them is that which is slaughtered and other than Allah's Name is pronounced over it, such as idols. Here, *rijs* and *fisq* have been brought together.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '…The evil ones incite their followers to argue with you...' (*al-An'am:* 121). Allah *Glorified is He* intends to show us that a good nature that does not follow whims will recognize the reality of goodness. That is why we find that those who incite each other to do evil and teach one another in secret play the role of Satan in regards to whispering and instigation for the sake of people's disobedience and disbelief. Good nature rejects such deviant dispositions. When a man commits a grave offence, he deceives others and takes an indirect course to commit such an offence; he may whisper to someone else and direct them towards corruption. Thus, such a person assumes the position of devils who whisper secretly to their followers, while people of good nature, who control their whims and desires, reject and combat evil things. Thus, when a devil from amongst the mankind or jinn, wants to make people's deeds fair seeming, he does not declare it directly; rather, he uses deceitful, crooked discourse.

'...The evil ones incite their followers to argue with you: if you listen to them, you too will become idolaters.' (*al-An'am:* 121) Here, there is an indication to the statement voiced by idolaters: 'You eat what you have killed and not eat what Allah has killed, while it would be better for you to eat what Allah has killed'.

If ‘...you listen to them, you too will become idolaters.’ (*al-An‘am:* 121) It is as if merely obeying these polytheists is a type of idolatry because worship means that a worshipper obeys and carries out the commands and prohibitions of that which he worships. Thus, if you receive a command from one other than Allah *Glorified is He* you are driven away from His True Religion because of having associated partners with Him.

After that, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted* says:

أَوَمَن كَانَ مَيۡتٗا فَأَحۡيَيۡنَٰهُ وَجَعَلۡنَا لَهُۥ نُورٗا يَمۡشِي بِهِۦ فِي ٱلنَّاسِ كَمَن مَّثَلُهُۥ فِي
ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ لَيۡسَ بِخَارِجٖ مِّنۡهَاۚ كَذَٰلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

Is a dead person brought back to life by Us, and given light with which to walk among people, comparable to someone trapped in deep darkness who cannot escape? In this way the evil deeds of the disbelievers are made to seem alluring to them [122] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 122)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* as we have earlier learned, presents some issues in the form of questions, not statements because Allah is fully aware that when He presents you a question, you will find only one answer after long thought; this answer is that what the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants. Thus, the Quran sometimes uses statements, and in other times it uses affirmative or negative questions. The most effective of these styles is that of a negative question. When Allah *Glorified is He* presents a given issue, He states that the only way you should look at this issue is what the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants since He is the All-Knower of what you do.

In this glorious verse, we find death and life and darkness and light. What is life? Life is the existence of beings in a state that allows them to carry out their missions; and so long as a being is in a state enabling it to achieve its task, then it sustains life. The most elevated level of life is that which combines motion, senses, and intellect. All these components are found in man. Concerning animals, they have motion and senses, but not intellect; however, they have natural instincts that may be sometimes stronger than man’s instincts. Man is governed by instincts in some aspects and by choice in others. You have nothing to do regarding instincts, while you have the say in the sphere of choice. You can either do or not do.

Thus, life means that a being is in a state that qualifies it to fulfil its mission. Hence, there is life in man, plants, and inanimate objects; there is even life in life itself. As science advances, it proves that there are forms of life in so many things that we have thought had no life, even if the nature of some things is sometimes changed due to chemical interactions. For example, an animal has life; but after we slaughter and eat it, and throw away the bones, it has another kind of life. These inanimate bones still maintain life until they break into pieces and go smashed.

In the country, we used to milk animals and keep milk in clay vessels put in storehouses. Milk stayed in those storehouses for a week, and each day it got sweeter. The sweetness of milk increased every day. Then, a farmer's wife brought the remaining cream to make cheese and butter of wonderful taste; but after boiling milk, we found that it had gone off few hours later. This means that when you put milk in clay vessels in storehouses, you put it with the life it contains, whereas when you boil it, you kill its very life. Hence, if you do not put it in a fridge, it will inevitably rot. Rotting here denotes that milk no longer has its original mission. Rather, it changes to another life due to bacteria and other factors. Destruction eventually eliminates all forms of life, as stated by The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*: '...Everything will perish except His Face....' (*al-Qasas:* 88)

Thus, do not look at dead things as having no life; they rather move to another life. 'Is a dead person brought back to life by Us, and given light with which to walk among people....' (*al-An'am:* 122) It is as if man has life of his own, then The True Lord *Glorified is He* grants him light to walk with, as though life moves from one a state to another. Man needs a life and a light so that he can see things. In earlier times, people used to believe that man sees when rays are emitted from his eyes towards objects, until the Arab Muslim scientist Al-Hassan ibn Al-Haytham came along and said that this theory had not been quite correct as far as the laws of light are concerned. He said man sees because of rays emitting from objects towards the eyes, providing compelling evidence since man can see objects in the light, not in the dark.

If rays emitted from man's eyes, then he would be able to see things in both light and darkness. Hence, all theories of light were modified at the hand of this Muslim scientist to make the way open for photography and cinema. Again, we repeat that light is a means of making things visible.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* presents us evidence related to concrete issues in the universe to prove abstract issues. For instance, tangible light represented in the sun, the moon, a lamp or anything else, makes man see objects. Man's seeing of things means that he interacts with them in a very useful way. We use an electric lamp when the natural light of the sun is away. When we turn lamps on, we see things and interact with them without hitting them or being hit by them. Each one of us takes the light he needs. Thus, each one uses a means to illuminate dark places in the absence of the natural light as much as he can. When the sun appears again, we all switch our lamps off. This can be a proof from the tangible, sensory universe that Allah gives light to the values He likes. So, we must not produce values for ourselves since His values are existence.

Allah *Glorified is He* enlightens us that a valueless man is a moving dead one. The religion's way of life is sent to him to grant him a superior life. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses every man as if saying, 'Strive for the other eternal life that will never end; this only comes about by adhering to the religion's way of life'. Beware of thinking that life is only what you see in this existence because if this life was our ultimate objective, man would feel unhappy. If the worldly life was our final goal, this would necessitate that all our fortune, lifetimes and circumstances would be one and the same. Difference in all these aspects is evidence that this life is not the end because the end of equals must be equal.

Thus, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says the truly decisive statement in this verse: '...the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew....' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) This is the life that neither misses you nor you miss it; and its goodness neither escapes you and nor do you escape it. Again, the one who lives the first sensuous life, through Allah's breathing into the spirit to produce motion, is a moving dead person. 'Is a dead person brought back to life by Us, and given light with which to walk among people…" (*al-An'am:* 122) This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has given such a slave an eternal life and light with which he walks; he neither harms other beings nor is harmed by them.

In regards to those who say that life with its worldly meaning does not differ from life in the light of Faith, we answer that they are totally different and not equal at all, since The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] when he calls you to that which gives you life....' (*al-Anfal:* 24)

Allah *Glorified is He* is addressing the believers; and since He is addressing them, then they are alive per the laws of this life. But Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the true religion that gives the believers a superior life. Note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* grants the first spirit which He breathes into the motionless body to move and feel this worldly life, to both the believers and the disbelievers. Meanwhile, there is another spirit that gives eternal life. Thus, Allah's way of life for His Creation is called a spirit: 'So We have revealed a spirit to you [Prophet Muhammad] by Our Command....' (*ash-Shura:* 52)

Religion's way of life leads to an eternal life. So, the True Lord's Statement: 'Is a dead person brought back to life by Us...' (*al-An'am:* 122) means, 'Is a lost person guided by Us...' or 'Is a disbeliever brought to Faith by Us…

'Per Arabic, there is the word (*mayt*) and the word (*mayyit*) with doubling the 'y' letter; both generally mean 'dead'. *Mayyit* refers to someone who is ordained to die, even though they are still alive. So, each one of us is *mayyit* even though we are alive. Meanwhile, *mayt*, is someone who has died and their spirit no longer exists. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, 'Yet, verily, you are bound to die…' (*az-Zumar:* 30).

This means that you will eventually die (*mayyit*), even though you are alive now since each one of us continues to live until we take on the state of non-existence. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...brought back to life by Us...' i.e. through the religion's way of life that gives such a man another life. This is why the Quran is called a spirit, the same word attributed to the angel who brought down the Quran (Gabriel).

‘...and given light with which to walk among people...’ (*al-An‘am:* 122). Why does he walk among people only, and not among everything? You can be careful concerning other things, while the word ‘people’ expresses uneasy interaction since they are subject to changing circumstances. The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues to say, ‘...comparable to someone trapped in deep darkness who cannot escape...’ (*al-An‘am:* 122). The answer for the question raised by this verse is no, i.e. the two persons are not equal. This question is similar to our saying, ‘Is a blind person like one who can see’? Natural disposition tells us no, just as it underscores that darkness and light are not equal, and shade and heat are not equal. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* trusts us with the answer because He knows that this question has only one answer which is what the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes this verse by saying: ‘...In this way the evil deeds of the disbelievers are made to seem alluring to them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 122). This means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has left them liable to allurement and temptation. Allah *Glorified is He* has not protected them from committing mistakes while choosing because He has given man the freedom of choice, ‘...let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so...’ (*al-Kahf:* 29).

Then, the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلۡنَا فِي كُلِّ قَرۡيَةٍ أَكَٰبِرَ مُجۡرِمِيهَا لِيَمۡكُرُواْ
فِيهَاۖ وَمَا يَمۡكُرُونَ إِلَّا بِأَنفُسِهِمۡ وَمَا يَشۡعُرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

And so We have put chief evildoers in every city to perpetrate their schemes there – but they scheme only against themselves, without realizing it [123] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 123)

‘And so...’ indicates that something is likened to something else; just as there are in Mecca enemies who oppose you, show hostility towards the Call of Allah *Glorified is He* and hinder the path of Truth, the same thing happened with the former messengers in the procession of Faith. There is nothing new. ‘And so...’ also means, ‘Just as We have placed in Mecca evildoers who mastermind plots against you, We did the same thing with the greatest criminals who conspired against their messengers in their cities. You are not anything new among Allah's Messengers. So, be steadfast like those messengers of firm resolve. You should even have more patience and exert more efforts because your mission is greater since you are a messenger to the entire world, while other messengers were sent only to their communities to purify them from definite evils at definite times. You have been sent for all nations, times and places until the establishment of the Hour. Thus, the hardships that confront you must match the universality of the Message Allah has chosen you for'.

'And so We have put chief evildoers in every city...' (*al-An'am:* 123). Per Arabic, *ijram* (evildoing or crime) is taken from the three radical letters in Arabic *jim*, *ra`* and *mim*, from which we get the words *jarm, jurm* and *jareema* which all have the meaning of cutting. *Mujrimeeha* (their 'evildoers') is the plural of *mujrim* or 'evildoer'; a *mujrim* is someone who has committed a *jurm* or a *jareema* (a crime). This means that such a person, by committing a crime, has cut himself off from his society. He thus separates himself for no one's benefit except his own, as if he is engaged in a process of social isolation. He has made everything for himself while making himself for none to realise his own desires, paying no heed to consequences.

Again, *ijram* means hasty engagement in the evils that make man isolate himself from the goodness of his society because he wants everything for himself. Since he wants everything for himself, he tends to be unfair and corrupt. Being corrupt, he wants all the members of the society to commit immoral acts so that none may be better than him '...to perpetrate their schemes there—but they scheme only against themselves, without realizing it.' (*al-An'am:* 123)

Per Arabic, *makr* (scheming) is related to the branches when they are wound around one another, in a way that you cannot learn if a certain leaf belongs to a definite branch because boughs and branches are intertwined and twisted closely together. A schemer behaves in a twisted manner because he wants to hide his plots lest anyone expose them. Acting this way, he proves to be of weak character. Only weak people are the ones who tend to conspire and scheme, while strong people never conspire or scheme; they rather meet others face to face. A poet says:

Though being weak, the cunning person always has a deceitful stance
This is the power of the powerless; he kills whenever he seizes the chance

When the weak person has the upper hand, he is convinced that he should finish off his enemy because if he passes up this chance, he will regret it for the rest of his life. However, when the strong person confronts his enemy, he has the choice to forgive him the first time. Whereas, when the enemy repeats the irresponsible action, he deserves to be faced. Thus, he who cunningly conspires against others is the weak person. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the evildoers of the most powerful people, i.e. those who demonstrate authorities over others and spread corruption where no one can stand against or to oppose them. There are many debatable verses related to this concern. It is astonishing that this controversy among Muslim scholars has not been settled yet, as each group sticks to its opinion. The verse under discussion goes together with Allah's saying: 'When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they persisted in their disobedience; Our sentence has passed, and We destroyed them utterly.' (*al-Isra': 16*)

This verse is somehow ambiguous; the matter which stirred up a debate among the scholars. Some of them wondered, 'How can Allah *the Almighty* command people to sinfulness'? They tried to find an interpretation so they said, 'Indeed, Allah compels and forces the most powerful people to be engaged in sinfulness'. The other team of scholars said, 'Definitely, Allah does not compel human beings to be engaged in sinfulness; but rather, His Command can likely be obeyed or disobeyed by the man who is legally responsible for his choice. Therefore, sinfulness is the consequence of the man's choice. In this way, the most powerful people disobey Allah's Command'; yet, Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Though all they are commanded to do is to worship Allah alone...' (*al-Bayyina:* 5).

On looking over the meaning of 'Allah's Command', it is represented in the working of the universe where no creation can disobey Allah. As He *the Almighty* says: 'When He wills something to be, His way is to say unto it, "Be" and it is done.' (*Ya Sin:* 82)

Allah's Command is also represented in the Heavenly Legislation whereas, the human beings to whom this Legislation is sent down have the choice to obey or disobey. Allah *Glorified is He* says about His Command to human beings to follow the Heavenly Legislation, ‘Though all they are commanded to do is to worship Allah alone...’ (*al-Bayyina:* 5).

Referring to this verse: ‘When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they persisted in their disobedience…’ (*al-Isra’:* 16), Allah *the Exalted* does not destroy a community oppressively. However, He guides the evildoers to the right path; if they obey they will be rewarded, but if they disobey they will be punished.

The scholars, who thought that sinfulness was a consequence of Allah’s Command overlooked that the Command came in the Quran in two types. The first is the subjugating irreversible command regarding the working of the universe where human beings are disallowed to contravene it. This subjugating command is mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘When He wills something to be, His way is to say unto it, “Be” and it is done.’ (*Ya Sin:* 82) Since the world of eternity, Allah’s Command has been decreed and is ready to be manifested when He *the Almighty* wills. The second is the legislative command where man is legally responsible for his choice either to obey or disobey. Within this framework, we can understand Allah’s saying: ‘When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth to reform, but they persisted in their disobedience; Our sentence has passed, and We destroyed them utterly.’ (*al-Isra’:* 16)

Thus, it is indisputable that Allah *the Exalted* does not command to sinfulness; He sets a doctrine to all human beings to sincerely worship Him alone. However, the most powerful people of this community refused to obey Allah’s Command and choose sinfulness and disobedience as a way of life. Hence, they deserve being destroyed by Allah’s punishment. If the command is regarding the working of the universe, then they are not legitimately responsible. As for the legislative command, then we should understand that there is a choice.

Using a cross-reference approach, this verse sheds light on the meaning of the other verse under discussion. In the first one, Allah *Glorified is He* shows that He decrees to destroy a community to whom He previously has shown the right path because the most powerful people of the community disobeyed

Allah's Command to lead the right path; thus, they are punished by being destroyed. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* tells in this verse, '... but they scheme only against themselves, without realising it.' (*al-An'am:* 123), that the cunning person is scheming to attain his goal by twisted means because he is weak and is unable to accept truth. This truth is only perceived by a sound natural disposition, inversely to his falsified disposition which gets him bent out of shape. Such a cunning schemer aims to realise immediate benefit and temporary pleasure for himself, but if he calls to mind the punishment that will be in store as a result for himself and, likewise, for the others whom he has led astray, he will realise how evil comes about. As Allah *the Exalted* tells us about the schemers, '... but they scheme only against themselves, without realising it'; i.e. the schemer does not identify the repercussions because he does not weigh matters properly to achieve actual benefit.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا جَآءَتۡهُمۡ ءَايَةٞ قَالُواْ لَن نُّؤۡمِنَ حَتَّىٰ نُؤۡتَىٰ مِثۡلَ مَآ أُوتِيَ رُسُلُ
ٱللَّهِۘ ٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ حَيۡثُ يَجۡعَلُ رِسَالَتَهُۥۗ سَيُصِيبُ ٱلَّذِينَ أَجۡرَمُواْ
صَغَارٌ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَعَذَابٞ شَدِيدُۢ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَمۡكُرُونَ ١٢٤

When a revelation is brought before them they say, 'We shall not believe unless we ourselves are given a revelation as God's messengers were.' But God knows best where to place His messages: humiliation before God and severe torment will befall the evildoers for their scheming [124] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 124)

This verse shows that even the Quran, sent by Allah *the Almighty* with His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to prove prophethood, did not persuade, or suffice the disbelievers; conversely, they demanded more miracles. As Allah says: 'They say, "We will not believe you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face…."' (*al-Isra':* 91-93) They do not believe; but rather, they want to be engaged in wrangling and arguing to avoid having faith. This is the cause behind their fabricated arguments against the call of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They said that he is a magician separating between man and his wife, as well as between the child and his father. Moreover, they alleged that he uses his powers which he claimed to be from Allah to cause sedition within families. However, they do not bother themselves to think that if he had the power to bewitch others, so why has he not bewitched them as well? Have they had the power of choice to refuse being bewitched? Indeed, the evildoers were deceitful in this concern.

Subsequently, they said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a poet. If other people said this allegation; it would be plausible from unacquainted strangers who did not know him, and who were, also, uninformed of the sciences of eloquence, rhetoric, and oration, whereas, it is known that the Arabs excelled in poetry, prose, oration and writing.

There were sporadic individual voices amongst them declaring, ‘By God, it is neither the speech of a soothsayer nor the speech of a poet’. For those individuals, Allah *Glorified is He* asks them to specifically utter their opinion away from the collective consciousness because the shared beliefs within society operate as a unifying force and confuse truth with falsehood. As Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Say [Muhammad], “I advise you to do one thing only: stand before Allah, in pairs or singly, and think”: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet]...’ (*Saba’:* 46). Allah *the Almighty* tells them not to utter their opinion collectively, while they are agitated, and accusing the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of being mad because their opinion would be based on the collective consciousness. However, they are required to take the witness stand before Allah in pairs; each pair observes the status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whether he is a soothsayer, a sorcerer or a poet. The truth is never lost between two people as they are discussing with each other, and the defeated party in the discussion will not be exposed in front of others. However, in a multi-party (three or four people) discussion, each defends himself, fearing of being defeated in front of the others. For this reason, Allah commands them to stand before Him in pairs or singly; each delivers his testimony about the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on whether he is mad or not.

Indeed, the actions of the insane are neither coherent nor proper; whereas, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is indeed on an exalted standard of character. This is never the trait of an insane because the reactions of the insane are unexpected and incoherent. On the contrary, being on an exalted standard of character means that the character of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is governed by values; they are not a camouflage for deception, but rather, they are outstanding inherent traits. If someone is said to be bountiful, this means that the attribute of generosity is deeply rooted so that he willingly and easily makes sacrifices, especially when the trait is inherently possessed. On the level of semantically immaterial actions, it is called *khuluq* (trait); whereas, on the level of material actions, it is called 'behaviour'; i.e. mechanism showing the inherent traits through actions.

It is known that if someone wants to learn driving, he studies the mechanism that runs the car until he gains proficiency and can drive without difficulty. The same illustration is applicable to the character; when the man manifests actions with experience and proficiency, this simply shows that this is his inherent trait. Another example, in case that someone is a jurisprudent and is asked about the ruling for a specific matter; if he spends a long time examining the matter from all aspects, he is still an inexperienced beginner. However, when he is experienced and professed in jurisprudence, he has the trait of being an inherently expert jurisprudent who does not have to toil to find a ruling.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* tells them that before they accuse Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of madness, they should sit in pairs or alone and to study his behaviour. They will find that his behaviour is, unlike the insane, governed by rationality and coherence. Likewise, it is impossible for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be a poet because they would have known because they are acclaimed in poetry. Similarly, it is impossible for him to be a soothsayer because fortune-tellers may tamper with Allah's words for a paltry sum. Contrariwise, he is the one who declared his rejection of any power, wealth, or eminence. However, they argued, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When a revelation is brought before them they say, "We shall not believe unless we ourselves are given a divine) Message as Allah's messengers were…."' (*al-An'am:* 124)

Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughirah privately claimed prophethood within himself. He told himself that he had all the elements to be a messenger; in terms of age, he was older than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; in terms of wealth, he was affluently rich and as per ancestry, he had a strong lineage. He weighed the matter using the parameters of human beings, overlooking the concept that prophethood is completely different from leadership. Assuming that he exclusively had all these bounties, he did not have the traits and natural disposition of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* granted by Allah. Nevertheless, some of them kept on saying: ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

The Quran responds: ‘Are they the ones who share out your Lord’s grace…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). Allah explains that they share out His worldly graces, but they cannot share out His mercy. There is a difference between mercy in sending messages which is a divine gift and mercy in supplying nourishment and wealth which are Lordly gifts. In this life, if someone is distinguished by wealth, children, and gardens, there is nothing peculiar about him, but this is the working of the universe that needs complementary, rather than repetitive talents. If all mankind received all worldly graces such as lands and wealth, there would be no one to cultivate the land and no one to saddle the horses. This is the reason that Allah *the Almighty* has made wealth alternate; no one has them perpetually.

When people asked Abu Jahl about the message, he said, ‘We have competed with Banu Abd Manaf in honour; so that we became like racehorses’. They said, ‘There is a prophet amongst us to whom Allah gives revelation with whom we will not be pleased and we will never follow him until we get some revelation as he does’. The meaning of racehorses is that when horses were released in a race at the same time, they would drive a stick into the earth at the end of the race and whoever pulls it out of the earth, would achieve a great success. The stick of success is the objective of the competition so that no competitor can claim that the other one scarcely precedes him or something like that.

Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘When a divine message is brought before them…’ (*al-An‘am:* 124), and, in another instance, says, ‘We have brought you a divine message from your Lord.' (*Ta Ha:* 47) Thus, the divine message, due to its clarity, independence, identity and peculiarity is personified as a human being who is indeed coming and brought before them.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* quotes the disbelievers' saying: '…They say, "We shall not believe unless we ourselves are given a divine message as Allah's messengers were…' (*al-An'am:* 124). Yet, Allah, in refutation of their words, warns them not to suggest this heresy because '...But Allah knows best where to place His messages...' (*al-An'am:* 124). The message only comes to spread goodness amongst people, but it refrains itself from taking benefit from this goodness. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* has come to convey goodness for others, while he himself obtains nothing from it, whereas, ordinary people firstly want this to themselves and then leave some to the others. For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before he died, ordered his family not to receive *zakat* (the obligatory charity) and to give any money left after his death as *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) to the needy. He *peace and blessings be upon him* did not get any benefit from the prophethood in this life, as well as, he did not want to leave any money to his family to inherit; this is the reason that he was entrusted with it. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* sets His goodness to be for all mankind; thus, the message is a responsibility rather than an achievement. The reward and compensation for Prophethood is not in this life, but it is in the Hereafter.

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made the Pledge of Aqabah with the disbelievers, they said, 'Stipulate something for your benefit.' He said, 'I would be deprived of what you deprive yourselves of and you should do such-and-such.' They said to him, 'What is the reward for doing this? You have stipulated for yourself, so what about if we abide by this? What is the recompense?' The Messenger said, 'You would have paradise.' This is the recompense that the Prophet has; paradise for whoever chooses faith, and whoever wants something other than paradise has no place with the believers. Although, he gave them other glad tidings of many things afterwards; he did not tell them this at the beginning because some people amongst them did not see goodness in this life in adopting Islam; they died while Islam was in its infancy and its followers were few. That is why he offered them the reward guaranteed for all of them. He *peace and blessings be upon him* was teaching them that the pleasures of this life are of less value to be a reward for righteous action. The righteous action is duly rewarded by an eternal dedicated recompense.

Reflecting on their saying, '…We shall not believe…' (*al-An'am:* 124), it is an insisting statement showing that they will not believe even in the future. They have made up a decision about the future. Allah disgraced them; some died as disbelievers and others become believers after the beginning of the Islamic reign in Mecca. It is amazing that the expression they are articulating is out of agitation; it does not fit with their disbelief. They said, 'We shall not believe unless we ourselves are given a divine message as Allah's messengers were…"' (*al-An'am:* 124). Their saying expresses their bitter opposition associated with stupidity; as they believe in Allah's messengers and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the seal of the prophets. If they recognise that Allah has selected messengers, how can they attempt to determine Allah's will regarding whom He chooses?

Although Allah's messengers did have universal, tangible, visible, and credibly timed miracles, they were not everlasting. For example, whoever witnessed the miracle of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* striking the sea with his staff causing it to split apart, would never deny this universal miracle, so long as he experienced it. However, whoever did not witness the miracle, but rather, heard it as a transmitted piece of information, would notice that the miracle was timed as being suitable to the limited message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to the children of Israel. Likewise, the miracle of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* when he cured the blind and the leper with Allah's permission was also limited to a certain time. These miracles worked for a limited time and for a particular people. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with the miraculous unlimited message that would remain everlasting until the Day of Resurrection. Hence, miracles are of two kinds; the tangible which targets only particular people witnessing this unrepeated timed matter. On the other hand, the intangible unlimited miracle of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which perpetually remain until the Hour of Resurrection. This is the reason that made the miracle intangible, conceptual, and perpetual regardless of various nations or times. Nevertheless, they wanted a tangible miracle and another conceptual to easily deny either of them. Putting an end to the matter, Allah *the Exalted* says, '…But Allah knows best where to place His messages….' (*al-An'am:* 124)

Allah's words 'knows best' indicate that He *the Almighty* may enable some of His creation to know the reason of choosing Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be a messenger. As per the believers of the call of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they did not wait for a miracle. They believed him at once because they used to recognise him as the ever truthful and trustworthy in worldly accounts, so he ought to be trusted with the news from the Heavens. Hearing about the message, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* believed this at once, saying, 'You have spoken the truth'; as well as the Mother of the Believers, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* who immediately believed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as he spoke of signs of prophethood. Her belief was based on the anticipated early stages of his life, where she set the first example on the jurisprudential derivation in Islam. Before jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was known in its modern terminological sense, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* originated this science and indicated that derivations of proofs depend on sound, natural, dispassionate and intellectual disposition, which can investigate the matter and inevitably be guided. As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told her that he feared that he had been afflicted by some illness, or by some jinn, as she contested this, since he maintained the ties of kinship, helped, and supported all people against calamities of life. She said to him, 'By Allah, He will never disgracefully desert you.'

Thus, she anticipated that Allah will never forsake him because of his outstanding merits and the sublime human virtues appeared, before the heavenly message came, due to his sound natural disposition. This first jurisprudential derivation in Islam was the reason of Allah's choice to Khadija Allah *be pleased with her* to be the first wife of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. During this period, not only did he need a supportive wife, but also a mature woman, having a comprehensive sanity to be able to perceive the signs of prophethood, to bring him food when he went to the cave and to accompany him to Waraqa ibn Nawfal. But for his first wife Khadija, no younger woman could have given the first model of jurisprudential derivation in Islam.

As Allah says, '…But Allah knows best where to place His messages…' (*al-An'am:* 124); yet, they persisted in overlooking the truth even though it made them conclude that he had the qualities of a messenger. Subsequently, Allah says: '... humiliation before Allah and severe torment will befall the evildoers…' (*al-An'am:* 124). In this verse, there is a transitional breach in the reference; beforehand, Allah refers to them as the most powerful people as they called themselves, whereas, He currently mentions them as evildoers who will encounter humiliation. The meaning of humiliation is not only the shame publicly brought upon them by others; but rather, it is the humiliation and shame from within each one of them such that each of them feels humiliated in front of himself. Thus, this humiliation that befalls man within himself and comes from Allah will never cease because there is no other power that can put an end to Allah's Preordainment. Hence, constant unavoidable humiliation will befall them, in addition to being afflicted with severe torment, even though they are the most powerful people.

Why is the torment characterised by being severe? It is previously said that torment is occasionally described as 'grievous', sometimes as 'shameful' and other times as 'severe'. Man has a physical structure and abstract self; the shameful torment is that which bears humiliation to the self; however, the grievous torment is that which causes pain to one's physical structure. In terms of physical structure, he is afflicted with torment, whereas, in terms of psychological abstraction, he is afflicted with humiliation. There are people who experience pain but cannot be humiliated; they bear the hardship with fortitude and the more they are subjected to humiliation, the more they regard themselves as noble for having endurance. In this concern, a poet said,

I show my endurance to those who celebrate at my misfortune
Indeed, with the passing of time, I will not become insubstantial

This is the reason that Allah's Preordainment decrees torment of two types; the first type causes pain to the physical structure and the second type bears humiliation to the abstract self. This is the humiliation and the severe unbearable punishment which Allah does not set upon the evildoers haphazardly, but rather due to their cunning schemes. He *the Almighty* says, '...We did not wrong them; yet, they persistently wronged themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 118)

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He does not enforce, with His Preordainment, any of His creation in matters of choice within the scope of legal responsibility. He *the Almighty* establishes a framework of this issue in the verse, ‘... “Let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so...”’ (*al-Kahf:* 29). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear in this verse, ‘...humiliation before Allah and severe torment will befall the evildoers…’ (*al-An‘am:* 124). As for the matter of legal responsibility, He does not punish them compellingly; but rather with consideration for the evil deeds resulting from their own choice. Hence, the punishment and the humiliation were a reward for their scheming.

Sequentially, Allah *the Exalted* mentions an issue causing justificatory argument among some people who have sinned. They claim that this transgression against themselves is subject to Allah’s will. They quoted this verse to support their viewpoint:

فَمَن يُرِدِ ٱللَّهُ أَن يَهۡدِيَهُۥ يَشۡرَحۡ صَدۡرَهُۥ لِلۡإِسۡلَٰمِۖ وَمَن يُرِدۡ أَن يُضِلَّهُۥ
يَجۡعَلۡ صَدۡرَهُۥ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجٗا كَأَنَّمَا يَصَّعَّدُ فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِۚ
كَذَٰلِكَ يَجۡعَلُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلرِّجۡسَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١٢٥

When God wishes to guide someone, He opens their breast to *islam*; when He wishes to lead them astray, He closes and constricts their breast as if they were climbing up to the skies. That is how God makes the foulness of those who do not believe rebound against them [125] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 125)

Someone may ask that if Allah wills to open a man’s heart to grasp Islam, so what about Allah’s guidance concerning the sins of those who are legally responsible?

In response to this, it should be notified that guidance has two meanings. The first meaning is that of indicating direction to the right path; the matter which is desired and required, even for the disbeliever. Thus, Allah’s guidance for the disbeliever implies showing him the right path. The other type of guidance is that of support presented to the believers who deserve Allah’s assistance to lessen the burdens of the commandments, make them passionately abide by all commands and intensely detest and avoid all prohibitions.

Some of the righteous people say, ‘O Allah, I fear that you will not reward me for my obedience because I have come to passionately demand it’. The righteous person no longer sees any burden in fulfilling commandments. Thus, he is afraid because he expects to encounter some hardships in fulfilling commandments. Such persons have become accustomed to worship and obedience in a reciprocal attractive relation. He took Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a role model. As Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* noticed that people performed prayers in an inactive laziness when they were called to it, as he ordered Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* at the time of prayer (to call for it), ‘O Bilal! Call for the prayer, provide relief to our souls with prayer.’(1)

Paradoxically, this concept of comfort is contrary to what some people say nowadays when they perform the prayer, ‘Let us hurry up and get this over with’; they perform it as if it is a burden, whereas, when something beyond the scope of reason afflicts those who have become used to comfort their souls with prayer, they will perform further prayers to draw nearer to Allah by way of optional extra acts of worship. This is the reason that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rose for prayer whenever something inflected him; i.e. something that humans were incapable of dealing with. Thus, rising for prayer represents a logical matter in times of distress. Similarly, on childhood, we used to go to our parents to solve some problems beyond our means; surely, to Allah ascribed the utmost example of perfection.

Therefore, ardently sticking to the commandment shows that the person has tasted the sweetness of obedience. It may be possibly hard on him because it detaches him at first from what he was habitually accustomed to. By then, he says, ‘Indeed, Allah causes this hardship to deserve an excellent reward’. As he comes to ardently desire the prayer as it becomes beloved to him. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave an example when he said, ‘None of you [truly] believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought,’(2) i.e. his desires come in accordance with Allah’s commandments, and then he is indeed a sound believer.

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(1) *Related in Sunan Abi Dawud*

(2) *Narrated by An-Nawawi*

If the person is induced by the guidance of indication to the right path and he believes in Allah *Glorified is He* then He *the Almighty* will ease his ardently fulfilling of commandments. Thereupon, the people of righteousness conceive that He *the Exalted* deserves to be prayed for more than five obligatory times a day, as well as more than the stipulated 2.5%-quota-share of *zakat* (obligatory charity) because He is the Giver of everything. This is the ardent fulfilment of the commands in Allah's verse, 'Whomsoever Allah wills to guide, He opens his heart to Islam…' (*al-An'am:* 125).

This verse means that He *the Almighty* shows His right path to all human beings, but He will ease the fulfilment of the commandments for those who are induced by the guidance and believe in Him, as Allah says, 'But Allah gives more guidance to those who are guided, and good deeds of lasting merit are best and most rewarding in your Lord's sight.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 76)

This is the guidance of support and assistance where there is a difference between 'being Muslim' and 'having faith'. Faith does not only involve creed; but also, it incurs the self with the requirements of faith. Accordingly, the most prominent figures of Quraysh refused to declare that there is no god but Allah because they knew that these were not mere words uttered, but rather, they entailed fulfilling the requirements of faith that would embarrass them by inconvenient subsequent obligations and prohibitions! The commandment would drive them to fulfil difficult obligations and evade desirable prohibitions. To that end, Allah says, 'Whomsoever Allah wills to guide, He opens his heart to Islam…' (*al-An'am:* 125).

Allah *Glorified is He* opens man's heart to Islam after admitting Allah's monotheism. Afterwards, he complies with the commandments because his faith entails compliance with the commandments. Whoever takes the first guidance and believes in His Lord, Allah opens man's heart to Islam and makes his actions easier as a reward for his faith. As Allah says, 'Have we not opened up your heart?' (*ash-Sharh:* 1)

The verse shows that Allah rewards the believer with this because he persists with the truth; thus, he seeks to know the required commandments. As Allah finds that he is exceptionally prepared to accept the commandments, as He *the Almighty* makes them easier by making him desire them. He may willingly restrain himself with more requirements beyond Allah's Commandments to seek to be among the superior people of divine manifestation who have affection and desire with Allah. He considers his decreed acts of worship insufficient as compared to Allah's bounties; thus, he increases his acts of obedience as per the Qudsi Hadith, 'Whosoever shows enmity to a friend of Mine, then I have declared war against him. And My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved to Me than the religious duties I have obligated upon him. And My servant continues to draw near to me with supererogatory deeds until I Love him. When I Love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks.'(1) Allah speaks about extra acts that go beyond the commanded requirements from the stipulated prayer, obligatory charity, fasting, and pilgrimage.

Therefore, the verse, 'Whomsoever Allah wills to guide, He opens his heart to Islam…' (*al-An'am:* 125) means that He *the Almighty* facilitates and eases matters on those who ardently desire these acts of worship and embarks on them with submissiveness. These acts are thought to be laborious because of the persistence of some people with them. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* gives examples in His creation; for instance, wealth is eagerly beloved by humans especially when it comes by a legislative and permitted way through toil and hard work. Therefore, Allah fills the righteous' heart with compassion to give and spend from this beloved bounty.

Indeed, the believer donates to the needy because the needy is a bridge for the giver to attain a reward from Allah. Thus, the believer is grateful to the needy who carries his provision to the Hereafter without any charge; i.e. the needy gives him causes to be recompensed in the Hereafter for his bounties. When a Muslim came to Ali *Allah be pleased with him* asking him, 'How can I know whether I am one of the people seeking for the pleasures of this worldly life or the people seeking for the rewards in the Hereafter?' Ali *Allah be pleased with him* set a standardised measure for assessing faith of every believer. He said to the man, 'Upon receiving two kinds of people; a needy asking for a donation, and a giver coming to offer you something, if you are courteous towards the giver then you are from the people seeking for the pleasures of this worldly life. If you are courteous towards the needy then you are from the people seeking for the rewards in the Hereafter; because the man loves the one who grants him what he loves.’

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

Therefore, this verse under discussion means that Allah *Glorified is He* makes the laborious aspects of the commandment easier for the believer such that there is no hardship. After that he is elevated to another rank in which he ardently desires the commandment and Allah guides him to Paradise because there is guidance to the right path and guidance to the reward for choosing the path. To this end, the Quran says about those who have gone astray, ‘Allah will not forgive those who have disbelieved and do evil, nor will He guide them to any path except that of Hell….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 168-169)

Thus, there is guidance to action and another to reward, as Allah says, ‘...That is the way, Allah could have defeated them Himself if He had willed, but His purpose is to test some of you by means of others. He will not let the deeds of those who are killed for His cause come to nothing. He will guide them in the hereafter as well and put them into a good state. He will admit them into Paradise He has already made known to them.’ (*Muhammad:* 4-6)

Somebody may ask: How does Allah guide a human being who has been killed? Is there any legal responsibility after being killed? It is the guidance of reward as per Allah’s saying, ‘He will guide them in the hereafter as well and put them into a good state. He will admit them into Paradise He has already made known to them.’ (*Muhammad:* 5-6) Whoever perseveres in doing righteous actions, Allah rewards him with paradise, whereas, whoever does evil actions, Allah punishes him in the worldly life and the Hereafter, as per Allah’s saying, ‘…And whomsoever He wills to send astray, He makes his chest tightened and constricted as if he is climbing up the skies. That is how Allah makes the foulness of those who do not believe rebound against them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 125) Someone may wonder: Is this considered an oppressive behaviour from Allah towards His creation? Certainly, this is not the case because Allah has called all people to have faith, yet only some of them do and become worthy of divine manifestations; whereas, others disbelieve and become worthy of heavy-heartedness. The meaning of ‘tight’ is that something is too small to carry out its function. When a family says that its house has become tight for itself, this means that the two-room house was relatively spacious in the beginning for the two spouses; whereas, it became tight after they had several children. Certainly, no change has taken place to the surface area of the house, but when the number of individuals increased, they felt that the house had become too small or tight.

There are various derivatives from the term ‘tight’ used in the Quran in various ways; ‘tight’, ‘tightened’ and ‘being tightened’. Allah says, ‘... Do not be distressed (have tight chests) by their scheming’ (*an-Nahl:* 127). Additionally, there is the word ‘tightened’ used in the verse under discussion. Moreover, the third term appears in Allah’s saying, ‘Is it, then, conceivable [O Prophet] that you are going to abandon any part of what is being revealed to you because the deniers of the truth dislike it, and because your chest is being tightened....’ (*Hud:* 12)

It is known that the chest is the place where the two fundamental organs; the heart and the lungs, are located, where life without them cannot go on. Concerning the intestines, they might slow down or partially stop, while man can survive without food for a long time depending on his own storage of fats or flesh. Likewise, he can survive for a shorter time without water; however, he cannot survive without air for more than a few minutes. No human being can leave off inhaling and exhaling.

As previously mentioned, Allah may allow some people to have the right to control other people’s need of food, and allow fewer people to control other people’s need of water, but He does not allow anyone to control other’s right to breathe. It is well known that pleasure and anger are subject to human vicissitudes; thus, if someone is angry with another and he owns his air, he can withhold it from him and the other person will die before their differences can be resolved. For this reason, Allah has never allowed any of His creation to own air.

Therefore, the entire matter is explained in His saying, ‘…He makes his chest tightened and constricted…’ (*al-An‘am:* 125). It is known that the chest is the place where lung takes in oxygen and take out carbon dioxide. When a man is afflicted with a cold, he has a difficulty breathing, as if his chest has become smaller and more tightened, i.e. there is not enough air getting in to make the lungs operate. The doctors diagnose this as being a case where the patient wants to inhale his need of oxygen and thus he gasps for breath because the chest has become more constricted. Likewise, when man ascends a staircase, he also gasps for air because the ascent requires effort to resist the earth's gravitational force that pulls man downwards. Whoever ascends upwards needs strength to move higher and resist gravity. On the contrary, descending the staircase is easy because coming down goes with gravity. If the chest becomes constricted, it means that the space within the chest is not able to inhale enough air that suffices the body. That is why it is said that 'this person has a tight chest'.

In the currently discussed verse, 'constricted' means that the one is prevented from doing something, as if you say, 'I prevented someone from doing something', i.e. I constricted and hindered him from carrying out this work.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…As if he is climbing up the skies….' (*al-An'am:* 125) 'Climbing up' means to move the entire body in that direction with exhaustion. That overtiredness caused on climbing up is due to opposing gravity. This requires two forces; one for doing the action itself and the second for resisting gravity.

This verse shows that man always feels exhausted on adopting acts of commandments because of the difficulties of legal responsibility; he does not embark upon them with ardent love. No one embarks upon the difficulties of legal responsibility except the believer, and he is the one who accepts these commandments with an open heart while remembering the reward which facilitates the difficulty of actions. For example, the scholar who is diligent in his studies calls to mind the pleasure and the fruits of success on himself and his family in the future. As for the one who does not call to mind the fruits of his work, the action becomes difficult for him.

The sky is everything that is above and overshadows the human being, so the atmosphere and the clouds above are among the sky. Allah *Glorified is He* has made it clear that He *the Almighty* has established the seven skies. In that respect, some scientists wanted to use this current verse to prove the veracity of the Quran as being incorporating universal miracles until the Hour is established. They used an emphatic form to demonstrate that Allah's verse is the first reference signifying that the person climbing up into the atmosphere becomes tired and needs two efforts; the first is for doing the action and the second is for resisting gravity. This is the reason that makes man’s chest constricted because he cannot find sufficient air to give him energy.

In reacting to their view, certainly, there is nothing that prevents the derivation of a universal issue from the Quran to prove Quranic veracity, but let us restrain ourselves from connecting the Quran to all universal issues. If we use the commentary of a verse to confirm an existing theory, then the verse is liable to be refuted afterwards by any scientist who may uphold the mistake of this theory in the future.

It is obligatory upon those who are sincere to connect the verses of the Quran with the universal miracles to be attentive in order not to connect the verses to any refutable issue but to scientific facts only. There is a difference between the theory and the fact because the theory is hypothetical and may be refuted. Thus, do not expose the Quran to uncertainties or doubts; do not connect it to any refutable theories, but rather to scientific facts whose veracity has been approved by scientific experiments.

Allah is the Creator of the universe, and therefore there is no contradiction between the Quran and the universal facts. Therefore, you should not restrict Quranic facts to your understanding, and you should be well aware that the Quranic fact remains as pure as the universal fact.

Per Allah’s saying, ‘…That is how Allah makes the foulness of those who do not believe rebound against them’ (*al-An‘am:* 125) Allah makes ‘foulness’ to be their punishment. It only comes to them because of their disbelief and their non-acceptance of legal responsibility. Subsequently, Allah says:

وَهَٰذَا صِرَٰطُ رَبِّكَ مُسۡتَقِيمٗاۗ قَدۡ فَصَّلۡنَا ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لِقَوۡمٖ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ﴿١٢٦﴾

[Prophet], this is the path of your Lord, made perfectly straight. We have explained Our revelations to those who take heed [126] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 126)

The demonstrative pronoun ‘this’ refers to the preceding verses from the Quran, which opens the heart to accept faith. The Quran is the bearer of

Islam, and the demonstrative pronoun refers at times either to the Quran, or to Islam. There is no difference between the Quran and Islam.

'This is the path of your Lord, made perfectly straight…' (*al-An'am:* 126). The path is straight; it could be twisting in some parts, but it goes straight as a whole. We know that the straight path is the shortest way that takes someone to the sought destination. Thus, the word 'path' should come with 'straight' to infer the meaning of the shortest way to the sought destination without any obstacles. Similarly, the engineers calculate the dimensions and measure the length of the way, as well as they bring specific tools to straighten and pave a road. The straightness of the road may be exposed to hindering obstacles such as mountains, for example. Thus, engineers either drill a passageway through the mountain to make sure that the road is straight, or bend the road around the mountains to ensure the quality of the road's construction. This is the case so that the vehicle can avoid obstacles.

However, if the path has been paved by Allah, will there be any obstacle? Absolutely no; therefore, it is a straight path. It is noticeable that Allah says, '... The path of your Lord…' (*al-An'am:* 126), i.e. it is the path that comes as a gift from Allah, the Lord and *the Exalted*. He is the Creator and the Warrantor Who supports His creation in their mission and makes it easy for them. This is the right, paved and straight path granted by Allah, that is, the easiest shortest way driving us to a good ending of life.

In this verse '[O Prophet!] This is the path of your Lord…' (*al-An'am:* 126), Allah *the Almighty* has associated the word 'Lord' to 'Muhammad'; i.e. Allah, for Prophet Muhammad's sake, has made the path straight because He *the Almighty* is the Lord of Prophet Muhammad, as He is the Lord of the entire universe. Messenger Muhammad is the most important being in the universe.

Allah's verse, '…We have distinctly explained in details Our revelations...' (*al-An'am:* 126) means that everything in this universe is distinctly created for what suits it, and that Allah has created everything in the universe to achieve its objective without any difficulty or adversity. The path that Allah has drawn is only to rectify the universe and make everything therein suited its mission. All human beings, per Allah *the Exalted* are equal because He does not grant life to any creation in the universe without providing him with the necessary tools needed for leading it. Every person has a tool, either a talent or an ability, granted by Allah Who makes them as numerous as the number of human beings. When someone wants to build a house, does he learn in an engineering school how to draw a design for a house? Does he learn how to be a technician, electrician, or wall painter? Obviously, the individual cannot specialise in all these, and that is why Allah has distributed talents amongst His creation. This is how society complements itself so that individuals do not overlap one another.

If we were all doctors or engineers, we would not have any benefit to the world. Those, whom we accused of being unsuccessful in education, are undertaking indispensable tasks. Indeed, Allah has created them with limited mental abilities to grant them other abilities suiting their tasks. If the entire society was highly educated, the pyramid would become inverted. That is why Allah has attached every task to the need for it. Whoever being excellently satisfied with Allah’s preordainment for him, will be granted all goodness in his work.

It is noticeably remarkable that any employee is subjected to a fixed salary, whereas, the plumber, for example, self-reliantly estimates his work and freely earns his wage in remuneration for effort exerted. The great suffering and toil afflict those whose work is estimated and controlled by someone else.

By examining every issue in the universe kept from the interference of the human being, it remains sound and proper, whereas, every corruption is found in the matters where man poked his nose deviating them away from Allah’s path. If we settle every issue per Allah’s Law, the universe would be entirely proper and organised. Allah *the Almighty* draws man’s attention towards the superior order of the universe from which human’s interference is denied. Definitely, man has no control over the skies, celestial bodies, sun, moon, or the movement of the earth, whereas, they work per a superior order organised by Allah. Allah informs us, ‘He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not transgress the due balance.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 7-8) Man should refer everything under his choice to Allah’s Law; without any interference, he would find that these matters would be carried out as should be.

Therefore, man should remember how to use the available preliminary measures that lead him to results. Should sound preliminary measures be taken, he would inevitably reach the objectives liable to natural disposition. The simplest truth he can reach after deep contemplation of, ‘Who created you’? ‘Did you create yourself’? ‘Certainly, you did not.’ ‘Were you created by some creatures like you’? ‘Definitely, you were not’. ‘Has any creature claimed – and how many are their claims – that he created you or created your soul’? ‘Unquestionably, there are no claims’. Consequently, we, and the entire universe are Allah’s creation. Thus, Allah is the Only One Who has the right to lay down the law of human being’s maintenance. Further, mankind will remain tired and weary until they become submissive to their Creator.

As Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘We have distinctly explained in details Our revelations to people who take heed.’ (*al-An‘am:* 126) He *the Almighty* does not explain revelations to only one person, but rather, he says ‘to people’. Accordingly, when one of believers deviates or is heedless, another one will give an advice to correct him. They have mutual responsibility of reminding each other so that everyone should protect the other from himself. If there is any inadequacy, out of forgetfulness or heedlessness or personal desires, another believer will give an advice to correct this. This is a universal issue; by examining all existences, it never differs. The objective that Allah has mentioned in the subsequent verse should be remembered:

لَهُمۡ دَارُ ٱلسَّلَٰمِ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡۖ وَهُوَ وَلِيُّهُم بِمَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ١٢٧

They shall have the Home of Peace with their
Lord, and He will take care of them as a reward
for their deeds [127] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 127)

Allah promises those people who were patient in adversity, were vied in patience with others and were ever ready to do what is right (having prayer, or warding off an attack), by having the abode of peace. The Quranic style brought forward those who deserve paradise for a specific reason that Allah intends. He *the Almighty* mentions them at first to indicate that this abode is specified for them alone and no one else. It is purely specified for them alone on the Day of Resurrection. ‘Abode’ is the place where man dwells and which contains everything that needed in his stay. It has a slightly broader meaning than the word ‘home’ which simply refers to the dwelling-place.

The word *bayt* means a place for lodging, but the word *dar* means a place to live in that contains all the necessities of life. Here the word *dar* is affixed to the word *as-salam* which refers to one of Allah's Magnificent Names. Allah clarifies that those who deserve the reward will have an abode of peace which belongs to Allah. Therefore, it is expected to contain bounties and facilities that suit the status of Allah, to Whom this abode belongs. Allah has not said, 'the abode of Allah' because He has willed to mention one of His Attributes that give them the feeling of peace, security and tranquillity. There is a difference between the abodes of the worldly life and this abode of peace; the abodes of the worldly life contain pleasures, but you have two options: either you leave these pleasures or they leave you. Therefore, there is no security in the worldly life because you may be subjected to enmity and hostility or suffer from diseases. All these sufferings disturb your peace and security in the worldly life; therefore, Allah made the Hereafter an abode of peace for the people who believe in Him, and will let them feel secure from all the problems of the worldly life.

"For them will be the home of peace with their Lord." (*al-An'am:* 127) The verse indicates that the abode of peace is not just a promise from Allah of something that does not exist now, but Allah has already prepared it for the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* has created paradise that can accommodate all the believers from among His servants, and He has created Hell that can accommodate all the disbelievers from among His servants. The believers will be rewarded with the abode of peace which has been prepared for them, and will inherit the abode which has been prepared for the disbelievers if they had believed 'Those are the inheritors. Who will inherit *al-Firdaus* (Heaven), they will abide therein eternally' (*al-Mu'minun:* 10-11). Allah has not created limited gardens; rather, He has prepared gardens that could accommodate all of mankind if they believed and has created hell that could accommodate all of mankind if they disbelieved. As long as these abodes of peace are attributed to Allah, they are secure. Then, Allah will not leave the believers in the abodes He has prepared for them without guardianship, He says, '...and He is their guardian because of what they did.' (*al-An'am:* 127)

Allah prepares paradise for the believers and he becomes their guardian. We should note that guardianship in the worldly life is provided through the means that Allah has created and subjected to the believers. However, in the Hereafter this guardianship will not be provided through the previously mentioned means, but it will be directly provided by Allah to the believers because He will give them immediately whatever will cross their minds. People are not familiar with this pleasure because in the worldly life people enjoy the means which Allah has created for them, but in the Hereafter, no one will possess anything except Allah. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...to whom belongs all sovereignty this Day?' (*Ghafir:* 16) The answer to this question is His saying, '...To Allah, the One, the Subduer of all.' (*Ghafir:* 16)

Allah will guard the believers and He will be close to them to provide them with all that they want to the extent that they will not need to call on Him, but in the worldly life, the believers ask Allah to bestow bounties on them and to keep harm away from them. He will be the guardian of the believers as a reward for what they used to do in the worldly life. People will reap in the Hereafter the rewards of their deeds in the worldly life. Allah gives the believers rewards in return for their patience because whatever good deeds the believers may do will not measure up to even a very small amount of Allah's bounties and will not be enough to show gratitude to Him. In addition, Allah's rewards in return for the believers' good deeds are considered grace from Him. Therefore, Allah clarifies that when you manage to make success, beware of being tempted by your deeds; rather, you must remember that it is a grace from Allah, 'Say, "In [this] bounty of Allah and in His grace – in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather."' (*Yunus:* 58)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this matter saying, 'The good deeds of any person will not make him enter Paradise.' That is none can enter paradise through his good deeds. They (the Prophet's Companions) asked, 'Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'Not even myself, unless Allah bestows His favour and mercy on me.'(1)

Therefore, success is achieved by Allah's grace, provided that one does righteous deeds. A person does righteous deeds and our Lord gives him double the reward of his deeds, which certainly, do not benefit His Majesty and do not increase any of His Attributes or Sovereignty. However, He rewards the believers in return for their deeds to benefit them.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in the chapter, Descriptions of the Hypocrites, and this is his wording; Related by Al-Bukhari in the chapter, Making the Heart Tender, and the chapter, Patients; Ibn Majah in the chapter, Asceticism, Ad-Darimi in the chapter, Making the Hearts Tender and Ahmad in Al-Musnad, 2/235, 256*

Therefore, Al-Razi *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Doing righteous deeds cause happiness and spiritual ease, which are regarded immaterial matter that exists in a physical form (human beings). Psychological issues affect the physical form; when a person becomes angry, this anger affects his physical appearance as his face turns red, and his body may shake. Likewise, if something that pleases you occurs, happiness affects the outward appearance and is reflected in the facial expressions. Therefore, deeds affect the physical form and vice versa.' Then, Allah says:

وَيَوۡمَ يَحۡشُرُهُمۡ جَمِيعٗا يَٰمَعۡشَرَ ٱلۡجِنِّ قَدِ ٱسۡتَكۡثَرۡتُم مِّنَ ٱلۡإِنسِۖ وَقَالَ
أَوۡلِيَآؤُهُم مِّنَ ٱلۡإِنسِ رَبَّنَا ٱسۡتَمۡتَعَ بَعۡضُنَا بِبَعۡضٖ وَبَلَغۡنَآ أَجَلَنَا ٱلَّذِيٓ أَجَّلۡتَ لَنَاۚ
قَالَ ٱلنَّارُ مَثۡوَىٰكُمۡ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ إِلَّا مَا شَآءَ ٱللَّهُۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿١٢٨﴾

On the day He gathers everyone together [saying], 'Company of jinn! You have seduced a great many humans,' their adherents among mankind will say, 'Lord, we have profited from one another, but now we have reached the appointed time You decreed for us.' He will say, 'Your home is the Fire, and there you shall remain'– unless God wills otherwise: [Prophet], your Lord is all wise, all knowing [128] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 128)

'And [mention, O Muhammad], the Day when He will gather them together...' (*al-An'am:* 128). The word "*yawm*" which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is an adverb of time, i.e., the verse tackles an event. This means that all creatures will be gathered. When we consider the next part of the verse, we find that it does not tackle the event; rather, Allah says, 'O assembly of jinn…' (*al-An'am:* 128). This is a vocative case, which requires the presence of someone calling – Who is Allah in this case - and someone being called, which is the assembly of jinn and human beings. This saying means that the Day when Allah gathers all creatures, He will say, 'O assembly of jinn…' The word *hashr* means 'gather' and the word *ma`shar* means 'an assembly of individuals who mix and coexist with each other while having all the elements necessary for life.' The word '*ma`shar* can also refer to a group of people who share a certain profession, such as the company of merchants, scientists or ministers. However, the expression '*ya ma`shar al-misriyyin*' (O Egyptians) refers to a group of individuals who mix and coexist with each other.

'O assembly of jinn, you have misled many of mankind….' (*al-An'am:* 128)

The Arabic verb '*istakthar*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means 'to take a great deal of something', such as the person who takes or gathers a great deal of money or makes many friends. What does '*istakthartum min al-ins*' mean? We know that some of the jinn are obedient and some are disobedient, and the reason for disobedience amongst the jinn is Satan who vowed, 'By Your Might, I will surely mislead them all…' (*Sad:* 82). Allah clarifies that the assembly of jinn have strived to mislead humans and have increased the number of the disobedient by doing so. At the beginning, the disobedient were only the devils from among the jinn, and then they have attracted some humans to the side of the disobedient. Therefore, they have increased in number and thought that by doing so, they would gain might and dominance because if the humans obeyed their whisperings, the jinn would become their masters; that is what happened. When someone entered a valley, he would say, 'I seek refuge in the Master of this valley from the jinn' and would ask Allah to protect him and his property. However, when the jinn whispered something to him, he rushed to carry it out. Accordingly, the jinn were increasing in number by attracting the humans to their side.'…And their allies among mankind will say, "Our Lord, some of us benefited others..."' (*al-An'am:* 128).

Not only did the jinn benefit the human beings, but humans also benefit from the jinn. Therefore, there is an exchange of benefits between the jinn and humans in contradiction with Allah's law. The first group have tempted and dominated the second as they have ordered them to carry out deeds that contradict with Allah's law, while the second group benefit from the first group as they help them attain their desires in a manner relevant to creed and religion. The second group urge the first to worship idols, the sun, or the moon, and they obey them, as this satisfies their natural inclination towards religious obedience because everyone is created with an instinct to resort to a higher power; when man considers his status and that of other humans, he will realise that they are subject to changing circumstances. Their statuses change between health and illness, and wealth and poverty, so what guarantees protection for the human from these vicissitudes of life?

A person loves to attach himself to certain powers so that they can support him during the vicissitudes of life. The believers seek power in religion, rely on Allah *Glorified is He* and have faith in Allah while observing the instructions of religion regarding the commands and prohibitions. However, the associates that some people worship instead of Allah do not give any instructions or commands, except that which they consider complying with their vain desires. This is regarded as lying to oneself which does not last long because man does not cheat himself. Faith protects oneself if something happens beyond his means. No one can invoke the sun, the moon, the devil, or the stone because he would never lie to himself. An example on this meaning is Allah’s saying, ‘And when affliction touches man, he calls upon Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove from him his affliction, he continues in disobedience as if he had never called upon Us to remove an affliction that touched him....’ (*Yunus:* 12)

Allah says about humans in this verse, “...and their allies among mankind will say, “Our Lord, some of us benefited from others, and we have [now] reached our term, which you appointed for us...” (*al-An‘am:* 128). This means that this exchange of benefits has a certain term and will end with the end of life. Then the reckoning of their deeds will begin and they will hear Allah’s saying, ‘…He will say, “The Fire is your residence, wherein you will abide eternally, except for what Allah wills.” Indeed, your Lord is Wise and Knowing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 128)

The word *mathwa* means residence and the word *mathwakum* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means ‘your place of residence’. Then the exception in the following part of the verse, ‘...except for what Allah wills...’ (*al-An‘am:* 128), was a cause for long discussions among scholars. Some scholars said that it means that Allah has absolute power and will and does what He wills. However, he has specified the misdeeds which He will not forgive and those He will forgive to whom He wills, ‘Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills....’ (*an-Nisa’:* 48)

Here Allah has specified that 'what He wills' applies to any sin other than idolatry which He will not forgive. Some scholars understand from the part of the verse '...except for what Allah wills...' (*al-An'am:* 128), that as soon as those polytheists will be resurrected and gathered, they will abide in hell, but this will happen only after they will be held to account. This exception indicates that no one will enter paradise or the hell until the reckoning of their deeds; therefore, the time of resurrection and reckoning and is excluded from the time of eternity in Paradise or in Hell.

There is also '...except as your Lord pleases...' in the chapter of *Hud* in which Allah says, 'As for those [who were destined] to be wretched, they will be in the Fire. For them therein is [violent] exhaling and inhaling. They will be abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except what your Lord should will. Indeed, your Lord is an effecter of what He intends. And as for those who were [destined to be] prosperous, they will be in Paradise, abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except what your Lord should will - a bestowal uninterrupted.' (*Hud:* 106-108)

The verse shows that there is the exception regarding residence in both Hell and Paradise. Allah says, 'They will be abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure except what your Lord should will....' (*Hud:* 107) The fact that the exception comes after stating the eternal residence in both Paradise and Hell indicates that there is a time excluded from the eternal residence in both Paradise and Hell although it has been indicated that the dwellers of paradise will remain eternally in paradise, and the dwellers of the Hell will remain eternally in Hell. How can this happen? The dwellers of hell will not only suffer from the torment of the fire eternally, but they will also be punished by freezing cold and other types of torment besides the fire. These types of torment also include Allah's wrath and curse upon them, and their dismissal and humiliation. The dwellers of paradise will have a reward greater and more distinct than paradise: Allah's goodly pleasure, as He says: 'Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode; and best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure; that is the grand achievement.' (*at-Tawba:* 72). In addition to paradise, Allah bestows on them bounties which no one other than Him knows. This is the purpose of the use of exception in this verse, which is proved by Allah's saying, '...a bestowal uninterrupted.' (*Hud:* 108) As for the dwellers of hell, Allah says, '…surely your Lord is the mighty doer of what He intends.' (*Hud:* 107) This means that Allah punishes the dwellers of hell as He wills just as He gives to the dwellers of paradise uninterrupted bestowal.

Allah ends the verse saying, '...Indeed, your Lord is Wise and Knowing.' (*al-An'am:* 128). He is Wise in His punishment, All Knowing of the person who deserves punishment and the extent of the punishment he receives. He is also All Knowing of the person who deserves rewards and bounties and the extent of the rewards and bounties he receives. He is also Wise regarding showing mercy. Then Allah says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُوَلِّي بَعْضَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ بَعْضًۢا بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٢٩﴾

In this way, We make some evildoers have power over others through their misdeeds [129] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 129)

The word *wa kadhalika* which is mentioned in the Arabic text refers to the debate that took place between the jinn and human beings, so Allah says quoting the humans as saying, '...Our Lord, some of us made use of others...' (*al-An'am:* 128).

He has not mentioned what the jinn said because this is stated in another verse. Allah says, 'And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth and I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid; nor can you be called to my aid....' (*Ibrahim:* 22)

In addition, Allah has stated what Satan says in another chapter, 'The hypocrites are like the example of Satan when he says to man, "Disbelieve." But when he disbelieves, he says, "Indeed, I am disassociated from you...."' (*al-Hashr:* 16)

Allah also has mentioned in other verses the sayings of people who have gone astray, '...And those who disbelieved will [then] say, "Our Lord, show us those who misled us of the jinn and men [so] we may put them under our feet that they will be among the lowest.'" (*Fussilat:* 29) '…And thus will We make some of the wrongdoers allies of others....' (*al-An'am:* 129)

This means that as the jinn have increased the number of the deviant people by attracting some people to their side, and as they have benefited from one another in misguidance, temptation, and submission, Allah causes wrongdoers to be their allies and does not let any righteous people to be their allies. This is because the righteous people's hearts are filled with mercy and do not have the ability to punish the wrongdoers because they adopt the approach of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the disbelievers on the day of the liberation of Mecca, as he said, 'Go, you are free.' Allah honours the righteous people, so He does not entrust them with punishing the wrongdoers; rather, He causes them to see the wrongdoers punishing one another. History has proved this point; wrongdoers have inflicted a great deal of sufferings on one another, but if their real enemies had gained the upper hand, they would have shown them mercy because their hearts are filled with mercy.

It was narrated on the authority of Malik ibn Dinar, who was a righteous person, that he said, 'I read in the *athar* (narrations from the Companions) a Divine Hadith (Revelation from Allah in the Prophet's words) in which Allah says, 'I am the King of kings; the hearts of the kings are in My Hand.'(1)

The tyrant ruler should not believe that he has assumed power because of his intelligence or strength; rather, Allah has brought him to power in order for him to discipline the wrongdoers. The evidence is that when Allah wills to put an end to the reign of this ruler, He removes fear from the hearts of his guards, and instead of using their rifles to defend him they aim their rifles at him. Thus, no one should think that a king assumes power against Allah's Will; rather, when the slaves of Allah oppress and transgress Allah causes a tyrant ruler to rule and oppress them. Therefore, it is said, 'The oppressive ruler is considered as Allah's sword on earth, as He takes revenge on wrongdoers using him, and He takes revenge on him.'

"…And thus will We make some of the wrongdoers allies of others for what they used to earn." (*al-An'am:* 129) This indicates that the great evil which Allah causes to dominate the life of some people is due to their misdeeds. One of the righteous people said, ‘I know whether my Lord considers me righteous or not from the behaviour of my riding beast. If it bolts while I am riding it, I ask myself about the reason for that and consider my sins the reason for the beast’s behaviour’. This is how Allah deals with righteous people; when they commit a sin, they are held to account for it immediately so that their record of deeds can constantly be free of sins. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There is no trouble that comes to a believer except that it obliterates from his sins, even if it is the pricking of a thorn.’(1)

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(1) *Tadhkira Al-Mawdu`at by Ibn Al-Qisrani*

When a righteous person commits some misdeeds, Allah holds him to account for them by afflicting him with an illness in his body or depletion in his wealth, as Allah does not want him to be punished severely in the Hereafter. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘A believer does not undergo (the trouble) of running a thorn or more than that when Allah effaces his sins in the manner tree leaves fall.’ (2)

‘And thus will We make some of the wrongdoers allies of others for what they used to earn.’ (*al-An‘am:* 129) The wrongdoers believe that Allah is not aware of their sins, but Allah will hold all people to account, and will either reward or punish them, depending on their deeds. Then, Allah says:

يَٰمَعۡشَرَ ٱلۡجِنِّ وَٱلۡإِنسِ أَلَمۡ يَأۡتِكُمۡ رُسُلٞ مِّنكُمۡ يَقُصُّونَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ
ءَايَٰتِي وَيُنذِرُونَكُمۡ لِقَآءَ يَوۡمِكُمۡ هَٰذَاۚ قَالُواْ شَهِدۡنَا عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِنَاۖ وَغَرَّتۡهُمُ
ٱلۡحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَشَهِدُواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ أَنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ كَٰفِرِينَ ١٣٠

‘Company of jinn and mankind! Did messengers not come from among you to recite My revelations to you and warn that you would meet this Day?’ They will say, ‘We testify against ourselves.’ The life of this world seduced them, but they will testify against themselves that they rejected the truth [130] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 130)

We notice that Allah says in this verse, ‘O company of jinn and mankind...’ because He wants to establish the proof against them that He has incriminated their actions and has set punishments for them only after He sent messengers to convey His commands and prohibitions. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has not oppressed them.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad*

(2) *Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud*

Both the jinn and human beings are addressed by this verse, '…did there not come to you messengers from among you….' (*al-An'am:* 130) Some of the scholars said that the jinn have messengers and human beings have messengers, while others said that the messengers are only from amongst human beings because the Quran states that they said, '…indeed we have heard a [recited] Book revealed after Moses…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30). Therefore, the jinn stated that a book was revealed after Musa (Moses) which they knew about. This means that the jinn received their message from human beings, and that Allah sent messengers only from among human beings and conveyed the message to the jinn. Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse, 'O company of jinn and mankind, did there not come to you messengers from among you....' (*al-An'am:* 130)

When you come across two people, the first of whom has a hundred pounds and the second has nothing, you may say that these two persons have a hundred pounds. Thus, His saying, '...did there not come to you messengers from among you..." (*al-An'am:* 130) means the humans and jinn in general. It may also mean that the messengers came to human beings then one of the jinn conveyed the message of the messenger to the other jinn, 'And [mention, O Muhammad], when We directed to you a few of the jinn, listening to the Quran. And when they attended it, they said, "Listen quietly." And when it was concluded, they went back to their people as warners.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 29) This means that warners from the jinn received the message from the human messengers and conveyed it to the jinn.

Did '...messengers not come from among you to recite My revelations…' (*al-An'am:* 130)? The word *ayat* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to the miracles that affirm the veracity of the messengers and proofs from the universe that prove the veracity of the messengers. The phrase '...to recite My revelations...' (*al-An'am:* 130) means that the messengers related to them about all the messengers, starting from Adam until Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The part of the verse, '...recite My revelations to you...' (*al-An'am:* 130) is a statement that shows accurate wording relevant to history because the word *qas* is derived from '*qas al-athar*' which means to follow someone's footsteps exactly without any deviation. Therefore, the story should be inspired by history.

'...recite My revelations to you and warn that you would meet this Day….' (*al-An'am:* 130) It is the day of disgrace on which they will stand before Allah Who will remind them that they were warned against what will happen in the Hereafter. '...They will say, "We testify against ourselves."' (*al-An'am:* 130) The life of this world seduced them, but they will testify against themselves that they rejected the truth.

Their saying, '…We testify against ourselves…' (*al-An'am:* 130), is an acknowledgement against themselves. They will bear witness that they received the messengers; what prevented them from believing the messengers and having faith? Allah answers this question saying, '…The life of this world seduced them' (*al-An'am:* 130). The thing that causes seduction should be influential; it is described in this verse as being '*dunya*' (literally means 'most inferior', but the intended meaning is the worldly life). Therefore, seduction caused by the worldly life is due to the lack of insight. '…but they will testify against themselves that they rejected the truth.' (*al-An'am:* 130) There is a verse in the Quran that reads, '...By Allah, our Lord, we have not set up partners beside Him!'

Therefore, one time they negate that they have disbelieved and another time they affirm that they are disbelievers due to the confusion that will take place in different situations. The statement, "…they will testify against themselves…" (*al-An'am:* 130) means that their limbs will bear witness against them because in the worldly life man has a will which controls his limbs and abilities enabling him to carry out voluntary actions. However, the involuntary actions are not subject to man's will. For example, no one can order his heart to beat a certain amount of times per hour or his intestines to move in a certain way, but he can walk to the mosque or to the bar. He is also able to read the Quran or a book of no benefit.

Therefore, man has control over the limbs to carry out voluntary actions while observing Allah's commands. However, on the Day of Resurrection man will not have any will over his limbs which will become free. In the worldly life, the limbs are subjugated to man’s will and are forced to do whatever he wants, but in the Hereafter they will not accept to do whatever he wants and will bear witness against their owner; the skin, the hands and the feet bear witness against people, saying, ‘And they will say to their skins, “Why have you testified against us?” They will say, “We were made to speak by Allah, Who has made everything speak....”’ (*Fussilat:* 21)

They will say, ‘…we have not set up partners beside Him…’ but their limbs will bear witness against them and will state all their misdeeds,

Then, Allah says:

ذَٰلِكَ أَن لَّمۡ يَكُن رَّبُّكَ مُهۡلِكَ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ بِظُلۡمٖ وَأَهۡلُهَا غَٰفِلُونَ ﴿١٣١﴾

Your Lord would not destroy towns for their
wrongdoing if they had not been warned [131]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 131)

The word *dhalika* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to what was stated in the previous verses, clarifying that Allah sent messengers who conveyed Allah’s message so that no one can have any pretext for their disbelief. They will affirm that Allah sent messengers to them and will bear witness against themselves. Therefore, this confirms that Allah would never destroy towns if they had not been warned because before Allah punishes for a sin, He sends down divine text via messengers. This means that Allah will not destroy them for their wrongdoing unless He has sent revelation. ‘...if they had not been warned.’ (*al-An‘am:* 131) The word *ghaflah* (heedlessness and the mind’s inattentiveness) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the word is the opposite of *yaqazhah* (heedfulness and constant attentiveness). Therefore, if they were heedful and attentive, they would not need messengers because when Allah created the creatures, He sent Adam to his offspring. Parents should instruct their children about means of sustenance in which they may be creative, they should also teach them the values of their religion, so that the values remain associated with people’s lives in the manner the other means of sustenance do.

Why have the means of sustenance survived and we have passed them on to one another and added things to them? Because religion is that which people may be heedless to, as it restricts them by its commands and prohibitions, while they seek luxury in their lives. Why is man keen to further luxury in life but he is not keen to promote values? In the past, people used to drink water from springs with their hands, afterwhich they made cups to use them for drinking, purified the water of impurities, and transferred it from springs to tanks. People are keen to make their life luxurious, but they do not pay attention to the values of religion.

If they had been heedful of their religion, every father would have taught his son the values that he learned from his father. However, Allah has shown mercy for this heedlessness and He has warned them again by His messengers. Whenever the values of religion get lost, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* sends a messenger out of His Mercy, Grace, and Justice and does not destroy towns while their people have not been warned.

Therefore, if they had been heedful to religious values, there would not have been any need for messengers because parents would teach their children the religious values just as they teach them worldly matters. This is the case up to now. For example, a father will censure his son if he is absent from school one day, neglects his lessons or fails. This is out of earnest concern for the son's future, while he has no concern for the son's performance of religious obligations. If people had as much concern for their religious values as they do for their worldly matters, the religious values would be maintained in their lives and they would be accustomed to observing them. Then Allah says,

وَلِكُلٍّ دَرَجَٰتٌ مِّمَّا عَمِلُوا۟ ۚ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

Everyone is assigned a rank according to their deeds; your Lord is not unaware of anything they do [132] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 132)

This means that all human beings and jinn have ranks according to their deeds, and this means that deeds differ; externally they may appear to be similar, but they differ in case of the abundance of deeds or according to the sincerity of the one doing them. Someone may perform a deed with complete sincerity, while someone else may perform it without showing complete sincerity. This issue of sincerity is not defined by regulations or laws, but it is only defined by Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad conveyed from Allah the following Qudsi Hadith (Revelation from Allah in the Prophet's words): ‘Sincerity is one of My secrets that I place in the heart of whomever I love of My slaves.’(1) Therefore, only Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* knows the degrees of sincerity, according to which people are assigned ranks. The ranks also depend on the amount of supererogatory deeds the slave of Allah performs; an example, is when the slave of Allah performs ten supererogatory units of prayer in addition to the five obligatory prayers which Allah has enjoined. Another example is when the slave of Allah fasts on Mondays and Thursdays in addition to fasting in *Ramadan.*

If a person performs only obligatory deeds, Allah rewards him according to the degree of sincerity in performing his deeds. When a nomad asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the position of the person who only carries out his obligations, he said to him, ‘He will be successful if he is true to what he affirms.’(2) The one who performs supererogatory deeds in addition to the obligatory deeds will be more successful, and no one can reach the rank of more successful people unless he attains a higher degree. The Arabic word *darajat* (degrees) indicates elevation, while the word *darakat* indicates descent. Allah is All-Aware of the inward and outward intention of the deeds of every slave. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَرَبُّكَ ٱلْغَنِيُّ ذُو ٱلرَّحْمَةِ ۚ إِن يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفْ مِنۢ
بَعْدِكُم مَّا يَشَآءُ كَمَآ أَنشَأَكُم مِّن ذُرِّيَّةِ قَوْمٍ ءَاخَرِينَ ١٣٣

Your Lord is self-sufficient and full of mercy. If He pleased, He could remove you and put others in your place, just as He produced you from the offspring of other people [133] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 133)

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* endears His worship, commands, and obedience to us for our benefit, and out of merciful Lordship. He makes us earning to attain His reward and He encourages us to perform good deeds for our own benefit because all our deeds - as previously mentioned - do not increase Allah's sovereignty by a mosquito's wingspan, and all our acts of disobedience do not decrease Allah's sovereignty by a mosquito's wingspan. He created us with having all the attributes of perfection and we have not increased Him in anything. He brought the worldly life into existence from nothing, and differentiated between an attribute that is ascribed to Allah's Essence and the creation of the creatures to whom Allah's attributes are related; Allah has been the Most-Gracious, the Most-Merciful, the Supreme and the Creator even before the creation of His creatures. He has created His creatures because He is the Creator, and He has been the Bestower of sustenance before the creation of the creatures that receive sustenance. Certainly, He has the Attribute of providing sustenance which has caused Him to provide His creatures with sustenance. As He has all these attributes, He tells anything to be and it is, and the entire universe belongs to Him. He has no need of His slaves and to Him belongs the entire kingdom. He also accepts repentance. Messenger Muhammad, *peace and blessings of* Allah *be upon him*, says, 'Allah is more pleased with the repentance of a believing servant than of a person who set out on a journey with a provision of food and drink on the back of his camel. He went on until he came to a waterless desert....' (1)

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(1) *Related by Abu Al-Qasim Al-Qushayry in Ar-Risalah from the narration of ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib*

(2) *Related by An-Nisa’i and Al-Bayhaqy in As-Sunan Al-Kubra*

'Your Lord is self-sufficient and full of mercy. If He pleased, He could remove you and put others in your place, just as He produced you from the offspring of other people.' (*al-An'am:* 133)

Allah continues to bring things into existence out of nothingness proving that Allah's attribute, the Creator exists.

Adam cannot be - by logic - the first creature in the universe,

By inductive analogy, many creatures were created before him. Thus, the entire universe was created before Adam, and it submits to Allah Who subjugated it to Adam as a vicegerent on earth. If He wills He can get rid of the creation and bring a new one.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in the chapter on Invocations, Muslim in the chapter on Repentance and At-Tirmidhi in the chapter on Invocations* '*Saqata `ala ba`irahu*` which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the Hadith means 'he found it expectedly'

Then Allah says:

إِنَّ مَا تُوعَدُونَ لَآتٍ ۖ وَمَآ أَنتُم بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

What you are promised is sure to come, and you cannot escape [134] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 134)

As Allah is the only God, when He promises, His promise will inevitably be fulfilled; and when He threatens, His threat will inevitably be carried out. The word *wa`d* (promise) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse indicates goodness while the word *wa`id* (threat) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse indicates evil. It may occur that a person does not fulfil his promise or threat because he is subject to changing circumstances, so his opinion may change and he may no longer deem his promise suitable because perhaps he promised to do something thinking that it is within his capacity, afterwhich it turned out to be beyond his capacity. He does not have control over things, but if the one who makes the promise is fully capable, and there is no other god who can oppose him regarding his promise or threat, it will inevitably be fulfilled. Therefore, when Allah gives a judgement, the believer should take it for granted because no deity besides Allah can change the judgement. In addition, Allah is not subject to change, a fact that is proved by Allah’s saying, ‘May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him. He will burn in the Flaming Hell— and so will his wife, the Hell wood-carrier, with a palm-fibre rope around her neck.’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5)

This is a threat regarding a voluntary matter; however, they did not embrace Islam. Every Muslim should be confident of Allah’s sayings and should never think that Abu Lahab and his wife could have repented and become Muslims, as Hind and Abu Sufyan became Muslims. However, Allah *Glorified is He* always knew what Abu Lahab and his wife would choose to follow, as both had the ability to choose. There is no other god who can alter what He says. ‘Say, ‘He is Allah the One.’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1) This means that there is no other god to change what Allah says.

‘What you are promised is sure to come, and you cannot escape.’ (*al-An‘am:* 134). Some people think that Allah may bring about what He has promised, but they may escape from it; yet this is simply not the case. The promise will come and they will not be able to escape, and no one can prevent Allah from fulfilling what He has promised or threatened, and they will never escape His promise or His threat. Also, they will never overcome Allah, or escape from Him or incapacitate Him for Allah is Predominant.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱعْمَلُوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّى عَامِلٌ ۖ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ
مَن تَكُونُ لَهُۥ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلدَّارِ ۗ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفْلِحُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

[Prophet], say, 'My people, you carry on as you are, and so will I: you will come to realize who will have a happy homecoming in the Hereafter.' The evildoers will not prosper [135] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 135)

The word *qawm* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means (a group of people), and it usually refers to men because they are working and life tasks are assigned to them, as the original matter regarding women is that they stay at home to take care of the household affairs. When the word *qawm* is mentioned in the Quran, it refers to a group of men who are related to each other. An example is the Allah's saying, '...let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them....' (*al-Hujurat:* 11)

As long as the opposite of *qawm* is women, then *qawm* refers to men, and the words '*al-qiyam bilmuhimmat*' (fulfilling tasks) and '*al-qawamah*' (protective care) are derived from it.

A poet said:

I do not know and I do not think I know,

Are the tribe of Hisan "qawm" (men) or women?

'[Muhammad] say, "My people, you carry on as you are…."' (*al-An'am:* 135)

The word *makan* means the space which someone's body occupies. Every organism has a '*makan*' whether in the standing or sitting position, and *makan* is a piece of the land that is occupied and assigned to a certain person. When you stand in a place, no one else can stand in the same place where you stand, as he must move you from it. If a certain space can only contain one person, then it cannot be occupied by two people at the same time, a fact which is known innately. You also find when a little child with limited knowledge wants to sit on the chair on which his brother or sister is sitting he pulls whoever is sitting on it because he innately knows that two things cannot exist in a specific space.

We also find this outside the visible realm; when we put a bottle in water, we hear air coming out of it because water cannot enter the bottle unless the air comes out. As water’s density is higher than the air’s density, it presses the air and forces it out. This proves that there is no overlapping between two things in the same place, i.e., two things cannot occupy one specific space. The word ‘*makan*’ also means the space which a person takes hold of; therefore, even regarding armies and wars, plans are formulated by different forces to take control of different spaces.

‘…you carry on as you are...’ is a saying that addresses the group who opposed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and adopted the stance of rejection towards him. Allah tells them, as a threat and rebuke, that they will never be able to harm Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He also tells them to do whatever they can do and to persist with the opposition and resistance because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is also carrying out his mission. Their persistence in opposition will not prevent him from carrying out his mission. They act per their capacity and he acts per his capacity and faith which were bestowed on him by Allah. ‘[Muhammad], say, “My people, you carry on as you are, and so will I; you will come to realise who will have a happy homecoming in the Hereafter.” The evildoers will not prosper.’ (*al-An‘am:* 135)

‘...you will come to realise who will have a happy homecoming...” (*al-An‘am:* 135). The word *lahu* which is mentioned in the Arabic text indicates that the believers will have the happy homecoming because the other party will receive a bad outcome. As the letter *‘lam’* is mentioned in the word *‘lahu’*, it indicates good outcome, but if the word *‘`ala*’ was mentioned in this context, it would indicate that they would receive a bad outcome. Therefore, the evildoers will not receive a good outcome, and they will not prosper.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَعَلُواْ لِلَّهِ مِمَّا ذَرَأَ مِنَ ٱلْحَرْثِ وَٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ نَصِيبًا فَقَالُواْ هَٰذَا لِلَّهِ
بِزَعْمِهِمْ وَهَٰذَا لِشُرَكَآئِنَا ۖ فَمَا كَانَ لِشُرَكَآئِهِمْ فَلَا يَصِلُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَمَا
كَانَ لِلَّهِ فَهُوَ يَصِلُ إِلَىٰ شُرَكَآئِهِمْ ۗ سَآءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

They apportion to God a share of the produce and the livestock He created, saying, ‘This is for God’–so they claim! – ‘and this is for our idols.’ Their idols’ share does not reach God, but God’s share does reach their idols: how badly they judge! [136] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 136)

This verse tackles those who oppose Allah’s religion. The word *dhara`a* means ‘create and spread out’. The crops are called ‘*harth*’ because they are obtained only through cultivation, and the word *al-An`am* (livestock) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is represented in eight mates which will be mentioned subsequently in another verse. They are the camels, cows, sheep, and goats.

‘They apportion to Allah a share of the crops and the livestock He created...’ (*al-An‘am:* 136). This means that they only cultivated the land, but Allah causes the plants to grow; He gives the seed its nutrients from the soil so that it can make roots to absorb the nutrients from the soil. He also creates all the nutrients that exist in the soil, and causes the seed to take the elements that are beneficial to it and leaves that which is not beneficial, per the following verse, ‘Who creates, then makes complete, and Who destines and [then] guides.’ (*al-A‘la:* 2-3) They imagine that they can act freely regarding the crops and livestock which Allah has created although Allah is the One Who has created them and can do what He wills.

They apportion to Allah a share of the crops and the livestock He created, claiming that a share of the crops and livestock is assigned to Allah and another to their idols. It would be fairer and more appropriate that the One Who has created the crops and livestock to make this division instead of them because they have taken that which is not their right to take. Furthermore, they did not give the poor, as a charity, the share which they assigned to

Allah. The other share which was assigned to the partners they worship besides Allah was given to the idols and the custodians who surrounded them along with the servants, and those who drew marked arrows. They did not make a fair division, and the reason is mentioned, '...Their idols' share does not reach Allah, but Allah's share does reach their idols....' (*al-An'am:* 136)

They were not even honest about the share they assigned to Allah. If there was crop failure, they had a specific way of allotment, and if the crops provided a surplus to sell, they followed another way of allotment. When there was a crop failure they would give what was apportioned to Allah, to the partners they worshipped beside Allah, and would say that Allah is free of need. Although they divided the shares, but they did not give the poor the share they claimed to apportion to Allah.

They adopted the same approach when they dealt with the livestock; they counted the number of livestock and apportioned a share to Allah and another to the idols. However, if an animal which had been apportioned to Allah died, they would not replace it. If an animal which had been apportioned to the idols died, they would replace it by taking an animal from the share apportioned to Allah. Furthermore, if a spring flowed to irrigate the crops that belonged to Allah's share, they would take some water from it to irrigate the land cultivated for the idols. Therefore, it is an unjust allotment from the outset, and they did not abide by it. Therefore, their judgement was bad and corrupt.

Then Allah says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ زَيَّنَ لِكَثِيرٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ قَتۡلَ
أَوۡلَٰدِهِمۡ شُرَكَآؤُهُمۡ لِيُرۡدُوهُمۡ وَلِيَلۡبِسُواْ عَلَيۡهِمۡ دِينَهُمۡۖ وَلَوۡ
شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَا فَعَلُوهُۖ فَذَرۡهُمۡ وَمَا يَفۡتَرُونَ ١٣٧

In the same way, their idols have induced many of the pagans to kill their own children, bringing them ruin and confusion in their faith: if God had willed otherwise they would not have done this, so [Prophet] leave them to their own devices [137] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 137)

They also adopted the same unfair approach regarding their children. The idols they worshipped besides Allah induced many of them to kill their children. The word *tazyin* means beautification of a certain matter due to strong attraction to it, a process which may be accidental. If the pagans were poor, they would think of killing their children so as not to be poorer; and if they were rich, they would think that their children will squander their wealth and will impoverish them. Therefore, the point is that there was either an actual state of poverty or fear of poverty. Hence, the verses that tackle this meaning have two styles; the ending of the verse differs according to its beginning. Some people may not understand clearly the reason for the Quranic styles used in the following two verses, ‘And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you...’ (*al-Isra’:* 31), And ‘...We will provide for you and them....” (*al-An‘am:* 151)

What is the difference between the two expressions? ‘We will provide for you and them’ and ‘We provide for them and for you’ are parts of two different verses. If the beginning of each of the two verses is matched with its ending, we will find that its ending is suitable for its beginning. As long as the beginning of each of these two verses differs from the other, the ending should differ. In the following verse Allah says, ‘...and do not kill your children in fear of poverty....’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) This means that there is an actual state of poverty, so the poor people referred to in this verse are more preoccupied with their own sustenance than that of their dependents. Allah says to them: ‘We will provide for you and for them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 151)

Therefore, Allah reassures them that He will provide for them and for their dependents. However, if there is not an actual state of poverty, Allah says, ‘And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you....’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) This means that Allah orders people not to kill their children out of fear of poverty. In this case, they have their own sustenance, and when they beget children, Allah will provide for the children and them. Therefore, the ending of the two verses differ because their beginnings differ. The idols whom the pagans worshiped beside Allah made killing children pleasant to the pagans. This process is very tough because humans innately love their children and love to have offspring, as they understand that no matter how long they live, they will die. Therefore, a person wants his remembrance to last and survive in the future generations, so he becomes full of joy when he has a grandson, as he guarantees to be remembered for the next two generations. He forgets that his deeds, not his children and love for extending the progeny, will cause him to be remembered. Killing children requires a severe kind of persuasion, as the pagans' associates may persuade them that if they begot children, they would impoverish and humiliate them because of raids and wars in which their nation were engaged. In addition, their children may cause them to be involved in fighting, and they would have two options: either to lose their children or their wealth. If they had daughters, they would be taken as captives after their death. This is an exaggerated incitement for the people to go against human instinct which urges them to have children. 'In the same way, their idols have induced many of the pagans to kill their own children, bringing them ruin and confusion in their faith....' (*al-An'am:* 137)

Many '…of the pagans…' (*al-An'am:* 137) indicates that some of them refused to kill their children and bringing them ruin. And '...confusion in their faith...' (*al-An'am:* 137) means that these associates brought them confusion in their religion. These people had inherited some of the religious values of the religion of Islam which were followed by the people who preceded them. Then, they deviated from this religion and turned towards idolatry. The idols induced the pagans to do some misdeeds bringing them ruin and confusion in the residual religious values they had.

If '...Allah had willed otherwise they would not have done this, so [Muhammad] leave them to their own devices.' (*al-An'am:* 137) This is because burying children alive and killing them contradicts the idea of creation because Allah has created people, and no one has the right to kill any person.

It seems that they are in conflict with Allah's will to bring beings into existence. However, if Allah *Glorified is He* had not willed, He would not have done so. He gave them the choice, per which they carried out everything they intended to do. If Allah had not created them with the ability to choose, they would not have done this because if He had willed for them not to go astray, they would not have done so. Allah has indeed brought into existence living beings that do not disobey Him, and [always] do what they are commanded to do: the angels.

Thus, this matter is not difficult for Allah, and when He imposes His will, it is only for the benefit of the creation. When He leaves man to choose, the

Creator grants him this freedom of choice. Yet, when man chooses, he does not do anything despite Allah's disapproval or in defiance of His will because divinity requires two things. It requires power that is manifested in coercive matters that the servants cannot oppose, and man is the only being that has the right of choosing between alternatives within his own will. As for the rest of the universe, it is under the law of subjugation and they have no choice.

Subjugated creatures are a proof of Allah's absolute power, but they do not prove the creation's love for Allah because love can only exist when the being has free choice. Man prefers Allah's will to his own will. (Yet, unless Allah had so willed, they would not be doing all this: stand, therefore, aloof from them and all the falsehood they invent.)

`Iftira` (inventing of falsehood) means to invent and lie on purpose, and they are intentionally fabricating because they wanted to change the truth of the matter regarding procreation. Indeed, Allah created two mates – the male and the female – for the sake of procreation.

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

وَقَالُوا۟ هَـٰذِهِۦٓ أَنْعَـٰمٌ وَحَرْثٌ حِجْرٌ لَّا يَطْعَمُهَآ إِلَّا مَن نَّشَآءُ بِزَعْمِهِمْ
وَأَنْعَـٰمٌ حُرِّمَتْ ظُهُورُهَا وَأَنْعَـٰمٌ لَّا يَذْكُرُونَ ٱسْمَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا ٱفْتِرَآءً عَلَيْهِ ۚ
سَيَجْزِيهِم بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

They also say, 'These cattle and crops are reserved, and only those we allow may eat them'– so they claim! There are some animals they exempt from labour and some over which they do not pronounce God's name [during slaughter], falsely attributing these [regulations] to Him: He will repay them for the falsehoods they invent [138] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 138)

This is persistence in idolatry; for they divided the animals and crops and allotted a share for the idols. These cattle were secured for the idols and no one could do anything to them. No one could take milk from them or ride them, or use them to benefit people in any way. They did not realise that these cattle were a blessing from Allah and should be benefitted from. It does not make sense to do nothing with animals that has been subjugated for your benefit. They indeed did this, and the True Lord tells us about them: ‘And they say, “These animals and crops are forbidden; no one may eat from them except whom we will (to do so)”, so they (falsely) claim...’ (*al-An‘am:* 138), i.e. cattle that were forbidden to use, and they were also forbidden to ride.

‘And there are those [camels] whose backs are forbidden [by them]….’ (*al-An‘am:* 138) They persisted in disbelief and pronounced the names of the idols over them, ‘and those upon which the name of Allah is not mentioned - [all of this] an invention of untruth about Him….’ (*al-An‘am:* 138)

This is a type of fabrication that they did and they attributed it as being from Allah claiming that He commanded it. If they had said that these matters were from them, then the fabrication would not be so bad, but it is a severe fabrication because they put these assumed rules and attributed them to Allah. They deviated from the religion and said that some of their practices were from the religion, and that is why Allah will requite them for what they fabricated as confirmed by His statement: ‘He will punish them for what they were inventing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 138)

The True Lord says after that:

وَقَالُواْ مَا فِي بُطُونِ هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ خَالِصَةٞ لِّذُكُورِنَا وَمُحَرَّمٌ عَلَىٰٓ أَزۡوَٰجِنَاۖ وَإِن
يَكُن مَّيۡتَةٗ فَهُمۡ فِيهِ شُرَكَآءُۚ سَيَجۡزِيهِمۡ وَصۡفَهُمۡۚ إِنَّهُۥ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٞ ١٣٩

They also say, ‘The contents of these animals’ wombs will be reserved solely for our men and forbidden to our women, though if the offspring is stillborn they may have a share of it.’ He will punish them for what they attribute to Him: He is all wise, all aware [139] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 139)

A falsehood leads them to another falsehood. They claimed that what was in the wombs of these cattle such as milk or foetuses if they came out alive, they would be for the males only and the women would not eat any of them. If anything from the wombs died both the men and the women would eat it, and this shows a split in the allotment.

The True Lord concludes the verse with the noble statement, ‘He will punish them for their description. Indeed, He is Wise and Knowing’ (*al-An‘am:* 139), i.e. He will requite them for their lies and fabrications with a suitable punishment for liars because He is wise in His actions, statement, legislation and power. He is All Knowing of the good and evil that they do, and He will punish them for what they have done in the most perfect and complete way.

The True Lord says after that:

قَدْ خَسِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَتَلُوٓاْ أَوْلَٰدَهُمْ سَفَهًۢا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَحَرَّمُواْ مَا
رَزَقَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ٱفْتِرَآءً عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ قَدْ ضَلُّواْ وَمَا كَانُواْ مُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٤٠﴾

Lost indeed are those who kill their own children out of folly, with no basis in knowledge, forbidding what God has provided for them, fabricating lies against Him: they have gone far astray and have heeded no guidance [140] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 140)

The purport of loss is that they did not realise that Allah provides sustenance for them and He also provides sustenance for their children. Perhaps a father, killed his child, and he was making a living in the vastness of his sustenance. Many children have an abundant provision and it is said about these children that their faces are faces of goodness, felicity, and blessings (their presence is the cause of good things to happen). From the day they are born, goodness is also born, and this is so that man is not ungrateful for Allah's gifts, for when you show lack of gratitude for Allah's gifts, you deprive yourself form His gift by thinking that it is not a gift, and this is a massive loss.

Indeed, we notice that the Arabs were in an environment that responded to and answered cries for help. Whenever someone cried for help, they would find someone to rescue them, and the first people to help were men and their sons. An example(1) of this is what happened to the grandfather of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when he wanted to dig a well. The people of Quraysh came and stopped him from digging and he said, 'If I had ten sons I would sacrifice one of them' (referring to the famous story concerning the father of our prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, having many sons in such situations provides family support and increases the number of sounds seeking help. This is only effective among people who are naturally disposed for helping others.

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(1) *The story of `Abd Al-Muttalib the prophet's grandfather digging the well of Zamzam and his vowing to sacrifice one of his sons*

If you kill a child for fear of poverty, then you may lose the blessings correlating with the offspring you kill. More than this, you lose the joys of having ancestry as well as family succour. In this verse, at the very least, they have lost because they have gone against Allah’s will of procreation and bringing new children into existence. ‘Those will have lost, who killed their children in foolishness without knowledge....’ (*al-An‘am:* 140) *Safahan*, 'in foolishness' means that they acted recklessly and out of stupidity and ignorance. And ‘…prohibited what Allah had provided for them, inventing untruth about Allah. They have gone astray and were not [rightly] guided.’ (*al-An‘am:* 140) When they prohibit the cattle that Allah has provided for them as sustenance, they are indeed people of misguidance and loss. If they made use of them they would have benefitted from them, in carrying their loads, providing them with milk as well as meat. Because of their ignorance, they lost a great deal. They did what they did and deliberately lied about Allah. They went astray and they were not people of guidance. It would be sufficient to describe them as ‘gone astray’ but He added ‘and were not [rightly] guided.’ (*al-An‘am:* 140) This is because going astray means that one is not heading towards the intended destination and this could be due to not knowing the route. However, the True Lord showed them the way and they preferred to go astray even though the path of truth was available.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنشَأَ جَنَّـٰتٍ مَّعْرُوشَـٰتٍ وَغَيْرَ مَعْرُوشَـٰتٍ وَٱلنَّخْلَ وَٱلزَّرْعَ مُخْتَلِفًا
أُكُلُهُۥ وَٱلزَّيْتُونَ وَٱلرُّمَّانَ مُتَشَـٰبِهًا وَغَيْرَ مُتَشَـٰبِهٍ ۚ كُلُوا۟ مِن ثَمَرِهِۦٓ إِذَآ
أَثْمَرَ وَءَاتُوا۟ حَقَّهُۥ يَوْمَ حَصَادِهِۦ ۖ وَلَا تُسْرِفُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾

It is He who produces both trellised and untrellised gardens, date palms, crops of diverse flavours, the olive, the pomegranate, alike yet different. So when they bear fruit, eat some of it, paying what is due on the day of harvest, but do not be wasteful: God does not like wasteful people [141] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 141)

In the True Lord’s statement, ‘…causes gardens to grow…’, *`ansha`a* means that He brought things into existence originally and there was no previous example. Allah did not use any illustrating models. He started them without there being any previous model because there is no creator besides Him. If there is no other partner or equal besides the Creator, then when He creates He brings a creation into existence for which there is no prior example or likeness.

The word *jannat* ‘gardens’ indicates what we know of as a defined space in which there are different kinds of plants and fruits that we eat, and it is called both *jann*a and *jannat* because the three radical letters all imply covering and veiling. From these letters, we have the word *junoon* (madness) which is the covering and concealment of the intellect, and we also have the jinn who are veiled from our eyes. There is also *al-mijann* (a shield) because it protects man from the attacks of enemies.

A garden is a place that is filled with plants and fruits. The trees tower over from above and the branches and twigs intertwine such that they veil whoever is inside and they veil him from all other places, because he has no need for other places. In the garden, there are all the essentials of life such as food, fruits, pasture, water, verdure, enjoyment etc. It contains everything. Likewise, a massive house that is complete and has all the necessary rooms is called a *qasr* (palace) because it limits your need ‘*qasarak’* for any other place. Everything you need is there, and you do not need anything else.

‘And it is He who causes gardens to grow, [both] trellised and untrellised…’ (*al-An‘am:* 141). He says, ‘*ma`rooshaten wa ghayri ma`rooshaten’* (trellised and untrellised). The word *`arsh* indicates height. The ceiling can be called *`arsh* and the word *`arsh* can also refer to a throne ‘*sarir*’ such as in the True Lord’s statement, ‘And he raised his parents upon the throne…’ (*Yusuf:* 100), *`arsh* is (throne). *`Arsh* can also apply to kingdom, such as in the True Lord’s statement, ‘and hers is a mighty throne’ (*an-Naml:* 23), where *`arsh* is (throne).

All of this indicates height and elevation. Here, the True Lord says, ‘trellised and untrellised...’ (*al-An‘am:* 141), i.e. there are plants like grapes that require stands and supports that we provide when we take care of them because their branches are very supple and cannot stand on their own. However, there is another type of plant that stands by itself and we call ground grapes. It is as if the statement refers to vines. If you look at plants that do not have a stem such as watermelons, cantaloupes, and courgettes, you find, that all other plants that do not have a stem are, spread out on the earth, and they are not held up by any stands or supports, even though, nowadays, we try to elevate them to enhance their ability to produce. The verse here is describing what was present in the Arab lands, at the time of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘And it is He who causes gardens to grow, [both] trellised and untrellised, and palm trees and crops…’(*al-An‘am:* 141), *zar`a* refers to the grains and seeds that we eat.

‘…of different [kinds of] food and olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar.…’ (*al-An‘am:* 141) When we look at this verse, we find that it has been preceded by a verse that contains all these meanings. He says, ‘And it is He Who sends down water from the cloud, then We bring forth with it buds of all (plants), then We bring forth from it green (foliage) from which We produce grain piled up (in the ear); and of the palm-tree, of the sheaths of it, come forth clusters (of dates) within reach, and gardens of grapes and olives and pomegranates, alike and unlike; behold the fruit of it when it yields the fruit and the ripening of it; most surely there are signs in this for a people who believe.’ (*al-An‘am:* 99)

Some people have tried to criticise the Quran by saying that it repeats the same meanings because they do not have the shrewdness to realise that the One speaking is Allah, and He talks about everything for a wise reason. Here, He is talking about these things as a proof of His existence and His oneness, and this is proven by how He concludes the verse, ‘…Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who will believe!’ However, the discussion in the verse that we are currently looking at, has to do with taking benefit from them. He says, ‘…Eat of [each of] its fruit when it yields….’ (*al-An‘am:* 141)

There is no doubt that having proper faith by believing in the One Creator, Allah, requires evidence first and foremost because its benefit is more inclusive, more general, more profound and longer lasting than eating for example. The most that eating can do is nourish us in this life. However, first proofs give us lasting rewards and abiding blessings. Therefore, the first verse is connected to proof, whereas this verse relates to benefit. Here we notice that He says, ‘…Eat of [each of] its fruit when it yields…’ This contains permission to consume fruits before they ripen without causing any kind of harm as a result;

if so, we should treat it with any way we are capable of, to remove, and negate the harm. Whenever you find food that has not ripened yet, you can eat it. The True Lord has not placed any restriction on us in tilling, sowing, or irrigating. Yet, Allah is the One Who causes things to grow and we are the ones who eat from it. We find that people of the countryside barbecue corn before it ripens. The True Lord says, '…and give its due (*zakat*) on the day of its harvest….' (*al-An'am:* 141)

Some said that the verse specifically refers to crops that are harvested. It does not include plants which are not harvested such as fruits. However, Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah be pleased with him* rejected this and said that everything the earth grows comes under the application of this context because it is not correct to take the meaning of *hasad* (harvest) from custom. Rather, it should be understood from the language.

What does *hasad* mean in Arabic? Linguistically, *hasad* means to cut, and when we split the desired fruit this is *hasad*. However, the harvest day '*yawm al-hasad'* is for grains, when they are still on the ears. Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah be pleased with him* is of the opinion that, from the beginning, you give to whoever is present at the time of division. Likewise, when you thresh and scatter you give, and when you filter the grains you should also give. The harvest begins from the moment you weigh and what precedes it is not counted. Whatever right you give on the harvest day is not obligatory, because He does not state that it is 'a known right' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24). In this way, the sphere of goodness expands to others who are not farmers.

'…And be not excessive….' (*al-An'am:* 141) *`Israf* (wasting) means to exceed the bounds, and some people have explained wasting as merely an increase, but the truth is that any exceeding of the bounds, whether an increase or a decrease, is called *`israf*, because it is taken from *saraf al-ma`a* (the wasting of water) which is releasing water and letting it be wasted and not used for any benefit. Mujahid said, 'If someone had an amount of gold the size of Mount of Abu Qabis, and he then spent lawfully, it would not be considered wasting, but if he spent a single *dirham* on disobedience it would be considered wasting.'

Therefore, the meaning of ‘…And be not excessive…’ contains two matters; do not exceed the bounds that the True Lord has legislated by using this in disobedience, or do not waste by giving the poor less than they deserve.

Hatim At-Ta`i was very generous, and people blamed him for this generosity. One of them said to him, ‘There is no goodness in wasting’, to which he replied, ‘there is no wasting in goodness’. That is, so long as it is in goodness it is not waste.

If we consider the matter according to the two meanings, decrease and increase, then what prevents us from giving more to the poor? There is a story related to some people who were overcome with generosity, sacrifice, and munificence when they saw the abundance of their crops, and the returns from their land that Allah had given them. They gave a lot as Thabit ibn Qays(1) had done, who had fifty date palms and gave them all to the poor and did not leave anything for his children. This matter was raised in front of Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he said, ‘Give and do not waste’. Why? It is due to the fear that afterwards you might need that which you have given and thus you will regret having given.

The True Lord then says:

وَمِنَ ٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ حَمُولَةً وَفَرْشًا ۚ كُلُوا۟ مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟ خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٤٢﴾

[He gave you] livestock, as beasts of burden and as food. So eat what God has provided for you and do not follow in Satan’s footsteps: he is your sworn enemy [142] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 142)

After talking about His blessings upon us in cultivation and His blessings upon us in livestock, He says, ‘And of the cattle...’ which are camels, cows and sheep, ‘...beasts that carry loads...’ i.e. those which carry loads *‘humula’*. It is also said that a person can be *‘hamool’*, i.e. he is tolerant and bears a lot of burdens. The True Lord says: ‘And they carry your heavy loads to regions which you could not reach but with difficulty to yourselves….’ (*an-Nahl:* 7)

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(1) *The story of the palm tree of Thabit ibn Qays*

That which they carry on their backs is also called ‘*humula*’, and that is why we say about a car that carry goods from a place to another that it has a load capacity ‘*humula*’ of such-and-such number of tonnes. ‘And of the cattle (He created) beasts that carry loads and those which are fit for slaughter only….’ (*al-An‘am:* 142)

On camels’ backs we carry men, and all our necessary things. The meaning of ‘*farshan*’ is the opposite of ‘*hamula*’. ‘*Hamula*’ are the strong animals that can carry loads. Every other grazing animal that cannot carry due to its small size, or because it has not been prepared for such a task, when you superficially look at it, you see it as something that covers the ground. The statement, ‘And of the cattle (He created) beasts that carry loads….’ (*al-An‘am:* 142) It may also mean animals that carry your goods to a place that you would be unable to reach without great hardship to yourselves. ‘*Farshan*’ refers to animals which you use to make a carpet that covers the ground, by knitting its fur, wool, and hair. ‘And of the cattle (He created) beasts that carry loads and those which are fit for slaughter only; eat of what Allah has given you and do not follow the footsteps of Satan; surely, he is your open enemy.’ (*al-An‘am:* 142)

In the discussion about cattle there is mention of those that carry loads, those that do not; and the fact that we eat them because we consume their flesh, milk and all the derivatives of their milk. This is how their benefits are multiplied. They carry us and we take their *wabar* (fur), their wool, and their hair to make carpets. *Wabar* is the hair of camels and *soof* (wool) is the hair of sheep, while the hair of goats is distinguished by lustre and a separation between its hairs.

We notice that He *the Almighty* says in the first verse ‘Eat!’ and in the second verse ‘Eat!’ and that is because it came after discussion about Allah’s provision on earth that they had deemed impermissible for themselves, so this meaning had to be emphasised, and He makes it clear, The One Who created is Allah, and the One Who commanded is Allah, so do not declare anything permissible or impermissible unless it is from the One Who created and commanded.

‘…eat of what Allah has given you and do not follow the footsteps of Satan; surely, he is your open enemy.’ (*al-An‘am:* 142) Satan is the one who whispers to them to make them contravene Allah’s way, and Satan’s enmity is manifest. If this enmity is from the past - as Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* descended from the rank of obedience to the rank of disobedience after he enticed them to contravene, and thus they left paradise - we must be on our guard against accepting his whispering.

The True Lord then distinguishes for us between the animals that carry loads and the animals that do not. He says:

ثَمَٰنِيَةَ أَزۡوَٰجٖۖ مِّنَ ٱلضَّأۡنِ ٱثۡنَيۡنِ وَمِنَ ٱلۡمَعۡزِ ٱثۡنَيۡنِۗ قُلۡ ءَآلذَّكَرَيۡنِ
حَرَّمَ أَمِ ٱلۡأُنثَيَيۡنِ أَمَّا ٱشۡتَمَلَتۡ عَلَيۡهِ أَرۡحَامُ ٱلۡأُنثَيَيۡنِۖ نَبِّـُٔونِي بِعِلۡمٍ إِن
كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ١٤٣

[God gave you] eight animals, in [four] pairs: a pair of sheep and a pair of goats – ask them [Prophet], ‘Has He forbidden the two males, the two females, or the young in the wombs of the two females? Tell me based on knowledge if you are telling the truth’ [143] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 143)

The word *azwaj* (pairs) is the plural of the word *zawj* (one pair). *Zawj* refers to something that has something else that goes with it, such as a pair of sandals or shoes. In our customary language, we understand it to mean two, but originally it refers to one which has another that goes with it except when there is no difference between the two; we cannot benefit from one except when it is put with the other, and one might not be distinguished from the other like socks. In cases like this we have allowed for the language to call both together a *zawj*, but if there is a difference between the two we do not refer to the two as a *zawj*.

The male and the female are both human beings, and it is true that both are linked in that each one of them is a person, but the male has a task and the female has a different task. As for socks, either sock can be put on either foot as there is no difference between them.

Therefore, the word *zawj* refers to a singular thing that has something else that goes with it. The True Lord says, ‘And We said, “O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 35). He says ‘*zawjuka*’ (your wife). And the word *zawj* here applies to Eve *peace be upon her* because Adam *peace be upon him* is a ‘zawj’ and Eve *peace be upon her* is a ‘zawj’. The True Lord says: ‘And that He creates the two mates - the male and female…’ (*an-Najm:* 45) He says, ‘*al-zawjaini*’ (the two mates). He does not say that both together are a ‘*zawj*’. Otherwise, He would say that He created a ‘*zawj*’ that comprised of a male and a female. Therefore, the word ‘*zawj*’ refers to one that has something else that goes with. It is similar to the word ‘*tawa`m*’ (twins), which is never said for two people but rather, for one along with another. If there are two, we say ‘*tawa`man*’ (twins).

‘They are eight in pairs - two of sheep and two of goats...’ (*al-An‘am:* 143). ‘…two of sheep...’ means the male and the female. The male is called a *kabsh* (ram) and the female is called a *na`jah* (ewe). As for the two sexes of goats, we call the male *tais* (buck) and we call the female *`anza* (doe). All in all, there are four, and from this we understand that the word *zawj* indicates an individual that has something else that goes with it. ‘Say, “Has He forbidden the two males or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Inform me with knowledge if you are truthful.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 143)

If you are the ones declaring things to be permissible and impermissible, and you say that this is from Allah, then tell us: has He forbidden the two males or has He forbidden the two females? They will not find an answer, because Allah has not forbidden this and He has not forbidden the other. Therefore, the matter is accentuated by being put in the form of a question. When something is presented in the form of a question it means that the matter is decided; such that when you ask your opponent, he will only say what you would expect him to say. This is called a rhetorical question. The True Lord says, ‘...Inform me with knowledge if you are truthful.’ (*al-An‘am:* 143), i.e. tell me what knowledge you have of prohibition if you are people of truth because you are not able to prohibit anything. Indeed, only He *the Exalted* Who created and legislated can declare things permissible and impermissible. If you have any knowledge of this, then let us know about it.

Then the True Lord mentions the four remaining types of cattle by saying:

وَمِنَ ٱلْإِبِلِ ٱثْنَيْنِ وَمِنَ ٱلْبَقَرِ ٱثْنَيْنِ ۗ قُلْ ءَآلذَّكَرَيْنِ حَرَّمَ أَمِ ٱلْأُنثَيَيْنِ
أَمَّا ٱشْتَمَلَتْ عَلَيْهِ أَرْحَامُ ٱلْأُنثَيَيْنِ ۖ أَمْ كُنتُمْ شُهَدَآءَ إِذْ وَصَّىٰكُمُ
ٱللَّهُ بِهَـٰذَا ۚ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا لِّيُضِلَّ ٱلنَّاسَ بِغَيْرِ
عِلْمٍ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

And a pair of camels and a pair of cattle – ask them [Prophet], ‘Has He forbidden the two males, the two females, or the young in the wombs of the two females? Were you present when God gave you these commands?’ So who is more wicked than he who fabricates lies against God with no basis in knowledge in order to lead people astray? God does not guide the evildoers [144] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 144)

And ‘…two of cows’ are also male and female. We call the male a *thawr* (bull), and some people make the mistake of calling the bovine female a *baqarah*. *Baqarah* is the name for both; the male and the female. The *ta`a* in *baqara(t)* is to indicate one. The female is actually called a *thawra*. ‘And two of camels and two of cows. Say, “Has He forbidden the two males or the two females...”’ (*al-An‘am:* 144). They said, ‘We have not been following a messenger. We are living in a period in which no messenger has appeared for a long time, and that no messenger has been sent to us’. So, there can be no prohibition except from Allah and Allah will only convey a prohibition to them via a messenger. Were they witness to this prohibition? Did they witness their Lord and see Him when He commanded them with this prohibition, or are they prophets? Indeed, they are deliberately lying about Allah to lead people astray. Therefore, the True Lord does not guide those who wrong themselves and wrong others.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* and then says:

قُل لَّآ أَجِدُ فِي مَآ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ مُحَرَّمًا عَلَىٰ طَاعِمٖ يَطۡعَمُهُۥٓ إِلَّآ أَن يَكُونَ
مَيۡتَةً أَوۡ دَمٗا مَّسۡفُوحًا أَوۡ لَحۡمَ خِنزِيرٖ فَإِنَّهُۥ رِجۡسٌ أَوۡ فِسۡقًا أُهِلَّ لِغَيۡرِ
ٱللَّهِ بِهِۦۚ فَمَنِ ٱضۡطُرَّ غَيۡرَ بَاغٖ وَلَا عَادٖ فَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿١٤٥﴾

[Prophet], say, ‘In all that has been revealed to me, I find nothing forbidden for people to eat, except for carrion, flowing blood, pig’s meat – it is loathsome – or a sinful offering over which any name other than God’s has been invoked.’ But if someone is forced by hunger, rather than desire or excess, then God is most forgiving and most merciful [145] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 145)

The True Lord *the Exalted* has spoken about prohibition in several verses, as there is the verse in which he says: ‘Forbidden to you is that which dies of itself, and blood, and flesh of swine, and that on which any other name than that of Allah has been invoked, and the strangled (animal) and that beaten to death, and that killed by a fall and that killed by being smitten with the horn, and that which wild beasts have eaten, except what you slaughter, and what is sacrificed on stones set up (for idols)....” (*al-Ma‘ida:* 3)

In the verse that we are currently discussing, we find that prohibition is restricted to only four things. He says, ‘Say, “I do not find in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden for an eater to eat of except that it be what has died of itself, or blood poured forth, or flesh of swine - for that surely is unclean - or that which is a transgression, other than (the name of) Allah having been invoked on it”; but whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring nor exceeding the limit, then surely your Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.’ (*al-An‘am:* 145)

So, how does this passage agree with the other passage? We say to whoever says this: You are not distinguishing between brevity and verbosity, and you are not distinguishing between the general and the specific. What has been left in this verse can be classed under carrion because the animal that has been strangled, killed by a fall, gored to death or savaged by a beast of prey, as well as that which has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars or as a sinful offering for other than Allah, can all be considered carrion.

Then, to whoever says: 'Is not the Quran the sole source of legislation?' we say that legislation is also for Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because Allah gave him authority to do so in His statement, '...and whatever the Messenger gives you, accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back....' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

Thus, do not say that what is prohibited is confined to this verse because there are many forbidden things, and the proof is that sometimes Allah generalises. For example, He declares evil things *khaba`ith* impermissible for us, and every evil thing is impermissible. We said before that blood poured forth is impermissible, and blood poured forth is the fluid that pours out, flows, and emerges at the time of slaughtering. Is there blood that does not pour forth? Yes, and it is the blood that has acquired the ability to hold itself together to be an organ in the body, such as the liver and the spleen. That is why the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Two kinds of carrion and two kinds of blood have been made permissible for us. The two kinds of carrion are the *hoot* (fish) and locusts, and the two kinds of blood are the liver and spleen.'(1) In another narration it says, '...*samak*' (fish) and locusts.'

According to the logic of prohibiting carrion and blood we would not eat the carrion of fish or the liver and the spleen, but Allah has declared fish, locusts, liver, and the spleen permissible for us because they do not harm the body. Fish and locusts do not have any blood that flows so whenever we slaughter them no blood flows out. As for the liver and the spleen, they are made of blood that is formed to be an organ in the body, and no organ in the body that carries out a task is composed of corrupt blood. Rather, they must all be composed of pure blood.

The True Lord who has legislated, considers the propitious circumstances of His commanded servants, and the situations in which they will find nothing to eat but carrion, and in this case, they only eat out of necessity to stave off harm and hunger, but the Muslim must not fill his stomach with these things.

'...but whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring nor exceeding the limit, then surely your Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-An'am:* 145) *Idtirar* (necessity) is of different types; if you cannot find anything permissible to eat, or there is permissible food to eat, but someone is forcing you to eat impermissible food, and force is classed under necessity, necessity urges you to protect yourself in a life-threatening situation, so you eat certain food to nourish yourself and avoid dying out of starvation. If Allah has allowed you to eat carrion if you think you are going to die of starvation, then what about being forced to eat under the threat of being killed instantly? Indeed, this situation is direr. He is the One Who gives and commences dispensations, which means that this is considered a commandment. Allah loves that his servants make use of His dispensations just as he loves that they abide by His rules. So long as dispensations are within the scope of the commandment, then there is forgiveness and mercy.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Majah, Al-Hakim and Al-Bayhaqi from Ibn `Umar*

The True Lord says after that:

وَعَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُوا۟ حَرَّمْنَا كُلَّ ذِى ظُفُرٍ ۖ وَمِنَ ٱلْبَقَرِ وَٱلْغَنَمِ
حَرَّمْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ شُحُومَهُمَآ إِلَّا مَا حَمَلَتْ ظُهُورُهُمَآ أَوِ ٱلْحَوَايَآ أَوْ مَا
ٱخْتَلَطَ بِعَظْمٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ جَزَيْنَٰهُم بِبَغْيِهِمْ ۖ وَإِنَّا لَصَٰدِقُونَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

We forbade for the Jews every animal with claws, and the fat of cattle and sheep, except what is on their backs and in their intestines, or that which sticks to their bones. This is how We penalized them for their disobedience: We are true to Our word [146] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 146)

Here the True Lord mentions the second prohibition which is a prohibition for correction and discipline. An example is what Allah says in a previous chapter of the Quran: 'Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful for them and for their hindering many (people) from Allah's way.' (*an-Nisa':* 160)

Zhufur (claw) is that which is apparent when we look at the feet of certain animals and birds, as there are animals whose digits are clearly distinguished and separated from one another, and these were not forbidden for them. There is another kind in which we find that the digits are not clearly distinguished and separated from one another, such as camels, ostriches, ducks, and geese, and they are all considered animals that have claws. All animals that have claws were forbidden for the Jews, and they were not declared forbidden because of any harm in eating them but rather to discipline them because they transgressed by taking what was not their right. For this reason, Allah forbade for them some of that which was permissible for them, just as a father would punish his son who has wrongfully taken something from his brother, and thus he denies him his pocket money, even though pocket money is not intrinsically impermissible, but it is denied for the sake of discipline. The True Lord says: ‘Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful for them and for their hindering many (people) from Allah's way. And their taking usury though indeed they were forbidden it and their devouring the property of people falsely....’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160-161) It was because they did all of this, prohibition comes to them as a form of punishment and discipline: ‘And to those who were Jews We made unlawful every animal having claws, and of oxen and sheep We made unlawful to them the fat of both, except such as was on their backs or the entrails or what was mixed with bones: this was a punishment We gave them because their rebellion, and We are surely Truthful.’ (*al-An‘am:* 146)

When you slaughter an animal, you find some fat on the kidney and inside you find something called the fatty tissue, also the fat tail of a lamb. When you cut the head, you find that it contains a kind of fat. The True Lord forbade them from consuming the fat of cows, sheep, and goats. Likewise, all beasts that have claws were forbidden and there is an exception in the case of cows, sheep and goats, which is ‘...except such as was on their backs or the entrails....’ (*al-An‘am:* 146)

The fat that is on the backs was declared permissible for them, as well as the fat that is in the entrails. *Al-hawaya* (entrails) is the plural of *hawiya*, or *haawiya* or *hawiya`a*, and it is that which contains the intestines, i.e. it gathers and wraps around. In the countryside, a woman who has a piece of cloth that she twists and rolls up to making a round spiral, then, places it on her head to protect it when she is carrying other things on top of it, will say, ‘I made *a hawaya*. *Hawaya* here is the large intestine, and it is about a metre long. Due to Divine Wisdom, the intestine is in the form of a spiral that revolves around its centre. That is why it is called ‘*al-hawaya*’. We also call it ‘*al-mombar* (in Egypt). Likewise, they were permitted to eat whatever is mixed with the bone in the legs, sides, head and eyes as well as any fat that is mixed with a bone in the buttock because the buttock clings to the end of the tail, i.e. its starting point. It is the molecule in the starting point of the tail at the head of the coccyx. Due to Allah’s Mercy, He sends down a punishment that contains mercy, as He permits something and He forbids something else.

The True Lord concludes the verse by saying, ‘this was a punishment We gave them because their rebellion, and We are surely Truthful.’ (*al-An‘am:* 146) This prohibition is not a transgression against them or rigidity in dealing with them, but rather, it is because they acted unjustly, and the one who acts unjustly must have his share of the sanction, so that he reflects on what benefit acting unjustly brings about, and what benefit of which he deprives himself. When he compares between the two he may adjust his persistence on acting unjustly. They had turned away from the path of Allah, taken usury to increase their wealth, and wrongfully devoured other people’s wealth. That is why the True Lord declared some permissible things to be impermissible for them, and He is truthful in everything He conveys. We know that the rationale behind prohibiting some permissible things was because of their wrongdoing and disobedience; it was a punishment for them.

The True Lord says after that:

فَإِن كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُل رَّبُّكُمۡ ذُو رَحۡمَةٖ وَٰسِعَةٖ وَلَا يُرَدُّ
بَأۡسُهُۥ عَنِ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ ١٤٧

If they [the disbelievers] accuse you [Prophet] of
lying, say, ‘Your Lord has all-encompassing mercy,
but His punishment cannot be diverted from the
evildoers’ [147] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 147)

It was necessary, when they denied you regarding what you had conveyed to them from Allah, that Allah would hasten their punishment. Yet, the True Lord did not do so because He is the Lord of All-Encompassing Mercy. ‘...say: “Your Lord is the Lord of All-encompassing mercy….”’ (*al-An‘am:* 147)

However, beware of greedily desiring constant mercy; it is only a mercy of deferment. His punishment will never escape you. Here, He is also softening their hearts because He is saying, '...All-Encompassing Mercy...' It is as if He is saying to them, 'Check yourselves, have shame before Allah, and do not delude yourselves from the fact that he is the Lord'. He created out of nothing, provided out of nothing, He is in charge of educating, and disciplining you, but His punishment and chastisement will not be withheld from the criminals that are amongst you.

He *the Glorified* says after that:

سَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا۟ لَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَآ أَشْرَكْنَا وَلَآ ءَابَآؤُنَا وَلَا حَرَّمْنَا مِن شَىْءٍۢ ۚ
كَذَٰلِكَ كَذَّبَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ ذَاقُوا۟ بَأْسَنَا ۗ قُلْ هَلْ عِندَكُم مِّنْ
عِلْمٍۢ فَتُخْرِجُوهُ لَنَآ ۖ إِن تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا ٱلظَّنَّ وَإِنْ أَنتُمْ إِلَّا تَخْرُصُونَ ﴿١٤٨﴾

The idolaters will say, 'If God had willed, we would not have ascribed partners to Him – nor would our fathers – or have declared anything forbidden.' In the same way, those before them continually denied [the truth] until they tasted Our punishment. Say, 'Have you any knowledge that you can show us? You follow only supposition and tell only lies' [148] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 148)

Whenever you read a verse that contains the words 'will say', then know that it comprises one of the Quran's inimitable secrets, and the one who this secret is conveyed through is an opponent, so that you know how the enemy of Allah conveys proof of Allah's veracity, which would indicate that he is in a state of heedlessness. In a previous verse, the True Lord says: 'The fools among the people will say...' (*al-Baqara:* 142). The meaning of 'will say' is that they do not say this now. The Quran tells that they will say it, and the Quran does not hide or conceal this verse. Rather, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed it as part of the Quran that is read and recited in prayer. If they had reflected on the matter they would have concealed the statement so that they could show that the one conveying and reciting the Quran did not tell the truth, or at least say, 'he said, "The fools among the people will say", but we are not fools and we do not say this'. But they uttered this foolish statement even though the verse preceded them by informing that they will say it because the One informing is Allah and no one from Allah’s creation can take precautions to find fault with Allah’s veracity. They heard these words from the Quran, and despite that they did not remain silent. Rather, the words just slipped their tongues, to corroborate the Quran.

Every individual who sins beyond measure against himself by not following Allah’s way says, ‘Indeed, our Lord is the One Who guides and He is the One Who leads astray’. They say this out of disdain and insolence to justify their foolish deeds. Those who sin beyond measure against themselves as well as the polytheists will go on saying this and they will try to make permissible what Allah has prohibited. The polytheists raised two issues: one issue regarding faith and another issue regarding the onus. They said, regarding the issue of faith, ‘If Allah had pleased we would not have associated [anything with Allah]…’ (*al-An‘am:* 148) as if they had associated with Allah’s will. They said about what they prohibited though Allah had made permissible, that what they did was also out of Allah’s will, to excuse themselves. This statement is illogical because if it were logical, it would have to apply to both good and evil. Someone could say, ‘Our Lord foreordained for us – and we seek refuge in Allah – that we would do evil, so why should he punish me’? This person will never say, ‘Allah foreordained for me to do goodness’. This is what logic would assume and require, but they are only talking about evil and not saying anything about goodness.

Their statement, ‘If Allah had pleased we would not have associated [anything with Allah]…’ (*al-An‘am:* 148) is correct in meaning because if He had willed that all mankind be guided to the right path, He would have done so, but He willed for us to have the ability to choose and within the framework of this choice, no matter goes beyond His universal will. It is disbelief and evil actions that are outside of His legislative will, and we know from before that there is a difference between the universal and the legislative. The disbeliever’s disbelief does not take place forcibly and coercively against Allah’s will. Rather, it occurs simply due to free will that Allah has allowed for man, for man is capable of choosing among various options.

Let ‘...him who so pleases believe, and let him who so pleases disbelieve...” (*al-Kahf:* 29). Man can direct the energy that Allah had granted him towards goodness or towards evil. Thus, either man’s choice will bring him to faith or it will lead him to disbelief. Therefore, the True Lord says about those who claim that their disbelief is out of His will: ‘...even so did those before them reject until they tasted Our punishment...’ (*al-An‘am:* 148). Those who had come before them had said this and they had denied the truth just as these people denied the truth, and a severe punishment and chastisement had come to them from Allah. Therefore, the True Lord commands Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘…Say, “Have you any knowledge with you so you should bring it forth to us? You only follow a conjecture and you only tell lies.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 148)

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them for some knowledge to confirm the truthfulness of what they were claiming, i.e. ‘do you have something that Allah has conveyed to you’? The truth is that they do not have any knowledge and they do not have any proof. They are merely following conjecture and guessing; i.e. what they are saying does not have any clear purport. It is just guessing, conjecturing, and lying. He then says:

قُلْ فَلِلَّهِ ٱلْحُجَّةُ ٱلْبَٰلِغَةُ ۖ فَلَوْ شَآءَ لَهَدَىٰكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

Say, ‘The conclusive argument belongs to God alone.
Had He so willed He would have guided you all’ [149]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 149)

Certainly, if Allah *the Glorified* had so willed, He would have forced them to be guided and not even one of them would have been able to escape this guidance, but He did not will that. Rather, Allah wanted people to have faith in Him and follow His commandments as part of their (granted by Allah) ability to choose. He created creatures who ‘they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6) Has He not created a universe that is entirely under His command? ‘Say, “Then Allah's is the final evidence (of all truth)...”’ (*al-An‘am:* 149).

Al-hujja (the final evidence) is the proof you establish to support what you say in a dispute, and that is why we call our contracts *hujjat al-milkiyyah* (the evidence that proves our possession of something), or the ‘final evidence’ is that which can never be penetrated or have its purport negated by anything.

The True Lord says after that:

قُلْ هَلُمَّ شُهَدَآءَكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَشْهَدُونَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ حَرَّمَ هَٰذَا ۖ فَإِن شَهِدُوا۟
فَلَا تَشْهَدْ مَعَهُمْ ۚ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَآءَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَٱلَّذِينَ
لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ وَهُم بِرَبِّهِمْ يَعْدِلُونَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

Say, 'Bring your witnesses to testify that God has forbidden all this.' If they do testify, do not bear witness with them. Do not follow the whims of those who have denied Our revelation, who do not believe in the Hereafter, and who set up equals with their Lord [150] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 150)

If you do not possess any knowledge, then it is possible that you have witnesses to what you are saying. The statement, '*halumma shuhada`kom*' 'Bring your witnesses', is addressed to a group, and the verb *halumma* (bring) equally applies to the masculine singular, the feminine singular, the masculine and feminine dual and the masculine and feminine plural. Thus, we can say, '*halumma* (Bring yourself to me) O Zayd!', or '*halumma* (Bring yourself to me) O Hind!' You can also say '*halumma*' to a group of males or to a group of females, and this is the language of the people of the Hijaz. It is different from the language of the tribe of Banu Tamim, who add to this verb by saying, '*halumma* O man!' and '*halumma* O woman!', as well as '*halumma*' (masculine and feminine dual), '*halummu*' (masculine plural) and '*halumamnna*' (feminine plural). The Quran was sent down in the language of the Hijazi people of Quraysh. The True Lord says, '*halumma*' (bring) your witnesses that He has prohibited this. Indeed, you have no knowledge and, likewise, you have no witnesses to what you are claiming. If you do have witnesses then bring them.

What if they bring false witnesses? Indeed, He warns His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and makes it clear to him that even if they do bring witnesses, he should be wary of believing them because they are liars.

It is as if Allah wants to shame the witnesses as well in front of the audience before whom the witnessing will take place, and He also introduces two issues. He refutes and invalidates their argument, and He disgraces the witnesses that they brought. It is as if He says, 'Bring these people who said this to you', and thus shames those who dictated these orders on them.

The True Lord commands Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to follow those who have denied His signs *Glorified is He*. The word *ahwa`a* (vain desires) is the plural of *hawa* and it is that which ripens in the mind to turn man away from the truth. Thus, it is desires that cause the mind to deviate from the truth. '…and follow not the low desires of those who reject Our communications and of those who do not believe in the hereafter....' (*al-An'am:* 150)

They do not only deny Allah's signs, but they also do not believe in the Hereafter because if they had believed in the Hereafter, they would have known that they would be requited with a punishment that is appropriate for their crimes. If they understood this matter, it would have prevented them from yielding to their vain desires.

The True Lord concludes the verse with His noble statement, '...and they make (others) equal to their Lord.' (*al-An'am:* 150) We understand that the word *ya`dil* (regard as equal) is from *`adl*, meaning justice. If it is said that someone '*`adala*' in such-and-such, or someone '*`adala*' between so-and-so, or *`adala* in giving a verdict, or *`adala* in such-and-such, it means that he made it equal and equivalent. This meaning appears in another verse in which the True Lord says: 'All praise is due to Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light; yet those who disbelieve set up equals with their Lord.' (*al-An'am:* 1)

They make that which is not equal to Allah be equal and equivalent to Allah. This is what was done by those who associated partners with Allah and the same goes for those who do not believe in Allah. One of them turns away in relinquishment of his Lord and he inclines and turns away from him, associates partners with Him and regards others as equal to Him. We notice that in the articulation of the word *tawhid* (monotheism), which is, 'there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah', we must not stop at 'there is no deity' because this would be a denial and negation of the existence of any God, and this - we seek refuge in Allah - is disbelief. Therefore, we must connect it to that which comes after it by saying, ‘there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’. Or, when we utter the words ‘there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’, our hearts have firm belief in His Oneness and the attributes of Majesty and Perfection that are due Him *the Almighty*. The meaning of ‘there is deity worthy of worship but Allah’ is that none deserves to be worshipped except Allah because those that are wrongly worshipped are many such as the idols, the stars, the jinn, human beings, angels and others.

The phrase ‘...and they make (others) equal to their Lord’ (*al-An‘am:* 150) indicates that they are people of idolatry. Likewise, whoever denies Allah’s existence is also regarding others as equal to Our Lord and is turning and deviating from acknowledging Him as a God.

The True Lord says after that:

قُلْ تَعَالَوْا۟ أَتْلُ مَا حَرَّمَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ أَلَّا تُشْرِكُوا۟ بِهِۦ شَيْـًٔا ۖ
وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَٰنًا ۖ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوٓا۟ أَوْلَٰدَكُم مِّنْ إِمْلَٰقٍ ۖ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكُمْ
وَإِيَّاهُمْ ۖ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا۟ ٱلْفَوَٰحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ ۖ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا۟
ٱلنَّفْسَ ٱلَّتِى حَرَّمَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ وَصَّىٰكُم بِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٥١﴾

Say, ‘Come! I will tell you what your Lord has really forbidden you. Do not ascribe anything as a partner to Him; be good to your parents; do not kill your children in fear of poverty’– We will provide for you and for them –‘ stay well away from committing obscenities, whether openly or in secret; do not take the life God has made sacred, except by right. This is what He commands you to do: perhaps you will use your reason [151]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 151)

When we consider this verse, we find that what is forbidden does not include any of the foods that contain the essentials of life. However, we find that it contains forbidden things that if we follow, we will ruin our abstract values that are the essentials of our spiritual life. Indeed, they are values which are the essentials of life: ‘Say, “Come, I will recite what your Lord has (really) forbidden to you”’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). Here the Quranic rendering uses the expression *ta`al* (come) which goes deeper than the direct meaning of the word which is 'coming'. It is as if the True Lord says, 'Come to Me as someone who wants to come to elevate himself by receiving My commands would do'. You approach Allah's commands to be raised and elevated above the state of decay of human legislations. Do not take your laws from the decay of human legislation because the necessary condition for the Legislator is that he must not be equal to the one He is legislating for. Otherwise, He stands to benefit from some of what he has legislated. Furthermore, it is a must that He be all encompassing so that He would miss nothing or overlook it. The created legislator does not legislate unless he is fully mature and his intellect is fully developed, and he is not able to prevent himself from benefitting from the legislation.

A capitalist, for example, legislates to derive benefit. A Marxist legislates to derive benefit, and each of them legislates with bearing his own personal desires in mind. Afterwards, legislations are amended when we notice that they have become insufficient and do not cover all the issues of life. It is as if the first legislator, due to the inadequacy of his knowledge, was unaware of certain realities that society revealed when issues came up. He looked at his statute and found that there was nothing covering those issues, so he says, 'We will amend the law and correct it'. Correcting the law means that there was something that he was unaware of when he made the law.

Therefore, it is necessary for the legislator not to be equal to the one he is legislating for, and no issue should be hidden from him so that he would have to supplement it later. Furthermore, he should not stand to benefit from the legislation, and this is never found amongst human beings. The True Lord made it clear, 'Leave the state of decay of human legislation, and elevate yourselves to the heavens to take your legislation from it'. When Allah calls, 'Come...', He is telling us to raise ourselves above the decay of our human legislation and to take our legislation for our daily activities from above because He does not benefit from what He has legislated, but rather, we are the ones who benefit. This is because nothing is hidden from Him. He is the Creator and He is the most entitled to legislate us.

'Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has (really) forbidden to you..."' (*al-An'am:* 151). *'Atlu* (recite) is from the word *tilawa* (recitation) '...what

Allah has (really) forbidden to you...', i.e. what He has made impermissible or what is forbidden for you to do "...that you do not associate anything with Him..." (*al-An'am:* 151). Here Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the prohibition of polytheism, by way of a linguistic arrangement that affirms to us that we should not associate partners with Him. When you give orders to someone you oversee you say, 'Listen to what I forbid you from doing, and follow my rules'. Then, you will start going into detail. The True Lord mentions the first clause of that which is forbidden and prohibited which is that we must not associate anything with Him. He conveys to us the prohibition of polytheism. This is the first thing to be prohibited. We must declare Allah to be One. Every prohibition of something is a command to do the opposite and every command is a prohibition to do the opposite. Thus, every command necessitates a prohibition and every prohibition necessitates a command. So, do not confuse commands and prohibitions. The meaning of '*alaykum*' ('to you') is actually 'upon you' and it is the beginning of a new sentence, i.e. it is obligatory upon you not to associate anything with Him, and it is obligatory upon you to show kindness to your parents, and not to slay your children, and not to draw nigh to indecencies etc., i.e. adhere to this.

Then He says, '...and show kindness to your parents...' (*al-An'am:* 151). Here, He commands with emphasis that parents must be treated with goodness, and as it is an affirmative command, it necessitates that the opposite is prohibited which is to show disrespect to parents. Not showing goodness to parents is part of what Allah has prohibited. Then He says, '...and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty - We provide for you and for them...' (*al-An'am:* 151).

Preserve the lives of your children. If you want to consider it as a prohibition, then it is a prohibition of killing children. If you want to consider it an affirmative command, then say, 'preserve life'. The statement '...for (fear of) poverty...', means impoverishment, as if they are poor and poverty is present, man will work to provide for himself before working to provide for those who come after him. So, to the people of poverty, remember that Allah shall provide sustenance for you and He will provide sustenance for those who come afterwards, and these are the children.

Allah *the Almighty* says, '...and do not draw nigh to indecencies, those of them which are apparent and those which are concealed...' (*al-An'am:* 151). This is a prohibition against approaching or even drawing near to accompanying circumstances and situations that could lead to the action. It is not just a prohibition of the action itself. When Allah wanted to forbid Adam and his wife *peace be upon them* from eating from the tree He says, '...but do not go near this tree...' (*al-A'raf:* 19).

This is because going near or approaching the tree could lead to eating from it. The same goes for '...and do not draw nigh to indecencies...' (*al-An'am:* 151), i.e. avoid antecedents that lead to indecencies, by having a glance or even staring at that which is forbidden. The same applies for the woman who adorns herself - in front of men other than her husband and unmarriageable kin - for indeed, by doing so, she approaches antecedents that lead to indecencies. If she refrains from this, she will be safe from tribulation and committing sins. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'What is lawful is clear and what is unlawful is clear, but between them are certain doubtful things which many people do not know. So, he who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and his honour blameless. But he who falls into doubtful things falls into that which is unlawful, just as a shepherd who grazes his cattle near a pasture declared prohibited by the ruler; he is likely to stray into the pasture. Mind you, every ruler has a protected pasture and Allah's involved limits are those which He has declared unlawful. Verily, there is a piece of flesh in the body, if it is healthy, the whole body is healthy, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily, it is the heart.'(1)

The True Lord is prohibiting you. (Do not approach) means to distance yourself from situations in which things will entice you, and this is similar to 'shun' totally. He says, 'So shun the abomination (worshipping) of idol, and shun lying speech.' (*al-Hajj:* 30) Here Allah says, 'And do not approach immoralities - what is apparent of them and what is concealed.' (*al-An'am:* 151) All shameful deeds that are manifest are the actions of the limbs that commit grave sins while ‘concealed’ refers to hidden actions such as hatred, rancour, and envy.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nisa`i and Ibn Majah from Nu`man ibn Bashir*

He continues, ‘…And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right.’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) People differ over the meaning of the word soul which can only refer to the spirit encountering the material. The spirit, in its essence, is a good thing, and the material in its essence is a good thing that glorifies and worships ‘And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise.’ (*al-Isra’:* 44)

Life starts when both the material and the soul meet, which makes the killing a mean that separates the spirit from the material by destroying the physical structure; and this is not death because Allah is the One Who causes the soul to die, whereas man kills the soul by means of killing the material structure [preserving] it. The One Who grants life is Allah and no one takes life except Him. Allah legislated for us to take life as retribution, or for adultery, married men, or women or for apostasy. This is killing in pursuit of justice, but He curses those who destroy what Allah has built without right. Man is what Allah has built, so do not transgress against it. Therefore, Allah has commanded us to take retribution for someone killing someone else so that everyone protects his own life, and when man protects every life, he himself is safe and secure.

This is how Allah commands us to kill the married adulterer, whether a male or a female. The same goes for the apostate. We are vigilant over freedom of belief, and the proof is that we do not kill an original disbeliever for their disbelief. However, the individual must understand that having faith in Islam requires that he studies it exhaustively and sufficiently, and he must know that his life is inviolable so long as he does not leave this religion. If he knows this, he will never enter it unless he is absolutely convinced. We defend choice, and we declare to whoever approaches Islam, ‘Beware of entering with merely an outward statement without understanding the meaning of Islam because if you enter and then apostate, you will be killed’. If the price of something is life, the individual must be extremely cautious. Furthermore, we are also confident that whenever an individual researches and studies the evidence they will become convinced that they truly have Allah, but we do not kill a disbeliever that has not entered Islam.

Therefore, killing the apostate is protecting the sanctuary of choice. So, beware of entering without deliberation because if you enter and then apostate, you will be killed. With this, the True Lord settles the matter in a way that it makes it necessary for the one approaching Islam to consider all the arguments and then enter having this knowledge. In any contract the individual attempts to know his obligations and to have these obligations made clear to him. He does not enter the religion in a foolhardy, thoughtless, or hasty manner. Rather, it is necessary for him to enter it unhurriedly and with deliberation.

In the case of marriage, the individual enters it with a simple phrase and exits with a simple phrase, which is 'you are divorced'. For this reason, the woman is cautious, and as long as she knows that the continuance of her marriage is the security of a simple phrase, then she must be careful not to put this right except in the hands of someone who is trustworthy. When her father says to her, 'Listen to me. It is for you to choose a husband who will honour you if he loves you and if he does not like you, he will not oppress you'; married life comes to an end with a simple phrase. Therefore, the woman must think about someone who can be trusted with this simple phrase.

Considering all this, there is still a caution against heedlessness. A man marries with a simple phrase and it is only said once. However, in the case of divorce, there are three stages; so watch out for heedlessness. A man marries a woman with a simple phrase, 'I marry you to myself', or her guardian marries her off and the husband accepts; by then, the marriage contract is completed. However, in the case of divorce, Allah has allowed, due to man's heedlessness and thoughtlessness, to divorce once and then overturn the decision without anyone coming in between them. Then he can give a second divorce and overturn it, but after the third divorce he finds the notice from the True Lord, 'We have made provisions for you by watching out for your heedlessness, but now if you want her to be your wife this cannot happen unless she marries someone else; and after that, she may go back to you or she may stay with whomever she has married'. Thus, you must be very careful with the matter you are embarking upon and the contract to which you are bound. If this is the case with contracting a marriage, then what about it regarding apostasy? Indeed, killing the apostate is only observable after he has believed, declared his faith, and become one of the believers, so that he knows that if he abandons Islam, he will be killed. In this way, entering Islam is made difficult and at the same time choice is defended.

He continues, '…This has He instructed you that you may use reason." (*al-An'am:* 151) The instruction is only for important matters without which life cannot be carried out properly. They are the main issues that cannot be neglected. This is why when we look at the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him,* we find he spent twenty-three years receiving revelation and conveying it to the people on earth. He then went to his farewell pilgrimage, and he concentrated all the principles of the religion within His statement, 'This has He instructed you that you may use reason.'

'Instructed' is not the same as legislating because legislating requires full coverage of all related details, while instruction includes the main issues of the legislation. The intellect must comprehend the matter from the beginning to the end, and if you used your intellect regarding everything that is prohibited or commanded in the verse, you will find discernment giving you balance in decisions. The True Lord concluded the five things that He mentioned in this verse with, 'This has He instructed you that you may use reason.' These matters are agreed upon amongst all divine messages and amongst all religions, and they call them 'The Ten Commandments'.

The five things that He enjoined are:

- Do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to others beside Him.
- Do good unto your parents.
- Do not kill your children for fear of poverty.
- Do not approach any shameful deeds, be they open or secret.
- Do not take any human being's life – [the life] which Allah has declared to be sacred – except in the pursuit of justice.

We would expect Him to have said, 'These things have He instructed you' but He said, 'this has He instructed you', as if all of Allah's commands and prohibitions are one inseparable entity and all of them are embodied in 'adhere to what Allah has commanded and shun what Allah has prohibited'.

His statement, ‘that you may use reason’, means that if intellect was free to consider these things, independent of the way of the heavens, it would find that life on earth requires the existence of these things.

Therefore, how do we prevent people’s personal desires from clashing? There must be one Allah so that everyone does not follow his/her own personal desires. Indeed, we know that the origin of man is from the father and the mother. That is why He enjoined regarding this origin by saying, ‘and to parents, good treatment.’ He enjoined that we do not kill children for fear of poverty because life continues through them. After that life must be clean and pure for all individuals and must never be contaminated by filth; and this can only happen when we leave off shameful deeds, open or secret. This is because we notice that all illegitimate children are neglected. The True Lord wants progeny to be pure in life so that everyone bears responsibility for their lineage and they are reckoned for it in front of society. He warns us against taking a human life without right because the soul is the source of life’s perpetuation.

Then the True Lord, in the following verse, mentions that which completes the enjoinments:

وَلَا تَقۡرَبُواْ مَالَ ٱلۡيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحۡسَنُ حَتَّىٰ يَبۡلُغَ أَشُدَّهُۥۚ وَأَوۡفُواْ ٱلۡكَيۡلَ
وَٱلۡمِيزَانَ بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۖ لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفۡسًا إِلَّا وُسۡعَهَاۖ وَإِذَا قُلۡتُمۡ فَٱعۡدِلُواْ وَلَوۡ كَانَ ذَا
قُرۡبَىٰۖ وَبِعَهۡدِ ٱللَّهِ أَوۡفُواْۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ وَصَّىٰكُم بِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

Stay well away from the property of orphans, except with the best [intentions], until they come of age; give full measure and weight, according to justice’ – We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear – ‘when you speak, be just, even if it concerns a relative; keep any promises you make in God’s name. This is what He commands you to do, so that you may take heed’ [152] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 152)

We know that the orphan is the one who has lost their father and has not yet become an adult, and this is the case with man. As for an orphaned animal, it is the one that has lost its mother. The True Lord says, ‘And do not approach the orphan's property except in a way that is best…’.

Allah *the Exalted* presupposes that the orphan has wealth and He did not say, ‘Do not consume the wealth of an orphan’. Rather, He has commanded you not to approach it, or even desire it or think about it. You must distance yourself from this. Yet, does this mean that it is an absolute command? No, because after that He added, ‘except in a way that is best.’ In other words, we invest their wealth profitably so that it suffices for their livelihood, while the original amount and profit belongs to them. That is why He said in another verse, ‘but provide for them with it.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5)

Thus no one should take the wealth of an orphan, save it, give them a monthly allowance until they grow up, and then finds that the wealth has decreased or disappeared. That is why He did not say, ‘but provide for them from it’. Rather, He said, ‘but provide for them with it’, i.e. provide them with sustenance that is profited from it which would not exist unless invested for the benefit of the orphan. Trusteeship of an orphan to manage their wealth is not prohibited when it is administered by those qualified for business administration and trusteeship. A qualified businessman and a trustee may be established, but his situation does not support him to bear the responsibilities and troubles of his own life and administer the wealth of the orphan. Allah says regarding this, ‘and whoever amongst guardians is rich, he should take no wages.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 6) The guardian should volunteer this custodianship for the sake of Allah without taking a wage in return for it; this guarantees that if there is an orphan in his progeny, until the Day of Resurrection, he will find someone who will support him voluntarily for the sake of Allah, and his wage will be with Allah. The True Lord says, ‘And let those [executors and guardians] fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So, let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 9)

When an orphan finds someone to take care of him and society shows compassion to every orphan in it, and the affairs of the orphans are taken care of by people who are trustworthy and able to administer their affairs, people will be less worried about dying and leaving their children behind. People fear death because they have children who are dependent on them and they can see that society does not take care of orphans. However, if someone finds an orphan being honoured, and sees that he has numerous fathers from amongst the Muslims, then he will feel at ease regarding his children when death comes. However, do not wait for society to rectify itself. Rather, you must rectify yourself and act righteously towards any orphan, as this will allow you to be at ease regarding your children as they will find somebody to take care of them after you die. There is a clear example of this in the chapter of *al-Kahf* between the righteous servant and Musa (Moses) when they passed by a village, 'So they set out until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food….' (*al-Kahf:* 77)

They did not ask for money, but had asked for food to stave off hunger, and this is a pressing need even though they asked the people of the village for food, the people of the village refused to take them in as guests. The meaning of this is that it was a village of wicked people. Despite the righteous servant receiving such a response and being refused food, when he found a wall and realised, with his intuitive knowledge, that the wall wanted to fall, he rebuilt it. Musa (Moses) reproached him and as he was looking at the situation logically. He and his sheikh had asked the people of the village for nothing but food and they refused; how can you respond to them by building a wall for them? You should take a payment for building it, as they are wicked people, and this is what Musa (Moses) said. However, the righteous servant rewarded them with what they deserved because by building the wall, he had made it impossible for them to gain access to the treasure. If he had left the wall to collapse, the treasure underneath it which belonged to two orphans would have been discovered. This is how the righteous servant knew how to raise them. After that, Allah explained to us that the wall belonged to two orphan boys living in the town. 'So, your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord.' (*al-Kahf:* 82)

It is as if bringing forth the treasure is to coincide with reaching puberty, and it is as if the righteous servant built the wall to last for a limited period such that it would not collapse until the boys reached the age of reason. The righteous servant built the wall in such a way that it would not hold together once the two boys had come of age which at that point, they would bring forth their treasure. After that He mentions to us the reasons behind all of this. He said, '…and their father had been righteous….' (*al-Kahf:* 82)

It is as if the righteousness of the father is what the True Lord wanted to use to show us how He protected the children's treasure. Thus, the righteous servant and Musa (Moses) came to the wicked people of the village and asked for food, but they did not feed them. Then the righteous servant rebuilt the wall as a temporary measure to protect the treasure from these wicked people. The True Lord says here, 'And do not approach the orphan's property except in a way that is best.' Whoever is not able to approach the wealth of an orphan and use it in a way that is best should stay away from it.

And so that people do not become wary of taking care of an orphan's wealth, He said, 'whoever amongst guardians is rich, he should take no wages, but if he is poor, let him have for himself what is just and reasonable.' (*an-Nisa':* 6) The words 'what is just and reasonable' means that the wealth should never be stored away or hidden from him. Rather, he should consume only what he needs to stave off hunger and clothe himself with what he needs to cover his body. In this case, we know that the orphan's intellect has not yet fully matured and the same goes for the adult who is weak-minded, as he is also unable to act independently. That is why the True Lord says in His eloquent rendering where He conveys the expression that reveals vast meanings, 'And do not give the weak-minded your property.' (*an-Nisa':* 5)

The True Lord classed the wealth of the weak-minded in the same category as the wealth of a legal guardian because a weak-minded person abuses his possessions and may squander them. However, the wealth can be returned to this person once they regain their intellect. The True Lord says, 'if you perceive in them sound judgement, release their property to them.' (*an-Nisa':* 6)

Indeed, the Quranic rendering is amazing. It encourages people not to leave a weak-minded person to squander his wealth as it will be a loss for the whole society. Thus, as long as the person is weak-minded, then regard his wealth as your wealth, and be a trustee over it as you would do over your wealth. When you find the person to be mature of mind, and you are confident of that, then the True Lord commands you to give their wealth back to them, and we return it to the orphan. Here the True Lord says, 'And do not approach the orphan's property except in a way that is best.'

This is if he has wealth, so what about the orphan that does not have wealth? Here the enjoinment is stronger. It is narrated from Sahl ibn Sa`ad Allah *be pleased with him* who said, ‘Prophet Muhamad said, “I and the carer of the orphan are like this in paradise.” He indicated with his index finger and middle finger and separated between them.’(1)

It is narrated from Abu Hurayra Allah *be pleased with him* who said, ‘Prophet Muhamad said, ‘The one who strives to take care of widows and the poor is like the one who fights in Allah’s cause, and he is like the one who fasts during the day and prays during the night.’(2)

Be careful, and make sure that supporting an orphan is done for Allah’s sake, because it is possible for an orphan to have a beautiful mother and a guardian may want to get closer to her by means of the child. Beware of this because, in addition to incurring Allah’s wrath and anger, it is vileness, wickedness, and depravity.

‘And do not approach the orphan's property except in a way that is best until they reach maturity.’ It is to stress the importance of vigilance over an orphan’s wealth until they reach maturity, at which point they will have an independent identity. How do we determine this? It is when an individual can reproduce. This is how we measure maturity. It is similar to when a fruit ripens, i.e. it contains a seed and we can place that seed in the ground and it will eventually grow into a tree. If you pick a fruit before it has ripened, it will not have a sweet taste. You will not enjoy its taste until it contains a seed and is ripe.

‘Reach maturity’ means that the individual has become capable of reproducing and this is what we call maturity. He is also able to act independently with regards to his wealth and everything else. The True Lord continues, ‘And give full measure and weight in justice.’ (*al-An‘am:* 152)

Measures are the means for measuring a size, while scales are the means for calculating density, so there is a criterion for size and a criterion for density. The criterion for size is measures and the criterion for density is weight. There are also just calculations in measurement. For soft goods, for example, and the measurement therein are done in metres. Therefore, everything has its own way of calculation. If you want to weigh something, then you must do so with justice.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*

This matter is difficult to achieve. That is why scales differ according to the preciousness of things. When we weigh beans, or lentils or potatoes, we weigh them with a large scale. Conversely, when we weigh things that are slightly costlier, we use a more precise scale. If the thing being weighed is gold, we surround the scales with glass walls because a gust of wind could decrease or increase the weight.

Indeed, we attempt to prevent air currents from affecting it, and when we weigh chemical substances we use a scale that functions according to the atom. Therefore, everything that is weighed, is weighed according to its preciousness and the degree to which it can be affected by external factors. This is because achieving justice in weighing is a difficult matter, and the same goes for measures. When someone measures the size of something, they take the scale and they shake it so that the measure can be precise and clear. If he wants to ignore his conscience and take more than his right, he fills the measure with more than it can bear and holds up the extra weight with his hand so that it does not fall. Our Lord says, ‘Woe to those who give less [than due]. Who, when they take a measure from people, take in full. But if they give by measure or by weight to them, they cause loss.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 1-3)

When he is to receive his due, he demands that it be given in full and takes more when he is making a purchase, but when he is selling, he decreases the measure or the weight and takes a price that exceeds whatever is being weighed or measured. The foundation of exchanges, in most cases, is between two parties. Some obstinate people say, ‘How can the True Lord say, “Woe to those who give less [than due]”, when giving short measure in any matter has to do with increase and not decrease’? Bear in mind that the One speaking is Allah, and giving short measure leads to an increase for one party and a decrease for the other. Every transaction between two people consists of a sale and a purchase, and if one of the two parties wants the other to lose out and for himself to be given in full, then he is giving short measure.

That is why the subtle Quranic rendering comes from our Lord, 'And give full measure and weight in justice. We do not charge any soul except [with that within] its capacity.' The True Lord says this because He knows that weighing and measuring with justice is a matter that is very difficult because the True Lord, due to the vastness of His Mercy in legislating for us, did not make the scope of our ability something that can be dominated by things that are beyond our ability. Regarding the accuracy of measures and weights He said, 'We do not charge any soul except [with that within] its capacity' because weighing and measuring are two matters dominated by circumstances which man has no control over. That is why we said that when we weigh things that we know are not precious, we use a certain tool. If it is slightly more precious, then another tool is used. If the things are very precious such that they can be affected by the tiniest of external factors, then we use an accurate tool that is protected from these factors so that not even a current of air can affect it. As a result, any increase or decrease that is beyond our capacity is excused. He then says, 'And when you testify, be just, even if [it concerns] a near relative.'

Is justice limited to one's statements or is it extended to action as well? In a dispute between two people, justice can be achieved by speaking not by just taking an action. When justice has become the norm in your speech, you become accustomed to it and you love it until it permeates all your other actions.

Speaking justly includes admitting something one has in a manner conforming to justice and truth, like when you bear witness, give a verdict, bequeath, give a fatwa, speak truth. Thus, being truthful in speaking has a place in several circumstances. This balance is shaken when falsehood is preferred over truth because if you judge in someone's favour who is not deserving, you have given them what is not rightfully theirs. Indeed, this action of yours restricts others in their life. However, if you protect the interests of everyone, and everyone takes their share of life according to their actions, then all matters are balanced and there would be no one living off the efforts of others. Therefore, speaking the truth is that which anchors life's interests.

That which affects justice is personal desires which prejudices one's decision away from truth. Justice is most required when you or one of your relatives is involved. One may be leaned to unjustly favour one's relative to please them. This, however, is not giving your relatives their right because the right of your relatives requires that you deny them all that is forbidden and you protect their honour and religion before securing for them any temporary benefit. That is why the True Lord commands you to speak with justice even if it is for, or against a relative because when you judge wrongfully, you are actually judging against them and not for them.

'And the covenant of Allah fulfil.' We know that Allah's covenant is that which He has contracted with us, and the first bond and the peak of bonds is to have faith in Him which consequently requires the reception of commandments from Him. This is because every commandment that Allah gives His creation is considered a bond within the framework of faith since Allah does not give a ruling or clarify it for those legally responsible unless He says beforehand, 'O you who have faith.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 1) It refers to those who have believed in the original bond underpinning all values, which is creed; 'You have believed in Me as your God; thus, take commandments from Me because you have entered into a bond with Me which is the bond of faith'.

That is why Allah does not give commandments to someone who does not believe in Him. We must accept the proof for every ruling from our faith in the One Who gave it, so do not look for proof in every ruling. The rationale behind every ruling is only that you believe in the One Who commands you to do such-and-such which makes the rationale of everything is the ruling itself.

The True Lord concludes the noble verse with His statement, 'This has He instructed you that you may remember.'

Ibn `Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said about these verses, 'Indeed they are firm principles that are not abrogated in any of the revealed Books. It has been said that they are the mother of the Book. Whoever acts in accordance with them will enter Paradise but whoever abandons them will enter the Fire.'

No legislation has come to abrogate any one of these enjoinments. That is why Ka`ab Al-Ahbar (a Jew who became Muslim) said, 'By the One who has Ka`ab's soul in His hand, indeed these verses are the first thing in the Torah, "Say, '"Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you."" Then we find that this last enjoinment gathers everything. We find that nine enjoinments have already been dealt with; five of them are concluded with, 'so that you might use your reason', the other four are concluded with, 'so that you may take heed.' For the tenth one, He said, 'you may become righteous.' This tenth enjoinment gathers all the kinds of virtues that have been commanded, and it is in the following statement of the True Lord:

وَأَنَّ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطِى مُسْتَقِيمًا فَٱتَّبِعُوهُ ۖ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟ ٱلسُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ
بِكُمْ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ وَصَّىٰكُم بِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

This is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it –' This is what He commands you to do, so that you may refrain from wrongdoing' [153] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 153)

He concluded the nine enjoinments with this statement because the straight path includes the nine preceding enjoinments and includes whatever else He did not mention here. I referred above to the ending of the previous commandments; so what is the difference between reason, taking heed, and becoming righteous?

Indeed, the first five things which the True Lord stated are, 'Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them. And do not approach immoralities - what is apparent of them and what is concealed. And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right. This has He instructed you that you may use reason.' These matters were present in the environment in which the Quran was sent down. People were associating partners with Allah, showing disrespect to their parents, killing their children, yielding to shameful deeds and killing human beings that Allah had forbidden to kill (except in the pursuit of justice). He made it clear to them: use your reason regarding these things. If you use your reason, you will find that Allah's commandment prohibits you from those things. It is a matter that requires a sound intellect that can make sound conclusions. However, the other four are things they used to do and regard as praiseworthy which included dealing with the wealth of orphans, giving full measure in weights and measures, speaking justly and observing bonds; He said, ‘so that you might take heed’, i.e. beware of neglecting them. If you are doing them in a state of ignorance, then do them and attach more importance to them now that you are in Islam. Then the conclusive commandments, ‘And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for you will be separated from His way. This has He instructed you that you may become righteous.’

Seeing as this commandment comprises all rulings, positive and negative, prohibitions and commands, He made it clear to them that they must follow the straight path to protect themselves from the consequences of the True Lord’s attribute of Power, and the first of His soldiers is the fire.

The path is a paved way leading to the Hereafter, which is – as has been said – finer than a hair and sharper than a sword. What does this mean? It means that it is walked upon with absolute wakefulness. If one leans right or left, he will fall. It is a path that has been made with precision and it is not a wide road, so you must walk along Allah’s path and His straight way. Do not deviate towards the right or the left because leaning – as we have said – will take you further away from the objective. If you begin from a place, and then you make a mistake of one millimetre in balancing yourself, and then wherever you go the imbalance will become greater, i.e. the slightest deviation at the starting point will make the abyss bigger and the distance farther.

The same goes for religion. Whenever we come together and we draw closer to one another, we travel along the straight path. Whenever we distance ourselves from the legislation, we divide ourselves into different paths.

The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* illustrated clearly what was intended in this verse when he sat amongst His Companions and drew a line. He then said, ‘This is Allah’s path.’

Then he drew lines going towards the right and lines going towards the left. Then he said, ‘These are paths and at the head of every path is a devil, calling to it.’ He then read this verse, ‘And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for you will be separated from His way.' That is why whenever the people of truth and the people of goodness come closer to the centre, the meeting continues to get closer and closer until it disappears and they will be all standing at a single point.

Look at the True Lord's majesty when He lays down the straight path in His religion and He attributes it to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'this is My path, which is straight.' The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* adheres to this path. The one doing this and walking in it, is commanding you to walk along. He is not commanding you to something, while he himself abstains from it. Even if he was cheating all of us, he would never cheat himself. This is his straight path to which he adheres.

The 'way' here is known because it is to Allah, so it is as if Allah's 'way' is the path of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but the action is attributed to Allah alone. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has not made that path for himself but rather, Allah wanted it to be for all the believers, and the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who takes them by the hand and leads them to it.

When we look at all the disputes that have come about between the various religions; for example, between the Jews and the Christians, 'The Jews say, "The Christians have nothing [true] to stand on," and the Christians say, "The Jews have nothing to stand on."' (*al-Baqara:* 113) The idol-worshippers said, 'neither of those people are upon anything.' 'Thus, the polytheists speak the same as their words.' (*al-Baqara:* 113)

We are faced with three statements. The Jews say that the Christians have no valid ground for their beliefs and the Christians say that the Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs. The people of Mecca said the same thing. Then we find that the one religion they had between them, has divided into numerous sects, and each sect has something to which is fervently adhered. Each sect regards what it says as the truth and whatever is said by anyone else is falsehood. How did this come about when the source is one and the divine revelations that the messengers were sent with is one message? Indeed, desire for temporal power is the source of this dissention. Everyone wants to have status, influence and a dynasty to succeed them. This person wants to be the leader of a group and that person wants to be the leader of a group. If they had united upon the one path, there would not be any groups.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The Jews divided into seventy-one sects, and the Christians divided into seventy-two sects. My nation will divide into seventy-three sects….’ (1)

In another narration, he said, ‘All of them are in the Fire except one, and they are the group. The group is *Ahl as-Sunna wal-Jama`ah* (Muslim Orthodoxy). In another narration he said, ‘…what I and my companions are upon.’

We notice the precision of this statement in the number of denominations and sects, even if you have not heard of some of them because they died out after the death of those who fervently adhered to them as well as of those who wanted to bask in its glory.

Therefore, the problem arises whenever there is a ruling under consideration. One person will have an opinion and another will have another opinion, for no reason except to differ. We say to them, ‘You should take note of the difference between a decisive ruling and a ruling that Allah has left to be an object of independent legal reasoning (*ijtihad*)’. When Allah wants a ruling to be decisive, He sends it down in an unequivocal manner, and this text puts an end to any differing. When Allah wants a ruling that will be alleviation in one way or another for those who are legally responsible, He brings a text that can be subject to independent legal reasoning. When the legislator brings a text of that nature, it means that it is allowed to apply independent legal reasoning to it because if He had wanted a ruling that was not differed over, He would have brought a decisive text.

A continuing example is what the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left for us in his noble *Sunnah*. When the True Lord wanted him to maintain the condition of war to discipline Banu Qurayza, who fought alongside the idol-worshippers of Mecca, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘None of you should pray *`asr* (the mid-afternoon prayer) before reaching Banu Qurayza.’(2)

The Companions then made their way to the tribe of Banu Qurayzha and the sun gave notice that it was setting while they were still travelling. The companions then split into two camps. One camp said, 'We will pray *`asr* before the sun sets.' The other camp said, 'The Messenger of Allah told us not to pray until we had reached Banu Qurayza.' Thus, some of them prayed *`asr* before the sun set, while the others did not pray until they had reached Banu Qurayzha. This matter was brought before the legislator, (Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*), and he gave consent to both positions because the text allows for such.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nisa'i and Ibn Majah from Abu Hurayrah*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the chapter on Military Expeditions Al-Maghazi and Al-Bayhaqi in Ad-Dala`il and (As-Sunnan)*

Why? It is because every event must occur within a time and a place, so those who said that the sun was about to set and they had to pray *`asr* before it set were looking at the time. Those who said that they would not pray until they had reached Banu Qurayza were looking at the place. When the matter was brought to the legislator who knows best, he gave consent to both positions.

Therefore, if a ruling carries a decisive text, there is no possibility for a difference of opinion. If Allah has left it to be subject to independent legal reasoning, the text is not decisive, and we cannot condemn someone for following either position. That is why we have been left the etiquette of the imams whose schools are still in existence now. We find one of them saying, 'The position I took is correct with the possibility of it being incorrect, and the one who takes the opposite position is incorrect with the possibility of being correct'. It is their beautiful etiquette that has allowed their schools to last this long.(1) The lack of etiquette of others caused their schools to become obsolete and vanish. You do not know about them and may Allah be praised that you do not know about them. The True Lord says after that:

ثُمَّ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ تَمَامًا عَلَى ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحْسَنَ وَتَفْصِيلًا
لِّكُلِّ شَىْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لَّعَلَّهُم بِلِقَآءِ رَبِّهِمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٥٤﴾

Once again, We gave Moses the Scripture, perfecting [Our favour] for those who do good, explaining everything clearly, as guidance and mercy, so that they might believe in the meeting with their Lord [154] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 154)

Whenever we hear the word 'then' we know that it is a conjunction. There are many conjunctions and each conjunction has a meaning that it conveys.

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi Allah *rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

Here we have ‘Then We gave Musa (Moses)’, and Musa (Moses) was given the Book before this statement of Allah, ‘Say, “Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you…’ The Torah came before the Bible while the Quran came as the final Book; so how can this statement be preceded with ‘then’ when Musa (Moses) was given the book before the True Lord’s statement, ‘Say, “Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you…”’?

We say to the people who have this understanding: You have understood *‘then’* to indicate a sequence of actions and events but forgotten that *‘then’* can also indicate a sequence of information. Someone could come up to you and say, ‘How come you do not ask about so-and-so and you do not give him his right that he has over you, such as the right of kinship’. You respond, ‘How can this be? I did such-and-such for him. Then, I did such-and-such for his father, and then I did such-and-such for his grandfather’.

Thus, you are giving a sequence of information and you are adding to that sequence. The Arab poet said,

Indeed, whoever is a leader, then his father was a leader
And then, before that, his grandfather was a leader

Leadership first belonged to the grandfather, then to the father and then it was inherited to the son. *‘Then’* in this case does not indicate a sequence of events, but rather a sequence of information, i.e. the sequence of conjoined elements is according to the order that they are spoken of, not according to any chronological sequence of events.

Look at the perfect rendering of the Quran when it says, ‘And We have certainly created you, [O Mankind], and given you [human] form. Then, We said to the angels, “Prostrate to Adam”; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He was not of those who prostrated.” (*al-A‘raf:* 11) We know that Allah commanding the angels to prostrate to Adam was in the beginning, so He, in this noble statement, wants to put our state into sequence; He created us after He formed us, and He formed us after He told the angels to prostrate to Adam.

‘Then We gave Musa (Moses) the Book…’ Since this is the story of Musa (Moses), then the Book is the Torah. When the Book is used in an undefined sense, it applies to the Quran because it is the book that gathers and supersedes everything that is in the other books. For example, if it is said, 'We sent down the Book to Musa (Moses)', the book being referred to is the Torah. If it is said, 'We sent down the Book to `Isa (Jesus)', then the book being referred to is the Bible.

'In fulfilment' means the containment of all the attributes of goodness. That is why the True Lord says, 'This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3)

This means that nothing is left out and nor will there be any reconsideration [of what is laid down]. Why did it come in fulfilment upon he who persevered in doing good with regards to Musa (Moses)? It is because those who confronted him *peace be upon him* with stubbornness and argumentation were the Jews. Thus, it is appropriate here to mention the story of Musa (Moses).

When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came with the Torah as Allah had sent it down to him, people who lived with him believed in what the Torah contained. They were granted salvation and then died. As for those who were alive when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came, it was obligatory upon them to believe in Him because the True Lord had made it clear to them in the Torah that a messenger was coming, and they must believe so that the blessing of you persevering in good can be given to you in fulfilment. This is because if they truly believed in Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and acted according to his way, then they must have faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Those who preceded you persevered in doing good in the age of Musa's (Moses's) *peace be upon him* message, and now Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come with the final message. So, if you want Allah to fulfil His blessings, Generosity and Perfection upon you, you must declare your faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Amongst you are those who have perfected their adherence to Musa (Moses) and believed in Muhammad, and their blessings have been fulfilled, '…and as a detailed explanation of all things, and as guidance and mercy, that perhaps in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, they would believe.'

'A detailed explanation of all things' means that it is suited to its time - and to Allah belongs the highest of example - when you have a young child, you can say, ‘I have tailored his clothes for him’. When he grows up, he will no longer be able to fit into his old clothes. The verse asserts that all things refer to the values fitting for the age that they were living in. So, whenever we find a new detail in the Quran, it is appropriate for its time. Someone could say, ‘Here is a detail and here is detail, so what is the difference between this detail and this detail’? We say, ‘Every detail is appropriate for its time, and the verses of the Quran are spelled out, ready and prepared for every age and for all of mankind until the Hour is established.

The bane – always – is with those who legislate because when they come across someone who has power and authority, they attempt to prepare and spell out a ruling that suits them. We say to this kind of man, ‘You are spelling out the ruling even though the rulings are ready, prepared, and clear’. Indeed, we find that our physical bodies differ so our clothes need different specifications, but in an abstract sense we find that there is equality amongst all of mankind. Truthfulness for a child is the same as truthfulness for an adolescent and the same as truthfulness for a man, woman, a scholar, a merchant, and so forth. There is not a special truthfulness for each of them, and the same goes for trustworthiness. Islam has been merciful to us by giving us a theology and a law that is ready and suited to every human being. There is not any verse that has one standard for one person and no one else. The verses are for everyone.

‘Guidance’ is anything that shows the end because the religion of our natural disposition could be wiped out due to parents not conveying to their children the way of Allah *the Exalted* regarding their life and what pertains to it, and the values that must be predominant. The bane is that fathers teach their sons how to eat and drink, but they forget to teach them about values. The True Lord, however, shows us mercy when we become heedless. He legislated and sent a new messenger for every time and a new guidance to remind us.

‘…that perhaps, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, they would believe.’ Every bane originates in turning away from Allah’s legislation. They forget to bear in mind their meeting with Allah, but if they had kept their meeting with Allah in mind, they would have prepared for it because an objective is what makes a man embark upon the means. A poet said, Is there not someone to show me my destination before I set off?

How can there be a destination after I have set off?

We say to this poet, the first part is correct. As for the second, it is not precise because the destination is that which defines the path. Likewise, Allah legislated for the destination first and afterwards He set down the path to it. Allah has legislated for everything that the circumstances of human life require, and that is why there will not be any amendments because everything has been spelled out. The True Lord says after that:

وَهَٰذَا كِتَٰبٌ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ مُبَارَكٞ فَٱتَّبِعُوهُ وَٱتَّقُواْ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُرۡحَمُونَ ١٥٥

This, too, is a blessed Scripture which We have sent down follow it and be conscious of your Lord, so that you may receive mercy[155] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 155)

The word *book* shows that it has reached a degree of preciousness such that it must be written down and recorded because someone does not record or write anything down unless it is crucial. Our Lord has said the Quran is a book, and sometimes He calls it a Quran. As a Quran, it is recited from the hearts, and as a book it is preserved in writing. When they came to gather it, they wrote it down so that it would match what was in the hearts.

'And this [Quran] is a Book. We have revealed which is blessed.' This means that Allah *Glorified is He* commanded it to be sent down, and the trustworthy spirit (the angel Gabriel) came down with it. The word 'blessed' means it contains more goodness and benefit than expected. You might say, 'So-and-so has a salary of two hundred pounds, but he is raising his children well and he is pleased'. Someone will say to you, 'That is *a blessing*'. It is as if this salary would never allow for these responsibilities to be carried out. The word *blessed* indicates that the hand of Allah is affecting all means, and we know that people always look towards the positive type of sustenance without considering the vaster negative. Positive sustenance gives you two hundred pounds while the negative sustenance strips you of the expenditures of which extent you are unaware. Thus, we find someone whose salary is a thousand pounds, but some of his children become sick, and another child needs private tuition. At this rate, the thousand pounds will run out and he still needs more.

Therefore, when the True Lord prevents someone from having to spend out in disobedience or sickness, this is a blessing in sustenance. We find someone whose wealth comes from lawful sources and he toils for it, Allah enables him to buy everything that he needs. Allah grants this small amount of wealth the attribute of acceptance. We also find someone whose wealth comes from unlawful sources, and Allah is angry with his wealth, so he spends it in [remedying] afflictions and trials, and he will need even more than what he has.

When you compare the Quran to the Torah in size, you find that it is smaller, but if you were to look at the blessings that it contains, you would find them endless. Every day the Quran gives a new gift and its wonders do not cease. Someone reads it and understands a certain meaning, while someone else reads it and understands a new meaning. This proves that the One speaking is Wise, and He has placed great benefit in something small.

This is the meaning of ‘And this [Quran] is a Book. We have revealed which is blessed…’ because every book has a specified time, a specified era and for a specified nation. As for the Quran, from the day Allah sent it down and until the Hour is established, it has and will continue to address new issues as they emerge and provide solutions for them. What is important is that the Quran came at a time of high aspiration for humanity along with civilization and its intellectual advancements. Therefore, it had to address all these issues in a way that would give it a constant advantage, and this can only happen if it contains blessings.

We all know that the Quran was revealed to an unlettered man, amongst an unlettered nation. There is profound wisdom behind this because the meaning of ‘unlettered’ is that he did not receive knowledge from human beings, but rather, he is the same as his mother gave birth to him (regarding knowledge). His knowledge and education came from Allah.

Therefore, being unlettered is an honour and an elevation in his sources of knowledge. The Quran came down amongst an unlettered nation because this religion was only sent down amongst this primitive and nomadic nation, moving from place to place without a law, but ruled instead solely by the chief of the tribe. When these spiritual values and legislative rulings came down to them, this itself proves that the book bearing these values and rulings came from Allah. If the Quran had been sent down to a civilized nation, it would have been called a transition of civilization. However, it was sent down to a nation that had not had any laws similar to those that governed the Persians or Byzantines.

Since this Book (the Quran) has these qualities that relieve the creation of the burden of legislating for themselves in such a way that absolutely guarantees for them the fulfilment of all what is good in this worldly life and the life to come, Allah *the Almighty* commands them to follow it and to be conscious of Him *Glorified is He* so that they might be graced with His mercy. (*al-An'am:* 155)

The word *la`all* in Arabic indicates the meaning of 'hope'. As a matter of fact, one may hope that somebody will do them a favour and thus say, 'So-and-so might give me such-and-such'. This statement indicates that a human being hopes that another human being will do them a favour. Yet, this human being, out of the fact that man is constantly subject to change, may do the favour or may not. They may even try to do the act required by the person but finds themselves unable to do it. When you say, 'I might do a favour for such-and-such', this clearly means that you are the one who is expected to do this favour, yet it is of importance here to know that you are also subject to change and thus may be unable to do the act even though you have the intention and the desire to do it.

But, the question is, 'Why did Allah *the Almighty* send down this Book'? Allah *the Almighty* wants to indicate the high and superior status of the adherents of Islam to which the Quran was revealed down. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَن تَقُولُوٓاْ إِنَّمَآ أُنزِلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبُ عَلَىٰ طَآئِفَتَيۡنِ مِن قَبۡلِنَا وَإِن كُنَّا عَن دِرَاسَتِهِمۡ لَغَٰفِلِينَ ١٥٦

Lest you say, 'Scriptures were only sent down to two communities before us: we were not aware of what they studied' [156] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 156)

This verse indicates that the Quran was revealed down to purify the previous beliefs that were previously sent down to the two groups, the Jews and the Christians. They have not studied the Torah and the Bible because they were an unlettered people whose members did not know how to read and write; the Quran was sent down so that they could not say, 'We were unlettered and thus were unable to study the heavenly Books previously revealed to the Jews and Christians'. As a matter of fact, this indicates clearly that Allah *the Almighty* wanted them not to seize on any excuse.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَوْ تَقُولُوا۟ لَوْ أَنَّآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا ٱلْكِتَـٰبُ لَكُنَّآ أَهْدَىٰ مِنْهُمْ ۚ فَقَدْ جَآءَكُم بَيِّنَةٌ
مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ ۚ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن كَذَّبَ بِـَٔايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَصَدَفَ
عَنْهَا ۗ سَنَجْزِى ٱلَّذِينَ يَصْدِفُونَ عَنْ ءَايَـٰتِنَا سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَصْدِفُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

Or 'If only the Scripture had been sent down to us, we would have been better guided than them.' Now clear evidence, guidance, and mercy have come to you from your Lord. Who could be more wrong than someone who rejects God's revelations and turns away from them? We shall repay those who turn away with a painful punishment [157] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 157)

The polytheists could argue that if the Torah and the Bible had been revealed to them, they would have followed its guidance better than the Jews and the Christians. This statement on the polytheists' part indicates plainly that their minds were ready to accept faith. That is why Allah *the Almighty* did not want to let them seize on any excuse. He *the Almighty* says, 'Who could be more wrong than someone who rejects Allah's revelations and turns away from them'?

Linguistically, the verb *sadafa* or 'turned away' can be used as transitive and intransitive. 'Intransitive verbs' are those verbs that have or need no object. For example, when you say, 'So-and-so sat down'; the meaning of this sentence is crystal clear because you understand that someone has already done the action of sitting down. As for the 'transitive verbs', they are those verbs that have or need an object. For example, when you say, 'Zayd hit', the meaning of this sentence is not clear because you do not know the person who has been hit by Zayd and thus you expect the speaker to tell you the name of the person who has been hit.

As a matter of fact, the verb *sadafa* in this verse under discussion enjoys these two qualities. Allah *the Almighty* uses this particular verb in this context to convey two important meanings, as follows: when the verb is used in the intransitive sense, it indicates that the person themselves have committed the act of turning and shunning away from the way of guidance; when the verb is used in the transitive sense, it means that they cause others to turn away from divine guidance and thus they will be punished first and foremost for leading themselves astray, and meanwhile for causing others to deviate from the way. As such, Allah *the Almighty* uses this verb to indicate the two possible meanings. Indeed, it is on that person who led them-self astray and causes others to go astray that Allah *the Almighty* will inflict His Punishment twice. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We shall repay those who turn away with a painful punishment.'

The verse indicates clearly that the Allah's punishment will be inflicted upon those who turn themselves and others away from the way of faith and guidance. If those people in question carefully reflected on this worldly life, they would certainly realise that death seizes people every day without giving them any prior notice. We know for certain that people's life spans are predestined by Allah *the Almighty* in *Al-lawh al-mahfuzh* (preserved tablet), and that death is the inevitable end of all beings. This means that every human being with a sound mind should consider that they may die at any moment. It is if Allah *the Almighty* wants to say, 'If death is man's inevitable end, why do they turn away from My way of guidance? Is there any way that they can live eternally in the world'? Allah *the Almighty* then says:

هَلۡ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّآ أَن تَأۡتِيَهُمُ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ أَوۡ يَأۡتِيَ رَبُّكَ أَوۡ يَأۡتِيَ بَعۡضُ ءَايَٰتِ
رَبِّكَۗ يَوۡمَ يَأۡتِي بَعۡضُ ءَايَٰتِ رَبِّكَ لَا يَنفَعُ نَفۡسًا إِيمَٰنُهَا لَمۡ تَكُنۡ ءَامَنَتۡ مِن
قَبۡلُ أَوۡ كَسَبَتۡ فِيٓ إِيمَٰنِهَا خَيۡرٗاۗ قُلِ ٱنتَظِرُوٓاْ إِنَّا مُنتَظِرُونَ ١٥٨

Are they waiting for the very angels to come to them, or your Lord Himself, or maybe some of His signs? But on the Day some of your Lord's signs come, no soul will profit from faith if it had none before, or has not already earned some good through its faith. Say, 'Wait if you wish: we too are waiting' [158]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 158)

Allah *the Almighty* tells those people, i.e. the Polytheists, clearly to undoubtedly wait for nothing except for the angles who are assigned to take their souls!

The word ‘angels’ here is used in a general sense. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says that those people who sin against themselves will surrender to the angles when the latter causes them to die. (*an-Nahl:* 28)

Indeed, no one will ever escape the angels, and that is why they extend their submission to them, i.e. the angels. Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘Are they waiting for the very angels to come to them, or your Lord Himself…?’ Concerning this part of the verse, i.e. ‘the Coming of Allah *the Almighty*’, some scholars mistakenly wanted to explain it in the light of ‘how humans do the act of coming’; they wanted to make between the two acts of coming, i.e. the divine one and the human counterpart resemble each other. Yet, this is totally wrong because man’s coming entails that they move from one place to another, a matter which is impossible to apply to Allah *the Almighty*. To those scholars, we say, ‘If you truly explain every act of ‘coming’ considering how we humans come, how do you then explain the act of coming of the ‘stupor of death’ in the saying of Allah in which He *Glorified is He* says that ‘the stupor of death will come in truth’ (*Qaf:* 19)?

So, the question to be asked here is ‘How can we interpret the act of coming on part of death’? We do not really know how death will come even though it is created, so how come we know about how the act of coming is performed on the part of Allah *the Almighty*? We must explain everything that is connected to Allah in terms of what befits His Essence which is to be within the framework of the undeniable fact that there is nothing resembling Him *the Almighty* (*ash-Shura:* 11). In the same manner, if we take this sound understanding into consideration, we will be fully aware of the fact that the ‘act of coming’ on part of a child is totally different from it on the part of a young man and so on. So, how can we think that this particular ‘act of coming’ on the part of Allah *the Almighty*? Wrong then, are those who understand the ‘act of coming’ on the part of Allah in the light of its counterpart by human beings. That is why I constantly repeat that we must not understand anything pertaining to Allah *the Almighty* by the virtue of our own human laws, but rather, by the virtue of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is *the Most High* and thus everything pertaining to Him *the Almighty* must be understood in the light of the undeniable fact that there is nothing resembling Him *the Almighty*. That is why we must say, 'Allah *the Almighty* has hearing that is not like ours, sight that is not like ours, a hand that is not like ours and so on.'

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'Are they waiting for the very angels to come to them, or your Lord Himself, or may be some of His signs?' In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is related to have said, 'Hasten in performing good deeds before these six things happen; the appearance of the *dajjal* (Anti-Christ), the smoke, the beast of the earth, the rising of the sun from the west, the general turmoil (leading to large-scale massacre) and the death of masses and individuals.'(1) The word *khuwaysatu* in this Hadith is the diminutive form of *khassah* or something which is 'specific'. In this context of the Prophetic Hadith, it refers to death. It has been used in this diminutive form, to show how small it is when compared to the other great events to take place after death, such as the resurrection, the gathering etc. Other scholars yet opine that it may also refer to those deep concerns that occupy people's minds including property, offspring etc.

As for his saying, *amru al-`ammah* or 'the general turmoil', it refers to the Resurrection which will include all creatures. It may also refer to the tribulation that will totally overwhelm people, or even to those acts done by the masses of people and not their elite.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, "Are they waiting for the very angels to come to them, or your Lord Himself, or maybe some of His signs? But on the Day some of your Lord's signs come, no soul will profit from faith if it had none before…'

This divine ruling that no one will profit from their faith if they had not already believed before the coming of these signs, is since one believes only in what is unseen. That is why the term 'faith' cannot be applied to any act that is witnessed and comprehended by senses. In fact, one does not say, 'I have faith that I am now reading *Khawater Ash-Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawy Hawla Ayat Al-Quran Al-Karim*' because they are actually reading this book right now. In the same context, one does not say, 'I have faith that light is illuminating my apartment' because this is an act which is perceived by one's senses. That is why when the signs of the Day of Resurrection will come, we then move from having faith in what is an unseen to what is perceived and tangible. When these signs already come or when the soul reaches the throat, no disbeliever will profit from their belief, nor will any kind of charity or righteous deeds be accepted. When one is in the agony of death, he thinks of doing good deeds and thus starts to allocate part of his wealth to the needy and the poor. In the same connection, when the disbeliever sees the occurrence of these signs shortly before the Day of Resurrection, they will attain faith, but this will not profit them anyway, for they had not previously believed. This is because the term 'faith' applies to the act of believing in what is unseen. So when these signs come, this means that what is unseen has turned into something tangible and thus attaining faith at that particular time will be of no benefit. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, 'But on the Day some of your Lord's signs come, no soul will profit from faith if it had none before, or has not already earned some good through its faith.' This means that faith must precede the coming of these signs to be accepted. Yet, if there is a legal excuse that prevents one form attaining faith, such as insanity or not attaining the age of puberty, faith will be accepted from those people with such excuses even after the coming of the signs.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran about similar incidents that took place in the past and in which people attained faith at times when it, i.e. faith would not benefit them in any way. In the chapter of *Yunus*, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the story of the children of Israel and Pharaoh; when Allah brought the children of Israel across the sea, Pharaoh and his hosts pursued them with vehement insolence and tyranny until they were overwhelmed by the waters of the sea. When Pharaoh was about to drown, he exclaimed, 'I have come to believe that there is no deity save Him in whom the children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender themselves unto Him!'' (*Yunus:* 90) Yet, Allah *the Almighty* did not accept his belief since he did not do that until fully realising that he would certainly drown (*Yunus:* 91). Therefore, it becomes clear that when the spirit reaches the throat, declaring one's faith will certainly be of no benefit.

Allah *Glorified is He* finally concludes the verse with His saying, 'Say, "Wait if you wish, We too are waiting."' This is to say that the polytheists and all those who turn away from the divine guidance are waiting for failure while we are waiting for success and prosperity.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا۟ دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا۟ شِيَعًا لَّسْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِى شَىْءٍ ۚ إِنَّمَآ
أَمْرُهُمْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions, have nothing to do with them [Prophet]. Their case rests with God: in time He will tell them about their deeds [159]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 159)

In truth, this verse gives the full and convenient explanation for a previously mentioned verse in this chapter. Allah *the Almighty* orders the followers of Prophet Muhammad to follow His Straight Path and not to follow other ways, lest they cause them to go astray (*al-An'am:* 153).

In fact, those who have broken the unity of their religion have already forgotten the fact that religion only comes to unite people and not to divide or break them up into factions. In doing so, religion tells us that all divine commands and prohibitions are viewed in the light of 'do' and 'do not do'; and so there will be no disagreement whatsoever regarding commands and prohibitions of shari'a. Yet, we have different opinions concerning what is permissible, that is, those acts which one will be rewarded for doing them; yet they will not be inflicted with any punishment if not performed. As a matter of fact, this category of 'what is permissible' is not included under 'do' and 'do not do'.

Therefore, those who break up the unity of their religion, contradict the divine way of guidance which was revealed down to unite mankind upon one thing and so that the course of life will run smoothly. In the same connection, it is of great importance to know that people's desires are not the same and thus if the course of life was to be run by virtues of every human being's personal desire, conflict among people will inevitably take place.

As for the word *shia`* (faction), it refers to that group of people that follow particular rulings. As such, the word *tashayyu`* indicates two possibilities; it may sometimes be used to indicate something good or beneficial, while other times it may be used to refer to something bad or harmful.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions, have nothing to do with them [Prophet]’, it clearly indicates that those people who have already divided their religion and broken up into factions are far away from the religion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that it is not true to attribute them to this pure religion of Islam. In fact, Islam has been sent down by Allah to regulate the course of life and make it run smoothly. The importance of Islam for Muslims is exactly like the importance of water to the preservation of life. In this regard, we know for certain that pure water has no colour, taste, or smell, yet if any of these characteristics changes, it will no longer be pure. The same applies to the pure religion of Islam which approves unity and rejects all kinds of division. Allah *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying, ‘…Their case rests with Allah; in time He will tell them about their deeds.’ This means that it is up to Allah *the Almighty* to either defeat or punish them in this worldly life or even to postpone that to the Day of Resurrection.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

مَن جَآءَ بِٱلۡحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُۥ عَشۡرُ أَمۡثَالِهَاۖ وَمَن جَآءَ
بِٱلسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجۡزَىٰٓ إِلَّا مِثۡلَهَا وَهُمۡ لَا يُظۡلَمُونَ ١٦٠

Whoever has done a good deed will have it ten times
to his credit, but who- ever has done a bad deed will
be repaid only with its equivalent – they will not be
wronged [160] (The Quran, *al-An’am:* 160)

We should differentiate between the following two words, namely; *hasan* (what is good) and *hasanah* (a good deed). In this regard, it is not true to say that *hasanah* is the feminine of *hasan.* Some people mistakenly believe that the letter *ta`* at the end of this word makes it a feminine form, while the correct opinion is that it indicates exaggeration; it is used with these adjectives attributed to the masculine names. For example, we say, ‘So-and-so is an *`allamah* (a well-versed scholar)’, ‘So-and-so is a *rawiah* (very skilful in narrating incidents of the past), and ‘So-and-so is a ‘*nassabah’* (a very skilful genealogist)’.

A good deed or *hasanah* is the goodness that brings forth reward. In fact, the more the good deed is sincere to Allah, the more the reward is everlasting and more profound.

Regarding the verse under discussion, the word *amthal* (times) is the plural of *mathal* which is a masculine noun. Arabic grammar rules state that when the counted noun is masculine, it must have a (*ta')* letter at the end, and when it is feminine, we should elide the *ta'*. This is because the original formation of numbers is based on the existence of the letter *ta`*, so if you use it with a feminine noun, you do the opposite by eliding its *ta'*. Yet, if you use numbers with their original formation which is the masculine, you use it naturally. For example, we say, *'thalathatu rijal'* (three men). If you want to talk about the feminine, you say, '*thalathu niswah'* (three women).

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Whoever has done a good deed will have it ten times to his credit….' This indicates clearly the Absolute Mercy and Grace of Allah *Glorified is He*. In this respect, the Qudsi Hadith narrated on the authority of Ibn `Abbas, Allah *be pleased with them*, who narrated that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them that Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Indeed, your Lord *the Almighty* is All-Merciful. He who intended to do good, but did not do it, one good was recorded for him, and he who intended to do good and did it, ten to seven hundred good deeds were recorded for him. And he who intended evil, but did not commit it, no entry was made against his name, but if he committed that, it was recorded or Allah would even wipe out (the evil committed by a man) and Allah does not put to destruction anyone except he who is doomed to destruction.'(1)

We know for certain that Allah *Glorified is He* rewards a good deed with ten times the like of it and even multiplies up to seven hundred times. Every action under Islam requires sincerity and a good intention to be accepted. As such, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* has laid down such a system of reward whereby the reward of one good will be ten times the like of it and will even multiply, due to a good intention, to reach seven hundred times of it, so that people will do good. Thus, if one wants to get more reward from Allah, they need to be sincere and show a good intention. In another verse in the Quran, He tells that whoever offers Him *the Almighty* a good loan, He will amply repay it to them and He will provide for them a noble reward (*al-Baqara:* 245 and 57: 11).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* tells that the reward of a good deed shall be the ten times the like of it. Yet, this reward will certainly multiply to seven hundred times or even more if the good deed is offered with a good intention. This fact is also mentioned in *al-Baqara* wherein Allah *the Almighty* says that the parable of those who spend their property in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears, with a hundred grains in every ear; and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases (*al-Baqara:* 261).

If the earth, which is created by Allah, gives you seven hundred grains when you put a seed into it, what do you expect the reward of Allah *the Almighty* shall be? Indeed, His Bounty is endless. That is why He says that He multiplies for whom He pleases (*al-Baqara:* 261).

The Almighty then concludes the verse with His saying, '…but whoever has done a bad deed will be repaid only with its equivalent - they will not be wronged.'

Since they are only requited once for the bad deed they did, they are never oppressed or wronged.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قُلۡ إِنَّنِي هَدَىٰنِي رَبِّيٓ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ دِينٗا قِيَمٗا مِّلَّةَ
إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفٗاۚ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ١٦١

Say, 'My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the faith of Abraham, a man of pure faith. He was not a polytheist' [161] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 161)

Allah's saying, '*dinan qiyaman*' (upright religion) means that Islam regulates people's affairs in this life. As for the word *qiyaman,* it is derived from the word *al-qimah* (value) or from the word *al-Qiyam* which means 'taking care of something'. Arabs say, 'So-and-so *qama `ala al-amr*' to point out that someone has taken care of something until it is corrected. The same applies to the religion of Islam that came to correct people's course of life through instructing them how to be of great moral conduct. In addition, it is responsible for such a correction of mankind.

In this vein, we should consider the fact that when Allah *the Almighty* sheds light on a very important topic, He refers us to a brief glimpse of the biography of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. In the verse under discussion, the polytheists of Mecca believed that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a polytheist. As for the Jews, they believed that he was a Jew. The Christians, on their part, believed that he was a Christian. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* denies all these unfounded allegations and clearly declares that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was neither a 'Jew' nor a 'Christian', but was one who turned away from all that is false, having surrendered himself to Allah (*Al-'Imran:* 67).

Judaism and Christianity came after him Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. As for the polytheists of Mecca, they were significantly affected by what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* left behind. In this regard, the Quran tells us about the supplication of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he left his son, Ismail (Ishmael), and his mother, Hajar, near the Scared House in Mecca; Ibrahim (Abraham) said to Allah that he had settled some of his offspring in a valley in which there is no fertile land, close to His Sacred Mosque, so that they might devote themselves to prayer. Ibrahim (Abraham) then asked Allah to cause people's hearts to incline towards them and to provide them with fruits (*Ibrahim:* 37).

In truth, it is Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who raised the foundations of the Sacred House in Mecca. In addition, it was due to him that all people give them respect, to the extent that their trade used to go east and west, with no one daring to attack it; and they earned a lot of money.

Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* says, 'It is an upright religion, the faith of Ibrahim (Abraham), a man of pure of faith. He was not a polytheist', He *the Almighty* refers to that religion which brings them all of the abundant provision they enjoy. As for the Arabic word *al-hanaf,* it is a curvature in the foot. The religion of Abraham never inclined away from what is true and correct. Rather, it inclined away from deviation and was always upright. We know for certain that Allah's messengers were sent only at times when deviation was so great. This clearly means that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* turned away from their deviation and is upright.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُلۡ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحۡيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

Say, 'My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death,
are all for God, Lord of all the Worlds [162]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 162)

The word 'prayers' in this verse refers to the act of worship which is the second pillar of Islam. Muslims are obliged to pray five times a day. No Muslim is excused for not performing it whatsoever. We previously explained that it is enough for a Muslim to declare the testimony of faith once in their life. As for the other pillars of Islam, a Muslim may be excused under certain circumstances for being unable to do them. For example, a Muslim may be unable to fast during the month of *Ramadan* and thus they are not obliged to fast. The same ruling applies to the fourth and the fifth pillars, i.e. *zakat* and pilgrimage; if one fails to meet certain requirements by means of which these two pillars are obligatory, they are excused for not being able to perform them. As for prayer, a Muslim is not allowed, under any circumstance, not to perform it.

In the same vein, it is of great importance to know that all the divine commands and orders were revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through revelation except for prayer, which was revealed to him directly through Allah *the Almighty* with no medium. When He *the Almighty* says: 'my prayer', this means that He refers to the most essential pillar of Islam which no one is excused from performing it, to the extent that the sick, who cannot move, are obliged to offer it with their eyes or by thinking of it in their heart. As for the word *nusuk* (sacrifice), it refers to all acts of worship. In the chapter of *al-Hajj* Allah says that He appointed acts of devotion which every nation should observe (*al-Hajj:* 67).

The word *nusuk* therefore, refers to the different acts of worship; yet it is used mainly to refer to those several acts pertaining to pilgrimage such as the circumambulation around the *Ka`ba,* running seven rounds between As-Safa and Al-Marwah, standing on the mountain of *`Arafa* and the throwing of pebbles. All these acts are called *manasik* (acts of worship). Etymologically, the word is derived from the verbal noun *an-nasikah,* which is an ingot of silver that is melted in such a way that renders it pure. That is why worship is called *nusuk*, that is, one must be so sincere to Allah *the Almighty* exactly as the ingot of silver is purified of all the minerals that are mixed with it by fire.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Say, ''My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for Allah, Lord of the Worlds."' This verse contains two acts which fall under man's free will and two others with which man's free will has nothing to do. One is free to either offer acts of worship or not, yet they are not free to define the time of their birth or death. It is taken for granted that life and death are defined by Allah *the Almighty* in accordance with His Divine Wisdom, and so are the act of prayer and the different acts of worship. In fact, one does not offer prayer except because they truly believe in Allah *the Almighty*; the One Who issued the command to pray. Therefore, one does not do anything of their own accord. Rather, they direct the capabilities that Allah has created in them towards carrying out divine orders. All actions are to be attributed to Allah *the Almighty*.

But why does Allah *the Almighty* mention 'prayer' and *an-nusuk* in particular, in the light of the fact that both two actions are subject to man's free will? It is because man's free will is implanted by Allah *the Almighty* in man. In the same connection, He is the One Who has laid down His Divine Commands and Orders including the obligation of prayer. Other scholars yet believe that the saying of Allah, 'Say, "My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for Allah, Lord of the Worlds' means that one is supposed to offer them sincerely to Allah *the Almighty* and not to show off. For example, a Muslim may go to perform pilgrimage in Mecca so that people will pay their great respect; this is totally wrong. Muslims are obliged to offer their acts of worship sincerely to Allah *the Almighty*. In truth, if one performs the different acts of worship seeking out the pleasure of people, they should consider that people are unable to reward them the same way Allah does. That is why *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.'

Life is Allah's gift to mankind and thus it must be made use of in such a way that pleases Him *the Almighty*. As a matter of fact, one's life and death must be sincerely and entirely for the sake of Allah *the Almighty*; a point which is emphasized in the next verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says:

لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُۥ وَبِذَٰلِكَ أُمِرْتُ وَأَنَا۠ أَوَّلُ ٱلْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٦٣﴾

He has no partner. This is what I am commanded,
and I am the first to devote myself to Him [163]
(The Quran, *al-An'am:* 163)

In fact, this verse indicates that some people may offer their acts of worship while seeking out the pleasure of Allah *the Almighty* along with other people; they show off with their prayers; their lives are not sincerely sacrificed with for the sake of Allah and so are all their actions and movements. That is why we must constantly consider the undeniable fact that Allah *the Almighty* has no partner.

He *the Almighty* then says, 'This is what I am commanded, and I am the first to devote myself to Him.' This part of the verse implies a command from Allah to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this regard, we must know perfectly well that the followers of Messenger Muhammad are included in all the divine commands and orders issued to him. These divine commands are undoubtedly beneficial to mankind and thus *the Almighty* is entirely worthy to be loved. Every act of worship for Him brings us goodness and benefit, which are out of the divine bounty and grace. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself is unable to provide people with such goodness and benefit; rather, it is Allah *the Almighty* alone Who can do so. Being preoccupied all the time with the affairs of his followers, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in the chapter of *Yunus* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and Blessings be upon him* has come to us from among ourselves; that our falling into distress is grievous to him; that he excessively solicitously respects us; and that he is compassionate to the believers (*at-Tawba:* 128).

He *peace and blessings be upon him* used to invoke Allah *the Almighty* to do good towards his followers saying, 'O Lord! My followers! My followers' whereupon He *the Almighty* wanting to assuage His Messenger Muhammad, said to him, 'Verily, We will please you regarding your followers and will never displease you.'(1)

The full narration of the Hadith reads, ''Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-`As Allah *be pleased with them* narrated, 'The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the Words of Allah *the Exalted* about Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who said, "O my Lord! They have led astray many among mankind. But whosoever follows me, he verily, is of me" (*Ibrahim:* 36), and those of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* who said, "If You punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily, You, only You, are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise." (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) Then Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised up his hands and said, "O Allah! My followers, my followers," and wept; Allah *the Exalted* said, "O Jibril (Gabriel)! Go to Muhammad and ask him, "What makes you weep?" So, Jibril came to him and asked him and the Messenger of Allah informed him what he had said (though Allah knew it well). Upon this Allah said, "Jibril, go to Muhammad and say, "Verily, We will please you regarding your followers and will never displease you."''(2)

Allah *the Almighty* then sent down a verse in which He *Glorified is He* states clearly that He will grant him *peace and blessings be upon him* until he is well pleased (*ad-Duha:* 5). In this vein, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Thus, I am not pleased so long as one of my followers is in the Fire.'(3) He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…and I am the first to devote myself to Him.'

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that he was the first of his followers to devote himself to Allah *the Almighty* this is true, for he *peace and blessings be upon him* embraced Islam before any other person. Similarly, every messenger is the first Muslim from amongst his followers. Another group of scholars yet opine that this part of the verse should be simply explained to mean that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the most prominent one among all the messengers and prophets; a point which is proved by Allah *the Almighty* taking the pledge from all the previous messengers and prophets to believe in him. As such, it is proved that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the first Muslim among all of Allah’s prophets and messengers just as he is the first Muslim among his followers. Let me offer the following example to illustrate the point; the faculty of law was established in the twentieth of the last century; from inception up till now, every grade has a student who gets the highest marks among their colleagues; this is the case until a student gets the highest marks ever and thus they are said to be the first of all students in the faculty of law since inception.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim*

(3) *Narrated by An-Naysaburi*

He *Glorified is He* then says:

قُلۡ أَغَيۡرَ ٱللَّهِ أَبۡغِي رَبّٗا وَهُوَ رَبُّ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖۚ وَلَا تَكۡسِبُ كُلُّ نَفۡسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيۡهَاۚ وَلَا تَزِرُ
وَازِرَةٞ وِزۡرَ أُخۡرَىٰۚ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُم مَّرۡجِعُكُمۡ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ فِيهِ تَخۡتَلِفُونَ ١٦٤

Say, ‘Should I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things?’ Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your differences [164]
(The Quran, *al-An’am:* 164)

The meaning of *ar-rabb* is that He is the One in charge of bringing all the creatures up. Mastery is His and everything in the existence is raised by Him *Glorified is He*. So, how can we take something that has been created and raised by Him to be a partner with Him?! Indeed, this is not a sound anyway. That is why He *the Almighty* puts the sentence in the form of interrogation, ‘Should I seek a Lord other than Allah, when He is the Lord of all things?’

This interrogative question implies reproach for anyone who might take a partner with Allah in worship. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us, ‘Think of this question very carefully and objectively and you will find the correct answer’. He *the Almighty* would not have said this unless He is certain that the answer is ‘No’. If there is a remote possibility that the answer might be in the negative, He *the Almighty* would not have asked the question. It is as if He *the Almighty* wants to say that those with sound minds will for sure agree with Me that it is not appropriate to take anyone else as a lord.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "Should I seek a Lord other than Allah, when He is the Lord of all things?"' The Arabic word *abghi* means to seek or to look for. As for the word *taksib*, it is taken from the root *kasaba* and *iktasaba*. We previously explained that the word *kasaba* is always used regarding goodness while *iktasaba* is always used regarding evil. However, there are some people who have become accustomed to doing evil deeds, to the extent that it does not burden them at all and thus they mistakenly view it as *kasab.* Yet, it is foolish to think that something is *kasab* when it is against you and not for you. As a matter of fact, when you carefully examine the true meaning conveyed by this word in this context, you will fully understand that it is not in your credit.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another.' The Arabic word *wizr* (burden) is the appalling hardship and thus all its derivatives convey the meanings of hardship and difficulty. For example, the word *wazir* refers to someone who bears a burden. Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran at the tongue of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that he asked Allah *the Almighty* to appoint for him out of his kinsfolk, one who will help him to bear his burden. Musa (Moses) then defined that man whom he wanted to be his *wazir;* it was none but his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* (*Ta Ha:* 29-31). It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew that conveying the message to the Jews was going to be a difficult process, so he asked Allah *the Almighty* to make his brother, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* help him with this hardship.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He had opened, his heart and lifted his burden that was so heavy on his back (*ash-Sharh:* 1-3). The very beginning of the process of divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was very difficult for him, since it involved the interaction between two beings of a totally different nature; i.e. Jibril (Gabriel) and Prophet Muhammad, a human being. That is why his *peace and blessings be upon him* face, while receiving the divine revelation, used to turn red. In addition, he used to sweat heavily even in very cold weather. Sometimes, he used to ask those around him to cover him; other times if he was sitting with his knee touching the knee of the person next to him, his neighbour would feel heaviness.

However, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* became well accustomed to the divine revelation, he came to fully realise the sweetness of receiving the divine message, to the effect that he no longer thought of any hardship. Accordingly he, *peace and Blessings be upon him* longed for the sending down of revelation upon its cessation.

Allah *Glorified is He* finally concludes the verse with His saying, '…no soul will bear the burden of another.' We will all return to our Lord in the end, and He will tell us the truth about our differences. It is clear now that the *wizr* indicates the meaning of 'heavy burdens'. This part of the verse tells clearly that no one will be held accountable for the evil deeds committed by another person unless they are responsible for the deviation of that particular person that committed this act. We previously explained the difference between the people who themselves turn away from the divine guidance and the ones who cause others to deviate this particular way of divine guidance. It is for sure that the latter person will be held accountable for the evil deeds committed by those whom they led astray. Then, we will all return to our Lord so that He can make us truly understand over what we were differing.

Allah says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَٰٓئِفَ ٱلْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَٰتٍ
لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِى مَآ ءَاتَىٰكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌۢ ﴿١٦٥﴾

It is He who made you successors on the earth and raises some of you above others in rank, to test you through what He gives you. [Prophet], your Lord is swift in punishment, yet He is most forgiving and merciful [165] (The Quran, *al-An'am:* 165)

In another verse of the Quran, namely in the chapter of *Fatir,* Allah *the Almighty* says that it is He who has made you successors upon the earth (*Fatir:* 39). The difference between these two verses is that the latter contains the preposition *in* or 'upon'.

The word *khalifa* or 'successor' refers to someone who comes after or succeeds someone else. As a matter of fact, this process of succession may pertain to time or place. As for the succession of time, it means that one lives during a period of time which comes after the elapse of a particular person's age or time. As for the succession of time, it means that someone takes the place of another person. If we carefully reflect upon man throughout their life, we will fully realise that they are strong in their youth; yet when they are old, all their strength is lost. Similarly, we find people succeeding each other in assuming different positions. This part of the verse may also indicate the meaning that Allah *the Almighty* wants us to be His successors on the earth. Everything in this universe is entirely subject to the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. Out of His Endless Bounty and Grace, Allah allowed certain things to be affected by other things. When you ignite a fire, for example, it is subject to you and does what you want; and when you till the earth and plant seeds in it, it responds positively to you. In the same connection, when you drink, your thirst is quenched, and when you eat, you feel nourished. How does all of this happen?

Certainly, it happens because Allah *the Almighty* has subjugated everything in the universe for you, and He has made causes and causative factors. As such, man's creation is to fulfil the Will of Allah *the Almighty*; a topic that must not be taken for granted. If you want to test the veracity of this topic, you should then look at any person, even a disbeliever, who wants to stand up from their place; you will find that their body parts respond to them positively and do what they want to do, yet the question is, 'What particular body part has been commanded to do this'? All what they know is that they want to stand up and it happens. So that one does not think that s/he has done all this due to their own ability, Allah *the Almighty* has made some matters, such as death and giving birth to children, prevalent and worldwide. In truth, all people are delivered to life and they all will certainly die. Likewise, all people can cry and laugh. People are the same as to these matters. That is why Allah says that it is He alone who causes [you] to laugh and to weep (*an-Najm:* 43).

The aforementioned verse in the chapter of *an-Najm* indicates that Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned this concrete fact that He is the One Who causes people to laugh and weep because these two particular acts are common among all people. One speaks and works whenever they want, yet when they want to laugh, it is Allah *the Almighty* the One Who causes them to do that.

That is why when you wish to flatter someone and laugh with them, you give them a dry laugh.

As such, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that He has full control over His universe, that is, He grants them the free will to choose what they want in certain matters, and at the same time Allah *Glorified is He* compelled them as to other acts. At this point, it is of great importance to know that man's control over the parts of their body is granted to them by Allah, *the Most High*. Indeed, man does not have full control over these parts, but Allah *the Almighty* does. That is why we find Him *Glorified is He* sometimes sapping man's will over their parts. For example, Allah *the Almighty* may command the brain not to convey the nervous signals to a particular body part and thus they become paralysed. If man had had full control over their body parts, they would have commanded the brain to resist the divine command and thus to convey the signals to the body parts and therefore, they will not get paralysed.

As such, human beings are the successors of Allah *the Almighty* on the earth. Allah *Glorified is He* subjugated the entire universe to them in accordance with His Will. Yet, if He *the Almighty* causes some of the objects of the universe to disobey them, this proves that it is the Ultimate Power of Allah that subjugated all these items to man and not their will.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '…and He raises some of you above others in rank…' This part of the verse indicates plainly that the act of succession entails that people should not be identical to each other in all aspects of life. Rather, He wants to make us perfectly complement each other as the different spheres of life. If all human beings were granted the same talents; the course of life would not move normally or smoothly. Thus, it becomes evident that talents must differ from one person to another because man's requirements of life are numerous. It goes without saying that it is not right for all humans to be doctors, nor is it right for all of them to be judges, or engineers or even farmers. Indeed, this points out the undeniable fact that Allah *the Almighty* has raised some of us above others in ranks.

Indeed, some people have been raised in rank by Allah *the Almighty* while others have been caused by Him *the Almighty* to be of lower ranks, so the question is, 'Who are those whom Allah, raised in ranks and who are those whom He *the Almighty* caused to be of lower ranks'? Indeed, some people have been raised in ranks by the talents they are endowed with, yet in case they lose these talents, they will surely be of lower ranks. Allah *the Almighty* certainly wants human beings to support one another, a matter which will be achieved, not out of people's courtesy, but rather, out of their compulsion to do so. This plainly indicates the All-Great Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty* in running the affairs of the universe. If one reflects carefully on their environment, they will find that some of their colleagues had already left primary school; yet, when they were in the preparatory school, some of the students left it too, and so on until they reached the university stage wherein you will find the number of students is much fewer than its counterpart at the very beginning of the students' education.

As such, we find that some people do not complete their education because there are certain jobs which cannot be done except by the holders of the primary, or the preparatory or even the secondary certificates. In fact, if every student joined university, these jobs would not be done.(1) That is why Allah *the Almighty* makes supporting one another in this worldly life based on man's need to their fellow man or women and not on their free will.

Let us offer the following example to illustrate this point: if someone is afflicted with hunger, or if their dependents are hungry, they will accept any kind of lawful work. In addition, if they are utterly content with this work and they do not harbour any resentment or hatred towards anyone else, they will become proficient and pre-eminent in their work and Allah will supply them with lawful and good provision. Imam `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Man's status is fully realised in the light of what they are able to do well.' Therefore, if man perfects his work, he will be prosperous in this worldly life.

The All-Great and Profound Wisdom of Allah entails that people's talents must not be identical to each other; rather, He *the Almighty* has raised some people over others in ranks by these talents. Each one of us is raised in rank by what we are perfectly able to do well. Yet, in case we lose this ability, we would not be raised in ranks over others; this plainly indicates that we must be constantly supporting one another. As such, the entire universe will be closely connected to each other, out of people's need for each other and not out of grace.

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(1) It is noteworthy to mention that Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *may* Allah *rest his soul* does not promote illiteracy, but rather, he wants to reveal the divine wisdom as to why it is impossible for all people to be university students.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…and He raises some of you above others in rank, to test you through what He gives you.' It is as if this raising in ranks is a test for human beings with regards to the talents granted to them by Allah, for His servants. He *the Almighty* knew perfectly well about what His servants would do in this worldly life, yet Allah gives them the opportunity to act in accordance with their free will, so that they would be held accountable for their own deeds on the Day of Judgement. *Liabluwakum* (to test you) means that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to test people so that they would admit their sins and acts of disobedience.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '…to test you through what He gives you. Indeed, your Lord is swift in punishment, yet He is most forgiving and Merciful.' This part of the verse indicates clearly that Allah *the Almighty* is swift in punishment and retribution. Thus, wrong are those who think that divine punishment is late. People will certainly be rewarded for their good deeds and punished for their evil ones after death. It is taken for granted that one may die at any moment. When one dies, they will be unable to do further deeds. This is how Allah *the Almighty* is swift in punishment, but some disobedient people, relying on Allah's Forbearance, mistakenly think that He will postpone their punishment for them. At that point, one of the most pious Muslims' sayings may be quoted, 'Make your gratitude for the One Who never deprives you of His Blessings. Make your obedience to the One you are never independent of, and make your submission to the One Whose Dominion and Authority you will never exit from.'

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* has granted mankind countless blessings. For example, if one wants to stand up, they do not know what muscles they need to move to perform the act of standing. However, all what they know well is that whenever they want to stand, they will be naturally able to do so. This clearly indicates the unchallengeable Will of Allah *the Almighty*. When Allah *Glorified is He* wills something, He says, 'Be!' and 'it is'.

So long as we are the inheritors and successors of Allah on the earth, then we must be complementary to each other, meaning that each one of us enjoys a talent others do not enjoy. As such, all the human beings will be compelled to cooperate with one another in such a way that enables each to mutually get the benefit of the other's talents. Undoubtedly, Allah *the Almighty* does not want us to share the fruits of these divine gifts out of grace. Rather, He wants us to need each other. Thus, we will need each other.

This way of appointing humans as Allah's successors on the earth indicates that some of us are raised in ranks more than others. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants to say that He has raised some people in ranks over others by the talents He granted to each of them. In such a way, people will be all equal.

Indeed, we are all dependent on Allah *the Almighty* and thus all of us are in dire need of Him because He has not taken a consort or a child. If we tried to calculate the various talents amongst humanity and their distribution amongst the entire creation, we would find that the sum of every individual is equal to the sum of every other individual. However, one may enjoy a talent, while others do not. In the same connection, someone may like to do an act, they find themselves unable to do it. Calculating all the varying degrees of proficiency in all talents reveals that people are all equal, and that there is no preference for someone over others except in Allah-consciousness.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'It is He Who made you successors on the earth and raises some of you above others in rank, to test you through what He gives you. Indeed, your Lord is swift in punishment, yet He is Most Forgiving and Merciful.' This indicates that each one of us can claim that they have been raised in rank by Allah *the Almighty,* yet they should become humbled because there are others who are of higher ranks than them. In fact, this is how balance is achieved. As such, one should not be arrogant because they have been raised to some degree. In the same vein, one should not feel humiliation when Allah *the Almighty* causes others to be of higher ranks than them. This is because all the affairs of the universe are subject to the Will of Allah. Thus, the one who shows full submission to Allah's All-Profound Wisdom to the distribution of talents to people will be enabled by Him *the Almighty* to get the maximum benefit of their talent to the effect that no one with the same talent will excel them.

But, will all mankind manage to show full submission to Allah in this regard'? The answer is 'no', because some people may fall prey to malevolence, hatred and envy when they see someone who is wealthier than them. We say to such people, 'If you examine the matter very carefully, you may find that you are more powerful than them, and you may even be happier than them. If you draw a comparison between the talents Allah gave you and the talents Allah gave other people, you will find the total of every individual equals the total of every other individual'. Thus, the one who manages to overcome this defect in their soul will gain reward from Allah *the Almighty* to the effect that He will expiate some of their evil deeds and forgive them. As for that one who objects to Allah's distribution of talents to His creatures, they will be punished by Him *the Almighty*. He has made it clear, 'I will certainly try you and test you. So, whoever passes the test will have forgiveness and mercy, and whoever fails it will have punishment. Do not think that My punishment is distant, because death is the only thing that keeps one away from the punishment in the Hereafter; death has no known cause. It is possible for someone to die at any time, and then their punishment begins'. Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying, 'Indeed, your Lord is swift in punishment, yet He is Most Forgiving and Merciful.'

And with this, we have come to the end of the interpretation of the chapter of *al-An`am* which began with Allah's saying, 'All praise is due to Allah...' and ended with His saying, 'He is Most Forgiving and Merciful.'

All praise is due to Allah in this worldly life, in the Hereafter.

The Chapter of

al-A'raf

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

Before we begin our explanation for the chapter of *al-A'raf,* we must consider a very important subtle observation related to the Book of Allah *the Almighty* that is, all the verses of the Quran are closely connected to each other.

For example, the final word in the chapter of *al-An'am* reads "Most Merciful" or *rahimun*; we find that this word is written in such a way as to suggest it will relate to what comes after it. We find the words *ghafurun rahimun* written with the vowel marking the final syllables of each; this means that this last word of the chapter of *al-An'am* is directly connected in reading to the saying of Allah, '*bismillahi ar-rahman ar-rahim*'.

This indicates the fact that all the verses of the Quran are connected to each other in such a way that tells obviously that the Quran is one entity. If He *the Almighty* willed, He would make verses end with consonants and thus there will be no space for the verses to be connected to each other, or He might instruct us to stop forcibly on the endings of every verse, yet Allah *Glorified is He* wanted all the verses of the Quran to be connected to one another. Allah says:

المٓصٓ ١

***Alif Lam Mim Sad* [1] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 1)**

In this verse, we should separate between the pronunciations of each letter, as follows: we read *alif*, then we pause and read *lam*; then we pause and read *mim*, then pause and read *sad*. These letters break the general rule of pronunciation of Arabic words for a wise reason, that is, they are discrete letters or '*huruf muqatta`ah* such as '*Alif, Lam, Mim', 'Ha. Mim', 'Ta Ha', 'Ya Sin', 'Sad', and 'Qaf*'; and they are all written without vowels, a matter which indicates that each of them actually has a separate meaning known to

Allah *the Almighty* alone. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, ‘Whoever recites a letter from the Book of Allah, he will be credited with a good deed, and a good deed gets a ten-fold reward. I do not say that *Alif-Lam-Mim* is one letter, but rather *Alif* is a letter, *Lam* is a letter and *Mim* is a letter.’(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* thereby indicates that these letters each have their own significance; and this could only be the case if they indicate a clear meaning. These meanings may not yet be understood by all people, to the effect that those who recite them in their prayers might not even understand their meanings. Everyone who reads the Quran earns reward for the recitation of every letter; if someone were to read, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan’, and then read a letter or more from the Quran, they would earn a good deed with every letter. When reading the openings of the chapters of the Quran, we find that some of them start with discrete letters like the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which Allah says, ‘*Alif Lam Mim.*’ (*al-Baqara:* 1)

And here at the beginning of the chapter of *al-A`raf*, we read, *‘Alif Lam Mim Sad.’* (*al-A’raf:* 1) They are disjointed letters which are read without any end vowels so that each letter is separate from the other. Another thing which can be noted about them is that they are not recited with their designated sounds, but rather, with their names. What are designated sounds? And what are names? When you say ‘write’, you do not say, ‘W-R-I-T-E’, but rather, you pronounce the designated sound of /w/; the letter is called ‘W’, but its designated sound is /w/. Every letter has a designated sound and a name. An illiterate person pronounces the designated sounds, even if they do not know their names; as for the literate person, he alone understands that when he says ‘write’, it is composed of the letters ‘W-R-I-T-E’; yet the illiterate person is unaware of this distinction.

If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, received this, and said *‘Alif Lam Mim’,* and since he was illiterate and had never learnt, then, who told him to pronounce the names of the letters instead of their designated sounds? He must have been taught them and had them transmitted to him.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi*

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So when We have recited it [through Gabriel], then follow its recitation.' (*al-Qiyama:* 18)

You find 'Alif Lam Mim' at the start of the chapter of *al-Baqara* and the chapter of *Al-`Imran*, but you read the first verse of the chapter of *al-Fil*, 'Have you not considered, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1)

The words 'have you not' in Arabic are '*alam* which is spelt with the letters *alif*, *lam*, and *mim*. What is the difference between the letters *alif*, *lam*, and *mim* at the start of the chapters of *al-Baqara*, *Al-`Imran* and others, and the very same letters in the chapter of *al-Fil* and others such as the chapter of *ash-Sharh*? At the start of *al-Baqara* and *Al-`Imran,* you read them as names, whilst at the start of the chapter of *al-Fil* you read them as designated sounds; and the thing which makes you differentiate between them is that you have heard them recited at the start of *al-Baqara* and *Al-`Imran* in this way, and you heard them recited at the start of the chapter of *al-Fil* in the other way. So, the recitation of the Quran is a matter of transmission, and no one is entitled to recite the Quran without first hearing it from a tutor so that they know how to recite it.

We read *'Alif Lam Mim Sad'* at the start of the chapter of *al-A`raf*, and these are disjoined letters; and we know that there is a total of twenty-eight disjointed letters in the alphabet, of which we find half at the beginning of certain chapters of the Quran. There might only be a single letter at the start of the chapter, as is the case with, 'Qaf. By the honoured Quran! But they wonder that there has come to them a warner from among themselves, and the disbelievers say, "This is an amazing thing."' (*Qaf:* 1-2) And in His words: 'Sad. Consider this Quran, endowed with all that one ought to remember!' (*Sad:* 1), or, *'Nun.* Consider the pen, and all that they inscribe.' (*al-Qalam:* 1)

On other occasions, there are two disjointed letters, as in His words, *'Ha. Mim.'* (*al-Ahqaf:* 1)

There are three disjointed letters, as in: *'Alif. Lam. Mim.'* (*al-Baqara:* 1), and there are four disjointed letters, as in, *'Alif Lam Mim Sad.'* (*al-A'raf:* 1) There are even five disjointed letters, as in His words, *'Kaf. Ha. Ya. `Ayn. Sad.'* (*al-Kahf:* 1)

If you look at these fourteen letters, you find that they represent half the letters of the Arabic alphabet, and this half contains half of the phonetic rules: some of them are voiced, or unvoiced, or light, or heavy; and of each kind you find half, which indicates that they have been placed according to a precise arrangement. And even though the phonetic descriptions of the letters – such as heavy, emphatic, light, voiced and unvoiced –were not developed until after the Quran had been revealed, the One who said these letters knew what His creatures would discover concerning these disjointed letters, and He had a wise reason for this. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was unlettered and never had a tutor; so how could he utter the names of the letters when only the learned know the names of the letters? He must therefore have received them through revelation. And we know that the Quran was revealed as a challenge to the Arabs to be a miracle for mankind. And challenges are only issued to those who are skilled in that particular discipline. The Arabs were eminently famous for their rhetoric, oration, poetry, verse, and parables. They were a people of speech, eloquence, and rhetoric, so the Quran came to them in the form of that in which they excelled. When Allah challenged the Arabs by sending them a Book which they could not imitate, the raw material was one, namely language, and composed of the very same letters of language in which the Arabs excelled, and of the very same wording they used. However, they were unable to imitate it because it came from Allah *the All-Powerful*, whilst the speech and rhetoric of the Arabs were the product of man.

This way, we know the secret of the cryptic disjointed letters which came to confirm that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received the Quran through revelation because he was unlettered. He was taught by the One Who taught man by the pen and that which he did not know. The human mind can delve into these verses and these letters and bring out many meanings, and we find that many of those who meditate and reflect on Allah's words have found many wonders in the realm of the majesty and beauty of the Quran; you can find a Sufi saying that *'Alif Lam Mim Sad'* came for a particular wise reason here: the first letter you pronounce of *'Alif'* is 'A' which comes from the palate, and the 'L' of *'Lam'* is pronounced by the tongue and the 'M' of *'Mim'* is pronounced by the lips; in this way, the points of articulation of the letters move from the palate to the tongue to the lips.

The Sufi said this indicates that this chapter speaks about the affairs of life beginning with the creation of Adam, referring to the beginning of the creation of man, and proceeding to the medial matter of life, and then moving to the end which is death, the Reckoning, and the life of the Hereafter; and the letter ‘Sad’ is here because this chapter contains the stories (*qasas*) of most of the prophets.

This is the thought process which the Sufi went through concerning this verse; do we have the right to object to it? Of course we do not; we do not object to it, but we say to him: Is this the entirety of God’s knowledge concerning it? No, because we must become acquainted with the array of connotations it contains in the realm of our limited capabilities of our human nature; but if we read it in the light of Allah’s intention, we will never be able to grasp and encompass all the scope of dimension of Allah's intentions because our understanding falls short of this.

As humans, we use letters which have no meaning to indicate things which serve our lives; for example, we find that people in the armed forces set ‘code words’ for every garrison so that no one can enter them unless they know the code word, and the one who knows the code word can enter. Every code word has a meaning for the one who sets it, for one's life may be squandered away if he approaches a military garrison without knowing such a code.

‘Alif Lam Mim Sad.’ (*al-A’raf:* 1). After these disjointed letters, we find discourse about the Book, and Allah says:

كِتَٰبٌ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ فَلَا يَكُن فِي صَدْرِكَ حَرَجٌ مِّنْهُ
لِتُنذِرَ بِهِۦ وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

This Book has been sent down to you [Prophet] – let there be no anxiety in your heart because of it – so that you may use it to give warning and to remind the believers [2] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 2)

When you hear the word *anzala* (sent down from on high), know that it means something has come from above, meaning that the Sacred Law is from up high. Some of the scholars asked, ‘Was there any anxiety in the heart of Prophet Muhammad’? We should be aware that when a commandment comes from Allah in which He says, ‘let there be no anxiety in your heart because of it…' (*al-A'raf:* 2), the prohibition is not for Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him,* but it is rather directed to the anxiety or discomfort that might befall Prophet Muhammad: it is as though He was saying, 'O anxiety! Do not befall or dwell the heart of Muhammad'!

Some of the scholars, however, said that Allah said '…let there be no anxiety in your heart because of it…' (*al-A'raf:* 2) as He knew that due to the limitations of human nature, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might become discomforted and feel grief for being called him a sorcerer, a liar and a madman. 'If an adversary ascribes some notorious qualities to you which you know better than him, they are groundless; so, he is the liar; for you have not lied, nor worked with sorcery, but rather, you wish to guide people'. Allah's words, '…let there be no anxiety in your heart because of it…' (*al-A'raf:* 2) came for one of two reasons: either they were a commandment to anxiety not to befall the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the commandment was addressed to Prophet Muhammad to reassure him and give him inner peace. In other words, 'Do not be disheartened, for it has been sent down upon you from Allah; would Allah send down the Quran to you to be a way of guidance for His creatures as pathfinder and then give you up to these fools? No, this could never be; so be completely assured and at peace'.

'…let there be no anxiety in your heart because of it—so that you may use it to give warning and to remind the believers.' (*al-A'raf:* 2) Warnings are only for the disobedient because they imply a severe utterance for the ominous doom that awaits the addressee. And it is also a reminder to the believers, just as He said before in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, '…guidance for all the God-conscious.' (*al-Baqara:* 2)

Here we notice that the message requires a sender of Higher Power (Allah), a medium as a messenger (Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) and recipients, (community or *ummah)*; the recipient either follows or declines the guidance. The verse came to say, 'This Book has been sent down to you from up high…' (*al-A'raf:* 2), i.e. from Allah Who is the Sender 'to you' because you are the Messenger; the recipients are the *ummah*: you will either warn them if they are astray, or else remind, guide and aid them or give them glad tidings if they are believers.

Allah then says:

ٱتَّبِعُوا۟ مَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ أَوْلِيَآءَ ۗ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord; do not follow other masters beside Him. How seldom you take heed! [3] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 3)

Allah's servants will be discriminately clustered before a messenger who brought them the message and the Book, into two groups; those who accept guidance and those who need to be warned. Allah *Glorified is He* therefore says to them, 'Follow what has been sent down unto you by your Sustainer…' (*al-A'raf:* 3).

And He warns them against idolatry and neglecting to seek guidance by associating partners with Allah, saying, '…and follow no masters other than Him.' How seldom do you remember.' (*al-A'raf:* 3)

When Allah brings forth a verse of this kind and says, 'and (it is) a reminder' or 'and remind them', this alerts us to the fact that the natural disposition of man is to have faith and none of the divine messages came to create new faith, but rather, they came to remind man of the solemn covenant which was pledged to Allah the time of Adam *peace be upon him* 'And when thy Sustainer took the seeds of the children of Adam from their loins, He made them bear witness against themselves; "Am I not your Sustainer?", to which they answered, "Yes, indeed, we do bear witness thereto." Of this We remind you, lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this."' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

This acknowledgement was made. So, when Allah *the Exalted* says, '…How seldom do you keep remember' (*al-A'raf:* 3), our attention is drawn to that which fathers forgot to pass on to their children; fathers teach their children how to attain the needs of their lives, but they should also teach them the values of this life which they themselves were taught. Allah said to Adam and Eve, '…Nonetheless, there shall most certainly come unto you guidance from Me; and he who follows My guidance….' (*Ta Ha:* 123) Thus, we know that 'guidance' came down to Adam, and it was incumbent upon Adam to teach this to his children, and for the children to teach it to the grandchildren; and this 'guidance' should have continued to be passed on to the next generations just as all the other matters of life were passed along. And Allah *Glorified is He* tells us the way this following is supposed to occur: ‘Follow what has been sent down unto you by your Sustainer….’ (*al-A’raf:* 3)

The methodology transferred to us by the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the way which rectifies life; and there is no harm done for any of you in following that which was sent down from the Sustaining, All-Powerful, Creator and it could not be that He would sustain our bodies with food, drink and air, then not sustain our values with morality; ‘…and follow no masters other than Him….’ (*al-A’raf:* 3) Allah *the Exalted* made it clear: follow that which is sent down upon you from up high, it is not right to seek guidance from those who are lower than Him, as the world is doing now by adopting laws enacted by other than Allah, and which are subject to man's desires. One loves capitalism and so imposes it with the sword; another loves socialism and so imposes it with the sword; each one imposes the laws which pleases him with the sword. They are all conflicting, man-made reasoning and all contrary to Allah's methodology.

‘…And follow no masters other than Him.’ How seldom do you remember?’ (*al-A’raf:* 3) Keep in mind, O believer, that your honour in following Allah's methodology is manifested in the fact that you are not submitting to one who is equal to you; and this is the distinguishing feature of religion which allows man to live in the world with his dignity preserved; and if something comes to him which is beyond his means, he meets it with all the means at his disposal having faith that the Lord of All Means will give him aid; and indeed Allah does give him succour, so he prostrates to Him in gratitude. Conversely, when the atheist is afflicted with a certain matter which is beyond his means, he feels desperately disheartened to the extent that he might commit suicide.

After this, Allah explains that the succession of messengers has been proceeding since the time of Adam *peace be upon him* and every time heedlessness overcame mankind Allah sent them a messenger to alert them, and awaken the values and the religious immunity that exists in the self so that if the self-relents to deviation, it will remind itself and say, ‘Why did you do that’? This is the self-reproaching soul; and if the self-reproaching soul falls silent and the person begins to take a liking to sin, and his soul begins to command him to do evil all the time, the society around him will put him right. This is the benefit of mutually enjoining what is right and having patience: each one advises one matter and is advised in another matter; when one is weak before a certain passion, another person who is not weak regarding this passion will advise him, and he will exchange advice with others. This is the meaning of mutually enjoining counsel, for counsel does not come from a single group of professional advisors who counsel the people, but rather, every person gives counsel in those matters in which they are competent, and receive counsel from others in those matters in which they are indolent. If society becomes corrupted, The True Lord intervenes by sending a new messenger, a new miracle and a new way of guidance; yet Allah made the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entrusted with the merit of counselling, and no messenger will follow him because we are the best *ummah* which has been brought forth to mankind, and this supremacy is manifested in that we enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, so mutual counsel will continue to exist until the Last Hour dawns, 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for the good of mankind; you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong….' (*Al-'Imran:* 110)

And this special distinction will never end; so if you see something wrong you must, out of your instinctive goodness, condemn it and say 'No'. And if Allah made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Seal of the Prophets, this is a testimony to his followers that it has become secure, and that the intrinsic immunity within it will never be barred or cut off, and likewise it will never lose its social resistance, so no messenger will follow the greatest of mankind, our Prophet Muhammad. Allah then says:

وَكَم مِّن قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَٰهَا فَجَآءَهَا بَأْسُنَا بَيَٰتًا أَوْ هُمْ قَآئِلُونَ ﴿٤﴾

How many towns We have destroyed! Our punishment came to them by night or while they slept in the afternoon [4] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 4)

When the interrogative phrase 'how many' is mentioned, it implies that the number of items in question is too large to be counted; yet when the number of the items we inquire about is small, we do not ask about it, but rather, it is definite. The word *qarya* or ‘town’ is a name for a place which is specially equipped for people to live in. Were the towns destroyed, or the inhabitants of the towns? Allah clarifies that sometimes this word is used to mean both the place and the inhabitants, whilst at other times the word ‘town’ can mean the inhabitants of the town such as the words of Allah in the chapter of *Yusuf*, ‘And ask you in the town in which we were at the time, and of the people of the caravan with whom we travelled hither….’ (*Yusuf:* 82)

One does not ask a place or buildings, but rather, he asks the inhabitants of the town, yet Allah did not say ‘Ask the inhabitants of the town’ because the thing being inquired about was something which was so true that even the place testified to it along with the inhabitants of the place. On other occasions, Allah clarifies that He destroyed the town with both its buildings and its inhabitants. ‘And how many a town have We destroyed, with Our punishment coming upon it….’ (*al-A’raf:* 4)

Which of them befell first: the destruction or the punishment? The thing which befell first was the punishment which thus destroyed since the manifestations of cosmological matters in events do not come about spontaneously, but rather, their occurrences are predestined from pre-eternity. It is as though Allah is saying to us: ‘And how many a town have We decreed to destroy, whereupon Our punishment came upon it to bring into realisation that which We decreed in pre-eternity’, that is, for the events to come into being according to how they were willed by Allah even though there was free will for those about whom Allah is speaking.

We know that a town is a place, and in this case, it has no free will. And if those about whom Allah is speaking possessed free will, He knew from pre-eternity that their actions would be typically compatible to what He decreed, and He stated this in the Quran which is recited so that the events would unfold exactly as Allah predestined their sequence. ‘And how many a town have We destroyed, with Our punishment coming upon it by night, or while they were resting at noontide.’ (*al-A’raf:* 4)

The word *ba`s* or ‘punishment’ means a power which cannot be fought off or overcome; and *bayatan* means ‘by night’, and ‘…or while they were resting at noontide’ (*al-A’raf:* 4) means while they were napping. Why did the punishment befall them by night or while napping? We find in the records about those who were destroyed like in the case of the people of Lot *peace be upon him,* the destruction befell them by night, and destruction befell the people of Shu`ayb (Jethro) while they napped. Night and naptime are times of relaxation and rest, and the events therefore surprised them so that they were unable to prepare themselves.

‘But then, once it alights upon them, hapless will be the awakening of those who were warned to no avail.’ (*as-Saffat:* 177) Destruction came to them whilst they were sleeping, and they had no power with which to face the punishment ‘…with Our punishment coming upon it by night, or while they were resting at noontide.’ (*al-A’raf:* 4) When Allah *the Exalted* said, ‘…by night, or while they were resting at noontide.’ (*al-A’raf:* 4), it might be that this town had suburbs, and the time for napping for some people differed from the time of those who lived in the suburbs so that they took it at night. The noontide rest is the time in which they would sleep at midday to take repose and rest; but how did they react when the time came for the punishment to befall and destroy them? Allah says:

فَمَا كَانَ دَعۡوَىٰهُمۡ إِذۡ جَآءَهُم بَأۡسُنَآ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٥﴾

their only cry when Our punishment came to them was,
‘How wrong we were!’ [5] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 5)

This statement clarifies the matter; from His word *da`wa* or ‘plea’, we can understand that it was a matter of pleading. If we say that so-and-so made an accusation (*da`wa*) against so-and-so, he must bring evidence to prove his claim, otherwise it will not be upheld. The word *da`w*a can also mean a supplication or prayer (*du`a*) as in: ‘…And their call (*da`wa*) will close with the words, “All praise is due to God, the Sustainer of all the worlds.”’ (*Yunus:* 10) Here, Allah says, ‘No plea had they, when Our punishment came upon them, save that they said, “Verily, we were wrongdoers.”’ (*al-A’raf:* 5)

Our Lord explains this matter in several chapters, which is that it was a confession from them that they transgressed and persisted in wrong doing; Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And they will add, “Had we but listened to those warnings or at least used our own reason, we would not be among those who are destined for the blazing flame.” And they will acknowledge their sins, but far will be forgiveness for those who are destined for the blazing flame.’ (*al-Mulk:* 10-11)

Allah then says:

فَلَنَسْـَٔلَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَنَسْـَٔلَنَّ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ٦

We shall certainly question those to whom
messengers were sent — and We shall question the
messengers themselves [6] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 6)

Allah will ask the messengers after gathering them about how far their people credited them; and the question is rhetorical, it is only for acknowledgement. The matter of such questions is mentioned in the Quran in different ways which seem at first sight to be contradictory, when actually, they refer to different things, and this has made the enemies of Islam claim that the Quran is contradictory.

Allah says, ‘Then, when the trumpet of resurrection is blown, no ties of kinship will on that Day prevail among them, and neither will they ask about one another’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 101) as well as ‘…and when no friend will ask about his friend…’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 10) as well as, ‘…but such as are lost in sin may not be asked about their sins.’ (*al-Qasas:* 78)

Then He says, ‘For on that Day neither man nor invisible being will be asked about his sins.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 39)

And then here, He says, ‘Thus, on Judgment Day We shall most certainly call to account all those unto whom a divine message was sent, and We shall most certainly call to account the message-bearers themselves.’ (*al-A’raf:* 6) This has made some of the orientalists attempt to show that the Quran – we seek refuge with Allah – contains contradictions. We say to each of them, ‘You are just decontextualizing the Quran without considering the faculty of expression in language. If you were to consider the fact that the Quran was received by a people who were eloquent Arabic speakers, nonetheless remained disbelievers so that it cannot be argued that they were being indulgent out of bias: had they found this ‘contradiction’, would not they have been able to reject the call of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘Could the Quran be a miracle when it is self-contradictory?’ But the disbelievers did not dare to claim that which shows that their faculties received the embedded meaning of the Quran in the way intended by the Sender of the Quran. In our customary norms, the question is posed for two purposes: sometimes the student asks his teacher to learn, and other times the teacher asks the student to confirm.

So, questions are asked for two reasons: either you ask to learn, or you ask to get corroboration so that the argument will become firmer for the one whom you ask. If Allah will ask someone, this means that He will ask for the purpose of acknowledgement, a rhetorical question, in order that the argument will be clearer to him, and after this, He says, 'And they will add, "Had we but listened to those warnings, or at least used our own reason, we would not be among those who are destined for the blazing flame.' but far will be forgiveness for those who are destined for the blazing flame.' (*al-Mulk:* 10-11)

This is both a confession and an acknowledgement on their part; and these two are the best of all proofs because the statement of the interrogator is only a testimony, whilst the speech of the confessor is both a confession and an acknowledgement. So, when the question is affirmed, this means it is a question of confirmation from Allah so that they testify against themselves and this is the clearest of proofs for the argument that cuts off any possibility for denial. Either the person will acknowledge, or otherwise if he does not, his organs will testify against him because they will no longer be subject to his will, and the person will no longer have any control over them, as Allah says, 'And they will ask their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?"–and they will reply, "Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us…"' (*Fussilat:* 21).

Here Allah says, 'Thus, on Judgment Day We shall most certainly call to account all those unto whom a divine message was sent, and We shall most certainly call to account the message-bearers themselves.' (*al-A'raf:* 6) And Allah says about this question of acknowledgement, 'On the day when God shall assemble all the apostles and shall ask, "What response did you receive..."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109) And when Allah asks the message-bearers, when they fulfilled their missions, this will be a rebuke for the recipients. Allah then says:

فَلَنَقُصَّنَّ عَلَيۡهِم بِعِلۡمٖۖ وَمَا كُنَّا غَآئِبِينَ ٧

And, with full knowledge, for We were never far
from them, We shall tell them what they did [7]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 7)

That is, Allah *the Exalted* will inform them at the moment of reckoning of all that they have done because He was never away from watching any of the actions of His creatures; therefore He says, '…for never have We been absent.' (*al-A'raf:* 7) We know that creation consists of many different people going through many different repeating occurrences in different places. There are many people, and each person has his own events, and each has his own place. So, when Allah says to them all, '…for never have We been absent' (*al-A'raf:* 7), this means that He is with them all. Since He is not absent from any act, or from the doer of any act, nor from the place of any act and they are all counted, this proves His spatiotemporal encompassment of His creations.

But, how could He be both here and there? I say that you must take this in the light of '…There is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11); and these kinds of concepts concerning unseen matters cannot be framed by these images. We discussed this before when we spoke about the 'coming' of Allah: He has absolute omnipotent power, and there is nothing like unto Him, and He was never absent from any event or place. Allah then says:

وَٱلۡوَزۡنُ يَوۡمَئِذٍ ٱلۡحَقُّۚ فَمَن ثَقُلَتۡ مَوَٰزِينُهُۥ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ ٨

On that Day the weighing of deeds will be true and just:
those whose good deeds are heavy on the scales will be
the ones to prosper [8] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 8)

In these verses, we find a discourse about the weighing of deeds which is all an emphasis of their accountability for their false argument; for Allah does not wrong anyone. The weighing of deeds constitutes a nullification of the argument of those who fear hell but did not fulfil Allah's rights in this worldly life. All of this is to emphasise the argument and highlight the justice, and to refute all false and groundless arguments. In this concern, Allah says, 'But We shall set up just balance-scales on Resurrection Day…' (*al-Anbiya':* 47).

These scales are the epitome of justice, and not only fair scales; rather, the precision of the scales on the Last Day will reach the point where they will be justice themselves. Allah says, 'And true will be the weighing on that Day…' (*al-A'raf:* 8). Indeed, the weighing of that day will be true and precise, and let us bear in mind that Allah said before, 'Whoever shall come before God with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof; but whoever shall come with an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof; and none shall be wronged.' (*al-An'am:* 160)

The true scale is that upon which the justice of the whole universe is based, and everything within it is weighed. And He is the One Who sets all the measures according to the wisdom, exactitude, and precision by which every being performs the role for which it was made; He says, 'And the skies, He has raised high, and has devised for all things a measure.' (*ar-Rahman:* 7)

We have never seen the sky cast and throw down upon us any unexpected events, for the universe has a precise order. The weighing on the Day of Resurrection will be the absolute justice. On that day, all the scales of the worldly life will be set aside; in so much as these scales suffered from an imperfection, whether in the weighing machine or the weight itself, or were affected by the events of the universe and the reactions which took place in it. Conversely the Scale of Heaven cannot be impaired, as it is not affected by anything except the value of the man's deeds.

When Allah says, 'And true will be the weighing on that Day…' (*al-A'raf:* 8), the scales of the worldly life can be imperfect, the ownership framework can be impaired likewise; for Allah granted the means of appropriate ownership to every person: this one owns this, another owns that and a third own this; and after that, every person uses what he owns either fairly or unfairly according to their free choice. But on the Last Day, there will be no ownership for anyone, '…With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With God, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16)

At this point, everything will belong to Allah alone; and if Allah granted ownership to His servants in this worldly life, this ownership will end on the Last Day: '…and those whose weight of good deeds is heavy in the balance – it is they, who shall attain to a happy state.' (*al-A'raf:* 8) He says, 'And then, he whose weight of good deeds is heavy in the balance shall find himself in a happy state; whereas he whose weight is light in the balance shall be engulfed by an abyss. And what could make thee conceive what that abyss will be? A fire hotly burning!' (*al-Qari`a:* 6-11)

So, the scale is heavily tipped in favour of good deeds and lightly tipped against bad deeds. We can observe that the logical breakdown of a balance necessitates three things; either the scale pan will be heavier, lighter or equal; but this is not the case here. Allah then speaks of those whose weight is light in the balance saying:

وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَٰزِينُهُۥ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ خَسِرُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُم بِمَا كَانُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

and those whose good deeds are light will be the ones who have lost their souls through their wrongful rejection of Our messages[9] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 9)

The previously quoted chapter mentioned both states, and this chapter also mentions both states; and it is strange that this discourse which concerns the heaviness or the lightness of the scale and does not mention the third case in which the two scales are equally balanced, comes at the beginning of the chapter of *al-A`raf*, yet later in this chapter He says, '…and on the Heights, are men who know them all by their marks…' (*al-A'raf:* 46). These are the ones whose good and bad deeds are equally matched, and our Lord has made for them a place which resembles the *`urf* (mane) of a horse which is the highest part of the horse so that the horse's hair sometimes goes to the left, and sometimes to the right, and neither side takes precedence over the other. Allah has made for the denizens of *al-a`raf* (the Heights) a place in which they will hear the denizens of Hell calling to the denizens of Paradise, and likewise, the denizens of Paradise calling to the denizens of Hell; and the denizens of the Heights will sit, neither in Paradise nor in Hell since their good deeds are equal to their bad ones. In this way, the logical breakdown of the possibilities of the weighing is covered by the words of Allah, 'And on the Heights, are men who know them all by their marks…' (*al-A'raf:* 46).

So, neither has their good deeds tipped the scale heavily enough for them to enter paradise, nor have their ill deeds tipped the scale lightly enough for them to enter hell, so their scales are evenly balanced. Some of the scholars assume, regarding the balance, that there will actually be a real balance, whilst others assume that the balance symbolises the absolute justice which is ordained by the Most Just. Even more curious is that Allah had said there are balances; does this mean that everyone has his own balance, or that every kind of action of moral responsibility has its own balance, one for doctrine, another for sacred rulings, and so on? And will Allah call us to account one by one, or will there be many simultaneous reckonings, as is borne out by the fact that when they asked `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* 'Will Allah call to account all His creatures at the same time?', he said, 'What is strange about this? Does He not provide for them all at the same time?' So, the matter of the balance is very easy and trifling for Allah as nothing overpowers Him.

'Whereas those whose weight is light in the balance – it is they who will have squandered their own selves by their wilful rejection of Our messages.' (*al-A'raf:* 9) Indeed, they will have squandered their own selves; for each one of them used to indulge in lusts and commit sins to give himself enjoyment, and then on the Last Day he will come forth and find that he has squandered everything. It is as the popular aphorism, 'He has squandered away the wheat and the chaff'. Why? The answer comes from Allah, '…by their wilful rejection of Our messages.' (*al-A'raf:* 9)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّٰكُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَٰيِشَ ۗ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ١٠

We established you [people] on the earth and
provided you with a means of livelihood there —
small thanks you give! [10] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 10)

The one who is given a place is the one who settles in it without being disturbed therein; if you tell someone that you have given them a place somewhere, this means you have set them up so that no one else can remove them. Allah granted us a bountiful place on earth and placed for us within it the means to preserve life, the luxuries of life, the adornments of life, and the comforts of life. The land gifted us in abundance when we farmed it, and the sun was never absent from us with its light, rays and warmth. Everything in the world fulfils its purpose, and we were not placed within the earth by our own power, but by Allah's power; and we must bear this in mind. None of us has any power over the sun, moon, wind or the earth; but the One Who created them and subjugated them is your Lord and their Lord. You have been given a place, and everything responds positively to you because Allah has subjugated it.

'Yes, indeed, O men, We have given you a bountiful place on earth, and appointed thereon means of livelihood for you; yet how seldom are you grateful.' (*al-A'raf:* 10) The word *ma`ayish* (means of life) is the plural of *ma`isha* which means 'life'; the word *`ish* means the constituents of life; this is why in the villages they call bread *`ish* because they have a high level of precision as they are aware that it is an essential constituent of life.

Allah's saying, '…how seldom are you grateful' (*al-A'raf:* 10) indicates that there are some who are grateful; there are people who give thanks for Allah's blessings in a general way for all blessings, or give Him special thanks for each blessing, and there are those who give Him special thanks not only for each blessing, but for each component of a single blessing; so when they begin eating they say, 'In the Name of Allah', and when they finish eating they say, 'Praise be to Allah', whilst another says 'In the Name of Allah' before every morsel, and then 'Praise be to Allah' after chewing and swallowing it because it did not stick in his throat. And when we drink, we should drink in three sips, saying 'In the Name of Allah' before each one and 'Praise be to Allah after each one'; and the one who does this will not commit a sin as long as this water remains in his body because it is all 'In the Name of Allah', so it will protect him from error; for if you considered a single blessing, you would find that it contains many other blessings within itself.

When you are ungrateful, you only limit your chances for reception of more blessings from Allah; if you were to give thanks for blessings, more blessings would come heap in abundance before you, '…If you are grateful to Me, I shall most certainly give you more and more…' (*Ibrahim:* 7); and it is foolish not to give thanks.

Allah then says:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَٰكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَٰكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِءَادَمَ
فَسَجَدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُن مِّنَ ٱلسَّٰجِدِينَ ﴿١١﴾

We created you, We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' and they did. But not Iblis: he was not one of those who bowed down [11]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 11)

The matter of creation has already been mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara*; the creation of Adam, and Satan. This matter is repeated over seven chapters, and is present in seven places: in the chapters of *al-Baqara*, *al-A`raf*, *al-Hajj*, *al-Isra`*, *al-Kahf*, *Ta Ha*, and *Sad*. Yet, in each place there are different scenarios of the story. This is because Allah must repeat this blessing for it to stick in the minds of His servants, and had He only mentioned it once it might have been forgotten; and for this reason, Allah repeats the reminder of it more than once. If Allah wants to evoke His blessings and draw attention to them in certain things, He repeats them, just as He repeated the evocation of His blessings in a single chapter many times, when He says, 'Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow?'

He mentions these blessings from their beginning saying, 'He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? He is the Sustainer of the two farthest points of sunrise, and The Sustainer of the two farthest points of sunset. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they might meet, yet between them is a barrier which they may not transgress. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? Out of these two bodies of water come forth pearls and coral. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? And His are the lofty ships that sail like floating mountains through the seas. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? All that lives on earth or in the heavens is bound to pass away: but forever will abide thy Sustainer's Self, full of Majesty and Glory. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 14-28)

And after every blessing, He says, 'which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow?' By this, Allah intends to increase and reiterate its repetition to the ears in order that it would settle in the hearts even if the ears were deaf; so sometimes He even uses it for things which do not appear on the surface to be blessings, such as when He says, 'A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned all of this because when things appear to us in their real light, whilst we are in this world of moral responsibility, this would be a mercy and a blessing from Him because this calls us to shield ourselves from forbidden acts and keep well clear of infringements.

Allah is beyond compare; when a child enters school, we say to him, 'If you do not work hard, you will fail'. By saying this, you are showing him mercy by giving him advice; you have not left him without showing him the consequences of things. Furthermore, when you see evil surrounding the disbelievers this pleases you; for if the disbelievers were equal to the believers, faith would have no advantage or distinction. The torment of hell is a calamity for the disbeliever, and a blessing for his opposite, the believer.

The detailed story(1) of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* was related seven times in the Quran because it is the story of the beginning of creation, and it answers the question whose answer man is searching for because of how he found himself in a universe which was prepared for him in the best way. The universe did not come into being after man, but rather, man came into the universe, and the question of how he was created remained, a question which is as important as the existence of man in the universe. When you examine the genera of the universe, you see that every genus has function, and its function is related to you. Minerals have a function, and so are plants and animals; and all of them ultimately serve you, because minerals benefit plants, which draw nourishment from them so that they in turn can give nourishment to animals which benefit you and give you nourishment; so all the genera ultimately serve you. As for you, O man, what is your main function in this universe? For this reason, it was essential for man to come to know his own function, and Allah wanted to teach man what his function is because He is the Maker, and when man searches for his Maker, Allah's power is revealed to him in everything that He made. It was also essential for man to receive information from the Creator: He sent down to us a methodology of guidance from Heaven accompanied by a miracle performed by a messenger, to whom Allah entrusted with the communication to people. The messenger informs us, and then we deduce the veracity of what he tells us by the miracles he performs. So, it was obligatory for us to believe the messenger because he came with a sign and a miracle from Allah.

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(1) The story of Adam's creation and the temptation of Satan to him

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received the message at the age of forty bearing the miraculous methodology of guidance. He informed us that he was a messenger from Allah. It was essential for us to search for confirmation that he was truly sent by Allah *Glorified is He* by considering his claim judiciously: this messenger came forth forty years after his birth with a miracle in the form of that field in which his people excelled, not the form of that in which he personally excelled. He did not invent the miracle, rather, it was bestowed by Allah because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought forth this miracle forty years after his birth, and it is absurd that ingenuity could suddenly spring forth forty years after birth because we know that ingenuity shows itself between the late teens and early twenties of a person's life. We take notice and find that he is speaking with inimitable eloquent speech. It is also absurd that he could have brought information about the universe whilst he was an unlettered man whose father had died whilst he was still in his mother's womb, and then his mother died when he was six and then his grandfather also died. He saw people succumbing to death all around him, so who was it who told him that he himself would survive and live long enough to reach the age of forty, whereupon he would reveal his miracle to us?

That is why we find that the Quran uses this fact as a proof, saying: 'And whenever Our messages are conveyed unto them in all their clarity, those who do not believe that they are destined to meet Us are wont to say, "Bring us a discourse other than this, or alter this one." Say, "It is not conceivable that I should alter it of my own volition; I only follow what is revealed to me. Behold, I would dread, were I to rebel against my Sustainer, the suffering on that awesome Day (of Judgment)."' (*Yunus:* 15)

In this way, the strong argument becomes clear that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was entrusted with conveying that which was revealed to him; and this is confirmed a second time when Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘Say, “If Allah had willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you, for I had remained among you a lifetime before it. Then will you not reason?”’ (*Yunus:* 16)

Here we find that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received the commandment from Allah *Glorified is He* to say to them, ‘In my whole life, have you ever known me to orate poetry or aphorisms, or have I ever given you a parable’? So, if we reasoned the matter, and reflect and ponder on his plea, we will believe that he is the messenger of Allah and that a miracle was sent down to him from Allah.

‘Yes, indeed, we have created you, and then formed you; and then we said unto the angels, “Prostrate yourselves before Adam.”–Where upon they all prostrated themselves, except Iblis (Satan); he was not among those who prostrated themselves.’ (*al-A’raf:* 11) In this way, we see that the matter of creation and our being brought into being is something which the human should have considered for him to know his function in the universe. When man looks into it to know his exact function, he must leave aside all guesswork and speculation because this matter is not something in which we can use existing premises to guide us to knowledge of the manner in which we were created, nor to the knowledge of anything at all concerning the purpose of our creation. The manner of creation was something unseen, and there is nothing before us now which we can use to deduce how it was. Allah decreed the matter of creation, whether the creation of the heavens and the earth and all within them, or the creation of man; He decreed both matters, and there is no source of knowledge of anything about them except from Allah. He closed the door to independent reasoning in this matter, and the door to guesswork, and He called all those who conduct human research into this matter misguided and misguiding. To pass final judgement on this matter, settle it and give minds respite from having to research into it, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves; and neither do I have any need to take as My helpers those beings that lead men astray.’ (*al-Kahf:* 51)

It is as though the one who attempts to say how the heavens and the earth and how man was created, is leading others astray because Allah did not make him a witness of this; and the one who says this is not a helper or an assistant for Allah.

Allah *the Exalted* tells us the story of the creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of man; and this verse refers to the creation of man. Those who conduct induction research and look to the past will certainly find that the matter is logical because the population of the world is growing and its proliferation can be detected. This growth is not only in the case of man, but also in the case of the other genera that serve man. We find that they are also subject to the phenomenon of growth, plant, and animal alike. If we look at the population statistics a century ago, we find that it is less than the current population; and every time we count and we look back to the past, the number becomes smaller and smaller until we arrive at just two because creation only comes from two; and Allah solved this puzzle for us by saying, '…who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate…' (*an-Nisa':* 1). This statement is correct, and it is confirmed and made certain by statistics because the population of the world increases as time progresses.

And '…out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women…' (*an-Nisa':* 1). This statement is true; and Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'And in everything have We created opposites…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49).

Allah told us the story of the creation of Adam; as for how Eve was created, did He take a piece of Adam and create Eve from it? This might be correct; or is the meaning that she was created from the same genus, and in the same way? This could also be correct; and He sufficed with mentioning the creation of Adam without needing to mention the creation of Eve, and He gave us the model in one of them, and then said, 'and out of it created its mate.'

The words *minha* (out of it) in this verse might not necessarily indicate partition, but might be akin to His words, '…an Apostle from among yourselves…' (*at-Tawba:* 128). This does not mean that He took a piece of the Arabs and decreed it to be 'Muhammad'; rather, He made Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon* from the same race when He created him and brought him into existence. And when He said to the angels, '…Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it…' (*al-Baqara:* 30) which was the first statement which He then followed by saying, 'and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down before him in prostration!' (*al-Hijr:* 29)

This means that before the breathing of the spirit, man would be fully formed. So, to whom did this forming occur, and who was the one who was formed? It was Adam who was formed. And it is stated that he was made from sounding clay, and a dark slime transmuted, and from earth, and from mud. These are various stages; so if Allah said that he created Adam 'From earth, we say, 'Indeed he was'; and if He says 'From water', we say 'Indeed he was'; and if He says, 'From mud', this is also true; for when water mixes with earth it becomes mud; and if He says 'out of dark slime transmuted', this is also possible since slime is mud which has become putrid so its odour has changed; and it then hardens and turns into clay. So, these are the various stages of creation; Allah then says, 'and (I) breathed into him of My spirit.' This completed the phases of creation, so He said, 'fall down before him in prostration!'

Some scholars say that the meaning of this prostration was submission and veneration, and not the same prostration that we know. Other scholars say that the meaning of the prostration was the same as that which we know, and that Adam was like the prayer-direction, like the Ka`ba which we face when we pray. But we have an observation here which is, 'We only prostrate to Allah because our Lord said, "Prostrate"'. The prostration here was obedience to the commandment of Adam's Creator. So, the intention was not to worship Adam, but it was obedience to Allah's first commandment. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to command them to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* because He had subjugated the entire universe to serve Adam; and some of the angels are entrusted with carrying out orders, and some of them are entrusted with protection, whilst other angels remain always with Allah. The prostration of the angels was not a way of showing submission to Adam *peace be upon him,* but was rather, obedience to Allah's Command, and for this reason the angels whose responsibilities involved the earth and the service of man prostrated. The angels who are close to Allah did not know anything about Adam *peace be upon him*. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to Iblis

(Satan), '…Are you too proud to bow down before another created being, or are you of those who think only high of themselves?' (*Sad:* 75)

The word 'high' here denotes the angels who did not witness the command to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* for the high and mighty angels are not assigned to any tasks related to Adam, and the prostration command was issued only to those who were assigned to such tasks related to Adam and his progeny. Those are the guardian angels whom Allah *Glorified is He* assigned to protect us and watch over us by His command, 'For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11)

There are angels who watch over us, those who are ever-present and those who sit and observe; and every natural phenomenon in the universe has an angel assigned to it. When True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about creation, He informs us, 'We created you, We gave you shape and then We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' and they did. But not Satan: he was not one of those who bowed down.' (*al-A'raf:* 11) This is the order that Allah chose for informing us about our creation, and not the chronological order of events. It is either that or, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* comprised the creation of all mankind in the creation of Adam; and modern science gives us indications of this when we observe a seed and discover that it contains all the constituents of the fruit. Likewise, within a single sperm we can find all the constituents of man. This is why, when they study about genetics, they say that the life of each of us comes through genome sequencing from those who came before. So, you came from the organism of your father when he was alive; if he were dead, the chain of existence would not have been passed on. Your father came from the organism of your grandfather when he too was alive. Hence, a living part has been passed from Adam to each one of us human beings, and this part has never died throughout that long genome sequence. So, we were all contained within the parts of Adam, and our Lord *Glorified is He* even tells us how He 'took out' the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves.

'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware."' (*al-A'raf:* 172) The True Lord *Glorified is He* spoke the truth, for He is the All-Powerful Creator who is able to bring us all from the loins of the children of Adam. In this way, the creation came first and the forming came first, and all of this is in the natural sequence. There are things which Allah reveals but does not expound; that is, He displays them only. So, when He addresses Adam and addresses his children, it is as though He is addressing all of us. 'We created you, We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, "Bow down before Adam," and they did. But not Satan: he was not one of those who bowed down.' (*al-A'raf:* 11) We have already explained who the angels are and the purpose of their prostration, '…and they did. But not Satan: he was not one of those who bowed down.' (*al-A'raf:* 11)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* excludes Satan from having been one of those who prostrated which indicates that he was one of those who had been commanded to prostrate; yet, is Satan an angel? No, because when you find two texts in the Quran about a common subject: one which has an associative connotation and one which has a decisive connotation, we should follow the one which has a decisive meaning.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And [mention] when we said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except for Satan. He was of the jinn and departed from the command of his Lord.' (*al-Kahf:* 50) This clearly tells that Satan is not of the angel kind and affirms that he is a jinn; and like men, the jinn were created with free will, and it is possible for them to disobey or obey.

So, when Allah tells us that Satan disobeyed his Lord's command, this mean that 'disobedience' is an option for him; as for the angels, they do not disobey what Allah commands them, and they do as they are told. Someone might wonder why the discourse about Satan came amidst the discourse about the angels; so let me explain this point further. Suppose a person possessing free will, whether man or jinn, adhered to Allah's path per Allah's command, and he obeyed Allah as he should—is his rank not like that of an angel, or indeed even higher than an angel because he possesses free will? This is why they would call Satan 'the peacock of the angels;' that is, the one who dwelt in splendour amidst the angels because he used to adhere to Allah's path, and he gave up his own free will, and chose that which Allah willed and obeyed it. He reached the status where he did not disobey Allah's Command, and did as he was told; he stood out above the angels because they were compelled to obey, whilst he had an option to obey or to disobey; yet, he still remained obedient. So, he used to have a special status amongst the angels and reached such a level of distinction that he attended the assembly of the angels; while he was with the angels, the first news of Adam came, and our Lord *Glorified is He* said to the angels: '… Bow down before Adam ...' (*al-A'raf:* 11) It was more fitting for him to obey the command instantly, but he rejected it haughtily. Since he was lower than the angels, and the commandment came to those who were higher than him—the angels—was it not fitting that he, being lower than them, should have obeyed the command? But because he was of the jinn, the trait of free will overcame him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسۡجُدَ إِذۡ أَمَرۡتُكَۖ قَالَ أَنَا۠ خَيۡرٞ مِّنۡهُ
خَلَقۡتَنِي مِن نَّارٖ وَخَلَقۡتَهُۥ مِن طِينٖ ١٢

God said, 'What prevented you from bowing down as I commanded you?' and he said, 'I am better than him: You created me from fire and him from clay' [12] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 12)

He then exclaimed, as the Quran tells us, 'Should I prostrate to one you created from clay?' (*al-Isra':* 61) So, his position was one of arrogance and haughtiness. This was obvious when Allah says: "[Allah] said, "O Satan, what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with my hands? Were you arrogant [then], or were you [already] among the haughty?" (*Sad:* 75)

Taking a closer look at this discourse; the expression 'kept you' means something like 'barred you'. In another instance, the Quran records this question in two different forms in the very same verse. The first form comes with the Arabic negation element *la* (not) (*Sad:* 75); the second form comes without the negation element—this is the only difference between the two forms in

Arabic. The first form is very obvious and clear; it means, ‘What has kept you from prostrating?’ But when Allah delivers it in the negative form—‘What has kept you from not prostrating?’ (*Sad:* 75) —it calls for pondering. Why did some scholars say that the negative element *la* is redundant, while others who were more ethical(1) said that it is a conjunction? But neither of these opinions is beneficial or appropriate since those who proposed, did not take into account the different meanings of the verb *mana‘a* ‘to prevent from’ or ‘refrain from'. You say ‘I kept someone from doing something’; it is as if he was about to do it, but you stopped him from going ahead with it. So the first form (without the negation) suggests that he was prepared to prostrate, but then a power stronger than him came and kept or barred him, stood between him and prostrating – but it did not happen exactly this way. The verb *mana‘a* also means to refrain; he refrained from the act; therefore, no one barred him from the act, but rather, he was convinced. There is a difference between being barred (*mamnu*) and refraining (*mumtani‘*); hence, the verse in question comes to confirm that he refrained of his own accord, and no one else barred him, but rather, he was convinced of it. So, the verse came to emphasise the active nature of the deed, namely his refraining from prostration; and this is the reason for the repetition in the Quran, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah said, “What prevented you from bowing down as I commanded you?”’ (*al-A’raf:* 12) He commanded the angels, and Satan was included with them either due to his superiority because he outdid the angels by obeying Allah out of his free will, so his rank was high, or he was included with them due to his inferiority as the angels are higher in rank than him in terms of their creation and natural disposition. Whether this inclusion was due to his superiority or inferiority, he had to obey Allah and bow down. Whether he was superior or inferior, Satan was obliged to prostrate, but he refused. Allah has said: “and he said, “I am better than him: You created me from fire and him from clay.” (*al-A’raf:* 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* did not ask Satan for a comparison between himself and Adam, He asked him – though He knew from His eternal knowledge that Satan had refrained because he was convinced, not because he was barred.

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(1) Proscribing ‘redundancy’ to the Quran is not ethical among the scholars.

That is why Satan said, ‘I am better than him.’ It is as though he had turned the matter over in his head to find a pretext for not prostrating; per his own code of standards, it was not customary for the higher to prostrate before the lower. Since Satan saw himself as being better than Adam and thought himself to be of higher rank, it was not right for him to prostrate to Adam. But why did he think he was higher than him? Because as he said, ‘…You created me from fire and him from clay,’ (*al-A’raf:* 12) it is as if fire has a higher nature. About this point, he was completely wrong because kinds differ due to the difference of their roles and no kind is better than the other: fire has its purpose, and clay has its purpose; fire cannot function as clay; plants cannot grow in fire.

Superiority exists for both elements since each is fulfilling its purpose. So, never say that one person is better than the other; rather say: ‘The deeds of this one are better than the deeds of that one.’ Everything in existence, when put in its intended place, is good. That is why we should not say that an iron bar is better than a hook because the function of the hook requires that it be bent, and it is this ‘bent’ feature that makes it fulfil its purpose. As for the question of superiority, it can only come when we compare things which have the same function. But Satan said: ‘… I am better than he …’ (*al-A’raf:* 12) He said this in obstinacy, pride and disbelief when he rejected his Lord’s command and wanted to alter Allah’s will; it is as though he was seeking to correct the True Lord *Glorified is He* in His command and throw it back at the Commander. The True Lord’s requital of Satan was nothing other than to say to him:

قَالَ فَٱهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَن تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَٱخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰغِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

God said, ‘Get down from here! This is no place for your arrogance. Get out! You are contemptible!’ [13] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 13)

To go down means to move from a high place to a lower one, and this is what led the scholars to say that the *Jannah* (paradise) which Allah describes as being ‘high’, is in the sky. But this is not accurate because going down does not necessarily mean a physical descent since it could be a descent in rank; and there is a difference between the spatial descent and the descent in rank. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* 'It was said, "O Noah, disembark in security from us and blessings upon you and upon nations [descending] from those with you. But other nations [of them] we will grant enjoyment; then there will touch them from us a painful punishment."' (*Hud:* 48)

That is, to descend (*ihbit*, literally 'get down') from the ship. So, the meaning of the word *hubut* (going down) does not necessarily mean moving from a high place to a lower one, since it can refer to a lower rank: 'Allah said, "Get down from here!" ...' (*al-A'raf:* 13) So, the descent here is in rank because Satan was no longer fit to attend the assembly of angels. He was only with them because he made himself adhere to obedience, whilst still possessing a free will to either obey or disobey. Thus, when 'obedience' was no longer a trait in him, he ceased being worthy of holding that rank since it is only held by those who never disobey Allah when He commands them, and those who do as they are told.

Allah's saying, 'Get down from here! This is no place for your arrogance …' (*al-A'raf:* 13) means that arrogance is not the type of attitude to be tolerated in such place. Your refraining from obeying the command of the Deity who issued it to you– His worshipper – is a kind of arrogance in the face of the Commander; and the angels are a group who never disobey Allah when He commands them—they do as they are told. Therefore, since you view this position with arrogance and haughtiness, you are not fit to occupy it. This means that it was actually his 'deeds' that made him fit for such high rank. When he ceased to partake of those deeds and abandoned them, he became fit only for a lower rank. Hence, the deeds which qualified him to the high rank were not something inherent in him; that devalues his statement that he was created from fire, whilst Adam from clay, since the scale by which things are weighed is a scale that hinges on deeds. Allah's wisdom decreed that the jinn are of such a form that they can do things which man is not capable of, such as high speed, penetrating barriers and being able to override certain means of causality. The jinn can penetrate walls or bodies, as the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Indeed, Satan runs through man just as blood runs.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab, Muslim in As-Salam, Abu Dawud in As-Sunna, Ibn Majah in As-Sawm) and Ahmad (iii. 106, 285, 337)*

In this aspect, Satan is like a microbe because the nature of fire, the material from which he was created, allows it to pass through barriers. The jinn are of such subtlety and transparency that they can pass through anything. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to clarify to the Jinn: Do not think that your race is what has given you this distinction; rather, it is the will of He who assigns race which is indicated by the fact that He made your rank lower than that of mankind. Allah made a man such as prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* a master over the jinn; Allah subdued them and placed them at his service. In the court of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* He made the one who had knowledge of the Scripture employ a power which was way mightier than the power of one of the 'powerful and crafty' jinn, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'A powerful one from among the jinn said, "I will bring it to you before you rise from your place, and indeed, I am for this [task] strong and trustworthy."' (*an-Naml:* 39) This indicates that the world of the jinn also contains the intelligent and the stupid; yet, the one who had knowledge of scripture outdid even the powerful and crafty jinn who had said that he could bring the throne even before Sulaiman rose from his seat, 'I will bring it to you before you rise from your place.' (*an-Naml:* 39) So, the crafty and powerful jinn wagered to bring the throne before Sulaiman (Solomon) was done with his daily council and before he would rise from his seat. Yet, what did the one who had knowledge of the scripture, who was just a man, reply? He wagered to bring the throne in the twinkling of an eye! 'I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you.' (*an-Naml:* 40) It is as though he would bring forth the throne of Bilqis (Queen of Sheba) before Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* could even turn his eye to look at something whereupon Allah tells us how Sulaiman (Solomon) saw the throne truly before him, 'and when [Solomon] saw it placed before him' (*an-Naml:* 40), as if it took no time at all, but rather happened immediately. So, the True Lord clarifies for all the different creatures which are created from the different elements: 'Do not be misled into thinking that your distinction comes from the element you were created from, because by My omnipotent power I can make the lower of you control the higher, if this is the will of the One Who created all the elements and races.'

'Allah said, "Get down from here! This is no place for your arrogance. Get out! You are contemptible!"' (*al-A'raf:* 13) The words 'get down from here' indicate that the descent was more of a moral nature; that is, he was not worthy of the rank or position. This is what the words indicate, and consequently, the exit from the actual place followed.

Contemptibility means disgrace and belittlement; he had met the command with arrogance so he had to be punished with contemptibility. In this way, he was punished with the opposite of what he intended; and to punish someone with the opposite of what they intend is a form of chastisement, rectification and rearing. Like when the Law of Allah decrees that whoever kills a person, inheritance from him is forbidden since killing him could have been the means to reach the person's inheritance. So, Allah decreed that the killer is to be excluded from the inheritance of the person he kills; thus, rendering murder an impediment to inheritance.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَنظِرْنِيٓ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

but Iblis said, 'Give me respite until the Day people are raised from the dead' [14] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 14)

The meaning of '… Give me respite …' (*al-A'raf:* 14) is 'give me time'; that is, do not cause me to die immediately or even soon; this is proved by the fact that Allah says:

قَالَ إِنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلْمُنظَرِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

And Allah replied, You have respite [15] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 15)

To ask for respite is to ask to be given more time rather than dying abruptly. Satan asked for this in order to inflict his revenge on Adam and his progeny because he was the cause of his humiliation, degradation, expulsion, and descent. Therefore, he insisted on trying his utmost to tempt the progeny of Adam, so they too can become disobedient. It is as if by making this request, Satan wanted to be saved from death and remain alive until the Day of Resurrection in which all who have died will be raised to life. It is as if he wanted to escape Allah's verdict that every human is bound to taste death. Allah says, 'Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185)

So, the True Lord *Glorified is He*, is telling him that the postponement of his death shall be until a day known to Allah and not known to him, Satan. Had the time of death been known to people, a lot of us would have sinned for as long as we lived and then we would do good deeds just before our time is up. But by making the time of death unknown, Allah wants us to sense its imminence the whole time. In another verse, Allah decrees that Satan's time will extend until the Day of the 'Appointed Time.' (*al-Hijr:* 38) This appointed time is the first trumpet blast. Allah says, 'And the Horn will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth will fall dead except whom Allah wills. Then it will be blown again, and at once they will be standing, looking on.' (*az-Zumar:* 68)

It is as though Satan wanted to escape death up until the second trumpet blast, but our Lord clarified that he would remain only until a time known to none but Allah—and this known time must be before the first trumpet blast.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ فَبِمَآ أَغۡوَيۡتَنِي لَأَقۡعُدَنَّ لَهُمۡ صِرَٰطَكَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمَ ﴿١٦﴾

And then Iblis said, 'Because You have put me in the wrong,
I will lie in wait for them all on Your straight path [16]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 16)

The word *ighwa'* (misguide) means to tempt to sin; from the same root comes the word *ghayy* which means 'disillusion'; the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses it in other verses, 'But there came after them successors who neglected prayer and pursued desires; so they are going to meet evil .' (*Maryam:* 59) When we read '… Because You caused me to be misguided…' (*al-A'raf:* 16), it is another way of saying 'because You misguided me, O Allah, I shall do such-and-such,' which means that he ascribed the misguidance to Allah. But does our Lord misguide or guide? Allah guides us through a dual process; through giving us directions and through empowering us; we have already spoken about this dual process. Allah *Glorified is He* has created Satan and given him free will; he was not subdued and compelled like the angels. Further, because he was created with free will, he was given a chance to obey or disobey. It is as though Satan, by saying that, was expressing a wish that he had been created in a state of compulsion, saying that Allah was the One Who gave him the 'will' to disobey; he did not consider the fact that 'free will' is not only an opportunity to be misguided, but also an opportunity to be guided. So, it was you, Satan, who chose to be misguided. Hence, by saying, '…, because You caused me to be misguided …' (*al-A'raf:* 16) Satan only meant to blame Allah for his own disobedience. We say to him: no, our Lord did not misguide you because the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* does not misguide, rather, He guides. Had Allah created him in a state of compulsion and subdual, he would not have been given the choice to 'do' or 'not do' a command. But Allah created him with the capacity to 'do' or 'not to do' and he chose to do nothing but disobeying: 'And then Satan said, "Because you caused me to be misguided, I will sit in ambush for them all on your straight path.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) This expression refers to the progeny of Adam and to 'sit in ambush' *qu'ud* literally 'to sit' is a kind of active movement of the body because the one who takes an action either does so standing, sitting or reclining. The most comfortable position is to recline because in such state, the body is relieved from the gravity pull. When a person sits, gravity acts just a little on him; when he stands, he carries the weight of his body on his feet, which is why we say to someone who has been standing for a long time, 'Sit down and rest;' if he sits and gets tired, we say to him, 'Lie down a little and rest.'

Why did Satan then choose to sit in ambush? So that he would be settled; he might get tired if he stood, and sitting will keep him alert and invigorated. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush.' (*at-Tawba:* 5) He did not command them to, 'Stand in wait' since it would exhaust them if they had to stand the whole time; but standing in wait means that when the time comes for action, they would have to get up. Sitting is closer to standing, and reclining is closer to slumber; Satan chose the state that would conserve his energy and at the same time ensure his alertness: ‘… I will sit in ambush for them all on Your straight path.’ (*al-A’raf:* 16)

Since Satan would tempt and lead others astray, he would choose to tempt those who are on the path of guidance. As for those who are tempted by their own choices and go astray driven by their own inclinations, Satan is not concerned with them and does not have any business with them. This is something which happens to people when they strive and try hard to be obedient: if a young man is obedient and committed, Satan tries to temp him to keep him from prayer and obedience. This is because Satan steals our faith; he is like a thief, and a thief does not lurk around a ruined house, he lurks around a house which is filled with goodies.

We notice this matter in all people when they come to pray; one of them says, ‘When I pray, the ‘slinking whisperer’ (1) comes to me and makes me feel doubtful about my prayer.’ We say to him, ‘Yes this is correct, and when he comes to you, consider this to be a healthy sign of faith because this means that Satan recognises that your deeds are accepted by Allah so he tries to spoil your obedience. But when you do something wrong that spoils your act of obedience, like praying without performing ablution, the slinking whisperer does not come to you. Since Satan wants to spoil your obedience, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is Hearing and Knowing.’ (*al-A’raf:* 200)

Why? Because Allah created you and created him; you cannot elude him because he runs through you like blood in your veins and whispers to you notions and feelings which you cannot control. He comes to you and reminds you of important issues whilst you are praying so that you remember things you had forgotten and get swamped with the most complicated issues while in prayer. All of this is because he vowed to sit in ambush for us along the straight path of Allah. ‘[Satan] said, "Because you have put me in error, I will surely sit in wait for them on your straight path.”’ (*al-A’raf:* 16)

He did not say that he would sit in ambush on the crooked path; Satan does not sit in places where alcohol is served, for instance; he sits by the doors of mosques or inside the mosques to spoil people's good deeds. So, what can we do in this case? The True Lord *Glorified is He* guides us to seek refuge with Him.

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(1) One of the adjectives used in describing Satan in the final chapter of the Quran; *an-Nas*: 4

The meaning of 'seek refuge with' is to flee from Satan to Allah because Allah, who granted him this special aptitude of running through our blood and infiltrating our thoughts, can block him from using it on us. When you say, 'I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Satan,' and you flee to Allah *Glorified is He*; He will surely save you from him. If you are reciting the Quran and a notion comes to you from Satan, say, 'I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Satan'; when you say this, it is as though you alert him to the fact that you are aware of whence this insinuation came, two or three times, so Satan will say to himself: 'This believer is vigilant and attentive; I cannot tempt him, so I will look for someone else.'

An example is on this is: A man(1) once went to Imam Abu Hanifa, who was known for his sound legal opinions, and asked him, 'I buried some of my money and I forgot where I buried it; can you tell me where it is, Sheikh?' Even though this is not a legal opinion in jurisprudence, Abu Hanifa said, 'Son, I have no knowledge of this, but I can teach you a trick to try: when night falls, stand before your Lord and pray through the night, and Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* might send you one of his hosts to tell you where your money is.' When Abu Hanifa was about to pray the following dawn, the man came up smiling and laughing and said, 'O Imam, I found the money!' Abu Hanifa smiled and said, 'By Allah, I knew that Satan would not leave you to spend the night with your Lord, and that he would come and tell you where the money was (to distract you); so come and do your prayer properly in gratification to Allah; come and pray!'

So, Satan knows how to sit in ambush and how to vow. In another verse, he vows by Allah's might to beguile us all into grievous error: '[Satan] said, "By Your might, I will surely mislead them all.' (*Sad:* 82) He managed to come up with the oath which would aid him throughout his mission. He knew that with Allah's autonomy from His creatures and His lack of need for them, He is the All-Conquering who cannot be overcome. Hence, if Allah willed it, Satan would not be able to tempt us, but Allah's will is to make all men free to choose; whoever wants to believe is free to believe; whoever wants to reject belief is free to reject it. 'And say, "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve."' (*al-Kahf:* 29)

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(1) This is the story of the man who asked Imam Abu Hanifa about the money he lost, and the latter advised him to pray.

So, Satan made an oath, and this was how he gained access to man. He swore by the very might of Allah. But then he finished it off saying that the only exception, the only ones off limits, will be the true and sincere servants of Allah: 'Except, among them, Your chosen servants.' (*Sad:* 83)

That is, if Allah wants someone to be guided, Satan cannot beguile him. Satan's quest is not to defy our Lord or resist Him; his quest is to defy the creatures of Allah. He does not wish to get into a battle with our Lord; his battle is against Allah's creatures, and it is a battle in which he has no real argument or power. The one who overcomes you in a battle coerces you to do something, using the power he has against you, or he convinces you to do it without coercion. So, does Satan possess the ability to do either? No, which is why he will come forward in the Hereafter and declare outright that he [Satan] had no power at all over us; he just invited us and we responded: 'But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves.' (*Ibrahim:* 22)

Power comes in two forms: coercing or convincing; Satan can only come to man through either of these channels.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that Satan said:

ثُمَّ لَآتِيَنَّهُم مِّنۢ بَيۡنِ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَمِنۡ خَلۡفِهِمۡ وَعَنۡ أَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡ وَعَن شَمَآئِلِهِمۡۖ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكۡثَرَهُمۡ شَٰكِرِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

I will come at them – from their front and their back, from their right and their left – and You will find that most of them are ungrateful' [17] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 17)

The phrase 'from their front' —*bayna aydihim*— literally means 'between their hands'; 'and their back'—*min khalfihim*, literally 'from behind'; 'from their right', literally from the right side; and 'from their left', literally from the left side. The place which is ahead of us and towards where we are going is the abode of the Hereafter; when Satan comes from our front, he causes us to doubt the truth about the Hereafter and Resurrection. He tries to make us unresponsive to Allah's way of guidance so that we become one of those who do not believe in meeting Allah and question the afterlife in which those who did good will be rewarded and those who did evil will be punished. All of that indeed happened; we saw those who (according to the Quran) wondered in disbelief about the possibility of being resurrected from mere dust and bones and doubted the same about their ancestors and forefathers: 'When we have died and become dust and bones, are we indeed to be resurrected [16] and our forefathers [as well]?' (*as-Saffat:* 16-17) For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* presents the matter of Resurrection in a way that leaves no argument for Satan. Allah clarifies that He was capable of creating us in the first place, so He will be capable of bringing us back again because, indeed, bringing us back is easier than creating us from nothing since our resurrection will be like restoring something that was already there. When Allah *Glorified is He* explains to the people that bringing them back will be easier than creating them in the first place, He uses an indisputable argument which they cannot refute; but for the omnipotent power of Allah *Glorified is He* all actions are alike and nothing is easier or more difficult than the other. He informs us of the complete encompassment of His knowledge; He tells us that He knows very well what the earth takes away from our bodies and He keeps a comprehensive record thereof. Allah says, 'We know what the earth diminishes of them, and with us is a retaining record.' (*Qaf:* 4) So, for each and every creature, Allah has a record where all their constituents and parts are written.

Satan also approaches from behind; and that which is behind each of us of is our progeny, for whom we fear lest they fall into ruin. So, Satan entices them to steal, pilfer, or take bribes to provide for his children's future, and therein corruption ensues. Like the type of corruption which we see when a person gets promoted to an important position at an old age, and he commits evil towards Allah thinking that he will leave something good behind for his dependants, but if he really feared for them, he would have entrusted them to the hand of their Lord, rather than entrusting them to those twisted ways. Allah tells those who fear for the future of their helpless children (if they were to die) to show the same concern for orphans, to be mindful of Allah and to speak out for justice. He says, 'And let those [executors and guardians] fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice.' (*an-Nisa':* 9)

Why does Satan not come to man from above and below? It is because above is the direction to which man turns to seek aid and assistance from his Lord, and below is the special direction of worship: the servants is closest to his Lord when he prostrates. So, man is protected from Satan's enticing within these two directions because Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that Satan has no power over His servants.

Allah records Satan to have said: 'I will come at them- from their front and their back, from their right and their left- and You will find that most of them are ungrateful.' (*al-A'raf:* 17) Satan comes from the right side to restrain people and make them abstain from doing acts of righteousness and obedience; the right is the symbol of good deeds because the record of good deeds will be given in the right hand, whilst the record of bad deeds will be given in the left hand. He also comes to them from their left to tempt them with the cravings of disobedience. We see how the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the words 'from their right' and 'from their left', and does not say 'on'; this is because 'on' indicates the notion of being 'above', and Satan is never above anything. He does not have the power to prevent by compulsion or convince by argument. But since most people forget to thank the One Who blesses them, Satan is adept at tempting them, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the verse saying: 'and you will find that most of them are ungrateful' (*al-A'raf:* 17).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ٱخۡرُجۡ مِنۡهَا مَذۡءُومٗا مَّدۡحُورٗاۖ لَّمَن تَبِعَكَ مِنۡهُمۡ لَأَمۡلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنكُمۡ أَجۡمَعِينَ ١٨

God said, 'Get out! You are disgraced and banished! I swear I shall fill Hell with you and all who follow you! [18]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 18)

Satan was so arrogant and he thought himself so shrewd, that he explained to us his plot and strategy, thereby proving to us that Allah's judgement over him has indeed come to pass in that He has made Satan’s strategies and plotting truly weak. Allah says: ‘Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah, and those who disbelieve fight in the cause of Taghut. So fight against the allies of Satan. Indeed, the plot of Satan has ever been weak.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 76)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* alerts us about Satan’s plotting and arrogance, and the sincere person is the one who is cautious and immunises himself against Satan’s insinuations. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says what means: ‘Get out! You are disgraced and banished!’ (*al-A’raf:* 18) In an earlier verse in this same chapter, Allah says to him: ‘…Get down from here! This is no place for your arrogance. Get out! You are contemptible!’ (*al-A’raf:* 13)

So, there was a descent and an exit accompanied with humiliation and loss of rank; there was also an affirmation that when he exited, he was in a state of degradation, humiliation, disownment and damnation. The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues the verse: ‘… I swear I shall fill Hell with you and all who follow you!’ (*al-A’raf:* 18) This informs all those who follow Satan that they will be the dwellers of hellfire. Allah did not only prepare hellfire to accommodate the disbelievers, He also made it on the grounds that all of mankind could possibly have disbelieved in Him, just as He made paradise on the grounds that all of mankind could possibly believe in Him. Allah is never short of space, and if all of mankind believes, paradise can receive them all; and if they all disbelieve, hellfire can receive them all. He also tells us that the dwellers of paradise will be the inheritors who will dwell in it perpetually. Allah says, ‘Those are the inheritors’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 10-11); whereas, those who ascribe other partners to Him will be the fuel of hellfire, wherein they will dwell perpetually. ‘Indeed, you [disbelievers] and what you worship other than Allah are the firewood of Hell. You will be coming to [enter] it.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 98)

This concludes the matter of Satan who refused to obey the command of the Highest Commander to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَٰٓـَٔادَمُ ٱسۡكُنۡ أَنتَ وَزَوۡجُكَ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنۡ حَيۡثُ شِئۡتُمَا
وَلَا تَقۡرَبَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١٩

But you and your wife, Adam, live in the Garden. Both of you eat whatever you like, but do not go near this tree or you will become wrongdoers' [19] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 19)

The Quran comes back to the story of Adam after telling us about the story of Satan. Allah says, 'But you and your wife, Adam, live in the Paradise' (*al-A'raf:* 19)

Many scholars have passed on the interpretation that the garden (*jannah*) mentioned here, is the same paradise of the eternal Hereafter; while others have objected to this, saying: 'How could Satan be admitted to paradise? And how could he be expelled from it? Do we not know that those who enter Paradise never come out of it?' The scholars who said that the garden here is the paradise of the Hereafter did not take into consideration the meaning of the word *jannah*.(1) When the word *jannah* is used, it automatically acquires the 'mostly used' meaning; so, it acquires a single meaning from the various meanings it has, and this is exclusively the meaning used by practise. Hence, when you hear it your mind immediately turns to this 'mostly used' meaning. As a believer, when you hear the word *jannah* your mind immediately goes to the paradise of the Hereafter because this is the word used for it. But when a word comes in the Quran, the speaker of which is Allah, we must first study the word and its different linguistic uses. The Quran was revealed in articulate Arabic language, where many words could have several meanings. When we talk within the Islamic context, we take the word from its linguistic usage and confine it in its terminological usage. An example of this is the word *ḥajj* or 'pilgrimage'. When you hear the word *hajj*, you say that it means to go to the Sacred House of Allah to perform rituals and worship in specific months, even though linguistically the word *hajj* means 'to embark on' or 'to head towards'; so when you head towards a destination, you use the verb *hajja* to express it. When Islam came, it took this word from the language and used it to mean *Hajj,* the major pilgrimage, which is to go to the Sacred House of

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(1) Proof-reader's Note: This is the Sheikh's interpretation and opinion.

Allah to perform particular rituals. Likewise, the word *salat*, the 'canonical prayer', linguistically means 'supplication', and Allah says 'pray for them' meaning supplicate for them. When Islam came, it took this word from the language and gave it a new Islamic usage so that whenever it is said, you think of the Islamic meaning; they are a series of specific words and acts, starting with the declaration 'Allah is great' and ending with the *salam* (greeting of peace), including all the other terms and conditions.

But does taking the word from the language and giving it a specific Islamic connotation mean that we thereby abandon the original meaning? No, because if you want to use it in its original sense you can do so, but within a context that indicates exactly which meaning you are talking about. This is what made the scholars assert that when the word *jannah* is used, the mind immediately goes to the eternal garden of paradise. We say that the linguistic meaning of the word *jannah* is 'garden'; that is, a place in which there are lush and varied trees; their lushness and height covers those who reside in it and protects them from all that is around, and the fruits and luxuries in it suffice the residents so that they will not have the need to leave it for any reason. The Quran does not use the word *jannah* to mean the paradise of the Afterlife only. Allah asks us, 'Would one of you like to have a garden of palm trees and grapevines underneath which rivers flow in which he has from every fruit?' (*al-Baqara:* 266)

In another chapter, He tells us the parable of the two men who had two gardens of vine surrounded with date-palms, with a field of grain in between: 'And present to them an example of two men: We granted to one of them two gardens of grapevines, and we bordered them with palm trees and placed between them [fields of] crops.' (*al-Kahf:* 32)

In yet another chapter, He tells us about the people of Sheba [Saba'] who had two vast expanses of gardens, 'there was for [the tribe of] Saba' in their dwelling place a sign: two [fields of] gardens on the right and on the left. [They were told], "Eat from the provisions of your Lord and be grateful to Him. A good land [have you], and a forgiving Lord.' (*Saba':* 15)

So, we must try our best to understand Allah's intentions when He gives us knowledge from Himself and leads us to the meaning He intends. We know that in the first information to come to us from Allah *Glorified is He*; He says about Adam, 'and [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority."' (*al-Baqara:* 30)

Thus, Adam was created for the earth; do not wrong Adam by saying that he was created for paradise, and that we would have been living there had he not disobeyed and thereby descended down to earth—that is why we must reject this argument and remember that the first thing Allah *Glorified is He* told us about Adam is that He made him His vicegerent on earth. What we should ask ourselves is that since Allah created Adam to be His vicegerent on earth, then what is this garden mentioned here?

Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* to be His vicegerent on earth, and Adam was obliged to take responsibilities from Allah based on 'Do' and 'Do not'; so when we do not obey, corruption ensues in the society. As for those things from which no corruption ensues, Allah leaves them permissible which means that everything that was left without a 'Do' or a 'Do not' will not corrupt the society. Hence, the 'Dos and Dont's' are the criteria which ensure the society's soundness.

But did Allah create man without any trials that would compromise the way of Allah? No! Since Satan took his stand against Adam and vowed to lead him astray; he will entice us in our 'Dos and Dont's'. So, when the command comes for us to pray, Satan will beguile us until we stop praying. When the command comes for us not to drink alcohol, Satan will entice us to drink it, and so forth. The essential point is to 'shift' the Dos into Dont's so that all our actions become muddled.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants His method to govern the motion of life to insure that the vicegerency of earth fulfils its purpose in a way which gives man happiness and delight in the Hereafter. For this reason, it is inevitable that the True Lord *Glorified is He* would prepare His vicegerent on earth to adhere to His method so that he would not take it in a theoretical manner. That is why, the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed that Adam would not embark on his role as a vicegerent without first preparing him for the mission of the Dos and Dont's, warning him of the consequences of transforming the Do's into Dont's or the Dont's into Do's. Allah chose for Adam a training ground in which all the constituents and comforts of life existed so that he would not be exerted by anything during the orientation period. He also clarified to Adam all about the garden, with the beautiful orchard in which all the elements and luxuries of life existed; He commanded him to eat from everything within that garden with the exception of one particular tree.

‘Eat’ was the command, and ‘Do not approach’ was the prohibition; Allah has clarified for Adam that the one who would compromise his implementation of the method of Allah would be his avowed archenemy, namely Satan, who refused to prostrate before Adam and was expelled and cursed because of that. Thus, he vowed by the might of Allah to beguile Adam and his progeny into grievous error: ‘[Satan] said, "By Your might, I will surely mislead them all.”’ (*Sad:* 82)

Hence, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* made the garden a place bearing all the constituents of life for Adam, and He bestowed upon him the exact portions which would sustain him without any waste, toil or illness… and so on. So, Allah gave Adam the exact amount which would suffice him without any waste, and Allah is capable of anything. Allah cares for the embryo in its mother’s womb till it grows; the embryo receives nourishment, and no waste comes from it. (1) This is because the nourishment which Allah gives to it is exactly equal to what it needs for growing. Since our Lord is the One Who supplied the heavenly garden with its nourishment, He was capable of supplying it impeccably.

So, the garden in which Adam *peace be upon him* first existed was not the Paradise of the Afterlife(2) because the paradise of the Afterlife only comes after responsibility, and there is no responsibility in it; those who dwell in Paradise never come out of it. Adam, as we said, was created for the earth, so the presence of the garden here means that it was the place of preparation for the mission of vicegerency, with a commandment to be obeyed in ‘eat’, and a prohibition to be obeyed in ‘do not go near.’ He did not say to them ‘do not eat’, but rather ‘do not go near,’ because it is likely that going near would lead to temptation, and he only ate from it because he came and approached it; had he listened and not gone near the tree, he would not have eaten from it.

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(1) The foetus does produce waste which is processed by the mother.

(2) Proofreader’s Note: This is the Sheikh’s interpretation and opinion.

Thus, Allah gave Adam two commands to train him while in that garden; the first being 'Do' and the second being 'Do not.' We also see that the thing which Allah prohibited is small compared to that which He allowed and permitted which is an act of mercy from Allah towards his servants. The believer does what Allah commands him to do, and he does not go near what Allah forbids because if he comes near, he might be inclined towards it. This is why He said 'do not go near…' Had they not gone near the tree, they would not have been tempted by it. For this reason, we find the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* forbids many of the things that could damage our pristine creed using the same command 'do not go near…' or using another similar command, 'shun' [avoid]. Allah says, 'So avoid the uncleanliness of idols and avoid false statement.' (*al-Hajj:* 30)

He did not say, 'Do not worship the idols,' He said, 'shun.' The commandment to shun also applies to drinking alcohol, but some superficial people say, 'There is no prohibition of alcohol since Allah tells us only to shun it.' We say to such people that shunning is an even stronger command than forbidding or prohibiting. Prohibiting it would simply mean not to drink it, whilst shunning it means not to even go near it, neither to sit in a place where it is found, nor to manufacture or carry it.

But '…do not go near this tree or you will become wrongdoers!' (*al-A'raf:* 19) Wrongdoing (*zhulm*) means to exceed the limit or to give a person that which is not rightfully his. It is as if Allah is saying to them, 'I have not granted the two of you the right to approach this tree, so if either of you approaches it, you will be breaching what I have ordained for you.' '… Or you will become wrongdoers!' (*al-A'raf:* 19) That is, lest you enter the ranks of those who wrong themselves because Allah does not wrong anyone. You wrong yourself because you avail yourself to a fleeting pleasure which ends quickly, and afterwards you will receive a punishment in the form of a painful and severe torment which will last a long time. In doing so, you wrong your own self, by not looking after yourself as you should have.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ لِيُبْدِىَ لَهُمَا مَا وُۥرِىَ عَنْهُمَا مِن سَوْءَٰتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا
نَهَىٰكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَٰذِهِ ٱلشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّآ أَن تَكُونَا مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ ٱلْخَٰلِدِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Satan whispered to them so as to expose their nakedness, which had been hidden from them: he said, 'Your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you becoming angels or immortals' [20] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 20)

The word *waswasa* (whispered) indicates that the temptation was done in a soft voice; we know that the one who says something right does not care who hears it, whilst the one who says something wrong lowers his voice lest someone finds out. The concept here is that every evil is whispered; the one who speaks it knows that it is wrong, is ashamed of it, and does not want the society to know about it.

The word *waswasa* originally means a seductive voice because *waswasa* literally means the 'clink' of gold and jewellery. So, what Satan whispered to Adam and his wife was a seductive message intended to distract them from the commandments of their All-Wise Lord.

Allah's words, 'Satan whispered to them…' (*al-A'raf:* 20) give us proof that Eve *peace be upon her* was innocent of this act of seduction since the popular story goes that Eve was the one who urged Adam to eat from the tree. Many of us wrong Eve although the Quran affirms that the whispered insinuation was directed at both Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*: 'Satan whispered to them so as to expose their nakedness, which had been hidden from them…' (*al-A'raf:* 20).

Did Satan whisper to them with the intent of making them conscious of their nakedness, of which they had been unaware, or did he whisper to them so that they would disobey Allah? He whispered to them so that they would disobey Allah, and he knew that there would be a consequence for this disobedience. He knew well that when they eat from the thing which our Lord had forbidden, their nakedness (*saw'at*) would be revealed to them. The word *saw'a* literally means something unpleasant to look at, and we use it to mean the private parts. By innate nature, a human being, with an intact humanity and disposition, would avert from looking at the private parts of another. As if in the beginning Adam and Eve could neither see each other's nakedness, nor see their own nakedness because the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… so as to expose their nakedness, which had been hidden from them …' (*al-A'raf:* 20).

There are four areas of private parts involved here; two for the man and two for the woman. It is as though each one of them did not see his own two areas nor those of the other because something existed which veiled their private parts from being seen. This notion makes complete sense—did not the Mother of Believers 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* say: 'I did not see (his), nor he saw mine ...' These words manifest the utmost decency, as she did not even utter the words. For, as long as a body part is considered to be private, it is supposed to be covered. This is why when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O people! You shall be gathered unto Allah barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised.' Then he recited the following verse: 'as We brought into being the first creation, so We shall bring it forth anew – a promise which We have willed upon Ourselves: for, behold, We are able to do (all things)!' (*al-Anbiya':* 104)(1) When our 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* exclaimed about this, he said to her, 'The situation will be so perilous that no one will look at anyone else.' '… So as to expose their nakedness, which had been hidden from them …' (*al-A'raf:* 20)

What had made them unaware of it? There must have been some kind of encasing (or sheath) on each of them; the scholars have spoken at great length about this sheath. Some say that our fingernails are the remnants of this sheath which existed on Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* and hid their nakedness. It is also said that when a person is overcome by a wave of laughter and he wants to check himself, he can just look at his fingernails, whereupon he will be able to hold this wave of laughter. They say it is because he will be reminded of this moment of regret at the unveiling of man's nakedness. Try it yourself, and you will see how your laughter will subside; and this is all the work of Allah.

Or the veil which concealed their nakedness could have been the Divine Light which surrounded them both; and when a brilliant light shines, it makes things seem hazy. It is true that we see when light falls on the objects around us, but when the light is too bright, it conceals things from your vision; too much of anything gives the exact opposite effect. So, either the sheath was from the substance of the fingernails or it was the Divine Light which concealed their nakedness. Nakedness is called *saw'a* and *'awra* in Arabic because it offends (*tasu'*). But why does it offend? What makes our orifices different; the mouth is an orifice and the private part is an orifice too?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The orifice of the private part is offensive because of what comes out of it. When Adam and Eve were eating what their Lord's provision in the Garden, as we said, they had no need to excrete waste, because Allah provided them both with the exact amount they needed for mobility and living, so both orifices were alike. But when they deviated from Allah's Command about what to eat, and ate what He prohibited and chose their own food, waste had to be excreted from them with all its offensiveness. But was the semblance of their nakedness a sign that they had sidestepped from the method of Allah in moral and spiritual values or was it a sign that they just sidestepped in material issues?

Indeed, it was the first because whenever something sidesteps from the method of Allah, indecency will certainly be exposed; if you see any indecency exposed in the society, know that a part of the method of Allah has been neglected. The Quran tells us what Satan said to them when he whispered: '… he said, "Your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you becoming angels or immortals."' (*al-A'raf:* 20)

Satan whispered and insinuated to them, what means: 'The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want you to approach this tree because, whoever eats from it, will become an angel or an immortal.' Neither one of them pondered Satan's words enough to realize that his guile is weak, feeble and foolish; if he knew that whoever ate from the tree would become an angel or an immortal, why did he not pick from it that which would make him an angel or an immortal? There is wisdom in this which shows us that when anyone is tempted and cajoled by anyone, he must analyse the thing to which he is being tempted and determine what the consequences of his act will be.

Did Satan not say, '…Give me respite until the Day people are raised from the dead'? (*al-A'raf:* 14) Why then did he not save himself by eating from this tree, which would have granted his wish? This proves that what Satan had said to them was a lie.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَاسَمَهُمَآ إِنِّى لَكُمَا لَمِنَ ٱلنَّٰصِحِينَ ﴿٢١﴾

And he swore to them, ‘I am giving you sincere advice’ [21] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 21)

The word *qasama* (swore) is in the Arabic verb form *fa‘ala* which implies dual participation; that is, two parties are involved, and each is active in one respect and passive in another one. For example, the sentence ‘*Zayd* shares (*sharaka*) with ‘*Umar’* in something,’ also means that *‘Umar* shares with *Zayd*. This is what is implied by using verb forms *fa‘ala* and *taf ‘al*; each party is active in one way and passive in another; so, as far as the meaning goes, we find that they are both subject and object. So, the verb here *qasama* (swore) implies two actions; did Satan sit and swear an oath to Adam and his wife *peace be upon them* and they swore the oaths back to him? We say ‘no,’ because sometimes this verbal form does not imply a shared action or an action where two parties participate but in different ways. The latter case can be clearly seen in Allah’s *Glorified is He* words, ‘And We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for thirty nights and perfected them by (the addition of) ten.’ (*al-A’raf:* 142)

‘We made an appointment’ (*wa‘adna*) is also on the *fa‘ala* form; so who made the appointment? Allah is the One Who appointed the term for Moses (Musa) *peace be upon him* and Moses (Musa) became part of the appointment by accepting and going through it. So ‘he swore (by Allah) to them’ means that they accepted the oath and became part of it. ‘And he swore (by Allah) to them, "Indeed, I am to you from among the sincere advisors"’ (*al-A’raf:* 21)

‘And he swore (by Allah) to them’ means that he made an oath; this is why when our Lord chastised Adam *peace be upon him* He *Glorified is He* clarified to him: ‘I told you that he is an enemy for you and your wife, and that he would endeavour to have you expelled from the Garden so that you would have to toil and labour'; so Adam *peace be upon him* replied, 'O Lord, I did not think that any of Your creatures would swear an oath by You for something false' In no way, did it occur to him that any creature would swear an oath by Allah for something false, and this was the first deception in all creation. This is why we find that Qatada *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'The believer in Allah can be deceived.'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* married a woman and she went to him; out of jealousy, the wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who feared that he would fall deeply in love with her, said to her: 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loves these words, so when he comes to you say them to him, "I seek refuge in Allah from you."' When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to her, she said to him, 'I seek refuge in Allah from you;' so he said to her, 'You have sought refuge in One who can provide it;' then, he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come close to her after that event. This explains how the believer in Allah can be deceived. The companion 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* used to free any slaves who prayed properly and on time and offered it with humility; so, when the slaves came to know this, they made a show of praying with humility in front of the place where he used to sit, and he Allah *be pleased with him* would free them. Someone said to him, 'The slaves are deceiving you,' but he replied, 'If someone deceives us in Allah, we let ourselves be deceived!'

The advice here is that we should not be tempted to disobey Allah's commandment, and Adam *peace be upon him* should not have been unaware of this; rather, he should have compared the two things: Satan's temptation to eat from the tree and the commandment of the True Lord *Glorified is He* who said to him and his wife, 'Do not approach it', but he did not compare them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'So he made them fall, through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the leaves of paradise. And their Lord called to them.

فَدَلَّىٰهُمَا بِغُرُورٖۚ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا ٱلشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتۡ لَهُمَا سَوۡءَٰتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخۡصِفَانِ عَلَيۡهِمَا مِن وَرَقِ ٱلۡجَنَّةِۖ
وَنَادَىٰهُمَا رَبُّهُمَآ أَلَمۡ أَنۡهَكُمَا عَن تِلۡكُمَا ٱلشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُل لَّكُمَآ إِنَّ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنَ لَكُمَا عَدُوّٞ مُّبِينٞ ٢٢

he lured them with lies. Their nakedness became exposed to them when they had eaten from the tree: they began to put together leaves from the Garden to cover themselves. Their Lord called to them, 'Did I not forbid you to approach that tree? Did I not warn you that Satan was your sworn enemy?' [22]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 22)

'So he made them fall, through deception' (*al-A'raf:* 22); that is, Satan took them down from the high level of obedience to the low level of disobedience and sin by deluding and deceiving them with his oath. The word *dalla* -he made them fall- is derived from the word that means 'to lower one's feet in a well to see if there is water in it or not,' or 'to lower a pail on a rope in a well.' This means that he did it step by step; and 'through deception' means with temptation, making them fall into disobedience as he appeared as a loyal adviser, while actually deceiving them.

There is an important hint here that refers to the struggle between truth and falsehood in the soul: '…And when they tasted of the tree …' (*al-A'raf:* 22) This indicates that by merely tasting, they remembered that it was from Satan's insinuation which had made them go to the tree; all it took was a taste for both to realise the enormity of the error: '…And when they tasted of the tree, their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the leaves of Paradise …' (*al-A'raf:* 22)

The word *khasf* means to take something and stick it to something else in order to conceal it. In the past, when shoe soles would wear out and tears appeared in them, the cobbler would put a leather patch on it which was larger than the tear so that it would completely cover it.

This is what Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* did; they took leaves from the Garden and placed one leaf over another to cover their nakedness. In the statement '… and they began to fasten together over themselves …' (*al-A'raf:* 22), the word *tafiqa* means that they made from the leaves of the trees a cover for their nakedness. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says 'and their

Lord called to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy?"" (*al-A'raf:* 22)

The responsibility here is implied within a single commandment, whilst permissible things were numerous. He *Glorified is He* only made them responsible for a single thing; that is, they were prohibited from approaching the tree, while many things were permissible. This is why it was not proper to fail in fulfilling their responsibility; and the responsibility was not given to them by an intermediary, but rather, it was given directly. This is why this point will benefit our understanding of such matter when part of this story is given in another chapter, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: "and Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred" (*Ta Ha:* 121); the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not mention the story of the disobedience here. He says to them that 'did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy?' (*al-A'raf:* 22)

Allah *Glorified is He* does not make something sinful without declaring it to be so; and He *Glorified is He* has said before 'but do not approach this tree', and clarified that there was a force of temptation called Satan, whose enmity appeared from the time when he refused to prostrate to Adam; an act of disobedience for which the True Lord *Glorified is He* expelled him from Paradise. So, if Allah took them to task and punished them for this sin, He would have done it out of His Absolute Justice; they were the ones who wronged themselves. Their response had to have been, 'Yes our Lord, we were indeed forbidden, and You indeed did say that to us.' But the ruling, therefore, is presented with the strongest possible evidence for it because a ruling might be given as a statement, or it might be given as a question and a demand for an answer—and it is the strongest if it is given as a negative question.

'… That Satan is to you a clear enemy?' (*al-A'raf:* 22) We know that a foe is an enemy who wishes to hurt and harm, and the word 'clear' here means 'surrounding'. This shows the enmity of Satan and his surrounding presence because he (Satan) explained before that he would come to them—the children of Adam—from the front, the rear, their right side and their left side; or it may mean that he was clear in his enmity and severe in his hostility.

Then, the confession of sin comes from Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*:

قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمۡنَآ أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمۡ تَغۡفِرۡ لَنَا وَتَرۡحَمۡنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلۡخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

They replied, ‘Our Lord, we have wronged our souls: if You do not forgive us and have mercy, we shall be lost’ [23] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 23)

In the chapter *al-Baqara,* Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepter of repentance, the Merciful’ (*al-Baqara:* 37) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* considers how His creatures will sometimes forget about His Way, so He ordains for them the means for repentance which includes three stages: its ordainment as a Divine Mercy; the sinner’s approach to it in confession and contrition; lastly, His acceptance of it out of His Mercy. The ordainment of repentance requires you to act—and when you turn to Allah in repentance, He turns to you in forgiveness.

Therefore, the ordainment for repentance was a mercy, not only for the sinner himself but for others as well; had Allah not ordained repentance, those who commit sins would find no possibility of forgiveness, so they would continue to sin; if they continued to sin, the entire society would suffer.

‘They said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers."’ (*al-A’raf:* 23) This was the situation of Adam and his wife *peace be upon them* after their sin which differed from the position of Satan after his sin. Satan wanted to justify his sin by saying, ‘Shall I prostrate myself before one whom Thou hast created out of clay?’ (17: 61) And what did Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* say? ‘They said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if you do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers’ (*al-A’raf:* 23).

This is why the requital of Satan – who refused Allah’s commandments and His ruling – was to be expelled from His Mercy, while the reward for the one who committed sins and then confessed that he has sinned and wronged himself his repentance is to be accepted. So, it is not right for the one who commits acts of disobedience to say, ‘I have my reasons for doing so’, justifying the sins that he commits. Rather, he should not expel himself from Allah’s Mercy, but say, ‘What I do is forbidden, but I cannot prevent myself from doing it.’ In this way, he will not have rejected the ruling but rather accuse himself of inadequacy and confess his sin; thereby, he deserves the forgiveness and the acceptance of his repentance.

Here, we may ask: what is the difference between the sin of Satan and the sin of Adam *peace be upon him*? We say that Satan sinned and gave a reason for refusing the command, while Adam *peace be upon him* sinned and confessed his sin and asked for forgiveness.

When Adam and his wife Eve *peace be upon them* said, ‘Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves,’ together and in one breath and one mournful penitent cry, does this not indicate that they had been taught such words? Had they both sought Allah’s Pardon separately, they would have done so with different words.

This proves that they had been taught those words, which is why our Lord *Glorified is He* says: “then Adam received from his Lord some words” (*al-Baqara:* 37) They called upon Allah and said, ‘Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves,’ (*al-A’raf:* 23) and ‘selves’ is the plural of ‘self’; they did not say ‘our two selves’ (*nafsayn*a) in the Arabic dual noun form, but rather, they said ‘ourselves’ (*anfusan*a) in the plural form, meaning that their hearts were also purified and freed from the mark of the sin, and that this would be included and incorporated into the souls of their offspring.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ٱهۡبِطُواْ بَعۡضُكُمۡ لِبَعۡضٍ عَدُوّٞۖ وَلَكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مُسۡتَقَرّٞ وَمَتَٰعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٖ ﴿٢٤﴾

He said, ‘All of you get out! You are each other’s enemies. On earth you will have a place to stay and livelihood – for a time’ [24] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 24)

We notice here that Satan had already been commanded to go down to the earth; here there is another command to go down to the earth. By Allah, had the Paradise been their dwelling place, and had Adam *peace be upon him* been created for it and then disobeyed and then repented, they would never have left it. But, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded Adam to go down to the earth, where He had made him His vicegerent, in order to undertake the role of vicegerency in the light of the experience which he had undergone; he had to respect Allah’s

Commandment in every responsibility, consider Allah's Prohibition in every responsibility and beware of the enmity of Satan, who was bound to whisper insinuations to him – and he had experienced this for himself, so he would be prepared when he descended, having no further excuse after that. '[Allah] said, "Descend, being to one another enemies ...."' (*al-A'raf:* 24)

This commandment is issued with the plural; He did not say, 'Down with the two of you,' in the dual Arabic form. In another verse, He said: 'We said: "Descend with you all..."' (*Ta Ha:* 123) with the imperative verb 'down with you' in the Arabic dual form, addressing two people. This is just so we know that this narration of this story in several places in the Quran is for the purpose of giving many lessons. The command here is given with His words 'Down with you,' using the plural in Arab because all three were involved in the descending: Adam, Eve *peace be upon them,* and Satan. The enmity was pre-existing, and we do not dispute it. The enmity existed between two parties: two people in one party—Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*—and one in the other party—Satan. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to show us the facts; and the One speaking is Allah, so every single letter He uses has its specific purpose, which is why we find that He *Glorified is He* orders us to reflect upon the Quran and Says: 'Then do they not reflect upon the Quran? If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction." (*an-Nisa':* 82) That is, beware of only taking the external meaning of the text; rather, look for the internal meanings of the text; and do not only take the external meaning of the word, but look at what lies behind the words.

'[Allah] said, "Descend, being to one another enemy. And for you on the earth is a place of settlement and enjoyment for a time."' (*al-A'raf:* 24) The word 'enemy' implies the occurrence of a conflict and a battle which would take place amongst the children of Adam *peace be upon him* or the enmity that would exist between them and their enemies amongst the other inhabitants on earth, such as the jinn and others. But this will be for a limited period, which is why Allah says that 'a place of settlement and enjoyment for a time' (*al-A'raf:* 24) would be settled for the children of Adam. That is, you shall have stability and pleasure on earth for some time. The one who upholds the truth must view the struggle for the sake of the truth as being a pleasure of this worldly life, not as though it is a battle with no reward; no, you struggle and take a great reward for this struggle, and that is a pleasure.

The Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ فِيهَا تَحْيَوْنَ وَفِيهَا تَمُوتُونَ وَمِنْهَا تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

He said, 'There you will live; there you will die; from there you will be brought out' [25] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 25)

Allah says, '… and for you on the earth is a place of settlement and enjoyment for a time.' (*al-A'raf:* 24) So, Allah wanted to give us an image of the journey of life and depict for us our relationship with the earth about which He says that He *Glorified is He* will make upon the earth a successive authority. Allah says, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.' (*al-Baqara:* 30)

He thereby linked us with the earth. We were brought into existence from clay, and given enjoyment thereupon with all kinds of distinctions, good things and fruits, and then we die and return to it, and finally we shall be raised from it afterwards. Each one of us is from the earth, living from it and dying upon it, returning to his origin and source, back to the mother earth that takes him in, embraces him, takes him in its care, and has mercy on him, especially in his weakest moment. When a person is in a good state and has a brother whose state is the opposite of that, the heart of the mother will always be with the weak, the sick, and the lowly.

The earth is what takes all mankind; it takes a man, causes all harm to disappear, and conceals his odour. As for his friends and family in this world, they were quick to cover him with soil to steer clear of the process of decomposition; and as soon as he died, the first thing to be forgotten is his name; so they say, 'Where is the body?' and not 'Where is so-and-so?' Once the body is wrapped in its shroud, it is placed in the bier to be concealed in soil and have the gravedigger stomp over him with his feet.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* directly addresses the children of Adam *peace be upon him* saying:

يَٰبَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ قَدۡ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡكُمۡ لِبَاسٗا يُوَٰرِي سَوۡءَٰتِكُمۡ وَرِيشٗاۖ وَلِبَاسُ
ٱلتَّقۡوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞۚ ذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ٢٦

Children of Adam, We have given you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you; the garment of God- consciousness is the best of all garments – this is one of God's signs, so that people may take heed [26] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 26)

The words 'O children of Adam' provoke you to remember your forefather's past with his clear enemy, Satan. You are the children of Adam *peace be upon him* and Satan exists, so be aware of this. Allah *Glorified is He* sent down garments to hide your nakedness because the first act of disobedience was the uncovering of nakedness; 'sending down' implies something coming from above; this is so that we understand that every good thing on earth receives its provision from the sky. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who sent down clothing because He is the One Who sent down rain; then, it watered the roots of plants so that they grew after which we spun them and made them into clothes. It is as if searching for the root of any good thing, you will find that it came down from the sky. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions His Favour to His servants, 'Then He made from it its mate, and He produced for you from the grazing livestock eight mates.' (*az-Zumar:* 6)

Indeed, He did send down cattle too because the causality of plants is the first stage, and the causality of animals is the second stage; so He is the One Who made the plants grow from the earth so that animals could feed on them. He *Glorified is He* also says, 'We have already sent Our Messengers with clear evidence and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice. And We sent down iron, wherein is great military might and benefits for the people, and so that Allah may make evident those who support Him and His messengers unseen. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might.' (*al-Hadid:* 25)

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* did send down iron too because we take it from the earth which Allah created which indicates that in all of these things, He sent down, Allah intended to protect all aspects of His Divine Guidance:

'O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts …' (*al-A'raf:* 26).

If We sent down a garment which covers physical and tangible nakedness, We also sent down a spiritual garment which covers the 'nakedness' of moral values. Just as you feel and perceive that material garments conceal and cover physical nakedness, you must also know that the garment which Allah sent down as moral values only covers and conceals your spiritual nakedness. The garments of material life not only conceal nakedness, but they also go beyond and provide one of life's luxuries; that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember.' (*al-A'raf:* 26) The word *rish* 'thing of beauty' literally means 'feathers', the garment of birds. In the past, they would take the feathers of birds and decorate clothes with them— they would also put feathers on crowns—people took this word and said that such person is 'feathered' (*murish*), meaning that he does not only possess the bare essentials of life, but also the luxuries of life. It is as if the noble verse is a declaration of the permissibility of luxurious things, as long as they consist of otherwise lawful things. It is said that whenever Allah *Glorified is He* calls our attention to the essential constituents of life, He also alerts us about the beautiful things in life; so, He says, '[He created] the horses, mules and donkeys for us to ride and [as] adornment. (*an-Nahl:* 8) We ride them to avoid extraneous toil, and we enjoy their comeliness for the sake of beauty.

Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision?"' (*al-A'raf:* 32) Indeed, He *Glorified is He* instructs us to beautify ourselves when we meet with Him in His House. Allah says, 'O children of Adam, take your adornment at every *masjid.*' (*al-A'raf:* 31) So, this is a command to beautify oneself. In the verse we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But the clothing of righteousness - that is best.' (*al-A'raf:* 26) Indeed, the garment of Allah-consciousness [*taqwa*-awareness of Allah] is better than all of that because material garments cover the private parts; the most they can do is covering and concealing the exposure of this world; but the garment of Allah-consciousness (*taqwa)* saves us from exposure in the Hereafter.

The 'garment of *taqwa*' here may also mean those garments by which you protect yourselves (*tattaqun*) from the horrors of war which are better than garments of beauty and adornment because you save yourselves from being slain by means of them; or this garment – the garment of *taqwa* – is better than material garments and is one of Allah's signs; that is, His miraculous wonders and amazing things. A man is made of materials and has material needs and material nakedness; and there are also moral matters; without them, life cannot have any order. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gave us the essential material constituents of life, the material adornments of life and also gave us the means to live in times of peace and of war; the way of Allah-consciousness gives you all of such distinctions. So, take the signs from what you know and what you can feel and use them to guide you to what you cannot see or feel.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰبَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ لَا يَفۡتِنَنَّكُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ كَمَآ أَخۡرَجَ أَبَوَيۡكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ
يَنزِعُ عَنۡهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوۡءَٰتِهِمَآۚ إِنَّهُۥ يَرَىٰكُمۡ هُوَ وَقَبِيلُهُۥ مِنۡ
حَيۡثُ لَا تَرَوۡنَهُمۡۗ إِنَّا جَعَلۡنَا ٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ أَوۡلِيَآءَ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Children of Adam, do not let Satan seduce you, as he did your parents, causing them to leave the Garden, stripping them of their garments to expose their nakedness to them: he and his forces can see you from where you cannot see them: We have made evil ones allies to those who do not believe[27] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 27)

Before, Allah *Glorified is He* has asked us not to be seduced by Satan. He clarified that He has arranged for us all the essential constituents of life, and we must remember the position of Satan concerning our father Adam *peace be upon him* and how Satan tempted him.

The original meaning of the word *fitna* (here meaning 'seduction') is 'test', and it is sometimes used to mean the evil tribulation which is more terrible than killing. But does man fall in the face of every tribulation? No, because tribulation is a test; and a person can either pass or fail a test. If he passes, the tribulation is good for him, but if he fails, it is bad for him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* told the story of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and informed us that He created him to be His vicegerent on earth, and that the time he spent in paradise was a preparation for the role of vicegerency because if he were to become Allah’s Vicegerent on earth, Allah would have a way of guidance to govern him in all his actions; since He had a way of guidance to govern him in all his actions; out of His mercy for him, Allah did not send him straight to earth without first giving him practical preparation for it. So, He made the paradise as one of the stages which he passed through before becoming vicegerent on earth. Allah warned him against Satan who refused to prostrate before him, and He wanted him to experience moral responsibility. Every responsibility is included in ‘do this’ and ‘do not do that’; that is why Allah wanted to give him, in paradise, a period of preparation, so that he would go down to earth to fulfil the mission of vicegerency after having practical experience of it. Allah clarified for him that he could eat from everything in t Paradise, but he should not approach the forbidden tree. ‘Eat’ was a commandment, and ‘do not approach’ was a prohibition—and every religious responsibility is covered by either ‘do’ or ‘do not do.’

After that, He warned him against Satan who would place and make obstacles to impede his following Allah’s way. When Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* approached the tree and ate from it, they disobeyed Allah’s commandment ‘do not approach’, and Allah wanted to show them with a practical experience that disobeying Allah’s commandment would cause something offensive to be exposed in life. Hence, Adam's and his wife’s nakedness became apparent to them, and when their nakedness appeared to them, they realised that disobedience of Allah’s commandments exposes the offensive things of the earth and the society. Then, Allah commanded them to go down to earth, fortified by this experience.

Once Adam and his wife *peace be upon them* came down to earth, Allah sent him the divine guidance after his experience. Allah wanted to show us that Adam had disobeyed the commandment of his Lord, ‘do not approach’, and then he received words from Him so that He accepted his repentance.

Allah *Glorified is He* also wanted to show us that Adam *peace be upon him* represents the fact that man does right things and wrong things, heedlessness can overcome him and that he might contravene Allah's way in something, but then he can wake from his heedlessness and repent. After Allah chose him to deliver His Message, and he became a Prophet, infallibility came to him so that he would never be heedless or forget to pass on the message. This is why we must be aware of Allah's words; He says, 'Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.' (*Ta Ha:* 121) It is human nature to disobey and then repent, if he wants repentance; we must also be aware of Allah's words 'Then his Lord chose him' (*Ta Ha:* 122).

Thus, the election came after the disobedience because his disobedience was a natural thing—since he was a human being who did right things and did wrong things, and who forgot and was unaware. But after he came out of paradise, Allah elected him to be a prophet and a messenger; and since he became a prophet and a messenger, he became infallible: 'Then his Lord chose him and turned to him in forgiveness and guided [him].' (*Ta Ha:* 122) Therefore, it is not right for us to say, 'How could Adam *peace be upon him* have sinned when he was a prophet?' We should bear in mind that prophethood did not come to him until after he had sinned and repented. He represents a stage of humanity because he was the father of all humanity, and humanity is divided into two sections: people who are given Allah's message and prophets who proclaim Allah's Message. As a human being, he was vulnerable to sin; as a Prophet, his Lord elected him, accepted his repentance, and guided him. To those who say that Adam *peace be upon him* was created for paradise, we say that your understanding is not right because He says, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.' (*al-Baqara:* 30)

The matter of paradise was one of the stages which came before the vicegerency on earth; it was a preparation for the mission he would undertake on earth. Otherwise, if Allah *Glorified is He* had created Adam *peace be upon him* for paradise, the sin had caused him to leave it, and then Allah accepted his repentance, He would have kept him in Paradise. This is why we emphasise that paradise was only one of the stages which came before the vicegerency on earth began. After that, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to impart to us the experience of Adam *peace be upon him* so that we would take admonition from it and recognised Satan's enmity towards us as to avoid being seduced as Adam was.

'O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts…' (*al-A'raf:* 27) This prohibition is issued to the children of Adam *peace be upon him* not to Satan, and it is within man's ability to do it or not because Allah *Glorified is He* does not forbid man from doing something which is not within his ability, but rather, He forbids him from what is within his ability. Satan swore that he would seduce man, and he will do so because he had sworn it; he said, 'I will surely mislead them' (*Sad:* 82) that is, all the children of Adam. So, beware of being fooled by the seduction of Satan because his situation with your forefather, Adam *peace be upon him* was clear; and you should learn the lesson that your forefather experienced and not be seduced in the same way that led your forefathers to leave Paradise. Some people wonder why Allah did not say, 'Do not allow Satan to seduce you as he seduced your forefathers, but rather said, 'let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise.' (*al-A'raf:* 27) We say that this is an aspect of the loftiness and high rhetorical style of the Quranic discourse.

This is a warning about the seduction of Satan, lest he cause us to be driven from the paradise of responsibility just as he seduced our forefathers and caused them to be driven out of the paradise of preparation.(1) This style of rhetoric is called *ihtibak* (interweaving); that means a statement which consists of two halves, and you delete in a half what is already understood in the other half for sake of brevity. This rhetorical style imparts the intended meaning in the most concise way possible in order to attract the listener's attention to Allah's words so that he takes in the wisdom and the succinctness of the discourse and the lack of excess in the style.

'… Let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise…' (*al-A'raf:* 27) As we said, the root meaning of *fitna* (seduction) is 'test' in order to cleanse something of the impurities which are mixed with it. If gold contains impurities, and we know that gold is mixed with brass and other metals, when we want to make the gold pure, we smelt it (in Arabic, this is also called *fitna*) in fire, so that all that was stuck to it dissipates and comes off of it. The same is the case for *fitna*; when applied to people, it comes as a test so that he cleanses himself from the impurities which are intermixed with him and remembers what Satan did to Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*. So, if Satan comes to seduce you, beware of being seduced because this seduction will harm you just as it harmed your father Adam and your mother Eve *peace be upon them*. Satan is the jinn who rebelled against the way of Allah, and the jinn are composed of believers and disbelievers, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And among us are the righteous, and among us are [others] not so …’ (*al-Jinn:* 11).

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(1) Proofreader's Note: This is the Sheikh's interpretation and opinion.

Satan was not the only one of his race to rebel against the Way of Allah; the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* tell that he has allies from his race. Allah warns Muslims, ‘Then will you take him and his descendants as allies other than Me while they are enemies to you?’ (*al-Kahf:* 50) Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Indeed, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them.’ (*al-A'raf:* 27)

‘His tribe’ means his forces and his progeny whom he sends out to the universe in order to implement his vow: ‘[*Satan*] said, "By Your might, I will surely mislead them all.” (*Sad:* 82) Hence, the seduction of Satan only came to take Allah’s creatures away from Allah’s Way; and when Satan disobeyed his Lord, this weighed heavily upon him; so, after being at the peak of obedience, he became a sinner against Allah’s Commandments with an act of disobedience that drove him to disbelief because he rejected the ruling of Allah. That aroused his anger and bitterness and made him intense and extreme in his enmity towards man because he knew that he was expelled and cursed because of Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells Adam, ‘… he [Satan] sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them.’ (*al-A'raf:* 27) This indicates that Allah is talking about Satan’s progeny because if it included the demons from among mankind, He would not have said, ‘Indeed, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them.’ (*al-A'raf:* 27) Accordingly, this verse specifically refers to Satan’s progeny; the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us to be aware that Satan will not be satisfied only with himself or his progeny, he will rather make it alluring for some people to be human devils, just as there are devils amongst the jinn; about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And thus We have made for every prophet an enemy - devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion …’ (*al-An‘am:* 112).

The expression ‘decorative speech’ means enticing words which incite man to commit sins, react, and be influenced by them. Every sin is committed, from the outset, as a result of decorative speech; falsehood has its preachers, promoters, and proclaimers. They make some of his desires alluring to man diverting him from the way of Allah. We can observe that the enemies of Allah and of Allah’s Way look out for man’s religious festive seasons, and whenever such season comes along, the enemies of Allah fear that it may renew faith in the souls of people, so they try their very best to prevent people from benefiting from the season atmosphere. In doing so, they achieve their goal of enmity against Islam as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘… He and his forces watch you ….’ (*al-A’raf:* 27)

Satan and his *qabil* (forces) can see you. The Arabic word *qabil* means a group of at least three people who may be of different races, or it can mean a group of people who are all descended from a single male or female ancestor. The scholars differ as to the meaning of the word in this noble verse; some of them maintain that it refers to Satan’s forces and his progeny, meaning his forces from amongst mankind. They did not take into consideration that Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘from where you do not see them’ which shows that the meaning of *qabil* here must be ‘descendants’, since we can see human beings. In this way, His words are to encourage people to have the utmost caution and awareness because if you can see your enemy, you can ward off his harm, whilst if your enemy can see you, but you cannot see him, he is severe in his enmity and even more severe in his guile. The jinn can see us, whilst we cannot see them, and some scholars explain that this is as a result of being created from clay, which is corporeal, whilst they are created from fire which is incorporeal.

The incorporeal can affect the corporeal, which is proved by the fact that we feel the heat of fire, even if there is a wall in the middle, but the corporeal cannot affect the incorporeal or pass through it. Thus, the influence and transparency of the jinn is more than that of man; that is why they move in subtle ways and we cannot see them.

Hence, the meaning is that Satan cannot be seen – yet it is affirmed by authentic Prophetic traditions that Satan has been seen, though he is made of fire and the angels of light, and each of them are subtle and hidden beings. Further, angels have taken the form of men and came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as he told us: 'This was Gabriel; he came to teach you your religion.'(1)

Consequently, the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Gabriel *peace be upon him* not in his angelic form, but as something resembling a human form—he had taken a physical shape for their sake.

It was also narrated that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Satan and said: 'A strong demon from the jinn came to me yesterday suddenly in order to spoil my prayer, but Allah enabled me to overpower him, so I caught him and intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the Mosque so that all of you might see him.'(2)

This was out of the etiquettes of prophethood. Therefore, Satan takes forms, and you cannot see him as he really is; if he wants you to see him, he appears to you in a physical form. The scholars have discussed this matter in such way that it shows their eagerness to understand the Book of Allah and prove their willingness to bring out its meanings and secrets; some of them said, 'When Allah says that Satan and his tribe see you from where you see them not, we must say that we will never see them.'

I say that if a man saw a jinn, he would not see it in its true form, but rather, in the physical form it took, and this form would resemble and correspond to the human form; for if a jinn took on a material form like that of a man or an animal or the like, it would be possible for man to see it, and at this point, we would lose our trust in the identity of those people we see and would wonder: is it the thing we know or is it Satan taking its form?

Certainty of one's identity is essential for the motions of life and the motions of society; you only feel emotion towards your son because you know he is your son and he is ascribed to you; you only trust your friend if you know he is your friend; further, you only take knowledge from a scholar whom you trust. Imagine that a demon took the form of a person you know; he would cause you to doubt his identity and prevent you from trusting the person whose form he took. Moreover, Satan's worst enemies are those who guide others to the Way of Allah; that is, the scholars. So what stops Satan from taking the form of a well-versed scholar and saying things that contradict the Way of Allah?

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*
(2) *Narrated by Muslim*

That means Satan cannot take forms – this is the view of some scholars. We say to them that they have understood that Satan's appearance in a certain form continues for some time; but no, he appears fleetingly. Knowing that if he took a human or any material form, he would be governed by it; in that case, anyone with a weapon might kill him, and given the fact that he fears us more than we fear him, Satan fears to take a continuous form, which is why he takes a form for an instant and then vanishes. If one scrutinises a jinn when it takes a physical form, he will find something amiss with it, such as it having the form of a man with the legs of a goat, but once you notice it, it is gone in a flash because it fears that you have recognised that the form which it takes governs it, and if you recognise, this you will be able to bring it down.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues: "Indeed, We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe." (*al-A'raf:* 27) The devils were made by Allah, and He left them to those whom they seduce; if Allah had wanted to prevent the devils from seducing them, He would have done so. Thus, for everything or every event to take place, two things need to be fulfilled: the energy and the motive to perform it. If a person has the energy and the motive to act, then the final form of the action requires Allah's bestowal of energy. You say, 'The weaver weaved a piece of fabric with high skill', and we say: 'The weaver did not weave, but rather, the machine weaved; and the machine did not weave, but rather, it was the manufacturer who designed it for such purpose; and the manufacturer only designed it thanks to the inventors who created the mechanism to operate it.'

Therefore, the worker utilised the energy created for the engineer to work and relied on the energy of the engineer who made it at the factory;

the engineer relied on the energy of invention and on the inventors who invented the mechanism, and the inventor created it using the mind and the materials that Allah created.

Hence, everything indeed goes back to Allah because He is the Creator of energy and the Creator of those who utilise energy; all that man does is directing this energy. So, if you say that the weaver weaved, you are right; if you say that the machine weaved, you are right; and if you say that the factory is the one that weaved, you are right as well. Thus, all the matter in reality goes back to Allah. You direct the energy created by Allah with the ability granted by Him when you do anything. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Indeed, We have made the devils…' (*al-A'raf:* 27), this means that Allah has left them to those whom they seduce; yet, if Allah wills, they will not seduce anyone. This is what Satan understood when he said: 'By Your Might, I will surely mislead them all. Except, among them, Your chosen servants.' (*Sad:* 82-83)

So, if Allah wishes to protect someone from error, Satan cannot beguile him; and the devils know that Allah has left them to their own free will which is called 'leaving them to their own devices.' This is why there is no disagreement amongst the scholars in this regard; their view is that energy is created by Allah, and every action is ascribed to Allah; some of them say that energy is directed by man so that the action is ascribed to man, whilst others are of the view that the Omnipotent Power of Allah means that He is the Doer of all things; some of them say that man is the one who commits sins; that is, he directs the energy to an action while being under his control, so Allah punishes him for directing the energy to a harmful action; and there is no disagreement between the scholars in this regard.

'Indeed, We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe.' (*al-A'raf:* 27) Therefore, Allah makes the devils allies to those who do not believe, but Satan cannot take the believer as an ally.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا فَعَلُوا۟ فَـٰحِشَةً قَالُوا۟ وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهَآ ءَابَآءَنَا وَٱللَّهُ أَمَرَنَا بِهَا ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
لَا يَأْمُرُ بِٱلْفَحْشَآءِ ۖ أَتَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

Yet when [these people] do something disgraceful, they say, 'We found our forefathers doing this,' and, 'God has commanded us to do this.' Say [Prophet], 'God does not command disgraceful deeds. How can you say about God things that you do not know [to be true]?' [28] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 28)

The word *fahisha* (shameful deed) is derived from the verb *tafahhash* which means 'to become viler;' that is why some of the scholars say that these words refer to a specific kind of sin—adultery—because this is especially vile. The ensuing effects of every sin committed by a person come to an end as he ceases to commit such sin, but adultery leaves effects behind it—either the child is buried in the sand, the woman aborts it or she bears the child and then abandons it far away so that it lives as an outcast in society and finds no one to be responsible for it; in this way, the effects are more far-reaching than those of any other sin because it creates doubt in society; we can imagine a person who doubts as to whether the children who are ascribed to him and bear his name are really his; this is a severe calamity. Those who say that the meaning of 'shameful deed' (*fahisha*) is adultery adduce Allah's *Glorified is He* words: 'And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way ….' (*al-Isra':* 32)

A 'shameful deed' is one for which *Shari'a* prescribes a punishment, or it signifies a major sin. We understand it to mean something especially vile, whatever it is. But which shameful deed is meant here? They are the shameful deeds of which He has already spoken, as He says: 'Allah has not appointed [such innovations as] *bahira*(1) or *sa'iba*(2) …' (*al-Ma'ida:* 103). And also that which He mentions: 'And likewise, to many of the polytheists their partners have made [to seem] pleasing the killing of their children….' (*al-An'am:* 137)

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(1) *Bahira* is a female camel whose milk was spared for the idols and no one was allowed to milk it. And 2 also.

(2) *Sa'iba* is a female camel let loose for free pasture for the idols, and nothing was allowed to be carried on it.

And also Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the polytheists assign to Allah from that which He created of crops and livestock a share and say, "This is for Allah," by their claim, "and this is for our partners [associated with Him]."' (*al-An'am:* 136)

This refers to how they would go around the *Ka'ba* naked, the men by day and the women by night – why? Because they claimed to be pious, and they said, 'We want to go around the *Ka'ba* of our Lord as we were when our mothers bore us and detach ourselves from the fleeting joys of this world; we will not circumambulate the Temple of Allah wearing clothes which we have disobeyed Allah whilst wearing'

Their words, 'We found our forefathers doing it,' imply blind following which does not stand as a basis for a legal ruling although it is a way to impart practical knowledge; such is the case when we train out children to do what Allah requires of us as legally responsible people, so that they will be able and accustomed to doing what they are required to do when they reach the age of legal responsibility. The evidence to prove that blind following is not the basis of truth is that you find that opposing ways of life – socialism and communism, for example – are based on blind following; such ways of life have people blindly following them. If the blind following of a custom was the basis of truth, two contradictory instances of blind following would both be true; yet, two contradictory things cannot be true because opposites cannot meet. This is the rational proof that blind following is false. This is why we find that the rhetorical style of the Quran is very precise since the One Who is speaking is Allah. 'And when they commit an immorality, they say, "We found our fathers doing it, and Allah has ordered us to do it ….' (*al-A'raf:* 28)

As regards the notion of blind following, Allah *Glorified is He* does not give a response since it axiomatically does not lead to the truth; rather, He says: '…Say, "Indeed, Allah does not order immorality. Do you say about Allah that which you do not know?" (*al-A'raf:* 28) This is the reply to their words 'Allah has ordered us to do it'; but where is the reply to their words 'We found our fathers doing it'? We say that this is something which requires no response being rejected by the sound mind, so Allah declines to respond to it because of its self-evident falsehood for the sound mind. In response to the suggestion that

Allah commanded this abomination, there comes the answer that Allah does not command abomination; and furthermore, how is it that Allah commands you to do such thing? Was it a direct command, meaning that He commanded each one of you to commit an abomination? Did you not pay attention to the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger…’ (*ash-Shura:* 51). Or did this command of abomination come to you by way of a prophet? Yet, how could it be so, when you deny that messengers ever come? In this way, we see that their claim is rejected from two aspects: first, there is no way of knowing Allah’s Command unless He speaks to you directly or sends messengers to you because you are not worthy of being addressed by Him directly; second, you have denied that prophets and messengers ever came. Hence, Allah neither spoke to you directly, and nor by means of messengers; therefore, there is nothing left to be said to you but: ‘… Do you say about Allah that which you do not know?’ (*al-A’raf:* 28)

This question can only be answered in one of two ways; either they will say, ‘No,’ then they will be attesting to the fact that they are but liars; or they will say, ‘Yes’ – and if they say ‘Yes’, they will be attributing things to Allah of which they have no knowledge; so, they would be exposing themselves and admitting that Allah does not command deeds of abomination; rather, He always commands what is right. This is why He *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِٱلْقِسْطِۖ وَأَقِيمُواْ وُجُوهَكُمْ عِندَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٖ
وَٱدْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ ٱلدِّينَۚ كَمَا بَدَأَكُمْ تَعُودُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Say, ‘My Lord commands righteousness. Direct your worship straight to Him wherever you pray; call on Him; devote your religion entirely to Him. Just as He first created you, so you will come back [to life] again’ [29] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 29)

The word ‘right’ (*qist*) means ‘just’ from the verb *qasata* which means ‘to be just’; the word *qasit* is the active participle of the verb, but it means ‘to deviate from the truth’, and the *qasitun* are those who deviate and divert away from the truth and do wrong. The word *'adl* (justice) means 'balance'; if you incline towards the truth, this is justice which is beloved to Allah; and if you incline towards falsehood, this is something abominable. 'Say: "My Lord has ordered justice …"' (*al-A'raf:* 29); this is a declarative sentence.

'… And that you maintain yourselves [in worship of Him] at every place [or time] of prostration …' (*al-A'raf:* 29); this is an imperative verb. It might come to one's mind that this is a command being added to a statement, but we should notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has added it to 'Say', so it is as though the meaning is: 'Say: "…My Lord has ordered justice…"' (*al-A'raf:* 29), and say: '…And that you maintain yourselves [in worship of Him] at every place [or time] of prostration…' (*al-A'raf:* 29).

The 'face,' as literally stated in the verse is the distinguishing mark of a person because if someone hides his face, you will not recognise him unless he has distinctive clothes which no one wears but him. The face is the noblest part of the body, which is why in prostration, one puts his face on the ground which is the utmost expression of submission to Allah's command; for prostration, as performed willingly by a man, is to place his forehead on the ground, and we can say that everything which submits to Allah's Command 'prostrates.'

'Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures...' (*al-Hajj:* 18). Trees prostrate themselves though they are plants, and beasts prostrate themselves though they are animals, and the sun, the moon, the stars, and mountains also prostrate themselves though they are inanimate objects. But when the discourse turns to man, He *Glorified is He* divides them, saying: '…And many of the people. But upon many the punishment has been justified…' (*al-Hajj:* 18). This is because man has the special distinction of free will, which the rest of creation lacks. That which does not have a face can also prostrate, in which case it means submission alone; as for man, his prostration is on his face so that he knows that he has been made a vicegerent, that all other creatures have been subdued for his service, they are all obedient and they all exalt the praises of our Lord. So, if the master, whom all these other genera of animals, plants and minerals serve, places his face on the ground, he is in submission from the moment he prostrates'… And that you maintain yourselves [in worship of Him] at every place [or time] of prostration …' (*al-A'raf:* 29).

To 'set something upright,' which is the literal translation of the verse, means to place it where it was made to go, where it was created and supposed to be, and if you put it anywhere else you thereby divert it, deflect it, send it off course and make it crooked. So, setting one's face upright means to prostrate because the One who subdued this world for you and governed you with His way of moral guidance is the One for Whom you must place your face on the ground; if you do not do this, you thereby choose to make your face crooked.; know that this submission, humility and prostration to Allah will not only give you mastery over the other creatures which give you the good of this world, but placing your forehead and face on the ground also gives you blessings in your work and goodness in the Hereafter. The sagacious person is the one who knows that he has been granted mastery over the other creatures, so he worships Allah as best as he can, thereby taking the good of this world and the Hereafter, wherein no delight will miss him, nor will he miss out on any delight. As for this world, you come to it as a part of a chain of succession; you know that a delight might pass you by or you might pass it by; and when you remember Allah and submit yourself to Him, you attain the blessings of this motion of succession. '… And that you maintain yourselves [in worship of Him] at every place [or time] of prostration …' (*al-A'raf:* 29).

The *masjid*, place of worship, is a place where prostration (*sujud*) is made; and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I have been given superiority over the other prophets in six aspects: I have been given words which are concise but comprehensive in meaning; I have been helped by terror (in the hearts of enemies); spoils have been made lawful to me; the earth has been made clean and a place of worship for me; I have been sent to all mankind, and the line of prophets is closed with me.'(1)

So, every place on earth is a place of worship, and when you enter a temple to pray in it, this is a place of worship; the whole earth is a place of worship for you and you can prostrate and pray there. You can also go about your work there; for in a factory you go about your production, and then, when the time for prayer comes, you pray; you can pray in the field as well. But the technical meaning of the word (*masjid*) is 'mosque', namely a place which has been consecrated to be a place of prayer and dedicated exclusively for this purpose so that nothing else takes place in it. Therefore, if you take the word *masjid* to mean a place of worship which includes the entire world, the verse 'And that you maintain yourselves [in worship of Him]' applies to every place on earth; if you take *masjid* to mean 'mosque', the meaning is to perform the prayer in a specific place directed towards the *Ka'ba*, which is the case no matter where you pray. We call mosques 'Allah's houses by man's choice'; one of us builds a mosque here or there, and they all face the House of Allah, the *Ka'ba,* by His own choice. This is why the *Ka'ba* is the prayer-direction for all of Allah's houses.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

In essence, we should look towards the *Ka'ba* in our prayers and set our faces in that direction. Allah chose the *Ka'ba* to be the House of His worshippers. Thus, at the time of due prayers, you should perform them in places that have been set for prostration or worship. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Set your faces upright at every place of worship' (*al-A'raf:* 29). The scholars of Islamic jurisprudence differed regarding the necessity of this ruling, whether offering the obligatory prayers in a mosque was a mere recommendation or a commandment. Most of the scholars said that praying in a designated mosque is recommended; however, a minority concluded that it was obligatory. We agree with the scholars that saw no evidence commanding Muslims to perform the due prayers in a designated mosque.

Those who say that praying in a mosque was an obligation based their evidence on the words of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'By the One in whose hand rests my soul, I had intended of ordering firewood to be brought forth and the call to prayer to be sounded. I would have then ordered a man to lead the people in prayer and went to those men (who did not attend the congregational prayers) to burn their houses down.'(1)

We ask, 'Did Prophet Muhammad actually carry this warning out?' We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not enforce these stern words and did not burn any houses down. He only used this firm statement to encourage us to pray in mosques when the call to prayer is sounded.

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(1) *Agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘And call unto Him, being sincere in your faith in Him.’ (*al-A’raf:* 29) A call of supplication (*du‘a*) is a request directed from an incapable person asking a capable superior to fulfil a desire or need. When you call unto your Lord, have sincere faith in Him without thinking of the worldly material means. Thinking of material means diminishes the sincerity of your supplication. Sincerity (*ikhlas*) is cleansing any impurities in the mind, as impurities of doctrine and effort will spoil precision and authenticity. Never assume that your heart is preserved from these disorders, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Verily, my heart is sometimes distracted, and I seek forgiveness from Allah *Glorified is He* one hundred times every day.’(1)

Thus, sincerity is an action of the heart. When you call upon Allah in supplication, He always sees in your mind's eye your dire need for His assistance. Therefore, avoid any hope or expectations from the material means of this world, and direct all your supplications to the Creator of these means. If you show this dire need to your Lord, He will respond to your prayers because you have consumed all the worldly means. Some people call upon Allah *Glorified is He* from a state of comfort. A person might possess his daily provision and still ask Allah, ‘Provide for me!’ He might have a good home and still say, ‘I want a house that I own!’ Some of us pray for things that require worldly effort, and we should exert this effort duly. However, most of our prayers are not made out of dire need. A person calling upon Allah’s help from a state of humility and necessity will never be unanswered by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* ends the noble verse by saying, ‘As it was He who brought you into being in the first instance, so also [unto Him] you will return.’ (*al-A’raf:* 29)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in Ad-Dhikr wa Ad-Du‘a, in the section (Istihbab Al-Istighfar), and by Abu Dawud in (As-Salat), An-Nisa’i in (‘Amal Al-Yawm), and Ahmad (iv. 211) The meaning of his heart being ‘covered’ is said to be the moments when Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was distracted from remembering Allah Glorified is He due to his concern for his followers so that he sought forgiveness for them. Al-Munawi said, ‘It was a covering of light, not a covering of distractions, veils, or heedlessness.’*

Allah's verses speak to humankind compassionately. He *Glorified is He* reminds them to perform certain acts of worship in a specific manner. He was certainly able to compel man to worship Him in the way He wanted, but He ordained that humankind are masters of their actions and granted them freewill. Allah also compelled the other creatures to serve humankind subordinately. Although Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed for Himself the attribute of Omnipotence, where nothing is outside His Power, His devout servants, who have the free will and ability to disobey His orders, still obey His commandments. Thus, faith becomes evident in one's love for Allah *Glorified is He* and the observation of His commandments. If a human is distracted by the worldly means and the whole universe serving his benefit, or by his health, strength, and enjoyable wealth, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds him to be aware that he will not escape my power. Allah has given him free will in this world, but he will return to Him in the Hereafter, when there will be no material means, and he will find nothing but the Creator of means. This is what we see in Allah's words, 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that (Judgement) Day? With Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who holds absolute control over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16)

It is as if sovereignty in this worldly life is partly under the control of humankind because of their direct contact with the means. Human beings share control of the resources and employ other human beings in this world. However, in the Hereafter, there will be no owner or king except Allah *Glorified is He*; so, do not be deluded by the material means of this world, that they have been accessible for you and you are currently able to control them. In the end, you shall return to Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَرِيقًا هَدَىٰ وَفَرِيقًا حَقَّ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةُۗ إِنَّهُمُ ٱتَّخَذُواْ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ
أَوۡلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَحۡسَبُونَ أَنَّهُم مُّهۡتَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Some He has guided and some are doomed to stray: they have taken evil ones rather than God as their masters, thinking that they are rightly guided [30] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 30)

Remember what we have said earlier that Allah *Glorified is He* guided everyone, in that He passed His orders to humankind through the succession of messengers. When He *Glorified is He* says, ‘Some [of you] He will have graced with His guidance, whereas for some a straying from the right path will have become unavoidable,’ (*al-A’raf:* 30), this does not mean the initial guidance to the right path, but rather, the guidance of His assistance. We made a distinction between the guidance of direction and the guidance of assistance.

Allah’s words, ‘Some [of you] He will have graced with His guidance,’ (*al-A’raf:* 30) means the guidance of assistance because these people approached Allah *Glorified is He* with humility and faith, so He made the burden of obedience easier for them to bear. He also made sins hateful to them and assisted them in their mission. As for those who disobeyed Allah *Glorified is He* and did not answer the guidance of direction, would Allah *Glorified is He* assist them? On the contrary, Allah will leave them in their delusion and misguidance. If He wanted them to be guided, no one would be able to prevent this, and Allah *Glorified is He* is above treating any of His creatures unfairly. However, misguidance is unavoidable for them because of their mischief and poor conduct. ‘For, behold, they will have taken [their own] evil impulses for their masters in preference to Allah *Glorified is He* thinking all the while that they have found the right path!’ (*al-A’raf:* 30) If someone commits a sin while acknowledging his error, his action is considered a mere misdeed. On the other hand, if he says that his poor conduct is actually the right path, he is flaunting his disobedience and disbelief and is rejecting the ruling of Allah *Glorified is He*. It is better for those who commit sins to say, ‘Allah’s ruling is right, but we could not control ourselves.’ On the other hand, if a sinner rejects Allah’s ruling and claims that his choice is the right path, he will have committed a grave mistake because he has now moved, may Allah forbid, from the level of a sinner to the level of a disbeliever.

‘Thinking all the while that they have found the right path,’ (*al-A’raf:* 30) this is because they committed acts that Allah *Glorified is He* forbade, not because they were unable to control themselves, but because they considered their misdeeds the right thing to do. We find this occurrence in many sins, such as usury, where we find people who say that it is lawful. We ask them to say, ‘It is unlawful, but we cannot control ourselves.’ At that, they are sinners, but not disbelievers. They can then seek forgiveness and repentance from Allah.

However, if they reject Allah’s rulings and say, ‘It is lawful,’ they have gone beyond the limits of sin and fallen in the perils of disbelief. Save yourself from that fate, knowing that all the children of Adam *peace be upon him* are sinners and that Allah *Glorified is He* only ordained repentance for His servants because He had foreseen their mistakes. He thus mercifully ordained repentance and accepts it. So, why would a servant leave a domain from which they can escape to another domain which traps them eternally? Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

يَٰبَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ خُذُواْ زِينَتَكُمۡ عِندَ كُلِّ مَسۡجِدٖ وَكُلُواْ وَٱشۡرَبُواْ وَلَا تُسۡرِفُوٓاْۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُسۡرِفِينَ ٣١

Children of Adam, dress well whenever you are at worship,
and eat and drink [as We have permitted] but do not be
extravagant: God does not like extravagant people [31]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 31)

When you hear the word ‘adornment’, you think of adding a fine-looking appearance to something that is not essentially beautiful. Allah’s words, ‘Beautify yourselves with adornment at every place of worship,’ (*al-A’raf:* 31) mean that the Muslim should go to the mosque in his best attire. Also, these verses might be a response to a specific situation, as the habit of some pagans was the circumambulation of the *Ka’ba* without clothing. In this case, the meaning of ‘adornment’ here would be to conceal one’s nakedness. The word can also indicate ‘embellishment that is above the necessary clothing’ or it might mean pleasant, graceful, and clean clothing. We know that the mosque is the place where Allah’s servants gather. They are diverse in their occupations and livelihoods, and every occupation has its own attire and uniform. The professional person who sits in an office and holds meetings with people has a particular dress code, while the one who works in a blacksmith’s shop has a special outfit that suits his work. However, when we go to the mosque, gathering with each other to meet with Allah *Glorified is He* is work attire appropriate? We should wear clothes that do not disturb other mosque attendants. If the outfits we use in a factory or other workplaces do not suit the mosque’s cleanliness, we are encouraged to keep some clean clothes that allow us to honour this meeting with Allah *Glorified is He,* ‘And eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful!’ (*al-A’raf:* 31)

Eating and drinking are permissible matters because they are essential needs of life. So, enjoy eating and drinking as much as you need to live without being wasteful. Allah *Glorified is He* has made most ingestible goods lawful for us, and has only forbidden the intake of a few substances. Therefore, do not transgress beyond the majority of goods that are lawful by choosing to consume that which Allah has forbidden. Transgression is a sin against the soul. For instance, if you find nothing to eat but unlawfully dead animal flesh, you are permitted to eat it as long as you do not do so excessively. It is not right for us to consider the unlawful substances as lawful because Allah *Glorified is He* has given us sufficient lawful foods. However, if we do not find that which suffices our basic needs, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it lawful for us to take enough to keep ourselves alive.

The wasteful people are those who overstep the limits because they excessively spend their resources on unlawful items. This unlawful expenditure is described as dissipation (*israf*). On the other hand, if a person spends their resources on what Allah has made lawful, it is not a form of excessive expenditure or dissipation. The tradition has it, ‘If I spend the weight of Mount Uhud in gold on something lawful, I would not consider it a waste. Yet, if I spend a single dime on something unlawful, I would consider it a waste.’ For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered us to use every blessing in its appropriate way, on the condition that we do not use it recklessly and ungratefully. ‘Uthman ibn Madh’un(1) *Allah be pleased with him* went to Prophet Muhammad and disclosed his intention of becoming an abstinent monk wandering throughout the world. ‘Uthman said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Messenger of Allah, I want to be castrated.’ He wanted that to eradicate his sexual desire. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘O ‘Uthman, the castration of my followers is fasting (from food).’

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said the following about those who cannot afford to marry, ‘O young people, those of you who can afford matrimony should get married, it is the best way of keeping one’s gaze lowered and guarding one’s chastity. Those who cannot get married should fast, for it shall be a protection for them.’ (1)

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(1) The story of ‘Uthman ibn Madh‘un asking Prophet Muhammad the permission to castrate himself.

It is also narrated (2) that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gathered the people and talked to them about the Hereafter’s trouble. Ten of Prophet Muhammad’s Companions, namely Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Ali, Ibn Mas‘ud, Abu Dharr, Salim (the freed slave of Abu Hudhayfa), Al-Miqdad, Salman, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Al ‘As and Ma’qal ibn Maqran *Allah be pleased with all of them* gathered in the house of ‘Uthman ibn Madh’un. They agreed that they would fast every day, pray through all their nights, not to sleep on beds, not to eat meat, not to approach women and to keep themselves completely chaste.(3) The Prophetic instruction concerning this was that he praised Allah *Glorified is He* and then said, ‘What is wrong with these people who have said such-and-such? As for me, I pray and sleep, fast and eat and I marry women. Anyone who seeks other than my way is not of me.’(4)

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

قُلۡ مَنۡ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَخۡرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِۦ وَٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ مِنَ ٱلرِّزۡقِۚ قُلۡ هِيَ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ
فِي ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا خَالِصَةٗ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۗ كَذَٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لِقَوۡمٖ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٣٢

Say [Prophet], ‘Who has forbidden the adornment and the nourishment God has provided for His servants?’ Say, ‘They are [allowed] for those who believe during the life of this world: they will be theirs alone on the Day of Resurrection.’ This is how We make Our revelation clear for those who understand [32]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 32)

Since He brought beauty forth for His servants, He wanted it for them. What is good for females, the prophetic sayings have prescribed for females; what is good for males, the prophetic tradition has prescribed for males. The bounties and means of sustenance are lawful for all the believers, men, and women alike. Notice the precision of the discourse here when Allah says, ‘they are for those who believe.’ Then, Allah *Glorified is He* continues, ‘exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection’ (*al-A’raf:* 32). It is as though we are faced with two distinct situations, one in this world and another on the Day of Resurrection. This means that the beauty of this world is not exclusive for believers, but for both believers and disbelievers to share. It has been bestowed as a bounty by the Lord, Allah *Glorified is He*. The disbeliever might even gain more of it in this world than the believer. Yet, in the Hereafter, bounties will be for the believers alone, and the disbelievers will not receive any of His bounties.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

(2) This is the story of the ten Companions who gathered at the house of ‘Uthman ibn Madh‘un and worshiped extensively.

(3) *Fath Al-Bari*

(4) *Narrated by Muslim*

Allah *Glorified is He* grants awareness and faith to the believer through the vicissitudes that encompass his life. This means that a man might have successive experiences between sickness and health, wealth and poverty or strength and weakness. This is the state of man in this world, for it is an abode of vicissitudes. Thus, man might be afflicted in it with things he dislikes and there is no exclusive worldly delight. The hardships will only offend you if your stock of faith is diminished, as your faith makes you aware of His wisdom in imposing such hardships.

‘Say, “They are [lawful] in the life of this world unto all who have attained to faith – to be theirs alone on Resurrection Day”…’ (*al-A’raf:* 32). The word *khalisa*, ‘to be theirs alone;’ it can be read in Arabic in the *mansoob* state (*khalisatan).* It will be considered as a circumstantial expression (*haal*) describing the beauty as exclusive to the believers; it can also be read in the *marfu*’ state (*khalisatun*). In this case, it is considered a predicate added to a previous predicate. The meanings of the word indicate that these beauties and bounties do not belong to the believers alone in this world because the disbelievers share them with them, and also indicate that these bounties are not free of the vicissitudes of fate. Yet, in the Hereafter, these bounties shall be for the believers alone, as the disbelievers will not share in them. In addition, no vicissitudes will affect these blessings anymore.

Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verse by saying, ‘Thus clearly do We spell out these messages unto people of [innate] knowledge!’ (*al-A’raf:* 32) ‘We spell out these messages’ means ‘We do not condense the messages in these verses, but rather elaborate them so that every believer can comprehend the messages without failure; We include in these verses all the concepts that are required in the matters of this life in a detailed and an unambiguous manner.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّيَ ٱلْفَوَٰحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ وَٱلْإِثْمَ وَٱلْبَغْىَ بِغَيْرِ ٱلْحَقِّ
وَأَن تُشْرِكُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِۦ سُلْطَٰنًا وَأَن تَقُولُوا۟ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘My Lord only forbids disgraceful deeds – whether they be open or hidden – and sin and unjustified aggression, and that you, without His sanction, associate things with Him, and that you say things about Him without knowledge’ [33] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 33)

Allah *Glorified is He* begins the verse with the word ‘only’, which implies a restricted list of rules. Thus, the verse means that Allah made everything lawful, except these sins: obscene acts done publicly or in secrecy, offenses, unjustified aggression, polytheism (adjoining partners to Allah in worship) and speaking about Allah *Glorified is He* without knowledge. So, we are not allowed to include other actions outside this list and make them unlawful too. Allah’s words, ‘Say, ‘Who is there to forbid the beauty which Allah has brought forth,’ are in the form of a question demanding an answer from the disbelievers. They will never find any superior reference in forbidding the beauty which Allah *Glorified is He* brought forth to us because Allah *Glorified is He* clarified and explained what He had actually forbidden. The following verses tell us clearly, ‘Say, ‘Verily, my Lord has only forbidden shameful deeds, be they open or secret, and [every kind of] sinning or unjustified aggression, and the ascribing of divinity to any partners beside Him – that He has never bestowed any warrant upon – and speaking about Allah with which you have no knowledge.’ (*al-A’raf:* 33)

Let us reflect on the five forbidden deeds which the verse mentions. Several essential elements must be preserved for humankind to have a healthy life on earth and remain dominant on it. The first factor is that society must be sure of the purity of its kinship (offspring and lineage). This is essential for a healthy society because if a man trusts that his wife’s children are truly his own, he will graciously devote his life to provide and care for them. On the other hand, if he doubts this matter, he will neglect his children and brush them aside. These children could be neglected by the rest of society as well. Thus, the security of kinship is important for a sound society. An important reason why some children are homeless despite their parents being alive is the father doubting his paternity of the child. Thus, he has lost the parental instinct to care for their livelihood and well-being.

Purity of kinship results in a secure society, with diligent parents and well-raised children. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* forbade obscene deeds (*fawahish*). The word *fuhsh* is any action that is exceedingly repulsive. The scholars deduced that this word ultimately refers to adultery. This is because the effects of adultery do not stop at the sin and its momentary pleasure, but continue to affect the offspring indefinitely. Any transgression that affects one's offspring affects the whole society, as it leads to a society that is neglectful and devoid of care.

After that, the verse forbade 'sinning' (*ithm*). Does sinning here mean every enormous sin or only those sins for which the Sacred Law sanctions a punishment? The scholars have deduced that *ithm* here means alcohol and gambling because Allah *Glorified is He* said in another verse, 'But the evil [*ithm*] which they [alcohol and gambling] cause is greater than the benefit which they bring.' (*al-Baqara:* 219)

By this, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to preserve the essential component that controls the motion of man's life which is the mind and its lucidness. Alcohol clouds the mind, and man is required to protect his soberness in order to improve the affairs of his life without transgressing against other people. A mind that is veiled by alcohol is corrupt and its control of life is spoiled. Some people choose to drink alcohol and say, 'We want to forget our worries,' It is not the will of Allah, the Lawgiver, that everyone forgets his worries. If everyone forgets their worries, no one will be cautious or plan things in a way which ensures their safety from harm. The Lawgiver asks you to confront the worries you suffer with all your strength so that you can remove them. However, if you veil the mind, you are only fleeing from your problems. Therefore, you must confront the problems of life with your mind and thought.

If the problems you are facing are a result of your negligence and poor caution, then you are to blame. On the other hand, if the problem is a result of a fateful necessity that is out of your hands, know that Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who ordained that incident, had a wise reason for doing so. The purpose of such a trial might be that Allah *Glorified is He* and is protecting you from people who may envy your possessions. Everyone who is blessed is envied. The blessing maybe incomplete, as a complete blessing is only bound to diminish.

Thus, thinking about the elimination of preventable harm can only be done with a sober mind. On the other hand, you can only deal with afflictions that are out of your control through faith. Faith requires you to refer everything to the wisdom of the All-Wise. You need your mind, so do not veil it by drinking alcohol because the mind manages the motions of life.

We know that 'unjustified aggression' (*baghi*) means to overstep an appropriate action with injustice, pride, or greed. Injustice means taking the right of another human being and preventing him from taking the fruits of his labour. This injustice makes people unwilling to work. It is why Allah *Glorified is He* forbids anyone from transgressing against anyone else's dignity, life or wealth. We must protect our dignities from shameful obscenities because shameful deeds can produce abandoned children. Even if it does not produce offspring, it still ruins one's dignified status. No one must transgress against another person's kinship by obscene acts or transgress against their lives by destruction and murder.

Allah *Glorified is He* also designated that people's wealth be protected by forbidding any transgression on other people's fruits and effort. Thus, no one is allowed to seize the income of another person's labour or compete with him with enmity and injustice.

There are many forms of unjustified transgression (*baghi*). One of these forms is the unjust and forcible seizure of power. There may be people who forcibly seize power justifiably. For example, if you are on a ship that is struck by fierce stormy winds, and you are the person most adept at steering it, will you leave the commander to steer the ship if it could sink along with everyone in it? Will you, instead, choose to seize his place and take the wheel and manoeuvre everyone to safety? Seizing control justifiably in order to save people's lives is a justified appropriation which is different from unjustified envious appropriation. We can give an example to illustrate the difference between such similar actions. It is clear when we protect the wealth of an innocent or inexperienced simple-minded individual to invest it for him; in doing that, we take the care of this right from its owner. It seems that we have transgressed against the rightful owner, but upon examination, our intention was the protection of his personal livelihood as well as the common good. This is justified aggression. It is still called an 'aggression' (*baghi*) because it takes the form of seizing a person's right in an apparently unjust way. In Arabic rhetoric, this is called *mushakala* which refers to the identification of a concept by the name of another concept because of their similarity. We find another example of *mushakala* in Allah's words, 'And the requital of an evil is a similar evil.' (*ash-Shura:* 40) Is it evil to respond to an evil? It is only an evil in the eyes of the wrongdoer. For example, when a thief steals money and you punish him and take the money back, you are actually offending him. This is why the Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only with the same extent of the attack levelled against you; but to bear yourselves with patience is indeed far better for [you, since Allah *Glorified is He* is with] those who are patient in adversity.' (*an-Nahl:* 126) If someone transgresses unjustly against us, we must remind him that there is a stronger authority than him. He should expect to be subjected to a transgression by someone with more power and authority.

After those sins, Allah *Glorified is He* alerts us of another unforgivable sin, 'And the ascribing of divinity to any partners beside Him – that He has never bestowed any warrant upon.' (*al-A'raf:* 33)

It is impossible that Allah *Glorified is He* would send down any partner to Him for us to worship. Furthermore, He would not send a proof, warrant or an argument that He had any partner because Allah *Glorified is He* utterly transcends such a thing! One of the tenets of faith is that Allah negated this polytheism, both with intellectual and textual proofs.

Another verse brings together all these sins in a concise way which mentions their opposites as well. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Behold that Allah ordains justice, the doing of good and generosity towards [one's] fellow-men, and He forbids *fahsha'* (all that is obscene) and *munkar (*all that runs counter to reason), as well as *baghi* (transgression).' (*an-Nahl:* 90) He has mentioned that He forbade obscene acts in this verse to affirm the importance of the purity of kinship; He also mentioned the unlawfulness of that which runs counter to reason and transgression.

In the verse we are examining of the chapter of *al-A'raf*, Allah added *ithm* (sinning) to the list of forbidden acts. On the other hand, the verse of the chapter of *an-Nahl* orders us to practise justice and goodness and forbids *fahsha'* (all that is shameful), *munkar* (all that runs counter to reason) and *baghi* (transgression). It is as if the concepts of *ithm* (sinning) in the verse from the chapter of *al-A'raf* are included in the word *munkar* (all that runs counter to reason).

All the actions that run counter to reason are not only forbidden by the Sacred Law, but are also rejected by the natural disposition of human beings. Even people who have poor dispositions could view these acts as wrong, when they perceive how it can cause him harm if others inflict it upon him. Therefore, they say, 'We seek Allah's refuge from these sins,' yet, when they commit the same sin against other people, they do not consider it to be wrong.

For example, we find that a man might allow himself to look at the wives of others and could take pleasure from this. However, if someone else looks at his wife or daughter, he sees this action as the vilest of wrongful deeds. For this reason, you must define what is wrong in a way that encompasses all people. You should not only look at your rights alone, but perceive the rights and responsibilities of others as well. Beware of saying in protest, 'Why did Allah prohibit my eyes from enjoying an attractive body in front of me?' Just as He *Glorified is He* forbade you from looking at that beauty, He forbade everyone else from looking at your own kinswomen, so this is in your interest.

After decreeing good and beautiful things lawful, and declaring shameful deeds, evil, transgression, and sinning unlawful.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌۖ فَإِذَا جَآءَ أَجَلُهُمۡ لَا يَسۡتَـٔۡخِرُونَ سَاعَةٗ وَلَا يَسۡتَقۡدِمُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

There is a time set for every people: they cannot hasten it, nor, when it comes, will they be able to delay it for a single moment [34] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 34)

We are faced here with a Quranic text that is affirmed by the events we see in real life. Those who spill blood or harm other people by violating their dignity and taking their wealth will not be able to do this forever. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* gives them time to commit their transgressions and then, in due time, will punish them for their misdeeds. Only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can take full reprisal. If their human rivals wanted to take revenge from them, they would not be able to inflict a minute fraction of the vengeance which Allah's ability can impose.

Allah *Glorified is He* imposes this vengeance on the oppressors in order to preserve the security of society. So if you see corruption or oppression, do not despair because Allah *Glorified is He* has made it clear that for all people a time has been set for retribution. In our short lives, we have seen that due end happening to more than one tyrant nation. Thus, this verse applies to every tyrant, 'and for all people a term has been set: and when (The end of] their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it.' (*al-A'raf:* 34)

If falsehood and oppression do not affect the people and make them cry out, they will not seek out the truth or aspire to it. Pain is a means of health because it alerts you to the presence of an ailment. The result is that oppressors, tyrants, and despots can only continue for a limited time. So, do not despair, but seek out the truth and look to the side of Allah *Glorified is He* seeking shelter in His name. We find that most people who are afflicted by adverse events find no relief except through their faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, they flee in pilgrimage to His House, filling his mosques in prayer, remembrance and the recitation of His Quran. We see these things and say, 'Whatever the corrupt tyrant does, Allah *Glorified is He* will use him to serve His religion. There are people who would have never turned to Allah's way except when the vicissitudes of time afflicted them. Then, they started seeking salvation from their Lord.

In our lives, we have known people, who did not worship Allah, pray to Him or fast in *Ramadan*. They did not remember their Lord for a long time. Then, only when they were harmed by a tyrant, they sought refuge in their Lord and asked for His protection and care. This is why we say to the tyrant, 'By Allah, if you knew what you had done for Allah's religion without earning any reward for it, you would feel regret. You have forced many people to seek Allah's religion after they had stopped practicing it. If you had known that your tyranny, injustice, and despotism would help Allah's religion, you would never have committed your atrocities. Every community has a set time, and if you are a tyrant leading a tyrannical regime, your end will come.' Look at history and you will find that some states, in their prime and their strength, ascended to rule over whole nations. Then, after a certain period of time, they began to fail and were overrun by weakness and incompetence because their set time had come. Allah *Glorified is He* blinds their sights by allowing them to take erroneous measures which they wrongfully assume will assure their continued ascendancy. Then, Allah allows the weak to overcome them and extract the power from their hands.

When the set time comes, no one can delay it because time neither lies in the hand of Allah who sustains the universe, and nor can anyone drive it faster. We can observe the use of the word 'moment' (*sa'a*) here. The word *sa'a* is the Arabic contemporary word we use to indicate a duration of 'one hour'. A day is divided into twenty-four hours, and the hour is further divided into minutes and seconds. Furthermore, man can divide seconds into smaller durations. The word *sa'a* is also used to mean the Day of Resurrection (the Last Hour).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰبَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ إِمَّا يَأۡتِيَنَّكُمۡ رُسُلٞ مِّنكُمۡ يَقُصُّونَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ ءَايَٰتِي فَمَنِ
ٱتَّقَىٰ وَأَصۡلَحَ فَلَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا هُمۡ يَحۡزَنُونَ ٣٥

Children of Adam, when messengers come to you from among yourselves, reciting My revelations to you, for those who are conscious of God and live righteously, there will be no fear, nor will they grieve [35] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 35)

Allah *Glorified is He* informs His orders to the children of Adam after telling them that He made good and beautiful bounties lawful and only prohibited five misdeeds. Thus, Allah created a system that preserves the security of their societies. Allah *Glorified is He* also assured them that He will extract vengeance from unjust people by placing an end and a set time for injustice. Allah *Glorified is He* ordered the children of Adam to apply these principles to all the affairs of their lives, 'O children of Adam! Whenever there come unto you apostles of your own, conveying My messages unto you,' (*al-A'raf:* 35) you must receive the Messengers of Allah *Glorified is He* with eager minds. Concern yourselves and try to find that which protects and benefits you. A messenger is someone who announces to each one of us the good and enjoyable things of life which Allah *Glorified is He* has made lawful. Messengers also tell us what Allah *Glorified is He* has made unlawful to protect the security of our societies. Thus, society should be eager to keep the messenger's company and hear his message. Allah's bounties instructed the messenger to continue their calls eagerly in a gentle way, even when their societies pay them no heed. They continued to show the signs and clear messages so that every person could understand what helped him with their life's affairs and what guided him to the straight path.

If you are afflicted in your health, you will be eager to call a doctor and search for the medicine. So, it is only logical that when a messenger conveys Allah's way to us, we should seek his message with attention and not confront him with animosity.

Usually, the ones who were pleased to see a messenger from Allah were the people of sound natural disposition. When the messenger from Allah simply declared that he was bearing a divine message, they believed him without difficulty. These people of sound natural disposition judged the messenger's words by their knowledge of his past with them. They already knew that he had a sincere soul and has never been sinful. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, there has come unto you [O humankind] an Apostle from among yourselves: heavily weighs upon him (the thought] that you might suffer [in the life to come]; full of concern for you [is he, and] full of compassion and mercy towards the believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 128)

The messenger who came to you was not a person you were unaware of. In fact, you had a clear and plain record of his past. This is why we find that the first people to believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not wait until he recited the Quran to them; they believed him because of what they had already known about him, having lived with him and known every detail of his character.

For example, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his wife, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* about the message he had received. He divulged his fear to her that what had come to him was the touch of a jinn or a demon. She immediately said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You maintain your family ties. You support the needy and strive to uphold the truth. You give to those who have not.' All of these precursors indicate that you, Muhammad, are in Allah's protection and care, because you were upright in your character before the Revelation came to you. Does it make sense that someone who never lied about people would lie about Allah *Glorified is He*? Then, Khadija went at once to ask Waraqa ibn Nawfal because he had knowledge of scripture.

Likewise, we find that as soon as Prophet Muhammad said, 'I am the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*' his friend Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I believe you.' If this proves anything, it proves the truthfulness of his natural disposition. This is one of the things we can learn from the words, 'an Apostle from among yourselves', or 'from your human race'. We can easily take Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a role model.

If a messenger had come to us from amongst the angels and said, 'This is the way of Allah *Glorified is He* and you should follow my example,' we could have very easily and convincingly replied, 'And can we do as you do, when you are an angel created in a mould of goodness?' Thus, a messenger was sent to us from our own human race with free choice, capable of doing good or evil. Therefore, he is an appropriate role model for us to follow. This is why it was foolish for the disbelievers to say, as the Quran narrates, 'Yet whenever Allah's guidance came to them [through a prophet], nothing has ever kept people from believing [in him] save this their objection, "Would Allah *Glorified is He* have sent a [mere] mortal man as His apostle?"' (*al-Isra':* 94)

This is the result of their mere foolishness, shortsightedness and fury. Allah *Glorified is He* sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a human messenger from our kind. Instead, they desired an angel. How could an angel messenger be a role model for them when his nature would have been different to that of man? This is why the Allah *Glorified is He* gives this logical rebuttal, 'Say, "If angels were walking about on earth as their natural abode, We would indeed have sent down unto them an angel out of heaven as Our apostle."' (*al-Isra':* 95)

A messenger is meant as a role model for you; Allah *Glorified is He* did not demand that you complete a task that conflicts with your natural existence. The task is not severely difficult and taxing. He sent someone similar to you whose past you knew, and did not bring him from another race.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O children of Adam! Whenever there come unto you apostles of your own, conveying My messages unto you.' (*al-A'raf:* 35) Consider His words, 'conveying My messages unto you.' (*al-A'raf:* 35) Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word, 'conveying,' (*yaqussuun*) because the word *qasas* (stories) is composed of the root letters '*q-s-s*', and the root verb made from these letters is *qassa* which means 'to follow the tracks'. If a man's camel or sheep were stolen, he would follow the tracks of their footprints. Thus, the words, 'Conveying My messages unto you,' (*al-A'raf:* 35) means that they were firmly adherent to what had been revealed to them. They never strayed from it, just as you should never stray from the footprint tracks you follow in the ground. 'Then all who are piously conscious of Me (*itaqa*) and live righteously (*aslaha*), no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-A'raf:* 35) Piety (*taqwa*) means to place a barrier (*wiqaya*) between yourself and that which harms you. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Be piously conscious of the Fire,' so that we protect ourselves from the flames of hellfire by doing righteous deeds.

When it is said, 'Be piously conscious of Allah,' this means that we should be conscious of Allah's Attributes of might. We cannot withstand the might of our Lord, and you must obey His commandments and stay away from His prohibitions. Conscious piety here means that we must not deny and rebuff the commands of the messengers because they only came to save humankind. When society fails in ailments, they must look for the healing messenger that guides them to Allah's way. That is why it is not right to rebuff a message which comes with proofs and miracles, 'Then all who are piously conscious of

Me (*itaaqa*) and live righteously (*aslaha*), no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-A'raf:* 35)

The Arabic word *aslaha* (live righteously) literally means 'to improve life.' It refers to the action of rectifying mistakes and fixing blunders. It is the process where we preserve the superior values and promote them. For example, there might be a well with drinking water. If the well is performing its function, we should not block it or throw garbage into it; in this way we can preserve the soundness of what is sound. We should also strive to make the well even better. For instance, we can construct a wall around it or design a pump that extracts its water and transports it to the houses. In this way, we would have helped promote the soundness of what is sound.

However, a major problem in this world is that some people may claim to upgrade existing constructs, when in reality, they are breaking their integrity. Regarding that, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "Shall we tell you who are the most futile of those who lose their lives? [It is] they whose labour has gone astray in (The pursuit of no more than] this world's life, and [mistakenly] think that they are doing good deeds."' (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

Therefore, when you approach any action, you must know the premises of your work. What will you take from it? Either leave what is sound in this world as it is or make it better. If you do this, you will have no need to fear, nor will you grieve for anything that has passed. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So that you may not despair over whatever [good] has escaped you nor exult [unduly] over whatever [good] has come to you.' (*al-Hadid:* 23)

What is the opposite of those who shall not fear or feel grieved? Allah *Glorified is He* describes the opposing group,

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ عَنْهَآ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

But those who reject Our revelations and arrogantly scorn
them are the people of the Fire and there they will remain [36]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 36)

Why is the fate of those who deny and scorn Allah's signs to abide in hellfire forever? It is because even if the material means of life were easy for them, they did not consider that they needed a share in the Hereafter. They did not look to the final end of this world and did not have faith in Allah’s words, ‘To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof – but he will have no share in [The blessings of] the life to come.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20)

Even if one of them was able to take ample income and fruits from this world, why did he forget that it was only temporary? Why did they not consider the time they would spend in the Hereafter? You must be aware that in this world you are only a guardian, appointed by Allah, of earth’s provisions. As long as we are all the sons of a single human race created upon the earth, with the mastery over other creatures placed in our hands, we must all be headed to a single destination. All of the aims in which we differ cannot be considered our final abodes, and the true final end of this world is the meeting with Allah *Glorified is He*. We can only reach that meeting through death, which transports us to a second life.

Those who scorn Allah’s signs out of pride thereby enter into a losing bargain, because this worldly life is finite, and the next life has no end. Furthermore, the enjoyment an individual takes from this life is proportionate to his abilities and possibilities. On the other hand, the Hereafter is certain, and the delight of the believer therein is proportionate to the omnipotent power of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the disbelievers, ‘These are destined for the Fire, therein to abide.’ (*al-A’raf:* 36) The Arabic words *ashab-un-nar* (destined for the fire) literally mean ‘companions of the fire’. The sinner will be accompanied by the hellfire just as one of us is escorted by a friend. The hellfire will be contented to accommodate those sinners and will ask, ‘Is there yet more [sinners] [for me]?’ (*Qaf:* 30).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says.

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the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

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The Chapter of

al-A’raf

Continued

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِـَٔايَٰتِهِۦٓ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَنَالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُم مِّنَ
ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا يَتَوَفَّوْنَهُمْ قَالُوٓا۟ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ
ٱللَّهِ ۖ قَالُوا۟ ضَلُّوا۟ عَنَّا وَشَهِدُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ كَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Who is more wrong than the person who invents lies against God or rejects His revelations? Such people will have their preordained share [in this world], but then, when Our angels arrive to take them back, saying, ‘Where are those you used to call on beside God?’ they will say, ‘They have deserted us.’ They will confess that they were disbelievers [37] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 37)

The words, ‘And who could be more wicked,’ (*al-A’raf:* 37) are in the form of a question which can have no answer except an acknowledgement of the truth. No one could be wickeder than him who attributes his own lying inventions to Allah *Glorified is He*. Such a person has truly wronged himself and his own people. The principle way to wrong one’s self is to be pleased with an ephemeral life and leave aside an eternal life. As for wronging his people, he will have to bear the burden of the evil they commit because of his lies about Allah *Glorified is He*.

‘Or disbelieved His messages’ (*al-A’raf:* 37) That is, they ascribe to Allah *Glorified is He* what He did not say. They also disbelieved in what He actually said. Each of these two is equal to the other. The Arabic word *ayatihi* (His messages) refers to the amazing miracles revealed by Allah. The word *ayat* is used in the Quran to mean several different things. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘A divine Book, the messages (*ayat*) whereof have been clearly spelled out …’ (*Fussilat:* 3). It is also used to mean the miracles which Allah *Glorified is He* sent to aid His messengers, ‘And nothing has prevented us from sending [this message, like the earlier ones] with miraculous signs (*ayatih*) [in its wake], except [Our knowledge] that the people of olden times [often] disbelieved in them.’ (*al-Isra’:* 59) Here, the word *ayat* means miracles, i.e. amazing signs. The Quran also tells us about the cosmological signs of the universe. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Now among His signs (*ayatihi*) are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon.’ (*Fussilat:* 37)

Thus, an *aya* is an amazing sign. This word is also applied to the verses of the Quran because when you look at the arrangement of the Quranic verses, how they incorporate facts of existence and cover matters of the universe, you say to yourself, ‘This is amazing because the one whose lips uttered these verses was an unlettered prophet. He was known to have never been educated, was not heard to utter any poetry or prose, and had not been trained in oratory. In addition, he had never ruled a nation, nor had he studied the history of the past nations to develop laws which the modern civilisations have not been able to surpass.’

When the Muslim Bedouins took their religion to Persia, it was the basis of the entire eastern civilisation. Despite that, the Persians adopted their laws from this Bedouin nation. Before the message was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the legal system of the Bedouins was based on a tribal system, with each tribe having its own chief. Prophet Muhammad’s message brought a system which encompassed all the nations of the earth and succeeded in managing the whole world. This is an amazing phenomenon, and every *aya* of these was a miracle and a wonder. In addition, the cosmological signs have absolute precision: the sun and the moon run in their appointed courses, with each of them floating in a distinct orbit. This is an amazing system.

So, these amazing signs included the verses of the Quran as well as the cosmological miracles and signs. How could they deny these signs? Did they not look at the universe with its clear-cut creation, perfectly engineered and flawless formation? Such signs express the precision of the Creator. He is the All Knowing, All-Powerful, All-Wise and the All-Accounting Lord. Likewise, how could they deny Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who came bearing these miracles? They called him a sorcerer, and when he recited the verses of the Quran, they denied them as well.

Thus, they did not look at the cosmological signs to deduce the greatness and the wisdom of the Maker. Likewise, they denied the signs and miracles which the Messengers brought, the greatest of which being the verses of the Quran.

When Allah *Glorified is He* presented this matter, He asked them, ‘How can you say that your Prophet bewitched the other people to believe in him. Why then, did he not bewitch you, too?’

Allah narrates another aspect of their disbelief in the following verse, ‘It is but a human being that imparts [all] this to him!’ (*an-Nahl:* 103) Allah replied to their false accusations, ‘The tongue they refer to in disbelief is not Arabic, whereas this (Quran) is in a clear Arabic tongue speaking the truth.’ (*an-Nahl:* 103)

'And they (the disbelievers) say, "Fables of ancient times which he has caused to be written down, so that they might be read out to him at morning and evening!"' (*al-Furqan:* 5) So, Allah *Glorified is He* taught Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say, 'Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you before this [revelation came unto me]. Will you not, then, use your (mind for) reason?' (*Yunus:* 16) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remind them that he had lived among them for forty years. Was he known ever to have said or uttered anything like this Quran?

Will Allah leave those who disbelieved in His signs without sustenance? They are His creatures and He will assure for them the essential necessities of life. He also commanded the material means of existence to serve those who disbelieved in Him, just as they should serve those who obeyed and believed in His messengers. The disbelievers who utilise the worldly means properly will reap their benefits. On the other hand, if the believers are negligent in utilising the universal laws, they will not reap their benefits. Allah's bounties are a provision of His Lordship, and therefore, he will provide the sustenance to those He created. Also, the natural laws of the universe serve the obedient and the disobedient alike because this is the way of Allah *Glorified is He* and His universal laws do not change.

So, their disbelief will not cause Allah *Glorified is He* to decrease their worldly provision that were ordained for them by Divine predestination. Whatever is written in their decree of fate will come to them, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Whatever has been decreed to be their lot [in life] will be theirs.' (*al-A'raf:* 37)

This would also mean that they will be afflicted by their share of torment in life. This is made clear in the Book that was sent to clarify that the obedient will be rewarded and the disobedient will be punished in the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* says here, 'Until there shall come unto them our messengers to take their souls (causing them to die), [and the angels] shall say, "Where, now, are those beings whom you were invoking beside Allah's name?" [Those sinners] will reply, "They have forsaken us!", and [thus] they will bear witness against themselves that they had been denying the truth.' (*al-A'raf:* 37)

When you hear the words, ‘causing them to die’, you will understand that this life will surely end and the spirit will be separated from the body. This is the meaning of ‘causing them to die’. Sometimes this action is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He*; in other verses, it is ascribed to the Angel of Death and, on other occasions, it is ascribed to the followers of the Angel of Death. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Until, when death approaches any of you, Our messengers cause you to die, and they do not overlook [anyone].’ (*al-An‘am:* 61) These three different forms of expression are all equivalent because the Angel of Death does not cause death by his own choice, but takes directions from Allah *Glorified is He*. The Angel of Death follows the orders and commands the angelic messengers to carry it out.

The most basic meaning of the Arabic word *tawaffi* (to die) refers to the moment when the appointed duration of life has reached its end. Every man has two appointed ends. It could be the end of this life, where it means the event of death; it could also mean the end of *barzakh* (the period of life after death, in the grave) until the Day of Reckoning and punishment in the Hellfire. This is their second appointed end.

We can also say that the time of reckoning of every man is at the moment of his death since the period of Resurrection is composed of stages that begin at the grave and end in the eternity spent in Paradise or Hell.

When the angels ask them, ‘Where, now, are those beings whom you were invoking beside Allah’s name?’ [Those sinners] will reply, “They have forsaken us!”, and [thus] they will bear witness against themselves that they had been denying the truth.’ (*al-A’raf:* 37)

At this point, they will admit that those idols which they had called upon instead of Allah *Glorified is He* have disappeared and vanished without a trace. ‘And they say, “What! After we have been [dead and] lost in the earth, shall we indeed be [restored to life] in a new act of creation?”’ (*as-Sajda:* 10)

In that final reckoning, they will testify against themselves about their disbelief. However, this testimony will not benefit them after the time of moral responsibility had ended; they will be in an abode where they will be compelled to do whatever Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to do with them. In this world, they were free to act as they pleased, but in the Hereafter, their testimonies will be useless. The purpose of this testimony will be to show the fairness of the requital to which they will be subjected. Thus, they will not object to this requital; which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ٱدۡخُلُواْ فِيٓ أُمَمٖ قَدۡ خَلَتۡ مِن قَبۡلِكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡجِنِّ وَٱلۡإِنسِ فِي ٱلنَّارِۖ كُلَّمَا دَخَلَتۡ أُمَّةٞ
لَّعَنَتۡ أُخۡتَهَاۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا ٱدَّارَكُواْ فِيهَا جَمِيعٗا قَالَتۡ أُخۡرَىٰهُمۡ لِأُولَىٰهُمۡ رَبَّنَا هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ أَضَلُّونَا
فَـَٔاتِهِمۡ عَذَابٗا ضِعۡفٗا مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِۖ قَالَ لِكُلّٖ ضِعۡفٞ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

God will say, 'Join the crowds of jinn and humans who have gone before you into the Fire.' Every crowd curses its fellow crowd as it enters, then, when they are all gathered inside, the last of them will say of the first, 'Our Lord, it was they who led us astray: give them double punishment in the Fire'– God says, 'Every one of you will have double punishment, though you do not know it'[38] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 38)

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us that by His command 'Be', they will enter the fire just as other disbelieving nations have entered it before them. They will not be the first, but they will join them in the same fate to which the others went. Those nations will be intermixed because all of the disbelievers will receive the same requital.

It was following the example of the nations which went before them that led them to the hellfire. The former nations were models of misguidance who were followed by those nations who came later. Therefore, when the final nations enter hellfire, they will curse those who led them in to that abode.

Suppose that a person went to jail for a crime he had committed. What if a subordinate wrongdoer imitated that former criminal and entered prison with him? By Allah *Glorified is He* when they meet in jail, will the latter not curse the former? 'Every crowd curses its fellow crowd as it enters (the fire), then, when they are all gathered inside, the last of them will say of the first, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray. Give them double punishment in the fire."— Allah says, 'Every one of you will have double punishment, though you do not know it."' (*al-A'raf:* 38) After one group of them follows the other into the fire and they meet, this curious conversation will be exchanged between them: '… the last of them will say of the first, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray. Give them double punishment in the Fire"...' (*al-A'raf:* 38).

'The last of them' denotes the ones who entered hell last, and ‘the first of them’ denotes those who were the leaders of error and misguidance and thus they entered hell before them. That is, the first crowd will consist of the generals and leaders of error and mischief, while the last crowd will consist of their followers who copied their bad example. The direction of speech in '…the last of them will say of the first, "Our Lord, it was they who led us astray …' indicates that the last crowd will be addressing it to our Lord.

But why would it happen this way? It might have been expected that the Quran would say, 'The last of them will speak to the first of them, "You led us astray.”' However, it is worded in this way because it will be no use, then, to speak to those who led them astray. Everything at this point will be solely in Allah’s Hands. They shall say to Allah *the Almighty* what they wish to say to everyone: '… it was they who led us astray …' (*al-A’raf:* 38) -with 'they' referring to those who led them astray. It is as though these words which they will be addressing to Allah *the Exalted* are a testimony from them against those who have been the causes of leading them astray. They say this to our Lord in attempt to increase the punishment of their leaders in the fire, as the Quran states: ‘give them double punishment in the Fire' (*al-A’raf:* 38) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* will say to them all: 'Every one of you will have double punishment, though you do not know it'" (*al-A’raf:* 38).

Based on this, each wrongdoing group of humanity, throughout time, shall receive a double punishment for both going astray and causing others to go astray. We understand that ‘double’ means something that is equal to twice the amount or size of something else. Accordingly, O, you who followed the bad example of others, you too led other people astray by the bad example you set for them. By following them, you increased their numbers and influence and induced people into following the same example. You too deserve a double portion of suffering since you led others astray as well. You should be aware that the One Who is judging you administer justice perfectly. He gives every human just what he deserves.

Now, what will be the answer of the first crowd to the last crowd? The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَالَتۡ أُولَىٰهُمۡ لِأُخۡرَىٰهُمۡ فَمَا كَانَ لَكُمۡ عَلَيۡنَا مِن فَضۡلٖ
فَذُوقُواْ ٱلۡعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَكۡسِبُونَ ٣٩

And the first of them will say to the last, ‘You were no better
than us: taste the punishment you have earned’ [39]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 39)

This means that since you too shall receive double punishment, the same as us, then we are equal: 'taste the punishment you have earned' (*al-A’raf:* 39). It is as though the criminal himself, when he meets another criminal like him, will say to him, ‘Experience the same punishment!’ This is not cruelty on Allah’s part or an exercise of irresistible power on His servants; rather, it is the justice of His Decree, for this is the result of what you have done.

It is obvious that tasting is connected to food. Does this mean they will eat the suffering? No, the True Lord *the Exalted* will make every part of their bodies experience the suffering. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the suffering to cover the entire body, He extends the sense of taste, perceived by the tongue, to every other part of the body. Therefore, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places. Then, it became ungrateful for Allah’s Blessings, so Allah made it taste the garment of famine and fear, for what its people had done.' (*an-Nahl:* 112) The significance of ‘made it taste’ is that the tasting experience becomes comprehensive and enveloping, like a garment covering the whole body. Taste is the strongest physical sense, and a garment extends over the entire body: 'taste the punishment you have earned' (*al-A’raf:* 39).

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* uses the word *taksibun* (gain, earn or win) which is translated in the verse as earn - and not *taktasibun* (acquire) since incurring evil deeds no longer involved the use of any artifice. Rather, it became for them a natural action even though the natural state of being is the spontaneous doing of good without any affectation or artifice. During the commission of an evil deed, the human soul undergoes an inner struggle since a wrongful act is alien to the original nature of human beings. However, due to the deep addiction to evil deeds, these people lost their original state of being; it became corrupted, and their faculties no longer came into conflict when committing evil deeds. Rather, they committed sins easily, as though they were natural. This is the danger that threatens those who excessively commit sins; rather than being irritated, they feel happy with sin.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا وَٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ عَنْهَا لَا تُفَتَّحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوَٰبُ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَلَا يَدْخُلُونَ
ٱلْجَنَّةَ حَتَّىٰ يَلِجَ ٱلْجَمَلُ فِى سَمِّ ٱلْخِيَاطِ ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

The gates of Heaven will not be open to those who rejected Our revelations and arrogantly spurned them; even if a thick rope were to pass through the eye of a needle they would not enter the Garden. This is how We punish the guilty [40] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 40)

The True Lord *the Most High* in this verse declares a new verdict and specifies who will be subject to this verdict in order to make known the type of crime involved. This crime is independent, unlinked to any previously stated crime, so that every human knows that such an act constitutes a crime liable and subject to judgment and punishment. 'Those who rejected Our *Ayat* and arrogantly spurned them' (*al-A'raf:* 40).

We have already elaborated on the meaning of the word *ayat*, saying that it can refer either to the inimitable Quranic verses or to heavenly signs. Any human being who holds himself above being a follower of a law brought by a prophet who was well known among his people for his honesty, deserves severe punishment. It is true that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* did not have the prestige and authority with which to compete with the leaders and aristocrats of the Quraysh, which is why we find some Qurayshi people quoted as saying: 'Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities (Mecca or Ta'if, the two main cities of the region)?'' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Although the Qurayshi people acknowledged the sublimity of the Quran, still they wished it had been sent down to someone else who would meet their own materialistic criteria for greatness.

Consequently, the gates of paradise will not be opened to anyone who denies Allah's signs and hates to follow Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* as stated in the Quran: 'The gates of Paradise will not be open to those who rejected Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations) and arrogantly spurned them; even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter Paradise. This is how we punish the criminals' (*al-A'raf:* 40).

Thus, we know the people in the face of whom the gates of paradise will be shut. Naturally, we also know, by contrasts, who are the people for whom the gates of paradise will be opened: they are the believers. When their souls ascend to *the Exalted* Assembly of Angels, they will find their good deeds lifting them higher. As for the deniers, they will not ascend, rather they will descend. They will not enter paradise. Allah *the Exalted* has linked their entry to paradise with something which is rationally, normally and intrinsically impossible: '… even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter Paradise' (*al-A'raf:* 40). 'The eye of a needle' means the hole in the needle through which a thread is passed. The tip of the thread cannot enter the eye of the needle unless the width of the thread is less than the width of the eye. Also, a thread should be firm enough to pass through, and its ends not frayed; since if it has been cut and its end is frayed, it will not pass through the eye of the needle. This is why the tailor makes the tip of the thread pointed so that it will pass through the eye of the needle. Therefore, if we bring a camel, or *jamal*, which also means a thick, twisted rope and tell it to pass though the eye of a needle, would it be able to do this? Of course, it would not. Thus, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has linked the entry of these people into paradise with an impossible event.

Some people may say, 'What does a camel have to do with the eye of a needle?' We answer them by saying that the word *jamal* also means a thick rope made of smaller ropes twisted together, like the ropes of ships, which are thick and plaited together.

Poets have utilised this issue in their poetry. A poet describing how his devotion and longing for his beloved has reached such a level that he has become emaciated and weak said:

If the passion and love I felt were felt by a camel,
No disbeliever would ever enter hell.

The poet is claiming that if the love and passion from which he is suffering were to afflict a camel, it would grow progressively thinner and thinner, and eventually emaciated until it could pass through the eye of a needle. In this verse, our Lord clarifies that only when a thick, twisted rope (or a camel) passes through the eye of a needle, will He let such transgressors into paradise: 'even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter Paradise. This is how we punish the criminals' (*al-A'raf:* 40). They deserve this punishment for the evil which they have committed. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* then says:

لَهُم مِّن جَهَنَّمَ مِهَادٞ وَمِن فَوۡقِهِمۡ غَوَاشٖۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

Hell will be their resting place and their covering, layer
upon layer – this is how We punish those who do evil [41]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 41)

The word *mihad* means a bed, from which is derived the word *mahd* which means a baby's cradle, and the word *ghashiya* means a covering. This means that the coverings and bedding components of that flat surface will be of hellfire. In another glorious verse, the True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'They shall have coverings of Fire above them and coverings (of fire) beneath them…' (*az-Zumar:* 16).

These covering layers will overwhelm two sides of the dimensional formation of the human body. The six directions of the human body are front, back, right, left, above and below. The word *mihad* (bed) refers to something that lies as a cover from below, while the word *ghashiya* (covering) refers to something that lies as a cover from above. The same applies to the word *zhulla* –multiple layers or canopies –of hellfire. Yet, the True Lord also decreed that Hell should surround the disbelievers on all six sides, by saying: '… We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides …' (*al-Kahf:* 29). This indicates that the torment will encompass the wrongdoers from all sides.

The word *jahannam* (hell) is derived from the word *juhuma* which denotes something terrifying with a hideous, frowning appearance. Allah *the Exalted* then mentions the contrasting state in order to reinforce the soul's aversion to such a situation and induce it to love the opposite condition; therefore, He *the Most High* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا
وُسْعَهَآ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَـٰبُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

But those who believe and do good deeds – and We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear – are the people of the Garden and there they will remain [42] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 42)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that those who believe and do righteous deeds will dwell eternally in paradise. The True Lord then places between the beginning and end of the verse the following clarifying alert, '…and We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear…' (*al-A'raf:* 42), to make us understand that those who transgress against themselves by disbelieving in Allah *the Almighty* and denying His signs have not grasped the reality of faith. Abstention from many desires lies within, and not beyond, the capacity of the human soul. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies for us that He has placed upon every accountable person (i.e. adult Muslim of sound mind) the obligations contained in 'Do's and Dont's' which are within the scope of human ability.

By viewing a total picture encapsulating the contrast and comparison between the dwellers of Hell and the dwellers of Paradise, we find that the True Lord *the Exalted* says about the people of Hell: 'The gates of Paradise will not be open to those who rejected Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations) and arrogantly spurned them; even if a (camel or a thick, twisted rope) were to pass through the eye of a needle, they would not enter paradise. This is how we punish the criminals.' (*al-A'raf:* 40)

They shall not enter paradise, which indicates that they will be deprived of something beneficial. Not only this, but they will also enter hell. So, there are two afflictions here: one is the loss of a beneficial blessing, namely entrance into paradise, of which Allah *the Almighty* deprives them and withholds from them this delight as requital for their sins. Beyond this is the second which is that they are also sent to Hell, another punishment, as the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'Theirs will be a bed of Hell (Fire), and over them coverings (of Hellfire). This is how We punish the wrongdoers.' (*al-A'raf:* 41)

In the first glorious verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'This is how we punish the criminals' (*al-A'raf:* 40), and in the second verse, He says: 'This is how we punish the wrongdoers.' (*al-A'raf:* 41)

It is as though their criminality is the cause for not entering paradise, while their injustice is the cause for being enveloped by fire from above and below along with being enclosed from all sides by an encirclement of hell.

After this reminder which rouses our abhorrence for the dwellers of hell, firstly, due to their non-performance of the responsibilities that have been assigned to them, and secondly for the horribleness of the punishment they have brought upon themselves, it is appropriate for us to be eager for the contrary end. Therefore, Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'However, those who believe and do good deeds—and We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear—such are the companions of Paradise. They will abide therein eternally.' (*al-A'raf:* 42) The True Lord's Words '—and we do not burden any soul with more than it can bear—' (*al-A'raf:* 42) come between the subject of the sentence and its predicate as a parenthetical clause. This is because the style of discourse in this verse is concerned with informing us that believers and doers of good works will spend eternity in paradise. The parenthetical clause '—and we do not burden any soul with more than it can bear—' (*al-A'raf:* 42) comes between the two key parts of the sentence, the subject and the predicate. Therefore, when we hear 'those who believe', we realise that this is an action of the heart; then we hear after it 'and do good deeds', which is an action of the body, and the harmonious combination of the emotional and physical actions leads to a conduct in line with the Islamic beliefs. Belief is what always facilitates faithful conduct and renders the difficulties encountered while fulfilling moral responsibility and righteous works acceptable and easy. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* gives this clarification:

Beware of thinking that I have assigned to you more than what you can bear. No, for I place on humans only that which they can well bear. Also, beware of understanding that My words: '…but those who believe and do good deeds…' (*al-A'raf:* 42) are meant to exhaust you, rather, they are well within your ability to do good. This is because I am the Lawgiver, and the Lawgiver makes people solely responsible for what lies within their power.

We do the same thing in our working lives. We find that the engineer who manufactures a machine tells us about the extent of its capabilities. He warns us that the equipment should not be overloaded, otherwise, it will be damaged. If a human manufacturer cannot charge a lifeless machine with doing more than it can, would the One Who created mankind charge them to do more than what they can? This is impossible.

We must close the door on those who wish to excuse themselves from the obligations which have been placed on them. Do not base your judgment on your listless, unjust assessment of your ability; rather base your judgment of your ability on what Allah *the Almighty* holds you responsible. If He charges you with a responsibility, you should regard this responsibility as within the scope of your ability. Clear evidence of the falsehood of those who wish to evade Allah's Rulings is their attempt to subject the rulings to their view of their own ability, although others do what they are avoiding. For example, when the True Lord forbids drinking alcohol, you find that there are people who abstain from drinking alcohol in obedience to Allah's Command. Likewise, you find that there are people who abstain from illegal sexual intercourse or taking usury. Since a human being who is equal to you and is a member of your own species is able to do the command, then whoever does not abstain from these forbidden things is a sinner and cannot blame it on the difficulty of the duty. The responsibilities that are entrusted to us by the All-Wise Lawgiver consist of the 'Do's and 'Dont's' commands. Allah *the Exalted* does not assign obligations that are beyond the ability of the one who is obligated. Allah *the Almighty* assigns responsibilities in proportion to human capacities. Also, the functioning of human powers and capacities require sustenance, such as food, drink, clothing, and the rest of survival needs. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear that He provides mankind with all basic material life's needs. Never think that Allah *the Exalted* tasks humans with unachievable responsibilities; rather, humans are the ones who put themselves into situations of excessive responsibilities. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: '…but let him whose provision is restricted…' (*at-Talaq:* 7) which is a phrase referring to the person whose means are somewhat straitened calling him to '… spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah does not burden any soul with more than He has given it ….' (*at-Talaq:* 7)

Therefore, do not make unreal estimations when calculating your livelihood expenses, and then try to subject your income to this reckoning; rather, you should consider your income and live within its limits. If your income is one hundred pounds, organise your life so that your expenses are equal to your income. Allah *Glorified is He* puts no obligation on you beyond what He has given you.

Let us look at what Allah has given us. Do not bring into your provision that which He has not made lawful. Do not steal, plunder, pilfer or take bribes and then say, 'This is what Allah has given me.' No, you must only take and benefit from what Allah *the Almighty* has made lawful for you. If you live within what Allah has made lawful, He will help you with all the details of your life and supply all your needs since you are living according to His Way. The True Lord *the Exalted* will spare you the needs of life which might require you to take in excess of what He has given you, so that they will not cross your mind or the minds of your children. For example, you might enter the market with the limited amount of money that Allah has given you, and see many good things, but the True Lord makes it so that you only look at those things which are within your budget. In this way, Allah makes what is within your budget look good to you and keeps what is beyond your budget away from you. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him, and He does not stir the cravings of the soul for anything beyond this.

This is the reason why the True Lord says: 'However, those who believe and do good deeds—and We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear— such are the companions of Paradise. They will abide therein eternally.' (*al-A'raf:* 42)

The companions’ of paradise are those who will never be parted from it, just as a friend, or *sahib*, loves the companionship of his friend. Paradise wants them, and they want paradise. Life there is eternal. Any joys which you did not obtain during this worldly life, they could never have been eternal. In this world, you fear that you may die and lose the joys of life. Even if you do not die, you fear that these joys will sooner or later leave you since we are living in a world of fluctuations. Such is Allah’s Constant Law in His creation. You find that the healthy person becomes ill, and the rich person becomes poor, for nothing intrinsically belongs to human beings. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* maintains the balance of humanity. He divides the economic condition amongst mankind. Thus, we find that a person who does not despise his portion of sustenance and work, as allotted to him by Allah, He will grant him ease after every hardship. Likewise, in paradise, Allah *the Exalted* will remove all types of vicissitudes which humans should confront in worldly life. Therefore, The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِم مِّنْ غِلٍّ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ
الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَٰذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ ۖ لَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا
بِالْحَقِّ ۖ وَنُودُوا أَن تِلْكُمُ الْجَنَّةُ أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

We shall have removed all ill feeling from their hearts; streams will flow at their feet. They will say, ‘Praise be to God, who guided us to this: had God not guided us, We would never have found the way. The messengers of our Lord brought the Truth.’ A voice will call out to them, ‘This is the Garden you have been given as your own on account of your deeds’ [43] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 43)

Allah’s Words 'We shall have removed all ill feelings from their hearts…' (*al-A’raf:* 43) also apply to those who exerted their best efforts to reach expert opinions about certain matters in this world and came to different conclusions. On the Day of Resurrection, they will be brought forth without any rancour or ill feeling in their hearts. Therefore, we find that `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* would say on reciting this noble verse, 'O, Allah, make me, `Uthman, Talḥa and Az-Zubayr among these people!' This is due to the fact that these were the very men who differed about the caliphate, and each of them was a Companion who had been given glad tidings of paradise. Therefore, if souls have been affected by fluctuations of feelings, do not think that they will accompany them to the abode of reward in the Hereafter since Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We shall have removed all ill feelings from their hearts….' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

In other words, it was the difference in formulating well-reasoned opinions amongst believers who all worked righteous deeds and who each wanted to exercise their judgment to the best of their ability. However, due to the fluctuations of life experiences, certain feelings ensued. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that this will not continue with them in the Hereafter; although each of them differed, they were exerting their utmost effort to reach the most well-founded and informed opinions for Allah's sake. In the Hereafter, this exertion will not exist. The True Lord wants to make this issue a universal principle. For example, you might find that a man marries a woman based on different criteria from those that Allah *the Almighty* has established for marriage. He might have married her, for example because she was beautiful or because her father was influential or wealthy. Then, after the marriage, her wealthy father did not give him anything of his wealth, so he said, 'He tricked me by marrying his daughter to me!' Or she was beautiful, but then he found many bad characteristics in her, so he grew to hate her. Our advice to this man is that since you did not choose her according to Allah's Criteria, you must accept the consequences of your choice.

On the other hand, when someone marries a woman for her religious commitment and righteousness and then finds a blameworthy trait in her, this blameworthy trait will not continue into her afterlife. This is why we find that the True Lord mentioned this exact matter and described it specifically in terms of the husband and wife rather than in terms of sons and daughters since the husband and wife are the main pillars of a family. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear to spouses: Never think that any bad traits in your spouses which might have annoyed, upset, or troubled you would remain with them in the Hereafter. For this reason, He *the Glorious and Exalted* says: '…purified spouses …' (*Al-'Imran:* 15).

This means that spouses will be purified from the things which used to anger you. They will be made pure by Allah's purification of them: 'We shall have removed all ill feelings from their hearts; rivers flowing from under them …' (*al-A'raf:* 43).

We find that the True Lord says in one verse '*tajri tahtiha*' which can be translated as '…Gardens under which rivers flow...' (*at-Tawba:* 100), and says in another verse '*tajri min tahtihim*' which can be translated as '…rivers flowing from under them…' (*al-A'raf:* 43). We notice that the difference in Arabic is the word *min*, or 'from'. People living in palaces may have water flowing around and beneath them, which is a delightful sight. The water of the Hereafter is unalterable; it does not change in taste or smell along with being free from the impurities which contaminate the water of this world. Just as we feel pleased by the sight of water in this world, we shall be pleased by it many times over in the Hereafter. Water may flow beneath a palace, yet it springs from a distant source, which causes the owner of the palace to fear that someone else may cut it off from him. In this verse, the True Lord assures His righteous servants the following: Rivers shall flow from under your gardens. All water shall be self-generating, springing at the place where you are stationed, so your spring shall be neither be controlled nor cut off by anyone. You shall see the rivers of paradise without any shores, for everything shall be governed, not by material means as is the case in this world, but by the command word 'Be!' – That is Allah Himself. This shall make Allah's servants in paradise of the Hereafter say: 'Praise be to Allah Who guided us to this. Had Allah not guided us, We would never have found the way …."' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

They shall thankfully say, 'Praise be to Allah' since He *the Most High* has gathered, directed and guided them to a permanent reward and bliss, which nothing can ruffle. 'Praise be to Allah' is an expression of worship which believers shall utter in the Hereafter for having successfully fulfilled the responsibilities that Allah *the Exalted* had placed on them during worldly life. Allah *the Almighty* consequently will grant them in the Hereafter more than they have expected. The delights of the Hereafter are without limits. No matter how great a person's ingenuity, he cannot arrive to that which paradise contains since wishes there will be realised as soon as thought of: '…They will say, "Praise be to Allah …."' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

Thanking and praising Allah is, in the worldly life, an obligatory act of worship, but in the Hereafter, it becomes a reaction of joy and satisfaction.

'…They will say, "Praise be to Allah, Who guided us to this: had Allah not guided us, we would never have found the way."(*al-A'raf:* 43)

The believers will say this gratefully since if it were not for Allah sending a Divine Law that defined the correct way of life and warned and inspired fear in them against sins, they would not have reached paradise. Guidance, as we have said, is direction to the way that leads to a specific goal. Therefore, you must first know what the goal is, and then plan the way that leads to it which must neither be crooked nor obstructive to your moving forward, thus elongating the distance for you. Allah's Words '… had Allah not guided us, We would never have found the way …' (*al-A'raf:* 43) signify that it is not possible for human beings to lay down laws for themselves that guide them to the goal, since they themselves do not know what the goal is. Therefore, their Creator clarifies it for them by sending down His Law and Way to His Messengers.

Guidance is solely from Allah, yet He would not speak to every person individually. Rather, He sends Messengers who convey to us the signs and revelations of Allah and explain to us His Way. For this reason, the True Lord wisely says in this same verse: '"The Messengers of our Lord brought the Truth.' A voice will call out to them, 'This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds."' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

In this worldly life, you may meet someone who says to you: 'If you wish to relax, I advise you to go to such-and-such a place by such-and-such road and you will find yourself happy and relaxed there.' You believe him and follow his advice, and you find that he is telling the truth. Does this not make you feel happy? Similarly, the True Lord sent messengers with clear proofs, signs and right guidance which, when the believers follow and attain paradise and bliss, they must surely give thanks to Allah, saying: 'The Messengers of our Lord brought the Truth' (*al-A'raf:* 43) This is because the Messengers have not lied to them, rather, they brought them goodness: 'A voice will call out to them, "This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds.' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

It is as though the True Lord is clarifying for us, while of the responsibility of adhering to Allah's Laws is still incumbent upon us, that we must receive Allah's Doctrine on this basis. Everyone will claim their place in paradise in proportion to how close or far they are from Allah's Way, for entrance into paradise is the reward for acting in compliance with His Way. The scholars–may Allah *the Almighty* reward them with the best of rewards–have raised a point here by saying, 'How can we reconcile between the part of the noble verse saying: "A voice will call out to them, 'This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds'" (*al-A'raf:* 43) with the following Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* "No one will enter Paradise because of his deeds alone." The Companions asked, "Not even you, O, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "No, not even me, unless Allah showers me with His Mercy."'(1)

Our answer to this is that there is no contradiction between Allah's statement and that of our reliably truthful and honest Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who brought to us the truth from Allah *the Exalted*. Rather, the two statements support one another; when the True Lord laid down the rules of our life, He made it clear that those who would act righteously would enter paradise. This Decree of Allah, which is forced by nothing, rather bestows grace and favours upon us. No one has a right over Allah since there is no action that benefits Him. Following Allah's Way and Laws only benefits and brings goodness to a servant. Accordingly, our entering paradise because of our good actions is also by Allah's Grace and Favour. The Quran elucidates to us the coherence in the meanings of these verses and the non-contradiction between a text of Hadith and a Quranic passage. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Say, "In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate."' (*Yunus:* 58)

The reward of every action belongs to the human; he takes the recompense for his actions. When the reward is greater than the exact recompense deserved for the action, this is an act of grace and favour from Allah. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… Each person is in pledge for his own deeds.' (*at-Tur:* 21) Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* also says: 'That man will only have what he has worked towards.' (*an-Najm:* 39)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the books of Ar-Riqaq (Heart Softeners) and Al-Marḍa (The Sick), Muslim in Sifat Al Munafiqin (Description of the Hypocrites), At-Tirmidhi in Al-Jana'iz (Funerals), Abu Dawud in Al-Jana'iz, An-Nisa'i in Al-Jana'iz, Ibn Majah in Az-Zuhd (Renunciation of Worldly Pleasures), and Aḥmad in his Musnad (vi. 125)*

Regarding the previous verse–'*wa-an laysa lil'insani illa ma sa`a*' (*an-Najm:* 39), if you understand Arabic language and you have a good aptitude for it, you will recognise that the Arabic letter *Lam*, which expresses ownership, signifies here that you have no right over Allah *the Exalted* unless your work and effort are consistent with and obedient to His Law. This previously mentioned glorious verse specifies just repayment, not the bountiful recompense: 'Say, "In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice. These are better than all they accumulate."' (*Yunus:* 58)

As an illustrative example, we as Muslims offer the funeral prayer over a deceased Muslim in compliance with the Islamic teachings. During it, we ask Allah to forgive the deceased person's sins. However, does this prayer add any extra deeds to the deceased person? If the prayer added nothing, the Islamic Law would not have commanded it. It is a prayer for a deceased person who is a Muslim; his acceptance and adherence to Islam is indeed part of his deeds. Therefore, we find that the True Lord says in another verse 'We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith …' (*at-Tur:* 21) which means that the parents and their offspring share together the faith and the actions consequent upon such faith: 'We unite the believers with their offspring. ' (*at-Tur:* 21)

This reunion indicates that the rank of the offspring is less than that of the parents, but the True Lord will raise their ranks as an honourable favour extended to their parents. This reunion may be a reward for the offspring or a reward for the parents. Their children will be united with them as long as they all share in faith, and the parents have provided for their offspring through lawful means and raised them according to the teachings of Allah *the Exalted*. A father may see his neighbour's children wearing expensive clothes and eating fine foods, but his children remain patient and live within the moderate means of their father who adheres to righteous deeds and a lawful income. Therefore, the children will attain Paradise alongside their father since they patiently bore with him the challenges of adhering to what is lawful.

In this way, we find that every believing person receives the reward for his deeds and then: 'A voice will call out to them, "This is the Paradise you have been given as your inheritance on account of your deeds.' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

The word *irth* (inheritance) signifies that some property has been passed on from one person to another. We know that Allah *the Exalted* knows from predestination how every human will behave and whether he will show belief or disbelief, obedience or violation of His Laws. Yet despite this, Allah *the Most High* prepared for every human a place in paradise which will be his own, on the basis of deeming him a believer and another place in hell on the basis of deeming him a disbeliever.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* has prepared paradise to accommodate His created beings, and He has equally prepared enough places in hell to accommodate everyone as well; there is no shortage of space for the Powerful and Able God. If we all believed, the vastness of paradise would amply contain every one of us. On the other hand – Allah forbid – if all mankind were to disbelieve, hell would not be cramped for them. This raises a question: 'When a group of mankind enters Paradise by their good deeds, to whom will the places allotted for the people of Hell go?' The True Lord, by His Grace, will grant them to the believers. They will inherit them from those undeserving of Paradise due to their disbelief.

Concerning paradise, the reward for the righteous, giving praise out of bliss and joy during life in paradise, it is appropriate for the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* to speak about the attitude of the dwellers of it towards the people of Hell; so He *the Most High* says:

وَنَادَىٰٓ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلنَّارِ أَن قَدۡ وَجَدۡنَا مَا وَعَدَنَا رَبُّنَا حَقّٗا فَهَلۡ وَجَدتُّم مَّا
وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمۡ حَقّٗاۖ قَالُواْ نَعَمۡۚ فَأَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنُۢ بَيۡنَهُمۡ أَن لَّعۡنَةُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٤٤

The people of the Garden will cry out to the people of the Fire, 'We have found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found what your Lord promised you to be true?' and they will answer, 'Yes'. A voice will proclaim from their midst, 'God's rejection [hangs] over the evildoers [44]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 44)

In this verse, we witness the reproach. The glorious verse depicts for us the time when the dwellers of Paradise shall see the dwellers of Hell. Their mutual seeing of one another is part of the bliss and pains each experience on the one side and the other. When believers in Allah's Way see those who have antagonised, oppressed and persecuted them being punished in hell, this will complete their joy. As for the other group, when they see their opponents in paradise, this will climax their suffering. Thus, they must see each other, which is why this dialogue shall take place. Then, the dwellers of paradise will call out to the dwellers of Hell, declaring that they have found that which Allah *the Exalted* has promised them real–the True Lord has granted them this paradise. Have you found, O, people of hell, what your Lord has promised to be true as well?

We notice the following difference between the two styles, even though the contextual structure is the same: the people of paradise will say, '…We have found what our Lord promised us to be true ' (*al-A'raf:* 44), while in the second occurrence of 'promised' the pronoun 'you' is omitted, and the verb is made impersonal, 'Have you found what your Lord promised to be true?' (*al-A'raf:* 44)

Allah *the Exalted* says, 'what your Lord promised' without using the personal pronoun 'you' since the statement is intended to convey to them the promise in general, not given specifically to them alone, but also to others. In this way, the Absolute Promise of Allah comes to be fulfilled. The people of paradise, through their faith and righteous deeds, shall dwell in paradise by Allah's Grace, and the people of hell, through their disbelief and rebellion, shall dwell in hell as a punishment from Allah *the Almighty*.

At this point, the dwellers of hell will respond in the affirmative: 'Yes!' This is a confession from them of the real situation which they are experiencing; when before this, it has only been a warning. They will not react with arrogant denial. Arrogant denial can only occur between opponents over something that is not yet a matter of fact and reality. In this world, they used to deny Allah's Message and Warnings before their occurrence in real life. Now, they have transitioned into the Hereafter phase, and their entrance into Hell has become a reality.

'A voice will proclaim from their midst, "Allah's rejection [hangs] over the evildoers."' (*al-A'raf:* 44) This means that a caller from among the angels will cry out, within the hearing of both the people of Paradise and Hell, to proclaim that expulsion from Allah's Mercy is a deserved retribution against the evildoers who have wronged themselves by not having faith and by denying the Last Day.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَبۡغُونَهَا عِوَجٗا وَهُم بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ كَٰفِرُونَ ٤٥

those who turned others away from God’s path and tried to make it crooked, those who denied the Hereafter’ [45] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 45)

Those who turn people away from Allah’s Path are those who refuse to follow His Path, along with hindering people from reaching it. In short, they go astray themselves and then lead others astray. These people attempt to make Allah’s Path appear crooked, criticising it and not believing in it; they also object to the application of Islamic legal punishments and just retaliation. They try to make people averse to Allah’s Way, to completely turn them off religion. Therefore, they turn other people away from Allah’s Path and seek to make Allah’s Laws seem deviant, aiming to stir up aversion to what He has ordained. They do not stop at this point, but they also disbelieve in the Hereafter. Had any of them believed in the Hereafter and recognised that he would certainly return to Allah and would not have done such things.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَبَيۡنَهُمَا حِجَابٞۚ وَعَلَى ٱلۡأَعۡرَافِ رِجَالٞ يَعۡرِفُونَ كُلَّۢا بِسِيمَىٰهُمۡۚ وَنَادَوۡاْ
أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ أَن سَلَٰمٌ عَلَيۡكُمۡۚ لَمۡ يَدۡخُلُوهَا وَهُمۡ يَطۡمَعُونَ ٤٦

A barrier divides the two groups with men on its heights recognizing each group by their marks: they will call out to the people of the Garden, ‘Peace be with you!’– they will not have entered, but they will be hoping [46] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 46)

A barrier will stand between the people of Paradise and the people of Hell. They will see one another through it. The True Lord *the Most High* explains this by saying (in another verse): 'On the same Day, the hypocrites, both men and women, will say to the believers, "Wait for us! Let us have some of your light!" They will be told, "Go back and look for a light." A wall with a door will be erected between them: inside it lies mercy, outside lies torment.' (*al-Hadid:* 13)

The inner side of this barrier facing towards the people of Paradise will contain mercy, and the outer side, facing towards the people of Hell, will contain suffering. The True Lord is Able to do all things; therefore, the dwellers of Paradise will not feel any of the misery that afflicts the dwellers of Hell. Similarly, the people of Hell will not receive any of the joy bestowed on the dwellers of Paradise. The people of Hell will hear the response to their desire of getting some light from the dwellers of Paradise, 'You are seeking guidance in the wrong place. The time of fulfilling obligations has ended.' Anyone who wanted light in the Hereafter should have worked for it while living in this world. Light in the Hereafter cannot be given by one created being to another, but it is offered as a gift by the Creator to the created beings who have believed in Him. You say, 'Wait for us! Let us have some of your light.' However, the dwellers of Paradise cannot give away any of their light. Giving is in the power of Allah alone. 'A barrier divides the two groups with men on its heights, recognising each group by their marks ….' (*al-A'raf:* 46) 'Each group' denotes both the dwellers of Paradise and people of Hell. We have seen already two groups, the dwellers of Paradise, and those of Hell. There is a third group; those are who dwell on the Heights. The word *a'raf* (heights or high places) is the plural of *'uruf* that derives from the word meaning 'crest' or 'comb' like the one on top of a rooster's head or a horse's mane. It is as though between Paradise and Hell there is a high place like a crest, upon which stand another category of people who will recognise the dwellers of Paradise or the people of Hell, each by their distinctive marks. This implies that there are certain signs and marks that will distinguish the dwellers of Paradise from those of Hell.

How do these marks occur? It is said that when a person believes, he becomes worthy to acquire the marks of faith. The more the person proceeds in the Way of Allah by showing higher obedience and deference, the more He adds gracious marks to him which become indelible and inseparable from his identity. While on the contrary side, such marks of graciousness will be far removed from the people of hell. Instead, marks of hideousness, vileness and foulness will appear on them.

On seeing the dwellers of paradise, the people of the Heights will say to them, 'Peace be upon you!' because the ones of lower rank–the people of the Heights–will say to those of higher rank–the people of paradise–'Peace be upon you!'

The people of the Heights are the ones whose good and bad deeds, when weighed in the scales of divine justice, which do not do even an atom's weight of injustice, will be found equal. The Quran says: 'The one whose good deeds are heavy on the scales will have a pleasant life, but the one whose good deeds are light will have the Bottomless Pit for his home.' (*al-Qari`a:* 6-9)

O, Lord, you told us about the scales of justice and only specified two groups with respect to weighed deeds: a group whose scales shall be heavy and a second group whose scales shall be light. The logic of weighing dictates that there should be a third group whose good and bad deeds have equal weight. This means that their scales are neither heavy enough to neither send them to Paradise nor light enough to send them to Hell. Such people shall be waiting at the heights, while their deeds are presented to Allah's merciful consideration. It is amazing how, on seeing the dwellers of paradise, they shall say to them, 'Peace be upon you!' even though they themselves have not entered paradise; but they long to enter. Allah's Mercy precedes His Wrath.

'They will call out to the people of paradise, 'Peace be upon you!'— they will not have entered, but they will be hoping.' (*al-A'raf:* 46) In this place, there will be no cheating or deception.

What will the people of the Heights say when they look at the people of hell?

وَإِذَا صُرِفَتْ أَبْصَـٰرُهُمْ تِلْقَآءَ أَصْحَـٰبِ ٱلنَّارِ قَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا مَعَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

And when their glance falls upon the people of the Fire, they will say, 'Our Lord, do not let us join the evildoers!' [47]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 47)

By considering the Quranic phrase 'their glance falls upon' (*al-A'raf:* 47), we can determine that they will not turn their eyes of their own free will; being cursed, the sight of the dwellers of hell will be repugnant to them. Also, the expression 'their glance falls upon' carries a kind of reproof to the people of hell.

The saying of the True Lord: 'When their glance falls upon the people of the Fire …' (*al-A'raf:* 47) means in the direction of the dwellers of hell. At this sight, the people of the Heights will say, 'Our Lord, do not let us join the evildoers!' (*al-A'raf:* 47) The people of the Heights will thus supplicate to Allah *the Exalted* 'O, Lord, keep us far from being with them!' The horror of the punishment, when witnessed, shall make them beseech Allah and seek refuge in Him against entering Hell with them.

The True Lord *the Exalted* then says:

وَنَادَىٰٓ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡأَعۡرَافِ رِجَالٗا يَعۡرِفُونَهُم بِسِيمَٰهُمۡ قَالُواْ مَآ
أَغۡنَىٰ عَنكُمۡ جَمۡعُكُمۡ وَمَا كُنتُمۡ تَسۡتَكۡبِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

And the people of the heights will call out to certain men they recognize by their marks, 'What use were your great numbers and your false pride? [48] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 48)

It seems that when the eyes of the people of the Heights shall be turned towards the people of hell. They will see certain categories of sinners being punished, 'Look! There is Abu Jahl and Al-Walid, and along with them is Umayya ibn Khalaf and other chiefs who thought that their leadership of their societies and their authority above other people gave them absolute power and superiority. They used to mock those who first entered Islam such as `Ammar, Bilal, Suhayb, Khabbab *Allah be pleased with them* and other believers who lived with and for the truth. The people of the Heights will say to these people, 'What use were your great numbers and your false pride?' (*al-A'raf:* 48)

It is as though they are saying to them, 'Your misguided alliance during your worldly lives have availed you nothing. Your devils, idols, statues, and influence did not benefit you, nor did your haughty rejection of the call to faith. What use were they? Did they bring you any benefit? No, you benefited nothing from them.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

أَهَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ٱلَّذِينَ أَقۡسَمۡتُمۡ لَا يَنَالُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِرَحۡمَةٍۚ ٱدۡخُلُواْ
ٱلۡجَنَّةَ لَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَلَآ أَنتُمۡ تَحۡزَنُونَ ٤٩

**And are these the people you swore God would never bless?
[Now these people are being told], “Enter the Garden! No
fear for you, nor shall you grieve” [49] (*al-A’raf:* 49)**

The people of the Heights will then point to the true believers such as Bilal and Khabbab, and say to the people of hell, such as Abu Jahl and Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, Are these righteous inhabitants of paradise, the ones about whom you used to say that they would never attain Allah’s Mercy?’ In this manner, the people of the Heights will engage in a comparison between the people of Paradise and the people of Hell during which it seems that they will be distracted from their own state of waiting for relief. They rejoice in the success of the dwellers of Paradise and reproach the people of Hell. Their preoccupation with their own position will not prevent them from taking this decisive stand. At this juncture, the True Lord *the Exalted* will allow the people of the Heights to enter His Paradise because of their feeling joy for the dwellers of Paradise and their reproach to the people of Hell. So He will say to them: 'Enter Paradise! No fear for you, nor shall you grieve.' (*al-A’raf:* 49) As we have said, these are the people whose bad deeds are equal to their good deeds. They are the ones who will be waiting at the Heights. Their good deeds are not heavy enough to make them deserve Paradise, nor are their bad deeds heavy enough to make them deserve Hell.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَنَادَىٰٓ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ أَنۡ أَفِيضُواْ عَلَيۡنَا مِنَ ٱلۡمَآءِ أَوۡ
مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُۚ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ حَرَّمَهُمَا عَلَى ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ٥٠

**The people of the Fire will call to the people of Paradise,
‘Give us some water, or any of the sustenance God has
granted you!’ and they will reply, ‘God has forbidden both
to the disbelievers [50] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 50)**

The people of Hell will then call out to the dwellers of Paradise pleading them to give and pour on them some water or any of the provisions that Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed on them in Paradise. However, the dwellers of Paradise will say, 'We are now linked with Allah’s Word "Be!" We no longer have choice (to give or refrain from giving). Allah has forbidden you anything from Paradise and prevented their reaching you. You are denied this, O, people of Hell, or such bounties are barred from you.' What the people of Hell are asking for is quite basic–water–while they dwell in 'a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides. If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

The True Lord further says about the disbelievers who will be deprived of the bounties of paradise:

ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُوا۟ دِينَهُمْ لَهْوًا وَلَعِبًا وَغَرَّتْهُمُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۚ فَٱلْيَوْمَ
نَنسَىٰهُمْ كَمَا نَسُوا۟ لِقَآءَ يَوْمِهِمْ هَـٰذَا وَمَا كَانُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

Those who took their religion for distraction, a mere game, and were deluded by worldly life.’ Today We shall ignore them, just as they have ignored their meeting with this Day and denied Our Revelations [51] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 51)

Through this noble verse, the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* explains to us who are the disbelievers who will be denied paradise. They are those who did not take their religion seriously, but merely as play and pastime. The first stage which a person passes through is *la`ib* (play), and then he moves on to the stage of *lahu* (futile pastime and amusement). We know that every action has behind it an active energy that is directed to perform it. Before this active energy is directed towards it, this action passes through the mind to specify the purpose of the effort. This purpose has specifications; either it will achieve some benefit or ward off some harm. Every purpose or intention that neither brings benefit nor wards off harm is considered play.

Therefore, the definition of *la`ib* is an act where the performer does not intend by doing such an act to achieve a proper objective that may ward off harm or bring about benefit, just as children play with their toys. When the child grasps his toy gun or toy car, does he have a proper intention towards which to direct his energy? No, because if he had a proper intention, a child would not break any of his toys. Children usually break their toys after a while which shows that they are directing their energy towards an improper intention, neither bringing themselves benefit and nor warding harm from themselves. When energy is directed to something useless, this is futile pastime such as when you should do a certain task, but instead you divert your energy to something else.

What incurs Allah's punishment is indulgence in useless amusement, not playing. Therefore, we find that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exhorted parents to train their children to engage in useful sport that can benefit their community such as swimming, archery and horseback riding. However, the problem in our time is that people have made playing games a goal in itself. It is amazing how games now have serious laws, which no one can break without being punished. The referee watches the players during the game carefully. If he overlooks a rule or makes a mistake, the spectators become outraged. I ask you that you have adopted serious laws and transferred them to sport, so why have you left truly serious matters without laws?

We find that the adverse effects of indulging in trivial delights are enormous. A person who indulges in trivial pastime puts aside important work in favour of unimportant activities. Therefore, he sits playing backgammon and neglects the work that provides his livelihood. Trivial amusement not only harms the one who indulges in it, but it also attracts the attention of other people to it and it wastes their time, too. Instead, their time should have been used to perform a beneficial action. Corruption of all societies is caused by some of their members misusing their energy in ways that bring no good for themselves and nor for their community. Thus, useless pastime is an abuse along with being a waste of one's energy. 'Those who took their religion for distraction, a mere game, and were deluded by worldly life' (*al-A'raf:* 51).

Their beguilement by the attractiveness of worldly life has originated from their misuse of the means that Allah *the Almighty* has placed at their disposal, so that each of them has believed himself to be the supreme master. When the life of this world deceived them, they forgot the diligent work that was required to lead them to the eternal beneficial goal. Their requital for this shall be as Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Today We shall ignore them, just as they have ignored their meeting with this Day and denied Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations).' (*al-A'raf:* 51) When Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Today We shall ignore them', does this mean that He shall leave them to do as they please? No, rather, hell will devour them and burn them. Disregarding them here signifies that Allah *the Exalted* will not include them in His Care, Kindness, and Mercy. Instead, He will abandon them to hellfire which will blacken their faces and scorch their skin.

Once again it is affirmed that this world is the arena through which a person constructs his place in the Hereafter. If he wants a place in the Highest paradise, he must fulfil the duties that will earn him a place there. If he wants a lesser degree, he will perform less work. It is as though the human, by his deeds, can assign himself his own place in the Hereafter. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not reward people arbitrarily, falsely or unjustly; rather, He repays each person according to his deeds. This is the reason why there are dwellers of Paradise, people of Hell and people of the Heights. The knowledge which the True Lord has sent down to us in the form of Quranic revelations, giving us warnings and glad tidings, is a guide for every Muslim. It should urge us to compete with one another for the attainment of honourable positions in the Hereafter.

'Those who took their religion for distraction, a mere game, and were deluded by worldly life, today We shall ignore them, just as they have ignored their meeting with this Day and denied Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations).' (*al-A'raf:* 51) The word *ayat* is from the saying of the True Lord '… and denied Our *Ayat* (proofs, signs or revelations)…' (*al-A'raf:* 51) can either denote cosmic signs, as in the verse stating, 'The night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His *Ayat* (signs)…' (*Fussilat:* 37), or it can denote the divine revelations, as in the verse stating, 'a Scripture whose *Ayat* (verses) are made distinct as a Quran…' (*Fussilat:* 3). It can also mean the miracles that prove and support the position of a prophet, as in the verse saying: 'Nothing prevents Us from sending miraculous signs, except the fact that previous peoples denied them.' (*al-Isra':* 59)

The people of past generations denied all forms of *ayat*, whether cosmic signs or revelations. They first denied the cosmic signs which they saw and lived through, even before they were entrusted with duties from Allah *the Exalted*. They experienced day and night, breathed air, enjoyed the warmth of the sun, and benefitted from the rain that watered their lands. They saw how the universe was orderly and uniform providing humans with their needs even before their perceptions and powers became active. These signs should have pointed them to the fact that they must have a Creator–the Sole, True, Supreme Lord. Then, when the successive Messengers came to them with miraculous signs and wonders proving their veracity as Messengers of Allah, they also denied them. Finally, when the Quran came as a miracle in its own right, they denied its elucidating verses that conveyed to them Allah’s Way. This left them without excuse. In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ جِئۡنَٰهُم بِكِتَٰبٖ فَصَّلۡنَٰهُ عَلَىٰ عِلۡمٍ هُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٗ لِّقَوۡمٖ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

We have brought people a Scripture – We have explained it on the basis of true knowledge – as guidance and mercy for those who believe[52] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 52)

What this means is that they have no excuse for this denial since the Scripture was clearly spelled out. They might say, ‘The Scripture came to us suddenly out of nowhere, as did the Messenger who brought it.’ Therefore, what do they have to say about the firm signs of the universe for they denied these, too? We have brought people a Scripture—We have explained it on the basis of true knowledge—as guidance and mercy for those who believe (*al-A’raf:* 52).

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not send down discourse which was abstract or vague, rather, the Scriptures contain spelled-out details from the All-Knowing and All-Wise Who clarified His rulings, meanings, counsels and stories so that the Scriptures were straight and not crooked; and He *Glorified is He* has the power to reveal a way which is appropriate for the standards and circumstances of every person.

When a person comes to us to ask us about anything, trying to twist his words so that we give him a legal opinion which justifies for him what he is already doing, we say to him, 'We do not have case-by-case legal opinions since there are ones we have are already prepared, and you can apply your question to any legal one of them.' 'We have brought people a Scripture—We have explained it on the basis of true knowledge—as guidance and mercy for those who believe.' (*al-A'raf:* 52)

There are people who heard the Quran, saw the signs, and were therefore guided. So, why were these ones guided whilst others went astray? The ones who believed were those who had faith in the existence of the Higher Power, as we said when we looked at the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'That is the Book; there is no suspicion about it; a guidance to the pious.' (*al-Baqara:* 2)

Therefore, those who were guided to the truth believed in the Quran, and some of them the True Lord *Glorified is He* described by saying that when they hear it, their eyes flow with tears. Also, there are also people whose hearts are not touched by faith when they listen to the Quran: 'Now among those [hapless sinners] are such as [pretend to] listen to thee, [O Muhammad,] and then, as soon as they leave thy presence, speak [with scorn] unto those who have understood [thy message], "What is it that he has said just now?…"' (*Muhammad:* 16) These are the ones whose hearts have become hard so that the light of the Quran cannot enter or become mixed with them, which is why we find that the True Lord *the Exalted* answers them by saying: '… It is such as these whose hearts Allah has sealed because they [always] followed but their own lusts.' (*Muhammad:* 16)

Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* says, 'Say: "Unto all who have attained to faith, this [Book] is a guidance and a source of health, but as for those who will not believe, in their ears is deafness, and so it remains obscure to them…' (*Fussilat:* 44). We gave the example of how the exact same action can be done in different situations, but those who receive the action differ from one another, so the end result is different. For example, if you go outside in winter and find the weather cold, you feel as if your fingertips will freeze due to the coldness. You may cup your hands together and blow into them, doing this spontaneously to warm your hands up. Likewise, when you are given a very hot cup of tea and you want to drink from it, you blow unto it to cool it down. The breath which is blown from your mouth is the same, but it brings warmth to your hands and coolness to the cup of tea; so the action is one, but the results are different. The same is the case of the Quran: those who are prepared for faith are guided by it, whilst those who are not prepared have hearts develop ones hardened to faith.

The attitude of those who are unable to receive Allah's Mercy is unnatural. What are they waiting for after this disbelief, and this oppression, and this arrogance, and this refusal, and after taking their religion lightly? What are they waiting for? The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells them what the result of their actions will be:

هَلْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُۥ ۚ يَوْمَ يَأْتِى تَأْوِيلُهُۥ يَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِن قَبْلُ قَدْ
جَآءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِٱلْحَقِّ فَهَل لَّنَا مِن شُفَعَآءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا۟ لَنَآ أَوْ نُرَدُّ فَنَعْمَلَ غَيْرَ
ٱلَّذِى كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ ۚ قَدْ خَسِرُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

What are they waiting for but the fulfilment of its [final prophecy]? On the Day it is fulfilled, those who had ignored it will say, 'Our Lord's messenger spoke the truth. Is there anyone to intercede for us now? Or can we be sent back to behave differently from the way we behaved before?' They will really have squandered their souls, and all [the idols] they invented will have deserted them [53] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 53)

What does *ta'wil* (final meaning) mean? *Ta'wil* means 'that to which a thing returns'; it is the final result after which the truth comes. Thus, mercy and Paradise will be for those who had faith, and Hell will be for those who disbelieved. Furthermore, the True Lord *the Almighty* is the One Who speaks here and has the power to make His Words come to pass, for the whole universe is in His hand.

In this verse, He *Glorified is He* says, 'Are [the disbelievers] but waiting for the final meaning of that [Day of Judgment] to unfold? ...' (*al-A'raf:* 53) Does this mean that are they waiting for anything but the final return which will be the day when their deeds return to them? Their final return will lead to suffering after the Reckoning on the Day in which will come the final end, destination, and consequences of their actions. When the Day of Resurrection comes and the truth comes out, and the veracity of the promises and warnings which the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought comes to light, what will they say? They will say what He *Glorified is He* tells us they will say: '… those who previously had been oblivious thereof will say, "Our Lord's Messengers have indeed told us the truth! ..."' (*al-A'raf:* 53)

Basically, they will announce their belief now that this belief cannot avail them in aught since they will no longer be in the realm of moral responsibility; they will agree to have faith that now can no longer benefit them. '… Those who previously had been oblivious thereof will say, "Our Lord's Messengers have indeed told us the truth! Have we, then, any intercessors who could intercede in our behalf? ..."' (*al-A'raf:* 53) Therefore, they will acknowledge that the Messengers indeed conveyed the true Way of Allah, and they will ask if they have any intercessors. We know that an intercessor must be loved by the one to whom he intercedes, and in this world, we find people searching for someone who can intercede for them with a person of high standing who is influential with, and dear to; this person of high standing, or who has always listened to him or has done him favours so that he will not refuse to listen to him now. Thus, who will come on the Day of Resurrection and intercede for these people? No one will, and we will find them trying to take as intercessors those whom they had set up as rivals to Allah, yet these beings will also announce their hatred of them. Even if Allah gave them the right to intercede, they would not give their intercession to disbelievers and idolaters. In this world, such people exploited mankind and misled them, whilst on the Day of Resurrection no one will be subject to anyone else's will, and even the body parts will not obey their owner's will, rather, they will obey the True Lord *the Most High*. In the Hereafter, there will be no free will for anyone.

We gave an example before by supposing that there is a platoon of an army under a junior commander with the rank of officer, and the soldiers of the platoon are expected to do as he says, and then they take their position and the junior officer gives them flawed commands. Since they are subject to his will, they do what he commands them to do. When they return and the high commander accounts them for their actions, they will say, 'We did as we were told by the officer entrusted with our command.' Likewise, on the Day of Resurrection, the body parts will come forward, and the hands, feet tongues, and skin will testify against their owners. So, the body parts will raise their complaints with Allah on the Day when no one will have ownership over anyone else, and on that Day, the deniers will announce belief which will not benefit them: '…Our Lord's Messengers have indeed told us the truth! ...'" (*al-A'raf:* 53). Likewise, they will look for intercession, but they will not find it; rather, the first people to scorn those who worshipped beings other than Allah will be the very ones which they worshipped.

This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '[Then they will be told:] "Verily, you and all that you [were wont to] worship instead of Allah are but the fuel of hell: that is what you are destined for."' (*al-Anbiya':* 98) What is the sin of those who were worshipped? The idols are blameless; indeed, each of them wishes to save itself by being the instrument of torment for those who ascribed something to it which did not rightfully belong to it. This is why we find that the stones which were worshipped will say, 'They worshipped us, yet we worshipped Allah even more than those who stand in prayer in the watches of the night. Thus, the one who prays in the watches of the night is subject to fluctuations and might choose to do other than this, yet we were compelled to obey Allah, and they took our silence as consent.'

The stones will announce that they did not have the power to refuse anyone worshipping them nor to ward him off; therefore, they will inform him of his foolishness.

A poet said:

They blamed us ignorantly, just as they blamed
The Son of Mary and the Apostles;
The deluded will be requited; as for the object
Of their delusion: the mercy of the All-Forgiving will save them.

Thus, the truth will be plainly shown to them on the Day of Resurrection. They will ask to be sent back to this world, and this will be a failure, for this kind of admission is not faith since faith applies to the unseen, not the seen. Furthermore, even if they went back, they would not have faith, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and if they were brought back [to life], they would return to the very thing which was forbidden to them …' (*al-An'am:* 28). It is as though they will forget, when they make their admission, that they are subject to fluctuations, and Allah’s final judgment will be rendered upon them: '… Indeed, they will have squandered their own selves, and all their false imagery will have forsaken them.' (*al-A’raf:* 53)

They squandered themselves after having been forsaken by all that they had falsely ascribed to Allah in their worldly lives. They refused to worship Him *Glorified is He* and instead worshipped idols which will become the fuel of the fire into which they will be cast.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says,

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ
عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ يُغْشِى ٱلَّيْلَ ٱلنَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُۥ حَثِيثًا وَٱلشَّمْسَ وَٱلْقَمَرَ وَٱلنُّجُومَ
مُسَخَّرَٰتٍۭ بِأَمْرِهِۦٓ ۗ أَلَا لَهُ ٱلْخَلْقُ وَٱلْأَمْرُ ۗ تَبَارَكَ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and earth in six Days, then established Himself on the throne; He makes the night cover the day in swift pursuit; He created the sun, moon, and stars to be subservient to His command; all creation and command belong to Him. Exalted be God, Lord of all the worlds! [54] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 54)

There is Lordship (*rububiyya*) and Divinity (*uluhiyya*): 'your Lord is Allah'. No one differs about the matter of Lordship since the True Lord *Glorified is He* says of the disbelievers and idolaters: 'And thus it is [with most people]: if thou ask them, “Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?” They will surely answer, “Allah”…' (*az-Zumar:* 38). Likewise if you ask them who created them, they will say, ‘Allah’, and no one ever claimed the matter of Lordship for himself since it was Lordship that benefitted them. As for Divinity, it brought them the way of ‘Do’s and ‘Dont’s’ since moral responsibility comes from The Lord, Allah, and responsibility is a blessing from Him for your own good, and no part of responsibility benefits Allah. Your good or bad deeds do not give Allah *the Exalted* an attribute He did not already have since His Attributes of Perfection are what brought you into being. If you are in doubt of this Lordship, then your Lord is Allah. Allah *the Almighty* is beyond compare and is absolved above resembling anything. For example, it is like when a mother says to her son, ‘Your father told you not to stay out late at night,’ and the son refuses. Thus, the mother warns him, ‘Your father is the one who brings you food, drink, and clothing, along with giving you pocket money’, and so on.

I gave this example to explain that the One Who assigns moral responsibilities is the Provider, and no one besides Him provides. Due to this, you should accept the responsibilities He assigned you since He already extended His Grace to you by providing for you and subduing the world for your service.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* previously gave us details of the creation of man, and also He gave us details of the creation of the sky and the earth; also, the space in which man lives is composed of the sky and the earth, and all good things come to him from them. If Allah *the Exalted* told us how He created us before, in this verse, He tells us how He created the sky and the earth, and the creation of man and the creation of the sky and the earth are two matters which modern science concerns itself about. There are scientists who say that the earth detached from the sun, and there are those who propagate the theory that man originated from apes. To these people, we say the following: 'This verdict of yours in unacceptable since you did not witness the act of creation. Therefore, you should listen to the One Who created all things when He tells you how He created them.' Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, your Lord is Allah Who has created the heavens and the earth in six days, and He is established on the throne of His almightiness. He covers the day with the night in swift pursuit, with the sun and the moon and the stars subservient to His command. Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command. Blessed is Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!' (*al-A’raf:* 54)

The verse is concerned with the first creation, namely that of the heavens and the earth, which as I made clear is the existential background for man, the vicegerent of Allah. Furthermore, man was placed into this universe with all of the power and natural laws which it contained. It is as though Allah *the Exalted* prepared the universe for His vicegerent before he was created, so that he would come and find the universe subdued for his service and that nothing within it could evade the Will of Allah for it. 'Verily, your Lord is Allah Who has created …' (*al-A’raf:* 54).

The meaning of ‘create’ is to bring into being something which did not previously exist or to form something without any prior example on which to base it. Our Lord *Glorified is He* measured everything out with a precise arrangement with no precedent; this is the meaning of ‘creation'. The subject of the Arabic word *khalq* (creation) is *khaliq* ‘creator’, and Allah *Glorified is He* uses this word in the plural form even though there is really only One Creator, saying: '…Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of *khaliqin* (creators)!' (*al-Mu’minun:* 14) Thus, there is the Highest Creator, Allah, but He included creators other than Himself *the Exalted* in these words, saying, '… Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu’minun:* 14) How could this be? It is due to the fact that 'creation' means to bring something into being which did not exist before. For example, the one who made the microphone is said to have ‘created’ it, the one who made the cup is said to have ‘created' it and the one who made the lamp is said to have ‘created’ it; this is so because it did not itself exist until he brought it into being. However, the difference is that a human creator makes something which did not exist by using existing materials; he does not create new material. The one who takes pre-existing materials and makes a lamp from them, by melting sand and blowing air into the glass, is said to have ‘created’ the lamp and brought something non-existent into existence by using pre-existing things.

The Creator, on the other hand, is the best of creators since He creates out of nothing; He also does not prevent His creatures, if they bring something non-existent into existence, from being called ‘creators’, though when He *Glorified is He* creates, He creates out of nothing. Also, when you create any product, it remains frozen in the form in which it was made. For example, if someone makes a glass from smelted sand, the glass remains as it is; as I said long ago, we cannot make a ‘male’ glass and a ‘female’ glass, and put them together, and then ask them to procreate little glasses for us. However, our Lord gives the spirit which is the secret of life to the things He creates and makes it so they can procreate, develop, and grow according to natural laws. Therefore, He is the best of creators.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us information about His creation of the heavens and the earth. Thus, He *Glorified is He* clarified to us that there are seven heavens which are stated in the plural form, while the earth is stated in the singular form. Yet, He *the Exalted* said in another verse: 'Allah is He Who has created seven heavens, and, like them, [the many aspects] of the earth…' (*at-Talaq:* 12). Therefore, just as He created seven heavens, He created seven earths. So, why does He state the word 'heavens' in the plural form in this verse while leaving the word 'earth' in the singular form? Why did He not say 'and seven earths'? It is due to the fact that the word *aradin* (earths) is difficult to say, so He left it because of its heaviness and gave 'heavens' in the plural because of its lightness and easy pronunciation.

A 'sky' or 'heaven' (*sama'*) is everything which is above, covering you; this is the lexical meaning of *sama*', but is the sky to which Allah *the Exalted* refers to in this verse meant to mean everything above you? Stars are also above, and it could be said that the sun and the moon are likewise above. We shall make the point of saying to those who like to include the celestial bodies in the meaning of 'sky' that they are not always above us, since the sun is sometimes above and other times below as is the moon. Therefore, this attribute applies to the sun or the moon only some of the time, but neither of them can be thought of as being part of the sky all the time. Another point is that when they said, of the seven planets which were known to them, that they constituted the sky, by doing this they fell into error. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has since made it known to us that the sun has other bodies orbiting around it; scientists at one point believed there to be eight planets, and at another point, they believed there to be nine, while at another point, they believed there to be ten. In this way, the notion that the planets represented the seven heavens was refuted; thus, the sky remains that which is above all of this. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, We have adorned the skies nearest to the earth with the beauty of stars.' (*as-Saffat:* 6)

This, therefore, is an adornment of the sky nearest the earth, and the sky which our Lord intends is not the same one which they are speaking of. Rather, the sky is another creation which no one can ever reach. The jinns used to dwell there to listen: '… and anyone who now [or ever] tries to listen will [likewise] find a flame lying in wait for him.' (*al-Jinn:* 9) This happened after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, and it was the True

Lord *the Almighty* who told us of this. The True Lord *the Exalted* did not tell us of the true reality of this sky and its order which means that our Lord did not want our minds to understand anything more than this. He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the sky above us, and He *the Exalted* is also the Creator of the earths. Where are these earths? Are they scattered here and there?

Science has confirmed that every galaxy contains millions of solar systems, and every solar system contains an ‘earth’; so, there are many earths. Also, we can observe that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about the earth, everyone is addressed according to the earth which they are upon; for this reason, some of the scholars have said that in the greater universe there are many earths, and to every earth, the True Lord *the Almighty* sent a messenger. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And among His signs is the [very] creation of the heavens and the earth, and of all the living creatures which He has caused to multiply throughout them, and [since He has created them,] He has [also] the power to gather them [unto Himself] whenever He wills.' (*ash-Shura:* 29)

Every day science brings us more discoveries. Therefore, the sky is everything which is above you, and the earth is everything which is below you. Likewise, as long as there are seven heavens, the first heaven is a huge void and space, and after it comes the second heaven which covers the first one, and every heaven contains an earth and another heaven. Also, we are not responsible for knowing this; we are only responsible for knowing that the earth upon which we live was created by Allah *the Almighty*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says that He '… created the heavens and the earth in six days …' (*al-A’raf:* 54). When He says 'six days', this was the time which the act of creation took. We know that the word *yawm* (day) means the period of time which lasts from sunrise to sunset and then to sunrise again, lasting twenty-four hours. However, we must examine some of the True Lord’s Quranic uses of language.

He *the Exalted* says, '… Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day.' (*Saba’:* 18) Therefore, there is night and day, so a day for the True Lord *Glorified is He* is not the same as a day for us since we use this word to mean the time between sunrise and sunset, and then sunrise again. Therefore, according to the convention of astronomy, a ‘day’ is from sunrise to sunrise, or from sunset to sunset. Allah’s Words '… Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day' (*Saba’:* 18) mean that He *Glorified is He* has made night time one division and daytime another. Likewise, did anyone know of days until the sun existed? If the sun is what defines day, how could day have been known before it, especially since at the time the heavens and earth were created, there was no sun nor were any celestial bodies? We must be aware that this is His measure, and He spoke of it to us after we had come to know the length of a day. Have you read that Allah *Glorified is He* says, '… and there will they have their sustenance by day and by night' (*Maryam:* 62), even though there will be no day or night in the Hereafter? Therefore He *the Almighty* measured out both day and night; and the same is with the case of 'six days'. The decisive verses of the Quran which deal with the matter of the time of creation state that it was six days; yet in the verse which gives the details of the act of creation, it appears at first glance that there were eight days. Read with me:

'Say: “Would you indeed deny Him Who has created the earth in two days? Also, do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?” For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it [and all this He created] in four days. Also, He [it is who] applied His design to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke, and He [it is who] said to them and to the earth, “Come [into being], both of you, willingly or unwillingly!” – to which both responded, “We do come in obedience.” He [it is Who] decreed that they become seven heavens in two days …' (*Fussilat:* 9-12).

The apparent implication of these detailed verses is that eight days were involved, while the verses which mention the matter generally say that it was six days. The orientalists have used this point to falsely claim that the Quran contains an inconsistency trying to make this into a big point of contention. We say that Allah *Glorified is He* created the earth and all within it in exactly four days, no more and no less, which means that this happened and was completed in a total of four days. Then, Allah added two days for the creation of the heavens, so the total number of days in which the heavens and earth were created was six. Or, we can explain the detailed verse by using the general verse; when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, your Lord is Allah Who has created the heavens and the earth in six days …' (*al-A'raf:* 54), does His creation require extra effort so much so that an extended amount of time would be needed? Our Lord creates with the word ‘Be’, whilst we humans must expend effort, according to our powers, to create something, and everything we do takes time. However, for the One Who creates with ‘Be’, the matter is quite easy for Him *Glorified is He,* but then why does He state that it took six days to complete the act of creation?

We know that there is a difference between the birth of something and the preparations for its birth. We gave the example before – and Allah is beyond compare – of the yogurt manufacturer who takes cups of warm milk and puts special yeast in them and then leaves the cups in the appropriate temperature. Does this man have to work on each cup for twelve hours, which is the time required for the milk to turn? Of course he does not; it is enough that each cup contains the right ingredients to ferment which react with one another until they are done.

Consider the creation of the embryo from the meeting of the egg and the sperm, and this creation takes nine months. Allah *the Exalted* does not need nine months of work to create the embryo; rather, He leaves it to go through the stages of development.

Therefore, Allah’s creation of the heavens and earth in six days does not mean that during these six days He was continuously busy with the act of creation; rather, He said ‘Be!’ and then left the constituent parts of the heavens and earth to go through their development and their stages since their ‘birth’ would take place after six days. There is a verse in the Quran which alludes to this theory when He *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, and [that] no weariness could ever touch Us.' (*Qaf:* 38) This means that He *the Exalted* created the heavens and the earth without becoming tired since He did not need to put forth any effort into the act of creation since all it took was His word ‘Be!’, and the heavens and the earth came into existence. Likewise, the verse which comes directly after this one says: 'bear with patience whatever they may say ...' (*Qaf:* 39). It is as though His Words in this verse were meant to console the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and to clarify to him, 'They call you a liar, and you might desire that We seize them with all Our might and power. However, the True Lord *the Almighty* has ordained a record for everything, and He created the heavens and the earth in six days.' Thus, we too, in our daily lives, say to those who are impatient, 'Sir, even our Lord created the heavens and the earth in six days, so do not rush things!'

Therefore, our Lord was quite able to complete the creation of the heavens and the earth in a single moment, but He gave the command 'Be!' and then left the components to react with one another for six days. Why should we not say that He did all this to teach us to be methodical, and not to rush things? Although He was able to bring forth the heavens and the earth in a single moment, He created them in six days. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'bear with patience whatever they may say …' (*Qaf:* 39). This means that do not overburden yourself since He *the Exalted* created the heavens and the earth in six days, and to these deniers shall come the Day when they shall be taken to task for their evil deeds; it will certainly come.

There are those who ask, 'How did Allah *the Almighty* create the universe with all the mountains and beings within it?' We reply, 'It was with the creative, single act of which He has informed us, and then the beings reacted to His Power a single time, after which numerous chains of reactions took place in everything addressed by His Power, in every aspect of the action. Also, this took place over six days, after which things settled and became stable.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '… and is established on the throne of His almightiness …' (*al-A'raf:* 54). We must be aware of what a 'throne' is. He *the Almighty* says of the Queen of Sheba: '… and hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 23). A throne, then, is the seat of a monarch since he only sits on his throne after his affairs are settled. It is as though His Words '… and is established on the throne of His Almightiness…' (*al-A'raf:* 54) are allusions to the fact that everything was completed and that He created them, and that was that. However, when the scholars came to the word 'established' (*istawa'*), they differed as to how to understand it; if the throne were a chair upon which Allah *the Almighty* sat, this would imply that He was contained and that He was placed and enclosed in some kind of body. The truth is that He is absolved above all such things, for He cannot be contained. This is why the scholars started to look for appropriate meanings for the word 'established'. Some of them said that it means that He fixed His intent upon it by creating it and forming it; others say that it means His affair is lofty and high; others said that it means His commandment was raised to the heavens, using His following Words as evidence: 'And He [it is who] applied His design (in Arabic this is also *istawa'*) to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke ….' (*Fussilat:* 11)

All of these meanings are close to one another. Other scholars wanted to avoid making any comparisons with Allah *the Exalted* so they said that 'established' means that He took control of all existence, therefore asserting that the concept of the throne and one's sitting on it are symbols of the stability of a monarch. In order that we avoid entering both the labyrinth of making comparisons with Allah and the labyrinth of corrupting the text, we must understand everything which is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He* in the light of His words: '… There is nothing like unto Him …' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Therefore, when He *Glorified is He* says, '… The hand of Allah is over their hands …' (*al-Fath:* 10), we understand that the word 'hand' has a recognised meaning, and Allah *Glorified is He* addresses us in the Quran in the Arabic language; therefore, this statement that Allah has a hand means that He has Power, and Allah's use of the word 'hand' here is a symbol of His Power. One must take everything which Allah *the Almighty* ascribes to Himself, but which is also possessed by man in the light of 'there is nothing like unto Him', so we say that He *the Exalted* has a hand, but it is not like a man's hand; He has being, but it is not like a man's being; He has an eye, but it is not like a man's eye; He has a face, but it is not like a man's face. This is why when our master Imam Malik *Allah be pleased with him* was asked about this matter, he said, '[Allah's] establishment is known, but the mode of it is unknown. To ask about it is heresy, and I see that you are an ill-intentioned man!' Indeed, it is heresy to ask about it since it takes us into the labyrinths of either making comparisons with Allah or else corrupting His Words. Did any of the Companions ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about this 'establishment'? No, they did not since they understood the meaning, and no part of its meaning was unclear in their minds so that they would find it necessary to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. They understood it by the natural disposition upon which Allah *the Exalted* had placed them, in the light of that which befits His Majesty and Perfection.

If someone says, 'Did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* know what it meant, or not?' Had he known it, he would have told us of it; yet, if he did not tell us, he might have wanted to conceal it from us. Also, if he did not know it, do you seek to know yourself that which the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not know? Or, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* left everyone to understand what they wanted, but in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Those who seek to forbid any interpretation say, 'Beware of interpreting the 'hand" to mean "power", for if He said that He has a hand, say that it is not like our hands in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). Allah *Glorified is He* has life, and you have life, but is His life like yours? No, it is not; so why should you make His hand like your hand? We must approach every attribute of Allah's by refraining from explaining it away and also refraining from comparing Allah to His creation. We also say to all those who seek to forbid interpretation: You will be forced to interpret in the end since the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…Everything is bound to perish, except His face…' (*al-Qasas:* 88).

As long as '…Everything is bound to perish except His face…' (*al-Qasas:* 88), this means that all which can be called a 'thing' will perish and only His face will remain. If you were to say that 'face' here means 'face' in its usual sense, this would mean that His hand will perish, His foot will perish and His breast will perish – and far be it for this to happen to Allah! Doing as such, you enter a labyrinth which has no exit. For this reason we say, 'Let us take the text and place it in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). Verses about this 'establishment on the throne' occur in several chapters, and specifically in seven places: the verse in the chapter *al-A'raf* which we are currently examining and in the chapters of *Yunus*, *ar-Ra'd*, *Ta Ha*, *al-Furqan*, *as-Sajda* and *al-Hadid*.

In the verse being discussed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after speaking about His establishment on the throne: 'He covers the day with the night.' (*al-A'raf:* 54)

Allah *Glorified is He* created the heavens and the earth for His vicegerent on earth and prepared for him therein the essential needs of life; He showed him how to get what he needs; thus, what would this vicegerent do then? He would inevitably seek out all the essential constituents of life, and when he worked, he would expend his utmost effort; however, effort necessitates rest. He who works for an hour must rest for an hour, and if he works for two hours and does not rest for an hour, he will be overwhelmed. We see that a machine that works three shifts a day, that is, for twenty-four hours without stopping wears out before the machine that works only two shifts. However, the machine that works only one shift, that is eight hours, lasts the longest. Everyone needs rest, so the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to explain to us that night and day follow one another for this very purpose: 'For it is out of His Grace that He has made for you the night and the day, so that you might rest therein as well as seek to obtain [what you need] of His bounty …' (*al-Qasas:* 73). What this means is that you can rest by night and seek Allah’s bounty by day, but if you were not to rest at night, you will not be able to do any activity. One of the necessary actions of Allah’s vicegerent on the earth is to make time for rest and time for work; thus, He *Glorified is He* clarifies for us, ‘I created night and day, and made night a time of repose’, i.e. a time of rest and inactivity. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…He covers the day with the night…' (*al-A’raf:* 54). What this means is that day also covers night, and we spoke before about how the fact that night and day follow one another is a proof that the earth is a sphere. 'And He it is who causes the night and the day to succeed one another, [revealing Himself in His works] unto him who has the will to take thought – that is, has the will to be grateful.' (*al-Furqan:* 62)

Night follows day and day follows night. For example, it might be day in Egypt, whilst it is night in another land at the same time. If you were to follow the chain back to the very first day and the very first night to find out which one came first, you will never figure it out since they are each a successor of the other. If the earth was created to be flat and the sun was created to face the flat surface of the earth, this would mean that day was created first and then night followed it. On the other hand, if the sun had been created so that it did not face the flat surface of the earth, this would mean that night would have been first, and then the sun would have risen above the surface to make day. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted night and day to each follow the other, and this could only be the case if Allah created night and day at the same time. Therefore, the earth had to be a sphere, in order that day would cover the part facing the sun, and night would cover the part facing away from the sun. Likewise, as the earth turns, night follows day and day follows night: 'And He it is who causes the night and the day to succeed one another, [revealing Himself in His works] unto him who has the will to take thought – that is, has the will to be grateful.' (*al-Furqan:* 62) Further, He says 'He covers the day with the night', and He also covers the night with the day; this is left unsaid because of other verses, including that in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… nor can the night usurp the time of day…' (*Ya Sin:* 40). Basically, night cannot overtake day nor can day overtake night; this shows that they were created at the same time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… with the sun and the moon and the stars subservient to His command. Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command …' (*al-A'raf:* 54). Therefore, none of these creations has the freedom to choose whether to act or not to act, rather, they are all subservient. Thus, you find that the cosmological laws in which man plays no part, and on which the choices he makes have no effect, run according to a precise order. At a certain time, the earth comes between the sun and the moon, and at another given time, the moon comes between the earth and the sun, so that there is an eclipse; all of these phenomena have a precise measure.

'… He covers the day with the night in swift pursuit, with the sun and the moon and the stars subservient to His command. Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command …' (*al-A'raf:* 54). Creation means to bring something into existence out of nothing, and after Allah created the universe, He did not leave its affairs to anyone else; rather, He *the Almighty* retained the command and sustenance of it after that. He did not merely assume control over His dominion at the time of creation, and then leave the natural laws to work. Rather, He sometimes commands these laws to cease applying, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed that the miracles of the Prophets would break the natural laws, in order that we would understand that the universe does not run merely by nature or by causality. Therefore, He said: '…Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command …' (*al-A'raf:* 54).

If you consider the word *amr* (command), you will find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…Say: "Verily, all power of decision (*amr*) does rest with Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 154). This verse means that there is a cosmological command; as for matters of free will, Allah's Commandment regarding them is embodied in His Way of Guidance, and you are faced therein with a commandment which you can either obey or disobey: you are free.

'… Oh, verily, His is all creation and all command. Blessed is Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!' (*al-A'raf:* 54). When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Blessed is Allah', along with saying, 'the best of creators' (*al-Mu'minun*: 14), every word has a meaning, and within His human creations are certain gifts of creative ability, but only creation from the pre-existent, as we clarified. Elsewhere in the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes Himself by saying, '… and He is the swiftest of all reckoners!' (*al-An'am:* 62)

People know how to calculate, and they have created mechanical calculators, machines which are programmed and prepared to add, subtract, multiply and divide. Yet, every act of calculation requires time. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will reckon all of mankind in a single instant, and He is the swiftest of all reckoners. Furthermore, there is not only one reckoning, and you will be reckoned by Allah, and another person will be reckoned by Him, and His Reckoning is as numerous as the people who will be reckoned. Also, the True Lord's Reckoning of His creation will not require any effort; rather, it will be akin to His provision of sustenance. When 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'Will Allah reckon all His creation at the same time?' He replied, 'Why should this be strange. Does He not provide for them all at the same time?'

Look at the Quran, and you will find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is 'the swiftest of all reckoners', 'the best of all creators', 'the most merciful of the merciful' and 'the best of inheritors'. These are the expressions which have been related to us, and in them, Allah shares His attribute with His creation, but His attributes are always in the light of 'There is nothing like unto Him'. (*ash-Shura:* 11)

'Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!' (*al-A'raf:* 54) The Words 'Blessed is Allah' mean that He is transcendent, for there is a difference between omnipotent power–the Power of Allah–and reaction to this omnipotent power by will and by 'Be!', which is a reaction and a conformity to the Divine Will and Commandment.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says,

ٱدۡعُواْ رَبَّكُمۡ تَضَرُّعٗا وَخُفۡيَةًۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُعۡتَدِينَ ٥٥

Call on your Lord humbly and privately – He
does not like those who transgress His bounds [55]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 55)

Du'a (supplication) only comes from an incapable being that calls upon a capable one to do and achieve what he is incapable of doing, or to aid him in doing it. When you feel that you are incapable, you rely on Him Who has omnipotent Power since your own power is limited. Therefore, if you act with transgression or arrogance, recognise well your position and rank and stop this since you are only a temporary accident. To supplicate is to be humble, contrite, and submissive, along with confessing your own incapability, and asking your Lord for aid and support. To call to mind your incapability and your Lord's Power constitutes for you continuous certainty and faith, and our Lord only gave people needs for this reason. If a person sees things reacting in response to him, and he invents and creates, he may be seized by delusion; so He sends him a need which he cannot meet by recourse to material means. Thus, he stands and calls upon Allah *the Almighty*. He who is arrogant, proud and boastful goes to a saintly ascetic who has detached himself from pride and temporal power along with devoting himself to the worship of Allah, and says to him, 'I ask you in the name of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call upon Allah for me, for I am in a crisis.' This person who asks the saintly ascetic is an important man amongst his people, but he thinks that the saintly ascetic is closer to Allah *the Almighty* than he is.

Therefore, to supplicate and call on Allah is to entreat to Him, along with showing Him humility and submission, in order to make one's certainty and faith constant: 'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts' (*al-A'raf:* 55). Be careful not to call upon Allah, whilst your mind is set on the fulfilment of your need: instead call upon Him with the intention of showing

Him your humility, submission, and subservience since even if you do not call upon Him, your affairs will continue on the course for which they were destined. To supplicate is to display your humility, so be careful not to understand that you call upon Him merely in order to gain that which you seek, for He is far absolved above being an ‘employee’ for you, and there is an order which Allah *Glorified is He* has established for the realisation of His servants’ requests. There are people who seek harmful things when they supplicate: 'As it is man [often] prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good, for he is prone to be hasty.' (*al-Isra’:* 11)

A man’s heart might become attached to harmful fancies, which is why we say, not be hasty with your supplication, seeking fancies which might be bad for you. The All-Knowing True Lord organises our affairs for us. Likewise, be careful not to despair when a supplication you have in mind is not answered since Allah decrees what is best for His servants. Furthermore, if Allah were to give you some of the things for which you supplicate, they might be bad for you, and He allows certain things to happen to you in order to show you this, so that you might say, ‘The thing I had been hoping for actually happened, but it ended up being bad for me.’ For example, you might buy a ticket for a plane but then not manage to catch it. However, it sets off before you arrive, so you are sad since you have lost out on some of your interests and failed to realise them. Then, you are astonished to find out that this plane crashes into the sea.

Make your purpose and intent behind supplication that you submit and humble yourself to Him, and not that your request be granted. You call upon Him to ask for what is best, so leave the True Lord *Glorified is He* with His sustenance and knowledge, to bring what is best for you. Listen to Allah’s, Words: 'As it is man [often] prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good, for he is prone to be hasty.' (*al-Isra’:* 11)

Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says 'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts …' (*al-A’raf:* 55), He asks us to call upon Him since we shall encounter many occasions when we are incapable of doing things; instead of remaining defeated by the attribute of incapacity, remember that you have a Mighty, All-Powerful Lord, and when you remember this, material means will not draw you away from your faith. We said before that whoever has a father does not have any concerns in the world, and if the one who has a father does not have any concerns for the demands of life, then he who has a Lord must be humble and know that his Lord will bring goodness to him. This is why He *the Almighty* clarifies by saying that if you are incapable of utilising the means, remember that you have a Lord Who has asked you to call upon Him. Do not think that your purpose of calling on Allah is to get what you are asking for; rather, your purpose of calling on Him should be to show your humility and subservience to Him; what has happened to you might be the result of your own self-delusion. Qarun (Korah) was delusional before you, and what happened to him? The True Lord *Glorified is He* destroyed him and sent upon him the worst of punishments. The True Lord *the Exalted* might make the failure of material means and their refusal to help you a way to draw your attention to Allah. However, the attention you show to Allah must not be based on your intention of getting what you need, rather you should base the attention you show to Him by displaying your incapability before Him in humility and subservience, and then He will give you that which was not even on your mind when you called upon Him.

'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts…' (*al-A'raf:* 55). The meaning of 'in the secrecy of your hearts' (*khufiatan*) is that the supplication be secret and hidden, and it also means that it be based on *khawf* (fear); this means call upon your Lord in fear of the manifestations of His Attributes of Majesty such as the All-Compeller and the All-Dominant, or call upon Him in fear that He might reject your supplication and not accept it.

Call upon your Lord humbly with lowliness, meekness, and subservience, in the secrecy of your hearts between yourselves and your Lord. Do not raise your voice when supplicating and make this your only way of doing it since the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us(1) When he was in one of his battles and his Companions went into a valley and began to shout loudly, saying 'There is no deity but Allah' and 'Allah is the Greatest', he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O, people, calm yourselves. You are not calling upon one who is deaf or absent, rather you are calling One Who is All-Hearing and Near, and He is with you.(1)

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(1) The story of the Companions entering a valley and worshiping their Allah in a loud voice

To call upon Allah in the secrecy of your heart keeps you far away from ostentation, and it is the best way to conceal what you ask of your Lord from others. When He clarifies for you, ‘Call upon Me secretly, for I am All-Hearing and All Knowing: I know all that you reveal and all that you conceal’, then supplicate with humbleness, subservience and devoutness in order to break the desire for egotism within you, along with the tendency for haughtiness and pride.

If you consider this matter, you will find that many of the scholars say, ‘We know people who recite the Quran in our presence, and we cannot even see their lips move. Likewise, we know people who can derive rulings from Allah’s Words, and we have never seen them act in a way which distracted them from us.’ Therefore, this is an expression of an inner activity.

The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to keep us far from ostentation and to keep our requests concealed from others since a person might ask Allah *Glorified is He* for something which he would be ashamed for other people to hear.

'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts…' (*al-A’raf:* 55). If you examine this verse, you will find that many people breach it in a public way. For example, at night you find people who climb the minaret or who shout into microphones which free them of the need of climbing the minaret; one of these people might sleep all day since calling to prayer is his only job. After this, he continues to shout and entreat Allah by saying, ‘These are supplications’, although there are people sleeping in order to get the rest they need to work the next day. Likewise, there is nothing required of these sleeping people except that they wake at dawn to pray, so why are you bothering people like this? We must let these who imagine that they are reminding others of Allah’s religion know that they are not doing the right thing by doing this since we cannot remind others of Allah whilst disobeying Him or harming anyone. He says: 'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts …' (*al-A’raf:* 55).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim with this wording, and also narrated by Al-Bukhari; the meaning of ‘still yourselves’ is ‘be quiet and lower your voices’*

Humbleness and secrecy dictate that I do not disturb people nor make public the things which I want for myself personally with a loud voice, such as the one who comes after the communal prayer is finished and makes his supplication loudly, along with raising his hands. To people who do this, I say that Allah *Glorified is He* gave us the *qunut* (the supplication read aloud by the imam in certain canonical prayers such as the dawn prayer and the special night prayers in *Ramadan*) in which we call upon Him, and He left it for every Muslim to call upon Him personally with their needs. When you call upon Allah loudly at the end of the prayer, there might be people who came to the prayer late and missed one or two *rak'as* (units of prayer) with the imam and who now wish to complete their prayers. Thus, when you raise your voice and supplicate at the end of your prayer, you spoil the completion of their own prayers for them. Also, you distract them with your own personal words and speech from the obligatory deed they are performing. Those who do this have a good intention in doing so, but they inadvertently spoil the worship of others.

Therefore, we must be aware of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has His requirements, and one might breach these requirements for the sake of something he sees to be good. However, he must take this in the light of the following: 'Say: "Shall we tell you who the greatest losers in whatever they may do are? [It is] they whose labour has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this world's life, and who none the less think that they are doing good works.' (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

Therefore, we must be aware of these things, and allow those who sleep to fully rest so that they can wake and offer the dawn prayer and then go to work; so, there is no need for anyone to turn on the microphone and supplicate with a raised voice. Those who do this think that they are diligently performing a desirable act when in fact they are disturbing those who are sleeping, and indeed, they are even disturbing those who are praying by night. They could be confusing those who are reciting the Quran or revising their studies. Those who do this should instead leave everyone to their own personal expressions and allow them to have control over their own selves and their own choices. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an image of this when He says: 'When he called out to his Lord in the secrecy of his heart, he prayed, "O my Lord!

Feeble have become my bones, and my head shines with grey hair…' (*Maryam:* 3-4). Therefore, the word 'in secrecy' occurs in the Quran, so we must acknowledge supplicating secretly.

'Call unto your Lord humbly, and in the secrecy of your hearts. Verily, He loves not those who transgress the bounds of what is right.' (*al-A'raf:* 55) If it is not humble and secret, it thereby transgresses the bounds of supplication, for you are held responsible, and Allah is the One Who holds you responsible; if He says to you, 'Call upon me humbly, and in the secrecy of your heart.' and you do anything other than this, you thereby transgress the bounds of what is right. Likewise, all of these people must understand that they are transgressors, either transgressing in the form of the entreaty or else transgressing in the thing which is requested.

This is due to the fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has specified the form of entreaty, by clarifying: 'Call upon secretly,' so if you call in a way which is not secret, you are transgressing against Allah's Way. Likewise, the transgression might be in something which is requested, as it is not right. For example, if you were to say, 'I call upon you, O, Lord, to make me a prophet' this is not right. Furthermore, our Lord *Glorified is He* taught us when He told us the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* by saying, 'And Nuh (Noah) called out to his Lord, and said, "O, my Lord! Verily, my son was of my family; and, verily, Your promise always comes true, and You are the most just of all judges!" [Allah] answered, "O, Nuh (Noah), behold, he was not of your family, for, verily, he was unrighteous in his conduct. And you shall not ask of me anything whereof you cannot have any knowledge. Thus, behold, do I admonish you lest you become one of those who are unaware [of what is right]?"' (*Hud:* 45-46) In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* alerted Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to the possibility of transgression in what one requests by saying, '… And you shall not ask of me anything whereof you cannot have any knowledge…' (*Hud:* 46). This is why we find that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* sought forgiveness for asking and calling upon Allah with this supplication without having any knowledge. When he realised his mistake, he sought His forgiveness by saying, '…O, Lord, the Sustainer! Verily, I seek refuge with you from [ever again] asking of You anything whereof I cannot have any knowledge! ...' (*Hud:* 47) Also, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to him: 'Disembark in peace from Us, and with [Our] blessings upon you as well as upon the people [who are with you and the righteous ones who will spring from you and] from those who are with you …' (*Hud:* 48).

So those who do not pay heed to, or implement, the Way of Allah in supplication are thereby transgressing against the True Lord *the Almighty* and He does not love those who transgress. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَٰحِهَا وَٱدْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا ۚ إِنَّ
رَحْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right call on Him fearing and hoping. The mercy of God is close to those who do good [56] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 56)

The earth is the place of mankind whom Allah has created as vicegerents to those who lived before. In it are all the means essential for the preservation of life. The sky, earth, sun, and air are all subjugated to us by the Will and Grace of Allah, and we do not interfere with their functioning, nor do we need to do anything to maintain them. We do not need to command the sun to rise or the wind to blow! Since they are thus out of our control, it is out of our scope to corrupt the higher laws of the universe: we cannot alter the path of the sun or the moon nor control the direction of the wind. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* commands us: 'Do not corrupt the earth …' (*al-A'raf:* 56), this refers to things within our scope of influence. Corruption can only result from employing our faculties by our free will, but Allah *the Almighty* has not left us the mission of deciding how to employ them, but He has sent down His Guidance for us to know the right way and follow it in all aspects of life. As long as He has revealed to us the Quran containing His ordinances, it means He has given us the means and tools of reform and prosperity, and this is why He commands us: 'Do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right–call on Him fearing and hoping …' (*al-A'raf:* 56).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* again mentions the issue of supplication (*du'a'*). In the previous verse, Allah orders us to pray to Him '…humbly and privately…'

(*al-A'raf:* 55), and in this verse, He tells us: '…call on Him fearing and hoping…' (*al-A'raf:* 56). Implore Allah, fearing His Might and hoping for His Forgiveness and Mercy. Allah has Attributes of Power and Majesty and Attributes of Beauty, so call upon Him in fear of the manifestations of the former and yearning for the manifestations of the latter. The verse may also be interpreted in another way: supplicate to Him in fear of being rejected and ask Him for what you hope.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '…The Mercy of Allah is close to those who do good.' (*al-A'raf:* 56) It is you who chooses to have Allah's Mercy close to you or otherwise: if you do the good, He will turn to you with Mercy. Allah *the Exalted* is never unjust to anyone. The key is to do the good. It is narrated in a Hadith: '… Allah never gets bored(1) of rewarding you unless you get bored of doing the good."

You may go to the mosque at any time to observe *salat* (prayer). Allah *the Almighty* has specified five particular times for observing mandatory *salat*, but you may perform voluntary *salat* at other times. It is in your hand to choose to stand before your Lord at any moment. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'If anyone comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed …'.

Our effort cannot be enough, so Allah *the Exalted* reassures us that we just need to show keenness to win His Good Pleasure, and He will cause us to become closer to Him. He will come to you! If you get tired at times, He never gets tired. Just show Him that you are mindful of Him and wish to meet Him. He also says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'If anyone remembers Me inwardly, I remember him inwardly, and if anyone remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in a better assembly (i.e. in the assembly of angels).' Thus, it is in your hand whether to seek Allah's Mercy or not; He grants it to those who seek it: '… The Mercy of Allah is close to those who do good.' (*al-A'raf:* 56) We know that Allah *the Almighty* has an Essence and Attributes and has eternally existed without a beginning and an end. He possesses all the Attributes of Perfection and every Attribute has manifestations: 'Mercy' has manifestations and so does 'Resurrection' since one of His Names is 'The Resurrector'. Glorify Him always by His Most Beautiful Names and call on Him by them too. Remember, however, that you may ask Allah for a particular thing which He does not grant you. This should not make you stop glorifying Him; He does not begrudge you anything, and He has Power over all things, but when He prevents you something, it is actually for your own benefit and good.

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(1) When a word is used to describe Allah, it has a completely different meaning and denotes a completely different quality and degree. Here, "bored" is not meant to ascribe to Allah the imperfection of getting tired of anything or anyone. Exalted is He above this. Rather, it means Allah does not ever stop rewarding His servants for their good deeds unless they are tired of doing them.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… The *Rahmah* (Mercy) of Allah is *qarib* (close) to those who do the good.' (*al-A'raf:* 56) Scholars have taken time to consider the word *qarib* (close). It is a masculine form even though the word it modifies, *rahmah* (mercy), is a feminine word. We know that the Quran was revealed in the Arabic language that has words indicating gender, feminine or masculine. Still, some adjectives indicate both masculine and feminine so that they are used in the same way whether they refer to a male or a female. For example, we use this form of the word *sabur* (patient) whether it refers to a man or a woman. Other examples are *mi'tar*, which means someone (male or female) who always wears perfume and *qatil* (murdered). The latter is used with men or women, and the feminine suffix is only added (*qatilah*) when there is no other word to indicate that the murdered person is female.

These are correct lexical usages, and this has come about in the language for sound reasons: the word *sabur* denotes 'patience' which requires strength, determination, struggle, etc., which are all meanings associated with masculinity, so the word is never used with the feminine suffix, *saburah*; rather, we use the masculine form which best embodies strength and firmness. Likewise, the word *mi'tar* means someone who always wears cologne/perfume. A man who is *mi'tar* is one famous for the fine scent of his cologne. Since it does not befit a woman to exhibit her charms or wear anything that may be inviting, wearing perfume, while out is allowed only for men. Therefore, if a woman wears perfume, she thus imitates men, and this is why she is described by the masculine form, *mi'tar*. The word *qarib* mentioned in the verse belongs to the lexical set of *fa'il*, like the word *zhahir* (supporter/helper). The latter can be used as a masculine and a feminine word for the same reason that it denotes help which requires strength that is more associated with masculinity, so it is always in the masculine form.

From this argument, we deduce that the word *qarib* (close), even though it modifies a feminine word, *rahmah* (mercy), is in the masculine form for any of the following reasons: it belongs to the lexical set of *fa'il*, and in this lexical set, where the word functions as an object, the same form is used for males and females. It is worthy of mention that the word *qarib* in the original Arabic text of the verse functions as an object complement; it modifies the object, *rahmah* (mercy) which is brought closer to those who do good. Thus, the subject or doer of the action is Allah and *rahmah* (mercy) is the thing made close or *qarib*, so this is an object and an adjective modifying it and functioning as an object complement. Another reason why *qarib* comes in the masculine form is that the word it modifies, *rahmah,* may be meant to refer to *rahem* (ties of kinship) or *tarahhum* (showing mercy), which are both masculine words. *Qarib* may also be in the masculine form since it modifies an omitted noun: '… The *Rahmah* (Mercy) of Allah is a *qarib* (close) [thing] to those who do good' (*al-A'raf:* 56). The Arabic for 'thing' is a masculine word, so this is why the word *qarib* is masculine since it modifies an omitted masculine noun, 'a *qarib* thing'. Finally, the reason why *qarib* (close) comes in the masculine form is that the word *rahmah* (mercy) it modifies is an inanimate thing, so it does not actually refer to a 'female' even though the word itself is feminine, or perhaps because the word is a root noun and root nouns are treated as masculine words in Arabic.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُرْسِلُ ٱلرِّيَٰحَ بُشْرًۢا بَيْنَ يَدَىْ رَحْمَتِهِۦ ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ
أَقَلَّتْ سَحَابًا ثِقَالًا سُقْنَٰهُ لِبَلَدٍ مَّيِّتٍ فَأَنزَلْنَا بِهِ ٱلْمَآءَ فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِۦ
مِن كُلِّ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نُخْرِجُ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

It is God who sends the winds, bearing good news of His coming grace, and when they have gathered up the heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land where We cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops, just as We shall bring out the dead. Will you not reflect? [57] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 57)

Sending the winds means stirring up the air in the world to freshen and renew it. Otherwise, the world would be like a stuffy room full of exhalations of countless people and with barely enough oxygen. Therefore, sending forth of the winds is essential so the air would not remain motionless. In an airtight place, air would be filled with carbon dioxide resulting from breathing, and if this persists, suffocation of all living beings in that place would most probably ensue. For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* has made the motions of the wind a continual and general mercy for everything. These motions are also connected to nourishment and to maintaining the basic constituents of life, which are air, food, and water. Why is this? The winds are sent forth to renew the air we breathe, and they also cause rains to fall, for Allah *Glorified is He* says about the winds: '… and when they have gathered up the heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land ….' (*al-A'raf:* 57)

Rains then fall on the earth and water the soil which we plough to produce crops. In this way, the winds indeed bear 'good news'- as the verse says- in three ways: their motions freshen the air we breathe; they cause to bring water by carrying clouds and causing rain to fall; and they, therefore, contribute to producing food that grows from the earth by means of this water.

The Arabic word used for 'good news' in the original text of the verse is *bushr,* which is different from *bushrah* even though both denote 'good news', so do not confuse them. The latter is a singular word meaning 'a piece of good news', as in this verse: 'To Ibrahim (Abraham) Our Messengers brought *bushrah* (good news)….' (*Hud:* 69) As for the word *bushr,* it is the plural of *bashir* which means 'a bearer of good news'. The plural form is originally pronounced as *bushur*, but it has been changed to *bushr* as an easier way of pronouncing it.

An example of the singular form, *bashir*, can be found in the verse: '...Then, when the *bashir* (bearer of good news) came….' (*Yusuf:* 96) The plural of *bashir* is *bushur*, just as the plural of *nadhir* (a warner) is *nudhur*, but the word *bushur* has been lightened to *bushr* so it can be pronounced easier, and both pronunciations are correct. Thus, the winds are bearers of good news: '…bearing good news of His coming grace….' (*al-A'raf:* 57) They indeed bear news of His Coming Grace since they bring us water which is a grace in itself that we and all living things drink, and by means of which the land is irrigated to yield crops. It is worthy of notice that when the word *riyah* (winds) comes in the Quran in the plural, it indicates a useful thing, whereas when it comes in the singular form *rih* (wind), it indicates a harmful thing, as in His words: 'Ad was destroyed by a furious *rih* (wind).' (*al-Haqqa:* 6)

Allah *the Exalted* sends punishment or torment in the form of a single wind, a single soldier of His that He sends on a particular mission. On the other hand, the general motion of winds in the world is a source of benefit and good, whether by causing rains to fall and producing food from the earth or by freshening the air so it can be always fit for breathing.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* sends the winds as heralds of His Coming Grace since they carry heavy clouds and cause rain to fall. The original text of the verse uses the verb *aqalla*, an Arabic equivalent of 'carry' or 'pick up'. It is derived from *aqall* which means 'less than' since one can only carry a thing or lift it from the ground when it is *aqall* (less) than one's strength. Allah *the Exalted* has made power of the winds great enough to carry and move the heavy clouds, or else the latter would inevitably fall down. We know that clouds are made of the water which evaporates and rises from the earth then gathers in the high stratum of the atmosphere. The winds carry them to a cold medium where the clouds are condensed and rain falls. This is the way distilled water is prepared in laboratories: water is made to boil and the rising steam travels inside pipes through a current of cold air where it is condensed and becomes water.

The Arabic text of the verse uses a singular form of the adjective for 'heavy' even though the word it modifies is in the plural form (translated here as 'clouds'). As long as all the clouds are driven together, they are treated as one unit, and this kind of plural in the Arabic language comes with singular verbs and adjectives.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…When they have gathered up the heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land….' (*al-A'raf:* 57) Clouds do not all head for the same place, but they are carried in different directions, but Allah, in this verse, mentions the dead land in particular. A thing is dead when it loses the ability to demonstrate life. The earth is like this. Allah *the Exalted* sends rain to the earth when it is lifeless through the winds that carry clouds. Then, life comes back to it, and it becomes rich in its produce. '… We drive them to a dead land where we cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops ….' (*al-A'raf:* 57)

Allah *the Almighty* means to draw our attention to this natural process which we always see in numerous forms. Rain would fall on a mountain, and a little while later, the mountain starts to get verdant without anyone sowing seeds in it. This means every place on the earth contains the constituents of life, the requirements for it to exist. Plants only wait for water, so as soon as rain falls, they sprout up without anyone having to interfere. '… We cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops, just as we shall bring out the dead. Will you not reflect?' (*al-A'raf:* 57)

Allah *the Exalted* brings life to a dead land; He makes it green and rich after it had been arid. Is not this proof He can bring the dead to life once again? Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to a manifestation of His Might that we can clearly see every day, so when He tells us about another manifestation of His Might that is in the realm of the Unseen, it befits people of understanding to reflect and believe. Allah thus makes His signs clear and visible for everyone so no one can stubbornly deny and dispute them. By reflecting on these signs, we can see the Truth with our hearts and minds and believe in our Lord.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَٱلْبَلَدُ ٱلطَّيِّبُ يَخْرُجُ نَبَاتُهُۥ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِۦ ۖ وَٱلَّذِى خَبُثَ لَا يَخْرُجُ
إِلَّا نَكِدًا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نُصَرِّفُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

Vegetation comes out of good land in abundance, by the will of its Lord, but out of bad land only scantily: We explain Our Revelations in various ways to those who give thanks [58] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 58)

Therefore, the previous verse deals with the issue of Resurrection by giving a parable based on a tangible sign: the winds carry the clouds and drive them to a dead land where rain falls and crops are thus brought forth. The earth can be dead, without any sign of life, and Allah *the Almighty* would bring it back to life. The same will be the case when He brings us from the dead. Just as that verse explains a matter relevant to faith through a parable from life, also Allah in it brings up a religious concept through a similar parable:

‘the vegetation of a good land comes forth (easily) by the permission of its Lord, and that which is bad, brings forth nothing but (a little) with difficulty….’ (*al-A’raf:* 58)

A good land is a fertile one which needs only water for its crops to come forth. In the case of bad land, however, no matter how much rain falls on it, its crops will only come forth with difficulty, and even then they will be scant and useless. Here is an illustration of a religious concept, just as the concept of Resurrection is illustrated in the verse before.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The similitude of the guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is as that of rain which falls upon a land, part of which is good, so it accepts the water, and many plants and crops grow. Then, there is part of which is dry but is fit to hold the water by which a stream is created for people to benefit from it by drinking from its water and watering their animals and crops. Others who receive this guidance are like a barren land, neither holding the water, thus creating streams for the benefit of others, nor giving forth crops. Such is the similitude of those who seek understanding of the religion of Allah *the Almighty* and benefit from that with which I have been sent, so they learn it and teach it, and those who do not take heed and reject the Guidance of Allah with which I have been sent.’(1)

Allah *the Almighty* has sent down His Guidance to us, and people divide into three groups based on their attitudes: a group, who accepts the ordinance of Allah, seek to understand it, benefit from what they learn and convey it to others so they may benefit too. They are like a fertile land which takes in the water and gives forth plants, so it is rich in itself and others get benefited from it as well. Another group embrace faith and convey it to people, but they do not practice what they preach. To this group, the following words of Allah *the Exalted* apply: ‘you who believe, why do you say things and then do not do them?’ (*as-Saff:* 2)

They teach others the Straight Path of Allah, but do not abide by it themselves. This reminds me of verses a poet once said:

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(1) *Cited by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Take my knowledge and do not rely on my action:

Pick the fruit and leave the wood for the fire!

This is a different story, yet it is worth underlining that those who teach people about faith are no infallible, so we should not try to find fault with them. They too are mortals and are, therefore, subject to error, so we should overlook their slips and not expose them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever protects a Muslim from being exposed [by overlooking his slips] will be protected by Allah from being exposed in this life and the Afterlife.'(1)(2)

It is the duty of a believer to forgive a slip of his brother and let it go unnoticed, particularly if that brother is a scholar from whom people receive knowledge. He is not infallible after all, and making his slips go viral will make people needlessly refrain from learning from him, which is a big loss. The third group is that of people who neither makes use of the water nor gives it to others. Those are the people who reject the Guidance of Allah. Allah's Guidance is like rain: it brings good to a good land, and it only increases a bad land in its aridity.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'the vegetation of a good land comes forth (easily) by the Permission of its Lord; and that which is bad, brings forth nothing but (a little) with difficulty. Thus, do we explain variously the *ayat* (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) for a people who give thanks?' (*al-A'raf:* 58) We have said before that the word *ayat* has three meanings: the signs of creation we see in the universe, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Now among His *ayat* (signs) are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon …' (*Fussilat:* 37). Verses of the Quran are also called *ayat*, and the third meaning of the word is that of the miracles given to prophets to support their cause and prove the truth for what they call.

In this reference, *ayat* refers to signs of the universe such as rain which is a parable of Allah's Guidance: those who take it succeed and gain triumph, and those who leave it go astray. Therefore, we should be grateful to Allah *the Almighty* for sending His Messages down to us.

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(1) *Al-Hakim classified it as "authentic" according to the criteria of Al-Bukhari and Muslim.*

(2) *Cited by Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, Ibn Hibban in his Sahih, and Al-Hakim*

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِۦ فَقَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ
إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُۥٓ إِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٥٩﴾

We sent Noah to his people. He said, 'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him. I fear for you the punishment of a fearsome Day!' [59] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 59)

After speaking about the obedient and the disobedient in this worldly life, recompense of each in the Hereafter, the dwellers of Paradise and Hellfire and the Heights, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies to His Prophet Muhammad that every one of His Messengers inevitably encountered difficulties and opposition and was subject to much harm. He thus means to strengthen His Messenger by explaining to him that what he experienced was not something new compared to the other Messengers of Allah. All of them were met with rejection and were subject to harm. Every Messenger of Allah had to endure hardships as much as the limited time and place of his mission required. However, the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is for all mankind at all times and places, so it is inevitable that he too had to face difficulties commensurate with the magnitude of his mission and message. Allah *the Almighty* meant to tell Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that since he was the final and noblest of Messengers, the harms and afflictions he would face will be the most severe. All the previous Messengers of Allah had to sacrifice and persevere much to fulfil their missions, so Allah told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to prepare himself for the same. He too would face harm and rejection, so he must be steadfast and struggle with patience for the cause of Allah. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* tells the stories of the previous Messengers in the Quran, and He expressed the purpose for telling these stories: 'So [Muhammad], We have told you the stories of the prophets to make your heart firm …' (*Hud:* 120). Every time he was met with denial or opposition, Allah told him the story of a messenger who was met with the same denial and opposition, so that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers Allah *be pleased with them* would remain steadfast and prepare themselves for the difficulties that still awaited them. They were not expected to fulfil the mission with ease and smoothness; rather, they were to combat the evil of Satan on the earth. These stories contain guidance in several forms to make firm the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and show him that what he faced in his call for Allah's religion was not something new compared to the other Messengers. They were also meant to strengthen the souls of his followers, for when they saw that the people of truth who believed with the Messengers were victorious in the end, and the disbelievers were defeated, this firmed up faith of the believers. On the other hand, that also weakened spirits of the disbelievers. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* said about one of the leaders of Quraysh: 'We shall brand him on the snout.' (*al-Qalam:* 16) This verse was revealed at the time when Muslims were unable to defend or protect themselves so much that they immigrated to Abyssinia to save themselves from the scourge of Qurayshite leaders. At such a critical time, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed that verse about Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira: 'We shall brand him on the snout.' (*al-Qalam:* 16) Al-Walid was one from Quraysh's nobility, and he was seen in the Battle of Badr with a wound that marked his nose! Thus, did the Words of Allah come true to reassure the believers that they were in the right and the religion they embraced was the truth from the Lord of the worlds? Who could ever foretell that the sword of one of the warriors would wound that man's nose? It is the One Whose Knowledge encompasses all things.

Besides making firm the hearts of the Prophet and the believers, stories of the previous Messengers came to confirm that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* truly received the Quran from Allah *the Exalted*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was an unlettered man who never studied with a teacher or read a book; from where, then, did the news of previous Messengers come to him? Allah *Glorified is He* says about this matter: 'You [Muhammad] were not present on the western side of the mountain when we gave our command to Musa (Moses)….' (*al-Qasas:* 44) He also says: 'You never recited any Scripture before We revealed this one to you;

you never wrote one down with your hand. If you had done so, those who follow falsehood might have had cause to doubt.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '… You were not present among them when they [the priests] cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Maryam (Mary)….' (*Al-'Imran:* 44)

So, how did this information get to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* whereas he never studied with a teacher or read a book? It all came from the True Lord *Glorified is He* and this is another proof of the truth of his message.

The story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is one of the stories told several times in more than one chapter of the Noble Quran, like the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. It is remarkable that the chapter of the Quran named *Nuh* (Noah), after this prophet, does not contain certain details and important events, which are considered the essence of the story. The reason is that the chapter of *Nuh* (Noah) deals particularly with his perseverance in calling his people to embrace faith and that he did not relent or falter in his mission; he called them day and night, secretly and openly, yet every time he called them, they strayed further. It is worthy to note that the Ark and the Flood are not mentioned in the chapter of *Nuh* even though they are primary events in the story. Likewise, the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) is not mentioned in the chapter named after him, yet we find it in the chapter of *Hud*.

Every part of the story is intentionally related in a specific chapter of the Noble Quran. However, the chapter of *Nuh* leaves out some important elements of the story; these elements are highlighted in the chapter of *Hud* and the chapter of *al-A'raf,* the latter which we are currently examining.

Every chapter of the Quran is meant to deal with a particular concept, so Allah *the Almighty* mentions in each chapter the events of each story that particularly serve the purpose of the chapter. We find, on the other hand, that the entire story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is related in one piece in the chapter of *Yusuf*; this story is not mentioned in any other chapter of the Quran except for this single verse: 'Yusuf (Joseph) came to you before with clear signs, but you never ceased to doubt the message he brought you. When he died, you said, "God will not send another messenger."...' (*Ghafir:* 34)

The chapter of *Yusuf* tells the story of the life of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* from his childhood until he became the governor of Egypt. This way, we see that when Allah *the Exalted* wants to give a story as a historical account, He relates it all at once. When He wants to alert us to matters pertinent to certain situations and lessons, He mentions particular parts of the story in several chapters of the Quran in order to emphasise and serve a certain purpose and meaning.

Thus, in the verse we are dealing with, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Certainly, We sent Nuh (Noah) to his people, so he said, "O, my people"' (*al-A'raf:* 59) the *lam* and *qad* are particles of emphasis (which are translated in the verse as 'certainly'). When they are both mentioned in a sentence, they denote very strong emphasis or an oath, as if Allah were saying: 'By My Magnificence and My Majesty, I sent Nuh (Noah) to his people ….'

The original Arabic text of the verse uses the word *qawm* (people) which is used to refer exclusively to the men of a community. Usually they are men who are primarily addressed by Messengers not because women are not addressed by the Divine Ordinance, but modesty of old has necessitated that women stay at their homes, so they would receive the revelations of Allah *the Exalted* from their fathers, brothers or husbands after they heard them from the Messenger of Allah. This is why Muslim women said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Men dissuade you from us!' That is, men always went to Prophet Muhammad to learn Islam from him, so there was no way for women to have a chance to ask the Prophet about religious matters. Therefore, they asked the Prophet to specify a day for them when they might have a chance to talk to him and ask him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed a day for them. From this, we understand that the usual state of affairs is that women are not allowed to interact freely with men. Rather, it befits the dignity and modesty of a woman to stay at her home, so even when it came to Allah's revelations, their husbands, fathers, or brothers passed on the ordinance of Allah to the women in their families after learning them from the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, men were mainly addressed by the call of Allah's Messengers and then communicated their teachings to women in their families. The word *qawm* is derived from the same root of *qa'em* or *qayyem*, which both mean to be responsible for something or attend to something, hence using *qawm* to refer to men. An Arab poet said:

I do not know, and I am not even close to knowing,

if the people of Hesn were qawm (men) or women!

He uses the word *qawm* to mean 'men'. Also, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: 'Believers, no *qawm* (one group of men) should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them ….' (*al-Hujurat:* 11) The verse makes a distinction between *qawm* and women; the latter is not included in the former word. Those who confronted the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* were mainly the men of their communities; from them came rejection, obstinacy and war.

The call of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* revolved around three elements: worshipping Allah alone ['"…serve Allah…"' (*al-A'raf:* 59)], never associating any partners with Him ['"…you have no god other than Him…"' (*al-A'raf:* 59)] and he showed them his concern and worry for them if they were to disobey Allah ['"Surely, I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous day."' (*al-A'raf:* 59)]

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* called his people to monotheism; he called them to worship Allah, the One God, by obeying His commands and avoiding His prohibitions. Seeing they did not do this, Prophet Nuh (Noah) feared for them that suffering would befall them on the Day of Judgement when Allah *the Almighty* will resurrect them to call them to account. Another interpretation of 'grievous day' is the day of the Flood. Such a call would normally weigh heavily on the thoughts of some who were likely to be disturbed by it. Who were they? The ones who were disturbed by this call were the tyrants who oppressed people and made them their slaves. Normally, they were troubled by that Messenger who called for submitting to only One God to Whom the right to command and forbid belongs and Who is the One worthy of being worshipped. Such a call threatened their temporal power, so they opposed the Messenger, as Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in the following verse:

قَالَ ٱلۡمَلَأُ مِن قَوۡمِهِۦٓ إِنَّا لَنَرَىٰكَ فِي ضَلَٰلٖ مُّبِينٖ ٦٠

But the prominent leaders of his people said, ‘We believe you are far astray’ [60] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 60)

The word *mala’* is derived from the same root of the verb *mala’a,* which means 'to fill'. It refers to prominent people who perhaps 'fill' their eyes with their statures, fill their hearts with awe or fill assemblies with their importance. They are the people of consequence and authority.

They were unwilling to believe that the call of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was a call to the Straight Path and that his words were true guidance. Consumed by rejection, they indulged themselves in the vain hope that his call was actually nothing but error and misguidance, so they said: ‘…“We believe you are far astray”’ (*al-A’raf:* 60). They resorted to the safeguard of accusing Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* of being so far from the truth, almost doomed to blindness beyond cure.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* responded, as Allah *Glorified is He* quotes him in the following verse:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ لَيۡسَ بِي ضَلَٰلَةٞ وَلَٰكِنِّي رَسُولٞ مِّن رَّبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٦١

He replied, ‘My people, there is nothing astray about me! On the contrary, I am a messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds [61] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 61)

Thus, they accused him of being far astray. He could have responded to them by saying, ‘I am not far astray’, but he said: ‘… there is nothing astray about me’ which includes emphasis that he is very far from being in error. The original Arabic text of the verse uses the singular noun *dalalah* which literally translates to the following: ‘There is not a single error in me!’ In this sentence there is strong emphasis. It is like saying, ‘I do not have a penny’ compared to ‘I have no money.' The former is more precise in emphasising the idea meant by the expression. Prophet Nuh (Noah) knew he had no whims or any personal interest, but he was delivering the Message Allah has sent down to him, so he underlined that fact and further explained to his people: ‘"… I am a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds.”’ (*al-A’raf:* 61) He meant to tell them, ‘Do not say that I am lost in error, for there is not even a single error in me, rather, I am a Messenger sent to convey Allah’s message, and Allah gives me nothing but guidance.’

“… I am a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds” (*al-A’raf:* 61); that is, he was sent to them by the One who has created the worlds and who undertakes to provide all creation with sustenance. He has created us and provides for us, so He would not send down to us a message which would lead us to stray or slide into error, rather, He has sent down to His servants a way of guidance that best rectifies them. Allah *the Almighty* has created the whole universe and made the earth subservient to mankind. He has created us and cares for us. He provides for all even those who do not believe in Him. It does not befit His Majesty to send down an ordinance that would mislead His creation. Elevated is He above that.

Having answered their accusation, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* continued to convey his message to his people saying:

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَٰلَٰتِ رَبِّي وَأَنصَحُ لَكُمْ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

I am delivering my Lord’s messages to you and giving you sincere advice. I know things from God that you do not [62]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 62)

The Arabic text of the verse uses the word *yuballigh* for 'deliver'; the stem *b-l-gh* means reaching the utmost level of something or reaching an end or destination. For example, the word *balaghah* eloquence) conveys the following meaning: the utmost level of beautiful expression. In the verse we are dealing with the word *yuballigh*, which means letting the communications of Allah reach those they are meant to reach. It denotes fulfilment of the mission of delivering the Message of Allah assigned to His Messenger.

It would have been enough for Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to say, ‘my Lord’s message’, but he said ‘my Lord’s messages’. In this is an indication that all the messages of Allah *the Exalted* are one as they share the same essence, so Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* delivered the 'messages' of his Lord in the sense that he came with a message that confirmed and conformed with those sent down to the previous Messengers. He only says that which any other messenger before him said–and we know that Prophet Idris (Enoch) and Prophet Seth had scriptures before them– so he proclaimed that he was delivering a message which incorporated the previous messages, whether the messages of Idris (Enoch), Seth or any other Messenger of Allah *peace be upon them*.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* delivered to his people everything Allah *the Almighty* has sent down to him for His servants as guidance that contains wisdom and mercy. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: 'In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Nuh (Noah), which We have revealed to you [Muhammad]….' (*ash-Shura:* 13)

Therefore, by 'messages', perhaps he was referring to the fact that all the messages of Allah share the same essence and fundamentals. Another possible interpretation of using the plural 'messages' instead of the singular is that he was referring to the several communications he received from Allah *the Exalted* from time to time. Using the singular 'message' would have meant the entire message had been revealed to him from Allah *the Almighty* already before thus addressing his people, which was not the case. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* delivered every message which was revealed to him immediately when he received it, hence the use of the plural 'messages'. The word may also be meant to refer to the various teachings that constituted the content of his call. The message dealt with all that was needed to rectify life. It consisted of obligations, prohibitions, counsels, reprimands, good news, warnings, stories, etc. Thus, they were several messages, not just one.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* then said: '…and giving you sincere advice....' (*al-A'raf:* 62) He called his people to follow the Way of Allah by appealing to their hearts and addressing them in a gentle way. This advice was something additional to the content of the message itself.

There is something particularly worth underlining in the Arabic expression of the verse. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said: '…and giving you sincere advice....' (*al-A'raf:* 62) The word *nush* means to give advice. If your own interest is involved in the matter, sincerity of the advice may be doubted. However, Prophet Nuh (Noah) said *ansahu lakum* which literally translates to the following: 'I give advice for you.' By adding *lakum* (for you), instead of only saying *ansahukum* (literally “I give you advice”), he thus emphasised his disinterestedness and that he gave them that advice only for their own benefit.

Then, he said: ‘... I know things from Allah that you do not.’ (*al-A’raf:* 62) It is as though Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* meant to tell his people, ‘What I say to you now is not all the knowledge which has come to me from Allah or all that Allah knows or has taught me; rather, I know other things which I will tell you if you accept the call and show mindfulness of Allah.' Another possible interpretation is that he was alluding to the fact that, unlike people of the previous Messengers, those who denied his message would be punished by Allah *the Exalted* in this life for their sin. This experience had not occurred to the people of Prophet Seth or Prophet Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon them*. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned….’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) This kind of punishment had not occurred before the time of Nuh (Noah), so he meant to explain to them that he knew Allah *the Exalted* planned for them a punishment if they rejected His message.

The words of Prophet Nuh (Noah), ‘... I know things from Allah that you do not’ (*al-A’raf:* 62) may also mean that he wanted to let his people know that the Guidance Allah sent down to him contains much more than what he told them, but he would reveal everything at the time which was destined for it.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* then says as Allah *Glorified is He* quotes him in the Quran:

أَوَعَجِبْتُمْ أَن جَآءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ
لِيُنذِرَكُمْ وَلِتَتَّقُوا۟ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord – through a man in your midst – to warn you and make you aware of God so that you may be given mercy?’ [63] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 63)

I would love to point to something respecting the structure of the verse. The original Arabic text of the verse uses the conjunction *wa* which means 'and/also'. Thus, rendered literally, the verse would translate as follows: 'Do you *also* find it so strange…', or 'So you do, *and* you find it so strange….' (*al-A'raf:* 63) This structure in Arabic means they have done something else besides deeming it strange that a message should come from their Lord. However, this something is not explicitly mentioned in the verse, but is implicitly referred to through using the conjunction *wa*. This omitted or implied clause can be rendered as such: 'So you *deny the truth of what I say* and you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord…' (*al-A'raf:* 63).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as saying: 'Do you find it so strange that a *dhikr* (message) should come from your Lord….' (*al-A'raf:* 63) The Arabic word *dhikr* has multiple connotations, generally denoting 'remembrance, which is the opposite of 'forgetting'; it refers to a thing one bears in mind and sometimes expressed by the tongue.

The word *dhikr* is used in the Quran to convey several meanings, and the first and foremost of these meanings is when it is used to mean the Quran itself: 'we relate to you [Muhammad] this *dhikr* (revelation; the Quran), a decisive statement' (*Al-'Imran:* 58). Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'We have sent down *dhikr* (the Quran) Ourself, and We Ourself will guard it.' (*al-Hijr:* 9)

The word *dhikr* may be also used to mean 'eminence' or 'high repute'. As Allah says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'and, verily, this [revelation] shall indeed become [a source of] *dhikr* (eminence) for you and your people….' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44) The Quran is a great honour for whoever follows it until the Day of Resurrection. Wonders of the Quran never end, and seekers of the truth never tire of researching into it and discovering its miraculous ness. Having been revealed in the Arabic tongue, it will forever be an honour to this language, its people and whoever attempts to learn or speak it. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Certainly we have revealed to you a Book in which is your *dhikr* (good remembrance)…" (*al-Anbiya':* 10). This means that this Book, the Noble Quran, contains the message that gives you honour and renown and makes your history; through this message, Islam has come to eliminate differences of race, colour, etc. so that all people are as equal as the teeth of a comb. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In Allah's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him….' (*al-Hujurat:* 13) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'No Arab is superior to any non-Arab, and no non-Arab is superior to any Arab except based on mindfulness of Allah.'

The Quran is the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent down in the Arabic language, so forever will this language exist and forever will honour be associated with it. The Quran is indeed an honour to whoever follows it. Allah *the Almighty* has conferred on it renown and grandeur that will mark it until the end of time. He *the Exalted* says: 'Sad: By the Quran, full of *dhikr* (grandeur/ honour)…' (*Sad:* 1). Prestige associated with the Quran is eternal. It has been and will be a focus of researchers and scholars. Scientists have always taken interest in exploring its verses that have scientific allusions. Even those who do not believe in it give it considerable attention. Countless copies of it are published all over the world using the best materials. This is the Quran, full of *dhikr*! Even though many Muslims stray from the Straight Path, where the Quran is concerned, they all show reverence for it. We would find a woman who is walking with her face unveiled, yet wears a large Quran pendant on her chest. A man who perhaps does not observe *salat* (prayer) constantly may well keep a copy of the Quran in his car! All these are various manifestations of the *dhikr* (renown/grandeur) Allah *the Exalted* has conferred on His Noble Book. Furthermore, reciters of the Quran compete to recite it in the most beautiful manner, learn its different modes of recitation, and record it with their voices. Quran recording may well be produced with high quality by people who do not even believe in it. Such is the eminence and prestige Allah *the Almighty* has made for the Noble Quran.

The word *dhikr* is also used to mean that which was revealed to all the Messengers; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Ever closer to people draws their reckoning, while they turn away, heedless. Whenever any fresh *dhikr* (revelation) comes to them from their Lord, they listen to it playfully.' (*al-Anbiya':* 1-2) So, *dhikr* refers to everything that has been revealed to the Messengers of Allah. Also, He *Glorified is He* says: 'We gave Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) [the Scripture] that distinguishes right from wrong, a light and a *dhikr* (reminder) for those who are mindful of Allah.' (*al-Anbiya':* 48)

Elsewhere in the Quran, the word *dhikr* is used to mean 'reflection' or 'remembrance'. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices and [divining with] arrows are repugnant acts – Satan's doing – shun them so that you may prosper. With intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to incite enmity and hatred among you, and to stop you from *dhikr* (remembering) Allah and prayer.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90-91) The meaning of *dhikr* in this verse is to reflect, to remember the ordinance of your Creator by living as a Muslim following His Guidance. The word *dhikr* also means 'glorification and praise of Allah', as in His words: '… shining out in houses of worship. Allah has ordained that they be raised high and that His name be remembered in them, with men in them celebrating His Glory morning and evening: men who are not distracted, either by commerce or profit, from *dhikr* (remembering and glorifying) Allah, keeping up the prayer, and paying the prescribed alms, fearing a day when hearts and eyes will turn over.' (*an-Nur:* 36-37)

The word *dhikr* can also be used to mean the goodness which Allah *the Exalted* bestows on His servants by sending guidance to them and also their worship of Him by obeying this guidance. This goodness is a manifestation of Allah's remembrance of His servants, and their remembrance of Him manifests itself through their devotion to Him. For example, contemplate these words of Allah *the Exalted*: 'Allah commands justice, doing the good, and generosity towards relatives, and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may *tadhakkarun* (take heed and obey Him; from the root *dhikr*).' (*an-Nahl:* 90) Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Recite that which has been revealed to you of the Book and keep up prayer. Surely, prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil, and certainly the *dhikr* (remembrance) of Allah is the greatest, and Allah knows what you do.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45) Indeed, Allah's remembrance of them by giving them guidance is the greatest. His remembrance is a grace and a favour, and how should we show gratitude for this favour? It is by observing remembrance of Him through constant worship.

Now back to the verse we are dealing with; Allah quotes Prophet Nuh (Noah) as saying: 'Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord– through a man in your midst– to warn you and make you aware of Allah so that you may be given mercy?' (*al-A'raf:* 63). Why did Nuh's (Noah's) people find it strange that he was sent to them? Incredulity occurs when something which goes against the usual run of things, takes place. Thus, where did their incredulity originate? Allah *the Exalted* says in another chapter of the Quran: '*Qaf-By* the Glorious Quran! But the disbelievers are amazed that a warner has come from among them….' (*Qaf:* 1-2) The source of their amazement and incredulity is that a Messenger came to them from their own kind, but what kind of being did they want the Messenger to be? They were so foolish that they imagined that a Messenger of Allah had to be an angel: 'But the disbelievers are amazed that a warner has come from among them and they say, "How strange!"' (*Qaf:* 1-2)

They were also incredulous about the resurrection. They wondered, after they disappeared into the earth and became dust after their deaths, would they be brought back life? It is logical to show incredulity respecting something that goes against the normal course of things, something unexpected given the facts and implications involved in the matter.

The verse we are examining tells that the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) were amazed that he wanted them to attain to faith in the existence of Allah *the Almighty*. Had they applied to logic, they would have pondered this vast universe that Allah has designed with His Might and Wisdom and brought mankind into it. Had they pondered, they would have realised that they were sent to this earth to find it was already shaped, made perfect to receive them and was for their service. Logic dictates then that they search for the Creator of this miraculous universe and seek to know Him. Not only did they neglect that natural duty, but even when a Messenger from Allah told them about the Creator, they deemed that strange! They should have eagerly received the one who informed them about their Lord. Look around you: the universe and its species of plants and animals, its mineral, natural resources and all that is in are made subservient to you. It was not by your own power that this universe or these created beings were brought to existence, but you were brought into existence to find this universe and all that is in it waiting for you. Should it not occur to you to wonder who has made all this for you?

So the people of Nuh (Noah) should have employed their minds to attain to faith. Imagine that a person's plane crashed somewhere that lacked the essential means of life, and exhaustion overcame him that he fell asleep. Upon waking up, he was surprised to find before him a table laid with the finest foods and drinks. Before eating, should he not ask himself who spread that table there for him?

So the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were incredulous about something that natural disposition requires that they should have sought knowledge of and should have believed in. Allah *the Exalted* does not benefit from your obedience or worship; rather, He gives you reward for it. It is true that worship comprises difficulties since it involves controlling one's desires and forbids him from indulging in unlawful pleasures, but the struggle and devotion are amply rewarded in the Hereafter.

Some may say, 'Why does Allah not simply give us the reward without the hardships of moral responsibility, so long as He does not benefit from our worship?' They see that human intellect is enough, without any religious ordinance, to guide people to do what is right and avoid what is wrong, and for those things which we cannot determine to be good or bad; we may resort to them if we have to and avoid them when we have no need for them.

The answer to this is simple, 'Who told you that human intellect is sufficient to guide us to what is best? That which is good for you might be bad for someone else.' Suppose there were a single property and two people desiring to have it. Each would see that taking it for himself is the best thing to do, whereas the other would see just the reverse. Someone must judge between them, someone who has no prejudices or whims of his own and to whom neither of the two is closer than the other. So Divine Ordinance is essential to protect us from our whims; Allah *the Almighty* has sent down to us guidance to make clear for us what is good and what is bad, for if human logic is left to decide what is good, our whims will clash.

Here is another example. A man would feel good about seeing a woman who is not akin to him by looking at her and talking to her, but how would the woman's family, father, or husband feel about it?

The people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) found it strange that a man from amongst themselves told them about Allah *the Exalted* and faith. However, they should have themselves sought to know about their Creator and employ their minds to understand the truth about Him since everything point to His existence.

Allah says in another verse of the Quran: ‘Our Lord! Bestow upon us all that You have promised us through Your messengers….' (*Al-‘Imran:* 194) Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell them that it is by the virtue of this Divine Promise to them that He sent down upon them His Way of Guidance through Messengers and Prophets. In this respect, we should take into account the fact that Messengers’ and Prophets’ missions were exceedingly difficult, for these missions were not only restricted to conveying the Divine Messages to people, but they caused them appalling hardships and difficulties. In addition, we should know quite well that He *the Almighty* out of His All-Great Wisdom, perfectly and freely chose Messengers and Prophets to carry out these difficult missions; that is to say that their lives were not luxurious in any way. For example, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left the world without eating his fill of barely bread. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* instructed that him and his family members are not allowed to receive almsgiving. Furthermore, Allah’s Messengers’ properties are not inherited by their relatives; rather, whatever they leave is to be spent in charity. It is thus clear that all the hardships caused by conveying the Divine Messages fall on Messengers and Prophets. This is the reason why He *the Almighty* did not say, 'on the tongue of a Messenger' since if the matter had to do only with the function of the tongue, Messengers’ and Prophets’ missions would only be restricted to conveying Divine Messages. Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'through a man in your midst' indicates that the Messengers and Prophets were fully responsible for the delivery of Divine Messages. He *the Exalted* says: 'Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord–through a man in your midst…’?'

However, what is truly strange in this regard? What is truly strange is their rejection to Divinity and Prophethood. Some of them did not yet reject Divinity but denied the fact that a man could be a Messenger or Prophet, to the extent that they asked for a messenger from among the angels to come down to them; they made this request since angels do not disobey, are striking in appearance and never lie. This raises a question: 'How could an angel become a prophet, especially if we were to take into account the fact that we are unable to see them?' It goes without saying that delivering Allah's Message requires direct contact with those to whom the Message would be conveyed; a matter that necessitates that people must see the Messenger and speak with him face to face, yet angels cannot be seen. Therefore, even if He *the Almighty* sent down an angelic Messenger for you, he would have to take the form of a man, just as Jibril (Gabriel) Allah *be pleased with him* did. Thus, deeming sending Messengers from amongst mankind to be strange is actually logical and necessary.

In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us plainly that people, strangely enough, did not follow Divine Guidance when it came to them unprompted, but they wondered how He sent a mere mortal man as His Messenger: 'And nothing prevents people from believing when the guidance comes to them save that they say, "Has Allah sent a man like us as a Messenger?"' (*al-Isra': 94*) As a matter of fact, their statement indicates exceeding foolishness on their part, for if they were sensible, they would hasten to attain faith since a Messenger was sent from amongst themselves; they were quite familiar with his past and dealt directly with him. Had he experienced any past deviations before becoming a Messenger, he would have been ashamed and hesitant to tell them to be upright. As long Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been sent from amongst themselves and they knew him quite well, they should have firmly believed that he would have never fabricated anything against Allah, for he never had lied to anyone. In the same respect, due to the fact that he had been sent from amongst you, he must be a human being. This is why Allah *the Almighty* reproached them in the Quran for asking for an angel to come from Heaven to them by saying: 'And if We had appointed as Messenger an angel, We would have made him appear as a man; and thus We would have caused to be confused to them that which they are now confusing themselves.' (*al-An'am:* 9)

As for this verse under discussion, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord- through a man in your midst- to warn you and make you aware of Allah so that you may be given mercy?', it indicates obviously that the mission of this Messenger is to warn his people so that they may attain piety which causes Allah, in turn, to give and show them mercy. In this way, we find this verse dividing the mission of the Prophet into several stages, namely giving a warning along with glad tidings. Giving a warning means to inform someone that something bad or evil will afflict him so that he can prepare for it and avoid it; *al-Bisharah,* or 'giving glad tidings', on the other hand, conveys a meaning contradictory to that of 'warning' since it means to tell someone that he will experience something good. As a result, one fully prepares himself to receive this forthcoming good and, thus, staying away from all that is evil and bad.

The main reason for giving warnings and glad tidings is for people to avoid what is bad and gain what is good, and thus, man will be really experiencing consciousness of Allah- which causes Him, in turn, to show them mercy.

Therefore, the reasons for their not believing about the coming of their Messenger are unacceptable since the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) should have naturally believed in him, for the message came to them in a way which was consistent with predecessors. 'In the same respect, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was not an angel. Rather, he was a mere human from among you so that he would serve as a model example for you.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* did not choose His Messengers from amongst the people of authority and power, lest they would spread Divine Messages by force, especially if taken into account the fact that, followers under the authority and power of the leaders used to willingly follow falsehood fabricated by such leaders. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* does not want people to think that Divine Laws have been forced by men of falsehood, and thus, He allowed religion to be spread by the hands of the weak. The polytheists of Mecca wished that the revelation of the Quran could have been revealed to a rich person and someone other than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was poor. In the chapter of *az-Zukuruf,* Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they wished if the Quran had been revealed down from above on a great man of the two cities: 'And they say, "Why has not the Quran been sent to some great man of the two towns?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

This indicates that the polytheists of Mecca wished that the Quran had been revealed to a great man from the two cities, yet they viewed this greatness from their own unsound perspective. In addition, it clearly indicates that they themselves believed that the Quran itself is a Divine Message and a miracle. In the same respect, why did not they wonder, 'Is the Quran ennobled by Prophet Muhammad, or vice versa?' It goes without saying that Prophet Muhammad himself *peace and blessings be upon him* was ennobled by the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* stresses in the Quran that the followers of Messengers and Prophets were obviously the most abject amongst their people: 'The chiefs of his people, who disbelieved, replied, "We see thee nothing but a mortal like ourselves, and we see that none have followed thee but those who, to all outward appearance, are the meanest of us. And we do not see in you any superiority over us; nay, we believe you to be liars.' (*Hud:* 27)

Yet, this is viewed as a sign of greatness of religion. If we offer the case of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as an example, we will find that his followers were not from among those of authority or power, and thus, they were completely unable to compel others to accept religion; they were tortured and severely hurt, to the extent that they left their homes and migrated to another place. Therefore, it is clear that the primary goal of sending Messengers and Prophets was to warn people, who will, by virtue of this warning, attain piety which will cause Allah, in turn, to show them mercy.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَنجَيْنَٰهُ وَٱلَّذِينَ مَعَهُۥ فِى ٱلْفُلْكِ وَأَغْرَقْنَا
ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ قَوْمًا عَمِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

But they called him a liar. We saved him, and those who were with him, on the Ark and We drowned those who rejected Our revelations – they were wilfully blind [64]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 64)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the story of the salvation of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and the believers with him. We know quite well how Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was prepared for receiving the Divine Mission; Allah *the Exalted* wanted him to learn carpentry in order to make the ark.

In the Quran, He *Glorified is He* says that the people of Prophet Nuh used to mock at him whenever they passed by him: 'And he started making the ark; and every time the chiefs of his people passed by him, they mocked at him. He said, "If now you mock us, the time is coming when we shall mock you even just as you mock now."' (*Hud:* 38) He *the Almighty* did not refer to the story of the Flood in this context. Yet, in another position in the Quran, He says: 'Thereupon we opened the gates of heaven with water which fell in torrents.' (*al-Qamar:* 11)

In this chapter of *al-'Araf*, He *the Almighty* tells us of the outcome of rejecting the Message of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* by his people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But they called him a liar. We saved him and those who were with him, on the ark and we drowned those who rejected Our revelations….' (*al-A'raf:* 64)

As a matter of fact, this was the first instance of punishment in the history of religion since the Message of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was the first one to face denial and stubbornness. All of the Messengers who came before Nuh (Noah) were only charged with conveying the Message; they were not charged with entering into wars or conflicts. This is why the matter of their punishment was left up to the Heaven due to the fact that the mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entailed that humanity would reach its full maturity; his followers became worthy of inflicting punishments directly upon disbelievers.

In aforementioned verse, He *the Almighty* tells us about the final outcome of rejecting the Message of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. He *the Almighty* says: 'We saved him and those who were with him…' Yet, Allah did not say how He saved him, nor did He tell us anything about the story of the ark; rather, He told us about the final end of those who called him a liar. In fact, the punishment inflicted upon them was the Flood. He *the Almighty* says: '…and we drowned those who rejected Our revelations. They were wilfully blind.' (*al-A'raf:* 64) The Arabic word *'Ama* (blind) means someone who has lost the sight of both eyes. Arabs also use the following two words in the same respect, namely, *'amih* and *a'mah*. As a matter of fact, there is no difference whatsoever between the two meanings indicated by the blindness of sight and that of the heart, for both of them refers to that person who deviated from the Way of Guidance.

Allah *the Exalted* then moves to tell us about another Messenger, in order to give Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an excellent example in him, too. Having shed light on the story of Nuh (Noah), He mentions the story of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them*. Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَإِلَىٰ عَادٍ أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا ۗ قَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُۥٓ ۚ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

To the people of ′ Ad We sent their brother, Hud. He said,
'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him.
Will you not take heed?' [65] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 65)

This verse clearly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who sent Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* to his people, exactly as He sent Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* before him. The words 'their brother' evoke many things: first of all that he was from their own race and spoke their own language and second that they knew quite well everything about him and his past. All of these points are undoubtedly signs which were supposed to make them place trust in Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* did not send them a foreign Messenger about whom they knew nothing so that they would not say, 'He has come to make himself our master.' Rather, He sent them one from their own race, namely their brother, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*.

Therefore, it is clear that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was from the people of 'Ad. Yet, another group of scholars holds a different opinion; they believe that he was not from that tribe. They claim that brotherhood is of two kinds; one pertains to the close father and another pertains to the origin of man, namely. Adam. According to the second opinion, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was their brother in humanity and not from among themselves. Therefore, we have two possible explanations for this part of the aforementioned verse. At this point, let us discuss the following story about Mu'awiah *Allah be pleased with him*. He was sitting once when a guard came in and said, 'O, Commander of the Believers! There is a man at the door who says he is your brother,' Whereupon Mu'awiah raised his eyebrows, confused, as though saying to his guard, 'Do you not know the brothers of the Commander of the Believers?!' He further said, 'Show him in.' When the man came in, Mu‘awiah said, 'which brother of mine are you?!' 'Your brother from Adam,' the man replied. 'A family tie which has been cut,' Mu‘awiah Allah *be pleased with him* replied, meaning that people no longer pay any attention to this kind of brotherhood. He then continued, 'I swear by Allah that I shall be the first to restore it!'

If we draw a direct comparison between the saying of Allah *the Almighty* on what Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to his people and that on what Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* said to his people, we notice that He adds the letter *Fa'* which translates in this verse as 'and' to the statement of Nuh (Noah) without doing the same with Hud's (Eber's). This actually indicates the absolute accuracy of the Quranic style, which proves definitively that the Quran has been sent down by Allah *the Almighty*. As a matter of fact, these two verses are identical to each other: the context and the meaning are the same. Also, Nuh (Noah) and Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them* were both Messengers, yet we find the letter *Fa'* in one verse, while the other does not have it. Grammatically, we know that the word 'and', the letter *Fa'* indicate chronological succession, and thus, it lends to the idea that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* repeatedly asked them to accept his Message; this is a fact which is mentioned clearly in chapter of *Nuh* in which Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the story of Nuh (Noah) with his people by saying that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* complained to Allah that he had been calling his people night and day, but his call has only caused them to flee further and further away from Him *the Almighty*. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* then added that whenever he called them to Allah so that He would grant them forgiveness, they would put their fingers into their ears, wrapped themselves up in their garments of sin, grew obstinate and became yet more arrogant in their false pride. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* further added that he openly called them by preaching to them in public, and he spoke to them secretly, or in private, by saying: 'Ask your Sustainer to forgive your sins for you – for, verily, He is All-Forgiving!' (*Nuh:* 5-10)

Thus, it is clear that the use of the letter *Fa'* (and) is quite appropriate in the context of speaking about the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and his people, but as for Prophet Hud (Eber), we find that he called his people to Allah once, or twice or even three times, and thus, there was no consistent and frequent repetition as in the case of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them*. This, indeed, clarifies for us why Allah *the Almighty* adds the letter *Fa'* to the statement of Nuh (Noah) and not to that of Hud (Eber). A person might yet find this point strange, especially if we take into account the fact that the time period spent by Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* with his people was not equivalent to the that spent by Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* with his people. The Quran tells us clearly that Nuh (Noah) remained among his people for a thousand years minus fifty years: 'And We, certainly, sent Nuh (Noah) to his people, and he remained among them a thousand years, short of fifty years. Then the deluge overtook them while they were wrongdoers.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 14)

This indicates that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* spent almost a thousand years calling his people by night and day, both secretly and openly, yet they always fled from faith. This is why when speaking of the mission of Nuh (Noah), Allah *the Almighty* used the Arabic particle *Fa'*, or 'and', which indicates chronological succession, whilst in the case of the people of 'Ad, He did not use it.

Similarly, by close reflection on the statement of Nuh (Noah), we find that he gave warning to his people that they might be afflicted with a great punishment. As for Hud (Eber), we find him asking his people to offer acts of worship to Allah *the Exalted* and to fear Him at all times. Therefore, the question is 'Why did Hud (Eber) not warn his people in the same way Nuh (Noah) did, especially if we take into account the fact that the context and the meanings are the same?'

The answer to this question may be quite evident from the fact that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was previously told by Allah that his people would be afflicted with a punishment. As for Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* he had no previous knowledge that his people would be tortured. This means that the punishment of drowning that afflicted the people of Nuh (Noah) was the first of its kind, and Allah had previously told him about it. This is why Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* relying on the possibility, his people should take into account, that they might be afflicted with the same punishment, just drew their attention that such a punishment might afflict them as well. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Will you not take heed?' (*al-A'raf:* 65). This part of the verse implies a warning to the people of 'Ad that punishment might afflict them in the same way it afflicted the people of Nuh (Noah).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالَ ٱلْمَلَأُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِن قَوْمِهِۦٓ إِنَّا لَنَرَىٰكَ فِى
سَفَاهَةٍ وَإِنَّا لَنَظُنُّكَ مِنَ ٱلْكَـٰذِبِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

**But the disbelieving leaders of his people said,
'We believe you are a fool,' and 'We think you
are a liar' [66] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 66)**

We notice that Allah *the Almighty* adds the act of disbelief to the leaders of the people of Prophet Hud (Eber), yet He does not do that while speaking about the people of Nuh (Noah). Why is that? The reason is that there was no one amongst the people of Nuh (Noah) who had attained faith, even secretly. As for the people of 'Ad, there was a man named Marthad ibn Sa'd who had attained faith secretly. Thus, the Divine statement concerning the people of 'Ad is quite on the mark given their status since amongst them was a believer who did not follow their falsehood in accusing Prophet Hud (Eber) of foolishness. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us what the people of Hud (Eber) said about him by saying: 'But the disbelieving leaders of his people said, "We believe you are a fool, and we think you are a liar." ' (*al-A'raf:* 66) As for the people of Nuh (Noah), they accused him of being lost in manifest error, saying: '…We believe you are far astray.' (*al-A'raf:* 60) Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* replied to them: 'My people, there is nothing astray about me!" (*al-A'raf:* 61)

At this point, we must provide an answer to a very important question: 'What is the difference between error (*Dalal*) and foolishness (*Safaha*)?' Error means to be averse to the truth, whilst foolishness means behaving in an insensible and silly manner, without thinking. The people of 'Ad fabricated another lie against Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* and accused him of being a liar. Allah says: '… and we think you are a liar.' (*al-A'raf:* 66) The word *Azh-Zhann,* in this verse translates as 'think', which means to presume that something is true without actually being certain of it. Truthfully speaking, there are things which are more likely to happen than others. Other scholars yet believe that this particular word *Azh-Zhann* conveys the meaning of certainty, a point which is believed to be correct in the light of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in chapter of *al-Baqara* wherein the word *Azh-Zhann* indicates certainty (*al-Baqara:* 46).

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us how Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* answered his people by saying:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ لَيۡسَ بِي سَفَاهَةٞ وَلَٰكِنِّي رَسُولٞ مِّن رَّبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٦٧

He said, 'My people, there is nothing foolish about me!
On the contrary, I am a messenger from the Lord of all
the Worlds [67] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 67)

As a matter of fact, this statement of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* completely negates their accusation against him of weak-mindedness and foolishness. In addition, it clearly indicates that he is just a bearer of the Divine Message, a point which is confirmed by the following verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says:

أُبَلِّغُكُمۡ رِسَٰلَٰتِ رَبِّي وَأَنَا۠ لَكُمۡ نَاصِحٌ أَمِينٌ ٦٨

I am delivering my Lord's messages to you.
I am your sincere and honest adviser [68]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 68)

Telling us about what Prophet Noah said to his people, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I am delivering my Lord's messages to you and giving you sincere advice.' (*al-A'raf:* 62)

This raises a very important question: 'Why are the two Quranic styles of giving advice different from each other in these two verses?' In other words, Allah *the Exalted* when speaking about Nuh (Noah), uses the verb to indicate the giving of advice by saying 'I am… giving you sincere advice...' However, when He speaks about Prophet Hud (Eber), He uses the noun by saying: 'I am your sincere and honest adviser.'

Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the verb in the statement of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to indicate frequent repetition, a point which clearly explains how Nuh (Noah) used to call his people to Allah; he called them day and night, both openly and secretly. As for Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* Allah *the Exalted* uses the noun. Grammarians believe that the use of nouns indicates that there is no motion or movement which plainly elucidates the condition of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* with his people, for he did not frequently repeat his call to them.

Telling us about what Prophet Hud (Eber) told his people, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَعَجِبْتُمْ أَن جَآءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ ۚ
وَٱذْكُرُوٓا۟ إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَآءَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَزَادَكُمْ فِى ٱلْخَلْقِ
بَصْۜطَةً ۖ فَٱذْكُرُوٓا۟ ءَالَآءَ ٱللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

Do you find it so strange that a message should come from your Lord, through a man in your midst, to warn you? Remember how He made you heirs after Noah's people, and increased your stature: remember God's bounties, so that you may prosper' [69] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 69)

Close reflection upon this verse indicates that Allah *the Almighty* states that a 'warning' was the ultimate goal behind the mission of Prophet Hud (Eber) showing that this statement of Hud (Eber) is different from that of Prophet Nuh (Noah) who showed that his ultimate goal was to make his people attain piety and fear Allah. Furthermore, the meanings of the two statements are identical to each other; Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* mentioned 'warning' so that his people would fear and be conscious of Allah so that they might attain mercy. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* mentioned the first link in this chain, namely warning, we can adduce the rest, that is being conscious of Allah which leads us to attain His Mercy.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… Do you but remember how He made you heirs to Nuh's (Noah's) people…' indicates a new statement by Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* since the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) were the first people ever to be punished for not believing. Thus, when Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was sent to his people, he told them about the punishment that afflicted the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) so that they would take admonition from them.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Do you but remember how He made you heirs to Nuh's (Noah's) people and endowed you abundantly with power. Remember, then, Allah's Blessings, so that you might attain to a happy state!' (*al-A'raf:* 69)

The verse explains that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* reminded them of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has endowed them powerful bodies, to the extent that it was said that the tallest of them measured one hundred cubits in height, while the shortest measured only sixty. Furthermore, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* ordered them to remember Allah's Blessings upon them—the greatest of blessings was sending them a Messenger to lead them to goodness.

However, what was their response? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us, by saying:

قَالُوٓا۟ أَجِئْتَنَا لِنَعْبُدَ ٱللَّهَ وَحْدَهُۥ وَنَذَرَ مَا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ ءَابَآؤُنَا ۖ
فَأْتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَآ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

They said, 'Have you really come to tell us to serve God alone and to forsake what our forefathers served? If what you say is true, bring us the punishment you threaten' [70]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 70)

Logic dictates that they were supposed to worship solely Allah and not to ascribe other partners with Him in worship. We know for certain that these false gods brought them neither benefit nor harm, nor did they even hear them. It is historically recorded that the polytheists used to take their broken idols to the blacksmiths to fix them. So, how could such idols be worshipped?! As for the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* they told him they were following the footsteps of their forefathers and that they could not leave what their forefathers worshipped. Likewise, they transgressed and challenged him by saying, 'If your Lord warns us of an eminent torment, then bring it upon us if you are truthful.' Consequently, it became clear that there was no hope of convincing them to accept the call to faith.

Thus, how did Allah *the Almighty* respond to them? The answer is clear in the following verse in which Allah says:

قَالَ قَدۡ وَقَعَ عَلَيۡكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ رِجۡسٞ وَغَضَبٌۖ أَتُجَٰدِلُونَنِي فِيٓ
أَسۡمَآءٖ سَمَّيۡتُمُوهَآ أَنتُمۡ وَءَابَآؤُكُم مَّا نَزَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلۡطَٰنٖۚ
فَٱنتَظِرُوٓاْ إِنِّي مَعَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡمُنتَظِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

He said, 'You are already set to receive your Lord's loathing and anger. Are you arguing with me about mere names you and your forefathers invented, names for which God has given no sanction? Just wait; I too am waiting' [71]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 71)

This verse indicates that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* used to enter in lengthy conversations with them; so, when they asked him to bring them the torment he promised them with, Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* told them immediately that they had been already set to receive Allah's Loathing and Anger. However, this raises an important question: 'Hud (Eber) was already speaking to his people when he told them that they had already been afflicted with Allah's Anger and Loathing. So, why did he use the past tense, even though the action had not yet happened?' He used the past tense which indicates that the action had already been decreed in spite of the fact that it had not yet happened since he had conveyed Allah's Message to them which means that this Divine Punishment would inevitably afflict them, and they would be unable to escape it by any means. In addition, we should take into account the undeniable fact that time is meaningless as to the Orders of Allah *the Almighty* for He is fully capable of carrying out His Will whenever He wishes. Furthermore, none can prevent them from being afflicted with this Divine Punishment. This verse points out that Allah *Glorified is He* afflicted them with *Ar-Rijs* which is impurity and uncleanness. Consequently, this verse does not clearly explain about how Allah's Anger will afflict them, yet it must have had a particular form in which it occurred.

The verse then tells that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* asked them scornfully, 'Are you arguing with me about mere names you and your forefathers invented…?' People used to name things after their indications, and thus, they are the ones who gave these false gods their names; yet are these gods true gods so that they can worship them? The answer is a definitive 'No'. Rather, they have ascribed Divinity to that which is not truly divine; therefore, these names they gave to these idols are absolutely meaningless. Likewise, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* tells them that they were only imitating their forefathers and that what they worshipped were only names for which Allah *the Almighty* gave no sanction. He *the Exalted* says: 'Are you arguing with me about mere names you and your forefathers invented names for which Allah has given no sanction?' (*al-A'raf:* 71)

This means that these names could in no way prove their claims, which are proven by the fact that during the pre-Islamic time period, they named an idol after al-'Uzza, or 'Dignity', yet when they smashed it, they found no dignity whatsoever. Since this so-called 'god' did not defend itself in any way, how could it be one along with a Sustainer for others?! Likewise, they had a goddess named *al-Lat*, yet when they smashed it, they found that it had no power, might, or wrath.

Confirming that they would be certainly afflicted by Allah's punishment, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* said to them, 'Just wait. I too am waiting.' Furthermore, Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* ordered them to 'wait' which enables us to properly understand the true meaning of His Saying, 'Just wait. I too am waiting.' What this means is that this loathsome evil and condemnation would undoubtedly afflict them. In this respect, it is of great importance to reiterate that time is of no meaning as to Divine Orders. To illustrate this point, let us examine the Quranic verse in the chapter of *an-Nahl* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: that His command has come, therefore, do not seek to hasten it: 'In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful, the decree of Allah is at hand, so seek not to hasten it. Holy is He and exalted far above all that which they associate with Him.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) Even though Allah *the Exalted* put the verb in the past tense indicating that His command has already come which seems to be in apparent contradiction with His Order, they were told not to seek to hasten it, namely the command. Yet, we affirm that there is no contradiction whatsoever since Allah *the Almighty* is the One

Who told us about this matter. In addition, there is no force that can prevent, or even alter, the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَأَنجَيْنَٰهُ وَٱلَّذِينَ مَعَهُۥ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِّنَّا وَقَطَعْنَا دَابِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ
كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا ۖ وَمَا كَانُوا۟ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

We saved him, and those who were with him, through Our mercy; We destroyed those who denied Our revelations and would not believe [72] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 72)

Drawing a comparison between the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and that of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them* clearly indicates that He told us about the means through which Nuh (Noah) and those with him were saved; yet He did not tell us anything about that means through which He saved Prophet Hud (Eber) and the believers with him. The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'We saved him' indicates that a general torment had afflicted them. In this respect, it is important to note that Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* to go far away along with his companions before afflicting his people with this torment. In the ancient past, Arabs used to go to the Sacred House when they were afflicted by any disaster they could not ward off; they used to do so to supplicate to Allah *Glorified is He* to save them from this particular disaster and calamity. That was actually the case with the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) who denied and rejected his Message; Allah *the Exalted* afflicted them with a famine which lasted for three years. This is why they went to the *Ka'ba* to call upon their Lord to lighten their suffering. A group of them headed by Qayl ibn ‘Anaz and Marthad ibn Sa‘ad, a Muslim who concealed his faith, went to Mecca. They became guests of their maternal uncle named Al-‘Amaliq whose lineage went back to ‘Amliq, son of Levi, son of Sam, son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. It was ‘Amaliq who ruled Mecca during that particular period of time. The group of the people of Hud (Eber) were guests of Mu‘awyah ibn Abu Bakr who comfortably accommodated them under Arab customs and traditions for three days; they were so comfortably accommodated to the extent that they forgot about the prime goal of their journey, enjoying the hospitality of Mu‘awyah for an entire month. It was at this point that Mu‘awyah wondered, 'they came to save their people from the famine striking them, yet they did not even think to go to the *Ka'ba*, or to call upon our Lord. However, I fear to say such to them lest they say that I have treated them inhospitably, and it becomes a black mark on my name.' He began to think how to settle the matter, thus, he decided to make use of his two songstresses known as 'The Two Locusts' who said to him, 'Compose poetry on the matter and we shall sing it for them.' Mu'awyah approved the idea and proceeded to say:

O Qayl, woe to you, stand and pray!
Perhaps Allah might send abundant rain
And water the lands of 'Ad, for the people of 'Ad
Have become so feeble they can barely speak!

Singing has a strong effect on people, especially when it is intended to target a particular person. So, when the songstresses sang and mentioned the name of Qayl, saying: 'O Qayl, woe to you, stand and pray, which really means: 'Why did you not go to the Sacred House to call upon Allah *the Almighty* to remove the punishment from your people, those of 'Ad, who were so utterly exhausted that they can barely speak?' Qayl regained his senses at these words and do did Marthad ibn Sa'd. At that point, Qayl knew that Marthad ibn Sa'd had already believed in Prophet Hud (Eber) and his Message, so he, therefore, refused to accompany him to the *Ka'ba.* Qayl already went to the Sacred House and supplicated to Allah *the Almighty*. Consequently, He sent three clouds of different colours: black, red and white. Qayl heard a voice asking him, 'Choose for his people.' The voice told him that whatever of these three clouds he would chose would go to his people. Thinking that black clouds contain huge amounts of water, Qayl chose the black one. They returned home and found the black cloud there, so he said to them, 'I chose the black cloud since it gives the most abundant rain.' Yet, this cloud actually contained the Divine Punishment that afflicted them for rejecting the Message of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*. Therefore, the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) mistakenly thought that the black cloud was nothing but a heavy cloud which will bring them much needed rain!: 'Then, when they saw the punishment coming towards their valleys in the form of a cloud, they said, "This is a cloud which will give us rain." We said, "Nay, but it is that which you sought to hasten - a wind wherein is a grievous punishment.''' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24) This is the cloud which Qayl told about. At that point, Allah *the Almighty* told them that they were wrong, for this cloud was the very thing which they so contemptuously sought to hasten; it brought forth a wind bearing grievous suffering, a wind which was bound to destroy everything at its Sustainer's behest, to the extent that they, the disbelievers of the people of 'Ad, were so utterly wiped out that nothing could be seen save their empty dwellings (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25). Therefore, it was by this punishment of wind and rain mentioned in the chapter of *al-Ahqaf* that Allah *the Almighty* tortured the disbelievers from among the people of 'Ad. Furthermore, no one escaped this Divine torment except those who had attained faith, which is confirmed by the saying of Allah *the Exalted*: 'We saved him and those who were with him, through Our Mercy; we destroyed those who denied Our Revelations and would not believe.' (*al-A'raf:* 72)

It is quite clear that Allah *the Exalted* made it easy for Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* and his believing followers to escape and leave the area the moment the cloud appeared. Prophet Hud (Eber) heard a voice confirming that this cloud bore within it grievous torment, so he took the believers with him and fled to Mecca. As for those who wronged themselves by denying their Messenger and refusing to believe in their Lord, they were utterly destroyed.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَإِلَىٰ ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَٰلِحًا ۗ قَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ
غَيْرُهُۥ ۖ قَدْ جَآءَتْكُم بَيِّنَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ هَٰذِهِۦ نَاقَةُ ٱللَّهِ لَكُمْ ءَايَةً ۖ
فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِىٓ أَرْضِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوٓءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

To the people of Thamud We sent their brother, Saleh. He said, 'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord: this is God's she-camel – a sign for you – so let her graze in God's land and do not harm her in any way, or you will be struck by a painful torment [73] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 73)

Following the same pattern as Prophet Hud (Eber) did, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* gave his people a warning so that they would be conscious of Allah, making them eligible to attain His Mercy. The Quran mentions Saleh's (Shelah's) statement for his people saying," … "My people serve Allah. You have no god other than Him.'" Thus, it is clear that the main purpose of 'giving a warning to the people of Saleh (Shelah)' is to make them fear Allah *the Almighty* in order to make them eligible for attaining His Mercy and prosperity. In this respect, I always say that the Quran may sometimes mention no details about a particular topic, yet the context reveals the intended meaning. In fact, the Quran does this in order to make us forever attentive all the time to acquire the true meanings of the verses. Let us offer a striking example to illustrate this point. Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* with the hoopoe. The Quran tells us that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) took count of his birds, but he did not see the hoopoe. Thus, he threatened that he would punish him severely or he would even slaughter it. However, the hoopoe came back and told Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* that it comprehended that which Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) did not comprehend and that it has brought to him clear information from Sheba. Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* then sent the hoopoe to the people of Sheba with a letter from him, ordering the hoopoe to turn away from them and see what answer they would return. The Queen of Sheba immediately told her people that she has received an honourable letter (*an-Naml:* 20-29). It is as though the hoopoe took the letter, threw it down to the Queen of Sheba, and she then made her response directly. This tells us clearly that the Quran does not repeat the events which may be understood from the context.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says in this verse under discussion: 'To the people of Thamud, We sent their brother, Saleh (Shelah).' The saying of Allah *the Exalted* 'their brother' confirms that the people of Thamud were well acquainted with Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* and that they were equally acquainted with his past and moral conduct. The word Thamud in the verse has been ascribed to Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* since he was from among themselves. It is important here to note that the Message of Prophet *Saleh* (Shelah) was quite similar to that of Prophets (Nuh) Noah and Hud (Eber) *peace be upon them*. The Quran tells us that Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* tells his people, 'To the people of Thamud, We sent their brother, Saleh (Shelah). He said, "My people serve Allah. You have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord. This is Allah's she-camel-a sign for you-so let her graze in Allah's Land and do not harm her in any way, or you will be struck a painful torment.'" (*al-A'raf:* 73)

The word *Bayyinah,* which translates as a 'clear sign' means the proof that Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* was indeed sent to deliver Allah's Message to the people of Thamud, and this sign was the miraculous she-camel. What is the story of that she-camel? Did Prophet Saleh (Shelah) bring them a she-camel and then ascribe its ownership to Allah? Of course he did not; the creation of this she-camel must have been miraculous so that they would realise that it did not belong to any human being. Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* called his people to have faith in Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, the leaders of his people challenged him and agreed that each of the two parties, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) and his followers, on one hand, and the disbelievers of his people, on the other, would supplicate to their own lords. The disbelievers even told Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* that they would follow him if His Lord defeated theirs. They called upon their false gods, but they received no answer whatsoever, whereupon they said to Prophet Saleh (Shelah), 'If you are truthful in what you say, let your Lord bring forth from this solitary rock, known as al-Kathiba, in front of you in the mountain a she-camel and let it be pregnant with a calf.' They even asked him that this she-camel must be a Bactrian – the finest kind of camels. Therefore, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* called upon Allah *the Exalted* to give him this miracle, and the rock opened and the she-camel came out. The coming of the she-camel out of the rock left no room for doubt since it was a sign from Allah, for this miracle had happened right before them. This is actually the true meaning of Allah's saying 'a clear sign', which is the rock splitting before them and revealing the she-camel which was pregnant and very hairy. The throes of birth then came to this she-camel, and it proceeded to give birth to its calf. This, undoubtedly, confirms that this she-camel was a true Divine Miracle. The people of Thamud were supposed to believe in Prophet Saleh (Shelah) and his Message and not to oppose him in any way. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He revealed to Prophet Saleh (Shelah) to tell the people of Thamud to share the water with it, so that it would drink one day, and they would drink the next:

'He said, "Here is a she-camel. She has her turn of drinking, and you have your turn of drinking on an appointed day."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 155) So, we should take into account that the people of Thamud had scarce resources of water.

Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* told them that they must designate a particular day for this she-camel to drink. In addition, he told them that they themselves and their animals must not approach the water during that day. Amazingly enough, this she-camel would drink the whole amount of water in the spring until there was no water left; it drank as much water as would suffice all the other animals of Thamud. All the water which it drank would, by the Permission of Allah, become milk in its udders and Thamud used to drink it.

It is true that the she-camel prevented them from the water for defined days, but they meanwhile got benefit from the milk they took from it. Due to the fact that this she-camel was a Divine Miracle, it was necessary that its body must be big in such a way which enables it to eat massive quantities of food and to drink large amounts of water which will consequently turn into huge amounts of milk. This indicates that this she-camel possessed miraculous qualities. Its calf used to accompany her all the time. When the temperature was high in summer, the she-camel and its calf used to dwell high in the mountain, whilst the other camels would descend to the lower areas of the land. However, when winter came, it would go down to the low-lying areas. It is known that Mada'in Saleh (the dwelling-place of Thamud) was in a very hot place; those who visit Medina or Tabuk can pass by it.

The she-camel was thus free to choose wherever it wanted to stay in summer or winter, and no one could ever harm it. There were two women who owned she-camels, and the she-camel of Allah used always to graze and drink more than theirs. So, these two women brought a man nicknamed 'the ruddy-faced man of Thamud', whose name was Qudar ibn Salif, to slay the she-camel. When he slew the she-camel, its calf climbed up a mountain known as Qara and gave three cries. At that point, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* called out, 'O, people! Find this young calf, for perhaps if you find it, Allah will hold back His Torment from you.' So, they went looking for it but could not find anything. Allah *the Almighty* thus informed Prophet Saleh (Shelah) that the torment would inevitably afflict his people.

Allah *Glorified is He* told him that the punishment would afflict them, as follows: on the first day their faces would become yellow; on the second they would become red, while on the third they would witness their faces turning black. The people of Thamud had actually committed an awful crime, for they knew for certain that the she-camel had belonged to Allah *the Almighty*; they had actually witnessed its creation by eye, and thus, they must have taken a warning from it. Furthermore, they must have understood that Allah *the Almighty* would afflict them with a painful torment in case they harmed it. Yet, their foolishness made them forget that it was Allah’s she-camel.

He *the Almighty* says: 'A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord. This is Allah’s she-camel-a sign for you-so let her graze in Allah’s Land and do not harm her in any way, or you will be struck a painful torment.' Indeed, a grievous chastisement did befall them once the 'little, ugly man of Thamud' slew the she-camel. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَٱذْكُرُوٓا۟ إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَآءَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَبَوَّأَكُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِن سُهُولِهَا
قُصُورًا وَتَنْحِتُونَ ٱلْجِبَالَ بُيُوتًا ۖ فَٱذْكُرُوٓا۟ ءَالَآءَ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

Remember how He made you heirs after' Ad and settled you in the land to build yourselves castles on its plains and carve houses out of the mountains: remember God’s blessings and do not spread corruption in the land’ [74] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 74)

Before, Allah *the Almighty* spoke about the people of *‘Ad,* He told us that Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* asked them to remember how He *the Almighty* made them heirs to Noah’s people: 'Do you remember how He made you heirs to Nuh's (Noah’s) people.' (*al-A’raf:* 69)

Concerning the verse under discussion, He tells us that Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* asked his people to remember how He made them heirs to the tribe of 'Ad.

This is naturally so due to the story of the people ‘Ad was nearer to them than that of the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah). Furthermore, their story was quite well known and its lessons were clear. As for the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* it was certainly somewhat less recent than that of the people of ‘Ad.

In this particular verse, Allah *the Almighty* reminds the people of Thamud that He made them settle in the land in which they lived, enabling them to make castles from its plains; a 'plain' is a flat area of land in which there are no hills, rocks, or mountains. Allah *the Exalted* made it possible for them to carve houses out of the mountains; the life span of one of the people of 'Ad was so long that a house would crumble twice during the single lifetime of a man. It is actually for this reason that they decided to make houses out of the mountains so they would remain secure. Today, when one sees how Mad’in Saleh (the dwellings of Thamud in Arabia) were wonderfully carved out of the mountains, he will undoubtedly have the opportunity to fully realise the Greatness of Allah *the Almighty* since He directed man to that which benefits them. Allah finally concludes the verse with His saying, 'remember Allah’s Blessings and do not spread corruption in the land'

We previously explained that the term *'Alaa’* Allah' means His countless Blessing and favours. Allah *the Exalted* then warns them that they must not spread corruption on the earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالَ ٱلْمَلَأُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ مِن قَوْمِهِۦ لِلَّذِينَ ٱسْتُضْعِفُوا۟ لِمَنْ ءَامَنَ مِنْهُمْ
أَتَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ صَٰلِحًا مُّرْسَلٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ ۚ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا بِمَآ أُرْسِلَ بِهِۦ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

But the arrogant leaders among his people said to the believers they thought to be of no account, ‘Do you honestly think that *Saleh* is a messenger from his Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes. We believe in the message sent through him’ [75]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 75)

The Quran tells us that people are divided into leaders and followers. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in the chapter of *al-Baqara* that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers: 'Could they but see when those who were followed shall disown their followers and shall see the punishment and all their ties shall be cut asunder.' (*al-Baqara:* 166)

In this particular verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* tells us that a dialogue took place between the leaders and the oppressed ones who have neither prestige nor power, and the oppressed were the ones who truly believed that the call to faith would be of great benefit to them and so they accepted it. As for the arrogant leaders of the people of Thamud; they were of higher ranks in their community. Thus, the arrogant leaders asked the oppressed ones who had faith in Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* whether they honestly believed that he was a true Prophet sent from Allah or not. It should also be mentioned that there were other oppressed people who remained in their allegiance to disbelief.

When the arrogant ones heard the answer of the faithful from amongst the oppressed, they replied to them in the following verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتَكۡبَرُوٓاْ إِنَّا بِٱلَّذِىٓ ءَامَنتُم بِهِۦ كَٰفِرُونَ ٧٦

But the arrogant leaders said, ‘We reject what you believe in’ [76] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 76)

As a consequence, they proclaimed their disbelief verbally and affirmed it by slaying the she-camel. Telling about what they did, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَعَقَرُواْ ٱلنَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوۡاْ عَنۡ أَمۡرِ رَبِّهِمۡ وَقَالُواْ يَٰصَٰلِحُ
ٱئۡتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَآ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ٧٧

And then they hamstrung the camel. They defied their Lord’s commandment and said, ‘*Saleh*, bring down the punishment you threaten, if you really are a messenger!’ [77] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 77)

The word *al-‘Aqru* means 'to slaughter a camel'. Following the same pattern of disbelievers before them, they challenged Prophet Saleh (Shelah) to bring them down the punishment he promised them proving if he was really a Messenger sent from Allah. Allah’s Messengers and Prophets are all truthful. Yet, they people of Thamud accused Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* of telling a lie even though they witnessed the miracle of the she-camel be performed before their very eyes. Accordingly, they deserved Allah’s punishment mentioned in the following verse in which He *the Almighty* says:

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ ٱلرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا۟ فِى دَارِهِمْ جَـٰثِمِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

An earthquake seized them: by the next morning they were lying dead in their homes [78] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 78)

An earthquake or *Ar-Rajfa* means a violent movement which causes something to convulse. In another verse, the Quran refers to this *Rajfa* as *At-Taghya,* or 'overpowering blast.' (*al-Haqqa:* 5)

After they had been overtaken with this severe punishment, they became, as the Quran describes them, *Jathimin,* or 'motionless bodies in their abodes'. This clearly indicates that when this punishment befell them, they died at once; for example, if one of them had been standing, he remained in his standing position, and if he had been sitting, he remained in his seated position, and if he had been reclining, he would remain in his reclined position; or, as they say, they were 'frozen on the spot'. The word *al-Jathim* in Arabic means someone who remains in his place without moving or one who sticks to the ground.

After the earthquake overtook them, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* turned away from them; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَـٰقَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَةَ رَبِّى
وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَلَـٰكِن لَّا تُحِبُّونَ ٱلنَّـٰصِحِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

So he turned away from them, saying, ‘My people, I delivered my Lord’s messages to you and gave you sincere advice, but you did not like those who gave sincere advice’ [79] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 79)

Another important question is raised: 'was Prophet Saleh (Shelah) truly speaking to them after they were dead?!' Yes, he spoke to them as a vindication of himself along with showing that he was free from blame. For example, this is exactly like when someone gets into trouble and his friend says to him, 'I cannot do anything for you now, for I advised you before.' Another example is when an evil man is slain; you say to him, 'I told you so!' As a matter of fact, you speak in order to prove your innocence and vindication. In the same respect, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did so with the idolaters who were slain in the battle of Badr by calling on them one by one after their bodies had been thrown into the pit of Badr. He said: 'O, men of the pit, (calling them by their names), have you found what your Lord promised you to be true? Indeed I have found what my Lord promised me to be true!'(1)

The Companions Allah *be pleased with them* said, 'Do you speak to them, O, Messenger of Allah, when they are corpses?' He replied, 'By Allah, you do not hear what I say any better than they do. However, they cannot answer me.'(2)

It is as though Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* said this so that they would remember how he had conveyed to them Allah's Messages and His Way of Guidance, along with how he advised them sincerely and dearly hoped for them that they would adhere to Allah's Way. However, they did not listen to his advice, for they did not love those who give sound advice. Truthfully speaking, the one who gives sound advice wants to take the person, whom he advises, away from the evil to which the advised has grown accustomed, yet the advised becomes angry when anyone advises him.

After finishing with the story of Thamud with their Prophet, Allah tells us about the story of another Prophet:

وَلُوطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِۦٓ أَتَأْتُونَ ٱلْفَٰحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُم
بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنَ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

We sent Lot and he said to his people, 'How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this [80] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 80)

Just as the Quran tells us that Prophet Nuh (Noah), Prophet Hud (Eber) and Prophet Saleh, (Shelah) *peace be upon them* had been sent by Allah *the Almighty,* it also makes it clear that Lut (Lot) was a true Messenger sent by Allah to his own people. In this particular verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* puts the name of Lut (Lot) in the Arabic accusative case which stresses that he, like the Messengers and Prophets before him, was sent by Allah to his people.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

However, when was the time in which he was sent? The verse indicates plainly that the time in which he spoke, was exactly the same time in which he was sent. This means that whenever a Messenger or Prophet is sent and held responsible for delivering Allah's Message to his people, he would not waste a single instant in vain; rather, he seized all the opportunities to fulfil his mission. It was as though the deliverance of the Message began immediately at that instant he said, 'O, my people!' Consequently, the Quranic style assures that whenever a Messenger or Prophet receives the Order from Allah *the Exalted* to deliver the Divine Message to his people, he immediately began to carry out the order, without delaying.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'we sent Lot and he said to his people' (*al-A'raf:* 80). The saying of Allah, 'his people', implies that Prophet Lut (Lot) was one of them. So, why did He not say 'their brother Lot'? This obviously means that Prophet Nuh (Noah), Prophet Hud (Eber) and Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon them* were sent from amongst their own people, but as for Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* he was not originally from amongst the people to whom he was sent. As a matter of fact, both Prophets Lut (Lot) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* had come to this place after fleeing the oppression to which they both had been subjected. This shows clearly us that Prophet Lut (Lot) was not from amongst the natives of his tribe. Nevertheless, they were 'his people' since he had lived with them for a long period of time, which was enough that they knew each other quite well. In fact, his people knew his moral conduct and everything about him.

I say this in order to direct people's attention to the precision and accuracy of the rhetorical style of the Quran; despite the fact that the all the stories revolve mainly around one prime goal, He *the Almighty* clearly and precisely distinguishes them from one another. Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* did not say to them, 'My Lord has forbidden you from indulging in this vile action, namely, lustfully approaching men', rather, he delivered the Divine Prohibition of this vile act to them in the form of interrogation so that they would refrain from committing it.

Prophet Lut's (Lot's) addressing an interrogative question to them was meant to chastise and rebuke them for committing this awful crime. He did not say to them, 'My Lord commands you to refrain from this deed', rather, he censured the deed as something which is contrary to man's natural disposition.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this.' (*al-A'raf:* 80) This indicates that he wanted to ask them a critical question to make them feel ashamed since, naturally, sound intellect rejects such an evil act. This means that this action has never taken place before; therefore, it is a filthy one since a man can only approach another man in a filthy place. Yet, the people of Lot (Lut) did dare do it. Truthfully speaking, the crime of sodomy cannot be done except by someone whose soul is perverted.

The word *al-Fahisha,* or 'outrage' means something excessively ugly, for this crime is hideously and incredibly ugly. This is due to the fact that it is an abomination even for a man to approach a woman who was made for this action, if he has not made a marriage contract with her. However, as for a man to approach another man in this way, it is even more abominable. If this matter is ultimately forbidden to be committed with a woman who is not man's wife, it is even more abominable in that particular case under discussion, for man was not created for this kind of act, and thus, it can never become lawful. Therefore, it is clear that this crime is even a greater abomination.

We previously explained that the Arabic particle *min* is sometimes meaningless when it occurs in human speech, but it would be wrong to say this about the speech of our Lord *the Almighty*. As for this particle *min* mentioned in this Quranic verse under discussion, it is used in this context to clarify that no one had ever done such a thing before the people of Prophet Lut (Lot). We said long ago that if you were to say to someone, 'I do not have any money', you have denied that you have any money, which is of any value, but you might have a small or minute sum which could be called 'money'. Thus, when Allah *the Exalted* says: 'No one in the world has outdone you in this', this means that not even a single person has ever done this before the people of Prophet Lut (Lot). By this, Allah *the Almighty* wants to stress its prohibition. Thus, the particle *min* mentioned in this verse means plainly that no one from any part of the world had ever committed this crime before the people of Lut (Lot). So, why is this crime so heinous? Allah *the Exalted* called this abomination an 'outrage' which means something extremely ugly, a point which is confirmed by the fact that no one in any part of the world had ever done it before the people of Lut (Lot).

When we carefully examine this matter intellectually, we find that man was created to be Allah's Vicegerent on the earth, and thus, mankind had to preserve its existence since everyone has a limited life span and people follow one another in this worldly life. Allah *the Exalted* has provided man with the means of nourishment by means of which he can maintain his survival. In the same respect, He *the Almighty* made marriage lawful to him in order for him to be able to preserve his race.

Allah *Glorified is He* made mankind into males and females. It is through the process of copulation between the male and the female that reproduction takes place. A man is first carried in his father's loins as a droplet; then his mother carries him as a foetus; she then gives birth to him and looks after him along with his father. Then, the mother and father raise him until he reaches adulthood. These are five difficult stages; the mother carries her child within her for nine months which is a difficult matter for if one of us were to carry something for even one full day, he would be tired out by doing so. However, the mother carries her child for nine consecutive months. Due to Allah's Great Wisdom, the size of the foetus in the very beginning of its creation is very little, and it increases gradually; this means that at its first stage of development the embryo weighs the smallest amount, and then it grows slowly and gradually for nine months until its creation is perfected.

Since the beginning of its creation, an embryo develops gradually until its weight reaches about three kilograms by the day of its birth. This indicates that there is a particular period of time between the very beginnings of its creation to the time of its birth. Miraculously, the embryo develops continuously every millionth of a second. This means that it develops incrementally during the passage of time.

A case in point is the sport of weight-lifting; unprofessional athletes will not start with lifting one hundred kilograms from the very beginning, rather they will train to lift twenty kilograms; the load will gradually increase so that the weightlifters' muscles are not overstretched. This process of training is thus described as being gradual. This is due to one needing to become accustomed to lifting such weights, so he cannot be trained to lift these weights all at once from the very beginning, rather, he is supposed to do this gradually. The same applies to the development of the embryo. Let us suppose that one will continuously watch the development of his baby since the moment the mother bore it. He will barely realise its development since it grows in an imperceptible way. However, if one were to go away for a month and then come back, he would be able to easily realise how big it became. Consequently, the child had actually grown during that particular period of one’s absence, the duration between the last time one saw it and the time being.

Therefore, it is clear that the embryo, out of Allah’s Mercy, develops incrementally during pregnancy, which is why the womb continuously increases in size every day from the beginning of pregnancy until its end. Even though women suffer quite a bit during pregnancy and during the time of delivery, they, along with their husbands, greatly and passionately care about their babies. Children take a long time -several years- to attain the age of adulthood. It is well known that man’s infancy is the longest among all created beings, which is why we find fathers bearing, alongside mothers, the difficulties of bringing up their children. Furthermore, it is out of Allah’s Infinite Wisdom that the process of reproduction is naturally dependant on the sexual desire-man’s strongest desire. Having given birth to her child, a woman may say, 'I made up my mind not to have any more children', yet, she ends up having more all the same. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* paves the way for the process of reproduction through sexual desire, and He made (lawful) sex the means to reproduction so that the existence of the human race is permanently preserved. Once men copulate with their wives and the latter get pregnant and give birth to children, fathers and mothers shoulder the responsibility of bringing them up together. If any man practises coitus interruptus in one way or another, he undoubtedly violates and breaches Allah’s Law meant with achieving man’s vicegerency on the earth. This is so in such a case, since during coitus interruptus, one will only experience the pleasure of the sexual intercourse, yet he will prevent his wife from becoming pregnant; thus, man’s vicegerency on the earth, at a particular point in time, will no longer be fulfilled. Another important point is that man, in sexual intercourse, is the main player, a matter that is turned upside down in homosexuality.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We sent Lut (Lot) and he said to his people, ‘How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this.’" (*al-A’raf:* 80) The word *al-Fahisha* which translates as 'outrage' means homosexuality. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* did not mention explicitly the name of this unlawful act from the outset as an indication of the fact that its prohibition is naturally well known to all people. Thus, the saying of Allah, 'How can you practise this outrage? No one in the world has outdone you in this', indicates that the people of Lut (Lot) knew quite well that this act was against man’s natural disposition. As for those who pretended to be foolish and refused to understand, Allah *the Exalted* then precisely defines this crime for them in the following clear verse in which He *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ ٱلرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّن دُونِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ ۚ
بَلْ أَنتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

You lust after men rather than women! You
transgress all bounds!’ [81] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 81)

The Arabic word *al-Israf* means 'transgressing the bounds'. For example, Allah *the Almighty* instructed us how to lawfully satisfy our sexual desire by instructing us to marry women, who will thus bear our children. Yet, if one deviates from this Divine Law, he will be judged as 'transgressing the bounds'. It is undoubtedly through marriage that a couple will be able to naturally and lawfully satisfy their sexual desires. In addition, the wife will give birth to one’s children, after which they both the wife and the husband will shoulder the responsibility of bringing them up. It is quite clear that any other act that goes against this prime goal of reproduction will be motivated solely by sexual desire. We should yet take into account the fact that satisfying one’s desires as well as reproduction are the major goals behind sex. This is why when the people of Lut (Lot) deviated away from this Divine Law, He *the Almighty* described them as 'transgressors of the bounds'.

Allah then tells us about their response to Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوٓا۟ أَخْرِجُوهُم
مِّن قَرْيَتِكُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ أُنَاسٌ يَتَطَهَّرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

The only response his people gave was to say [to one another], 'Drive them out of your town! These men want to keep themselves chaste!' [82] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 82)

This verse indicates clearly that these people stubbornly refused to acknowledge that homosexuality is a vile act, to the extent that they told one another to 'drive Prophet Lut (Lot) and the believers with him out of their town'.

This raises yet an important question: 'What was the argument they offered to justify their decision of expelling Prophet Lut (Lot) and his faithful followers from the town?" It goes without saying that chastity and purification are good moral qualities, yet these people of Lut (Lot) had lived so long in filth to the extent that they had become accustomed to it, and even refusing to abandon it. This is actually the main reason why they hate chastity and purification. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; a young man wants to join a group of friends who are of the same age as he, but he finds that they drink alcohol and chase after women, so he advises them to stay away from these immoral acts. As a result, these friends reject him by not including him in their group on the grounds that he is a pious, chaste, and purified person who is not accustomed to corruption and who would not participate with them in doing these unlawful acts. Therefore, it is clear that good moral qualities are viewed by people with deviant thoughts as something vile and immoral, exactly like animals that permanently live in filth, so that if they were to change to a clean environment, they would die.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَأَنجَيْنَٰهُ وَأَهْلَهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱمْرَأَتَهُۥ كَانَتْ مِنَ ٱلْغَٰبِرِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

We saved him and his kinsfolk – apart from his wife who stayed behind [83] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 83)

Consequently, their decision to drive Prophet Lut (Lot) and his believing followers out of the town put them at a grave and serious risk. By doing this, the disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) only hastened Allah *the Almighty* to inflict His punishment on them. Due to His Infinite Wisdom and Mercy, Allah *the Exalted* saved Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and his kinsfolk from this punishment. If someone were to ask, 'What does the word "kinsfolk" mentioned in the verse refer to? Does it refer to Lut's (Lot's) family members? Or does it refer to the believers who believed in him?' The answer is that it refers to both Lut's (Lot's) family members along with the group of believers from amongst his people. However, Allah *the Almighty* included the wife of Lut (Lot) in this punishment imposed on her people. This clearly indicates that the rest of his family had attained faith in his Message, and so did a group of his followers.

Thus, it is apparent that Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was accompanied by some of his family members along with his followers; they were all from *al-Mutattahirin*, or 'the ones who purified themselves”' It should be mentioned that 'purification' means that one keeps himself away from vileness and evil. In the same respect, when Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) advised his people to give full measure and weight in all their dealings along with not depriving people of what is rightfully theirs, they were utterly amazed by his saying, to the extent that they wondered if his prayer compels him to ask them to give up all that their forefathers were wont to worship. (*Hud:* 85-87)

The people of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) deemed it strange that prayer could forbid such a thing; their misguidance led them astray, to the extent that they did not understand that prayer forbids all evil things. Actually, some of the disbelievers of Mecca did the very same thing when they accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of madness even though they admitted that the Quran had been revealed to him: 'And they said, "O, you, to whom this exhortation (reminder) has been sent down, you are surely a madman."' (*al-Hijr:* 6)

Indeed, this statement of theirs indicates plainly that they were exceedingly foolish, for as long as they believed that the Quran has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* they should have asked themselves about the one who sent down this reminder upon him. Furthermore, the word 'exhortation (reminder)' refers to the Quran and the One Who sent it down is

Allah *the Almighty*. So, how could they acknowledge the Quran as a reminder and then accuse Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a madman. It goes without saying that they believed in the Quran as a reminder and that it was sent down to him, so how could he be mad?! The disbelievers of Mecca were undoubtedly deniers of the truth. In addition, their own statement clearly points out that their thinking was completely incorrect.

Concerning the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We saved him and his kinsfolk except his wife who stayed behind.' (*al-A'raf:* 83). The verse plainly affirms that the wife of Prophet Lut (Lot) was not included amongst those who were saved since she was one of those who stayed behind, or *al-Ghabirin*. The verb *Ghabara* conveys many meanings: it may convey the meaning of staying and remaining in a particular place; it can also be used to refer to anything which took place in the past. Arabs used to say, *'Hadha Ash-Shay' Ghabarat Ayyamuh*' or 'This thing has become obsolete.' This may cause someone to ask the following, 'How can one single word indicate one particular meaning and its opposite at the same time?' This question is actually based on the fact that the word *Ghabara* means 'to stay' and also 'to pass' or 'to end'. We reply that both of these opposite meanings given by this word *Ghabara* are understood from the verse, as follows: as long as Allah *the Almighty* saved Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* from the torment that He inflicted upon his people and as long as his wife did not exit from this land with him, this apparently means that she remained in the town where she was afflicted, like her people, with Divine Punishment. Furthermore, when these disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) were destructed by Allah's Punishment, this means that they would be completely forgotten. Therefore, it is clear that the verse gives these two different meanings correctly indicated by this particular word *Ghabara.*

Thus, we shall not go into the details of why the wife of Prophet Lut (Lot) stayed behind. In this respect, I would like to draw your attention to an important fact, namely that some scholars have wrongly accused this woman of committing vile acts. They are completely wrong since if she had committed something like this, Allah *the Almighty* would have told us in the Quran. Therefore, we must suffice with these pieces of information delivered to us through the Quran concerning this point which is that she acted contrary to the Message of Allah revealed to Lut (Lot) and that she did not have faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the chapter of *at-Tahrim* about the disbelief of the two wives of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and Prophet Lut (Lot), respectively. He *the Exalted* says that these two women had betrayed their husbands by disbelieving in the Divine Messages Allah *the Almighty* revealed to them: 'They were under two righteous servants of Ours, but they acted treacherously to them. So, they availed them naught against Allah, and it was said to them, "Enter the Fire, you two, along with those who enter it.' (*at-Tahrim:* 10)

Some scholars yet mistakenly interpret the phrase, in the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *at-Tahrim*, *'Fa Khanatahuma'*, which translates as 'they betrayed them'- to mean that these two wives of these two Prophets, Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) had committed adultery. Once again, I strongly stress that this opinion is completely wrong since if they had committed something like this, Allah *the Almighty* would have told us within the Quran. As for the matter of belief, it is entirely dependent upon one's free will. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* wants to tell us that even Messengers and Prophets were unable to cause their family members to attain faith which is, once again, a matter of free will. In addition, if we examine the verse more closely, we will certainly know that none of these two wives were arrogant with her husband, a matter confirmed by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* that both of these two women were under these two Prophets. This clearly means that Prophets Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* were in charge of their wives in spite of these two women's disbelief. As for faith, it is completely a matter of choice and free will; everyone has the free will to choose whatever religion he wants to adopt, and Allah *the Almighty* will judge all human beings on the Day of Resurrection. Confirming the fact that faith is a matter of choice and free will and that even Messengers and Prophets may be unable to guide even their own family members, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran about the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) about whom He *Glorified is He* states that he was not from his family: 'Allah said, "O, Nuh (Noah), he is surely not of your family. He is indeed a man of unrighteous conduct. So do not ask of Me that, of which you have no knowledge, I admonish you lest you be one of the ignorant."' (*Hud:* 46)

Therefore, it is quite apparent at this point that man's free will to choose whatever religion he wants to adopt and follow was the main reason that led the two wives of these two Prophets to be disbelievers. In addition, even though Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* were two Prophets of Allah, they could not guide their own wives to attain faith, a matter that plainly indicates that belief is entirely dependent on man's free will to choose whatever he wants. This point is yet affirmed by another example of the wife of Pharaoh. Allah *the Almighty* tells us that this woman prayed to Him to build her a mansion in the Paradise and to save her from Pharaoh and his doings along with saving her from all evildoing people: 'And Allah puts forth as an example, for those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh when she said, "My Lord, build for me a house with You in the Garden and deliver me from Pharaoh and his work and deliver me from the wrongdoing people."'(*at-Tahrim:* 11)

This aforementioned verse talks about the wife of Pharaoh who attained faith in Allah *the Almighty* even though her husband, Pharaoh, was a tyrant, who laid claim to divinity. However, Pharaoh could not prevent his wife from having belief in Allah. Thus, we find that Prophets themselves might be unable to guide their own wives to attain faith; the same applies to that tyrant who laid claim to divinity: he was unable to prevent his wife from attaining faith in Allah. This clearly shows us that belief is entirely a matter of free will and choice, which is completely protected so that everyone will be able to freely choose his religion on the basis of conviction.

Allah *Glorified is He* also gives us another example of Maryam (Mary), daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity: 'And sets forth as an example Maryam (Mary), the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity. So, We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and she fulfilled the prophecy conveyed to her in the words of her Lord contained in His Books, and she was one of the obedient.' (*at-Tahrim:* 12) We notice that Allah *the Almighty* did not give the names of the two wives of Prophets Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot), nor did He *Glorified is He* mention the name of the wife of Pharaoh, yet He did tell us the name of Maryam (Mary) and the name of her father. So, why were the first names left vague? The answer is that Allah *the Almighty* wants us to realise that it is quite possible for a woman to be married to a tyrant, yet she is a believer; and she may be married to a Prophet, yet she does not attain faith.

Back to the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him;* He *the Almighty* says: 'We saved him and his kinsfolk except his wife who stayed behind.' (*al-A’raf:* 83) The saying of Allah *Anjayna* which translates as 'We saved him' indicates that the torment was yet to afflict the town in which Prophet Lut's (Lot’s) people resided. Due to the fact that Allah *the Exalted* wanted to punish a particular group of people, namely the disbelievers from among the people of Lut (Lot) but not another, He caused those who were destined to be saved namely Prophet Lut (Lot) and the believers with him, to leave the town. Amazingly enough, the disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) had previously made up their minds to expel Lut (Lot) and his followers from their town. So, Allah *the Almighty* ordered them to leave the town, not by way of fulfilling the wish of the disbelievers, but rather to save them from the Divine Punishment.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us about the kind of torment He afflicted the disbelievers from among the people of Lut (Lot) by saying:

وَأَمۡطَرۡنَا عَلَيۡهِم مَّطَرٗاۖ فَٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

And We showered upon [the rest of] them a rain
[of destruction]. See the fate of the evildoers [84]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 84)

Let us reflect on: What is the essence of that rain mentioned in this particular verse of *al-‘Araf?* Was it the like the natural rain which usually falls down from the sky?' No, it was of another kind. Allah *the Exalted* in the chapter *of adh-Dharaiyat* tells us about it saying that He punished the disbelievers from among the people of Lut (Lot) by sending down upon them stones of clay: 'That we may send down upon them stones of clay, Marked with thy Lord, for those guilty of excesses.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 33-34) So, it is clear that this particular rain mentioned in this verse of *al-‘Araf* was none but the Divine punishment of the stones of clay that afflicted the extravagant from the people of Lut (Lot).

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the verse under discussion*,* the word *Fanzhur* which translates as 'see', is a term that means to strongly encourage people to reflect carefully on this story of the destruction of the people of Lut (Lot) so that they would take admonition. It tells us, likewise, that Allah never leaves evildoers to transgress against His Messages delivered to people by His Messengers and Prophets, without meting out any punishment upon them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then proceeds to tell us about the story of another Prophet, Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* by saying:

وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا ۗ قَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُۥ ۖ
قَدْ جَآءَتْكُم بَيِّنَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ فَأَوْفُوا۟ ٱلْكَيْلَ وَٱلْمِيزَانَ وَلَا
تَبْخَسُوا۟ ٱلنَّاسَ أَشْيَآءَهُمْ وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَٰحِهَا ۚ
ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

To the people of Madyan We sent their brother, Shu'aib. He said, 'My people, serve God: you have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you from your Lord. Give full measure and weight and do not undervalue people's goods; do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set in order: this is better for you, if you are believers [85] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 85)

Midyan is one of the sons of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who came and settled in this place. Thus, this particular word Midyan is a name of that particular son of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). Later, this name was used to refer to that particular place-the area from Mount Sinai to the Euphrates- wherein he resided. When the descendants of Midyan grew numerous and became a tribe, it was named after him, namely the people of Midyan or the tribe of Midyan.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* again uses the word 'brother' to make it clear that if Midyan treated them sternly on one occasion, he *peace be upon him* would treat them compassionately on another since they were his brothers, and he felt affection towards them. He lived amongst them and they knew everything about him. Midyan was married to Prophet Lut's (Lot's) daughter. They reproduced and gave birth to many children, to the extent that they formed a tribe. Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to the people of Midyan to deliver them, like the way all previous Prophets did with their own people, Allah's Message. As stated in the Quran, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* ordered them to worship Allah *the Almighty* solely, for there is no other god beside Him: ‘My people, serve Allah: you have no god other than He.' (*al-A'raf:* 85)

Worship generally means to obey commandments and to keep away from prohibitions. As a matter of fact, one does not obey any commandment or even shun away from any prohibition of anyone unless he, who makes either the commandment or the prohibition, is of higher rank than him. I if he were one's equal, he may ask, 'Why do you order me to do such and such? Or why do you order me to keep away from such and such? Another example to illustrate this point is when a father orders his child not to do something, the child does not discuss it with him since he knows that his father is the one who provides him with food, drink and clothing. Yet, when the child grows up, he indeed will discuss the reasons behind commands and prohibitions with his father since his identity will be completely formed, and thus, he will want to know the wisdom behind commands and prohibitions.

He *the Almighty* tells us that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* said to them: 'My people, serve Allah. You have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you from your Lord.' The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'serve Allah: you have no god other than Him' clearly indicates that Shu'aib (Jethro) was a Messenger sent from Allah; therefore, he must have had a miracle to prove this. However, the Quran tells us that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) came with a clear sign and not a miracle.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A clear sign has come to you from your Lord. Give full measure and weight.' Truthfully speaking, all acts of disobedience and disbelief lead to deceit in measuring and weighing. As long as Shu'aib (Jethro) ordered his people to give full measure and weight, this apparently indicates that the contrary, i.e. not giving full measure and weight, was a common act of disobedience at that particular period of time, and thus, he *peace be upon him* was sent to tackle this problems of undervaluing people's good and of not giving full measures and weight.

Some people mistakenly believe that this act of disobedience in the verse under discussion is of lesser evil. In other words, they think that undervaluing other’s goods and not giving them full measures and weight will help them acquire great wealth. When one deliberately weighs and measures deficiently, he commits this act of disobedience against those who buy from him. Then, the seller himself will go to buy from other people who will do the same things to him, making this act of disobedience spread on a large and wide scale. This is why if one gives full measure and weight to other people, he is undoubtedly doing what serves his interest since he will, by means of that, spread fairness amongst all people, for one’s own interest will first and foremost be protected and, at the same time, so will be the interests of others.

Likewise, when one sells any commodity, even dates, and deliberately lessens the weight, he thereby makes a profit, which is not rightfully his; the same ruling applies to one who does not give the full weight of wheat to buyers. Wheat and dates are some of the major constituents of life. What is absolutely true is that most of people’s essential commodities are weighed and measured. Thus, if one reduces the weight or the measure, people, in turn, will do the same with him. By doing as such, all the members of the society will suffer loss. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Give full measure and weight and do not undervalue people’s goods.' (*al-A’raf:* 85)

In reality, if a loss incurred by reducing measures and weight is slight and bearable and yet forbidden by Allah, undervaluing people’s goods and depriving them of what is rightfully theirs by unlawfully taking their wealth and usurping their rights are thus more sinful and evil. This is actually the main reason behind the prohibition of theft, for the thief unlawfully takes something which belongs to someone else and keeps it. In the same respect, we are prohibited, under Islamic Law, to extort, or pilfer or take bribes. This is the true understanding of this part of the verse under discussion. Basically, even though the loss incurred by not giving full measures and weight is slight, Allah *the Almighty* still forbids it. Therefore, it is consequently all the more certain that it is also forbidden to deprive people of what is rightfully theirs. Allah *Glorified is He* then continues: '… do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set in order.' (*al-A’raf:* 85)

Thus, it is quite clear that the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) implied a number of orders and prohibitions. He *peace be upon him* ordered them to worship Allah alone, for there is no other god but He *the Almighty*. As a result, this worship would have cultivated their manners and made them carry out Divine Orders. In addition, it would have made them more awestruck at the Might of Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* then ordered them to give full weight and measure. After that, he forbade them from depriving people of what is rightfully theirs and undervaluing their goods. Finally, he forbade them from causing corruption in the land after it has been set in order. Even though Allah *the Almighty* orders us to permanently carry out reform in the land, we should take into account that this reform is only achieved in light of the existence of the essential components of life.

Let us discuss a number of blessings conferred by Allah *the Almighty* upon mankind. For example, air is one of the most essential elements of life; He *the Almighty* keeps it in motion so that it does not corrupt. The second most essential blessing in life is drink; He *Glorified is He* sends down water from the sky. Allah *the Almighty* then causes the land to produce its grains, and as a result, people and animals eat. A fourth divine blessing conferred by Allah upon mankind is the livestock from which milk, hair, wool, and leather are taken. In fact, He *the Almighty* subdued all of this for us, which is the result of an order set by Him *the Almighty* in the land. However, are these all the essential constituents and components of life? The answer is 'No' since if all of these constituents are provided for us in the light of the spread of extortion, stealing, bribery and pilfering, everything will be corrupted. Truthfully speaking, there is nothing at all that can put things on the right track again except religion since it is the Way of Guidance prevents the spread of corruption on the earth.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'My people, serve Allah. You have no god other than Him. A clear sign has come to you from your Lord. Give full measure and weight and do not undervalue people's goods. Do not cause corruption in the land after it has been set in order.' (*al-A'raf:* 85) It goes without saying that the orders and prohibitions mentioned in this particular verse falls under the legal obligations of 'Do's and 'Dont's. These orders and prohibitions may yet be viewed as restricting the freedom of man; this is incorrect, and we will prove right now. It is of great importance while one is considering his own interests to also pay attention to public interests of the entire society.

Consequently, one only represents a single unit of the building of the entire society. Thus, all what the individual wants is to fulfil his interest, which represents only one part of the entire society's other vast interests. So, if one gives full measure and weight to other people, this is good for him, for the rest of the society, under the same prohibition, will surely deal with him in the same way, and thus, justice will prevail for the entire society.

Careful reflection on the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'and do not undervalue people's goods', indicates that all the members of the society are included under this prohibition, namely, you are commanded not to deprive other people of what is rightfully theirs, and so other people are commanded not to deprive you of anything which is rightfully yours. In the same respect, just as you are commanded not to spread corruption on the earth after it has been so well ordered, other people are also commanded not to do this; thus, the entire society experiences maximum benefit. This is why we should consider all the legal obligations and prohibitions, irrespective of all the burdens they impose, in the light of the interest that will be attained by the entire society. For example, when you are ordered not to look at what is unlawful for you, this entails that others are also prohibited from doing the same. This prohibition of not looking at what is forbidden to you undoubtedly protects and guards your honour. The same goes when you are ordered not to steal from others, for all other people are ordered not to steal from you. As such, the entire society will live in security.

By the same token, when you are ordered by virtue of legal obligation to pay almsgiving from your money, you must not disobey this order on grounds that you are the one who earns the money through your hard work, since all wealth belongs to Allah *the Almighty*. Likewise, you, a human being, have nothing to do in earning this money but exerting your efforts in accordance with the plans made by your mind. It is taken for granted that your efforts, mind, actions, etc. are created by Allah *the Almighty*. Considering all of this, He *the Exalted* obligates you to pay out a certain amount of your wealth to the poor. By doing so, He protects you from the calamities that may afflict man by the continuous change of time; the strong may turn weak, and vice versa, and the rich may turn poor, and vice versa, and so on. Therefore, it is clear that you, under this obligation of giving obligatory charity, will permanently enjoy social solidarity, for in case you -a rich man- become poor, you will find others who will sustain and support you in the same way you did before.

In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran that if we want to feel secure about our young children after our death, we should then look after orphans in our society, and even be fathers to them. Furthermore, when all the members of the society perform the role of father to orphans, they will feel no sadness, for if they had already lost their fathers, the entire society of believers perform the same role. Thus, we will not fear for our own children if they become orphans since we have previously done the same with other orphans. However, we will surely grieve if we live in a society that does not care for orphans since it is at that time that we will be certain that our children will live under no protection or care.

In this way, it is quite clear that Divine obligations and ordinances are concerned with securing people's life. Another example to illustrate this point is when you say to a woman, 'Wear the headscarf, and do not show your beauty to any men other than your near relatives.' The woman might believe that her freedom is thus restricted under this obligation, yet, meanwhile, she does not take into account the fact that it is this particular obligation that protects her dignity at the given time when she becomes unattractive due to old age. A woman may marry whilst still young and beautiful. Then, when she reaches the age of forty, her beauty gradually fades due to the hardships of bearing and raising children, and thus, her husband, upon seeing a young woman showing her adornment, may feel no desire whatsoever to his wife whom he views unappealing. He may fall in love with this young one. Therefore, it is quite apparent that the *Shari'a*, Islamic Law, commands a woman to wear the headscarf when she is young in order to keep her husband for her when she gets older and less attractive. If the *Shari'a* restricted her when she was young, it restricts others in her interest when she gets older. Therefore, all of these obligations and prohibitions are meant to protect people's life.

At this point, it is quite evident that giving full measure and weight to people and the avoidance of depriving them of what is rightfully theirs, as well as the avoidance of spreading corruption on the earth after it has been so well ordered are meant with achieving good for the entire society, both in this worldly life and the Hereafter. For this reason, He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying, '…This is better for you, if you are believers.'

The saying of Allah *the Almighty Dhalikum* which translates as 'This' refers to Divine commands and prohibitions that has just been mentioned in the verse under discussion. What this means is that we must worship Allah without ascribing any other partner in divinity to Him, to give full measure and weight in all dealings, not to deprive people of what is rightfully theirs and finally not to spread corruption on the earth after is has been so well ordered. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* encourages us to do so if we are believers. This brings up a very important point, which is when we carry out all these Divine commands, goodness will prevail the entire society including believers and disbelievers; yet we must take into account that believers will benefit from this goodness in both this world and the Hereafter. As for disbelievers, they will benefit the good of this world alone and will find nothing for them in the Hereafter. Therefore, if you (O, people of Midyan!) would but believe, the goodness resulting from carrying out these commands would be doubled for you so that it would be everlasting in this worldly life and the life to come.

Allah says:

وَلَا تَقۡعُدُواْ بِكُلِّ صِرَٰطٖ تُوعِدُونَ وَتَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ مَنۡ
ءَامَنَ بِهِۦ وَتَبۡغُونَهَا عِوَجٗاۚ وَٱذۡكُرُوٓاْ إِذۡ كُنتُمۡ قَلِيلٗا
فَكَثَّرَكُمۡۖ وَٱنظُرُواْ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡمُفۡسِدِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

Do not sit in every pathway, threatening and barring those who believe in God from His way, trying to make it crooked. Remember how you used to be few and He made you multiply. Think about the fate of those who used to spread corruption [86] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 86)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty Wa la Taq'udu Bikulli Sirat,* which means 'Do not set in every pathway' is an order to them not to sit on the roads, lest that they might bar the way of those who are attempting to get to the Messenger or Prophet. In this respect, we should take into account the fact that Satan had previously said to Allah *the Almighty* that he shall most certainly lie in ambush for the children of Adam all along His *Glorified is He* Straight Way: 'He said, "Now, since You have adjudge me to be erring, I will assuredly lie in wait for them on Your straight path."' (*al-A'raf:* 16)

Therefore, when you sit on every road to prevent people from reaching the Messenger, each one of you thereby becomes a demon, exactly like Satan. This is why He *the Almighty* prohibits the act of sitting in every path. Thus, we should take into account a very important point, namely that Allah *the Exalted* has only One Straight Path which we all must follow and firmly adhere to. The ways of Satan, on the other hand, are numerous, and this is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-An'am* in which He *Glorified is He* orders us to follow His Way and not to follow other ways, lest they cause us to deviate from His Way: 'And say, "This is My straight path. So follow it and follow not other ways, lest they lead you away from His Way. That is what He enjoins upon you, that you may be able to guard against evils.' (*al-An'am:* 153) It is thus clear that the ways of misguidance of Satan are numerous including temptation with money, women, authority, etc., whilst the way of righteousness is one.

This particular part of the verse may also indicate that the guidance to which every Messenger called his people was so common that it affected everything around him; yet when anyone comes towards any way of guidance, he will find those who try to turn him away, to the extent that he who seeks the guidance of the Messenger, will be met with threats and obstacles to prevent them from reaching the way of the truth. So, why do they do this? Allah *the Almighty* answers this question to us when He says: '… trying to make it crooked.' (*al-A'raf:* 86) This means that they try their utmost effort and avidly seek to make the *Shari'a* of Allah (Islamic Law) crooked and deviant from the way of righteousness. Another possible explanation for this particular part of the verse is that disbelievers from amongst the people of Shu'aib (Jethro) used to describe the *Shari'a* of Allah as being unrighteous in order to prevent people from embracing it along with making them averse to it. People who are addicted to drinking of alcohol, for example, bitterly criticise the prohibition of it, for they mistakenly believe that it brings one happiness and well-being. Yet, they are only doing so out of their desire to make the *Shari'a* of Allah crooked or to prevent people from embracing it. In the same respect, we find people who declare usury to be lawful since they mistakenly believe that its prohibition prevents people from considerable benefit. Therefore, such people do so in order to achieve their personal goals or to make people averse to it.

Allah *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying: 'Remember how you used to be few and He made you multiply. Think about the fate of those who used to spread corruption.' (*al-A'raf:* 86) We know for certain that all proscriptions and prescriptions are meant with achieving two main goals, namely encouraging people to do good and deterring them from committing evil. For example, a teacher might say to his pupils, 'I will give a prize to the hardest worker.' This is actually an act of encouragement, yet, he then adds, 'However, if anyone is neglectful with his studies, I will expel him from the school.' This is viewed as an act of intimidation. As long as people are able, by virtue of the free will implanted in them out of Allah's Infinite Wisdom, to choose either to do good deeds or to do evil ones, they must be addressed by these two things: encouragement to do good and intimidation from doing evil.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Remember how you used to be few and He made you multiply.' It is as though He *Glorified is He* is asking them to reflect upon the Blessings He conferred upon them, so that they would give up their stubbornness. We know quite well that Midyan married the daughter of Prophet Lut (Lot), and they had many children, to the extent that they became a tribe. Furthermore, the members of this tribe of Midyan were weak, but He *Glorified is He* strengthened them. They were also poor, but He *the Almighty* enriched them. So, as long as He *the Almighty* is the One Who did all this to you and for you, why should you not then obey His Commandments?! Indeed, you should have done so. Also, this particular part of the verse implies some kind of encouragement to them to refrain from the evil they used to do.

Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* was preceded by four Prophets, namely Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* all... Therefore, he was the fifth one to be sent after these previous four. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* in this particular verse being explored, reminded disbelievers from among the people of Midyan of the Divine punishments that befell disbelievers who denied and rejected the Messages of the Prophets before Shu'aib (Jethro). This is to say that even though the people of Nuh (Noah) might have been excused since they were the first ever to experience this Divine Punishment, Allah *the Exalted* did not pardon them but afflicted them with this great torment, so that all people would know with certainty that whoever denies the Messages of Prophets and Messengers, will be afflicted with such severe Divine punishments. This point is affirmed in the Quran by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-'Ankabut* in which He *Glorified is He* says that He seized each of the wrongdoers and the evildoers with their sins: 'So each one of them We seized for his sin; of them were those against whom We sent a violent sandstorm, and of them were those whom a roaring blast overtook, and of them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow up, and of them were those whom We drowned. And Allah did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40)

Thus, Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* warned them of the bad consequences of denying his Message asking them to think about the fate of those who used to spread corruption from amongst the previous nations. He *peace be upon him* gave them warnings of the punishment that afflicted disbelievers from amongst the people of Nuh (Noah) who were tortured by drowning, of the punishment that afflicted those disbelievers from among the people of Hud (Eber) who were taken by the wind storm, of the punishment that afflicted the deniers of the truth from amongst the people of Saleh (Shelah) whose houses were overturned and destroyed and of the punishment that afflicted disbelievers from amongst the people of Lut (Lot) upon whom stones of clay were poured down from the sky. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wants to deter the people of Midyan by asking them to think about the bad consequences of those who spread corruption before them. Of course, He *the Exalted* proceeded to threatening them after they failed to seize the opportunity of encouragement granted to them by Him. Allah *the Almighty* encouraged them to refrain from their evil acts by asking them to reflect upon His countless Blessings upon them, yet they failed.

Allah says:

وَإِن كَانَ طَآئِفَةٞ مِّنكُمۡ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱلَّذِيٓ أُرۡسِلۡتُ بِهِۦ وَطَآئِفَةٞ لَّمۡ
يُؤۡمِنُواْ فَٱصۡبِرُواْ حَتَّىٰ يَحۡكُمَ ٱللَّهُ بَيۡنَنَاۚ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡحَٰكِمِينَ ٨٧

If some of you believe the message I bring and others do not, then be patient till God judges between us. He is the best of all judges'[87] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 87)

This verse clearly indicates that there were some people who believed in the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro), while some others did not. Allah *the Almighty* then orders, as indicated by the verse, the two groups (believers and disbelievers) to be patient until He judges amongst them. Yet, this touches upon a very important point of showing the absolute accuracy of the Quranic style, namely that even though the Order issued by Allah to the two groups is the same, the meaning inferred from it is different in the case of believers from the case of disbelievers. As for believers, the order to be patient implies they will be admitted into paradise, and as for disbelievers, it ironically tells them about the bad consequence that awaits them in the Hereafter, namely the severe punishment that will afflict them. In the same respect, the verse tells that Allah, the best of all judges, is the One Who will judge all of mankind. We know with absolute certainty that people are all equal in the sight of Allah, the All-Just, and thus He never commits any injustice against anyone.

Allah says:

قَالَ ٱلۡمَلَأُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ مِن قَوۡمِهِۦ لَنُخۡرِجَنَّكَ يَٰشُعَيۡبُ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ
مَعَكَ مِن قَرۡيَتِنَآ أَوۡ لَتَعُودُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَاۚ قَالَ أَوَلَوۡ كُنَّا كَٰرِهِينَ ٨٨

His people's arrogant leaders said, 'Shu'aib, we will expel you and your fellow believers from our town unless you return to our religion.' He said, 'What! Even if we detest it? [88] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 88)

We previously explained that the Arabic word *al-Mala'* refers to these arrogant leaders who were of high social rank, a ranking so high that people feared them. This verse indicates that the arrogant leaders from the people of

Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) denied and rejected his Message and even threatened to expel him and the believers with him from their land, exactly as the disbelievers from among the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) did before: 'However, the only answer of his people was that they said, "Drive out Lut's (Lot's) family from your city. They are a people who would keep pure."' (*an-Naml:* 56)

The word *Qarya*, usually referred to as 'village' in English, is mistakenly used nowadays to give a meaning which is different from the original meaning it must convey; we now use it to refer to a particular area which is smaller than a town, yet it was used in the past to refer to such a place wherein all the essential components of life were found. This is why Mecca was called *'Umm al-Qura'* or 'The Mother of Lands'. Back to Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him;* the arrogant leaders from amongst his people asked him and his followers to choose between two options, which were to leave their land so that they would not misguide, as the arrogant leaders said, or to return to their previous religion.

A very wonderful subtle observation can be made, which I would like to draw attention to, namely the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…unless you return to our religion' which indicates that they would return to something they had already been accustomed to previously. However, the question to ask is 'Did Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers previously follow the ways of their people, and then they came to have faith, and now they were being asked to return again to their original religion?!'

We must fully recognise the fact that even though this statement addresses both Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers, it is inconceivable to think that Shu'aib (Jethro) is included in the order of these arrogant leaders of his people to return to their religion since he was a Messenger sent by Allah. Yet, the believers with Shu'aib (Jethro) might be included in this order since they actually followed the religion of their people before the advent of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro).

Therefore, the arrogant leaders from amongst the people of Shu'aib (Jethro) asked him to choose either to return to their religion or to leave the town, yet they did not take into account a very important point which is that the Will of Allah *the Almighty* might have decreed something else other than these two options offered by them, something that would go against the will of those arrogant leaders. For example, what if they were afflicted with an awful disaster that would completely prevent them from fulfilling their will!

It is ever so apparent that these arrogant leaders from amongst the people of Shu'aib (Jethro) did not take into account the fact that the Divine Will might have already decreed something else other than these two options. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* might have decreed to make them suffer weakness and thus be unable to expel Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers of faith, or even afflict them with an awful and big disaster that would completely and utterly destroy them. So, how could it be for such arrogant leaders of Midyan to decide a matter which goes against the Supreme Will of Allah *the Almighty*?! How could they ask Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers of faith to choose between two particular options even though the Will of Allah might have decreed something else?! However, how did Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his fellow believers answered them? The Quran tells us about their response, confirming that they rejected this call issued by those arrogant disbelievers: 'What! Even if we detest it?' (*al-A'raf:* 88) This means that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers wondered if it was possible to force someone to abandon faith for disbelief! Consequently, this statement of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers indicates that disbelievers had forgotten that moral responsibility is subject to one's free will and man is thus able to choose between the way of faith and the way of disbelief.

Allah *the Almighty* continues narrating what Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) later told them by saying:

قَدِ ٱفْتَرَيْنَا عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا إِنْ عُدْنَا فِى مِلَّتِكُم بَعْدَ إِذْ نَجَّىٰنَا ٱللَّهُ مِنْهَا ۚ وَمَا
يَكُونُ لَنَآ أَن نَّعُودَ فِيهَآ إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّنَا ۚ وَسِعَ رَبُّنَا كُلَّ شَىْءٍ عِلْمًا ۚ عَلَى
ٱللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا ۚ رَبَّنَا ٱفْتَحْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ قَوْمِنَا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَأَنتَ خَيْرُ ٱلْفَٰتِحِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

If we were to return to your religion after God has saved us from it, we would be inventing lies about Him: there is no way we could return to it – unless by the will of God our Lord: in His knowledge He comprehends everything. We put

our trust in God. Our Lord, expose the truth [and judge] between us and our people, for You are the best judge' [89]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 89)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'If we were to return to your religion after Allah has saved us from it, we would be inventing lies about Him', means that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and his followers knew quite well that returning to their people's religion would be, in a way, telling a deliberate lie against Allah. Furthermore, 'to lie' means to say something which is not true and to affirm something which is not real. If one, however, says something while knowing that it is not real or true, this is considered as a lie; yet, if one knows perfectly well the truth but says something different, this is judged as an act of lying and deliberately spreading falsehood. As for the believers with Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro), they certainly knew that their old religion was false. In addition, they, having believed in the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro), had experienced the sweetness of faith and thus refused to tell a deliberate lie against Allah *the Almighty*. They said as mentioned in the Quran: 'If we were to return to your religion after Allah has saved us from it, we would be inviting lies about Him.'

This part of the verse clearly elucidates that the believers with Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) knew that moral responsibility is completely a matter of choice and that they had chosen faith. Yet, they meanwhile affirmed the undeniable fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who has Absolute Omnipotent Power; a point which is quite clear in their saying: '…unless by the Will of Allah, our Lord…' It is taken for granted that His Will cannot be challenged by any other will. In this respect, a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* may be stated: 'Indeed, the hearts of the children of Adam are between two Fingers of Allah's Fingers, He changes them as He wills.'(1)

In the same respect, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked Allah *the Almighty* to preserve him and his children from ever worshipping idols: 'And call to mind when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord, make this a city of peace and preserve me and my children from worshiping idols."' (*Ibrahim:* 35)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was fully aware of the Absolute Omnipotent Power of Allah, so he did not ask Him to preserve the entire humanity from worshipping idols; rather, he restricted his supplication to himself and his own children. Likewise, the believers who followed Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) made a similar request by saying, '… there is no way we could return to it-unless by the Will of Allah our Lord.'

However, it goes without saying that Messengers and Prophets, infallible human beings, are protected, by the Will of Allah, from falling into the trap of misguidance. Furthermore, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who guides people to the way of righteousness and He is also the One Who supports people to keep on the Straight Path.

Allah *the Exalted* continues telling us about how those who believed in Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) responded to their arrogant leaders by saying: '… In His Knowledge He comprehends everything. We put our trust in Allah. Our Lord, expose the truth [and judge] between us and our people, for You are the best judge.' (*al-A'raf:* 89) The believers declared that they had placed their trust in Allah since the arrogant leaders of their people asked them to choose between leaving their town or returning to their previous religion. In other words, these arrogant leaders of the people of Midyan, in this verse, wanted to force the believers to abandon their faith and that is why the latter placed trust and confidence in Allah *the Almighty* so that He would protect them from the arrogance of these disbelievers.

When we read the word 'open', 'he opened' or 'opening', words that are composed of the root *f-t-h*, we understand that there is something which is closed or vague. Yet, if we are talking about a physical object, *fath* will mean opening something which is closed by removing locks. Furthermore, if we are speaking about the 'opening' of a non-physical thing, then it means to remove its vagueness. Consequently, examples for these two cases have been mentioned clearly in the Quran. Regarding the first case, which is 'opening' of closed, physical objects, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *Yusuf* that when the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) opened their packs, they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. (*Yusuf:* 65)

In reality, their saying that 'when they opened their packs' means that the packs were closed and needed to be physically opened. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* telling us about the people of paradise says in the chapter of *az-Zumur:* 'And those, who feared their Lord, will be conducted to Heaven in groups until when they arrive there, its gates will be opened and its Keepers will say to them, "Peace be upon you! Be happy, and enter it, abiding therein."' (*az-Zumar:* 73) Therefore, as long as the doors will be opened, this means that this act of opening applies to a physical object.

On the other hand, *al-Fath* may be used in connection with matters of belief and knowledge wherein it will indicate the meaning of 'disclose or unveil, etc.' Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran orders believers not to inform disbelievers of what He has disclosed, or *fataha* to them so that disbelievers might use it in arguments against them: 'And when they meet those who believe, they say `We believe.' And when they meet one another in private, they say, `Do you inform them (the believers) of what Allah has unfolded to you, that they may thereby argue with you before your Lord. Will you not then understand?' (*al-Baqara:* 76)

This particular word *al-Fath* may be used to refer to the bringing of goodness and assistance. This is proven by the saying of Allah in the chapter of *Fatir* in which Allah *the Almighty* says that whatever grace or mercy He opens up to man, none can withhold it: 'Whatever sources of mercy Allah lays open for mankind - there is none to withhold them.' (*Fatir:* 2)

The same meaning of bringing of goodness and assistance is also evident in His Saying in the chapter of *al-'Araf*: 'And if the people of those towns had believed and been righteous, We would have surely opened for them blessings from heaven and earth, but they disbelieved, so We seized them because of that which they earned.' (*al-A'raf:* 96)

Furthermore, rain, which is the most important reason behind the goodness that comes forth from the land, is undoubtedly one of these blessings that came from heaven.

Yet, this particular word *al-Fath* can also be used to convey the meaning of 'settling a conflict or a dispute' between two rivals or enemies. Even until recently, Yemenites call a judge who rules over people’s affairs 'the Opener' or *al-Fatih* since he settles conflicts between parties. *al-Fath* can also mean 'victory'; it is used in this respect in the saying of Allah in which He states that the Jews used to pray for victory (*yastaftihun*) over those who were bent on denying the truth: 'And when there came to them a book from Allah, fulfilling that which is with them - and before that they have prayed for victory over the disbelievers - yet when there came to them that which they knew to be the truth, they rejected it. The curse of Allah be on the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89). The Jews waited for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to come and lead them to victory over those who disbelieved.

Concerning the true and exact meaning of *al-Fath* in the verse under discussion, it is to finally and wisely decide on matters.

This statement of the believers from among the people of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) is, in essence, a supplication to Allah in order to make His Religion victorious over disbelief. Allah says:

وَقَالَ ٱلۡمَلَأُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن قَوۡمِهِۦ لَئِنِ ٱتَّبَعۡتُمۡ شُعَيۡبًا إِنَّكُمۡ إِذٗا لَّخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

The disbelieving leaders among his people said,
‘You will certainly be losers if you follow Shu‘aib [90]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 90)

This verse indicates that the arrogant leaders from the people of Midyan warned those who already believed in Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and those who were ready to believe in him against following him; the arrogant leaders claimed that they would not be the only ones who remain in misguidance.

When we read the word *la* (certainly) followed by *in* (if), we should recognise that it implies an oath. In this verse, there is also the particle *in* (if) which implies a condition; both the two Arabic styles of oath and condition require a clause of result. Yet, when the first clause contains an oath and condition structure, we provide the result of the one that proceeds in order. For example, we say, 'By Allah, if you do this, such-and-such will occur.' The same applies to Allah *the Almighty* with the verse under discussion: 'The disbelieving leaders among his people said, "You will certainly be losers if you follow Shu‘aib.’" (*al-A’raf:* 90) However, what would those who believed in Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) lose? In the opinion of the arrogant leaders of the people of Midyan, the believers had lost the extra amount they were to (unlawfully) take when they gave less then due. Therefore, the strong committed injustice against the weak. So, when these believers adhered to and followed the Way of Allah, they lost out what they were to take by systematically reducing the measures and weight, which is a great loss in the opinion of those who are deviant. Allah tells us about the punishment that afflicted them by saying:

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ ٱلرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا۟ فِى دَارِهِمْ جَٰثِمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

An earthquake seized them: by the next morning
they were lying dead in their homes [91]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 91)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty Ar-Rrajfa* which translates as 'an earthquake' in this verse means a violent movement that causes man to tremble involuntarily. When the disbelievers of Midyan were afflicted with this punishment, they lay dead in their homes; they were in a state of abasement. This indicates that when every one of them was afflicted with the punishment, he remembered all their previous acts of disbelief and disobedience and thus wanted to show remorse for each one of them. They even blamed and reproached themselves for the injustice they had committed. At the point when the punishment befell them, they displayed no arrogance at all. Consequently, at times of disasters and calamities, people, even the arrogant, will not deceive themselves. This is why we find that those who wrong and oppress others and usurp their rights want to give these rights back to their rightful owners when they are in the agony of death, but they do not find those whom they wronged. Due to this, they say that it during that particular moment that a wicked man attains faith, but faith at that moment will not benefit one in any way. Allah *Glorified is He* continues to describe what happened to them after the earthquake seized them by saying:

ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ شُعَيۡبٗا كَأَن لَّمۡ يَغۡنَوۡاْ فِيهَاۚ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ شُعَيۡبٗا كَانُواْ هُمُ ٱلۡخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

It was as if those who had rejected Shu‘aib had never lived there; it was those who had rejected Shu‘aib who were the losers [92] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 92)

The Arabic term *Ghana Bi al-Makan* means that someone had already resided in it. Therefore, when the disbelievers of Midyan became lifeless and their homes were destroyed, it was as if they had never dwelled there for they were utterly annihilated and wiped out. Ironically, although these deniers had said to the followers of Prophet Shu‘aib (Jethro) that they would be losers if they followed him, they themselves, the ones who denied the Message of Shu‘aib (Jethro) were the losers.

Continuing His Speech about Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنۡهُمۡ وَقَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ لَقَدۡ أَبۡلَغۡتُكُمۡ رِسَٰلَٰتِ رَبِّي
وَنَصَحۡتُ لَكُمۡۖ فَكَيۡفَ ءَاسَىٰ عَلَىٰ قَوۡمٖ كَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

So he turned away from them, saying, ‘My people, I delivered my Lord’s messages to you and gave you sincere advice, so why should I grieve for people who refused to believe?’ [93] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 93)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'So he turned away from them…' means that Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* left and went far away from them, and then, he spoke to them symbolically by saying to them, 'My people, I delivered my Lord's Messages to you and gave you sincere advice.' It is as if Prophet Shu'aib's (Jethro's) *peace be upon him* natural human feelings and emotions were roused when he saw their awful and dreadful fate; he even felt sympathy for them and mourned, but then he overcame this emotion by asking rhetorically, 'So why should I grieve for people who refused to believe?' In fact, ordinary believers, let alone prophets and messengers, do not grieve for these people. This is why he reflected, 'I was not remiss in undertaking my mission, rather, I delivered to you the Messages which I received from Allah.'

The word *Ar-Risalat* which translates as 'Messages', may refer to the Message of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and the Messages of the previous Messengers before him *peace be upon them* concerning the laws in which no abrogation or change was made; it may also refer to all the different messages he conveyed to them since every time a ruling was sent down to him, he would convey it to them. Or, it means that for every good thing there is a message, and for every evil thing there is a message. Indeed, he conveyed to them everything he received from Allah; he did not confine himself only to conveying the Message to them, rather, he also gave them good and sincere advice. It should be stated that there is a big difference between *An-Nushr* and *al-Balagh*. *An-Nushr* is 'conveying what you have received or known and that is all', whilst *al-Balagh* is imploring people to follow the Way of Allah. Allah says:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا فِي قَرۡيَةٖ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّآ أَخَذۡنَآ أَهۡلَهَا بِٱلۡبَأۡسَآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَضَّرَّعُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We afflicted its
[disbelieving] people with suffering and hardships, so
that they might humble themselves [before God] [94]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 94)

We previously explained that the word *al-Qarya* which translates as a 'town' in this verse means a place which provides all of the life’s components for its inhabitants.

What is meant by the word *al-Qarya* in this verse is that town to which He *the Almighty* sends a Messenger, yet its people denied and rejected his Message. As a result, Allah *the Exalted* would afflict its inhabitants with misfortune and hardship. 'Misfortune' or *al-Ba’sa’* means a calamity which afflicts one in something other than himself such as the loss of money, the ruin of a business, the destruction of a house, etc. As for 'hardship' or *Ad-Darra’,* it means a calamity which afflicts man himself, such as illness. In fact, He *the Almighty* afflicts them with misfortune and hardship since they forgot Him in times of ease, so He sends them misfortune and hardship that perhaps they might return to their Lord and seek Him out so that He will be with them in both times of ease and times of hardship. Telling us about man’s nature when he is afflicted with any kind of harm, Allah *the Exalted* says that when affliction befalls man, he cries out to Him, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing, but as soon as He has freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Him to save him from the affliction that befell him!: 'And when trouble befalls a man, he calls on Us, lying on his side, or sitting or standing, but when We have removed his trouble from him, he goes his way as though he had never called on Us for the removal of the trouble that befell him. Thus, it is that the doings of the extravagant are made to seem fair in their eyes.' (*Yunus:* 12)

Man should turn to his Creator when misfortune befalls him. He *the Almighty* made misfortune a means of alerting and reminding man that he has a Lord; it is at this point that Allah *the Exalted* answers the call of the straitened person and comes to his aid. Allah says in the Quran that it is He Who responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him and Who removes the ill that caused the distress. In addition, He *the Almighty* has made us inherit the earth. He concludes the verse with stating that most people seldom bear these facts in mind: 'Or, Who answers the cry of the distressed person when he calls upon Him, and removes the evil, and makes you successors in the earth? Is there a god with Allah? Little is that you reflect.' (*an-Naml:* 62)

If Allah does this with the distressed person, he might be fully aware of the fact that he must not forget Allah *the Almighty* the One Who answered his call at times of distress. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* reminds us of His Omnipotent Power when He says that yet when the misfortune decreed by Him befell them, they did not humble themselves: 'Why, then, when Our punishment came upon them, did they not humble themselves? But their hearts were hardened all the more and Satan made all that they did seem fair to them.' (*al-An'am:* 43)

Therefore, when misfortune afflicts us Allah *the Almighty* wants us to seek refuge in Him; He does not wants us to feel that we are left in this world alone, rather, He wants us to firmly believe that the course of our lives is running smoothly by virtue of the means created and subdued to us by Him *the Almighty*. Yet, whoever finds no way to make use of these created means let him resort to Allah *the Almighty* and the Creator of these means. This is why Allah *the Exalted* out of His Mercy, afflicts any town that denies the Messages of their Messengers with misfortune and hardships so that its people might humble themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* in the Quran tells us: ‘That the hearts of those deniers of the truth had already grown hard.’ (*al-An‘am:* 43) Thus, do we think that Allah *the Almighty* will leave them all the time in this happiness or in this affliction? The answer is definitive 'No', for He afflicts them with hardships and misfortune so that their hearts might incline towards Him *the Almighty*. Yet, in case they do not go back to Him, He changes the hardship into prosperity in accordance with His saying,

ثُمَّ بَدَّلْنَا مَكَانَ ٱلسَّيِّئَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةَ حَتَّىٰ عَفَوا۟ وَّقَالُوا۟ قَدْ مَسَّ
ءَابَآءَنَا ٱلضَّرَّآءُ وَٱلسَّرَّآءُ فَأَخَذْنَٰهُم بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

And then We changed their hardship into prosperity, until they multiplied. But then they said, ‘Hardship and affluence also befell our forefathers,’ and so We took them suddenly, unawares [95] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 95)

This verse actually tells us about one of Allah’s most important Laws in the universe, that is, if He wants to utterly destroy a tyrant, He supplies him with abundance in wealth and health. Then, He gives respite to him and even allows him to be of extreme cruelty until He *the Almighty* will suddenly overtake him by the Mighty, Powerful One. Pharaoh is a case in point. Allah *the Almighty* allowed him to transgress to an extent that he falsely claimed to be the ‘Most Exalted Lord’, and thus, Allah seized him in exemplary punishment for the last and the first transgression.

As a matter of fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'until they multiplied' means that these people who rejected to the Messages of their Messengers increased in number, wealth, and power. Thus, the meaning will be that He *the Almighty* only afflicted them with hardships and misfortune in order to make them turn to Him. Yet, when they did not consider this trial, He provided them with wealth and all that pleased them, and then He overtook them without any warning.

Having shed light on the fact that Allah *the Exalted* created man to perform the role of vicegerency upon earth, He provided them with everything by means of which their lives are preserved: how He, through the Messages of His Messengers, provided them with moral values; how He *the Almighty* sent down His Way of Guidance to make clear what He had made lawful to them and what He had forbidden upon them. Therefore, we notice that some of the adversaries of Islam, out of their desire to turn people away from the Straight Path, ask the following question, 'As long as Allah had judged something as being unlawful, why did He create it?' To those people, we reply that everything in this life has been created out of Allah's Infinite Wisdom, which means that there is a wise reason behind the creation and existence of everything in this life, but this reason might yet have nothing to do with food, drink, and clothing. For example, a number of things had been created in this life to achieve a particular purpose which might not concern man directly. Petroleum, for example, is created to fulfil a particular purpose, namely the producing of energy and that is why we do not drink it. In the same respect, there is a Great Divine Wisdom behind the creation of pigs, yet it is only known to Allah *the Almighty*. We may assume that the wisdom behind the creation of pigs is that they serve as means to gather the microbes which emerge from decomposition of things used by people. Therefore, it is clear that everything in this world is created for a wise purpose, so you (O, mankind!) should not, based on your whims, believe that the wisdom behind the creation of a particular thing is such and such, which may be totally against the Great and Profound Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty*. It is taken for granted that Allah, the Creator is the One Who is only entitled to exactly define and set the course and the way for His Creation. We know, for example, that there are many forms of fuel: there is the very clean petrol known as 'number 1 fuel, which is specially used for planes, whilst the petrol used for cars is labelled 'number 2'. Thus, if we use the fuel specially designated to a particular machine in place of another, the machine will get out of order or not function properly. In the same respect, Allah *the Almighty* having created mankind and subdued all other created beings for them, clarified, 'These things are eligible for your direct use, whilst these others are created to serve you in an indirect way. So leave them alone.'

Having told us about the positions of the people of paradise, the dwellers of the hellfire and the denizens of the Heights- those whose good deeds are equal to their evil deeds- along with clarifying and explaining to us His Divine Way of Guidance, He wanted to show us quite clearly that all of the aforementioned things are not merely theoretical, rather, they are facts that actually took place. In fact, we should take into account that there is a difference between theory and practice. So, He *the Almighty* told us about the stories of the Prophets when He sent them to their people, confirming that those who denied these Divine Messages were overtaken in a manner of a Mighty, Powerful One, a thing which all people during that particular period of time witnessed. Allah *Glorified is He* told us the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* with his people, the story of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* with his people (*'*Ad) the story of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* with his people (Thamud*)*, the story of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* with his people of Midyan and the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* with his people. In all of these stories, Allah *the Exalted* told us quite clearly that the believers were saved from the different severe punishments that afflicted the disbelievers and the deniers of the truth. In the same respect, He *the Almighty* explains that He afflicts people with misfortune and hardships so that they might humble themselves before Him. Man is a creature to whom Allah gives many of His Attributes of Majesty and His Attributes of Beauty; Allah is the All-Powerful, and thus, He gave man some of His Power; He *the Almighty* is the All-Rich, and thus, He gave man some of His riches; He *the Almighty* is All-Wise, and thus, He gave man part of His Wisdom, and He *Glorified is He* is All Knowing, and thus, He gave man part of His Knowledge.

In fact, if one wants to have a clear view about the Perfect Knowledge of Allah *the Almighty* let him then consider today's scientific advancement and progress in the light of the undeniable fact that this knowledge is still incomplete and imperfect. In addition, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who enabled them to achieve all of this progress and all of mankind's knowledge is thus attributed to Him. Yet, man might be deluded by the material means when the latter obey them, to the extent that he might falsely believe that they had complete control over things; man ordered them, and the material means carried out the order! In actuality, this causes him to incorrectly believe that he had held absolute power over things. This is why Allah *the Almighty* warns us against this point, saying in the Quran that man becomes incredibly arrogant whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient: 'Nay! Man, indeed, transgresses because he thinks himself to be independent.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7)

When man finds all of the material means at his disposal, he should remember that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who provides them with all of this. It goes without saying that man's body parts are subject to his will; when one wants to stand up, his body parts perform the action of standing, and when he wants to hit someone, his body parts responds positively to him and perform the action of hitting. So if this happens within man who is created by Allah *the Almighty* the universe which is also created by Him, must have, in turn, become entirely subject to His Will. Thus, if man, relying on the material means in the universe, believes that he became self-sufficient, He *the Almighty* would afflict him with a trial so that he would return to Him. For example, a person with good health might be afflicted with a particular disease and thus become weak to the extent that he seeks the help of others to move or to do a particular act. Therefore, it is of great importance to note that Allah *the Almighty* destructs tyrants and oppressors with the very same things they used to show arrogance thereby. Thus, it is clear that Allah *the Exalted* wants us not to forget about Him, the Creator of all means.

In this respect, it is of great importance to know that Allah *Glorified is He* fills the universe with different wonders and secrets. Today, science has achieved great advances and progress in the field of astrophysics to the extent that man unveiled a number of Allah's Secrets in the universe, yet scientists are still unable to reveal the secrets of particular phenomena, a matter that shows man's incapability. Having finished the manufacturing of a particular advanced machine, they discover the existence of one single defect by means of which the entire work will be in vain. In the same respect, we should take into account that when a storm or hurricane blows and destroys everything or when there is a big fire that eagerly devours everything before it, this actually does not mean that He *the Almighty* wants to spread corruption in the earth; rather, He wants to alert us so that we do not become deluded by the means which we have been given. As a matter of fact, even though radars have been manufactured to enable us to predict events before their occurrence, Allah *the Exalted* may sometimes cause these radars to be inoperative so that people may fully respect and acknowledge the fact that their knowledge is still imperfect.

Therefore, it becomes quite clear that affliction with misfortune and hardship is one of Allah's Laws by means of which the affairs of the universe run smoothly. It is primarily meant with allowing man to be fully aware of the fact that he had come into existence to perform the role of vicegerency on the earth. This is why the corruption of man stems first and foremost from the fact he mistakenly believe that the entire universe will not dispense with him. Basically, the falsehood of this conviction is proven by the fact that people die and still the affairs of the universe run smoothly in their absence. It thus goes without saying that man will never be able to make all what is in the universe subject to his will since there are some natural laws in the universe which refuse to obey him, and thus, he can never control them.

Nowadays we see a number of nuclear reactors that exploded after having been set in order. This raises the question: 'Why?' In fact, the explosion and the destruction of these reactors clearly indicate the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty* which is unchallengeable and cannot be defeated. Once again, afflicting people with misfortune, hardships and things which we might view as 'evil' and 'bad' is primarily meant with returning man to the essence of his role as Allah's vicegerent on the earth. That is to say that if he is deluded by the created material means, Allah will afflict him with such trials to make him return to Him *the Almighty* the Creator of means. Furthermore, when Allah *the Exalted* tries people with misfortunes which are calamities that do not, in essence, afflict man himself, rather, something or someone else such as loss of wealth or loss of children or the destruction of one's home. Or when Allah *the Almighty* tries them with hardships which are calamities that befall man's person, this means that He wants to remove their ostentation of pride, and thus, they should find no recourse other than to surrender themselves before the Lord of heavens and earths and to humble themselves before Him *the Almighty*.

We previously explained that the Arabic word *At-Tadaru'* means 'to show humility and be humble before Allah *the Almighty*'. Yet, if the disbelievers and the deniers of the truth took no admonition whatsoever from these afflictions to the effect that they believed that these were nothing but natural disasters that might befall people at any time, Allah *the Almighty* will, amazingly, change these afflictions and hardships into prosperity in accordance with His saying in the chapter of *al-An'am* in which He says: 'When they forgot that with which they had been admonished, and We opened unto them the gates of all things, till, even as they were rejoicing in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, and lo! they were in utter despair.' (*al-An'am:* 44)

When people stray far from the Divine way of guidance, Allah *the Almighty* will give them requite in a way which fits their crime. Likewise, if He *the Exalted* were to take them to task whilst being in a wretched condition, the impact of the punishment would not be so powerful; therefore, He opens the gates of all good things for them so that when He overtakes them suddenly and unexpectedly, the punishment will be severer and more painful, and thus, they will be in utter despair.

We previously mentioned that proverb used by the laymen, which says: 'If you want to push someone over, you do not push him from a reed mat; rather, you should push him from a high place.' In the same respect, Our Lord *Glorified is He* gives the deniers of the truth all that they want in this worldly life and even makes them behave more cruelly so that when He overtakes them, He will do so in a manner of a Mighty, Powerful One. The true events of life have served to prove this fact. We have already known quite well about many oppressive tyrants who were overtaken by the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty* after He had thrown open the gates of all that is good for them.

He *the Almighty* says: 'And then We changed their hardship into prosperity, until they multiplied. But then they said, "Hardship and affluence also befell our forefathers,' and so We took them suddenly, unaware."' (*al-A'raf:* 95) Thus, man might invent things that alert him to bad events which may afflict him in the coming future such as the radar which reveals the approach of any kind of possible danger. Yet, when He *the Almighty* says that the disbelievers would be overtaken while being unaware, this means that the disbelievers did not have any calculations or measurements by means of which they could recognise the approach of the punishment about to be imposed upon them.

In fact, if we carefully reflect on this topic, we will find that people may use their intelligences and their thoughts in a way which is contrary to that of Allah *the Almighty* yet they are afflicted with Divine punishments while being unaware of them; this means that their minds and thoughts benefited them nothing. Amazingly enough, people find animals, that are not legally responsible or charged created beings, running away when the punishment is about to afflict people. So, this raises a question: 'Why do these animal run away?' At this point, man becomes of a lower rank than animals since it is a fact of nature that in lands where earthquakes occur, the animals are the first to flee a site where an earthquake will strike. This is why we stress that Allah *the Almighty* has removed this knowledge from people so that a Divine punishment would afflict them severely. When an earthquake is about to hit a particular area, we find that donkeys run to escape that particular site, whilst people remain in their places until the danger overcomes them which raises another important question: 'What is this particular sense that enabled animals to escape the danger of an earthquake?' It is undoubtedly an instinctive sense which our Lord *Glorified is He* created within them. Thus, if Allah *the Exalted* did not grant them the ability to reason things, He granted them instincts by means of which they could sense the approach of danger. Therefore, as long as those disbelievers did not heed the warning by the misfortune and hardships that afflicted them, He *the Almighty* threw open all the gates to what is good for them, and thus, He drew them near to destruction from whence they did not know.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us that the case of the people of faith is totally different from that of disbelievers; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوۡ أَنَّ أَهۡلَ ٱلۡقُرَىٰٓ ءَامَنُواْ وَٱتَّقَوۡاْ لَفَتَحۡنَا عَلَيۡهِم بَرَكَٰتٖ مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ
وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبُواْ فَأَخَذۡنَٰهُم بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكۡسِبُونَ ٩٦

If the people of those towns had believed and been mindful of God, We would have showered them with blessings from the heavens and earth, but they rejected the truth and so We punished them for their misdeeds [96] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 96)

This verse clearly indicates that if the people of the towns, namely the disbelievers from amongst them, had attained faith in Allah *the Almighty* and had firmly adhered to His commands and kept away from His prohibitions, they would have been saved from Divine punishment and torture. When man makes a machine, he writes the helpful guide wherein he defines and specifies the main purpose behind the creation of this machine, how it could be used and how it could be maintained. Therefore, it is clear that if people had closely followed the Divine Way of Guidance, they would have enjoyed all kinds of good. This is why Allah *the Almighty* tells disbelievers that if they were mindful of Him, He would have showered them with blessings from the heaven and the earth including the rain that falls from the sky, the plants that come out of the earth and the other essential elements from which the most important things in life are obtained.

However, what does the word *al-Baraka* or 'blessing' mean? It means for something to give more than what is naturally expected from it. For example, if someone’s income is only fifty pounds and yet we find him and his children living in happiness and comfort without any worries, we ask, 'How can he live in such a happiness with such a small sum of money?' He answers you, 'It is a blessing!' Furthermore, 'blessing' may be explained in the light of our daily life. We previously explained that people are quite keen on increasing the amounts of their money and properties, believing that by doing so they will be safe from the changes of time. Yet, they pay no attention at all to the fact that even though a person's income is low, it is blessed, and thus, it meets all the family’s different needs and requirements. Let us offer the following striking example to make this point ever so clear. Your income may be thousands of pounds, but it does not meet the needs of your family, and thus, you might need even more. On the other hand, the income of another person may be only one hundred pounds, but their income meets all the needs and requirement of his family, and thus he needs no more.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'If the people of the towns had believed and been mindful of Allah, We would have showered them with blessings from the heaven and the earth…' means that He blesses the small amount of money obtained through lawful means and wipes out the large amount obtained through unlawful means, such as usury. This is why He *the Almighty* calls the act of giving out a particular amount of money to the poor *zakat* which literally means 'increase', even though this act of almsgiving might apparently be viewed as reducing the amount of money a person has. When you have a hundred pounds, for example, and you pay two-and-a-half pounds from it, then it appears on the surface that your wealth has decreased. On the other hand, if you lend someone a hundred pounds and take it back from him one hundred and ten, this is apparently viewed as increasing your wealth. Yet, we find Him *the Almighty* judging the decrease resulting from the paying of *zakat* as 'purification and increase' while judging the increase resulting from the second case as 'loss and an abomination'.

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'If the people of the towns had believed and been mindful of Allah, We would have showered them with blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they rejected the truth and so We punished them for their misdeeds' thus means that if people had firmly adhered to all the instructions and directions set to them by the Creator *Glorified is He,* all of their affairs would have been set in order, and they would not have suffered any disturbances in this life. Yet, some people might not adhere to the Divine way of guidance, a fact which is definitively proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '… but they rejected the truth and so We punished them for their misdeeds….' (*al-A'raf:* 96)

This part of the verse plainly means that Divine punishments that afflicted disbelievers are not acts of tyranny on part of Allah, the Creator; rather, it is His Justice that decrees the affliction of punishments upon these people. If He *the Almighty* did not take corrupters to task, those who are pious may consequently deviate from the Right Path since it is at this point that they would say, 'As long as we are equal to corrupters whose worldly affairs are fine, why do we not practise corruption like them?' Undoubtedly, if this were to be the case, then those who are pious may be allured to practise corruption to the extent they might allow themselves to commit any form of evil. However, when He *the Almighty* takes corrupters to task for their misdeeds, the pious will realise the bad fate of those who spread corruption, and thus, they will keep themselves from falling prey to misguidance and disobedience.

Concerning the conclusion of this particular verse under discussion, it was expected that He *the Almighty* would use the Arabic verb form *yaktasibun* instead of *yaksibun*; it goes without saying that committing evil causes a number of man’s faculties to be in opposition to each other. We previously gave a striking example to illustrate this point; a man feels no worry whatsoever when he sits with his wife and stares at her beauty, but if he sits with a foreign woman and wants to woo her to enjoy her beauty, his faculties will clash with one another. Therefore, there is a big difference between a particular person whose faculties are in harmony with each other and another whose faculties are in conflict with each other. However, as for these corrupters, they used to practise it day and night until it became almost second nature to them, which is why He *the Almighty* used the verb *yaksibun,* which clearly means that they used to practise corruption while feeling no any shame at all.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَفَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ ٱلْقُرَىٰٓ أَن يَأْتِيَهُم بَأْسُنَا بَيَٰتًا وَهُمْ نَآئِمُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾
أَوَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ ٱلْقُرَىٰٓ أَن يَأْتِيَهُم بَأْسُنَا ضُحًى وَهُمْ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾

Do the people of these towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them by night, while they are asleep? [97] Do the people of these towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them by day, while they are at play? [98] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 97-98)

In these two verses under discussion, we notice the existence of 'do', which implies a question, and then the word 'then' which implies succession. This naturally implies the existence of two consecutive clauses which are introduced by interrogation; this means that having suddenly overtaken those who committed acts of disbelief and disobedience, how could the people of towns feel secure that Our Punishment and Torment will not come to them by night or by day, just as was done with the previous nations who came before them? If this is actually the case, this means that they have failed to heed the warning or lesson of the torment and destruction that afflicted the nations that came before them.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that those who denied and rejected the truth from amongst the people of the towns would also be unable to protect themselves from Divine punishment if it afflicted them, exactly as disbelievers from among the people of Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and Shu'aib (Jethro), who were unable to ward off the punishment that afflicted them. As for the Arabic word *al-Ba's* that translates as punishment, it means the chastisement with which Allah *the Almighty* meted out to the people of towns when they disregarded His way of guidance. So, how could they be so certain that they were all safe from being afflicted with such severe punishments that fell upon the nations who came before them?!

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* talks about events, this means that He will shed light also on the particular time and place in which these events took place. It is taken for granted that every event must have a particular time and a particular place. In this respect, the place mentioned in these Quranic verses refers to the 'lands in which these communities lived', while the time refers to 'that particular period of time' in which Allah's Punishment would come upon them. Consequently, this Divine punishment might come to them by night while they are asleep or by the brightness of mid morning, while they are at play. When the sun rises over a particular place, then it is the day, while the other part to which the light of the sun does not reach will be in dark, and thus, it is nighttime. The Divine punishment might yet come to the people of towns by day or even by night, at any moment of the course of time. Today's science reached the conclusion that when the sun rises over a particular area on the earth, this means that there is another area which witnesses sunset at that same time. This is to say that day and night follow each other consecutively. So, whether it is day or night where you are, you cannot be sure that you are safe from Divine punishment, which may come to you by day or by night.

As for the people of the towns, they are those who rejected the truth, and thus Allah punished them for their misdeeds (*al-A'raf:* 96). Truthfully speaking, as long as they denied and rejected the truth, this means that they did not believe in the Messengers sent to them to deliver Allah's Message to them, a matter that clearly indicates that they did not believe in the Divine way of guidance by means of which the affairs of the life are run perfectly: in the light of the Divine Laws of 'Do's and 'Dont's'.

Therefore, the deniers of the truth spent their days in vain; they performed actions which were neither honourable nor beneficial. As for their nights, they used to spend them either asleep or committing acts of disobedience including frivolity, shamelessness, and licentiousness. In fact, everyone who lives in conflict with Allah’s way of guidance spends his nights in either sleep or disobedient frivolity, whilst his days are spent in worldly play since however great his work might be, it will go unrewarded in the Hereafter. Allah says:

أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

Do they feel secure against God’s plan? Only the losers feel secure against God’s plan [99] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 99)

'Security' means to be able to avoid being harmed by any risk, danger, or threat. Arabs say 'This person is secure' which means that there is nothing that makes his life hard and unhappy. The Saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Do they feel secure against Allah’s Plan?' obviously means that He *Glorified is He* has ascribed the act of planning, or *Makr* to Himself. This raises a very important question, namely: 'Does Allah *the Almighty* really make plans (or *Yamkuru*, an Arabic word that conveys the meaning of cunning)?' This question is actually based on the fact that the act of cunning is impossible to take place on part of Allah *the Almighty*. Yet, we must take into account the fact that the Quran actually tells us about another kind of planning which is a good one. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says that the evil plans shall not beset any save the authors of it: 'For, they sought exaltation in the earth and devised evil schemes. But the evil schemes encompass none but the authors thereof. Do they, then, look for anything other than Allah's way of dealing with the people of old? But you will never find any change in the way of Allah, nor will you ever find any alteration in the way of Allah.' (*Fatir:* 43) In another chapter in the Quran, He *the Almighty* says that He is the best of planners: 'And 'Isa's (Jesus's) enemies planned and Allah also planned, and Allah is the Best of Planners.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 54)

The Arabic word *al-Makr* conveys, in essence, the meaning of 'intertwining'. When we go to a garden or a forest, we find that the branches of the trees are intertwined as though they are braided to the extent that one cannot tell to which tree this particular leaf belongs. Likewise, we see this act of intertwining in climbing plants that have shoots that are plaited like a rope. Therefore, it is clear that the original meaning of *al-Makr* is to deceive others by making things unclear to them. In fact, if one wants to gain the upper hand over his foe, he plots something against him of which he is unaware. Thus, if this is actually the case of man when he wants to plot and scheme against his fellow man, how about the plans made by Allah *the Almighty,* the One Whose Knowledge is Complete and All-Comprehensive? It goes without saying that His Plans against the wrongdoers are good since He protects the entire humanity from evil by destructing such oppressors.

Once again, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do they feel secure against Allah's Plan? Only the losers feel secure against Allah's Plan.' This raises another important question, namely: 'Did Messengers and Prophets feel secure from the Plans of Allah?' The answer is 'Yes'. They were secure from the Plans of Allah since they were elected to serve as Allah's Messengers. Yet, another important question is raised: 'How could it be, then, that none feels secure from Allah's Plans except those who are lost?!' We reply that it was an intrinsic part of the Message of every Messenger that none feels secure from Allah's Plans except those who are lost. Allah *the Almighty* is All-Omnipotent. He *Glorified is He* sent down His way of guidance so that man, if he firmly adhered to it, will be prosperous and successful in this worldly life and the Hereafter. Yet, if he does not act upon it, he loses the security of faith both in this world, even if he gains wealth, prestige, or knowledge therein, and in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَوَلَمۡ يَهۡدِ لِلَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ أَهۡلِهَآ أَن لَّوۡ نَشَآءُ
أَصَبۡنَٰهُم بِذُنُوبِهِمۡۚ وَنَطۡبَعُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمۡ فَهُمۡ لَا يَسۡمَعُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

Is it not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations that We can punish them too for their sins if We will? And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear? [100]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 100)

The Arabic word *Yahde* which translates as 'it is clear' means that the way of goodness has become clear to those who have inherited the earth. Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty:* '… those who inherit the land from former generations…' means that the earth was owned by others than them, and those who currently inherited it came after them. When one carefully reflects on the world's different civilisations, he finds that every civilisation was built on the rubble of a previous civilisation and that which is in one's hand and one's possession was once in the possession of someone else. This is actually what is meant by the word 'legacy'. So, as long as one is aware that he has inherited what is in his hands from others, he must also bear in mind that one day others will inherit from him.

Therefore, it is clear that man's affairs in this worldly life are subject to continuous alteration and change. This is why we reiterate all the time that one should not be deluded by his position or rank. In our daily life, we see someone holding an important and influential position, and then later he is dismissed and removed from this position or is even forced to retirement. This is why it is said, 'If it had lasted for anyone else, it would never have come to him.' So, if one a person of high status and prestige and senior position, he must take into account that he will one day have to leave all of this; thus, it is better to prepare himself for the inevitable coming of this day so that the matter will not be too difficult for him.

In the same respect, one must take into account how to simply abandon his senior position even before he makes arrangements for taking it.

At this point, the following poetic verses may be quoted:

The true commander is the one who becomes
A commander the day he is deposed:
If the power of his command has ended,
The power of his virtue remains.

When we read the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations…,' we notice that He did not make the people a direct object; He does not say, 'Have, then, not those who have inherited the earth been guided…', rather, He says: 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations…', so what is the deep wisdom behind this? We know with certainty that guidance (*al-Hidaya*) means directing others to the way which leads to the final destination; this act of guiding others will surely benefit you which means you might guide someone else for your own benefit. Yet, guidance might also mean directing and guiding another to a righteous deed which brings benefit to both the one who guides and the one who is guided. However, if the act of guidance solely benefits you, and not the one who guides you, would you doubt the guidance he gives you? The answer is 'No'. In fact, one may seriously doubt the guidance of the one who will get benefit from his guidance, since this particular case implies a suspicion that one does so in order to gain a personal interest; however, if the guidance will not benefit the one who gives it but will solely benefit the one who receives it, then there is not the slightest doubt about it.

This point is further explained in the following Qudsi Hadith in which Allah *the Almighty* is related to have said: 'O, My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and even the whole of human race of yours, and that of jinn even, become (equal in) Allah-consciousness like the heart of a single person amongst you, nothing would add to My Power. O, My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and the whole human race of yours and that of the jinn too in unison become the most wicked (all beating) like the heart of a single person, it would cause no loss to My Power. O, My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and the whole human race of yours and that of jinn also all stand in one plain ground and you were to ask Me and I confer upon every person what he asks for, it would not, in any way, cause any loss to Me (even less) than that which is caused to the ocean by dipping the needle in it.'(1)

Therefore, when He *the Almighty* guides you to the Straight Path, what Attribute of Perfection does He gain from this? He already possessed all Attributes of Perfection before He created you, and thus, your creation did not add any new Attribute of Perfection to Him *Glorified is He*. Consequently, it becomes quite clear that the essence of the act of guidance depends ultimately on the one who does it.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations that We can punish them too for their sins if We will. And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear.' (*al-A'raf:* 100) This raises a very important point which is when Allah *Glorified is He* sheds light on His Will, He uses the expression 'if We will' In this verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* defines the real causes behind this particular Divine Will mentioned in the verse, saying, '…that We can punish them too for their sins if We will…'. Therefore, it becomes clear that man has free will which is totally different from that of Allah *the Exalted*.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

In another verse of the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that if He pleased, He would certainly guide everyone: 'Have not the believers yet come to know that if Allah had enforced His Will He could have surely guided all mankind?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31). This raises yet a very important question: 'Why does not He *the Almighty* will to guide all mankind?' It is taken for granted that no one can hinder the Will of Allah *the Exalted* from being fulfilled. Yet, He created the angels in such a way that prevents them from sinning which means that they are guided and infallible by their very nature. On the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* created all the other created beings on the earth in such a way that makes them subdued to His Will so that they constantly exalt His Praise and Glory. Thus, as long as none of the earthly creatures can evade the Will of Allah, this definitively proves the Omnipotence of His Power. However, we must take into account that the nature of creation of angels would not affirm the attribute of love to Allah *the Most High* and the Lawgiver. This is why He *Glorified is He* created another created being with free will to choose whether to obey or disobey Him.

It thus goes without saying that when this particular created being, i.e. mankind out of his free will, implanted in him by Allah, chooses to obey and believe in Him *the Almighty* his faith would undoubtedly be viewed as conclusive proof of the affirmation of the attribute of love for Him *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, it is clear that those who are compelled not to disobey the Divine commands, namely the angels, affirm the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty,* whilst the act of obedience on part of those who have free will either to obey or even disobey affirms the attribute of love for Allah *the Most High*. He *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…We can punish them too for their sins if We will. And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear.' (*al-A'raf:* 100)

This raises a vital point, which clearly indicates the Infinite Mercy of Allah *the Almighty* since He did not say: 'If We so willed, We could smite them for their sins'; rather, He made the punishment dependant on the sins they committed by virtue of their free will. Likewise, He sealed their hearts as a result of their own free choice to disbelieve and disobey. We previously explained the meaning of *At-Tabu'or* the 'sealing the hearts' while speaking about the interpretation of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, in which He *the Almighty* says that He has sealed thee hearts of disbelievers: 'Allah has set a seal on their hearts and their ears, and over their eyes is a covering, and for them is a grievous chastisement.' (*al-Baqara:* 7)

The heart is the main part of man's body that receives the Message of faith, so if it is completely full of disbelief, this clearly means that disbelief becomes an intrinsic part of it, to the extent that the heart becomes no longer dispensed with faith. This is why Allah *the Almighty* helps him fulfil his will. It is as though He *Glorified is He* tells them that He will help them do what they want; therefore, He will seal their hearts so that the disbelief within them shall not exit. In addition, the natural faith which Allah *Glorified is He* implanted in everyone's hearts, which left them before, shall not enter them once again. This is due to the fact that you (O, disbelievers!) have already given precedence to disbelief over belief. Furthermore, one is naturally supposed to make his heart completely empty from any conviction, and then receive belief and give it precedence over disbelief.

It is taken for granted that Allah *the Almighty* has not made for any man two hearts within him. This is to say that man does not have two hearts, one for belief, and another for disbelief, rather, He *the Exalted* created only one heart in every human being. This one heart has a limited capacity, and this, it accepts just one thing, that is, either belief or disbelief. Let us offer the following example to illustrate this point. When we take an empty glass and say that it is 'empty', this is shown to be untrue when we pour water into it and see bubbles of air being released from it. Furthermore, it is this releasing of bubbles of air that allows water to enter into the glass. Therefore, it becomes clear that the glass was not really empty; it just appeared to us that it was since we could not see the air in it. If the glass were emptied of air without having been specially designed for this purpose, it would have certainly broken. The same applies to the heart; it has a limited capacity, so if faith enters into, there will be no room for disbelief, and vice versa. A person with sound mind will carefully and fully examine both of the two cases to objectively decide which one of them is entirely beneficial to him both in this world and in the Hereafter. Yet, if he discusses this issue while firmly believing that he will not believe, this is a fruitless task.

He *the Almighty* says: 'It is not clear to those who inherit the land from former generations that We can punish them too for their sins if We will. And seal up their hearts so that they cannot hear.' (*al-A'raf:* 100) In other words, it is like He is saying, 'Has it not become clear to those who took over the earth after their predecessors were destroyed because of their disbelief and sin, but then those who followed the same path as their predecessors, did the same misdeeds like them and disobeyed their Lord like them, that if We so willed, We could impose upon them the same torment We imposed upon their predecessors.' As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'so that they cannot hear', it refers to the kind of hearing which leads to reflection and admonition; so, it is as though they did not hear the divine Messages sent to them. Allah says:

تِلۡكَ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ نَقُصُّ عَلَيۡكَ مِنۡ أَنۢبَآئِهَاۚ وَلَقَدۡ جَآءَتۡهُمۡ رُسُلُهُم بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ فَمَا كَانُواْ
لِيُؤۡمِنُواْ بِمَا كَذَّبُواْ مِن قَبۡلُۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَطۡبَعُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٠١﴾

We have told you [Prophet] the stories of those towns:
messengers came to them, and clear signs, but they would not
believe in what they had already rejected – in this way God
seals the hearts of disbelievers [101] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 101)

This verse highlights the main purpose of relating these stories to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is actually the same purpose clearly mentioned in chapter of *Hud* in which Allah *Glorified is He* says that all He relates to you of the accounts of the Messengers is to strengthen your heart therewith: 'And We relate unto you all the important tidings of the Messengers, whereby We strengthen your heart. And herein has come to you the truth and an exhortation and a reminder for the believers.' (*Hud:* 120)

So, if you (O, Prophet Muhammad!) experience any obstinacy, rejection and arrogance from the people of your *ummah* (followers of Islam), you should take into your consideration that you are not experiencing anything new which other Messengers did not face before you for each of them was faced by this wave of denial from disbelievers from amongst his people. Thus, if every Messenger had already experienced difficulties and challenges according to the importance of his Message, then you (O, Prophet Muhammad!) must certainly undergo trials and tribulations equal to those of all the other Messengers before you.

We previously explained that what is meant by *At-Tabu',* mentioned in the verse under discussion, is that He *the Almighty* has sealed their hearts. The hearts of these disbelievers were filled with misguidance, and so they denied and rejected the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Another important point is raised which is that He *Glorified is He* has sealed their hearts, not out of compulsion but due to the fact that they concealed disbelief within their hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَا وَجَدْنَا لِأَكْثَرِهِم مِّنْ عَهْدٍ وَإِن وَجَدْنَآ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

We found that most of them did not honour their commitments; We found that most of them were defiant [102] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 102)

The verse indicates plainly that those who denied and rejected the Divine Messages sent to them through their Messengers and Prophets did not honour their many commitments. The covenant in which Allah *the Almighty* took from the loins of Adam, namely his descendants, and made them testify that He is their Lord is a case in point: 'And remember when your Lord brought forth from Adam's children - out of their loins - their offspring and made them to bear witness against their ownselves saying, "Yes, we do bear witness." This He did lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were surely unaware of this."' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

The mind might yet find it difficult to understand how this covenant could have been taken from all of the progeny which existed within the loins of

Adam *peace be upon him* so we say, 'If Allah said it, He spoke the truth whether we understand it or not.' Furthermore, if you consider the creation of man, you will find that all human beings must have had forefathers. This definitively proves that man came into existence as a result of the process of fertilisation that takes place in the womb of woman. In this process, a living sperm cell from a father fertilises a living egg from a mother and thus begins the creation of man. Had either the sperm or the egg died, the procreation would have been prevented.

Therefore, this makes it clear that all human beings are the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him*. Adam gave birth to his children, who, in turn, gave birth to their children, who, in turn, gave birth to their own children, and so on. This clearly indicates that all human beings are the sons and daughters of Adam *peace be upon him*. This means that all human beings had already made this covenant to Allah *the Almighty*.

We previously gave an example to illustrate this point, saying that atoms, which are spread throughout something, are also spread through its big quantities. We said that if we were to take a cubic centimetre of red colorant, for example, and dilute it in a bottle of water, every part of the bottle would contain a part of the colorant. If we were to take the bottle and pour it into a large vat, then every drop of the liquid in the vat would contain a part of the red colorant. The same actually happens if we were to take the vat and pour it into the sea, for then every atom in it would eventually contain a part of this colorant. In this way, it becomes clearer to each of us how every human being contains a tiny particle of Adam *peace be upon him*. It is actually this tiny particle that witnessed the first covenant made to Allah *the Almighty* by the progeny of Adam. Someone might yet ask, 'How did Allah speak to the progeny which existed in the loins of Adam?' The answer is that He *the Exalted* did so, just as He previously spoke to the earth and the sky. In the Quran, Allah tells us that He applied His Design to the skies: 'Then He turned to the heaven, while it was something like smoke, and said to it and to the earth; "Come both of you in obedience, willingly or unwillingly." They said, "We come willingly."' (*Fussilat:* 11) Therefore, our lack of understanding of how the Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to His creation does not in any way affect the essence and truth of this matter.

This is the case of the first covenant. Then comes the second covenant which He *the Almighty* took from His Messengers, a covenant which is clearly shown in the chapter of *Al-'Imran* in which Allah tells us that He took the covenant of the Prophets: 'And remember the time when Allah took a covenant from the people through the Prophets, saying, "Whatever I give you of the Book and Wisdom and then there comes to you a Messenger, fulfilling that which is with you, you shall believe in him and help him." And He said, "Do you agree, and do you accept the responsibility which I lay upon you in this matter?" They said "We agree." He said "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."' (*Al-'Imran:* 81)

Then, there were specific covenants occasioned by specific events such as that one described by Him *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Yunus* in which He says that He is the One Who enables people to travel on land and sea until when they are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein then, there comes a storm wind and the waves come upon them from everywhere ,and they assume that they are surrounded, supplicating sincerely to Allah, 'If You should save us from this, we will surely be among the thankful.' (*Yunus*: 22) The people experiencing times of distress did not surrender themselves to ruin, nor were they at that particular time deluded by their prestige or by the means at their disposal since they had all been exhausted; so they did not cheat themselves, rather, they humbly retreated to Allah's Refuge, supplicating sincerely to Him that if He should save them from this hardship, they will surely be among the thankful.

Basically, we see that they, while experiencing considerable difficulties and hardships, made a covenant to Allah that if He should save them, they will surely be from among the thankful. However, once Allah saved them, they broke the covenant. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about this: 'And when trouble befalls a man, he calls on Us, lying on his side, or sitting or standing, but when We have removed his trouble from him, he goes his way as though he had never called on Us for the removal of the trouble that befell him. Thus, it is that the doings of the extravagant are made to seem fair in their eyes.' (*Yunus:* 12) Therefore, it is clear that a covenant may be either general or specific.

Back to our verse under discussion, we find Allah *the Almighty* concluding it with His saying, 'We found that most of them were defiant.' (*al-A'raf:* 102) This part of the verse clearly signifies that most of these people remained in iniquity. In addition, they did not honour their covenants. In fact, a covenant is something by means of which the actions of a free person are restricted in the light of the pledges and promises he makes. We know for certain that man is totally free to do an act or not to do it. Yet, once he pledges to do something, he becomes bound to it and must fulfil the covenant by his own free choice since once he binds himself to the covenant this means that he must govern his actions within the confines of it. Yet, if his actions take him outside the confines of this covenant, this is judged as *al-Fisq* (iniquity), which is an Arabic word used originally to describe that particular state that a ripe date breaks out of its shell, giving protection to the fruit so that nothing bad can enter it from outside. It is as though our Lord *Glorified is He* has made legal obligations a covering to protect man from misguidance. Thus, if one breaks the rules of religion just as the fruit breaks out of the shell, he becomes liable to pollution and harmful microbes. This is why He *the Almighty* calls the one who abandons His Way of Guidance *al-fasiq* or 'iniquitous' since he thereby deviates from the confines which He *the Almighty* set to protect him from corrupting elements and from the destruction and punishment which might otherwise afflict him.

He *the Almighty* then says:

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِم مُّوسَىٰ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَآ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَإِي۟هِۦ فَظَلَمُوا۟
بِهَا ۖ فَٱنظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَـٰقِبَةُ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

After these, We sent Moses to Pharaoh and his leading supporters with Our signs, but they rejected them. See the fate of those who used to spread corruption [103]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 103)

Having elaborated on the stories of Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them* with their people showing how Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed the deniers and saved the believers, He *the Almighty* wanted to relate to us the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who is one of those Messengers with great determination (*Ulu al-'Azm)* an expression used to refer to Messengers who possessed strong will and perseverance in fulfilling the duties commanded by Allah. I think you are quite aware that the story of Musa (Moses) with the Jews is covered thoroughly in the Quran to the extent that it is the longest story ever in it since their deviations, displays of impetuousness and rebellions against their Prophets were so numerous. Many Prophets were sent to them, and the Jews are proud of that and say, 'Of all nations, the most Prophets were sent to us!' We replied to them, 'Yes, this is true, but the many Prophets that were sent to you shows how severe your sickness is since a large number of doctors are only required when it becomes extremely difficult to treat a patient. So, this clearly indicates that one single Messenger was not enough for you, rather, you required many to treat your many diseases.'

The word *ba'ath* (sent) means both 'to send' and 'to seek out'. As we understand it, the term indicates and suggests that He *the Almighty* sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as a Messenger to Pharaoh. As a matter of fact, this particular word, *ba'ath*, is always used with Divine Messages since the concept of it implies that something was present, and then was covered up until Allah *the Almighty* brought it forth again.

Faith was actually found in the first era of Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* created Adam with His Hands and then directly issued His commands and prohibitions to him. Adam, in turn, passed these Divine orders and prohibitions on to his progeny. This original form is what includes the realities of faith which Adam possessed. Likewise, sending many Messengers and Prophets does not mean that each of them had had a new creed; rather, they all revived that which had been present before. The Will of Allah decrees that He sends a Messenger when corruption becomes widespread. Therefore, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* charged Adam with passing the first legal obligation issued to him to his progeny. Had man seriously taken religious responsibilities from those who came before him just as he took the essential constituents of life from them, faith would have remained of constant presence in our life.

We learn from our forefathers things which benefit us in our worldly life, so why did we not take religion from them, too? It is due to the reason that religion curbs one’s freedom of action and puts it on the right track, a matter which is against the will of man, who wants to flee from that which restricts his freedom of action. In this respect, it is of great importance to know that using the following two verbs, *arsala* (sent forth) and *ba‘atha* (sent), with Messengers indicate clearly that He *the Almighty* did not bring anything new, rather, He brought back that which man should have retained with him just as he retained other things which he inherited from his forefather and which bring him benefit. For example, we benefit from loaves of bread and tailoring, so why did we benefit from these material things and forget the ethical ones? It is because these material things can assist man in his passions, whilst the values of religion fight against these passions.

The word *Ayat,* which translates as 'signs', is the plural of *aya* which means an amazing thing that causes the mind to feel surprise. Furthermore, this particular word, *Ayat* has three different meanings which are as follows: Firstly, it can be used to refer to the verses of the Quran with its rhetorical style that will remain miraculous until the end of time; for everyone benefits from them according to the capacity of his mind and the capacity of his understanding. Secondly, it may also be used to refer to natural signs which are spread everywhere in the heaven and the earth. Lastly, it may furthermore be used to refer to the miracles given to Messengers and Prophets by way of proving their truthfulness and credibility. The act of 'sending' itself requires a courier, which in this case is Musa (Moses); in this case, Allah is the sender, while the recipient is the people of Pharaoh. Furthermore, in this case, the thing with which the Messenger is sent is the Divine Way of Guidance.

The signs with which Allah *the Almighty* sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were the proofs of the veracity of his prophethood. In addition, they represented the Divine Way of Guidance sent to Pharaoh and his leading supporters. We previously explained the meaning of the word *al-Mala’* and said that it refers to people who are of high social rank and position to the extent that people fear them. Thus, ordinary people, to whom no one pays attention, cannot be called 'leading supporters'. This raises an important question: 'Why did Allah *the Almighty* in this verse, restrict the Mission of Musa (Moses) just to Pharaoh and his great ones?' The answer is that it is because it would have been easy to guide their followers if the leaders were guided. Naturally; those who resist goodness are the ones who benefit from evil, namely arrogant leaders and their entourage. Truthfully speaking, arrogant leaders do not desire the way of goodness to be established since it goes against their interests and their passions, and so they fight against it. As for ordinary people, they are in a state of subjugation; when they see that someone has stood in the way of those who afflicted them with their injustice and oppression, their hearts will attach to this liberator.

He *the Almighty* says: 'After these, We sent Musa (Moses) to Pharaoh and his leading supporters with Our signs…' If what is meant by 'signs' in this verse is these words which set out the Divine way of guidance present in the Torah, or even if it means the miracles which proved the veracity of Musa (Moses), this should have led the Jews to believe. We know that the Quran mentions that Allah *the Almighty* supported Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with a number of miracles to prove the veracity of his prophethood. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He gave Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* nine clear signs: 'And certainly We gave Musa (Moses) nine manifest signs. So, ask then the children of Israel. When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him, "I do think you, O, Musa (Moses), to be a victim of deception."' (*al-Isra':* 101)

The list of the miracles given to Musa (Moses) includes the staff, the hand which he placed in his pocket or under his armpit and then came out shining white without any injury or blemish and seizing the people of Pharaoh with years of famine. The Arabic word *As-Sinin*, which literally translates as 'years', means an extremely severe drought which lasts for a period of time so that people remember the event and use it as a reference of time thereafter, by saying, 'It happened in the year of the terrible famine', for the year contained many grievous events which destroyed the comforts of life, and then destroyed the essential constituents of life, primarily food and drink. When this happens, they are thus afflicted with a poor harvest causing hunger and famine. So, a famine of this severity is called *Sana* which literally means 'year', and its plural is *Sinin* since it is something which thereafter will be used as a reference to a particular event that took place during a particular period of time.

However, how did Pharaoh and his great ones respond to the signs which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* brought them? Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they wilfully rejected them: ‘After these, We sent Musa (Moses) to Pharaoh and his leading supporters with Our signs, but they rejected them.' (*al-A’raf:* 103) Were these signs the cause of their rejection and oppression? Or were they wilful due to their rejection to them as a way of life?

They wilfully rejected them since they refused to follow the way of truth; they even remained in their corruption. We know that corrupters are those who deliberately spoil and destroy that which is intrinsically sound. Corrupters do so although man is required to take into account that there are certain things that are above his choice and his will, and there are also other things which are subject to his choice and his will. The essential constituents of life are not subject to man’s free will, and thus, he finds that they are as sound as could be.

Man has, in fact, no control over the motion of the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind, or the rain; these entire created beings act in the right way designed and set to them by Allah *the Almighty*. Corruption only comes in those things in which man has some influence. People do not complain of an 'air crisis', for example, because no one has any influence over the motion of the air. Meanwhile, they do complain of food crises since man plays a part in this. Yet, we find that their complaints about water crises are less frequent, since man has only a small influence over water.

Allah *the Almighty* gives you only partial control over the mechanism which regulates your nourishment. For example, He makes within your body a store of fats to provide you with the energy at times of hunger. Amazing enough, these fats are made of a single substance. Yet, when you need to be nourished by it, this single substance transforms into the other substances that you require.

You need protein, for example, so the fat turns into protein; or you need carbon, so the fat gives you carbon; or you need phosphorus, so it gives you phosphorus; or you need magnesium, so it gives you magnesium, and so on. Although we are able to go without food according to how much we have stored in our bodies, and we can also go without water according to the amount we have stored in our bodies, we cannot go without air since breathing is a simple matter of inhalation and exhalation. This is why if there were a person who owned air and only gave it to you when he pleased, along with withholding it from you when he was angry, you would die before he became pleased with you again. The same does not apply to water, since if he withheld water from you for a while, your enemy's heart might soften towards you, someone else might bring you water or you might come up with a plan to get it on your own.

So, we find that the things over which man has no influence are as sound as can be, and corruption only comes to the things over which man has influence.

He *the Almighty* finally concludes the verse with His saying, 'See the fate of those who used to spread corruption' to tell that those who used to spread corruption will be eventually punished by Him *the Almighty*.

In this context, He *the Almighty* chose to mention the successive events of the story, not from the beginning, rather, from its very end. He is not teaching us history, instead He gives us admonition. Therefore, He did not speak, in this chapter, about the birth of Musa (Moses), how He inspired to his mother to cast him into the sea, how he *peace be upon him* went to Midyan and how he met with Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them*. Rather, He *the Almighty* speaks here about the story of Musa (Moses) with Pharaoh.

Allah says:

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ يَٰفِرۡعَوۡنُ إِنِّي رَسُولٞ مِّن رَّبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

Moses said, 'Pharaoh, I am a messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds [104] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 104)

The Quran elucidates for us how Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* conveyed the Message to Pharaoh and his people, how he confirmed for them that Allah is One and Unique and that Allah is the Lord of all the worlds. Pharaoh's people believed that there existed one god for the heavens and another for the earth, so Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* told them that there is only One God. In the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara',* Allah tells us that Musa (Moses) said to Pharaoh, upon asking him about the Lord of the worlds, that Allah is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them if you (O, Pharaoh!) would allow yourselves to believe!: "Musa (Moses) said, "The Lord of the heavens and the earth and of all that is between the two, if you would believe." (*ash-Shu'ara':* 24)

We notice that Musa (Moses) repeats the word *Rabb* (Sustainer or Lord) in several other verses, in order to address the matter of Lordship that had been falsely ascribed to Pharaoh. The people of Pharaoh believed that there was one god in the heaven and another on the earth, so Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* told them that there is only One God Who is Lord of both the heaven and the earth. They used to believe that there was one god for the east and another for the west, so Musa (Moses) conveyed to them that there is only One God. They, in addition, believed that there is one god and lord for the living, and another god and lord for the dead, so Musa (Moses) said to them that Allah is their Sustainer and the Sustainer of their forefathers of old!: 'Musa (Moses) said, "Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of yore."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 26)

In this particular verse under discussion, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says to them: 'I am a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds.' (*al-A'raf:* 104) Thus, as long as Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds, he spoke nothing but the truth, which is why Allah *the Almighty* tells us about what he said next to Pharaoh:

حَقِيقٌ عَلَىٰٓ أَن لَّآ أَقُولَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ إِلَّا ٱلْحَقَّ ۚ قَدْ جِئْتُكُم
بِبَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعِىَ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

Duty-bound to say nothing about God but the truth, and I have brought you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the Children of Israel go with me' [105] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 105)

This raises a good question, that is: 'Which one of these matters required clear evidence; was it that he was a Messenger sent by the Lord of all the Worlds?' This saying of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* shows clearly that he differed with Pharaoh over three points, namely first, Pharaoh did not believe that Musa (Moses) was a Messenger; second, Pharaoh did not believe that the worlds have but one single Lord; and that he did not believe that Musa (Moses) conveyed only the truth. Yet, there is a very important point in this regard which is that even though these are three points of difference between Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh, the latter asked Musa (Moses) for clear evidence of the veracity of his Message; Pharaoh asked him to offer a proof that he was a Messenger from the Lord of all the worlds, which shows that Pharaoh certainly knew that the world has a Supreme Lord.

This is actually why Pharaoh did not argue with Musa (Moses) concerning the fact that the worlds have a Lord Whose way of guidance may not be understood by every person, which is a reason why He *the Almighty* sent Messengers and Prophets to tell people about Him. Pharaoh did not argue with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* concerning this point; rather, he asked him to prove whether Musa (Moses) was a Messenger sent by Allah or not. Musa (Moses) therefore said, 'Bound by duty to say nothing about Allah but the truth, and I have brought you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the children of Israel go with me.'

This aforementioned verse indicates that the mission of Musa (Moses) to Pharaoh was primarily concerned with securing the freedom of the children of Israel. We are well acquainted that the story of the children of Israel began in the days of Prophets Ya'qub (Jacob) and his son Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon them*. The brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) plotted against him and discussed whether to kill him to expel him from the land or to cast him into a deep well. Apparently, Allah *the Almighty* did not tell us about the story of the children of Israel at one time so that our emotions will appropriately react to the different events within it. The psychological and emotional stages which you pass through with someone you hate takes two different forms: one form indicates the gradual growth of mercy in your heart, whilst the other indicates the gradual growth of evil in the heart. For example, suppose you have an enemy and he wrongs you in some way, so you tell your friends the story of what this enemy did to you and how you would like to extract vengeance from him, so you say, 'I want to avenge what he did to me by punching him twice', and then the evil grows within some of the hearts of the involved', and thus, they say, 'I would like to shoot him dead!' This is the case for the evil person; as for the good person, he says, 'I do not want to kill, punch, abuse, or even insult him', which is a gradual growth of goodness. Therefore, the gradual growth of vengeance or forgiveness differs according to the power of the evil or good implanted in the soul. In the same way, the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* plotted against him. The Quran tells us about that story saying that the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) said: `Verily, Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother (Benjamin) are dearer to our father than we are, although we are a strong party. Surely, our father is in manifest error.' (*Yusuf:* 8)

The brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) explicitly acknowledged that they had power and that they were many in number. In spite of all of this, they envied Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother (Benjamin) for their father’s greater love for them, and they thus objected to this situation. In order not to mistakenly think that Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) did not deal justly and equally with all of his children, the Quran tells us about the main reason why his children erroneously had this bad thought. Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother were still young and weak, and this is why the heart of their father, Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), inclined to them more than the rest of his children who were strong and fully mature. It is taken for granted that Allah *the Almighty* fills the hearts of fathers and mothers with mercy for their children; furthermore, the younger the child is, the more mercy his parents show him. What this means is that the youngest child is the one who needs to be taken care of and protected more than the rest of his brothers and sisters. In the same respect, we know quite well that the heart of a mother and father inclines to their ill or absent children more than to the rest of them. This is why when a wise woman was asked which of her children she loved the most, she replied, 'The youngest one until he grows up, the absent one until he returns and the sick one until he recovers.'

Therefore, it is clear that the saying of Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph’s) brothers that they were so many is against them. Truthfully speaking, if Yusuf's (Joseph’s) brothers carefully reflected on the matter, they would have recognised that as long as they were so many in numbers, their father would naturally be attached to Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother who were both young and in need of greater care more than them. In this respect, I would like to direct your attention to a very important point, namely Ya'qub's (Jacob’s) sons, being the progeny and descendants of Prophets, gradually moved from evil to goodness, as follows: at first they announced their strong desire to kill Yusuf (Joseph), yet they did not do it, for instead they considered driving him away to a far distant land so that their father’s regard may be exclusively for them; yet they did not do this also, rather, they considered casting him into the depths of a well. That is to say that they started with the idea of killing when they were still in their bitter and fierce anger. Then, they rejected the idea of killing and replaced it with driving him away or leaving him in a place where he was likely to get lost; they, however, rejected the second idea also and finally decided to cast him into the depths of the well where some caravan would doubtless pick him up. Thus, it is clear that they did not want to hurt him, for they had already thought of how he could be saved. This was actually a gradual growth in goodness.

The Quran tells us about the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with the children of Israel and states that they eventually settled with Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) in Egypt and became many in number. When we carefully reflect on history, we find that Allah *the Almighty* speaking about the rulers of Egypt, singles out some of them with the title 'Pharaoh' while calling some others under the title of 'King'; so there was a pharaoh, and there was a king. If we consider the ancient past, we will realise that Allah called the ruler of ancient Egypt as Pharaoh: 'And with Pharaoh, lord of vast hosts.' (*al-Fajr:* 10)

The same applies to the time of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in which Allah *the Exalted* also called the ruler of Egypt 'Pharaoh'. However, during the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* He called him 'King'. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says that as soon as Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph's) interpretation was conveyed to the king, the king said: 'Bring him before me!' (*Yusuf:* 50)

After the French scientist Champollion discovered and studied the Rosetta Stone, we knew that pharaohs were not the rulers of Egypt during the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), rather, it was the Hyksos who governed the country during that particular period of time. The Quran alluded to this historical fact when it called the rulers of Egypt before Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) 'pharaohs', yet when it came to describe the rulers of Egypt during that particular period of time, it called them 'kings'. Historically, it has been recorded that the Hyksos conquered Egypt and ruled it and that they were aided and served by the children of Israel. Yet, when the Egyptians expelled the Hyksos out of the country, the pharaohs remembered what they had suffered at the hands of the

Hyksos and thus began to abuse and humiliate the children of Israel due to their assistance to the Hyksos in retaining the rule of Egypt. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to liberate and save them from this torment by means of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is clearly mentioned in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Musa (Moses) said, "Pharaoh, I am a Messenger from the Lord of the all Worlds, bound by duty to say nothing about Allah but the truth, and I have brought you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the Children of Israel go with me.”' (*al-A’raf:* 104-105)

It is as though the ultimate objective behind the mission of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was to liberate and free the children of Israel; as for the matter of Pharaoh’s claim to divinity and lordship, it was related to this, as shown from these verses under discussion.

Allah then tells us about how Pharaoh replied to Musa (Moses):

قَالَ إِن كُنتَ جِئْتَ بِـَٔايَةٍ فَأْتِ بِهَآ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّـٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

He said, ‘Produce this sign you have brought, if you are telling the truth’ [106] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 106)

This verse indicates that Pharaoh challenged Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to show the sign he had brought, if he was indeed truthful; this is a point which undoubtedly indicates that Pharaoh firmly believed that Allah *the Almighty* supported His Messengers with signs and miracles to prove their truthfulness. This is yet proved by the fact that Pharaoh asked Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to produce the sign he had brought if he was speaking the truth.

Responding to this challenge, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* revealed the sign, as stated by Allah *Glorified is He*:

فَأَلْقَىٰ عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِىَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٠٧﴾

So Moses threw his staff and – lo and behold! – it was a snake, clear to all [107] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 107)

Furthermore, Prophet Musa (Moses) had previously experienced this particular miracle of throwing the staff and its transformation into a snake when he went out from Midyan with his family and saw a fire. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When he saw a fire, and he said to his family, "Wait. I perceive a fire. Perhaps, I may bring you a brand therefrom or find guidance at the fire."' (*Ta Ha:* 10)

Upon reaching the position of the fire, he heard a voice addressing him and asking about what he has in his right hand, whereupon he answers that it is his staff on which he leans and with which he beats down leaves for his sheep. He further adds that he uses it, i.e. this staff in other many purposes. Allah *Glorified is He* says: `"And what is that in thy right hand, O, Musa (Moses)?" Musa (Moses) said, `This is my staff. I lean on it and beat down therewith leaves for my sheep and other uses also I find in it."' (*Ta Ha:* 17-18)

Upon being asked about what was in his hand, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could have said, 'My staff', yet we found him adding more details including leaning on it and using it for many other purposes. Allah *the Almighty* as shown in these Quranic verses in the chapter of *Ta Ha* did not ask Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* about what he did with his staff. Therefore, it is clear that the answer provided by Musa (Moses) for this divine question was fully detailed to the extent that some scholars are under the opinion that he should have given a brief answer, but those who say this forget that there is no one who would wish to abstain from the comfort and sweetness of speaking with Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* gave this answer to Allah, he was fully aware of the Majesty and Omnipotence of Him Who he addressed; therefore, he gave a fully detailed answer, yet when he felt that he might have digressed, he immediately put an end to his answer showing that he uses his staff for many other purposes. He could have named the other purposes for which he used the staff. Thus, it is clear that the staff was thrown down more than once; it was previously thrown down for the purpose of training and preparing Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for the meeting with Pharaoh. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that He ordered Musa (Moses) to throw down the staff. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* responded to the Divine Order by throwing it, and thus, it turned into a snake moving rapidly: 'Allah said, "Cast it down, O, Moses." So he cast it down, and behold it was a serpent running.' (*Ta Ha:* 19-20)

However, what happened next? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He ordered Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to take hold of it and not to fear, for He shall restore it to its former state: 'Allah said, "Take hold of it and fear not. We shall restore it to its former state."' (*Ta Ha:* 21)

The fear of Musa (Moses) indicates plainly that what happened to the staff was not a kind of sorcery since when a sorcerer throws his staff or his rope he sees it in original state, i.e. a staff or a rope, whilst others see it as a snake. This is why Allah *the Almighty* while speaking about the sorcerers, says that they cast a spell upon the people's eyes: 'And when they threw, they bewitched the eyes of the people and struck them with awe and produced a mighty magic.' (*al-A'raf:* 116)

This shows clearly that in the case of sorcery, the object remains in its original state in the eyes of the sorcerer; yet the matter was completely different in the case of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for he conceived in his mind a fear which clearly means that the staff had already changed from its original wooden state into a snake, moving rapidly.

At this point, we must take into account that it was possible that the staff could have sprouted leaves and become verdant even though it was a branch that was entirely dry. Had this happened instead, it would also have been viewed as a miracle. However, Allah *the Exalted* changed it from a lifeless state into a living animal and thus transformed its previously original case as a plant.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He, the All-Knowing* responded to those who seek to object to the matter of the throwing of the staff. Some ignorant people mistakenly think that the Quran repeats itself as to this particular topic of throwing the staff. Yet, they do not take into account that the three contexts in which the Quran sheds light on the staff were completely different from each other, as follows: first, when Allah *the Almighty* informed Musa (Moses) on Mount Sinai that He chose him as a Messenger, He ordered him to throw the staff down by way of preparing him for the meeting with Pharaoh; it was in this first meeting that Allah *the Almighty* told Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that He is the Only God Who deserved to be worshipped: `Verily , I am Allah. There is no god but I, so worship Me alone and observe prayer for my remembrance.' (*Ta Ha:* 14)

Furthermore, this first throwing-down of the staff, a preparation process, was primarily concerned with assuring Musa (Moses) that the staff would undoubtedly respond to him and turn into a snake when he was to throw it down before Pharaoh. Had Allah only said to him, 'When you go to Pharaoh, just throw down your staff, and it will become a snake', his heart might have been worried and concerned about this. This is why Allah *the Exalted* wanted to give him practical experience of this so that he would know with absolute certainty that the staff would respond to him when he threw it down and become a snake. This was the first occasion on which the staff was thrown down. As for the second occasion, it was when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went to Pharaoh to inform him of his Divine Message and that he was a Messenger from the Lord of all the Worlds. It was actually on this occasion that Musa (Moses) would show the clear signs he had brought to Pharaoh. When Musa (Moses) met with Pharaoh, the latter asked him produce a clear sign and thus Musa (Moses) threw the staff down, and it turned into a living snake; this is actually the second throwing-down of the staff that is mentioned clearly in our verse under discussion.

As for the third occasion, it was when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* challenged the sorcerers. Therefore, it is quite clear at this point that each occasion on which the staff was thrown down had its own context; and thus, it is completely incorrect to claim that the Quran repeats itself. We now fully realise that each occasion has its own context and that not one of the three could replace the other.

Back to the chapter of *al-'Araf;* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So, Musa (Moses) threw his staff and- lo and behold- it was a snake, clear to all.' (*al-A'raf:* 107)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* describes the staff as if it were a serpent: `"Throw down thy rod." And when he saw it move as though it were a serpent.' (*an-Naml:* 10) In this aforementioned verse, He uses the Arabic word *Jann* for 'serpent'.

Thus, it is of great importance to know that orientalists, who seek to cast doubts about the Quran, claim that the Quran, while speaking about the miracle of the staff of Musa (Moses), has given it three different descriptions, as follows: it first says that 'it was a snake (*Thu'ban*), clear to all'; in another verse, it says that 'it was a snake (*Hayyah),* moving rapidly', while in a third verse, it describes it 'as if it were a serpent (*Jann*)'. So, how could it be like this? We say to orientalists who make such a claim that we must recognise the fact that there is a big difference between these different items which contradict one another and the (different) ones which complement one another. These three different descriptions mentioned, *Ath-Thu'ban, al-Hayyah* and *al-Jann* fall under the second category which is 'different items complementing one another'. This means that the staff has turned into a snake, which is long and moves lightly; it may also be that it has turned into *al-Hayyah* which is fearsome in its size when it is coiled; it may even be that it has turned into a serpent (*Jann)* which is of terrifying appearance. Therefore, it is as though every time it took a form which terrified those who saw it, and thus, it had different appearances or shapes, namely *Ath-Thu'ban, al-Hayyah* and *al-Jann.* In this respect, we find that the ambiguity actually adds more clarity to that which at first seemed ambiguous.

Let us offer another example to illustrate this principle. We certainly know that Allah *the Almighty* has concealed the timing of death from people, so it is ambiguous; it afflicts people in the exact time predestined by Allah *the Almighty* therefore, it is not subject to a particular age, a particular cause, or a particular time. Yet, this ambiguity of its time and cause make it completely plain and well known to the extent that one expects at any time and at any place. Thus, the ambiguity gives us a powerful and vivid image.

Some orientalists are not satisfied by this; rather, this rouses another misconception, causing them to say, Muslims receive and read the verses of the Quran with great awe and surprise to the extent that they do not carefully reflect upon it to discover the contradictions within it. However, when a non-Muslim reads it, many contradictions are clear to him.' Let me quote their misconceptions in full, 'According to the Arabic rhetoric, simile is used to compare something unknown to something known. For example, if someone says to you, “Do you know so-and-so?” You might say, “By Allah, I do not know him.' Whereupon he says to you, “He looks like so-and-so. His height is like him and so are his body and appearance.” Therefore, he compares something unknown to something known in order to clarify it. However, the Quran does violate this rule and compares something unknown to something also unknown, and thus, the meaning is still unclear.' 'In the Quran,' they continue, 'Allah describes the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* saying that it grows in the very heart of the blazing fire and that its fruit looks like devils' heads: "It is a tree that springs forth in the bottom of Hell. The fruit thereof is as though it were the heads of serpents." (*as-Saffat:* 64-65)

So, how could there be a tree growing in a blazing fire when they are contradictory to each other?! We certainly know that trees are verdant and require irrigation with water, which all are contradictory to the essence of fire, which blazes and is dry; in other words, it contains no water. Moreover, men do not know what demons look like, and the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* is also unknown to them because it only exists in the Hereafter.

So, how could Allah *the Almighty* compare something unknown to something else that is unknown?' This is the misconception roused by orientalists who mistakenly believe that Muslims do not reflect carefully upon the verses of the Quran, and as a result, they are unable to discover what is contradictory in it. Yet, we reply to orientalists that they are unable to understand the true meanings of the verses of the Quran, since Arabic is not their native language, rather, they learnt it as a particular field of study. Furthermore, the Arabic language uses certain words to symbolise things which it saw ugly and horrible. For example, Arabs say, 'Blue teeth like the fangs of ghouls.' A ghoul is an imaginary creature, but they imagined that there was such a creature which had fangs, etc.

Therefore, it is plainly clear that a simile might be drawn from an imaginary thing which is pictured in people's minds. In addition, it goes without saying that the basic rule of a simile is that 'something which is unknown is compared to another which is known, so that it can be known'; yet, we do not know the essence of the tree of *Az-Zaqqum*, and we have also never seen the heads of demons, and so it seems that Allah *the Almighty* had compared something unknown to something else unknown, so how could this happen? It is due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make this particular statement universal and known to everyone. Furthermore, He wants to make the benefit more considerable. It is taken for granted that fear is not struck into the hearts of people unless there is something fearsome to do so, yet we must take into account the fact that people's experience of fear is not exactly the same, which means that there might be something which scares you but does not scare someone else. In the same respect, you might find something vile, while someone else does not. This is why we gave a striking example before, saying, 'If we bring a group of the most highly skilled caricaturists in the world and ask them to draw us a picture of Satan, do you truly think that they all will draw exactly the same thing?' The answer is a definitive 'No' since each of them will draw Satan in a way which is particularly frightening for him. This is why Allah *the Exalted* draws a simile between the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* and the heads of devils in order that everyone who hears this will imagine the image of Satan which frightens and scares him and so fear will be struck into their hearts from the tree of *Az-Zaqqum.* Had Allah *Glorified is He* given it a particular and defined form, it would have frightened and scared some people but not others. The same applies to the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is given three different descriptions, namely *Thu'ban, Hayyah* and finally *Jann.* As for the verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* states clearly that the staff turned into a snake, clearly visible to all: 'So, Musa (Moses) threw his staff and- lo and behold!- it was a snake, clear to all.' (*al-A'raf:* 107)

As for the saying of Allah *the Exalted* 'lo and behold', it clarifies how Pharaoh was startled by this, for the staff had actually turned into a huge serpent in the blink of an eye. Therefore, it is quite clear that one of the benefits of preparing Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for the throwing of the staff on Mount Sinai was that he would not be taken by surprise when he threw it down before Pharaoh; rather, Pharaoh would be the one to be surprised and startled. It is as though the first preparation was to convince and assure Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that he would not be frightened when the time came to carry out the miracle. It is important to note that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was filled with fear when he saw the staff had turned into a real serpent, moving rapidly. Had it been a kind of sorcery, he would not have been frightened, since the staff would not have been changed in his eyes. So, his fear of it at the time of preparation definitively proves that it truly did change into a snake; it was not a matter of illusion at all. This is actually the difference between the miracle and an act of sorcery: a miracle really happens, whilst sorcery is simply a matter of illusion. This is actually what made the sorcerers fall down in prostration when they saw this Divine Miracle; they were dumbfounded at what happened.

The Arabic word *Mubin,* which translates as 'clear to all' means that the frightening appearance of that miraculous snake was clear and plain to all of those who saw it. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then presented the second sign; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَنَزَعَ يَدَهُۥ فَإِذَا هِىَ بَيْضَآءُ لِلنَّٰظِرِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

And then he pulled out his hand and – lo and behold! – it
was white for all to see [108] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 108)

This verse tells us about another miraculous sign. The saying of Allah *the Almighty Wa Naza',* which translates as 'pulled out', means that he pulled his hand out with some difficulty, as though there were something preventing him from taking it out, for had it been easy for him to take his hand out, Allah *the Exalted* would not have used the word *Naza',* since this word implies that there is something resisting the action. The meaning of this particular word is also quite clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Al-'Imran* in which He says that He is the Owner of Sovereignty; He gives sovereignty to whom He wills and takes it away from whom He wills. (*Al-'Imran:* 26)

It goes without saying that wresting dominion from someone is seldom easy since usually the one who owns the dominion attempts to hold onto it, but Allah, the Omnipotent, wrests this dominion from him. The same is the case when He says that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had pulled out his hand. What this clearly indicates is that when he drew his hand forth and took it out with difficulty, it moved to another position, as though it had been in a secure place. At this point, we should note that he was ordered to do to particular acts to his hand; first of all, he was ordered to place it into the opening of his garment: 'And put your hand onto your bosom. It will come forth white without evil. This is among the nine signs unto Pharaoh and his people, for they are a rebellious people.' (*an-Naml:* 12) Then, he was then commanded to press it to his side, so that it shall come out white without the presence of disease: 'And draw your hand closer under your armpit. It shall come forth white, without any disease - another sign.' (*Ta Ha:* 22)

As for the Arabic word *al-Jayb*, it means the opening of the garment through which one inserts his head when putting it on; although in our time, we use *Jayb* to refer to 'pocket'. Long ago, when people wanted to look after things, they would put them in front of themselves and before their hands; so, when people began to make pockets in their clothes, they called them *Jayb* for this reason.

Therefore, it is clear that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was commanded to do two particular acts to his hand; first, he was ordered to place it on his bosom and then to pull it out. Therefore, it is important to note that every verse on this point puts forth a particular idea, as follows: one affirms that he placed his hand in the opening in his robe, while another tells that he pressed it to his armpit. Yet, a third verse indicates that he drew his hand out of his bosom. These are all various images which give us a general view about this particular miracle. Thus, we understand that the Quran does not repeat itself, rather, every verse puts forth a particular idea which, in turn, gives a new piece of information. Therefore, when we examine them all together, we have a really vivid story.

We previously explained that the conflict between Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh could only have arisen from the enmity between them. It is taken for granted that in order for the conflict to be bitter and serious, there must have been mutual enmity between the two foes, for if one of them felt enmity, but the other did not, he would not have had the vehemence of hostility, and he might have excused his rival, seeing the difference as trivial, and thus forgiving him and thereby settling the conflict. Thus, the main reason which makes enmity flare up and becomes vehement is of the case of it being mutual. The Quran thus tells us that enmity did indeed exist on the part of Pharaoh towards Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Musa (Moses) likewise felt enmity towards Pharaoh. Concerning Pharaoh's enmity to Musa (Moses), Allah says that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will be adopted by an enemy to Him *the Almighty* and an enemy to Musa (Moses): 'there one who is an enemy to Me and also an enemy to him will take him up.' (*Ta Ha:* 39)

Concerning Prophet Musa's (Moses's) enmity to Pharaoh, Allah *Glorified is He* in another verse in the Quran tells that some of Pharaoh's household found and spared Prophet Musa (Moses), for He had willed that he would become an enemy and a source of grief to them: 'She did accordingly and one of the family of Pharaoh picked him up so that he became for them an enemy and a source of sorrow. Verily, Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts were wrongdoers' (*al-Qasas:* 8). These two separate pieces of information complement each other to give us the complete picture.

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And then he pulled out his hand and – lo and behold! - it was white for all to see' (*al-A'raf:* 108). We know that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was dark-skinned, so the whiteness of his hand was distinctly different from the colour of the rest of his skin. His hand, under this Divine Miracle, became white so that when people saw it, its light colour would catch their eyes and attract their attention. It was not the whiteness which afflicts dark-skinned people as a result of leprosy, since Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse that the hand of Musa (Moses) will come forth shining white, without blemish: 'And draw your hand closer under your armpit. It shall come forth white, without any disease - another sign.' (*Ta Ha:* 22)

Once again, I stress that each individual verse conveys a new piece of information by means of which the image is complete. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* describes the hand as 'shining white', this indicates that its light was bright and shining so that the eyes of all were attracted to it and this could not be the case unless it was bright, glowing, and radiant. Yet, when He describes it as '[Shining] white, without any disease…' this means that whiteness was not a result of illness or disease.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

قَالَ ٱلْمَلَأُ مِن قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَسَٰحِرٌ عَلِيمٌ ١٠٩

The leaders among Pharaoh's people said, 'This man is a learned sorcerer! [109] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 109)

We previously explained the meaning of the word *al-Mala'* and said that it refers to people who are of high social rank and position, to the extent that others fear them. In this context, it refers basically to those who were in Pharaoh's inner circle who seemed to have been acquainted with sorcery. Yet, in the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara',* Allah *the Almighty* says that Pharaoh said to the great ones around him that Musa (Moses) was indeed a sorcerer of great knowledge: 'Pharaoh said to the chiefs around him, "This is surely a skilful sorcerer."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 34)

This obviously indicates that Pharaoh is the one who told the leaders from amongst his people this idea. Concerning this point, we have two positions which are as follows: one verse tells that the leading supporters were the ones who said that Musa (Moses) was a sorcerer, while another says that it was Pharaoh who said this himself, yet there is no contradiction whatsoever between them since it is possible that Pharaoh might have said it and so might have the leaders. We certainly know that different people may come up with one idea. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. When verses were revealed about the creation of man and his development from a clot to a morsel of flesh and so on (*al-Mu'minun:* 14), the scribe who was writing down the Revelation said loudly, 'So blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.'

In the same respect, Anas Allah *be pleased with him* narrated that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I totally concurred with my Lord in four things. When the saying of Allah, 'And certainly We created man of an extract of clay' (*al-Mu'minun:* 12) was revealed, I said, "So blessed be Allah, the best of the creators," and then it was revealed.'(1)

Moreover, Zayd ibn Thabit Al-Ansari Allah *be pleased with him* is narrated to have said, 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dictated to me this particular verse "And certainly We created man of an extract of clay. Then, We made him a small seed in a firm resting-place. Then We made the seed a clot. Then, We made the clot a lump of flesh. Then, We made (in) the lump of flesh bones. Then, We clothed the bones with flesh. Then, We caused it to grow into another creation" (*al-Mu'minun:* 14), whereupon Mu'adh *Allah be pleased with him* said, "So blessed be Allah, the best of the creators." Prophet Muhammad smiled, and so Mu'adh asked him, "Why do you smile, O, Prophet Muhammad?" He replied, "It is already concluded with these very words."'(2)

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Abi Hatim*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Abi Hatim, Weak*

Thus, it is clear that these ideas came to the minds of the Companions at this particular moment when the Revelation concerning this point about the development of man’s creation was revealed.

Therefore, what would prevent the thoughts from coming simultaneously to Pharaoh and the great leaders from among his people so that both spoke the same words?! Another possible interpretation is that it may be Pharaoh said it first, and then the followers and cronies repeated it, exactly as it always is with the case of subordinates and their masters.

The verse under discussion clearly states that Pharaoh’s supporting leaders did not only describe the action of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as the work of a sorcerer, but went even further and said that he was a sorcerer of great knowledge. They then added as stated by Allah, in the Quran:

يُرِيدُ أَن يُخْرِجَكُم مِّنْ أَرْضِكُمْ ۖ فَمَاذَا تَأْمُرُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

He means to drive you out of your land!’ Pharaoh said,
‘What do you suggest?’ [110] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 110)

Musa's (Moses’) Message to Pharaoh was actually a catastrophe to Pharaoh, the so-called god, and to the supporting leaders around him. So, how could he head this catastrophe off so that he would remain in his position and authority? He accused Musa (Moses) of being a sorcerer, believing that this accusation would prevent those who had witnessed the miracles of Musa (Moses) from believing in him as a Messenger of the Lord of all the worlds. Not only did Pharaoh use this accusation, he also tried to stir up his people’s patriotism by provoking their zeal and targeting their feelings of national identity, and thus, he told them the Musa (Moses) wants to drive them out of their land: ‘He means to drive you out of your land!’ (*al-A’raf:* 110)

Therefore, it is clear that Pharaoh and his people accused Musa (Moses) of seeking to drive the people out of their land with his sorcery. Truly, the main purpose for this accusation was to stir up the people and make them angry since Pharaoh had convinced them that he was a god, and this 'so-called divinity' was about to collapse at any given moment. So, he called Musa (Moses) a sorcerer in front of a people who were accustomed to sorcery. This brings up a very important point, namely the fact that Pharaoh asked his leading supporters for advice which indicates that Pharaoh was of a lower rank than those who were addressed; this should not have been the case since Pharaoh was the one who gave orders to everyone. Yet, this statement on his part indicates that Pharaoh realised that his position had slipped along with his pride on the verge of being destroyed. Another possible interpretation is that Pharaoh may have said this as a way of pleasing the hearts of those around him, implying that he would not issue an order without first seeking their advice. However this raises an important question: 'How could you seek people's counsel, Pharaoh, when you have led them to believe that you are a god? Does a god seek the counsel of his slaves?' These words of yours show up your own total failure since you claimed to be a god, and then sought the advice of your worshippers!

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُوٓاْ أَرۡجِهۡ وَأَخَاهُ وَأَرۡسِلۡ فِى ٱلۡمَدَآئِنِ حَٰشِرِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

They said, 'Delay him and his brother for a while, and send messengers to all the cities[111] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 111)

The Arabic word *Arjih* means 'let him wait'; this meaning is also understood from the saying of Allah *the Almighty* that there are yet others – people whose cases are deferred (*murjawn*): 'And there are others whose case has been deferred pending the decree of Allah. He may punish them, or He may turn to them with compassion. And Allah is All Knowing, Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 106) This means that they have been given time before a verdict shall be rendered on them; this refers to the three men who abstained from the battle of *Tabuk* by staying behind. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* postponed judging them until Allah's Pardon was revealed down.

Therefore, the saying of Allah, 'Delay him and his brother…' indicates that they recommended this delay since the situation was quite dire to be acted upon hastily, rather, the decision had to be delayed until the great ones had counselled with each other to arrive at a solution on how to deal with it; actually, it was not a simple matter. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threatened the so-called divine status of Pharaoh, which could bring an end to the rule of pharaohs and also the benefit which the great ones obtained from this rule. When Pharaoh asked them about their advice, it was as though he wanted their opinion immediately, but they said that the matter needs careful consideration, in which they decided as a first step to send for those who had knowledge of sorcery, by saying, 'As long as we say that Musa (Moses) is a sorcerer, let us combat him with the sorcery which we ourselves possess.' For Pharaoh to accept this counsel would mean the destruction of his divinity since he claimed to be a god and then sought the aid of his worshippers, the sorcerers, who were supposed to be his followers.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'and send messengers to all the cities' indicates that sorcery was widespread and prevalent throughout the cities of Egypt during this particular period of time. Allah *the Almighty* then tells us about what Pharaoh's supporting leaders said:

يَأْتُوكَ بِكُلِّ سَـٰحِرٍ عَلِيمٍ ﴿١١٢﴾

To summon every learned sorcerer to you' [112]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 112)

This brings up another misconception roused by orientalists who seek to cast doubts on the Quran. They say, 'In the chapter of *ash-Sh'uara',* Allah uses the Arabic word *Sahhar* instead of *Sahir* , so how could it be like this?!' It is apparent that these orientalists want to make a difference between the two words, *Sahhar* and *Sahir.* Yet, since they do not have a full and deep understanding of the Arabic language, they do not know that the word *Sahhar* gives emphasis in two ways, as follows: as for the word *Sahir,* it means a person who practises sorcery, while *Sahhar* means that he is very skilled in sorcery. In Arabic, emphatic substantives are used either to indicate that the action is immense or that it is repeated. Thus, the word *Sahhar* means a person whose sorcery is very strong or who engages in sorcery all the time, making him highly adept at it. In the same respect, as long as there were several speakers making this announcement, there is a possibility that one might say *Sahir,* whilst another might say *Sahhar*, and so on. The Quran thus gives us all the different elements of the story.

As for the Arabic word *Hashirin,* it means those who will gather the sorcerers for Pharaoh and bring them before him, not out of their own choice, but by the power of Pharaoh and the strength of his forces.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَجَآءَ ٱلسَّحَرَةُ فِرْعَوْنَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّ لَنَا لَأَجْرًا إِن كُنَّا نَحْنُ ٱلْغَٰلِبِينَ ﴿١١٣﴾

The sorcerers came to Pharaoh and said, 'Shall we be rewarded if we win?' [113] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 113)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'The sorcerers came to Pharaoh…' clearly shows how a powerful commander Pharaoh was! As soon as he gave the word, his forces rushed quickly to gather the sorcerers. Once again, some orientalists have also objected to this by saying, 'Why is this verse under discussion stated differently from that mentioned in the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara'* in which the saying of the sorcerers takes the form of interrogation, while this verse from *al-'Araf* takes the form of a statement?'

These orientalists did not yet take into account the fact that every one of Pharaoh's sorcerers reacted in the way which got him what he wanted: those who interrogated the matter from Pharaoh were weak, whilst the bolder ones put their saying in the form of a statement. In addition, the question did not make the reward certain since Pharaoh could have responded by saying, 'There shall be no reward for you', but as for the statement in *al-'Araf*, it indicates that some of the sorcerers declared that there had to be a reward. The Quran thus informed us of both the question and the statement.

Then comes Pharaoh's answer to the sorcerer's demand for a reward; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ نَعَمْ وَإِنَّكُمْ لَمِنَ ٱلْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾

And he replied, 'Yes, and you will join my inner court' [114] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 114)

The Arabic particle 'Yes' indicates response. In this context, it substitutes for the sentence 'You shall have a reward'; Pharaoh further added that they would indeed join his inner court.

This statement on his part indicates clearly that he was fawning to them or exaggerating in his praise of them. He did this since he needed them so badly; thus, we see that the so-called divinity of Pharaoh had crumbled before his worshippers, the sorcerers. In addition, his words to them that they would indeed join his inner court indicate the corruption of his rule, for as long as he was the ruler, all of his subjects should have been equal before him. However, if there were some who were nearer to him, then the first tier would plunder according to their nearness, and so would the second and the third, and so on. What this means is that each group would indulge in their corruption as long as the people were categorised by this ruler.

This is why when the Companions would sit and listen to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they were pleased that it means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* equally esteemed and respected all his Companions; the word 'regard' here means 'esteem, respect, etc.'; yet in spite of that, major companions used to get closer to him when he was teaching them anything. This is something which is quite clear in his biography.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

قَالُوا۟ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِمَّآ أَن تُلْقِىَ وَإِمَّآ أَن نَّكُونَ نَحْنُ ٱلْمُلْقِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾

So they said, ‘Moses, will you throw first or
shall we?’ [115] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 115)

This verse tells that they did not really want Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to be the first to throw his staff, rather, they affirmed their desire that they should be the first to do so. This point is inferred from their use to the additional pronoun 'we', which indicates emphasis.

We know with certainty that people judge latter actions and not the first ones. The same applies to Musa's (Moses’s) case with the sorcerers; they really wanted to go second after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him,* but their pride made them go first, which is why they came up with an expression which incorporated both possibilities by saying 'Musa (Moses), will you throw first or shall we?' (*al-A’raf:* 115) So, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew that they were eager to throw first, since they used the word 'we'; he thought it would be better for him if they threw first since his staff would then eat and swallow up what they had thrown.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us about the response of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to them by saying:

قَالَ أَلْقُوا۟ ۖ فَلَمَّآ أَلْقَوْا۟ سَحَرُوٓا۟ أَعْيُنَ ٱلنَّاسِ
وَٱسْتَرْهَبُوهُمْ وَجَآءُو بِسِحْرٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١١٦﴾

He said, 'You throw,' and they did, casting a spell on people's eyes, striking fear into them, and bringing about great sorcery [116] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 116)

Therefore, they cast a spell that affected the people's eyes. It is well known that sorcery is subtle trickery which produces a startling thing resembling a miracle; it seems as though it is breaking natural laws. It is not the same as the trickery which conjurers perform, for they use quick movements and sleight of hand to make people blind to what is actually happening. Sorcery, however, is something else. We know that Allah *the Almighty* created man, jinn and the angels and defined particular laws for each of them. Yet, what is eligible for man is not like that for jinn and angels, and so on. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells that none can comprehend His Forces (of angels) but He: 'And none knows the host of your Lord but He.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31)

Each created being is governed by laws that have their own characteristics and distinctive features which suit the substance from which it was created. Man, for example, is created from clay, and thus cannot pass through walls; if there is an apple behind the wall against which he is sitting, neither its scent nor its taste will reach his mouth since the wall comes between him and it. The case is completely different if there were to be a fire on the other side of the wall against which he leans. This is due to the fact that it is possible that it could affect you since fire has rays which pass through solid objects. Due to this fact that the jinns "Demons" are created from fire, we find that they enjoy this characteristic (of the ability to penetration). In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the Satan and his tribe see us although we do not see them: 'Truly, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you see them not.' (*al-A'raf:* 27)

It is clear that jinns have their own laws and so does man, but that raises a good question: 'Does this truly mean that these laws are in charge with all the affairs of life?' The answer is definitely 'No', rather, it is the Lord of the law who is in charge for everything in life since He is the Creator of this law. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* enables a particular man to learn some of the secrets of His Universe so that he can subjugate the jinns for his service even though jinns are subtle and swift. He *the Exalted* thus clarifies the matter for us by saying: 'Do not think, O jinns, that because you have taken your special characteristics from the substance from which you were created, you became superior to man. Allah *the Most High* is the One Who created you and everything else; this is a fact which is proven by how man – who is made of a different substance – is able to control you after Allah teaches him some of the secrets of His Universe.' We should realise that knowledge of the secrets of how to subjugate *jinns* is but one of the trials which Allah tests mankind with. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that Harut and Marut used to tell people that they were a temptation to evil. They even urged them not to deny the truth (*al-Baqara:* 102).

Therefore, this aforementioned verse tells that Harut and Marut, who taught people how to perform sorcery, first advised any person who desired to learn sorcery by clarifying for him that that they were but a temptation, i.e. a trial and a test, and even said to him not to deny the truth. This indicates that those who learn sorcery are evildoers, even if they claim that they are doing so for good purposes since they might say this, whilst their souls have pure intentions towards mankind. However, what about the case if someone treats them badly in some way or another and harms them, whilst they know some of the secrets of sorcery? Will they be able to control themselves? It is true that they said to be trustworthy when they made the pledge, but will they prove trustworthy when the time comes to honour it? As a matter of fact, anyone who learns sorcery might use it to take revenge on others, thereby violating the rule of equal opportunities which protects people, makes them safe from one another and even makes everyone stay within his limits.

In the same respect, if a person takes a weapon which no one else has, he might use it against someone who does not possess the same. Thus, the one who exploits his ability to subjugate jinns thereby has a special characteristic which his fellow man does not possess. Thereby, he claims for himself an opportunity which is more considerable than that of anyone else. In fact, this is viewed as a source of tribulation, for he might succeed in achieving his goals or he might not. As for Harut's and Marut's warning to people not to deny the truth, it shows that the two angels knew well that human nature dictates that when people take a higher opportunity, they might be trusted, whilst their souls are pure, but they cannot be as such when they are disturbed.

It goes without saying that as long as Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gives them this power, He is able to take it back from them, just as He gives power to a man to create wealth and thus be able to buy a gun and learn how to shoot. Therefore, when this man becomes angry, he might imagine that the way to resolve a dispute with his foe is to shoot him – but had he not possessed a gun, his anger might have been abated by hearing a pleasant and good word. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* prohibits something, He does it out of His Mercy, which is why He says Harut and Marut never taught sorcery to anyone without first declaring that they are but a temptation to evil. They even warn them against denying the truth (*al-Baqara:* 102). This indicates a warning to those who study sorcery and anything like it; Allah *the Almighty* wants to protect His Creation from the evil and harm of this matter. It is enough to know that He *the Exalted* pledged that they can harm none thereby save by His Leave (*al-Baqara:* 102).

If you were to follow these people, they would subjugate you and consume you, and Allah would leave you to them since you mistakenly believed that they were truthful. However, if you were to seek refuge in Him *the Almighty* and say, 'O, Allah, You have given some of Your creation the ability to do sorcery and evil, but You have kept for Yourself the right to protect from harm's occurrence. Therefore, I seek refuge in that which You have kept for Yourself from the power which You have given to them, by Your words "they can harm none thereby save by God's leave" (*al-Baqara:* 102)'. If you were to say this supplication, Allah *the Almighty* would not let them harm you. It is only if you respond to them and become one of them that they will consume you. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to expose this kind of action, so He conveyed to us the sorcerers' demand to Pharaoh to reward them if they beat Musa (Moses):

'And when the sorcerers came, they said to Pharaoh, "Shall we have a reward if we are the winners?"' (*ash-Shu'ara': * 41)

It is as though they acknowledged their own deficiency: although they claimed to be able to work miracles, they were unable to obtain that which sufficed and met their needs, so they asked Pharaoh for a reward. This actually is the state of those who occupy themselves with sorcery and occultism, for they claim to have power, but meanwhile they suffer from poverty and penury. Allah *the Almighty* has actually ordained that anyone who makes a living from sorcery would be given straightened provisions. In addition, He *the Exalted* always exposes them. In this regard, the intelligent person may rightly say, 'As long as sorcerers claim to bring success to others, let them successfully put their own affairs in order?! In addition, as long as they claim to know where treasures are hidden, why do they not know where treasures are hidden in land which belongs to no one, so that they can claim them for themselves?!' This, of course, is if we first assume that a sorcerer is quite trustworthy that he would not seek to take the treasures of others.

This is why we find that all those who make a living from sorcery and occultism die as paupers in dismal conditions; they also have problems with their children, for each of them utilises an opportunity which does not come to all the members of the human race in order to bring harm to people. In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* tells that certain kinds of humans would seek refuge with certain kinds of such invisible forces, namely jinns, but jinns only increased their confusion: 'And, indeed, some men from among the common folk used to seek the protection of some men from among the jinn, and thus they increased the jinn in arrogance.' (*al-Jinn:* 6)

Thus, Allah *the Exalted* affirms that sorcerers will live in confusion and hardship throughout their lives. In this regard, it is important to know that we do not deny the existence of sorcery, just as we do not deny the existence of the jinn since we have the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, 'Last night a demon from the jinns came to me (or Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said a similar sentence) to disturb my prayer, but Allah gave me the power to overcome him. I intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque till the morning so that all of you could see him, but then I remembered the statement of my brother Sulaiman (Solomon): "O, my Lord, grant me forgiveness and bestow upon me a kingdom that may not be inherited by anyone after me. Surely, You are the Great Bestower." (*Sad* :35)'[1]

Therefore, as long as Allah *the Exalted* said that He created beings which you (O, human beings!) cannot perceive with your senses, we fully accept that. Thus, we should know that there is a difference between the existence of something and being able to perceive it. Every created being has its own law which it acts under it. In the Quran, we were told that powerful chieftain from among the jinns told Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* that he would bring him the throne of the queen of Sheba before he rose up from his place: 'A powerful chieftain from among the jinns said, "I will bring it to you before you rise from your place. Indeed, I possess power, and I am trustworthy.' (*an-Naml:* 39)

This obviously indicates that the jinn required some time to achieve the act, as Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* might have remained seated in the council with them for an hour, or two or even three. However, the one who had knowledge of scripture told him: 'I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye.' (*an-Naml:* 40)

His eye, of course, blinked in less than a second after he said this, which is why we find that the Quran relates what happened immediately saying that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* saw the throne of the queen of Sheba right before him (*an-Naml:* 40).

All of this shows that Allah *the Exalted* created different kinds of created beings and made particular laws applicable for each of them. Yet, some laws might be stronger than others, but those governed by these laws are created beings, and therefore cannot be certain of them since the One Who created these laws might annul them and even give a lower created being power over a higher one.

Back to the chapter of *al-'Araf;* let us carefully scrutinise the Quranic expression 'they cast a spell upon the people's eyes.' We are faced with two

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(1) Narrated by Al-Bukhari

things here, staffs and ropes, as well as a crowd of people watching the situation. We can understand from the aforementioned part of the verse that sorcery affected the eye of the onlooker, not on the object itself which remained as it was. In our case, the staffs remained in their original case and so did the ropes. Yet, the only thing which was affected was the vision of the onlooker. A point which is proven by another Quranic verse, in which Allah *the Almighty* says that it was imaged to him on account of their magic as if their ropes and staffs were running: 'Moses said, "No, you cast." Then lo! Their ropes and their staffs appeared to him, by their magic, as though they ran about.' (*Ta Ha:* 66)

Therefore, it is quite clear that sorcery does not change reality; rather, reality remains as it is, and the sorcerer sees it as it really is, for it is only the people who see it differently. Hence, the sorcerers of Pharaoh did their task which was to cast a spell upon the people's eyes and strike them with awe: 'they did, casting a spell on people's eyes, striking fear into them and bringing about great sorcery' (*al-A'raf:* 116).

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'striking fear into them' means that they struck fear into the souls of the people by their actions. The sorcerers thought that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would be fearful just as the bewitched people were, forgetting that Musa (Moses) would not be fooled by their sorcery, for he was a Messenger sent by Allah Who had supported him with such a miracle that would defeat their sorcery. They had already produced mighty sorcery which made sense, since the affair was a great contest by which it would be decided whether Pharaoh's divinity would be destroyed or preserved, so they had to come up with the best and mightiest sorcery which they could.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰٓ أَنْ أَلْقِ عَصَاكَ ۖ فَإِذَا هِىَ تَلْقَفُ مَا يَأْفِكُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

Then We inspired Moses, 'Throw your staff,' and –
lo and behold! it devoured their fakery [117]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 117)

This raises a good question: 'Why was a new inspiration needed, especially since Musa (Moses) had been already trained for throwing down the staff?'

We say that there is a difference between training and practice So, when the time came, Allah *the Exalted* gave a new command, for perhaps the human nature of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* might have affected somewhat by this mighty sorcery. We know that the story of Musa (Moses) contains many amazing things. Pharaoh was slaying all the male-born and leaving the women alive, yet our Lord *the Almighty* decreed that Musa (Moses) would not be slain, so He inspired the mother of Musa (Moses) to suckle him for a time, and then to cast him into the river when she was fearful: `Suckle him, and when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve, for We shall restore him to you and shall make him one of the Messengers.' (*al-Qasas:* 7)

The order of Allah *the Almighty* to the mother of Musa (Moses) to cast him into the river when she feared about him shows that the fearful thing had not yet come, but it would come later. Go to any woman and say to her, 'If you fear for your son for some reason, then throw him into the sea.' Of course, she will not believe you; rather, she will scorn you, leading her to ask, 'How can I save him from an expected death by casting him into certain death?' This is something natural since in this case we are faced with an inspiration from Allah to one of His creation. It is taken for granted that the Inspiration of Allah cannot be doubted, so when an inspiration and a revelation comes from Allah, nothing can appease them. In addition, one does not ask for evidence, for the soul is assured by it – so Musa's (Moses') mother cast her child into the sea without any hesitation.

Allah *the Almighty* taking into consideration the fact that she was a mother, ordered her no to fear and not to grieve, for He shall restore him to her (*al-Qasas:* 7). In addition, not only would He return him to her, but he would be given a mighty status, as well. Allah says to her that her son Musa (Moses) would be one of the Messengers: `Suckle him, and when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve, for We shall restore him to you and shall make him one of the Messengers.' (*al-Qasas:* 7) It is as though Allah *the Almighty* was clarifying for Musa's (Moses') mother that her son would not only be kept alive for her sake, but he had another mission in life which was to be a Messenger of Allah. Therefore, if Heaven would not protect him for the sake of his mother's concern and emotions, it would protect him because he had a crucial mission, namely he would be one of the Message-bearers. We notice here that Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention the story of the wooden chest that He mentioned in the chapter of *Ta Ha* in which He reminds Musa (Moses) of His Grace upon him saying that He had inspired his mother to place him in a chest and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore: `When We revealed to your mother what was an important revelation, to wit. Put him in the ark, and place in into the river, then the river will cast it on to the shore, and there one who is an enemy to Me and also an enemy to him will take him up.' And I wrapped you with love from Me, and this I did that you might be reared before My eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 38-39)

In this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Ta Ha,* He did not order her not to fear and not to grieve since He clarified for her how the river would cast him safely ashore. As for His words in the first verse, namely to cast him into the river when she is fearful, it was a preparation for the event before it came. As for these verses of *Ta Ha,* we find that the quick succession of pieces of information explicitly expresses her actions at the moment of peril, a matter that does not happen in the verse of *al-Qasas,* whose tone is slow, calm and normal since it is speaking of preparations for what would come in the future.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* defines a particular law for every kind of created being. These laws must yet be respected since Allah wants all the members of a given kind to have equal opportunities. When He wanted to inform us of this, He clarified that a believer must consider the advantages that will result from abiding by legal obligations. In the verse of credit transactions, for example, we find that He counsels the debtor, who is the weaker party, to write the record of the credit transaction himself to the creditor, who is the stronger party. Allah *Glorified is He* says not to hate writing down every contractual provision, be it small or great, together with the time at which it falls due (*al-Baqara:* 282).

On the surface, this seems to protect a creditor and his money, but we should also be aware that it protects a debtor from himself since if a debt is not written down, a debtor may not try hard enough to pay it. Furthermore, if a debtor works hard, then everyone is benefitted by his productivity. If we do not write down a debt, however, and a debtor is lazy in working to pay it back, chaos will spread through the society, and everyone will refuse to lend money to those who need it, and thus, all the economic matters will be corrupted.

Therefore, He *the Almighty* commands that contracts of debt be written down, even though this apparently seems to be a protection for a creditor, but also provides protection for a debtor since there is a difference between the moment when a trust is taken on and the moment when it must be fulfilled.

For example, when someone says to you, ‘I have one thousand pounds, but I fear to lose them, so keep them with you as a trust until I need the money’ this person is giving you a trust for which there is no document of receipt or witnesses. It all lies in the hands of the trustee who can either deny or acknowledge it. Some people may ask for this trust with the intention of returning it. They are ready for due repayment at the time of taking the trust, but they have no guarantee of what they will do at the time of repayment. Difficult circumstances may befall them at that time, so they contrive excuses to escape or postpone repayment. Therefore, there is a difference between the conditions of the trustee when he takes a trust and when he has to fulfil it. A true believer always bears in mind both moments of when he assumes the trust and of when he returns it. This is why some people refuse to take responsibilities for trusts in order to spare themselves their burdens.

In this context, we say to those who learn things that go against the natural laws of the universe, e.g. sorcery, beware of subjecting yourself to trial and temptation. Stay away from them and save yourself. Do not use them and beware of saying, ‘I will use sorcery, for instance, in good causes or if an afflicted person comes to me, I will relieve him by sorcery.’ We affirm that you just speak about the time when you take on the trust, but you cannot speak about the time of fulfilment. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Then We inspired Moses, saying, "Throw down your staff." And it immediately swallowed up their false devices.' (*al-A’raf:* 117)

The word *ifk* (to reverse something) is to tell lies (false devices). As stated before, every statement has two aspects: the expression uttered and the relevant reality. If you were to say, for example, ‘Mohammad is a hard worker’, the predicate is 'is a hard worker', but does reality assert it? If the statement and reality correspond to one another, the speech is truthful, but if they differ, it is a case of lying even if the teller does not know the fact. However, if a person intentionally tells a lie against the reality, it is a case of deception and fabrication. 'Then We inspired Musa (Moses), saying, "Throw down your staff." And it immediately swallowed up their false devices.' (*al-A'raf:* 117)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says: '*fa idha*' which means immediately, to express a quick reaction that occurred when the staff of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* turned into a snake and swallowed up all the sorcerers' lies and false devices whereby they had bewitched the eyes of people.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَوَقَعَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَبَطَلَ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١١٨﴾

The truth was confirmed and what they had produced came to nothing [118] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 118)

Allah's Words 'the truth prevailed' (*al-A'raf:* 118) means the mere truth had become a reality. There is a difference between theories and revealing realities. The word *waqa'a*, which conveys 'prevailed' has the literal meaning of 'fell', as things that fall from above everyone can see and recognise them. He *the Most High* then says, 'the truth prevailed' that means that it occurred and became a proven fact after being a mere statement which could be accepted or denied: 'Thus, the truth prevailed and what they had produced came to nothing.' (*al-A'raf:* 118). The sorcery they had wrought had been proven vain. The True Lord *the Most High* made the truth of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* a real event for all to witness, and the sorcerers suffered defeat.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَغُلِبُوا۟ هُنَالِكَ وَٱنقَلَبُوا۟ صَٰغِرِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾

They were defeated there and utterly humiliated [119] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 119)

Not only were the sorcerers vanquished, but Pharaoh and his entourage and supporters were vanquished as well. All those who opposed Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* suffered defeat and humiliation; humiliation for those who summoned people and those who were summoned. Therefore, Allah *the Most High* concludes the Quranic verse by saying: “[they] became utterly humiliated” (*al-A’raf:* 119).

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَأُلْقِيَ ٱلسَّحَرَةُ سَٰجِدِينَ ﴿١٢٠﴾

The sorcerers fell to their knees [120]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 120)

Allah *the Exalted* did not say, ‘And the sorcerers prostrated.’ Instead, He says: 'and down fell' (*al-A’raf:* 120) to indicate that their fall into prostration was not their own choice, but rather, it was a spontaneous expression of awe at what they had seen taking place before them. Seemingly, something else threw them down in prostration. This was the awe they felt upon beholding the truth. Each one thought himself a sorcerer, but they were all shocked at the staff thrown by Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when they saw a real snake, it was the moment they knew that it was not sorcery. They threw down the ropes and staffs they brought from all cities. It is said that they had seventy camels laden with such staffs. They witnessed how Musa's (Moses') staff, turning into a serpent, devoured all their devices. However long it is, a staff is still a staff. The sorcerers became certain that it could not be a work of a sorcerer. In response, they expressed their surprise by saying:

قَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِرَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٢١﴾

And said, ‘We believe in the Lord of the
Worlds [121] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 121)

Did they prostrate before having faith or afterwards? The text suggests they first prostrated in submission before having faith. Normally, no one prostrates himself without having faith first. Yet, we know that faith lies in heart, whereas prostration is a physical, practical action. As such, each one of them had faith in his heart before prostration. Clearly, they first believed, then prostrated and announced their belief: 'We believe in the Lord of the worlds!' We do not base faith on prostration' rather, we base prostration on the testimony and announcement of faith. Truly, the announcement of faith differs from having a firm faith. People around them might have asked, ‘What had happened to you?' In response, they said, 'We have come to believe in the Lord of the worlds!' (*al-A'raf:* 121)

Consequently, those who criticise the order of the text should be aware that their announcement of faith implies their previous faith. The sorcerers came to believe and then prostrated. When people voiced their amazement at this prostration, the sorcerers replied, 'Do not be amazed or confused, for we have believed in the Lord of the worlds': (They said,) 'We have come to believe in the Lord of the worlds!' (*al-A'raf:* 121)

Some scholars state that Pharaoh said, 'I am the lord of the worlds', but the sorcerers did not pass his claim unchallenged and made it clear that the Lord of the worlds is 'The Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!' Whereupon, Pharaoh said, 'I raised Musa (Moses) in my own household!' In response, they said, 'But you did not raise Harun (Aaron).' This is why Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies here that the Lord of the worlds is,

رَبِّ مُوسَىٰ وَهَٰرُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

The Lord of Moses and Aaron!' [122]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 122)

After their clear announcement of faith in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron), Pharaoh became enraged. The Quran relates his reply:

قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ ءَامَنتُم بِهِۦ قَبْلَ أَنْ ءَاذَنَ لَكُمْ ۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَمَكْرٌ
مَّكَرْتُمُوهُ فِى ٱلْمَدِينَةِ لِتُخْرِجُوا۟ مِنْهَآ أَهْلَهَا ۖ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

But Pharaoh said, 'How dare you believe in Him
before I have given you permission? This is a plot
you have hatched to drive the people out of this city!
Soon you will see [123] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 123)

It seems as if Pharaoh was still trying to affirm his authority. We know that the children of Israel had mingled with the Egyptians, and some Israelites even learnt sorcery. Therefore, Pharaoh accused the sorcerers of having staged the event with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in advance. Pharaoh was backed to the corner. He had to find a way out since everyone had witnessed what happened. He did not want them to doubt his divinity, lest the castle of lies he had built would come crashing down. He then said to the sorcerers, 'Behold, this is indeed a plot which you have cunningly devised in this [my] city…' (*al-A'raf:* 123). He accused them of staging the event with Prophet Musa (Moses), *peace be upon him*. He went on to accuse Musa (Moses) of sorcery as well, 'Verily, he must be your master who has taught you magic!' (*Ta Ha:* 71)

As a result of the supposed 'plot', Pharaoh threatened them:

لَأُقَطِّعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُم مِّنْ خِلَٰفٍ ثُمَّ لَأُصَلِّبَنَّكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

I will cut off your alternate hands and feet and then crucify you all!' [124] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 124)

As seen, this threat was cruel and shocking. Indeed, having one's hands and feet cut off and one's body crucified are all fearsome things. How did those to whom the threat was issued respond, after the radiance of faith had entered their hearts? Allah *Glorified is He* says their response.

قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّآ إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا مُنقَلِبُونَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

They said, 'And so we shall return to our Lord [125] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 125)

Therefore, you are only expediting goodness for us since we will go to meet our Lord. Your recklessness and absurdity only do us a favour and benefit, even if you fail to realise it! They continued to admonish Pharaoh, as the Quran tells us:

وَمَا تَنقِمُ مِنَّآ إِلَّآ أَنْ ءَامَنَّا بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّنَا لَمَّا جَآءَتْنَا ۚ
رَبَّنَآ أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَتَوَفَّنَا مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٢٦﴾

Your only grievance against us is that we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord, pour steadfastness upon us and let us die in devotion to You' [126] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 126)

What is wrong with us that you hate? Vengeance is inspired by hatred. In essence, they are saying to Pharaoh, 'Is it not our belief in the Divine

Messages that you hate? Is it a hateful thing to believe in the Divine Messages when they come?' In linguistics, they call it a case of affirming commendation with introductory sentences seemingly blameworthy buy essentially commendatory. For example, when someone says, 'What do you hate about me? Is it my honesty, my trustworthiness, my generosity, my knowledge?'

It is as though he is enumerating things which everybody knows are not hateful. However, the error lies in the standards of the one who hates non-hated things such as righteousness, something that should not be criticised or hated. They were certain that meeting Allah *the Exalted* in a state of faith was the best thing. They all preferred the company of the Lord to the company of Pharaoh. What Pharaoh saw as punishment and even his execution of the punishments only affirmed his failure. Shall he not threaten them with death; they will die and meet their Lord. It is a certain fact; the fate of every created being is to return to Allah *the Almighty*. It seems as though they nullified the threat of Pharaoh when he said, 'Most certainly shall I cut off your hands and your feet in great numbers because of [your] perverseness, and then I shall most certainly crucify you in great numbers, all together.' (*al-A'raf:* 124) Then, they turned to their Lord and Creator by saying, 'O, our Lord, shower us with patience in adversity and make us die as men who have surrendered themselves unto You!' (*al-A'raf:* 126)

Ifragh means to pour something unto something else, or in other words, to shower until being fully covered and inundated. Apparently, they said, 'O, Lord, give us all of the utmost patience.' Truly, they needed patience since Pharaoh had threatened to cut off their hands and feet. Once a man inspired with Divine Knowledge said, 'I marvel at the sorcerers of Pharaoh. They started the day as pagan sorcerers and ended the day as righteous martyrs!'

Allah *the Most High* then says:

وَقَالَ ٱلْمَلَأُ مِن قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ أَتَذَرُ مُوسَىٰ وَقَوْمَهُۥ لِيُفْسِدُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَيَذَرَكَ
وَءَالِهَتَكَ ۚ قَالَ سَنُقَتِّلُ أَبْنَآءَهُمْ وَنَسْتَحْىِۦ نِسَآءَهُمْ وَإِنَّا فَوْقَهُمْ قَـٰهِرُونَ ﴿١٢٧﴾

The leaders among Pharaoh's people said to him, 'But are you going to leave Moses and his people to spread corruption in the land and forsake you and your gods?' He replied, 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females: We have complete power over them' [127] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 127)

Therefore, we know that the closest ones to Pharaoh were those who feared losing their authority. This statement indicates that Pharaoh did not expose Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to harm since Pharoah was still in awe of the powerful truth he brought which was undeniably visible, leaving him terrified and afraid of Musa (Moses). Pharaoh was the first to know that his 'divinity' was completely false. He knew quite well that Prophet Musa (Moses) was on the side of truth. However, acknowledgement of defeat in front of the masses is not an easy matter for human souls. The notables of Pharaoh's people, whose authority and stature had been shaken before their eyes, said to Pharaoh, 'Will you leave Musa (Moses) and his people to spread corruption in the land?' It seems that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* left the scene after the sorcerers were punished. Pharaoh did not detain them, so the entourage of Pharaoh asked, 'Are you going to leave Musa (Moses) and his people to spread corruption in the land and forsake you and your gods?' (*al-A'raf:* 127)

The word *yadharuk* means to forsake, leave or abandon. Pharaoh believed that there existed higher gods and lower gods and that he was the lord of the lower realm in its entirety. That is why they said, 'And [cause your people to] forsake you and your gods' (*al-A'raf:* 127). Another accepted reading of the word *alihatak* or your gods, is *ilahatak*, or your worship. This means that they shall forsake you and forsake your worship. In reply, Pharaoh said, 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females. We have complete power over them.' (*al-A'raf:* 127)

Even at this point, Pharaoh did not expose Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to harm. His fears of Musa (Moses) prevented him from approaching him or even speaking a word against him. He was keen not to hurt Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* lest Musa (Moses) would surprise him a second time. It is said that the serpent which appeared when Musa (Moses) threw down his staff opened its jaws and headed towards Pharaoh's direction, whereupon he said, 'Keep away from me, and I shall believe in that which you have brought!' This is certainly possible since even at this point Pharaoh did not dare approach Prophet Musa (Moses). He announced how boys would be killed and women be enslaved, but he never said anything about what would be done with Musa (Moses): 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females. We have complete power over them.' (*al-A'raf:* 127)

When the powerful ones are dominate over the weak, they do not need to clutch them so tightly that they decimate them; they know that their enemies are weak, so they can get them any time they want. However, if the enemy is strong, the powerful ones terrorise them with power so that they yield to them. This is why Pharaoh said, 'We have complete power over them.' (*al-A'raf:* 127) Pharaoh confirmed to his people that he and his entourage were in control and had authority and that the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could not escape from them. Pharaoh emphasised, 'We shall kill their male children, sparing only the females' since male children represent strength, whereas females usually stay home, concealed from the outside world. Keeping females alive whilst slaying their males is degrading for men since it will be the women who will suffer. This is why when Arabs used to go out for war, they would take their women with them to increase their enthusiasm. Therefore, no one would lag or act cowardly whilst his wife, sister or daughter were there behind him. Likewise, Arabs would fear defeat, lest the enemy should seize their women as captives.

In this verse, Pharaoh confirmed that he was bent on degrading the people of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* once again by slaying their sons and sparing their women, for Pharaoh had done it before. The reason for this was that the Children of Israel used to aid the kings of the Hyksos. When pharaohs expelled the Hyksos from Egypt, they turned their wrath on the children of Israel who had been on the side of the Hyksos; the children of Israel who remained were exposed to having their sons slain. However, the True Lord *the Almighty* saved Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from this fate when He inspired his mother to cast him in the river, so that Pharaoh would raise him. Now, once again Pharaoh ordained to kill their sons and spare their women.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوۡمِهِ ٱسۡتَعِينُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱصۡبِرُوٓاْۖ إِنَّ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ لِلَّهِ
يُورِثُهَا مَن يَشَآءُ مِنۡ عِبَادِهِۦۖ وَٱلۡعَٰقِبَةُ لِلۡمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٢٨﴾

Moses said to his people, 'Turn to God for help and be steadfast: the earth belongs to God – He gives it as their own to whichever of His servants He chooses – and the happy future belongs to those who are mindful of Him' [128]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 128)

Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* repeated once more the plain truth—neither did the earth belong to Pharaoh, and nor did the future belong to him, for it belongs the righteous. In this statement, he wanted to bring their attention to the verdict of history that the final outcome is always in the favour of the righteous. If Pharaoh said, 'We have complete power over them' (*al-A'raf:* 127) since they had power, authority, dominance and control, Prophet Musa (Moses) responded, 'We seek the aid of One Who is more powerful than you.' Musa (Moses) commanded his people to seek the aid of Allah and to bear patiently the tyranny and injustice that Pharaoh wreaked upon them.

Under suppression did the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*) live when Allah promised to rescue and establish them in the land. It is a Divine statement, and Divine statements are true. However, what was the position of Musa's people towards him after their great victory? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us:

قَالُوٓاْ أُوذِينَا مِن قَبۡلِ أَن تَأۡتِيَنَا وَمِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا جِئۡتَنَاۚ قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمۡ أَن يُهۡلِكَ
عَدُوَّكُمۡ وَيَسۡتَخۡلِفَكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَيَنظُرَ كَيۡفَ تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١٢٩﴾

And they replied, 'We were being persecuted long before you came to us, and since then too.' He said, 'Your Lord may well destroy your enemy and make you successors to the land to see how you behave' [129] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 129)

They said to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'Before you came to us we suffered when they slew our sons and spared our women. Again, since you have come, we suffer again. In other words, your leadership did nothing for us.' They only saw the trials that Allah *the Almighty* sent upon His creation, but they failed to see His blessings, gifts and graces of victory when Pharaoh gathered all of the sorcerers, and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* defeated them. This should have been a sign of Divine Graces. However, they remembered the days of trial and ignored the days of ease.

Allah's Words 'Thereupon, He will behold how you act' (*al-A'raf:* 129) indicate how they would break their covenants and do things entirely not in compliance with all that had gone before them. In Islam, we find that 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd went to visit Al-Mansur before he became a Caliph. He had one of two slices of bread, so he said, 'Find some bread for Ibn 'Ubayd!' Yet none could be found. After he had assumed the caliphate and had royal luxury and splendour, Ibn 'Ubayd went to visit him and said, 'The True Lord was true to you, O, Commander of the Believers, when He said: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe and make you inherit the earth, and thereupon, He will behold how you act' (*al-A'raf:* 129).

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said the same to his people when they criticised his inability to protect them from suffering. In this same manner did the people of Musa (Moses) receive the first defeat of Pharaoh at the hands of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* by saying: 'We have suffered persecution before you came to us and since you have come to us. Our sons were slaughtered and only our women were relieved. You availed us nothing, as we still suffer the same torment. We do not need you since your mission failed to relieve us from the persecution we had in the past!

They did not take into consideration that the persecution they suffered in the past and the present only came from an enemy. The response of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* implied that the causes of suffering would come to an end as Allah *the Exalted* would destroy their enemy who had hurt them in the past and the present. It will not be the only blessing, but He will do even more for them by making them inherit the earth and giving them dominion and land. Two things are to be considered here:

- The first is negative: The destruction of the enemy.
- The second is positive: They will inherit the land.

It was a promise from Allah *the Almighty* that they will have authority and dominion. They had to recognise that the Divine Graces of destroying enemies and making them inherit the earth will not simply be left unquestioned; He will watch over them and see how they act, namely whether they will receive the blessings with gratitude, firm faith and certitude along with developing a closer bond with Allah, or will they prove ungrateful for that Grace. Allah's statement on the tongue of Musa (Moses), 'It may well be…' ordinarily denotes hope; as linguists say, what may come later is hoped to occur. There is a difference between a wish and a hope. The wish manifests itself by seeking impossible, mostly unlikely or difficult matters. You only seek to express your love and desire for it by wishing, e.g. ‘If only youth would return!’ Really, it cannot possibly happen, but you are expressing your love for younger days. The most that can come from this is that you express your love for such a thing. As for whether it will actually happen or not, this is irrelevant. As for hope, it is something beloved and might well occur. Therefore, we certainly know that hope is stronger than wish. A phrase to express a wish is ‘If only’, and a phrase to express a hope is ‘It might well be’. When the words ‘It might well be’ are followed by something which is hoped for, there are successive stages in which the strength of the hope of attainment increases.

For example, if I were to say, ‘It might well be that I will be generous to you’, it depends on me. Simply, treating you generously requires that I remain alive and that my feelings towards you do not change. It is possible that my feelings towards you change before I am generous to you, so that it would never happen. This is the hope of one who is subject to change. As long as I am subject to fluctuations, I might not be able to show you generosity, or I might be able to do it but not as a wish as my soul went against it. This spoils hope and makes it less likely to be attained. If you were to say to someone, ‘It may well be that so-and-so will be generous to you’, whilst such person is a third party, it is somewhat less likely since a third party is subject to change.

However, if you were to say, ‘It may well be that Allah will treat you generously’, this is stronger since nothing can prevent the Lord from being generous to a person. Will Allah *the Exalted* respond to your hope? This question requires some consideration. From the perspective of power, He *the Most High* possesses absolute Omnipotence, and nothing can stop, defy or refuse Him. If the True Lord *the Almighty* says about Himself: 'It may well be that your Lord…' (*al-A'raf:* 129), this is the end of the matter. The promise has been made and kept. This is what is called 'a certain hope.' Therefore, the stages of hope: 'It might well be that I will be generous to you', 'It might well be that Zayd will be generous to you' and 'It might well be that Allah will be generous to you', and the strongest of all hopes is that of Allah *the Most High* Who promises generosity and mercy. 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe…' (*al-A'raf:* 129).

Evidently, it was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who spoke these words. No one could do that except Allah, so what is the level of expectancy that this would be realised? We know that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a Messenger aided by a miracle that Allah had commanded to convey unto them, so his hope here was assured: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe' (*al-A'raf:* 129).

Sometimes, the removal of a harmful thing is a blessing in and of itself. If Allah *the Almighty* destroys my enemy and gives me my enemy's high position, this is a positive blessing coming after a negative one. Something akin to this will occur on the Day or Resurrection. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'He who shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185) To be drawn away from hell is a blessing and a grace; what about the one who is drawn away from hell and brought into paradise? He thereby gains two blessings. Here, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe' (*al-A'raf:* 129), which is itself a blessing, and is then followed by another blessing: 'and make you inherit the earth'. In return for this blessing, you are under watch to see how you will act, whether you prove righteous and grateful for the blessings, or you will show ingratitude and thanklessness for them, for man is a wicked ingrate.

If the word 'behold' is used for man, it evidently means that he has eyes to *'see with.'* Yet, if the same word is used for Allah, it is different. Clearly, Allah *the Most High* is far beyond having that vision of physical eyes like ours. Furthermore, He is not ignorant of anything; He knows all things before they happen. We know that there is a difference between a verdict rendered upon a man according to the Knowledge of the Creator and a verdict rendered upon a man according to a man's deed.

For example, a teacher of a particular subject knows each level of his students. When the dean of a college says to him, ‘What do you think?’, he replies, ‘So-and-so deserves to pass with high marks! So-and-so will definitely fail.’ The teacher bases this judgement on his knowledge about each student. However, if a student fails on account of his estimate without real exams, the student might say to the teacher, ‘You misjudged me’ or ‘Had you let me take the exam, I would have passed!’ Finally, when the dean agrees to test that student, the student actually fails. The dean is certain that the teacher already knows the student would fail and eventually the result came as the teacher expected.

When Allah *the Most High* says: 'Thereupon He will behold how you act' (*al-A’raf:* 129). This kind of Divine Beholding is not initiated by a need to know—Allah forbid. Allah already knows all about their acts. However, He does not want to judge them by His Omniscience but through their actions, even if He knows since pre-eternity the guided ones and those who will go astray. This is why He created Paradise and Hell large enough to accommodate all created beings. He did not just create enough places in paradise for those who will enter it. Similarly, he did not just create enough places in hell for those who will enter it. Rather, each one is capable of accommodating all created beings. Allah *the Exalted* does not judge people by His Absolute Knowledge. He left the final judgement to the realities of human life as decided by human free will. Supposing that you were all believers, there would be enough room in paradise for everyone. Yet, if everyone were all disbelieves—Allah forbid, there would be enough room in hell for all as well. Allah *the Most High* will not make anything new; He has already prepared everything, and it is all done.

When the dwellers of Paradise come to enter it and the denizens of Hell come to enter Hell, the dwellers of Paradise will find out that they have equal places reserved for those who went to Hell. It will be announced to the people of Paradise, ‘You have inherited them. Take them for yourselves’: ‘[A voice] will call out unto them: “This is the Paradise which you have inherited."’ (*al-A’raf:* 43)

They inherited places of paradise originally prepared for the currently losers, who fell short complying with the orders and thus failed to claim their places. Beware of thinking that Allah beholds His creation in order to find out anything about them. Actually, He is the Omniscient of all things. Indicating this fact, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘And [all this was given to you] so that Allah might mark out those who would stand up for Him and His Messengers, even though He [Himself] is beyond the reach of human perception.’ (*al-Hadid:* 25).

Allah *the Most High* knows since pre-eternity about all human behaviours, realities and actions. However, it is only realities that stand evidence against criminals. The current Quranic verse highlights three things:

- Allah will destroy their enemy.
- He will make them inherit the earth.
- He will behold how they would act and judge them accordingly.

Giving the interpretation of these promises, He *the Almighty* introduces the effectuation of the first promise: destructing their enemies:

وَلَقَدۡ أَخَذۡنَآ ءَالَ فِرۡعَوۡنَ بِٱلسِّنِينَ وَنَقۡصٖ مِّنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ١٣٠

We inflicted years of drought and crop failure on
Pharaoh’s people, so that they might take heed [130]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 130)

In this verse, we see that the destruction did not occur all at once, rather, it occurred in several stages so that when hardship afflicted them, they might return to Allah. The word *sana* (a year) which means the time between one occurrence of a calendar date to the next occurrence of the same date, is normally used to mean ‘drought’ and ‘famine.’ This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in his supplication against Arab idolaters, 'O, Allah, afflict them with years of drought (*sineen*) like the years of drought (that took place during the time) of Yusuf (Joseph)!'(1) In other words, he asked the Lord to send drought upon them for a while so that they may heed admonition. It is said in Arabic *asnat al-qawm* means a drought and famine has afflicted the people. Therefore, the word *sana* in this verse means drought and famine.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in At-Tafseer; Muslim in Al-Munafiqun, and Ahmad (1/ 280, 441)*

Why did He call it *sana*? It is due to the fact that the Divine Blessings are manifold and successive, whilst the trials of evil that He sends upon the creation occur infrequently. Allah *the Almighty* gives them blessings for a long period and then subjects them to trials for a moment. When He subjects them to tribulation for a particular time, this time is used as a historical reference point. It is even said, ‘The tribulation occurred in such-and-such year.’ It becomes known as ‘The Year of Locusts’ or ‘The Year of Cairo Fire’. In this way, we find that people use perilous events as historical marks since happy events are usually much more frequent than bad ones. This is why we said before that the one who counts all the days of misfortune he has lived should compare them to the days of ease. Each one should consider his happy days of the year so that when a disheartening day of tribulation occurs, we say to him, 'How many times did you live and enjoy the blessings of ease?!' We find that their happy days of ease are much more frequent than those of tribulation.

'Indeed, We already overwhelmed Pharaoh’s people with drought and scarcity of fruits' (*al-A’raf:* 130). The years of drought and famine overwhelmed them along with 'scarcity of fruits'. It indicates that some fruits were present or that the famine and drought were in the countryside, whilst the fruits were grown in the town. It is said that a date-palm of the city would give no more than a single date in a year! Why was this single date given? It is symbolic of the Divine Mercy shown to His creation. Had all the date palms not given even a single date, the lineage of the date palm would have been cut off. Therefore, it is according to Divine Plan to preserve the means of His Mercy for us.

We see in our times that no matter how hard they have tried to grow seedless fruits using the advanced modern science, we still find odd fruits amongst them which have seeds. Why is this? We are told that it is in order to preserve the species, for if all the fruits were to grow without any seeds and then we ate them all, how would we grow a new generation of crops? We said before that it is the Divine Mercy of the True Lord *the Most High* that preserved the blessings and essential constituents of human lives. Furthermore, the fruits are only purely sweet, tasty and healthy when their seeds are mature. If you open a melon when its seeds are still white, you find that it is not tasty, and you throw it away. Once the seeds become black and are ready to be planted, the fruit of the melon becomes ripe and sweet-tasting. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that fruits are not acceptable and tasty until their seeds are enough mature to be planted once more. It is a sign of Divine Mercy. Similarly, in the case of sinners, we find that Allah *the Exalted* shows His Mercy to them.

'Indeed, We already overwhelmed Pharaoh's people with drought and scarcity of fruits, so that they might take it to heart.' (*al-A'raf:* 130) His Words 'so that they might take it to heart' imply that man must remember his being a Divinely-made vicegerent on the earth. He is not an integral part of the universe, so the world will remain in order. The world becomes corrupt only when the physical universal means and natural laws of life submit to man. Man plants, sows and grows crops, lights fire and brings water from wells, but he forgets that all these are only means. Man rarely bears in mind the Creator of these means unless when they fail him.

A frequent example from our daily lives is when one turns on the tap in the house, but no water comes out; the first thing he does is check the main water valve which controls the flow of water into the house and sees if it is locked or impaired. If he finds that it is fine, he usually examines if the main water pipe is broken. If the main water pipe is fine, he might look for faults in the mechanism which draws up the water, and he continues to examine all these various means for however long.

In the past, water only came from wells. When there was no water in the well, one would say, 'O, Lord, give us water!' The means of modern civilisation have distanced us from the Creator of the means. The True Lord overwhelmed the people of Pharaoh with drought and scarcity of fruits in order to separate their hands from the means. When the hand is separated from the means, nothing would remain. They would turn to the Creator of the means in submission and supplications, 'O Lord', for the Quran tells of human nature: 'When affliction befalls man, he cries out unto us, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing.' (*Yunus:* 12) A man remembers the Creator of the means when the means fail him. Since they are essential constituents of life, when they fail man, he cries out, 'O Lord!' In the same respect, the trials that Allah *the Almighty* sent upon the people of Pharaoh, overwhelming them with drought and scarcity of fruits, aimed to remind them of their Creator.

Allah says:

فَإِذَا جَآءَتۡهُمُ ٱلۡحَسَنَةُ قَالُواْ لَنَا هَٰذِهِۦۖ وَإِن تُصِبۡهُمۡ سَيِّئَةٞ يَطَّيَّرُواْ بِمُوسَىٰ
وَمَن مَّعَهُۥٓۗ أَلَآ إِنَّمَا طَٰٓئِرُهُمۡ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَهُمۡ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ١٣١

then, when something good came their way, they said, ‘This is our due!’. When something bad came, they ascribed it to the evil omen of Moses and those with him, but their ‘evil omen’ was really from God, though most of them did not realize it [131]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 131)

The word *hasana* (good fortune) refers to the source from any good thing comes. However, the *hasana* may be for you (in which case it means ‘good fortune’), but at other times you have to do it (in which case it means ‘a good deed’). The good fortune intrinsic in man is first and foremost good health and safety. There are also the good things necessary for human livelihood and life which is found in plants and animals, and fertile ground and natural resources. The good deed, or *hasana,* that a human being shall do is also a favour for humans. Allah *the Most High* requires you to do things, which will bring you salvation and prosperity in the Hereafter. He says: 'Whoever shall come (before Allah) with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof…' (*al-An‘am:* 160).

This form of good deeds gives a human being everlasting good fortune in the future life. As for the good fortune of health and safety among other necessary things for human life such as fruits, animals, crops, herbs and natural resources, they all exist temporarily in a given time in this worldly life, while the second kind of *hasana*, the good deed, is unlimited because it has no time limit. Which of these good things is better and more preferable for man? It is the goodness of the Hereafter.

The True Lord’s Words 'But whenever *hasana* (good fortune) alighted upon them' (*al-A’raf:* 131) means that a certain amount of crops, fruits and other kinds of provision came to them, and they would then say, 'This is [but] our due', which means we deserve it; one of them would say, ‘I deserve it because I prepared, farmed, and harvested it properly.’ Qarun (Korah) said something similar: 'This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge I possess!' (*al-Qasas:* 78). Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* tried him.

Since he claimed that his wealth had come to him due to his own knowledge, let him employ his knowledge to preserve his wealth or even preserve his life. Thus, people said about the good things which Allah gave to them, 'This is but our due', which means 'We deserve it since we have done preparatory tasks that led to these results. The usual occurrence from ancient times was that the Nile would flood its banks every year, and then they would plant the seeds and wait for the fruits. If any affliction befell them, such as drought and scarcity of fruits which Allah sent upon them, they blamed Musa (Moses) for it: 'Whenever affliction befell them, they would blame their evil fortune on Musa (Moses) and those who followed him. Oh, verily, their [evil] fortune had been decreed by Allah, but most of them knew it not.' (*al-A'raf:* 131)

Therefore, when affliction befell them, they blamed they became pessimistic. Pessimism is absolutely the opposite of optimism. Both phenomena occur in our expressions like he has a bad luck or he has a good luck. The Arabic word for pessimist is *tatayyur* which is derived from the root *tayr* or bird. In ancient times, when people wanted to know what course of action to take in something, the one facing that question would take a bird and place on his arm before agitating and releasing it. If it flew to the right, it was a good omen, but if it flew to the left, it was a bad one. The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies in this verse by saying: in essence 'Do not wrong Musa (Moses), for your bad luck is not his fault since he does not possess anything of Allah's Dominion. The sole owner of the universe is the Lord of Musa (Moses).' It is as though Allah *the Exalted* also wanted them not to be deluded if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did something which brought them goodness. In this verse, He told them not to blame their ill fortune on Musa (Moses), for their fortune lies in the Hand of Allah.

The events of life are of two kinds. Some events in which man plays a part, such as the student who does not study and, as a result, fails, or the man who does not drive a car properly and, as a result, has a horrible accident or hits someone with it hazardously. In this case, man is the adversary of his owns self. Then, there are those things which befall a person—accidents. Therefore, all events of concern to man is of two kinds: those afflicting man because of his own actions, e.g. negligence, and those afflicting man by fate. We say that these are from Allah *the Almighty* and occur for a wise reason which is unknown to a person. A person always looks at the superficial things or at their immediate consequences, but he does not look at their ultimate end. Basically, some things happen to him over which he has no influence.

For example, a man might have a fine and intelligent son, who always gets the highest marks at school. Yet, on the day of the exam or the night before, he is afflicted by a headache so severe that he cannot answer the question, and so he fails the exam. This is an affliction over which man has no influence. Usually people grieve over such afflictions, but the believer says, ‘The boy was not negligent. It was all decreed by Allah. He is the All-Glorious and far above all vanities, He is All-Wise and, as such, has a wise reason for decreeing such matters. After time passes, the wisdom becomes clear: had the boy passed, he may have suffered evil envious eyes with consequent unpleasant afflictions. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* made for him an amulet to protect him from envy. In the past, they used to protect their children with amulets leaving their children unclean concerning their bodies or clothes. They only aimed to protect them from envious evil eyes. Now, why do you not think that Allah made this sudden accident in order to protect him from the evil eye or to stop people from talking about him? Why do you not suppose that Allah did not allow him to pass this year because he would not have been able to get the result required by the college he wanted, whilst the following year he would study hard and would be easy for him to get that college? We would then tell him, ‘Praise your Lord that you did not succeed last year! Allah only wanted the best for you. You can work hard, succeed and enter the college you wanted.’

Such accidental events that happen to people without their interventions are decreed by Allah *the Exalted* for some wise reasons. On such occasions, it is said: ‘Your fortune was Divinely Decreed!’ As for those instances when a person has influence over what happens to him, it is said that his fortune came from him, and his bad luck was due to his own self and his disobedience: 'But whenever *hasana* (good fortune) alighted upon them, they would say, “This is [but] our due”, and whenever affliction befell them, they would blame their evil fortune on Musa (Moses) and those who followed him. Oh, verily, their [evil] fortune had been decreed by Allah, but most of them knew it not' (*al-A’raf:* 131). The Jews in Medina also blamed their evil fortune on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they said, ‘The rains have become scarce, and prices have become very high due to the ill luck brought by the coming of this man.’ They did not seek to understand Divine Wisdom. They were leading figures in Arabia noted for their knowledge of the Scripture and took control of the movement of markets. They practiced usury, sold weapons and possessed garrisons and weapons. Allah *the Most High* wanted to draw their attention by seizing some of their material means and threatening their position to alert them of their misguided course. Simply, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to bring them back to the Way of Allah.

The True Lord concludes the verse in question by saying: 'But most of them knew it not.' It indicates that there were a minority who indeed did know. So what was the position of this minority? Why did they not decry the position of the majority? They kept silent for fear of oppression. The tyrants forced and coerced them to be silent and abstain from opposing the falsities. In our life, we see many people who know about corruption and tyranny, yet they do not speak out. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُواْ مَهۡمَا تَأۡتِنَا بِهِۦ مِنۡ ءَايَةٖ لِّتَسۡحَرَنَا بِهَا فَمَا نَحۡنُ لَكَ بِمُؤۡمِنِينَ ١٣٢

They said, ‘We will not believe in you, no matter
what signs you produce to cast a spell on us’ [132]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 132)

The people of Pharaoh said to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘Whatever miracle you bring to us to take us from our current way of life, we will not believe in you.’ They called that which Prophet Musa (Moses) brought a 'sign', as a form of mockery mixed with sarcasm. All of these events were precursors, which justified the destruction about which Allah *the Most High* said: 'It may well be that your Lord will destroy your foe' (*al-A’raf:* 129). They announced that what Prophet Musa (Moses) had done was sorcery even though they had witnessed the most excellent and knowledgeable sorcerers fall down in prostration and declare their belief. How could this happen to all the sorcerers who were gathered at an appointed time? All people witnessed the genuine event in which the staff of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* swallowed up all the devices of the sorcerers, and so they fell prostrate and believed. How could those who had no knowledge of sorcery accuse Musa (Moses) of it? How could they think that the signs which he brought from the Lord were mere sorcery?

In the verse, they used the word 'whatever' to indicate their personal persistence and obstinacy. It is like one saying to another, ‘I have made up my mind not to accept what you say!’ In reply, the other says, ‘Wait to hear my second argument, for it might convince you.’ The former replies, ‘Whatever argument you come up with, I will not listen to you.’ This indicates the persistent obstinacy, rejection and denial. The people of Pharaoh justified their denial by saying: 'Whatever sign you may produce before us in order to cast a spell upon us thereby shall not make us believe it.' (*al-A’raf:* 132). If they thought the Divine signs given to Musa (Moses) *peace and blessings be upon him* was sorcery, does the bewitched person have any free will in the face of the bewitcher? If it were sorcery, they would all have been bewitched and that would have been their end. In response to those who say, ‘Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bewitched the people to believe in him’: If he had bewitched the people to believe in him, then why did he not bewitch you? The fact that you remain in your obstinacy is proof that he employs no kind of sorcery. When you hear the word ‘whatever’ (*mahma*), you know that there is a conditional clause and ‘result'. The scholars say that the origin of this word is *mah* which means ‘stop’, or, in other words, ‘stop bringing us such signs, for we will never believe you'. They were adamant and obstinate in their refusal to believe. The True Lord *the Most High* then tells us how He requited them for this:

فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلطُّوفَانَ وَٱلْجَرَادَ وَٱلْقُمَّلَ وَٱلضَّفَادِعَ وَٱلدَّمَ ءَايَٰتٍ
مُّفَصَّلَٰتٍ فَٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ وَكَانُوا۟ قَوْمًا مُّجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

And so We let loose on them the flood, locusts, lice,
frogs, blood all clear signs. They were arrogant,
wicked people [133] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 133)

The word 'floods' refers to the deluges of water. The water as we know is the means of life, which Allah *the Almighty* also employs as a means of destruction. Do not think that things have intrinsic natures. Rather, things are as they are because of how the All-Powerful directs them. Look at the Flood that drowned the people of Nuh (Noah) from which no one survived except those who boarded the Ark with Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. In this verse, the people of Musa (Moses) had no Ark since Allah *the Exalted* wanted to show them his tribulation against their tyranny. The flood afflicted the people of Pharaoh, whilst the children of Israel were amongst them insomuch that the water would reach a man's collar bone, so that he had to remain standing; if he sat down, he would die. H would have to remain like that. The sky rained down upon them for seven days, in which they could not tell night from day. To their surprise, they could see that the houses of the children of Israel escaped the floods. It was a plain miracle—widespread destructive floods, when the Lord willed to save the children of Israel from destruction without any human intervention. It would not be said that the flood is merely natural. Instead, the flood came to their houses but never afflicted the children of Israel. Old tales relate that the flood reached Pharaoh, and he cried out appealing to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for help. He said, 'Call it off us, and we shall believe in what you have brought!' Therefore, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* supplicated to the Lord, and the flood subsided, but they went back to their disbelief. Allah *the Almighty* introduced His signs one-by-one, beginning with the flood. The Lord made it clear that He punished the people of Nuh (Noah) and the people of Pharaoh with floods as indications to the truth of the case. Heavy rains can fall in any land, destroying houses and drowning crops and livestock. It is a universal natural sign we can observe. Likewise, Allah sends locusts from time to time. They can come at any moment, and we undertake campaigns to combat them. This shows the truth of the afflictions told. If floods and locusts did not exist with regularity, we might be more likely not to believe.

Likewise, Allah *the Exalted* plagued them with *qummal* (lice). It is not necessarily the same lice that afflict human bodies and clothes as a result of contamination. It is said that it was a kind of maggots that afflicted their seeds. It may also refer to 'ticks' or insects which destroy crops and plants. Seeing them, we panic and immediately look for a way to rid the crops of them, either manually or by pesticides. All these things are just ways to alert mankind. They act as a warning and guidance to the True Lord. Likewise, Allah *the Most High* sent upon them 'frogs' insomuch that when any of them put his hand in something, he would find a frog there. For example, if one were to lift a lid from a vessel of food, he would see a frog therein and even in the water they drank. When one opened his mouth a frog would enter it! It was a miracle as was the 'blood' when everything turned to blood before their eyes. It is even said that a woman of Pharaoh's people wanted to drink, so she went to an Israeli woman and said, 'Take water in your mouth and then pass it into mine' as a means to escape blood. The water left the mouth of the Israeli woman as water, but when it entered her mouth, it turned into blood: 'Thereupon, We let loose upon them floods, [plagues of] locusts, lice, frogs and [water turning into] blood – distinct signs [all].' (*al-A'raf:* 133)

His Word *mufassalaat* means distinct and evident. He *the Most High* did not send all these plagues simultaneously, so they would shock the people all at once and test them as to whether they would announce their faith or not. Rather, He made each sign distinct from the next. No sign occurred at the same time as another. He sent them as clear miracles bearing admonition and caution, indicating the successive warnings that they would take heed and keep restrained. Had they only taken heed and restrained after one single plague, Allah *the Almighty* would have withheld the calamity from them.

In the Quranic verse, He sent five signs: floods, locusts, lice, frogs and blood. The True Lord also says: 'He overwhelmed them with drought and scarcity of fruits' making them seven. There is the staff of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace and blessings be upon him* which swallowed up the works of the sorcerers as the eighth sign. Likewise, there is the 'white hand' that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* showed to Pharaoh and his entourage, which is the ninth sign. Then, the signs are as follows:

- the staff,
- the hand,
- the drought,
- the scarcity of fruits,
- the flood,
- the locusts,

- the lice,
- the frogs and
- the blood.

The distinct signs are wondrous miracles that Allah sends upon those whom He wills to humiliate. He may test some people with them and relieve others. What was their reaction to these wondrous miracles? Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the Quranic verse: 'But they gloried in their arrogance, for they were people lost in sin.' (*al-A'raf:* 133) They did not believe! Instead, they were arrogant, sinned against themselves and cut themselves off from faith. The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَلَمَّا وَقَعَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلرِّجۡزُ قَالُواْ يَٰمُوسَى ٱدۡعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ بِمَا عَهِدَ عِندَكَۖ لَئِن
كَشَفۡتَ عَنَّا ٱلرِّجۡزَ لَنُؤۡمِنَنَّ لَكَ وَلَنُرۡسِلَنَّ مَعَكَ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

They would say, whenever a plague struck them, 'Moses, pray to your Lord for us by virtue of the promise He has made to you: if you relieve us of the plague, we will believe you and let the Children of Israel go with you' [134]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 134)

After they gloried in their arrogance as a people lost in sins, the events came to them successively. The 'plague' refers to horrifying things and torments that afflicted them. They went to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asking him to pray for their relief from the punishment sent upon them. Evidently, they believed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was sent by the Lord. They understood that the plagues they experienced could only be removed by that Lord. This contradicted the false 'lordship' of Pharaoh. If they still had faith in Pharaoh's lordship, they would have gone to him rather than going to their enemy Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to ask his Lord for them. We have several conclusions here:

- First, the divinity of Pharaoh was false.
- Second, the supplication of Musa (Moses) was accepted by his Lord.
- Third, had our Lord not removed the plague, it would have continued.

These precursors fill a person with faith in Allah *the Almighty*: 'They would cry: “O, Musa (Moses), pray for us to Your Lord on the strength of the covenant (of prophecy) which He has made with you! If you remove this plague from us, we will truly believe in you and will let the Children of Israel go with you!”' (*al-A'raf:* 134)

That is, ‘Call upon your Lord by the promise that Allah gave to you that He will succour you as you are His messenger, supporting you with His miracles, and He would not desert you. Call upon Allah to lift this torment from us; by Allah, if you remove from us the torment which we are now experiencing, we will believe in you and believe in what has been sent down to you, and we will let you go and set the children of Israel free with you, as they were using the children of Israel to do the basest and most contemptible jobs for them’. But every time after the True Lord *Glorified is He* lifted the torment from them, they went back and broke their promise, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا كَشَفۡنَا عَنۡهُمُ ٱلرِّجۡزَ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ هُم بَٰلِغُوهُ إِذَا هُمۡ يَنكُثُونَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

But when We relieved them of the plague and gave them a fixed period [in which to fulfil their promise] – lo and behold! – they broke it [135] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 135)

So, it is as if they broke their promise after every sign. Look at the difference between the two expressions: between the True Lord’s words *Glorified is He* ‘But when We removed the punishment from them until a term which they were to reach, then at once they broke their word.’ (*al-A'raf:* 135) and His words before: ‘…invoke for us your Lord by what He has promised you. If you (can) remove the punishment from us…’ (*al-A'raf:* 134). So, who removed the plague? The removal here is ascribed to Allah, and every plague which was lifted had an appointed time which was known to the True Lord *Glorified is He* as He said, ‘…until a term which they were to reach, then at once they broke their word.’ (*al-A'raf:* 135), meaning that they would go back on their promise.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

فَٱنتَقَمۡنَا مِنۡهُمۡ فَأَغۡرَقۡنَٰهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡيَمِّ بِأَنَّهُمۡ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَكَانُواْ عَنۡهَا غَٰفِلِينَ ١٣٦

And so, because they rejected Our signs and paid them no heed, We exacted retribution from them: We drowned them in the sea [136] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 136)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there was nothing left except to destroy them because there was no good in them. They incurred His punishment on themselves, on the constituents of their lives and peace, so the command came for them to be drowned – not by tyrannical might, but by a just order; for they had denied all the signs and remained stubborn in their disbelief. We can notice here that the most important part of the story, namely the drowning, was mentioned very briefly; and the event is mentioned in detail in another chapter, wherein the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We inspired to Musa (Moses), “Travel by night with My servants; indeed, you will be pursued.”’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 52) The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not give the details of the drowning here because every verse in the Quran addresses a specific issue and a specific aspect; for the story is narrated briefly in one place and at full length in another. The part concerning the drowning here is narrated briefly, ‘So We took retribution from them, and We drowned them in the sea.’

The words ‘We caused them to drown’ have a long story which is well-known, and is narrated elsewhere in another chapter. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the children of Israel got out of Egypt, Pharaoh chased them; and when the children of Israel saw this, they said, according to the logic consequence of events, ‘we are to be overtaken’ by Pharaoh and his people because the sea was before them and they had no way of crossing it. But Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew that Allah would not abandon him because He wanted to complete the blessing of guidance at his hand. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was filled with certainty and trust; that is why he said confidently, ‘…No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62)

He said, ‘No!’, that is, ‘they will not overtake you’ – not by his own means, but by the means of the One who sent him, which is shown by the qualification he then added to this, '…No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) He spoke with the logic of the believer who resorts to a firm support, in the knowledge that things could not possibly end like this because he had not yet completed his mission. Therefore, he said, in full confidence, 'No!', even though all means were exhausted; for the sea was before them, and the enemy was behind them. In addition, he added, '…with me is my Lord; He will guide me' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62), with protection and succour. That is, 'the means which Allah has already sent with me before were beyond the capacity of men: Allah has already succoured me with the staff against the sorcerers'; and it was the very same staff which He inspired him to use at this grave moment, saying to him, '…Strike the sea with your staff…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63).

We know that the sea is a container of water, and the first law of water is the liquidity which makes it flow; were water not liquid but rather solid and hard, it would become an unlevelled mass. The thing which allows it to flow is its liquid state; that is why, when we want to know the delicate balance of any surface, we use a 'spirit level' which measures by use of water.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* '…Strike with your staff the sea...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63). When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff, the water broke its law of liquidity and lost its flowing state, and Allah *Glorified is He* depicted this for us precisely when He said, '… and each portion was like a great towering mountain.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63) We find that mountains are hard, and likewise the water lost its liquidity and each part of it became like a standing mountain. No one could do this except the Creator because liquidity and flowing are natural laws, and the One Who created these natural laws is the One Who is able to annul them. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* walked over the dry land, and they all crossed the path which had been made in the sea, Pharaoh and his hosts followed them; and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* wanted to strike the sea with his staff again to return it to its liquid, flowing state so that Pharaoh and his soldiers could not follow them; and this is also a human way of thinking. But the commandment came to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from Allah, '…And leave the sea in stillness…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24). That is, leave the sea alone in the form which it has taken so that Pharaoh and his people will enter it. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the water to return to its liquid and flowing state so that Pharaoh and his people will be tempted to cross the dry path and come and pursue you. When they enter and are surrounded by the dry path, We shall return the water to its liquid and flowing state and they shall be drowned, to affirm that the True Lord *Glorified is He* can deal salvation and destruction with the same thing. The True Lord *Glorified is He* combines all of this here, 'So We took retribution from them, and We drowned them in the sea.' The Arabic word *yamm* means a place in which there is deep water, and it can either mean salty or fresh water. For example, in the story of Musa's (Moses's) mother *peace be upon him* the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And We inspired to the mother of Musa (Moses), "Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river."' (*al-Qasas:* 7) Here the word *yamm* refers to the Nile River, but in this verse, in the chapter of *al-A`raf*, it means the sea. The reason why they were drowned is then given when He says, '…because they denied our signs and were heedless of them...' (*al-A'raf:* 136). How, then, could He punish them and drown them because of their heedlessness, when we know that heedlessness is not accounted, since if the fasting person forgets and eats, his fast is still valid, and it is said that our Lord has gifted this person a meal and accepted his fast because he was heedless? But here the heedlessness was different. The meaning of 'heedless' here is that they gave the lie to the signs of Allah and then turned from them in a way which only he who deliberately ignores Allah and His way could. Had they been servants who bore the way of Allah in mind, they could not have been heedless in this way. These words represented the realisation of what Allah *Glorified is He* had said before, '…Perhaps your Lord will destroy your enemy…' (*al-A'raf:* 129), and after this, there comes the realisation of what Allah *Glorified is He* said after this, '…and grant you succession in the land and see how you will do.' (*al-A'raf:* 129)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, in affirmation to this:

وَأَوۡرَثۡنَا ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَانُواْ يُسۡتَضۡعَفُونَ مَشَٰرِقَ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَغَٰرِبَهَا
ٱلَّتِي بَٰرَكۡنَا فِيهَاۖ وَتَمَّتۡ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ ٱلۡحُسۡنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُواْۖ
وَدَمَّرۡنَا مَا كَانَ يَصۡنَعُ فِرۡعَوۡنُ وَقَوۡمُهُۥ وَمَا كَانُواْ يَعۡرِشُونَ ١٣٧

And We made those who had been oppressed succeed to both the east and the west of the land that We had blessed. Your Lord's good promise to the Children of Israel was fulfilled, because of their patience, and We destroyed what Pharaoh and his people were making and what they were building [137] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 137)

That is, Egypt and the Levant came under the control of the children of Israel, the land which Allah blessed with fertility, growth, crops, fruits, animals, and with all of life's essential constituents and its luxuries, '…And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they had patiently endured…' (*al-A'raf:* 137). '…And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled…' (*al-A'raf:* 137), that is, the word continued with them and Allah's true promise of stabilization to the children of Israel in the land and succouring them against their foe was fulfilled, and the blessing was completed; for Allah destroyed their foe and made them inherit the land, and His words which were uttered on the tongue of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'and grant you succession in the land and see how you will do…' (*al-A'raf:* 129). And in this way, the promise of Allah was fulfilled by His words, '…We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones…' (*al-A'raf:* 137).

We know that the words 'eastern' and 'western' are relative, since there is no specific place called 'the East' and another called 'the West', but rather, these directions are relative: a place may be called 'eastern' with respect to one place, and be called 'western' with respect to another. And when one moves to another place, he finds a new east and a new west. For example, those people who live in India and Japan consider the Middle East to be west for them, while those who live in Europe consider the Middle East to be east for them. We said before that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives the words 'east' and 'west' in the plural, as is the case here, this merely indicates that every place has an east, and every place has a west; when the sun sets in one place, it rises in another place. Thus, we find in *Ramadan* that the sun sets in Cairo a few minutes before Alexandria.

The reason for this cycle may be for that the remembrance of Allah, with all of the remembrance of Allah's requirements, remains constant throughout all of Allah's times. For example, when we pray the dawn prayer, we find that at the very same moment, some people pray the midday prayer, and others praying the mid-afternoon prayer, and others praying the sunset prayer, and others praying the night prayer. In this way, the Will of Allah is fulfilled that there be worship always and in every moment. When a Muslim says *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatestest) and gives the call for the dawn prayer, there is another Muslim saying *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) to call for the midday prayer, or the mid-afternoon prayer, or the sunset prayer, or the night prayer. This difference in times of day was intended by Allah *Glorified is He* in order that His Name would be invoked by all tongues, at all times, so that *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) would ring out in all places.

If you count time, even by milliseconds, you would find that Allah's universe never passed without the mention of, 'There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah'. '…And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled…' (*al-A'raf:* 137). We know that the word *husna* (good) is a feminine adjective, as the word *kalima* (promise) is feminine; and the promise here means the True Lord's *Glorified is He* words, 'And We wanted to confer favour upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors.' (*al-Qasas:* 5)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* told the story briefly; and this is what our Lord says, and it was a 'good promise' because Allah *Glorified is He* did not give them a blessing which was contemporary to the blessing that their foe enjoyed, but rather, their blessing was built on the rubble of their foe; so it was a blessing which comprised the ruin of their foe, and then after that He granted them to be leaders and guides, and made them inherit the earth, '…And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled…' (*al-A'raf:* 137).

Indeed, they did bear with patience the harm they were dealt, which Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned before when He says, '…who afflicted you with the worst torment, slaughtering your [new-born] sons and keeping your females alive...' (*al-Baqara:* 49). And Allah's punishment came to Pharaoh's people, '…And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building.' (*al-A'raf:* 137) The destruction means that breaking something and ruining it; and what Allah did to Pharaoh's people has remained in the artefacts which show you the greatness of what they did. We find that every day archaeologists discover many artefacts beneath the earth; and it is amazing that everything they discover is always beneath the earth, and no archaeological discovery is ever made above ground.

The words 'And We destroyed' indicate that the objects which were destroyed, were of high stature, and then the process of denudation came and covered them; and Allah left certain examples of them to give us an idea of the civilisation they built, such as the pyramids. And every day new discoveries are made of artefacts found under the soil such as the city of 'Thebes' which we discovered in the Valley of the Kings which was covered with dust because of the processes of denudation which transfer sand from place to place. So, if you leave your house for a month, even if you close the doors and the windows before you travel, when you come back, you find dust covering the house and the furniture; and all of this is actually because of the processes of denudation which can pass through the smallest of gaps. That is why if you look at how towns were in the past before the process of paving was developed to make the ground firm, you find that the streets of the town which led to the houses rose gradually over time, so that each house sank into them a little so that people filled up the floors of the houses to make them taller. All of this was because of the processes of denudation which raised the level of the streets. The artefacts of the world can only be found by digging; so the words 'And We destroyed' are well supported. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the buildings of Pharaoh, 'And [with] Pharaoh, owner of the stakes.' (*al-Fajr:* 10)

We find the pyramids are an attestation of the strength of their architecture; and until now no one has discovered how the pyramids were built, and how their stones adhere together without any material such as cement; rather, it has been said that the pyramids were built by the process of the evacuation of air. And no one knows how the Egyptians carried the stones which stand at the top of the pyramids. So, they possessed extensive knowledge; and if we look at this knowledge they had of architecture, artefacts and mummification of the dead – if we look at all of this and see that the ones who did this were priests who belonged to religion, we will be certain that the secrets of these things were all possessed by men of religion; and the origin of this religion was from Allah, even if it had been corrupted later. This confirms for us that the True Lord *Glorified is He* was the One Who guided men, from the onset of creation, to this extensive knowledge. 'And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed. And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they had patiently endured. And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building...' (*al-A'raf:* 137).

The words *ya`rishun* (what they had been building) means that they made hanging gardens (*ma`rushat*); and we said before that some of the plants which grow on the surface of the earth do not have stems, while other plants do have stems, and there is a third kind which has a soft stem, for which they make trellises or espaliers to carry the plants and their fruits.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَجَٰوَزۡنَا بِبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱلۡبَحۡرَ فَأَتَوۡاْ عَلَىٰ قَوۡمٖ يَعۡكُفُونَ عَلَىٰٓ أَصۡنَامٖ لَّهُمۡۚ
قَالُواْ يَٰمُوسَى ٱجۡعَل لَّنَآ إِلَٰهٗا كَمَا لَهُمۡ ءَالِهَةٞۚ قَالَ إِنَّكُمۡ قَوۡمٞ تَجۡهَلُونَ ١٣٨

We took the Children of Israel across the sea, but when they came upon a people who worshipped idols, they said, 'Moses, make a god for us like theirs.' He said, 'You really are foolish people [138] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 138)

They said this while they immersed in the blessings Allah had given them in saving them from their foes and making them inherit the earth. Yet, as soon as they came to the shore and saw people worshipping an idol, they asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to make for them an idol of their own to worship. They envied those who were ignorant of the principles of faith and devoted themselves to worshipping idols; and 'devoted' *ya`kifuna* here means that they kept vigil with them. From the same root the word *i`tikaf* (the spiritual vigil Muslims keep in mosques) is derived which means to cut oneself off from life outside the mosque and to devote oneself to worship in His house.

'…people intent in devotion to [some] idols of theirs. They said, "O Musa (Moses), make for us a god just as they have gods."' (*al-A'raf:* 138) This statement of the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the absolute form of foolishness; as if Allah for them was unknown despite all the blessings He had showered upon them; and this was a grievous failing. They wanted to make Allah, a thing which is 'set up', even though Allah, by His Perfection and Omnipotent Power, is the One Who sets up all things. Yet their minds did not take in all the blessings He had given them, and their hearts were closed so that faith had not filled them, and they said, 'make for us a god'! They wanted him to carve idols for them; and one of them might have said, 'The god's head is too big, make it a little smaller; and his nose is not straight; let us straighten it with the chisel. Their words 'make for us a god' make us understand that their minds did not comprehend the reality of faith, which is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to them, '…you are a people behaving ignorantly!' (*al-A'raf:* 138)

He did not say to them 'you do not know', but rather, he called them 'ignorant'; for there is a difference between being uninformed about something and being ignorant about it. To be uninformed means that the mind might be completely empty concerning the matter, while to be ignorant means that you 'know' something which is contradictory to the actual truth of the issue. So, the ignorant person believes something which is not actually true; as for the uninformed person, he has no thought on the matter either way, and when the truth of the matter comes to him he will be convinced by it, and this will require only one intellectual process. This is like the illiterate person who does not know because his mind is vacant of the issue; but as for the one who 'knows' something contrary to the truth, and this will require two intellectual processes from the messenger: one to remove from his mind the ignorant issue, and another to give him the new issue. The world suffers because of ignorant people, not illiterate people, because when you give the illiterate person the information, he has nothing else in his mind to contradict it, but the ignorant person has something in his mind which contradicts and conflicts with reality.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ مُتَبَّرٞ مَّا هُمۡ فِيهِ وَبَٰطِلٞ مَّا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ١٣٩

[the cult] these people practise is doomed to destruction, and what they have been doing is useless [139] (The Quran, al-A’raf: 139)

The word *mutabbar* (destroyed) means ‘destructive’ and ‘ruinous’. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* explains to them that these people who worship idols will be ruined along with their idols, and all what they do is worthless. Because if you want to know the truth of the affairs of the universe, you must have stability; and the truth is stable and never changes because it is a reality which can be witnessed. For example, if an accident happens right before our eyes and then each of us is asked privately to describe what we saw, we will not differ in our narratives because we are describing an actual event. Yet, if the event did not really happen, we will all describe it in a different way. That is why we find that one of the skills of judiciary investigation is that the judge manages dialogues with the witnesses to establish what they agree upon and what they differ in. If the witnesses are all describing a factual event, they will not differ in their narratives; but they will differ if one of them is not sure about the event, or if it is not true.

The Arabic proverb says, ‘If you had to be a liar, then you should have a good memory’! That is, if you had to lie – May Allah keep us away from it – as say something which is not true, you must remember your lie; and you will not remember it because it is imagined, and not a fact. It might be the case that a lie is attractive and enticing, in which case we say, beware of being deluded by this attractiveness because the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘He sends down from the sky rain and valleys flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries rising foam. And from that [ore] which they heat in the fire, desiring adornments and utensils, is foam like it. Thus, Allah presents [the example of] truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth. Thus, does Allah present examples?’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws similarity between falsehood and foam which is the substance that floats on liquid or water containing the dross and refuse which sits on top of the water. It vanishes and passes away, while what benefits man remains. We test metals to see if they are adulterated or not, and we put them into fire so that the foreign materials and impurities rise out of it, and the pure metal remains at the bottom. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says on the tongue of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘Indeed, those [worshippers] - destroyed is that in which they are [engaged], and worthless is whatever they were doing!’ (*al-A’raf:* 139)

Events may be either speech or action; speech is the work of the tongue, and action is the work of the rest of the body, and together speech and action make ‘deeds’. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Why do you say what you do not do?’ (*as-Saff:* 2) Their deeds included both their speech and their action. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Worthless is whatever they were doing.’ (*al-A’raf:* 139) The idols which they used to make and worship were based on speech and action, such as their saying, ‘O Hubal!’, ‘O Lat!’ or ‘O ‘Uzza!’, calling upon these idols and asking them to bring certain actions into fruition; and they would stand before them in humility and lowliness. So, they produced both speech and action, which together made deeds.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَغَيْرَ ٱللَّهِ أَبْغِيكُمْ إِلَٰهًا وَهُوَ فَضَّلَكُمْ عَلَى ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ١٤٠

Why should I seek any god other than God for you,
when He has favoured you over all other people?’ [140]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 140)

When they asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to set up a god for them just as the others had gods, he said to them, ‘you are a people behaving ignorantly!’, and then he said, ‘Indeed, those [worshippers] - destroyed is that in which they are [engaged], and worthless is whatever they were doing!’ (*al-A’raf:* 139) After this, he continued to explain why this was an ignorant request, and that those who worshipped gods other than Allah *Glorified is He* did so worthlessly, saying, ‘Is it other than Allah I should desire for you as a god while He has preferred you over the worlds?’ (*al-A’raf:* 140) His words ‘other than Allah’ mean that Allah who, as you know from practical experience, has favoured you above all other people; and you saw what He did with your enemies who debased you and afflicted you with cruel suffering. He destroyed them and utterly vanquished them; could you therefore seek any lord other than Him?

His words, 'Is it other than Allah I should desire for you as a god…' (*al-A'raf:* 140). That is, shall I look for another god than Him for you? This question of his implied admonition since he then followed it by mentioning how Allah had favoured them above all men; and then he wanted to remind them of the greatest favour He gave them, so Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ أَنجَيْنَٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ ۖ يُقَتِّلُونَ أَبْنَآءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَآءَكُمْ ۚ وَفِى ذَٰلِكُم بَلَآءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٤١﴾

Remember how We saved you from Pharaoh's people, who were subjecting you to the worst of sufferings, killing your male children, sparing only your females – that was a mighty ordeal from your Lord [141] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 141)

When you hear the word 'when', know that it is an adverbial particle denoting a time when something happened of which the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to remind us. 'When!' means remember well, and do not let it slip your minds how Allah saved you from Pharaoh's people who afflicted you with cruel, wicked and terrible suffering. He says after this, by way of explaining and elucidating this suffering, '…killing your sons and keeping your women alive...' (*al-A'raf:* 141). We can notice here that He did not use any conjunction. He did not say, 'Who afflicted you with cruel suffering, and kill your sons in great numbers and spared (only) your women' which indicates that He was mentioning the very height of the cruel suffering to which they were subjected; for the subjugation and humiliation were also part of the suffering, but the height of it was the slaying of the sons and the sparing of the women.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and [recall] when We saved your forefathers from the people of Pharaoh, who afflicted you with the worst torment, slaughtering your [new-born] sons…' (*al-Baqara:* 49). This means that they were exposed both to being slain and to being slaughtered. And in a third verse, He says, 'And [recall, O Children of Israel], when Musa (Moses) said to His people, “Remember the favour of Allah upon you when He saved you from the people of Pharaoh, who were afflicting you with the worst torment…”’ (*Ibrahim:* 6). Here, He indeed used the conjunction ‘and’ because the speaker is different. The Speaker here is Allah and Allah *Glorified is He* is reminding them of the height of His blessings to them; but in the case of, ‘And [recall, O Children of Israel], when Musa (Moses) said to His people, “Remember…”’ (*Ibrahim:* 6). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was mentioning all the blessings which Allah sent to the children of Israel, both the great and the tiny blessing.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the noble verse by saying, ‘And in that was a great trial from your Lord.’ (*al-A’raf:* 141) It was a painful and grievous trial to be separated from those who were killed and slaughtered, and another trial of woe and grief for the women who remained to be humiliated and degraded by servitude.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَوَٰعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ ثَلَٰثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتْمَمْنَٰهَا بِعَشْرٍ فَتَمَّ مِيقَٰتُ رَبِّهِۦٓ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ۚ وَقَالَ
مُوسَىٰ لِأَخِيهِ هَٰرُونَ ٱخْلُفْنِى فِى قَوْمِى وَأَصْلِحْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٤٢﴾

We appointed thirty nights for Moses, then added ten more:
the term set by his Lord was completed in forty nights.
Moses said to his brother Harun, ‘Take my place among my
people: act rightly and do not follow the way of those who
spread corruption’ [142] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 142)

We saw before that there are two ways of counting, the first comes in the total form, and the second gives the details. Sometimes the total agrees with the detail, in which case there is no doubt or ambiguity. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, ‘And [recall] when We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for forty nights…’ (*al-Baqara:* 51). There, He gave the total, while here in the chapter of *al-A`raf* He did not want to give it only once as a total, but rather, He explained in detail as being thirty nights to which the True Lord *Glorified is He* then added ten for a purpose which we shall see in due course. This means that the meeting took forty nights in total; and if the number was given as a simple total in one place and in detail elsewhere, and the two totals are the same, there is no ambiguity. But if the total seems to be different from the detail, the detail is usually explained in such a way as to make it conform to the total as the details might overlap to make the total.

Previously, we gave the example for the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days. Every verse dealing with the creation mentions the six days as a bare total, but Allah *Glorified is He* willed to say in another place in the Quran, 'Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds. And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its creatures' sustenance in four days without distinction - for [the information] of those who ask.' (*Fussilat:* 9-10)

Apparently, it seems that the process was finished and created in six days; but He the Almighty, then goes on to say, 'Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, "Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion." They said, "We have come willingly." And He completed them as seven heavens within two days and inspired in each heaven its command. And We adorned the nearest heaven with lamps and as protection. That is the determination of *the Exalted* in Might, the Knowing. (*Fussilat:* 11-12) So, the matter here is of the creation of the world; we find the total and the details, and the details seem of the apparent meaning of the matter to bring the days of creation to eight, while the total is stated to be only six days. So were they six days, or eight? We say they are six days because we can overlap some of the detailed days and combine them. If you say, 'I travelled from Cairo to Tanta in two hours, and to Alexandria in three hours', this means that the two hours are included in the three.

'And We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for thirty nights and perfected them by [the addition of] ten…' (*al-A'raf:* 142). The purpose of this appointment was that Allah promised Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that after the children of Israel were saved, Allah *Glorified is He* would send down to him a Book in which all the teachings which Allah's creatures were required to follow in their lives will be collected. But as soon as Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went to meet his Lord, they began to worship the calf during these thirty days;

and Allah did not wish to let Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* go after the thirty days were completed, but rather He added another ten to them so that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would not go back and see what his people had done. And after he went back to them, he took his brother by the neck and was harsh with him, and dragged him by his beard; for how could he have allowed the children of Israel to worship the calf? Concerning this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says on the tongue of Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* 'O son of my mother, do not seize [me] by my beard or by my head. Indeed, I feared that you would say, "You caused division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe [or await] my word!"' (*Ta Ha:* 94)

It is as if the ten days were added to the thirty to give the final picture which is presented in the chapter of *al-Baqara*.

And here in the chapter of *al-A`raf*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Take my place among my people, do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters.' (*al-A'raf:* 142) 'Take my place' means, 'be my vicegerent amongst them until I return', in that matter in which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was specially delegated, namely prophethood. When Musa (Moses) left Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* in his place, this was not a new responsibility for Harun (Aaron) since Allah had sent both Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* as messengers; for when Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* presented themselves to Pharaoh, they used the plural form which referred to them both, 'Indeed, we are messengers of your Lord…' (*Ta Ha:* 47). So, they were both messengers. Allah's words, '…And Musa (Moses) said unto his brother Harun (Aaron)…' (*al-A'raf:* 142), indicate compassion, that is, 'I had a connection to you before you became my partner in prophethood, for I am a brother to you and you are a brother to me, and it is my right that you should hear my words and take my place. Our brotherhood makes it fit that you should be my partner in prophethood'. We find that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* invoked the background of their brotherhood and their partnership in prophethood; and by using the words 'my people', Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* emphasised that they were dear to him, and that he wished for them nothing but the same goodness he wished for himself. So, when he issued them a commandment, they should have known that it was for their own good, and when he issued them a prohibition, they should have known that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will be the first person to heed it.

It is said that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* prepared for the meeting with his Lord; these preparations must have included purification ablutions and the cleansing of the soul by fasting. He fasted for thirty days, after which he found his breath was unpleasant, so he took a tooth-stick and cleaned his mouth with it to remove this unpleasant smell, whereupon the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarified for him, 'Know you not, O Musa (Moses), that the changed breath of the one who fasts is more fragrant to Me than the smell of musk? Since you have removed this breath, yet I want you to come to Me smelling of musk, so add another ten days so that you shall come thus'. Some of the scholars say that the forty days are divided into thirty and ten because the thirty days were those in which the people worshipped the calf in Musa's (Moses's) absence, so there had to be an extra period in which Allah separated the foul from the fair. 'And Musa (Moses) said to his brother Aaron, "Take my place among my people, do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters..."' (*al-A'raf:* 142).

There is a commandment and a prohibition here; the commandment is 'do right' and the prohibition is 'do not follow'. We know that all the responsibilities which the True Lord *Glorified is He* issues are embodied in 'Do' and 'Do not'; and the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not say to His servants, 'Do this' unless they are able to do it or not to do it; and if He says to them 'Do not', they also must be able to do it or not to do it. That is why we clarified previously that Allah distilled all moral responsibility for Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* in paradise, '…and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will…' (*al-Baqara:* 35), which was the commandment, and He said, '…but do not approach this one tree…' (*al-Baqara:* 35), which was the prohibition. '…do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters…' (*al-A'raf:* 142).

The words 'do right' mean that one must leave what is sound as it is without corrupting it, and if he wished, he can make it even better. And he says that and do not follow the way of the corrupters because this was directed to a prophet, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* so no corruption could come from him; but Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was telling him that there would be mischief after a short while. It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* revealed that there will be corruption, and so the most he asked of his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was that he not follow the path of those who spread this corruption. That is why Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* would later say, in defence of his decision to leave the children of Israel to worship the calf and having tried his very best to stop them and dissuade them until they overwhelmed him and overpowered him, and almost killed him, ‘Indeed, I feared that you would say, “You caused division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe [or await] my word.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 94)

The True Lord says:

وَلَمَّا جَآءَ مُوسَىٰ لِمِيقَٰتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُۥ رَبُّهُۥ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِىٓ أَنظُرْ إِلَيْكَ ۚ قَالَ لَن تَرَىٰنِى وَلَٰكِنِ ٱنظُرْ
إِلَى ٱلْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ ٱسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُۥ فَسَوْفَ تَرَىٰنِى ۚ فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّىٰ رَبُّهُۥ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُۥ دَكًّا
وَخَرَّ مُوسَىٰ صَعِقًا ۚ فَلَمَّآ أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَٰنَكَ تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا۠ أَوَّلُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٤٣﴾

When Moses came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, ‘My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!’ He said, ‘You will never see Me, but look at that mountain: if it remains standing firm, you will see Me,’ and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble: Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said, ‘Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!’ [143]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 143)

The word *miqat* (appointed time) refers to the time which is appointed for a particular action, and usually it refers to the times in which Islamic actions are performed such as the times (*mawaqit*) of the pilgrimage. We know that every action or event requires two things in which it is contained, that is, which give it its context: it must have a place in which it occurs, and likewise a time in which it occurs; and these are called the ‘circumstances of time and place’ (*zharf zaman wa zharf makan*). Yet, the circumstance of time is not constant since the dawn might come and go, after which comes midday, mid-afternoon, evening and night; but the circumstance of place is constant.

Appointed times, then, are either governed by time, place or by both. If we consider those appointed times which are governed by time, the obligation of fasting has a specific time, namely *Ramadan*, and fasting is governed by time, so it can be done in any place. Likewise, the recommended fast on the Day of *`Arafa* is also governed by time, since it takes place on the Day of *`Arafa*, and wherever one is he may fast this day – yet it should not be fasted by the pilgrim. The action of standing at *`Arafa*, however, is governed by both place and time. And the act of *ihram* (consecration) for the greater or lesser pilgrimage is governed by place, which is what we call the 'appointed place' (*al-miqat al-makani*, literally 'the spatial appointed time'); and for those who approach Mecca from each direction there is a special site which they are not supposed to pass without first consecrating themselves. So sometimes 'time' governs, and sometimes 'place' governs and sometimes both govern. So, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came at the time set by Allah, which would last forty nights.

And did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* come to the appointed time, or at the appointed time? He came at the appointed time, so the Arabic particle *li* means 'at', not 'to'; and the particle *li* takes the meaning 'at' many times in the Quran such as 'Establish prayer at the decline of the sun [from its meridian] until the darkness of the night…' (*al-Isra':* 78). That is, establish the prayer at the time when the sun passes its zenith, i.e. just after midday when it passes the centre of the sky until the darkness of night. From the zenith to the darkness of night, we find there occurs the midday prayer, the mid-afternoon prayer, the sunset prayer and the night prayer; this makes four obligatory prayers, leaving only the fifth obligatory prayer, which is offered at dawn, about which the True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, 'And [also] the Quran of dawn. Indeed, the recitation of dawn is ever witnessed.' (*al-Isra':* 78)

Why did He start with the passing of the zenith? Does the day start at midday, or dawn? The Night Ascension took place by night, and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to Mecca the next morning. The prayer had been made obligatory during the Ascension. It means that the first obligatory prayer to be offered was the midday prayer. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying, 'Take the end, and take the beginning'. The beginning was the midday prayer, then the mid-afternoon prayer, then the sunset prayer, and then the night prayer, which left the dawn prayer, of which was then said, ‘And [also] the Quran of dawn. Indeed, the recitation of dawn is ever witnessed.’ (*al-Isra’:* 78)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* gave to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the *tahajjud* prayer (the night vigil) which was obligatory for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* alone, while for the rest of his community it is an optional extra act of worship, ‘And from [part of] the night, pray with it as additional [worship] for you; it is expected that your Lord will resurrect you to a praised station.’ (*al-Isra’:* 79)

And those who imitate the example of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* will have generous recompense and great reward, but this is left to the personal choice of the Muslim.

‘And when Musa (Moses) arrived at our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him…’ (*al-A’raf:* 143) requires some investigation. His words, ‘…and his Lord spoke to him…’ (*al-A’raf:* 143) indicate that speech came directly from Allah to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; yet how could this be, when Allah *Glorified is He* says about His speech to mankind in general, ‘And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He wills. Indeed, He is Most High and Wise…’ (*ash-Shura:* 51)?

This negates the notion that Allah speaks directly to man except in three ways: revelation, from behind a veil or by means of a messenger. For prophets, revelation means that the inspiration is cast into the heart of the prophet suddenly, along with certain knowledge that it is from Almighty Allah. *Wahy* (revelation) can also mean the flashes of inspiration given to the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or to the Apostles of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* or also to the angels. *Wahy* can also mean ‘subdual’, such as the subdual of the earth, or the bee.

After this comes ‘from behind a veil’, i.e. he hears speech but he does not hear the speaker; and ‘by sending a messenger’ means Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. The Quran was only sent down in a single way which was by the means of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* descending to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Quran was not revealed by flashes of inspiration, and nor by a voice from behind a veil, but rather, it was revealed by means of an envoy from Allah, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who had certain distinguishing marks.

And here concerning Allah's speech to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* I say that it was sent from behind a veil, and at this point we should refrain from delving any further because it is a matter of the unseen which has not been shown to us, and we leave it up to Allah.(1)

Previously, we said that Allah's attributes are not the same as those of man. Man's existence is not like Allah's Existence, and man's wealth is not like Allah's Wealth; and likewise, your speech could never be akin to the Speech of Allah because you must take everything connected with Allah in the light of, 'There is nothing like unto Him.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made it clear that His speech to Musa (Moses) was a special gift for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is why He says, 'I have chosen you over the people with My messages and My words [to you] (*al-A'raf:* 144).

We must take every attribute which exists for human beings and is also ascribed to Allah, such as 'to be established', 'to sit', 'face' and 'hand' according to 'There is nothing like unto Him.'

'And when Musa (Moses) arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him...' (*al-A'raf:* 143). When Allah *Glorified is He* singled out Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with the distinction of speaking to him, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was moved by boldness because of his election, as though he said to himself, 'Since He has spoken to me, it may be that I can look upon Him'! This is because when a person is pleased, the soul reaches out in hope that whatever is pleasing him will continue. The same was the case before when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* responded to Allah's question, 'And, what is this in thy right hand, O Musa (Moses)?' (*Ta Ha:* 17) Though it would have been sufficient to answer, 'a staff', he said, 'He said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep…"' (*Ta Ha:* 18). He said this even though the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not ask him what he used it for; and by this way, he sought to extend the comfort he felt through the nearness to his Lord; and it is as though he knew that it would be inappropriate merely to respond with a single word to answer the question. Allah is beyond compare – we find when one of us sees a small child, he jokes with him and speaks at length with him to make him feel with comfort. And when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* found that Allah was speaking to him, his soul became bold enough to hope that he might be able to look upon Him, as in the verse, ‘And when Musa (Moses) arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, “My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You…”’ (*al-A’raf:* 143). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not say, ‘Show me Your Essence’, but rather, he said, ‘My Lord, show me [Yourself]…’ (*al-A’raf:* 143). It is as though he knew that by the nature of his composition, he could not possibly see Allah; but if Allah were to show him, this would be by the Will of the True Lord. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* put forward his request such that it was conditioned by the Will of Allah and His Decree because he knew that he was not prepared to see Allah because his composition was not strong enough for this. Even when it comes to revelation and speech, our Lord does not speak to people directly, but rather, He always chooses an envoy from the angels; and then the second stage is that He chooses messengers from amongst mankind, who convey the Word of Allah to the people. This is because the perfect and superior, transcendent attributes of the Creator cannot be perceived by the creature.

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash- Sha`rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

Previously, we gave an example before to illustrate this– and Allah is beyond comparison – of human inventions: a person might sleep at night and then wake up for some reason, and if it is dark he might crush the things which are smaller than him, or be crushed by things which are harder than him. If he bumps into something small, he might break it, while if he bumps into a closet or a wall he might be injured. This is why a man leaves a small source of light in the house so that he can benefit from the peace and coolness of the night; so he takes a simple lamp or ‘night light’ which is no more powerful than a few candles; and he cannot plug it directly into the socket in the house because it will burn it out immediately, so he uses a transformer for it which takes the large amount of energy from the socket and feeds only a little of it into the lamp.

So, if there are human inventions which are weak and can only take from powerful sources by means of an intermediary, it is even more certain that it is not possible for Allah's creatures to receive anything from Allah without intermediaries. Human and angelic intermediaries are chosen by Allah for not all of them are suitable for this task; and the chosen angel conveys to the chosen man, and after this, the chosen man conveys to the rest of mankind.

The same is the case where the vision of Allah is concerned; and this will become clear to us when Allah gives the proof that He created you, not in the form which you are able to see now, but rather, when you will be reshaped into the Hereafter and you are formed in a different way so that you can attain the honour of seeing Him: 'Some faces, that Day, will be radiant.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

And people are not all equal in this regard because the believer will be the one to attain the honour of looking upon Allah, while the disbeliever will be veiled from beholding the True Lord *Glorified is He*. He says about the disbelievers, 'No! Indeed, from their Lord, that Day, they will be partitioned.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 15) So the believer and the disbeliever will not be equal in this state, as the disbeliever is veiled, so the believer is unveiled and can look upon his Lord. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, '…My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You…' (*al-A'raf:* 143), and the True Lord *Glorified is He* replied, 'You will never see Me.'

In linguistics, we find that the Arabic word *lan* which negates the future, has the meaning of 'never' meaning that the thing in question will never come to pass. Does this mean that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* said, 'You will never see Me', mean that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would never see Allah, not in this world nor the next life? To this, we say: who said that the time of the Hereafter is the same as the time of this world? This world has its time, and that world will have its own time; 'It will be on the Day the earth will be replaced by another earth, and the heavens [as well], and all creatures will come out before Allah, the One, the Prevailing.' (*Ibrahim:* 48) Thus, the time of the Hereafter, and the state upon which men are created therein, will be something completely different. It is enough to show this when we reflect that the inhabitants of paradise will eat but not produce any waste; it will be a new creation. The word ‘never’ in His words ‘You will never see Me’ is relative, referring to this world only; and there was a reason why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was unable to attain this vision, as Allah *Glorified is He* then adds, ‘…but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me. But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Musa (Moses) fell unconscious….’ (*al-A’raf:* 143)

Here Allah *Glorified is He* explained to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* by a practical example, clarifying, ‘You can never see Me, but for you to be assured that you are a created being in a form which does not allow you to see Me, look at the mountain’ – and mountains are known to be hard, strong, firm, and fixed – ‘and if it stays firm in its place, you will be able to see Me’. According to logic, a mountain is stronger than a man, and harder and firmer than him; yet when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, it crumbled. The word *dakka* (rendered it level) means literally to put pressure on something from above until it flattens and becomes level with that which was below it. The True Lord says, ‘No! When the earth has been levelled - pounded and crushed.’ (*al-Fajr:* 21)

And here, concerning Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his dialogue with Allah, it is confirmed to us that Allah revealed Himself to one of His creatures; but was that to which He revealed Himself capable of withstanding this revealing, or not? If Allah had made it capable of withstanding it, it would have been able to do so; but if Allah did not, it would not. The mountain was hard, but when its Lord revealed Himself to it, it crumbled. So, it is possible for Allah to reveal Himself to some of His creatures; but what is important is whether that to which He reveals Himself is strong enough, or not. The nature of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not strong enough for this revealing, which was proved by the fact that even that which was stronger than him was not strong enough. After this, Allah wanted to impart unto us an additional element of this issue, explaining to us that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* swooned merely by looking at the object to which was revealed – so what if he had seen the One Who revealed? ‘…but when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Musa (Moses) fell unconscious…’ (*al-A’raf:* 143). The word *kharra* (fell) means to come down from a high place to a low place, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse of the Quran, ‘…And David became certain that We had tried him, and he asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allah]…' (*Sad:* 24).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us here that 'Musa (Moses) fell unconscious', and the Arabic word *sa`iqa* (unconscious) can also mean 'death', but here it means that he fainted and remained unconscious for a long time. As for the use of this word to mean 'death', the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that whoever is on the earth will fall dead except whom Allah wills. Then it will be blown again, and at once they will be standing, looking on, (*az-Zumar:* 68). So, the first blast of the trumpet will cause everyone to fall and die, and then the second blast will prompt the dead people to their Resurrection. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…And when he awoke he said, "Exalted are You! I have repented to you…"' (*al-A'raf:* 143); this indicates that the unconsciousness here was not that of death. And then Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* awoke from unconsciousness and realised that it had been inappropriate of him to ask to see Allah directly; as we say, 'So-and-so came to his senses'. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* awoke from two things: he woke from the unconsciousness which overcame him when he fell unconscious, and it is as though he asked himself, 'Why did I fall unconscious'? He fell unconscious because he asked his Lord about something of which he had no knowledge. '…when he awoke, he said, "Exalted are You!" (*al-A'raf:* 143) When you hear the words 'Exalted are You', you should know that it is meant to proclaim how Allah is far above the event which we are concerned with here – the possibility of His being beheld. That is, 'Far be it for You, O Lord, to be beheld by Your creatures', for to 'behold' means to have enough power of sight to see the thing beheld. To see something means that the human eye is powerful enough to behold it; and if we created beings could see Allah by means of reflected light, this would mean that our eyes were strong enough for our Lord – and this could never be, because the subject of power cannot become its object, and the object of power cannot become its subject.

'And when he awoke, he said, "Exalted are You! I have repented to You, and I am the first of the believers."' (*al-A'raf:* 143). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* repented having asked Allah that of which he had no knowledge; he did not stop at the Divine manifestations which break the natural laws of the universe and because his Lord has given to him without his asking. Allah spoke directly to him, so why did he take things further and ask to behold Him? Why did he not leave things up to the graces which Allah gave him, enjoying the blessing of pure grace instead of actively seeking them?

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* proclaimed, ‘I am the first of the believers.’ That is, to believe that His Essence cannot be seen or perceived by any created being. Musa (Moses) felt grave disappointment because he had aspired to that which was beyond his capability, and said, ‘Exalted are You! I have repented to You, and I am the first of the believers.’, as though he understood what the True Lord was clarifying to him, ‘Do not look at what I have denied you, but look at what I have given you’.

قَالَ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِنِّي ٱصۡطَفَيۡتُكَ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ بِرِسَٰلَٰتِي
وَبِكَلَٰمِي فَخُذۡ مَآ ءَاتَيۡتُكَ وَكُن مِّنَ ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

He said, ‘Moses, I have raised you above other people by [giving you] My messages and speaking to you: hold on to what I have given you; be one of those who give thanks’ [144]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 144)

‘Chosen’ means to single out the elite. His statement, ‘I have chosen you over the people’ is precisely expressed. Had He only said, ‘I have chosen you’ without the addition of ‘over the people,’ it would be understood that he was raised above the angels, too; but the selection here was confined to the human realm. Someone might say, ‘The True Lord raised other messengers besides him, as well’; for the True Lord says, ‘Indeed, Allah chose Adam, and Noah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 33).

There is a difference between Allah’s choice of someone for a message only, and raising him for a message and something else besides it. Let us give an example to illustrate this – and Allah is beyond compare: If a teacher gives one of his students a pen as a prize, and then gives another student a pen and an ink bottle, by doing this he singled out the first pupil by the gift of the pen, and singled out the other by the combination of the pen and the ink bottle in a single gift. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was chosen by the message, just as Allah *Glorified is He* raised other messengers, and then also by the added honour of the Divine speech.

We said before that 'messages', when taken together, constituted a single message; but the message of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* continued to be revealed in piecemeal for twenty-three years, as though every separate revelation was a message in itself. Or, every kind of goodness is a message thereby comprising several messages. Or, his message encompassed the messages of those who came before him.

'Allah said, "O Musa (Moses), I have chosen you over the people with My messages and My words [to you]. So, take what I have given you and be among the grateful."' (*al-A'raf:* 144). That is, 'Do not look to what I have denied you, but remember that I have raised you and spoken to you; and you must thank Me for this'. That is why when the believer encounters that which Allah has destined for him, he must always consider the blessings which remain for him, not those which may have been taken from him. That is why we find that the optimistic believer looks at the glass which is half filled with water and says, 'Praised is Allah, the glass is half-full', whilst the pessimist says, 'The glass is half-empty'. Even though they are both speaking the truth, the optimistic believer considers the blessings of Allah which remain.

When Ibn Ja`far went to the Umayyad Caliph in Damascus, he injured his leg whilst travelling from Medina to Damascus, and he had no recourse to medical attention so the wound turned gangrenous. When they finally brought him doctors and they announced that his leg would have to be amputated, one of those present said, 'Get him an anaesthetic'. But he said, 'No, I do not want to be absent from my Lord for a single moment'. And when they amputated it and took it away to be buried, he said, 'Bring it forth!' They brought it to him, and he took hold of it and said, 'O Allah, although you took one part of my body, you gave health to the rest!' This is the outlook of the believer, who does not consider what has been taken from him, but rather what remains for him. Such was the direction of the True Lord to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* explaining to him, 'Do not consider that I denied you the vision of Me, but rather consider how you were raised and given the honour of being spoken to by the Creator, and be grateful for this'.

The True Lord then says:

وَكَتَبْنَا لَهُۥ فِى ٱلْأَلْوَاحِ مِن كُلِّ شَىْءٍ مَّوْعِظَةً وَتَفْصِيلًا لِّكُلِّ شَىْءٍ
فَخُذْهَا بِقُوَّةٍ وَأْمُرْ قَوْمَكَ يَأْخُذُوا۟ بِأَحْسَنِهَا ۚ سَأُو۟رِيكُمْ دَارَ ٱلْفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

We inscribed everything for him in the Tablets which taught and explained everything, saying, 'Hold on to them firmly and urge your people to hold fast to their excellent teachings. I will show you the end of those who rebel [145] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 145)

'Wrote' literally means to write with a pen on a writing surface such as paper, leather, bone or the like. When our Lord says, 'And We wrote', Allah did not actually write it down Himself, but rather, His angelic envoys wrote it in obedience to the True Lord's Commandment. He says, 'Indeed, it is We who bring the dead to life and record what they have put forth and what they left behind.' (*Ya Sin:* 12).

The angelic envoys write down our actions by Allah's command. Sometimes, the commandment is ascribed to the one who issues it, whilst other times it is ascribed to the one who carries it out or acts as the intermediary.

'On the tablets': There is a reason for writing on tablets. In the past, they used to write on anything flat, and there are artefacts which show us that books used to be written on animal hides. For example, the ancient Egyptians used to write on stone, such as the Rosetta Stone which decoded for us the secrets of their history. Arabs used to write on the bark of date-palm trees, the bones of slaughtered animals, from which they would take the flat bones such as the shoulder blade and write on them; and this was the most prevalent means of writing they used so that everything they wrote became known as *tablet*. "And We wrote for him on the tablets [something] of all things."

His word 'all things' refers to everything required by man being a vicegerent upon Earth at the appropriate time. The messengers shared one doctrine, but there might have been certain legislations which were appropriate for the time in which a messenger came, but then Allah, *Exalted is he*, added something else to the messenger who came next, until Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with the completed teachings which would last until the end of time.

He clarified that He ordained, in the tablets admonition and clear guidance for the way of life. 'Admonition' means that you do not give the one you address a new instruction, but rather, you advise him to put into practice that which he already knows what he needs do. That is why a preacher is called an 'admonisher' because he does not establish anything new, but presupposes that the one whom he addresses already knows the foundational teachings of the religion, so he advises him to put what he knows into practice.

The True Lord's saying, 'And explanation for all things - saying, "Take them with determination…"' means that His revelations did not come all at once, but rather, they were spelled out gradually in detail. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to hold fast onto the admonition and clear details of the tablets with all his strength. Why? Because when a man is given a commandment, it might contradict that which he has grown accustomed to; and when he is given a prohibition, this prohibition might contradict that which he has grown accustomed to. In this way, the commandment or prohibition seeks to wrest the man from that which he has grown accustomed.

When a man is in this situation, his soul must be strong enough to overcome the desires rooted in him by habit. Because of this, the one who wishes to accept the way of Allah *the Exalted* must be aware that this way will take him away from those things to which he is accustomed, and therefore he must accept the teachings with strength and resolution so that he can combat the habits of the soul; for they say to him, 'Do not do that'. The believer, therefore, must hold fast to his responsibilities with all his strength; for the passions of the soul bring only the passing pleasure of this worldly life, whilst the way of Allah brings long-lasting enjoyment.

Passions might give man pleasure according to his power and his preparations, but moral responsibilities accrue for the believer a benefit which is commensurate with Allah's Omnipotent power to give benefit. So, you must charge your soul with the teachings of the way which Allah shows you; and when you see the way of Allah requires you to make some effort, do not complain; for you are not alone, others are following it alongside you. If it commands not to steal, do not claim that it is restricting your freedom because it protects you from being wronged by others, who, in return, are commanded not to steal, and therefore you are the one who benefits most. The True Lord continues to tell us what the tablets contained by saying, ‘and order your people to take the best of it.’ This implies that there is a level below this which is a ‘lesser best’; the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded them to leave the lesser best and take the best. We know that man is subject to vicissitudes, and that if something bad afflicts him because of someone else, he considers that person to be his adversary. And if a person has an adversary, the inclinations of his soul are inspired to repay this adversary the hurt which he inflicted upon him. Allah has made this lawful through the channel of legal retribution, but He asks the believer to forgive, if he can. So long as punishments of retribution or otherwise have been legislated by Allah *the Exalted* according to equal retaliation, this is the level of ‘lesser best’; but if you ignore the inclinations of your soul and forgive, this is the level of ‘the best’. This hierarchy exists because the True Lord *the Exalted* created in man, emotions and instincts, which play a part in man’s life. A man cannot control his emotions, which is why Allah does not place restrictions on emotions, but rather on instincts. How is this?

We know that the love for food is an instinct, but love for food must not reach the level of greed. The preservation of the species is also an instinct, or the sexual pleasure which the True Lord *Glorified is He* placed in man for the sake of the preservation of the species; but it should not reach the level of deviation and the violation of people’s honour and dignity. Curiosity is also an instinct, and the works of those who made scientific discoveries stemmed from their curiosity about the secrets of existence; yet, it is not right that curiosity should reach the level of devious spying.

Man has certain instincts which the Sacred Law curbs. As for love, it is an emotional matter. The Lawgiver says to you, ‘Love whom you will, and hate whom you will, but do not wrong those whom you hate, and do not wrong people for the sake of those whom you love’.

We have a fine example in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said, ‘None of you believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self, his children, parents and all other people.’(1)

‘How?’ said `Umar *Allah be pleased with him*. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated what he said. Out of natural disposition,

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, An-Nisa`i and Ibn Majah*

`Umar realised that this was a commandment of moral responsibility, and he realised that the love meant here is rational love. The believer therefore says to himself, 'Who would I be, were it not for the Prophet Muhammad'? Every believer loves the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a rational way, and this might ascend until it becomes an emotional love. As we said before, one of us might love his medicine with his reason, but not his emotion, since it is bitter. He would be angry if the pharmacy is out of stock, but would be happy if it is not.

So, moral responsibility requires rational love. One of the stories of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah *be pleased with him* is that when the one who killed his brother Zayd ibn Al-Khattab walked past him, `Umar said to him, 'Take yourself from my sight, for I love you not.' So the man replied, with the boldness of faith, 'Does your lack of love for me mean that any of my rights will be denied?' `Umar said, 'No.' The man replied, 'Only women weep for lost love!'

Another example is, when a person is murdered, their near kinsman has the right to demand retribution; but the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make the heart of the kinsman feel compassion for the murderer, so He says, 'But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up.' (*al-Baqara:* 178)

When the True Lord *the Exalted* calls the murderer 'brother', he calms the current of emotions and stills the urge for revenge. He also says, 'And whoever is patient and forgives - indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*ash-Shura:* 43).

As Allah stated, tolerance requires 'determination' because it warrants patience and forgiveness. So long as the believer is able to have patience and forgive his adversary, will he not also be patient when a misfortune befalls him without the involvement of any adversary, such as an illness or the loss of a loved one? Who is your adversary in illness? And with whom will you be angry, and at whom will you rage and where will your reaction be directed? For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Bear in patience whatever [ill] may befall you' with no adversary involved. And He affirms to you, 'that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*Luqman:* 17) We can observe here that the context is different, as opposed to the abovementioned instance; this is because in the first instance, you have an adversary who evokes your rage whenever you see them. In this instance, the True Lord says to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'and order your people to take the best of it.' (*al-A'raf:* 145)

This means, if they have a way and a means of doing something with a better alternative, then bid them to choose that which is better. Why? Because when a man disciplines himself, making himself accustomed to that which is best, he has understood what Allah *Glorified is He* wants of him. Let us suppose that someone treats you badly and you have an opportunity to treat them badly in return. You must be careful to ensure that your retaliation to their mistreatment is exactly equivalent to it, as the True Lord says, 'And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed.' (*an-Nahl:* 126)

But who amongst us can weigh matters of the soul with such precision that they can determine the exact equivalent, by use of their desire? If someone has struck you and you want to strike him in return, how can you measure the pain which his blow caused you? You cannot possibly measure this pain because it is relative according to strength. So why cause yourself to enter such a maze, and why not simply forgive and end the matter?

When the True Lord indicates to you that to forgive is best, He wants to curb the malice of souls and the rancour of hearts. When a man kills someone, there will be retaliation and blood; but if the kinsman of the victim pardons him, the life of the pardoned man will be a gift to him from the kinsman of his victim; and after that, the murderer will be ashamed to do as much as raising a hand to this kinsman or to any of his relatives, and this will bring an end to any grudge or lust for revenge. That is why we find that in those places where cycles of revenge take place and revenge is a widespread thing – such as Upper Egypt – we find that when the murderer takes his burial shroud in his hand and presents himself to his victim's kinsman and says, 'I have come to you', the kinsman pardons him, and the whole family understands that the life which was demanded for revenge has become a gift from the victim's kinsman, and the cycle of revenge comes to an end. That is why the True Lord commanded them to hold fast to what is best, '…and order your people to take the best of it.' Another example of holding fast to what is best is we might find a debtor who is unable to repay his debt. The True Lord says regarding this type, 'grant him a delay until a time of ease.' (*al-Baqara:* 280)

The man took the loan because he was needy. It is obvious people only resort to debt when they have a need to fulfil, as opposed to begging, for which there may be a need or may not. That is why we find that the reward for loaning is greater than the reward for giving charity because the one who asks for a loan only does so out of need. Unlike charity where the giver has given up any attachment for that which he gave out. On the contrary, the soul of the lender is still attached to the money. So, every time the lender has patience despite his soul's attachment to the money, he is rewarded for this. That is why the reward for loaning is more than that of charity.

Once again, there is the best of something, and there is the lesser best. It is lesser of you to claim your lawful rights, but it is the best for you to relinquish them; and those who relinquish them are the ones who have understood best what Allah *Glorified is He* wants of them. We have a fine example in Hasan Al-Bassri, who was good to those who treated him ill, made this his motto, 'Shall we not be good to those who have placed Allah on our side?' I always like to give the following example – and Allah is beyond compare: Suppose that a man has children, and one of them treats the other badly. We find that the father's heart will be on the side of the one who has been ill-treated. It is the same regarding the creation of Allah. If one of Allah's creations mistreats another, we find that the Lord is on the side of the one who was mistreated, and the one who was mistreated should therefore say, 'This man who mistreated me has placed our Lord on my side, so it is fitting that I treat him well in return'. That is why the True Lord says, 'Who listen to speech and follow the best of it.' (*az-Zumar:* 18) And in another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And follow the best of what was revealed to you from your Lord.' (*az-Zumar:* 55)

The True Lord ends the verse which we are currently examining by saying, 'I will show you the home of the defiantly disobedient.' The abode of the disobedient is hell, so it is as though the True Lord were saying, 'I will show you Hell'. We know that every man will pass by it and see it, but the believers will only pass over it and traverse it to enter paradise. Someone might say, 'Why is the path to Hell mentioned here'? I say it is mentioned here to strike fear into the soul, and make it steer clear of everything which leads to hell. This statement was also addressed to the children of Israel, whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* had succoured against Pharaoh's people, from whom they took treasures and a noble position. It is as though the True Lord were saying to them, 'If you would like your end to be the same as that of Pharaoh's people, then do as they did; and if you would not like this end, then hold fast to the way of the True Lord'. So, the True Lord's words *the Exalted* were meant to prompt them to adhere to the admonition of the tablets, and to hold fast to it with all their strength, and to follow the best laws which Allah sent down to them. Or, 'home of the defiantly disobedient.' This refers to the towns which were destroyed and ruined because of its inhabitants' rebellion, disbelief and disobedience and their iniquity, so that you will take admonition from them and keep from falling into the same iniquity they did lest Allah *the Exalted* do with you as He did with them; for you pass by their dwellings on your travels and journeys.

The True Lord then says:

سَأَصۡرِفُ عَنۡ ءَايَٰتِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَكَبَّرُونَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ بِغَيۡرِ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَإِن يَرَوۡاْ كُلَّ
ءَايَةٖ لَّا يُؤۡمِنُواْ بِهَا وَإِن يَرَوۡاْ سَبِيلَ ٱلرُّشۡدِ لَا يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلٗا وَإِن يَرَوۡاْ
سَبِيلَ ٱلۡغَيِّ يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلٗاۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَكَانُواْ عَنۡهَا غَٰفِلِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

I will keep distracted from My signs those who behave arrogantly on Earth without any right, and who, even if they see every sign, will not believe in them; they will not take the way of right guidance if they see it, but will take the way of error if they see that. This is because they denied Our signs and paid them no heed [146] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 146)

The word 'signs' means an amazing thing, and has three usages. It either means the wondrous signs of the cosmos such as His words, 'Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding.' (*Al-'Imran:* 190) Or, it means the signs which prove the veracity of the messenger in all he brings from Allah; or finally it refers to the verses of the Quran bearing Allah's rulings.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He will cause all those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on earth to turn away from looking with a contemplative eye at the signs of the cosmos. Or it means that He will nullify the plans of all those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on earth to seek out the truth to destroy it; for when one of such people sees one of Allah's signs, he will deem it to be sorcery or witchcraft, or he will say that it is merely one of the tales of the ancients.

Turning away would be by means of unleashing upon him such arrogance that he is unable to judge these signs properly. The haughty person is the one who thinks that others are lower and lesser than him. The cause of haughtiness might be strength; but has this haughty person never seen a strong person become weak? Or the cause of haughtiness might be wealth; but has the haughty person never seen a wealthy person become poor? Or the haughty person might enjoy a position of eminence; but has he never seen an eminent person become lowly?

So, if anyone wishes to be haughty, he should be haughty about something which is intrinsically his and can never be taken from him. If you apply this to mankind, you will never find anyone who has the right to be haughty because mankind has no quality which is intrinsic; they are all given and subjected to be taken away. They are all from Allah, and they are not intrinsically man's; for if strength is intrinsically yours, then preserve it-but you cannot. And if wealth is intrinsically yours, then preserve your wealth forever-but of course, you cannot. And if might is intrinsically yours, then preserve your might forever-but of course, you cannot. The causes of man's arrogance, therefore, are not intrinsically his.

His words 'who are arrogant upon the earth without right' indicate that there is such a thing as rightful pride, which belongs to the one who intrinsically possesses all the elements of strength, wealth, eminence and might, which is why pride is the right of Allah Alone. Be aware that it is true of every arrogant person on earth that Allah never crosses his mind; for if Allah *Glorified is He* with His Perfection and Majesty, were to cross his mind, he would diminish in his own sight. Allah only enters the minds of those people who are humble, which is why we like to give the following example; we find around us the bosses at the top of the chain, and those who are superior to some and subordinate to others, and those who are only subordinates. The one who is both superior and subordinate cannot sit with his subordinates and behave haughtily, putting his feet up and issuing orders because he might look around and find that his own superior has come to see him; and if he were to behave in such a way, his subordinates would laugh at him. Likewise, we find that those people who do not keep Allah in mind are objects of scorn, whilst those who keep Allah – He to whom belongs pride in Heaven and Earth – in mind are never haughty.

He turns the haughty away from looking at the signs of the cosmos, so they do not reflect on them; and He turns them away from believing in the signs which prove the prophethood of the prophets. And He turns them away from the ability to believe in the rulings of the Quran, and sets a seal on their hearts so that the disbelief which these hearts contain cannot exit, and the faith which is outside these hearts cannot enter. Despite their motions in life, the True Lord prevents them from being able to see His signs in the cosmos. '…and if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it. And if they see the way of righteousness, they will not adopt it as a way, but if they see the way of error, they will adopt it as a way.'

When the people of haughtiness see cosmological signs, miraculous signs or the verses of the Quran, they do not believe in them, and when they see the path of righteousness, they do not choose to follow it. This is because the path of righteousness restricts the passions and desires of the soul, forbidding sins and they are unable to bridle their passions because they have been overwhelmed by them. But the path of error gives free rein to the passions of the soul, and this can only occur if one is heedless of the inspirations of faith which forbid one from doing something to acquire something more valuable. In this way, the viewpoint of the people of arrogance is superficial.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the haughty people who follow the way of error, 'That is because they have denied Our signs and they were heedless of them.' We said before, that heedlessness is not usually something which would be requited, since the heedless person only forgets, but these people turned away from the truth deliberately and lucidly to the extent that they do not pay the slightest attention to faith.

The True Lord then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَلِقَآءِ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ حَبِطَتۡ
أَعۡمَٰلُهُمۡۚ هَلۡ يُجۡزَوۡنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

the deeds of those who denied Our signs and the Meeting of the Hereafter will come to nothing – why should they be repaid for anything other than what they have done?' [147] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 147)

The words signs or messages have been used here more than once which means that the entire issue here is centred on the signs of the universe which point to the One who created them, and the miraculous signs which point to the truth of the messengers whom He has sent and the verses of the Quran which impart the way of Allah *the Exalted* for the maintenance of the balance and soundness of man's actions in life.

'Their deeds have become worthless.' On the surface, it seems that they have done good deeds, but their deeds are vain and corrupt. There are people who do good deeds which benefit society, however, their intention is not to please Allah, but to seek fame so that their names become well-known and people would praise them; or they seek eminence, social position and influence. That is why when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, 'Who is the martyr'? He replied, 'The one who fights in order that Allah's Word be ascendant, and thus follows Allah's cause.'(1) A man might fight out of lust for battle, or in order that he gains a reputation of being brave. There are those who do good deeds so that they take pride in them. For example, it is said, 'The disbelievers are the ones who discovered the microbe, and flew into space'! We say to this: Indeed, yes, they were well appreciated by the people because the people were on their minds; yet they are not appreciated by Allah because Allah was not on their minds when they acted. A man takes his reward from the one for whom he works; Allah *Glorified is He* does not squander the reward of their good deeds, but rather, He gives them their reward in this world; yet, the harvest of the Hereafter is not for them, ‘Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter - We increase for him in his harvest. And whoever desires the harvest of this world - We give him thereof.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20)

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(1) *Related by Ahmad, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nisa`i, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

The one who chooses his seeds well, sows them, chooses the soil well and waters it regularly, they will yield fruitful crops because he utilised the means well. This is called the ‘bestowal of Lordship’, a general bestowal for everyone whom Allah created, whether believer or disbeliever, obedient or sinful. But the bestowal of Divinity is only for those who follow Allah’s way, and this is reserved exclusively for the believers. If they utilise the means of life well and according to natural laws, they will take their share of them, and the disbelievers will also take their share if they utilise the means well, after which their reward making their names immortal, the statues will be built for them and they will be given prizes, awards and honorary parties. As for the reward of the Hereafter, it will be given to those who worked for the sake of the Lord of the worlds *the Exalted*. As for those who did not work to prepare for the meeting with Allah, He says regarding them, ‘And We will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed.’ (*al-Furqan:* 23)

And He says, ‘But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water.’ (*an-Nur:* 39) The disbeliever is like a thirsty man travelling in the desert who imagines that there is water in front of him, and walks but finds no water. When the thirsty man sees the mirage, he feels hope that water is coming soon, and that he will get it: ‘But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing.’

What is important is not whether he finds anything, but rather, he is surprised when ‘but finds Allah before Him.’ He is shocked to find that Allah *Glorified is He* in whom he did not believe before him on the Day of Resurrection, whereupon He will give him his reckoning and requite him for his evil deeds. So, if a man does a deed, let him wait for the reward from whoever it was he did the deed for; and if he does a deed without having Allah on his mind, he must not expect any reward from Him. Despite this, Allah indeed does give such people reward according to the natural laws of life because those who do a deed well are rewarded for it.

‘Those who denied Our signs and the meeting of the Hereafter - their deeds have become worthless. Are they recompensed except for what they used to do?’ (*al-A’raf:* 147) So, they denied Allah’s messages, the Last Day and did not act in accordance with the way of faith. Therefore, they shall be requited and punished by the True Lord who sent down this way which they turned away from and denied.

Therefore, He says, ‘Say, [O Muhammad], “Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? They are those whose effort is lost in the worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

The True Lord then says:

وَٱتَّخَذَ قَوۡمُ مُوسَىٰ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦ مِنۡ حُلِيِّهِمۡ عِجۡلٗا جَسَدٗا لَّهُۥ خُوَارٌۚ أَلَمۡ يَرَوۡاْ
أَنَّهُۥ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمۡ وَلَا يَهۡدِيهِمۡ سَبِيلًاۘ ٱتَّخَذُوهُ وَكَانُواْ ظَٰلِمِينَ ١٤٨

In his absence, Moses’ people took to worshipping a mere shape that made sounds like a cow – a calf made from their jewellery. Could they not see that it did not speak to them or guide them in any way? Yet they took it for worship: they were evildoers [148] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 148)

His words ‘after his departure’ refer to when after he went to meet his Lord having said to Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* ‘Take my place among my people.’ After this, the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* made from their jewellery an effigy of a calf which made a lowing sound. You know that jewellery is the trinkets used for decoration made of gold, gems and other valuable things; and the most valuable among all jewellery is gold. We know that a skilled goldsmith can shape gold however he wishes, and if it breaks, it is easy to repair, and it is also slow to break. That is why it is said, ‘A good man is like gold: slow to break, easy to repair’.

When you hear the word ‘ornaments’, this may include diamonds, emeralds and pearls, but gold is the most valuable among all these ornaments. We know that however much the world advances, there will be no reserves for its currency except gold. That is why He did not say here pearls, or gems or diamonds; for when the word ‘ornaments’ is used by itself, it means gold.

It was from this ornament that the Samaritan, made the effigy of the calf. He used gold ornaments, since diamonds and gems cannot be melted. But from where did Musa's (Moses's) people acquire these ornaments, given they were oppressed and lowly? They deceived the Egyptians and took their ornaments as though it were a loan which they would repay later, but then they set out on their exodus and took the ornaments with them!

Pharaoh's people were then drowned, but the ornaments remained. The Samaritan, made the calf of the gold that remained. A calf is a young male cow; and when you hear Him say 'image of a calf', this means that it was three-dimensional, having a clear bodily form. The exegetes have understood, from the word 'image', that the calf was only a body with no spirit.

The True Lord's words 'an image having a lowing sound' indicates that the effigy of the calf was lifeless because if it had been a body which contained a spirit, He would not have needed to say, 'an image having a lowing sound', and it would have been enough for Him to say that it was a calf. His words 'having a lowing sound' indicate that the calf had a body, but did not mean it had life. He described it by saying, 'having a lowing sound' meaning the sound which cows make. He made it from gold, as though he wanted to make it distinct from the deities which were made of stone. He tried to make it a valuable deity by making it from gold which – as we know – was stolen. He made the calf in such a way that when wind blew into the back of it, a sound would be produced in its hollow inside that sounded like the lowing sound which usually comes from a cow's mouth. We see this same principle with the flute, a tube made of reed with holes bored into it which the player then blows into to produce the tune he wants to play.

When the Samaritan, made the calf with this device, a sound came from it like the lowing of a cow. The story of the calf is told in detail in the chapter of *Ta Ha*, and we will cover it when we come to examine that chapter, Allah willing.

'…a calf - an image having a lowing sound. Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to a way? They took it [for worship], and they were wrongdoers.' Why did the Samaritan choose to make a calf? It was because when they came out of Egypt, and then saw the ancient Egyptians worshipping the calf because of a quality which it possessed, they saw in it a manifestation of power. Just as others would worship the sun when they saw it as a manifestation of power; and likewise, there were those who worshipped the moon, and the stars. The ancient Egyptians worshipped the calf because the yearly flooding of the Nile would saturate the land with water, and they would use calves when they wanted to plough the land. They were strong and powerful at ploughing the land, and this was a manifestation of power. But how could the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in his absence, have taken a calf to worship besides Allah *the Exalted* after He had bestowed them such a great blessing by saving them and drowning Pharaoh and his people? Allah clarifies for us that the Children of Israel crossed the sea and passed by people who worshipped idols, so they said to Musa (Moses), 'Set up for us a deity as they have deities!'

The True Lord says, 'Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to a way?' This principle refutes the worship of anything but Allah. The worshipper must receive commandments from that which he worships; and that which he worships must have a way which he wants his worshipper to follow. The way must be conveyed by messengers who deliver Allah's messages and His speech unto mankind. As for those who worship the sun, for example, we say to them why do you worship it? What is the way of guidance which the sun has sent to you? Worship means to obey the commands and refrain from the prohibitions. So, has the sun ever given commands or prohibitions? No, because there is no speaking intermediary which conveys the way of guidance unto you. How, then, could anything be worshipped without its giving a way of guidance to its worshippers? Did the sun say, 'For those who worship me, I shall rise upon them and give them light and heat; while for those who do not worship me, I shall give them none of this'? Of course, it did not. It gives to both those who believe in it and those who do not, and it has not sent any information to us about the Hereafter and the Resurrection. In this manner, before our eyes the worship of everything besides Allah is shown to be false, since worship requires commandments and prohibitions in the form of 'Do' and 'Do not'; and none of these worshipped beings ever told us in what way we should obey them or disobey them. The essential characteristic of the worshipped being is that it guides its worshippers to the path which leads to goodness in this life and the next. Therefore, the True Lord says, 'Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to a way?' They were evildoers because they devoted the right of worship of something undeserving of it. The True Lord deserves His rights more than any other, which is why He said about the practice of associating partners with Him, 'Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice.' (*Luqman:* 13)

The True Lord then says:

وَلَمَّا سُقِطَ فِىٓ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَرَأَوْا۟ أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ ضَلُّوا۟ قَالُوا۟ لَئِن لَّمْ
يَرْحَمْنَا رَبُّنَا وَيَغْفِرْ لَنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

When, with much wringing of hands, they perceived that they were doing wrong, they said, 'If our Lord does not have mercy and forgive us, we shall be the losers' [149]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 149)

This indicates that the worship of the calf became prevalent amongst the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* but those who possessed some insight or a remainder of faith said, 'This is a terrible state of affairs, and we should have never done it'. They regretted what had occurred. The phrase 'And when regret overcame them…' indicates a natural state in which no one nation differs from any other, but rather is shared by all races and all languages. It indicates that when a person does something and it turns out badly for him, he bites his fingernails in regret and sorrow. This is one of the natural gestures which still remain with us from those natural forms of communication which are common to all races. A man bites his nails because he has done something which he should not have done; and if the wrong is grave, he does not stop at his fingernails, but rather, he takes hold of his whole hand and bites it. The True Lord says, 'And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands [in regret].' (*al-Furqan:* 27) 'And when regret overcame them" means they were extremely regretful so much that their teeth would bite their hands, as though their remorse was especially severe. This happened in the case of those people who opened their eyes and saw that what they had done was falsehood and folly. They said, 'If Allah does not grant us His Mercy and His Forgiveness, we will be destroyed'! This was an acknowledgement from them of their sins, and a repentant return to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord then says:

وَلَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوسَىٰٓ إِلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِۦ غَضۡبَٰنَ أَسِفٗا قَالَ بِئۡسَمَا خَلَفۡتُمُونِي مِنۢ بَعۡدِيٓۖ أَعَجِلۡتُمۡ أَمۡرَ رَبِّكُمۡۖ
وَأَلۡقَى ٱلۡأَلۡوَاحَ وَأَخَذَ بِرَأۡسِ أَخِيهِ يَجُرُّهُۥٓ إِلَيۡهِۚ قَالَ ٱبۡنَ أُمَّ إِنَّ ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱسۡتَضۡعَفُونِي وَكَادُواْ
يَقۡتُلُونَنِي فَلَا تُشۡمِتۡ بِيَ ٱلۡأَعۡدَآءَ وَلَا تَجۡعَلۡنِي مَعَ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

On his return to his people, angry and aggrieved, Moses said, 'How foul and evil is what you have done in my absence! Were you so keen to bring your Lord's judgement forward?' He threw the tablets down and seized his brother by the hair, pulling him towards him. Aaron said, 'Son of my mother, these people over- powered me! They almost killed me! Do not give my enemies reason to rejoice! Do not include me with these evildoers!' [150] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 150)

The fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* returned to his people full of wrath and sorrow shows us that he was already informed about the matter of the calf. Wrath and sorrow are feelings involving sadness. These feelings could also be called 'emotional responses'. Thus, we find that there is a difference between someone who feels sorrow but suppresses it and someone who displays anger. The latter's veins swell up and his face reddens, his rage deepens, his eyes light up with evil and his hands lash out rashly; and we call such a person 'wrathful'. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came to be in both states simultaneously; and he gave precedence to his wrath because he was a messenger who came to deliver a way of guidance. In such a situation, sorrow was not enough, but rather, there had to be wrath which transformed into action.

We said before that every emotional process has three stages. First, there is the stage of perception, then the stage of sentiment then the stage of the bodily reaction. We illustrated this with the example of a rose. When one sees a rose, this is perception; when he enjoys it, feels peace and contentment from it, this is sentiment; but if he stretches out his hand to pick it, this is a bodily reaction. The Sacred Law did not ordain laws for perception or sentiment; rather, it ordained laws for action except in the case of the obligation of lowering one's gaze from those things which Allah has forbidden, as a way of protecting people's honour.

The sorrow Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* felt was not displayed to those who had contravened Allah’s way, but rather, his wrath was displayed; and this was an emotional reaction. Even Allah’s description of how Musa (Moses) felt expresses that sorrow was very deep and overwhelming.

‘Were you impatient over the matter of your Lord?’ This means, ‘Do you think I have been slow in coming’? This was because Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went for thirty nights and then ten more were added. So, Musa (Moses) asked them, ‘Did you think that I would not come? Or that I was slow in coming to you? Was your belief and your faith for my sake, or for the sake of *the Almighty* Allah’? Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* died, ‘He who worshipped Muhammad, Muhammad has died; and he who worshipped Allah, Allah is Living, and dies not.’

Here, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was saying, ‘Supposing that you sought to hasten the affair, and deemed that I was slow in coming, or feared that I had died: were you worshipping me, or worshipping your Lord’? ‘Were you impatient over the matter of your Lord? And he threw down the tablets…’ We know that the tablets bore Allah’s way of guidance. Musa (Moses) then, ‘seized his brother by [the hair of] his head, pulling him toward him.’ This wrathful reaction that made him seize his brother’s head was not abated by their brotherly connection, so what was his brother Harun’s (Aaron’s) *peace be upon him* response? ‘Harun (Aaron) said, “O son of my mother, indeed the people oppressed me and were about to kill me, so let not the enemies rejoice over me and do not place me among the wrongdoing people.’

Notice here that he did not say ‘son of my father’, but ‘son of my mother’. This is because the story of the father of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* is lost in the history of the prophets, and we have no information about him. We do have some knowledge about Musa’s (Moses’s) mother, however, because she was the one who underwent hardships for the sake of his life. For this reason, Harun (Aaron) made mention here of the prominent thing which was common to both their lives. The True Lord *Glorified is He* here mentioned the common element in the lives of both Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* as they shared the same mother, which was a vivid part of their history. As for the father, we know nothing about him. All the verses of the Quran concerning Musa (Moses) make reference to his mother. That is why we find that his brother Harun (Aaron) spoke to him is a way which would awaken his affection.

Since he said, 'and were about to kill me' this proves that he opposed and resisted them to the extent that they thought of killing him. The True Lord continues on the tongue of Harun (Aaron), 'so let not the enemies rejoice over me and do not place me among the wrongdoing people.'

In other words, it is to gloat when an adversary is afflicted by misfortune. The 'enemies' here were the people who had worshiped the calf. He called them 'enemies' to prove that he had stood up to them as though there was enmity between them, and that any conflict between Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* would only delight them.

Musa (Moses) did this to hear Harun's (Aaron's) excuse because he knew that Harun (Aaron) was a messenger just as he was. He wanted the whole world to hear the argument of his brother when he clarified that he had not been negligent. He said, 'The people brought me low, because I was alone, and they almost slew me' which shows that he opposed them with all the strength and effort he could muster, and hence they almost killed him. He did not agree with them in any way, but rather, he opposed them as much as he could. The True Lord *the Exalted* ends the verse by saying, 'and do not place me among the wrongdoing people.'

It is as though he were saying to Musa (Moses), 'If you blame me whilst you are full of wrath, it might be thought of me that I was with them, or that I also worshiped the calf'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to clarify for us what the positions of Musa (Moses) and his brother were. The position of Musa (Moses) became clear when he was wrathful with his brother, and the position of Harun (Aaron), was clearly shown to be such that the people brought him low and almost killed him, and nothing more than this could have been asked of him. When Harun (Aaron) said this, Musa (Moses) became aware of two things:

The first was how could he have thrown down the tablets, when they contained Allah's way of guidance? The second was how could he blame his brother in this way before first hearing the truth of the matter from him?

The True Lord tells us what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then said:

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱغۡفِرۡ لِى وَلِأَخِى وَأَدۡخِلۡنَا فِى رَحۡمَتِكَۖ وَأَنتَ أَرۡحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ١٥١

Moses said, ‘My Lord, forgive me and my brother;
accept us into Your mercy: You are the Most Merciful
of all who show mercy [151] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 151)

He asked his Lord to forgive him if he did anything which contradicted sound reason and truth. He also asked his Lord to forgive his brother Harun (Aaron) for what he did; for he should have fought those who worshipped the calf until he prevented them or they overcame him, if not by killing him, then at least by injuring him, or scratching him and so on.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sought the grace of mercy for himself and his brother, ‘…and admit us into Your mercy, for You are the most merciful of the merciful.’ When you hear the words ‘most merciful of the merciful’, or ‘the best of providers’, or ‘the best of inheritors’, or ‘the best of creators’, and every instance like this where a plurality is given to one of Allah’s attributes, He is thereby also calling upon mankind to adorn themselves with these attributes. So, you should know that Allah has not denied man the ability to take on these attributes because they have the ability to act in accordance with them, even if only in a limited way which is correspondent with their power and their status as created beings and servants of Allah – to say nothing of the fact that such attributes are a gift and a blessing from Him. As for Allah’s Attributes, they are unlimited and unending in their majesty, perfection and beauty; for, ‘There is nothing like unto Him.’ So, if Allah is ‘…the Most Merciful of the merciful.’ this means that He has not denied His creation the ability to show mercy to one another; so whoever shows mercy to his brother may be called ‘merciful’, but Allah is the Most Merciful of the merciful; for the mercy which one man shows another is merely curbing the anger which he feels against him. If you say, ‘I was merciful with so-and-so’, this means that you spared him your anger and your punishment; and whatever it is you could have inflicted upon him was only commensurate with your power. But when Allah *Glorified is He* wants to take someone to task for his sin, His power is unlimited; and likewise, His mercy is unlimited.

The True Lord then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُواْ ٱلْعِجْلَ سَيَنَالُهُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ
وَذِلَّةٌ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلْمُفْتَرِينَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

Those who took to worshipping the calf will be afflicted
by their Lord’s wrath, and by disgrace in this life.’
This is the way We repay those who invent such
falsehoods [152] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 152)

When it is said that they ‘took the calf for worship’ someone might ask, ‘Did they take the calf and slaughter it to eat it? Or did they use it to plough the land, or water the crops and turn the water wheels’? For calves are meant for these purposes; yet they did not take the calf for these purposes, but as a deity and an object of worship. As for taking it for those purposes for which Allah created it, this is blameless. This distinction is left unsaid for the intelligence of the listener to discern. If we take a calf for those purposes for which calves were created, Allah’s wrath will not be called upon us. The ones who incurred Allah’s wrath, they are those who took the calf for purposes other than those for which it was created. They took it as a deity, and therefore, ‘will obtain anger from their Lord and humiliation in the life of this world…’ The words ‘will overtake them’ (*al-A’raf:* 152) indicate that the time for this wrath and disgrace had not yet come, and would happen in the future – and the future with respect to this worldly life of is the Hereafter. Yet, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that the disgrace would occur in the life of this world. How could it be that wrath would overtake them, when they had repented? Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this for us elsewhere when He says, ‘…so, repent to your Maker and kill yourselves [the guilty among you]. That is the best you can do in the eyes of your Maker. Thereupon He accepted your repentance…’ (*al-Baqara:* 54). Since some of them had turned in repentance to their Maker and killed themselves, so why would this wrath overtake them? The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies that the wrath which overcame them caused what was said to them, ‘kill yourselves [the guilty among you].’ (*al-Baqara:* 54). Thus, we understand that His words ‘…will be overtaken by their Lord

Glorified is He's wrath…' (*al-A'raf:* 152) means before they repented. Killing one's self is the utmost degree of disgrace and humiliation.

'Those who took to worshipping the calf will be overtaken by their Lord's, wrath, and by disgrace in this life. This is the way We repay those who invent such falsehoods.' (*al-A'raf:* 152). This principle does not apply solely to them; for, everyone who invents falsehoods and thus goes beyond the boundaries of Allah's Law must surely be overtaken by this requital; for when our Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about what happened in their history, and when He relates these stories unto us, Allah *Glorified is He* intends that the listener takes admonition from the story and applies it to their own life; the listener will not apply the lessons of the story to their own self unless Allah *Glorified is He* says to them as a warning and a caution, 'This is the way We repay those who invent such falsehoods.' (*al-A'raf:* 152). That is, 'Beware of being like these people lest you be overtaken by that which overtook them'. Thereby, Allah *Glorified is He* cautions each one of us to benefit from this admonition and this story; for, history is told for taking admonition and learning a lesson, that the listener might pay heed.

The True Lord then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ عَمِلُواْ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ ثُمَّ تَابُواْ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهَا وَءَامَنُوٓاْ إِنَّ
رَبَّكَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهَا لَغَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿١٥٣﴾

But your Lord is most forgiving and most merciful towards those who do wrong, then repent afterwards and truly believe [153] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 153)

This is what happened after they worshipped the calf, and Allah *Glorified is He* said to them, 'kill yourselves as an act of repentance to your Maker', and they repented and returned to Allah *Glorified is He* and believed in what He had sent to them, and Allah *Glorified is He* forgave them. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us stories of the manifestations of His Apparent Omnipotence, He also does not want to leave us amidst this atmosphere of His Omnipotence; rather, He wants to admit us into the comfort of His Mercy, which is why He says, 'But those who commit misdeeds and repent afterwards and truly believe, indeed your Lord, thereafter, is most Forgiving and most Merciful.' (*al-A'raf:* 153)

The True Lord's words 'and repent afterwards' mean that they regret what they have done, and are resolved and determined not to do it again. We said previously that repentance has three aspects. First, there is the aspect of its legislation. Secondly, there is the action of the one who repents. Thirdly, there is Allah's acceptance of this repentance. The legality of repentance is an act of absolute mercy; and had our Lord *Glorified is He* not legislated repentance, all of mankind would have suffered, and all those who commit evil deeds would have multiplied their evil by continuing to do evil deeds. Our Lord's *Glorified is He* legislation of repentance and His call for His servants to cease committing evil is a mercy for sinners and for the society in which those sinners live. After the servant repents, the True Lord *Glorified is He* accepts this repentance, which is the height of bestowal and mercy from Him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But those who commit misdeeds then repent afterwards and truly believe…' (*al-A'raf:* 153). This statement indicates that bad deeds mar faith, so the Lord *Glorified is He* commands His servant to, 'Renew your faith, and recall your Lord consciously because doing wrong indicates that you have become heedless of the Him as well as His commandments and prohibitions. When you repent, you renew your faith and find that your Lord *Glorified is He* is forgiving and merciful'; '…indeed your Lord, thereafter, is most Forgiving and most Merciful.' (*al-A'raf:* 153)

The servant sins when he contravenes his Lord's way of guidance composed of 'Do' and 'Do not do'. If the servant seeks Allah's forgiveness and repents to Him, He accepts this repentance. The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies, 'If I am forgiving and merciful, then beware, My creatures, of reminding a sinner of his sin after he has repented, for, the Master has forgiven him'.' So, beware of saying to a former thief who has repented, 'O thief!', and beware of saying to adulterer who has repented, 'O adulterer!', and beware of saying to a briber who has repented, 'O briber'. So long as the sinner has renewed his faith and repented, and Allah *Glorified is He* has forgiven him, do not be so intrusive as to remind him of his sins anew.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَلَمَّا سَكَتَ عَن مُّوسَى ٱلۡغَضَبُ أَخَذَ ٱلۡأَلۡوَاحَۖ وَفِي
نُسۡخَتِهَا هُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٞ لِّلَّذِينَ هُمۡ لِرَبِّهِمۡ يَرۡهَبُونَ ١٥٤

When Moses' anger abated, he picked up the
Tablets, on which were inscribed guidance and
mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord [154]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 154)

Can wrath be stilled? Does wrath have feelings so that it might fall still? Yes, indeed; for wrath is the stirring up of the soul so that it reacts against the one who wronged it. It is as though wrath implores and entreats the wrathful: 'Strike! Abuse! Kill!' It is as though wrath takes on the form of a person who has the ability to give orders; so Allah *Glorified is He* likened Musa's (Moses's) wrath *peace be upon him* to a man who implored him to do such-and-such things, and when Allah *Glorified is He*, says, 'When Musa's (Moses's) anger stilled…' (*al-A'raf:* 154), it was as though the anger was silenced in him.

Otherwise, it is as our brethren from amongst the scholars call 'inversion', linguistically speaking, meaning that a phrase is turned around and the intelligence of the hearer is trusted to put things back in their places. For example, we might hear someone say in Arabic '*kharaq al-thawba al-mismaru*' (the nail tore the dress). *Kharaqa* (tore) is a verb. The object *thawba* (dress) came before the subject *al-mismaru* (nail). Yet, we understand that it was the nail which tore the dress because we cannot imagine that dress could tear a nail. This is called 'inversion', that is, the order of a sentence is inverted, yet, the intelligence of the hearer interprets it, ottherwise, it could be that the nail was stuck in its place and the cloth dragged along it and was torn, so that the cause of the tearing was the cloth, thus it is as though the cloth was the active participant in the event.

'When Musa's (Moses's) anger stilled…' (*al-A'raf:* 154). It could also be that the word 'stilled' is a way of saying that the wrath abated and ended. 'When Musa's (Moses's) anger stilled, he picked up the Tablets, on which were inscribed guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf:* 154) The first thing Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did when he was filled with sorrow and anger was to cast down the tablets, and as soon as the anger abated and left him, he picked up the tablets. This is logical, for anger made him throw the tablets down and seize his brother's head. Then, he understood what his brother had done, excused him and accepted his excuse. Then, he beseeched Allah *Glorified is He* to forgive him as well as his brother. As his anger abated, he picked the tablets which were cast on the ground.

'…on which were inscribed guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf:* 154) The Arabic word *nuskha* (inscription) literally means 'copy' which means to transfer something from one place to another, so it is said, 'I copied such-and-such book from such-and-such book', i.e. there was a manuscript and then it is transferred by print or by writing to a copy or several copies. An image of it is made from the original; this is called *mansukh* (copied). The word '*nuskha*' is in the morphological form *fu`la* which can have the same meaning as a passive participle. So, *nuskha* (a copy) means that it is *mansukha* (copied). This morphological form occurs many times in the Quran. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…Allah will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused]…' (*al-Baqara:* 249).

The word for 'handful' here is *ghurfa* which literally means the same as the passive participle *maghrufa* (scooped), meaning a small amount of water scooped up by the hand to merely take the edge off one's thirst. The word *ghurfa* also means 'room', as in the room of a house because it is a place which is cut off from the whole house with walls to bound it, i.e. it is a place of a size 'scooped' off the space. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…on which were inscribed guidance and mercy…' (*al-A'raf:* 154).

The meaning of 'guidance' is the Divine way - represented by 'Do' and 'Do not do'- that leads to the goal, which is the reward of the Hereafter. So, guidance and mercy are one single thing with two different aspects. Guidance is the way that, if followed, will lead you to grace. The True Lord *Glorified is He* therefore says, '…guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf:* 154)

Thus, we find that the way of Allah *Glorified is He* is that of guidance and mercy. He who hears Allah's words and follows them, will be guided and granted mercy by our Lord *Glorified is He* because he keeps Allah in his mind and fears the True Lord's attributes of Omnipotence. Therefore, it is essential for man, or a believer, to call to mind his awe before his Lord and his fear of Him *Glorified is He* so that the Lord's way can be guidance and mercy for him, and that he will be amongst those who stand in awe of their Lord *Glorified is He*.

In the Arabic context of this verse, the words 'of their Lord' come before 'stood in awe'. When the object of the verb is brought forward like this, we understand that this is an example of what is called, according to Arabic linguistics, *`ikhtisaṣ* (special emphasis) and *qasr* (exclusivity) such as is the case when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Fatiha,* 'It is You we worship.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5)

What is the difference between 'It is You we worship' and 'We worship you'? If we say, 'We worship you', this statement could be added to; as in 'We worship you and your associates besides you'. But when we say, 'It is You we worship', this means 'We have chosen you exclusively for our worship and no other besides you – Glory be to you! – and our worship is devoted to none other than you'.

So, when the object of the verb is brought forward, this imparts special emphasis. An example of this from our daily lives is when you say, 'I treated you generously', there is nothing to stop you from then saying, 'and I treated Zayd and 'Umar generously, too'. But if you say, 'It is you I treated generously', this means that I was generous to none but you. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…for those who stood in awe of their Lord.' (*al-A'raf:* 154)

Someone might say, 'Is it not possible for anyone to claim that they feel awe, and that they are following Allah's Commandments, simply out of ostentation or a desire to have people say of him, 'So-and-so is a good Muslim', and praise him? But here we find exclusivity; that the servant must stand in awe of none but Allah *Glorified is He* and that this awe is especially for Him alone, not out of ostentation, affectation or the seeking of praise.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then, says:

وَٱخۡتَارَ مُوسَىٰ قَوۡمَهُۥ سَبۡعِينَ رَجُلٗا لِّمِيقَٰتِنَاۖ فَلَمَّآ أَخَذَتۡهُمُ ٱلرَّجۡفَةُ قَالَ رَبِّ لَوۡ شِئۡتَ
أَهۡلَكۡتَهُم مِّن قَبۡلُ وَإِيَّٰيَۖ أَتُهۡلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ ٱلسُّفَهَآءُ مِنَّآۖ إِنۡ هِيَ إِلَّا فِتۡنَتُكَ تُضِلُّ بِهَا مَن
تَشَآءُ وَتَهۡدِي مَن تَشَآءُۖ أَنتَ وَلِيُّنَا فَٱغۡفِرۡ لَنَا وَٱرۡحَمۡنَاۖ وَأَنتَ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡغَٰفِرِينَ ١٥٥

Moses chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment, and when they were seized by trembling, he prayed, ‘My Lord, if You had chosen to do so, You could have destroyed them long before this, and me too, so will You now destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is only a trial from You – through it, You cause whoever You will to stray and guide whoever You will – and You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the best of those who forgive[155]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 155)

The word ‘chose’ indicates that in the choosing process the intelligence gives preference to doing something over not doing it, or over doing something else; otherwise it is not a choice because *ikhtara* (to choose) means to seek *khayr* (what is good), whilst you have the ability to take something else. This only applies to those matters of free choice included in legal obligations. For example, the tongue is subject to the will of its owner, and it yields to the believer when he says, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’, and yields to the atheist –who is cursed by Allah- when he says, ‘Allah does not exist’. The tongue does not disobey in the former case, or the latter. Giving preference is done by the believer when he gives preference to faith when he says, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’, and by the atheist when he gives preference to atheism as he says, ‘Allah does not exist’. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And Musa (Moses) chose from his people seventy men…’ (*al-A’raf:* 158).

Those who studied the language say that there is an action, and there is a doer of the action whom we call *fa`il* (the subject). For example, when we say, ‘Zayd wrote the lesson’, this means that Zayd is the one who performed the writing, whilst we call ‘the lesson’ which was written *maf’ul bihi* (the object of the verb). Sometimes, there is also what we call the *maf`ul le`ajlih* (the object of reason), such as when we say, ‘I stood up out of respect for my father’. The one who stood was the son, and respect was the reason why the action was undertaken, so we call it the ‘object of reason’. If we say, ‘I fasted the other day’, we call this *maf'ul fihi* (the object of time) meaning that the verb took place during this time. Sometimes, an action affects something directly so that it is its direct object, and sometimes it occurs because of something so that it is its ‘object of reason’, and sometimes it occurs on such-and-such day or at such-and-such time so that it is its object of time. And sometimes it could be the ‘object of accompaniment’, such as when we say in Arabic, ‘I walked with the Nile’ meaning that I walked by the Nile, and as I walked I always found the Nile next to me.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And Musa (Moses) chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment…’ (*al-A’raf:* 155). In the Arabic context, the verse says, ‘And Musa (Moses) chose his people seventy men…’. So, we understand that the seventy men are from his people. Thus, the actual object ‘seventy men’ is taken out of the ‘people’. ‘People’, here, is called ‘source of the object’ (*maf'ul minhu*), since Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not choose all his ‘people’, but rather chose seventy men from amongst them for the appointment set by Allah *Glorified is He*. Some said that the reason behind choosing seventy, was that the followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were divided into several tribes. So, he chose a certain number of men from each tribe. Thus, every tribe was represented at the appointment. The word *miqat* (appointment) is used in another verse when Allah *Glorified is He*, says, ‘When Musa (Moses) came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him…’ (*al-A’raf:* 143). Was this appointment here the same as the first one? No, because the first appointment was just for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to speak with his Lord *Glorified is He,* whilst the second appointment was to seek pardon for the worship of the calf.

‘And Musa (Moses) chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment, and when they were seized by trembling, he prayed, “My Lord, if You had chosen to do so, You could have destroyed them long before this…”’ (*al-A’raf:* 155). Why did this trembling seize them? It was because they did not resist those who worshipped the calf well enough, and Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to experience a bit of His punishment. *Rajfa* (trembling) means strong shaking which shakes whom it is aimed to and causes him to tremble, arouses in him fear and awe of the One Who sent it upon him. When the violent trembling seized them, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: 'My Lord, if You had chosen to do so, You could have destroyed them long before this, and me too…' (*al-A'raf:* 155). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* clarified, 'I brought them from their people, and their families know that these seventy men have come with me; if you destroy them, O Lord, their families might think that I brought them here to die, and that I delivered them to their doom. If Your will is to cause them to die, O Lord, You would have destroyed them before, and destroyed me with them'.

The Quran, then, adds that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the others said together, '…so will You now destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is only a trial from You — through it, You cause whoever You will to stray and guide whoever You will— and You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the best of forgivers.' (*al-A'raf:* 155) 'You are too Merciful, O Lord, to destroy us for what the foolish among us have done'. This statement indicates that the people had done something, namely, worshiping the calf; and if this had been the first meeting, such a statement would not have been required because the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had not yet worshipped the calf. After the first appointment, they said, 'Since Musa (Moses) has spoken with Allah, we must see Allah for ourselves', and they therefore said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* '…Make us see Allah face to face…' (*an-Nisa':* 153).

Thus, what the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did after the first appointment when they said, '…Make us see Allah face to face…' (*an-Nisa':* 153), was something that they said not an action they took, whilst, here the verse speaks about an action, '…so will You now destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is only a trial from You…' (*al-A'raf:* 155).

So, we know that the verse speaks about a second appointment set after some of them had worshipped the calf. A 'trial' is a test, and a test is not a bad thing in itself, and no test can be called bad; what is bad is the result when one fails the test. Tests and trials are not bad for those who pass them.

So a trial is an ordeal and a test, and this test is directed at the ignorant human who does not know how things will ultimately turn out so that he can choose the road which leads to the goal. This is not the case for Allah *Glorified is He* since He has known from pre-eternity what all His servants will do; but this knowledge is not an argument against His servants. It is a must that the servants take actions to cause this knowledge to stand out, manifest and have factual existence so that it can be an argument against them. To base judgements on facts is the fairest way.

The words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'This is only a trial from You — through it, You cause whoever You will to stray and guide whoever You will…' (*al-A'raf:* 155) mean: 'O Lord, You made this test because you created them with free will so that they are able to obey or to disobey'. Allah *Glorified is He* is The One who sends astray and guides because as long as He has made man free to choose, He has placed within him the power to go astray and the power to be guided. And He shows us clearly those whom He wills to guide, and those whom He wills to send astray, when He says, '…And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.' (*Al-'Imran:* 86) The reason He does not guide them is the evil they do. Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…And Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.' (*al-Baqara:* 264)

Thus, we see that it was their own disbelief that prevented them from being guided. So, Allah *Glorified is He*, allowed His servant to choose guidance or choose aberrance. Whatever a servant chooses to do, he does without any compulsion from Allah *Glorified is He*. Had He not created us all with free ability to choose, no one would be able to do anything against Allah's will. Allah *Glorified is He* created man with free will. It is His bounty that enables man to choose to be guided or to go astray. He made it clear that the evildoer and the one who acts wickedly, is worthy to be aided by Allah *Glorified is He* in his misguidance, just as He aids the one who chooses to be guided because he is worthy to be aided by Allah *Glorified is He* in his guidance.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says on the tongue of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* at the end of this verse, '…You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the best of those who forgive.' (*al-A'raf:* 155)

The word *wali* literally means someone who is close to you; and no one is close to you unless you have drawn him closer to you by showing your love for them; and you do not allow this closeness unless there is something about them which pleases you, benefits you and aids you when someone wrongs you, or to take from their knowledge because they are knowledgeable.

Musa's (Moses's) words *peace be upon him* 'You are our Protector' mean 'You are our Succour, and the closest One there is to us; so if any of us commits a sin, You are the most entitled to decide his fate, for You are the only One Who can forgive him'; that is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then said, 'so forgive us.' From this, we can ascertain that prevention of what is harmful comes first because it must be prevented before any benefit can be brought. So, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* first asked for forgiveness for the sin, and then asked and beseeched his Lord *Glorified is He* to have mercy on them which meant the bringing of benefit. About preventing harm, our Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'then whoever is removed far away from the fire' -this is the prevention of harm, namely to be drawn distant from the fire- 'and is made to enter Paradise, he indeed has attained the object.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185) This is the bringing of benefit. So, harm must be prevented before the benefit is brought. For example, you see an apple on a tree and you want to stretch out your hand to take it, then, you see a youth who wants to throw a brick at you, what do you do? In such a situation, you automatically protect yourself from the brick first, and then you pick the apple later. This is the prevention of harm which comes before the bringing of benefit. Here, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says, 'so forgive us and have mercy on us…; forgiveness is the prevention of harm and mercy is the bringing of benefit. Likewise, the Quran says, 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy…' (*al-Isra':* 82). This is because disease comes first, and when you follow the way of the Quran, it heals you from this disease. 'Mercy' means that the disease never comes to you; so if you take the Quran as your guide, this disease will never befall you.

Forgive '…us and have mercy on us. You are the best of forgivers.' (*al-A'raf:* 155) This resembles the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'the best of providers', 'the best of planners', 'the best of inheritors', and here we have 'the best of forgivers.' It is possible for a man to forgive a man, but we know that forgiveness of The Lord *Glorified is He* is above the forgiveness of

His creation; for the man who forgives might do so out of ostentation, or to get a good reputation or he might forgive because he fears the strength of the other. But Allah *Glorified is He* does not fear anyone, and He is the best of all forgivers without any recompense.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَٱكۡتُبۡ لَنَا فِي هَٰذِهِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا حَسَنَةٗ وَفِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُدۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَۚ قَالَ
عَذَابِيٓ أُصِيبُ بِهِۦ مَنۡ أَشَآءُۖ وَرَحۡمَتِي وَسِعَتۡ كُلَّ شَيۡءٖۚ فَسَأَكۡتُبُهَا
لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ وَيُؤۡتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱلَّذِينَ هُم بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١٥٦

Grant us good things in this world and in the life to come.
We turn to You.' God said, 'I bring My punishment on
whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. 'I shall
ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay
the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations [156]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 156)

We can observe that this verse includes new requests made by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to his Lord *Glorified is He* after having said, '…forgive us and have mercy on us…' (*al-A'raf:* 155). We see that the words '…the best of all forgivers' (*al-A'raf:* 155) refer back to the words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* '…forgive us and…' (*al-A'raf:* 155); and as for the goodness mentioned in his words 'And ordain Thou for us what is good in this world…' (*al-A'raf:* 156), it refers to his request for mercy. 'And ordain for us what is good in this world and in the life to come…" (*al-A'raf:* 156). He asked for goodness in this world and in the Hereafter.

The word *hasana* (good) has a general lexical meaning, and a meaning specific to the Sacred Law. Regarding the lexical meaning, everything that a man feels to be good is called *hasana*; but the meaning of *hasana* or 'good deed' in the Sacred Law is everything which the Law declares to be good. The Sacred Law oversees all our deeds and actions, and the good deed is not everything which man deems to be good because a man might deem a sin to be good and this human assessment of what is good is far from Allah's way. As for the Sacred Law's assessment of what is good, it is to implement Allah's way of 'Do' and 'Do not do.'

Those who are *mukallafeen* (who are obliged not to act in accordance with Allah's orders) should only deem good that which the Sacred Law declares to be good because a man might deem something unlawful to be good because he only considers the immediate benefit of it and not the long-term benefit, and he does not consider the quantity of the benefit it brings. As we know, benefit in this world is commensurate with your own conception of benefit, whilst the value of the benefit of the Hereafter is not known to any save the Knower of the unseen. So, the good in His words 'And ordain for us what is good in this world and in the life to come…' (*al-A'raf:* 156) means that which the Sacred Law deems to be good in this world as deed, and in the Hereafter as reward.

We can observe here that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* intended by the first 'good' that which includes both the Sacred Law's definition of 'good' and the lexical meaning of 'good'; it was a prayer for health and great blessings, and every kind of goodness in the world in the light of Allah's way. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "These are for the believers in the life of this world, exclusively (theirs) on the resurrection day"' (*al-A'raf:* 32).

So, the exclusive goodness is on the Day of Resurrection, but there are people who benefit from goodness in this worldly life. In this worldly life, inanimate objects, plants, animals and the disbelievers benefit from Allah's mercy. This is the case in this worldly life, and this is the mercy which outspreads everything; but in the case of the Hereafter and the reward for good actions, this reward is exclusively for the believers alone.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues to relate the words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'Indeed, we turn to You' (*al-A'raf:* 156). The verb 'had' means 'to return', and '…we turn to You…' (*al-A'raf:* 156) means 'We have returned to you'. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was speaking here for himself, his brother and the people who worshipped the calf and then repented for doing so. 'As long as we have returned to You, O Lord, You are too generous to turn us away empty-handed'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* responds, 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of Allah and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations.' (*al-A'raf:* 156)

The words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'I bring My punishment on whoever I will…' (*al-A'raf:* 156), mean, 'There is no one who can compel Me or direct Me to turn My punishment on anyone; when My servant commits a sin, I may either punish him or forgive him'. So, no one should ever say to a sinner, 'Allah will surely punish you', for He Himself says, '…I bring My punishment on whoever I will, but My mercy encompasses all things…' (*al-A'raf:* 156) What does 'mercy' mean here? Does it mean mercy in this world, or mercy in the Hereafter? It means the mercy which, in this world, encompasses the obedient and the sinful, the believer and the disbeliever; but on the Last Day, as we said, it will be exclusively and purely for the believers.

His words 'I shall ordain My mercy' indicate that it will be in the Hereafter; that is, Allah's mercy overspreads everything in this worldly life, but for the disbelievers this mercy goes no further than this worldly life, whilst for the believers this mercy will continue as Allah *Glorified is He* conferred it from pre-eternity, and it will be given to the believers as a special gift and bestowal from Him.'I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of Allah and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations.' (*al-A'raf:* 156)

When some of the Jews were heard to say, 'We are conscious of Allah', it was said to them, 'What way of guidance do you follow in your consciousness? Is it the way of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*? If you were conscious of Allah following the way of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as you claim, then you would have believed in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since one of the teachings of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was to believe in Allah's Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*'. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ ٱلرَّسُولَ ٱلنَّبِىَّ ٱلْأُمِّىَّ ٱلَّذِى يَجِدُونَهُۥ مَكْتُوبًا عِندَهُمْ فِى ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةِ
وَٱلْإِنجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُم بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَىٰهُمْ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ
وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْخَبَٰٓئِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَٱلْأَغْلَٰلَ ٱلَّتِى كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ فَٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا۟ بِهِۦ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَٱتَّبَعُوا۟ ٱلنُّورَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ مَعَهُۥٓ ۙ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

Who follow the Messenger – the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel – who commands them to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad

things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens, and the iron collars that were on them. So it is those who believe him, honour and help him, and who follow the light which has been sent down with him, who will succeed' [157]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 157)

These are nine attributes of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* namely that Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to him a unique scripture, the Quran, and that he was supported from Allah by miracles. He conveyed and taught the finest and most perfect doctrines, devotions and morals despite that he was unlettered and had never learned to read or write or studied under a teacher so that He remained as he was when he was born. His Lord *Glorified is He* mentions him by his name, and by the attributes and qualities by which he was known to the Jews and Christians in the Torah and the Gospel, which the disbelievers amongst them had concealed or deliberately misinterpreted. His Lord *Glorified is He* also describes him as enjoining upon them the doing of what is right and forbidding them the doing of what is wrong, and commanding them to do all that is consistent with upright human nature and sound natural disposition; for this is the way to success in this worldly life and felicity in the Hereafter. In addition, it is he *peace and blessings be upon him* who deters them and forbids them from all that is bad and improper, and that which appears foul to upright disposition and well-balanced moral sensibility. He makes lawful for them the good things which had been forbidden to them, which Allah *Glorified is He* had made unlawful to them as requital for their tyranny and misguidance; and he forbids them from all that is harmful and bad such as consuming carrion and unlawfully earned wealth such as usury, bribing and cheating. He *peace and blessings be upon him* lightens for them the burden of responsibilities which had existed in the Law of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* such as the amputation of sinful limbs, and the unlawfulness of battle-spoils, which they were obliged to burn. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* lightens and annuls the harsh covenants which were imposed upon them as a punishment for their iniquity and evildoing. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before: for having frequently debarred others from Allah's path, for taking usury when they had been forbidden to do so and for wrongfully devouring other people's property. For those of them that reject the truth we have prepared an agonizing torment.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160-161)

In this way, Allah *Glorified is He*, instructed those messengers who came before the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell their people about the coming of Muhammad so that all those people who lived to see the coming of His message would believe in him. It is true that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not a contemporary of any of the previous messengers, but the prophets brought glad tidings of him which were recorded in the scriptures revealed to them. Every messenger who came before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was commanded by Allah *Glorified is He* to ask those to whom they were sent to follow Muhammad, believe in him and not to hold on to their temporal power and fear lest it be taken from them. Since Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came supported from Allah by miracles and proofs, they had to believe in him. ‘And when Allah took a pledge from the prophets’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 81). So Allah *Glorified is He* made a leaven of faith so that the followers of different religions would not conflict, and so that the followers of an existent religion would not think that another religion had come to abrogate it and wrest from them their temporal power; for the message of faith continues, and deals with people’s affairs which arise as time progresses. All the messengers of Allah *peace be upon them* were eager to ensure that life would be safe and happy, where different talents complemented one another and no opposing powers conflict. The True Lord *Glorified is He* instructed His messengers *peace be upon them* to do this and took from them a pledge, and then affirmed it by saying, ‘…Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding on you?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 81) And He foretold their response that affirmed this way of guidance. That is why no follower of any prophet should oppose a new message if it is supported by a miracle and by a way of guidance which ensures for man security and happiness in life.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not settle for making the belief in the message of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a mere piece of information, but rather, He placed a description that fitted Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone in the scriptures which came before him.

Allah *Glorified is He* described his physical appearance to them; for, describing physical appearance is clearer than merely informing them about his coming in words. `Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him*(1) said, when 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* asked him about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'I know him better than I know my own son'. He asked him why, and he replied, 'I have no doubt that Muhammad is a prophet; as for my son, his mother might have cheated on me'. Upon this, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* kissed his head. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons…' (*al-Baqara:* 146).

There is no doubt that a father has thorough knowledge of his own son. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had specific qualities which affirmed His physical appearance. What happened on the Night of Ascension and Journey was not only a matter of speech, but rather, when he was asked about this Journey he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I saw Musa (Moses), and he was thin and wavy-haired, like one of the men of Shanu`a.(2) And I saw `Isa (Jesus), who was of middling height and reddish complexion, as though he had just come out of a bath. And of all the sons of Ibrahim (Abraham), I resemble him the most.'(3)

Likewise, in the Torah and Gospel, Allah *Glorified is He* did not only give information about Muhammad, but rather, He gave details about his appearance to provide them with a vivid image of him so that they would not confuse him upon his coming with anyone else. Therefore, the True Lord says, 'Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons…' (*al-Baqara:* 146). Yet, some of them concealed the truth to hold on to their temporal power because they thought that when a new religion came it would deprive them of this power and assume authority over nations and peoples. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make for His messengers *peace be upon them* sent to earth by Allah to complement one another and not contradict one another so that each of them would succour the other, as is stated in the chapter of *al-Fath*: ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. You see them kneeling and prostrating, seeking Allah's bounty and His good pleasure; on their faces, they bear the marks of their prostrations. This is how they are pictured in the Torah and the Gospel: like a seed that puts forth its shoot, becomes strong, grows thick and rises on its stem to the delight of its sowers. So Allah infuriates the disbelievers through them; Allah promises those who believe and do righteous deeds forgiveness and a great reward.’ (*al-Fath:* 29)

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(1) The story of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* asking `Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him*

(2) The word *darb* means 'thin', and *rajal* means hair which is neither curly nor straight. 'Like the men of Shanu`a means 'tall', as the men of Shanu`a were a Yemeni tribe known for being very tall. As for the description of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him,* the word *rub`a* means average-sized, i.e. neither tall nor short.

(3) *Agreed upon by Al- Bukhari and Muslim*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* described, in the Torah and Gospel those who would believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because when Islam would be revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* no other religion would come after it. Therefore, He mentioned the life of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his attributes as well as those of his followers, in the Torah and Gospel. This religion would contain that which the Jews were missing because of how they had drifted to pure materialism and had abandoned spirituality, which is why the description of the followers of Muhammad is given in the Torah as, ‘on their faces they bear the marks of their prostrations’

When the Jews became lost in materialism, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to bring forth a messenger who inclined and leaned toward spirituality, namely `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him* to bring about a balance in life with neither negligence nor excess.

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* paved the way for the coming of every messenger by having the messenger who preceded him give glad tidings of him because there is no contradiction between Allah’s messages. Since the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the seal of the succession of prophets, Allah had to describe him not only with words, but also as an image so that when they saw him they would recognise him. We find that when Salman Al-Farisi *Allah be pleased with him* saw Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina, and saw many signs upon him, he wanted to see a certain physical sign, and saw the seal of prophethood between his shoulders. Was this of any benefit? Indeed, it was, for many people believed in him. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* engaged in a debate with the Jews with the intermediation of `Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* who said after he embraced Islam in the presence of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O Messenger of Allah, the Jews are people of deceit. If they know of my Islam before you ask them about me, they will surely calumniate me to you.' So the Jews came, and `Abdullah entered the house and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'What kind of man is `Abdullah ibn Salam?' They said, 'He is the most knowledgeable of us and the son of the most knowledgeable of us, and the best of us and the son of the best of us.' Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Then what would you say should `Abdullah embrace Islam?' They said, 'may Allah save him from that!' Upon this, `Abdullah came out to them and said, 'I testify that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah!' They said, 'He is the worst of us and the son of the worst of us,' and went on slandering him. (1)

So, attributes connected with his speech and his physical appearance were given, lest anyone say, 'The religions of Allah contradict one another'; they are all complementary in that they connect the earth to Heaven according to what the time and place of the message requires. In the past, the different sectors of the world were cut off from one another, and every environment had its own atmosphere and problems, so a messenger would come to heal the specific ailments of a specific place. But Allah *Glorified is He* sent His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at a time when these ailments had become uniform over the world. Our Noble Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to treat these global ailments. He was aided in his coming by his previous descriptions, and aided by his teachings which lifted their burdens and shackles from them. *`Isr* 'burden' means a heavy load, and *aghlal* (singular *ghull*) 'iron collars' are the iron chains which bind the hands to the neck to restrict one's movement. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gave these descriptions and paved the way in people's minds for the coming of the message of Muhammad *peace and*

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, in the chapter Bad` Al-Wahy, on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him*

blessings be upon him in order that their iron collars be removed by the light which Allah *Glorified is He* sent down to Muhammad; for, the message of Muhammad is protecting and inclusive. Therefore, the True Lord then said:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنِّى رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا ٱلَّذِى لَهُۥ مُلْكُ
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْىِۦ وَيُمِيتُ ۖ فَـَٔامِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ٱلنَّبِىِّ ٱلْأُمِّىِّ
ٱلَّذِى يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَكَلِمَٰتِهِۦ وَٱتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

Say [Muhammad], 'People, I am the Messenger of God to you all, from Him who has control over the heavens and the earth. There is no God but Him; He gives life and death, so believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered prophet who believes in God and His words, and follow him so that you may find guidance' [158] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 158)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* orders His Messenger with the following, 'Say [Muhammad], "O mankind, I am the Messenger of Allah to you all…"' (*al-A'raf:* 158). He sent him with a message for all times and all places. Regarding this, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I have been given five things which no prophet before me was ever given. I have been given victory by dread over (the lands covered by) a month's journey, the earth has been made for me a purified place of worship, so that any man of my community to whom comes the time of prayer may pray (where he is), battle-spoils have been made lawful unto me, and a prophet used to be sent to his people alone, whilst I was sent to all mankind and I have been given the right of intercession.'(1)

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to affirm that the message is as universal as the utilisation of nature for man's benefit is; that is why the address is made to all of mankind, 'Say [Muhammad], "O mankind…"' (*al-A'raf:* 158). Everyone belongs to mankind, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sent to them, 'I am the Messenger of Allah to you all…' (*al-A'raf:* 158). The True Lord wanted to give us the reasons which made Him send a messenger to both his own people and to all other people to convey to them the way of Allah, in life. So He said, '…who has control over the heavens and the earth....' (*al-A'raf:* 158)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has dominion over the heavens and the earth, and none of His creatures ever claimed to have dominion over them, and the heavens and earth and all between them contain our life and the constituents of our existence, it is therefore righter and fitting that we worship Him. Were it that the sky belonged to one god, the air to another, the earth to another and what lies between them to another, it might be possible that there be a god here, and a god there, and another god yonder. Regarding this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…each deity would have taken his creation aside and tried to over- come the others...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91).

Since all existence – the earth, heavens and everything else – belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*, it is more fitting that He be worshipped. The primary peak of worship is that you say, 'There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah'. The first aspect of His divinity is that He has dominion over the heavens and the earth. Since He is a God, He must be obeyed; and He cannot be obeyed unless He has a way of guidance; and there is no way of guidance without 'Do' and 'Do not do'. The primary concern of the way of guidance is the peak of all doctrine; the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*; and Allah referred to His Oneness by means of an aspect from our real life, saying: '…He gives life and death...' (*al-A'raf:* 158). This is something which no one has ever claimed for himself because Allah *Glorified is He*, is The One Who has dominion over the heavens and the earth, and because He gives life and death. That is why we find that the one who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* about his Lord is described by the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He says, 'because God had given him power to rule? When Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "It is my Lord who gives life and death"' (*al-Baqara:* 258).

This king attempted to begin a misleading sophisticated argument to silence Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and so he said, 'I too give life and death" (*al-Baqara:* 258). He illustrated this by his ability to order that a man be killed, and then pardon him; and in doing this, he did not deal him death, but rather 'granted him life' according to logic. Yet, is giving order to kill the same as death? Of course not, because there is a difference between death and killing. A man might kill another man, but he cannot make him die since death comes without the destruction of the body in any way such as by a bullet, a stone or a bomb. No one can deal death to someone simply by desiring him to die because death happens without any cause; but for one person to kill another, this is certainly possible. The True Lord *Glorified is He* therefore says about Himself, 'He gives life and death, so believe in Allah and His Messenger' (*al-A'raf:* 158).

Look at this precise wording, the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded His Messenger to say, '…I am the Messenger of Allah to you all…' (*al-A'raf:* 158), and the essence of faith is to acknowledge and believe in the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*, who has dominion over the heavens and the earth, He besides whom there is no other deity, and He who gives life and death. Therefore, He calls them to faith in *the Most High*, the Creator: '…so believe in Allah and His Messenger…' (*al-A'raf:* 158).

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, 'And believe in me' because it is not something intrinsic in your person, O Muhammad, but rather, it is for the honour of your having been sent as a messenger to mankind. Faith is not in yourself and your character, but rather in the fact that you are the Messenger of Allah. So, the essential aspect is given in the words, '…believe in Allah and His Messenger…' (*al-A'raf:* 158), and the Apostle might be Muhammad, or someone else. After this, He gave a description of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* '…the unlettered prophet who believes in Allah and His words…' (*al-A'raf:* 158). The unlettered status, as we said before, was an ennoblement for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and He believes in Allah's words, which either refer to the Revelations of the Quran which came to us through him, or else it refers to what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* conveyed unto his people from Allah: 'And I shall place My words in his mouth.' (*Deuteronomy* XVIII: 19) `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said of him, 'He shall not speak from himself, but whatever he shall hear (from his Lord), that shall he speak.' (John XVI: 13)

And the comprehensive descriptions of the words of Muhammad are those which the True Lord *Glorified is He* elucidates thus, 'And neither does he speak out of his own desire.' (*an-Najm:* 3)

Or, that faith in words means believing that Allah's entire universe was created by a single word from Him, 'When He wills something to be, His way is to say, "Be"— and it is!' (*Ya Sin:* 82)

Someone might say, 'How could Allah *Glorified is He* address something which had not yet existed'? We say: He knew of it from pre-eternity, and its existence was affirmed and certain, but Allah *Glorified is He*, wanted to show this existence to mankind. Everything has existed since pre-eternity in Allah's Knowledge, and it is as though He says to the thing, 'O thing, show your existence so that mankind can see you after you had been concealed in folds of My omnipotence'.

Whether the Word instigated creation of means such as the creation of the sun or the moon, or creation without any means, such as `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* who was 'a word from Him' (*Al-'Imran*: 45), i.e. a word which bypassed the usual means of causality in that he was born to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* without any man which was a bypassing of the usual means of causality, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…a word from Him.' (*Al-'Imran:* 45) We know that everything only exists by a word from Him, but this word either instigates means of causality, or it works without these means.

Allah's words are also the verses which bear His way of Law, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "We believe in Allah and (in) that which had been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), and Ya`qub (Jacob) and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus), and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit."' (*al-Baqara:* 136)

It is narrated to us in the *Sunnah* that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to his Lord *Glorified is He* 'I find in the tablets mention of a community who shall believe in the first Book and the last Book, and who shall fight against the forces of misguidance until they fight The One-Eyed Deceiver (the Antichrist); make them my community!' He was answered, 'This is the community of Ahmad.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his exegesis of Allah's words* 'And when Musa's (Moses's) wrath was stilled…' (7:154)

The words of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘who shall believe in the first Book and the last Book’ allude to that which the True Lord *Glorified is He* refers to when He says, ‘Say, “We believe in Allah and (in) that which had been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), and Ya`qub (Jacob) and the tribes…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 136).

And the True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the verse which we are currently examining by saying, ‘…and follow him so that you may find guidance.’ (*al-A’raf:* 158) The words ‘that you may’ are an expression of hope and aspiration, and we know that every aspiration is for one of two things: Either something impossible which you nevertheless aspire to as a way of showing how you love it which is a kind of wishing such as when one says, ‘If only youth would return’! He knows that youth will never return, but he says this to show you how much he loves youth. Or someone might say, ‘If only the stars would come down to me so I could thread them in a necklace of praise’! This aspiration is impossible, but he wants to show you that this is something he would love to happen.

Then, there is also a kind of aspiration which is possible to realise, and this is called ‘hope’. Hope has various stages. When you hope something for someone, you say, ‘It might well be that so-and-so will give you this’. Venturing through the door of hope would be for you to say, ‘It might well be that I will give you this’ because the hope is then from you, yet even so, not anyone else; yet, you might not be able to accomplish it. Stronger still is for you to say, ‘It might well be that Allah *Glorified is He* will give you this’; but this is only your own speech, which Allah *Glorified is He* might choose to answer or not answer. Yet, if Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says ‘so that you may…’ this is the strongest of all hopes, and it will certainly be realised.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* He speaks about them by telling their stories, their scandals and their breaking their covenants after the many blessings with which Allah *Glorified is He* showered them. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us, ‘Beware judging them and making this judgment universal; for, were it universal not one single member of Musa’s (Moses’s) people would have believed in Muhammad'. That is why we said before that there is something called 'allowing for the possibility'. For example, we find that there were some Jews who believed in the message of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as Mukhayriq *Allah be pleased with him* of whom the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Mukhayriq is the best of the Jews'. There was also `Abdullah ibn Salam. Some of the Jews were indeed drawn to the faith, so do not take the matter as though it is universal; for there are, amongst the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* some whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes with the following noble words:

وَمِن قَوْمِ مُوسَىٰٓ أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَبِهِۦ يَعْدِلُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

There is a group among the people of Moses who guide
with truth, and who act justly according to it [159]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 159)

When the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* heard these words, they would say to themselves, 'He knows what is in our hearts and how we have been thinking about having faith in the message of Muhammad'. Yet, if judging them – as people of scandals and people who broke their covenants etc.– were made universal, those who had been thinking of believing in Muhammad would have said, 'Why would He make a judgement against me when I am thinking about believing'?

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'allowed for the possibility', and clarified for all of those who were thinking about believing in Muhammad that they should openly declare their faith, saying, 'There is a group among the people of Musa (Moses) who guide with truth, and who act justly according to it.' (*al-A'raf:* 159). That is, they direct others towards the truth and call them to the way of goodness, and considering this truth, they act justly when judging between people, and they do not commit injustice.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then, says:

وَقَطَّعْنَٰهُمُ ٱثْنَتَيْ عَشْرَةَ أَسْبَاطًا أُمَمًا ۚ وَأَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰٓ إِذِ ٱسْتَسْقَىٰهُ قَوْمُهُۥٓ أَنِ
ٱضْرِب بِّعَصَاكَ ٱلْحَجَرَ ۖ فَٱنۢبَجَسَتْ مِنْهُ ٱثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا ۖ قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ
مَّشْرَبَهُمْ ۚ وَظَلَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْغَمَٰمَ وَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْمَنَّ وَٱلسَّلْوَىٰ ۖ كُلُوا۟ مِن
طَيِّبَٰتِ مَا رَزَقْنَٰكُمْ ۚ وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

We divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities, and, when his people asked him for water, inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out. Each tribe knew its own drinking place; We gave them the shade of clouds and sent down to them manna and quails [saying], 'Eat the good things We have provided for you.' They did not wrong Us; it was themselves they wronged [160]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 160)

Allah's saying, 'We divided them' (*al-A'raf:* 160) refers to the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. It is well known that the Quran is not like any other book, specifying a chapter to Prophet Musa (Moses), another to Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) and another to Prophet Muhammad. Rather, it presents different issues relevant to the *Da'wah* (call to Allah), moving, for example, from the issue of 'Isa (Jesus) to that of Musa (Moses) and so on. Then, it returns to the main issue in order to take advantage of the soul's reaction to any particular story.

So, Allah tackles the topic of the people of Prophet Musa (Moses) again—after Allah has treated them fairly—stating that there are people amongst them who guide with truth and act justly according to it. He says: 'And We divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] nations…' (*al-A'raf:* 160). This verse refers to the children of Israel. The Arabic word *qatta'* means 'dividing an object into parts and sections.' Allah clarifies that He divided the Children of Israel into *asbat* (tribes). The word *sibt* literally means tribe; and in this context, it refers to the twelve sons of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob). The chapter *Yusuf* states: 'O my father, I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me.' (*Yusuf:* 4)

When counting the number stated in this verse, we will find eleven stars, the sun, the moon and Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), so the total number will be fourteen; if the sun and moon – who symbolise Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) and his wife – are not counted, the total number will be twelve, who were the twelve descendant tribes. Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) had twelve sons from different wives; a fact that caused a conflict of which Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) was aware. It is well known that children from different wives may have conflicts with each other. Therefore, Prophet Ya'qub (Joseph) predicted what would happen and told Prophet Yusuf (Joseph): 'O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers or they will contrive against you a plan…' (*Yusuf:* 5) This is the first sign that they were at odds, and it was one of the reasons why they were divided: 'We have divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities.' (*al-A'raf:* 16)

The following verse is stated in the chapter of *Yusuf*: '…This is the explanation of my vision of long ago. My Lord has made it reality…' (*Yusuf:* 100).

In the following verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out…' (*al-A'raf:* 160). They did not even want to share the water because of the differences between them; so, Allah gave every tribe a spring to drink from in order to cure them of the jealousy and rancour they felt towards one another. Allah says about them: 'We have divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) There is a purely linguistic point to consider in this context: the tribes that descended from Prophet Ishaq (Isaac) and Prophet *Ya'qub* (Jacob) are paralleled to the tribes formed by Prophet Ismail's (Ishmael) descendants. However, the descendants of Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) – the Arabs – are called *qaba'il* in Arabic, while the descendants of Prophet *Ishaq* (Isaac) and Prophet *Ya'qub* (Jacob) are called *asbaṭ* in Arabic. It is well known that the words *ithnatay 'ashrah* (twelve) refer to the feminine gender since *ithna* is for the masculine gender, whilst *ithnata* is for the feminine gender. The word *ithnata 'ashara* (twelve) is a compound number, and the noun to which it refers is always singular in Arabic. Hence, Allah says: *Ahad 'ashr kawkaban* (eleven stars).

The word *sibt* (tribe) is in the masculine form, but if the word is mentioned in the plural form, it will become a feminine noun because there is an Arabic rule stating that every plural noun is a feminine noun. Moreover, the word *asbat* in this verse means ‘tribes’, a meaning which is referred to by the Arabic word ‘*qaba*’*il*’ (a plural word whose singular is *qabila*), which is also a feminine noun. As Allah divided them, this implies that they had been united previously. In Arabic, it is correct to say *ithnata ‘ashrah qabilah* (twelve tribes), but it is not correct to say *ithnata ‘ashrah qaba’il.* Therefore, Allah uses the word *asbat* (tribes) instead of *qaba’il,* as every *qabila* includes different *asbat*, so the noun following the numeral is mentioned in the masculine form.

‘And We have divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities…’ (*al-A’raf:* 160) Allah has made every tribe a community in itself; a reality which has been confirmed, as in the past there was not any national community called ‘the Jewish state.’ Despite the fact that powerful and tyrannical nations aided them and established a state for them in Palestine, there are Jewish communities in many countries living in a state of isolation from the people in whose lands they live, since they do not want to integrate with the different peoples. In Paris, for example, you find the Jewish district, and the same applies to London. In every city they live in, they maintain their own customs, traditions and ways of life, and are isolated from the people, fulfilling Allah’s decree concerning them: ‘And We divided them into twelve tribes [as distinct] communities…’ (*al-A’raf:* 160). Our Lord has divided and dispersed them on earth, and has not given them a homeland to settle in. Therefore, Allah says in the chapter of *al-Isra’*: ‘After his death, We told the Children of Israel, “Dwell in the land”…’ (*al-Isra’:* 104). Allah said to them after the time of Prophet Musa (Moses): ‘Dwell in the land…’ (*al-Isra’:* 104). The Arabic word *iskun* (dwell) indicates specifying a certain place to dwell in. For example, a person may dwell in Alexandria, Cairo, Jordan or Syria, but as Allah says to them to dwell in the land, this means that they would be dispersed on earth and not to be gathered.

Allah says: ‘… and when the promise of the Hereafter is fulfilled, We shall bring you to the assembly of all people.’ (*al-Isra’:* 104) This means that when the promise of the Hereafter is fulfilled, it will be the end of the Jews, as their enemies cannot pursue them in every country and cannot send armies to fight them wherever a group of them live. However, when the promise of the

Hereafter is fulfilled, Allah will bring them together so that they will be attacked and annihilated while they are in one place. Then, Allah states the miracles which occurred: '…when his people asked him for water, We inspired Moses to strike the rock ...' (*al-A'raf:* 160).

The word *istasqa* means asking for water to quench one's thirst; since they asked for water, they must have been very thirsty. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to show them His grace at a time of need; He let them feel thirsty for them to ask for water and feel the grace of quenching one's thirst. Allah says: '… when his people asked him for water…' (*al-A'raf:* 160). They asked Prophet Musa (Moses) for water, but he told them that he would not give them water by his own means, but he would ask Allah for water. We know that the essential constituents of life, ordered according to their importance for maintain life, are air, water and food; and when an Arabic verb starts with *hamzah, sin and ta'*, this indicates a request and a desire. For example, when Prophet Musa (Moses) walked with the righteous servant and came to a village, they asked its inhabitants for food, an action that is expressed in the Quran by *istat'ama ahlaha*. Food is considered the third essential constituent of life, while water which is mentioned in this verse, is the second essential constituent of life. It is well known that the first essential constituent of life is air; without it, all the living beings cannot survive. Therefore, Allah has not caused it to be controlled by any person and has granted it to all living beings.

As air is not owned by anyone and is generally prevalent, no one asks another for it. However, food and water can be owned, so Allah has mentioned in the Quran the word *istat'am* (asking for food) and *istasqa* (asking for water), but the word *istahwa* (asking for air) has never occurred with this meaning; it occurs with the meaning (enticing) as in the following verse: '…like one whom the devils enticed…' (*al-An'am:* 71). The verse means that the devils enticed a person to follow their orders and desires and not to follows Allah's Commands.

The story of the people of Musa (Moses) asking for water has already been mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'And [recall] when Musa (Moses) prayed for water for his people…' (*al-Baqara:* 60). In the chapter of *al-A'raf* which we are currently discussing, the people of *Musa* (Moses) asked for water – is there any contradiction? Certainly, there is not, because the people of Musa (Moses) asked him for water, so he asked his Lord for water. This cannot be considered repetition because Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned Musa (Moses) who interceded for the children of Israel, then referred to Himself as the source of water. Therefore, He said in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '… when his people asked him for water, inspired Moses…' (*al-A'raf:* 160). In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah says: 'And [recall] when Musa (Moses) prayed for water for his people…' (*al-Baqara:* 60). This is a natural sequence. The difference between the two expressions should be illustrated for the reader to be sure that there is neither contradiction nor repetition. The people of Musa (Moses) asked him for water; Musa is the one who prayed for water; Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who was asked for water—this is an ordinary sequence. Allah says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'and [recall] when Moses prayed for water for his people, so We said, "Strike with your staff the stone"…' (*al-Baqara:* 60).

The Revelation came down to Musa (Moses), with Allah's saying: '…so We said, 'Strike…' (*al-Baqara:* 60). In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, Allah says: '…when his people asked him for water, inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out ...' (*al-A'raf:* 160).

We should be aware that 'We Said' (*al-Baqara:* 60) has the same meaning of 'We inspired' (*al-A'raf:* 160) in this context, since the meaning of 'said' in the first verse does not refer to the direct conversation between Allah and Musa (Moses), which is referred in Allah's saying: '… And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech.' (*an-Nisa':* 164)

Not every revelation received by Musa (Moses) from Allah was in the form of direct speech; Allah spoke directly to Musa (Moses) only once in order to honour him, then He sent down revelation to him in the same way He sent revelation to the other Messengers. Allah's saying: '… inspired Moses to strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out…' (*al-A'raf:* 160), this indicates an absolute miracle—Allah commanded Musa (Moses) once to strike the water with his staff, '… and it parted, and each portion was like a great towering mountain.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63) Then, He commanded him to strike the rock so that water gushed out from it. Accordingly, we notice the Omnipotence of Allah, as He gives and withholds with the same object by means which are controlled only by Allah. Allah's decree is manifested when Musa (Moses) struck the sea with his staff, and each part appeared like a mountain and stopped flowing. When Musa (Moses) and his people reached land after crossing the sea, he wanted to strike the sea again with his staff so that it would return to its previous flowing state, but Allah has inspired to him: '… and leave the sea in stillness…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24). This means that Allah told him to leave the sea as Allah wanted Pharaoh and his people to be deceived by seeing a dry path through the water, so that they would attempt to cross it after Musa (Moses) and his people. Immediately after Pharaoh and his people have entered the sea behind Moses, the water returned to its flowing state and Pharaoh and his people drowned. Thus, Allah saved Musa (Moses) and his people and caused Pharaoh and his people to drown. The same idea applies to Musa's (Moses) staff; when it struck the water, it parted it so that each portion became like a towering mountain. In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, Musa (Moses) struck the rock, and twelve springs of water gushed out from it. Hence, this indicates Allah's Omnipotence.'… Strike the rock with his staff [so that] twelve springs gushed out…' (*al-A'raf:* 160).

The meaning of the word *inbajasat* is different from that of the word *infajarat;* the first word means 'to flow slowly', while the second means 'to gush quickly and in large amounts.' It is well known that water flows slowly first, then it flows in large amounts. When Musa (Moses) struck the rock, a little amount of water came forth at first then it began to flow in large amounts. Accordingly, Allah has reviewed the stages which followed the striking of the rock in detail from the beginning to the end.

When the Prince of Poets, Ahmad Shawqi, handled Allah's bestowal and omnipotence, he said:

Glory is to Allah, the Best of Instructors,
You gave the first generations knowledge,
You sent the Torah as a guide to Musa (Moses),
And the Virgin's son taught the Gospel.
Then, he said about Prophet Muhammad:
You caused Muhammad to flow with eloquence,
He quenched the people with the Hadith and conveyed the Quran.

The poet's choice of the expression 'He quenched the people with the Hadith' is very appropriate and wonderful, as he likened the Prophet's Hadith [tradition] to water which quenches the people's thirst, while the Quran, which was revealed by Allah, was conveyed by the Prophet to His slaves.

Allah says: '… [So that] twelve springs gushed out…' (*al-A'raf:* 160). One blow from one staff has been expected to cause one spring to flow, but Allah willed that the blow of the staff caused twelve springs to flow, and each tribe knew its own drinking place. Therefore, this means that the place where this incident occurred was large. In addition, this blow was a prompt for the land to react. '… [So that] twelve springs gushed out. Each tribe knew its own drinking place…' (*al-A'raf:* 160).

How did each tribe amongst them know the spring that was assigned to them? Allah distributed the water amongst them, and each spring attracted those for whom it was meant, so they did not compete over the springs. This also indicates that all the springs were equal, so no spring flowed with more water than the others, inciting greed; rather, all of the tribes were arranged in the manner Allah wanted: '… Each tribe knew its own drinking place…' (*al-A'raf:* 160).

In this verse, Allah describes the journey of the children of Israel in the desert under the burning sun without any water. They asked Musa (Moses) to pray for water, so he asked Allah to give them water, then twelve springs flowed for them so that they would not be crowded together, and all of them knew their own drinking place. Allah says: '… We gave them the shade of clouds…' (*al-A'raf:* 160). As the sun was burning, Allah graced them with shade from a series of clouds; each tribe had a cloud to cover themselves. For example, a human being is able to divide a large group into small groups and distribute those over twenty camps; therefore, Allah can certainly distribute them among the springs and bring clouds to shade them.

Allah provides people with sustenance, clothes and water so that they do not become hungry, naked or thirsty. He also does not cause the sun to burn them. As for the children of Israel, Allah says about the food He provided for them: '… and sent down to them manna and quails [saying], "Eat the good things We have provided for you"…' (*al-A'raf:* 160). When the words 'sent down' are mentioned, this means that the object under discussion comes from a sublime position, not necessarily a high place. It also indicates a higher power that exceeds one's own power.

'Manna' is a white sweet-tasting substance similar in appearance to drops of mercury which could be found on trees that still exist in Iraq. When the tree leaves are shaken in the morning, the solid white drops fall, and people collect them on white sheets. The Iraqis also call them *mann*; the taste is sweet like honey, and its consistency is similar to cream.

Quails are a type of fowls which live in Europe and the Mediterranean countries. These birds are called in Arabic *salwa* or *summani*; coastal people call them *samman*. This type of birds migrate from a country to another and are not bred by people, so they can be considered as sustenance that Allah sends down, as they go beyond the people's capabilities. Allah says: '… and sent down to them manna and quails [saying], "Eat the good things We have provided for you."…' (*al-A'raf:* 160)

Some factories produce different types of *mann* along with other types of sweet. Some people who visited Iraq tasted it and brought some for their families. The quails, as previously mentioned, are the *samman* which can be found in cold environments, but Allah causes them to immigrate to warm environments where people can eat them. These birds immigrate to warm environments seeking survival, but Allah provides them to people as a type of food to show that He can give sustenance that transcends their knowledge and ability. He sent down the *manna* and quails to the children of Israel, just as He caused water to flow from the rock and clouds to shade them. Accordingly, their needs were fulfilled by unseen means that they could not control. However, they said that they were not sure that the provision of *manna* and quails would continue and that they could never endure just one kind of food. Therefore, they said to their Prophet Musa (Moses): 'And [recall] when you said, "O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So, call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions."' (*al-Baqara:* 61) Allah guided them to go to any city or land so that they could find what they wanted: '… Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked…' (*al-Baqara:* 61) Allah gave them provision without the need for any means, as it was a grace from Him. Therefore, they should have given thanks to the One Who made sustenance easy for them, but they did not thank Allah and were insubordinate to Him. Hence, Allah ends this verse: '… They did not wrong Us; it was themselves they wronged.' (*al-A'raf:* 160) Certainly, they wronged themselves by neglecting to thank Allah for His grace.

Then, Allah says:

وَإِذۡ قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱسۡكُنُواْ هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡقَرۡيَةَ وَكُلُواْ مِنۡهَا حَيۡثُ
شِئۡتُمۡ وَقُولُواْ حِطَّةٞ وَٱدۡخُلُواْ ٱلۡبَابَ سُجَّدٗا نَّغۡفِرۡ لَكُمۡ
خَطِيٓـَٰٔتِكُمۡۚ سَنَزِيدُ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ١٦١

When they were told, 'Enter this town and eat freely there as you will, but say, "Relieve us!" and enter its gate humbly: then We shall forgive you your sins, and increase the reward of those who do good' [161] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 161)

This story is also mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara*. In this verse, Allah says, 'When they were told…' (*al-A'raf:* 161), but He does not mention the one whom were told because Allah divided the children of Israel into *asbat* (tribes) and gave each tribe a spring to drink from, and each tribe had a chief. This shows that they did not get along; not all of them would receive an order from one person, but their orders were given by the Most Sublime Lawgiver who conveyed them to their Messenger Musa (Moses), then the Messenger conveyed them to their chiefs who, in turn, conveyed them to the people.

In another verse, Allah says: 'And [remember] when We said…' (*al-Baqara:* 58); it clarifies that the One Who gives orders is Allah. As they were tribes, each having its own place to drink, Allah clarifies that He has revealed His saying to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The Arabic word *idh* mentioned in this verse refers to the time when they were asked to dwell in a town and eat freely. It is said that the town is Jerusalem or Jericho, but the children of Israel said that they would never enter it because it was inhabited by tyrannical people; they added: '… so go, you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24)

Allah has not specified the name of the town in this verse because it is not important; rather, He has mentioned the important matter which is the obedience of the commandment regardless of the place: '… Dwell in this town and eat freely…' (*al-A'raf:* 161).

Allah clarifies that He would provide for them and fulfil their needs in that town just as He did in the desert, as He shaded them with clouds, provided them with water, which sprang from a rock, and also provided them with manna and quails. Therefore, as Allah ordered them to enter the town; this indicates that He would not abandon them. He says, 'Dwell in this town and eat freely there as you will…' (*al-A'raf:* 161). In the past, every town had a gate, so Allah says: '…but say, "Relieve us of our sins!" and enter its gate humbly…' (*al-A'raf:* 161).

The word *hitta* which is mentioned in the Arabic verse means supplicating to Allah to remove one's sins, as they obeyed His commandment and went to the town which He ordered them to enter. They were ordered to enter the gate humbly in a state of prostration because Allah had saved them from the wilderness after giving them blessings and bounties. Had they done so, the reward for them would have been: '…We shall forgive you your sins, and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].' (*al-A'raf:* 161)

Allah *Glorified is He* would have first forgiven them and then recorded a good deed for them. This means that He would have removed harm and brought benefit, but in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, there is a verse that says: 'And [recall] when We said, "Enter this town and eat from it wherever you will in [ease and] abundance, and enter the gate bowing humbly and say, 'Relieve us of our sins.' We will [then] forgive your sins for you, and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward]."…' (*al-Baqara:* 58)

The general theme is the same, but we find there are differences in the words and phrases in the previous verse and the verse mentioned in the chapter of *al-A'raf*. The first difference is 'And [recall] when We said…' (*al-Baqara:* 58) and 'When they were told…' (*al-A'raf:* 161) Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to give us a different aspect of the incident, as we have previously mentioned. In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *Glorified is He* says 'Enter', whilst in the chapter *al-A'raf* He says, 'Dwell.' We know that the reason for entering the town was to dwell there; a point which is clarified in the chapter of *al-A'raf*, as the word *iskunu* (dwell) shows that they would not enter merely to pass through, but they would settle there. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the final goal of entering the town: dwelling, as no one can dwell in a town unless he enters it first. Accordingly, this indicates that the words of the Quran are not redundant, but they affirm and give new meanings which clarify and explain the intended point.

Allah says in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '… eat freely there as you will…' (*al-A'raf:* 161); whilst in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: '… eat from it wherever you will in [ease and] abundance ...' (*al-Baqara:* 58). When Allah commanded them to enter the town while they were hungry, He commanded them to eat immediately and in abundance; He used the word *raghada* (in abundance), as they were in dire need of food. But after He commanded them to dwell in the city, He told them to eat because when a person dwells in a place, he feels settled; therefore, he can eat comfortably and leisurely. Allah says in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '… but say, "Relieve us" and enter its gate humbly…' (*al-A'raf:* 161). This means that He lets their asking for forgiveness precede their entering humbly, while in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He has mentioned their humble entering first, saying: '… and enter the gate bowing humbly and say, "Relieve us of our sins"…' (*al-Baqara:* 58).

Allah has made this difference because He knows that the reactions of the listeners would differ when they entered the town; some of them would react to Allah's saying and ask Him to remove and forgive their sins, while others would respond to the command relevant to action, so they would humble themselves and prostrate as soon as they entered.

Allah also says in the chapter of *al-A'raf*: '… We shall forgive you your sins, and increase the reward of those who do good;' (*al-Baqara:* 58) in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: '… We will [then] forgive your sins for you, and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].' (*al-Baqara:* 58)

It is well known that there are forms of plural nouns in Arabic: irregular plural and regular feminine plural. In the first form, the order of the word letters changes; for example, the irregular plural of the Arabic word *qifl* (lock) is *aqfal.* As for the regular feminine plural, the Arabic letters *alif* and *ta'* are added to the end of the root after omitting the feminine ending *'ha''* from the end of the singular form; for example, the regular feminine plural of the word *Fatimah* is *Fatimat* and *aklah akalat*. Accordingly, the order of the word letters does not change. Another difference between the irregular plural and the regular feminine plural is that the former indicates abundance, and the latter indicates scarcity. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the regular feminine plural and irregular plural to indicate the different amounts of sin because some of the people committed many sins, while others committed few sins.

There is also another difference at the end of both verses: in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, there is the letter *waw* at the end of the verse: *wa sanazid al-muhsinin* which means 'and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward]' (*al-Baqara:* 58), while in the chapter of *al-A'raf* there is no letter *waw* at the end of the verse: *sanazid al-muhsinin*, which means 'We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].' (*al-A'raf:* 161)

Allah calls the believers to say, *ighfir lana wa'anta khayr al-ghafirin, warhamna wa'anta khayr al-rahimin, waktub lana fi hadhihi al-dunya hasanah* (Forgive us and You are the best of those who forgive, have mercy on us as You are the best of those Who show mercy and give us in this world that which is good). Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He will not only forgive them and remove their sins, but He will also give them from what is good in this world. This means that He removes harm and brings benefit. Allah uses the word *khatayakum* (your sins) in the irregular plural, as it implies that the sins were numerous, and uses in the other verse the word *khati'atikum* in the regular feminine plural which implies that the sins were few. After forgiving them, Allah will '... increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward].' (*al-A'raf:* 161) This means that they will be forgiven and granted rewards. A detailed comparison has been made between a verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* and a verse in the chapter of *al-A'raf* for the reader to know that the verses of the Quran do not conflict with each other, but they complement one another. Accordingly, this proves Allah's saying: '... if it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.' (*an-Nisa':* 82)

Then, Allah says:

فَبَدَّلَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ قَوْلًا غَيْرَ ٱلَّذِى قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَرْسَلْنَا
عَلَيْهِمْ رِجْزًا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

The wrongdoers among them substituted another saying
for that which had been given them, so We sent them a
punishment from heaven for their wrongdoing [162]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 162)

This verse indicates that they were divided into two groups because since Allah says *minhum* (among them), this means that some of them obeyed Allah's Command, while others were wrongdoers and substituted another saying for what had been given to them. Allah commanded them to say, 'Relieve us of our sins,' (*al-A'raf:* 162) and to enter the town humbly in prostration. The change they made was in the words they were supposed to say because a person may speak to himself so that no one else can hear, while his action can be seen by others. This shows that some of them were showing off; some of them mocked the command they were given and mentioned inappropriate words, as they said *hinta* which means (wheat) instead of *hittah* (relieve us of our sins).

Accordingly, they made substitution of the saying, but nothing with regard to the action took place although some people said that some of the children of Israel altered the action as well; instead of entering in humble prostration, they entered crawling on their buttocks in pride. However, Allah has not said anything about that; the action might have been the result of the inability of some of them to move normally. 'The wrongdoers among them substituted another saying for that which had been given them…' (*al-A'raf:* 162).

Allah reminds us of the care he showed to them in the desert, and the clouds which shaded them, the manna and quails that He had sent to them, and the water which Allah granted them when Musa (Moses) prayed to Him. However, their tendency towards insolent rebellion and substitution of Allah's sayings has not changed; accordingly, they deserved Allah's punishment: '…so We sent them a punishment from heaven for their wrongdoing…' (*al-A'raf:* 162).

There is another verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which Allah says: '...so We sent down upon those who wronged a punishment from the sky because they were defiantly disobeying…' (*al-Baqara:* 59). The difference between the word *inzal* (sending down) and *irsal* (sending) is that the former means sending something only once, while the latter implies continuous sending. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says about rain: '… We send down from the sky pure water.' (*al-Furqan:* 48) The word *anzalna* (send down) is used in this verse because rain does not fall continuously, but Allah uses the word *arsalna* (send) in the following verse in the context of air, saying: 'We have sent the fertilizing winds…' (*al-Hijr:* 22). Allah uses the word *arsal* (send) in the context that implies continuous action, as He mentions this word in the verse which tackles the flood that drowned those who disbelieved Musa (Moses). He says: 'So We sent upon them the flood…' (*al-A'raf:* 133).

When Allah aroused the interest of the people of Prophet Hud, 'Ad, in seeking forgiveness from Allah and repenting of their disbelief and sin, He said to them: 'And O my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him. He will send [rain from] the sky upon you in showers…' (*Hud:* 52).

Allah gives us different aspects of the story of the children of Israel, as He uses the word *arsalna* (sent) and *anzalna* (sent down), as the punishment differs according to the sinners; each one's punishment is commensurate with his sin. Allah sends upon them continuous punishment which is commensurate with their sins. In this verse, Allah says: '… so We sent them a punishment from heaven for their wrongdoing.' (*al-A'raf:* 162)

The word *rijz* means 'torment,' and the word *rujz* means sins and acts of disobedience; therefore, *rijz* (torment) results from *rujz* (sins). For example, Allah says: 'And avoid sins!' (*al-Muddaththir:* 5) This means: avoid sins in order to be safe from punishment. Allah explains that these people were punished because of their evildoing, while in the other verse, Allah says: '…because they were defiantly disobeying.' (*al-A'raf:* 59)

Fisq (act of disobedience) happens before wronging because a person cannot wrong himself by contravening the path of Allah unless he first falls into an act of disobedience. Therefore, Allah clarifies both the effect and the cause of punishment. Accordingly, this emphasises that every word in the Quran gives a certain meaning and is not redundant. In addition, there is no repetition except for the story as a whole; as for the elements of the story, they brought new meanings and aspects.

Then, Allah says:

وَسْـَٔلْهُمْ عَنِ ٱلْقَرْيَةِ ٱلَّتِى كَانَتْ حَاضِرَةَ ٱلْبَحْرِ إِذْ يَعْدُونَ فِى
ٱلسَّبْتِ إِذْ تَأْتِيهِمْ حِيتَانُهُمْ يَوْمَ سَبْتِهِمْ شُرَّعًا وَيَوْمَ لَا
يَسْبِتُونَ ۙ لَا تَأْتِيهِمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَبْلُوهُم بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿١٦٣﴾

[Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea; how its people broke the Sabbath when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays – We tested them in this way: because of their disobedience [163] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 163)

There is a question about a town by the sea. We know that the first town they had entered was Jerusalem, but it is not by the sea. The town that is by the sea may be either Ayla, Midyan or Tiberius – what matters here is that it is *hadirat al-bahr* (near or adjacent to the sea). If we say that so-and-so *hadara*, this means that he was far away and then he approached. For example, we could say that Alexandria is *hadirat al-bahr* (near or adjacent to the sea).

Allah's saying, 'And ask them' (*al-A'raf:* 163) is directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for him to ask the people of the Book to read their scriptures to make sure that what he said was a Revelation from Allah. They knew that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not gain this knowledge from a teacher and did not read it in a book; rather, he gained this knowledge from the One Who sent him as a Messenger. He did not come to them to learn from them previous events and stories, but he wanted to inform them that he had already known these stories. Therefore, the word *ma kunta* (you were not) is mentioned in the Quran in many verses, such as Allah's saying: 'And you, [O Muhammad], were not on the western side [of the mount] when We revealed to Moses the command…' (*al-Qasas:* 44). Another example on this meaning is Allah's saying: 'And you were not a resident among the people of Midyan, reciting to them Our verses…' (*al-Qasas:* 44). The following verse also includes the words *ma kunta* (you were not): 'And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Mary. Nor were you with them when they disputed…' (*al-Baqara:* 44).

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad was not present when such incidents took place; at that time and age, he was not able to tell the people of the Book what had happened; rather, those incidents were mentioned in their own Books. Therefore, the One who gave him this information is the One Who sent him as a Messenger. Allah confirms this point, saying: 'And you did not recite before it any Scripture, nor did you inscribe one with your right hand. Otherwise the falsifiers would have had [cause for] doubt.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48)

The following verse includes a command from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* to Prophet Muhammad to tell the people of the Book that He informed him of matters they could not deny, so that they would be certain that Allah had taught him and thus believe in him. '[Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea…' (*al-A'raf:* 163). The words 'ask them' solve for us many ambiguous matters; one example of that is the event of the Night Journey, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* led the Prophets in performing the prayer of Ibrahim (Abraham).

Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said, 'I found myself in Hijr and Quraysh were asking me about my Night Journey. I was asked about things pertaining to Jerusalem, which I could not preserve (in my mind). I was very vexed as I had never been before. Then, Allah raised it (Jerusalem) before my eyes; and I looked towards it, and I gave them the information about whatever they questioned me. I also saw myself among the group of Messengers. I saw Musa (Moses) saying prayer and found him to be a well-built man as if he was a man of the tribe of Shanu'a. I saw 'Isa (Jesus), son of Mary *peace be upon him* offering prayer; he had the closest resemblance with 'Urwa ibn Masu'd Al-Thaqafi. I saw Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* offering prayer; he had the closest resemblance with your companion (the Prophet himself) amongst people. When the time of prayer came, I led them. When I completed the prayer, someone said, "Here is Malik, the keeper of the Hell. Salutations." I turned to him, but he preceded me in salutation.'(1)

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih*

There is a verse in the Quran that says: ‘And ask those We sent before you of Our messengers…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 45). A commandment was given to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* to ask the other Messengers who were sent before him, but when could he ask them. There must have been an opportunity for them to meet so that he could ask them. Therefore, when Messenger Muhammad said that he met with the Prophets, spoke to them and led them in prayer, the news is believable because in this way, he had obeyed Allah’s Commandment. ‘[Prophet], ask them about the town by the sea…’ (*al-A’raf:* 163). The question, which Allah ordered Prophet Muhammad to ask the people of the Book was meant to rebuke and reproach them; what was the story of the town by the sea?

This town was close to the sea, and we understand that the question which the verses posed to them indicated that the sea had some significance in the matter because the question was connected with fish and fishing, so it was inevitably a coastal settlement. ‘… How its people broke the Sabbath when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays - We tested them in this way: because of their disobedience.’ (*al-A’raf:* 163)

The Arabic word *hitan* which means a kind of fish is the plural of the word *hut*, just as the word *nun* which also means ‘fish’ is pluralised as *ninan.* Allah forbade them from working on a particular day (Sabbath) so that they would devote it to worship. They still practise some of these customs. I have heard that one of them visited America and refused to ride in a car on Saturday because it is a day off, and refused to work until the next day. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to discipline them when they committed acts contrary to their religion, and He took from them time—during which they could have been working—as He says: ‘For wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We made unlawful for them [certain] good foods which had been lawful to them…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160)

This verse includes admonition and lessons for anyone who strays from the religion, as he should beware of thinking that delusion will bring him benefits which Allah will not know; our Lord is able to punish him with disasters which will cause him to lose what he plundered. As for the bribee, for example, Allah will cause him to have illnesses, ailments and disasters that will eat up all that he has taken.

The children of Israel declared some forbidden things lawful to them, so Allah tried them by forbidding them things which had been lawful for them. Therefore, the punishment which befell them was caused by the wrongdoing they did, as they were preoccupied with the worldly life and material things, so Allah forbade them from working on the Sabbath. As for those who were living close to the sea, Allah afflicted them with a great trial: they could see the fish in the sea with their fins raised above the water like the sails of a ship, while they were in their houses. This was a punishment from their Lord because they were forbidden from catching fish on every Sabbath, but on the other days of the week, when they were allowed to work, no single fish would appear to them. '… when their fish surfaced for them only on that day, never on weekdays – We tested them in this way because of their disobedience.' (*al-A'raf:* 163)

Therefore, they thought that as long as Allah forbade them from fishing on the Sabbath, they had to make a scheme. Accordingly, they made a net from weaved cords like the one that is called *jubiyah* in Egypt, and they were the first people who made this kind of net in this specific way; the fish gets in and cannot get out again. They planned that the fish would come and enter the net on the Sabbath and they would take it out on Sunday, a plan that indicated transgression. Sometimes, they would make a pool with an entrance but with no exit, an act that indicated plotting. Accordingly, Allah made an even cleverer plan for them; He wanted to afflict them because they strayed from His path, disobeyed Him and sought to make lawful what Allah had forbidden; therefore, He made unlawful for them that which He permitted for others. Allah says:

وَإِذْ قَالَتْ أُمَّةٌ مِّنْهُمْ لِمَ تَعِظُونَ قَوْمًا ۙ ٱللَّهُ مُهْلِكُهُمْ أَوْ مُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا
شَدِيدًا ۖ قَالُوا۟ مَعْذِرَةً إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٦٤﴾

How, when some of them asked [their preachers], 'Why do you bother preaching to people God will destroy, or at least punish severely?' [the preachers] answered, 'In order to be free from your Lord's blame, and so that they may perhaps take heed' [164] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 164)

If a saying is addressed by a certain people, this means that there must be addressees; therefore, such people were divided into three groups: people who preached to those who were preached and those who criticised the act of preaching.

The people who preached to others, asking them to adhere to Allah’s religion were the true believers who did so because they saw those who contravened Allah’s religion. Those who criticised the preachers were pious people from among the dwellers of the town who despaired about the rectification of the affairs of those who contravened Allah’s religion.

Considering the verse that says: ‘How, when some of them asked [their preachers], “Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely?” ...’ (*al-A’raf:* 164) It is well known that the ones who uttered those words mentioned in this verse neither transgressed nor preached; they posed this question to the preachers because they believed that preaching to the people who went astray from Allah’s religion was futile. This conforms to what Allah has said to His Messenger Muhammad: ‘Then perhaps you would torment yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 3)

Allah tells His Messenger not to torment or kill himself with grief. In the current verse, some of the children of Israel blamed the preachers for preaching to people who were lost in disbelief and did acts which would cause them to be punished. The preachers said: ‘In order to be free from your Lord’s blame, and so that they may take heed.’ (*al-A’raf:* 164)

The words *ma’dhirah ila rabbikum* mean to be free from your Lord’s blame. When you commit a misdeed against someone, and you tell him your excuse for doing it, he may free you from blame. For example, you may say to your friend, who has failed to come on time for his appointment with you, ‘You are late. You have made me wait for a long time.’ Then, he replies to you, ‘My car broke down and I could not find a ride.’ This is considered an excuse. Therefore, the meaning of the word *ma’dhirah* is the reason why you did something which annoyed another person. Hence, there is a saying, ‘He who warns is excused.’ Allah says: ‘And those with excuses among the Bedouins came…’ (*at-Tawba:* 90).

The Arabic word *mu‘dhir* means someone who offers a false excuse, while the word *mu’adhdhir* means someone who offers a true excuse. The preachers intended to say to the righteous people—who blamed them for preaching the disbelievers—that they would not lose hope in guiding the disbelievers who chose to be tormented by Allah. Even if the preachers lost hope in guiding the disbelievers, they would continue preaching to them to avoid being blamed by their Lord, as they did what they were able to do.

There is a difference between conveying a ruling and preaching about a ruling, as preaching means to repeat to the listener what he already knows but does not do; for example, preaching to someone about performing the obligatory prayer—he already knows that prayer is obligatory, but he does not perform it.

Accordingly, preaching means reminding the heedless person of a ruling; the word 'preacher' is derived from the word 'preach' which refers to those who remind people of the rulings they already know, so that they will adhere to them. Therefore, preachers do not bring any new ruling.

Some scholars say that Allah's words, 'Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely' (*al-A'raf:* 164) were not directed towards the preachers, but they were directed towards those who committed sins and were being preached. This means that those who were preached said that their Lord would chastise and punish them, so there was no need for preaching. However, this is not correct because the ending of the verse contradicts this opinion as Allah says: 'In order to be free from your Lord's blame, and so that they may take heed.' (*al-A'raf:* 164) The Arabic word *la'allahum* (so that they may) affirms that the previously mentioned words were not said by those who were preached. Then Allah says:

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا۟ مَا ذُكِّرُوا۟ بِهِۦٓ أَنجَيْنَا ٱلَّذِينَ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلسُّوٓءِ وَأَخَذْنَا
ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ بِعَذَابٍۭ بَـِٔيسٍۭ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿١٦٥﴾

When they ignored [the warning] they were
given, We saved those who forbade evil, and
punished the wrongdoers severely because of
their disobedience[165] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 165)

Allah informs us in this verse that when the sinners forgot about the admonition they received from some of the believers, Allah tormented them severely for their delusion and abandonment of Allah’s religion and saved those who preached to them. As for the third party, who neither joined the preachers, nor the sinners, they said: ‘… Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy or at least punish severely?…’ (*al-A’raf:* 164). Their words were also a kind of preaching, as the pious people tried to frighten them by saying that Allah would destroy or chastise those who abandoned His path.

Allah’s saying, ‘When they ignored [the warning] they were given,’ (*al-A’raf:* 165) indicates that the disobedient people received preaching and admonition, and Allah punishes severely those who do not follow the instructions of His religion and do not take heed to the preaching and admonition they receive. Therefore, Allah does not treat them unfairly, but they will be punished due to either their disobedience to Allah or their wrongdoing.

Then, Allah says:

فَلَمَّا عَتَوۡاْ عَن مَّا نُهُواْ عَنۡهُ قُلۡنَا لَهُمۡ كُونُواْ قِرَدَةً خَٰسِـِٔينَ ١٦٦

When, in their arrogance, they persisted in doing
what they had been forbidden to do, We said to
them, ‘Be like apes! Be outcasts!’ [166]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 166)

The torment that Allah caused them to suffer indicates that He did not end their lives because tormenting means inflicting pain, and death is not considered torment because it ends any feeling of pain. We can learn something about the difference between death and torment when we read the story of the hoopoe and Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon). Upon noticing that the hoopoe was absent, and its place was empty, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) said: ‘I will surely punish him with a severe punishment or slaughter him…’ (*an-Naml:* 20-21)

These verses clarify the difference between torment and death. In the chapter of *al-A’raf*, Allah says: ‘When, in their arrogance, they persisted in doing what they had been forbidden to do….’ (*al-A’raf:* 166) This means that when they arrogantly rebelled and disobeyed, Allah’s torment for them had been confirmed; this is clarified by Allah’s saying: ‘Be like apes! Be outcasts!’ (*al-A’raf:* 166)

Due to their arrogance and rebellion, Allah punished them by making them akin to the basest of creatures, apes; each one of them had his private parts exposed, so the people mocked and laughed at them. Did they really turn into apes? Yes. Before you command someone to do something, you consider whether he is able to fulfil it or not. When Allah says, 'Be like apes,' (*al-A'raf:* 166) was it within their power to turn themselves into apes? This is a command given to subject the creatures to Allah, turning the disobedient from among the children of Israel into apes; those who preached to them saw them in that state. This is a declarative statement which we believe to be true due to our trust in the One Who said it; this statement was an actual fact for those who witnessed it.

Many miracles were performed by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of* Allah *be upon him* aside from the Quran which has been revealed as a Book of guidance and will remain until the Day of Resurrection. Water flowed from between the fingers of Messenger Muhammad. In addition, he performed other miracles which his Companions witnessed and narrated, and which were intended to make their belief firm. They reached us through narrations (Hadith); if your mind can accept them, it will be good, but if your mind cannot accept them, do not let them shake your faith because they are not intended for later generations. Every miracle, which was bestowed upon Messenger Muhammad, was intended for those who witnessed it. It has reached you as a narrtion which you may believe or not, but if you do not believe it, this should not undermine your faith. However, if it has reached you through an authentic chain of transmission, you must believe it.

Allah has informed us by His saying, 'Be like apes Be outcasts!' (*al-A'raf:* 166) that He inflicted a torment upon the disobedient people from among the children of Israel, by turning them into despicable apes, as a punishment for the arrogant insistence on doing what they had been forbidden to do. Those who preached to them or lived during their time witnessed the torment being inflicted on them. Does the one who is transformed into an ape or a pig remain in that state? The ones who were transformed into apes or pigs remained in that state for a while so that those who saw their evildoing and transgression could see the consequences of their evil, and then they died.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذۡ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكَ لَيَبۡعَثَنَّ عَلَيۡهِمۡ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ مَن يَسُومُهُمۡ سُوٓءَ
ٱلۡعَذَابِۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَسَرِيعُ ٱلۡعِقَابِۖ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَغَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ١٦٧

And then your Lord declared that, until the Day of Resurrection, He would send people against them to inflict terrible suffering on them. Your Lord is swift in punishment but He is most forgiving and merciful [167]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 167)

The Arabic verb *ta'adhdhana* and its derivatives mean 'informing.' The ear is the means by which one is informed. Moreover, before a person can read and write, first, he should be taught the alphabet which is recited to him. This is because one cannot read and write unless he first hears and learns the alphabet. So, hearing is the primary means of obtaining information. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When the sky has split [open], and has responded to its Lord and was obligated [to do so].' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [mention] when your Lord declared that He would surely [continue to] send upon them until the Day of Resurrection those who would afflict them with the worst torment. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*al-A'raf:* 167) Allah *Glorified is He* explains that, although they had the freedom to choose how to act, their adherence to faith was always wavering. They were eager to spread corruption and, therefore, Allah sent upon them those who would afflict them with the worst torment. Why? This is because they are seen as followers of religion. Allah does not afflict disbelievers or atheists with worse torment due to their disbelief or atheism; they are not considered role model for religion. Allah has not sent any messenger to them. But if those who follow Allah's Religion, Message, and Book act corruptly, whilst people know them to be the followers of a prophet who is sent with a Scripture, they will be evil role models of corruption for the people. Accordingly, when Allah afflicts them with torment, He *Glorified is He* does not do so merely because of their corruption, but because such corruption is ascribed to people who are seen as role models for religion.

Back to the verse at hand (*al-A'raf*: 167), we know that the linguistic root *'a-dh-n* means 'informing.' In another verse, Allah says: 'And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78) Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the creation, He explains that He brought us out of our mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and He gave us hearing and sight and minds so that we might be thankful.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the Arabs who lived at the time of the Messenger Muhammad as 'unlettered', meaning that they possessed none of the means of knowledge, although He *Glorified is He* created for us, human beings, means of knowledge by giving us hearing, sight, and minds. It is amazing that He listed them in the order they are used, since – as we said before – if any of us has a new-born baby, he can observe that if he waves his finger in front of the baby's eye, he does not react because his eye has still not begun to perform its function. A baby's vision develops within a period of three or ten days from his birth. But if you were to go close to his ear and shout, he would react. This proves that the baby's ear develops hearing from the very moment he is born, whilst his eye only begins functioning after some time. First comes hearing, then comes sight; hearing and sight information is received, so a person begins to develop mental capabilities. For example, parents may say to a child, 'Do not go near this fire because it will burn you', but he does not believe them as fire looks attractive to him, so he touches it, and it burns him once. Having gone through that experience, he becomes no longer in need of anyone to tell him that fire burns because now he has mental information. So, first comes hearing, then sight, and lastly comes the mental capability. Therefore, Allah urges people to be thankful to Him for giving them the means which help them have knowledge and be rid of ignorance.

There is another aspect of the miraculous nature of the Quran here. When Allah speaks about the means of acquiring knowledge, He uses the word *sam'* (hearing) in the singular form; when he mentions *al-absar* (vision), it is in the plural form. Even though they are both faculties of perception; He *Glorified is He* does not use both of them in the singular form, nor does He use them in the plural form. This is because hearing is the faculty we use to perceive sounds, and it has no natural way of being closed. On the other hand, this does not apply to the eye, since a natural part of it is the lid, which can be closed. If one makes a sound, everyone in the surrounding area can hear it; as for sight, one can open his eyes to see anything he wants to see, whilst if he does not want to see a thing, he can just close his eyes.

Accordingly, with regards to vision, one has more than one option; either to open the eyes and see something or close them, if he has no wish to see anything. Nevertheless, there is no such option for hearing; there is no natural lid to close one ear in case one does not want to hear something. Allah stated this in the Quran even before the development of the science of physiology. He *Glorified is He* mentions 'hearing' in the singular and 'sight' in the plural—even though they are both faculties of perception—in order to communicate this miraculous aspect. There is, however, one Quranic verse which states both words in the singular form: 'And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [ones] will be questioned.' (*al-Isra'*: 36)

The singular of both words in this Quranic verse underlines the individual responsibility of everyone; that is, every individual will be called to account for his own hearing, sight and thinking, not for what other people hear, see or think.

Likewise, we see that, in the Quran, hearing always comes before sight except in one single verse: 'If you could but see when the criminals are hanging their heads before their Lord, [saying], "Our Lord, we have seen and heard, so return us [to the world]; we will work righteousness. Indeed, we are [now] certain."' (*as-Sajda:* 12) This verse speaks about the Day of Resurrection; Allah mentions sight before hearing because when the terror of the Day of Resurrection comes, we will see the universe change before we hear anything.

In this verse (*al-A'raf*: 167), Allah *Glorified is He* states that He assured that the children of Israel would always go astray, and therefore Allah should send someone who would inflict a cruel torment on them; either from the side of faith—such as that which the Prophet Muhammad did with the tribes of Banu Al-Nadeer, Banu Qurayzha, Banu Qaynuqa'and Khaybar—or He would send an oppressive, irreligious ruler. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And thus will We make some of the wrongdoers allies of others for what they used to earn.' (*al-An'am:* 129) This was exactly what happened in the cases of Nebuchadnezzar and Hitler. Accordingly, when Allah informs us of anything, He surely has the power to put that thing into practice; on the contrary, when a human being tells that he is going to do something, he may not have the ability or means to put this very thing into practice. However, Allah possesses all the means and power to bring it about, and His announcements are always confirmed; as for others than Allah, the surrounding conditions might not aid them in bringing about what is announced. For example, the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad were weak and unable to defend themselves against the oppression of the idolaters and disbelievers of Mecca, and each one of them searched for a place where he could be safe; some of them went to Abyssinia, others sought the protection of powerful people who could protect them. In such hard times and unbearable conditions, Allah revealed a Quranic verse in the chapter of *al-Qamar* to Prophet Muhammad, telling him that those disbelieving people would be defeated. Allah has said: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

Some people wondered, 'How could they be defeated, while we are not even able to defend ourselves?' When this verse was revealed, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, 'Which assembly will be defeated?' Later on, he said: 'on the day of the battle of Badr, when I saw Prophet Muhammad, striding in his armour, saying: "Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee," I realised what those words meant.' Allah announced that victory would come, and He is able to bring about whatever He announces, exactly as He announces it; for there is no other god who could prevent Him. So, all what Allah tells shall come true, and none can confront Him or overpower His Power.

In the Quranic verse under discussion (*al-A'raf*: 167), Allah says that he would send against the children of Israel those who would inflict cruel suffering upon them. The Quran clearly states that people would come to oppress them. In this case, Allah would not protect the children of Israel, but He would let the matter to those oppressors who would cause them to great suffering and torment. Allah also states, in another verse in chapter of *Maryam,* that He let loose Satan upon the disbelievers to seduce them. This does not mean that Allah gives Satan the power that they cannot repel, but He does not protect those disbelievers against their temptations. Allah says, ‘do you not see that We have sent the devils upon the disbelievers, inciting them to [evil] with [constant] incitement?’ (*Maryam:* 83) Allah says, ‘… until the Day of Resurrection’ (*al-A’raf:* 167). This implies that this rebellious group of Jews will remain in the world as a constant source of concern until the end of time. Why? They are a source of evil in this universe, and if such evil did not exist, or people did not suffer from its harm and corruption, no one would strive to seek the truth and goodness. Evil, therefore, comes to make the people suffer its torment and corruption so that they turn to what is good. This is why you find that the strongest responses take place in the hearts of the believers, and the most powerful physical reaction for the sake of Islam occurs when they encounter those who seek to persecute Muslims and attack Islam.

The purpose of the existence of evil is to cause those who call for what is good in this world to unite, and the purpose of the existence of falsehood is to stir up and encourage those who call for the truth to fight and counter the evil. This is because when falsehood becomes widespread, and the people suffer because of it, they cry for help and say, ‘O people, do what is good!’ If this does not happen, you will not find anyone striving to do what is good with passion and fervour.

The word *yasum* (afflict) is derived from the root *sam*. When it is used to refer to animals, the word *sa’ima* means ‘freely grazing livestock’, i.e. those animals which go out and graze; they do not need to be fed by their owners. As for the livestock which is tied up and does not graze freely, it needs someone to bring it its food. So the original meaning of *sam* is ‘to seek.’

The word *sam* means also ‘to seek the help of others in afflicting people with torment.’ No one does so unless he has exhausted his own power to inflict it, so he asks someone, who is able to inflict torment, to do so. That is, Allah would send those who would inflict suffering upon them as much as possible, and then when their strength ran out or is weakened, they would seek assistance from others in tormenting the disbelievers. Accordingly, the meaning here is that he will torment them until he gets exhausted; he still finds this insufficient; therefore, he asks another one to inflict them with great torment.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse by saying: 'Your Lord is swift in punishment, but He is most forgiving and merciful.' (*al-A'raf:* 167) Swiftness means that something takes less time than expected. Swiftness here refers to both this life and the next; for when they committed a sin, He would send upon them those who would inflict on them suffering in this world, whilst in the Hereafter, there will be the ultimate swiftness because the distance between a disbeliever and his suffering is not the entire duration of this world. As soon as a man dies, the world ends for him. Prophet Muhammad says, 'When one of you dies, his Resurrection Day is near.' (1)

The Reckoning of the Hereafter will be swiftly done. Even if we assume that each one of us were to go without being reckoned until the end of this world, the reckoning would still be swift as every moment passes of man's life brings him closer to his punishment. Moreover, if we assume that this world will last for million years ahead, every day which passes will cut it short.

After declaring the swiftness of His punishment, Allah *Glorified is He* states that He is most forgiving and merciful. Someone may ask how Allah combines the swiftness of punishment and forgiveness and mercy in the same verse. We reply that Allah is the One Who is speaking, and He is the All-Powerful; so, if He says that He is swift in inflicting punishment, this means that He is swift in punishing the spreaders of corruption and oppressors because He is forgiving and merciful to the oppressed people. Accordingly, Allah shows His mercy to the oppressed people by His swiftness in punishing the oppressors. It may be said also that after Allah stated that He is swift in punishment, and this may frighten people, He wanted to encourage people to seek His Mercy and, therefore, He stated that He is All Forgiving and All Merciful.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Daylami on the authority of Anas*

وَقَطَّعْنَٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ أُمَمًا ۖ مِّنْهُمُ ٱلصَّٰلِحُونَ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ
ذَٰلِكَ ۖ وَبَلَوْنَٰهُم بِٱلْحَسَنَٰتِ وَٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٦٨﴾

We dispersed them over the earth in separate communities some are righteous and some less so: We tested them with blessings and misfortunes, so that they might all return [to righteousness] [168] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 168)

In this regard, Allah states in another verse that He has 'divided them into twelve tribes or communities.' (*al-A'raf:* 160) But here, the verse under discussion has another meaning. Allah *Glorified is He* dispersed them over the earth so that they would no longer have a homeland, and so they would live in humility. This is because they were in disagreement from the very beginning: as grandchildren and cousins.

The meaning of 'We dispersed them' is that the members of each separate group were intrinsically bound to one another, and also that they would not spread out in the places in which they lived. This is why we said before, that they [the Jews] never integrate into societies. When visiting Spain, for example, one finds that they have their own quarter. This is also the case in France and Germany; and wherever they are, they establish an exclusive community which no one can enter. Moreover, they do not adopt customs from anyone else. Allah *Glorified is He* decreed them to be dispersed in this way after He had ordered them to enter the holy land, and they refused to enter it unless those who were residing there left (*al-Ma'ida:* 21-24). Allah says: 'They said, "O Moses, indeed within it is a people of tyrannical strength, and indeed, we will never enter it until they leave it; but if they leave it, then we will enter.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21) Allah also says: 'They said, "O Moses, indeed we will not enter it, ever, as long as they are within it; so go, you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here"….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24)

Therefore, Allah did not allow them to settle together in one homeland, and He made them scatter throughout the whole world. This is because when they live in one place, their corruption would be concentrated only in that place; and Allah wants to announce to the whole world that their corruption is comprehensive. So, if they ever gather in one place, they will be forced by power to leave that place and be expelled from it or persecuted. I think that the recent actions of Hitler are not difficult for us to call to memory. We have explained this before when we commented on Allah's words: 'and We said after Pharaoh to the children of Israel, "Dwell in the land, and when there comes the promise of the Hereafter, We will bring you forth in [one] gathering"….' (*al-Isra':* 104)

Here, we said that their dwelling on earth means for them to spread out upon it since He *Glorified is He* did not specify any particular place for them to live in; and when the promise of the Hereafter comes, Allah will exact punishment on them with a single blow. Allah *Glorified is He* will bring them forth in one gathering in preparation for this final punishment.

Some of the Jews came and settled in Medina. They became people of knowledge, Scripture and wealth and built great fortresses. When Prophet Muhammad immigrated to Medina, he made a treaty with them. Those who embraced Islam would be treated as the rest of the believers; they had the same rights and responsibilities. Allah states that there was a group of the people of Moses who were guided to the truth.

We said that this is called 'a consideration of the possibility' that some of them might follow Prophet Muhammad. The word *duna* in the Quran (*al-A'raf*: 168) has two meanings. It may mean 'other than'—as the opposite of the righteous people are the corrupt people. It may also mean that some of them were the most righteous, whilst others were less righteous. There are always people who aspire to perfection, and others who are content with what is merely good. Then, the verse continues: 'We tested them with blessings and misfortunes, so that they might all return [to righteousness].' (*al-A'raf:* 168) The last part of this sentence, 'so that they might all return [to righteousness],' reveals to us that the verse means that some of them were righteous and others were disbelievers because if it were only that some of them were good and others were better, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have said: 'so that they might all return.' However, it may mean that they aspire to what is best.

About the Arabic word *balawnahum* (we tested them), Allah has the absolute freedom to impose whatever tests He wills. He may test people with blessings in order to reveal their reactions towards Allah's favour upon them—although He eternally knows how people will behave in every situation. But His pre-eternal knowledge is not considered a witness against us. Therefore, He puts us to the test so that our actions will be a testimony from us and against us. Hence, Allah tests with blessings as well as with afflictions. Allah *Glorified is He* tries people with blessings in order to see if the worldly wealth will delude us and cause us to forget the Creator of all means who gave them to us. Allah tells us that man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient, Allah says: "No! [But] indeed, man transgresses, because he sees himself self-sufficient" (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

It is incumbent upon us to be thankful to Allah for His blessings and to use them in the best way we can. If a servant utilises the blessing whilst giving thanks to Allah, he passes the test; if he does not thank Allah, he fails the test. On the other hand, Allah may test people by putting them in into hardships in order to see whether His servant will show patience or not. This means that He only wants people to know themselves and how they will react to the test as He eternally knows it.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* states that when He tries some people by His generosity, they say that this is a proof that Allah is pleased with them, and when He tries some people straitening their means of livelihood, they consider it a sign for Allah's displeasure with them. Allah says: 'and as for man, when his Lord tries him and [thus] is generous to him and favours him, he says, "My Lord has honoured me"…' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16) But Allah tells such people that they both speak falsely for blessings are not proof of honour, nor is the absence of blessings proof of disgrace. Rather, honour comes when one receives the blessing and is thankful to Allah and when he bears the misfortune with patience. So, the blessing in itself is nothing but a trial; likewise, if Allah straightens your provision and makes it scant, this is not a disgrace, but a test too.

Furthermore, Allah blames those people who think that if Allah gives them wealth, then he is pleased with them. He blames them that they do not feed the orphan or urge one another to feed the needy. Then, how can their wealth be considered a blessing? Rather, in this case, it is a sign of their misfortune.

In this verse, Allah clarifies that He put the children of Israel to various tests so that they return to Him. The example of this is when one says, 'So-and-so has worn me out! I tried dealing with him in both ways, yet the stick did not work on him, nor did the carrot; it did not avail when I was generous to him, nor when I was sparing with him.' To Allah belongs the perfect example. Allah tested the children of Israel, yet they did not return to obedience which indicates that disobedience was one of their natural characteristics.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَخَلَفَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ خَلۡفٞ وَرِثُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ يَأۡخُذُونَ عَرَضَ هَٰذَا ٱلۡأَدۡنَىٰ وَيَقُولُونَ سَيُغۡفَرُ
لَنَا وَإِن يَأۡتِهِمۡ عَرَضٞ مِّثۡلُهُۥ يَأۡخُذُوهُۚ أَلَمۡ يُؤۡخَذۡ عَلَيۡهِم مِّيثَٰقُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ أَن لَّا يَقُولُواْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ
إِلَّا ٱلۡحَقَّ وَدَرَسُواْ مَا فِيهِۗ وَٱلدَّارُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةُ خَيۡرٞ لِّلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

And they were succeeded by generations who, although they inherited the Scripture, took the fleeting gains of this lower world, saying, 'We shall be forgiven,' and indeed taking them again if other such gains came their way. Was a pledge not taken from them, writ- ten in the Scripture, to say nothing but the truth about God? And they have studied its contents well. For those who are mindful of God, the Hereafter is better. 'Why do you not use your reason?' [169] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 169)

The words *khalf*, *khalaf* and *khalifa* refer to that which comes after something else; it is said that someone is so-and-so's successor; and we read in chapter of *al-A'raf,* 'And We made an appointment with Musa (Moses) for thirty nights and perfected them by [the addition of] ten; so the term of his Lord was completed as forty nights. And Moses said to his brother Harun (Aaron), "Take my place among my people, do right [by them], and do not follow the way of the corrupters"' (*al-A'raf:* 142) Allah *Glorified is He* used the Arabic verb *ukhluf* meaning 'be my successor.' However, when you hear the word *khalf*, which here means 'generations,' know that it implies a corrupt succession, whilst the word *khalaf* implies a good succession. This is why when you say a prayer for someone, it goes as follows, 'O Lord, make him the best successor (*khalaf*) of the best forebears (*salaf*).' The word *khalf*, in the Quranic verse, implies that they were corrupt in themselves and corrupted the others. Labid ibn Rabi'a, an Arab poet, said:

Gone are they in whose company one could live,
And I remain, amongst their successors, like a mangy.

The poet here laments the death of the noble and generous ones because nothing remains of those in whose generosity and munificence he used to live; for those in whose company one could live are all gone, and it was a blessing just to be in their vicinity. When a man of straightened means lives in the vicinity of a good man, who has been blessed, the blessings of that good man are passed down to him. The poet says, ‘And I remain, amongst their successors, like a mangy,’ meaning that his skin is close and attached, but it is the skin of a scab.

We know the story of Abu Dalf, who was a generous man in Baghdad whose blessings were enjoyed by all the people, and he gave to all who needed. A neighbour of his had an emergency and wanted to sell his house so he put the house up for sale, and when they asked him what price he wanted he said, ‘My house I will sell for a hundred *dinars,* but my position as the neighbour of Abu Dalf is worth a thousand *dinars*!’ on hearing these words, Abu Dalf said, ‘Any man who values being my neighbour ten times what he values his house must certainly not be abandoned! Tell him to remain our neighbour, and he may take whatever money he needs from us.’

In the Quranic verse, the Scripture refers to the Torah, taken as an inheritance by the succeeding generations, but something can only be inherited if the one bequeathing it kept it safe and passed it on to the inheritor. Being a people of corruption, what did they do with their Scripture? They inherited it, and it was conveyed unto them so that they knew what it contained. They took the fleeting gains of this lower world saying, ‘We shall be forgiven,’ and indeed taking them again if other such gains came their way, as stated in this verse of the chapter of *al-A’raf*; that is, they have no excuse for not following the righteous way, and they did not even pay attention to what the Scripture – the Torah – contained of covenants and declarations of the lawful and unlawful, and orders and prohibitions; they were utterly heedless of this saying to themselves: ‘This book only gives the distant bliss of the Hereafter’, whilst they wanted the nearer bliss; so, some of them took bribes and abused power, thereby clutching at the fleeting good of this lower life, this worldly life. They did not manage their worldly life in accordance with Allah's way. This worldly life is composed of substances and accidents: the substance is what is essential, and man in his flesh and bones is 'substance' (*jawhar*); as for his colour and whether he is dark or white-skinned, this is an 'accident' (*'arad*) as is whether he is short or tall, well or ill, rich or poor; those are all accidents. So accidents are variable beings, whilst substances signify beings which remain invariable as long as they exist. As the logicians say, the substance is being as existing in and by itself, whilst the accident is being existing in another as its subject.

They took the 'fleeting gains' (*'arad*) of this worldly life; which may be obtained through unlawful wealth, cheating and bribery. We know that any man – even the believer – may commit a sin, and our Lord does not prevent this because when the Lawgiver ordains a punishment for a crime, this allows for the possibility that the crime will be committed. As Allah specifies the punishment for theft, as stated in verse 38 of the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, this implies that the lower soul of the believer might incite him into stealing, for example. However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not leave this crime without a punishment. Were we to see a Muslim stealing, we would say to him, 'This action is forbidden in Islam, and it requires a punishment.' The criminal cannot commit a sin and practise the religion at the same time; otherwise, he would be falsely ascribed to it; and when a Muslim commits a sin or an act of disobedience and then feels remorse, repents and resolves not to do it again, his repentance is genuine. The same is true if he, being tempted to commit the sin again, returns to it and then repents again. The important thing is that he does not insist on perpetuating the sin and saying each time, 'I will repent later.' They, the children of Israel, used to persist in their sin and say, 'Allah will forgive us,' but they did not even think about repenting. We find that some of them claimed to be Allah's children and his beloved ones, as stated in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*: 'But the Jews and the Christians say, "We are the children of Allah and His beloved" (*al-Ma'ida:* 18). The response comes: why should He, then, chastise you for your sins? "Say, "Then why does He punish you for your sins?" Rather, you are human beings from among those He has created" (*al-Ma'ida:* 18).

So, they clutch onto the fleeting gains of this lower world, seeking to justify it by saying that Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive them. In doing so, they make lawful what is unlawful, thereby passing from the realm of sinful disobedience to that of outright disbelief; for there is a distinction between doing something whilst acknowledging that it is a sin and committing the sin and saying, ‘It is not a sin’ – to do this is to turn from disobedience to disbelief. An example of that are those people who declare usury to be lawful. We say to them: accept that you are sinful, but do not throw yourself into disbelief because if you declare that which Allah has made unlawful to be lawful, you fall into disbelief and deserve to have it ascribed to you – Allah forbid! Yet if you say, ‘It is forbidden, but my circumstances are difficult and I cannot control myself,’ Allah might forgive you. Adamant in their sin, the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* used to say, ‘Allah will forgive us.’

In the verse (*al-A’raf*: 196), Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that they left aside what is high and took the fleeting gains of the lower life, and persisted in their transgression committing sin after sin without knocking upon the door of repentance. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* warns them as stated in the Quranic verse under discussion that they inherited the Scripture within which a solemn pledge was taken from them that they would not attribute anything to Allah but what is true; but does the transgressor leave falsehood and return to truth? Of course, he does not, so they ignored what the Scripture said, despite the fact that they had studied it.

This is explained in the Quranic verse (*al-A’raf:* 169) where the verb *darasa* which means to read again and again or to study implies the repetition of the action. If it is said that so-and-so has studied (*darasa*) jurisprudence, this means that he read it continuously until it became an innate faculty for him. This is different from the one who merely reads the book only once; so, jurisprudence does not become an innate faculty for him. In order to understand the difference between ‘knowledge’ and ‘faculty’, we say: knowledge is to receive information, whilst he, who studies and applies this information to make it automatic, masters the knowledge, so it becomes an innate faculty for him. If a person, who is fasting, for example, meets with a jurist and asks him a question about fasting, he will answer him straight away because he knows everything about jurisprudence matters, both big and small. But if you ask a junior student at Al-Azhar [university in Cairo], he might hesitate and need to go over his books to find the answer because jurisprudence has not yet become an innate faculty for him. Faculties in abstract matters are akin to automation in material matters; it requires training. The one who takes hold of the loom to weave and is adept at passing the shuttle between the threads, can only do this after much training; he has learned it with difficulty and constant training.

Hence, the verse under discussion indicates that they repeatedly studied the Scripture until they knew well the knowledge it contained. The Arabic word *dars* (to study) is derived from a tangible concept, namely that of threshing grain which in Arabic is also *dars*. Those who grew up in the countryside know how we thresh grain. When the thresher turns on the ears of wheat, the grains come out of its sheaves and the stalks are cut; in Arabic, this is called *dars*.

Their disobedience was not the result of their negligence of the pledge they had made not to attribute anything to Allah but the truth—because they had thoroughly studied the Scripture that was sent down to them, the Torah—but it was their preferring to take the fleeting gains of this lower world. It is then necessary that He clarifies for us the recompense for preferring the fleeting gains, in contrast to the great reward granted to those who seek the abode of the Hereafter—everlasting reward. Allah says: "And the home of the Hereafter is better for those who fear Allah, so will you not use reason?" (*al-A'raf:* 169) This is an essential precaution before acting: to consider what good your action will bring forth and to refrain from it, if it brings more evil than good. You must weigh things up using intelligence; only then, you will see that doing what is good is the most sensible course.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُمَسِّكُونَ بِٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَأَقَامُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ ٱلْمُصْلِحِينَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

But as for those who hold fast to the Scripture and keep up the prayer, We do not deny righteous people their rewards [170] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 170)

Many of the children of Israel inherited the book and took the fleeting gains of this lower world, and did not weigh things up with their intelligence; therefore, instead of holding fast to the Scripture, they abandoned it following their whims, as though they were not governed by a Divine Law dictating orders and prohibitions. However, in contrast to them, there were others who did hold fast to the Scripture they inherited and attributed nothing to Allah but the truth.

The Arabic root letters *m-s-k* imply a strong bond, and that which connects a man with something is his grasp called *masik*. The derivatives of the word are *masaka*, *massaka*, *amsaka*, *istamsaka* and *tamasaka* all of which have the same essential root meaning. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says 'hold fast' using the verb form *massaka* which is an intense form of *masaka* (to hold), just as there is *qata'a* (to cut) and *qatta'a* (to cut into pieces) which is more intense.

Massaka means to hold fast to what you clutch, whilst *istamsaka* means to seek to clutch (i.e. to take hold) and *tamasaka* means that two things hold onto each other. In His mercy, our Lord does not ask us to hold fast *massaka* to His Book, but rather, He asks us to 'take hold' (*istamsaka*) of it; Allah *Glorified is He* therefore clarifies: 'If you wish to draw close to Me and feel My nearness, leave aside the rest, for the aid comes from Me Myself.' Accordingly, it can be inferred that he who follows the way of the Quran, will never be forsaken, for he indeed has taken hold to the firmest handle, as clearly stated in the Quranic verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara;* Allah says: 'So whoever disbelieves in *Taghut* and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it.' (*al-Baqara:* 256) The verb 'to grasp' is used instead of 'to hold fast,' because he who directs his intention to do so will be given aid by Allah. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith:

'I am just as My slave thinks I am'—that is, 'I am able to do for him what he thinks I can do for him and I am with him if He remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than them; and if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, in 'Kitab At-Tawhid', and by Muslim in his Sahih, with three chains of narration on the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him; also narrated by At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

By your faith in Allah and His help, you get aid and strength. If you want Allah to remember you, and then remember Him; if you remember Him in yourself, He remembers you in Himself; and if you remember Him in a group, He remembers you in a better group; and if you draw a hand's span nearer to Him, He draws an arm's length nearer to you. So, what more could you ask for, especially that you add nothing to Him? Hence, it is all in your hands, and if you want Allah to be with you, then follow His way, and His aid will come to you directly. In this way, the whole affair lies with you, and you have it in hand, by virtue of your faith in Allah and your desire to draw near to Him.

This is why we said before that if a person wants to meet with a very important person in this worldly life, in pursuit of a benefit from him, he has to make a written request, and either the VIP agrees or not. If he does agree, he specifies the time and the place, and his office manager asks you to state the topics you intend to discuss with him. When you meet with him, and the time runs out, he stands up from his chair to end the meeting. This is the case of the great human being; but what about The Greatest of all and every being, with whom you meet on the grounds of faith? You can meet with Allah at any time, in any place, say whatever you want to Him and you are the one who ends the meeting. Is all this not enough for you to take hold of faith?

The Scripture, mentioned in the Quranic verse of (*al-A'raf*: 170), refers to the inherited Scripture, meaning the Torah, which they had studied over and over, and in which Allah took from them a pledge not to attribute anything to Him but the truth. In the Quranic verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that they used to observe prayer constantly. Did their Scripture contain nothing but prayer? No, but He mentions it specifically being the buttress of the faith; and in the *Shari'a* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayer is made obligatory by a direct command from Allah, whilst other obligations were enjoined through Revelation.

An example of that is when the head of any governmental department wants to give ordinary, routine instructions; he signs the document with the instructions and writes on it, 'For the attention of so-and-so', then it follows its regular course. When he is more concerned with the matter at hand, he speaks to the employee in question on the telephone; when the matter at hand is of the utmost importance, he has the employee come and see him in person. Prayer was made obligatory in this way because it is a constant proclamation of fidelity to Allah established five times every day, and if you wish to offer more, you can perform supererogatory and night prayers.

Establishing prayer is a sign of continuous allegiance to Allah; by observing all His other Laws, you show your allegiance to Allah: by giving *zakat* once a year, by fasting for one month—*Ramadan*— and by performing the pilgrimage once in your lifetime if you are able to. But prayer is a constantly renewed proclamation of allegiance, and because prayer has this great importance, it is never excused. As we know, there are five pillars of Islam: the testimony that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah – faith in Allah and the Messenger as a single unit that cannot be separated – and it is sufficient for a person to say it once in order to fulfil the obligation; then comes the pillars of prayer, *zakat* (the obligatory alms), fasting and the pilgrimage— the latter is only obligatory on those who are able to perform it, and a person might not possess enough wealth to pay the obligatory alms, in which case he does not have to pay it at that time; he might be ill or on a journey so that he does not have to fast either.

A Muslim may be excused for not performing some Islamic obligations, except for prayer; neglecting it is never excused. Superficially speaking, prayer cuts you off from your work for a while— for example, if every obligatory prayer took half an hour, one would take two and a half hours daily to pray. Time is dear to man, and prayer consumes some of this time in which he could otherwise be earning money. Furthermore, during prayer one must fast, in that he has to abstain from eating, drinking and marital intimacy; so, prayer comprises all the constituents of the Pillars of Islam, which is why it is never excused.

Therefore, the notion of holding on is very plain in the verse under discussion, and observing prayer expresses adherence to the way of faith. This is why we hear people say, ‘When we went to Mecca and Medina, we experienced psychological clarity, spiritual illumination and overwhelming theophany and light.’ I say to those people: our Lord is here just as He is there; it is only that when you were there, you adhered to the faith; when you heard the call to prayer you rushed to pray. If you did here the same as you did there, you would feel the same illumination. Hence, if you constantly pledge your allegiance to Him, Alah says: “But those who hold fast to the Book and establish prayer - indeed; We will not allow to be lost the reward of the reformers” (*al-A'raf:* 170). This is a universal truth: Allah *Glorified is He* never allows the reward of the one who enjoins what is right to be lost. The fact that He mentions the reward of the good doers after referring to holding fast to the Scripture and establishing prayer shows that any attempt to reform society depends on those who hold fast to the Scripture and observe prayer constantly because society cannot be rectified unless you maintain your link with The One Who created you and created society, and sends down His way of righteousness for your guidance.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذۡ نَتَقۡنَا ٱلۡجَبَلَ فَوۡقَهُمۡ كَأَنَّهُۥ ظُلَّةٞ وَظَنُّوٓاْ أَنَّهُۥ وَاقِعُۢ بِهِمۡ
خُذُواْ مَآ ءَاتَيۡنَٰكُم بِقُوَّةٖ وَٱذۡكُرُواْ مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ١٧١

When We made the mountain loom high above them like a shadow, and they thought it would fall on them, We said, ‘Hold fast to what We have given you, and remember what it contains, so that you may remain conscious of God’ [171]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 171)

It is known that mountains are made of compacted rocks and can be very high, reaching a thousand metres or more; Allah *Glorified is He* points out that He made mountains firm and says: ‘And the mountains He set firmly’ (*an-Nazi'at:* 32), using the Arabic verb *arsaha,* ‘He set firmly’ (to fix or anchor) which is not to be employed unless you are speaking about something heavy—you would not say, ‘I fixed the paper on the desk,’ but you would say, ‘I fixed the plate of glass onto the desk to protect it.’ So, the verb *arsa* refers to fixing in place something that is heavy.

Allah *Glorified is He* fixed the mountains firmly in place and made them as stakes or pegs on earth. A peg, as we know, is held in place by the base into which it is driven and fastened; if it comes loose, we wrap it with material to make it thicker and fasten it to the place into which it is driven. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He uprooted Mount Sinai and caused it to be raised above them. In one verse (*an-Nisa':* 154), Allah states that He has raised Mount Sinai above them at their pledge. In another verse (*al-Baqara:* 63), Allah reminds the children of Israel that He took their pledge and raised that mountain high above them.

There is a difference between *nataqa* (to cause to quake) and *rafa'a* (to raise)—mountains are firmly fixed on earth and held in place like pegs; hence, before a mountain is raised up, it first needs to be pulled and taken from the ground; then, it can be raised. Therefore, the verse in hand means that Allah *Glorified is He* has taken the mountain from its firm place before He raised it up. Allah raised up the mountain so that it would be a source of shade for them. Accordingly, there were three stages: the mountain was pulled and uprooted, raised, and then He *Glorified is He* made it cast its shadow over them. This means that the thing which was raised must have been directed in a particular direction. Allah *Glorified is He* reminds people of this great miracle when He caused the mountain to quake; then, He pulled it from the ground. Allah pulled it up from the earth in order to use it for a different purpose, which was to cast a shadow. Allah showered them with His favour by causing clouds to cast shadows on them. The shadow of clouds was a mercy for them, while the shadow of the mountain was a torment. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the Torah to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* so that he would convey it to them. But his people said to him, 'The laws of this Torah are too harsh.' One might wonder why they were so hesitant to accept the laws which came for the good of mankind. So, Allah sent this punishment, raising the mountain above them like a shadow to serve as a threat—as though it would fall upon them.

This is why we find that all Jews prostrate on their left temples, although proper prostration should be done with the forehead placed squarely on the ground. They prostrate with a slight inclination to the left because when the early Jews saw the mountain above them, they were overcome with fear lest it fall, so they watched the mountain as they prostrated. They continued to prostrate in this way thereafter, always placing their left temples on the ground because of the incident of the mountain which Allah raised above them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and they thought it would fall on them…' The Arabic word *zhann* (think) something signifies probability; some other times such probability is so high that it signifies certainty. In the verse (*al-Baqara*: 46), the word *yazhun* gives the meaning of certainty.

When that situation continued, they feared that the mountain would fall upon them. Allah revealed a Scripture – the Torah – to them, and they disobeyed and rebelled against it; therefore, He *Glorified is He* ordered them to hold fast to it and put it into practice so that they might be mindful of their duties to Allah.

The Arabic word *khudhu* (to hold fast) is imperative which requires a commander and a command. The word *al-quwwah* which here means holding fast to something, is people's active energy. The original case is that we should approach all things in this entire universe with great enthusiasm because all what exists in this universe is subservient and controlled; it always responds when it is commanded. As we have said before, the sun has never become angry with people and said, 'I shall not rise today'; likewise, the air has never denied us; neither does the donkey, for example, refuse to carry manure, nor to be washed by its owner or saddled to be mounted. The whole universe is subject to fixed laws. Allah states clearly in the Quran that, 'it is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming.' (*Ya Sin:* 40)

Allah *Glorified is He* developed this definite system for the universe since it is compelled and not ordered to follow divine legislation. Those masses are governed by laws; thus, their existence is different from the human's existence because the latter has the right of free will. Despite his free will, there are many processes going on inside the human's body of which he is completely ignorant; yet, they are essential to one's very life. No one can control one's own heart beats, one's respiratory system, the processes of the digestive system and the excretion system—when the bladder is full of urine, a person feels the urge to answer the call of nature. All of those processes are regulated without ever being subject to man's free will. In addition, there are other things which are out of man's control. For example, if a person is eating and a grain of rice falls into his windpipe, and he drives it out by coughing, this is 'instinctive', that is, it is not governed by free will.

Likewise, if you bring food to an animal, it will not eat more than it can, even if its owner beats it; on the contrary, a human being may continue to eat even after he is satiated. For example, when a guest gets satiated, and his host says to him, ‘You have not tried this kind of meat yet!’ he eats it. This is why we find that man is prone to illnesses more than animals because human being’s free will works in many different spheres, and that may harm or injure him.

To illustrate the difference between man and animals, we relate the following example. Man boils mint and drinks it, while he cooks mallow and eats it. He does so because he experimented with both of them and found that mint is suitable for drinking and mallow is suitable for eating, even though their leaves are very similar. However, if we are to place the mint plant and some dry hay before a buffalo or donkey, we will find that both will go straight to the dry hay and leave the fresh green mint aside—they do so instinctively. Those beings which are governed by instinct have their own order. If animals had free will, the system of life would all be disturbed, and it would become very difficult for man. Hence, we see that the essentials of life are governed by the natural laws which exist in the universe to serve us, human beings.

Electricity, for example, already existed before we discovered it, but afterwards we did indeed utilise it. The same applies to the force of gravity. It has always existed, but we were not aware of it, and when we discovered it, our ability to benefit from it increased. Thus, we see that although man is only one of the many beings in the universe, he is distinguished by having free will in certain affairs, whilst being compelled in other affairs. He shares with the rest of existence the aspect of compulsion, and is distinguished from the rest of creation – all save the jinn – by the free will in other affairs. For example, when a man who suffers from a heart problem climbs a ladder, he gasps and breathes rapidly out of exhaustion and exertion because he is governed by the instinct that informs his body that his lungs have to work harder to give him the oxygen he needs to climb the ladder.

Another example is that male animals approach females to smell them, and if they find them pregnant, they do not go near them. In this regard, animals are different from human beings because the animal’s instinct that the sexual intercourse between them is meant to preserve the species, and since the female is already pregnant, the male does not go near the female. People are different from animals in this regard because the pleasure man derives from sex is greater than that of the animal. This is because, in the case of animals, it is merely dependent on instinct, whilst, in the case of man, it depends on both instinct and the free will which Allah has endowed man. Thus, it is a mercy from Allah that man is compelled in some things, but has free will to choose amongst various other things.

In the verse under discussion, Allah has commanded the children of Israel to hold fast to what Allah gave them in the Scripture, the Torah; the Quran had told us about power before modern science elaborated on it. Science had enlightened us about power before we saw its practical applications. We can now perceive energy which gives power. Newton discovered the law of gravity and came up with the three laws of motion. He discovered that every object remains as it is; if it is static, it will remain thus until something comes to move it; and if it is in motion, it will not stop unless it collides with something or is held by something. The scientists call this the law of 'inertia;' that is, a force is what makes an object stay in the same position until it is moved, or it continues moving until it is stopped. If you get in a car and sit still, whilst the car moves, you will remain still unless the car stops suddenly; then, you will move from your place unless you are holding onto something.

In the marketplaces, we can encounter conjurors that play games to bewitch people's eyes. They take a table covered with a shiny and smooth piece of cloth and place cups and plates on it, and then they pull the piece of cloth so quickly and smoothly, that cups and plates do not even move when the cloth moves.

Newton made a comparison between power, motion and inertia. We said that inertia means that a static object remains motionless, and an object in motion stays in motion. This principle helped the science of aeronautics which is concerned with movement of spaceships and rockets. We see spaceships and imagine that they move through space using fuel despite the fact that they are not large enough to be able to carry enough fuel for years of travel. The truth is that they move according to the law of inertia without any fuel. They are propelled into space by the power of the rocket until they arrive in the outer space where they continue to move as long as nothing stops them. We can observe this with a simple experiment: when one fires a bullet from a gun, the bullet travels by the power of the shot for a certain distance and then falls, if nothing gets in its way first. It falls after travelling a specific distance because it comes into contact with air and undergoes friction until it stops moving. Yet, in outer space there is no air, so the spaceship does not stop because it is moving according to the law of inertia. When taking off, those spaceships are accelerated by rockets that propel them beyond the atmosphere; the rockets are propelled by expelled gas in accordance with Newton’s third law which states that every action has an opposite and equal reaction; when this expelled gas becomes hot and shoots powerfully out of the back of the rocket, the rocket is pushed forwards.

In this way, we see the True Lord’s words, ‘Take what We have given you with determination…’ (*al-A’raf:* 171) in its materialistic and spiritual reality. Look at irreligious people; you will find that they are motionless in specific situations, and they do not move forward or go beyond them: one of them does not pray, neither gives the obligatory alms, nor speaks righteous words. However, he needs some power to move him from his motionless state instead of the obedience of Allah. We also find that some irreligious people drink wine, fornicate, steal or take bribes. However, they need some power to prevent them from this kind of motion. Thus, we say that, in his intentional actions, man requires two things: first, if he is motionless regarding good deeds, we provide him with a power which moves him towards this goodness; and if he is in motion towards evil deeds, we provide him with a power which causes him to stop – and this is what the way of faith presents to us in the form of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do.’ If someone is lazy with regard to prayer and does not perform it, we say to him, ‘Pray!’ and if someone indulges in gambling and moves towards it, he will not stop unless there comes to him a power which stops him and restrains him. So, the legislative power of the way of Allah consists of ‘Do’s’ which urge the motionless into action, and ‘Do not’s’, which stop what is in motion, provided that all motion and motionlessness are in the way of Allah.

We should know that Allah *Glorified is He* enables the disbelievers so that they are able to explain the obscure matters of the universal law to us; they discovered the laws of physical motion, and we understood it both physically and metaphysically. The fact that the disbelievers discovered these universal laws is no reason for us to be lazy and dependent on them, but rather, we must also do our best to participate in the progress in science which control the affairs of life. We should know that nothing can generate in us a new natural disposition since from ancient times man has possessed the natural disposition which tells him that this world has a Maker; and all of our atoms and our dimensions affirm for us the existence of the One God; Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, even when the philosophers investigated that which lies behind matter, this was confirmed for them. Most of the philosophers were non-believers, and by looking into what lies behind matter they were simply searching for *The Most High* Creator because a person does not look for something unless he believes that it exists. Because they all know that man has come into the universe, that this universe is built according to a wise design and is created with a power which not even the power of all men combined could equal, therefore, this universe must have a creator.

We have shown that the laws which appear to us in the physical world are similar to the laws of morality; yet, people tend to prefer material laws because they bring them benefit or keep them away from harm; so they take what benefits them and leave aside what causes harm to them. Man therefore, needed a way of guidance from heaven to clarify and explain to him the laws of morality by which he may obtain instant happiness in this world and lasting happiness in the Hereafter. As for the material laws of earth, Allah left them for the mind to discover by its endeavours so that those who do not believe in Allah would approach material laws and discover them while fleeing from moral laws because they restrain the passions of the soul and bring on the difficulties of moral responsibility, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* wished to say 'Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.' (*al-A'raf:* 171)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to reveal to us those material laws which clarify for us the moral laws of action and reaction in order to understand that the soul may love an evil action because it satisfies one of its passions, but one is to be mindful that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. If you are pleased by this act and you love and desire it, remember well the reaction it will bring about—an ensuing punishment. The same is true of the burden of legal responsibility: when you perform acts of obedience, it might be difficult for you, but you must remember the reaction they bring, which is comfort and perfect reward. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '[They will be told], "Eat and drink in satisfaction for what you put forth in the days past."' (*al-Haqqa:* 24) This statement comprises an action and a reaction: the action is the good deeds performed in days gone by, and the reaction is the pleasant food and drink in the Hereafter. To those who are deluded and proud of themselves, their might and their power, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'So let them laugh a little and [then] weep much…' (*at-Tawba:* 82). Here we find heavy, copious weeping as a result of little laughter. On the Day of Resurrection, such a man will be brought forth, and it will be said to him: 'Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) If you deem yourself to be so mighty and noble that you can wrong others, you will be punished. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to us, about His way of guidance: '…and remember what is in it that perhaps you may become righteous.' (*al-A'raf:* 171) Beware of heedlessness in this regard; for it is what renders Allah's ways difficult for people—obedience is hard and burdensome, while disobedience gives pleasure and satisfies lust. Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies: Bear in mind well the actions and reactions of these moral values.

We know that remembrance requires a great many things: the preacher, for example, continuously reminds them; we said that 'preaching' is a way of repeating and reminding others about a ruling: I preach to him, who already knows the rule because I want him to obey it so that instead of just knowing it, he puts it into practice. We all know that prayer, the pilgrimage and the *zakat* (prescribed alms) are Pillars of Islam, and we have all been informed of that, but some of us are too lazy to put this knowledge into practice. We, therefore, continue to alert his mind with reminders and preaching; and this is the nature of the superiority of the Prophet's *Ummah* [followers]: 'You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110). Why is it a reminder? The True Lord *Glorified is He* replies: '…You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110).

Enjoying what is right is a verbal admonition, and so is forbidding what is wrong. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* enumerated the various means of doing this so that the reminder would remain, and every Muslim would hold fast to Allah's Way with all his strength. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then with his heart – and that is the weakest faith.'(1)

So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised the issue from enjoining and forbidding, which are verbal admonitions, to the level of direct action; and if one of us cannot amend an evil by his tongue or his hand, he should at least condemn it with his heart. You will find that the Quran presents this as a matter of enjoining and forbidding, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* presented it as an action because there is a difference between information absorbed into the mind and one's actually bringing the soul to live up to what the information requires. This is why when we study religion in our schools, as well as algebra, geometry, chemistry and biology, it is not difficult to study religion, but rather to make the soul live up to what it requires. But when a pupil studies algebra, geometry or chemistry, all of which give the good things of this worldly life, he inclines to them; the matter of religion, however, is concerned with morality. Therefore, it is not enough for us merely to know the religion, but we must also act upon it, following a good example and a sound role model.

Imagine that one teaches religion and imparts it to pupils; however, they find it having no effect at all on his behaviour; what will be the result? The pupil's trust in his teacher will diminish, as will his trust in the religion itself because he learnt nothing about religion but empty words since those preaching it only pay lip service to it – much to the failure of religious education. The problem, then, is that people mistakenly think that the way of religious instruction stops at the teaching of religious information. No, religious education requires the implementation of such information, as opposed to the other sciences which only give information from which man may elect to derive benefit or not.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Hence, sometimes, reminding takes the form of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and other times it takes the form of action: ‘Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he cannot, then with his tongue.’ But what does it mean to change with the tongue? It means that if a person is skilled and gifted in preaching and knows the proper way to give advice, he has the right to preach. Not every person is suitable for preaching; for the object of the preaching strays from Allah’s Way, and the preacher stands in his way to bring him back; he takes him away from that which he loves and is passionate about; consequently, the one who advises him must be delicate in how he goes about this.

For example, we find that when a patient goes to the doctor, he prescribes medicine for him; and in the past, all medicines were bitter, and people found it difficult to take them; adults would take hold of children and force them to take the medicine. When pharmaceutics developed, the laboratories began to wrap the dose of medicine with a cover concealing its bitterness in order to be delicate with the person who is bodily ill – so what about the person who is morally ill? He needs the very same thing. For this reason, we must make our advice gentle, and not dissuade the one we advise from what he loves in ways which he hates. This is why we said that advice is heavy because as you advise a person, you suppose that your behaviour is better than his, and that he is inferior to you in this regard—this is the first obstacle because the one you advise looks at you as though you deem yourself to be better than him. This is why the traditional saying goes, ‘Advice is heavy, so do not make a mountain out of it, and do not turn it into an argument.’ It is also said, ‘Truth is bitter, so lend them subtle words.’ This is how reminders should be given, and if you cannot prevent by action, then prevent by words because changing with the hand entails you having authority over the one to be changed, and this is only the case if he has some previous experience with him proving that the amender wants what is best for him. This might well go without saying, such as if you are his father or mother; the father and mother look after the son, and meet all his needs for food, drink, shelter and expenses; and each one of them does what is best for their son. If the adviser does not have this kind of connection with the one he advises, he must first soften him with something he loves; so, when he asks him for something, he meets his need, and then he informs him of the thing about what needs to be addressed; having done him a favour, the adviser will entice him to accept advice.

Another example: suppose your son asks you to get him a watch, and then his mother tells you that he has not done any study; then you bring him the watch and say to him, 'Son, you asked me for a watch and I have brought you one;' you give it to him and say, 'Your mother tells me that you are not paying attention to your studies, and if I remembered what she had said, I would not have bought the watch!' You might rebuke him, but he smiles because you have softened his heart, and showed him that you love him, so he accepts the advice; and even if you give him a light blow, he will accept it because he knows that you want what is best for him. Therefore, reminding has many forms: preaching with words, amending with actions and condemning with the heart. '…And remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.' (*al-A'raf:* 171)

The basic meaning of *taqwa* (fearing Allah) is to shield one thing with another: you protect yourself from pain by making a shield (*wiqaya*) to protect yourself from it. This word, as we have already seen, can be used with things opposite to each other; the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And fear the Fire, which has been prepared for the disbelievers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 131) Using the same word *taqwa* to mean 'beware', He also says: '… fear Allah that you may be successful.' (*al-Baqara:* 189)

Someone might wonder how Allah can say both 'fear (*ittaqu*) the fire' and 'fear (remain conscious—*ittaqu*) of Allah.' We say that it is indeed because to remain conscious of Allah means to beware lest Allah's wrath falls upon you and beware of Allah's chastisement by placing a shield between yourselves and His punishment. As we know, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has Attributes of Majesty and Attributes of Beauty; the Attributes of Beauty are those which give man happiness, such as His being 'The All-Forgiving,' and 'The Giver of Mercy' and 'The Munificent.' Further, just as Allah has Attributes of Beauty which cause you to desire Him and turn to Him, He *Glorified is He* also has Attributes of Majesty which inspire fear and awe, for He *Glorified is He* is the All-Compeller and the Lord of Retribution.

Hence, be conscious of Allah so that you may shield yourself from the manifestations of His Attributes of Majesty such as the All-Compeller and the Lord of Retribution.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنۢ بَنِىٓ ءَادَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ
بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا۟ بَلَىٰ ۛ شَهِدْنَآ ۛ أَن تَقُولُوا۟ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَٰذَا غَٰفِلِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they replied, ‘Yes, we bear witness.’ So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We were not aware of this’ [172]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 172)

The Arabic word *idh* (and when) refers to time meaning ‘Remember the time when Allah took from the children of Adam…’ The subject of the action of taking was Allah, the indirect object was the children of Adam *peace be upon him* and the direct object was their offspring; these are the elements of the action here. Let us reflect on it carefully: our Lord was the Taker; the children of Adam had something that was taken from them, and what was taken was their offspring. The children of Adam *peace be upon him* are Adam’s descendants from his time until the Day of Resurrection which means that the thing taken, and those from whom it was taken, were, in fact, one and the same. We must have some kind of explanation for this because if something is taken from something else, the thing that is taken must be a part, while the thing from which it is taken is the whole.

For example, if I take something from you, the thing from which it is taken is the whole, and the thing which is actually taken is a part of it; however, the thing taken is the very same as the thing from which it is taken. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* erased the ambiguity from this verse when He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, as Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* tells us: ‘When Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam, He wiped his back and every person that He created among his offspring until the Day of Resurrection fell out of his loins. He placed a ray of light between the eyes of every person. Then, He showed them to Adam, and he said: 'O Lord! Who are these people?' He said: 'These are your offspring.' He saw one of them whose ray between his eyes amazed him, so he said: 'O Lord! Who is this?' He said: 'This is a man from the latter nations of your offspring called Dawud.' He said: 'Lord! How long did you make his life span?' He said: 'Sixty years.' He said: 'O Lord! Add forty years from my life to his.' So, at the end of Adam's life, the Angel of death of came to him, and he said: 'Do I not have forty years remaining?' He said: 'Did you not give them to your son Dawud?' He said: 'Adam denied, so his offspring denied, and Adam forgot and his offspring forgot, and Adam sinned, so his offspring sinned.(1)

So, Adam's progeny came from Adam's loins; we have previously mentioned that before each one of our mothers became pregnant with us, we were seeds in our father's loins; and our fathers were seeds in their father's loins and so on, all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him*. Thus, we find that everyone was taken from his father's loins as a seed; and there were people who were taken as seeds but no seed was taken from them, such as those whom Allah destined to be infertile; likewise, the generation upon whom the Hour will rise so that they will not procreate. Adam *peace be upon him* was the one from whom all this was taken since he was the first man, and he was not taken from anyone; all those who came between Adam—the father and the final child to be born—are both taken and also taken from. In this way, everyone is both taken and taken from; so, it makes sense. Adam *peace be upon him* was taken from, and then everyone else—from the first children of Adam until the final generation who will not procreate.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified that our Lord *Glorified is He* wiped Adam's back with His hand and brought out his offspring, whereupon He asked, 'Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf:* 172) to which they said, 'Yes'. Thus, we understand that each seed was taken from the one which came before it; and from each was taken that which came after it so that all of them were both taken and taken from – all except from two: the first being Adam *peace be upon him* who had others taken from him, but was not himself taken from anyone; and the second being the final of his offspring to be born, who were taken from others but had no one taken from them. This is because each one of us was made from his father's sperm, and had this sperm died the father would not have been born. Just as each one was made from his father's sperm; his father was made from the living sperm of his own father. If you follow it back to Adam *peace be upon him* you will find that every one of us has a living piece of Adam within us which will never die.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi*

Therefore, our Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants…' (*al-A'raf:* 172). Do not say that everyone would be in his loins because what was taken from him was the basis which lay in his loins; and, as long as everything reproduces, it was made from the smallest thing, and we know that the greater lies hidden in the lesser.

Our Lord took the seeds from the loins of the children of Adam and spoke to them by saying: '…Am I not your Lord?...' (*al-A'raf:* 172) Someone may ask at this point, 'Had these seeds the ability to speak when they were seeds, each one waiting to be developed further and united, for example, with the egg in the mother's womb?' We reply by asking, why do you think it would be difficult for our Lord to speak to them? Some men are able to speak up to ten languages and have ability to marry four women; each of these wives bearing them children, and then stay one day with one of his wives and her children and teach them English, for example, and stay with the other and teach her German, and teach the third wife and her children Arabic and so on. Further, he can even communicate by means of signals with those of unknown languages to him. If a human can communicate in several ways, cannot our Lord communicate with His creatures in many different ways? Indeed, He is able to address them in numerous ways. Did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not say to the mountains, 'O mountains, repeat [Our] praises with him' (*Saba':* 10)?

How, then, could a man not realise that Allah is able to address any of His creatures? In fact, He is able to address each of His creatures with a unique language which the others may not understand; and He *Glorified is He* says, 'And We subjected the mountains to exalt [Us], along with David ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 79). We know from the Noble Quran that the mountains exalt

Allah's glory even without the Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* like any other creature, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '… And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His Praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting ...' (*al-Isra':* 44).

Even the atoms of the disbeliever's hand glorify Allah; even if he does not will them to do so.

The True Lords' *Glorified is He* words, 'And We subjected the mountains to exalt [Us], along with David ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 79) explain that the mountains would repeat David's exalting of Allah and reciting the psalmody; and the True Lord's command was not given only to the mountains, but rather to all beings. For example, we read in the Noble Quran that our Lord revealed the bee to build their dwellings in the mountains, in the trees and in the hives that humans build. So, Allah has ways of addressing His creatures because He is the One Who created the world and all creatures; and He *Glorified is He* addresses with words, with signals, with inspiration and with revelation. Thus, if we read that the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to the seeds of Adam *peace be upon him* 'Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf:* 172), this means that He said it to them in a language they could understand, as He Who said to the heavens and the earth, '… "Come [into being], willingly or by compulsion." They said, "We have come willingly."' (*Fussilat:* 11)

When the ant spoke, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* understood its speech; had Allah *Glorified is He* not taught Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* how to understand its speech, we would not have known that it can speak, as in the verse when an ant said, 'O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not.' (*an-Naml:* 18)

It understood what men do when they trample over small creatures without seeing them; but Solomon *peace be upon him* was one of Allah's prophets, and he would not hurt any of Allah's creatures, and the ant which spoke was keeping guard for the other ants. Likewise, the hoopoe spoke to inform Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* of the kingdom of Sheba, Bilqis, and her people.

So, Allah Almighty speaks to all of His creatures, and all of His creatures answer Him. Therefore, do not ask how The Lord could have spoken to the seeds, seeds which were not yet morally responsible. The scholars have not attempted to investigate this matter because apparently, it seems to be very distant from the mind's conceptualization. It is enough that our Lord the *All-Powerful Creator* informed us that He spoke to the seeds, saying, 'Am I not your Lord?' to which they answered: yes. This statement indicates that this passage is meant to symbolise the natural disposition which has been placed in the human soul; it is as though He *Glorified is He* placed in the human soul and human essence a natural disposition which affirms the fact that there is a creator of this universe Who is All-Powerful Creator and Who arranges it.

Some years ago, we said: imagine that your plane crashed in the desert, and when you wake from the terror, you think about your situation and realise that you have no food, drink, or people. Then, you lose all hope because of that and fall asleep; when you wake, you find a table covered with the finest foods and drinks, would you not stop to wonder who prepared this feast for you, before you stretch your hand out to this fine food? Likewise, man came into existence in this universe of such wise design and amazing composition; is it not fitting that he asks himself who created this universe?

We know that the electric lamp required many scientists and skilled technicians to be made, and that it required countless resources to maintain light on, even in a small room. When we see the sun light up the whole world, without ever breaking down or malfunctioning, without requiring any maintenance from us, should we not ask who made it? Especially since no one else has claimed to have made it—and the Lord *Glorified is He* has informed us that He created the earth, the sun and the moon—either this statement is true, in which case we must worship Him or, if it is not true, we must search for whom actually did create and make the universe and worship him.

Because no one has ever claimed to have made these things, the claim must be given to the sole claimant; and it must be affirmed that there is no deity other than Allah. Hence, natural disposition guides us to the notion that, behind this magnificent universe, lies a power which is commensurate with this magnificence and precision; this precision from which we have taken our standards for the measurement of time. We have taken standards for the measurement of time from the celestial bodies; were it not for the movements of the celestial bodies which control night and day, we would not have divided the day into hours; were the motions of the celestial bodies not created with such boundless precision, we would not have been able to use them as standards for the measurement of time. When we reflect on the True Lord's *Glorified is He* words, 'The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation (*ar-Rahman:* 5), we find that the words '[move] by precise calculation' apply to two things: the True Lord *Glorified is He* has informed us that He made the sun and moon run on appointed courses or commanded them precisely, and they are among the signs which indicate His perfect omnipotence and His tremendous power; He did not create them in jest, but rather, in great wisdom, '… you may know the number of years and account [of time]….' (*Yunus:* 5)

We have taken standards of measurement from the orbits of the sun and moon and we could not have done that except for the fact that they have been created in a precise order because the universe was created and made with this level of precision and exactingness. Therefore, we must be aware that there is a power behind this world commensurate with its magnificence; but can we know, using only our minds, what this power wants from us? The most important thing that the mind can do is to guide us to the knowledge that there is a power, but the mind cannot determine this power's name. Likewise, it cannot determine what this power wants from us. Therefore, it was essential that a messenger came to us from this power to tell us what It wanted, and the succession of messengers came to earth so that each messenger could tell men what the Creator wanted from them; and each messenger said: the name of the Power which created you is Allah; He has absolute power over this universe, and what the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants from man is that they thrive in this world in light of the way of worship of the True Lord *Glorified is He* who created man and created the universe. The mind could never have come to know these things by itself.

Thus, we see that the final limit of the mind is faith in the existence of a Creative Power behind this universe, and all naturally disposed minds are equal in this regard. As for the name of this Power, and the way of guidance that this Allah *Glorified is He* requires us to follow; only a Messenger can tell us this.

The philosophers exhausted their efforts searching for this Power and Its will, and they called this area of investigation 'metaphysics' meaning 'the study of that which lies beyond nature.’ Usually, the philosophers would be met by a believer who said to them, ‘And who told you that there is a Power behind the material world which you must search for?’ In reply, the philosophers would usually say, ‘It was natural disposition which guided us to this.’

Philosophy split into many schools; each philosopher trying to imagine the nature of this Power; and this way is not true because although man is able to intellectually realise the existence of the Creative Power, he cannot imagine what its nature is. Many philosophers therefore drowned in destructive psychological anxiety, and some of them saved themselves by faith. Every philosopher should have turned his ear to hear what the messengers said to solve this puzzle, instead of wearing himself out by trying to combine the intellectual awareness of the existence of a power behind the physical world on the one hand, and an attempt to imagine the nature of this power on the other hand.

In this regard, I will give you the following parable which I hope you will not forget: when we are sitting in a room and all the doors are closed and then the doorbell rings, we all agree that there is someone at the door; we all agree on this because we have determined it rationally, but can we imagine who is at the door? Man or woman; young or old? We will certainly differ when it comes to imagination, even though we agreed when we used our reason.

We say to the philosophers: you are the first people who should turn your ears to a messenger who comes to solve the puzzle of this universe for you, to tell you the name of the Power behind this universe and what this Power wants from us.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* guides us to this by means of the Messengers; and here, He says, ‘And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.”’ (*al-A’raf:* 172)

This is the testimony of natural disposition; and we see that this natural disposition exists in the newborn baby when it seeks out its mother’s breast with its mouth, even if she is asleep, and takes hold of the breast to feed by natural disposition or instinct. This natural disposition is what protects each one of us in many things and in spontaneous reactions; for example, if you put your fingers near to a baby's eye it closes them, without anyone having taught him to do this. The True Lord *Glorified is He* made us bear witness to His Oneness while we were in the world of the seed: '… "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified."…' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

The verb *ashhada* means to make someone a witness (*shahid*); to bear witness against oneself is a form of confession, and a confession is the most conclusive of all proofs because when you make someone bear witness against someone else, the witness might change his testimony, but, here, mankind bore witness against themselves, and Allah took from them the covenant of natural disposition, lest they say on the Day of Resurrection: '…Indeed, we were of this unaware.' (*al-A'raf*: 172) So, when the Day of Reckoning comes, there will be no cause for anyone to say, 'I was unaware.'

The Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

أَوْ تَقُولُوٓاْ إِنَّمَآ أَشْرَكَ ءَابَآؤُنَا مِن قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً
مِّنۢ بَعْدِهِمْ ۖ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ ٱلْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿١٧٣﴾

Or, 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to God, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?' [173] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 173)

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to cut off their argument for contravening the way of Allah, evoking the covenant of natural disposition which lies within every human being; hence, every being bore witness that He is One Single Allah; and He *Glorified is He* reminds us of this covenant of natural disposition which was made before the vicissitudes of passions existed in us.

'…"Am I not your Lord?" – to which they answered: "Yes"....' (*al-A'raf:* 172). Could any of these seeds, under the knowledge, will and power of Allah, have had the courage to say: 'No, You are not my Lord?' Of course this was impossible; and by their natural disposition, every seed answered 'Yes!' (*bala*) which in Arabic is meant to negate the negative and thus affirm the positive, such as the case with the True Lord's *Glorified is He* words: 'Is Allah not the most just of judges?' (*at-Tin:* 8) 'Is not' is a question about a negative thing, which is why we are told that when you hear ‘Is not’ you must answer ‘Yes, indeed’ (*bala*), thereby negating the negative, that is, ‘I affirm that the most just of judges is none other than Him *Glorified is He*.’ Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Am I not your Lord?’ (*al-A’raf:* 172) and the answer came as Yes, we have testified! ...’ (*al-A’raf:* 172) And what is the reason for all this? The True Lord *Glorified is He* said this to affirm for all mankind that, by their natural disposition, they believe that Allah is the Lord, and the thing that makes them heedless of this natural disposition is the urging of their passions in the sphere of free will; and despite the urging of their passions in the sphere of free will, if you ask them who created them, they will say ‘Allah’—and as long as Allah *Glorified is He* created them, He is their Lord. ‘If you asked them, “Who created the heavens and earth and subjected the sun and the moon?” they would surely say, “Allah”…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 61). The True Lord *Glorified is He* told the story of this testimony so that no one would say, ‘… It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before…’ (*al-A’raf:* 173). Thus, we see that the excuses proffered by the sinners and disbelievers to absolve themselves all come down under two things: heedlessness of the covenant of the seeds and imitation of forefathers.

What is heedlessness? What is imitation? Heedlessness might not be preceded by disbelief or sin, and the people who come thereafter imitate it. The clear example of this is that Adam *peace be upon him* who conveyed to his children the way of righteousness, but they grew heedless of it; and it was not appropriate for any of them to say that their father was guilty of associating partners with Allah, but rather, this situation was the result of heedlessness. Then, the second stage was to ascribe one’s error to his forefathers; if everyone who associated partners with Allah were imitating his forefathers, this would mean that this idolatry went all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him* yet Adam was not an idolater; but heedlessness of Allah’s righteous way arose in some of the children of Adam, as a result of the delusion that the way of Allah imposed difficult responsibilities. So, some of the sons of Adam indulged in what they loved and ignored the way of Allah; it no longer remained at the forefront of their consciousness—and a person only implements what is at the forefront of his consciousness. As for those things which impose hardships upon him, he ignores them and is heedless of them. This was the first stage of the severing of man from the way of Allah, namely heedlessness concerning his forefathers. Here, two factors were combined: the factor of heedlessness and the factor of the example of the family and forefathers—and the principles of faith were no longer at the forefront of consciousness. This is why it is said that people usually do not forget their rights, but they are quick to forget their responsibilities; a person keeps what others owe him at the forefront of his consciousness, but he casts what he owes other away from it. Since some people imagine that the responsibilities of faith constitute hardships, they try to keep themselves away from it and forget them; thus, some people try to distance themselves from these responsibilities.

Let us draw an example from our worldly lives: we might find a person, who owes money to a grocery store or a carpenter, and he does not have enough money to pay them; therefore, he will try to stay away from this store or avoid being seen by the carpenter. In this way, the artifice of heedlessness appears as a way to evade the supposed hardships of responsibilities; but when the covenant of the seeds was taken, mankind said, 'Yes, we have testified.' (*al-A'raf:* 172) This covenant was taken from them, and they acknowledge it, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* made them bear witness against themselves so that they could not say at the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were of this unaware' (*al-A'raf:* 172) because we should never be heedless of this covenant. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* knows that we are human beings, and He says about our father, Adam, 'We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.' (*Ta Ha:* 115) Since Adam *peace be upon him* forgot it, his forgetfulness would be counted against him. It has been clarified for us that the nations who came before Islam were accounted for their forgetfulness, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly told us: 'My *Ummah* [followers] have been excused for their honest mistakes, forgetfulness and that which they are coerced into doing.'(1)

The meaning of 'mistake' is clear such as when a person intends to do something but another thing happens; 'forgetfulness' means that the remembrance of a thing does not come to one's mind; coercion means that someone who is more powerful than one forces him by threatening his life or his freedom. For all three, responsibility is lifted from the Muslim, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, told us that Allah honoured the *ummah* [followers] of Prophet Muhammad with a special distinction by excusing the Muslim's forgetfulness. This indicates that those who lived before the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were held accountable for it; and if we follow the chain of all those who lived before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we will arrive back to our father Adam *peace be upon him* whom Allah created directly by His hand— and we are the children of Adam, created according the natural law of procreation between man and woman.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Majah*

In the garden, which He made for him to undergo his preparation for living on the earth(1), Allah *Glorified is He* issued to Adam *peace be upon him* a commandment and a prohibition; He *Glorified is He* said to him, '…eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree.' (*al-Baqara:* 35)

Hence, the basis of every responsibility is a commandment 'Do,' and a prohibition, 'Do not do.' Adam *peace be upon him* forgot the responsibility of this one simple command; he was created by Allah's hand and given by Him one command, which was to eat whatever he wished but to refrain from eating from a specific tree – and if Adam did not remember that, what did he remember? It was not true that he forgot, for he was created directly by Allah's hand, and given his responsibility directly from Allah; and although this responsibility seemed to be two-fold, in reality it was really only one single thing, since eating from whatever he desired was for Adam's own interest, and 'do not approach' was the only real responsibility.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.' (*Ta Ha:* 121) It was an act of disobedience because it was the forgetting of one single commandment, and it was not right for him to forget it because it was not multiple. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says that [lest] you say, 'It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?' (*al-A'raf:* 173)

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(1) Proofreader's Note: The existence of a 'preparation garden' is the Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi's opinion.

These words are meant to call attention to the fact that heedlessness should not be a role-model to be followed simply because the responsibilities are difficult, and a person might forget them and then pass this forgetfulness down to the following generations, so that the descendants may say that their fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and they were but descendants after them. 'Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?' (*al-A'raf:* 173) This means that their faith was based on imitation, despite the fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent them a clear message; and if the forefathers behaved falsely towards the message and the way of guidance, that is no reason for the descendants to be heedless of the true faith.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ وَلَعَلَّهُمۡ يَرۡجِعُونَ ١٧٤

In this way We explain the messages, so
that they may turn [to the right path] [174]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 174)

The Messages (*Ayat*) which Allah *Glorified is He* has clearly spelled out here are the special covenants, and the raising of the mountain so that they would hold fast to the Torah with all their strength; likewise, the universal covenant in which all of mankind from Adam *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Hour. Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned all this to affirm to them that the doctrinal principles of faith must be at the forefront of our consciousness. Therefore, those who are heedless must take heed, and those who imitate their forefathers, in anything which contravenes the straight path, must desist from this imitation— the responsibilities of faith are intrinsic responsibilities, and He *Glorified is He* does not make you responsible when you are still in need of your father or mother, but rather, He makes you responsible after you reach adulthood because when you reach adulthood, you become completely independent just like your father; and since you are much of a man as your father is, and ready to be a father yourself, you do not owe any religious allegiance to your father. Hence, do not say, 'I am merely imitating my father, even if he was not following the right way' as this kind of statement would only be acceptable if each person was made morally responsible when he was still in childhood, when the father strove to feed his children and take care of them. But moral responsibility does not apply to a person until he reached adulthood, and the meaning of adulthood is that you are able to have children of your own and look after yourself. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* requires fathers to prepare their children and get them used to their responsibilities before the time comes when Allah *Glorified is He* holds them responsible; the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, said: ‘Command your children to perform the prayer when they are seven years old, and beat them for leaving it when they are ten years old, and separate them (girls from boys) in their beds.’(1)

So, the father commands and punishes his children before the age of responsibility to prepare them for it, so that it becomes easy and they are not worn out by it once they reach adulthood. ‘And thus do We [explain in] detail the verses, and perhaps they will return.’ (*al-A’raf:* 174) That is, the heedless a person must get rid of and take heed, and the one who imitates his forefathers must desist from this imitation, in light of the True Lord’s *Glorified is He* words, ‘… when no father will avail his son, nor will a son avail his father at all’ (*Luqman:* 33).

The True Lord says:

وَٱتۡلُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ نَبَأَ ٱلَّذِيٓ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُ ءَايَٰتِنَا فَٱنسَلَخَ مِنۡهَا فَأَتۡبَعَهُ
ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ فَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡغَاوِينَ ١٧٥

[Prophet], tell them the story of the man to whom We gave
Our messages: he sloughed them off, so Satan took him as his
follower and he went astray [175] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 175)

‘And because they said that indeed, we were of this unaware.’ (*al-A’raf:* 172) Allah *Glorified is He* wants to tell us the story of these people, so He says, ‘And recite to them, [O Muhammad], the news of him to whom we gave [knowledge of] Our signs, but he detached himself from them.’ (*al-A’raf:* 175)

The word ‘news’ *(naba’*) means an important piece of information meant to inspire reflection which we can benefit from; it is not merely news. This is why He *Glorified is He* says about the Last Day: 'About what are they asking one another? About the great news ...' (*an-Naba':* 1-2).

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud*

Thus, He says, 'And recite to them, [O Muhammad], the news of him to whom we gave [knowledge of] Our signs…' (*al-A'raf:* 175), as though this news was very well known. It is said that it happened to a man named Ibn Ba'ura', or Umayya ibn Abu As-Sult, or 'Amir, the monk or that it was one of them; what matters is not his name, but that Allah gave His messages to someone who discarded the messages; instead of benefiting from them by amending himself and drawing near to his Lord, he 'detached himself from them' and followed his own desire and inclined to Satan.

The word 'detached himself from them' (*insalakha*)—literally meaning 'to slough off' or 'peel off'—indicates that Allah's message surrounds one powerfully, so that it requires the brute force of disobedience for a man to detach himself from them because the root meaning of *salkh* is to skin a sheep. It is as if our Lord wants to clarify that He *Glorified is He* gave man His messages but he discarded them, meaning that the messages surrounded man just as skin surrounds the body to protect man's physical form—this form contains nerves, veins, flesh, fat and bones; likewise, Allah has made the responsibilities of faith a protection for man. This is why the one who leaves Allah's way is called *fasiq* in Arabic (wicked) just like a fresh date: after being exposed to the sun, the date loses some of its moisture, and the fruit becomes wrinkled inside its shell and begins to break through its shell. Therefore, the one who leaves Allah's way is called a *fasiq* after the word *fusuq* which describes the process of the fruit breaking out of its shell. Allah *the Almighty* says, '… to whom we gave [knowledge of] Our signs,' (*al-A'raf:* 175) and he should not have been heedless of them because the coming of these sign to him was a blessing which he should preserve, but he discarded them.

We all know about the snakeskins which can be found in the exact shape of a snake because the snake sheds its skin every once in a while; and it only gives up the old skin when the skin underneath matured so that it can bear the exposure to the weather and the air. Likewise, when boiling water is spilled on human skin, you can notice how the affected area swells up and has some liquid inside; if you were to make this liquid come out, the area would become inflamed, while if you leave it, it protects the area until the skin beneath it develops, whereupon it dries and comes off. Likewise, we know, for example, that the sheep does not skin itself, but rather, we skin it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And a sign for them is the night. We remove from it [the light of] day, so they are [left] in darkness.’ (*Ya Sin:* 37)

The image depicted here is that the night was like a skin covering the day; the night is black while the day is light, and we know that black is not one of the colours of the spectrum, nor is white because the colours of the spectrum are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The colour black takes the colours of the spectrum and makes them invisible because you cannot see things unless some rays of light reflect from them into your eyes, and the colour black absorbs all the rays that come to it so that no rays reflect from it back to the eye; thus, we see it as dark. White is a combination of several colours; that is, if you mix them, you are able to make white. Thus, we know that white is similar to black: black absorbs all the rays, so that no rays come from it to your eyes, and white reflects back all the rays, so that no specific ray reflects from it to your eyes. The True Lord’s *Glorified is He* says, ‘We remove from it (light of) day,’ which implies that the blackness of night was covering the whiteness of day.

If the one to whom news of faith come discards and leaves Allah’s way, Satan says: ‘He is apt to follow me.’ It is as though when Satan finds someone in whom he has some hope, he runs behind them in fear that they will return to what Allah gave them in His Book which conveys to them His way, and so Satan makes the flouting of our Lord’s way seem alluring to them.

We have said before that sometimes sins come from the passions of the lower soul, and other times from Satan’s instigations; we have also clarified the difference between these two situations. Satan does not dare to come to you unless you have first shown him through your behaviour that he has cause to have hope in you; but if you are good and righteous, then Satan whispers to you about an obedience and tries to make you hate it. For example, Satan does not go to bars, but rather, he lies in the straight path looking for people who have good intentions; as for the others, their souls are already ripe for his taking. So, when Satan sees someone begin to be heedless towards

Allah's messages, he follows him in fear that the messages will cause him to repent and return to them. Therefore, we must make a distinction as to whether the motivation for a sin is from the lower soul or from the instigation of Satan. If the sin comes to you, and your soul urges you to do it, but then for whatever reason, you are not able to do it; then your soul urges you to do exactly the same sin another time, know that it is from the desire of your soul. But if you are not able to do that sin and then you find yourself thinking of a different sin, this is the instigation of Satan; for Satan does not want you to commit any particular sin, but rather, he wants you to stray from the way of Allah, whereas the soul wants a particular sin and no other. Therefore, if you see a sin which your soul insists upon, know that it is from your own soul; and if you are unable to commit a sin and you leave it, but then you think of another sin, this is from the instigation of Satan. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '… so Satan pursued him, and he became of the deviators.' (*al-A'raf:* 175)

The 'deviator' is the one who loses the way and becomes lost in misguidance; we know that guidance is the way which leads to the goal; those, who stray from the way which leads to the goal, will get lost or wander into the wilderness; thus, they are in 'deviation.' Since they are in deviation concerning the way of Allah, corruption will come from them— for they are corrupt in themselves and will corrupt others. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَرَفَعْنَٰهُ بِهَا وَلَٰكِنَّهُۥٓ أَخْلَدَ إِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱتَّبَعَ هَوَىٰهُ ۚ فَمَثَلُهُۥ كَمَثَلِ
ٱلْكَلْبِ إِن تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْهِ يَلْهَثْ أَوْ تَتْرُكْهُ يَلْهَث ۚ ذَّٰلِكَ مَثَلُ ٱلْقَوْمِ
ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا ۚ فَٱقْصُصِ ٱلْقَصَصَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٧٦﴾

If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desires – he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone. Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect [176] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 176)

There are two matters here: there is 'elevation' which means to raise something; and then comes the second matter which is 'adherence to the earth;' that is, degeneration; these two verbs are ascribed here to two different agents.

‘And if We had willed, we could have elevated him thereby…’ (*al-A’raf:* 176) The verb ‘elevate’ here is ascribed to Allah, but the man chose to adhere to the earth. This is the case because it is logical that elevation would be ascribed to Allah, but degeneration cannot be ascribed to Allah, even if, ultimately, every action takes place by the command of the Master of the universe. Our Lord elevates those who follow His way; and when the True Lord, Almighty, says, ‘If We had willed,’ this means that it was a matter of His will: ‘Had We willed to exalt him, it would have been done.’ However, this would have been contrary to free will, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to preserve man’s free will; if he chooses what is right, he is welcome to do so, and his reward will be Paradise; if he chooses misguidance, he will find just punishment as a result. For us to further reflect on the narrations of the Quran, read with me the story of the ‘Righteous Servant’ and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom we had given mercy from us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge. Moses said to him, “May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?”’ (*al-Kahf:* 65-66)

Despite the fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a messenger sent by Allah, he did not find it far-fetched that one of Allah’s servants could have drawn close to Allah; so Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* followed him, asking, ‘May I follow you on [the condition] that you teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgement?’ (*al-Kahf:* 66) This was a confirmation of Musa’s desire to seek knowledge from all those to whom Allah gave knowledge. The Quran tells us this story to impart unto us the proper etiquette of studying with a teacher.

What did the righteous servant say? He excused Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saying, ‘Indeed, with me you will never be able to have patience. And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge?’ (*al-Kahf:* 67-68)

That is, ‘O Musa (Moses), you will not be able to have patience – not because of any defect in you, but because you will see things you are not aware of them.’ But Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to him, ‘You will find me, if Allah wills, patient…’ (*al-Kahf:* 69). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* insisted on following the righteous servant, telling him that he would not disobey him in any way; and the righteous servant agreed on condition that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not ask him about anything until the righteous servant explained it to him. However, all of this was only theoretical speech which contained give and take; and when the matter actually came to pass, everything changed completely. After they boarded the ship and the righteous servant bore a hole in it, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not have patience but rather said, 'You have certainly done a grave thing.' (*al-Kahf:* 71)

Therefore, the practical experience showed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could not patiently bear the actions of the righteous servant; and when the righteous servant reminded him of his promise not to ask any questions, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* repented of his question; and he continued to ask and then remind himself until the righteous servant explained to him the secrets of all that of which he had no knowledge.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'If We had willed, We could have elevated him thereby…' (*al-A'raf:* 176) – So, why? Because Allah's will is absolute, and He does what He wills; but He *Glorified is He* had already ordained the reward for man's free choices; therefore, He did not elevate him because of his disobedience—because this is the way of Allah – and you will never find any change in the way of Allah. The way of Allah is: those who do good deeds are rewarded by Allah; those who do bad deeds are punished by Him; His will is absolute; nothing can repel His will or amend His decree. The decree of Allah is that He punishes the sinner by His Justice and rewards the obedient by His Grace. He *Glorified is He* possesses absolute will and is Mighty and Wise in all that He does.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead, he clung to the earth and followed his own desire.' (*al-A'raf:* 176) The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…he clung to the earth…' means that he chose to descend into the abyss even though Allah *Glorified is He* guided man and showed him the way of goodness so that he would ascend to the heights. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* orders the believers to come to Prophet Muhammad *peace and Blessings be upon him* so that he would tell them about what Allah has forbidden upon them, Allah Says: “Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you.” (*al-An‘am:* 151)

The Arabic word (*ta‘alaw*) carries both the two meanings of ‘coming’ and ‘the ascent to what is higher’. As a matter of fact, the Divine Law is meant to put man on the track by instructing him not to cling to the earth through indulgence in lusts and whims, but rather, it shows them how to purify their souls through strict and faithful adherence to the Way of Allah which will undoubtedly secure them high spiritual positions. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* urges people to come and exert their utmost efforts to raise themselves to attain higher spiritual positions through following the Way of Guidance set by Him *the Almighty*; a matter that will never be achieved if they follow manmade laws, which may contradict His Law. It goes without saying that in case people refrain from the divine guidance, they will undoubtedly fall into the abyss.

Allah says: ‘If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to raise him high, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desire- he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone.’ (*al-A’raf:* 176) The true explanation of Allah’s words, ‘…whether you drive it away or leave it alone…’ is given in the light of the fact that if a dog approaches you while sitting, you will hasten to chase it away. That is, you threaten it and chide it in order to drive it away, and so it pants and lolls its tongue. Likewise, if you leave the dog alone, without rebuking it and chasing it away, it will also pant and loll its tongue—a natural behaviour of dogs. Here, it is important to know that this is a unique trait in dogs; that is, they always breathe quickly with their tongues sticking out.

We know perfectly well that animals do not pant unless they are disturbed or in danger; thus, they run in order to miss the pain or torment that other creatures might inflict them. Scientists prove that when an animal runs, it needs energy, so the heart beats faster and faster in order to supply the blood full with oxygen to the whole body. As such, it is clear that the heart must work alongside the lungs to supply oxygen to the blood. On the other hand, when living creatures sit peacefully, without being disturbed, their breathing is so normal that it cannot be noticed or even heard. However, when they run, their chests regularly expand and contract to extract oxygen from the air, and thus the blood will be full with extra amount of oxygen, which exactly and perfectly fits the extra motion. As a matter of fact, animals—except dogs—do not do this— the process of panting—unless they are hungry, tired or agitated. As for the dog, it does it whether it is hungry or full, thirsty or not, agitated or not; it pants all the time. So, why does He *the Almighty* compare such a person to a panting dog? It is because the one who acts in this way is always disliked because he follows his own caprice and allows his desires to control him to the extent that when he attains a particular caprice now, he wonders whether or not he will be able to do the same tomorrow. Hence, he will be entirely subject to his whims and caprices, living in constant and acute discomfort, always fearing that he will be deprived from this blessing or even that he will miss it. Therefore, he becomes akin to the dog, which pants all the time, whether it is safe or not, hungry or not, thirsty or not.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with by saying, 'Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect.' (*al-A'raf:* 176) This particular part of the verse clearly tells about the destiny of those who reject the Signs and Messages of Allah *the Almighty*.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Tell them the story…' indicates clearly that Allah does not want to teach us history, but rather, He *Glorified is He* wants to teach us how to take admonition from the lessons of history. That is why we find Him *Glorified is He* throughout the pages of the Quran narrating one story more than once; yet, every time the story contains and imparts a different piece of information; so, when we study and gather all of those pieces of information, we will certainly have a comprehensive view about it. If He only wanted to tell us history, there would be no point for narrating it more than once. Throughout the pages of the Quran, we find many stories about the clash of truth with falsehood, conflicts between the agents of falsehood and the agents of truth and of those who stubbornly opposed the Messengers of Allah *the Almighty*. We know for certain that a story talks about a real event, whilst legislation is a matter of words. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to clarify for us the way of guidance which is entirely related to reality because the reality of life gives the narrated story big impact and immediacy; that is, the divine way of guidance is not a matter of mere theoretical speech, which is divorced from reality.

In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He sent us His Way of Guidance by means of His Messengers and Prophets. However, some people may firmly believe in this divine way of guidance and then apply it to their way of life—a matter that leads them directly to be of higher spiritual positions. In the same connection, it was not right for those people to whom Allah gave this way of guidance to relinquish the attainment of their spiritual supremacy in favour of clinging to the lowness of the earth; unfortunately, this is what some men do when they make laws for themselves and run the affairs of their lives according to their own caprice and whims, setting aside the Way of Allah *the Almighty*—the One Who created them and made laws for them so that their kind will be preserved to the end of time.

As a matter of fact, this verse under discussion tells us about the real story of Ibn Ba‘uraa’- a man whom Allah *the Almighty* gave knowledge but who preferred to cling to the earth and not to follow what he had learnt and thus detached himself from the divine way of guidance just as a sheep is skinned. This man, Ibnu Ba‘uraa’*,* is the one this verse talks about, ‘he was like a dog that pants with a lolling tongue whether you drive it away or leave it alone.’ (*al-A’raf:* 176)

This part of the verse tells us clearly that Allah set for them the way of guidance, through which they could attain the spiritual heights of the Heaven, yet they chose to cling to earth are like dogs, if not worse than them; we know for certain that dogs, out of their nature, pant instinctively all the time, so they cannot be blamed for that, whether they are chased away or not. As for mankind, whom Allah *the Almighty* has honoured by the mind which protects their lives and whom He *Glorified is He* has created in a manner that makes them naturally incline to doing goodness, they should in no way do such act of detaching themselves from the divine way of guidance. Here, a good question arises; that is, ‘Why does Allah *the Almighty* compare the act of disbelief to the instinctive act of panting on part of dogs?’ We answer this question by stating that dogs do the act of panting instinctively. In addition, they are not legally charged and thus cannot be blamed for any act they do. As for man, whom Allah honoured by giving him the opportunity to choose whatever they want to do, be it good or evil, they should in no way detach himself from the divine way of guidance. In truth, this kind of behaviour—panting on the part of dogs— is accepted by people because of the fact that this is a natural instinct in them; hence, people do not blame them for it. Once again, it is not right to ask questions like 'Why did Allah *the Almighty* set forth parables with certain creatures? Or what is the offence committed by these creatures so that they are used as illustrative example?' And so on.

Likewise, we have another position in the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: "The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]." (*al-Jumu'a:* 5)

Similarly, should a donkey be disparaged when it carries a load of books because it does not understand their contents? The answer is definitely 'no', because the donkey's job is not to understand the contents of the books, but simply to carry them. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wants to instruct us not to be like the donkey which carries books containing guidance, but does not know the value of what it carries. Furthermore, it is clear that He *Glorified is He* wants us to bear His Divine Way of Guidance and to act upon it so that we can obtain considerable benefit. So, these parables are not meant to disparage the dog or the donkey, but to disparage those who resemble them because they descend to such a low level which Allah does not want for them. In fact, Allah sets forth these parables with things which are not blameworthy in essence, whereas if a man does such things, he is to be blamed for them.

At this point, we should take into account that abandoning the divine way of guidance leads a person to an uncomfortable life, even if he already enjoys the blessings of life. That is because he, in such case, is detached from Allah and thus will constantly wonder, 'Will I enjoy these blessings to the end of my time or not?' Hence, he will permanently live in a state of worry and fear lest his blessings may leave him. That is why we say that such person looks like a dog which pants whether it is tired or not. So, when Allah *the Almighty* gives us a real example of that man, Ibn Bau'raa'; He *Glorified is He* does so to make us take admonition from that incident which actually took place.

That is, when Allah *the Almighty* wants to raise someone high, He *Glorified is He* gives him knowledge of His Way of Guidance; however, if he detaches himself from it, then he will look like those who reject the signs and Messages of

Allah. So, you (O Muslims!) are not the first ones to do this, for Ibn Bau‘raa’ had already done the same before you; that is, Allah had instructed him to the way of guidance, but he chose to cling to the earth by detaching himself from it. The Arabic word for ‘parable’ is *mathal*, a word derived from the root *m-th-l.* By the way, we can pronounce this particular word in two different ways: *mithl* or *mathal*. The word *al-mithl* gives the meaning of ‘what is like or similar.’ Arabs say, ‘This person is like (*mithl*) so-and-so in his generosity, knowledge, height, and width;’ this way, you can illustrate something unknown in the light of something which is already known. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘There is nothing like (*mithl*) unto Him.’ (*ash-Shura:* 11) That is, nothing resembles Him in any way because He is transcendent in His Essence, Attributes, and Actions.

Similarly, we use the word *mathal* to convey the meaning of ‘exemplar’, meaning that the person we are describing is of a lower rank than the person we use as an exemplar. This goes when the person we see as an ‘exemplar’ is so famous that everyone knows his name. For example, we compare generous people to Hatim At-Ta’i, who is very famous for his generosity. The difference is that if you say, ‘So-and-so is as generous as Hatim’, this means that you might be the first person to ever say this about him. The same applies to the following statements; Arabs say: ‘The exemplar of Hatim in generosity’, ‘the exemplar of ‘Antara in courage’ and ‘the exemplar of Iyas in intelligence.’ In fact, each of these names mentioned in the previous examples is very famous for a particular quality; thus, they are used as exemplars. Therefore, when a poet, Abu Tammam, wanted to praise the caliph, Ahmed ibn Al-Mu‘tasim, he said about him:

The caliph has:

‘Amr’s bravery with Hatim’s largess,
And Ahnaf’s patience with Iyas’s cunning.

One of the men attending the caliph’s court at that moment said: ‘How dare you compare the Caliph to such boorish Arabs?! The Caliph is above all of those whom you mentioned! Who is ‘Amr next to the Caliph? And who is Hatim next to the Caliph? How dare you say this while another poet had previously said:

The praise-poets compare his bravery and munificence
With that of those who are like his feeblest servants:
In his army are fifty thousand the like of 'Antara,
And a thousand of his servants are as generous as Hatim!'

That is, the caliph has at his command many servants like Hatim and 'Antara. Yet, Abu Tammam's brilliance and sharp wittedness helped him out of this predicament, and he said:

Censure me not for comparing him to his lessers,
Such aberrant examples of valour and bounty;
For Allah used a lesser thing to symbolise His Light:
A niche wherein a lamp is shining...

It is as though the poet was saying: 'I used them as examples because they had become the exemplars of these qualities and exemplars do not change.' In this regard, it is important to know that because the particular qualities of those people were so famous that their names became well-known, so Arabs used to omit their particular qualities when making comparisons to them; just mentioning their names used to suffice. For example, they used to say: 'So-and-so is Hatim,' 'So-and-so is 'Antara' and 'So-and-so is Iyas'. This actually means that the 'exemplar' is so famous and well known that all people know him perfectly well.

The Arabic word *al-mathal* can also mean a 'proverb' which is defined as a short saying or sentence people use to comment about a particular situation because of its resemblance to it. Let me offer the following example to illustrate this definition: a great Arab leader once sent a female envoy named 'Isam to make his marriage bid to Umm Iyas, whom he had heard was beautiful and enjoyed a number of good characteristics. The man, thus, said to her: 'Go, O 'Isam, so that you can tell me all about the daughter of 'Awf!' So, the envoy went, and the girl's mother left them alone together, saying to her daughter: 'My lady, this is your maternal aunt; she comes to bear witness to something about you, so do not conceal anything which she wishes to see or know about, neither of face, nor of character; tell her whatever she wants to know'. The woman was then admitted to Umm 'Iyas's tent and closely examined the young lady. The Arab leader who sent her was waiting for her return expectantly and eagerly; so, when he saw her, he asked her, 'What happened, O 'Isam?' She replied, *'Abda al-Makhdu 'An Az-Zubd'*, an Arabic proverb meaning that the journey has been fruitful. After that, whenever the Arabs sent a messenger, whether male, female or even a group of two or more, to know the results of the journey, they would ask, 'What happened O 'Isam?' in the Arabic feminine form, even if they were addressing a male messenger. This is actually based on the important fact that 'the form of a proverb is constant and does not change.' That is why Arabs always used the following proverb—The churn has brought forth butter— to refer to any successful effort. For example, when a student studies hard and gets the mark he wanted, it is said, 'The churn has brought forth butter.'

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran that He does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat or of something even less than that, Allah Says: "Indeed, Allah is not timid to present an example - that of a mosquito or what is smaller than it." (*al-Baqara:* 26) When commenting on this particular verse, some people asked, 'How could Allah propound a parable of a gnat?' However, in another place in the Quran, He *the Almighty* declares that They—the disbelievers—cannot create as much as a fly; even were they to join all their forces to that end! Allah says: "O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose." (*al-Hajj:* 73) Some people incorrectly understand the words of Allah *the Almighty* 'or of something [even] less than that' and mistakenly interpret it to mean that He *the Almighty* says that He can set forth a parable with something bigger than that— the gnat, which is not correct because He *Glorified is He* is giving a parable of the smallest thing. So, when He *the Almighty* said, 'or anything above that,' this actually means that He *the Almighty* can give a parable with a thing which is less important and smaller than the gnat. In order to properly understand this point, consider that we sometimes hear someone saying: 'So-and-so is sick;' then, another person responds, 'So-and-so is even sicker than him.' The words 'sicker than' do not mean that the illness is less, but rather, it is even worse and more acute.

Back to the chapter *al-'Araf:* Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Such is the image of those who reject Our signs. Tell them the story so that they may reflect.' (*al-A'raf:* 176) In this particular part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* addresses the Jews, saying to them: 'You, O Children of Israel, are akin to the man to whom we gave Our Messages, yet he discarded them; the Torah has been given to you; it contained glad tidings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it told you about his signs and indications, so that if anyone of you saw him, he would know that he was the Messenger who had been foretold in the Torah, for you truly knew him by descriptions as you know your own sons. However, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* came to you bearing that which you knew of him, you refused to believe in him. Thus, the likeness of you is like that man to whom Allah gave His Messages but he discarded them'.

Because of their stubbornness, transgression, and disbelief, they even rejected the natural signs which are visible to the eye, such as the heavens, the earth, and the sun. In addition, they rejected and denied the miraculous signs which proved the veracity of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, they denied and rejected all what he *peace and blessings be upon him* brought to them from Allah *the Almighty* including the verses of the Quran which conveyed the divine way of guidance to them.

Allah *the Almighty* finally addresses Prophet Muhammad and orders him to tell them this true story from which they could take admonition and exhortation in such a way that would positively and significantly affect the course of their life.

He *Glorified is He* finally concludes the verse by saying, '… so that they may reflect.' (*al-A'raf:* 176) We have previously explained that the Quran, throughout its pages, gives orders and commands for people to contemplate, to remember and to reflect. We previously explained that *at-tafakkur* (contemplation) is a mental process in which various alternatives are compared in order to rationally give preference to one over another.As for the concept of *at-tadhakkur* (remembrance), it means to remember something you were heedless of. As for *at-tadabbur* (reflection), it is also a mental process in which we do not consider only the outward appearance of things, but rather, we consider them from all their different angles and perspectives, aiming to reach a correct conclusion. For example, it is said: ‘Read between the lines and you will find the subtle meaning of the words.’ We can apply this principle of *at-tadabbur* to that particular verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* where Allah *the Almighty* says that He does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat or of something even less than that.

When we contemplated and reflected upon this verse, we realised that Allah *the Almighty* does not mean that ‘He *Glorified is He* is going to give a parable with something bigger than the gnat, but rather, He *the Almighty* means that He can give a parable with a thing which is less important and smaller than the gnat.’ This is why we must not consider the literal meaning of the words only, but rather, we must consider the connotative meaning as well.

Thus, Allah’s words, ‘Tell them the story so that they may reflect,’ mean that they might think in a way which leads them to follow Allah’s Way of Guidance; that they might have faith which is the point of the story.

He *Glorified is He* says:

سَآءَ مَثَلًا ٱلۡقَوۡمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَأَنفُسَهُمۡ كَانُواْ يَظۡلِمُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

How foul is the image of those who reject Our
signs! It is themselves they wrong [177]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 177)

We must take into account the fact that Allah *the Almighty* had previously said that the Jews had rejected His signs and Messages. He *Glorified is He* has shown the similarity between them and Ibn Ba‘uraa’- the man to whom He gave His Message, but he discarded it. However, their rejection and denial to the verses of Allah was even worse than that of Ibn Bau‘raa’, since they were a group, while the latter was an individual. That is why we must be fully aware of the fact that the Quran never repeats itself.

He *the Almighty* says: ‘How foul is the image of those who reject Our signs!’ (*al-A’raf:* 176) The Arabic word *sa’* (here translated as ‘how foul is’) means ‘how ugly is’. Arabs say: ‘How foul is such person’ to give the meaning that his state is bad, but what is that particular aspect of his state which is bad?

We can say: 'He is in ill health,' meaning that he is sick, 'He has had some ill fortune,' meaning that he is poor or 'He has a bad moral character,' meaning that he is malicious. Therefore, it is clear that we must define the particular meaning we intend when using the Arabic word *sa'* because it conveys different meanings.

So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'How foul is the image of those who reject Our signs!' This apparently means that it is that example of the Jews who became foul and evil; however, we know well that examples cannot be foul or evil because He *the Almighty* Himself is giving examples to elucidate, explain and clarify a particular point. So, what is true meaning of this particular part of the verse? We say that the exact meaning of this particular part of the verse is that either the condition of the Jews is evil and foul or they are evil because they rejected and denied the Messages of Allah, and thus wronged themselves. As a matter of fact, their denial neither impeded the implementation of the divine way of guidance on earth, nor their rejection caused any imbalance whatsoever in the affairs of the universe—which runs by due measure and under the Undefeatable Will of Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, their denial of the Signs and Messages of Allah could not harm Him *Glorified is He* in any way, but rather, they would certainly be the losers. Ironically, when the Jews rejected and denied the Prophetic miracles, those miracles have not been damaged, but rather, they are engraved in memories until this day; therefore, they have failed and became the losers. Moreover, when they rejected the divine way of guidance, they lost out here as well since no harm afflicted those miracles or the verses of the Quran. Hence, it is clear that they wronged themselves by doing that, just like the patient who does not obey the instructions of the doctor, thereby only harming himself, whilst the doctor is not harmed in the least. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* sent us His Way of Guidance to set the course of life in order; therefore, whoever adheres to it benefits himself, and whoever does not adhere to it does not harm Allah in the slightest.

The Jews wronged themselves and thus became the enemies of their own selves; yes, they could in no way harm Allah, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the community. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'It is themselves they wrong'; we find that the object has been mentioned before the verb. According to the Arabic language grammar, this case is known as 'restriction' or *al-qasr* meaning that we confine the doing of a particular act to a particular subject. We could say: ‘They are sinning against their own selves;’ then, it would be possible for us to add ‘and against others;’ however, when we say, ‘it is themselves they wrong,’ this means that their sin does not affect anyone but themselves; therefore, the speech is restrictive and exclusive. It is exactly like the verse where Allah *the Almighty* says that with Him *the Almighty* rests all power of decision, first and last “To Allah belongs the command before and after” (*ar-Rum:* 4). That is, the power of decision is never given to any but to Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَن يَهۡدِ ٱللَّهُ فَهُوَ ٱلۡمُهۡتَدِيۖ وَمَن يُضۡلِلۡ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡخَٰسِرُونَ ١٧٨

Whoever God guides is truly guided, and whoever God
allows to stray is a loser [178] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 178)

This particular verse is the only verse in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* uses the word *al-muhtadi,* with a long vowel (*i*), at the end, whilst it is given as *al-muhtad,* without the (*i*), in several other verses, including verses (*al-Isra’*: 97), (*al-Hadid*: 26) and (*al-Kahf*: 17).

The continuous battle between guidance and misguidance is as old as man himself is. We clarified this matter before, but we repeat it here for emphasis and reinforcement. At that point, some people always ask, ‘As long as Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who causes guidance and misguidance, why would He *Glorified is He* punish me if I go astray?’ As a matter of fact, this question has become widespread to the extent that the orientalists and philosophers have seized on it as a way of justifying the commitment of the different acts of disobedience by man. However, we say to all those who proffer this argument: ‘Why did you restrict your argument and objection to the topic of punishment in case you go astray while paying no attention to the reward you will receive for your good deeds and faith? The fact that you restricted yourself to the former and not the latter is in itself definitive proof that the guidance which came to you was a beneficial, but you left it aside in favour of what is harmful; nobody says such things except those who have transgressed against their own selves. We have previously given many examples to illustrate this point. Nevertheless, we must take into account a very important point; that is, such people are totally unable to differentiate between two totally separate things: is it Allah *the Almighty* who creates people's actions or is it people who do so themselves?

To answer this question, we should the exact meaning of the word 'action'. It is to use your power to do something in particular. For example, one, upon using the power of the hand, can do any action; he can strike another man with it, help someone who has fallen down, or even pat on an orphan's shoulder to console him. So, it is clear now that the power of the hand can be used both to do good and to do evil. When you strike someone, which particular muscle do you move within your body? You do not really know the answer, but the hand responds to your will to strike once you want to do that. This is actually in contrast to the robot; it cannot carry out anything unless being directed through its programme. In the same connection, when you pat an orphan on the shoulder, what particular body parts do you have to operate in order to perform this act? Then, it is clear now that it is Allah *the Almighty* who gives you the power that allows you to carry out the action. Thus, if we consider this particular point of giving us the power necessary to do the actions, then Allah is the One Who creates all man's actions; however, of the action of directing the body parts to do something, be it good or bad, is what the person will be held accountable for.

Therefore, we will be held accountable for the fact that we had done the action, not because we created them, for Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of all actions. We act according to our free will and choice. For example, the tongue was created with such power that enables it to express all what the person wants to say. If you want to use it to declare the testimony of faith and say: 'There is no God but Allah,' it will respond positively to you. In the same way, it will undoubtedly obey the atheist if he wants to say– Allah forbids, 'there is no god.' Hence, the tongue obeys you in both cases.

We realize now that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who creates and supplies man's body parts with the power required to do actions; however, man, out of his free will, is the one who uses this particular power to do good or bad. At this point, we can declare that all people's actions are created by Allah *Glorified is He* because He has supplied them with the power to the do the act, but man himself is the one who uses the power to do good or evil. In this regard, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* has sent down His Way of Guidance to guide people to the Right Path. So, whoever accepts it—the divine way of guidance—with a faithful intention, He *the Almighty* helps him to do so. Therefore, it is not right to differ about such issue, rather, we must carefully reflect on how actions are created and what role man plays in them. Here, we should take into consideration a very important point, that is, Allah *the Almighty* can cause man to lose his power to do the act—such as the case when a man intends to harm another with his hand, but he is struck with paralysis and becomes unable to move it. If he were the one who created his actions, he would raise his hand and use it to harm whomever he wanted, but he does not create the power required to perform the actions.

Therefore, we can say that guidance is of two kinds. First, *Hidayat Ad-Dalalah* (or guiding people to the divine way of guidance) and it is given to everyone, believers and disbelievers alike. Concerning this kind, we should affirm that Allah *the Almighty* shows the way of guidance to the believer and the disbeliever alike; yet, whoever follows this way and accepts faith in Him, He *Glorified is He* will support him be on the Right Path. In addition, He *the Almighty* will make the matter of faith easy for him, give him the energy to do good deeds, expand his breast, and make things easy for him. In the Quran, Allah orders us to remain conscious of Him since it is He who teaches us. In another place in the Quran, He *Glorified is He* says that whomever He causes to err, these are the losers So, if Allah *the Almighty* makes a general statement and then restricts it by a specific one, it means that the specific statement governs the general one.

In this respect, Our Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies that He guides whomever He wills to the Right Path; and whomever He causes to err, He will help them to go astray. In addition, He *the Almighty* made clear that those whomever He, out of His Help to them, wishes to guide are truly guided. As for the disbelievers, the evildoers and the iniquitous, they will not be guided to the Right Path because He *the Almighty* deprives them of His Help and thus leaves them to their own free choice; a point which is clearly mentioned in the Quran in which He *Glorified is He* tells us about the people of Thamud saying that He *Glorified is He* offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance, Allah says: "And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance, so the thunderbolt of humiliating punishment seized them for what they used to earn." (*Fussilat:* 17) The verse clearly shows that the guidance given to the people of Thamud belonged to the first kind of guidance, which is *Hidayat Ad-Dalalah;* it was not the guidance of Divine Help.

In another place in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that He *Glorified is He* increases the ability of those who are willing to be guided to follow His Guidance and causes them to grow in Allah-Consciousness. That is, He *Glorified is He* out of His Help, increases the ability of those who choose guidance to follow His Divine Way of guidance. In addition, He places a shield between them and hell. In a third place of the Quran, he *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that he cannot guide aright everyone he *peace and blessings be upon him* wants, Allah says: "Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided" (*al-Qasas:* 56).

In this aforementioned verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he cannot help anyone to be obedient, for this is something over which only Allah has dominion.

Moreover, in another position in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says to him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he shows the way to the right path. There is no contradiction whatsoever between the verse of *ash-Shu'ara'* and that of *al-Qasas,* because the former refers to the Guidance of Help, whereas the latter refers to the Guidance of showing the way to the right path.

So, if we see a particular action being attributed to a particular subject, but this action is affirmed once and negated at the same time, we should realize that the way of approaching the issue is different in each case. As for the case under discussion, it is decided by Allah *the Almighty*—the One Who is All-wise, All Knowing.

Back to the chapter of *al-'Araf:* why did Allah *the Almighty* say: 'Whoever Allah guides is truly guided, and whoever Allah allows to stray is a loser'. It is because when He *Glorified is He* deprives His servant of His Help, the servant will surely go through his life alone, without any divine assistance from his Lord; so, he will suffer a lot, whether he is materially comfortable or not. This is if we only consider the life of this world to be eternal; if we add to his heedlessness the fact that the life of this world is only a bridge leading to the Hereafter, the loss will be grievous indeed.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ ذَرَأۡنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡجِنِّ وَٱلۡإِنسِۖ لَهُمۡ قُلُوبٞ لَّا
يَفۡقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمۡ أَعۡيُنٞ لَّا يُبۡصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمۡ ءَاذَانٞ لَّا يَسۡمَعُونَ بِهَآۚ
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ كَٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ بَلۡ هُمۡ أَضَلُّۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡغَٰفِلُونَ ﴿١٧٩﴾

We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell, with hearts they do not use for comprehension, eyes they do not use for sight, ears they do not use for hearing. They are like cattle, no, even further astray: these are the ones who are entirely heedless [179] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 179)

The Arabic word *dhara'a* (here translated as 'created') literally means 'to spread' or 'to scatter'—this meaning is also mentioned in the very beginning of the chapter of *an-Nisa',* where Allah *the Almighty* says that He spread abroad a multitude of men and women out of Adam and Eve. In addition, He *Glorified is He* says that He made mates for us from among ourselves, and mates of the cattle too, multiplying us thereby.

As for the verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* says: 'We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell.' (*al-A'raf:* 179) We know for certain that all the creatures in the universe, with the exception of man and jinn, are obedient to Allah by their nature. As for jinn and man, Allah gave them the free will to choose whatever they want to do. In the chapter of *ar-Rahman,* He *Glorified is He* called them the two armies. (*ar-Rahman:* 31) So, the Arabic word *dhar'na* means that He *the Almighty* has created jinn and man and caused them to spread, disperse, and multiply. Here, we should consider a very important point, that is, the fact that the word 'many' used here does not necessarily mean that those in the contrary situation are few in number, since something might be numerous and its opposite be numerous, too. This can be proved by the Quran in the chapter of *al-Hajj;* Allah *the Almighty* says that before

Him *the Almighty* prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures. (*al-Hajj:* 18)

This means that all beings and creatures, including inanimate objects, plants, and animals prostrate themselves before Allah *the Almighty* and glorify Him. However, when He *the Almighty* tells us about man, he says that many people prostrate themselves before Him *the Almighty* too, yet upon many the punishment has been justified, Allah says: "Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified." (*al-Hajj:* 18) That is, there are many who prostrate and humble themselves before Him *the Almighty*, but meanwhile, there are many who disbelieve and refuse to prostrate and humble themselves before Him *the Almighty*; thus, they deserve to suffer as a result. About this particular part of the verse, some people might ask, 'Did You create them solely for Hell, O Lord? What, then, can they do? They can do nothing, as long as You created them for this!' We say that this is a misunderstanding that results from being fully unaware of Arabic grammar. As a matter of fact, we have a particular particle in Arabic known as *lam al-'aqibah* which can be translated as (so, in order to, to, etc). This particle is used to state the consequence which occurred in a way that might not have been the same as that which you intended and wanted. If we apply this principle to our case under discussion, we will find that the ultimate objective behind the creation of jinn and man is to worship Allah *the Almighty* "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56)

Worshipping means to obey the commands and orders of Allah *the Almighty* and to refrain from His prohibitions. Here, we consider that mankind and jinn are, out of their free will, able to choose either to do good or bad. Worshipping, then, requires that some people will obey, while others will not. Let me offer you the following example to illustrate this: someone comes to you and discusses another person's life with you and says: 'Why does he show you such enmity? Were you not the one who took him and gave him a job?' Then, you reply, 'I did him this favour, but he rewarded me with evil!'

So, did you take into account that he is going to hurt you when you first hired him? The answer is definitely ‘no’, but that is how it turned out in the end.

Likewise, we should take into account that the ultimate objective behind the creation of man is to worship Allah alone and not whether they are going to be admitted into Paradise or Hell. However, there are people who believe and act righteously and therefore, will be admitted into the Paradise, while others disobey and thus will be admitted into Hell. This is the true meaning of *lam al-‘aqibah* which is something followed by a result different from that intended by man. Another example to illustrate this point: Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran that He *Glorified is He* inspired the mother of Musa (Moses) to suckle him and cast him away in the river in case she feared for him. He *the Almighty* also ordered her not to fear or grieve, for He *the Almighty* would bring him back to her. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the family of the Pharaoh picked him out of the river so that he could be an enemy to them. (*al-Qasas:* 7-8)

Hence, the question to be asked here is: did the Pharaoh’s family really spare him so that he would become an enemy to them? No, they rather wished that he would be a comfort for the Pharaoh and his wife. (*al-Qasas:* 9) Therefore, it is clear that the main reason why they spared Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was that he would be a joy and comfort to their eyes, a matter which did not eventually happen because Moses became the enemy of the Pharaoh. This is actually the true meaning of *lam al-‘aqibah.*

If we apply this to the verse under discussion, that is, the saying of Allah, ‘We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell’, we will fully realise that the ultimate objective behind the creation of man is to worship Allah alone and not whether they are going to be admitted into Paradise or Hell. However, there are those people who believe and act righteously and therefore will be admitted into the paradise, while others disobey and thus will be admitted into Hell. Let me remind you of the following example, so that we can fully understand this point: when the Minister for Education asks the headmaster of a school or the dean of a college about the level of the study and the level of the students, the headmaster or the dean may say: ‘We know well who will fail and who will pass, and if you like, I will tell you their names and list them for you.' The headmaster or the dean does not actually say this because he is in control of the students' answers; rather, it is because he knows perfectly well their level through their behaviour. At that point, we must affirm the fact that knowledge is based on observation; it does not exert any impact whatsoever on the person. Therefore, we can explain Allah's words, 'We have created many jinn and people who are destined for Hell,' to mean that He *Glorified is He* had destined that many people and jinn—obviously those who turned away from the divine way of guidance—would be admitted into Hell. He *Glorified is He* tells us the reasons behind this divine judgement, as follows: first of all, those people who turned away from the divine way of guidance have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth; second, they have eyes with which they fail to see; and third, they have ears with which they fail to listen. "And we have certainly created for hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless" (*al-A'raf:* 179)

Thus, someone might ask: 'If their hearts were created in such a way that they cannot grasp the truth; then, what is their sin? Also, if their eyes were created in such a way that they cannot see; then, what is their sin? Likewise, if their ears were created in such a way that they cannot hear; then, why are they punished for this?' To those, we say that the matter does not go like this. Allah *the Almighty* did not create people to make them suffer; rather, those people were entirely and directly subject to their whims and lusts to the extent that their minds became such that they never thought about anything else and only planned for satisfying their desires and lusts. The same applies to their eyes which only saw what they lusted for, and so did their ears. That is to say that everyone from among them did not make use of these divine gifts given to him. In other words, they did not utilise those body parts towards things that would help them achieve prosperity in the Hereafter.

The difference between the discernment of the heart on the one hand, the sight of the eye and the hearing of the ear on the other, is that the discernment of the heart is the direct result of what man's different senses perceive. We know for certain that man perceives things by means of five senses. For example, we utilise our sense of touch to know that silk is soft. In the same way, we utilise our sense of smell to realise that musk has a fine scent, while we use our sense of taste to realise that honey is sweet. Further, it is clear that each sense has a particular job to do. Then, all these pieces of information perceived through these senses will be passed to the heart which will process them to eventually take the form of a mental issue which is overwhelmingly approved.

We all know for certain that fire burns because once a person touches fire, it burns him. Therefore, he, based on the previous experience, will keep away from fire. This experience was non-existent at first, when, through his sense of touch, man first realised that fire burns. This piece of information will then pass to the heart wherein it will turn into an idea. So, information is conveyed to the human soul by means of the external senses. At that point, we should take into account that there are other senses which are invisible, such as one's ability to ascertain the weight of things by lifting them. Scientists recently discovered that man has a particular sense called the 'muscular sense'. This particular sense functions when one lifts something very heavy beyond his capacity.

Hence, it is clear that all the pieces information obtained from man's different senses travel to the heart, wherein they are developed into ideas and concepts. This is why Allah *the Almighty* reminds people of His Grace upon them, saying that He *Glorified is He* has brought us forth from our mothers' wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed us with hearing, sight and minds so that we might have cause to be grateful, Allah *Glorified is He* says "And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful." (*an-Nahl:* 78)

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-'Araf* that is, '... with hearts they do not use for comprehension....' (*al-A'raf:* 179) The Arabic word *al-fiqh* literally means 'to understand'. So, when something is properly and adequately understood, it becomes an established fact of which one is firmly convinced. However, the disbelievers see nothing with their eyes except their caprices, and their ears only hear what pleases them, so they do not listen to guidance. Furthermore, they do not notice the signs around them in which they might see evidence of the Creator. In sum, their hearts live without grasping and understanding the truth. This means that they do indeed possess heart, eyes, and ears, but they exploit these body parts in what brings about their destruction.

That is why He *Glorified is He* describes such people by saying: 'they are like cattle, no, even further astray: they are the ones who are entirely heedless.' (*al-A'raf:* 179) Here arises a very important question, that is, 'What is the sin of cattle to be compared to disbelievers? Especially if we take into account the fact that cattle are not legally charged, and that they do not have hearts to grasp the truth, neither do they have eyes to see the signs of Allah, nor do they have ears to listen to the Commands of Allah.' All they do is to go to the pasture to feed; if they see a wolf, they instinctively flee away from it. They even grow accustomed to the sound they hear around them. As a matter of fact, the course of life of all animals is run by virtue of this special instinct placed in them by Allah *the Almighty* that allows them to distinguish what is good and what is bad.

At this point, we should affirm that there is a big difference between man and animal; the former does not keep away from harm unless he, based on previous experience, fully realises it, while the latter, based on its natural instinct, keeps away from all different kinds of harm. Because animals do not possess reason or the ability to choose between alternatives, Allah *the Almighty* has created them with instinct which guides them to choose what is beneficial for their life. For example, we might find a weak animal living in a particular environment; yet, Allah *Glorified is He* gives it a colour which matches the colour of this environment to protect it from more powerful animals.

Here is another example to illustrate this point: we know perfectly well that animals are created to benefit and serve mankind; thus, they must reproduce so that man benefits from their offspring in the future. That is why the animals copulate with each other for no reason but to reproduce; a point which is in obvious contradiction to that of man, who views sex as a means of reproduction and satisfying his desire at the same time. This is why we find that man learnt many of his life activities from animals. For example, when the son of Adam killed his brother, he did not know how to bury him, so

Allah *the Almighty* sent a raven which scratched the earth to show him how he might conceal the nakedness of his brother's body "Then Allah sent a crow searching in the ground to show him how to hide the disgrace of his brother." (*al-Ma'ida:* 31) Thus, it is obvious that the raven was guided by its instinct. Therefore, to those who ask how Allah could compare the misguided person to cattle, we say that the misguided person totally differs from cattle in that he possesses free will and has the ability to raise himself above the cattle, however, he has chosen to place himself at their level by not using his reason to choose between alternatives; in this way, he has become even less conscious of the right way than cattle. However, Allah's words, 'They are like cattle, no, even further astray,' makes it clear that cattle are not misguided because they are governed by instinct and have no free will to choose whatever they want to do. As for the disbelievers from among the jinn and men whom our Lord has destined for hell, they do not know their Lord, whilst animals, inanimate objects and plants indeed know their Lord. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that there is not a single thing but extols Allah's Limitless Glory and Praise, but we fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him. So, it is clear that cattle know their Lord and glorify and praise Him. In another place in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says that each of the creatures knows indeed how to pray to Him and to glorify Him.

I have told you before about one of the stories of those who have deep knowledge of Allah. For your information, when those people sit together, they encourage one another to attain higher spiritual levels. Those people, the most conscious of Allah, used to meet and greet those who offer acts of worship better than them, with a smile. They, on the other hand, used to meet those who are superior to them in worldly matters, with a grimace. That is why when one of them asked another, 'Do you yearn for your Lord?' He replied, 'No.' 'How can you say that?' asked the first. 'Indeed,' he replied, 'only those who are absent are yearned for.'

That is why He *the Almighty* describes those who turn away from His Divine Way of Guidance, 'They are like cattle, no, even further astray: these are the ones who are entirely heedless.' (*al-A'raf:* 179) This particular part of the verse obviously indicates that those people, whom Allah had destined to

Hell are astray not because they had no way of guidance, nor had any one to remind them, and nor had any one to give them glad tidings or warnings; rather, it was because of their heedlessness; everything was made clear for them, but they ignored it and were wilfully heedless of it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلِلَّهِ ٱلۡأَسۡمَآءُ ٱلۡحُسۡنَىٰ فَٱدۡعُوهُ بِهَاۖ وَذَرُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ يُلۡحِدُونَ فِيٓ
أَسۡمَٰٓئِهِۦۚ سَيُجۡزَوۡنَ مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١٨٠﴾

The Most Excellent Names belong to God: use them to call on Him, and keep away from those who abuse them – they will be requited for what they do [180] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 180)

Allah's words, 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah,' mean that no names other than His names could be described as 'the Most Excellent.' If you say that a person is 'generous', this particular word is an attribute; it is also the case if you say that he is 'forbearing'. In fact, all those attributes are accidental; thus, they only become 'Most Excellent Names' if Allah is described by them. For example, you have a particular power through which you can perform many actions; however, this power of yours is totally different from that of Allah *the Almighty* who is Omnipotent. As for man's power, it is entirely subject to change because one may lose it at any time, for a reason or another. Likewise, you might be wealthy, yet your wealth is accidental; thus, it is totally different from that of Allah *the Almighty* who has the treasures of everything and who is Self-Sufficient.

Therefore, the 'Most Excellent Names' in their absolute sense belong only to Allah *the Almighty*; if they are applied to anything other than Him, they become limited attributes; no matter how great their extent may be. He *the Almighty* says: 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah: use them to call on Him.' (*al-A'raf:* 180) The Arabic word *al-husna* (here translated as 'the Most Excellent') is the feminine form of the word *al-ahsan* which is a superlative. They are the most perfect names inasmuch as they are suited to the divine qualities, and the divine qualities are suited to them. When we say that He *Glorified is He* is 'the

Most Merciful', this is something perfect both for me and for you because I consider the mercy He shows me, and you consider the mercy He shows you. The same applies when you say that He is 'All-Forgiving', for this has an effect on you, on me and on everyone else who hears it.

Furthermore, when you say that He *the Almighty* is 'All-Dominant', this means that those who are sinful will fear Him. At that point, it is important to know that Allah *the Almighty* has both attributes of beauty and attributes of majesty— the attributes of beauty are designated for those who obey Him, whilst the attributes of majesty are designated for those who disobey Him. Therefore, we should not only consider blessings by how they affect us personally, but rather, according to what Allah originally intends by them.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran that a flash of fire and smoke will be let loose upon people in case they pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth. In addition, they will be left without succour. He *the Almighty* then tells us that this is actually one of His Blessings that cannot be denied. (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36)

Here arises a very important question; that is, whether the loosing of fire and smoke can really be considered a blessing we should not deny. We say that indeed it is a great blessing since He *Glorified is He* warns us of the considerable power of such fire before it afflicts us, and thus we will take admonition and exhortations and keep away from it. So, the warning and admonition that He *Glorified is He* gives us before the fire comes is viewed as a great blessing. In addition, when the believers obey Him in this worldly life and adhere to His way of guidance, they are rewarded for their obedience. As for those who turn away from His way of guidance, He warns them against their acts of disobedience which is also a great blessing since they might show repentance.

As a matter of fact, He *Glorified is He* told us about His Name—Allah—through direct transmission from Him, so that we, relying on our intellect, might be able to know about His Omnipotent Power. However, we will be unable to know about the essence of the name itself. As I have said before, let us suppose that there are some people sitting in a room when there is a knock at the door. All of them will agree that there is someone at the door, but they will differ when they try to imagine who it might be. One might say, 'It is a man;' but another may reply, 'No, it is a woman because the knock was light;' and then a third says, 'The knock came from the top of the door, so the caller must be tall, and he must be bearing ill news because he knocked hard.' So, they all agree that there is someone knocking at the door; yet, they all disagree on the identity of the knocker, and none of them really knows his name. So, if you want to know exactly who is knocking at the door, you should ask, 'Who's there?', whereupon he shall reply by telling you his name.

Hence, it is clear that names cannot be deduced or reached by the intellect or reason. Thus, if we carefully consider this fact, we shall know that Allah, the Creator of the entire universe, is Almighty, All-Powerful, All-Wise and All Knowing—all of which are qualities which are essential for the purpose of creation, and which can be deduced by man's intellect. As for His name, Allah, it is transmitted to us through revelation, and thus the intellect has nothing to do with it. The same applies to the rest of His Excellent Names which are all transmitted to us through revelation; that is why we are obliged to call upon Him *Glorified is He* only with use of these Most Excellent Names. Therefore, if one takes one of these names and applies them to other than Allah; he will be judged as invoking other than Him by the Most Perfect and Excellent Names which are exclusive to Allah alone. For example, Musaylima, the liar from Yamama, called himself 'the giver of mercy' or *Ar-Rahim,* and thereby distorted the true meaning of this Most Excellent Name by applying it to himself. The same goes for the Arabs who called one of their idols, '*al-Lat'* which is the feminine form of the word 'Allah;' another idol of theirs was called '*al-'Uzza'* word derived from Allah's Most Excellent Name, '*al-'Aziz'* or Almighty; and yet a third idol of theirs, '*Manat'* a word derived from Allah's Most Excellent Name, '*al-Mannan'* or 'the One Who gives continuously without expecting anything in return.' All of these had actually distorted the meaning of these Most Excellent Names of Allah by which we should invoke no one other than Him. This is why it is said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once supplicated to Allah and said: 'O Allah, I am Your servant, and the son of Your servant, and the son of Your servant-girl. My forelock is in Your hand; Your judgement holds sway over me, and Your decree is ever just to me. I ask You by every name which is Yours, by which You have named Yourself, or sent down in Your Book, or taught unto any of

Your creatures, or kept secret in the knowledge of the unseen which You possess, to make the Quran the spring of my heart, and the light of my breast, and the relief of my disquiet, and the release of my sorrow and worry.'(1)

Hence, it is clear that our Lord *Glorified is He* had told us about the Most Excellent Names through revelation because they cannot be discerned by the intellect. As for the unique qualities by means of which the universe was created, they can be realised and discerned by the intellect. Let me offer the following example to illustrate this point: we establish many big factories for the manufacture of light bulbs; we take glass and empty it of air and then place wires inside it so that it is able to conduct electricity. After a certain period of time, the light bulbs break. However, the sun has been illuminating the world for all this time, since the beginning of creation, and it does not require any spare parts from us. So, when we say that He *the Almighty* is 'All-Wise', we say this as a result of the cohesion and harmony we notice in the movement of the planets—every planet moves in its due orbit without crashing or colliding into one another; a point that definitely proves the Great Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty*.

In the verse, 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah: use them to call on Him,' (*al-A'raf:* 180) He *the Almighty* encourages us to invoke Him by the Most Perfect and Excellent Names. That is because He *the Almighty* wants His creatures to constantly remember Him—for He is the Lord Who created everything from nothing, replaced privation with provision and preserved creation with His sustenance. Thus, whenever you need something, you must remember the Most Perfect and Excellent Names of Allah and call upon Him by them. In addition, whenever you wish to draw closer to Allah, you should not call upon Him by any other Name than those which He gave to Himself, namely; Allah because this is the Most Beautiful and Excellent Name for Allah. In this connection, it is important to know that all of Allah's Most Perfect Names are Attributes which have reached the level of Names, and there are some Names which convey the meanings of various attributes.

For example, when you say, 'Zayd', the listener knows that this is the name of a person called Zayd, who also has other attributes besides that; he might be a merchant, a knowledgeable jurisprudent or even an engineer. However, his proper name is Zayd; you do not have other friends under this name even though your friends may have the same qualities of Zayd.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad*

At this point, we say that Allah's Names are of two kinds: a name which indicates His Essence without any further connotation, namely Allah and Names which were originally attributes, such as 'The Most Merciful,' 'The Bestower of Mercy,' 'The Ultimate Sovereign,' 'The All-Holy,' 'The Peace,' 'The Giver Of Faith' and 'The Guardian.' However, these attributes have reached the highest and loftiest of levels where there is nothing higher than them, to the extent that, if they are used with their fullest meaning, they can refer to none but Him, and thus they have become Names. You might say that someone is rich, generous, or wise, but absolute richness belongs to Allah alone.

The Most Perfect and Excellent Names are originally derived from adjectives of the utmost intensity because He *the Almighty* is the Most Perfect and Excellent Embodiment of them, and they are essentially attributes which have active manifestations. Allah's Names are of two kinds: one kind in which both the Names and their opposites can be ascribed to Him, and another, in which the opposites of the Names cannot be ascribed to Him *Glorified is He*. Furthermore, there are other attributes which are derived from the same lexical root, so we say: 'The Rich' and also 'The Enricher', for He was rich in His Essence before there was anyone to enrich, and His Attribute of enriching was only manifested after there existed servants for Him to enrich. In the same way, He *the Almighty* is 'The Ever-Living' in His Essence, and He is also 'The One who grants life' to others, which is an action to be done to someone else, and it must have an opposite, so we say that He is 'The One who grants life' and also 'The One who causes death;' nevertheless, the opposite of this Name, *al-Mayyit* or the dead, cannot be ascribed to Him. Therefore, the Name which has an opposite is called an 'Attribute of Action', whilst the 'Attributes of the Essence' are those which have no opposites. What is truly meant with Allah's saying that they abuse the Most Excellent Names is that they ascribe them to others than Him, that they call Him *the Almighty* by the names of creatures or even that they take a meaningless or incomprehensible name and ascribe it to Him. Hence, *al-Ilhad fi Asma' Allah* (here translated as abusing

Allah’s Names) can be interpreted as follows: either to ascribe one of Allah’s Names to other than Him, to call Him *the Almighty* by the names of creatures or to ascribe a name to Him about which He did not tell us through revelation. ‘… And stand aloof from all who distort the meaning of His names: they shall be requited for all that they were wont to do!’

We know that ‘to do’ (*‘amal*) means an action of any part of the body: the speech of the tongue is a deed; the smell of the nose is a deed; we know that there are things called ‘speech and action.’ An action is the deed of all the limbs except the tongue, and speech is the deed of the tongue; both of them are called ‘deeds.’ This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *as-Saff*: ‘…Why do you say one thing and do another?’ Hence, speech is the contrast of action, and here the reward is for both speech and action because they are both ‘deeds.’

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has so many names, can we derive names for Him from His actions? For example, He says: ‘And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things…’ (*al-Baqara:* 31) He says: ‘…and [He] has imparted unto you the knowledge of what you did not know…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 113). So, can we say that Allah is a ‘Teacher’ or ‘Imparter of knowledge?’ He says, ‘but I shall bring all their scheming to nought’ (*at-Tariq:* 16) which literally means, ‘I shall devise a scheme’. Does this mean we can call Him ‘The Schemer?’

This is not allowed because Allah’s names must be imparted to us by Him; and if you see an action ascribed to Allah, go no further than the action; do not try to derive a name for Allah from it.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَآ أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَبِهِۦ يَعْدِلُونَ ﴿١٨١﴾

Among those We created are a group of people who
guide with truth and act justly according to it [181]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 181)

After having said, ‘And most certainly have We destined for hell many of the invisible beings and men…’ (*al-A’raf:* 179). Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure those people who follow His way, so He did not say 'all men', but rather, '… many of the invisible beings and men…' (*al-A'raf:* 179). As we saw, those people in the opposite condition will also be many, since He says in the chapter of *al-Hajj*: '… And many human beings [submit to Allah consciously], whereas many [others, having defied Him,] will inevitably have to suffer….' (*al-Hajj:* 18) That is, many people prostrate themselves before Allah, whilst many others are destined to suffer.

The True Lord's words, 'Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light,' (*al-A'raf:* 181) mean that Allah's universe is never bereft of those who follow guidance and guide others, so that the right behaviour remains a role model in society.

The role model for society's behaviour is what produces natural belief in young people. A young person does not know how to pray or fast, and he does not know the difference between falsehood and truth, but he learns by imitating his parents. If the child sees that when the call to prayer is sounded, his mother and father each go to perform ablution and pray, he learns how to pray. When someone starts talking about other people's business, the father or the mother says, 'There is no need for us to delve into the affairs of others, lest our good deeds be decreased because of it;' this way, the child learns how to hold his tongue from delving into other people's business because he absorbs their behaviour. This happens because of the fact that when a young child, who has not yet reached the age of reason, hears the muedhdhin, he stands up of his own accord and gets to the prayer rug, imitating his mother and father.

From His words, 'and act justly in its light,' we understand that when they judge things, they apply true justice— 'justice' here might mean to negate the association of anything with Allah; it might refer to the issue of grave sins or it might mean that they act justly when it comes to giving people their rights.

'Now, among those whom We have created there are people…' (*al-A'raf:* 181). The word 'people' (*ummah*) in Allah's noble verse means that the perfect attributes of Allah's way of guidance are too vast for one single person to encompass and implement them all. Everyone has a piece of them which he implements: there are those who are distinguished by honesty, some by bravery, and others by generosity. In this way, the role model for righteous qualities remains in society. Allah *Glorified is He* singled out Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when He said: ‘Verily, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a man who combined within himself all virtues, devoutly obeying Allah’s will, turning away from all that is false, and not being of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.’ (*an-Nahl:* 120)

The words ‘…a man who combined within himself all virtues…’ (*an-Nahl:* 120) are a translation of one single Arabic word *ummah*. That is, he encompassed all the qualities of righteousness which are usually only found in a large community.

‘Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.’ (*al-A’raf:* 181) Which community is it, then, out of all the communities on earth that guides others to the truth? Allah *Glorified is He* said about the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘And among the folk of Moses there have been people who would guide [others] in the way of the truth…’ (*al-A’raf:* 159).

Then, there came the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after whom there would come no other messenger; so, this Muslim community would remain entrusted with the preservation of the way of Allah until the end of time.

If you see disbelief spreading, know that Allah has assistance to give; and the more the people’s disbelief increases, the more Allah’s assistance increases. Even if a Muslim land becomes sunken in iniquity, there may be one single person in it who embodies all these noble qualities which guide to the truth so that Allah’s Law remains preserved by those people who behave righteously and follow the way of Allah.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has left corruption to work its evil. Someone might ask, ‘Why does this evil have to exist in a universe which Allah created with such order?’ We answer that if people were never harmed by evil, they would not be aware of the sweetness of good; were people never hurt by the followers of falsehood, no one would be ardent to protect the truth, so people would not know how essential it is that truth be deeply rooted in existence. Evil, therefore, has its own message to this existence, which is to inspire people to do good. Just as Allah has destined many jinn and men for

Hell, He *Glorified is He* has also clarified for us that: 'Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.' (*al-A'raf:* 181) When judging, the peak of justice is to refrain from associating any partners with Him because the first contravention of justice is idolatry which is an enormous injustice. Idolatry, may Allah protect us from it, transfers something from where it is deserved to where it is not deserved; the same is true for the act of declaring to be forbidden that which Allah has permitted, or declaring to be permitted that which Allah has forbidden—all of this is unjust. The same is true of refraining from keeping the balance of people's rights; if people's rights are not preserved by judges, custodians and rulers, we will find that every person will only work enough in life to meet his basic needs so that he does not leave anything for the tyrant to seize from him. He will therefore only do limited work in life, doing no more than what is necessary to meet his basic needs; and if this happens, those who are too weak to work, will not find any excess wealth to live on.

Hence Allah wanted, by justice, to preserve everyone's labours and toils, and therefore clarified for everyone that what you lawfully earn is your possession, but Allah has a right to a part of it, and the rest is for you; this way, those who are too weak to work for a living, will find someone to provide for them. This is why the way of faith warns you: beware of begrudging to give to the weak because the power you utilised to earn wealth is only accidental, and it will not last forever; so, if we take from you, whilst you are strong enough to work, we will take for you when you are unable to work— this is true insurance and justice.

Concerning the people mentioned in this verse, 'Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light,' (*al-A'raf:* 181) there is a tradition which states that the people meant in this noble verse are the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Qutada *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I was told that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say when he recited this verse: 'This is for you; and the people who came before you were given the like of it: "And among the folk of Moses there have been people who would guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light."' (*al-A'raf:* 159)(1) The

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(1) *Tafsir Ibn Kathir Vol. 2... Tafsir At-Tabari, Vol. 6*

Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was addressing his Companions when he said, ‘This is for you;’ that is, ‘This refers to your community;’ which is further confirmed by the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for (The good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 110).

The words, ‘for (The good of) mankind,’ indicate that Allah did not only make the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the community who responded to his call, the best of believers, but rather, He made them the best of all mankind, believer and disbeliever alike. ‘Now, among those whom We have created there are people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light.’ (*al-A’raf:* 181)

The word ‘people’ (*ummah*) is used here because all the qualities of goodness cannot be encompassed by a single person, but rather, each person takes a single element of goodness: this one is intelligent, that one is brave, the other has wealth, and another has good manners. It is as though there can be found, within the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* individuals who collectively encompass all the necessary gifts for fulfilling man’s vicegerency on earth.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then gives their opposite because to mention something along with its opposite has a deeper effect on the soul. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُم مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٢﴾

But We lead on those who reject Our messages,
step by step, without them realizing it [182]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 182)

These are the opposite of those whom Allah created as a people who guide others in the way of the truth and act justly in its light. The word ‘messages’ (*ayat*) is the plural of *ayah* (‘sign’ or ‘message’). We have said before that there are three kinds of *ayat*: signs that you see in the cosmos which guide you to awareness of the existence of Him Who created this vast universe with such great precision and exactitude—signs which capture your attention such as night and day, the sun and the moon; then, there are the signs which break the natural laws of the universe to prove that a messenger is truly sent by Allah; lastly, there are the verses of the Quran which convey the way of Allah. Those who deny the signs of the cosmos and take no heed of them, who do not derive from them realisation of the existence of a Wise, All-Powerful Allah, who deny the miraculous signs which prove the truth of prophethood and who, likewise, deny the verses of the Quran and refuse to apply them or adhere to them – those people will receive the verdict of Allah: He will not only make them enter hell, but He will also torment them in this worldly life because, if everything were left to the Hereafter, the transgression of the evildoer who does not believe in the afterlife, would be even worse. Meanwhile, the one who believed in the Hereafter would live in the world according to the protocol of faith, and his actions would all be beautiful and in accordance with Allah's way, in contrast to the one who behaved iniquitously in the world. Therefore, punishment must come during this worldly life to those who behave iniquitously in the world. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But verily, for those who are bent on doing evil, there is suffering in store [even] closer at hand than that [supreme suffering in the hereafter]…' (*at-Tur:* 47) That is, they will be punished before the Hereafter. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the punishment of this world: 'But as for those who are bent on giving the lie to Our messages – We shall bring them low, step by step, without their perceiving how it came about.' (*al-A'raf:* 182)

When you say, 'I led so-and-so on,' (in Arabic *istidraj* which, in the verse above, is translated as 'to bring low step by step') you mean that you worked on him craftily until he admitted what he had done—like what the prosecutor does when he interrogates a criminal, posing questions to him from here and there until he admits his guilt and confesses; this is the meaning of *istidraj* or 'leading'. The word *istidraj* is derived from the word *darj* which means 'step' (something used to go from a low place to a high place or vice-versa). One cannot jump from the ground floor to the fifth floor of a building, that is why they made staircases with ascending steps, which can be traversed by walking in a normal fashion; for example, some of them make every step twelve centimetres high so that everyone can lift their feet and put them on the next step without exhausting themselves; this means that we ascend or descend the staircase gradually (*bi'l-istidraj*). They say that in the Hereafter, Paradise contains the highest levels (*darajat*), and Hell the lowest.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But as for those who are bent on giving the lie to Our messages – We shall bring them low, step by step, without their perceiving how it came about.' (*al-A'raf:* 182) That is, We shall take them step by step giving them blessings and then wearing them out with what they attain, as He *Glorified is He* has said before: '… until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – We suddenly took them to task…' (*al-An'am:* 44). This is because when Allah wants to punish someone, for his crime against his fellow man in this worldly life, He does not take him to task for the very first crime because this would be a light rebuke; but rather, He gives him rein for a while, raises him up, and then lets him fall from high.

'Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – We suddenly took them to task…' (*al-An'am:* 44). In this way, He takes them to task as only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can.

Furthermore, when a human being leads someone on, the person he leads on also has intelligence, and he sees that he is being plotted against and that a trap is being laid out for him; but when our Lord, the Strong and Almighty, leads on, no one knows how to evade it. The cause for His words, '…We shall bring them low, step by step…' (*al-A'raf:* 182) is found in His words, '…without their perceiving how it came about' (*al-A'raf:* 182) because human beings know the different ways in which they lead one another on.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأُمۡلِي لَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ كَيۡدِي مَتِينٌ ﴿١٨٣﴾

I will give them respite, but My plan is sure [183] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 183)

To 'give rein' means to delay and postpone; that is, He does not take them to task right away. When the corrupt person commits all kinds of evil in society, we find that the righteous people increase their righteous deeds, and we always hear people say: 'Were there no such thing as faith, people would consume one another.' Faith imparts a sound role model and certitude. When the evildoing disbeliever is given rein, this is not because the Lord is ignoring him, but rather, it is only a postponement, after which Allah will take him to task, as only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies: 'If I lead them on step by step and give them rein, know that My subtle scheme is exceedingly firm.' A scheme (*kayd*) means a plot, and a plot means to take someone to task without his perceiving how it came about; a clandestine action which aggrieves the object of the plot.

A plot is a clandestine plan so that its object can have no way of warding it off. If human beings are able to plot and plan things without others being aware of it, how will it be when Allah *Glorified is He* plans a scheme or plot against the disbelievers? Will any of them be able to discover anything about it? Of course, no one will; this is the meaning of '… My subtle scheme is exceedingly firm.' (*al-A'raf:* 183) The word 'firm' (*matin*) means strong from the root word *matn* which means 'back'. We know that the back is composed of the spinal column and vertebrae, which are surrounded by muscles; if the spinal column was only made of bones, any load placed on it would break it. So, the manifestations of our Lord *the Exalted* decreed, and His mercy and power ordained, that these bones be surrounded by two large muscles called trapeziuses which protect and strengthen the back.

If we consider the word *matin*, we find that the word *matn* is used to mean something which is foundational to many things; for example, as part of the Islamic sciences, we study jurisprudence and grammar, and we utilise what are called 'primers' meaning short texts which summarise the subject using few words which intelligent students memorise entirely. The Arabic word for this 'primer' is *matn*. Usually, you will find that this *matn* will be accompanied by an interlinear commentary, and then there will also be a marginal commentary.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَمۡ يَتَفَكَّرُواْۗ مَا بِصَاحِبِهِم مِّن جِنَّةٍۚ إِنۡ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٞ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٨٤﴾

Has it not occurred to them that their companion
is not mad but is giving clear warning? [184]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 184)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* encourages all mankind to reflect on the matter of the Messenger who was sent to tell mankind what the Higher Power wanted from them. The first thing that we should think about is to determine whether this man, who claims to be a messenger, is truthful or untruthful. The truthfulness of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was confirmed before the message was ever sent down to him, and the message came to take hold of man's hand and lead him to faith in Allah. However, they did not want to listen; they had to invent justifications for their refusal to follow Allah's way, so some of them accused the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a madman, and others said that he was a sorcerer, a soothsayer or a poet; our Lord answered all of those vain claims.

You might ask: what is a madman (*majnun*)? We know that a madman is someone who has lost his ability to think rationally and choose between alternatives; when Allah takes from him this ability to think rationally, he is no longer morally responsible because responsibility requires the ability to choose whether to act or not to act, and the madman does not have the ability to make such judgement.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not hold a man morally responsible until he reaches physical and mental maturity; when he reaches maturity, he comes to have an identity which is independent from his family and parents. This is why we can observe that when a child is young, his parents choose his food and clothing for him; then, when he grows up and becomes a teenager, he rebels and demands to choose what he wants for himself because he has come to have his own identity. Identity, as we know, exists in plants, animals, and men as soon as the individual is able to reproduce, whether this individual is a plant, animal, or man. Yet, if a person has an identity, inasmuch as he is able to reproduce and have children, but he does not possess an intellectual identity and ability to think, he is not held to be morally responsible because he has involuntarily lost his reason.

We know, then, that moral responsibility does not apply to children, the insane, and those who are coerced by someone stronger than them; this is the just requital of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. Thus, we see that moral responsibility is only applied to those whose bodies and minds have matured; in this way, our Lord guards the world with His infinite sustenance.

If the madman is the one who has lost the rational balance to choose between alternatives, how could they say this about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he had lived among them and had never lost his ability to choose rationally between alternatives? Indeed, they knew him as 'the honest and trustworthy one;' and even after they had become disbelievers, they used to trust him to look after all their precious belongings; his fine character was intrinsic and constant.

They did Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an injustice by saying that about him, repeating it non-stop; each one of them laying accusations which had no basis in fact. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* has said to those who laid those claims: 'Say: 'I counsel you one thing only: Be [ever conscious of] standing before Allah, whether you are in the company of others or alone; and then bethink yourselves [that] there is no madness in [this prophet,] your fellow man…' (*Saba': 46*).

That is, every two people should sit together and discuss whether Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sane or insane, whereupon each of them would find, from their personal experience, that Muhammad was the most trustworthy of people, and everyone knew him as 'the trustworthy one,' even before the Revelation came to him; it did not make sense that the Revelation would harm him or cause him to lose his balance. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: *'Nun.* Consider the pen, and all that they write (Therewith]! [1] You are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman! [2] And, verily, yours shall be a reward never-ending [3] for, behold, you keep indeed to a sublime way of life. [4]' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4) The Prophet's way of life was sublime because 'way of life' (*khuluq*) means the attributes which make a person fit to live in peace in a healthy society; as long as his character and way of life were sound, his standards of judgment must also have been sound.

After that, they said he was a ‘sorcerer.’ We ask these people: why were the leaders of Quraysh not bewitched into believing in his message then? These are all futile arguments; there is no sorcery involved here at all.

‘Has it, then, never occurred to them that there is no madness whatever in [this] their fellow man? He is only a plain warner.’ (*al-A’raf:* 184) The madness which you invoke and with which you slander Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the anathema of all reason and the anathema of all good character; Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a clear warner who came first with glad tidings, but because of your iniquity, you do not deserve glad tidings, but you deserve only warnings. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

أَوَلَمْ يَنظُرُواْ فِي مَلَكُوتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ مِن شَيْءٍ
وَأَنْ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَكُونَ قَدِ ٱقْتَرَبَ أَجَلُهُمْ ۖ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍۭ بَعْدَهُۥ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٨٥﴾

Have they not contemplated the realm of the heavens and earth and all that God created, and that the end of their time might be near? What [other revelation] will they believe in if they do not believe in this? [185] (The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 185)

In this way, the focus of the dialogue turns from the issue of the Messenger sent to them to lead them by the hand to faith, to the concept of reflection, about which Allah says: ‘Have they, then, never considered [Allah’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth…?’ (*al-A’raf:* 185)

To reflect means to use the intellect so that no one can then say that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was a madman because to simply consider the universe, makes a man see that the sky is raised with no supports, the earth is spread out and the air moves according to a precise order. ‘Have they, then, never considered [Allah’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth… ?’ (*al-A’raf:* 185)

So, above us is the sky, and there is something above the sky; beneath us is the earth, and there is something else beneath the earth; there is also something between the sky and the earth. What we can see in the external world is called the ‘kingdom’ (*mulk*); as for the subtle realm which you cannot reach by solving mathematical equations, it is called the 'dominion' (*malakut*). Allah *Glorified is He* says about Prophet *Ibrahim* (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'And thus We gave Abraham [his first] insight into [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth…' (*al-An'am:* 75). The word *malakut* (dominion) is an intensive form of the word *mulk* (kingdom), just as *rahabut* means 'great dread' from the word *rahba* (dread); both words have a morphological pattern which adds *-ut* to the root letters to intensify their meaning.

'Have they, then, never considered [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, and all the things that Allah has created…?' (*al-A'raf:* 185) We can see the sky and the earth clearly, but the greatness and secret do not only lie in the sky and the earth, but rather, there are things which are very minute and so subtle that they cannot be seen with the eye; despite that, they contain the great wisdom of creation. You might see the clock tower of 'Big Ben' in London, perhaps the largest clock in the world, but a skilled human craftsman has made a wristwatch as small as a ring, and we applaud and marvel at the precision of his work and craft. So, what can we say about the Mighty Creator Whose creatures see the heavens and the earth as so magnificent because they are beyond human perception, and Who also created tiny subtle things which you cannot see with your eye such as microbes, or that you can only see with difficulty such as flies and gnats (each one of these creatures possessing all the necessary constituents of their lives). Even those creatures which have no stomach are provided by their Lord with the ability to suck blood directly from other creatures, either by their intelligence or by their instinct, so they rush to eat and fill themselves and have organs which convert this blood into nourishment.

Thus, the magnificence is not only in the creation of the heavens and the earth, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… and all the things that Allah has created, and [asked themselves] whether, perchance, the end of their own term might already have drawn nigh? In what other tiding, then, will they, after this, believe?' (*al-A'raf:* 185)

That is, from the very first thing which can be called a 'thing', everything is ordained to exist so that if you consider it, you will find the organs which give it life and aid it; some of these creatures possess intrinsic means of perception which even an intelligent person cannot replicate. For example, we find that the animal that has the wit to flee before an earthquake occurs is the donkey which we accuse of being stupid.

When the intellect reflects on the things which science has discovered in the animal and the ocean worlds, it will realise that faith in the existence of a Wise Creator is inescapable. If the disbelievers refuse to consider the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and the creatures Allah has created which cannot be seen by the naked eye, they should look after their own interest, for it might be that the end of their term has come near.

We know that man is a species that has two forms, male and female; between the two forms, there is an ambiguous sex called 'hermaphrodite.' The sexes are composed of many individuals, each possessing a character, a talent and a purpose; the True Lord *Glorified is He* requires of us: "Beware of belittling something you have done to someone, and beware of exaggerating something you have done *for* someone; you must give the word 'thing' its proper measure'' This is why the Sacred Law tells you that when you do a good deed, you must not exaggerate it, but rather say, 'It is of no great consequence;' and if anyone desires to do a bad deed, he must not say, 'And what harm will a single bad deed do to me?', thereby belittling this bad deed. To such a person, we say: no, because the word 'thing' must govern the universe. If you consider this matter, you will find that someone might be physically puny and weak, but have great talent; another person might be physically strong, but have no talent at all. This is because Allah might give the weak person a powerful intellect or great ingenuity or a special talent in a particular field. So, do not look at what is lacking in a person, but rather consider the beautiful qualities which he possesses, which may at first be hidden from you.

'… and [asked themselves] whether, perchance, the end of their own term might already have drawn nigh? In what other tiding, then, will they, after this, believe?' (*al-A'raf:* 185) Why is the nearness of their own term mentioned here? To answer this question, I say that this is something very important because as long as we are individuals belonging to either of the two sexes, or three, and our Lord has told us that we are His vicegerents on earth, we must know that the vicegerent on earth has come to succeed those who came before him. Our Lord might cause a person to die when he is a month or a year old, or two or five years old because the life span of any person is something which the True Lord Himself has specified and is known to no one else. The final destination of equal beings must be equal; for example, if we ask law school students their goal for studying law, they will say, 'To earn a degree.' Yet, we will find that they are tall or short, black or white, intelligent or slow, strong or weak, and they have nothing in common except that they are all studying law. In the same way, as human beings, we are only equal before death; there are those who die in their mother's womb, those who die as infants, and those who die as youths. Though we differ with respect to what will happen after that, the believer and the disbeliever alike, both see these things happening before them, and neither of them can say, 'No, I will not die.'

Since you will eventually die, look to your own interests so that you are rewarded for what you did in this worldly life instead of being punished for it; it might be that the end of your term is near, and you do not know when the end will come. The fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has made our time of death ambiguous is a way to remind us of that, and ambiguity is the clearest reminder; when our Lord wants to elucidate something as clearly as can be, He makes it ambiguous.

For example, had Allah made an age for death, the matter would have been specific and hopeless; but He *Glorified is He* did not assign death any particular age or cause, spreading it out through all times, so a person could potentially face death at any moment. The coming of death is not dependant on any particular cause; it might have a cause or have no cause at all. Since man can expect death at any time, the sinner must endeavour not to meet death whilst engaged in disobedience to Allah.

Beware of saying, 'How could so-and-so have died when he was not even ill?' because death has many causes, and among them is death without a cause. The person whom we lose through death has died because his term came to an end. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies: O disbelievers, do you not know that there are those of you who die at the age of one year, or two years, or three years; and there are those who die as evildoers, and those who die as victims of evil; and if there is no other life after this, what will bring equality to this life?

And what is the sin of those who only live for a single month in this worldly life? You must know, therefore, that there is a second destination waiting for you; the individual destinations of men come when their personal terms of life end, and the universal final end is represented by the Day of Resurrection.

When He says '…In what other tiding, then, will they, after this, believe?' (*al-A'raf:* 185), the True Lord *the Exalted* clarifies that since this tiding which He sent down to them contains the miraculous nature and sublime rhetoric and encompasses all kind of perfections, what more than that could they want?

Can they find happiness by following their caprices and making laws for themselves? On the contrary, they will only suffer, and they should have had better etiquette with Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore He *Glorified is He* says:

مَن يُضۡلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُۥۚ وَيَذَرُهُمۡ فِي طُغۡيَٰنِهِمۡ يَعۡمَهُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

No one can guide those God allows to stray: He
leaves them blundering about in their insolence [186]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 186)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* repeats this warning many times because if something might be difficult for the mind to understand, or have many applications in life, Allah repeats it so that it is always in the forefront of one's consciousness so that the repetition might be taken in by the listener, whilst he is in an attentive mood. Look at how the True Lord *Glorified is He* enumerates His blessings in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, saying after each blessing: 'which, then, of your Sustainer powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 13) He repeats the mention of the blessings so that the meaning will stick in the mind of the listener. 'For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide…' (*al-A'raf:* 186) He *Glorified is He* does not force anyone to follow His guidance; if a man follows guidance, it is for his own good; if he does not follow guidance, he will taste the bitterness of being astray.

We all know that the doctor writes a prescription for the patient so that he will be cured by Allah's leave; therefore, the medicine is a means of regaining health. But if the patient refuses to take the medicine, does this harm the doctor? No. The same is true for Allah's way of guidance. 'For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide…' (*al-A'raf:* 186). But does Allah want anyone to go astray? No, but rather, He *Glorified is He* calls all people to follow His way of guidance, and for those who follow it, He increases them with the guidance of assistance; however, those who choose to go astray are free to disbelieve, if they so wish. This is why the Sacred Law tells us to beware of associating partners with Allah in any deed because our Lord says in a Qudsi Hadith related to us by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who told us that Allah *the Exalted* said: 'I am self-sufficient above any need for a partnership; if anyone offers a work to others alongside Me, I will leave it for those partners of his.' (1)

The meaning of 'partnership', according to human convention, is that a group of people know that their individual work, wealth and talent are not enough to undertake a given project alone, so they get together in partnership to undertake the venture – and does our Lord lack anything so that He would need to get it from anyone else? Glory be to Allah! Rather, the servant's mere inkling that Allah has any partner is enough to make Allah refuse his acts of worship. This is why the Qudsi Hadith says: 'I am self-sufficient above any need for a partnership, and so if anyone offers a work to others alongside Me, I will leave it for those partners of his.' Since Our Lord has refrained from looking after him, this person should expect all kinds of problems befalling him when he least suspects it.

From His words, 'For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide,' it becomes clear that, when Allah ordains that a person be guided and another be astray, no human being can second-guess Allah and turn any part of error into guidance or turn any part of guidance into error.

It also becomes clear from this noble verse that if someone has disease in his heart, Allah increases this disease and leaves him blindly stumbling in his evil arrogance; the *'amh* (blindness) meant here is the loss of the heart's insight, whilst *'amy* means the blindness of the eye.

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih*

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلسَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَىٰهَا ۖ قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِندَ رَبِّى ۖ لَا يُجَلِّيهَا لِوَقْتِهَآ
إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ ثَقُلَتْ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ لَا تَأْتِيكُمْ إِلَّا بَغْتَةً ۗ يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ كَأَنَّكَ
حَفِىٌّ عَنْهَا ۖ قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾

They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, ‘When will it happen?’ Say, ‘My Lord alone has knowledge of it: He alone will reveal when its time will come, a time that is momentous in both the heavens and earth. All too suddenly it will come upon you.’ They ask you about it as if you were eager [to find out]. Say, ‘God alone has knowledge of [when it will come], though most people do not realize it’ [187]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 187)

The person, to whom this question is posed, is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the questioners are the Jews, who asked him about the Last Hour, the Spirit and Dhu Al-Qarnayn. The answers he gave the Jews were in line with what the Torah says; they had expected that the answer that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave would only come from his own self without any ordinance, and not from a Lord Who sent it down to him. When he answered them, with the very same information they had in the Torah, they knew that he was not simply inventing things; then, they asked him about the People of the Cave and what happened to them—they were a group of people who lived in the distant past. When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* answered them, they agreed with everything he said except the matter of the duration because the Quran specified the duration with Allah's words: ‘And [some people assert], “They remained in their cave three hundred years;” and some have added nine [to that number].’ (*al-Kahf:* 25) The Jews said, ‘We know three hundred years, but not these nine other years.’ They did not realise that the True Lord *Glorified is He* chronicles the history of the world according to the precise measurements of the universe; our Lord says: ‘Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, [laid down] in Allah’s decree…’ (*at-Tawba:* 36).

So, all true measurements of time are according to the lunar calendar, and we know that, when they want to measure time to an exacting degree, they chronicle it according to the new moon; for example, all of the measurements taken concerning the ocean are based on the new moon because it is more precise. Furthermore, the new moon is a means of telling us when the month begins which we cannot ascertain from the sun because the sun is a daily indicator of night and day, whilst the moon is an indicator of the months, and the total twelve months is an indicator of the year. But they were not aware of this, and they based their calculation of three hundred years on the solar calendar. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* added, 'and some have added nine,' because three hundred solar years are equal to three hundred and nine lunar years.

The Quran presents the asking of questions as a healthy phenomenon since the purpose of faith is to govern the actions of life with 'Do' and 'Do not do', and when the Sacred Law says 'Do', the action might appear on the surface to be difficult; when it says 'Do not do', the action might appear on the surface to be easy and desirable, whilst refraining from it goes against the desires of the soul. In confirmation that it is a healthy phenomenon for the believers to ask questions, we find that many questions were posed to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by his community which the Quran depicts in many forms: sometimes the question is mentioned in the Arabic present tense, 'They ask you,' and other times it is related in the conditional form, 'If they ask you.' Most often, questions are mentioned in the Arabic present tense, 'They ask you' because it can refer to both the present and the future.

Asking questions was mentioned fifteen times in the present tense in the Quran, and in the conditional form, only once. If you look at those fifteen instances, you will find that in every case they are meant to pronounce a ruling. If we consider the instances of the verb 'to ask' in the order they appear in the Quran, we will find that the Quran says: 'They ask you about the new moons. Say: "They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind"…' (*al-Baqara:* 189).

He *Glorified is He* says: 'They ask you as to what they should spend on others. Say: "Whatever of your wealth you spend shall [first] be for your parents, and for the near of kin"…' (*al-Baqara:* 215).

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'They question you (O Muhammad) with regard to warfare in the sacred month. Say: "Warfare therein is a great (transgression), but to turn (men) from the way of Allah, and to disbelieve in Him and in the Inviolable Place of Worship, and to expel His people thence, is a greater with Allah; for persecution is worse than killing.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 217)

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: “In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man”…’ (*al-Baqara:* 219). In the very same verse, He says: ‘And they ask you as to what they should spend [in Allah’s cause]. Say: “Whatever you can spare.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 219) He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they ask you about [how to deal with] orphans. Say: “To improve their condition is best.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 220)

He *the Exalted* says: ‘They question you (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say: “It is an illness, so let women alone at such times.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 222)

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘They ask you as to what is lawful to them. Say: “Lawful to you are all the good things of life.”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 4)

Then, in the chapter of *al-A‘raf,* He says: ‘They ask you [O Prophet] about the Last Hour: “When will it come to pass?” Say: “Verily, knowledge thereof rests with my Sustainer alone”…’ (*al-A’raf:* 187).

He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘They ask you – as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry!’ (*al-A’raf:* 187)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you (O Muhammad) of the spoils of war. Say: “The spoils of war belong to Allah and the messenger”…’ (*al-Anfal:* 1).

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘They ask you concerning the Spirit (of inspiration). Say: “The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord”…’ (*al-Isra’:* 85).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they ask you about the Two-Horned One. Say: “I will convey unto you something by which he ought to be remembered.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 83)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘and they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains [when this world comes to an end]. Say, then: “My Lord will scatter them far and wide.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 105)

The final mention of these questions comes in His words: ‘they ask you [O Prophet] about the Last Hour: “When will it come to pass?” [42] [But] how could you tell anything about it? [43]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 42-43)

These are the fifteen verses in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘They ask you;’ there is one single verse in which the True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls unto Me…’ (*al-Baqara:* 186).

In the fifteen verses in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic imperfect form, ‘they ask you’, we find that every response is prefixed by ‘Say…’, which is a command to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to say a certain thing. But in the one verse in which the conditional form is used, ‘If (They] ask’, He does not say, ‘Then say: I am near’, but rather, He says, ‘behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls…’. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* knows how much Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loves his community and how concerned he is for them; Allah says: ‘Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

He also says: ‘Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.’ (*al-Kahf:* 6)

This is why when the True Lord *Glorified is He* saw that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was so deeply concerned for his community; he was eager that Allah would encompass them with His forgiveness and mercy and that he would not disappoint Him concerning them; the Lord *the Most High* informed him that He would give him cause to be pleased about his community. There is a Hadith that confirms this: ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As, *may Allah be pleased with them* both, related that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* recited Allah’s words concerning Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: “For, verily, O my Lord, these [false objects of worship] have led many people astray! Hence, [only] he who follows me [in this my faith] is truly of me; and as for him who disobeys me – You are, verily, much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy!” (*Ibrahim:* 36)

Then, he recited Isa’s (Jesus’s) words: “If thou cause them to suffer – verily, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them – verily, You alone are almighty, truly wise!” (*al-Ma‘ida:* 118)

Then, he *peace and blessings be upon him* raised his hands and said, “My community, my community!” and wept. So, Allah *Exalted is He* said, “Jibril (Gabriel), go to Muhammad – and your Lord knows best – and ask him why he weeps.” So, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* went to him, and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* told him what he had said – and He knew best –The Almighty said, ‘O Gabriel, go to Muhammad and say, “I shall give you cause to be pleased for your community, and shall not disappoint you.”’(1)

In confirmation of the True Lord’s knowledge of the Prophet’s concern for his community, He wanted to honour this community in the same way that He had honoured the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* so He addressed them directly in the verse of supplication without preceding it with ‘Say’: ‘And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near…’ (*al-Baqara:* 186).

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make it clear to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his community that Allah not only knows what you ask about, but He also knows what you will ask about in the future. This is why there are fourteen verses in which it is said ‘They ask you’ to which the answer is ‘Say’ (*qul*), and then in the fifteenth verse (*Ta Ha:* 105), we have ‘they will ask you’ – the form in Arabic in both instances is (*yas’alunak*) which can mean both ‘they ask you’ and ‘they will ask you’, but we know that in this case, the future tense is meant because the response is ‘Say, then’ (*faqul*), with the particle (*fa*) ‘then’ added to the imperative verb ‘say’ to indicate that the question had not yet been asked; it is as though the word ‘then’ indicates an implied conditional which can be interpreted as: ‘When they ask you about this, say, “My Lord will scatter them far and wide.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 105)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you [O Prophet] about the Last Hour: “When will it come to pass?” Say: “‘Verily, knowledge thereof rests with my Lord alone. None but He will reveal it in its time. Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; [and] it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden.” They ask you – as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry! Say: “Knowledge thereof rests with Allah alone; but [of this] most people are unaware.”’ (*al-A’raf:* 187)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

To 'reveal' (*yujalli*) means to make plain; in Arabic, we have what is called *jalwa* and *khalwa*: *jalwa* means for a person to show himself to the people, and (*khalwa*) means for him to withdraw himself from the people. Hence, 'None but He will reveal it' (*yujalliha*) means 'None but He will make it plain.' Notice that the phrase 'in its time' (*liwaqtiha*), the word for 'time' (*waqt*) is preceded by the Arabic particle *li* which usually means 'to' or 'for'—in Arabic linguistics, this is called 'the *li* of time.' For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Be constant in [your] prayer from the time when the sun has passed its zenith…' (*al-Isra':* 78). Here, the particle *li* is used before 'the time when the sun has passed its zenith' to mean 'at'; that is, 'at the time when the sun passes the halfway point of the sky and begins to incline to the west.' His words, '…None but He will reveal it in its time…' (*al-A'raf:* 187) mean that no one will make it plain at its appointed time except He *Glorified is He*.

'… Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; [and] it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden…' (*al-A'raf:* 187). 'Heavy' means that the weight of something is greater than the strength which bears it because if the load is equal to the strength which bears it, it is not heavy.

It can also be that the strength which bears it cannot compete with the earth's gravitational pull, therefore the object is heavy. This heaviness might be physical such as if a man carries a measure of wheat on his back and is able to lift it, but if you add another half-measure it will weigh heavily on his back because his strength will not be able to bear this weight, and he will fall under its weight.

'…Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth…' (*al-A'raf:* 187). Heaviness is not only physical, but it can also be mental and intellectual such as when a student solves an exercise in geometry or algebra: sometimes, the student feels that these exercises are heavy on his mind and difficult to solve.

Also, something might be heavy for the soul and its faculties such as intense worry which is oppressive and heavy on the heart; this is the most intense form of heaviness, which is the why a poet of yore said:

A burden is not what tests the back;
A burden is what the heart must bear.

Hence, there are three kinds of heaviness: physical heaviness, mental heaviness and psychological heaviness.

'… Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth…' (*al-A'raf:* 187). We know that the heavens contain the angels and that the angels, too, do not know when the Last Hour will come; no one even tries to know it except man because of his passion for thinking; as for the angels, they are not morally responsible because they have no free will. Some of the angels serve mankind, and those are the ones who prostrated to Adam *peace be upon him*; they are entrusted with looking after his best interests and his life; they yielded to Allah's decree that there would be a new master in the universe, so they were subdued to serve him. Those protect the angels and the noble scribes, and they were created with certain tendencies towards mankind: they tend to hate the disobedient and to love the obedient. They rejoice in those human beings who follow Allah's way of guidance; if an obedient person should slip and commit sin, they feel sorry for him and hope that he will not do so again. As for those who follow the opposite of Allah's way of guidance, the angels are angry with them. Abu Hurayra Allah *be pleased with him* related that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*, said: 'Not a day goes by save that when the servants awaken, two angels descend and one says, "O Allah, give those who spend (in Your cause) remuneration", and the other says, "O Allah, give those who withhold (from spending in Your cause) loss!"' (1)

We know that those who spend in Allah's Cause will be rewarded for their spending; as for those who withhold, if their money is lost, and they bear this trial patiently, they will also be rewarded for that. Thus, the angels do pray for us.

The phrase, 'Heavily will it weigh,' here means that no one knows when the Last Hour will come except our Lord; this date is neither known to those who dwell in the heavens, nor to those who dwell on earth; everyone on earth is afraid of what will happen when the Last Hour comes, especially since the Chosen Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us a clear image to explain what the True Lord's words, '… it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden.' (*al-A'raf:* 187)

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Daraqatni in As-Sunnan*

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* told us what the condition will be when the Last Hour comes when he said: 'The Hour will beset the people whilst a man repairs his basin, and a man waters his livestock, and a man sets out his wares in the marketplace, and a man lowers and raises his scales.'(1) Such prophecies arouse fear in men.

The words of our True Lord '… Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; [and] it will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden…' (*al-A'raf:* 187) mean that what happens on this day will be beyond the expectations of any man, and it will come all of a sudden, that is, it will come without any opportunity to psychologically prepare for it.

He *Glorified is He* continues: '…They ask you – as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry!' (*al-A'raf:* 187) The word *hafey* means to keep on incessantly requesting something such as the pupil who does not understand something he is studying, so he keeps on asking this person and that person until he gets an answer.

The person who persistently asks about something is thereby trying to attain knowledge of it; he also knows exactly what he is asking about, and this knowledge comes from the fact that he asks about it so incessantly.

A person either deals with something by remaining where he is—such as the case with intellectual or physical matters which are linked to a particular place—or he might want to deal with something far from him so that he has to cover the distance to the place where it is to be able to investigate it. Thus, he has to go and walk there, and the soles of his shoes get worn by all the walking until he is said to be 'barefoot' (*hafey*); this is why the verb *hafiya* has come to mean, 'to inquire persistently after something' because when the person who does this walks such large distances, his shoes get worn, so he has to walk barefoot. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about such people: '… as if you could gain insight into this [mystery] by dint of persistent inquiry ...' (*al-A'raf:* 187). That is, as though you are concerned with it; as though you are always asking about it; as though you have knowledge of it.

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(1) *Related by Sa'id on the authority of Qutada*

Then, the response comes from the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '… Say: "Knowledge thereof rests with Allah alone"…' (*al-A'raf:* 187). In the same verse, He has already said: '… Verily, knowledge thereof rests with my Lord alone…' (*al-A'raf:* 187).

Lordship is connected to mankind and the care which Allah takes to sustain their best interests; Godhood is connected to worship and the implementation of Allah's way. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* first mentions Lordship and then Godhood; the former is the cause of the latter—you have chosen to worship Allah and obey Him because He created you and gave you His way of guidance; He does not disdain, out of His munificent Lordship, to offer everything to His righteous servant in addition to blessings; and also, to give anything to the disbeliever, who utilises the means to attain it; yet, without blessings and without any reward in this life or the next –therefore, He is the True Allah, whose guidance we follow.

'Say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him."' (*al-A'raf:* 187)

Most of the people who ask about the time of the Last Hour are not aware that our Lord has concealed it. He *the Exalted* says: 'Indeed, the Hour is coming - I almost conceal it - so that every soul may be recompensed according to that for which it strives.' (*Ta Ha:* 15) So, they are not aware that Allah has the [exclusive] knowledge of it. He then says:

قُل لَّآ أَمۡلِكُ لِنَفۡسِي نَفۡعٗا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَآءَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَلَوۡ كُنتُ أَعۡلَمُ ٱلۡغَيۡبَ
لَٱسۡتَكۡثَرۡتُ مِنَ ٱلۡخَيۡرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ ٱلسُّوٓءُۚ إِنۡ أَنَا۠ إِلَّا نَذِيرٞ وَبَشِيرٞ لِّقَوۡمٖ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١٨٨

Say [Prophet], 'I have no control over benefit or harm, [even] to myself, except as God may please: if I had knowledge of what is hidden, I would have abundant good things and no harm could touch me. I am no more than a bearer of warning, and good news to those who believe' [188] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 188)

The True Lord *the Exalted and Glorified* says, on the tongue of Prophet Muhammad: 'You [Non-Muslims] ask me about the Last Hour, yet I am a human being who only tells what Allah tells him. The message comes to me with a message from Allah, and I convey it. I have no knowledge of when the Last Hour will be, and I have no control over harm or benefit. I can neither avert harm from myself, nor bring myself any benefit.' Rather, when Allah sends forth benefit or withholds harm, every man has what Allah gives him. When the intelligent person attains something, he says: 'this possession is only accidental, and I cannot be sure it will not be taken from me.' Therefore, the True Lord, *Glorified and Exalted*, says: 'Say, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom You will and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, You are over all things competent."' (*Al-'Imran*: 26)

And here, the True Lord says: 'Say, "I hold not for myself [the power of] benefit or harm, except what Allah has willed."' That is, no one can attain anything unless Allah wills for him to attain it, and the Prophet Muhammad was a human being. He adds: 'And if I knew the unseen, I could have acquired much wealth, and no harm would have touched me.'

Had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* known the unseen, he would have had abundant good fortune, but he *peace and blessings be upon him* never knew the unseen except for certain matters which were revealed to him by Allah *the Almighty*; a point which is proved by the fact that he sometimes was victorious in his wars against the disbelievers, while other times his army were defeated by them. That is to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mere human being, but with the main difference that he was supported and guided by Divine Revelation. In this regard, we stress that some people may have had better knowledge of a technical skill in a worldly affair than him *peace and blessings be upon him*. For these reasons, he *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly states, as mentioned in the Quran, that he does not have the knowledge of the unseen. It is historically narrated that his relatives in Quraysh used to ask him to tell them the time of the Hour (Resurrection Day) for them to prepare for it, but he did not tell them anything for he himself knew nothing about it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'and no harm could have touched me. I am not anything but a warner and a bearer of good news to those who believe' (*al-A'raf:* 188).

As for the Arabic particle *'in'* (not), it has various uses and indications; it may be used as a conditional particle and hence give the meaning of 'if'; people say, 'If you study hard, you will succeed'. It may also be used, when followed by a noun, to indicate negation. As such, the meaning of this particular part of the verse under discussion is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is only a warner and a herald of glad tidings to those who believe. In this part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* addresses the believers because they are the ones who receive benefit from the warnings and glad tidings. That is because they abstain from what they are warned against and at the same time firmly adhere to the Divine Way of guidance given to them.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَٰحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ
إِلَيْهَا ۖ فَلَمَّا تَغَشَّىٰهَا حَمَلَتْ حَمْلًا خَفِيفًا فَمَرَّتْ بِهِۦ ۖ فَلَمَّآ أَثْقَلَت
دَّعَوَا ٱللَّهَ رَبَّهُمَا لَئِنْ ءَاتَيْتَنَا صَٰلِحًا لَّنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ﴿١٨٩﴾

It is He who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her: when one [of them] lies with his wife and she conceives a light burden, going about freely, then grows heavy, they both pray to God, their Lord, 'If You give us a good child we shall certainly be grateful' [189] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 189)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'It is He who created you all from one soul…' refers to Adam *peace be upon him,* whilst His saying: '…and from it made its mate…' refers to Eve. Careful reflection on this verse under discussion clearly indicates that the pronoun refers mainly to the woman. Yet, He *the Almighty* mentions that man is the one who finds comfort in his wife. Here, we should take into account that a woman cannot be viewed as a place of rest for the man unless the latter works hard and exerts a lot of effort in his daily life. As a matter of fact, it is after this that man can resort to his wife to enjoy her affection, love, and compassion. Yet, if she does not provide him with such tranquillity, he prefers to stay out of the house most of the day.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'and from it made its mate', it stresses the undeniable fact that Adam was created from clay and mud and then Allah

Glorified is He breathed the spirit into him. As for Eve, this particular part of the verse tells that she has been created out of Adam. That is to say that she was a part of him *peace be upon him*. Some scholars yet opine that Eve was created from a curved rib of Adam. In fact, they hold this position because Allah *Glorified is He* they believe wants both man and woman to be physically connected to one another. Similarly, each of us loves our sons as they are a part of us. Therefore, this saying that Eve was made from a rib of Adam indicates that they both should show mercy, compassion, and affection towards each other.

Here arises an important question some people might ask, 'Why was the name of Eve not mentioned in the Quran, although she was created in the same way as Adam?' The answer to this question may be clear because of the fact that Adam *peace be upon him* was the first human being ever to be created. In addition, he was a Messenger to whom Allah *the Almighty* ordered the angels to bow down. Furthermore, we know for certain that all the affairs of women are naturally built on concealment, which is why we, the Egyptians, prefer not to call women by their given names, but rather, we call them by their appellations instead.

Back to Allah's saying: 'and from it made'; we may have two possible explanations for the Arabic particle *'min'* (translated here as 'from'); it may give the meaning that Eve was created from a curved rib of Adam; it may also give the meaning that she was created in the same way Adam was created, and thus it is linguistically judged as an 'explanatory' preposition. Let us offer a striking example to fully clarify the meaning of the explanatory particles. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: 'He it is Who raised among the inhabitants of Mecca a Messenger from among themselves…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2). This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mere human being for people to be able to deal with him normally when he delivers the Divine Message to them. We previously explained that the deniers of the Truth had rejected the Message of Prophet Muhammad on grounds that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was nothing but a mere mortal Messenger. In the Quran, Allah says: 'and nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said, "What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be a Messenger? (*al-Isra':* 94) That is why Allah *Glorified is He* refutes their allegation, saying: ‘Say, “Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, we would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a Messenger”’ (*al-Isra’:* 95). In the same vein, let us assume that Allah had already sent down an angel as a Messenger, how could they then be able to see him in his original nature?! That is why the Messenger sent to them must have been from among themselves.

Further to this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…when one [of them] covers (*taghashshaha*) her (his wife), she conceives a light burden....’ The phrase ‘when one [of them] lie with his wife’ is a refined way of expressing sexual intercourse between a man and his wife. As for the Arabic word ‘*ghisha’* (which comes from ‘*taghashshaha*’)*,* it means a ‘cover’. Here, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* has allowed man to have lawful sex with women so that people will reproduce and give birth to many men and women. The meaning of this particular part of the verse is that she bears the embryo for a while without realising she is pregnant because the embryo develops little by little to the extent that mothers might not feel it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…carries it about [unnoticed]. When she grows heavy, they both pray to Allah their Lord [saying], “If you give us a good child, we shall certainly be grateful”’ (*al-A’raf:* 189). That is to say that the woman, due to the fact that she does not realise that she has become pregnant, normally continues her daily life’s activities, as usual until she becomes fully aware she is pregnant when her pregnancy grows heavy in the final months of its term. At this point, the husband also becomes aware that his wife is pregnant, and therefore they both invoke Allah *Glorified is He* to grant them a child who is free from any physical disabilities and who is also able to firmly adhere to the Divine Way of guidance.

As such, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…It is He Who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her…’ indicates males have due roles to perform in life and so have females. It also tells us that man, being exposed to the pressure of daily life, inclines to his wife to get comfort from her. Here, we should take into account the fact that even though this verse under discussion refers mainly to both Adam and Eve, it is also applicable to their offspring. We know for certain that Eve used to give birth to one male and one female each time, and as a result they are the origin of the human race.

Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that even though the Quran might shed light on topics that are seemingly unrelated, each one of these different topics are written in a special way, each one teaching its own important and useful lessons. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He it is Who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships and they sail with them with a pleasant breeze and they rejoice, a violent wind overtakes them and the waves surge on them from all sides, and they become certain that they are encompassed….’ (*Yunus:* 22)

In this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Yunus,* He *the Almighty* does not tell the story of air, but rather, He mentions land and sea and then begins to speak about the coming of death. In the same vein, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And we have enjoined on man kindness to his parents…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15), that is, He orders children to do good to their parents, i.e. the father and the mother. Then He *Glorified is He* continues: ‘With trouble did his mother bear him and with trouble did she bring him forth; and the bearing of him and the weaning of him is thirty months…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). That is to say that He *the Almighty* moves to explain in detail the matter about the mother, without giving any further mention of the father.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَلَمَّآ ءَاتَىٰهُمَا صَٰلِحٗا جَعَلَا لَهُۥ شُرَكَآءَ فِيمَآ
ءَاتَىٰهُمَاۚ فَتَعَٰلَى ٱللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشۡرِكُونَ ١٩٠

And yet when He gives them a good child they
ascribe some of what He has granted them to others
God is far above the partners they set up alongside
with him! [190] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 190)

It is related that this verse under discussion has been revealed concerning one of Prophet Muhammad’s forefathers named Qusay*,* who is said to have asked Allah *the Almighty* to grant him good and righteous children; yet when He *Glorified is He* answered his call and gave him what he wanted, this man gave them names indicating their slavery to idols, such as ‘Abd Manaf, ‘Abdud-Dar, ‘Abd Al-‘Uzza, etc. That is to say that he, i.e. Qusay, ascribed partners to Allah *the Almighty* when naming (his children), a point which is deduced from Allah’s saying: ‘…they ascribe some of what He has granted them to others….’ (*al-An‘am:* 190) At that point, we stress that one, when in distress, resorts first and foremost to Allah *Glorified is He* to remove harm from him/her; yet when He *the Almighty* does so, the person is given to arrogance and forgets Allah’s favour upon him/her. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when affliction touches a man, he calls on Us, whether lying on his side, sitting or standing; but when We remove his affliction from him, he passes on as though he had never called on Us on account of an affliction that had touched him….’ (*Yunus:* 12)

Consequently, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* inflicts harm upon us for us to turn and resort to Him *Glorified is He* to complain of our grief and sorrow to Him *the Almighty*. Here, we should take into account that a person offers acts of worship to Allah *the Almighty* in the best way while in distress and illness, which is why patients due to the fact they are showered with the Mercy of Allah, should seize this opportunity to ask Allah *the Almighty* of His Grace and Bounty. We have actually deduced this point from the supplication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, ‘O Allah, to you do I complain of my weakness, my helplessness, and the disregard of people towards me. O Most Merciful of the merciful. You are the Lord of the oppressed, and you are My Lord. To whom do You entrust me? Is it to a stranger who would frown on me? Or is it to an enemy to whom You have given mastery over me? If you are not angry with me, then I do not care. But Your Protection is all embracing, enough to cover me as well. I seek refuge in the Light of Your Face whereby all darkness are illuminated, and the affairs of this worldly life and the Hereafter are set right, lest You should send down upon me Your Anger or Your Wrath should befall me. Yet it is Your Right alone to blame until You are Contented, and there is neither power nor might except Yours’. (1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Hisham* =

As a matter of fact, when man suffers illness, s/he fully realises that this illness entails a great blessing; for it undoubtedly makes her/him remember Allah *the Almighty* all the time. In addition, her/his worldly lusts and desires will for sure be replaced with positive energy which, in turn, enables one to attain higher spiritual ranks. At that point, we can quote the following Qudsi Hadith in which Allah is related as saying, 'Allah *Glorified is He* will say on the Day of Resurrection, "O son of Adam, I fell ill and you visited Me not". He (man) will say, "O Lord, and how should I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?" He will say, "Did you not know that My slave so-and-so had fallen ill and you visited him not? Did you not know that had you visited him you will have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not". He will say, "O Lord, and how should I feed You when You are the Lord of the worlds?" He will say, "Did you not know that My slave so-and-so asked you for food and you fed him not? Did you not know that had you fed him you will surely have found that (the reward for doing so) with Me? O son of Adam, I asked you to give Me to drink and you gave Me not to drink". He will say, "O Lord, how should I give You to drink when You are the Lord of the worlds?" He will say, "My slave so-and-so asked you to give him to drink and you gave him not to drink. Had you given him to drink you will have surely found that with Me.'(1) As such, it is crystal clear that patients enjoy lasting blessings, for they are all the time in the Presence of Allah *the Almighty*. Yet, when they recover, they enjoy the blessing of good health.

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And yet when He gives them a good child they ascribe some of what He has granted them to others. Allah is far above the partners they ascribe to Him!' (*al-A'raf:* 190) This plainly indicates that Allah *the Almighty* says He never ever has any partner with Him that should be worshipped; an unshakeable fact which is yet proved by the following verse in which He *Glorified is He* says:

= From the proofreader: This Hadith is weak due to a weakness in the chain of narrators. Ruling given by: Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta', Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

أَيُشْرِكُونَ مَا لَا يَخْلُقُ شَيْئًا وَهُمْ يُخْلَقُونَ ﴿١٩١﴾

How can they set up with Him these partners that create nothing and are themselves created [191]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 191)

In this particular verse under discussion, He *Glorified is He* mocks at those polytheists who associate creatures, like themselves, with Him *Glorified is He* in worship, although He *the Almighty* is the One Who created them all. It thus goes without saying that those polytheists have neglected their intellect, which is why they have fallen prey to their illusion. In the same vein, there is another verse in the Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* fully exposes the falsehood of those polytheists; He *the Almighty* says: 'O people! A parable is set forth, therefore listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create [even] a fly, though they all may gather for it (that purpose).' (*al-Hajj:* 73)

We know for certain that today's modern science is still unable to create a single cell. In this aforementioned verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells us clearly that we, human beings, are still unable to even take back from the fly that which it snatches from our food with its proboscis. That is to say, so weak are the seeker, i.e. man, and the sought, i.e. the fly.

We previously explained that Allah *the Almighty* created the universe due to His Unlimited Power; hence, how could those polytheists worship those idols with Allah *the Almighty* even though they themselves have admitted that they, i.e. the idols, are unable to create anything?! Yes, it is absolutely true; they do not create anything whatsoever–a point which is definitively proved by the fact that they do not reproduce. That is why when those polytheists wanted to add another idol, they made and created it themselves. In this regard, we should take into account that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…How can they associate [others] with Him…' indicates exclamation; that is, He *Glorified is He* strongly denounces their act of polytheism, which is against man's natural disposition. This style under discussion is strikingly similar to Allah's saying in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which He *the Almighty* says: 'How do you deny Allah…'? (*al-Baqara:* 28) In this particular part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* mocks at the disbelievers, asking them how they could deny His Existence in spite of the fact that His signs and miracles were crystal clear to them?! That is to say that this act of disbelief causes surprise and strong denial. As a matter of fact, when Allah *Glorified is He* strongly denies something, we find Him *the Almighty* sometimes directing His speech to the believers, while other times directing it to the non-believers, a point which is crystal clear in this particular verse under discussion. Allah *the Almighty* by virtue of this verse wants to highlight two important points, namely; first, He *Glorified is He* wants to deny what the polytheists do of setting up others with Him in worship; second, He *the Almighty* wants to promote the self-confidence of the believers and to make them rejoice with their steadfast belief, since they did not act like the disbelievers.

Here arises a misconception concerning the Arabic rhetorical style of this verse; some people, due to their improper understanding of the rules of Arabic language, might ask, 'How could Allah *the Almighty* use a singular verb (literally 'does not create') in this particular context in which He *Glorified is He* directs His speech to a group?!' To those people, we say, 'You have come to this misconception because you have an improper understanding of the rules of Arabic Language. According to the rules of Arabic grammar, the relative pronouns '*ma', 'man'* and '*al'* all of which giving the meaning of 'that'*,* can be used to refer to the singular, dual and plural forms of both masculine and feminine nouns.

As such, it is clear that even though the relative pronoun '*ma'* in this verse is used with a verb indicting singular (literally 'does not create'), it refers to a plural noun (i.e. those in the phrase 'those that do not create'); a point which is proved by the fact that He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with a pronoun indicting the plural form.

Let us offer another example to fully clarify this point; Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *Muhammad*: 'And there are those of them who seek (literally 'one of them who seeks') to listen to you, until when they go forth from you…' (*Muhammad:* 16). In this verse, we notice that He *the Almighty* uses a verb (seek) clearly indicating a singular noun (literally 'one seeks') even though He *Glorified is He* speaks about the group of the disbelievers; yet we stress that the Arabic style in this context is absolutely true, for this particular verb has been preceded with the relative pronoun, i.e. '*man'* (who) which can be used to refer to the singular, dual and plural forms of both masculine and feminine nouns.

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'How can they associate with Him those that do not create anything and they are [themselves] created…' (*al-A'raf:* 191). We notice that there is a very important subtle rhetorical usage in this verse; Allah *the Almighty* uses the Arabic subject pronoun '*hum'* (they) to refer to the idols which are inanimate, although this particular pronoun is used mainly to refer to mankind! Here, we stress that Allah *the Almighty* out of the fact that He knew that those disbelievers believed that idols could bring them benefit and harm, spoke with them in the same way they believed to take them step by step to the firm denial of their mistaken belief. That is why He *the Almighty* told them first that these idols are unable to create anything whatsoever. Then He *Glorified is He* told them that idols are actually created and thus are unable to give them any help. That is to say that they are utterly useless; for they, first, are unable to create anything, and they, second, are created. Having shown that idols are in no way able to do anything, He *the Almighty* moved to another level of interrogation by asking the disbelievers whether or not these idols are capable of helping them; a point which is perfectly clear in the following verse in which He *the Almighty* says:

وَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ لَهُمْ نَصْرًا وَلَآ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَنصُرُونَ ﴿١٩٢﴾

That cannot help them at all, or even help
themselves? [192] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 192)

This verse clearly indicates that none of the idols is able to succour itself, let alone provide succour to others. Thus, we find that the discourse has developed to include four points: first of all, they, i.e. idols, cannot create anything; secondly, they are themselves created; thirdly, they cannot succour the disbelievers; and fourthly, they cannot succour themselves. Then, He *Glorified is He* highlights the fifth point, which is recorded in His saying.

وَإِن تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى ٱلْهُدَىٰ لَا يَتَّبِعُوكُمْ ۚ سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْكُمْ أَدَعَوْتُمُوهُمْ أَمْ أَنتُمْ صَٰمِتُونَ ﴿١٩٣﴾

If you [believers] call such people to guidance, they do not follow you: it makes no difference whether you call them or remain silent [193] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 193)

In this way, Allah has developed the discussion to include five points, which I will repeat them to remain firm in your mind: first of all, they cannot create anything; secondly, they are themselves created; thirdly, they cannot succour the disbelievers; fourthly, they cannot succour themselves; and fifthly, they do not accept the guidance you call them to.

It is historically recorded that the polytheists of Mecca, when in distress, used to seek the help of their idols, such as Hubal, al-Lat and al-'Uzza; yet if they were not touched with any harm, they would not call these idols at all, which is why Allah tells them through revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'If you call them (the idols) to guidance, they will not follow you: it makes no difference whether you call them or you are silent' (*al-A'raf:* 193). That is, your calling these idols will make no difference; it will be exactly as if you are totally silent (as they cannot hear).

Careful reflection upon the Arabic style of this verse under discussion shows clearly that Allah *the Almighty* uses the Arabic noun '*samitun'* (translated here as 'you are silent'), that is, He does not say the verb '*samattum*' (you remained silent) in the same way He does with the verb '*da'wtumuhum*' (you call them). Here, we stress that the use of nouns, according to the Arabic grammar, indicates stability and constancy of the action, unlike the verb which indicates the renewal of the action. Based on this, we can say that this verse tells us clearly that the disbelievers used to seek the help of their idols only during times of hardships; that is, most of the time they did not mention them in the least. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* rebukes the polytheists and says to them, 'Whether or not you call these idols, their failure to respond to you is assured and guaranteed, and so is their inability to succour themselves or anyone else'.

He *the Almighty* then moves to cast light on another topic; He says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ تَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ عِبَادٌ أَمۡثَالُكُمۡۖ فَٱدۡعُوهُمۡ
فَلۡيَسۡتَجِيبُواْ لَكُمۡ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

Those you [idolaters] call upon instead of God are created beings like you. Call upon them, then, and let them respond to you if what you say is true [194] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 194)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '… you call …' has two possible interpretations, as follows: it may give the meaning that the polytheists have worshipped idols instead of Allah, or that they called them, i.e. they asked them for things; both meanings can be understood from this verse in question.

Here arises a good question, which is 'How could Allah *the Almighty* use the word '*'ibad'* (translated here as 'created beings') to refer to the idols although this word is used mainly with living human beings?!' As a matter of fact, there are two possible explanations for this point; first of all, the word may be understood in the light of its most usual meaning; second, it may be understood in the light of its linguistic root, which gives the meaning of humiliation; a point which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And is it a favour of which you remind me that you have enslaved (*'abbadta*) the children of Israel?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 22) That is to say that Pharaoh had humiliated and enslaved ('*'abbadta*' which has the same root as *''ibad'*) the people of Moses *peace be upon him*. If we understand the verse in question in the light of the latter explanation, we will reach the meaning that idols are also humiliated and enslaved; a point which is affirmed by the fact that whenever they because of heavy rain or strong wind, were destroyed, the polytheists, idols worshipers, rushed to find someone to repair these so-called 'gods' for them! In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* tells the polytheists that they, because of the fact that they are creatures of Allah *Glorified is He* Who gave them some strength, they are able to ward off harm if it touches them. As for the idols, they are completely powerless to ward off harm from themselves, and thus they are even weaker than you are. For this reason, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '… (idols) are created beings like you…' is attributing more to the idols than they deserve. This is because it is now perfectly clear that idols are totally unable to defend themselves, a point which is completely different for man who is able to ward off harm from him/herself if this harm is not stronger than him/her. Therefore, it is crystal clear that the word '*'ibad'* (created beings) is used to refer, in general, to all that which is subdued and enslaved (to Allah *the Almighty*).

Concerning this point, we should be fully aware of the fact that man is allowed to do particular things because of her/his free will, while there are other things over which this free will has no power, that is, the person is compelled to do these acts. For example, the disbeliever has the free will to choose whether to believe or not, yet s/he chooses disbelief. The believer, on the other hand, has the free will to choose whether to obey or disobey. But there are other things which happen to a man over which s/he has no free will, such as sickness and death. It is taken for granted that a person cannot choose whether to become ill or not. In addition, no one can reject death when it comes to take the soul away. Similarly, a person's property may be ruined while s/he is unable to do anything. All of these examples fall under the category of compulsion, i.e. matters over which man has no will to decide, but rather, s/he is humbled and subdued, believer and disbeliever alike.

Here, clearly and strongly, emerges the benefit of belief, for the believer, by firmly adhering to the Divine way of guidance, subdues his/her free will to the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* and thus is different from the disbeliever. That is to say the believer is equal to all the other creatures that have no free will. Therefore, we say to the disbelievers, 'You, O disbelievers, have denied the Truth and refused to have faith by means of the free will implanted in you and about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…so whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve…' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Consequently, as long as each one of you, O disbelievers, stubbornly refuses to obey the commands of Allah, why do you not reject illness when it comes to afflict you. As a matter of fact, there in not one disbeliever who can do this since the disbeliever only disbelieves in that particular area which is subject to his/her free will, but otherwise they are subdued like all other creatures.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Call upon them…' it means 'ask them, i.e. idols, to fulfil any request for you'. Yet He *the Almighty* clearly tells us that these idols, out of their total inability, will not respond to you in any way or another. As a matter of fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...Then, and let them respond to you…' is viewed as posing a challenge to the idol-worshippers. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* is saying to them, 'Even though you, O disbelievers, call upon the idols to fulfil your wishes, they, by their very nature, will be unable to do anything for you'.

Having stated that idols are nothing but created beings, like man, Allah *Glorified is He* will state that they are of a lower rank than human beings. In this regard, He says:

أَلَهُمْ أَرْجُلٌ يَمْشُونَ بِهَآ ۖ أَمْ لَهُمْ أَيْدٍ يَبْطِشُونَ بِهَآ ۖ أَمْ لَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ يُبْصِرُونَ
بِهَآ ۖ أَمْ لَهُمْ ءَاذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا ۗ قُلِ ٱدْعُوا۟ شُرَكَآءَكُمْ ثُمَّ كِيدُونِ فَلَا تُنظِرُونِ ﴿١٩٥﴾

Do they have feet to walk, hands to strike, eyes to see,
or ears to hear? Say [Prophet], 'Call on your
"partners"! Scheme against me! Do not spare me! [195]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 195)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* wants to drive the attention of the disbelievers to a very important point which is they have feet upon which they can walk, hands with which they can strike, ears with which they can hear and eyes with which they can see, yet the idols they worship instead of Allah have none of these senses at all, and hence they are of a lower rank than man. Here arises the most important question, which is, 'As long as these idols are of a lower rank than you, O idol-worshipers, how could you worship them instead of Allah *the Almighty*?!' This is for sure the epitome of failure.

As for the cause of revelation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Do they have feet by which they walk, hands by which they strike, eyes by which they see, or ears by which they hear?' (*al-A'raf:* 195) It has been narrated that the idolaters sculpted idols with two feet, two ears, and two eyes. In addition, they used to set pearls in the places of the eyes so that they looked like the whites of eyes. As such, when one of them, i.e. the idolaters, looked at the idol, it seemed to him/her that it was looking towards him/her. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and you see them looking towards you, yet they do not see.' (*al-A'raf:* 198)

Back to the verse in question, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* puts this fact in the form of question. We may ask why? It is because He *Glorified is He* wants to definitively prove the falsehood of the polytheists. It is taken for granted that questions must have answers. Here, we stress that if Allah *the Almighty* phrased this verse under discussion in the form of a statement, the disbelievers, on their part, might or might not believe it; yet, when they themselves are the ones who give an answer to this question, their answer will certainly serve as a concrete proof against them, for they will confess that idols can in no way walk, or touch, or see or even hear. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* wants the disbelievers to confess this undeniable fact themselves. We have many examples like this in the Quran; in the chapter of *ash-Sharh,* Allah *the Almighty* asks Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Have We not opened up your heart for you [with Our Guidance]?' (*ash-Sharh:* 1)

As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* could phrase the verse as follows, 'We have opened up your heart for you'; yet He *Glorified is He* put it in the form of a question for Prophet Muhammad himself to admit the fact that his heart was opened up by the Will of Allah.

Once again, the verse under discussion draws a comparison between man and idols; man has legs by means of which they can walk, hands by means of which they can strike, eyes by means of which they can see and ears by means of which they can hear, but idols have none of these faculties at all. In this way, the polytheists should have ascertained that they are of a higher rank than those idols they worship. Here arises a very good question, which is 'As long as idols are of a lower rank than man is, how could it be possible for man to worship them?!' This is for sure a kind of insanity.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: 'Say [Prophet], "Call on your 'partners'! Scheme against me! Give me no respite!"' (*al-A'raf:* 195) In truth, Allah *the Almighty* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say this statement to the polytheists in order to show their falsehood in setting up these idols with Allah *the Almighty* and also to show that they lacked proper and correct understanding. That is to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* declared enmity against both the idols and their worshippers, which is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them, i.e. the polytheists, to make the idols scheme against him, or even to prevent the victories won by Islam, if either they or their idols had any power to bring harm or benefit.

As for the Arabic word '*al-kayd'* (scheme), it means to 'make clever secret plans which often deceive others'. That is to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged them to inflict harm upon him, but what happened later on? Did they manage to hurt him *peace and blessings be upon him*?

But with regards to this point, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* might cause Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* suffer particular hardships for the believers to draw lessons from these hardships. The incident of magic being worked on him *peace and blessings be upon him* is a case in point. If we assume for the sake of argument that this incident actually took place, we may ask, 'How could Prophet Muhammad be affected by magic? And Who told us that what happened was magic in the first place?' We can reply that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who informed Prophet Muhammad of the actually kind of magic it was and the one who had worked it on him as well as the place in which it was put. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* proves that He will make all of their schemes clear.

The event of rescuing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from being murdered is another case in point. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And [remember, O Prophet] how those who were bent on denying the truth schemed against you in order to restrain you [from preaching], to slay you, or to drive you away….' (*al-Anfal:* 30)

This aforementioned verse in the chapter of *al-Anfal* tells us that even though the disbelievers of Mecca had plotted to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in such a way that could not give his family the opportunity to avenge his death, Allah *Glorified is He* uncovered their plot to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. As such, He *the Almighty* definitively proves that they, i.e. the deniers of the Truth, will in no way be able to prevent him *peace and blessings be upon him* from delivering the Message to people, even if they (the disbelievers) have recourse to their own powers or the powers of the jinn which are stronger than them. That is to say that as long as you, O disbelievers, fully realise that you were totally unable to prevent Prophet Muhammad from delivering the Message in one way or another, you should be driven to despair and thus stop your enmity against him *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* challenges them: ‘Call on your “partners!” Scheme against me! Give me no respite!’ (*al-A’raf:* 195)

The Arabic phrase ‘*andhirhu’* (give him respite) means to ‘give time and delay something’, that is, the verse means, ‘Do not delay, O disbelievers, your contrivances, and ask your partners to help you in inflicting harm upon me!’ In other words, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them not to delay their plotting against him. As a matter of fact, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said this because of the fact that he relied on the strongest of supports; a fact which is crystal clear in the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ وَلِـِّۧىَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى نَزَّلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَۖ وَهُوَ يَتَوَلَّى ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١٩٦﴾

My protector is God: He has revealed the Scripture,
and it is He who protects the righteous [196]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 196)

That is to say that as long as Allah *the Almighty* is the Protector, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should in no way take them into account. As for the Arabic word *al-wali* (protector), it means ‘the one who is near to you’ or ‘the one who follows you’. As a matter of fact, one does not take anyone as a protector unless this protector is closer to his/her soul and heart than anyone else and unless the protector has power and knowledge which are more considerable than his/hers. As for Allah’s saying: ‘My Protector is Allah…’; it means that Allah *Glorified is He* helps Prophet Muhammad to foil the plots hatched against him *peace and blessings be upon him* by the polytheists. That is to say that He *the Almighty* is his Protector and the One Who is near to him *peace and blessings be upon him* with His Attributes of Perfection and Majesty which belong only to Him. Here, we stress a very important point which is that when the believer feels weak, we find him/her turning to Allah *the Almighty* the One Who is Ever-Strong, a point which is proved by the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. When the Jews felt that Pharaoh was about to catch them, they said, as stated in the Quran: ‘…Most surely we are being overtaken.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 61) That is to say that the people with Musa told him that Pharaoh's army will catch up with them and that they had nowhere to flee or any way to escape. As a result they will have to stand up to Pharaoh's army although they were powerless; yet Musa *peace be upon him* assured them and said: 'He said, "By no means; surely my Lord is with me: He will show me a way out."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) Upon this, the matter ceased to be one of human means and was thus given over to the Strongest Protector, i.e. to Allah *the Almighty* to Whom all Messengers and Prophets turned in times of need. It goes without saying that nobody makes such a statement unless s/he was absolutely certain of the Succour of Allah to her/him. I told you previously about the story of the European woman who embraced Islam upon reading the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As a matter of fact, she fully realised that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the world's greatest hero and the man who made the world's greatest revolution. She reached this fact by reading the story in which he *peace and blessings be upon him* when Allah's saying: '…and Allah will protect you from the people' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) was revealed, dismissed his Companions who had come to guard him. As a matter of fact, this woman, out of her discernment, fully realised that if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had lied to everyone (about the Message), he will not have lied to himself. Consequently, he will not have ordered the guards to leave him unless he was absolutely certain that Allah *the Almighty* will protect him and that He *Glorified is He* is fully capable of protecting him; he will not have experimented with his own life. This woman had already learnt this lesson from his biography. Likewise, since Prophet Muhammad was absolutely certain Allah will protect him, he *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged the polytheists and said to them: 'Call on your "partners"! Scheme against me! Give me no respite!' (*al-A'raf:* 195) That is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* due to his absolute confidence in Allah, challenged the deniers of the Truth to harm him in any way and not to delay this harm. It goes without saying that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them to do this because he knew for certain that Allah is his Protector, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'My Protector is Allah: He has revealed the Scripture, and it is He Who protects the righteous.' (*al-A'raf:* 196)

In the same vein, this verse in question tells us that Allah *the Almighty* has sent down the Quran upon Prophet Muhammad for him to deliver it to mankind, which is why He *Glorified is He* will in no way let the disbelievers cause him any harm in any way. In other words, as long as the ultimate objective of revealing the Quran is for it to be delivered to mankind, Allah had to protect His Messenger Muhammad to fulfil this mission. As for Allah's saying *the Almighty*: '…and it is He Who protects the righteous' (*al-A'raf:* 196), it means that He *the Almighty* does not provide His Protection exclusively to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone, but rather, He provides His Protection to all the righteous believers at any time and place. As a matter of fact, when Allah *the Almighty* mentions the ruling in a general way, He does this in order to assure the hearts of the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Consequently, we deduce that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who ordered Prophet Muhammad to deliver the Message to people, and that He *Glorified is He* is the One Who protects the righteous for them to thrive in the world. Moreover, we should not forget the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has made man His Vicegerent in the land within which to spread righteousness. In addition, we should be fully aware of the fact that the first level of righteousness is to leave that which is sound as it is or to make it even better if one can.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ تَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦ لَا يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ نَصۡرَكُمۡ وَلَآ أَنفُسَهُمۡ يَنصُرُونَ ١٩٧

But those you call on instead of Him cannot help you or even help themselves' [197] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 197)

As a matter of fact, if there is someone who is able to succour you, but s/he does not, this means that this person does not want to give you any help, or that s/he does not sincerely love you, or even that s/he wants to keep the means by which s/he might succour you for her/himself. But the matter is totally different if this person is utterly unable to succour you, for s/he, in this case, does not possess the means to give you succour–that is the one whom you take as a protector is helpless and powerless, exactly as was the case with the polytheists who took helpless and powerless idols as gods. It is historically recorded that Muslims, on the Day of the Liberation of Mecca, utterly destroyed the idols with their axes and none of them, i.e. idols, even offered any resistance whatsoever.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِن تَدۡعُوهُمۡ إِلَى ٱلۡهُدَىٰ لَا يَسۡمَعُواْۖ وَتَرَىٰهُمۡ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَيۡكَ وَهُمۡ لَا يُبۡصِرُونَ ١٩٨

If you [believers] call such people to guidance, they do not hear. You [Prophet] may observe them looking at you, but they cannot see [198] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 198)

It is taken for granted that these idols cannot be guided to the Truth even if they are called to do so. That is because they are mere inanimate objects which have no minds to reason with. This is actually the case in spite of the fact that we today might see the idols with eyes, just like those ones in the Hindu and Buddhist temples; people put pearls in the eye sockets to make people think that the idols are looking towards them, although in reality they cannot see anything.

Addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says:

خُذِ ٱلۡعَفۡوَ وَأۡمُرۡ بِٱلۡعُرۡفِ وَأَعۡرِضۡ عَنِ ٱلۡجَٰهِلِينَ ١٩٩

Be tolerant and command what is right: pay no attention to foolish people [199] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 199)

As a matter of fact, this verse in question sheds light on all the aspects of a good moral character. Having ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call the idolaters along with their idols and devils to cause him any kind of harm if they are able to do so, He *the Almighty* then orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* to show tolerance to people. In fact, this Divine Order here applies to Prophet Muhammad and his followers. Here, we should take into account that even though we use the word *'afw* (tolerance) in our daily life, we do not know that it imparts various meanings. First of all, it may give the meaning of 'ease', such as when someone asks you, 'Where did you get this from?', and you reply, 'It came to me easily (*'afwan*)', that is, without any effort or work on your part.

It may also be used to give the meaning of 'spontaneity', i.e. without thinking about something such as when someone says, 'This idea has spontaneously come to my mind'. In this verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to accept what is easy, that is, to keep to those things which are trouble-free and simple and which require no undue effort. As such, people's affairs will be made easy for them. In other words, if things are made difficult for people, they will not be bothered to do them, which is why Allah *the Almighty* in another chapter in the Quran, orders Prophet Muhammad to say: 'Say, "I do not ask you for any reward for it; nor am I among the ones who take things upon themselves [more than they have to]."' (*Sad:* 86)

As a matter of fact, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the aforementioned verse: '…nor am I among the ones who take things upon themselves [more than they have to]' indicates clearly that he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not make things difficult or complicated in order for life to be simple, and for fierce disputes not to break out among people. In this regard, we should be fully aware of the fact that disputes arise when people are in distress and under compulsion which are the two elements that undermine the dealings and interactions between people, which is why it is said, 'The believer is the one who is lenient when he buys, lenient when he sells, lenient when he claims his rights, and lenient when rights are claimed from him'. That is, he shows leniency at all times. In this regard, we stress that Allah's saying: 'Take [the course of being] tolerant…' may give another possible explanation which is to pardon those who wrong you because this makes things easier.

In the same vein, the word '*'afw*' may also give the meaning of 'beyond your needs', a meaning which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*, 'And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say, "What is beyond your needs."' (*al-Baqara:* 219)

In truth, this previously mentioned ruling of spending from that which is beyond one's needs was in practice before almsgiving was made obligatory. We notice a very important point for both of these matters. It is that they both are meant to make things easy for people; it is a point which is proved by the fact that the believer is not required to give that which is needed for him/herself, but rather to give that which is above and beyond his/her needs.

Back to the verse under discussion; we notice that the verse starts with an imperative verb '*khudh',* translated here as 'take'–the opposite of which is 'give'. You might give something to a person, but this person might not take it from you if s/he sees that it is not good for him/her; but the matter is totally different when Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gives you the order to do this, for this Divine Command will undoubtedly bring you benefit in one way or another. For example, even if it seems on the surface that forgiving the one who wrongs you is a loss for you, you should know fully well that you have already taken ease and forgiveness for yourself by doing so.

In this regard, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* loves for His believing slave to be lenient and amicable with his/her fellow believers, that is, if a believer is arrogant towards another believer, then s/he should be tolerant to him/her in reply. In the same vein, if a fellow believer is haughty or unjust with you, then do not be haughty or unjust with him/her in return, lest enmity breaks out between you; instead be tolerant and gentle, so that Allah *the Almighty* will exalt you in ranks and also increase your honour.

Consequently, it is clear that Allah *the Almighty* wants us to be tolerant and lenient with each other for us to obtain goodness. Let us offer this striking example to illustrate this point more clearly; when you enter your house and find that one of your sons has been bad to his brother, your heart, and your compassion turn to the one who has been wronged. We are the dependants of our Lord, and thus if one person wrongs another, s/he thereby causes Allah *the Almighty* to succour the wronged, which is why we should treat those who wrong us well, since they are the main cause behind Allah's Care for us. Concerning this, we can quote one of the incidents that took place with Imam Al-Hasan Al-Basri; it is narrated that someone had been backbiting him and he called his servant and said to him, 'Take a plate of fresh dates and give it to so-and-so'–and he gave the servant the name of the man who had backbitten him. The servant was surprised by this, saying, 'How could you send him a gift of fresh dates when he has backbitten you?' whereupon the Imam replied, 'Should I not be kind to the one who has placed Allah on my side? Go to him and say, "My master tells you that he has heard you have backbitten him, thereby gifting him your good deeds; so he wishes to gift you these fresh dates."'

Furthermore, we notice that the verse also mentions the enjoining of what is right. As for the word '*al-'urf*' (translated here as 'what is right'), it refers to the behaviour which is judged sound and right by human reason and which makes the soul calm on condition that it conforms to the Divine Law. As a matter of fact, the word '*'urf*' is used to mean 'custom' because everyone in the society is accustomed to it, that is, no one is ashamed of doing it. That is why we, all the time, find people here and there chanting the following statement, 'This is done in accordance with custom (*'urf*)'. Here, we should stress a very important fact which is that 'sound custom' is viewed as one of the sources of legislation in the Islamic *Shari'a.*

The following is a striking example to fully clarify this point; we find that a young man is not ashamed of knocking on the door of a family's house to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage because this is a matter of custom which causes no shame. Yet, it is taken for granted that members of the Muslim society would be ashamed to find one from among them committing fornication even though the goal of both fornication and a marriage proposal is enjoyment–but there is a big difference between lawful pleasure and forbidden pleasure.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying: 'But turn away from the ignorant.' (*al-A'raf:* 199) Here arises the question, 'How does one leave alone those who choose to remain ignorant?' Wrong are those who think that the 'ignorant' simply means one who does not know! As a matter of fact, one who does not acquire knowledge is called '*ummi'* (unlettered), while the 'ignorant' is the one who 'knows' something in such a way which is actually contrary to reality. At that point, we should be aware that problems do not come from unlettered people who do not acquire knowledge, for they will believe anything you tell them on condition that it is approved by their natural disposition because they do not have any alternative to it. As for the ignorant person, he is the one who 'knows' something in such a particular way which is contrary to reality, and therefore his knowledge of this matter first needs to be changed, after which he needs to be convinced of the truth.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad and the believers with him to turn away from the ignorant person who believes something which contradicts reality and firmly clings to it. When you turn away from the ignorant person, you must not debate or argue with him because to debate with him, will not produce any beneficial result. With regards to this, I say to those people who oppose religion but have not read a single book about it, whilst they have read hundreds of anti-religious books, ‘Logic, justice and objectivity entail that you should read books that are pro-religion in the same way you read books against religion’. Moreover, if one wants to examine religion in such a way which leads to attaining sound belief, s/he must first remove all previous convictions and emotions from her/his heart and then objectively and rationally study the two matters while the heart is completely detached from being inclined to one of them. After that, the person should accept the conclusion about which the heart is assured. Once again, all this process must be carried out in an atmosphere of sincerity and objectivity; a point which is deduced from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah has not made for any man two hearts within himself….’ (*al-’Ahzab:* 4)

That is to say that man has only one heart, which will be filled either with certainty and faith, or with something else. The heart can only contain one thing, and therefore you, in pursuit of reaching the Truth, should not fill it with Falsehood; rather, you must first remove Falsehood from your heart and then keep both Falsehood and Truth outside it. After that, you are supposed to objectively examine the matter in such a way that enables you to reach a sound conclusion.

At that point, we have a Prophetic Hadith which also offers an explanation to the meaning of this verse in question; Ubayy ibn Ka‘ab narrated that when the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Take [the course of being] tolerant [with others] and command what is right: but turn away from the ignorant’ (*al-A’raf:* 199) was revealed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the Archangel Gabriel about its meaning, whereupon the latter told him, ‘Allah commands you to pardon those who have wronged you, to give to those who have deprived you and to keep relations with those who have cut theirs with you’.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Abi Hatim*

It is crystal clear that Allah *the Almighty* wants to teach us a lesson in humanity and faith, that is, a Muslim is supposed to give a hand to both those who are physically injured as well as those who suffer moral degradation.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَإِمَّا يَنزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ نَزۡغٞ فَٱسۡتَعِذۡ بِٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّهُۥ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

If Satan should prompt you to do something, seek
refuge with God – He is all hearing, all knowing [200]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 200)

The Arabic word for *'nazagha'* (instigate) literally means 'to prod', that is, to take an object and press it into the body of the person beside you or in front of you. The meaning of this word makes it clear to us that there is a certain amount of distance between the prodder and the one prodded, and that a tool is used in the process of prodding.

When one prods another with an object, the two do not feel the heat of each other's bodies; a matter which is different from the act of '*mass'* (touching) in which both the two parties feel the heat of each other's bodies. Here, we should take into account that there is also a difference between the latter act and that of '*lams'* (touching with the hand), for each of the two parties involved in the act of '*al-lams'* feels the softness as well as the heat of one another. As a matter of fact, it is on this point in question that wars are waged, that is, when the enemy is far away, its adversary must move away from it in order not to be hit by arrows, while at the same time attempting to hit the enemy with its own arrows. Likewise, modern armies send their planes to drop bombs on the enemy forces. Concerning this, we stress that the power of nations is judged by their ability to strike enemy forces without those forces being able to respond because they strike them from afar, exactly as when we see some countries launch long-range rockets against others. In truth, Allah *the Almighty* has already told us about this important notion in the chapter of *al-Anfal* in which He *the Almighty* says: 'Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster…' (*al-Anfal:* 60).

Explaining this verse, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us about the meaning of 'force' in the Hadith narrated by 'Uqba ibn

‘Amir who said, ‘I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recite when he was on the pulpit, “Against them, make ready your strength to the utmost of your power. Beware, strength consists in archery (shooting). Beware, strength consists in archery. Beware, strength consists in archery.”’(1)

This is because shooting allows one’s bullets to reach the enemy from afar, and as a result one will keep away from its fire. In the past, an army would march toward the enemy’s land, which is why the latter fired arrows at it to the extent that the more the army became closer to the enemy, the more each of them shot others with arrows and spears. Yet, when the fight raged hot, swords met. That is, it is clear that actions taking place during war mainly revolve around the concepts of ‘prodding’, ‘touching’ and ‘handling’.

Back to the verse under discussion, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Allah *the Almighty* how a person could suppress his anger, whereupon Allah *Glorified is He* sent down His saying: ‘And if [it should happen that] an evil instigation from Satan instigates [you to do otherwise], seek refuge with Allah. Indeed, He is All Hearing, All Knowing.’ (*al-A’raf:* 200)

But someone might ask, ‘Could Satan stir Prophet Muhammad to anger?’ The answer to this question is crystal clear in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* did not say, ‘And if an evil instigation from Satan instigates you to…’, but rather, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if [it should happen that] an evil instigation from Satan...’, meaning that this act of prompting might not happen to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, why should Allah *the Almighty* prevent him *peace and blessings be upon him* the pleasure of defying Satan? Concerning this, we can quote the Hadith narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud in which Prophet Muhammad is narrated to have said, ‘There is not one of you but he has an attaché from amongst the jinn (devils) with him’. They (the Companions) said, ‘Allah’s Messenger, with you too?’ Thereupon he said, ‘Yes, but Allah helps me against him and so I am safe from his hand and he does not command me to do anything but good’.(2)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim*

In the verse in question, He *the Almighty* says: 'and if [it should happen that] an evil instigation from Satan instigates [you to do otherwise], seek refuge with Allah…' (*al-A'raf:* 200). To seek refuge means to seek aid, sanctuary and protection. Indeed, one only seeks shelter from another who is more powerful than the one who wants to afflict him/her with harm. It is known that Satan has many means of subtle movements, penetration and infiltration; and therefore we should not seek refuge with one who is equal to him or weaker than him, but rather, we should seek refuge with the Creator of man, jinn and all creatures, Who is fully Able to relinquish the power of Satan. He *Glorified is He* is All-Hearing and All Knowing: two Divine Attributes which are very important in this regard; He sees all and knows all things. Hence, when we sincerely call to mind the meaning of seeking refuge and sanctuary with the One Who created us and created Satan too, Satan will surely flee from our path because he knows that we have sought the Sanctuary of Allah, the Creator *the Almighty* and the All-Powerful, and he has no power to resist the One Who created him. Moreover, we should take into account that He *the Almighty* hears us well when we say, 'I seek refuge with Allah'. In addition, He knows full well our ultimate intention behind uttering this supplication.

If the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions here the case of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'And if there [should happen that] an evil instigation comes to you from Satan that instigates [you to do otherwise], seek refuge in Allah' (*al-A'raf:* 200)–which means that Satan is far away and can only attempt to prod–what, then, about all the other Muslims in this regard? The Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوۡاْ إِذَا مَسَّهُمۡ طَٰٓئِفٞ مِّنَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ تَذَكَّرُواْ فَإِذَا هُم مُّبۡصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠١﴾

**those who are aware of God think of Him when Satan
prompts them to do something and immediately they can see
[straight] [201] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 201)**

It is out of Allah's Mercy towards the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He says, '*massahum*' (literally, slightly and imperceptibly touches them–translated in the verse at hand as 'comes to them') using the verb '*mass*', which means 'a light insubstantial and imperceptible touch' and not '*lams*' which means 'a substantial and perceptible touch'. This is because those who have *taqwa* ('fear Allah', i.e. they are Allah-consciousness thereby protect themselves from all what Allah forbids) make this *taqwa* a shield between them and Allah's Attributes of Power and Retribution which make them careful and alert not to overstep the limits set by Allah. Therefore, Allah says: 'Verily, those who fear Allah, when an evil thought comes to them from Satan; they remember (Allah)' (*al-A'raf:* 201).

The Arabic word '*ta'if*' (evil thought signifies the imaginative thoughts that roam around in one's mind during the night. Since Satan is invisible, we depict him only in our imagination. Thus, whenever Satan goes around touching the thoughts of the Allah-conscious people, they remind themselves of the One Who created Satan and created them. They remember Allah's guiding principles that resist their wrong desires. They also remember the Ever-Watchful Eye of Allah that is upon them all the time and is never off them, and the fact that all that which Allah has forbidden is plain and clear. In a Hadith narrated by An-Nu`man ibn Bashir, our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was narrated to have said, 'That which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is clear, and between the two are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Whoever avoids these doubtful matters absolves himself of blame with respect to his religion and his honour. Whoever falls into doubtful matters falls into that which is unlawful. It is like the shepherd who grazes his flock too close to a private pasture, he greatly risks moving into it. Verily, every king has a sacred precinct. Verily, the sacred precinct of Allah is His Prohibitions. There lies within the body a morsel of flesh. If it is sound, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily, it is the heart'.(1)

Once the believers recall the punishment resulting from any shameful act which Satan embellishes to make it sound acceptable to them, the veil before their eyes dissipates and they can see the straight path clearly again.

Allah then says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in the Book of Iman (Faith)*

وَإِخْوَٰنُهُمْ يَمُدُّونَهُمْ فِي ٱلْغَيِّ ثُمَّ لَا يُقْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠٢﴾

The followers of devils are led relentlessly
into error by them and cannot stop [202]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 202)

When we track the word '*yamuddunahum'* ('to plunge' or 'to lead further into error') in the Quran, sometimes we find it in the form '*yamuddu*' and other times we find it in the form '*yumdid*' as is the case when the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And increased you in wealth and children, and bestow on you gardens and bestow on you rivers' (*Nuh:* 12).

We know that the devils will never leave the believers alone. They will persist in trying to tempt them into error. The devils try to tempt the obedient believers more than they try to tempt the sinners because the sinners readily help Satan by submitting to their passions and desires. Neither the sinner nor the devil fails short in this regard, but rather, they both seek to tempt the believers into error. The verb '*aqsara*' (to give up, desist, cease) comes from the root word '*qasr*' (to shorten), that is, taking a short cut despite the ability to go the long way. This is the nature of Satan's insistent attempts to mislead the believers.

Satan–as the Quran tells us–admitted his intention to pursue the believers, using evil insinuations and instigations, and embellishing sins and wrongdoings to them: '…I will lie in wait for them (human beings) on Your Straight Path' (*al-A'raf:* 16).

Satan knows that those who are not conscious of Allah do not need to have sins made alluring to them, since they already desire to commit sins and are inclined to sin–Allah is our refuge. This is the reason why Satan does not put a lot of effort in trying to tempt them into error.

The Lord then says:

وَإِذَا لَمْ تَأْتِهِم بِآيَةٍ قَالُوا لَوْلَا اجْتَبَيْتَهَا ۚ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَتَّبِعُ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ
مِن رَّبِّي ۚ هَٰذَا بَصَائِرُ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٠٣﴾

When you do not bring them a fresh revelation, they say, 'But can you not just ask for one?' Say, 'I merely repeat what is revealed to me from my Lord: this revelation brings you insights from your Lord, and guidance and mercy for those who believe [203] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 203)

In earlier verses, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the word '*aya*' (plural of *'aya',* which means 'proof', 'verse', 'lesson', 'miraculous sign', 'revelation'); and, as already explained, the word '*ayat*' can refer either to physical signs in the universe, to the miraculous wonders or miracles that prove and support the veracity of the Messengers, or to the verses of the Divine Scripture.

Here, Allah *the Exalted* and the Glorious, uses the word '*aya*' in the singular, not '*ayaat*' in the plural. This is because right before their eyes was this entire universe, filled with signs and wonders of Allah's Power, and they had, in their hands, the clear law of guidance that had been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so the only thing that was missing–in their eyes–was a physical miracle. Although in the chapter of *al-Isra'*, the Lord *Glorified is He* cautioned them against saying this: 'In this Quran, We have set out all kinds of examples for people, yet most of them persist in disbelieving. They say, "We will not believe in you (Muhammad) until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face; or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky — even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a [actual] book down for us to read". Say, "Glory be to my Lord! Am I nothing but a mortal, a Messenger?"' (*al-Isra':* 89-93)

The Messenger could not produce on his own the miraculous wonders which his people asked for. Similarly, the teachings and revelations which he brought them were not his own, but revelations from the Mighty and All-Wise God. But they used to accuse him of having fabricated the Quran; therefore, they asked him to produce a tangible, physical miracle, ignoring the fact that the Noble Quran itself was of such a miraculous nature that they could not produce a single verse like it. They said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Why have you not brought it (i.e. produced one yourself)?' (*al-A'raf:* 203)

His Lord here instructed him to answer them saying: 'I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord' (*al-A'raf:* 203). That is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was charged with the responsibility of conveying the Divine Revelations that were brought down to him by the Trustworthy Angel of Revelation, Jibril (Gabriel *peace be upon him*). These Divine Revelations consisted of Quranic verses that contained Allah's Guidance. This Divine Guidance in itself is an inexhaustible miracle, constantly overflowing with goodness; therefore, Allah adds: '…This (Quran) is insight from your Lord, and guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.' (*al-A'raf:* 203)

The Noble Quran contains insights, guidance, and mercy. The word '*basa'ir*' (insights) is the plural form of '*basira*' (insight) and is derived from the word '*ibsar*' (sight). A heart infused with the light of certainty makes the person see clearly and be enlightened. A person who has such a spiritual state is said to be possessed of insight. Ordinary sight is the role of the eye so far as material and physical entities are concerned. However, there are also abstract issues that can only be discovered by insight. Insight illuminates the heart thereby enabling it to discover these abstract issues, but the heart only possesses insight when it is charged with assured belief.

The Noble Quran is a means of insight; it endows those who believe in it and the contemplators of its words with a deep perception that provides them with renewed knowledge of spiritual realities. Consequently, these realities become more visible to them, it is as though they can see them and bear witness to them with the physical, naked eye.

This Glorious Quran is a means of insight and guidance, that is, it directs and guides the humans to the Truth and to Allah's Straight Path. It is also a source of mercy for those who do not have insight that guides to belief, and lack the ability to accept the evidence that leads to guidance. Clearly, it is a grace and mercy to all people, guidance to those who seek direction, and insight to those who have certitude in the essentials of belief to the extent that it is as though these essentials are actually present and they can actually see them.

As we have said before, Allah has informed the believers of certain matters of the Unseen, one of which is the existence of Paradise and Hell. The believers in Allah accept everything that is conveyed to them from their Lord. They know for certain that it is the Truth from Allah. This knowledge then develops into a solid conviction which all the believers have and acknowledge. And when the Day of Resurrection comes, and they see the bridge set over hell just as they believed it to be, their knowledge transforms into an actual vision in front of them. And when some of them actually enter hell–may Allah protect us–in order to expiate the sins they committed, this is the 'experience-based certainty' (realizing the absolute truth with certainty by personally experiencing it). I have given this example before to illustrate the point–but Allah is beyond all comparison: Our geography teachers used to tell us, when we were young, about the map of the United States. They said that its capital is Washington, the main port is New York, and in New York there are 'skyscrapers', that is, very tall buildings more than one hundred storeys high, which is over two hundred metres tall. We believed our geography teachers. Then, when some of us had the chance to travel and they saw Washington and New York from the plane, this sight gave them the 'sight-based certainty' after they had only had the 'knowledge-based certainty'. Finally, when the plane landed at Washington airport, they came to have the 'experience-based certainty'.

The Lord *Glorified is He* presents to us the concept of belief in the Unseen when He says: 'Striving for more distracts you until you [die and] visit your graves. No indeed! You will come to know. No indeed! In the end you will come to know. No indeed! If only you could know now with the knowledge of certainty. You will most definitely see Hellfire; you will see it with the eye of certainty.' (*at-Takaththur*: 1-7)

In the previous verses, Allah uses the terms '*'ilm al-yaqin*' ('knowledge-based certainty') and *'ayn al-yaqin*' (sight-based certainty). As for '*haqq al-yaqin*' (experience-based, assured certainty), it occurs in His statement: 'If that dying person is one of those who will be brought near to Allah, he will have rest, ease, and a Garden of Bliss (Paradise); if he is one of those on the Right (he will hear), "Peace be on you", from his companions on the Right; but if he is one of those who denied the Truth and went astray, he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in Hell. Verily, this! This is an absolute Truth of assured certainty' (*al-Waqi'a*: 88-95).

The believers are on different levels in terms of certitude in matters of the Unseen: There are those who believe in what Allah tells them about the Unseen on the level of 'sight-based certainty', and others who believe in the information that Allah has revealed about the Unseen on the level of 'experience-based certainty'. This is the reason why Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If the veil were to be lifted from me, my certainty will not increase'.

The following dialogue between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the venerable Companion Al-Harith ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* reveals to us more about the real meaning of such a degree of certitude.

It was narrated that Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Anṣari passed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said to him: 'How are you, O Harith?' Al-Harith replied, 'I have become a true believer'. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Be careful of what you say. Everything has a true state, so what is the true state of your belief?' Al-Harith said, 'I have lost interest in this world. I spend my nights awake praying, and my days thirsty (i.e. fasting). And it is as if I am looking at the Throne of my Lord, prominent in view. And it is as if I am looking at the people of Paradise visiting one another there. And it is as if I am looking at the people of Hell screaming in it'. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him three times, 'O Harith, you have realized the Truth, so live according to it!'(1)

This venerable Companion arrived at the point where everything Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told him became an experience-based, absolute reality for him, providing the insight that enabled him to behold all this as though he actually experienced it.

'And if you do not bring them a miraculous sign (*aya)*, they say, "Why have you not brought it (i.e. produced one yourself)?" Say, "I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord. This (Quran) is insight from your Lord, and guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.'" (*al-A'raf:* 203)

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani*

This is how the Noble Quran provides insight to believers of high spiritual calibre, gives guidance to people seeking direction, and bestows mercy on all mankind.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ ٱلْقُرْءَانُ فَٱسْتَمِعُوا۟ لَهُۥ وَأَنصِتُوا۟ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٢٠٤﴾

So pay attention and listen quietly when the Quran
is recited, so that you may be given mercy' [204]
(The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 204)

Since the Lord *Glorified is He* has already clarified to you that this Quran provides insights from Him, and it is a guide and mercy, is it not appropriate that you, O believer, should receive it honourably? Are these three aspects insufficient to attract your full attention to the Quran, and not to ignore it?! You need to listen carefully to the Noble Quran in order to obtain these three benefits, namely insight, guidance and mercy; it merits and deserves that a person silently and attentively listens to it when it is recited.

We may notice that Allah *the Exalted* uses '*fastami'u*' (i.e. so listen attentively to it), and not merely '*asma'u*' (i.e. hear it). This is because attentive listening comprises the conscious will to hear. As for 'hearing', you may hear everything that is said around you, and you may pay or fail to pay attention to what you hear. Due to the merciful values that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* preached, no one should deliberately listen to the secrets of other people by way of spying on them, eager to know their faults and errors. Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Do not envy one another; do not hate one another; do not spy on one another; do not seek out one another's faults; and do not overbid one another. Rather, be Allah's slaves and brothers.'(1) This is a warning against five misbehaviours, among them spying and listening to people's secrets. 'When the Quran is recited, listen attentively to it and be silent that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf:* 204)

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in the Book of al-Bir wa Al-Silah wa Al-Adab (Virtues, Relationships and Manners)*

A person may be listening silently, but without setting his intention on worshipping Allah by listening, thus depriving himself of the reward of listening to the Quran. One should listen carefully and quietly with the intention of worshipping Allah because Allah is the One speaking. It is neither reasonable nor appropriate that you turn or wander away while Allah is talking. Our master Ja`far Al-Sadiq(1) Allah *be pleased with him* alerted our attention to this when he said, 'I am amazed at the one who is afraid yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'Allah is sufficient for us; He is the Best Disposer of affairs' (*Al-'Imran*: 173), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'They returned with grace and bounty from Allah; no harm touched them...' (*Al-'Imran*: 174). And I am amazed at the one who is distressed yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'There is no God but You. Glory be to You. Indeed, I was of the wrongdoers' (*al-Anbiya':* 87), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'We answered him and saved him from distress. And thus do We save the believers' (*al-Anbiya':* 88). And I am amazed at the one who is plotted against yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'I entrust my affair to Allah; Allah is the All-Seer of His servants' (*Ghafir:* 44), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'So Allah saved him from the evils they planned…' (*Ghafir:* 45). And I am amazed at the one who seeks worldly boons, yet does not seek refuge in Allah's saying *Glorified is He*: 'This is Allah's Will. There is no power except in Allah' (*al-Kahf:* 39), for I have heard Allah say after it: 'My Lord may well give me something better than your garden…' (*al-Kahf:* 40).

Careful listening to the Quran recitation, with the intention of worshipping Allah, is the proper etiquette with which we should receive the lessons of the Quran that bring us blessings and benefits.

The scholars deliberated the nature of the commandment to be silent and listen to the Quran: should it be adhered to whenever the Quran is being recited or only when it is recited during the prayers or the Friday sermons?

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(1) *Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq bin Muhammad Al-Baqir bin `Ali Zain Al-Abidin bin Al-Hussain*

They held different opinions regarding this ruling, some of them saying that silent attentive listening to the Quran is only required during the prayers. The basis for this opinion was that, during the Congregational Prayers, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the Quran, those performing prayer behind him would repeat every verse he uttered. For example, when he said: ‘In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*al-Fatiha*: 1), they would also say, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’. And when he said: ‘Praise belongs to Allah; Lord of the Worlds’ (*al-Fatiha*: 2), they would say, ‘Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds’. Consequently Allah *Glorified is He* told them to let Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* recite alone, and to listen to his recitation without repeating after him.

Other scholars said that the commandment meant that silent attentive listening to the Quran should be observed during prayers, the sermons on Fridays and during the Two *Eids* (Feasts) Prayers. They all consist of recitation of Quranic verses; however, these sermons contain more words of the preacher than Quranic verses. Others pointed out that the obligation of listening to the sermon had already been emphasized by the warning of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘If you say to your companion, “Be quiet and listen” while the Imam is delivering the Friday sermon, you have engaged in idle talk.’(1) Therefore, the obligation of listening to the sermons is affirmed by evidence from the *Sunnah*.

Other scholars held the opinion that silent attentive listening to the Quran is required at any time and in any situation as an expression of respect and awe for Allah’s Words. The following opinion, pertaining to this point is ascribed to our master and Imam Abu `Abdullah Al-Hussain, who said, ‘Whenever the Quran is being recited, whether you are praying in congregation, or attending a sermon, or you are free (not engaged in any specific task), you must listen to it. This is because the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make the Quran different from any other speech, hence He made it different in the following ways: when it is recited, you should listen to it; and when you touch a copy of the

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(1) *Narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra by Imam Malik in his Musnad, Imam Ahmad, Al-Bayhaqi, Abu Dawud and Al-Nasa’i*

Quran, you must be in a state of ritual purity. This is to protect it from people handling it like any other book. It helps develop awe of Allah; as a result you do not touch the Quran unless you are in a state of ablution'. When we instil this into our children, by saying to one of them, 'Do not go near the book of the Quran unless you are in a state of ablution', we help build awe and respect for the Quran in the child's soul'.

Also, when it comes to orthography or the written representation of the recited text of the Quran, the Lord decreed that some words in His Book have a particular written form, different to how they are normally written. This makes the recitation of them have a special holy ambience. Thus it is a unique Book, unlike any other book; and its words are unlike any other words. 'When the Quran is recited, listen attentively to it and be silent that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf:* 204)

Some scholars said that listening here does not just mean hearing with the ears, but rather responding to its duties. Do you not say, when you supplicate for one another, 'May Allah hear your supplication'? You say this even though you know that Allah can hear you because you mean 'May Allah *Glorified is He* answer this supplication'. Accordingly, listening to the Quran entails responding to its commands. Why? In order to gain mercy from the Lord, for He is the Most Merciful and the Giver of Mercy: 'that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf:* 204)

We know that the Arabic words '*la`all*' (which is contained in '*la'allakum*') and '*`asa*' express hope, and '*layta*' (if only) implies a wish that is impossible and not expected to happen. We express hopes using '*layta*' as a way of indicating that we love some situation but know it cannot possibly happen. An example of this is what the old poet said:

If only (layta) youth would return one day,
So I could tell it what old age has done to me!

He knows for sure that youth will never return, but his words indicate that youth was a beloved time to him. Another example is found in the poet's words:

If only (layta) the stars would come down to me, that I might arrange them
In a necklace of praise for you, since words are not enough!

But the stars will never come down.

The notion that comes first to your mind when you hear the words ‘*`asa*’ and ‘*la`all*’ is the hope for something to occur; and when Allah uses an expression of hope, it is coming from the Bountiful Lord and therefore will certainly be fulfilled. Allah then says:

وَٱذۡكُر رَّبَّكَ فِي نَفۡسِكَ تَضَرُّعٗا وَخِيفَةٗ وَدُونَ ٱلۡجَهۡرِ مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡلِ
بِٱلۡغُدُوِّ وَٱلۡأٓصَالِ وَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ ٱلۡغَٰفِلِينَ ٢٠٥

[Prophet], remember your Lord inwardly, in all humility
and awe, without raising your voice, in the mornings and in
the evenings – do not be one of the heedless [205]
(The Quran, *al-A’raf:* 205)

The Arabic word for ‘*dhikr*’ (remembrance) means to let something pass either through one’s mind, by remembering it within the soul, or through one’s lips (invocation). *Dhikr* done with the tongue which no one but oneself can hear is silent *dhirk*. When it is loud enough that others can hear it, it is of two kinds: acceptable and unacceptable loud *dhikr* based on the level of loudness. The unacceptable level of loudness is when *dhikr* turns into a disturbance–Allah forbid. Therefore, the Lord *Glorified is He*, says: ‘(O Prophet Muhammad), do not be too loud in your prayer, or too quiet, but seek a middle way.’ (*al-Isra’:* 110)

Hopefully our brothers, the Quran reciters, will pay heed to this verse in a way that makes them adhere to Allah’s Command in this regard and refrain from raising their voices so loudly that it becomes a disturbance. I say to each one of them, ‘Your Lord has not asked you to be loud of voice, but rather, He asked you to use a moderate tone of voice that is between loud and low’. I address this especially to those who spoil Allah’s blessing for others by crying out with loud voices during the night, thereby holding back Allah’s nightly Mercy from others, a Mercy which He described, saying: ‘In His mercy He has given you night and day, so that you may rest and seek His Bounty and be grateful.’ (*al-Qasas:* 73)

Do not ruin Allah’s Mercy for people. Reminding people of Allah is not a matter of yelling from pulpits; except if you are seeking to ‘advertise’ yourselves through the Mosques of Allah and upon the pulpits of Allah–but this is something that is rejected and unacceptable according to the Sacred Law.

'(O Prophet Muhammad), remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe…' (*al-A'raf:* 205). The Lord *Glorified is He* says in one place in the Quran: 'Believers, remember Allah with much remembrance; and glorify Him morning and evening' (*al-'Ahzab:* 41-42), and in another place He says: 'Remember your Lord…'.

His words 'remember God' make the listener think of his moral responsibilities because God is the One Who is worshipped, meaning the One who is obeyed in all His commandments and prohibitions.

His Words: 'Remember Allah' make the listener recall his moral responsibilities because Allah is the only One Who deserves to be taken as a Deity and to be worshipped, meaning He is the One Who must be obeyed with regards to all His Commandments and Prohibitions. On the other hand, His Words: 'Remember your Lord', are a reminder to you of all the graces which He has extended to you: your Lord is the One Who created you, sustained you, and gave you endless blessings. Remember your Lord because if you do not feel love for Him through His commandments, you will feel love for Him because of the bounties He has extended to you. Allah *the Exalted* showers us with His Favours and continuous Blessings.

I will give the following example to illustrate this point–but Allah is beyond all comparison and transcends all similitudes: You have children, to whom you give pocket money. When you give them their allowance every month, you find that they will only try to see you once a month; but if you give them their allowance daily, you will find that they are always around you. For example, when you are asleep, your son may come to your bedroom, or walk by your side, or gently cough to get your attention that he needs something from the room. What about you, then, when you, in your totality, owe your entire existence to the munificence of your Lord? And, for as long as you remain completely reliant on your Lord's Munificence, you should remember the One Who is munificent to you; i.e. remember your Lord all the time.

While remembering Allah you should maintain two states of mind: first, humble entreaty, meaning humbleness with excessive reverence for Him; for you may think of someone but still with arrogance. Rather, remembrance of the Munificent Creator must be filled with the humility of servitude before the Glory of His Lordship. Second, remember your Lord ‘in awe’ which means fear with humbleness; for the more you humble yourself before Allah, the more He increases your honour. We find servitude to humans hateful, as it means enslavement. People hate those who enslave them. For a human to be enslaved by his equal is immense tyranny and injustice; it transfers all the good things of the slave into his master’s possession. But your servitude to Allah results in the transfer of His Goodness and Blessings to you. Therefore, we find that the Lord reminds His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of His favours upon him, saying: ‘Glory to Him who made His slave travel by night from the Sacred Mosque (at Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (in Jerusalem), whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He alone is the All Hearing, the All-seeing.’ (*al-Isra’:* 1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rose to a high rank by virtue of the-Isra’ (the miraculous night journey of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem), and it is mentioned here as a way of evoking the recognition and remembrance of the grace that Allah granted to His slave and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. A believing poet once said:

It is sufficient honour for me to be a slave
  Whose Lord meets with him without any appointment:
Despite His Mighty Holiness,
  I may meet Him when and where I please.

As a believing slave, you can meet Allah whenever you wish. If you let faith handle your life, you are in control of it. All you need is to make the intention to pray and say, ‘*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest!)’ and you are instantly transported to His Presence, whether you are at home, in the street, or anywhere else. This is the absolute height of honour for you.

‘(O Prophet Muhammad), remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe, without being loud of voice’ (*al-A’raf:* 205). Allah has not said here, ‘The Lord of the Worlds’. Rather, He has said, ‘Your Lord, O Muhammad’, and this remembrance is the most precious bounty conferred upon mankind. It is the gift of sending Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a Messenger who represents a Special Blessing and a Favour from Allah to all those who believe in his Message. Every Muslim is then included in the favour that was granted to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah's Words to His Messenger: 'Remember your Lord inwardly…' (*al-A'raf:* 205) mean that He has not limited the proof of the care He bestows on you to what can only be seen on the outside and what exists far from you; for you may not see or hear some things in the universe since the universe is separate from you. But look into your own self and you will find there plenty of signs that all remind you of your Creator: 'And in yourselves too (there are signs), do you not see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

Before our Lord placed the proof of His existence in the universe surrounding you, He placed this proof within your own self. Your self is never separated from you, and you know well its faculties, perceptions, and inclinations better than anyone else. Therefore, humble entreaty and awe before Allah have a role to play here since you can see the secrets of His creation within yourself. You can find there many signs which are greater than you are. They make you feel yourself dwindling away before the One Who has given you all this, and fear lest you fall short of fulfilling the duty that you owe to Him.

Let us return to Allah's saaying: 'Remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe, without being loud of voice, in the mornings and in the evenings...' (*al-A'raf:* 205). *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) is an action, and actions require a time and a place. Morning and evening are two times that cover virtually all the daylight hours: '*ghudu*' (early morning) is the beginning of the day, and '*asal*' (late afternoon) is the time between mid-afternoon and sunset, which we commonly referred to in the words '*shams al-asil*' (pre-sunset sun). This aspect of the universe is repeated in many verses in the Noble Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Believers, remember Allah often and glorify Him morning and evening.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 41-42)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'We have truly sent you (O Prophet Muhammad) as a witness, a bringer of good news and a warner, in order that you (O people) may believe in Allah and His Messenger (Prophet Muhammad), and assist and honour him, and praise Him (Allah) morning (*bukra*) and evening (*asil*).' (*al-Fath:* 8-9)

The word '*asil*' (evening) is the common word used to refer to evening in these verses; as for its counterpart, namely morning, Allah sometimes refers to it using the word '*bukra*' and other times using '*ghudu*'. He *the Most High* says: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as (if there were) a niche and within it a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil almost glows forth (by itself) though no fire touches it. Light upon Light! Allah guides to His Light whom He wills. And Allah sets forth parables for mankind, and Allah knows all things. In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified in the mornings (*ghudu*) and in the evenings (*asal*).' (*an-Nur:* 35-36)

You realize on reading the words 'in houses' that there is an action involved here, because 'in houses' is an adverb of place. But if you go back and read what precedes it, you find that it has no semantic connection (*muta`alliq*). You may also notice then that what precedes it is: 'Light upon Light!' 'In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified…' (*an-Nur:* 36). When you come to the mosque to meet with Allah, this is Light; and when you pray to Him, this is also Light. And on stepping out, you take with you the Light that descends upon you in His Houses. All this is Light upon Light. Hence, whoever wishes to expose himself to the rays of Almighty Allah's Light let him frequently visit Allah's Houses. Mosques are filled with Light because they are places of prayer. We know that prayer is a time to be alone with one's Lord. Whenever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was faced with a difficult moment, he would stand and pray. If you follow the example of Prophet Muhammad and offer two *rak`as* (units of prayer) whenever you are faced with a difficult situation or a hard problem that is beyond your power to deal with, and you ask Allah and put the matter into His hands, Allah will not let you walk away without being content and satisfied. 'In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified in the mornings and in the evenings.' (*an-Nur:* 36)

As we know, morning ('*ghudu*' or '*bukra*') and evening ('*asal' or 'asil*') are the first moments of the day and the first moments of evening. Why are the first moments of day and of evening mentioned here? It is because these are the times when it is most needed to supplicate to Allah and remember Him. Before you go to work at the start of the day, you need a recharge of determination to carry out your work and provide for your living needs. At the end of the day, you also need to seek solace in your Lord for Him to heal your exhaustion after the day's toils. Therefore, beware of letting life distract you from the Giver of life; you can remember our Lord while you are performing any of your daily activities, and receive every outcome of your actions by saying, '*Alhamdu lillah* (praise is due to Allah)'; and when you see anything of the beautiful creation of the Bestower of life, you should say, '*Masha'-Allah* (Allah has willed this good)!'; and when you see anything amazing, you should say, '*Subhan Allah* (Glory be to Allah)!' This is the reason why, when Allah calls His believing slaves to prayer, He says: 'O you who believe! When the call to prayer is made on the day of Friday, come to the remembrance of Allah and quit all trading, That is better for you, if only you knew' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). This duty is related to the Friday Prayer which must be offered in congregation; assemblage for the Friday Prayer is required, we must all gather to offer it as a congregation. A congregation is a condition for the validity of a Friday Prayer.

We know that the prayer is a means of invoking and remembering our Lord; so, what should follow prayer? 'Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek Allah's Bounty. And remember Allah often so that you may prosper' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). That is, beware lest your pursuits on earth and your seeking to obtain Allah's Bounties through the use of worldly means distract you from your obligation to Allah; rather, you must constantly remember Him. '(O Prophet Muhammad), remember your Lord inwardly, with total humility and awe, without being loud of voice, in the mornings and in the evenings–do not be one of the heedless.' (*al-A'raf:* 205)

That is, do not be one of those who are heedless of Allah's Demands contained in the boundaries that He has explained to us. Heedlessness signifies the occupation of the mind with something other than its Creator. When you keep your Creator in your mind all the time, you cannot be neglectful of what He demands of you in the morning, evening, or any other time, whether you are offering the five prayers or moving throughout the land for any reason. Believers should follow the good example of the angels in this regard, as they incessantly glorify their Lord during the night and day without slackening or slowing down. If this is how the angels behave, although they have never committed any sin and can never disobey Him, and neither eat nor procreate, and experience neither hunger nor lust–since all sins arise from these desires- because of all this, you should imitate their good example. This is because they are the ones who never disobey Allah's Commands and do whatever they are ordered to do. They do not disdain to worship Allah, nor do they become tired of worshipping Him. They glorify His Praise and prostrate themselves before Him without slackening. Therefore, the Lord then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ عِندَ رَبِّكَ لَا يَسۡتَكۡبِرُونَ عَنۡ عِبَادَتِهِۦ وَيُسَبِّحُونَهُۥ وَلَهُۥ يَسۡجُدُونَ ۩ (٢٠٦)

[even] those who live in the presence of your Lord are not
too proud to worship Him: they glorify Him and bow
down before Him [206] (The Quran, *al-A'raf:* 206)

But if we are all near to our Lord, and in the presence of all that which He has created for us, and have all equally benefitted from the bounty He has bestowed on us by creating us out of nothing, why is it that only these creatures are singled out as being near to Him? Do not misunderstand this 'nearness' as being a spatial nearness; for space is a container, and our Lord *Glorified is He* cannot be contained by any space. Rather, the nearness here is nearness of merit, nearness of grace, nearness of sovereignty and nearness of providence. Allah has established a sequence of causes and effects for all His creatures, yet some of His creatures glorify Him for His Intrinsic Glory and do nothing else but this. These are known as '*al-`alina*' (the exalted angels). This category of angels is different from '*al-mudabirat'* (the angels who execute Allah's Commands) and '*al-hafazha'* (angels who guard and write every human's good and bad deeds). For this reason, as we have said before, when the Lord *the Exalted* commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* and Satan refused to do so, Allah said to him: 'Are you too proud (to fall prostrate to Adam) or are you one of the high exalted (angels)?' (*Sad:* 75)

'The high exalted' here denotes the angels who were not included in the command to prostrate. Those angels exist for no other reason than to glorify the Divine Essence, and they know nothing about the many existing creatures or the earthly world. Those angels differ from the angels who are made to serve us. Those who are near to our Lord are the angels who are wholly engaged and engrossed in the Glory of Allah, knowing nothing but the Divine Essence and doing nothing but glorifying Him. In the next verse, Allah specifies their role saying: '… (They) are not too proud to worship Him; they glorify Him and to Him they prostrate.' (*al-A'raf:* 206)

The scholars differed as to the nature of the angels' prostration. Does it mean submission; does it mean prayer? Or is it the physical prostration that we know? For us, prostration is the deepest expression of submission to Allah *Glorified is He* in the act of prayer. It is to place the noblest part of man, the face, onto the floor as the believer's token of obedience and surrender to Allah *the Most High*. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that when we come across one of the verses requiring prostration in the Book of Allah, due to containing a mention of this act, we should respond to it in a genuine way and offer a prostration known as '*sujud at-tilawa*' (the prostration of recitation). We do this when we recite the verse ourselves or hear it recited. The scholars have located the verses of prostration in the Quran and have placed marks there in the written text, and they have put a line underneath the word where prostration should be performed. The scholars have clarified the places where one should prostrate in the course of reading the Quran and found that the first of these verses is at the end of the chapter of *al-A'raf* whose meanings we are now contemplating, and the final one is in the chapter of *al-`Alaq*: 'Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists)….' (*al-'Alaq:* 1)

Between these two chapters, other verses of prostration occur. Some of the scholars hold that there are two verses of prostration in the chapter of *al-Hajj*, while others do not count the second of these two verses as a verse of prostration. Those who count the second disagreed-upon verse of prostration in the chapter of *al-Ḥajj* along with the first agreed-upon verse give a total of fifteen prostrations in the whole Quran. Those who do not count this second prostration in the chapter of *al-Hajj* give a total of fourteen.

Any time you want to prostrate to Allah to offer thanks to Him or when reading any Quranic verse, you may prostrate yourself in thankfulness to Him. This takes the form of a single prostration, just the same as the prostration of recitation. It is recommended whenever a blessing is received by you, some trouble is eliminated, or some evil is dispelled. This kind of prostration is only performed outside the Canonical Prayers.

A prostration naturally begins with the exclamation, '*Allahu Akbar'* (Allah is the Greatest) and a rising of the hands as though one is beginning the Canonical Prayer. It may be assumed that one says, '*Subhana Rabbiyal a`la* (Glory be to my Lord the Most High)' as one usually does in the prescribed Prayers, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us what to say in the prostration of recitation. It was narrated that Ibn `Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said that he was with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when a man came to him and said, 'I dreamt last night that I was praying towards the base of a tree. I recited a verse of prostration and prostrated myself, and the tree prostrated along with me. I heard it saying, "O Allah, remove a sin from me for it, write down a reward for me for it, and store it with you for me"'. Ibn `Abbas added, 'I saw Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recite a verse containing a prostration and he prostrated himself. I heard him say the same words that the man had told him the tree had said'. (1)

We have thus reached the end of the chapter of *al-A`raf (the Heights).* The name of this chapter is in itself appropriate, as it refers to the prominent place where those whose good and evil deeds weigh the same will sit. Their position will allow them to look at the people of Paradise on one side and the people of Hell on the other. In this sense, the word '*a'raf*' (heights) designates a place that is especially high. It is derived from the word for the mane of a horse '*'urf*' which is on the highest part of the horse. The name of the next chapter '*al-Anfal*' (battle gains) also literally signifies an increase. Therefore, the names for the chapters of *al-A`raf* and *al-Anfal* are both appropriate for their respective chapters. There is also a connection between the two chapters which we can observe when we read Allah's Words near the end of the chapter of *al-A`raf*: 'Verily, those who fear Allah, when an evil thought comes to them from Satan, they remember (Allah), and (indeed) they then see (things as they truly are)' (*al-A'raf:* 201).

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Majah and At-Tirmidhi, whose narration adds, '...and accept it from me as you accepted it from Your slave David peace be upon him'*

The Chapter of

al-Anfal

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

(Revealed in Medina)

A the beginning of the chapter of *al-Anfal* Allah says: ‘They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about (distributing) the battle gains. Say, “That is a matter for Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad), so fear Allah and make things right between you....”’ (*al-Anfal:* 1) One of Satan’s aims is to sow division between the believers through his insinuations; but as soon as they remember Allah and what He has in store for the believers, they are again able to clearly see the Truth which stands out higher than everything else, and that is belief in Allah. Such belief requires the heart to be cleansed of everything that may pollute it for it to remain sincere and pure.

Allah (God) (1) begins the chapter of *al-Anfal* by saying:

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْأَنفَالِ ۖ قُلِ ٱلْأَنفَالُ لِلَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ ۖ فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَأَصْلِحُوا۟
ذَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ ۖ وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥٓ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ١

They ask you [Prophet] about [distributing] the battle gains. Say, ‘That is a matter for God and His Messenger, so be mindful of God and make things right between you. Obey God and His Messenger if you are true believers [1] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 1)

A question requires a questioner, who in this case are the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; a questioned person, who in this case is the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and the topic of the question being asked. The topic of a question may be self-apparent, like when we ask a friend, ‘What did you eat today?’ This question limits the scope of the answer, and in turn the answer is specific and focused.

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(1) The Islamic conception of ‘Allah’ is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of ‘God’. However, the word ‘Allah’ does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (Who has no son). We prefer, however, to use ‘Allah’ rather than ‘God’ as it has a unique character; it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

With regard to the topic of the question in Allah’s saying: ‘They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about menstruation. Say, “Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from women during it. Do not approach them until they are cleansed; when they are cleansed, you may approach them as Allah has ordained”’ (*al-Baqara:* 222). The topic asked about is indicated by the answer. Clearly the Companions did not ask about the causes of menstruation, or why menstrual periods stop when a woman becomes pregnant or when she reaches menopause. Rather, the subject under question, which is clear from the response of the Lord, was ‘Is it permissible for a man to have sexual intercourse with his wife during her period?’

Orphans were the topic of another question which they posed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and again the answer specifies the topic being asked. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘they ask you concerning (the property of) orphans. Say, “The best thing is to work honestly with their property.” And if you mix your affairs with theirs, they are your brothers. And Allah knows him who means mischief (i.e. to consume their property) from him who means good (i.e. to save their property). And if Allah had wished, He could have put you into difficulties. Truly, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise’ (*al-Baqara:* 220).

Out of piety and the desire to stay away from doubtful matters, the Companions were afraid of mixing the orphans’ wealth with their own wealth, whether through the expenses of feeding them or other forms of interaction. For this reason, the answer addressed this specific topic.

Sometimes a question is posed in which the basis of the answer has to be limited because it is too general, like in the saying of the Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about crescent moons. Say, “They show the times appointed for people, and for the pilgrimage”’ (*al-Baqara:* 189).

They asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the reason why the moon begins small and then grows larger? And why it then disappears as it wanes? This is a question related to astronomy. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only responded within the limits of what would benefit them, by focusing on the practical and useful significance of their question. Thus, the answer came as: ‘They show the times appointed for people and for the pilgrimage’ (*al-Baqara:* 189).

Even now, despite being in the twentieth century, some people still deny the scientific facts which have been proven beyond any measure of doubt. Our clarification to the common people in this regard is: truly, the moon resembles a nail clipping, then it becomes larger and rounder, then it disappears gradually. In this matter, the poet says:

> The end of the light of the waning Moon, I imagined
>
> as the clipping shaved from fingernails.

If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said to them, ‘Actually, the moon appears when the earth is halfway between the sun and the moon, and after that the illuminated part of the moon begins to become larger’, their minds will not have been able to comprehend the matter. Instead, he told them the direct and practical wisdom that their minds could completely grasp. Later, our understanding of science became more refined and the study of astrophysics has provided explanations for the minute details of the celestial bodies.

There is also a type of question that was raised about a particular issue, like when Allah says: ‘They ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about the sacred month–about fighting therein. Say, “Fighting therein is great [sin], but averting [people] from the way of Allah and disbelief in Him and [preventing access to] *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* and the expulsion of its people therefrom are greater [evil] in the sight of Allah”’ (*al-Baqara:* 217). As such, we realize that the topic of the question is the ruling on fighting during the sacred months, and not specifying or defining the sacred months themselves.

Here in the chapter of *al-Anfal*, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘they ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about (distributing) the battle gains’ (*al-Anfal:* 1). The word ‘*anfal*’ (translated in the verse at hand as ‘battle gains’) is the plural of ‘*nafal*’ pronounced with a ‘*fatha*’ or short ‘a’ vowel on the first and second

Arabic letters (‘*n*’ and ‘*f*’), much like the word ‘*sabab*’ (reason) whose plural is ‘*asbab*’. The meaning intended by ‘*anfal*’ in this verse is booty which is one of Allah’s Bounties; as booty was made lawful to Prophet Muhammad as a special favour from Allah to him and his followers; a privilege that was not granted to previous nations. The word *‘nafl’* without a vowel on the second letter means something additional or extra, from which comes the term *‘salat an-nafila*’ (Supererogatory Prayer). It signifies additional prayers which are extra to the prescribed obligatory prayers. It is with this meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra devotion (*nafilah*) for you…’ (*al-Isra’:* 79).

So *‘nafila’* means something extra or beyond what is necessary. For this reason, we say that *‘nafl’* is additional worship, and it has to fulfil the condition of being the same form as the obligatory forms of worship. This is because a human does not worship His Lord according to his personal whims, but rather offers any form of worship in the exact manner that His Lord has ordained. As such, if one wants to perform additional worship, let it be of the kind and form that Allah has prescribed for him so the worshipper does not concoct rites and rituals that are not lawful. Therefore, the Lord *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra offering of your own, so that your Lord may raise you to a (highly) praised status’ (*al-Isra’:* 79).

Based on the above-mentioned definition, *‘nafl’* is an extra-obligatory act of worship. When Allah *Glorified is He* tested Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* by ordering him to sacrifice his son Isma’il (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* the test came to him not by explicit revelation but in a vision. Indeed, it was a hard trial, for the burdensome task of slaughtering our master Isma’il was not—for example—assigned to another person besides Ibrahim, and after that our master *Ibrahim* was to patiently endure his loss. No; rather, Prophet Ibrahim was commanded to perform the act of slaughtering his own son Isma’il himself. This was a grievous trial especially because Isma’il was born only when Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was already quite old. It was one of the many circumstances that must have been very painful and hard on his soul. For this reason, our Lord *Glorified is He* described Ibrahim as an *'ummah'*, or a community unto himself, which is to say that all the good righteous qualities necessary for an entire community were all gathered in him. 'And (remember) when the Lord of Ibrahim (Abraham) tried him with (certain) Commands, which he fulfilled' (*al-Baqara:* 124).

We can discern the mercifulness with which our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* discharged the prophethood duty. Visions of the prophets are true revelations. From the outset, when Ibrahim undertook to fulfil the command he received in his vision to sacrifice his son, he did not want to take his son away before informing him of the truth. Not mentioning the truth to him might, for a moment, drive his son to a thought of filial disobedience. The son might think to himself, 'What kind of a father is this who slaughters his own son?' Our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* also wanted his son to have his share in the reward for this sacrifice. He also wanted that his son, like himself, would be submissive and obedient to the Order of the Lord *Glorified is He*. For this reason he said to him: 'My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?' (*as-Saffat:* 102) Our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* thus explained the trial he was put through by this vision. How did the son answer his father? 'He said, "Father, do as you are commanded and, Allah willing, you will find me steadfast"' (*as-Saffat:* 102). This means that Isma'il *peace be upon him* surrendered the reins to Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *the Most High* resumes describing the progress of the trial that Ibrahim faced in being asked to sacrifice his own son, by saying: 'When they had both submitted to Allah, and he had laid his son down on the side of his face, We called out to him, "O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the vision". This is how We reward those who do good' (*as-Saffat:* 103-105).

After both our masters, Ibrahim and Isma'il *peace be upon them* accepted and resigned themselves to Allah's Will, and they obediently started to fulfil Allah's Order, Allah, in His Mercy, lifted His Order. Allah *Glorified is He* describes this trial and the sacrificial ram that He sent to be sacrificed instead of Isma'il, saying: 'It was a test to prove (their true characters)–We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice' (*as-Saffat:* 106-107).

This event teaches us Muslims that, when faced with some predestination from Allah, we should not show despair, anxiety, and anger or discontent; in doing so we only protract the duration of the sentence. Instead, we should submit ourselves to Allah's Decree. Only then will it be lifted; for the sentence is not lifted until one accepts it. Ransoming the life of Isma'il was not the only reward that Ibrahim received for his steadfastness during this trial; in addition, our Lord gave him the good tidings of more gifts. He says: 'And We gave him the glad tidings of Ishaq (Isaac), a Prophet from the righteous' (*as-Saffat:* 112).

In other words, Allah did not bless him with just any second child, for He gave him a child who would be a righteous Prophet. Even more abundance came in another Divine Gift to our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* as Allah further says: 'And We bestowed upon him Ishaq (Isaac) and, as an additional gift, Ya`qub (Jacob), and made each of them righteous' (*al-Anbiya':* 72).

This manifests the Bounteous Gifts of the Lord *the Most High* to our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him*. Not only did Allah grant Ibrahim *peace be upon him* a child who preserved his father's name, but one who also preserved the legacy of the Islamic faith. All this is a *'nafila*' (extra giving) from Allah, or, in plain words, generous gifts surpassing the expected reward and a great bounty to the father of all prophets.

So *'an-nafl'* is the additional excess beyond the basic standard. An example of this is found in the special favours that Allah conferred on His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger of Allah stated, 'I have been given five things that were not given to any of the prophets before me: I have been granted victory by fear (being cast into the hearts of my enemies) for a distance of one month's travel; the earth has been made a place of prostration and a means of purification for me, so when the time of prayer comes for any person among my followers, let him pray; battle booty has been made lawful for me, when it was not lawful for anyone before me; I have been granted the right of intercession; and a prophet was sent only to his own people, but I have been sent to all mankind.'(1)

Thus, Allah's Decision to make booty lawful in Islam is something above and beyond the original standard because taking booty was not permissible to any of the prophets before our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Jabir Allah be pleased with him; it was also recorded by As-Siuyuti in (Jami' Al-ahadith), vol. 1, p. 635.*

There is '*nafal*' (excess) and there is '*ghanim*' (booty gained by fighting), and there is '*fai'*' (booty gained without fighting) and *'qabad'* (the yet-undivided booty).

We shall briefly explain the meaning of each of them. We will briefly describe each of these words. *Al-Ghanimah* is what Muslims take from defeated enemies and is divided amongst themselves according to specific shares- The foot soldier takes one share and the horseman takes two shares. But this is only by way of example, for the division of spoils of war is according to the Laws of Allah *Glorified is He*. As for *an-nafal* and *an-nafl,* (battle gains), an explanation has already been previously given. *Al-Fai'* is anything that becomes the property of Muslims by any means other than war or subjugation. *Al-Qabd* means whatever was captured, i.e. that loot and booty which is gathered before being divided.

But if the commander told the fighters, as Prophet Muhammad did, 'Whoever kills a disbeliever gets his spoils of war', in order to embolden them to enter the battle, then that would be an addition to the portion of that fighter in the loot.

The leader might send out a brigade; and to embolden them to dive headfirst into difficult situations, he might say to the members of that brigade, 'To you is half of what you take in loot, or a fourth, or a fifth'. This means that it is their right to take the portion which their leader has allotted to them as an added bonus, and then they would divide the remaining loot after that. When the fighters take the treasure, gear, equipment, and money from prisoners of war, these are all considered *ghana'im* (spoils of war), but when they are all gathered together before the commander, its name becomes *Al-Qabd* which was previously explained.

On the day of the battle of Badr an incident occurred as narrated by the noble Companion Saʿd ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* who related that he said to Prophet Muhammad, 'O Messenger of Allah, today Allah has made me feel satisfied and removed the rage from my heart regarding the idolaters, so grant me this sword'. Prophet Muhammad said, 'This sword is not for you, nor for me; put it down'. Saʿd ibn Malik continued, 'So I put it down, and then went away. I thought he was trying to give this sword to someone who had not been tested as I had been tested. But suddenly Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called to me from behind me. I asked, "Has Allah sent a revelation about me?" Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, "You were asking me for the sword and I said it was not mine. But verily it has now been given to me as a gift, so now it is yours"'. At that time the Prophet said that Allah has revealed this verse: 'They ask you [Prophet] about [distributing] the battle gains. Say, "That is a matter for Allah and His Messenger"' (*al-Anfal:* 1). This means that it was not for the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to determine the matter of the sword until the Ruling of Allah *Glorified is He* was revealed. We all know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to the battle of Badr without the intention to fight; rather, the foray was intended to intercept the caravan carrying goods for the Quraysh coming from the Levant which had no more than forty guards. Accordingly, the Muslims set out with only three hundred and thirteen men without their battle gear or equipment and no more than two mounts because they did not set out to engage in battle; they had set out for the caravan, intending to gain something for themselves in return for what had been plundered from them in Mecca. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them that Abu-Sufyan (the leader of the caravan) had taken the seaside road, i.e. he had taken a path far from the Muslims and had not come in the direction of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those with him. Meanwhile, Quraysh had called all their men to war to protect the caravan, and the question became whether the believers should withdraw without a fight, or face the amassing army which numbered a thousand men, geared and equipped for war. In light of the enemy's numbers, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to encourage the younger men to face the enemy, and that is why he said to them, 'Whoever kills a disbeliever gets his spoils', i.e. he set aside for them an added bonus to their portion in the spoils of the battle. When the elders from among the Companions and older men learned of this, they said, 'O Prophet Muhammad, they killed and were killed, but we stood by the banners. They would have sought our protection if a defeat had befallen them, and for this reason we must all take our share equally'. Clamour and discord broke out, but Allah *Glorified is He* has responded to this discord with the revelation of His saying: 'they ask you (O Prophet Muhammad) about [distributing] the battle gains. Say, “that is a matter for Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad), so fear Allah”’ (*al-Anfal:* 1).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has explained for them that the distribution of all the spoils of war among the people was the right of Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and as a result they have to be wary of transgressing against the Command of Allah *Glorified is He* in this matter, and keep a protective barrier between themselves and His Anger. Therefore, they must not quarrel or bicker among yourselves.

If a little quarrel had broken out between the two sides, the youths and the older men, the matter should be made right between them. When you hear: 'Make things right between you’, you might ask, what does *bayn* (between) mean here? The answer is that it is anything between two things. If you lined people up sitting side by side, that which is between each person is called the *bayn.* That which lies between us could be friendship or it could be animosity. That which is between people has a form and shape; if the form of what is between you has a bit of animosity, adjust and repair the cause of this animosity until there is no longer any bitterness or enmity among you.

After this Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and His Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’ (*al-Anfal:* 1). We have said that the command to obey means being submissive to Allah *Glorified is He* and obedience is not only restricted to the commands but also to the prohibitions, for a command is a demand to do something, and a prohibition is a demand not to do something, each of which is a kind of order. Consequently, whenever Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to obey Him and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you should understand this saying in light of what we have learned before, i.e. that the issue of obedience takes three forms in the Quran. In the first form, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad)’ (*al-Anfal:* 1). Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions two people to be obeyed: He and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but He mentions the command to obey only one time. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad)’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 92). In this form, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the two people to be obeyed and repeats the command to obey. In a third verse, He *Glorified is He* commands us to obey the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We obey Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding the commands issued by Allah because in His Message there are affairs mentioned by Him and also mentioned by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and furthermore the *Sunnah* is in unison with the Quran regarding them. Further, there are some commandments that were revealed as general principles which necessitate explanations and specifications. One such example is the prayer about which Allah says: ‘Establish regular prayers; for such prayers are a prescribed obligation for the believers at appointed times’ (*an-Nisa’:* 103).

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed prayer as a general principle and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this principle and how to perform it. It consists of five prayers, two required units of prayer in the *Fajr* (Dawn Prayer), four for *Zhuhr* (Noon Prayer), four for ‘*Asr* (Afternoon Prayer), three for *Maghrib* (Sunset Prayer), and four for *'Isha'* (Early-Night Prayer). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also specified the prayers in which we recite *al-Fatiha*–the Opening chapter of the Quran–and some verses from the Quran aloud, and that in which we do not recite aloud.

Hence, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah’, that means to submit to Him by following the rulings in general; and when He says: ‘Obey the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’, this means to follow the Prophet’s explanation of the rulings. And when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Obey Allah and the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’, this means that Allah *Glorified is He* has issued the command, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has reported it, and the purpose of both is one and the same. However, if there is no Decree from Allah *Glorified is He* but the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said something, we should obey him as Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to obey Prophet Muhammad and Allah has vested authority in him with His Command: ‘So [Muslims] take whatever the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) gives you and refrain from anything he withholds from you’ (*al-Hashr:* 7). That is to say every command from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the result of the established authority which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon him.

In the verse under discussion, Allah says: ‘So fear Allah and make things right between you. Obey Allah and His Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)’ (*al-Anfal:* 1). This means that if you are true believers, then fear Allah *Glorified is He* out of piety, and follow His Commands and the commands of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the meaning of faith is that the heart should be so firmly convinced of an issue that it does not come up for discussion again such as the conviction that the universe has but One God, and He has a Message conveyed by a Messenger (Muhammad) who has proven his prophethood with a miracle from Allah *Glorified is He*. This faith and the Message call upon you to be pious and to fear Allah in amending discord and enjoin you to obey Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad in every matter. Those matters which are before you now, require obedience from you, as they are very sensitive points.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* goes on to clarify who the believers are. He says:

إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ ٱللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُهُۥ زَادَتْهُمْ
إِيمَٰنًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٢﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَٰهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord [2] who keep up the prayer and give to others out of what We provide for them [3] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 2-3)

These two noble verses list five attributes with regards to the belief, behaviour and bodily actions of a believer, and with these the meaning of the word ‘believers’ is defined. The first attribute is that if Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned, their hearts tremble with awe. The second of the attributes is that if the verses of Allah are recited to them, their faith increases. The third attribute is that they put their trust in their Lord. The fourth is that they perform the prayer. And the fifth attribute is that they give in charity from what Allah *Glorified is He* has provided them.

Consequently, the first attribute of believers is that if Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned, their hearts tremble with awe. Here, trembling means fear and panic which causes a person to shake a little and results in some disturbance in his/her heart. From the poets who tried to provide an image for this sensation, we find one of them who said:

> The heart, when it is said that Layla of 'Amir
>
> Is departing in the morning or evening, is like
>
> a sand grouse fooled by a net
>
> Which it pulls at and its wing is stuck.

The poet pictures the state of his heart when he hears the news of his beloved's departure as if he has become a pigeon trying to free itself from a net or a snare into which it fell. It struggles at the net trying to escape, flustered at this predicament. This is the condition of the poet's heart at the moment of separation from his beloved one.

But, if the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* prompts believers' hearts to tremble, does that not contradict another saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Truly, in the Remembrance of Allah does hearts find satisfaction?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28) In reality, there is no contradiction between the two verses because invoking the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* happens in varying circumstances. Clearly, if the man harms himself by his own excesses, he trembles when he mentions the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* whose Commands he has broken. But if the man is mindful of the rights of Allah *Glorified is He* as best as he can in all his dealings, then certainly his heart will find peace when Allah's Name is mentioned.

This fear or trembling arises from the remembrance of the exaltedness and supremacy of Allah's Attributes of Majesty, and the contentment of a restful heart results from being reminded of the compassion and kindness of Allah's Attributes of Beauty. One verse contains both of these when Allah says: 'Allah has revealed the most beautiful Message, a book, consistent with itself and repeating (its teachings on various aspects). The skins of those who fear their Lord shiver from it. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 23).

The skin shivers out of dread and fear of Allah *Glorified is He* and then softens after being reassured and given hope by the Gentle Benefactor because our Lord says: 'Tell my slaves that I am indeed the Oft-Forgiving, the Dispenser of mercy' (*al-Hijr:* 49). Thus, let none say that there is a contradiction between these two statements as both the trembling of a fearful heart and the contentment of a restful heart spring from invoking Allah's Name when man is in different situations. And if a man trembles in fear at the mention of Allah's Name, he will change and start doing righteous deeds, and thereby find restfulness and contentment, according to Allah's saying: 'Good deeds remove evil deeds' (*Hud:* 114).

Does this means that faith increases and decreases? Scholars have differed on this matter. When we look to what Allah *Glorified is He* has said, we find that it affirms that faith increases, and whenever you ask, 'What is Belief?' and 'What is Islam?', etc., you will find the answer in Prophet Muhammad's answer to the questioner in the following Hadith narrated by the venerable Companion Abu Hurayrah *Allah be pleased with him* wherein he said, 'One day, while Prophet Muhammad was sitting with the people, a man came to him walking and he said, "O Allah's Messenger, what is Belief?"' Prophet Muhammad said, "Belief is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the meeting with Him, and to believe in the Resurrection". The man asked, "O Allah's Messenger, what is Islam?" Prophet Muhammad replied, "Islam is to worship Allah and not worship anything besides Him, to offer prayers perfectly, to pay the (compulsory) charity i.e. *zakat* and to fast the month of *Ramadan*". The man again asked, "O Allah's Messenger, what is *Ihsan* (i.e. perfection or benevolence)?" Prophet Muhammad said, *"Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, then (take it for granted that) Allah sees you". The man further asked, "O Allah's Messenger, when will the Hour be established?" Prophet Muhammad replied, "The one who is asked about it does not know more than the questioner, but I will describe to you its portents. When the female slave gives birth to her mistress that will be one of its portents; when the bare-footed naked people become the chiefs of the people that will be one of its portents, The Hour is one of five things which nobody knows except Allah. Allah says, 'Verily, the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone). He sends down the rain, and knows that which is in the wombs' (*Luqman:* 34). Then the man left. Prophet Muhammad said, "Call him back to me." They went to call him back but could not find him. Prophet Muhammad said, “That was Gabriel who came to teach the people their religion.”(1)

When Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came asking questions to teach some of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Prophet Muhammad said to him that *al-'iman* (Belief) is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment. A different narration also lists belief in the Divine Decree and both the good and evil that may be fated for us.

All of these are unseen matters. Belief does not concern matters that we can physically sense. For example, one does not say, 'I believe that I am moving about on the ground’ because this is a matter of the senses. Belief is only in intangible and unseen matters, and the first of these matters is to believe in one God Whom sight cannot grasp and Who is unseen, and to believe in His Angels who are also unseen and whose existence we accept as true because Allah *Glorified is He* has told us of their existence. We should also believe in the Messengers of Allah and the Books revealed to them. It is true that a Book is something physical and the Messenger also has a physical presence, but one was not able to see the Divine Revelation when the Book was being sent down to the Messenger, and hence it is a matter of the unseen. Similarly, the belief in the Resurrection Day, the Divine Decree, and Fate whose wisdom is hidden from us– all of these are thus unseen matters.

This is the highest level of Belief. But there is another kind of Belief as well. We know that Divine Laws did not come all at once, but rather came in stages. The first Command that was revealed states that we must believe that the Law is from Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, what increases or decreases with regards to Belief is our faith concerning what Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to do, and that these commandments are issued by Him. Whenever a verse was revealed with a new law, Belief of the faithful increased. For example, when the command to pray was revealed, they believed in its performance, complied and carried it out. Next was the order to fast, and they submitted to it. Next came the order to pay *zakat* (charity), and it was obeyed and carried out. Naturally, there is a difference between believing in a thing and doing it.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

As such, believing is one thing and action is another; for Islam involves outward compliance to Allah's Message. And applying everything which Islam lays down is a way of continually increasing one's Belief because we believe that anything that is in the Message is from Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, what increases is the responsibilities that come from these commandments and the level of submission to them. As an example of that, we all know the saying of Allah: 'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah for those who are able to undertake it' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

But there are people who cling to a literal understanding of the next part of Allah's saying: 'those who disbelieve [should know that] Allah has no need of any [of His creatures]' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

Those who cling to a literal understanding of this saying of Allah *Glorified is He* did not ask themselves, 'How did someone disbelieve? Did someone disbelieve because he did not perform the pilgrimage?' No, surely, disbelief in this issue is nothing other than to deny that the pilgrimage is one of the pillars of Islam. Consequently, what is demanded of us is to faithfully accept the performance of the pilgrimage as one of the pillars of Islam according to one's ability to undertake it. Thus, if the person undertook it, he obeys the command, and if he did not undertake it, this should be due only to his inability to do it.

And lastly Allah *Glorified is He* ends the noble verse before us from the chapter of *al-Anfal* saying: 'in their Lord [the believers] put their trust'. Usually, the prepositional phrase comes towards the end of a sentence, whereas here it comes first. In this way, the sentence style indicates both restriction and limitation, like the idiom, 'For Zayd is the money' (meaning, 'The money is for Zayd', but with the prepositional phrase 'for Zayd' coming first) which is to say that the money belongs to Zayd and no one else has a right to it. Similarly, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'and in their Lord [the believers] put their trust' means that they do not put their trust in anyone else, and they limit whom they trust to Allah *Glorified is He*. By *at-tawakkul* (putting trust in someone) we mean to believe that you have a trustee who takes care of your most essential affairs for you, as demonstrated by the fact that when there is something you are incapable of, you say, 'I trusted so-and-so to do it for me successfully'; and because you chose who you trust, and he is well-suited to carry out that task, you are able to announce with self-assurance that you have trusted him to do so-and-so.

Thus, the meaning of putting trust in Allah is that they entrust their affairs to the One Who they can trust their well-being with, and that one is Allah the fully Capable, the Most Great Who has created the universe, and Who has created the means whereby results will be achieved. Beyond that, He has left the root causes of some things unapparent except that we always note that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who causes all things. For this reason, do not despair that something will not come to pass simply because you do not have the means to make it happen. Instead, say, ‘This is with regards to the means, but as for me, I have a Lord Who created the means, and He is the Fully Capable Who controls all the means’. In our daily lives, we notice that people confuse the work of the limbs with that of the heart. Someone might think that he has trusted in Allah and therefore does not make use of any means; instead he resorts to laziness and idleness. He says, ‘I am trusting in Allah’. To such a person we say that this is considered indifference and not trusting in Allah because trusting in Allah is not the work of the limbs, but of the heart.

The believer who accepts and understands Allah’s Message will find the means which he should concern himself with, and Allah is the One Who creates absolutely all of the means. Faith stresses that the body and limbs perform work, and the heart trusts in Allah. Consequently, the limbs must plough the earth, choose good seed, sow them in the earth, irrigate the land, and care for them; all of these are means. Lastly, do not depend on the means alone, but rather say, ‘Above all means, there is the One Who creates absolutely all of the means’; it is possible that the crop will prosper and grow only for an outbreak of rain or heat to strike and ruin it in an instant.

And whoever moves, trusting in Allah *Glorified is He* the work of the heart to the work of the limbs, we say to him, ‘You have become indifferent and have shifted the work of the heart onto the limbs’. Whoever does this deludes himself and deceives mankind because he has neglected making use of the means and has claimed that he is trusting in Allah *Glorified is He*. If anyone like this truly trusted in Allah *Glorified is He* he will have concerned himself with the means. I always tell whoever claims to trust in Allah while he is lazy, ‘Why do you not let the food come on its own to your mouth? Why do you stretch your hand out to it?' Whoever mistakes laziness for trusting in Allah lies concerning his claim of trusting in Allah, for no one waits for a piece of meat to jump from a plate of food into his mouth, for instance; rather, he picks it up with his hand, chews it with his teeth and swallows it after chewing. However, if he truly believed that trusting in Allah *Glorified is He* meant that his limbs do not do any work, he will not do any of these actions. Instead, he falsely trusts in Allah concerning anything that tires him; that is, he makes his limbs work with regards to what pleases him but does not use them for matters which weary him. Allah's saying: 'And in their Lord [the believers] put [all] their trust' means that they believe that the means are part of Allah's Creation. And when the believer concerns himself with the means, he shows his belief when he takes refuge with Allah and depends on Him. But if the means were ever beyond him, he knows that he has a Lord who sustains him. For this reason, the name 'Lord' was used in the verse. *Ar-Rabb* (The Lord) is the One Who creates out of nothing and Who furnishes aid out of nothing, and so long as it is He Who has aided you and created you out of nothing, is it conceivable that He will do you wrong? Of course, He will not, but it is your responsibility to understand that He has created limbs for you; you must use them for the purposes for which He has created them.

The subsequent verse goes on to clarify that the limbs' work is to carry out both the fourth and fifth attributes of a believer: 'Who establish the prayer and spend from what Allah has provided them' (*al-Anfal:* 3). In prayer, assuming the standing position, the sitting position, reciting and saying '*Subhanallah'* (Glorified is Allah) and '*Allahu Akbar'* (Allah is the Greatest) are all the work of the limbs and body. Likewise, *zakat* (compulsory charity) is a kind of work resulting from previous effort. In order to give it, you must exert effort and concern yourself with the means to produce what is needed to support yourself and those close to you — your wife, your children, and then your relatives — and after that *zakat* is deducted from the remaining money. Naturally, this does not pertain to the agricultural *zakat* about which Allah says: 'But render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered' (*al-An'am:* 141).

We always find prayer and *zakat* coupled together. Every verse you can find which mentions prayer also makes mention of *zakat*. This is because prayer entails leaving behind your worldly concerns in which you toil by taking lowly means, going to Allah *Glorified is He* and standing before Him, i.e. you set aside a portion of the time that you will otherwise have spent in the activities of your daily life to pause before your Lord, the Creator of all means.

Meanwhile, *zakat* entails setting aside a portion of your money and that is why we say that by performing prayer you give *zakat* and even more. Whatever extra remains to you after you have met the basic needs and your money has reached a certain amount, 2.5% of that is the amount subject to *zakat*. But with prayer you sacrifice some of the time that you will otherwise have spent in work which serves as the source of your money; thus prayer is *zakat* and more. In *zakat*, you relinquish some money, but in prayer you give up some of your time, and with time you work and earn your wages, which are the means to pay *zakat*.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse saying that the believers spend from what He has provided them. And as the scholars mention, we know that *ar-rizq* (provision) is everything useful for the man. Even what the robber steals and gains by theft is considered to be provision for him, but it is an unsanctioned gain; that is, if he is caught, he will be punished in this world, and surely he will not escape the punishment of Allah, the Just Judge of this world and the next. Naturally, the provision of the robber is different from lawful gains such as those from lawful work, and the true believer is he who spends from these lawful gains either on the necessities of his life or in service to his religious community.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ حَقّٗاۚ لَّهُمۡ دَرَجَٰتٌ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡ وَمَغۡفِرَةٞ وَرِزۡقٞ كَرِيمٞ ٤

Those are the ones who truly believe. They have high standing with their Lord, forgiveness, and generous provision [4] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 4)

The pronoun 'those' refers to those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has blessed with the five attributes of faith that He mentions previously: they are whose hearts tremble at the mention of Allah whose faith is increased when they hear His Verses, who put their trust in Him, establish Prayer and give *zakat*: ‘Those are the ones who are true believers’ (*al-Anfal:* 4).

And verily, we know that Truth is constant; it does not change or let changes sweep it away. All people are subordinate to it for it is tied to the welfare and well-being of their lives. If falsehood tried to shake Truth, Truth is solid and unmoving because Truth is strong and powerful. Let us recite the saying of Allah: ‘He [Allah] sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries a growing layer of froth on its surface. Furthermore, from that (metal ore) which they heat in the fire to make ornaments and tools, there is a froth likewise. In this way Allah illustrates (by parables) Truth and falsehood–the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind. This is how Allah sets forth parables’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). When the rain comes down from the sky, every valley draws from the rainwater according to the measure of its breadth and depth. Floating above the flood almost as if it were a capricious wind, you see the scum and dross caused by the presence of impurities like bits of straw and other things. This is a parable for what we see in our own lives, for we find that the earth, mankind, and all creatures benefit from water, but they do not benefit from the scum or dross. Then, in the very same verse Allah *Glorified is He* moves from the parable about water, to the parable of fire: ‘Furthermore, from that (metal ore) which they heat in the fire to make ornaments and tools, there is froth likewise’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17).

When you watch a piece of metal being melted in fire and transformed into liquid, you see sparks of impurities fly from it, and then they float on the surface of the molten metal; this is what is called ‘the dross of the metal’. Eliminating this dross is done to leave the pure metal for us to use it to make swords, daggers or other similar tools. This same process occurs with gold when the goldsmith melts it to remove any impurities and reshape it into an ornament or jewellery.

The scum in water and the dross in metal and gold are gathered to the sides until the water, and similarly the iron and gold, remain pure. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘In this way does Allah set forth the parable of Truth and falsehood’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). This is to say that Truth remains pure and unchanged, while falsehood rises just to be gathered to the sides for it to be removed, without any benefit.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the supremacy of His Word in another verse, saying: ‘And [Allah] brought low the word of those who disbelieved whereas His Words remain supreme’ (*at-Tawba:* 40). We note that Allah *Glorified is He* has brought low the word of the disbelievers, but His Word possesses an unchanging supremacy.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that the believers who are characterized by these five attributes are believers of true faith. He says: ‘Those are the ones who are true believers’ (*al-Anfal:* 4). This means that there are believers who are not of a high degree of faith, and that there are different ranks and levels of faith. Moreover, the rank and reward correspond to the extent to which one possesses the five attributes of a true believer.

We can see examples of people of this calibre in someone who is showered with kindness from people once he bestows his friendship on them, or someone who is not a scholar but finds some knowledge from scholars whom he befriends, or the weak person who forms a friendship with a strong person who comes to his aid, or the poor person who gives his friendship to a rich person who then gives him some of his money, and the irrational person takes a measure of sensibility from among the rational people whom he befriends.

Thus, the pious and people close to Allah are given profuse blessings from the Lord, and it is they whom Allah *Glorified is He* has singled out with gifts, for whosoever has these attributes and is a true believer has a rank with His Lord equal to the extent of his Truth and purity. Indeed, we know that walking in the path of Truth has much to offer. Let us provide an example of this. Suppose there is someone who prays the five prayers in their prescribed times which is a general requirement. If he performs the *Qiyam Al-Layl* prayers (Supererogatory Night Prayers), or keeps attending Congregational Prayers, and adheres to the path of Allah, this person will gain a measure of purity that he did not have before. He will find compassion and clarity in his heart, and the concerns of his life will proceed smoothly and with ease.

Such a blessed person could be someone who–by way of example–on his way out of the house is asked by his wife, 'What should we make for dinner today?' and he answers, ‘Let us finish off what we have left over from yesterday.’ But when he returns, he might be surprised to learn that his brother has come into town from the countryside and brought a gift of a duck, some cream, and a cake. His wife asks him, 'Did you know that your brother was coming?' and he says, ‘No, I did not know he was coming.’

This story is merely an example. But the blessings and gifts, both spiritual and material, to those who are pure are much greater than this. Whoever keeps up worship and increases his worship, and does all this correctly, will be increasingly blessed by Allah *Glorified is He* because He never tires of giving the people who are pure. Whoever makes an effort to worship like this and increases his worship, he will increasingly find himself surrounded by Allah's Blessings.

The following example is one I always offer to illustrate this point, but Allah is above all possible comparison for He is not similar to anything. Let us suppose that a person wanted to travel from Cairo to Alexandria and asked another for advice. That other person then says, ‘If you went along route (A), you will find a pleasant rest stop, whereas along route (B), you will find no such thing’. The traveller heeds the advice of the person guiding him and finds him to be truthful; hence, from then on, he relies on that person’s opinion. In ways like this, people who are pure receive similar care and blessings from Allah according to the extent of their purity. Being surrounded by the radiance on Allah’s Care is what encourages people to go to great lengths in worship and piety. There are some who call devout ascetics lunatics, but in reality what the people who call them this actually see (when the ascetics worship a lot) is a high status and sublime rank, which is what attracts the ascetic to worship so much. From another vantage point the ascetic looks at those who are caught up in earthly wants, and he prays for them, considering them, not himself, to be the unfortunate and the poor ones. I tell whoever meets someone like this, ‘Those ascetics are of no concern to you, therefore leave them alone and do not interfere with them as long as they do not ask anything of you, for they have their own status and rank assigned to them from Allah *Glorified is He*’.

Rankings among people are like promotions to be striven after, so what do we think of the rankings that come from Allah *Glorified is He*? As long as Allah *Glorified is He* has promised exalted ranks for them, they are sure to be forgiven and they will be cleansed by such forgiveness. The assignment of ranks from

Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned in the verse before forgiveness because He has created all of creation and knows that people are subject to change. He knows that there are some people who transgress against themselves through extravagance. They try to do good deeds only because they believe that the good deeds take away their sins and misdeeds. Allah *Glorified is He* has taught us that the outlining features of Islam are there because of the impious and those who wrong themselves because one finds that those who are not impious and do no wrong to themselves, obey Allah *Glorified is He* naturally and calmly, without anything burdening them. As for those who do evil, these misdeeds disrupt their nightly solace. The impious person, at the moment of his erroneous extravagances, thinks that he has slipped something past the Plan of Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* tells him in clear terms, 'Do not dare believe that there exists anyone who can deceive Allah *Glorified is He*. You will exert much effort when repenting, yearning to serve Allah's Plan'. And at the moment they become aware and repent, we find the impious person compelled to do good deeds, thereby confirming the saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Verily, Allah upholds His religion through the impious'.(1)

The impious person feels compelled to do good works in order to erase his misdeeds because his sinful excesses seem to take on bodily form before him, showing him the evil of his life. As for those who do not err, we find them with peace in their hearts, contentment in their souls and without needing anything to force them to avoid straying.

Those believers will have a generous provision, but can this provision be described only as something which is given by a generous person? The answer is no, because generosity transcends the originally generous person until the provision itself is described as generous, as if the provision itself loves its owner. For when Allah *Glorified is He* bestows a blessing upon someone, and he uses it to obey Allah, the blessing itself feels overjoyed in going to this person, knowing that he will use it in pious works and in whatever pleases Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani*

It behoves you to know that Provision from Allah *Glorified is He* will never miss us, for no one knows how to find the provision which Allah *Glorified is He* has destined for him, but the provision knows how to find the person it is meant for and searches for him everywhere until it finds him. In this way we understand the fact that generosity is attributed to the provision itself, and for this reason it can be said that the provision itself is generous.

All of these issues came as a result of the argument over the spoils of war. Allah *Glorified is He* has laid out the legal ruling, making it clear that the distribution of the spoils is the right of Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and none can rightfully disagree with Allah *Glorified is He* after He has spoken. This incident with the spoils of war occurred while they were heading out for battle. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first wanted to set out, there was a party of Muslims who were at first averse to the idea, but later accepted it; however, their attitude differed with regards to the spoils of war and some of them demanded more than they deserved. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to these Muslims saying:

كَمَآ أَخۡرَجَكَ رَبُّكَ مِنۢ بَيۡتِكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ لَكَٰرِهُونَ ﴿٥﴾

For it was your Lord who made you [Prophet] venture from your home for a true purpose — though a group of the believers disliked it [5] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 5)

Here, the word '*Kama*' (Just as) refers to a comparison of two situations: they accepted Allah's apportioning of the spoils of war after they had first refused it, just as they previously had agreed to meet up with the departing party of war after their initial reluctance to do so. Instead, they set out, engaged the enemy in battle, and were victorious. Then they quarrelled over the spoils of victory and finally accepted the division of the spoils laid down by Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Is the mention of their aversion to going to war done to impugn this group of people? No, rather, this story presents a very human perspective: whoever wants to plunge into battle must be seized with the belief that he will emerge victorious, otherwise he will consider his venturing out to fight as being recklessness. At the time the Muslims were few in number and unequipped, having no more than two horses with them. They set out to overtake the caravan and take possession of its goods, not to face a full army. As such, the reluctance of some to engage in battle was not the result of refusing Allah's Orders or the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was only that they weighed the entire matter out by human standards and did not find the expected balance of powers. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to show them that if they had gone and just gained victory over the caravan, then it will have been said of them that they were merely a band of highway robbers who swooped down on the caravan and plundered it. Remember that there were no more than forty men with the caravan, and the Muslims were more than three hundred; clearly, it stands to reason that they will be the victors. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to aid them against the army that the disbelievers of Mecca had dispatched. This army was massive in number and included both valorous and clever members of Quraysh. But Allah's Desire to wipe out those who supported falsehood came to pass.

Going out from the home in the verse signifies Prophet Muhammad's going out from Medina to confront the disbelievers. Furthermore, the reluctance of this party of believers did not mean they fell out of the bounds of Belief. This is because the meaning of ‘a party’ is merely one group that differs from another group within a larger entity all held together with a common bond. An army, for instance, consists of many divisions within the same army. These parties, which are the subject of discussion here, are the ones which were reluctant to go out to battle, although they are also believers. We know that the reluctance to fight is a normal condition for the people because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Fighting is prescribed for the believers, even though it is hateful to you’ (*al-Baqara:* 216).

After that, in the next verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal*, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يُجَٰدِلُونَكَ فِى ٱلۡحَقِّ بَعۡدَ مَا تَبَيَّنَ كَأَنَّمَا يُسَاقُونَ إِلَى ٱلۡمَوۡتِ وَهُمۡ يَنظُرُونَ ٦

and argued with you about the truth after it had been made clear, as if they were being driven towards a death they could see with their own eyes [6] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 6)

Arguing with Prophet Muhammad refers to the argument about going out to confront the army even after the true promise from Allah *Glorified is He* had become clear to them. This promise was that one of two enemy hosts will be theirs, either the caravan or the massive army that Quraysh had amassed to confront them. Now, so long as Allah *Glorified is He* had promised you one of the two, why did you not choose the stronger of the two?! Why did you want the promise to be for the weaker one? Indeed, He has guaranteed that one of the two will be yours, and hence reason and logic would assert that as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has promised us one of the two, we should pursue whichever is most beneficial to Islam and the Truth in whose cause we struggle. Logic and reason also have it that we pursue the target which possesses power and formidable might because while it may be true that victory will be easily assured against the caravan, afterwards that victory will be no more than a trifling victory spoken of in idle prattle. Indeed, it will be merely the victory of highway robbers, not of a people fighting in the cause of Belief and Religion. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* afterwards says: ‘You wanted the unarmed group to be yours, but it was Allah’s Will to establish the Truth according to His Word and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers’ (*al-Anfal:* 7).

Therefore, reason presumes that as long as Allah *Glorified is He* promises Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* one of the two enemy parties, the first being a caravan and the other an army, reason dictates that the believers will be keen on pursuing the stronger of the two, for victory over the army is nobler than victory over the caravan.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that they argued with Prophet Muhammad about the Truth after it had been made clear, as if they were being driven towards a death they could see with their own eyes.

Note that there is the act of ‘driving’ people and there is ‘leading’. Leading means that you are at the forefront to guide people along the path, and driving people is done from the rear in order to spur those in front of you onward for them to complete the journey in a shorter amount of time; thus, instead of traversing a given distance in an hour — for example — it is traversed in half an hour. Consequently, Allah's saying that they were as if they were being driven towards death means that they did not march of their own volition, rather, they were forced while seeing the ugly spectre of death, as they thought that facing a thousand young Qurayshi warriors was extremely difficult for them. A battle of three hundred against a thousand is no trifling matter; this means that each Muslim has to face three equipped and geared men. Therefore, the picture that presented itself to them seemed grave, but in the course of adopting this view they did not realize that they had a Lord Who will make them victorious over all those gathered against them.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ يَعِدُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ إِحْدَى ٱلطَّآئِفَتَيْنِ أَنَّهَا لَكُمْ وَتَوَدُّونَ أَنَّ غَيْرَ ذَاتِ ٱلشَّوْكَةِ
تَكُونُ لَكُمْ وَيُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ أَن يُحِقَّ ٱلْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَٰتِهِۦ وَيَقْطَعَ دَابِرَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٧﴾

Remember how God promised you [believers] that one of the two enemy groups would fall to you: you wanted the unarmed group to be yours, but it was God's will to establish the truth according to His Word and to finish off the disbelievers [7] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 7)

Whoever is promised something from Allah *Glorified is He* has to accept what is promised by Him as a truthful promise. The promises of mankind are questionable because man is changeable. For instance, you might have promised something to someone and tried to fulfil your promise but were unable to, or you might have been able to fulfil your promise when you made it but then lost the power to do so, or you might have simply changed your mind. As such, promises from human peers are not certain, but with respect to the fully Capable, the Powerful, before whom no barriers stand to prevent the realization of what He desires, His promise is truthful and must be accepted as truth.

The verse means that if you preferred to have the enemy party which guards the caravan and which lacks power, or not *ash-shawkah…*: and *ash-shawkah* can also mean a thorn which is something with a very sharp point that easily pierces through things. It is slim and tapered at the tip and then increases in width towards its bottom until its thickness fits its base. This way it can pierce a wider area. As for saying the party of *Ash-Shawkah*, this implies that they possess enough strength to pierce through to their desired goals, and will not be denied their objective. For this reason we have the phrase, *shaki al-silah* (armed to the teeth). That is, the verse means, to those who might wish to avoid confronting the army of the disbelievers in battle, Allah *Glorified is He* says to them that He has willed to establish the Truth according to His Word and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers. He has desired to make Islam victorious by putting a weak meagre unequipped force against a powerful army in order for them to know that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who truly supported them. Thus, He has established the Truth with His Words, that is, His promise. And there was also the promise from Allah: ‘And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit both the east and the west of the land wherein We have bestowed blessings’ (*al-A’raf:* 137).

Likewise, the promise of Allah to cut off the roots of the disbelievers was fulfilled. ‘The roots’ and remainder mean what is left behind, and therefore, to say, ‘I cut off the roots of something’, is to say I made it so that not a trace of that thing was left.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِيُحِقَّ ٱلْحَقَّ وَيُبْطِلَ ٱلْبَٰطِلَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ٨

To prove the Truth to be true, and the false to be
false, much as the guilty might dislike it [8]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 8)

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* previously says that He wanted to '…establish the Truth…' (*al-Anfal:* 7), and here He says again: 'To prove the Truth to be true…' (*al-Anfal:* 8). The first ‘Truth’ refers to the victory of the feeble few over the mighty multitude. That is the first Truth which Allah *Glorified is He* has promised by His Words, that is, to establish the Path of Islam even if it is hateful to those who are lost in sin.

And after that that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَٱسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ أَنِّى مُمِدُّكُم بِأَلْفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ مُرْدِفِينَ ٩

When you begged your Lord for help, He answered you, ‘I
will reinforce you with a thousand angels in succession’ [9]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 9)

The form of the word ‘*istaghath’* (to beg for aid) denotes the meaning of asking for help, just as ‘*istasqa’* which means to ask for a drink, and ‘*istafhama’* which means to ask for understanding. As such, the pattern of words that begin with the Arabic letters (*alif, sin* and *ta*) are used when asking for something. *Istighathah* is to ask for aid from someone more powerful who is capable of providing help, the root of that word comes from the word *'al-ghayth'* that means 'rain'. For this reason, when the earth is dry for want of rainfall and no one can find water, they say, 'We asked for aid (*al-ghawth*)'. And because water is the root of all life, this word is used in the context of preserving life, thus warriors ask for aid from Allah *Glorified is He* because they risk death during times of war.

The words *'tastaghethun Rabbakum'* (you beg your Lord) are in the second person plural, as if all of them were praying for aid at the same time. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had prayed for aid when everyone was in line for battle and Abu Jahl said, 'O God, give victory to those who are right among us'. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised his hand, turned towards the *qibla,* and said: 'O Allah, fulfil what you have promised me. O Allah, bring me what you have promised me. O Allah, if you destroy this band of Muslims no one will be left to worship you on this earth.'(1)

What Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said shows that he was seeking the Aid of the Creator who has promised him victory. After the Prophet finished, the people behind him said, 'Amen' because whenever a believer utters 'Amen' after an imam or leader says a supplication, it is as if he had also made the supplication spoken by the leader or imam. For this reason, whoever says 'Amen' is one of the supplicants in the same supplication. Allah *Glorified is He* says that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* supplicated Allah: 'Our Lord! Obliterate their (Pharaoh's and his chief's) wealth and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the agonizing torment' (*Yunus:* 88). This is what the noble Quran has conveyed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said. After that, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has said, "Accepted is your supplication"' (*Yunus:* 89).

Hence, despite the fact that it was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who supplicated, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Accepted is your supplication' (*Yunus:* 89) stating the dual form of the word ‘your’ which shows that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* offered supplication and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* said, ‘Amen’, and in this way he became a supplicant as well like his brother Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So He answered you, “I will aid you with a thousand angels in succession”’ (*al-Anfal:* 9). The Arabic ‘*fastajab lakum’* (so He answered you) also has the letters (*alif, sin, ta*) which–as we learned earlier–are used to ask for things. When Allah *Glorified is He* says He answered their supplication, it means that He has asked His soldiers on earth to side with and support Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. For Allah *Glorified is He* has created the universe and He has created reasons and the means in it which we ourselves can see, and behind that world are the hidden forces of angels. Angels are Allah's hidden Creation which we cannot see or know anything about if Allah does not tell us that He has angels.

So angels are not among the creatures visible to us, and only our faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and our belief in what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed from Allah have made us aware that He has created angels. Allah *Glorified is He* also informs us that He has created the jinn and we believe that as well. Thus the reason for our belief in the existence of angels and jinn are the reports of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is truthful in what he communicates from Allah *Glorified is He*. Should one’s mind pause before this issue and wonder, ‘How can someone exist and not be seen?’ we say to him, ‘This is information from Allah’. There are those who deny the existence of angels and jinn, and say, ‘It’s just the forces of mechanics working in the physical world’, and they take no note when Allah *Glorified is He* talks about anything unseen and intangible. But Allah leaves signs of that invisible world to help the mind grasp its existence. For instance, He causes you not to know of a thing’s existence, but you feel its effects and notice its traces. Then, with the passing of time, you become aware of its existence. These things are not created when you discover them, but rather, they existed and you could not detect them. There is a difference between the existence of some matter and realizing the existence of this matter. An example of this is the discovery of the microbe which took place in the seventeenth century, and which of course had already existed before it was discovered. It had been entering people's bodies and penetrating their skin, and when it was discovered, this simply proved that it had existed before, but they did not possess the tools to detect it. Consequently, when you are told that Allah *Glorified is He* has a world and a creation that you cannot perceive, take what you know now, but had not been able to perceive before as true evidence of that imperceptible world.

Allah *Glorified is He* has told us of the existence of angels and that every person's affairs are conducted for him by angels. They are 'those who conduct affairs' and they are the guardians, for Allah says: 'for each [person] there are [guardian angels] in succession, before and behind him, watching over him by Allah's Command' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Not a word does one utter but there is [with him] an ever-present observer' (*Qaf:* 18). These angels are the agents responsible for man's welfare and concerns on earth. Rain, for instance, has its own angel, and agriculture has its angel, as does everything else. This is the hidden unseen means that makes everything come about. Allah says: 'He answered you, "I will aid you with a thousand angels in succession"' (*al-Anfal:* 9). The aid was reinforcements for the army, just as whenever any army is faced with a battle, it cannot win with its present amount of troops and supplies, the army's leader will call for reinforcements and backup to be sent. Similarly, Allah reinforced them with a thousand angels in succession.

We know that when our Lord ordered the angels to bow before Adam *peace be upon him* the order was not to every type of angel, but it was issued to angels responsible for the interests and affairs of the earth. As for the other angels, the issue had nothing to do with them. This is why when Satan rebelled, Allah *Glorified is He* reproached him saying: 'Are you too proud or are you one of the exalted?' (*Sad:* 75) What is meant by 'exalted' are those higher angels to whom the order to bow did not pertain.

In this verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal*, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He has aided the Muslims fighting in the battle of Badr with a thousand angels in succession.

Ar-Ridf is what follows behind you, that is why people say, ‘So-and-so a person sat on his mount and *ardafa* (put behind him) such-and-such a person’ which means he put the other person behind him. That is, the doer of such an action, *almurdif,* is the person at the front, and the person who this is done to, *almurdaf,* is the person in the back. The verse thus makes it clear to us that the angels were in front of the Muslims because it describes them as *murdifeen*. Indeed, because the army of Muslims was few in number, and the army of the disbelievers was many in number, the angels came to increase the number of the Muslim army. There were a thousand warriors arrayed against the Muslims, and therefore Allah *Glorified is He* sent an equal number of angels, thereby increasing the army of the believers until its number surpassed the disbelievers by the number of Muslims who had originally left from Medina. It would have been sufficient for Allah *Glorified is He* to send just one angel, as the stories of what happen to the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* show. It is narrated that Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* struck one of his wings beneath the cities of the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and lifted them into the sky until the angels in heaven could hear the braying of donkeys, the barking of dogs, and the cries of roosters, but through all this not a jar fell over nor a pitcher spilled, and then he turned them upside down and hurled them onto the earth in one motion.

In addition, a single shriek shook the people of Thamud, destroying them with an earthquake. Why then did Allah *Glorified is He* send a thousand angels? He did that in order to increase the numbers against the enemy and aid them in two ways: The first way was to strike fear into the hearts of the enemy, and the second was to strengthen the believers’ resolution. However, did the angels physically do anything in the battle? There is some disagreement about the answer.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا جَعَلَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشۡرَىٰ وَلِتَطۡمَئِنَّ بِهِۦ قُلُوبُكُمۡۚ وَمَا ٱلنَّصۡرُ
إِلَّا مِنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ١٠

God made this a message of hope to reassure your
hearts: help comes only from God, He is mighty
and wise [10] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 10)

This means that the angels were only heralds of good tidings for them, and the believers were the ones who fought their enemies. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them, and [He will] heal the breasts (feelings) of the believers’ (*at-Tawba:* 14).

Allah *Glorified is He* said this to the believers as they embarked on their first battle and encountered the first battle between them and the disbelievers because if they had known that the angels would fight in the battle, they might have slackened while fighting and entered the battle unprepared and without enthusiasm. Allah clarifies that He sent the angels as good tidings: ‘for your hearts to be assured thereby’ (*al-Anfal:* 10). This also means that the number of angels corresponded to the number in the disbelievers’ army, and the remainder was those who originally set out to fight. The angels were sent to the battle in order for the believers’ hearts to be assured, but Allah wants to chastise the disbelievers at the hands of only the Muslims, because Allah wants the disbelievers to fear and respect the believers and to hold them in awe.

There are different narrations concerning the role of the angels in the battle of Badr. Abu Jahl said to Ibn Mas’ud, ‘What are these voices I hear on the battlefield?’ There were voices which frightened the disbelievers in the Battle of Badr. Ibn Mas’ud responded to Abu Jahl saying, ‘They are the voices of angels’. Abu Jahl said, ‘Then it is the angels that make you conquer’.

Allah instructs the believers not to be tempted even by angels, for victory does not come from you or from the angels; it comes only from Allah. A person must be confident that the one whom he wants to give him victory is able to do so. When human beings depend on other human beings, they cannot be sure of gaining victory, as the opposing party may conquer, but true victory comes only from Allah *Glorified is He* Who cannot be conquered: ‘And victory comes only from Allah...’ (*al-Anfal:* 10).

When you seek someone’s help to make you victorious over your enemies, he may cause you to conquer your enemy or both of you may be conquered by the enemy, even though you think you will win with the help of the person aiding you. As for Allah *Glorified is He*; He alone cannot be overcome or conquered: ‘And victory comes only from Allah. Indeed, Allah *is the Almighty*, the All-Wise.’ (*al-Anfal:* 10)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who gives true victory and help, a fact which gives the believer the zeal of faith and certainty of victory. There is wisdom behind Allah's help for the believers. If they slack in any matter, they will not be victorious because Allah does not change His way with people. In the Battle of Uhud, when the Muslims slackened and did not carry out the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* they did not achieve victory because wisdom necessitated that they should not gain victory. If Allah made them victorious, they will have thereafter made light of Prophet Muhammad's orders. Some of them will have said that although they disobeyed his order, they won the battle. Accordingly, one sees how important it is to obey Allah and Prophet Muhammad and to make use of all possible means. Prophet Muhammad ordered the archers in the Battle of Uhud not to leave their places and to carry out their tasks, even if they saw the rest of the army fleeing back towards Medina or being conquered. However, they disobeyed his order, and as a result Allah caused them to be defeated. Accordingly, they became sure that victory comes only from Allah *the Almighty* Who cannot be defeated. Al-Bukhari narrated on the authority of Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib who said, 'We met the disbelievers on that day and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* positioned a batch of archers and appointed 'Abdullah ibn Jubair as their commander. Then he said, "Do not leave this place; if you see us conquering the enemy, do not leave this place, and if you see them conquering us, do not (come to) help us."'(1)

We notice that the number of angels who were sent down to help the believers is mentioned once as a thousand and another time as three thousand; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Remember when you said to the believers, "Will you be satisfied if your Lord reinforces you by sending down three thousand angels?"' (*Al-'Imran:* 124) If three thousand angels were not enough, Allah would increase their number. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Truly, if you are steadfast and fear Allah, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand swooping angels…' (*Al-'Imran:* 125). Accordingly, sending down the reinforcements depended on the status of the believers. This is proven by Allah's saying: 'truly, if you are steadfast and fear Allah….' (*Al-'Imran:* 125)

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari*

Patience alone is insufficient, as piety and perseverance in fighting the enemy are necessary as well. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, '…be patient and persevere, and outdo [all others] in perseverance…' (*Al-'Imran:* 200). This is because the enemy may also possess the trait of being perseverant. But Allah rewards the believers who remain perseverant in order to overcome such enemies. Accordingly, if the enemy is perseverant, the believers must be more perseverant.

Allah *Glorified is He* sent the reinforcement of angels as good tidings in order for their hearts to be at rest and for them to be certain that victory comes from Allah *Glorified is He*.

'And Allah made it (the promise of help) but only as good tidings and for your hearts to be assured thereby. And victory comes only from Allah. Indeed, Allah is the Almighty, the All-Wise' (*al-Anfal:* 10). As soon as the battle had begun, a series of blessings that brought victory were sent. These blessings include a reinforcement of angels, good tidings to set hearts at rest, and certainty that victory comes from Allah *the Almighty* and the Wise.

The following verse gives the proof of this, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذۡ يُغَشِّيكُمُ ٱلنُّعَاسَ أَمَنَةٗ مِّنۡهُ وَيُنَزِّلُ عَلَيۡكُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءٗ لِّيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِۦ
وَيُذۡهِبَ عَنكُمۡ رِجۡزَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ وَلِيَرۡبِطَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِكُمۡ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ ٱلۡأَقۡدَامَ ﴿١١﴾

Remember when He gave you sleep as a reassurance from Him, and sent down water from the sky to cleanse you, to remove Satan's pollution from you, to make your hearts strong and your feet firm [11] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 11)

The word '*al-nu'as*' means drowsiness that overtakes a person when he wants to sleep. The common folk in Egypt call it '*ta'sila*' and say someone is '*m'assil'* when he becomes drowsy. One of Allah's signs is to give man a temporary respite of this type. Allah *Glorified is He* says about His exalted Self: '…neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep...' (*al-Baqara:* 225). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* is never overcome by light or deep sleep because drowsiness implies that the body needs to sleep. However, there is nothing like Allah Who is not embodied or represented in anything; neither drowsiness nor sleep overcomes Him. If a person is talking to another beside a drowsy person, the later will wake up, but the sleeper may not wake up. This verse means that Allah gave them drowsiness for them to find some tranquillity. We know that sleep is one of the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* in His creation. When a person eats food, drinks water, or breathes, the body changes all these substances into energy needed for movement. This energy is formed through interactions between different parts of the body, represented in metabolism and transformation of food into various components that give the appropriate nutrients to every cell in the body. Then, the lungs take oxygen by breathing and release carbon dioxide. There are thousands of other chemical reactions which do not release wastes as well as other reactions that produce wastes, which are expelled through the urinary passage, anus, the ear canal, or other ways. These wastes which are produced through a combustion process are called exhaust in mechanical machines. Exhaust refers to the gases which are ejected for the motion to continue. In the human body, it corresponds to faeces, earwax, rheum, and sweat. However, there is a type of process which produces energy without expelling wastes.

The primary means to restore the chemical balance in the human body is to have some rest for the body's substances to interact with each other and for the body to restore its natural state which can only happen during sleep. For this reason, when a person stays up very late and then goes to sleep, he feels his legs have gone numb because the body's substances are unable to interact as required due to staying awake too long. All of these are involuntary processes, as sometimes a person tries to sleep, but he cannot as sleep is one of the processes for which Allah is responsible, and is considered one of His amazing signs. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And of His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking of His bounty. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who listen' (*ar-Rum:* 23).

When researchers tried to explain the phenomenon of sleep, they put forth dozens of theories. In the latest experiment that was carried out, they brought a person and suspended him from his middle, as though he were a stick being lifted up at its middle by a construction crane so that the two halves of the stick are evenly balanced. They made certain that each half was equal in weight. When the person in the experiment fell asleep, the scientists found that he leaned to one of the two sides, as if some weight had been added to one half and had increased its mass. This experiment proved that sleep is a marvel that deserves Allah to say about it: ‘And of His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking of His bounty. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who listen’ (*ar-Rum:* 23).

The word ‘*an-nahar*’ (day) is mentioned in the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And of His signs is your sleep by night…’ (*ar-Rum:* 23) to reveal that if a person could not sleep at night due to any reason, he may sleep during the day.

It is out of Allah’s wisdom that He concluded this verse with His saying: ‘...Indeed, in that are signs for a people who listen’ (*ar-Rum:* 23). Allah says this because sleep stops all bodily senses except hearing. Therefore, when someone calls a sleeper, he can hear it. When a person is asleep, he cannot voluntarily move his body, and the eye, for example, does not see during sleep. However, the ear does not stop functioning during sleep. When a father calls his sleeping son, his son can hear the call. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* caused the people in the cave to sleep for three hundred and nine years, He said: ‘Then We drew [a veil] over their ears [with sleep] for a number of years in the cave’ (*al-Kahf:* 11). If He had not sealed the ears of the people with sleep in the cave, they will have been able to hear, and hurricanes, the howls of coyotes, or the roars of lions would have awakened them, and they will not have been able to sleep for such a long period of time.

In the verse under consideration, Allah says: ‘[Remember] when He covered you with drowsiness as reassurance from Him...’ (*al-Anfal:* 11). Perhaps a question crosses one’s mind: Is there a kind of drowsiness which does not give reassurance? Yes, because drowsiness is no more than rest and relief from tiredness in order for a person to regain energy. Therefore, the word ‘*amanah*’ (reassurance) is mentioned in the verse in order to reassure the hearts of believers in the midst of the surrounding causes of tension, as the number of their enemy’s army was large, and they (the believers) were not equipped enough. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not want them to lose the energy necessary for battle by thinking of this matter, and for this reason He gave them a special type of drowsiness which was a form of reassurance.

Allah *Glorified is He* also caused this to be one of His signs, as it happened to all of them as a whole. If they had been overwhelmed by deep sleep, their enemies might have attacked them all. Instead, they were given some rest that includes some alertness: '[Remember] when He covered you with drowsiness as reassurance from Him...' (*al-Anfal:* 11).

In this verse, the word '*nu'as*' (drowsiness) is a direct object which includes reassurance from Allah *Glorified is He* Who says in another verse: 'Then after distress, He sent down upon you security [in the form of] drowsiness...' (*Al-'Imran:* 154).

In *al-Anfal*, the word '*nu'as*' (drowsiness) is followed by '*amanah*' (reassurance), but in this verse in the chapter of *Al-'Imran*, the word '*amanah*' (reassurance) is followed by '*nu'as*' (drowsiness). The conditions were different when each verse was revealed; the verse of the chapter of *Al-'Imran* explains that drowsiness overwhelmed one group of the fighters during the Battle of Uhud. These fighters were the true believers who were encircling (and guarding) Prophet Muhammad. However, the verse mentioned in the chapter of *al-Anfal* clarifies that drowsiness overwhelmed the entire army (in the Battle of Badr) as all the believers were united during that battle, and there was no hypocrite or suspicious person among them. Therefore, this drowsiness which came as reassurance overwhelmed them all in order to rid them of fear and to fill their hearts with tranquillity and confidence in Allah's Help. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal*: '... and sent down upon you from the sky rain by which to purify you and remove from you the evil [whisperings] of Satan…' (*al-Anfal:* 11).

Purification implies that an incident occurred and consequently they needed to purify themselves, but they could not find water in order to do this because the disbelievers controlled the water and deprived the Muslims of it at the beginning of the battle. Therefore, the Muslims felt thirsty and were preoccupied with their thirst and need to purify their bodies. This implied that the believer has to remain clean even if he is in a battle; but if the battle lasts a day or two thereby preventing him from washing himself, no one will blame him for not washing during that time. This verse was revealed to point out the believer's strong desire to maintain his cleanliness if some secretions or sweat are discharged. The believers referred to in the verse might also need purification from evil whisperings of Satan because he might cause them to have wet dreams and whisper to them saying not to pray in this state of ritual impurity. The fact that this idea happened to all of them is another of Allah’s signs. Then Allah *Glorified is He* infuriated Satan by sending down water for them to drink and purify themselves.

In the same verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and to make steadfast your hearts and plant firmly thereby your feet’ (*al-Anfal:* 11). Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure the believers and calm their feelings. As soon as it began to rain, the believers dug holes to collect the rainwater. Accordingly, Allah protected them from the lack of water. In addition, raining on a sandy terrain is a further blessing as it keeps the sand on the ground and prevents dust from flying up. We know that when someone walks on the ground, his weight presses down on the land under him with a force that corresponds to his weight. When a child walks on sand, the traces he leaves are shallow in comparison to the traces left by a heavy man walking on sand. If you measure the depth of the traces in relation to the weight of a child and that of a huge man, you will find that the land sank in proportion to the mass of the person that walked on it. When people walk only for leisure, their pressure on the land is less than their pressure on it during a battle. During a battle their feet sink into the sand and part of the warrior’s ability to move may be impaired because feet maintain the body’s balance. Clearly, the sending of rain is an example of Allah’s Wisdom. In our own lives, people in the countryside place the trunks of palm trees or a wooden bar across streams for people to get from one bank to another. However, if the person crossing the stream thinks about crossing the stream too much, he might fall into the water, but if he lets his legs move automatically, he will be well balanced and cross easily. A similar situation occurs in the construction of home staircases. Each step is of the same level for a person to ascend easily without thinking. However, if the level of one-step in the staircase is different from the level of the other steps, the person may lose his balance and fall because that person’s legs have been automatically adjusted to the height of the step.

Similarly, ascending spiral staircases is exhausting because such staircases are widely spaced on one side and close to each other on another side. A person might easily misjudge the distance while ascending. Accordingly, armies subject recruits to medical examinations and only choose people with balanced feet so their feet can help them in unusual circumstances. Out of the Creators' Majesty, He has bestowed unique features on every part of the body.

Allah concludes the verse, saying: '...and your feet firm' (*al-Anfal:* 11). In one sense, making feet firm in the verse represents a spiritual matter, and in another sense, it refers to the fact that rainfall made the land firm and prevented dust and sand from flying up. In another verse, Allah says: 'and how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought many religious men. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the Cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves the steadfast. And their words were not but that they said, "Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excesses [we may have committed] in our affairs [thereby transgressing our duties], and establish our feet firmly and give us victory over the disbelieving people"' (*Al-'Imran:* 146-147). Accordingly, we understand that making feet firm has several meanings, both spiritual and physical. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذۡ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ أَنِّي مَعَكُمۡ فَثَبِّتُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْۚ سَأُلۡقِي فِي قُلُوبِ
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ٱلرُّعۡبَ فَٱضۡرِبُواْ فَوۡقَ ٱلۡأَعۡنَاقِ وَٱضۡرِبُواْ مِنۡهُمۡ كُلَّ بَنَانٖ ١٢

Your Lord revealed to the angels: 'I am with you: give the believers firmness; I shall put terror into the hearts of the disbelievers – strike above their necks and strike all their fingertip' [12] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* inspired the angels that He will support and help them, saying: 'So strengthen those who have believed…' (*al-Anfal:* 12). Allah wanted the angels to strengthen the believers' resolution and make their hearts firm, and as a result they will not fear their enemy. This further clarifies to the believers that they should not think that the large number of fighters or powerfulness of weapons is the reason for victory, as victory always comes from Allah *Glorified is He* who says: 'How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allah...' (*al-Baqara:* 249).

Allah told the angels to strengthen the believers because the ratio of believers to disbelievers was unbalanced and necessitated aid from Allah. We have said that Allah intervenes if the matter transcends the normal means known by people. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him?’ (*an-Naml:* 62). If someone says that he has supplicated Allah several times but He has not answered his supplication, we respond to him saying, ‘Your supplication is not that of the distressed; it is for a luxury, like the supplication of the person who lives in an apartment and supplicates Allah to give him a small palace. It is also like the supplication of the person who walks on foot or takes the company’s vehicle and supplicates Allah to give him his own car. Moreover, it is like the supplication of the person who owns a television and asks Allah to give him a video player. None of these supplications are considered that of the distressed because the distressed people are those who have lost their means of subsistence’.

Allah says in this verse: ‘I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve so strike [them] on the necks and strike from them every fingertip’ (*al-Anfal:* 12). Once Allah *Glorified is He* casts terror and fear into the hearts of the enemy, no matter what their numbers are or how well equipped they are, the enemy will leave everything behind and flee in terror. This is what some of the disbelievers did in this battle. Allah *Glorified is He* blessed the believers by supporting them with angels that gave them good tidings and reassurance, and also by sending them water, purifying them and expelling the whisperings of Satan from them. These were just precursors to the battle which indicates fulfilment of Allah’s Promise to help the believers. All that they had to do was to join the battle with the faithful determination of a brave warrior who develops plans and prepares for confrontation.

The war weapons in the past were the sword, spear, and arrow, and the warrior had to use his mind to plan for the battle and his hands and fingers to grip the sword. Therefore, Allah drew the believers’ attention to two essential points. He says: ‘…so strike [them] on the necks and strike from them every fingertip’ (*al-Anfal:* 12).

When the neck is struck, the person either loses the ability to think or dies. If he remains alive, he will witness the death, defeat, and humiliation of his companions. Striking fingertips refers to striking the disbelievers’ hands with swords because such a strike wounds the hands and renders them incapable of fighting.

Allah orders them to do that for a reason mentioned in the following verse:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ شَآقُّوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ ۚ وَمَن يُشَاقِقِ
ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿١٣﴾

That was because they opposed God and His
Messenger, and if anyone opposes God and His
Messenger, God punishes them severely [13]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 13)

Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* and his Companions victorious and inflicted defeat upon the disbelievers because the disbelievers ‘opposed Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]…’ (*al-Anfal:* 13) The Arabic word ‘*shaqqu*’ (opposed) is derived from the word ‘*shaq*’ which means dividing something into two parts. It was incumbent on them to accept Allah’s Religion and Guidance which will guide their actions in this world, and there was no need to waste energy by splitting into two groups: one siding with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the other siding with disbelief and idolatry. The energy required for rectifying the affairs of humankind and the world is partially wasted in wars between Truth and falsehood. If the wars had stopped, all the human faculties and energies will have been directed towards reform, progress and doing good for humankind. However, the disbelievers separated from the path of Truth and opposed Allah, His Messenger Muhammad and the believers, so they deserved Allah’s severe punishment. Allah says: ‘And whoever opposes Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]–indeed, Allah is severe in punishment’ (*al-Anfal:* 13). This is a general issue; Allah’s way in this regard encompasses all those who oppose Him and His Messengers, and this has been the case since when the Message was first sent, and it will remain like this until the Day of Resurrection.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكُمْ فَذُوقُوهُ وَأَنَّ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾

‘That is what you get! Taste that!’ — and the torment of the Fire awaits the disbelievers [14]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 14)

“That” refers to what happened at the Battle of Badr when the believers stroke the disbeliever’s necks and fingertips. The disbelievers had to taste Allah’s severe Torment. Tasting means sensing the flavour of the food or drink, but it can also go beyond the senses when it does not refer to food or drink. Our Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘[It will be said], "Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!"’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49)

This verse does not refer to tasting food or drink, but it refers to the feeling of shame and humiliation; tasting food is an apparent human sense. A person may taste something bitter or sweet, rough or smooth, etc. In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* gives an example of a general case, saying: ‘And Allah presents an example: a city which was safe and secure, its provision coming to it in abundance from every location, but it was ungrateful for the Favours of Allah; so Allah made it taste the garment of hunger and fear because of [the evil] which they had done’ (*an-Nahl:* 112).

Hunger is the need for food, so how can someone taste hunger? Hunger and clothes cannot be tasted, but we understand from Allah’s saying that the Arabic word ‘*idhaqah*’ (taste) refers to a strong awareness, with your senses, of what you are eating. Clothes–as we know–surround the body, hence this *idhaqah* (a strong awareness of what one is eating) encompasses the whole body to the extent that the fingertips, the leg, the chest and neck has the ability to ‘taste’. This implies that hunger surrounded the person completely. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘That [is what you receive in this life], so taste it’ (*al-Anfal:* 14).

However, tasting is different from swallowing and eating to one’s fill. There is an example of this meaning in the field of trade. When you buy–for example–guavas, dates or figs, the seller says to you, ‘They are sweet fruits, taste one’. He does not say, ‘Eat to your fill’. He tells you to taste the flavour of the fruit and then buy some for you to eat as you wish. What we experience in this world is merely an act of tasting to which the following rural proverb applies, ‘Do not forget to grant me some of your favour even if it be something that can merely be tasted’. The torment that the disbelievers experienced at the hands of the believers was very brief compared to the severe punishment and painful torment they will experience in the Hereafter. Why? ‘That is because they opposed Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]. And whoever opposes Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]–indeed, Allah is severe in punishment’ (*al-Anfal:* 13).

Making these obstinate disbelievers taste shame and humiliation in this world is merely a sample of Allah’s severe Punishment for disbelief. On the Day of Judgement Allah will apply on them the ruling that is clarified in His saying: ‘And indeed for the disbelievers is the punishment of the Fire’ (*al-Anfal:* 14).

The shame and humiliation of the disbelievers represented merely a modest sample of the painful torment that will happen to them on the Day of Judgement. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and surely those who are unjust shall have a punishment besides this [in this life], but most of them do know not’ (*at-Tur:* 47). The torment in the Afterlife will be dreadful. The Arabic word ‘*al-‘adhab*’ means feeling great pain and sufferings. The feeling of pain and sufferings will remain as long as the sensory organs are exposed to the source of pain. Hence, when Allah *Glorified is He* recounts the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) and the hoopoe, He says: ‘And he took attendance of the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe? Is he absent? I will punish him with a severe punishment, or slaughter him, unless he brings me a convincing excuse for his absence’ (*an-Naml:* 20-21). The verse implies that slaughtering ends the punishment, and the evidence is that the other alternative for punishment is slaughtering.

What about the punishment of the fire? Fire known in our lives to burn anything thrown into it, but the fire of the Hereafter fundamentally differs from this because Allah says about it: ‘So oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the torment’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56).

The next verse in the chapter of *al-Anfal* states:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا لَقِيتُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ زَحۡفٗا فَلَا تُوَلُّوهُمُ ٱلۡأَدۡبَارَ ﴿١٥﴾

Believers, when you meet the disbelievers in
battle, never turn your backs on them [15]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 15)

We know that Allah addresses the believers in the Quran saying: ‘O you who believe’ (*al-Anfal:* 15). Then He mentions a matter related to faith and its requirements, or faith itself. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who believe, believe in Allah…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136). Some people may say, ‘How does Allah call them believers then asks them to believe?’ These inquisitive people have not realized that when Allah addresses the believers, He knows that they have believed, but the resolution of some of them may waver, causing them to neglect some of the prerequisites of Belief. Consequently, when Allah tells them: ‘…believe in Allah…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136), this means to renovate their Belief and to have continuous faith.

If Allah mentions after ‘O you who believe’ a command pertaining to faith including a legal ruling or a moral lesson, this means that those who believe in Allah as a Deity Who is Omnipotent and Wise should be sure that all His Commands involve benefits for them, and not for Him. Since His Attribute of Perfection is eternal, Allah’s creation of people has not given Him an extra Attribute of Perfection. Hence, all of Allah’s Commands to the believers involve their benefit and well-being. An example of this–but Allah is beyond comparison as He is the utmost example of perfection–is when you go to a doctor after conferring with your family and friends and making sure that he can treat you. He diagnoses your condition and prescribes medicine for you. You are free to decide whether to take the medicine or not, and the consequences of that decision affect only you and will not harm the doctor at all. If you do not take the medicine, you will harm yourself. Similarly, if you follow the instructions of Allah’s religion which He made as a model and guide for rectifying the affairs of life, you will benefit yourself. If you do not follow it, you will harm yourself. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “The Truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish believe, and let those who wish reject [it]”’ (*al-Kahf:* 29).

Clearly, the choice is left to the human being, whom Allah created. He also created the whole universe before creating man in order for it to serve him. Man was created after the creation of the sun, the moon, the earth, the mountains, water, and everything else in this universe. He Who created everything before creating you must inevitably possess the Attribute of Absolute Perfection, for He created everything with wisdom and in a perfect order. As He possesses the comprehensive Attribute of Absolute Perfection, He does not ask human beings to grant Him a new attribute of perfection when they perform His Commands. Allah is Self-Sufficient and does not need you; when you believe in Him, you will benefit from your faith, and He has only ordained the rulings which will rectify your affairs. And each ruling is preceded by 'O you who believe' (*al-Anfal:* 15).

The believer should not search for the reason behind Allah's Rulings because if the believer does so, he will be acting the same way the disbeliever acts. When a believer–for example–knows about the Command to abstain from intoxicants, he should follow the Ruling because it is ordained by Allah. After the ordainment of the Ruling on intoxicants, some of the non-Muslims found out through scientific analysis that intoxicants are harmful and as a result they abstained from it; however, this action did not come out of faith.

Consequently, the believer should follow Allah's Commands because they are ordained by Allah. The Muslim should perform righteous deeds without searching for the reason why Allah has ordained them. For example, it is true that one of the benefits of fasting is that the rich feels the sufferings of hunger and sympathizes with the poor, but the poor person who has nothing to give to anyone else should also offer fast.

The believer fasts because Allah has ordained fasting. Most of Allah's Orders are preceded by 'O you who believe' (*al-Anfal:* 15). Allah calls the believers to obey His Commands. If they try to find the reason for the Ruling, they will not be considered as believers in Allah, the Commander, and Lawgiver; rather, they believe only in the reason behind the commands. Allah wants the believers to submit to Him alone, and for this reason He gives certain commands and prohibitions. For example, when you perform pilgrimage you should greet the Black Stone according to Allah's Command, and you may have the chance to kiss this stone like Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* did. In all cases, you do not submit to the stone but to the Most Sublime Commander who appointed Prophet Muhammad to tell the people to abstain from worshipping idols and stones. You should follow the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* with complete faith and submissiveness. Then during pilgrimage, you should throw pebbles at the stone pillars that symbolize Satan out of submission to the Orders of Allah *Glorified is He* which were conveyed through His Messenger Muhammad.

In the verse under discussion, Allah says: ‘O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve [while you are] advancing [for battle], do not turn your backs on them’ (*al-Anfal:* 15). So long as you believe in Allah, you also have to defend His Religion for your benefit because when you believe in Allah, all the society will benefit from your goodness, as Allah orders you to do only good. Consequently, you will not steal, commit adultery, drink intoxicants, harm people, or take bribes. Such behaviour will benefit the society because a society is harmed by the members who are misguided, and you will attain benefits when you strive to guide people to belief. In order for you to be a true believer, you should pass the values of belief to other people for you and other people to benefit from the conduct of those who have been guided to belief.

As Allah charges you to struggle in His Cause, you will benefit when you do so. ‘O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve [while you are] advancing [for battle]…’ (*al-Anfal:* 15). The word *‘zahf’* (advancing) is the verbal noun of the verb *‘zahafa’* the meaning of which is to move from one place to another using the upper half of the body. As such, the phrase ‘the baby *‘zahafa’* means that he moved from his place by moving his hands and dragging the rest of his body along. When we say, ‘The baby *haba*’, this means the baby used his thighs and knees to move his body. Then when we say, ‘The baby *masha*’, this means that he stood on his own two feet and walked. The stages of movement start with *zahf* (moving using the upper part of the body), then *habuw* (moving using the lower part of the body), and finally *mashy* (walking). A child begins his first movements with moving his head, and then he moves his upper part of his body after controlling the movement of his head. Next he becomes able to sit. After his thighs become strong, he begins to crawl, and when his legs become stronger, he walks. That is, the strength of a child begins from the upper part of his body.

What is meant by the word *'zahf'* (advancing) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse? Why does Allah not say '*harwilu*' (rush into battle)? In this verse, the word '*zahf*' means moving as one block without any visible separation in it, so that it appears to the viewer that the entire block is moving as one body, well planned.

This means that Allah wants the believers to move to war as one cohesive block for it to seem as if they are crawling forward (slowly and well planned). The word *'zahfa'* originally comes from the active participle *'zahifin'*, but Allah does not mention the active participle and uses the verbal noun instead. For example, when you say about a fair person that he is fairness itself, this means that fairness is embodied in him. A poet says about the advancing army:

The khumays (1) in the east and west of the land advances (zahfuh),

Like thunder in the ear of the Gemini

The poet describes the advancing army as one cohesive block, and in this way no one can distinguish the movement of one soldier from that of the other soldiers, and one imagines that the entire group are moving at the same pace. An example of this movement can be seen during *Hajj* when one ascends to the second floor of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, as the people circumambulating the *Ka'ba* are so closely cohered together that they move as one block. For this reason, such a movement in battle is described as a flood.

The wide valley flooded with the necks of mounts.

The movement of these mounts is like the flow of flood in which no single drop can be distinguished from another.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that believers should encounter the disbelievers as a cohesive block. The disbelievers will be terrified when they see the massive block of the believers whose members are indistinguishable from one another. This is how real confrontation should be.

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(1) It means a huge army which consists of five regiments: the vanguard, centre, right, left, and rear.

Allah continues to warn the believers, saying: '…do not turn your backs on them' (*al-Anfal:* 15). This means that Allah instructs them not to run away from them. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…do not turn back [from fighting in Allah's Cause] and [thus] become losers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21).

Allah intends to portray a horrible image in the people's minds. The word *'al-adbar'* is the plural of *'dubur'* the back, and it is the opposite of the front. This is a warning to the believers against turning their back to their enemy as this allows the enemy to attack you from behind, and an enemy attacking anyone from behind is abominable. Hence, when someone told Imam 'Ali that his armour had a breastplate but did not have a back piece, i.e., his armour covered his chest but not his back, Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'May my mother be bereft of me if I enabled my enemy to approach my back'. This implies that Imam 'Ali's courage and nobility caused him to leave his back unprotected as he will never turn his back on the enemy.

Allah's saying: '…do not turn your backs on them' is a warning against fleeing from confrontation with the enemy. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن يُوَلِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ دُبُرَهُۥٓ إِلَّا مُتَحَرِّفًا لِّقِتَالٍ أَوْ مُتَحَيِّزًا إِلَىٰ فِئَةٍ
فَقَدْ بَآءَ بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَمَأْوَىٰهُ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٦﴾

if anyone does so on such a day – unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting group – he incurs the wrath of God, and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination! wrath of Allah, and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination! [16] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 16)

In this noble verse, we note that Allah's anger is incurred only on the one who turns his back fleeing from the battle with the enemy. As for he who turns his back (on the enemy) manoeuvring to fight or to give the enemy the false impression that he is retreating but then resumes the attack against the enemy in a pincer movement, he is a real warrior of true faith who is beguiling his enemy. The same is true for someone who turns his back to join another troop of believers for him to continue battling against the enemy with them and not lose his life in vain (by trying to fight alone). This person also uses his mind to inflict defeat on the enemy's army, for the believer always wants his death to be in return for something valuable. As Allah has promised him with paradise, he should fight in order to defeat his enemies. The price of a believer at first was ten disbelievers, i.e., Allah granted each believer enough power to vanquish ten disbelievers. This is confirmed by Allah's saying: 'Prophet, urge the believers to fight: if there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred, and a hundred of you, if steadfast, will overcome a thousand of the disbelievers, for they are people who do not understand' (*al-Anfal:* 65).

However, Allah knows that there was a weakness in the believers, so He made the believer equivalent to two disbelievers in battle. This is confirmed by Allah's saying: 'But Allah has lightened your burden for now, knowing that there is weakness in you–a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred and a steadfast thousand of you will defeat two thousand, by Allah's permission: Allah is with the steadfast" (*al-Anfal:* 66).

Consequently, the person who retreats from three enemies is not referred to as a fleeing coward in the Islamic legislation, but the person who retreats from two enemies is considered a fleeing coward because before this weakness existed in us, Allah says: 'If there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred...' (*al-Anfal:* 65).

In other words, one believing warrior was capable of facing ten disbelievers. And, if the number of opponents was less than ten disbelievers, the believer had to guard himself well in order not to die cheaply without achieving much or without killing many disbelievers in the process. Allah *Glorified is He* explained that weakness later afflicted the believers hence He says: 'Now Allah has lightened your burden, knowing that there is weakness in you–a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred...' (*al-Anfal:* 66). Thus, the ratio between believers and disbelievers changed from one to ten to one to two. This was out of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* and as a result, whoever found himself facing more than two enemies at once, Allah instructs him to join a group of believers to protect himself from being defeated in vain.

‘If anyone does this on such a day–unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting group...’ (*al-Anfal:* 16). We learned that *‘al-mutaharrif lil-qital’* (one manoeuvring to fight) is the person who manoeuvres in battle and makes others think that he is defeated, but his manoeuvres bring about victory. In our daily-life language, we say someone is ‘*harrif*’ meaning that he is cunning and outwits others. And Allah’s saying ‘*mutahayyiz*’ (join a fighting group) is derived from the word *‘hayyiz’* meaning the space occupied by one’s body, and each of us occupies a space, i.e. every one of us is *mutahayyiz*. *Hayyiz* is an adverb of place that encompasses a person. In this verse, the word *‘mutahayyiz’* instructs every battling believer to take a suitable place for himself that enables him to achieve his target, and the word similarly indicates that it is necessary for the warrior to join a troop of other warriors in order to reinforce their efforts against the enemy. Whoever does not obey Allah’s Commands will be punished by Him. This punishment is made clear in Allah’s saying: ‘...he returns bringing upon himself the wrath of Allah’ (*al-Anfal:* 16).

The word *‘ba’’* (returns bringing upon himself) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of this verse, means returning with something, and therefore the wording of the Quran in this case is fitting for what they did. This is because the one who turns his back to the enemy is retreating from the battlefield; however, he who returns with the intent of fooling the enemies and manoeuvring on the battlefield or reinforcing another group of believers, his case is entirely different. He is an advocate of Allah’s religion, contrary to the retreating coward who is associated with Allah’s Wrath which is known as one of the reasons for receiving punishment. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…he returns bringing upon him the wrath of Allah, and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination.’ (*al-Anfal:* 16)

The word *‘al-ma’wa’* (destination) is the place in which one seeks shelter. We know that when someone seeks rest, he takes shelter in a place where he can find peace and security from evil. The coward, who flees from confronting the enemy in a battle for the sake of Islam, will only find shelter in Hell which will welcome him. There will be a dialogue between Hell and Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment as mentioned in the following noble verse: ‘On the Day We will say to Hell, "Have you been filled?" and it will say, "Are there any more?”’ (*Qaf:* 30)

Allah proves that hell is furious with the disbelievers because it is one of Allah's soldiers that is harnessed to carry out Allah's judgment. Whoever disobeys the instructions of Allah's Religion in this world will be received by hell's fury and roaring. The disbelievers will hear hell's furious moans when it sees them from a distance, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When the hellfire sees them from a distant place, they will hear its fury and roaring' (*al-Furqan:* 12). When hell is shelter, is that not a miserable destination? This means that the person who retreats from the confrontation with the enemy fearing death will go to something worse than death.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* safeguards and protects the believers instructing them not to be distracted by worldly means. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمۡ تَقۡتُلُوهُمۡ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمۡۚ وَمَا رَمَيۡتَ إِذۡ رَمَيۡتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
رَمَىٰۚ وَلِيُبۡلِيَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ مِنۡهُ بَلَآءً حَسَنًاۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿١٧﴾

It was not you who killed them but God, and when you [Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but God's, to do the believers a favour: God is all seeing and all Knowing [17] (The Quran, *al-Anfal*: 17)

Allah's saying: 'It was not you who killed them but Allah …' (*al-Anfal:* 17) is similar in meaning to Allah's saying: 'and victory is only from Allah' (*Al-'Imran:* 126). That is, Allah *Glorified is He* safeguards the believers, and victory is from Allah for the person who makes use of all the available means. In addition, the death of disbelievers at the hands of the believers was according to Allah's Will. The believer struck the disbeliever with a sword causing him to bleed and be wounded. However, a wounded person may not die and an unwounded person may die. This shows that death is caused by Allah.

Glory be to My Lord Whose Will inevitably takes effect,

How many wounded people have survived while the unwounded have died?

Thus, whenever believers fight the disbelievers, they only wound them, but death is caused by Allah *Glorified is He*. 'It was not you who killed them but Allah' (*al-Anfal:* 17). A person can say that Allah says in another verse: 'Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands…' (*at-Tawba:* 14) Accordingly, the fighting believer fights the disbelievers and Allah causes them to die. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and when you [Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but Allah’s’ (*al-Anfal:* 17).

In this holy verse, something unknown to them was given by something known to them. Accordingly, something unknown was measured against something known. We learned previously that if a verb or an event has been negated and affirmed at the same time, it may involve a contradiction. In this verse, for example, Allah negates the verb in His saying: ‘It was not your throw’ (*al-Anfal:* 17) and affirms it in His saying ‘when you [Prophet] threw’ (*al-Anfal:* 17).

The act of throwing is well known, and the person who threw is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. But how is the verb negated then affirmed? We know that the speaker is the Lord, the Wise, and He speaks in the most eloquent language possible. In order to understand this issue, we should know that every incident has a certain purpose; sometimes the incident takes place, but its purpose is not realized. For example, when a father says to his son, ‘The exam is coming soon; you must stay in your room and study’, and then the son stays in his room only turning the pages of the book. After an hour, the father enters his son’s room and says, ‘Give me the book to question you about what you have studied’. The father asks his son questions, but the son does not know the answers and the father says, ‘you (apparently) studied, but you have not (actually) studied’. This means that he went to study, but he did not actually do what he had to do because the purpose of studying has not been fulfilled.

During the Battle of Badr, Prophet Muhammad turned to his Lord for help and supplicated Him raising his hands and saying, ‘O Lord, if you destroy this band of adherents to Islam, you will not be worshipped upon the earth’. Then Jibril (Gabriel) said to him, ‘Take a fistful of sand and throw it at them’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took a handful of sand and threw it at their faces, and it stuck in all the disbelievers’ eyes, noses and mouths and caused them to flee.(1) It is well-known that when a grain of sand enters a person’s eyes, he becomes distracted from anything else. Allah says:

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(1) *Related by At-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir*

'And when you [Prophet] threw [sand at them] it was not your throw [that defeated them] but Allah's…' (*al-Anfal:* 17).

This means that when Prophet Muhammad threw a handful of sand, he was not the one who caused it to become stuck in the eyes of all the enemies because no one is capable of doing this; He only carried out Jibril's (Gabriel) advice. However, Allah the All-Powerful and the Omnipotent caused the sand to strike the enemies' eyes. Then Allah *Glorified is He* continues His saying: '…that He might test the believers by a fair trial [from Him]: Allah is All-Seeing and All Knowing' (*al-Anfal:* 17).

The fair trial in this verse refers to (the believers) joining the battle and fighting fiercely during it. It is erroneous to think that the Arabic word '*bala*" (trial) refers to only calamities, as it refers to any type of trial. For example, an exam is considered a fair trial for the student who has reviewed his lessons, but a bad trial for the person who has not studied his lessons. Thus, trial itself is neither absolutely bad nor good, as it depends on whether the person has succeeded or not. In order to realise that the different verses of the Quran clarify each other, let us read the following saying of Allah: 'We test you with evil and with good as a trial' (*al-Anbiya':* 35). Good and evil are considered types of tests. Using good in the service of Allah's religion without adopting any aggressive approach, and tolerating afflictions without rebelling against Divine Fate are considered tests from Allah. To clarify, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[The nature of] man is that, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, "My Lord has honoured me"' (*al-Fajr:* 15).

This refers to being tested with good blessings. As for being tested with difficulties, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But when He tries him, restricting his provision for him, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me"' (*al-Fajr:* 16). Being tested by good or evil is merely a trial which as we have explained, is neither an object of blame nor praise in itself, but it depends on the person being tested whether they have achieved the purpose of the trial or not. If he succeeds, then he has done well in the test; if he fails, he has done badly in the test.

We notice—by way of example—that the student who focuses and devotes his mind, time and energy to learning and studying throughout the academic year will, once he begins to take his exam, try to requite himself for the pains he suffered while studying. Thus, he answers the questions with diligence, and every time he answers a question correctly, he feels a bit of relief. If one of his peers tries to disturb him, he will pay him no mind and turn him away, or he might even call the proctor on him. The believer who participates with other believers in a goodly test is like the pupil who carries out his tasks assiduously.

It is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who hears the whispers and sees the actions of every believer, which is why after talking about goodly tests Allah says: '...Verily, Allah is all-hearing, all knowing!' (*al-Anfal:* 17) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* hears all that you say aloud to him, and Knows all that you conceal in your hearts. Allah knows those who fight with the strength of faith and those whose intentions are tainted with wanting others to see his fighting skill in battle so they will praise his prowess; no one is capable of deceiving Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكُمْ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مُوهِنُ كَيْدِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

That is what you get! — and God will weaken the disbelievers' designs [18] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 18)

'That' alludes to the fact that things were as stated (in the previous verse). 'Weakening disbelief kindles and rouses faith, making faith dearer to the believers when they see the effects of disbelief damaging the earth even in their weakened state. Thus, letting disbelief remain is a form of preserving faith, since the fervour of belief increases when Islam is opposed by its enemies. After this, Allah says:

إِن تَسْتَفْتِحُوا۟ فَقَدْ جَآءَكُمُ ٱلْفَتْحُ ۖ وَإِن تَنتَهُوا۟ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۖ وَإِن تَعُودُوا۟
نَعُدْ وَلَن تُغْنِىَ عَنكُمْ فِئَتُكُمْ شَيْـًٔا وَلَوْ كَثُرَتْ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

[Disbelievers], if you were seeking a decision, now you have witnessed one: if you stop here, it will be better for you. If you return, so shall We, and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you. God is with the believers [19] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 19)

Tastaftihu, is derived from `*istiftah* which literally means seeking the unlocking or opening of something because when the Arabic letters *sin* and *ta`* come together at the beginning of a word it gives the meaning of asking or requiring. We know that all abstract ideas are derived from sensory perception because the first familiarity a person has with knowledge comes from sensory matters which subsequently comprise a person's cognitive knowledge. An example of that is our saying 'fire burns'. We learnt this fact from a physical experience that has happened to more than one person and then became a rational theory which a person knows even if he does not see a fire or feel a burning sensation. When the things we sense are all compiled together, they constitute the seeds of a person's abstract thoughts and the comprehensive hypotheses by which they will manage their general affairs. As an example of this is when someone tries hard, they succeed; we have drawn this fact from reality, just as we learnt the fact that the negligent and careless fails.

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to this topic saying, 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing...' (*an-Nahl:* 78). In other words, we as people are created with empty minds and the emptiness of our minds require that they would be filled. When a young mind receives any information, it can immediately acquire. That is why a young pupil is better able to memorize the Quran than a teenager since the mind of this older youth is crammed with cognitive thoughts.

Psychologists have explained this matter to us by saying that every consciousness has a focal point which is the centre of that consciousness. When you think about a subject you instantly find the information pertaining to it in your brain. This information could be moved aside to the margins of your awareness, when you think about another topic, and thus replaced by the information related to the new topic.

A limited space in abstract matters is like a limited space in tangible matters. When you fill a bottle with water, there must be an orifice that is wide enough for water to pass through while going in and for air to pass through while going out. If the bottle's orifice is too narrow like that of a perfume bottle, for instance, it would be very hard to fill it with water, except by using a certain tool that has a thin nozzle, like a syringe through which sucking the air in the bottle and ejecting water to fill the bottle is possible. Thus, we see that a limited space that contains tangible matters cannot hold in two quantities of different matters, and that the size of each of them is equal to the size of that space. The brain works very similarly, for you only recall information pertinent to a specific topic when that topic is at the centre of your consciousness. If the topic is far from your thoughts, then the information related to it is removed to the far edges of consciousness. That is why the young child whose mind is empty absorbs and recalls information more rapidly.

Therefore, we should not accuse one person of stupidity and another of intelligence based merely on one's ability to remember swiftly and the inability of the other to keep up with his colleague. Intelligence has many different measures which scientists continue to debate about even till now. But in matters of memory, several scientists agree that the mind, like a camera, takes in information at first exposure, on condition that the seat of consciousness is empty and ready for that information. If the consciousness is busy with some other matter, it does not pick up on a different piece of information. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

Hearing and sight are on top of all senses through which we receive what we sense, then use them to form cognitive thoughts. The True Lord says, '[Disbelievers], if you were seeking a judgment, the judgment has then indeed come to you: if you stop here, it will be better for you. If you return, so shall We, and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you. Allah is with the believers.' (*al-Anfal:* 19)

Al-fath (literally opening – unlocking) has various meanings, some of them physical like *fath al-bab* (to opening a door) or *fath al-kees* (opening the bag). Here *fath* means unlocking something that safeguards something else, like opening a door which safeguards whatever is inside the room behind it. The Holy Quran presents the physical meanings of *fath* in the saying of the True Lord, 'Then, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their goods had been returned to them…' (*Yusuf:* 65). This indicates that when Yousef's (Joseph's) *peace be upon him* brothers opened their saddlebags—which were used at the time instead of regular bags—they found the goods they had taken, intending to exchange them for other commodities. This is the physical meaning of *fath*.

Fath might also be used in abstract matters, like the opening of goods or knowledge, or like the saying of the True Lord, ‘No one can withhold the blessing Allah opens up for people…’ (*Fatir:* 2). Here, the opening of mercy is a figurative usage of the abstract meaning of opening.

Al-fath might also be used in the context of arbitration and judgment because arbitration occurs between conflicting parties in a case each party lays claims against the other, and judgment reveals and opens whatever is hidden in the case. An example of this is what happened between Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his people, who said, ‘...Noah, if you do not stop this, you will be stoned...’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 116). So, what did Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* say? ‘He said, “My Lord, my people have rejected me, so make a firm judgement between me and them, and save me and my believing followers.”’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 117-118) In other words, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* prayed to Allah to judge which side was right in the conflict between him and his people knowing that Allah was on his side. That is why he asked Allah to save him and the believers who were with him.

In the current noble verse under consideration, we see that *al-fath* means the judgment between conflicting parties. The core of the judgement would decide between two sides: the side of true guidance and those who call for it, i.e. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers who follow him, and the opposing side, that of misguidance and the disbelieving people of Quraysh. Both sides asked for *al-fath*. When Abu Jahl met with his people, he said, ‘Oh Allah, he -referring to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*- has transgressed against ties of kinship and brought upon us the unknown. Vanquish him tomorrow (in the morning).’(1) Abu Jahl believed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was going against the bonds of kinship, causing sons to part ways with their fathers and mothers. Additionally, when the idolaters came from Mecca to the battle of Badr, they brought with them the cover of the *Ka`ba* and asked Allah for victory saying, ‘Oh Allah, bring victory upon the mightiest of the two armies, the most blessed of the two parties and the best of the two tribes. That was the prayer of the disbelievers! As for the prayer of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it was: ‘Oh Allah, if you destroy this band of Muslims no one will be left to worship you on this Earth.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, An-Nisa’i and Hakim*

The fact that both sides implored Allah for victory suggests that each of them was as strained as the other is because if one of them had been at ease and the other exhausted, then only the exhausted party would have asked for victory. In this case, judgment came from Allah *Glorified is He* when He ruled that the disbelievers be stripped of their arms, defeated, and made into a laughing stock to all who saw them. They deserved this because of their disbelief, misguidance, obstinacy, and opposition to the truth. What made it likely that victory came as Allah’s answer to the believers’ prayers was corroborated by the True Lord’s saying, ‘...the judgment has then indeed come to you...’ (*al-Anfal:* 19) meaning you had all asked for victory and judgment from Allah. So, *al-fath* came to you and it was to the advantage of the believers. Yet it also came in answer to the disbelievers’ prayer. It came in both forms: victory for the believers, and in keeping with the disbelievers’ prayer. The disbelievers had prayed and Allah’s answer to their prayer was to their detriment. This is proof that they were foolish in their prayers, and each party had to accept their lot. The disbelievers had to accept that they were defeated, and the believers had to accept that they were victorious. ‘...if you stop here, it will be better for you...’ (*al-Anfal:* 19).

This ‘stopping’ seems to be foremost for the good of the disbelievers. In other words, if you cease your enmity towards Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and stopped insisting on making him your enemy or conspiring against him, if you abstained from all this, it will be good for your earthly affairs because you have seen the result (if you do not). Some of your prominent leaders have been killed and the rest have been captured and their belongings plundered. If you abstained from the behaviour that leads to this, that would be good for you in this world and it would be good for you in the Hereafter; that if abstaining brings you to embrace the religion that you once saw as your enemy.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues His saying with, ‘...If you return, so shall We, and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you...’

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim on the authority of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab*

(*al-Anfal:* 19). So if you do not cease, but instead resume your opposition to this religion, we will make the believers victorious over you once more. Do not say that you are the group with the greater numbe because your group will not avail you against Allah and the proof of that is that you were defeated at Badr when you were many and had the advantage of numbers on your side. But your strength in numbers will gain you nothing: '...and your forces, though greater in number, will be of no use to you. Allah is with the believers.' (*al-Anfal:* 19) The believers had been outnumbered, and despite that they had been triumphant.

So far, our discussion pertains to the disbelievers, but what about the believers? What are they to abstain from? They must cease quarrelling over war booty, and it is in this context that the True Lord says, '...Say, "The spoils of war belong to Allah and His Messenger..."' (*al-Anfal:* 1).

Their quarrelling over booty obliged the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray to his Lord. If they went back to bickering and arguing amongst themselves, as if they were two opposing groups and forgot that they have a common faith, neither side will avail the other. Oh people of faith! If a portion of you has gained power, let the rest be humble before them. And do not think that you have become great in victory because victory comes neither from people nor from angels, but verily it comes from Allah *the Almighty*, the Wise.

After that, the True Lord says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَلَا تَوَلَّوۡاْ عَنۡهُ وَأَنتُمۡ تَسۡمَعُونَ ٢٠

Believers, obey God and His Messenger: do not turn away when you are listening to him [20] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 20)

This is a clear call from Allah *Glorified is He* to the believers, and a specific command to obey Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because faith is the firm and sincere belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, *peace and blessings be upon them* and fate with both the good and the bad it brings. Believers are to carry out the requirements of faith, which are - oh you believers - to perform the tasks and ordinances of the Plan of Allah *Glorified is He* and the orders and prohibitions of that Plan as conveyed to us by Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As we have previously explained, obedience to Allah is a general principle and obedience to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is through adherence to the specific and practical application that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* set for the general principle. As such, obeying any command or rule by the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is obligatory because Allah delegated authority to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys Allah.' (*an-Nisa':* 80)

The delegation of authority from the True Lord to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is presented in the True Lord's saying, '…so accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you.…' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

In the noble verse that is currently under consideration, we find the same concept in eloquent Quranic rendering, 'O, you who have believed! Obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not turn from him while you hear [his order].' (*al-Anfal:* 20)

To turn from, as we know, is to shun. The command here is to not shun; so long as you are believers, do not turn from or shun what you believe in. The eloquent wording is in the fact that Allah did not say 'Turn not away from both' (Muhammad and his Lord) the way that human beings might have phrased it. Instead, he said, 'do not turn from him'. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* united the speech about the two cases into one—obeying Allah and obeying His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* — because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys Allah's message. So, there is no distinction between obeying Muhammad and obeying the One Who sent him. Obeying Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an act of obedience to Allah.

Or we could also say that 'turning from' can never be said of Allah because no one is able to turn away from Allah, for Allah overtakes him at every turn and is aware of him at all times. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'They (hypocrites) swear by Allah to please you [believers]: if they were true believers it would be more fitting for them to please Allah and His Messenger.' (*at-Tawba:* 62) In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* unites earning the approval of Allah with earning that of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Some of these hypocrites only swear that they have not done anything contrary to faith so that they might please the believers and establish their innocence to the people. But there is a higher approval that is earned by complying with and applying the plan that Allah *Glorified is He* revealed and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed. There is Allah *the Almighty and All-Sustaining* Who watches over every action and knows both what is shown and what is hidden. So, if we were left to our own devices, every person would have to confront the other according to his own strength; but through our faith we know that we are under the watchful supervision of the Omnipotent, the All-Sustaining. So, whoever oppresses his brother, or whenever the oppressed forgives his oppressor, Allah *Glorified is He* is both Lord of the oppressor and Lord of the oppressed, and He does not forgive the oppressor, but rather holds him to account.

Allah combined pleasing Him with pleasing Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this verse as well. He did not say, 'it is Allah and His Apostle whose pleasure*s* they should seek' in the way that human speech might dictate, but rather, He saw fit to combine the two 'pleasures' into a singular word because it revolves around a single command and a single act of obedience with one ultimate goal.

'O you who have believed, obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn from him while you hear [his order].' (*al-Anfal:* 20) This command to obey Allah and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a communication from Allah, and the first means of communication is oral because the ear is the first instrument of comprehension. So, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave orders to people verbally rather than in writing because the people could not read, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relayed the Quran revealed to him to the people in speech; he also ordered it to be written down so it would be preserved.

We know that listening is rudimentary for learning how to read because you cannot read what is written nor can you write what is heard unless you know grammar and phonics. A teacher first teaches a student how to read and write orally. Thus, listening is the precursor to everything, and no one during the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have been able to say, 'The call to Islam never reached me' because the call to Islam was communicated to people verbally. And His saying ‘while you hear [his order]…’ (*al-Anfal:* 20) tells us that if a person had not heard the call to Islam yet, he was not accountable to follow the injunction because Our Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger.’ (*al-Isra’:* 15)

Societies that live in ignorance and have not had a messenger or have not received a word of Allah’s Path will not be punished by Allah. Nowadays, such a situation is possible in distant countries far removed from contact with Islam and hearing about the way of Allah. They have never heard anything about Islam and know nothing of its Path, and thus are saved from punishment, in accordance with Allah’s statement: ‘…nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger.’ (*al-Isra’:* 15)

The benefit of sending a messenger is that he conveys the message to people. Therefore, we have drawn an important principle from the saying of the True Lord, ‘...while you hear [his order].’ (*al-Anfal:* 20) From this statement, we have surmised that whoever has not been conveyed the Path of Islam, is not called into account for it. But is hearing about the Path enough to know it? No, it does not suffice to hear and know that a messenger has come to succeed a preceding messenger, but rather, it is incumbent upon you to investigate. If anyone on earth has not been informed of it, he is saved, but whoever has received news of the coming of a prophet without being told of the entire Path, he must search for it himself; for man occupies himself with investigating even the most trifling of things merely upon hearing about them.

Let us suppose that someone in a village said that the government is going to alter the rations cards. Will every individual in the village not take a deep concern in the matter and set out to ask about it? Thus, all it took for the communication to be made was for a person to hear that a messenger from among the Arabs had come to all of mankind with a universal message, and that this message followed up on the previous messages from other messengers *peace be upon all of them*. Whoever heard this was obliged to treat it as he would his earthly interests; for if the affairs of this world are important, what are we to make of the issue of righteousness in both this world and the next? Partial responsibility for that falls upon the Muslims who do not make an effort to convey the religion of Allah to others.

After this, the True Lord says:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوا۟ سَمِعْنَا وَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ٢١

Do not be like those who say, ‘We heard,’ though in fact they were not listening [21] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 21)

In this noble verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* forbids us to be like those who say, ‘We heard’ (*al-Anfal:* 21), but Allah judges them to have not listened. They applied the norm of superficial changes of outward appearance on hearing. So, they heard but did not listen attentively. In this context ‘hearing’ does not mean to merely hear, but to carry out the commands you have heard, and whoever does not carry them out, is like someone who has not heard anything. If you do so, you have heard, and the call to Islam has reached you, but you have not answered it or done what it asks of you. So, Allah’s statement: ‘‘We heard,’ though in fact they were not listening’ (*al-Anfal:* 21) explains to us that their hearing was merely the transference of the vibration of the speaker’s voice to their ears, when they did not really take what they have heard seriously so that it can have a profound impact on their lives. Without this profound impact, it is as if they have not heard anything at all. Thus, it would have been better if they have not heard anything because hearing without answering the call is worse than not hearing. ‘And do not be like those who say, ‘We heard,’ though in fact they were not listening.’ (*al-Anfal:* 21)

It could also be that ‘hearing’ in this verse refers to acceptance, like when we say, ‘Allah, please hear the prayer of so-and-so’. You know that Allah hears all prayers even if you had not said that, but you say, ‘Allah, hear the prayer of so-and-so’ meaning ‘Allah, please accept the prayer of so-and-so’. So, the meaning of ‘to hear’ is ‘to accept’.

After this the True Lord says:

إِنَّ شَرَّ ٱلدَّوَآبِّ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلصُّمُّ ٱلْبُكْمُ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ٢٢

the worst creatures in God’s eyes are those who are [wilfully] deaf and dumb, who do not reason [22] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 22)

The word *dabbah* is everything that walks or crawls on the ground although it is usually reserved for four-legged creatures. The plural of *dabbah* is *dawab*.

Ad-dawwab as animals constitute the third sphere in the world, for existence is divided into ascending spheres: the first is inanimate materials, second is plants, the third is animals, and the fourth is mankind. A single chain connects these four things. We find that the highest layer of the lowest sphere is the first layer in the next highest sphere. So, the lowest sphere is inanimate materials, and above them are plants. The highest thing in the inanimate sphere represents the first aspect of plants, like corals, as if the sphere of inanimate materials itself had ascending layers which stop at a specific impassable boundary. So, they cannot become plants, nor can plants become animals. Rather, each sphere remains independent in itself with internal ascending sub-layers that stop at a specific limit. Even though the highest inanimate thing is almost equivalent to the lowest form of plant life, it does not become a plant, like the phenomenon of growing coral reefs which take on the aspect of plants but are still only the apex of inanimate materials rather than a plant. Similarly, with plants we find that they progress and develop until reaching the highest level of plant life. Plants are at different levels, the highest of which is the existence of a plant that can sense things because perception leads to the beginning of animal life, and that is exactly what we see in some plants that grow in the shade and by nature, orient themselves towards sunlight as if they possessed a kind of sensory perception; if the position of the light changes, the plant reorients itself or part of it towards the new place.

Some plant species wilt as soon as it is touched. We also know of a plant that people in the countryside call ‘The Shy Lady’ that closes its leaves around its fruit as soon as it is touched. These occupy the highest level of plant life, and are the first level before animal life, but they are not in the sphere of animal creatures, remaining instead in their sphere as plants.

Then, we come to the animals, finding that they too are grouped into ascending categories. There are animals that can be tamed and animals that cannot be tamed and remain wild, for they are created that way by Our Lord for some reason. Man can domesticate camels, but cannot domesticate foxes or fleas. It is as if Allah wanted to let us know that it is not we who tamed the domesticated animals with our intelligence and abilities, but rather, it was He who empowered us to tame them. Thus, you might tame a camel so that even a small girl can ride it, ordering it to stand and sit, but a little flea makes man sleepless throughout the night eluding his attempts to catch and kill it. These matters demonstrate a piece of wisdom that the True Lord sums up saying, ‘Can they not see how, among the things made by Our hands, We have created livestock they control, and made them obedient, so that some can be used for riding, some for food…’ (*Ya Sin:* 71-72).

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* had not subdued these animals, then man would not have been able to subdue them. Tiny creatures that man is incapable of taming remind us that the tamer is not man, but rather, Allah *Glorified is He*. Among the animals which can be domesticated are species that can accustom themselves to some actions and perform them, like when a trainer asks his monkey to perform a dance called (in Egypt) ‘the old woman’s dough’, and the monkey –with its natural inclination to imitate- obeys. Apes have a special level of comprehension. They are the highest in the order of animal ranking. Despite this, they stop at that limit and do not advance beyond it. This is shown by the fact that if you train a monkey, it can reproduce all the motions you have taught it to amuse people, but it cannot teach those motions to its own kind. Thus, we find circus men training lions and tigers to perform tricks for entertainment, but the lion cannot teach its cubs what it learns from the circus trainer.

Thus, not one of the four spheres in the world—inanimate material, plant life, animal life, and mankind—exceed its upper level, but rather stops at a specific limit. It occurred to some thinkers who believe that ape is the origin of man because living organisms are in ascending order leading from one to the next and the lowest level in one sphere is the highest level within the limits of the previous sphere. But what rules out Darwin’s Theory of Evolution from the outset is the understanding of the nature of evolution.

Allah says, ‘And of everything We have created pairs…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49) meaning that every living organism was created first by Allah, and no species developed from another species. To those who are not religious, we present rational evidence for this, asking ‘Why did the conditions that led to the first ape becoming a human not also lead all apes to become humans’? Thus, Darwin’s theory falls apart in its entirety, and even now there are taxonomists who dispute it. The True Lord has told us that these animals that belong to the highest sphere just below man cannot set up calculations or derive solutions to them nor can they comprehend the idea of deciding by choosing from different options. The most advanced of animals do not consciously weigh choices; they know only one task and nothing more. Man possesses the ability to choose among options, whereas animals cannot reason. For example, suppose you try to tease a cat, it will attack you and scratch you with its claws even though you were only trying to be friendly and play with it. As for the devout and rational believer who is legally competent to perform religious duties in Islam, he has different responses to situations. If someone harms him, he might respond violently in the same way he harms him, or he might forgive him or he might suppress his anger. Allah loves those who, '…hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow-men…' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). So, you, believer, have many options to choose from, but animals have none.

We previously referenced the example of when you feed an animal until it is full, if you introduce the tastiest of foods to it, it will not eat it. On the other hand, if a person is full, nothing prevents him from eating more of the food he likes.

Another example is: whenever a donkey comes across a stream that is too wide for it to jump across, it refuses to jump or cross this stream. Can the donkey measure the distance visually or weigh it against its abilities? It will leap over a stream that suits its ability to do so, but refuses what is beyond that ability unlike humans. Yet, we describe donkeys as extremely stupid. This shows that every species acts according to its natural disposition to carry out the purposes that Allah willed for it. Some might say, 'how can the True Lord say, 'Verily, the vilest of all creatures in the sight of Allah' (*al-Anfal:* 22), when all creatures are subjugated'? Our reply is that you, as a human being, assume the lowest position in this hierarchy, when you choose to be viler than animals because the lowest creature in rank is subject to its natural disposition, and does things instinctually without thinking for it lacks the concept of deciding among different options. However, Allah made human beings unique by giving them a mind to choose among options. So, if you stop using your mind and surrender your ability to take in the spoken word of revelation, are you not worse than animals?

Whenever we regard the words 'good and evil', we remember the statement by the True Lord, 'Whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8) Good is the opposite of evil, and man can differentiate between them because good is pleasant and useful, whereas bad is noxious and repugnant.

But the word *khayr* (good) sometimes has a different meaning which is not the opposite of *sharr* (evil). Sometimes we say, 'this is better than the other'. This means that both are good, but one is better than the other, like the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which was narrated by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* 'The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, but there is good in each of them.' Indeed, both—the strong believer and the weak believer—have goodness in them, but goodness has ascending degrees. There is a kind of goodness that exceeds others, and Allah tells us, 'The worst creatures in Allah's eyes are those who are [wilfully] deaf and dumb, who do not reason...' (*al-Anfal:* 22). In other words, the disbelievers are worse than creatures that crawl on the ground because they have lost the means to true guidance which is hearing. Thus, they have also become dumb, meaning they do not utter words of right guidance.

After that the True Lord says:

وَلَوْ عَلِمَ ٱللَّهُ فِيهِمْ خَيْرًا لَّأَسْمَعَهُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ أَسْمَعَهُمْ لَتَوَلَّوا۟ وَّهُم مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

If God had known there was any good in them, He would have made them hear, but even if He had, they would still have turned away and taken no notice [23] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 23)

Allah *Glorified is He* knew that there was no good in them so He did not grant them responsive hearing. Allah *Glorified is He* was above making them unable to hear and be receptive to the truth, but rather, He did it because there was no good in them. Here, 'good' refers to the initial belief in the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They did not believe, so, they did not listen to the call to True Guidance from Allah through His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the absence of goodness began on their part. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and Allah does not guide the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 264) They had refused to acknowledge the truth from the beginning, for that reason Allah did not guide them. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '...Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.' (*al-Baqara:* 258)

They had already done wrong, so Allah did not guide them. And Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah does not guide the defiantly iniquitous people. (*al-Ma‘ida:* 108) They were already iniquitous, so Allah did not guide them.

Allah is impeccably above unfairly accusing His servants. So, He did not grant them the hearing necessary to receive and respond to the call of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. ‘If Allah had known there was any good in them, He would have made them hear, but even if He had, they would still have turned away and taken no notice.’ (*al-Anfal:* 23)

Allah is Omniscient and His knowledge is eternal, but He does not judge His servants according to His prescient knowledge of them. Rather, He bequeaths them the right to make decisions in practical day-to-day experiences. Take the following story for example (to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection). A father suffers from the tragedy of his son failing in his studies or being independent. The son lives luxuriously without thought for life’s responsibilities. The father’s friends say, ‘Why do you not set up a business project for your son to keep him busy and keep him away from wasting his time in amusement’? The father replies, ‘I know this boy well. He will take the business so he can sell it and fritter the money away on diversions’. The father says that out of his experience with his son. However, is it not conceivable that the son might be weary of his profligacy and want to repent, or at the least prove to people that his father’s opinion of him is untrue? Thus, the father opens a business project for his son, but the son’s weaknesses overcome him and he sells the project to spend the proceeds in sinful waste.

Did this happen because of a flaw in the father’s understanding of his son? No, the father knew his son’s unreliability and how easily he would succumb to his whims. So, what then would we make of the True Lord, the Highest, and eternally All Knowing of all that His servants hide and all that they show? Allah *Glorified is He* did not want to hold His servants to account according to His eternal and everlasting knowledge, but rather, He holds them accountable for their actions. So, He says, ‘Allah will be sure to mark out which ones are the believers, and which the hypocrites.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 11) Allah *Glorified is He* is All Knowing of creation eternally, but He wanted that His servants to acknowledge their deeds because if Allah judged His worshippers according to His eternal knowledge, they would say, ‘I would have done what the Path asks of me, oh Lord (but I have not because You pre-determined it)’. That is why the True Lord granted humanity the ability to choose so that they might act according to their choices so that what they do becomes the recognition of what they choose.

‘If Allah had known there was any good in them, He would have made them hear, but even if He had, they would still have turned away and taken no notice.’ (*al-Anfal:* 23) Even if Allah *Glorified is He* had made them hear, they would have turned away from what they heard because Allah knows that they have chosen to be worse than animals to Him. They are the deaf who do not hear the call of True Guidance and the dumb who do not speak a word to proclaim the unity of Allah. They do not comprehend the benefit of Allah’s way which He set, to make right their lives in this world and the next.

Next, the True Lord says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ ۖ
وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ ٱلْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِۦ وَأَنَّهُۥٓ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Believers, respond to God and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life. Know that God comes between a man and his heart, and that you will be gathered to Him [24] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 24)

Here the issue has shifted from listening to responding because the point of listening is to respond. ‘O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.’ (*al-Anfal:* 24) meaning respond to the laws Allah has set, and to what the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed. The aim of legislation and conveyance are one and the same. Narrating what The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed also complies with the legislations of Allah. Moreover, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is delegated to legislate. He does so by decree of none other than Allah Who says, ‘And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from.’ (*al-Hashr:* 7)

I use the following example (to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection); suppose we hear that someone has been fired because he was absent for fifteen days from work. His lawyer (trying to dispute the legality of the dismissal) reviews the country's constitution and does not find anything related to this case in the content of the constitution. He learns from a more experienced lawyer that this law is derived from the constitution's authorization of an institution to oversee labour and employment. Similarly, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is authorized by his Lord to convey (Allah's message) and to legislate: 'O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you...' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

The True Lord said, 'when he calls you' and did not say 'when they (Allah and His Messenger Muhammad) call you'. Therein is a unification of their purposes, for Allah did not distinguish between the legal rulings of Allah and the communications of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to us. We know that the matters when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made a judgement, and Allah amended it, this amendment originated with Allah, but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not amend anything from Allah and created rulings only for matters left unlegislated by Allah. Whenever Allah revealed a ruling contrary to those of Muhammad the Prophet out of his greatness conveyed that alteration to us. So Muhammad's rulings were thus: if they were in accordance with the truth, then they were unaltered, but if they were not as such, the Prophet would amend them for us. This way, to Allah, every single ruling ultimately and eventually is returned. And if someone asks, 'How can you say that Muhammad's statements are from Allah'? We answer with what Allah says, 'He does not speak from his own desire. It is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him.' (*an-Najm:* 3-4)

To speak from one's own desire means to deviate from what one knows to be a true ruling and instead creates one that is contrary to the truth, to serve one's own whims and desires. Whenever Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took up any ruling he made without having a ruling from Allah, he received an amendment for it, which he then conveyed to us. Thus, talking about 'his own desire' means things that he *peace and blessings be upon him* might have ruled beyond what Allah had revealed. But Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him* had no such capricious desires to influence his rulings. Allah says, ‘O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life…’ (*al-Anfal:* 24).

The verb *da`akum* (calls you) is singular, just like the verb *yardouhu* (please) in His statement addressed to you believers, ‘...it would be more fitting for them to please Allah and His Messenger.’ (*at-Tawba:* 62)

The same is the case with the pronoun in *anahu* (from him) in His saying, ‘O you who have believed, obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn from him while you hear [his order].’ (*al-Anfal:* 20)

In these noble verses, two nouns are unified into a singular pronoun after mentioning both Allah *Glorified is He* and his Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This grammatical unification aroused the scepticism of orientalists, who said, ‘How can He mention two, then make them into one’? To whoever asks this, we say, ‘You have not understood because you approached the Quran without command of the Arabic language’. If the disbelievers found something in the language of the Quran that breaks with the grammar of the language, they would have obstinately created a fuss about it, and if they encountered a single inconsistent word in the Quran, they would have loudly broadcasted this inconsistency. This signifies that the disbelievers understood the aims and meanings of everything that the Quran says. They understood, for example, the verse that orientalists frequently speak of to incite people to doubt the Holy Quran. That verse of the True Lord being, ‘If two groups of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them; if one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other, fight the oppressors until they submit to Allah's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them: Allah loves those who are even-handed.’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9)

Orientalists wonder, disapprovingly, how is it that the Quran talks about two groups, and then uses a plural form verb for them (instead of the Arabic dual form)? We reply that ‘*ta`ifatan’* (two groups) is the dual form of *ta`ifah* (group) which is never used to refer to an individual but is only used to refer to several people, like when we say, ‘The two schools met together’. Though a ‘school’ is singular, but each school has many students. ‘Two groups’ is just like that; each group consists of individuals, and so when the ‘fighting’ happens, it occurs between two plurals (as opposed to two singular nouns, which would require a verb in the dual form). Thus, the Holy Quran is concise when it says, ‘If two groups of the believers fight...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9). *Iqtatalu* (fight) addresses the plural. The Quran did not say, ‘Hence if two groups of believers fight’ where fighting is in the dual form *iqtatala* instead of the plural form *iqtatalu* because that sentence would not concisely express the nature of the fighting. As two groups, if the conflict between them leads to fighting, each individual does not go aside to fight another individual; rather, each individual confronts all the individuals of the other group. Thus, the fighting is among the large mass of individuals from both groups.

After that the True Lord continues to layout the conditions of the fighting in detail. Allah says, ‘...fight the one that acts wrongfully until they submit to Allah's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9). Allah *Glorified is He* returns to the dual form and says *aslihu baynahuma*, (make peace between the two of them). Thus, He refrains from using the plural conjugation that went along with ‘to fight’ and instead uses the dual because in making peace we are reconciling between two contending sides, and each side is represented by its leaders or a delegation rather than every individual from one group having to go make peace with all the individuals of the other group. Thus, the True Lord uses the dual in its appropriate place, and He uses the plural in its appropriate place. Allah *Glorified is He* is infallible and does not err.

In the verse still under consideration, Allah Our Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...’ (*al-Anfal:* 24). The verse begins by addressing the believers. Addressing someone, first, requires that those who are addressed are alive. For, Allah says, ‘…nor are the living and the dead alike. Allah makes anyone He wills hear, and you cannot make those in their graves hear.’ (*Fatir:* 22) So how can Allah say to those whom He addresses, and are already alive, ‘…he calls you to that which gives you life’? (*al-Anfal:* 24) First, what is life? We know that life takes on two qualities, perception and movement, and that only happens after a soul exists in the body. This is what comprises life, and in this matter, both the believer and disbeliever are equal.

The profit in this life is for a person to live happily, not to live in war and hate, or to hurt others and be hurt by others. True life exists when the abilities to move and feel exist, on the condition that the movement of each person is of benefit to the person and those around him. Thus, all potentials collaborate for spreading goodness and benefit for all. As for when the abilities derived from perception and motion are squandered and life is lost in the antagonism of some to others, this life becomes one of weariness and misery devoid of all good and repose. This contravenes what the True Lord wants for the world, since Allah made man His vicegerent on earth to spread righteousness, not to corrupt, and so that what is good becomes even better. Thus, the movement of the individual would not create conflict with others; for every person, is a vicegerent of Allah on earth. So, why do we not act cooperatively with one another instead of against each other?

For example, if someone wants to help himself and those around him by digging a well, it behoves everyone who will benefit from the well to provide him their assistance. That way one group can dig and another group can carry the dirt away until the water comes up and everyone benefits from it. But if someone were to sneak over and collapse the well, that would be working in conflict with others rather than supporting them.

The Path was revealed by Allah, to make us live and move cooperatively. That is why the True Lord says, 'O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.' (*al-Anfal:* 24) The call here is from Allah to the believers alone. If Allah were to say, 'O you who believe, respond to and fulfil your beliefs', then obviously, He does not require those who do not believe in Him to respond. He asks you to respond only if you have already embraced faith in Allah, been guided to it by your mind and universal signs and begun to believe that when Allah asks something of you, He does not do so for naught; He asks it of you because you believe in Him as the Lord, Creator, Provider and the All-Wise and the Most Just.

Whenever the One with such attributes gives you an order, you must respond to what He calls you to do. For example (to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection), parents provide for the most important needs of their child. The father says to his child, 'Listen to me and follow my instructions because I work hard for you to live comfortably'. The mother adds, 'obey your father for he is no stranger to you; you are family and he is not you enemy. By experience, he has always been helpful to you and wished you well'. Thus, the son responds to his father. So, when Allah says, 'O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger who speaks on the authority of Allah; for, he will call you to what gives you life', then, it is incumbent upon us to respond to this call. The One Who calls here is Allah Whose blessings you had received before He commanded you to do anything. He had sent Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* provided by the evidence of miracles that no other can perform; he calls each person to goodness. Nothing would prevent anyone from responding to this call unless he is a fool.

In our daily lives, we notice that when a person is sick and is afflicted by an ailment that affects the most precious thing he has, his good health, he will try to seek a cure for his illness and ask after a doctor specialized in his ailment. There is a specialisation for every part of the body, so if this person is familiar with doctors, he will go to the appropriate physician, and if not, he will ask around until he finds the right one. In doing so, he has completed the mental work to reach someone who will see to his health. Then, when he goes to the doctor and a prescription for medicine is written, the sick person would not say at that moment, 'I will not take the medicine until you convince me of its efficacy and tell me what it does to my body'. The doctor would say, 'If you want to be sure of the usefulness of this medicine, join the school of medicine to learn like I did'. Of course, the sick person would not do that because the matter concerns his health. He will go to the pharmacy, buy the medicine, and ask how he should take it. When the sick person does that, he acts out of his own self-interest, not that of the doctor's or the pharmacist's.

When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* calls us to what gives us life, he does so because Allah assigned him to communicate to us the Plan that would put right our lives. If life is movement and perception once the soul has entered the body, from then onward a person deals with the realities of life until the time of his or her death. This is life for both the believer and the disbeliever. Life might be full of agitation and clashes; one home might be rife with conflict between children or with the neighbours until one says, 'This is a hard and cruel life, and death is much better'. A poet said, 'It is enough a disease for you to see in death a cure.' Another poet said, 'He is wretched who envies a humiliated person's life; for, *himam* (death) is much better than living in humiliation.'

Himam means death, as if death—in the poet's eyes—is lighter than a life full of tribulations. Thus, it is not merely basic life that is required, but the life of a vicegerent of Allah in a society of such vicegerents on earth. Each of us is charged to work together and put right our respective domain. It is unseemly for His agents to bicker with one another; rather, their duty is to work in unity because they are agents of the One and Only. This is how Allah made man his vicegerent: he created him to be His deputy on earth. That vicegerent begot many other such vicegerents to carry out their charge in cooperation with each other.

For example, when we consider what goes into making one *jilbab* (robe), a peasant grows the cotton, a spinner spins it and a weaver weaves it. After that, we buy it to bring it to the tailor who makes the appropriate measurements, then he sews the *jilbab* on a machine, which other individuals had manufactured before he bought it. Thus, one *jilbab* needs many people working and cooperating. In the same way, our lives cooperate.

When we look at the world we live in, we find it full of hardships, especially in backward nations. Yet, in advanced nations life is full of hardships too. Lowlifes from any country board a plane belonging to the advanced country then threaten to bomb the plane along with everyone inside it. They impose their demands, thus bringing low the great nation. So, even life in advanced nations has its burdens.

Take also for example, the wars that have erupted in our region with Israel since 1948, and continued for decades, the civil war in Lebanon, and the war between Iraq and Iran. These wars cost billions which would have advanced our countries if they had been put to better use.

That which makes the world tiresome is counterpoising our efforts against one another. The True Lord revealed the True Path to us to make the actions of our lives in harmony with one another. If we are true to the Path, we begin to take our orders from the One Lord, and each of us is charged to cooperate with the other. This only occurs if we respond to Allah's call, His laws, and Muhammad's divinely inspired message. This is how life flows harmoniously and with pleasure; a life which Allah describes in his statement, 'To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, We shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions.' (*an-Nahl:* 97) As for whoever lives without a plan from Allah, they fall under Allah's saying, 'But whoever turns away from it will have a life of great hardship. We shall bring him blind to the Assembly on the Day of Resurrection.' (*Ta Ha:* 124) Based on this, the punishment for failing to follow the divine Path does not wait until the Day of Judgment. It starts in this world, where life becomes full of exhaustion and hardship.

So, beware of thinking that the religious path of Allah has the afterlife as its sole purpose; no. While one following the Islamic Path of Allah is rewarded in the Afterlife; whoever has the good fortune to live rightly and cooperate with others in this world will be rewarded by Allah with a comfortable life in this world in addition to his reward in the next. Now, we understand the aim of religion is our worldly life. As for the Afterlife, it is a reward for our worldly test.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal:* 24). In other words, Allah set for you the path which does not bring good upon Him or upon His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who conveyed it to us, but verily it brings good upon you, O believers. This is the rationale behind responding to the call, and whoever does not respond is deluded.'...respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

Thus, good comes by the order of the Allah, the One. Each one of us should not make a god of his own desire (whims), and desires become numerous, '…but if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the heavens, the earth and everyone in them would disintegrate. We have brought them their Reminder and they turn away from it. …' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71) This way, Allah's legislations will never be subject to things that might fall prey to desires. As for things that will not be affected by a person's desires, it is left for that person to confront with whatever capacities Allah gave him. Allah's legislations intervene only in matters that are subject to desire. As for other matters which are not affected by a person's whims, even the most inveterate of enemies agree upon them.

Life nowadays is witnessing a wave of ambitious scientific progress. This scientific progress has its roots in the experience gained from the work of scientists and scholars who spent long periods of time innovating and developing. One example of this is Thomas Edison who spent a lot of time inventing the electric light bulb. Other scientists then developed his inventions and created new ones. All we know about them is that their inventions astound us. If you were to see such a scientist, he would look dishevelled and unkempt, largely unaware and careless of his appearance; perhaps he would not eat or drink very much. But all you know about him is the fruits of his work and innovation. We say, 'somebody invented something' (e.g. Morse invented the Morse Code). Meanwhile you benefit from his invention even though you did not suffer his hardships and toil to enjoy the advantages resulting from it.

We see that opposing camps in our modern world seek to steal scientific technologies from one another. These camps differ only superficially: this one is a communist, another is a capitalist, and a third is existentialist. The difference, then, is only according to desires uncurbed by substance or experience. It is truly saddening that the inventions we have agreed upon, like universal material sciences which are the outcome of experimentation, should be used to advance our differences. Thus, we find that hardship in the world comes from our whimsical ambitions, and not from scientific ones. Allah's legislations mediate and remove our whims and desires so that each of us is a servant of Allah and each of us is held free by the other. With His Plan Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* calls the living—those who possess both perception and movement—to a pleasant, goodly life without the narrowness of hardship. This is if we consider our way of living. As for when we measure life against the length of the Afterlife, it is hardly comparable because as Allah's vicegerents on earth, we can all agree that the vicegerents must have an end purpose. Our Lord might create one person to die in his mother's womb, another to die an hour after his birth and a third to die a month after his birth; there are some who live a hundred years. Matters that are subject to difference can never form an end purpose for those of the same kind. The end purpose is to furnish this world with righteous and pious deeds so that we might have the good fortune to pass from this world to something more splendid, the Afterlife, where we will be sure never to die or tire because whatever we desire, will simply appear before us. This is the pinnacle of having a good life.

Assuming that you will toil in the cause of communicating Allah's Methodology, defend it through battle, struggle and financially sacrifice; eventually you will gain an eternal, goodly life. Allah clarifies the nature of this life as He says, ‘Whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life; if they but knew this!’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64)

So, the concept of life in the Hereafter is much extended; your mortal life is timed and finite; you benefit from it by the virtue of your potential and perceptions while life in the Hereafter is eternal and infinite and you are blessed by the virtue of the capabilities of your Creator, the fully Capable Bestower of blessings. As such, we are assured that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has called us for what entitles us to the pleasures and liveness of the real goodly life.

Whenever Allah *Glorified be He* calls us to a goodly life, He calls to living according to His designated Methodology 'a real life’ because it is a happy life leading up to an eternal life. Thus, too does He name the first life which is created when Allah breathed spirit into matter; He said of Adam and his descendants, ‘and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit…’ (*Sad:* 72).

Allah granted this kind of life to both the believer and the disbeliever, and He also calls the medium that carries the Methodology ‘a spirit’, ‘So We have revealed a spirit to you (Prophet) by Our command…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52).

The Methodology then, is life at Allah's command by which the Holy Spirit, Jibril (Gabriel) descended; Allah wants us to live happily, cooperatively and in paradise eternally. Thus, He revealed the Methodology to prevent quarrelling and friction among the believers, and for each believer to protect himself against blunder, and slipping into sin; as such he resists wrongdoing in its earlier stage before it worsens and becomes irremediable.

Then Allah says, '...and know that Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart, and that unto Him you shall be gathered.' (*al-Anfal:* 24) What does Allah mean when He says, 'and know that Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart'? I say, do not think that the disbeliever's heart is inextricably enmeshed in disbelief because he might try to rid himself of his ill-begotten whims and consider the truth of belief and become convinced of it still without being overcome by his whims. More than one evil heart has turned to good, like the disbelieving hardliners of Quraysh who eventually believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Their hearts were wrapped in evil, yet still they did not persist; rather, Allah has stood between each one of them and his heart.

The heart is the seat of hopes and wishes, and the first of those is to hope for a lengthy life, especially when a person sees someone his own age pass away, or when he sees someone his father's age pass away or when his grandfather passes away. As people like their lives to be prolonged, they hope to have lineage to hold their name; they aspire for life, even though it was granted to other than themselves so long as those others bear their bloodline.

Similarly, man loves to hope and aspire, building up much in his dreams that he wishes to achieve. However, he must not forget that this world has a Lord that might end the life of any one of us regardless of this man's desires for life prolongation. Allah might stand between a person and the hopes he wishes to fulfil. None of us are secluded from our Creator; we are all in the hand of the Creator. He did not create the world only to let it run according to disorganised orders irrespective of His Will; rather, every order and rule is under His control.

Allah *Glorified is He* intervenes between man and the desires of his heart—prolonging of his life, realizing his dreams—and acts as a cover hiding death, its causes, and its hour. All that is so that we might always incline towards doing good deeds and living in the light of the Methodology unaware of our appointed and definite hour of death; our fate is at the hands of Allah.

Allah says:

وَٱتَّقُواْ فِتْنَةً لَّا تُصِيبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ مِنكُمْ خَآصَّةً ۖ
وَٱعْلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿٢٥﴾

Beware of discord that harms not only the wrongdoers
among you: know that God is severe in His punishment [25]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 25)

Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to beware of temptations and nip them in the bud before they get out of hand. A person should avoid offences, and society should stand firmly against any transgression because whoever is a bank robber now first began with petty theft stealing from his brother or from the house, then the neighbours then the bank. If every transgression were quickly followed up by reprimand and punishment for whoever did it when they were still young, they would not grow up to be law-breakers and their transgressions would not become increasingly severe. Grave crimes would be buried alive in their infancy because whoever committed a minor offence was punished. Do not be languid in combating any deviant behaviour as long as you are not susceptible. Whoever brazenly wrongs someone can easily wrong you as well. We all know the story(1) of the three bulls, the red, the white and the black. The lion attacked the white bull and ate it, while neither the red bull nor black one defended it. Then the lion attacked the red bull and so the black bull said to itself, ‘As long as the lion does not eat me, it is no business of mine’,’ and when the lion came to the black bull, as he approached he said, ‘You were already eaten the day I devoured the white bull’. Therefore, Allah says, ‘And beware of that temptation to evil which does not befall only those among you who are bent on denying the truth, to the exclusion of others...’ (*al-Anfal:* 25).

This verse suggests that being wary of temptation begins with chastising the insinuator as early as he engages in impairing by mongering for temptation or discord. I cite this following example to ingrain it permanently in your memory. A mother divided the food—meat, vegetables and fruit—among her children; one of them ate his share, then the mother put the rest of the food, i.e. his brothers’ shares in the refrigerator for safekeeping; after that the mother noticed that the son who had already eaten his portion was eating his brother’s food behind her back without permission. In this case, the mother must reprimand and punish him for behaving like this so that it does not happen again. Similarly, if a boy comes home with a toy or something whose price is beyond the child's means, the father must reprimand the boy so that he does not go too far and corrupt his own integrity. We see that in the event of a murder, Allah created the system of blood money for the Bedouin tribe that is akin to the killer on his father's side. The tribe is considered the killer's family because the members of this family will chastise someone for constantly terrorizing or threatening outsiders, knowing that each of them will have to pay a part of the money for being of the killer's clan.

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(1) The story of the three bulls, the red, the white and the black

In the same manner, we notice that if people spot a tyrannical wrongdoer and let him go unpunished, Allah unleashes His wrath on them, for the wrongdoer would persist in his oppression and tyranny unless clamped down on with an iron fist. Then injustice runs rampant in society and Allah's punishment falls upon everyone. Imam Ahmad Allah *rest his soul* narrates that Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* explained this matter; Imam Ahmad narrated: 'Abu Bakr stood up, praised and glorified Allah, then said, "O people, you read this verse, "O you who have attained to faith! ... Those who go astray can do you no harm..." (*al-Ma'ida:* 105), and you misunderstand its implicit meaning. Indeed, I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, "Truly, if people are witness to wrongdoing and do not change it, then the wrath of Allah would encompass them all."'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* illuminates the uninterrupted path for us in legal and doctrinal matters, and He provides a clear example of this case, which is unanimously agreed upon. As narrated on the authority of Nu`man ibn Bashir, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Whoever respects the proper limits set down by Allah are like the people who drew lots on a boat; some of them drew the top of the boat, and some the bottom, and whenever those in the bottom drew water, they passed by those above them. They in the bottom said, "If we pierced through our quarters, we would not harm those above us." If those on top left them do what they wanted, they would all perish, but if they held their hands at bay, they would all be saved.'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* provides us with this example of a group of people who were riding a boat and hold a lottery to divide themselves into two groups, one group residing on the top half of the boat, i.e. its deck, and another group living below decks according to the results of the lottery which is also called drawing lots.

This suggests that they were kind and good-hearted people among whom the strong did not impose upon the weak. Those who were occupying the bottom of the boat would go up to whenever they wanted water and would let down buckets from the deck to the river. If those in the bottom of the boat were left to carry out their urge to pierce the hull of the boat so they could draw water directly from the river, then the boat would have floundered and gone under, but when those living on the top half of the boat restrained and reprimanded those who wanted to pierce the boat, they were all saved.

Similarly, we understand the statement of, ‘And beware of that temptation to evil which does not befall only those among you who are bent on denying the truth, to the exclusion of others; and know that Allah is severe in retribution.’ (*al-Anfal:* 25)

It befits one to say, ‘The punishment here falls upon both the oppressor as well as the oppressed. A concern here may be raised, the oppressor deserves the punishment for the injustice he has perpetrated, but what is the fault of the oppressed? The answer is that the oppressed had it in his grasp to denounce the injustice, but instead he remained silent and so deserved to be included in the punishment.

If societies pay no heed to resisting temptations, Allah would afflict them with collective punishment, and the punishment of Allah is more severe than any other punishment in creation. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱذۡكُرُوٓاْ إِذۡ أَنتُمۡ قَلِيلٞ مُّسۡتَضۡعَفُونَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ تَخَافُونَ أَن يَتَخَطَّفَكُمُ ٱلنَّاسُ
فَـَٔاوَىٰكُمۡ وَأَيَّدَكُم بِنَصۡرِهِۦ وَرَزَقَكُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَشۡكُرُونَ ٢٦

Remember when you were few, victimized in the land, afraid that people might catch you, but God sheltered you and strengthened you with His help, and provided you with good things so that you might be grateful [26] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 26)

After all the events that have transpired, now Allah reminds those who enjoy a privileged present status of their modest past one, stressing to them that He who raised you up from the dregs of life to its pinnacle is ever-present, and so long as He, in His Omnipotence, saw fit to raise you up high so, too, can He in His Omnipotence bring you low if He so wished. So, if you are in a position of privilege, be wary of forgetting that you were once in a position of humbleness. You must acknowledge the beauty of the gift of the Bounteous Creator Who bestows His blessings upon us. We say, 'My Lord, the Powerful, the Most Great, He is the One Who blessed me and elevated my standing, I did not do that by my own skill, or even if I did, those skills are also a gift from Allah'. Consequently, Allah says, 'And remembers the time when you were few [and] helpless on Earth...' (*al-Anfal:* 26). In other words, be mindful of this fact always, and do not fear any (other) power, no matter what its strength or force, but rather prepare an appropriate strategy to confront it because you are the bearers of the call to Islam, and whosoever bears the call to Islam incurs hardships and difficulties.

But that must not undermine your strength and resolve. The first generation of Muslims were a small minority suffering from oppression and persecution at the hands of the more powerful disbelievers, and occasionally when one of those early Muslims found no one to protect them from the harsh mistreatment of the cruel disbelievers, they would seek refuge with a non-Muslim whom they hoped would treat them with mercy. They would say, 'Grant us asylum from your disbelieving brethren'. When the early Muslims were most vulnerable, they could not find anyone to protect them from the tyranny and cruelty of the disbelievers, so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proposed that they emigrate to Abyssinia (roughly present day Ethiopia) because in that land there was a king who did not oppress any among his people. The emigration to Abyssinia was to escape the power of their enemies, but the Muslims' state of affairs did not remain that way, rather, Allah *the Exalted* made them victorious, not through their strength, but instead He willed them to be victorious by adopting His given divine means. And so, the Word of Allah was raised high.

We drive from this fact an argument and an example to use against those who cast doubt on the ability of Muslims to manage society and better it; for the entire world once witnessed a thousand years of Muslim pioneering in science, philosophy and technological innovation at a period when the majority of nations were subservient to the rule of the Islamic nation.

As I have previously said, the Muslim Caliph, Harun Ar-Rashid(1) dispatched a gift to the king of France (Charlemagne) a fine repeater watch that used water to function and was crafted with exquisite detail beyond the people's capacity to imagine in France. Upon seeing the watch, the French thought that demons must be what made it move because the scientific and technical advancement of Baghdad at that time surpassed all belief of Europeans who were living in drastic scientific backwardness.

But in this age of ours the balance has reversed and we have begun to suffer from backwardness in using our reasons to benefit from science. When the radio and television were introduced to some of the Islamic countries, some would say of the radio, 'A demon must be speaking from inside of it and imitating a human voice'. People of this opinion only stopped rejecting and refusing the placement of broadcasting stations and radio technology in their countries when we asked them to, 'Turn the radio frequency indicator and it will air the recitation of Holy Quran'. When they did that, they listened to the voice of Sheikh Muhammad Rif'at as he read the chapter of *Maryam* and we told, 'Demons do not recite the Quran. Broadcasting and transistor radios are scientific inventions discovered by people who used their reason in applied science.

Another example when the microphone was introduced, and many demanded it be installed in mosques for Friday Prayers, some refused to introduce the microphone to mosques, ignoring the fact that people in large mosques could have used more microphones for sound amplification during Friday Prayers. I told one such person, 'May Allah straighten you out and your mind-set, why do you wear prescription glasses and place them over your eyes?' He answered me: 'Because my vision is poor, and the glasses make writing clearer to me.' I said, 'The microphone does the same thing, it makes sound clearer to those who sit far from the Imam and the *minbar* (like a 'pulpit') during congregational prayers generally and Friday prayers specifically.'

Considering the state of affairs in some Islamic countries and that they have become so incapable of absorbing and accepting technology, it is whistle blowing to renew interest in the scientific principles of Allah’s Universe and advancing the sciences to use them in service to Allah’s Plan instead of remaining backwards even though Allah’s Plan urges us to take an interest in the underlying principles at work in the world. Each of us knows that Allah's Universe is under His control as are its laws and codes, and He makes them serviceable to whoever adopts those means to reach the desired end.

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(1) The story of the clock offered by the Arab king to the French king Charlemagne

Allah reminds us in His saying, ‘and remember the time when you were few (and) helpless on Earth, fearful lest people snatch you away...’ (*al-Anfal:* 26). And *al-khatf*, (translated above as ‘snatch you away’) is to take something quickly, i.e. a person or group of persons takes something or someone without the right to do so, and as we know such an action can take various forms. For example, a merchant is displaying his goods, say dates, or apples, and some passer-by comes to look over the offered commodities without having any money to buy them, so instead, he snatches an apple or a handful of dates and quickly runs away. The rightful owner of the goods tries to run after him but cannot catch up. This is to nab something *(al-khatf)*. But if the shopkeeper catches up with him and the thief tries to do away with him and escape, in law this is called ‘coercion’. As for theft, it is taking money surreptitiously from wherever it is secreted, while the owner is absent which is also different from embezzlement, the taking of something that has been entrusted to you and is in your possession but not under your ownership. Thus, taking wrongfully has several forms, nabbing, coercion, theft, and embezzlement. Allah says, ‘...fearful lest people do away with you – whereupon He sheltered you, and strengthened you with His succour...’ (*al-Anfal:* 26).

In other words, they had feared to be taken away without anyone to defend them, but now you Muslims have become stronger through the well-seated faith of your hearts and the aid of Allah. Thus, you must remember Him with eternal gratitude, servitude, and obedience. Allah granted you stability in the new refuge—Medina—and a community of faithful to welcome you.

And when the Muslims came to Medina, they erected the mosque there as a marker of the continuance of light from the heavens as a gift to the world. This was the first act for Muslims there, and they concerned themselves with none other before it. The community of The *Ansar* (supporters) considered the Muslims as brothers, and so the Muslims became strong with the help of their brethren in faith, as did their supports become strong with their newfound Muslim brethren after the Jews of Medina there had tried to enlist the help of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came in the cause of victory for the oppressed. The Methodology he called for was a source of strength for the Muslims and their supports. Muslim immigrants from Mecca found invitations from The *Ansar* to their houses not just to eat and drink, but to live as well.

Interestingly enough, when Allah blesses a man with many and diverse comforts, he might gladly share all of them with his friend, that is, all except his woman, for a husband guards his women jealously. But whoever among these *Ansar* was married to two women was willing to divorce one of his women, whichever the emigrant desires, to marry her off to his emigrant brother after her waiting period ends; in the plea that the latter has left behind all his family in Mecca. Never could an Arab man have imagined such an extraordinary selflessness.

Allah closes this noble verse saying, '...and provided for you sustenance out of the good things of life, so that you might have cause to be grateful.' (*al-Anfal:* 26) Allah provided them with sustenance and stocked them with resources, weapons and treasure and they defeated the disbelievers of Quraysh. Besides, War booty was not lawful to any of the previous prophets, but they were made lawful for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* anyone who could do all that for you, O Muslims, is truly worthy of eternal remembrance and gratitude.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَخُونُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلرَّسُولَ وَتَخُونُوٓاْ أَمَٰنَٰتِكُمۡ وَأَنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Believers, do not betray God and the Messenger, or knowingly
betray [other people's] trust in you [27] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 27)

The opposite of betrayal is trust, and a trust is something a person gives to another without any writ to record it, nor witnesses to bear testimony to it. Rather, the matter is left to the entrusted person, whether he wants to acknowledge it or refuse it because a trust has no contract, nor witnesses, nor bill of sale and is governed only by the accountability of the entrusted. Allah says, ‘Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

Every creature and entity in creation such as, animal life, plant life, inorganic objects etc. all, but mankind, are subjugated and denied the freedom of choice. The sun cannot choose to say, ‘I will rise today over these people’, or ‘I will not rise today’. The wind has no will to choose; all created things that Allah brought into existence in the Universe except mankind can be made to serve the believer and the disbeliever. These creatures and created things all refused to bear the trust of decision-making. But man said, ‘I have mind to well decide on the various options; I accept bearing this trust and will discharge all the due obligations, because I am capable of choice’. But man attributed to himself the ability to tend to what was entrusted to him as if he were certain he could take good care of its due obligations, he issued his prior judgement although he neither can predict the future nor have clues to the unseen.

It is true that at the time man took up this burden, his intention was to faithfully take hold of what was entrusted to him, but what about when it comes time to discharge his duty? You do not know how the vicissitudes will unfold to you. Some circumstances might arise whereby you are forced to annul or abandon the trust. As such, the rational person would say, ‘Keep the trust of decision-making away from me, for I do not know what the vicissitudes of time will do to me when it comes to fulfilling their due obligations’. Every other thing had announced its unwillingness to bear this trust before they were all made insentient, but man declared that he would accept the trust and that he would discharge it faithfully. Of him the Holy Quran says, ‘... Lo! He has proved a tyrant and a fool.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72) Man is a ‘tyrant’ to himself because he charged himself with bearing something beyond his control, and man is a ‘fool’ because he took stock at the time of assuming the task, but did not consider the time when he would discharge it, nor did he take into consideration the updates that time would cause him. Allah says, ‘[Hence], O you who have attained to faith, do not betray Allah and the Apostle, and do not knowingly be false to the trusts that have been reposed in you.' (*al-Anfal:* 27)

Many of people's actions and behaviour are hidden from the eyes of the public. When those eyes spot a crime of some nature, they call upon men of law to exact society due from the criminal. But what is it about clandestine criminal acts? We know that for every crime that clearly comes to light, there are many hidden crimes underlying it. Whoever commits murder surely is concealing other crimes, like purchasing a weapon without a permit, or if he did not have enough money, he might have stolen money to buy the weapon, and then he may also have enlisted others to help him in the murder. All these are hidden crimes. Unquestionably there exist secret, private actions that precede the type of explicitly criminal behaviour that troubles society, for the purview of human law is to guard society only from explicit crimes. The eye of the law does not penetrate through the hidden or secret crimes, but matters differ with regards to the eye of religion which guides a person's depths to righteousness because religion is the trust that Allah—who created the entire Universe—places in the consciences of men. Do not betray the trust in matters unseen which none can know but Allah. You can defend yourself against whatever people know if you stand accused before those people which is not the case in unseen, hidden affairs and they are the most important because they are what control the genesis of later behaviour. Never betray Allah nor His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by betraying the trust given to you. You have no excuse for that but your own decision-making. If you want to do something, you will do it, or you will shun it if you so choose. It is upon mankind not to betray the trust between man and the Lord, and if people's consciences are not possessed of an abundant religious watchfulness over unseen actions, they might stray, for every explicit crime happens only through the collusions of some hidden affair.

So long as you believe in Allah entirely of your own choosing, you should follow and observe the things revealed to you by the One you believe in. You know that faith is the underlying reason to carry out every command. For example, you pray five obligatory prayers every day because the Law-Maker ordered you to do that; you pray two *rak`as* (a unit of prayer) in the morning, four at midday, four again in the afternoon, three at sunset and four *rak`as* in the evening, all because the Law-Maker is Allah the Lord, and He ordered you to do so. You fast because Allah ordered you to fast. If you realised there are benefits to fasting after the fact, this is a completely different matter because despite those benefits, the underlying reason for fasting is that Allah commanded it. Similarly, the underlying reason for obeying each provision of Islamic law is faith and belief in He Who decreed that law.

'[Hence], O you, who have attained to faith, do not betray Allah and the Apostle...' (*al-Anfal:* 27). What is betrayal? The essence of betrayal is one of deficiency and falling short, contrary to completeness; it is also contrary to fidelity that is the opposite of treachery and deception. Because Allah says to us, 'Do not betray Allah and His Messenger', we must sincerely adhere to faith, for the canon of Islamic law came to us from Allah through His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and whoever obeys the Messenger obeys Allah because Allah did not address us directly, but rather through a messenger whom He selected from His people and whom He provided with miracles. Every statement and communication we received came through the intermediation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Do not betray Allah and the Apostle...' (*al-Anfal:* 27). So, do not betray Allah neither vis-a-vis the content of the Quran, nor Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was given authority by Allah to enact laws. The right of Prophet Muhammad's law making comes in Allah's saying, '...And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from…' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

So a trust is something owed to Allah through the Quran's stipulations, and another trust is owed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through whatever topics the Quran has left untouched save by the direction of He who first spoke the Quran to empower the one entrusted, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make laws such that whenever you obey the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you have obeyed Allah.

We previously learned that betrayal is a failure to measure up meaning falling short of the required completion or fulfilment. When a person is a believer, the faith in his soul comes with an obligation, a trust of sorts. So, you believe that there is no deity but Allah; and the trust of this testimony obliges you not to make anyone your sovereign ruler, nor give allegiance to him, unless that allegiance derives from following the Methodology of Allah. This is the trust of the *shahada* (‘testimony of faith’, i.e. to bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah); as for the trust of the message, it manifests itself in a keen willingness to apply everything Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to us from his Lord to the best of one’s ability.

The trust we take from Allah is to stay true to the utterance of faith in ‘there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah’ meaning rest assured only Allah is capable of disposing your affairs, nor harm or benefit you, nor that your best interests can lay far from Allah, for everything is by the power of Allah *the Almighty*; there is no deity but Him. And do not ever think that any legal provision comes to you through any other than the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you stray from this framework of understanding, you would be someone who did not fulfil the trust of Allah or the trust of the His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The pinnacle of this trust is belief in Allah, and in the Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for Allah has charged you with legally binding provisions and once you accept them, they too come with an obligation, a trust to be borne. Their trust is to carry them out without any mistake whether public or private, even in speech, for the trust of faith extends over all things, just like the trust and obligations of a meeting you might attend: you have no right to convey the secrets of others to this meeting, nor the secrets of this meeting to others.

Ziyad ibn Abiya(1) was one of the leaders of the Arabs and was most judicious. One day, a slanderer denounced Hamam ibn Abdullah As-Saluli to Ziyad. People expected Hamam to be punished severely because Ziyad seemed convinced of the suspicion, but Allah inspired Hamam with reasoning that proved an effective way out. So, when Ziyad summoned Hamam, Ziyad said, ‘I was informed that that you were mocking me.’ Hamam said, ‘Of course not, may Allah make amends. I did not do such a thing, and so you must be mistaken.' Ziyad said, 'This man told me so', and he drew the man out from hiding. Hamam looked at the man, and when he saw he was a friend and companion, he went up to him and said, 'You are someone whom I either trusted foolishly and who then betrayed me, or you spoke of something you had no knowledge of. So, whatever was between us ultimately reaches the status of betrayal and sinning. In other words, you are either a traitor or a sinner, for if you are someone I trusted with something I uttered myself, you are a traitor, but if you falsely attributed it to me, then you are a liar.' Ziyad was pleased with this logic, so he sent the slanderer away and refused to listen to him. It is said that he bestowed gifts and presents to Hamam, and when Hamam next saw the slanderer he said to him, 'Do you have any more slandering with which you wish to make me richer?!'

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(1) The story of the false accusation of Hamam ibn Abdullah As-Saluli to Ziyad ibn Abiya

Prophet Muhammad's biography records some incidents of betrayal that happened in his time as well, even from some of the Companions. For example, we know that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, he made a covenant with the Jews there. He treated them well so long as they abided by the pledge, but when they broke the covenant, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to punish them, and he did. The first tribe to do so was the tribe of Banu An-Nadir. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made it clear to them that he would not kill them but would instead be satisfied with merely expelling them from their homes and exiling them to the Levant. Then another act of betrayal came from the tribe of Banu Qurayza, so he laid siege to them for a period. They sent an emissary to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said, 'O Messenger of Allah, the Qurayzha want you to treat them as you did the Nadir' meaning the Qurayza offered to leave the country and go to the Levant. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused to do anything until hearing the judgment of Sa`d ibn Mu`adh who had some connection to the Qurayzha tribe and was considered a bosom friend to them. The Qurayzha tribe knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was deferring to Sa`d ibn Mu`adh, so they said, 'No, first send us Abu Lubaba'(1), which was his surname. His real name was Marwan ibn `Abd Al-Mundhir and his money was in the hands of the Jews who with his money engaged in mercantile trade for him; in short, he had a financial connection to them.

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(1) The story of the Jews consulting Abu Lubaba

Abu Lubaba went to the Jews and they consulted him in the matter asking, ‘Will we be pleased with the judgment of Sa`d ibn Mu`adh?’ So, what did Abu Lubaba say? He said, ‘It will be slaughtering’, and pointed to their throats. Immediately after that Abu Lubaba rebuked himself, saying, ‘By Allah, no sooner do my feet take a step than I feel certain that I have just betrayed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.’ Contemplate faith, conviction of faith and the preponderance of the afterlife over the present life. Thoughts of a person’s disgrace in this world pales in comparison to disgrace in the afterlife.

Abu Lubaba went to the *sariya* (the columns in the middle of the mosque) of the mosque, i.e. in plain view of the people, and sentenced himself to be tied to the columns by his hand. He stayed there without food or drink for seven days until his strength gave out and he fainted. Allah took pity on him and the Messenger of Allah told him that Allah had forgiven him. So, the people said to him, ‘Untie yourself, for you are the one who first bound yourself there.’ But he said, ‘By Allah, I will not undo the bonds until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself unties me.’ So he *peace and blessing be upon him* went and untied him.Why did Abu Lubaba do that to himself? Because he felt that he had betrayed the Prophet Muhammad*peace and blessings be upon him* by saying to the Jews that slaughtering would be the judgment.

There is another Companion, Hatib ibn Abu Balta`a(1), (who betrayed the Prophet Muhammad’s trust). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was planning to liberate Mecca, and he wanted to conceal his proceeding to take Quraysh by surprise and thus avoid the outbreak of a bloody struggle; for peaceful conquest to be concluded. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* kept the matter secret until one day, while he was sitting among his Companions and Allah informed him that Hatib had sent word to Quraysh

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(1) The story of Hatib ibn Abu Balta`a sending a message to Quraysh in the pigtail of a woman informing them of the intention of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to conquer Mecca

(of his plans). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commissioned `Ali and two other Companions *Allah be pleased with them* to go to a certain place of his choosing on the road to Mecca where they would find a young woman bearing a letter for Quraysh. When they arrived at the said place, they found the young woman, and `Ali said to her, 'Show us what you are carrying'. She said, 'I am not carrying anything'. So `Ali ibn Abu Taleb grabbed her by the locks of her hair and withdrew the letter from where she kept her belongings. `Ali discovered it was a letter warning Quraysh, so he brought the letter back to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who asked Hatib, 'What drove you to do this, O Hatib?' He said, 'By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, I knew that it would do you no harm because Allah would surely grant you victory, but I wanted to curry favour with Quraysh, for I am a weak, lowly man without money or family to support me.'

So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pardoned him even though his act was, in a sense, a betrayal of the Messenger. But despite this you must keep in mind that whenever you break a directive you have already accepted from Allah Whom you believe, such a violation is considered a betrayal of the trust (of faith). '...Betray not Allah and His messenger, nor knowingly betray your trusts.' (*al-Anfal:* 27)

In other words, do not betray Allah and the His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by betraying their erected Path; do not knowingly betray the trusts you have with Allah and the Messenger, and let none of you intentionally betray his people. From this verse, the basis for forgiving instances of unheedful forgetfulness and error is taken because what is forbidden is an act of knowing and intentional betrayal. If something happens because of a slip of the tongue, know that our Lord is Forgiving and Merciful. He possesses a sublime graciousness and would not hold you to something you did unknowingly if you knew deep down that such an act was reprehensible and immoral to any decent person, even those who are not exceedingly religious. You should gauge this matter with a clear litmus test: would you like someone else to do to you what you have done to others? The answer to that question will reveal one's natural disposition. If you learn that your innate character balks at the act and rejects it, then you should not do it because it is opposing to the innate character that Allah ingrained in humans. For example, if a thief imagined himself as someone who has been robbed, stealing would no longer appeal to him. Similarly if a scandalmonger disgraced someone and put himself in their shoes, he would not have transgressed only to satisfy his own lusts. We must wish for others what we wish for ourselves. Would you like someone to betray a trust you had entrusted him with or betray you by divulging what you breathed out in confidence? No. Thus, you must not simply view everything as if it were done to a second party, but rather, as if it were done to you yourself.

So the saying of Allah, '...knowingly betray...' (*al-Anfal:* 27) pertains to things done intentionally, not out of forgetfulness or absentmindedness or a slip of the tongue; if you were aware and cognizant, however, committing these deeds would constitute a betrayal, and Allah forbids that by saying, '…O ye who believe! Betray not Allah and His messenger, nor knowingly betray your trusts…' (*al-Anfal:* 27).

We take note that the statement here is addressed to the totality of believers in the plural, and the word 'trusts' is also plural; so once you divided the multiple trusts among the multiple people being addressed, you see that each person is charged with one specific command: not to betray his own trust. A similar situation is when the teacher says to his students, 'Take out your pencils'. The command is to the group of students for each one of them to take out his pencil. In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّمَآ أَمۡوَٰلُكُمۡ وَأَوۡلَٰدُكُمۡ فِتۡنَةٞ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عِندَهُۥٓ أَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿٢٨﴾

Be aware that your possessions and your children
are only a test, and that there is a tremendous
reward with God [28] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 28)

When distinguishing, this verse is clearly related to the one immediately preceding it because betraying Allah and the His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and betraying one's trusts are almost always done to realise some base desire or gain for one's self. You must have self-control since your own self is the only thing you can control with certainty. For example, you might not be able to control your children's wants and desires, and you may not have enough money to meet their needs, but does that mean you should steal from a trust that someone else entrusted to you? No. Does that mean you should act deceitfully in your daily trade to meet some needs or self-interest? No. Does that mean you should betray people’s trust for the sake of your children or to attain riches? No.

Here Allah brings up two things, money and children, and tells us that they are a *fitnah* (trial and temptation) which as we learned previously can be worthy of blame or praise depending on the consequences of that trial or temptation. It is praise-worthy if one rises above the test, and invites blame when one fails the test mentioned in the above noble verse.

Those with an avid interest in the nuances of Quranic recitation know that every letter, every word and sentence is crafted with some wisdom in mind. Thus, some ponder, ‘Why did Allah place ‘worldly goods’ before ‘children’ in this verse’? We say, ‘Because everyone has worldly goods, even if all he has is his clothes, but naturally not everyone has children. Furthermore, children are the product of marriage between two spouses, and finding a spouse first requires money, thus it stands to reason that Allah would bring up worldly goods first, and children second’. The stylistics of the Holy Quran takes up this issue in varying fashions. For example, Allah says, ‘Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 14).

In this verse, the ‘heaped-up treasures of gold and silver’ come after ‘women’ and ‘children’ rather than mentioning worldly goods as the first temptation and children second. We should see that Allah placed the ‘heaped-up treasures’ as He did because they come after a person who has already consumed the first allure, women, and the second, children. We know that whoever has enough money for marriage and rearing children might desire more money. ‘Heaped-up treasures’ denotes a great many of the singular ‘treasure’ meaning that whoever possesses one treasure covets more, just like whoever has a penny hankers to increase what he owns to a million pounds, and so on and so forth. Thus, the heaped-up treasures refer to the desire for excessive riches.

In the verse currently under examination, Allah says, ‘And know that your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation...’ (*al-Anfal:* 28).

In another verse, He says, ‘O you who have attained to faith! Behold, some of your spouses and your children are enemies unto you: so beware of them....’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14) In this verse, we see that the enmity of spouses comes before that of children, and we know that in some instances the spouse is the first to sow hate, and then the children are influenced by this hatred and imitate it; all of this is rhetorically logical because He who speaks it is but the Wise Lord. ‘And know that your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation...’ (*al-Anfal:* 28).

There is a clear warning in this verse. Beware failing this trial, for whoever accumulates money unlawfully so that his children can live in luxury has betrayed his trust (with Allah and the Messenger) and will be punished. Thus, at the end of this verse, Allah reminds us of the incentive to succeed in this test as He says, ‘And that with Allah there is a tremendous reward.’ (*al-Anfal:* 28)

We know that the human spirit, by its innate natural disposition, is driven to love self-gain, what distinguishes one from another is how to assess the value and longevity of these gains. Whoever steals wants merely to benefit himself through other people’s efforts, and whoever refrains from stealing also wants to make gains for himself, but in his case, it is by having Allah bless him with money and a lawful livelihood. Thus, there is some utility behind each action, whether negative or positive.

The example I always cite is that of the student who neglects his studies, who only gets up in the morning after his family goes to great lengths to waken him up, and who then leaves the house only to loaf around in the streets. The second student wakes up every morning and goes to his school and engrosses himself in his studies. Each of the two students sought out some gain for himself: the failing student sought out the foolish gain, while the successful student sought out the gain in the long run. We know that beneficial gain is the desired goal of every person. The important part is the value and longevity of what is gained. If betrayal gains you something in children or worldly goods, remember the reward promised by Allah which acts as collateral for the trust (reposed in us by Him). Place that in one hand, then place the other gain in the other hand, and tip your scale in favour of the heavier which is the reward of Allah. That is why Al-Mutanabbi (a renowned poet) wrote,

I think each of us covets life for himself
Guarding it jealously, hopelessly infatuated of it
The coward's love of self makes him fearful
The valiants' love of self-conveys him to battle

So, each of us loves life: the cowardly person frightened of war cherishes his life, and the valiant person who cherishes his soul and knows that its value is with its Creator plunges into battle desiring the life of a martyr, a life devoted to Allah until the Hour of Resurrection which will be followed by an eternal life in paradise.

So, the standards we use to measure a gain are what are open to dispute. In human practice, the rewards or wages are equivalent to the value of the work done for them, but Allah's reward is more than equivalent; it is made prodigious by the Omnipotence of Allah.

In the next verse, Allah *the Exalted* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن تَتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ يَجۡعَل لَّكُمۡ فُرۡقَانٗا وَيُكَفِّرۡ
عَنكُمۡ سَيِّـَٔاتِكُمۡ وَيَغۡفِرۡ لَكُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلۡفَضۡلِ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ٢٩

Believers, if you remain mindful of God, He will give you a criterion [to tell right from wrong] and wipe out your bad deeds, and forgive you: God's favour is great indeed [29] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 29)

Allah *Glorified is He* opens this noble verse with a call to the faithful, then adds a restrictive conditional clause, '…If you remain conscious of Allah…' (*al-Anfal:* 29), and if the conditional is fulfilled, then a standard is created for us; our bad deeds are erased, and our sins are forgiven, for Allah is Bountiful, and possesses a limitless bounty. Being conscious of Allah or having fear of Him is adhering to and abiding by the provisions of Islamic law, and the apex of adherence to those provisions is faith in Allah. Whenever the two are present, both faith in Allah and adherence to the ordinances of Islamic law, no doubt the promise of Allah will be fulfilled as presented in His saying, '...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false, and will efface your bad deeds, and will forgive you your sins: for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Anfal:* 29)

Al-furqan (translated above as criterion) is a word based on the root *frq*, '*fa``*', '*ra``*', and '*qaf*' which is always used to distinguish or divide two things. For instance, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff, each half or (*firq*) was like a great mountain. And Allah says, 'And when We cleft the sea before you...' (*al-Baqara:* 50). 'We cleft' is *faraqna* in Arabic. In other words, Allah severed the continuity between the two connected parts and a great division, or *farq*, appeared between them. Suppose, for example, that you bought a robe made from cloth of a good weave and dye, and you ripped at part of the robe. Here one would not say that you split *(faraqt)* it into the two pieces, rather, we would say you *(fasalt)* ripped or tore them because one uses *(farq)* only if the tear creates two separate pieces totally distinctive from each other; each with its respective parts and things attached. So *al-farq*, in a broader sense, is more than just a cut or a tear through a formerly cohesive body, it is a cut or tear that creates entirely separate distinctive portions, each with its own particulars and characteristics.

'...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal:* 29). *Yaj`al lakum furqanan* means He will split apart two incongruous things because if there were congruity between them, they would be a single whole, but instead, they differ from each other, and there must necessarily be an incompatibility between them. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He will 'create for you a criterion by which to discern...'. An example of this is that there are some who are rightly guided, and there are some who stray. Naturally there is a division between being guided and straying. Allah took the heart of the rightly guided and opened it to Islam, and He made the heart of the disbeliever constricted and full of rancour, envy, deception, and wile. Thus, Our Lord divides out whoever has the serenity of faith in his heart and whoever has malice in his heart. The believer belongs to a different grouping than those with rancorous hearts. Allah says, '...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal:* 29). That means that Allah divides you out into people of truth and people of falsehood because He wants the ebb and flow of life to move harmoniously as one unit, not for it to be governed by the clash between the capricious desires of different groups. All of them (the people of truth) are vicegerents of Allah on earth, all of them are Allah’s creatures, and all of them enjoy the blessings of Allah. Thus, their lives and actions should be in cooperation and coordination, not in conflict.

And *at-tafarruq*, or discord, as we know arises from a clash between two groups, one of whom represents the band of the rightly guided, and the other group are those who rightfully deserve the punishment of Allah. ‘...He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false...’ (*al-Anfal:* 29). The criterion by which you discern the true from the false is represented by the rightful guidance of the heart, by mental acuity and knowledge, i.e. things that can distinguish between truth and falsehood. Man’s affairs, as we know, fall into two categories, those of this world, and those of the next world. The affairs of this world include hidden internal matters, and visible outward matters. If we look to the affairs of this world, we find they are comprised of both outward matters or tangible and perceivable actions, and internal matters, which none know other than Allah *the Exalted* and the person under question. The discerning criterion touches upon the hidden, internal affairs of this world in the difference between one who is rightly guided and one who has gone astray. In case of the rightly guided Allah has opened his heart to Islam, while one who has gone astray, Allah has not opened his heart to Islam. The rightly guided live among people who are without rancour, while those who stray live among the malicious and malevolent. This is with regards to hidden, internal matters. As for outward actions, Allah creates the discerning criterion between those of belief and those of disbelief by making one powerful, victorious, and dominant.

But what is it of the discerning standard in the afterlife? Allah creates this discerning criterion because the believers will have an everlasting blessing and a sublime reward, and the disbelievers will receive a most severe punishment and awesome retribution.

‘...If you remain conscious of Allah, He will endow you with a criterion by which to discern the true from the false, and will efface your bad deeds, and will forgive you your sins: for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.’ (*al-Anfal:* 29)

But if we were going to remain conscious of Allah, would we really commit bad deeds? I think that if ‘...conscious of Allah...’ is supposed to mean belief and faith in Him, then Allah forgives your bad deeds whether minor or major, trifling or grievous, and a few infractions will not adversely affect your faith, for you will receive Allah's pardon and His forgiveness. However, if 'conscious of Allah' was supposed to mean obeying commands and commandments, then for our bad deeds to be effaced we must be conscious of Allah by remaining free of major, grievous sins, and Allah will forgive us our bad deeds, which are the minor, trifling sins. This forgiveness is of two forms: one form is having your sins overlooked in this world, and the other form having your punishment withheld in the afterlife. Therefore Allah says, in a beautiful closing to the verse, that He, '...will forgive you your sins: for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Anfal:* 29)

Because Allah's bounteous gift is described as great, that means there is a gift and a bounty which is less than great, as is there a gift which excels 'great'. We know that people socialize by exchanging gifts and presents. For instance, some person might confer a gift of food to another person, or of clothing or drink or lodgings. There are diverse and numerous kinds of bounty, but they are not characterized by greatness because the great bounty is from Allah alone, for all gifts are derived from Him and none other. So, whenever a person gives someone a loaf of bread, we know that behind him is another person who brought the bread from the bakery, and another person who brought the flour from the mill and a third one to sow and to harvest the wheat.

All bounties are from Allah and their value is derived from Allah; that is the great bounty. We also find that whenever someone bestows a gift to someone else, they are almost always trying to attain something through that gift, like self-gratification, or praise and thanks or peace of mind for a humanistic soul. One notices people being generous to others to dull their own pains not because they are executing Allah's Plan. They merely want peace of mind, like the disbelievers who make useful things for other people, but they do so without Allah being in their minds; the only thing they give regard to is the serenity and repose of their own hearts.

So, someone who confers a favour wants something in return, whether that be monetary returns, praise or peace of mind from whatever painful visions haunt him. This is a sign that he suffers from void he needs to fill. If it were Allah giving the bounty, would He desire recompense?! No. That is the great bounty and He bestows it upon His servants as a gift from Him without desiring praise or anything else in return. Also, every favour done by any but Allah implicitly entails a debt of gratitude. However, Allah's bounty does not entail such a debt; nor does it ever tarnish or belittle the recipient's stature or worth. A person might loathe accepting something from someone else, but who is there that would be loathsome towards Allah's bounty? No one would, because life in its entirety is a blessing from Allah. That is why the following parable is told of a young woman who said to Ma`n ibn Za`ida:

Come back; verily the generous always has a place to return to
I suspect, O son of Arwa, that he will come back

The young woman[1] was asking ibn Za`ida to return to generously bestowing them with blessings, so her father scolded her. She said to him, 'O father, kings are not put out by making requests of them': '…for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Anfal:* 29)

Allah *the Exalted* wants you to be mindful of every aspect of your life, your continued existence, and the totality of your blessings. If you trace them back to their origin, they will lead you to Allah. Suppose, for example, that you were to buy furnishings for your house and you chose rosewood to be the material with which the carpenter will make your furniture. So, you bring in this wood from Indonesia or Pakistan perhaps because the forests there produce this kind of wood. If you were to follow the roots of everything in your life, you would find that the works and labour of humankind are ultimately the creation of Allah and His gift to man. That is the great bounty from Allah.

And now after Allah has expounded this directive—do not betray Allah or the Messenger; do not betray the trusts reposed in you for the sake of your children or your spouses; know that all bounty and blessing spring from Allah; and be mindful of the world around you and its realities— (one asks) is there truth to these matters, or not? Verily they are all true, just as He said

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(1) The story of the girl who asked Ma`n ibn Za`ida for a bounty and her father scolded her, so she told him that one should not be ashamed of asking kings

before, ‘And remember the time when you were few [and] helpless on Earth, fearful lest people do away with you…’ (*al-Anfal:* 26). This verse was related with respect to Muslims, but what about the Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Allah says:

وَإِذْ يَمْكُرُ بِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لِيُثْبِتُوكَ أَوْ يَقْتُلُوكَ أَوْ يُخْرِجُوكَ ۚ
وَيَمْكُرُونَ وَيَمْكُرُ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ خَيْرُ ٱلْمَٰكِرِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Remember [Prophet] when the disbelievers plotted to take you captive, kill, or expel you. They schemed and so did God: He is the best of schemers [30] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 30)

We notice that Allah does not explicitly ask the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remember. He did not say, ‘Remember how those who were bent on denying the truth…’, but when addressing the companions, Allah does explicitly enjoin them to remember, saying ‘And remember the time when you were few…’ (*al-Anfal:* 26), so what is the reason for this difference? This is because it is inconceivable that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would neglect to remember (and be mindful of) Allah because remembrance of Allah is the core of his mission, for Allah says, ‘and so, (O Prophet), remind them; thy task is only to remind them.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 21) Remembrance and reminding are the duties charged to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* while the purpose of faith in the life of believers is different because it is purely to set their lives right. Thus, what He says here is only a modifying statement.

‘…And, O Prophet, see how those who were bent on denying the truth were scheming against thee, in order to restrain thee (from preaching), or to slay thee, or to drive thee away: thus, have they (always) schemed: but Allah brought their scheming to nought – for Allah is above all schemers.’ (*al-Anfal:* 30) All of this serves to qualify and elaborate Allah’s saying, ‘…for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.’ (*al-Anfal:* 29)

To scheme is to plan some hidden thing to harm one’s enemy. He who schemes and plots something hidden for his enemies lacks the ability to confront them head on, so he plans behind their backs. If he had possessed the ability to confront them, he would not scheme. That is why only the weak resort to scheming. Allah says, '…verily, Satan's guile is weak indeed!' (*an-Nisa': 76*) And we know Allah says, '…O womankind! Verily, awesome is your guile!' (*Yusuf:* 28) While their cunning is great, their weakness is greater. In this regard, we find Abu Tammam, an Arabic poet saying,

If a powerless woman finds a chance,
She strikes to kill; so is the power of the weak.

When a weak person finds an opportunity, he takes advantage of it, knowing that he may not have another chance; therefore he rushes to destroy his enemy. On the other hand, a strong self-confident man always gives his enemies several chances, then punishes them according to their wrongdoing towards him.

'Remember [Prophet Muhammad] when the disbelievers plotted to restrain, kill or expel you…' (*al-Anfal:* 30). The cunning disbelievers intend to plot and scheme against Prophet Muhammad but they do not realise that nothing is hidden from the One Who has sent him *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, they may be able to scheme against those who resemble them in power, but the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is safeguarded by the Power and Care of Allah *Glorified is He*. Since Prophet Muhammad was entrusted with conveying His Message, he was always under His Providence and Protection. He was not alone because he took refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* Who revealed to him all their plans. These schemes and plans are also uncovered and laid bare by Allah *Glorified is He* to all people. Thus, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…They schemed and so did Allah: He is the best of schemers.' (*al-Anfal:* 30)

When the disbelievers of Quraysh plotted against him *peace and blessings be upon him* they had their own means and goals. They schemed to restrain (from preaching), kill, or expel him. Each one of these three goals had its own motive. When they learned that the Tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj in Medina had pledged to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they would help him, they were frightened and intended to put an end to those threats. They held a meeting in Dar An-Nadwah (House of Assembly) to find a solution that could stop the call of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Meanwhile, an Arab of the desert walked in and found them conferring on this matter. They proposed, 'Let us restrain him'; restraining opposes movement. So, Allah's Phrase, 'to restrain you' (*al-Anfal:* 30), means to shackle his movements in order not to let him spread the call of Islam because this call shakes them. If not for his Message, they would have continued to welcome him *peace and blessings be upon him* for they had seen him as the most truthful and trustworthy one among them. The only thing that upset them was his move to spread Allah's religion on earth. That is why they wanted to curb his movement.

To restrain someone is either to prevent them from moving or to make them move within a limited circle. So, restraining is done through either shackles or imprisonment. One of the plotters said, 'Restraining will not do because if you restrain or imprison him (Prophet Muhammad), his people will rise up to fight or find a way to release him from his bonds or imprisonment. You know that you had an unsuccessful siege experience'. Another said, 'Let us expel him from our town'; they discussed this proposal but could not reach an agreement. Some argued, 'If he leaves, he will influence the people he would meet and get more followers who will come to fight us afterwards'. The Bedouin man suggested the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* be assassinated but the chiefs among Quraysh said, 'We fear his followers will seek revenge against us'. Then Abu Jahl made a proposal saying, 'Let us select one strong, self-confident young man from each of our tribes. Those young men will go to Muhammad while he is asleep in bed to strike him at the same time as if they were one man. When he dies, his blood will be lost among all the tribes and Muhammad's tribe will not be able to face all the other tribes together. They will have to accept blood money; once we pay it to them, it is over'.

Thus, the disbelievers discussed the different options concerning the cunning plan of disposal of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; restraining him and shackling his movement, expelling him from Mecca or assassinating him. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed all these plans to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and helped him emigrate from Mecca to Medina to prove to Quraysh that Allah *Glorified is He* is the best of schemers.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا تُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ءَايَٰتُنَا قَالُواْ قَدۡ سَمِعۡنَا لَوۡ نَشَآءُ لَقُلۡنَا
مِثۡلَ هَٰذَآ ۙ إِنۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّآ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them they say, 'We have heard all this before – we could say something like this if we wanted – this is nothing but ancient fables' [31] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 31)

'Our Revelation' refers to the verses of the Quran. As we previously said, *ayaat* (verses, miracles etc.) can also mean the signs of the universe that denote the existence of the Highest Creator such as the night, the day, the sun and the moon, or they can mean miracles: 'When you [O Muhammad] do not bring them a fresh Revelation as a miracle, they say, "But can you not just ask for one..."' (*al-A'raf:* 203). These miraculous verses are evidence that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* speaks the truth. Furthermore, *ayaat* can mean the verses which constitute the Quran, the Divine Way of Life.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them…' (*al-Anfal:* 31). The word 'recited' underscores that the intended meaning is the verses of the Holy Quran. So, what did the disbelievers say when the verses were conveyed to them? '...they say, "We have heard all this before—we could say something like this if we wanted..."' (*al-Anfal:* 31).

The clause 'if we wanted' implies that they did not actually compose similar verses because the particle (*lau*) in Arabic (translated as the conditional 'if') is used to indicate that such a thing is impossible. This is just as we say, 'If you came, I would warmly welcome you'; this means that I did not welcome you because you did not come. To clarify this point, here is another example, 'If I had money, I would buy a palace'; since I have no money I cannot buy a palace. Then, the disbelievers neither 'willed', nor 'said'; so their claim was a mere hollow threat.

Thus, the miraculous nature of the Quran became a fact because Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first demanded that they bring the like of this Quran. When they said that the Quran was so long that they could not produce something of its volume, he *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged them to come up with the equivalent of ten chapters. When they failed to do that, he challenged them again to produce one chapter, but they could not. This was a gradual process to prove the inimitability of the Glorious Quran.

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged those disbelievers, he pushed them to muster all their might to meet the challenge. When they felt that they were too weak to meet the challenge, they retreated. However, one among them named An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith went to Persia (now Iran) where he found a book containing myths and anecdotes. When he came back to Quraysh, he said, 'look, I am going to speak as Muhammad does'. But his speech was purposeless and had no methodology; the words were far away from their denotations. So, the people turned away from him.

'Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them, they say, "We have heard all this before—we could say something like this if we wanted—this is nothing but ancient fables."' (*al-Anfal:* 31) This was what they said, even though they had previously acknowledged the truthfulness of the Quran when they asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring them one of the following signs to believe in him. 'They say, "We will not believe in you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us, or until you have a garden of date palms and vines and make rivers pour through them, or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen, or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face, or have a house made of gold or ascend into the sky—even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read." Say, "Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?"' (*al-Isra':* 90-93)

When we read these noble verses, and count their demands, we find that they asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to do unattainable things: make a spring gush out of the ground, have a garden of date palms and vines and make rivers pour through them, make the sky fall on them in pieces, as he claimed will happen, bring Allah and the angels before them face to face, have a house made of gold or ascend into the sky. Since all their statements have been included in the Quran, does this mean that their words can be considered Quran? No. Look to the precise expressions of the Quran. These demands were not made by a single person. They are rather voiced by different persons through different styles. However, the Holy Quran combined all these styles and expressed them with great eloquence and unique clarity. So, whenever we hear statements uttered by people in the Quran, we must be sure that they are just words said by some people and then miraculously rephrased by Allah *Glorified is He*. Let us cite the following example—Allah is above all. You called one of your children and say to him, 'O Son, go to your uncle and tell him that your father invites you to have dinner with him tomorrow evening, for he will host guests whom he would like you to get to know them since it is an honour to have you here'. Now, when the son goes to his uncle, does he say these words to the letter? Of course not, as the father might be well educated and the son would be unable to repeat the exact words. Or the father might be illiterate while the son might be lettered, thus communicating his father's message in a more obvious way.

Thus, if you ever hear or read words that are voiced by someone except Allah *Glorified is He* be certain that this is the way Allah *Glorified is He* expresses the speaker's ideas and statements.

'Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them, they say, "We have heard all this before—we could say something like this if we wanted—this is nothing but ancient fables."' (*al-Anfal:* 31) *Asatir* in Arabic, translated above as 'fables' is the plural of *ustura* which means make-believe stories and happenings like 'One Thousand and One Nights', 'The Panchatantra', 'The Iliad'...etc.

Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قَالُوا۟ ٱللَّهُمَّ إِن كَانَ هَٰذَا هُوَ ٱلْحَقَّ مِنْ عِندِكَ فَأَمْطِرْ
عَلَيْنَا حِجَارَةً مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ أَوِ ٱئْتِنَا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ٣٢

They also said, 'God, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment' [32] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 32)

Idh in Arabic, translated above as 'also' can be used to indicate an adverb of time according to Arabic styles. Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, 'Remember [Muhammad] that they said...', but He says, 'They also said….' They were so helpless that they said, 'If this Quran is the Truth coming from You, then rain down upon us stones or inflict upon us a painful suffering’. Is this speech not an evidence of the stupidity of the speaker? If they had clear and logical thinking, would they say such nonsense?

Would it not be appropriate for them to say, ‘O Allah, if this is the Truth from You, then guide us to know it, or make it easy for us to accept it’? Since they said, ‘O Allah’, they were addressing none but Him *Glorified is He*.

‘...if this really is the Truth from You, then rain...’ (*al-Anfal:* 32). They were aware that Allah *Glorified is He* is the source of the Truth, thus acknowledging the existence of Allah Whom the Truth belongs to Him. So, what would your reaction be if someone came to you and said, ‘Verily I am a Messenger from Allah. This is the Divine Way of Life which represents a miracle at the same time’. Would it not be their duty to listen to that one who conveyed this Truth from Allah *Glorified is He* and follow him? Their request to be cursed and punished shows their hatred of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the extent that they called upon Allah *Glorified is He* to inflict punishment upon them as He had done with the previous nations. Their request for punishment indicates that they knew that whoever gives the lie to the messengers and rejects the religion is subject to the wrathful punishment of Allah *Glorified is He*. Hence, it becomes clear that the one thing that prevented them from declaring their belief is their refusal of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a person. This point is supported by another verse that says, ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Thus, if the Quran had been revealed to a different person, they would have believed in it. This is considered evidence on their part that the Quran is a miracle and a Divine Way of Life. Allah’s Words: ‘They also said, “O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment”’ (*al-Anfal:* 32) were repeated by Abu Jahl showing how ignorant, suspicious and obstinate he and the other disbelieving idolaters were. Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that ‘Abu Jahl ibn Hisham said, “O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.” Then the following verse was revealed, “But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet Muhammad] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness.'" (*al-Anfal:* 33)(1) Those stubborn people also said, '…or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen...' (*al-Isra':* 92).

This denotes confused statements and lack of reason, '...or send us some other painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32) The True Lord *Glorified is He* is fully Capable of inflicting punishment upon certain people while saving the believers amongst them. But, Allah *Glorified is He* intended not to inflict punishment on the disbelievers because the sight of someone suffering a lot of pain, even if he is an enemy, causes viewers to feel pain too. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَأَنتَ فِيهِمْ ۚ وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ مُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

But God would not send them punishment while you
[Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if
they sought forgiveness [33] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 33)

Allah's method towards His slaves who disbelieve in messengers is to bring the messenger and his followers out of their city before Allah *Glorified is He* inflicts a punishment. An example of this is when Allah *Glorified is He* commanded Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to build the Ark so that he would be saved from the flood. Every society that disbelieved its messenger experienced something like this. Each disobedient nation had its share of punishment. Thus, Allah's messenger leaves his city before the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings His wrath down. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* explains the grace of people taking refuge in Him by seeking forgiveness, '...nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness' (*al-Anfal:* 33).

If they were to ask Allah *Glorified is He* for forgiveness, this would mean that they believed in Him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed this verse to show them the way to get rid of the offence of disbelief. It is as if Allah, the Most Merciful, was urging them to ask for forgiveness and provide them with a lifeboat to escape punishment.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari*

'But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet Muhammad] are in their midst...' (*al-Anfal:* 33). As long as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lives amongst those disbelievers, Allah *Glorified is He* will not punish them. So, the Messenger's presence in their midst is given special consideration and appreciation. Regarding the disbelievers, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness.' (*al-Anfal:* 33)

Here, we see the facts of faith. A good pure believer never harbours a grudge against his enemies. He does not gloat when they are stricken with misfortunes. These are the good manners of the faithful believer who feels pain when he sees his enemies in a state of impotence and humiliation. So Allah *Glorified is He* refrains from punishing people as long as there are some who ask for His Forgiveness. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to us, 'Let the good-doers among you save the wrong-doers', which means that those who do good shelter those who do wrong and do not expose them. Thus, we find Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was denied the visit to the *Ka`ba* according to the Treaty of Hudaybia concluded with the disbelievers of Mecca. The treaty stipulated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers return to Medina and not enter Mecca for performing *Hajj* that year, but do it the following year. There were some believers who objected to this treaty. One of them, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Is this how we repay villainous conduct in our religion?' And there is another sign of disapproval. When writing the treaty clauses, 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was about to write in its preamble, 'This is an agreement between the Messenger of Allah...', but the negotiator representing the side of the disbelievers objected, saying, 'If we acknowledged you (Muhammad) as the Messenger of Allah, we would not go to war with you; instead write "This is an agreement between 'Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah"'. Ali *Allah be pleased with him* abstained from writing this saying, 'I will not write anything but 'Messenger of Allah'. But the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered him to write the phrase as they wished in order to solve this problem and further tell about a self-fulfilling prophecy concerning this good Companion. Filled with pleasure, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* looked at 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* saying, 'Write it. You shall do the same in a similar incident when you are hard-pressed.'(1) We did not see this prophecy come true, except after the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* nor in the caliphate of Abu Bakr, the caliphate of 'Umar and the caliphate of 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with them*. It occurred during the caliphate of 'Ali himself *Allah be pleased with him* with its crucial events. Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not speak from his own desire.

'Write it. You shall do the same in a similar incident when you are hard-pressed.' This statement means, 'you will find yourself in a similar situation and you will accept the status quo'. So, after Mu`awiyah *Allah be pleased with him* and his army had got into a dispute with 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* and his army, they sought to draw up a treaty between them to prevent splits among Muslims. 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* wrote, 'This is what the Leader of the Believers, 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, agrees to'. But the negotiator for Mu`awiyah *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If you were the Leader of the Believers, should we fight against you?' At that time, 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* recalled what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said on the day of the Treaty of Hudaybia, 'Write it. You shall do the same in a similar incident....'

This shows that politics requires that you should be flexible with a far-sighted vision and not be cast in one mould to cope with difficult situations. If each party had insisted obstinately upon their position, the Treaty of Hudaybia would not have been reached at all. The treaty was necessary as an appropriate truce so that the Muslims could have the opportunity—now that they were safe from Quraysh—to spread the call of Islam and the Divine Way of Life all over the globe. This is exactly what happened over the ten years that followed this treaty. Islam spread to all quarters of the Arabian Peninsula and then to all parts the world. So, those in authority must be of great insight and flexibility; otherwise they, alongside their peoples will lose much. Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to instruct us how to be flexible and adaptable when he signed the Treaty of Hudaybia even though some companions, including 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with them* said as we previously showed, 'Is this how we repay villainous conduct in our religion?' Other Companions said in an inquiring blaming tone, 'Have you not promised us, O Messenger of Allah, that we would enter the *Ka`ba*?' The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'Have I said that it would be this year?'

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(1) *Cited by Al-Bukhari in 'Kitab As-Sulh' Book of Compromise*

Hearing such words, the Muslims did not grasp the importance of thoughtful and well-planned political decisions for steering the course of events. So, splits threatened the Muslims' unity. Sad as he was, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to his wife Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* saying, 'O Umm Salama, the Muslims are about to be destroyed! I gave them orders, but they have not obeyed them.' We see Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* as a faithful wife and a wise advisor. She said, 'O Messenger of Allah, they are just upset. They came in the hope of entering the *Ka`ba* after long exile and severe isolation, only to be denied this blessing, while they are within sight of Mecca. Get up, O Messenger of Allah, and proceed with what Allah has ordered you. Do not say anything to them; go ahead with slaughtering your sacrifice. When they see you doing so, they will do the same.'

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* actually went out and slaughtered a sacrificial animal and the Muslims followed suit. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said about the Treaty of Hudaybia, 'It was the greatest triumph for Islam.' Indeed, there was no greater victory than that of Hudaybia, but people's minds could not realise the way of Allah *Glorified is He*. People are always in a hurry, while Allah *Glorified is He* is not rushed by the haste of His slaves till matters reach their intended end.

Those who disagreed with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were zealous Muslims who advocated their religion according to the best of their knowledge, being unaware of Allah's Indefinite Knowledge. The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to explain to the Muslims why He refrained from turning Hudaybia into a battleground. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They were the ones who disbelieved, who barred you from the Sacred Mosque, and who prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been among them, unknown to you, believing men and women whom you would have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account—Allah brings whoever He wills into His Mercy—if the [believers] had been clearly separated, We would have inflicted a painful punishment on the disbelievers.' (*al-Fatḥ:* 25) Indeed, there were believing men and women hidden amid the disbelievers since there were no separate quarters in Mecca for the Muslims who concealed their faith before the Treaty of Hudaybia described by the Quran as 'Triumph'. At that time, all people lived side by side; so, if war was waged between the people of Mecca and the (Muslim) army heading toward Hudaybia, coming Muslims would kill their resident brethren who had not publicly declared their faith. Were it possible to separate the believers who hid their religion from the disbelievers, then Allah *Glorified is He* will inflict a grievous punishment upon the disbelievers at the hands of the Muslims. Here, in this noble verse that we are now contemplating, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness' (*al-Anfal:* 33).

This means that if some of them asked for forgiveness, Allah *Glorified is He* will save them all from punishment, just as He refrained from punishing the disbelievers due to the Treaty of Hudaybia because there were Muslims hidden among them.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا لَهُمْ أَلَّا يُعَذِّبَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ عَنِ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ وَمَا كَانُوٓاْ
أَوْلِيَآءَهُۥٓۚ إِنْ أَوْلِيَآؤُهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Yet why should God not punish them when they debar people from the Sacred Mosque, although they are not its [rightful] guardians? Only those mindful of God are its rightful guardians, but most of the disbelievers do not realize this [34] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 34)

We may wonder about the thing that can save them from being punished by Allah *Glorified is He*. Punishment is fitting requital for them because they deserve it. They prevented Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims from visiting the Sacred Mosque in Mecca because they thought they controlled it, even though some of them heard about the story of Abraha Al-Ashram who had invaded Mecca with elephants to destroy the *Ka`ba*. Abraha seized a hundred camels owned by the chief of Quraysh, Abd Al-Muttalib, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, 'Abd Al-Muttalib went to him and said, ‘You have taken a hundred camels from me; kindly return them.’ Abraha said to him, ‘I have come to demolish your house of worship, the one of your forefathers; instead of speaking to me on this issue, you speak of your hundred camels I seized!’ 'Abd Al-Muttalib then said, ‘I am the owner of these camels. Concerning the House, it has its own Lord and Protector.’ These words are only uttered by someone who is fully confident that the Sacred House has a Lord to safeguard it. Indeed, flocks of birds came to pelt Abraha and his army with stones, making them like eaten straw.

Thus, how could Quraysh debar Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers from entering the Sacred House, while they learned, according to their old chief’s words, that the House has its own Lord Who protects it? How then could they claim control over it? They should have learned that the protection and guardianship of the House of Allah *Glorified is He* is only granted by Allah *Glorified is He* Who gives it to the righteous people who fear Him; Quraysh were not that kind.

Then, the justification for having them punished is represented in their preventing the Muslims to enter the Holy Mosque, while they were not its rightful guardians. Why? ‘...Only those mindful of Allah are its rightful guardians, but most of the disbelievers do not realise this.’ (*al-Anfal:* 34) While most of them did not realise this fact, a few of them were definitely aware of the truth of the Sacred House. The Holiness of the *Ka`ba* learned by most Quraysh disbelievers and forgotten by the minority is demonstrated in this verse of the Quran. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says through the words of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* ‘…Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer, make people’s hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce…’ (*Ibrahim:* 37).

Allah *Glorified is He* made them (Ibrahim’s [Abraham’s] family) reside in this place to keep the prayer because He is pleased with being eternally worshipped on earth even if only by a single person in this particular spot. The might and influence of this group of Quraysh betrayed them when they turned people away from the Sacred House because Quraysh followed their own whims. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* does as He wills. Thus, He, caused Quraysh to be defeated and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be victorious, and the sanctity of the *Ka`ba* to be restored as a place for worshipping Allah *Glorified is He* forever.

We see the Wisdom of the True Lord *Glorified is He* demonstrated in the times of prayer. The dawn prayer in a country might be the noon prayer in another; and the noon prayer for one country is the dawn prayer in another. Similarly, the afternoon prayer for some people is the dawn prayer, the sunset prayer, or the evening prayer for other people. Thus, we find that every part of the day is occupied with periods for worshipping Allah *Glorified is He*. At every moment, we find people involved in timely prayers towards Allah's Sacred House. Not a single spot on earth does not have someone saying, '*Allah Akbar'* (Allah is the Greatest). Indeed, the Sacred House was built for establishing these prayers.

However, Quraysh made of the prayers that represent submission, subjugation and bowing in worship to Allah *Glorified is He* with His Majesty and Greatness, a different thing demonstrated by the True Lord *Glorified is He*:

وَمَا كَانَ صَلَاتُهُمْ عِندَ ٱلْبَيْتِ إِلَّا مُكَآءً
وَتَصْدِيَةً ۚ فَذُوقُوا۟ ٱلْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Their prayers before the House are nothing but whistling and clapping. 'So taste the punishment for your disbelief' [35] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 35)

Their prayers took the shape of amusement and play to the point that they prayed through whistling and clapping. Those prayers were like a loud whistling noise ringing in the ears, along with clapping with a certain rhythm. Are these real prayers? And how dared they drive people away from the Sacred House, while they had no control over it? Those who oversee the Sacred House must be righteous and must fear Allah *Glorified is He* whereas those disbelievers were the opposite. They did not perform the type of prayers required for this House, in which Allah *Glorified is He* must be remembered and worshipped. Thus, punishment was the ultimate requital for those who insisted on being misguided in worship after Allah's religion had been revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Afterwards, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ لِيَصُدُّوا۟ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَسَيُنفِقُونَهَا ثُمَّ تَكُونُ
عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَةً ثُمَّ يُغْلَبُونَ ۗ وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ يُحْشَرُونَ ٣٦

They use their wealth to bar people from the path of God, and they will go on doing so. In the end this will be a source of intense regret for them: they will be overcome and herded towards Hell [36] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 36)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that these idolaters were bent on denying Allah *Glorified is He* and spent money to hinder the path of Allah *Glorified is He*. Nevertheless, they achieved nothing and their hopes were in vain. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* pushes the disbelievers into overspending to fight faith; thus, they lose their money and feel great regret, for Allah *Glorified is He* will overcome them in the end.

When the disbelievers heard Allah *Glorified is He* say, '...and they will go on doing so. In the end this will be a source of intense regret for them: they will be overcome and herded towards Hell.' (*al-Anfal:* 36), they did not realise that the True Lord *Glorified is He* was talking about the future, and that their funds, no matter how big they might have been, used in combatting Allah's religion, would never accomplish their aspirations. Indeed, events have shown the truthfulness of the Glorious Quran. Why did they fail to realise this fact? Why did they not save their riches, seeing the triumph of Allah's religion? Indeed, this is the practise of those who lack insight and good thinking. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and they will go on doing so...' which is the translation of *(fasayunfiqunaha)*, this means that spending will continue to be made in the future. The future has two forms: the near future and the distant future. If spending is related to the near future, He says, *(fasayunfiqunaha)* as in this verse, but if it is for the distant future, He will say *(fasawfa yunfiqunaha)*. This is similar to another verse in the Glorious Quran: 'The foolish people will say, 'What has turned them away from the prayer direction they used to face?' (*al-Baqara:* 142) The Noble Quran revealed that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* changed his direction (*qibla*) while praying; and the companions thus, proclaimed that piece of news. Though the disbelievers learned about the incident demonstrated by this verse, they did not take heed of the statement which the Quran said they were going to utter. The statement became a reality, giving evidence that they had a bad nature and crooked disposition. Back to the verse that we are discussing now, we say that the disbelievers were overcome with intense regret after they had wasted their money without fulfilling their goals and ambitions. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse by saying, '...they will be overcome and herded towards Hell.' (*al-Anfal:* 36)

Whenever the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the great punishment that befalls the disbelievers in the hellfire, He does not intend to make the fire their refuge, but He rather, frightens and terrifies them away from disbelief, while calling upon them to accept faith and urging them not to be deniers of the Truth so that they will not be driven into hell.

After that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لِيَمِيزَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْخَبِيثَ مِنَ ٱلطَّيِّبِ وَيَجْعَلَ ٱلْخَبِيثَ بَعْضَهُۥ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ
فَيَرْكُمَهُۥ جَمِيعًا فَيَجْعَلَهُۥ فِى جَهَنَّمَ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

God will separate the bad from the good, place the bad on top of one another – heaping them all up together – and put them in Hell. They will be the losers [37] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 37)

This verse reveals to us that the struggles that erupt between Islam and its followers on one hand, and the enemies of Islam and their followers on the other, are initiated by the Will and Command of Allah *Glorified is He*. The hardships that the believers face during these confrontations are aimed at testing their faith. An example of these tests is what happened after the Night Journey when those having little faith wondered, 'Is it reasonable that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went as far as the holy city of Jerusalem and return in a single night?' Meanwhile, those with unshakeable faith like Abu Bakr As-Siddiq (the Truthful) *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If he has said it, then it is true.' Those with strong and firm faith always act truthfully, while those with weak faith always act deceitfully. Thus, the great historical events throughout the eras of Islam have come to separate the good elements from the bad ones, place the bad elements on top of one another, heaping them all up together so that Allah *Glorified is He* finally puts them in hell.

The historical Islamic events happened for the sake of purification, just as exposing metals to fire to make them pure after discarding impurities. Thus, Islam helps the believers to have good hearts and strong faith through the numerous tests they experience, since they carry the Message of Allah *Glorified is He* to all corners of the earth. Such tests which are aimed at cleansing the believers resemble qualifiers in sports. Weightlifters, for example, undergo domestic contests and whoever can lift the heaviest weights qualify to take part in international competitions which come up with the strongest world champions. 'Allah will separate the bad from the good, place the bad on top of one another—heaping them all up together—and put them in Hell. They will be the losers.' (*al-Anfal:* 37)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given us several examples of events that separate the bad from the good since you can hardly judge people in normal conditions. People often claim to be courageous, generous, and noble when they feel safe. They allege that they have strong faith that qualifies them to be ready to make any sacrifice in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He*. However, experiences and events are the real test of people's sincerity and earnestness. A person might say to a friend of his, 'I am at your disposal will all my money'; but when a calamity befalls this friend, he seeks to evade him. What, then, proves the sincerity of our claims and allegations? Experiences and events do this mission. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to separate the bad from the good through having the believers involved in crucial events and harsh tests, and exposing those with hollow faith, so that people could bear witness to themselves. The believers come out of these experiences with soft hearts and great faith. When Allah *Glorified is He* sorts the good out from the bad, He wants to keep the good intact. The bad comes in various forms and aspects and does not take a single mould. Allah *Glorified is He* gathers all bad things to put them together in hell.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُل لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِن يَنتَهُوا۟ يُغْفَرْ لَهُم مَّا قَدْ سَلَفَ
وَإِن يَعُودُوا۟ فَقَدْ مَضَتْ سُنَّتُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ٣٨

[Prophet], tell the disbelievers that if they desist their past will be forgiven, but if they persist, they have an example in the fate of those who went before [38] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 38)

‘Tell’ is in the imperative and refers to a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. A command requires someone to convey it; this means that there is a speaker and someone spoken to. The speaker here is Allah *Glorified is He* and the person spoken to is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says to him, ‘Tell’; the message he is required to transmit to people is included in Allah’s statement, ‘[Prophet Muhammad] Tell the disbelievers that if they desist, their past will be forgiven...’ (*al-Anfal:* 38). In other words, if they cease denying the Truth, the sins they committed during their days of disbelief will be forgiven. Here, we notice a change of pronouns as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is supposed to address the disbelievers this way, ‘If *you* desist, *your* past will be forgiven’. However, Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘[Prophet Muhammad] Tell the disbelievers that if *they* desist, *their* past will be forgiven....’ (*al-Anfal:* 38). Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If *they* desist’ instead of saying, ‘If *you* desist’, even though the disbelievers are present and being addressed. How then does He address them in the third person? Allah *Glorified is He* wants to include everyone who might hear these words from any believer; it is as if He makes a general speech to preclude anyone from being excused or excluded. This is much like another statement voiced by the True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘Those who disbelieve say of the believers, “If there were any good in this Quran, *they* would not have believed in it before we did....”’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 11)

If we thought the same way, then the sentence should have been, ‘If there were any good in this Quran, *you* would not have believed in it before we did...’ Since this statement has been said by many a disbeliever to the believers at several places, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to draw our attention to the fact that the speech is general and covers all people, being not confined to a single incident, but rather pertaining to all similar situations. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...if *they* desist, *their* past will be forgiven...' (*al-Anfal:* 38). This means that if they stop plotting against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and hindering his call, Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive them. Hatching plots and hindrance of the call of faith are a result of disbelief; and if they turn to Allah *Glorified is He* and desist from fighting His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* they will be good people since Islam removes the previous history of disbelief.

This story supports such a fact: a warrior declared his faith, embraced Islam, and bore witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger. This warrior then took part in a battle and was killed and thus became a martyr since all the sins committed during the period of disbelief and concerning his duties towards Allah *Glorified is He* were forgiven when he uttered the Two Testimonies of Islam. Regarding his obligations to people, it was incumbent upon his heirs to fulfil them.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes this verse, saying, '...but if they persist, they have an example in the fate of those who went before.' (*al-Anfal:* 38) When Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...but if they persist, He intends to tell us that this message must be conveyed to the believers all the time. If they revert again to disbelief, obstinacy, and plotting, they will be cast away from the Mercy and Forgiveness of Allah *Glorified is He.* Granting them forgiveness is contingent upon their maintenance of faith and not returning to the state of disbelief.

The word 'example' (which is the translation of *sunnah*) mentioned in '...they have an example in the fate of those who went before' refers to the way and the manner through which the previous people were punished or the state in which they became afterwards. In another verse, the word *sunnah* is translated as 'established way':'...you will find no change in Allah's established way.' (*al-Ahzab:* 62) In other words, this is the way that Allah *Glorified is He* has selected to enforce His Will by means of truth and justice. Thus, '...they have an example in the fate of those who went before' (*al-Anfal:* 38) refers to the way that people of disbelief know well which Allah *Glorified is He* used with those who stubbornly opposed and fought His messengers. That is much like what happened to the disbelievers at the battle of Badr; for whoever stands in the path of Allah's Call and Religion will be inevitably destroyed as occurred to all those who opposed the prophets. You already know what Allah *Glorified is He* did to the peoples of `Ad, Thamud, and Pharaoh. You have gained knowledge of all these events and have seen Allah's way with all the previous disbelieving nations when they tried to hinder the prophets from calling upon people to believe in Allah *Glorified is He*.

Either the words in this part of the verse address the disbelievers in their homeland concerning what happened to the transgressors at the battle of Badr, or they represent a general demonstration of Allah's way with the wrongdoers who oppose His Way, and whose inevitable destiny is destruction.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَٰتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّىٰ لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ ٱلدِّينُ كُلُّهُۥ
لِلَّهِ ۚ فَإِنِ ٱنتَهَوْا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Believers], fight them until there is no more
persecution, and all worship is devoted to God alone:
if they desist, then God sees all that they do [39]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 39)

This is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to the Muslims to fight. Fighting is an action that occurs between two or more people, i.e. a clash between two fighting parties. So, when one hears the word 'fighting,' the first thing that comes to mind is that it happens between two sides or between two groups of people, not one. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Fight them', we understand that this command is for the believers to fight the disbelievers. Undoubtedly, the disbelievers must have done something that led them to be fought. Or they must have arranged for fighting the believers; so the believers had to confront them. Here Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, 'Kill them' but he says, 'Fight them'. This means that there is a confrontation, a conflict or an action between two opposing sides just as when you say, 'I met someone or I took part with someone in doing so-and-so.' i.e. you two held the meeting or participated in doing something. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Fight them until there is no more persecution...' (*al-Anfal:* 39).

This means that the confrontations are continuous, one leading to the other, until matters are decided upon by fierce fighting. Leaving those disbelievers to oppress the Muslims and spend their wealth in support of falsehood may be seen as weakness and humiliation on the part of the believers, and as mighty and prideful on the part of the disbelievers. Thus, there can be persecution and oppression to the followers of Islam; people are tortured and insulted because of maintaining their religion, with no efforts exerted for combatting the aggressors and defending the weak.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to put an end to this persecution which is a kind of test to the disbelievers. As we earlier said, tests are not a bad thing in themselves, but they are such if the results are shameful or disappointing. For instance, if a student fails the tests, the results of the tests become blameworthy, whereas if he succeeds, they become praiseworthy. The disbelievers of Quraysh severely tortured people for their religion until their bodies gave out and they became subservient to the disbelievers' orders. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to put an end to this injustice; so He commanded them to fight the disbelievers since they had acted in a way that justified their fighting.

In this verse, we find Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and all worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Anfal:* 39), while in another verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, the word *'all'* is not mentioned: '...and worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Baqara:* 192). Each verse has its own meaning and impact since every word in the Glorious Quran has a particular indication. Hence, Allah's statement, '...and *all* worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Anfal:* 39) means that there must not be more than one religion in the Arabian Peninsula and this actually came true. But Allah's statement: '...and worship is devoted to Allah alone...' (*al-Baqara:* 192) gives us another shot. The first statement refers to the Arabs and the Arabian Peninsula, whereas the second statement denotes that Islam is for the entire world.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says as a conclusion of the verse, '...if they desist, then Allah sees all that they do.' (*al-Anfal:* 39) The clause 'if they desist' means that if they respond and obey. Allah's statement, '...then Allah sees all that they do.' means that they must beware doing so in a deceitful tricky way, for Allah *Glorified is He* sees all that they do and is always aware of their intentions and actions. Since they move from disbelief to faith, Allah *Glorified is He* wipes their bad deeds out and replaces them with good ones. It is not so easy for people who had lived as disbelievers for a long time and committed shameful sins to get accustomed to the new life of faith. They are required to do their best to overcome their desires. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* helps those who help themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Generous Who greatly rewards His slaves when they prove themselves sincere and faithful.

There is another nice meaningful gesture in Allah's statement, '...then Allah sees all that they do.' (*al-Anfal:* 39) A message is supposed to be directed to the believers to the effect, 'O those who have suffered much because of your faith and strived to guide the disbelievers and turn them into truthful well-mannered people, feel sure that Allah *Glorified is He* witnesses all what you have done for the sake of ensuring that all worship is dedicated to Him'. Thus, both explanations of the verse complement each other.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن تَوَلَّوۡاْ فَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَوۡلَىٰكُمۡۚ نِعۡمَ ٱلۡمَوۡلَىٰ وَنِعۡمَ ٱلنَّصِيرُ ﴿٤٠﴾

But if they pay no heed, be sure that God is your protector, the best protector and the best helper [40]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 40)

Allah *Glorified is He* urges people to believe in Him, but at the same time He makes it clear to them that the great number of believers is not the thing that raises the banner of Islam and ensures victory for the faithful. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But if they pay no heed...' (*al-Anfal:* 40). One might suppose that Allah *Glorified is He* moves people's hearts to believe, embrace Islam and side with the Truth, so that Islam can be made stronger through their numbers. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'But if they pay no heed...' (*al-Anfal:* 40) to warn the believers not to get desperate or lose heart should those disbelievers turn away for you are made victorious only through the aid of Allah *the Most High, the All-Powerful*. If they do not truly believe, know that Islam does not depend on them for victory; Islam does not spread by the large number of Muslims since victory is from Allah Who does not need His Creation. Again, Islam does not rely on the number of its believers to win a victory because Allah *Glorified is He* leads them to victory if they follow His path whether they are few or many. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* draws the believers' attention to the fact that if the disbelievers turn away and do not believe, you should not lose heart because your victory is not based on the aid of those who reject faith, but on the Aid of Allah *Glorified is He* for He is your Protector. Allah *Glorified is He* is not only your Protector Who supports you and leads you to victory, but also He is 'the Best Protector and the Best Helper.' (*al-Anfal:* 40)

Why? Because if the protector were someone other than Allah *Glorified is He,* then he would be subject to changes and variables. He might be strong and able to support us and lead us to victory today, but he might die tomorrow; so, he is unfit to be a protector. The dominion and power of a false protector may depart him, thus rendering him weak and in need of others to support him; he is no longer able to aid or protect anyone. The True Protector in Whom we must seek refuge, is the One Who is not affected by changes and variables because He is the Ever-Living Who never dies. He is the All-Powerful Whose Absolute Might never becomes lesser. This is the Protector in whom you must place your confidence and trust. Thus, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* always underscores that we must put our trust in Him to fulfil our hopes and aspirations. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Put your trust in the Living [Allah] who never dies...' (*al-Furqan:* 58). If you truly want to place your trust in someone, do trust in the One Who is the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful; do trust in Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah's Words: 'the Best Protector...' (*al-Anfal:* 40) affirm that Allah is the All-Strong, the All- Capable and the Ever-Living, while Allah's Words, 'the Best Helper' (*al-Anfal:* 40) stress that Allah *Glorified is He* surrounds your enemies and their plots against you; nothing escapes Him. You fight your enemies according to the fighting strategies and techniques you know and they do the same thing. But Allah *Glorified is He* knows their schemes and tricks and foils them while leading you to victory by inspiring you to adopt strategies that cannot be confronted by them. Allah *Glorified is He* provides you with a supplement that helps you to emerge victorious.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about battle gains saying:

وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّمَا غَنِمۡتُم مِّن شَيۡءٖ فَأَنَّ لِلَّهِ خُمُسَهُۥ وَلِلرَّسُولِ وَلِذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ وَٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ
وَٱلۡمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱبۡنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ إِن كُنتُمۡ ءَامَنتُم بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَىٰ عَبۡدِنَا يَوۡمَ
ٱلۡفُرۡقَانِ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡتَقَى ٱلۡجَمۡعَانِۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤١﴾

Know that one- fifth of your battle gains belongs to God and the Messenger, to close relatives and orphans, to the needy and travelers, if you believe in God and the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the day of the decision, the day when the two forces met in battle. God has power over all things [41]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 41)

What is the reason for mentioning battle gains here? What is the occasion for this? Allah *Glorified is He* talks about fighting. There were battle gains at the end of every battle in which the Muslims emerged victorious. Thus, the battle gains are mentioned in this chapter. In the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* talks about His aid to the believers, underscoring that He is the Best Protector and Helper Who leads the believers to victory. We know that battle gains come as a result of victory in battle. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wants the believers to feel sure that victory will be theirs since He moves to talk about battle gains which are movable property seized by the Muslims from disbelieving fighters. It is clearly established that battle gains were not lawful for any of the prophets prior to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Know that one-fifth of your battle gains belongs to Allah...’ (*al-Anfal:* 41). So, one-fifth belongs to Allah *Glorified is He,* while the four-fifths are distributed among the fighters. How is the fifth that belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* divided?

The Glorious Quran mentions the method of distributing this fifth, but religious scholars disagree over the explanation. The verse says, ‘Know that one-fifth of your battle gains belongs to Allah and the Messenger [Muhammad]...’ (*al-Anfal:* 41). Then, it goes on to say, ‘...to close relatives and orphans, to the needy and travellers...’ (*al-Anfal:* 41).

Some scholars explain the noble verse to the letter saying that this fifth of battle gains is distributed among the six recipients that Allah *Glorified is He* names in His Holy Book—Allah *Glorified is He,* Messenger Muhammad *peace* *and blessings be upon him* close relatives, orphans, the needy and travellers. Thus, we have six shares. But most scholars agree that this fifth of battle gains should be divided into five portions because one portion would go to Allah *Glorified is He* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* together since the two are not separated from each other, while the remaining four portions of this fifth are distributed equally among the other four groups — close relatives, orphans, the needy and travellers.

Scholars also differ over the meaning of ‘close relatives’. Are they the relatives of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the relatives of others? There is no disagreement on the shares of orphans, the needy and travellers. In summary, the total of battle gains is divided into five parts: one part belongs to the above-mentioned categories, while the other four-fifths belong to the fighters because Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the recipients of this fifth and mentions nothing about the other fifths; this indicates that they belong to those involved in fighting. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* adds, ‘...if you believe in Allah...’ (*al-Anfal:* 41). They definitely believe in Allah *Glorified is He,* but it seems that these words are voiced to make them check their faith in case they object to this division of battle gains. If one of them desired the fifth set aside for Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* and was not content with the four-fifths devoted for the fighters—as ordained by Allah *Glorified is He*—he would then do harm to his faith through objecting to the One Who issues this Command. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who orders this specific division of battle gains. So, those who stray and desire others’ possessions should dispose of these feelings because the One Who ordains this distribution is Allah *Glorified is He* Who brings victory to fighters. While victory results in battle gains, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who grants victory. Man must submissively accept Allah’s distribution of His Blessings among His servants.

An example of man’s acceptance of Allah’s division of blessings is the shares of inheritance. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the Muslim’s money to be justly distributed. During one’s life, man is given free will to spend his money as he desires. Furthermore, at the time of making the will, Allah *Glorified is He* gives man the right to designate a third of his will to go to certain quarters and persons in appreciation of the social, human, and emotional considerations in the society. For instance, you might wish to reward some people who are not among your relatives who are entitled to inheri, because they have served you for a long time or have helped you during your illness or old age. Or you might find that some of your acquaintances need money more than your sons do; so you would designate a part of your wealth for them. You are allowed to take this step provided that the donations do not exceed a third of your fortune. Again, the True Lord *Glorified is He* stresses the importance of human and religious sentiments in the society. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* grants you the freedom to donate a third of your estate to whoever you want, while the remaining two thirds are divided as ordained by Allah *Glorified is He*.

So, the True Lord's Words '...if you believe in Allah...' (*al-Anfal:* 41) means that Allah *Glorified is He* makes it a matter of faith that battle gains be divided in the manner prescribed by Him. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...and the Revelation We sent down to Our Servant on the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter], the day when the two forces met in battle...' (*al-Anfal:* 41).

Al-furqan, translated above as 'the decisive encounter', is the thing (the Battle of Badr) that distinguishes the Truth from falsehood in a way that is quite clear to everyone. Allah *Glorified is He* also uses the word *al-Furqan* to describe the Holy Quran in the chapter of *Al-`Imran*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…He sent down the Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down *al-Furqan* [the Quran which is the distinction between right and wrong] …' (*Al-'Imran:* 3-4).

When Allah *Glorified is He* sent down the Torah and the Gospel, they were both revealed to distinguish between the Truth and falsehood. But Allah *Glorified is He* ordains that the word *al-Furqan* be used exclusively to describe the Holy Quran because it is the final and definitive criterion that differentiates between the Truth and falsehood; No divine books and no other criteria will come after it. '...and the Revelation We sent down to Our Servant on the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter]...' (*al-Anfal:* 41). Allah *the Almighty* refers in this verse, '... And the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter] ...' (*al-Anfal:* 41) to the extremely distinctive day of the Battle of Badr in which truth was distinguished from falsehood. The Muslims were few, while the disbelievers were a great many. The Muslims had set out to seize the merchandise of the caravan without having battle gear, whereas, the disbelievers came ready with their great numbers, equipment and soldiers needed for the battle. It is known that the Muslims merely hoped to seize the caravan of Quraysh which they thought would not require much time or great effort because it was only guarded by a small troop of men that did not pose any real threat. However, Allah decrees the victory of the small party of Muslims to be a result of their confrontation with a fully equipped outnumbered army of disbelievers so that everyone would acknowledge that this small poorly equipped party of believers had won out against an army of superior numbers and gear. In this manner, the decisive distinction has been clearly made between belief and disbelief, as well as between the victory of Allah to His faction and the deceit of Satan to his minions. Had the Muslims merely seized the caravan of Quraysh, sceptics would have alleged that the caravan might have been plundered by an armed group. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* instead of endowing them the easy capture of the caravan tested them in a war against the well-equipped and strong army advancing from Mecca. Thereby, Allah *Glorified is He* focuses on the concept of the possibility of the victory of the believers unqualified to fight in a war over the disbelievers. The winning of the three hundred believers over the one thousand disbelievers affirmed that the scales had begun to tip in the favour of the believers. If anyone feels incredulity that this small number of unequipped fighters could defeat such a large number of equipped fighters, he should read the saying of Allah: '... Allah has power over all things' (*al-Anfal:* 41). This means that the Divine Will is the motive that tipped the balance in favour of the believers.

Near the end of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *the Almighty* relates the story of Talut (Saul) and Jalut (Goliath). The story tells that the children of Israel asked one of their prophets to ask Allah to divinely elect someone to be a king over them to lead the battle against Jalut (Goliath), the tyrant who had turned them out of their homes and put them to flight. When the Divine Command came that Talut (Saul) would be the king, the children of Israel contended his leadership: '… But they said, "How can he be king over us when we have a greater right to rule than he? He does not even have great wealth.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 247) It was they who had asked for a king to rule over them, but they objected to Talut (Saul), though he came by divine selection. When Talut (Saul) set out to fight with his followers, Allah tested them with thirst and disallowed them from deeply drinking from a passing-by river. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘When Talut (Saul) set out with his forces, he said to them, “Allah will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused].” But they all drank [deep] from it, except for a few.’ (*al-Baqara:* 249)

Allah *Glorified is He* tested the believing faction by disallowing them from drinking to their full from a nearby river even though they were thirsty and commanded them to drink only a handful amount of water that could restore moisture to the mouth. As they reached the river, the majority stampeded to the river and gulped down their fill. Only a small minority did not fully drink and followed the Command of Allah; those were the ones who stayed with Talut (Saul) and crossed the river. When they saw the opposing army, most of them said as the Munificent Quran narrates, ‘…When he crossed it with those who had kept faith, they said, “We have no strength today against Jalut (Goliath) and his warriors…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 249). Their words mean that they feared the confrontation with the army of Jalut (Goliath); everyone but a very few refused to fight. Thus, the army of believers underwent two selection tests; by choice and by trial. The former was done by perseverance over thirst and the latter by choosing to face the opposing army. Those who remained were the purely and deeply faithful few followers. The Quran quotes their saying, ‘…But those who knew that they were going to meet their Lord said, “How often a small force has defeated a large army with Allah’s permission! Allah is with those who are steadfast.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 249)

The remaining faction of believers who feared the reckoning of Allah in the Hereafter were undaunted by the scarcity of their numbers against the abundance of the soldiers of Jalut (Goliath). However, they stressed that the small host can overcome a large army by Allah’s leave and they were indeed victorious. A clear-cut distinction is made by Allah to separate the truth from the falsehood as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...the day of *al-Furqan* [the decisive encounter] is the day when the two forces met in a battle..." (*al-Anfal:* 41). This refers to the day when the host of believers won the battle despite their poorer numbers and equipment as compared to the disbelievers. Accordingly, Allah ends the verse by saying, '...Allah has power over all things.' (*al-Anfal:* 41) This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has the power to bring victory to the believers even though they are few and unequipped.

In the next verse, Allah says:

إِذْ أَنتُم بِٱلْعُدْوَةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَهُم بِٱلْعُدْوَةِ ٱلْقُصْوَىٰ وَٱلرَّكْبُ أَسْفَلَ مِنكُمْ ۚ وَلَوْ
تَوَاعَدتُّمْ لَٱخْتَلَفْتُمْ فِى ٱلْمِيعَـٰدِ ۙ وَلَـٰكِن لِّيَقْضِىَ ٱللَّهُ أَمْرًا كَانَ مَفْعُولًا لِّيَهْلِكَ
مَنْ هَلَكَ عَنۢ بَيِّنَةٍ وَيَحْيَىٰ مَنْ حَىَّ عَنۢ بَيِّنَةٍ ۗ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَسَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٢﴾

Remember when you were on the near side of the valley, and they were on the far side and the caravan was below you. If you had made an appointment to fight, you would have failed to keep it [but the battle took place] so that God might bring about something already ordained, so that those who were to die might die after seeing a clear proof, and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof – God is all hearing and all seeing[42] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 42)

The verse begins with an Arabic adverb of time; *idh* (when). Allah *Glorified is He* reminds the believer of such day when they were on *`udwa ad-dunya* (the nearer side of the valley). Since 'valley' is the name given to a depression enclosed between mountains; thus, the high places to the right and left of the valley are called *`udwa*. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* refers to the topographical landmarks to explain the geographical settings of the battlefield.

Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *ad-dunya* (near) to refer to the Muslims who were at the site of the Battle of Badr nearer to Medina, whereas, the disbelievers of Quraysh advanced from Mecca, which is at *al-`udwa al-quswa* (a far place from Medina) and occupied the farthest side of Badr. Allah continues this verse, saying, '...And the caravan was below you...' (*al-Anfal:* 42). The caravan, of course, refers to the camels hauling the merchants and the goods that the Muslims had initially set out to capture. When Abu Sufyan, the leader of the caravan, learned of the intentions of the Muslims, he rerouted the caravan towards the seashore. In this part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the switched path taken by Abu Sufyan. It is well known that the seashore is the lowest part of dry land and the global sea level is used, today, as the standard measurement for altitude. Thus, the altitude of a place is said to be one hundred metres, for example, above sea level. The seashore is always as the same height as that of the sea level; yet, mountains and valleys have different heights and depths so they are poorly suited to serve as the standard measurement for altitude. However, the global sea level is flat and uniform. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* draws the attention to the fact that the lowest part of the earth is the seashore.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...if you had made an appointment to fight, you would have failed to keep it, [but the battle took place] so that Allah might bring about something already ordained...' (*al-Anfal:* 42). This signifies that if the believers had agreed with the disbelievers upon the time and the field of the battle, some of them would have come late and others would have strayed away from the designated battleground. However, Allah had decreed the time and the battlefield with utmost precision so that the confrontation would take place at the specified time and place and so that the believers would be victorious over the disbelievers.

Allah *the Almighty* says, '...so that those who were to die might die after seeing a clear proof, and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof...' (*al-Anfal:* 42). Does Allah mean that the disbelievers literally or figuratively die in this context? Though some believers also died, but they became martyrs. Moreover, does Allah mean that the believers merely survive; though many disbelievers survived after the Battle of Badr? Thus, 'to die' does not mean actual death here; but rather, it is applied to all disbelievers, whether they physically died or not, because death here happens in a spiritual sense. Whichever of the disbelievers were killed died and whichever survived of them morally died. By fighting against the believers, they would eventually perish by the punishment and pain that awaited them in the Hereafter unless they found the Mercy of Allah and came to believe before their time on earth expired. Similarly, ‘to live’ does not mean actual survival, but rather, it refers to the believers who will live in eternal bliss even though they died. The intended meaning is then, ‘Let he who disbelieves, disbelieve, and let he who believes, believe with certainty’.

As aforementioned, the word ‘life’ is used in the Quran in various meanings; there is the life which is defined by movement and perception and which exists from the moment the soul enters the body to give life. This kind of life is enjoyed by both believers and disbelievers and is ended in an untimed death. However, the intended life is that led by believers for the sake of Allah in the Hereafter without death, tiredness, or misery. As Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…The true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) This is the true life; thus, Allah *Glorified is He* grants whoever truly believes a life of eternity in paradise. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life...’ (*al-Anfal:* 24). Someone may wonder, ‘How does Allah address living people while He says to them, ‘gives you the life’? Allah *the Almighty* ordains that the believers will lead an eternal life in paradise due to their faith.

Allah concludes this verse by saying, ‘... Allah is indeed All-Hearing, All Knowing’ (*al-Anfal:* 42). All-Hearing and All Knowing mean that Allah *Glorified is He* is aware of everything and every thought. Whatever is to be heard, He hears, whatever is to be seen, He sees and whatever is hidden in the hearts or emotions of man He knows, because He is the Omniscient and the Cognizant of all things.

A human perceives information through senses: hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling. These are the five senses that provide information to a person even when he has no prior knowledge of anything. Allah says, ‘Allah is He Who brought you out of your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78) Thus, these means of perception provide the person with newly perceived information. Accordingly, whenever the person learns something new, he should praise Allah.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* shows how He shapes destiny saying:

إِذۡ يُرِيكَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِي مَنَامِكَ قَلِيلٗاۖ وَلَوۡ أَرَىٰكَهُمۡ كَثِيرٗا لَّفَشِلۡتُمۡ وَلَتَنَٰزَعۡتُمۡ
فِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَلَّمَۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيمُۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٤٣﴾

[Prophet], remember when God made you see them in your sleep as few: if He had shown them to you [believers] as many, you would certainly have lost heart and argued about it, but God saved you. He knows the secrets of the heart [43] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 43)

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* ordains that a decisive battle takes place, so He incites the thoughts of each party to be bent on war because He decrees the confrontation of the two parties to distinguish between the good and the evil. If this encounter were humanly planned without divinely intervention, the lesser party might be too frightened to face the outnumbered opponent. Aiming at joining the battle, each party should have faith in attaining victory; otherwise, they would not go into the battle.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers how He has psychologically prepared them for the battle by conveying a vision upon Prophet Muhammad. In a nightly vision, Muhammad *peace be upon him* saw that the disbelievers were few so that he would consider that the Muslims could easily defeat them and he informed his people as such. Allah has made the number of disbelievers seems few in the eyes of the believers and the number of believers seems few in the eyes of the disbelievers in order that the battle raged between them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَإِذۡ يُرِيكُمُوهُمۡ إِذِ ٱلۡتَقَيۡتُمۡ فِيٓ أَعۡيُنِكُمۡ قَلِيلٗا وَيُقَلِّلُكُمۡ فِيٓ أَعۡيُنِهِمۡ
لِيَقۡضِيَ ٱللَّهُ أَمۡرٗا كَانَ مَفۡعُولٗاۗ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُرۡجَعُ ٱلۡأُمُورُ ﴿٤٤﴾

When you met He showed them to you as few, and He made you few in their eyes, so that He might bring about what has been ordained: everything goes back to God[44] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 44)

Therefore, the believers thought that the disbelievers were few and vice versa. But for the will of Allah to give the believers the impression that the disbelievers were few, or to give the disbelievers the impression that the believers were few, the battle would not have taken place. Allah decreed to make each side seem less challenging to the other so that the battle would begin. Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* narrates, ‘I said to someone next to me, “I think they are seventy.” He said, “Nay, they are a hundred.”’ Allah *Glorified is He* also decreed to use this vision to serve as a clear indication of prophethood. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw that the number of disbelievers were few, he informed his followers; thus, the battle decreed by Allah had taken place.

The prescribed decree of Allah is to bring about the two challenging parties at the Battle of Badr to distinguish between the belief and disbelief to attribute all things to Allah. Each fighter in the battle had his reward from Allah; the believer was compensated in accordance with his good intentions and loyalty to the struggle, while the disbeliever received the wrath of Allah according to his evil deeds. In the saying of Allah, ‘everything goes back to Allah’ (*al-Anfal:* 44), the word *al-`umoor*, is translated as ‘everything’. In this context, it either refers to ‘every command’ issued in battles, where there are all types of commands for each fighter, or it refers to the ‘outcome’ of any battle; i.e. the triumph of a party and the defeat of another. To ensure victory for the believers, Allah directs them to be firm in the battle. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا لَقِيتُمۡ فِئَةٗ فَٱثۡبُتُواْ وَٱذۡكُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ
كَثِيرٗا لَّعَلَّكُمۡ تُفۡلِحُونَ ٤٥

Believers, when you meet a force in battle, stand firm and keep God firmly in mind, so that you may prosper [45] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 45)

In this context, the word ‘force’ denotes a group of people gathered specifically to take up arms on the battlefield; it is not just any group; rather, it is a cohesive unit of warriors where each fighter forms part of a larger whole. Any other incoherent group can be easily broken apart, whereas, disciplined fighters are hardly overpowered. Accordingly, each one protects his comrades so that each one of them is indivisible from the others.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions ‘force’ in His saying: ‘...How often a small force has defeated a large army with Allah’s permission! Allah is with those who are steadfast.’ (*al-Baqara:* 249) He also says, ‘You have already seen a sign in the two forces that met in battle, one fighting for Allah’s Cause and the other made up of disbelievers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 13)

In the verse under consideration, Allah *the Almighty* instructs the believers to be firm during battle when the fighting breaks out. War firstly requires preparation, then planning undertaken afterwards followed by deployment and confrontation. Allah’s saying, ‘when you meet’ means that confrontation with the disbelievers had taken place and ‘being firm’ means ‘being brave’. In battle, the disbelievers would pose a great threat if the believers were not firm. The weak fighter can easily be intimidated and, consequently, is forced to retreat.

Since the Muslims had willingly gone into battle under such adverse conditions, their enemies could not help but be convinced of their bravery. But for the firmness and bravery of Muslims, the opponents would have borne witness to their weakness. Thus, training to be firm in combat is essential. Pre-war planning consists of strenuous training and precise planning so that no one would flee during confrontation because such act of desertion is an utmost grievous sin. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If anyone does so on such a day– unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting force– he incurs the wrath of Allah.’ (*al-Anfal:* 16)

‘Turning his back on them’ is an invective epithet for the process of retreat because the back is the part of the body that is meant to be guarded and protected. ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was once asked, ‘Why does your armour only have a breastplate without a back plate?’ He said, ‘I would prefer to die than to enable the enemy to hurt my back’. So, if his armour were to have both a back and a front, it would seem, in that case, that he intended to show his back to an enemy during confrontation. This shows that he will never disgracefully turn his back to the enemy. This is an example of self-restraint, confronting adversities even in a moment of duress. When the fighter goes into the battle with only his chest protected, this means that he will not turn his back or flee away because he knows that if he turns around he will turn his back unprotected to his enemies and he will be killed.

Allah asks the believers to 'stand firm' (*al-Anfal:* 45), in an absolute sense; but rather, He wants them to be firm in battle. Since the believers face a large-numbered and well-equipped force, preparation and consideration are indispensable for the situation. Allah *Glorified is He* guides them to stand firm as they should certainly know that they will not face their enemy with their own mere strength, but rather, they will do so with the power and support of Allah for Whom they fight. That is why Allah says, '...and keep Allah firmly in mind' (*al-Anfal:* 45). As they are fighting, they should remember that Allah supports them with His aid and victory; so, if their means are insufficient according to a worldly account of normal reasons, then Allah, the Omnipotent, is the One Who achieves victory.

It is well known that Allah *the Almighty* has created causality in the universe. Whenever the theistic adoption on causality has been taken; thus, the believers should be relying upon Allah, the Creator of causality. Therefore, the worldly account of normal reasons fails an atheist; he often commits suicide, suffers a total nervous breakdown, or goes insane. However, the believer seeks refuge in Allah, the unshakeable source of support, by saying to himself, 'The world of cause and effect has been proved to be treacherous, but Allah, the Lord, and Creator of causality is the Ultimate Cause'.

When a young child encounters a mistreatment from someone else, he says, 'I have a father or brother who will keep me out of harm's way' because he does not have the means to protect himself. This is the case with the support of people; so, what about having the support and strength of Allah Who possesses the unfailing and the incomparable Might over the entire universe. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* along with his followers reached the seashore, they were enclosed between the sea before them and the soldiers of Pharaoh approaching behind them. The Quran quotes their saying, '…We shall definitely be caught…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). What they said made rational sense; the sea was in front of them, their enemy behind them, and they had no way of being saved through the worldly account of normal reasons. But Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* due to his strong faith in Allah, said, 'No, my Lord is with me; He will guide me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) He said that Pharaoh and his soldiers could not overtake them although his followers did not understand because the sea blocked their way forwards and the soldiers blocked their way backwards. Yet, he acknowledged the fact that he should forsake relying on causes and completely depend on Allah, the Creator of causality. Accordingly, Allah commanded him to strike the sea with his staff whereupon it was parted into two halves and (a path of) dry earth appeared in-between. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his followers reached the other shore, he wanted to strike the sea with his staff once more so that the sea would return to its original state to prevent the soldiers from reaching them, but Allah says, 'Leave the sea behind you parted and their army will be drowned.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24) Allah tells Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* not to strike the sea with his staff in order that the water will not rush back too early, but instead to leave it for Allah Who will drown the soldiers of Pharaoh by the same means with which He saved the believers of the children Israel. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* saves and kills in a single stroke, where only Allah is capable of such feats.

Allah is the Creator of the human soul; He knows everything inside whenever it faces an incalculable force, as well as acknowledges the great intolerable distress, particularly on the battlefield. Thus, He asks the believers to always remember that they are not alone in battle, but Allah is with them. They ought to often remember that He intermittently aids them in victory over their enemies. As they persistently remember Allah, as the remembrance will strengthen their faith and give their hearts the required courage to attain victory.

Allah *the Almighty* uses the word 'often' to suggest that the person might only remember Him in times of despair; whereas, he might forget to remember Him, later, as his life becomes comfortable and luxurious. That is why Allah emphasizes that He should often be remembered to aid the believer to win over his enemies. An example of this is when Allah *Glorified is He* summons the believers to the congregational Friday Prayer, saying, 'O you who believe, when the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew. Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9-10) Allah asks the believers to remember Him on the day of congregation even though He is ever aware of their continued fealty to Him five times a day. Afterwards, He guides them to disperse freely in the land after the Friday Prayer to seek the bounties of Allah. He notifies the believers to remember Him diligently and perpetually, as well as He alerts people against letting their earthly concerns and occupations distract them from remembering Him. The remembrance of Allah is never limited within the mosque or to the times of prayer; but rather, it should be diligently done throughout all life events; it means feeling at every moment that Allah is with you, so you fear Him, praise Him, and seek succour from Him. Remembering Allah frequently will lead man to eternal bliss because there will always be a permanent link with Allah.

The 1973 War on the tenth of *Ramadan* is a good example of victory due to remembering Allah. The remembrance filled the hearts of the Egyptian soldiers by repeating ‘Allah is the Greatest’. It empowered the Egyptians with tremendous drive to face the enemy and break through the Israelis’ Bar Lev Line. Allah aided them by bolstering their faith and imbuing every soul with an indomitable energy to achieve victory. They deserve success because of rigorous training and diligent remembrance of Allah.

In the next verse, Allah says:

وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَلَا تَنَٰزَعُوا۟ فَتَفْشَلُوا۟ وَتَذْهَبَ
رِيحُكُمْ ۖ وَٱصْبِرُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Obey God and His Messenger, and do not quarrel
with one another, or you may lose heart and your
spirit may desert you. Be steadfast: God is with
the steadfast [46] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 46)

As previously mentioned, paying heed to Allah *Glorified is He* is done through obeying the prescriptions and avoiding prohibitions. Moreover, paying heed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is applied by obeying him in everyday behaviour which is another form of obeying Allah as well because the messenger conveys the commands of his Lord. He who obeys should avoid being at variance with his believing brethren because quarrelling is a waste of energy and resources since the adverse forces are at odds. Mutually opposed forces squander their energies until each becomes weak and ineffectual. Alternatively, acting as one unit is better than being in conflict which breaks up your strength and causes failure. Accordingly, quarrelling parties will not accomplish any of their goals because they will no longer possess the power to attain their desires, as well as they will lose their gravity. Failure is going to spin their wheels without coming any closer to their desires.

Considering the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '...and your strength may desert you...' (*al-Anfal:* 46), the word *rih* (strength) can also be used to refer to air or wind. It is known that the atmospheric air freely occupies the vacuum space of earth. There is no air found inside a pillar made of cement and metal because there is no empty space inside. However, air externally surrounds pillars since nothing but empty space lies there. It is known that the essentials of life are food, drink and air, salient of which is the air since you cannot wait except for only a few breathes of air before dying.

Thus, so long as air surrounds an object from all sides, it exerts the same amount of pressure on all sides. However, if a vacuum is created on one side, the air pressure can destroy that object. In laboratory experiments, the effect of air pressure is concluded by bringing a tin can filled with water; boil the water over a flame until the steam expelled the air and eventually filled the empty space of the can. Afterwards, the can is air-tightly sealed and cold water is poured on it from the outside so the steam condensed and diminished so that a part of the can was vacuumed. The walls of the can collapsed inwards because of the air pressure from outside due to the vacuum inside the can. Likewise, Allah punished wrongdoers by sending them destructive winds, as He says, '`Ad was destroyed by a furious wind, that Allah let loose against them for seven consecutive nights, eight consecutive days so that you could have seen its people lying dead like hollow palm-trunks.' (*al-Haqqa:* 6-7) Allah *Glorified is He* also, says, '…this cloud will give us rain! "No indeed! It is what you wanted to hasten: a storm-wind bearing a painful punishment, which will destroy everything by its Lord's command..."' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25).

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the mountain breaking wind-blown waves, '... You are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favourable wind, a storm arrives, waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape....' (*Yunus:* 22)

As referring to the destructive power of the air, Allah mentions the powerful wind which destroys through the combination of its direction and forceful power. If two winds collide with each other, a state of equilibrium is reached between them and no destruction takes place. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* uses the single form, *ar-rih* 'the wind' only to refer to destruction; He will cause it to blow from a definite direction so that the power of the wind will not be mitigated by the force of another one from the opposite direction, whereas, He uses the plural form, *ar-riyah* 'the winds' to refer to good events because the variation in the directions of the wind leads to life equilibrium. As Allah says, 'Allah is He who sends the winds as heralds of good news before His Mercy...' (*al-Furqan:* 48), and, 'We send the winds to fertilise lands...' (*al-Hijr:* 22). This refers to the fact that the winds bring pollen grains to fertilise plants to bear fruit; thus, the winds in plural come with good. However, there is only one verse where the singular form 'wind' is used to denote good events. Allah says, '...until, when you are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favourable wind....' (*Yunus:* 22)

In this verse, Allah uses the singular form of 'wind' and describes it as 'favourable'; whereas, in the verse under consideration, He refers with 'wind' to strength, because here the word indicates the destructive force with which the person will assail his enemies. It is recognised that ships in the past used to sail using the power of wind; but with the advances of science, steam power and electricity made the sailboat obsolete and were used instead of wind to move the boat.

The word *rih* is also used to mean the scent or smell. Scents linger in a room even after the scented person left; everyone has a unique scent much like the unique fingerprint. Although, we are not able to discern different individual scents, trained dogs are able to do. This is the way that a dog can smell a person's scent, and then track him wherever he went and pick him out from a crowd of dozens of people. So, the person's scent does not mix with that of the others even if they are all in the same room; otherwise, the trained dog would not be able to distinguish the scent of a specific person from among many people.

In this sense, Allah's saying, '... And your strength may desert you...' (*al-Anfal:* 46) comes to mean that you would cease to exist and that no trace would remain of you. So long as you remain in the world, you will have a scent that distinguishes you from others and which can be used to trace you by trained dogs, as previously said. However, the dead and buried have no scent. The Holy Quran alludes to this fact when it tells the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* who was thrown into the well by his brothers. A passing-by caravan found him there and eventually sold him to the king of Egypt. As the story progressed, he was imprisoned, freed and in time became a close advisor to the king. When his brothers came to him, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* gave them his shirt, telling them to put it over their father's face to regain his sight lost due to sadness when he was firstly deprived of Yusuf (Joseph). Allah says about the caravan that departed from Egypt to the Levant where Prophet Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* lived: 'Later, when the caravan departed, their father said, "You may think I am senile but I can smell the scent of Yusuf (Joseph)."' (*Yusuf:* 94)

This verse shows that the buildings of the city can easily hide the scent because they emit their own smells (from within) which may mask another scent or smell. But, once the caravan departed out of the city, Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* smelled the scent of his son Yusuf (Joseph) from the shirt that they carried with them.

Eventually, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verse currently under consideration by saying, '...be steadfast: Allah is with the steadfast.' (*al-Anfal:* 46) This harbours the same idea of being firm while fighting. Allah *the Almighty* draws the attention to confrontation requisites, namely: strength, abstention from inter-bickering and patience in the face of adversity, particularly if your enemy is unflaggingly perseverant.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* asks the believers to be firm in the battle, to remember Allah often, to refrain from quarrelling amongst each other in order not to waste their power and finally, to be patient. Since the enemy might possess great patience and steadfastness, the believer should necessarily have an abundant store of them as well, to be able to defeat him. An example of patience is the underwater diving competition where the person remaining underwater longest proves that he can hold his breath longer than the competitor. For that reason, Al-Abbas and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them* competed to see who can stay underwater for a longer time and be the most steadfast; i.e. endure more distress than his opponents.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* highlights that each believer should feel that Allah is the One Who appoints him to undertake this military action. Allah is with him so he should not be feeble because if the weak is fortified by Allah the Powerful, he will have the courage and strength to endure, just like the small child who might be bullied by other children if he is wandering alone, but who will not be harmed if he is with his father. A stronger example, Allah has the utmost example of protection; Allah *the Almighty* enjoins each warrior to remember that he is in the company of his Lord, and that no harm in the world can befall him, no matter how weak he is because he is fortified by the Power of Allah.

It was narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah *the Almighty and Glorified is He* says on the Day of Resurrection, "O son of Adam, I fell ill and you visited Me not". He will say, "O Lord, how should I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?" Allah says, "Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had fallen ill and you visited him not? Did you not know that had you visited him you would have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not". He will say, "O Lord, and how should I feed You when You are the Lord of the worlds?" Allah says, "Did you not know that My servant so-and-so asked you for food and you fed him not? Did you not know that had you fed him you would surely have found that (the reward for doing so) with Me? O son of Adam, I asked you to give Me drink and you gave Me not drink". He will say, "O Lord, how should I give You drink when You are the Lord of the worlds?" Allah says, "My servant so-and-so asked you to give him drink and you gave him not drink. Had you given him drink you would have surely found that with Me."'(1)

If a person falls ill, he is unable to walk or move, but burns with fever in bed. Allah explains that He blessed the ill person by taking his good health back because he is in the company of Allah. Thus, the person should not be upset if Allah's blessings desert him so long as He Who provides all blessings is taking care of him. When a Muslim is in the company of Allah, worldly and human normative standards are no longer applied. An example of that is when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr

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(1) *It was related by Muslim in Kitab At-Targhib wa At-Tarhib (Book of Awareness and Apprehension), Part IV, pg. 317.*

Allah be pleased with him were hiding in the cave as they fled from Mecca to Medina. When the disbelievers came right up to the entrance of the cave, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* saw them and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, if one of them but looks beneath his feet surely, he will see us.’ This was only logical from the rational point of view, for if one of the disbelievers had turned around and looked down the entrance of the cave, he would have seen them. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to reassure Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and dispel the fear that the disbelievers would see them. Anyone would have assumed that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have told Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* to be at ease, for surely, they will not look inside the cave. Nevertheless, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said instead, ‘O Abu Bakr! What do you think of two (persons) the third of whom is Allah?’ On this subject, Imam Ahmad *Allah rest his soul* relates on the authority of Anas *Allah be pleased with them* that Abu Bakr told him, ‘I said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* while we were in the Cave, “If any of them should look under his feet, he would see us”. He [The Messenger] said, “O Abu Bakr! What do you think of two (persons) the third of whom is Allah?”(1) Since they were in the company of Allah Who cannot be captured by sight, they would not be seen by their enemies. O Allah, make us always remain in Your company.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* enjoins the believers to refrain from the bad deeds performed by the disbelievers during times of adversity. He says:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا۟ مِن دِيَٰرِهِم بَطَرًا وَرِئَآءَ ٱلنَّاسِ
وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿٤٧﴾

Do not be like those who came out of their homes full of conceit, showing off to people, and barring others from the way of God – God has full knowledge of all that they do [47] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 47)

The disbelievers who went forth from Mecca full of self-conceit to rescue the caravan from the Muslims, learned that Abu Sufyan had survived along with the caravan and that the Muslims had failed to capture it. Even though, they heard that the caravan had returned safely under the leadership of Abu Sufyan, yet this was not sufficient for them. They insisted on going forth, doing battle with Muhammad and his followers, defeating them, beating the drums, and offering sacrifices so that the entire Arabian Peninsula might know of their defeat until no one would dare to threaten any of their caravans.

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(1) *It is related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

Thus, they were not satisfied with the fact that their money and goods had returned to them safely; they wanted to set out for war in a false show of pride and arrogance to prove their strength. If they had only been content with the safe return of the caravan, the story would have ended then and they would have returned home. However, they wanted to be engaged in a completely superfluous show of force.

Hence, it was a matter of conceit and arrogance; i.e. when the person is gifted by some blessings, but he does not sufficiently appreciate them and desires more than that. Such a person is as ungrateful as the disbelievers of Quraysh who failed to be satisfied with the safe return of the caravan, depreciating this blessing and asking for more. As Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘showing off to people’ (*al-Anfal:* 47), He means that they make war to be held in the highest esteem by the Arabs of the peninsula once it was known that they had gone out to Medina and fought Muhammad and his companions.

Allah’s saying, ‘and barring others from the way of Allah’ (*al-Anfal:* 47), shows that people would be tempted to follow the path of the disbelievers who had stood against the way of Allah and His Messenger, celebrating their victory and having gained the upper hand in the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, people would be tempted by the disbelievers when they found the Muslims afraid of confronting them. Thus, it would have been as if the disbelievers were turning people away from the path of Allah through their desire to fight Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions *Allah be pleased with them*. Afterwards, Allah further clarifies that He knows everything done by the disbelievers, ‘...Allah has full knowledge of all that they do.’ (*al-Anfal:* 47) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* fully encompasses everything they do and they cannot elude Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* draws the attention to the role of Satan and his minions in enticing the disbelievers. He says,

وَإِذۡ زَيَّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ وَقَالَ لَا غَالِبَ لَكُمُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ
وَإِنِّي جَارٞ لَّكُمۡۖ فَلَمَّا تَرَآءَتِ ٱلۡفِئَتَانِ نَكَصَ عَلَىٰ عَقِبَيۡهِ وَقَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيٓءٞ
مِّنكُمۡ إِنِّيٓ أَرَىٰ مَا لَا تَرَوۡنَ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ ٱللَّهَۚ وَٱللَّهُ شَدِيدُ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ﴿٤٨﴾

Satan made their foul deeds seem fair to them, and said, 'No one will conquer you today, for I will be right beside you,' but when the armies came within sight of one another he turned on his heels, saying, 'This is where I leave you: I see what you do not, and I fear God – God is severe in His punishment' [48] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 48)

In his vision, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw, by the ordainment of Allah that the disbelievers were few to bolster and strengthen them so that the battle would take place. Conversely, Satan began to make all the deeds of the disbelievers seem praiseworthy; he tempted them, saying, 'You are many, and unparalleled in martial skills; you will attain victory in the blink of an eye'. Allah shows His Messenger that the disbelievers were few; still, the truth was that they were few indeed because victory is not achieved by numbers but by the aid of Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, no matter how many disbelievers there are, they are nothing compared to the support and aid of Allah. Satan tried to give the disbelievers the impression that fighting the believers would be praiseworthy. Accordingly, he boosted their egos and told them that they would achieve victory, thereby, becoming great figures feared and dignified by the entire Arabian Peninsula. Thus, Satan has shown an entire stupidity and inability to know the judgment of Allah, for if he had known the outcome of the Battle of Badr, he would not have painted such a rosy picture of the battle for the disbelievers. Conversely, the battle ended with the victory of the Muslims, the death of many of the leaders of the Quraysh and the establishment of the reputation of the believers in the entire Arabian Peninsula. Victory was not what Satan wanted, but rather, he ignorantly enjoined the disbelievers to the battle unknowing what would happen.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* shows that the Satanic whispers to the disbelievers exaggerated their strength and told them that they would not be beaten in the Battle of Badr because he would bring them victory and protect them against any harm that could happen. However, Satan does not have power or authority to aid the disbelievers. It is known that his only power is to flatter or provoke misleading thoughts, but he impossibly could hold sway over the result of the confrontation between truth and falsehood. In the afterlife, the disbelievers will ask Satan to protect them from Allah's wrath because it was he who tempted them into committing their transgressions and led them down to Hell. But he acquits himself from guilt and says, '...I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries (help you), nor can you respond to mine (help me)…' (*Ibrahim:* 22). Satan says to the disbelievers that he did not oblige them to commit misdeeds because he does not have the power to compel them or to reluctantly persuade them to misbehave. He only tempted them and they responded to his enticement because they wanted to disobey and follow their desires.

Responding to the cries of someone necessitates that he heard the cries and then went to rescue him. When a person is subjected to a greater power, he resorts to screaming, hoping that someone will hear his cry and come save him. He who hears the cry is either weak and so cannot save the person in danger, or he is strong enough to save him. In case he responded to the cries of others, he, thereby, rescued them from the cause of their cry. Contrariwise, the words of Satan mean that he is as unable to save his minions from their torturous castigation or end the cause of their cries as they cannot save him from the affliction of Allah's punishment.

Satan had made the deeds of the disbelievers seem praiseworthy and falsely promised them of protection, aid and victory, only before the believers and disbelievers saw each other in the battle. Allah says, '…but when the armies came within sight of one another he turned on his heels, saying, "This is where I leave you…"' (*al-Anfal:* 48). As soon as the believers and disbelievers saw each other before they clashed together, Satan fled far away and disavowed the disbelievers. This situation is furtherly explained in Allah's saying, 'Like Satan, who says to man, “Do not believe!” but when man disbelieves, he says, “I disown you; I fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.”’ (*al-Hashr:* 16) This is logically consistent with Satan's previous experience when he was expelled and cursed for refusing to obey Allah’s Command to bow to Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah tells him, ‘My curse will follow you till the Day of Judgement!’ (*Sad:* 78) Accordingly, Satan implored Allah to spare him until the Day of Judgment, saying, ‘Give me respite until the Day people are raised from the dead.’ (*al-A’raf:* 14) Thus, Satan acknowledged that Allah is the All-Powerful and that he exercises limited power as compared to that of Allah. So, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘You have respite, until the Day of the Appointed Time.’ (*al-Hijr:* 37-38)

Satan is powerless, and incapable of doing anything; all he can do is to trick, lie, and entice. That is the reason that he used trickery and deceit against the disbelievers. As soon as the believers and disbelievers saw each other in battle, Satan turned on his heels and fled revealing his own fear of Allah for he knows that Allah punishes severely. Hence, the source of Satan's trepidation is the fear of the punishment that awaits and will inevitably befall him; thus, he is not afraid out of love for Allah as the believers are.

Subsequently, Allah conveys:

إِذۡ يَقُولُ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقُونَ وَٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ غَرَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ
دِينُهُمۡۗ وَمَن يَتَوَكَّلۡ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ٤٩

The hypocrites and those who have sickness in their hearts said, ‘These people [the believers] must be deluded by their religion,’ but if anyone puts his trust in God, God is mighty and wise [49] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 49)

The term *munafiq* (hypocrite) in Arabic is taken from the name of a small rat-like creature which is a species of the Jerboa that lives in the deserts and flees to its underground den as soon as it senses a predator stalking it. It creates more than one opening to the den such that it has multiple exits, like backdoors so it can be safe from predators. It essentially opens a multi-exit tunnel by which it can beguile others so they are unable to catch it. Similarly, the deeds of the hypocrite are inconsistent with his thoughts; and he says things that he does not believe, whereas, the believer is at peace with himself and says things from his heart. Perhaps the disbeliever can also be in harmony with his inner self when he says things keeping up with the godless disbelief in his heart. On the other hand, the hypocrite is always at odds with himself; his mouth utters words of faith, while his heart hides disbelief, thus his actions and character are rife with contradictions. Whenever the heart and mouth disagree, there can be no peace of mind. It is identifiable that the words of the hypocrite are inconsistent to what lies in his heart. Allah *Glorified is He* describes hypocrites by saying, ‘When they meet the believers, they say, “We believe,” but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, “We are really with you; we were only mocking.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 14)

In this case, the inner self is weak because the person does not easily go amiss if his actions and personality traits are all in harmony with one another, but when they are not, he lives in constant confusion and psychological nervousness. That is the reason that the hypocrite tries to escape from reality resorting to narcotics or other bad habits. The solution is not escapism through narcotics; but rather, the person should confront the reality and try to solve his problematic events, yet the hypocrite is incapable of doing that, so he eventually breaks down.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘The hypocrites and those who have sickness in their hearts said, “These people [the believers] must be deluded by their religion….”’ (*al-Anfal:* 49) After the believers won the Battle of Badr, their faith and self-glory strongly grew, so the hypocrites maliciously envied and hated them. By their double standards, the hypocrites became disbelievers who heartedly had a deep rancour towards the believers. Secretly, they told each other that the believers have been deluded by their religion, but they are not because delusion means that they are misled due to their natural disposition or due to some traits by which they consider themselves superior to others. Yet, the believers, at the time of victory, did not take pride in themselves, but instead they took pride in Allah *the All-Powerful and the All-Mighty*. They were increasingly humble before Him, out of unflagging gratitude for the blessed victory they were endowed. As for the deluded arrogant people, they overlook the reference of blessings to Allah, the Grantor, and attribute them to their own efforts, whereas, the believer attributes everything to Allah because he knows that His Hand is stretched with uncountable blessings. So long as the blessings do not make the person forget Allah, he will be further enriched with blessings because he is grateful and attributes everything to Allah. On the other hand, the arrogant person feels superior above others by points of excellence distinguishing himself from others. Thus, Allah describes the believers as, '...those who follow him (Muhammad) are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

Harshness is not out of arrogance; rather, it is a trait that characterizes the believers' attitudes at sometimes. Had they been harsh out of arrogance, they act accordingly even with their fellow believers. However, the believer is harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards other believers, never acting haughty with them. A believer's faith cannot lead him to have a rigid pattern of behaviour because faith allows believers the flexibility to deal with different situations. In this way, we see that a believer is not harsh in all situations because there are some circumstances which require mercy when interacting with fellow believers; and likewise, he is not merciful in all situations because there are circumstances that require harshness when dealing with disbelievers.

Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was known to break out in weeping from his fearful reverence of Allah and his heart was filled with mercy and kindness towards the believers. However, what happened when some people refused to pay *zakat* (obligatory alms giving) after the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Abu Bakr and `Umar ibn Al-Khattab had a session to deliberate on the matter. ʿUmar was known to be very harsh and adamant. However, he opined that they should not go to war with those who had renounced the believers and refrained from paying them *zakat* because they were still testifying that there is no deity but Allah. But then Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'By Allah, I will fight any who distinguishes between prayer and *zakat* supposing the latter as a divisible aspect of Islam, for *zakat* is the due right drawn from their property, and by Allah if they deny me even a camel's rope's worth of what they would have given to the Prophet, *Peace and blessings be upon him*, I will fight them over it.'

Remember, this was Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who was known to break into weeping merely out of his pious fear of Allah *Glorified is He*. His heart was full of mercy and compassion towards the believers. In that hard time, he determinedly swore by Allah that he would fight those who violated Allah's obligations and refused to pay the *zakat*. Had this attitude been shown by 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* people would have said, 'Such a pattern of harshness is what is expected from `Umar'. But as this attitude is shown by such a compassionate and delicate man, it truly impresses upon us the severity of the believer in confronting disbelief. In this way, we find that a believer is not always severe, by nature, nor is he by nature merciful at all times. Yet, a believer shows harshness when his religion calls for severity, shows compassion when his religion calls for mercifulness, shows force when it calls for strength, and shows humbleness when it calls for meekness.

So, when the hypocrites said, 'Their faith has deluded these [believers]!' (*al-Anfal:* 49), it was not a sound statement. Rather, it was out of their hypocrisy. Why was that? This was because believers always put their trust in Allah and attribute every blessing to Him *the Almighty and All Wise* (*al-Anfal:* 49). As Allah is the Almighty; He gives honour to those who believe in Him. Allah clearly states that might belongs to Allah, His Messenger and the believers. (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) Glorified is He, as Allah is All Wise, He instils wisdom into the believers. Relying on Allah means that one entrusts all one's affairs to Him *Glorified is He*. However, the first and foremost thing is that one should exert one's effort in attaining anything and then rely on Allah. However, if you exert all your efforts and still cannot attain what you aim at, then, you still have the One Who created all means. Allah tells the believers who fight the disbelievers for His sake that Allah is One Who afflict those people with torment at the hands of the believers. (*at-Tawba:* 14), and Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to strive hard in all walks of earth in pursuit of sustenance. (*al-Mulk:* 15)

Just as Allah *Glorified is He* orders the believers to fight and concern themselves with preparations necessary for this because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to afflict the disbelievers with torment at their hands, so too did Allah *Glorified is He* command them to work and strive for their attaining their sustenance.

If ever you turn your trust in Allah into an excuse for idleness or apathy, you reverse one role with another because trusting in Allah is an affair of the heart, whereas action and activity is the mission of the body. Therefore, one should not turn trusting in Allah into the work of the body because the limbs do their work through cause and effect, while the heart trusts in Allah. Thus, we understand that the true way for the body to express its trust in Allah is through labour and enterprise, and so one must work and concern oneself with the cause and effect in addition to trusting in Allah.

Moreover, it behoves us to bear in mind the position of the hypocrites of whom Allah *Glorified is He* said, 'At the same time, the hypocrites and those in whose hearts was disease were saying, "Their faith has deluded these believers]!"' (*al-Anfal:* 49)

Hypocrites as we have said are whose people who have inherent differences. They say with their tongues what is not within their hearts. As to those who have weak faith, they used to declare that they were Muslims at times when Islam was triumphant, and renounce Islam at times of hardships. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions two groups: the hypocrites who were from the two tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj whose expressions had discrepancies. They were assuming power over Medina. Even one of them was about to be crowned the king of Medina. But with the coming of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he lost his opportunity to attain kingship and leadership which sowed rancorous malice in his soul. However, the people of Medina were eager to accept and convert to Islam rendering those hypocrites incapable of resistance or lashing out, so they uttered the *shahada* (to testify that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) with their tongues, though enmity against Islam remained in their hearts, and as such they were being pulled in two opposite directions.

On the other hand, those in whose hearts was sickness were not pure hypocrites so much as they were weak in their belief of Islam. They simply embraced Islam to take benefits from it, not to sacrifice for it. So, when Islam brought them some worldly blessings, they rejoiced and welcomed them, but if hardship befell them, they fled. This category included also some people who embraced Islam in Mecca but did not have strong faith enough to migrate to Medina; they feared that they should leave their property and children behind and, therefore, they remained in Mecca. These people, who had unfaithful hearts, were not disbelievers as their unfaithfulness to Islam does not render them disbelievers. When the time to fight in the Battle of Badr came, they took counsel among each other: would they go with the disbelievers or not? With which side would they fight? They said, ‘We will set out with the disbelievers, and if we find that they are the stronger, we will stay with them, but if we find that the Muslims are stronger, we will then join them on the battlefield.’

Among such individuals were Qays ibn Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, `Ali ibn Umayya ibn Khalaf, Al-`As ibn Munabbiah ibn Al-Hajjaj, Harith ibn Za`ma ibn Al-Aswad ibnul Muttallib and Abu Qays ibn Fakih ibn Al-Mughira. All of them gathered together and went to battle intending to join the winning side whether it be the believers or the disbelievers. These individuals adopted such an attitude because their hearts lacked true faith and were strongly attached to the love of earthly things.

The sayings of the hypocrites and those whose hearts were unfaithful demonstrate that they both were wishing to avoid harm. Even though some of them were in Medina and some were in Mecca, they all uttered the same statements. This proves that Satan’s temptation of the two groups was also one and the same, which is why the wording is uniform across both groups’ expressions. Both said, ‘Their faith has deluded these [believers]!’ (*al-Anfal:* 49)

Both groups, the hypocrites and those whose hearts were unfaithful, said this despite being in different places—one being in Mecca and the other in Medina, as we have said. So, it stands to reason that there must be a common denominator between them that prompted them to utter the same statements. Satan must have whispered these words to them. They should have realised that the uniformity of their words was clear evidence that they were under the influence of Satan’s temptation.

But what does ‘Their faith has deluded these [believers]!’ (*al-Anfal:* 49) mean? In Arabic, when you say, ‘*gharartu* so and so’, this signifies that you made something very attractive for someone to the extent that he became eager to have it, even though he did not have the ability to afford it. But you bolstered his resolve, or increased his readiness to accept something or go through with something. For example, if you want to convince and tempt a person of limited means into buying a car, you -in order to make the decision much easier for him- would say to him, 'Borrow money from someone, and pay the rest in instalments'. As such you tempt him into making a decision that he did not intend to take.

Then, what about *ghurur* with regards to religion? In this respect, the believers were made to feel that they were many even though they were few in number. They willingly advanced to engage in the battle because of the promise Allah made them of victory and because of the vision Allah *Glorified is He* gave to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* which showed the disbelievers as being only a few. Perhaps they seemed unnaturally optimistic because Allah had made clear to them that whoever would die in that war would become a martyr and be granted an eternal residence in paradise, thus making both the weak and the strong among them fight vigorously so they could go to heaven as martyrs. In these ways, for the hypocrites, the believers seemed deluded by their religion. Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them saying, 'But if anyone puts his trust in Allah, Allah is exalted in Might and wise.' (*al-Anfal:* 49)

The rebuttal here is that the believers were not deluded by their religion; rather, they put their trust in Allah. Whosoever puts his trust in Allah, He *Glorified is He* suffices and protects him. Allah *Glorified is He* is Exalted in Might and therefore, is Undefeatable and He is Wise as He causes victory and defeat to happen in their proper, fated times. So, the heart of the matter is that these believers had chosen Allah, and thus He made them mighty and victorious.

But was this invective expression of the hypocrites said aloud publicly? No, they did not dare to say such a thing openly, instead they said it silently to themselves, and Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of what transpired in the privacy of their souls. Allah *Glorified is He* drew attention to the shameful truth about them so that they might at some point discern what was happening inside themselves and leave their hypocrisy behind to return to the fold of true faith. This would be particularly true if they took heed of that fact Allah communicated in the

Quran that these hypocrites were wishing that a bad thing would happen to the believers, while the fact of the matter is that the believers are either victorious, and in this case, they defeat the disbelievers, kill them and take their booty, or they become martyrs and be admitted to paradise. Either of the two possibilities is a blessing (*at-Tawba:* 52). Allah *Glorified is He* exposed what was hidden in the hearts of the hypocrites which served as a warning to the believers that they would not let themselves be affected by the hypocrites' reasoning and rhetoric. The believers had put their trust in Allah and He dictates all affairs as He wills.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوۡ تَرَىٰٓ إِذۡ يَتَوَفَّى ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَضۡرِبُونَ
وُجُوهَهُمۡ وَأَدۡبَٰرَهُمۡ وَذُوقُواْ عَذَابَ ٱلۡحَرِيقِ ٥٠

If only you [Prophet] could see, when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers, how they strike their faces and backs: it will be said, 'Taste the punishment of the Fire [50] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 50)

The person being addressed here is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the meaning is essentially 'If we revealed to you the unknown, you would see'. Note that Allah *Glorified is He* does not state the apodosis of this conditional clause. He does not say what happens to these people who are bent on denying the truth when the angels strike them. As the apodosis is omitted, it is left to each person to imagine the worst of what could happen. If Allah *Glorified is He* had stated the apodosis of this sentence, then we would know what happens, but leaving it out induces each of us to conjure fantastic, incredible scenarios. In this way, whatever will happen is made to seem even more horrific.

This Quranic verse shifts us away from the punishment of the disbelievers in this world and turns our attention to death and dying. Death is the moment when the angels come to take the souls of human beings. Throughout the Quran, death is at one point attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* (*al-An'am:* 60); in some other references it is attributed to messengers from Allah, i.e. angels of death (*al-An'am:* 61) and at other occurrences it is attributed to the Angel of death, `Azra`il (*as-Sajda:* 11). As such, causing people to die is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* in some instances, to `Azra`il in other instances and to the Messengers of death in yet some other instances. This may seem contradicting. However, I say that there is no contradiction at all because the order to cause someone to die is always issued by Allah *Glorified is He* and it is either carried out by `Azra`il or any of his many assistants from among angels. In other words, a death order is principally originated from Allah. It is sometimes attributed to `Azra`il, the direct recipient of the order from Allah, or it is attributed to the angels who are asked by `Azra`il to carry out the order.

The painful torment mentioned in this verse happens at dying minutes; the moment when a person can no longer lie to himself. A person might deceive himself during his life. For example, one may suffer from an incurable illness, but still say to oneself, 'I will soon get better' to offer oneself a glimmer of hope. Another person may be poor and does not possess any worldly means, but still says to himself, 'I will become rich'. This is because man always hopes against hope. However, when one makes sure that he is dying and that there is no escape from his meeting with Allah, one gives up deceiving oneself. At this moment, a dying person who once treated someone else unjustly would say to his children, 'Bring so-and-so here. I treated him wrongly, so recompense him for whatever I owe him'. At the hour of death, a person recalls the record of all his deeds. So, if he is a believer, he sees a shining record and he smiles and welcomes death contentedly. But if his deeds are evil, he sees only darkness and fear grips him because he knows what fate waits for him.

Satan promised the disbelievers victory and coaxed them into fighting the believers saying, 'I will be your protector should you are stricken by misfortune,' but once the disbelievers and believers were within eyesight of each other, Satan fled because, unlike the disbelievers, he experienced Allah's Punishment. Satan's position is ever like this. As soon as he sees the punishment of Allah, he flees and confesses that everything he said were merely false promises. His actions are born of the rancour in his heart that began the day he was punished by Allah *Glorified is He* for refusing to prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him*. It is Allah Who forced this punishment upon him. Allah tells us that Satan swears by Allah's Might that he will beguile all human beings into grievous error (*Sad:* 82).

Allah's Might *(`izza)* signifies that Allah is in no need of any of His creation. He has the Most Sublime Attributes before any of His creations existed. He created the entire universe without any assistance whatsoever. Even if all of humanity believed in him, that would not increase His Supremacy one bit and if all of humanity turned to blasphemy and disbelief, that would not decrease His Supremacy one bit. Satan's swearing is an acknowledgement of his behalf of Allah's Might; Satan swore by the Might of Allah that he would tempt humankind. As the belief of people neither augments nor diminishes Allah's Supremacy, He has given humanity freedom of choice. If Allah had wanted all of humankind to be believers, Satan would not have been able to tempt any of them. Out of his malice and hatred for mankind, Satan tries to divert people from the path of faith. But does Satan really possess the power to tempt a true believer? No. That is why when Satan made a promise to tempt all humankind, he made an exception that he would not be able to beguile the true believers into grievous errors (*Sad:* 83). This clearly proves that Satan cannot influence a devoted believer who has true faith. Therefore, we should pay heed to what Satan is recorded as saying in the Quranic verse, 'I fear Allah– Allah is severe in His punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 48)

So, given that Satan feared Allah and given that he knew that Allah is severe in retribution, what was it that allayed this fear and led him to disobey Allah's Order to prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him*? If he had thought that Allah did not punish transgressors or would punish them only lightly, then we might think that the lenience of Allah's punishment tempted Satan to disobey, but his knowledge of the severity of Allah's retribution must have compelled him to obey Allah from the outset.

We say that in a moment of pride and arrogance, Satan forgot all that he knew! At times of pride and arrogance, you may become haughty. Even in the face of the most unfavourable circumstances and when you know that a severe punishment might await you, all that is inconsequential to you if pride and arrogance enter your soul. That is why a person may be brutally beaten, but pride prevents him from screaming or yelling. Moreover, in a moment of arrogance, a person might make a decision with dire consequences, but he tries to endure them. As for Satan, he was full of pride and conceit when he refused to follow Allah's order to bow before Adam *peace be upon him*.

Arrogance possessed him so that he refused to obey Allah's order wondering why he should he prostrate himself before one whom Allah had created out of clay (*al-Isra': *61). In a moment of pride, Satan forgot everything, and his vanity propelled him towards disobedience. Despite being aware that Allah is severe in retribution, he persisted in crossing Him. In the fiftieth verse of the chapter *of al-Anfal*, the apodosis of the conditional sentence starting with the Arabic article *lau* (if) is omitted. Accordingly, the meaning is 'if the angels' concealment was removed so that you could see them as they took the souls of the disbelievers, it would be a truly awe-striking sight. Does this process happen when disbelievers are killed in battle, or does it only happen during a natural death? The answer is that it happens in both cases. Furthermore, the torment described in the above verse suggests the movements of advancing and retreating as indicated in the verse, 'how they strike their faces and backs.' (*al-Anfal:* 50) In other words, they strike those who are advancing on their faces, and if they turn back to shield their faces from the blow, they are stricken on their backs. The disbelievers of Quraysh used to mistreat the early Muslims in this same fashion; they would strike a believer on his face as he approached them, and if he tried to flee, they would strike him on his back and his head.

So, Allah made the disbelievers taste the torment the believers endured at their hands, but the difference is that a blow from the disbelievers is delivered with their limited human strength, whereas a blow from the angels is delivered with their inhuman might. It is said that the angels have bludgeons of steel with which they strike the disbelievers' faces and backs. Due to the force of the blow and the contact of the steel with the disbelievers' bodies, sparks of fire fly from them to burn and singe their bodies.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says to them, 'Taste the punishment of the Fire.' (*al-Anfal:* 50) At the time of death, they forcibly strike the disbelievers, causing them immense pain, but that blow, despite its severity and the flames and sparks that it emits, does not absolve them of suffering through fire in the afterlife.

One of the Companions went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah, I saw a mark like the tie string of a sandal on the back of Abu Jahl, i.e. a welt or bruise from a forceful blow appeared on his back. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘That was the blow of the angels that took Abu Jahl’s soul.’ Another Companion came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I was about to kill someone so I swung my sword toward him, but before my sword would reach his neck I saw his head chopped off his body.’ So the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘An angel got there before you.’ This is all in accordance with the Quranic verse under consideration in which Allah orders His angels to support the believers against the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If only you [Muhammad] could see, when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers, how they strike their faces and backs.’ (*al-Anfal:* 50)

This signifies that striking and beating is more shaming and humiliating than being tormented, even though torment is surely more painful. For example, when a criminal commits a crime and then is caught and severely beaten, he might endure beating, but if he is beaten in public, this will be more shameful and humiliating for him. Moreover, if his victim is the one who beats him that is yet again even more shaming.

Nevertheless, this beating and torture do not absolve the disbelievers of punishment in eternal fire; rather, it is only the overture to a more severe punishment on the Day of Judgment, which is a natural consequence of their actions, their disbelief in Allah, their mistreatment of the believers and their spreading of corruption on the earth.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّٰمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿٥١﴾

This is caused by what your own hands have stored up for you: God is never unjust to His creatures [51] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 51)

It is known that the human being uses his hands for carrying out most things. Although he may do some things using his feet or tongue, most of his work is done by hand because hands are best suited for activity.

Accordingly, we find that Allah's reference to hands only in this verse is not an exaggeration.

The Arabic demonstrative pronoun *dhalika* (this) in the verse under discussion refers to the beating and torture which the disbelievers suffer in return for what their hands have made. Allah *Glorified is He* underlines, 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures.' (*al-Anfal:* 51) This means that the disbelievers' punishment is the result of two factors: first, the sins and acts of disobedience they have committed by their own hands and second, the Justice of Allah *Glorified is He*. Throughout the Glorious Quran, we find that the statement, 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures' is repeated three times; in *Al-'Imran:* 181-182, *al-Anfal:* 51 and *al-Hajj:* 10.

Those who eagerly seek to prove that there are contradictions and mistakes in the Quran state that this statement is mentioned in the Quran several times but does that mean that He—Allah save us—might still be unjust, or *zhalim*, to some degree? We say, no, Allah *Glorified is He* denies that any manner of injustice can be attributed to Him. When man does injustice, then he is called *zhalim* and when his acts of injustice multiply and worsen, he is called *zhallam* which is a word that refers to grave injustice. This Arabic word form, following the pattern *fa`al,* is a hyperbole, exaggeration or excessiveness. So, we might say a person is an *`akil* meaning he is an eater, but when we say someone is *`akkal*, or a glutton, this means that he eats an excessive amount of food. Also, we might say a person is *`najir*, meaning that he picked up a piece of wood and, without any experience, crafted something from it. But when we say that someone is a *najjar,* this means that he is experienced in woodworking. Similarly, there is *kha`it* and *khayyat*, the first meaning one who can sew a cloth without experience, and the second meaning a tailor. Also, someone can be a *jazir*, meaning he knows how to butcher an animal, but when we say that someone is a *jazzar*, this means that he is a butcher by profession.

So, the Arabic pattern *fa'al*, is for hyperbole, exaggeration or excessiveness in some action or activity. It can be used in the negative or affirmative; when you say someone is an *akkal*, or a glutton, you state that he is an overeater.

This signifies by necessity that he eats. So long as you affirm the excessiveness or exaggeration for something, then by necessity, you are also stating that the normative characteristic is true. Accordingly, when you say someone is a *khayyat*, or a tailor, then you affirm that he knows how to sew, or is a *kha'it* and has perfected that skill. Similarly, if you say someone is a *najjar*, or a carpenter, then you affirm that he is a *najir* that has mastered his trade. But in terms of the negation of words on this pattern; *fa'al*, if you say someone is not a glutton, *akkal*, you negate that he is an overeater, but that does not mean that he does not eat. When you say that someone is not a *najjar* (carpenter), then you negate that he masters woodworking, but you do not negate that he can still work with wood. Likewise, when you say that someone is not an *`allama* (an erudite scholar), this does not rule out the possibility that he is an *`alim* (learned and knowledgeable). So, when you affirm the stronger characteristic, you also affirm the lesser characteristic, but if you negate the stronger, that does not negate the lesser. Accordingly, when you say someone is not a *zhallam*, (great tyrant), you have negated the stronger, hyperbolic form, but not necessarily the weaker, normative form. Thus, he could still be a *zhalim* (someone who commits unjust deeds). Accordingly, In Allah's saying, 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures' He negates the great tyranny, but this does not rule out the possibility of lesser wrongdoing. In this respect, orientalists said that the verses of the Quran are inconsistent, for one verse says that Allah is not a *zhallam*, but that does not necessarily mean He might not cause some injustice and Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'Verily, Allah does not wrong [anyone] by as much as an atom's weight' (*an-Nisa':* 40). In this verse, both the hyperbolic and the weaker, normative forms are negated. This, in orientalists' opinion, is an inconsistency. Then, does it stand to reason that if the hyperbolic form is negated that the normative form must be true? No, of course, it does not. If the hyperbolic form is negated, that does not prevent the affirmation of the weaker, normative form, but neither does it necessitate its affirmation.

In (*an-Nisa':* 40), Allah *Glorified is He* categorically negates injustice, or wrongdoing, and in the verse under consideration, He negates the hyperbolic form. The verses of the Quran complement and complete each other; so if someone says, ‘Allah negates the hyperbolic form, *zhallam*, and this affirms the normative form, *zhalim*,’ we say in response that negating the hyperbolic word form does not necessarily affirm the normative word form, nor does it negate the possibility of it being true. So, if there is another verse that negates the normative form, then Allah is neither a *zhallam* nor a *zhalim*.

Moreover, we must keep in mind the rhetorical and stylistic inimitability of the Quran, for the speaker is none other than Allah Himself. Now we ask, did Allah say He never does the least wrong to His creatures which could also be translated as servant or slave, or did Allah say He never does the least wrong to His creatures? The hyperbolic word form can sometimes be used to indicate the severity of a single act of injustice, even if it does not reoccur, and other times it may indicate the repetition of such acts. When someone commits clear and wanton injustice, he is called *zhallam* because he was excessive in his wrongdoing. Yet, if a person was not grossly unjust, but he makes many small acts of oppression and injustice against a great many people, he is also *zhallam,* given the large number of people whom he wronged.

Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘for Allah is not unjust to His creatures’ (*al-Anfal:* 51), and He did not say, ‘never does Allah do the least wrong to His creatures or servants’ because doing wrongdoing and injustice is commensurate with a person’s power to commit injustices. We find, for example, that the ruler’s power to do injustice is much greater than the power of someone of influence, and the power of the latter is still greater than the power of an ordinary person to commit injustices and wrongdoing. So, if Allah *Glorified is He* treated each of His creatures with injustice, even if only an atom’s weight, He would be called a *zhallam*. Thus, in this verse Allah shows us that He does not do injustice to anyone, not even as much as an atom’s weight of wrongdoing. Even this little bit of injustice does not befall anyone from Allah; *Glorified is He* because He does not do injustice to any of His creatures.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* cites some of the worst examples of disbelief which had occurred beforehand.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَدَأۡبِ ءَالِ فِرۡعَوۡنَ ۙ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡۚ كَفَرُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ
فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَوِيّٞ شَدِيدُ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ﴿٥٢﴾

They are like Pharaoh's people and those before them who ignored God's signs, so God punished them for their sins: God is strong and severe in His punishment [52] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 52)

In Arabic *ad-da`b* means a custom or habit that a person repeats. So, when one says, 'someone is *da`ub* on doing something', it means that he does it regularly. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Their comportment with you, O Muhammad, is like that of Pharaoh's people with their Messenger', i.e. they are doing to you like what Pharaoh's people were doing with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

Allah's *Glorified is He* saying, 'And those before them' refers to the people of Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and others *peace be upon them*. What happened to these people? They suffered destruction, extinction, torture, or drowning. The disbelievers of Quraysh enmity to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and their desire to fight and do him harm resembles the attitude and comportment of Pharaoh's people with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that of Lut's (Lot's) people *peace be upon him* and that of those people who lived before them with their respective messengers.

Allah *Glorified is He* then continues to state that those people, 'ignored Allah's signs.' Did Allah simply leave them so? No, Allah punished them for their sins. Some of these sinners were drowned, some were struck by lightning, and some were swallowed up by the earth at Allah's Command. As Allah punished previous disbelievers as clearly stated in the Quran, then Allah *Glorified is He* will also send down His punishment upon the disbelievers who disbelieve in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is the general applicable principle of dealing with people who disbelieve in Allah's messengers *peace be upon them*. History tells many similar true stories. The people of Pharaoh, for instance, had reached the highest level of progress and civilization in their age, Allah *Glorified is He* states that the people of Pharaoh were of enormous strength and power (*al-Fajr:* 10). As for the

Thamud, if you went out to the cities of Saleh in Saudi Arabia, you would find the ruins of Thamud where they had carved their houses out of the stone of the mountains. Allah urges people to take example of the people of Thamud who hewed into the rocks in the valley (*al-Fajr:* 9).

Every ancient civilization came to an end, and most of them left no trace behind, except for some vestige or monument which do not reflect all aspects of civilization. The most prominent exception is the civilization of Pharaoh's people whose monuments include massive obelisks, towering columns and great pyramids; all of which still exist today. As for the civilization of the people of `Ad, Allah *Glorified is He* obliterated its remains so that we have not discovered anything thereof so far. Most of the relics and monuments of past civilizations have been destroyed, save that of Pharaoh's people. People come from all corners of the world to watch and wonder at the grandeur of their construction, the magnificence of their art and the excellence of their engineering. People marvel at how these massive stones were transported to high places without scaffolding or how the stones have all remained locked together in their original configuration throughout the ages and without the use of cement or any other sticky substance. Instead all of that was done by air discharge. How did they reach such level of engineering which enabled them to discharge air between two huge stones so that they clung together without any adhesive materials, so perfectly that no one can dislodge them?! As the civilization of the pharaohs had attained such a level of technical engineering by discharging the air between two massive pieces of stone, then, considering the art of masonry, it must have truly been an advanced civilization. However, considering the mummification the secrets of which that keep mummies preserved against decay for thousands of years are still unknown and given drawings painted on temples whose colours remain as vivid as they used to be despite the passage of millennia, and considering the beans that were so well preserved by the mummification process that they did not spoil and indeed are still edible, all these achievements of that civilization had secrets which have not yet been discovered till this day. There is no doubt, that civilization was a magnificent and powerful one. However, it could not survive and stand against collapse, eventually becoming ruins and nothing more. How did those who made such a great civilization and held the reins of the world during their age be overcome? It must be true that there was a higher power that was greater than them and destroyed them. Why does Allah mention Pharaoh’s people specifically and by name in this verse while He only mentions the civilizations before them as a collective group in this verse (*al-Anfal:* 52)?

Allah enabled people to unearth the monuments of Pharaoh’s people and made them attractive to them so that they are keen to visit that highly advanced civilization which could not survive. The Pharaoh who claimed that he was a god could not secure himself immortality. Allah *Glorified is He* willed that the monuments of that civilization should be preserved so that everyone could see them, and see how Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed the establishers of this civilization and it became remains after it was a real fact so that people shall know that all power resides with Allah, and that divinity rests with Allah alone, for everything fades and dies but Allah. That is why the civilization of Pharaoh’s people is singled out here, and this reference to the ruins of Pharaoh’s people is one of the many unique aspects of the miraculous nature of the Quran because Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this civilization particularly and then states all the other civilizations collectively. The people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and the people of `Ad, Iram and Thamud; all of them denied Allah’s miracles and disbelieved in Him.

Allah says, ‘They disbelieved in Allah’s verses (*al-Anfal:* 52). We stated earlier that, in Arabic, the word *ayat* signifies three types: the cosmic proofs or signs which prove the existence of the Highest Creator, such as alternation of night and day, sun and moon (*Fussilat:* 37). Then there are the miracles with which Allah supports His messengers so that they can prove the truthfulness of what they convey from Allah, like parting the sea for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* curing lepers and the sick and bringing the dead back to life by Allah’s Will for `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Lastly there are the verses of the Glorious Quran which contain the legislation of Allah to be applied on this earth.

This proves that they denied the existence of the Creator. In Arabic, *kufr* originally means ‘to cover’ or ‘to conceal’. That is why the word *zari`* (farmer) is called *kafir* because he covers the seed with soil. Likewise, the word *al-layl* (night) is also linguistically called *kafir* because it covers and conceals things. An Arab poet says to the night,

Because of you I shall get a warrior's reward
    If it is true that the night is kafir

Thus, saying that they denied the truth means that they covered or concealed the belief in the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*. This proves that Allah *the Exalted* exists undeniably and existed eternally before they denied Him, for faith is the essence of people's existence and they were all created as believers and thereafter some of them concealed this faith. So, the word *al-kufr* is an evidence of the truth of faith. Otherwise, if Allah did not exist, how could they conceal something that does not exist? Therefore, when someone says to you that he denied the truth or *kafara*, say to him, '*al-kufr* means to cover or conceal, so what is it that you have concealed? Whatever you have covered must be something that exists'.

Allah's saying, 'denied Allah's *ayat*' means that they denied the cosmic signs created by Allah and disbelieved in Allah, despite the manifest signs that the universe abounds with, and they disbelieved in the messengers even though they came to them with miracles that defied the standard laws of life. Moreover, they denied the verses of the Quran which were sent to reveal to people Allah's legislation.

The beginning of the verse under investigation which reads, 'They are like Pharaoh's people and those before them who ignored Allah's signs,' succinctly accounts for the punishment Allah inflicted upon them, which is clearly stated in the ending of the verse, 'so Allah punished them for their sins; Allah is Strong and Severe in His punishment.'

Allah clearly states that He punished them for the sins they committed and the corruption they made on the earth. When man finds himself surrounded by misfortune and facing grave torment, he tries to flee from it. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* states in another verse that He is Mighty and Powerful in His punishment (*al-Qamar:* 42). This means that when Allah *Glorified is He* decides to punish a disbeliever, He grips him firmly and tightly so that he cannot escape.

Accordingly, Allah’s *Glorified is He* saying, ‘Allah is Strong and Severe in His punishment.’ (*al-Anfal:* 52) means that Allah is more powerful than anything you can make or contrive within His universe, and His retribution is severe and painful. We know that Allah’s retribution befalls people only in proportion to their sins, so Allah being severe in retribution does not mean that the most severe punishment is meted out for some minor trifling sin, but rather, each is given his due punishment in accordance with his sins. At the same time this punishment, no matter how light, is extremely painful because Allah’s punishment is proportionate to Allah’s Strength and Power, so it is very painful even at its slightest.

Although Allah states that He punishes people for their sins, this has nothing to do with the viewpoints of the determinists which have some indication in the following verse:

He threw him shackled into the vast ocean and said to him
Be careful so that you should not get wet

It would be erroneous to think that Allah fates a person to be a disbeliever against his own will and then casts him into the hellfire. Such a scenario is antithetical to Allah’s justness. It is you who is charged with deciding between obedience and disobedience, between faith and disbelief, and in the light of this we understand Allah’s statement that He punishes disbelievers for their sins. As Allah *Glorified is He* threatens them with the most severe retribution for their sins that only serves as an evidence of the gravity of their sins.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* provides us with the rationale for that, saying:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَمۡ يَكُ مُغَيِّرٗا نِّعۡمَةً أَنۡعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوۡمٍ حَتَّىٰ
يُغَيِّرُواْ مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمۡ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿٥٣﴾

[He did] this because God would never change a favour He had conferred on a people unless they changed what was within themselves. God is all hearing, All Knowing [53] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 53)

‘This’ refers to what was said in the preceding verse. If you refer to the beginning of humankind, you will see that Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* for the sake of making him a successor on earth, and He created Eve *peace be upon he*r for the sake of the continuation of the human species. Before placing Adam *peace be upon him* on earth, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to him divine commands. From Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* sprang the progeny of mankind. Had the progeny of Adam followed and obeyed the divine commands given to him, humans would have lived in prosperity. However, some descendants of Adam and Eve became ungrateful for the blessings bestowed on them and denied that there was a Creator who bestowed such blessings on them. In this case, would Allah maintain them in safety and prosperity now that they had changed as such? No, rather, it must be the case that Allah would also change what they had been blessed with; otherwise religion would become a senseless thing. Mankind descended upon the blessings of this world, meaning that Allah did not create mankind and then create the blessings of this world for him, rather, He created those blessings first and then humankind came into a world that had already been completely prepared for him with all the amenities essential for life and the perpetuation of life. For a long stretch of time, man remained in the infancy of his development, at ease among the blessings of Allah. Before he knew how to farm, he found plenty of fruit to eat and before he knew how to search for water, he found water to drink in plenty. Allah taught him how to live, and for him Allah subdued the animals that provided milk and meat. Man was to receive all these blessings and more, showing profound gratitude and faithful devotion to Allah, the Blessing Creator.

However, man began to take the blessings of Allah for granted, denying that there is a Provider. Would happiness and a secure life on this earth continue to be his in this case? Of course, it would not. Since mankind had changed his attitude, Allah *Glorified is He* had to transform blessings into a curse. Out of His Compassion and Mercy, Allah *Glorified is He* had willed mankind to change his attitude at first. Allah *Glorified is He* would not ever be keen to do injustice to humankind; rather, man began to do injustice to himself. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* states clearly that He ‘would never change a favour He had conferred on a people unless they changed what was within themselves. Allah is All Hearing, All Knowing.’ (*al-Anfal:* 53)

So, Adam's descendants first began to change the blessing of faith into disbelief and to change gratitude for the blessings bestowed on them into ungratefulness, so Allah *Glorified is He* requited them by sending the Great Flood, lightning bolts and devastation because they changed what was inside themselves. If they had returned to worshipping Allah and thanking Him, Allah would have returned to them their blessings, security, stability and well off life.

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that following His Path increases our blessings, not diminishes them. Allah *Glorified is He* states that should people believe and be mindful of Him, and He will shower them with blessings from the heavens and earth (*al-A'raf:* 96). In accordance with this divine law, we find that whenever people shift from faith to disbelief, it is necessarily matched by a corresponding shift in Allah's blessings to them; otherwise Allah's Commandment would become worthless. For example, all students take an exam, but only the ones who study will do well. As for those who did not study, they will fail. Otherwise there will be a state of chaos in the world, for if Allah *Glorified is He* gives to the one who follows His Path the same reward that He gives to the one who does not, what then is the value of following Allah's Path? Thus, one must have faith, and that faith must not be merely for superficial show, rather, it should be deeply rooted in the heart and soul. You should not claim to be righteous, while you are corrupt; do not claim to be honourable and trustworthy, while you steal and do not claim to be just, while you wrong the poor and side with the rich. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* only gives His blessings, whether spiritual or physical, to those who follow His Path. So, if you see that corruption is widespread throughout a community, know then that their inner selves have not changed even though they make a show of following the divine Path.

Accordingly, before we complain of our misfortune, we should first know what we did wrong, and change it to behaviour that will please Allah *Glorified is He.* Then Allah will change our fortunes. Thus, when you find that a certain group of people are in hardship, know that this is because Allah altered the blessings they had received from Him after they changed their inner selves. In other words, in their original state, they had enjoyed the blessings of Allah and had been following Allah's Path. Then they disobeyed Allah and deviated from the Path, so their worldly comforts changed as well. Essentially, there are two fundamental factors: Allah changes the blessings He bestows on people and that happens only when they change what is inside their selves.

The conclusion of the verse which states, 'Allah is All Hearing, All Knowing.' is that Allah *Glorified is He* knows the truth of what people do, and He hears what they say to their own selves in secret and what they say aloud in public. So, if we change anything, Allah *Glorified is He* hears and knows it because change happens by either visible action or spoken word. If the change is something communicated by speech, Allah *Glorified is He* hears it, even if it is only a thought in our minds. Likewise, if we change something through our actions, Allah sees it, regardless of how keen we are to hide it.

In the next verse Allah *Glorified is He* returns once again to tell us about Pharaoh's people. He says:

كَدَأْبِ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمْ
فَأَهْلَكْنَٰهُم بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَآ ءَالَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَكُلٌّ كَانُوا۟ ظَٰلِمِينَ ٥٤

They are indeed like Pharaoh's people and those before them, who denied the signs of their Lord: We destroyed them for their sins, and We drowned Pharaoh's people – they were all evildoers [54] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 54)

Some people may ask, 'Why did Allah *Glorified is He* tell us again about Pharaoh's people here, while He already spoke of them the preceding verse'? We respond that there is a subtle nuance of meaning between the two verses. In the earlier verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'they disbelieved in Allah's *ayat.*' (*al-Anfal:* 52) In the present verse, He says, 'who denied the signs of their Lord' (*al-Anfal:* 54).

The first verse quoted above denotes that they denied the cosmic signs that prove the existence of Allah *Glorified is He,* the miracles of Allah's messengers and the verses of the Scriptures that were revealed to them. As for the verse under discussion, it signifies that they did not show gratitude for the blessings that Allah bestowed upon them. As Allah is the only One Lord, He bestows blessings upon people, and as He is the Only One God; He reveals to people commands and Legislations. So, in the first verse they denied Allah as the Only One God and thus disbelieved in Him, whereas in the second verse, they denied Allah as the Only One Lord and thus they denied that He is the Only Provider of all blessings. The Blessings of the Only One Lord is that He is the One Who created the universe from nothing and provides all creatures which are unable to secure anything for themselves so that man could be imparted with all the essentials for his life. With regards to sustenance, Allah treats all people equally; the disbelievers and the believers and the disobedient and the obedient people, making no distinction between faith and disbelief in this respect.

At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and We drowned Pharaoh’s people’. As they all were disbelievers, then there were not believers to be singled out and saved. Rather, all of them had done evil to themselves by disbelieving in Allah as stated clearly in the verse. Allah *Glorified is He* specifically mentions Pharaoh’s people here because they are the only nation whose civilization’s remains can still be seen to testify to the extent of their advancement, the secrets of which are still a mystery to this day. The establishers of such a civilization could only be overcome by the workings of a greater power that was stronger and mightier than them. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* specifically wants to draw our attention to Pharaoh’s people because He ordained that their monuments and ruins will be discovered and will capture the attention of the entire world. Allah decrees that people will feel the desire to come and see the civilization of Pharaoh to marvel at how they attained such progress only to have their civilization collapse—and all this to act as a sign of the existence of a higher power, Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* brought ruin to Pharaoh’s people because they denied the truth of His divinity and instead took Pharaoh as their lord and god. Moreover, they denied Allah’s blessings. In the Quran, Allah tells us He bestowed upon them many favours such as gardens, water-runnels, fields of grain, noble dwellings, and well off life. However, they disbelieved in Him and therefore He perished them and made them to leave all such blessings (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-27).

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states that He gave them agricultural land and water in great abundance. Moreover, He gave them riches and power which uphold their honour and dignity and made them the masters of the world in their age. In this way, they built noble dwellings and none dared to affront them or oppress them. Theirs were the treasures of the earth, and theirs was the power required to secure for them welfare (*ad-Dukhan:* 26-27).

Furthermore, Allah increased them in knowledge which helped them secure a luxury and well off life in all its aspects. But they denied that all these blessings were bestowed upon them by the Only One God worthy of worship and the Only One Lord Who provides all creatures with sustenance. So, they deserved to be punished and their ruins remained to show what a great civilization they made. Their monuments include gold and treasure buried with their dead, perfectly engraved inscriptions on their temples which relate the story of their civilization and battles and it also depicts tremendous blessings that Pharaoh and his people lived with. But they did not show gratitude towards Allah *the Creator and Bestower of all Blessings* and, instead, they disbelieved in Him.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ شَرَّ ٱلدَّوَآبِّ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

The worst creatures in the sight of God are
those who reject Him and will not believe [55]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 55)

In Arabic, *ad-dawab* (creatures) is the plural of *dabba* which is anything that walks or crawls on the face of the earth. According to this definition, humans are included here as well, but linguists limit the meaning of *dabba* to four legged creatures, i.e. animals. The Creator *Glorified is He* honoured man by not making him walk on all fours so he could thus be excluded from this categorical grouping. In the light of this meaning, it becomes evident to us that Allah *Glorified is He* has appended the disbelievers to the category of *ad-dawab* and exempted only the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* created creatures and all other species in the world as insentient beings, carrying out their various endeavours instinctively without any decision making. Something which is done by instinct occurs without rational deliberation. Thus, we find that many of the things we have learned as sentient beings, we learned from insentient animals and insects because animals act by instinct that never errs. For instance, when we recite the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Thereupon Allah sent forth a raven which scratched the earth, to show him how he might conceal the nakedness of his brother's body…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31), we see that the raven, who does not have a mind for conscious decision making, taught something to man who has a mind and can make conscious decisions. That happened because the raven is driven by its instincts, so every animal's behaviours and mannerisms are made so by the choosing of Allah *Glorified is He* because animals are compelled to follow His commands. It is out of the Mercy and Compassion of Allah *Glorified is He* that all creatures, except for human beings, were created insentient; acting according to instinct rather than by deliberative reasoning. However, human beings, whom Allah blessed with the ability to reason, can disbelieve and disobey, even though it was Allah *Glorified is He* Who bestowed upon them the gift of mediation and choice.

It is amazing to see that animals driven by instinct never change the course of behaviour designed for them, always carrying on with their lives exactly as was planned for them. A cow will, for instance, give birth and not be upset when one of her calves is taken from her to be slaughtered because that is their purpose in life, to provide mankind with meat. The pigeon incubates her eggs and when the little chick emerges, she takes care of it for only a very short period of time until it knows how to independently fly and eat. After that, she leaves it to lead its life on its own because it is driven by instincts which never err. Animals act according to instinct without ever having to learn it.

When we turn to human beings, we still find all kinds of instinctual behaviour that is not consciously learned. If a person becomes hungry, he wants for food without anyone having to teach him what it means to feel hungry—this is instinctual. Likewise, when someone becomes thirsty, he wants for water without anyone having to teach him what thirst is or how to drink. We are all similar in terms of instincts. The rich, the poor, the mighty king and the lowly soldier, all of them, when they feel hungry, they seek food and when they feel thirsty, they seek water—all of this is governed by a general instinct that is shared with everyone.

It is incredible, for instance, that when a donkey wants to cross a river, it looks at it and from just one glance it can tell if it will be able to get across or not. If it can jump the river in one leap, it does, and if not then it finds another way. You cannot force a donkey to try to leap over a stream or river that is too wide for it. No matter how much you beat the animal, it will not respond to you and it will not leap. But with a person, if you command him to cross a waterway, he might say to himself, ‘I will garner all my force and cross it in one mighty leap’! But if his assessment is incorrect, he falls into the water. That is because he erred and the faculty of decision-making led him to believe that he could do something of which he is incapable. In this sense, animals that are governed by instinct are more keenly shrewd than we are.

When we consider eating, we find that primal instinct is again more keenly shrewd because an animal will eat until it is full and then it will not touch anything more, even if it comes across the most savoury foods. You cannot force an animal to eat an extra twig of clover, handful of hay or pod of peas once it is full. Whatever exceeds its needs, it will simply stomp it beneath its feet. When we come to people, however, we see them eating their full and washing their hands, and once enticed by a friend, ‘You forgot this piece of fruit’, or, ‘these pastries’, they go back to eating once more even though they were already full. So, they upset their stomachs and the natural rhythm of their bodies. Because humans are wantonly excessive in so many ways, they are afflicted with many diseases that do not afflict animals. Truly, most of the diseases that afflict animals are the result of contamination or dirty surroundings; things which are all caused by humans.

The True Lord wants to show us that being insentient creatures governed by instinct is still better than being disbelievers because the animal carries out its life’s purpose flawlessly, while the disbeliever does not. Instead he wreaks havoc on the earth and spills innocent blood. As such he is worse than an animal since, as we said, an animal will carry you from place to place without complaining, and it will carry your burdens without making a fuss. When you ride atop it, it will keep walking for a long time without being bothered by you or throwing you off its back. Truly it was created for this purpose, and it does what it was created for without complaining or grieving because it is governed by an accurate set of actions which it follows to precision. But look at man who invented and developed the cars, yet we find him falling asleep behind the wheel sometimes, ending with a gruesome accident and hurting himself as well as others.

Man is designed with the intent of following the Path of Allah the way it was revealed to us, but some humans rejected this Path and instil strife and discord in the world—this way they are worse than animals because they refrain from using their rationale in utilizing the basics of existence. If they did, they would know that they have been brought into a universe that was fully subjected to them. A sun that illuminates half the world to provide it with daylight, then sets to leave them to rest during the night, the moon and stars to guide their way whether on land or at sea, the rain that falls so that plants and crops can grow and the domesticated animals to provide milk and meat and to carry the loads. Unavoidably any person with a sound mind would think, ‘Who created all these wonderful things for me’? That is the whole purpose from being empowered with a ‘mind; to guide us to the truth of the Creator. In this respect, it only stands to reason that a person with a mind would realise that the One Who created all these blessings and made animals serviceable for him, is indeed someone who wishes him well. So, when the Path comes to him from Allah, he should follow it because he knows that the path is good and right for him, having come from his Creator.

In this case, if humankind had unanimously followed the Path, doubtlessly the affairs of the world would have gone smoothly and properly, but some of us concealed the existence of Allah and denied Him. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that they are worse than animals because they do not believe.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says next:

ٱلَّذِينَ عَٰهَدتَّ مِنۡهُمۡ ثُمَّ يَنقُضُونَ عَهۡدَهُمۡ فِي كُلِّ مَرَّةٖ وَهُمۡ لَا يَتَّقُونَ ٥٦

Who, whenever you [Prophet] make a treaty with them, break it, for they have no fear of God [56]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 56)

After having talked about the disbelievers who made war against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* the True Lord moves on to talking about the group of people with whom Prophet Muhammad had entered a treaty, wherein they agreed to desist from harming him. These were the Jews of Medina. Did they remain faithful to the treaty? No, they breached it. The Qurayza tribe, for instance, made a pact with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declaring that they would not support any of his enemies. But, when the Battle of Badr started, they broke the pact and supplied the disbelievers with weapons. Then they returned after the disbelievers were defeated and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them a second chance, and made a treaty with them once again. When the Battle of Khandaq (The Battle of the Trench) started, the Qurayzha tribe agreed to let the soldiers of Quraysh penetrate through the area under their control so they could surprise the Muslims from behind. But Allah sent a wind that disbanded the disbelievers. The True Lord says, 'who, whenever you [Prophet] make a treaty with them, break it…' (*al-Anfal:* 56). They acted as such because they abandoned the Path and feared Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so they tried to deceive him and break their treaty with him. Allah says, '…for they have no fear of Allah.' (*al-Anfal:* 56)

They were not conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* even though they believed in Him because they were people of The Book (Jews and Christians). They were given the Torah and a messenger, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him;* this means they were not left without a divine book. Yet, they did not adhere to what was in that book and they were not conscious or fearful of Allah. So, they violated the treaty. *An-naqd* meaning 'to violate' is the antonym of *al-ibram*; which means both 'to ratify' a treaty and 'to entwine' a string or rope. *Al-ibram* is to strengthen something, exactly as you would entwine a rope to make it stronger. When you entwine a rope, you twist it around itself, thus making it thicker and stronger. An entwined rope will be reduced to the half of it length since it will be twisted around itself and thus getting much tougher. But upon *an-naqd* or breaking it apart, makes it weak again. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in another verse of the Quran not to be like the woman who breaks and completely untwists her yarn which she herself has spun and made stronger (*an-Nahl:* 92).

The True Lord gives us the bottom line on individuals of this ken: they are those who do not believe, do not fear Allah, and break their covenants. So, the True Lord says of them:

فَإِمَّا تَثْقَفَنَّهُمْ فِي ٱلْحَرْبِ فَشَرِّدْ بِهِم مَّنْ خَلْفَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

If you meet them in battle, make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them, so that they may take heed [57] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 57)

In other words, if you meet them in battle, make an example of them such that those who follow their path or method would be terrified of what you did. Note that in Arabic, this verse begins with the word *imma* simply translated above as 'if'. *Imma* is a combination of the conditional particle *(in)* and the additional particle *(ma)*. Other conditional sentences can come with a different structure like *(in ja`aka Zaydun fakrimhu`* or 'If Zayd comes to you, honour him'. This sentence contains an if-clause 'If Zayd comes to you', and a main clause 'honour him' with just the conditional particle *(in)*. This means that if the condition is fulfilled, then the prescribed request needs to be fulfilled only once. However, when we use *(ma)* in conjunction with *(in),* this indicates that every time the condition comes about we are to fulfil the request as Allah ordered us. It is like saying, 'Every time you receive more than your need, be generous with it' because *(imma)* indicates continuity like saying 'every time'. 'Every time you receive extra, be generous with it, even if it should happen a hundred times'. If this verse were constructed with just *(in)* as the conditional particle, it would mean that fulfilling the request just once is enough.

Allah says, 'If you meet them in battle…' (*al-Anfal:* 57) meaning every time you find them at war with you, '…make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them…' (*al-Anfal:* 57), in other words use them to frighten and scatter those who would come after them; you must teach them a lesson of such magnitude that those who come after them will fear you and want to avoid you. Or, as the saying goes, 'Beating one to frighten another'. So, we are being asked to fight them pitilessly and forcefully so that those who follow their example would not be tempted to fight on their side or come to their aid. *At-tashrid* translated above as 'make a fearsome example of…' is the same as *at-tashtit* and *at-tafriq* or to disband and *al-ib`ad* to eliminate with cruelty; thus, even if they wanted to flee, prevent their escape and then disband them against their will. Then the True Lord says, '…so that they may take heed.' (*al-Anfal:* 57) This means that this experience should be a lesson for them such that they do not think again of making war against you, for they will remember what happened and shy from confronting you again.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِمَّا تَخَافَنَّ مِن قَوْمٍ خِيَانَةً فَٱنۢبِذْ إِلَيْهِمْ عَلَىٰ سَوَآءٍ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْخَآئِنِينَ ٥٨

And if you learn of treachery on the part of any people, throw their treaty back at them, for God does not love the treacherous [58] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 58)

Allah *Glorified is He*, begins this verse with *imma*, just as he began the previous verse. The usage of *imma* has already been explained in the previous verse. Allah is talking about people of another kind who do not fight openly in war, instead they plot in the dark to betray Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We ask, 'Is this a definitive or presumptive treachery?' Allah *Glorified is He* out of His justice distinguishes between the presumptive treachery and the definitive one. So, the treachery that has been put into action is treated one way, and the meditated treachery is treated another. Thus, the True Lord says, 'And if you learn of treachery on the part of any people…' (*al-Anfal:* 58).

Meaning, when definite words reach you that they are plotting to betray you, how should you act? The True Lord says, '…throw their treaty back at them…' (*al-Anfal:* 58). Since there is a treaty governing the two signatories, one party being us, the other being them, you should not attack them or exact any pre-emptive action; rather, you should throw the treaty back at them. In other words, you should first annul the treaty between you and them. So, as soon as you fear or suspect treachery distance yourself from them, but do not attack them before informing them that you have annulled the treaty for a clear and stated reason.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that the Khuza`a tribe was among his allies after the Treaty of Hudaybiya. The treaty dictated that Quraysh were not to aggress against the allies of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* nor would Prophet Muhammad and his allies attack them or any of their allies. Some of the people of Quraysh went to the Khuza`a tribe and attacked them, thereby violating the treaty between them and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They aided the tribe of Banu Bakr in their aggression against Khuza`a (the Prophet's allies), so what did the surviving members of the Khuza`a tribe do? They delegated `Amr ibn Salim of Khuza`a to go to Medina and proclaim to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Quraysh had broken their word and violated the treaty with him. When this happened, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not keep the matter a secret. He informed the people of Quraysh of what had happened and told them that he was now annulling the Treaty of Hudaybiya which he had entered with them. When Abu Sufyan came to mediate to try to justify what had happened, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused to meet him.

So, if someone from among those with whom you have made a treaty plots treachery, first reject and annul the covenant. And if you are certain that they have truly betrayed you, and then take a pre-emptive act against them. Just as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did with the Jews who betrayed him in the Battle of the Trench; leading to breaching their covenant with the Muslims.

The True Lord says, '…for Allah does not love the treacherous.' (*al-Anfal:* 58) This is as if to say that Allah, Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims are all not beyond committing any act of treachery even towards the disbelievers. This proves to us that Islam came to poise the norms of the world, not just for the believers, but for all people. So, when we hear the True Lord telling us that He has sent down the Scripture to Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* with the truth so that he can judge between the people in accordance with what Allah has shown him. (*an-Nisa':* 105); we note that Allah did not say 'judge between the believers', but 'between the people'. This means that there should be no distinction between justice for the Muslims and non-Muslims; a non-Muslim is still a creature of Allah, whom Allah summoned into this life and prepared for him place in this universe. That is why we must defer to justness and fairness in all aspects of our dealings with him; rather than wrong him, we must give him his due right because in doing so we are a reinforcement extended to him by Allah. Equitable treatment like this, by the order of Allah, was one reason why so many people came to Islam. Even more, reason why the True Lord tells us not to be an advocate for those who betray trust (*an-Nisa':* 105), which is to say, 'O Muhammad, do not side with the treacherous, even if they are from among your followers'. This verse was revealed when a shield(1) was stolen from Qatada ibn An-Nu`man; one of the *Ansar*. The ongoing suspicions incriminated a man from the *Ansar* from a tribe called Banu-Ubayriq. The owner of the shield went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Ta`ma ibn Ubayriq stole my shield.' So, when the thief caught on to what was being said, he placed the shield in a sack of flour and quickly disposed of it in the house of another man who was Jewish and whose name was Zayd ibn Samin. Then he said to his tribe, 'I have placed the shield in the house of Zayd ibn Samin the Jew.' His tribe members went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, our friend is innocent. The one who stole the shield was ibn Samin, the Jew. When the Companions went to Zayd ibn Samin's house and found the shield in the sack of flour, the man rejected the accusation saying, 'Ta`ma of the Ubayriq tribe brought this here!' As it so turned out, while Ta`ma was carrying the shield to Zayd ibn Samin's place he failed to notice that there was a small hole in the sack from which flour had leaked and left a trail on the ground. Ta`ma was too careless to notice, for Allah leaves signs of what happens so that those responsible for justice would be able to reveal the truth. Hence, the Muslims followed the trail of the flour until it brought them to the house of Ta`ma ibn Ubayriq, and suddenly the matter at hand precipitated to be a Muslim thief falsely accusing a Jew of robbery. The companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If you judge in favour of a Jew against a Muslim, all the Muslims will be put to shame.' It was here and then that a revelation was sent down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to protect him from swerving in the direction of his natural inclinations and Allah commanded him saying, 'We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust.' (*an-Nisa':* 105)

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(1) The story of the theft of the shield of Qatada ibn An-Nu`man

In other words, do not defend anyone for the sake of treacherous people, even if they are Muslims. As such the fairness and equity of Islam is that Allah will not wrong a Jew who stands by the right, nor will He favour a Muslim who stands by the wrong. Do they not see that the compelling forces of truth and righteousness within this religion? Does that not call them to approach Islam, the religion of justice and equity so that they might be embraced by it?

Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And if you learn of treachery on the part of any people, throw their treaty back at them…’ (*al-Anfal:* 58). In other words, ‘Tell them “I have abrogated this treaty between us and now I am absolved from its obligations.”’ Allah says, ‘…for Allah does not love the treacherous!’ (*al-Anfal:* 58) He makes it clear that He does not love the treacherous, even those who are committed to Islam.

In the next verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ سَبَقُوٓاْۚ إِنَّهُمۡ لَا يُعۡجِزُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

The disbelievers should not think they have won;
they cannot escape [59] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 59)

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* engaged the disbelievers in the Battle of Badr, one portion of the disbelievers were killed, another portion were taken prisoners and a third portion fled. Those who were killed or taken prisoners had their equipment and belongings seized as spoils of war. As for those who *‘sabaqu’*, translated above as ‘escape’, they were those whom the Muslims were unable to overtake to kill or capture. *Sabaqu* is the past tense verb in the third person plural, i.e. when someone wants to catch up with something else in front of him, but cannot. It can also mean ‘precede’ or ‘outrun’ which is to say that the escaping disbelievers outran the Muslims who, had they been caught, would have been killed or taken as prisoners of war.

The True Lord wants us to know that even though this is what seems to have happened, yet the truth of the matter is that even though these runaway disbelievers were unharmed by Muslim hands that day, still they cannot frustrate Allah and they have not eluded His Mastery *Glorified is He*. Their punishment will catch up with them at a future time, either when their time in this life has come to an end, or in some other battle.

Most of the time in such situations both the pursuer and the pursuant use every ounce of their energy; the runaway and the one in his pursuit. Thus, when you see them, you might be surprised at how fast each of them runs. This is human instinct. Under normal circumstances, a person has a certain amount of strength and ability, but under extraordinary circumstances, his abilities are amplified. So, if a ship sinks at sea, for example, and one of its passengers manages to float adrift a piece of wood from the wreckage, he might swim for a long time without getting weary, but once he reaches the shore he collapses and his power ebbs.

Physiologists revealed to us the reason beyond this behaviour and attributed it to the adrenal glands which secrete the adrenaline hormone. When a person finds himself in an unexpected hazard, the adrenaline boosts his strength exponentially. If the danger persists, the gland slows down until it reaches the normal amount of adrenaline that the body requires. That is why an imperilled man in the sea can swim so well that he might seem like just another wave in the ocean; this gland provides him with extra energy, but once he reaches the shore and the danger is gone that gland goes back to normal and his strength ebbs. He might even spend as much as three days sleeping to recover from the ordeal.

There is a fable told about(1) a hunter who sent his hound chasing after a gazelle to bring it down for him. The hound wanted to catch the gazelle, and the gazelle tried to save itself. Suddenly the gazelle turned around and said to the hound, ‘You will not catch me because I am running for my life, but you are running for your master’.

So, whenever someone is acting for his own survival he will be stronger. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘The disbelievers should not think they have won.’ (*al-Anfal:* 59) They are in the grip of Allah’s will, and they remain subject to the Omnipotence of Allah who one day will summon them and pass His judgment on them.

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(1) The story of the hunter’s hound and gazelle

After having talked about those who fought in battle, those who entered treaties, those who were treacherous, those who fled and escaped and those who tried to pursue them, the True Lord wants to draw our attention to an important point. We should not fall short in preparing whatever force is necessary to face our enemies whether in time of war or peace. War might be impending and we would be unable to adequately prepare for it. Thus, we must not slack in garrisoning for warfare up to and including the onset of battle. We must be ready both in times of peace and war. Thus, the True Lord says next:

وَأَعِدُّوا۟ لَهُم مَّا ٱسْتَطَعْتُم مِّن قُوَّةٍ وَمِن رِّبَاطِ ٱلْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِۦ
عَدُوَّ ٱللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَءَاخَرِينَ مِن دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ ۚ وَمَا
تُنفِقُوا۟ مِن شَىْءٍ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off God's enemies and yours, and warn others unknown to you but known to God. Whatever you give in God's cause will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged [60] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 60)

When Allah says, 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster…', this refers to all those categories of people previously discussed: those who fight, who are killed and whose families are obliged to avenge their deaths, those who are taken captive and those who betray their treaties blatantly or those who are suspected of betraying their treaties. We must be prepared (for war with) all these types of people, in accordance with the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '…whatever forces you [believers] can muster…' (*al-Anfal:* 60). For the believing servants of Allah who strive and struggle to uphold His word, this is a command to be always ready with whatever force they are capable of mustering. Why 'whatever you can'? Because humans are of limited capacities, and beyond the capacities of the believers lies the Ability of Allah.

Thus, we are to get ready and equip until we are empowered, then and only then, we ask for Allah's aid (for what is outside our ability). When you do all your best, you must never think, 'This will not be enough to outdo the weaponry that my enemies have arrayed against me'. Your enemy is not aided by Allah; you are the one with divine succour, and so long as you have this source of support, with the help of Allah your strength will be superior, no matter who your enemy is. Thus, when Allah addresses the believers, He makes it clear that they are not to be frightened by the sheer numbers of the enemies. All one needs to do is to muster whatever forces he is able to, even when he is certain that Allah is with him. Remember that Allah told us that He will cast terror into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth (*Al-'Imran:* 151). Once Allah *Glorified is He* casts terror into the hearts of the disbelievers, they will be on the brink of casting off their weapons and fleeing the battle even if they were equipped with the best of weaponry. Then the believers will seize them and be victorious over them through whatever forces they had prepared (for the battle). Allah says, '…whatever forces you [believers] can muster…' (*al-Anfal:* 60). This force can be in the form of a fearless heart, or a strong and healthy physic empowered by a sound mind, eager to fight with courage and bravery. Or it can be in the form of an advanced long range and state-of-the-art weaponry. So, the believers must be keen on possessing everything that can boost their power. Ever since the beginning of time, the goal (in war) has been for the warriors to possess an edge over their enemies and prevent them from getting the best out of them. During the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the range of the archers was the criteria that measured power. Upon a battle's initial onset, they would start with the arrows and slingshots. Then if the enemy advanced and came closer, they would use spears, and if at last they met in close combat, they would use swords. So, the best force war of at that time was an archer's capability of hitting the enemy from as far as possible before they could advance. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained 'force' the way he did in the following Hadith. \`Uqaba ibn \`Amir narrated: 'When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was delivering a sermon, I heard him say, "Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster…" (*al-Anfal:* 60). Then he said, "Take note, 'forces' means archery, 'forces' means archery 'forces' means archery."'(1) This is because archers provided an edge over their opponent and allowed attacking without being attacked. So, excelling in archery was one way to victory. But how can this logic be applied to modern day warfare now that weaponry has become so advanced? For a while the cannon was the weapon of choice because it provided a good edge with its long range. Then planes became the most powerful weapon because they could cover great distances, drop bombs, and return. An air force became the factor that determined the victor in warfare because it could inflict massive damage on the enemy without exposing the main corps to a counterattack, so long as their air power was superior to their enemy's. Then missiles and intercontinental ballistic missiles came about. And so forth up to the latest advanced weaponry that nations are racing to invent at this very moment. All these are long-range weapons. The goal is for each nation to be able to reach its enemy's territory without allowing the enemy to reach its own territory. In the verse under discussion, the True Lord *Glorified is He* also adds, 'including warhorses' (*al-Anfal:* 60). War mounts and cavalry are the force that seizes or occupies land. No matter how strong your weapons are, you will not be able to seize your enemy's land with them alone. So, in the past after the archers attacked, the mounted warriors would enter battle to seize the land. In modern times this is done by tanks and armoured vehicles. Battle begins with long distance attacks from missiles and planes until the enemy's force is demolished. Then tanks and armoured vehicles advance to occupy the lands. So, planes and missiles break the enemy, but they cannot seize land. The forces that allow us to seize land are war mounts, tanks, or armoured infantry. Horses must be prepared, fed, and trained if they are to be ready for war at any moment. Same with tanks and armoured vehicles; to be ready for battle at a moment's notice, they must be well supplied with spare parts and be properly tweaked, and their operators must be trained on their usage. Thus, Abu Hurarya *Allah be pleased with him* narrates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The best among those living is a man who is ever ready to grip his steed's reins for the Path of Allah, to fly onto its back whenever he hears a cry for help and to ride to places where he can expect lethal danger. (Next comes) a man who shepherds sheep among the hills or in the heart of a valley and prays regularly, gives his due in charity and worships His Lord. Truly there are none better than these two among mankind.'(1) In other words, such a person does not dally or linger; he sets out straightaway upon hearing any scream. Part of the miracle of the Quran is that it provides us with a general outline for battle. A battle begins with an attack to demolish the enemy's force from afar, whether by rockets, planes or other similar means. Then close-range battle ensues—never the other way around. The True Lord designed for us how to deploy forces during battle: first the long-range attacks and through them you weaken the destination, then you move in and seize the land. In the past, this was done with war mounts which have now been replaced by tanks and armoured vehicles.

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(1) *Related by Muslim and others*

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(1) *Related by Muslim and an-Nisa`i and referenced from the book 'At-Targhib Wa-Tarhib', volume 3, page 246*

The True Lord revealed the Noble Quran with signs of human inventions from days to come. Nowadays we see that the power of cars, or vehicles or tanks is measured still by horsepower. So, people say that this engine is five horsepower, or five-hundred horsepower and so forth. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off Allah's enemies and yours….' (*al-Anfal:* 60) You prepare your forces to strike terror into your enemy's heart so that he will not think you are an easy target. Merely preparing a force intimidates the enemy, which is why military exhibitions are held, so that enemies can see a country's full display of power. And when your enemy sees the strength and power that you possess, they will not have the audacity to aggress against you. This is how we can attain what is known nowadays as, 'The Balance of Power'. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the international community maintained 'The Balance of Power' through peace alliances between a group of powerful nations. After introducing economy as a cause of war, power no longer lies in weaponry and military prowess alone, but it depends on several factors, including economy and the media. Concern over other nations' reactions has become a strong disincentive against going to war. Each country worries about what the other is hiding. Thus, preparing for war has become a way for preventing war. 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off Allah's enemies and yours….' (*al-Anfal:* 60) Do not think that the people before you are Allah's enemies alone, even if Allah has put you in a position of authority over them. You should know that Allah's enemies are yours as well because they try to corrupt the lives of believers. An enemy of Allah always tries to get at the believers, to pull them away and force or tempt them into disbelief if he can. The True Lord is not angered because they do not believe in him, but rather because they do not follow The Path that brings mankind prosperity on earth. Allah *Glorified is He* does not hate them; rather, He punishes them only because of the ruin, wrong and tyranny that they wreak upon the world. '…and warn others unknown to you but known to Allah …' (*al-Anfal:* 60).

This is the True Lord's way of telling us that the Muslims' enemies are not only those who rose at the time of the revelation of the Quran, such as the disbelievers of Quraysh, the Jewish tribes of Medina, the hypocrites, and others. Many enemies would come long after the advent of the Quran; people of whom we are not aware, but of whom Allah *Glorified is He* is ever aware. At the same time, Allah tells us that the Muslims' enemies are not only those who rise to fight Muslims on the battlefield; rather, there are many who do not fight on a battlefield but nonetheless fight against Islam, the true religion, and its adherents. The import of this noble verse held true back then, and it has continued to hold true for Muslims. Since that time, the animosity of Persia materialised, Rome waged war against the Muslims, and the Crusaders invaded Muslim lands. In other times other enemies will emerge, people of whom Allah is aware and we are not. The events of history have always unfolded in ways to affirm the truth and accuracy of the Noble Quran. Then the True Lord addresses the apprehensions that naturally arise in the human heart upon hearing these verses about military prowess. There are those who think to themselves, 'Preparations like these need funding, effort and time above and beyond what is already needed to see to our own needs and interests'. We must not neglect to be prepared and at the ready because everything that we spend in Allah's Cause is accounted for by Allah. And we must not say, 'Keeping our people's forces prepared requires money and thus diminishes what we can spend on our children'. Allah will provide you what you need, and as Allah told us, whatever we expend in His cause will be repaid to us in full, and we will not be wronged. (*al-Anfal:* 60)

In other words, whatever you expend, no matter how small or big, is returned to you (by Allah). This expression, whatever you expend, came in another verse about war booty. (*al-Anfal:* 41) Without the word 'whatever' the classification would not have included simple items. But Allah meant to say that this includes even the most basic or simplest of things. Even a piece of string owned by a defeated enemy should go to the spoils of war. Anything that you expend in Allah's Cause is held to be returned to you so long as you spent it with nothing but Allah in mind at the time. As for the expenditures that are made ostensibly for Allah's sake, whereas they are after fame, pride or other selfish causes; these are excluded from the mentioned verse. Only that which is spent sincerely for Allah's Cause will be returned to you in keeping with the said verse (*al-Anfal:* 60).

But since the True Lord wants us to stay on the path of justice and avoid the path of falsehood and tyranny, He commands us not to abuse our prowess or use it to wage war against the creatures of Allah. Although we have the capability, and although we prepared our forces and weapons, but that does not mean that we should presume to aggress against the creatures of Allah. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* warns us saying:

وَإِن جَنَحُواْ لِلسَّلۡمِ فَٱجۡنَحۡ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلۡ عَلَى ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٦١

But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet]
must also incline towards it, and put your trust in
God: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [61]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 61)

In other words, Allah does not call upon us to be strong for us to oppress others. He does not want us to prepare our forces for the sake of aggression. He wants us to be prepared so that war is averted and peace pervades throughout the world. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* forbids us from using our military prowess as a means for attacking innocent people. So, if the enemy inclines towards peace, it becomes incumbent upon us to make peace with them. You ought not to say, 'They are just tricking us. It is only a ruse!' because everything you accomplish is not through your strength, but rather through your faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and trusting that He is with you. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the universe to be in harmonious and cooperation, rather than being in conflict and antagonism. Allah *Glorified is He* asks you to use your might to intimidate and frighten your enemies, not to spread tyranny or oppression without reason. The True Lord says, 'But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it….' (*al-Anfal:* 61) In other words, if they desire peace, and they make peaceful approaches towards you, then, you should move towards making peace with them as well. There is no point in accusing them of trickery or fearing any treachery, for Allah is with you and ultimately, He is the One Who will provide you with protection and victory. But with that in mind, you should always be ready with whatever force you can muster.

The True Lord says, '…and put your trust in Allah….' (*al-Anfal:* 61) This means that you should not put your trust in whatever forces you have prepared because no matter what, ultimately you will be depending on Allah to protect you. Next the True Lord gives us the rationale for why we should depend on Him alone. '…He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.' (*al-Anfal:* 61) In other words, no words escape His hearing and no acts escape His knowledge. Remember that you must not confuse trusting Allah with using this trust as a pretext for laxity or apathy. Putting your trust in Allah is done on the level of the heart, whereas the limbs take care of the actions. So, do not abandon your obligations and claim that in doing so you are putting your trust in Allah. A Muslim must be ever watchful of the world around him, and if you notice someone slipping into laxity, you must alert him to the need for being attentive and industrious, and you would do so in words and actions. So, we all have a role here, and thus Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.' (*al-Anfal:* 61) Let us note that this verse 'But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it, and put your trust in Allah: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing,' (*al-Anfal:* 61) comes after the verse, 'Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off Allah's enemies and yours....' (*al-Anfal:* 60) This verse exhorts us to be prepared for battle by priming our military prowess and forces.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make us see that the believers' military prowess must not be a tool for tyranny or pointless warfare. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He*, tells us that if they incline to peace, we must not ignore them or insist on war, for our religion wants peace for all of humanity, and Islam is not spread by force but by persuasion and wisdom. Warfare is not necessary for Islam to flourish and grow; it is the religion of the True Lord

Who convinces people (of the truth of Islam) by the power of His proofs and grasps people’s hearts with His Eminence. All of this helps in building up faith and belief to their pinnacle. Let us be as prepared as possible to face the disbelievers, but without being reckless or calling for improper use of our forces. If they incline to peace, we must incline to peace as well because Allah *Glorified is He* wants stability and safety to reign over mankind. If you are worried that their peace approaches are merely a ruse to trick you into a false sense of security so they can get you by surprise, know that their trickery will surely come to naught. They have schemed and plotted to ensnare human beings (like them), but the true believers’ planning and strategies are inspired by the True Lord. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن يُرِيدُوٓاْ أَن يَخۡدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسۡبَكَ ٱللَّهُۚ هُوَ
ٱلَّذِيٓ أَيَّدَكَ بِنَصۡرِهِۦ وَبِٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ٦٢

If they intend to deceive you, God is enough for you:
it was He who strengthened you with His help and
with the believers [62] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 62)

If you suspect that their peace approach to you is merely a manoeuvre so that they can gain more time for their own preparations, or to be able to get you off guard, then know that Allah is All Knowing, and He knows of their scheming. He will reveal it to you, and so long as Allah is with you, they will not be able to trick you. If you need any assurances, then think of the Battle of Badr. The Muslims’ victory in that battle was truly from Allah. The apparent causes underlying their success were their readiness to fight and their decision to embark on a battle. The hidden causes underlying their victory were the invisible soldiers Allah sent to fight against the disbelievers and the terror He cast into their hearts. Victory was their ally that day by the will and power of Allah. The True Lord says, ‘If they intend to deceive you…’ (*al-Anfal:* 62). *Al-khid`a* (deception) entails displaying something desirable, and concealing entails something undesirable. We say, ‘Someone *khada`ani’* meaning ‘Someone cheated me’. In other words, this person came to me and showed me the facet which I liked, and concealed that which I disliked. But does that mean the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was left at their mercy, or did he have a

Lord who was his steady pillar of support and his source of safety? The answer comes from the True Lord: ‘if they intend to deceive you, Allah is enough for you; it was He who strengthened you with His help.’ (*al-Anfal:* 62)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* is sufficient for you. Allah is your source of strength and your pillar of support because He is responsible for your victories and your strength. The proof to this is obviously that Allah made you, Muslims, victorious at the Battle of Badr despite your inferior numbers and equipment. By the power of Allah’s Aid, the Muslims achieved the best possible outcome. So, long as it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who aids you, and then surely events will unfold such that the desired outcome is achieved. After that the True Lord says:

وَأَلَّفَ بَيۡنَ قُلُوبِهِمۡۚ لَوۡ أَنفَقۡتَ مَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ جَمِيعٗا مَّآ أَلَّفۡتَ
بَيۡنَ قُلُوبِهِمۡ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَلَّفَ بَيۡنَهُمۡۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ﴿٦٣﴾

And brought their hearts together. Even if you had given
away everything in the earth you could not have done this,
but God brought them together: God is mighty and wise [63]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 63)

Allah’s Aid came to them in three forms: He aided them with His succour, and aided them through guiding others to follow Islam and lastly, He brought together the hearts of the believers. Allah had to join the hearts of the believers because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to a people who had tribal and arduous traditions. He was sent among a people of disparate tribes and clans who waged war with each other for the flimsiest of reasons. Elements of disband were stronger in their temperaments than the elements of accord and harmony.

A whole tribe would take a collective plunge to defend any of its members for any small cause or situation. All it took was for someone from the Aws tribe, for example, to spit on someone from Al-Khazraj tribe, and a war would erupt between the two. If their hearts had remained disbanded, these tribes would never have been able to confront the enemies of Islam and their internal belligerence would have distracted them from contributing to the victory and defence of Islam. But Allah joined their hearts, and after having been enemies, they became the closest friends. After having been in a state of discord and disunion, they were united in fraternal concord.

That is how Allah joined the hearts of Muslims, by making Islam the strongest common tie among them, in their hearts, their deeds, and their way of life. A brother in faith became closer and more important than a brother in blood. Once hearts were joined, faith became the strongest bond among them because everything a person does springs from conviction in the heart.

Behaviour is subordinate to intention, and the heart is the seat of our intentions. It is the heart that can propel a person into disliking you or provokes them to act against you. So, if you see someone frowning at you, know that there is something in his heart (that prompts him to do so). If a person tries to lash at you, know that there is something even more intense in his heart. And if someone tries to kill you, he has in his heart the deepest of loathing and hatred for you. So, the source of all emotion is the heart. That is why we see some people sacrifice everything, perhaps their freedom or wealth, for the sake of a cause they believe in, and yet they remain content in their hearts. Scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, deprive themselves of the comforts of this worldly life, living only among their classes for many years because knowledge has become like a creed or article of faith in their hearts. It is as if the heart's intentions and its fulfilment became the strongest aspect in this life for them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that joining the believers' hearts together is a great blessing from Him. He says, '…and brought their hearts together. Even if you had given away everything in the earth you could not have done this, but Allah brought them together: Allah is mighty and wise.' (*al-Anfal:* 63) When hearts are joined together, people are gathered in friendship and common alliance. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a Hadith narrated by Nu`man ibn Bashir, '…In the body there is a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, all of the body is sound, and which, if it is diseased, all of the body is diseased.…'

The Hadith in its entirety says, 'That which is lawful is clear, and that which is unlawful is clear and between the two of them are ambiguous matters about which not many people are knowledgeable. Thus, he who avoids these ambiguous matters certainly clears himself regarding his religion and his honour. But he who falls into the ambiguous matters falls into that which is unlawful, like the shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Verily, every king has a sanctuary, and Allah's sanctuary is His prohibitions. In the body, there is a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, all the body is sound, and which, if it is diseased, all the body is diseased. This part of the body is the heart.'(1)

Joining the hearts together was never about the need for money or exchange of material benefits. Money cannot create true bonds of fraternity and love. We see around us a lot of ties coming from worldly interests, and we see others coming from the hearts. The bonds coming from mundane interests reach an end abruptly once those interests have been met or ceased to be important. On the other hand, heartfelt bonds can withstand all challenges and ordeals. You cannot make a person love you, no matter how much money you give him because true love cannot be sold or bought. Hypocrisy and pretences can be bought as can many other phoney emotions. The Arabs whose hearts were joined together by Allah, were not interested in money so much as they were fixated on tribalism and fanaticism. Most of them had riches, but what kept them in disband the whole time was their tribalism and fanaticism. This was what evoked envy and ire in the hearts of others and roused them to action. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…but Allah brought them together; Allah is Mighty and Wise.' (*al-Anfal:* 63) Because Allah is Almighty, He is unconquerable and because He is Wise, He causes things to happen in their proper place. Allah alone is capable of compelling hearts to come together because our hearts are in the Hands of the All-Merciful, and He can alter them as He desires. That is why we call Allah with the supplication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that says, '…O Changer of the hearts, make my heart firm upon Your religion.' Shahr ibn Hawshab said, 'I said to Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her* O Umm Salama, which supplication did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say most often when he was in your house?' She said, 'His most frequent supplication was, 'O Changer of the hearts, make my heart firm upon Your religion.'(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). Next Allah *Glorified is He* brings to our attention an important issue of faith. He says:

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ حَسْبُكَ ٱللَّهُ وَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Prophet, God is enough for you, and for the believers who follow you [64] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 64)

Do not think for once that Allah *Glorified is He* punishes the disbelievers just because they did not believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He punishes them because their actions corrupt the universe. Allah does not need anyone to believe in Him, and surely, the True religion would be victorious whether people believed in it or not. Allah wants, by revealing His Path, to provide His servants with wellbeing and prosperity. That is why Allah tells us not to consider our submission as a favour to Him because it is Allah who has done us a favour by guiding us to faith (*al-Hujurat:* 17). So, when someone converts to Islam, he must not see his conversion as a favour he did to Allah since it will not add a speck to Allah's Magnificence. That person needs to know that Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed a gift upon him by leading him to Islam for his own good. Allah does not want Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pay any heed to the number or power of the disbelievers because he has Allah, the Most Powerful, on his side. Thus, He says, '…Allah is enough for you….' (*al-Anfal:* 64) In other words, you do not need anything but Allah. And He says, '…and for the believers who follow you,' (*al-Anfal:* 64) probably pertaining to '…Allah is enough for you…' as well because it is Allah who guided those believers to faith. Meaning, that Allah is enough for you and enough for those believers who follow you. As such, do not seek strength from any but the True Lord. It could also mean that Allah is enough for you with regards to things you do not have any means to achieve, and the believers (who follow you) are enough for you with regards to things you have the needed means to achieve.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi and categorized as a Hasan Hadith*

We note that the True Lord says here, ‘O Prophet….’ (*al-Anfal:* 64) This form of address is used for a particular orientation; when the matter at hand relates to setting a model for exemplary behaviour. But when the topic involves conveying the revelation or relaying a divine law, Allah would address him as ‘O Messenger’. Like in the verse, ‘O Messenger, proclaim everything that has been sent down to you from your Lord….’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 67) This is because the messengers came as conduits to announce and relate the Path on the authority of Allah, and they also lived according to that Path as models of exemplary behaviour. However, we notice that in the Noble Quran, the True Lord addresses every messenger by name except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, Allah would say, ‘Musa (Moses)…’, or ‘`Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary)’ or ‘Ibrahim (Abraham)’ *peace be upon them*. But with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He would address him as ‘Prophet!’ or ‘Messenger!’ Erudite scholars have taken note of this fact and they saw in this form of address, a special reverence to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah addresses Adam, Nuh (Noah), Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) using their names *peace be upon them* in different verses of the Quran:

- ‘…Adam, live with your wife in this garden….’’ (*al-Baqara:* 35)
- ‘…Nuh (Noah), descend in peace from Us, with blessings on you….’ (*Hud:* 48)
- ‘…Musa (Moses)! Verily, I am Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!’ (*al-Qasas:* 30)
- ‘…`Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Did you say to the people, “Take me and my mother as two deities alongside Allah?” (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116)

But when addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah does not merely say to him, ‘Muhammad’, instead He says, ‘O Messenger!’ or ‘O Prophet!’ In the noble verse currently under our consideration, the True Lord wants to tell His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah is enough for him and for the believers to triumph over the disbelievers, no matter how few the believers are. Then Allah Our Lord *Glorified is He* uses a second form of address in His saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ حَرِّضِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَى ٱلْقِتَالِۚ إِن يَكُن مِّنكُمْ عِشْرُونَ
صَٰبِرُونَ يَغْلِبُوا۟ مِا۟ئَتَيْنِۚ وَإِن يَكُن مِّنكُم مِّا۟ئَةٌ يَغْلِبُوٓا۟ أَلْفًا مِّنَ
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَّا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

Prophet, urge the believers to fight: if there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred, and a hundred of you, if steadfast, will overcome a thousand of the disbelievers, for they are people who do not understand [65]
(The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 65)

Whenever you hear that someone "urged" someone else to do something, it means that he impelled him to do it, or aroused his desire to do it. There are many ways to ask someone to do something. There is a call to do something, an order to do something and a prohibition against doing something. These are all methods for asking someone to do something, and they are often preceded by addressing that person. For instance, one can ask someone to approach, or to withdraw or to run an errand for them. Each of these entails the speaker proposing that the listener do this or that. But there is one such request that is not a binding imperative, rather, a proposition; a friendly request, Like you might say to one of higher social standing than you, 'I am not saying you must do this, I am merely suggesting it'. Then there is the verb to urge or *yahudd* which is a way of urging someone to do something by providing them an incentive. For instance, when you urge your children to study, the prospects of succeeding in life are an incentive for them. Whenever you urge people to do something, you are neither ordering nor prohibiting them from anything because you want them to do it eagerly and of their own will. If you order them to do something like a dictator, they might start to hate it, but when it comes as a suggestion, you will see that they will be happy to do it without any persistent orders from you. So, Allah says, 'O Prophet, urge the believers to fight….' (*al-Anfal:* 65) In other words, incite them and encourage them. The verb consists of the Arabic letters *ra`*, *ha`* and *daad* from which we get the verb *harad* or *yahrid* which means to be on the verge of death. This word was used by the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to their father when they told him that he will keep remembering Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* till his body and spirit would be broken or till he is on the brink of death. (*Yusuf:* 85) In other words, he will continue mentioning or remembering Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* until he is almost dead.

But the word *harrad* in the verse currently under our consideration is slightly different. Does '*harrid* the believers' (translated above as 'Urge the believers') mean 'bring the believers to the brink of death'? No. This is an instance of a derived verb that eliminates the origin of its derivation. For instance, when we say, *'Qashshart* an orange' (i.e. I peeled an orange), it means that I removed the *qishra* or the peel of the orange. Similarly, when we say a doctor *marrad* someone (i.e. treated him), it does not mean he gave that person a *marad* (an illness); rather, it means that the doctor cured the illness. There are many verbs that follow this semantic pattern (meaning to remove), and they are characterized by the doubling of the middle letter as in *harrad* and *qashshar*, although sometimes verbs of similar meaning are instead indicated by a *hamza* (an Arabic letter corresponding to a glottal stop) at the beginning. For instance, if someone *`ajam* a book, i.e. he removed the *`ujma* or the errors and mistakes from it. That is why dictionaries and language reference books are called *m`ajim* because they remove the ambiguities of the meanings of words. We have previously explained the meaning of *qasat* and *aqsat*. And *qasat* means injustice or tyranny, like when Allah speaks about the 'tyrants' who will be the fuel of Hellfire. (*al-Jinn:* 15)

Conversely, *aqsata* signifies the act of removing injustice. As seen, the prefix (*i.e. hamzah* '*a*' in *aqsata*) may change the meaning entirely. Likewise, some forms of diphthongs e.g., *qash-shar* (to peel) indicate the removal of the original root *qishr*, (peel). Other similar examples include *marrada* and *harrada* (to nurse and cure) which denote the treatment and removal of *marad* and *harad.* Thus, the Quranic verse essentially says, 'O Muhammad, encourage them to fend off (remove) the danger of death by means of fight. We can use this linguistic mechanism in understanding many Quranic verses. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Final Hour, 'Behold, [although] (*akad `ukhfiha)* I have willed to keep it hidden, the Last Hour is bound to come' (*Ta Ha:* 15). For those who only approach the literal meaning, it means 'I have almost hidden it and, thus, kept it from disclosure'. However, we say the prefix *hamzah* (a) at the beginning of *akad* implies the removal of concealment. Then, it means 'I almost revealed the coming of the Last Hour' by removing its covering through the major and minor signs of which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told people. Some people may exhaust themselves in endeavours to explain *'akad `ukhfiha'* and never realise that the Arabic verbal form of removal takes two forms: doubling the middle letter and adding the prefix of *hamzah* (a) at the beginning of verbs. Allah *the Most High* says, 'O Prophet! Urge the believers to battle…' (*al-Anfal:* 65).

In other words, Allah *the Exalted* commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to encourage the believers to fight and struggle. In other words, 'invite your people to distance themselves from death and destruction; if they do not fight, the disbelievers will surely conquer them'. The disbelievers only recognize the warlike path of arrogance, dominance, and tyranny. Consequently, when the believers fight them, they hold them at bay on their borders. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'O Prophet! Urge the believers to battle' (*al-Anfal:* 65). Death and destruction would encircle them in this world and the in afterlife only if they abstain from strife against the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to secure a safe and dignified life for the believers in this life and in the Afterlife. Noticeably, Allah *Glorified is He* has put a faith criterion for the etiquettes of war between the believing and disbelieving parties. The maker of this criterion is the Creator—the Creator of their very powers, abilities and sentiments. In this regard, Allah says, 'If there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred; and [that,] if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome a thousand of those who are bent on denying the truth.' (*al-Anfal:* 65) In short, it is a one-ten ratio; the power of faith makes the strength of a believer equal to the strength of ten disbelievers. Many people hold that the rhetoric of the Quran is brief, concise, and miraculous. Why did Allah then say, '…twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred…' (*al-Anfal:* 65), and then repeat, '…if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome one thousand…' (*al-Anfal:* 65)? Would it not be more concise to say, 'One believer will overcome ten disbelievers'? However, you have not considered the facts of Islamic history. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* participated in some battles with the believers, which are technically known as *'ghazawaat'* whereas the armed expeditions in which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* only sent a few believers—usually from twenty to one hundred warriors without taking part in them are called *sayarah* (expeditions). Allah *the Exalted* stresses the numbers 'twenty' and 'hundred'; 'twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred….' (*al-Anfal:* 65)

Evidently, what matters most is not the numbers of warriors but their patience and endurance. Another verse affirms patience and perseverance as necessary for warriors because the enemies may also be patient. In that case, you must outdo them in patience. If they endure the hardships of battles, you must endure more than they can. The military power necessary for victory includes patience and steadfast faith to endure the difficulties and violence of battles. In justification of this faith-related ruling, the True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'O Prophet! Inspire the believers to conquer all fear of death when fighting, [so that,] if there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred; and [that,] if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome a thousand of those who are bent on denying the truth because they are people who cannot grasp it.' (*al-Anfal:* 65). The fact that one believer may overcome ten disbelievers finds its rationale in the power of belief—the disbelievers cannot grasp the truth as they do not understand it. Conversely, the believers do understand it. Thus, we draw a comparison between the believer who grasps the truth, and the disbeliever who does not. When the disbeliever fights, they faithlessly do it with no belief in the Afterlife. All they have is this world and the fear of losing it. When the disbeliever finds himself in the arena of war, they want to maintain their own life even if this leads them to flee from the battle. However, for the believer, this world is but a fleeting period in their life, whereas martyrdom admits them to the pleasures of Allah and paradise without any need to pass through judgement. As such, a believer is keen on battle and fights bravely. Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* once said to the Persians, 'I have come to you with warriors who love death as much as you love life.' If the disbelievers grasp the truth and understand that this world is a transient bridge to the everlasting Afterlife, they will have a keen drive for the battle. Instead, they want to keep this life because—to them—it is all they have. The Noble Quran says 'Say, "Are you, perchance, hopefully waiting for something [bad] to happen to us – [the while nothing can happen to us] save one of the two best things?"' (*at-Tawba:* 52)

Eventually, the outcome of wars is either victory and gains or martyrdom leading to paradise. Both are undoubtedly good things. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying, ‘But as far as you are concerned, we are hopefully waiting for Allah to inflict chastisement upon you, [either] from Himself or by our hands! Wait, then, hopefully; behold, we shall hopefully wait with you!’ (*at-Tawba:* 52) In other words, the disbelievers will meet anything but disgrace and misfortune. They suffer either the severe punishment or defeat. They only expect misfortune when they enter the battle; if killed, they suffer painful punishment in hell or suffer the disgrace of fear divinely placed in their hearts in battles. In battles, the disbelievers rely only on their numbers, strength and equipment, whereas the believers rely first and foremost on Allah the All-Powerful and the Almighty. The believers trust that He will bring them victory. They are eager for battle as their faith lends them an incredible energy to overpower all numbers and equipment. The believing warriors are mighty in combat and eager for battle because they feel that they receive aid from Allah Himself. We know that every person is eager to fulfil their life’s purposes, but the disbelievers’ purpose is nothing but enjoying this limited earthly life. As for a believer, it covers both lives in this world and in the Afterlife. The disbeliever fights only with their worldly strength which is devoid of any true faith. Notice that several clauses are declarative statements in Allah's saying, ‘O Prophet! Inspire the believers to conquer all fear of death when fighting, [so that,] if there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred; and [that,] if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome a thousand of those who are bent on denying the truth because they are people who cannot grasp it.’ (*al-Anfal:* 65)

Declarative statements do not contain a request or demand. If a request or demand takes on the form of a declarative statement, it might mislead you to believe that it is describing a constant and normative condition. For instance, some years ago when several armed renegades entered the Sacred House in Mecca and took worshippers as hostages, some people misunderstood the Quranic verse, ‘Whoever enters it [the Sacred House] is safe,’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 97) guarantees security to everyone who enters the Sacred House in Mecca. In response, we say that it obliges the obedient believers to ensure the safety of those who enter it. A person may obey Allah and ensure the safety of those in the Sacred House or disobey and fail to ensure the safety of the said people. The issue is whether you are obedient or disobedient to Allah. The same goes true for the Lord’s saying, ‘The divorced women shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting-period of three monthly courses.’ (*al-Baqara:* 228) It is a similar declarative sentence, but they only wait this period if they obey Allah. If they are disobedient, they may not forbear it. Allah also says, ‘Good women are for good men and good men are for good women….’ (*an-Nour:* 26) However, many marriages fail and go against this statement. It may happen that a despicable man marries a good woman or a depraved woman marries a good man. You might then wonder why the good man has not married the good woman and vice versa as Allah says? In response, this understanding is untrue. Allah only advises and guides us to the right choice; the righteous women should choose good and righteous men as marital partners leaving the disobedient partners to meet one another. Accordingly, you have a straightforward life, but if you disobey, unrest follows. For example, when ill-tempered partners insult one another, they exchange offense and ugliness. Misery and wretchedness occur when a bad man marries a good woman or a bad woman marries a good man—one party will always suffer! The true meaning of the verse is not that you will never find a good husband with a bad wife or vice versa, but it is a moral command to obey and upon which to act. As a good person, you shall have a good marital partner. Or else, you commit an act of disobedience.

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

ٱلۡـَٔـٰنَ خَفَّفَ ٱللَّهُ عَنكُمۡ وَعَلِمَ أَنَّ فِيكُمۡ ضَعۡفٗاۚ فَإِن يَكُن مِّنكُم مِّاْئَةٞ صَابِرَةٞ يَغۡلِبُواْ
مِاْئَتَيۡنِۚ وَإِن يَكُن مِّنكُمۡ أَلۡفٞ يَغۡلِبُوٓاْ أَلۡفَيۡنِ بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ مَعَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ٦٦

But God has lightened your burden for now, knowing that there is weakness in you — a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred and a steadfast thousand of you will defeat two thousand, by God’s permission: God is with the steadfast [66] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 66)

This mitigating enactment moderates the previous verse in which twenty believers who are patient in adversity can overcome two hundred disbelievers. As known, there are many requisite preparations for a battle. A warrior must be of sound body, strong faith and knowledgeable in tactics and strategies of war such as military manoeuvres, change of position and camouflage. The outcome of battles is not determined by combat alone. Indeed, the victory depends upon timely advances, retreats, preparations and other ruses just as Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* did on many occasions. To ensure that twenty patient warriors can overcome two hundred opponents, they must all possess patience, strength, and endurance. However, a given person might not have the reserves of strength and lasting endurance needed, for sometimes spells of weakness afflict people for a period of time, as do spells of strength and good health. It is through the Divine Mercy and Compassion for the believers that Allah *the Exalted* has lightened their burden; He knows that there are times when people are weak whatever the reason is. Thus, He changed the proportion of believers to disbelievers from one to ten to one to two. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Now, Allah, for the time being, has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak. So, if there be one hundred of you who are patient in adversity, they should [be able to] overcome two hundred; and if there be a thousand of you, they should [be able to] overcome two thousand by God’s leave: for Allah is with those who are patient in adversity.’ (*al-Anfal:* 66)

Does it abrogate the previous verse? No, rather, the second verse merely provides for and considers the fluctuating circumstances and human weaknesses. In conclusion, the first verse is effective and acts as the maximum proportion, just as the second verse is also effective and acts as the minimum proportion. As such, if a believer encounters three disbelievers and flees, he neither is a cowardly deserter, nor blamed for flight in that case. However, if he faces two disbelievers and flees, he is a deserter because the lowest ratio is that a believer can overcome two disbelievers. This proportion oscillates between one to two and one to ten according to the believer’s patience and physical prowess among other factors which may give support to one side over the other.

Naturally, we know that a strong person may become weak and the patience may fade away when people change quickly. Furthermore, as numbers of believers increase, it becomes possible for them to rely on their collective strength. However, when they are a few, each one of them exerts his utmost strength and energy in battle to defend his beliefs. Allah, the Lawgiver, does not make decrees so He can heap unbearable burdens upon the believers; rather, He makes laws for them to lighten their burdens. For example, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* made it permissible to break the obligatory fast during *Ramadan* if a person is sick or travelling.

Similarly, the True Lord *the Exalted* provides rules for shortened prayers during travel. Allah knows that human souls have their points of weakness which sometimes make impossible to carry out all Divine Commands. In this circumstance, Allah Himself lightens the believers' burdens rather than leaving them to lighten their own burdens as may appear proper to us. Some people argue that modern life does not allow the effective implementation of these rules and commandments; we cannot observe them. They even present the Quranic verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear…’ (*al-Baqara:* 286) as evidence. In reply, we say that you misunderstood the meaning of ‘what any human being is well able to bear’. People should measure their strength based on what Allah has commanded them to do rather than measuring the Divine Commandments against their assessment of strength. If Allah has commanded it, then His command is an assurance that it lies within human ability. Do not say to yourself, ‘I will gauge my ability to comply first and then contemplate whether the command lies within the scope of my ability’. You should first contemplate whether you have been commanded to do something. If Allah has commanded it, then it lies within your power to carry it out; Allah does not burden a human being with more than they can bear; He does not command a human being to do something without first providing enough strength for it. Do not subordinate the Divine Commands to your presupposed level of strength; rather measure your abilities according to what you have been commanded to do.

The True Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘Now, Allah, for the time being, has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak....’ (*al-Anfal:* 66) It is Allah *Glorified is He* who has lightened your burden by alleviating your hardships. A person can say that something is light or heavy, but do you know how people can weigh or measure the burden they endure in picking up some objects? If you pick up a pen, you may say, ‘It is light’ but if you pick up a large slab of stone, you say, ‘It is heavy’. How did you gauge their weight?

Was it by sight alone? No. You may distinguish between the weights of two bags of similar dimensions when you see one full of iron and the other of lighter items. You cannot weigh things by the senses of hearing, smelling or touching, e.g., you cannot tell if something is light or heavy simply by touching it. All the five senses are incapable of perceiving the heaviness or lightness of an object. By what means do we then measure it? Scientists of kinesiology have finally concluded that weight perception has its own sense associated with muscles—the sense of muscles. When there is some weight straining a person's muscles, it is heavy, which differs perceptibly from a weight that does not greatly tire the muscles or require much exertion—a weight like that is light. Thus, we have some means of perception, which we had not identified in the past but modern science has discovered it.

For example, you might grasp a piece of cloth between fingers and say, 'This cloth is thick or thin and light'. What is the sense of perception that tells you this? It is the perception of proximity and width. Your fingers may be slightly apart from each other when grasping the thick cloth and slightly closer to the thin cloth. The distance may be as slight as a millimetre or less which you cannot measure by sight alone. However, you can feel it between your fingers. Now, you must not assess matters purely by numbers and think that victory lies in numbers. In that case, you distance yourself from Allah and delude yourself with false senses. Truly, the victory comes from Allah and belongs to Allah *the Exalted*. Why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not say, 'Allah knows that you are weak, so He has lightened your burden' instead of the reverse order, 'Allah has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak' (*al-Anfal:* 66)? Simply, Allah *the Exalted* puts more emphasis on the reduction granted more than on its reasons, even though the lightening of burdens may spring from several reasons, of which the everlasting characteristic of the Divine Law. Allah *the Exalted* provides the maximum limit as well as the minimum limit for the fluctuating powers, certainties of faith and love of worldly desires that differ from the early Muslim generations to the following generations. It also considers the temptations and domestic chaos that changed from the age of prophecy and became widespread in our age.

Concluding this verse, the Lord *the Most High* says, 'for Allah is with those who are patient in adversity.' (*al-Anfal:* 66) Suppose you said to a friend, ‘So-and-so travelled to the Arab Gulf States with only five dollars in their pocket.’ When your friend expresses astonishment and asks, ‘How could he do that with such a small amount?’ You answer, ‘Oh, he has a millionaire friend with him.’ Your friend's astonishment fades away. Again, if it is said that an old man went up mountains to quarry some stone, you would ask, ‘How is that possible?’ In response, it is told that a strong person went with him. So, you feel it is all right. When the weak is in the company of the strong or the poor in the company of the rich, it creates a kind of transference. The strong supports the weak, the rich provides for the poor and the knowledgeable guides the ignorant. Their coupling lends some strength from the superior ones to the weak ones.

Here, Allah *the Exalted* clearly tells the believers: your human strength and ability to keep patient are limited, so do not attempt to make do with this limited strength in isolation from the Limitless Divine Power. Be patient because Allah *the Exalted* is with those who are patient; Allah *the Most High* is with you all. He will support you with His Strength such that no other power will be able to overcome or force you into submission. This brings us to an opportune moment to talk about the story of the cave. During the Muslim emigration to Medina, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* went into a cave to hide. However, the disbelievers chased them to the very entrance of the cave. What did Abu Bakr say to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*? He said, ‘If they but look below their feet, they will see us.’ This was, of course, a form of logical thinking. In response, what did the Prophet say to calm Abu Bakr? He said, ‘What do think you of two persons whose third is Allah?’ What is the rationale here? The Prophet was essentially saying that so long as Allah is with you, fear no one as no human sight can discover you in the presence of His Providence. Like the previous verse, this verse talks about battles and victory. Winning battles usually implies the seizure of spoils of war. The spoils taken at the Battle of Badr included movable objects which were divinely decided to set one fifth thereof to Allah and His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in addition to the prisoners of war. In the Battle of Badr, seventy men of Quraysh were killed and another seventy were taken as prisoners of war. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* consulted his Companions on this matter(1) saying: ‘What is your opinion regarding these prisoners? Truly, Allah has put them under your grasp. Meanwhile, they were your brothers until recently.’ Abu Bakr, *Allah be pleased with him*, said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they are your people; Allah made you triumphant over them. Let them survive; they are our brothers, our uncles, and our clansmen. I say that you ransom them and whatever we earn from them will add to our strength against the disbelievers. Perhaps Allah will guide them to Islam and they become allies to you.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘What is your opinion, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab?’ `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, these people have expelled you, fought against you and denied the truth of your message. I am not of the opinion of Abu Bakr. Rather, I think you should let me have so-and-so (a relative of `Umar) to kill him and let `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* have `Aqeel (his brother) to kill him and give Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* his brother for the same reason. As such, Allah may know that we bear no affinity in our hearts for the idolaters. They are the most courageous leaders and prestigious elites of Quraysh, so kill them. I do not think it is proper to take them prisoners; we are just a new-built diverse community.’ Expressing his opinion, `Abdullah ibn Rawaha *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I see a valley full of wood for kindling. Let us light a fire to kill the captives in flames.’ Al-`Abbas, who was hearing nearby, said, ‘Then, you break your ties of kinship.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* followed the opinion of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and said, ‘Truly, Allah softens hearts of some people until they are softer than milk (2) and hardens some hearts until they are harder than stones. Like the angel Michael *peace be upon him* Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* comes with mercy and compassion. He is also like Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who said, ‘Hence, he who follows me [in this my faith] is truly of me. Yet, whoever disobeys me, You are, verily, Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy!’ (*Ibrahim:* 36) Abu Bakr is also following the example, of `Isa (Jesus)—son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him* who said, ‘If You cause them to suffer, verily, they are your servants and if You forgive them, verily

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(1) *Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad, (Hadith numbers: 3632-3634) with various wordings*

(2) *Al-Waqidi has related these words as ‘Softer than butter’ (Waqidi, v.1 pg. 110).*

You alone are Almighty, Wise!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) You, O `Umar, are like the angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who brings sorrow and retribution upon the enemies of Allah and like Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* who said, 'O my Lord! Leave not on earth any of those who deny the truth' (*Nuh:* 26) and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who said, 'O our Lord! Wipe out their riches and harden their hearts so that they may not attain to faith ere they see the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!' (*Yunus:* 88) If you both agree on one opinion, I will not depart your opinion. O Muslims, you are impoverished, so none of the prisoners shall be released freely; they either pay ransom or suffer execution.' The prisoners had several wealthy relatives. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had consulted the companions before the Battle of Badr. When he chose the position of the Muslim army, Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir ibn Al- Jamuh(1) *Allah be pleased with him* approached him and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, are these locations places that Allah has revealed to you in order that we station ourselves here and only here, or is it only a matter of opinion, warfare and strategy?' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'It is merely a matter of opinion, warfare, and strategy.' So Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir *Allah be pleased with him* advised him to change the position to have the water sources behind them, so they could drink freely instead of letting the disbelievers have access to them. If, however, the position was divinely decided, none would dare to speak up against it, for Allah possesses the Absolute Knowledge. We are merely human beings with limited understanding while Allah has the infinite Omniscience. In the issue of taking prisoners, there was no law sent down by Allah to regulate it. Thus, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* consulted his Companions. `Umar ibn Al-Khattab and `Abdullah ibn Rawaha *Allah be pleased with them* expressed similar strict opinions while Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* expressed an opposing kind view. Finally, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke to them and summed up their opinions— the opinion of clemency led by Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and that of punishment led by `Umar ibn Al-Khattab

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(1) The story of the advice of Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir ibn Al-Jamuh Allah *be pleased with him* on the day of the Battle of Badr

Allah be pleased with him. Eventually, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* preferred the opinion of taking ransoms from the captives and made the ransom of each captive between one and four thousand *dirhams.* Al-`Abbas, the Prophet's uncle was one of them. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* heard his uncle moaning in bonds. He said, ‘Release him from his shackles.’ Some people understood it as a sign of the Prophet favouring his uncle, although in actuality, it was a repayment for the kindness that Al-`Abbas did for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Pledge of `Aqabah when a delegation from Medina visited Al-`Aqaba to declare their Islam and pledges of allegiance to the Prophet. Al-`Abbas attended that meeting. And he was the first to speak, even though he was still a disbeliever.

Al-`Abbas addressed them saying, ‘O people of Al-Khazraj—the Arab called the citizens of Medina ‘Al-Khazraj’ from the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj alike—You know that Muhammad is living in honour and safety in his own birthplace and his clan had so far protected him from our tribal men's persecution, even if we share the same view about his message. Now, he desires to join you in Medina, so if you expect to be loyal to him, keep your words, and protect him from enemies, then take him to Medina. However, if you will surrender him to enemies and leave him in a lurch, it is better for you to leave him here now; he is among the best and most precious people.’(1) Al-`Abbas had taken an admirable stance that could only be repaid in kindness. However, he was a disbeliever, his disbelief did not interfere with his affectionate inclination to protect the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* rewarded Al-`Abbas for his kindness. The Islamic principle on this issue is clear as the True Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘And when you are greeted with a greeting [of peace], answer with an even better greeting, or [at least] with the like thereof....’ (*an-Nisa’:* 86)

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not favour his uncle but paid him his right. The Prophet said to him, ‘O Al-`Abbas, ransom yourself and your nephews `Aqeel ibn Abu Taleb and Nufal ibn Al-Harith and your friend `Uqabah ibn `Amr ibn Jahdam—the brother of Banu Al-Harith ibn

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(1) *Sirat Ibn Hisham, (Al-Anwar Al-Muhamadiyya edition), 2:44*

Fihr, for you are a rich man.' Al-`Abbas replied, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am a Muslim but the disbelievers forced me to fight against you.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If you say the truth, Allah knows of your Islam and will reward you for it, but apparently, you fought against us, so ransom yourself.' Now, Muslims had taken twenty ounces of gold from Al-`Abbas as spoils of war in the Battle of Badr, so he said, 'O Messenger of Allah, count this sum as part of my ransom.' In reply, the Prophet said, 'Nay, that is something taken from you and given to us by Allah *the Exalted*.' Al-`Abbas said, 'I do not have any money; you force me to beseech Quraysh for support.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* laughed and said, 'Then, what about the money you secretly left with your wife Umm Al-Fadl Bint Al-Harith before leaving Mecca? You said to her, 'If I am killed on this journey, distribute the money to Fadl, `Abdullah, Qutham, and `Ubaydullah in such and such manner!' Upon hearing this, Al-`Abbas said, 'True, by Allah no one knew about that but she and I. I know now that you are the Messenger of Allah.' Al-`Abbas ransomed himself for four thousand dirhams and ransomed his nephews and friend for a thousand each.(1) As far as the financial assessment is concerned, Al-`Abbas paid the ransom fourfold. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* also had his son-in-law Abu Al-`As(2) ibn Al-Rabee` among the prisoners.(3) He was the husband of the Prophet's daughter—Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*.(4) Khirash ibn As-Simma captured him at Badr. When the people of Quraysh sent the ransoms to release their prisoners, Zaynab sent money for the release of Abu Al-`As and his brother `Amr ibn Al-Rabee`. Along with the money, she sent her own necklace— a gift she had from her mother Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* upon her marriage. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw the necklace, he was deeply moved and said, 'If you all see it alright to release her captive and return her money, do it.' In response, the companions said, 'It is alright, O Messenger of Allah.' They released Abu Al-`As and returned her money.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir with somewhat different wordings*

(2) *At-Tabari has his name listed as Abu Al-`Asi`.*

(3) *See the Hadith collections of Abu Dawud (1:267); At-Tabari (2:290); Ibn Hisham (pp.306-308).*

(4) The story of the necklace of Zaynab, the daughter of the Prophet, when she sent her necklace to free Abu Al-`As and his brother `Amr ibn Rabee`

For his release, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* also secretly made a condition that Abu Al-`As allows his wife departure to her father in Medina. No one knew about it but the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Al-`As. When Abu Al-`As left, the Messenger of Allah sent Zayd ibn Harithah and a man from among *Al-Ansar* and said to them, ‘Await in the valley of Ya`jah until Zaynab comes across you, then accompany her and bring her to me.’ They went out one month or so after the Battle of Badr. Once Abu Al-`As arrived in Mecca, he ordered his wife to depart to her father. She immediately made preparation for the journey. Allah says:

مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَن يَكُونَ لَهُۥٓ أَسۡرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ يُثۡخِنَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ
تُرِيدُونَ عَرَضَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ﴿٦٧﴾

It is not right for a prophet to take captives before he has conquered the battle field. You [people] desire the transient goods of this world, but God desires the Hereafter [for you] – God is mighty and wise [67] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 67)

In Arabic, the word *asra* is the plural of *aseer* which is defined as someone who is chained and restrained so that he is squarely in the hands of the person who captured him. In Islam, prisoners of war are the only left source of slavery; the prisoner is under the control of his powerful enemy who may either kill or enslave them. Generally, when one falls to capture, the comparison is not between a free man and a slave but between killing or slavery under the then international laws.

Of course, keeping them alive is preferable and recommended that Allah *the Exalted* revealed this ruling concerning the captives to spare their lives from death. It was possible to simply allow killing them, but Allah *the Exalted* wanted to preserve life even the lives of the disbelievers. It was Allah who brought them to life and made them stewards on earth. Perhaps, they find guidance and become true believers. We know that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* condemned those who killed human beings unjustly. Some falsely slandered Islam as legitimizing slavery, whereas slavery preceded the advent of Islam; Islam did not invent or found it. It was the status-quo of the past times. The sources of slavery, just and unjust, were proliferating at times of war and peace. For example, someone, who committed a small infringement against another and failed to compensate for it, would say, ‘Take me as a slave instead’. Likewise, an insolent debtor would say, ‘Take my son or my daughter as a slave.’

Evidently, the sources of slavery were many, while the only way to freedom was the emancipation by the will of masters. In other words, the sources of slavery were many and the numbers of slaves had been steadily increasing with only one way left for freedom. When Islam appeared in these circumstances, it worked seriously upon resolving the problem. Characteristically, Islam treats social problems gradually, rather than radically. First, Islam annulled all sources of slavery, excepting the legitimate warfare declared by the legitimate political leader. Taking slaves by any means other than lawful warfare was declared forbidden. Meanwhile, Islam increased the available means to freedom, making the emancipation of slaves a form of penance for numerous sins, many of which Allah *the Exalted* will not forgive except if freedom is granted. Moreover, if someone frees a slave out of faith and love for Allah, they earn a substantial reward in the Afterlife. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘But he would not try to ascend the steep uphill road, and what could make you conceive what it is, that steep uphill road? [It is] the freeing of one’s neck [from the burden of sin].’ (*al-Balad:* 11-13) If a master of a slave has not committed any sin necessitating the emancipation of a slave and does not like to free the slave out of religious goodwill, they must treat them kindly. Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* narrates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Your slaves are as brothers/sisters to you whom Allah has placed under your control, so whoever has their brother/sister under authority should feed them from their own food and dress them the like of their own clothes. They should not make unreasonable demands of their slave but if they do, they should help their slave to carry them out.’(1)

This noble Hadith lays down equality between slaves and masters and nullifies the imbalanced distinction between them, giving slaves full right to wear clothes and have food equal to that of their masters who shall even help them in labour. The masters should treat their slaves like brethren and call them respectfully. To distil slavery was rampant at the advent of Islam with many ways to get slaves or become a slave. Only one way left for freedom. Then, Islam closed all ways to slavery and while opened all doors wide for emancipation of slaves to gradually abolish slavery in its entirety. As for bondwomen, the following divine commandment was revealed, ‘But if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then have only one [wife] or from among those [bondwomen] whom you rightfully possess…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 3). This verse marked an additional means to terminate slavery. When a bondwoman marries a male slave, they and their children are still slaves. However, when a freeman takes her to bed and she becomes pregnant, she becomes an unsalable mother and her offspring is free. In this way, Islam takes yet another step to do away with slavery. Meanwhile, Islam keeps the slave woman safe from licentious sexual activities that might lead her astray if she is far from home and family, while other women around her enjoy protection and amorous affections of their husbands. Normally, female passion moves in that case. So, it was made permissible for a man to have intercourse with her if their passions get the better of them. She becomes an equal wife after giving birth and, meanwhile, slavery is liquidated. Slavery has since been abolished by numerous international treaties which established the very same principles that Islam espoused such as the humane and reciprocal exchange of prisoners. This principle was first introduced by Islam, because it would have been unreasonable for my enemy to take my children as prisoners of war under his authority and expect me to release his children. Instead the principle of reciprocity says that if they are lenient, we will be too, but if they ransom their captives, so will we. The Lord even wills to limit the slavery arising from prisoners of war by saying ‘It does not behove a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth….’ (*al-Anfal:* 67)

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(1) *Ibn Hanbal, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

We hold that there is a distinction between a command preceding an event, in which case the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would not violate it and a command coinciding with an event. One must distinguish between the two scenarios. If a command precedes the relevant event is broken, it is a transgression. However, if a command is revealed at the time of the relevant incident, it is a completely different matter. Suppose that you are sitting and someone comes to you saying, 'Your relative has agreed to some foolish trade and is writing out a bill of exchange at this very moment, so you had better go stop him from making a mistake'. Then, you can go and prevent his foolishness. This is like a commandment coming before its pertinent event has happened, so there is no violation of the commandment. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘It does not behove a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth….’ (*al-Anfal:* 67) This command was revealed after the disbelievers had been taken as prisoners and transported to Medina following the Prophet's consultation with the companions and after his decision was made. The commandment came after the entire process as evidenced by the fact that Allah *the Exalted* did not order them to change the decision, even if they were still prisoners and taking ransom continued effective in accordance with the original plan.

‘It does not behove a prophet to keep captives….’ (*al-Anfal:* 67) This means that it is improper for a prophet to keep prisoners until he completely subdues the disbelievers in warfare. The Lord *the Exalted* discourages the believers from keeping the prisoners of war as slaves for some worldly reasons, e.g. to make them servants, or to satisfy their desire for women or make money to create a pleasant life. All that is rejected; Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the believer to make this world a foremost priority. Allah *the Exalted* wants the believers to strive and better their stewardship over the earth to establish justice to the best of their ability. Allah will reward them with eternal life in paradise. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘It does not behove a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on earth. You may desire the fleeting gains of this world – but Allah desires [for you the good of] the life to come; and Allah is Almighty, Wise.’ (*al-Anfal:* 67)

Allah *Glorified is He* the Unconquerable, the Wise Who puts everything in its proper place and time, follows up on this with His saying:

لَّوْلَا كِتَٰبٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ سَبَقَ لَمَسَّكُمْ فِيمَآ أَخَذْتُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ٦٨

and had it not been preordained by God, a severe
punishment would have come upon you for what you
have taken [68] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 68)

This noble verse explains that the True Lord *the Exalted* does not hold anyone to account until after He reveals the laws and regulates the procedures and results to define the nature of possible violations and punishments. Otherwise the believers would have suffered punishment for taking prisoners before realizing absolute victory. The True Lord *the Exalted* does not unleash His punishment unless a previously revealed command has been broken. Since this act had not been outlawed yet, there is no retribution for it. The True Lord *the Exalted* then explores the topic of the spoils of war attained after the Battle of Badr saying:

فَكُلُواْ مِمَّا غَنِمۡتُمۡ حَلَٰلٗا طَيِّبٗاۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿٦٩﴾

So enjoy in a good and lawful manner the things you have gained in war and be mindful of God: He is forgiving and merciful [69] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 69)

In other words, do not spend the spoils of war frivolously on some trite pointless things; rather, be conscious of Allah in what He has given you and the spoils of war that He has awarded you, be they money, chattels or prisoners who may be used in profitable works. Remain continuously conscious of Allah and do not fritter it away foolishly. His saying, ‘Allah is Much-Forgiving’ (*al-Anfal:* 69) means that Allah *Glorified is He* had forgiven the believers for what they did before this verse was revealed. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the prisoners saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ قُل لِّمَن فِيٓ أَيۡدِيكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡأَسۡرَىٰٓ إِن يَعۡلَمِ ٱللَّهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمۡ
خَيۡرٗا يُؤۡتِكُمۡ خَيۡرٗا مِّمَّآ أُخِذَ مِنكُمۡ وَيَغۡفِرۡ لَكُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿٧٠﴾

Prophet, tell those you have taken captive, ‘If God knows of any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you: God is forgiving and merciful’ [70] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 70)

In other words, if Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* truly did convert to Islam in secret as he said, Allah knows what is in his heart and will give him greater reward for what he paid. At-Tabari quoted Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* saying, ‘This verse was revealed when I told the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* about my conversion to Islam and asked him to take my ransom from the twenty ounces of gold that had been taken from me but he refused and excused for they were seized in fight. Allah eventually requited me for that with twenty slaves, all of whom became a source of profit.'(1) According to the narration of Ibn Kathir, Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'In place of the twenty ounces that I paid in Islam, Allah *Glorified is He* gave me twenty skilled slaves, with each of them sums of money in which he traded. Yet, I wish for Allah's Forgiveness.'(2) As such, Allah's promise came true, 'He will give you something better than all that has been taken from you….' (*al-Anfal:* 70)

This verse came in accordance with the Prophet's decision. He *peace and blessings be upon him* had informed the prisoners that they should either pay the ransom or suffer execution. At this point, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said, 'O Messenger of Allah, exclude Sahl ibn Bayda, for I knew that he is very near to Islam.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* fell completely silent for a while. 'Never have I been so apprehensive as I was on that day, so much so that I feared that a stone might fall from the heavens and strike me down until he said, "Except for Sahl ibn Bayda."' Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* said, '…for Allah is Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy.' (*al-Anfal:* 70) So long as your hearts are filled with good and you believe in Allah, Allah knows the truth in your hearts and will forgive you; He is Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy. Once the matter had been settled, some prisoners said, 'O Messenger of Allah, we have money in Mecca. Allow us going there to send the ransom to you.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* feared lest it should be a subterfuge, so what did he do? Would he release them and trust them? Would they not harbour treachery and deceit in their hearts?

The Lord says:

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(1) *At-Tabari*

(2) *Ibn Kathir*

وَإِن يُرِيدُواْ خِيَانَتَكَ فَقَدْ خَانُواْ ٱللَّهَ مِن قَبْلُ فَأَمْكَنَ مِنْهُمْۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٧١﴾

But if they mean to betray you, they have betrayed God before, and He has given you mastery over them: He is all knowing, all wise [71] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 71)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not to accept their claims, for they sought to deceive Allah in the past. They hide treachery in their hearts. Allah has given you mastery over them, so do not trust them; Allah *the Exalted* knows what is in their hearts. After Allah *the Exalted* had talked about the story of the Battle of Badr, the prisoners of war and the views of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions, Allah *the Exalted* explained to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the elements of the contemporary Muslim society. We know that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* initiated his call to Islam in Mecca—the seat of the Arab leadership as Quraysh dominated all Arab tribes and Arabia. They were the masters of Mecca honoured with the Holy House. During pilgrimage, each Arab tribe had regular visitors in Mecca and thus had to beseech for protection from Quraysh. No tribe ever showed hostility or attacked Quraysh because they knew that a day would come when they would be at the mercy of Quraysh during their pilgrimage to the Holy House. Quraysh won its position from the existence of the Holy House in Mecca. But for it, their territory would have been just like that of any other Arab tribe. If the Sacred House had been destroyed by Abraha, the dominance of Quraysh would have come to an end. Clearly, the True Lord *the Exalted* says in the chapter of the *Elephant*, ‘Are you not aware of how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not utterly confound their artful planning? Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying creatures, which smote them with stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained, and caused them to become like a field of grain that has been eaten down to stubble.’ (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

After that chapter telling how Allah *the Exalted* protected His House, a chapter bearing the name of *Quraysh* follows in affirmation of their authority. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So that the Quraysh might remain secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. Let them, therefore, worship the Lord of this House, Who has given them food against hunger and made them safe from danger.' (*Quraysh:* 1-4) It was the Holy Mosque that gave Quraysh their power. That is why they could send their commercial caravans as far as Yemen and the Levant without anyone daring to touch them. If the Holy Mosque had not been in Mecca or if Quraysh had not been the masters of Mecca, they would not have enjoyed this privileged position in Arabia. The power and security of Quraysh lay in the Sacred House and their dominance lay in the fact that they could rest easy, knowing that their caravans could traverse the distance from Yemen to the Levant, and then return safely laden with goods and money. Now, when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* first made the call to Islam, he did so in Mecca in the presence of some of the most powerful and influential people in Arabia. If he had begun his call to Islam outside Mecca, among a weak tribe, certainly people would have said, 'He is merely taking advantage of their weakness and fooling them'. They would have also said, 'This tribe means to use him to gain power'. Since they are weak, they might have accepted his message not out of faith but to conquer the entire Arabian Peninsula. However, the Lord willed the birth of Islam to occur in Mecca and willed the leaders and masters of Quraysh to be the first people to receive it. So, the message was unveiled at the seat of power. Bringing forth the truth was the purpose of the message and laying that truth before the most influential people in Arabia was the reason it was revealed in Mecca. Then came the conflict between the leaders of Quraysh and Islam. They harassed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers and tried to stop the spread of Islam by all possible means and ploys.

Now, had they proved successful? Or had Islam prospered and spread from Mecca? No, the migration to Medina had to take place and then Islam spread from Medina. Islam began in the seat of power in Arabia, but it expanded and grew from a place without any power or authority associated with it. Why is that? If Islam had spread from Mecca, people would have said, 'The people of Quraysh customarily held sway over others and they just banded together under one leader to extend their dominion from Arabia to other places in the world'. Instead victory came from Medina, so that the entire world would know that faith in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* inspired his ardent followers and lead to his victories. The devotion he inspired was not the fact that he was a member of the strongest tribe of Arabia. The True Lord *Glorified is He* categorizes the types of people who believed in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*:

- Those who emigrated— *Al-Muhajirun*
- The Helpers of Medina—*Al-Ansar*
- A third group that embraced Islam but later emigrated to Medina and joined the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.
- A fourth group that accepted Islam but remained in Mecca until the liberation of Mecca.

There are four groups: the immigrants who left to be with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to Medina; *Al-Ansar*, who welcomed them and offered them refuge; those who believed but did not migrate immediately to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who remained in Mecca until it was liberated by the Muslims.

The True Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَهَاجَرُواْ وَجَٰهَدُواْ بِأَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡ وَأَنفُسِهِمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَاوَواْ وَّنَصَرُوٓاْ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ بَعۡضُهُمۡ أَوۡلِيَآءُ بَعۡضٖۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَلَمۡ يُهَاجِرُواْ مَا
لَكُم مِّن وَلَٰيَتِهِم مِّن شَيۡءٍ حَتَّىٰ يُهَاجِرُواْۚ وَإِنِ ٱسۡتَنصَرُوكُمۡ فِي ٱلدِّينِ فَعَلَيۡكُمُ
ٱلنَّصۡرُ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ قَوۡمِۭ بَيۡنَكُمۡ وَبَيۡنَهُم مِّيثَٰقٞۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ بَصِيرٞ ﴿٧٢﴾

Those who believed and emigrated [to Medina] and struggled for God's cause with their possessions and persons, and those who gave refuge and help, are all allies of one another. As for those who believed but did not emigrate, you are not responsible for their protection until they have done so. But if they seek help from you against persecution, it is your duty to assist them, except against people with whom you have a treaty: God sees all that you do [72] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 72)

- The first group is *Al-Muhajirun*—the emigrants. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'Those who have believed and emigrated and strived with their money and lives in the cause of Allah…' (*al-Anfal:* 72).

- The second group is *Al-Ansar*. The True Lord *the Exalted* says, '…those who have sheltered and supported; these are the allies of one another…' (*al-Anfal:* 72). Then Allah draws a connection between these two groups saying, 'These are truly the friends and protectors of one another.' Some scholars understand Allah's saying, 'The friends and protectors of one another.' as denoting a complete alignment of the two groups insomuch that they would have the right to inherit one another when the following verse was revealed: 'And they who are [thus] closely related have the highest claim on one another in [accordance with] Allah's decree' (*al-Anfal:* 75), and the verses on inheritance were sent down and abrogated their right to inherit one another.

As such, the last-mentioned verse precluded that meaning. Other scholars said that *al-wilaya* (friendship/alliance) implies mutual support of one another backed by showing kindness and respect to one another. These are the characteristics of *al-wilaya*. There is also another verse that speaks of *Al-Ansar* in which the Lord *the Exalted* says, 'And [it shall be offered, too, unto the poor from among] those who, before them, had their abode in this realm and in faith – [those] who love all that come to them in search of refuge, and who harbour in their hearts no grudge for whatever the others may have been given, but rather give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot.' (*al-Hashr:* 9) We have known so much of the matchless generosity of *Al-Ansar* which reached such an unprecedented limit virtually impossible for usual human beings unless it be through the power of faith. For instance, a man who lives a somewhat luxurious life might share those blessings with friends or beloved ones.

A true friend would let you have his car, invite you to his fine house, share his clothes with you and would not begrudge you any precious thing he has. But would he give up his wife for you to marry? This is the one thing a man would begrudge his friend, and this what makes the instance we are dealing with so unique! When the Emigrants (*Al-Muhajirun*; Meccan Muslims) headed for Medina, they left behind in Mecca all they had, including their wives, so a man from the Helpers (*Al-Ansar*; Muslims of Medina) would ask a man from the Emigrants to look at his wives and choose whoever pleased him! The Helpers were ready to divorce some of their wives for their brothers, the Emigrants, to marry! Only true, firm faith could drive a man to offer that. Faith was deeply ingrained in their hearts that it uprooted any other feeling of desire or jealousy. Men of the Helpers would not let their brothers, the Emigrants, stay without wives, while each of them had more than one wife.

Allah *Glorified is He* has described in the Quran the attributes of each group of the believers. The first group was that of the Emigrants. They were those who believed in Allah and forsook their former religion, migrated to Medina, leaving behind their homes, their homeland, their riches, their wives, their children, their crops and their livestock. They started a new life in Medina and worked to earn money to provide for themselves and spend on fighting for the cause of Allah, which they did even though they had left all their properties and money in Mecca. They readily fought against the massive army of the disbelievers at the Battle of Badr even though they were a small group that by no means exceeded three hundred Muslims; they were not confident of victory, but they aspired to martyrdom. Thus, Allah praised the Emigrants, for they were the first to believe, they emigrated, leaving everything behind for Islam, they fought in Allah's Cause with their wealth and they readily gave their lives for that cause. They were a good example for others to follow, for their sacrifices would ever encourage others to embrace faith and sacrifice for it. Whoever initiates a good practice will have his reward as well as the rewards of those who follow him- without diminishing the followers' rewards the slightest bit. The Emigrants were the first to embrace faith and fight for the cause of Allah, and they have the reward of whoever follows this blessed path.

The second group was that of the Helpers *(Al-Ansar),* or Medina's Muslims. It was they who provided refuge for the emigrants. They were the first community who offered support to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and His earlier companions. Third, they lovingly befriended the Meccan Muslims who emigrated to them. To honour the two groups, Allah has established among them the bond of alliance which manifested itself in mutual aid and mutual esteem.

Then, Allah says, '… As for those who believed but did not emigrate, you are not responsible for their protection until they have done so....' (*al-Anfal:* 72)

This noble verse speaks about the third group of the believers. They were those who have embraced Islam and cast aside their old beliefs, but did not emigrate from Mecca nor left their homes, families, and wealth. Thus, one aspect of their behaviour was praiseworthy, while the other was not in their favour. Their status was rather uncertain, so Allah revealed regarding them the aforesaid decree stated in the verse. Even though they were believers, their reluctance to migrate to Medina exempted the rest of the believers, who have emigrated, from any obligation to provide them with protection '…until they have done so...' (*al-Anfal:* 72); namely, until they have migrated to Medina, too. In this verse, there is also a kind of encouragement to this group of the believers to emigrate. It is like someone saying to his son, 'I am not giving you your pocket money until you do your homework'. This is an incentive for the child to take care of his lessons. Likewise, this verse is not meant to punish those believers or block the way to deliverance before them. Perhaps they thought that emigration was only required of the earliest group who embraced faith, so this verse was meant to clear the misconception and encourage them to take that essential step.

The Arabic for emigrate is *haajara* which shares the same root of the verb *hajara* which means abandon. The latter implies to leave one's place of residence due to a desire to do so or inability to remain. As for *haajara* (emigrate), it denotes a conflict between two parties where one compels the other to leave his country. If the believers had not been oppressed by the disbelievers, if they had been allowed to declare their faith and practice it safely, then the emigration to Medina might never have happened. However, the harassment and oppression Muslims were made to suffer by the disbelievers lead to their departure. This reminds me of this line from a poem by Al-Mutanabbi (a renowned Arab poet):

If you part with people who do not appreciate your company,
then it is they who have chosen to part with you!

The Muslims' emigration to Medina took place because they were forced to do so. Allah has willed to teach them that a place where they were oppressed and prevented from their right to publicly practice and call for their religion was no home and they, therefore, had to leave it.

After thus explaining to the believers they were not responsible for protecting that group who did not emigrate to Medina, Allah Almighty further explains, '...but if they seek help from you against persecution, it is your duty to assist them....' (*al-Anfal:* 72) This was meant to draw the believers' attention to the fact that they were still their brothers even though they did not emigrate. Even though they were under no obligation to protect them, the bond of faith made it incumbent on them to assist them in case they were persecuted. However, that assistance was bound by a condition, '...except against people with whom you have a treaty....' (*al-Anfal:* 72) In such a case, you are commanded, O believers, to comply with that treaty because Islam calls for respecting agreements. In case there is a covenant between you and those they seek your assistance against, you must remain within the bounds of your covenant so long as the other party also respects what you have agreed upon with them.

Allah concludes the verse by saying, '... Allah sees all that you do.' (*al-Anfal:* 72) Indeed, Allah knows and sees everything that we do. He mentions all three groups of the believers in one verse to convey the message that all the believers are brothers and they all form parts of a whole.

In the following verse, Allah speaks about the other party, that of the disbelievers:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ إِلَّا تَفْعَلُوهُ تَكُن
فِتْنَةٌ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَفَسَادٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

**The disbelievers support one another. If you do not do
the same, there will be persecution in the land and
great corruption [73] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 73)**

The disbelievers, as we know and as this noble verse tells us, are allies and protectors of one another, so if the believers do not come together and act as a united entity, the disbelievers will come together by the bond of their disbelief and enmity to Islam and defeat the believers, hence Allah's warning to the believers, '… If you do not do the same, there will be persecution in the land and great corruption.' (*al-Anfal:* 73)

What will bring persecution and great corruption to the world? If the believers do not come together in solidarity, this will surely give a chance to the disbelievers to infiltrate them and work to abolish the Islamic identity, generation after generation. If the Muslim community is thus fragmented, children will grow up in societies where the taint of disbelief mixes with faith, and they will be brought up with beliefs and practices alien to their religion and they will gradually be severed from the roots and essence of Islam. The inevitable result is a community of Muslims in name only where in fact they have only grown into an aimless community that has lost its identity and given itself up to worldly temptations. However, if Muslims live in solidarity, as faith commands, this will form a powerful safeguard against infiltration by their enemies who would then be too weak to do them any harm. Not only will Muslims thus protect their faith, but in being stronger, they will be able to attract others to Islam as well. The great corruption the verse mentions is inevitable when Muslims are not united, in which case their enemies become bolder and Muslims, however so many in number, will turn weak and abject. Instead of being the best community singled out for people, Muslims then will present Islam in a most unfair light by their miserable condition and deviation from the Straight Path.

In the verse, Allah says, 'The disbelievers support one another….' (*al-Anfal:* 73) In the previous verse, Allah commands the believers to be allies of one another, so is this verse a command to the disbelievers to be allies of one another, too? Definitely, it is not! The disbelievers would not even bother to recite the word of Allah, and if they do, they would not follow His commands. This is not a command to the disbelievers, but a statement of fact about them. When Almighty Allah asks the believers to be protectors of one another, this is a command that the believers are expected to willingly comply with. However, when He says that the disbelievers are protectors of one another; this is simply a declaration of the state of the disbelievers and a warning to the believers. Islam was first presented to the idolaters of Quraysh, the Jews of Medina- who were people of the Book- and in Medina too there were then Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj tribes who were disbelievers like Quraysh. Before the advent of Islam, there had been animosity between the Jews of Medina on the one hand and Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj tribes on the other hand. It never came to war since Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj depended on the Jews for money, knowledge and other benefits. The Jews had been praying for victory against the disbelievers- Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj- when the awaited Prophet of Allah who was mentioned in their Torah finally came. They would tell Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, ‘When the Prophet of Allah comes, we will follow him and destroy you as the people of `Ad and Iram were destroyed!’ As people of the Book, the Jews thus threatened to defeat the disbelievers under the banner of faith. However, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did come, they denied the truth of his message and allied instead with the disbelievers of Quraysh. They said, as Allah quotes them in the Noble Quran, ‘… They say of the disbelievers, “They are more rightly guided than the believers.”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 51) The Jews took the side of the idolaters of Quraysh, claiming they were more rightly guided than those who believed with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The disbelievers and the Jews had historically been enemies, but they entered an alliance after the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The believers, too, had to be allies and protectors of each other so they would defeat their united enemies.

This understanding refutes the claim that the word *awliya`* (allies, friends, protectors etc.) denotes a right to inheritance among the believers. Some argue that the verse means the believers are ‘heirs’ to one another. If this were the case, then the disbelievers too would have the right to inherit each other since Allah uses the same word *awliya`* to describe them as well. This is untrue and illogical, for Allah does not issue rulings to govern the lives of the disbelievers.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَهَاجَرُوا۟ وَجَٰهَدُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَاوَوا۟ وَّنَصَرُوٓا۟
أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ حَقًّا ۚ لَّهُم مَّغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٧٤﴾

Those who believed and emigrated, and struggled for God’s cause, and those who gave refuge and help – they are the true believers and they will have forgiveness and generous provision [74] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 74)

Allah has already spoken of those who believed, emigrated, and struggled in His cause, as well as those who offered shelter and aid, so is this verse a redundant repetition? No. In the previous verse, Allah mentions these two groups of the believers to illustrate the juristic ruling binding them: that they should be allies and protectors of one another. The previous verse is concerned with the command Allah gives to the believers based on their faith. In this verse, however, Allah mentions the reward they will have for serving His cause. He says, '…they are the true believers…' (*al-Anfal:* 74). This is a reward they have in this worldly life: Allah praises them in the Glorious Quran for their firm faith. The expression used in the original Arabic text of the verse literally translates: *only these are the true believers*. This is a structure in the Arabic language used to confine a certain description on a certain group of people which implies that none but them have the stated description. Allah praises the Emigrants and Helpers by stating that only they are the true believers, which means whoever deviates from their way is not a true believer. This is like saying, 'Such-and-such is the true man here' which means others around are not true men.

After praising the believers, Allah concludes the verse by saying: '… they will have forgiveness and generous provision.' (*al-Anfal:* 74) This is their reward in the Hereafter. So, Allah rewards them in this life by declaring them to be the true believers and will reward them in the Afterlife by wiping out their sins and elevating them to a higher station. 'Forgiveness' means their bad deeds will be erased and 'generous provision' means their good deeds on earth will be repaid to them several folds in paradise.

So, the previous verse is intended to illustrate a command to the believers to ally and protect each other, and the second verse speaks about their reward in this world and in the Afterlife. In this world, their reward is being true believers, which is the greatest blessing Allah bestows on His servants. In the Afterlife, their rewards will be forgiveness of their sins so they will not be punished for them, and generous provision, which is several times greater than the good deeds they have done on earth. Even though they are the true believers, but no one is infallible except the prophets whom Allah has guarded against straying. The true believers do have their sins, but Allah will pardon them. They will have generous provision as well. Provision means whatever sustains and maintains a person. Some people think that the word *rizq* (provision) refers only to material things, like money, property, food, or clothes, but the meaning is far wider. *Rizq* encompasses various things, some of which are material and others nonmaterial. If Allah makes you righteous, this is *rizq*. Virtue and knowledge are precious kinds of *rizq*. Everything that adds to a person's life is a *rizq*, a provision. In the verse, Allah describes the provision He has prepared for the believers in paradise as 'generous'. The word 'generous' describes unconditional provision. Whatever provision that comes without labour or effort is therefore generous provision. Air blows and you can breathe without having to do any work for it, and water falls on us from the sky without having to reach for it. Food is a kind of provision that requires a little bit of work since you need to plant seeds and water them; still, this remains 'generous' provision as it is not you who put the sap into the plant to make it grow, nor is it you who yield the fruits; Allah does by His Will and Grace. The benefits far outweigh the effort you make. When you pay someone their deserved wages, this is not any kind of generosity because it is his due recompense for his work. Generosity means offering without expecting or receiving anything in return. Such is the provision Allah has prepared for the true believers in paradise: whatever wish crosses the mind of anyone of its dwellers will be made true instantly before he has time to think!

Allah has decreed for everyone his provision in this life; you do not know how, when or where to expect it, but your provision knows how, when and where to find you. All are predestined by the Almighty Creator. You might work diligently to till and plant your land, yet only to have some pests strike your crop and destroy everything, leaving you without sustenance. On the other hand, you might go to some place without anything particular in mind only to meet by chance someone who concludes with you a deal that causes to bring you plenty of sustenance. What Allah has decreed for you will reach you at the appointed time and place. Almighty Allah has already determined the provisions of all His servants, so every bit of provision that is meant for you will go to you and no other. You might eat some delicious morsel of food then have an upset stomach and vomit what you have eaten, only for a bird to pass and eat what you have thrown up. The food is thus meant for the bird, not for you. You might eat some food which turns into useful nutrients that run in your blood; then, you go donate blood to someone, so that food has been decreed to go to someone besides you. This reminds me of a verse where Allah says, 'Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places…." (*an-Nahl:* 112)

The verse gives the example of a town that was ungrateful to Allah even though sustenance reached it from everywhere without having to seek it out. Generally, if sustenance in this life is dependent on one's doing his part, in the Afterlife, sustenance will come to the people of paradise without any work.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مِنۢ بَعۡدُ وَهَاجَرُواْ وَجَٰهَدُواْ مَعَكُمۡ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مِنكُمۡۚ وَأُوْلُواْ
ٱلۡأَرۡحَامِ بَعۡضُهُمۡ أَوۡلَىٰ بِبَعۡضٖ فِي كِتَٰبِ ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمُۢ ٧٥

And those who came to believe afterwards, and emigrated and struggled alongside you, they are part of you, but relatives still have prior claim over one another in God's Scripture: God has full knowledge of all things [75] (The Quran, *al-Anfal:* 75)

This means whoever embraces Islam later, forsakes the domain of evil, and fights sincerely for Allah's Cause will also be granted forgiveness and generous provision.

In these verses, Allah describes the groups of the believers and puts each in the proper place. All those who believe belong first and foremost to Allah. Allah has given us free will in some matters, yet strips us of control over some others. In what we have the choice, a true believer chooses to do what Allah commands and avoid what He forbids. His choices are within the limits of religion and in compliance with the ordinance of Allah. The essence of faith is to believe sincerely from your heart in Allah Who has all the Attributes of Perfection and Majesty. It is to believe that He has created us and created this world for our service. We came into this world and found it already well prepared for our reception and everything in it serviceable to our needs. Allah gives us the freedom to choose in some matters, and, out of His Mercy, gives us no power or control over some others.

The heart beats without any interference on our part. Blood circulates round one's body and all the internal processes of the body take place directly under the Will and Control of Allah *Glorified is He*. We do not choose to make them function or stop at any moment. We breathe, and we fall asleep, but we do not consciously think or do anything to make such things happen. Only the actions you take after conscious thought are those Allah has given you control over and for which He will hold you accountable. If He so willed, Allah would make us creatures with no will of their own and no freedom to choose. If He so willed, He would make all humankind believe in Him. However, Allah means to let us have the choice. Let whoever wills believe and let whoever wills disbelieve. This freedom entails responsibility: those who love and obey Allah will have their reward and those who defy Him will be given their due. A true Muslim is defined by his faith first and foremost. People have different ways of defining themselves: by their countries, family lines, wealth etc. As for a Muslim, his most essential quality is his religion; he belongs to his Lord in the first place. Faith should be his first and foremost belonging. He should be ready to leave his country, his family, and worldly possessions for the sake of religion if the situation requires such sacrifices. A true believer prefers to do what Allah commands, cost him what it may; he is ready to give his money and his life for the cause of Allah. A true believer ultimately belongs to His Lord and Creator. Those who migrated to Medina, as well as those who sheltered and aided them, give up their children and their worldly possessions out of sincere devotion to Him *the Exalted and Almighty*. The Helpers did not emigrate, but they did put every single resource they had possession of at the service of their fellow believers, the Emigrants, driven by their firm faith in Allah and love for Him. They divided their homes and riches with their brothers and even offered to give up some of their wives by divorcing them and marrying them off to those of the Emigrants who left their wives in Mecca. They did all of that sincerely for Allah’s cause. They were the true believers. As for the third group of Muslims, those who embraced faith but did not emigrate, their faith was not firm yet, since they preferred to stay with their families and keep their riches to emigrating with their brothers to support Allah’s cause. Allah told the Emigrants and Helpers concerning that group: ‘…you are not responsible for their protection....’ (*al-Anfal:* 72) They were thus denied the advantage given to the believers who emigrated. Still, they retained the advantage of faith, and that is why Allah commands the other groups of the believers to help them if they asked for assistance against religious persecution.

Another group of the believers are those who embraced Islam later when there was no need for emigration. However, they believed in Allah, fought for His cause, and completely submitted to His Will, so they had the same elevated station of the early Muslims because they made religion above all other considerations. With this noble verse, Allah concludes the chapter of *al-Anfal:*, ‘And those who came to believe afterwards, and emigrated and struggled alongside you, they are part of you, but relatives still have prior claim over one another in Allah’s Scripture; Allah has full knowledge of all things.’ (*al-Anfal:* 75).

Having ended our reflections on the chapter of *al-Anfal*, we move to the following.

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الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد [9]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (9)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY

الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (9)

the chapter of

at-Tawba

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

Every chapter of the Noble Quran begins with a *basmalah* which is ‘*Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim* (In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, and the Giver of Mercy)’, but the chapter of *at-Tawba* is the only exception. Quran exegetes have had several opinions all attempting to explain the reason behind this exception.

Some have said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the one who specified the beginning of every chapter of the Quran, did not mark the beginning of this chapter by a *basmalah*. However, this is inaccurate, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to specify the place of each verse within each chapter of the Quran.

The Noble Quran is comprised of a hundred and fourteen chapters, all beginning with a *basmalah except for at-Tawba*. This should draw our attention that starting chapters of the Quran with ‘In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ is not a matter of routine, but it is for a purpose even if we do not realize that purpose by our limited minds. It is essential to underline that everything in the Quran was thus revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by Allah *Glorified is He*. This includes the *basmalah*, the name of every chapter, order of the chapters, and the verses of every chapter, etc. This is exactly how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received the Quran from Jibril (Gabriel) by the command of Allah. We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* revised the Quran with Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* once a year in the month of Ramadan and revised it with him twice in the year of the Prophet’s death. Everything in the Quran is a direct Revelation from Allah and not the outcome of anyone’s reasoning.

An aspect of the greatness of Islam is that it calls people to think, yet meanwhile just submit to what Allah commands even if they do not see the wisdom behind it. We may find things that are difficult for the mind to comprehend. In this case, the role of faith comes to prevent the mind from getting stuck on matters above its limited scope and just submit to Allah because, even if we do not understand, this is what He wills. If everything in religion could be explained by the mind, what would prove whether one is a true believer or not?

Let me give you an example. When we observe *hajj* (pilgrimage), we kiss one stone (the Black Stone), yet hurl pebbles at another stone (the one symbolically representing Satan). It is the command of Allah to hold the former sacred and the latter despised. This should let us know that nothing in this universe is inherently sacred, but it is the ordinance of Allah that confers sacredness on anything. They are only stones, but we kiss one because He commands us so and pelt the other because He commands us so.

An army commander would say to the soldiers, ‘Attention!’, and they would stand up the very moment and give him undivided attention. Even if one of them had some food in his mouth, he would stop chewing it! This is discipline, so is faith not worthier of discipline? Soldiers would not question every order of their commander, so should we obey every command of Allah *the Exalted and Almighty*?! A true believer, whenever his mind cannot comprehend a matter pertaining to religion, should remember that it is the Will of Allah and he should obey it because his Lord so commands.

Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* gave a wonderful example to follow in this respect. When he was told that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was taken to Jerusalem and raised up to the heavens overnight, he did not subject the matter to rational enquiry, but rather said, ‘Did he (Prophet Muhammad) say this?’ They said yes, so Abu Bakr replied, ‘Then I testify that if he has said it, he has spoken the truth.’ People exclaimed, ‘Do you believe that he went to the Levant and returned to Mecca overnight?!’ ‘Yes’, he said, ‘as I believe him concerning a more miraculous matter that he receives revelations from Allah.’ It is narrated on the authority of Abu Salama that it was on that occasion that Abu Bakr was given the honouring appellation of As-Siddiq (the truthful one; the constantly sincere one; the one truly firm in faith).

Back to the issue of the *basmalah*; some exegetes argue that the chapter of *at-Tawba* and the chapter of *al-Anfal* are in fact just one chapter; the former completes the latter. The latter includes covenants and the former deals with the disavowal of these covenants. For instance, Allah states in the chapter of *al-Anfal* the law of distributing battle-spoils, '… one-fifth of your battle gains belongs to Allah and the Messenger…' (*al-Anfal:* 41). Then, in the chapter of *at-Tawba*, He details the law of distributing Alms (*zakat*), 'Alms are meant only for the poor, the needy, those who administer them, those whose hearts need winning over, to free slaves and help those in debt, for Allah's cause and for travellers in need. This is ordained by Allah; Allah is All Knowing and Wise' (*at-Tawba:* 60). Some scholars argue that this is why the chapter of *at-Tawba* comes right after the chapter of *al-Anfal* without a *basmalah* which marks the beginning of a new chapter of the Quran.

Some scholars have come up with a different opinion. The chapter of *at-Tawba* begins with the verse, 'A release by Allah and His Messenger from the treaty you [believers] made with the idolaters [is announced]' (*at-Tawba:* 1). With such a powerful announcement, it would not be appropriate to begin the chapter with, 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy'. The statement of the *basmalah* denotes security, yet the aforesaid verse is a disavowal, so associating them together would be implausible. It is worthy of notice that the chapter is named *at-Tawba* (repentance) and not bara`ah (disavowal). The reason is that even though the chapter opens by giving notice of the severance of the treaty with the idolaters because they had broken it, the bulk of the chapter deals with the Expedition of Tabuk and those who lagged and failed to support Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The chapter declares that the door of repentance is open for them to turn to Allah again, hence the name *at-Tawba* (repentance). The chapter begins with a disavowal, yet its name is *repentance*; this is meant to allude to the fact that Allah's Mercy prevails over His Wrath and Punishment. Repentance (Allah turning to His servants in Mercy) is mentioned in several verses of *at-Tawba*, '… Allah turns to whoever He will in His mercy…' (*at-Tawba:* 15), 'In His Mercy, Allah has turned to the Prophet (Muhammad), and the Emigrants and Helpers who followed him in the hour of adversity…' (*at-Tawba:* 117) and '…He turned to them in Mercy in order for them to return [to Him]…' (*at-Tawba:* 118).

Allah has opened the door for repentance as a grace and mercy from Him. If He had not prescribed repentance, a single sin would be enough to destroy a sinner. If there were no chance for repentance, a sinner would despair of ever being forgiven and would, consequently, persist in sinning and strays into deviation and error. If a single sin were enough to deprive one of Allah's Mercy and cause him to end up in the Hell Fire, there would be no difference then between committing one sin and a thousand sins; a sinner would inevitably perish anyway. What then would prevent him from committing a crime every day?! Allah has willed to open the door for repentance to prevent the spreading of crime in society. Every sinner may well turn to Allah in repentance and do good after he had done evil, and society can live in peace and security. It is out of His Mercy that He has prescribed repentance and accepts repentance from His servants when they turn to Him; it is a further manifestation of His bounty.

Allah says, '…He turned to them in Mercy in order for them to return [to Him]…' (*at-Tawba:* 118). What does this mean? Allah has turned to His servants in Mercy by prescribing repentance in the first place. Then, if they repent to Him, He bestows His Grace on them by accepting their repentance.

Thus, Allah has prescribed for us two things to grant us deliverance: He has made repentance available to us and, when we do repent, He accepts us. Allah describes Himself as the 'Ever-Relenting' which means His Mercy and acceptance of repentance have no limits. If one commits a sin and then repents, Allah accepts his repentance. If he weakens and sins again, if he yields to the insinuations of the devil or the whims of his own self, he may repent again still. If he does, Allah will accept him. He is the Ever-Relenting, the Most-Merciful.

The chapter of *at-Tawba* deals with the disbelievers, Jews, Christians, hypocrites and a group of the believers at the end of it. It explains the status of each.

Such explanation is necessary. The hypocrites, for example, suffer from an inner conflict because they profess faith even though they do not really believe. The disbelievers do not have such a conflict, but what they have in common with the hypocrites is their enmity towards the believers. In the chapter of *at-Tawba*, Allah exposes them both and unveils what they conceal in themselves and the enmity they harbour to Islam and Muslims. A large portion of the chapter deals with the hypocrites because they claim to have faith only to draw close to Muslims and infiltrate them. It is hard for one to encounter discord with a dear person, so what about one who encounters discord with his own self?! This was the state of the hypocrites who lived among early Muslims, and such was their conflict. They were more dangerous to the believers because they acted as though they belonged to them, whereas they concealed disbelief.

In the chapter of *at-Tawba*, Allah explains how the hypocrites act in total defiance of the laws all other creatures act upon. They profess faith, conceal disbelief and harbour enmity and hatred to the believers. In this, they hold themselves up to censure since they degrade themselves to such a status that is even lower to plants, animals and inanimate objects, with respect to obedience and devotion to Allah. He says in the Quran, 'Do you not realize [Prophet] that everything in the heavens and Earth submits [literally: prostrates] to Allah; the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains…' (*al-Hajj:* 18). These are the inanimate objects, and the verse says they submit to Allah. Then comes the mention of plants and animals when Allah says, '…the trees and the animals…' (*al-Hajj:* 18). Then comes also the mention of humankind, '…So do many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved…' (*al-Hajj:* 18). So all the creatures of Allah glorify Him and prostrate themselves to Him: inanimate objects, plants and animals, all without exceptions. Only people defy Him and rebel against His ordinance and only a few people are devoted to Him, as the aforesaid verse tells.

Among the sublime manifestations of Allah's Mercy is that He provides for the believers and the disbelievers alike, even though He declares in this chapter a disavowal of the disbelievers who breached their covenants with Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah's Mercy prevails over His Wrath, hence the name of the chapter *at-Tawba* (repentance). It gives hope that there is always another chance to return to Allah after having disobeyed Him.

Before we begin our reflections about the chapter of *at-Tawba* and how it deals with the status of the disbelievers, people of the Book and the hypocrites, we must first shed adequate light on the issue of the *basmalah*. This issue was the object of much interest among Quran exegetes.

We know that the *basmalah* (In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy) occurs one hundred and fourteen times in the Noble Quran: one hundred and thirteen times at the beginnings of the chapters (except *at-Tawba*) and once in the chapter of *an-Naml,* when Allah says, ‘It is from Sulaiman (Solomon), and it says, “In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.”’ (*an-Naml:* 30). This is acknowledged by the consensus of opinions to be a verse, but what about the *basmalah* which occurs at the beginning of the chapters of the Noble Quran?

Exegetes agree that ‘In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ is one of the verses of the Noble Quran, but they have disagreed as to whether it is a verse of every chapter it comes at the beginning of. Most exegetes agree that it is a Quranic verse which has been revealed for the purpose of separating chapters and marking their beginnings, not for separating chapters only. Some argue that it is not for separating chapters from one another, for it comes at the beginning of *al-Fatiha*, which is the first chapter of the Quran and no other chapter precedes it. However, this may not be very accurate. Whoever studies sciences of the Noble Quran understands that the written order of the chapters does not follow the order of revelation. The Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in parts, and *al-Fatiha*, for example, was revealed after the chapter of *al-Muddaththir.* The *basmalah* at the beginning of *al-Fatiha* can therefore be seen to mark a separation between it and *al-Muddaththir* which was revealed earlier.

When we examine the text of the Quran, we find that ‘In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ is a verse of *al-Fatiha*, for it is numbered (1) in it and the following verse ‘Praise belongs to Allah; Lord of the Worlds’ is numbered (2). In the other chapters of the Quran (except *at-Tawba*), verse number (1) comes after the *basmalah.* Accordingly, most scholars consider the *basmalah* (In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy) to be a verse of the chapter of *al-Fatiha* only.

May Allah amply reward the author of *Al-Mu`jam Al-Mufahras* (the Indexed Lexicon) of the Noble Quran. By looking up a word (in Arabic), the lexicon tells its number of occurrence and the chapters where it is mentioned. However, man errs. Allah has willed that the good man and able researcher who authored this useful lexicon should forget to count ‘In the Name of

Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy', among the verses of the Quran. He lists 980 occurrences of the word 'Allah' ending in a *dammah* (a diacritic representing the short vowel sound /u/), 92 occurrences ending in a *fatha* (a diacritic representing the short vowel sound /a/) and 1,152 occurrences of the word 'Allah' ending in a *kasrah* (a diacritic representing the short vowel sound /i/), which means he does not count the occurrence of the word in this verse 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' where 'Allah' ends in a *kasrah* and this makes the number of occurrences 1,153 instead of 1,152.

When we start reciting the Quran, we start by seeking Allah's refuge from Satan then we say the *basmalah*, for revelation of the Quran started in the Name of Allah, so whoever recites it should start in the Name of Allah, too.

We know that the first instance of the revelation was sent down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was observing solitary worship of Allah in the Cave of Hira' when Jibril (Gabriel) went down to him and said, 'Read...' (*al-'Alaq:* 1). To ask someone to read means you either want him to recite something he has learnt by heart or you are asking him to read a written text before him. However, neither case applied to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon* him then. He *peace and blessings be upon him* could neither read nor write. That is why Prophet Muhammad- who had not yet known that was a revelation from Allah- replied, 'I cannot read!' Jibril (Gabriel) repeated it a second time, 'Read!', yet Prophet Muhammad gave just the same reply.

That repetition has an important significance. It suffices as a refutation to the devious suggestion raised nowadays by the opponents of Islam that the Quran is but the inner whisperings and thoughts of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In Prophet Muhammad's reply to Jibril (Gabriel)- 'I cannot read!'- is sufficient refutation of this groundless allegation.

Here we have two distinct persons: one giving a firm command and the other declining to obey. If this were an inner thought, there would have been no conflict. There would not have been two persons, one ordering a thing and the other rejecting it, knowing his abilities were short of complying to that order. Therefore, we are before two different persons here, not one person.

Prophet Muhammad's reply, 'I cannot read' was plausible and realistic. However, when the angel Jibril (Gabriel) asked him- as Allah commanded him- to read, he did not mean to ask him to read based on any knowledge he previously had, but to read in the Name of his Lord Who would teach him. It is as though he were saying to him, 'O Muhammad, you will read in the Name of your Lord, not in the name of your learning'.

Then, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* continued, 'Read! In the Name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clinging form.' (*al-'Alaq:* 1-2) Just as Allah has created man, by His Power, from a clinging form, He can make you read, O Muhammad, even though you had never learned to read. He was commanded to read in the Name of Allah, not in the name of his knowledge or previous learning. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not asked to read that which he had learned from people, but that which he would learn directly from the Creator of people.

Allah says in the following verse, 'Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One.' (*al-'Alaq:* 3) We learn reading and writing from one another, which manifests the Bounty of Allah who has made us capable of teaching and learning. When knowledge comes directly from Allah without any human intermediary who teaches us, this is a more elevated manifestation of Allah's Bounty. That is why He says, 'Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One.' (*al-'Alaq:* 3) Such was the message that was intended to be conveyed to Prophet Muhammad, 'You will not read in the name of your learning or based on any knowledge your memory has saved, but rather, you will read in the Name of your Lord'; He has Absolute Power: if He wills something, He just says to it 'Be! – And it is' (*Ya Sin:* 82).

So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* read the Quran in the Name of Allah, and so do we. The *basmalah* should be considered from two different perspectives: the first can be observed in the language we use on the different occasions that occur in life. When a person speaks to you with an air of authority or to persuade you of something, you would ask him, 'In whose name are you speaking?' so he would tell you the authority in whose name he is speaking. This authority may be that of the government, the police, the tax authority etc. In the context of politics, for example, a ruler would start his speech by saying, 'In the name of the people', which is quite common.

Another aspect to be highlighted about the *basmalah* is that it reflects the belief of whoever says it that he is starting his work depending on the Absolute Power of the Creator, not his own limited power. You plough the soil, and it gives you crops. Do you create that soil or control the nutrients it contains? Do you create the seeds you plant in the earth, or do you bring down rain from the sky to irrigate the earth? No, you use the mind and powers Allah has endowed you with to employ the means and resources He has created for your service.

Saying, ‘In the Name of Allah’ is an acknowledgment of your limited power and that you depend on the Limitless Power of Allah in whatever you are doing. It is an acknowledgement that you cannot farm the earth in your own name and you have no power to make the earth give forth the various kinds of crops.

One should ask himself when he begins any action, ‘What power do I have to make this action happen?’ We have no power on our own, but Allah has, by His Power, made the earth and its resources subservient to us. Starting every action by saying, ‘In the Name of Allah’ shows reverence to the Lord Who has created the earth and all that is in it and subdued them to the will of man.

Think of how life goes. Can we influence the motion of the sun or make it rise or set? We cannot control the sun, the moon, the air or the stars. Glory is to Him Who has created them all for our service.

If you begin any action without having Allah in your mind, if you depend on the means rather than Him Who has created them for you, then what is the difference between a believer and a disbeliever? A disbeliever thinks only of the available means and resources and believes they have the power to bring the desirable fruits. In whatever he does, farming, industry etc. he does not think of the Creator even the blinking of an eye.

As for a believer, he always acts in obedience of the laws Allah enjoins. He always keeps Allah in his mind and heart. This grants him attainment of the fruits desired by his action, a reward shared also by the disbelievers, yet also brings him reward in the Hereafter for his obedience to Allah, so praise is to Allah for all His favours. ‘Praise be to Allah, to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and Earth, and praise be to Him in the life to come…’ (*Saba’:* 1).

When the believer sees the fruits of his labour in the life of this world, he will say, ‘Praise is to Allah!’ When he sees Allah’s abundant reward for him in the Hereafter, he will also say, ‘Praise is to Allah!’ Indeed, all praise is due to Allah in the beginning and end, in this life and the life to come.

Saying, ‘In the Name of Allah’ as you begin any action is an acknowledgement that if Allah did not subdue for you the earth and what is in it, nothing would respond to you or give you the fruits you desire.

I never get tired of giving this example! Allah has created animals of which some are fit to be tamed, whereas others are not. We tame camels, and perhaps elephants, but it would require special skills to tame a snake or a wolf. Allah has made some of His creatures free from the control of human beings. This is for us to know that we have no power or might of our own; if Allah did not tame certain animals for us, we would not be able to tame any by ourselves. Allah directs our attention to this truth, saying, ‘Can they not see how, among the things made by Our hands, We have created livestock they control, and made them obedient, so that some can be used for riding, some for food.’ (*Ya Sin:* 71-72)

Allah has left some animals wild and untamed to make us aware that we do not possess the power to tame and subdue, but rather, He *the Exalted and Almighty* is the One Who creates the power to subdue and tame what He wills for whom He wills. This is a clear caution to people so they would not go astray or be taken by delusions. It is in the Name of Allah that everything in life goes.

Someone might wonder, ‘A disbeliever does not start any action “in the Name of Allah”, so how is it that he receives the results he desires?’ The answer is that a disbeliever only gains the immediate result of his action and no reward awaits him in the Hereafter; he is unlike a believer who is rewarded by reaping the fruits he expects and is also rewarded for being mindful of Allah.

Moreover, Allah may make certain things in the universe go against their normal course and laws which He has made for them. The universe is governed by laws and norms Allah has set, so why does He reverse these laws and norms sometimes? This is to show us one of the manifestations of His Might. In our life, causes must be employed to achieve results. If we do not follow this normal course, no results will come out. As for Allah, if He wills, He suspends the laws and brings results- by His Might and Power- despite absence of causes.

A place where rain always falls may well be suddenly struck by drought. By doing this, Allah directs our attention to the fact that the universe is not subject to these laws, but rather to the Will of the Creator of these laws. Allah, Glory is to Him, breaks these laws to draw our attention to His Absolute Power so that we know that it is 'in the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' that everything in the universe goes.

There are countless examples of this in our lives. We know that human reproduction occurs when a man and woman marry and enter an intimate relationship. However, Allah is the One Who decides whether they will be given a boy, or a girl or no children at all, according to His will: 'Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons. Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren; surely, He is the Knowing, the Powerful' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50).

Thus, even when a man and woman marry, even when everything is ready, Allah may decree a different result. The law does not act according to its own will, but rather the Will of its Creator.

Allah tells us in the Quran the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) and Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*. He took charge of her and provided for her. One day, he went to her and found that she had some food which he had not given her. Hence, he asked her that well-known question which teaches us how to be careful with our sons and daughters and guard them from being corrupted, '…Mary, how is it you have these provisions?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) This teaches us to watch over those under our charge; otherwise, they would be spoiled. If a mother finds with her son an expensive pen his father did not give him, she must ask him, 'How is it you have this pen?' Or if she sees her daughter wearing a dress she did not buy for her, she must ask her, 'How is it you have this dress?' A wife whose husband spends on the family more than his salary affords must ask him, 'How is it you have this money?' Otherwise, sons and daughters may grow up in corruption, and families may be provided for by ill-gotten money. This essential question, 'How is it you have such-and-such?' establishes a principle that needs to be borne well in mind by those who have others under their charge. This way, corruption would be cut off at its roots. Allah guided Zakaryya (to asking Maryam this question after he had taken charge of her, '…Mary, how is it you have these provisions?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) to which she replied, '…They are from Allah; Allah provides limitlessly for whoever He wills.' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Zakaryya witnessed a miraculous breaking of natural laws. He saw how Allah sent provisions to Maryam without any effort, so he aspired to earning such a favour from Allah. He called upon his Lord to grant him a son even though he had reached old age and his wife was infertile. Since Allah bestows His blessings limitlessly on whomever He wills, Zakaryya called upon Him, 'There and then Zechariah prayed to his Lord…' (*Al-'Imran:* 38). Allah responded to Him and sent down to him the good news of Yahya (John), and Zakaryya's faith in the Bounty of Allah was thus manifested.

It is worthy of mention that by this miraculous provision, Allah was preparing Maryam (Mary) and firming up her faith in Him because she would have to undergo a test which no other woman in the world had ever or would ever undergo. Allah wanted to brace her for something extraordinary so when that thing did occur, it would not shock her human nature or shake her beliefs; she already knew and already acknowledged that Allah has Power over all things, '…Allah provides limitlessly for whoever He wills.' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Through Maryam (Mary), Allah Almighty would break the natural law of reproduction and make her bear a child with no father. She had already acknowledged His Power of creation that is not limited by natural laws and witnessed the experience of Zakaryya *peace be upon him* when Allah gave him a son even though, '…I am so old and my wife is barren?' (*Maryam:* 8), as Zakaryya himself said.

Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* saw it was easy for Allah to do that. Allah says, '…This is what your Lord has said, "It is easy for Me"' (*Maryam:* 9). When the angel came to her in the form of a man to give her the news of a son, she said, '…How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste.' (*Maryam:* 20) The angel who was sent to her replied, '…This is what your Lord said, "It is easy for me…"' (*Maryam:* 21). Thus did Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* bear the child, and thus did Allah break the natural law of reproduction by His Omnipotent Power.

It is worthy of notice that Allah states twice in this verse that He has chosen Maryam (Mary) above the women of the world, '… Maryam (Mary), Allah has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women.' (*Al-'Imran:* 42). This repetition is for a reason. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'and as the angels said, 'O, Maryam (Mary), surely Allah has elected you and purified you and has elected you over the women of the world.' (*Al-'Imran:* 42) The first elevation of Maryam's (Mary's) status mentioned in this verse was her election to have esteemed virtue. Allah *the Exalted* chose her to enter the circle of the elite and righteous people. The second elevation of Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* was bearing her child, Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* without being touched by a man. Thus, she was raised above all the women of the world who can only bear children by means of male partners. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* specified the names of the people involved in this story because such a miracle would never happen to any other woman.

There are some stories in the Noble Quran in which the names of the characters are not specified, such as the story of the People of the Cave: 'Behold, they were young men who had attained to faith in their Lord, and [so] We deepened their guidance to the right way.' (*al-Kahf:* 13) Allah *the Almighty* did not specify their names or exact number as these specific details of the People of the Cave do not add to the significance of their glorious story. Likewise, Allah *the Most High* did not specify the land or the time in which they lived. If He had given us these particular facts, some people might think that the lessons and obligations of this story applied specifically to these personalities and would not be applicable to different people and times. Thus, He did not specify the distinctive details of these men, in order to clarify that their endeavour could be attempted by any group of people in every time and place. The ambiguity used here increases the benefit of the story.

On the other hand, in other instances in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* specified the names of the people in the Quranic story. For example, we find a verse saying: 'for those who are bent on denying the truth, Allah has struck a parable in [the stories of] Nuh's (Noah) wife and Lut's (Lot) wife. They were married to two of Our righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband (by disbelieving in their messages). Also, neither of the two [husbands] will be of any avail to these two women before Allah when they are told [on Judgment Day], 'Enter the fire with all those [other sinners] who enter it!' (*at-Tahrim:* 10)

Allah *the Almighty* specified the wives of these two prophets because they adhered to their false beliefs and the prophets (they were married to) could not guide them to the right path. On the other hand, the wife of Pharaoh believed in Allah, and even though Pharaoh claimed to be a god, he could not convince his wife to believe in him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and for those who have believed, Allah has struck a parable in [the story of] Pharaoh’s wife, as she prayed, ‘O my Lord! Build for me a house in your Providence in Paradise and save me from Pharaoh and his doings and save me from the unjust folk!’ (*at-Tahrim:* 11) So, she was a believing woman who had her own convictions independent of her husband. When Allah *the Most High* mentioned Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* He specified her name and the name of her father, saying: ‘Maryam (Mary), the daughter of Imran.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 12)

The Noble Quran also tells us the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was asked about Dhu Al-Qarnayn’s name, Allah *Glorified is He* did not give his name in the Quran, rather, He stated his attributes: ‘Behold, We established him securely on Earth and endowed him with [the knowledge of] the right means to achieve anything [that he might set out to achieve].’ (*al-Kahf:* 84)

Allah *the Almighty* willed this ambiguity (by not mentioning the names) of people in many Quranic stories. If anyone asks you, ‘Who was Dhu Al-Qarnayn’s, you should answer, ‘Do you not understand the purpose of this ambiguity? The purpose of the Quranic story is to keep his name insignificant to emphasise the man’s attributes.’ Dhu Al-Qarnayn’s strength was established firmly on the earth by Allah *the Most High*. He surrounded himself with good people, kept away from evil companions and stood up for the weak. This example set by the man must remain as a lesson to people of all times and backgrounds.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* began His Quran with the words: ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful', we must also begin our recitation of the Noble Quran with it. Remember the words of Prophet Mohammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Every significant matter which is not begun with ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful’ shall be cut off from blessings.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by as-Suyuti and Ibn Kathir*

Any action not begun in the Name of Allah is deficient. Never be assailed by delusion and fallacy, imagining yourself to be the one who subdues things to obey you, thereby losing the proper perception of your powers. When you do not mention the Name of Allah *Glorified is He* at the start of an action, this means that Allah is not on your mind, and your action will not be rewarded in the Hereafter despite yielding the benefit of the action in this world. This saying at the beginning of any action of importance, preserves the worldly gains and the goodly rewards in the Hereafter.

People should get married in the Name of Allah and as long as they begin the relationship in His Name, they will be giving more thought in distinguishing the lawful from the unlawful. Naturally, you would not begin any action in the Name of Allah unless it was something that Allah *Glorified is He* has made lawful. Similarly, a man does not naturally steal or accept bribes in the Name of Allah. When you begin a lawful action in the Name of Allah, you will submit that you are worshipping Him and that He has commandments that ordain your obligations and forbid you from committing sins. Even if you are a sinner, do not be ashamed from beginning your lawful actions in His Name, for Allah *Glorified is He* does not bear malevolence towards His creation or change His Mercy towards their worldly affairs. When He ordained punishments for particular sins, this means that He had prior knowledge that his servants would possibly commit these sins. He is the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. We know that the Arabic words for 'Most Gracious' (*ar-Rahman*) and 'Most Merciful' (*ar-Raheem*) are derived from the Arabic root word for 'womb' (*rahim*). The womb is the place where the foetus grows in its mother's body and is the epitome of compassion and care. Therefore, in the Qudsi Hadith which is a saying by Allah *Glorified is He* that has been narrated by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* apart from Quranic verses, Allah says about keeping family ties, 'I am God, and I am the Most Gracious (*ar-Rahman*). I created the womb (*rahim*) and gave it a name from My own Name. Therefore, whoever keeps connected to his kinsman (and family ties), I shall maintain my connection to him, and whoever severs his family ties, I shall sever my ties with him.'(1) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* is always compassionate to His servants, and sinners should not be ashamed to say: ‘In the Name of Allah,’ and ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,’ at the beginning of their worldly actions. By doing so, sinners will prevent themselves from having the delusion that they act by their own powers, and instead, will be reminded that they have the power to act because Allah *Glorified is He* had facilitated this for them. In addition, they will not deny themselves the reward of the Hereafter for their worldly efforts.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, and at-Tirmidhi*

When a believer says, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful', he enters into Allah’s protection. The phrases, ‘The Most Gracious' and ‘The Most Merciful’ are Arabic expressions of intensiveness (*mubalagha*) that indicate Allah’s refined and deepened Mercy towards His creation.

However, do not fall under the assumption that Allah’s attribute of Mercy fluctuates between states of weakness and strength. Some may falsely assume that Allah *Glorified is He* is only ‘Merciful’ (*Rahim*) at times, while being ‘Gracious’ (*Rahman*) at other times. The Arabic intensive adjective form only applies to Allah’s created beings who are subject to changes and fluctuations. It may be said that a certain person is ‘knowledgeable’ (*‘Aleem*), another person is ‘thoroughly knowledgeable’ (*‘Allaam*), while a third person is ‘an authority in the field’ (*‘Allaama*). Indeed, human attributes may vary. In our discussion, none of Allah’s attributes are weaker or stronger than any other attribute. In fact, it is the manifestations of these attributes which can be intensified or decreased by Allah’s Will.

In the Arabic language, we have the three words to indicate ‘a person who eats’. These words are as follows: *'akil'* (eater), '*akkal*' (intense eater) and '*akul'* (constant eater); and they indicate different degrees of the habit of eating. For example, the *akil* may eat one slice of bread per day, whilst the *akul* might eat five slices at once in a single daily meal. The *akkal,* on the other hand, might eat five meals a day instead of three. Therefore, the increased intensity can sometimes be describing the degree of the action itself as the number of slices per meal the *akkal* eats, and sometimes the increased intensity is describing the frequency of the action as the increased number of meals the *akul* eats per day.

It is important for us to recognise that human attributes, being accidental, are subject to changes and variations. Allah *the Most High* does not change, nor are His attributes subject to variation. Only the manifestations of His attributes can decrease or intensify, according to His Will. He is the Most Gracious (*Ar-Rahman*) since He shows Mercy to both believers and disbelievers in this world, and therefore, His Mercy is vast. At the same time, He is the Most Merciful (*Ar-Raheem*) in the Hereafter since He shows intense Mercy to believers therein. Allah *the Exalted* does not change His attributes for us, rather, we are the ones who change and are obligated to change for Him. If Allah *Glorified is He* changed according to our actions, the earth would certainly swallow up the servant who disobeyed Him in secret. Yet, a sinner disobeys Allah *the Almighty* and He conceals his sins from other people, for He is truly forbearing, and His attributes are inviolable.

When Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to begin our recitation of the Noble Quran by saying, 'In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful', we should recognise that He subdued everything for us. Additionally, Allah *the Most High* does not want our worldly actions to go unrewarded. Even a married couple's conjugal relations are rewarded since they intend to satisfy themselves lawfully to produce righteous offspring. Actions should be initiated in the Name of Allah to be rewarded. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'For one of you to have conjugal relations (with your spouse) is an act of charity.'

The companions said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* 'Does that mean that if one of us satisfies his passion, he will be rewarded for it?'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said, 'Tell me. If one were to satisfy his passion unlawfully, would he not incur a sin? Likewise, by satisfying it lawfully, one gains a reward.'(1)

Therefore, every significant action not started in the Name of Allah is fruitless. 'Significant' actions are the actions that a person does consciously. On the other hand, he will be excused for actions that are habitually done automatically, that he might forget to begin them by mentioning the Name of Allah. These actions are excused since there are three aspects to everything that we do: the mental aspect, the verbal aspect and the external (material) aspect. For example, if a person is thirsty, the mental aspect is the thought which comes to his head saying, 'I want a glass of water.' The person may then say aloud, 'Please hand me a glass of water' which is the verbal aspect. Then, when the glass of water is brought for the thirsty person to drink, this is the external aspect. The external aspect only occurs as a result of the other two premises. Every action that you do with an external aspect or a verbal aspect without possessing a mental premise, is an insignificant action.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim*

Imagine that an electric lamp which gives you light at night is suddenly burnt. You may exclaim, 'O, Allah who protects us from harm!' and move swiftly away from the dangerous area without saying, 'In the Name of Allah'. This action does not have a mental aspect, and therefore is insignificant.

As for the external material actions that require conscious thought, you will be able to take the benefits of this world and also the reward of the Hereafter if you say, 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful'. Some of us may notice that when a disbeliever farms the earth, the land may give him the appropriate yield he desired. However, he does not gain any heavenly reward along with this worldly yield.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us to begin our recitations of the Quran by saying, 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful'. This is how chapter *al-Fatiha* is started and how every chapter in the Noble Quran begins, except the chapter of *at-Tawba* which we are currently examining.

We find in the formula of '*basmala*' ('In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful') three of Allah's names. These are the following: Allah (God), *Ar-Rahman* (the Most Gracious) and *Ar-Raheem* (the Most Merciful). The word 'Allah' is a noun which refers to the Essential and Necessary Being Who owns all the attributes of perfection. *Ar-Rahman* (the Most Gracious) refers to the breadth of Allah's actions and attributes, while *Ar-Raheem* (the Most Merciful) refers to the breadth of Allah's Mercy to us in the Hereafter.

Since we do not have the ability to control any of the genera in existence unless Allah *the Almighty* subdues them so as to serve us, it is natural for us to begin our interactions with any object in the universe by saying the Name of the Power Which subdued this thing for you. You do not deal with these forces using your own power for your power only lies within the limits that Allah *the Most High* ordained. Similarly, you do not deal with anything with your own knowledge since you have no knowledge except that knowledge

Allah *Glorified is He* gives you. When a man begins an action in the Name of Allah, He gives him the benefits of this action along with blessing him in it.

It is true that the natural laws also obey disbelievers when they utilise material objects without mentioning Allah's name since He ordained His Lordly sustenance to all mankind. Since Allah *the Exalted* created both believers and disbelievers into existence, He made the natural laws responsive to the believer and the disbeliever alike. However, when a believer begins any action with Allah's name, the action is counted in his good deeds as an act of worship. The material benefits may be the same, but the heavenly reward for your remembrance of Allah's blessing will be preserved until the Day of Reckoning.

Thus, the word 'Allah' is a noun that refers to the Essential and Necessary Being Who owns all the attributes of perfection. These perfect attributes are described in the ninety nine Most Perfect Names of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And to Allah (belong) the Fairest Names, so invoke Him by them …' (*al-A'raf:* 180).

To explain the concept of these Perfect Names of Allah *the Most High* let us look at our daily lives. If you meet a person who is forbearing and dignified, you may describe him as being 'tolerant' and 'patient'. You might meet a rich man and say that he is a wealthy person, and then meet a man of prudence and say that he is wise. In each of these cases, you noticed a relative attribute in a created being, and you described it accordingly. Yet, when you want to use the words 'patient', 'wealthy' and 'wise' in an absolute sense, you can refer to no one else but Allah *Glorified is He*.

We use the words *Al-Hakeem* (All-Wise), *Al-Raheem* (the Most Merciful) or *Al-Ghani* (the Rich) in the absolute form when we are referring to Allah *Glorified is He* alone. For instance, Mercy in its absolute sense refers only to Him since the mercy that is exhibited by all the compassionate created beings in the world is only a part of Allah's Mercy to His creation. Since Allah *the Most High* is the only source of this Mercy, when the word '*Al-Raheem'* (the Most Merciful) is uttered, it only applies to Him. On the other hand, if you describe a human as being merciful, this mercy is limited and relative.

This is true to all the attributes of Allah *the Exalted* which are also His Names, As for the name 'Allah', it does not refer to an attribute, rather, it refers to the Essence which is described with all the attributes of perfection. Thus, it cannot be used for anyone else. This Noble Name was the Name of the Necessary Being Who is the True Lord *Glorified is He,* both before and after Islam.

When people give their new-born children names, one of them may call his son ‘Mohammad’. However, that parent will certainly not give his next son the same name since the name ‘Mohammad’ has become the personal identifier of the first son. Some people in the countryside still love to seek the glad tidings associated with the Prophet’s name by giving the name ‘Mohammad’ to their following sons. So, one of them might call his first son ‘Mohammad, the Elder’ and call his next son ‘Mohammad, the Younger’. They may distinguish their different sons who share the same name by giving them combined names such as *‘Mohammad at-Tayyib’* and ‘Mohammad At-Tahir’.

When the Lord *the Most High* chose the Name Allah which refers to His attributes of perfection, no one from His creation, believers or disbelievers, will have the same name or its attributes. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘… Do you know any name that is worthy to be mentioned with His Name?’ (*Maryam:* 65) Allah *Glorified is He* thereby provoked the pagans with a challenge, as they may have said, ‘This idea never occurred to us, to call other things with the same name as God.’ Allah *the Exalted* made it clear to them that there is no other being worthy of the Name Allah, and its attributes of perfection, except Him.

The pagans did not dare expose themselves to this experiment. This shows that these pagans of Quraysh who disbelieved in Prophet Muhammad’s message of monotheism and associated partners with Allah *the Almighty* in worship, really only worshipped their idols in doubt. If they were certain of their false ways, they could have responded to the challenge by giving a similar name to any created being, worshipped it with their idols and claimed that Allah *Glorified is He* is similar to His creation. However, they knew that any response to that challenge would be ludicrous and realised their paradoxical practices in associating partners to Allah *the Most High*. Thus, deeply knowing that Allah was distinctly different from their idols, the pagans were unable to respond to the Quranic challenge.

When you say, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful’, you also mention two of Allah’s names which are ‘The Most Gracious’ and ‘The Most Merciful’. You are mentioning the Names and Attributes of the One Who can help you with your task. If you wish to do an action which requires strength, you would say, ‘In the Name of (Allah), the Strong,’ so that Allah *Glorified is He* will aid you with the secrets of His attribute of strength. If you are seeking knowledge, you would say, ‘In the Name of the All-Knowing’. A person who desires wisdom would say, ‘In the Name of the All-Wise'. Another person who wants Allah *Glorified is He* to help him overcome an adversary would say, ‘In the Name of the All-Dominant’.

You are free to engage in your actions with any of Allah’s Names. However, many attributes are usually required for any action in this world. No matter how trivial an action may seem to you, it needs Allah’s Power, Wisdom, Patience, Forbearance, as well as other attributes of Allah *Glorified is He*. Instead of repeating every single distinct attribute of Allah *the Exalted* He taught us that His Name 'Allah' encompasses all the attributes. Therefore, when you say, ‘In the Name of Allah’, it is as though you have said, ‘In the Name of the Strong’, ‘In the Name of the All Knowing’, ‘In the Name of the All-Wise’, ‘In the Name of the Most Gracious', ‘In the Name of the Protector’, ‘In the Name of the All-Powerful’ or ‘In the Name of the All-Dominant’. You have initiated your action by invoking all of our Lord’s Most Perfect Names by saying the name *‘*Allah’ since it is the Name of Essence that is endowed with all the attributes of perfection.

Following Allah’s command, we must put this concept into practice and compensate for all the previous occasions when we did not observe this command. We can call this compensation the *'basmala* of restitution’ since in these sayings of *basmala*, we are amending many previous actions with which we missed uttering the *basmala*. You can also add, 'In the Name of Allah' for everyone who forgot to begin his actions with the words, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful'. By doing this, you pay your debt for the present and the past actions, along with paying your brother’s debt for the times he forgot to say the *basmala*. Allah *Glorified is He* will give you additional blessing in all that you do, and the rewards are multiplied by the intention you had while doing your work.

Therefore we hear that some imams say the *basmala* silently when leading their followers in prayers, after which they read the chapter of *al-Fatiha* aloud beginning with Allah’s Words: ‘All praise is due to Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds.’ (*al-Fatiha:* 2). However, the more knowledgeable imams amongst them will add a silent *basmala* even before the start of their prayer. This is because they realise that prayer is a significant action, and every significant action must begin with ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful’.

The Sacred Hadith related by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* stated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah says, "I have divided the prayer into two halves between Myself and My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for. When a servant says, "All praise is due to Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds" (*al-Fatiha:* 2), Allah says, "My servant has praised Me." And when he says, "The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful" (*al-Fatiha:* 3), Allah says, "My servant has extolled Me." Also, when he says, "Owner of the Day of Judgment" (*al-Fatiha:* 4), Allah says, "My servant has glorified Me." When he says, "Thee alone do we worship, and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid" (*al-Fatiha:* 5), Allah says, "This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for." When he says, "Guide us to the straight path – the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings, not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray" (*al-Fatiha:* 6-7), Allah says, "This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for."'(1)

We can observe that we read ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful' (*al-Fatiha:* 1) in the beginning of the chapter of *al-Fatiha* which is read in the beginning of every unit of prayer. Allah *Glorified is He* began the Quran with the chapter of *al-Fatiha* and began *al-Fatiha* with ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful’ (*al-Fatiha:* 1) to teach us that every action should be started with these words, and every action has its own purpose and goal. In this Qudsi Hadith, Allah *the Most High* starts by mentioning the servant’s praise of Him. Some scholars see this as an indication that the text of the chapter of *al-Fatiha* is distinctive from its opening *basmala*. ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful’ (*al-Fatiha:* 1) is part of the Quran, but these scholars consider it apart from the text of the first chapter since Allah *the Almighty* does not mention this starting *basmala* in this Qudsi Hadith. This is why some imams sometimes say it silently during the announced prayers instead of saying it aloud as the rest of the chapter.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nisa’i, and Ibn Majah*

We should bear in mind that Allah *Glorified is He* devoted His Mercy to His creation, and He wants to alleviate the shame of sinners. Thus, a sinner has the right to seek Allah's Aid when he does a lawful deed. No sinner should question themselves out of shame: 'Should I seek the aid of Allah Whom I have disobeyed and angered?' Truly, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. The fact that you have disobeyed Allah in previous times should not prevent you from beginning every action with His Name. Were it not for His Mercy and Compassion, the world would not exist for us all. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If Allah were to punish mankind [immediately] for the evil that they do [on the earth], He would not leave a single living creature upon its face. However, He grants them respite until a term set [by Him], but when the end of their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it.' (*an-Nahl:* 61) We still live in this world, in the blessings and the gifts of the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, despite our sins.

We must consider carefully the words of Allah *the Exalted* mentioned in the following two verses in the Quran. In the first verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them! Behold, Allah is indeed Much-Forgiving and a giver of Mercy.' (*an-Nahl:* 18) In the second verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… and should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them. [And yet,] behold, man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing and stubbornly ingrate!' (*Ibrahim:* 34) The two verses are similar in their introductions and different in their endings. The first verse was mentioned in the context of Allah's Abundant Mercy. On the other hand, the second verse was directing out attention to a sinner's wickedness when he exploits Allah's blessings to commit sins against his Lord *Glorified is He*. If we read the chapter of the second verse, we find this indication in its former verses: 'Art thou not aware of those who met the blessing of Allah with disbelief and [thereby] invited their people to inhabit the abode of utter desolation?' (*Ibrahim:* 28) Thus, the statement in the second verse is appropriate in indicating man's wrongdoing and his ingratitude to Allah's blessings.

If man wanted to count Allah’s blessings, he would never be able to complete counting, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. A blessing, as we know, consists of three elements. There is the giver of the blessing, the one who receives the blessing and the blessing itself. We know that the Arabic particle *'in'*, which translates in this verse as ‘should you try’, has a similar function to the English article ‘if’. It is a conditional particle used to indicate matters of doubt. Another article in Arabic is ‘*idha*’ which can be translated as ‘when’ in such sentences as, ‘When this event happens, carry out the following.’ In this verse, the word ‘when’ (*idha*) is used in Arabic to certify that something will surely happen in the future. When Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘… and should you try to count Allah’s blessings, you could never compute them’ (*Ibrahim:* 34), this verse uses the word ‘*in’,* as it expresses doubt, since nobody with a finite time would even attempt to count Allah’s blessings. A person only attempts to count something if he believes the process of counting is accessible. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* used the Arabic word ’*in*’ instead of the Arabic word ‘*idha’* here. A person might be able to start counting Allah’s blessings, but he would never succeed in completing it. The One Who gives the blessings sustains a gracious flow of benefaction to the receiver since Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. He does not abandon sinners or deny them His blessings for He called them all into existence and continues his blessings even when man is persistent in wrongdoing and ungratefulness.

Now, let us turn our attention to an examination of the chapter of *at-Tawba*. We have seen it appropriate to discuss this chapter after discussing the meanings of ‘*basmala’.* In the chapter of *at-Tawba*, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the various factions of people who have disbelieved in the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him.* These were the idolaters, the people of the Book and the hypocrites.

We said earlier that a hypocrite has conflicting faculties since he claims to be a believer while concealing his disbelief. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when they (the hypocrites) meet those who believed, they assert, "We believe [as you believe]", but when they find themselves alone with their evil impulses, they say, "Verily, we are (disbelievers) with you. We were only mocking (the believers)!"’ (*al-Baqara:* 14) When a person has two faculties that are incompatible, he is an object of people's contempt and similarly scorns himself. Most of the scholars agree that one of the names of the chapter of *at-Tawba* is 'The Revealer' since it revealed the attributes of hypocrites.

Sa'id ibn Jubayr narrated that he asked Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* about the chapter of *at-Tawba*, and he replied, 'It is the Revealer (of people's intents). It kept speaking about (the attributes of disbelief) in one group of people after another, until we feared that it would mention all of us (as having attributes of disbelief).'

One of these hypocrites said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before the Battle of Tabuk: '… Grant me permission [to remain at home], and do not put me to too hard a test!...' (*at-Tawba:* 49) This hypocrite had sought this permission to stay behind at the time of the battle, and the excuse he claimed was his weakness towards women. The Roman women were known to be beautiful, so he claimed that he feared being tempted by them. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to this by saying: '…Oh, verily, [by making such a request] they had [already failed in their test and] succumbed to a temptation to evil!' (*at-Tawba:* 49)

There were others amongst them who criticised the way Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* distributed the charitable offerings by saying, 'He favours some and leaves out others!' Allah *Glorified is He* said about this: 'And among them find fault with thee [O Prophet Muhammad] concerning [the distribution of] the offering.' (*at-Tawba:* 58)

There were also other hypocrites who accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of injustice claiming that he gave his ear and judgment to whoever spoke to him first, then based the ruling on what he heard from that party. These hypocrites forgot that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* paid the best of attention towards and adhered to the truth. He only listened to the truth and delivered his message by speaking the truth. Allah mentioned that claim and disproved it in the verse by saying: 'And among those [enemies of the truth] are those who malign the Prophet by saying, "He is all ears." Say, "[He is] an ear of charity for you. He believes in Allah and believes (i.e. trusts, reassures) the believers, and (is) a mercy for the ones of you who have believed. The ones who hurt the Messenger of Allah, for them is a painful torment."' (*at-Tawba:* 61).

One of them was named Tha'laba. He was stingy with the wealth and bounties that Allah *the Exalted* had bestowed upon him. He had previously pledged to Allah *the Most High* that he would give part of his blessings in charity. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And among them are those who vow to Allah, "If indeed He grant us [something] out of His bounty, we shall most certainly spend in charity and shall most certainly be among the righteous! But as soon as He (Allah) has given them [aught] out of His bounty, they cling to it greedily and turn away in their obstinacy [from all that they have vowed].' (*at-Tawba:* 75-76)

There were others who considered their spending in Allah's cause to be a loss: 'And among the Bedouins are those who regard all that they might spend [in Allah's cause] as a loss.' (*at-Tawba:* 98) Some of the Bedouins were hypocrites, so Allah *the Almighty* said concerning them: 'But some of the Bedouins who dwell around you are hypocrites, and among the people of The [Prophet's] City [too], who have grown insolent in [their] hypocrisy. You do not [always] know them, [O Muhammad – but] We know them. We shall cause them to suffer doubly.' (*at-Tawba:* 101)

In this way Allah *Glorified is He* revealed, to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers, all the factions who were opposed to them. Therefore, this chapter was known as 'The Revealer' since it revealed the various faults in these people's disbelief. It did not do this in order that people would insult one another, or in order that some people would gain satisfaction by seeing others exposed and revealed. Rather, it did this to purify the ranks of faith from the blemishes of falsehood and to expel any weakness of faith from the ranks of the believers, so that the true and devoted believers would remain steadfast.

Some of the scholars called this chapter 'The Sweeper' since it swept away hypocrisy and removed it, along with clearing the ground of faith from the attributes of hypocrisy. Others called it 'The Scatterer'. Only something which is piled up can be scattered. When you scatter a pile, you bring to plain view what is hidden in the middle. This chapter scattered the secrets of the hypocrites. The chapter is also known as 'The Digger' since when one digs the earth, he finds what is concealed under the dirt. It is also known as 'The

Awakener' because it brings to light that which the eyes were not able to see, and 'The Destroyer' since it made clear the punishment which awaits every evildoer. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Their Lord brought upon them utter destruction for their sin, destroying them all alike.' (*ash-Shams:* 14) It is also known as 'The chapter of Torment' since it lifted the veils of hypocrites' hearts and appointed to every enemy of Allah the appropriate requital. It is narrated that Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'You call it the chapter of Repentance, but it is really the chapter of Torment!'

Therefore, the chapter has many names, and every name has its meaning and connotation. Many of these names are referring to what the chapter did to the hypocrites: The Exposer, the Sweeper, the Scatterer, the Awakener, the Digger and the Destroyer. All of these are connected to the exposure of the hypocrites. The chapter begins with the words: 'Disavowal by Allah and His Prophet [is herewith announced] unto those who ascribe divinity to partners beside Allah, [and] with whom you [O, believers] have made a covenant.' (*at-Tawba:* 1) The name of the chapter is *'at-Tawba'* (Repentance), even though the word 'disavowal' means rejection. So, what are the indications of these names?

We know that Allah *Glorified is He* created man and made him His vicegerent, and Allah is the Lord of all beings. Therefore, He has two forms of bestowal. The Lordly bestowal means that He created and possesses everything. It also means that He provides for all His creation equally. This includes both believers and disbelievers. It includes righteous people and sinners. Whoever of these people utilises the means and the natural laws of the Universe will partake in the goodness of Lordly bestowal. In fact, if a believer does not utilise these means, he will remain behind a disbeliever in gathering worldly benefit. This is the Lordly bestowal. Thus, Allah is the Lord of all His creation since He called them all into existence and provided them with the essential constituents of life. On the other hand, the Divine bestowal is related to the degree of moral responsibility of man, in obeying the ordained laws that obligate him to perform certain tasks and forbid him from other actions. Hence, this Divine bestowal is related to acts of worship. The chapter says:

بَرَآءَةٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦٓ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ عَٰهَدتُّم مِّنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١﴾

A release by God and His Messenger from the treaty you [believers] made with the idolaters [is announced] [1] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 1)

As we said, disavowal means the annulment of an accord, or *‘esma* in Arabic. To have an accord means to hold onto something. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘… But he who holds fast (*ya‘tasim*) unto Allah has already been guided onto a straight way.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 101) Allah also says: ‘Today there is no protection (*‘asim*) [for anyone] from Allah’s judgment.’ (*Hud:* 43) Therefore, disavowal implies that there was a pact which had previously been adhered to between believers and disbelievers. The chapter was announcing the disavowal of this pact which the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had with them. Believers were still adhering to this pact, but then the commandment came from Allah *the Almighty* for it to be annulled.

The Arabic word used for ‘disavowal’ (*bara’a*) is also used in credit transactions. When a person has ‘disavowed himself (*bari’a*) of a debt’, it means that he repaid it and is no longer bound by its contraction. Similarly, when a person is ‘disavowed of his illness’, it means that he is cured. The illness once had a grip on him, and the grip has now eased.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made pacts with the Quraysh and the Jews, and they did not honour these pacts. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad was obligated by Allah to annul these pacts. Someone might ask, ‘Why were these pacts not annulled until the ninth year after Emigration, even though Mecca was regained by the Muslims in the eighth year after Emigration?’

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* removed the pagan idols from the *Ka’ba.* After the Muslims’ state settled, it was time for a distinction to be made clear regarding those who lived near the Inviolable Sanctuary. The believers had to identify the idolaters, the people of the Book and the hypocrites living among them. This happened in the ninth year after the Emigration in order that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not make the pilgrimage unless the place was set free from the shackles of false slavery and disbelief.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* clarified, with this verse, to those who had made pacts with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You have proved yourselves neither worthy to be trusted, nor have you fulfilled your pacts. Therefore, We have annulled these pacts.' Thus, this annulment was not the human will of Prophet Muhammad or his Companions; rather, it was an annulment by Allah's Decree. It might be that human beings know some things and are ignorant of others, but Allah, the Knower of All, said: 'Disavowal by Allah and His Prophet [is herewith announced] …' (*at-Tawba:* 1).

Allah *Glorified is He* did not say: 'Disavowal by Allah and disavowal by His Prophet' since it was a single disavowal which came from Allah, the One Who ordained the Sublime Laws, to be conveyed by His last Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The disavowal was directed at the idolaters who did not honour the pacts they had with Prophet Muhammad.

We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had made a pledge with the tribe of Khuza'a, who had a rival tribe named Bakr that stood with the Quraysh. The Quraysh had assisted the tribe of Bakr against the tribe of Khuza'a, so a poet from Khuza'a named 'Amr ibn Salim al-Khuza'i went to Medinah and said his famous poem which included the following verses of poetry:

O Lord, I call upon Muhammad,
By the old pact of our fathers
You were a father to us, and we were sons,
And then we embraced Islam, and therein still we remain.
So aid us, may Allah guide you, with the firmest aid,
And allow Allah's servants to come in droves.
Quraysh have indeed broken their promises to you,
And violated your avowed pledges
They have plotted against us with all their cunning,
And slain us even as we bowed and prostrated!

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this, he said, 'You have found succour and aid, O, 'Amr ibn Salim! I shall not be aided (by Allah) unless I support you!'

Thus, the idolaters were the ones who broke the pact first, and thereby, proved themselves untrustworthy since they respected no pact or pledge. Allah revealed the verse: ‘Disavowal by Allah and His Prophet [is herewith announced] unto those who ascribe divinity to partners beside Allah, [and] with whom you [O, believers] have made a covenant.’ (*at-Tawba:* 1) These words are addressed to the Muslims, and the disavowal is announced unto the idolaters.

After these verses, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following verse:

فَسِيحُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّكُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِى ٱللَّهِ ۙ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مُخْزِى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢﴾

you [idolaters] may move freely about the land for four months, but you should bear in mind both that you will not escape God, and that God will disgrace those who defy [Him] [2] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 2)

These words are addressed to the idolaters. Someone might ask, ‘How could Allah’s Words in the first verse address the Muslims, concerning their disavowal of the idolaters, and in the next verse, He addresses the idolaters directly?’ Some scholars said that since the disavowal had been announced by Allah *the Most High* He was ordering the believers to transmit the next verse to the idolaters: ‘Go, then, [freely] about the earth for four months …’ (*at-Tawba:* 2). Our opinion is that when a pact made between two parties is annulled by Allah *Glorified is He,* there had to be a verse addressing both those parties: those who severed the agreement and those who were severed by it. The first verse addressed those who were harmed by the pact, and the second verse addressed the disbelievers who broke the rules of the agreement.

The justice and tolerance of this religion that Allah *the Almighty* has revealed is clear in the second verse. Allah *the Exalted* gave a period of four months as a respite, free from any attacks towards disbelievers, so that it would not be said that Muslims had attacked them without prior notice. Allah gave this period to disbelievers whose pact was to end in less than four months. For those disbelieving tribes whose pacts were signed for more than four months, Allah ordered the Muslims to give them security until the end of their pact’s term. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* despite annulling the pacts with the disbelievers, forbade the Muslims from any attacks during the pact times that they had originally agreed upon.

‘Go, then (*seehu*), [freely] about the earth for four months …’ (*at-Tawba:* 2) The words ‘Go, then’ give a faithful assurance to disbelievers. The Arabic word ‘*saaha*’ (or *seehu*) means to move slowly; while another Arabic word ‘*saala*’ means ‘to flow quickly’. Thus, the word ‘*saaha*’ (or *seehu*) can be used to describe the melting of butter, whereas the word ‘*saala’* is used to describe a quicker fluid movement. Why did Allah use the word ‘*seehu’*, which indicates a slower movement when talking about the disbelievers? The answer is that the tolerance of Islam forbade the Muslims from attacking the disbelievers without prior notice. Those with whom the Muslims had severed the pact had the right to travel in safety and security, without being threatened by anyone, for the allocated time.

The scholars deliberated the reason for the respite term being specified as four months. Some of the scholars considered this specification to be related to the time at which the verse was revealed, which was the month of Shawwal. So, the four months would have been *Shawwal*, *Dhul-Qi‘da, Dhul-Hijja* and *Al-Muharram.*

Other scholars said that the time at which the verse was revealed has nothing to do with the four months ordained by Allah *the Most High*. The four months began the moment the announcement was made which was during the pilgrimage since Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and a proclamation from Allah and His Prophet [is herewith made] unto all mankind on this day of the Greatest Pilgrimage.’ (*at-Tawba:* 3). Based on this, the four months would have been from the tenth of *Dhul*-Hijja until the tenth of *Rabi-ul-Akhir*. Still, other scholars had the opinion that this verse was revealed during the year of the *Nasee’* in which some Arabs altered the sanctity of the four sacred months according to their convenience. Allah *Glorified is He* says about this practice: ‘The *Nasee’* [intercalation (of months)] is but one more instance of [their] disbelief – [a means] by which those who are bent on denying the truth are led astray. They declare this [intercalation] to be permissible in one year and forbidden in [another] year, in order to conform [outwardly] to the number of months which Allah has made sacred’ (*at-Tawba:* 37).

Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered a sermon during the pilgrimage wherein he said, ‘Indeed, time began to turn in its natural way the day Allah created the heavens and the earth. The year consists of twelve months, of which four are sacred; three are consecutive: *Dhul-Qi’da*, *Dhul-*Hijja and *Al-Muharram*; and (then there is) the month of *Rajab Mudarr*, which lies between *Jumada* and *Sha’ban*.’[1]

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declared that from the beginning of the world, this system of time had existed. Thus, the practice of *Nasee’* was forbidden. In this practice, Arabs used to advance or postpone the sacred months according to their choosing. If the sacred months came during the middle of a war, they would delay the sacred months so that their war would continue. Therefore, that year, the pilgrimage took place in *Dhul-Qi’da*, and since the pilgrimage took place in *Dhul-Qi’da*, this meant that the four months of respite would have ended on the tenth of *Rabi-ul-Awwal*.

It is also said that the four months were chosen to reflect what Allah *Glorified is He* decreed when He said: ‘Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, [laid down] in Allah’s Decree on the day when He created the heavens and the earth; [and] out of these, four are sacred…’ (*at-Tawba:* 36). According to this opinion, the number of months of respite, mentioned in this chapter, was the same number of the sacred months ordained by Allah *Glorified is He*. The problem with this opinion is that only three of the sacred months are consecutive. These are *Dhul-Qi’da, Dhul-*Hijja and *Muharram*. The fourth sacred month which is not in this succession is *Rajab*. Therefore, we say that this opinion is not right, and these are not the same four successive months of respite as the four sacred months ordained by Allah *the Exalted*. Our opinion is that the four sacred months, which include *Rajab*, are the constant sacred months, whilst the four months this verse mentions are ordained by Allah *Glorified is He* to forestall the end of the pact.

Allah *the Almighty* established the sacred months to protect people’s lives from one another since the wars of Arabs lasted for long years without any decisive victory. Thus, Allah established the sacred months so that people would incline towards peace and use their reasoning to end these wars.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad and Al-Bukhari*

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* informs us that He gave the idolaters four months to travel freely. Why is that? The army that is weak will seize any opportunity to defeat its enemy and will not give any days of respite or peace, let alone four months. On the other hand, a strong established army does not fear to give its enemy time of peace and respite since they can overcome their enemies at any time they please. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… but know that you can never elude Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 2)

When it is said that a person 'eluded' (*a'jaza*) another person, it also means 'to overpower' or 'overwhelm'. This means that they made the other person weak and powerless (*'ajiz*). You will find that any transcendent force that overpowers a worthy opponent is an honour for the overpowered opponent. For example, when the Noble Quran came as an overwhelming miracle and challenge to Arabs, this was an honour for them since they were a people of eloquence and rhetoric. Allah does not challenge the weak, but only challenges the strong and established. The language of the Quran overwhelmed their eloquence and rhetorical brilliance.

Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* gave this respite to the idolaters, it was subject to certain conditions. The leader of the pilgrimage that year was our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and he would be the one to deliver to the idolaters the articles of the disavowal. These articles stated that no idolater could enter the Sacred Mosque, perform the pilgrimage or perform circumambulation around the *Ka'ba* naked and that no one would enter Paradise except those who had faith.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew with his prophetic wisdom that the Arabs would only accept the severing of pacts to be done by a kinsman who had written the pact with them. Thus, he sent 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* to announce the disavowal. This would prevent the idolaters from saying, 'We do not accept the severing of the pacts from Abu Bakr, rather, we must hear it from a close kinsman of the one who has severed them.'

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…but know that you can never elude Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 2) Allah *the Exalted* gave this long period of respite since He has sublime control over everything, and nothing escapes nor eludes Him. Despite their trials to find allies that support them, they would not be able to do anything against Allah *the Most High*. It is true that they were weak at this time, and the weak armies can often be deadly to the strong armies since they are using their last straw. However, Allah has complete control over everything. An Arab poet wanted to express this, so he said:

When the weak have their one chance,

This is when the power of the weak emerges.

Since weak people will seize their opportunity to defeat their rivals, whilst the strong people know that they can deal with their enemy at any time.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '… and [know] that, verily, Allah shall bring disgrace upon all who refuse to acknowledge the truth!' (*at-Tawba:* 2) To bring disgrace to them means to humiliate them by revealing and exposing their flaws. This humiliation brings its toll only to someone who is arrogant and full of pride. This means that Allah *Glorified is He* can bring disgrace upon disbelievers by exposing them, however strong and mighty they appear. Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَأَذَٰنٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦٓ إِلَى ٱلنَّاسِ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡحَجِّ ٱلۡأَكۡبَرِ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بَرِيٓءٌ مِّنَ
ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ۙ وَرَسُولُهُۥۚ فَإِن تُبۡتُمۡ فَهُوَ خَيۡرٌ لَّكُمۡۖ وَإِن تَوَلَّيۡتُمۡ فَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ
أَنَّكُمۡ غَيۡرُ مُعۡجِزِي ٱللَّهِۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ٣

On the Day of the Great Pilgrimage [there will be] a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all people: 'God and His Messenger are released from [treaty] obligations to the idolaters. It will be better for you [idolaters] if you repent; know that you cannot escape God if you turn away.' [Prophet], warn those who ignore [God] that they will have a painful punishment[3] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 3)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Disavowal by Allah and His Prophet' (*at-Tawba:* 1) in the first verse. Why are the words repeated in the third verse: 'and a proclamation (*adhan*): Allah disavows all who ascribe divinity to partners beside Him, and [so does] His Prophet.' (*at-Tawba:* 3)? We say that the first verse was meant to announce the concept of disavowal, while the third verse's proclamation was meant to convey the disavowal to disbelievers. A ‘proclamation’ (*adhan*) means an announcement given to all the people just like the call to prayer (*adhan*) is an announcement to the people that it is time to pray. The word ‘*adhan*’ is derived from the word ‘*udhun*’ which means ‘ear’ since when someone wants to tell the people something, he must announce it so that they hear it with their ears which are the primary means of perception. Before you can speak, you must hear, and if you have never heard spoken words, you will not be able to speak properly. Therefore, Allah says about the disbelievers: ‘deaf, mute …’ (*al-Baqara:* 18) which means that they cannot hear the truth, and as long as they cannot hear the truth, they cannot speak it unto others.

The ear is the first means of perception to function as soon as one is born. If you signal with your fingers to the eye of a new-born baby, it will not react since the eye does not begin to function until a few days after birth. However, if you shout near a baby, it will hear and be startled.

When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the means of perception, He mentioned hearing first by saying: ‘… He has blessed you with hearing, sight and minds.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78). This is due to the fact that the ear begins to function right away, as we said, whilst the eye only begins to work properly after some time. The ear is able to receive several sounds all at once, whilst the field of vision is limited. When you do not want to see something, you can turn your eyes away from it, but sounds enter your ear from all directions without you being able to stop them easily. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word ‘*sam‘*’ (hearing), which is an Arabic singular noun, while using the plural noun for ‘sight’ by saying ‘*absar’*. The ears can hear sounds whether you are awake or asleep. Different sounds can be heard, and the perception of them is united in one single wave. So, it is a means of recollection and awakening. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* spoke about the People of the Cave, He made them sleep for three hundred and nine years, even though the most a man sleeps is a single day or part of a day. Allah *Glorified is He* says about this: ‘And thereupon we veiled their ears in the cave for many years.’ (*al-Kahf:* 11)

He veiled their ears so that they would not be woken by the loud voice of a man or a beast. When they finally awoke, they said, ‘We have remained thus a day, or part of a day,’ (*al-Kahf:* 19) since a man does not usually sleep longer than this. This indicates that when they awoke, they were in the same condition they had been in before they slept, and nothing had changed about them. This indicates that Allah *the Exalted* stopped time from moving for them. Had Allah not veiled their ears, they would have been startled by the sounds of thunder, wild animals or similar noises.

Modern science has affirmed that if someone remains unconscious for a long period of time due to illness, doctors fear that he will be afflicted by bedsores. The doctor does not only worry about the illness itself, but also the effects of prolonged recumbence. Allah *Glorified is He* alludes to this fact when He says: '… And We caused them to turn over repeatedly, to the right and to the left.' (*al-Kahf:* 18) Since the ear is the means of hearing, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When the sky is split asunder, obeying its Lord (*adhinat le-rabiha*), as in truth it must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2) The Arabic verb used for 'obeying' was '*adhinat*', derived from the Arabic noun '*udhun*' (ear). This indicates that as soon as the sky hears Allah's command to split, it will immediately obey by splitting on the Day of Resurrection.

The one who delivered the proclamation from Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to all the people on the day of the pilgrimage was 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him*. Then, why did Allah say: 'And a proclamation from Allah and His Prophet' (*at-Tawba:* 3)? Allah *the Most High* told His Messenger Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Prophet Muhammad told 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him*. Then, 'Ali made the announcement and conveyed the message to the disbelievers.

Someone might object that Allah *Glorified is He* instructed that the proclamation be addressed to all the people even though the disavowal was concerned with the idolaters only. The proclamation was made to all the people, believers and disbelievers alike so that everyone would know their situation. They should know that the pact was annulled in light of the proclamation issued by Allah, and no one would be attacked by surprise. Allah *the Almighty* wanted to make matters fair and balanced between the believers and the disbelievers. Therefore, He did not address the believers alone, but addressed the whole world. The believers must be the ones who strive to harmonise the motions of the world with the ways that please Allah *Glorified is He*. Both the believers and the disbelievers will then benefit from this justice, security and integrity, which Allah's Way establishes on the earth.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* alerts us that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* came bearing Allah's Way in order to rectify the whole world, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, We have bestowed upon you from on high this Book, setting forth the truth, so that you may judge between people in accordance with what Allah has taught you …' (*an-Nisa':* 105). What this means is to judge between all people according to the way of Heaven is what Allah wants from His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Words of Allah *Glorified is He* 'and a proclamation from Allah and His Prophet [is herewith made] unto all mankind on this day of the Greatest Pilgrimage …' (*at-Tawba:* 3), are universal with respect to both place and people on the day of the pilgrimage, where all the people gather in one place.

Someone might ask why He called it the 'Greatest Pilgrimage'. We say that it is because it was the only pilgrimage which was attended by both disbelievers and believers; for after this, there was no longer a pilgrimage for disbelievers and idolaters. Some scholars say that the words 'Greatest Pilgrimage' were meant to distinguish the 'lesser pilgrimage' (*'umra*) from the major pilgrimage in which the pilgrims stand at *'Arafa,* but we say that *'umra* is not known as the 'lesser pilgrimage.'

It is said that the 'day of the Greatest Pilgrimage' is the Day of *'Arafa,* but other scholars say that it is the day of the sacrifice because this day contains many rites: pelting the stones, cutting the hair and making the going-forth circumambulation (*tawaf al-ifadah*). Therefore, the day of the sacrifice is called the 'day of the Greatest Pilgrimage' because of its numerous rites. It is also said that in this verse all of the days of the pilgrimage are meant which are called 'the days of the pilgrimage' after a tradition of the Arabs to refer to a single event, with all its many happenings, as one single event. For example, Allah *the Exalted* refers to the 'Day of Hunayn' even though the battle of Hunayn lasted several days; it is as though the word 'day' in this phrase means the unifying period of time in which a great event occurred, and therefore, all the days of the pilgrimage are called 'the day of the pilgrimage.'

Or it means that the message which our master ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* delivered was announced on the Day of *‘Arafa,* and everyone who heard this announcement told those who did not hear it. The noble verse says: ‘And a proclamation from Allah and His Prophet [is herewith made] unto all mankind on this day of the Greatest Pilgrimage: "Allah disavows all who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and [so does] His Prophet …"’ (*at-Tawba:* 3).

This was a proclamation from Allah unto His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* and from ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* to the believers, and from the believers who heard to those who did not, that Allah had disavowed the idolaters. This was an announcement of exclusion, but in His Mercy Allah *Glorified is He* never closes the door to His servants, and therefore, He then says: ‘… Hence, if you repent, it shall be for your own good …’ (*at-Tawba:* 3). What this means is that Allah opened the door of repentance to them so that if they repented, He would pardon them, and if they did not repent, then the final word was the following: ‘… and if you turn away, then know that you can never elude Allah! And unto those who are bent on denying the truth give you [O, Prophet] the tiding of grievous chastisement.’ (*at-Tawba:* 3)

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* had absolute power over them and could take them to task no matter where they were. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who conveyed his message had to give disbelievers the tidings of a grievous chastisement. A ‘tiding’ (*bisharah*) is news of something good, and a warning is news of something bad. So is chastisement a tiding or a warning? We say that this is an aspect of the beautiful rhetorical style of the Noble Quran: it announces a glad tiding to disbelievers so that they expect something good, and then it gives them the bad news of the chastisement which awaits them. It is like going to a very thirsty person with a glass of ice cold water, and then when you almost reach him and the water all but touches his lips, you pour the water onto the ground. This is an even worse torment and a worse disappointment; the soul first expands, and then contracts. A poet said of this:

It is as though a cloud formed above a people waiting for rain,

And then as soon as they saw it, it dissipated and cleared.

Therefore, there are two wounds, not only one: a hopeful beginning, and then a crushing end. In the case of a warning, there is only one wound. Consider the Words of the True Lord *the Exalted*: '… and if they beg for water, they will be given water …' (*al-Kahf:* 29). When you hear 'they will be given water', you expect that there will be relief, but then the full answer is given: '… they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces …' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: '… and if you turn away, then know that you can never elude God! And unto those who are bent on denying the truth give you [O, Prophet] the tiding of grievous chastisement.' (*at-Tawba:* 3) Sometimes Allah's chastisement is described as being 'severe', other times as 'humiliating' and other times as 'grievous'. This is due to the attribute differing according to the attributes of those who are being chastised, and He will give every sinner and disbeliever the punishment which is most appropriate for them: there are men who can withstand punishment, but cannot withstand being humiliated, and there are others who can withstand humiliation, but cannot withstand grievous pain. It is as though everyone will be given the chastisement which will affect them the most; if nothing but severe chastisement affects them, they will be given it; if nothing but humiliation affects them, they will be given it, and if nothing but grievous pain affects them, they will be given it. Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ عَٰهَدتُّم مِّنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمۡ يَنقُصُوكُمۡ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَمۡ يُظَٰهِرُواْ
عَلَيۡكُمۡ أَحَدٗا فَأَتِمُّوٓاْ إِلَيۡهِمۡ عَهۡدَهُمۡ إِلَىٰ مُدَّتِهِمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ ٤

As for those who have honored the treaty you made
with them and who have not supported anyone against
you: fulfil your agreement with them to the end of their
term. God loves those who are mindful of Him [4]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 4)

This is an exception, but it is an exception on the condition that these people were faithful to the covenant they made and held to it, contravening no part of it. This means that they did not block your trade, seize any booty from you or steal your weapons, along with none of them trying to turn others against you or aid others against you. These were the tribes of Banu-Damrah and Banu-Kinanah, who did nothing against the believers, and therefore, the commandment came to hold to the pact made with them as long as it lasted. Someone might say, ‘An exception means that there must be people from whom the exception is made.’ We say that the people from whom the exception was made were the idolaters (those who ascribed divinity to aught besides Allah) of whom the True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘But excepted shall be – from among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah– [people] with whom you [O, believers] have made a covenant and who thereafter have in no wise failed to fulfil their obligations towards you, and neither have aided anyone against you …’ (*at-Tawba:* 4).

The word *inqas* which translates in this verse ‘to fail to fulfil one’s obligation’, literally means ‘to decrease the amount of something’ and can be applied both to human beings and human assets. When it is applied to human beings, it means ‘to kill’, and when it is applied to human assets, it means to forcibly seize goods, livestock or weapons.

Therefore, there are two levels of *inqas*: one concerns human beings, i.e. to kill, and one concerns human assets, i.e. possessions. Thus, He says, ‘…and who thereafter have in no wise failed to fulfil their obligations towards you …’ (*at-Tawba:* 4) in any way at all, whether regarding human beings or human assets, and also they did not try to turn anyone against you nor encourage anyone to work against the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘… and neither have aided anyone against you …’ (*at-Tawba:* 4).

To ‘aid', or *yuzhahir*, in this verse means ‘to assist’ and is derived from the word *zhahr* which means ‘back’, and the back can carry more than the hand. For example, a man cannot carry a sack of wheat in his hand, but he can carry it on his back. Therefore, the popular Egyptian saying goes: ‘If someone has your back, you shall not be hit on the belly.’ Thus, the back symbolises assistance. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘… But [now] we have given strength against their foes unto those who have [truly] attained to faith, and they have become the ones that shall prevail (*zhahirin*).’ (*as-Saff:* 14). This means that they shall be ascendant.

When Allah *Glorified is He* tells us the story of how two of the Prophet's wives contrived against him, He says: '… And if you uphold (*tazahara*) each other against him [who is Allah's message-bearer, know that] Allah Himself is his Protector, and [that,] therefore, Jibril (Gabriel) and all the righteous among the believers, and all the [other] angels will come to his aid (*zhahir*).' (*at-Tahrim:* 4). Thus, the word *zhahir* in this noble verse means 'aid', and the True Lord *the Most High* is alluding here to man's area of strength. Therefore, it is said, 'So-and-so backs me up', which means he aids me with his strength. Furthermore, in Arabic, the verb *zhahara* can mean 'to defeat', and it can be said that so-and-so 'overcame the other's back' which means that he overcame his strength. Thus, we find that when Allah *the Exalted* spoke about Dhu Al-Qarnayn in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, He mentioned some events in his life by saying: 'And he marched on] till, when he reached [a place] between the two mountain-barriers, he found beneath them a people who could scarcely understand a word [of his language]. They said, "O, you two-Horned One! Behold, Gog and Magog are spoiling this land. May we and then pay unto you a tribute on the understanding that you will erect a barrier between us and them?" He answered, 'That wherein my Lord has so securely established me is better [than anything that you could give me]. Hence, do but help me with [your labour's] strength, [and] I shall erect a rampart (*radm*) between you and them!"' (*al-Kahf:* 93-95)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to a scientific fact which we only came to know recently. If a dam is entirely made of hard material, it will be in risk of collapsing if it is struck by a tremor which affects all sides of it. However, if there is a hard layer on the outside and then another small layer in the middle, and a third and a fourth layer, each layer separated from the other by a soft layer (*radm*) of soil, these soft layers will absorb the force of the impact. The same principle is behind the sponge in which we wrap things that we fear might break in order to protect them. If we placed these fragile objects in a box made of wood, steel or any other hard material, the contents would break as soon as the box was placed firmly on the ground. However, if we wrap the fragile objects in sponge, the sponge will absorb the impacts. The kinds of dams which can handle impacts are called rubble-filled dams.

Therefore, we can note that the True Lord *the Most High* says: '… do but help me with [your labour's] strength …' (*al-Kahf:* 95). This shows us that the strong must aid the weak in a way which will mean he does not have to seek his aid again thereafter. Therefore, it is said: Do not give a hungry man a fish but teach him how to catch fish so that he will rely on himself from then on. This is the right way to give assistance. Thus, we find that Dhu Al-Qarnayn refused to take any payment for building the rampart since the mission of strong people on earth who possess the power of faith is to ward off evil without taking any payment so that the balance of life will be restored; the weak might not be in a position to repay them. Also, if any strong person wanted payment for succouring the weak, the balance of life would be disturbed, and people would become tyrannous. However, in our world, the strong people may seek to use their power to do evil, and therefore, the balance of the world in which we live will be disturbed. Let us then consider the decision which Allah entrusted to Dhu Al-Qarnayn, how he ruled the people well and established justice amongst them and how he dealt with the evildoers. The Noble Quran tells us that Dhu Al-Qarnayn said: 'as for him who does wrong [unto others] – him shall we, in time, cause to suffer, and thereupon he shall be referred to his Lord, and He will cause him to suffer with unnameable suffering. But as for him who believes and does righteous deeds, he will have the ultimate good [of the life to come] as his reward …' (*al-Kahf:* 87-88).

Thus, Dhu al-Qarnayn established justice by chastising evildoers and honouring believers and doers of righteous deeds.

The Words which Allah *Glorified is He* tells us Dhu Al-Qarnayn uttered were 'help me' which teach us how to maintain justice on the earth. If the one to whom Allah has given means wants to help the weak, he must include them in his actions, not work, whilst they look on, otherwise, they will become used to laziness, and their determination will be spoiled. On the other hand, if he makes them work with him, they will do the work and then become adept at it, so their skills and their ability to face life with strength will increase. Therefore, we find that Dhu Al-Qarnayn had the weak ones work alongside him and said to them, 'Bring me ingots of iron!' (*al-Kahf:* 96). Therefore, he had them work and build with him, and this is the duty of a strong person regarding the strength which Allah *the Exalted* gives him. Indeed, we find that he communicated with them even though the True Lord *the Exalted* says the following about them: '… a people who could scarcely understand a word.' (*al-Kahf:* 93)

So, how did he communicate with them? Perhaps he used sign language and tried to make them understood what he meant. The Quran indicates that they understood him when Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that they said: '… O, you Two-Horned One! Behold, Gog and Magog are spoiling this land. May we, then pay you a tribute on the understanding that you will erect a barrier between us and them?' (*al-Kahf:* 94)

The barrier was built with the aid of these weak people, and this barrier was built in a way that challenged the power of the enmity of Gog and Magog; each of them attempted to scale the barrier and pass over it, but it was beyond the ability of either one of them to get past it. Allah *Glorified is He* makes this clear to us when He says: 'And thus [the rampart was built, and] their enemies were unable to scale it, and neither were they able to pierce it.' (*al-Kahf:* 97)

Therefore, the True Lord's Words '…and neither has aided anyone against you. Observe, then, your covenant with them until the end of the term agreed with them …' (*at-Tawba:* 4) mean that they have not aided or abetted any of your enemies to overcome you. Also Allah's allowing the covenant to be completed to the end of its term means that the term must have been longer than four months. Thus, He *the Almighty* shows us the magnificence of His justice: He allowed those whose pact would have lasted less than four months to have a four-month respite. Furthermore, since the True Lord *the Most High* does not love to see covenants broken, He instructed the believers to give the idolaters, who had made covenants with them, the full duration of theirs, even if it was due to last more than four months, so that a believer would know that he must adhere to covenants as long as the other party respects them. The increased period of time here, or the increased respite, was a product of the Power and Might of Allah *Glorified is He* for no one on the earth can escape Him; so whether the period was long or short, it would not give the idolaters any special advantage, and Allah could take them to task at any time or place.

Allah *Glorified is He* ends this verse by saying: '…Verily, Allah loves those who are conscious of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 4)

Allah-conscious, or *muttaqun*, is those who place a barrier, or *wiqaya* between themselves and anything which angers Him. If some people are astonished that Allah would say, ‘Be conscious of Allah’ and also ‘Be conscious of the fire’, we say, ‘Be conscious of Allah’ means to place a barrier between yourselves and Allah's attributes of Might; be conscious of Allah's attributes of Might so that you are not afflicted with His chastisement. Allah has attributes of Majesty such as the Lord of Retribution, the All-Compeller and the All-Dominant, and He has attributes of Beauty such as the Dispenser of Mercy, the All-Giver, the All-Provider and the Superb Arbiter; so place a barrier and a means of protection between yourselves and Allah's attributes of Majesty lest you incur Allah's Wrath. A man can protect himself from Allah's attributes of Majesty by following His Way and obeying His Commandments, thus attaining the gifts of the attributes of Beauty. Also, when the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Be conscious of the fire’, this means place a barrier between yourselves and hell so that the fire does not touch you.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا ٱنسَلَخَ ٱلۡأَشۡهُرُ ٱلۡحُرُمُ فَٱقۡتُلُواْ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ حَيۡثُ وَجَدتُّمُوهُمۡ وَخُذُوهُمۡ
وَٱحۡصُرُوهُمۡ وَٱقۡعُدُواْ لَهُمۡ كُلَّ مَرۡصَدٖۚ فَإِن تَابُواْ وَأَقَامُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَوُاْ
ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ فَخَلُّواْ سَبِيلَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٥

When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you encounter the idolaters, kill them, seize them, besiege them, wait for them at every lookout post; but if they turn [to God], maintain the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, let them go on their way, for God is most forgiving and merciful [5] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 5)

The word (*insalakha* means ‘to end’, which basically means ‘when the sacred months come to an end'. The root of this verb *s-l-kh* means to remove something which is stuck to something else; the verb *salakha* means ‘to skin’, or, in other words, to remove the skin of a slaughtered animal such as a sheep from its flesh; also, the skin is always firmly attached to the flesh. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that the sacred months are a period of time, and time is a container – people are contained within time and space

– so it is as though the sacred months surround them as a protection for them from disbelievers, and once the sacred months are over this protection will be removed from them after it had been firmly attached to them. The verb *insalakha* has two meanings: it can mean 'to be removed' from something (*insalakha 'an*), or it can mean 'to remove oneself' from something (*insalakha min*). Therefore, we find in the Noble Quran that the True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'And tell them the tiding of him to whom We vouchsafed Our messages and who then discarded them (*insalakha minha*) …' (*al-A'raf:* 175).

This noble verse was revealed about Ibn Ba'ura', to whom Allah gave knowledge, wisdom and messages, but he treated them lightly and discarded them; it is as though he was the one who removed himself from them willingly, and it was not they that were removed from him. Therefore, he was in a similar position to that of the sheep from which we remove the skin.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And [of our sway over all that exists] they have a sign in the night: We withdraw (*naslakhu*) from it the [light of] day …' (*Ya Sin:* 37). It is as though the night is like a slaughtered animal, and then the day comes and not only strips away the darkness, but removes it along with bringing light. It is as though the night is a dark garment which is covered with the white garment of day, and when the time for night comes, the white garment is pulled back, or the light is stripped from the dark of night so that the world becomes filled with the darkness of night. It is as though the light intrudes upon the darkness and covers it with whiteness, or in other words,, the light is what comes and goes, whilst the darkness is always there; when the light of the sun comes it becomes day, and when it is taken away, it becomes night.

Also, what would happen when the sacred months were over? The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And so, when the sacred months are over, slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah wherever you may come upon them, take them captive, besiege them and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place …' (*at-Tawba:* 5).

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that, after the idolaters were given a four month respite and those whose pacts would last longer than that were given until the end of them, the punishment of the idolater would then be death. Why is this? The reason is that there could not be two religions in that one place

Someone might say, ‘What about religious freedom?’ We say that there is a difference between the environment in which the Quran was revealed in the language of its inhabitants (to a messenger from their own selves whom they knew well including all about his history and past) and an environment which has its own rules concerning how revelation comes. These were the ones in whose land the Quran was revealed and to one of whose own people the message was given, and he was known by them to be faithful; they recognised his honesty and trustworthiness, and they would trust him with any of the valuable treasures they possessed. All of this was a prelude to the coming of the message, and this prelude was enough that if he said to them, ‘I am the Prophet’, they should not have disbelieved him, for if he had never told a lie to any of them in the forty years he had lived amongst them, would he tell a lie about Allah? Would the one who never lies about men lie about Allah? This notion is illogical and irrational. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘… a Prophet from among yourselves …’ (*at-Tawba:* 128). What this means is that he is not a stranger to you, and you know him well to the point that you would even trust him with the most valuable of your possessions. Furthermore, you knew him as ‘The Trustworthy One’ in all of your worldly affairs. So, how could the trustworthy one lie to you? Moreover, the Noble Quran which was the miracle of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was revealed in your own language and its rhetorical style is the same kind as that in which you most excel. It was therefore an unanswerable miracle for you, and Allah challenged you to bring forth a chapter like it, yet you were unable to do so, even though you are the kings of rhetoric and eloquence. Therefore, the twin unanswerable miracles of the Messenger’s honesty and trustworthiness and the Quran’s miraculous rhetoric meant that you had to believe, and for you not to believe in such a situation is a grave sin, deserving of a stern punishment.

Thus, if someone asks, 'Is there religious freedom?' Is there implementation of the True Lord’s Words ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith …’ (*al-Baqara:* 256)? We say that, indeed, no one must be compelled to believe in Allah and in His religion, but as long as you have believed, you must do what this belief demands of you; as to whether you are thinking of accepting the religion or not, you are free to choose to believe in Allah or not. However, if you believe, we must expect of you full adherence to this belief.

Moreover, the True Lord *the Most High* willed that there should not be two religions on the Arabian Peninsula. As for other lands, such as Persia and Byzantium, they could not appreciate the miraculous nature of the language of the Noble Quran, but they could hear the lofty teachings, which it imparted in the form of effective laws that gave life order and raised it to a higher level.

As for those who knew the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the eloquence of the miracle which he brought, it was not acceptable for them not to enter Islam, nor was it acceptable for them to remain in the land of the message without submitting to it; if they wanted to continue with their idolatry, they would have to move far away from this land.

There are those who say that ‘Islam spread by the sword’ or ‘by the non-Muslim poll tax (*jizya*)'. We say that Islam spread because of the sound role-model it embodied; as for the sword, it was used to defend the people’s right to choose their beliefs in the lands which Islam entered by conquest. Furthermore, the purpose of the non-Muslim poll tax was to protect those who wanted to remain in their old religion.

We find in our daily lives people who take ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith’ (*al-Baqara:* 256) out of its proper context. When a Muslim says to another, ‘Why do you not pray?’, he replies to him by saying, ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith.’ (*al-Baqara:* 256) We say: ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith’ (*al-Baqara:* 256) is concerned with the peak of faith, namely whether you wish to profess yourself a Muslim or not. However, once you have professed your faith and become one of the Muslims, you must adhere to what the religion has made incumbent upon you; so you cannot drink wine or commit adultery.

So, ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith’ (*al-Baqara:* 256) means that no one should be compelled to embrace Islam, but once someone has embraced it, they must be diligent in adhering to all of the religion’s requirements.

Therefore, why were the Arabs compelled to enter Islam? It is said that there were two reasons for this: the first is that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was one of them, and the second is that the miracle was in their language.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues His words: '…Take them captive and besiege them …' (*at-Tawba:* 5). If it is too much for you to slay them, then take them captives; however, as long as they do not defend themselves by fighting you or threaten your lives, their blood should be spared, and they should be benefited from as captives. Likewise, if you fear their evil, then besiege them in a well-guarded place so that if they attempt any act of aggression, it will be easy for you to expose it and chastise them for it. To 'besiege' in this verse means to restrict their movement whilst allowing them a certain amount of it so that they never escape your sight.

Allah *the Exalted* then continues: '…and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place…' (*at-Tawba:* 5). What this means is watch their movements so that you are protected from their plots and so that they cannot get to one another and band together in aggression against Islam. Observe their movements, their speech and their actions; do not let them out of your sight and do whatever you can to be safe from their evil. However, do not observe them to such a point that you humiliate them, for to examine is not to humiliate.

Someone might ask: 'What is the reason for this difference in punishment, being slained, besieged or observed closely in streets and alleys?' We say that the punishments differed according to the different attitudes of the idolaters in the enmity they showed towards Islam. There were the leaders of disbelief who waged war against this religion and called the people to refrain from believing in it. Likewise, they strove to fight the believers, kill and hurt them; also, they would never be rectified and would never cease trying to hurt the believers, so they had to be requited with death.

There were also those who did not harm the Muslims but only publicly proclaimed their enmity to the message; these were less dangerous, so they were taken prisoners. Then there were the disbelievers who were guilty of nothing but refusing to be believers; as for these ones, their movements were observed to protect the believers from their evil, and so that the believers would always be ready to face them if they decided to harm, attack or fight the Muslims.

So, there was not one single punishment to deal with everyone since they were not all alike in the scale of their enmity towards Islam. There was one ruling for the leaders of disbelief and another ruling for those whose enmity towards Islam was less severe. Then comes the Mercy of Allah, for He is merciful to His servants and never makes them despair of the possibility of returning to Him. He says: '… Yet if they repent, take to prayer and render the purifying dues, let them go their way, for, behold. Allah is Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy.' (*at-Tawba:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* opens the door of repentance to His servants always, never closing it upon them. Therefore, Abu Hamza Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* the servant of the Prophet narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah rejoices at His servant's repentance more than one of you does when he finds his camel after having lost it in a barren land.'(1)

For example, you are travelling in a barren desert very far from any settlement, and then you sit to take a rest along with the camel you are travelling on, loaded with your water and food and all your provisions. Then, you lose track of the camel, and it strays into the middle of the desert, and you cannot find it when you look. Suddenly, as you are stumbling along blindly you come across the camel there before you. How happy would you be? Doubtlessly, you would be exceedingly joyful having found the only thing which could save you from certain death, and this joy would completely fill your soul and overwhelm it. This is the joy of Allah at His servant's repentance. Therefore, He *the Exalted* clarifies that if these idolaters repent of their enmity to Allah's religion and His Messenger, take to prayer and render poor-dues, the Muslims must leave them alone and give them their freedom.

Therefore, we find three conditions: the first is repentance and the return to faith, the second is to take to prayer and the third is to render poor-dues. All three of these must be fulfilled; for to repent of disbelief is to embrace faith, and to embrace faith is to testify that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Prophet, and then to take to prayer, render poor-dues, fast the month of Ramadan and perform the pilgrimage, if one is able.

If you consider the Five Pillars of Islam, you find that a Muslim might perform some of them but not others. For example, the poor Muslim who possesses nothing but the bare necessities of life is not obligated to pay poor-dues nor perform pilgrimage, and the Muslim who is seriously ill is not obligated to fast. Thus, there remains the testimony that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Prophet, which a Muslim is only legally obligated to say once in his life, along with the pillar of prayer which is never excused, whether in poverty or riches, or in health or sickness. This is due the prayer being the difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, and it is the fortress of the whole religion since it is offered and repeated five times every day. So, an ill person must pray in sickness as well as when he is able; if he cannot perform it standing, he may sit, and if he cannot perform it sitting, he may lie down.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

We know that every prayer incorporates all the other Pillars of Islam, for in every prayer you testify that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Prophet. In essense, every prayer contains a kind of poor-due since the poor-due is giving money to the poor, and money comes from work, and work requires time, and the prayer takes up some of the time which you could otherwise use to work and earn provisions, which you could give as poor-due; therefore, it is as though when you pray, you give some of your wealth to Allah *the Most High* since you take the time in which you otherwise could have worked and earned money to pay to the poor. Thus, it is as though to pray means to give up one’s time as poor-due.

Time is what we require in order to work and earn money, so prayer is a kind of poor-due. After this, comes fasting. When you fast, you refrain from the desires of the stomach and the desires of the libido from just before dawn until sunset. Likewise, during prayer, you cannot eat, so it is as though you have to fast from the desire of the stomach whilst you pray, and similarly, you must fast from the desires of the libido since you cannot pray or do anything with your spouse at the same time. Indeed, when praying, you must abstain from even more things than when fasting, since you are prohibited from moving or speaking.

Then, we come to the pilgrimage to Allah's Inviolable House. We say that when you pray, you must face Allah's Inviolable House and determine the prayer-direction (*Qibla*); so it is as though Allah's House is on your mind and in your thoughts when you face it during every prayer. Thus, we see that prayer combines all the Pillars of Islam, and therefore, our master ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Prayer is the fortress of the religion.(1) If prayer is the fortress of the religion as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stated, then whoever performs it has performed the whole religion. One of the amazing aspects of the arrangement of the Quran’s verses is that you find that prayer is always linked to poor-due since to pay poor-due is to offer money whilst performing prayer is to offer time, and we need time in order to work and earn money.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘… Yet if they repent, take to prayer and render the purifying dues, let them go their way …’ (*at-Tawba:* 5). This implies that if they do not fulfil these three things, they must not be allowed to go their way; furthermore, as long as we do not allow them to go their way, they are included in the punishments which Allah specified when He said ‘slay them’, ‘take them captive’, and ‘… besiege them. Lie in wait for them at every conceivable place …’ (*at-Tawba:* 5).

The first of the punishments specified in this verse is death which was reserved for the leaders of disbelief. If a disbeliever embraced faith but neglected to pray, it could not be said that he had repented and embraced faith, nor could this be said if he neglected to render poor-dues. Therefore, if they did not perform these three acts of worship, they would not be left alone; this is why some scholars have the opinion that the one who refuses to pray should be executed. However, we say that one should not be executed since he who refuses to pray either does so because he denies that it is obligatory and disparages it, or it could be due to him being too lazy to do it. If he has abandoned prayer due to laziness and cannot keep himself from worldly distractions, we must try to use wisdom and sound counsel to advise him and encourage him to go back to praying at proper times. Then after that if he abandons it wilfully out of laziness, he should be punished with a severe blow. However, some scholars say that Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* fought against those who apostatised and refused to pay poor-dues. We say to them that he did not fight them because they were sinners, rather, he fought them due to their denying Allah's Law along with the obligation of poor-due, and thereby they had become apostates. There is a difference between those who deny Allah's Law and repudiate it and those who acknowledge Allah's Law and admit that although they believe in this law, they are unable to obey it, or those who confess that their observance of it is remiss. Therefore, we say to those who seek to defend usury and make it lawful. They may say, ‘It is forbidden, but we cannot control ourselves’ so that they do not thereby become disbelievers, for if they say that usury is not forbidden, they thereby disavow Allah's Law and take the position of disbelievers. However, if anyone of them were to say ‘Usury is forbidden, but my circumstances have forced me to indulge in it, and I cannot help it’, then he is only a sinner.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi*

As we have said, this is the difference between the sin of Satan (Iblis) and the sin of Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah commanded Satan (Iblis) to prostrate, and he disobeyed, and Allah commanded Adam *peace be upon him* and he also disobeyed. Therefore, why did Allah *the Almighty* condemn Satan (Iblis) to be cursed until the Day of Resurrection, whilst Adam *peace be upon him* received words of repentance from his Lord and thus repented, and He forgave him? We say that it is because Satan (Iblis) disavowed Allah's commandments by saying: ‘… Shall I prostrate myself before one whom You have created out of clay?...’ (*al-Isra’:* 61) Furthermore, he said, ‘…I am better than he. You have created me out of fire, whereas him You have created out of clay.’ (*Sad:* 76)

It is, therefore, as though Satan (Iblis) disavowed Allah's ruling. Adam *peace be upon him* however, did not say anything of the kind, rather, he said, ‘Your ruling is correct, Lord, and what you commanded me to do was right. However, I could not help myself, and I sinned. So turn to me in forgiveness and pardon me!’ Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘The two replied: "… O, our Lord! We have sinned against ourselves – and unless You grant us forgiveness and bestow Your Mercy upon us, we shall most certainly be lost!’ (*al-A’raf:* 23)

This is the difference between sin and disbelief. So, if the idolaters did not repent, take to prayer or render poor-dues, and Muslims were unable to deal with them, what should they do? Muslims must try to apply what Allah *the Exalted* commanded them to do about them.

However, what about the case if an idolater sought the protection of the Muslims? The True Lord *the Exalted* says:

وَإِنۡ أَحَدٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ٱسۡتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرۡهُ حَتَّىٰ يَسۡمَعَ كَلَٰمَ
ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبۡلِغۡهُ مَأۡمَنَهُۥۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ قَوۡمٞ لَّا يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٦﴾

If any one of the idolaters should seek your protection [Prophet], grant it to him so that he may hear the word of God, then take him to a place safe for him, for they are people with no knowledge [of it] [6] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 6)

Allah *Glorified is He* previously specified the period of respite which was either the sacred months or the duration of the pact, if there had been one. Also, He affirmed that if idolaters repented, took to prayer and rendered poor-dues, along with confirming their faith with action, the True Lord *the Most High* would forgive them for all they had done. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* showed the greatness of Islam and the mercy which this religion brought with it by telling us that for disbelievers who did not repent and remained as they were, and we were not able to punish them in any of the prescribed ways, and then one of them came to the believers seeking protection – what should we do with him? Allah's verdict was that as long as he seeks your protection, give it to him. Furthermore, if you give him protection, then let him hear the Word of Allah and try to guide him to faith and the straight path; if he embraces faith and is convinced and proclaims his Islam, he will become one of the Muslims, and if he does not listen to the Word of Allah and is not convinced, then do not kill him. Rather take him to his secure place, or in other words, ask him where he came from. If he tells you the name of his tribe or the place where he comes from, make sure that he has safe passage to whatever place he can feel secure. This is the final stage of the relationship of faith with disbelief, the stage of protection and security for those who seek the believers’ protection.

Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed graces upon mankind on the earth by sending to them His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which occurred a long period after the time of the messengers who preceded him. The people had forgotten the way to Heaven, and even the people of the Book had corrupted the teachings which had been revealed to them.

It was therefore necessary for Heaven to intervene by sending the Seal of Prophets and Messengers, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for the True Lord *Glorified is He* has placed various preventative measures within faith which reside first of all in the soul. When a soul inclines to sin, the faithful conscience diverts it from this sin, and this person repents and returns to Allah by his own accord and his own faithful conscience – this is the ‘self-reproaching soul'. The existence of reproach in the soul means that there is still faith in it, and this faith is what holds back passion and prevents the soul from becoming accustomed to sin, along with returning the individual to the right track and the straight path.

However, suppose that a soul becomes so attracted to contravening Allah's Way that it no longer reproaches itself; it keeps sinning until it is accustomed to sin, and the faithful reserve within it dies so that we find it begins to love – Allah forbid- to contravene the way of the religion. It thereby becomes the ‘soul which enjoins evil’, and at this point, Allah transfers the preventative measure of faith from this individual soul to the people who live around it so that those who live around this sinner divert him from sin and take a faithful stance with him by preventing him and ostracising him until he comes to his senses and returns to his Lord. This is the second stage of faith. When the whole society is corrupted and there is no longer a sector which enjoins what is good and forbids what is evil, Heaven must intervene by sending a new message with a new messenger aided by a miracle from Heaven to wake people up from this deep state of heedlessness, which has overcome both individuals and societies.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came and confronted his society in which disbelief had spread throughout individuals and communities, there would inevitably be a conflict between faith and the disbelieving society. This is why the Prophet was met with such vehement enmity. Also, this opposition to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only came from those who benefited from the existence of corruption on earth, namely the rulers who benefited from the abandonment of truth and the spread of falsehood, seizing the rights of others and enslaving the people by using them to bring benefit and success to themselves, while withholding this from the rest of Allah's servants.

Those who benefit from corruption hate any reformer who comes to re-establish the balance of life's motions, so they will inevitably try to stand in his way to protect their positions of power, their benefits and their wealth, which they gained through falsehood and oppression, along with enslaving people. At this point in time, the Arabian Peninsula was composed of several tribes, each tribe having its own laws which its leader decreed, in order to bring himself personal benefit from everything.

This means that there was no link which connected these tribes to one another, and no general law to govern them; every tribe had its own battles, disputes and wars. Every tribal member had to be a warrior, carrying his weapon and being in a constant state of readiness for war at any moment since he was always threatened with the possibility that another tribe would turn against it. This was true of every tribe except one: Quraysh. They were the leaders, and no tribe would transgress against them or raid their caravans. Furthermore, no tribe in the north or south was able to attack their trade, for all of these tribes would one day have to come to the pilgrimage at Allah's Inviolable House in Mecca, and during the pilgrimage, all of these tribes would need protection from the Quraysh. Therefore, all the Arab tribes tried their utmost to keep good relations with the Quraysh since the control of Allah's Inviolable House which Allah had assigned to the Quraysh was their source of their assured security. Allah *Glorified is He* had undertaken to protect the Inviolable House against any aggression; even when Abraha came with his elephants to destroy the *Ka'ba,* Allah made him and his army like a field of grain eaten down to stubble, as the True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'Are you not aware of how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not utterly confound their artful planning? Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying creatures, which smote them with stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained and caused them to become like a field of grain that has been eaten down to stubble.' (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

If you read the chapter which comes directly after the chapter of *al-Fil*, you find that it says: 'So, that the Quraysh might remain secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys, let them, therefore, worship the Lord of this House Who has given them food against hunger and made them safe from danger. ' (*Quraysh:* 1-4) It is as though the protection of the *Ka'ba* from destruction was also protection from Allah *the Almighty* for the ruling status of the Quraysh. Therefore, it was incumbent upon the Quraysh to receive the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with faith and gratitude, along with an understanding and appreciation of this favour, instead of taking a stubborn stance against Islam and waging this vicious war against it. Instead of this, the opposite was the case: the Quraysh incorrectly imagined that Islam had only come to take their power, so they waged war against it.

If this was the case, why was the call to Islam not made far away from this power? It was due to the True Lord *the Most High* wanting the call of truth to be made right in the face of the tyranny of falsehood, and for Islam from its earliest days to confront the tyranny of all the leaders of the Arabian Peninsula, so that Allah could test the hearts of the early Muslims, for they would be the ones who later on would bear the message of Islam to the world. Therefore, no hypocrite or weak-faith people entered Islam at that time; rather only those who had true faith in their hearts and who could withstand all the manifestations of oppression and torture with the strength of their faith.

The True Lord *the Exalted* willed that Islam begin in Mecca, yet He did not give it succour from Mecca; rather, He *the Exalted* willed that the succour for Islam came from Medina. Had the Quraysh given succour to the call made by one of their own, they would have tried to keep it for themselves to rule the world by means of it, and thereupon, it would have been said that they only supported one of their own in order to retain their temporal power, and their embrace of Islam would have been hypocritical, not real. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* gave Islam succour from Medina so that everyone would know that tribal allegiance to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not create the belief in the his message of Muhammad. Rather, it was belief in the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which created allegiance to him. Therefore, Allah *the Most High* willed that there be a fierce confrontation between the bearers of faith and the leaders of disbelief, and this confrontation had several stages:

The first stage was the call to faith, the call to love and the call to equality, along with the refusal to meet torture and murder with any violent response. This beginning did not impress the leaders of the Quraysh; instead, it made them belittle the believers and harm and torture them even more severely, thinking that they would exterminate them completely. Thus, when they found that the call was becoming stronger, despite all the forms of torture and oppression which were directed against it, they began to repress the believers even more. So, some of the believers emigrated to Abyssinia and began to look for someone to protect and give them asylum. The True Lord *the Exalted* willed all this so that Islam would only be embraced by those whose hearts were filled with love for it and those who thought nothing of all the difficulties, persecution, murder and torture; these were the ones who would prove worthy to be trusted with the role of bearing the message to others. After this, the state of disbelief remained as it was, whilst faith began to gradually draw more people to it, and the disbelievers tried to attract the believers using cunning tricks after their power, force and terrorism had failed, so they said, ‘We shall worship your God for a while, and then you shall worship our gods for a while.’ So Allah *the Exalted* sent down a chapter which contained what they would call today a ‘suspension of relations’. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Say: "O, you who deny the truth! ‘I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship! [And I will not worship that which you have [ever] worshipped, and neither will you [ever] worship that which I worship. Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine!’ (*al-Kafirun:* 1-6)

This was an announcement of a second stage, which was characterised by a complete absence of any amity or intermixing between disbelief and faith, for had the believers agreed to worship the gods of disbelief, this would amount to an admission that these gods were real. Furthermore, had they agreed to worship One God and then associate Him with other gods, this would be a capitulation, and this could never happen. The negation in this noble verse referred to both the present and the future; in international politics this is called a ‘suspension of (diplomatic) relations’. Indeed, the suspension of international relations might be done temporarily for a contingent reason, whilst the difference between the early Muslims and the idolaters was not a conflict between two human ideas, rather, it was a conflict between the Way of Guidance willed by Heaven for the inhabitants of the earth on one side, and those who benefited from the corruption on earth on the other. Therefore, the separation had to be permanent, and there could be no amity or intermixing between disbelief and faith. Therefore, the plots of the disbelievers to dilute and undermine the religion failed, and their scheme came to nothing. Furthermore, faith continued to be strong and united in the face of the tyranny of disbelief after it had been threatened by it.

After this came the third stage: the stage when the forces of disbelief acknowledged the power of faith. The disbelievers had been meting out oppression and torment to the believers, and the believers had met this with patience and forbearance; this continued until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated to Medina, and the first armed encounter between faith and disbelief took place at the battle of Badr. The believers were victorious and attained a reputation which protected them so that they were no longer the weak and oppressed minority; rather, they came to have a position of strength and potency.

Although they did not yet have ascendancy, they became powerful enough to confront the disbelievers, or became just as powerful as they were so that they could prevent their acts of aggression and meet their blows with blows of their own.

When the faithful came to have this power and potency to protect themselves and became equally matched with the disbelievers, this was the beginning of the stage which gave Islam breathing space to spread the call outside of the influence of Mecca, and the Muslims could spread their message safe from the aggression and oppression of the disbelievers after the treaty of Hudaybiyya was made. The very signing and ratifying of this treaty was an acknowledgement of the existence of the Islamic state which is something that our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* realised, whilst others at first thought that the treaty of Hudaybiyya was a violation of the rights of the believers, so much to the point that ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Why do we yield in such a lowly manner against the honour of our religion?’

This issue caused great debate which almost arrived to the point where the believers went against the commandment of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, when Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her* saw that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* feared that the believers would not obey what he had commanded them to do, and she saw the great sadness on his face. She said, ‘O, Messenger of Allah, grieve not. The people are but saddened, for they had hopes of circumambulating the Sacred House, and here they are, so near the House but denied the right to circumambulate therein. The best thing to do now is not to speak to any of them, but to do as your Lord has commanded you, for if you do so, they will know that the matter is a firm one which cannot be left undone.’ This is exactly what happened; the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sacrificed his offering and ended his ritual state of consecration, and the Muslims did the same. Likewise, before the believers had returned to Medina, it was Allah's Will to show them the reason why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had accepted the treaty of Hudaybiyya even though it apparently seemed to be a loss for the Muslims, but in reality, it was not.

The treaty stipulated that if anyone fled from Quraysh and went to Medina, they would return him to Mecca, whilst if any Muslim apostatised and fled back to the disbelievers of Mecca, they would not have to bring him back. Some people thought that this was unfair and unequal, and the situation was very delicate. Also, when Suhayl ibn ‘Amr came to negotiate the truce, and ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was writing, as the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* dictated to him, ‘This is what Muhammad, the Prophet, and Suhayl ibn ‘Amr have agreed…’. Suhayl objected and said, ‘If we believed you were the Prophet, we would not be fighting like this. Instead, write: "This is what Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah and Suhayl ibn ‘Amr have agreed."' ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* objected to this and said, ‘No, I will write: "This is what Muhammad, the Prophet, and Suhayl ibn ‘Amr have agreed …’" Suhayl refused to assent to this. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to put an end to this, so he said, 'O, ‘’Ali, write it, for you will experience the very same thing and assent to it, though you be wronged thereby.' What this means is that the same thing will happen to you one day which you are now refusing, and you will accept it on that day. This was one of the signs of prophethood, for indeed ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* did experience the same thing when the treaty of Siffin was made, and he wanted to write, ‘This is what ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb, Commander of the Faithful, agrees…’ and they said to him, ‘If you were the Commander of the Faithful, we would not be waging war against you. Write: "This is what ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb agrees."’ ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* then remembered that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said, 'Write it, for you will experience the very same thing and assent to it, though you be wronged thereby.'

Since the True Lord *the Most High* did not want the Muslims to enter Medina without first their souls being purified, without their sensing it, from thinking that they had lost and the others had won. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* sent down His Words which took the bitterness from their souls and replaced it with peace and tranquillity: ‘[It was not for your enemies' sake that He stayed your hands from them, for] it was they who were bent on denying the truth, and who debarred you from the Inviolable House of Worship and prevented your offering from reaching its destination. And had it not been for the believing men and believing women [in Mecca], whom you might have unwittingly trampled underfoot, and on whose account you might have become guilty, without knowing it, of a grievous wrong – [had it not been for this, you would have been allowed to fight your way into the city, but you were forbidden to fight] so that [in time] Allah might admit to His grace whomever He wills. Had they [who deserve Our mercy and they whom We have condemned] been clearly discernible [to you], We would indeed have imposed grievous suffering [at your hands] on such of them as were bent on denying the truth.’ (*al-Fath:* 25)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* informed the believers the reason why He did not allow them to enter Mecca: there were many believers, men and women, therein who were concealing their faith, and there was no way of distinguishing them since they were intermixed with the idolaters, and they did not have a specific place where the believers could have recognised them and distinguished them from the others. Thus, they could not be allowed to be exposed to the fighting which would have taken place within Mecca. Had the fighting become severe, many believing men and women who resided in Mecca would have been killed by the believers themselves, and it is a terrible thing for a believer to slay a believer, whether man or woman.

Upon this, the Companions recognised the reason, which was to protect the lives of the believers. At the same time we find that the treaty of Hudaybiyya caused the call of Islam to spread throughout the whole Arabian

Peninsula, and some of the Companions considered it to be a true victory for the faith. From this came the famous saying: ‘There was never a victory for Islam greater than the victory of Hudaybiyya.’ However, not all of the people were able to understand the wisdom of what happened, and people are always too hasty, yet Allah does not speed up to meet the hasty ambitions of His servants, until the matter occurs as He wills it. Due to the call, Islam spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula, and the numbers of the Muslims increased greatly.

Therefore, the stages of faith began with the stage of torment and oppression, and then the stage where the idolaters tried to deceive the believers to bring an end to the religion, and then the third stage was that of treaties and pacts. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was faithful to his pact, but the Quraysh broke the pact by helping the tribe of Bakr, their allies, to attack the tribe of Khuza‘a, the allies of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, Bakr attacked the people of Khuza‘a and slew them as they prayed, and an envoy of Khuza‘a went to seek aid from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* therefore announced that the pact between him and the Quraysh was annulled because of how the Quraysh had violated it, and he assembled an army to conquer Mecca and cleanse the Sacred House of the idols. After Mecca was conquered in the eighth year after the Emigration, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to cleanse His House of the idolaters and announce that there would be no more intermixing of faith and disbelief.

Allah wanted to liberate the place, the land of the *Ka‘ba*, first, and then to liberate its inhabitants. So, the *Ka‘ba* had to be cleansed of all idols, and people had to be prevented from circumambulating naked in the Inviolable House, along with idolaters being prevented from living in the sacred heartland of Islam. In addition, before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made the pilgrimage, all relations were suspended, meaning that the pacts were annulled, but the tolerance of faith and Allah’s love for all His creation meant that He did not command His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to annul all the pacts immediately, or to instruct the believers to fight the idolaters and take them captives immediately; this was not the case. He gave them four months in which they might turn to Islam and repent to their Maker.

Allah *Glorified is He* made it clear to the disbelievers that this period would not aid them in their war against Islam since they can never evade Him on the earth. This means that their preparation, their plots or anything else they did in these four months would not outwit Allah. Once these four months were over, the disbelievers would be subject to requital either by death, besiegement, close monitoring or they would have to live their lives by wandering through the land, as long as they remained disbelievers; this was due to a verdict that had been issued from Allah stating that no idolaters can be allowed to reside on this sacred land.

In His mercy, the True Lord *the Exalted* wanted to leave the door open for the idolaters, so that they might return to His Way. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* said: ‘And if any of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah seeks your protection, grant him protection, so that he might [be able to] hear the Word of Allah [from you], and thereupon convey him to a place where he can feel secure. This, because they [may be] people who [sin only because they] do not know [the truth].’ (*at-Tawba:* 6).

If any of the idolaters were to seek protection from you after the four months were over, give it to them. Why does the Noble Quran do this? We reply that there is a refugee, and there is the action of seeking protection; is the refugee made known by his request, or is the request made known by him?

I say let us suppose one of the believers is sitting by the boundary near to an area where disbelievers reside and that he heard a voice saying, ‘I seek the protection of Muhammad and the believers.’ Later, a man who cried out for protection appeared before believers. Here, the request for protection was apparent before the one who made it. It was as though the ear was the first to be requested, and then the eye saw the body of the one making this request. Or the situation might be different, and the one seeking aid might appear first, and then cry out his plea for safety and protection. In this case the eye sees first, and then the ear hears the plea for protection second.

In these instances, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to alert us to the importance of determining whether the plea for protection is sincere or not, and this can only be done if the one who makes the plea first announces it, and then shows himself. A believer must be cautious so that the one seeking aid does not turn against him or trick him by feigning a request for protection.

To seek protection means to request security and refuge, and therefore generally the one who makes such a request will be weak and unable to protect himself. When a person seeks protection from another in such conditions, the one asked must be prudent and discern the true intentions of the one who makes the request: is he only seeking protection in order to remain in disbelief as long as possible? Or does he mean to learn the foundations of faith as presented in the Book of Allah? Or does he want to hear Allah's verdict concerning disbelievers in chapter *at-Tawba*, to hear the Word of Allah so that faith will be cast into his heart, to hear something about which he is seeking evidence or to hear what Allah says about something of which he is doubtful?

A believer's prudence must be prepared to closely scrutinise the situation of the one who seeks his protection. Seeking protection or sanctuary was well known to Arabs, and if someone sought the protection of his enemy, he was bound to give him protection, and this showed his gallantry. Furthermore, if faith obligated Muslims to give protection to those who sought it, this showed the strength of faith, its greatness and tolerance. Perhaps, it would cause the natural disposition of faith to awaken in disbelievers, so that they would seek knowledge of the basics of Islam.

A ruler, or indeed any Muslim, must give protection to those who seek it, and why would not we listen and speak to him. Perhaps, he might come to have faith and enter the circle of Islam. In Islam, either a ruler or any other Muslim may give protection to others, for the blood of all Muslims is equal, and there is not one blood for the master and another for the slave, nor one for the noble and another for the peasant; if the lowliest of them gives protection, it counts for all of them. Therefore, if any Muslim grants protection to a non-Muslim or a disbeliever, it is as though all the Muslims give him protection, even the pre-pubescent child and the insane man; each of these may give protection as long as the ruler and the Muslims agree to this. Why is this? This is so because we criticise disbelievers for breaking pacts and ignoring conventions of chivalry, so we believers must adhere to our pacts. If any disbeliever were to seek our protection, we must be sure to keep our promise.

However, how could a child or insane person have the right to give protection? We say that a believing child has benefited from Islam since he has been raised in an environment of faith in accordance with the Way of Allah and has grown up in the light of the True Lord’s Words: ‘And say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] a child!"’ (*al-Isra’:* 24) Indeed, Islam gives the upbringing of faith to a child even before he is conceived since it commands the father to choose a virtuous woman who will be a good mother, along with commanding the mother to choose a virtuous man who will be a good father. Islam serves a child before he is even born by requiring the father to choose a pious woman and the mother to choose a pious man, and it serves him after he is born by providing him with a sound Islamic upbringing. In this way, a child benefits from all of these Islamic values, and the one who conveyed unto us the way of Islam was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Islamic education was given to all of us, and therefore, we must all pay homage to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who taught us that the blood of all Muslims is alike and that if the lowliest of them gives protection, it counts for them all. Thus, if a child gives protection to a disbeliever who has come to hear Allah’s Word, this protection or security is accepted from him, for the child benefitted from an Islamic upbringing derived from the way of guidance which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he benefitted from his mother, who patiently endured her pregnancy along with the pains of childbirth. Were it not for the fact that Islam protects the human being when it is present in the womb, the woman would have been able to abort the child when the pregnancy became too difficult for her, or to throw the child away, but Islam protects the baby in its mother’s womb and protects it until the mother has finished breastfeeding it. The Muslim mother obeys all the rulings of Islam: ‘Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years.’ (*al-Baqara:* 233)

Islam respects a baby and supports it and requires its mother and father to give it a good name and a good upbringing. As we said, even before this baby existed in its mother’s womb, Islam protected it by commanding a man to choose a pious wife to be a good mother. Abu Hatim Al-Mazani narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘If there comes to you someone whose religion and character please you, then marry him (to your daughters); if you do not, there will be strife on earth and great corruption.' They said, 'O, Prophet Muhammad, even if he is so and so?' (That is, even if he is deficient in some worldly way.) He said, 'If there comes to you someone whose religion and character please you, then marry him (to your daughters).' He repeated it three times.(1)

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in another Hadith: 'Be victorious by choosing a religious one. May your hand be sullied (if you do otherwise)!' The full Hadith was related by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* who narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A woman is married for four reasons: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty and her religion. Be victorious by choosing the religious one. May your hand be sullied (if you do otherwise)!'(2)

Since Islam respects a child with all his rights, should not Muslims also respect him? It might be said that a child benefits from Islam, but an insane person has no reason and Allah *Glorified is He* and has even excused him from accountability. We say to consider an insane person in comparison to a sane person: the most a sane person can hope for is that his words are obeyed without anyone objecting him and that he might say what he wants without being held accountable. In contrast, an insane person always has this because no one will object to what he says and no one will account him for his actions – even Allah *Glorified is He* will not hold him to account on the Day of Resurrection.

An insane person has something which no sane person has, and his insanity is a means of protection and security for him: if he speaks the truth which might offend people of influence, he will not be punished for it, and the mere excuse of his insanity will be enough for him to be pardoned. Also, perhaps a single word of truth spoken by an insane person may be worth more to Allah *the Almighty* than those said by a sane people who spend his life being hypocritical, untruthful and doing things to incur Allah's Wrath.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nisa'i and Ibn Majah*

There is a purpose in life which an insane person might fulfil, but which the sane person cannot, for some people think that if Allah takes something from someone, this makes him less special than the others. The truth is the opposite since Allah’s justice will not let him go uncompensated. Therefore, one finds that if someone loses the use of his eyes, Allah *the Almighty* places the eyes of others at his service. People take his hand, lead him in the street and bring him food and drink and so on.

If a person is disabled, for example, one finds that someone helps this person, another gives him rides in his car and a taxi might stop for him and take him where he needs to go, whilst an able-bodied person spends hours looking for a taxi without finding one. Notably, if one were to look at a poor person, one might find that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed several wealthy people at his service: so-and-so ploughs and digs the earth and Allah gives him the finest crops to sell and donate his profit to the poor; another person manufactures, works and toils so that he can give part of his income to the poor, and indeed, he might toil even further in his search to find someone who is truly poor so that he can give him some of his wealth; the poor person truly deserves to take it, as long as he is not merely pretending to be poor.

As long as he has accepted Allah’s destiny for him to be poor and powerless, his Lord clarifies to him: 'You have accepted that I have made you powerless, so take from the power of the wealthy that which will help you in your life, for the dominion of My universe has its proper order.’ I say this so that we understand that wealth and poverty, health and sickness, and strength and weakness are all subject to fluctuate, and therefore, no one can be certain of his future. If any one of us is able to give to the poor, he must do so, since if one day we lose our wealth, we will find people to give to us. We must help the sick person so that if we fall ill, we will find someone to help us; we must serve people in their hour of dire need so that they will serve us in our hour of dire need. At the same time, when we see someone to whom Allah has denied sight, we must give thanks for how He has blessed us, and if we see a person who cannot walk, we must be conscious of Allah’s blessing in granting us the power to walk. Thus, a person does not notice his own blessings until he sees someone who is deprived of them; the True Lord wants everyone who suffers to be content and accept his suffering without bitter complaint, and therefore, He confers upon him all manners of goodness.

Everyone who embraces Islam benefits from Islam, even a child and an insane person. Therefore, we must pay homage to the one who passed on to us this Way of Guidance which had protected us, and we must study it and act in accordance with it.

If we look at the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* we find that he returned the favour of everyone who helped him: an example of this is Halima As-Sa‘diyya who had the honour of breastfeeding him *peace and blessings be upon him* as an infant, and then after he became a prophet, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was generous to her and her family.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to Ta'if to seek support in conveying the Message after the death of Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* and the death of his uncle Abu Taleb*;* yet no support was offered. He thought of returning to Mecca, and he sought someone to give him protection when he entered Mecca. One of the disbelievers named Mut'am ibn ‘Udayy offered him protection. Therefore, if a disbeliever gave protection to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whose Message had come to bring an end to disbelief, should we not give protection to a disbeliever, and thus return the favour with an even greater one?

If a disbeliever gave protection to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Mecca, all believers must return the favour by giving protection to any disbeliever who seeks it from them. After the believers gave protection to the disbelievers who asked for it, hoping that they listen to the Word of Allah, there were two possibilities: either a disbeliever would embrace faith, in which case he would become one of the believers, or a disbeliever would remain in his disbelief and obstinacy, in which case it would be the duty of Muslims to convey him to a place he could feel secure by helping him to get to a safe place securing his life and his possessions. Once he had reached his place of security and heard the Word of Allah, Muslims should not let him go free as the previous commandment stated: ‘… convey him to a place where he can feel secure.’ (*at-Tawba:* 5) Muslims should take him to a place he feels secure, and then apply to him Allah’s verdict: keep him captive, besiege him or execute him, according to Allah’s Judgment on the matter. The reason for giving a disbeliever security is that he is from a people who do not know the truth, as Allah says: ‘this, because they [may be] people who [sin only because they] do not know [the truth].’ (*at-Tawba:* 6)

Faith is not only a matter of natural disposition, for knowledge has many forms: there is the knowledge of natural disposition and knowledge which is acquired. Sometimes the tool of knowledge is the ear, other times the eye and other times the mind. Knowledge is developed either from what an ear hears or an eye sees, and then after that the ideas settle in a soul. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78) The Noble Quran specified for us the means of attaining knowledge by hearing and sight, and then this information settles in the mind since this is where all mental and intellectual concepts are kept. If a man hears but does not understand what he hears, he does not know.

Therefore, the one who seeks protection comes to seek the means of knowledge and the proofs of faith, and his excuse is that he does not know. We must think positively and consider the one who seeks protection to be a true seeker of knowledge who wishes to learn the proofs of faith.

Allah returns to the issue of the covenant by saying:

كَيۡفَ يَكُونُ لِلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ عَهۡدٌ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَعِندَ رَسُولِهِۦٓ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ عَٰهَدتُّمۡ
عِندَ ٱلۡمَسۡجِدِ ٱلۡحَرَامِۖ فَمَا ٱسۡتَقَٰمُواْ لَكُمۡ فَٱسۡتَقِيمُواْ لَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ ٧

How could there be a treaty with God and His Messenger for such idolaters? But as for those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque, so long as they remain true to you, be true to them; God loves those who are mindful of Him [who fear Him] [7]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 7)

What this means is that you have tried to make covenants with idolaters, yet every time they make a covenant with you, they break it. They broke the covenant they made with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at

Hudaybiyya. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* wants to warn us not to place too much trust in the covenants of idolaters since they do not keep their covenants, rather, they break them. Therefore, the reason that a covenant has been annulled is that they have not kept it before, and for a covenant to be allowed to continue would be meaningless.

The word 'how' in this verse is a question about a state. Someone asks, 'How are you?' You reply, 'Very well, thanks be to Allah!' So, the word 'how' is used to enquire about a state. The state might be general (i.e. 'how are you, your family, your children, your life, etc.') or it might be specific, such as if you ask about a sick person by asking, 'How is so-and-so?' It is said, 'He is better, thanks be to Allah.' Or you might ask about someone going through hard times by asking, 'How is he?' It is said, 'Allah eased his difficulties.' Or you might ask about a son who ran away from home, and the answer is, 'He came back, thanks be to Allah.'

Therefore, 'how' have a general and a specific meaning. Sometimes, however, it does not really indicate a question; rather, it is an expression of amazement or incredulity: amazement at something good or incredulity at something bad. For example, it might be asked, 'How could he abuse his own father?' This expresses incredulity at something bad since something vile has occurred which ought not to have happened. Furthermore, a person might make an important invention so that one asks, 'How did you make such an invention?' This expresses amazement at something good. Expressing incredulity at something bad implies condemnation, whilst to express amazement at something good implies praise; an example of this is if one were to ask, 'How did you build this mosque?' In this noble verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'How can there be for the polytheists a treaty?' This expresses incredulity that the idolaters could have anything called a covenant since all they know is how to break covenants, along with them never keeping them or honouring them. Thus, it is appropriate to be incredulous at the notion that they could have a covenant since the fact is that they have no covenant whatsoever. This incredulity expresses condemnation and ridicule. For example, if someone were to threaten you and then you were to say to him, 'Who are you to threaten me?', this is meant to express ridicule and condemnation because you know who he is. You are also ridiculing the notion that he has the power to carry out his threats on you. At other times, it is a genuine question such as if you were to ask someone, ‘Who are you?’ So he tells you his name. Sometimes the answer to ‘how’ will be given in words, whereas at other times words will not do, and the answer must be in the form of an action.

The True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘And [mention] when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead."’ (*al-Baqara:* 260) This ‘how’ implies an expression of amazement since if you infuse life into something lifeless, this is amazing, and it demands praise. Allah *Glorified is He* did not answer Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* with words, and rather, He answered him with a practical example. A dialogue took place between the True Lord *the Most High* and His friend Ibrahim (Abraham). The Lord asked him: ‘Have you not believed?’ (*al-Baqara:* 260). Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* replied: ‘Yes.’ (*al-Baqara:* 260) This means that he is saying, ‘I believe, Lord’; and the Noble Quran tells us that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* then added, ‘but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied.’ (*al-Baqara:* 260)

Faith means the assurance of the heart; so how could Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* say, ‘I believe’? Is this not a contradiction? I say that Ibrahim (Abraham) was certain that Allah *Glorified is He* created the whole universe, but he wanted to know how resurrection happens and its mode. At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* did not give him a spoken answer, rather, He gave him a practical demonstration along with saying: ‘Take four birds and commit them to yourself.’ (*al-Baqara:* 260) This means that he must take four birds and bring them close to him and familiarise himself with their forms so that when they die and are resurrected, he will be certain that they are the same birds. ‘Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them - they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.’ (*al-Baqara:* 260)

In other words, he has to cut these birds into pieces himself and then place a piece of them on every hill. After this, he leaves them to come to him walking or running, so it could not be said that they are other birds that came from another place; rather, the very same birds will come running to him.

Also, if Allah *the Almighty* can give a created being the power to call the dead so that they return to life and come to him, then what does one think of the Omnipotent Power of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*?

When the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘How can there be for the polytheists a treaty in the sight of Allah and with His Messenger’, this question expresses condemnation and incredulity, for idolaters do not have any covenant, rather, it is always their habit to violate their covenants. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘except for those with whom you made a treaty at Al-Masjid Al-Haram? So as long as they are upright toward you, be upright toward them. Indeed, Allah loves the righteous [who fear Him].’ (*at-Tawba:* 7) What this means is that whilst informing the believers that the idolaters are not bound by any covenant, Allah *the Exalted* does not ask the believers to respond to the idolaters in the same way. He *the Almighty* rather commands believers to keep to a covenant as long as idolaters keep to it; if idolaters begin to violate the covenant, Allah requires believers to respond to this in the same kind. This explains His words: ‘Indeed, Allah loves the righteous.’ (*at-Tawba:* 7)

A righteous person is the one who obeys Allah in all that He commands and forbids, thereby placing a barrier between himself and Allah’s attributes of Majesty. Therefore, the essence of righteousness is for a believer not to violate any covenant, whether with a believer or a disbeliever. The only one who should ever begin to violate a covenant is a disbeliever, whilst a believer must honour his covenants and promises.

Allah *Glorified is He* a then says:

كَيْفَ وَإِن يَظْهَرُوا۟ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا يَرْقُبُوا۟ فِيكُمْ إِلًّا وَلَا ذِمَّةً ۚ
يُرْضُونَكُم بِأَفْوَٰهِهِمْ وَتَأْبَىٰ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ فَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٨﴾

[How,] when, if they were to get the upper hand over you, they would not respect any tie with you, of kinship or of treaty? They please you with their tongues, but their hearts are against you and most of them are lawbreakers [8] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 8)

We can observe in this verse that the True Lord *the Most High* did not say, ‘How could idolaters be granted a covenant?’ rather, He sufficed by saying, 'How' by itself. This is due to their treachery that had become well known. The first 'How' was a question about something in the past, whilst the question in this verse clarifies for us that they will always violate their covenants just as they did in the past, for the One Who tells us about the past also tells us about the future since He knows all that they will do.

Allah continues: 'if they prevail against you'. Prevailing means to gain the upper hand, which if they do, they would not honour any tie or obligation to protect them. They will do as they please in all regards. This is a testimony from the True Lord *Glorified is He* of what lies in the souls of idolaters, and the rancour they feel towards believers. This means they would not pay heed to any covenant they would make with you, nor would any of them be prevented by any scruples from doing anything at all, however vile. For example, if a strong man raises his hand to strike a small child who could not withstand the blow, someone might take his hand and ask him to bear in mind that the child is young and cannot withstand the blow. Yet, if the child is one of his relatives or a neighbour, the strong man would not pay heed to any of this and would follow through with a blow down to the child.

The scholars have more than one opinion on this matter; each one of them offered their view about the phrase 'tie of kinship'. Ibn 'Abbas and Ad-Dahak *Allah be pleased with them* said that it means 'relation' since relation is a cause for compassion, and it is difficult for anyone to betray someone to whom he is related, as it requires no covenant. It is also said that it means 'covenant'. Al-Hasan said that it means the relationship of neighbourhood and all that is obligated by it. Qatada said it means a vow and a pact. Abu 'Umayra said that it means a promise and an oath.

All of these meanings evoke the idea of compassion such that a person is not governed by harshness and blind reaction and such that a person has someone to tell him, 'Calm down. He is your neighbour (or a member of your tribe or those with whom you have family ties).' The barrier which keeps a man from inclining to evil and delving into it when things become difficult for him is the awareness of his connections to others. This is how dialogue comes into play. There may be a family tie, an oath or a neighbourly relationship which prevent one from acting harshly and cruelly. In short, it is whatever ordinarily prevents a cruel response to something which may have happened accidentally. It also means that he may have had no respect for any moral values: no respect for ties of family, neighbours, covenants or vows. If a strong man amongst them had the chance to harm a small child, he would not worry about any of these things.

The True Lord wants us to know that if idolaters were to gain the upper hand over believers, they would not worry about any family ties, covenant, neighbourly ties, oaths nor anything else. So, how could idolaters be granted any given covenant? If they were to gain the upper hand over believers, they would never be deterred by any ties, whatsoever.

Allah *Glorified is He* then adds: ‘covenant in respect of you'. A ‘covenant in respect of you' requires a trust which is not recorded or officially witnessed; if someone were to borrow money from someone else and make a written record of it, this record is the guarantee of repayment. Likewise, if witnesses were to attend the transaction, then their testimony guarantees the creditor his rights. However, if there were no written record or witnesses, the matter is in the hands of the honour of the debtor; if he wishes, he will acknowledge the debt or deny it. There is another layer of this concept which is between you and yourself. For example, you might promise yourself to give so-and-so a certain amount of money every month. For such a thing, there are no written records or witnesses, rather, it is up to your own conscience, either you will do it if you so wish or not do it if you so wish. It is something which will harm your reputation not to do. For example, if you agree (to yourself) that you will help a certain family, this is something totally subject to your own will; there is no covenant to compel you to do it, nor any tie of family or neighbourhood. It is only your conscience. Therefore, you are careful to honour what you have promised yourself in order to protect your reputation and your standing in the eyes of others. Likewise, when you incur a debt without any record or witnesses, you nevertheless make sure to pay it back since it is on your conscience.

‘How can it be, if they prevail against you, they would not observe any tie of kinship or covenant in respect of you. They satisfy you with their mouths, but their hearts refuse [compliance], and most of them are defiantly disobedient.' (*at-Tawba:* 8)

Thus, we see that ‘how’ in this verse is meant to express incredulity at the idea that idolaters could be granted a covenant now or in the future since they habitually break covenants. Furthermore, if they were to gain the upper hand over believers, they would abuse them in the most despicable ways without any scruples. Someone might say, ‘They are perfectly amiable with us, smiling at us and receiving us with kindness, and so on. Thus, how, if they were to gain the upper hand over us, could they turn into merciless beasts?’ We say that Allah *the Exalted* knows all that is open and all that is hidden, and He knew what was in the minds of believers, so He replied to them so that these things would not remain concealed in their souls. Therefore, He *the Almighty* replied to this idea of theirs: ‘They satisfy you with their mouths, but their hearts refuse [compliance], and most of them are defiantly disobedient.’

What this means is that Allah *Glorified is He* warns believers and encourages them not to trust the appearance of idolaters that they see before their eyes since it is not real, rather, it is a matter of deception and hypocrisy. They say nice things and greet you with smiling faces and soft words, but their hearts are filled with malice against you Muslims, such that if they were to gain the upper hand over you, their true feelings of violent hate and enmity would surface, and they would not respect any tie with you nor any obligation to protect you.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They satisfy you with their mouths’, believers must accept what the True Lord tells them and realise that the sweet words and kind greetings are nothing but deception from their enemies. By revealing this to us, He gives us immunity from being deceived by what we see on their faces. This is a matter of the future, not the past or the present, and when He *the Most High* speaks of a future matter, He does this to inform His believing servants. Therefore, we find that He *the Exalted* responds to these ideas in the same way. An example of this is found in His Words: ‘O, you who have believed, indeed the polytheists are unclean, so let them not approach Inviolable Mosque after this, their [final] year.’ (*at-Tawba:* 28) This is an announcement of the prohibition against idolaters entering the Inviolable Mosque or coming near it. It was natural that misgivings might occur to the minds of the believers who benefitted economically from idolaters during the pilgrimage season since they lived off the trade which was conducted during the pilgrimage, e.g. when they sold their wares to the pilgrims to gain their earnings for an entire year's provisions. If idolaters were barred from the pilgrimage or from coming near the Inviolable Mosque, where would they get the provisions which they had previously earned through this trade? Believers must have wondered: 'How will we eat? We get our wares ready and wait all year until the pilgrimage season comes. Therefore, if the number of pilgrims decreases, who will buy our wares?'

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* answered these misgivings by saying: 'And if you fear poverty, Allah will enrich you from His bounty.' (*at-Tawba:* 28) This means not to fear poverty since Allah knows what will come to pass. He is Rich possessing the keys to everything, and will enrich you out of His bounty by opening to you the doors of provision so that you will be compensated and then given even more. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* answered the misgivings which entered believers' souls as the Quran was being revealed so that their hearts and souls would find rest. Allah said: 'but their hearts refuse [compliance], and most of them are defiantly disobedient.' (*at-Tawba:* 8). These words are an answer to the misgivings which had entered the souls of believers when they saw how idolaters had met them with kind words and cheery faces. The True Lord *the Most High* made it clear to them: Do not be deceived, for what their hearts conceal is not what their faces show. His words 'most of them are defiantly disobedient' make it clear that they were far from the right way, for indeed, there is no such things as obedience for the hypocrite and the disbeliever.

We say that if you were to look at these people, you will see that they are even living in contradiction to the way they have chosen for themselves. They do not even adhere to the false ways in which they claim to believe. Thus, they are disobedient even with respect to the religious way they profess. Given how they behaved in respect with the false way, how do you expect they would behave in respect to the right way?

The phrase 'most of them' implies that a minority of them are upright. This is a beautiful example of the Quran's inclusiveness. It also answers a probable question, suggesting that since these people are disbelievers – and no sin is greater than disbelief– how can it be said that they are ‘disobedient’ when they are not even believers? We say that they have even strayed from the ways of disbelief that they have chosen for themselves, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies their position by saying:

ٱشْتَرَوْا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَصَدُّوا۟ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ سَآءَ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩﴾

They have sold God’s message for a trifling gain, and
barred others from His path. How evil their actions are! [9]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 9)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* shows us how their scales are imbalanced. What does it mean to ‘have purchased’? It means to get a commodity in return for a price. If you say, ‘I bought a clock’, as an example, then you are the buyer as long as you paid the price, and the seller is the one who takes the price. Yet in this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘They have purchased with the signs of Allah for a small price’, whilst it should have been the case that they paid the price since the buyer is the one who pays the price. Nevertheless, in this verse the opposite is the case, for Allah *Glorified is He* states that the price is what they bought, even though a price is supposed to be paid. This situation is therefore a contradiction of the usual custom of buying and selling. We must also bear in mind that a price should be equal to the value of the commodity; you take the commodity and give the seller an equivalent price since the price of something must be in proportion to it. If you buy something trifling, you pay a trifling price for it; if you buy something valuable, you pay a high price for it.

This is widely observed, including at work. For example, someone who wants to pick a fight with others pays one of his followers ten pounds to verbally abuse them; if he wants his henchman to strike his adversary, he gives him fifty pounds; if he wants him to kill his adversary, he gives him thousands of pounds. Usually, those who are devoid of faith say, ‘Every man has his price.’ In other words, every scruple can be overcome with money. The only question is how much money is needed to make a man abandon his scruples? There are those who can be bought for a single piece of silver, others need twenty or thirty, while others need millions before they sell out their scruples.

The True Lord *the Most High* informs us in this verse that these disbelievers turned faith into a commodity which could be bought and sold. They sold their faith. However instead exchanging it for a price equally valuable to faith —which is more precious than all the treasures of the world – they sold their faith for a trifling gain. They did not even appreciate the value of faith by selling it cheaply. Thus, how could they sell their faith for a trifling gain?

We say that the one who takes bribes is the prime example of this by intending thereby to upset the scales of truth. If someone alters the scales of truth, people doubt his honesty, and if people doubt his honesty, he loses ground for their trust. This is due to everyone who is wronged wanting to take his case before courts so that they will give him justice, or he raises his case before the one who is responsible for such things so that he will give him his rights. When people feel that the truth has been abandoned because faith has become a commodity with a price, so that the balance would be upset if this price is paid, the entire society will be corrupted. It is as though they have allowed their society to be completely corrupted, just in order to make a trifling gain.

Allah *Glorified is He* also wants to draw our attention to the Reckoning of the Day of Resurrection and how believers will abide in Paradise and enjoy therein that which no eye has ever seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart imagined, whilst disbelievers will abide in Hell. Therefore, they will have sold their faith for a cheap price, no matter how much money they gain as a consequence for all the money in the world is not equal to a single day in Paradise as the life of this world is temporary, and its delights are limited and few. It is as though they have sold everlasting bliss for temporary pleasures which might last no longer than a few days or years. At this point, disbelievers will realise that what they gained was exceedingly trifling compared to what they lost. It would have been bad enough for them to merely make faith the price they paid to gain small delights in this worldly life;

yet, they went even further than this by barring others from Allah's Path. Barring occurs when a call has been made for which evidence has been presented, but one prevents people from hearing it since he knows that if they were to hear it, they will be convinced and follows it. For example, we find that when the Quran was revealed, along with Arabs being a people of rhetoric and eloquence, disbelievers knew that if the people heard the Quran, they would be aware of its miraculous nature, its eloquence and its sweetness, and they would believe in it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said about them in the Quran: ‘And those who disbelieve say, "Do not listen to this Quran and speak noisily during [the recitation of] it that perhaps you will overcome."’ (*Fussilat:* 26) This is due to disbelievers knowing that if people were to listen to the Quran, they would believe in it; therefore, they prevented them from listening to it. If anyone recited the Quran, they would tell one another to talk frivolously about it and speak over it so that nothing would be understood. This was a testimony from the disbelievers themselves that if people were to hear the Quran, they will believe in it, and to talk frivolously about it was a way of barring the Path of Allah.

There was another way in which the Path of Allah was barred, which was preventing people from listening to the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knowing that the sweetness of the Messenger’s Call would make those who listened to it believe in it. Therefore, they would bar people from hearing Allah’s Words and from listening to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition, they said to visiting pilgrims, ‘Do not believe the man who says he is a prophet.’ This was a testimony on their part that if the ears of the people were to hear the Quran, their hearts would be drawn to faith; therefore, this was a testimony against them, and not for them, since they were certain that if the pilgrims were to hear the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it would take them away from disbelief. They feared that people would be affected by this religion, the true religion, and believe in it, and this made them seek to bar others from it.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says: ‘Indeed, it was evil that they were doing.’ ‘Evil’ means ‘vile’. It is not only vile in the present moment but also now, and the punishment for it in the future will be severe. This shows us the precision of the Noble Quran. The evil they did was not only a single deed but many, in both words and actions. That is to say that they barred people with their words and also impeded them by using physical force on certain occasions. By using the words ‘were doing’, the True Lord draws our attention to the fact that their deeds were not only speech nor only action.

There exists both action and speech, both of which are included; speech is the deed of the tongue, whereas action is the deed of the limbs. Had Allah *the Exalted* said, ‘Evil are all of their actions', we would have thought that they only acted and did not speak. Had He said, ‘Evil is all that they say', we would have thought that they spoke and did not act. Allah *Glorified is He* clarified for us that speech and action are both kinds of action when He said: ‘O, you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do?' (*as-Saff:* 2) This shows us that there is a difference between speech and action: speech is performed by the tongue, while action is performed by the rest of the limbs.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

لَا يَرۡقُبُونَ فِي مُؤۡمِنٍ إِلّٗا وَلَا ذِمَّةٗۚ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُعۡتَدُونَ ١٠

Where believers are concerned, they respect no tie of kinship or treaty. They are the ones who are committing aggression [10] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 10)

Those who respect pacts of kinship or covenants of protection and then do injustice to others violate the rights of others. If there is a family tie, covenant or pact between two parties, and one does not honour this, he would thereby violate the rights which he owes the other. It would be bad enough if the violator restricted himself to only violating the rights of others, but he also transgresses against himself since he gives himself trifling pleasures in this worldly life but then he casts himself into hell in the Hereafter; he is thereby transgressing against himself. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘and those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression].’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 135) Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And we did not wrong them [thereby], but they were wronging themselves.’ (*an-Nahl:* 118)

Does the one who commits a shameful deed sin against himself? Indeed, he sins against his soul in the Hereafter after giving it pleasure in this world. He takes immediate gratification in exchange for deferred torment. However, the one who transgresses against himself the most severely and the most plainly is the one who sins without even gaining pleasure in this world, thereby gaining neither pleasure in this world nor in the Hereafter. An example of this is the one who gives false testimony voluntarily. He will suffer torment in the Hereafter without taking any pleasure in this world.

Someone might say, ‘this verse is a needless repetition since Allah has already said: "How can it be, if they prevail against you, they would not observe any tie of kinship or covenant in respect of you. They satisfy you with their mouths, but their hearts refuse [compliance], and most of them are defiantly disobedient."’ We say the context is different. In the eighth verse of the chapter of *at-Tawba*, the True Lord clarifies that were they to gain an upper hand over believers, they would not pay heed to family ties, neighbourly ties or oaths, even if they tried to make it seem otherwise. As for the verse under examination, they transgress against their own selves and barter their faith away for a trifling gain, and there is a difference between the one who wrongs others and the one who wrongs oneself.

When they barred others from the Path of Allah and showed enmity to believers, they gained no worldly benefit from this; rather, they waged war against faith and the religion, incurring sins and gaining nothing. It is as though they respected no tie or protective obligation even for their own selves. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* calls them transgressors since without being transgressed against, they wilfully waged war on Allah’s religion, His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and on believers, and thereby waged war on their own selves.

Allah’s Mercy followed this to show us how Allah is Merciful to His servants and His creation. Allah *the Exalted* tells us that no matter what they have done, if they repent, Allah will accept their repentance. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِن تَابُوا۟ وَأَقَامُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَوُا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ فَإِخْوَٰنُكُمْ
فِى ٱلدِّينِ ۗ وَنُفَصِّلُ ٱلْـَٔايَـٰتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١١﴾

If they turn to God, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, then they are your brothers in faith: We make the messages clear for people who are willing to learn [11] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 11)

This noble verse affirms that Islam erases all man’s previous actions when he embraces it and that the door of repentance is always open for the idolaters and disbelievers, no matter what sins they may have committed; this is the nature of Allah's Mercy. We can observe that the True Lord *the Most High* says here 'if they repent' not 'when they repent' since if He had said as such, this would mean that their repentance was certain to occur. However, His Words 'if they repent' imply probability because they had done so much against the faith, and our hopes in them were so slight. However, repentance necessitates that the one who makes it must then embark upon his faithful obligations, and therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if they repent, establish prayer, and give *zakat*.' Therefore, once repentance has been made, the obligation of faith is nothing other than to testify: 'There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' Naturally, one must also offer prayer since it embodies all the other Pillars of Islam and it is a daily action. It is not required from a person only once in his lifetime like the pilgrimage, or one month of the year like fasting. So in order for repentance to be affirmed, one must attend to offering the prayer every day in its proper times, for it is the daily action which cannot be postponed or brought forward out of its time.

The Noble Quran usually associates prayer with *zakat* since *zakat* is a sacrifice of money, and money is the fruit of work, with work requiring time, and prayer is a sacrifice of time. Therefore, as we said, it is as though the prayer incorporates *zakat.* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if they repent, establish prayer, and give *zakat,* then they are your brothers in religion, and We detail the verses for a people who know.' (*at-Tawba:* 11) We must note in this verse the stages of faith which Allah *the Almighty* is showing us. The first stage was to bear oppression and be steadfastly patient. The second stage was that there can be no intermixing between faith and disbelief; this dashed the attempt of idolaters to dilute the faith by asking us to worship their gods for a while, and then offering to worship our god for a while; and this was completely unacceptable then, as is now, and will always be until the end of time. Then there came the stage of covenants, and then the covenants were annulled and the respite of the four sacred months was given to disbelievers. All of these things were based on canon law, yet the Arab nation had never known canon law before.

Thus, all of these legal pronouncements came from Heaven. The legislations of earthly communities require many processes, and no human law is ever perfect and correct from the moment of its inception. Rather, each law is passed and then faults appear in its implementation, so it is amended; it evolves, expands and requires the attention of legal authorities who spend their whole lives making amendments and specifications. Therefore, how did this unlettered Arab nation, which had no knowledge of science or culture, produce all these laws? We say that they did not produce them; rather, they were produced by their Lord Who has knowledge of all things. Each of the stages through which the faith passed was guided by laws from Heaven which showed believers what they had to do.

Generally, we only recognise the brotherhood of heredity: This is my brother from my mother and father, or my brother on my father's side only, or on my mother's side only. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) came [seeking food].' (*Yusuf:* 58) This is the brotherhood of heredity, and we know that the word 'brother' sometimes refers to the brotherhood of heredity, whilst on other occasions it means the brotherhood of way of life and doctrine. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to raise faith to the level of family, so He said: 'All believers are but brothers' (*al-Hujurat:* 10) to show us that as long as they have joined us in the circle of faith, we owe them the rights of true brotherhood along with the compassion and love it obligates, and the way it binds brothers together so that they always protect, love and honour one another, and all the related rights of true brotherhood.

However, note that in this verse Allah *the Almighty* says: 'your brothers in religion' (*at-Tawba:* 11). Why did He not simply say 'your brothers'?

We say that it is illogical that they could leave behind all the crimes they had committed before by repenting and at the same instant become the believers' brothers; rather, this would only happen once their faith had become deep-seated and when their repentance had been proved sincere. Only then would they become brothers.

Allah says: 'and We detail the verses for a people who know.' How such detail is given to those who already have knowledge? If they know, why is this explanation necessary? We say that the meaning in this verse is that Allah *Glorified is He* explains His signs to those who seek to obtain true knowledge which comes from Him since this knowledge has a great effect on the future of faith. This is why non-Muslims who are seriously interested in studying the Islamic religion find true knowledge end up embracing Islam, for as long as they are people of knowledge, talent and ambition in their fields, and as long as they have been overcome by the curiosity to know, along with seeking to study the Islamic way objectively, you find that they embrace Islam since they find the true image of the religion which they are studying. Also, they take Islam from its faithful source which is the Noble Quran and Prophetic *Sunnah.* They do not take Islam from those who ascribe themselves to Islam (i.e. the Muslims) since Muslims might include sinners, thieves, people who take bribes, liars or hypocrites: if they were to take Islam from Muslims, they would say, 'What is this? Sin, stealing, lying, bribery and hypocrisy?'

I always advise those who never studied Islam from other countries not to consider those who name themselves Muslims, rather, I advise them to consider the essence of Islam, namely the Quran and the *Sunnah.* Does Islam forbid and ascribe punishments for bribery, stealing, lying and hypocrisy? Yes, it does. All these actions that exist amongst some Muslims and which most denounce have nothing to do with Islam. When those seek Islam from its intellectual sources and away from those ascribed to it, they shall believe in it at the end.

Therefore, if the Muslims who deviate from the Right Way knew how much harm they do to Islam, they would recognise that they were engaging in something very grave, for Islam is a practical way, not only a theoretical way. Islam is a practical way that should be exercised and implemented in life. The Noble Quran represents the foundations of the way, while the life story of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* represents the practical and applied way of Islam. Allah *Glorified is He* has made it clear that Prophet Muhammad is an excellent example for those whose hope is in Allah and the Hereafter: 'Verily, you have in the Prophet of Allah an excellent model, for him who hopes to meet Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah much.' (*al-Ahzab:* 21)

Actually when a Muslim implements the Way of Islam, he attracts non-Muslims and endears Islam to them. On the other side, when he does what is not in accord with Islam, he alienates them from it. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* addresses Muslims stating that it is disliked in His sight to do what contradicts sayings and beliefs: 'O, you who believe, why do you say what you do not? It is most hateful in the Sight of Allah that you say what you do not.' (*as-Saff:* 2-3)

This is so due to our behaviour contradicting Islam to which we call and in which we believe, it turns against Islam and the non-Muslim would say, ‘I saw a Muslim cheating, stealing and taking unlawful things.’ Thus, it is as if everyone who strays from Islam was carrying an axe with which he demolishes the religion, and he would be held accountable for not only his actions, but also the actions of those who followed his example.

We stated before that when we look at the diplomatic representation of the Islamic world, we find that there are seventy-two Islamic nations with embassies in most of the countries of the world. Having stated this, I wonder how many members of the staffs of these embassies adhere properly to the Islamic religion! Moreover, how many of the Muslim communities in the foreign countries adhere to the teachings of Islam? (It is) Very few! Were they all to adhere to the teachings of Islam, all nations of the world would know that this religion has a protective power and immunity. They would know that this immunity was the reason why the deviant materialistic civilisation had not affected Muslims. This would be a significant point of attraction for nations of the world to study the religion of Islam. Unfortunately, you find Muslim communities are getting mixed and rushing after the materialistic civilisation of the countries in which they live. This leads nations to say, 'If their religion was strong, they would have adhered to it and would not have rushed after our civilisation.'

When we study the history of Islam, we find that it has not spread by wars or sword. Rather, it has spread by showing a fine example. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if they repent, establish prayer and give *zakat,* then they are your brothers in religion, and we detail the verses for a people who know.' (*at-Tawba:* 11) This means that Allah *the Almighty* details the signs for a people who know and are searching for the genuine knowledge that He shows in His Way of Guidance. Therefore, we find, for example, that when a nation comes to a new discovery, knowledgeable Muslims know that it is nothing new since Islam mentioned it a long time ago.

In Germany, for example, lawmakers have drafted an article, which they called ‘Misuse of Rights’ which means that one has rights, but he might use them improperly. Therefore, Germany began to move towards legislating new laws to forbid misusing rights and producing commentaries on these laws, their implementation, and so on. A Muslim lawyer from Bani Suwayf who went to Germany to obtain his doctorate learned about this matter, while he was attending a lecture given by the one who came up with the theory of the law, Misuse of Rights. The Muslim lawyer stood up and asked the lecturer, 'Do you say that you are the inventor of this law?' The German lecturer answered, 'Yes.' The lawyer said, 'This theory existed fourteen centuries ago in the teachings of Islam.' The German lecturer was taken by surprise and called some orientalises to discuss the matter with this Muslim lawyer. They brought books of the Prophetic biography where the Muslim lawyer introduced a story of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon Him*. The story states that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sitting one day when one of his Companions came in complaining that another Companion had a date-palm tree in the sphere of his house. The house belonged to the one who was making the complaint, whilst the tree belonged to the other. The one who owned the date palm tree got used to coming to it often to pick from it, pollinate it and check on it. His family was disturbed by his frequent visits and thus the owner of the house went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to complain about that matter. The Prophet sent for the owner of the date-palm tree and told him that he should give the date palm tree away to the owner of the house, sell it to him or cut it down. (1) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified for him that although the date-palm was his right, he misused this right by constantly going to see it for a reason or no reason, a matter that disturbed the privacy of the owner of the house. This action was a perfect example of misusing of rights. In the interest of preserving the honour of science, the German law professor had to be fair in his lecture and said that he thought he had invented something new, but Islam had actually preceded him fourteen centuries ago. The amendment was made, and German law acknowledged that Islam beat it to the law of Misuse of Rights fourteen centuries earlier.

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(1) *[Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Hakim and Al-Bazzar]*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and many of his followers were unlettered, which was a testimony of the heavenly celestial origins of their law. They did not gain their knowledge by exploring previous civilisations, rather, they gained it from Allah. The most that learned people could do is to take knowledge from one another, but the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received their knowledge from Allah *the Exalted* and thus, they led the world for more than one thousand years.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن نَّكَثُوٓاْ أَيۡمَٰنَهُم مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ عَهۡدِهِمۡ وَطَعَنُواْ فِي دِينِكُمۡ فَقَٰتِلُوٓاْ
أَيِمَّةَ ٱلۡكُفۡرِ إِنَّهُمۡ لَآ أَيۡمَٰنَ لَهُمۡ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَنتَهُونَ ١٢

But if they break their oath after having made an agreement with you, if they revile your religion, then fight the leaders of disbelief – oaths mean nothing to them – so that they may stop [12]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 12)

The meaning of breaking a pledge is to fail adhering to the stipulations of a covenant. In this verse, Allah *the Most High* explains why idolaters had to be fought. This is due to the fact that of all the wars they had waged against Islam, the way they broke their covenants and even exceeded this by reviling the religion. They abused the religion maliciously. When we say that someone reviled someone, this means that he went very far beyond mere insult. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to fight against them unless they embrace Islam. This is right since Muslims had advanced all manner of kindness, but the leaders of disbelief had rejected them all.

We notice that fighting mentioned in this verse must be launched against the leaders of disbelievers first. This is due to their encouraging their followers to war against Islam. Their followers are not the principals, rather, the leaders of disbelief are. They planned, executed and exhorted: 'And those who were deemed weak will say to those who were proud, "Nay, but it was your scheming night and day when you bade us to disbelieve in Allah and set up equals with Him." And they will conceal their remorse when they see the punishments, and We shall put chains round the necks of those who disbelieved. They will not be requited but for what they did.' (*Saba': 33*)

In modern parlance, they are called war criminals, and the entire world knows that a war ends once war criminals are discarded because the reason for this is that they are the ones who plan, operate battles and lead men to battlefields. These war criminals are exactly as the leaders of disbelief who dared to corrupt the ways of the Noble Quran by preventing tribes who performed pilgrimage from listening to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and waging wars against Islam using all possible means of delusions, exhortations, threats and promises.

What is surprising is that some people justify killing war criminals and denounce the killing of the leaders of disbelief! Allah *the Almighty* has made it clear that they would break their pledges because they have no regard for their own pledges: 'And if they break their oaths after their agreement and [openly] revile your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief; surely their oaths are nothing so that they may desist.' (*at-Tawba:* 12)

Orientalists, along with those whose hearts incline towards them, act outwardly as though they are with us; they say that there is a contradiction here. They say Allah *Glorified is He* affirms that they have pledges and then says they have no pledges. They wonder how He affirms that they have pledges and then deny as such since negation and affirmation cannot come together in the description of a single person. We say, indeed, those who have a superficial way of thinking or understand things literally see that they do not come together, but those who understand the true intent of words know that, when something is negated and affirmed in the Noble Quran regarding one thing, this means that the perspective differs in each case. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning the Battle of Badr by saying: 'and you did not smite when you smote [the enemy], but it was Allah *Glorified is He* Who smote.' (*al-Anfal:* 17) In this verse, there is both denial and affirmation of the same act. The deed and the doer are the same. This is called a different perspective. This means that each perspective gives a different meaning from the other. It is like saying that so-and-so lives above me. Although this is true, he at the same time lives beneath the person who lives above him. Therefore, he is up and down at the same time. He is above the one who is under him and beneath the one who is above him. To illustrate this point, we could mention another example. We say so-and-so is a person who is both a father and a son, and this seemingly looks like a contradiction. In fact, he is a father to his son and a son to his father. Therefore, he is a father from his son's perspective and a son from his father's perspective, so there is no contradiction. This is what we call a difference of perspective. Therefore, there is not even a slight contradiction between the negation and affirmation of the act of smiting in regards to the Prophet. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* took a handful of pebbles and cast them towards the army of the idolaters. This is what the Prophet who is a human did, but the Omnipotent Power of Allah took these pebbles and caused them to reach every single soldier in the army of the idolaters.

Another verse that elaborates this point is when, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'but most people do not know. They know the outward of this world's life, but of the Hereafter they are absolutely heedless.' (*ar-Rum:* 6-7)

They said Allah denies and affirms knowledge to the very same people. We say that Allah *the Exalted* does not negate true knowledge and affirm superficial knowledge, whereas the two are completely different.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* affirms that they have pledges and then denies it at the latter part of the verse. We proclaim that the purpose of a pledge or a covenant is to keep it, and thus, those who do not keep it consequently have no pledges. because the reason for this is that their pledges are of no value since they are void of preservation. Similarly, when a liar makes an oath, we say this person has no oaths! Therefore, these people have not respected the sanctity of their pledges; it is as though they had no pledges. This is exactly as if you have a son whose examination is approaching, and you make him study and sit around watching over him. He flips through the pages of the book, yet he does not understand anything. Therefore, you say you studied, but you have not studied! Although this affirms and negates the action, there is no contradiction since the perspective is different.

The negation of the pledges at the latter part of the verse means that they do not honour it, and as long as they do not, their pledges are worthless.

Allah *Glorified is He* differentiates between fighting and killing. He commands to fight, not to kill. This means fight them, and thus, fighting might cause them to desist from aggressing against Islam. When they find that some from amongst themselves have been killed and that they are too weak to fight back, the ferocity of their wars against Islam would abate causing them to desist from persecuting Islam.

Allah *Glorified is He* further says:

أَلَا تُقَٰتِلُونَ قَوۡمٗا نَّكَثُوٓاْ أَيۡمَٰنَهُمۡ وَهَمُّواْ بِإِخۡرَاجِ ٱلرَّسُولِ وَهُم
بَدَءُوكُمۡ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍۚ أَتَخۡشَوۡنَهُمۡۚ فَٱللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَن تَخۡشَوۡهُ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ١٣

How could you not fight a people who have broken their oaths, who tried to drive the Messenger out, who attacked you first? Do you fear them? It is God you should fear if you are true believers[13] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 13)

In this noble verse, Allah *the Most High* exhorts resisting and fighting the leaders of disbelief, so that they do not get the opportunity to wage more wars against Islam, thus preventing people from embracing Islam and barring the Path of Allah. The Arabic particle (*Alla)* is called a particle of specification. It is as if you are saying, ‘Will you not go and see so-and-so?’ It exhorts doing something and is, therefore, a form of request. They have violated their covenants, initiated the enmity and attempted to expel the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca. The word *Hamu* means that they firmly intended and aimed at the expulsion of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They initiated enmity to the believers and barred the way to Islam from the first moment the master of humankind, Prophet Muhammad, began to call to it. The verb *Bada‘a* means to initiate, and *marra* means an action which is not repeated since if it is repeated, we say *Marataiyn* which means twice. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Divorce may be [pronounced] twice.' (*al-Baqara:* 229)

Therefore, they were the ones who began the enmity at the first place. Islam, as we know, faced two different powers at two different stages of the Islamic mission. Those were the power of the idolaters of the Quraysh and that of the Jews. As for the Quraysh, they wanted to expel the Prophet from Mecca. However, someone might say the believers were those who started fighting at Badr. I say that Muslims did not intend to fight at Badr. Rather, they went to claim compensation from the caravan for all that they had lost in Mecca. The disbelievers, on the other hand, stated that they would not return home until they have annihilated Muhammad and all those who followed him, and they showed up with an army to fight at Badr. Despite the fact that the caravan was brought to safety thanks to a scheme of Abu Sufyan, the Quraysh wanted to fight, and amassed their soldiers and horses to do as such against the Muslims.

Jews did the same thing. They broke their covenants and attempted to expel Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Medina, just as the Quraysh had attempted to expel him from Mecca. There was a treaty between the Prophet and the Jews. It was one of the first achievements of the Prophet in Medina. Yet, did the Jews keep this treaty? No, they did not. Although they swore not to aid any enemy against Prophet Muhammad, they broke their pledge and dishonoured their treaty by aiding the Quraysh against the Muslims.

The Jewish tribe of Banu Nadir did the same thing. They wanted to assassinate the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by dropping a boulder onto him. Jews went even further at the battle of al-Ahzab by aiding the Quraysh. They agreed to letting the enemy pass into the city of Medina through their lands in order to take Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslim army by surprise.

Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* say that 'they attacked you first', it refers to more than one instance in addition to the way they broke their covenants and their initiated fighting. This all makes it necessary for you to fight them to secure yourselves from their evil: 'What! Will you not fight a people, who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger while they attacked you first? Do you fear them? But Allah is most deserving that you should fear Him, if you are believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 13) We notice that when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Will you not fight', He is encouraging them to fight. It means what keeps them from fighting the enemy, unless it be that they are in awe of them. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* exclaims about the possibility that they might be afraid of them and says that it is He Whom they should fear (*at-Tawba:* 13).

In this context Allah *the Exalted* alerts the attention of the believers to the fact that they have two choices, namely to fear men and their persecution or to fear Allah. However, it is more fitting to be in awe of the One Who is more Powerful, more Mighty, and whose requital is more permanent. This is due to the fact that if one were to compare the power of these people to the Power of Allah, He has infinitely more right to be feared. When one has two choices, he chooses the one that causes less harm. How could believers fear what disbelievers might inflict upon them and not fear that which Allah might inflict upon them?

Allah *the Almighty* clarified in another verse in this very chapter that believers must not fear disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you wait for us but one of two most excellent things? And we wait for you that Allah will afflict you with punishment from Himself or by our hands. So wait. We too will wait with you.' (*at-Tawba:* 52) Thus, Allah *the Most High* took fear away from the souls of believers. What could the army of disbelievers do to you? You will be martyred, be admitted to paradise or be victorious. The question is a rhetorical one that is meant to express censure. It means that you must never fear or hold them in awe, for if they were more powerful than you and they were to overcome you, then you would achieve martyrdom. Moreover, if they were weaker than you, and you were to overcome them, you would achieve victory. Thus, both eventualities are beloved and desirable for the souls of those who believe in Allah. It is, therefore, a means of strength for your heart and firmness for your feet at times of battle and combat.

Allah *the Almighty* gives His final verdict stating that it is He Whom Muslims should fear. It means to revise your faith, and if you are true believers in Allah, you would desire martyrdom. Likewise, if you are believers in Allah *the Almighty* the Powerful and the Invincible, you are aware of Him, His Power and Omnipotence which are incomparable in terms of the power of humans. Either you shall defeat them and enjoy the delight of victory, or you shall be martyred and enter paradise. Both results are good, while what awaits disbelievers is either infliction of suffering upon them by your hands or else infliction of His own torment upon them.

Thus, any battle between faith and disbelief, we find that the faithful are always on the winning side whether they are martyred or succoured. The losers are always the disbelievers. They will be tormented either by believers or by Allah in this life or the Hereafter. Thus, Allah has established a balance which removes fear from the souls of believers as they battle the disbelievers. So, as a rule, do not ever turn upon your heels in a battle since no matter how powerful the disbelievers might be materially, the Power of the Allah *Glorified is He* is greater. Allah *Glorified is He* states that many small hosts have overcome a great host by the Will of Allah: `How many a small party has triumphed over a large party by Allah's command!' (*al-Baqara:* 249)

Therefore, the relative material strengths of the opponents do not count; it is a kind of fear that has no place in the hearts of believers since Allah is on the side of those who believe

Allah *Glorified is He* further emphasises His exhortation to fight. He says:

قَٰتِلُوهُمْ يُعَذِّبْهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَيُخْزِهِمْ وَيَنصُرْكُمْ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَيَشْفِ صُدُورَ قَوْمٍ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

Fight them: God will punish them at your hands, He will disgrace them, He will help you to conquer them, He will heal the believers' feelings [14] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 14)

After Allah exhorted believers in the previous verse to fight, He then mentions fighting in this verse to further encourage and urge them to fight. It is a Divine Commandment to believers to fight disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* gives the wisdom behind the commandment of fighting by saying, 'Allah will punish them by your hands.' We might ask why Allah does not send forth a sign directly from Him to subject them to punishment if He wants to punish them. We say that had the Muslims been given victory by a natural disaster rather than by fighting, the disbelievers would say that it was only a natural disaster that aided them. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* wills that the disbelievers be defeated at the hands of the believers since the disbelievers are materialists and believe in nothing but the material world. If they believed in Allah, that would have been the end of it. Yet, Allah wanted to show the disbelievers the might of the believers so that their hearts would be filled with dread and awe of them, that they would be exceedingly cautious and that they would never dare again to even think of attacking the faith or the religion of Islam nor belittling the believers.

Thus, a question might be raised: 'Why does Allah order fighting here, while in another verse, He states that He would not punish them while Muhammad is amongst them (*al-Anfal:* 33)?

So how could Allah both affirm this punishment and then negate it? We say that both of these verses were revealed concerning disbelievers. We note that He has not said that believers would punish them with their hands, rather, He will punish them. If it was said as such, the meaning would have been different. Therefore, one of the two verses affirms the punishment, while the other negates it. We observe that the perspective is different in each. When Allah says that He would not punish them while the Prophet is still amongst them, He means that He would not send upon them a punishment from Heaven, whilst Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were still amongst them. This becomes clear when we consider the verse in which disbelievers asked Allah to rain down upon them stones from the skies or to inflict [some other] grievous sufferings on them: `O, Allah, if this be indeed the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from Heaven or bring down upon us a grievous punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32)

Thus, we see that disbelievers had asked for punishment to befall upon them from the sky to prove that the Quran was true. Allah *the Most High* responded that He would not punish them as long as the Prophet was still amongst them because He sent him as a mercy to the worlds. The fact that no punishment was sent down upon them from Heaven since the Prophet was sent with his message does not mean that the punishment of disbelievers had ceased. Indeed, Allah has entrusted believers with triumph by guiding them to His Way of guidance and His religion along with aiding them, but still the punishment would be exacted by earthly means. Therefore, there is no contradiction here since a punishment from Heaven would likely mean the annihilation of all disbelievers, whether young and old. A flood would drown them, a calamity would wipe them out, a ferocious and devastating wind would destroy them or an earthquake would bury them. There would have been no disbeliever left in any of these cases. While the act of fighting, carried out by human hands, does not wipe out all disbelievers, Islam forbids us from harming women and children, along with fighting those who do not fight us: 'Allah forbids you not respecting those who have not fought against you on account of your religion.' (*al-Mumtahana:* 8)

Therefore, we understand that the punishment that comes after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been sent is not a punishment of annihilation and obliteration as had happened with the previous communities. We know that Allah *the Exaltd* punished previous communities using these ways. The Messengers who were sent before Prophet Muhammad were ordered to convey their messages and when their people did not believe in their messages, Heaven intervened against them with all the previous forms of punishment. However, Allah *the Almighty* commanded Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his *Ummah,* or followers, after him to call to the religion of Allah and reprimand those who show enmity to the faith and to the believers. Some of those who should be fought might flee or be captured, whereas women and children should not be chastised in any way.

What is the difference between punishment and disgrace? Sometimes we might find a proud and thick-skinned person who could bear punishment without showing alarm, fear or weakness. His natural pride would prevent him from crying out. For such a person, there is another form of punishment, namely disgrace. Disgrace is harder on the soul than punishment because it means humiliation. For example, say that there is a person who is feared in his neighbourhood as the brawler of the area, and another young man, in front of everyone, comes up to him, fights him and throws him to the ground. This fall would not cause him physical pain, but it disgraces him and humiliates him in front of the people. He would never lift his head amongst them again. This kind of disgrace is more painful to the soul than physical torment. Thus, Allah does not only want to punish disbelievers by the hands of believers, but He also wants them to be humiliated so that they would not be able to lift their heads.

Allah *the Almighty* gives a third consequence for fighting, namely granting Muslims victory. In view of this, when believers fight disbelievers, the disbelievers are afflicted with punishment, disgrace and defeat. Therefore, there is a stage of punishing, second there is a stage of disgracing, third there is a stage of being victorious, and then comes a stage of soothing the hearts of believers.

This means that a victory which believers would attain, with the aid of Allah, in their battle against disbelievers would soothe their hearts after having suffered abuse and oppression. It is as though victory would cure the illness which had filled the hearts of these believers, along with removing wrath from their hearts. In other words, it would remove wrath and curbed emotions in their hearts. It is as though fighting against disbelievers would not only bring punishment and disgrace to the disbelievers, but it would aid believers, along with curing believers' hearts, which had been filled with pain and wrath due to the aggression of disbelievers against them, their attempt to humiliate them and their usurping their rights. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيُذۡهِبۡ غَيۡظَ قُلُوبِهِمۡۗ وَيَتُوبُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ١٥

And remove the rage from their hearts. God
turns to whoever He will in His mercy; God is all
knowing and wise [15] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 15)

Those who betray their covenants and aid one another against the allies of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* shall see how Allah requites them, and thus, the hearts of believers are soothed and their entire wrath fades away. We know that a cure follows a sickness, and medicine is essential for a cure. It is as if the punishment of Allah was a cure for the hearts of believers; it was a cure for what the disbelievers of the Quraysh had done to them by aiding the tribe of Bakr against Khuza‘a that was an ally of our master Prophet Muhammad. So, Allah punishes them through believers' hands, making believers victorious over them and disgracing them at the same time.

We notice that although Allah *the Exalted* punishes them and severely censures them, He opens a door for repentance. This is something only Allah is able to do since everyone is His servant; whether a believer or a disbeliever, and He is his Creator Who is jealously protective of His creation. After punishing and disgracing them severely and thereby soothing the hearts of believers, He opens the door to repentance. Thus, He *the Almighty* gives believers the power of faithful clemency. They must not be haughty with those who come forth in repentance and faith: 'and Allah turns [mercifully] to whom He pleases.' (*at-Tawba:* 13)

Allah sets and knows all requirements of rulings, and everything has wisdom behind it. In spite of that, He wants fighting to take place in order to smash their tyranny. There is wisdom behind repentance, namely preventing disbelievers from carrying on evil. The establishment of repentance was a Mercy from Allah *the Most High* to His creatures. Had Allah not established repentance, everyone who would commit a sin would seize whatever he could from this worldly life, go to extremes with evildoing, increase his corruption and drag others into corruption with him; all of this is due to his believing that there is no way of repenting and that he is doomed to go to hell. Furthermore, he sees that his fate is sealed and there is no repentance. Thus, the establishment of repentance stops evildoers from going to the extremes with evil, and thereby, Allah *the Exalted* protects society from their evil and places in their heart hope that He will accept their repentance along with a wish that Allah will forgive him. They, therefore, would seek to do good deeds that might expiate the sins they have committed. Then, it is a means of protection for people and a way of halting the spread of evil and corruption. Therefore, fighting, punishment, disgrace and repentance have wisdom in addition to Allah requiting; He requites with wisdom as well as when He accepts repentance, He accepts it with wisdom.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

أَمۡ حَسِبۡتُمۡ أَن تُتۡرَكُواْ وَلَمَّا يَعۡلَمِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ جَٰهَدُواْ مِنكُمۡ وَلَمۡ يَتَّخِذُواْ مِن
دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا رَسُولِهِۦ وَلَا ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَلِيجَةٗۚ وَٱللَّهُ خَبِيرُۢ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ ١٦

**Do you think that you will be left untested without God
identifying which of you will strive for His cause and take no
supporters apart from God, His Messenger, and other
believers? God is fully aware of all your actions [16]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 16)**

The rhetorical question in this verse is meant to express negation, in other words, Allah would not leave you without manifesting His Knowledge in the world and knowing who have strong enough faith amongst you, making you worthy of striving in Allah’s cause. If you imagine that Allah would leave you without any trials, without testing and without purification, you have to rid yourselves of this false notion and accept the contrary (*al-’Ankabut:* 2-3/ *al-Baqara*: 141).

Trials are essential for those chosen by Allah to carry the message and confront the evils of social dissolution and corruption. Allah, thereby, purifies the faithful so that each one of them will be completely loyal to Him and willing to sacrifice for the sake of His cause. When Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has not yet known, this does not mean that He does not know and that He will come to know. Undoubtedly, Allah knows everything pre-eternally, but His pre-eternal Knowledge is not an argument against man. I always give the following example, and Allah *the Almighty* is incomparable. A dean of a college could announce that an award for academic achievement will be given, and he wants to give it to the best student. A teacher, who knows the level of the students, tells him that so-and-so student is the top of the class and deserves the award. The dean says that he wants to arrange a test so that those who do not win will have some evidence. This is the practical, reality-based knowledge that the Allah *the Exalted* wants to reveal by means of trials. He knows everything from pre-eternity, but when this knowledge is manifested in the real world, it is an argument against those who disobey.

Allah *Glorified is He* questions us by asking if we think that we will be left alone without trial and purification. Allah uses the Arabic word *Lamma* (when) that indicates negation. It is as saying someone has not come yet, which means that he has not come until now. ‘The word *Lamma* is different from *Lam* (not) as the word *Lam* does not imply any expectation that the action will be accomplished later, rather, it implies that it will never be accomplished. As for *Lamma*, it implies that the action is expected to be accomplished later. What this means is that the action has not been accomplished at the time of speaking, but might be accomplished later. When you say, ‘Our orchard has not yielded fruit yet', this means that it has not borne any fruit, but it might easily bear fruit later. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The dwellers of the desert say, "We believe." Say, "You do not believe but say, 'We submit.'" Faith has not yet entered into your hearts, and if you obey

Allah and His Messenger, He will not diminish aught of your deeds. Surely, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-Hujurat:* 14) This noble verse means that faith had not entered their hearts yet, but it would enter them later, which was a glad tiding for them. The Bedouin said, 'We have attained to faith', so Allah *Glorified is He* clarified to them that they have surrendered, but faith has not entered their hearts yet. Faith means the absolute conviction of the heart, whilst Islam is submission to the behaviours which the faith of the heart demands. Therefore, the meaning is that one has chosen to act in accordance with the way of Islam, but this is only superficial behaviour which does not come from the depths of the heart.

When Allah says that He has not yet known, this does not mean that His Knowledge is linked to the moment, for His Knowledge is pre-eternal, not subject to vicissitudes of time and change. The knowledge meant in this verse is the reality-based knowledge that would be an argument against a person. If Allah had not told us, we would say, 'Had You commanded us to fight, O, Lord, we would have fought, and had You commanded us to bear the war with steadfast patience, we would have done so, and we would have been the best of all those who struggled!'

Therefore, trials are a practical test. One of these trials is facing the enemy in battle. Those who flee prove themselves deficient in this duty, while those who cannot bear the trials patiently recognise the deficiency of their faiths; this is reality-based knowledge.

Therefore, Allah intends, by manifesting His Knowledge in this world, to distinguish between honouring the struggle and fleeing from it. He wants a defined conduct of faith that shows those people did not seek help from any but He and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The word *Walija* (help) is an active noun derived from the word *walijah* which means entrance. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah causes the night to enter into the day and causes the day to enter into the night.' (*al-Hajj:* 61) This means that He makes the night enter into day and makes the day enter into night. The meaning of *walija* is something which enters into something else that is not part of it. It is said in the same form in Arabic whether it refers to singular, dual or plural forms of masculine or feminine cases. It is the same whether it describes a man, a woman, two men, two women or a group of men as just. The meaning of *walija* in this verse is the evil advisor who mixes with weak believers and penetrates their souls to discover their secrets and pass them on to disbelievers. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wants to clarify that He knows in the real world those who struggle hard without befriending any evil advisors from amongst disbelievers who interfere with their affairs and reveal their secrets

We can say that believers are not allowed to seek help from disbelievers since disbelievers would seek to learn their secrets and reveal them to their enemies, thus exposing believers to danger. Believers must take Allah, the Prophet and other believers as helpers. Muslims must allow them into their inner circle since they can be trusted with the secrets they know. As for the enemies and rivals amongst disbelievers, they cannot be trusted with any of the believers' secrets. Thus, Allah ends the verse, stating that He is aware of what we do.

This warns against thinking that believers can mix with disbelievers and give them the secrets of other believers without anyone knowing it. Believers should be aware that Allah hears and sees all. Allah is aware of everything, and nothing escapes His Knowledge. Therefore, believers should not deceive themselves by imagining that when they conceal something from people's eyes, they conceal it from Allah. Nothing escapes the eyes of the Creator, and if believers manage to escape the justice of the worldly life, they will never escape the justice of Heaven.

Allah *Glorified is He* then takes us to another issue. He says:

مَا كَانَ لِلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ أَن يَعۡمُرُواْ مَسَٰجِدَ ٱللَّهِ شَٰهِدِينَ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِم
بِٱلۡكُفۡرِۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ حَبِطَتۡ أَعۡمَٰلُهُمۡ وَفِي ٱلنَّارِ هُمۡ خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

It is not right for the idolaters to tend God's places of worship while testifying to their own disbelief: the deeds of such people will come to nothing and they will abide in Hell [17] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 17)

This verse seems to be an explanation of the reason for the disavowal which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed 'Ali ibn Abi Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* to announce on the day of the greatest pilgrimage. Disavowal means separation, and it meant that no idolater would be allowed to enter the Mosque or do circumambulation naked in the Sacred House. This disavowal of Allah and His Messenger acted as prevention for idolaters from entering the Sacred Mosque. A number of idolaters had turned the Sacred Mosque into a kind of social club for themselves sitting there to chat at night, conducting business and doing other things. They had also given pilgrims unfermented raisin juice to drink, they had taken care of the Mosque's veils and they had fed those who came to visit the House of Allah.

The disbelievers used to do all of this in Mecca, but it all ended with the disavowal which ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb announced on behalf of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was inspired by his Lord to do so. Therefore, idolaters no longer had the right to visit the mosques of Allah. The phrase that 'The idolaters have no right to visit the mosques of Allah' has two meanings. The first is to sit in the mosques in order to visit with others, and the second is to look after the mosque, its cleaning and maintenance. Allah *the Exalted* forbade idolaters from both of these activities. In this verse, we are referring to the Inviolable Mosque (*at-Tawba:* 17).

The Inviolable Mosque is a place where people from all over the world turn to when they pray. Every place where a Muslim prostrates may be called a mosque and due to the great number of those who prostrate, the Inviolable Mosque can be considered as being many houses of worship, not only one. Or it may be due to the directions of prayer being numerous in the Inviolable Mosque since some prostrate at the north side of the *Ka‘ba*, others on the south side, others on the east side and others on the west side which are cardinal directions. There are also the derivative directions, meaning that some people face southeast, while others face southwest. The derivative directions from which people may face the *Ka‘ba* are manifold, with every direction being a mosque in itself, and there are also those who cannot physically see the *Ka‘ba*, yet they turn to face its direction.

We must note in this verse that the words 'it is not for' express negation. We understand that it is not rationally, logically or religiously acceptable that disbelievers come near the mosque nor tend to it. This is due to mosques being for worship, and worship needs an object, namely Allah, but idolaters associate partners with Him. It is therefore logical that they are not to be allowed to enter mosques. Preventing them from entering, visiting and tending mosques is something logical, and their own disbelief bears witness to this. This is why they are prohibited from entering mosques of Allah.

Testimony is considered by either state or words. As for their spoken testimony, they used to ask Jews and Christians what their religion is. They used to respond with their religions, but if an idolater were asked, he would affirm his own idolatry. This was their spoken testimony, and as for the testimony of their state, they prostrated before idols and worshipped them instead of Allah.

So how could we not say to an idolater that he has no place in the mosque and that he should keep away from it? Islam is far above the need for any idolater to build a mosque for it or for a disbeliever to tend to any of Allah’s places of worship. Allah *the Most High* is far above the need for anyone to visit Him in His house, while he does not believe in Him. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says that they bear witness against themselves when they deny the truth. They had forgotten the very first testimony of the truth, which they made when Allah called them to bear witness against themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes! We bear witness." Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Surely, we were heedless of this."' (*al-An‘am:* 172-173)

Therefore, they bore witness to the Oneness of Allah at the first moment of creation and swore to Him, but then they repudiated this testimony, associated partners with Him, placed idols in Allah’s Inviolable House, and then falsely claimed that they only worshipped them to bring them nearer to Him: 'And those who take as protectors others beside Him say, "We serve them only that they may bring us near to Allah in station." Surely, Allah will judge between them concerning that wherein they differ. Surely, Allah guides not him who is an ungrateful liar.' (*az-Zumar:* 3) This is the very essence of idolatry, and thus, they bore witness against themselves to their disbelief.

We know that a mosque is a place where we prostrate. For Muslims, every place on this earth is suitable for prostration and may, therefore, be considered as a mosque. This is something by which Allah has solely honoured Muslims. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I have been given five things which no (prophet) before me was ever given. I have been given victory by dread over (the lands covered by) a month's journey, and the earth has been made for me a purified place of worship, so that any man of my community to whom comes the time of prayer may pray (where he is). Battle-spoils are lawful for me, whilst they were lawful to none before me. I have been given the right of intercession, and a prophet used to be sent to his people alone, whilst I was sent to all mankind.'(1) This Hadith makes it clear that one of the things with which Allah honoured solely the followers of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is that He made every place on the earth suitable for the performance of prayer and made the entire earth pure. It is enough for a believer to perform dry ablution with earth and then to pray on it. However, there is a difference between a place which is suitable for prayer, a place which is also the area for your daily life and a place which is expressly reserved for worship. You may pray in the field where you cultivate. You may pray in the factory where you produce, and you may pray at school as well as learn there. These places are all mosques in the general sense in that there are places of prostration to Allah. However, when the word 'mosque' is used, one ordinarily thinks of the enclosed place in which none of life's daily activities takes place, a place that is dedicated solely for prayer and prostration. When you corner an area even with only a white line of chalk or a piece of string and call it a mosque, then you should perform no activities therein except prayer. This is the meaning of mosque in the technical vocabulary of the Sacred Law. Every house you build for the Sake of Allah is called a mosque. The prayer-direction of all the mosques throughout the world is the Inviolable Mosque. Therefore, mosques are places that are singled out to be mosques or places of worship, so they are for prayer and no other actions of life. The devotion of this space is a human choice, and the direction it faces is the Inviolable Mosque, the Greatest Mosque which was chosen by Allah *the Almighty* and the first to be built: 'Surely, the first House founded for all mankind is that at Becca, abounding in blessings and a guidance for all the worlds.' (*Al-'Imran:* 96)

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*

In addition, since the Sacred House was chosen and set up by Allah for mankind, we might ask whether mankind were those who set it up. No, they were not. Someone other than mankind set it up since the meaning of mankind is Adam *peace be upon Him* and his progeny. Therefore, it must have been set up before the time of Adam. The Quran's logic suggests that the House existed before Adam, and if we go a little deeper, we find that this Inviolable House is 'abounding in blessings and a guidance for all the worlds' and the angels are part of the worlds.

Thus, we see that the idea some people have that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon Him* was the one who specified the location and the foundations of the House is incorrect. It is due to the House being the place and not the things within the place, and furthermore, the House is not the stone or the building which we call the *Ka'ba*. The *Ka'ba* is what inhabits the place. The House, however, is the place wherein the *Ka'ba* is built. For if a great rain were to come and sweep the *Ka'ba* away and a flat area of land left in its place, where would we pray? We would pray towards the place, as rain might remove the objects within the place, but the place remains.

When our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* came along, the traces of the House were nowhere to be seen. Allah commanded him to raise the House. Allah *Glorified is He* did not ask him to identify the place, rather, He commanded him to build the third dimension (height) as every area has two dimensions, length and width. Plus, if it is circular it has a circumference, and if it is triangular, it is composed of three sides, However, raising the height gives the object volume, and our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* raised the foundations of the House after Allah had specified its place and shown it to him:

'And remember the time when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) raised the foundations of the house by praying, "Our Lord, accept this from us, for You are the All-Hearing, the All Knowing" (*al-Baqara:* 127).

It is as though the House was already dedicated before they raised it. This is supported by the fact that when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the coming of Hajar and her baby son, Ismail (Ishmael) and about how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*, sent them to live in this place, He said: 'O, our

Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Your Sacred House.' (*Ibrahim:* 37)

Ibrahim (Abraham) raised the foundations with the help of his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*, after he had grown up and become strong, for he had sent him and his mother to live by the House when he was still a baby. Therefore, the place was already designated as a House, but Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* built the structure, which would occupy the site by giving it its third dimension, namely height.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And when We assigned to Ibrahim (Abraham) the place of the House.' (*al-Hajj:* 26) This means that Allah showed and designated to him the site, which was where Ibrahim (Abraham) would build upon with stones to give the House discernible form. Thus, the House was already there.

We can observe that all the mosques spread throughout the world must face a single point, for One God. Allah *the Almighty* specified this point by the prayer-direction, which faces the *Ka'ba*. Some free thinkers want to change the meaning of the verse that says that wherever you turn, there is Allah's countenance (face): 'To Allah belongs the East and the West, so wherever you turn, there will be the Face of Allah. Surely, Allah is Bountiful, All Knowing.' (*al-Baqara:* 115)

They claim that whatever place they face while praying, they will find Allah's countenance there. We say that the correct understanding of this is that the countenance of Allah is in all places, but beware of thinking that the *Ka'ba* is specified as our prayer direction since it is Allah's Countenance! No, rather, we are merely commanded to face it when we pray. If you were to look at Muslims all over the world, you would find that each one of them faces the *Ka'ba* when he prays. The *Ka'ba* is the focal point, and we all face it. You find that some face it from the east, others from the west, others from the north and others from the south. Thus, it is true that wherever we turn, there is Allah's countenance.

Since we know that mosques are specified and dedicated for worship, it is not right that an idolater should come to them. We should not accept or tolerate an idolater aiding in their reparations or cleaning because Allah is in no need of this. We should also refrain from discussing worldly matters in the mosque. The Prophet of Allah said, 'A time will come when the people will gather in circles at their mosques having no concern but this worldly life: Allah has no need of them, so do not sit with them.' (1)

It is as though it is not enough for them to love this worldly life outside the mosque, but they want to retain it even during those minutes they set aside for prayer. They drag the life of this world into the mosque with them. I want to ask them why they do not set aside the affairs of this world during these minutes. Each one of them spends all his life in this world immersed in Allah’s favours. So let him then devote some of his time to Allah, the One Who gave him all these favours.

We must therefore know that as long as we have devoted a place to the worship of Allah, we must accompany this devotion of place with a devotion to the purpose for which a man enters the mosque. We should turn to Allah *the Almighty* therein because the mosque is devoted to the worship of Him. Even though the whole earth is suitable to be prayed on, when we go to the mosque, our attitude must be centred on worship and all our actions, feelings and emotions must be directed to Allah. Therefore, the best thing we can do when we enter the mosque is to intend to make a spiritual retreat. We must keep ourselves away from those who want to engage us in conversations about worldly matters.

Traditions narrate that it is forbidden to engage in a conversation in a mosque because doing so nullifies works and erases good deeds. We might do many good deeds outside the mosque, but we must only enter it with the proper etiquette of the mosque. Standing before Allah in His House has its proper etiquette and decorum. We must not step in front of people as they pray, and this should not even require any arrangement since there should be no empty spaces at the front, whilst the back is full. This will ensure that we can sit where we want to pray without steeping in front of others. We should sit in the mosque in the order in which we arrive; and this will ensure that the proper etiquette and decorum of the mosque is observed.

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Hakim]*

We know as well that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for loss to be incurred by all those who conduct business deals in the mosque, and he prayed that those who seek worldly things in the mosque may not be given success by Allah. He also prayed that anyone who searches for a lost item in the mosque that Allah does not grant it to him. Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If you see someone buying or selling in the mosque, say, "May Allah not make your bargain profitable!" When you see someone announcing in it that they lost something, say, "May Allah not restore it to you."' He also narrated that the Prophet of Allah said, 'If anyone hears a man inquiring in the mosque about something he has lost, he should say, *"La raddaha Allahu 'alaika* (May Allah not restore it to you)" for mosques are not built for this purpose.'

Therefore, let us devote the time we spend in the mosque to the One Who gives us all these favours. That is Allah *the Most High*. When outside the mosque and at any other times, we live in the midst of the favours which Allah has extended to us.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says that He had established the House as a means of guidance for all the worlds: 'Surely, the first House founded for all mankind is that at Becca, abounding in blessings and guidance for all the worlds.*' (Al-'Imran*: 96), this means it is for all people, not only for those who sit within it. It is as though the illuminations and revelations of the Allah *Glorified is He* are the most magnificent things in His House first of all, then these illuminations and revelations spread out to all the other houses of Allah and to those who attend them and offer worship in them. The houses of Allah are the places in which mercies descend from Allah *the Almighty* and this fact is quite clear when He spoke about His light in the chapter of *an-Nur* when He says: 'In houses which Allah has permitted to be exalted and that His name may be remembered in them.' (*an-Nur:* 36) This means that those who observe this light which descends on them are the attendants of the mosques.

In the same chapter, Allah *the Exalted* says that He is the light of the heavens and the earth. This means that His light engulfs them. When Allah wants to introduce a similitude for something that is intangible, He precedes it with something tangible that men know so that people can recognise the intangible or invisible thing. Metaphysics and the unseen are difficult to realise in regards to humans. This is why Allah simplifies it by coining a similitude out of tangible things since we all see them. By this approach, Allah *the Most High* gathers the metaphysics which is unknown and tangible, which is known together to draw the similitude closer to our minds and make it clear to us. Therefore, Allah wanted to combine between what is unfamiliar to people to what is familiar to them. That is, visitors of Mosques are the ones who attain benefit from being exposed to this Divine Light. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *an-Nur:* 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth…' (*an-Nur:* 35). This clearly means that His Light fills the heavens and the earth. When Allah *the Almighty* gives parables to illustrate spiritual matters for people to understand them properly, He presents tangible examples which everyone understands; and in this way He *Glorified is He* makes these spiritual or metaphysical matters easier for people's minds to grasp. In other words, due to the fact that spiritual and metaphysical matters are difficult for people to understand, He *the Almighty* makes these things easier by presenting them in the form of parables drawn from tangible, physical matters which are clearly perceived by people. As a result, people will have a clearer image about this topic which they know nothing about.

In this regard, we, human beings, find that 'day' and 'night' occur as a result of the movement of the earth around the sun, which is why we find that one particular half of the earth has day while the other has night. We know for certain that 'the day' is used to refer to that particular period which is naturally light, whilst 'the night' refers to that particular period which is dark. This indicates that the term 'light' is defined as the brightness which comes from the sun, fire, etc. and from electrical devices, and which allows things to be seen. It goes without saying that when man clearly sees items and objects around her/him, s/he will never collide with any of them.

But, if there is no light at all, man will certainly collide with these objects and items around him/her; a matter which will consequently lead to one of the following two results: either colliding with something which is weaker than him/her, or vice versa. As a result, both of the two parties involved in the collision will suffer damage, but of course, in accordance with the level of the collision, which is why we firmly believe that 'light' is the most important and crucial factor whereby one avoids collisions and, in this way, is protected from destroying other things or him/herself being destroyed.

Clearly, it is by virtue of ‘light’ that one can perceive items and objects around him/her well and in this way avoid collision with them. As a matter of fact, this is the due role to be performed by visible light, i.e. the light of the sun from which all creatures, with no exception at all, derive benefit. Hence, we stress that ‘light’ is a Divine Blessing granted by the Lord *Glorified is He* to all His Creatures in this worldly life–those who believe in Him and those who do not believe alike.(1)

That is why when the sun is absent; we resort to making use of different items and objects by means of which we can produce light. With regards to this, we should be aware that the light generated by all these objects is of limited strength and for this reason is able to lighten only a limited area of the place. For example, one may light a candle, while another might use a small gas-lamp; still a third might use an electric neon light. Furthermore, we might have a fourth who uses several electric lamps to fill the space with light, that is, each will try his/her best to get light according to his/her feasible means. Yet, when the sun rises, everyone turns off the lamps because their light becomes useless in the presence of the greater light of the sun–this is actually the true meaning of visible light. As such, we can fully realise the great difference between the Divinely created light and that made by man for the following reason: the first, which is the Divinely created light, is greater than all other forms of light, which is why they all are useless in its existence.

Moreover, we have the spiritual light (guidance) by means of which one is guided to attain a perfect moral character and not degraded into having a vile moral character. That is to say that all that guides to the Divine Way of guidance is called ‘light’; a point which is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…Indeed, there has come to you light and a clear Book from Allah…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 15).

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(1) ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah Almighty shared out your character between you as He divided your provision between you. Allah Almighty bestows wealth on those He loves and those He does not love. He only gives faith to those He loves’ *(Narrated by Ahmad)*

The ‘light’ in this particular aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Ma’ida* refers basically to the Divine Way of Guidance by means of which one is able to attain a higher spiritual rank and a perfect moral character, and therefore none will harbour grudges against his/her fellow man, nor will we envy one another, nor will we take bribes from one another, but rather, we will all respect the rights of one another.

Here, we should be fully aware of the undeniable fact that as long as experiment proves that the light of the sun, a created being, is brighter than all other forms of light to the extent that all these other forms of light are deemed useless in the existence of the light of the sun, the light of the Divine Way of Guidance in the same way is stronger than all other man-made ideologies and thus cannot exist with any of them in the same heart. That is to say that capitalism, communism, existentialism and all similar ideas are useless and meaningless in the presence of the Divine Way of Guidance. This is based on the fact that all of these ideologies were invented out of man’s personal caprice. In addition, they all work for achieving the personal interests of those who adopt them; a point which is totally different when it comes to the Divine Way of Guidance which is primarily meant to achieve the interests of all mankind. Hence, no one should lay down ideologies or hold onto values which are against the Way of Guidance set by Allah *Glorified is He* because He *the Almighty* through His Way of Guidance, has arranged everything clearly for His Creatures.

At that point, we ask all those who adopt such deviant ideologies which contradict the Divine Way of Guidance, ‘Why do you not use material matters as a key to understanding spiritual ones? You are fully aware of the fact that all different forms of light are useless in the existence of the light of the sun created by Allah *the Almighty* so why do you not get rid of all man-made ideologies and cling to the Divine Way of Guidance instead–especially if we take into account that the Divine Way of Guidance is eligible for all times and places?’

Here, I should drive your attention to the fact that even though we, through experience, unanimously agree on the fact that the visible light of the sun created by Allah is brighter than all other forms of light, we refuse to admit that the Divine Way of Guidance is more fully qualified to attain the interest of all mankind than all other forms of man-made ideologies. In other words, despite the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has given us this light, i.e. the Divine Way of Guidance to show us the way to the right path, we refuse but to hold onto these deviant ideologies and values resulting from the work of the human mind which is of limited knowledge and experience. As a result, the entire world today suffers corruption and misery. Ironically, although we are fully aware of the main reason behind this deterioration and decadency which is keeping away from the Divine Way of Guidance, we do not return to it, but rather, we hold onto our own values and ideologies instead.

Once again, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a striking example of a tangible matter, i.e. the visible light, for us to be able to properly understand the true meaning of 'The Light of Allah'; He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth …' (*an-Nur:* 35); that is to say that His Light fills all the corners of the heavens and the earth, leaving no part of them whatsoever in darkness. He *Glorified is He* then says: '…a likeness of His light is as a niche …' (*an-Nur:* 35). The Arabic word *Mishkah* (niche) is an alcove or a hollow in a wall in which people of the countryside used to use to place lamps to light up the room. As a matter of fact, today we have replaced these niches with small shelves upon which lamps are placed. Because the light of the lamp is heavily concentrated in this alcove, it is fully filled with light which is then scattered to fill the rest of the room. The light of the lamp, in this case, first fully lightens the niche and then the rest of the room.

As such, we reach the conclusion that the Light of Allah *the Almighty* leaves no place in the heavens and the earth without reaching it, which is why we find no (permanent) darkness in our world, exactly like the small circle through which the entire light of the lamp shines so that there is not a single millimetre of darkness in it. By the way, we call this particular device which emits light *Misbah* ('lamp', from the root *'s-b-h'*) because it gives us something akin to the light of *As-Sabah* ('the morning' from the same root).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass …' (*an-Nur:* 35). As a matter of fact, if we want to make the light of something brighter, we place it inside a glass in order to protect it from the wind that might negatively affect it in such a way that makes it scatter here and there in vain. We should remember that the glass surrounding the lamp works as a reflexive surface for the light, which clearly gives the true meaning of the concentration of light within the niche.

He *the Almighty* then continues, indicating that the glass surrounding the niche is not an ordinary one, but rather, it itself produces light, and therefore this Divine Light is brighter than any other form of light; He *Glorified is He* says: '…(and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star …' (*an-Nur:* 35). But from this arises the following question, 'What is that particular source that supplies this lamp with fuel to produce such a strong light?' In fact, Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gives us the answer, saying: '…lit from (the oil of) a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West …' (*an-Nur:* 35). That is, the blessed tree, the olive tree, has two additional characteristics, which are that it is neither of the East nor of the West. As such, its light has not been affected by the heat or cold, but rather, it is a pure light which has been produced in a moderate environment. The term 'pure light' has been used in this context to refer to the highest and most unadulterated form of light. Let us enumerate these stages for us to fully realise how we reach this purest form of light: the first stage begins with a narrow niche in which there is an extraordinary lamp; then, the lamp is enclosed in an extraordinary glass which amplifies the light for it to shine out like a radiant star; and finally the oil with which the lamp is fuelled comes from a blessed olive tree which is as pure as pure can be.

Allah *Glorified is He* then continues, describing the oil of this olive tree by saying: '…whose oil almost gives off light even if no fire touches it…' (*an-Nur:* 35). That is, everything therein shines of its own accord and in this way amplifies the power of the light emitted by this particular lamp placed in this narrow niche. In other words, the small circle shines and its light is amplified by the glass surrounding the lamp; the glass itself shines and gives more light; the oil is blessed and unadulterated, resulting in the light it produces being brilliant and above all else; and the oil itself produces its own light without being touched by fire. It is as though there is light upon light, and as a result there is not a single part of this circle which is left in darkness. As a matter of fact, this is how Allah *Glorified is He* lights up the entire universe so that not a single part of it is left in darkness, but rather, it is all covered with Divine Light.

However, we should be wary of relying on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Allah is Light …' to say that He *Glorified is He* resembles–Allah forbid–His creation; rather, we should be fully aware of the fact that this particular saying of Allah tells us how He *the Almighty* lights up His entire universe including the heavens and the earth and what is between them.

Concerning this, we can quote the following story of the famous poet Abu Tammam in which it is said that he wanted to praise caliph Ahmed ibnul Mu'tasim and thus described him as having:

'Amr's bravery with Hatim's largess,
And Ahnaf's patience with Iyas' cunning

These poetic verses indicate plainly that Abu Tammam had praised the caliph by saying that he acquired all of these good, moral characteristics: the bravery of 'Amr ibn Ma'ad Yakrib (a brave Yemini knight), the tolerance and generosity of Hatim At-Ta'i, the forbearance of Al-Ahnaf ibn Qays and the intelligence of Iyas, characteristics which none before him acquired together.

But, one of the caliph's retinue said, 'How could you praise the Caliph with such characteristics which his subjects possess? The Caliph is above all of those whom you have mentioned! He is braver than 'Amr, more generous than Hatim, more forbearing than Ahnaf, and cleverer than Iyas!'

When replying to this, Allah *the Almighty* guided Abu Tammam to give a suitable answer straight away as the poet said:

Censure me not for comparing him to his lessers,
Such aberrant examples of valour and bounty;
For Allah used a lesser thing to symbolise His Light:
A niche, wherein a lamp is shining

That is, the poet had only given this example by way of allegory, not intending to draw a similarity between Allah and His creatures.

Back to the verse of the chapter of *an-Nur,* Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…whose oil almost gives off light even if no fire touches it-Light upon light-…' (*an-Nur:* 35). This part of the verse obviously indicates that everything that produces its own light makes the original light brighter and stronger. And just as one needs visible light to show him/her the way in this worldly life, a person also needs the spiritual light by means of which his/her moral character is perfected, which is why we all should firmly adhere to the Divine Way of Guidance which is not in any way comparable to any of these deviant ideologies and values.

Let us offer another example to fully clarify this point; Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Anfal:* 'O you who believe! Answer (the Call of) Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] when he calls you to that which gives you life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). It goes without saying that Allah *the Almighty* addresses people who are alive, so what is the wisdom behind using this particular phrase: 'to that which gives you life' in this context? Actually, we should be fully aware of the fact that this particular verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal* tells us clearly that we have two kinds of life, each one of which is different from the other; the first is the worldly life in which we move and exert efforts to obtain our needs and which has a limited period of time; it is permanently subject to change, that is, its blessings will never last forever, but rather, man will certainly be deprived of them at some time for one reason or another. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* does not want people to firmly cling to this life because if man does this, s/he will do anything, lawful or unlawful, to get what s/he wants. Concerning this, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* wants His slaves to follow the Divine Way of Guidance which will undoubtedly cause them benefit in both this worldly life and the Hereafter in which people will, due to the Omnipotence of Allah, have eternal blessings.

It is now clear that the saying of Allah: 'O you who believe! Answer (the Call of) Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] when he calls you to that which gives you life …' (*al-Anfal:* 24) clearly means that there are two lives: one life in which man moves and exerts efforts to obtain what s/he wants. In fact, man's affairs in this particular life will run properly if s/he adheres to the Divine Way of Guidance which, in turn, leads man to be prosperous in the other eternal life, i.e. the Hereafter.

As such, we can reach the conclusion that Allah *the Almighty* wants us not to consider this worldly life as our ultimate objective, but rather, we should make use of this limited life to be successful in the life to come. In other words, He *Glorified is He* does not want us to give precedence to this worldly life over the everlasting one in the Hereafter. We should take into account the fact that Allah *the Almighty* describing this worldly life, says: ‘When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down making obeisance to him’ (*Sad:* 72). Allah *the Almighty* in this verse of the chapter of *Sad* describes this worldly life which He does not want us to take as our ultimate objective; rather, He *Glorified is He* wants use to view it as a means leading to an everlasting life whose blessings are eternal and select in every way and according to the full meaning of the words. There is a very important point that we should notice in this verse which is that just as Allah *the Almighty* called this particular thing which He breathed into Adam *Ruh* (Spirit), He *Glorified is He* in the same way called His Way of Guidance *Ruh*; a point which is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in which He says: ‘And thus did We reveal to you [Prophet Muhammad] an inspired Book *(Ruhan)* by Our Command. You did not know what the Book was, nor [what] the faith [was], but We made it a light, guiding thereby whom We please of Our servants; and most surely you show the way to the right path’ (*ash-Shura:* 52).

As a matter of fact, this verse of the chapter of *ash-Shu’ara’* refers to the Divine Way of Guidance which benefits us in the Hereafter. That is to say that if we adhere to and follow this Divine Way of Guidance, we will attain a higher rank of spirituality. In addition, we will for sure have a perfect moral character. Clearly, Allah *the Almighty* grants you both these two kinds of light, i.e. the visible light of the sun and the light obtained from His Way of Guidance, for you to be prosperous in both this worldly life and the Hereafter.

Back to the verse of the chapter of *an-Nur;* He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Light upon light …’ (*an-Nur:* 35). Concerning this verse, we can see the absolute accuracy of the style of the Quran; Allah *the Almighty* does not say, ‘Light with light’ because man is not held legally responsible before Allah until s/he reaches adulthood.(1) That is, man derives benefit from the visible light in the period before adulthood, then after adulthood s/he is supposed to derive benefit from the Divine Way of Guidance which is the light represented in the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *‘Ali Allah be pleased with him* narrated that he heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘The pen has been lifted from three: From the sleeper until=

Once again the light of the sun is clearly a Divine Blessing from which all mankind, believers and disbelievers alike, obtain benefit. Similarly, He *the Almighty* sent down His Way of Guidance but left people, due to the free will He created in them to choose whether to follow it or not, and for this reason it is crystal clear that there is a difference between this visible light and that one pertaining to the Divine Way of Guidance. Finally, we should not forget that Allah *the Almighty* sets such parables for people for them to be able to understand matters, a point which is clear in the conclusion of the verse in which Allah says: '…and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is All Knowing of all things' (*an-Nur:* 35). And the next verse tells us clearly where people can receive this Divine Light; He *Glorified is He* says: 'In houses which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified …' (*an-Nur:* 36).

The verse starts with a prepositional clause which means we should search for the word that determines it, that is, what is that particular thing which exists in the Houses of Allah?! Indeed, we can only find the answer in the saying of Allah: '… Light upon Light …' (*an-Nur:* 35). That is, mosques, Houses of Allah, are the places in which spiritual light is received from Him *Glorified is He*. And it is by virtue of this Divine Light that one attains a higher spiritual rank which will certainly benefit him/her in the Hereafter. Let us offer the following example to illustrate this point; when a machine breaks down or does not work properly, the one who is able to repair it best is the one who made it in the first place. That is, because of the undeniable fact that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created man, He *the Almighty* Alone, is the One Who is fully Able to set the way of guidance by means of which people's affairs will run smoothly and perfectly. Similarly, as long as our Lord *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who creates, supplies with provisions, gives life and causes

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= he wakes up, from the minor until he grows up, and from the insane until he comes back to his senses or recovers' *(Narrated by Ahmad).*

death, how is it conceivable for a mere human being to claim that he laid down a way of life for mankind; in fact, man only knows and inclines to what causes corruption in the earth. We say to all those who make this claim, ‘As long as you hurry with your broken down television to the one who makes it to repair it for you, why do you not similarly turn to Allah, the One Who created you, to know how to perfect your moral character?!’

In truth, Muslims’ frequent attendance in mosques to be permanently in the Presence of their Lord is a way of perfecting and cultivating the moral character of their souls; for when Muslims stand before Allah to offer their prayers, they are filled with contentment and a peace of mind because one may not know which of his/her mental faculties has been actually affected by uneasiness.

This is why whenever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was distressed by anything, he used to offer prayers.(1) But what does the Arabic statement ‘*adhabahu amr’* (anything distressed him) mean? It refers to when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was afflicted with something which was beyond his capacity or which he *peace and blessings be upon him* was unable to tackle. As such, why do we not all follow the good example of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?! Truly, if we do this and follow his example, we, at times of distress, will certainly head for the mosques to tell Allah *the Almighty* about what distresses us and causes us hardships. Hence, it is crystal clear that when we suffer any distress, we must turn to Allah *the Almighty* to remove it from us. And we should know fully well that mosques are the best places in which one is able to supplicate Allah *Glorified is He* and tell Him about one’s problems. This is why we find him *peace and blessings be upon him* resorting to the mosque when there was a fierce wind during the night in order for it to abate. In addition, he *peace and blessings be upon him* according to the Hadith narrated by Al-Haythami used to do the same when there was a lunar or solar eclipse.

With regards to this, the adversaries of Islam might say, ‘But what did Allah do for that person who was afflicted with something beyond his/her capacity?! After all, s/he leaves the mosque in the same condition as s/he entered it!' We say to those people, 'This is how the matter appears on the surface, but you do not know what has happened to his/her inner being. You are speaking materially since you know nothing about spiritual treatment. You do not know that Allah *Glorified is He* spiritually treats the inner soul without your being aware of it. This is because mosques are the places where the Divine Light descends–this Light by means of which man's affairs in this worldly life are set in order and which also gives assurance to man's soul. Furthermore, it makes it feel secure and content'.

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(1) *Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him is narrated to have said, ‘When anything distressed Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him he prayed’ (Narrated by Ahmad).*

This means that those mosques play the same role of clinics in which doctors(1) treat patients from their physical diseases, but there is only one major difference which is that Allah *the Almighty* Himself is the One Who spiritually treats people in mosques from the diseases of their souls and hearts. In mosques, we are in the Presence of Allah *the Almighty* which is why we are in direct contact with that (incorporeal) Divine Light by means of which all man's spiritual diseases are successfully treated. Yet, we should consider our hygiene when we want to offer prayers in mosques. In addition, we must wear our best clothes while in the mosques; for although Allah *Glorified is He* does not look to our cleanliness or smartness in themselves, He *the Almighty* wants fellow Muslims who pray next to us not to feel uncomfortable on our account. If someone who works at a factory goes to the mosque in his/her work clothes, it might not be suitable for him/her to go there without bathing first; it is taken for granted that man's working clothes are an honour for him/her, but the person should change them before going to the mosque.(2) Similarly, one should pay attention to the fact that s/he might be covered in perspiration because of her/his work and as a result might give off an offensive odour which harms her/his fellow Muslims in the mosques. It is mainly for this reason, i.e. not to harm Muslims, that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prevented those who had eaten garlic and onion from attending the Prayer in mosques. In this regard, Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Whoever has eaten garlic or onion should keep away from us (or should keep away from our mosque)’.(1)

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(1) *Abi Rimthah said, 'My father said to him (Prophet Muhammad), "Show me what is on your back, for I am a physician". He (Prophet Muhammad) said, "You are only a soother. Its physician is He Who has created it"' (Narrated by Abu Dawud).*

(2) *'Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, 'The people used to work (for their livelihood) and whenever they went for the Jumu'a (Friday) Prayer, they used to go to the mosque in the same state they had been in work. Consequently, they were asked to take a bath on Friday' (Narrated by Al-Bukhari).*

In another narration narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Sahih,* Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, ‘He who has eaten onion, garlic or leek should not approach our mosque because the angels are offended (by the strong smells) just as the children of Adam are offended.’(2)

Therefore, the Muslim should do his/her best to keep the ambience of the mosque agreeable, so that people’s hearts will open wide for the Divine Light to descend therein. In addition, we must not breach the etiquettes of attending mosques. There is a very important point that I would like to drive your attention to concerning this; some people, knowing fully well that Allah *the Almighty* showers those who attend prayer in the first rows with His Infinite Mercy, attempt to prevent other Muslims from sitting in these rows by putting something like a rug or something like it in a place in the first rows until s/he comes to occupy it.(3) In the same vein, some people, upon the beginning of the prayer, try to cut through the rows to reach the first ones, which is also prohibited. We heavily stress that the front row can in no way be reserved for anyone; every person should take her/his place as s/he arrives at the mosque, that is, s/he shall sit in the empty space s/he finds. It goes without saying that Allah *the Almighty* knows very well those people who came first to the mosque and those who came late. That is why I say to those who reserve places for their relatives or friends who come late, ‘You are free to do this in your own house, but those who come to Allah’s House first shall sit down first’. I say to those who find a place that has been reserved with a prayer-mat or the like, ‘You should move it out of the way and pray there’.

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(1) *(Narrated by Al-Bukhari)*

(2) *(Narrated by Muslim)*

(3) *Abu Umamah narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is narrated to have said, ‘Allah and the angels send blessings upon the first row’ (Narrated by Ibn Majah).*

As a matter of fact, when one comes to the mosque, s/he is viewed as the guest of Allah *the Almighty*. Furthermore, we should remember a very important point which is that when someone comes to visit us at our house without arranging a meeting, we offer him/her warm and generous hospitality; yet if s/he comes after having an appointment, the hospitality shown and extended to her/him will certainly be warmer and more generous. So what about the Generosity and Hospitality of Him Who created us all when we visit Him at His Houses?!

In truth, Allah *the Almighty* out of His Overwhelming Generosity rewards you as soon as you intend to visit Him at His House, i.e. the mosque; that is, He *Glorified is He* out of His Infinite Mercy, deems you to be in a state of Prayer from the moment you make ablution in your house before you set out to offer the Prayer in the mosque. This is because He *Glorified is He* wants to extend for you the blessing of being in His Presence.

Moreover, we should take into account that when Allah *the Almighty* calls us through the *Adhan* (call to prayer) to attend prayers in mosques, He does so because He will punish those who do not answer this call.(1) But this does not mean that Allah *Glorified is He* has not also kept His Houses, i.e. mosques, open to you to visit at any time you like. As a matter of fact, the call to prayer shows how Allah *the Almighty* is keen to meet with His slaves for Him to confer His Grace and Bounty upon them. You should know that if you want to sit in the mosque before the prayer or even after it, then do so; come at any time and pray as much as you like, and when you say, 'Allah is Great', you should fully realise that you have become in the presence of Allah *the Almighty*. As for those who, for one reason or another, are unable to offer the recommended Prayers, they are only obliged to perform the five prescribed Daily Prayers since these prayers are viewed as the essential minimum one needs to preserve to protect his/her faith. This is because one, while in prayer, is in the Presence of Allah *the Almighty* to Whom s/he declares her/his loyalty and allegiance.

Prayer, then, is a benefit which Allah wants for us in order for us not to be overwhelmed by the problems of daily life. That is to say that He *Glorified is He* wants, through prayer, to drive our attention to His Way of Guidance by means of which our course of life will run smoothly. In other words, He *the Almighty* wants us not to give precedence to the adornment of this worldly life over the Divine Way of Guidance whereby one becomes prosperous in both this life and the Hereafter. Consequently, when you hear the muezzin (one who says the call to prayer) calling out to announce the Midday Prayer, for example, you must leave aside all worldly matters in your hand and go to stand before Allah *Glorified is He*. After performing the Midday Prayer, you go back to your work until you hear the call for the Afternoon Prayer, and so on. All of this is actually meant to remind you of Allah *the Almighty* the Creator so that this worldly life does not distract you and make you forget that your redemption is in the Hand of your Creator *Glorified is He*. In fact, we should be aware that the longest period between the Prayers is that between the Early Night Prayer and the Dawn Prayer, during which people are asleep and thus cannot be taken by the delights and adornments of this worldly life.

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(1) *Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever hears the call and does not come, there is no Prayer for him, except for those who have an excuse' (Narrated by Ibn Majah).*

Clearly, Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to show loyalty to Him all the time. If you are proud of being a slave to Allah, you will constantly pledge your allegiance to Him *Glorified is He* by offering prayers regularly. When you humbly prostrate yourself before Allah *the Almighty* He increases your honour,(1) supports you all the time and protects you from being humiliated by any other creature in this worldly life.

We previously said that if man wants to meet with an important person, s/he has to make an appointment. This important person might agree to meet with him/her or might not; and if the important person does agree, s/he specifies the date, the time, the place and the duration of the meeting; if you, for any reason, want to extend the meeting, s/he stands up to indicate that it is over.

But Allah *the Almighty* out of His Absolute Generosity, does not treat His creatures in this way; rather, the doors of His Houses are always open, that is, one can meet with Him *Glorified is He* in the times fixed for performing the obligatory Prayers and also at any other time s/he likes. Actually, we should take into account that you can remain in His Presence for as long as you want; no one, while in His Presence, will say to you, 'The meeting is over'. We can quote the following poetic verses concerning this:

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(1) *Thawban, the slave of Prophet Muhammad, narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Perform prayer more often; for every prostration that you perform before Allah will raise your position one degree and will remit one of your sins’ (Narrated by Muslim).*

It is enough honour for me that I am a slave

Whose Lord meets with him without an appointment;

Despite His Holy Sanctity,

I can meet Him wherever and whenever I like.

Back to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *at-Tawba*: 'It is not right for idolaters to tend Allah's Places of Worship …' (*at-Tawba:* 17); Allah *Glorified is He* laid down this ruling because mosques are dedicated for the worship of Allah *the Almighty* and therefore it is illogical that they be built or attended by an idolater or disbeliever.

As for Allah's saying: 'It is not right for idolaters …', it means that they, i.e. idolaters, are in no way allowed to carry out that act of tending Allah's places of worship; as for Allah's saying: '…while testifying to their own disbelief …', it clearly indicates that they themselves are the ones who testify that they are disbelievers; that is, their reality indicates their disbelief and also their sayings. On the other hand, we, the followers of Prophet Muhammad, bear witness that we are believers when we say during the (major or minor) pilgrimage, 'I am at Your service, O Allah, I am at Your service. You have no partner. I am at your service'. This actually means that we testify that Allah *the Almighty* has no partners in worship.

He *the Almighty* then says: 'The deeds of such people will come to nothing…'. The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '*U'la'ika'* (here translated as 'such people') refers to the idolaters who bore witness against themselves as to their own disbelief; those whom Allah prevented from tending His Mosques. As for Allah's saying: 'The deeds of such people will come to nothing', it means that they, i.e. these deeds of theirs, fell from a high level to a low one. That is to say that the deeds of those idolaters apparently seem to be good while, in essence, they are valueless and null and void; a fact which is proved by the saying of

Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: ‘Say, “Shall we tell you who are the greatest losers in whatever they may do? [It is] they whose labour has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this worldly life, and who none the less think that they are doing good works’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-104).

You find that one of such people, i.e. the greatest losers, keeps on working hard, thinking that s/he will be provided with great rewards for this work, yet her/his work, because of the fact it lacks a good intention, is judged null and void, although this work might be beneficial for other people. In fact, we should remember that the Quran frequently states that the deeds of the deniers of the Truth shall come to nothing. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But as for those who are bent on denying the Truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert which the thirsty supposes to be water–until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing. Instead he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full…’ (*an-Nur:* 39).

A ‘mirage’ is an image produced by very hot air of something which seems to be far away from the person, but in reality it does not exist, which is why when you reach it you find nothing there. As a matter of fact, the one who is not thirsty might not even notice this, but the thirsty person, because s/he is in dire need for water, painstakingly and meticulously searches for water in every place, here and there, to the extent that if s/he sees anything glimmering, s/he deems it to be water; yet when s/he comes to it, s/he finds nothing there at all. It is bad enough if this were the end of it, but such a person also finds that Allah *the Almighty* is there to hold him/her accountable for his/her deeds. Because people like this were all the time heedless of Allah *the Almighty* He *Glorified is He* will certainly not provide them with any reward. That is because man seeks reward from the one whom he intended the work for, and this man did not, in fact, intend the deed for Allah.

Concerning this, we should take into account a very important point which is one must sincerely seek the pleasure of Allah with her/his deeds if s/he wants to be rewarded for this; but if s/he does a good deed to attain a worldly benefit for her/himself or to become famous, then s/he will receive no reward from Allah. That is why the believer must perform all his/her actions seeking only the pleasure of Allah *the Almighty,* the Creator Who gives him/her many blessings. For example, if you feed a poor person, you should do this only for the sake of Allah; we should be careful not to do chivalrous things simply in order to be called ‘chivalrous’. Once again, those who do good deeds must endeavour to make sure that they seek only the pleasure of Allah by doing such deeds, that is, they should not do them to become famous among the people. In other words, these good deeds of theirs must not be revealed to anyone under any circumstances.

For example, consider the plaques we find on mosques with the names of those people who established them. It is taken for granted that the One for whom the mosque should be built is Allah *the Almighty* Who knows full well all things, including the name of the one who built the mosque. To conclude, we should avoid naming mosques after the names of people, instead we should name them after those who have nothing to do with them for us not to fall under the category of those described in the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad, ‘You did it so that such-and-such will be said; and indeed it was said’. Even the warrior who fights in the cause of Allah must devote his intention solely to Allah *Glorified is He* that is, he must not fight for him to be labelled as brave; for if he does, his action will come to nought and he will be among the losers because his action as such is not done for the sake of Allah.

This aforementioned point is crystal clear in the Hadith which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, ‘The first of the people for whom judgment will be passed on the Day of Resurrection are three. A man who was martyred; he will be brought and Allah will remind him of His Blessings and he will acknowledge them. He *the Almighty* will say, “What did you do with them?” The man will say, “I fought for Your sake until I was martyred”. Allah will say, “You are lying. You fought for it to be said that so-and-so is brave, and it was said”. Then He will order that the man be dragged on his face and thrown into the fire. And (the second will be) a man who acquired knowledge and taught others, and read Quran. He will be brought, and Allah will remind him of His Blessings, and he will acknowledge them. Allah will say, “What did you do with them?” The man will say, “I acquired knowledge and taught others, and read the Quran for

Your sake”. Allah will say, “You are lying. You acquired knowledge for it to be said that you were a scholar; and you read Quran so that it would be said that you were a reciter, and it was said”. Then He will order that the man be dragged on his face and thrown into the fire. And (the third will be) a man whom Allah made rich and gave him all kinds of wealth. He will be brought and Allah will remind him of His Blessings, and he will acknowledge them. Allah will say, “What did you do with them?” The man will say, “I did not leave any way that You like wealth to be spent but I spent in it”. Allah will say, "You are lying. You spent for it to be said that he was generous, and it was said". Then He will order that the man be dragged on his face and thrown into the Fire’.(1) Because of this, if man does not seek the pleasure of Allah by her/his deeds, s/he will find that Allah will render all the deeds null and void.

In another place in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The parable of those who deny their Lord is that all their works are as ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day; [in the life to come] they cannot achieve any benefit whatever from all that they may have earned’ (*Ibrahim:* 18). You can imagine what a storm wind does to ashes?! It leaves absolutely nothing behind. The idolater who used to enter the Sacred Mosque and give people unfermented grape juice to drink, and who used to tend to the Mosque before Allah prohibited him from entering it–this idolater would not have been rewarded for his deeds because he committed a grave treachery by associating partners with Allah in worship; yet the believer will indeed be rewarded because s/he enters the mosque and tends to it while believing in Allah and associating nothing with Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying: ‘The deeds of such people will come to nothing and they will abide in Hell’ (*at-Tawba:* 17). As a matter of fact, the idolaters will abide in the Hell because they did not seek the Pleasure of Allah with their deeds.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

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(1) *(Narrated by An-Nasa’i)*

إِنَّمَا يَعۡمُرُ مَسَٰجِدَ ٱللَّهِ مَنۡ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡأٓخِرِ وَأَقَامَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَى
ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَلَمۡ يَخۡشَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَۖ فَعَسَىٰٓ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَن يَكُونُواْ مِنَ ٱلۡمُهۡتَدِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

The only ones who should tend God's places of worship are those who believe in God and the Last Day, who keep up the prayer, who pay the prescribed alms, and who fear no one but God: such people may hope to be among the rightly guided [18] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 18)

The word *Iman* (Belief) means to believe in Allah, His angels, His Scriptures, His Messengers, the Last Day and fate–the good and bad thereof. By the way, the peak of Belief is to testify that 'There is no deity but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. With regards to this, we should take into account that the people of Quraysh*,* due to their arrogance, rejected to believe in Prophet Muhammad to the extent that some of them wondered how the Quran was sent down upon his heart in particular; a point which is mentioned in the Quran in which Allah says: 'And they say, "Why was this Quran not revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31). This shows that they had no problem at all with the Quran, but rather, they strenuously objected to the character of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Yet Allah *Glorified is He* responds to this objection and says: 'Will they distribute the Mercy of your Lord? We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world …?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) That is, none has any right to interfere in distributing the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty*; He, due to His Unchallenged Will, distributes it as He wills, just as He *Glorified is He* apportions to them their worldly possessions and material provisions. From this fact arises a good question which is 'As long as Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who apportioned their provisions for them in this worldly life, how could they hope to have control over distributing what is of a higher rank than this worldly provision?' Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran tells us of what they said. In the chapter of *al-Anfal,* He *Glorified is He* says: 'And when they said, "O Allah! If this is the Truth from You, then rain upon us stones from heaven or inflict on us a painful punishment"' (*al-Anfal:* 321). It would have been more logical for them to say, 'O Lord, if this indeed be the Truth from you, then guide us to it!' But they, due to their foolishness, asked for death instead of guidance. Consequently, we reach the conclusion that their prejudice was directed against the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this regard, we stress heavily that belief in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a Messenger sent by Allah is inseparable from belief in Allah *Glorified is He*.

In fact, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The only ones who should tend Allah's places of Worship are those who believe in Allah and the last Day, who establish regular prayer …' (*at-Tawba:* 18), we should know that this statement implicitly includes belief in Prophet Muhammad because Allah says: '… who establish regular prayer …'.

We should fully realise that their Prayers could only be sound if they believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since he is the one who taught us that there are five Daily Prayers,(1) and he is the one who taught us how to perform them and what to say in them. Furthermore, we testify to his prophethood as we pray when we announce the beginning of the Prayer and when we say the testimony of faith during the prayer; so, in order to soundly establish the Prayer, we must believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is therefore clear that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '… establish regular prayer …' indicates the necessity of believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the Messenger of Allah. In this noble verse, Allah *the Almighty* lays down some conditions for those who are eligible to tend to His Mosques. These are as follows: believing in Allah and in the Last Day, establishing the prayer and finally paying the prescribed alms. At the end of the verse, He *Glorified is He* orders us not to have awe (fear) for anyone but Him. Instructing Prophet Muhammad how to act when he has reason to fear treachery from people, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if you fear treachery on the part of a people, then throw back [their covenant] to them [so as to be] on equal terms' (*al-Anfal:* 58).

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(1) *Anas Allah be pleased with him narrated that a man came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'O Prophet Muhammad, tell me of what Allah has enjoined upon me of Prayer', whereupon the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'The five Daily Prayers, unless you do any more voluntarily' (Narrated by Ahmad).*

Clearly, one may feel fear from different things. We should know that 'fear' in the verse under discussion refers to feeling fear of Allah *Glorified is He* but this does not mean that one might not fell fear from the treachery of his enemy, which is why he should take precautions.

In truth, this verse in question clearly indicates the absolute accuracy and precision of the Noble Quran, for Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned all the pillars of Belief including belief in Allah and the Last Day, establishing the Prayer and the payment of the prescribed alms, but He *Glorified is He* does not mention the obligation of belief in Prophet Muhammad. This is because the belief in Prophet Muhammad is implied in the pillars of Islam. And those who have these beliefs will certainly fall under the category of those described in Allah's saying: 'Such people may possibly be among the rightly guided' (*at-Tawba:* 18).

A good point can be noted about this; someone might ask, 'Those people have already acquired the pillars of Belief, so why does Allah use the word 'may possibly' in this context, and if this is the case with the believer, what about the disbelievers?'

The answer to this question is clear in the fact that the two Arabic particles 'may possibly' and 'perhaps' are linguistically used to express hope, that is, you hope that what you say next will be achieved and fulfilled. But we should be fully aware of the fact that we have different stages and grades of hope, as follows: the levels of hope with respect to oneself are different from those with respect to others, and they both are different from the levels of hope with respect to Allah *the Almighty*. For example, if you say, 'I will ask so-and-so, perhaps he will give you (such-and-such)', this is one level of hope; and if you say, 'Perhaps I will give you (such-and-such)', this is more likely to come to fruition than hoping that someone else will give you (such-and-such).

That is to say, the second sentence indicates that the action is more likely to happen. Yet, when we say, 'Perhaps Allah will give you (such-and-such)', this is actually a third and higher level of hope because you place your hope in Allah, the All Generous, and not a human being. However, if Allah *the Almighty* Himself says, 'Perhaps I will give you (such-and-such)', this implies absolute certainty that you will be given what He promised you.

Consequently, we can reach the conclusion that the levels of hope are as follows: hoping that a person will do something for another one; hoping that someone will do something for you; hoping that Allah will do something for a particular person and finally Allah *the Almighty* Himself, is the One Who hopes to do something. Hence, when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It may be possible that your Lord will have mercy on you …’ (*al-Isra’:* 8), this clearly means that this Divine Hope and Possibility will certainly be fulfilled and achieved, because He *the Almighty* is All-Generous and loves to show us mercy, and nothing can prevent Him from doing this.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Such people may possibly be among the rightly guided’ (*at-Tawba:* 18), it tells us that guidance is of two kinds: either guiding someone to the Divine Way of Guidance which, if followed, will lead to Paradise; a point which is yet proved by Allah’s saying concerning the disbelievers: ‘…nor will He guide them onto any road, but the road that leads to Hell…” (*an-Nisa’:* 168-169); or showing someone the way leading to a particular destination.

In this verse under discussion: ‘The only one who should tend Allah’s Places of Worship are those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, who establish regular Prayer, who pay the prescribed alms, and who fear no one but Allah …’ (*at-Tawba:* 18), Allah *the Almighty* mentions those people who have already followed the Divine Way of Guidance and as a result will, by the Permission of Allah, be admitted into the Paradise. He *the Almighty* subsequently says:

أَجَعَلْتُمْ سِقَايَةَ ٱلْحَآجِّ وَعِمَارَةَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ كَمَنْ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ
وَجَٰهَدَ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ لَا يَسْتَوُۥنَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

Do you consider giving water to pilgrims and tending the Sacred Mosque to be equal to the deeds of those who believe in God and the Last Day and who strive in God’s path? They are not equal in God’s eyes. God does not guide such benighted people [19] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 19)

This verse in question was revealed to refute the allegation of the disbelievers of Mecca who were captured at the battle of Badr, amongst whom was Al-‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* the uncle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be* *upon him*. It is narrated that some of the Companions spoke to him and invited him to embrace Islam and to strive in the Cause of Allah, but he denied their call, saying, 'We give water to the pilgrims, tend the (Sacred) House, free prisoners and look after the Sacred Mosque'. As a matter of fact, this statement of Al-'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* was a summation of the view of the polytheists of Quraysh who had carried out these things instead of having faith in Allah and striving in His Cause, which is why Allah *the Almighty* refutes their allegation, asking them: 'Do you consider giving water to pilgrims ….?' (*at-Tawba:* 19)

As for the Arabic word '*Siqaya'* (giving of water), it has three meanings: it can be used to refer to a public place in which there is water for people to drink which we call a 'public fountain'; it can also be used to give the meaning of the vessel from which we drink water directly, such as a cup, a glass or a goblet; a point which is proved by the Quran in which Allah, speaking about the story of Prophet Joseph *peace be upon him* says: 'And [later] when he had provided them with their provisions, he placed the [King's] drinking-cup in his brother's camel-pack' (*Yusuf:* 70). As for the third meaning of this word in question, i.e. *Siqaya*, it refers to the craftsmanship itself, in the same way the words '*Khiata'* (sewing) and '*Hidada'* (blacksmithing) do. The meaning of this word in the verse under discussion refers to giving water to the people.

In this verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do you consider giving water to pilgrims and tending the Sacred Mosque to be equal to the deeds of those who believe in Allah and the Last Day …?' (*at-Tawba:* 19). That is, if you, O polytheists of Mecca, are proud of watering the pilgrims and tending to the Sacred Mosque, believing that these acts might substitute your embracing Islam, you are utterly mistaken; that is, no comparison can be drawn at all between the two parties. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* due to His Unchallenged Will, is the Only One Who has the Absolute Right to decide on the matter in question. In other words, He *the Almighty* has the right to accept the deeds of some people and reject those of others. As for the believer who strives in the Cause of Allah, he does so seeking the reward only from Allah, whilst those polytheists who gave water to the pilgrims and tended the House of Allah did not believe in His Oneness and thus sought reward from those people for whom they acted. That is why Allah, because of the fact that He is the One Who gives rewards and imposes punishments, clarifies to us that these two actions are not equal in His sight, i.e. they do not merit the same reward.

Concerning the cause of revelation of this particular verse in question, Ibn Kathir narrated that Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* once passed by Talha ibn Shayba and Al-‘Abbas and found them both boasting in an attempt to prove who of them was better than the other. We should remember that Arabs used to boast even of matters in which they had no role and which had been given to them by Allah *the Almighty*. For example, they used to boast of their appearance and lineage, although none of them had anything to do with these two matters which are defined by Allah *the Almighty*.

For example, the Arabs used to sit in front of a pool of water and boast about which one of them could hold his head under the water for the longest, i.e. which of them could hold his breath the longest even though this is solely a matter of how the body was formed and created by Allah, the Creator, and no one has any part to play in it; there are those to whom Allah gives stronger lungs than others, and are therefore able to keep their heads under water longer. But, this is the kind of thing the Arabs would boast about in the pre-Islamic period.

Back to the story of Talha and Al-‘Abbas, Imam ‘Ali heard Talha saying, ‘The key to the *Ka‘ba* is in my keeping, and I could sleep there if I wished’; to which Al-‘Abbas replied, ‘I am the one who gives the pilgrims water, and if I wanted to withhold water from them, I could’. Replying to this, Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said to both of them, ‘I know not what you are saying; for I prayed six months before the people did, and I participated in striving in the Cause of Allah’, whereupon the following verse: ‘Do you consider giving water to pilgrims and tending the Sacred Mosque to be equal to the deeds of those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and who strive in Allah’s Path? They are not equal in Allah’s sight …’ was revealed.

No sooner had Al-‘Abbas heard this verse than he said, ‘We are satisfied, we are satisfied!’ He said this because Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who had passed this verdict. In addition, this verse indicates clearly that the act of boasting which had happened between Al-‘Abbas and Talha had not been appropriate.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…in Allah's sight…', it indicates that Allah's Standards of Judgement are different from man's; for man's standards usually differ even between people themselves: you have your own standards and other people have theirs. In the same vein, you, out of caprice, might give precedence to yourself, and the same is the case for other people; they might give precedence to themselves and be hard on you. That is, every human standard of judgement may involve caprice because every person wants to put him/herself first and to take everything for him/herself. This is totally different with the Divine Standards of Judgement in which there is no caprice at all; rather, these Divine Standards are based on pure justice, which is why we find that they give everything its proper due–that is, they are above reproach.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying: 'Allah does not guide those who do wrong' (*at-Tawba:* 19). Truly, this particular part of the verse produces the solution to the many problems raised by some people about the nature of guidance and whether or not it is from Allah or from His slave. In the Quran, Allah talks about guidance in different positions. For example, in the chapter of *al-Qasas,* He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases …' (*al-Qasas:* 56).

We explain this verse of *Al-Qasas,* saying, 'It is true that the will to guide is from Allah, but He *the Almighty* has made it clear to us who exactly it is that He does not include in His Will to guide, saying: 'Allah does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the Truth' (*al-Baqara:* 264); 'Allah does not guide people who [deliberately] do wrong' (*al-Baqara:* 258); and 'Allah does not bestow His guidance upon iniquitous folk' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108).

He *the Almighty* has already mentioned these facts in many places in the Noble Quran. Some people might yet say, 'Guidance is from Allah, and had He *the Almighty* guided me, I will not have committed murder, or stolen, or cheated'. We reply by saying, 'This is a misunderstanding of the verse of the Quran; for Allah says: 'Allah does not guide…', meaning that He negates gracing guidance to those who do evil, are iniquitous or who disbelieve. That is to say that the disbelievers, evildoers and iniquitous persons are the ones who prevented themselves from being guided. Were a person to choose faith, s/he would thereby attain Allah's Guidance. Clearly, when a person is denied the Guidance of Allah, it is because of his/her own action and his/her own choice, for a person might choose the way of error and avoid the way of guidance, and therefore Allah will not guide him/her. To sum up, we stress that Allah *the Almighty* only guides those who believe in Him. Consequently, if a person chooses the way of guidance, He *the Almighty* gives her/him further guidance because s/he believed in Him *the Almighty* and freely chose the path of guidance. This is actually the true understanding of Allah's Saying: 'For, verily, Allah leaves to go astray who He wills, just as He guides who He wills..' (*Fatir:* 8).

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* guides those who faithfully listen to the Quran and who have firm belief in Allah. We have previously detailed this topic while speaking on the topic of fate; we said that those who read the Quran in order to understand the topic of guidance must consider every single verse which is concerned with this matter. He *the Almighty* made it clear that He does not guide the disbeliever which means that He does guide the believer. In addition, He *Glorified is He* made it clear that He does not guide the unjust, which means that He does guide the just. Furthermore, He made it clear that He does not guide the iniquitous which means that He does guide the obedient. Consequently, no one can say, 'Allah did not wish to guide me', because this is a misunderstanding of the meaning of the essence of the Guidance of Allah. Allah *the Almighty* made it clear to us whom He wishes to guide and whom He wishes to send astray; He guides those who seek the means to obtain guidance and surrender themselves to faith. In this respect, He *the Almighty* says: 'And Allah increases in guidance those who go aright; and ever-abiding good works are best as a reward with your Lord and best in yielding fruit' (*Maryam:* 76); and 'And [as for] those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their [ability to] guard [against evil]' (*Muhammad:* 17).

Now it is crystal clear that Allah *the Almighty* has already informed us of who deserves His Guidance and who does not. You choose the path you follow: if you choose to believe, you will be guided; and if you choose the path of disbelief and sin–Allah forbid–you will not be guided. Therefore, if someone comes to argue with you about the saying of Allah: 'In this way Allah leaves to go astray who He wills, and guides aright who He wills' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31), you can say to him/her, ‘Allah *Glorified is He* has made perfectly clear whom He wills to guide and whom He wills to send astray’. We previously gave an example to fully illustrate this point; guidance is given with two different meanings in the Noble Quran: the first meaning is directing people to the right path, which is a general guidance,(1) for Allah guides the believer and the disbeliever to the path of faith by means of His Messengers and His Scriptures; that is, He made clear to them what makes them earn His pleasure and what incurs His Wrath, and what causes them to be showered with His Mercy and what incurs His Curse. The first kind of guidance is directed to all mankind. Then, there is a second kind of guidance which is given only to the believers and about which Allah says: ‘and [as for] those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their [ability to] guard [against evil]’ (*Muhammad:* 17).

That is, He helps them to follow His Way of Guidance which means He makes obedience easy for them and disobedience difficult for them. If a believer adheres to the Way of Allah and obeys Him, Allah *Glorified is He* consequently fills the believer’s heart with faith and makes obedience beloved to him/her, resulting in such a believer becoming yet more obedient; and if a believer is about to commit sins, Allah *the Almighty* makes them hateful to him/her with the result that such a believer will keep away from them.

In illustrating this point, we previously gave the example of a man who is driving his car to go to a certain place, and when he comes to a crossroad, he finds a traffic policeman who shows him which way to go–this is the meaning of general guidance. When the man thanks the traffic policeman, he gives him further directions by saying, ‘Do not take such-and-such a road because there is heavy traffic there, but rather take such-and-such road and you will get there quickly and easily’; this is more detailed guidance. But if the driver says, ‘This traffic policeman does not know anything’ and declines to thank him, the traffic policeman will leave the driver to do what he wants.

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(1) *This kind of guidance is referred to in the Hadith when Prophet Muhammad said to ‘Ali Allah be pleased with him: ‘By Allah, if a single person is guided by Allah through you, it will be better for you than a herd of red camels’ (Narrated by Al-Bukhari).*

Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* guides both believers and disbelievers to the path of faith; if one chooses the path of faith, Allah will certainly help him/her to follow it; yet if a person chooses the path of disbelief–Allah forbid–Allah will leave him/her to go astray and suffer the consequences. Therefore, we must always remember that there are two kinds of guidance: the guidance of direction which is given to all mankind, and the guidance of assistance which is given only to the believers. Concerning the universal guidance, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and [We have] shown him the two highways’ (*al-Balad:* 10).

Regarding the guidance of assistance, Allah says: ‘But to those who are rightly guided, He increases their guidance and bestows on them their righteousness and restraint [from evil]’ (*Muhammad:* 17).

What proves to us that guidance of direction is universal is that when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the People of Thamud, to whom He sent the Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon Him* He mentioned that He has guided them. If the meaning of guidance here meant that they became guided people and followed the right way, Allah will not have said that they chose error above guidance. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And as for Thamud, We showed them guidance, but they chose error instead of guidance; so there overtook them the scourge of an abasing chastisement for what they had earned' (*Fussilat:* 17).

Therefore, guidance here means that Allah *Glorified is He* guided them to the right way, but they chose the path of blindness and disbelief. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَهَاجَرُوا۟ وَجَٰهَدُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ
وَأَنفُسِهِمْ أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْفَآئِزُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Those who believe, who migrated and strove hard in God’s way with their possessions and their persons, are in God’s eyes much higher in rank; it is they who will triumph [20] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 20)

In the chapter of *al-Anfal*, there is another description of the believers: ‘those who have believed and fled [their homes] and have striven hard in Allah’s Way, as well as those who give [them] asylum and aid; they are in truth believers. For them is forgiveness [of sins] and a provision most generous' (*al-Anfal:* 74). In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the description of the believers straight after the Emigration. Moreover, after the Emigration had finished and everyone had become equal, a concise description of the believers was given in the verse of the chapter of *at-Tawba*.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that these actions are not accepted from the idolaters; but if the believers carry them out, Allah will grant them a high rank. In the verse of the chapter of *at-Tawba*, Allah *Glorified is He* describes them as having a higher rank. The word '*a'zam'* (higher) is a comparative form in Arabic which is used to imply an increased level of the adjective. When we say, 'So-and-so is more knowledgeable (*a'lam)* than so-and-so', this means that the former person is the more knowledgeable of the two; the latter is also knowledgeable, but the former is even more knowledgeable. This is exactly when we say, 'Such-and-such a person is more generous (*akram*) than such-and-such a person'; this means that the latter person is generous, but the former is even more generous.

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to show us what triumph means in His sight. That is, those believers, immigrants and those who strive hard in the Way of Allah with their property and their souls will have a much higher rank with Allah than other believers will. To be triumphant means to attain what your soul loves. Allah *Glorified is He* explains what they will win: 'Those who have believed and fled [their homes] and have striven hard in Allah's Way with their property and their souls are much higher in rank with Allah; they are the people who will achieve [success]' (*at-Tawba:* 20).

Triumph is of two kinds. Those who work for worldly matters might enjoy triumph by attaining a measure of delight therein. Their delight, however, is commensurate with their abilities and it is a temporal delight. It will either fade away by coming to an end or they will leave it due to death; it is an imperfect delight.

As for those who believe, forsake the domain of evil, strive and prepare for the Hereafter, they will enjoy triumph by attaining a delight which is not commensurate with their abilities; rather, it is commensurate with those of Allah, and there is no comparison between the abilities of Allah and that of

His creatures. Moreover, it is an eternal delight, which will never leave them by being taken away from them, nor will they ever leave it. They are in Eternal Paradise where no death exists.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يُبَشِّرُهُمۡ رَبُّهُم بِرَحۡمَةٖ مِّنۡهُ وَرِضۡوَٰنٖ وَجَنَّٰتٖ لَّهُمۡ فِيهَا نَعِيمٞ مُّقِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًاۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عِندَهُۥٓ أَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿٢٢﴾

And their Lord gives them the good news of His mercy and pleasure, Gardens where they will have lasting bliss [21] And where they will remain for ever: truly, there is a tremendous reward with God [22] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 21-22)

This is the pinnacle of triumph for those whom Allah *Glorified is He* gives glad tidings of His Grace and His Lasting Goodly Acceptance. Glad tidings, as we know, refer to information about something that will happen in the future. When you give a glad tiding to someone, you are informing him of something pleasing that will happen. The point of a glad tiding is to encourage somebody to act in a way that helps attain it. When I give you glad tidings of success if you work hard, study and listen to your teachers, my words encourage you to strive in order to bring these tidings to fruition. It is as if glad tidings make you utilise the means to reach them.

In fact, we say that means and consequences, causes and effects, as well as conditions and results must be defined in different ways. We have been taught that a condition is the cause of its result, as we say, ‘If you study, you will succeed’. Studying is the condition and success is the result. But we say, ‘No, this is not right’. The result is the cause of the condition, as you only study because of the idea of success and all the joy it brings. The existence of a condition causes the existence of a result in the first place; but a result provides the motivation for fulfilling a condition. This means that your motivation to study is the idea of success, either morally and/or materially. Everyone wants to succeed, but success cannot be attained by only praying; rather, through studying success is actually attained. You only study because you have the notion of the success, gifts, distinctions and position it brings. You know that your family will be happy for you and you will be satisfied with yourself as well. Hence, we say that the real cause is what comes first to one’s mind. To provide another example, suppose that you want to travel to Ta'if and thus Ta'if is the goal. You plan the means with that goal in your mind. Consequently, the result motivates you, and the condition is what is actually performed.

Allah *Glorified is He* informs those described above of the happy end which they will reach to make them bear the difficulties of the moral responsibilities that the Way of Allah enjoins upon them. Disagreeable things surround paradise; the Divine Law restricts man’s free will, and a believer is confined to the Commandments of Allah which entail ‘dos’ and ‘don'ts’. A disbeliever merely follows his caprice in all that he does. He does whatever he wants and obeys his passions. Regarding a believer, his freedom is restricted to those things, which have not been mentioned in Allah's Legislation. However, concerning matters that fall under the Legislation of Allah, he is obliged to do what Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed for him. It seems that faith is meant to restrict, but when we compare the two rewards, we find that he who follows his passions in this worldly life only gains a passing pleasure and his life in this world is limited. Such is the loser. By contrast, he who restricts his actions to the Way of Allah receives tranquillity in this worldly life and a lasting bliss in the Hereafter that does not vanish or end. I always give the example of a student who does not attend school or does not study. He rather spends his time playing and enjoying himself. He, thereby, satisfies himself with what he wants, but the pleasure he gains is limited and he will live in misery for the rest of his life. On the other hand, for a student who puts himself under the restraint of studying and curbs his desire of amusement and delight, the result is that he realizes a comfortable and secure future for himself for the rest of his life.

Both students, in this way, gain a kind of pleasure for themselves. However, one of them gains a very short-lived pleasure and then becomes one of the failures of life. while the other who restrains himself for a few years enjoys a successful future.

The case of you in this worldly life is the same. When you restrict yourself to the commandments of Allah of ‘dos’ and ‘don'ts’, it seems on the surface that you are sacrificing your freedom, but the reality is that if you do this willingly, Allah will give you ease, tranquillity and pleasure in your soul. We find that the prayers which a Muslim performs at least five times a day seemingly take up a certain amount of our time every day. However, it gives peace of mind and an unimaginable contentment to the person who performs it humbly and properly. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* 'Give us comfort by it [the prayer] O Bilal'. It is also narrated by Anas ibn Malik that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My comfort has been provided in prayer'. This is because fulfilling religious obligations transforms one from just experiencing the pleasure of observing it to attaining tranquillity. The person who observes it is given a deep understanding and Graces from his Lord, and consequently his soul finds peace and calm. When you consider the glad tidings mentioned in this verse, you find it coming from the Lord and the Creator Who owns everything, arranges all of your affairs and looks after you.

Allah says: ‘Their Lord gives them good tidings of Mercy from Himself and [His] Good Pleasure’ (*at-Tawba:* 21). These are two of the Essential Attributes of Allah, and these result in men receiving Allah's Bounty that He bestows to whomever He wills.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues enumerating His Blessings in this verse. We find that there are different ranks and levels of Blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* first gives them tidings of Mercy, which is an Essential Attribute of His, and then a constant blessing in this life. We should note that there is a difference between a blessing and the giver of the blessing. To give an example of the different ranks of blessings, although Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond comparison, suppose that someone invites you to his house for a meal. He brings out a plate of apples and there must be enough apples for all those present for each to take an apple. When the host takes an apple and gives it to one of those present, this is a kind of special attention from the host and a distinction for this particular guest out of all the others. This represents a higher level of generosity and concern. It thereby represents the Mercy of Allah and His Good Pleasure, while the apple itself is the blessing and represents the Gardens of Paradise.

Thus, we see that there are different levels of honours. When the level of faith of a believer rises, he always lives with the blessing along with the One Who gives it to Him. When food is presented they say, *Bismillah* (In the Name of Allah) and after they finish they say, *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to Allah). However, when he rises to a higher level of faith s/he lives being only concerned about the Giver of the blessings. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* boasts about His slaves to the angels. He boasts about their worship and their obedience, which they adhere to no matter what their condition may be, even if the hardest of trials were to befall them and all their blessings were to be taken from them. Such people are among those who occupy the highest ranks. That is why those who undergo the hardest trials are the Prophets, the righteous and then those who are most like them and so on; this is for Allah *Glorified is He* to see who loves Him for His sake alone, even if their blessings are taken away from them. This is a high rank. A person who worships Allah in order to enter Paradise, Allah will give it to him, while a person who worships Him because Allah deserves to be worshipped will rise to a rank of Paradise wherein he may see Allah at all times, unlike others who will only have glimpses of Him. To conclude, the slave will be rewarded in the Hereafter according to the depth of his faith. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And whoever hopes to meet his Lord, let him do good deeds and not join anyone in the service of his Lord' (*al-Kahf:* 110). One of the righteous said, 'I shall not associate anything in the worship of you, even Paradise itself; for Paradise is a thing'.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He gives them glad tidings of His Mercy followed by His Good Pleasure. That is because you might be given Mercy without attaining *Ridwan* (Pleasure) which is more than bliss. After attaining *Ridwan*, Allah *Glorified is He* gives them Gardens wherein lasting blessings shall be theirs.

Someone might wonder whether there is a Garden with no blessings. He might ask why blessings are mentioned here, since a basic aim of paradise is to give blessings to man.

In response to such a question, we say, ‘Look closely and pay attention to the meaning. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who is speaking here. A person might enjoy many blessings yet have many discomforts as well that prevent him from enjoying these blessings, such as an illness which causes him pain, a wicked son who makes his life miserable or a wife who fills his life with bitterness and gloom. This all might happen and prevent a person from enjoying the blessings which Allah *Glorified is He* has given him. Discomforts have surrounded him. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* alerts us to the fact that the Paradise of the Hereafter does not have the discomforts of this worldly life. It is filled with purity and delight. Allah *Glorified is He* gives His slave therein whatever his/her soul desires and keeps all discomforts away from him/her. A person might fear that such blessings may not last; therefore Allah *Glorified is He* reassures the believing slave that it is a lasting bliss. Someone might think that staying there permanently is doubtful as it could last for a very long time but then end. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* willed to reassure the believers with a true promise. He promised the believers that they would abide therein forever, saying: ‘They will dwell there forever. Indeed, with Allah is a magnificent reward’ (*at-Tawba:* 22).

Reassurance is emphasised throughout these verses using the word ‘theirs’, which implies the notion of possession of this bliss. The possessions of a person, no matter how much he owns in this world, are not more than the state of sitting and his slaves carrying out his orders; pleasure is either in your own hand or is brought to you while you are relaxing. For example, when you want to eat, either you make the meal by yourself or someone else makes it for you. And no matter how much someone possesses, he cannot achieve everything he wants by himself. It is inevitable that he needs to seek the aid of others. However, a believer in paradise gets whatever he wishes as soon as the notion comes into his head. This is different from how it is in this world. When you want something in our world, you must either get it by yourself or rely on someone else to get it for you, even if it is only a cup of coffee. You must tell the one who makes it how you like it, such as how much sugar you like in it, for every one of us, in this world, depends in his life on the means Allah makes available for us. While in paradise, the believers will depend directly on the Creator of all means, Who is Allah *the Almighty and All-Powerful.*

When Allah *Glorified is He* says that He gives them glad news of Gardens, we may observe that there are two plurals here that are related to each other. As we mentioned before, this implies that one group of items is divided between each individual of the other group resulting in each individual having only one item. When a teacher instructs his pupils to take their pens out of their bags, each pupil does not take out several pens, but rather each one takes out his own pen. Similarly when we say, get into your cars, this does not mean that every person will get into every car, but rather, every person will get into his own car. In the same way, the meaning here regarding the Gardens does not mean that every believer will enter every Garden. It means that each one of them will enter his own Garden, according to the deeds he acquired and the rank he reached.(1)

It is important to know that those who reach the middle ranks of Paradise will not be jealous of those who reach the high ranks of paradise, and the ones who reach the lower ranks of paradise will not be jealous of those who are above them. Likewise, those who are in the higher ranks will not be haughty to those who are lower than them. Each of them will be happy for the other believers' rank. This even occurs sometimes in this worldly life. When a person gains a high mark in his studies, we might find someone who got a lower mark than him rejoices because of him as his soul is pure, and likewise the more successful people do not necessarily act haughtily to the less successful. If this happens even in this world, so what do you think will happen in the Hereafter? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We shall remove from their hearts any rancour, [they will be] as brethren, on raised couches, facing each other' (*al-Hijr:* 47). This means that all the people of paradise will rejoice because of their ranks as well as the ranks of those who are higher than them. That is because they will benefit from the overflowing graces which those of higher ranks enjoy when they go to visit them. For this reason, scholars have commented on the verse: 'But for those who fear the time when they will stand before their Lord, there will be two Gardens’ (*ar-Rahman:* 46) by saying that those who have high ranks in paradise will have two Gardens. One Garden is especially for them and another Garden to host those who are of a lower rank than them, as though it is a guesthouse for those whom they love. For this reason, in the Hereafter, people of Paradise will rejoice for those who have higher ranks because they will receive goodness from them.

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(1) '*Abdullah bin 'Amr* narrated that the Prophet said, 'It shall be said to the one who memorized the Quran, "Recite and rise up. Recite (melodiously) as you recited in the world. For indeed your rank shall be at the last verse you recited"' *(Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud).*

In this worldly life, if a man wants to benefit from the blessings of all humans, he must rejoice over the blessings given to others. This is because when he feels happy for a blessing bestowed to others, this blessing comes to him and benefits him. We should be certain that a blessing loves its owner more than he loves it, as it knows that Allah *the Almighty* sent it to him. Allah, speaking about a tree, says: ‘It yields its fruit at all times, by the permission of its Lord’ (*Ibrahim:* 25).

When you plant the seed of a tree, it gives you fruit. The tree gives you its fruit; you are not the one who takes it from the tree. In fact, we always say that a provision knows very well where you are, but you never know where the provision is. You might search for a provision in every place but not find it. However, what Allah has apportioned to you rushes to you and finds you right away.

People of paradise know no jealousy, rancour or hatred. One day the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his Companions as they were sitting together that a man will presently come to them; a man who will be among the people of paradise. A man who the Companions knew entered. They wanted to know what this Companion had done that earned him the glad tidings of paradise from the Prophet. They asked him what he used to do in order to be with him (in paradise). The man said that he prayed as they all prayed, fasted as they all fasted and he gave the poor-due as they all gave. All of them were the same, but when he went to bed, his heart bore no rancour to anyone. They went to Prophet Muhammad and told him what the man had said, and the Prophet replied that Paradise was better than this world due to this very reason. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We shall remove from their hearts any rancour’ (*al-Hijr:* 47).

Allah *Glorified is He* continues by saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُوٓاْ ءَابَآءَكُمۡ وَإِخۡوَٰنَكُمۡ أَوۡلِيَآءَ إِنِ ٱسۡتَحَبُّواْ
ٱلۡكُفۡرَ عَلَى ٱلۡإِيمَٰنِۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُم مِّنكُمۡ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ٢٣

Believers, do not take your fathers and brothers as allies if they prefer disbelief to faith: those of you who do so are doing wrong [23] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 23)

The Arabic word *wali* (ally) is someone who follows you closely and gives you what you love. The one to whom you always resort and seek his advice. The one who is able to give you refuge if you seek it from him, who is always ready to extend aid to you and who is your close friend that always listens to you, gives you aid and support when you seek it, and who is always by your side. That is, if we should compare the requests of created beings with the requests of the Creator… And Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us here that if you want to make the implementation of Islam strong and free of flaws, do not at all, have any allegiance except that of faith. Allegiance of faith is above all allegiances of blood, lineage and so on. So if we compare the requests of created beings and the requests of the Creator, we find that what the Creator asks you to do should take precedence over what His creatures ask you to do. If you anger creatures to please the Creator, you win and Allah *Glorified is He* will cast pleasure into the hearts of those around you. They will be pleased with you and will say that you have manners and principles, and do not anger Allah for the sake of a mortal pleasure. On the other hand, if you anger Allah to please a mortal, whoever he might be, you will find that Allah *the Almighty* will make him hate and revile you.(1) If you give false testimony in favour of someone, the one whom you testified wrongly against will know that you are a liar, and will not trust you, and if you ever find yourself having to testify before him, he will not accept your testimony and will despise your words. For this reason, a wise man once said that a bearer of false testimonies might raise your head above your rival with his testimony, but he tramples his own honour beneath your feet as he has lost your respect.

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(1) *'Aisha Allah be pleased with her narrated that the Prophet Muhammad said, 'Whoever seeks Allah's Pleasure despite the people's wrath, Allah will suffice him against the people. And who ever seeks the people's pleasure despite Allah's Wrath, Allah will leave him to the patronage of the people.' (Narrated by Ibn Hibban and At-Tirmidhi).*

Clearly, Allegiance should be given to Allah. If a relative of yours comes to you and asks you to do something which will anger Allah, do not obey him but do not be harsh with him as well, especially with your parents. Allah *Glorified is He* says about parents: ‘But if they strive to make you associate in worship with Me things which you have no knowledge about, do not obey; but keep company with both of them in this life with justice’ (*Luqman:* 15). In the verse of the chapter of *at-Tawba*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe! Do not take your fathers or your brothers as allies if they love disbelief more than belief' (*at-Tawba:* 23).

Clearly, faith, or disbelief, is the link which connects everything. The Companions of the Prophet gave us the enduring example. Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr was the most pampered boy in Mecca, where his life before embracing Islam was of the highest form of opulence. He would enjoy parading around in his fine clothes. But when he emigrated to Medina, he lived in absolute penury to the extent that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him on the street with nothing on but a sheepskin to cover his private parts. The Prophet alerted the attention of his Companions to the state of Mus'ab *Allah be pleased with him* and showed them how faith altered him after he had chosen it above all the delights of this worldly life. Mus'ab *Allah be pleased with him* found that the honour of allegiance to Islam was greater than fine clothes and an opulent life. He, in this way, falls under the category mentioned in the words of Allah: ‘Those who have believe and fled [their homes] and have striven hard in Allah's Way with their property and their souls are much higher in rank with Allah; they are the people who will achieve [success]. Their Lord gives them good tidings of Mercy from Himself and [His] Good Pleasure, and of Gardens wherein lasting blessings will be theirs. They will dwell there forever. Indeed, with Allah is a magnificent reward’ (*at-Tawba:* 20- 22).

Mus'ab *Allah be pleased with him* and others presented to us a great example of the allegiance of faith and of how to struggle in the cause of Allah. They taught us how we should subject our choices to the Way of Allah; the Way which restricts man's freedom of choice, for man is compelled in certain aspects and free to choose in others.

We know that the sphere of moral responsibility does not involve those things men are compelled to do. It is present in those things in which we have free will. Consequently, we have to consider choices in the light of the Way of Guidance of Allah, and not stray out of this light. Early Muslims used to sacrifice their homes, possessions and children and set out to struggle in the cause of Allah. They accepted all these difficult sacrifices with faithful hearts, steadfast patience and forbearance due to their trust in the glad tidings of Allah *Glorified is He* that they will be given Paradise, [His] Good Pleasure and a lasting bliss which will never leave them nor will they leave it, and wherein they will abide forever. Thereby, the religion of Islam was established on earth.

After Allah *Glorified is He* showed us the foundations of religious allegiance and the reward for this allegiance, He warns us against straying from it in order to please a father, a brother or relatives. Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to know that nothing ever takes precedence over allegiance to Allah. When we deviate from the Truth in order to please relatives or keep hold of wealth or positions, we wrong ourselves. This is because the reward and bliss of allying to what is right is greater than this. For this reason, none of us should help falsehood or manipulate his faith to serve those who do not believe in Allah. This image is made clear in this verse: '..if they love (*istahabba*) disbelief more than belief' (*at-Tawba:* 23). The Arabic word *istahabba* literally means (to seek love), just as *istakhraja* means to seek an exit. When we say *istajaba*, this means to respond. And the word *istahabba* means *ahabba* (to love), but it has a connotation of seeking, unlike *ahabba* which entails no idea of seeking love.

This implies that disbelief is against the human natural disposition of faith. Humans, by natural disposition, are believers and love faith, and thus if anyone tries to love other than faith, this will mean that s/he has to exert effort and force his feelings. This is because such a feeling is unnatural to his/her instinct. As such, Allah says in the Noble Quran: 'How do you deny Allah, seeing that you were dead and He gave you the life?' (*al-Baqara:* 28) This rhetorical question and expression of wonderment explains to us that those who use reason, logic and intelligence find it difficult to deny Allah. That is because the universe existed first, then man came into existence. Thus, we must ask who brought this universe of which no part was made by us into existence. It is natural for the mind to search for its maker, especially since the universe contains things which man could never make, such as the sun, the earth, water, air, plants and animals. These all comprise the essential constituents of your life. It is natural that we look for a creator. We always ask about the inventors of the simplest things, such as the electric lamp. We study their lives and how they made their discoveries simply because they added inventions that benefited our lives, so how about the One Who created this universe? Allah *the Merciful* saved us from wandering in confusion and sent us a Messenger [Muhammad] to awaken us and tell us that Allah, Who is *the Almighty and All-Powerful*, has created this universe. Why do we not believe this Messenger [Muhammad] and follow the way of guidance which was sent down to us?

We gave an example before to clarify this point, although Allah is beyond any comparison; a man survived after his plane had crashed in the middle of the desert, but he had neither water nor food. He then fell asleep for a while and after waking up he found food, drink and all that he needs around him. Will he not think about who brought them before starting to eat? And you, O human, have come into this great universe which has been perfectly prepared for your life. It has been organised beyond the capacity of man. It is natural that you think about who brought this universe into existence.

Clearly, faith is a natural and intellectual necessity. Deviation from faith is forced and requires effort because you deviate from nature and a sound intellect to attain the desire of your soul, Following caprice and submission to desires is a kind of forced love which upsets the balance of faculties and causes confusion in the mind. The love of disbelief in not emotional or natural and it is not in harmony with a sound mind; rather, it is a forced love. He, who does what is lawful, lives a life in which all his faculties are in harmony, and the one who does what is unlawful, lives a life in which all his faculties are in conflict.(1) For example, when a man looks at his wife, he looks at what is lawful for him to see and he feels that his faculties are in harmony, unlike the case of looking at another woman as then he feels that his faculties are in conflict. The behaviour, which is in line with faith, is balanced, whilst the behaviour, which goes against the way of faith, is forced and requires effort, and this forced behaviour is in conflict with the normal nature of man. The upright ways of faith require no forced behaviour. A believer is upright. He does not cheat or steal. He does not let himself slip into the ways of caprice or whims. He, thereby, lives a good life. While opening his chest of drawers and taking something out of it, he takes what he wants calmly and contentedly. The corrupt person, on the other hand, enters another’s room to take something from the chest of drawers there, even if it is from the chest of drawers of his own sleeping father. That is why he walks on his tiptoes to open it. As such, righteousness is not forced and does not require effort–unlike deviation, that is why Allah used the verb *istahabba*, rather than simply *ahabba*, for love is something natural but love of disbelief is not natural. Man loves his son naturally and emotionally, for natural and emotional love has no rules that can be followed. You cannot say that you will love so-and-so and hate such-and-such a person. Emotions do not happen this way. Thus, you emotionally love your son, even if he fails in his studies. However, you like your enemy’s son by your mind if he excels in his studies. Consequently, love that is based on the use of one’s mental faculties (logical love) is what is governed by rules. Likewise, you hate bitter medicine due to your emotions, but you like it with your mind, since it makes you better. You, therefore, search for it and spend your money to obtain it, and make sure that you take it.

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(1) *Nawwas bin Sam'an Allah be pleased with him narrated, 'I asked the Messenger of Allah [Prophet Muhammad] peace and blessings be upon him about virtue and sin, and he said, "Virtue is noble behaviour, and sin is that which creates doubt and you do not like people to know about it"' (Narrated by Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Ahmad).*

Prophet Muhammad said, 'None of you is a believer till I am dearer to him than his child, his father and the whole of mankind'.(1) 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab responded to this, saying, 'O Messenger of Allah, I love you more than my possessions and my child, but how can I love you more than I love my own self?’ To this, Prophet Muhammad repeated what he had just said, three times. Consequently, 'Umar realised that this was a moral responsibility that could be obtained by using one’s mind, which is governed by rules. A believer’s love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* may rise to the level of both logical and emotional love. However, logical love is the one which is a moral responsibility, unlike emotional love. Allah *Glorified is He* did not legalise emotional reactions because He does not prevent emotions from reacting in their natural way. You love the one who does you a favour. You might love someone without knowing why and hate another without them showing enmity to or harming you.(1) This is all up to you. However, Allah *Glorified is He* forbids letting this lead to showing enmity to others unjustly. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably' (*al-Ma'ida:* 8). This tells Muslims not to let their hatred of a people make them leave the way of Truth and wrong others; if you hate them, still be just to them.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad.*

Clearly, Allah *Glorified is He* did not forbid love or hate. He rather forbade us from wronging those whom we hate or showing bias in favour of those whom we love at the expense of Truth and justice.

The Companion 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab gives us a living image of this. Abu Maryam Al-Hanafi killed Zayd, the brother of 'Umar, during the battle of Yamama, but he later embraced Islam. Every time he passed by 'Umar, 'Umar said to him, 'Turn your face away from me, for I do not love you'. Abu Maryam Al-Hanafi replied to him, 'And will your lack of love for me take away any of my rights?' 'Umar said, 'No, it does not'. Abu Maryam replied, 'Only women cry out of love'

Allah, using the verb from *istahabba*, wants to alert us to the fact that they went against their natural disposition and intellect. Consequently, we must never give them our allegiance, but rather give allegiance to Allah. Allegiance to Allah comes before every other right, even if it was the right of fatherhood. It is true that your father was the means for your existence, but Allah *Glorified is He* created your first father, i.e. Adam *peace be upon Him* out of nothing. Thus, do not allow the secondary creation violate the rights of the primary creation. For this reason, Allah ends this noble verse by declaring: 'And whoever of you takes them as allies, these are the people who are the unjust' (*at-Tawba:* 23). That is because they take the right they owe to Allah *Glorified is He* and give it to men, and they wrong themselves by forbidding themselves from the reward of the Hereafter simply in order to gain instant benefit in this worldly life. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They wronged only themselves’ (*al-Baqara:* 57) because no one can wrong Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, 'Souls are troops collected together, and those who were familiar with each other (in the heaven from where they come) will have affinity with one another (in the world), and those among them who were distant and indifferent (in the Heaven) will also be disinterested in each other (in the world)' (Narrated by Muslim, Ahmad, Abu Dawud).*

Rejecting faith after being invited to it and not believing and disobeying after being commanded to obey is a rebellion against faith. Yet, if you were one of those who rebel against faith and then Allah smites you with an illness, will you be able to ward off the illness and become healthy? If Allah *the Almighty* decreed that you die, will you be able to rebel against death, ward it off and live? Clearly, there are decrees of fate against which we cannot rebel. You only rebel against those things for which you have free will.

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to address the believers directly. He *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ إِن كَانَ ءَابَآؤُكُمۡ وَأَبۡنَآؤُكُمۡ وَإِخۡوَٰنُكُمۡ وَأَزۡوَٰجُكُمۡ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمۡ وَأَمۡوَٰلٌ ٱقۡتَرَفۡتُمُوهَا
وَتِجَٰرَةٞ تَخۡشَوۡنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَٰكِنُ تَرۡضَوۡنَهَآ أَحَبَّ إِلَيۡكُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَجِهَادٖ
فِي سَبِيلِهِۦ فَتَرَبَّصُواْ حَتَّىٰ يَأۡتِيَ ٱللَّهُ بِأَمۡرِهِۦۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهۡدِي ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلۡفَٰسِقِينَ ٢٤

Say [Prophet], ‘If your fathers, sons, brothers, wives, tribes, the wealth you have acquired, the trade which you fear will decline, and the dwellings you love are dearer to you than God and His Messenger and the struggle in His cause, then wait until God brings about His punishment.’ God does not guide those who break away [24] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 24)

This address was given to the Prophet to pass it on to the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions in this noble verse the various levels of relationship. He first mentions the family ties of fathers, sons and brothers. He then mentions marriage, which is the means of procreation, kin and clan, wealth which we actually possess, wealth which we hope to earn and the dwellings which we are content with. He mentions trade through which we hope to earn and increase our wealth. He, thereby, differentiates between the wealth we possess and the trade we undertake. That is because trade might bring us more wealth, and a man can only buy somewhere to live if he has some excess wealth. Allah *Glorified is He* proclaims to us that if any of these aforementioned things are more beloved to us than He, His Prophet Muhammad and the struggle in Allah’s Cause, then we should wait until Allah brings about His Command. We will, at this time, come to realise the true value of this worldly life and the true value of the Goodly Acceptance and Lasting Bliss of Allah. All those things mentioned at the beginning of the verse are enjoyments of this worldly life.

The reason of the revelation of this verse is that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was commanded to emigrate from Mecca to Medina, he commanded the Muslims to emigrate. They left behind the wealth they had in Mecca, their commerce, homes and their fathers, sons, brothers and wives. They left behind all these things and their clans which could protect them, and immigrated to a new land.

However, some Muslims were attached to this worldly life and stayed with their wealth and their idolatress wives and children. Those idolatresses used to cling to the foot of their Muslim husbands who intended to emigrate in order for the husbands not to leave them. Their hearts, thereby, inclined to them. Others feared that their wealth will be lost and the trade they shared with the idolaters will decline. Because of all these points, this verse was revealed.

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to clarify the value of faithful allegiance and make the believers accustomed to it. That is because the faith of the Muslim became perfect through emigration and leaving behind his family and relatives. This was difficult for them to do. They said to Prophet Muhammad that if they broke away from those who have a different religion from them, they will, thereby, cut their ties with their fathers, sons, wives and families. They told him that they feared losing their wealth and trade. They feared that their houses will be wrecked and they will become homeless. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed this verse telling them that gaining faith is better than any other gain.

When this noble verse was revealed, the Companions took it very seriously and emigrated. They also cut their ties with their fathers and sons, and they reached the level that they might not talk to their fathers or sons in the streets or let them enter their houses. They refused to invite them to their homes whenever they meet them and refused to provide for them until the following verse was revealed: ' But if they strive to make you associate in worship with Me things which you have no knowledge about, do not obey them; but keep company with both of them in this life with justice' (*Luqman:* 15) This means that kindness with them should go no further than keeping their company and providing for them, while obeying them concerning something that would incur the Wrath of Allah is forbidden. Some orientalises, attempting to find a fault in the Quran, said that there is a contradiction between the verses of the Quran; as the former verse tells a believer to cut himself off from his father and son who prefer disbelief to faith, while the latter verse tells him to treat them kindly and not to cut them off. And a third verse states: ’One will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day loving those who oppose Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad], even though they were their [own] fathers, their sons, their brothers, or their kinsfolk’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22).

They fail to understand that there is a difference between love and kindness. Love is an action of the heart. One loves and feels affection with his heart, unlike kindness. One might be kind to a person whom he does not even know, and might be kind to an enemy in a dilemma without giving him love or affection.

To conclude, what is forbidden is to feel love and affection for those who contend against Allah and His Prophet. Kindness, on the other hand, is not forbidden. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* wants the faithful soul to acknowledge the favour of fatherhood. A believer should be kind to his father and help him during difficult times. But by contrast, he must not obey him in anything that will incur the Wrath of Allah. He wants to help the soul of the faithful develop respect for those s/he is indebted to. Mothers and fathers are among the secondary causes of life, and therefore we are commanded to treat them with kindness in this worldly life as long as we do not accept their calls to disbelief if they are disbelievers. A believer's faith in Allah must be stronger. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever possesses three qualities will taste the sweetness of *Iman* (Belief): To love Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] more than anyone else; to love a slave (of Allah) only for (the Sake of) Allah; and to hate returning to disbelief after Allah has saved him from it, just as he hates to be thrown into the fire (of Hell)'.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The reason behind this is for the believer not to make love of lineage or family relationships the standard, but rather, the closeness to Allah should be the cause of love and the distance from Allah should be the cause of hatred. Faith takes precedence over love. During the battle of Badr, the Companion Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was fighting on the side of Prophet Muhammad while his son, who was not a Muslim yet, was fighting on the side of the idolaters. Later, when his son embraced Islam and found faith, he said to his father that He had seen him in the battle and had turned his face away from him in order not to kill him. Abu Bakr As-Siddiq replied that if he had seen him (his son), he would have killed him. This is logical in terms of faith. The son of Abu Bakr had to choose between his father and an idol, which he worshipped, and the scale of his father was heavier. On the other hand, when Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* saw his son, he had to choose between his Lord and his son, and the scale of his Lord was heavier.

If this is the case with relationships, and this is how feelings are overcome by faith, how about wealth? Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about wealth that is earned through hard work. The Arabic word '*iqtarafa'* (acquire) is derived from the word '*qarf'* which means a shell. If you want to remove a shell or a husk from a seed, you might need to exert some effort to do this because the husk clings tightly to the seed. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And the property which you have acquired (*iqtaraftumuha*)' that is you earned it due to effort and hard work. It does not refer to the wealth which is inherited without working for it but is merely inherited from someone else. This is easy and trivial money for its owner. As for wealth that is earned through hard work and toil, its owner is more eager to keep hold of it than the inherited one. It is said that so-and-so a person *iqtarafa* something which means that he exerts effort to achieve it. The verb *iqtarafa* could come with an act of lying and stealing, it takes effort to do it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then wait till Allah brings about His Command: for Allah does not guide the rebellious' (*at-Tawba:* 24). He *Glorified is He* tells us to wait for the Command of Allah to be manifested because He does not guide an iniquitous person who has abandoned faith. He does not guide those whose love for worldly relationships is stronger than their love for Allah, and thereby prevent themselves from receiving Allah's guidance for Allah does not guide the evildoers or the disbelievers because they were the ones who adopted evil, disbelief and iniquity first. This caused Allah *the Almighty* to exclude them from His Will to give them the guidance of assistance, but He had earlier given them the guidance of direction.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to instil faithful assurance into the souls of the believers. Consequently, He explains to them that if they want to gain strength from their fathers, brothers, families, clans and wealth, the strength of a believer comes from his Lord. That is, do not look for an ally other than Allah, as the support of any human is subject to change and alteration. The allegiance given by humans keeps fluctuating and is subject to the vicissitudes of life. A rich man might become poor, a healthy might become sick, a strong might become weak. The permanent support, however, comes only from one who is all-powerful and all-overpowering, and who is not subject to change. If your ally is Allah, He is always All-Powerful and All-Overpowering. He is always Invincible, always Present and He is the Constant Supporter. If allegiance is from one man to another, the vicissitudes of the world could turn a friend into an enemy and turn a patron into a weakling who possesses nothing. It also brings death to the living. As such, one must make Allah *Glorified is He* his ally since He never changes. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches His believing slave to be always aware, vigilant and alert; He orders His slave to entrust the One Who is Ever-Living. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And rely on the Ever-living Who does not die' (*al-Furqan:* 58). This tells us not to rely on one who might die tomorrow, but rather rely on the One Who is Ever-Living *the Almighty* Who cannot be defeated, the Strong Who cannot be overcome. Allah *Glorified is He* notes that when believers are afraid of His Command to leave the society of disbelief due to the false solace from fathers, sons, brothers, relatives and wealth, they should know that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who gives help. He is their ally. The disbelievers have no helping ally because they choose as their allies beings that are subject to change, and yet beings that are subject to change cannot be trusted. For this reason, it is said that when a person reaches any peak, this is the beginning of the end of this perfect state. That is because as long as he has reached the top in a world where everything changes, he himself is also bound to change. A poet composed a very true line, stating:

If anything reaches completion, it begins to decline.

Expect ruin and decay on hearing the expression ‘It is complete!’

That is, because everything is subject to change, everything must ruin and decay. Allah *Glorified is He* thus clarifies to the believers that when He requires them to move away from the society of disbelief, thereby causing them to lose strength and support, they will be compensated with an even greater power because they will have Allah on their side and He is the Giver of Support. This is not only theoretical speech; it is backed up by real events which you have witnessed. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِى مَوَاطِنَ كَثِيرَةٍ ۙ وَيَوْمَ حُنَيْنٍ ۙ إِذْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ كَثْرَتُكُمْ فَلَمْ تُغْنِ
عَنكُمْ شَيْـًٔا وَضَاقَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْأَرْضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتْ ثُمَّ وَلَّيْتُم مُّدْبِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

God has helped you [believers] on many battlefields, even on the day of the Battle of Hunayn. You were well pleased with your large numbers, but they were of no use to you: the earth seemed to close in on you despite its spaciousness, and you turned tail and fled [25] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 25)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that support comes from Him alone. The proof that support comes from Allah is that He supported His Prophet Muhammad and those who followed him on many battlefields. The word *mawatin* (battlefields) is the plural of *mawtin* which literally means settlement. All humankind are settled on earth and every group specifies a certain area of land to be its homeland. A homeland is a specific place in which we live on the common homeland which is earth itself. The earth is the homeland of all humankind, but people are dispersed all over it. Every group amongst them is living in an area in which they move freely back and forth and in which they are settled.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the victory given to the Muslims. Since victory is the theme of the discourse, the meaning here is that Allah *Glorified is He* gave you victory in the arenas of war, i.e. the locations in which the fight was. Those are like the events of Badr, Al-Hudaybiyya, Banu An-Nadir, the Confederates, and the Liberation of Mecca. All of these were events during which Allah helped the Muslims; however, this verse singles out a single day after speaking about many places. After speaking generally about many battles, Allah refers to the Day of Hunayn in particular. This is because the great number of the Muslims on this day was a special event. Their number on other occasions such as the Battle of Badr was small. In spite of the fact that their number on the day of the Liberation of Mecca was great, the Muslims did not boast about it and felt no self-importance. However, on the Day of Hunayn, their great numbers were combined with pride on their part. Therefore, the Battle of Hunayn was distinct from all others. It was a special event which was mentioned after the general statement.

This pride refers solely to this day, itself. As such, the words: 'on the Day of Ḥunayn' are not related to 'many battlefields'. It is an independent sentence. The great number and the pride taken at this time were not features of any other battles. This linguistic difference requires further investigation. The word ‘battlefields’ refers to places while the Day of Hunayn refers to a time; but how can an adverbial expression of time be stated with an adverbial expression of place? This is what the Arabs call *ihtibak* (interweaving). This is because every action, such as eating, drinking, hitting or studying, must have a place and a time. When you say that you ate, we will ask. 'When did you eat? Was it in the morning, afternoon, evening or night? Where did you eat? Was it at home, a hotel, a restaurant, or in the street?’

Every action needs to be contextualised by a time and place, and if you keep asking you will understand the full context, i.e. both the place in which the action occurred and the time it occurred. When you say that you ate at three o’clock, but I do not ask you where, or when you say that you ate at home, but I do not ask you when it was, whether in the morning, afternoon or night, the full context of the action is still incomplete. It is known that time and place are both adverbs, but they are different. Place is immobile and static, while time constantly changes. There is morning, midday, afternoon, evening and night. Time revolves as well. There is past, present and future. Therefore, time and place are both adverbs, but time changes, while place is static.

The verse mentions both. It gives the time and place of a great event. The verse gives the place when it says; ‘on many battlefields’ and mentions time when it says: ‘on the Day of Hunayn’. If it is said that time and place are not both mentioned, we say, ‘No, they are’. Place is mentioned in one part and time is mentioned in the other. This is what is called interweaving. What is left out of the first part is alluded to in the second, and what is left out of the second part is alluded to in the first. The meaning is that Allah *Glorified is He* gave you victory on the battlefields on different days. When you mention the Day of Hunayn with these days, the meaning will be ‘and on the battlefield on the Day of Hunayn as well’. That is, both contexts are mentioned here, but Allah *Glorified is He* willed that there not be any repetition so He mentioned one of them here and the other there. This is clearly exhibited when He says: 'Indeed, there was a sign for you in the two armies [which] met together [in combat]; one party fighting in the Way of Allah and the other disbelieving' (*Al-‘Imran:* 13).

As long as the other party are disbelievers, the first have to be believers. The description ‘believing’ is omitted because the other description, which is disbelieving, implies it. This is to avoid repetition. We see that a believer who listens to the Words of Allah must have a deep understanding. He should listen eagerly and carefully to them for him to be able to recognise that what is omitted in the first clause is implied in the second. As such, the expression of time is included in one part, and the expression of place is included in the other. They allude to one another. An example of this is that after the battle, and when the Muslims had returned to Medina in a state of exhaustion, Prophet Muhammad ordered them before they removed their battle apparel, to let none offer the Afternoon prayer until he was in Banu Quraizha.(1)

Therefore, the Muslims set out before resting to the land of Banu Quraizha, who were a Jewish tribe who lived in Medina and who had violated the covenant of Prophet Muhammad. They had allied with the disbelievers against the Muslims. When the Companions were on their way to Banu Quraizha, the sun was close to setting. Hence, some of them said that they had to pray as the sun was about to set, and they prayed the Afternoon prayer. The second group of Companions said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had told them not to pray the Afternoon prayer until they reached Banu Quraizha, and they did not pray until they arrived there.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

We say that both groups used logic. Prayers require both a time and a place. Those who considered the time observed that the sun was about to set and prayed, while those who considered the place which Prophet Muhammad had specified did not pray. Later, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* approved the actions of both groups and respected their reasoning concerning the aspect of time and place. Nafi' narrated that Ibn 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them* said that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned from the battle of al-Ahzab (The confederates), he said to them, ‘None should offer the 'Asr [Afternoon] Prayer but at Bani Quraizha’. The Afternoon Prayer became due on their way there. Some of them decided to offer the Afternoon Prayer only at Bani Quraizha, while others decided to offer the Afternoon Prayer where they were and said that the intention of Prophet Muhammad was not what the former party had understood. And when that was told to the Prophet, he did not blame anyone of them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [even] on the Day of Hunayn, when your great number pleased you but it did not avail you at all’ (*at-Tawba:* 25). The word ‘to avail’ means to suffice so that nothing else is needed. Hunayn is a place in a valley between Mecca and Taif where the disbelievers who were offended by the Liberation of Mecca had gathered. They intended to launch a counter attack to undermine this victory. The tribes of Hawazin and Thaqif gathered and chose Malik ibn 'Awf to lead them into battle. Malik was able to muster four thousand warriors, joined by some of the Bedouins of the area. Malik based his plan on the idea that the army will set out with all the wealth of the army of the idolaters they possessed, including cows and camels, and women and children, for every soldier to fight for his honour and his wealth, and as a result no one will flee the battle. Thereby, they will continue to fight bravely and fiercely to protect their women, wealth and children. This included all the factors that assure victory to any army. On the other hand, the believers fought to defend Allah and His Path.

The disbelievers gathered and camped in a place called ‘Awtas Valley’. Among them was an old blind man named Durayd ibn As-Simmah who was the leader of the Jashm tribe(1). When he arrived at the battlefield, he asked,

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(1) An ancient Tribe in the Arabian peninsula

‘What land are we in?’ They replied, ‘We are in Awtas Valley’. He smiled and said, ‘Neither miserably rocky nor soft and slippery’. That is, the land was appropriate, being neither full of jagged rocks which are difficult to walk on nor too soft which causes the feet to sink into the earth while walking. As such, the terrain was neither rough and tiring nor too soft, sandy and flat for the foot to sink into the earth

When the old man heard the children crying and the sheep bleating, he said, ‘I hear the cries of children and the lowing of cattle’. They said to him, ‘Malik ibn ‘Awf has brought with him his offspring and all his wealth’. He replied, ‘The wealth is not a problem, but as for women and children, this is sheer recklessness of one inexperienced (in battle). Bring him to me’. They brought Malik to him, and he said, ‘O Malik, what made you do such a thing?’ Malik said, ‘What will you have me do?’ He said, ‘Send back your female relatives and children to the farthest (safe) part of your town. If you win, those you left behind will come and join you; and if you lose, your women and children will be safe from disgrace’. Malik said to him, ‘You have grown old, and your knowledge and mind have forsaken you!’ And he insisted on his opinion. He then began to position his troops in crevices and behind trees for the Muslims not to see them when they arrived and thereby proceed without fearing any danger, and consequently be ambushed from all sides.

When the Muslim army arrived, they did not notice the disbelievers, who were hidden from their eyes. Malik ibn ‘Awf then gave the signal to attack and the disbelievers sprang out from all around. The Muslims were surprised by the fierce attack, as recounted by a witness afterwards, ‘By Allah, the Muslims lasted no longer than it takes to milk a goat!’ Due to the fierceness and severity of the attack and the strength of the surprise, the Muslims army was defeated in the first hours of the battle. Some of those who fled the battlefield returned to Mecca. There only remained nine men with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the battlefield. These included Al-‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* the uncle of Prophet Muhammad, who was holding on to the mule upon which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was riding, ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* who was carrying the banner, Al-Fadl *Allah be pleased with him* who was standing on the right of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Sufyan ibn Al-Harith *Allah be pleased with him* the cousin of the Messenger, who was standing on his left; and there was also Ayman ibn Umm Ayman, and several other Companions.(1)

Here, we might ask why the Muslims were routed at the beginning of the battle in this way. It was because when they went out to the battle, they said, 'Our numbers are so great that we shall not be defeated due to the smallness of numbers'. They occupied themselves with the means and instruments (of victory), forgetting the Creator of such means and instruments. Allah, therefore, wanted to punish them in a way that disgraced them while elevating the status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw what had happened, he ordered Al-'Abbas, who had a sonorous voice, saying, 'Call to the people!' Hence, Al-'Abbas shouted loudly, 'O Ansar(2)! O Companions! O you who swore allegiance under the tree!' On hearing the voice of Al-'Abbas calling them back, the people replied, '[We are] Here at your service, here at you service!' Anyone who said this could be heard by those behind him, who repeated the same words, until a large number of Muslims returned to the battle. The fighting became ferocious and the battle flared up. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* smiled and said, 'Now the fight has become fierce!' Then he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am the Prophet, [this is] no lie! I am the son of 'Abd Al-Muttalib!'

These last words of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* were narrated in the two authentic books of Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib *Allah be pleased with him* who narrated that a man asked him, 'O Abu 'Umarah, did you flee and leave the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad] on the Day of Hunayn?' He replied, 'But the Messenger of Allah did not flee. The tribe of Hawazin were skilled archers. However, when we met them and charged at them, they retreated. Then when the people went after the booty, they met us with arrow shots, and as a result the people fled. (At that time) I saw the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with Abu Sufyan ibn Al-Harith, clutching the reins of his white mule while the Messenger was saying, “I am the Prophet, [this is] no lie! I am the son of ‘Abd Al-Muttalib!”’(1) That is, he (Prophet Muhammad) is truly the Messenger of Allah, and Allah will not forsake him or abandon him. None of the tribes of Hawazin or Thaqif withstood in the face of the believers, and the battle ended with the capture of six thousand women. The Muslims also gained booty beyond count, and a large number of camels, cattle, sheep and donkeys. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent for Budayl ibn Warqa’ and said to him, ‘You are in charge of this booty; go, and I shall go after those who fled’.

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(1) *For details, see Zad Al-Ma'ad (ii.185-187)*

(2) *The Prophet's supporters from Medina*

The Muslim army went to At-Ṭa’if in pursuit of the enemy who had fled. The enemy’s leader, Malik ibn ‘Awf went into hiding. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then returned and divided the booty among the Muslims, but the division almost caused discord among the Muslims. This was because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* distributed them among those whose hearts he wanted to win over to the Truth and to the rest of the Arabs, but not to the *Ansar* (the Supporters from Medina). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted in this way to contrast two issues. The first was the battle gains, which were worldly items that could be given to those whose hearts were to be won over. The second was the love of Allah and His Messenger Muhammad, which the *Ansar* had as their share. The Ansar who supported the opinions and judgements of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by the strength of their love for Messenger Muhammad and their faith in Allah, willingly gave away or dispensed with such worldly trinkets. But despite this, some of the *Ansar* felt a little bitter and were affected by the distribution of the booty.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave the booty to Quraysh and the other Arab tribes and the Ansar received nothing, a clan of the Ansar felt discontent and began to murmur excessively on this account, and one of them even said that Prophet Muhammad had met his people to give them booty. Then Sa‘d ibn ‘Ubada went to him and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, some people from among the Ansar feel dissatisfied because of the way you have distributed the booty you gained. You distributed it among your people and gave great shares to some members of the Arabs while the people of the Ansar did not receive anything'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'and where do you stand in this regard, O Sa'd?' He said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am but a man from my people, that is all'. He said, 'So bid your people gather with me in this plot'. Sa'd went and gathered the people. Then some of the *Muhajirun* (Emigrants) came to attend, and he allowed some of them to enter but sent back others who came later. Once they had gathered, Sa'd went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'This clan of the *Ansar* have gathered to meet you'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out to them, thanked and praised Allah, and then said, 'O people of the *Ansar,* a word has reached me that you feel grief in your souls. Did I not find you astray and Allah guided you through me? Were you not dependent and Allah gave you self-sufficiency and independence through me? Were you not enemies and Allah brought your hearts together?' They said, 'Yes indeed, Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] are the most bountiful and gracious'. He said, 'Why do you not reply to me, O people of the *Ansar?*' They said, 'How should we reply to you, O Messenger of Allah, when indeed all the favours are from Allah and His Messenger?' Prophet Muhammad said, 'By Allah, if you wish you could say, and you will be telling the truth and you will be believed: You came to us being accused of lying and we believed you, being forsaken and we supported you, being a fugitive and we gave you shelter, in poverty and we enriched you'.(1) That is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned to them three blessings that came to them because of Islam, namely delivering them from error to guidance, from dependence to self-sufficiency, and from enmity to brotherhood and love.

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(1) *Narrated in Al-Bukhari (no. 4317) and Muslim (no. 1776), on the authority of Al-Barra ibn `Azib*

In stating the virtues of the *Ansar,* Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned four favours they had done for him–namely, that when the Meccans tried to kill him and he emigrated to Medina, the Ansar graciously took him in; and when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be*

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 3, p. 76) from Ibn Ishaq on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri, and by Ibn Hisham in his Sira (vol. 4, p. 146)*

upon him and the believers came to Medina with nothing in their possession, the *Ansar* shared their possessions with them and some even offered to divorce their wives for the Emigrants; and when the disbelievers tried to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the *Ansar* protected him; and lastly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been rejected and forsaken by his own people of Quraysh, but the *Ansar* espoused him. The *Ansar* (the Helpers from Medina), on hearing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recounting their merits, said, ‘Rather, the favour is all from Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]’. They meant that they, as the *Ansar*, can never say this, because the sweetness of Faith and its reward were greater than all that Prophet Muhammad had said about them. From this perspective, they were not the ones who gave, but rather, it was Faith that gave to them; for the benefits of Faith are eternal. Allah *Blessed and Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “Do not consider your Islam a favour to me; it is Allah who has conferred a favour upon you by guiding you to the Faith, if you are indeed true [in your claim that you are believers]”’ (*al-Hujurat:* 17).

When the Ansar said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Rather, the favour is all from Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]’, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘O people of the Ansar, are you aggrieved over a trifle of this world that I used to reconcile some people’s hearts for them to embrace Islam, and I have entrusted you to your faith in Islam? Are you not content, O company of the *Ansar,* that the people leave with their sheep and camels, while you return home with the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad]? By He in Whose Hand is Muhammad’s soul, if the people went one direction and the *Ansar* went another, I will go in the direction of the *Ansar*. O Allah have mercy on the *Ansar*, and on the children of the Ansar, and on the grandchildren of the *Ansar'*. On hearing this from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they wept until their beards were wet with tears, and then they said, ‘We are well content with Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] as our portion and our lot’; and there was no problem about the booty after that.

We thus can see that when we consider two types of possessions, we should take pride in the permanent and lasting possessions that we have acquired. As for perishable possessions, people who lack them live just like those who have them. These are the transient worldly belongings, and life can be lived with or without them. But no one can dispense with Faith. We can do without worldly pleasures and possessions, but we cannot dispense with Faith, Allah or His Messenger Muhammad. Following the distribution of booty, a delegation of Hawazin came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was at Ji‘ranah, after they had embraced Islam. They said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, we are of noble origin and we are kinsfolk. The calamity which has befallen us is not hidden from you. Please be bounteous to us, may Allah be bounteous to you’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Which is dearer to you, your wealth or your wives and children?’ They replied, ‘O Messenger of Allah, you have given us the choice between our honourable lineage and our wealth; return to us our wives and children, for they are dearer to us’. He said to them, ‘As for what belongs to me and to the children of `Abdul-Muttalib, you may consider them, from now on, as yours. When I have finished leading the congregation in the Noon Prayer, stand up and say, “We ask the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad] to intercede for us with the Muslims, and we ask the Muslims to intercede for us with the Messenger of Allah regarding our children and our women’, and I shall give them back to you and request (the Muslims) on your behalf’. Once Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had finished leading the people in the Noon Prayer, the delegation stood up and said what he had told them to say. Upon that, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘As for what belongs to me and to the children of `Abdul Muttalib, you may consider them, from now on, yours’. Upon hearing that, the *Muhajirun* (Emigrants) said, ‘What belongs to us belongs, from now on, to the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad]’. The *Ansar* (the Helpers from Medina) also said, ‘What belongs to us belongs, from now on, to the Messenger of Allah’. But Al-Aqra` ibn Habis said, ‘We will grant none of what belongs to me and to Banu Tamim’. `Uyayna ibn Hisn ibn Hudhyfa ibn Badr said, ‘As for me and Banu Fazarah, we say no’. `Abbas ibn Mirdas also refused and said no for Banu Sulaym and himself. But the members of Banu Sulaym said, ‘No, whatever is ours belongs from now on to the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad]’. `Abbas replied, ‘O Banu Sulaym, you have undermined my position!’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Those of you who have their share of these captives shall be given as a recompense for every captive six times as much from the first booty Allah gives us'. After this, they returned the wives and children of the tribe of Hawazin to them.(1)

That was the incident referred to in the Lord's Words: 'Truly, Allah has given you victory on many battlefields, and on the Day of Hunain(2) when you rejoiced at your great number but it did not avail you at all, and the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for you; then you turned back in flight' (*at-Tawba:* 25).

That is, you began the battle without taking Allah into account, but rather, you relied on your great numbers; yet they did not avail you or gain you victory. As a result, you fled in fear of defeat and the earth before you seemed narrow. As such, you looked here and there for a place to hide, but you could not find any. Despite the earth's vastness, it became narrow in your eyes as you fled the battle. Yet the Lord *Glorified is He* did not want the battle to end this way. He only wanted to remove from the Muslims' hearts the boastfulness they had felt about their great numbers, and the assumption that their reliance on means assures victory for them. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to fully understand that they will only gain victory through Him *the Most High* and that their great numbers will not do them any good if they did not rely on Him.

Allah says:

ثُمَّ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُۥ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِۦ وَعَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَنزَلَ جُنُودًا لَّمْ
تَرَوْهَا وَعَذَّبَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Then God sent His calm down to His Messenger and the believers, and He sent down invisible forces. He punished the disbelievers – this is what the disbelievers deserve [26] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 26)

That is, Allah *Glorified is He* first sent inner peace down upon His Messenger Muhammad and the believers who remained with him, and then He sent it down upon the believers who returned after fleeing from the battle. And His Saying: '…and sent down soldiers (angels) whom you did not see, and punished those who disbelieved. And that is the recompense of the disbelievers' (*at-Tawba:* 26) means, as the Quran has narrated to us, that the angels descended and strengthened the believers and cast terror into the hearts of the disbelievers and also brought torment to them. This was testified to by the believers who witnessed this, as they later mentioned how they saw beings on piebald(1) horses the like of which they had never possessed.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 2, p. 218) and An-Nisa'i in his Sunan (vol. 6, p. 262) from Muhammad ibn Ishaq on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As. It was also narrated by Ibn Hisham in his book of Sira (vol. 4, p. 135). See also the exegesis of Al-Qurtubi*

(2) Refers to a Battle that early Muslims fought during the early days of Islam and after the Liberation of Mecca

When the Noble Quran tells us that the angels came down, and there were people who saw them,(2) we should all take the position of a true believer and trust in the One Who said this, for He is truthful. We should believe in what He says without searching for the 'how' of it. If some of you find this hard to accept, they should not deny that it occurred but rather admit their ignorance of how it occurred. For the existence of something and our knowledge of how it exists are two completely different issues.

There are many things in the universe that exist and perform their function, but we do not know how they came into existence. Our lack of knowledge of them does not mean that they do not exist. All the discoveries that modern science has made already existed in nature, but in the past we knew nothing about the manner of their existence. Gravity existed, but we did not know that it existed or how it worked. Likewise, electricity has existed in the universe since the beginning of creation, but we did not know about it until Allah revealed it to us and we became able to use it. Microbes existed and performed their function, without our knowing it, until Allah revealed them to us and we learned of their existence and how they existed. All these elements and components existed in Allah's universe from the moment He created it, but we did not know about them. Our lack of knowledge of them cannot detract from their existence in the slightest. For this reason, if you are told about something beyond your understanding, do not deny that it exists because there are things which we knew nothing about before Allah gave us knowledge of them. And later, we found out that they lived according to fixed physical laws. Clearly, the existence of something and the perception of its existence are two completely distinct facets.

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(1) Black horses with white patches

(2) *In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi said that the part of the Quranic verse that says: '...sent down soldiers whom you did not see…' (at-Tawba:26) meant the angels who strengthened the believers by instilling faithful thoughts and firmness into their hearts, and weakened the disbelievers by instilling fear and cowardice in them without their being able to see them. They did this without actually fighting, since the angels only fought at the Battle of Badr. It was narrated that a man from Banu An-Nadir said to the believers after the battle, 'Where are the piebald horses and the men in white who were riding them? Compared to them, we were mere blemishes, and we were only killed because of them'. They told Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him about this, and he said, 'These were the angels'.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then Allah sent down His tranquillity upon His Messenger [Muhammad] and upon the believers and sent down soldiers (angels) whom you did not see…' (*at-Tawba:* 26). The words: 'whom you did not see' provide an excuse for all those who did not see. And it is enough that Allah said it to make it a true fact. Allah says: '…none knows the soldiers of your Lord but Him…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31).

When we are told that Allah has creatures called jinn, just as He has other creatures called angels, and that the jinn can see us while we cannot see them, some people disapprove of this. Likewise, when we hear that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Satan runs through the son of Adam like blood',(1) some people object to this and say, 'How can Satan enter a person's veins and run in them like blood?' It is undeniable that we have progressed in empirical science and discovered microbes, and have seen how they can invade the body and enter the bloodstream; yet does anyone feel the microbes as they enter his body? Is anyone aware of the moment when the microbes enter the body? Of course not; but when they divide and reproduce, and their affects begin to show on our body, we become aware of it. This shows that microbes are so minute that the sensory nerves under the skin do not feel them. They are so minute that they can travel through or between these nerves without our sensing it, and enter the bloodstream without our knowing it. As the blood flows in the veins, it is governed by a law which states that the square of the radius needed for all the blood has to be distributed over every vein and capillary. An example of this is to be found in water distribution. We take a main pipe whose radius is eight inches and connect it to a village, the area of water that flows from it will be 8x8 inches or 64 square inches. When we come to distribute it to the pipes that branch off from it, we will run into a pipe with a four-inch diameter, and then from this runs a pipe with a two-inch diameter, and then from this runs a pipe with a one inch or half inch diameter. What is important is that the square of the diameters of the tributary pipes is equal to the area of the water that flows out from the main pipe.

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(1) *Narrated in Al-Bukhari and Muslim… Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (book of authentic Hadiths) (2035 and other places) and Muslim (2175) on the authority of Safiyya bint Huyyay, the wife of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him*

The same applies to veins. The blood flows though large arteries, veins and capillaries. The minuteness of the microbe allows it to penetrate these vessels without any blood spilling from them. And when these vessels are blocked, this leads to the diseases we hear about, such as cholesterol or blood clots. Medicine, therefore, has to intervene to widen the vessels because they are the ‘pipes’ through which blood flows. There are surgeries that can be performed using laser beams or other modern inventions which can penetrate the skin between the blood vessels and because the rays are very accurate, they do not cut the vessels or spill any blood.

Clearly, everything in the body is arranged according to Allah’s Pattern. Every microbe has an incubation period inside the body during which we do not feel it, but after this time its effects begin and illness appears. It takes a long time for the microbe to replicate in the blood and to fight the white blood cells, all the time we do not feel or sense what is going on.

A microbe, which is a physical entity like you, i.e. with specific mass and volume, can only be seen with a microscope and appears to have a frightening form. It reproduces by multiplying and has a life cycle. If you cannot feel this microbe when it is inside your body, what do you think about Satan who is made of an even more transparent substance than a microbe? Is it possible for you to feel him if he enters your body? No. And if a material object can enter your body without your feeling it, what about a creature that Allah made from a substance more transparent and subtle than clay? Is he not able to enter the son of Adam and run through him like blood?

So when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Satan runs through the son of Adam like blood’, do not be amazed by this or deny it simply because you cannot feel it. Allah has given you something in the material world that is more substantial than this and yet it enters your body without your feeling it.

Science has confirmed that there exist creatures that we cannot see with the naked eye. By using modern electronic microscopes and studying every cell in the human body, we can see marvels. We will observe on the human skin, which we consider to be smooth, deep pores from which sweat comes out and other such tiny details which the eye cannot see. Consequently, when Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that angels came down and fought, we believe this. The Lord *Blessed and Glorified is He* gave us something to placate our human natures by saying: ‘…soldiers (angels) whom you did not see…’ (*at-Tawba:* 26). If one person said that he saw them, and another said that he did not see any, we say that Allah’s Words: ‘…whom you did not see…’ (*at-Tawba:* 26) mean that not all of you could see them. There were those who saw a glimpse of them and those who did not.

The Lord’s Words: ‘…punished those who disbelieved’ (*at-Tawba:* 26) mean through death, capture or the loss of their wealth. And His Words: ‘…and that is the recompense of the disbelievers’ (*at-Tawba:* 26) mean that the loss they suffered was a requital for their disbelief. But some people may ask why the punishment did not descend on them at once, and why the defeat did not occur at the first moment of the battle. We say that Allah wanted to increase the disbelievers’ torment. If He arranged it for them to be defeated right away, this will have been easier for them and less of a torment. But by first giving them the joy of victory, the ultimate defeat will certainly be more difficult and severe. As a poet said:

It is as when a thirsty people see a cloud overhead,
But as soon as they see it, it dissipates and clears.

When a cloud passes over the heads of drought-stricken people, they hope that it will rain on them; but then the dream completely vanishes. Or, it is like a prisoner who is very thirsty and asks his guard for water. The guard says, ‘I will get some for you’, and he really leaves to get him a glass of cold water after which he gives it to him; but as soon as the prisoner takes the cup in his hand and his soul fills with joy, the guard knocks his hand and the cup falls to the ground. Of course, the prisoner will be severely disappointed. This is the worst kind of torture. Had the guard simply refused to bring him water in the first place, this will have been less painful for the prisoner; but when he brought the prisoner the cup of water and placed it in his hand, and then prevented him from drinking it, this is a worse torment. Thus Allah wanted to increase the disbelievers' punishment by first giving them the signs of victory and its sweetness, and then making them taste the bitterness of defeat that dispossesses them of everything. Hence, they were struck by a double calamity involving two facets: a positive one and a negative one (i.e. winning and then losing).

We are then given a glimpse of the Mercy in which Allah envelops His whole universe, opening the door for the sinner to return to the way of Faith for Allah to accept him. The Lord *Blessed and Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ يَتُوبُ ٱللَّهُ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُۗ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٢٧

But God turns in His mercy to whoever He will. God is most forgiving and merciful [27] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 27)

This is the greatness of the Creator, the Most Merciful and Ever Merciful. He always leaves the door open for His slaves; for He is the Creator of this universe. Allah opens the door of repentance before every sinner. And this is logical because those who sin and disbelieve do not hurt Allah in the least, but only hurt themselves. They attempt to transgress the laws of the Lord. Once any sinner realises that he has no refuge except Allah, Allah *Glorified is He* opens the door of repentance for him.

In this chapter, Allah *Blessed and Glorified is He* made it clear to us that He and His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have disavowed the polytheists (those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity or worship), and He revealed to us that their nature is to not respect any covenant or treaty. He made this matter official by stating: 'A release by Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] from the treaty you (believers) made with the polytheists (is announced)…' (*at-Tawba:* 1), and He instructed us to annul all the treaties that existed between us and them. Those who violated their treaties were to be disavowed immediately, but we respected the treaties of those who kept them until their appointed period was over. He then ordered the polytheists to keep away from the Inviolable (Sacred) Mosque (in Mecca), and also made it possible for any error or sin to be effaced by opening the door of repentance. After all this, Allah *the Most High* turns from the issue of the expired covenants with the disbelievers to the issue of the disbelievers themselves, saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِنَّمَا ٱلۡمُشۡرِكُونَ نَجَسٞ فَلَا يَقۡرَبُواْ ٱلۡمَسۡجِدَ
ٱلۡحَرَامَ بَعۡدَ عَامِهِمۡ هَٰذَاۚ وَإِنۡ خِفۡتُمۡ عَيۡلَةٗ فَسَوۡفَ يُغۡنِيكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
مِن فَضۡلِهِۦٓ إِن شَآءَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٞ ٢٨

Believers, those who ascribe partners to God are truly unclean: do not let them come near the Sacred Mosque after this year. If you are afraid you may become poor, [bear in mind that] God will enrich you out of His bounty if He pleases: God is all knowing and wise [28] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 28)

That is, it is not enough for the believers to annul all their covenants with the polytheists, but rather, they must also disavow the polytheists themselves because they are impure. An impure thing is something repellent and detestable to people. One of these polytheists might be acceptable with respect to his appearance and his clothing, but this is only the external appearance. When Allah *the Exalted and the Glorious* speaks, He only speaks about spiritual and moral values. Allah does not look at external appearances, but rather, He looks at hearts. Abu Huraira *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah does not look at your bodies or your forms, but rather He looks at your hearts'.(1)

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(1) *This means that what counts on the Day of Resurrection is your hearts, not your outward forms. This encourages us to look after our hearts and purify them. Narrated by Muslim (2564), Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 2, p. 285, 539) and Ibn Majah (4143); this is the wording of Muslim*

The appearance might be superficially acceptable, while the beliefs held within the hearts of these bodies are foul and impure. Allah *Glorified is He* does not judge by appearances or forms, but rather by moral values. But if you contemplate true and sincere values and beliefs, you will find that every belief is visible in the material form that contains it. For example, when you are happy, your facial features show this. Those who meet you will recognise this and see that you are in a good mood. And if you are angry or annoyed, this will also show on your face.

Clearly, the material of the body interacts alongside the moral values. Since the moral values are corrupt, the material of the body will rebel against its owner. Any material, in its natural state, worships and extols Allah, as does the spirit. Corruption may only occur after the spirit is placed within the body resulting in the self having this combination, body and spirit. When the self gives preference to Allah's Way, it becomes a tranquil soul. When the self-swings between obedience and disobedience, it will either obey and become a 'self-reproaching soul', or else it will choose disbelief and the way of wickedness and become a 'soul that is inclined to evil'. But before the spirit is breathed into the body, all of the body glorifies Allah because everything in existence worships and glorifies Allah. Concerning all that it does, the soul is compelled to obey its owner in the way that Allah *Glorified is He* has created it to do. When death comes, human free will comes to an end and the human loses control of his body. This body will even testify against its owner on the Day of Resurrection. But during this worldly life, the will of an individual is in command of his physical form, by Allah's Leave. Consequently, the hand might strike someone or it might aid someone in difficulty; and the tongue of the Muslim testifies that there is no god but Allah, while the tongue of the disbeliever associates other gods with Allah.

The human body is subject to the will of the individual in this world of vicissitudes, but with the transition to the Hereafter, humans will no longer have control of the material body. The body will be free of having to obey its owner in sin, and it will rebel against him and testify that he used it to commit evil. In this regard, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Their ears, eyes, and skins will, when they reach it (hellfire), testify against them for their misdeeds. They will say to their skins, “Why did you testify against us?” and their skins will reply, “Allah, who gave speech to everything, has given us speech–it was He who created you the first time and to Him you have been returned”’ (*Fussilat:* 20-21).

It is as though the body parts of the human will say to him on the Day of Resurrection, ‘You wore me out in the worldly life and forced me to do things I will not have done on my own, since I worship Allah and glorify Him. The things which you commanded me to do were disobedience to Allah *Glorified is He*’. We gave the example before of a squadron commander who gives bad instructions which the soldiers nevertheless obey, and when they return to the high commander, they complain to him about what the squadron commander made them do. Likewise, the body parts will testify against their owners before their Creator on the Day of Resurrection. When you worship Allah and glorify Him, your body will be for you; and if you do otherwise, your body will be against you. For example, the tongue in itself worships and glorifies Allah; if you force it to associate partners with Allah, it will obey you in this worldly life and then testify against you on the Day of Resurrection. The Lord *Blessed and Glorified is He* will call out on that Day: ‘…whose is the kingdom this Day?’ (Allah Himself will reply to His Question): ‘It is Allah’s, the One, the Irresistible!’ (*Ghafir:* 16)

Here, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Verily, the polytheists are impure…’ (*at-Tawba:* 28), that is, their corrupt beliefs are clearly manifested in their actions. Allah *Glorified is He* sustains the concepts of Faith in the soul and makes them grow. For example, we pelt Satan with pebbles as one of the rites of the pilgrimage to Mecca; we pelt a pillar of stone which represents Satan for us. We cannot see Satan, and for this reason we have made a symbol for him, and have firmly established in our minds the notion that Satan is our enemy and that we must pelt him to stay clear of his intentions. By doing this, we have represented these abstract notions in a physical way to make it clear to the human soul that Satan is our enemy. Every time Satan whispers an insinuation to us, we pelt him by remembering the pure articles of Faith so that he flees from us. We must all remember well that Satan will laugh at the sinners and disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection and say, as Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘I had no power over you except that I called to you, and you responded to my call. So do not blame me; [rather] blame yourselves...' (*Ibrahim:* 22). These words serve to mock those who used to listen to Satan and believe him; for force is either authoritative, such as when you compel someone to do something by using physical force, or persuasive, such as when you persuade a person to do something using convincing arguments–and Satan possesses neither the power to force nor the power to argue.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, the polytheists are impure. So let them not come near the Sacred Mosque (at Mecca) after this year…' (*at-Tawba:* 28), He thereby clarifies for us that their impurity makes it necessary for us to prevent them from entering the places which only pure people may enter. Allah *Glorified is He* considers spiritual impurity to be the same as material impurity, which is why the scholars say that as long as the Lord describes them as being impure, they must have some kind of physical impurity. This is the reason why, when you approach them, you may find that some may have an unpleasant smell because they do not cleanse themselves properly (with water or any hard material) after answering the call of nature, and they do not take purificatory baths after sexual relations. When we went to Algeria after it was liberated from the French rule, we found that the houses did not contain baths since the occupiers only bathed every twenty days or so, and as a result they kept the baths far away from the houses. But after Algerian independence, they began to put baths in the houses because Islamic culture is based on purity, and it is obligatory for Muslims to clean themselves properly after using the restroom, and take a full ritual bath after sexual relations.

Some people say, 'If I shake an idolater's hand and it is wet, I must wash my hand(1); and if it is dry, I just wipe my hand'. This is a way of being cautious and an affirmation that these idolaters should be avoided. And if we should avoid them with our physical person, is this not all the more reason for us to avoid them with our hearts?

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(1) Al-Qurtubi narrated in his exegesis (vol. 4, p. 3030) that Al-Hassan Al-Basri said, 'Whoever shakes an idolater's hand should then perform ablution'. Ibn Kathir said in his exegesis (vol. 2, p. 346), 'This noble verse indicates that the idolater is spiritually impure, as the authentic Hadith states, "The believer is never impure". As for the impurity of his physical body, the majority of scholars say that he is not actually physically or personally impure because Allah declared the food of the people of the Book to be lawful. But some literalists (zhahiri school) say that they are physically impure. Ash'ath narrated that Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, "Whoever shakes an idolater's hand should then perform ablution". It was narrated by Ibn Jarir'.

Allah *Glorified it He* sent down this noble verse in the ninth year after *Hijrah* (the Emigration to Medina), the year in which the polytheists were barred from approaching the Inviolable Mosque (in Mecca) and the disavowal from them was announced. The scholars asked whether the polytheists were banned from entering the Inviolable Mosque, or from the entire Sanctuary.

Imam Ash-Shafi`i specified that the polytheists were only barred from entering the Inviolable Mosque itself; and although we respect Imam Ash-Shafi`i's opinion, we say that the Lord has said: '…let them not come near the Sacred Mosque' (*at-Tawba:* 28), not 'let them not enter into it' which means that they were not even allowed to come near it. The nearest thing to the Inviolable Mosque is the Sanctuary in its entirety. If only the Mosque itself was meant, the Lord will have directly specified that they were barred from entering it alone.(1) As such, we see how it is possible for someone to exercise independent human reasoning and extract the true import of a text.

The Lord *Glorified is He* continues: '…and if you fear poverty, Allah will enrich you if, He wills, out of His Bounty. Surely, Allah is All Knowing, All-Wise' (*at-Tawba:* 28). These noble words speak about the Unseen. As we know, the Unseen means that which is unknown to you and also to others. As for that which is unknown to you but not to others, this does not belong to the Unseen. For example, if some money is stolen from you and you do not know who stole it, in such a case the thief is unknown to you but not to others. The thief knows himself, and the one who helped him do the crime knows him, and the one who saw what he did but concealed it knows him. Moreover, you do not know where the stolen objects are now, but the thief knows where he has hidden them.

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(1) Al-Qurtubi said in his exegesis, 'Imam Ash-Shafi'i, Allah have mercy on him, said that the noble verse refers to all polytheists, in general, specifically regarding the Inviolable Mosque, which means that they are not forbidden from entering other mosques. As such, he held it permissible for Jews and Christians to enter other mosques. Ibn Al-'Arabi said that this was a restrictive opinion on his part that deviates from the plain meaning of the text, since Allah's Words: "Verily, the polytheists are impure…" (*at-Tawba:* 28) alert us to the fact that Shirk (joining false gods with Allah) and impurity go hand in hand'.

Although it is unknown to you, it is known to others. This is the game of the sorcerers and fortune-tellers who utilise the jinn in this domain. As long as something is known to other than you, it is easy to discover it. But there are things which are unknown both to you and to everyone else, and are solely known to Allah. This is what the Lord refers to in His saying: ‘He is the One who knows the Unseen. He does not disclose it except to a Messenger of His choosing’ (*al-Jinn:* 26-27).

There are also things which are unknown to all people, but will not remain unknown until the end of time. Electricity, for example, was unknown to us before we discovered it, as this was the case with details about splitting the atom and the laws of gravity, then these things became known to mankind. However, this is not the kind of the Unseen which Allah means when He says: ‘He is the One, who knows the Unseen,’ (*al-Jinn:* 26), as this verse refers to matters of the Unseen which only He knows. Therefore, one should not say that so-and-so knows the Unseen, but rather say that he has been given knowledge of something that was unknown before. Unseen matters are veiled by either time or space. Buried relics, for example, point to something that existed in the past and disappeared. They provide information on past nations which no one knew, and which were hidden by the veil of the past until they were discovered and Allah gave some people the ability to solve their mysteries.

Moreover, the knowledge that Allah gave His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about previous nations in the Noble Quran was an uncovering of the veil of the past such as His Words: ‘That is from the news of the Unseen which we reveal to you (O Muhammad). And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Mary. Nor were you with them when they disputed’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 44). Allah also says: ‘And you (O Muhammad) were not on the western side (of the Mount) when we made clear to Musa (Moses) the commandment, and you were not among those present. But we created generations [after generations i.e. after Musa], and long were the ages that passed over them. And you (O

Muhammad) were not a dweller among the people of Madyan (Midyan), reciting Our Verses to them. But it is We Who kept sending [Messengers]' (*al-Qasas:* 44-45). His saying: 'you were not', which is repeated in other glorious verses as well, indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of issues that were hidden in the past. As for the issues that will happen in the future, they are hidden from you by the veil of the future. The Noble Quran also lifted the veils of the future in many verses which all began with the Arabic letter '*sin'* (translated as shall), which indicates an event that has not happened yet.

Allah's saying: 'We shall show them our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth…' (*Fussilat:* 53) indicates that Allah, throughout the future, will continue to reveal to us His signs in the universe. Another example is Allah's saying: 'Alif, Lam, Mim. The Byzantines have been defeated in the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome, within a few years. To Allah belongs the command, in the past and in the future…' (*ar-Rum:* 1-4). The previous saying pierces the veils of the future because the victory referred to was achieved nine years after the revelation of these verses. That which will happen in the future is veiled from you by future time. There are also things which are happening in the present, but you do not know about them because they are veiled from you by the veil of place. In other words, that which occurs in a place where you are not present is unknown to you. If you are sitting in Mecca, for example, you do not know what is happening in Medina because it is veiled from you with the veil of place. There is also the veil of the soul; as no one but you knows what is going on in your soul because it is veiled by the veil of the soul.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, the polytheists are impure. So let them not come near the Sacred Mosque (at Mecca) after this year,…' (*at-Tawba:* 28), He is addressing people who He expects will implement this commandment. At the same time, Allah knows the kind of thoughts that will go through the minds when they hear these words. It is like when someone comes and tells you that the bakery near your house will close. The first thing you think is, 'Where shall we get our bread now?' Or, if you are told that the shipment of meat and vegetables has got lost, the first thing you will think is, 'What shall we eat?'

The polytheists used to bring their wealth to the pilgrimage and engage in trade and spend money. This was considered the time of financial boom for those who lived around the House of Allah as they earned enough money at this time to live on for the rest of the year.

So what kind of thoughts arises in the souls of the believers when the Lord tells them, 'Verily, the polytheists are impure? So let them not come near the Sacred Mosque (at Mecca) after this year' (*at-Tawba:* 28)? The question that would certainly present itself in the depths of their souls will be, 'Then, who will buy our wares?' But did Allah leave this question unanswered? No, He answered it by saying: 'And if you fear poverty, Allah will enrich you, if He wills, out of His Bounty' (*at-Tawba:* 28).

Thus Allah removed the veil of the soul, answering the worries that entered the believers' souls in the very same verse in which He forbade the polytheists from coming near the Inviolable Mosque. The Lord *Glorified is He* did not wait for the believers to give voice to what they were thinking, but He answered the thoughts that were in their minds before they even gave them voice.

When Allah removes the veil of the soul in this way, the sagacious believer will say to himself, 'This is what was in my mind'. He will feel contented and say, 'Since Allah knows what occurs in my mind, He will surely provide for me'. If this had not occurred to their minds, they will have denied the text; and if they had denied the text, they will not have retained their faith. But they continued to retain their faith which shows that the text expressed exactly what was going on inside their souls.

Allah *Glorified is He* removes the veil of the soul in many other noble Quranic verses, for example, when He says about the hypocrites and the disbelievers: 'And (they) say inwardly, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?"' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

No one can hear the speech of the soul. If these people had not really said this to themselves, they will have said, 'By Allah, this never occurred to us!' But because they truly did say this to themselves, they were amazed when the

Noble Quran revealed what was inside their souls. In this noble verse, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to what could occur to the souls of the believers when they heard this command. The Lord *Glorified is He* did not wait until the believers complained to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of their fear of poverty or scant provision, but rather, He *Glorified is He* answered this before it even crossed their minds. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* even legislates for thoughts before they cross the mind; He does not leave things until they occur and then react to them by legislating for them.

The Lord *Glorified is He* uses here the word '*ʿayla'* (poverty): 'And if you fear poverty (*ʿayla*)…' (*at-Tawba:* 28) and follows it by saying: 'Allah will enrich you, if He wills, out of His Bounty…' (*at-Tawba:* 28). The future particle '*sawfa*' (translated as 'will') is used for the distant future, which indicates that some time will pass, but it will be a relatively short time. In this context, it signifies that the prosperity that will ensue will be produced by many different means. It is as though Allah will compensate them for the profits they used to obtain through the disbelievers by causing rain to fall for their crops to grow which will require time, or by giving them the means to engage in thriving trades with people other than the polytheists, or by revealing to them treasures of the earth which will enrich them. Therefore, Allah used the Arabic future particle (*sawfa*) which refers to the distant future. Definitely, instruments and means need time to develop and crystalize. Rain fell near Jeddah, whose people had embraced Islam, and crops grew in the valley of Khalit, Tabali in Yemen, Jerash and Sana'a, and caravans loaded with goods came to the people of Mecca. Moreover, the Islamic conquests occurred, and the revenues of the non-Muslim poll-tax and the land taxes started to flow in. Thus we can see that: 'Allah will enrich you…' (*at-Tawba:* 28) is a process that evolves over many stages, and it still continues to this day.

So the process took a considerable amount of time. However, we must be aware that the Lord's Words: 'And if you fear poverty…' (*at-Tawba:* 28) point out that the believer must not be lax in his religious observances for the sake of attaining some worldly gains. To any person who commits a sin out of fear that he will otherwise lose some material or worldly benefit, such as fearing to speak the truth lest he should lose his job, or anger his boss and get fired, we say, 'You have no excuse because Allah says: 'And if you fear poverty, Allah will enrich you, if He wills, out of His Bounty…' (*at-Tawba:* 28).

Since all provisions come from Allah *the Exalted and Glorious* and these words are spoken by Allah, no one has an excuse for committing a sin under the pretext of preserving his livelihood, or driving away poverty from himself, his family and his children.Yet Allah's saying: 'if He wills' might induce one to think that time may stand in between him and his livelihood because it is dependent on Allah's Will. But how can this be the case, when He *Glorified is He* intended this noble verse to be a source of reassurance for the Muslims? In the light of Allah's Words: 'And if you fear poverty, Allah will enrich you, if He wills, out of His Bounty' (*at-Tawba:* 28), we answer this by saying that the Lord wants His slave to be always connected with Him, and not to ruin His slave's constant feeling of hope and confidence in Him. The expression: 'if He wills' is a means of preserving this hope in Allah because the slave will continue to hope in Him *Glorified is He* and therefore will remain mindful of Him. He will always seek Allah's Pleasure, and this will make him keep away from sin and remain constantly obedient.

Above all this, the Lord *Blessed and Glorified is He* has absolute power over His creation. Allah's Decree and Predestination cannot be an argument against the total freedom of Allah's Will. Allah's Will is absolute and is not restrained even by His Predestination. If He wills, the predestination occurs; and if He does not will, it does not occur. This is how Allah maintains absolute power over His creation.

Sometimes Allah may reveal a glimpse of the Unseen to one of his devoted slaves, but if His slave divulges any of this to another person, Allah *Glorified is He* causes events to happen in a way contrary to what he had previously divulged, for Allah to remain the Sole Knower of the Unseen. Since the one whom Allah has chosen to inform him of the Unseen decided to tell other people about it, Allah *Glorified is He* changes the events of the Unseen and never gives that person knowledge of any other unseen matter.

Consequently, Allah's saying: 'if He wills' affirms Allah's Omnipotent Power over His creation. If He wills, He will give to you; and if He wills, He will not give to you. There is wisdom in giving, and wisdom in withholding.

Some people may misuse blessings, and consequently the Lord withholds them. This is what happens in many lands which transgress and show ingratitude to the blessings that Allah has bestowed on them. Were Allah to simply leave the giving of His Blessings without any regulations, corruption and sin will spread throughout these lands. Hence, Allah's Will entails giving or withholding, and giving and withholding are both administered for a particular wisdom. This is because the Lord treats His creatures based on their changeable and mutable natures, as some people, on becoming possessed of worldly goods, commit transgressions. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(The nature of) man is that, when his Lord tries him [by] giving him honour and blessings, he says, "My Lord has honoured me", but when He tries him through the restriction of his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me"' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16). That is, when Allah confers worldly gifts on a human, the man considers this to be generosity from Allah *Glorified is He*; but if Allah withholds such gifts from him, man sees this as a disgrace and a mark of disfavour from Allah. Allah corrects this wrong way of thinking by answering: 'No indeed', that is, wealth is not a mark of favour from Allah, nor is its absence a sign of disfavour. 'No indeed! You (people) do not honour orphans, you do not urge one another to feed the poor, you consume inheritance greedily, and you love wealth with inordinate love' (*al-Fajr:* 17-20).

So if wealth comes to you and you abuse it, it becomes a curse upon you and not a blessing. Conversely, if the lack of wealth prevents you from transgression, it counts as a blessing for you, not a curse. Allah *Blessed and Glorified is He* says: 'Nay! Verily, man does transgress all bounds. Because he considers himself self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

You might be deprived of wealth which, if it came to you, could delude you into thinking yourself as being self-sufficient, not needing Allah's Help, and thus you will fall into transgression. Such withholding acts as a blessing, not a curse. Consequently, Allah's Statement: 'Allah will enrich you, if He wills, out of His Bounty…' (*at-Tawba:* 28) preserves Allah's absolute sovereignty over creation. Accordingly, sufficiency is not only a question of material wealth, but also of moral values. Wealth must never come at the cost of heavenly values, nor pull one away from Allah's Way.

Allah's Saying: 'if He wills' means that if Allah wills, He gives; and if He wills, He deprives. No one can withhold what Allah gives, and no one can give what He withholds. It is Allah's Absolute Will, as His Wisdom dictates. As such, do not say when He withholds, this does not fulfil His Words: 'Allah will enrich you, if He wills, out of His Bounty …' (*at-Tawba:* 28) because just as enrichment can be material, it can also be moral. This is reinforced by the following Words of Allah: 'Surely, Allah is All Knowing, All-Wise' (*at-Tawba:* 28) that is, He knows what is best for you, and He wisely gives when it is best to give and withholds when it is better to withhold.

Allah then says:

قَٰتِلُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَلَا بِٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ
ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ ٱلْحَقِّ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
حَتَّىٰ يُعْطُوا۟ ٱلْجِزْيَةَ عَن يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَٰغِرُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

**Fight those of the People of the Book who do not [truly]
believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what
God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the
rule of justice, until they pay the tax and agree to submit [29]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 29)**

Here Allah returns to the theme of fighting. We know that the Lord *Glorified is He* is speaking in this chapter about the polytheists and their circumstances, the annulment of covenants with them, their banishment from the Sacred Mosque, and the fighting of those of them who continued to spread *Shirk* (joining false gods with Allah) for there not to be two religions in the Arabian peninsula;(1) and we knew earlier the reason for this.

Yet, in this glorious verse, Allah speaks about a different category of people. The Lord *Glorified is He* sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the idolatrous Arabs, as a Messenger from among their own people whom they knew well. Likewise, the miracle that Prophet Muhammad brought in support of his prophethood was akin to their skills in eloquence; consequently, anyone who accused him of falsehood will have been gravely mistaken to do so. Despite all this, they denied him and refused to believe in him. It was a different case for those who lived outside the Arabian Peninsula, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not one of their own and the Quran was not sent down in their own tongue. It was the soundness of the Message that obliged them to follow it. However, we see that the opposition to faith in Islam did not come only from the polytheists of Mecca, but also from some of the Jews of Medina and some Christians from Najran. Having specified in this chapter the position of the religion towards the polytheists, Allah *the Most High* also wanted to specify the position of the religion towards the people of the Book.

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of `Aisha that one of the last sayings of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was, 'Let there be no two religions in the Arabian peninsula'. It was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 6, p. 275). Also, Al-Haithamy mentioned it in Al-Majma` (vol. 5, p. 325) saying, 'It was narrated by Ahmad and At-Tabarani in Al-Awsat, and the narrators of the Hadith are the same as those mentioned by Imam Al-Bukhari and Muslim.'*

We know that there is a difference between the people who join false gods with Allah and the people of the Book. Those who ascribed partners to Allah, i.e. the polytheists, did not believe in the Oneness of Allah, but rather worshipped others alongside Him. On the other hand, the people of the Book believed in Allah, His Messengers, and the Divine Scriptures, and therefore they were closer to true faith. We notice that the Noble Quran presents this kind of distinction to us as a matter of natural disposition; for example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions were saddened by the defeat of the Byzantines in the nearest land (to the Arabian Peninsula).(1) Why was the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saddened by the news of the defeat of the Byzantines although he knew that they will stand against him one day? He was saddened because the Byzantines believed that the universe had One Creator Who sends Messengers to people to convey His guidance and Who has sent down to them scriptures, but this was not the case with the polytheists, since they disbelieved in Allah Himself which is the worst form of disbelief. It is true that some of the people of the Book joined the polytheists in their enmity towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but the Prophet's heart was with them because they were a people who believed in the central article of Faith. In consolation to His Messenger Muhammad, Allah says: *'Alif, Lam, Mim.* The Byzantines have been defeated in the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome' (*ar-Rum:* 1-3). Here a question arises: when will they be victorious? The Lord *Blessed and Glorified is He* gives the answer: '…within a few years...' The Arabic word '*bid'*' (few) means a number between three and ten. Allah *Glorified is He* did not give any further specification here because battles have antecedents and aftermaths, and as such the Lord specified enough time for all these stages to be included and announced that the Byzantines will be victorious over the Persians within a few years. And by the Name of Allah, tell me, how could an unlettered Prophet, living in a peninsula inhabited by unlettered people, who had no information about other nations, have passed judgment about which of these two empires will defeat the other? And how could this pronouncement still remain in the Book that conveyed his prophetic Message and which will continue to be recited and used in worship until the end of time? With all confidence, he announced the outcome of an event which the Quran predicted will occur in the near future because it came to him from his Lord. He was sure that the One Who spoke these words was well able to make them happen.

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(1) *Byzantine-Sassanid War of 602-628* and the *Siege of Constantinople (626).*

To explain, what will have happened if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said this and then a few years passed without the Byzantines achieving victory? And what will have been the attitude of all those who believed in Muhammad as a Messenger of Allah? He could never have said this unless he was confident that the Speaker of these words was the Lord Himself, Who willed to reveal this information in the form of a Quranic verse that will continue to be recited, written, memorised and used in prayers for all times until the coming of the Last Hour. Allah *Glorified is He* sent it down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at a time when he was weak and inexperienced in matters of military power, and could not have known whether the Byzantines will prepare themselves sufficiently to gain victory or not.

Furthermore, was it not possible that the Byzantine and Persian empires might make peace? But Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not need to consider any of this because the information had come from Allah Himself, the All-Powerful and All-Able Lord.

Did Allah not give us information of other things that pierced the veil of time? Indeed, there were other events that broke the law of time of which Allah *Glorified is He* informed us. Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*, on being given the glad tidings that he will be blessed with offspring, responded by saying: ‘My Lord! How can I have a son when my wife is barren and I have reached an extreme old age?’ He (the Angel) said, ‘So (it will be). Your Lord says, “It is easy for Me. Certainly, I have created you before when you were nothing!”’ (*Maryam:* 8-9)

That is, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* said it, it is certain to come to pass. The believers felt closer to the Byzantines because they were people of the Book, and because they had a connection with Heaven; and those who have a connection with Heaven are filled with a longing for news from Heaven, and they listen eagerly to what the believers have to say about the most essential of doctrines. And amazingly, this verse simultaneously proved true concerning what it said about the Byzantines and the Persians, and also what it said about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions were victorious at Badr, and for this reason Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice, in Allah’s Help... ’ (*ar-Rum:* 4-5).

In the verse we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[And] fight against those who–despite having been given revelation [a foretime]–do not [truly] believe either in Allah or the Last Day, and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] have made unlawful, and who do not follow the religion of Truth [which Allah has enjoined upon them] from those who were given the Scripture–[fight] till they [agree to] pay the Jizyah (exemption tax) with a willing hand and feel they are humbled’ (*at-Tawba:* 29).

We may notice here that Allah *Glorified is He* describes them as non-believers, even though they were people who had faith; the meaning is that they did not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* with the faith that acknowledges all of Allah's Attributes of Majesty and Perfection because some of them said that Allah *Glorified is He* has a son named ‘Uzayr, and others said that the Messiah was the son of Allah; as such, they did not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* the right way that entails faith and its resulting glorification and exaltation of His

Glorious Essence above all that which cannot be ascribed to Him. Likewise, their belief in the Last Day was contrary to what true faith affirms about it: it was a faith which did not accord with what Allah likes. For example, they say that the delights of the Hereafter is not physical but only spiritual, while we say that when Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the delights of the Hereafter we must know what the delights are in order to understand the meaning; and what, we ask, is the meaning of 'spiritual delights'? Do spiritual delights simply mean things which occur to the soul and have nothing to do with reality? Is this what the delights of the Hereafter will be?

Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified, in such a way as to leave no room for doubt, that He *Glorified is He* has made a Paradise for the believers and a Hell for the disbelievers; and He *Glorified is He* has told us of the reward and punishment of this life in such a way as to convince us that it will contain delights with which we are acquainted. If the delights will be spiritual, and we are not acquainted with spiritual delights and know nothing about it, then how can Allah *Glorified is He* attract us with something we do not know anything about? Clearly, the faith these people have about the Last Day is not as Allah *Glorified is He* intended it to be.

When Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about paradise, He only tells us about those things with whose nature we are acquainted, not of those things with which we are not acquainted. It is indubitably true that Allah *Glorified is He* has depicted for us certain images of the delight of paradise and compared them to certain things, such as when He *Glorified is He* says: 'The parable of the Paradise promised to those who are conscious of Allah [is that of a garden] through which running waters flow: [but unlike an earthly garden] its fruits will be everlasting, and [so will be] its shade. Such will be the end of those who are conscious of Allah–just as the end of those who deny the Truth will be the Fire' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35).

So Allah *Glorified is He* only gives parables. It is obvious that every word in a language must have a recognised meaning, and when Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the delights of Paradise He *Glorified is He* speaks to us with words whose meanings we know. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be* *upon him* said about Paradise, ‘It contains what no eye has seen, nor any ear has heard, nor any human heart has imagined’.(1)

That is, there are no words in any language that can express the delights of Paradise because the meaning is not known to us; but Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make us love these delights, and for this reason He *Glorified is He* gives us an image of them which we can understand. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘The parable of Paradise…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 35) intending thereby to make us know that it contains delights which are free of all the negative aspects which the parable might contain. For example, in this worldly life wine has two characteristics: the first is that it intoxicates the mind, and the second is that it is not drunk for pleasure. The one who drinks wine does not drink it in the same way as he drinks a cup of mango juice or lemon juice, which he imbibes and drinks slowly; rather, he throws the cup down his throat in a single gulp because it does not have a nice taste, so he shortens the time the wine spends on his taste buds which means that its taste is not appealing. Also, the wine takes away the drinker’s consciousness, leaving him having no control of his actions, and he apologises the next morning for what he did when he was drinking the night before saying with shame, ‘I could not tell my head from my feet!’ This is the wine of this world. Conversely, the wine of Paradise does not intoxicate and it has a sweet taste, and this is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes it as: ‘…delightful to those who drink it…’ (*Muhammad:* 15). That is, it is completely different from the wine which Allah *Glorified is He* prohibited in this worldly life. The wisdom in using the verb ‘to taste’ here is illustrated by the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘There are three qualities which, if one possesses them, s/he tastes the flavour of Faith: to love Allah and His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad, more than anything else, to love one’s fellow for the sake of none but Allah, and to hate to return to disbelief after Allah saved her/him from it as a person hates to be cast into fire’.(2)

In His Mercy to His creatures, Allah *Glorified is He* did not make food just mere fuel, but He *Glorified is He* attracted people to the fuel which preserves their life by giving it a taste which is pleasing to man and making the pleasure of it last as long as it is being eaten, so that a man does not have to wait until after digestion to feel the benefit of food. The Hadith indicates that it is as though Faith persists only for those who love and hate for Allah's sake alone; and this gives them the energy to preserve their Faith, just as food gives man the energy to preserve his life. To continue, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to depict paradise for us by giving us parables of what it contains, not by specifying and stipulating exactly what paradise contains. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And [as for all such believers], no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them [in the life to come] as a reward for all that they did' (*as-Sajda:* 17).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Hakim*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Since no human being can imagine this, we do not possess words to describe that which we cannot imagine, and if Allah *Glorified is He* were to tell us what Paradise literally contains, we will not understand; for this reason He *Glorified is He* spoke to us by using parables, saying: 'But to those who have attained to Faith and do good works, give the glad tiding that theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow. Whenever they are granted fruits therefrom as their appointed sustenance, they will say, "It is this that was granted to us as our sustenance before!"–For they shall be given something that will recall that [past]. And there they shall have pure spouses, and there they shall abide' (*al-Baqara:* 25).

As such, it will be provision that resembles the provision that they had in this worldly life, but it will not be exactly the same. If it is claimed that the delights of paradise are spiritual, mental images, or 'pleasant dreams' such as when a hungry person imagines that he has eaten a large amount of meat or fish for his spirit to be pleased with this even though he did not eat such food in reality. But all of these ideas are not true: the only reason they make this claim is that if the delights of Paradise are only mental images, the torment of Hell will also be only mental images, and this will make the torment easier–for they fear the corporeal torment of Hell, and this is why they want to make it only a spiritual torment.

But the sensations of delight and torment must have something to resemble them in this world, otherwise there will be nothing to make us desire the delights of Paradise and fear the torment of Hell; clearly, the delights of paradise must be real, and the torment of Hell must be real. Allah's Will was to cleanse the delights of Paradise from all impurities, and therefore He *Glorified is He* said about the rivers of Paradise: '…and rivers of honey pure and clean…' (*Muhammad:* 15). This means it contains none of the impurities which the honey of this world contains. And likewise He *Glorified is He* said about the milk of paradise: '…and rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters…' (*Muhammad:* 15).

The words 'the taste whereof never alters' had a special meaning to the Arabs at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because an Arab used to milk his camels and then put their milk in pots, and the taste of the milk changed and became sour, but he drank it if he needed to. Consequently, when he heard the words '…the taste whereof never alters…' (*Muhammad:* 15), this gave him a parable from an experience in his own life, and an image of milk cleansed from all the impurities which spoil it in this worldly life.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'fight against those who… do not [truly] believe either in Allah…' (*at-Tawba:* 29), i.e. with the proper faith which is owed to Allah's Magnificence and His Transcendence, The Jews believe in Allah *Glorified is He* in totality, but they anthropomorphise Him by saying that He *Glorified is He* sat on a rock and stretched out His Feet putting them into an emerald bowl, but then He *Glorified is He* disdained to stretch out His Hand to the Children of Israel; but this image does not befit Allah's Perfection or His Sacred Essence, and it is a faulty image. Likewise, their depiction of the delights of Paradise and the torment of Hell were also mistaken, and as a result they did not have true faith in the Last Day, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'or the Last Day'. Moreover, they did not only stand against Islam as a way of life, but rather, they also took the same stance against their own religions, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] have made unlawful' (*at-Tawba:* 29).

And as people of the Book, they corrupted and altered their religion by permitting that which Allah *Glorified is He* had forbidden, and for this reason He *Glorified is He* says: '…and (they) do not follow the religion of Truth…' (*at-Tawba:* 29).

The Truth, as we know, is that which is constant and unchanging. If we consider every Divine Messenger at his time, we will find that he brought the Truth; and when the next Messenger came after him, he did not abrogate any doctrines, only rulings. As such, we know that every Messenger brought unchanging doctrines and the rulings which were appropriate for his time, until Allah *Glorified is He* sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was the Final Prophet, with no prophet coming after him until the end of time; clearly, the Truth which he brought had to be, by necessity, the constant unchanging Truth because he was the Seal of the Messengers and Prophets, and there are no Messengers after him. Hence, Allah's words: '…and (they) do not follow the religion of Truth [despite having been given revelation]' (*at-Tawba:* 29) means that they do not even believe in what their own scriptures tell them of the glad tidings of Prophet Muhammad's coming; and they were the only ones who had this specific characteristic, for their problem was that they did not believe that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly sent by Allah *Glorified is He* to them. By his example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* established Allah's Decree in how they should be treated which is that they should be treated differently to the idolaters: the idolaters were treated by having their covenants disavowed and being banned from the Sacred Mosque, and being fought wherever they were found unless they entered Islam. As for the people of the Book, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dealt with them by giving them the choice to either enter Islam or pay the non-Muslim poll-tax and preserve their lives; therefore Allah *Glorified is He* said: '[Fight them] till they [agree to] pay the *Jizyah* (exemption tax) with a willing hand and feel they are humbled' (*at-Tawba*: 29).

This means, fight them until they pay what they are obliged to pay in return for safety and shelter; and this was a means for their protection. As a result we find that Muslims conquered non-Islamic lands and were able to rule over them, but they did not kill their citizens; rather, they allowed them to live. Hence, sparing their lives was one of the favours which Islam did them. The second favour was that they were not forced to convert to the religion, but rather, Islam protected their right to choose whatever religion they wanted. This is a rebuttal to those who claim that Islam was 'spread by the sword'; to this claim we say, 'The citizens of the lands which Islam conquered chose their own religion, and their freedom to choose was protected; indeed, the Muslims turned their swords towards those who prevented the people from having the right to choose, and they gave the people the freedom to choose what religion they want'. But we find that the books of the West are full of exaggerations about the issue of the sword; and we always respond to this by saying that had Islam truly been spread by the sword, there will not still be people in the lands it conquered who keep their old religions. Rather, Islam took the exemption tax from those people of the Book who held to their old religions, and the fact that the exemption tax was taken proves that they remained in their old religions and remained alive. These were two of the favours which Islam did them; and they had to give some recompense for this, this recompense being the exemption tax (*Jizya*). The word *'Jizya'* is derived from the root *'jaza'*, which means 'reward' or 'recompense'; it is as though the exemption tax was truly recompense. Islam did them a good deed by allowing them to keep their lives and their old religions without any compulsion to enter Islam, and in return, they were obliged to give some recompense for this favour which Allah *Glorified is He* gave them through Islam.

Moreover, they will henceforth live in a faithful society in which Islam is the guardian, and the Muslims will undertake to defend them and guarantee their safety and the safety of their families, wealth, and all that they had. As the Muslim was obliged to pay *zakat* (the poor-due) for the sake of the poor and the Muslims in general, the people of the Book who lived in the Islamic society also benefitted from the services which Islam rendered them, and they were naturally obliged to pay something in return for these favours. Furthermore, Islam did not, for example, oblige the people of the Book to join the army to fight in any war against the enemies of the Muslims, unless they volunteered to do so. Clearly, the exemption tax was not an oppressive obligation, but rather, it was payment rendered for the services Islam did for them by sparing their lives and their religious freedom. Allah *Glorified is He* specified that they should give the exemption tax 'with a willing hand'. The hand is the body part with which we act, and most actions are performed by the hand; we find that the Noble Quran says: '…though it was not their hands that made it. Will they not, then, be grateful?' (*Ya Sin:* 35)

The tongue is also the tool of speech, and Allah requites speech for its fairness or foulness, but the essential tool of action is the hand. Moreover, the word ‘hand’ can be used to mean the power which acts; in Arabic it can also be used to mean ‘favour’; you can say that ‘So-and-so has a hand above so-and-so’, i.e. he has done him a favour, or ‘So-and-so has white hands’, i.e. he is helpful.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…till they [agree to] pay Jizyah (the exemption tax) with a willing hand…’ (*at-Tawba:* 29). Do the words ‘with a willing hand’ (‘*‘an yad’*, which literally means ‘out of hand’) refer to those who give the exemption tax, or the others who collect it?

The words ‘out of hand’ are like the expression ‘So-and-so has washed his hands of this affair’, meaning that he has abandoned it and no longer wishes to participate in it; in this case the words ‘out of hand’ mean ‘without refusing our favour’, i.e. out of the willing hands of those who give the exemption tax. Or ‘out of hand’ might mean that it must come from the hand of the payer, meaning that one of the people of the Book living in the Islamic community under Islamic rule may not send a messenger to pay his exemption tax, while he stays where he is, but rather, he must pay it in person from his own hand. Or we say that ‘out of hand’ means ability which means we only take the exemption tax from those who are able to pay it, not from those who cannot afford it.

As such, the hand which they offer must be characterised by three things: firstly, they must be loyal to us and our rule and not seek to rid their hand of us; secondly, each of them must bring it themselves without sending a messenger to give it for them, and he must bring it on foot and give it standing while the one who collects it is sitting, which is what: ‘…and feel they are humbled’ (*at-Tawba:* 29) means. And why must they give it in a humbled state? Because Allah *Glorified is He* wants Islam to have the upper hand, and Islam did them more than one favour, neither killing them nor forcing them to convert to Islam; this is why they had to deal with the Muslims without any arrogance or haughtiness, yield to Islam’s rules, be loyal to the Muslims and not wash their hands of them, and give the exemption tax in person. As for those who could not afford it, they were excused from paying the tax.

‘…Till they [agree to] pay the Jizya (exemption tax) with a willing hand and feel they are humbled’ (*at-Tawba:* 29). The word ‘humbled’ (*sighar*) is derived from the root *(s-gh-r)*, which has two meanings: it can mean ‘young’, in which case the verb is *‘saghura’*, or it can mean ‘small’ in which case the verb is *‘saghira’* meaning someone or something which has a low rank or diminutive size. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘dreadful (‘*kabura’*, literally ‘large’) is this saying that comes out of their mouths…’ (*al-Kahf:* 5).

Here, His words ‘…till they [agree to] pay the *Jizyah* (exemption tax) with a willing hand and feel they are humbled’ (*at-Tawba:* 29) mean that they must pay it in a state of humility, not a state of pride, and the one who gives it should not imagine that he has the upper hand when he gives it; we say to him, ‘No, the hand which takes has the upper hand here’.

Allah wanted to give us the reasons why those who do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* or the Last Day must be fought. For this reason He *Glorified is He* said:

وَقَالَتِ ٱلۡيَهُودُ عُزَيۡرٌ ٱبۡنُ ٱللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ ٱلنَّصَٰرَى ٱلۡمَسِيحُ ٱبۡنُ ٱللَّهِۖ
ذَٰلِكَ قَوۡلُهُم بِأَفۡوَٰهِهِمۡۖ يُضَٰهِـُٔونَ قَوۡلَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن قَبۡلُۚ
قَٰتَلَهُمُ ٱللَّهُۖ أَنَّىٰ يُؤۡفَكُونَ ٣٠

The Jews said, ‘Ezra is the son of God,’ and the Christians said, ‘The Messiah is the son of God’: they said this with their own mouths, repeating what earlier disbelievers had said. May God confound them! How far astray they have been led! [30] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 30)

This claim is an affront to Allah’s Majesty; a man has a child for various reasons: either because he wants to be remembered in this world after he leaves it–but Allah is Ever-Present; he wants his son to help him when he grows old and weak–but Allah is always Almighty; he wants someone to inherit his wealth and his possessions–but Allah is the Ultimate Inheritor of the earth and all who dwell upon it; or he thinks having children will make him more powerful–but Allah is Ever Powerful. Thus, all the reasons that lead to such a claim are nullified. It does not make sense that Allah *Glorified is He* sends the people a Messenger to show them the true way, only for the

Messenger to say that he is the son of Allah, resulting in them not having complete faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah tells us what the Jews and the Christians say: 'And the Jews say, "Ezra is the son of Allah", while the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah…"' (*at-Tawba:* 30). Thus we see that they have not properly affirmed Allah's Transcendence, and therefore they have fallen short of true faith. We must be aware that not all the Jews say that Ezra is the son of Allah, but rather, only some of them declared that Ezra was the son of Allah when they saw the favours which Allah *Glorified is He* gave him; they said, 'Allah *Glorified is He* does not give such tremendous blessings to an ordinary man, but only to His son'. This is because after the time of Prophet Musa (Moses)(1), the Jews murdered prophets, and hence Allah *Glorified is He* punished them by causing those who had memorised the Torah to forget it; but there was one child who was not pleased that the Prophets were murdered and so he went out into the desert, fleeing from his people. A man met him and said, 'Why are you wandering aimlessly?' He replied, 'I have left my town in search of knowledge'. The man who asked him was the angel Gabriel and he taught him that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down a Torah. The child memorised it, thereby becoming one of four people who had memorised the Torah: Moses, Jesus, Ezra, and Elias–and because in the past books were not written on thin paper as they are today, but rather on stones and date-palm leaves, the whole Torah weighed the same as seventy camel-loads. When Ezra returned having memorised the Torah, his people were amazed and said, 'He must be the son of Allah because Allah gave him the Torah and chose him above all other people'.(2) A certain faction amongst the Jews came to believe this, including

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(1) *The story of our master Ezra with the Jews and how he memorized the Torah*

(2) *This story is mentioned in the exegesis of al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir. Ezra was one of the Prophets of the Israelites, the one to whom Allah gave a parable of the raising of the dead to life, as Allah says: 'Or [are you, O man, of the same mind] as he who passed by a town deserted by its people, with its roofs caved in, [and] said, "How could Allah bring all this back to life after its death?" Thereupon Allah caused him to die for a hundred years; then He brought him back to life…' (al-Baqara: 259). Ibn Kathir relates that Ibn 'Abbas asked Abdullah ibn Salam why the Jews said 'Ezra is the son of Allah', and he told him the story of how the children of Israel were amazed that Ezra memorised the Torah even though Moses had given it to them in a book. For this reason, some of them said he was the son of Allah.*

Sallam ibn Mashkam, Shas ibn Qays, Maik bin Sayf and Nu‘man ibn 'Awfa. When Allah *Glorified is He* sent down His words ‘And the Jews say, “Ezra is the son of Allah”’, the Jews who lived in the place and time of this revelation did not deny it or repudiate it; this suggests that some of the Jews who lived in Medina believed in this, for otherwise they would have objected to it. This shows that the verse applied to some of them, or that they knew that some of them had made this claim. Likewise, the Christians said the same about Jesus. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘…while the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of Allah…”’ (*at-Tawba:* 30). Allah continues: ‘Such are the sayings which they utter…’ (*at-Tawba:* 30), clarifying for us that to declare that Allah *Glorified is He* has sons is an anthropomorphism, and they should have been aware of this and have declared Allah to be Transcendently Exalted above such a thing; for Allah *Glorified is He* describes His slaves as Allah’s slaves, and all creation as Allah’s creation.

Allah *Glorified is He the All-Powerful Creator* Who can do all things created all creation out of nothing, and took for Himself neither spouse nor son. The problematic point for some of the followers of the Messiah was that the Messiah came into the world without a father. We say to them, ‘If this is the reason why you hold this belief, there was all the more reason for you to have the same opinion about the creation of Adam, since the most that can be said about the Messiah is that he had no father, while Adam had neither father nor mother; which one of them is more fittingly described as the “son of Allah”?’

In fact, the Noble Quran says: ‘Verily, in the sight of Allah, the nature of Jesus is like the nature of Adam…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 59). Allah *Glorified is He* creates things–all things–with means, and all the means are also His creation. Each one of us was born from the mating of father and mother. When there are two elements present, this gives us four logical possibilities: either the person is created by the presence of both male and female, or he is created in the absence of both, like Adam, or the person is created with the presence of the male alone, like Eve, whom Allah *Glorified is He* created from Adam, as He says: ‘…and out of it created its mate’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1), or the person is created with the presence of the female element alone, as was the case with Jesus, who had no father. This is in order for Allah *Glorified is He* to teach us all that means have nothing to do with creation, and that the Creator of all means is well able to bring a person into existence without father or mother as He *Glorified is He* created Adam, or with both father and mother as He *Glorified is He* created most people, or with a mother and no father as He *Glorified is He* created Jesus, or without a mother as He *Glorified is He* created Eve.

This allocation exists by the Power and Will of Allah, and nothing else besides Allah's Will has anything to do with it; the means do nothing on their own, but rather, the Will of the Creator is what acts. He says: ‘To Allah alone belongs the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills], and causes to be barren whomever He wills: for, verily, He is all-knowing, infinite in His power’ (*ash-Shura:* 49-50).

Both the male and female elements might be present, but Allah might still not give them children; this is the Omnipotent Power of Allah *Glorified is He*. Beware of saying that it is dependent on material means; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* gifts female offspring to whom He wills, and gifts male offspring to whom He wills, and gifts both male and female offspring to whom He wills, and He makes whomever he wills barren. People’s attitudes towards new-borns differ: the Arabs loved to receive male offspring because they were stronger, brought more pride, and could mount horses and wage war against the enemies; they did not like to have girls born to them because they might disgrace them. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘for whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger; avoiding all people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received…]’ (*an-Nahl:* 58-59).

Islam then came to make it clear that as long as you have nothing to do with determining what children if any you will be given, leave the matter in the hands of Him who bestows the gift of children. Allah *Glorified is He* called children ‘gifts’ to remind you that procreation is something He *Glorified is He* gives to you free of charge; male children are gifts, and females are gifts, too; do not prefer one gift to the other. I always say to the one who has girls and then takes his wife to doctors to attempt to remedy this, ‘If you accepted

Allah’s gifts of girls just as you want to accept His gift of boys, Allah will give you a reward beyond your expectation, making each of your daughters seem fair to the eyes of pious men so that they marry them; and if you have ten daughters, they will bring ten husbands who will treat their wives’ mother and father as their own’. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* provides for those who are content with the children He *Glorified is He* gives them, and the husbands of these daughters will be even more dutiful than any sons may have been. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies to the one who is happy to be given daughters, ‘You were pleased with my gift to you, and you did not follow the ancient Arabs in their hatred of daughters, and therefore I will give you, by means of your son-in-laws, sons whom you did not toil to raise, and who will be more loving and loyal to you than any sons you might have had’. Consequently, if you find a man who has been granted success in marrying his daughters off to men of good standing who treat their in-laws well, know that the father was pleased to have female offspring because they were gifts from Allah, He says: ‘…and [He] causes to be barren whomever He wills’ (*ash-Shura:* 50).

Similarly, to be barren is also a gift because if a person gladly accepts Allah’s decision to make him childless, he will feel that all men are his sons; this is because he gladly accepted this privation, just as the other man gladly accepted to be given only daughters. Hence, as long as it is a gift from Allah *Glorified is He* you must receive both what Allah bestows and what He withholds with satisfaction.

Jesus was born by means of the Absolute Power of the Creator because all the possible arrangements, both logically and doctrinally, could not have been realized without such a birth; and this will not be repeated. This is because Adam was created first, and those who came after Adam all had two parents; and likewise, Eve came before them. These three forms had already come into existence (before the birth of Jesus), but there was still one other form that was yet unfulfilled which was for a person to come into existence with a mother but no father; and Allah *Glorified is He* completed this with Jesus: ‘…while the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of Allah”. Such are the sayings which they utter with their mouths…’ (*at-Tawba:* 30).

Allah's word ‘such’ refers to their claim that the Messiah or Ezra were sons of Allah; and Allah adds by way of clarification: ‘…are the sayings which they utter with their mouths’ (*at-Tawba:* 30). We ask, ‘Is there any type of speech which is uttered by something other than the mouth?’ All speech is uttered by the mouth; even the believers’ assertions that Allah is One and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah is a saying uttered by the mouth. We say, ‘There is such a thing as a statement made by the mouth alone without having any meaning, and there are also statements made by the mouth which do mean something, but which are untrue and false’.

First of all, we should know what speech is. It is the vocal means by which all people convey their intentions, such as when you say to a child, ‘Sit down’. The child must know what it means to sit; if you say this in Arabic to an English child, he will not understand what it means.

Clearly, language is a system of words by which all people convey their intentions; and the intention must be something whose meaning is accepted by both the speaker and the listener, and they must both know what the words are supposed to mean. If the listener does not know the meaning of the words used by the speaker, he will not understand anything.

Furthermore, we see that in order for the speaker and listener to understand each other, it is necessary that they both be familiar with the words used; if a person speaks using words the listener does not know, the listener will not understand him/her. They used to tell us the story(1) of the grammarian ‛Ulqama who was famous for his knowledge of grammar and lexicology and adept at using words, but he only spoke using unusual words and phrases which the people did not know. ‛Ulqama had a servant, and one day ‘Ulqama fell ill and went to a doctor named A‘jaz to complain of his ailment. ‘Ulqama described the ailment to the doctor using very archaic words which the doctor could not understand because he was not a specialist in linguistics and did not have a dictionary with him. He was confused by ‘Ulqama’s words, and said, ‘Repeat what you said, for I did not understand any of it!’ ‘Ulqama repeated what he said with anger and reproach at the doctor for not understanding the language he used. The doctor finally understood ‘Ulqama’s complicated words, and said to him, ‘Give me a pen and paper for me to write your treatment down for you’. He wrote a prescription using very complicated and bewildering medical jargon, and ‘Ulqama said, ‘Repeat what you said, for, by Allah *Glorified is He* I did not understand a thing!’ The doctor replied, ‘May Allah *Glorified is He* curse those who make themselves the least understandable to their fellows!’ ‘Ulqama realised that the language he used was too complicated, and that the words he used were not in common usage by the people. Our teacher told us that it was his servant who finally rebuked him for this: ‘Ulqama(1) awoke one night and said some archaic words to his servant which mean, ‘Have the cockerels crowed yet?’ which the servant did not understand, so he replied by saying, ‘*Zaqfalila* (a nonsense word)’. ‘Ulqama said to the servant, ‘What is this *‘zaqfalil’*?’ The servant said, ‘And what did you mean just now?’ ‘Ulqama said, ‘Boy, I meant to ask you if the cockerels have crowed yet’. The servant said, ‘and I meant to say: not yet!’

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(1) *The story of the grammarian ‘Ulqama and A‘yon the physician*

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Such are the sayings which they utter with their mouths’ (*at-Tawba:* 30). As such, speech means the words that the mouth pronounces, and this utterance might have a meaning, or it might not. Take, for example, the word *‘zaqfalil’* which ‘Ulqama’s servant uttered: this word does not exist in any language; it is an utterance of the tongue which has no meaning. Furthermore, speech might well have a meaning, but it is only speech of the tongue which is not backed up by reality: this is a lie.

Allah's words ‘…Such are the sayings which they utter with their mouths’ (*at-Tawba:* 30) include both of these notions. It may be that they are saying something they do not mean, and they do not know what they are saying; for example, the word *‘kataba’* (to write) is made up of the root letter *(k-t-b)*, and we can use the same letters in a different order and say *‘kabata’* (to stifle) which is composed of the same letters and also has a meaning; or we could say *‘tabaka’* which is not a real word: it is speech with the mouth, but it has no lexical meaning; rather, is a nonsense word. If a person says something which has a meaning we can understand such as ‘Zayd was in such-and-such place yesterday'; here 'Zayd' is known to us, and 'place' is known to us, and 'yesterday' is known; but if Zayd did not really go to that place, this statement is actually a lie which never occurred. It is speech made with the mouth, but it has no corresponding reality in life.

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(1) *The story of the grammarian ‘Ulqama and his servant when he asked him ‘Have the cocks crowed?’*

To sum up, a statement made by the mouth may either have no meaning at all, being used as a nonsense word which does not exist in any language, or otherwise it may have a meaning in itself, but with no reality to back it up.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). And He *Glorified is He* says: '…and [just as] He has never made your wives whom you may have declared to be "as unlawful to you as your mothers' bodies" [truly] your mothers, so, too, has He never made your adopted sons [truly] your sons: these are but [figures of] speech uttered by your mouths…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). This, then, is speech which has no corresponding reality: the wife does not become her husband's mother, and the adopted boy does not really become a son to the man or the woman; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5).

And Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All praise is due to Allah who has bestowed this Divine Book from on high upon His slave, and has not allowed any deviousness to obscure its meaning: [A Divine Book] unerringly straight, meant to warn [the godless] of a severe punishment from Him, and to give to the believers who do good works the glad tiding that theirs shall be a goodly reward, [a state of bliss] in which they shall dwell forever. Furthermore, [this Divine Book is meant] to warn all those who assert, "Allah has begotten a son"' (*al-Kahf:* 1-4). That is, this speech of theirs has a meaning according to their belief, but it has no corresponding reality, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Dreadful is this saying that comes out of their mouths…' (*al-Kahf:* 5) which means that this speech is not supported by reality, and is therefore false.

'Such are the sayings which they utter with their mouths…' (*al-Kahf:* 5). Does this statement of theirs with their mouths mean that they have invented or innovated something new? Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us that they are merely '…following in spirit assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the Truth…' (*at-Tawba:* 30) This means they did not come up with this notion on their own, but rather, they derived it from something that already existed; for Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the idolaters: '…claim that the angels–who are themselves slaves of the Most Gracious–are females' (*az-Zukhruf:* 19).

The idolaters imagined that Allah *Glorified is He* has daughters–we seek Allah's refuge from this–yet Allah *Glorified is He* is Transcendently Exalted above such a thing; and the Lord addresses them directly concerning this by saying: 'Why–for yourselves [you choose] male offspring, but for Him [you attribute] females?' (*an-Najm:* 21) The above indicates that this is an old claim, which is why Allah says that they are: '…following in spirit…' (*at-Tawba:* 30), i.e. resembling those who came before them and made similar claims, just like how the Buddhists in China and Japan spoke about Allah having sons and being incarnated, and some of them received these ideas from them. Nothing new came from their lips; rather, as the Noble Quran describes them, they were '…following in spirit…' (*at-Tawba:* 30), i.e. resembling the claims of those disbelievers who came before them. To 'follow in spirit' (*mudaha*) means to resemble and act like others; it is said that it is derived from the root word *'dahya''* which means a woman who resembles a man in that she does not menstruate or bear children.

'Following in spirit assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the Truth…' (*at-Tawba:* 30). What follows these words comes directly from Allah *Glorified is He* to them; He *Glorified is He* did not leave us to comment on it. When you hear the words 'Allah has begotten a son…' (*at-Tawba:* 30) naturally sound human disposition dictates that whoever hears such words should say, 'May Allah destroy them! How could they say this?' Here, Allah willed to take it upon Himself to say what follows for all of us; for if we said, 'May Allah destroy them' or 'May Allah curse them', none of us could be sure that our supplication against them will be answered, for it might not be answered; but when Allah *Glorified is He* says this Himself, it is assured. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'May Allah destroy them! How perverted are their minds!' (*at-Tawba:* 30) What does: 'May Allah destroy them' mean? If you see someone do something vile, you say 'May Allah destroy him' because his life causes evil to increase. For example, if someone reviles his own father, the one who hears him says, 'May Allah destroy him', while if you see a person doing good deeds, you say, 'May he live a good life' because you see that his life is a source of goodness for others.

And the words: 'May Allah destroy them' mean 'May Allah curse them and banish them'; He *Glorified is He* then says: 'How perverted are their minds!' (*at-Tawba:* 30) The word 'how' (*anna*) has two meanings in Arabic: it can mean 'from where', or it can mean 'how'. An example of the first meaning is found when Allah *Glorified is He* tells us what Zechariah said when he came to see the Virgin Mary: 'From where (*anna*) does this come to you?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) He said this because he saw she had with her good things which he had not brought for her even though he was her only guardian and the one who brought her all her life's needs. When he came to her and saw she had something he had not given her, he said: 'From where does this come to you?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) That is, 'Where did you get this from?' In reply, Mary, the chosen one, said, as the Noble Quran tells us: 'It is from Allah; for Allah grants sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning' (*Al-'Imran:* 37).

These words of Allah *Glorified is He* serve to support a great many matters of Faith; and He *Glorified is He* put these words into the mouth of Mary, the chosen one, because it was not only a matter of food which came to her from a source unknown even to her guardian, but it was also a precursor to what will come later. Do not think that everything comes to pass by the measures of means and consequences, causes and effects, and actions and results; rather, it all comes from Allah's Will. If it were an act of man, he will do it with a measured reckoning; but Allah *Glorified is He* gives beyond all reckoning, for He is the Creator of all means, and He is well able to create any consequence directly, for He '…grants sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning' (*Al-'Imran:* 37). When Allah *Glorified is He* put these words in Mary's mouth, it was meant to clarify for her and for Zechariah at the same time, 'You, Zechariah, bring her provision from your own limited resources and human measures, but Allah *Glorified is He* provides sustenance beyond all reckoning, and provides that which no human powers can provide'. The provision that Zechariah saw with Mary may have been in the form of summer foods during winter, or vice versa, and it may have been a provision which did not exist in their land, and therefore he said: ‘From where does this come to you?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) Allah's words: ‘From where does this come to you’ impart a lesson to society: if a guardian sees that his wards have something he did not give to them, he must ask where it came from. If you see in your son’s hand an expensive fountain pen which you did not buy for him, you must ask him where he got it from, in order to know what outside influences he may be exposed to: Did he steal it? Or did someone who wished to incite him for nefarious purposes give him the pen to tempt him? You must therefore ask your son where he got it from. Likewise, if you see your daughter wearing a dress that you did not buy for her, nor did her mother, as far as you know, you must ask your daughter where she got it from. If this became the rule in every one of our households, nothing disgraceful will happen to them; but sadly we see that in some households, a child might enter the house with a piece of chocolate, yet his mother does not ask him where he got it from, but rather, she pats his back and even takes a piece of the chocolate to eat herself. However, the mother who is a good parent asks her son, ‘Where did you get this?’ She asks him to determine whether he could have afforded to buy it with his pocket-money or not; and if she finds that he did not get this chocolate from a source which is both known to her and lawful, she tells him off and smacks his hand.

We should be aware that the law of ‘from where does this come to you’ should govern the whole world; it applies to all aspects of social upbringing. Islam preceded the world fourteen centuries ago when Allah *Glorified is He* revealed His words ‘From where does this come to you?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) And Mary replied with the response of faith, clarifying for Zechariah, ‘Your words are based on your own reckoning, but I am speaking with the reckoning of Allah; for Allah *Glorified is He* grants sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning’. He *Glorified is He* put these words into her mouth because this statement deals with many aspects of the Doctrine

The first of these issues is that when she said: ‘For Allah grants sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37), she reminded Zechariah of a particular aspect of the Doctrine, which is that Allah *Glorified is He* is not governed by means, and He *Glorified is He* gives beyond all reckoning.

Zechariah then looked at himself and wondered, ‘As long as Allah *Glorified is He* gives beyond all reckoning, and I have reached a great old age and my wife is barren, why should I not ask Him to give me a son?’

So Mary reminded Zechariah and drew his attention to a particular aspect of the Doctrine which is that Allah *Glorified is He* gives without means and beyond all reckoning; consequently, he beseeched Allah *Glorified is He* to give him a son. When He *Glorified is He* gave him tidings of a son, he asked, ‘How could he be given a son when his wife was barren and he had reached a great old age?’ And the answer came from Allah: ‘He [the angel] said, “This is what your Lord has said, ‘It is easy for me: I did indeed create you before, when you were nothing’”’ (*Maryam:* 9).

This is how Zechariah benefitted from Allah’s gift to him of a son; and Allah *Glorified is He* did not stop there, but rather, He took it upon Himself to name the child for Zechariah; and He *Glorified is He* had a reason for the name He chose. We know that people give their children positive names in hope of good fortune for them, such as a man naming his son ‘Sa‘d’ (happiness) in the hope that he will be happy, or ‘Faris’ (knight) in the hope that he will be chivalrous, or ‘Fadl’ (grace) in the hope that he will be generous, or he may name his daughter ‘Qamar’ (moon) in the hope that she will be beautiful. For this reason, people choose names which have noble meanings in the hope that the child will live up to them. There was a poet whose children always died at birth, and then he had a son whom he named ‘Yahya’ (he who lives), but this son died as well, so the poet said in his grief:

I named him Yahya that he might live,
But there was no way to deter Allah’s Will.

Hence, people choose noble names, or names which have optimistic meanings, expressing the hope that the child might live up to them; but the one who gives the name does not have the power to ensure that the child will be happy or chivalrous, or that he will live because all this is in the Hand of Allah *Glorified is He*. But if Allah *Glorified is He* Himself chooses the name ‘Yahya’, this is different since the One Who has given the name is the One Who can cause it to be manifested. Did John (‘Yahya’ in Arabic), the son of Zechariah, live the same life we live, ending as it does in certain death for all? Yes he did, and therefore Allah *Glorified is He* willed that he die in order that he will be resurrected when the Hour comes. Mary realized that Allah provides everything the moment Zechariah said to her, ‘From where does this come to you?’, as she answered: ‘For Allah grants sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37).

She also saw all of this in the story of Zechariah and in the birth of John, and Allah *Glorified is He* made all these things precursors for her because she was going to be tested in the matter of her reputation, and was going to conceive a child without a father; as such, she always had to remember: ‘Allah grants sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37).

Consequently, we find that in the course of this amazing story, the Noble Quran tells us that Mary said: ‘How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?’ (*at-Tawba:* 20) Allah *Glorified is He* gave her glad tidings of this, as the chapter of *Al ‘Imran* tells us: ‘O Mary! Behold, Allah sends you the glad tiding [of a son, brought into being] by a word from Him, who shall be known as the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 45).

As long as he is ascribed to Mary, this meant that he has no father; she wondered, ‘How could I have a child with no father?’ And Allah *Glorified is He* reminded her of the words: ‘Allah grants sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37), and said: ‘Thus it is, your Sustainer says’ (*Maryam:* 21), just as He had said to Zechariah before.

To conclude, the word ‘from where’ (*anna*) was the key which started the discussion on all aspects of the Doctrine for both Zechariah and John, and Mary and Jesus. This is the meaning of ‘from where’ (*anna*). And we said that *‘anna’* can also mean ‘how’. This is akin to what Abraham said to Allah: ‘O my Sustainer! Show me how You give life to the dead!’ (*al-Baqara:* 260). Prophet Abraham did not doubt that Allah could raise the dead, but he wanted to ask about how this takes place.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘May Allah destroy them! How perverted are their minds!’ (*at-Tawba:* 30) meaning, how could they stray from the Truth in such a way? This is a logical matter of which they should not have been unaware; how could they stray from the reality which is affirmed by the sound natural disposition of faith? And how could they err from the Truth when it was very plain, and stray into falsehood? He *Glorified is He* then says about the People of the Book:

ٱتَّخَذُوٓا۟ أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَـٰنَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ
وَٱلْمَسِيحَ ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَآ أُمِرُوٓا۟ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوٓا۟ إِلَـٰهًا
وَٰحِدًا ۖ لَّآ إِلَـٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ سُبْحَـٰنَهُۥ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ٣١

They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. But they were commanded to serve only one God: there is no god but Him; He is far above whatever they set up as His partners! [31] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 31)

The word ‘rabbi’ (*habr* in Arabic) is the Jewish name for a religious scholar; the word *(habr)* in its general sense means a man who chooses his words carefully and precisely in a scholarly fashion; and monks (*ruhban*) are Christians who devote themselves solely to worship. A rabbi is a Jewish teacher, and a monk is a Christian ascetic worshipper; a Christian scholar is called a ‘priest’, as Allah says: ‘…priests and monks…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 82).

When we refer to the scholar of the Christian religion, we say ‘priest’, and when we refer to the man of action, i.e. the ascetic worshipper, we say ‘monk’. The monk is the one who chooses to devote himself solely to the worship of Allah *Glorified is He* above and beyond that which Allah *Glorified is He* has obliged him to do, but with works of the same kind which Allah has made obligatory. We know that there is no monasticism is Islam,(1) but a man is free to draw near to Allah as much as he likes with works of the same kind which Allah *Glorified is He* has already asked of him. If Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to pray five times a day, the Muslim who wishes to draw closer to Allah *Glorified is He* can offer double the number of prayers; and if

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(1) *The wife of ‘Uthman ibn Mazh‘un complained to ‘A’isha that her husband had neglected her by spending all his days in fasts and all his nights in prayer, so Prophet Muhammad went to ‘Uthman and said, ‘O ‘Uthman, monasticism has not been made obligatory for us. Do you not have a good example in me? For, by Allah, I fear Allah more than any of you, and keep to His Limits more than any of you’ Narrated by Ahmad (vi. 226) and Ibn Hibban (1288).*

Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to pay *zakat* (poor-due) of two-and-a-half percent, the pious servant may give double this or many multiples of this, if he wishes. This is an increase of the same kind of works which Allah *Glorified is He* has made obligatory, and in Islam this means that one has entered the station of Spiritual Excellence (*Ihsan*);(1) if you wish, read the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '[But] truly, the Allah-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Sustainer will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good ('*muhsinin'*, from the root word '*ihsan'*) in the past' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16).

This means they reached the station of Spiritual Excellence (*Ihsan*), which is above the level of Faith (*Iman*.) Allah *Glorified is He* tells us more about the station of Spiritual Excellence when He says: 'They were [in the habit of] sleeping but little during the night, and praying for forgiveness in the hours of early dawn, and [assigning] in all that they possessed a due share for the beggar and the deprived' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19).

Allah *Glorified is He* did not make it religiously obligatory for us to sleep for only a little part of the night, but we only have to pray the Early-Night prayer and then we can sleep until the Dawn Prayer. But if one of us rises at night and prays the Night Vigil, this is more than Allah *Glorified is He* obliged him to do, but it is an action of the same type as that which Allah *Glorified is He* made obligatory. The same is the case with seeking forgiveness: if someone does this of his own volition, it is good for him. The same is true of giving charity to the poor: this means to give more than that which Allah *Glorified is He* has made obligatory through the poor-due, whose determined portion was referred to when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and in whose possessions there is an acknowledged right' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24).

Monasticism was the expression of the desire of some of them to reach the station of Spiritual Excellence, but Allah *Glorified is He* did not make it obligatory on them; for He *Glorified is He* is the One Who created man and knew from pre-eternity the capabilities of those He created; and for this reason He *Glorified is He* said: ‘But as for monastic asceticism–We did not enjoin it upon them: they invented it themselves…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27). They invented it themselves in order to seek Allah’s Goodly Acceptance and increase their worship; and this was not blameworthy on their part, but it is against human nature, and as a result they did not observe monasticism as it ought to have been observed.

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(1) *Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali said, 'Spiritual Excellence (Ihsan) means that the believer worships his Lord in this worldly life as though He is with him and watching him, and as though he sees Him with his heart and looks towards Him as he carries out acts of worship; and it is as though the reward of this is to see Allah for real in the Hereafter.... This requires reverence, fear, dread and exaltation of Allah, and also requires sincerity in worship and the expending of effort to perfect this worship and refine it'.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are currently examining: ‘They have taken their rabbis and their monks… for their lords’ (*at-Tawba:* 31). Does this mean that they literally called their rabbis and monks ‘lord’? No, but they treated them as though they were lords; for Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who declares things permissible and forbidden by saying ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’, and if these rabbis came along and permitted something which Allah *Glorified is He* had made forbidden, or banned something which Allah *Glorified is He* had made permissible, they thereby took the attribute of divinity and applied it to themselves; as the authority to legislate what is prohibited and what is permissible is reserved for only Allah. Therefore, when ‘Udayy ibn Hatim went to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the latter saw a cross of silver or gold around his neck, our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Remove that idol’. The man removed the idol out of politeness to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘You have taken the rabbis and monks as lords’. ‘Udayy said, ‘We do not worship them’, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied to him, ‘Do you not obey them in what they forbid and what they allow?’ He said, ‘Yes’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘That is worship’.(1) The Quran says: ‘They have taken their rabbis and their monks–as well as the Messiah, son of Mary–for their lords beside Allah' (*at-Tawba:* 31). Someone might ask, 'Why is the Messiah connected to the 'lords' here, and to the rabbis and monks?' The answer is that if the one who forbids and permits is not a Messenger, then he is merely a man seeking temporal power; but this could never be the case with a Messenger because Messengers only come to urge the people to worship Allah *Glorified is He* by the means Allah has established. Jesus was a Messenger and he only told the people what Allah *Glorified is He* told him to say, but some people mistakenly took him to be the son of Allah–and Allah continues: '…although they had been commanded to worship none but the One God [Allah]. There is no Deity but Him: glory to Him, [He is] far above all that they associate with Him in His Divinity!' (*at-Tawba:* 31) Thus Allah *Glorified is He* states that all He commanded was that all those who believe in the Divine Messages must worship the One God [Allah]. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The best thing that I and the other prophets have said is, "There is no Allah but Allah"'.(1)

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(1) *'Udayy ibn Hatim said, ‘I went to Prophet Muhammad wearing a gold cross round my neck, and he said, “O ‘Udayy, take off that idol”. And I heard him recite from the Quran: “They have taken their rabbis and their monks… for their lords beside Allah…” (at-Tawba: 31), and then say: “They did not worship them, but if they permitted something for them they held it to be permitted, and if they forbade something for them they held it to be forbidden”’ (Narrated by At-Tirmidhi (3095).*

If you consider the phrase 'there is no god but Allah', you will see that 'there is no' is a negation, and 'but' is an affirmation; this negates Divinity for all but Allah and affirms it for Him alone. When you say 'Allah is one', on the other hand, this implies only affirmation. The philosophers who possess the power of exposition have taken this notion of 'negation and affirmation' or 'negative and positive' and said, 'Every time a positive and negative meet, energy is produced, and energy can be used to create light or to power a machine; likewise, the energy of Faith requires both "positive and negative"'; the poet Iqbal said:

Monotheism combines both positive and negative energies,
They give soul resolution and acuteness.

Allah *Glorified is He* ends this noble verse by saying: '… [He] is utterly remote, in His limitless Glory, from anything to which they may ascribe a share in His Divinity!' (*at-Tawba:* 31) When you hear the Words 'He is utterly remote in His limitless glory' (*subhanahu*), know that it is meant to affirm Allah's transcendence; there is no being like Allah's Being, and no attributes like Allah’s Attributes. Allah is Rich, and you are rich. However, is your temporal wealth like Allah’s timeless wealth? Also, you are alive, and Allah is Alive. However, is your temporary life like His Life? His Life is Essential, but yours is nonessential. Therefore, you must differentiate between His Name (or Attribute) '*Al-Hayy*' (The Ever-Living) and His name '*Al-Mu'hyi*' (The Giver of life). He is alive without beginning or end, and He gives life to others. If an Attribute of Allah describes His Essence, it is not attributed to others; it is exclusive to Allah, and its opposite cannot be attributed to Him. He is described as 'The Ever-Living', but cannot be described by the opposite of this attribute or name. On the contrary, if an attribute of Allah describes an action of His, such as 'The Giver of life', then He can be described by the opposite of this attribute, which is 'The Taker of Life' or 'the Creator of Death'; So, Allah *the Almighty* is described as ‘The Straightener’, ‘the Expander’, ‘the Dispenser of Mercy’ and ‘the All-Dominant'.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi (3585) and Al-Bayhaqi (iv. 89)*

Thus, Allah’s Self-attributes do not have corresponding opposites, whilst His Action- Attributes do have corresponding opposites since they are transitive to beings other than Him: He *the Most High* gives life to others and takes it from them, but He is Self-Existent. Thus, the Words '… utterly remote, in His limitless Glory …' (*at-Tawba:* 31) refer to the transcendence of His Essence, Attributes and Actions. If Allah performs an action and the same kind of action is performed by man, we say that the action of Allah *the Exalted* is not the same as the action of man since Allah’s Actions do not require the intermediation of means, whilst man’s actions do require them. In other words, an action takes a certain part of time; for example, when you move something from one place to another, you take as much time to do this as your strength allows, while the actions of Allah *the Almighty* takes no time, and His strength is infinite.

Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* announced that he had been taken up by night to Jerusalem, those who heard him said, ‘Do you claim that you got there in a single night, when we strike our camel’s livers (ride camels) for a month to get there?’(1) None of them paid attention to the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, ‘I went there by my own powers.’ Rather, he said, ‘I was taken up from the Sacred Mosque (in Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (in Jerusalem).’ Therefore, the One Who took him up was Allah, the All-Powerful, and He requires no time.

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(1) *Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him narrated that after the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him had been taken up to Jerusalem by night and returned to Mecca in the morning, but he* saw that the people did not believe him, he sat alone in=

Thus, the Words '… utterly remote, in His limitless glory …' (*at-Tawba:* 31) are meant to declare Allah’s transcendence above all human attributes. Do not compare Allah’s Powers to the powers of the human beings, however great they might be; rather, an action is ascribed to the power of its doer, and the greater the strength, the greater the power will be. Allah is *the Almighty*. His Words '… The One Who is utterly remote, in His limitless glory, from anything to which they may ascribe a share in His Divinity' (*at-Tawba:* 31) are meant to declare Allah’s transcendence; and you never find any human being saying this word to another, even in the case of disbelievers who are opposed to faith – none of them ever says this to another, ‘Glorified are you!’ This is due to transcendence being something which applies solely to Allah *the Exalted.*

People give their children names, along with choosing whichever ones they like, but you never find even an obstinate disbeliever, who is opposing Allah’s religion, naming his son ‘Allah'. A believer would never dare give this name to his child because he believes in Allah, and a disbeliever will also never dare to do it because of Allah’s Power and Might. Therefore, the Words '… The One Who is utterly remote, in His limitless glory …' (*at-Tawba:* 31) and the Divine Name ‘Allah’ are two expressions which belong to Allah alone by means of His Omnipotent Power. He *Glorified is He* says: 'The Lord of the heavens and

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= sadness, and then God’s enemy Abu Jahl passed by him, and came up and sat next to him and said in a mocking tone, ‘Is there anything new?’ The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, {Yes.} Abu Jahl asked what it was, and he replied: {I was taken up last night.} ‘To where?’, asked Abu Jahl. {To Jerusalem}, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* answered. Abu Jahl said, ‘And then you arrived back to us the next morning?’ He said, {Yes.} Abu Jahl was then afraid to give the lie to him, lest he call his people and they confirmed what he said. *(Narrated by Ahmad.)* And Jabir ibn ʿAbdullah *Allah be pleased with him* related that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: {When Quraysh gave me the lie when I was taken up to Jerusalem, I stood in the Precinct and God showed Jerusalem to me, so I began to describe it to them as I beheld it.} *Narrated by Ahmad (iii. 377), Al-Bukhari (4710) and Muslim (170).*

the earth and all that is between them! Then, worship Him alone and remain steadfast in His worship! Do you know any whose name is worthy to be mentioned side by side with His?' (*Maryam:* 65) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* by His Power and Might, has held back the tongues of all human beings from saying to one another, 'Glorified are you' or naming their children 'Allah'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… The One God, save Whom there is no deity. The One Who is utterly remote, in His limitless glory, from anything to which they may ascribe a share in His Divinity!' (*at-Tawba:* 31) The attitudes of idolaters and the people of the Book are included in this verse, for the Discipline of Heaven comes to address the widespread corruption and Allah *Glorified is He* wants man, His vicegerent on the earth, to be righteous himself and helpful to others. The lowest level of righteousness is to leave sound things as they are without corrupting them, even better if you can improve things. For example, if there is a well from which people drink, it is right to leave it sound without damage, but it is even better to protect its sides with bricks so that it does not collapse, thus trying to make it easier for people to get the water from the well. What is better than this is to build a high water-tower and to extend pipes from it so that people can have water supplies in their own houses so they have less labour to do. This is an improvement, and by doing this, you utilise the means of the True Lord Who said of Dhu Al-Qarnayn (the possessor of the two horns): '[We] endowed him with [the knowledge of] the right means to achieve anything [that he might set out to achieve],and so he chose the right means [in whatever he did]. ' (*al-Kahf:* 84-85)

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* gave Dhu Al-Qarnayn means, or instruments, and he further utilised other means by his hard work. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* wants man to make improvement in the earth so that society will be happy with and benefit from them; this is why He gives us choices in certain matters but not in others. A person can choose whether to pray or not, or to give charity or not, or to work or not, and so on, but the higher cosmos is compulsorily manipulated and managed by Allah. The sun, the moon, stars, air and water are all governed by a precise order; none of them nor any object of the higher cosmos is subject to man's will – otherwise, the universe would have been ruined. Everything is working by sound predisposition, and corruption only occurs in things over which man has free will, for free will might follow desire and whims of the soul. Even compelled created beings, such as animals that Allah has subdued for man, do not cause this evil; indeed, even their excrement can be used to fertilise the earth, but the things which man has made have filled the farthest corners of the world with poison and pollution. This is due to the former being created with Divine design, while the latter being made by human design, its maker knowing some things and being ignorant of others.

People might believe that some of man's discoveries have solved some of the world's problems, yet later when some years have passed by, they realise that they actually have caused distress to mankind. Perhaps, the pollution of the environment, which has begun to affect life in the world, will finally alert us to this fact. Man has cut down trees, cleared away the forests, which Allah created in this world to be a source of clean air, and built factories and cities in those places; yet, now he is trying to replant trees after finding out that his interference with nature has corrupted its climate and water, along with spoiling the lives of all living beings. If man, with his free will, were only to live in the world according to Allah's Way, the world would be safe and sound just as the higher cosmos is safe and sound. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The most gracious has imparted this Quran [unto man]. He has created man. He has imparted unto him articulate thought and speech. [At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses[Before Him] they prostrate themselves, the stars and the trees. And the skies has He raised high and has devised [for all things] a measure. ' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-7)

Thus, the order, the balance or the scale of the higher creatures is never disrupted; having known this, you should obey the commandment of the True Lord *Glorified is He* presented in His saying: 'So that you [too, O men,] might never transgress the measure.' (*ar-Rahman:* 8)

So, if you act in accordance with Allah's Way, your worldly matters will be as sound as the higher ones; you see the cosmos running in an orderly manner, and the same rule applies to things with which man has free choices. If it is not guided by the Way of Allah, you will have disruption in them. Thus, if you see a flaw in the world, know that a rule of Allah's approach has been violated.

Therefore, you also find that when corrupt people see that a reformer has come to restrain them and correct their ways, they try to corrupt and attract him to live the same way they are living; if they do not manage to do this, they stand in the way of this reformer since they only live through corruption and by corruption, and they gain power and tyranny for themselves and enslave others. Therefore, when the corrupt see a man who wants to restore balance to life, they fight him.

When you buy a commodity, the merchant weighs an amount equivalent to the price you pay, and the merchant needs precise scales to weigh what you buy. If he is a dishonest merchant, he tinkers with his scales so that he can sell you a smaller amount for a higher price so as to usurp what is rightfully yours. This merchant is one of the corrupt ones who feel distressed to see a reformer coming and redressing the balance of the world since Allah *Glorified is He* commanded that justice should be upheld and that the unbalanced be restored.

We said before that the True Lord *the Most High* has given a parable in which He stated that He has two Lights: the first light is physical, and the other is spiritual. The physical light guides man to the right way to avoid colliding with other things, for, by colliding with something smaller, man will destroy that thing, and by colliding with something bigger, it destroys man. Likewise, Allah has made a light for spiritual matters; therefore, He says: '… Light upon Light! Allah guides unto His Light him that wills …' (*an-Nur:* 35).

The corrupt hate that this light exists and desire to extinguish it; therefore Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

يُرِيدُونَ أَن يُطْفِـُٔوا۟ نُورَ ٱللَّهِ بِأَفْوَٰهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى ٱللَّهُ إِلَّآ
أَن يُتِمَّ نُورَهُۥ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْكَـٰفِرُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

They try to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God insists on bringing His light to its full- ness, even if the disbelievers hate it [32] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 32)

However, can they extinguish Allah's Light? No, they cannot, even in the material world; no one can extinguish light, for there is a difference between the source of light and the tool which gives light. Someone can break a light bulb which gives light, but no one can extinguish the ‘giver of light’, and the greatest Giver of Light is Allah, and no one can extinguish Him. 'They want to extinguish Allah’s [guiding] Light with their utterances, but Allah will not allow [this to pass] …' (*at-Tawba:* 32) this means that Allah does not want this, '… for He has willed to spread His Light in all its fullness…' (*at-Tawba:* 32). Allah *Glorified is He* sent the Messengers to convey the way of light; He did not send them to be defeated by disbelief. Therefore, He says: '…but Allah will not allow [this to pass]…' (*at-Tawba:* 32) This means that Allah *Glorified is He* does not want this: '… for He has willed to spread His Light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth' (*at-Tawba:* 32).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُۥ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ ٱلْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ
عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْمُشْرِكُونَ ٣٣

It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance
and the religion of truth, to show that it is above all
[other] religions, however much the idolaters may
hate this [33] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 33)

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* has already presented the values which lead to the straight path, and he has presented the religion of truth; the word ‘religion’ (*din*) can also be used to apply to false creeds and rites. Did the True Lord *the Most High* not command His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to the disbelievers and idolaters of Mecca: 'Unto you, your moral law (*din*), and unto me, mine' ((*al-Kafirun:* 6)? Did they have a religion? Indeed, they did have something they followed as a religion, along with beliefs which they had invented for themselves, but ‘the religion of truth’ is the one which came down from Heaven.

'It is He Who has sent forth His Prophet with the [task of spreading] guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religion …' (*at-Tawba:* 33). We can observe that Allah *Glorified is He* said these Words to affirm that Islam came to be ascendant over all religions; we know that many religions were founded on falsehood, as He *the Exalted* says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them [would long ago have perished]!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71)

Let us take some time to consider the True Lord's Words 'over all [false] religion'. If all the corruption in the world was of a single kind, it would have been said, 'to prevail over the existing corrupt religion', but there are several religions, including Buddhism, polytheism beliefs, the religions of the people of the Book, the Magi and the Sabians.(1) Due to this, Allah *Glorified is He* does want His religion, the religion of truth, to prevail over not only one religion amongst the corrupt religions which exist, but over all of these religions. If something comes to prevail (*yazhar*), it becomes prominent and significant; thus, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'and thus [the rampart was built, and] their enemies were unable to scale (*yazharu*) it…' (*al-Kahf:* 97). What this means is that they could not climb over its back (*zahr*). All religions are far inferior to the Islamic religion. Some people ask, 'So, why is it that disbelievers exist, like *Magi, Buddhists, Sabians* and followers of other religions like Judaism and Christianity? They still exist, and their followers are many.' My answer is that we should understand the meaning of 'ascendancy'. Ascendancy means that clear proofs and sound teachings become ascendant, meaning that non-Muslims' world will run into practical and social problems, which it cannot solve without following the teachings of Islam, and thus taking its legislation from Islam. When they do this, they do not take the teachings of Islam in a religious way; rather, they take them as social necessities without which life cannot be rectified. As a Muslim, when you are loyal to the teachings of your religion, this is not a testimony on your part that you have faith; rather, your inner being and your insight inspired you to believe in the religion of truth. The strong testimony comes when the enemy who hates Islam and resists it is forced to use one of Islam's teachings to solve his problems. When this happens, the strongest testimony comes from the enemy of your religion, or your rival. This means that he could not find any other idea in existence to solve this problem, so he had to take his solution from Islam.

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(1) The Sabians were a community whose religion was a cross between Jewish and Magianism belief. Al-Khalil said that their religion was similar to Christianity, except that they prayed towards the south; they claimed to follow Noah's religion.

For example, the Vatican in Italy has authority over all Christian doctrine in the West, and the Catholic Church was against divorce and attacked Islam for allowing it, and then the severe problems which faced Italian society and other European societies forced them to legalise divorce since they could not find any other solution to their serious social problems.

However, did they allow divorce since Islam allows it or because their social problems could only be solved by allowing it? When they take a solution to their problems from our religion and apply it as a law, this is a strong testimony which affirms for them the correctness of Allah's religion, along with confirming the True Lord's Words: '… to the end that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religion – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 33) By Allah, if prevailing in this verse means a complete doctrinal conquest that no other religions would exist in the world but Islam, the True Lord *Glorified is He* would not have said here, 'however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth'. Also, He would not have said, '… however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 33) This means that Allah *the Exalted* has made those who oppose Islam themselves cause Islam to prevail over other religions, not because they are convinced of and believed in it; rather, they remain with their own religions but are forced, by circumstance, to seek solutions from Islam for their difficulties.

Another example of this is found in the issue of breastfeeding. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And the [divorced] mothers may nurse their children for two whole years, if they wish to complete the period of nursing …' (*al-Baqara:* 233).

In Europe and America, there were many campaigns against natural nursing, and they told people to use powdered milk that was produced chemically instead of the milk of the mother; in their opinions, this was a better source of nutrition for the baby. Then, after this, serious health problems emerged in infants, and in their psychological welfare because they had not been nursed by their mothers, the whole world was forced to go back to natural nursing with great enthusiasm. Do they do this because they believed in the Noble Quran, or because they found that the only way to solve their problem was to return to the natural way of nursing infants?

The same is true on the case of alcohol. We now find that there is an urgent campaign against alcohol in the countries which broadly permitted it before. Recently, they have begun to wage this war against alcohol; now that science has discovered the harm it does to the liver, the brain, and to human behaviour. This is the meaning of '… that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religions …' (*at-Tawba:* 33). This means that He will cause it to be ascendant, with its clear proofs and true arguments, over all who oppose it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religions – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 33) This religion has prevailed and become ascendant in the way it deals with many of the things which have emerged in the societies of polytheists and disbelievers who hate this religion and fight against it; this prevailing has not been based on faith, rather, it is based on necessity. What this means is that they have accepted it despite themselves.

After making it clear to us that the rabbis and monks do not have completely correct faith in Allah or the Last Day, along with permitting what Allah has forbidden and forbidding what Allah has permitted, their followers take them as lords besides Allah *Glorified is He* Who says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ ٱلْأَحْبَارِ وَٱلرُّهْبَانِ لَيَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَٰلَ
ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلْبَـٰطِلِ وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَٱلَّذِينَ يَكْنِزُونَ
ٱلذَّهَبَ وَٱلْفِضَّةَ وَلَا يُنفِقُونَهَا فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَبَشِّرْهُم بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ٣٤

Believers, many rabbis and monks wrongfully consume people's possessions and turn people away from God's path. [Prophet], tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in God's cause that they will have a grievous punishment [34] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 34)

Allah *the Almighty* explains to us what goes on in their minds, and how they stray from Allah's Way. He also describes how they became steeped in the love of this worldly life and passions, along with how they bartered Allah's Words away for a trifling price and distorted the teachings of Heaven so that they could wrongfully devour people's wealth. However, can wealth be devoured really? Of course, it cannot, rather, we use it to buy the food which we eat. Why does the True Lord *the Most High* use the expression ' devour men’s possessions' (*at-Tawba:* 34)? By this, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to alert us to the fact that not only did they take enough wealth to meet their needs for food and drink, but they took more than they needed in order to hoard it.(1)

Therefore, He says in this verse that they '… turn [others] away from the Path of Allah. But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of grievous suffering.' (*at-Tawba:* 34) Thus, they wrongfully devoured people’s wealth, as the True Lord *the Exalted* says: '…do indeed wrongfully devour men’s possessions' (*at-Tawba:* 34); this means that it is possible to devour people’s wealth rightfully by engaging in beneficial trade transactions; a merchant takes your money and gives you a commodity in return, and then takes this money and uses it to buy another commodity to sell, and so on. The law of circumspection in this verse means that there must have been some rabbis and monks who did indeed preserve the teachings of their religion and did not wrongfully devour people’s wealth, which is clearly implied in the True Lord’s Words '…Behold, many of the rabbis and monks do indeed wrongfully devour men’s possessions…' (*at-Tawba:* 34). Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, ‘All rabbis and monks wrongfully devour men’s possessions’, instead He said: '…Behold, many of the rabbis and monks …' (*at-Tawba:* 34). Allah said it like this since there may well have been a limited number of rabbis and monks who adhered properly to their faiths, and He does not wrong anyone. Therefore, He allowed for this possibility. Had Allah *the Almighty* made a general statement even though some of them did indeed adhere to their religion, this would mean that the Noble Quran was not aware of all the possibilities –Allah forbid such a thing, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* allows for all possibilities in His Quran.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi says in his exegesis (iv. 3049): ‘They used to tax their followers’ wealth and take contributions for the churches and synagogues, which deluded them into thinking that this spending was part of the Sacred Law and a way of drawing nearer to God; but they would conceal this wealth, as Salman Al-Farisi narrated about the monk who dug up his treasure.’*

Therefore, some of these rabbis and monks appropriated people’s wealth in a wrongful way; this means that they not only took that which they needed to suffice themselves, but they took it wrongfully by taking more than they needed.

They took wealth in order to turn others away from the Path of Allah, for the path they followed was that of seeking worldly gains. They changed Allah’s Way so that it would accord with their lust for wealth and help them gain the vast wealth they desired. Therefore, this verse specifies what their punishment will be, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come].' (*at-Tawba:* 34) The Arabic word for ‘treasure’ (*kanz*) is derived from a root word meaning ‘fullness and gathering’; when a sheep is described to be (*muktanaza)*, it means it is very meaty which means much meat has collected on it.

Therefore, to ‘lay-up treasures’ means to gather, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that they 'lay-up treasures of gold and silver' (*at-Tawba:* 34). These two metals are the basis of worldly economics. Economic dealings began with swapping, i.e. the exchange of commodities which is called ‘bartering'. When economic dealings progressed, currency was invented and became the basis of dealings between people and nations. From its inception until the present day, currency is based on gold and silver. Even when paper currency was invented, it had to be backed up by an equivalent value of gold in order to have any economic value since paper money has no value unless it is backed up by gold and silver.

An aspect of the miraculous nature of the Noble Quran is that when the True Lord *the Most High* speaks about gold and silver which are both metals, He makes them the basis of money and business even though other minerals have been found which are more valuable than gold or silver, such as diamonds. The basis of currency in the world still remains gold and silver. The currency of any nation rises and falls in value based on the gold reserves which back up paper currency. For example, in Egypt during the British occupation, there were eight million pounds in circulation, and our gold reserves were worth ten million pounds, so there were two million pounds worth of extra gold; therefore, the Egyptian pound was worth one pound and two-and-a-half pence of gold.

Money is devalued if the gold reserves are small and the amount of currency in circulation is large. Therefore, gold remains the primary basis of the world economy.

Thus, in this noble verse, Allah *the Almighty* wants to attract our attention to the fact that gold and silver are the basis of dealings in the world's economic movement and that this requires money to be constantly circulating since the purpose of money is to benefit from it to make the world thrive. If you do not circulate your wealth and you are a believer, then every year 2.5% of it is taken in the form of the poor-due (*zakat*), and therefore all of this money will disappear in forty years. If a believer wants to maintain his money, he should circulate it in the activities of life, investing it so that it will grow, and not hoard it away so that the poor-due will consume it all. The poor-due is a small amount to be paid from one's wealth, but if the owner of the wealth circulates what he owns in life's activities, the people will benefit from this even if he does not intend so, for the one who invests his wealth in building an apartment block, for example, is only concerned with making profit for himself; however, people will benefit from this wealth even if he does not intend to benefit them. The one who digs the foundations will be paid, as well as the one who brings the bricks, the one who brings the cement, the one who brings the iron, the factories that produce building materials, the people who work in the factories that produce the safety apparatus, electric cables and so on and the ones who install these things. Therefore, a great many people in the owner's society will benefit from his building, even if he did not intend to benefit them; thus, the one who builds an apartment building provides an economic service to society which benefits many people, and the same is true of anyone who makes an investment project.

Therefore, Allah *the Most High* does not want wealth to be static, rather, He wants it to be dynamic, even if it is in the hands of disbelievers; if it is dynamic, then it will benefit all people, and there will be buying and selling. Goods will be produced, factories will be built and people will find jobs, and so on. However, if we all saved our money instead of investing it in the life processes, goods would not be used, factories would shut down and people would lose their jobs.

Just as Islam encourages us to invest our money, it tells us not to give people money if they do not work for it so that they will not be used to getting money in exchange for idleness and inactivity. Therefore, it is said that if there is a lot of money and there is no need for any new projects, do not let the people become idle, rather command them even to dig a well and then fill it again, and pay the workers for digging it and for filling it. This will prevent idleness from spreading and prevent people from getting accustomed to eating without having to work for it since this is the quickest way to corrupt society.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants wealth to circulate, and not be hoarded. Thus, He says: '… But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of grievous suffering.' (*at-Tawba:* 34) This is due to the fact that by hoarding wealth, they bring to a halt the motions of life which Allah wants for His creation. You see that today there is a serious unemployment problem in the world since wealth is not being placed in motion to make the world thrive, rather, there are those who only hoard it.

Someone might say, ‘But in these days, people use paper currency, while Allah *the Almighty* speaks of gold and silver.’ We say that paper currency is not money in itself, rather, it is used to spare people the inconvenience of carrying large and heavy amounts of gold and silver around with them which they might not be able to carry; it is therefore a matter of convenience, but it is linked to a value of gold. So, those who hoard paper currency and do not spend it to make this world thrive are also meant by this noble verse.(1)

However, in this verse, ‘to lay up treasure’ not only means that they amass wealth, but it also means that they do not honour Allah’s right concerning it.

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(1) *Al-Qurttubi says in his exegesis (iv. 3049): ‘The root meaning of ‘treasure’ (kanz) is ‘to collect and gather’; and this does not only refer to gold and silver, for the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: {Shall I not tell you of the finest treasure a man can obtain? A virtuous woman.} That is, he can gather her to himself (by marrying her). Gold and silver are singled out for mention here because they are hidden from others, unlike other possessions.’ At-Tabari said that a ‘treasure’ is everything which is collected, whether below the earth or above it. The Hadith quoted by Al-Qurttubi was narrated by Abu Dawud in his book (Sunnan) (1664) and Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (i. 409).*

Therefore, the money for which you pay the poor-due is not considered to be a hoarded treasure since it decreases by the poor-due every year; hoarded-up wealth means the wealth for which no poor-due is paid.

The one who owns wealth, no matter how much, but honours Allah’s right in it, is not thereby considered to be a hoarder of wealth; rather, the meaning of hoarded treasure here is the wealth for which Allah’s right is not honoured.(1)

Let us return to the text of the noble verse: '… But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them…' (*at-Tawba:* 34). We might ask why Allah did not use the Arabic dual form (*huma*) here for 'them' (rather, the non-human plural form *ha* was used) since gold and silver are two metals. We say that the True Lord *the Most High* used the plural form because ‘gold’ means many things: one person owns a thousand gold pieces, another owns one hundred and a third owns only a single piece; the same is true of silver. As long as this plurality exists, we must say 'spend them' in the plural.

Further, the noble verse did not say, ‘he who lays up treasures’, rather, 'all who lay up treasures', so this refers to several people: one has gold, another has gold and a third has silver, so the plural must be used. The Noble Quran alerts us to this fact when it says in another verse of a different chapter: 'Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting …' (*al-Hujurat:* 9); in this verse, the verb is in the Arabic plural form, not the dual, since the word ‘group’ means a plurality made up of many individuals, and when fighting breaks out, the whole group does not fight the other with a single sword, rather, each individual from the one group fights each individual of the other. Thus, they are two groups in times of peace, but, when war breaks out, each individual from one group fights each individual of the other. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says 'fall to fighting' (*iqtatalu*) in the Arabic plural form, not *(iqtatala)* in the dual form. As for the time of reconciliation, He *the Most High* says, 'make peace between them' (*al-Hujurat:* 9) in the dual form; this is due to the fact that when we make peace between the two groups, we do not bring each individual from the one group and reconcile him with each individual from the other, rather, we bring the leader of the one group and reconcile him with the leader of the other, thus, peace is made; therefore, the dual form is required.

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(1) *Ibn ‘Umar said that if the poor-due is paid for wealth, it is not hoarded treasure, even if it is buried seven fathoms deep in the earth; and if the poor-due is not paid for it, it is a hoarded treasure even if it is kept above ground. Narrated by Al-Qurttubi in his exegesis*

The same is true when He says: '…all who lay up treasures of gold and silver…' (*at-Tawba:* 34): He does not say ‘and do not spend them both’ in the dual form, rather, He says, '… and do not spend them for the sake of Allah …' (*at-Tawba:* 34) in the plural form. Spending for Allah’s Sake takes many forms, and, for Allah’s Sake, there occurs motion in society, and the people benefit from it. When the poor-due is paid, people benefit. Likewise, when it is used to equip the Muslim army, people benefit. The theory which states that money should not be hoarded might have only recently appeared in global economics, but it has existed since the Noble Quran was revealed.

If you spend and do not hoard, the market becomes active, and this creates work, sources of provision, along with the impetus which leads to the progress of humanity. When you buy a washing machine, a fridge or build a small house, you contribute to an economic boom in society, and at the same time, you improve your living standard with the appliances you obtain, and this economic boom leads to new discoveries which benefit mankind. On the other hand, if you hoard all your money, this leads to economic stagnation.

This does not mean that a person should spend all the wealth he owns and then some since the True Lord *the Exalted* wants us to follow the middle way in everything. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And who, whenever they spend on others, are neither wasteful nor stingy, but [remember that] there is always a just mean between those.' (*al-Furqan:* 67)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* warns us not to spend foolishly without retaining part of our wealth in case of emergency. However, if you are stingy, the market will become stagnant, production will cease and jobs will be lost. Islam wants us to spend in moderation to make the market boom, along with saving money in order to improve our lives and to deal with crises.

Spending is of two kinds: spending which is given to one’s equal to preserve the constant motion between producer and consumer and spending which is given to those less fortunate in the form of the poor-due to the poor and needy. The poor-due cleanses society from many impurities(1): it prevents people from resenting each other since if a poor person finds someone to give to him, he will hope that they continue to be blessed so they will keep on giving to him, and, therefore, the poor will not feel hatred towards the rich. Also, the rich and the poor benefit equally from this because when the poor person takes, he will not be bitter at his poverty, rather, he will feel that all those around him give to him; furthermore, when the rich person gives, he will feel this is a means of security for him since if one day were his blessings to end, he will find someone to give to him, too.

Therefore, there will exist equality amongst people in society, and there will not be anyone who is unable to obtain his life's essential needs, nor will there be anyone who hoards their excess wealth from the people.(2) Therefore, our faith calls us to work hard so that we can earn living more than our needs, so that there will be excess wealth for poor-dues and charity. When a person works, they not only benefit themselves, but they also benefit society. For example, if a taxi driver earns one hundred pounds a day, he might think that he has only benefitted himself, but in fact he has benefited all society by making things easier for people: he took one person to work, another to hospital, another to the market to buy what he needed and another to visit a relative, and so on.

Thus, when a person works, his work is good for him and for society too; if everyone were to work only enough to meet his own needs, how would those who are unable to work live? How would those eligible for poor-dues and charity live? They can only live off the excess wealth of those who are able to work, and, therefore, every Muslim should work as much as he can, and not only as much as he needs. If he works as much as to only meet his needs, this will allow him to provide for the needs of those whom he supports, so he will not have to stretch out his hands to ask others; what this means is that he is saved from the evil of need. Yet, if he works as much as he can, he not only fulfils his own needs but also gives to those who cannot work to attain the means to live; therefore, he does the good for himself, for those whom he supports and others as well.

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(1) *Therefore, the True Lord Glorified is He says in this very sura:* "accept that [part] of their possessions which is offered for the sake of God, so that you may cleanse them thereby and cause them to grow in purity, and pray for them: behold, your prayer will be [a source of] comfort to them – for God is all-hearing, all-knowing." (*at-Tawba:* 103)

(2) *The Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him stressed this to the believers when he said, as Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him narrated: {Whoever has a spare mount, let him give it to him who has no mount; and whoever has spare provisions, let him give them to him who has no provisions.} Abu Sa'id said: 'And he continued to name different kinds of possessions in this way, until we felt that none of us had the right to anything spare.' Narrated by Muslim (1728), Ahmad (iii.34) and Abu Dawud (1663)*

The society in which the needs of the incapacitated are met, is a society in which both the capable and the incapable have peace of mind. We know that we live in a world of fluctuations, and there is no one whose wealth or poverty is bound to last forever since nothing in this life lasts forever; so, if a wealthy person lives in a self-supporting society in which the poor's needs are met, he will not fear the fluctuations of time, for if he gives to the poor now, and then, he were to ever become poor himself, he would be provided with his life’s essential needs; also, if Allah enriches a poor person, he will remember how he used to take from the wealthy, thus, he will be eager to help the poor as a way of returning this favour. In this way, all society will live in security, and living in such a society will cause people to feel secure about their children and their descendants, for the lives of people are in Allah’s hands, and if a person feels that if he were to die and leave behind young and weak children, society would take care of them, then he will feel secure about their life. On the other hand, if society is brutal and ignores the rights of the orphan, fathers will not feel secure about their young children. Therefore, we find that the True Lord *the Most High* commanded us to take care of the orphan(1), in order to replace the one father who was lost with many fathers who will all look after the orphan; so fathers can feel secure, as well as mothers and children. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And let them stand in awe [of Allah], those [legal heirs] – who, if they [themselves] had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account – and let them remain conscious of Allah and let them speak [to the poor] in a just manner.' (*an-Nisa': 9*)

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(1) Taking care of orphans is something Islam urges us to do; orphans are mentioned in the Quran 23 times, such as His Words: “And worship God [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy…” (*an-Nisa’* :36) And see how the Quran counsels those who look after orphans to act with a faithful sensibility which comes from their hearts and their consciences when they deal with their financial matters, as He *Glorifired is He* says: “And test the orphans [in your charge] until they reach a marriageable age; then, if you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions; and do not consume them by wasteful spending, and in haste, before they grow up. And let him who is rich abstain entirely [from his ward’s property]; and let him who is poor partake thereof in a fair manner. And when you hand over to them their possessions, let there be witnesses on their behalf – although none can take count as God does.” (*an-Nisa’* : 6)

Allah-consciousness assures that society will take care of orphans, and, therefore, security will enter the heart of every father who fears of dying and leaving young children behind.

Thus, when society takes care of an orphan, the child will not rail against fate for being deprived of a father since he will find that he has many fathers to look after him. There is a story which many of our scholars have told. Once, there was a colleague of theirs who died and left behind young children, and their mother wept for them because they had been orphaned. Then, the years went by, and the children grew up; one became an engineer, another doctor and another lawyer, while those whose fathers were still alive were unsuccessful in their studies. One of these fathers said to the other, 'If only we had died, so that Allah would have opened the door of provision for our children!'

So, there are some fathers who block the coming of provision, and, if they die, Allah showers their children with provision. This is something we see occurring in the world, and so, we see that the matter is all in the hands of Allah *Glorified is He* Who said: 'for, verily, Allah Himself is the Provider of all sustenance, the Lord of all might, The Eternal!' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 58)

Therefore, Islamic economics are based on the existence of motion in the world, and this motion must be commensurate with the abilities of those who perform it, and not only with their needs, in order that there be excess wealth which those who are unable to work can take from those who are able to work.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a lesson of faith when we see an incapable poor person taking his sustenance from a rich one who works hard; it is as though those who are richer are working to provide for the poor one. Thus, when Allah *the Exalted* takes the strength away from him, He compensates him by giving him some of the fruits of the labour of others, so that he does not become bitter that Allah has tested him with this trial.

'… But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of grievous suffering.' (*at-Tawba:* 34) When you hear the Words 'give them tidings', you know that ‘tidings’ usually means good news; if it is used to introduce grave news, it is meant to be ironic. If a leader of a certain people, who is highly respected by his people, acts with tyranny and oppression, his people are afraid to resist him because he does not fear Allah, and thus, he treats them unfairly. This oppressor will be brought forth on the Day of Resurrection and chastised severely, and it will be said to him: 'Taste it – you who [on earth] has considered yourself so mighty, so noble!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 49)

Given the nature of his position in the Fire as he is humiliated by the torment of Hell, he is neither mighty nor noble; the words of the angels of hell, 'Taste it – you who [on earth] has considered yourself so mighty, so noble!', are meant as stern irony. In this respect, they resemble the Words of the True Lord *the Most High*: '… and if they beg for water, they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces …' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

When they hear the Words 'they will be given water', he will be happy because his thirst is severe and he has asked for water and been told that he will be given it. This seems to him to be glad tidings, but the water he will be given will be as hot as molten lead which will scald his face. Will this bring any relief? It is meant ironically, and it serves to further increase his suffering. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says here: '… give them the tiding of grievous suffering.' (*at-Tawba:* 34) The True Lord then describes for us this grievous suffering which people like this will encounter, depicting for us the matters of the Hereafter which we are unable to see by use of a sensory image. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوْمَ يُحْمَىٰ عَلَيْهَا فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ فَتُكْوَىٰ بِهَا جِبَاهُهُمْ وَجُنُوبُهُمْ
وَظُهُورُهُمْ ۖ هَٰذَا مَا كَنَزْتُمْ لِأَنفُسِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا۟ مَا كُنتُمْ تَكْنِزُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

On the Day it is heated up in Hell’s Fire and used to brand their foreheads, sides, and backs, they will be told, ‘This is what you hoarded up for yourselves! Now feel the pain of what you hoarded!’ [35] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 35)

We know that only metals are heated up in fire; so, if what they have hoarded up is paper currency, how will it be heated? If what they have hoarded is metal, it will be suitable to be used to brand their bodies, but how will this be done with paper currency? We say that the All-Powerful *Glorified is He* is well able to heat that which cannot ordinarily be heated, or transform it into gold and silver, and then brand these parts of their bodies with it. To brand means to take heated metal and press it onto the skin so it burns it and leaves a mark.

When one of the Companions died during the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they looked through his clothes and found a gold coin there, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'This shall be used as a brand in the fire.' This was due to the fact that the owner of this coin was obsessed with hoarding it. Likewise, there was another Companion who was found to have two coins which he had hoarded, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'These are two brands.'(1)

This was before the poor-due had been legislated, but if the owner of wealth has fulfilled Allah's right concerning it, it is not considered to be a hoarded treasure. If this were not the case, we would have to say that a person, who had left money to his children upon dying, even if he had paid the poor-due for it, was thereby guilty of hoarding. Also, if we said this, then we would render meaningless all the verses of the Noble Quran concerned with inheritance since the whole purpose of inheritance is that a person passes on what he owns when he dies. Inherited money has to be from a lawful source such that its owner fulfils all Allah's rights concerning it, and therefore, it is not considered to be hoarded treasure.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith …' (*at-Tawba:* 35). Why does Allah single out these particular places for this torment? It is due to each of these body parts playing a part in the refusal to spend money in Allah’s Cause. How is this so? For example, the face is the part of the body with which one faces things: if one sees a poor person turn to him to ask for charity, and he knows that this person is truly poor, coming to him due to severe need, the first thing he does to avoid fulfilling Allah’s right is turning his face away from him or frown at him and show anger in his face. This poor person will feel shame and humility since the rich one has ignored him. If turning face does not work, and the poor person continues to follow the rich one, the latter will avoid the former by turning the body side so that he will feel unwelcome. If the poor person continues to stand by the rich person's side, the latter turns his back to the former.

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(1) Ahmad narrates this on the authority of Abu Umama, who said that these men were of the 'People of the Bench'. Someone might ask why the possession of one or two coins is such a sin as to deserve branding in hell; the answer is that this man was one of the People of the Bench, that is, one of the poor people who spent all their time at the Prophet Muhammad's mosque and lived on the Muslims' charity, and yet he was hoarding gold, even if only a single coin, in the folds of his clothes. It is, therefore, as though he usurped the rights of others and deprived the Muslim society of what he was hoarding, and of his labour. Had he taken this coin and bought an axe to cut firewood, as the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed others to do, it would have been better for him, his family, and others; and therefore he deserved his fate.

So, these three body parts are all involved in the refusal to spend in Allah’s Cause: firstly turning one's face far away, then giving one's side and finally turning one's back to the poor. These are the three body parts involved when the rich withhold the right entitled, by Allah, to the poor, and therefore, they must be punished; so, the face, the body side and the back are all branded.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says: '…These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves!' (*at-Tawba:* 35) This means that the wealth for which one refused to give Allah’s right. If a person has hoarded up much wealth, his torment will be more severe than the one who hoarded only a little. This is due to the brand being larger, the more wealth that is hoarded, while if the hoarded wealth is small, the brand will be small. Therefore, the one who hoards must not be deluded by the size of what he hoards since the more he hoards, the more severe will be his punishment.

Allah's Words '…Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures' (*at-Tawba:* 35) mean one's suffering in the Hereafter will be the result of the wealth he hoarded; the wealth which he rejoiced in hoarding in his worldly life should have been a cause for his grief because he merely hoarded up suffering for himself on the Day of Resurrection. No matter what pride and delusion his hoarded wealth gave him in his worldly lives, it will be repaid with suffering in the Hereafter, suffering which is commensurate with the amount he hoarded.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

إِنَّ عِدَّةَ ٱلشُّهُورِ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ٱثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَٰبِ ٱللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلْأَرْضَ مِنْهَآ أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرُمٌ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلدِّينُ ٱلْقَيِّمُ ۚ فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا۟ فِيهِنَّ أَنفُسَكُمْ ۚ وَقَٰتِلُوا۟
ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ كَآفَّةً كَمَا يُقَٰتِلُونَكُمْ كَآفَّةً ۚ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

God decrees that there are twelve months – ordained in God's Book on the Day when He created the heavens and earth – four months of which are sacred: this is the correct calculation. Do not wrong your souls in these months – though you may fight the idolaters at any time, if they first fight you – remember that God is with those who are mindful of Him [36] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 36)

A month means a full cycle of the moon, as is well known. We know that the cosmos contains a sun, a moon and stars, all of which we can see; also, there are other celestial bodies far away from us which could fit one million of our suns inside them. All of this may give you some idea of how enormous the universe is. We should not imagine that the sun exists of its own accord; rather, it derives things from other stars which are much bigger than it, but what we can see with our eyes is limited, and there are things we cannot see because they are not within our range of vision. If we look at an electric light, its light is not intrinsic to it, rather, there are many devices behind it which feed the electricity through wires, cables and transformers, and then there is the power station that generates the electric current, and then the factories that produce the machines that operate in the power station. So behind this small lamp is a huge amount of work and different machinery.

We see that the sun has light which we call in Arabic *diya'*, whilst the light of the moon is called *nur*. What is the difference between *ḍiya'* and *nur*? *Diya'* means the emission of both light and heat, while *nur* contains light but not heat. Therefore, the light of the moon is called 'the mild light' since when we sit in the light of the moon we do not need a parasol to shade ourselves from it. However, if we sit in the light of the sun, we need a parasol to protect ourselves from its intense heat.

The True Lord *the Most High* calls the sun 'a lamp full of blazing splendour', and a lamp (*siraj*); the sun is something which emits both light and heat. As for the moon, He called it 'light-giving' (*munir*) since the rays of the sun reflect off it and give it light. Allah *the Exalted* has made these two celestial bodies, the sun and the moon, a means of measuring the passage of time. Time has many stages which require different standards and measures: the basic unit of time measurement is day and night, and the basic units of day are morning, noon, afternoon and evening. Also, there is true dawn, false dawn and sunrise, and there are times when the lengths of an object and its shadow (made by the sun rays projecting on the objects) are equal; there are other times when the shadow is twice as long as an object's length, and at night all is dark. In the standards for time measurement, after day and night, come months and then years.

Therefore, the measurements of time require tools to measure them. We know when day begins because the sun rises, which makes the sun the standard means of measuring day, and we know when night begins because the sun sets, which means that the sun tells us when both day and night begin and end; however, it does not tell us anything about the months. If we look at the sun, it does not tell us whether the month has just begun, is in the middle or is about to end. On the other hand, if we look at the moon, we can indeed tell these things: at the beginning of the month, it is a crescent, in the middle of the month, it is full and at the end of the month, it disappears. Also, the number of months in the eyes of Allah is twelve.

Thus, we see that, before Allah *the Almighty* created man and made him His vicegerent on the earth, He created for him a universe which was judiciously prepared for his arrival. For example, He placed a means of sustenance on the earth, made the sun and the moon and sent down rain; everything man needs to live be present in the universe before man came to live in it. Allah made man His vicegerent on the earth and gave him movement, meaning the events which he makes happen, which happen within him or which happen to him; and events require time and place. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* created a time and place for them. So, life in its entirety is an interaction between the actions of man, Allah's vicegerent on one side, and time and place on the other.

Just as Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for man his life's daily requirements, He also sent down the moral values which would preserve his spiritual life for him. By doing this, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted human motion to be in harmony, not in discord, and the meaning of harmony is that the motion of all mankind is united in making beneficial things to improve the quality of life on the earth. Yet, if the actions of man are in discord with one another, corruption will appear on the earth since everyone will seek to destroy what the other has done.

In order for man's actions in the world to be in harmony, there must be one sole lawgiver, namely *the Most High* Lawgiver Who makes laws for the actions for all of mankind. When people seek to avoid the laws of Allah and begin to make laws for themselves, we find that human laws follow human whims, and everyone tries to secure advantages for himself while usurping the rights of others, and life is thereby corrupted. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin …' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

If Allah *the Most High* had allowed them to follow their whims, the universe would have been subjected to human caprices: this one wants one thing, while the other wants the opposite. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the actions of the world to be peaceful, stable and secure and this will not happen unless all of mankind adheres to the Way of Allah. When this happens, there will be perpetual and universal peace, and man will be at complete peace with himself, the universe and Allah. However man, whom Allah created free and to whom He gave His way of moral guidance, has the ability to either obey this guidance or disobey it; if man disobeys this guidance, he, thereby, corrupts the earth and spreads tyranny and wickedness throughout it.

The True Lord *the Most High* has wanted to ensure peace by making a force which stands in the way of corruption on the earth; therefore He willed the existence of war in this world, so that different desires would conflict with one another. As long as man has free will, along with there being those who obey and those who disobey, conflict will inevitably take place. As for those things in which man has no free will, they do not cause peace to be disrupted in the world. For example, there will never be a revolution with the goal of making the sun rise, nor a war to make rain fall since these things are ruled by the law of compulsion which Allah intended for them, and they give their benefit to all. Corruption happens when people deviate from Allah's Way.

Furthermore, as long as there exists some people who are eager to preserve this way, so that if a person deviates, they reprimand him so that he returns to the right path and, hence the security and peace of life will be preserved. However, if corruption becomes universal, and there is no one in society to stand against him, the motion of life will be stymied, along with people's lives and livelihood being made unbearable.

In order for peace to transpire throughout the world, the True Lord *the Most High* places barriers in time and place which stand in the way of the soul's tyranny, in order to awaken it and return it to the truth: He places in time sacred months in which fighting is not allowed, so that peace prevails during them by the edict of Heaven. Allah *the Almighty* wants this compulsory peace to be an opportunity for those at war to return to their senses and settle their differences. Likewise, Allah makes certain places inviolable so that no fighting is allowed within them, and if the people meet together in these places, it is a chance for them to purify themselves and settle their differences.

When a human being fights a war against another fellow human, they are worn down by the fierceness and the consequences of this war; they are worn down by the loss of blood, loss of property and loss of equipment. People are weakened by all these losses, whether they win or lose the war. However, due to the pride they feel when facing a rival, they want to continue the war so that they do not appear to their enemy to have capitulated. Therefore, by His Mercy with His creation, Allah wants to make times and places in which fighting is forbidden, so that it will not be said that such-and-such tribe or group halted the fighting since they fear their enemy or because their enemy is stronger; rather, people will say that they stopped fighting by Allah's command. In this way, each party of the conflict retains its honour, and reconciliation becomes easy, along with spirits and souls accepting it.

Likewise, if one of the warring parties seeks refuge in one of the places in which Allah forbids fighting, it thereby protects itself, and this prevents the evil from continuing, along with protecting people from degradation and capitulation before the enemy. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* wants to make it clear to us, 'I am your Creator, and I am merciful to you. I shall make times in which fighting is forbidden and places in which all who enter are safe, so shield yourselves behind this and stop fighting.' This is an aspect of Allah's Mercy by which He gives people a chance to live, and this is one of the gifts of Lordship, which Allah gives to all of His creation, whether believers or disbelievers, obedient or disobedient, and all of the blessings of existence are bestowed by His Lordship.

Allah's gifts do not make a distinction between a believer and a disbeliever: the earth, for example, does not give crops to the obedient and withhold them from the sinner, and the sun does not send its light and heat down on a believer and not a disbeliever; all the material blessings of the universe are gifts of Allah's Lordship to His creation. Material means, then, are for all people, and they can choose whatever schedule they like for their life's motions. For example, they can farm according to whatever system they choose and fix the seasons in the way that benefits them the most; in doing this, they organise their material benefits, which are gifts of Lordship. However, Allah is also a Lord of virtue, and therefore, there are gifts of deity, which Allah has placed in the way of guidance with which He sent the Messengers to mankind. Thus, this clarifies, 'I shall choose the times I hold appropriate for virtue and lofty moral values, and I shall choose the appropriate places for virtue and lofty moral values.' The True Lord distinguished this time and place, along with wanting to establish this by making it well known during all times and places through the message of His Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Months in Allah's sight are twelve in number; as long as He says: 'in the sight of Allah', this means that there are also months 'in the sight of' other than Allah and 'in the sight of' man.

Allah *the Exalted* made it clear to His creation: 'Set your own times according to what benefits you', and this is what actually happens. We find that people grow crops according to the Coptic calendar in which the summer months are always the same, as are the months of winter, spring and autumn since the Coptic calendar is based on the movement of the sun.

However, Allah wants to allocate times according to moral values, which is why He says: 'Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months…' (*at-Tawba:* 36). Thus, He clarifies: 'Do not make your moral calendar the same as the calendar by which you organise your worldly benefits.'

Allah *the Almighty* wants moral values to encompass all times and not be fixed to any particular time. Therefore, He chose specific times for prayer. For example, dawn prayer has its time, as do midday, afternoon, sunset and evening prayers. However, despite the fact that prayer times are fixed, they encompass all times; for example, the prayer time arrives to Aswan, a few minutes later in Luxor, a few minutes later in Cairo, a few minutes later in Alexandria, and then to the European nations, etc. The prayer never stops for a moment, rather, it continues according to the time in different places. Dawn prayer, for example, is offered before sunrise, and the sun rises every minute in different places in the world. It is therefore as though the prayer is always being offered on the earth. Furthermore, at the time we pray the afternoon prayer, those in Northern Europe, for example, pray the midday prayer, while those in America and Canada pray the morning prayer. It is as though prayer is being offered at all times, all over the world, for the entire universe glorifies Allah *the Almighty*.

After this, we come to Allah's choice for the Day of *Arafat,* the month of fasting and other such times. The month of *Ramadan* sometimes occurs during summer, winter, spring or autumn, and likewise, the pilgrimage occurs during all the different seasons of the earth. In this way, Allah has justly decreed that the days which He made preferable are distributed all over the year. The True Lord made one day the basic unit of time, which is composed of daytime and night, and days are grouped into months, and months into years. Also, He made the sun's task to determine days for us, and the moon's task to determine months. At the start of the month, the moon is a crescent, then a quarter-moon, then a half-moon, then a full moon, etc. Thus, the moon is what determines when a month begins and ends.

The True Lord *the Most High* specified the months of the year by saying: 'Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months…' (*at-Tawba:* 36), and then He says: '… out of these, four are sacred…' (*at-Tawba:* 36).

However, why did Allah not make all the months times of peace (sacred)? We say that by His legislations, the True Lord wanted peace to prevail, but war may also be a war for the sake of making peace, especially since not every man nor every society follows the right path. Therefore, such people must be fought. Goodness must inevitably stand in the way of evil, and as long as man has free will, there is the possibility that he will choose to follow the way of evil. Therefore, society must be able to reprimand wrongdoers. If a nation decides to aggress against another and fight it, war is necessary for defence. Likewise, had the True Lord made the whole year a time of sacred peace, idolaters and disbelievers would have had believers at their mercy since they would disobey Allah and wage war, whilst believers would have to obey Allah's commandment. This would mean that Allah would have imposed slavery upon those who believe in Him. Moreover, the forces of good and evil are bound to conflict with each other in this world, and the forces of truth and that of falsehood are bound to fight one another, and the truth must stand in the way of falsehood. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* permitted fighting in the sacred months so that if falsehood intensifies, truth can stand up to it powerfully. The poet, Ahmad Shawqi, said:

War for the sake of truth is, for you a sacred right

From venomous poisons medicines may be distilled

So, Allah *the Exalted* decreed that there be people who resist falsehood. He gave the forces of truth the right to wage war against the forces of falsehood and confront them. This is why He did not legislate that fighting to be forbidden throughout the whole year, but only in four months, during which the people may taste the sweetness of peace, cease their fighting and have an opportunity to reconcile.

Allah *the Exalted* set a universal law, which is that when truth and falsehood meet in battle, falsehood is always quickly routed. If you see a battle continue for years and years, know that it is a battle between two opposing forces of falsehood; furthermore, if such a battle is fought, Heaven does not intervene. If a battle is fought between truth and falsehood, however, then Heaven succours the side of truth against the side of falsehood. Battles never take place between two forces of truth since there is only one truth in the whole world, not two; rather, there is truth and there is falsehood, and if there is a conflict between them, it does not last long, for falsehood is doomed to perish by its very nature. If a war breaks out between two forces of falsehood, Heaven makes it clear to us that neither one of these falsehoods is more deserving of Allah’s succour than the other; rather, He leaves them to struggle with the means at their disposal, which makes war lasts for a long time.

When Allah *the Exalted* ordained the sacred months, He provided the requirements for constant peace for people, for war wearies people, making them long and love to be free of it. When the sacred months came, this was an opportunity for people to end their wars without either side feeling the shame and humiliation of defeat. We resort to this sometimes. For example, if we are in a house in which many people live – as is usual in the countryside – and something valuable is stolen from the house and the thief is one of those who live there, we want him to return the stolen item without being discovered. We may specify a particular place, and every resident comes by night and leaves a sack of soil in that place, so that the thief might place the item he stole amongst the sacks of soil. In this way, his small society gives him the opportunity to return what he stole without being found out by anyone, and this screens him without being exposed in front of everyone.

The sacred months are an opportunity for peace without any of the fighting parties being exposed to the people as being weak or unable to continue fighting. During these months, war is stopped so that Allah *the Exalted* screens each party, and the possibility of making peace and reconciliation is much stronger than that of provoking war.

However, what happens if sinful people who do not obey Allah attack the believers during the sacred months in which Allah has forbidden fighting? The True Lord does not ever intend His legislations to be a source of degradation for believers and ascendance for disbelievers. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* informs us that we must not allow His enemies to take advantage of the sanctity of the sacred months by stepping up their offensive against the believers, so He permitted believers to fight in these months if disbelievers attack them therein. The same applies for those places in which fighting is forbidden. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about fighting in the prohibited month. Say, "Fighting in that month is a great offence..."’ (*al-Baqara:* 217). Thus, Allah permits fighting in the sacred months for believers in the case of self-defence if disbelievers fight them first, and the True Lord also permits fighting in the Sacred Mosque if disbelievers attack believers therein. Although the unlawfulness of fighting in the Sacred Mosque applies during all times, the True Lord *the Most High* made an exception to this when He says: ‘Do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do fight you, kill them. This is what such disbelievers deserve.*’ (al-Baqara:* 191) In this way, the Divine Legislation came to protect believers from the tyranny of disbelievers. Believers must keep from fighting in the sacred months as Allah has commanded them, as long as the side which is fighting them also keeps from it; if disbelievers do not keep to this ban, Allah does not simply leave believers to be defeated. Therefore, the True Lord wants to establish the appropriate rulings for this matter: if both parties respect it, it applies; however, if disbelievers do not respect it, then Allah has permitted the believers to fight.

In this verse, He *the Most High* says: ‘Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, (laid down) in Allah’s Decree…’ (*at-Tawba:* 36). The Arabic word for ‘decree’ here is *kitab* which literally means 'book' or something which is written down and recorded. Words are only recorded if they have some kind of importance so that they can be used as evidence if there is a dispute. People do not write down or record ordinary conversations which they have.

Thus, where is ‘Allah’s Decree’, in which this is written? It is the Preserved Tablet which is with Allah, the Overseer of all the scriptures which were sent down to the succession of Messengers *peace be upon them*. *Kitab* can also refer to the Noble Quran in which this verse was sent down. The Quran is the collected compilation of all of Allah’s Ways of Guidance from the beginning with Adam *peace be upon him* until the coming of The Hour. Many of the rulings of the previous messages were changed in the Quran, whilst all doctrines remain the same. In addition, the Quran contains mention of cosmological facts which were unknown at the time of its revelation; for example, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons. Say, "They show the times appointed for people and for the pilgrimage..."’ (*al-Baqara:* 189). Likewise, the True Lord says: ‘It is He who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light, determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time. Allah did not create all these without a true purpose; He explains His signs to those who understand.’ (*Yunus:* 5)

Allah links years and measurements of time with the moon, and this measurement system is one of the inimitable rhetorical miracles of the Quran since the world searched for the most precise measurement of time and did not find anything more precise than the moon, and all oceanic life depends on the lunar calendar for its measure of time.

Allah *the Exalted* wants us, when we read a book, to carefully scrutinise the placement of the words therein. He says: 'Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, (laid down) in Allah's Decree on the day when He created the heavens and the earth …' (*at-Tawba:* 36). After this comes an exception, which is: 'out of these', i.e. out of these twelve months, '… four are sacred: this is the ever-true law (of Allah). Do not, then, sin against yourselves with regard to these (months)…' (*at-Tawba:* 36). Someone might ask why Allah *the Most High* did not say *fiha*, which is usually used for non-human plurals, instead of using the plural form *fihinna*, since this is a pronoun meant to refer to the words: '… out of these four are sacred…' (*at-Tawba:* 36), in which the ordinary feminine singular pronoun *ha* is used for 'these'.

We say that the True Lord generally forbids sin in every month, but if indeed it is the four sacred months which are meant here, then the forbidding of 'sin' in this verse means the sin of war. There is a linguistic rule of which we must be aware: namely in Arabic language, there are plurals which indicate a small amount as well as plurals which indicate a large amount. The small-amount plural refers to a number between three and ten. Some people get confused about these two kinds of plurals, one for a small amount and the other for a large amount. Furthermore, there is the issue of the Arabic 'broken plural', in which the form of the noun is changed, and the 'sound plural' in which a regular plural ending is affixed to the noun. The plurals of small and large amounts are not the same as broken and sound plurals: a broken plural means to change or 'break' the form of the noun. For example, the plural of the word *bayt* (house) is *buyut*, and the plural of *rasul* (Messenger) is *rusul*; the form of the noun is 'broken', or in other words, changed.

As for the word *muslim*, its plural is *muslimun*; the letters *un* have been added, but the singular root of the word *muslim* is still sound and has not been altered in any way. If you say *safina* (ship), the plural is *sufun*, so the singular form of the word has been altered.

The True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, (laid down) in Allah’s Decree…’ (*at-Tawba:* 36). As long as the number referred to is twelve months, it is above the number of the ‘small plural’ since this is for amounts between three and ten. Furthermore, if a plural is small, the Arabs treat it as a plural noun, whilst if the amount is greater than ten they treat it as a feminine singular noun. So, when Allah *the Exalted* refers to the four months which He has made sacred in His Decree, He says, ‘… Do not, then, sin against yourselves with regard to these…’ (*at-Tawba:* 36) using the feminine plural form *fihinna* for ‘these’ since – as we said - the ‘small plural’ is treated as a plural noun. The reason why the ‘large plural’ is treated as a feminine singular noun is that the singular is weak unless it is supported within a group.

Likewise, an individual is protected by the group, and in this way the entire group acts like one single body. A poet once mocked the notion of ‘strength in numbers’ by saying:

I care not for their plurality,

For every plural is feminine!

Thus, every plural in Arabic is considered to be feminine, and this is the case when Allah says: ‘… Do not, then, sin against yourselves with regard to these …’ (*at-Tawba:* 36). To reiterate, if we take these words to mean sin in general, then Allah has forbidden sin throughout the whole year, whether we sin against ourselves or against others. However, if we take it to mean the forbidding of war during the sacred months, then the word *fihinna* in ‘… Do not, then, sin against yourselves with regard to these …’ (*at-Tawba:* 36) gives the Arabic feminine plural, so this may also be the case.

The meaning of His Words 'Do not, then, sin against yourselves’ (*at-Tawba:* 36) is do not imagine that when you go against Allah’s Way that you, thereby, do anything to harm the True Lord; all you do by sinning against yourselves is to harm yourselves or others, but none of you can harm Allah. Allah’s attributes concerning creation are not affected whether people obey or disobey.

Therefore, to follow Allah's Way is for the people's own good. All of the moral values which Allah *the Almighty* has revealed are for our own good, whether pertaining to war or to peace, and whether forbidding or permitting.

Therefore, why did the True Lord choose the sun to measure the day, and the moon to measure the month? I say that the reason is that Allah wants to distribute His blessing over all times, to make it easy for people to perform His rights and to hold them responsible for what they do. If the months were measured by the sun, this would mean that the pilgrimage would take place in summer every year, and if those who live in cold places, for example, went to the pilgrimage in summer they would face serious danger; it would be as though there were no fairness in the rites of pilgrimage between those who live in cold places and those who live in hot places. If the pilgrimage were always in summer, those who live in hot places would perform it easily whilst those who live in cold places would find it difficult. Due to Allah's perfect fairness with His creation, we find that He has made the lunar year rotate throughout the solar year, so that the weather of the pilgrimage is not always the same. Thus, all environments and all people are equal under Allah's Laws.

Also, if fasting during the month of *Ramadan* were to be always in summer, some people would have fasted only eight or nine hours a day, whilst those who live near the North Pole would have fasted twenty hours a day. However, since *Ramadan* cycles through all the seasons of the year, those who live near the North Pole sometimes have to fast nineteen hours a day, and other times only two or three hours a day, and the one makes up for the other, so it is fair. If we take the average number of hours of fasting for those people for the whole year, we will find that their fast ranges between nineteen hours and three hours a day, and so the average is the same as those who fast eight or nine hours a day.

By calculation, we find that the lunar year is shorter than the solar year by 11.3 days every year, so that every 33.3 years there is a full year's difference between them. This means that sometimes *Ramadan* comes in January, sometimes February, sometimes March, and so on, as does the pilgrimage. In this way, all the believers have equal opportunities: those who fast long days in summer also fast short days in winter, and those who find fasting difficult because of the intense heat also fast in the cold of winter. In this way, *Ramadan* and the pilgrimage circulate throughout the months of the whole year. Allah is absolutely just to all by means of His true legislation, and the difficulty and ease of performing religious obligations are equally shared by all the believers.

If we consider how the day is determined by the sun, we find that when the True Lord connected the prayer times to the sun, He thereby assured that the prayer would always be offered. Why is this? The reason is that we see the moon on certain days, but we do not see it when it is waning; so, if prayer had been connected to the moon, we would not have been able to offer it every day. In addition, the moon only appears to us at irregular intervals. For example, when it is a new crescent, it only appears to the eye on the horizon for a few minutes, but the sun rises every day at a certain time and sets every day at a certain time, and it is bright enough for everyone to see from sunrise to sunset, so it is not difficult for people to see it. Therefore, the connection of the prayer to the sun makes it easy to perform the prayer obligation with constancy. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Prayer is the foundation or support of the religion: he who fulfils it fulfils the religion.’(1) It is the only Pillar of Islam which can never be excused: the poor person does not have to pay the poor-due, the sick person does not have to fast, the one who cannot afford to go on pilgrimage does not have to and the testimony ‘There is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' only has to be said once in a person’s life; prayer, on the other hand, is never excused. Thus, it is the foundation or support of the religion, and this is why it is repeated five times a day by people all over the world. Dawn in one place might be midday in another place, afternoon in a third, sunset in a fourth and evening in a fifth; this is all due to the time difference between different countries around the world. In this way, prayer times always exist somewhere on the earth, so that Allah *the Almighty* is always worshipped by prayer at any given time somewhere on the earth. Likewise, the call to prayer, ‘Allah is Great! I testify that there is no deity but Allah! I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’ is always being called somewhere on the earth at every given moment.

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(1) *This Hadith is weak, as stated by Al-‘Ajlun i (ii.39) and, Al-‘Iraqi in (Takhrij Ahadith Al-Ihya) (i. 147) An-Nawawi said that it was a false Hadith, but Ibn Hajar said that this was not the case, since Abu Na‘im – one of the teachers of Al-Bukhari – narrated it with the wording {Prayer is the buttress of the religion} with a sound chain from one of the Companions.*

We might find an unlettered man who does not know how to read or write, yet who is granted illumination and insight by Allah to say, ‘O, dawn, you contain all time!’ In other words, it is like he is saying, ‘O, dawn, you contain all the prayer times on the face of the earth.’ Apparently, it seems that there are five prayers, but the truth is that prayer is always being offered on the earth at every second. There is no part of the day when Allah *the Exalted* is not being worshipped by the acts of worship of every allocated time; this means that with every passing moment we find that Allah is being worshipped with the five prayers on the face of the earth. This is why prayer is connected to the sun.

When we realise this fact, and we find that there is someone or persons around the world praying to Allah at every single moment of time, we thereby recognise that the Quran encompasses a great many things and that every generation understands the Quran according to the capacity of its mind. We also realise that every time the mind progresses, the Quran gives new lessons. This confirms that the understanding of the verses of the Quran broadens with the progression of time, and we become cognisant of new meanings, which we had not been capable of conceiving before.

When orientalists say that the Quran contains contradictions pertaining to cosmological matters, we say to them, 'This is impossible.' They say: ‘The Quran says: "Moses continued, ‘Lord of the East and West and everything between them. If you would only use your reason…’" (*ash-Shu'ara':* 28). And it says: "He is Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two settings." (*ar-Rahman:* 17) And it says: "… and, by the Lord of every sunrise and sunset, We have the power …" (*al-Ma'arij:* 40).

These verses contain what appears to orientalists as contradictions. We reply that the progress of science has allowed us to understand these verses deeply since every place on the earth has its own sunrise and sunset, and this is the general view. Therefore, His Words ‘Lord of the East and West …’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 28) make sense. Moreover, we know that when the sun rises for some people, it sets for other people, and vice versa. Thus, with every sunrise there is a sunset, and with every sunset there is a sunrise; this means there are two sunrises and two sunsets. Moreover, we know that the time of sunrise and sunset for every day is different from the next day and that every second there is a sunset and sunrise, so the vow made here: ‘by the Lord of every sunrise and sunset’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 40) is due to the times of sunrise and sunset differing throughout the year.

If someone asks, ‘Why do you use the sun to determine days and the moon to determine months?’, we reply that the sun is connected to a daily visible phenomenon called ‘daytime’, and its absence is connected to a daily visible phenomenon called ‘night’. However, the moon is not connected to a daily phenomenon. It is true that the moon is always present, but one can only see it and be aware of it at certain times.

Some people say, ‘Since the purpose of this verse, ‘Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, (laid down) in Allah’s Decree…’ (*at-Tawba:* 36), is to speak of the four sacred months, what is the purpose of mentioning the other months?’ We say that you can only specify the four sacred months by first clarifying the division of the year into a number of months. This is essential if we are to specify when the four sacred months of the year occur. If not, how could we distinguish these months and their times? Therefore, we must first know that there is a year and that this year is composed of twelve months, prior to our determining when the four sacred months are. Three of the four sacred months are consecutive, and one of them stands alone: the three consecutive months are *Dhul-Qi’dah*, *Dhul-Hijja* and *Muharram*, and the month which stands alone is *Rajab*. The fact that the True Lord *the Most High* specifies these four months as sacred means that they must have some special characteristics, for had He wanted these months to be at just any time of the year, He would have left us to choose them ourselves according to our knowledge, and we would have chosen whatever months we preferred to cease fighting in. If Allah is specifying these months, it must be that they have some special characteristics. Some people say, ‘As long as He made the months twelve in number and made four of them sacred, and we want to fight in *Muharram*, let us do so and cease fighting in some other month – in this case, we will have preserved the number of sacred months which Allah specified, namely four.' We say that it is true that you will have preserved the number, but not what is numbered. Had the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not explained to us the identity of the four months that the noble verse mentions, out of the total twelve months, it would be the right of every faction to choose whatever months of the year it liked. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did indeed tell us which months they are, and by this, we learnt how to preserve both the number and the numbered.

The notion of number and numbered solves many confusions for us, including the confusion stirred up by orientalists who wish to speak ill of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying that Arabs used to be able to marry as many women as they wanted, and then Allah specified that a man may have no more than four wives. Furthermore, the Prophet commanded those who had more than four wives to keep four of them and divorce the others.(1) The orientalists add to this, 'If Muhammad commanded the people to do this, why did he not apply the same to himself? Also, why did he marry nine wives?' We say to this that if we undertake a fair accounting of the matter, we will find that this was not a privilege for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rather, it is an extra burden for him. If one says that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took nine wives, but his followers were only allowed four, he has only considered the number and not the numbered. What this means is that if one's four wives all died, he may marry four more, and if one wife dies, he may marry another. Therefore, as a Muslim man, we have an unlimited number of possibilities, such that if we divorce one or two wives, we may marry one or two others. We are restricted as to the number, but free in the identity of the numbered. As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the following noble verse was revealed concerning him: 'You [Prophet] are not permitted to take any further wives, nor to exchange the wives you have for others, even if these attract you with their beauty, but this does not apply to your slave-girls. Allah is watchful over all....' (*al-Ahzab:* 52)

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(1) *Ibn 'Umar narrated that Ghilan ibn Salam At-Thaqafi embraced Islam and had ten wives, so the Prophet said to him: {Retain four of them.} Narrated by Ahmad (ii. 44), Ibn Majah (1953) and ad-Daraqaṭni (iii. 269).*

Therefore, this legislation restricted the identity of the numbered for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; his exception was only with regard to the number permitted, for he would only marry according to the legislation willed by Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah says in the verse we are currently examining: 'Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, (laid down) in Allah's Decree on the day when He created the heavens and the earth …' (*at-Tawba:* 36). We saw before that His Words 'in Allah's Decree' mean the Preserved Tablet or the Quran, and His Words '… when He created the heavens and the earth…' (*at-Tawba:* 36) mean that this was not something that spontaneously entered the universe, rather, it was already ordained before the creation of man. Therefore, it is a matter of the cosmological order upon which the universe was created; He created the universe with great precision and exactitude. It is as though the True Lord wants to alert us to the fact that one of the purposes of the existence of sun and the moon is for them to be means of measuring time: for days, months and years. Thus, He says: 'The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5) What this means is that they were created according to a precise measure. He also says: 'He makes the dawn break; He makes the night for rest, and He made the sun and the moon to a precise measure...' (*al-An'am:* 69). This means that He wants us to use the sun and the moon as means of measuring time. This is consistent with the logic of things, for the thing you wish to use as a measure must itself be created according to a precise measure. If a clock, for example, is not made precisely, it is not fit to be used to tell time since it will run fast or slow. However, if it is made with precision, it will give the exact time. So, the precise measurement of time necessarily depends on the precise manufacturing of the tool used to make this measurement.

Before Allah *the Exalted* revealed this verse we are currently examining, Arabs knew about the four sacred months, but they would change their dates. For example, two factions of them would be at war, and if one of them sensed that their victory was nigh, but then the sacred months came, they would say, 'Let us replace this month with another month.' In other words, let us fight in the sacred month and then choose another month in which to refrain from fighting. They believed that as long as they preserved the number, they would thereby fulfil Allah's requirements, but they forgot that they had not preserved the identity of the numbered, along with forgetting that religion means a collection of moral values in which we must believe and must implement.

It is well known that faith means to yield and submit to Allah; if Allah commands something, we have no choice about it since He sees, with His Wisdom and Knowledge, a particular goal or wise reason for it, and at this point human free will must yield. In other words, none of us has the right to object to Allah's Will in any way; for in our ordinary lives if we were to see a man who is renowned for his wisdom and knowledge in a particular matter, and he is our superior in this regard, we would say to him, 'We will rely on you in this matter, and we will follow whatever decision you make.' This means that we submit our will to the will of this wise person. We do not give anyone this authority unless we have learnt by experience that he has great knowledge of this issue and that he is wise in the way he deals with it. If someone were to ask you, 'Why did you do what so-and-so advised you to do?', you answer that he is wise and experienced in these matters; this indicates that you trust his knowledge, his honesty and his wisdom.

The living and repeated example for us is that of our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*. When he was told that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had announced that he was a prophet, Abu Bakr said, 'If he indeed said this, he has spoken the truth.' Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said this because he knew from experience that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had never lied about anything before; if he would not lie about the people of this world, would he lie about Heaven?(1) Of course, this would not make sense.

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(1) *These particular words of Abu Bakr were spoken about the event of the Night Ascension, when he was told that the Messenger of Allah had claimed to have been taken up to Jerusalem and back in a single night, as 'Aisha narrated; and Abu Bakr added: 'Indeed, I believe what he says about things more amazing than that: I believe the revelation which comes to him morning and evening!' For this reason, Abu Bakr was named 'As-Sidd iq' ('the Great-faithed One'). Narrated by Al-Hakim and Ad-Dhahabi.*

You do not submit your affair to the hands of your equal unless you have experiences which confirmed for you that he has more expertise than you in a particular field. It is true that he is your equal as an individual and a human being, but he has more knowledge than you in the field in which he excels, so you do what he says without argument since you trust his knowledge. If you fall ill – Allah forbid – and a doctor in whose knowledge you trust says to you, ‘Take this medicine’, do you dispute or argue with him? Of course you do not, rather, you do as he says without any discussion. If someone asks you why you are taking this medicine, you tell him, ‘The doctor I trust prescribed it for me’, and this is enough of a justification.

Consider Allah Who prepared this world for us and revealed to us a way of guidance, asking us to submit to Him and to obey everything He commands with all aspects of life. If we need wisdom, He alone is the Wise; if we need power, He is always the All-Powerful; if we need dominance, He is the All-Dominant over His servants; if we need provision, He is the All-Provider, and He possesses the treasures of the heavens and the earth. Is there anyone who is more worthy than the True Lord for us to submit to and do as He commands us? No, of course not! So, if someone asks us why we follow this way of guidance, we say that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* commanded us to follow it. This is true Islam. The word Islam is derived from *taslim* (to submit); in other words, one submits his free will in life to the Will of *the Almighty* Creator. Religion means to adhere in obedience to Allah, which is why He says: ‘This is the ever-true law’. *Qayyim* (ever-true) means the ever-true authority for all the affairs of our life, and the evidence for this is well established in all that we have discussed. As long as Allah is the One Who says it, we do it. Therefore, the religion is the ever-true authority to which we adhere, and it also has authority over all the other Divine messages which were sent before it which means that it protects and encompasses them, as the True Lord says: ‘We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it and with final authority over them …’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 48).

The verse which we are currently examining specifies that there are sacred months in which fighting is prohibited, and it warns against sin, whether the sin of war or anything else. It has been said that this means the spirit of war must weaken for those who wish to wage war against the forces of falsehood, so that we may see falsehood before our eyes during the sacred months but be unable to fight it. We say that this is not correct, for this period of peace can be a period of recharge for the aspirations of those who fight against the forces of disbelief and evil; you might see falsehood right before your eyes, but you obey Allah's command to cease fighting, and this increases the reaction which falsehood produces by the challenge it poses to the believing soul. Once the sacred months are over, you will be even more fervent. It is just like the forbearing man whom someone abuses constantly, but he bears this patiently for two or three months. However, once his patience finally wears out, his anger will be all the more vehement, and his rebuttal all the more terrible. Therefore, it is said, 'Beware of the anger of the forbearing man' since his anger is more terrible than that of any other man. The forbearance which a believer shows a disbeliever during the sacred months should be a means of recharging a believer's fervour if the forces of falsehood keep up their challenge; this is a warning to believers not to allow the thought of fighting and the resolve to fight wanes in their souls. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And fight those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah, all together – just as they fight against you, (O, believers) all together' (*at-Tawba:* 36). The word 'all together' is preceded by the command 'fight'. Thus, which side is meant by the words 'all together'? Does this refer to the warring believers, or the warring disbelievers? This is an aspect of the richness of the Quranic discourse, giving us a word which gives a different meaning depending on how it is interpreted.

However, does the True Lord *the Most High* want us to fight polytheists when we believers are all together? Or does He want us to fight them when they are all together? As we know, the Arabic word *kaffah*, meaning 'all together', has one single form and cannot be made into a plural or a dual form: one man can be called *kaffa*, as can two men along with a whole group of people. It is derived from the word *kaff* (palm of the hand); it also means the 'edge' of something since it prevents it from going any further, and it also means the 'hem' of a garment which prevents it from unravelling.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: ‘And fight those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah, all together …’ (*at-Tawba:* 36). In other words, O, believers, unite together in fighting polytheists; this word can apply to even a single warrior, to two warriors or to a whole army. He says, ‘… fight against those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah,, all together – just as they fight against you, (O, believers) all together …’ (*at-Tawba:* 36); this means that the forces of falsehood always come together; the clear example of this from the life of the Prophet is that the Jews of Medina made an alliance with the polytheists against the Muslims. So, just as the forces of falsehood ally with one another, you must also unite your powers, O, believers and people of truth, to combat the falsehood, disbelief and polytheism.

‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Amazed am I at how the people are united to defend their falsehood, yet you have failed to defend your truth!’ ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was amazed that the people of truth were lax in defending their truth, whilst the people of falsehood were united in defending their falsehood. The Quran gives us a clear example of how the people of falsehood unite when it tells us what the Jews said to the polytheists of Mecca: ‘Do you not see how those given a share of the Scripture, [evidently] now believe in idols and evil powers? They say of the disbelievers, "They are more rightly guided than the believers."’ (*an-Nisa’:* 51) This means that the Jews said that the idol-worshippers were certainly more guided than the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers.(1) They said this even though their scripture told them that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would come with the final religion; and they even said to the idolaters of Medina a foretime, 'The time is nigh for the coming of a prophet whom we shall follow, and with whom we shall slay you even as ‘Ad and Iram were slain.’ Ad were the people of Prophet Ad, and Iram was the father of Ad. Thus, the scripture of the people of the Book contained tidings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a description of his attributes and his time, but when what their scriptures had said actually came true, they denied it and allied themselves with the people of falsehood.

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(1) *When Ka‘b ibn Ashraf led a Jewish delegation to Mecca to make a pact with them after the battle of Uhud, Abu Sufyan said to him, ‘You are man of scripture and learning, and we are unlettered and devoid of learning; tell me, which of us is more rightly guided and closer to the truth: us, or Muhammad?’ Ka‘b replied, ‘By Allah, you are closer to the truth than Muhammad.’ Narrated by Al-Qurttubi in his exegesis of an-Nisa’: 51*

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us that as long as the forces of falsehood unite against us and we are on the side of truth, we must unite to fight falsehood and bring an end to it. Therefore, Allah says: '… And fight against those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah,, all together – just as they fight against you, (O, believers) all together – and know that Allah is with those who are conscious of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 36). Thus, Allah commands believers to unite in the fight against polytheists. Furthermore, since Allah is on the side of believers, He will aid them. If Allah is on the side of some, and not on the side of others, then which side is stronger? Of course, the side of the believers is stronger: '… and know that Allah is with those who are conscious of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 36)

Knowledge, as we have said, is a conviction based on the certainty of evidence; what this means is that it requires no further evidence, for knowledge means to take something unknown, and then prove it with evidence so that it becomes a certainty. If Allah says 'and know', the level of knowledge here goes from 'the knowledge of certainty' (*at-Takathur*: 5) to 'the eye of certainty' (*at-Takathur*: 7). It is well known that knowledge means something known to the soul, which real life corroborates and which you can prove with evidence. If you know something by having been told of it, then your certitude in this knowledge will be commensurate with your trust in the one who told you of it.

For example, when Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was told that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had claimed to have been taken up from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque in Jerusalem and to have been taken up through the seven heavens, he said, 'If he indeed said this, he spoke the truth.' This was the extent of his trust in the one who said this, and concerning this, he based his trust in everything he subsequently said.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his wife Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* about the first revelation and spoke of his fear at what he had seen. She assured him, 'No, indeed. Allah would never disgrace you, for you keep your family ties, support the needy, give to those who have not, honour your guests with great generosity and strive to uphold the truth.'(1) In doing this, she based her judgement on her prior experience, and therefore, she was the first Muslim to use the principle of analogy to arrive at a sound line of reasoning; she based the present on the past.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says '… and know that Allah is with those who are conscious of Him' (*at-Tawba:* 36), it is enough for us to remember that this is the speech of Allah, taken as a matter of certainty in our souls. *'Ilm al-yaqin* (knowledge of certainty) may come to you from someone whose knowledge and honesty you trust, and when you actually see the thing he told you about by witnessing it for yourself, it becomes *ayn al-yaqin* (eye of certainty). When you actually experience and live it, it becomes *haqq al-yaqin* (true certainty).

When Allah *the Almighty* says '… and know that Allah is with those who are conscious of Him' (*at-Tawba:* 36), we find that some believers took this as knowledge of certainty, eye of certainty or true certainty since they witnessed this in battles when they were few in number. Those who accepted these words without any rational discussion – because it was Allah who spoke them – took it as certain knowledge; those who accepted these words to the level that it is as though they had witnessed them with their eyes took them as certain vision, while those who accepted these words as though they had lived them for themselves took them as certain experience. In order for us to know these levels better, let us read the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'Competition in [worldly] increase diverts you until you visit the graveyards. No! You are going to know. Then no! You are going to know. No! If you only knew with knowledge of certainty.' (*at-Takathur:* 1-5) This is the first level, namely knowledge which is certain because it comes from Allah.

'You will surely see the Hellfire. Then you will surely see it with the eye of certainty.' (*at-Takathur:* 6-7) This means that in the Hereafter you will see it with your eyes, after having believed in it as certain knowledge, for then it will become certain vision, namely a beholding of the eye. In this chapter of the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* gives us an image of the first two levels of certainty, namely certain knowledge and certain vision. In the Hereafter, a bridge will lead over hell, and all the people – both believers and disbelievers – will see Hellfire as they pass over it. They will both see it blaze and rage. When a believer passes over the bridge and sees hell with its horrors, he will see how faith has saved him from this awful torment, so he will rejoice; furthermore, when he enters paradise and sees its delights, his joy will increase: he will rejoice in being saved from suffering, and then rejoice again in the bliss of paradise and in Him Who gives it. Thus, a believer will say, ‘Praise be to Allah Who saved me from the Fire!’ This is a great blessing and a tremendous triumph. The True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘… Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise will have triumphed …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185). To be saved from hell is in itself a great grace, and to enter paradise is an even greater grace.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (3) and Muslim (160) on the authority of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her*

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘But every single one of you will approach it, a decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled.’ (*Maryam:* 71) *Wariduha* (will approach it) is derived from *warada* which means to reach it without actually entering it;(1) They say that ‘*warada al-ma’a*’ means to arrive to where a source of water is without actually drinking from it. Thus, every one of us will see hell, and a believer will recognise how Allah has favoured him by saving him from it, whilst a disbeliever will feel regret as he will be tormented in it.

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(1) *There are different interpretations of this ‘coming in sight’ (wurud): Some say it means ‘to enter’; Jabir ibn 'Abdullah said that he heard the Messenger of Allah say: {(Wurud) means to enter: every single righteous and wicked person shall enter it, but for the believer it shall be cold and peaceful as it was for Abraham… And then Allah will deliver those who fear Him from it, and leave the evildoers in it on their knees.} Narrated by Ahmad, Al-Hakim and Adh-Dhahabi.*

Others say it means to pass over the bridge above hell, as several Hadiths on this matter indicate.

Others say it means to come near it and see it, as all will do when they stand in the place of Reckoning.

Some say that this (wurud) means the fevers which may afflict the believer in this worldly life, which are like a taste of hell for the believer, who thereafter will not enter it.

Others say it means to see it, whilst one is in the grave, when the successful will be saved from it, but those who are destined to enter it will enter it and then be taken out by virtue of intercession or some other grace of Allah; this is indicated by the Hadith: {When one of you dies, his ultimate destiny (in the Hereafter) is shown to him morning and evening.}Imam Al-Qurtubi mentions all these possibilities in his exegesis, and says that the believers will pass through hell, but it will be cool and peaceful for them so that they will not even realise they have passed through it.

I gave the example before – to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection – of the one who reads about New York City of the USA. The reader knows that it is built on several islands that it contains skyscrapers and that it has a very large population. This reading gives him certain knowledge. When this person gets on a plane and sees the city from the sky, he gains certainty by vision. Also, when he lands and lives there amid the skyscrapers and large population, he attains certainty through experience of it.

In the chapter of *at-Takathur*, Allah only mentions the first two stages of certainty, and He speaks about the third stage in the chapter of *al-Waqi'a* when He says: 'If that dying person is one of those who will be brought near to Allah, he will have rest, ease and a Garden of Bliss. If he is one of those on the Right, [he will hear], "Peace be on you" from his companions on the Right, but if he is one of those who denied the truth and went astray, he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in Hell. This is the certain truth.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 88-95) *Haqq al-yaqin* (the certain truth), or literally 'the truth of certainty', is the final stage of knowledge. A person might deny a certain fact when he reads it or argue about something he has witnessed, but he cannot deny something which he experiences for himself. The history books tell us that this indeed happened to our master 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who said about one of the battles in which he fought, 'When I held my sword aloft to cut off so-and-so's head, I found that something had been ahead of me and had severed his head.'(1) This means that he witnessed this for himself.

After giving His verdict concerning those who alter the sacred months or exchange them by bringing them forward or postponing them, Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

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(1) *Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani narrates in (Fath al-Bar i) (v. 313) that it was actually Abu Waqid Al-Laythi who said this.*

إِنَّمَا ٱلنَّسِىٓءُ زِيَادَةٞ فِي ٱلۡكُفۡرِۖ يُضَلُّ بِهِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ يُحِلُّونَهُۥ عَامٗا
وَيُحَرِّمُونَهُۥ عَامٗا لِّيُوَاطِـُٔواْ عِدَّةَ مَا حَرَّمَ ٱللَّهُ فَيُحِلُّواْ مَا حَرَّمَ ٱللَّهُۚ زُيِّنَ لَهُمۡ
سُوٓءُ أَعۡمَٰلِهِمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهۡدِي ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ٣٧

Postponing sacred months is another act of disobedience by which those who disregard [God] are led astray: they will allow it one year and forbid it in another in order outwardly to conform with the number of God's sacred months, but in doing so they permit what God has forbidden. Their evil deeds are made alluring to them: God does not guide those who disregard [Him] [37] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 37)

Nasi'a means postponement. It is as though if they were fighting and a sacred month came, they would say, 'We will transfer this sacred month to next month' and continue with their fighting; by doing this, they permitted the month which should have been forbidden and made an ordinary month into a sacred month. Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* makes it clear that such an action is an increase of disbelief since it makes permitted that which is not permitted and makes forbidden (sacred) that which is not forbidden, for disbelief means to lack faith, and if you then try to alter and change the way of faith, this is an increase in disbelief.

He then says: '… by which those who disregard [Allah] are led astray. They will allow it one year and forbid it in another …' (*at-Tawba:* 37). The verb 'led astray' here is in the passive voice, which means that there must be someone who leads disbelievers astray; this is the work of Satan, for there is a difference between going astray and leading astray: to go astray is a personal matter, whilst to lead astray is to affect others. There are some who are astray and are not content to only be astray themselves, rather, they go to others, lead them astray and tempt them into sin by making it seem alluring to them. Therefore, those who go astray will be requited, but those who lead others astray will be requited even more severely. If a man is astray, he is a disbeliever in his own self; what this means is that his error does not go beyond his own person and is not transferred to others. However, if he tries to tempt others into error and sin, he both goes astray and leads others astray by doing this.

Some orientalists try to use this matter as a way to criticise the Quran – without any understanding or sagacity on their part – by saying, ‘The Quran says: "No burdened soul will bear the burden of another …" (*Fatir:* 18), and then in another verse it says: "They will bear their own burdens and others besides..." (*al-’Ankabut:* 13). So, how can the Quran say that no one will bear more than his own burden, and then say that there will be those who bear burdens other than their own?’

We say to them that they have not understood the meaning. The first case is that of a person who has gone astray by committing sins, but has not tempted others to do the same; this means that, he has disobeyed Allah but not gone any further than this. As for the second case, this refers to a person who both goes astray and leads others astray; in other words, not only did he commit sins, but he also tempted others to disobey Allah. Every time he tempted someone to sin, he earned the same burden of sin as the one he tempted did.

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘… by which those who disregard [Allah] are led astray. They will allow it one year and forbid it in another.’ (*at-Tawba:* 37) Of course, they permitted and forbade in this way because they saw that it was in their interest to do so, which means that they subjected the sacred months to their own private desires and went against what Allah willed for His universe the day He created the heavens and the earth.

However, why did they make it permissible one year and forbidden another year? Allah *Glorified is He* gives the answer: ‘… in order to conform outwardly with the number of Allah's sacred months …’ (*at-Tawba:* 37). Thus, they did so in order to preserve the number of months which Allah *the Exalted* made sacred so that they could justify their actions, and say to themselves, ‘We are not sinful, for if Allah wants there to be four sacred months, we have adhered to this!’ However, Allah’s Law does not only specify the number, but also the identity of the numbered, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specified for us which months are sacred.(1)

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(1) *Abu Bakr narrated that the Prophet said: {Time began to turn its course on the day Allah created the heavens and the earth. The year is made of twelve months, of which four are sacred: three are consecutive: Dhu al-Qa‘da, Dhul-Hijja and Muharram, and then there is Rajab Mudarr, which stands between Jumada and Sha‘ban.} Narrated by Al-Bukhari (3197) and Muslim (1679)*

The first person to intercalate the sacred months in this way was either ‘Amr ibn Luhayy or Na’im ibn Tha’laba, in which one of them profaned (made fighting permissible in) the month of *Muharram* and made another month sacred in its stead.

Those who did this knew that there were four sacred months, proven by how they permitted and forbade in this way, which they would not have done, had they not known this. However, they wanted to subject Allah’s Law to their own whims, and this was their motivation for profaning the month of *Muharram* and making another month sacred instead. They wanted to subject Allah’s demands to their own vain desires, for *Muharram* is proven sacred by evidence from the Quran, and it is a sacred month whether men postpone it or not. It is a sacred month by Allah’s Will, not by the will of men. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* declared that this postponement is an increase of disbelief, for when you defer the sanctity of *Muharram* to another month, you thereby do two things: you profane a sacred month which itself is an act of disbelief, then you sanctify an ordinary month which is also an act of disbelief. The True Lord *the Most High* then says: ‘… in order to conform outwardly with the number of Allah's sacred months, but in doing so they permit what Allah has forbidden …’ (*at-Tawba:* 37). Allah declared that they were guilty of disbelief for permitting what He had forbidden in this way.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘… Their evil deeds are made alluring to them …’ (*at-Tawba:* 37). To ‘make evil deeds alluring’ means to add something to it in order to make it acceptable to people. A woman, for example, has her natural beauty, but she *tatazayyan* (wears make-up) in order to exaggerate her charms so that she will seem more beautiful to men; this is what *tazyin* (to make evil deeds alluring) means. Therefore, to make something seem good means to change its appearance, but not its essence. This occurs in many different things. For example, one can ornament an idea, as when a commander comes to his troops as they prepare for battle and says to them, ‘You shall win victory in mere hours, none of you shall be harmed and your enemy shall flee’; this kind of ornamentation is praiseworthy.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wants to reveal to us the true nature of how they made evil deeds alluring when they profaned the sanctity of the sacred months. Furthermore, He revealed to us that this was a blameworthy kind of ornamentation by saying: '… Their evil deeds are made alluring to them. Allah does not guide those who disregard [Him].' (*at-Tawba:* 37) As long as evil seems good to them, this action is outside the confines of guidance and has gone beyond the confines of praiseworthy ornamentation into the confines of blameworthy ornamentation. As long as they have abandoned guidance, Allah *the Exalted* will not aid them, for He does not aid those who disbelieve, those who do evil or those who are iniquitous.

Allah *the Exalted* thus, says: '… Allah does not guide those who disregard [Him].' (*at-Tawba:* 37) This means that by disbelieving they have expelled themselves from Allah's guidance. The True Lord *the Most High* did not deny them guidance, but they are the ones who denied it to themselves by disbelieving and thereby expelling themselves from Allah's Will to guide them. This applies only to the guidance of aid; we know that Allah gives both guidance of direction and guidance of aid. The guidance of direction is given to both believers and disbelievers, and Allah guides everyone to His Way, by showing them His signs, and likewise, the Messengers *peace be upon them*, convey the Divine Way, which clearly shows the path that leads to Allah's good pleasure, as well as the path that leads to His wrath and chastisement. Those who believe in Allah thereby follow into His Will to give them the guidance of aid, and thus, He aids them in this world and gives them Paradise in the Hereafter. As for those who refuse the guidance of direction from Allah, He does not give them the guidance of aid since they disbelieved first. The same is the case with evildoing and iniquity: those who commit these sins thereby deny themselves the guidance of aid. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… Allah does not guide those who disregard [Him]' (*at-Tawba:* 37). He *the Most High* also said the same before : '… Allah does not guide those who disregard [Him]' (*at-Tawba:* 19) He *the Almighty* also says: '… Allah does not guide those who disregard [Him]' (*at-Tawba:* 24) Thus, they were the ones who chose disbelief, evil or iniquity, and thereby, they denied themselves the guidance of aid about which the True Lord says: '… Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path and given them their awareness [of Him]' (*Muhammad:* 17).

After commanding the believers to face up to falsehood all together, just as the forces of falsehood will unite against them and fight them all together, the True Lord says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَا لَكُمۡ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمُ ٱنفِرُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
ٱثَّاقَلۡتُمۡ إِلَى ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ أَرَضِيتُم بِٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا مِنَ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۚ فَمَا
مَتَٰعُ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

Believers, why, when it is said to you, ‘Go and
fight in God’s way,’ do you feel weighed down to
the ground? Do you prefer this world to the life
to come? How small the enjoyment of this world
is, compared with the life to come! [38]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 38)

When you hear the words, ‘You who believe’ (*at-Tawba:* 38), this call is specifically for those who believe in Allah; for Allah does not command those who do not believe in Him to do anything. None of the rulings of Allah’s way ordain moral responsibility for the disbeliever or the non-believer; all the rulings of Allah’s way are directed to the believers, for, they have chosen to believe by their free will, and have entered faith willingly. He says to you, ‘As long as you have believed in Me as the All-Powerful, All-Sustaining Allah, who possesses all attributes of perfection, so listen to Me as I tell you what I planned for you as a way of life’.

No one should imagine that he can embrace faith without following Allah’s way,(1) and no one should imagine that he can harm Allah in any way. We gave the example before of the ill person who chooses the most skilled of doctors – and no one forces him to go to him – and the doctor runs test to diagnose the illness, and prescribes the treatment for it; but suppose that the ill person leaves the doctor’s clinic, tears up the prescription or buys the medicine but refrains from taking it. In doing this, has he punished the doctor or only punished himself?

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(1) As Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Now whenever Allah and His Apostle have decided a matter, it is not for a believing man or a believing woman to claim freedom of choice insofar as they themselves are concerned: for he who (thus) rebels against Allah and His Apostle has already, most obviously, gone astray.’ (*al-Ahzab*: 36)

The doctor is not affected or harmed in any way by what this ill person does, but he is the one who will have to suffer as the illness becomes worse, and he thereby leads himself towards destruction. The same is true of the man who does not follow Allah's way: he squanders his own soul and immerses it in misery. For the True Lord made His way of guidance so that it contains the cure to all of man's ailments; if man acts in accordance with it he is saved from the trials of this worldly life; and if a society acts in accordance with it, it will not be marred by misery, but rather will be filled with ease, security and peace of mind. And those who do not act in accordance with it do not harm Allah in the least, but rather, they cause themselves misery and destruction.

When the True Lord addresses those who believe, He clarifies to them, 'accept this commandment from Me, for within it lies happiness for man in this life and the next'. The True Lord does not issue any of his commandments or prohibitions without preceding it with the words 'You who believe', such as when He says, 'You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you…' (*al-Baqara:* 183), and when He says, 'You who believe, fair retribution is prescribed for you in cases of murder…' (*al-Baqara:* 178).

Grammatically speaking, these commandments were not given in the active form, so who ordained them? It was the True Lord. The verb is in all instances given in the passive form, which suggests that these actions of ordaining were performed by many. We might ask, 'Since Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who ordained, why did He not say, "O believers, I have ordained for you", and why did He say, "You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you…" (*al-Baqara:* 183)'? We say, 'It is because although Allah is the One Who ordained it. He did not ordain it for all of His creatures, but rather, for those who believed in Him. By having faith, you have become subject to all the components of moral responsibility; it is as though the True Lord did not ordain it, then obliged you to do it, but rather, your adherence became a fact the moment you decided, of your own free will, to embrace faith. In this way, all these rulings were ordained for us by our own free choice. Those who did not choose faith are not ordained to obey the rulings of faith. They cannot be obeyed without the contract of faith which exists between the believers and their Creator. He respected the fact that we entered this contract, so He did not only ascribe it to His own Mighty Essence, but rather, He included in it all those who embraced faith.

If anyone asks about the wisdom of obliging people to carry out religious duties, we say to him, 'Sufficient wisdom is found in the fact that He is the One Who commanded it'. Moreover, the knowledge of the wisdom can only be shared among equals. If a sick person goes to the doctor and he prescribes medicine for him, and the patient keeps on discussing the medicine and its benefits with the doctor, the doctor will refuse to discuss the matter and will say to the patient, 'Go to medical school and study there for seven years, and get your qualifications. Only then we can discuss the matter with each other'. So, you base the justification of the instruction on the status of the one who gives it, even though a human who gives an instruction might make a mistake. If a group of doctors are to examine a patient whose case all previous doctors failed to detect, then they sit after the examination and discuss it. Each doctor will gladly consider the opinions of the other because they are equal in education and learning. But if you want to ask about the wisdom for one of Allah's commandments, you will find no one is equal to Allah, and so this discussion is unacceptable.

So, the one who gives an instruction must have a standing which qualifies him to do so, and the standing of the True Lord is that you believe in Him. Therefore, my opinion is that to look for the reasons behind Allah's commandments is something which faith does not allow. If it is said, for example, that Allah commanded us to fast so that the wealthy person would feel the pain of hunger and therefore feel compassion for the poor, we say, 'No, because if this was the case, poor people would have not been obliged to fast since they already know all about the pain of hunger'. Also, if it is said to us that the wisdom of fasting is that it cures such-and-such illnesses, we say, 'This is not the case because otherwise Allah would not have excused sick people from fasting as He did when He said, "…anyone who is ill or on a journey should make up for the lost days by fasting on other days later...." (*al-Baqara:* 185)

Allah has excused the sick from fasting, then, how can anyone say that the rationale behind the decree of fasting is to cure illnesses? Indeed, there are some illnesses which make it impossible for one to fast.

So, we fast because Allah has commanded us to fast. Since Allah said it, the sufficient reason to do it is the fact that Allah said it, and nothing else besides. If the wisdom of the commandment happens to be apparent, this causes our faith to increase. For example, it has been proven that eating pork is bad for man, because pork is full of microbes and germs which the pig imbibes when it eats refuse. But we do not refrain from eating pork for this reason, rather because Allah commanded us to do so. Had science not discovered this fact for us, this would not have detracted from our conviction of not eating pork; for we take our moral responsibilities from Allah, not from any other source.

Let us return to our examination of the noble verse, ‘You who believe, what is [the matter] with you that, when it is said to you, “Go forth and fight in Allah's way”, you cling heavily to the ground?’ (*at-Tawba:* 38) The words *ma lakum* (what is [the matter] with you that) come when we wonder at a situation which is inconsistent with another. It is as though the notion that the believers should engage in war against the disbelievers is something expected and demanded by the situation. When the believers fight against the disbelievers, they thereby impart a measure of certitude to pious people, for if pious people do not find someone to keep the disbelievers in check, those of them who are likely to be tempted to deviation might deviate. But when they find that there is someone to keep the disbelievers in check, and so their enemy is subjected to chastisement, this will strengthen their faith as believers. It is like when you say to a pupil, ‘What is the matter with you that you are neglecting your studies when the examination is soon’? That is, when the exam is soon the student is supposed to study hard, and if the pupil neglects his studies, we wonder at his behaviour as it is not consistent with what should be the case. Therefore, we find it hard to believe that such negligence should occur, just as we would find it hard to believe that a sick person would ignore his medicine even though he is in pain.

Here, the True Lord expresses wonder at how the believers were slow to respond when they were called to fight, for the power of faith necessitates that the believers be always prepared to fight. This preparation firstly intimidates the disbelievers and prevents them from attacking and underrating the believers, secondly it makes the believers able to respond and fight back at any time and thirdly it gives a measure of certitude to the faithful society when it sees that there are those who are always prepared to resist the disbelievers if they attack the believers and try to debase their society.

So, for the believing society to be strong and secure, the believers must always be prepared to fight in Allah’s cause and with the desire to be martyred. The True Lord says, ‘…what is [the matter] with you that, when it is said to you, “Go forth and fight in Allah’s way” (*at-Tawba:* 38). It is as though a constant state of preparedness for fighting in Allah’s way is something which must necessarily exist by natural disposition and intelligence; and if this preparedness weakens or diminishes, this is a cause for wonder because the believers know that the society of disbelief always lies in wait for them, so they must be constantly prepared for the confrontation. The True Lord *the Exalted* condemns the believers for clinging to the earth, or slackening, when they were called to fight in Allah’s cause.

The Arabic word for ‘go forth’ is *infiru*, from the root word *nafara* which means to set out to something which disrupts one’s stability. When one is sitting in his place, something might take place and disturb him so that he is forced to stand up and deal with it. For instance, when you see that a person is about to fall into a well, this disturbs you and you rush from your place to pull him away from danger. From this word is derived the word *nufra* which means estrangement which takes place between loved ones who live in constant affection, but then something happens between them which turns this love into coldness.

So, the word ‘go forth’ means to set out to deal with a provocative situation; and this is natural and inevitable because the actions of the disbeliever will stir up the believers to confront them. The True Lord’s words ‘go forth’ indicate that the disbelievers will constantly do things to rile the believers. And the True Lord says, ‘You who believe, what is [the matter] with you that, when it is said to you, “Go forth and fight in Allah's way”, you cling heavily to the ground?’ (*at-Tawba:* 38)

Heavily, which is derived from heavy, means that an object's weight is too much for the one who carries it. If you say, 'This is heavy', this means that its weight is more than the power of your muscles can handle, so you cannot carry it. As for 'to cling heavily', it indicates the incompatibility of something with the nature of its composition. If you say, 'So-and-so is heavy', it means that he weighs so much that he cannot stand up without difficulty, nor can he move without discomfort, whereas, 'To cling heavily' means to feign difficulty in doing something; that is, you are able to do something, but you pretend you are unable to do it. For example, there might be something which weighs only one pound, but you claim that it is too heavy for you and you cannot lift it. So, the meaning of 'you cling heavily to the ground' is that you claim that this is too difficult when this is not really the case; you have the power to fight, but you act as though you have no power.

Therefore, we see that the situation required *nafrah* (going forth to battle) to combat the forces of disbelief because Allah's way which the believers chose for themselves and adhered to brought peace, security and assurance to them and to others. It is as though to cling heavily to the ground is the opposite of to respond and fight in Allah's cause, and to do otherwise would be to act in the cause of Satan, or the cause of the soul's vain desires.

Scholars have spoken about what makes man sin which are the soul that suggests things to him, and Satan. Man sins because of one of these two inducements only. But what is the difference between the two, and how can one be aware of this? The scholars say that if the soul urges you to do a specific sin, such that if you think of something else it keeps on coming back and urging you to do the same sin to gain a passing pleasure; this urging comes from the 'soul which enjoins evil'.

But Satan does not want this from you, he wants you to disobey Allah's way by any means; if you resist him from tempting you to take unlawful wealth, he will make the desire for women seem alluring to you, and if this fails, he will try and tempt you with alcohol. He wants you to be a sinner no matter what the sin is, whereas your soul wants you to commit the sin which it desires – this is the difference.

So, we see that there are two realities: one that calls the believers to fight the disbelievers who seek to corrupt Allah's way on earth, and another reality which calls them to cling to the earth and avoid this fighting either because of love for this world and fulfilling impulses, or else it is because of Satan's tempting. Therefore, the True Lord says, '…are you contented with this world to the life to come?' (*at-Tawba:* 38) Contentment is the love of the heart; if someone is content, this means that he is happy with his present condition.

Had the believers clung heavily to the earth instead of fighting in Allah's cause, this would have meant that something in their souls have defeated something else; that is contentment with this worldly life have defeated the love for the Hereafter. But the logic of faith says that if there is something else besides this world, or another life besides our worldly life, then we must compare what this world can give us with what the Hereafter can give us. If we are content with what this material life can give us, the believer is therefore bereft of all ambition and all intelligence because he is content with a small and passing pleasure, yet rejects an eternal pleasure which is given by Allah's power.

If you scrutinise this world carefully, you will find that it is always changing and transforming. The healthy become sick, the rich become poor and the strong become weak. The pleasures of this world are in constant change, and you have no control over them. You cannot protect yourself from illness, weakness or poverty because these are all vicissitudes which govern you, you cannot govern them or overpower them. If you are content with the pleasures of this life today, you cannot be sure that they will last until tomorrow.

Therefore, you must not delay implementing that which Allah commands you to do because you are able to do it now, but you cannot be sure that you will be able to do it tomorrow.(1) Likewise, you should not consider religious obligations to be something which will take from your freedom or your wealth; rather, it takes from you and gives to you at the same time. If Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to pay alms, you might think that this decreases your wealth,(1) or that it is a loss; but we say, ‘This might seem to be the case superficially, but He takes this wealth and makes it grow and increase for you’. A single pound, for example, might be increased to seven hundred pounds, then, increased beyond this by as much as Allah wills. Moreover, the very same ruling which takes from you when you are rich will give to you if you become poor and need other people’s help. If the same ruling which takes, will also give, this is justice and an assurance against the vicissitudes of time. You should always keep both sides of the bargain in mind. When you give to those who do not have, you must remember that there might come a day when you do not have.

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(1) *Ibn `Abbas narrated that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Take advantage of five before five. Your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your occupation, and your life before your death.' Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (iv. 306), and by Ibn al-Mubarak in Az-Zuhd (2).*

The Arabic word for ‘this worldly life’ is *dunya.* This word is completely appropriate since the word *dunya* literally means ‘the lowest’, opposite of ‘the highest’. The highest life will be in the Hereafter. If this worldly life is the lowest life, then why would you cling to the lower unless this is simply a result of the weakness of your resolve?

A fine example(2) of the strength of faith is set by `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz *Allah rest his soul*. Before he became caliph, he used to wear the finest clothes and the best perfumes; people would pay the one who washed `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz’s clothes to wash their clothes with them so that their clothes would be infused with his perfume; such was the fineness of the perfume that `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz would put on his clothes, which would spread to all the clothes that were washed with them. When `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz became caliph, they would bring him the kind of rough clothes he would disdain to wear before he became caliph, and yet he would refuse to wear them and say, ‘Bring me clothes that are rougher still!’, and he ceased to wear perfume. This was because his standards had changed; there was no contradiction in this, but rather indeed, it was a higher standard of leading life.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Charity does not diminish wealth, and Allah only increases the honour of the servant who forgives, and no one humbles himself before Allah save that He raises them.’ Narrated by Muslim (2588), Ahmad (ii. 235) and At-Tirmidhi (2029).*

(2) The story of perfuming the clothes of `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz Allah *rest his soul* before becoming a caliph and his status afterwards.

He said, ‘My soul yearned for a position of command, so I said to it, “Be still my soul”, and when I got that position, my soul yearned for the caliphate, so I refused it. And when I attained to the position (of caliph), my soul yearned for Paradise, so I follow every path which leads to it.’(1) Thus, we see that there was no contradiction in his conduct in both cases, but rather, his gain in the faith-based bargain increased ever higher. He always sought a higher level. First, he yearned for the office of governorship, and when he gained it he yearned for the caliphate, and when he gained it, he yearned for Paradise; so his aspiration was always rising higher.

I say that his behaviour was not contradictory in the least. The psychologists have explained to us that contradiction in human behaviour is based on different comparisons: a man compares one thing to another, then to another, and so on; for everything in this worldly life is relative. The meaning of ‘relativity’ is that something is referred to the other things around it. If you say, ‘I live above so-and-so’, at the same time you live below so-and-so who lives on the floor above you. So, you are above one person and below another at the same time. Do not take cognizance of one point and ignore the other. This is what is called a ‘relative concept’; that is, concepts do not exist by themselves, but rather, they are based on something else to which they are compared. Likewise, the standards which differentiate things must be based on their value to you. If you look at this worldly life, you find that the True Lord called it the *dunya* (the lowest) and there is no lower name to describe it. Why? Because the pleasures you enjoy in this world are commensurate to the time you spend in it, i.e. to your life-span. However long life lasts, it is still limited to a few years. Your enjoyment of it might lasts until you are thirty, forty or fifty, more or less. Moreover, your enjoyment in this life is based on what your powers can attain. The one who has one thousand pounds gains what enjoyment they can bring him, the one who has several thousand gets what enjoyment he can from them and the one who has millions gets even more. So, everyone gets as much enjoyment as the wealth he possesses can buy him. Even if a person attains to the highest pleasure he can in this world by becoming a millionaire, these millions will either leave their owner by running out, or else he will leave them by dying; either the one, or the other will assuredly happen. So, the enjoyment of this world will either be taken from you, or you will be taken from it.

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(1) *Abu Na`im related this in (Hilyat al-Awliya`) (v. 331).*

By contrast, the bliss of the Hereafter is eternal and is never taken from you, and you live therein forever and will never be taken from this bliss by destruction or death. This bliss does not depend on the limits of your own powers, for it is drawn from the power of Allah. It is as though the delight is much greater than your powers, and much higher than anything you could possibly attain. For example, if you have a coin and a poor man approaches you, you give him the coin so he can get something to eat. Apparently, it seems that you have preferred the poor man to yourself by giving him what you have so he can spend it, and denying it to yourself. But you have preferred yourself to the poor man because you have given him this coin so that Allah will multiply it for you -from ten to seven hundred times-. Then, which one of you has benefitted and gained the most? You have.

True religion is opposed to foolish selfishness, and it promotes smart selfishness by transferring you to a higher level of self-love. When you give charity, you love yourself because you want to give what is best and most beneficial. When you give to a person who is equal to you in social status, such as if you give him a gift on a special occasion, you expect that he will give you a similar gift on another occasion. So, the gifts are equal, and this person might return the gift to you, or he might not; or he might intend to return it, but be prevented by circumstances from doing so. But the True Lord says, ‘Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over?’ (*al-Baqara:* 245)

So, when you give for Allah’s sake, you do not receive an equivalent gift in return, but rather, you receive a gift which has been multiplied with manifold increase; and the One Who gives you this reward is Allah who always exists, and whose bestowal will never run out for you, because His power is eternal, and a time will never come when He is unable to repay you what you have given. His are the treasures of the heavens and the earth, and Allah *the Exalted* is always able to multiply your reward no matter how valuable of what you give. Yet, if you prefer this worldly life to the Hereafter, you thereby judge by your own standards of value, standards which are false and worthless. If you possess the correct standards, you will know that the highest benefit is gained for you when you give and work for the Hereafter, not for this worldly life. Therefore, the True Lord says, '…Are you contented with this world to the life to come?' (*at-Tawba:* 38) That is, you seem to want this worldly life instead of the Hereafter, yet this comparison is neither intelligent nor wise.

The word *min* (to) indicates substitution referring to the words that precedes it, 'with this world'; and the usual form of substitution and exchange is buying and selling. We know that the word 'with' usually refers to what is paid. You say, 'I bought it with however many dirhams'; that is, you gave the dirhams to buy the thing. It is as though those who are content with this worldly life have taken this life in exchange for the Hereafter, and this is a bargain devoid of intelligence and wisdom.

After reproofing the believers' content with this worldly life and neglecting the Hereafter, Allah says, 'How small the enjoyment of this world is compared with the life to come!' (*at-Tawba:* 38) 'Enjoyment' refers to something which is enjoyed. Man cannot be certain that he will enjoy the life of this world, for this is doubtful. Not every living creature enjoys life, and there are people who are miserable and worn-out, and people whose whole lives are spent in toil; and even those who enjoy life now; how can they know what the future will bring to them? Is it not possible that this enjoyment may be temporary? Is it not possible that some circumstance might befall them, or that some twist of fate might fill their lives with misery?

We find that when intelligent people see that one of the favours which Allah has given them might make their life difficult, they give thanks to Allah,whilst those who consider and perceive matters superficially forebode ill tidings, react and end up making things worse. By contrast, a smart person knows that man lives in a world of vicissitudes which indicates that events come along and move us from one state to another: from richness to poverty, from health to sickness and so on for the other worldly states which change and alter. Nothing lasts forever in this worldly life and as long as the world is subject to vicissitudes, people's circumstances must always be changing.

Suppose that a man reaches the top such that he cannot rise any further. We say to him: You should not be filled with joy and pride at your situation, and you must never forget that you live in a world of vicissitudes, and that nothing lasts forever; for if it had lasted for someone else, you would not have been able to get it yourself since you only got to the top because someone else fell from it. This means that if you get to the top, you will not remain there forever without any change; and as long as you have got as high as you can go, the only possible change that can happen to you is that you will go down. Since once you get to the top there is nowhere else left to climb. The change which you may expect, then, is that you will descend; it is as the proverb goes: 'expect the vanishing of what becomes complete'. Therefore, we find that people of wisdom and insight say that afflictions in wealth and life are actually a cause for bounty's completion. It is as though the True Lord does not want to make His bounties, in this world, complete because if they were completed, they would have to decline. As such, as long as afflictions occur, they will inevitably decline.

When He says, 'How small the enjoyment of this world is compared with the life to come!' (*at-Tawba:* 38), He wants to stress the fact that the bounty of the Hereafter is greater. *Fi,* which literally means 'in' (here: compared with); if you say that something is 'in' something else, which one of them is bigger? The one which contains the other is bigger. If we say that so-and-so is in the house, this means that the house must be bigger than he is, otherwise it would not have accommodated him. If we say that Mohamad is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia or in Egypt, this implies that there is a container and content, and the container must be larger than the content so that it is big enough to encompass it on all sides.

The True Lord's words, 'How small the enjoyment of this world is compared with the life to come!' (*at-Tawba:* 38), mean that the enjoyment of this world is nothing compared to the enjoyment of the Hereafter because the enjoyment of the Hereafter is so vast that it encompasses all the enjoyment of this worldly life and more besides. As long as these words issue from the omnipotent power of Allah, this means that the enjoyment of the Hereafter is infinite compared to the enjoyment of this world. If the True Lord says, 'How small the enjoyment of this world is compared with the life to come!' (*at-Tawba:* 38), this is meant to depict the vastness of the enjoyment of the Hereafter. Addressing the intellect, the exception found in the words *illa qalil* (but small) and in the verse, 'How small' (*at-Tawba:* 38) means: in contrast with the utmost enjoyment which might be attained in this worldly life.

An example to illustrate this is that you find that Allah may give a person the utmost enjoyment in this world, so that he imagines that there could not possibly be more enjoyment than that which he has attained. So, the True Lord clarifies to him: even if you have the most enjoyment which this worldly life could possibly give you, it is still a paltry thing compared to the enjoyment of the Hereafter.

And if someone who has no enjoyment in this world looks to the one to whom Allah has given the enjoyment of this world and wonders, 'Could there be any enjoyment greater than this? This man enjoys this, and that, as though he were living in Paradise, and I do not see how there could be any more enjoyment than this?', we say to him: No, what you see as being the utmost end of human enjoyment is but small compared to the enjoyment of the Hereafter.

So, His words: 'How small…' (*at-Tawba:* 38) do not refer to the ordinary enjoyment which people experience in this world, but rather, they mean the absolute highest enjoyment which only very few people in the world could reach or attain. A man might live in a huge palace with hundreds of servants and electronic devices which allow him to get anything he wants just by pressing a button, so that everything around him fulfils his desires; indeed he is even able to control the temperature of his palace, and he enjoys the finest kinds of food and drink, and if he wants to move from one place to another he may press a button which moves his chair wherever he wants to go, and everyone around him obeys him blindly so that all his desires are fulfilled and his life is like a sweet dream. If a person lives in such luxury and exults in this blessing, the Lord of Might corrects him and says to him: Do not exult, for this enjoyment in which you live is but small compared with the enjoyment of the Hereafter.

If the people read or hear about the enjoyment in which this man lives, or witness it for themselves, and are dazzled by it, Allah clarifies for them: Do not be dazzled or amazed, for all the enjoyment you see is but small compared with the enjoyment of the Hereafter. So His words, 'How small…' (*at-Tawba:* 38) indicate that Allah has made it man's natural disposition to love and desire much more than just a little enjoyment. The True Lord warns His servants not to let the blessings of this worldly life bewitch them no matter how great they might seem, clarifying to them: 'Do not think that these blessings are a lot, for in fact they are paltry blessings compared to what awaits you in the Hereafter'. If it is natural for a man to love many blessings, he should not be infatuated with the bounties of this worldly life, but rather, he must seek out the bounties of the Hereafter. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If the son of Adam were given a valley full of gold, he would love to have a second one and if he were given the second one, he would love to have a third...'(1) That is, the man who owned two valleys of gold would love to keep hold of them and then desire to have a third valley even though he is not likely to live long enough to spend what the first valley alone is worth. By nature, man aspires to greater bounty. Why is this? Because man forgets about the Hereafter, and believes that this worldly life is all there is, and therefore you find that a person like this wants to look after himself, and if he has enough to suffice himself he wants to look after his children, and if he has enough to provide for himself and his children he looks forward to reserve for his grandchildren. But the true believer is the one who knows that the life of this world is but a road which leads to the Hereafter, and a short journey which will come to an end, so he does not feel the need for such precautions. The one who strives his utmost to make such precautions is the one who thinks that this worldly life is the whole purpose of creation, and does not realise that it is merely a path leading to the Hereafter.

We find that such people wrong themselves by seeking to satisfy their passions, trying to take all that this world can give whether it is lawful or unlawful; and this is clearly shown by their worldly behaviour.

As for the believer, he is like the student who works hard in his studies and gets up early to go to school, and stays up late at night to revise, denying himself many enjoyments because by his intelligence and wisdom he knows that this is also a temporary denial, and that he will only have to do this for a short period of time so that he can live the rest of his life in comfort and get a good position, and a high income, and all the other things which the future can give him. As for the one who wrongs himself, he is like the student who does not go to school but instead spends his time playing and having fun; by doing this he is being short-sighted, allowing himself to immediate pleasures and ensuring that he will experience hardship for the rest of his life. So, both students have given themselves what they want: the first one gave himself a long and comfortable future, and reached the top of society; the second gave himself an immediate but short-lived pleasure, and then after a few years became a worthless wretch in his community. So, beware of looking no further than your own two feet, for the world does not end where your feet stop, but rather, it stretches on to distant horizons; and if you see these horizons, it is not right for you to choose such limited, short-lived pleasures.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (6438) and Abu Na`im in his Hilya (i. 337), on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr.*

The True Lord's words, 'You who believe, what is [the matter] with you that, when it is said to you, "Go forth and fight in Allah's way" you cling heavily to the ground? Are you contented with this world to the life to come? How small the enjoyment of this world is compared with the life to come!' (*at-Tawba:* 38) were revealed about the battle of Tabuk,(1) the first battle which Muslims ever fought against non-Arabs. This battle had been preceded by all the battles which took place between the Muslims and the disbelievers and polytheists in the Arabian Peninsula such as the battles with the polytheists at Badr or Mecca, or the battles with the Jews of Medina. These battles were fought within the Arabian Peninsula, but the battle of Tabuk was fought against the Byzantines on the northern borders of the Arabian Peninsula. When the army began to be prepared to go to Tabuk to fight the Byzantines, the Muslims were reluctant to go.

Here a question emerges, 'How could the Muslims fight the Byzantines, when they had grieved to see the Persians defeat the Byzantines'? Would the Muslims grieve at the defeat of the Byzantines, and then go to fight them themselves? We say yes, because faith-based attitude is not cast in iron, but rather, it alters depending on the attitudes of the disbelievers towards faith and Islam.

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(1) Al-Qurtubi says in his exegesis (iv. 3066): 'It is unanimously accepted that this verse was revealed about those who deserted the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* at the battle of Tabuk, in the ninth year after the Emigration, one year after the conquest of Mecca.'

The true believer reacts to events with a reaction based on faith. For example, we find that the heart of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was filled with mercy and compassion, whilst the heart `Umar ibn al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* was filled with strength and resolve. Look at the attitude of each of them when the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away and some Muslims apostatized from Islam and refused to pay alms, Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* decided to fight these apostates since they had refused to honour one of the Pillars of Islam, yet `Umar ibn al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* opposed Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* in this regard and said, ‘O Abu Bakr, will you fight those who have testified that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah?’ Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* replied, ‘O `Umar, were you a tyrant in the day of pagan ignorance only to become a coward after embracing Islam? By Allah, if they deny me a single camel-rope which they used to give Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* I will fight them for it!’(1) So, the attitudes were reversed: power and might filled the heart of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who was famous for his compassion, mercy and empathy, whilst the heart of `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was filled with softness, though he was famous for his power and might. Had it been `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who said what Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, the people would have said, ‘This is but the harshness we have come to expect from `Umar’.

But instead, the people said of `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* ‘His heart has softened whilst the heart of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* has hardened!’ This is the attitude of faith which fills the soul of every believer. That which determines a believer’s attitude is his faith, not his nature, and therefore the True Lord described the believers by saying, ‘…Allah will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him, people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers.…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 54)

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(1) *Narrated by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi in (Kanz al-Ummal) (iv. 349).*

How can a person be proud and humble at the same time? And how can a person describe himself as being proud and humble? How can two opposites be found in one person? But the True Lord reassures us when He says, ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. …’ (*al-Fath:* 29) The True Lord describes the believers as being firm, and described them as being full of mercy. In order to understand what this means, you must be aware that the attitude of faith is what determines the feelings of the believer not his personal and individual nature. He adjusts his attitudes to correspond with the attitude of faith and what it requires of him; so he is firm and merciful, as well as humble and proud.

Let us return to the battle of Tabuk about which the verse which we are currently examining was revealed, and to the question: How could the Muslims fight the Byzantines, when they grieved the day the Byzantines were defeated by the Persians? We say: The Muslims grieved because an atheistic force which denied the existence of Allah had defeated a force of faith which was linked to a divine message,and because the Byzantines, as Christians, were therefore closer to the hearts of the believers than the disbelievers. So, it was a matter of belief in the existence of Allah. As for the battle of Tabuk, it was a matter of acceptance of the abrogating message and the prevention of this message from spreading; because of this, the attitude in the battle of Tabuk was that of an enemy of the faith, and this is what led to the war.(1)

If we consider the battle itself, we find that Tabuk is very far from Medina, and the time of the battle was during the fierce heat of summer. Moreover, it fell soon after the battle of Hunayn in which the Muslims had fought fiercely. It had also been a difficult year, and the army did not have enough food, horses or camels.

Many hardships were involved in to this battle. The heat was intense, the distance was long and the strength of the Muslims was diminished after the battle of Hunayn. When the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to go out to a battle, he would not tell his companions about it until they arrived at the battlefield; yet this battle was an exception, for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his companions about it before they set out from Medina in order that they could prepare for the hardships which awaited them. But the Muslims dragged their feet, and some of them got used to sitting in the shade of Medina's orchards and eating their fruits. Enjoying the shade and the fruit, they responded with reluctance to go out to fight. So, this verse was revealed to rebuke them for this. The True Lord then revealed the following verse to explain and clarify the consequences of this action:

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(1) Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani says in *(Fath al-Bari)* (viii. 111) that the reason for the battle was that the Muslims heard from the Nabatean tribesmen who delivered oil from the Levant to Medina that the Byzantines had gathered an army and the Arab tribes of Lakham and Judham to aid them, and that they had reached the town of Balqa’; so the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* chose people to go out and meet them, and told them where the battle would be fought.

إِلَّا تَنفِرُوا۟ يُعَذِّبْكُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا وَيَسْتَبْدِلْ قَوْمًا غَيْرَكُمْ
وَلَا تَضُرُّوهُ شَيْـًٔا ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ٣٩

If you do not go out and fight, God will punish you severely and put others in your place, but you cannot harm Him in any way: God has power over all things [39] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 39)

That is, Allah warns you of chastisement if you do not go out to fight; and if the True Lord gives a warning, then what He warns will certainly come true. If you refuse to go out to fight because you fear the possible suffering ahead in the shape of weariness and toil, then what about the suffering which will assuredly befall you if you disobey Allah's command for you to go out and fight? If a comparison is made between the hardships of travel, fighting and intense heat on one hand, and the chastisement of Allah on the other, the believer will undoubtedly choose the hardships of war, however bad they may be; for every action is commensurate with the power of the one who performs it. The possible hardships of heat, travel and the danger of warfare cannot be compared to Allah's chastisement because the chastisement which awaited those who dragged their feet or fled from fighting would be worse than the hardship of agreeing to fight, however hard it might have been.

The True Lord then says, '…and will replace you with another people…' (*at-Tawba:* 39). So, do not think that by dragging your feet and being unwilling to fight, you thereby harm Allah in any way; for Allah is well able to create new men, and this is within His power, which is why He then says,

‘…Allah has power over all things.’ (*at-Tawba:* 39) In another verse, the True Lord says, ‘Though now you are called upon to give [a little] for the sake of Allah, some of you are grudging. Whoever is grudging, is so only towards himself; Allah is the source of wealth and you are the needy ones. He will substitute other people for you if you turn away, and they will not be like you.’ (*Muhammad:* 38)

Hence, do not think that the wealth or power you possess makes you capable of harming Allah’s way with miserliness or dissent; for Allah *Glorified is He* is well able to replace you with other people who possess the fervour of battle and sacrifice for Allah’s cause, for He is able to create anything.

His words, ‘…Allah has power over all things.’ (*at-Tawba:* 39), give the grounds for the previous assertions made when He said, ‘If you do not go forth and fight, Allah will punish you with a painful chastisement and will replace you with another people, and you cannot harm Him in any way…’ (*at-Tawba:* 39). If one of them thought that these were merely theoretical words, the True Lord gave them a practical example based on real events which they had witnessed for themselves, when the polytheists of Quraysh gathered to fight them, but Allah gave them succour against them. Thus, He says:

إِلَّا تَنصُرُوهُ فَقَدْ نَصَرَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِذْ أَخْرَجَهُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ثَانِىَ ٱثْنَيْنِ إِذْ هُمَا
فِى ٱلْغَارِ إِذْ يَقُولُ لِصَٰحِبِهِۦ لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَنَا ۖ فَأَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ
سَكِينَتَهُۥ عَلَيْهِ وَأَيَّدَهُۥ بِجُنُودٍ لَّمْ تَرَوْهَا وَجَعَلَ كَلِمَةَ ٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا۟ ٱلسُّفْلَىٰ ۗ وَكَلِمَةُ ٱللَّهِ هِىَ ٱلْعُلْيَا ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Even if you do not help the Prophet, God helped him when the disbelievers drove him out: when the two of them were in the cave, he [Muhammad] said to his companion, ‘Do not worry, God is with us,’ and God sent His calm down to him, aided him with forces invisible to you, and brought down the disbelievers’ plan. God’s plan is higher: God is almighty and wise [40] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 40)

The orientalists have objected to the words of the True Lord, ‘If you do not help the Prophet, Allah certainly helped him…’ (*at-Tawba:* 40). As is their wont, as doubters in Islam, we find that they try their best to seek out 'mistakes' they imagine exist in the Noble Quran, saying, 'The awe and reverence you have for the Quran, as Muslims, prevents your minds from having the necessary boldness needed to study its language properly and discover the mistakes it contains. However, if you consider the Quran as an ordinary book with no sanctity, you will find contradictions and mistakes in it'.

The orientalists have taken a lot of time to search for grammatical mistakes in the Noble Quran, and they came upon the grammatical form of cause and effect. Whoever reads their criticism will see at once that the plain truth is that they have been ignorant of the subtleties of the Arabic language; they only learned Arabic in a superficial way, and they have not become adept or even proficient in it. They claim that the form of conditional sentences in Arabic necessitates that every condition have a result (a 'main clause' as we would say in English), so that if you say, 'If Zayd comes, honour him!', you find that the honouring is mentioned after the coming of Zayd; and if you say, 'If you revise, you will succeed', then the success comes after the revision – so the time of the response (the main clause) comes after the time of the conditional clause.

They gave this entire preamble in order that they might then profess doubts about the Quran. We say to them, 'What you say about conditional clauses and their results are correct?', but you must understand something further: when the matter is fulfilled, we see that the result was actually the cause of the condition; for when you say, 'If you revise you will succeed', if the student does not think of the good things that success will bring him, he will not bother to revise; rather, the student must first imagine the positive things success will bring him in order to be motivated to revise. So, the result is the motive for the condition, but the condition is the practical cause of the result. The success which is first imagined is the reason why the effort is expended to attain this success; so the point of view is different; this is a motivational cause, and the other is a practical cause.

Allah's words, 'If you do not help the Prophet…' (*at-Tawba:* 40) contain a verb in the present simple tense, but the True Lord follows it with a past-tense verb, 'Allah certainly helped him.' But can the condition refer to the present or the future, whilst the response refers to the past? We say that the meaning here is: 'If you do not help him, then Allah will help him, which is proved by how He helped him before'. This is not a result of the conditional clause, but rather, it is a proof of the result. When the proof of the result is an event in the past, it is even more of a proof that the result will indeed come true. When Allah called them to go out and fight and they clung to the earth, He clarified for them: Do you think that your striving is what will succour Muhammad, and succour his mission? No, because He is able to succour him, which is proved by how He succoured him before on many occasions; and the most crucial of all these occasions was the Emigration, when He succoured him with one single man, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* against Quraysh and all the disbelievers of Mecca. Likewise, He succoured him at Badr with forces which you could not see. So, the previous succour which Allah gave His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a precedent; therefore, it is not the result of the conditional, but rather, it is proof of the result.

We see in Allah's words, 'If you do not help the Prophet, Allah certainly helped him…' (*at-Tawba:* 40), that Allah's succour of him applied to three different times. The Arabic word *idh* (when), is repeated three times. He says: '…when the disbelievers drove him out, when the two of them were in the cave, he [Muhammad] said to his companion, "Do not worry, Allah is with us…"' (*at-Tawba:* 40). That is, we have the time of the driving away, the time of the cave and the time in which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* 'Do not worry, Allah is with us…' (*at-Tawba:* 40). Succour was given on each of these three occasions: upon the expulsion from Mecca, when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered the cave with Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and when he spoke with Abu Bakr.

Someone might ask, 'Was it the disbelievers who drove Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of Mecca, or was it Allah who made him leave'? We say that the stubborn refusal of his people, their plotting against him and their enmity towards his mission all forced him to leave; but the True Lord intended a different result for this exit than the disbelievers themselves intended. They wanted to kill him, and when he left they thought that his message would dwindle and die because of his isolation; but Allah made him leave so that the message would be spread, and He made it clear to them: ‘You want to drive Muhammad out by persecuting him, but I will not allow you to expel him in a degraded state, so I will make him leave with the support of helpers’. They say that the Emigration was the ‘twin of the mission’, meaning that the Mohammedan message came alongside the Emigration, when the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was taken by Khadija the mother of the believers *Allah be pleased with her* to see Waraqa ibn Nawfal after his experiences in the cave of Hira`, Waraqa said to him, ‘Would that I could live to see the day when your people drive you out!’ Waraqa ibn Nawfal said this to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before he was even sure he was a prophet, so the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘Will they drive me out?’ Waraqa ibn Nawfal replied, ‘Indeed yes, for no man ever brought that which you have brought save that he was opposed.’(1)

So, the Emigration was an indivisible part of Muhammad’s responsibility as a message-bearer. Why? Because he was the first one ever to announce to the leaders of Quraysh the message of truth and monotheism. The notion of the Emigration was there from the moment the mission began because the mission was a call made for the leaders of Quraysh to hear, and they were the leaders of the whole of Arabia. Had he made the call to anyone other than the leaders of the Arabs, they would have said, ‘He held these people to be weak, and therefore made his call to them’. But the call of the message was proclaimed to the leaders of all Arabia, and they began to torment the Muslims to put an end to this call. Allah did not will to give the Prophet succour through Quraysh in Mecca because Quraysh had become accustomed to ruling the Arabs, and so when a Messenger came to guide all the people to Islam, the people to whom he was sent would have said, ‘Quraysh have followed him out of tribal allegiance because they wish to rule the whole world just as they have ruled Arabia’. So, the True Lord wanted to make it clear to us that the first call was given to the leaders of the Arabs, but it was necessary that succour be given to Islam, and the religion be allowed to spread, by a different city other than that one so that it could not be said that it was only allegiance to Muhammad which created faith in his message – rather, it was faith in the message of Muhammad which created the allegiance to him.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (3) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (160)*

It may be observed that the verb in Arabic for 'emigrate' is *haajar*; this tells us that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not *hajar* (abandon) Mecca, but rather, he emigrated from it; *muhajarah* indicates a certain measure of reciprocity on the parts of two sides. His people persecuted him so he was forced to leave; and his leaving in itself was a form of succour because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was alone when he left his house which was surrounded by strong young men from all the Arab tribes who were determined to strike him a single blow all at once; and he threw dust at them so that their sight was veiled. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was waiting for him outside.(1) It was as though the True Lord wanted to affirm to them that they would never get to Muhammad, neither by a secret plot nor by an open assault; and this was help from Allah.

The True Lord continues, '…when the two of them were in the cave…' (*at-Tawba:* 40), and He confirms that, in the cave, another instance of help took place. This was that the tracker(2) whom Quraysh employed who was named Karz ibn Alqama from the tribe of Khuza`a followed their tracks until he came to the cave, and said, 'This is Muhammad's footprint, and it resembles nothing so much as the print in the *Ka`ba*, that is, the footprint of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*!' Then he said, 'And this is the print of Abu Bakr, or his son, and they did not go any further than this.' The tracker could identify each foot's shape and the print it left in the ground, and he added that they had not gone any further than that place unless they had risen into the sky or sunk into the earth. Despite this certainty, they did not enter the cave, and none of them thought to turn over a stone or search for Muhammad and his companion even though this is the first thing that anyone would think of doing. As long as the footprints led to the cave, they should have looked inside it, but none of them did.

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(1) *Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him was waiting in his own house with his family, and the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him joined him after having passed through the ranks of forty strong young men who had unsheathed their swords to kill him; the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him then came to Abu Bakr's house and told him that he had been given leave (by Allah) to emigrate, and he took Abu Bakr as his travelling companion, and they then left together from Abu Bakr's house. This was narrated by Al-Bukhari (3905), Ahmad (vi. 198), Abu Na`im in (Dala`il An-Nubuwwa) (p. 270), and Ibn Hisham in his (Sira) (ii. 96).*

(2) The story of Karz ibn `Alqama the trail tracer at the time of immigration

One of them went to urinate, exposing his private parts in the direction of the cave, and therefore Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘If one of them even looks beneath his feet, he will see us.’

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* replied with the wisdom of prophethood ‘Were they able to see us, they would not have exposed their private parts in our direction.’(1) This indicates that an Arab did not like to expose his private parts to others, or else, it was a dignifying honour for Muhammad that the private parts of another could not be exposed to him; the reader may take it as he likes. In any case, it was a moment of inspiration for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition to this, the True Lord made a spider weave its web over the entrance to the cave, and made a dove build a nest there containing eggs, so that Suraqa ibn Malik said, ‘Muhammad and his companion could not have entered the cave, or else they would have disturbed the dove’s nest and broken the spider’s web.

We know that the spider’s web is the weakest of houses, as the True Lord says, ‘…the spider’s is the frailest of all houses’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41). The divine miracle emerges here in that Allah held back a group of strong warriors with the frailest of all houses, a spider’s house; and Allah’s omnipotent power emerged in that He made a spider’s web stronger than steel, and likewise the True Lord willed that the dove lay eggs even though it is the meekest of birds and flees at the slightest disturbance. This was succour, and then the third act of succour was psychological and personal: when Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘If one of them even looks beneath his feet, he will see us’, we find that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied with all confidence in his Lord, ‘What say you of two for whom Allah is the third?'(1) This reply does not seem to be in line with Abu Bakr's question since Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* feared that if they looked beneath their feet they would see who was in the cave; so the natural response would be to say, 'They will not see us'. But Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to awaken our faith to the highest of principles, so he said, 'What say you of two for whom Allah is the third?', for as long as Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* were in the company of Allah, and Allah cannot be seen by the eye, then all who are in Allah's company also cannot be seen by the eye.

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(1) *There is some uncertainty as to whether this narration is authentic or not, as stated by Al-Haythami in (Majma` az-zawa`id) (vi. 54), and Al-`Asqalani in (Fath al-Bari) (vii. 11).*

The word of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which Abu Bakr was accustomed to trusting, was the irrefutable argument for anything he said. When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that he was taken to Jerusalem in a single night and raised to Heaven, Abu Bakr said, 'If he said it, he spoke the truth.'(2) So when the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* as He tells us, '…do not worry, Allah is with us…' (*at-Tawba:* 40), the grief was bound to leave Abu Bakr. When he entered the cave, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*(3) found holes and worried that they might contain snakes or serpents, so he began to tear pieces from his clothes and fill the holes with them, until he only had enough clothes left to cover his private parts; and then he closed the remaining holes with his hand and his heel.(4)

Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was willing to sacrifice his own life for Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him*. Simply, if Abu Bakr's life was exposed to danger, he is but one man, but if the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* suffered any fatal incident, the entire mission falls into ruin. The grief of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was not a reflection of weak faith but a passion overwhelmed with fears lest the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* should face any harm. The Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…grieve not; verily, Allah is with us. Thereupon, Allah bestowed upon him from on high His [gift of] inner peace and aided him with forces which you could not see.' (*at-Tawba:* 40). The scholars differed(1) whether the words 'upon him' refer to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* or to Abu Bakr, *Allah be pleased with him*? Since the inner peace was sent down, it must have been sent down to a grieved heart. But all other pronouns in the verse refer to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (4663) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (2381)*

(2) The details of this narration were given earlier.

(3) The story of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* filling the holes of the cave upon his entrance to it with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

(4) The details of this story are narrated by Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in (Kanz Al-Ummal) (iv. 349).

- 'If you do not succour Him.' (i.e. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*).
- 'Then [know that Allah will do so–just as] Allah succoured him.' (i.e. Muhammad *Allah's peace be upon him*).
- 'When those who were bent on denying the truth drove him (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) away.'

Then Allah's *Glorified is He* words come, 'Thereupon Allah bestowed upon him from on high His [gift of] inner peace' (*at-Tawba:* 40). The pronoun must refer to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. I observe that the commentators did not pay attention to the fact that the Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'The Prophet said to his Companion, "Grieve not; verily, Allah is with us…"' (*at-Tawba:* 40). The words of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* helped Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* to find inner peace. Evidently, the pronoun refers to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him Allah be pleased with him*. The Lord *Glorified is He* says, '[Allah] aided him with forces which you could not see.' (*at-Tawba:* 40) The disbelievers saw a cave's entrance with a dove's nest and spider's web that were not disturbed which discouraged them from entering it where they would find the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, this is not the only meaning of the verse; Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'with forces which you could not see.' (*at-Tawba:* 40), while the dove and the spider can be seen. First, comes the idea that no one thought to look into the cave, even though the footprints led to it; Allah covered their hearts and kept their thoughts from that idea. There was also Suraqah ibn Malik—a disbeliever who managed to catch up with the Messenger of Allah and Abu Bakr on their way to Medina, but every time he tried to approach them, his horse lost footing in the sand.(1) Truly, the Lord *Glorified is He* emphasizes, ‘with forces which you could not see’ and ‘None can comprehend You Lord's forces save Him alone’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). In other words, the powers that Allah sent to support His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* during his migration are known only to Allah. Everything in the universe simply works in accordance with the Will of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* even subdues the disbelievers to serve the religion. Was not the guide of the Prophet during his migration from Mecca to Medina `Abdullah ibn Urayqit—a disbeliever at that time?(2) In this way, a disbeliever serves the faith. Meanwhile, the great reward that Quraysh promised to anyone who would tell about the place of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not tempt this disbelieving guide to betray the Prophet. Allah placed something in the disbeliever's heart to make him faithful to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, 4:3074; Ibn Kathir 2:358; Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him,* ibn Al-`Arabi held the opinion that the verse speaks of the Divine Peace given to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him.*

The Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘[Allah] aided him with forces which you could not see, and brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth…’ (*at-Tawba:* 40). The disbelievers wanted to terminate the message by killing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* driving him far away or imprisoning him.(3) Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to alert us to the fact that falsehood can never prevail over truth. The truth is always triumphant. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘[He] brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth…’ (*at-Tawba:* 40). Only a high cause can be made low when its highness is like that of the scum on top of water about which the Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘As far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on Earth.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). Allah *Glorified is He* introduces this parable saying, ‘[Whenever]

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, (3906); Ahmad, Musnad, 4:176*

(2) *The details of this were narrated by ‘A`isha Allah be pleased with her as narrated by Al-Bukhari (2263).*

(3) In this regard, Allah says, ‘And [remember, O Prophet,] how those who were bent on denying the truth were scheming against you in order to restrain you [from preaching], or to slay you or to drive you away; thus have they [always] schemed; but Allah brought their scheming to nought – for Allah is above all schemers.’ (*al-Anfal*: 30)

He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17), i.e. every river-bed takes the amount of water as divinely planned for it 'the stream carries scum on its surface' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17). As seen, whenever a stream runs, we find that it carries dirty floating thing; but do they stay? No, they are cast aside by the force of the current and the water is eventually clean. Then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on Earth' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17). The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that the vain dominance of disbelievers is like the scum over water. Why did Allah allow disbelief to become high, even only temporarily? The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants that when Islam comes and defeats it, Islam would overcome something high and strong. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* gives the contrast saying, '[He] brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah's cause remained supreme.' (*at-Tawba:* 40)

The rhetoric of the Quranic performance has its own order, '[He] brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah's cause remained supreme' (*at-Tawba:* 40) because Allah's cause is always supreme, and is not ever 'made' supreme. There is no time when it was not supreme. So, Allah did not say, '[He] made Allah's cause supreme'. Allah's cause is always supreme. If the disbelievers wanted to kill the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* or banish him to a distant land where he could not deliver his message or imprison him they would never be able to do any because Allah is Mighty and Undefeatable. His Might is built on wisdom. Here, the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to alert the believers to the fact that their reluctance to strive in the battle of Tabuk would not harm the message in any way, for Allah helped His messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was alone and sent invisible powers to support him. Now, if succour needs no more than Allah's word and cannot come save by Allah's Will, then what is the reason for this reluctance?

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱنفِرُوا۟ خِفَافًا وَثِقَالًا وَجَٰهِدُوا۟ بِأَمْوَٰلِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ فِى
سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

So go out, no matter whether you are lightly or heavily armed, and struggle in God's way with your possessions and your persons: this is better for you, if you only knew [41] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 41)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* opens doors wide to have His pleasure. They should rush to aid the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and clear their minds of the fog which clouded them. He opens for them the door leading to Him since they are all His creatures and dependents. Allah *Glorified is He* wants them all to win guidance and help the Message of Truth. Fighting in Allah's cause may seem a source of hardship but it promotes and empowers the message. When Muslims give succour to the Islamic call, they gain forgiveness, repentance and mercy. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Verily, Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His slave than a person who lost their camel in a waterless desert carrying their provision of food and drink, and then finds it.'(1)

Furthermore, the Lord *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'The sky said, "O Lord, give me leave to fall in pieces upon the Children of Adam, for they have tasted Your bounties and refused to give You thanks." The seas said, "O Lord, give me leave to drown the Children of Adam, for they have tasted Your bounties and refused to give You thanks." Likewise, the earth said the same. In response, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, "Leave My servants to Me; had you created them, you would have shown mercy to them. If they repent to Me, I am their beloved and if they repent not, I am their doctor.'(2) We can see how merciful Allah is with His creatures.

After rebuking Muslims for their idleness regarding the struggle, the Lord *Glorified is He* opens doors wide for them to repent saying, 'Go forth to war.' It is a commandment from Allah by means of which Allah *Glorified is He* awakens faith in hearts of Muslims and meanwhile opens the door for them to repent for their reluctance to go out and fight the battle of Tabuk. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Go forth to war, whether it be easy or difficult [for you]’ (*at-Tawba:* 41). *Nafara* is to go out for something with provocation; the word *nafar* i.e. ‘separated’ such as that which exists between two friends who used to love one another until one of them says or does something provoking the other to break up their relationship, so they became separated. The Lord *Glorified is He* commands, ‘Go forth to war’ to support Allah's religion and cause. When you support Allah's cause, He opens for you the door to highness and elevation. He says, ‘Go forth to war, whether it be easy or difficult [for you]’ (*at-Tawba:* 41). *Khifafan* (lightly/easily or heavily) refers to the strong and healthy people who are not tired out or exhausted by travel and movement, whereas *thiqalan* (difficult or heavily) refers to those who are sick or elderly. Allah wants all members to help one another in defence of their community to escape the awful torment and attain His Forgiveness and Satisfaction. A healthy person can take part in fight, but what about the sick person? The sick follows the example of Sa`eed ibn Al-Musayyeb who was sick and they told him, ‘Allah excused you from taking part in fight, ‘No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for staying away from a war in Allah's cause].’ (*al-Fath:* 17)’ In response, he said, ‘By Allah, I will be with Muslims to appear more and huge in numbers and look after their belongings.’(1) A sick person may be intelligent and clever; their advice may prove useful. The fact that the sick person takes part in the battle will give a role-model to people and provoke them to do the same. The sick and weak person can encourage the strong to go out and fight. When the strong people see the sick taking active part in fight, they will be ashamed to stay behind. The scholars differ(2) about the meaning of His words, ‘Go forth to war, whether it be easy or difficult…’ (*at-Tawba:* 41). Some say that the verse refers to the individuals’ weight. Some are light, whereas others are heavy and cannot move easily. Others say that a single person may have ardent motives and an enthusiastic spirit to take part or may be low-spirited and suffer disappointment. Allah's words ‘Go forth to war’ addresses the community generally. The Arabic word *khifafan* is the plural of *khafeef* (light, e.g. avid and enthusiastic) while the word *thiqalan* is the plural of *thaqeel* (heavy, e.g. low-spirited and downhearted). The address comes in plural to encourage individuals to help one another. Every single Muslim must go forth, be they avid and high-spirited or downhearted. For example, when a teacher commands students to bring their books out. Every student must take out their own book. The verse clearly orders every Muslim to actively take part, be they avid or not. Surely, the same act may be light and desirable or heavy and difficult. A Muslim may be physically able to go out and fight but feels it difficult and becomes reluctant to undergo the hardships of war. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Fighting is ordained for you, even though it be hateful to you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 216) Undertaking difficult missions(1) for the sake of Allah strengthens the firmness of faith.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, (6309); Muslim, Sahih, (2747)*

(2) *Al-Ghazali recorded a similar narration from an early Muslim predecessor. See, Ihyaa' `Ulum Ad-Deen, 4:52.*

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi, Tafseer, 4:3076*

(2) *Al-Qurtubi mentions ten different opinions in his exegesis (4:3075) and declares that the strongest opinion is that all people were commanded to go forth, whether it was easy or difficult for them.*

The verse clearly is open for several meanings: the first is general. It may be easy for some and difficult for others. The fight itself may be easy and quick in action or difficult. Furthermore, a person who has a horse to mount might find it easy for the mount eases the hardship and covers distances quicker, whilst the one who fights on foot finds it difficult because they must bear the long distance. When the Lord wants to encourage the hearts of the believers, He strongly commands them but He also reveals His Mercy by lightening His commandments. If the commandment was given lightly at the beginning and then was made difficult, this would be difficult for souls to bear. However, it was first made difficult and then lightened to make it easier for souls to undertake.

For example, the Lord *Glorified is He* spoke to His Messenger *peace be upon him* ‘O Prophet! Inspire the believers to conquer all fear of death when fighting, [so that,] if there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred; and [that] if there be one hundred of you, they might overcome one thousand of those who are bent on denying the truth.' (*al-Anfal:* 65) The True Lord *Glorified is He* provides the standard measure of the power of believers compared to disbelievers: twenty can defeat two hundred. It is a one-to-ten ratio. Therefore, when this verse was revealed, it meant that one single believer had to fight ten disbelievers but the Lord *Glorified is He* knew that the principle is very difficult for a human soul to fight ten counterparts. Only those of immutable resolve could do it. In consequence, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'For the time being, [however,] Allah has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak.' (*al-Anfal:* 66) Weakness entails lighter laws for the believers in battles against the disbelievers. The Lord *Glorified is He* then lightened the proportion from one disbeliever to ten disbelievers from one to two, 'For the time being, [however,] Allah has lightened your burden, for He knows that you are weak; and so, if there be one hundred of you who are patient in adversity, they should [be able to] overcome two hundred; and if there be one thousand of you, they should [be able to] overcome two thousand by Allah's leave; for Allah is with those who are patient in adversity.' (*al-Anfal:* 66) If someone flees from fighting two, he is guilty of deserting the battlefield, but when he flees from three, he is excused(1) because they are more than the number ordained by Allah. In the current verse, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Go forth to war, whether it be easy or difficult [for you].' (*at-Tawba:* 41) This commandment includes everyone, no matter their condition; it is a universal commandment to all Muslims. But there is another verse in the chapter of *at-Tawba* excusing certain sincere believers in some conditions; Allah *Glorified is He* say, 'But no blame shall attach to the weak, nor to the sick nor to those who have no means [to equip themselves], provided that they are sincere towards Allah and His Messenger: there is no cause to reproach the doers of good, for Allah is Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy. Nor [shall blame attach] to those who, when they came unto you [O Prophet, with the request] that you provide them with mounts, were told by you, "I cannot find anything whereon for you to mount you' – [whereupon] they turned away, their eyes overflowing with tears out of sorrow that they had no means to spend [on their equipment].' (*at-Tawba:* 91-92)

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(1) *In his Quranic exegesis, Al-Qurtubi says (1:952) that they disliked war for the loss of wealth, departure of home and family, physical harms and impending death. They never hated the Divine Law.*

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(1) *At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabeer, (11151) narrated a prophetic statement on the authority of Ibn `Abbas to that effect. See also, Al-Haythami, 5:328; Sa`eed ibn Mansur, (2538).*

These verses speak of the people excused from blame for not taking part in battle. It was an exception from the general rule requiring every believer to defend the cause of Allah as given in the verse in question, ‘Go forth to war, whether it be easy or difficult [for you] and strive hard in Allah's cause with your possessions and your lives.’ (*at-Tawba:* 41) The possessions must be expended for you to obtain weaponry for war—any army must have weapons and vehicles which are equivalent to the horses used at the time of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Enough provisions must also be available. That is why the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions possessions first before lives. One who possesses the necessary strength and wealth must strive with them and whoever has either one of them must strive therewith. A weak person must use their wealth to aid the strong fighters by providing equipment, weapons, horses, shields and other necessities of war. Here, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘strive hard.’ *Jahada* (to strive), while *qatala* (to fight) implies reciprocity; if a disbeliever fights you, you must do your utmost in fight against him. These two verbs imply two acting parties. When saying ‘Zayd joined’, you need to complete the sentence, e.g., ‘Zayd joined 'Umar’. Likewise, ‘Zayd fought’ entails another party and reciprocity of action. According to another verse, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have attained to faith! Be patient in adversity, and vie in patience with one another, and be ever ready [to do what is right], and remain conscious of Allah, so that you might attain to a happy state!’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 200)

This is a commandment to be patient in war; but suppose that your enemy also has patience as you have. Here, another command comes from the Lord *Glorified is He* ‘Vie in patience with one another…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 200); you must prove more patient than the patient enemies. Likewise, ‘strive hard’ (to beat them in battle) by proving more enduring and steadier than them.

Let us return to the Lord's words, ‘Strive hard in Allah's cause with your possessions’ (*at-Tawba:* 41). Here, ‘Allah's cause’ means the way leading to the goal of Allah's goodly acceptance and Paradise. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘This (*dhalikum*) is for your own good.’ (*at-Tawba:* 41) The word ‘this’ (*dha*) is a demonstrative pronoun which refers to the singular which here is drawn from His words, ‘strive hard in Allah's cause with your possessions and your lives.' (*at-Tawba:* 41) So 'this' means striving with one's possessions and life, while the addition *(likum)* (for you) indicates the second person, since the Lord *Glorified is He* is speaking to a group of people here.

Some people who do not know Arabic well think that the word *dhalikum* here is a single word consisting of a demonstrative pronoun *dha* (this), and a second-person pronoun, but we say that actually it is two words: a pronoun and an address. The pronoun refers to a single thing, whilst the address is given to a plurality. Another example is found in the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* when the king's wife brought all the women together and brought Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to them. A group of women were present and Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was present with them when she said, 'This (*dhalikunna*), then, is he about whom you have been blaming me!' (*Yusuf:* 32) Here, the word *dha* (this) refers to Yusuf (Joseph), and the word *likunna* (for you women) refers to the women whom she was addressing.

Another example is found in the Lord's words, '*Dhanika* (these) then, shall be the two signs from You Lord unto Pharaoh and his great ones.' (*al-Qasas:* 32). The pronoun *dhan* refers to two persons or things. Here, it signifies two miracles given to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: the staff and the white hand. As for the letter 'k' in *dhani(k)*, it refers to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who is being addressed in this context. As such, the word 'that' (i.e. *dhalikum*) in the current verse is made of two words: a singular demonstrative pronoun and a second-person plural pronoun of address. When He says, 'This is for your own good' (*at-Tawba:* 41) what good is Allah *Glorified is He* speaking about? If you go forth to war and strive with your possessions and lives, it is good and will be better for you than staying behind and abstaining from striving with your possessions and lives. The word *khayr* (good) has two uses in Arabic: First, it signifies 'good' generally. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it. And They who shall have done an atom's weight of evil, shall behold it.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8) In this case, it is the opposite of 'evil'. Second, the word *khayr* also means 'better', as in 'this is better than that'. In this case, both alternatives are good, but one of them is better than the other. An example of this is found in the words of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer and there is good in them both.'[1]

If the word *khayr* is not followed by the preposition '*min'* (i.e. than), it means 'good' whose opposite is evil. Some linguists maintain that when *khayr* is used as a superlative (i.e. the best), the definite article *al* (e.g. *al-khayr* i.e. the best) shall precede it. However, when it is used in the comparative form, it means that one alternative has more goodness than the other, whilst both share goodness.

For example, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had Zayd ibn Harithah as his slave whom Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* bought and granted to the Prophet. Zayd's father and uncle knew about his stay in Mecca and came to release him from slavery. In reply, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'You know and see how I love you, so choose between me and them.' Zayd said, 'I would never prefer anyone to you' and decided to remain in Mecca with the Messenger of Allah rather than returning to his family. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to reward him for his decision, so he adopted him by saying, 'O you who are present, bear witness that Zayd is my son; he shall inherit from me and I from him.' Adoption was then lawful as per the Arab customs but the Lord wanted to annul all forms of adoption and began with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* himself. Allah *Glorified is He* forbade adoption saying, 'Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is Allah's Messenger.' (*al-Ahzab:* 40) 'As for your adopted children, call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is aqsatu (more equitable) in the sight of Allah.' (*al-Ahzab:* 5)

The Lord did not deny that Muhammad *peace be upon him* had been just. He rather revealed that which is more just. When you see a comparative adjective, know that it implies an extra level of a particular attribute for one while affirming the basic attribute in the other. In the current verse, we have 'for your own good' (*at-Tawba:* 41) which means that the contrasting action of abstaining from striving with one's possessions and life is evil. The Lord

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (2664), Ahmad (2:370), Ibn Majah (79, 4168), and Al-Humaidi (1114) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah Allah be pleased with him.*

Glorified is He says, ‘This is for your own good, if you but knew it!’ (*at-Tawba:* 41) There are criteria by which we can know what is good and what is evil. When the Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘if you but knew it’ it implies that there are certain indications to give them knowledge; if they do not know, Allah will give them knowledge. In other words, the one who does their utmost using their possessions and life is absolutely certain that their defence of the divine cause will admit them to what is better than wealth and mortal life. If killed, their martyrdom will make them a role-model for those who come after them. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stated that those who fight with patient steadfastness and confidence shall enter Paradise,(1) a companion who was chewing dates came to him and said, ‘Is there nothing between me and Paradise but to fight and die?’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* answered in the affirmative, and the companion did not even waste the time in chewing the dates before entering the fray. He cast them from his mouth and fought until he was martyred.(2) This shows that he had absolute confidence that martyrdom will give him a reward far greater than that which he left behind. The Lord *Glorified is He* then resumes the discussion with those who were reluctant to strive to pass judgement over the entire affair.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَوۡ كَانَ عَرَضٗا قَرِيبٗا وَسَفَرٗا قَاصِدٗا لَّٱتَّبَعُوكَ وَلَٰكِنۢ بَعُدَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلشُّقَّةُۚ وَسَيَحۡلِفُونَ
بِٱللَّهِ لَوِ ٱسۡتَطَعۡنَا لَخَرَجۡنَا مَعَكُمۡ يُهۡلِكُونَ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ إِنَّهُمۡ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

They would certainly have followed you [Prophet] if the benefit was within sight and the journey short, but the distance seemed too great for them. They will swear by God, ‘If we could, we certainly would go out [to battle] with you,’ but they ruin themselves, for God knows that they are lying [42] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 42)

The word `*arad* (i.e. gain) literally means ‘accident’ as opposed to ‘substance’. ‘Substance’ means something which is not subject to change: health or sickness are ‘accidental cases’ because neither of them last indefinitely. To sum up, everything that changes is called a temporary accident. It is said, ‘The life of this world is a temporary gain, from which both the pious and the impious consume’.(1) The Lord's words ‘had there been [a prospect of] immediate gain’ (*at-Tawba:* 42) mean, were it a matter of an easily-gained enjoyment with neither hardship of travel nor sacrifice of possessions and lives, they would have rushed to it.

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(1) *Abu Dawud (2519) and Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (ii. 85)*

(2) *Al-Bukhari (4046) and Muslim (1899) on the authority of Jabir Allah be pleased with him.*

‘And *qasid* (an easy) journey’ (*at-Tawba:* 42). The word *qasid* literally signifies that which is in the middle; some people are exceedingly lazy and unconcerned with work or making good use of what Allah created for them while others are exceedingly active in their worldly work, rushing around like wild beasts; yet they can gain nothing except that which Allah has apportioned to them. People's temperaments swing between laziness and activity; but the believer must always be active and moderate. The Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Some of them do pursue a right course’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 66). Simply, the believer should not fall prey to laziness insomuch that they lose out on the good of the world, nor should they be so frenzied that they forget about their faith. The Lord *Glorified is He* makes it plain to His messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that had it been a matter of worldly gains or travel without hardship and toil, they would have followed you; yet they did not follow you because there were no worldly gains expected. Travel to Tabuk and fight against the Byzantines whose civilisation was as great as that of the Persians constituted a challenging hardship. In addition, the year was very tough and the heat was intense; had things been easy, they would have followed you.

The Lord *Glorified is He* continues, ‘But the distance was too great for them’ (*at-Tawba:* 42). The distance was very far. Allah says, ‘Yet, [after your return, O believers,] they will swear by Allah, “Had we been able to do so, we would certainly have set out with you!”’ (*at-Tawba:* 42) They did not follow you, because it was not a case of an immediate gain or an easy journey, but rather, a journey full of risks and sacrifices of possessions and lives. However, when you return from the battle, they will swear that had they been able to, they would have gone out to fight with you. The Lord *Glorified is He* told about their behaviour before they did it. It is a sign of the truth of the prophecy, so the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* could identify the hypocrites from the truly faithful. Allah *Glorified is He* wished to expose the absurdity of the hypocrites. He says, ‘They will swear by Allah’ using the word ‘will’ which means that they had not said this yet, but they would say it in the future. Had they been aware of this, they would have refrained from swearing. They might have said, ‘The Quran told that we will swear, but we will not’. Allah blinded them and they indeed did swear. In a word, the enemies of Islam did testify to the truth of Islam. This same thing occurred when the prayer-direction was changed from Jerusalem to the Ka’ba. The Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘The weak-minded among people will say, “What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which they have hitherto observed?”’ (*al-Baqara:* 142) His words ‘will say’ mean that they had not said it yet; otherwise the word ‘will’ would not have been used. This Quranic verse is frequently recited and permanently unchanged until the Day of Resurrection. Despite they could have abstained from that, which would have been a reason to doubt the Quran and might have destroyed the religion as they desired, they went ahead and affirmed what the Quran told, ‘What has turned them away from the direction of prayer?’ (*al-Baqara:* 142)

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(1) *Abu Na`im, Al-Hilya, 1: 264; Ibn `Adiy, Al-Kamel, 3:361; this Hadith's chain of transmission is weak.*

Nowadays, some people strangely say that they would only follow the Quran apart from the *Sunnah*. In reply, we ask them how could you determine the units of prayers the dawn, the noon, afternoon, sunset or evening prayers? In reply, they will say that the dawn prayer has two units, the noon prayer has four units, the afternoon prayer has four, the sunset prayer has three and the evening prayer has four. Now, if we ask, ‘How do you know the number of units?’, they reply that they know it from the *Sunnah*. Consequently, you must follow the *Sunnah* in prayers and you cannot understand how to apply many rulings without recourse to the *Sunnah*.

The Lord *Glorified is He* forces those who attack the Sunnah of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and claim that it is unnecessary to acknowledge its indispensable importance. It is a reaffirmation of the truth of what the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Soon there will come a time that a man will be reclining on his pillow and when one of my statements is narrated he will say, “The Book of Allah is sufficient between us and you. Whatever it states is permissible, we will take as permissible and whatever it states is forbidden, we will take as forbidden.” Verily, whatever the Messenger of Allah has forbidden is like that which Allah has forbidden.’⁽¹⁾

They only said that to criticise the *Sunnah* without realising that they confirmed the words of the Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him*. They are not intelligent, because the intelligence that does not lead to faith is a kind of stupidity and blindness. Similarly, those who swore that they were unable to go out and fight while Allah says, ‘They will swear by Allah, “Had we been able to do so, we would certainly have set out with you!”’ (*at-Tawba:* 42) They did swear and affirm the truth of the Quran. They swore that they were unable to go out to fight, even though they possessed material and physical means. The Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘[And by thus falsely swearing] they will be destroying their own selves; for Allah knows indeed that they are lying!’ (*at-Tawba:* 42) They swore by Allah in affirmation of their lies and thereby exposed themselves to destruction. They were not content only to refuse to take part in Muslim struggle but they indecently lied and Allah exposed their lies.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

عَفَا ٱللَّهُ عَنكَ لِمَ أَذِنتَ لَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكَ ٱلَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا۟ وَتَعْلَمَ ٱلْكَـٰذِبِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

God forgive you [Prophet]! Why did you give them permission to stay at home before it had become clear to you which of them spoke the truth and which were liars? [43] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 43)

The word ‘pardon’ *`afa* literally indicates that a trace is removed, just as the wind blows away the footprints a man leaves in the sand and removes them. In a religious context, it means that Allah effaces the sins of His servants. As long as a person seeks forgiveness for their sins and say, ‘I seek forgiveness in Allah, besides whom there is no deity, the Ever-Living, the All-Sustaining, and I repent to Him’!⁽²⁾ No one may bother them any further or make them

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(1) *Ahmad, Musnad, 4:132; At-Tirmidhi (2664); Ibn Majah (12) and Ad-Daraquṭni 4:286*

(2) *Abu Dawud (1517) and At-Tirmidhi (3577) on the authority of Zayd, the freeman of the Prophet peace be upon him*

feel bad for their action. Actually, they have sought the forgiveness of Him Who possesses everything and He Alone *Glorified is He* possesses the right to pardon and forgive.(1) No one else should interfere in this matter. No sinner should be made to feel bad once they have sought the forgiveness of the One Who can grant pardon. If one hears someone seeking forgiveness, they should say, ‘May Allah pardon you’! No one knows whether Allah has pardoned them or not, so you should help them through prayers. To those who try to make sinners feel bad, we say, have good manners because they did not sin against you but rather against the Lord; if the one who seeks forgiveness for their sin should not be further bothered by people, then what do you think about the pardon of Allah, the only One Who can truly give pardon?

Here, the Lord *Glorified is He* gives pardon to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who allowed them staying home instead of fighting. The Quran then affirms that it was the right choice for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to give them permission. Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the chapter of *at-Tawba*, ‘Had these [hypocrites] set out with you, [O believers,] they would have added nothing to you save the evil of corruption.’ (*at-Tawba:* 47) Had they gone out to fight, they would have been a cause of defeat, not victory. The Lord then affirms that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was right in his decision. He *peace be upon him* was infallible. Here, we are faced with an instance of Allah's pardon even though there was no sin. There was only the Messenger's permission for them to stay behind which the Quran affirms it was right. Some people understand the Lord's words, ‘Why did you grant them permission?’ (*at-Tawba:* 43) as a rhetorical question expressive of censure as though the Lord was saying, ‘How could you have allowed them doing this’? The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is between two probabilities:

First: A pardon for which no sin is specified.

Second: A rhetorical question that some people understand to be critical.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…for who but Allah could forgive sins?’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 135). He also says, ‘Say, “If you were to own all the treasure-houses of my Lord’s bounty, lo! you would still try to hold on [to them] tightly for fear of spending [too much]”; for man has always been avaricious whereas Allah is limitless in His bounty.’ (*al-Isra’*: 100), (were the right to dispense mercy and forgiveness given to men, they would be stingy with it).

The Lord *Glorified is He* supports His messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when He says, ‘Had these [hypocrites] set out with you, [O believers,] they would have added nothing to you save the evil of corruption.’ (*at-Tawba:* 47) It is as though the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was guided to it by his pure nature and faith. The Quran indicates this to clarify for us that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was infallible and his nature was pure and sound. He had to present—as a role-model— a logical explanation to people so that no ordinary person would come after him and give an opinion on a religious matter, saying, ‘My instinct tells me that such-and-such is right’. Rather, before a person gives an opinion about any matter of religion, they must first consult the Quran and Sunnah. For example, Muslims differed whether to ransom the prisoners captured at the Battle of Badr or not.(1) In response, the Lord revealed, ‘Had it not been for a decree from Allah that had already gone forth, there would indeed have befallen you a tremendous chastisement because all [the captives] that you took.’ (*al-Anfal:* 68)

Allah thereby supports the verdict of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and upholds it. The Messenger was guided to the right decision by his faithful instinct, but this right is not afforded to anyone but the infallible. The Lord permits giving leave when He said, ‘Hence, when they ask leave of you for some [valid] reason of their own, grant this leave to whomsoever of them you choose [to grant it].’ (*an-Nur:* 62) The verse in question says, ‘May Allah pardon you [O Prophet]! Why did you grant them permission to stay at home? You should not have until it had become obvious to you as to who was speaking the truth, and you came to know who were the liars?’ (*at-Tawba:* 43)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, (1763); Ahmad, Musnad, (30-31) on the authority of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab and Abu Bakr* Allah *be pleased with them... Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him felt that the prisoners should be ransomed because they were the Muslims’ kinsmen and Muslims could use* the ransoms to strengthen themselves whilst `Umar felt they should be killed for they were the leaders of disbelief. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* followed Abu Bakr's opinion and ransomed them. Then, Allah revealed His word, ‘It does not behove a prophet to keep captives unless he has battled strenuously on Earth. You may desire the fleeting gains of this world – but Allah desires [for you the good of] the life to come.’ (*al-Anfal*: 67)

Thus, it is made clear to us that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them permission to stay behind based on his prior knowledge, deliberation and instinct. He saw it more proper to allow them staying behind as conforming to the will of the Lord; had they gone out to fight with the Muslim army, they would have added nothing to their cause except evil and corruption. They had no pure intention for taking part in battle. Allah weakened their resolve and dashed their spirits so that they would not go out to fight. The pardon given here is a form of outward tolerance, since the truth of things should have been ascertained before permission was granted. The Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'You should not have until it had become obvious to you as to who was speaking the truth, and you came to know who were the liars?' (*at-Tawba:* 43) That is, had the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* not given them permission to stay behind, they would have been exposed, but the permission proved a cover behind which they concealed their hypocrisy; they had already resolved not to go out to fight and had they done it, they would have been exposed before all Muslims; the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to conceal them.

The Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لَا يَسْتَـْٔذِنُكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ أَن
يُجَٰهِدُوا۟ بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Those who have faith in God and the Last Day do not ask you for exemption from struggle with their possessions and their persons – God knows exactly who is mindful of Him [44]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 44)

Allah *Glorified is He* alerts us to the fact that those who requested permission to stay behind exposed themselves. They asked for that permission after the divine command 'Go forth to war, whether it be easy or difficult.' (*at-Tawba:* 41) In such conditions, no one who truly believes in Allah and the Last Day would refrain from striving in Allah's Cause. The true believer would not proffer excuses for staying behind, even if he had valid excuses. Rather, he would attempt to conceal these excuses from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to go out with him to struggle. Indeed, he would rush to go out and struggle, even if Allah had given him a valid excuse not to do so. This verse, then, is a rebuke to those who asked for leave to stay behind. Indeed, it is more than this, for the believer who is called to struggle alongside the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by a command from Allah does not think like an ordinary person thinks. In an ordinary situation, if a person is asked to do something, they think about it and turn it over in their minds before deciding. But if a believer is commanded to struggle in Allah's Cause with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by Allah, he does not need to think about the answer and the word ‘no’ will not even cross his mind, but rather he will set out to join the struggle.

However, how could the command to go out and fight come from Allah to the people who ask for permission to stay behind? The very fact that they asked for that permission proved that the faith in their hearts was shaky; it showed their deliberate intention and decision to stay behind. It is strange that these people asked the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* for permission to stay behind even though the command to fight had been given by Allah Himself—there was no need for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to give them permission to stay behind; they were merely looking for an excuse to hide behind.

For example, an object of ridicule in our society is the stingy man who does not offer hospitability for his guests, yet acts as though he is ready to honour them. You find that he calls their son and says to him in front of guests, ‘Go to the market and find us a sheep to slaughter for the guest. Do not be late. We are waiting for you’. When the guest says, out of good manners, ‘No, there is no need for that’, you find that the stingy host tells his son not to bother after using the guest's refusal as an excuse not to entertain them. He acts as though he wants to do so, but in reality, we see that he never intends to do it from the beginning. We all know that a person does not seek permission to entertain his guests.

For example, when the angels visited Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in a human form, he wanted to honour and entertain them. He did not seek their leave to slaughter a calf out of good hospitability. He brought it to them slaughtered and roasted.(1) This is how a person shall behave if he really wants to entertain the guests; as for the one who wants to find an excuse to escape that, he looks for different ways to act as if he wants to entertain them, whilst, in reality, he does not want to do it. For example, he might say to his guest, ‘Would you like some coffee or do you not like it’? He might also say, ‘Would you like to eat dinner or have a light meal so you can sleep better’? Or, ‘Would you like to stay at my home or at a hotel to be more comfortable?’

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(1) ‘Indeed, there came unto Ibrahim (Abraham) our [heavenly] messengers, bearing a glad tiding. They bade him peace; [and] he answered, “And peace upon you be!” – and made haste to place before them a roasted calf.’ (*Hud*: 69) ‘Then he turned quietly to his household and brought forth a fat [roasted] calf.’ (*adh-Dhariyat*: 26)

Those who asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him,* ‘Should I come out to fight with you or not’? showed their vacillation, whilst faith must be firm and unshakeable. Vacillation means doubt. It means that the one asking the question is uncertain because both options are equal in their eyes. The one who truly believes in Allah would not ask the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* for permission to stay behind after receiving the command to fight. It does not behove the believer to ask for permission to defend the cause of Allah. Allah says, ‘Allah has full knowledge as to who is conscious of Him.’ (*at-Tawba:* 44) Allah knows whether their hearts are conscious of Him; though they might fool people, they cannot fool Allah. Simply, He sees what their hearts conceal.

Then Allah sends down His judgement concerning these people, saying:

إِنَّمَا يَسْتَـْٔذِنُكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ
وَٱرْتَابَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ فَهُمْ فِى رَيْبِهِمْ يَتَرَدَّدُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Only those who do not have faith in God and the Last Day ask your permission to stay at home: they have doubt in their hearts and so they waver [45] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 45)

Accordingly, Allah has issued His judgement concerning those who asked for exemption. As long as a man wavers between going out to strive in the cause of Allah or not, this reveals the shakiness of his faith which means that he doubts what Allah has in store for him in the Hereafter. If he is truly certain that he will enter Paradise without being held to account if he is martyred, he will not hesitate for a single second concerning his striving in the cause of Allah. Since paradise is the goal, the person who has faith will follow any path that leads to it. If a shorter path is available, this will make the believer rejoice because he wants to leave the misery of this world for the bliss of the Hereafter. If he is living a blissful life in this world, he knows that this bliss is transitory and he wants a permanent bliss which never ends.

The meaning of ‘wavering’ and ‘asking for permission to stay at home’ in this verse indicate that doubt has entered the person’s heart; and doubt means that there are two equal options before you, neither of which seems better to choose than the other. Issues of speech and reason are affected by many different factors. If you make a firm decision about something, there must be a fact which supports it because if you are certain about something which is not based on a fact, this will be considered ignorance. Ignorance means that you believe that something is true, when in fact it is untrue and baseless. For example, if you say, ‘the earth is flat’, and someone has brought to you a picture of the spherical Earth, but you continue to insist that it is flat, this will be considered ignorance. The difference between the ignorant and illiterate is that when the illiterate person who did not know that the earth is spherical, but learns later the truth of the matter, he accepts the truth and believes in it. However, the ignorant person believes in something untrue, so that if you tell him the truth he argues about, he insists that his opinion is correct. Therefore, we find that the real problems are not caused by the illiterate but by the ignorant because the illiterate person only needs a single intellectual endeavour which is to give him the correct information and so he accepts it. However, convincing the ignorant person requires two endeavours: firstly, you must remove the incorrect information and baseless notions from his head, and secondly, you must convince him of the truth.

The facts which can be proven are called knowledge, but if they cannot be proven, this is called dictation. For example, when we teach the young child that Allah is One, but he has not reached yet the age in which you can prove this to him, the child accepts this fact, but he cannot prove it. During this phase, he merely imitates his father, mother or whoever teaches him this until his mind matures and becomes able to prove what he accepted as a child through dictation.

Knowledge requires belief in facts which can be proven by evidence, but if certainty has not been reached, this means that there are two options in one’s mind. If one option has not been given preponderance over the other, this refers to the state of uncertainty. If a person thinks that one of them is more likely, this is called ‘supposition’, but if a person chooses the option which is less likely, this is called ‘delusion’.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘Only those who do not have faith in Allah and the Last Day …’ (*at-Tawba:* 45) who, if their belief in Allah and the Last Day were firm in their hearts, and if they had real belief that that their final return will be to Allah Who will hold them to account for their deeds, and if they considered the sacrifice of their money and lives to be trivial in comparison with the great reward that awaited them in the Hereafter, they would not have asked for permission to stay at home. Since doubt had entered their hearts, this means that they were doubtful concerning the fact that they will meet Allah on the Last Day. Since they doubted this matter, they considered that the sacrifice of their money and lives would be in vain. Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘…they have doubt in their hearts…’ (*at-Tawba:* 45).

Therefore, doubt resides in the heart, as knowledge does, and both pass through the mind because the mind passes judgement over these issues after the senses receive them. Then it discusses the given facts and results. Once the mind has reflected on all the given facts and has chosen faith, they become firm and steadfast in the heart and the mind does not reflect on them again. Therefore, the Arabs call faith ‘*`aqidah*’ *(creed)* because the word ‘*`aqidah*’ means tying something firmly so that it cannot be removed from its place.

For example, when a child puts his hand close to a burning object and feels its heat, he knows that fire burns, and does not try to do this again. In addition, his mind never reflects on this matter again and thinks that the fire will not burn him this time. Rather, the matter becomes firm in the child’s mind, and moves from being a sensory matter to a matter of conviction which does not need to be subjected to experiment again, and requires no further evidence.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…they have doubt in their hearts…’ (*at-Tawba:* 45). In another verse, He says, ‘Allah has sealed their hearts…’ (*al-Baqara:* 7). This means that the heart is the place which keeps the matters which have gone through the phase of reflection and have become convictions which the mind does not need to reflect on again. Allah’s saying, ‘…they have doubt in their hearts…’ (*at-Tawba:* 45) means that their faith has not reached the level of certainty in which the mind does not need to reflect on the matter again to decide whether to believe or not. There is still some doubt which causes the issue to move from the heart to the mind to ponder them again. Therefore, Allah describes them perfectly accurately by saying, '…and so they waver.' (*at-Tawba:* 45) This means that their faith fluctuates between the heart and the mind, settling into the heart and then going to the mind to be pondered again, then settling into the heart. Thus, their faith wavers and fluctuates between the heart and the mind, never settling anywhere. Accordingly, they have no certainty about the Hereafter and the reward which Allah has prepared there for them. They also doubt that they will meet Allah on the Last Day; all these matters come to their minds, but they never reach the level of certainty.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this further, saying:

وَلَوْ أَرَادُوا۟ ٱلْخُرُوجَ لَأَعَدُّوا۟ لَهُۥ عُدَّةً وَلَـٰكِن كَرِهَ ٱللَّهُ
ٱنۢبِعَاثَهُمْ فَثَبَّطَهُمْ وَقِيلَ ٱقْعُدُوا۟ مَعَ ٱلْقَـٰعِدِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

If they had really wanted to go out [to battle] with you, they would have made preparations, but God was loath to let them rise up and made them hold back. It was said, 'Stay with those who stay behind' [46] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 46)

Their wavering proved that they did not want to go out to join the battle; had they truly resolved to go out, they would have made the necessary preparations for war by preparing their provisions, steeds and weapons. However, they did not do anything of this kind because they lacked the true intention to go out and strive in Allah's cause with their money and lives.

Someone may say, 'Is it not possible that they would make all the preparations for war at the last moment'? We say no, because fighting cannot be prepared for at the last moment; rather, the one who will go out to fight must busy himself with the necessary preparations for war such as weapons, provisions, a mount and so on. If he does not take care of these things early enough before he sets out, making sure that his weapon is suitable for fighting, and that he has enough food and so on, he will not be able to go out to fight. This matter cannot be delayed to the last moment; rather, their non-preparation for war revealed their real intention not to go out to fight. Allah *Glorified is He* was aware of their intentions and what their hearts hid, so He requited them for what they concealed in their souls. Therefore, Allah says, '…but Allah was loath to let them rise up and made them hold back. It was said, "Stay with those who stay behind."' (*at-Tawba:* 46)

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* has no need for any of His creatures; rather, His creatures are the ones who are in constant need of Him. Therefore, He caused these people to hold back from going out to fight, and was loath to let them go out to fight. The word '*thabbatahum*' (caused them to hold back) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means that He caused them to stay in their places and was loath to let them prepare for the battle and was averse to cause them to join the battle actively. Aversion is a matter of emotion, whilst holding back is a matter of motivation.

For example – to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - When you see a flower, your eyes perceive its beauty and if you stretch your hand out to it to pick it, but it is prohibited this because it is a conation to seize something which you do not own. If you wish to have a flower like it, you must either buy or plant it. Therefore, the Sacred Law only intervenes in matters relevant to conation. Allah's aversion to their conation was manifested in holding them back and preventing them from acting, beautifying to them abstaining from fighting with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* intended this for a wise reason which coincided with the permission of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for them to remain behind. We observe in this verse that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, '…it was said, "Stay with those who stay behind."' (*at-Tawba:* 46). If Allah was the One Who held them back, this means that He let them stay behind by the divine will or Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them permission to stay behind because he noticed their reluctance to fight. Also, Satan might have whispered to them to stay behind. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'In the same way We assigned to each prophet an enemy, evil humans and evil jinn. They suggest alluring words to one another in order to deceive...' (*al-An'am:* 112).

The phrase 'it was said' (*at-Tawba:* 46) is in the passive form so that the subject of the verb is not mentioned so that the saying may be made by different speakers. When Allah caused them to hold back, this implies that Allah, Messenger Muhammad and Satan urged them to stay at home or told them to stay at home. Those people might also have encouraged each other to stay at home. Accordingly, a single word '*qil*' (it was said) suggested many meanings, neither of them negates or contradicts with the other, as all of them are suitable to the context.

'…but Allah was loath to let them rise up and made them hold back. It was said, "Stay with those who stay behind."' (*at-Tawba:* 46) 'Those who stay behind' in this verse refers to the people who were not obliged to strive in the cause of Allah such as women, children and the old. It seems that by staying behind, they relinquished their manhood which obliged them to perform striving in the cause of Allah. They should not have accepted this matter for themselves. In another verse in the same chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They prefer to be with those who stay behind. Their hearts have been sealed…' (*at-Tawba:* 87). Their manhood should have urged them to strive in the cause of Allah, but they were pleased to be levelled with women and children in their weakness.

An Arabian poet who wanted to urge the members of his tribe who were reluctant to fight alongside him, He said to them:

I do not know, nor am I about to know,
If the tribe of Hisn are men or women!(1)

The word '*qawm*' which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the line of poetry refers to men only. Allah explains the wisdom of making them hold back. If their remaining at home was something good, then there must have been wisdom in Allah's action of causing them to hold back and the Messenger's permission for them to stay behind. If their remaining at home was the result of Satan's insinuations or self-insinuations, then these insinuations served the cause of faith and helped in fulfilling Allah's intention. Theirs is the foolishness caused by disbelief. These insinuations beautified to these hypocrites refraining from going out to perform *strive* in the cause of Allah. Had they gone out, they would have done what Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says about them:

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(1) The poet's name is Zuhayr ibn Abu Salma.

لَوْ خَرَجُوا۟ فِيكُم مَّا زَادُوكُمْ إِلَّا خَبَالًا وَلَأَوْضَعُوا۟ خِلَـٰلَكُمْ
يَبْغُونَكُمُ ٱلْفِتْنَةَ وَفِيكُمْ سَمَّـٰعُونَ لَهُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

They would only have given you trouble if they had gone out [to battle] with you: they would have scurried around, trying to sow discord among you, and some of you would willingly have listened to them – God knows exactly who does evil [47]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 47)

The word '*khabal*' literally means 'mental illness which causes one's thoughts to become disordered'. If someone is described as *makhbul*, this means that he is not able to think clearly or judge matters rationally. Therefore, Allah's saying, '…They would only have given you trouble…' (*at-Tawba:* 47) means that they would have been a source of confusion if they had gone out to fight with the believers, so the believers could not have made correct decisions. Therefore, they would have helped against the believers and would have been a cause of defeat which Allah did not want for the believers. This means that their refraining from going out to fight was a means of repulsing evil. Allah willed that they did not go out to strive in the cause of Allah as a means of protecting the strength of the believers during their fight.

Allah's saying: '…they would have scurried around…' (*at-Tawba:* 47) suggests that they would have caused dissent among the Muslim ranks and sought to sow discord among them. The word '*khilal*' literally means the gap between two things or two people. This means that each one of the hypocrites would enter a group of believers to sow discord between them. Accordingly, they would have dissention among the believers.

But the question is, would they have set out '*ma`ahum*' (with them) or '*fihim*' (among them)? This verse says '*fikum*' which literally means 'in you' or 'among you'. They would have entered among the believers to confuse their thoughts. We say that prepositions in Arabic can substitute each other, so the word '*fikum*' (literally 'in you') implies the existence of an adverb and the noun that follows it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says in another verse that which helps us understand this notion, '…I will crucify you in the trunks of palm trees…' (*Taha:* 71).

Did Pharaoh mean to crucify the sorcerers inside or on the trunks? Although the linguists said that Arabic prepositions may substitute one another, we do not like this answer because although we might accept this for human speech, we cannot accept it where the speech of Allah is concerned. This is because the Arabic preposition *'fi*' (in) is different from the Arabic preposition '*`ala*' (on). Had Allah said, 'I will crucify you in the trunks of palm trees' using the Arabic preposition '*`ala'* (on), this would mean that it would be an ordinary crucifixion. As He says, '…I will crucify you in the trunks of palm trees…' (*Taha:* 71), this indicates that the crucifixion would be done in such a severe way that it would cause parts of the crucified body to actually penetrate the trunks. Accordingly, Pharaoh's soldiers would have hammered the bodies of the sorcerers until they would have entered the trunks of the palm trees, so that the bodies and the trunks would look like one single object. This image is meant to depict the harshness and severity of the crucifixion.

But if we said, 'on trunks of palm-trees' using the word *'ala* (on), the manner of the crucifixion would have been less harsh. The Noble Quran uses the words which give the most precise meaning so that if even a single preposition were changed, the meaning would be spoiled. In another verse in the Noble Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord…' (*Al-'Imran:* 133). This means that if we hasten to do good deeds, this will lead us to forgiveness, so before hastening to do good deeds, we have not gained mercy, but once we do, we attain it.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* also says, '…they used to hasten to increase their good deeds…' (*al-Anbiya':* 90). Allah did not say that '*yusari'un ila al-khayrat*' (hasten to do good deeds), but He said '*yusari'in fil khayrat*' (hasten to increase their good deeds) because their deeds were already good, and then they only would hasten to increase them. Therefore, *'yusari` ila'* something means that these things have not crossed a person's mind before. However, '*sara`ta fil khayr'* indicates that you already do good deeds, but you increase them.

If we ponder Allah's saying, 'they would have scurried around' (*at-Tawba:* 47), we find that the word '*awda`a*' means to move at a pace between swiftness and slowness; if an animal scurries, this means that it moves neither hastily nor slowly. If you consider how those hypocrites would have acted if they had gone to fight alongside the believers, you will see how they would have made corruption alluring to them and tried to confuse their minds. Such action would have required movement somewhere between slowness and swiftness. They would have required slowness because they would have whispered in the ears of the believers to make falsehood alluring to them. Then one of the hypocrites would have hasted to move to another believer to do the same thing with him. Therefore, slow movement would have been required regarding whispering insinuations, and quick movement would have been required regarding moving from one believer to another. This is the most accurate description which could be applied to what would have happened.

What was the goal of these hypocrites in sowing confusion in the minds of the believers and separating them into factions? The goal was to disrupt their unity and power. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘trying to sow discord among you’ (*at-Tawba:* 47), The hypocrites wanted to cause mischief among the believers because when an evil person sees other people doing good, the instincts of faith deep inside him make him feel disgusted with himself. Therefore, he tries to belittle the one who does good by mocking his actions and ridiculing him. This takes place clearly in places where intoxicants are served; when the people drinking them perceive the severity of their sin and find someone who does not drink alcohol, they try to tempt him to commit the same sin. If he refuses, they begin to insult and mock him, claiming that he lacks manhood. You also find that a liar tries to make others lie, a thief tries to tempt others to steal and a briber tries to tempt all his colleagues to take bribes. If an honest person appears amid those who commit these kinds of sins, they persecute and mock him.

For example, when a person goes to pray in the presence of people who do not usually pray, they try to mock him in different ways. The Noble Quran draws our attention to this matter for us to be protected by faith, saying, ‘The wicked used to laugh at the believers. They would wink at one another when the believers passed by them. Joke about them when they got back to their own people. And say, when they saw them, “These people are misguided”, though they were not sent to be their keepers. So today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers. As they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36)

These verses depict what happens when corruption becomes widespread on earth. Those who mock the believers utter laughs which will most certainly stop sooner or later, and will be followed by torment in the Hereafter. As for the believers, they fear Allah in this worldly life, so Allah will reward them in the Hereafter, and they will be eternally cheerful.

Therefore, Allah's saying, 'trying to sow discord among you' (*at-Tawba:* 47) means that those whose hatred for the believers and their faith is severe, will try to tempt them in their religion to come down to their degraded level, just as the kinds of behaviour we have just described.

Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* explains that the believers would not have been completely immune to the hypocrites. Although they did not go out to fight with the believers, some believers would have listened to them. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, '…and some of you would willingly have listened to them – Allah knows exactly who does evil.' (*at-Tawba:* 47) '*Sami`t min fulan*' means listening to what someone says or listening to the reports of someone to convey them.

Therefore, the letter '*lam*' gives two meanings. Some believers listened willingly to the hypocrites who caused confusion and dissension, and some of the hypocrites had spies who conveyed the believers' news and worked for them. Some of the believers first would listen to the hypocrites, and once they were confused they would convey reports about the believers to them. Therefore, the Arabic letter *(lam)* can literally suggest both 'listening to someone' and 'listening in the interest of someone'. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the matter in His saying, 'We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust.' (*an-Nisa':* 105)

A person may say that this is a warning against disputing with those who betray trust for fear that one may not be able to resist them or that they will commit more sins due to this dispute. We can tell him that he has not understood the meaning; as the meaning is: Do not defend those who betray trust.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Allah knows exactly who does evil.' (*at-Tawba:* 47) because both, those who would have listened to the hypocrites, and those who would have listened in the interest of the hypocrites, were evildoers whom Allah knows exactly. Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

لَقَدِ ٱبۡتَغَوُاْ ٱلۡفِتۡنَةَ مِن قَبۡلُ وَقَلَّبُواْ لَكَ ٱلۡأُمُورَ حَتَّىٰ جَآءَ
ٱلۡحَقُّ وَظَهَرَ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ وَهُمۡ كَٰرِهُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

Indeed, they had tried before that to stir up discord: they devised plots against you [Prophet] until the truth was exposed and God's will triumphed, much to their disgust [48] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 48)

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* wants to remind the believers of the previous misdeeds committed by the hypocrites and disbelievers against Islam and the Muslims, including plotting against Islam, trying to sow dissention among the Muslims and plotting against the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

Allah's saying, '…they had tried before that to stir up discord…' (*at-Tawba:* 48) prove the misdeeds that they did before.(1) As for His saying, '…they devised plots against you…' (*at-Tawba:* 48), the Arabic verb '*qallaba*' (devised plots) literally means turning upside down. We see this in the marketplace when you go to the greengrocer, you find that the best fruits at the top of the pile, but when you buy some fruits from him, he fills the bag with the worst fruits which are hidden at the bottom of the pile. Therefore, he brings you fruits with the lowest quality whose blemish is concealed which you would never have bought had you seen it.(2)

This is what the hypocrites did when they turned things upside down so that they could afflict the believers with the most possible evil without being harmed.

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(1) See Ibn Kathir's exegesis (2, 361). As for Al-Qurtubi, he says in his exegesis (4, 3083), 'They sought to spread discord and confusion before they were exposed and the Revelation announced what they would have done. Ibn Jurayj said that this refers to twelve men of the hypocrites who stood at Al-Wada` mountain during the night of the Pledge of Al-`Aqabah, intending to assassinate Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

(2) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prohibited this act when he happened to pass by a heap of corn. He thrust his hand in that (heap) and his fingers felt wetness. He said to the owner of that heap of corn, 'What is this?' He replied, 'O Messenger of Allah, these have been drenched by rainfall.' He remarked, 'Why did you not place this (the drenched part of the heap) over the corn so that people might see it? He who deceives is not of us.' *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (102); Ahmad in His Musnad (2, 242); At-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (1315) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah. At-Tirmidhi said, 'The Hadith is Hasan/ Sahih.'*

A clear example of this occurred when Quraysh plotted against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bringing a young man from every tribe to strike him all at once so that all the tribes would share in his murder.

However, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* makes use of these temptations in the interest of the believers, as He says, '…until the truth was exposed and Allah's will triumphed, much to their disgust.' (*at-Tawba:* 48)

The plots they made against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and their attempt to murder him were what caused him to immigrate from Mecca. Then Allah caused this incident to expose and give victory to the Truth and spread Islam, as Allah did not send a messenger and then forsook him; since He sent a messenger, He certainly supported him.(1) Therefore, Allah clarified that the discord they stirred before turned against the hypocrites and brought about much good to the believers.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, 'And Our word has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers. [That] indeed, they would be those given victory. And [that] indeed, our soldiers will be those who overcome.' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) Allah's saying, 'And [that] indeed, our soldiers will be those who overcome' (*as-Saffat:* 173) represents a matter relevant to creed; so if you ever see believers engaging in battle with disbelievers and suffering defeat, you should know that they are not truly among Allah's soldiers, and that they have fallen short of fulfilling one of the conditions of being soldiers of Allah. Therefore, we should hold ourselves to account first.

For example, at the Battle of Uhud when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered the archers to remain at their places at all costs, but they disobeyed him,(2) one of the conditions of being soldiers of

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says in this regard, 'Indeed, We will support Our messengers and those who believe during the life of this world and on the Day when the witnesses will stand.' (*Ghafir*: 51)

(2) Al-Bara` ibn `Azib said, 'We faced the pagans on that day (of the Battle of Uhud) and the Prophet placed a batch of archers (at a special place) and appointed `Abdullah ibn Jubair as their commander and said, "Do not leave this place; if you should see us conquering the enemy, do not leave this place, and if you should see them conquering us, do not (come to) help us," but they disobeyed Prophet Muhammad, so seventy Muslims were killed.' *[Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4043), and Ahmad in his Musnad (4, 294)]*

Allah was unfulfilled, namely obeying Messenger Muhammad. What would have happened to Islam had those archers disobeyed Messenger Muhammad and yet gained victory? All the orders of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have seemed unimportant to the believers.

During the Battle of Hunayn, when the believers thought that they would gain victory by their great numbers and not their faith, the result was that they suffered grave defeat at the onset of the battle, for them to learn a lesson in faith. Therefore, if you ever see believers defeated by disbelievers, you should know that one of the conditions of being soldiers of Allah has not been fulfilled. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘And how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought many religious scholars. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves the steadfast. And their words were not but that they said, “Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excess [committed] in our affairs and plant firmly our feet and give us victory over the disbelieving people.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 146-147)

The first thing these warriors did was realising that their sins might cause their defeat, so they sought Allah’s forgiveness, repented to him, went out to fight and Allah gave them victory. If the believers have not gained victory, this means that their faith is deficient in some way because Allah will not let a worldly incident contradict a well-established Quranic principle.

Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَقُولُ ٱئْذَن لِّي وَلَا تَفْتِنِّيٓ ۚ أَلَا فِي ٱلْفِتْنَةِ سَقَطُوا۟ ۗ
وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمُحِيطَةٌۢ بِٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

Some of them said, ‘Give me permission to stay at home:
do not trouble me.’ They are already in trouble: Hell will
engulf the disbelievers [49] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 49)

Those are the ones who sought permission from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to stay at home and not go out to strive in the cause of Allah; and some of them uttered the words, ‘Do not put me to trial by refusing to give me permission.’ But what does ‘trial’ mean in this verse? Does it mean torment, evil or idolatry and disbelief (Allah forbid)? All these, besides other things, are kinds of trial. Allah's saying, 'Give me permission to stay at home; do not put me to trial.' (*at-Tawba:* 49) apparently looks like a command, but in fact it is not because when an imperative statement is issued by a person of lower esteem to a person of higher esteem, it is not called a command; rather, it is a supplication or a plea. If it comes from a person of equal esteem, it is called a request. If it comes from a person of higher esteem to a person of lower esteem, it is called a command. All these are forms of requests for action.

Al-Jadd ibn Qays, a man of the *Ansar,* went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Grant me permission [to remain at home], but do not put me to trial.' This is because had Messenger Muhammad not given him permission, he would have fallen into the trial of disobeying Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.(1)

It is said that he was not strong enough to tolerate the hardships of war. It was also said that he had a weakness for women and had heard of the beauty of Byzantine women, so he feared that he would be tempted by them, especially when the battle took place on the lands of Byzantium, and the warriors would be likely to capture Byzantine women as captives.

Allah's saying, 'Give me permission to stay at home; do not put me to trial' (*at-Tawba:* 49) already subjected this person to trial as Allah says next, 'They are already put in trial' (*at-Tawba:* 49). This person was corpulent and complained that he was unable to endure the journey because of the long distance and the heat, so the reply came, 'If you flee from heat and cold, it is more proper for you to flee from the Hellfire'. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hell will engulf the disbelievers.' (*at-Tawba:* 49). And in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Say, "The fire of Hell is more intensive in heat" - if they would but understand.' (*at-Tawba:* 81) Therefore, the fire of hell is more intense and hotter than the battle,(2) and however hot the weather in the worldly life may be, it is much less intense than the fire of the Hereafter which will encompass the disbelievers.

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(1) See `Asbab Al-Nuzul (Occasions of the Revelation of the Verses), p. 94; Ibn Kathir in his exegesis. Al-Jadd ibn Qays was one of the leaders of Banu Salamah.

(2) Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Those who remained behind rejoiced in their staying [at home] after [the departure of] the Messenger of Allah and disliked striving with their wealth and their lives in the cause of Allah and said, "Do not go forth in the heat." Say, "The fire of Hell is more intensive in heat" - if they understand.' (*at-Tawba*: 81)

Then Allah says:

إِن تُصِبۡكَ حَسَنَةٞ تَسُؤۡهُمۡۖ وَإِن تُصِبۡكَ مُصِيبَةٞ يَقُولُواْ
قَدۡ أَخَذۡنَآ أَمۡرَنَا مِن قَبۡلُ وَيَتَوَلَّواْ وَّهُمۡ فَرِحُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

If you [Prophet] have good fortune, it will grieve them, but if misfortune comes your way, they will say to themselves, ‘We took precautions for this,’ and go away rejoicing [50] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 50)

The verses still tackle the issue of the hypocrites after showing how the hypocrites tried to flee from war by offering various excuses. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* wanted to make the image even clearer by depicting the hatred which the hypocrites bore in their hearts towards the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If you [Prophet] have good fortune…’ (*at-Tawba:* 50). ‘Good fortune’ means victory in war; for the hypocrites, victory in war simply meant that the believers would gain battle-spoils, a matter which would aggrieve the hypocrites and sadden them because the primary concern of the hypocrites was this worldly life from which they wanted to get as much as they could. Since they did not go out to join the struggle and offered untruthful excuses for evading war, they would be aggrieved to see the believers victorious because they would have no right to share in the spoils. In this case, they would wish to have joined the way so that they would have a share in the spoils.

However, if the believers were defeated, this would sadden every Muslim, but the hypocrites would consider this defeat as good news, and would say to themselves that they were more clever and prudent, as they did not join the war. Therefore, they were saved from what befell the believers. Misfortune in war takes the form of loss of life, men, wealth and weapons, besides bitterness of defeat.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘If you [Prophet] have good fortune, it will grieve them, but if misfortune comes your way, they will say to themselves, “We took precautions for this”, and go away rejoicing.’ (*at-Tawba:* 50). This indicates that they took precautions before the beginning of the fighting by refusing to join the war. The hypocrites may rejoice if any misfortune or catastrophe befalls the believers. In this verse, misfortune refers defeat in war. They would say, ‘We took precautions for this’ (*at-Tawba:* 50). This means that they safeguarded themselves by refusing to go out to fight, while Muhammad, his Companions and his army did not take precautions. Then they would turn their backs to hide their glee.

Allah says, ‘If you [Prophet] have good fortune, it will grieve them…’ (*at-Tawba:* 50). This clarifies that the victory of the believers deeply aggrieved the hypocrites. This statement has become a verse in the Quran which they heard. If the good fortune which was gained by the believers had not aggrieved them, would this not have motivated them to say that they neither rejoiced nor grieved. When the Quran surprised them by exposing the secrets of their souls, would this not motivate them to be guided? Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew their inner thoughts after Allah disclosed them to him. However, they kept their hypocrisy in their hearts and waited for misfortune to befall Muhammad and his Companions.

Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* responds to them saying:

قُل لَّن يُصِيبَنَآ إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ ٱللَّهُ لَنَا هُوَ مَوۡلَىٰنَاۚ
وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلۡيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

Say, ‘Only what God has decreed will happen to us.
He is our Master: let the believers put their trust in
God’[51] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 51)

‘Say, “Only what Allah has decreed will happen to us.” (*at-Tawba:* 51) refers to what befalls or happens to a person. If he experiences something which brings about benefits to him, he deems this good; and if it afflicts him with misfortune, he deems it bad. Therefore, the word ‘*isabah*’ means that something happens to someone; if it brings benefit it is good, and if it brings evil it is bad. Misfortunes are of two kinds: those which involve an adversary, and those which involve no adversary. If someone hit me, for example, he becomes my adversary, so rancour and rage towards him develop in my heart, and I desire to avenge myself from him. But if I fall ill, for example, there is no adversary. Allah urges us not to have rancour but to pardon our adversaries, as He says, '…and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good.' (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

The verse includes three stages: to hold anger in check, to pardon and to do good; thereby, a person will attain the rank of those doers of good whom Allah loves.

In addition, Allah says, 'And whoever is patient and forgives - indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*ash-Shura:* 43) This means those who patiently bear their misfortunes and forgive their adversaries and enemies. Patience and forgiveness require resolution and strength of will for a person to accustom himself to pardon instead of seeking revenge.

As for those misfortunes in which no adversary is involved, they do not require this effort, but require only patience, since no one plays a part in them. We find that Allah says about these kinds of misfortunes, '…and be patient over what befalls you. [All] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*Luqman:* 17) because this case requires less resolution. Therefore, the emphasis added by the Arabic letter '*lam*' in the word '*lamin `adhm al-umur'* (indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination) is not used in the previous verse, while it is used in the following verse, 'And whoever is patient and forgives - indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*ash-Shura:* 43)

And we must pay attention to Allah's saying regarding human emotions, '…and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good.' (*Al-'Imran:* 134) This noble verse represents the stages which a person passes through. First, one must hold his anger which means that anger still exists in the heart and is renewed every time the person sees his adversary. Therefore, he needs to hold his anger every time he sees him. Then the believer moves to a more sublime stage urged by faith, namely pardon, in which he removes the anger from his heart and replaces it with pardon. The third stage is, '…and Allah loves the doers of good.' (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

Allah loves doing good and rewards the people who observe it. A person should treat kindly whoever mistreated him so that he can attain Allah's love. This represents perfection urged by faith because all people are Allah's dependents. For example – and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - imagine that you go home and find that one of your children has hit another. With whom will you side as the male head of household? You will side with the one who was hit so you will pat him on the shoulder and soothe him, and you might give him some money or buy him something to cheer him up. This means that you will treat him kindly.

Since we are all Allah's dependents, if someone assails and wrongs another, Allah will be on the side of the wronged person. Therefore, the one who mistreats you causes Allah to side with you, so should you not return the favour by being kind to him?

The child at fault sees that his brother, whom he wronged, now enjoys the affection of his father, and perhaps the wronged child has obtained something that he wished for. Therefore, the child at fault wishes that he were the one who was wronged, so that he would get something good in return.

In the verse which we are currently examining, Allah advises us that when misfortunes afflict us, we should respond by saying, 'Say, "Only what Allah has decreed will happen to us...' (*at-Tawba:* 51), accordingly, everything is referred to the wisdom of the Creator of the universe Who arranges all its affairs. Something that a person dislikes may afflict him although it is good for him. If a person's father disciplines him because he neglects his studies, is this merely a punishment or for his own good? If he considers the future and the success he will attain in life if he studies, this punishment is for his own good. Accordingly, we must view the things which happen to the believers; if they are defeated at a battle, this means that Allah draws their attention to do good and He teaches them that they must be aware of the means that bring about victory which they did not utilise, so they were defeated.

For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - when the teacher takes the pupils' notebooks to correct them, sometimes he punishes the pupils who make mistakes to educate them.

Therefore, if misfortune befalls us and you believe that it harms us, you should know that we trust the One Who afflicted us with it. We are also confident that He incurred it to discipline us, and that everything is destined for our good, and the One Who destined it – Allah *the Almighty*– says, 'I will surely win, I and My messengers...' (*al-Mujadala:* 21).

Our faith teaches us that everything that befalls us from Allah is good, and that certain incidents may take place to discipline and reform us so that we do not deviate from the right path. A person only disciplines and reforms the one he loves, and he does not care about rectifying the affairs of the one he does not love; what about the Creator's love for us? If a father finds some children playing cards in the parlour and his son is among them, he will be angry. However, if he only finds the neighbours' children playing cards, he might not pay any attention to them. Accordingly, if the Muslims are afflicted by something which the hypocrites and disbelievers consider as a misfortune that causes them to rejoice, this is foolishness on their part. This is because everything which Allah ordains is for the good of the believers, as it is either as a kind of discipline, a cause for reward or a means of raising one's status in life. Therefore, everything that afflicts the believers is good.(1) Therefore, the following verse, 'Say, "Only what Allah has decreed will happen to us...' (*at-Tawba:* 51) means that all that Allah decrees for the believers is for their own good.

Then Allah puts further emphasis on this notion, saying, '…He is our protector…' (*at-Tawba:* 51). Since Allah is the One Who takes cares of all the believers' affairs and protects them, He will not mistreat those who seeks his support. Then Allah clarifies this meaning further saying, '…let the believers put their trust in Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 51) Allah, in whom you believe, is Wise and All-Powerful, so when afflictions befall you, contemplate them; if they occurred as a result of your own misdeeds, then you must blame yourself; and if Allah afflicted you with them, then you must understand that they happened for a wise reason.

Allah gives the disbeliever his life's essential needs, but He gives the believer the essential needs of both his material and his spiritual life. With this notion, we know that if something we dislike has afflicted us, this does not mean that Allah has forsaken us, but He wants to discipline us or draw our attention to something. If He had not done that, He really would have forsaken us.

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(1) Suhayb Ar-Rumi narrated that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'How wonderful is the case of a believer; there is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity attends him, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him; and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him.' *[Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2699), Ahmad in his Musnad (4. 332, 333), Ad-Darimi in his Sunan (2. 318) and Abu Na`im in Hulyat Al-Waliya (1. 154)]*

The believer should understand this point. Therefore, no one should say that Allah has forsaken us because this saying shows weakness of faith and lack of trust in Allah. When Allah disciplines you, this means that He has not forsaken you. When misfortune afflicts you, you should know that He is still your Protector; since your Protector holds you to account for your misdeeds and rectifies your affairs, be confident and place your trust in Him.

For example, suppose that someone trusts you with some worldly affair, and then you make a mistake in this regard. He will certainly inform you of your mistake and suggest to you a way to rectify the matter in which case you will find yourself filled with trust in this person. What about Allah if we put our trust in Him, and He rectifies our affairs?

However, beware of misunderstanding putting trust in Allah and stopping. It is said, ‘The body should work and the heart should trust Allah’. The farmer should plough the land, plant the seeds and water them, acts which are considered physical work which the farmer must undertake. Then he puts his trust in Allah, hoping that the seeds produce a large yield, and that no disaster or meteorological phenomenon, such as a lashing rain or fierce wind takes place destroying what he has done. Therefore, after doing the work carefully, one should supplicate to Allah and ask Him to protect the yields of his labour.

As for those who do not work and claim that they put their trust in Allah, they are considered liars because putting one’s trust in Allah is not relevant to physical work, but it is relevant to one’s heart.

But in whom do you trust? When you put your trust in the Ever-Living Who never dies, your work will not be in vain; but if you trust in someone, however powerful he may be, his power may turn to weakness and he may coerce or humiliate you. In addition, a catastrophe may befall him causing him to die.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells His Messenger to respond to those who rejoice in the misfortunes of the believers to reveal to them that their rejoicing indicates their foolishness. Allah says:

قُلْ هَلْ تَرَبَّصُونَ بِنَآ إِلَّآ إِحْدَى ٱلْحُسْنَيَيْنِ ۖ وَنَحْنُ نَتَرَبَّصُ بِكُمْ أَن يُصِيبَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
بِعَذَابٍ مِّنْ عِندِهِۦٓ أَوْ بِأَيْدِينَا ۖ فَتَرَبَّصُوٓا۟ إِنَّا مَعَكُم مُّتَرَبِّصُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Say, 'Do you expect something other than one of the two best things to happen to us? Well, we expect God to inflict punishment on you, either from Himself or at our hands. So wait; we too are waiting'[52] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 52)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* responds to those who grieve if the believers have good fortune and rejoice if misfortune befalls them. He affirms that everything which befalls the believers is for their own good. Therefore, He said, 'Say, "Only what Allah has decreed will happen to us"' (*at-Tawba:* 51). In the Arabic text of the verse, Allah says '*lana*' (to us) which literally implies possession. This indicates that everything that Allah ordains for the believers is either to discipline them and expiate their sins or to direct them towards the Truth after deviating towards falsehood. All of this is for our own good.

Then, Allah says, '…we too are waiting.' (*at-Tawba:* 52) This means that they should wait and see what theirs and the believers' end will be. Their end will be continuous chastisement in this worldly life and the Hereafter. They will receive all the means of chastisement in the worldly life, and will be denied all the means of goodness in the Hereafter. As the disbelievers wait for misfortune to afflict the believers, the believers will see them afflicted with evil, whilst the disbelievers will find the believers receiving goodness. Therefore, the result of the comparison will be in the believers' favour. After Allah has clarified this matter, a question might occur to the believer, 'Have these people not done anything good at all'? Will no good at all come to them? We know that Allah always rewards even for the smallest amount of good.

Allah clarifies the outcome of disbelief (Allah is our refuge); and He showed us that no good deed will be accepted from any disbeliever because unbelief annuls all good deeds. If their works are good for other people and benefit them, Allah will reward them materially in this worldly life, but in the Hereafter, they can receive nothing but Hell.(1) Allah says:

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(1) Anas ibn Malik narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah does not wrong a believer a good deed because he is given blessings for it=

قُلۡ أَنفِقُواْ طَوۡعًا أَوۡ كَرۡهٗا لَّن يُتَقَبَّلَ مِنكُمۡ إِنَّكُمۡ كُنتُمۡ قَوۡمٗا فَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

Say, ‘Whether you give willingly or unwillingly, what you give will not be accepted, for you are disobedient people’[53] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 53)

Therefore, the condition for Allah’s acceptance of any deed is that it should be performed by a believer, but if a person does not do his deeds for the sake of Allah, He will not be rewarded by Allah.

Therefore, Allah gives an example of the works of the disbelievers in His saying, ‘But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.’ (*an-Nur:* 39) Allah *Glorified is He* gives another example in His saying, ‘The example of those who disbelieve in their Lord is [that] their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day; they are unable [to keep] from what they earned a [single] thing. That is what is extreme error.’ (*Ibrahim:* 18)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter - We increase for him in his harvest. And whoever desires the harvest of this world - We give him thereof, but there is not for him in the Hereafter any share.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20) This explains what some of the scholars found hard to understand in His saying, ‘So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8)

Some of the scholars asked, ‘Will Allah *Glorified is He* reward these disbelievers in the Hereafter or in the worldly life?’ They found it difficult to understand because the meaning of the verse is general. Allah rewards in this life those who work for the sake of this worldly life, and rewards in the Hereafter those who work sincerely for the sake of Allah seeking rewards in the Hereafter. Therefore, those who utilise well the means which Allah has

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= in this world and will be rewarded for it in the Hereafter. But the disbeliever is given in the world the reward for good deeds, he has performed for the sake of Allah and when he comes to the Hereafter, there is no good deed for which he can be rewarded.’ *[Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2808) and Ahmad in his Musnad (3: 123,125,283)]* created with his Lordly bestowal, succeed in their lives. For example, those who advance (in a worldly sense) in agriculture, selection and taking care of good seeds will be rewarded for their work in this worldly life. Allah will withhold nothing from them, but He also says, ‘And We will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed.’ (*al-Furqan:* 23) This saying explains what Allah’s bestowal in the Hereafter will be; therefore, the good deeds which the disbeliever does will not be rewarded in the Hereafter(1) because his deeds are not for the sake of Allah, so how can he hope to be rewarded by the One in Whom he does not believe?

Allah *Glorified is He* rewards those who believe in Him and work for His sake, but the works of those who disbelieve in Him are all annulled. This is what is expected because as long as the person’s deeds are not for the sake of Allah, he should not expect reward from Him. If you act for the sake of humanity, it will reward you; if you act for the sake of society, it will reward you by making statues of you, naming cities and streets after you and founding establishments in your name. Therefore, your name will be immortal in this worldly life which will be your reward. But if you believe in Allah and hope for His reward, you will find on the Day of Resurrection that Allah’s rewards for the good that you did.

Allah says in this verse, ‘Say, “Whether you give willingly or unwillingly…’ (*at-Tawba:* 53). The Arabic word ‘*taw`an*’ means a deed that you performed without being forced; so how would you not be rewarded for the good deed you performed willingly?

We must make a distinction between the word ‘*taw’an*’ (willingly) and ‘*ta`i`an*’ (obedient), and between the deed which a person does willingly and that which a person does because he is forced to do it. All deeds are either performed willingly and coercively. Had Allah ordered us to spend in obedience to His command, He would not have said, '…what you give will not be accepted…' (*at-Tawba:* 53) because obedience indicates that the worshipper yields to the will and command of the One he worships. However, He says 'willingly', which means that what they spend freely according to their own will. This applies to the hypocrites during the era of Messenger Muhammad: some of them sent their sons out to strive in the cause of Allah, others offered some of their wealth for the sake of striving in the cause of Allah. They performed these deeds willingly for them to hide true intentions so that their hypocrisy would not be discovered. Some of them might join the front row of the prayer in the mosque willingly out of fear that his hypocrisy would be discovered, not out of obedience to Allah. Obeying Allah means the obedience of a worshipper to the One he worships; as for those kinds of deeds, they are performed willingly for showing off not for the sake of worshipping Allah.

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(1) *'Aisha Allah be pleased with her narrated that she said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, Ibn Jud`an lived in the pre-Islamic era, and he used to keep his family ties and feed the poor. Will this avail him in the Hereafter?’ He said, ‘No, it will not avail him, as he never said, “O Lord, forgive me my sins on the Day of Judgment.”’ [Related by Muslim in his Sahih (214), Ahmad in his Musnad (4: 93, 120), Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak (2: 405) from another line of transmission that does not include 'Aisha as a narrator. He said that it is Sahih, but he did not relate it, and Ad-Dhahaby acknowledged it.*

'Say, "Whether you give willingly or unwillingly…' (*at-Tawba:* 53). Is this a command to spend? Does Allah really want them to spend even though Allah *Glorified is He* will not accept it from them? No, this is not a command to spend, but it is a threat and warning. For example, you may say to someone, 'Just wait'. You are not really asking him to wait, but you threaten him, and the intended meaning is, 'Just wait and you will see what I will do to you'. This point is clarified by Allah's saying, '…then be patient or impatient…' (*at-Tur:* 16), and His saying, '…Do whatever you will…' (*Fussilat:* 40). Whether you are patient or not will not affect the retribution you shall receive. Were the words 'Doing whatever you want…' (*Fussilat:* 40) meant as a commandment, and then committing a sin would be considered obedience to Allah, if He had commanded to do what you liked. Instead, these words are a threat, meaning, 'Do what you want, but you shall return to Allah and He will judge you for what you have done, and you will not be able to flee from Him'. Also, 'give' is a threat, since their spending is of no avail whether they do it willingly or unwillingly.

The word *karhan* (unwillingly or with compulsion) appears in several chapters of the Quran: *Al-`Imran, An-Nisa`, at-Tawba*, *Al-Ahqaf, Ar-Ra`d*, and *Fussilat.* The short vowel over the first consonant (*kaf*) is a *fatha* reading *karhan* and in some recitation methods it is read *kurhan* with the vowel *damma*. Some people think *karhan* and *kurhan* both mean the same thing, but I say they do not. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…His mother carried him *karhan* and gave birth to him *kurhan* with hardship or struggle.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). Here *kurhan* (unwillingly) is not referring to the pregnancy itself nor the delivery. It refers to the hardship which a mother suffers during pregnancy and childbirth. She is not forced to become pregnant although conception occurs without her precise will. For no woman can say to herself, 'I will conceive tonight'. So, a mother cannot choose the precise moment she conceives, nor can she choose the precise moment she will give birth. Similarly, she cannot say, 'I will give birth today', or 'I will not give birth today'. All of this happens unwillingly. Therefore, *kurhan* with the 'u' sound means something unwanted because of the hardship it entails, whilst *karhan* with the 'a' sound means something done by coercion from someone else.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "Whether you give willingly or unwillingly, what you give will not be accepted…"' (*at-Tawba:* 53). Allah will not accept what you give away. But what is the difference? Hypocrites used to pay alms, and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would not reject it; he would accept them out of courteousness. Then every performed action passes on to Allah, the One Who sees all from above. One of those people, named Tha`laba, asked the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings upon him* to pray for him to be rich. He supplicated for him and Allah gave him wealth, but then he was too stingy to pay his alms, and tried to evade its payment.(1) Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed, 'There are some among them who pledged themselves to Allah, saying, "If Allah gives us some of His bounty, we shall certainly give alms and be righteous", yet when He did give them some of His bounty, they became mean and turned obstinately away. Because they broke their promise to Allah, because of all the lies they told, He made hypocrisy settle in their hearts until the Day they meet Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 75-77)

When these verses were revealed, Tha`laba offered his alms to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him,* but he did not accept them.

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(1) *The details of this story are narrated by At-Tabarani in his book (Al-Kabir) (page 7873), on the authority of Abu Umamah.*

After the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, Tha`laba offered his alms to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who also did not accept from him. And after Abu Bakr, he offered its payment to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* who did not accept it either. Then Tha`laba died during the caliphate of 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him*.

But there were hypocrites during the time of the Messenger *peace and blessings upon him* whose alms payments were accepted. Allah, nevertheless, did not accept them. So, the verse means that Allah will not accept what these hypocrites spend in good causes, even if people accepted it. Allah *Glorified is He* gives the reason for that, saying, '…what you give will not be accepted, for you are a dissipated people.' (*at-Tawba:* 53). The word *fasiq*, (dissipated) is derived from the verb *fasaqa (*dissipate) commonly used to describe a fresh date when separating from its skin. As in all fruits, the skin is a protective layer, which when peeled off, makes the fruit vulnerable to rotting. Definitions of moral concepts in the Sacred Law are derived from the material world. So, religion can be seen as a protective layer or hedge preventing a person from crossing Allah's boundaries, and a protection from sins. When one is in dissipation or away from religious teachings, one becomes like a fruit from which the protective skin has been peeled off.

One who drinks alcohol, commits a crime or indulges in adultery will be punished for his specific sins, but a hypocrite will also have any good deed unacceptable due to disbelief in Allah. Suppose someone believes in Allah, but has a weakness towards a certain sin. In this case, the rule is that one thing does not abolish the other. He will be rewarded for his faith, and punished for his sin.

So, in this verse 'dissipation' does not mean general lack of obedience, but it is a specific kind of dissipation. A person, who fails to live up to moral responsibilities, is in a limited kind of dissipation. But the worst kind of dissipation is for a person to disbelieve in Allah. So, in the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا مَنَعَهُمْ أَن تُقْبَلَ مِنْهُمْ نَفَقَٰتُهُمْ إِلَّآ أَنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَبِرَسُولِهِۦ وَلَا يَأْتُونَ
ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ إِلَّا وَهُمْ كُسَالَىٰ وَلَا يُنفِقُونَ إِلَّا وَهُمْ كَٰرِهُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

The only thing that prevents what they give from being accepted is the fact that they defy God and His Messenger, perform the prayer only lazily, and give only grudgingly [54] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 54)

Dissipation can be of two types, general or specific. Some might say if you commit a sin, then your prayers, your alms-giving and any acts of worship are deemed worthless. No! As long as the basis of religion remains intact, namely the belief in Allah and in His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and acknowledging religious teachings, then every act of worship has its reward, and every sin has its punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Just, the Most-Merciful and would not hold someone accountable for all evil.

In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* gives the reason as to why their spending is unacceptable, and specifies the general meaning of dissipation, namely disbelief; not specific dissipation. He points out three attributes that prevent their deeds from being accepted: Disbelief in Allah and His Messenger which is the focal point of disbelief, and then their reluctance towards prayer and stinginess towards spending.

‘The only thing that prevents what they give from being accepted…’ (*at-Tawba:* 54). The verb ‘prevent’ is to reverse an action or stop it from occurring, such as making someone sit down when they want to stand up, or blocking someone’s hand as they try to hit someone else. In the former, you reversed the intention of sitting into standing, and in the latter, you prevented a person from afflicting someone. Thus, prevention can be applied to the subject or the object. When you stop Zayd from striking at someone, you prevent the subject; and in preventing him from being struck, you prevent the object (his hand). Everything in life is based on prevention which summarises action and reaction: this applies to human beings, time and space.

A human’s life depends on breathing, food and drink, breathing being the most essential. If you do not breathe in, you die and if you do not breathe out, you die. A person dies if air is prevented from entering the lungs, and dies if air is prevented from leaving the lungs.

The motion of the whole world is based on actions and its opposite reaction. If someone is about to hit another, but you hold back his hand and say, ‘His sons, or brothers or family will come and beat you’, he abstains from this action, fearing the reaction. The whole world will not live in peace except with fear of reaction.(1) Two strong forces fear each other and the possible reaction if one of them transgresses against the other. But when there is only one strong force facing a weak one, it annihilates its opponent.

This is true of the whole universe; it is either still or in motion. Where the universe is in motion, there is a balance of powers living together in peace because each of them fears the reaction of the other. It is a similar case where the world is still. Tall buildings are stable because the air does not only come from one direction, but rather from various directions which balances the pressure over all sides of the building. But if you were to remove the air from one side and make it blow from the other, the building would collapse; just as suddenly removing air from a closed vessel would cause it to break.

First, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘The only thing that prevents what they give from being accepted is the fact that they defy Allah and His Messenger…’ (*at-Tawba:* 54). This does not mean that their tongues did not utter the testimony of faith. In fact, hypocrites spoke the words of the testimony, but there is a difference between the speech of the tongue and the conviction in the heart, where faith resides. Hypocrites combined testifying tongues and denying hearts. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them the rights of the tongue’s testimony. He did not confront them, detain or kill them and he gave them the same material rights that true believers were given. All out of respect to the words they said, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. Yet because their inner souls are so vile, Allah requites them for what their inner souls conceal, and will punish them. They will gain no reward for what they do and secretly defy. Thus, they are dealt with in a logical and equitable way. They give publicly, and Allah gives them public rights; yet because they do not present a good unobservable core, He does not give them the unseen bestowal of His reward and His Paradise, but rather punishes them in His Hell-Fire.

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(1) In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And prepare for them whatever power and whatever garrisoned horses you can, to (spread) awe thereby into (the hearts) of the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others, apart from them (i.e., besides them) that you do not know…’ (*al-Anfal*: 60).

The second reason is in Allah's Words *Glorified is He* '...[they] perform the prayer only lazily…' (*at-Tawba:* 54). Laziness means reluctance to do something. So, they pray only to be seen. When prayer is called for and they are with the believers, they stand to it with reluctance; and where no believers see them, they do not perform the prayer. So, their conduct is full of duplicity and contradiction.

The third reason is, '… [They] give only grudgingly.' (*at-Tawba:* 54). Giving is to donate from what Allah bestowed upon you, be it wealth, knowledge, status or power. This strikes a balance in society. In every society, there are the strong, weak, rich and poor; some educated and others ignorant, some healthy and some diseased. If everyone were to work only to meet their own needs, it would spell ruin for the weak, the sick, the infirm and the poor. Rather, every individual should do their best, and not just live for themselves. One must take from the fruits of his labour that which meets his needs and the needs of his dependants. Then, he should help others with the extra grace that Allah has bestowed upon him, especially those who are incapable of working for themselves. May those with health use their strength to help those who are sick, and those with wealth donate to the poor to help them survive and may the abled aid the disabled. This defines a self-sufficient society, from which everyone can benefit. For it is common that a rich person today becomes poor tomorrow, and someone strong may soon become weak. Individuals living in a self-sustainable society do not worry about such drastic life changing events. This is the real insurance for the healthy and the wealthy, and everyone living in such a society feels assured and supported. Also, a poor person does not live in terror of dying because he knows his dependants would not starve. There is assistance for people if they become poor and health benefits for people who become sick.

Therefore, giving and contributing is a necessity to society. The market is described as *nafiqa* (spending or giving) because it thrives with more commodities being bought and sold and the transactions therein are mutually supportive. At the marketplace, you either sell or take money in exchange for what you sold, or you pay money for what you buy. In the past, people used to trade goods and since money was invented, people began to buy goods for a price. Whoever gives away money to please Allah *Glorified is He* will send goodness his way.

As for the hypocrites, Allah makes them suffer a hidden torment in this worldly life, and a torment witnessed by everyone in the Hereafter. He warned them that their 'giving' will not do them any good, be they willingly or unwillingly.

But people see hypocrites enjoying wealth and children not realizing that wealth and children are in fact tools for a hypocrite's torment. Someone might object by referring to Allah's saying *Glorified is He* 'Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life…' (*al-Kahf:* 46).

Those who say that must be reminded of the rest of the verse, where Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope.' (*al-Kahf:* 46). And Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Your wealth and your children are but a trial…' (*at-Taghabun:* 15).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* addresses His Messenger *peace and blessings upon him* and within that He also addresses all Muslims:

فَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَٰلُهُمْ وَلَآ أَوْلَٰدُهُمْ ۚ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُم بِهَا فِى
ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَتَزْهَقَ أَنفُسُهُمْ وَهُمْ كَٰفِرُونَ ٥٥

So [Prophet] do not let their possessions or their children impress you: through these God intends to punish them in this world and for their souls to depart while they disbelieve [55] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 55)

Beware of seeing one of these people who have been given wealth and children by Allah, and then say, 'How could they be tormented in this worldly life when they possess wealth and children'? This kind of admiration implies that wealth and children are necessarily a good thing, or that all goodness resides in them. But with deep consideration, wealth and children, and all the vanities of this worldly life deserve no admiration. Never be deceived by something that might leave you or be a cause of torment to you. Wealth and children often lead to focusing on the blessings and disregarding the Giver of all blessings, then there is no remembrance of Allah, which in turn leads to neglecting His teachings.

Moreover, having wealth and children in this worldly life often leads to worrying about having to die and leave it. If you do not have faith in what Allah has in store for you in the Hereafter, you might worry about losing money or a child. To someone who does not believe in the Last Day, this worldly life is all the time there is; so, missing out on it is disastrous and losing it is devastating. A believer in Allah and the Last Day, however, would say, 'If I am to lose good opportunities in this worldly life, then Allah has something better for me in store'. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to prevent His believers from a deceiving blessing that distracts from the Giver of all blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So do not let their wealth or their children excite your admiration …' (*at-Tawba:* 55); this noble verse implies that both wealth and children cause separate admiration: the wealthy admires his belongings, and the one who does not have wealth and has children admires them, too; and when someone has both, the admiration is even greater. By repeating the word '*la*' (no) in Arabic, Allah *Glorified is He* is putting emphasis on letting 'no children' and 'no wealth' excite admiration in our souls. Indeed, the context of the verse warns from admiring the possession of wealth alone, or children alone, 'So do not let (*la*) their wealth or (*la*) their children excite your admiration…' (*at-Tawba:* 55).

Allah *Glorified is He* explains that when He blesses a disbeliever or a hypocrite with wealth and children, it is not an uplifting for them, but rather a means for their torment in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…through these Allah only intends to (*li*) punish them…" (*at-Tawba:* 55). The letter (*lam, li*) added here to the verb 'punish' is called 'the *"lam"* of consequence'. When added at the beginning of a verb, it means that although the action is done for a certain purpose, the consequences of that action turns out to be completely different, or even the opposite of what was intended. An example from the Quran is where Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Pharaoh's household picked him up—[later] to *(li)* become an enemy and a source of grief for them…' (*al-Qasas:* 8).

Did Pharaoh's household pick up Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to become an enemy, or to be a source of joy? Surely, they did so for him to bring joy. But what happened was the opposite of what they intended with the verb 'to pick up'. And instead of Musa (Moses) bringing joy, he became an enemy to Pharaoh, and in fact caused the destruction of his realm. So, (*li)* -the letter (*lam*)- here indicates consequence rather than purpose.

Allah gives some disbelievers wealth and children, which are seemingly an upraise in this world. However, instead of using these blessings to draw nearer to Allah, they distracted them from faith in Him to the extent that Allah punishes them with the blessings. Allah does not intend to punish them; rather, the unlawful investment in wealth or in pleasing their children is what causes their punishment.

'…through these Allah only intends to punish them in this worldly life…' (*at-Tawba:* 55). The first form of this punishment is that these blessings distract them from their Giver and cause them to stray from Allah's way and they become enemies to those who believe in Allah's way, yet they fear to make this enmity public. Therefore, whenever the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would send a messenger to call for one of the hypocrites or the Jews, they would panic. They would also wonder, 'Has the Messenger discovered the truth about us, or has Allah revealed some of our secrets to him?'(1) They feared that the truth about them would be exposed, and they would then be banished and treated as idolaters.

Secondly, they feared that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would engage in war. As believers, they would be asked to spend their money in Allah's Cause, and would have to let their older children go out to fight alongside the Muslim army. They would say to themselves in private, 'Why should we spend our money and sacrifice our children to a cause in which we do not believe'? As such, they differed from Muslims who would answer the call of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* seeking Paradise or victory. That is another form of punishment, which would also manifest itself when one of those hypocrites would go to battle. They would fear being killed, or their families being harmed, or that they or their women would be captured. So, throughout the journey to battle and at the battlefield they were in a constant state of mental torment.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The hypocrites fear that a chapter will be revealed exposing what is in their hearts– say, "Carry on with your jokes: Allah will bring about what you fear!"' (*at-Tawba*: 64) Mujahid said they would say this to each other, and then they would say, 'Perhaps Allah does not reveal this secret of ours.' Al-Hasan said, 'The Muslims used to call this chapter 'The Digger', because it dug up what was in the hypocrites' hearts and revealed it.' See the exegeses of Ibn Kathir (ii. 366) and Al-Qurtubi (iv. 3121).

Their punishment takes on a third form. When someone worships money, they do not care if it comes through a lawful or unlawful source. While someone with a lawful income works in life without secrecy, someone with an unlawful income is a thief who always worries of being exposed. They live in constant painful torment from the fear of a day when Allah will let people know that they have been bribed, or have embezzled or have defrauded and deceived. They may fear having done something which makes them subject to a legal charge or which would make people despise them, like being involved in drug-dealing or racketeering, or the like. This fear of being exposed causes them to live in a dilemma and in constant torment.

Let us consider the following example to know the difference between lawful and unlawful possessions. If you tell your neighbour you liked something in his house and he gives it to you, you are not worried of anyone finding out what happened. But if you were to steal it from your neighbour, you would not go by day or when people can see you, but rather, you would go by night while taking all precautions not to be seen. You would not enter from the front door, but you would wait for a left open window through which you could enter without being seen. So, there would be a plan for the theft, and you would enter the house on your tiptoes, trembling. And if, whilst you implement your plan, you hear a sound, you panic and run and hide, grabbing the item and hiding it; and if someone were to see it, you would panic. All this is a torment, which those who earn unlawful money must go through; so, the gathering of unlawful money is, in itself, a torment.

And if someone raises his children with unlawful money, Allah will not bless them. One of them might grow up to be a torment for his father as he raises him, by failing his exams or foolishly wasting money. Then the more money he gets, the more he needs. This kind of son will not obey his father. For such a father, the suffering might even be worse if the child grew up to be a true believer refusing to eat or wear clothes bought with the father's money or constantly argues with him about the source of his money.

During the time of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* there was a man named Abu `Amir who was an enemy to Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings upon him.* Abu `Amir's son Handhalah(1), however, was a believer. Whenever Abu `Amir saw his son, his heart would seethe with rage. Handhalah had just had intercourse with his bride, when he heard the call to battle.(2) He could not wait to take the purifying shower, and rushed to join with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in battle where he was martyred. But how did the companions get to know the story of Handhalah, when such matters are private between a man and his wife? Allah *Glorified is He* showed His Messenger *peace and blessings upon him* as angels descended from the sky and bathed Handhalah's body. Unlike any deceased, a martyr is not supposed to be washed(3), so the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings upon him* realised that Handhalah's bathing was not due to his death, but that he was being washed to avoid meeting Allah in a state of ritual impurity. When he returned to Medina, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* sent for Handhalah's wife who related to him how her newly wedded husband had rushed out to battle unwashed.(1) Look how the angels had come down to wash a martyr whose father was an enemy to Allah and His Messenger, *peace and blessings upon him,* and how this must have enraged his father's heart.

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(1) *Handhalah was the son of the monk `Abd `Amr ibn Sayfy Al-Awsy known as Abu `Amir. Handhalah was from the people of As-Suffa (The Shaded Corner).*

(2) *Al-Hakim relates in his (Mustadrak) (iii. 204) that it was their wedding night, and his wife conceived that night and gave birth to `Abdullah (born in the year 4 AH), who became one of the finest and bravest of the Second Generation of Muslims. `Abdullah was chosen as commander of the army of Medina and fought fiercely against the army of Yazid ibn Mu`awiyah until he was killed in 63 AH. See Az-Zarkali's (Al-A`lam) (iv. 99).*

(3) *Jabir ibn 'Abdullah relates that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said about the martyrs of the Battle of Uhud, 'I am a witness in their favour on the Day of Judgement.' And he commanded that they be buried as they are with their blood. They were not washed and the funeral prayers were not performed for them. (narrated by Al-Bukhari no. 1343 of The Authentic; narrated in Sunnan of Abu Dawud no. 3138; At-Tirmidhi no. 1036; Ibn Majah no. 1514; An-Nisa'i v.62... Ahmad narrated in his Musnad, also on the authority of Jabir (iii,299) 'Do not wash them, for every wound or every drop of blood will smell like musk on the Day of Judgement.'*

Also, one of the companions, Abdullah, was the son of ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, the leader of the hypocrites in Medina, who turned his back on the Muslims in the Battle of Uhud and took a third of the army with him. Abdullah heard that the companions were asking the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* upon him, for permission to kill his father, ibn Ubayy, for treachery. How much faith did that son possess, to say to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* upon him, 'Messenger of Allah, if you will command anyone to kill my father, then please command me to do it. I do not want anyone else to kill him because I fear to hold any grudges in my heart towards any Muslim.'(2) When a father hears that his own son has asked permission to be his killer, will that not torment his heart? Thus, we see that wealth and children, which are meant to be a blessing, could be divine chastisement in this worldly life?

Unfortunately, non-believers do not recognize the Giver of blessings, nor do they fear His requital in the Hereafter. They pay no attention to the wisdom of creation which affirms that man is Allah's vicegerent on earth, nor how Allah has prepared the earth with all its possibilities and goods to serve this vicegerent. Humans have been brought onto a world that is complete in every way, and perfectly prepared in a way that they could never have done themselves.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'I created all things for you, and I created you for myself; so, do not let what is for you distract you from what you are for.' This means: do not let the blessing distract you from its Bestower. If someone attends a huge feast and finds a table filled with all kinds of foods, but does not even greet the host, who is present, but goes straight to the food, then people would agree that this person is being ungrateful to the host. Compare that to a person who greets and praises the host as soon as they enter, giving thanks for the hospitality. While the former was only concerned with the blessing, the latter did not allow the blessing to make him or her forget to thank the one who prepared it.

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(1) *This incident was narrated by Abu Na`im in (Hilyat al-Awliya`) (i. 357), Al-Hakim (iii. 204) and Al-Bayhaqi in (Al-Kubra) (iv. 15).*

(2) *Ibn Kathir relates this in his exegesis on verse al-Munafiqun: 8.*

Another example, is that health is one of the most valuable blessings because with it, one can enjoy all of life's blessings. On the other hand, sickness is the most difficult condition to endure, since it makes it hard to feel and appreciate most of life's blessings. Therefore, Allah compensates a diseased person by drawing him or her to His Own company instead of being in the company of the blessing. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'Son of Adam, I was ill but you did not visit Me.' He will reply, 'My Lord, how could I visit you and you are the Lord of the worlds?' Thereupon Allah would say, 'Did you not know that such and such a slave of mine was ill but you did not visit him? Did you not realize that if you had visited him you would have found me with him?'(1)

Tell me, by Allah, why would a diseased person grieve when knowing that while missing the blessing of health, the disease has placed them in the company of the Giver of blessings, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*? No, rather, this should lessen the hardship of sickness; savouring the pleasure of Allah's company should relieve all pain. Sadly, people are not logical with themselves. They do not realize what they were created for and are drawn to what has been created for them. Everything has been created for us, and we have been created to worship Allah. Thus, it would be more logical to pay attention to the purpose of our creation.

If we consider, for example, the logic applied by humans to time, it is said to be either past, present or future; and if we want to expand time to encompass all infinity, we say that time is present, pre-eternal and eternal. 'Pre-eternal' being all past without a beginning, 'eternal' being the future without an end, and the 'present' being what we live in today.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (2569) on the authority of Abu Hurayra… The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Verily, Allah the Exalted and Glorious, will say on the Day of Resurrection, "Son of Adam, I was ill but you did not visit Me." He will reply, "My Lord, how could I visit You and You are the Lord of the worlds?' Thereupon Allah would say, "Did you not know that such and such a slave of Mine was ill but you did not visit him? Did you not realize that if you had visited him (you would have known that I was aware of your visit to him, for which I would reward you) you would have found Me with him?…"'*

The universe has been created by Allah, The Necessary Being. By His word 'Be!', everything possible came into existence. For everything requires a creator and is thus merely a 'possible being' that must one day cease to exist (see nihil fit ex nihilo or nothing comes from nothing and the Cosmological Argument). As for the being that is required for everything else to exist and itself requires no creator, the Necessary Being, Allah, He is the Eternal Being with neither a beginning nor an end; He is outside the bounds of time as we know it.

Everything except for Allah, all 'possible beings', require a creator, including this worldly life, which some people worship besides Allah. This world is not eternal, since it did not exist before Allah created the heavens and the earth; it had a beginning and it has an end, The Day of Resurrection.

Therefore, a believer's heart cannot contain both the love of Allah and the love of this worldly life together because Allah is Eternal and this worldly life is not eternal. In fact, as far as any individual is concerned, this world is only their lifetime, since the time before birth and the time after death do not concern them. And even if we consider the life of this world in its totality, it still has a beginning and an end. But how can the heart of a believer combine a love for Him Who has neither a beginning nor an end, and a love for that which has a beginning and an end? They cannot coexist.

Az-Zamakhshari(1) said that anything existing is either necessary, or possible: The Necessary Being is Allah alone, and the possible being is all besides Allah, and nothing is eternal except Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*.

It is logically impossible to suggest that something could exist with no beginning, yet has an end because that which has no beginning cannot have an end, it is eternal.

Can a being be endless but have a beginning? This applies to two beings, the Hereafter, and humans. A person has a beginning, the date of his or her creation, but has no end because after death there will be resurrection, either to spend eternity in bliss, or to be chastised a little and then enter Paradise or to spend eternity in hell -Allah forbid. Likewise, the Hereafter has not yet begun, but once it begins it will have no end because life is eternal in Paradise and in Hell. So, humans and the Hereafter have one thing in common, and we must connect ourselves to the Hereafter. Whoever chooses this worldly life has chosen something which has a beginning and an end; but those who follow Allah's commands and worship Him out of love and free will have chosen He Who is eternal. And whoever works for the reward of the Hereafter is working for that which is endless, and wherein life is real and everlasting.

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(1) *Abu Al-Qasem Mahmoud ibn 'Umar Az-Zamakhshari who lived from 467-538 AH. (Al-A'lam by Az-Zarkaly vii.178)*

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The life of this world is merely an amusement and a diversion; the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) This verse emphasises that the true life is that of the Hereafter, not this worldly life. Everything has a set purpose. For example, a chair is made for sitting on it; so, no matter what shape or colour, all chairs have a single purpose which is to be sat on. Similarly, our creation has a set purpose. All of us are members of the same species, so we all must have one single purpose. But what could that purpose be? Health? No, some of us are sick. Is it ability? No, some of us are disabled. Is it to live a long life? No, some of us only live for a few hours.

If we consider everything, we will conclude that we differ in everything except in death. Therefore, from the first moment of our worldly life we must realize that we are doomed to die and meet Allah, and we must prepare for this, since we are all headed towards the same end.

In the verse that we are currently discussing, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So do not let their wealth or their children excite your admiration: through these Allah only intends to punish them in this worldly life…', and Allah *Glorified is He* has not stopped at that, but rather continues to say, '…and for their souls to depart (*tazhaq*) while they are disbelievers.' (*at-Tawba:* 55)

The word *tazhaq* literally means to exit with difficulty. Why? Because those who worship this worldly life have only devoted all their efforts to it, and did nothing for the Hereafter. So, when death comes, they know that torment awaits them, so they hate to leave the delights of this worldly life for the torment of the Hereafter. But when death comes to someone with good deeds, they rejoic because what awaits them is so much better than what they will leave behind. Like a man who lives in a tiny hut and then moves to a luxurious palace, will he not be happy? As for the one who lives for the sake of this worldly life, he is like someone who is taken out of a palace and cast into a burning fire, and therefore hates the moment of death.(1)

A believer rejoices while leaving this temporary life to the permanent eternal life, and leaving the blessings to be with The Giver of blessings, and leaving the life of causalities to a life with the Creator of causality. In this worldly life, we must follow the rule of causality. For example, to eat you must cook food or have someone prepare it for you, and to wear clothes you need someone to make the material and stitch the clothes. Thus, to every outcome there is a series of causes, like the farmer, or the reaper, or the delivery to the mill or the factory, or the miller of flour or weaver of cloth. In the Hereafter, however, there will be no causality, but as soon as something occurs to your mind, you find it before you. Is this not a life of bliss?

So, at the moment of death, only a believer's face is beaming(2), whilst the one who frowns and convulses when the Angel of Death comes is a sinner or a disbeliever because they will transition from the delightful, though only relatively so, to a terrible chastisement.

`Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'O `Ali, I want to know whether I am from the people of this world, or from the people of the Hereafter?' `Ali replied, 'Allah is more merciful than to let me decide the answer to that, but He lets you decide the answer: If you prefer someone who comes asking you to give them over someone who comes to give you a gift, then you are from the people of the Hereafter.' If you are from the people of the Hereafter, you are aware that the charity you give now in this ephemeral world will earn you reward in the Hereafter to which you are looking forward. So, you welcome the person asking you for it and gladly give away money. Yet if you prefer a person who comes to give you a gift over the one who comes to ask of you, you are from the people of this world. Because the one who gives you a gift only increases your worldly lot; and if you delight in this more than you delight in what increases your lot in the Hereafter, then you are from the people of this world.

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(1) 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* mentioned that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever loves to meet Allah, then Allah loves to meet him. And whoever dislikes meeting Allah, then Allah dislikes meeting him.' She said, 'O Messenger of Allah! All of us dislike death.' He said, 'It is not like that. But when the believer is given the good news of Allah's mercy, His pleasure, and His paradise, then he loves to meet Allah and Allah loves to meet him. Whereas when the disbeliever is given the news of Allah's punishment and His wrath, he dislikes meeting Allah, and Allah dislikes meeting him.' *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2684) and narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (1067) and he said it is a good, authentic Hadith.*

(2) Al-Hasan Al-Basry said, 'There is no comfort for a believer except in meeting Allah. And whoever finds comfort in meeting Allah, then the day he dies is his day of joy, happiness, safety, honour and distinction.' (see Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din v.465).

When people see that a person's face is relaxed and brightened up at the moment of death, they say the deceased has been granted a good ending by Allah. This is true because death is a moment of truth when one cannot lie. While suffering from any illness, one might cling on to the hope that a brilliant doctor could find a cure. But it is different at the moment of death because one realises that death is here and there is no escape from it. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When the soul of a dying man comes up to his throat.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 83) At that moment one clearly sees what was hidden from him in this worldly life and starts to think of his deeds. Then if his life was righteous and full of light, he smiles and his face brightens, and he dies with that expression. But if his life was filled with evil and sin, his face darkens and he frowns, then dies with that expression. This is what we call the '*khatimah*' (end). When one knows for certain that he's dying; like a final exam, where you see a failing student is pale-faced and trembling, whilst a hard-working student is bright-faced and smiling. Now the mind is emptied of everything except the list of one's deeds which settles in one's deepest conscience, that place deep inside, where if a certain feeling is established, it is never forgotten. Say a student finds out just before entering the exam that there will be a question about a certain section of the book. That student immediately opens this section in the book and quickly reads it while thinking of nothing else. And simply reading it once enables him to give an excellent answer on that question because, like a camera, his deepest conscience has taken a picture while his mind was clear. Our deepest conscience can only be occupied with a single thought at any time, so when another thought comes to it, the first thought is expelled.

Therefore, if you memorise something as soon as you hear it, that is a sign that your deep conscience was empty and receptive when you heard it.

Likewise, at the moment of death, the dying person has no thought in his deep conscience other than that of the Hereafter.

‘And for their souls to depart (*tazhaq*) while they are disbelievers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 55) This phrase conveys two meanings: The first is that the blessing will remain with them and continue to distract them from Allah until the time of death; and the second meaning is that the hour of death will be difficult for the disbeliever and the hypocrite because they must leave behind their possessions and children knowing the chastisement that awaits them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَحْلِفُونَ بِٱللَّهِ إِنَّهُمْ لَمِنكُمْ وَمَا هُم مِّنكُمْ وَلَٰكِنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ يَفْرَقُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

They swear by God that they belong with you
[believers], but they do not. They are cowardly [56]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 56)

Why did Allah place this verse here, after having warned us from admiring their wealth and their children? First, they are not really blessings for them, but Allah’s condemnation. Second, Allah wants to turn us against the hypocrites and have us take all our precautions. He gives an example of them swearing by Allah, which no one would normally do unless someone suspects they are lying. If you say something and people believe you, there is no reason for you to swear about it. But if someone challenges what you said, you swear by Allah to remove their doubts. So, why would the hypocrites swear without any previous challenge?

They constantly hear the Quran as it is revealed against them. And they have a feeling that every Muslim doubts their conduct. So, to make the Muslims believe them, they start their statement with an oath(1). Allah, however, had already made the believers immune due to the faith in their hearts. They would not believe what the hypocrites say without taking precautions and guarding themselves from the evil plans of those hypocrites. Allah warns the believers from trusting what the hypocrites say even if they swore it to be true.

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(1) In a similar context, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘They use their oaths as a cover and so bar others from Allah’s way; what they have been doing is truly evil.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 2)

Had Allah not given the believers this immunity of faith, they would have believed what the hypocrites said because of the sanctity of an oath. And what did the hypocrites swear to? They swore they were believers. Although outward they were doing what believers do, their hearts were void of faith.

So why were they swearing? This is what we call self-contradiction. Believers do not contradict themselves because they believe with their hearts and soul as well as their actions. Their bodies are not in conflict with their souls. Disbelievers, too, do not contradict themselves, since they openly announce disbelief in Allah or His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* upon him. So, their actions do not contradict their souls. They have only one inclination, though corrupt, but they have no contradictions. Hypocrites, however, suffer from an inner conflict; with their tongues, they each utter, 'I am a believer, and I testify that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', yet their hearts contradict what they say, and neither believes in Allah's Oneness nor in the prophethood of Muhammad.

In the chapter of *al-Munafiqun*, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, "We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah." Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1)

How does Allah say, '…the hypocrites are liars', when they have witnessed to the very same thing to which Allah has witnessed, which is that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah? Allah is exposing them, for they have uttered with their tongues what is not in their hearts. He clarifies that their tongues are lying because they are not conveying what is truly in their hearts. So, a hypocrite lives in contradiction with his own soul and is even worse than a disbeliever, who openly announces his enmity to religion and to you, allowing you take precautions against him. A hypocrite, however, pretends to have faith in order to gain your trust, so his ability to betray you is greater and more harm can come from him. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell.' (*an-Nisa':* 145)

Self-contradiction is truly the most miserable character in the whole world. The poet Al-Mutanabbi elucidates this fact saying:

What spoils the world to a free man is to see

An enemy whom he has no choice except to befriend.

This is the inner conflict that occurs when circumstances force you to treat your enemy as a friend. Another poet says:

We spent the night feeling rancour towards one another,

Yet out of fear we acted as though we praised one another.

A third poet tries to depict the contradiction in society that makes people praise someone they despise, saying:

Enough underestimation of our self-contradictions

When will the statements ever be true to their fearful tongues?

So, hypocrites swear with their tongues that they are among the believers, and they are so only when it comes to outwardly following the Sacred Law. In reality however, they do not belong to you, for in their hearts they are not among you. The picture depicted is completed when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘They swear by Allah that they belong with you [believers], but they do not. They are cowardly people (*yafraqoon).*’ (*at-Tawba:* 56). *Yafraqoon* means fear. They are in a constant state of panic, afraid of being exposed which would lead to their being banished from the Muslim community. Moreover, the Muslim community would then treat them as disbelievers, fight them in war and seize their possessions. They falsely swear out of fear of being exposed. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* about them, ‘We could even point them out to you [Prophet] if we wished, and then you could identify them by their marks, but you will know them anyway by the tone of their speech.…’ (*Muhammad:* 30) This is an encouragement to examine what people of hypocrisy say, even if what they say sounds fair(1).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Allah Glorified is He says about hypocrites, ‘When you see them, their outward appearance pleases you; when they speak, you listen to what they say.’ Al-Kalby says, ‘The verse is talking about 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, Jad ibn Qays and Mut`ab ibn Qashir. They all had perfect looks and eloquent speech.*

لَوۡ يَجِدُونَ مَلۡجَـًٔا أَوۡ مَغَٰرَٰتٍ أَوۡ مُدَّخَلٗا لَّوَلَّوۡاْ إِلَيۡهِ وَهُمۡ يَجۡمَحُونَ ٥٧

If they could find a place of refuge, or a cave, or somewhere to crawl into, they would run there with great haste [57]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 57)

A refuge is where we go to protect us from harm, such as a fortress, "or a cave" in the mountain. "somewhere to crawl to" could be a tunnel under the ground, entered with difficulty while bending oneself. So, there are three places to which they flee if they are ever found in a battle; all because what they say with their tongues is contrary to what lies in their hearts. They wish they could go to a distant place to revile Islam for the hardship they find in battle. But they cannot do this in front of Muslims, so they search for a place where no one can hear them. 'If they could find a place of refuge, or a cave or somewhere to crawl into, they would run there with great haste." (*at-Tawba:* 57). The verse refers to hypocrites whom Allah had described as violating their treaties, swearing false oaths, and everyone who lives in inner conflict which causes them misery. Each one of them acts in a way which contradicts their true feelings and fears being exposed.

Their lives are the opposite of a believer's life which is in harmony because the tongue states what is in the heart. In addition, faith makes a believer live in harmony with the universe. The state of a hypocrite similarly differs from that of a disbeliever, who announces the disbelief in his heart with his tongue. Hypocrites harbour resentment towards Allah's religion while publicly claiming to love it.

When someone is compelled to praise their enemies and act as though they loved them, they are carrying a terrible psychological burden. Thus, hypocrites burden themselves more than they burden society. Like a stingy man trying to act generous, but every time he gives a penny to support this claim, it terribly hurts him. To live in peace, one must first be consistent and make peace with one's own soul.

So, whenever hypocrites need to vent the hatred in their hearts, they secretly meet away from the eyes and ears of Muslims. They seek out a refuge where they would be safe, or a mountain cave far from the people so that no one could hear them or a hidden narrow place that is hard to enter; they seek any place to hide from the eyes and ears of the believers and let out the hatred concealed in their hearts. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If they could find a place of refuge, or a cave, or somewhere to crawl into, they would run there *(wallow)* with great haste *(yajmahun)*.' (*at-Tawba:* 57) *Wallow* is to hasten to a place without thinking of anything else. And *yajmahun* literally means to lose control of your horse while riding it and cannot restrain it from bolting off. When this word is used to describe a person, it means he quickly heads to his destination without anyone being able to prevent him; and if anyone gets in his way he pushes them aside and quickly continues.

The verse clearly depicts the hypocrites' behaviour at any battle. As soon as the fighting starts, they avoid the enemy and martyrdom. And they search for a safe place to flee to, or a cave to hide in or a crack in the earth in which they can crawl to spare them the fighting. Then as soon as the battle ends, they come out and join the rows of the Muslims. They do not fight for a religion in which they do not really believe. They were the first to try to flee whenever there was a call to battle in Medina. And they would go to the Prophet *peace and blessings upon him,* to try to get an exemption from fighting; and one of them(1) would say, '…Grant me permission [to remain at home], and do not put me to a test!' (*at-Tawba:* 49)

And with respect to charity, they try to raise doubts about the fairness of its distribution; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَلْمِزُكَ فِي ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ فَإِنْ أُعْطُواْ مِنْهَا رَضُواْ
وَإِن لَّمْ يُعْطَوْاْ مِنْهَآ إِذَا هُمْ يَسْخَطُونَ ٥٨

Some of them find fault with you [Prophet] regarding the distribution of alms: they are content if they are given a share, but angry if not [58] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 58)

When sitting together they criticise the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings upon him* and try to find fault in him, as Allah *Glorified is He* says about them, ‘There are others who insult the Prophet by saying, “He will listen to anything.” Say, “He listens for your own good; he believes in Allah, trusts the believers and is a mercy for those of you who believe.” An agonizing torment awaits those who insult Allah’s Messenger.’ (*at-Tawba:* 61).

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(1) That person was Aljad ibn Qays, whose story has been given while explaining the mentioned verse.

These are some of the hypocrites’ attributes, which Allah reveals to the believers. And He reveals even more of their traits, saying, ‘Some of them find fault *(yalmizu)* with you [Prophet] regarding the distribution of alms: they are content if they are given a share, but angry if not.’ (*at-Tawba:* 58)

We all read Allah’s words, ‘Woe to every fault-finding *(lumaza)* backbiter *(humaza)*.’ (*al-Humaza:* 1) So, who is the ‘*humaza*’ (backbiter*)* and who is the ‘*lumaza*’ (fault-finder)? The *humaza* is one who secretly criticises and mocks a hidden trait of someone else. They do so with a gesture of the eye or a body movement. For example, when a group of people are sitting together and one of them tries to subtly mock another by winking his eye at his neighbour, or whispering in his ears or the like. In conclusion, he points to the person’s fault in a subtle way that most attendees do not notice. On the other hand, the *lumaza* is someone who openly finds fault in others and criticises them in their presence. The one who exposes the fault of another bravely and openly is called *lammaz* in Arabic, whilst the weak one who secretly finds fault in others is called *hammaz*. Also, the word *lumaza* is used to describe someone who often finds fault in people.

The words *humaza* and *lumaza* are in the Arabic hyperbolic form *(fu`ala)*, which indicates an action being performed repeatedly. For example, the word *duhaka* means someone who laughs (*dahik*) a lot. So *lumaza* means one who frequently finds fault with others and openly expresses it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Some of them find fault (*yalmizu*, same root as *lumaza*) with you [Prophet] regarding the distribution of alms...’ (*at-Tawba:* 58). As mentioned, *lamz* means the seeking out of faults, and it is linked here to the distribution of alms. Some of the hypocrites would criticise the notion that the rich should have to work and strive to earn money only for the poor person to take it without effort. Did they find fault in the principle of almsgiving itself, or in the amount of obligatory alms, or in the way Allah continuously encouraged people to give, or the way in which charity is distributed to the poor in that some are given more than others? They criticised all these aspects, or some of them.

But the event about which this noble verse was revealed centred around the distribution of charity. A man named Harqus ibn Zuhair, also known as Ibn thil-Khuwaysira, leader of the *Kharijite* sect, stood up and said, 'Be just, Muhammad!' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Woe unto you! Who shall be just if I am not? I shall surely fail and lose out were I not just!' 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Messenger of Allah, give me the permission to strike his neck!' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Leave him, for he will have companions whose prayer and fasting shall make the prayer and fasting of any of you seem meagre in his own eyes. They shall recite the Quran, yet it shall not go beyond their throats.(1) They will deviate from Islam (as fast and unaffected) as an arrow that pierces its target: its pointed edge, its notch and its shaft, when examined, will be so clean (as if the arrow did not touch the target); neither the contents of the stomach nor any blood has clung to it. Their sign will be a black man, one of whose forearms will be like a woman's breast or a dangling piece of meat. They will emerge at a time when people are divided.'

Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I testify that I heard this from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and I testify that `Ali ibn Abu Taleb fought against them, and I fought alongside him. That man (i.e. the black man mentioned in the aforesaid Hadith) was sought out, found and brought forth, and I saw that he was just as the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had described him.'(2)

Allah *Glorified is He* adds further clarity to the description of these people saying, 'Some of them find fault with you [Prophet] regarding the distribution of alms; they are content if they are given a share, but angry if not.' (*at-Tawba:* 58) So, the amount of charity they were given would determine whether they felt angry or contented.

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(1) That is, it will not reach their hearts.

(2) *Cited by Bukhari (6163, 6963) and Muslim (1064), in the chapter of Zakat (alms), Hadith no. (148), on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri, the version of Muslim*

A similar thing happened at the Battle of Hunayn. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* distributed the spoils among the Muslims of Mecca, yet gave nothing to *Al-Ansar* (the Helpers; Muslims of Medina). Since Al-Ansar did not understand why Prophet Muhammad did so, their exclusion was rather hard on their hearts, so the Prophet gathered them and said, 'Are you not content that people should return with sheep and camels along while you return with the Messenger of Allah? I will live with you and I will die with you (I will not leave you as long as I am alive). Were all the people to go one way and the Helpers another, I would go the way of the Helpers.'(1) Upon this, the Helpers wept; they realised that they would return with what is far greater than any battle spoils; they would return home in the company of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger of Allah gave those who had newly embraced Islam a share of *zakat* (alms) to further attach them to the Islamic religion. A share of the alms may also be given to some to reconcile their hearts and win them to Islam, and the poor whose dignity prevents them from admitting their need are also among the lawful recipients of *zakat*.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had many different things to bear in mind when he distributed alms and battle spoils, which other people might not have been aware of. Muslims obeyed what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* did because his conduct meant to establish the rule.

The Pact of Al-Hudaybiya is a very good example. When it was concluded between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the disbelievers of Quraysh that neither would transgress against the other for ten years(2); this truce angered some Muslims. Some of them even said to the Messenger of Allah, 'How can we allow our religion to be demeaned?!' They were astonished Prophet Muhammad made that pledge to the disbelievers who were unjust to them. Even `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* was so enraged that he said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Are we not in the right, O Messenger of Allah?!' Hence, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* firmly replied to `Umar, 'Know your place, O 'Umar! He is the Messenger of Allah!'(1)

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(1) *This is an authentic Hadith that has been cited before in detail.*

(2) The Pact of Al-Hudaybiya included other terms which the books of Prophet Muhammad's Biography and Quran exegesis have stated:

1. Prophet Muhammad and his Companions shall return and not enter Mecca to observe *`Umrah* (Minor Pilgrimage) that year.
2. They shall be allowed to enter Mecca the following year to observe *`Umrah* without any weapons except their swords sheathed in their covers, provided that they shall only stay in Mecca three days then leave it.
3. A truce of ten years shall be held.
4. Whoever of the disbelievers who goes to the believers and declares faith- whether a man or a woman- shall be returned to the disbelievers.
5. Whoever of the believers forsakes Islam and goes to the disbelievers shall not be returned to the Muslims.

Later, Muslims realised the wisdom behind the Pact of Al-Hudaybiya when they saw how that truce allowed Islam to spread and gave it power which led to the conquest of Mecca. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'There has been no greater victory for Islam than the victory of Al-Hudaybiya.'

At the time when the pact was concluded, Muslims did not know what was between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Lord; people are always hasty, but Allah is not hasty as His servants are- Exalted is He above that. He lets matters run according to the course He intends for them.

Allah wanted to soothe the believers, so on their way back to Medina after the Pact of Al-Hudaybiya had been held, He sent down this verse to His Prophet, 'They were the ones who disbelieved, who barred you from the Sacred Mosque and who prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been among them, unknown to you, believing men and women whom you would have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account- Allah brings whoever He will into His Mercy- if the believers had been clearly separated, We would have inflicted a painful punishment upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Fath:* 25)

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(1) `Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, 'I went to Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, "Are you not truly the Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Indeed I am." I said, "Are we not in the right while our enemy is in the wrong?" He said, "Indeed it is so." I said, "Then why do we allow our religion to be demeaned?" He said, "I am The Messenger of Allah; I would not disobey Him, and He will grant me victory." I said, "Did you not tell us we would go to the Sacred House and circulate (round the *Ka'ba*)?" Then I went to Abu Bakr and said the same to him, so Abu Bakr said to him, "O man, he is the Messenger of Allah; he would not disobey his Lord, and He will grant him victory, so stay by his side and do not disobey him, for indeed he is in the right."' (*Fath-al-Bari*, 5/332).

That way, Allah let the believers know the reason why He decreed that the Pact of Al-Hudaybiya should be held and the believers should not fight the disbelievers at that time and place. There were believers in Mecca who concealed their faith for fear that the disbelievers would have oppressed them had they known they embraced Islam. If a battle had broken out, this would have led to Muslims killing Muslims, for had the Muslims who came from Medina engaged in fighting against the Meccans, they would have unknowingly killed some of their fellow believers who were living in Mecca. Had all the believers been on one side and all the disbelievers on the other, Allah would have afflicted painful punishment on the disbelievers by the hands of the believers. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew a secret from his Lord, which he did not reveal to the believers until the right moment despite their hastiness.

Similar things take place in our lives. A believer may call upon Allah, but his invocations may not be answered; this believer should not grieve, but he should know that Allah has not answered his prayers for a good reason which is unknown to him. It is out of His Mercy that He withholds from you what can harm you. It is like when you prevent your young son from carrying a weapon for fear that he might brandish it in some dispute and kill someone. Although the weapon is meant to protect him, it is a means of protection that may cause great harm and lead to grave consequences.

Thus, when you call upon Allah and He does not answer your prayers, trust that He is protecting you from yourself, for you do not know what Allah knows. You may implore Him to give something you think is good for you, but He knows it is otherwise. Therefore, the fact that your prayers are not answered sometimes, is the best answer you could have.(1)

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(1) *Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, 'No Muslim makes a supplication that does not involve a sin or severance of family ties except that Allah rewards him for it in one of three ways. He will answer his prayers right away, save the reward for him in the Hereafter or protect him from an evil equivalent to what he has asked.' They said [to the Prophet], 'In that case, we will ask for much!' He peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allah has even more.' Cited by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/18), Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (1/493) and At-Tabarani in his Al-Mu`jam As-Saghir (2/92)*

Allah says, ‘Some of them find fault with you [Prophet] regarding the distribution of alms; they are content if they are given a share, but angry if not.’ (*at-Tawba:* 58). The Arabic text of the verse uses the word *sakhat* (anger) which denotes discontentment in the heart which is manifested through the tongue. Such was the case with Harqus ibn Zuhair when he said to Prophet Muhammad, ‘Be just, O Muhammad!’ His heart was discontented which showed in his words.

When Allah draws our attention to an ailment that may endanger the community of the believers, He also gives us the way of treatment to eradicate that ailment. Those mentioned in the verse expressed discontent regarding the distribution of *zakat* (alms), even though when they were given a share, they were contented. That means their standards were inconsistent; they were standards based on whims. The laws set by Allah do not follow or depend on the whims of His servants, but they are firm and unbiased, and we are ordained to abide by them with justice, even with our worst enemies.(1)

As for those who were angry with Prophet Muhammad’s distribution of *zakat* (alms), they had double standards. Their attitudes differed based on their interests. When they were given a share, they were pleased; otherwise, they were angry. Their standards of judgement were based on their personal interests, far from all notions of justice.

After stating the problem, Allah gives the cure in the following verse:

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ رَضُوا۟ مَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥ وَقَالُوا۟ حَسْبُنَا ٱللَّهُ
سَيُؤْتِينَا ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَرَسُولُهُۥٓ إِنَّآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ رَٰغِبُونَ ٥٩

If only they would be content with what God and His Messenger have given them, and say, ‘God is enough for us – He will give us some of His bounty and so will His Messenger – to God alone we turn in hope’[59] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 59)

Allah says, ‘what Allah and His Messenger have given them’ (*at-Tawba:* 59). However, they were not given anything, which was the reason why they were angry. Then why does Allah say so? By this, Allah wants to draw our attention that even when He withholds from you a thing you want, this is itself a form of giving and a manifestation of His Bounty, but people do not realise this. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* withheld the spoils from the Helpers after the Battle of Hunayn. However, they gained instead the company of Prophet Muhammad which is far more precious than any spoils. On that occasion, Prophet Muhammad said to them: I will live with you and I will die with you (I will not leave you so long as I am alive). Were all the people to go one way and the Helpers another, I would go the way of the Helpers.'(1) They won what was far greater and more valuable than mere battle spoils. Thus, even withholding can be an act of giving.

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(1) Allah says in this regard, ‘But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them [would long ago have perished]...’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 71).

Allah says, 'what Allah and His Messenger have given them' (*at-Tawba:* 59). He *the Exalted and Almighty* is the Lawgiver, and Prophet Muhammad was the one who delivered and implemented His Law. Contentment with what Allah ordains and bestows on us is a deed done by the heart and then expressed by the tongue, 'If only they would be content with what Allah and His Messenger have given them, and say, "Allah is enough for us…"' (*at-Tawba:* 59). If they were mindful of Allah, they would know He is the One Who takes care of us and both, His giving and His withholding are good for us. At times of affliction, those who are mindful of Him remember they have a Lord. They have a Protector, so no one may usurp their rights or transgress against them will go unpunished. They know Allah is there for them and will compensate them with more than what they have missed. They know their usurped rights will be the bane of the usurper's life.

What a believer should strive to preserve is not the blessings given to him, but his relationship with the Giver of blessings. He should know that Allah is Ever-Able to compensate him for anything he has lost. Allah clarifies this image for us when He says, ' Allah is enough for us– He will give us some of His Bounty' (*at-Tawba:* 59). That is, He will give us something even better. Allah bestows His favours on each person even before he is able to worship Him, even when he is still is his mother's womb. When you come to this life, you think with the mind Allah has created for you, and work with the energy

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(1) *This is an authentic Hadith that has been cited before in detail.*

He has given you and employ the resources of the earth He has made subservient to you. However, when you were in your mother's womb, you could do nothing, yet He provided for you. Even when you are borne, you find the universe ready for your reception. Even before you develop the ability to work, you find the earth filled with Allah's blessings; you have not created any of its resources. All you do is make use of them as Allah commands. You have not made the earth or the sun. Were rain to stop, you cannot make it come down. Ponder this one blessing of Allah; everything on earth would perish if rain stopped. When drought strikes any part of the world, we see how everything dies: people, animals and plants.

Allah *Glorified is He* has created us in a world so full of vicissitudes. The weak turn strong and vice versa. The sick heal and vice versa. This is in order that we know that whatever powers or strength we possess, are not intrinsically ours but are gifts from Allah that He may take back whenever He wants. He who uses the strength Allah has given him to persecute His servants may well be stripped of this strength and turn in desperate need for a helping hand. Everything in the universe is from Allah and out of His Bounty.

In the verse we are examining, Allah says, '… "Allah is enough for us– He will give us some of His Bounty and so will His Messenger– to Allah alone we are *ragheboon* [we turn in hope]."' (*at-Tawba:* 59) The Arabic verb *ragheba* has several meanings depending on its preposition. *Raghiba fi* means 'to desire', *raghiba `an* (to refrain; turn away from) and *raghiba ila* (which we have in the noble verse) means 'to turn to in hope'. So long as we turn to Allah, then we should not think only of His bestowals in this worldly life, but also of what He prepares for us in the Hereafter. This worldly life is not the goal or the final destination; as long as you turn with hope to Allah, He will give you boundless delight in the Hereafter. With this belief firm in the heart, one would not lament of grieve for the loss of transient delights in this worldly life, so long as we aspire to the Hereafter.

In the following verse, Allah explains the way in which *zakat* (alms) should be distributed so that those who desire the enjoyments of this worldly life would be able to determine whether they deserve a share of it or not. He *the Exalted and Almighty* says:

إِنَّمَا ٱلصَّدَقَٰتُ لِلْفُقَرَآءِ وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱلْعَٰمِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَٱلْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِى ٱلرِّقَابِ وَٱلْغَٰرِمِينَ
وَفِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱبْنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ۖ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ٦٠

Alms are meant only for the poor, the needy, those who administer them, those whose hearts need winning over, to free slaves and help those in debt, for God's cause, and for travellers in need. This is ordained by God; God is all knowing and wise[60]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 60)

The Arabic word *innama* (rendered in the verse as 'only') denotes restriction. It means restricting a particular quality to a particular person or group. Therefore, using it in this verse means that *zakat* (alms) is confined only to the lawful recipients stated in the verse.

Allah says, '*As-Sadaqat* (alms) is meant only for…' (*at-Tawba:* 60). Why does Allah use the word *sadaqat* which denotes 'voluntary charity' if He means *zakat* (alms; mandatory charity)? In the verse, Allah specifies the lawful recipients of *as-sadaqat* which proves He means the mandatory *zakat* and not voluntary charity, so why does He use this word?

Do you not see that even in disbelieving and atheistic societies, there are people who establish charitable institutions to care for the poor? One's compassion for his fellow human is something instinctive Allah has created in all of us. In this light, *zakat* is not just an obligation, but also a manifestation of the sound human disposition, hence the word *sadaqat* which recalls compassion and benevolence of humans towards each other. Life events point to the significance of Allah's description of the mandatory *zakat* as *sadaqat* (charity). It is an obligation that agrees with the nature of humans who- be they believers or not- offer help voluntarily to the poor. The able feel happy when they give to the needy; it is an instinct Allah has placed in His servants so they may alleviate the miseries and destitution of one another.

In the noble verse, Allah says, 'Alms are meant only for *al-fuqara'* (roughly 'the poor'), *al-masakeen* (roughly 'the needy')…' (*at-Tawba:* 60). Scholars have differed respecting the meanings of *faqeer* (singular form of *fuqara`*) and *miskeen* (singular form of *masakeen*). Some say one who is *faqeer* possesses nothing at all, while a *miskeen* is one who does possess something, but it is by no means enough to provide for him. This would mean that a *miskeen* is in a better condition than a *faqeer*. Scholars who hold this view seek evidence in this verse, ‘As for that boat, it belonged to some *masakeen* who toiled upon the sea…’ (*al-Kahf:* 79). If they owned a boat, it obviously means a *miskeen* does own something, but the income they gained from the boat was not enough to meet their needs.

Some other scholars say the case is just the opposite, i.e. a *miskeen* is he who does not own anything at all while a *faqeer* is he who does not have enough. Given this, a *faqeer* is therefore better off than a *miskeen*. I think it is of no use to dwell on this debate any further since Allah has made a share for both. It may be worth mentioning that the word *faqeer* is derived from the same root of *faqarah* (vertebra). A *faqeer* is him whose backbone is worn out by life’s toil, so his destitute condition is already obvious and does not need any words to express it. The word *miskeen* is he whose poverty has caused him to be struck by *maskanah* (weakness; wretchedness).

Besides the poor and the needy, ‘those who administer them’ (*at-Tawba:* 60), are also among the lawful recipients of *zakat* (alms). Those are the employees in charge of collecting *zakat* and placing them in the treasury to be distributed among its lawful recipients. This is a general rule that includes all those who administer *zakat*, whether they need money or not. Some might argue that if he who collects *zakat* (alms) is affluent, then he does not need to be paid for it. This means that his work would be voluntary. Usually, voluntary work may not be undertaken with the same efficiency as paid work. Payment entails responsibility and guarantees efficiency, so why should society be denied an efficient and hard-working collector of *zakat*? An employee who oversees collecting *zakat* (alms) serves- by the job he does- the Islamic state(1). He collects *zakat* and gives it to the ruler or local governor who distributes it among its lawful recipients. He does a service for the entire Muslim society, especially if *zakat* is distributed by the government. This would allow no giver of *zakat* the chance to hold himself superior to those who take it and would spare the latter humiliation. This is meant to maintain dignity of the believers. When a recipient of *zakat* (alms) takes it directly from its affluent giver, he will suffer from the humility of having to stretch out his hand to others. Besides, improper pride may creep into the heart of the giver. Children of the poor can thus be spared the humiliating scene of their fathers' going to rich families to ask for money, and children of the rich will be saved from the degradation of taunting poor children arrogantly. If a rich man and a poor man quarrel, the former will not have the chance to gibe, 'I give you such-and-such', nor can his children say to the poor man's children, 'Were it not for our father, you would have starved to death'!

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(1) ‘Islamic state’- not capitalized- generally refers to a regime primarily based on the application of shari'a (Islamic Law); it by no means refers to ISIS! [Reviewer’s Note].

Allah has prescribed the system of *zakat* to prevent the tyranny of givers and spare recipients the humiliation of begging. Everyone goes to the treasury, either to deposit or receive money. When the poor go to the treasury to take their shares by the command of the state, there is no shame in this since the state is responsible for all its subjects.

Another category of the lawful recipients of *zakat* (alms) is, 'those whose hearts need winning over' (*at-Tawba:* 60). These are people Muslims want to encourage to think about Islam or prevent from harming its adherents. In the early years of Islam, Muslims were weak and helpless. Later, when Allah granted victory and power to Muslims, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* cancelled out this share. He commanded that no share of *zakat* (alms) would be used for winning over the hearts of any non-Muslims, for the Islamic state was then strong enough that no support was required from those who had no firm faith.(1)

This raises a question: Can a heart be won over? Yes, this is possible; acts of kindness can attract the heart of a good person. It can also pacify and unarm an evil one so that he would not harm him who shows kindness to him by a word or deed.

A share of *zakat* (alms) is also prescribed, 'to free slaves" (*at-Tawba:* 60). This refers to slaves who have been captivated during legitimate conflicts. Abolition of slavery is one of the goals of Islam, and therefore one of the shares of *zakat* (alms) is devoted to freeing slaves. Some people claim that Islam established slavery and permitted it, but this is quite mistaken. Slavery already existed before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent. Islam established the principle of manumission by making it a means of expiating certain sins(1) as well as devoting a share of *zakat* (alms) to freeing slaves.

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(1) This was also the opinion of Al-Hasan Al-Basri, Ash-She`bi and others. Az-Zuhri said, 'I do not know anything that proves this ruling has been abrogated.' Ibn Al-`Arabi said that this share depends on the power of Muslims and whether they need to win over the hearts of some. (See: Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, 4/3706.)

The Quran was revealed at a time rife with slavery. It was customary at that time that in case of failing to repay a debt, a creditor would take the debtor or one of his children as a slave. When a crime was committed, the perpetrator would procure pardon from the injured party by giving him one of his children as a slave. In cases of theft, a thief would not be punished, but would give one of his children as a slave in exchange for the stolen item. The strong enslaved the weak by kidnapping their women and children by force and selling them in the slave market. The ways in which people could be enslaved in the world were so many, and there was only one way a slave could be freed, the will of the master. He could free him or keep him as he pleased. Slavery existed in Europe, Asia, Africa and America. It was on the increase before the advent of Islam. It was like a basin filled by several taps, but having only one plughole. One of the manifestations of the wisdom of Islamic Law is that it has introduced cures for problems and ailments through stages to uproot them. An example of this is the prohibition of intoxication. It started with forbidding the believers from observing the prayer while drunk and ended by banning intoxication totally.(2)

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(1) An example of this is manslaughter, '…And upon him who has slain a believer by mistake there is the duty of freeing a believing soul from bondage and paying an indemnity to the victim's relations, unless they forgo it by way of charity…' (*an-Nisa'*: 92). Another example is the expiation of oaths, '…Thus, the breaking of an oath must be atoned for by feeding ten needy persons with more or less the same food as you are wont to give to your own families, or by clothing them or by freeing a human being from bondage…' (*al-Ma'ida*: 89).

(2) The stages of banning alcohol were as follows:

1. 'They ask you [Prophet] about intoxicants and gambling: say, "There is great sin in both, and some benefit for people: the sin is greater than the benefit."' (*al-Baqara*: 219).
2. '… Do not come anywhere near the Prayer if you are intoxicated, not until you know what you are saying…' (*an-Nisa'*: 43).
3. 'By means of intoxicants and games of chance Satan seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among you, and to turn you away from the remembrance of Allah and from Prayer. Will you not, then, desist?' (*al-Ma'ida*: 91).

Islam has been keen on freeing humankind from slavery. This began by eradicating the sources of slavery so that the only remaining source is a religious war waged by a Muslim ruler where disbelieving female captives can be taken as slaves under special terms(1). As for all the other ways in which people could be enslaved, such as enslaving someone for committing a crime, for his inability to repay a debt and so on, Islam has brought an end to them by forbidding them. Moreover, Islam has not made the will of the master the only way for a slave to be freed, but has prescribed several other ways. Allah has made freeing slaves as an expiation for sins- as we have explained earlier. Even if one has done none of these sins, Islam encourages freeing slaves as a righteous deed that one is anyway rewarded for.(2)

Allah says, ‘Yet he has not attempted the steep path. What will explain to you what the steep path is? It is to free a slave.’ (*al-Balad:* 11-13) Thus, Islam has established many ways for slaves to be freed so that slavery would come to an end within a few years. Furthermore, Islam has enjoined certain duties on masters so that even before release from slavery, a slave can still enjoy an acceptable life. So long as a master keeps a slave, he must give him of the same food and clothes he gets from himself and help him with the work he assigns to him.(3) This makes the difference between a master and his slave almost disappear.

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(1) When Allah grants Muslims victory against disbelievers, female captives- who have taken part in the fight- may be distributed among Muslim warriors as slaves. When each warrior is given his share, he has the right to enjoy the intimate relationship with his slave(s) upon certain conditions. She has to be strong enough for intercourse. She must have her menstruation (to ensure she is not pregnant); if she is pregnant, her master must wait until she delivers her baby. Any man other than her master is strictly forbidden from touching her. The relationship between a master and his female slave(s) must be publicly announced, not to let suspicions rise respecting him or her, especially if she conceives. If a slave woman bears her master a child, he has no right to sell her. [Reviewer’s Note]

(2) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘If a Muslim frees a Muslim slave, Allah will free a part of his body from the hellfire in return for each part of the body of the slave he has freed, even their private parts.’ *[Cited by Al-Bukhari (6715) and Muslim (1509) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah Allah be pleased with him]*

(3) On the authority of Abu Dharr, Prophet Muhammad said, ‘They (slaves) are your brothers whom Allah has placed under your command. Therefore, if any man is given by Allah command over his brother, let him feed him the same food he eats and clothe him with the same clothes he wears. Let *him not bid him do more than he is able to; if he bids him do more than he is able to, he must help him.’ [Cited by Al- Bukhari in his Sahih (6050) and Muslim in his Sahih (1661)]*

When some Muslim states prohibited slavery by law, slaves went to their former masters and said, ‘Let us live with you as we used to.’ They did this because they led good lives with their masters who were mindful of Allah concerning them. Thus, by abolishing such inequalities slavery entailed, Islam preserved the dignity of slaves even before they were set free.

Given all that, some might wonder why Allah mentions them in the Quran as ‘slaves’; ‘and those (slaves) whom your right hands possess’ (*an-Nisa’:* 36). We need to understand well what Allah really means here. This verse refers only to disbelieving women who take part in a war against Muslims, i.e. who fight alongside disbelieving men and are taken as captives. In this case, every ruling that applies to male captives applies also to female captives. Otherwise, how would she make her living in the land of her enemy? To simply let her have her own way among society would be dangerous both for society and for her. Moreover, she has feelings and she needs protection. Islam therefore permits her master, if he loves this slave-woman, to have a relationship with her just as he would with his wife. If she bears him a child, she becomes a free woman and her children will be free,(1) which also contributes to abolishing slavery.

Back to the verse we are examining, another category of the lawful recipients of *zakat* (alms) are, ‘those in debt’ (*at-Tawba:* 60). This refers to someone who has incurred a debt for a lawful purpose and fails to repay this debt, so the creditor refuses to give him respite as Allah commands, ‘…[grant him] a delay until a time of ease…’ (*al-Baqara:* 280). At this juncture, the treasury should pay the debt out of the money of *zakat*.

This is meant to help a debtor in two ways. First, through repaying his debt and second, through preventing the affluent growing averse to generosity and loaning. This makes things easier for society by ensuring that those facing hard times can find help. No one will refuse to loan those in distress so long as they know they will restore their money either way: from the debtor or- if he cannot afford repayment- from the treasury that will cover the loan from the money of *zakat* (alms).

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(1) *The name Islam gives to a freed woman in this case is umm walad (literally: mother of one’s child). A man is entitled to keep the mother of his child (his freed slave woman) as long as he is alive. Once he dies, she becomes mistress of herself. (See Nayl Al-Awtar, 6/96-99).*

The verse also refers to a person who seeks to make peace between two parties who are disputing over financial issues; for example, he settles the matter by paying the amount disputed over. If that person then goes through hard times- having been driven by pure faith to pay that amount- he may be repaid out of the money of *zakat* (alms). This will guard people against refraining from interference to settle such disputes and help achieve conciliation among each other.

Among the shares of *zakat* (alms) is also one assigned, ‘ for Allah’s Cause’ (*at-Tawba:* 60). Most scholars say this refers to armed struggle.(1) No one would give his wealth for Allah’s Cause unless he were sure of the reward. Faith is the motive that can make one give his money and his life for a cause. No one would fight if they did not know that martyrdom will lead to paradise.

Islam is a creed and a way of life. He who struggles in Allah’s Cause is a role model for other believers. Through the example he offers, he strengthens Islam and helps firm up faith in people’s hearts. By giving wealth and life, they teach others the value of sacrifice. They convey the message that for whatever you give, Allah will grant you ample reward that far exceeds what you give.

Scholars also say that ‘for Allah’s Cause’ (*at-Tawba:* 60), also refers to public services. Building mosques, schools, hospitals etc. and the like are also included in this share of *zakat* (alms).(2)

One more category of the lawful recipients of *zakat* (alms) remains; they are ‘travellers in need’ (*at-Tawba:* 60). The verse uses the Arabic expression

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi says in his exegesis (4/3110), ‘This refers to those who fight battles and army units stationed to protect Muslim territories from external attacks. They must be reimbursed for what they spend in this regard, whether they are rich or poor. This is the opinion of most scholars and the position of the Maliki school of thought. Ibn ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him said, ‘...for Allah’s Cause...’ refers to those who set out to perform hajj (Major Pilgrimage) or `umrah (Minor Pilgrimage).*

(2) Az-Zubaydi says in *Sharh Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din* (4/250) that this share of *zakat* (alms) covers all the public services which righteous conduct demands. This includes any service which is for the general good of people or animals, even if it is watering a tree almost dying dry. The money of *zakat* (alms) may be used for this purpose, since it is among the good deeds done for the public and intended for the cause of Allah.

ibn as-sabil (he who belongs to the road). Every person belongs to his own homeland. A traveller is a stranger who does not belong to the place he travels to. If he is stuck on the road since his means fall short of affording his journey back home, then he-figuratively-belongs to the road, hence the Arabic expression. We must help such a person who is far from home so that he can get back there. When a wayfarer is sure to find someone to help him if the need arises, the young will be encouraged to travel for work or tourism, to seek new opportunities or accumulate new experiences. A traveller might be rich, but might lose his money because of some unexpected mishap during his journey. Therefore, Allah has prescribed this share of *zakat* (alms) to protect His servants while they are abroad from any sudden event that might put them in difficulty. He wants His servants to travel through the earth and to see His signs and search for provisions. So, the verse includes every stranger who faces difficulties and does not have the means to return home.

After stating the shares and lawful recipients of *zakat* (alms), Allah says, '…this is ordained by Allah…' (*at-Tawba:* 60). This means it is mandatory on the believers to give all those stated in the verse their due shares of *zakat* (alms). *Zakat* is mandatory for the poor, the needy, those in charge of collecting it, those whose hearts need winning over, those overburdened with debt, for Allah's cause and for the wayfarer.

Allah concludes the verse by saying, '…Allah is all Knowing and Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 60) Allah has existed eternally, with no beginning and no end, and He is the Creator of all things. He has created humankind and honoured them by making them vicegerents on earth. Before the creation of humankind, Allah prepared the universe for their reception. He created the earth, the sun, the moon, the sky, the planets, the stars and everything. We have come to this life to find the earth and all that is in it made for our service. None of the things Allah has created for us refuses to serve us. The earth does not refuse to give crops when it is sown. The animals Allah has subdued to our will do not rebel against us. A donkey would not refuse to be loaded with manure, nor would it object if you take him as a mount to carry you from place to place!

Since Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who has created all things and people, He knows His creatures best and knows best what is good or bad for them. Nothing is like Him and He is above all comparison. Still, let me give you an example to illustrate. An engineer who creates a simple machine is the one who sets the rules for its operation and maintenance, so what about the Creator of humankind, with all the complexity of the latter? The creation of humankind and disposition of their affairs require knowledge and wisdom as well. One might have knowledge, but he does not put this knowledge into action. He might know the rule, but thinks it more beneficial to ignore it and act his own way. Therefore, knowledge must necessarily be accompanied by wisdom so that one can put everything in place. Hence Allah, '…is all Knowing and Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 60)

The obligation of *zakat* (alms) means there is a giver, a recipient and the amount given. These are three components. This might call some to think, 'Why has Allah made some people strong and others weak, some able and others helpless so that one has to give *zakat* and the other receive it? Why has He not simply made us all equally affluent and able?

Allah has created variation, for the differences inherent in things make them complementary. For example, there is the night and the day. Are they opponents? Do they conflict, or complement one another? Were they not created together, the world would have been unbalanced. Allah says, 'Say [Prophet], "Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual night over you until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than He could bring you light? Do you not listen?" Say, "Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual day over you until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than He could give you night in which to rest? Do you not see?"' (*al-Qasas:* 71-72)

We need the light and vigour of the day to move and work, and we also need the dark and stillness of the night to sleep. If we had no time for rest and sleep, we would not be able to work and struggle. Thus, we see that the difference between the day and night makes them complementary, not conflicting. Also take the example of the creation of man and woman. They are complementary, too. Some do not see this fact, so they want men and women to be exactly equal in every respect. They do not see that men and women are the same creature but made in two types for each to perform a distinct mission in life. They are equally honoured by Allah and their roles equally essential, but their different natures make each appropriate for their role. Let us ponder these verses of the chapter of *al-Layl,* ‘By the enshrouding night, by the radiant day, by His creation of male and female!’ (*al-Layl:* 1-3) Mentioning the male and female after the day and night implies a subtle similarity between the creation of each pair. Just as the day and night complement each other, men and women support and complement each another. Their differences are by no means intended to make them enemies, but rather look at how they complement one another perfectly, not despite these differences, but because of these differences! Such is a fact Allah alludes to in His words, ‘The ways you take differ greatly’ (*al-Layl:* 4). Each has a different purpose in life, hence the difference in their creation. Allah is the All-Wise. Out of His Wisdom, He made countless things in the earth for the service of humankind. Inanimate objects serve us, as do plants and animals. This is to help us perform the mission of worshiping Allah, which He has created us for. On the other, Allah’s Wisdom manifests itself in the fact that He has also created things, which do not obey humankind. This is for us to know that whatever in this world is subdued to our will is the outcome of Allah’s making it so; we do not subdue Allah’s creatures by our own powers. Only Allah, out of His Power and Wisdom, has made them subservient to us. This should make us humble. Otherwise, arrogance would overwhelm us, as Allah says, ‘But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7)

A camel, as huge as it is, would well obey a young child, while a snake, despite its relatively diminutive size, would scare an adult. This is to let us know that the powers and strength we have are not intrinsically possessed by us but are bestowed on us by Allah, *Exalted is He*. For the same reason, Allah has created some people weak or poor, for the strong and the rich to realise that it is Him Who has endowed them with strength or wealth and He can strip them of all that whenever He wills. Were these intrinsic traits of humankind, then no one would be weak or poor. The less weak and the poor teach the strong and the rich an important lesson; your powers are a gift from Allah that He can deprive you from and make you just like us.

The weak man who cannot work, the blind and the handicapped all exist in the world to show the healthy and strong that health and strength are from

Allah. This is to guard them against arrogance and deviation and call their attention to the Creator, for just as He gives, He may strip one of what He has given him.

Among the manifestation of His Wisdom, too, is the way He distributes provisions among His servants. If people were all affluent, who would sweep streets? Who would clear drains and sewers? Who would carry bricks and cement on his shoulders for building? If we were all wealthy, none of us would assent to do such menial and strenuous jobs. Allah has created people different in social status and made those jobs a means of earning a living so some people must do them to provide for themselves and their children.

Does the situation always remain the same with the different people and classes? No, time changes the fortunes of people. In every life, there is spring and there is winter. There is prosperity and there is decline. Days may come when humble labours yield the highest incomes and most abundant provisions that even exceed what university graduates can earn through their more prestigious jobs.

The world requires different talents that complement one another. For a house to be built, an architect, a contractor, a carpenter, a blacksmith, a builder and so on are all necessary. No one can possess all these talents at the same time, so they are all equally needed and must all perform their complementary roles. What makes people do their jobs with diligence is that they are the means of earning livelihood. A common Egyptian proverb says, 'The carpenter's door needs repair!' One of the allusions of this proverb is that one invests his talents mainly for earning his living. Therefore, when a job has nothing to do with earning, one may be reluctant to do it. A carpenter who repairs countless doors may not bother to repair his own door.

The existence of humankind is not an essential part of the universe. The universe is already a complete whole irrespective of our existence and we have only been placed in it as a vicegerent. Corruption often stems from human arrogance, when we think that our powers are inherent and we are independent of and superior to everything. We and everything else belong to Allah alone. A person who gives has no superiority over him who is given, nor is the latter superior in any way to the former. Rather, both are equal, for faith manifests itself in two main aspects, gratitude and patience. A believer shows gratitude at times of prosperity and patience at times of afflictions and hardships. A wealthy person is tested through prosperity and abundance so Allah would see whether he would show gratitude to Him or life’s finery would make him slide into heedlessness. Besides gratitude, Allah would not deprive him from a chance to show patience too, so He enjoins on him to give a prescribed portion of his wealth, which he earns through hard work and strain, to the destitute who do not have enough to provide for themselves. A poor person is also given a chance to show both gratitude and patience. He mainly needs to show patience for his poverty. He also has the chance to show gratitude for the money and provisions he receives effortlessly through his share of *zakat* (alms) Allah has prescribed for his wellbeing. Thus, if both the rich and the poor abide by Allah’s religion, they will each receive their reward amply both for their patience and their gratefulness.

Let the poor and needy rejoice at the Mercy of Allah and His blessings. Let them guard their hearts against sorrow and discontent, for they have a Bountiful Lord Who gives them provisions they do not need to work for. He has ordained the rich to give them a prescribed portion of their wealth; you would find a rich person eagerly reaching out to the lawful recipients of *zakat* (alms) to pay them the due share Allah has made mandatory on him. A person may be well off, but then a crisis would befall him, so we find his friends hurry to help him even without his asking for help. For those who do, Allah has prepared a generous reward, ‘Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over? It is Allah Who withholds and Allah Who gives abundantly, and it is to Him that you will return.’ (*al-Baqara:* 245) Even though everything belongs to Him, Allah respects the work that man does to earn his wealth. He honours the effort of those who struggle so much that He describes whatever they give to the poor as a ‘loan’ given to Him *the Exalted and Almighty*! Allah is far elevated above all comparison, but this is only an illustrative example. A child may give his savings to help his father who is going through distress. Even though his child’s savings are only some of the pocket money he gives him, the father appreciates what his child does and thanks him for his help as if the money were originally his. The money originally belongs to Allah, yet He is the All-Generous Who respects the effort and devotion of His servants; He counts the money they give to the poor and needy as if it were a loan given to Allah that he recompenses them for many times more. This does not only honour the rich, but in this is an honour to the poor as well; Allah, for their sake, takes a loan from the rich to answer their needs and meanwhile preserve their dignity.

Allah has made *zakat* (alms) one of the tenets of Islam for the benefit of the poor. By this ruling, faith of the rich cannot be complete unless they devote part of their riches to the poor. On the other hand, the poor have no such duty towards the rich, nor is their faith dependent in any way on any kind of devotion to them. This honours the poor and does not constitute any injustice against the rich; the prescribed portion of *zakat* (alms) is taken out of the money excessive to the need of the giver. It is an extra amount he is already in no need of. Allah is in no need of the whole universe and all it contains. I contend, therefore, that it is as though Allah has given the rich a share in one of His Attributes; for He is the Rich, the Self-Sufficient Who provides for His servants and is free from any need.

Money is not in itself useful, but it is only useful to the extent that it can bring useful things to the possession of its owner. Let me give you an example I always prefer to use in illustrating this point. Suppose someone owned a whole mountain of gold gets lost in the desert where there is not even a single slice of bread or a sip of water. What is the benefit of his mountain of gold then? It is worthless. Money is valuable only as much as it is a means that leads to an end, but it is not in itself an end. When a rich person withholds his money from the poor, he thus falls into the mistake of making money a goal rather than a means which may well cause his money to be effaced and the benefit desired of it to be prevented. By giving to the poor, money is thus used in the proper way it is created for, which is to be one of the means of life. Since money is useful only when it helps us reach our goals, so let us use it to serve our ultimate goal; winning the good pleasure and reward of Allah.

Allah respects His servants who work and appreciates their efforts. This is meant to encourage everyone to work as much as he can, not only as much as he needs. If people only worked as much as they need, there would be no extra wealth to be given as *zakat* (alms).

Allah has decreed that everyone has a claim to what he earns in this worldly life. The outcomes of everyone's work belong to him, and this should urge everyone to work as much as he can since whatever he earns is his. It is in the nature of humankind that everyone would love to keep the fruits of his efforts to himself. When you have more wealth than you need, you do not love to lose this extra wealth. Therefore, when Allah commands the rich to give some of their wealth to the poor, He encourages them to do by promising them His reward in return for their sacrifice of wealth. Allah gives them a goal to reach for as they give their money; namely, His abundant reward in the Hereafter. It is like a bargain: you give a prescribed portion of the wealth you have in excess to pave the way for the Hereafter. The poor, on the other hand, needs this portion to provide for themselves. Thus, each of us is in need of the other. Since Allah respects human labour, He allows for everyone the greater share of what he earns and prescribes for the poor the lesser share.

That is why the less the effort made, the more the prescribed share of *zakat* (alms) is. If a man finds a buried treasure, the amount he should give as *zakat* is 20%(1) whereas the share of *zakat* due on a farmer who sows the land, waters it and harvests the crop is 10%(2). As for a man who earns his livelihood from daily labour such as trade, the prescribes amount of *zakat* he should pay is only 2.5%. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to encourage us to work. Society benefits from the work of everyone, even if that individual does not mean it.

Take this example. A business person who establishes residential buildings offers many job opportunities. He employs workers who carry sand, bricks, cement and iron. He employs drivers who transport these materials to the building site. He contracts with manufacturers for safety and electrical equipment, and so on. Benefit thus extends to many others, and the owner of the building himself may not benefit from his property due to death, for example.

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(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'A fifth of unearthed treasure is due as zakat (Alms).' [Cited byAl- Bukhari (2255) and Muslim (1710) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah]*

(2) The amount of *zakat* (Alms) due on crops differs according to the method of irrigation. When a crop is irrigated without any machines- as by rain- only 10% is due. When a farmer irrigates his land using machines, or if he needs to buy water for the purpose, only 5% is due as *zakat*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The amount of *zakat* (alms) due on what is irrigated by rain, from springs, or any natural means is a tenth, and half a tenth is due on what is irrigated [by unnatural means, like sprinkling].'

Some people think that work alone brings wealth, forgetting that work is only a means and success and wealth come only from Allah. A crisis may happen and ruin crops, squandering the labour of those who ploughed, sowed and watered the land. By such events, Allah directs our attention to the fact that everything occurs by His Will, not by material means alone.

It is worthy of mention that even when such crises befall some, Allah makes a way for them. If the wheat crop, for example, is destroyed in one land, Allah makes up for such a loss by causing the wheat crop of another land to be in surplus. The one who has incurred loss may buy wheat from the other, or the land with a high yield may send some of its surplus crop to the afflicted land as an aid. This is how Allah makes life balanced.

We must always remember that all might and power belong to Allah alone. He is the One Who grants us whatever powers we have and none but Him can do that. Allah possesses Absolute Power; He sends down to His creatures some of the effects of His Power so they would help one another in carrying the burdens of life. All what a mortal can do is help others by means of the power he is endowed with, but none of us can create power in another. Only Allah *Glorified is He* gives power to whomever He wills.

Wealth is beneficial only to the extent that it helps one get his needs. Its value is confined to its ability to purchase food, clothes, a car or anything else you need. If such needs are unavailable, what is the use of money if it cannot buy them? Since money is the means to get one’s needs, everyone holds it valuable. Children who receive their pocket money on a monthly basis would be keen to meet their father at the beginning of every month, even though they might not pay him any attention for the rest of the month. If he gives them their pocket money on daily basis, they would be keen to see their father every day.

Allah *the Exalted and Almighty* is the Creator of the human soul, and He knows what is in the hearts of people. That is why He urges the affluent to be there for those who are too weak to earn. We live in a world of vicissitudes.

He who is strong today may become weak tomorrow. This should fill the strong and the rich with concern when they see the weak and the poor. This should remind them how Allah has blessed them with His favours so they would show gratitude by hastening to help the weak and the poor. Knowing that he may turn the one in need one day, a rich person should be glad to offer his help so Allah would send him help if he needs it later.

Allah says, ‘Take alms from their wealth in order to purify them and sanctify them with it…’ (*at-Tawba:* 103). Giving *zakat* (alms) cleanses the giver from heedlessness that might afflict him at times and causes his heart to increase in purity. Even though giving *zakat* seems to be a loss and a decrease of one’s money, it brings increase and abundance since Allah blesses the money it is taken out of. *Riba* (usury), on the other hand, seems a means of increasing money, yet in fact its effect is just the opposite since Allah effaces the money it is added to. One hundred pounds(1) become ninety-seven and a half pounds after *zakat* (alms) has been paid, whereas they may become two hundred after usurious interests have been added. Usury seems on the surface to be a gain, but in reality, it obliterates all the good that can be gained from money. *Zakat* (alms) seems on the surface to be a loss, but in reality, it is a gain. It is an increase of purity, wholesomeness and blessedness.

Money secures the basic as well as the secondary needs of life, so possessing it makes one feel reassured about his present and his future. However, even supposing that your wealth may last your whole life, this life is too short. The day will surely come when you pass away and leave this wealth behind. At this moment, all the money you have saved will pass on to your heirs and you will take none of it with you except that which you had spent in Allah’s cause. This is the only portion of your wealth that will remain with you in the eternal life, and Allah has willed to multiply the reward for His believing servants who spend money in His cause.

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(1) This is just an example and does not mean that any *zakat* (alms) is due for such a small sum as a hundred pounds. The minimum taxable amount for which *zakat* is due is the equivalent of 85 grams of gold and it must remain with its owner for one full year without his needing it.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘A son of Adam would say, “My wealth, my wealth!” Still, have you any wealth, O son of Adam, except that which you spend on the food you consume or the clothes you wear out, or that which you preserve by giving as charity?’(1)

Let whoever loves to keep his wealth therefore spend out of it on the poor. This is what preserves wealth beyond the life of this world and makes it accompany you to the eternal life of the Hereafter.

We have an excellent example in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He once received a sheep as a gift, and said to 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* ‘Give its meat as charity.’ 'Aisha knew that the Messenger of Allah liked the meat of the shoulder, so she gave all the sheep’s meat as charity except for a piece of the shoulder which she kept for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. When the Messenger of Allah returned home, he asked her what she had done with the meat of the sheep, and 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, ‘I gave it all as charity and kept the shoulder.’ The Messenger of Allah replied, ‘But say you have kept it all except the shoulder!’(2) The part of the sheep that has actually remained is that which 'Aisha gave as charity since its reward will remain. As for the shoulder she kept, this is the part that has actually been given away. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called things by their true names.

Allah blesses the money of the giver in this life and gives him the best reward in the Hereafter. A man asked `Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* ‘How can I know if my heart is attached more to the life of this world or the Afterlife?’ `Ali said, ‘You have the answer, not I. If someone comes to ask you for money and another comes to give you money, who of them do you welcome more gladly? If you are happier with him who comes to ask for your help, then your heart attached more to the Afterlife. If you are happier with him who comes to give you money, then your heart attached more to the life of this world. He who asks for your help causes you to be rewarded in the

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(1) *This is an authentic Hadith cited by Muslim (2958), Ahmad (4/24, 26) At-Tirmidhi (2342), and An-Nisa`i (6/238), on the authority of Abdullah ibn Ash-Shikhir.*

(2) *This is an authentic Hadith cited by 'Ahmad (6/50), At-Tirmidhi (2470), and Abu Na`im (5/23), on the authority of Aisha Allah be pleased with her.*

Hereafter, yet he who gives you money only increases your worldly lot and adds nothing to your Hereafter.’

The life of this world is not our ultimate end. Your fortunes in it last only as long as you live in it. As for the Hereafter, your life there will never end. Thus, give some of your wealth as charity and it will be good for you in the Hereafter.

Allah concludes the verse by saying, ‘… Allah is all Knowing and Wise.’ (*at-Tawba:* 60). He puts everything in its right place through His Knowledge and Wisdom, as He says, ‘Does He not know who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.’ (*al-Mulk:* 14) Through His wisdom, Allah manages the lives and affairs of all people. All of them are His servants, and there is no difference between the rich and the poor in His Sight. Allah has willed that such differences occur only in this worldly life because the world does not need individuals who are all the same in every respect. Life would not go properly if we were all doctors, engineers or if we were all judges. Allah has chosen to distribute talents among people in a way that best answers the essential needs of life. Each one of us excels in something. Everyone has a skill in a certain field, but he does not know about the other fields. This means that I am in need of the work of others and they are in need of my work. Based on our varied talents and skills, we exchange knowledge and services for our common good. Allah has thus made us all almost equally dependent on each other so no one would withhold what he has from the rest, nor would it depend on one’s voluntary kindness to offer his services to others.

Allah’s wisdom demanded that He distributes talents amongst mankind appropriate for man to perform his duties as a vicegerent on earth. Allah gave one person an exceptional skill, and another person a different one. All these different skills combine collaboratively to form a society. We said before, that the combined aspects of one man are equal to the combined aspects of another; but people only consider wealth, and they do not pay attention to those things which are more important than wealth such as health, character, contentment, happiness and success of children, the blessing of one’s provision etc. For example, if you give a mark out of ten for each of these aspects, eventually, the total of every person’s talents will be equal to the total of anyone else’s. There is no superiority except by piety. What will a helpless person who watches wealthy people refrain from paying the poor-due or any charity? He will certainly hope that these people lose this bounty. But, when the fortune enjoyed by the rich is passed on to the poor and helpless, the poor will wish the rich continuous wealth and prosperity. That is because if the rich lose their power, the poor will be deprived of their dutiful share. Thus, the helpless will pray to Allah to adorn the rich's wealth with His blessing. When Allah blesses the rich person's wealth, a portion of it will be passed on to the poor.

When the poor and helpless do not receive any charity from the rich, they might take it unlawfully by conspiring to steal or pilfer from them, or their hatred and jealousy might even drive them to murder them, or plot to cause their death.

So, paying *zakat* (alms) in a society wards off many evils from those who give it. It is one of the essential needs of life. Therefore, we have seen that even the rich people in societies which do not believe in any religion voluntarily establish social institutions to look after the poor to ward off potential harms which they might cause society. That is why we see that in most of the world's nations there are people who try to devote funds to look after the incapacitated and the unemployed so that they can meet their needs. This protects society from the evil they might otherwise do.

The True Lord's words, 'Alms are meant only for the poor, the needy, those who administer them, those whose hearts need winning over, to free slaves and help those in debt, for Allah's cause and for travellers in need. This is ordained by Allah; Allah is All Knowing and Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 60) mean that charitable offerings must obligatorily be given to these people, and the True Lord Himself is the One Who made this obligatory when He says, 'This is ordained by Allah…' (*at-Tawba:* 60).

Charitable offerings might be obliged on people as a public tax or the like to protect society from evils. This only happens after grave incidents occur which cause the able to suffer at the hands of the weak so that someone emerges and says, 'In order to be safe from their evil, we must give them their needs so that things will settle down'.

Thus, we find that man-made laws are only made after society suffers for a long time because of a particular situation; but the True Lord, out of mercy for His vicegerent on earth, established His laws when He first created them and even before He created them, to give man a happy life free of misery. Therefore, He established religion and arranged the sequence by which the religion’s laws were sent down to mankind to guide them and protect them from grievous ills before they occur.

The True Lord wanted to make the chapter of *at-Tawba* a means of exposing the hypocrites. Another name for this chapter is ‘The Digger’ or ‘Unearthing’; this is so because the hypocrite might conceal his disbelief, but Allah reveals this by unearthing it to bring it out, just as – Allah is beyond compare – a man digs in the earth to find what is buried there. This chapter mentions many of the hypocrites’ attributes. He says: ‘Some of them said, “Give me permission to stay…”’ (*at-Tawba:* 49) And He also says: ‘Some among them who pledged themselves to Allah…’ (*at-Tawba:* 75) He adds saying: ‘Some of them find fault with you [Prophet] regarding the distribution of alms…’ (*at-Tawba:* 58).

Therefore, they call these phrases ‘some-of-them’ from the chapter of *at-Tawba*. Then, the True Lord informs of another characteristic of the hypocrites and their behaviour saying:

وَمِنْهُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ ٱلنَّبِيَّ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ أُذُنٌ ۚ قُلْ أُذُنُ خَيْرٍ لَّكُمْ يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَيُؤْمِنُ
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ مِنكُمْ ۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ رَسُولَ ٱللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٦١﴾

There are others who insult the Prophet by saying, ‘He will listen to anything.’ Say, ‘He listens for your own good: he believes in God, trusts the believers, and is a mercy for those of you who believe.’ An agonizing torment awaits those who insult God’s Messenger [61] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 61)

We know that abusing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* only took place after his prophetic mission had started. Some of the disbelievers would say, as the Quran tells us, ‘…Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.’ (*al-Anfal:* 32)

This is a prayer of someone who has no intelligence, for had they been intelligent they would have said, ‘If this indeed be the truth from you, then guide us to it or make us believe in it'! But because of their excessive hatred and misguidance, they would have rather been made to suffer than to believe in the truth. This shows us how petty-minded the disbelievers were.

The True Lord says, 'some of them abuse the Prophet…' (*at-Tawba:* 61). The ones who abused the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* were the leaders, the people of influence who feared that this Prophet's teachings would take from them their influence, their riches and all that they had unlawfully seized from the weak. The weak, as we know, were the first people to embrace Islam because they felt that this religion would protect them from the tyranny, exploitation and influence of the rich. The True Lord willed to replace the fear of the weak with strength and security, and He willed that several rich and powerful join the faith such as Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, `Uthman ibn `Affan, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab, and others *Allah be pleased with them* so that the powerful men of Quraysh would not say the same thing which the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to him, '…and it is clear to see that only the vilest among us follow you…' (*Hud:* 27).

So, abusing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* started after the onset of his mission, whereas, before the mission, he was known by everyone to be honest, trustworthy and reliable. It is amazing that, before the revelation, they did not trust anyone as much as they trusted Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If the disbelievers had anything valuable, they would go to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to keep it for them. This contradiction can only be explained by the trust they had in His morality. Despite this, they were enraged and aggrieved that the Quran had been revealed to him. The True Lord tells us that they said, 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Thus, their own words acknowledged the greatness of the Quran, after their actions had proved the trustworthiness of Muhammad, but they objected to the True Lord's choosing of him, and wished that this Quran had been sent down to one of their own people. The True Lord responded to them, 'Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace? We are the ones who give them their share of livelihood in this world…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). This was a call for them to mind their manners with Allah, for He did not authorize them to choose those upon whom *the Almighty* sends down His Mercy and the revelation. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who chooses and the One who distributes the means of people's livelihood in this worldly life. If anyone enjoys any kind of bounty like wealth, position, honour or anything else, this is not the result of man's powers or their intrinsic worth, but rather, it is a bounty granted by Allah.

The True Lord says, 'some of them abuse the Prophet…' (*at-Tawba:* 61). The cause of this abuse was that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them with a call to goodness; and no messenger comes with a call to goodness unless evil has first become prevalent in society. When evil becomes prevalent in society, there are those who benefit from it. Therefore, when a messenger is sent by Allah with goodness, the forces of evil are quick to malign the one who brings the message of good; it is natural then for a prophet to have enemies. The True Lord says, 'In the same way, we assigned to each prophet an enemy, evil humans and evil jinn. They suggest alluring words to one another in order to deceive (them)…' (*al-An'am:* 112).

Indeed, it can be said for every scholar who bears the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the following generations that if he does not have enemies, this detracts from his share of the Prophetic inheritance. To everyone who has enemies who oppose how he guides people to Allah's way, we say: Do not worry, and be at ease because the very existence of those who oppose you means that you bear one of the vestiges of prophethood.

The hypocrites abused the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in several ways; one of which was, 'He is an ear.' As we know, man has several means of perception: the ear is a means of perception, as are the eyes and all the body parts. Every person has many faculties, perceptive and psychological; the perceptive faculties are the ones by which one senses things such as hearing, sight, smell and taste, whilst the psychological faculties are those by which people may be described. For example, we call the spy an 'eye' because he spies and conveys what he sees to others; and we call the man who hears everything an 'ear'; and we say that the thief, who takes the things of others, has 'a long arm', and so on.

So, every part has a sense. Sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste are all among the means of sensory perception from which abstract notions are formed after which they become convictions. These means of perception receive from the physical world things which give them information which they then store to base them on their future actions, and their combined total comprises all that a person knows. Therefore, we find that the True Lord reminds His creatures of how He blessed them by saying, ‘It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78)

Gratitude is only felt and shown when there are bounties. So, it is as though these means of perception which allow you to hear, or see with your eyes, or perceive with your mind are all blessings of Allah for which we must thank Him because they gave us tangible knowledge when, formerly, we had known nothing at all.

If a person is named after any of his body parts, then this means that this body part is the basis of his character. The hypocrites said about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘He is an ear’, as though they meant this as a criticism of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as though they were saying, ‘Beware lest any of this reaches the ear of Muhammad so that your hypocrisy will be exposed to your detriment’, since in their view, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believed everything he was told. They wanted to accuse Him of not investigating the things he was told, and of believing everything he heard, just as we say in our dialect, ‘So-and-so is all ear’ meaning that he gives credence to everything he hears.

Allah replies to them, ‘It is an ear for your own good’ (*at-Tawba:* 61) because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* listened to the teachings of Allah and conveyed them to mankind so that the people would be guided. Thus, he was goodness for all people. Even if we take their words to mean that the Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believed them when they lied to him, this was good for them, since the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not harm them. He was ‘…an ear for your own good’ (*at-Tawba:* 61) because he only listened to what Allah sent him through revelation. Therefore, we said before that the wisdom behind the illiteracy of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was that he did not listen to an equal of his, but rather, all his knowledge came directly from Allah. If to be unlettered is a shortcoming for us, it was a total perfection for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he learned from none but his Creator; and he was ‘an ear’ for goodness because he was the ear which listened to the final message which came down from Allah.

The hypocrites said, ‘He is an ear’ (*at-Tawba:* 61), and Allah says, ‘It is an ear for your own good’ (*at-Tawba:* 61) and his goodness has benefited the whole of mankind. He is an ear but not in the way you meant; he might listen to your abuse, and then listen to your excuses and pardon you instead of harming you. Since this is what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does, then why do you abuse him and weary him?

Linguistically, there is an affirmative response, wherein someone says something to you and you answer ‘Yes’. You can express this in a different way. If a person visits his friend often and says to him, ‘I have overburdened you’, his friend might reply, ‘you have overburdened me with your generosity’, that is, you have done me many favours. Yet, someone might say, ‘I have kept you too long’, so his friend replies, ‘No, you have prolonged (extended) your favours’, that is, you have done me a favour by spending time with me. Although he agrees with what he says, he responds with the opposite.

They criticised the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* for being an ear, as though his ear governed all his actions and he reacted to whatever he heard, and if he heard something which disturbed him his attitude would change from one extreme to another. They tried to claim that he believed everything he heard without carefully considering those who conveyed the information. They said that he was ‘an ear’ and the True Lord responds, ‘It is an ear for your own good…’ (*at-Tawba:* 61). Of course, the True Lord’s words were not congruent with what they said, since what they meant by ‘an ear’ was not the same ‘an ear’ that Allah affirmed.

A superficial person might say that when the hypocrites said that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was ‘an ear’, they meant that he believed everything he heard, and that he did not have the wisdom to discern and choose; but we should pay attention to the fact that the True Lord says, ‘It is an ear for your own good…’ (*at-Tawba:* 61) because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* listened only to Allah, and he obeyed and implemented all that he received from Him. As for what he heard from people, he assessed it according to Allah's teachings, and if it agreed with these teachings he followed it, whilst if it contradicted these teachings he rejected it. In this way, he was an ear to what was good, listening to none but Allah; and his message brought nothing but good to those who followed it.

But why did the True Lord not say, 'he is an ear to what is good for the believers', but rather said, 'It is an ear for your own good…' (*at-Tawba:* 61)? It is because the goodness of the Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was passed on to all people: to the believers, the disbelievers and to the hypocrites. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never exposed any hypocrite unless Allah exposed them in the Quran. For example, the hypocrites would go to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* offer excuses to avoid participating in fighting for Allah's Cause and seek leave to stay behind, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would give them leave to do so. When the hypocrites went to the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and swore to him false oaths by Allah, he would believe them – or rather, he would not expose their lies to the people. So, the goodness in Him was passed on even to the hypocrites because his noble morality was above exposing them to people.

As for the disbelievers, they also benefitted from his goodness because calling them to Islam relentlessly made some of the disbelievers embrace Islam and find faith. Thus, they greatly benefitted from being guided to the religion of truth. So, when the True Lord says, 'It is an ear for your own good…' (*at-Tawba:* 61), this means all mankind.

In this way, the True Lord makes a clear distinction between what they meant and what Allah meant. They meant to say that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* listened to everything he heard, whilst Allah meant that he listened to what was good. As we said, this is what they call an 'affirmative response' in the sense that you agree with what your rival says, but you change what he says from something bad to something good. Another example of this can be found when the True Lord tells us that the hypocrites said, 'They say, "If we return to Medina, the more honourable will surely drive out the meaner therefrom"' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). By this, they meant that they were mighty and that the believers were lowlier. The True Lord acknowledges what they said, 'indeed the more honourable would drive out the meaner'; but He wants to clarify to them who is honourable and who is lowlier, so He says, '…but power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and to the believers...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8).

It is as though the True Lord confirmed to them that the most honourable would indeed drive out the most contemptible, but they believed themselves to be the most honourable, so He said to them, '…but power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and to the believers...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). This is what is called an 'affirmative response'; that is, you agree with what the person has said, although he intended to say something bad, but you change the meaning of what he said to make it something good. The reason you do this is to humiliate the speaker; you make him think that you agree with him so that he smiles and feels happy, then, you contradict what he said so that he feels humiliated. It is as though a guard comes to a prisoner who is thirsty and begging for water and says to him, 'I will bring you a cup of water', and then he really goes and fills a cup with ice-cold water; and the prisoner rejoices and thinks that he will get what he wants; but the guard brings the cup right to the prisoners lips and then pours it onto the ground, so his torment is worse than it would have been had the guard simply refused his request for water to begin with.

In this way, the True Lord wanted to increase the humiliation of the hypocrites, so He agreed with them that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an ear, then contradicted what they meant by saying, 'Say, "It is an ear for your own good; he believes in Allah, trusts the believers, and is a mercy for those of you who believe…"' (*at-Tawba:* 61). He believed in Allah, he took his teachings from Allah, he trusted the believers and was a means of mercy for those who believed.

So, we have here three proofs of the goodness of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He believed in Allah and followed His way, he trusted the believers and he was a mercy for those who believed. We may notice that there is a difference between His words *yu`minu billlah* (he believes in Allah) and His words *yu`minu lil-mu`minin* (trusts the believers), where the same verb *yu'minu* (to have faith or to trust) is used both times, in the case of ‘believes in Allah’ being followed by the preposition *bi* (in or with), and in the case of ‘trusts the believers’ being followed by the preposition *li* (for or to). Some people say that the word has the same meaning both times, because ‘believes in Allah’ means to believe in His existence, whilst the hypocrites did not believe in Allah, and ‘trusts the believers’ means to believe what the believers say, whilst He knew that the hypocrites were liars, so he did not trust them; although he did not expose them to the people lest they thereby be prevented from repenting and embracing true faith. Had he exposed them to the people, their dignity would have been completely lost, and had one of them then thought of abandoning hypocrisy and becoming a true believer, he would have found this very difficult because no one would believe him. Instead, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to conceal their fault from the people and leave the door to faith open for them because He only came forth as a mercy to all the worlds, and so he endeavoured to keep the door of repentance and faith open for them always by preserving their honour.

The True Lord’s words ‘trusts the believer’ mean that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believed them; and the word *iman* (faith in, belief in or trust) is used in many verses of the Quran to refer to human beings, such as when the sorcerers announced that they had found faith in the Lord of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and fell in prostration before Him, so Pharaoh said to them, ‘… “How dare you believe in him before I have given you permission? This must be your master, the man who taught you witchcraft...”’ (*Taha:* 71). The meaning of *amantum lahu* is ‘believe in him’; but what is the difference between the use of the preposition *(bi)* and the preposition *(li)*? When you say ‘*amanna bi llah’* (we believe in Allah), you announce that you believe in the Essence and all His attributes of perfection; and when you say ‘*amantu lilmu`menin* (I believe in what the believers say), this means that you believe them because they are believers.

The meanings of the root word *iman* and its verb *amanna* (to have faith) all revolve around *amn* (security and peace of mind), but sometimes the verb takes an indirect object, whilst at other times it takes a direct object such as when you say, for example, ‘I deem the road to be safe’ *amantu at-tariq*, that is, I feel assured that no evil will befall me thereon. An example of this can be when Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* said to his sons, ‘… “Am I to entrust him to you as I did his brother before? Allah is the best guardian and the Most Merciful of the merciful.'" (*Yusuf:* 64) Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* said, '*hal amanukum alaih* (Am I to entrust him to you?)? That is, the precedent here is that he trusted them with Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him,* but they did not live up to his trust, so he no longer trusted them with Yusuf's (Joseph's) brother. The verb *amana* (trust) is intransitive here; as for its transitive sense, this occurs when the security refers to more than one thing, as is the case when Allah says, '…provide them with safety that word off fear.' (*Quraysh:* 4) He says, *amanahum* (provide them with safety). Fear has many forms: there is the fear of darkness, for example, the fear of foes and the fear of the road's perils. So, safety encompasses many things, and The True Lord made them safe and secure from many things.

His words 'he believes in Allah' mean belief in the Essence and in the Attributes, belief in the Way and belief which encompasses the entire community to which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sent. It is as though the belief here has many aspects. As for the faith in the believers, it means to trust them; and this is the second aspect of Muhammad's goodness. Allah says, '…and is a mercy for those of you who believe…' (*at-Tawba:* 61) because He will be their intercessor on the Day of Resurrection and will say, 'my followers, my followers!'(1) He is a mercy for them in this world as well because he leads them to goodness which in turn leads them to happiness in this world and then to paradise in the Hereafter, and keeps them away from evil and hell. So, he is a source of mercy which wards off harm and brings goodness; for mercy is attained by protection from harm.

Allah says, 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe....' (*al-Isra':* 82) Healing means that there is an illness and then the person is cured of it, whilst 'mercy' means not to fall ill in the first place. It is as though Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brings glad tidings with his teachings that if people follow him and believe in him, they will be protected from evil in this world and hell in the Hereafter.

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(1) *This is mentioned in the long Hadith about intercession narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (4712) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (194) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him, wherein it is mentioned that, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him will come before The Throne and fall down in prostration, and he will praise Allah, by His grace, such as none has ever praised Allah before, and then it will be said, 'O Muhammad! Raise your head, and ask and you shall be given, and intercede and it shall be granted', so he will lift his head and say, "O Lord, my followers, my followers!"'*

Some people ask, ‘The True Lord says, “…and is a mercy for those of you who believe…,” (*at-Tawba:* 61) and the hypocrites only believed with their tongues, then, what does this have to do with them’? We say that because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mercy, he respected their words and gave them credence before the people; as for the True Lord, He will send them to hell. Then Allah says, ‘…An agonizing torment awaits those who abuse Allah's Messenger.’ (*at-Tawba:* 61)

The hypocrites did not abuse Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by confronting him because they had claimed to have faith. Rather, the hypocrites abused Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in their hearts and in their private gatherings. Therefore, their abuse was not at all direct; but the verses here affirm that they abused him in various ways, such as finding fault in the way he distributed the offerings, saying that he was ‘an ear’, swearing false oaths to him to try and mislead him and all the other things they did.

The True Lord then gives us another example of the hypocrites by saying:

يَحۡلِفُونَ بِٱللَّهِ لَكُمۡ لِيُرۡضُوكُمۡ وَٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥٓ
أَحَقُّ أَن يُرۡضُوهُ إِن كَانُواْ مُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٦٢﴾

They swear by God in order to please you [believers]:
if they were true believers it would be more fitting for
them to please God and His Messenger [62]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 62)

It is remarkable how many times the chapter of *at-Tawba* contains the phrase ‘they swear’, whilst this phrase occurs only once in the chapter of *al-Ma`ida*, once in the chapter of *an-Nisa`*, and three times in the chapter of *al-Mujadala* (also, the chapter of *al-Qalam* containing the word ‘swearer’); it occurs seven times in the chapter of *at-Tawba*. Because of this, the chapter of *at-Tawba* has also been known as the ‘they swear’ chapter as it contains the phrase ‘they swear’ more than any other chapter in the Noble Quran.

The True Lord says, ‘They [the hypocrites] swear by Allah to you in order to please you [believers]’ (*at-Tawba:* 62). This shows how the hypocrites repeatedly swore false oaths, and illustrates their foolishness and lack of sagacity. The True Lord also says, ‘When you return to them, they will swear to you by Allah in order to make you leave them alone…’ (*at-Tawba:* 95).

The True Lord’s use of the word ‘will’ here means they had not yet sworn this, but they would swear it in the future; that is, this noble verse was revealed at a time when they had not yet sworn this, but they would swear after the verse was revealed. Had they possessed even the slightest intelligence, they would not have sworn and would have then said, ‘The Quran said we would swear, but we did not’. But even though the verse had been revealed, they confirmed the truth of the Quran, and affirmed the faith by swearing. The word *halaf* (swear) means to vow or make an oath; and if we look carefully at the Quran, we find that the word *halaf* is only used for false oaths, whilst the word *qasam* is used to refer to both truthful and false oaths. For example, we read in the chapter of *al-Ma`ida*, ‘This shall be the atonement for your oaths whenever you have sworn…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 89). He says: *halaftum* (you have sworn).

Since there is atonement, this means that the oath was false, since only false oaths need to be atoned for. If we go on to examine every use of the word *halaf* in the Quran, we will find that it always refers to a false oath. Therefore, the True Lord says in the chapter of *al-Qalam*, ‘Do not yield to any contemptible swearer.’ (*al-Qalam:* 10) He says *halaf* (swearer). So, *halaf,* here means a false oath.

However, if the True Lord uses the word *aqsam*, this might mean either a truthful oath or a false oath. The True Lord says, ‘They [the hypocrites] swear by Allah to you in order to please you [believers]…’ (*at-Tawba:* 62). That is, the goal of their false oath is to please the believers so that they trust the hypocrites and expect no evil from them. Then, the True Lord declares the truth of the matter, ‘…Allah and His Messenger are more worthy for them to please…’ (*at-Tawba:* 62). So, they swear oaths to please you, but the true believer only takes oaths to please Allah; for a man might fool other men, and he might evade justice on earth, but you can never fool Allah or evade His Justice.

One of the essentials of faith is that one must be aware of Allah whenever he interacts with other people, and seeks His pleasure and fear His wrath; this is the true believer. We notice that the True Lord says, '…Allah and His Messenger are more worthy for them to please' (*at-Tawba:* 62), using the Arabic word *yurduhu* which literally means 'to please him', whilst it might be thought, if we judge by human standards, that He would say *turduhuma* 'please them' since this refers to both Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. But the True Lord chose to say *yurduhu* 'please him' using the singular pronoun because the pleasure of Allah and the pleasure of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* constitute one single pleasure as the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not invent the Quran, but rather it was a revelation from Allah. Thus, to seek the pleasure of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* means to follow the way which pleases Allah. Therefore, the True Lord says, 'Those who pledge loyalty to you [Prophet] are actually pledging loyalty to Allah Himself…' (*al-Fath:* 10). Allah also says, 'Say, 'if you love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 31). Allah also says: 'Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys Allah. If some pay no heed, We have not sent you to be their keeper...' (*an-Nisa':* 80).

There is no separate obedience to Allah and another to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* or a separate way to please Allah and another to please His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because obeying Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is out of obedience to Allah.

The True Lord's words, '…Allah and His Messenger are more worthy for them to please…' (*at-Tawba:* 62) indicate that Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* are pleased by the same things; whatever pleases Allah pleases the Messenger, and whatever angers Allah angers the Messenger. (1)

Otherwise, it might be that the True Lord wants us to be polite with Him in that even if something refers to Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* we should not place anyone alongside Allah, but rather, we should refer to Him Alone. Therefore, when a man(1) committed a sin and they said to him, ‘Announce your repentance before Muhammad’, the man said, ‘I repent to Allah but I do not repent to Muhammad.’ Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘You have spoken well.’(2) Look at the greatness of the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* who praised a man who said before him, ‘I do not repent to Muhammad, I repent to Allah.’

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whosoever obeys me thereby obeys Allah, and whosoever disobeys me thereby disobeys Allah.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari (7137) and Muslim (1835) in their Sahih collections.*

The True Lord’s words, ‘…if they were true believers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 62) mean that if their faith is real, and not merely hypocrisy. Therefore, we do not seek to please Allah’s creatures; rather, we seek to please Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* who delivered His message as the same thing. That is why Allah says, ‘…Allah and His Messenger are more worthy for them to please.’ (*at-Tawba:* 62) using the singular pronoun – at the end of the verb- *yurduhu* which literally means ‘to please him’ and not ‘to please them’. The True Lord then says:

أَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّهُۥ مَن يُحَادِدِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَأَنَّ لَهُۥ نَارَ
جَهَنَّمَ خَـٰلِدًا فِيهَا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْخِزْىُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ٦٣

Do they not know that whoever opposes God and His Messenger will go to the Fire of Hell and stay there? That is the supreme disgrace [63] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 63)

When you hear the words ‘Do they not know’, this indicates disapproval, as though all the means of knowledge are there, so that they should know. If you say to someone, ‘Do you not know that such-and-such happened’? this means that this incident has been announced several times, yet he still does not know about it and this is disapproval of the person’s lack of knowledge. Here, the True Lord disapproves of the hypocrite’s lack of knowledge about something which Allah has announced over and over again, which they should have known, and which indeed should never have left their minds. We said before that the words ‘do they not’ are both a question and a negation. The ‘do’ is a question, and the ‘not’ is a negation, which together produce disapproval. If you say to someone, ‘Did I not treat you generously?’ this means that you were generous to him time and again, but he acts as though you did not.

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(1) The story of the man who sinned and was asked to repent in front of the Prophet to which he said, ‘I shall repent to Allah and not to the Prophet.’

(2) *Al-Aswad ibn Sari` narrated that a prisoner of war was brought to the Prophet and said, ‘O Allah, I repent to You, and I repent not to Muhammad.’ The Prophet said, ‘He gave the right to its proper Owner.’ Narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (iii. 435).*

The True Lord’s words ‘Do they not know’ are meant to give an argument for something which has already been established; for they might have said, ‘We have not heard about this’. So, the True Lord clarifies to them: Indeed you did hear about it, and I told you of it time and again.

‘Do they not know that whoever opposes Allah’ (*at-Tawba:* 63). What does *yuhadid* (opposes) mean? In the countryside, we find that the people make signs made of *hadid* (iron) which mark property boundaries, and the name for a boundary which separates one property from another is called a *hadd* in Arabic. Those who oppose Allah are the ones who put Allah on one side and themselves on another, and thereby do not live in the company of Allah, enjoy the blessings of faith in Him, or follow His way, but rather, they place a boundary between themselves and that which Allah ordains.

When the scholars sought to explain this, they said that ‘opposes’ means ‘shows enmity to’, and that it means ‘splits away from’, i.e. one places himself on one side, and places Allah, His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and His religion on the other. Otherwise, it might mean that he wages war against Allah’s religion so that he is on one side of the conflict and Allah’s religion is on the other.

There is a link between the word ‘to wage war’ *yuharib* and the word *hadd*, since the *hadd* of a sword means its cutting edge which divides an object into two pieces. It is as though the one who ‘opposes’ is the one who wages war against Allah’s way and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. He does not only deny the existence of Allah, but he takes up arms to force Allah’s creatures to disbelieve as well.

The True Lord wants the believers to be always on the side of faith, and not to place any boundaries between themselves and faith in Him. The rulings of the Sacred Law are also called *hudud* (plural form of *hadd)* because every ruling establishes one of Allah’s boundaries by which rights and commandments are preserved.

Allah's way of guidance is composed of commandments and prohibitions, because the way of religion is all based on 'Do' and 'Do not do'; and the True Lord assigns punishments to those who transgress His boundaries, as He says, '…these are the bounds set by Allah, so do not go near them...' (*al-Baqara:* 187). Allah also says, '…These are the bounds set by Allah; do not overstep them...' (*al-Baqara:* 229).

Some people ask, what is the difference between the expressions 'do not transgress them' (*al-Baqara:* 229) and 'do not go near them' (*al-Baqara:* 187)? We say that if they are commandments, then do not transgress them; and if they are prohibitions, then do not go near them (*la taqrabuha*, literally means 'do not approach them').

We may observe that when the True Lord prohibited Adam and Hawwa` (Eve) *peace be upon them*, from eating from the forbidden tree, He did not say, 'Do not eat from the tree', but rather, He says, '…Both of you eat whatever you like, but do not go near this tree or you will become wrongdoers.…' (*al-A'raf:* 19). By this, He gave them permission to eat all the fruits of the garden, but He commanded them 'but do not go near this tree' (*al-A'raf:* 19) because to approach this tree would tempt them to sin, for it might look pleasing to them, and its scent might attract them, and its colour might fascinate them; but as long as they did not go near these tempting things, they would protect themselves from sin.

When the True Lord speaks about alcohol, He says, 'You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices and [divining with] farrows are repugnant acts— Satan's doing- shun them so that you may prosper.…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90) The True Lord did not say, 'Do not drink alcohol', but rather, the command is to shun alcohol, i.e. do not go to any place where there is alcohol(1); for the presence of a man in a place where there is alcohol might tempt him to drink it, and the people sitting there might try to convince those who do not drink to take a sip. So, the True Lord wants to protect the believer's soul from being tempted into sinning.

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(1) *Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him narrated that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'May Allah curse wine, and the one who drinks it, the one who pours it, the one who sells it, the one who buys it, the one who brews it, the one who has it brewed, the one who carries it and the one to whom it is carried.' Narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (ii. 97), Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (3674), Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) and At-Tabarani in (As-Saghir) (i. 266)*

Allah says about the spiritual retreat, 'Do not lie with them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). What is forbidden here is to lie with them; that is, if a woman is with her husband in the mosque, this is not a sin as long as the husband does not lie with his wife.

Then, the True Lord says, 'these are the bounds set by Allah' (*al-Baqara:* 187), and does not say, 'So do not do these things', but rather says, '…so do not go near them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). If Allah forbids something, the Muslim must not go anywhere near it. That is, do not be in the same place as the thing which Allah has forbidden, but rather stay away from such a place; for sins have their temptations, and so long as you keep far from these temptations you protect yourself; if you go near them, however, you might fall into them and commit the sin.

As for the case of commandments, the True Lord says, 'do not transgress them.' For example, if a husband and wife are estranged and all efforts to reconcile them fail, the True Lord says, '…if you [arbiters] suspect that the couple may not be able to do this, then there will be no blame on either of them if the woman opts to give something for her release. These are the bounds set by Allah; do not overstep them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229).

In the case of commandments, the True Lord says, 'do not transgress them' (*al-Baqara:* 229), and for prohibitions He says, 'do not go near them.' (*al-Baqara:* 187) In the verse we are currently examining, the True Lord warns those who set themselves against Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'Do they not know that whoever opposes Allah and His Messenger will go to the Fire of Hell, wherein he will abide eternally? That is the supreme disgrace.' (*at-Tawba:* 63) The warning here is embodied by how He makes it clear to them that what awaits them is not only physical torment, but also a torment of disgrace and humiliation. Some people can bear pain and tolerate it so that their enemies cannot gloat over their pain. Therefore, the torment which Allah has prepared for them in the Hereafter is not only painful, but it also imparts disgrace and humility. The disgrace is manifested in that the one who was arrogant in this world, will be brought forth in the Hereafter and humiliated in front of all mankind; and it will be enough disgrace that he will enter hell, whilst the believers above whom he held himself to be superior in the worldly life will live in the bliss of Paradise; for him this will be a woe beyond all woes.

The True Lord then further exposes the hypocrites by saying:

يَحۡذَرُ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقُونَ أَن تُنَزَّلَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ سُورَةٞ تُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا فِي
قُلُوبِهِمۡۚ قُلِ ٱسۡتَهۡزِءُوٓاْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مُخۡرِجٞ مَّا تَحۡذَرُونَ ٦٤

The hypocrites fear that a sura will be revealed exposing what is in their hearts – say, 'Carry on with your jokes: God will bring about what you fear!' [64] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 64)

Hadhar (dread) means to prepare to defend oneself against anticipated danger or harm. For example, it is said to a person who wishes to travel on a road filled with perils, '*kudh hidhrak* (take caution) when you follow this road'. The traveller might then decide to take a companion with him, or a weapon to defend himself if he is beset by a gang of highway men. If the chapter would be sent down from Allah to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* then, how could they take caution and prepare for the descending of such a chapter? We say that this is meant to deride them because they claimed to be believers whilst secretly harbouring unbelief, and because verses had already been revealed to expose what they concealed in their souls, so they always feared that a new verse would come down and expose them to the Muslims.

The True Lord wants them to know that He knows what is in their hearts, and make them fear that these verses are revealed to expose them. They feared that the disbelief they concealed in their hearts would come into the open, whilst for the time being it was unknown to the believers. The *ghayb* (the unknown or unseen), as we know, is veiled by time and by place; the unknown matters of time are veiled by the past or the future, so if something happened in the past which you did not see, it is unknown to you as long as you do not learn it from a history book. Likewise, if something will happen in the future and has not happened yet, it is veiled by the future. As for the veil of place, it is the veil of the present moment. For example, if we are in Cairo now, we do not know what is happening in Alexandria. Allah disclosed all these veils in the Noble Quran. The True Lord disclosed the veil of the past on many occasions when He informed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of it such as His words, ‘You [Muhammad] were not present on the western side of the mountain when We gave Our command to Musa (Moses); you were not there’ (*al-Qasas:* 44). He also says, ‘…you did not live among the people of Madyan or recite Our Revelation to them. We have always sent messengers to people.’ (*al-Qasas:* 45)

It is as though the True Lord revealed things to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from behind the veils of the past which no one knew, as He says, ‘These accounts are part of what was beyond your knowledge [Muhammad]. We revealed them to you. Neither you nor your people knew them before now, so be patient, the future belongs to those who are aware of Allah.’ (*Hud:* 49)

Allah also revealed things to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from behind the veil of the future, saying, ‘The foolish people will say, “What has turned them away from the prayer direction they used to face?”’ (*al-Baqara:* 142) These weak-minded people heard this verse before they asked about the changing of the prayer-direction, yet despite this they still went ahead and asked about it. Another example of the True Lord’s exposing of the veil of the future is found in His words, ‘Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.’ (*al-Qamar:* 45) This verse was revealed when the Muslims were undergoing grave persecution at the hands of the disbelievers such that ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘What forces are these?’(1)

When the Battle of Badr took place, ‘Umar said, ‘My Lord spoke the truth, ‘Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.’ (*al-Qamar:* 45)

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(1) *`Akrama narrated that when the verse ‘(Yet) the hosts (of those who deny the truth) shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs (in flight)’ (al-Qamar:45) was revealed, ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him said ‘What hosts are these? What hosts are meant here?’ ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him later said, ‘The day I saw the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him striding in his battle-array saying, “the hosts shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs”, I understood what it meant.’ Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his exegesis (iv. 266)*

The True Lord also revealed what lays behind the veil of the future to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when He says, ‘The Byzantines have been defeated. In a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory. In a few years' time — Allah is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice. By Allah’s help. He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful. (*ar-Rum:* 2-5) That is, Allah stated what the result of the battle between the Byzantines and the Persians would be years before it took place, and affirmed that the Byzantines would be victorious.

Likewise, the True Lord informed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of what went on in the depths of men’s souls and what their hearts concealed; and when He rendered the veil of the soul asunder, it is as though He said to every person: Your innermost secrets are known to Allah. For example, the True Lord says, ‘…and say inwardly, “Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?”’ (*al-Mujadala:* 8) They said this to themselves, and had they not said it, they would have objected to what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them of what they said to themselves, and they would have announced that it was untrue. But they did not give the lie to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning what he conveyed from Allah, and this shows that the hypocrites felt dread, and that they were very much aware of the truthfulness of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Here, the True Lord says, ‘The hypocrites fear that a chapter will be revealed exposing what is in their hearts— say, “Carry on with your jokes, surely Allah will bring about what you fear!”’ (*at-Tawba:* 64) If some of them spoke mockingly and said, ‘There is no need for us to speak, lest the Quran say something about us’, the True Lord instructed His Messenger to respond, ‘Say, “Carry on with your jokes, surely Allah will bring about what you fear!”’ (*at-Tawba:* 64) What you dread, O hypocrites shall be revealed by Allah and His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the believers.

The True Lord then says:

وَلَئِن سَأَلۡتَهُمۡ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّمَا كُنَّا نَخُوضُ وَنَلۡعَبُۚ قُلۡ
أَبِٱللَّهِ وَءَايَٰتِهِۦ وَرَسُولِهِۦ كُنتُمۡ تَسۡتَهۡزِءُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

Yet if you were to question them, they would be sure to say, ‘We were just chatting, just amusing ourselves.’ Say, ‘Were you making jokes about God, His Revelations, and His Messenger? [65]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 65)

If you were to ask them, O Muhammad ‘Have you spoken badly about Islam and criticised it in your private gatherings?’ they would say, ‘If this happened, then we were only engaging in vain and playful talk, and there is no value to what we say in our gatherings’.(1)

The word *khawd* (chatting) means literally to ‘plunge’, that is, to immerse oneself in liquid such as the one who plunges into water or mud. The word originally meant any kind of plunging, and then became used specifically to mean indulging in false talk, i.e. something which is not serious, but only fun and games.

Allah says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘…Say, “Were you making jokes about Allah, His Revelations and His Messenger?”’ (*at-Tawba:* 65) That is, if they say to you that this talk was only fun and play, and play is something which has no benefit except to kill time, then say, ‘Have you no better way to spend your time than to mock Allah’s messages and His Messenger and the rulings of Islam? Are these kinds of things fit subjects for chatting and play’?

Allah then gives them His verdict:

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(1) *One of the hypocrites said, before the battle of Tabuk, ‘Never have I seen, compared with these companions of ours, any who were more fearful, nor more dishonest, nor more cowardly in battle’, meaning Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and his companions. ‘Nay’, said `Awf ibn Malik, ‘You lie, and are a hypocrite, and I shall tell the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him.’ So he went to tell him, but he found that the Quran had already beaten him to it. The man went to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him after he had set off and mounted his camel and said, ‘O Muhammad, we were only engaging in vain talk and playing, and speaking words to pass the time and lighten the woes of travel.’ See Wahidi’s (Asbab An-Nuzul) p. 144.*

لَا تَعۡتَذِرُواْ قَدۡ كَفَرۡتُم بَعۡدَ إِيمَٰنِكُمۡۚ إِن نَّعۡفُ عَن طَآئِفَةٖ مِّنكُمۡ
نُعَذِّبۡ طَآئِفَةَۢ بِأَنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ مُجۡرِمِينَ ٦٦

Do not try to justify yourselves; you have gone from belief to disbelief.' We may forgive some of you, but We will punish others: they are evildoers [66] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 66)

Did the hypocrites really believe before, then disbelieve? No, but rather, His words 'you have gone from belief to disbelief…' (*at-Tawba:* 66) mean that you hypocrites have exposed yourselves because you only professed to have faith, and then the True Lord made it known that your faith is a mere matter of words, not true convictions.

The True Lord then says, '…We may forgive some of you, but We will punish others; they are evildoers.' (*at-Tawba:* 66) Look at Allah's mercy, and how He does not close the door of repentance on them after having revealed what was in their souls. The True Lord says that those of them who would repent sincerely and refrain from indulging in this idle talk would be forgiven by Allah; as for those who persisted in their hypocrisy and sin – and the word used for 'sin' here is *ijram* which literally means 'to cut' just as a fruit is cut, and this word was applied to sin because sin splits truth from falsehood by cutting. This means that those who cut themselves off from faith in their hearts and their conduct – those who persisted in this would be chastised by the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقُونَ وَٱلۡمُنَٰفِقَٰتُ بَعۡضُهُم مِّنۢ بَعۡضٖۚ يَأۡمُرُونَ
بِٱلۡمُنكَرِ وَيَنۡهَوۡنَ عَنِ ٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَيَقۡبِضُونَ أَيۡدِيَهُمۡۚ
نَسُواْ ٱللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ هُمُ ٱلۡفَٰسِقُونَ ٦٧

The hypocrites, both men and women, are all the same: they order what is wrong and forbid what is right; they are tight-fisted. They have ignored God, so He has ignored them. The hypocrites are the disobedient ones [67] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 67)

Allah, then, returns to the subject of the rulings and these rulings are usually given by Allah to man in the masculine form. Women are only explicitly mentioned in a few verses, such as when He says, ‘Believers, no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 11). He also says, ‘To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith…’ (*an-Nahl:* 97).

The rest of the rulings were issued to males; females were implicitly included in them, since the feminine is implicitly included in the masculine in the Arabic language; but here, it was necessary that both the male and female hypocrites be mentioned explicitly because men have their gatherings and women have theirs, and each of them have actions and words which differ from the other. Therefore, it was necessary that there be an explicit wording referring to female hypocrites.

The True Lord says that they ‘are all the same.’ (*at-Tawba:* 67) That is, the male and female hypocrites do not differ from one another in their baseness, vileness and scandalous behaviour, and Allah defines their attributes by saying, ‘…they enjoin what is wrong and forbid what is right; they withhold their hands [from doing good].’ (*at-Tawba:* 67) If the people do what is right, the hypocrites forbid it. They even encourage them to do what is wrong, and they never spend in Allah’s cause unless they are asked to do so.

The True Lord then says, ‘…They were oblivious of Allah, and so He was oblivious of them…’ (*at-Tawba:* 67). Could the True Lord possibly be forgotten by natural disposition? No, but what this means is that they were oblivious of Allah’s demands and obligations, so Allah was oblivious of them, i.e. He ignored them. If someone distances himself from Allah, Allah distances him even further, as He says, ‘There is a disease in their hearts, to which Allah has added more; agonizing torment awaits them for their persistent lying…’ (*al-Baqara:* 10). If you are happy to forget Allah, He will let your forgetfulness increase and set a seal on your heart so that disbelief will never leave it.

The True Lord then gives His verdict, ‘…The hypocrites are the disobedient ones.’ (*at-Tawba:* 67) The word *munafiq* (hypocrite) is derived from the word *nafaq* (tunnel) of the jerboa, a mouse-like animal which lives in the desert and digs tunnels under the ground which have two entrances, so that if one of them is blocked with sand it can exit from the other. Likewise, we see that the hypocrite has two faces. *Fusuq* (iniquity) means to stray from the way of obedience; the Arabic word is derived from the verb *fasaqa* which describes the way a date breaks free of its skin. The skin is meant to protect the fruit, and if it breaks away from it the fruit is lost; and if a man falls into iniquity, he breaks away from obedience to Allah.

Allah then tells us what He has in store for the hypocrites saying,

وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ وَٱلْمُنَٰفِقَٰتِ وَٱلْكُفَّارَ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ هِىَ حَسْبُهُمْۚ وَلَعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

Allah promises the Fire of Hell as a permanent home for the hypocrites, both men and women, and the disbelievers: this is enough for them. God rejects them and a lasting punishment awaits them [68] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 68)

Wa`d* (promise) means something good, whilst *wa`eed (warning) means something bad. The Arabic verb *aw`ada* means ‘to warn’ and sometimes ‘to promise’ (*wa`ada*) is used instead of ‘to warn’ so that when the listener hears it, he expects something good, and then when the punishment is proclaimed, it will be painful for the soul. This is a way of deriding the hypocrites and disbelievers; similar to Allah’s words, ‘…If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces…’ (*al-Kahf:* 29). It is as though Allah gives them a promise that if they ask for water they will be given water, and then He turns it around for them and makes it water which boils and scalds their faces – we seek refuge with Allah from this! We may observe here that the True Lord mentions the hypocrites, men and women before the disbelievers, which is supported by what He says elsewhere, ‘Verily, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell, and you will find no one to help them.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 145) The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah has promised the hypocrites, men and women – as well as the [outright] deniers of the truth – the fire of hell, therein to abide; this shall be their allotted portion. For Allah has rejected them, and long-lasting suffering awaits them.’ (*at-Tawba:* 68)

Thus, we see that the hypocrites will be in the lowest level of hell, whilst the disbelievers will be on a higher level. Someone might ask how can this be? The disbeliever because of his open disbelief, gave us a means of protecting ourselves: since he made his disbelief public, we are always cautious of him, so he can only harm us in a limited way. As for the hypocrite, he acts as though he is a believer so we trust him, and therefore he can inflict terrible evil on us because, since he has our trust, he can find out our secrets and weak points; and the blow he strikes us might be fatal. The hidden enemy, as we know, is worse than the open enemy because we are cautious of the open enemy but not of the hidden enemy. He knows my personal details and my movements, and he can betray me at any time without me expecting it.

Therefore, when people want to plot against Islam without embracing Islam, their plots fail, since as disbelievers, they find that the believers protect themselves by refusing to listen to them. But if they contrive to strike Islam from within, they can rally those whose faith is weak to their cause and use them to attack the religion; and the attack of those who are Muslims by name alone will be fatal and devastating.

Here we may observe that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…the fire of hell, therein to abide…' (*at-Tawba:* 68), and the True Lord does not speak of eternity in hell using the phrase 'beyond the count of time' (*abadan*) except in three verses of the Noble Quran. It occurs in His words, 'but the road that leads to hell, therein to abide beyond the count of time, and this is indeed easy for Allah.' (*an-Nisa':* 169), 'Indeed, Allah has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a blaze, abiding therein forever, they will not find a protector or a helper.' (*al-Ahzab:* 64-65), and '…Now as for him who rebels against Allah and His Apostle – verily, the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide beyond the count of time.' (*al-Jinn:* 23)

But the eternity of Paradise is mentioned many times.(1) We say that Paradise is a glad tiding and a joy for the believers, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to attract His creatures to the bliss that awaits them. As for hell, it is an abode of suffering, and Allah, the All-Merciful Creator is too merciful to His servants to mention the notion of hell enduring beyond 'beyond the count of time' (*abadan*) in more than three verses, which he did in order to make sure that the disbelievers did not imagine that when Allah *Glorified is He* says,

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(1) It is mentioned eight times, as follows: (*an-Nisa'*: 57, 122), (*al-Ma'ida*: 119), (*at-Tawba*: 12, 100), (*at-Taghabun*: 9), (*at-Talaq*: 11) and (*al-Bayyina*: 8).

‘therein to abide’ without adding the phrase ‘beyond the count of time’, this means that they will abide only temporarily in hell; to avoid this, He tells them explicitly that it will be an abiding beyond the count of time. Yet at the same time, Allah *Glorified is He* was too merciful to mention it in every single verse which talks about hell so that the door of repentance and mercy would remain open to every sinner that perhaps he might repent and come back to Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says, ‘Now as for those who [by their deeds] will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, [they shall live] in the fire, where they will have [nothing but] moans and sobs [to relieve their pain], therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise. For, verily, thy Lord is a sovereign doer of whatever He wills. But as for those who [by virtue of their past deeds] will have been blest with happiness, [they shall live] in paradise, therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise – as a gift unceasing.’ (*Hud:* 106-108) The orientalists discussed this much, saying: how can the True Lord *Glorified is He* say that hell and Paradise will last forever beyond the count of time, and then say in both verses ‘…unless thy Lord wills it otherwise...’ (*Hud:* 108) exempting thereby both the disbelievers and the believers? We say that the ones who raised this objection understood neither the Quran nor the teachings of the religion. Those who will enter hell are of two kinds: one group who had faith but disobeyed and committed sins, who will be punished in hell for as long as the magnitude of their sins dictates, after which Allah will take them out of hell and place them in Paradise because they are believers; and the other kind are those who were disbelievers or hypocrites. Both groups will enter hell, but the former group – the sinful believers – will only be punished according to the magnitude of their sins, whilst the latter group will remain there forever because they were disbelievers or hypocrites. So, the sinful believer will not remain in hell forever, which is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…unless thy Lord wills it otherwise…’ (*Hud:* 108) as he will only remain in hell until his sins are expiated; it is as though his stay in hell will have only been temporary from the outset, and he will never have been destined to remain there beyond the count of time; the will of Allah *Glorified is He* will take him from hell to Paradise. As for the disbeliever and the hypocrite, they will abide in hell and never come out of it.

It is as though there are some who will not abide in hell beyond the count of time, namely the sinful believers, and then there are those who will enter hell and remain there forever, namely the disbeliever and hypocrites.

And when we come to paradise, there are those who will enter it and abide there forever, from the moment of the Reckoning until eternity. These are the believers whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds so that the True Lord *Glorified is He* places them in paradise. But there are also those who will enter paradise but will abide there for less time, namely the sinful believers because they will only enter paradise after first being requited for their sins in hell.

The sinful believer's stay in hell will be curtailed because he will not stay there forever; and likewise, he will not enter paradise the moment the Reckoning is finished because he will not enter it directly after the Reckoning but rather will enter hell first to expiate his sins. Therefore, the True Lord's words, '…unless thy Lord wills it otherwise…' (*Hud:* 108) apply to the sinful believers who will first have to be punished to expiate their sins before entering paradise.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says that the hypocrites' abiding in hell will be 'their allotted portion' (*at-Tawba:* 68),which is *hasbuhum* (it will suffice them). It is as though there is an evil man and you want to chastise him, and then a strong man comes to you and says, 'Leave him to me, I will take care of him', so you say to him, 'That is enough for him', i.e. that will be sufficient to impart to him the required chastisement. The same is true of hell. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to alert us to the fact that it will suffice them; that is, the pain and suffering they will endure therein will be quite enough to require them for the evil they have done.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, 'For Allah has rejected them.' (*at-Tawba:* 68). That is, He has excluded them from His Mercy, so no repentance or contrition will be accepted from them because the place of repentance is this lower world, whilst after death in the Hereafter there is no further opportunity to repent because the time for this will have passed. Therefore, the chastisement of those who do not repent in this worldly life will be a long-lasting chastisement in the Hereafter: '…And long-lasting suffering awaits them.' (*at-Tawba:* 68) The True Lord *Glorified is He* sometimes calls the suffering of hell ‘grievous’, sometimes ‘shameful’, and sometimes ‘long-lasting’. This is because He wants us to know that every manner of suffering will befall the denizens of hell. If a person is thick-skinned and able to endure severe pain without showing his agony because of his pride, his suffering will not only be grievously painful but will also be shameful. To shame means to inflict pain on the soul; if the man is prideful and thick-skinned, he will be dragged on his face and shamed. Some people might be able to endure pain, but they cannot endure being humiliated in such a way that their souls are made to suffer worse than their bodies. You might come to a leader and humiliate him in front of his followers, or humiliate a father in front of his children; this hurts his soul more than it would hurt his body.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘long-lasting suffering’ (*at-Tawba:* 68), this means eternal suffering. So if it is painful, this pain will retain in its severity and never be lessened and if it is shameful, this shame will continue and never come to an end. Either way, the suffering will continue and remain without end.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then addresses the disbelievers and hypocrites saying to those who refuse to follow His way:

كَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ كَانُوٓا۟ أَشَدَّ مِنكُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَكْثَرَ أَمْوَٰلًا وَأَوْلَٰدًا
فَٱسْتَمْتَعُوا۟ بِخَلَٰقِهِمْ فَٱسْتَمْتَعْتُم بِخَلَٰقِكُمْ كَمَا ٱسْتَمْتَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُم
بِخَلَٰقِهِمْ وَخُضْتُمْ كَٱلَّذِى خَاضُوٓا۟ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَٰلُهُمْ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۖ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

‘You are like those who lived before you: they were even stronger than you, with more wealth and children; they enjoyed their share in this life as you have enjoyed yours; like them, you have indulged in idle talk.’ Their deeds go to waste in this world and the next; it is they who will lose all in the life to come [69] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 69)

Allah *the Exalted* reminds them of the bands of disbelievers encountered by all the previous messengers; these successive messengers encountered both disbelievers and hypocrites, and whenever Allah sent a messenger He aided him against them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to remember what happened to the previous nations who had even more power, wealth and children than the disbelievers and hypocrites who opposed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Let us read what the True Lord *the Exalted* says of them, ‘By the daybreak and the ten nights. And the even and the odd. And by the night as it runs its course. Is there [not] in [all] that an oath [sufficient] for one of perception? Art thou not aware of how thy Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] `Ad, the people of Aram the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? –And with the tribe of Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? It was they who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein and therefore thy Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering, for verily, thy Lord is ever watching.’ (*al-Fajr:* 1-14) We have not witnessed any remnants of the people of Aram, whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* described by saying, ‘The like of whom has never been seen in the land.’ (*al-Fajr:* 8), but the Quran confirms that they reached a level of civilisation that no one else had ever reached. Someone might ask how can ‘Aram the many-pillared’ be compared to the civilisations of the present day? Allah has secrets in His universe which He divulged to some of His creatures but did not divulge to anyone else even to this day.

If we consider Pharaoh, for example, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* described them in the Quran by saying, ‘And [with] Pharaoh, owner of the stakes.’ (*al-Fajr:* 10) The pyramids are like poles or stakes, and the obelisks are like poles, and the sciences of the Pharaonic civilisation are still not known to man to this very day, and there are certain elements of this civilisation which still elude our capabilities, such as the secrets of mummification and the building of the pyramids. These huge blocks of stone which were raised and hold on to each other without any adhesive continues to baffle science, as technological advancements are unable to reproduce building a pyramid using the same method of the ancient Egyptians without using some type of adhesive. Yet despite their power and their civilisation, those Pharaohs were not able to conquer the world, but rather, Allah took them to task as only *the Almighty*

Determiner can, and sand came and buried their civilisation. Then Allah willed that we discover a small part of it, and this small part dazzled the whole world, and the whole world came to see the Pharaonic civilisation and marvel at this art and this advanced science. If this was the civilisation of the Pharaohs, what do you imagine the civilisation of Iram, the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been seen in the land, was like?

Thus, we know that a part of the civilisation of Iram, the many-pillared, is still hidden today, unbeknown to anyone, and lies buried somewhere under the ground. Perhaps Allah *Glorified is He* might have preserved it to be discovered at some future time when people are even further from religion; for the more man advances materially, the further he gets from religion because he feels as though he has mastered the universe and gained sway over it. At such a time, the True Lord *Glorified is He* might allow the civilisation of Iram, the many-pillared' to be discovered so that people can see that what they have achieved is nothing compared to what Allah revealed to those people.

If someone asks where the civilisation of 'Aram, the many-pillared' was located, we answer that it was in *Al-Ahqaf*(1) (the Valley of the Wind-Curved Sand-dunes) where a single gust of wind can bury an entire caravan in sand. That is, if the wind blows, the sand does not only cover the road, but it covers the caravan as well; so just imagine how many sand-storms must have blown over the place where Aram resided, thereby concealing their civilisation. It would therefore take a great deal of digging to uncover this civilisation; for as we know, all archaeological discoveries must be dug up because sand builds up over the relics. Indeed, we may observe that even in the case of old houses in villages, you must take one or two steps down to enter them through the door because natural processes, paving and so on have caused the road to rise. If this is the result of natural weathering over a short period of time, then what do you think great storms would do over the ages?

And if you travel and leave all the windows of your house closed tightly and then return after a month, you will find the furniture covered with a layer of dust; and if you are away for a year, you will find a great quantity of dust.

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(1) In present-day Yemen

This is in the case of a house which is tightly sealed, so what do you think would happen to a civilisation which lies open to all these natural phenomena and is covered every month by a new layer of thick dust?

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Greater than you were they in power.' (*at-Tawba:* 69) That is, their civilisation was greater than ours because the more advanced a civilisation is, the stronger its people are and the more primitive a civilisation is, the weaker its people are.

So those who lived before us had a greater civilisation and were richer in wealth and children than us. Someone might ask, 'How can they have had more children when the world population increases every year, and how can they have had more wealth when we discover more and more treasures of wealth every generation?' Do not assume that this richness is a matter of number, but rather, it is a matter of relativity. If you take a hundred people and place them in one room, they are said to be a large group; but if you take each one of them and place him far from the others, the number is therefore small. In the past, the world was only settled in certain places, which is borne out of the fact that we have discovered villages and places which were not know to anyone.

So, the word 'richer' here is relative to the environment. In the environment in which they lived they were a large number, and the wealth they possessed, given their small numbers, was greater than the wealth you possess given your great numbers; that is, every individual's share was greater, and the same is true in the case of children.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, 'and they enjoyed their share' (*at-Tawba:* 69). A *khalaq* (share) means a portion or a part of any enjoyable thing which a person gets. Allah *the Exalted* says elsewhere, '…For there are people who [merely] pray, "O our Lord! Give us in this world" – and such shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come.' (*al-Baqara:* 200), *Ma lahu min khalaq* (literally 'he has no share'). That is, he will be allotted no portion of Allah's blessings in the Hereafter. Those who work solely for this worldly life without having Allah in mind will not be denied, by the True Lord's Justice *Glorified is He* the fruit of their labours, and therefore He will give it to them in their worldly lives; but for those who work with Allah on their minds, Allah will reward them in this life and in the Hereafter.

We find that some believers ask, ‘How can the disbelievers enjoy a more advanced material civilisation than the believers, and why are the disbelievers able to take enough of the good things of the earth to suffice them and more, to the extent that in some countries they throw the surplus into the sea, whilst we find that the Muslims live in basic material civilisations and have to import all that they eat?’

We must bear in mind the simple fact which I always repeat to every Muslim: Never forget that there is ‘lordly bestowal’, and ‘divine bestowal’. The Lord gives to all because the Lord is the One Who creates and sustains, and provides us with our sustenance. Allah *the Exalted* is not only the Lord of the believers, but is the Lord of the believers and the disbelievers alike. Therefore, if the believer or the disbeliever utilises the proper means, Allah will give him. The earth gives forth a good yield to the one who farms it well and gives it its proper nutrients and takes care of it, and it does not make a difference whether the disbeliever or the believer does this; and the universe divulges its secrets to those who look for them and strive after them, whether they are disbelievers or believers. This is the meaning of ‘lordly bestowal’.

As for divine bestowal, this is what Allah *Glorified is He* gives solely to His believing servants who follow His way. This is the bestowal of worship for which one is rewarded in the Hereafter. The fortunate one is the one who can earn both bestowals. He earns lordly bestowal by utilising the means of life so that Allah gives him good things in this worldly life, and then he earns divine bestowal by living his life in accordance with Allah’s way so that Allah gives him bliss in the Hereafter.

The means of this worldly life do not distinguish between the believer and the disbeliever. The sun rises above the believer and the disbeliever, and the rain falls on the righteous and the sinner, because this is lordly bestowal; the one who utilises it well will be given, whether he is righteous or sinful.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘For we shall have turned towards all the [supposedly good] deeds they ever wrought, and shall have transformed them into scattered dust.' (*al-Furqan:* 23) Why? Because you worked for the sake of this worldly life alone, and you worked to be called an inventor or a discoverer, or to earn wealth or awards or to attain prestige or influence in this worldly life; but you did not work with Allah on your mind.

Some people come and say to you, 'Was the one who discovered the cure for a microbe which caused man misery, or discovered electricity, or discovered something which brought happiness to all mankind – was such a person a disbeliever who deserved to suffer in hell?' We say to him, 'Yes', because he did all this without Allah in mind. He only did it to attain prestige, wealth and influence on earth, and therefore Allah gave him what he worked for, and he attained an enduring legacy, and his story was taught in schools, and they gave him awards and named streets and towns after him.

As long as he worked for this world, Allah *Glorified is He* gave him his reward in this world. The one who works with Allah in mind takes from the world by utilising its means, but in the Hereafter, he takes directly from the Creator of means. Man might advance in his civilisation, such that in some developed countries you only need to push a button to get tea or coffee, and another to get food. But we say that this is all enjoyment of material means. Before you pressed the button, there were people who made this tea or this coffee for you, and the machine transported it to you.

But however far man develops technologically, the day will never come when the moment you think of something, you will find it in front of you except in Paradise, as soon as something comes into your mind will you find it before you.(1) This is because the bestowal of this world is based on means, whilst the bestowal of the Hereafter takes place without any means.

Allah *Glorified is He* gave us free will and the ability to utilise means in this worldly life, but in the Hereafter things will come to you without you having to work for them, and they will taste and smell different from how they do in this world.

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(1) Ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'You shall look upon a bird in Paradise and desire it, and it shall come to your hands, roasted.' Narrated by Al-Bazzar in *Kashf Al-Asrar* (3532)

So the one who only has the means in mind when he works is given in this worldly life, and the one who has the Creator in mind when he works is given in both lives; the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him…’ (*an-Nur:* 39).

When you arrive at the mirage which you walk towards, imagining it to be water, you find that nothing is there. This is what will happen to the disbeliever on the Day of Resurrection. He will be astonished to find that Allah exists; he will find Allah *Glorified is He* in whom he did not believe, and he will ask reward of Allah, but it will be said to him, ‘Your reward must come from those for whom you worked; and as long as you did not work for Allah, you will find no reward in the Hereafter since Allah is the One Who rewards in the Hereafter’.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and they enjoyed their share [of happiness]. And you have been enjoying your share – just as those who preceded you enjoyed their share…’ (*at-Tawba:* 69). That is, they took their share of this worldly life, but they have no share of the Hereafter; for the share of the Hereafter is earned by means of ‘do’ and ‘do not’ of religious responsibility, and if you adhere to both, you will advance. This is proved by the fact that Muslim civilisation lasted for a thousand years, whilst they utilised the means without forgetting the Creator of all means; rather, they safeguarded the means by adhering to the morals of the Creator which were imparted by ‘do’ and ‘do not’. Therefore, they ruled the world for a thousand years, and no other civilisation lasted so long. And if the political aspects of Islamic civilisation declined, the religion remained in the people’s souls; and you cannot find any civilisation whose principles remained in people’s souls after its civilisation declined except that of Islam. Despite the political weakness of the Muslims, there remains a beacon of guidance.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and they enjoyed their share [of happiness]. And you have been enjoying your share – just as those who preceded you enjoyed their share…’ (*at-Tawba:* 69). That is, take your share of this worldly life by utilising the means, but remember that this enjoyment is temporary and no man can retain possession of it; for an individual's time in this world does not last as long as the world lasts, but only as long as his own life lasts. The world belongs to you, and to those who will come after you, and your life within it is limited and you do not know how long it will last: will it be a month, a year, ten years or one hundred years? So, your stay in this world is only presumed and temporary. Therefore, the work you do with the world's means is limited, and only lasts as long as you remain alive in the world. And even supposing your life is long and you become one of those who live the longest – your life will still inevitably end.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…just as those who preceded you enjoyed their share…' (*at-Tawba:* 69). You emulated them and followed in their footsteps: whenever they sinned you sinned, and they indulged in scurrilous talk about the prophets, and you did the same. So, you are the associates of those people who came before you in that you took your share and portion of this worldly life and left nothing for the Hereafter, so you have a share in what they did. That is one aspect; a second is that you exchanged the truth for falsehood. So, you did the same things they did at the onset, and so you were led to the same results as they were. '…It is they whose works have come to nought in this world and in the life to come.' (*at-Tawba:* 69) That is your works in this world have failed and been lost, just as the worldly works of those who came before you came to naught. They were of two kinds: some of them waged war against the call to goodness until they were killed, and therefore gained nothing; and others were not killed, so they escaped with their worldly possessions, but they left this world without having done anything for their Hereafter and so will gain nothing therein.

Those whose works came to naught in this world are those who were killed or captured and taken prisoner, and whose wealth was seized as battle-spoils by the believers; it is as though they lost out on this worldly life and gained none of its trinkets, and they also lost out on the Hereafter; and this is the most grievous loss, to lose out on both aspects of time, this world and the Hereafter.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

أَلَمْ يَأْتِهِمْ نَبَأُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَقَوْمِ
إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَأَصْحَٰبِ مَدْيَنَ وَٱلْمُؤْتَفِكَٰتِ ۚ أَتَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ ۖ
فَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

Have they never heard the stories about their predecessors, the peoples of Noah, 'Ad, Thamud, Abraham, Midian, and the ruined cities? Their messengers came to them with clear evidence of the truth: God would not deceive them; they deceived themselves [70] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 70)

In the previous verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned this matter in a general way by saying, ‘just as those who preceded you enjoyed their share’; and in this verse, He mentions the specific people involved namely the messengers and those who opposed them. He says, ‘Have, then, the stories of those who preceded them never come within the ken of these hypocrites and deniers of the truth?’ When He says, ‘have the stories never come within their ken…’ (*at-Tawba:* 70), we have a question ‘have’ and a negative ‘never’. The question negates this negative word, so what this means is that indeed these stories did come to them. When a negative is negated, the intention is to affirm the matter; and you only ask rhetorical questions when you are certain that the person you are asking will have to answer ‘Yes’. When you say to someone, ‘You abandoned me in my time of need’ and he replies, ‘Did I not visit you on such-and-such day? Did I not give you such-and-such? Did I not do such-and-such for your son?’ he is certain that you will not be able to deny any of these things because they really did happen.

We may notice here that the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the third person pronoun here, saying, ‘Have, then, the stories…never come within the ken of these…’ (*at-Tawba:* 70). Allah *the Exalted* first spoke to them directly to appeal to them, and then He spoke about them as though they were absent. It is as though this was also an expression of the Prophet’s increased concern for them in their absence, as he *peace and blessings be upon him* was eager that they be guided.

‘Have, then, the stories (*naba`*) of those who preceded them never come within the ken of these hypocrites and deniers of the truth?’ (*at-Tawba:* 70)

The word *naba`* (stories or tidings) means important information. We do not call every piece of information *naba`*, but only important pieces of information. The word *naba`* comes from the same root as *nubuwwa* (prophethood), and prophethood is plain and clear, and is not ambiguous; and therefore, every event which is important and manifest may be called *naba`*. In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'About what do they [most often] ask one another? About the awesome tiding (*naba`*) [of resurrection], on which they [so utterly] disagree.' (*an-Naba':* 1-3) And there is no tiding more awesome than that of the Day of Resurrection.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned the first matter which was general, by speaking in a direct address, and He mentioned the second matter which was specific, by speaking in the third person.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then specifies who is meant by 'those who preceded them', namely the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* whom Allah drowned with a flood. Whenever Nuh's (Noah's) people passed him by as he was making the Ark they mocked him, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* said about this as a reply to those who mocked Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* 'If you are scoffing at us – behold, we are scoffing at you [and your ignorance], just as you are scoffing at us.' (*Hud:* 38). That is, you who mocked Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* are ignorant of the unseen. But Allah had informed Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his people of what would ensue, and therefore the ones who were truly deserving of mockery were those who refused to believe, not knowing what Allah had in store for them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then mentions `Ad, Thamud, the people of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the people of Midyan and '*al-mu`tafikat*' (the cities that were overthrown; the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*) who were literally 'overthrown' because Allah turned them over so that their highest part became their lowest, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Just as He thrust into perdition those cities that were overthrown and then covered them from sight forever.' (*an-Najm:* 53-54)

That is, they were lofty and then He reduced them to rubble. The word *ifk*, from which *mu`tafikat* is derived, means to turn away from the truth, as they said to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* '… "Have you come to delude us away from our gods? Then bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the truthful.'" (*al-Ahqaf:* 22) That is, to turn us away from them.

What is the story of those prophets and their peoples? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…To all of them their apostles had come with all evidence of the truth, but they rejected them, and so it was not Allah who wronged them by His punishment, but it was they who wronged themselves.' (*at-Tawba:* 70) That is, the peoples of Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*, and so on were sent messages from Allah; and not only messages of the divine way came to them, but also miracles which proved that the messengers were truly sent by their Lord. It is as though they had no good argument for avoiding Allah's message of guidance or denying it because every message is aided by a miracle which proves that the messenger who brings it is truthful. These messengers continued to come to mankind one by one to guide them to the message of Allah and show them the way of truth. The reason that many messengers were needed at the beginning is that the people of the world were separated from one another such that different peoples could live on earth at the same time in different places without knowing anything about one another. But now the people of the world are connected, such that if an event occurs in one place we can see it via satellite broadcasting in mere seconds, or even the instant it is happening if it has been prepared for beforehand; the whole world saw the first man to walk on the moon at the very instant it took place.

When the people of the world lived in separation from one another, every environment within it had its own forms of sin and corruption; so their messenger would come to fight that particular form of sin and corruption that existed in a particular place, and did not exist in other places.

But when the problems of the world became homogenous, such that if a problem emerges in America, for example, it will soon spread to Europe or Egypt, a single messenger had to come because the problems had become unified and therefore the solution had to be unified. That is why the message of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was a universal message for all times and all places.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…To all of them their apostles had come with all evidence of the truth' (*at-Tawba:* 70), 'evidence of the truth' means that which shows you what is true. The miracles which accompanied the divine messages showed and confirmed that the messenger was truly sent by his Lord, and the miracle would always be completely clear so that the people would see it and know what it meant; therefore, every messenger would bring something which all could agree was a miracle. You might do something amazing, but the people might not all agree that it is a miracle. When the magic lantern was invented, some people said, 'This is incredible', whilst other people said, 'It is just an optical illusion.' But the miracles of the prophets must be conceivable to all mentalities, both the educated person and the person who has never read a single word in his life. This is because religion is a matter of natural disposition which addresses the greatest and most learned of minds, as well as the nomad who lives all his life in the desert and has never experienced civilisation or been educated.

So, miracles must be clearly intelligible to all minds, so that no one has any excuse. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and so it was not Allah who wronged them…' (*at-Tawba:* 70). This indicates that the True Lord *Glorified is He* will reckon them according to their comprehension of the miracle; it is as though every mind understands and is certain that a miracle has occurred. Those who met the miracle with disbelief wronged their own selves in doing so because after they comprehended the miracle and became sure that it broke the natural law of the universe, and that no one could have performed it but Allah *Glorified is He,* they nevertheless refused to believe.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says of them, '…and so it was not Allah who wronged them by His punishment, but it was they who wronged themselves.' (*at-Tawba:* 70). Wrongdoing means to take a truth and turn it into falsehood; but truths differ, so which truth was it that they turned into falsehood? It was the truth of the Greatest Being in whom all must believe and whom all must worship.

And how does a person wrong himself? He wrongs himself when his soul finds a sinful passion alluring so he indulges it to obtain instant gratification, thereby denying his soul eternal bliss. There are those who wrong themselves by wronging others, such as the one who gives false testimony – the one who helps a man to wrongfully usurp the right of another. The one who gives false testimony even goes down in the estimation of the one for whose benefit he testifies; and if he ever testifies anything to him, he will not accept his testimony and will hold him in contempt. Anyone who is asked by someone to give false testimony ought to strike the one who asks him because he wants to cause him to fall in the estimation of the people and even in the estimation of the one for whose benefit he testifies. When the giver of false witness aids someone against their adversary, everyone holds this witness in contempt.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ يَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ
عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ ٱللَّهَ
وَرَسُولَهُۥٓ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٧١﴾

The believers, both men and women, support each other; they order what is right and forbid what is wrong; they keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. God will give His mercy to such people: God is almighty and wise[71] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 71)

This verse comes shortly after another verse in which the hypocrites were described, 'The hypocrites, both men and women, are all of a kind…' (*at-Tawba:* 67). It was therefore appropriate that the contrasting state of the believers, men and women, be mentioned; this is the complementary juxtaposition of opposites, for when opposites are compared they are both made clearer. An example is found in the poet's words, praising his beloved:

A face as white as dawn,
Hair as black as night:
Two opposites which go well together;
For one opposite shows the beauty of the other.

After mentioning the scandals and vices of the hypocrites, and how they swore false oaths and broke their covenants, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give a contrast between them and the believing men and women.

But the contrast here differs slightly in that Allah *the Exalted* said of the hypocrites, ‘The hypocrites, both men and women, are all of a kind…’ (*at-Tawba:* 67), but when He spoke about the believers He said, ‘And [as for] the believers, both men and women – they are close unto one another…’ (*at-Tawba:* 71). So the True Lord *Glorified is He* described the hypocrites, both men and women, as being ‘all of a kind’; that is, they are all alike and their conduct is based on imitation and emulation; they imitate one another. And since their belief is based on evil, they are all evil, and there is no one among them to advise them to do what is right, or try to make them renounce their hypocrisy. Rather, they continue in their evil to the greatest extent possible.

As for the believer, his belief is based on conviction and goodness, and if there is evil in a believer, the believers who are close to him will guide him away from evil and back to the way of goodness. The human soul is subject to many vicissitudes, and not every believer adheres perfectly to Allah’s way of guidance in all aspects, but rather, there are weak points in every human soul. So, if a believer has a weakness, the believers who are close to him will show his weak point to him and give him guidance and advice, and help him to combat his weakness; and the believer will also guide and advise others. Thus, we find that in the believing society, believers help one another to combat their weak points, and they all counsel one another, so that the combined faith of all is self-completing. If one person is remiss in some aspect, someone who is close to him will fill this gap in his conduct.

As for the hypocrites, the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes them as being ‘all of a kind’ meaning that they are all alike so that they do not counsel one another to desist from the evil they do, nor does any of them advise the others.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And [as for] the believers, both men and women – they are close unto one another…’ (*at-Tawba:* 71), He does not specify who is active in this relationship of closeness (*walaya*) and who is passive; for every believer is both active and passive in this relationship, since the word *walaya* is derived from the verb *yali*, which means ‘to be close’, and its opposite is *`ada* (to have enmity), which means ‘to be far’ and ‘to abandon’. So ‘closeness’ is the opposite of ‘enmity’, and the benefit of this closeness is that each believer helps his fellow believer to resist those things for which he has a weakness.

If I have a weak point, my fellow believer will help me with it; and as long as my fellow believer helps me in some way, if he becomes weak in any way, I will help him in return. Our relationship is therefore complementary and mutual, and we are each, both active and passive in our closeness. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘By time. Verily, man is bound to lose himself unless he be of those who attain to faith, do good works, enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth and enjoin upon one another patience.’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3) Were it ‘enjoin’ only, this would mean that there are some who advise and others who are advised; but the True Lord *Glorified is He* said, ‘enjoin upon one another’ which means that every believer must advise his fellow believer. If I have a weakness, you advise me and say, ‘Refrain from this and do not do it, for you are a believer!’ And if you have a weakness, I say the same to you. So, each one of us both gives and receives advice, and the same is the case with our relationship of closeness: you are close to me, i.e. you stick with me and help me to combat my weakness; and I am close to you, i.e. I stick with you and help you to combat your weakness. For we are all subject to vicissitudes, and we all have our own weaknesses which are different from the weaknesses of others.

This closeness also applies to the truth. I might incline towards falsehood in some matter, so my fellow believer says to me, ‘Come back to the truth’; and he might incline towards falsehood, so I say the same to him. In this way faith is self-completing, and therefore we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about *walaya* meaning closeness and succour, in His own right when He says, ‘For thus it is, all protective power (*walaya*) belongs to Allah alone, The True One....’ (*al-Kahf:* 44) That is, true succour and true closeness belong to Allah; for we live in a world of vicissitudes, and you might seek succour from me when my own strength is gone, or my money is all spent or my influence has waned; but the True Lord *Glorified is He* alone is always Strong, and always Rich. He causes change, but never changes Himself. And when Allah succours you, this is the true eternal succour, not the succour of vicissitude.

And we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Oh, verily, they who are close to Allah – no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.’ (*Yunus:* 62) This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has made certain people close to Himself.

Allah *the Exalted* also says, ‘Allah is near unto those who have faith…’ (*al-Baqara:* 257). The True Lord *Glorified is He* is sometimes close to people, and other times they are close to Him. If you draw near to Allah by obeying Him, Allah *the Exalted* draws near to you by supporting you, as He says, ‘If you help [the cause of] Allah, He will help you, and will make firm your steps.’ (*Muhammad:* 7) That is, if you draw near to Allah by obeying Him and helping the cause of His way, He will draw near to you in your times of dire need and help you, and make your feet firm.

So, the word *walaya* means nearness and mutual succour; and as long as there is mutual succour, this means that one believer has a particular weakness and another believer has strength; but who will always be weak, or always strong? No one. Therefore, everyone supports and everyone is supported. Since True Lord *Glorified is He* said, ‘close unto one another’ (*at-Tawba:* 71), and did not specify the relationship any further, this means that everyone has the possibility of helping and of being helped.

To make this clearer, consider the True Lord’s words *Glorified is He* ‘And they say, too, “Why was not this Quran bestowed from above on some great man of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) The disbelievers acknowledged the truth of the Quran and its miraculous nature, yet they did not believe simply because the Quran was revealed to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and not to one of the leaders of Quraysh. Allah *Glorified is He* answered them, ‘But is it they who distribute your Lord’s grace? Nay, as it is we who distribute their means of livelihood among them in the life of this world, and raise some of them by degrees above others, to the end that they might avail themselves of one another’s help…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to make some of you masters and others slaves and some of you rich and others poor. This is the case where worldly affairs are concerned, so if you want to distribute religious affairs according to your own whims, then first distribute your livelihoods in this way; for the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who distributed them among you, and your lives in this world obey the laws of causality, so it should be easy for you to distribute it, instead of presuming to distribute Allah’s Mercy, which is the right of Allah *Glorified is He* Alone.

We may observe that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…[We] raise some of them by degrees above others…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32); this means that some are raised above and others are left below. As long as the word 'some' is ambiguous, this means that all of us are raised above some people, yet left below others, at the same time. No human being is raised above all the rest of mankind such that he alone possesses every possible talent, but rather, each one of us is gifted in one thing and not gifted in other things. This means that the complementarity of life is essential and not merely voluntary. If a believer sees that others are raised above him in some aspect, he must ask himself, 'In what aspect have I been raised above others, and in which aspects are others better than me?' You excel in a particular occupation, and thus you have been raised therein. So, in those things I do not do well, others have been raised above me; and in the things which I do well, I have been raised above others. Therefore, you find that everyone in Allah's creation is raised is some things and left below in others, and this is the meaning of, '…[We] raise some of them by degrees above others…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

But our problem is that we only pay attention to one aspect of raising, which is that one person is rich, whilst another is poor. We do not consider health, knowledge, children, a good spouse, a blessed life and many other aspects, for if one of us is given a high degree in one aspect, he will have no share of another aspect. In the end, the total of one man is equal to the total of any other man, and the only superiority is that of piety. If you see that someone is ahead of you in one aspect, beware of envying him; rather, ask yourself in what aspect are you ahead of him and you will find that there are other aspects and facets of life in which you are ahead of others.

So, we are both raised above and left below at the same time, and we must understand that everyone who possesses a talent benefits society with his talent and perhaps he might benefit society with his talent more than he benefits himself. Consider the carpenter, for example, you find that he makes excellent doors and windows for people, whilst he does not offer the same standard of work for himself. Why? Because the door he makes for himself is the one door for which he will not be paid.

We gave the example before of the left hand and the right hand. Most people are right-handed whilst their left hands are clumsy and cumbersome. If you want to cut your fingernails, for example, you take the nail clippers in your right hand and clip the nails of the left hand easily; and then you take the nail clippers in your left hand and clip the nails of your right hand clumsily.

Thus, we see that no man possesses every talent, but rather, he does some things well and others poorly; but the total talents of any one person are equal to the total talents of any other person. Divine justice intervenes in this, so we find for example that a rich man eats bread made with fine white flour, and then a time comes when he is only able to eat wholemeal or granary bread. And you find that the one who eats too much will inevitably come to a day when doctors will forbid him from eating food because he took more than his fair share of food before, and his health necessitates that he now stops eating. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has established a natural order in which all support one another in order that they are mutually complementary. You need me for what I do well and I need you for what you do well; and in this way people support one another, and society is sound.

Therefore, it is said that people will live well and long as they differ; for if they do not differ and become possessors of the same single gift or the same single job, then the world will be ruined. If we were all judges, for example, then who would treat the sick? And who would dig the earth? And who would carry the bricks? And who would clean the street? If we all had the same talent, wealth or work, then none of us would do these jobs, since if we were all doctors, engineers, chemists, judges or politicians, we would not be able to live. Rather, it is necessary that we differ so that I need you and you need me, and in this way the elements of society cling together, and the world's needs are met because of necessity, not simply because people volunteer to meet them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes the believer as being, 'close unto one another' (*at-Tawba:* 71), so if a believer does what is wrong, his fellow believer will tell him to stop doing it; and if he fails to do what is right his fellow believer will enjoin him to do it. So, all of us will both forbid wrongdoing and be forbidden from wrongdoing.

You cannot enjoin what is right while simultaneously doing the opposite or being far from it. You cannot hold a glass of wine in your hand and then tell someone else to cast aside the glass of wine he is holding. You cannot forbid an evil deed while doing it yourself; the one who enjoins a good deed must do it himself, and the one who forbids an evil act must abstain from it himself.(1) Every believer both enjoins what is good and is enjoined to do it, and forbids evil and is forbidden from doing it.(2)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then adds to His description of the believers, '…and [they] are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues…' (*at-Tawba:* 71). To perform the prayer is to announce one's loyalty to *the Almighty* Creator, He who is eternal and infinite. The believers are close to one another, but who is close to all of them? Allah *Glorified is He* is and therefore they must adhere to the way of Him who is closest to all of them, and whom none of them can do without.

When Allah *Glorified is He* described the believers as being close to one another, He also said, '…If you help [the cause of] Allah, He will help you...' (*Muhammad:* 7). We must all turn towards *the Almighty* Protector, for He is beyond all our means and beyond our strength and He succours us. If the protection the believers afford one another is not enough, we seek refuge in the Almighty Protector. As long as all protective power (*walaya*) belongs to Allah, the True Lord *Glorified is He* we must constantly renew our allegiance (*wala`*) to Him *Glorified is He* and the only way to do this is to pray. Then you hear the *mudhin* (the caller for prayer) say, 'Allah is Greatest', you go directly to the prayer. Why? Because Allah *Glorified is He* – your Lord, Maker and Protector – has called you to pray, so you must answer the call.

And if you want to pray more besides the five daily prayers and be with Allah all the time, then do so, after you fulfil what Allah *the Exalted* has obliged you to do by praying the five daily prayers. If a product is shown to its manufacturer five times every day, this is good for it; and if you take any device and have the engineer who made it inspect it five times a day, it will never break down.

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(1) *Usama ibn Zayd narrated that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'A man shall be brought forth on the Day of Resurrection and cast into hell, and his intestines shall be spilled and he shall turn about them as a donkey turns about a mill-stone. The denizens of hell will gather around him and say, "O so-and-so, what is wrong with you? Did you not use to enjoin good and forbid evil?" He will say, "Indeed, I used to enjoin good yet not do it, and I used to forbid evil yet do it."' Narrated by Al-Bukhari (3267) and Muslim (2989)*

(2) *Elucidation of translator*

The same goes for man, who Allah has created. If he presents himself to Allah five times a day, his soul will never break down. When you present a device to a human manufacturer, he fixes it with material means, whether by finding a fault in the electrical wiring or a broken component; material is fixed with material means. But Allah *Glorified is He* is unseen, so He repairs us by unseen means. You do not know what He does with you when you stand before Him in prayer, but you definitely feel that something has been fixed.

Therefore, whenever the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was concerned about something – that is, this thing was beyond his power – he would go and pray(1); for he was not able to accomplish anything with the means available to him, so He would turn to the Creator of all means and stand before Him, for Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who has the solution for everything. That is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Billal *Allah be pleased with him* 'Give us peace with it (the prayer), O Billal!',(2) as though it was a source of peace; that is, 'Bring harmony to our faculties by calling for the prayer'. Therefore, it was inevitable that the True Lord *Glorified is He* would say, '…and [they] are constant in prayer…' (*at-Tawba:* 71), for prayer is a constant pledge of allegiance to Allah, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to be connected to Him *Glorified is He* and this connection is made by praying the five obligatory daily prayers; and Allah *the Exalted* left the door open for you to offer more voluntary prayers besides this so that you do not miss out on any opportunity to stand in the presence of Allah.

To know the difference between Allah's authority and human authority, consider this: if you do not have the means at your disposal to deal with something, you ask to meet with someone who has a higher status than you and has the means at his disposal to meet your need. When you ask to meet with him he might say yes, or he might say no; and if he says yes, he will ask you what you want to speak to him about, and once you tell him what you wish to speak about he will set the time, date and place of the meeting. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not do any of this; you can go to Him at any time you like, and any place you like, and speak to Him about whatever you like; and Allah *the Exalted* never brings the meeting to an end, but rather, you are the one who ends the meeting with your Lord. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah does not lose interest until you lose interest.’(1) The True Lord *the Exalted* cannot be distracted by one thing from another, and therefore He can meet with all His servants at the same time, and listen to them all at the same time, and answer their requests all at the same time.

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(1) Hudha *said, 'Whenever something concerned the Prophet, he would pray.' Narrated by Imam Ahmad (v. 388) and Abu Dawud (1319)*

(2) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad (v. 364) and Abu Dawud (4985) on the authority of a Companion.*

Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘…and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues…’ (*at-Tawba:* 71). Prayer is always mentioned alongside the poor-due because the prayer is a constant pledge of allegiance to Allah, the Giver, and the poor-due is a means of preserving the life of those who deserve to be given it; you give to them in order to preserve their lives, and so he keeps his allegiance to Allah alongside you, since there can be no allegiance without life, and you help him to preserve this life. And because the poor-due means to give money to the poor, and money is earned by work, and work requires time, you therefore sacrifice part of your time to give charity, just as to offer the prayer means to sacrifice specific portions of your time.

And during the time you work, you can also pledge your constant allegiance to Allah by offering a part of the earnings of this time as poor-due. Therefore, not all your time is devoted to work, but rather, it is devoted to both work and worship. When you devote a part of the money which you earn by working to the poor, you have thereby purified your time by praying, and purified your wealth by giving.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And (they) are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and obey Allah and His Apostle.’ (*at-Tawba:* 71) Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned enjoining the good, forbidding the evil, offering prayers and giving the purifying charity to the people in need. These are all acts of obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* in that they are among the Pillars of Islam. So why did Allah then say, ‘…and obey Allah and His Apostle.’ (*at-Tawba:* 71)?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (43) and Muslim (785) on the authority of 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that there are five pillars of Islam. These are the testimony of faith (that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger), performing the obligatory prayers, paying the *zakat* (charity), fasting the month of *Ramadan* and performing *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque for those who can afford it). Yet, these pillars do not constitute the entirety of Islam, but are the foundations upon which Islam is built. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Islam was built on five pillars.’(1) So, these five pillars are the foundations upon which Islam was built, but Islam itself is every action which improves life and does not corrupt it. It is made up of all the actions that bring happiness and not misery, and therefore Allah *Glorified is He* and wants us to understand that Islam does not only consist of its foundations. In addition to these five foundations, we must obey Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger in every aspect of life’s motion for which He gave us instructions.

The motions of life are all complementary. The tools which benefit your life are the result of a series of improvements achieved by many generations of mankind. How did we determine the simplest of utilities such as the use of yeast to make bread? There are people who were inspired by Allah, by means of a chance occurrence or a mistake, when they discovered that putting yeast in dough made the bread taste better. Most of life’s discoveries occurred by chance or as results of mistakes. Penicillin, for example, was discovered as the result of a mistake. Archimedes’ principle of buoyancy and displacement was inspired by an unexpected observation which Allah inspired Archimedes to realize. Whenever a new secret is discovered by mankind, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* guided His creatures to it.

What made us understand that meat tastes better when cooked or roasted? What makes you cook some kinds of vegetables but not others? Allah *Glorified is He* guided us to all of this. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘who creates (everything), and thereupon forms it in accordance with what it is meant to be, and who determines the nature (of all that exists), and thereupon guides it (towards its fulfilment).’ (*al-A‘la:* 2-3)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (8) and Muslim (16) on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar*

Many of the concepts we benefit from in life were passed down to us from the previous generations. Some people wrongly choose to do nothing in their lives but pray and fast, using the verse in the Quran in which Allah said, 'And (tell them that) I have only created the jinn and the men to worship Me,' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56). However, if they devote themselves solely to prayer and fasting, how will they get the food that gives them strength and power to pray.

Suppose that you will only need a single slice of bread, you will still need to purchase it from the bakery. The bakery gets the flour from the mill. The mill gets the wheat from the grain silo and the grain silo gets the grain from the farmers. Still, the farmers will have to rely on factories to get the tools necessary for ploughing and irrigation.

Therefore, people cannot solely devote themselves to acts of worship because all people need the work of other craftsmen. Every action wherein you remember Allah *Glorified is He* is an act of worship. and every action in life that helps you in worshipping Allah is itself an act of worship.

Let us state another example. To pray, we must wear clothes that cover our bodies appropriately. We buy these clothes from a merchant, who in turn brings it from the textile factory. The textile factory depends on the spinning mill, the cotton ginnery and the cotton plantations. The plantations also require materials to produce an ample harvest and to protect their cotton from harm. All these motions of life are required to get clothes that cover our bodies when we pray, and each one of them is an act of worship. So, it was necessary that Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and obey Allah, and His Apostle' after saying, '…and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues' (*at-Tawba:* 71). After praying to Allah *Glorified is He* and paying the purifying charities, the believers must obey Allah in the rest of the teachings (of Islam) which were built on these pillars.

Allah *Glorified is He* then said, 'It is them, upon whom Allah will bestow His Mercy' (*at-Tawba:* 71). The word 'them' refers to all the believing men and women, who support one another in doing what is right and forbid each other of committing what is wrong. They are in constant prayer, pay the purifying charities and obey Allah and His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. These people shall be granted grace and mercy by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Is it more eloquent to say, ‘It is they upon whom Allah bestows His Mercy’, or to say, ‘It is they upon whom Allah ‘will’ bestow His Mercy,’ (*at-Tawba:* 71)? The words ‘Allah ‘will’ bestow His Mercy’ are more eloquent because the word ‘will’ crosses the veil of time, and therefore, indicates that the believer will live in constant mercy and grace from Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is the same reason why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse regarding those believers who do good deeds, ‘…(Allah) The Most Gracious will bless (them) with affection’ (*Maryam:* 96). That is, this affection will be continuous throughout time. Even those who hear this verse and then die shortly afterwards will be blessed with Allah’s love and affection.

Allah *Glorified is He* also said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘and, indeed, in time will thy Lord grant thee (what thy heart desires), and thou shall be well-pleased’ (*ad-Duha:* 5). Allah did not say, ‘Thy Lord grants thy’, but rather said, ‘and, indeed, in time will thy Lord grant thee’ (*ad-Duha:* 5), to show us that Allah *Glorified is He* bestows his blessings in a continuous manner.

An application of this linguistic choice can be made clear in the following example. When you threaten someone, you do not say, ‘I am getting revenge on you’. Rather, you say, ‘I will get my revenge on you’ meaning that your revenge will continue for a certain amount of time.

Allah said, ‘It is them upon whom Allah will bestow His Mercy (*Rahma*),’ (*at-Tawba:* 71). This means that Allah’s attribute of Mercy (*Rahma*) is greater than the attribute of mercy in his creation(1) because people are merciful to one another according to the means they have at their disposal, whilst the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* exists through His attributes of perfection. These attributes of perfection are limitless and infinite. Allah’s mercy can be manifested in the absence of illnesses from a body. On the other hand, Allah's cure heals the body that has fallen ill. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Thus, We bestow in this Quran all that gives health (to the spirit) and is a mercy (*Rahma*) unto those who believe.' (*al-Isra':* 82)

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Allah has divided mercy into one hundred parts, keeping ninety-nine for Himself and sending one down to Earth; and from this one part, all created beings have mercy on one another, even the horse as it lifts its hoof from its foal in fear that it may harm it.’ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6000) and Muslim (2752)*

These two forms of blessings spare society from the social ailments that man can suffer from. Mankind can either be spared from the onset of disease, or they can be spared after an ailment occurs. If someone has an attribute of wickedness as an ailment, the Quran can cure him of it. On the other hand, if Allah grants that person grace and mercy (*rahma*), the ailment will not befall him in the first place. Therefore, grace and mercy are continuous blessings.

Allah *Glorified is He* then said, 'Verily, Allah is Almighty and All Wise!' (*at-Tawba:* 71) The meaning of 'Almighty' is that He has full control over everything. Allah's Will is always manifested and He cannot be overcome. Never perceive this power and might as similar to autocratic tyranny, because Allah *Glorified is He* does not wrong anyone. His might is based on divine wisdom, while mankind's might is devoid of wisdom and knowledge.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* promised the believing men and women that reward and bliss will await them in the Hereafter, saying in the next verse:

وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَٰكِنَ
طَيِّبَةً فِى جَنَّٰتِ عَدْنٍ ۚ وَرِضْوَٰنٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿٧٢﴾

Allah has promised the believers, both men and women, Gardens
graced with flowing streams where they will remain; good,
peaceful homes in Gardens of lasting bliss; and – greatest of all –
God's good pleasure. That is the supreme triumph [72]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 72)

The Arabic word *wa`d* (promise) refers to glad tidings or blessings which will come later in the future, whilst the Arabic word wa`eed (warning) is a threat of a torment that is yet to come. A *wa`d* (promise) encourages the hearer to strive and work hard to attain the reward he has been promised, whilst a *wa`eed* (warning) gives the hearer a chance to repent from what incurs Allah's wrath, to escape from His chastisement.

However, we may observe that Allah *Glorified is He* says in an earlier verse, ‘Allah has given a promise (*wa`d*) to the hypocrites, both men and women, of Hell-fire’ (*at-Tawba:* 68), and then described the hypocrites’ punishment. He also said in the verse we are currently discussing, ‘Allah has given a promise (*wa’d*) to the believers, both men and women, of gardens’ (*at-Tawba:* 72) and then described the bliss which awaits them. Some people might have assumed it more lexically appropriate if Allah *Glorified is He* used the word ‘*wa`eed*’ instead of the word ‘*wa`d*’ in relation to the hypocrites’ punishment. They may have wanted the earlier verse to say, ‘Allah has given a warning (*wa`eed*) to the hypocrites’ because the rest of the verse mentions chastisement, hell and evil, while wanting the second verse, related to the believers’ reward, to remain the same, ‘Allah has promised the believers’ because it mentions Paradise, bliss and goodness. However, the rhetorical style used here by Allah *Glorified is He* is different than superficial human convention and Allah used the word ‘*wa`d*’ for both glad tidings and warnings for a reason in these verses.

To start with, we should not have the habit of comparing Allah’s speech with human speech, because certain observations that may escape from human speech will never escape Allah’s revelation. Additionally, humans vary in their modes of speech, while the style of Allah’s revelation is uniform.

Now to explain the point at hand, we need to consider the first verse closely. When Allah *Glorified is He* defined who the hypocrites are and then spoke about the punishment that awaits their actions, Allah wanted them to renounce their hypocrisy and turn to goodness and faith. Thus, Allah’s warning is a kind and caring admonition to them. When you say to a student who neglects his studies, ‘You shall fail if you neglect your education’, your desire is to encourage him to learn more. Your warning is essentially a heartened encouragement and your aim is to avoid the failure you are warning him from. This lexical style is also employed in another of Allah’s glorious verses from the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, where Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) Are flashes of fire a blessing, such that Allah *Glorified is He* could follow them with the words, ‘which, then, of your Lord’s blessings can you disavow?' Are these descriptions of punishment a favour by Allah towards His creation? They are indeed a favour because Allah's description of His punishments is a form of advice. They are favours because they encourage you to avoid the path that leads to Hell-fire and choose the path that leads to Paradise.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* warns the hypocrites of the poor fate that awaits them, they may pay heed to this advice, renounce their hypocrisy and sincerely accept the true faith. If they choose that, they will save themselves from the torment of hell and this is a great good. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* used the word *wa`d* (promise) rather than *wa`eed* (warning), as it fulfils the meaning that Allah wanted.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse, 'Allah has given a promise to the believers, both men and women' (*at-Tawba:* 72). Promises and warnings constitute the balance of existence in this life and the Hereafter because if you promise a good thing to the one who adheres to Allah's way, reasonable people will choose to persevere to reach this good reward. If you warn them that evil awaits them if they disobey Allah *Glorified is He* the reasonable people will be averse to disobedience and sin because of their fear of torment. If your promise of glad tidings to the doers of good is true, and your promise of punishment to the doers of evil is true, then life will have balance.

We may advise a student during his revision for an exam, 'You will succeed if you revise well, and this will qualify you for the college of your choice. However, if you neglect your studies, you will fail and your future will be affected'. Here we have presented the student with a promise and a warning. If we do not fulfil our promise, and mistakenly grant success to a student who did not revise properly, we will contribute to the destruction of a natural equilibrium upon which the interest of all mankind is based.

Similarly, you may lay down a rule that a score of 90%, for example, will be accepted as a minimum entry score to medical school. If you break your promise by allowing those who get lower scores to enter medical school, while denying entry to those who get higher scores because of personal desire or nepotism, you will be transgressing against the motions of life by tarnishing the principals of good work. Additionally, if an authority loses the power to keep its promises and does not follow through with its warnings, its words will be devalued. Our promises differ from Allah's promises because we are subject to vicissitudes. I might promise something which I cannot deliver, or warn of a consequence that I become too weak to implement. So, for life's motions to be balanced, promises and warnings must come from the One Who is always All-Capable, Strong and always Present. His words are final statements and nothing can prevent Him from keeping His promise or following through with His warning. When you read the chapter of *Al-Masad*, you find that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab and doomed is his fate! What will his wealth avail him, and all that he has gained (from Allah's punishment)? In the life to come, he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing; together with his wife, the carrier of evil tales, who bears around her neck a rope of twisted strands!' (*al-Masad:* 1-5) Allah *Glorified is He* decreed, in this blessed chapter, that Abu Lahab (the one with the glowing flame of fire) and his wife would die as disbelievers and enter Hell. Many of those who were disbelievers at the time when this verse was revealed such as Khalid ibn Al-Walid, `Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl and `Amr ibn al-`As *Allah be pleased with them* subsequently attained to faith, proved that they were true Muslims, and struggled in Allah's Cause. So, why did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* decree that Abu Lahab and his wife (Ummu Jamil) would not attain to the true faith as `Amr, `Ikrima and Khalid ibn Al-Walid did? The answer is that this damnation was not the decree of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but rather, it was Allah's decree. When Allah *Glorified is He* decrees something, have no doubt in his ruling, for there is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He* and He is able to do all things.

In the Quranic arrangement, these verses about Abu Lahab's doomed fate are followed by the chapter of *al-Ikhlas* where Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "He is Allah, the One, Allah, The Eternal, The Uncaused Cause of All Being."' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-2) Because Allah is the One, His commandments will always take effect, even in matters when man has free will. Allah *Glorified is He* says that, 'There is nothing that could alter His words' (*al-Kahf:* 27). This means that His promises are distinct events and His warnings are definite punishments. For life's balance to be maintained, there must be promises and warnings from Allah *Glorified is He* to provide us with certitude. No one shares in Allah's dominion and there is no invincible power except Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us practical worldly examples of this natural principle. When you farm the earth, ploughing and irrigating it properly and placing seeds therein, its yield will give you abundant harvest. On the other hand, if you neglect the soil and leave it without ploughing, farming or planting, it will not give your desired yield. This natural principle gave a promise to mankind, that the one who farms his land well will receive a good yield. It is also a warning, that the one who does not bother to farm his land will not get his desired fruits from it. If the natural order of life was different, and people who farmed, ploughed and irrigated got nothing, while those who did not work got a rich yield from their land, the standards of the world would be inverted and no one would bother to work for food.

So, for the natural order to be maintained, the promise and the warning must be maintained by Allah, the One Who is able to fulfil all His promises and never weakens or changes. For a balanced life in our societies, we must be able to see this natural principle before us every day without contradiction. The one who studies properly succeeds and the one who does not study fails. This is a natural principle. If we interfere with this natural order and whims and nepotism interfere with our principles, the fruitful and successful motion of life will be thrown out of balance. It is this balance of promise and warning that drives the motions of life. Otherwise, the world will be disrupted.

Everyone wants to benefit themselves. There is no difference in this regard between the righteous believer, the sinner or the disbeliever. However, the sinner and the disbeliever love themselves unintelligently. Thereby, they seek to gain slight pleasures and benefits for a limited time, in exchange for an extended or eternal torment. As for the believer, he is distinguished by the ability to look ahead. Therefore, he may deny himself instantaneous and short-lived pleasures to gain a greater pleasure which lasts beyond the count of time.

We have given an example to illustrate this earlier. Suppose there are two dissimilar brothers. The first brother wakes up early to pray, eats breakfast, goes to school to listen attentively to his teachers and then returns home to revise his books. The second brother, however, stays asleep to enjoy his rest and then rises at midmorning. Then, he just wanders around in the streets for the rest of his day. When his soul suggests any kind of pleasure, he indulges in it without paying any heed to Allah’s way and the moral values of life.

Both brothers love themselves, but the first brother subjects himself to bearable difficulties during his school years to attain comfort, a good position and wealth for the rest of his life. As for the second brother, he also cares for himself, through giving himself instantaneous gratification. There, he squanders his entire future, and becomes worthless to society. Therefore, we all care for ourselves, but the standards upon which we base this care are different. Some of us base our love on sound standards and endure slight hardships to earn eternal bliss, while others give themselves ephemeral pleasures and thereby loose the lasting blessings. You will find that this is the natural order of this worldly life. No person is comfortable in this life unless they worked hard in their early years to attain comfort for the rest of their lives.

It is said that no one ever takes their share of good fortune twice. The person who works hard at the start of their life may relax for the rest of it, and the one who relaxes at the start of their life must work hard for the rest of it. The popular expression has it, that the one who neglects his youth, will be neglected by his old age.

Parents and educators must alert their youngsters by means of promises and warnings, so that their lives remain balanced. Guardians must not delay the promises of good fortune while passively waiting until the fruit is ripened, or postpone warnings of ill-fate until evil has already occurred. Parents and educators must pay close attention to the behaviour of the children under their supervision by encouraging and making promises to the hard-workers. They should not simply wait for them to succeed. Promises must be given so that they will work hard, and warnings must be given before the child fails and ruins his life. Do not wait for a person to choose the wrong path and then warn him because promises and warnings are what give balance to life’s motions.

If we see a society withholding the appropriate reward from the hard-workers while giving everything to the idle and indolent people, we will know that the balance of justice has been disturbed and that the society in question has problems. When hard-workers find out that their struggle gets them nowhere, they devote their energies to other efforts, such as hypocrisy, ostentation, falsehood and sycophancy. The result of this will be that society loses the value of work and becomes bereft of any productive labour, and turns into a society plagued by insincerity, showiness and injustice.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* established the standards of life's motions by means of promises and warnings. So, do not give incentives except to those who are worthy of them, and do not give compensation except to those who have earned it. However, if you squander rewards by giving them to hypocrites and those who fulfil your personal goals and deny those incentives to the vigilant and diligent, you will ruin the balance of life. Society benefits from each person working with skill and dedication. If a single hard-worker brings benefit to tens of people, or a single sincere employer facilitates the work of his employees, and then you neglect those people, all society will be disturbed.

Let us look at a verse in the chapter of *al-Kahf*. The Arabic word '*kahf*' means a cave in a mountain, and truths are often hidden and concealed like the interiors of caves. In this chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the parable of Dhu Al-Qarnayn in the verse, 'And they will ask thee (O Muhammad) about the Two-Horned One (Dhu Al-Qarnayn). Say, "I will convey unto you something by which he ought to be remembered."' (*al-Kahf:* 83) What is this remarkable attribute of Dhul Al-Qarnayn that Allah *Glorified is He* referred to in this verse?

Some people confused themselves and overlooked the moral of the story by trying to identify the historical figure that was named Dhu Al-Qarnayn by Allah *Glorified is He*. They wondered if he was Cyrus, Alexander the Great or someone else. We say that the historical personality itself does not concern us. Our greater concern is that Dhu Al-Qarnayn was a man whom Allah *Glorified is He* blessed with firm power on earth. The moral of this story can be applied to any man who was blessed with established authority and influence on earth at any time or place. The purpose of being given authority on earth is not to passively utilize the means with which we are blessed. The divine purpose is to use these means of authority to attain strength to support the truth, as Allah said, 'Behold, We established him securely on Earth, and endowed him with (the knowledge of) the right means to achieve anything (that he might set out to achieve); and so he chose the right means (in whatever he did).' (*al-Kahf:* 84-85)

His purpose, then, was to reward that who worked appropriately and punish those who transgressed, as Allah *Glorified is He* clarified, 'We said (to him), "O you Two-Horned One! You may either cause (them) to suffer, or treat them with kindness!" He answered, "As for him who does wrong (unto others) – him shall we, in time, cause to suffer; and thereupon he shall be referred to his Lord, and He (Allah) will cause him to suffer with unnameable suffering. But as for him who believes and does righteous deeds – he will have the ultimate good (of the life to come) as his reward; and (as for us,) we shall make binding on him (only) that which is easy to fulfil."' (*al-Kahf:* 86-88)

The first thing a person with firm authority on earth must do, after using the means at their disposal to attain power, is to rectify things by punishing the wrongdoers and restraining them. This is a way of reforming the motions of this worldly life. As for the Hereafter, the wrongdoers will have another kind of punishment therein. We cannot simply leave those who spread corruption on earth to the punishment of the Hereafter, for they do not believe in the Hereafter. If we leave them in their corruption without restraining them, they will fill the earth with wrongdoing. The corruption of society does not only affect the corrupt people, but affects the entire society. We must therefore penalize them now in this worldly life to protect society from corruption, and Allah *Glorified is He* will chastise them in the Hereafter as they did not believe in Him, and will not have prepared to meet Him on the Day of Resurrection. As for those who have faith and do good deeds by benefiting society from their faith, we must reward them well and encourage them. This is the law of righteousness in the universe, and these are its standards.

As we said, the power implementing these promises and warnings must have omnipotence, changelessness and omnipresence. There is nothing more powerful than Allah *Glorified is He*. He causes change but does not change and He Alone exists always and forever. The true believer is the one who knows that Allah's promises cannot be affected by vicissitudes, while human promises are always subject to change. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* wants you to say, 'By Allah's will', whenever you promise anything, in order that you remain truthful. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow", without (adding), "If Allah so wills". And remember your Lord, if you ever forget (saying this at the time) and say, "I pray that my Lord guides me, even closer than this, to a consciousness of what is right!"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24) This does not mean that we must refrain from planning and making arrangements for the coming years, but, with planning, we must say, ‘By Allah’s will, I shall do such-and-such tomorrow’, or ‘By Allah’s will, I shall do such-and-such next year’. When you make a promise, the time might come to deliver your promise, while having lost the power to do so.

For example, if I say to someone, ‘We will meet tomorrow at the Mosque of Zaynab and speak about such-and-such’, do I have the power to ensure that I, or my friend, will live to see that meeting? Will the reason for the meeting still exist? If I was going to meet him to borrow money, I might receive that money on the night before the meeting or I might change my mind. So, when you say, ‘I will do a task tomorrow’ say, ‘By Allah’s will’ because you do not intrinsically possess any of the means which will enable you to do it.

Every action requires a doer, and you cannot guarantee that you will remain alive to be that doer. Every action also requires an object, and you cannot guarantee that the object will remain in existence. Additionally, every action requires an appropriate amount of strength which you cannot guarantee will remain intact, as you might fall sick and unable to move. Likewise, every action requires a reason for doing it, and the reason itself might change. Allah *Glorified is He* alone possesses all the constituent parts of the action.

On the other hand, if a promise is made by Allah *Glorified is He* it is certain to be fulfilled because Allah is Eternal, Immortal, All-Powerful and does whatever He wills.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that the believing men and women support one another, and that they enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong. They are constantly in prayer, and render the purifying charities. They also obey Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger in their worldly matters. Allah *Glorified is He* promised that He would bestow His Grace and Mercy upon them. So, what form will this mercy take?

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah has given a promise (*wa`d*) to the believers, both men and women, of gardens (*Jannat*) through which running waters flow, wherein they will abide, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss.’ (*at-Tawba:* 72) Allah *Glorified is He* has promised the believing men and women paradise (*al-janna*). The Arabic word *janna* literally means a ‘garden’ or any beautiful place filled with flowers and trees. This is a universal reward which all the believers will enjoy. Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '…and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss' (*at-Tawba:* 72). These dwellings are an addition to this Garden. This is a promise from Allah *Glorified is He* of a garden for every believer in which he will have a pleasant dwelling.

So, there are gardens for all the believers, and pleasant chambers for every believer. What is 'pleasant' about these dwellings? We may observe that man loves to own a wide expanse of property before building a private and snug construction for his warmth and comfort. He finds that smaller construction a pleasant and warmer place to live. Allah's words, 'pleasant dwellings' mean that nothing in these homes cause offence or discomfort. Instead, everything therein fills their souls with joy and warmth. The word *janna* (garden or Paradise) refers to a place with plants and greenery. These plants provide cover and conceal you from the eyes of others. Another meaning is that they provide you with all your needs and sustenance, so that you would not need to emerge from them looking for food or drink. Allah *Glorified is He* also uses the word *'janna'* to mean the gardens of this worldly earth. He says, 'Would any of you like to have a garden of date-palms and vines' (*al-Baqara:* 266). He also said, 'As for such sinners, behold, we (but) try them as we tried the owners of the garden' (*al-Qalam:* 17). This last verse is from the chapter of *al-Qalam,* which narrates the story of a group of brothers who owned a garden. They failed in the test of wealth when they refused to give the obligatory charity to the people in need from their garden's harvest.

How did Allah *Glorified is He* give us an image of the Garden of Paradise in the Hereafter, when this Garden contains that which no eye has seen, nor any ear heard nor any human heart imagined? We say that the things which obviously exist in the universe are those things that you can see or hear. Hearing in particular has a broader sphere of perception because you can learn about the things that others have seen through their narration. Hearing is, therefore, broader than sight because it incorporates your experiences and those experiences of others. If you say that you have been to New York, for example, this means that you have seen it. However, if you have not been there and one of your friends narrates a story of this city, the sphere of your knowledge thereby broadens. You are able to add to your knowledge both what you have seen and what others have seen. As for those things which no human mind has ever imagined, they are much broader than what you have seen or heard, for they are countless.

Words are coined to symbolize known abstract meanings and material things. The words of a language must refer to concepts which have been seen, heard or imagined by human thought. Before the television was invented, it had no name. Therefore, there cannot be a name unless there is a thing to be named. Words are only added to languages after the things they describe come to exist. This is the function of language congregations all over the world. Things come into existence, and then, these academies meet to assign names to them.

Now, the Garden of Paradise in the Hereafter will contain neither what no eye has seen nor any ear heard. So, we do not have the words necessary to express what the Garden of Paradise will contain. If we add to this that it will contain, '...what no human mind has imagined' this shows how utterly incapable language is of expressing what the Gardens of Paradise will be blessed with.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wants to give us an image of Paradise He has promised to the pious and righteous people, He clarified that we cannot take its image from our languages because these languages are deficient in portraying what we have not seen or heard and what our minds cannot comprehend. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* only gave us approximate examples to bring the image closer to our comprehension. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not simply refer to it as 'Paradise'. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The parable of the Paradise which the pious (people) are promised' (*Muhammad:* 15). This is only a parable to facilitate our comprehension, but is not the true reality of what Paradise contains.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah has given a promise to the believers, both men and women, of gardens through which running waters flow' (*at-Tawba:* 72). The word 'gardens' (*jannat*) is the plural of 'garden' (*janna*), and the root letters of this word (*j-n-a)* have the basic meaning of cover and concealment. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Then, when the night overshadowed him (*Ibrahim*/ Abraham) with its darkness (*janna*), he beheld a star; (and) he exclaimed, "This is my Lord!" – but when it went down, he said, 'I love not the things that go down.'" (*al-An'am:* 76) So, the Arabic verb *janna* here means 'covered' and 'concealed'; and the word *junun* means 'madness' or the covering of the rational mind.

A garden (*janna*) conceals everything within it because its trees are tall and lush. Those who walk amidst its trees are concealed by the branches and leaves of the trees from the sight of outsiders. All the needs of this life are also provided therein, so that he does not have to leave the garden searching for food, water or places to sit and rest.

If Allah *Glorified is He* has promised the believing men and women gardens, we can see that the words 'believers' and 'gardens' are mentioned in the plural form. When two plurals are juxtaposed in Arabic lexicon, this means that one group is divided amongst the individuals of the other group. This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has promised every believing man and woman a garden of their own.

However, we also find that Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman,* 'But for those who stand in fear of their Lord's Presence, two gardens of paradise are prepared.' (*ar-Rahman:* 46) We must be conscious here of the context and position of these words to ascertain their meaning. The chapter of *ar-Rahman* does not speak only of men, but also mentioned the jinn, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the jinn, He has created out of a merging flame of fire.' (*ar-Rahman:* 14-15) Allah *Glorified is He* also said, 'We will soon finish your affair, O you (both) overburdened pair (the jinn and humankind).' (*ar-Rahman:* 31)

There shall be one garden for the jinn and another for mankind, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But for those who stand in fear of their Lord's Presence, two gardens of paradise are prepared.' (*ar-Rahman:* 46) So, the men who stand in fear of their Lord's Presence shall have a garden, and the jinn who stand in fear of their Lord's Presence shall have a garden. The meaning might also be that everyone will have two gardens. It is in Allah's Knowledge what the final end of His servants will be and whether they will be pious or iniquitous. However, enough gardens were created in paradise to accommodate all the pious and the evil of creation and enough places were created in Hell-fire for the evil creatures and the pious people.(1) When the occupants of Paradise enter therein, the gardens that were created for the residents of the Hell-fire will be given to them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘For such will be the paradise which you shall have inherited by virtue of your past deeds.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 72) That is, they were not created for you, but inherited them, because their intended occupants ended up in hell.(2)

The Noble Quran has a special style, since the One speaking is Allah *Glorified is He*. Every word in the Noble Quran has an exact meaning. In any language, before you speak, you must know what the words you will use mean. Similarly, the listener must also know the meanings of the words to understand the meanings you had intended. If you say to someone, for example, ‘Please bring me a cup of water to drink’, they must know what the word ‘cup’ means, and what the word ‘water’ means. Otherwise, they will not be able to comprehend the request.

Similarly, the word ‘Allah’ or ‘God’ exists in every language. Since in every language, the concepts and the meanings of the words exist before the formulation of these words, our understanding of Allah’s existence came before our knowledge of His Name. Therefore, the assertion that the concept of ‘Allah’ did not exist before known religions is false. Disbelievers came across this Name of God (Allah), and tried to conceal the word, although the meaning is present in their minds. That is why disbelief is called ‘*kufr’* in Arabic, because it means ‘to conceal’. Here, the word *kufr* refers to the disbelievers concealing the concept of Allah’s existence. The disbelievers are trying to conceal the concept of Allah’s presence which their minds acknowledge. Thereby, they are inadvertently proving that faith in Allah is the natural state of a mind.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘No one enters Paradise without first being shown the place in hell which would have been his had he been evil, so that he shall be ever more thankful; and no one enters hell without first being shown the place in paradise which would have been his had he been good, so that he shall be regretful.’ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6569) and Ahmad (ii. 512)*

(2) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Every one of you has two (possible) abodes, one in paradise and the other in hell; and if he should die and enter hell, the denizens of paradise shall inherit his abode. Therefore, Allah says, “It is they (the pious) who shall be the inheritors.”’ (al-Mu’minun: 10) Narrated by Ibn Majah (4341).*

The word *(janna)* means several different things in the Noble Quran such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘As for such sinners, behold, We (but) try them as We tried the owners of the garden (*janna*) who vowed that they would surely harvest its fruit on the morning.’ (*al-Qalam:* 17) In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…two men, upon one of whom We had bestowed two vineyards (*jannatayn* or ‘two gardens’), and surrounded them with date-palms, and placed a plantation in between (the gardens).’ (*al-Kahf:* 32) So, the word *janna* is used in the Quran to mean the place in which plants, fruits and trees grow. Therefore, these gardens conceal those residents within and suffice those residents from going anywhere else for their livelihood and needs.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to give us glad tidings of anything in the Hereafter, He compared it with things we can understand from this world and based these meanings on our knowledge of earthly things. This is because language is composed of words which can only describe established meanings that we can understand. Words do not exist unless their meaning exist first. If the meanings that are referred to, do no exist in this world, what words can help express these meanings for us? It is impossible because the meanings intended do not exist in our realms.

Therefore, the Gardens of Paradise are not the same as the gardens of this world. The gardens we know are only referred to as the closest possible approximation because Allah *Glorified is He* uses words which you can understand. In fact, the Gardens of Paradise contain that which no eye has ever seen, nor any ear has heard nor has any human heart imagined. Allah *Glorified is He* alerted us to this point when He says, ‘The parable of the Paradise which the pious (people) are promised.’ (*Muhammad:* 15) This is not a description of Paradise itself, but is only a parable to bring the meaning closer to your mind.

Take an image from the society in which you live. You need a dwelling in which you can rest and relax after the weary struggles of life. Some people’s dwellings consist of a single room. If they are promoted in their earnings, they might get a dwelling with one room and a hall, or two rooms and a hall. Then, after further promotion, they might get to live in a spacious apartment, followed by a separate house. Further advancement might allow them a garden around the house and so on. It is not only a matter of having a place in which to reside. The more you achieve progress in life, you gain a more enjoyable residence.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and pleasant dwellings' (*at-Tawba:* 72). Essentially, there will be gardens prepared for the righteous people. Additionally, there will be residential dwellings because sometimes, a person may prefer to sit by himself in the midst of his private chambers. At other times, he may choose to interact with other people in beautiful surroundings such as the case on special occasions, when we go out to gardens or orchards to sit together. It is as if the gardens are meant for luxurious comfort, when you wish to enjoy the company of others. On the other hand, the dwellings allow every individual to have a private place where they can sit and enjoy their personal property.

So, the Gardens of Paradise have a similar outline to the worldly gardens. However, they are not made by material means, but rather, are made by the Creator of all means *Glorified is He*. When we go to a wealthy man's house, we might find that the house has a garden which is tended by a skilled gardener. The gardener selects the flowers and trees which suit the wealth of the owner. We may be very impressed with this man-made garden and its scenery that we sometimes do not wish to leave it. If this is our choice in gardens designed by humans, what will the gardens created by Allah *Glorified is He* be like? How entertaining, charming and pleasant will they be?

Allah *Glorified is He* has promised us these Gardens, and He is well able to fulfil what His promise. He prepared gardens for the righteous people which contain sublime perfections and luxuries that no eye has ever seen, nor any ear heard nor any human heart imagined. He has made these Gardens wide and generous, rich with plants and flowers of all kinds, that are pleasant to behold, delicate to our touches and will fill our senses with fragrance. The rivers flowing through these gardens will arise from distant springs to flow beneath them or they will spring right out of the ground from every garden.(1) This exquisite beauty will be made by Allah *Glorified is He* Himself.

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(1) The words 'through which running waters flow' (*tajri min tahtiha*, literally 'flow from under them') occur in The Quran 35 times. In one verse (*at-Tawba*: 100), the Arabic word '*min'*, (which literally means 'from') is not used, so the verse tells us that these rivers 'flow under the gardens'.

In our worldly lives, we see that every river has two banks. The rivers of Paradise will not have banks, but rather, will be held in place in the same way that the sky is held in place so that it does not fall onto the earth.(1) Moreover, you will find that the rivers might flow side by side. There will be a river of milk, a river of honey, a river of water and a river of wine, all flowing side by side without mixing. They are separated from one another because Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who made them, and how glorious His making is!

After all this, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the inhabitants of these gardens will abide in them eternally. He says, '…therein to abide' (*at-Tawba:* 72). We know that a man might have limited enjoyment in this worldly life because it will never be eternal. You might lose your blessings and enjoyments, if you are struck by a financial crisis, for example. You might be removed from your blessings by death. On the other hand, in the Gardens of Paradise, you will enjoy all the perfection and beauty they contain, and Allah *Glorified is He* will increase your fortune therein by making you abide there eternally. The bounty of paradise never leaves you, nor do you leave it. There will be no vicissitudes there, nor any mortality.

In this world, every person's enjoyment is proportional to their powers. People's perceptions of bliss differ according to their environments and social status. If you are a farmer, your greatest pleasure might be to sit on the terrace in front of your house. Another person might enjoy the comfort of a large living-room in his house, while a third person might have several living-rooms. Thus, every person enjoys this world according to their power. In the Hereafter, we will all have enjoyment according to the powers of Allah *Glorified is He*. Our enjoyment will be drawn from a power which is beyond all other powers. Your rewards will depend on Allah's Pleasure with the good you did in this worldly life, and how you followed Allah's way. Therefore, you are the one who determines how great your share of paradise will be. By Allah's Will, your deeds will determine what dwelling you will have and what kinds of bliss you will enjoy there.

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(1) As Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…And [that it is He who] holds the celestial bodies [in their orbits], so that they may not fall upon the earth except by His leave. Verily, Allah is most compassionate towards men, a dispenser of mercy.' (*al-Hajj*: 65)

What threats do you face regarding your earthly pleasures? People face two threats in this world. The first threat is losing their blessings and becoming poor. The second threat is dying while leaving their blessings behind. The blessings of the Hereafter are not subject to either of these threats because they are eternal blessings, and the residents of paradise will abide in their enjoyment. Therefore it will be said, ‘O residents of Paradise! Your life is abiding without death, and bliss without dejection!’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…therein to abide beyond the count of time’ (*at-Tawba:* 72). To ‘abide’ means to remain for a very long time, and ‘beyond the count of time’ means that they will live there infinitely. When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of this abiding, He makes an exemption, saying, ‘But as for those who, by virtue of their past deeds, will have been blest with happiness, they shall live in paradise, therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise.’ (*Hud:* 108)

What sky and earth is Allah *Glorified is He* speaking about here? Is it the sky we can see? We know that the earth upon which we live will be replaced and that the sky will be convulsed.(2) When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the skies and the earth in the context of the Hereafter, He is speaking about the new skies and earth which will replace the old ones, as He says, ‘His promise will be fulfilled on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens, and when (all men) shall appear before Allah, the One Who holds absolute authority over all that exists.’ (*Ibrahim:* 48)

Since the heavens and the earth will be replaced, this means that Allah *Glorified is He* is speaking about the heavens and earth of the Hereafter. Some superficial people say, ‘The Quran says that the believers will remain in paradise as long as the heavens and earth endure. Then, the Quran also says, ‘When the sun is shrouded in darkness, and when the stars lose their light, and when the mountains are made to vanish.’ (*at-Takwir:* 1-3) It is as though the earth upon which we live, and the sky which covers us, will be destroyed on the Day of Resurrection. Why, then, does the Quran say, ‘…therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure…’ (*Hud:* 108)? Where is the eternity in this’? We say to these people, ‘Read the Quran in its entirety, and you will see that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens…’ (*Ibrahim:* 48). So this earth is only a worldly body, as is the sky above it. Both will be replaced by other structures in the Here-after.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra and Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudri narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘A crier will cry out (on the Day of Judgment),”You shall be healthy, and never fall ill! And you shall live, and never die! And you shall be young, and never grow old! And you shall be blissful, and never dejected!” This is what it meant when Allah said, “...And (a voice) will call out unto them, “This is the paradise which you have inherited by virtue of your past deeds!”’ (al-A’raf: 43). Narrated by Muslim (2837), Ahmad (ii. 319) and At-Tirmidhi (3246)*

(2) *As Allah Glorified is He says, ‘It will come to pass on the Day when the skies will be convulsed in (a great) convulsion.’ (at-Tur: 9). This means that the skies will move and melt into one another.*

The earth upon which we live contains constituents of life which are governed by means: you sow, reap the harvest and manufacture your livelihood. As for the Hereafter, your life does not require you to utilise any means, and the moment something comes into your mind in paradise, you will find it materialized in front of you without having to move, plough, sow or engage in any toil. No matter the level of advancement in this world, you can never get to the point where your ideas materialize in front of your eyes in the same instant without any effort. The earth is a place in which you enjoy and gather whatever your skills allow you to. On the other hand, in the Hereafter, you will receive the blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed for you according to your righteousness.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise.’ (*Hud:* 108) It is as if Allah excluded some people from this abiding in the Hereafter. ‘Now as for those who, by their deeds, will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, they shall live in the fire, where they will have nothing but moans and sobs to relieve their pain, abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise.’ (*Hud:* 106-107)

That is, there is a way into paradise and a way into hell. As soon as a person is judged, he goes either to paradise or to hell. If the one judged is a hypocrite or a disbeliever, his eternity will begin from the moment he enters hell and abides therein. If the one judged is a sinful believer, he will go to hell until his sins are expiated and then enter paradise.

So, the ones who enter the hell-fire will be of two kinds. There are those who will spend eternity there, namely the hypocrites and disbelievers. Then there are those who will stay there temporarily, namely the sinful believers. The stay of the sinful believers in hell will be incomplete, compared to that of the disbelievers. As for the believers who have done good deeds, they will enter paradise from the start and abide therein, whilst the sinful believers will only enter paradise after they have first been requited for their sins. Thus, the sinful believers' stay in Paradise will be incomplete. This is due to the period they missed because they will not enter it immediately after the Reckoning. Similarly, their stay in hell-fire because they will not abide therein forever.

Allah *Glorified is He* says pleasant are the '…dwellings in the gardens of perpetual bliss (`Adn)' (*at-Tawba:* 72); the dwellings of the believers in paradise will be in private gardens. The word *`Adn* means 'perpetual bliss'. It is derived from the root *a-d-n*, from which the verb *`Adana* (to reside) is derived. Therefore, they will be in gardens of permanent residence, as there is a difference between staying in a hotel, for example, where your existence is temporary, and residing somewhere forever.

When Allah *Glorified is He* gives believers glad tidings of something, He always wants us to remember that these things are related to His power. Things are always proportional to the power of their maker. When a poor man builds a house, the house will be humble, consisting of mere walls that provide him with cover. However, when a very wealthy man builds a house, it will be a huge palace. If the Creator of all existence makes something, it will be done in accordance with His Omnipotent Power. He is the One Who has power over everything, and everything He intends goes in accordance with His will.

So, to abide in the blissful gardens of paradise is to abide forever, and these gardens contain such pleasure that no resident would ever want to leave them because the Gardens of *`Adn* are the utmost height of paradise, and there exists nothing better than them. A person only desires to leave a place when he has no desire for what it contains. If the contents of the gardens of perpetual bliss could elicit any boredom, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have described them in this way.

For pleasure to be perceived, a source of bliss must be created into existence by Allah *Glorified is He*. There must be an object that gives this pleasure, namely paradise itself. Finally, there must be someone to enjoy this bliss, namely the believers, men and women. Whoever obeys Allah *Glorified is He* desiring to attain His blessings in the Hereafter will receive this pleasure. Further than that, there are believers who obey Allah *Glorified is He* simply for Allah's sake because He alone deserves to be worshipped and obeyed. In the Hereafter, these believers will experience sublime honour, love and pleasure, in their meeting with Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator of all pleasures.

Therefore, every person will get what they worked for. Some people will worship Allah *Glorified is He* more than He has obliged them to striving to constantly meet with Allah *Glorified is He*. They were vigilant in their prayers by night reciting the Quran and praying while others slept, remaining diligent in working to improve their life and the lives of others and doing this solely for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He*. If you join them, you will deserve the highest level of paradise. There, you will be in the company of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah says, 'Some faces on that Day will be bright with happiness, looking up towards their Lord,' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23).

Allah *Glorified is He* will reveal Himself to the residents of paradise at given times, but will be present with those who were especially devoted to Him, at all times.(1) Allah *Glorified is He* will show His presence to the residents of paradise and say, 'O denizens of Paradise!' They will say, 'At Your service and Your pleasure, Lord, and all goodness is in Your hands!' Allah *Glorified is He* will ask, 'Are you pleased?' They will reply, 'and why should we not be pleased, our Lord, when You have given us that which You gave no other of our creatures?' He will say, 'Shall I not give you something even better?' They will say, 'Lord, what could be better than this?' He will say, 'I shall bless you with My pleasant acceptance, such that I shall never be displeased with you after that.'(2)

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(1) *Ibn 'Umar narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The highest ranked among you shall look upon the Face of Allah twice every day.' Narrated by Ahmad (ii. 13) and Abu Nu`aym in the Hilya (v. 87)*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6549) and Muslim (2829) on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri*

Having informed us about delight, bliss and gardens through which rivers flow, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there is something greater than all of this, which is Allah’s goodly acceptance, as He says, ‘but Allah’s goodly acceptance is the greatest [bliss of all] – for this, this is the triumph supreme!’ (*at-Tawba:* 72) The one who works for paradise, Allah admits him to paradise; and the one who works for pleasing Allah Himself will live in Allah’s company

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this noble verse saying, ‘That is the supreme triumph.’ (*at-Tawba:* 72) What does this supreme triumph mean? Many things have been mentioned before these words. There has been mention of gardens through which rivers flow, gardens of perpetual bliss, goodly dwelling and Allah’s goodly acceptance; so which one of them is the supreme triumph? We say that they all constitute supreme triumph. The one who attains to prime bliss of paradise gains a supreme triumph, and the one who attains to goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss gains a supreme triumph and the one who attains to Allah’s goodly acceptance attains the greatest and supreme triumph.

It is noteworthy that the Quran always connects Allah’s divine legislation with the recompense; it does not speak about the recompense in one section and the divine legislation in a separate section. Rather, when it describes paradise and its bliss to us, it guides us to the path which we should follow to get there; and when it describes to us the superior status the believers will enjoin in the Hereafter, it also reminds us of the torment which awaits the hypocrites and the disbelievers so that we shall avoid the path which leads us to hell -- Allah is our refuge.

We therefore find that after telling us of paradise and His goodly acceptance, Allah says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ جَٰهِدِ ٱلۡكُفَّارَ وَٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ وَٱغۡلُظۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡۚ
وَمَأۡوَىٰهُمۡ جَهَنَّمُۖ وَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡمَصِيرُ ٧٣

Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be tough with them. Hell is their final home – an evil destination! [73] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 73)

After telling us of paradise and what it contains which makes the soul yearn for it, Allah *Glorified is He* then reminds us of what we must do to be obedient to Allah. Let me illustrate the point here with an example and Allah is surely beyond comparison. When you say to your son, ‘When you become a doctor, you will have a large clinic and then a hospital’, and you tell him of all the good things he can expect in the future, and then you remind him of how it is essential that he study hard so that he can get what he hopes for. By doing this, you attract him to the goal he can attain, and then you change focus to attract him to the means he must utilise to reach this goal.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be tough with them.’ (*at-Tawba:* 73) Allah *the Exalted* singles out His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with privilege and glorification by not calling him by his name, and rather saying, ‘O Prophet’, elsewhere saying, ‘O Messenger’.(1)

As for all other messengers and prophets of Allah, He calls them with their very names such as Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* all, as in (*al-Baqara:* 35, 11: 48, 37: 104-105, 20: 12 and *al-Ma‘ida*: 116). Allah *Glorified is He* called every messenger by his name, except for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whom He called by saying, ‘O Prophet’ or ‘O Messenger’ as a token of honour and appreciation to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites.(2) We know that Allah does not intervene by sending a messenger to earth unless society has become completely corrupted; and we know that the human soul was made to instinctively love goodness. Therefore, if one is not driven by one’s whims, one does what is good and loves it. On the contrary, when one is driven by one’s own whim, it will veil him from goodness and open the doors of evil to him. A person might obey his own whim in some way and then come to his senses and reproach himself for what he has done; this is the ‘self-reproaching soul’ which reproaches one for doing sin and incites him to do good. But there is also a soul in which all the impulses to goodness have been suppressed so that it does evil without regret, and this soul becomes so evil that it turns into the ‘soul which enjoins evil’. It does not suffice itself with doing evil, but rather, it commands and attracts others to do evil. There are different categories of the human soul: there is the soul which finds peace in following Allah’s Way and obeying Him; this is the ‘soul at peace’, to which Allah *Glorified is He* gives glad tidings that it will be admitted to paradise along with Allah’s true worshippers. (*al-Fajr:* 27-29) If the ‘soul at peace’ and the ‘self-reproaching soul’ exist, then the society is doing well because the soul at peace obeys and enjoins obedience, and the self-reproaching soul reproaches itself for sinning. Every believer has a weak point, and so if a believer weakens, his fellow believer rushes to reproach him for his weakness and correct his conduct. As weak points differ from person to person, we find that society is on the right track when there are those who point out evils and forbid them. Allah *Glorified is He* describes those people as those who believe in Him, do good and cooperate with one another for prevailing truth and show patience in this respect. (*al-’Asr:* 3)

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(1) In the Quran, Allah called His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the phrase ‘O Prophet’ 13 times, and twice with the phrase ‘O Messenger’.

(2) *Al-Qurtubi quotes Ibn `Abbas as saying, commenting on this verse, ‘This is a command for the disbelievers to be fought with the sword, and the hypocrites to be fought with the tongue, with rebuke and resoluteness. (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, vol. 4, p. 3129).*

But when all souls become corrupt so that there is no one who enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong and, on the contrary, you find people who enjoin what is wrong and forbid what is right, at this point Allah *Glorified is He* intervenes to return truth to its rightful position in the world.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not intervene when there exist souls at peace who adhere to Allah’s way and enjoin obedience, or self-reproaching souls, whether individually or collectively, who reproach and upbraid those who commit sin. But when society becomes completely steeped in corruption so that there is no longer anyone who enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong and the few good people who remain are unable to do anything, the messengers of Allah come to bring back Allah’s Way so that the life of society will be returned to order.

When one of Allah’s Messengers comes, he knows that he has only been sent because corruption has filled the world and that the corrupt people are the majority and enjoy all the influence and power benefitting from the corruption and deviance which has saturated society. When these people are faced with the call of truth, they will not simply stand aside and make way for it, but they will wage war against whoever conveys the message of truth to them. In such a case, the messenger must stand firm in their faces, and strive against them.

The verb *jahada* (to strive hard) is in the morphological form *fa`ala* which implies a reciprocity, like the word *sharaka* which means to share with someone, or the word *qatala* which means to fight with someone. So, there must be reciprocity between the messenger and his followers on one side, and the leaders of disbelief and corruption in society on the other.

The messenger and those who believe in his teachings must be prepared to be harmed by those who do not believe in these teachings; for the disbelievers benefit from the corruption that exists. It is natural then that, for this benefit to continue, the disbelievers must stand in the way of those who convey the teachings of Allah *Glorified is He* and resist them to ensure the preservation of the state of affairs which allows their falsehood to remain unchecked. Allah *Glorified is He* alerts His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* here of the reality of those disbelievers who benefit from corruption, and tells him that they will wage war against him. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* does not say to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Unite with them’, but rather, He said, ‘Strive hard against the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites’ (*at-Tawba:* 73). That is, be firm against them in battle. There are many Quranic verses in which Allah commands His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers to have steadfast patience in battle, for to strive means to confront, and therefore Allah *Glorified is He* commands people to show patience.

But suppose that my enemy is also patient in battle: if I am patient and my enemy is also patient, then we will be equal. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* orders the believers to be more steadfast than the others. (*Al-‘Imran:* 200) This means that if your enemy confronts you with patience, then your patience must be even stronger than his so that you defeat him with patience and fortitude. Allah orders his Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to stand patiently against the disbelievers and hypocrites with those who believe in his message at his side. The forces of faith must confront the forces of disbelief and hypocrisy. A disbeliever is the one who denies faith with his heart and announces it as much with his tongue, whilst the hypocrite is the one who disbelieves in his heart but claims to be a believer and this is the one of whom we must be especially cautious, for as we do not know his identity we cannot guard against his evil as we can with the disbeliever. A hypocrite might backstab us, whilst we trust him and feel secure with him and this makes the blow he can strike deadlier.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that the enmity he will face while conveying Allah’s teachings will come from two categories of people: disbelievers and hypocrites. The hypocrite is the difficult enemy because he mixes with us while we are unaware of his reality. Despite this, hypocrisy is a powerful proof of the truth of Allah’s teachings because only the strong are infiltrated hypocritically; no one seeks to infiltrate the weak.

That is why there were no hypocrites around Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was still in Mecca before his emigration to Medina. In Mecca, Muslims were a weak minority and were subjected to torment and persecution. There was nothing to attract anyone to infiltrate them because there would have been nothing to gain from this infiltration, but rather, anyone who sympathised with them would have been subjected to the same torment and persecution. When a hypocrite acts as though he believes in something which he does not, he does this to gain some type of personal benefit for himself.

Things were different after Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated to Medina. Hypocrites emerged after Islam had gained its own state and power. At this point, the hypocrites falsely claimed to have faith to use the power of the Muslims to their own ends. So, hypocrisy is a defect in the hypocrite, but at the same time it is a proof of the power of the believer whom the hypocrite dissembles.

We observe that Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the disbelievers before the hypocrites in this verse, whilst in other verses He mentions the hypocrites first.(1) As we know, the conflict with the disbelievers came first. In the early years of Prophet Muhammad’s call to Islam, there were no hypocrites as there were only believers and disbelievers. The struggle against the disbelievers came about in stages, not all at once. The first stage of the struggle was to struggle with arguments; for in the beginning, the believers were a weak minority without the power to face such a large number of disbelievers. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would present the teachings of the faith with arguments to convince the mind, that perhaps some minds would wake up to the truth and believe in Allah's teachings. He would ask them, for example: Who created the heavens and the earth?

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(1) Such as (*an-Nisa’:* 140 and *at-Tawba*: 86).

When a disbeliever pondered this in his mind, he found that no one claimed – or could claim – that he created the heavens and the earth, so the only possible answer is that it is Allah who created them.(1) Why? This is because man, by nature, may claim that he owns anything, even if it is not his, but he never denies ownership of what is rightfully his. An inventor or manufacturer of anything will never deny that he invented it or made it, but rather, he wants the whole world to know that he invented it or made it. Therefore, you cannot find anything beneficial in the world, however trivial it is, save that we know its history where it came from and who invented it, discovered it or made it. Examples of this are what we studied in school about the discoverer of electricity, the inventor of the first electric light bulb, the one who developed this science and likewise the ones who invented the aeroplane and we know about how the notion of flight began with Abbas ibn Firnas(2) who attempted to fly using large wings, which was the beginning.

So, for everything beneficial in the world, we know who discovered, made or invented it. If this is true for man's limited creations, then what about the universe itself? When we ask who made the sun, does not its maker deserve to be known to us, especially given that we know who invented the electric light bulb and brought it into our lives?

We have been greatly celebrating the inventor of the electric lamp which lights a small space for a period of time and large factories were built to produce this lamp, then should we not know who made the sun which lights half of earth all at once? This sun, which has been shining for millions of years without ever once going out and which has never required any maintenance in all this time, must have had a maker whose strength and power commensurate with this miracle which we see, whether with respect to its light, the characteristics of this light or the precision of its design. The sun never rises even a second late or a second early. Its maker must have enough power to produce such a magnificent creation.

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(1) This is clearly stated in (*Luqman*: 25).

(2) 'Abbas Abu Al-Qasim ibn Firnas ibn Wirdas Al-Takurini, also known as 'Abbas ibn Firnas, was an Andalusian polymath: an inventor, physician, chemist, engineer, Andalusian musician and Arabic poet (Wikipedia).

So, when a messenger comes and tells us that it is Allah who created the sun, then this is either true, in which case we must all accept that Allah is the Creator and the Maker; or otherwise it is not true, in which case we say: why did not someone else claim to have created it?

However, the precision and miraculous nature of creation, which no human power can ever emulate either individually or collectively, proves that it could have been no one other than Allah *Glorified is He* who created it.(1) Until someone else comes and claims that he created the sun – and no one ever will, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only Creator of the universe and no one can dispute this.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to people that the Creator of the earth, the sun, the heavens and the universe is Allah *Glorified is He* no one else claimed that he had created any of this. This confirms that what the Prophet has said is true and it also confirms that the One Who made this universe has infinite strength and infinite power and, therefore, it is more proper to worship Him than to worship the statues and Gods which the idolaters worship.

Afterwards, Allah informs His Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* to logically question them: Have you yourselves been created from nothing or have they created themselves? (*at-Tur:* 35)

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(1) Nimrod, King of Shinar, claimed that he was Allah and argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not ask him to produce something similar to the sun, but he challenged him to make it only rise from the west instead of east, but Nimrod failed. (*al-Baqara*: 258)

If the answer is, 'neither one nor the other', then there must have been a Creator and a Maker. Then if a messenger comes and tells us that the universe's Creator and our Creator is Allah, then we must believe him because no one else has claimed, nor could anyone ever claim, to have created this universe or to have created himself. Let us draw a logical example to illustrate this point. If we all sit together somewhere and then after we leave, a wallet is found and the host asks all those who were present about it. If they all say it is not their wallet except for one person, this means that the wallet belongs to him because he is the only one who claimed this and no one disputed it.

When it comes to the creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of man, no one would dare to dispute Allah *Glorified is He* and claim that he created them. So, it is indisputably true that Allah is the Creator. This is the struggle of argumentation which uses logic to convince those who have rational intellects, or those who hear and employ their minds. Having proved that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator and the Originator, we may then ask: Who is best placed to give man a way of guidance for life on earth? We must all know that the one best placed to give man a way of guidance on earth is his Creator and Originator, just as we are sure that the manufacturer of any device is the one best suited to give the instructions for its use since he knows best what is good for it and what is bad for it.

For example, when one's wristwatch malfunctions, one brings it to a watch mender and calls for a refrigerator repairman if one's refrigerator breaks down. We always call on the experts who have studied all the details of how to repair particular devices and every repairman refers to the maintenance manual written by the device's manufacturer in which he specified what is good for it and what is bad for it. One never calls for a carpenter to repair a television.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has given us a way of guidance, we must follow it because He is the Originator of this universe and our Originator as well; He knows what is good and what is bad for us.

If the struggle of argumentation fails, Allah *Glorified is He* then orders, 'And be tough with them.' (*at-Tawba:* 73) Why should Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* be tough with them? He should be tough to clarify the fate that awaits them. As disbelievers are keen on enjoying all pleasures of this worldly life and fear lest they may miss them, since they do not believe in the Hereafter, Allah orders His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to warn them of the Hereafter and of the torment that awaits them, saying to them: You are not immortal in this world, and there awaits you in the Hereafter great horror.

On the contrary, the believers know that this worldly life will be followed by a Hereafter and a Paradise, which is why we find that a believer said to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at one battle, ‘Invoke Allah for me that I be martyred, O Messenger of Allah!’, and another said, ‘Is there nought between me and Paradise save that I fight these people and they kill me?’ The Messenger of Allah told him that indeed this was so, whereupon the man threw aside the dates he had been eating and rushed into the battle and was martyred. This is the true meaning of faith. Had the believing man not been completely certain that he would go on to bliss beyond all bliss, he would not have rushed to battle in search of martyrdom. As believers welcome martyrdom with this bravery, their deepest souls are filled with pure faith and obedience to Allah’s commands. Their absolute conviction that Paradise exists encourages them to seek martyrdom. On the other hand, we know that the fate of the disbelievers is hell. This is how we understand Allah’s words, ‘And be tough with them’ (*at-Tawba:* 73), that is, warn them of the terrible torment that awaits them, that they might come to their senses. An Arab poet says:

Have patience, and if it succeeds not, then give a threat;
And if it succeeds not, then to implement it will succeed.
Nothing less than the sharp edge of a sword
Will straighten the neck of those who stray.
This is the cure for every ignoramus’ sickness,
And the other is the cure for the intelligent man’s disease.

So, there are those who only need logical arguments to come to believe. But to those who still do not believe we say, ‘Allow the teachings of the truth to be proclaimed to all people and you are free to choose whether to believe or not. Moreover, if you want to live within the Islamic community, then you are welcome, whether you believe or not, for Allah *Glorified is He* states clearly in the Quran that people are given free will either to believe or disbelieve in Prophet Muhammad'. (*al-Kahf:* 29)

Know that it is necessary that all those who embrace Islam be convinced with it and convinced that it is the true religion. Those who do not believe but still live in the Islamic community have complete freedom to follow their own beliefs, but the public life must be in accordance with Allah's way. As long as the rites of Islam and its teaching are prevalent in the community, then let whoever wants to believe, let him believe and whoever wants to disbelieve, let him disbelieve.

Allah is man's Creator and the One Who made him successor on earth. Therefore, He is protective of His creatures. It is just as though you take an artwork and spoil it in the presence of the one who crafted it. In this case, this person will get profoundly irritated and angry and will be quick to punish you.

When Allah *Glorified is He* sees someone corrupting His creation and trying to break it, Allah *Glorified is He* is jealously protective of His creation, for Allah created us with free will and for the Reckoning to be fair, Allah's Message shall be honestly and intact communicated to all people. When the call is conveyed, then Prophet Muhammad's mission comes to an end, and it is then the turn of the individual to choose whether to believe or not. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to strive against the disbelievers and hypocrites. Allah ordered him to begin with proofs and arguments and if proofs do not work and disbelievers tried to oppose the call militarily, then they shall be prevented to do so militarily. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* orders His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to be tough with them and not be lenient with them because lenience may tempt them to sin. For example, if someone commits theft and you let him go unpunished, this might tempt him, and even others, to steal, but to punish the crime, even once, is a deterrent and a protection for all society. That is why we find that punishing murder with execution prevents further murder; when you take a murderer and execute him publicly, this deters other people from considering murder or committing it. So, by punishing, we protect society from becoming inundated with crime.

Some superficial people may say, ‘Does a thief really deserve to have his hand amputated’? We say to them, ‘Indeed yes, because amputating one person’s hand protects society from the crime of theft. The goal of this action is not then that a hand be amputated but rather that no one steals’. When the person is found guilty of committing the crime and the punishment is set for him, beware of allowing mercy to prevent you from implementing the punishment, for if you succumb to mercy at this point, you are encouraging others to commit the crime. That is why after He has clearly stated the punishment of a fornicator(1), he orders believers not to let compassion with them keep you from carrying out the punishment set out by Allah *Glorified is He*. (*an-Nur:* 2)

Despite this, the debate about punishments in Islam continues unabated.(2) We say to those who engage in such debate: Is there any society in which there is no criminalisation or punishment? Consider even the non-religious societies, do they not have crimes and punishments? Every society protects itself by stipulating the actions that are deemed criminal and assigning punishments for them. There can be no punishment without criminalisation, and no criminalisation without a text.

So, every state and every society must have punishments, otherwise life would become chaotic and it would be impossible to live in security. If even the ruler of any small nation establishes laws of crime and punishment, although he does not own that which he rules, would not Allah, Who is the real Ruler, also stipulate the actions He deems to be crimes and legislate appropriate punishments for these crimes. If Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained the amputation of the hand, which He Himself has created, He willed this to prevent millions of hands from seizing the property of others.

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(1) *The punishment of an unmarried fornicator is to be flogged one hundred lashes. As for a married adulterer, his punishment is to be stoned to death. `Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, ‘Allah sent His Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him with the truth and revealed to him the Book, the Quran. Among the revealed verses were the verses of stoning to death which we recited and understood. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him carried out stoning to death and so did we. I fear that people may come after the passage of time and say, ‘we find no mention of stoning to death in the Book of Allah and, in this way, they will violate an obligation. Stoning to death is stated in the Book of Allah as a punishment for the married person who is proven to have committed adultery or due to pregnancy outside the limits of lawful marriage or confession.’ Narratedby Malik in his Al-Muwatta’, vol. 2, p. 823*

(2) The Quran and *Sunna* have affirmed that there are certain specific punishments for certain specific crimes, namely: Fornication, false accusations of fornication, stealing, (public) drunkenness, unjust war, apostasy and public licentiousness. The purpose of this is to protect, in society, the sanctity of religion, sanity, property, honour and life. Each one of these crimes must be proven according to exacting standards before they may be punished. Details of this may be found in the relevant sections of the works of jurisprudence.

Therefore, there must not be too long interval between the time where a crime occurs and the implementation of the punishment. This is because when the process of litigation and judicial proceedings take a very long time, this places people into great hardship and leads the people to forget all about the crime and begin to feel pity and mercy for the criminal. Yet, if the punishment were to be implemented right after the crime was committed, no one would seek to be lenient with the criminal.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah's saying, 'Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be tough with them. Hell is their final home– an evil destination!' (*at-Tawba:* 73) We have seen how the disbelievers should be struggled against, but how should we struggle against the hypocrites when they act as though they are believers?

We say that to strive against them means to punish them for their sins.(1) The hypocrites would commit sins and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would then ask them about this and they would deny it, so he would leave them. Allah *Glorified is He* here made it clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: Be tough with them if they commit sin. In this chapter of *at-Tawba*, Allah states that the hypocrites swore false oaths about many things, as in (*at-Tawba:* 56, 62 and 74) and in (*al-Mujadala:* 14). It is as though every time they swore an oath, Prophet Muhammad *peace and*

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(1) *Al-Hasan Al-Basri said that this verse means, 'Strive against the hypocrites by inflicting prescribed legal punishments on them and by rebuking them. Most of those who were punished by the prescribed legal punishments were hypocrites.' Abu Bakr ibn Al-`Arabi responded to this by saying that, on the contrary, the sinner is not a hypocrite. Rather, a hypocrite is the one who conceals hypocrisy, not judged according to the sins that one may visibly commit. Moreover, the stories of those who were punished by the prescribed legal punishments (at the time of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him) clearly show that they were not hypocrites. See Al-Qurtubi's exegesis (vol. 4, 3129).*

blessings be upon him believed them and pardoned them, so Allah exposed them as liars and told His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to be adamant about punishing them. But did the Messenger of Allah’s adamant stance with them absolve them from punishment in the Hereafter? We say no, as they must be treated adamantly in this worldly life to preserve the security of life’s motions and for every hypocrite to know that he is exposed before Allah, but this does not absolve him from punishment in the Hereafter.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Hell is their final home– an evil destination!’ (*at-Tawba:* 73) It is possible that any punishment might not actually be carried out in full as it is scheduled, since the one who punishes might choose to forgive, or a person might be released before his sentence is completed for medical grounds, or for having served three-quarters of his sentence or the like. But there will be no release from the punishment of the hypocrites and this is a means of making them fear it, for when one becomes certain that the punishment will be eternal, one will fear to commit the crime.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then gives us another example of how the hypocrites swore false oaths, saying:

يَحۡلِفُونَ بِٱللَّهِ مَا قَالُواْ وَلَقَدۡ قَالُواْ كَلِمَةَ ٱلۡكُفۡرِ وَكَفَرُواْ بَعۡدَ إِسۡلَٰمِهِمۡ وَهَمُّواْ بِمَا لَمۡ
يَنَالُواْۚ وَمَا نَقَمُوٓاْ إِلَّآ أَنۡ أَغۡنَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥ مِن فَضۡلِهِۦۚ فَإِن يَتُوبُواْ يَكُ خَيۡرٗا لَّهُمۡۖ وَإِن يَتَوَلَّوۡاْ
يُعَذِّبۡهُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۚ وَمَا لَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مِن وَلِيّٖ وَلَا نَصِيرٖ ﴿٧٤﴾

They swear by God that they did not, but they certainly did speak words of defiance and became defiant after having submitted; they tried to do something, though they did not achieve it,— being spiteful was their only response to God and His Messenger enriching them out of His bounty. They would be better off turning back [to God]: if they turn away, God will punish them in this world and the Hereafter, and there will be no one on earth to protect or help them [74] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 74)

In this noble verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us of the series of false oaths that the hypocrites swore. They swore that they had said nothing wrong, and making Allah the object of their oath, even though they had spoken words of disbelief, and had disbelieved after having professed with their tongues to have accepted Islam, and this was only a claim.

There is a story behind this noble verse which took place during the events of the Battle of Tabuk in which the Muslims went to fight the Byzantines. This was the first battle between the Muslims and non-Arabs. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called on the believers to fight at a time of intense heat; a time when everyone preferred to sit in private gardens beneath the palm-trees in the clement breeze and no one liked to come out from under the shade.

When Prophet Muhammad called on the believers to strive in Allah's Cause and to set out to fight the Byzantines, the hypocrites proffered false excuses in order not to join fighting. The Quran continued to be revealed with words concerning those who did not join the army for two whole months. A man named Al-Julas ibn Suwayd said, 'By Allah, if what Muhammad says about those who stayed home from the battle is true, then we are worse than donkeys!' Upon hearing this, `Amir ibn Qays *Al-Ansari Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Indeed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke truly, and you are worse than donkeys!' Upon this a group of hypocrites assaulted `Amir *Allah be pleased with him* because Al-Julas ibn Suwayd was a leader among his people. Thereafter, `Amir *Allah be pleased with him* went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him what had happened, so the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* sent for Ibn Suwayd and asked him about it, but the latter swore by Allah that what `Amir *Allah be pleased with him* said had never happened. Since he had sworn by Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left him unpunished. At this point, `Amir *Allah be pleased with him* raised his hands towards the sky and said, 'O Allah, I ask you to reveal unto Your servant and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a confirmation of who is telling the truth (in this matter), and who is lying!' Upon hearing this, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Amen'(1). As soon they (Prophet Muhammad and `Amir) ended their supplications, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the verse under discussion which reads, 'They swear by Allah that they did not, but they certainly did speak words of defiance and became defiant after having submitted; they tried to do something, though they did not achieve it.' (*at-Tawba:* 74) In this way, this noble verse gave the final word on the matter and revealed who was telling the truth and who was lying regarding what `Amir ibn Qays *Allah be pleased with him* said, and what al-Julas had denied.

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(1) See the exegesis of Ibn Kathir, (vol. 2, pp. 371-373).

Furthermore, the noble verse went even further than that part of the incident that was known and mentioned something that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had not been told. Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘They tried to do something, though they did not achieve it.’ This was because Allah *Glorified is He* wanted the hypocrites to know that He would always tell His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* what they concealed. Had the verse only been concerned with the event of the false oath, the hypocrites would have said, ‘Muhammad knows nothing more than what `Amir has told him’. But there were things they said that `Amir did not hear such as the plot they developed in order to assassinate Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as he passed through Al-`Aqaba, which is a group of tall rocks that impeded a path. People used to traverse these rocks either by passing through tunnels under them or by climbing on top of them and then down the other side.

The hypocrites planned to push Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the top of the rocks so that he would fall into the valley.(1) As Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman became aware of the plot as he walked behind Prophet Muhammad’s camel, the hypocrites fled. Thus, they did not get what they wanted, just as they did not get what they wanted when Prophet Muhammad

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(1) *There were twelve men who died whilst waging war against Allah and His Messenger. Hudhyfa ibn Al-Yaman said, ‘I was holding the reins of Prophet Muhammad’s camel and leading it, and `Ammar was driving it. When we arrived at Al-‘Aqaba, we found twelve men, mounted and waiting to confront him. I told Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him that they were there, and he called out to them, whereupon they turned and fled. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to us, “Do you know who they were?” “No, O Messenger of Allah”, we said, ‘their faces were veiled, but we recognised their mounts.’ He said, “They shall be hypocrites until the Day of Resurrection. Do you know what they meant to do?” ‘No’, we said. “They meant to fall upon The Messenger of Allah at Al- `Aqaba,” he said, “and cast him from it.” ‘O Messenger of Allah,’ we said, ‘will you not send word to their kinsmen that each tribe must send you their heads?” “No,” he said, “for I would hate for the Arabs to say to one another that Muhammad fought alongside people, and then when Allah gave him victory by means of them he set about killing them.” Then he said, “O Allah, send (Dabila) upon them!” We said, ‘What is the (Dabila), O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “A burning flame that strikes a man’s heartstrings and kills him.” Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in (Dala’il An-Nubuwwa) (v. 5, pp. 260-261)*

peace and blessings be upon him emigrated to Medina when they had been planning to make `Abdullah ibn Ubayy their king, but the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not allow them to do so.

It is also said that they plotted to kill `Amir ibn Qays *Allah be pleased with him* because he told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what Al-Julas ibn Suwayd had said, but they were unable to do so.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'being spiteful was their only response to Allah and His Messenger enriching them out of His bounty.' (*at-Tawba:* 74) As we know, richness is not something to criticise. Therefore, the fact that they criticize it here showcases their corrupted natures and unfair judgements, for the wealth and security given to them was not a flaw which could be criticised, but rather, it naturally should have inspired love and self-sacrifice for the sake of faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* is clarifying to them: Why do you put Muhammad down? What do you hate about him? Do you hate that he has brought you honour and wealth?

Before Prophet Muhammad's emigration, the ones who later hated to see him come to Medina were paupers who owned nothing, but after they dissembled and pretended to enter Islam, they took battle-spoils and Allah enriched them.(1) Indeed, when a servant of Al-Julas ibn Suwayd was killed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave him an indemnity of twelve thousand dirhams. So, because of him *peace and blessings be upon him* everyone was enriched. Is this something they should have hated? Of course not, but it shows how corrupt their natures were and how unjust their thinking was. As long as Allah *Glorified is He* enriched them by sending them His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* it was not right for them to put the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* down on this account, but rather, they should have praised him for it and been keen to believe in him and succour him.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says 'out of His bounty', this draws our attention to the rhetorical style of the Noble Quran in this verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says,

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(1) *Al-Kalbi said, 'Before Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him came they lived a meagre existence; neither mounting horses nor plundering spoils. Yet, once Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him came to them, they were enriched with battle-spoils.' Related by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis (vol. 4, p. 3132)*

'Allah… and His Messenger' (in the Arabic these words directly follow one another: *Allah wa Rasuluhu*); the usual human way to proceed, according to the rules of Arabic, would have been to say, 'out of their bounty, but He says, 'out of His bounty' because Allah cannot be paired with anyone else, even with Muhammad ibn `Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard a man giving a sermon and saying, 'Whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will be saved, and whosoever disobeys them will be damned', Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'How ill-fit are you to preach to the people!' This is because the preacher used the plural pronoun 'they' to refer to Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and this signifies some sort of equality.

Upon this the preacher stopped and said, 'what then should I say, O Messenger of Allah?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Say, "And whosoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger will be damned."'(1) Do not say, 'disobeys them and do not place Allah in a plural or a dual with anyone else.' That is why we find that the Glorious Quran did not say, 'Allah and His Messenger enriched them out of their bounty', but rather 'out of His bounty' because there is only one source of bounty. Although Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has bounty, its original source is the bounty of Allah. In any case, it is not permissible to mention or set someone equal to Allah. That is why we find that the Glorious Quran mentions the singular pronoun referring to Allah Alone, after mentioning both Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. (*at-Tawba:* 62).

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the singular pronoun to refer to His pleasure because Allah's Pleasure and the Prophet Muhammad's pleasure intersect; anything that pleases Allah shall please Prophet Muhammad. This clearly indicates that when Allah's Name is mentioned, it must not be grouped with anyone else in a pronoun.

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(1) *The like of it is what is narrated on the authority of `Udayy ibn Hatim that while a person was giving a sermon in the presence of Prophet Muhammad, he said, 'Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will be guided and whoever disobeys them will be astray.' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'How ill-fit are you to preach to the people! But rather say, 'and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger will go astray'. It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (870), Ahmad (4/256, 379) and Abu Dawud (1099).*

After exposing the hypocrites and what is in their hearts, Allah *Glorified is He* did not completely deny any chance of attaining His Mercy; for He is Merciful with His servants and therefore opens for them the door to repentance by saying, 'They would be better off turning back [to Allah].' Opening the door to repentance is a mercy and to people go with their lives; for had Allah closed the door to repentance, everyone who commits a sin would be inevitably destined for hell and once a man knows he is destined for the torment of hell no matter what good he may do, he would inevitably steep himself in sin and increase his evildoing. It would make no difference whether he commits one sin or a whole legion of sins. But if a man who sins knows that the door to repentance is open, he will not steep himself in sin. Moreover, it is the society which really suffers from sins and evil acts committed by a person. If there is, for example, a dangerous thief, the whole of society suffers from his acts of theft and if there is a mass murderer, the ones who suffer from his crimes are the members of society whom he murders.

So, opening the door to repentance is a mercy for all society because it does not compel the criminal to steep himself in his crimes. If you examine this noble verse, you see that after Allah *Glorified is He* made clear the truth and told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers about things which the hypocrites had been concealing, He then opened the door to repentance for the hypocrites. Upon this, Al-Julas ibn Suwayd, the then leader of the hypocrites, said, 'O Messenger of Allah, as Allah gives me a chance to repent, then I swear by Allah that I did say what `Amir told you about me. Surely, `Amir told the truth about me.' Al-Julas ibn Suwayd repented and became a true Muslim.(1)

As for those to whom Allah gives the chance to repent, but they refuse it, He, says of them, 'If they turn away, Allah will punish them in this world and the Hereafter, and there will be no one on earth to protect or help them.' (*at-Tawba:* 74). According to this verse, the requital of those who refuse to repent and admit their wrongs will be grievous suffering not only in the Hereafter but also in this worldly life. The suffering in this world will be either to be killed or to be exposed and the suffering in the Hereafter will be to inhabit the lowest level of hell.

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(1) See Ibn Hajar Al-`Asqalani's *Al-`Isaba*, biography no. 1172.

But some people might misunderstand Allah’s saying, ‘And there will be no one on earth to protect or help them.’ as meaning that this suffering only applies to this worldly life, but the fact of the matter is that there is an earth in this world and there will be another earth in the next world too; the earth of the Resurrection, as Allah clearly indicates in (*Ibrahim:* 48), that the earth shall be changed into another earth and so shall the heavens. The word ‘earth’ gives us two images, one applying to this world and the other to the Hereafter.

Moreover, this statement of Allah explains to us that the word *wali* (to protect or help) means the one who is close to you so that you can seek his aid at times of hardship and peril. At such times, you only seek the aid of one in whose succour you have hope, or one who is stronger than you. As for the one who gives succour (*nasr*), he is the one from whom you seek help. He might be distant from you and have no close connection with you. So, neither the one who is close to you, nor the stranger from whom you seek aid and succour will be able to do anything for you; for there is no salvation for the hypocrite or the disbeliever from Allah’s punishment.

Allah *Glorified is He* then presents us with another appearance of hypocrisy, saying:

وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ عَـٰهَدَ ٱللَّهَ لَئِنْ ءَاتَىٰنَا مِن فَضْلِهِۦ
لَنَصَّدَّقَنَّ وَلَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلصَّـٰلِحِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

There are some among them who pledged themselves
to God, saying, ‘If God gives us some of His bounty,
we shall certainly give alms and be righteous’ [75]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 75)

This verse states that from among the hypocrites of whose practices Allah has presented many times in this chapter. The exegetes and narrators have differed in their ascription of who exactly is meant by the words, ‘there are some among them who pledged themselves to Allah'. Some of them say he was Tha`laba ibn Hatib, others say he was Mu`attib ibn Qushayr, others say that it was Al-Jadd ibn Qays and others that it was Hatib ibn Abu Balta`a. The verse could possibly refer to any one of these because Allah *Glorified is He* refers to them in the following verse using the plural pronoun saying, 'Yet when He did give them some of His bounty, they became mean and turned obstinately away.' (*at-Tawba:* 76).

So, as the pronoun is plural, then all these narrations could conceivably be correct since the verse refers to several people. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'There are some among them who pledged themselves to Allah', one may ask: how could the hypocrites have made a pact (*`ahd*) with Allah? We say that these hypocrites were treated according to what they claimed with their tongues; they claimed to have embraced Islam and one of them would say, 'I vow to Allah that I will do such-and-such', just as they might attend the prayer and do their best to get a place in the first row. Did their hypocrisy prevent them from performing the outward actions of the prayer? They were not prevented by anyone. In the same way, when they made vows to Allah they did so with their tongues alone.

The occasion of the revelation of this verse(1) is as follows. A poor man from among the people of *Al-`Ansar* (the Helpers) went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am desperately poor, so pray to Allah for me that He may give my wealth.' Out of his great sagacity, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'A little for which you give thanks to Allah is better than a lot which you cannot manage.' But the man insisted, saying, 'Pray to Allah that He may allow me to get rich', so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for him and Allah gave him wealth.

Someone might ask: How could Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* assent to pray for a hypocrite? And if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only prayed for him to please him, then how could Allah answer His Prophet's prayer for a hypocrite? We say: Perhaps it was because the hypocrite wanted to test if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truly a divine messenger by seeing whether Allah would answer his prayer or not.

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(1) The details of the narration of this story were already given above on the commentary on the verse (*at-Tawba*: 53).

When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made his supplication, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to teach this hypocrite that indeed he truly was the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and if he prayed for anyone Allah would answer the prayer, so this was for the sake of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for Tha`laba, Al-Jadd ibn Qays or for Hatib ibn Abu Balta`a, Allah answered the prayer of His Messenger and gave the one who asked for the prayer abundant wealth. It is narrated that Tha`laba's wealth increased until his sheep bred so much that the streets of Medina were too small to keep them all, so he took them into the mountains and to the open desert and filled it. His wealth first distracted him from the communal prayer so that he would only attend the Friday prayer. When his wealth increased even more, it also kept him from attending the Friday prayer. This confirms Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* prediction for the man. So, all of this happened to prove to them the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he could show them how absurd it was that they falsely claimed to be Muslims.

After all this happened, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked after the man and he was told that he was out in the valley, preoccupied with his wealth. Prophet Muhammad said, 'Woe betide Tha`laba!' and he sent a charity-collector to him;(1) for Tha`laba had made a vow to Allah, and said, 'If Allah gives us some of His bounty, we shall certainly give alms.' (*at-Tawba:* 75)

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(1) This is because when the Tha`laba made his vow to give charity, there was not obligation for Muslims to give charity, but rather, they were only commended to do so. (*at-Tawba:* 103). Afterwards, Allah made it obligatory on Muslims to give *zakat* (obligatory alms giving). Nevertheless, Tha`laba refused to pay *zakat.* Allah relates to us in (*al-Baqara*: 246), a similar account which happened to the children of Israel. They called upon their messenger to assign for them a king who would lead them in fighting for the sake of Allah, but when their demand was accepted and fighting was made obligatory upon them, they turned away and disobeyed Allah's Order.

The charity-collector went to him and said, ‘Give up the charity which Allah has ordained you should give from your wealth.’ He said, ‘Is this like the non-Muslim poll-tax?’(1) The collector reminded him, ‘You are the one who vowed that if you were given wealth, you would spend in charity and be righteous. Why do you not fulfil your vow?’ Tha`laba said to the collector, ‘Leave me until I decide what to do.’

When the charity-collector returned to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him about Tha`laba’s response, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Woe betide Tha‘laba!’ When Tha`laba knew that a Quranic verse had been revealed about him, he became severely worried and rushed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and presented him the share of *zakat* due on him, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not accept it. He began to beseech him again and again to accept it, but the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would not accept it from him. In doing this, the Prophet meant to affirm that Allah and the poor people are in no need of his wealth.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, Tha`laba brought all of the shares of *zakat* due on him to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* but Abu Bakr said, ‘It is not fitting that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refuses something and Abu Bakr accepts it.’ When Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* died he presented it to `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who said the same thing Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* had said. Afterwards, he came to present it to `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* but he died before he reached him.

The Arabic article *la`in* as well as the letter *lam* which occur in the beginning of the word *lanasaddaqan* in the Quranic verse (*al-A’raf:* 75) signify that he made an oath to give obligatory alms giving and charity and be righteous should Allah grant him wealth.

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(1) The non-Muslim poll-tax (*jizya*) is a tax levied on the people of the Book who live under the protection of the Muslims. It is levied on the people of the Book as a substitute for the *zakat* which is obligatory on Muslims and as a fee for the protection afforded to these people living within the Muslim lands. It must be given by all free adult males of the people of the Book, except for the poor and needy. See Al-Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh As-Sunna,* vol. 3, pp. 112-117.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَلَمَّآ ءَاتَىٰهُم مِّن فَضۡلِهِۦ بَخِلُواْ بِهِۦ وَتَوَلَّواْ وَّهُم مُّعۡرِضُونَ ٧٦

Yet when He did give them some of His bounty,
they became mean and turned obstinately away [76]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 76)

Allah gives in two ways. He gives through means, and He gives through bounteous grace. His giving through means occurs when a man works hard at any task so Allah gives him the fruits of his labours whether he is a believer or a disbeliever, obedient or disobedient because he has utilised the means well. That is why we find that some people who deny the existence of Allah live in comfort because they exert their efforts and utilise the means provided by Allah to acquire wealth. As long as they utilise the means well and as they are Allah's servants, and as He is the One Who created them, He therefore guarantees for them that the means they utilise shall serve them to acquire what they aspire for. When the sun rises, the believers and disbelievers as well as the righteous and sinners all benefit from it. Likewise, rain falls onto the earth to benefit all people. In this way, everything on earth serves all people. This is how Allah gives through means.

But Allah *Glorified is He* conceals His gifts of bounteous grace within His gifts of means as is the case when someone is lost and stumbles upon treasure, when a farmer's yield is untouched by winds of storms which could cause it to diminish or when Allah *Glorified is He* blesses him by ensuring that his yield sells well and blesses the provision he earns from it so that he does not spend it on things which squander his wealth. These are all examples of how Allah gives through grace. The gifts of means are given to all people, but the gifts of bounteous grace are exclusively given to the true worshippers of Allah who sincerely devote their actions to Allah and obey Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When He did give them some of His bounty' (*at-Tawba:* 76); this indicates that the provision which comes to them is not only the result of the means they utilise, but rather, it is more than what they may earn due to exertion of their utmost effort. The way in which Tha`laba's sheep increased was not only a natural increase based on his effort, but rather, there was also a blessing which made the sheep produce so many lambs and made the grass they fed on produce large quantities of milk.

Allah says, ‘When He did give them some of His bounty, they *bakhilu bihi* (became mean)’ (*at-Tawba:* 76). What does *al-bukhl* (mean) refer to in this context? In Arabic, there are many words to describe the action or declining to give charity such as stinginess (*bukhl*), greed (*shuhh*) and stinginess (*kazaza*). All these words mean ‘to decline to give in charity’, but the degrees of the giving and the withholding differ in each. That is, some people only give to those who ask them – this is one degree; other people do not give to everyone who asks them, but only to those who ask in a way that moves them by, for example, saying ‘I am ill’ or ‘my house burned down’; here the petitioner does not only ask, but he gives a reason for asking which might move one’s emotions. Then there are those who give without even being asked.

So, there are three levels of giving in charity. One gives to those whom he deems to be needy without their even asking him. This is one of the acts of worship which draw people nearer to Allah. Allah enlightens the insights of those people so that they give out of the wealth Allah has given to them. Moreover, there are some people who reproach themselves if someone comes and asks them for charity or assistance as they feel guilty that they did not give them before they ask. Once a man went to someone’s house and knocked on the door, so the owner of the house came out and asked him what he wanted. The man asked for money, so the owner of the house went into the house, got some money and gave it to him. Having given the money to the asking person, he went into the house weeping. Noticing the whole story, the wife of the home owner asked him, ‘Why are you weeping, although you gave him what he asked for?’ He replied, ‘It makes me weep that I left him until he was forced to ask.’ That is, he weeps because he did not have the alertness to ask about the people around him to give to the needy without their having to ask of him.

So again, there are many levels of giving in charity. One person gives after being asked, another gives without being asked but rather gives freely from his bounty; that is, he owns a lot and gives from it. Of this category, a person may give half of what he has, dividing up his possessions, or give as much as he can according to the need of the one who asks. The third level is the one who gives the one who asks him for charity in a way that moves him.

So the question is, who is the stingy one? The worst kind of stinginess is when a man is asked to give in charity and the one who asks gives the reasons which force him to do so, yet his heart remains unmoved; this is the real stinginess. Allah describes those whom He blessed with wealth and still refuse to give charity saying, ‘Yet when He did give them some of His bounty, they became mean and turned obstinately away.’ (*at-Tawba:* 76) Such people do not refuse to give in charity to the needy, but they also turn away from the one who asks them. A case in point, is the one who turned away when the *zakat* collector came to collect the *zakat* due on him. What he should have done, for example, was to bid the collector sit down welcome him properly and then say, ‘We will see what we can do’, but instead he turned away and left him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then tells us of the requital which awaits those who behave in this way, saying:

فَأَعْقَبَهُمْ نِفَاقًا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يَلْقَوْنَهُۥ بِمَآ أَخْلَفُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ
مَا وَعَدُوهُ وَبِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْذِبُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

Because they broke their promise to God, because of all the lies they told, He made hypocrisy settle in their hearts until the Day they meet Him[77] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 77)

Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He makes the consequence of this action that He causes hypocrisy to take root in their hearts and remain therein until the Day of Resurrection. Because Allah said this, this constitutes a proclamation by Allah that the one who acts in this way (being asked for charity but clings to it stingily and turns away) will never die as a believer. The fact of the matter is that indeed none of these people died as believers. This was the consequence of their having failed to fulfil the vow they made to Allah and because of all the lies they told. It is as though each one of them lied first when he made his vow and then lied again when he said, ‘Is this like the non-Muslim poll-tax?’, although he knew full well that the *zakat* is one of the Pillars of Islam.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

أَلَمۡ يَعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعۡلَمُ سِرَّهُمۡ وَنَجۡوَىٰهُمۡ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَّٰمُ ٱلۡغُيُوبِ ﴿٧٨﴾

Do they not realize that God knows their secrets
and their private discussions? That God knows
all that is hidden? [78] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 78)

The ‘knowledge’ meant here is to come to know about something of which one was unaware before. In this verse, Allah’s saying, ‘Do they not know?’ includes a question which includes an interrogative particle followed by negation. This also applies to the question included in the chapter of *al-Fil*.

We know that the dialogue which takes place between a speaker and an addressee can take several forms. The first form is that the speaker tells the addressee what he knows; this is called ‘informing’. The second form is that the speaker does not tell the addressee the information, but rather, he makes him tell it himself, such as when one says to another, ‘Was I not kind to you?’ He may say to him, ‘I was kind to you’ so that the information come from him, but he wants to make it stronger by having acknowledgement from the addressee himself. Therefore, he phrases the question in such a way as he is sure that the addressee would be able except to rely to the question in the affirmative by saying, ‘Yes, you were kind to me’.

Therefore, predicate can either be a normal statement with no negation or with negation. It can be posed as a question as well. The strongest way of stating a predicate is to pose it in a form of both a negation and a question, for a mere predicate is given by the speaker himself which means it could either be true or false, while a question requires an answer from the addressee. The addressee will only give the answer which the questioner wants to hear because if the questioner thought that the addressee might answer in a different way than expected, he would not ask in the first place. He would not say, ‘I trust your judgement’ which means that the one saying that knows for sure that there is nothing else true, but what he expects and that anyone who thinks about the subject matter will inevitably conclude that it is true.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about hidden thoughts and their secret counsels, which are *sirr* and *najwa* respectively. What are they? A hidden thought is something that you keep to yourself and do not divulge to anyone. It is not what you divulge secretly to others, for this is a *najwa* (a secret counsel). The root meaning of *najwa* is distance. If it is said that someone is '*bi najwa* from something', it means that he is far away from it. Another root meaning of it is the higher part of a mountain since it is far away from the surface of the ground. When someone wants to tell another something that no one else hears it, he draws him away from others to tell him what he wants or he lowers his voice so that only the one to whom he whispers can hear what he says. That is why they call it *munajat* (intimate discourse) which means speech that even those near cannot hear it because you lower your voice to a level that is not even clear to those near you, as if your voice was remote. So, a hidden thought is what you keep to yourself while a secret counsel is what you secretly divulge to someone without anyone around hearing it.

Apparently, those who refused to spend in charity must have agreed amongst themselves to do so and have spoken about withholding charity after they became wealthy and well-off. They refused to submit to the edict of Islam even though they were always keen to present themselves as though they were even better than real Muslims. They used to always pray in the first row to conceal their hypocrisy.

When Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies to us that they confined a secret to themselves and reveals it, the veil of time and place is being torn asunder. Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of the content of this secrecy just as He revealed to Him the veil of the past incidents that he has not witnessed, heard from any teacher or read in any book since He was unlettered. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke of many things he has never seen, heard or read. So how did He know such things? Allah *Glorified is He* who knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth, told him. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the veil of the future to Him as well. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew about things before they occurred. He had been informed by the One Who holds sway over time, place and over all events. Those future highlights are what it is meant by revealing the veil of future. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to him the veil of place as well. Therefore, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would tell them about the things they had concealed in their souls. Allah

Glorified is He revealed to His Prophet that they secretly say, 'Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

Tell me, when one of them hears the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* disclosing what he had told himself, who could possibly reveal this veil to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Undoubtedly, it is the One Who knows all that is secret and what is even more hidden than that. There are no veils that can conceal things from Allah *Glorified is He*. Veils of the unseen are only applied to men. Thus, there are veils of the past, the future, place and time.

Therefore, Knowledge of Allah is not restricted to that of their own affairs only but rather, He knows their hidden thoughts and secret counsels. He is the Lord Who knows fully all the things that are beyond the reach of human perception. He knows the secrets of this one, that one and that one. Thus, the Arabic word *`Allam* expresses a hyperbole as Allah's Knowledge encompasses the secrets of everyone. He even knows what you tried to hide and conceal (*Luqman:* 16). Therefore, nothing escapes His Knowledge.

Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to highlight another image of the hypocrites and what they do to the believers. He says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَلۡمِزُونَ ٱلۡمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ فِي ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا
يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا جُهۡدَهُمۡ فَيَسۡخَرُونَ مِنۡهُمۡ سَخِرَ ٱللَّهُ مِنۡهُمۡ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٩﴾

It is they who criticize the believers who give freely and those who can only give a little with great effort: they scoff at such people, but it is God who scoffs at them – a painful punishment awaits them [79] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 79)

Allah *Glorified is He* is giving another description of the hypocrites. The Arabic word *lamaz* means to taunt but in an implicit way like a gesture of the eye, the hand, the mouth or the like. There was a group of hypocrites who taunted those believers who volunteered to help collect the poor-due. Some of those hypocrites criticised with words, others with actions while others with gestures. Those who are *mutawwi'in* are the ones who give more than their prescribed duty. Allah *Glorified is He* obliged us, for example, to pray five times a day. However, some Muslims voluntarily offer five more prayers. Allah *Glorified is He* prescribed 2.5% of wealth as *zakat*, yet there are some who voluntarily give ten percent. Allah *Glorified is He* obliged us to fast Ramadan but there are those who also fast every Monday and Thursday. This is what we call approaching the level of *ihsan,* by drawing near to Allah through observing more of the obligations that Allah has prescribed.

However, when you only carry out what you are obliged to do, you adhere to the way of Allah. A man once asked the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the obligations of Islam and on hearing them he said, 'I will neither make any addition to this nor will I decrease anything from it.' Upon hearing this, the Messenger of Allah remarked, 'He is successful if he proves truthful.'

There are two things that can be said about observing more than what Allah has obliged of the same kinds of actions. Firstly, the servant testifies to the mercy Allah that He obliged him to do far less than He deserves. Secondly, being obedient to Allah has made those obligations easy for a believer and thereby, he enjoys them. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about the prayer, 'give us comfort by it, O Bilal.' (1)

The person who is *mutaww'* is the one who does more than what Allah *Glorified is He* has obliged of the same kinds of actions. These are *al-muhsinoon* (doers of good). Allah *Glorified is He* promises them saying, 'Surely those who guard [against evil] shall be in gardens and fountains. Taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that, the doers of good. They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning, they asked forgiveness. And in their property, was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied [good].' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19)

The Islamic religion does not oblige the believers to sleep only a little portion of the night and spend the rest praying, nor does it oblige them to pray for forgiveness in the night. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* does not speak of a specific share of wealth that must be given away. That is because a believer gives more than he is obliged to. Here, we might ask, when a believer voluntarily does more than Allah *Glorified is He* obliges him to, does he deserve to be blamed, criticised and taunted? Or does he deserve to be honoured and esteemed? However, the hypocrites have imbalanced standards of judgement. They consider a good deed to be a flaw like when a man denotes some of his wealth to the poor and some people mock him saying that he is a fool. A believer who gives a lot of charity spreads the benefit of his wealth throughout society and is cleverer than they are. They spend their money on themselves and use it up, while he gives it in charity and thereby, preserve it.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The cause of revelation of this verse is as follows. 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf *Allah be pleased with him* migrated to Medina and left all his possessions behind in Mecca. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made bonds of brotherhood among the Emigrants and Helpers by assigning every man of the Helpers a man from the Emigrants to share his wealth with.

When 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf came, his assigned brother from the Helpers told him that he wanted to split his wealth with him. He replied, 'May Allah bless your wealth, but direct me to the market.' He went to the market, and Allah *Glorified is He* blessed his trade. He used to divide his profits between charity and his family. One day he came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said that he had made eight thousand dirhams and that he would give four thousand to Allah *Glorified is He* and keep the same amount to his family. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed to Allah to bless what he had given and what he had kept. When 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf *Allah be pleased with him* died, they counted his fortune and there was a dispute about its value. His heirs wanted to please his fourth wife, Tamadur, by giving her eighty thousand *dirhams.* Since she was one of four wives and four wives inherit an eighth of the estate, this means that his total wealth was worth at least two million, five hundred and sixty thousand *dirhams.* 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf *Allah be pleased with him* used only his own money for trade.

When the hypocrites heard about the amount of charity 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf had given away, they said that he had given charity only to show off and take credit. Is ostentation something people can see or is it something known only to Allah *Glorified is He*? 'Asim ibn 'Udayy owned a very fruitful orchard. He came and gave one hundred loads of dates in charity. The hypocrites swore that he only did this to show off. Another man named Abu 'Qail *Al-Ansari* came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Prophet Muhammad, I spent the other night working and collected two *sa*' (an Arabian measure) of dates. I kept one for my family and brought the other to you as charity.' The hypocrites mocked him and remarked that Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger were doing well without his charity.

They taunted 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf for giving too much and said that he did so ostentatiously and when 'Asim ibn 'Udayy came they said that he was showing off by giving away half of the yield of his orchard. Similarly, when someone who only had a single *sa'* of dates to denote came, they said that Allah and His Messenger can do well without his dates! They, therefore, mocked those who gave a lot and those who gave a little. They should have praised them instead because each one of them gave as much as he could afford and they gave of the bounty which Allah *Glorified is He* gave them, whether a little or a lot.

Therefore, those who mock the believers must be rebuked for having such bad character, as to mock and belittle pious conduct. Their reward was that Allah *Glorified is He* Himself scoffs at them and prepares a grievous punishment for them. To scoff means to mock someone’s action. When those hypocrites scoff at the believers, it expresses nothing other than their displeasure at those who do good deeds and their scoffing could only hurt the feelings of benevolent believers. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* scoffs at them, it means, a just requital due to what they themselves did. But, is the scoffing of Allah *Glorified is He* nothing more than an expression of displeasure or is there a requital included?

Apparently, there is also requital from Allah *Glorified is He*. Requital is commensurate to the power of the one who scoffs and there is a huge difference between the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* and the power of men. When they scoffed at the believers for giving a little charity out of what they possessed, Allah *Glorified is He* undertook the task of responding to them and their scoffing. In doing so, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to show us an image of how He defends the devoted believers. In addition, it is Allah Who is going to punish the hypocrites and it would certainly be grievous and humiliating.

We said before that when someone offends another, the person offended returns the offence by punishing him according to his capability, but if he pardons him, we advise the offender not to imagine that this pardon is good for him. In contrary, he who pardons you leaves your judgement up to Allah *Glorified is He* and your punishment therefore, will not be commensurate with the strength and power of the one who pardoned you, but rather, your punishment will be left up to Allah and will be commensurate with the power of Allah.

Therefore, the one who takes revenge and returns the offence only, enlists his own power, while the one who pardons, he enlists the power of Allah *Glorified is He* and there is even a higher level than this prepared for the sinner and for the one who is wronged, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of both. So, when someone wrongs you, you might return the wrong as according to your power and capability or you might pardon and Allah *Glorified is He* will punish according to His own power and strength.

The person who wrongs you does you good even though he does not intend to do so, how? Suppose that when you come home and find that one of your sons had beaten the other and wronged him, to which side will your heart and your sympathy incline? Your heart will be on the side of the one who had been wronged, and you will try to please him and give him a gift, some money or the like. Hence, the etiquette of Islam is to be kind to who wrongs you, because he thereby, does you a favour without intending to. Allah *Glorified is He* asks you to forgive those who sin against you and reassure you that who scoffs at Muslims, He will cause their scoffing to rebound on themselves. (*at-Tawba:* 79) Literally, it means that Allah *Glorified is He* scoffs at them. When you see a human action with a corresponding divine action, do not understand the divine action in the same way you understand the human action. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And they planned and Allah [also] planned, and Allah is the best of planners.' (*Al-'Imran:* 54), and says, 'Surely the hypocrites strive to deceive Allah, and He shall requite their deceit to them.' (*an-Nisa':* 142) Literally, this means that He deceives them. Here, we find an action performed by Allah *Glorified is He* and the same action could be carried out by humans. We, Muslims, must understand actions of Allah *Glorified is He* in a way that is different than human action.

For example, when we consider the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says that the hypocrites strive to deceive Allah but He shall requite their deceit to them, we find that the word *makr* (scheme) means to defeat the enemy by use of cunning. That you make him think you will do something good to him when you mean to harm him by digging a large pit, for example, and then covering it with grass and flowers and then asking your enemy to bring you a flower so that he falls into the pit and breaks his bones.

Thus, you plotted a secret plot against him. Plots and schemes do not prove one's power, but rather, they prove one's weakness. A brave and strong man faces his enemies openly because he is stronger than they are, while a weak man uses ruses and schemes to hurt his enemy. Therefore, we read the verse that speaks about women describing their plans as great (*Yusuf:* 28). As long as their plans are great, their weakness must be severe as well since only a feeble person contrives ruses of guile on one hand. A strong person is not outdone by his enemy's challenge. He says to him, 'Go where you like and I will come and get you whenever I want. There is nowhere you can hide from me.' On the other hand, when a person who is feeble gets an advantage over his enemy, he would destroy him because he knows that such an opportunity would not come again. Therefore, a poet composed a line of poetry stating that when a weak one gets her chance, she kills and such are the chances of the weak. As for the strong person, he is able to pardon and excuse because he knows that he could take care of his enemy whenever he wants.

The root meaning of the word *makr* is a tree whose branches are intertwined like a braid that you cannot tell which leaf grows from which branch and makes you confused. In the same way, a scheme makes things confusing for you so that you do not know where the truth lies. A human plots according to the abilities of his mind and intelligence, but when Allah *Glorified is He* requites him for his plot, the requital will be terrible. Allah knows well your plot, but you do not know what Allah *Glorified is He* has in store for you.

Allah *Glorified is He* succoured His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* openly in battles. He also succoured Him against all the things which they plotted and schemed against him in secret. For example, when the disbelievers gathered outside his house to kill him on the eve of the Emigration, Allah inspired him to go out with no fear from their schemers. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out and found them all sleeping where they stood with their eyes open but unseeing. He walked right through them throwing handfuls of dust at them and saying, 'May these faces be deformed.' Once the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* went far from their place, they all woke up and were amazed to find that he had eluded them. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to know that they would never be able to get the Prophet, neither with open battle nor with secret schemes.

On reading the subject verse, you notice that the act of scoffing on the part of Allah *Glorified is He* is a result of their own scoffing. The act of scoffing on the human part does not exceed criticism, but on the part of Allah, it leads to suffering. Therefore, Allah says that for them is a grievous punishment. This is what distinguishes the actions of Allah *Glorified is He* from human actions. Those who scoffed at the believers criticised their actions, but Allah *Glorified is He* will scoff at them on the Day of Resurrection before all His creatures. In addition, He will cast them into grievous suffering.

We said before that the Quran speaks of three kinds of punishment. These are *alim, 'adhim* and *muhin*, which are a grievous, great and shameful punishments respectively. These are all attributes of punishment and suffering. Punishment means torment but there are those who scream when they are exposed to pain and others try to be thick-skinned and bear the pain because their pride does not allow them to cry out. In such a situation, their punishment will be shameful because they bear the pain due to their pride but they are humiliated because their pride is which makes their suffering shameful.

Punishment might take a long time or a short time. However, there is a punishment which is great in its grievousness and shamefulness. A punishment which is great in its grievousness is the kind of punishment which is exaggerated in terms of pain, while that which is greatly shameful is that in which the shame is pronounced. As for the punishment which is greatly extended, it is that which is pronounced in terms of duration and this is what is called a lasting punishment, that it will be endless without ceasing or relenting.

Allah *Glorified is He* moves on to present another image of the way Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dealt with the hypocrites. Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew who the hypocrites were since Allah *Glorified is He* informed him. Allah could have made the Prophet recognise them by their marks and the intent of their speech. (*Muhammad:* 30) He could simply recognise them by looking and listening to them, as if they had the word hypocrite written on their foreheads.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to go out to those who believed in him and in his message with a tranquil heart and without feeling ill-disposed towards anyone. That is because his light would shine upon them all, that perhaps a ray of his light might shine upon a hypocrite and cause him to repent to Allah and embrace the True Faith, as the case was with many hypocrites, who announced their repentance and became true Muslims.

We know that 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, who was the leader of the hypocrites, was about to be crowned king of Medina. During the preparations for the coronation, they were surprised by the emigration of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Medina, which was one of the reasons why 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul hated the Prophet. He lost out on his chance to be a king. 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy had a son, also named 'Abdullah. He embraced Islam and became a true Muslim. He went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he heard that he would order the execution of his father for his saying, at a certain battle, 'If we return to Medina, the mighty will surely drive out the meaner therefrom.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8)

'Abdullah ibn Ubayy meant that the hypocrites of Medina were the mighty ones, while the Muslims of the Emigrants and Helpers were the meaner. Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed that the ones who were most worthy of honour would drive out the most contemptible ones. However, Allah *Glorified is He* said that all honour belongs to Him, His Apostle and those who believe. (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* confirmed what the hypocrite had said, but it turned out that the hypocrites would be driven from Medina and the believers would remain there in honour since all honour belongs to them.

When 'Abdullah, son of 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, heard that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would order the execution of his father, he went to him and said, 'O Prophet Muhammad, if you are truly to command the execution of my father, then command me to execute him, for I fear that when my fellow Muslim executes him, I will hate him and I would not like to harbour hatred against any believer.' Here, we see the power and truthfulness of faith. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to be kind to this hypocrite for his son’s sake, so he did not order his execution. The son afterwards asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray for his father’s forgiveness. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knowing that he had been sent as a mercy to the worlds, prayed for forgiveness for 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, whereupon the next noble verse was revealed:

ٱسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ أَوْ لَا تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ إِن تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً فَلَن يَغْفِرَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُمْ ۚ
ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلْفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

It makes no difference [Prophet] whether you ask forgiveness for them or not: God will not forgive them even if you ask seventy times, because they reject God and His Messenger. God does not guide those who rebel against Him [80] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 80)

Concerning this verse, the scholars had observed a principle known as *mafhum al-mukhalafa* (the contrary inference). Allah *Glorified is He* identifies the number of petitions for forgiveness, which will not be accepted as seventy. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whom Allah *Glorified is He* sent as a mercy to the worlds, clarified that as long as the petitions of forgiveness were limited to seventy, he would go a little further over seventy petitions. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave preference to the side of mercy and the side of honour for 'Abdullah, son of 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, who embraced Islam and was a true Muslim.

The number seven was considered by Arabs to be the last of numbers and any other number was a mere addition to this. The basis of all numbers is number one and all members stem from adding to it. One plus one makes two, to which another one may be added to make three and this continues until the number seven is reached. When we leave the number one to the side because it is the basis, we would have three even numbers, which are two, four and six and three odd numbers, which are three, five and seven. Thus, the number seven synthesises the singular, the dual and the plural.

Therefore, when they wanted to add a number to seven they would have to use a conjunctive like ‘and’. We find an example of this in the chapter of *al-Kahf* where Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the people of the cave. He says, 'Some say, [They are] three, the fourth of them being their dog; and [others] say, five, the sixth of them being their dog, making conjectures at what is unknown; and [others yet] say, seven, and the eighth of them is their dog.’ (*al-Kahf:* 22) Allah did not add the conjunctive ‘and’ after the number seven because the number eight is a different kind of number. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the number seventy, he said that he would go beyond seventy. Thus, he respected the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* as well as his honour due to 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, who had asked him to pray for his father’s forgiveness.

Here, some wonder how could the real meaning of the number seventy, which implies an outgoing and endless number of petitions, had escaped the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while they said that he was the most eloquent of the Arabs, especially given that he was of Quraysh? A poet of ancient times said in this regard, be bad to us, or good, you shall not be blamed, which implies the meaning of ‘Do whatever you wish’.

Therefore, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* meant to mention the uppermost multiples of numbers, which is seventy, to make it clear that the matter was final. And elsewhere Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned that it was the same for them whether the Prophet asked for their forgiveness or not and that He would never forgive them. (*al-Munafiqun:* 6) This means that even though you prayed for their forgiveness many times, Allah *Glorified is He* will not forgive them.

We say that this matter has two possible implications. The first one is that Allah *Glorified is He* would forgive, while the second is that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been paying a compliment to 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy, whilst knowing fully well that Allah *Glorified is He* would not forgive the hypocrites. Thus, asking for forgiveness on the part of the Prophet was only to honour the son’s request and a mere courtesy since his prayers for forgiveness were not accepted. There is a prayer for forgiveness which results in forgiveness and another one that merely pleases someone as in this case of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy. But, does the father not have his own distinct identity?

We say that we read the history of 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy and he had his own share of the world. Allah *Glorified is He* said that He will not allow the reward of any who did well in deeds to be lost. (*al-Kahf:* 30) The reward for good deeds might be given to some people in this world and in the Hereafter to others. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Whoever desires the gain of the hereafter, We will give him more of that gain; and whoever desires the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the hereafter, he has no portion.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

The scholars of the biography of the Prophet tell us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'the punishment of Abu Lahab is being eased every Monday.' That is Abu Lahab, about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Perdition overtake both hands of Abu Lahab, and he will perish. His wealth and what he earns will not avail him. He shall soon burn in fire that flames.' (*al-Masad:* 1-3)

Why is the punishment of Abu Lahab being eased every Monday? It is because this was the day when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born? Abu Lahab was so pleased with His birth that he freed the slave-girl who gave him tidings of the birth. Thus, for this reason his punishment is being eased every Monday.

Likewise, 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy did something honourable during the events of The Treaty of Hudaybiya, when Muslims went to perform the lesser pilgrimage but the disbelievers prevented them from entering the Sacred House of Allah. This led to the ratification of the Treaty of Hudaybiyah which was the first covenant to be made between the forces of faith and disbelief. Even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions were hindered from entering the Sacred House, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* realised the graces of Allah *Glorified is He* which would be culminated from the Treaty of Hudaybiya. The disbelievers of Quraysh recognised Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims to the level of concluding a treaty with them. The Prophet carried out the mission of calling to Allah freely and secure form Quraysh. Islam continued to spread until Quraysh violated the treaty and Mecca was conquered.

Thus, looking back at the story of 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy on the day of Hudaybiya we see he did something good. The disbelievers knew the hatred he harboured against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because of how the coming of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had prevented him from being crowned king of Medina. They also knew that his conversion to Islam was hypocritical. They wanted to cause discord amongst the Muslims, so they said that Muhammad and his companions would not enter, while ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy and his companions might enter Mecca and perform the lesser pilgrimage. ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy refused, saying that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was his role-model and he did not wish to perform the lesser pilgrimage unless Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went as well. This was a praiseworthy stance for him.

Likewise, he had another good stance at the Battle of Badr. The uncle of Prophet Muhammad, named Al-‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* was taken prisoner. He was very tall and his clothes were torn in the battle. They found no one the same height as him except ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy. He duly gave them his shirt for Al-‘Abbas to wear and the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not forget this. Because of all this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for his forgiveness but the higher verdict was revealed stating that Allah would not forgive them (*at-Tawba:* 80).

There are means by which sins are expiated and it is not only a matter of the Prophet's prayer for forgiveness. When someone sins, he must first come to you, O Prophet Muhammad, to ask for forgiveness and then ask you to pray for his forgiveness. That he would find Allah Accepting of repentance and Merciful (*an-Nisa’:* 64).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not pray for forgiveness for someone who wants to repent and be forgiven unless the guilty person first asks for his own forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness on the part of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* follows that of the guilty person himself. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not pray for their forgiveness, while they do not do that themselves. Thus, we learn that ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy did not know the right way of seeking forgiveness. He should have gone to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* humbly, prayed for forgiveness before him and not send someone else to ask for prayers of forgiveness on his behalf.

Allah *Glorified is He* then clarifies why He did not forgive them. That is because they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people. When Allah *Glorified is He* negates guidance of certain people, it does not make them say that Allah has not guided them. They cannot wonder what they should do about it and thereby, blame Allah. Rather, we should ask them, 'Why did He not guide you?' It is because you are iniquitous.

Therefore, the cause of your deviance is that you chose the way of wrong and abandoned Allah's way of guidance. The guidance referred to in this verse is not the guidance which means direction to the right path. Allah *Glorified is He* gives direction to the right path to both believers and disbelievers since His way of guidance has been conveyed to all mankind. He shows them the right path and directs them to it. However, what is meant by guidance in this verse is the other kind of guidance which Allah *Glorified is He* gives to those who embrace Islam and do good deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* declares that He guides those who are willing to be guided, increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness. (*Muhammad:* 17)

Therefore, all those who intend the path of faith are helped by Allah unlike those who do not. Allah *Glorified is He* thereupon, proclaimed that He does not guide the wrongdoing people (*al-Ahqaf:* 10). He declared that He does not guide the disbelieving people (*at-Tawba:* 37). Similarly, Allah does not guide the transgressing people (*as-Saff:* 5).

We can never say that those people are excused because Allah *Glorified is He* did not guide them. Indeed, He guided and directed them all to the right path but they are the ones who chose the path of disbelief, evil and wrong doing. You could read in the Holy Quran that Allah offered guidance to the people Thamud, however, they chose blindness in preference to guidance (*Fussilat:* 17). Therefore, the guidance of direction is for everyone, while the guidance of assistance is for the believers alone.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us another image of the hypocrites, saying:

فَرِحَ ٱلۡمُخَلَّفُونَ بِمَقۡعَدِهِمۡ خِلَٰفَ رَسُولِ ٱللَّهِ وَكَرِهُوٓاْ أَن
يُجَٰهِدُواْ بِأَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡ وَأَنفُسِهِمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَقَالُواْ لَا تَنفِرُواْ فِي ٱلۡحَرِّۗ قُلۡ
نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ أَشَدُّ حَرّٗاۚ لَّوۡ كَانُواْ يَفۡقَهُونَ ٨١

Those who were left behind were happy to stay behind when God's Messenger set out; they hated the thought of striving in God's way with their possessions and their persons. They said to one another, 'Do not go [to war] in this heat.' Say, 'Hellfire is hotter.' If only they understood! [81]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 81)

To rejoice means to feel happiness because of an action that pleases the soul. Those who were left behind were those whose hypocrisy caused them to lag behind, and whom the Prophet left in Medina and he set out to struggle in the cause of Allah after they came up with false excuses. Prophet Muhammad left them behind because Allah had informed him that would add nothing to him save corruption (*at-Tawba:* 47). Whoever does not desire to struggle in the cause of Allah, would be against you and will not be on your side, if it happens and they set out with you. They will spread lies amidst the believers and try to instil in them fear of war. They would be the first to flee and seek out a cave or rock to hide behind, once the fighting starts. So, they will not be with you but against you. They will not fight alongside you, they might even aid your enemy against you; at the same time, they will harm the believers and try to instil dread in them by spreading false rumours.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* shows the natural faithful instinct of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. He gave them permission to stay behind and not go out to fight even though they made up their excuses. Allah uses the words *maq'ad*. It refers to a place where one can sit. Sitting symbolises staying in one place, while standing symbolises the beginning of the act of moving from one place to another. Those who fought alongside the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stood and prepared for fighting, but those who stayed behind sat, did not stand and desired to remain where they were.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the word *khilaf* which is derived from the root *khalafa* which means to distinct and differ, like the verb *qatala* which means to fight. The difference can be either a difference of opinion like saying that such and such a person is distinct from another meaning that they hold separate opinions. It can be a difference of movement such as if you stand up to leave the place and your colleague or companion differs from you by remaining seated or you remain seated whilst he leaves.

Differences in terms of opinions are a matter of the heart, while differences of movement involve both the heart and the body. Their rejoicing at remaining seated after the Prophet and the believers stood to go out and struggle, indicates that their staying behind was in accord with their whims that they were pleased with. Thus, they contravened a condition of faith because those who had the right to stay behind were specified in the Holy Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It shall be no crime in the weak, or in the sick, or in those who do not find what they should spend [to stay behind], so long as they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger.' (*at-Tawba:* 91)

He also says, 'nor in those who when they came to you that you might carry them, you said, “I cannot find that on which to carry you.”'(*at-Tawba:* 92) This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them that he had no mount for them to carry them with him to the battleground. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* portrayed to us the state of those people who were unable to go out alongside the Prophet due to these reasons. He said that they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears out of sorrow that they had no means to spend (*at-Tawba:* 92).

Therefore, those who stayed behind for good reasons were flooded with sorrow and their eyes with tears because they had lost out on the reward of struggling in the cause of Allah, while those who rejoiced at staying behind, instead of going out to struggle, were hypocrites.

We may observe that the word *khilaf* can also mean ‘after’, that is, after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As he set out to the battle, they sat down and did not go themselves. They joined those who were weak, sick and those with true excuses in addition to those for whom the Prophet had found no mounts. Those were the ones who were left behind. However, Allah *Glorified is He* reveals the reason why the hypocrites stayed behind. He said that they hated the thought of striving with their possessions and their lives for the cause of Allah (*at-Tawba:* 81).

That is, they hated to struggle and fight. It would have been enough if this was just it. However, they wanted to hold the believers back and make fighting repugnant to them. They enticed them not to go forth to war in this heat. They were not content with their own disgraceful stance, but they attempted to urge the believers not to fight. This battle, which was the Battle of Tabuk, took place during a very hot spell. The city of Medina was packed with shady orchards and fruits, but the way to the Byzantine front was long and thereby, was a battle of many ominous hardships.

The hypocrites told the believers *la tanfiru* (not to go). The meaning of the Arabic word *nafar* is to be averse to something When it is said that such and such a person *nafir* from such and such a person, it means that neither likes to exist in the same place as the other. It is as if the person who set out to war hated to remain in the place where he was sitting in and went forth to the battleground as well as sacrificing of property and life in the cause of Allah was more beloved to him than sitting and relaxing.

Allah proclaimed that they wanted to justify themselves in quitting the struggle. They said that the weather was hot and arduous. But they were foolish. They satisfied themselves with short-lived comfort in exchange for a long-lasting ordeal by fearing heat and its ordeal and preferring to sit in shade and its comfort.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* ordered His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to say that the fire of the Hell is hotter by far. If they thought that they would evade an ordeal by evading heat, the ordeal of hellfire and eternity therein is much worse than what they evaded. When a person is given good news of something, which would please him for a year or several years, but he was informed of something that will come after it which will cause him woe and suffering, thereby, his knowledge of what is coming will cause him pain so that he cannot enjoy his present comfort. A person is always prepared to bear something difficult to secure his future. Therefore, you might find someone who works night and day happily and if you ask him how he can bear all this hardship, he would answer that he could secure his future. Thus, the happiness of a year or a few years is spoiled by the prospect of a few bad and tiring days or years. What about the eternity in hell which awaits them?

There are some related questions here. Did they only conceal that saying in this hearts without saying it aloud? Or did they say it secretly to one another? Who informed the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of what they had said? We say that this might be something they thought about in their minds. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to know that He knows what their souls concealed. He wanted to expose their hidden thoughts, so that this might instil fear in their hearts knowing that Allah knows everything and would attain to faith out of fear of Hell.

A similar example to this is when Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to bar the idolaters from making the pilgrimage to His Sacred House. He said that those idolaters who were impure and thereby, shall not approach the House (*at-Tawba:* 28).

The economy of Mecca used to rebound during the ceremony of pilgrimage. Riches would come to Mecca from all over during the pilgrimage season. The idolaters would even say, ‘Be careful, do not perform circumambulation wearing sinful clothes’, as if their souls were filled with piety. In fact, they were indeed far from piety since they were idol-worshippers. They, instead, would say this to make the pilgrims remove their clothes and buy new clothes to use for circumambulation and whoever could not afford to buy it would perform the circumambulation naked.

So, the season of pilgrimage was an economic boom for the people of Mecca. They would make enough profit to live on the rest of the year. When Allah *Glorified is He* announced that they were impure and not allowed to come near the House, the question that popped to the human soul was, how shall we live then? This was the first thought that came to mind because it is about the basic needs of life. The One Who created them knew well what was going on in their minds even if they uttered it not with their tongues. Thereupon, Allah *Glorified is He* responds, 'and if you fear poverty then Allah will enrich you out of His grace if He pleases.' (*at-Tawba:* 28) So Allah *Glorified is He* knew what was in their minds and responded to them before they even uttered it.

Allah *Glorified is He* said that if only they could understand that the hell fire is much severe in heat. The word used to express understanding is *fiqh*. It means to understand deeply. When you know something superficially, you have knowledge of it, however, when you know all its details and implications, you truly understand it. When you set out to fight during a hot spell, you might suffer. However, when you refuse to go out and fight, your punishment will be worse and your suffering greater. Thus, your knowledge of the heat, which you will endure when you go out to fight, must not make you forget what you do not observe. That is a person who evades going out to fight will lead him to a fire which is hotter, where he will abide. When one forgets that, this means he does not understand reality because he knows one thing and forgets many others.

That was the logical argument that ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* used in response to those whom he called to fight against the kharijites. He said, 'Struggling in the cause of Allah is one of the doors to Paradise and whoever dismisses it, shall be disgraced!' Then he said, 'If I told you to fight them in the winter, you would say, “It is to cold.” If I told you to fight them in summer, you would say, “Leave us be until the heat passes.” If you flee like that from cold and heat, then by Allah, you shall end up in the hellfire. You are but men-like and not men.'

Thus, the meaning is that although they delighted and rejoiced at evading fighting in the heat, they would come to greatly regret this. Therefore, Allah says next:

فَلۡيَضۡحَكُواْ قَلِيلٗا وَلۡيَبۡكُواْ كَثِيرٗا جَزَآءَۢ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكۡسِبُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

Let them laugh a little; they will weep a lot in return for what they have done [82] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 82)

Laughter is a natural instinctive reaction which happens when a person encounters something which pleases him or when events occur in an unexpected manner. As for weeping it is also a natural instinctive reaction to events which cause sadness or grief. It stems from remembering something that saddens him. They are both natural phenomena. They occur naturally in the same way to all people and are not affected by race, colour or environment. There is no such thing as Russian or American weeping. Similarly, there is no Russian or American, or Eastern or Western laughter. This is because laughter and weeping are universal natural reactions which are unaffected by environment, culture or race. Allah *Glorified is He* ascribed the origin of both to Himself. Allah *Glorified is He* gives life, causes death and likewise; He alone causes laughter; it is He Alone Who causes weeping. Allah says, 'And that He it is who makes [men] laugh and makes [them] weep; And that He it is Who causes death and gives life. And that He created pairs, the male and the female. From the small seed when it is adapted.' (*an-Najm:* 43-45)

That is why laughter and tears happen suddenly for no reason. I do not say to myself before laughing that I am going to laugh now, likewise I do not say before weeping that I am going to weep now. They are instinctive reactions with which will and choice play no role. However, we pretend to laugh and weep sometimes, but this is pure affectation and not genuine. Suppose that someone tells you a joke to make you laugh. However, the joke is not funny and you want to please him, so you laugh. Likewise, weeping can also be affected, as in the case of the professional mourner who sits amongst the bereaved family and weeps. She might put drops of glycerine in her eyes to make her cry. That is all affectation. However, true laughter and true weeping are purely natural matters which are under the control of Allah *Glorified is He* alone.

The subject verse comes directly after the verse that explains their happiness due to staying behind (*at-Tawba:* 81). They rejoiced when they stayed in Medina and the believers set out to fight. They sat in the gardens of Medina rejoicing in comfort, happiness and laughter because they thought that they had won by avoiding participation in the fighting. However, this laughter would only last a little and a great weeping and regret would replace it for a long and endless amount of time when they enter Hell. May Allah secure us from it.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘Let them laugh a little and let them weep a lot.’ He did not say, ‘they will laugh a little and then weep a lot’. Why? We say that when an action is ascribed to a created being that lives in a world of vicissitudes and has free will to choose from several possibilities, the action might or not occur. However, ascribing the matter of laughter and weeping in the verse to Allah, bears the meaning of a commandment for them to laugh and weep. Are these commandments to laugh and weep optional from Allah that they might obey and disobey?

If it was optional, would the hypocrites obey a commandment of Allah which is optional? We say that this is not an optional commandment of free choice because Allah *Glorified is He* alone is the One Who places in the human soul the reactions of laughter or weeping at events, and we have shown that man cannot make himself truly laugh or weep.

So, the meaning of the verse is that the action of laughing is their inescapable fate and likewise the action of weeping is inevitable because the action of weeping has been destined for them by Allah. As it is said that the one who laughs last, laughs longest and the one who weeps last weeps the longest.

Therefore, everything depends on its final outcomes. Something pleasing might happen to a man at which he feels happy, although, a bad time of woe comes and effaces all this happiness and the opposite is also true. If those hypocrites had laughed a little in this worldly life, their lives in this world is short. If they spend their whole worldly life laughing, how long they would laugh, forty, fifty years?

Each one of us has a limited time in this world. If you say that an event lasts for the entire duration of this world, it is still short, and if you say that it only lasts as long as you live in this world, it is shorter as well. The Hereafter will come with its endless abiding where the weeping of the hypocrite will last for eternity.

Therefore, every person must consider the punishment alongside the sin and the reward along with the good deed. A man might commit sins to please his soul's passions, but he does not bring up its due punishment along. If he were to think about the punishment, he would refrain from the sin. If a thief thought, while stealing, that he might be caught, plead guilty and be sentenced to have his hand amputated; if he was certain of this, he would never steal. Rather, he steals because he thinks he will evade punishment. No thief plans a robbery whilst imagining that he will be caught, but rather he is certain that he will steal and get away with it.

Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The one who commits illegal sexual intercourse is not a believer at the time of committing illegal sexual intercourse and a thief is not a believer at the time of committing theft.' This is because if a fornicator imagined that he would be cast into hell because of his act of fornication, he would never fornicate. The same is true with the one who drinks wine. He would not put the glass to his mouth if he imagined himself being punished in hell for doing so. Sins are committed during the inadvertency of faith. Faith requires you to think of the punishment when you approach the sin. It wants you to know, for sure, that everything you do will be reckoned in the Hereafter and that there will be requital.

If you laugh at the obligations of faith, you will certainly weep for it in the Hereafter. If you are happy, for example, to abandon the prayer or *zakat*, and you imagine that you have gained riches in this worldly life, you will certainly feel regret and woe in the Hereafter; and if you enjoy the fruits of ill-gotten wealth, you will certainly be made to suffer in the Hereafter. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. And whenever they passed by them, used to wink one to another (in mockery); and when they returned to their people, they would return jesting.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-31)

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* gives us several images of the ridicule directed at the believers in this worldly life, the first of which is that the hypocrites and the disbelievers laugh at the believers. One of them might say to a believer who prays, 'Carry me on your wings in the Hereafter!' And then He mentions how they wink and gesture; and then when the hypocrite goes back to his own people, he mocks the righteous people and says, 'I did such-and-such to a religious person, and I mocked him and he could not respond!' He feels happy as he tells this story, rejoicing in what he has done; but he forgets that he has committed three crimes. The crime of the ridicule itself, the crime of being happy with it and the crime of telling others about it. Had he mocked the believer and then felt bad about it afterwards, his punishment might have been light, but as long as he rejoices in his action, his punishment will be more severe; and then when he goes back to his people and tells them what happened with glee and pride, he condemns himself to a third punishment. It was bad enough for them to go so far, but then they went even further by accusing the believers of being astray, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when they saw them, they said, "Verily! These have indeed gone astray! But they had not been sent as guardians over them."' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 32-33) That is, they went even further by accusing the believers of being astray, and this is what they did in this worldly life, which is transitory and short-lived; and then the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us what the contrasting image will be in the Hereafter, saying, ‘So Today those who believed are laughing at the disbelievers. On adorned couches, observing. Are not the disbelievers paid (fully) for what they used to do?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 33-36)

Just as the disbelievers laughed at the believers in this worldly life, the believers will laugh at the disbelievers in the Hereafter, and the believers will sit on couches in Paradise looking on as the disbelievers are tormented in hell. Allah will compensate them with their own action, with the difference that their powers are limited, whilst His powers are unlimited. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say, ‘they will laugh’ as a mere statement which might happen or not, but rather, He emphasised it; and when He talks about the hypocrites here, ‘Let them, then, laugh’ this means that the laughter will definitely take place because these are the words of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘Let them, then, laugh a little – and [then] weep much as recompense for what they used to earn’ provide us with the reason for why their laughter will be short-lived, whilst their weeping will be long-lived; for this is the recompense for what they did in this life. They rejoiced in evading the struggle in Allah’s cause, and were happy to stay and relax in Medina. They will inevitably be requited for this action in the Hereafter, just as the believers will be rewarded for going out to struggle in the heat.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not wrong them, but rather, He gave them fair recompense for their actions, as He says, ‘as recompense for what they used to earn.’ The word ‘earned’ here requires us to make an observation. He could have said, ‘in return for what they have done’ or ‘for how they have acted’; so why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* say, ‘earned’? And what is the difference between this and ‘done’ or ‘acted’?

We know that every part of a man’s body has an action: the ear hears, the eye sees, the hand grasps, the foot walks, the nose smells and the fingertips feel; so, every part of the body has its function. If the function is to make utterances with the tongue, we call this ‘speech’; and if the function is performed by any other body part, we call it a ‘deed’. The tongue alone carries out speech, and all the other body parts carry out deeds. And speech and deeds together are called ‘actions’. So, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* had said, ‘they had done’ this would contrast with what they said because a man might say something with his tongue which the rest of his body does not actually do. This is made clear by the noble verse, ‘O you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do? Most hateful it is with Allah that you say that which you do not do.’ (*as-Saff:* 2-3).

So, if speech and deed are united, this makes action. Every action which is not in line with Allah’s way involves a certain amount of additional work. The verb ‘earn’ is an action, whilst ‘contrive’ is to put an effort to earn something; earning is to act naturally, whilst ‘to contrive to earn’ means to act with effort. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned.’ (*al-Baqara:* 286) This is because when forbidden deeds are committed, this requires additional effort and disturbs the soul so that it is not in harmony with the body. When a man is at home with his wife, his body is relaxed and he fears nothing, but when he is with someone else’s wife, his body is tense, and he closes the windows and turns off all the lights; and if the doorbell rings, he is filled with nervousness and anxiety. This is because his soul’s faculties are not in harmony with his action.

But if the soul becomes used to sin, as in the case of a habitual criminal, forbidden deeds do not disturb it. In this case, the ‘contrived deed’ becomes a regular deed, and the soul becomes accustomed to sin and evil. The requital it shall receive from Allah becomes grievous and severe.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* alerts us here to the fact that these hypocrites have grown accustomed to sin, and lived in disbelief, so their evil deeds had become easy for them and they no longer needed to exert extra effort.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘As for the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands in recompense for what they earned as a deterrent [punishment] from Allah.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 38)

Stealing is not an ordinary action, and therefore the thief does it stealthily. This might have made it logical to use the verb ‘contrive’ but the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted us to know that thievery has become natural for these people because of how often they have done it so that it has become easy and automatic for them. The Sacred Law has placed a minimum value for this penalty which is the theft of one quarter of a *dinar*, for example.(1) The one who steals less than this is not punished with the amputation of his hand. Why? Because at that time, a quarter of a *dinar* was enough to feed a medium-sized family for a whole day, and so if someone stole enough to feed a family for a single day, it would be said that perhaps he stole it because his family does not have anything to eat. Yet, if he took more than the absolute necessary, he must have taken more than he needed, and therefore was guilty of stealing and had to be punished.(2)

We know that the purpose of the human mind is to choose between alternatives, and a person is supposed to bear the consequences in mind when he commits the sin, and bear the reward in mind when he does good deeds. Such understanding encourages a man to do good deeds. If we ask the hard-working student to lessen the amount of study he is doing, he refuses to put the books away because he is thinking about success, and what will happen after he succeeds and how he will be able to enter whatever university he wants. Or if he is studying for his finals at university, he thinks about what will happen after he graduates; and he also thinks about what his family, teachers and colleagues will think of him. Thinking about all of this drives him to spend long hours studying without feeling tired. So, the way to love good deeds is to think of the sweetness of their reward and conversely the way to hate sins is to think of the pain of their punishment.

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(1) *'A'isha Allah be pleased with her is narrated to have said, 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him would amputate the thief for stealing a quarter of a dinar or more.' Related by Muslim (1684), Ahmad (vi. 6) and At-Tirmidhi (1445)*

(2) Stealing is of two kinds: one that requires taking a disciplinary action, and another that requires exacting the legal punishment. The first kind is the one that lacks the necessary requirements for exacting the legal punishment like the one stealing the fruits from trees. As for the kind which is punished by the prescribed legal punishment, it must fulfil three conditions:

1 – The value of the wealth stolen must be at least a quarter of a *dinar*.

2 – The wealth must be secured in such a place as a treasury, house or mosque.

3 – The theft must be committed clandestinely and secretly (so a mugger, snatcher or traitor is not counted as a thief whose hand must be cut.)

If it is proven that an act of theft took place consistent with all these conditions, the thief's right hand is amputated from the joint of the wrist; if he steals again, his foot is amputated. See details of this in Sayyid Sabiq's *(Fiqh As-Sunna)* (ii. 461-476).

But these hypocrites and disbelievers have become accustomed to sin and disbelief to the extent that they act impiously without thinking about the punishment for sin, and they commit sins gleefully. Allah says, ‘for what they have earned’ to give us the correct image, which is that they were accustomed to sin to the extent that they committed it without any extra effort.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then tells us His worldly decree concerning those hypocrites who rejoiced in staying at home instead of going out to strive for Allah’s cause, saying:

فَإِن رَّجَعَكَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَىٰ طَآئِفَةٖ مِّنۡهُمۡ فَٱسۡتَـٔۡذَنُوكَ لِلۡخُرُوجِ فَقُل لَّن تَخۡرُجُواْ مَعِيَ أَبَدٗا وَلَن
تُقَٰتِلُواْ مَعِيَ عَدُوًّاۖ إِنَّكُمۡ رَضِيتُم بِٱلۡقُعُودِ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٖ فَٱقۡعُدُواْ مَعَ ٱلۡخَٰلِفِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

So [Prophet], if God brings you back to a group of them, who ask you for permission to go out [to battle], say, ‘You will never go out and fight an enemy with me: you chose to sit at home the first time, so remain with those who stay behind now’ [83] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 83)

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘When you finish with the battle and return to Medina, there is an ordinance which you must apply to those hypocrites who stayed at home and rejoiced in not joining the battle’.

‘If Allah should return you’, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the subject of the verb, and the pronoun ‘you’ is the object. In another verse, Allah says, ‘And when Musa (Moses) returned to his people, full of wrath and sorrow.’ (*al-A’raf:* 150) In a third verse addressing the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when his mother cast him into the sea, Pharaoh’s family adopted him and his sister went after him; then Allah made him refuse all the nursemaids so that he would be returned to his mother to relieve her sorrow. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And We favoured you when your sister went and said, “Shall I direct you to someone who will be responsible for him?” So, we returned you to your mother that she might be content and not grieve.’ (*Ta Ha:* 40)

What is the difference between the three verses? Why is the same verb *'return'* used with both a transitive and an intransitive sense? We say that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And when Musa (Moses) returned to his people' this meant that Musa (Moses) made the decision to return on his own. As for when He says, 'If Allah should return you' at this point, Musa (Moses) was a baby who could not return on his own accord, and therefore the True Lord *Glorified is He* provided him with a way of returning by bringing someone to carry him and return him. And when He says, 'If Allah should return you' He could have said, 'and if you once again come face to face with some of them', just as He said of Musa (Moses), 'And when Moses returned to his people', but the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah should return you' to indicate that Muhammad's decisions to act or abstain were not in his own hands.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* were saying, 'Beware of ascribing Muhammad's actions to his human nature, for if Muhammad goes somewhere, it is because Allah sent him there; and if he returns from somewhere, he only returns because Allah returns him'. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* emigration to Medina was undertaken by Allah's leave. Before Allah gave him leave to emigrate, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could not emigrate by his human nature. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us always to know that when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went anywhere or returned from anywhere, this was not the result of the Prophet's human nature, but rather, the result of the will of the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

But why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* say, 'If Allah should return you to a faction of them' when He could have said, 'if Allah brings you to them', or 'if Allah brings you to Medina'? We say that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants these words to refer to those who refused to join the battle, for there were those who had remained in Medina against their wishes because they could not afford to go or because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could not find mounts for them. In addition, there were also those who were unable to fight because of illness or old age; and these people were true Muslims, and their excuses were accepted by Allah and His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* is speaking about those who refused to go out and fight even though they were able to do so and possessed the necessary wealth, weapons and everything else that was required. These were the ones who rejoiced in not going out to fight; as for the others, their eyes filled with tears grieving for not being able to join. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is referring here to the hypocrites who continued in their hypocrisy; if any hypocrite repented before this verse was revealed, their repentance was accepted, and those who died before this verse was revealed were left to the judgement of Allah. So, there remained those hypocrites who rejoiced and laughed when they remained in Medina. Allah punished them by erasing their names from the records of those who struggled for Allah's Cause, and they were denied the great reward merited by striving in His cause.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If Allah should return you to a faction of them [after the expedition] and then they ask your permission to go out [to battle].' How could they first ask for leave to stay behind and contrive ways to get this leave dishonestly, but then ask leave to go out and fight? We say that when they saw the believers come back with battle-spoils, this caused them to feel woe in their hearts because they were worldly people, and thereupon they asked leave to go out and fight the next time so that they could get hold of spoils and worldly gains. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* instructed His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* not to give them leave to fight alongside the Muslims, saying, 'You will not go out with me, ever, and you will never fight with me an enemy.' That is, your names have been erased from the record of those who strived in the cause of Allah. Why the True Lord *Glorified is He* chose not to give them the honour of struggling and the reward of fighting alongside the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, you were satisfied with sitting [at home] the first time.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says, 'ask your permission to go out.' This only applies to cases where the believers went out of the city to fight; what, then, would their position have been if Medina itself was attacked? The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should not even allow them to fight in such a case, instructing him to inform them of, ‘nor shall you fight an enemy together with me!’ So that was the end of the matter; they were not allowed to go out and fight battles outside, nor to fight the enemies if they invaded Medina, for they had been completely erased from the records of those who strived for Allah’s cause, and they were not allowed to fight either within Medina or outside it. As long as they rejoiced in staying behind and refused to join when they were able, the True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed that they would remain with those who remained behind.

What does ‘those who stay behind’ mean? It either means those who remained behind when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out. Or it means those who disobeyed the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by refusing to go out. Or it means that their scent was changed. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about fasting, ‘Yes, the changed scent of the breath of one who fasts shall be sweeter to Allah on the Day of Resurrection than the scent of musk.’(1)

When something’s scent changes, this indicates that it has turned rotten, so it is as though they had become rotten. This implies that they have become rotten and corrupt because they disobeyed the Prophet’s command. It also means that they stayed behind when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out to fight. The requital of these deserters was not only that their names were erased from the records of those who strive for Allah’s Cause, but there was another requital, of which the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us:

وَلَا تُصَلِّ عَلَىٰٓ أَحَدٖ مِّنۡهُم مَّاتَ أَبَدٗا وَلَا تَقُمۡ عَلَىٰ قَبۡرِهِۦٓۖ إِنَّهُمۡ كَفَرُواْ
بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَمَاتُواْ وَهُمۡ فَٰسِقُونَ ٨٤

Do not hold prayers for any of them if they die, and do not stand by their graves: they disbelieved in God and His Messenger and died rebellious [84] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 84)

Prophet Muhammad’s prayer over the dead was a means of mercy for them and a means for their sins to be forgiven because to pray over the dead means to supplicate for mercy and forgiveness for them, and to ask Allah to include them with the righteous. And if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said these words and made this supplication, his prayer would certainly be answered by Allah. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* denied them mercy at a time when a man had a dire need of it, when he leaves the life of this world for the life of the grave is between this life and the Hereafter.(1)

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(1) *Related by al-Bukhari (1904) and Muslim (163) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

The True Lord's words to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'And do not pray [the funeral prayer, O Muhammad], over any of them who has died – ever' are a prohibition of something which has not yet occurred. When He says, 'or stand at his grave' this means do not go to his grave and supplicate for mercy for him. Why did the True Lord not say, 'that dies' instead of using the past tense and saying, 'that has died'? We say that it is because death is a certain event which has been decreed by Allah and destined, and the event of death is recorded and known to Allah, and cannot be called future in respect to Allah. Death is not decreed a night or two before it occurs, but rather, its occurrence has already been decreed and made final.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'and do not pray [the funeral prayer, O Muhammad], over any of them.' This tells us that this matter is not a special circumstance, but rather it is a general rule. There are rulings which are determined by certain circumstances and others which are general. An example of a ruling determined by circumstance was the verse which was revealed about the leader of the hypocrites, `Abdullah Ibn Ubayy, when he contracted his final sickness, his son `Abdullah went to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him to give him his shirt to use as his father's shroud, so he gave it to him. He then asked him to pray over him, so the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to pray over him and supplicate forgiveness for him.(2) The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings*

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(1) The life of death and resurrection, as Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, "and behind them is a *(Barzakh)* barrier until the Day they are resurrected.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 100). The word *barzakh* in Arabic means a veil or barrier between two things, as is found in Allah's words, 'And it is He who has released [simultaneously] the two seas, one fresh and sweet and one salty and bitter, and He placed between them a barrier and prohibiting partition.' (*al-Furqan:* 53)

(2) See the notes for verse 9:80.

be upon him did this as a kindness to `Abdullah the son of `Abdullah Ibn Ubayy, who was a true Muslim.

When the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* stood by `Abdullah Ibn Ubayy's side, he said to him, 'It was your love for the Jews that ruined you.'(1) This was because `Abdullah Ibn Ubayy used to indulge the Jews and aid them, and the reason he dissembled Islam hypocritically was to assist the Jews. When he was with the Jews he would act as a disbeliever, whilst when he was with the Muslims he would act like a Muslim. Upon this, Ibn Ubayy said, 'O Prophet Muhammad, I asked to see you so that you might pray for forgiveness for me, not so that you would scold me.'

So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for forgiveness for him, whereupon the verse was revealed, 'Ask forgiveness for them, [O Muhammad], or do not ask forgiveness for them. If you should ask forgiveness for them seventy times - never will Allah forgive them.' (*at-Tawba:* 80)

`Abdullah Ibn Ubayy asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to give him his robe to be shrouded and buried in, and when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to his house, he sent him his outer robe. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to wear two robes, one against his body and the other over it, and when the outer robe was delivered to `Abdullah Ibn Ubayy, he said, 'I want the robe which has touched the skin of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.'

Look at the leader of the hypocrites, who was filled with prideful disdain for the believers, making all these requests as he lay dying. So, what did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* do? He sent him the robe which had touched his blessed body. All of this was to please `Abdullah, the son of `Abdullah Ibn Ubayy.

Several believers did not accept these actions and felt uneasy about them. When `Abdullah Ibn Ubayy finally died, his son `Abdullah came and asked

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(1) *Related by Ibn Kathir in his exegesis (ii. 379) on the authority of Qatadah, who did not specify which companion he heard it from. Ibn Hajr related it in 'Al-Fat-h' (8/334) and ascribed it to Abd Ar-Razzaq and At-Tabari on the authority of Qatadah. Ibn Hajar commented, 'This is a Mursal Hadith and its narrators are trustworthy. It is backed by what At-Tabari related on the authority of ibn 'Abbas with similar wording.'*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray over him. And when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to pray over him, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* stood between the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the direction of prayer so he will not pray the funeral prayer.(1) At this point the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave the final word on the matter and revealed the noble verse, ‘and do not pray [the funeral prayer, O Muhammad], over any of them who has died – ever.’ The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to pray over Ibn Ubayy because he was a prophet of mercy to the worlds, but `Umar ibn al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* stood between him and the prayer-direction so that he could not pray. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed his words, ‘and do not pray [the funeral prayer, O Muhammad], over any of them who has died – ever.’ They say that this was one of the times when the Revelation agreed with `Umar bin al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him*.

One of the things about which the Revelation agreed with `Umar bin al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* was the changing of the prayer-direction from Jerusalem to Allah’s Inviolable House. `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* used to wish for this, and used to say to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Prophet Muhammad, would that you were to take the Station of Ibrahim (Abraham) as your place of prayer!’(2) Another example was the issue of the prisoners taken at Badr. ‘Umar thought they should be killed. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was of the opinion that the prisoners should have been employed to teach the Muslims how to read and write, or that they should be ransomed; and then the noble verse was revealed, ‘It is not for a prophet to have captives [of war] until he suppressed the enemies [upon Allah 's enemies] in the land. Some Muslims desire the commodities of this world, but Allah desires [for you] the Hereafter.’ (*al-Anfal:* 67)

Some people wonder, ‘How could `Umar challenge the judgement of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*?’ We say that it is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not remain alive forever, so he wanted to give them a good example of how if he *peace and blessings be upon him* saw a good idea, he would accept it. Some of the orientalists say, ‘you are always talking about how `Umar did this and that; why do you never tell us about how Muhammad did this and that?’ We reply to this that if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did something, he was a Messenger of Allah. As for others than him, when they did things, this showed that it is possible for the natural Islamic instinct to have an opinion with which Allah concurs.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (4671), Ahmad (i. 16), At-Tirmidhi (3097) and an-Nisa’i (iv. 67)*

(2) *Related by Al-Bukhari (4483) on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him*

And after ‘And do not pray [the funeral prayer, O Muhammad], over any of them who has died – ever’ was revealed, it became a general rule that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will never pray over the hypocrites, but if anyone else wanted to pray over them, they could. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would honour every Muslim by praying over them when they died, but after this noble verse was revealed, he stopped praying over the hypocrites.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also refrained from praying over people who died leaving debts behind. He would ask the family of the deceased if he owed any debts, and if they said yes, he would ask if the deceased had left any wealth to cover the debts. If they said that he had not, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would say, ‘Pray over your fellow.’(1)

But what is the sin of the one who owes a debt, to the extent that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would refrain from praying over him? We find the answer from his narration, ‘If one takes money from people with the intention of paying it back, Allah will make it easy for him to pay it back; and if one takes it with the intention of squandering it, Allah squanders him.’(2)

So, if the one who died leaving behind debts and he had the intention to repay them, Allah would have helped him to repay them; and if he left enough wealth to cover these debts, in the form of property, land or money in the bank, he is not considered to be a debtor.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (2298) and Muslim (1619) on the authority of Abu Hurarya Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *Related by Al-Bukhari (2387), Ahmad (ii. 361, 417) and Ibn Majah (2411) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘or stand at his grave.’ We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would visit the grave of Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* and would stand by the graves of the believers and say, ‘Peace be upon you, abode of believing folk!’(1) The True Lord *Glorified is He* forbade him from doing this for the graves of the hypocrites. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then gives us the reason for this, saying, ‘They disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger and died while they were defiantly disobedient.’ We know how they denied Allah and His Prophet, but what about the True Lord’s words, ‘and died while they were defiantly disobedient.’? Did they die whilst being outside the confines of the religion? Indeed, they did. But we might ask here: Is disbelief not worse than disobedience, since we know there is no sin graver than disbelief? So why does Allah *Glorified is He* say, ‘and died while they were defiantly disobedient,’ when they also disbelieved?

We say that disbelief means the absence of faith in Allah and His Prophet and the refusal to enter Islam, but disobedience means to be bereft of adherence to any kind of values; for religion generally instils values which even those who disbelieve follow. For example, when they wanted to rebuild the *Ka`ba* before the coming of Islam, they said, ‘We want to build it with lawfully-earned money, not unlawful money.’ In those days, they used to run prostitutes and fly flags to advertise them, and take a share of their earnings. Islam had not yet come, but there was still a sense of the values of the divinely-revealed religions which had come before Islam, some of which Islam acknowledged.

So, the True Lord’s words, ‘They disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger’ mean that they were not Muslims; and His words, ‘and died while they were defiantly disobedient’ meant that they did not adhere to any values.

The True Lord says:

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(1) *Related by Muslim (249), Ahmad (ii. 375), Ibn Majah (4306) and An-Nisa’i (i. 94) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

وَلَا تُعۡجِبۡكَ أَمۡوَٰلُهُمۡ وَأَوۡلَٰدُهُمۡۚ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ أَن يُعَذِّبَهُم بِهَا فِي
ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَتَزۡهَقَ أَنفُسُهُمۡ وَهُمۡ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

Do not let their possessions and their children impress you: God means to punish them through these in this world, and that their souls should depart while they disbelieve [85] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 85)

We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* said in a previous verse, ‘So let not their wealth or their children impress you. Allah only intends to punish them through them in this worldly life and that their souls should depart [at death] while they are disbelievers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 55)

When one verse very similar to another, we say that the specific wording used and the context differs, and whoever pays attention to the specifics and the contexts will see that this is reinforcement, not repetition. Two verses might have the same general meaning, but every verse has its own special meaning to impart. Let us take an example of this from the True Lord’s words, ‘and do not kill your children out of poverty; we will provide for you and them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 151); And His words, ‘And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you.’ (*al-Isra’:* 31)

Some of the orientalists have claimed that the Quran repeats itself. Yet this is not correct because they are only considering the general meaning of the verse not the specific meaning it imparts. The specific meaning of each verse corresponds to its context. Regarding His words about sustenance for children, they did not look at the beginnings of each verse, but only at the ending of each, which is a result of their ignorance of the Arabic language manner of articulation. We would like to ask the orientalists who raise these kinds of issues if they believe that either one of these verses is more eloquent than the other. They will have no answer since they do not know about the precision of the Arabic language manner of articulation. We say to them: If you consider both the ends and the beginnings of each verse, you will find that the wording of the end of each verse is a natural consequence of its beginning otherwise the meaning would be lost. Notice that in one verse, ‘for fear of poverty’, and in the other, ‘out of poverty’ at the end; and in the beginning, one says, ‘We will provide for you and them', and in the other 'We provide for them and for you.' The two verses begin differently: the first verse asserts the existence of poverty, whereas the second asserts it does not exist, but the parents fear that they will fall into poverty because of the coming of their children.

The first verse addresses those who are already poor, whilst the second verse addresses those who are not yet poor but who fear they will become poor if they have children. The poor person, as we know, must get provisions for himself before he can get them for his children, and therefore the True Lord *Glorified is He* reassures him that his children will not detract anything from his provision saying, 'We will provide for you and them.' That is, 'Be assured, O poor person, that you will be provided for and your children will not take anything from your provision because the True Lord *Glorified is He* will provide for you first and then for your children as well'. As for the one who is not yet poor but fears having children will bring poverty with them, he might worry that the new baby will come and turn his wealth into poverty; so, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses him by saying, 'We provide for them and for you.' That is, their provision will come from Allah before your own provision will. So, do not fear poverty and kill your children due to this fear; the True Lord *Glorified is He* will certainly provide for them, and you will not become poor because of your children. Thus, we see that the meaning of the two verses is completely different, and there is no repetition.

Likewise, regarding the verse we are currently studying, some people say, 'This verse was revealed in the same chapter that the one which resembles it is in'. We say to them: Indeed, it was, but each verse has its own meaning. But what is the difference between the two verses, so we can see that there is no repetition? The first verse says: 'So let not their wealth or their children impress you. Allah only intends to punish them through them in this worldly life and that their souls should depart [at death] while they are disbelievers.' The second verse, which we are currently examining, says, 'And let not their wealth and their children impress you. Allah only intends to punish them through them in this world and that their souls should depart [at death] while they are disbelievers.' The first difference is found at the beginning of the verses: the first verse says, 'So let not', whilst the second says, 'And let not.'

In the first verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘so’ which implies that this verse is based on the previous one; that is, ‘And what prevents their expenditures from being accepted from them but that they have disbelieved in Allah and in His Messenger and that they come not to prayer except while they are lazy and that they do not spend except while they are unwilling.’ (*at-Tawba:* 54) It is as though this is the nature of their disbelief: they only pray hypocritically, and they only spend money for Allah’s Cause with resentment.

What makes money enjoyable is to spend it on what you like: if you like a certain food, you buy it, and if you like a certain item of clothing, you buy it. In doing so, you are happy as you spend your money; but these people feel resentment as they spend their money. When the believer spends his money on charity, he does this with faith that Allah *Glorified is He* will give him many multiples of reward in this life and in the Hereafter; so, when the believer spends his money on charity, he is happy to have contributed to the good of his worldly life and his Hereafter. As for the hypocrite who conceals disbelief in his heart, he does not believe in the Hereafter, nor know anything about blessed provision, so it is as though he spends his money without getting anything in return. That is, he considers it as a loss of wealth and nothing else. If a person spends resentfully, the money he possesses is a source of ignominy and woe for him because he gets the money after toil and struggle, and then spends it without believing in the Hereafter or divine reward.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to alert us to the fact that the provision He gives to these people is a cause of their misery and ignominy in this life. He makes them gather money by work and toil but then spend it without reward, so that they lose it. One of them might go hypocritically to war, spending money on his weapon and his mount, but getting no reward for this; or he might raise his sons until a time of war comes, and send them off to war hypocritically so that they die without attaining martyrdom if they are hypocrites like their fathers. Thus, we find that the wealth of the hypocrite, who pretends to be Muslim whilst really being a disbeliever, is nothing but a source of woe for him. Because of this, as a believer you must not admire their wealth as it will be a source of ignominy for them in this worldly life. They spend it hypocritically because if they were to refuse to spend and fight for Allah’s Cause whilst claiming to be Muslims, it would be as though they were announcing themselves to be hypocrites. Therefore, we find that their reluctant spending was a source of ignominy for them, and if they did not spend, this would expose them, so it is as though their wealth and children were a source of torment for them; and this is not something to be admired but rather to be pitied.

Do not think that when you erased their names from the records of warriors and soldiers so that they would never go out with you or fight an enemy alongside you, that their wealth would make up for not being allowed to go out; do not let this excite your admiration, for it will cause punishment, exposure and ignominy for them.

But in the first verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘So let not their wealth or their children impress you.’ Why? Because some of them had wealth of which they were proud, and others had many children of whom they were proud, and some of them had both wealth and children. So, their states were different, which is why He says, ‘their wealth or their children’ to convey all these states, and to include those who had only wealth, those who had only children, and those who had both.

As for the second verse which we are currently examining, it says, ‘And let not their wealth and their children impress you. Allah only intends to punish them through them in this world and that their souls should depart [at death] while they are disbelievers.’

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gave them wealth to punish them; but there are those who ask, ‘If Allah wanted to punish them with wealth and children, does this mean that wealth and children are the cause of the punishment? Do Allah’s actions require causes? Do the Muslims not say that Allah’s actions require no causes?’ We reply to this: They said the same thing about the True Lord’s words, ‘And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56).

They did not realise that the cause of creation does not benefit Allah, but rather, it benefits the creation because this worship is a source of benefit and advantage for the created being. The reason for creation is worship, and this reason does not benefit the Creator and does not give any advantage to Allah, and nothing is added or taken away from His Dominion. Another interpretation of the verse suggests that worship is the consequence of creation, as is the case when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And the family of Pharaoh picked him up [out of the river] so that he would become to them an enemy and a [cause of] grief.' (*al-Qasas:* 8) Did Pharaoh's family adopt Musa (Moses) so that he would become an enemy and source of grief for them, or did they adopt him so that he would become a source of joy for them? They adopted him so that he would become a source of joy for them, but things did not turn out as they intended, and the one they adopted to be an ally and aid for them ended up bringing their end. If Pharaoh had knowledge of the unseen, he would not have adopted Musa (Moses) and would have killed him instead. The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to conceal the unseen from him so that he would raise the child that would one day bring an end to his reign. It is like when you send your son to school and he fails, and you spend money on him, but he does not graduate. Did you put him in school so that he would fail? Of course, you did not.

Likewise, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'intends to punish them' He wants us to understand that the punishment is not the reason for their amassing wealth; rather, the reason they amass wealth is that they love wealth and pleasure. The same is true for children: the reason for having children is not so that they will be a cause of their parents' punishment, but rather, they have children to derive pride from them. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to punish them with their wealth and children in this worldly life. The hypocrite amasses wealth in both lawful and unlawful ways, and after this the wealth either leaves him because of some catastrophe which befalls him, or he leaves his wealth by dying, or this wealth will be a source of punishment for him and he will live in fear of poverty and loss of his blessings. Likewise, in the case of children, he will raise them and struggle with their upbringing, and then either they will leave him by dying, or they will grow up to be corrupt and therefore will be a source of punishment for him.

It is as though the True Lord's words, 'So let not their wealth or their children impress you. Allah only intends to punish them through them in this worldly life and that their souls should depart [at death] while they are disbelievers' are directed from the True Lord *Glorified is He* to the believers, because Allah might confer wealth and children upon those hypocrites, but this will not be good for them. It will rather be a punishment for them; for by concealing their disbelief and pretending to be believers, they obliged upon themselves responsibilities which will claim part of their wealth and children, and this will be a punishment for them because they will have lost everything and gained nothing. They will have no reward if their children are killed, and no reward for charity they give out of ostentation and hypocrisy.

As for the second verse, which says, 'And let not their wealth and their children impress you, Allah only intends to punish them through them in this world and that their souls should depart [at death] while they are disbelievers.' It is a general verdict concerning the worldly blessings Allah gives them, whilst they deny His existence. These blessings will be a source of punishment for them because they will always fear losing their wealth or their children, and therefore they will be punished by suffering. They will also be tormented by their fear of dying and leaving behind their possessions. They do not want to die because they do not believe in the Hereafter, and their wealth and children will be a source of woe for them; if the believer's child dies, he knows that the loss of his child will close the way to hell for him and lead him to Allah's Mercy, and he will be rewarded for his loss. If the child is still young, he will be a treasure for him in the Hereafter, and if the child is grown, he will remember what the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And those who believed and whose descendants followed them in faith - We will join with them their descendants.' (*at-Tur:* 21). This will console him for the loss of his child, but the hypocrite will live in fear and woe, and this will be a punishment for him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* alerts us to the fact that the hypocrite's wealth always causes him woe when He says, 'Indeed, those who disbelieve spend their wealth to avert [people] from the way of Allah. So they will spend it; then it will be for them a [source of] regret; then they will be overcome. And those who have disbelieved - unto Hell they will be gathered.' (*al-Anfal:* 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* punishes those who use hypocrisy to fight His religion by leaving them in their hypocrisy and then succouring His religion so that this will cause them woe in their souls when they see the wealth they have spent and how it has introduced the opposite effect they intended, contributing to the victory and spread of the religion.

The True Lord's words, 'and that their souls should depart [at death] while they are disbelievers' refer to the greatest loss. When the disbeliever dies, and finds that there is nothing in store for him in the Hereafter but hell because he died without having any certitude that paradise exists and without having done anything to earn it, he will be cast into hell full of woe for what he left behind in this world. And this is not all, but rather, we read that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who disbelieved... They are striking their faces and their backs.' (*al-Anfal:* 50) Thus, they shall experience the punishment.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then gives us another image of the hypocrites, saying:

وَإِذَآ أُنزِلَتۡ سُورَةٌ أَنۡ ءَامِنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَجَٰهِدُواْ مَعَ رَسُولِهِ ٱسۡتَـٔۡذَنَكَ
أُوْلُواْ ٱلطَّوۡلِ مِنۡهُمۡ وَقَالُواْ ذَرۡنَا نَكُن مَّعَ ٱلۡقَٰعِدِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

When a sura is revealed [saying], 'Believe in God
and strive hard alongside His Messenger,' their
wealthy ask your permission [to be exempt], saying,
'Allow us to stay behind with the others' [86]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 86)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to expose the hypocrites who enjoyed the same rights as the believers simply by claiming to be Muslims, when, in fact, their hearts harboured disbelief and schemes against the believers. The True Lord's words, 'and when a chapter was revealed [enjoining them] to believe in Allah and to fight with His Messenger' are addressed to the hypocrites who revealed the falseness of their faith. It is why He says 'Believe', which means to bring your hearts into agreement with your tongues, for Allah wants faith to be in the heart as well as on the tongue, so that actions are in line with convictions. His words, 'fight with His Messenger' mean: go out to war and fight alongside the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* which is a practical expression of faith. Do not rejoice in how you have avoided going out to fight for Allah’s cause because fighting in Allah’s cause is a great honour which will be greatly rewarded, and so to avoid the fighting is to lose out on a great good. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives great reward to those who truly struggle in His cause.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘those of wealth among them asked your permission.’ They asked for permission to stay behind because they pretended to have faith whilst secretly concealing their disbelief, proven by their abandonment to believers when the call to fight was made. They should have joined those who went out to fight and used this as an opportunity to proclaim their repentance and return to the truth so that their fighting would make up for their previous hypocrisy; but they did not do this. They rather asked permission to stay behind.

Who among them asked for permission? They were those who possessed the necessary means to go out and fight such as bodily health and strength. They did not suffer from the weakness of old age, and were men and not boys; for the old man is too weak to go out and fight, and the young boy is not strong enough to fight. Also, a sick person might be prevented from fighting because of his illness. As for those able-bodied, they were the ones who possessed all the necessary means of war such as bodily strength and weapons. They were neither too old, too young nor too ill,

So, whenever a verse was revealed mentioning to strive in Allah’s Cause, the ones who asked for exemption did not have any valid excuses – for otherwise they would have been excused – but rather, the ones who asked for exemption would be the hypocrites who satisfied all the criteria for being able to fight, yet still they asked leave to remain behind. They would say, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us, ‘Leave us to be with them who sit [at home]’. The verse strictly refers to men, not women. When the hypocrites sat and stayed behind, and asked to be allowed to stay with the women, the disabled, the ill and the children, they thereby dishonoured themselves. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them:

رَضُوا۟ بِأَن يَكُونُوا۟ مَعَ ٱلْخَوَالِفِ وَطُبِعَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

They prefer to be with those who stay behind.
Their hearts have been sealed: they do not
comprehend [87] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 87)

They were content to be judged according to the standards of women rather than men. Therefore, they could not ‘understand’ because they were happy to be described in a way which no man should be content with, and indeed they rejoiced in this description without realising how humiliating it was for them. They fled from battle as women flee from it. The hypocrite, as we said before, has two faculties: his speech, and his heart. The hypocrite’s words proclaim his faith, yet his heart is filled with disbelief; and therefore, his faculties are contradictory.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for them: ‘We shall treat you in this worldly life according to what you say, whilst in the Hereafter, we shall treat you according to what your hearts conceal. We shall set a seal on these hearts so that the disbelief shall never come out of them, nor shall faith enter them’. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘their hearts were sealed over.’

Elsewhere the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah has sealed their hearts.’ (*al-Baqara:* 7), and, ‘wherefore Allah has sealed their hearts’. (*at-Tawba:* 93) As long as the disbeliever is pleased with the disbelief in his heart, the True Lord *Glorified is He* seals his heart so that the disbelief within it, cannot come out, and the faith outside it cannot come in. It is just like when you seal something with red wax, so that what is inside it remains as it is, and what is outside it remains as it is. Allah seals the heart by preventing the disbelief inside from coming out and preventing the faith outside from coming in.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘so they do not understand.’ They do not understand that they have been denied the reward and bliss of the Hereafter because of how they rejoiced in staying behind and not going out to fight; and they believe that this is good for them when really the opposite.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure the hearts of the believers and tell them not to be aggrieved by those hypocrites who did not go out to fight even though they were able to do so financially and physically. The True Lord *Glorified is He* removed the effects of this from the souls of the believers by saying:

لَـٰكِنِ ٱلرَّسُولُ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ مَعَهُۥ جَـٰهَدُوا۟ بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ ۚ
وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ لَهُمُ ٱلْخَيْرَٰتُ ۖ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

But the Messenger and those who believe with him strive hard with their possessions and their persons. The best things belong to them; it is they who will prosper [88] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 88)

That is, do not be aggrieved by these hypocrites because they did not join the fighting alongside you, and do not say, ‘We have lost their support in our fight’, because the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not need them or their fighting, as Allah says, ‘But if the disbelievers deny it, then We have entrusted it to a people who are not therein disbelievers.’ (*al-An‘am:* 89), ‘But if they are arrogant - then those who are near your Lord exalt Him by night and by day, and they do not become weary.’ (*Fussilat:* 38), ‘Here you are - those invited to spend in the cause of Allah - but among you are those who withhold [out of greed]. And whoever withholds only withholds [benefit] from himself; and Allah is the Free of need, while you are the needy. And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people; then they will not be the likes of you.’ (*Muhammad:* 38) and ‘O you who have believed, whoever of you should revert from his religion – Allah will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 54)

So, if some of those who possessed power, wealth and influence refused to join the fight, this must not cause concern or grief in the souls of the believers because Allah is with them and because the most excellent things await them, which is everything that could be called ‘excellent’ or ‘good’.(1) ‘Those will have all that is good, and it is those who are the successful.’ The successful is the one who succeeds and triumphs by gaining the fruits of his labours. The root Arabic word, equivalent to ‘successful’ is taken from ploughing the earth which is required for farming, and man must plough it to get crops. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘and have you seen that [seed] which you sow? Is it you who makes it grow, or are we the grower?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64) When we plough the earth we churn it up, so that it softens and allows air to enter it or sunrays to penetrate it. After ploughing, it becomes receptive to air and sunrays, and this cleanses it of any stagnant water it may have contained within it. In this way, the earth takes in enough air to allow the roots of the plants to grow; for if you plant a seed in unploughed ground, the plant will not grow because its roots will not have any air to breathe. But if you plough the earth, you allow the rays of the sun to penetrate beneath the surface of the earth so that the water stored therein can evaporate and air replaces it; and then the roots of the plants can grow. So, whenever an action leads to a good result we call this success, a word which is derived from a physical matter we see every day, namely farming.

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(1) *‘The most excellent things’ means that they shall have the good things of both this life and the next. Al-Hasan, however, said that it means beautiful women, based on Allah’s words: ‘In them [gardens] are good and beautiful women.’ (ar-Rahman: 70) See the exegesis of Al-Qurtubi (iv. 3149)*

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to explain an abstract concept to us, He presents us with a physical image which we can see before us to make the matter easier for the mind to comprehend. This is especially true when it comes to unseen matters which we cannot see for ourselves. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make them easier for our minds to understand, He presents us with parables based on psychical things. When a man ploughs the earth and splits it, and then plants the seed in it, it gives him a large yield. Likewise, we call every action which leads to a good result a 'success'.

To explain the way *zakat* and all acts of charity will be rewarded and multiplied for us in the Hereafter, He says, 'The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills.' (*al-Baqara:* 261) If a single grain, when it multiplies in the ground, gives seven hundred grains; and if the earth, which is Allah's creation, can give you seven hundred multiples of one thing, then how much can the Creator of the earth give? And how many multiples can He make?

This is a tangible image of the reward for charity and *zakat*. When you farm the earth, you do not say, 'I have decreased my wheat stores by such-and-such a measure', because you know that you are taking this amount from your wheat stores to plant it in the earth. You do not worry about the amount of wheat you have taken from the stores, but rather, you think about what this wheat will bring you when the harvest comes. The same is true of *zakat*: do not consider how your wealth will be reduced when you pay *zakat*, but consider how Allah will multiply this wealth for you.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* drew this parable from something physical which everyone knows, and an image which everyone can see before them, so that we can understand what awaits us. If the earth, which is the primary source of sustenance, takes one single grain planted in it and gives a yield of seven ears, each contains one hundred grains, and if the earth which was created by Allah can give you a seven-hundredfold return of what you place within it, then how much can the Creator of the earth give you?

Allah *Glorified is He* is able to multiply for whomever He wills beyond any reckoning. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives glad tidings to the believers by saying, 'Those will have [all that is] good, and it is those who are the successful.' (*at-Tawba:* 88). This is the reward of the believers in this worldly life, but there will also be another reward in the Hereafter, of which the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us glad tidings when He says:

أَعَدَّ ٱللَّهُ لَهُمۡ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ﴿٨٩﴾

God has prepared Gardens graced with flowing streams for them and there they will stay. That is the supreme triumph [89] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 89)

We have already spoken about the tidings of gardens and rivers. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the great goodness in which the believers will abide.

Why does Allah *Glorified is He* call the reward of the Hereafter 'supreme success'? It is because there is a difference between goodness and success in this worldly life and success in the Hereafter. The life of this world only lasts as long as your life within it, and the enjoyment you gain from it is commensurate with the means available to you; so it contains a limited success, but nothing that could be called a supreme success. As for the Hereafter, its blessings never cease and you never leave them; the blessings live forever, and you live forever. At the same time, these blessings are not commensurate with your own power, but rather with the power of your Creator *Glorified is He* and they do not require you to work or strive for them, but rather as soon as you think of something it comes to you. This only happens in the in paradise. This is the supreme success because it is permanent and everlasting.

The True Lord says:

وَجَآءَ ٱلْمُعَذِّرُونَ مِنَ ٱلْأَعْرَابِ لِيُؤْذَنَ لَهُمْ وَقَعَدَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا۟
ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ ۚ سَيُصِيبُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٠﴾

Some of the desert Arabs, too, came to make excuses, asking to be granted exemption. Those who lied to God and His Messenger stayed behind at home. A painful punishment will afflict those of them who disbelieved [90] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 90)

These words refer to the nomadic hypocrites who lived around the outskirts of Medina and were called ‘Bedouin’. The previous verses referred to the hypocrites who lived in Medina, of whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘and [also] from the people of Medina. They have become accustomed to hypocrisy.’ (*at-Tawba:* 101)

This verse under discussion speaks of the hypocrites who lived in the desert areas around Medina, who were Bedouin. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘and those with excuses’. This refers to the ones who wanted to avoid going out to fight by proffering contrived excuses, wanting to stay behind where they were instead of fighting, even though they had no genuine excuse for doing so. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘and those with excuses among the Bedouins came to be permitted [to remain], and they who had lied to Allah and His Messenger sat [at home].’ They lied to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they claimed to believe in him, for they did not even bother to proffer false excuses, and simply remained behind. Had they truly believed, they would not have refused to go out and fight, or at least they would have asked the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for leave to stay behind.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, ‘There will be, for those who disbelieved among them, a painful punishment.’ Disbelief, as we know, means to cover up faith. The hypocrites from amongst the Bedouins pretended to have faith, but their hearts were filled with disbelief; and the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘The Bedouins say, “We have believed.” Say, “You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], 'we have submitted,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts.”’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14) That is, they adhered to the outward actions of Islam, but faith had not yet entered their hearts.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us of the requital which awaits those Bedouin who stayed behind, saying, ‘There will be, for those who disbelieved among them, a painful punishment.’ We saw before that the punishment in hell is sometimes called ‘grievous’ in the Quran, sometimes ‘humiliating’, sometimes ‘horrendous’ and sometimes ‘lasting.’

The True Lord *Glorified is He* and then wanted to give a dispensation to those who were unable to fight and had a genuine excuse to stay behind, so He said:

لَّيْسَ عَلَى ٱلضُّعَفَآءِ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلْمَرْضَىٰ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ
مَا يُنفِقُونَ حَرَجٌ إِذَا نَصَحُوا۟ لِلَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ ۚ مَا عَلَى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ مِن
سَبِيلٍ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٩١﴾

But there is no blame attached to the weak, the sick, and those who have no means to spend, provided they are true to God and His Messenger – there is no reason to reproach those who do good: God is most forgiving and merciful [91]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 91)

We know that the weak person is the one who is unable to work, not because of illness but because he is either too old or too young to go to war. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also excuses the sick from fighting. These are the ones who have been afflicted with a malady which has made them unable to fight. Additionally, Allah also excused those who do not have the means to spend on their equipment because they are too poor to afford mounts to carry them or weapons to fight with.

Means of equipment, as we know, requires that you can support yourself throughout the journey to war, the duration of the war itself and then the journey home; and every warrior had to provide his own means for going to war. Allah *Glorified is He* excused those who could not afford to equip themselves and gave them other tasks to serve the cause, as He says, ‘they are sincere to

Allah and His Messenger'. That is, they advise and encourage those who can go out and fight to instil in them the zeal to fight. They could also assist those who went to fight(1) by combating the rumours and lies which the hypocrites stirred up in Medina to detract the Muslims' spirit, and responding to them to silence their wicked tongues.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, 'There is not upon the doers of good any cause [for blame]. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.' The meaning is that they are not guilty of any sin or fault, nor should they be censured or reprimanded; and there is no cause for doing any of this to the doers of good. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there is no cause be reproach them since they did all that is required from them, but they did not actually go to the battlefield for reasons out of their control, and they did what that faith asked of them.

If the warrior did have enough to support himself but did not possess a mount to ride, he had to go to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and ask him for a mount; and if the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'I can find nothing for you to ride upon' (*at-Tawba:* 92). There will be, for those who disbelieved among them, a painful punishment.', this was permission for him to stay behind. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says of this:

وَلَا عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا مَآ أَتَوۡكَ لِتَحۡمِلَهُمۡ قُلۡتَ لَآ أَجِدُ مَآ أَحۡمِلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ
تَوَلَّواْ وَّأَعۡيُنُهُمۡ تَفِيضُ مِنَ ٱلدَّمۡعِ حَزَنًا أَلَّا يَجِدُواْ مَا يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

And there is no blame attached to those who came to you [Prophet] for riding animals and to whom you said, 'I cannot find a mount for you': they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they had nothing they could contribute[92] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 92)

Those excused are: the weak, the sick, the one who cannot support himself and the one who does not have a mount even after he asked the Prophet

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(1) *Zayd ibn Khaldi Al-Jahni Allah be pleased with him narrated that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever equips a warrior in Allah's Cause thereby joins the battle; and whoever looks after a warrior's family in his absence thereby joins the battle.' Related by Al-Bukhari (2843) and Muslim (1895)... An-Nawawi said in his commentary in Sahih Muslim, 'This reward is given to all those who look after the warrior's family in his absence by attending to their needs, spending money on them or helping them in their affairs.'*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for one, and could not secure it. The one who experienced this would grieve for two reasons: the disability of Muslims to possess enough financial means to provide the necessary equipment for the warriors themselves and the necessary means to transport them to the battlefield. The second: he was unable to get to the battlefield to join his brothers and fight alongside them, and the only way he could participate was to strive with a different kind of striving to that which occurs on the battlefield. His type of struggle was to protect the others who stayed behind from the rumours the hypocrites spread; for the hypocrites would not cease to fight the faith with their words. They would endeavour to bring false reports to the families of those who had gone to fight. In modern terminology, we would call them the 'fifth column'. They were the ones who attempted to bring down the aspirations and spirits of the families of those who went out to fight. So, those who stayed behind from the battle because of genuine excuses had to strive in another way which was to protect the home front, composed of the families of those who had gone out to fight, by countering the war of rumours which was waged by the hypocrites.

We find that *jihad* is one of the obligations of Islam.(1) *Jihad* against the non-Muslims is for two reasons: Firstly, when the non-Muslims oppose the call to faith and stand in the way of the preacher to silence him and prevent him from giving the call to Allah; secondly, to allow the Muslims to disperse throughout the earth to make Allah's word ascendant – not by compelling people to follow it, since there is no compulsion in religion. The sword which was wielded for the cause of Islam was not wielded to force people to accept the religion, but rather, it was wielded to protect man's freedom to choose the religion he wanted to follow without any compulsion. Man's freedom to choose can only be liberated by removing the obstacles which imposed any religion upon him so that he is free to examine all religions and then freely choose the religion he wants to follow. So, Islam was not compelled by use of the sword; otherwise, who imposed Islam onto the first people who accepted it when it was weak, and could not protect those who adhered to it?

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(1) *Jihad* is an individual obligation in the case where the aggressor invades the land, but it is a collective obligation when the aggressor does not invade. Likewise, *jihad* is also obligatory to spread Allah's Call by use of argument and proof; for Islam only resorts to the sword if the Muslims are attacked and oppressed by others.

As long as *jihad* is obligatory in this sense, every Muslim is obliged to join: either as an individual obligation if the believers are compelled by force to do something they do not wish to do or else as a collective responsibility which if fulfilled by some, the rest are excused. Allah only excused the following people from the struggle: the weak because they are too old or too young, the sick and those who do not have the means. The last category is of two kinds: those who do not have enough to support themselves at all, and those who do not have the means to go to war such as weapons or mounts.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* excused those people, and gave them another task of faith which required them to assist the families of the warriors, to hinder the rumour-mongers who sought to break the spirits of the Muslims and to reply to them and silence their wicked tongues. This was true in the case of those who did not have the means to go to war such as food, weapons and so on. As for those who have the means to support themselves but do not possess means of transport to get them to the battlefield, they must go to the ruler and ask him to provide them with a mount. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the commander of all the warfare which took place while he was alive. If he said to anyone, ‘I do not have anything to carry you to the battlefield’, this constituted permission for them to stay behind, but it was not sufficient to absolve them of blame. Rather, they had to emotionally express their reaction because of their desire to join and their grief at not being able to fight alongside the others. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘They turned back while their eyes overflowed with tears out of grief that they could not find something to spend.’ The phrase ‘overflowed with tears’ expressed what was in the hearts of these believers. The word ‘overflow’ is always used for tears which are drops of water which come from the eyes out of sorrow; and if sadness is so intense the tears run out and the eyes dried up, and another liquid replaces them and it is said that the person ‘cries blood’.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* depicts for us the intensity of the sorrow the believers felt when they were prevented from joining the battle. Allah *Glorified is He* did not say ‘their tears overflowed’ or ‘they cried blood instead of tears’, but rather ‘overflowed with tears’, as though the eye contained neither water nor blood, but that the eye itself flowed out onto the cheek. This showed the deep sorrow in the heart; and a warrior such as this is not at all guilty of any fault or sin, for he had done his best and all that he could have done. This is clearly expressed by his emotional pain at not being able to join the others.

The True Lord says:

إِنَّمَا ٱلسَّبِيلُ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يَسۡتَـٔۡذِنُونَكَ وَهُمۡ أَغۡنِيَآءُۚ رَضُواْ بِأَن
يَكُونُواْ مَعَ ٱلۡخَوَالِفِ وَطَبَعَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمۡ فَهُمۡ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ٩٣

The ones open to blame are those who asked you for
exemption despite their wealth, and who preferred to be
with those who stay behind. God has sealed their hearts:
they do not understand [93] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 93)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘There is not upon the doers of good any cause [for blame]’ referring to those who had valid excuses for not going out to fight and who nevertheless were doers of good, as He says, ‘when they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger.’ So, who should be reproached? The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us the answer. ‘The cause [for blame] is only upon those who ask permission of you while they are rich.’ That is, reproach and censure was only directed towards those people who were fully able, but nevertheless asked leave to stay home instead of fighting. When you hear the word *rich,* it usually refers to possessing wealth, but if the word is used in a specific way, its meaning is determined by the context of the text. The one who could not afford to support himself was excused, and therefore the one who was able to support himself was rich in food; and the weak person was excused, so the strong person was rich in strength; and the sick person was excused, and therefore the healthy person was rich in health; and the one who had no mount to carry him to the battlefield was excused, and therefore the one who had a mount was rich in the sense that he possessed a mount. In this way, do not take for granted the word ‘rich’ to mean only ‘possession of wealth’, but consider those who possess all the means to join the battle. So, rebuke and censure was rightfully directed at those people who were enriched by all these means, yet asked to remain behind.

Someone might ask, ‘Why did they ask for exemption when they were fully able to go’? We say, ‘It was because they were hypocrites, and their hypocrisy put them in a humiliating position such that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them, “They are satisfied to be with those who stay behind.”’ Those who were pleased to remain with those who are left behind were thereby tainted by dishonour and shame, for they were happy to be treated as women. As we know, this description came in stages; first they said, ‘Allow us to stay behind with those who remain at home!’ (*at-Tawba:* 86). We said before that ‘remain at home’ is for women. They were happy to be humiliated and debased; they descended from the level of men and were happy to join the women in fleeing from battle. A poet said:

I do not know, nor am I close to knowing
Whether the tribe of Hisn are men or women!

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then tells us of the punishment which awaits them, saying, ‘and Allah has sealed over their hearts, so they do not know.’ In a previous verse, He says, ‘and Allah has sealed over their hearts, so they do not understand.’ (*at-Tawba:* 87) What is the difference between the two statements? If you see a verb which ordained responsibility given in the passive voice, such as Allah’s words, ‘Fighting is ordained for you, even though it is hateful to you’ (*al-Baqara:* 216) and His words ‘Fasting is ordained for you’ (*al-Baqara:* 183), someone might say that it should have been ‘Allah has ordained fighting for you’ and ‘Allah has ordained fasting for you’ because this is a clear and binding commandment, and so it would have been better to say ‘Allah has ordained for you’. Even though the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordains them, obligations are always given in the passive voice in the Quran such as when Allah says, ‘prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered - the free for the free, the slave for the slave and the female for the female.’ (*al-Baqara:* 178), and when He says, ‘Prescribed for you when death approaches [any] one of you if he leaves wealth [is that he should make] a bequest for the parents and near relatives’. (*al-Baqara:* 180)

The reason is that Allah *Glorified is He* does not ordain any religious responsibilities to disbelievers; He only issues religious responsibilities to those who believe in Him and submit to Him. Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordains responsibilities, He says, ‘O you who have believed, prescribed for you…’ (*al-Baqara:* 178).

From this, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* has not ordained any obligations or tasks to those who do not believe in Him. An individual embraces faith of his own free will, and once he embraces faith Allah ordains things for him. So, faith is the basis of obligation; as long as you believe, you become addressed in what the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes obligatory; for if you do not believe, you are not subject to any obligations. So, you are the one who has obliged yourself to obey Allah's Law because you believe in Him as a Deity, Creator and God. Because of your own faith, Allah obliges you to do things, and you are a party in everything you are obliged to do. Even though He is the One Who obliges, He loves that you have entered into the sphere of religious responsibility by believing, and therefore He gives the verb in the passive voice.

If we consider Allah's words, 'their hearts have been sealed', we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is drawing our attention to the fact that the hypocrites are the ones who caused their own hearts to be sealed because they embraced disbelief in their hearts and then claimed with their tongues that they had faith, and tried to deceive the believers and to deceive Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* therefore wanted to make it clear to them, 'As long as you have chosen hypocrisy and disbelief in your hearts, We shall close these hearts and seal them so that the disbelief does not come out and faith does not enter'.

Allah *Glorified is He* therefore, is the One Who sealed their hearts, but only after they themselves filled their hearts with disbelief and then hypocritically claimed to have faith. They are the ones who incurred the sealing of hearts by disbelieving to begin with, so the True Lord *Glorified is He* sealed their hearts because of the sickness within them. Had they not disbelieved in the first place, Allah would not have sealed their hearts. Therefore, the verb is given in the passive voice because they were involved in it.

As for the verse which we are currently examining, He says therein, 'and Allah has sealed over their hearts, so they do not know.' When the act of sealing is attributed to Allah, this shows that the hearts have been sealed in the most powerful way. The sealing comes from Allah *Glorified is He* as a final verdict upon them. Neither the slightest amount of hypocrisy will leave their hearts, nor will a single atom of disbelief nor a single atom of faith creeps into their hearts; for they do not know the value of true faith.

A person might not understand something, but someone else might be able to explain it to him and teach him about it. Therefore, to deny that someone understands or grasps the truth of something does not deny that he might know it; but when knowledge is negated, this negates both personal understanding and appeal to understanding by someone else. When Allah says, ‘they do not understand’, this refers to their personal understanding, but they might be taught to understand by someone else. In contrast, when Allah says, ‘they do not know’, this means that they neither understand, nor will they come to learn. The negation of their knowledge is mentioned alongside the attribution of the sealing of their hearts to Allah, whilst the negation of their grasping the truth is given a general attribution using the passive verb. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* denied that they grasped the truth by using the passive verb, He explained that their hypocrisy is what caused them to fail to grasp the truth. Allah, however, did not negate the possibility that they might learn from someone else in the future. But when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘so that they do not know’, He further negated that they had personal knowledge, and negated their ability to learn from someone else; this is a more powerful effect. Therefore, the sealing of their hearts was even more powerful because they refused to have personal knowledge or learn it from anyone else.

That is why we find ‘they do not understand’ in one place, and ‘they do not know’ in another; and each one is appropriate to its individual context. Allah says:

يَعْتَذِرُونَ إِلَيْكُمْ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ قُل لَّا تَعْتَذِرُوا۟ لَن نُّؤْمِنَ لَكُمْ قَدْ
نَبَّأَنَا ٱللَّهُ مِنْ أَخْبَارِكُمْ ۚ وَسَيَرَى ٱللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُۥ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ
عَـٰلِمِ ٱلْغَيْبِ وَٱلشَّهَـٰدَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

When you return from the expedition they will carry on coming to you [believers] with excuses. Say, ‘Do not make excuses. We do not believe you: God has told us about you. God and His Messenger will watch your actions now, and in the end you will be returned to the One who knows the seen and the unseen. He will confront you with what you have done’ [94] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 94)

‘To make an excuse’ means to present a justification which absolves one of blame or censure. If it is said that someone offers an excuse, it means that he has done something which is deemed to be bad and now wishes to be excused of it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'They will make excuses to you when you have returned to them.' In a previous verse, He said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'If Allah should return you to a faction of them.' (*at-Tawba:* 83) Thus, we may observe that when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the returning of the companions and the warriors, He says, 'you have returned,' and when He attributes it to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He says, 'If Allah should return you.' This indicates that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was solely in the control of his Lord, whilst his followers were controlled by their own free wills. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, They will make excuses to you when you have returned to them' after which comes a plain response to the hypocrites' attempts to excuse themselves, 'Say, "Make no excuse…"' This is a decisive response. When someone offers an excuse to you, you might listen to his excuse but not accept it; and the mere fact that you listen to his response indicates that there is a possibility that his excuse could either be accepted or rejected. But when you refuse to even listen to his excuse, this means that he is inexcusable.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Say, "Make no excuse - never will we believe you…"'. It is as if when the hypocrites approached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers began to make excuses, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* made it clear to them, 'Do not make excuses' refusing to even allow them to begin making excuses. He then took them by surprise by giving the final verdict, 'never will we believe you.' The word *believe* has several meanings: it means to have faith, as in 'I believe in Allah', and it means to accept something as being true, as in 'I believe this'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'But no one believed Musa (Moses).' (*Yunus:* 83). The brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* said to their father, 'But you would not believe us, even if we were truthful.' (*Yusuf:* 17) And in the verse which we are currently examining, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "Make no excuse - never will we believe you…"' That is, we shall not accept that what you say is true. The hypocrites came with the intention of offering false excuses, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused even to listen to these excuses, and told them, 'We shall not believe that what you say is true'.

Had the hypocrites possessed even the slightest bit of intelligence, they would have understood that Muhammad's Lord had told him everything, even what was in their hearts before they spoke it. And had they possessed the least sagacity, they would have abandoned their hypocrisy and embraced true faith. But they have not learned their lesson, and so the True Lord *Glorified is He* spelled it out for them directly by saying, 'Allah has already informed us of your news.' So it was not a matter of astute deduction, but rather, a divine inspiration.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, 'and Allah will observe your deeds, and [so will] His Messenger.' What was the action which Allah *Glorified is He* and His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would observe, after the Prophet refused to hear their excuses and informed them that Allah had told him about the lies they concealed in their hearts? Allah *Glorified is He* knows what the hearts contain, and He did not wish to close before them the door of repentance. After all this, they should have restrained themselves and rest assured that nothing could escape the True Lord *the Exalted* even their intentions. As long as you know that everything Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has told you is true, you must therefore restrain yourselves and abandon hypocrisy for true faith. If, however, you insist on continuing as you are, this means that you have benefited nothing from the miraculous way in which Allah informed His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* of your deceit.

Out of mercy, Allah has opened the door of repentance to you, so take this opportunity; for Allah *Glorified is He* will see all that you do in the future, and what He sees will be the basis of how you will be requited for your deeds.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'then you will be taken back to the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed, and He will inform you of what you used to do.' As long as Allah *Glorified is He* knows all that is beyond the reach of our perception, it is all the more obvious that He also knows all that we can witness.

The unseen or unknown, as we know, is that which you cannot perceive so that you know nothing about. But if it is unknown to you but known to others, then it is only relatively unknown because there are things which veil it from your knowledge. For example, if something is stolen from you, then you do not know who stole it, whereas its place is known by the thief as well as his accomplices including the one with whom the thief hides the stolen goods and the one who sells the stolen goods. In this case, it is unknown to you but known to others. As for the absolute unknown, it is that which is unknown to you and to everyone else. There are people who go to fraudsters who claim to read minds and are called ‘psychics’. The psychic tells someone to take all the money from his pocket and count it, and then he tells him how much is there. If you want to discover his trickery, put your hand in your pocket and take out some money the value of which you do not know, and then ask him to tell you how much is there. He will not know. Why? Because you have changed it from a manner of something unknown to one person but known to others into a matter of the absolute unknown.

The absolute unknown is that which is unknown to you and to everyone else as well. Also, it is that for which you have no clues to help you determine it. If you give your son a geometry problem to solve, the solution is unknown to him when he first reads it, and then he uses the given information and the appropriate formulas until he finds the solution. So, anything that has clues leading to their solutions are not unknown, and therefore it cannot be said that the people who discovered electricity and atom-splitting had knowledge of the unknown. There were clues in the universe which led them to discover certain laws which already existed but were previously unknown to us.

In some exercises, you find that the one who sets them writes the correct solution next to them because he does not want to know the solution but rather wants to teach the pupil the right method to reach it.

Therefore, if you want to solve a geometry problem, for example, you must have certain given information to reach the solution. If you are required to prove that two lines are parallel, this requires that every two opposing angles be equal, and that each two reciprocal angles be equal. So, you take given information or clues to lead you to the solution. In the same way, the equality of two or three sides of a triangle is proved by the equality of its angles. In such cases, can it be said that you have attained knowledge of the unknown? Or have you merely used clues to lead you to solutions? When you seek to prove the accuracy of a theorem, you say for example, that this equals that according to the theorem of number nine, and that this corresponds to that according to the new theorem; and once your proofs take you to theorem number one, this is the theorem which has no antecedent, and it must be self-evident. Thus, we find that all the knowledge in the universe is based on self-evident theories or antecedents, which then developed into discoveries of the secrets which Allah placed in His universe. As for the True Lord *Glorified is He* He says of Himself that He is the ‘Knower of the unseen and the witnessed.’ That is, He has knowledge of the absolute unknown for which there are no clues to guide us to it. We cannot ever hope to know the absolute unknown because it is not known to some and unknown to others, and there are no clues to lead us to it, for it is known only to the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

We find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘[He is] Knower of the unseen, and He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] unseen to anyone. Except whom He has approved of messengers, and indeed, He sends before each messenger and behind him observers.’ (*an-Naml:* 26-27) Allah *Glorified is He* has knowledge of the absolute unknown, which is different from those things which are unknown to some and the True Lord *Glorified is He* says of the discovery of these partially unknown things, ‘and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills.’ (*al-Baqara:* 255)

When Allah wills to reveal some of the secrets of the universe, He determines the time when He wishes this to occur, and everything in this universe has its proper time to come forth. For example, electricity, atoms, man’s journey to the moon and the exploration of space all had their proper times to come forth, and the scientists investigated them by utilising the prior knowledge available to them. But they cannot cause any discovery to come forth without the permission Allah gives them by directing them towards this secret, either by scientific investigation or by pure happenstance. We see that mankind only encompass knowledge of these things after following their clues, and by Allah’s leave.

As long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has knowledge of what we cannot perceive, He must also have knowledge of what we can plainly witness. Someone might think that if he sits somewhere empty and concealed, Allah will not witness what he does there because he can do what he wants without anyone seeing him. But this is not the case since the True Lord *Glorified is He* knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind, and thus nothing in this universe is concealed from Him. The unknown is not unknown to Him, nor is the world we ourselves can perceive.

As long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that He is ‘the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed’ it was inevitable that He would then say, ‘and then He will inform you of what you used to do.’ That is, He is informing you in advance of how you will be recompensed for the good or evil you will do, so that no one can say that he did not know about this, or that had he known that his actions would lead him to a bad end, he would not have done them; and so that everyone will be a witness over himself. For Allah told him of the requital which makes it fair, not unjust. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as an accountant.’ (*al-Isra’:* 14)

The True Lord says:

سَيَحْلِفُونَ بِٱللَّهِ لَكُمْ إِذَا ٱنقَلَبْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لِتُعْرِضُوا۟ عَنْهُمْ ۖ فَأَعْرِضُوا۟ عَنْهُمْ ۖ
إِنَّهُمْ رِجْسٌ ۖ وَمَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ جَزَآءًۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

When you return to them, they will swear to you by God in order to make you leave them alone – so leave them alone: they are loathsome, and Hell will be their home as a reward for their actions [95] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 95)

The phrase ‘they will swear’ comprises a miraculous secret from Allah because the word ‘will’ here indicates that they had not yet sworn, meaning that the verse was revealed, recited and heard by the believers and the hypocrites before the hypocrites swore; and the verses of the Quran would be recited and read in the prayer, and would never change or alter until the Day of Resurrection. Had the hypocrites possessed the ability to reflect, they would not have come forth and sworn, and they would have said, “The Prophet Muhammad said in the Quran which was revealed to him that we would come and swear, but we will not come and will not swear’. But because Allah spoke these words, and He is the Creator and Doer, He willed that all sagacity leave their minds. It is like when He says, ‘The foolish among the people will say, “What has turned them away from their *qibla*.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 142)

They then went ahead and said this, even after the verse was revealed. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘They will swear by Allah to you when you return to them.’ It means to return to Medina, the place of peace and security, after war. It is as though the balance was restored after the fighting by the return home to Medina. But why would the hypocrites swear by Allah to the believers? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘that you would leave them alone.’ That is, you might refrain from censuring and condemning them for refusing to join you in the struggle. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘leave them alone.’ Give them what they want by letting them be. However, it is different in the sense that they will not be blamed nor rebuked. They are left un-blamed as a way of disgrace and humiliation to them without pardoning or forgiving them as a requital for what they did. Censure and rebuke are ways of requiting an act of disobedience, but they are only employed if one has a hope that the disobedient party might come to his senses and repent. If your son does not go to school, for example, you rebuke him, and you do this because you hope that he will fix his behaviour; but if he continues to behave in this way, you end up ignoring him, which shows that you have lost all hope of ever correcting him.

This was the case with the hypocrites. Had it been the case that censure and humiliation might have caused them to wake up and return to true faith, this would have shown that there was some hope that they might be rectified. But they could not be rectified, and in this respect, they differed from the believers. When a believer commits a sin, he deserves to be reprimanded and censured by his fellow believers, and this causes him pain. It is always possible that a believer might be heedless for a moment and commits a sin, and if after this sin he censures himself so that he feels pain for what he did; or if his fellow believers censure him, then he will wake up and feel guilty for what he has done, and this will lead him to repent.

As for those hypocrites, it would have done no good to censure them or make them feel emotional pain because they would never return to true faith. Therefore, the commandment came to leave them be because they did not even deserve to be reprimanded, since you only reprimand someone for a sin if you think that this might make him desist from it, but there was no hope that they would ever desist. The Quran gives the reason for this; ‘indeed they are evil; and their refuge is Hell as recompense for what they had been earning.’ The scholars say that the word ‘*rijs*’ means that they are vile and filthy, but I say that it means filthiness itself. Do not therefore say that they are filthy because this would imply that they were once pure and were then made filthy; actually, they were not. Rather, they were filthiness itself, and nothing could cleanse them because whatever comes from filth will be the same as it. So, they were impure, and no amount of censure or reproach could cleanse them. The word *rijs* is used here in the same way as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have believed, indeed the polytheists are *rijs* (impure)' (*at-Tawba:* 28) meaning that they were impurity itself.

The word *rijs* also means something which is physically loathsome, like carrion. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "I do not find within that which was revealed to me [anything] forbidden to one who would eat it unless it be a carrion, or blood spilled out, or the flesh of swine - for indeed, it is impure - or it be [that slaughtered in] disobedience, dedicated to other than Allah.' (*al-An'am:* 145) So, carrion is physically loathsome, as is wine, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah] and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90) So, alcohol itself is loathsome, i.e. physically loathsome. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* adds to this gambling, idolatry and divining the future, all of which are judged the same way as alcohol. Thus, we understand that alcohol is physically loathsome, whilst gambling, idolatry and divining the future are morally loathsome.

There is also the word *rijz*, which means the whispered insinuations of Satan. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Remember when He overwhelmed you with drowsiness [giving] security from Him and sent down upon you from the sky, rain by which to purify you and remove from you the evil [suggestions *rijz*] of Satan.' (*al-Anfal:* 11)

The word *rijs* has different meanings, and here it means disbelief; and the disbeliever is loathsome in his very nature. He is not a person who has been made loathsome. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'So leave them alone, indeed they are *rijs* (evil); and their refuge is Hell as recompense for what they had been earning.' If the refuge to which they are headed is hell, this means that they will search for an escape and find nowhere to go except to enter hell, which of course is the worst of all places.

Is this a way of deceiving them, or is it a recompense for them? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘in recompense for what they had been earning.’ We know that both good and bad deeds are described with the verb ‘earn’. This is because unlawful actions which go against Allah’s instructions must involve a certain amount of contrivance, whilst lawful actions are natural, and do not trouble the soul or disturb the faculties. But some sinful people become so accustomed to sin that it becomes easy, and does not trouble them in the least. Such a person sees a sin as an acquisition; for example, someone might tell you about the adventures he had abroad when he travelled to London or Paris, and the sinful things he did there. He imagines that he is telling you about things he has acquired, not knowing that they are calamities into which he fell of his own free choice. This kind of person commits sins habitually so that his action becomes ‘acquisition’. This is the opposite of the person who sins but then weeps much and feels regret. He might rebuke himself every time he thinks of the sin, and feel remorse for it.(1) The first rejoices in his sins and ill deeds and sees them as acquisitions, and he becomes proficient in these sins and accustomed to them.

The True Lord says:

يَحۡلِفُونَ لَكُمۡ لِتَرۡضَوۡاْ عَنۡهُمۡۖ فَإِن تَرۡضَوۡاْ عَنۡهُمۡ فَإِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ لَا يَرۡضَىٰ عَنِ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡفَٰسِقِينَ ٩٦

They will swear to you in order to make you accept them, but even if you do accept them, God will not accept people who rebel against Him [96]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 96)

To be pleased means for the heart to feel secure about something which is beneficial? When I say, ‘I am pleased with this’, it means that the amount of benefit I get from it is enough for me. The levels of pleasure differ from one person to another. You might be pleased with a certain benefit, and someone else might have something even better but not be pleased with it. The believer is distinguished by the fact that if anything comes to him without his acquisition to it, he must be pleased with it, because the One Who caused it to come to him is Merciful. Mercy might be contained in something without the believer being able to see it now. Allah might withhold wealth from him because He knows that if he gives him more wealth, he will spoil his children with it, and this wealth will cause them to go astray.(1) The True Lord *Glorified is He* therefore gives him enough wealth to feed his children until they get through their teen years, and then He blesses him with wealth once his children have reached adulthood. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* to withhold from His servants is sometimes the best way He can give to them, and therefore it is said, 'If you do not have what you want, then want what you have'.

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(1) *`Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him is narrated to have said, ‘The believer views his sins as though he is sitting beneath a mountain which he fears might fall upon him; and the wicked man sees his sins as a fly which passes by his nose, so he swats it away.’ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6308), Ahmad (i. 383) and At-Tirmidhi (2497) Ibn Hajar says in Fath al-Bari (xi. 105), ‘The Muslim is always fearful and vigilant, seeing his good deeds as slight and fearing for the smallest of his sins.’*

Why did the hypocrites swear?(2) The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives the answer, 'so that you might *be pleased with them*.' And what would the pleasure of the believers have done for those hypocrites? Could the believers be pleased if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not pleased? And could Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* be pleased if his Lord was not pleased? The only pleasure which is of any good is the pleasure of one who can give benefit. If you were pleased with them after they swore to you, being convinced because of your human nature, your pleasure could not benefit them in any way, nor did the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* have any pleasure other than his Lord's Pleasure. The only truly beneficial pleasure here would be the pleasure of Allah. Beware, then, of being deceived by their sweetened words and artful speech into being pleased with them.

The True Lord says, 'indeed, Allah is not satisfied with a defiantly disobedient people.' That is, if they attain your pleasure, this pleasure is far removed from Allah's pleasure and the pleasure of His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) The Sheikh said elsewhere that even when Allah withholds, He gives; and when He gives, this might be a curse.

(2) *Al-Qurtubi said in his exegesis (iv. 3157) that `Abdullah ibn Ubayy swore to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him that he would not stay behind at wartime ever again, and asked him to be pleased with him.*

It does not reflect the Prophet's pleasure nor Allah's Pleasure. The True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the verse by saying, 'Allah is not satisfied with a defiantly disobedient people.' And if Allah is not pleased with them, then your pleasure cannot avail them. It is foolish for them to seek your pleasure. Your pleasure will not do anything for them at any time unless it reflects the pleasure of Allah and His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Here we might ask, 'Are they disobedient, or are they disbelievers'? We say that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, the hypocrites shall be in the lowest depth of the fire.' (*an-Nisa':* 145) That is, the destination of the hypocrites in Hellfire is even lower than that of the disbelievers. So how the hypocrite could be called disobedient, given that even a believer might be disobedient? A believer might be disobedient by committing a grave sin. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'As for the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands in recompense for what they committed as a deterrent [punishment] from Allah.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38) A believer might steal and might also commit adultery, as Allah says, 'As for the adulteress and the adulterer…' (*an-Nur:* 2).

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* declared the act to be criminal and set a punishment for it, this means it is possible that a believer might commit it. But we must distinguish between the disobedient person and the sinner: the one who commits grave sins is disobedient, and the one who commits venial sins is a sinner. So why does the True Lord call the hypocrites disobedient?

Let us call to mind what we always say, which is that disbelief means to disbelieve in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Islam, and if iniquity accompanies disbelief, then it is not the iniquity of a person who sins whilst being Muslim, but it means to disobey even the other religions which his own people follow. All religions comprise certain values, and their followers will be accountable for the values which their religion ordains, but even some are also iniquitous in this regard.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* and then says:

ٱلْأَعْرَابُ أَشَدُّ كُفْرًا وَنِفَاقًا وَأَجْدَرُ أَلَّا يَعْلَمُوا۟ حُدُودَ مَآ
أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِۦ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٩٧﴾

The desert Arabs are the most stubborn of all peoples in
their disbelief and hypocrisy. They are the least likely to
recognize the limits that God has sent down to His
Messenger. God is all knowing and all wise [97]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 97)

Before, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* spoke of the hypocrites who were not Bedouins, namely the Arabs to whom Allah's Message was revealed, as it was to all people. In this verse Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the Bedouins (*A'rab*) – and what is the difference between Arabs (*'Arab*) and Bedouins (*A'rab*)? Arabs were those who lived in towns and settled in specific places from which or within which they sought their livelihoods and to which they always returned, living in permanent dwellings and settlements. As for Bedouins, they lived in the wilderness and had no fixed abodes. They would move between grazing sites, having no fixed homes and no special affiliations to any particular place. This meant that none of them had civic laws to govern them in the places they lived and each one of them answered only to himself or to the chief of his tribe. As long as they lived this way, having no homes to inspire them to act peacefully and respectfully with other, they were all considered to be 'wild'; in other word, they had no affiliation to any place, community or civil law.

On the other hand, the one who lives in a town which he calls his home has neighbours, is ruled by laws, and has an affiliation to a place and to the inhabitants of this place. He cooperates with others and gets along well with the other inhabitants of his town and has affinity for them; affinity and affiliation afterwards brings about peaceful relations. This is the opposite of the situation of those who live as nomads; they are filled with harshness, rudeness and boorishness since their environment has stigmatised them and made them accustomed to solitude and isolation.(1)

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(1) *An example of their harshness is that Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him kissed [his grandson] Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, whereupon Al-Aqra' ibn Habis At-Tamimi, who was sitting nearby, said: 'I have ten sons, and I have never kissed a single one of them.' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him*=

If one hears the word ‘Bedouin’, he should know that they are nomadic people infamous for their harshness since they do not have any community spirit which would inspire them to be kind and polite.

The word *a‘rab* is the plural of the word *a‘rabi*, which is one of the singular-plural forms found in Arabic. Thus, *a‘rab* is the plural of *a‘rabi*, not *‘arab*. Bedouins were of two kinds: some of them had experience of civilisation since every civilised family might have had land in the wilderness to which they would sometimes go so that when they went there they would be treated as guests; these were known as *ma‘arif* (acquaintances). On the other hand, some who lived in the wilderness might have had relations in the civilised world, so that when they had to go to the town or city, they would stay with them. There was another kind of Bedouin who neither owned land in the wilderness nor in the towns.

After speaking about Arabs and their hypocrisy, Allah *the Almighty* speaks here about Bedouins by saying: "[The hypocrites amongst] the Bedouin are more tenacious in [their] refusal to acknowledge the truth and in [their] hypocrisy [than are settled people] and more liable to ignore the ordinances which Allah has bestowed from on high upon His Prophet – but Allah is All-Knowing, Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 97)

Why were they more tenacious in their disbelief and hypocrisy? This was due to them living far away from centres of knowledge and religious teaching,(1) and they are harsh and rough-natured.

Allah's Words '…and more liable to ignore the ordinances which Allah has bestowed from on high upon His Apostle…' (*at-Tawba:* 97) mean that they are less likely to know the limits which Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* has ordained

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= *looked at him, and then said: {He who has no mercy shall be shown none.} Narrated by Al-Bukhari(5997) and Muslim (2318)*

(1) Someone might ask: ‘How can this be, when we use their poetry and rhetoric as evidence in our scholarly research, and linguist such as al-Asmai and others used to interview the Bedouin tribes to learn their languages?’ Abu Yahya al-Ansari answers this in *(Fath ar-Rahman)* (p. 172) by saying: ‘Their ignorance concerned the rulings of The Quran, not its vocabulary. We do not use their language as proof for the elucidation of rulings, but rather to show what certain words mean, because The Quran and *Sunna* were revealed in their languages.’

since knowledge of the limits that He has ordained in the form of commandments and prohibitions, and the lawful and unlawful, comes from being connected to centres of knowledge, and this cannot occur when a person moves from place to another constantly, rather, it requires him to be settled. True knowledge, as we know, means that a scholar possesses immense knowledge of the universe, whereas each one of us has knowledge commensurate with his experiences in life and with the time he spent studying under the tutelage of well-learned scholars; only Allah *the Exalted* encompasses the knowledge of everything.

Human knowledge might be utilised, or it might not be; many people have knowledge but do not utilise it, and if someone has knowledge but does not utilise it, his knowledge is to his detriment. As for those who utilise their knowledge, putting commandments, prohibitions, the lawful and the unlawful in their proper places, and making appropriate judgements for doubtful matters, they are the ones who can be called ‘wise’ since they put everything in its proper place.

When Allah *the Almighty* ordains a commandment, He does it with knowledge and wisdom; as long as He ordains it, we must not disobey Him since every law that He sends down to His messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is meant to regulate the motions of life. It is Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* the One Who created life and created all created beings. Beware of spiting yourself by ordaining laws which incur Allah’s Wrath, for all the corruption in the world is caused by those who want to enact laws for man even though they did not create him. We advise them to leave the making of laws to the Creator of man, for Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is their Maker and therefore knows best the limits of what He has made, and He has ordained laws for the good of man, and only He can repair them if they are damaged or corrupted.

Amongst these Bedouin, there were those who were more tenacious in their disbelief and hypocrisy, and thus, more liable to ignore the ordinances which Allah *the Almighty* bestowed from above upon His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Also, there were others of whom Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلۡأَعۡرَابِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مَا يُنفِقُ مَغۡرَمٗا وَيَتَرَبَّصُ بِكُمُ ٱلدَّوَآئِرَۚ
عَلَيۡهِمۡ دَآئِرَةُ ٱلسَّوۡءِۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿٩٨﴾

Some of the desert Arabs consider what they give to be an imposition; they are waiting for fortune to turn against you, but fortune will turn against them. God is all hearing and All Knowing [98] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 98)

For example, if a caller to Allah preaches to them about Islam, some of them might openly claim that they follow Islam. Yet, once they learn that the zakat (poor-due) exists in Islam, they give the collector the due amount, but they would consider it as a 'loss', i.e. a waste, and thus give it reluctantly. As long as you give it reluctantly, this means that you do not really believe in the wisdom behind giving it, and you reckon what you give as being taken from you. Also, you would be more apt to say, ‘They took from me the fruits of my labour and gave it to someone who does not work for a living.’ You forget that what is taken from you is insurance for your life since when you are disable to work, you will find others to support you in the same way. Islam takes from you when you are able to work and gives to you when you are disabled, and this is insurance for your life.

It is widely known that everything in this universe is unsustainable; power, illness, health and disability are unsustainable. If you are able bodied, it is possible that you may become incapacitated; and likewise, if you are healthy, you may get ill. Therefore, when the Lawgiver assures you that in the event of your fellow man being incapacitated, that something will be taken from you to help him when you are able bodied, you will face life with strong faith and courage. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is telling you that you do not live on your own, rather, you live in an interdependent society; if you become incapacitated, the strength of others will be your reference. One Bedouin would pay the poor-due reluctantly and reckon it as a loss, and others amongst them would hope that Muslims would be beset by a disaster, so that they would not take the poor-due from him. Thus, one of them would wait for misfortunes to encompass Muslims, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '… and wait for misfortune to encompass you …' (*at-Tawba:* 98). This means that some hope and wait for a disaster to befall Muslims so that they would not collect from him the poor-due which he considered to be a loss.

Why does Allah *the Almighty* say 'misfortune' (*dawa'ir*)? We know that when a calamity befalls a man or a community and it is very strong, Arabs say that misfortune (*dawa'ir*) has encircled (*darat*) them which means that it has encompassed them to an extent that there is no way for them to escape from. Some of Bedouins would wait for misfortune to encompass Muslims since they hated paying the poor-due and saw it as a loss; they did not understand that the poor-due is added to a person's account of good deeds, that it is a means of purifying wealth and causing it to grow, that it looks after those who are incapacitated and that if any of them were to become incapacitated, they would find others to look after them.

The one who waits for misfortune to encompass you does not understand the wisdom of what is taken from him will be the one whom evil shall encompass, as Allah *Glorified is He* says '… it is they whom evil fortune shall encompass – for Allah is the All-Hearing, All Knowing.' (*at-Tawba:* 98) This is due to them not understanding and appreciating the value of living in a faith-based society, which would give the poor-due to them if they became incapacitated. If you wait for misfortune to encompass the one who takes from you, and you do not realise that the one who takes from you can also give to you if you were to become incapacitated, then misfortune will be yours.

Allah's Words '…it is they whom evil fortune shall encompass…' (*at-Tawba:* 98) appear to be a claim, and who is making this claim? Allah is. There is a difference between the claim of a powerless being and the claim of a powerful being. It is as though Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* Himself is saying '… it is they whom evil fortune shall encompass …' (*at-Tawba:* 98) which means that evil fortune shall certainly encompass them, without any doubt.

Allah *the Exalted* ends the verse by saying: '… for Allah is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.' (*at-Tawba:* 98) So, He hears their words when the collector comes to collect his share of the poor-due and how they would receive him rudely. Or they might have harboured a grudge deep in their souls without speaking. If they spoke, then Allah *the Almighty* is the All-Hearing; and if they did not speak and concealed the hatred in their hearts, then Allah is All Knowing. Thus, they were encompassed by Allah's Knowledge and His Hearing.

After this Allah *the Most High* comes to the second kind of Bedouin: those who were at least partly civilised, being either Bedouin with family in the towns or with townspeople with Bedouin families. He *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلْأَعْرَابِ مَن يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَيَتَّخِذُ مَا يُنفِقُ قُرُبَٰتٍ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ
وَصَلَوَٰتِ ٱلرَّسُولِ ۚ أَلَآ إِنَّهَا قُرْبَةٌ لَّهُمْ ۚ سَيُدْخِلُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِى رَحْمَتِهِۦٓ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٩٩﴾

But there are also some desert Arabs who believe in God and the Last Day and consider their contributions as bringing them nearer to God and the prayers of the Messenger: they will indeed bring them nearer and God will admit them to His mercy. God is most forgiving and merciful [99] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 99)

Some of these people believed in Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* and the Last Day, and when they gave the poor-due or charity, they did so in order to draw nearer Him since they believe in Him and see it as a treasure for them in the Hereafter. The word *qurba* in this verse means '… a means of drawing them nearer to Allah …' (*at-Tawba:* 99), which would be stored up for them until the Last Day. Allah's Words 'and of [their being remembered in] The Prophet's prayers' (*at-Tawba:* 99) mean that they considered what they spent as a means of drawing nearer to Allah *the Exalted* and also a way of asking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to supplicate for them since 'prayer'(s*alah)* in essence means 'supplication'. When charity for weak Muslims reached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from those who considered them as a means of drawing nearer to Allah, Prophet Muhammad would supplicate to Him for those who gave.

For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O, Allah, forgive the family of Abu Awfa and bless them!' when the poor-due and charitable contributions of Abu Awfa were brought to him. Also, the supplications of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were always answered, unless Allah *the Almighty* announced that He would not answer them for some reason.(1)

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(1) For example, when He *Glorified and Exalted is He* said: 'Ask forgiveness for [O Muhammad], or do not ask forgiveness for them. If you should ask forgiveness for them seventy times - never will Allah forgive them. That is because they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people.' (*at-Tawba*: 80).

Someone might say, ‘Does the giver of the poor-due and charity who does so as a means of drawing nearer to Allah not know that He does not benefit anything from this? Does he not know that it is only a means of devotion for himself personally?’ Indeed, he does know this, and he knows that Allah will reward him for something that benefits the poor. This indicates that every responsibility ordained by Allah benefits the assignee rather than the obligator. As long as the assignee is the one who benefits from it, Allah *the Exalted* calls him to what is best for him and what brings him goodness.

Concerning those who consider what they give a means of drawing closer to Allah *the Almighty* He says: '… Oh, verily, it shall [indeed] be a means of [Allah’s] nearness to them, [for] Allah will admit them unto His grace …' (*at-Tawba:* 99). Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* said this to the Bedouin who gave in order to draw closer to Him, and also, who hoped that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would supplicate for him. Allah is telling those like this that indeed it would be a means of Allah’s nearness for them since they would benefit from it and Allah *Glorified and Exalted is he* would admit them into His Grace. Allah’s Grace and Mercy is an everlasting blessing. As for paradise, it is eternal as long as Allah *the Exalted* keeps it in existence. Therefore, to be admitted into Allah’s Grace and Mercy is even better than being admitted into His Paradise. Therefore, when it is said that someone has been ‘admitted into Allah’s Mercy’, this means that he will be covered by grace forever.

Furthermore, when any Bedouin hears Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* say: 'However, amongst the Bedouin there are [also] such as believe in Allah and the Last Day and regard all that they spend [in Allah’s cause] as a means of drawing them nearer to Allah and of [their being remembered in] the Prophet’s prayers. Oh, verily, it shall [indeed] be a means of [Allah’s] nearness to them, [for] Allah will admit them unto His Grace…' (*at-Tawba:* 99), he will speak to himself about Allah's Gifts and will relinquish all evil impulses from his mind, namely any tendencies to want to sin, along with any evil slips of tongue he might have been tempted to utter. Also, this Bedouin might say to himself, ‘I fear that Allah might not forgive these impulses, sins and evil slips.' Thus, the verse reassures him that as long as he committed these sins heedlessly or forgetfully, he should know that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is Forgiving and

Merciful, and there is no need for him to torment himself by imagining that he will not be admitted into Allah's Grace and Mercy.(1)

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy!...' (*at-Tawba:* 99). Perhaps, someone who hears what came before this might imagine that reward, nearness and admittance to Allah's Grace and Mercy are only given to those who have never sinned, so these words tell him, 'Be reassured that if you have ever been guilty of sin and heedlessness, know that Allah *the Almighty* is Forgiving and Merciful. Do not let your sin destroy your faith that you will be admitted into Allah's Grace and Mercy.'

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* then says:

وَٱلسَّٰبِقُونَ ٱلْأَوَّلُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُهَٰجِرِينَ وَٱلْأَنصَارِ وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُوهُم
بِإِحْسَٰنٍ رَّضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا۟ عَنْهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى
تَحْتَهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٠٠﴾

God will be well pleased with the first emigrants and helpers and those who followed them in good deeds, and they will be well pleased with Him: He has prepared Gardens graced with flowing streams for them, there to remain for ever. That is the supreme triumph [100] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 100)

We are all believers, praise be to Allah, both 'the forerunners' and those who believed later. However, there were people who believed first –were they forerunners in the chronological sense or in the sense of being the most faithful followers? The chronological sense of being forerunners only applies to the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Mistakenly, one assumes that 'forerunners' in this verse means those who came before us chronologically; thus, someone might wonder: ‘What fault did we commit, not to be distinguished as those who are chronologically forerunners?’ Therefore, we say that the issue of being forerunners only applies in relation to one’s contemporaries meaning that there were other people during their times whom they outstripped, which is why Allah says in this verse '… amongst the Muhajireen and the *Ansar…*' (*at-Tawba:* 100). We know that those who emigrated with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were not all the Muslims of Mecca. Furthermore, when He *the Most High* says '… amongst the Muhajireen and the Ansar…' (*at-Tawba:* 100), this means that not all of the inhabitants of Medina who were Ansar (Helpers) were necessarily of 'the forerunners'. This means that the forerunners of those who embraced faith in Mecca and those who aided the Muslims in Medina are the ones meant by 'the foreruners'.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: {God says: 'I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he invokes Me. If he invokes Me to himself I invoke him to Myself, and if he invokes Me in a gathering I invoke him in a better gathering; and if he draws a hand's span nearer to Me I draw an arm's length nearer to Him; and if he draws an arm's length nearer to me I draw a fathom's length nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.'} Narrated by al-Bukhari(7405) and Muslim (2675)*

In chapter of *al-Waqi‘a*, Allah *Glorified and Exalted be He* says: 'And the forerunners, the forerunners those are the ones brought near [to Allah] in the Gardens of Pleasure.' (*al-Waqi’a*: 10-12) Then, the next rank after them is 'The companions of the right - what are the companions of the right?' (*al-Waqi’a*: 27) Allah *the Exalted* specifies who the forerunners are by saying: 'a good many of those of olden times, but [only] a few of later times.' (*al-Waqi‘a:* 13-14) Therefore, when someone says, ‘None of the Ummah, or followers, of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who followed his time could possibly reach the lofty status of the Companions since Allah *the Almighty* called them the 'forerunners'.’ We say to him, 'No, you must also understand that Allah *the Almighty* also says: "A [large] company of the former peoples. And a few from amongst the latter."' (*al-Waqi‘a:* 14) This shows that some of those who came after the time of Prophet Muhammad could attain the highest rank; therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted be He* did not deny any member of Muhammad's followers until the end of time to reach the lofty status of the Companions.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave reassurance to those who are not contemporaries of his lifetime by saying, 'I would have loved to meet my brethren.' The Prophet’s companions said to him, ‘Are we not your brethren?’ He said, 'You are my companions, but my brethren are they who shall believe in me without having seen me.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (iii. 155) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik*

This was a true word spoken by Allah's chosen one, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for there are those of us whose dearest wish is to perform the pilgrimage and visit the Noble Tomb of the Prophet. Furthermore, the Prophet went on to describe his beloved ones, 'The deeds of one of them shall be like that of fifty men.' They said, '[Fifty men] of them, or of us, O, Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'Of you, for you have much help in the good you do, yet they will have no help in the good they do. This is indeed what is happening in our times.

However, who are the forerunners meant in the verse we are currently examining? 'And the first forerunners [in the faith] amongst the Muhajireen and the Ansar…' (*at-Tawba:* 100). We know that the first of the Muhajireen (Emigrants) were those who fought at Badr and participated in the first battle in the history of Islam, even though they had not set out from Medina with the intention of going to war, rather, they intended to raid a caravan transporting goods and claim battle-spoils. Yet, despite this they went to war, not with caravans guarded by sentinels and shepherds,(1) but with the army of the Quraysh that came from Mecca, led by the leaders of the Quraysh.(2) Thus, the rank of those who fought at Badr was that of the forerunners who struggled in the first battle in Islam's history.

Therefore, when Hatib ibn Abu Balta'a(3) divulged the news that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would attack Mecca, the Prophet sent for him and said, 'What made you do this?' for Prophet Muhammad wanted to conquer Mecca without anyone knowing, so that the Muslims would not fight the believers who still lived in Mecca as they came out to defend it with the others, and the Muslims would not know that they were believers.

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(1) *This was because Abu Sufyan took the coastal road with the caravan when one of his scouts told him that he had seen two riders halt on the hill and draw some water and then depart. Abu Sufyan went to the spot they had halted and took some of the camel dung there and broke it up, and saw that there were date-stones in it. He said, 'By God, this is the fodder of Yathrib', and returned quickly to his companions, and turning the caravan away from the road they pressed on at full speed along the shore by the sea, leaving Badr on their left. See Ibn Hisham's Sira (ii. 618).*

(2) *They were Abu Jahl, Umayya bin Khalaf, and others.*

(3) *The story of Ḥatib Ibn Abu Balta'a sending a message to Quraysh in the pigtail of a woman informing them of the intention of Prophet Muhammad to conquer Mecca*

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to conquer it by surprise so that the disbelievers' ferocity would be dampened, but Hatib ibn Abu Balta'a wrote a message to some of the Quraysh, and Allah *Glorified and Exalted be He* told His Prophet about this. Therefore, the Prophet told 'Ali and his companions to go to a place called Rawdat Khakh, which was along the road between Mecca and Medina, where they would find a female traveller with a message to the Meccans hidden in her braids. When 'Ali went with his companions and searched for the woman in the place Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had told them, they found the woman, but she denied she had the message. So, they threatened her, and she brought out the message from her braids. They found that it was addressed to some Qurayshi idolaters from Hatib ibn Abu Balta'a. They took the message back to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who sent for Hatib and said to him, 'What made you do this, Hatib?' He replied, 'O, Messenger of Allah, I have familial and land connections with the Quryash, but I am without standing amongst them. Thus, I sought to win their favour, so that they would recognise me and look after my family and my property. Also, I knew that this would not harm you in any way, that Allah would aid you and that what I did would help me but not harm you.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'You have spoken the truth. You have spoken the truth.' 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* wanted to strike him with his sword, but the Prophet said, 'He fought at Badr, and for all you know it may be that Allah looked upon the men of Badr and said, "Do as you wish, for I have forgiven you."'

This is due to the men of Badr having gone to battle unprepared and ill-equipped, yet, they were willing to do so; thus, it is as though Allah *Glorified and Exalted be He* said, 'You did what you had to do, and I have forgiven all the sins you might do.'

Thus, the forerunners amongst the Emigrants were those who fought at Badr, those who were present at the Treaty of Hudaybiyya and those who made the Pact of Goodly Acceptance after returning with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the lesser pilgrimage, after which he made treaties with the Quraysh.

Furthermore, the forerunners amongst *Ansar* (the Helpers) were the ones who came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Mecca and gave him their backing, promising him security and alliance; there were twelve of them at the first Pledge of Al-‘Aqaba and seventy-five at the second Pledge of Al-‘Aqaba. They were the forerunners. Also, Allah *Glorified is He* adds to them: '…as well as those who follow them in [the way of] righteousness…' (*at-Tawba:* 100). What this means is that those who would come after them 'in [the way of] righteousness …' (*at-Tawba:* 100).

Allah *the Exalted* said: 'and [to cause this message to spread] from them unto other people as soon as they come into contact with them…' (*al-Jumu‘a:* 3).

Also, He says in the chapter of *al-Hashr:* 'And so, they who come after them pray: "O, our Sustainer! Forgive us our sins, as well as those of our brethren who preceded us in faith …"' (*al-Hashr:* 10). Furthermore, in these cases, the pertinent phrase is also added;

In the verse we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the great attainment.' (*at-Tawba:* 100). These words give a reassurance to the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah *Glorified and exalted be He* did not only tell us about the hideous group of hypocrites amongst the Arabs and the Bedouin, but He also informed us that there were people who conveyed unto us the beauty of this religion.

Allah *Glorified and exalted be He* then says:

وَمِمَّنۡ حَوۡلَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡأَعۡرَابِ مُنَٰفِقُونَۖ وَمِنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ مَرَدُواْ عَلَى ٱلنِّفَاقِ لَا
تَعۡلَمُهُمۡۖ نَحۡنُ نَعۡلَمُهُمۡۚ سَنُعَذِّبُهُم مَّرَّتَيۡنِ ثُمَّ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَذَابٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

Some of the desert Arabs around you are hypocrites, as are some of the people of Medina – they are obstinate in their hypocrisy. You [Prophet] do not know them, but We know them well: We shall punish them twice and then they will be returned to [face] a painful punishment [in the Hereafter] [101] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 101)

Allah *the Most High* clarified in this verse, ‘Prepare yourselves for the fact that around you, amongst the Bedouin and the people of Medina, there are hypocrites’ Likewise, this preparation would give the immunity of vigilance so that none of these hypocrites could take advantage of any of the good believers who happened to be heedless. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* alerts them, 'Beware, for you are living in a society surrounded by hypocrites.' Vaccination against the diseases which afflict nations is one of the ways of fighting the enemy; we do this on a material plane when we hear that there is a rampant epidemic, taking vaccinations which immunise us from it. Even though the vaccination itself is a form of disease, it gives us immunity against the disease. In the same way, Allah *the Almighty* wishes to give us immunity so that the believers will not be attacked, whilst they are heedless, so He says: 'And amongst those around you of the Bedouin are hypocrites, and [also] from the people of Medina. They have become accustomed to hypocrisy. You, [O, Muhammad], do not know them' (*at-Tawba:* 101). They become accustomed to something and experienced with it so that they become adept at it; it is as though they are extremely skilled at hypocrisy. All of this is meant to give immunity to the Islamic community so that a believer can face anything with his eyes wide open, and if he detects any behaviour which involves hypocrisy, he can spot it immediately. Alertness protects a person from what is harmful, but does not keep him from what is good.

Suppose that someone says to you, ‘This road is dangerous, so do not traverse it alone at night.’, Then, another person says, ‘It is a safe road, and we traversed it without anything happening to us.’ If you are cautious and take a weapon or a companion with you, thereby, you prepare for the worst and guard yourself against it; thus, if nothing happens, then what have you lost? You have not lost anything. This is a logical philosophical position, by means of which we may respond to those who try to raise doubts about the religion, such as astrologers and so-called ‘philosophers’ by claiming that there will be no Reckoning no Resurrection, nor Last Day. A poet says:

The astrologer and the doctor both claim

The dead will not be regained:
If you are thought to claim,
Then I have nothing to claim
But if I am plain!
then you have no one to blame!

This means that if what you say is true and there will be no resurrection – Allah is our refuge – then I shall not lose anything since I do good deeds. Therefore, if indeed there will be a Resurrection – which is the truth – then I shall be rewarded in Paradise, so I shall not lose, but gain. However, suppose that you commit all kinds of evil acts and then the Resurrection comes: you will be the losers. So, the logical philosophical position is that even if I do not gain, I shall not lose out; on the other hand, even if you do not lose out, you will not gain.

Allah *the Exalted* says in this verse: 'And amongst those around you of the Bedouin are hypocrites and [also] from the people of Medina. They have become accustomed to hypocrisy. You, [O, Muhammad], do not know them,' (*at-Tawba:* 101). The Words 'amongst those around you' indicate that you are surrounded, and not only by those who dwell around you, but also by those who dwell in your midst in Medina; these are the ones who are so adept at hypocrisy as if they have an affinity with them.

These verses, as we know, were revealed to give an account of the state of the hypocrites. Hypocrisy causes the different faculties of a person to be in conflict since disbelief dwells deep in the heart, whilst belief is only uttered by the tongue; thus, the heart does not agree with the tongue. Those who believe speak words which agree with what is in their hearts, and those who disbelieve do the same.

As for the third category, those who express faith with their tongues, whilst their hearts conceal disbelief, these are the hypocrites. The word *munafiq*, or ‘hypocrite’, is derived from the word *nafqa’* which means the tunnels of the jerboa, a desert animal that resembles a mouse and deceives those who hunt for it by making several entrance holes in its nest or its burrow; thus, if a man or animal pursues it, it enters one hole so that the hunter thinks it will come out of this same hole and stays there waiting for it to come out, but in the meantime the jerboa comes out of a different hole. It is as though it deceives the hunter; the hunter thinks that its burrow only has one hole, but in fact the burrow has more than one entrance and exit. With this image in mind, we can say that hypocrisy entails two aspects: an aspect of sickness on the part of the hypocrite and an aspect of health on the part of the object of his hypocrisy. This is why the phenomenon of hypocrisy did not arise in Mecca, but only in Medina.

It seems strange that hypocrisy arose in Medina, where Islam found refuge and from where it began to spread until it had reached the whole world. Yet, it did not arise in Mecca whose inhabitants wanted to suppress Islam and whose leaders and rulers waged war on the Divine Message.

Therefore, we are able to recognise two aspects of hypocrisy: the first is the aspect of sickness, as Allah *Glorified and exalted be He* says: 'In their hearts is disease, and so Allah lets their disease increase…' (*al-Baqara:* 10). As for the second aspect, it is the aspect of health. Islam became strong in Medina unlike how it had been in Mecca at the beginning of the message. Only those who are strong are faced with hypocrisy since a hypocrite wants to benefit from the strength of others, and furthermore, a hypocrite knows that he is unable to confront the strong or stand in open enmity against them. Thus, when hypocrisy arises, it only arises in areas of strength, not weakness. No one cajoles the weak man; rather, the strong man is prey for people's hypocrisy. So, hypocrisy arises from an aspect of sickness on the part of the hypocrite and an aspect of soundness on the part of the target of his hypocrisy.

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to reveal to the believers the malicious intents of the hypocrites who spied on them, behaving like thieves in that they only came out into the open at night, and they tried stealthily sneaking into places without being noticed, seeking out those entrances that were concealed, along with concealing things which contradicted what they revealed.

As for a confrontation with a disbeliever, it is open and plain since he candidly unearths what is in his chest and confronts you with open enmity. You are, therefore, able to confront him with all your strength and intelligence since his movements are plain to see. As for a hypocrite who claims to have faith, whilst his heart is filled with disbelief, he creeps up on you, and you must be cautious and aware of the ways he can gain access to you since he is waiting for an opportunity to stab you in the back.

Allah *the Most High* alerts us to the necessity of caution, along with the need for believers to have wisdom, awareness and discernment, so that they see things as they truly are and are not deceived by them. Therefore, He *the Almighty* revealed to us all the different aspects of hypocrisy: He revealed the hypocrites of Medina, where both hypocrites and non-hypocrites were present, and He revealed the hypocrites amongst the Bedouin who were composed of both hypocrites and non-hypocrites. Also, He taught believers how to detect hypocrites by recognising the signs which reveal what their hearts conceal. Furthermore, He says about hypocrites: 'And if we willed, we could show them to you, and you would know them by their mark, but you will surely know them by the tone of [their] speech …' (*Muhammad:* 30).

However, there was another form of hypocrisy which was skilful and subtle that even an intelligent person was unable to spot. Therefore, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* clarifies for us: ‘I do not leave it up to your intelligence to identify the hypocrites, rather only I know them with certainty, whereas you do not know them since they are especially skilled in their hypocrisy.’: '…You do not [always] know them, [O, Muhammad – but] We know them…' (*at-Tawba:* 101). Despite the wisdom and intelligence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *the Exalted* made it clear to him that even he would sometimes be unaware of their identities due to their skill in hypocrisy was such that they revealed no sign of it.

The Quran was especially precise in its expression saying that they had been 'accustomed to hypocrisy', derived from the root letters *m-r-d* which describe something soft and smooth that is without cracks; the word *amrad* means a young boy whose face has not grown any hair. Thus, the root of this word centres on the concept of constancy and the lack of anything to disturb this constancy.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is saying: ‘Be on your guard, for amongst the Bedouin who dwell around you there are hypocrites.’ Allah's Words 'who are around you' give the impression that they were surrounded by hypocrisy. Why was this the case? The reason for this was that new revelations form Heaven did not come unless an environment became steeped in corruption.

We know that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* placed in the soul means of resisting falsehood so that if falsehood presses itself upon the soul for a while, the soul will recognise it and drive it away.(1) These people are the ones who repent: they commit a sin, and then their faith returns to them, and they renounce it. Therefore, the deterrence either comes from within the soul itself, or it comes from society to the soul which does not restrain itself; this is the ‘soul which enjoins evil’, which does not only enjoin evil a single time, rather, it continues to enjoin it ceaselessly becoming skilled at this task; this is indicated by the Arabic word *ammara* which indicates constancy and persistence.

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(1) Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Indeed, those who fear Allah - when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight.' (*al-A'raf*: 201) *That is, they come back to righteousness and correct their prior error. (Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, ii. 279).*

If a soul has immunity, then this is an easy matter, and a ‘self-reproaching soul’ acts on its own. Thus, if a soul is weak in some way, then the society around it will restrain it, in which case the immunity is present in society itself. However, if society too becomes steeped in corruption, then not only will a soul possess no self-restraint, but society will not offer any restraint either. At this point, Heaven must intervene, and Allah *the Almighty* must send His Message with its signs, its proofs and its messenger’s miracle. When this happens, the people of corruption – who possess ‘souls which enjoin evil’ – will take a hypocritical stance in order to infiltrate the new power, whilst their souls will continue to enjoin evil upon them; thus, the phenomenon of hypocrisy emerges.

Allah's Words *Glorified is He* 'And amongst those around you of the Bedouin are hypocrites and [also] from the people of Medina. They have become accustomed to hypocrisy. You, [O, Muhammad], do not know them,' (*at-Tawba:* 101) mean ‘You are both infiltrated and surrounded, for hypocrisy exists in the place where you live, as well as the area around you.’

The worst thing a person can fear is for a harmful force to be around him and in his midst, for if the harmful force exists in the place where he lives, those around him might save him, or he might leave the place. However, if he is surrounded by harm from those around him as well as in the place where he lives, then where will he go?

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* wanted to alert the believers to the fact that the phenomenon of hypocrisy was widespread; the believers were able to identify some instances of it by observing the behaviour, character and speech of the hypocrites,(1) whilst other instances would be so subtle and hidden that they would not recognise them – but He would know them. Since they were not left to their own devices, rather they had a Lord who could teach them what they knew not, they could rest assured that He, would expose hypocrites to them. The result of this knowledge would be that they would see hypocrites punished, as Allah *the Exalted* says: '… We shall cause them to suffer doubly(1) [in this world], and then they will be given over to awesome suffering [in the life to come].' (*at-Tawba:* 101) Thus, they would be made to suffer twice in this worldly life, and then be given over to the suffering of the Hereafter. The first cause of suffering for the one who conceals his hypocrisy is that his hypocrisy is exposed, which is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once addressed the people thus: 'Stand up, so-and-so, for you are a hypocrite. Stand up, so-and-so, for you are a hypocrite. Stand up, so-and-so, for you are a hypocrite!'(2) Or it may mean that misfortunes would come to him in this worldly life.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra is narrated to have said: ‘The hypocrites have signs by which they may be known: Their greetings are curses, their food is pilfered, and their booty is stolen. They never approach mosques unless they are fleeing, and they are always late for prayer. They are arrogant, neither friendly nor befriended. They are lazy as boards of wood by night and boisterous by day.’ Narrated by Ahmad (ii. 293) and Al-Bazzar (Kashf al-astar, 85).*

Someone might say, ‘But would these misfortunes be for a hypocrite alone, or would they befall a believer, too?’

We reply that misfortunes befall a believer in order to benefit him; however they befall a hypocrite in order to destroy him. When a believer encounters misfortune, Allah *the Almighty* either erases one of his sins by means of it or else He raises his rank because of it.(3) On the other hand, when misfortune befalls a hypocrite, it is nothing but a loss since a hypocrite does not hope for anything in the Hereafter. This is why it is said, ‘The misfortunate one is not the one who loses what he loves; the misfortunate one is the one who is deprived of the Hereafter’s rewards.’

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(1) Once in this world, and once in the grave by being shown the punishment which awaited them in the Hereafter.

(2) *Abu Mas‘ud Al-Ansari said: ‘Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him addressed a sermon to us, first praising and lauding God and then saying: {There are hypocrites amongst you, so those whom I name must stand. Stand, so-and-so! Stand, so-and-so! Stand, so-and-so!} He went on like this until he had named thirty-six men.’ Narrated by Ahmad (v. 273) and Al-Bayhaqi (Dalai'l An-nubuwwa, vi. 286).*

(3) *‘A’isha narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: {A believer is not afflicted, even by a thorn or anything more than it, save that God raises his rank or effaces one of his sins by means of it.} Narrated by Muslim (2572), Ahmad (vi. 42) and at-Tirmidhi (965)*

If a believer accepts misfortune with patience and satisfaction, knowing that it was sent to him by the All-Wise, Who knows what, is good for him even if he does not know himself, he will be rewarded for his patience and his contentment. Therefore, he will be spared any serious pain. The non-believer, on the other hand, wants to rebel against fate, and because of his lack of faith, he goes unrewarded.

Or, the twofold suffering might not mean that their hypocrisy is exposed but might be manifested in their attempt to act as though they are believers and Muslims. This means that each one of them has to pay the poor-due, and wealth is beloved to the soul, so he pays the poor-due grudgingly and feels that he has lost his money since he does not believe in Allah, and therefore, his misfortune is great. Also, the hypocrite might send his son to war even though he knows he will gain no reward for this, which is another form of suffering.

This suffering is mentioned explicitly when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And let not their worldly goods and [the happiness which they may derive from] their children excite thy admiration. Allah but wants to chastise them by these means in [the life of] this world …' (*at-Tawba:* 85).

Or the suffering of this worldly life might be what they see when in their death throes when the spirit reaches the throat and the dying man sees the angels. This point is elucidated when Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who disbelieved. They are striking their faces and their backs and [saying], "Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire."' (*al-Anfal:* 50) These are all forms of worldly suffering.

As we know, there are three times clearly marking human life: his lifetime, his death time and his Hereafter time. When a believer encounters misfortune in his lifetime, this worldly life, he is consoled by the rewards of his later times, his Hereafter. However, when a disbeliever or a hypocrite is beset by misfortune in his worldly life, there is nothing which can console him since he does not believe in Allah, along with not hoping for any of the good things Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* has to offer. Thus, when the clock of his second time strikes, namely death, he is encountered by 'the torture of the grave' (*'adhab al-qabr*).

Torture only exists in two forms: either to be shown the suffering which awaits one, or to actually experience this torture which will take place in the Hereafter. As for the presentation of the torture, this occurs in the grave.(1) It is as though Allah *the Almighty* says to one: 'Behold what awaits you!'(2) Thus, if a man sees the evil which awaits him, will this not cause him to suffer? Indeed, it certainly will. '… We shall cause them to suffer doubly [in this world], and then they will be given over to awesome suffering [in the life to come].' (*at-Tawba:* 101) Had Allah *Glorified is He* only said 'We cause them to suffer doubly' with saying 'shall', the meaning would be completely different and would convey that once one of them had been made to torture, his account would be settled. However, His Words '…We shall cause them to suffer …' (*at-Tawba:* 101) affirm for us, every time we read them, that the suffering will be ongoing.

Allah *the Almighty* ends this noble verse by saying: '… and then they will be given over to awesome suffering [in the life to come].' (*at-Tawba:* 101) The words 'they will be given over' are like the words 'they will be brought back' or 'they will return'. Sometimes we say 'they will be brought back', and other times we say, 'they will return'; it is as though the words 'they will return' mean that the human soul will be pleased to gain its requital, whereas the words 'they will be brought back' mean that a higher power will force them to return without delay.

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(1) *Allah Glorified and Exalted is He says: '...And Allah preserved him from the evil of their scheming, whereas suffering vile was to encompass Pharaoh's folk [Gafir: 45] The fire [of the hereafter – that fire] which they had been made to contemplate [in vain], morning and evening: for on the Day when the Last Hour dawns [Allah will say], 'Make Pharaoh's folk enter upon suffering most severe![46]' [Gafir:45-46] Ibn Kathir says in his exegesis (iv. 81): 'This verse indicates that the souls will be shown their punishment morning and evening in Barzakh [a realm of life between this world and the Hereafter], but does not indicate that they will feel physical pain in their graves, since this refers specifically to their spirits; as for the pain which will afflict the body in Barzakh, it is only mentioned in the Sunna, by way of sound Hadith.'*

(2) *Ibn 'Umar narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: {When one of you dies, his destiny shall be shown to him morning and evening; if he is of the denizens of Paradise, then [he will be shown that he is] of the denizens of Paradise; and is he is one of the denizens of hell, then [he will be shown that he is] of the denizens of hell. And it will be said, 'This is your destiny, until Allah Glorified and Exalted is He summons you forth on the Day of Resurrection!'} Narrated by al-Bukharii (1379) and Muslim (2866)*

Thus, we find that either the one who is punished will be compelled by a higher power, or else something within him will compel him to go to receive his punishment. A man might behave in a certain way, and then return to his senses and be displeased by his action, along with rebuking and chiding himself, since something within the soul itself insists that there be punishment.

Furthermore, one might live his entire life with a ‘soul which incites evil’, committing evil acts, and then when the punishment befalls, he says to himself: ‘Take this punishment, my soul, for what you have done!’ Therefore, the one who is punished might be compelled to go to receive his punishment, or he might compel himself to go. '… And then they will be given over to awesome suffering [in the life to come].' (*at-Tawba:* 101) As we said before, there are different kinds of suffering: it can be awesome, grievous, shameful or lasting. Grievous suffering can either be caused by means or by the Creator of means Himself. The suffering of this worldly life is always caused by means: the punishment might be carried out by a cane, a lash or by humiliation. These means differ in their strength or weakness. The suffering of the Hereafter, however, is caused by the Creator of all means, and the punishment of the Hereafter is meted out by One Alone Whose Power is Infinite. If the suffering of the Hereafter is compared to the suffering of this worldly life, it will certainly be seen that the suffering of the Hereafter will be awesome.[1] Allah says:

وَءَاخَرُونَ ٱعۡتَرَفُواْ بِذُنُوبِهِمۡ خَلَطُواْ عَمَلٗا صَٰلِحٗا وَءَاخَرَ سَيِّئًا
عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن يَتُوبَ عَلَيۡهِمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٌ ١٠٢

And there are others who have confessed their wrongdoing,
who have done some righteous deeds and some bad ones:
God may well accept their repentance, for God is most forgiving
and merciful [102] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 102)

Allah's Words 'And amongst those around you of the Bedouins are hypocrites and [also] from the people of Medina. They have become accustomed to hypocrisy …' (*at-Tawba:* 101). Would they all remain in their hypocrisy, or would some of them return to their senses and realise that their position was shameful, even to their own selves? For the first estimation in which a hypocrite falls is his own, for he acts underhandedly, being too weak to act directly, and thus, he considers himself to be lower than those he seeks to confront and despises himself. Some hypocrites must surely have been displeased by this condition and desired to bring an end to it, either by believing or by disbelieving, and then by preferring faith and ridding themselves of their hypocrisy by acknowledging their sins. By doing this, they would become those of whom Allah *the Exalted* says: 'And [there are] others – [people who] have become conscious of their sinning …' (*at-Tawba:* 102). What this means is that those who have not persisted with their hypocrisy and become conscious of their sin, their becoming conscious of sin is a way of confessing it. There are different ways of confessing sin. One person confesses his sin with regret, whilst another confesses it impudently. For example, when one says to someone, ‘Did you hit so-and-so?’ Then, he says, ‘Yes, I did.' He is confessing his sin. However, if he then adds, ‘And I will hit anyone who defends him, too!’, then this is an impudent confession. Then, there is the one who confesses his sin regretfully; he admits that he committed the sin and asks to be pardoned. This is the confession which Allah *the Almighty* accepts. They had '… become conscious of their sinning …' (*at-Tawba:* 102) regretfully, which is implied by the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* says that they had ' done righteous deeds side by side with evil ones' (*at-Tawba:* 102). In this verse, their righteous deed is that they confessed their sin and recognised that to be exposed in this life is easier than to be exposed in the Hereafter; as for their evil deed, it was that they declined to join the struggle and spend in Allah’s Cause.

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[1] *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: {Your [earthly] fire is but one seventieth of the fire of hell.} It was said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, if it were [only akin to the fire of this world], it would be enough!’ He said: {It is sixty-nine times hotter than [the fires of this world].} Narrated by al-Bukhari (3265) and Muslim (2843)*

Their consciousness of their sinning was a regretful confession, and the scholars have differed as to whether this constituted repentance or not. We say that when Allah *the Exalted* said '…[they] have become conscious of their sinning after having done righteous deeds side by side with evil ones…' (*at-Tawba:* 102), and then said '… [and] it may well be that Allah will accept their repentance, for verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy' (*at-Tawba:* 102); this means that He might turn to them in Mercy, for this is only the beginning of repentance and not repentance itself. If it was accompanied by regret for the past transgression accompanied with determination not to repeat it in the future, then the matter is determined by whether they did this in fear of being exposed or in a genuine attempt to follow Allah's Way of Guidance. Also, if they were genuinely seeking to follow Allah's Way of Guidance, then their repentance was sincere.

The words 'done…side by side' (*khalatu*, literally translates to 'mixed') mean to combine two things which were separate, and this action may take two different forms. The first form is that they are mixed together whilst still being distinct, such as if things which do not mix are combined together; an example of this is mixing chickpeas, grains and beans together in one container, for nevertheless, each will retain its individual and separate form. One does not cause a grain to enter a chickpea, and they do not join together to make a single thing, for if this were to happen it would be a blend, not a mix; an example of a blend is when milk is added to tea, for when they are put together, they make a single liquid which cannot be divided again.

Therefore, when they mixed righteous deeds with evil ones, they did not make a single blend of these deeds, rather, the righteous deed remained righteous, and the evil deed remained evil.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '… it may well be that Allah will accept their repentance …' (*at-Tawba:* 102). The word *'asa* ('it may well be') implies hope, which further implies that something good is likely to happen; also, it is an expression of expectation of something desired. Hoping is not the same as wishing since wishing is loving something and desiring that it existed although it cannot possibly exist, as when a poet said:

> If only youth were to return one day,
> So I could tell it what old age has done!

He wishes that his youth could return, which implies that his youth was beloved to him; however, this will never happen. Therefore, to express something one desires had two forms: one form is possible, and the other is impossible; the one which is possible is called 'hope', and the one which is impossible is called 'wish'. A poet said:

> If only the stars would come down so I could string them
> Into a necklace of praise for you, for words are not enough!

This poet wishes that this would happen, but it will not. As for hope, it applies to that which could possibly happen, and hope has different levels and degrees in the human soul. When you hope something for someone and were to say, ‘It may be that so-and-so will give it to you', you are expressing hope to someone concerning someone else, who is the person who can actually give the thing hoped for, so there are three parties involved here.

However, do you have authority over the person who might give? No, you do not. If you were to say, ‘Maybe I will give it to you', you are expressing hope to someone else about what you might give him, so this is more likely to actually happen. If you were to say, ‘Maybe I will give it to you’, you might say this whilst you are feeling well-natured towards the person to whom you are speaking, but then you might hear something about him that changes your feelings towards him, or you might intend to give him but not find anything to give him; in this case, the hope goes unfulfilled.

However, when you say, ‘Maybe Allah *Glorified is He* will give you’, you express hope in Allah *the Almighty* for him, and Allah is well able to do all things, and no vicissitudes can affect Him. Also, if Allah *the Exalted* Himself says, ‘It may well be that Allah will do it', this is the strongest possible expression of hope.

Thus, we have four different levels of hope: to say ‘So-and-so might give you', to say ‘I might give you', or to say ‘Allah *the Most High* might give you’, to which He might either assent or not – but when the Allah *the Almighty* says ‘I might do it', this is the fourth kind of hope. Furthermore, they say that if Allah *the Exalted* hopes for something, it is inevitable. '… It may well be that Allah will accept their repentance' (*at-Tawba:* 102). This is an expression of hope that Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* will accept their repentance; as for a servant’s repentance itself, this requires that he regret what he has done, return to Allah’s Way and resolve not to incur Allah’s Wrath in the future. As for Allah’s accepting repentance, it includes all the different forms of repentance. Allah’s legislation of repentance is a mercy to those who sin and also a mercy to those who are the victims of such behaviour that requires repentance. Furthermore, if you repent, then the acceptance of your repentance is a second mercy, for had Allah *the Most High* not established repentance, everyone who sinned would increase their sin and fill society with his evils. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* established repentance, this created hope that a servant would return to Him, that society would thereby be spared his continued sin and that he would cease to cause trouble for others.

Furthermore, when Allah *the Almighty* accepts repentance, it is said that He 'turned (*taba*) to them in mercy'; so Allah has more than one form of repentance (*tawba*) which is why we read His Words: '… He turned again unto them in His mercy, so that they might repent …' (*at-Tawba:* 118). What this means is that Allah *the Exalted* established repentance for them so that they might repent, and if they repented, He accepted their repentance. Thus, repentance has three stages: first it is legislated, then it occurs, and then it is accepted. The Arabic word *tawba* literally means 'to return' from something, for a man it means to return from a sin, while for Allah *Glorified is He* it means to return from and forego the punishment that a sin would have deserved had a sinner not repented.(1)

Allah *the Almighty* ends the verse by saying: '… for, verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy' (*at-Tawba:* 102) since forgiveness is difficult for a man. For example, if someone steals something from you, he harms you, and the desire for vengeance nags at you because of how he harmed you. However, does anyone harm his Lord by sinning? No, he does not because if he harms anyone, it is himself, not Allah; He is in no way harmed by his sin, rather, the sin harms him alone.(2)

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(1) *Imam Abu Ḥamid Al-Ghazzali says in his commentary on the divine Name (at-Tawwab) (The Most-Relenting): 'He is the One who returns to facilitating repentance for His servants again and again by means of the signs He sends to them and the warning, cautions and admonitions He gives them, so that by His direction they come to recognise the dangers of sin and by His admonition they come to feel fear, so they repent, whereupon Allah's grace returns to them in the form of His acceptance.' (Sharh Asma Allah al-Ḥusnaa, p. 123).*

(2) *Abu Dharr related that Prophet Muhammadm peace and blessings be upon him said that Allah Glorified and Exalted is He says in a Qudsi Ḥadith: {O My servants, you are incapable of harming Me, and you are incapable of benefiting Me. O My servants, if the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you, were as pious as the heart of the most pious man amongst you, it would not increase My dominion ought. O My servants, and if the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you were as wicked as the heart of the most wicked man amongst you, it would not decrease My dominion ought.} Narrated by Muslim (2577), Ahmad (v. 145), at-Tirmidhi (2495) and Ibn Majah (4257)*

When Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says 'Oft-Forgiving', He is Oft-Forgiving of him, and 'a Dispenser of Mercy' to him. There are two kinds of misfortunes or calamities: those in which one has an adversary and those in which he does not. If one becomes ill, he has no adversary in this illness, whilst if he is robbed, then the robber is the adversary. These misfortunes for which one has an adversary drive the soul to react and punish the adversary, but when a misfortune involves no adversary, it is attributed to Allah. This is why it is said that a misfortune which involves no adversary is the one which requires greater faith. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives – this, behold, is indeed something to set one’s heart upon!' (*ash-Shura:* 43)

He emphasises this in this verse that the adversary disturbs one's soul, and whenever one sees him, he remembers what the adversary did to him, and he is, therefore, incited to do evil.

In His Statement: ‘Bear with patience whatever befalls you. These are the most honourable traits!’ (*Luqman:* 17), the context needs no emphasis, for no one cares to harass a person held in adversity. Those who became ‘conscious of their sinning’ (*at-Tawba:* 102) are those who were left to stay behind the army without having any excuse and then they came and said, ‘We have no excuse.’ They did not try to concoct false excuses. We know that some persons did not offer any excuse, while others offered true excuses, and there are still others who proffered false excuses. Those who became ‘conscious of their sinning’ (i.e. declared that their excuses for staying behind the Prophet and forsaking fight were untrue as they had no good reason for their action) had their repentance accepted earlier as Allah *the Exalted* corrected their faith, whilst Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was still in Tabuk.

After the battle, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to Medina, and he first went to the mosque to offer his two-unit prayer as he would usually do upon returning from journeys.(1) He found some people had tied themselves to the pillars of the mosque. He asked about them. In response, some told him that those were the ones who falsely offered false excuses to stay at home and did not join the battle. Now, they acknowledged their sin and vowed not to release themselves until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself declares his acceptance of their apology and releases them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘I do swear by Allah that I will not release or pardon them until I am commanded to do so. They spurned me and refused to join Muslims in battle.’(1) When Allah *Glorified is He* revealed this Quranic verse, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* untied them. Abu Lubabah was one of those persons. Therefore, those who visit Medina will find a column named after Abu Lubabah who was the first to tie himself to that column before others followed him. Evidently, when a believer is firm in faith and deeply concerned with the matters of faith, he does not wait for the Divine punishment to befall him but punishes himself at once. For example, a woman and a man(2) who committed adultery both came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked for the due penalty.(3) They did not wait for Allah *the Most High* to punish them, rather, they gave themselves up. When ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* expressed his reluctance at one of them, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Hold back, ‘Umar! She has offered such repentance that if it were divided between seventy of the inhabitants of Medina, it would be sufficient for them.’(4) Abu Lubabah ad himself tied to the pillar in affirmation of his firm faith, remorse and truthful desire for atonement. Certainly, the punishment of the Hereafter is worse than that of this world. These sinners became conscious of their sin and questioned their actions, refrainment from the battle and false excuses! They found that the battle of Tabuk took place in extreme heat when Arabs enjoyed the shade of orchards and ate ripe dates. Thus, they solemnly vowed to take the wealth that kept them from the battle and led them to sin and give it in charity. It was not the obligatory charity of the poor-due, but a voluntary charity they paid to expiate their sins. They said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Take that wealth which kept us from joining the struggle!’ In reply, Prophet Muhammad refused it until Allah accepted it:

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(1) *Muslim, Saheih, (Hadith: 2769) in the long narration of Ka‘b ibn Malik's about his repentance after staying behind the Prophet during the Battle of Tabuk; see also Ahmad, Musnad, 3:455; Abu Dawud, Sunan, (Hadith: 2773).*

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(1) *See the causes of revealing this verse, Al-Qurtubi, Tafseer, 4: 3168; al-Wahidi, Asbab al-Nuzul, p. 148.*

(2) *The man is Ma‘iz ibn Malik Al-Aslami (Al-Bukhari, 6815; Muslim, 1691) and the woman is Al-Ghamidiyyah (Muslim, 1695).*

(3) *That man was Ma‘iz ibn Malik al-Aslami whose story is narrated by al-Bukhari (6815) and Muslim (1691). A narration of Muslim states that he went to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, ‘I have wronged myself and committed adultery; I want you to purify me!’ As for the woman, she was from Ghamid Tribe (1695).*

(4) *When the woman was stoned, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him offered funeral prayers for her. ‘Umar may Allah be pleased with him said, ‘Will you offer prayers for her, O Prophet, and she was an adulteress?’ Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied: “She has offered such a repentance that if it was divided between seventy of the inhabitants of Medina, it would be sufficient for them; is there any repentance greater than to give one’s life to Allah Almighty?” Muslim (1696) and Ahmad, 4:440*

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَٰلِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِم بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ إِنَّ
صَلَوٰتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَّهُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

In order to cleanse and purify them [Prophet], accept a gift out of their property [to make amends] and pray for them – your prayer will be a comfort to them. God is All-Hearing, All Knowing [103] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 103)

It was not an obligatory charity. Simply, if it were obligatory, it would not need a new directive. Rather, it was a voluntary charity for expiation. The Lord’s Words ‘that [part] of their possessions’ (*at-Tawba:* 103) designated the possessions of those who acknowledged their sins; Allah *the Exalted* declared them owners of their possession, though He is the Owner of all things. He *the Most High* says, ‘Give them [their share] of the wealth of Allah which He has given you’ (*an-Nur:* 33). The Lord *the Most High* transfers graces to His servants and He *the Almighty*, clarifies, ‘If I tell you to give something from the wealth I have given to you, I do not thereby reclaim what I gave to you.’ Therefore, if a believer needs anything from his fellow believer, the True Lord *the Exalted* says, ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan’ (*al-Baqara:* 245). Allah *Glorified is He* is the Giver of all possessions and honours the gifts He grants. In reflection on this verse: ‘[Hence, O, Prophet,] accept that [part] of their possessions which is offered for the sake of Allah’ (*at-Tawba:* 103), the scholars observe that when possessions are attributed to their owners, it means to encourage them to work in life more than they need to and to make savings. In this way, a man earnestly works and extends benefits to others even if he does not intend it. It is divine assurance that any earning a man makes from work beyond his needs will be their possession and should not be taken from them unless he is legally incompetent. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do not entrust to those who are weak of judgment the possessions which Allah has placed in your charge for [their] support’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5). Clearly, the weak-minded persons are not competent for legal actions and disposition of their possession; their unwise acts might squander their wealth. So, Allah *the Most High* the All-Wise, gives the ruling to keep the possessions of the weak-minded person out of their charge until they attain maturity, for the possessions also belong to the community. The Lord *the Most High* teaches, ‘If you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions’ (*an-Nisa’:* 6). Their possessions should be returned to them once they reach maturity and qualify for ownership.

In this Quranic verse, Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘[Hence, O, Prophet,] accept that [part] of their possessions which is offered for the sake of Allah, so that you may cleanse them thereby and cause them to grow in purity’ (*at-Tawba:* 103). Allah *the Most High* owns all things and releases thereof by the means He chooses for mankind in their life’s work; He entrusts unto them the fruits of their labour and their possessions. Hence, no one will decline to work. If everyone receives only his basic needs in return for his work and is not allowed to keep possessions, people would be disinclined to work, along with those who are unable to work would not receive any benefits. Allah *the Almighty* decrees to allow people to take possession of all things beyond their needs since a human soul naturally yearns for possessions. Evidently, Allah *the Exalted* imposes some shares to be taken from possessions and promises multiple returns for that through the growth of possessions.

The Lord’s Words ‘Accept that [part] of their possessions’ (*at-Tawba:* 103) attribute possession to owners so long as they are free from weak-mindedness or immaturity, e.g. a minor heir who is disqualified for financial actions. Thus, the Lord *the Most High* explains that the possessions of the weak-minded/infants do not belong to them to take action, and then, a wise guardian should look after the possessions. Allah *the Almighty* warns a guardian against transgression of these possessions. A guardian only had them to look after them properly until a minor reaches adulthood or a weak-minded person retains sound mind: ‘Do not entrust to those who are weak of judgment the possessions which Allah has placed in your charge for [their] support’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5).

Beware, guardians, of thinking that Allah has given you these possessions; He only entrusts you with guardianship. He *the Most High* says, ‘Then, if you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions’ (*an-Nisa’:* 6). He did not say, ‘hand over to them your possessions!’ Scholars *Allah be pleased with them* observe that since one’s possessions contain an acknowledged share due to the begging poor and the deprived, he should not be regarded as the only owner; there are others who have shares in it—the begging poor and the deprived. The shares of the poor and the deprived are exceptions from ownership. According to another Quranic verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And in whose possessions there is a due share, acknowledged [by them], for such as ask [for help] and such as are deprived [of what is good in life]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 24-25).

A ‘due share’ means the poor-due which is a specific amount that must be paid from the wealth. The other kind of charity is set by the donor himself; it is voluntary. Therefore, the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat* does not mention ‘acknowledged'; Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘Behold, the God-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them. Verily, they were doers of good in the past. They would lie asleep during but a small part of the night and would pray for forgiveness in the watches of the night and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19).

Allah *the Exalted* spoke of the due share without saying that it is ‘acknowledged’, for the owner of wealth held in the rank of spiritual excellence (*ihsan*), which requires him to do more good deeds beyond the obligatory ones. Allah *the Most High* did not command man to spend all night in prayer or to spend it beseeching Allah for forgiveness. Rather, a Muslim may pray the evening prayer and sleep until the dawn prayer. If he is willing and able, he may pray through the night in pursuit of the rank of *ihsan*. Likewise, a Muslim must pay the poor-due—a specific due share; but if he wants to rise to the rank *ihsan*, he gives more than the poor-due. He gives Allah His due share but not specific so those whose intentions are noble may give more than just the specific due share. Instead of giving only 2.5%, one who wishes for the rank of *ihsan* may give double this or more.

Scholars *Allah be pleased with them* say that the Lord's Words 'accept that [part] of their possessions' (*at-Tawba:* 103) imply that the money taken for the poor does not belong to the poor, rather, it belongs to the giver. Had Allah specified the share due to the poor, it would mean its loss when the money is lost, so the poor person will have no right. Conversely, since wealth belongs to a rich man, a poor man's right is payable, and the possessor of the wealth must pay it, which is better for the poor. For example, if a rich man does not give the poor-due at its proper time and the money is lost, then the rich man must repay for the poor their due share.

'[Hence, O, Prophet,] accept that [part] of their possessions which is offered for the sake of Allah, so that you may cleanse them thereby' (*at-Tawba:* 103). Charity cleanses and purifies their souls from the taints of disobedience. As long as they sullied their souls with disobedience, they needed to purify themselves by means of charity from their wealth which held them back from the battle. We may observe here the rhetorical style of the Quran. The Lord *the Most High* instructs the Prophet 'accept that [part] of their possessions which is offered for the sake of Allah' (*at-Tawba:* 103) which means from the possessions of the wealthy. The charity will go to the needy. We have four elements here:

- The one who takes—Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,*
- The giver—the owner of the possessions,
- The thing which is taken—the part of the possessions,
- The one for whom it is taken—the needy person.

As long as this instruction is being given to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* it is also applicable to all those in charge of a Muslim community. Someone might say, 'It is charity, not poor-due.' In response, we say that as long as Allah makes it a means of purification, it must be obligatory. The Quranic verse is unambiguous. It imposes a legal authority for the rulers to take from the rich and give the poor and other legal recipients.(1) Allah *the Almighty* does not will to humiliate the poor by forcing them to beg for charity from equal human beings. If He takes from a ruler who is responsible for the poor, then there is no shame in this. Moreover, the Lord *the Most High* wants to protect poor families from knowing that a certain household has given them poor-due, lest their children feel humiliated before the children of the giving families who may also act arrogantly. When a ruler gives, no one feels arrogant or humiliated.

If there is no Muslim authority and one does not know where to give his charity, every individual becomes responsible for the distribution of the poor-due. In this case, there will be one who gives—the owner; he gives a given share of the wealth to the recipient—the poor person. When reading Allah's Words: ‘so that you may cleanse them thereby and cause them to grow in purity’ (*at-Tawba:* 103), some maintain that the verse speaks of purifying the giver of charity and growing their wealth. However, a deeper understanding leads us to highlight three elements who enjoy cleansing (i.e. removal of sins and impurity) and growth (increase) in the verse:

- the owner of the wealth from whom the charity is taken,
- the wealth given is also cleansed and made to grow and,
- the taker of charity—the poor person.

Impurity is accidental to the pure essence, so we wash and remove it. Growth is something additional that causes increase. In this way, charity results in purification and growth to all elements involved. For the giver of poor-due, he may have heedlessly allowed some doubtful gains to come into the wealth, so the poor-due cleanses the wealth. Now, how does growth take place? When taking from the wealth of a healthy and able person, it ensures that he will also receive help when he is in need. In this way, the giver of charity knows that he is not living alone nor has no need to fear the loss of wealth. Give and when you need, be assured that you will have your necessary means. In this way, the social trust grows and the wealth becomes pure from doubtful gains. You might imagine that paying the poor-due results in partly loss of the wealth and that usury increases it. For example, usury might turn 100 into 110 pounds whilst after giving the poor-due, 100 pounds becomes 97.5. Following the superficial human standards, the poor-due decreases the wealth whilst usury increases it. However, the Divine Standard of the Possessing Lord maintains that poor-due, which we see a loss, causes growth and the usury which we see as a gain actually causes loss. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah deprives usurious gains of all blessing, whereas He blesses charitable deeds with manifold increase' (*al-Baqara:* 276).

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(1) Allah (God) explains the recipients of the poor-due when He said: ‘The poor-due shall only go for the poor and the needy, and those who are in charge thereof, and those whose hearts are to be won over, and for the emancipation of human beings from bondage, and [for] those who are overburdened with debts, and [for every struggle] in Allah’s Cause, and [for] the wayfarer: [this is] an ordinance from Allah – and Allah is All Knowing, Wise.’ (*at-Tawba*: 60) Sheikh already commented on this Quranic verse. A Shari'a-led ruler may take some of the Muslim wealth to establish social justice following the Guidance of the Quran.

In other words, human beings have their standards of judgement and Allah *the Almighty* has His own. What you see a loss Allah sees an increase and what you consider a gain is actually a loss. How is that? Simply, people only consider the positive provision, thinking that this is the only sustenance. They forget all about all invisible graces. The positive grace may increase the wealth from 100 to 110, but the invisible graces lie, e.g. in being full sustained by 70 instead of 100 or in keeping a person from spending on evil things.

The Lord *the Most High* says, 'Whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through [other] people's possessions will bring [you] no increase in the sight of Allah, whereas all that you give out in charity, seeking Allah's countenance, [will be blessed by Him]. Those who seek His countenance shall have their recompense multiplied!' (*ar-Rum:* 39)

However, how can charity be a means of cleansing for the needy recipient if he did not commit a sin? In reply, when a needy person takes from others while being unable to earn for himself, his heart becomes clear from bitterness towards those blessed with wealth, since they have their due shares in their wealth. He feels no bitterness or envy towards them. Furthermore, if he sees them doing well, he prays that they do even better since parts of their gains will come to him. The Egyptian farmers, for instance, give milk and milk products to one another. When one of their dairy animals passes by villagers, they pray for Allah to protect it. This is how the soul of a needy person gets rid of bitterness and envy.

Now, what about growth and increase? When a poor person sees the faithful society looking after and supporting him, and the wealthy people vying with one another to help him, his soul grows in tranquillity, for he is in a faithful and kind society. Allah's Words ‘so that you may cleanse them thereby and cause them to grow in purity’ (*at-Tawba:* 103) refer to all the elements included. Allah *the Exalted* then says, ‘and pray for them’ (i.e. supplicate for their good). Whenever anyone brought charity to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* he would say, 'O, Allah, send blessings upon them!' Once Abu Awfa brought charity to him, so he said, 'O, Allah, send blessings upon the family of Abu Awfa!'(1) Everyone loves this verbal encouragement and loves to give more and more. Even those who had nothing to give would work hard to give and hear such sweet words from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says ‘Behold, your prayer will be [a source of] comfort to them’ (*at-Tawba:* 103). This means that it gives them tranquillity and serenity. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prays for a charity-giver, it is a sign that this charity has been accepted; Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rewarded it with supplications. When the one who receives the charity hears this, he is also motivated to work for livelihood and charity to win such prayers from the Prophet? The Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying: ‘for Allah is All-Hearing, All Knowing.’ He hears everything you call ‘speech’ and He knows everything you call ‘action’. The Lord *the Most High* then says:

أَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ يَقْبَلُ ٱلتَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَأْخُذُ ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٠٤﴾

Do they not know that it is God Himself who accepts repentance
from His servants and receives what is given freely for His sake?
He is always ready to accept repentance, most merciful [104]
(The Quran, at-Tawba: 104)

‘Do they not know’ (*at-Tawba:* 104) is composed of the question word ‘do’, the negation word ‘not’ and the verb ‘know’. Does Allah want us to deny that they have knowledge or to affirm it? Allah *the Exalted* is making a ‘rhetorical question’, which implies negation. Why did He not simply say ‘Know that’ in the imperative mode? In response, when the Lord *the Most High* presents something in the interrogative form, it implies that the one who responds has no option but to concur. In this case, rather than being a statement from Allah, it will be an admission from the hearer.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari (1497); Muslim (1078) on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn Abu Awfa*

‘Do they not know that it is Allah alone who can accept the repentance’ (*at-Tawba:* 104). Why does Allah *the Almighty* say ‘alone’ here? He *the Most High* wants to use this specific wording to exclude the possibility that anyone else can do it. This wording implies uniqueness and precludes all others from that area. Was there any suspicion that anyone else can accept the repentance but Allah? No! Simply, everyone knows that we repent to Allah and not to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The rhetorical styles of the Quran show particular wordings, such as (in Arabic is called) ‘the affirmative pronoun of separation’ used between the subject and the verb to deny all possibilities to share the action. It is also seen in the account of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘[How it was] when he asked his father and his people, "What is it that you worship?" They answered, "We worship idols, and we remain ever devoted to them." Said he, "Do [you really think that] they hear you when you invoke them, or benefit you or do you harm?" They exclaimed, "But we found our forefathers doing the same!" Said [Abraham], "Have you, then, ever considered what it is that you have been worshipping – you and those ancient forebears of yours? Now [as for me, I know that,] verily, these [false deities] are my enemy, [and that none is my helper] save the Lord of all the worlds."’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 70-77)

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not say ‘they are enemies’ (*a‘da’*, using the plural form), but he gathered them all together in a single unit and said *(innahum ‘aduwwun li)* which literally means ‘verily, they are an enemy unto me.’ He used the singular to combine them as though they are a single thing. Some of Ibrahim's (Abraham’s) people worshipped the One Allah, whilst others worshipped idols and claimed that they were Allah’s ‘associates'. The people of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) had two different ways of worshipping. Since some worshipped Allah *the Almighty* and others associated partners with Him, Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's), words might have been taken to mean that Allah is included in enmity. For this reason, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) made an exemption saying, 'These [false deities] are my enemies [and that none is my helper] save the Lord of all the worlds' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77). Allah *the Most High* was not an enemy to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Only the idols were his enemies. If his people had only worshipped deities other than Allah and had not worshipped Allah at all, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* would not have needed to make an exception, which indicates that some of his people were like those who said, 'We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* dissociated himself from the false gods and said, 'these [false deities] are my enemies [and that none is my helper] save the Lord of all the worlds' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77). The words are precise and well-considered. He added, 'Who has created me and is the One Who guides me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78) He did not say, 'Who has created me and guides me', rather, he left 'created me' without any additional pronoun, but specified that Allah Alone *the Exalted* guides by saying, 'and is the One Who guides me'. This is due to the addition of 'the One Who' only being necessary if it could possibly be suspected that the action is shared with another; as for creation, no one claims that he has created anyone else, and therefore he did not say, 'the One Who created me.'

The True Lord *the Most High* says, 'Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah"…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). Thus, there is no creator but He *the Exalted*. For things attributed to none but Allah, there is no need to say, 'the One Who'; but in things attributed to others besides Allah, He specifies the matter by saying 'the One Who' to affirm that the action is Allah's Alone: 'Who has created me and is the One Who guides me.' No one has a claim to this matter; no one has ever claimed to have created anyone. Therefore, the specification is made to show that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) guidance was a grace from Allah alone. It is possible to claim making laws for human happiness, social welfare and cure of social ills. However, we deny it and say the One Who creates us is the One Who guides us according to His own laws. To sum up, things never claimed by other than Allah need no emphasis, e.g. 'the One Who', whereas things claimed by someone else need that emphasis. Allah *the Most High* then says, ‘And is the One Who gives me to eat and to drink’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 79). Another pronoun is used; one sees his father bringing him food and drink and imagines that his father is a partner to Allah, so the words ‘And is the One’ are used here. If you trace the chain of any provision that your father brings you, finally you will return to Allah. This is why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said: ‘And is the One Who gives me to eat and to drink, and when I fall ill, is the One Who restores me to health’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 79-80). Therefore, no one would imagine that doctors can heal and forget that Allah Alone is the Healer; the doctor is just a means. We sometimes take someone to a doctor only for him to die in the doctor’s care. A poet said about death:

> If it leaves you alone, any medication leads to cure
>
> But if it leaves you not, then medicine will be a means to it.

Doctors might give medicine to the patient only to cause his death. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* declared that healing is only from Allah Alone, lest anyone may think that anyone but Allah *the Almighty* can heal. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* then says, ‘And Who will cause me to die’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 81). He did not say, ‘Who is the One Who will cause me to die’; this is due to that only Allah causes death. Someone may object and feel that indeed he should say, ‘Who is the One Who will cause me to die'. In reply, we say to be aware that death is different from killing; death occurs without the body being destroyed, whilst killing occurs by destroying the body. The Lord *the Most High* tells us that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said: ‘And who will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 81). It is a well-said speech. Allah *the Exalted* did not say, ‘The One Who will bring me back to life’ since there is no doubt that this power belongs to Him Alone. Only ‘the One who’ is used when something is suspected to involve others. ‘And Who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on Judgment Day!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 82) He did not say, ‘the One Who’ in this verse either, for only Allah has the power to forgive.(1) In conclusion, every matter wherein it is known that He has no associate, the words ‘the One Who’ are not used, but they are used for matters wherein others are involved.

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(1) He *the Most High* says, ‘Who but Allah could forgive sins?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 135)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Do they not know that it is Allah alone Who can accept the repentance of His servants’ (*at-Tawba:* 104). He may say, ‘Do they not know that it is Allah alone Who can accept repentance *from* His servants’, instead, He says, ‘of’ (*‘an*) rather than ‘from’ (*min*). Some people say that Arabic prepositions can replace one another. Therefore, the preposition *‘an’* really means *‘min’*, but we say that no this is not the case, for this is the speech of Allah *the Almighty* and no preposition needs to do the work of another. Repentance implies that a punishable sin has been committed, but if Allah accepts the repentance, He relieves (*tajawaza ‘an*) a sinner from punishment. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do they not know that it is Allah alone Who can accept the repentance’ (*at-Tawba:* 104), it means that accepting repentance relieves a person from punishment. The proposition '*‘an*' exactly means that He *the Most High* accepts the repentance and excuses the punishment of the sin.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘And is the [true] recipient of whatever is offered for His sake’ (*at-Tawba:* 104). Truly, Allah told the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to ‘accept’, but the Messenger only takes for the sake of Allah. The ‘recipient’ here means ‘the One Who accepts.’ The Lord *the Most High* says, ‘[But,] behold, the God-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying (*akhidhin*, from the verb *akhadha,* ‘to take’) all that their Lord will have granted them’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16), which means that they receive all the Divine Graces that the Lord grants to them. For example, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to see Fatima *Allah be pleased with her,* he found her polishing a silver coin. Indeed, the silver does not rust, but it is soft and, thus, mixed with hard metals when minted into coins to make it harder. The metal mixed with it does rust. This is why Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* was polishing the silver coin. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to her, he asked her what she had. She said, ‘It is a silver coin.’ He asked her why she was polishing it. In response, she said, ‘I have decided to give it in charity. I know that before charity falls into the hand of the needy man, it falls into

Allah’s hand, so I want it to be gleaming.’ Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* did that because she knew that Allah Alone is the true recipient of charity.

‘Do they not know that it is Allah alone Who can accept the repentance of His servants and is the [true] recipient of whatever is offered for His sake – and that Allah alone is an Acceptor of Repentance, a Dispenser of Mercy?’ (*at-Tawba:* 104) This verse removes all traces of doubt that may befall them about the acceptance of their repentance after the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* took their charity. The One Who accepts repentance and receives charity is Allah; He is All-Repenting and Merciful, The Lord *the Most High* says,

وَقُلِ ٱعۡمَلُواْ فَسَيَرَى ٱللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمۡ وَرَسُولُهُۥ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَۖ وَسَتُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ
عَٰلِمِ ٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ١٠٥

Say [Prophet], ‘Take action! God will see your actions – as will His Messenger and the believers – and then you will be returned to Him who knows what is seen and unseen, and He will tell you what you have been doing [105] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 105)

They announced their repentance after admitting their sins; they had their righteous deeds tainted with evil deeds and tied themselves to the pillars of the mosque vowing not to release themselves until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* unties them. They even said, ‘Take our wealth as charity to cleanse us.’ Their action placed a dividing barrier between the past they regretted and the future they initiated. A new page is open, so will you act in accordance with this repentance or not? Do not think that your affairs will all be private; rather, some would be public. Allah sees your private affairs; He says, ‘Allah will behold’ (*at-Tawba:* 105). As for those matters which require the wisdom of prophecy, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will see them by his penetrating insight into your behaviour. As for the public matters, ‘the believers’ will see them. We have three kinds of watch:

- the public watch: All believers see your deeds. As such, adhere to the way of guidance for believers to bear witness for you according to their sight.

- he Prophet's watch: Beware of attempting to deceive believers, for the Prophet's wisdom, insight and purity will see through your deception.
- the Divine watch: If you escape the sight of believers and the Prophet, Allah knows about it.

‘And say [unto them, O, Prophet]: "Act!"' (*at-Tawba:* 105) which means act in a new way which accords with your confession of sins, claims of repentance, tying yourself to the pillars of the mosque and charity. Act in a way that will allow you to turn a new page in your lives and know that we shall be watching over you. Allah *the Exalted* will see those things which no human could know, namely your intentions. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will know what his illumination and insight show him, and believers will know about your ordinary public actions. This Divine beholding along with that of the Messenger and believers is worthless unless it leads to some sorts of reward or punishment. It is not only a beholding, but it is the Beholder Who has the ability to reward or punish. You shall all return to Him without doubt. In this world, you have the means equally used by believers and disbelievers, the righteous and the sinner. However, there is also the Unseen World whose knowledge and dominion rests with Allah Alone: ‘With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir:* 16) The one who repents will receive kind treatment. After repentance, he may heedlessly sin in forgetfulness of the Last Day, so he needs to a reminder of faith. Therefore, Allah *the Most High* says, ‘And say [unto them, O, Prophet]: "Act! And Allah will behold your deeds, and [so will] His Messenger, and the believers’ (*at-Tawba:* 105). When He says, ‘will behold’, He mentions the verb only once which implies that it will be a single look by which they will see whether you follow the way of Allah or not. ‘And [in the end] you will be brought before Him who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind’ (*at-Tawba:* 105). Allah *the Almighty* alone has the knowledge of the Unseen. As for the perceptible world, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knows certain things about you, and so do believers. However, the Lord knows it all. Wisely, Allah does not punish a person based on His Knowledge but according to a person's own records and deeds. He *the Exalted* says, 'Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!' (*al-Isra':* 14)

The Lord *the Most High* concludes this verse by saying: 'Then He will make you understand what you have been doing' (*at-Tawba:* 105). Those who confessed their sins, tied themselves to the pillars of the mosque and gave in charity, Allah accepted them and then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* untied them and accepted their charity. They were not alone in that sin. Others did the same sin but did not tie themselves to the mosque's pillars or confess their sins. Allah *Glorified is He* says about them:

وَءَاخَرُونَ مُرْجَوْنَ لِأَمْرِ ٱللَّهِ إِمَّا يُعَذِّبُهُمْ وَإِمَّا يَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾

**And there are others who are waiting for God's decree,
either to punish them or to show them mercy. God is all
knowing and wise[106] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 106)**

The verse refers to three men whose account is told later in another verse: 'And [He turned in His Mercy, too,] towards the three who had fallen prey to corruption, who eventually after the earth, despite all its vastness, had become [too] narrow for them and their souls had become [utterly] constricted—came to know with certainty that there is no refuge from Allah other than [a return] unto Him, and thereupon He turned again unto them in His Mercy, so that they might repent. Verily, Allah alone is an Acceptor of Repentance, a Dispenser of Mercy' (*at-Tawba:* 118).

The three men were Ka'b ibn Malik,(1) Hilal ibn Umayyah and Murarah ibn Al-Rabi'; they failed to attend the battle of Tabuk(2) without having any good excuse for doing so. Indeed, each one had his mount, wealth and other belongings. One of them[1] told his story later and made it clear that he had no good excuse. He said, ‘I was never more equipped with wealth and mount than I was at the time of that battle. I would say, "I shall get ready tomorrow!" The morrow would come, yet I would not get ready. When the riders had all set out, I said I would follow them, but I did not.’ These were the three of whom Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘and [there are yet] others – [people whose cases are] deferred until Allah wills to judge them’ (*at-Tawba:* 106). The word ‘deferred’ means that their judgement had not yet been pronounced since Allah wanted to show people something. It is worth noting that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not establish a prison wherein criminals would be incarcerated. It was for a wise reason to take a criminal and keep him away from the society by detaining him somewhere is possible, but the stricter punishment is to let him go free in a big prison when all the society deserts him.

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(1) *Ka'b ibn Malik al-Ansari was a famous poet who attended the second 'Aqaba pledge, did not attend the battle of Badr, and then attended every battle after it until the Battle of Tabuk which he did not attend. He died in the year 50 AH during the rule of Mu'awiyah. See, Al-Isabah 5:309.*
As for Hilal ibn Umayyah, he was present at Badr and all the battles which followed it, and died during the rule of Mu'awiya; he is known for having been proved honest when he accused his wife of adultery (Al-Isabah, 4:289); Murara ibn Al-Rabee' was also a famous Companion who fought at Badr (al-Isabah, 4:76).

(2) The story of the three who defaulted from the battle of Tabuk.

The greatness of faith is manifested here. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* issued a commandment for all people to ostracise these men, neither speaking to nor taking care of them. The command was also in effect concerning their relatives. No one would mix with them in the marketplace or the mosque. One of them would try to pray near Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then steal furtive glances to see if Prophet Muhammad looked at him or not, and then go to his cousin’s house and climb the wall, saying, ‘Do you know that I love Allah and His Messenger?’ His cousin would reply, ‘Allah and His Messenger know best.’ In this way, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took the society away from them instead of taking them away from society. He also took them from their wives, a very difficult issue to control. He *peace and blessings be upon him* warned their wives not to go near them until Allah *the Exalted* manifested His Will. ‘And [there are yet] others – [people whose cases are] deferred until Allah wills to judge them. He will either chastise them or turn again unto them in His mercy’ (*at-Tawba:* 106). For all we knew, Allah might either chastise them or turn to them in mercy, but the Lord *the Most High* Alone knew what the fate of each of them would be. Therefore, the doubt was on our part since Allah *the All-Wise* had deferred their judgement, and He had not declared

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(1) *It was Ka‘b, as Muslim relates (2769).*

whether they were destined for Hell or Paradise, or whether they would be forgiven. The decision of their fate rests with Allah *the Most High* alone; Allah's judgements are wisely manifested at particular times.

There are people for whom Allah gave His verdict immediately and others for whom He deferred it in order to purify and educate those whose judgement was deferred, for their own sake and for the sake of those who witnessed their affair. This matter went on for more than fifty days so that they could receive their reprimand from the society of faith; Allah did not want to make His judgement clear until they were completely reprimanded, and people saw and heard about their case to learn from their example.

Had Allah *the Almighty* given their judgement immediately, there would have been no reprimand for those who gave false excuses and others besides them; He says, 'And [there are yet] others – [people whose cases are] deferred until Allah wills to judge them…' (*at-Tawba:* 106). Since He *the Most High* postponed their judgement, we had no right to rush their matter until Allah finally told: '[He turned in His Mercy, too,] towards the three who had fallen prey to corruption' (*at-Tawba:* 118).

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us another story about the hypocrites:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُوا۟ مَسْجِدًا ضِرَارًا وَكُفْرًا وَتَفْرِيقًۢا بَيْنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَإِرْصَادًا لِّمَنْ
حَارَبَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ وَلَيَحْلِفُنَّ إِنْ أَرَدْنَآ إِلَّا ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَـٰذِبُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

Then there are those who built a mosque — in an attempt to cause harm, disbelief, and disunity among the believers — as an outpost for those who fought God and His Messenger before: they swear, 'Our intentions were nothing but good,' but God bears witness that they are liars [107] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 107)

The Quran tells us here about another incident involving the hypocrites.(1) Their incidents with Muslims are many. Allah *the Almighty* spoke about many

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(1) They were twelve hypocrites, who established a mosque to cause mischief, harm Muslims of Qubaa' mosque and promote apostasy among them. They built it by the command of Abu 'Amir, 'the Monk' to be a rallying-place for him and his fellow conspirators. He had gone to bring troops from the Emperor of Byzantium to fight Prophet Muhammad *peace and* =

of their incidents in the chapter of *at-Tawba* introducing each segment with His Words ‘And among them’, ‘And among them’, ‘They will swear to you’ and ‘They will swear to you’. The scholars call the chapter of *at-Tawba* 'the chapter of among them'. For example, Allah says,

- ‘And among them are such as vow unto Allah…’ (*at-Tawba:* 75).
- ‘And among those [enemies of the truth] there are such as malign the Prophet …’ (*at-Tawba:* 61).
- ‘And among them there was [many a one] who said, "Grant me permission [to remain at home], and do not put me to too hard a test"' (*at-Tawba:* 49).

The Lord *the Most High* also says of them several times, ‘They will swear to you’ which the scholars call the ‘the chapter of “They Will Swear"’.[1] In

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= *blessings be upon him* and divide the believers who prayed in Qubaa’. As a way-station for those who sought to wage war on Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. They would surely swear falsely that they only built it with “the best of intentions”, such as sheltering the poor from the rain and heat and making room for Muslims; “Allah bears witness that they are lying’ (*at-Tawba*: 107).

[1] They are seven in number as follows:
- ‘They will swear by Allah, ‘Had we been able to do so, we would certainly have set out with you’ (*at-Tawba*: 42)
- ‘And they swear by Allah that they do indeed belong to you–the while they do not belong to you but are [only] people ridden by fear’ (*at-Tawba*: 56).
- ‘[The hypocrites] swear to you by Allah [that they are acting in good faith], with a view to pleasing you [O believers] – the while it is God and His Apostle whose pleasure they should seek above all else…’ (*at-Tawba*: 62).
- ‘[The hypocrites] swear by Allah that they have said nothing [wrong]; yet most certainly have they uttered a saying which amounts to a denial of the truth’ (*at-Tawba*: 74).
- ‘When you will have returned to them, [O believers,] they will swear to you by Allah, [repeating their excuses,] with a view to your letting them be’ (*at-Tawba*: 95).
- ‘They will swear to you with a view to making you pleased with them’ (*at-Tawba*: 96).
- ‘And they will surely swear [to you, O believers], ‘We had but the best of intentions’ (*at-Tawba* :107).
- The expression also appears elsewhere in the Quran:
- ‘Whereupon they will come to thee, swearing by Allah, ‘Our aim was but to do good and to bring about harmony’ (*an-Nisa’*: 62).

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this chapter, Allah *the Almighty* tells us of another incident of the hypocrites. After telling us similar things, the hypocrites have conflicted faculties. Their tongues utter words of faith, whilst their hearts harbour disbelief. The conflict of faculties is difficult for the soul. It requires great emotional, mental and physical effort. When they were alone with their demons, they said one thing, but when they were with believers, they said another. The Lord *the Most High* tells us how they would claim faith with tongues: ‘And when they meet those who have attained to faith, they assert, "We believe [as you believe]"’ (*al-Baqara:* 14). Yet, when they are alone, Allah tells us this about them: ‘When they find themselves alone with their evil impulses, they say, "Verily, we are with you."’ (*al-Baqara:* 14)

Their faculties of speech were repressed when they spoke in the presence of believers, but when they were with their own evil fellows, they would vent their faculties and say something different. This is a contradiction, which is why the Quran tells: ‘If they could but find a place of refuge, or any cavern, or a crevice [in the earth], they would turn towards it in headlong haste’ (*at-Tawba:* 57). If they had a safe place where believers could not see them, they would vent their feelings and insult Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and believers, expressing their innermost. However, they had no such place. They wished they had a refuge to hide or a cave to enter in order to vent to their true selves. Thus, ‘they would turn towards it in headlong haste’ (*at-Tawba:* 57). In this verse, the Lord *the Most High* tells us another story of their doings by saying: ‘And [there are hypocrites] who have established a [separate] house of worship in order to create mischief, to promote apostasy’ (*at-Tawba:* 107). We know that the word *masjid* (i.e. mosque or a place of prostration) is a place where prayers and prostrations are made. It one intends the literal meaning, then the whole earth is a *masjid*;(1) one can pray

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= - ‘They are neither of you [O believers] nor of those [who utterly reject the truth]: and so they swear to a falsehood the while they know [it to be false]’ (*al-Mujadala:* 14).
- ‘They will swear before Him as they [now] swear before you, thinking that they are on firm ground [in their assumptions]…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 18).

(1) *Jabir related that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘The whole earth has been made for me a clean and purified place of prayer’ (Al-Bukhari: 335; Muslim: 521)*

anywhere and thus making it a ‘place of prostration’, not since one built it but due to one prostrating there. After that, one may continue his worldly affairs there. One might pray in the school classroom, the office, the factory, the field or any other place where he carries out worldly affairs. Therefore, the place where one prays becomes a place of prostration.

There is also the mosque built and devoted for prayer in which no worldly activities should be undertaken therein except prayers. We know that the first mosque built in Islam was that of Qubaa’ by the tribe of Banu ‘Amr ibn ‘Awf. Then, the hypocrites wanted to have themselves a space in the guise of being righteous, so they built a mosque for corruption which was built by the tribe of Banu Ghunm ibn ‘Awf. They built it to compete with the mosque of Qubaa’. We are well aware of disputes arising between competitors in our times and hearing people say, ‘Why has that neighbourhood built a mosque, yet we have not built one?’

Every mosque built for the sake of vain reputation and rivalry between different parties or for ostentation is thereby a mosque of mischief. All these things cause dissent amongst Muslims. Someone might say, ‘It is a healthy phenomenon’ to which we reply that it is not, for we should realise that it is a disease which afflicts faith. When we see a mosque which does not even have two full rows in congregation, and then a few metres away, there is another mosque, and then a third nearby, and then a fourth, these are all mosques of mischief.(1) The word *masjid* in its specific sense means a place devoted and reserved for worship in which nothing takes place except worship. Whenever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw someone asking people about lost property in the mosque, he would say to him, 'May Allah not return to you what you have lost!'(2) Simply, when one enters a mosque, he intends to remain in sincere devotion to enjoy his Lord’s presence. Outside the mosque, he has enough time to speak about worldly things. The hypocrites wanted to have a place to vent their hypocrisy and hide their evil in righteous masks. They said, ‘Let us build a mosque to divide Muslims. One group will pray here and another there. When we are praying in this mosque, we will be free to say what we like. Yet, when we pray in the other mosque, we repress ourselves and are unable to speak there, but we want to speak our minds.'

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(1) *Al-Qurṭubi says something similar in his exegesis.*

(2) *Al-Naasa’i, al-Darimi and Al-Tirmidhi from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

They built the mosque and asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray with them in the new mosque, whilst he was on the way to the Battle of Tabuk. He declined to do so and made it clear to them, 'We cannot do so now, but if Allah wills it, then we shall pray here when we return from battle.' After his return from battle, they tried to make him keep his word and asked him again, but Jibril (Gabriel) *Allah be pleased with him* conveyed unto him the verses which spoke about this mosque and how it was a mosque of mischief. Allah *the Almighty* knew what they truly intended. The word *diraran* (mischief) literally means 'harm'. They wanted a place for rest to avoid the company of the believers in the mosque where Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed and planned to be alone with each other to speak about their desire to harm and disunite Muslims. Then, Allah *the Most High* says, 'To promote apostasy and disunity among the believers' (*at-Tawba:* 107).

Whenever Muslims become divided, their disunity harms Islam. Islam wants people to remain united and to keep their power visible. Allah *the Exalted* permits us to pray anywhere but places an obligation upon us to pray the Friday Prayer in congregation in a single place. Therefore, Muslims rejoice when they willingly adhere to the religion and meet one another, whereas the mosque of mischief aims to promote disunity amongst believers. He *the Most High* then says, 'And to provide an outpost for all who from the outset have been warring against Allah and His Messenger' (*at-Tawba:* 107). The Arabic word *'Irsadan'* implies the act of waiting and keeping an eye on someone (to eliminate him for the sake of hatred) which is entirely different from waiting for someone to meet him solely for the sake of love.

The ones who built the mosque of mischief made it an outpost where they could wait for a deadly enemy of Prophet Muhammad who advised them to build the mosque.(1) It was Abu 'Amir Al-Rahib ('the Monk') whom Prophet

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(1) *For instance, he dug holes for Muslims to fall into them. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him fell into one of them until 'Ali and Talha Allah be pleased with them helped him get out, as Ibn Hisham related in his Sira.*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called 'the Dissolute One' (*Al-Fasiq*). He embraced Christianity during the irreligious sphere of ignorance. For example, if a man travelled somewhere and heard of a religion, he would go home, claim to follow it and gather followers around himself. Abu 'Amir was one of those who became Christian and lived in Medina. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to bring an end to all these falsehoods, his authority was lost, making him become an enemy to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He became such an enemy to the Prophet that he said to the Prophet at Uhud, 'If any people would fight you, I will fight you alongside them.' When Islam took hold in Medina, he fled to Mecca. When Mecca was conquered, he fled to Ta'if; when the people of Ta'if embraced Islam, he had nowhere left to go, so he fled to the Byzantines in the Levant. Then he sent a message to the hypocrites telling them, 'Build a mosque, for I shall bring you forces from the King of Byzantium to attack Muhammad and drive him out of Medina.'(1)

They built the mosque to cause mischief, apostasy and disunity providing an outpost for Abu 'Amir who went to the Levant to mobilise an army for war on Allah and His Messenger. Despite that they did all that, they had the nerve to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray with them in the mosque to make it an 'official' mosque where the Prophet had prayed, so Muslims would pray there too. They thought that their ruse would succeed. However, Allah Who protected His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and religion from them revealed the truth of this mosque to the Prophet.

For good reasons did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* overlook and tolerate the hypocrites. After professing Islam, they had attained a kind of companionship with him, and he did not expose them at first, lest it should have been said, 'Muhammad is fighting his Companions.'(2) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew things that others did not know, and he wanted to protect Islam from the tongues of those who did not know what he knew. After the truth of the matter came to light, Prophet

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(1) *The story of this hypocrite is narrated by Al-Wahidi in his Asbab An-Nuzul (p 149), and in the exegeses of Ibn Kathir and al-Qurtubi, and in the Sira of Ibn Hisham.*

(2) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him himself said this.*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent Malik ibn Al-Dukhsham, ‘Amir ibn Al-Sakan, Wahshi (the killer of Hamza) and Ma‘n ibn ‘Adiy *Allah be pleased with them* to demolish this mosque and put a garbage dump in its place. The hypocrites were exposed, and they endured it silently. If one sees his enemy doing something he truly dislikes, he must first try to stop it; this is the first stage. If the enemy continues forcefully, he must put him in his proper place. The hypocrites wanted this mosque to undermine Islam and cause destruction. Once the Lord *the Most High* exposed them, they should have restrained themselves from doing such things. Conversely, they did not stop, instead they continued their opposition to Islam. Therefore, just as the plot was removed, the plotter had to be removed. They became afraid lest the deterrence would move from the deed to the doer. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘[Some of] the hypocrites dread lest a [new] *sura* [chapter of the Quran] be revealed [in evidence] against them, making them understand what is [really] in their hearts. Say: "Go on mocking! Behold, Allah will bring to light the very thing that you are dreading!"’ (*at-Tawba:* 64)

We know that the guilty person sometimes seems to be doing everything but crying aloud, ‘Take me!’; his behaviour reveals what his soul conceals. The Quran also describes hypocrites as having an outward pleasing appearance, so when they speak, we listen to what they say, as if they were propped-up timbers, along with them thinking that every cry they hear is against them: 'And when you see them, their figures please thee; and when they speak, you listen to their speech. They are as though they were blocks of wood propped up. They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemy, so beware of them. Allah's curse be upon them. How are they being turned away from the truth?' (*al-Munafiqun:* 4)

They act like this because of the guilty disquiet that fills their every depth, and each time one of them sees a believer coming his way, he thinks he has come to either strike him or kill him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says here: ‘…an outpost for all who from the outset have been warring against Allah and His Messenger…’ (*at-Tawba:* 107) ‘From the outset’ in this verse indicates that they have already fought against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in an attempt to hurt him, but Allah *the Exalted* always protected him, and they no longer had any plot or aggressive tactic by which they might harm him.

There are many examples for this. When the Quran tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Jews who killed prophets contrary to what is right: '…they incurred the wrath of Allah; that was because they rejected the signs of Allah and sought to slay the prophets unjustly…' (*al-Baqara:* 61). Would this not make him think that they might slay him as well? Indeed, since they had the nerve to slay the other prophets, what would stop them from slaying him too? However, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures him, and restrains them by exposing their pretenses and reminding them that they would have never killed Allah's prophets had they been believers: '…Say, "Why, then, do you seek to slay the prophets of Allah before this, if you were believers."' (*al-Baqara:* 91) '…Before this' means that this would not happen this time, for the situation was different. Thus Allah reassures Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and their evil plots are thwarted whenever they occur to them.(1)

Also, when the Quran spoke of things they intended but had not done yet, thus exposing their intention that they would still stupidly go ahead and do what was exposed. Had they possessed even the slightest acumen, they would have refrained from doing what the Quran had said they would do.

Even when they intended to swear, had there been a single wise or smart man amongst them, he would have said to them, 'you are planning to swear "…'We had but the best of intentions!" (*at-Tawba:* 107), but do not do so, and the Muslims will have doubts about the Quran.' What compelled them, other than their utter stupidity, to take an oath about something they were completely free to do or not do? Also, when Allah *the Almighty* said that the weak-minded people will say, 'What has turned the Muslims away from the prayer direction they used to face?' (*al-Baqara:* 142)

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(1) *'A'isha–Allah be pleased with her – narrated that prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to have a guard until the verse '...And Allah will protect you from (unbelieving) people...' (al-Mai'da: 67) was revealed, upon which prophet Muhammad raised his head and said, {Be gone, people, for Allah has protected me.}' Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Abu Na'im and Al-Hakim.*

When it was revealed, they had not said this yet, and Allah *the Exalted* revealed it in the Quran which would be recited in every prayer and known to every Muslim. Therefore, what compelled them then to go ahead and say just what the Quran had predicted they would say? The Jews did this, and by doing this, they chose to be weak-minded, and not a single smart man amongst them encouraged them to do otherwise.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And they will surely swear [to you, O, believers], "We had but the best of intentions!"' (*at-Tawba:* 107), affirming this by using the word 'surely'. Thus, they indeed did swear, and said, 'We only made this mosque for the benefit of Muslims and to make it easier for those who were too sick or otherwise unable to attend the other mosque, so that when it rained or was very cold, people would find a second mosque to pray in.'(1) Yet, Allah's Verdict was stark clear: '…while Allah [Himself] bears witness that they are lying.' (*at-Tawba:* 107)

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

لَا تَقُمۡ فِيهِ أَبَدٗاۚ لَّمَسۡجِدٌ أُسِّسَ عَلَى ٱلتَّقۡوَىٰ مِنۡ أَوَّلِ يَوۡمٍ أَحَقُّ أَن تَقُومَ
فِيهِۚ فِيهِ رِجَالٞ يُحِبُّونَ أَن يَتَطَهَّرُواْۚ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُطَّهِّرِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

[Prophet], never pray in that mosque. You should rather pray in a mosque founded from its first day on consciousness of God: in this mosque there are men who desire to grow in purity – God loves those who seek to purify themselves [108] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 108)

Do the True Lord's Words 'never pray in that mosque' (*at-Tawba:* 108) mean that the mosque itself would continue to stand but must not be prayed in? Is 'never pray in that mosque' (*at-Tawba:* 108) a prohibition in the sense of 'Never pray in it', or is Allah stating that no prayer would ever be held in it again since it would no longer exist? These words of Allah *the Exalted* meant that the mosque should no longer exist, and He *the Most High* then says: '…You should rather pray in a mosque founded from its first day on consciousness of Allah …' (*at-Tawba:* 108). So, it is not simply a matter of building a mosque, but it is also a case of who attends the mosque. There is one mosque, and there is another: the first one (Quba'(1)). Quba was founded on consciousness of Allah and was filled with those who desired to grow in purity, while the latter was founded on intent of harm by hypocrites who desired to grow in impurity; this was the exact opposite of those who desired to grow in purity.

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(1) *Ibn Ishaq said in his Sira: "When they finished building this mosque, they went to the Messenger of Allah (who was prepping himself for the expedition of Tabuk), and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, we have built a mosque for the sick and needy and for rainy and cold nights, and we would like you to visit us and pray for us in it.' [The Prophet] said that he was on the verge of travelling, and was preoccupied, or words to that effect, and that when he returned, Allah willing, he would come to them and pray for them in it." Then the verse in hand was revealed. (The Sira of Ibn-Hisham 4/530)*

'Love' is the inclination of the heart towards something providing expansion and joy to the soul. When this verse was revealed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O, Ansar! Allah has praised you for your cleanliness. What is the nature of your cleanliness?' They said, 'We perform ablution for prayer, and we take a bath to cleanse ourselves of impurity after sexual activity. Also, we clean ourselves with water (after urinating).' He said, 'This is it then. So adhere to it.'(2) One of them would take a stone and clean himself after reliving himself and would use water only sparingly since water was precious to them; then, he would use water after the stones(3) to make himself completely clean. They added, 'Plus, we do not sleep in a state of major ritual impurity, and we do not persist in sins. If a sin overcomes us, we are quick to repent.' 'There are men who love (*yuhibbuna*) to grow in purity- Allah loves (*yuhibbu*) those who seek to purify themselves.' (*at-Tawba:* 108) The love (*hubb*) in this verse is mutual, for there is nothing more painful to the soul than one-sided love, and this is the worst kind of misery. A poet said:

You are my beloved, but I seek refuge in You

Lest I be a lover, but not loved in return

It is miserable for those who are in love when their emotions are one-sided; however, when love is mutual, it becomes the greatest joy. Likewise, when enmity is mutual, it augments and burns up to antagonism and hostility; unlike one-sided enmity, which can end quickly.

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(1) First mosque to be built in Islam, even before the Prophet's mosque

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Majah (355), Ad-Darqatnei (i. 62) and Al-Hakim (i. 155)*

(3) *Three stones would be used according to the Prophet's instruction, as narrated by Ahmad (vi. 108), Abu Dawud (40), An-Nasa'i (i. 41), and Ad-Darqatni (i. 54).*

Therefore, when love is mutual, one finds that whenever a lover sees an expression of love from his beloved, he reacts to it, and that is how love grows and increases. This can only be the case if the love of the hearts is channelled through an unwavering factor, that is to say ‘a love for Allah’s sake'. On the other hand, when one sees the love between two people ebbing as time goes, know that this love is not for Allah’s sake; it is unlike love that grows every day since this is love for Allah’s sake.

Allah *the Most High* tells us that the Pharaoh’s household picked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* so he could become an enemy and a source of grief for them: '… one of the family of Pharaoh picked him up so that he became for them an enemy and a source of sorrow.' (*al-Qasas:* 8) This does not mean that they wanted him to become an enemy for them! Had this possibility ever occurred to the Pharaoh’s household, they would have killed him right away. Rather they rescued him so that he would become a source of joy for them; however, behold how Allah *the Almighty* utilises the ignorance of those who disbelieve in Him.(1) Pharaoh’s household were, in fact, the ones to raise Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. This is why Pharaoh reminded Musa (Moses) how he brought him up as a child among his family and how he stayed with them for many years: 'Pharaoh said, "O, Musa (Moses), did we not bring you up amongst us as a child? And you did stay amongst us many years of your life.' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 18)

However, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* made no concessions when it comes to right and wrong since, in reality, it was Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* who brought him up. As for the upbringing of Pharaoh, it was of no account on the scales of right and wrong. This enmity might have been inconsequential had it been from Musa’s (Moses's) side only, but Allah *Glorified is He* willed that the enmity becomes mutual between Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh. Allah *the Exalted* decreed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would be brought up by one who is enemy both to Allah and to him: 'one who is an enemy to Me and also an enemy to him will take him up.' (*Ta Ha:* 39)

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(1) Allah also says of this: ‘and Pharaoh's wife said, 'Here is a joy to behold for me and for you! Do not kill him: he may be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son.’ (*al-Qasas:* 9)

As for mutual love, Allah *Glorified is He* tells that in time he will bring forth people whom He loves and who love Him: 'Allah will soon bring in his stead a people whom He will love and who will love Him.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) Thus, when they love Allah, He responds to their greeting of love by loving them all the more,(1) and they respond to His greeting of love by loving Him even more; so love keeps increasing and growing until it reaches a pinnacle. However, Allah's love remains infinite. Listen to Allah's saying in the Quran that all praise is due to Him and that peace is upon those servants of Him whom He chose: 'Say, "All praise belongs to Allah, and peace be upon those servants of His whom He has chosen. Is Allah better or that which they associate with Him?"' (*an-Naml:* 59) Likewise, listen to Him saying that on the Day when they meet Him, they will be welcomed with the greeting of 'Peace' (*al-Ahzab:* 44). 'Peace' in this verse does not come with the definite article *(al)* (the). Had the definite article been used, this would restrict the word to one kind of peace only. When one says, 'I met the man', he restricts the identity of the man in one person, but when one says, 'I met a man', the identity of the man is open. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* He tells us that the peace of Allah was upon him on the day he was born and on the day of his death, and it will be upon him on the day when he shall be raised to life again: 'And peace was on him the day he was born, and the day he died, and peace will be on him the day he will be raised up to life again.' (*Maryam:* 15) Allah wants peace to be manifold upon Yahya (John). Same applies with 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* when he spoke about himself and said that peace was upon him on the day he was born, on the day of his death and that it will be upon him on the day when he shall be raised to life again: `And peace was on me the day I was born, and peace will be on me the day I shall die, and the day I shall be raised up to life again.' (*Maryam:* 33) (In this verse, the word used is literarily ‘the peace’ as in *as-salam*, with the definite article, unlike in the instance mentioned above.)

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet said: {Allah Almighty says: 'I am as My servant thinks of Me. I am with him when he remembers Me. If he mentions Me within himself, I mention him within Myself. If he mentions Me in an assembly, I mention him in a better assembly. If he comes near to Me a hand-span, I come near to him the distance of a cubit. If he comes near to Me the distance of a cubit, I come near to him the distance of two outspread arms. If he comes to Me walking, I come to him running.'} Narrated by Al-Bukhari (7405) and Muslim (2675)*

When someone meets you, he says, ‘Peace be upon you’ (*Salamu ‘alaykum*, with the indefinite noun), and you answer him, ‘And upon you be peace’ (*wa ‘alaykum As-salam*, with the definite noun). Why is this? The reason is that *salamun ‘alaykum* means that the peace I give you is for you and others, whilst your response *wa ‘alaykum As-salam* means that you wish this peace upon this person in particular.

In the verse which we are currently examining, the greetings are amplified when Allah says: ‘…in this mosque there are men who love to grow in purity- Allah loves those who seek to purify themselves.’ (*at-Tawba:* 108) This is for this is that the one who loves to be pure at all times is at peace with the blessings which Allah *the Exalted* sends to him. As long as he is entirely purified from both spiritual and physical impurities, he will be in a constant state of readiness to receive Allah’s blessings. The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* sends His blessings and graces the whole time, never ceasing to send them to mankind. Allah *Glorified is He* calls Himself the Self-Sustaining – so be rest assured; if you want to sleep, then sleep soundly, for slumber or sleep never overcomes your Lord. Therefore, the purpose of faith is to put us at peace, not distress. This is why Allah describes His Hands as wide-open and that He gives as He pleases: '…both His hands are wide open. He spends as He pleases.' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 64) What this means is that He is telling mankind to be rest assured that it is simply their faith which will cause His graces and blessing to come to them, both spiritually and materially. Thus, make sure that you are able to decode them by not allowing yourself to be contaminated by impurities, whether physical or spiritual. Therefore, if you see a person blessed with a surplus of righteousness from Allah, know that his cells have been nourished from a lawfully-earned income(1) and that he is not tarnished by spiritual or physical impurity. This can be clearly seen on his face, in his words and in his good comportment; even if his skin is dark, you find that he captures your heart with his luminosity and brightness. Another man might have white skin, but with no light in his face at all since the Lord's graces are deflected from him.

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(1) *The Messenger of Allah said: {By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, the likeness of the believer is as unto a bee: It eats what is good, and produces what is good.} Narrated by Ahmad (ii. 199) on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr Allah be pleased with him*

Therefore, how do these graces come? They come from the soul's purity; if a man misses divine graces, he must look to see if he is even prepared to receive them. Consider the example of the radio transmission: The station sends out the transmission, and the one who has a sound receiver can listen to the broadcast; but if the receiver is broken, this does not mean that the station is not broadcasting its programmes. That is why Allah describes His Hands as wide-open and that He gives as He pleases: '… both His hands are wide open. He spends as He pleases.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 64)

So, be eager always to take from your Lord's Hand the graces which never cease. A Qudsi Hadith says: 'Allah stretches out His hand by night, so that he who sins by day may repent. Also, He stretches out His hand by day, so that he who sins by night may repent, (and He shall do so) until the sun rises from the West.'(1)

The night might end for one person and begin for another, as might the day, for it is always night somewhere, and always day somewhere. Thus, His hands are always outstretched, and they will never be withdrawn.

Allah says:

أَفَمَنۡ أَسَّسَ بُنۡيَٰنَهُۥ عَلَىٰ تَقۡوَىٰ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرِضۡوَٰنٍ خَيۡرٌ أَم مَّنۡ أَسَّسَ بُنۡيَٰنَهُۥ
عَلَىٰ شَفَا جُرُفٍ هَارٖ فَٱنۡهَارَ بِهِۦ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهۡدِي ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

Which is better, the person who founds his building on consciousness of God and desire for His good pleasure, or the person who founds his building on the brink of a crumbling precipice that will tumble down into the Fire of Hell, taking him with it? God does not guide the evildoers [109] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 109)

The words 'Which then' are phrased as a question, as though He were saying: 'How can you imagine that a mosque founded on Allah's Consciousness from the first day is equal to a mosque which was established for the sake of mischief, disbelief, disbanding Muslims, along with giving an outpost to those who wage war on Allah?' They could never be equal. Furthermore, when Allah *the Exalted* poses this rhetorical question, He is certain that His servant will give the answer which He wants to hear.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (2759) and Ahmad (iv. 395) on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari*

In the True Lord's Words 'Which then is better, the person who founds his building …' (*at-Tawba:* 109), we find that the word *bunyan* (building) is the gerund of the verb *bana/yabni* (to build), but it is also used to mean something which has been built, like 'This building *"bunyan*" is nice', or, 'This building *"bunyan*" is on the Pharaonic style.' There is a difference between the act of building and the result of the act. The Arabic word *bunyan* is a collective noun, meaning that it can also be used as a plural. However, there is still a singular form for it, which is *'bunyana'* with an *–a* at the end, as in other Arabic nouns like *rumman/rummana* (pomegranate), and so on. Thus, the added *–a* makes the word singular. Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that they should not pray in the mosque of mischief, and that they must pray instead in the other mosque at Quba'. Then, He presented the matter to the believers, so that they could see that Allah's Verdict was the logical one and that their own verdict would have been the same as His.

Allah says: '…or the person who founds his building on the brink of a crumbling precipice that will tumble down into the Fire of Hell taking him with it?...' (*at-Tawba:* 109). There are three words in this verse: 'brink', 'crumbling' and 'precipice'. The word *shafa* (brink) is derived from the word *shafa* (lip), and it means the edge or rim of something. People who live on the coast know that sea water eats through the earth making tunnels under the ground by way of erosion leaving behind cliffs and abysses that people could slip and fall off from with nothing under them to act as support.

A 'brink of a crumbling precipice' means one which will soon slide since 'crumbling' means that it is not stable. What happens is that the water erodes the coast making overhanging cliffs with nothing underneath them, and this is what is called a 'brink of a crumbling precipice'. The Quran reminds us elsewhere, about how Allah *the Almighty* brought our hearts together, and we became brothers by His Grace when we were just about to fall into an abyss of fire, but He saved us from this fate: '… remember the favour of Allah which He bestowed upon you when you were enemies, and He united your hearts in love, so that by His Grace you became as brothers. You were on the brink of a pit of fire, and He saved you from it.' (*Al-'Imran:* 103) What does an abyss of fire look like? It must be horrifying!

We know that in digging water wells, the walls of the well must be retained to prevent any landslides or collapsing; however, if a well does not have a retaining wall, it might collapse when soil crumbles from its sides. Thus, retaining walls keep the sides of wells from crumbling. The same happens with a mosque of mischief; it is like a well with no retaining walls, tumbling down with those within it into the Fire of hell.

Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verse by saying: '… Allah does not guide the evildoers.' (*at-Tawba:* 109) They were wrongdoers due to their hypocrisy, and thus, Allah *the Exalted* did not guide them to good deeds since He does not guide the wrongdoer. Allah *the Almighty* says more than once in the Quran that He does not bestow His guidance upon immoral people: 'And Allah guides not the disobedient people.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108) Nor does He guide disbelieving people. (*al-Baqara:* 264), nor those who deliberately do wrong: 'And Allah guides not the unjust people.' (*al-Baqara:* 258) Guidance, as we have seen before, is of two kinds. There is the guidance of direction, which is for all mankind: Allah *the Almighty* guides all people to the direction of goodness (the dos and don'ts), and they are free to choose whether to follow or not. But the type of guidance which Allah negates in these verses is the guidance of assistance.

Allah says:

لَا يَزَالُ بُنْيَٰنُهُمُ ٱلَّذِى بَنَوْا۟ رِيبَةً فِى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِلَّآ أَن
تَقَطَّعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١١٠﴾

The building they have founded will always be a source of
doubt within their hearts, until their hearts are cut to pieces.
God is all knowing and wise [110] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 110)

The building that they built was a mosque for causing harm, mischief, disbelief, and discord, along with giving an outpost to those who fought Allah and His Messenger. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had told them he would pray in it, but the True Lord *the Most High* revealed to him that they only wanted him to pray in the mosque by way of an acknowledgement, so as to make the prayer therein official.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned from the battle of *Tabuk,* Allah revealed to him: '… Never pray in that mosque …' (*at-Tawba:* 110). Thus, he sent some of his companions to destroy the mosque. Not only did he command them to destroy it, but he told them to make the place where it had stood a garbage dump, as a signal from him that, due to their intention underlying this mosque, it was spiritually impure. Placing material impurities, which are cleaner when compared to the spiritual impurities, is as though he cleansed the spiritual impurities by means of material impurities. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us here that material impurities are not as important since spiritual impurities are far graver than material impurities. A man might be free of material impurities, but the impurities which tarnish hearts, concepts and consciousness are the cause of all misery.

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'The building they have founded will always be a source of doubt within their hearts…' (*at-Tawba:* 110). So, after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* destroyed this building, and its location became a garbage dump, they remained dubious about the building and began to fear that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would punish them; they suspected that he would harm them in some way. This anxiety would not leave their hearts until these hearts would be cut to pieces.

The place of doubt and anxiety is the heart, and the heart is the second most important organ in preserving life, after the brain. As long as the cells of the brain are intact, the vital signs could be restored, even for comatose people. However, when the heart stops, the doctors try to make it start again, either by split opening the chest or resuscitating the heart. The chance will always be there as long as the brain cells are intact, since the brain is the maestro of the whole human body. This is why Allah *the Exalted* has protected the brain with the strongest of shields: the skull.

Likewise, Allah *the Exalted* has protected the nerves by which the body is controlled with the shield of the spine, so that they remain guarded. We see in fossils that long after bodies decay, skulls last longer than anything else, which shows us that Allah has assigned the strongest bone to protect the brain. Therefore, as long as the brain is sound, life can be resumed, and this is how the entire body serves and maintains the organ that controls the whole body.

When a man misses nourishment, his body starts feeding on stored fats which might cause him even to refuse to eat when offered food. Scientifically speaking, this man has been nourished since when one miss his mealtimes without eating, his body takes what it needs from his reserve fats. If the fats are all used up, the body takes nourishment from the muscles, then the flesh, then the bones; thus, all of this so as to keep the 'maestro', or the brain, intact. This is why the Quran tells us that Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* invoked Allah telling Him that his bones have become feeble: `My Lord, my bones have indeed become feeble, and my head is all aflame with hoariness, but never, my Lord, have I been unblessed in my prayer to You.' (*Maryam:* 4) It is like he was telling Allah that he was closely running out of nourishment from the very last resort.

Plants, on the other hand, are the opposite of mankind: the maestro of the plant is the lowest part of it: the root. Plants always try to look after their roots. When plants get no nourishment from water, their leaves begin to wilt since they give their life force and their moisture to the roots. Then, the stalks dry out since they give their life to the roots so they can stay alive until a little water or a little nourishment comes by, whereupon the stalks become strong again.

In mankind, the heart is the abode of convictions and beliefs which are originally derived from concrete concepts developing in the heart into deep-seated creeds which never rise to the surface for debate or negotiation. As for the mind, it debates everything, and as soon as it is convinced of an idea, this idea settles into the heart. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* explains to us that the effect of this building will remain in their hearts, and it will only leave them in one case, and that is '…until their hearts are cut to pieces…' (*at-Tawba:* 110); this means upon their very death. Therefore, the anxiety caused by this building will continue to follow them to their death beds. Or, it could mean 'until they surrender to repentance, sorrow and grief'.

This is a warning to them that the source of their evil is not from outside, but that it resides within them, and the presence of anxiety in their souls would prevent them from furthering their corruption, due to their constant fear of punishment. Allah then says: '… Allah is All Knowing and Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 110) His Knowledge is all-encompassing, and nothing escapes His vision, and His Wisdom is that He puts everything in its proper place.

The next verse says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱشۡتَرَىٰ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَأَمۡوَٰلَهُم بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ ٱلۡجَنَّةَۚ
يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَيَقۡتُلُونَ وَيُقۡتَلُونَۖ وَعۡدًا عَلَيۡهِ حَقّٗا فِي
ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةِ وَٱلۡإِنجِيلِ وَٱلۡقُرۡءَانِۚ وَمَنۡ أَوۡفَىٰ بِعَهۡدِهِۦ مِنَ ٱللَّهِۚ
فَٱسۡتَبۡشِرُواْ بِبَيۡعِكُمُ ٱلَّذِي بَايَعۡتُم بِهِۦۚ وَذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ١١١

Allah has purchased the persons and possessions of the believers in return for the Garden – they fight in God's way: they kill and are killed – this is a true promise given by Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. Who could be more faithful to his promise than God? So be happy with the bargain you have made: that is the supreme triumph [111] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 111)

After speaking about those who stayed behind instead of going out to fight, those who gave false excuses and those whose judgement He deferred, the True Lord *the Most High* makes it clear that their desertion was of no importance since He compensated Islam with something better than them. Do not think that by refusing to fight, you would harm Islam; the opposite is true due to Allah *Glorified is He* always aiding His religion. So, He says: 'Allah has purchased the lives and possessions of the believers …' (*at-Tawba:* 111).

This raises a question: How can Allah buy from believers their lives and possessions when He is the One Who created all souls and gave all possessions? The scholars answer that Allah would not take back His gifts since all wealth belongs to Him. However, when He gives it to man in return for his work, He makes it clear that: 'It belongs to you, but if your fellow believer needs it, I shall borrow it from you'. Allah did not say, 'I shall claim it back'. Rather, He says: 'Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over? It is Allah who withholds and Allah who gives abundantly, and it is to Him that you will return. ' (*al-Baqara:* 245)

Allah *Glorified is He* respects the gift He gave to man; and respects his toil and work. It is as though when He gives mankind life and their souls, He makes it clear that they truly own them. Still, He is the true Giver and when He wants to take them from you, He does not say that He is claiming them back; rather, He buys them from you for a price. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Verily, Allah's commodity is priceless. Verily, Allah's commodity is priceless. Verily, Allah's commodity is Paradise.' This means that we should make it priceless.

'Allah has purchased the lives and possessions of the believers…' (*at-Tawba:* 111). The word 'purchased' indicates that there is a deal, an act of buying and selling. However, since all this belongs to Allah, then He is both the buyer and the seller; thus, this must symbolise something. It is similar to the situation of when we see a guardian of an orphan or a weak-minded individual. An orphan might own something, and his guardian might wish to buy it for him; so he sells this item to himself (in his capacity as the guardian), and then buys it from himself (in his capacity as a buyer seeking to purchase this item).(1) So, one person becomes the buyer and the seller at the same time. It is as if Allah is giving us this allegory: 'Without Allah's Way of Guidance, you are a weak-minded orphan, so let Allah sell and let Him purchase.'

However, what is the price? The True Lord *the Most High* specifies it: '…in return for Paradise …' (*at-Tawba:* 111). This is the price which never runs out or ceases, and the delights you experience there are up to Allah's infinite powers. As for the delights you experience in this mundane life, they are up to your ability in pursuing Allah's means, and that is how Paradise becomes priceless.

When the Ansar came for the Pledge of 'Aqaba to meet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, 'Put whatever terms you wish for your Lord and yourself.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The terms for my Lord are that you worship Him and associate none with Him, and the terms for myself are that you guard me as keenly as you guard your lives and your possessions.' They said, ‘And what shall we have in return for this?’

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(1) Imam Malik allows this as long as it is done honestly.

What did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say? Did he say, ‘You shall conquer the castles of Bosra and the Levant, be kings, and Allah will conquer the East and the West for you’? No, he did not! He did not say any of this, rather, he said, 'Paradise.' This is due to everything in this world fading out when compared to this price. Therefore, they replied, ‘A fine deal, and we shall neither repeal it nor seek that it be repealed.’(1)

When the pact was made between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Ansar,(2) it was likely that one, two or three of them might have died before Islam became victorious; it might be said of this, ‘So-and-so died without gaining any of the material goods of life.’ However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Paradise', which means that the price has been earned just by settling the deal. ‘…in return for Paradise…’ (*at-Tawba:* 111) means that this is the price, but it is a promise of something which will come in the future, and a promise made by One Who is well able to fulfil it. The thing which spoils promises that people make to one another is that one might promise something but then live his life without ever fulfilling it, or without having the ability to fulfil it.

However, the true promise is that which is made by the One Who has the power to fulfil it and Who is Alive and can never die, and this is why He says: ‘Allah has purchased the lives and possessions of the believers in return for Paradise …’ (*at-Tawba:* 111).

After that, He says: ‘a true promise given by Him’. The word *wa‘d* (promise) is a gerund, so where is the verb? (In the Arabic for this verse, there is no verb, but it literally says ‘a true promise given by Him’, *wa‘dun ‘alayhi haqq*.) We can understand that this means that Allah *the Exalted* has promised them Paradise as a promise from Him, and He possesses the power to fulfil it; therefore, it is a true promise. When the Quran states something as a fact, a believer accepts that it will definitely come to pass, and when its time comes and it happens, it becomes an established fact. An example of this is when Allah vows that His hosts will indeed be victorious: 'And that it is Our host that will, certainly, be victorious.' (*as-Saffat:* 173)

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(1) *This verse was then revealed, according to As-Suyuti in Asbab An-Nuzul (p 101), and by Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi in their exegeses.*

(2) There were seventy men and two women from the Aws and Khazraj in all.

This is a Quranic statement of fact which indeed occurred and was confirmed by real events in this life. So, what comes next after Allah *the Almighty* has purchased the lives and possessions of believers? The True Lord *the Most High* then states the mission ahead of them: '… they fight in Allah's Way. They kill and are killed …' (*at-Tawba:* 111). The word *qatala* (to 'fight') is in the verb form *fa'ala* and is distinct from the verb *qatala* (to kill). Killing is a one-sided act, while fighting requires reciprocity, like the verb *sharaka*, which means 'to cooperate', and every verb in the *fa'ala* pattern indicates reciprocity, and that all who participate therein are both active and passive. The Arabs have ways of phrasing this so that one party is more active and the other is more passive, but upon impartial review we see that both parties are active in one respect and passive in another.

For example, a man travels in the desert where snakes and serpents are present, and the man does not disturb the snakes or serpents but avoids them. As long as you do not disturb a snake, it will not spew its poison since it only does so in self-defence. However, when a snake senses danger, it uses its poison. Therefore, when the man passes through and has the ability to avoid disturbing the snakes, it is said that he has 'left them in peace'.

One poet says:

The snakes left his foot in peace,

And his foot left the snakes in peace.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… in return for Paradise – they fight in Allah's Way …' (*at-Tawba:* 111). The one who fights will either slay or be slain, and in the canonical reading of Al-Hasan *Allah be pleased with him* it is mentioned the other way around: (1) 'they are killed, and they kill.' Since the deal says '… in return for Paradise…' (*at-Tawba:* 111), then their being killed comes (according to this reading) first since it is closer to the concept of this particular deal. On the other hand, since, 'the believers together are like a building, each part of which holds up the other',(1) so when believers come on one side and disbelievers on the other, believers act like a solid building, and Allah tells us that He loves those who fight in solid lines for His cause, like a well-compacted wall: 'Verily, Allah loves those who fight in His cause arrayed in solid ranks, as though they were a strong structure cemented with molten lead.' (*as-Saff:* 4) Consequently, if some of the believers are killed first, this will mean that they have all been killed.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi gives the details of this in his exegesis of this verse.*

Therefore, when we read the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* according to Al-Hasan: ‘and are killed, and they kill', we will understand that when they enter battles, their only thought is to be killed, without assuming their own survival.

We all know the story(2) of the Companion who said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Is there really nothing standing between me and paradise save that I engage those men, and they kill me?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that indeed this was the case. Thus, the companion took a date from his mouth, cast it aside, and entered the battle, as though he was eager to get to paradise as soon as possible.(3) ‘… this is a true promise given by Him in the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran…’ (*at-Tawba:* 111). This emphasises that paradise will be theirs, and it is a promise made by Allah *Glorified is He* in the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran for all those who enter battles to defend Allah’s Cause.

Every religion in its time has those who believe in it and who fight to defend it. Therefore, fighting for the cause of aiding and defending religion is not something restricted to Muslims only, although it was not generalised for all Messengers since the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* would directly intervene, in cases, to punish those who persisted in disbelief. The Messenger would convey the message, and if his people did not respond to him, then Allah *the Almighty* would punish them. Allah tells us how He punished the peoples in various ways using deadly sand storms, blasts, being swallowed by the earth, drowning, etc.: 'So each one of them We seized for his sin; of them were those against whom We sent a violent sandstorm, and of them were those whom a roaring blast overtook, and of them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow up, and of them were those whom We drowned. And Allah did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40)

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(1) *This is a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari (2446) and Muslim (2585) on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash‘ari Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) The story of the companion who threw away the dates on the day of Uhud to enter heaven speedily at his martyrdom

(3) *This story was narrated by Al-Bukhari (4046) and Muslim (1899) on the authority of Jabir Allah be pleased with him?*

Fighting in Allah's Cause was only ordained after the time of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when the Jews requested permission to fight in Allah's Cause. They asked him to call Allah to send them a king so they can fight in Allah's Cause: '… when they said to a Prophet of theirs, "Appoint for us a king that we may fight in the way of Allah?"' (*al-Baqara:* 246) Thus, Allah made this promise in the Torah to those who believed in Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and they requested permission to fight in Allah's Cause; He made it in the Gospel to those who believed in 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and finally in the Quran to those whom believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.(1)

Either that or this promise is specifically given to the people of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since they are the people who have been given the trust of defending Allah's Word by utilising human effort. This would mean that the promise made in the Torah, Gospel and Quran was a promise to the people of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well. It is as if the Torah came with glad tidings of these Muslims who would believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and likewise, the Gospel contained glad tidings of this same promise made to Muslims. The proof for this is found in the final verse of the chapter of *al-Fath*, where Allah tells us that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and that those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. And those who are with him are hard against the disbelievers but tender among themselves.' (*al-Fath:* 29)

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi says in his interpretation of this verse that this principle existed in all these scriptures, and that fighting the enemies of religion began in the days of Musa peace be upon him.* Allah *tells us that Musa peace be upon him said*: 'My people, go into the holy land which Allah has ordained for you- do not turn back or you will be the losers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21), until He says: They said, 'Moses, we will never enter while they are still there, so you and your Lord go in and fight, and we will stay here.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24)

Therefore, Islam does not entail being either constantly harsh or constantly compassionate; it only entails possessing a temperament of being harsh when harshness is needed, and being compassionate when compassion is needed. If harshness became a believer's second nature, he would be harsh the whole time, and if compassion became his second nature, he would be compassionate the whole time. However, Allah *the Exalted* decreed for a believer the temperament of being harsh towards disbelievers and compassionate to one another. Hence, religion does not format its followers on constant humility or constant might; rather, it encourages them to be mighty with disbelievers and humble with each other.

A man must train his soul to be thus: harsh and compassionate, mighty and humble. He obeys Allah's teachings, and when Allah's Way requires him to be harsh, he is harsh; when it requires him to be compassionate, he is compassionate; when it requires him to be humble towards his fellow believers, he is humble, and when it requires him to be mighty towards disbelievers, he is mighty. Allah describes, in His Noble Quran, believers as being harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. They are seen kneeling and prostrating, seeking Allah's bounty and His good pleasure. On their faces they bear the marks of their prostrations. This is how they are pictured in the Torah and the Gospel: 'Their marks are upon their faces, being the traces of prostrations. This is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is like unto a seed-produce that sends forth its sprout, then makes it strong; it then becomes stout and stands firm on its stem, delighting the sowers' (*al-Fath:* 29).

Therefore, the Torah revealed the glad tidings of the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his community who would possess spiritual and moral tributes which Jews themselves did not possess. Jews were overcome by materialism, and their essence was never promoted by the religious values. If you look at the forged Torah, which they have today, you will not find any mention of the Last Day since everything in it is materialistic.

As for the Gospel, it imparted values of monasticism, but the material side was under-emphasised. Hence, the Quran came as a comprehensive way of guidance to govern all the affairs of life; imparting moral values which safeguard material values. The world is ruined when material values are allowed to overrule moral values or when there are morals with no material power to protect them which empowers the advocates of evil to use their material power in dominating the spiritual values, leading to the uprooting of the society.

Thus, we have a constant need for morality which is protected materially, and materiality which is protected morally. Allah *Glorified is He* told the people of Musa (Moses) that they do not possesses spiritual values and that they hold their material values dear, so the community of Muhammad shall possess both the spiritual and material values; they will be kneeling and prostrating, seeking Allah's bounty and His good pleasure: on their faces they bear the marks of their prostrations.

Next, He told the people of ‘Isa (Jesus) that by sending forth the community of Muhammad, He shall provide them with a way of guidance which shall secure for them the material values they do not possess, leading them to withdraw from life and invent a monasticism which Allah did not ordain.(1)

So, the Muslims are pictured in the Torah and the Gospel: like a seed that puts forth its shoot, becomes strong, grows thick, and rises on its stem to the delight of its sowers (*al-Fath:* 29). Thus, Muslims have every right to say to disbelievers that they do not have any material advantage over them since the teachings of Islam seek to establish a balance between the material side and the spiritual side on the earth; it is spirituality which protects the civilisation, whereas the material power protects spirituality. When Muslims possess material power, no one will dare to persecute them for their religious beliefs. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* commands Muslims to prepare whatever forces and war mounts they are able to muster, so as to deter the enemies of Allah, who are their enemies as well: 'And make ready for them who fight you whatever you can of armed force and of mounted pickets at the frontier, whereby you may frighten the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you know not, but Allah knows them.' (*al-Anfal:* 60). Therefore, when disbelievers see that Muslims are prepared for them, they will be afraid.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…We caused them to be followed by Jesus, the son of Mary, upon whom We bestowed the Gospel; and in the hearts of those who (truly) followed him We engendered compassion and mercy. But as for monastic asceticism – We did not enjoin it upon them: they invented it themselves out of a desire for Allah’s goodly acceptance. But then, they did not (always) observe it as it ought to have been observed: and so We granted their recompense unto such of them as had (truly) attained to faith, whereas many of them became iniquitous.’ (*al-Hadid*: 27)

In the verse we are now examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…this is a true promise given by Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran…' (*at-Tawba:* 111). Since Allah *the Almighty* gave the promise, no one can be more faithful to a promise than Him, so He says: '…Who could be more faithful to his promise than Allah?...' (*at-Tawba:* 111). With this, He reassures us that His promise will surely be kept because a 'promise' is like a contract between two parties, one of which makes the promise and the other receives it, and this contract can only be broken by one of these two ways.

The first way is that the one who made the promise turns out to be pretentious, and his intention was not to honour it, or he was just using it as a ruse to lead on the other party.

The second way is that the one who made the promise knows that he is unable to keep it, so he is a liar. However, Allah is far above lying or deceiving, for He is utterly absolved beyond all that; therefore, no one is more faithful to his promise than Allah.

A promise might be broken by someone's inability to keep it, but the power of the True Lord *the Most High* is utterly self-sufficient. Thus, true promises are only taken from Allah, and He presents this issue in the form of a question, '…Who could be more faithful to his promise than Allah?' (*at-Tawba:* 111) to which the answer is, 'No one' since promises can only be broken by breaching, lying or their likes.

Allah *Glorified is He* is utterly above deception since only dishonest people engage in it. Therefore, if anyone hears the words '…Who could be more faithful to his promise than Allah?...' (*at-Tawba:* 111), and then he tries to find an answer, he will have nothing to say, but 'There is no one more faithful to his promise than Allah.' After all it is Paradise which is promised here, and no one possesses paradise except Allah, so His promise is nothing but truthful and irrevocable. Therefore, He says: '… So be happy with the bargain you have made. That is the supreme triumph.' (*at-Tawba:* 111)

Allah *the Almighty* has bought from believers their lives and their possessions in return for paradise, and this was His true promise in the Torah, Gospel and Quran, coming as recorded testimonies of the glad tidings of the bargain believers have made with Allah. He is beyond comparison, but we may say that a man only records what is in his benefit and does not record what is in his enemy’s benefit. When one has an IOU stating what someone owes him, he becomes so keen on it, and he take good care of it since it is in his interest.

Yet, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tell us that it is He Who has sent down the Quran and that it is He Himself Who shall truly guard it: 'Verily, it is We Who have sent down this Exhortation, and most surely We are its Guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9), since the Quran is the complete and perfect argument for all the affairs of this life and the following. The truthfulness of the Quran is so great that mankind might establish a certain cosmological truism, and then later this ‘truism’ is proved to be wrong; thus, when they return to the Quran, they find that what it says about this matter is true. So, Allah *Glorified is He* guards the Quran since the facts of the universe which He created can never contradict the facts of the Quran because the One Who sent down the Quran is also the One Who created the universe, and therefore nothing can contradict it.

‘… So be happy with the bargain you have made. This is the supreme triumph!’ (*at-Tawba:* 111) The word *istabshara* (to be happy) is derived from the word *bashra,* which literally means ‘complexion’ in a general sense, and more specifically refers to the face.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says ‘Allah has purchased the lives and possessions of the believers…’ (*at-Tawba:* 111), someone might understand that lives will be lost and possessions will be spent, and this might make one feel troubled since it involves death and loss of wealth, so the normal reaction is that the face becomes ‘contorted’ with fear. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘Allah has purchased …’ (*at-Tawba:* 111), the face of a believer brightens with joy and happiness, and he becomes radiant. Even if his life will end, a believer knows that Allah *Glorified is He* only ends a temporary life to replace it with an eternal life. Hence, all the matters of faith must never cause us any fear, we should be happy instead, and this is why Allah tells us, ‘So be happy’; let the effect of this show on your faces with delight and radiance.

'… So be happy with the bargain you have made…' (*at-Tawba:* 111). Do we become happy with a bargain? Yes, we do. A person usually only sells what he does not need and buys what he needs; thus, happiness is consequence of a sale, not a purchase since a believer sells something fleeting in return for something eternal. '…So be happy with the bargain you have made: that is the supreme triumph.' (*at-Tawba:* 111)

If one looks at those who breach their agreements, he will find that they usually need to breach them since honouring the agreements would inconvenience them. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is self-sufficient, and free of any need. Hence, He could never have the slightest reason for breaking His promise.

The words 'that is' indicate the bargain which you have made with your Lord. '… that is the supreme triumph!' (*at-Tawba:* 111) To triumph means to reach a goal which is sought by a sound mind; for example, you might say to your son, 'Study so as to triumph and succeed', or to the merchant, 'Work hard and honestly, and you will triumph and profit.' So, there is a 'triumph', and then there is a 'supreme triumph'. Triumph in this life means for a man to enjoy health, wealth and peace of mind; yet, there is a triumph which is superior to this; when you are guaranteed that the blessings you attained shall never leave you, nor shall you leave them, this is the greatest of all triumphs.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

ٱلتَّٰٓئِبُونَ ٱلْعَٰبِدُونَ ٱلْحَٰمِدُونَ ٱلسَّٰٓئِحُونَ ٱلرَّٰكِعُونَ
ٱلسَّٰجِدُونَ ٱلْءَامِرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَٱلنَّاهُونَ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ
وَٱلْحَٰفِظُونَ لِحُدُودِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١١٢﴾

**[The believers are] those who turn to God in repentance;
who worship and praise Him; who bow down and prostrate
themselves; who order what is good and forbid what is
wrong and who observe God's limits. Give glad news to such
believers [112] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 112)**

Now that the True Lord *the Most High* has offered this bargain, who will accept it? The repentant will. Repentance means turning away from what is false towards what is true. From what do these believers repent?

We know that faith is a natural disposition of mankind. Allah tells us in the Quran that He took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He asked them, 'Am I not your Lord?', and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' Allah did this so we cannot say on Judgment Day, 'We were not aware of this', or 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to you, and we were only the descendants who came after them' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173).

Faith is a natural disposition, and disbelief is a subsequent intrusion. Also, we said before that disbelief is the ultimate proof to belief since *kufr* means 'to cover'. Thus, those who disbelieve in Allah only attempt to conceal His existence which means that His existence is established, and disbelief intruded to conceal it. However, when someone comes to rouse our natural disposition of faith, we start believing in Allah once the veil which had cloaked our natural disposition has been removed.

'[Such believers are] those who turn to Allah in repentance…' (*at-Tawba:* 112); this includes those who repent from disbelief which had displaced their natural disposition of faith and who adopted the Way of Allah in which they believed. It is from here that worship emerged, necessitating the presence of a worshipper and an object of worship. Worship means that the worshipper surrenders fully to the commandments and prohibitions of the one whom he worships. '[Such believers are] those who turn to Allah in repentance; who worship and praise Him…' (*at-Tawba:* 112). All worship is obedience, which is manifested in implementing the 'dos' and 'don'ts' Allah stipulated. It could be true that the Way of Allah might bear on your freedom a little, but with the power of faith, you will consider this to be a blessing for which you must give praise to Allah. Had He left you to your whims, it would have been like a parent leaving an offspring to his whims till he fails in his studies. However, when a father encourages his son to study and forbids him from fooling around, he will certainly succeed.

Therefore, these commandments and prohibitions are blessings for which we should praise our Lord; everything which Allah sends upon His believing servant should be received by the servant as a blessing.

As for those who repented from the disbelief which took over their natural disposition of faith, they did so by accepting the way of faith from the object of their worship, transforming them into true worshippers of Allah, obeying all His commandments and abstaining from all His prohibitions. They know that these commandments and prohibitions restrict the soul's whims, and they believe the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'The road to paradise is strewn with burdens, and the road to hell is strewn with whims.'(1)

Thus, when you find that worship requires you to do things which are burdening, know that this is for your own good and that you must praise Allah for it, so as to join the ranks of those who praise Allah *the Almighty*.

When you believe in Allah, He will be present in your mind, and His universe will cease to distract you from Him. Remember that you must never let any blessings distract you from Him who gives them to you; rather keep Allah always in your mind. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that man exceeds all bonds when he thinks that he is self-sufficient: 'Nay, man, indeed, transgresses because he thinks himself to be independent.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7) Therefore, a believer should always think of Allah and thank Him for His blessings, along with acknowledging the tranquillity those blessings bring to his home, his children and his career.

Those who 'praise' Allah must also accept every act of fate He sends them with satisfaction since the One Who sends these acts of fate upon them – since He never commands them to do anything beyond the power of their free will – is Wise, and He only sends them things which are for their own good. And as soon as the soul accepts what has been sent to it, it will recognise the wisdom in it. That is why Allah tells us to remain conscious of Him, since it is He Who teaches us: '… And Allah teaches you and Allah knows all things quite well.' (*al-Baqara:* 282)

Allah *Glorified is He* continues to describe those who accept the bargain of faith by saying: '…the travellers [for His cause]' (*at-Tawba:* 112) or *as-sa'ihun*. Now the word *sa'ih* literally means 'traveller' which is someone who leaves the place which he calls home (his house, family, children and acquaintances) and travels to a place where he had nothing and where he might encounter perils. A believer can do this because nothing in the world distracts him from the Creator, and the True Lord *the Most High* encourages us to walk all over the earth and to observe: 'Say, "Go about in the earth and see what was the end of those who treated the Prophets as liars."' (*al-An'am:* 11)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (iii. 153), Muslim (2822), At-Tirmidhi (2559) and Ad-Darimi (ii. 339), on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him*

The word *siyaha* means to travel in a general sense, and one might travel all over the world to learn more about the heavens and earth along with seeing the signs of Allah which fortify his faith; one might also travel for business and seek the provisions and bounties of his Lord.

So, travelling may either be undergone with the intent of learning or business, and travelling for business is for those who (by nature) seek to pursue work; namely men. Traveling for learning, on the other hand, is something which both men and women can engage in since Allah describes some women as being 'believing, devoutly obedient, repentant, worshipping, and travelling (*sa'ihat*) …' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). Therefore, 'travelling' in this verse means those who travel for the sake of learning or to accompany their husbands who travel in pursuit of work.

It is also said that *siyaha* in this aforementioned verse means 'fasting' since travelling takes you away from familiar things such as your home, your possessions and your family; in the same manner that fasting takes you away from familiar habits like eating, drinking and your whims.(1) Thus, the types of *siyaha* in which both men and women engage are learning and fasting.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says: 'those who bow and prostrate [in prayer]' (*at-Tawba:* 112). This means those who perform the prayer. He only alluded to two particular elements of the prayer, although prayer is composed of various things like standing, sitting, bowing and prostration. However, bowing and prostrating are the two actions which are reserved for prayer only, and as for standing and sitting, they are done outside the prayer as well. Therefore, the two distinctive actions are bowing and prostrating, and this is why Allah *the Exalted* commands Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* to be devout to her Lord, and to specifically prostrate herself and bow down with those who pray: 'O, Maryam (Mary), be obedient to your Lord and prostrate yourself and worship the one God with those who worship Him" (*Al-'Imran:* 43).

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(1) Ibn Manzhur mentioned this linguistic possibility in his dictionary *(Lissan Al-'Arab).*

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O, Maryam (Mary)! Keep obeying your Lord and humble yourself and bow down with those who bow.' (*Al-'Imran:* 43) What this means is that He *the Most High* orders her to offer prayers with those who do so. Thus, we find that bowing and prostration are the only two pillars involving action in prayer.

He *the Almighty* then says: 'those who enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong' (*at-Tawba:* 112). In this verse, we should be fully aware of the fact that the act of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is the main reason why the *ummah,* or followers, of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is judged as the best nation raised up for the benefit of people; a point which is quite clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'You are the best of the nations raised up for (the benefit of) men; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and believe in Allah …' (*Al-'Imran:* 110). This brings up a very important point which is that in case a person enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong, this clearly means that he himself must be away from committing the wrong which he forbids for it would not make sense for one to forbid others from committing something which he himself does.(1) That is to say that one will be unable to enjoin what is right and forbids what is wrong unless he himself is righteous.

Yet, there is a very important point which we should take into account which is that one is not allowed to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong unless he is well versed in the knowledge of the *Shari'a* (Islamic Law), that is, people who are not specialised in the *Shari'a* knowledge are not allowed to do that act.

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(1) Usama ibn Zayd Allah be pleased with them narrated that Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said: 'A man will be brought and put in Hell (Fire) and he will circumambulate (go around and round) in Hell (Fire) like a donkey of a (flour) grinding mill, and all the people of Hell (Fire) will gather around him and will say to him, O so-and-so! Did you not use to order others for good and forbid them from evil?' That man will say, 'I used to order others to do good but I myself never used to do it, and I used to forbid others from evil while I myself used to do evil."' *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and those who observe the limits set by Allah …' (*at-Tawba:* 112). The Arabic word *Hudud* (limits) is the plural of *Had* (limit) is used in the Quranic context to indicate two meanings. One meaning is that is that of carrying out and of having firm adherence to the Divine Commands, which is why Allah *the Almighty* under this meaning, orders us not to breach them; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'These are the limits of Allah, so do not exceed them …' (*al-Baqara:* 229).

This particular word in question, *Had,* may also give the meaning of keeping away from what He *the Almighty* prohibited; a fact which is proven the saying of Allah, '…these are the limits of Allah, so do not go near them …' (*al-Baqara:* 187). Allah *the Most High* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…. And give good tidings to the believers' (*at-Tawba:* 112). In this particular part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to give glad tidings to believers who acquired the characteristics of true faith. This is to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* will not give good news to hypocrites who may unfaithfully offer prayers and observe fasting. Concerning the Arabic words *Bashshir, Istabshar, Al-Bushra* and *Al-Bashir,* they all refer to the good news which causes happiness and joy. As a matter of fact, when one feels happiness and joy, you find his face lighting up.

Having shed light on these characteristics of the true believers, He *Glorified is He* moves to talk about a very important topic, which fully occupied the minds of the believers whose parents were still disbelievers. Due to the fact that children must be righteous towards their parents, the believers wanted to ask Allah *the Exalted* forgiveness for their disbelieving parents, which is why He, in the following verse, tells clearly that not to breach His Limits must be given precedence to the blood ties; in other words, believers' loyalty to Allah *the Almighty* must be given priority to their loyalty to their disbelieving parents. We thus reach the conclusion that believers' loyalty must first and foremost be to Islam.

Allah says:

مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَن يَسۡتَغۡفِرُواْ لِلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ وَلَوۡ كَانُوٓاْ
أُوْلِي قُرۡبَىٰ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمۡ أَنَّهُمۡ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ﴿١١٣﴾

It is not fitting for the Prophet and the believers to ask forgiveness for the idolaters – even if they are related to them – after having been shown that they are the inhabitants of the Blaze [113] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 113)

In this aforementioned verse, Allah *the Almighty* prohibiting believers to ask forgiveness for their disbelieving parents, starts with ordering Prophet Muhammad not to do so. That is to say that as long as he *peace and blessings be upon him* is forbidden concerning this matter, then it is all the more clear that believers do not have the right to do it; since even though Prophet Muhammad's relatives have a greater claim on Allah *the Exalted* than the relatives of anyone else, He prevented him from asking forgiveness for them as long as they are disbelievers.

At this point, we should take into account that there is a difference between the following two Arabic styles, namely *Ma Kan* (it is not fitting) and *Ma Yanbaghi* (it should not). As for the first style *Ma Kan,* it means that one is fully unqualified to do a particular act, whereas the second style *Ma Yanbaghi* means that one is not allowed to do a particular act even though he is able to do it.

For example, it might be said to a very poor person, 'It is not fitting for you to buy a video' since his poverty makes him unable to buy this device. However, if it is said to someone else, 'It is not appropriate for you to buy a video', this means that he has the ability to buy it, but the speaker sees that there is a reason, other than poverty, why he should not buy it. Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *the Most High* says: 'It is not fitting for the Prophet and the believers to ask forgiveness for the idolaters– even if they are related to them– after having been shown that they are the inhabitants of the Blaze.' (*at-Tawba:* 113)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells clearly that it is not fitting for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers present with him to ask Allah Forgiveness for the polytheists and disbelievers who died while professing disbelief, even if they are relatives of them. Yet, lest any of the believers argue that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had actually asked Allah forgiveness for his father, Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَا كَانَ ٱسۡتِغۡفَارُ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَن مَّوۡعِدَةٖ وَعَدَهَآ إِيَّاهُ
فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُۥٓ أَنَّهُۥ عَدُوّٞ لِّلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنۡهُۚ إِنَّ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ لَأَوَّٰهٌ حَلِيمٞ ﴿١١٤﴾

Abraham asked forgiveness for his father because he had made a promise to him, but once he realized that his father was an enemy of God, he washed his hands of him. Abraham was tender-hearted and forbearing [114] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 114)

The Quran recorded in another verse that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* promised his father that he would ask Allah Forgiveness for him; Allah says: ‘He said, "Peace be on you. I will pray to my Lord to forgive you. Surely, He is ever gracious to me."’ (*Maryam:* 47) The Arabic word *Hafiyya* in this verse translated as ‘ever gracious’, means that the Lord *Glorified is He* loved Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), which is why Ibrahim (Abraham) thought that He would accept to forgive his father. Yet, when he *peace be upon him* as recorded in the Quran, realised that his father was an enemy of Allah, he washed his hands of him. This means that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had acquired all the good virtues and attributes, a fact which is proven by another verse in which Allah says: ‘surely Ibrahim (Abraham) was an exemplar …’ (*an-Nahl:* 120).

Concerning this aforementioned verse of *an-Nahl,* Allah *the Almighty* shows clearly that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had uniquely acquired all the good values and attributes which never can all be found in one person, or two, or three, etc. We should thus know that when good virtues are distributed to all of mankind, there is no single person who acquired all of them, which is why we find someone who is described with honesty, while there is another who is described with truthfulness. There are still yet a third who is chivalrous and a fourth who is well versed in knowledge. Thus, it is clear that good virtues are distributed by Allah to all mankind, so that they will all have equal opportunities in the different fields of life. Thus, we reach the conclusion that there is no single person acquiring all the good virtues at the same time.

Yet, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is a different case, for Allah *Glorified is He* provided him with all of the good virtues which made him worthy of being described as an exemplar. Allah *the Almighty* then tells us the main reason why Ibrahim (Abraham) was seen as an exemplar confirming that he used to devotedly carry out Divine Commands which means that he, due to his love for Allah, carried out these commands. In other words, his offering of the acts of worship was not a matter of throwing them off, rather he, as we said before, devotedly and sincerely carried out Divine Commands.

Let us offer a striking example to illustrate this point; Allah says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'and when his Lord tried Ibrahim (Abraham) with certain words, he fulfilled them.' (*al-Baqara:* 124) This means that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* obeyed these Divine Commands fully and completely, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reward him. He says: '… He said: "Surely, I will make you an Imam of men …"' (*al-Baqara:* 124).

This plainly indicates that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was entirely worthy of being a leader of men since he was a role model, meaning that even though he was an ordinary human being; he acquired all the good virtues and thus became most worthy of being a role model. Therefore, no one could say that he *peace be upon him* was only virtuous since he was an angel. No, this was not the case as Ibrahim (Abraham) was merely a human being whom Allah wanted, as shown in the Quran, to reward by making him an Imam for people. That is to say that He *the Almighty* made him a role model confirming meanwhile that he was merely a human being not an angel. Commenting on disbelievers' rejection to the Divine Message on grounds that Messengers and Prophets were mere human beings, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Yet whenever [Allah's] Guidance came to them [through a prophet,] nothing has ever kept people from believing [in him] save this their objection: "Would Allah have sent a [mere] mortal man as His Messenger?"' (*al-Isra':* 94) This means that disbelievers rejected to believe in the Messengers and Prophets of Allah on the grounds that they were mere mortal human beings, which is why He, in the following verse, refutes their allegation and says: 'Say: Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a Messenger.' (*al-Isra':* 95)

This means that as long as you are human beings, the Messenger sent to you must have been from amongst yourselves so that you can take him as a role model, a fact which is proven by the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And [even] if We had appointed an angel as Our Message-bearer, We would certainly have made him [appear as] a man – and thus We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves.' (*al-An'am:* 9)

Let us offer an example to know fully well how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* devotedly offered acts of worship to Allah *Glorified is He*; Allah says: 'And when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the House …' (*al-Baqara:* 127). This means that the mission of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in this regard, was restricted to adding the third dimension of the *Ka'ba*, which is height. We know that the Sacred House, like any other building, has length, width and height. Mathematically, when we multiply these three dimensions by each other, we get the surface area. Some people mistakenly believe that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is the one who built the *Ka'ba*; this is not correct, for he (is not the one who built the *Ka'ba;* rather, his mission was conclusively restricted to raising the foundations by means of which the volume of the *Ka'ba* is defined. This is proven by the fact that when he *peace be upon him* took his wife Hajar along with her son Ismail (Ishmael) to the remote area of the land, Ibrahim (Abraham), as clearly mentioned in the Quran, said, 'O, our Lord! Surely, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House …' (*Ibrahim:* 37).

This aforementioned part of the verse of the chapter of *Ibrahim* definitively proves that the Sacred House was already built and known before Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* came there. In addition, when he left them there, Hajar and her baby, Ismail (Ishmael) settled in the place until Ismail (Ishmael), Hajar's son, grew up and was able to help his father to raise the foundations of the House. At this point, we should be fully aware that there is a difference between the two following words, *Makan* (location) and *makin* (the building(s) in a location). Once again, we heavily stress that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did nothing but raising the foundations of the Sacred House, whereas the location of the building of the *Ka'ba* was already known.

In this regard, let us suppose that a flood were to destroy the *Ka'ba*. where would we face in our prayers? Of course, we would pray towards the location until its contents were rebuilt. This point may also be supported by another fact; Allah *Glorified is He* describing the Sacred House, says: 'In it are clear signs …' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

This raises another good point which is even though Allah *the Almighty* mentions the word 'signs' in plural, He does not mention any sign but that about which He says: '… In it are clear signs, the standing place of Ibrahim (Abraham) …' (*Al-'Imran:* 97).

This certainly means that 'the standing place of Ibrahim (Abraham)' is viewed by Allah as encompassing all the clear signs, but why? It is due to the fact that when Allah *the Exalted* commanded him *peace be upon him* to raise the foundations of the Sacred House, he had to search for something by means of which he would be able to carry out the Divine Order of raising these foundation, for had he only raised them as far as his hand could reach, he would not be able to exceed the reach of his hands. This is why Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* thought of something whereby he could fulfil the mission and thus brought a stone upon which he could stand. In this way, he was able to make the walls of the *Ka'ba* higher. This clearly shows how he *peace be upon him* devotedly and perfectly carried out the divine legal obligations. In the same respect, man, based on this verse of *Al-'Imran*, is supposed to take Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as a role model and devotedly and completely fulfil the divine obligations imposed upon him, not otherwise.

Back to the verse of *at-Tawba,* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Ibrahim (Abraham) asked forgiveness for his father because he had made a promise to him, but once he realised that his father was an enemy of Allah, he washed his hands of him. Abraham was tender-hearted and forbearing.' (*at-Tawba:* 114)

This raises a good point which clearly tells us how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a tender-hearted and a forbearing person. As for the Arabic word *Awwah* translated as 'a tender-hearted person', it refers to the one who, out of his deep and great fear of Allah, feels much sorrow and woe for himself and for sinful people to the extent that his mind, out of pity, is fully occupied by the punishment that will be meted out on such people which means that he is a person who is deeply concerned about others. Thus, we stress that Allah places this compassionate tenderness in the hearts of some of His creation so that they might console others.[1] At this point, the following poetic verses may be quoted:

It is best to complain to a man of virtue:

He will counsel you, or console you, or at least feel sorrowful for you.

What this means is that if a person is afflicted with a calamity, he should complain to a virtuous man, for he will either help him to solve the problem, or console him by showing him tender-hearted compassion and sharing the burden of the calamity with him. Furthermore, this tender-heartedness is a sure sign of the compassion and mercy of the human soul.

It is thus clear that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a tender-hearted person. Likewise, this was his nature towards all people; so how do you think his behaviour towards his relatives was? He must have been most tender-hearted towards them especially concerning his father. Yet, Allah *the Almighty* wanted Ibrahim's (Abraham's) tender-hearted nature to be properly used, which is why He warns him against asking forgiveness for his father. That is to say Muslims' loyalty to Allah *the Exalted* must be given precedence to any other forms of loyalty.

This also raises a very important point which must be discussed thoroughly and extensively since it is viewed as a source of many problems.

We have just explained that Allah *the Almighty* due to the fact that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father was an enemy to Him, ordered him *peace be upon him* not to ask forgiveness for him; so if this is actually the case, why did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is from the progeny of Ibrahim (Abraham), say that he was born of the best, who were born of the best, who were born of the best? This means that as long as Allah *the Almighty* ordered Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* not to ask forgiveness for his father, this means that his father was an enemy to Allah. In the same respect, inasmuch as

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(1) The word *Awwah* may also be used to refer to that person who supplicates and entreats Allah while having full confidence that He *the Almighty* will answer his/her calls.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is from the progeny of Ibrahim (Abraham), this means that his lineage contains someone who is an enemy of Allah. Based on this premise, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying 'My parents never committed fornication. Allah kept moving me from the good loins to the pure wombs, purified and refined. Whenever there were two ways to go, I was in the best of them' may be judged untrue and contradictory!

To derive the answer to this question, we should first understand the meaning of the Arabic word *Abb* (father). Truly, we use this word to refer to the one who sired you, or sired the one who sired you, namely your forefather. That is to say that there is a direct father whose father is also considered a father of you, and so on until we get back to Adam *peace be upon him*. This is how we all understand the meaning of this word in question, 'father'; but the Quran uses this word in a much deeper sense than our simple traditional understanding, a fact which is quite clear in the chapter of Yusuf in which this word 'father' has been mentioned twenty-eight times. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of the chapter of Yusuf " 'When Yusuf said to his father, "O, my father! Surely, I saw eleven stars ..."' (*Yusuf:* 4).

Allah *the Almighty* then tells yusuf that He will choose him and teach him how to interpret events and dreams; He *Glorified is He* says: 'And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of sayings and make His favour complete to you and to the children of Ya'qub (Jacob), as He made it complete before to your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac) ...' (*Yusuf:* 6).

This aforementioned verse refers to both Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*, as the two fathers. In continuation of narrating the events of this story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) with his brothers, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'now [Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers] spoke [thus to one another], "Truly, Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother [Benjamin] are dearer to our father than we ...' (*Yusuf:* 8). Admitting their error, the brother of Yusuf (Joseph) says: '...most surely our father is in manifest error.' (*Yusuf:* 8). They then hatched the following plot, which is clear in the Saying of Allah: 'Slay Yusuf (Joseph) or else drive him away to some [faraway] land, so that your father's regard may be for you alone ...' (*Yusuf:* 9).

Having agreed upon one opinion, they started paving the way to carry out their plan, which is why they began to deceive their father; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They said, "O, our father, what reason have you that you do not trust in us with respect to Yusuf (Joseph)? And most surely we are his sincere well-wishers. Send him with us tomorrow that he may enjoy himself and sport, and surely we will guard him well."’ (*Yusuf:* 11-12) Having fulfilled their goal by casting Yusuf (Joseph) into the dark depths of the well, they returned to their father: ‘And at nightfall they came to their father, weeping.’ (*Yusuf:* 16)

This is actually the eighth time this word in question, 'father', is mentioned in the chapter of Yusuf. In this verse it is the ninth time; Allah *the Almighty* tells us how the children of Ya'qub (Jacob) justified the loss of their brother Yusuf (Joseph) by saying: ‘[And they] said, “O, our father, behold, we went off racing with one another and left Yusuf (Joseph) behind with our things …’ (*Yusuf:* 17).

Then, the story goes on until our Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was sent to the jail wherein he met with two other prisoners who told him that they believed that he was virtuous and one of the doers of good. The two prisoners thus asked him *peace be upon him* to interpret their dreams for them, whereupon he said: ‘There shall not come to you the food with which you are fed, but I will inform you both of its interpretation before it comes to you …’ (*Yusuf:* 37). Yusuf (Joesph) *peace be upon him* then attributes this blessing of being able to interpret the dreams to Allah *the Almighty* by saying: ‘… this is of what my Lord has taught me. Surely, I have forsaken the religion of a people who do not believe in Allah, and they are deniers of the hereafter. And I follow the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Isaac) and Ya'qub (Jacob) …’ (*Yusuf:* 37: 38). Therefore, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* mentioned the names of Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Isaac) and Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them* saying clearly that they are all his fathers.

Having been released from prison and given the role of running the affairs of Egypt’s economy, his brothers came for trade; Prophet Yusuf (Joesph) recognised them although they did not know him. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and when he had provided them with their provisions, he said, “[When you come here next,] bring to me that brother of yours from your father’s side …"’

(*Yusuf:* 59). As a result, his brothers answered, ‘We shall try to persuade his father to part with him …’ (*Yusuf:* 61). Thus, they returned to their father and pleaded with him to allow them to take their youngest brother, Benjamin, with them, yet Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* did not allow them to do so except after they swore by Allah that they would bring him back unless circumstances beyond their control prevented it. They returned to Egypt and asked for provisions.

Commenting on this part of the story, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And [later,] when he had provided them with their provisions, he placed the [King’s] drinking-cup in his brother’s camel-pack. And [as they were leaving the city,] a herald called out, “O, you people of the caravan, verily, you are thieves!” Turning towards the herald and his companions, the brothers asked, “What is it that you miss?” They answered, “We miss the King’s goblet, and he who produces it shall receive a camel-load [of grain as reward]!” And [the herald added], “I pledge myself to this [promise]!” Said [the brothers], “By Allah, well do you know that we have not come to commit deeds of corruption in this land and that we have not been thieving!” [The Egyptians] said, “But what shall be the requital of this [deed] if you are [proved to be] liars?” [The brothers] replied, “Its requital? He in whose camel-pack [the cup] is found – he shall be [enslaved as] requital thereof… "’ (*Yusuf:* 70-75).

Therefore, when the Egyptians apparently detained Benjamin, the brothers pleaded to them and said: ‘O, chief, he has a father, a very old man, therefore retain one of us in his stead. Surely, we see you to be of the doers of good.’ (*Yusuf:* 78) At this point, Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* replied, ‘…May Allah preserve us from [the sin of] detaining any other than him with whom we have found our property …’ (*Yusuf:* 79). Then, he *peace be upon him* ordered them to go back to their father and to say to him, ‘Go back to your father and say, "O, our father, surely your son committed theft, and we do not bear witness except to what we have known, and we could not keep watch over the unseen.’ (*Yusuf:* 81)

When the brothers returned to their father, he censured them and said, ‘…Nay, but it is your [own] minds that have made [so terrible] a happening seem a matter of little account to you…’ (*Yusuf:* 83). Ya'qub (Jacob) then commanded his sons to return again to Egypt by saying, ‘O, my sons, go forth and try to obtain some tidings of Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother…’ (*Yusuf:* 87). At this point, when Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* revealed himself to them and learnt that his father has gone blind, he said to them, ‘[And now] go and take this tunic of mine and lay it over my father’s face, and he will recover his sight…’ (*Yusuf:* 93). In addition, he ordered them to go back to their homeland and to bring their whole family with them.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and as soon as the caravan [with which Ya'qub's (Jacob’s) sons were travelling] was on its way, their father said [to the people around him], “Behold, were it not that you might consider me a dotard, [I would say that] I truly feel the breath of Yusuf (Joseph) [in the air]!’ (*Yusuf:* 94)

Telling us about the end of the story, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour, and they [all] fell down before Him, prostrating themselves in adoration. Thereupon [Yusuf (Joseph)] said, “O, my father, this is the real meaning of my dream of long ago …"’ (*Yusuf:* 100).

Having shed light on this story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with his brothers in brief, I would like to stress that the two verses that have to do with the subject of our discussion is (*Yusuf:* 6) and (*Yusuf:* 38). Understanding these two verses in the light of each other, we reach the conclusion that Ya'qub (Jacob) is the father of Yusuf (Joseph); Ishaq (Isaac) is the father of Ya'qub (Jacob), and Ibrahim (Abraham) is the father of Ishaq (Isaac), which means that the three, as mentioned in the Quran, are the fathers of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon them*. In other words, the word ‘father’ can be used to refer to the grandfather and the forefather, a fact which is also plainly clear in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Baqara:* ‘Nay, but you [yourselves, O Children of Israel,] bear witness that when death was approaching Ya'qub (Jacob), he said to his sons, “Whom will you worship after I am gone?” They answered, “We will worship Your God (Allah who is), the God of your forefathers Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) …’ (*al-Baqara:* 133).

According to this aforementioned verse of *al-Baqara*, we know that Ibrahim (Abraham), is a father of Ya'qub (Jacob); so is Ismail (Ishmael), and so is Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*. Therefore, we should take into account that even though Ismail (Ishmael) was Ishaq's (Isaac's) brother, he was called as a father of Ya'qub (Jacob); this clearly indicates that the word 'father' has been used in this context to mean 'uncle'. Thus, we reached the conclusion that if the Arabic word *(Abb)* is used alongside the name of the person, it could refer to either the grandfather or the uncle; yet if the person's name is not mentioned, it only refers to the direct father.

In another position in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* commenting on the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* with his father, says: 'And when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father, Azar …' (*al-An'am:* 74). In this aforementioned verse of *al-An'am,* Allah *the Exalted* refers to Azar as the father of Ibrahim (Abraham); yet, as we previously explained, had Azar been the man who sired Ibrahim (Abraham), Allah *the Almighty* would not have clearly mentioned his name. For example, someone may ask you, 'Where is your father?' this question clearly indicates that the questioner is asking about the father who sired you. However, in case someone asks, 'Is your father Muhammad here?', we understand that the questioner is asking not about the real father but the uncle. It is thus clear that the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'And when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father, Azar…' (*al-An'am:* 74) implies the fact that Azar was the uncle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and not his biological forefather.

Back to the Saying of Allah *the Almighty:* 'Ibrahim (Abraham) asked forgiveness for his father because he had made a promise to him, but once he realised that his father was an enemy of Allah, he washed his hands of him. Ibrahim (Abraham) was tender-hearted and forbearing.' (*at-Tawba:* 114); the Arabic word 'forbearing' is a quality of patience, forgiveness and self-control shown in a difficult situation.

The Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were concerned about their fellow believers who died before the rulings of Islam had all been revealed, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* sent down the following verse, 'Allah would not condemn for going astray those He had already guided [to the faith] before making entirely clear to them what they should avoid. Allah has knowledge of everything.' (*at-Tawba:* 115)

We know for certain that the teachings of Islam have been revealed over twenty-three years, which is why we believe that Muslims were not obligated to obey all the rulings of Islam at the very onset of their faith. On the contrary, there are some people who embraced Islam by declaring the Testimony of Faith, which means that they did not do any of the teachings of Islam. The story of Mukhayriq is a case in point. It is narrated that this Jewish man had embraced Islam and died without even performing one unit of prayer, for the war broke out right after he embraced Islam. Having become a Muslim, he donated all his property to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition, he engaged in the Muslims' war against the disbelievers and was martyred. I stress this fact that he is a martyr, for he did not have enough time to practise the rest of the teachings of Islam before he died.

In the same respect, this ruling equally applies to those who died before the rules of Islam had all been revealed down, that is, they were true Muslims. For example, considering those who died before alcohol had been completely forbidden, it is not right to call them sinners or disbelievers, for they are actually true believers. The person who died before the direction of Muslims in prayers is changed into Mecca is a third case in point. Commenting on this point, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيُضِلَّ قَوْمًۢا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَىٰهُمْ حَتَّىٰ
يُبَيِّنَ لَهُم مَّا يَتَّقُونَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١١٥﴾

God would not condemn for going astray those He has already guided [to the faith] before making entirely clear to them what they should avoid. God has knowledge of everything [115]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 115)

This verse in question is in conformity with that particular human-made law, which states that '*Nullum crimen sine lege, nulla poena sine lege'*. This means that we, Muslims, only punish after first specifying which actions incur punishment, and after establishing or adopting a law which defines the crime and the punishment assigned for it.

It is thus clear that those who died before a particular law was laid down will never ever be blamed for it. This is based on the undeniable fact that

Divine Laws are not 'retroactive', a point which is perfectly clear in the saying of Allah in the chapter of *an-Nisa',* '…except what has already passed…' (*an-Nisa':* 22). Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* tells believers not to grieve about their fellow believers who died before all the rulings of Islam had been revealed, conforming meanwhile that their Islam was judged according to how they followed the rulings which did reach them, along with stressing that if they followed them, i.e. these rules revealed to them before their death, they would be gifted with the same reward given to those who practised all the rulings and teachings of Islam after they had been sent down; this fact is yet proven by the saying of Allah in which He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah would not condemn for going astray those He had already guided [to the faith] before making entirely clear to them what they should avoid. Allah has knowledge of everything.' (*at-Tawba:* 115)

Furthermore, this verse under discussion sheds light on 'the guidance of direction', a point which is deduced from the saying of Allah, '…before making entirely clear to them what they should avoid …' That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* would not judge people astray until He made it entirely clear to them what they should avoid. As for the term *At-Taqwa* (piety), it means to adhere to the Commands of Allah and to refrain from His Prohibitions. Thus, in the case that people act accordingly, Allah *the Exalted* will help them through the Way of Guidance. Yet, in case they denied and rejected the divine Way of Guidance, they will be judged astray. Therefore, we stress that when the uncle of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) did not follow the Way of Guidance shown to him, he was judged as a misguided person.

In conclusion, we can clearly state that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* showed his uncle the Way of Guidance, but he refused to be guided, and therefore Allah *Glorified is He* commanded him *peace be upon him* not to pray that he be forgiven.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُۥ مُلۡكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ يُحۡيِۦ وَيُمِيتُۚ وَمَا
لَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِيّٖ وَلَا نَصِيرٖ ﴿١١٦﴾

control of the heavens and earth belongs to God; He alone gives life and death; you have no ally or helper other than Him[116] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 116)

The Arabic words *Mulk* (dominion), *Malik* (owner), *Malik* (king), *Malak* (angel) and *Malakut* (kingdom) are all derived from the root *m-l-k.* The Arabic word *Milk* (property) means that which one owns. As for *Malik* (the King), it refers to the One Who owns everything in this life. Yet, if a person has control over others, meaning that he manages and rules over their affairs, he possesses *Mulk* (dominion). For example, the sheikh of a tribe has dominion; the mayor of a village has dominion; the ruler of a nation has dominion, and so on. Thus, we should take into account that people have dominion and control over the items of this worldly life, a point which highlights the difference between *Mulk* and *Malkut,* for the latter is used to the kingdom of the heavens and the earth including the universe's natural secrets and signs. In the Quran, Allah says: 'And thus did we show Ibrahim (Abraham) the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and that he might be of those who are sure.' (*al-An'am:* 75)

At this point, we should take into account that adding the letter *t* at the end of particular Arabic words like *Malkut* (kingdom) and *Rahabut* (severe dread) indicates intensification of the word. Therefore, it is as if Allah *the Exalted* is saying to believers, 'Do not think that when I forbid you from praying that your disbelieving forefathers to be forgiven that your obedience too will disturb your existence in life, for they as well as their allies are part of My Dominion.' That is to say that as long as Allah *the Almighty* has dominion over the heavens and the earth, then no one will cause you, O, believers, any harm, for He *Glorified is He* supports you all the time.

Concerning the undeniable fact that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who possesses the dominion of the heavens and the earths, He says: 'Say: "O, Allah! Lord of all dominion! You grant dominion to whom You will, and take away dominion from whom You will. You exalt whom You will, and abase whom You will. In Your Hand is all good …' (*Al-'Imran:* 26).

As a matter of fact, this saying of Allah *the Most High* contains four contrasting things, as follows: first, the act of giving dominion to whomever Allah *Glorified is He* wants which is opposite to the act of taking it away from whomever He wants; second, the act of exalting whomever Allah *Glorified is He* wants which is the opposite of the act of abasing whomever He wants. So, we should take into account that the two acts of granting dominion and exalting whomever Allah wants are viewed by people as good things, while their opposite are viewed as bad. In the same respect, we notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… in Your Hand is all good …' and not '… in His Hand is all good'. Why is this? This is due to all of the Decrees of Allah entailing good. For example, when He *the Almighty* grants dominion to a man, this is a good thing, and thus, this man in particular must take advantage of this good. In the same respect, when He *the Almighty* takes dominion away from someone, this is also viewed as good since this person might have misused this dominion, which is why Allah wanted not to make him more extravagant in this regard. The same applies to the other two acts mentioned in this verse of *Al-'Imran.* It is thus clear that all the Divine Decrees entail good for man.

When you see a despotic king, do not think that he gained this dominion against the Will of Allah; no, it was Allah *the Almighty* Who gave it to him., We must stress that if the people were obedient to Allah *the Exalted* in all their affairs, He would soften the heart of their rulers towards them, a fact which is quite clear in the following Qudsi Hadith in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I am Allah, the King of Kings, and the hearts of all kings are in My Hand. If my servants obey Me, I will change the hearts of their kings to treat them with kindness and mercy. And if My servants disobey Me, I will change the hearts of their kings to treat them with wrath and punishment, and they will mistreat them and inflict on them the worst punishment. Therefore, do not busy yourselves with invocations (or imprecations) against your kings, but busy yourselves with remembrance [of Allah] and devoted supplication, then I will suffice the whole affair of your kings [for you].'

At this point, we should be fully recognising the fact that all the events that take place in the universe around us are based on great wisdom. In this respect, we stress that when we see anyone attaining dominion whilst being an evildoer; this means that Allah *the Almighty* has given it to him in order to admonish the evildoers whom he rules, for He *the Almighty* does not use good people to carry out that task, a fact which is proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And in this manner do We cause evildoers to seduce one another…’ (*al-An‘am:* 129). That is to say the good people do not enter this battle, rather, they watch it from a distance. Therefore, we heavily stress that everything in the universe runs according to a due measure since Allah *the Almighty* has dominion over the heavens and the earth. In addition, He Alone is the One Who grants life and causes death. So, you, O believers, should not be awestruck by anyone but your Creator, no matter how great a created being’s power and tyranny become, he can never protect himself from the punishment of Allah *the Almighty* which is why believers should take Allah as their Protector and Helper.

Having said that He *the Almighty* is the One Who had dominion over the heavens and the earths, He then reminds us of something in which His Omnipotent Power is clearly manifested, and which no one else shares with Him. Concerning this particular part of the verse in question, that is, the saying of Allah, ‘…He alone gives life and death …’, some scholars, due to the fact that they believe that life means to move, to speak, etc., are under the opinion that it means that Allah *the Almighty* grants life to inanimate things and deals death to living things. Yet, they forget that Allah has placed life into every atom in the universe and that it is by means of this life that everything in the universe performs its role by due measure. For example, the grains of sand have life, so do the mountains, and so on. This point is yet proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in which He says: ‘…That he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth…’ (*al-Anfal:* 42).

This aforementioned part of the verse of the chapter of *al-Anfal* clearly indicates that ‘perishing’ is the opposite of ‘life’; yet He, in other places of the Quran, states that ‘death’ is the opposite of ‘life’. Therefore, we reach the conclusion that ‘perishing’ is nothing but death. Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self’ (*al-Qasas:* 88), this means that all the creatures must be alive before being afflicted with death. Therefore, we reach the conclusion that life does not only mean to move, to speak, etc., a point which is definitively proven by today's recent scientific discoveries. Thanks to microscopes, we have discovered some invisible, live creatures which we previously knew nothing about them. It is thus clear that man became fully aware of the fact that everything in this life has a due role to perform. If we take a piece of metal, for example, and leave it for some time, it oxidises, meaning that it reacts with other natural elements in the universe, which indicates that this material, i.e. metal, is alive.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

لَّقَد تَّابَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَى ٱلنَّبِيِّ وَٱلۡمُهَٰجِرِينَ وَٱلۡأَنصَارِ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱتَّبَعُوهُ فِي سَاعَةِ ٱلۡعُسۡرَةِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا كَادَ يَزِيغُ قُلُوبُ فَرِيقٖ
مِّنۡهُمۡ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيۡهِمۡۚ إِنَّهُۥ بِهِمۡ رَءُوفٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿١١٧﴾

In His mercy God has turned to the Prophet, and the emigrants and helpers who followed him in the hour of adversity when some hearts almost wavered: He has turned to them; He is most kind and merciful to them [117]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 117)

We previously explained that the act of repentance has various stages. So, we stress that Allah *the Almighty* due to His Infinite Mercy, allows people to show repentance for their sins. As a matter of fact, had Allah *the Almighty* not allowed the sinful people to show repentance, they would have fallen prey to the frequent committing of sins, a matter which will cause the entire society to fall prey to doing evil. Therefore, it is clear that thanks to the Infinite Mercy of Allah, He allows the sinful to repent. In the same way, it is also a kind of mercy to those who are oppressed. Furthermore, Allah's acceptance to the repentance of His sinful servants is viewed as another kind of mercy to them. So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: '…He turned again to them in His Mercy, so that they might repent…' (*at-Tawba:* 118), this means that He has instructed the sinners to show repentance to Him so that He *the All Merciful* would accept it.

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(1) When late Sheikh Sha'rawy *may Allah rest his soul* says that an inanimate object is alive, he means that this particular object has a due role to perform in life.

This raises a very important point, which is Allah *the Exalted* has included Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* under the category of those to whom He has given His Mercy, so what did he *peace and blessings be upon him* do to be gathered with them? We say that the answer to this question should be given in the light of His saying, 'May Allah pardon you, [O, Prophet Muhammad]; why did you give them permission [to remain behind]?' (*at-Tawba:* 43) We know that some of the hypocrites came and asked him for permission to stay at home instead of going to fight with Muslims, whereupon he gave them permission since Allah *the Almighty* had said about hypocrites: 'Had these [hypocrites] set out with you, [O, believers,] they would have added nothing to you save the evil of corruption …' (*at-Tawba:* 47).

That is to say that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of his sound *Fitra,* had taken the right decision. Therefore, we strongly stress that Allah *the Almighty* did not want people to follow only their inner dispositions, which is why He sent down His Divine Way of Guidance to be followed.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to tell us that He had pardoned the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* for giving permission to the hypocrites who asked leave to stay behind instead of fighting with Muslims. Thus, we should know with certainty that Allah *the Almighty* sometimes corrects His servant for doing things which are against his own interest. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. When you see your son spending twenty hours a day studying, you go into his room and take the book from him or turn off the light, telling him to go to sleep. In essence, you are only firm with him in this way because you love him, not because he has broken any rule; you do as such since he has gone too far and worked so hard that he might harm himself.(1) At this point, we should wonder, 'When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* let some people stay behind, did he do this against the interest of the war, or for it? In fact, had the hypocrites taken part in the battle, they would have been well rewarded, even if they were only to guard the weapons of Muslims; what that means is that he *peace and blessings be upon him* by giving them the leave to stay behind, he had made things more difficult for himself, for by doing this, he has deprived himself from their support.

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him narrated that Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him came into the mosque and noticed a rope stretched between two poles. He enquired, "What is this rope for?" He was told: "This is Zainab's rope. When during her voluntary prayer, she begins to feel tired, she grasps it for support". Prophet Muhammad then said, 'Untie it. You should perform prayers so long as you feel active. When you feel tired, you should go to sleep.' [Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

Thus, we strongly and heavily stress that whenever Allah *the Exalted* instructed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to do a particular act, He did so to achieve his own benefit. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says in chapter *at-Tahrim,* 'O, Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you …' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). This verse clearly indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not make lawful what Allah *the Most High* had forbidden, rather, he prohibited to himself what He had permitted for him which is against his own interest. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* was asking him, 'Why are you making matters hard for yourself?' That is to say that He *the Almighty* instructed him *peace and blessings be upon him* to do what achieves his own interest (alongside the interest of believers). His story with the companion 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum is another case in point. 'Abdullah who was blind came to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* something about one of the rulings of the Islamic faith, yet he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not pay attention to him since he was fully occupied with telling the chieftains of the Quraysh about Islam, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* revealed His saying, 'He frowned and turned away because the blind man approached him.]' (*'Abasa:* 1-2)

As a matter of fact, Ibn Umm Maktum had come to ask the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about a particular topic of faith which means that Ibn Umm Makhtum *Allah be pleased with him* was not there to argue with him *Peace and blessings be upon him* as did the chieftains of Quraysh; yet the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* chose the difficult matter which required exerting considerable effort, meaning telling the disbelievers of the Quraysh about Islam. It is thus clear that He *the Almighty* by revealing these aforementioned verses of the chapter of *'Abasa* instructed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to do what is easy for him.

Concerning the main point in question, which is 'Why did Allah include Prophet Muhammad within the emigrants and the helpers to whom He turned

His Mercy?' The reason for this is that He wanted none of the emigrants and helpers to feel worried that He would not show them mercy; that is to say His Infinite Mercy was extended to all of them including Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself.

Furthermore, there were sound justifications for all of these events, a fact which is proven by His saying, '…when some hearts almost wavered …' As for the Arabic word *Yazigh* translated as 'waver' means, in this context, to incline to do something evil; in other words, some of the believers, due to the fact that the battle of *Tabuk* was very difficult, were about to leave the battlefield. We previously explained that the battle of *Tabuk* is known as the battle of distress, for the distance to the land of Byzantines was long. In addition, Muslims were supposed to face the forces of the Byzantines in extremely hot weather. Moreover, they did not have enough mounts; it is narrated that there was only one camel for every ten men, not to mention that the Muslim soldiers had nothing to eat but maggot-ridden dates.

Regarding the extreme hardship Muslims suffered during this battle, it is narrated that each of the Muslim fighters would lick a date for a moment and then pass it to his companion who would do the same, and they would pass it around until there is nothing remained from it but the pit. In the same respect, the barley was infested by worms and utterly ruined. The following is a testimony of one of the Muslim soldiers who attended this battle, and it may be quoted that he is narrated to have said, 'It (the barely) got to the point where if one of us took a handful of it to eat, he would hold his nose so he would not have to smell it.' Thus, all of these difficulties made some of the Companions desire to turn back and not to finish the journey to the battle.

It is thus clear that Allah *the Almighty* has shown the helpers and emigrants mercy out of the fact that some of their hearts had almost inclined to leaving the battlefield, which is a major sin. In the same respect, Allah *the Most High* took the severity of the conditions into account and alluded to the thoughts which had come to some of their minds. At this point, we should recognise that there were some of the companions who were about to decide not to set out towards the battle. The story of Abu Khaythama is a case in point. It is narrated that this aforementioned companion had remained ten days in

Medina after the army of believers had set out to the land of the Byzantines. Yet, when Abu Khaythama *Allah be pleased with him* entered his orchard, he found his two wives preparing food for him, each in her hut. When he saw these great blessings including the cool shade and hanging fruits, he came back to himself and said, 'Prophet Muhammad is in the glare of the sun and blown on by hot winds while I am here in cool shade with food made ready for me, two fair women and softly-furnished huts! This is not fair!' He *Allah be pleased with him* consequently rode his camel and headed towards the land of the battle. At this moment, his two wives begged him to stay, yet he paid no heed to either of them and continued his journey to catch up with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The companions then said to him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O, Prophet Muhammad, we see a man approaching from afar!' Then, he *peace and blessings be upon him* looked and said, 'By Abu Khaythama! And indeed it was.(1) This is how we should understand the saying of Allah, 'In His Mercy, Allah has turned to the Prophet, and the emigrants and helpers who followed him in the hour of adversity when some hearts almost wavered. He has turned to them; He is Most Kind and Merciful to them.' (*at-Tawba:* 117)

In this regard, we should know that Allah *the Almighty* has also accepted the repentance of the companions who confessed their sins; this is proven by the saying of Allah, 'And [there are] others – [people who] have become conscious of their sinning after having done righteous deeds side by side with evil ones; [and] it may well be that Allah will accept their repentance, for, verily, Allah is Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy.' (*at-Tawba:* 102) In the same respect, He *the Most High* also shows that He deferred the cases of certain others about whom He said: 'and [there are yet] others – [people whose cases are] deferred until Allah wills to judge them…' (*at-Tawba:* 106).

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* said that their cases were deferred until He wills to judge them, this means that He had not yet pronounced His Judgment on them, which is why they had to wait until He judges them. At this point, the believers had to leave them alone until He judged them according to His

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(1) *[Narrated by Muslim]*

Will. In the following verse, He *the Almighty* tells us also that He accepted the repentance of those three companions who had been left behind by saying:

وَعَلَى ٱلثَّلَٰثَةِ ٱلَّذِينَ خُلِّفُواْ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا ضَاقَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ بِمَا
رَحُبَتۡ وَضَاقَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡ أَنفُسُهُمۡ وَظَنُّوٓاْ أَن لَّا مَلۡجَأَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَّآ
إِلَيۡهِ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ لِيَتُوبُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ١١٨

And to the three men who stayed behind: when the earth, for all its spaciousness, closed in around them, when their very souls closed in around them, when they realized that the only refuge from God was with Him, He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return [to Him]. God is the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful [118] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 118)

Someone might think that the saying of Allah ‘And to the three men who stayed behind …’ means simply that they stayed behind because someone has ordered them not to set out to war with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which is not true. Rather, it means that the Will of the Lawgiver decreed to defer their case; this point is proven by His Saying: ‘and [there are yet] others – [people whose cases are] deferred until Allah wills to judge them…’ (*at-Tawba:* 106). That is to say that as long as their judgment had been postponed, it was necessary to wait.

We know fully well that when a person is concerned about something, he thinks about leaving the place where he is sitting and which is causing him discomfort, in the hope that the discomfort will be relived. However, these three men found discomfort wherever they went, to the extent that the earth, despite its vastness, became too narrow for them, and none of them found a place to go. This means that they were completely surrounded by woes.

Likewise, even if the earth becomes too narrow for a man, his soul might still accommodate him, a point which is totally different with those three companions under this case, for Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…when their very souls closed in around them …’ (*at-Tawba:* 118). This means that the earth, despite all its vastness, became too narrow for them, and their souls also utterly constricted them. We should recognise the fact that these three men had stayed behind and refrained from going to battle for no reason but laziness and sloth, which is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded the believers to ostracise them. In this respect, it is narrated that Ka‘b ibn Malik(1) *Allah be pleased with him* used to go out to the market, but no one would speak to him. In addition, he used to go to see his relatives, but yet none of them would speak to him to the extent that he would climb their walls in the hope that they would look at him, but they would not.

As a result, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* raised their suffering up a notch by censuring them, for he ordered their wives to leave. As such, it is clear that the act of ostracising became severe, for it had been conducted on three levels: first, the society; second, their relatives; and, third, their wives. At one point, the wife of Hilal ibn Umayya went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O, Messenger of Allah, Hilal ibn Umayya is a sick and weak man, and I ask your permission to help him what he needs to sustain him.’ Then, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* answered her, ‘No blame, but he must not go near you.’ She said, ‘By Allah, O, Prophet Muhammad, he never even moves, and by Allah, he has been weeping ever since all this began.’ As a result, some Muslims went to Ka‘b ibn Malik to tell him that Messenger Muhammad had permitted Hilal’s wife to serve him, and they tried to talk him in to go to him *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask permission for his own wife to serve him, too.

Yet, Ka‘b said, ‘Hilal is an old man, so what will I say to Prophet Muhammad when I am a young man? By Allah, I shall never go to him (for that).’

The three men remained in this social and personal boycott for fifty days until Allah *the Exalted* declared that He had relented towards them. In truth, this was a trial and a test for them. Ka‘b ibn Malik, for example, spoke later about his condition before the battle by saying, ‘Never did I possess means enough and (my circumstances) more favourable than at the occasion of this expedition. Also, by Allah, I had never before this expedition simultaneously in my possession two rides.’ This means that he had no excuse whatsoever for not going. Having experienced this great affliction, the glad tidings came that Allah, out of His Infinite Mercy, had relented to him. It is narrated that someone came from Mount Sal‘ and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Ka‘b, for this is best day of your life! Allah has revealed verses of the Quran concerning you and has turned to you in mercy.’ Ka‘b later said, ‘I had no gift to give him for bringing me this glad tidings but my own two robes, so I took them off and gave them to him, and then borrowed two others to wear and set off for Prophet Muhammad’s Mosque.’ When he got there, he said, ‘O, Messenger of Allah. Am I allowed to give in charity my wealth for Allah's sake and for the sake of His Messenger?’(1)

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(1) The other two men, Marara ibn Ar-Rabi′ and Hilal ibn Umayya, kept to their houses, and only Ka‘b went out during this time.

So, the reason why the verdict on these three companions was delayed was to test them and to make others take admonition of their case, for when they saw how the earth, despite all its vastness, had become too narrow for them, and their own souls had constricted them, ‘they came to know with certainty that there is no refuge from Allah other than [a return] to Him’ (*at-Tawba:* 118). What this means is that no one could protect us but Allah Who is also sought to protect us from Himself. How can we understand this point? When no one can protect you except for the one who is pursuing you, then you know that no one has any real power over you but the One Who created you. Therefore, we say that you do not seek refuge in Allah from His creatures, rather you seek refuge in Him to protect you from Himself, for He *Glorified is He* has both the Attributes of Majesty and Beauty; His attributes of Majesty are manifested in the undeniable fact that He is All-Dominant, All-Compelling, Lord of Retribution, Severe in Vengeance, and so on. As for the His Attributes of Beauty, they include being Much-Forgiving, the Dispenser of Mercy, and so on. Thus, when a man sins, he becomes liable to be punished by the Attributes of Majesty, Therefore, we stress that nothing can protect the servant from the Attributes of Majesty except those of Beauty.

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(1) *Messenger Muhammad Allah’s Peace and Blessings be upon him then replied to him: ‘Keep some of your wealth, for this would be better for you.’ Ka‘b then said: ‘I shall keep with me that part (of my property) which fell to my lot (on the occasion of the expedition of) Khaybar.’ [Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

Furthermore, we can quote the following supplication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in support of this point; he is narrated to have said, ‘I seek refuge in You from You.’(1)

This means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* seeks refuge in Allah’s Attributes of Beauty from His Attributes of Majesty, for nothing can protect him from Allah’s Attributes of Majesty but His Attributes of Beauty.

Therefore, when speaking about the last night of the month of Ramadan, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘And when the last night of Ramadan falls, the All-Compelling manifests Himself in forgiveness.’ Some people think that this does not make sense, for how could the All-Compeller manifest Himself in forgiveness?! Would it not make more sense to say, ‘The All-Forgiving shows Himself in Forgiveness’? To those people, we say the answer is 'No', since forgiveness implies the existence of sin, which falls under the category of the Attribute of All-Compulsion, and therefore, the Attribute of Mercy supplants that of All-Compulsion. It is as though we say, ‘O All-Compeller, You Alone are the True Lord, but we seek the intercession of Your Attributes of Beauty with Your attributes of Majesty.’ This is the true meaning of this Prophetic Hadith mentioned earlier.

In the same respect, when Abu Sa‘id Al-Asma‘i*,* a great Arabic grammarian, heard someone supplicating to Allah *the Almighty* at the doors of the *Ka‘ba,* saying, ‘O Lord, I am ashamed to ask You for forgiveness because I have disobeyed You, but I searched, and found no other god but You.’ He said to him, ‘I believe that Allah *the Almighty* will forgive you, for you have made your request so well!’ Allah *the Exalted* then says: ‘… He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return to [Him].’ (*at-Tawba:* 118) We notice that verb ‘to show mercy’ has been mentioned two times in this verse being discussed, yet there is a different as to the signification of each of them, which proceeds as follows: the first of them refers mainly to the act of legislating repentance itself, whilst the second refers to the fact that when people sincerely show repentance to Allah *Glorified is He,* He will certainly accept it. Therefore, the saying of Allah, ‘…in order for them to return to Him’ indicates that the three Companions had returned to their former state of keeping away from sins.

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(1) *[Narrated by Muslim]*

He *the Most High* then concludes the verse with His Saying: ‘Allah is the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful.’ (*at-Tawba:* 118) That is to say that He *the Almighty* Alone is the One Who is able to accept repentance from His sinful salves. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Whose Mercy encompasses everything in the universe. Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَكُونُواْ مَعَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾

You who believe, be mindful of God: stand with those
who are true [119] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 119)

In this verse, we should note the point that when Allah *the Exalted* calls His believing servants, He does so either to give them an instruction pertaining to their faith or otherwise to ask them to have (true) faith; the second point is yet quite clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘O you who believe, Hold fast to your belief in Allah and His Messenger …’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136). In this verse of *an-Nisa’,* Allah *the Almighty* tells believers that their faith in Him may be negatively affected for one reason or another, which is why He *the Most High* asks them to be steadfast in their faith. On the other hand, in case He asks believers to do something other than attaining faith in Him, this means that He directs them to carry out certain instructions and orders; this is a fact which is perfectly clear in the verse being discussed, for Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… be mindful of Allah …’ (*at-Tawba:* 119).

Therefore, the Arabic phrase *Ittaqu* (be mindful of Allah) means to ‘place a protective barrier between oneself and Allah *the Almighty*’. Therefore, someone might ask, ‘Why would anyone ask a believing man to place a barrier between him and his Lord, especially if we take into account that he greatly desires to be in His Presence?’ This is another case where it is vital to understand the concept of the Divine Attributes of Majesty and Beauty. When Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘.. be mindful of Allah …’, this implies an order for believers to place a barrier between themselves and Allah’s Attributes of Majesty, just like when He *the Almighty* says: ‘…be conscious of the fire…’ (*al-Baqara:* 24). Due to the fact that Hellfire falls under the category of the Attributes of Majesty, we must place a barrier between ourselves and Allah’s Attributes of Majesty. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…be mindful of Allah: stand with those who are true.’ (*at-Tawba:* 119)

Some scholars yet explain this particular part of the verse under discussion to mean ‘be amongst those who are true to their word’. In other words, they have the opinion that the particle *Ma*‘ (with) in this context gives the meaning of the preposition ‘amongst’, meaning that the believers are, in general, supposed to be amongst those who are true to their word. However, I stress that there is a difference between these two sentences, namely ‘…stand with those who are true…’ and ‘stand among those who are true’. For example, the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…stand with those who are true…’ implies an order to believers to join with those who are truthful so that they will be in their company.

At this point, we need to call to mind what we said before about ‘the spoken aspect’ and ‘the mental aspect’. When a thought comes into one’s mind before he interprets it, this is viewed as the mental aspect. For example, when one says, ‘Mohammad visited me’, this means that there is an idea that came to his mind before he interpreted it. In this case, we should realise that the listener knew nothing about ‘the mental concept’ that came into the mind of the speaker until the latter spoke it.

Upon carefully reflection concerning this particular sentence, the listener, who firmly believes that the speaker is always truthful, fully realises that there is actually a person named Mohammad and who came to visit him. Thus, we reach the conclusion that ‘truthfulness’ means that the spoken aspect exactly corresponds to reality. However, in case someone says, ‘Mohammad had travelled to America’ when he actually did not, this means that the spoken aspect does not correspond to the factual aspect and therefore is judged as telling a lie, It is thus clear that we have three different aspects in this respect which are the mental, the spoken and the factual; in case the spoken aspect exactly corresponds to the factual one, this brings forth truthfulness; otherwise it is viewed as an act of telling lies.

In the same respect, we should take into account that man’s speech is judged true or otherwise based on reality which means that whether or not it corresponds to reality. At this point, I Would like to draw your attention to another aspect which is that of making a request. For example, when someone orders you, ‘Pay a visit to so and so’, this has nothing at all to do with truthfulness or lie since the action will be done later.

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘…be mindful of Allah. Stand with those who are true.’ (*at-Tawba:* 119) In this verse, we should know that ‘truthfulness’ is a trait which gathers together all the aspects faith. Let us offer a striking example to illustrate this point; it is narrated that a Bedouin once came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I possess three weaknesses of which I will never be able to rid myself: the first is (having strong desire for) women, the second is (drinking) wine and the third is (telling) lying, and I have come to you, O, Prophet Muhammad, to ask you to choose one of these three traits and give me strength to resist it, confirming that I shall make a covenant with our Lord *the Almighty* concerning whichever one you will choose.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said to him, ‘O, Bedouin, be truthful and you shall be blameless.’ This means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* chose for him to give up telling lies. So, when the man wanted to drink wine, he wondered, ‘what would I tell Prophet Muhammad if he asks me about whether or not I still drink wine?!’ Therefore, he gave up drinking wine so as not to lie to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. In the same respect, when the Bedouin was about to steal a glance at a woman, he said to himself, ‘What will I tell Prophet Muhammad if he asks me about this? And how can I degrade myself with doing such an act which behoves no Muslim?!’ Thus, he gave up looking at women. In this way, truthfulness overcame all of man’s weaknesses and thus refined his conduct entirely. In this respect, we can also quote the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he was asked, ‘Can a believer be a coward?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ He was then asked, ‘Can a believer be a miser?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ He was further asked, ‘Can a believer be a liar?’ He said, ‘No.’(1) This is due to the way of attaining faith is firmly based on accepting the truth of the firm matters of doctrine, which is why ‘truthfulness’ is viewed by scholars as the most important trait ever. It is thus clear that the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…be mindful of Allah. Stand with those who are true.’ (*at-Tawba:* 119) implies an order to believers not to say anything which does not accurately reflect reality and likewise not to say things which contradict one's own deeds, for Allah *the Almighty* has warned those who do so. In the chapter of *as-Saff,* He *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who believe, Why do you say one thing and do another? Most loathsome is it in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do!’ (*as-Saff:* 2-3)

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(1) *[Narrated by Malik]*

In the same respect, Allah *the Exalted* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara:* ‘True piety does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or the west – but truly pious is he who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, the angels, revelation and the Prophets, and one spends his substance – however much he himself may cherish it – upon his near of kin, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarer, the beggars and for the freeing of human beings from bondage; he is constant in prayer and renders the purifying dues …’ (*al-Baqara:* 177).

This raises a very important point that we should carefully reflect upon, which is why does Allah *the Almighty* mention the act of giving the recommended charity, although He already mentioned that of giving the prescribed alms later in the same verse of *al-Baqara*? The answer is perfectly clear in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* does so to tell that there is a difference between these two acts, for the former is recommended and supererogatory while the latter, namely *Zakat*, is obligatory. Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse of *al-Baqara* with His saying, ‘… And [truly pious are] they who keep their promises whenever they promise and are patient in misfortune and hardship and in time of peril, It is they that have proven themselves true, and it is they who are conscious of Allah.’ (*al-Baqara:* 177)

According to this aforementioned verse of *al-Baqara,* these are the attributes of those who are true to their word. As for the verse under discussion of the chapter of *at-Tawba,* they are described as being mindful of Allah and truthful. Thus, we should take into account that Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned the attribute of truthfulness here in particular since the context of these verses tells about those who declined to go out to the battle of *Tabuk* and lied about the excuses they proffered for this, and therefore, Allah *the Almighty* instructs them to be truthful.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently, says:

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(1) *‘Ab dullah ibn Mas‘ud Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘You must be truthful. Truthfulness leads to dutifulness and dutifulness leads to the Garden. A man continues to tell the truth until he is written as a trustworthy with Allah. Beware of lying. Lying leads to deviance and deviance leads to the fire. A man continues to lie until he is written as a liar with Allah." [Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

مَا كَانَ لِأَهۡلِ ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ وَمَنۡ حَوۡلَهُم مِّنَ ٱلۡأَعۡرَابِ أَن يَتَخَلَّفُواْ عَن رَّسُولِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا
يَرۡغَبُواْ بِأَنفُسِهِمۡ عَن نَّفۡسِهِۦۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ لَا يُصِيبُهُمۡ ظَمَأٞ وَلَا نَصَبٞ وَلَا
مَخۡمَصَةٞ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا يَطَـُٔونَ مَوۡطِئٗا يَغِيظُ ٱلۡكُفَّارَ وَلَا يَنَالُونَ مِنۡ
عَدُوّٖ نَّيۡلًا إِلَّا كُتِبَ لَهُم بِهِۦ عَمَلٞ صَٰلِحٌۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجۡرَ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ١٢٠

The people of Medina and their neighbouring desert Arabs should not have held back from following God's Messenger, nor should they have cared about themselves more than him: if ever they suffer any thirst, weariness, or hunger in God's cause, take any step that angers the disbelievers, or cause any harm to an enemy, a good deed is recorded in their favour on account of it – God never wastes the reward of those who do good [120] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 120)

This verse under discussion yet sheds light on those who stayed behind during the battle of *Tabuk.* We have previously explained that there is a difference between the following two styles, namely *ma kan laka* (it is not for you) and *ma yanbaghi* (it is not of right/one should not), as follows: when one says to another, 'It is not for you to do such and such act', this means that this person does not have the ability to do that particular act; yet in case it is, one says, 'You should not do such and such act,' this means that even though one has the ability to do the act, he is not allowed to do it. As for the verse under discussion, it tells that even though Allah *Glorified is He* tells that the people of Medina and their neighbouring desert Arabs should not have held back from following Allah's Messenger, some of them had already stayed behind and did not set out to the battle with him *peace and blessings be upon him*:

As for the saying of Allah, '…nor should they have cared about themselves more than him …' (*at-Tawba:* 120), it refers to two kinds of selves, namely the selves of those who stayed behind during this battle and the self of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Concerning the Arabic verb *Raghiba* (care), it means that the heart inclines towards something; yet if the verb under discussion is followed with the preposition *fi* (in), it means that the heart strongly desires to perform the action in question, whilst if it is followed by the proposition *'an* (from), it means that the heart desires to keep well away from the action in question. Thus, the preposition is what determines the nature of the heart's inclination.

The saying of Allah *the Exalted*, '...nor should they have cared about themselves more than him…' (*at-Tawba:* 120), thus indicates clearly that those who stayed behind were averse to obeying the command issued by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which means that they preferred their own commands to that of the Messenger, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells them that they should not do that, for they by virtue of their belief were supposed to love him *peace and blessings be upon him* more than their own selves.(1)

This is why when 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'None of you is a (true) believer till I am dearer to him than his own self'(2), 'Umar said to him, 'O, Prophet Muhammad, I indeed love you more than my family and my wealth, but not more than my own self', which is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated the saying, 'None of you is a (true) believer till I am dearer to him than his own self'. At this point, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* fully realised that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* strongly and heavily affirms one of the unshakeable principles of faith. In addition, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* became fully aware of the fact that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was referring exclusively about the act of rational love and not the emotional one. Therefore, we should take into account that there is a difference between these two acts of love, for the former has to do with legal obligation while the latter not.

For example, one loves his son emotionally, even if the boy is not clever; however, one might love the son of his enemy rationally if he is clever, honest and successful. In this respect, we previously gave the following example to illustrate this point; man might love a bitter medicine because it cures him; that is to say that he does not love this medicine emotionally and thus does not feel any pleasure when he drinks it. However, he loves it rationally since it might be the means by which his health is restored, to the extent that if he does not find it in the pharmacies, he becomes angry and complains, yet he is delighted when someone brings it for him from abroad.

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is narrated to have said: 'There are three qualities whoever has them, will taste the sweetness of belief: To love Allah and His Messenger peace and blessings be upon him more than anyone else; to love a slave (of Allah) only for (the sake of) Allah; and to abhor returning to disbelief after Allah has saved him from it as he would abhor to be thrown into the fire (of Hell).' {Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

(2) *[narrated by Al-Bukahri]*

It is thus clear that those who stayed behind during the battle of *Tabuk* from amongst the people of Medina and the neighbouring desert Arabs had sinned by their action since this action was in contradiction with their faith, which obligates them to love Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* more than their own selves. In addition, these people were supposed to care about him more than themselves, and not vice versa because the reason for this is that obeying the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will bring them none but goodness.

However, if they show love for themselves more than Prophet Muhammad, this will for sure bring them nothing but evil, and even if it brought them goodness, it would be temporary and contingent on their own possibilities. It is thus clear that their love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would undoubtedly bring them perpetual goodness commensurate to the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty*.

The Arabic pronoun *Dhalik* (for) in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…for if ever they suffer any thirst…' refers to the reasons why they will be provided with this great reward. The reasons for this are as follows: Allah *the Exalted* says: '…if ever they suffer any thirst…', and we know for certain that thirst assailed the believers in this battle, to the extent that a warrior would slaughter his camel and extract the water from its stomach to wet his mouth and the mouths of his companions.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'if ever they suffer any) weariness', the Arabic word *Nasab* (weariness) means exhaustion, for the battle, as we know, took place in extremely hot weather.

As for Arabic term *Makhmasa* (hunger) in the Saying of Allah *the Most High* in the aforementioned verse, it refers to starvation. We know quite well that believers during this battle ate the worm-ridden dates and maggot-infested barley. Yet, Allah *the Almighty* will certainly reward them with the best for all the hardships they experienced in His cause.

As for the explanation of the saying of Allah *the Exalted* 'if ever they take any step that angers the disbelievers…', it means that when the believers attack the army of the disbelievers in such a way that makes the latter move backwards, to the extent that the believers occupy their valleys and orchards, this matter will for sure enrage the people of disbelief.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '(if ever they) cause any harm to an enemy…,' it means that the believers gain the upper hand over the enemy, in which they defeat the enemy so that they retreat and feel loss. Having enumerated all of these reasons, Allah *Glorified is He* then tells that He will reward the believers for each of these deed; a point which is proved by the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…a good deed is recorded in their favour on account of it…' (*at-Tawba:* 120).

It is thus clear that those who preferred themselves to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and thus refrained from going out to battle lost much, for they indeed lost the great reward provided by Allah *the Almighty* for each of the hardships experienced by the believers in this battle.

Allah *the Most High* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…Allah never wastes the reward of those who do good.' (*at-Tawba:* 120) What this means is that Allah *Glorified is He* will certainly not waste the reward of those who do the good.

He then moves to count the good deeds that may are done by the believers who set out to the war with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying:

وَلَا يُنفِقُونَ نَفَقَةً صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً وَلَا يَقْطَعُونَ وَادِيًا
إِلَّا كُتِبَ لَهُمْ لِيَجْزِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾

If they spend a little or a lot for God's cause, if they traverse a mountain pass, all this is recorded to their credit so that God can reward them in accordance with the best of their deeds [121] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 121)

This verse clearly indicates that all of man's actions are recorded which means that Allah *the Almighty* knows fully well those who spend in His cause and those who travelled the long road and crossed valleys to join Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his battles confirming meanwhile that He will certainly reward them the best for their actions. Having set out with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the battle to the extent that Medina was about to not have a single Muslim residing in it Allah *Glorified is He* instructs them how to act in such a situation, by saying:

وَمَا كَانَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا۟ كَآفَّةً ۚ فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَآئِفَةٌ
لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا۟ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا۟ قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

Yet it is not right for all the believers to go out [to battle] together: out of each community, a group should go out to gain understanding of the religion, so that they can teach their people when they return and so that they can guard themselves against evil [122] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 122)

Having revealed these verses concerning the condition of those who stayed behind during the battle of *Tabuk* and having counted the advantages of the believers and the great reward they would be provided with by Allah *Glorified is He* for their good deeds, He *the Almighty* sent down this aforementioned verse. That is to say that Allah *the Most High* in these two previous verses, counts the reasons why people should join striving in His cause. As a matter of fact, these two verses have encouraged the believers to do so in such a way that makes them leave behind their lands, properties and families, taking only into consideration the great reward they would obtain from Allah *the Exalted*.

Upon careful examination of these two verses, scholars have the opinion that they were revealed to perfect the topic of *Jihad,* confirming meanwhile that companions of Prophet Muhammad, upon hearing these two verses, swore to participate in all the battles and expeditions to the extent that they sometimes left him *peace and blessings be upon him* with a small number of the companions since most of them had already set out to take part in war.

We know for certain that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the one appointed by Allah to receive the Divine Message and to deliver it to people. Yet, when all of the people showed a strong desire to take part in jihad, Allah *the Almighty* instructed them how to deal with this topic in the best way; He made it clear that Islam was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he could convey it to the people. Thus, we should acknowledge the fact that the religion of Islam is mainly based on two requirements, which are as follows: someone to convey it to people and something to prove to them that he is truthful. Likewise, when people see someone sacrifice himself only for the sake of Allah while another spending his wealth for the same reason, they will undoubtedly realise that these people do apply their steadfast and firm belief.

The act of jihad is certainly a good deed, yet there is a very important point which we must take into account which is that in case all the people set out to take part in wars, then who would remain to learn Islam from Prophet Muhammad and to convey it to people? That is to say that those who shouldered the responsibility of learning Islam and conveying it to others would have a great reward, like those who sacrifice themselves and wealth for the sake of Allah.

It is thus clear that the Divine Way of Guidance was sent down upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to convey it to people who, in turn, were obligated to deliver it all over the corners of the world. This means that those who received the knowledge of Islam were supposed to spread and disseminate it to all mankind, which is why the residence of some of the companions with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina was of cardinal importance since they were to get this knowledge from him; otherwise, they would have nothing to tell people about.

Therefore, we reach the conclusion that Muslims had to take care of two things: the reception of the Message from Heaven through Prophet Muhammad and the deliverance of this Message throughout the land. Thus, if you, O, believers, all go out to struggle in the Cause of Allah, you thus achieve one of these two goals, but not the other one which is that you should remain with Prophet Muhammad to hear the Divine Message from him. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* wants to tell the believers that those who shall remain with Prophet Muhammad to learn the Message are already striving in the cause of Allah exactly like those who set out to participate in battles and expeditions; this point is proven by His saying: ‘Yet it is not right for all the believers to go out [to battle] together …’ (*at-Tawba:* 122).

Thus, we should realise that the Arabic style *Ma Kan* (It is not right) indicates the denial of a particular topic. Therefore, this particular part of the aforementioned verse means that it is not right for all believers to set out for war together which means without any of them staying behind.

As for the Arabic word *Kaaffah* (all… together), it is derived from the verb *kaff* which means ‘to halt’. For example, when a tailor wants to put a hem on a garment to stop it from unravelling, the same word is used to give this meaning. It is thus clear that the word *Kaaffah* is used in this context to give the meaning of ‘all’.

This raises a good question: ‘why should not all the Muslims go out to fight and struggle in the cause of Allah, especially if we take into consideration that jihad is a means to spread the Divine Message among people?'

We say that it is undoubtedly a good way of disseminating and spreading the Divine Way of Guidance throughout earth, but the one who travels to fulfil this task must have something to proclaim and tell people about; this is a matter which was not to be fulfilled during that particular period of time except through learning from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, we can summarise the entire topic as follows: people had to learn and receive the teachings and instructions of Islam from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then spread them throughout the land. Had all the believers gone out to join jihad in the cause of Allah, then the Message of Islam would not have been conveyed to people, which is why Allah instructed them how to deal with this matter by saying, ‘Yet it is not right for all the believers to go out [to battle] together …’ (*at-Tawba:* 122). What this means is that even though all believers might have the ability to set out for battles and expeditions, they were not allowed, under this verse, to do so.

In this respect, we know for certain that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was brought up amongst people who were masters of eloquence and speech. It is historically recorded that many Arabs during that particular period of time were known for their extraordinary talent of making speech and composing poetry, yet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not known for that, to the extent that some of his tribe tried to disparage his eloquence by saying, ‘His eloquence is less than that of the orators, speakers and poets’, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* refutes their allegation in the

Quran by saying, ‘And [thus it is:] We have not imparted to this [Prophet the gift of] poetry, nor would [poetry] have suited this [Message]…’ (*Ya Sin:* 69).

What this means is that had Allah *the Almighty* so willed, He would have made the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* excel everyone in this regard, yet He *the Almighty* did not teach him poetry since it did not befit him. However, why did He not?! Since Arabs knew fully well that the best poetry is that which is most untrue and since this was the case, Allah *Glorified is He* did not want people to think that the Quran was from the own composition of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who, let us assume, would have been highly skilled in composing poetry and making eloquent speech. That is to say that if this were truly the case (i.e. Prophet Muhammad was highly skilled in these arts of Arabic language), people would not deny that the Quran was from his composition. Therefore, we should stress that he *peace and blessings be upon him* lived amongst them for a long time, yet they never heard him recite poetry; in other words, all what he delivered to them was revealed upon his heart from Allah *the Almighty*.

Therefore, it is clear that the saying of Allah in the chapter of *Ya sin,* ‘…nor would [poetry] have suited this [Message] …’ (*Ya Sin:* 69) means that even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was highly qualified by Allah to master poetry, it was not right from him to do so. In other words, had Allah *the Almighty* willed to make him master the art of composing poetry, He would have made so, which is why He, refuting the allegation of those who claimed that the Quran was the production of him *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘…Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you before this [revelation came to me]. Will you not, then, use your reason?’ (*Yunus:* 16) As a matter of fact, Prophet Muhammad lived amongst them for forty years without ever reciting a verse of poem or even making a speech. Thus, we shall wonder, ‘Who is that person who can delay his genius until the age of forty?’ We know for certain that genius shows itself obviously before the age of twenty, or during the second decade of life, and no one ever delays showing his genius.

So, when Allah *the Most High* encouraged believers to strive in His cause by revealing down these verses of *jihad,* Medina was almost emptied of Muslims which is why Allah *Glorified is He* sent down the following verse to tell them how to deal in such a situation: ‘Yet, it is not right for all believers to go out [to battle] together: out of each community, a group should go out to gain understanding of the religion, so that they can teach their people when they return and so that they can guard themselves against evil.' (*at-Tawba:* 122) Once again, this verse in question sheds light on two very important points, which are the reception of the Divine Message and its propagation. What this means is that *jihad* is of different kinds including those who sacrifice themselves in the Cause of Allah and those who receive knowledge of Islam and disseminate it to others. Thus, we should take into account that had all the believers set out to perform *jihad* in the battlefield, leaving Prophet Muhammad behind, how could the believers then know about the instructions and teachings of Islam? In the same respect, had they all remained in Medina, how could this Message then reach people throughout the land? At this point, we should know that these two aforementioned cases are totally different from that one in which the believers remained with him *peace and blessings be upon him* during times of no wars or peace. As a matter of fact, the believers, according to the last case, were only in a state of receiving knowledge.

Likewise, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself went out to fight, all the believers who were able to fight had to join him, so that they would be able to learn about the Message from him. It is thus clear that the problem concerning this matter only exists when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not go out with those who went to strive in the cause of Allah, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* instructed them, under this case, to divide themselves into two groups: one who remains with him *peace and blessings be upon him* to learn the teachings and instructions of Islam from him, and the other who sets out to strive in the cause of Allah.

At this point, we should mention that the war in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took part is called *Ghazwa* (battle), as for a war in which he did not take part, it is called *As-Sariyya* (an Expedition).(1)

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(1) *It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him had already set out to twenty-seven battles and fought personally in nine of them: Badr, Uhud, Al-Murisi', Al-Khandaq, Banu Qurazha, Khaybar, the Opening of Mecca, Hunayn and At-Ta'if. Scholars yet differed concerning the number of the expeditions he sent; some of them say it was forty-seven while others opine that they were around sixty.*

There is only one exception to this aforementioned rule which is the expedition of Mu’ta; it is called *Ghazwa* even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not set out for it himself. The reason for this naming was that this expedition witnessed the occurrence of a number of violent incidents exactly like those that took place in battles. For example, a number of the Companions including the three leaders Zayd ibn Haritha, Ja‘far ibn Abi Taleb and ‘Abdullah ibn Rawaha were martyred during it. That is to say that it was a fierce and decisive battle, which is why we cannot call it expedition.

Therefore, there is a very important point that we should take into account about the battle of Mu’ta which is that even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not set out for the battle with the believers, he arranged all the affairs of the army of Islam before it even set out for fighting to the extent that he appointed the leaders of the army by saying, ‘If so-and-so is killed, let so-and-so take his place, and so on.' This means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had arranged the events of the battle even before its start.(1)

Therefore, we should note the fact that this battle of Mu’ta is considered the only one in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave such instructions for the army of believers. What this means is that Allah *Glorified is He* has informed him of what would happen in the battlefield, an undeniable fact which is proven by that when the army of Islam reached the land of Mu’ta, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while in Medina, started telling the companions about the events of the battle by saying: ‘Zayd took over the flag and was martyred. Then it was taken by Ja‘far who was martyred as well. Then ‘Abdullah ibn Rawaha took the flag, but he too was martyred. After Allah's Messenger *peace be upon him* mentioned this, his eyes were full of tears. Then, Khalid ibn Al-Walid took the flag without being nominated as a chief (beforehand) and was blessed with victory.(1)

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(1) *‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar is narrated to have said: ‘Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him appointed Zaid bin Haritha as the commander of the army during the battle of Mu'ta and said, "If Zaid is martyred, Ja‘far should take over his position, and if Ja‘far is martyred, ‘Abdullah bin Rawaha should take over his position.' "‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar further said, "I was present amongst them in that battle and we searched for Ja‘far ibn Abi Taleb and found his body amongst the bodies of the martyred ones, and found over ninety wounds over his body, caused by stabs or shots (of arrows).’ [Narrated by Al-Bukhari] .*

When the warriors of the army of Islam came back home, the companions learned from them that events of the battle had taken place in the same way narrated to them by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This means that there was no difference whatsoever between his narration and reality, which is why the companions firmly believed that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had already witnessed the battle. Based on this, scholars have the opinion that this battle of Mu'ta is to be called *Ghazwa.*

Back to the verse being discussed, Allah *the Almighty* says: '… out of each community, a group should go out to gain understanding of the religion …' (*at-Tawba:* 122). At this point, we should understand that there are some Arabic particles which give the same meaning, such as *Law la*, *law*, *Law ma* and *Halla,* all of which are used to indicate exhortation. As for *law* (if only), it indicates the negation of two acts: one because of the other. For example, if you say, 'If only Zayd were with you, I would visit you', this means that you are not coming because Zayd is not there. So, the word *law* is a particle which implies that one thing is negated because another is. In the same respect, if you say, 'If only you had come to my house, I would have welcomed you', this means that I did not welcome you because you did not come.

As for *law la,* it is used, if followed by noun, to indicate that a particular act will not take place because of another act, which has already taken place. For example, if you say, 'If only Zayd were not with you, I would come to you', this means, 'I am not coming to you because Zayd is there.' However, if this particle in question is followed by a verb, it indicates exhortation; this meaning is quite clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Why do the believing men and women, whenever such [a rumour] is heard, not think the best of one another…?' (*an-Nur:* 12) Another example for this meaning is the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Why do they not [demand of the accusers that they] produce four witnesses to prove their allegation …?' (*an-Nur:* 13) Thus, we should know that the particle *Law ma* is also used to give the same meaning; this point is perfectly clear in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Why do you not bring to us the angels if you are of the truthful ones?' (*al-Hijr:* 7).

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(1) *Narrated [Reported by Al-Bukhari]*

In the same respect, the particle *Halla* is used to give the meaning of exhortation: for example, when one says, 'Have you revised your lessons?' Furthermore, this particle in question is made up of a question word, which is *hal,* as well as a long vowel indicating exhortation. When one says, 'Have you not honoured so-and-so,' this actually encourages one to be generous to so-and-so.

As for the verse under discussion, Allah *the Exalted* tells believers that they all are not allowed to set out to war together, and thus He *Glorified is He* stresses to them to divide themselves into two groups: one of them should set out to perform jihad, while the other should remain with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to learn the teachings and instructions of Islam. Concerning the saying of Allah *the Most High* '…out of each community, a group should go out to gain understanding of the religion…' (*at-Tawba:* 122), the Arabic verb *Nafara* (go out to) is used to give the meaning of 'repulsion', yet it is used in this context to give the meaning of 'going out to war'; this meaning is deduced from the Saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…What is amiss with you that, when you are called upon, "Go forth) to war in Allah's Cause," you cling heavily to the earth? Would you content yourselves with [the comforts of] this worldly life in preference to [the good of] the life to come?! But, the enjoyment of life in this world is but a paltry thing when compared with the life to come! If you do not go forth to war … ' (*at-Tawba:* 38-39).

This raises a very good question, which is 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* use the verb *I'nfiru* (go forth to) in the context of war?' The answer is quite clear in the fact that one is prevented from going out to strive in the Cause of Allah due to the joy he feels from relaxation and happiness which he experiences while with his family and properties. This point is made in the Saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Fighting is ordained for you, even though it be hateful to you…' (*al-Baqara:* 216). It is taken for granted that this aforementioned verse of *al-Baqara* has actually told the absolute truth, for even though man dislikes the act of fighting, Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained it upon them. As a matter of fact, due to the fact that believers know with certainty the great reward prepared by Allah *the Almighty* for those who strive in jihad for His cause, they disdain all what they leave behind, for it is in no way comparable to Bounty of Allah. That is to say that the true believer leaves behind all what he owns to be eligible to receive the Reward of Allah *the Exalted*. This is actually why *jihad* in the cause of Allah is called *Nafra.* Truthfully speaking, when a believer compares the value of what he can gain from jihad in the light of the value of what holds him back from it, he will ask, 'What would make me hold onto what is lesser, as long as there is something more valuable in store?'

Thus, when the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… out of each community, a group should go out to…' (*at-Tawba:* 122) was revealed, the companions understood that this verse clarified the topic of jihad by instructing them to divide themselves into two groups: one of them to remain with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to learn the Divine Message from him, while the other to set out to perform jihad in the battlefield. Therefore, someone, upon reading this verse under discussion, may ask, 'How could it be for those who remain in Medina to acquire a deeper knowledge of religion than those who set out to perform jihad in the battlefield?!' The answer to this question is yet evident in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* mentions the word *Firqa* (community) which is divided into several groups which is exactly as it is the case with today's armies; we find today's armies divided into several battalions which are, in turn, divided into squadrons according to their different duties. In the same respect, the word *Ta'ifa* gives the meaning of 'many'.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…out of each community, a group should go out to …' (*at-Tawba:* 122) means that He *the Almighty* has divided the community of believers into two factions: one of them is supposed to go out to fight in the cause of Allah, while the other is supposed to stay with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to learn the teachings of Islam from him. This means that each of the two factions has a due role to perform.

Once again, the community of believers, according to this verse in question, is divided into two groups: one of them had to shoulder the military responsibility, while the other had to play the role of propagating the Message, as clearly mentioned in the Saying of Allah, '…to gain understanding of the religion…' (*at-Tawba:* 122). That is to say that those who stayed with him *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina to gain the understanding of religion would perform the role of disseminating the Message to those who were not present with him *peace and blessings be upon him* during that time. Then, those who came back from war were to remain in Medina with him *peace and blessings be upon him* to learn from him, while the other group was to set out to fight, and so on.

There is yet another group of scholars who have a different opinion believing that both of the two parties referred to in this verse under discussion are viewed as performing jihad. They say that those who remained with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* underwent another kind of struggle since they gained new knowledge from him and exchanged it with the warriors when they returned from the battlefield. What this means is that while the warriors returned from the battlefield with victory, this plainly indicates how Allah *the Almighty* aided the small party over the numerous host; how He supported the believers with the angels; and how He destroyed the enemy. Also, it indicates that those who stayed with him *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina would convey them the knowledge they got from him during the formers' absence. Therefore, it is clear that they both perform jihad in the Cause of Allah as if they were a firm and compact wall.

Thus, we reach the conclusion that the explanation we gave to this verse being discussed should be considered as viewing or as shedding light on the concept of jihad; yet how could we explain this verse in case it is meant to cast light on a topic other than *jihad?* The answer to this question is quite clear in the fact that the act of *jihad* entails the propagation of the Divine Way of Guidance throughout the land, a matter that requires being well versed in knowledge which tells us about the destiny of those who strived in the cause of Allah and those who stayed behind.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…out of each community, a group should go out…' (*at-Tawba:* 122) thus means some Muslims shall go to the lands around Medina to convey the teachings of Islam to the people therein. It may also be explained to mean that people from around Medina shall come to learn about the religion of Islam so that they could be able to teach their relatives.

Once again, this particular part of the aforementioned verse which is the Saying of Allah, '…out of each community, a group should go out …' may be explained to refer to those who come from places far from Medina to sit with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to acquire a deeper knowledge of religion so that they can then return to their communities and tell them about the teachings and instructions of Islam.

Therefore, we can hold the position that this verse in question either sheds light on the topic of jihad or on those who came from areas surrounding Medina to gain the understanding of religion from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that they would be able to teach their people about the instructions of Islam; this is a point which has nothing at all to do with jihad. Thus, to go out (*nafara*) to acquire a deeper knowledge of the Faith can impart the two meanings; this means that there is no difference between those who stay behind to acquire knowledge, which they then teach to those who go out to fight in the battlefield, and those who go out to fight and thereby acquire knowledge by means of the miracles or events which occur during war and which they then teach to those who do not go out to fight.

Once again, this verse may also be explained in the held opinion that it sheds light on a topic other than that of *jihad,* and thus, it means that groups of people from around the Medina came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to gather understating of religion. Therefore, we stress that Allah *the Most High* has called it *Nafra* since it entails exerting great efforts to attain the knowledge of religion, which truly requires the exertion of one's utmost efforts; furthermore, going out to strive in battle requires that one should well understand the reasons why this Divinely-revealed Way of Guidance must be defended.

Thus, we know that the word *Firqa* (community) in the saying of Allah under discussion gives the meaning of a 'group', which, in turn, is divided into individuals or factions. In this respect, we should take into account that a 'group' is composed of at least three people. As for the legitimacy of accepting the deliverance of knowledge from one person, scholars differed concerning this point, as follows: some of them hold the position that the report of one person should be accepted, while others reject this, stressing that there must be at least two persons. Yet, if we review this opinion in the light of the verse under discussion, we know that *Firqa* is composed of at least three persons, while *At-Ta'ifa* is composed of either two or one, which is why it is believed that it is allowed for one person to report and convey knowledge to his people.

Yet, some scholars do not accept this opinion, saying that the verse does not mean that only one person is he who went out to learn from Prophet Muhammad, rather, it is a faction of the community which is composed of more than one person.

As for the main reason for *An-Nafra* (the act of going out)*,* it is quite evident in the Saying of Allah, 'to gain understanding of the religion' (*at-Tawba:* 122). That is to say that acquiring deeper knowledge of Islam is the main reason behind going out, exactly as is the case when a delegation of students is sent to a developed country to learn modern sciences; yet, if any of the members of this delegation abandons its purpose by playing and fooling around, he is thus judged as not fulfilling his mission. Therefore, each one of the members of this delegation must always remember that he has come in order to acquire a deeper knowledge in a particular field of science.

As for the Arabic term *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), it linguistically means 'understanding', which is why Arabs used to say about any topic they understood as '*Faqihtu Al-A'mra',* which means that he really understood it. As a matter of fact, this applies to the understanding of any topic, whether it relates to geometry, biology, etc. Yet, we should take into account the fact that this word in question is used today to refer to the topics of religion more than anything else. The reason for this is that religion is the most important thing in life. Furthermore, the *Faqih* (the person who has a deep understanding of religion) is the one who tells people how to adhere to the Divine Way of Guidance in the light of the two orders: 'Do' and 'Do not do'.

Thus, generally speaking, *(fiqh)* linguistically means 'understanding', but it, due to the fact that it is meant with showing people what is right and what is wrong, has come to be a technical term meaning 'the understanding of the Shari'a (Islamic Law) of Allah'. At this point, we should differentiate between the following two verbs, namely *faqiha* and *faquha*; this confirms that no one is called a jurist unless he has successfully gained the knowledge of the religion of Islam in such a way that enables him to answer any question offered to him in this regard quite easily, or in other words, the matter becomes natural to him, for he has practised it so many times. As for the *faqiha,* it means that he understood (something). This is actually the difference between these two verbs.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…to gain understanding of the religion…' (*at-Tawba:* 122) thus means that that they shall learn the rulings and teachings of Islam in such a way that makes this knowledge second nature to them.

However, what if a man comes forth for a reason other than understanding the matters of religion, will he be rewarded for this? Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. If a Bedouin, upon seeing his people going out, asks them where they are going to, and, in turn, they tell him that they are going to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to learn the knowledge of religion from him, so he decides to go with them. However, he does not listen him *peace and blessings be upon him*; rather, he goes here and there to the extent that he does not make any effort to acquire deeper knowledge. Will this person be rewarded for this act, especially if we take into account the fact that the reason behind his going out to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was to learn from him?! At this point, we heavily stress that jurists do not seek fame, power or employment, rather they show people how to correctly act in accordance with the sound teachings of religion; this is a point which is quite evident in the saying of Allah *the Exalted* '…so that they can guard themselves against evil.' (*at-Tawba:* 122)

As a matter of fact, when we examine this matter of going out closely, we fully realise that it is done according to several stages. The first stage is quite clear in the Saying of Allah, '…out of each community, a group should go out …', while the second stage is manifested in the saying of Allah, '…to gain understanding of the religion …'. As for the third stage, it becomes evident in the saying of Allah, '…so that they can teach their people when they return and so that they can guard themselves against evil'.

As for those who acquire knowledge for nothing but to draw people's attention, they full under the category of those about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say: "Shall we tell you who are the greatest losers in whatever they may do? [It is] they whose labour has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this world's life, and who none the less think that they are doing good works."' (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

Thus, knowledge should be acquired for the purpose of giving tidings and warnings, so that people can guard themselves against evil.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ قَٰتِلُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ يَلُونَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡكُفَّارِ
وَلۡيَجِدُواْ فِيكُمۡ غِلۡظَةٗۚ وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

You who believe, fight the disbelievers near you and let them find you standing firm: be aware that God is with those who are mindful of Him [123] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 123)

By this verse, Allah *the Exalted* sheds light once again on the topic of *jihad.* As a result, we might wonder, 'Why did Allah separate the verse talking about *jihad* by the topic of going out to learn the knowledge of religion from Prophet Muhammad?' The answer is quite apparent in the fact that a person is not eligible to perform jihad unless he is fully aware of his reasons; this is a matter that will not be fulfilled except through acquiring deeper knowledge of religion.

Concerning these verses shedding light on the topic of *jihad,* Allah *the Most High* divided people into two groups: those who go out to fight and those who remain with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Yet, in case there is no *jihad,* they should be divided into two groups: one of them should struggle, while the other should learn the rulings of religion. Yet, these two groups shall exchange their spiritual and military knowledge in such a way that makes all of their attitudes complementary, not opposed. As a matter of fact, if this is fully achieved, believers will be then able to fight against disbelievers. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'You who believe fight the disbelievers near you …' (*at-Tawba:* 123), it means that there were people near the believers, and they were still disbelievers. Meanwhile, there were others who were far from them. Likewise, if we discuss this verse in question in the light of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… And fight against those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah, all together – just as they fight against you, [O, believers,] all together…' (*at-Tawba:* 36), we will reach the conclusion that there are priorities that must be taken into consideration in wars.

Furthermore, fighting disbelievers who are near is a means of attaining security for the forces of faith. For this reason, the commandment is given here to fight those who are near since this fighting does not require mounts or provisions necessary for long travel. In addition, you know about the condition of your nearby enemies better than the distant ones; this means that you know fully their points of strengths and weaknesses and thus how they could be defeated. Furthermore, you cannot fight against a distant enemy unless you do so first against a near one; otherwise, they both will gather their forces to make a ‘pincer movement’ to trap you, which is why it is a must to first protect our back from the near enemy. It is thus clear that there is no contradiction whatsoever between fighting a distant enemy and fighting a near enemy.

In the same respect, there is no contradiction between the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘You who believe, fight the disbelievers near you…’ (*at-Tawba:* 123) and His saying, ‘And fight against those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah, all together' since the words ‘all together’ mean ‘all of them’. However, there are priorities in this; so fight, O, believers, those nearest to you first so that you own their land and thus become stronger. Let us offer this example to clarify this point. If your enemy has a sword and you have another, but yet you take his sword; this means that you now have two swords, while he does not have any.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear to disbelievers and instructs them to take admonition of the fact that the area of their lands, by the passage of time, decreases from beneath their feet to increase the area of the land of Islam.(1) Thus, there is a very important point which is that as long as Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word ‘fight’ which entails that the act of *jihad* requires resolve, boldness and endless patience; for you might find yourself facing someone who is stronger or braver than you. Yet, we stress that if this enemy realises that you are braver and have more patience thean them, they will have no hope at all to defeat you; this point is yet proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘… and let them find you standing firm …' (*at-Tawba:* 123) which means that you, O, believers, must be firm in your fighting with them, or in other words, you should firmly and strongly strike your enemy from disbelievers.

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(1) Commenting on the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *ar-Ra‘d,* ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never yet seen how We visit the earth [with Our punishment], gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon?...’ (*ar-Ra‘d*: 41), *Ibn ‘Abbas* Allah *be pleased with them explained this to mean: ‘Have they not seen how We conquer land after land for Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him’ [Narrated by Ibn Kathir]* .

In the same respect, when your enemy tries to strike you, you should receive his blow with great endurance. Thus, you find that 'the act of being firm' is required in two different situations: when the blow goes from you to disbelievers and when it comes from them to you. What this means is that it is not enough that you strike your enemy a powerful blow, yet when your enemy returns it, you capitulate and cower. In this regard, it is stressed that Allah *the Almighty* wants you, O, believers, to be adamant when striking your opponent and adamant when receiving his blow.

This point is yet clear in the saying of Allah in the chapter of *Al-'Imarn* in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Be patient in adversity…' (*Al-'Imran:* 200). Yet, if we suppose that the enemy, in turn, shall show patience, then you, O, believers, are supposed to try to be more patient than them; this is a fact which is proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '… and vie in patience with one another …' (*Al-'Imran:* 200). In the same respect, He *the Most High* warns you not to cast aside your weapons once the battle is over since the enemy might try to attack you while you are not paying attention; He *the Almighty* says: '…and be ever ready …' (*Al-'Imran:* 200).

What this means is to be stable on earth, O, believers, so that the enemy knows that you are waiting for him if he ever tries to attack you again or even thinks about fighting you again. Thus, to be adamant and firm, you are obligated to attack, to bear hardships and to show patience and courage. Yet, if your enemy too has patience and courage, you must vie in patience with him, or in other words, you must have more patience than they. As for the Arabic word *Sabara* (to vie in patience) means to compete with one another. The word *Munafasa*, in turn, is derived from the word *Nafs*, which means 'soul'. Allah *the Most High* says: '…To that, then, let all such aspire as [are willing to] aspire to things of high account.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26) This means aspire, O people, and compete with one another for what is good. In this respect, we know that a human body might require something once or twice a day; yet, it might require another thing five or six times a day, whilst it might require a third constantly. For example, one eats three meals a day and might need to drink two or four litres of water, or more. As for breathing (*tanaffus*), he cannot do without it even for a moment, which is why it is viewed as the most crucial of all human needs.

We said before that Allah *the Almighty* due to His Infinite Mercy, has allowed some people to own the food of others. Therefore, we should take into account that man might go without food for weeks, but he cannot go without water for more than three to ten days depending on how much water he has stored in his body, and therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has not allowed anyone to own water in the same way He has allowed them to own food. Yet, as for air, He *the Almighty* due to the fact that one cannot go without it for more than a few seconds, has never allowed anyone to own it. It is as though Allah *the Most High* knew that His servants could not be trusted to look after the affairs of one another. For this reason, the Arabic word for 'breathing' is *tanaffus*. At this point, we should fully acknowledge that the process of breathing (inhaling and exhaling) is the main reason for the existence of the soul (*nafs*, which is the meeting of spirit and body.

Truthfully speaking, when you compete with the enemy, you seek to get something precious, which is to make the Word of Allah superior. In the same respect, when you vie in patience with the people of falsehood, one of them might have patience obstinately for a little while, but he will then give up since it is the nature of falsehood to pass away and vanish. This is why Allah *the Almighty* orders us to be firm when attacking the enemy along with enduring his attack when it happens.

This raises a good question: 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* ask us to be adamant with disbelievers, when He said to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before: '…for if you had been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 159)?' I say that we should differentiate between two points, which are being adamant as to having a strong argument and being hard in times of warfare. As for the affairs of ordinary life and company, one should be soft and relenting. Thus, the saying of Allah, '…and let them find you standing firm…' (*at-Tawba:* 123) indicates that being adamant is not meant to be a constant attribute, rather, it must be produced when it is needed. Therefore, we previously said that Allah *the Exalted* does not want the nature of a believer to be always adamant, to be always harsh or to be always proud, rather, He *the Most High* wants them to be as those whom He describes in His saying '… Firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another …' (*al-Fath:* 29) and His saying '… Humble towards the believers, proud towards all who deny the truth …' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54).

Allah *the Exalted* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…be aware that Allah is with those who are mindful of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 123) Do not, O, believers, imagine that you face your disbelieving enemies with your own forces and preparations, for these forces and preparations are only means which are required for you to enter the battle with a feeling of assurance. It is like when a person travels through barren desert and wilderness, or follows a dangerous path where he might encounter highwaymen; we find him, under any of these cases, carrying a weapon with him, so that he could have a feeling of reassurance. Furthermore, amassing forces and preparations for war looks like this

As for victory, it comes from the divine aid sent by Allah *the Almighty*. Truthfully speaking, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* is with those who are conscious of Him and is on their side, He will surely provide them with His Aid; this is a point which is proven by the saying of Allah, '…Allah is with those who are mindful of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 123) This means to take into account that the righteous in this regard are those who are adamant against the enemy. Thus, we should know that someone might be adamant for the sake of battle-spoils, so he fights the disbeliever fiercely, and the heart of this disbeliever might be ready to accept faith, to the extent that he might say, 'I submit myself to Allah. I surrender!' Yet, the one who fights this disbeliever might take a fancy to his mount and consider it as battle-spoil for himself.

Therefore, he should take admonition from Allah's Words: '… Allah is with those who are mindful of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 123), for if someone surrenders to him, he must take the person captive, and he must not harm him or seize his belongings as battle-spoils; the truth is that he did not go out to fight simply in order to gain spoils or to have the high status of a warrior in his community. Rather, one must fight when fighting is required, and he must do so with the proper spiritual conduct of those who are conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* and one must fight to make the Word of Allah the uppermost(1). It is at this point that Allah *the Almighty* will be with you, for: '… Allah is with those who are mindful of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 123) Thus, one's being harsh does not mean that harshness became his natural way of being, rather one's enemy should find him harsh when harshness is required. However, if harshness is not required, then his nature should be lenient and gentle.

Therefore, they say, 'The real man is the one who shows bravery in war and mildness in peacetime, and the best of you is the one who is valiant in battle and childlike at home.' So his harshness with the enemy does not continue when he goes home to his wife and children, since this entails directing his energy the wrong way.

This is how we understand the Allah's saying: 'You who believe fight the disbelievers near you and let them find you standing firm. Be aware that Allah is with those who are mindful of Him.' (*at-Tawba:* 123) What this means is that you should be harsh in times of war when this is needed because war requires hardness and harshness, but you should beware of using this to your own advantage, rather, you should use it for Allah's Cause instead, so that He will be with you.(2)

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari narrated that a Bedouin came and said, 'O Prophet of* Allah*, one man fights for the spoils of war; another fights that he may be remembered, and another fights that he may see his (high) position (achieved as a result of his valour in fighting). Which of these is fighting in the cause of* Allah*?' The Prophet Muhammad said: 'Who fights so that the Word of Allah is exalted is fighting in the way of* Allah*.' [Narrated by Bukhari (123) and Muslim (1904)].*

(2) *Mu'az Ibn Jabal narrated that Prophet Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him *said: 'Campaigns are of two types. As for the one who seek the Face of Allah, obeys the imam, spends what is precious to him, is easy-going with his Companion and avoids mischief, when he is asleep and when he is awake, it will all bring reward. But as for the one who fights to show off, and he disobeys the imam and does mischief in the land, he will not come back the same as when he left' [Narrated by Ahmed (5/234), Abu Dawud (2512) and An-Nasa'i (6/49)]*

وَإِذَا مَآ أُنزِلَتۡ سُورَةٞ فَمِنۡهُم مَّن يَقُولُ أَيُّكُمۡ زَادَتۡهُ هَٰذِهِۦٓ إِيمَٰنٗاۚ
فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ فَزَادَتۡهُمۡ إِيمَٰنٗا وَهُمۡ يَسۡتَبۡشِرُونَ ١٢٤

When a sura is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, 'Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?' It certainly does strengthen the faith of those who believe and they rejoice [124] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 124)

He says: 'When a chapter of the Quran is revealed.' (*at-Tawba:* 124) Now we know there are the Arabic words *nazala* (to come down), *anzala* (to send down) and *nazzala* (to send down gradually); also, *anzala* is a transitive verb. The Quran came down from the Preserved Tablet to the lower heaven all at once, and then Allah *the Most High* and sent it down gradually(1). Therefore, the verb *Nazzal* describes how all the parts of the Quran were successively sent down; the entire Quran was sent down all at once to the Preserved Tablet, and then Allah *the Almighty* sent it down gradually when Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* delivered it to Prophet Muhammad *peace an blessings be upon him.*

There is a verse which mentions both how Allah *the Exalted* sent down the Quran to the lower heaven and how Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* then brought it down to Prophet Muhammad *peace an blessings be upon him.* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We sent down the Quran (*Anzala*) with the truth, and with the truth it has come down *(Nazal)*.' (*al-Isra':* 105) In another verse, He says: 'The Trustworthy Spirit brought it down.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193)

In the verse being discussed, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When a chapter of the Quran is revealed.' (*at-Tawba:* 124); the Arabic word *sura* (a chapter) means a section of Quran which is bounded in a certain way. A chapter begins with 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy', and then continues until another chapter begins after it with 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, and the Giver of Mercy'. The word is derived from the Arabic word *sura* which means 'a wall', i.e. something which marks the boundary of a place.(2)

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(1) According to the incidents

(2) Terminologically, *As-Sura* (the chapter) includes some verses of the Quran with a beginning and an end. The least chapter consists of three verses and every *Sura* (chapter) is a miracle and a sign of Allah. There are long and short chapters, but a short chapter like Al-Kawthar which consists of three verses, shares the same miraculous nature with *al-Baqara*. You can find the details in *Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum Al-Quran* for Az-Zarkashi (1/263-265).

Does Allah *the Exalted* mean the revelation of an entire chapter of the Quran or just the revelation of any particular part of it? What is meant is the revelation of any particular part of the Quran.

The verse continues: '... Some [hypocrites] say, "Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?"' (*at-Tawba:* 124) This verse refers to the hypocrites who apostatised from the religion of Islam. We, the believers, know that the Quran is true that it is from Allah *Glorified is He* and that it has a captivating impact, effectively illuminating and purifying the soul. Even disbelievers testified to this when they heard the Quran.(1) When believers heard it, they were utterly captivated by it because they were prepared to receive it, as all actions are not completely dependent on the doer, but also on the recipient of the action. For example – and Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond compare – if you take a hammer, and hammer down a piece of iron, it becomes thinner and its surface area increases. However, if you use the hammer on a hard piece of steel which is stronger than the hammer itself, it will not affect it.

Therefore, the act of hammering is one thing, and the reception of this hammering is another; in this way, the doer of the action must have a responsive receiver, and this receiver should receive the thing without any feeling of animosity towards it in his heart. If someone wants to hear the Quran, he must first remove from his heart any animosity against it. Then, he should place both his feelings for the Quran in his heart and anything against it outside his heart, but he should listen to both of them equally, and whatever seems best to his heart after this, he should accept it.

However, if he receives the Quran with hatred he already has for it in his heart, it will not have any effect on him; this is similar to the position of the hypocrites who heard the Quran and said, ‘It did not affect us.’

The reason for this is that the heart has a limited capacity, and it cannot contain both a thing and its opposite. So, do not fill your heart with hatred for the religion of Islam and then say, ‘I heard the Quran, but it did not affect me.’ In such a situation, we say to you, ‘Remove all what is against the Quran from your heart and also place the Quran outside your heart, and then look at both stances. Then, see which one of them is most pleasing to your heart.’ However, if you are already full of feelings against the Quran and then you say, ‘The Quran does not affect me’, this means that you have not paid attention to the difference between the doer of an action and its recipient, nor to the fact that your heart has a limited capacity and a limited ability to take things in.

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(1) *Among them was Al-Walid Ibnul-Mugheera whom the disbelievers tried to persuade to describe the Quran as soothsaying, the words of a mad person, poetry or the talk of a sorcerer. But he said, ‘By Allah it overflows with sweet clarity; it is fruitful at its lowest and prodigious at its highest. And if you tried to say something like this, it would be proven false’ [Sirat An-Nabi for Ibn Hisham (1/270)].*

A thin-necked bottle will not take the water in if you dip the bottle into it since the thin neck does not allow the air inside to escape, nor does it help the water to enter, as the water cannot enter until the air escapes. Therefore, the neck of the bottle must be wide enough to allow the air to escape and the water to enter, and then you will see bubbles of air rise to the top of the neck. Furthermore, if this is the case with material matters, then it will be the same with spiritual matters which resemble material ones.

So, take all what contradicts the truth from your heart and place both the truth and falsehood outside it, and then consider them both. When you do this, you will have no option but to accept the truth.(1) Allah *the Exalted* describes those who persist with their disbelief by saying: ‘… Allah has sealed their hearts so they do not understand.’ (*at-Tawba:* 93)

In other words, what is outside these hearts cannot get inside them and what is inside these hearts cannot get outside them. Therefore, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has sealed their hearts, these hearts will not open up to faith and will continue to harbour disbelief. Thus, if any of these disbelievers or hypocrites listens to the Quran and is not captivated by its eloquence, this is due to his inability to behold the meanings and values therein.(2) When a person listens to the Quran with a pure soul that does not contain anything to disturb the attraction and rhetorical force of the Quran, it captivates him, and his soul finds peace in it.

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(1) This is in conformity with Allah's Words: ‘Will they not contemplate the Quran? Do they have locks on their hearts?’ (*Muhammad:* 24) So their hearts have been locked whilst containing other than Allah *Glorified is He* and other than His Word, and therefore they do not contemplate the Quran

(2) *Ibn Ishaq relates in his (Sira) that some of the Qurayshi disbelievers went by night to listen secretly to Prophet Muhammad's recitation of the Quran while he was praying in his house, and each of them stayed there to listen to him without knowing that the others were there. When dawn broke, they left and encountered one another in the*=

This is how 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* first read the Quran. He was a dead set against Islam and went to his sister to check if she had really embraced the religion of Islam. When he discovered her conversion to it, he struck her and made blood flow from her, which made his feelings towards her soften. Then, he read the Quran and it settled in his heart.(1) Thus, to receive the Quran, you must first remove what is in your mind.

When a new chapter was sent down from above, a believer accepted it with a pure heart(2); as for disbelievers and hypocrites, some of them said, 'Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?' (*at-Tawba:* 124) This verse tells us that we have two different groups: one that reads, and the other that listens. Also, we can understand from the context of the verse that those who asked this question posed it to two groups: those who had weak faith or had newly converted to Islam and those who were hypocrites. These two groups had not yet removed their disbelief, or some of it, from their hearts, and their receptivity towards faith was not yet confirmed. Allah *Glorified is He* says about some of them: 'Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once

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= *road, and censured one another and pledged never to do that again – but they each returned to listen to the Quran several further times. One of them, namely Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq, said to Abu Sufyan, 'O Abu Hanzalah, what is your opinion about what you had heard from Muhammad?' He replied: 'O Abu Tha'laba, by Allah, I heard some things I know and whose meaning is clear to me, and I heard other things which I do not understand.' And Al-Akhnas asked Abu Jahl the same question, and he replied, 'What did I hear? We competed with the tribe of Babu Abd Manaf for honour: they fed food, and we fed food; they bore the burdens of others, and we bore them; they gave, and we gave, until when we were running equal, knee to knee, like two mares in a race, they said, 'One of our men is a prophet; revelations come to him from Heaven!' And when shall we ever attain to the like of this? By Allah, we shall never believe in him.' (Sira ibn Hisham, 1/315-316).*

(1) Ibn Hisham mentioned the story of 'Umar's conversion to Islam in his *Sira* (1/343, 346).

(2) Allah *Glorified is He* says in this regard: 'Allah has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings: a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons; that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of Allah: such is Allah's guidance. He guides with it whoever He will. ' (*az-Zumar*: 23)

they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, "What was that he just said?"…' (*Muhammad:* 16). He also says: '… But the ears of the disbelievers are heavy; they are blind to it...' (*Fussilat:* 44).

Therefore, the doer of an action is one thing, and the recipient of it is another. They heard the Quran which is implied by Allah's Words: 'When a chapter of the Quran is revealed...' (*at-Tawba:* 124) and the context of the verse indicates to us that a whisper was heard from some of them: '...Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?...' (*at-Tawba:* 124). This whisper was said in a sarcastic tone, and the one who said it meant to imply that hearing the Quran had not strengthened him in any way, nor had it weakened him. So, he whispered to his fellow hypocrite, or to those whose faith was weak, saying, '... Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?...' (*at-Tawba:* 124). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* replies to this psychological matter and teaches us that He has divided the people into two groups: those who are hypocrites or disbelievers whose disbelief increases when they hear the Quran,(1) and the second group are believers whose belief increases when they hear the Quran.(2) So the doer is one thing, and the recipient is something else.

The scholars have differed about this verse and held different stances regarding Allah's Words: 'When a chapter is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, "Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?"...' (*at-Tawba:* 124), for some of them say that faith decreases and increases, whilst others say that it does not. The scholars of theology battled over this point. The intelligent people do not come into conflict over something unless they each understand it from a different point of view, some of them seeing it in one way, and some in another.(3)

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(1) As Allah *Glorified is He* says in the next verse: 'but, as for the perverse at heart, each new chapter adds further to their perversity. They die disbelieving. ' (*at-Tawba*: 125)

(2) As Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'true believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe when Allah is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord.' *(al-Anfal:* 3)

(3) Those who maintained that faith does not increase or decrease looked at the linguistic meaning of faith that is to accept and belief in something, which cannot decrease. As for those who held that faith increases and decreases, they looked at it as the belief of the heart, the saying of the tongue and the acts of the limbs. The righteous acts of the limbs increase the meaning of faith in the heart of the servant, but the misdeeds decrease his faith, that is, they badly affect its firmness in the heart. Look for the books of theology for more details.

What those who say that faith does not increase or decrease mean by ‘faith’ is that faith which settles in the heart, namely faith in Allah besides whom there is no deity, and faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as His Messenger, cannot increase or decrease. For example, ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Even were the veil to be removed from my sight, my certitude could not increase.’

As for the scholars who say that faith can increase or decrease, what they mean by ‘faith’ is the practical application of the requirements of faith as each verse requires that those who believe in it should, firstly, have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and then act in accordance with what the verse demands of them.

All of the Muslims believe in Allah *the Almighty,* but when it comes to the individual details of practice, we find that there are some who observe twenty of them, whilst others observe thirty. However, as for the basis of faith, namely faith in the Oneness of Allah that only after which can a man receive his religious responsibilities, it does not increase or decrease.

When these hypocrites said, ‘Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?’ (*at-Tawba:* 124), did they say this secretly or openly? They must have said it secretly, but then Allah *Glorified is He* has exposed them. Also, it could have been enough for them to know that Allah *the Exalted* informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of all that they concealed, but they were skilled in obstinate debate. Therefore, when they said, ‘Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it’ (*at-Tawba:* 124), Allah *Glorified is He* responded: ‘It certainly does strengthen the faith of those who believe and they rejoice.’ (*at-Tawba:* 124) When a person ‘rejoices’ (*istabshara*), this means that his joy lights up his skin (*bashara*) so that it gleams with happiness and glee; all of these are signs of rejoicing. The person who rejoices in a verse revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* is the one who understands something new from this verse which brings happiness to his soul; therefore, he is content to see new religious assignments being revealed because they will increase the reward he receives. Likewise, he is completely different to the one who hates to see a new ruling come down from Allah *the Most High*. This is the meaning of their rejoicing.

As for the others, Allah *Glorified is He* says about them:

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَتْهُمْ رِجْسًا إِلَىٰ
رِجْسِهِمْ وَمَاتُوا۟ وَهُمْ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

But, as for the perverse at heart, each new sura adds further to their perversity. They die disbelieving [125]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 125)

Literally, the Arabic word *Rijs*⁽¹⁾ means ‘filth’ or something disgusting, and filth can be both physical and spiritual. The disgusting nature of carrion, for example, is physical because its blood remains in it after it dies, and as we know, there are two different stages to the flow of blood: one before it is purified and one after it is purified. Before the purification of the blood, it flows to the lungs and kidneys, which cleanse it of the harmful things that enter it as a result of the various reactions of the body parts. Once it is purified by the lungs and kidneys, it becomes clean.

Thus, when an animal dies, both its clean and unclean blood remain within it, which is why we slaughter the animal before we eat it, and we let out its clean blood along with the unclean so that the unclean blood does inflict us with diseases. Therefore, carrion is considered to be filthy (*rijs*), and intoxicants are also physically impure and filthy. There is also spiritual filth, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and [divining with] arrows are (*rijs*) repugnant acts –Satan’s doing’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 90).

Thus, there are physical filth and spiritual filth, and the word *(rijs)* also means ‘disbelief’, and it can also mean the whispering and insinuations of Satan. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Remember when He gave you sleep as a reassurance from Him and sent down water from the sky to cleanse you, to remove Satan’s pollution (*Rijs*) from you, to make your hearts strong and your feet firm.’ (*al-Anfal:* 11)

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(1) *Ar-Rijs* is what is physically and spiritually disgusting and filthy, and what is legally abhorred is also called *Rijs* and it is synonymous with the word *Rijz* and both of them are used to refer to the punishment Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘You are already set to receive your Lord’s loathing (Rijs) and anger..’ (*al-A'raf*: 71) He also says: ‘But, as for the perverse at heart, each new chapter adds further to their perversity (Rijs)...’ (*at-Tawba*: 125). And He says: ‘They would say, whenever a plague (Rijs) struck them...(*al-A'raf*: 134).

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But, as for the perverse at heart, each new chapter adds further to their perversity (*Rijs*)...’ (*at-Tawba:* 125).

Their disbelief in Allah and His verses adds further to their perversity so that their disbelief becomes compounded. Thus, we find that glad tidings are given to believers, and a warning is given to disbelievers because their disbelief increases and they end up dying whilst still adhering to it.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّهُمْ يُفْتَنُونَ فِي كُلِّ عَامٍ مَّرَّةً أَوْ
مَرَّتَيْنِ ثُمَّ لَا يَتُوبُونَ وَلَا هُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ﴿١٢٦﴾

Can they not see that they are afflicted once or
twice a year? Yet they neither repent nor take
heed [126] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 126)

Allah's saying ‘Can they not see...’ (*at-Tawba:* 126) means: do the hypocrites not notice their history with Islam and how they are tested once a year with calamities and once with exposure? We find that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw them, he would expel some of them from the rows of the prayer by saying: ‘Be gone, so-and-so, for you are a hypocrite!’(1), and then after a few months this situation would be repeated. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* reminds them that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exposes them every year once or twice.

The basic meaning of *(fitna)* is ‘trial’ or ‘test’ which in itself is not a bad thing, but it can be bad depending on the result which comes from it. No test is ever bad in itself, but what is bad for a man is to fail the test. Thus, a trial or a test is not bad in itself, but what is bad is that the result of the test is not as you would like. The hypocrites were tested when they saw the Muslims gain victories despite their hypocrisy and the plans they made against the Muslims. They should have realised that they could not impede the progress of Islam since it is supported by Allah *the Exalted*. They should have also reflected and repented in order to attain to the goodness of Islam, for its goodness would continue in spite of them, and the loss would not be for Islam, but for those who disbelieved in it.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (5/273) and Al-Bayhaqi (6/286)*

Also, we know that the first people to embrace Islam were the weak, and later the powerful people began to embrace it; this is the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* in the universe. Indeed, we find in the beginning of the Message that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself was required to believe that he was a messenger; and just as you say, ‘I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also had to say, ‘I testify that here is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’ Even the Generous Creator *the Almighty* has declared His belief in His Own Self first of all, as He says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18) Thus, the first one to testify to the true Divinity was Allah Himself, and He testified to His Own Self. He mentions this to us so that we believe that He continues to manifest His Self-sustenance and Omnipotence by the Word ‘Be!’ knowing that His creation will inevitably respond. It was necessary for Him to tell us that He is the first to believe that He is the First and that He is the True God so that if He issues a Commandment of compulsion to any being, His Command will inevitably come to fruition. He has no fear of commanding anything, and therefore He says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18); this is a testimony of the Self for the Self; and then the angels testified according to what they witnessed first-hand, along with those endowed with knowledge testified according to what they perceived by means of evidence. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* testified that he was the Messenger of Allah, he believed that he was a messenger. Had he not believed in his own Message, he would have been afraid to convey it to us. Also, once he believed that he truly was the Messenger of Allah, he was commanded by Allah *Glorified is He* ‘to warn his nearest kinsfolk.’ (*ash-Shu‘ara’:* 214)

Afterward, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* continued to call to Islam and convey the signs and verses of Allah *Glorified is He* until the verses instructing him to defend the religion were revealed, and then Allah *the Most High* said: ‘You who believe fight the disbelievers near you...’ (*at-Tawba:* 123).

Therefore, in the beginning, it was necessary for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to believe that he truly was a Messenger and to deliver the Call of Islam to the Quraysh and the rest of Arabia. Afterward, his call reached as far as the Levant by way of reports rather than actual preachers; then his companions took the Call of Islam to all the corners of the earth. Also, letters which were sent to various leaders(1) had a symbolic significance and showed to the world that the Prophet Muhammad's Call to Islam is a universal call unlike those of the Messengers *peace be upon them* who came before him, for each one of them knew that his call was limited to his own community.(2)

As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* his Message has various stages: first of all, he believed in himself, then he called his near kin, then all of the Quraysh, then all of Arabia, then the Levant and then his Message was sent by letter to all the monarchs of the world. Finally, his *Ummah* (followers of Islam) were then charged with the task of bearing the Message and spreading it everywhere, along with its proof, the Quran.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* willed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* finalise His Messages, and He sent him with Islam which overcame whole civilisations, even though he came from an unlettered community who knew nothing so that no one would say that Islam is only a 'civilizational movement'. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to the people with a way of guidance that overcame the great civilisations which existed at the time, the Persians and the Byzantines, both at the same time.

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(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him sent letters to the monarchs around Arabia like Caesar of Byzantin, Khosrau of Persia and Muqawqis of Egypt to called them to Islam. He sent the letters with some of his Companions and said to them: '* Allah *has sent me as a mercy for all people so convey the Message on my behalf may Allah have Mercy on you.' [Sira Ibn Hisham (4/607)]*

(2) *This is something specially given to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him as Jabir Ibn Abdullah Al-Ansari narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ' I have been conferred upon five (things) which were not granted to anyone before me (and these are): Every apostle was sent particularly to his own people, whereas I have been sent to all the red and the black the spoils of war have been made lawful for me, and these were never made lawful to anyone before me, and the earth has been made sacred and pure and mosque for me, so whenever the time of prayer comes for any one of you he should pray wherever he is, and I have been supported by awe (by which the enemy is overwhelmed) from the distance (which one takes) one month to cover and I have been granted intercession.' [Narrated by Bukhari (335) and Muslim (521)]*

Thus, the Arabs before Islam lived in a tribal society in which the chief of the tribe governed randomly without any social system, and they knew nothing of anything. They were a nomadic people who had no kind of political or economic system; the home of every one of them was found with his camels, his tent and a few simple tools to make his life easier. Each group would settle in a place where there was grass and water, and once the sheep and cattle had eaten all the grass they would move on to another place, after looking at the sky to see where the clouds were headed and where the rain would fall. Later, these very people went out into the world to convey the Message of Islam, and had they been attached to a home, a house or a specific place, it would have been hard for them to leave, but they were accustomed to travelling around.

The verse which we are currently examining exposes the weak faith of some and the hypocrisy of others, for Allah says: ‘Can they not see that they are afflicted once or twice a year? Yet they neither repent nor take heed.’ (*at-Tawba:* 126). What this means is that they should have repented or taken heed, along with realising that their standing against Islam had never, and would never, impede it, and that they would lose out and be defeated – so it would have been better for each one of them to reflect to himself and see that it was in his own interest to embrace faith.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا مَآ أُنزِلَتۡ سُورَةٞ نَّظَرَ بَعۡضُهُمۡ إِلَىٰ بَعۡضٍ هَلۡ يَرَىٰكُم مِّنۡ
أَحَدٖ ثُمَّ ٱنصَرَفُواْۚ صَرَفَ ٱللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُم بِأَنَّهُمۡ قَوۡمٞ لَّا يَفۡقَهُونَ ١٢٧

Whenever a sura is revealed, they look at each other and say,
‘Is anyone watching you?’ and then they turn away – God has
turned their hearts away because they are people who do not
use their reason [127] (The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 127)

Allah *the Almighty* says in a previous verse: 'When a chapter of the Quran is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, "Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?"...' (*at-Tawba:* 124). This means that these hypocrites felt constrained and surrounded, along with being afraid to speak since they lived amongst the Muslims; however, they were not entirely bereft of ways of expressing their disbelief. One of them would roll his eyes, and another would gesture with his hand. When they asked before, ‘Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it’ (*at-Tawba:* 124), this question was related to religious assignments; as for the verse which we are currently examining, it does not refer to new assignments.

They wanted to say something, but they could not say it in words, so they said it with their eyes and their glances, and though their looks implied the words: ‘Is anyone watching you?’ (*at-Tawba:* 127). You might have seen someone do this as he listened to someone give a sermon which contained things he did not like; the reaction on his face would convey his displeasure. Therefore, there were looks, and there was speech. Also, they wondered, ‘Is anyone watching you?’ which is like a person saying, ‘Do I have any money at all?’ which implies that he does not have what can be called money. These words are more explicit than simply saying, ‘Can anyone see you?’

Allah's Words, 'Is anyone watching you?’ (*at-Tawba:* 127) show that they were afraid that someone would identify them, and after this, one finds that they attempt to sneak away to avoid listening to the Quran or Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since they cannot bear to keep on listening as the logic of truth silences falsehood. Since each of them is unable to believe in the truth or to declare his disbelief, they simply withdraw and leave. Therefore, we find that some of them said before: '…The disbelievers say, "Do not listen to this Quran. Drown it in frivolous talk. You may gain the upper hand!"' (*Fussilat:* 26) They said this because a disbeliever or a hypocrite might temporarily be distracted from his falsehood, and faith might creep into his heart, just as a believer might be temporarily distracted from the truth, but then he seeks Allah's Forgiveness for it.

If a disbeliever or a hypocrite momentarily becomes heedless of his disbelief or hypocrisy and faith begins to come to him, he becomes afraid and says to those who are like him, ‘We should tell those who are with us not to listen to the Quran.’ Why is this so? This is so due to they not being momentarily distracted from their hypocrisy, for if that were to happen, faith might enter their hearts. Therefore, they said, ‘Do not listen to this Quran’ (*Fussilat:* 26), and they did not stop there, for they actually told their followers to talk frivolously about it, i.e. to speak over it: ‘... Drown it in frivolous talk. You may gain the upper hand!’ (*Fussilat:* 26) Therefore, they could only gain the upper hand by refraining from listening to the Quran or by making noise when they heard the Quran so that it would not penetrate their hearts.(1)

In this verse, Allah *the Most High* says about these hypocrites: 'Whenever a chapter of the Quran is revealed, they look at each other and say, "Is anyone watching you?"...' (*at-Tawba:* 127).

They would say this because, as hypocrites, they had previously claimed to be Muslims, and they claimed that they practised the rulings of Islam better than everyone else. They would also insist on standing in the front row at the communal prayer in order to absolve themselves of any suspicion of hypocrisy. A proverb says: 'The dubious man almost seems to cry out, "Take me!"' Also, they would look at one another and ask, '"Is anyone watching you?" and then they turn away...' (*at-Tawba:* 127) because they could not bear to sit with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the believers.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verse by saying: ‘Allah has turned their hearts away because they are people who do not use their reason.’ (*at-Tawba:* 127) This was a result of how they turned away psychologically by adopting hypocrisy, so He has aided them in this, for as long as they did not know the value of faith, they stayed away of it. Allah *the Exalted* only turned their hearts away since they chose this so that no one would say, ‘Allah is the One Who has turned their hearts away. So, what did they do wrong?’ No, they turned away themselves by means of the free will which Allah *Glorified is He* created in them, so He has turned their hearts away. Why is this? The reason is that they are people who do not use their reason, or in other words, they do not understand.(2)

Understanding is the first stage of a human being, and there is a difference between understanding and knowledge. Understanding means that one possesses the ability to comprehend the nature of things by means of an aptitude he possesses; knowledge, on the other hand, means that one might not understand something himself, but someone else understands and teaches him. He might know a detail not by himself, rather, his teacher tells him of it. However, someone might say, ‘If someone cannot grasp the truth, then what is his sin?’ We say that the one who does not understand must accept to be taught, but those like this neither understood nor sought to be taught, and they persistently refused to accept any knowledge.

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(1) This was the customs of the polytheists and the disbelievers with every revelation coming from the heaven. The people of Nuh (Noah), for example, about whom he said, ‘Every time I call them, so that You may forgive them, they thrust their fingers into their ears, cover their heads with their garments, persist in their rejection, and grow more insolent and arrogant.’ (*Nuh*: 7)

(2) As in Allah's Words: ‘When they went astray, Allah left their hearts to stray: Allah does not guide rebellious people. ’ (*as-Saff*: 5)

After this comes the conclusion of the chapter of *at-Tawba* which began with a declaration of disavowal: ‘A release by Allah and His Messenger from the treaty you [believers] made with the idolaters [is announced].’ (*at-Tawba:* 1) Furthermore, this chapter told us about different situations pertaining to disbelievers and hypocrites, and the difficult responsibilities of struggle in Allah's Cause. Allah *the Exalted* has wanted to end the chapter with a justification of all these aforementioned hardships, so He has made it clear to us: Beware of abandoning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or making him angry; for if he conveys unto you things which are difficult, you must take these difficult things as coming from someone who is beloved to you, not from someone who is an enemy to you.

For example, if you see your enemy strike your son and wound him, this will be most grievous to you because he is your enemy. However, if you take your son to the doctor and the doctor decides to operate on the child, you accept this in order to save your child from danger. Therefore, there is a difference between the wound your enemy inflicts upon your son and that inflicted by the doctor even though the pain he feels is the same. Also, do not refuse things which are difficult for you simply because they are difficult, rather, first of all, you must know the identity of the one who burdens you with this difficulty; thus, if it is your Lord, then your Lord is Merciful towards you, and if it is Prophet Muhammad, then accept his commandments and obey them because they come from someone who loves you and wants the best for you.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَقَدْ جَآءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ
حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُم بِٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢٨﴾

A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him: he is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers [128]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 128)

We can observe here that Allah *the Most High* ascribes the act of coming to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and does not say, ‘I have sent you a Messenger.’ We all know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come of his own accord, and he never claimed that this momentous matter was of his own devising. Rather, he was created with all the spiritual virtues which made him worthy of receiving the Message. As soon as the Revelation came down to him, he possessed the intrinsic motivation to convey it, and he did not need anyone to motivate him to do so. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to affirm that indeed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did come forth on his own, for this coming forth was not instigated by him in the first place, rather, he was a Messenger sent forth by Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* uses the word ‘has come’ in this verse.

Thus, the word ‘a Messenger’ indicates that he did not send himself forth, whilst the words ‘has come’ indicate that his spiritual preparation made him actively involved. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* yearned to struggle in the cause of the Message and to strive in order to fulfil it.

Thus, you should not view the things he has brought to you as though they are difficulties which wear you out, rather look at from whom they have come. If they are from the Originator Who sent all the Messengers, then the Lord is Merciful, and He has created you out of nothing and sustained you when you had nothing. Likewise, He bestows His Blessings to you even when you disobey Him, and when you disobey Him, He loves those who conceal your sin(1) so that you are neither the subject nor the object of suspicion. Yet, you must accept your assignments as they have come from one who is beloved to you, so you should not say that they are difficulties. For example – and Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond compare – you tell your son to revise his lessons, and sometimes you make him review them against his will. Furthermore, you might take hold of your son's arm so that the doctor can inject him with the medicine, which Allah *Glorified is He* made a means for his cure. Therefore, do not judge things by what they bring you, rather judge them by the One Who decreed them for you, in other word, Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) This is one of the rights of the Muslim on his Muslim brother and Allah *Glorified is He* is pleased with this act. 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'A Muslim is a brother of=

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves...' (*at-Tawba:* 128). This means that Allah *the Almighty* has not sent you a man who was a stranger to you, rather, he sent you one of your own with whom you could communicate. Allah's saying 'from among yourselves' has many meanings. It could mean 'from your species', such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says about *Hawwa'* (Eve): 'People, be mindful of your Lord, who has created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate...' (*an-Nisa':* 1).

What this means is that He has created *Hawwa'* (Eve) from the same human race as Adam *peace be upon him*. Thus, no one should say, 'Why has not Allah sent a human being to be His Messenger', for Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen a human beings to be His Messengers due to His mercy for mankind. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emphasised his own humanity more than once, and on many occasions.(1) The Quran also

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= another Muslim. So he should not oppress him nor should he hand him over to (his Satan or to his self which is inclined to evil). Whoever fulfils the needs of his brother, Allah will fulfil his needs; whoever removes the troubles of his brother, Allah will remove one of his troubles on the Day of Resurrection; and whoever covers up the fault of a Muslim, Allah will cover up his fault on the Day of Resurrection.' *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2442) and Muslim (2580)] We must understand that covering up the fault does not mean to keep silent about the transgression of someone who habitually sins rather, it is to cover up the sin of someone that happened and ended.*

(1) *Allah Glorified is He says: "Say [Prophet], 'I am only a mortal like you, [but] it has been revealed to me that your God is One....'" (Fussilat: 6). And Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him alluded to this many times, such as his saying which Umm Salam Allah be pleased with her related: "Prophet Muhammad heard some people quarrelling at the door of his dwelling, so he went out to them and said, 'I am only a human being, and litigants with cases of dispute come to me, and someone of you may* =

says: 'The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, "How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?"' (*al-Isra':* 94).

So, Allah *the Most High* cannot be criticised for choosing a human being, Muhammad, to be His Messenger, rather, He should be thanked for it since He has sent someone who was part of the human race so that he would be able to communicate with mankind, and it would be easy for them to follow his example. Therefore, He says: 'Say, "If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger."' (*al-Isra':* 95). In addition, His Words 'from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128) also mean 'from Arabs', for He has not chosen him from the Persians or the Byzantines, rather, He has chosen for you someone who knew your natures best. 'from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128) could also mean from the same tribe to which the members of the Quraysh belong. Furthermore, 'from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128) could mean one whose past is known to you, and you know him to be worthy of bearing the trusts of Heaven to earth, just as he bore all your worldly trusts on earth. Since this is his character, he is well able to convey the trust of Heaven to earth, and you yourselves named him 'The Truthful, Trustworthy One', and 'The Honest One'. All of these precursors indicated how essential it was to believe in him as a Messenger from Allah *Glorified is He*. Likewise, if the way he had always behaved with you made you feel proud, then his coming as Messenger should only increase your own esteem and raise your own status. You are the people of the Quraysh and of Mecca, and you have authority over the Sacred House, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to increase the area you authority over, for if you were the masters of the Sacred House before he was sent as a Prophet, you would become the masters of the whole world after the beginning of his Mission.

= *happen to be more eloquent (in presenting his case) than the other, whereby I may consider that he is truthful and pass a judgment in his favour. If ever I pass a judgment in favour of somebody whereby he takes a Muslim's right unjustly, then whatever he takes is nothing but a piece of Fire, and it is up to him to take or leave.'" [Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2458) and Muslim (1713)] He also said: 'I am a human being and I have made this term with my Lord, the Exalted and Glorious: For any servant amongst Muslims whom I curse or scold, make that a source of purity and reward.'[Narrated by Muslim (2602)]*

Allah *the Exalted* also says: 'for it is a reminder for you and your people: you will all be questioned.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44) Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Prophet for the whole world and a member of the Arabs and of the Quraysh, and therefore, they should have rejoiced in his Message and aided it. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has not willed this to be the case because the Quraysh had grown accustomed to having mastery over the Arabs, and this had made the Arabs wary of the Quraysh, and all the tribes of Arabia feared them and held them in awe and dreaded them. All the Arabs needed to make the pilgrimage to the *Ka'ba*, and during the pilgrimage, all the tribes were present on Qurayshi land; thus, all the Arabs protected the caravans of the Quraysh, and no tribe would ever attack them. So, their caravans would come and go in peace to the north and the south, and no tribe would ever stand in their way nor threaten them.

Furthermore, the Quraysh derived all this prestige and awe from their service to Allah's Sacred House. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* willed to prevent Abraha from destroying the House so that the power of the Quraysh would be preserved. Had the Sacred House been destroyed, and the site of the pilgrimage relocated to Yemen, as Abraha intended, then from whence would the Quraysh have derived their power thereafter? Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says about Abraha and his people: 'He made them [like] cropped stubble.' (*al-Fil:* 5) Furthermore, He follows this by saying: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys.' (*Quraysh:* 1, 2) As long as Allah *Glorified is He* has willed this, then He has commanded in the next verse: 'So let them worship the Lord of this House Who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.' (*Quraysh:* 3, 4)

Allah *the Almighty* has willed to send Muhammad as His Messenger to call first of all upon the leaders of the Quraysh and the tribe which possessed prestige and inspired dread. He has willed that the call of faith be proclaimed to the ears of those who ruled Arabia and were feared by all the tribes therein, lest it would be said, 'Muhammad has sought out a weak minority of people and proclaimed his call to them.' No, rather, his call was directed at the chieftains, the leaders and the foolish people of the Quraysh; thus, when they rejected his call, he emigrated and was then given permission to fight them. Islam was not given victory by means of these leaders, rather, the weak were the first to believe in Islam. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* migrated to Medina and victory came from there.

Had victory come by means of the leaders, people would have said, ‘Islam has prevailed by a people who are accustomed to leadership, and when one of them came forth and claimed to be a Messenger, they wanted to use him to gain more power, not only over Arabia but also over the whole world. So, it was partisan loyalty to Muhammad which created faith in him.’ However, Allah *Glorified is He* has wanted the victory to come from the weak so that everyone would understand that it was faith in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which engendered loyalty to him.

Thus, we understand the meaning of ‘A Messenger has come to you...’ (*at-Tawba:* 128) to be that he was sent by Allah *Glorified is He* 'from among yourselves’ (*at-Tawba:* 128) with all the different meanings that this implies. Furthermore, he came to convey Allah's Message and did not invent anything of his own accord, rather, everything which he conveyed came from his Lord, and by your own admission, the Lord is the One Who has created for you everything from which you benefit in the heavens and the earth, as He says: 'If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, "Allah," …' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). He also says: 'If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, "God."…' (*Luqman:* 25).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has created man to be His vicegerent and all that He has created in the universe is meant to serve you all, and you yourselves admit this. If the Lord has also previously given you all these blessings, and then sent you His Messenger with guidance to bring you felicity, along with you having received His Goodness before He has given you assignments and having received His Blessings before asking Him, then when He has sent you His Messenger to give you assignments and His Way of Guidance, He must have chosen for this role someone whom you trusted. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not an angel, rather, he was a man just like you; so if he says to you, ‘Do this, and I am your role model in doing it’, then do not find this surprising. However, the foolishness of those who disbelieved in Allah *the Exalted* made them desire that the Messenger be an angel, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, "How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?" Say, "If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger."' (*al-Isra':* 94). What this means is 'If you want an angel, then the angel's form is invisible to you, and therefore We would have to put this angel in a human form in order for him to speak to you.' So is it merely a problem of form and shape? Moreover, the nature of the angels by creation is that they 'Never disobey Allah's Commands to them, but do as they are ordered.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6) Therefore, if this angel sent to you were to say to you, 'I am your role model for righteous conduct', would this be a real role model? Of course some of us would say, 'No, it would not be a good role model because, as an angel, you are naturally righteous, and you have no appetite or lust. So we cannot take you as a role model.'

Due to His Mercy with you, Allah has given you a Messenger from your own selves, tribe and Arab race, not from the Persians or Byzantines, and he speaks to you in your own language; for you are the first people to hear the Message, so the Messenger must speak your own language. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also came with friendliness and cordiality for the Quraysh had bonds and ties with tribes all over Arabia. They had friendly relationships with all the Arabs. There was also the friendliness that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had with all humanity in that he was one of them. Furthermore, Allah *the Exalted* chose him as an individual who was known for his honesty and trustworthiness before he began to convey Allah's Message unto you.

Therefore, if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brings you an assignment which is hard for you, then think of all these things and remind yourselves that he is a man, not an angel; he is an Arab, not a foreigner; he is from your tribe and was raised amongst you, and you knew his conduct well before he began to convey Allah's Message unto you – and if he never lied to any man about any man, would he lie to men about Allah?

The Arabic for 'from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128) is *min anfusikum*, and 'Abdullah ibn Qusait Al-Makki recited it as *min anfasikum* which means 'from your very finest.'(1) This means that he is from the best and most esteemed of you according to human standards. Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first received the Message from Allah *Glorified is He* did our lady Khadeeja *Allah be pleased with her* wait for him to show her a miracle? Also, did our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* wait for him to be shown a miracle? No, they did not wait because they both saw the miracle in Prophet Muhammad's previous conduct.

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(1) So Allah *Glorified is He* exclusively granted him physical and spiritual attributes that makes him the best of Allah's creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* says: Prophet, We have=

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told Lady Khadeeja *Allah be pleased with her* of the things which came to him, her thought and logic was truly mature, and what she said to him tells us why Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen her to be the wife of His Messenger when he was twenty-five years old and she was forty, although usually a man likes to marry someone younger than him.

However, this was not an ordinary marriage, rather, it was intended for a higher purpose than that, for during this marriage, the transition period from ordinary humanity to that which receives the revelation would take place, and this required a mother's heart and care to embrace and raise him up. Had she been a young woman, and he had told her what he told Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* she would have doubted his sanity. Due to her intelligence, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* considered the matter from a purely logical standpoint. When he said to her, 'I fear that these visions are being sent to me by a jinn', she said to him, 'You join ties of relationship, help the destitute, and you help against the vicissitudes which affect people. It cannot be. I swear by Allah that He shall never humiliate you.'(1)

Thus, she looked at how Prophet Muhammad's life had been before he was sent and saw in it proof that he was truthful after he was sent.

= sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and warning, as one who calls people to Allah by His leave, as a light-giving lamp.' (*al-Ahzab:* 45, 46).

(1) *When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him returned from the cave of Hira', his heart was trembling, and he went to Khadija and said: Wrap me up, wrap me up! So they wrapped him till the fear had left him. He then said to Khadija: O Khadija! What has happened to me? and he informed her of the happening, saying: I fear for myself. She replied: It cannot be. Be happy. I swear by* Allah *that He shall never humiliate you. By* Allah*, you join ties of relationship, you* speak the truth, you bear people's burden, you help the destitute, you entertain guests, and you help against the vicissitudes which affect people.' *[Narrated by Bukhari (3) and Muslim (160)]*

Likewise, when they said to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* ‘Your friend claims that he is a Messenger,’ he said, ‘Did he really say it?’ They answered in the affirmative, so he said, ‘Then he is a Messenger from Allah, for he has never told a lie in his whole life.’(1)

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Your suffering distresses ('*Aziz*) him…’ (*at-Tawba:* 128). The word (*‘Aziz*) means something which cannot be attained and which no one can bear, and every rare object is called *(‘Aziz)*. Also, if you say to someone, ‘You might be a minister someday', he might be silent in hope that this will be the case. However, if you say to him, ‘You might be a prime minister one day’, he might say, ‘that’s a little far-fetched and a difficult matter for me.’

Therefore, if something is *(‘aziz)*, this means that it is unattainable, rare or impossible; it is something which people dearly wish to do, but which is very hard for them to do, such as climbing to the top of a mountain. So, ‘Your suffering distresses ('*Aziz*) him…’ (*at-Tawba:* 128) means that he finds is very difficult him to assign you with something which might cause you to suffer, for his heart is full of mercy for you. He does not bring you rulings in order to make things difficult for you, rather, these rulings are sent down by Allah *the Most High* for your own good. Furthermore, it weighs heavily on him that you might find them difficult.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The similitude of mine and that of my *Ummah* (followers of Islam) is that of a person who lit fire and when the atmosphere was aglow, moths and insects began to fall into the fire, but I am there to hold them back. However, they are plunging into it despite my efforts.' He further added, 'This is your example and mine. I am there to hold you back from fire and to save you from it, but you are plunging into it despite my efforts.’(2) If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is from your own selves and from the best of you, and he loves you so much that it weighs heavily upon him that you suffer difficulties. Then, accept his instructions with good thoughts and think the best of them and this is the educational standard which should prevail over the whole world.

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(1) *Abu Ad-Darda’ relates that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said about Abu Bakr: "Are you (people) leaving for me my companion? (Abu Bakr), Are you (people) leaving for me my Companion? When I said, 'O people I am sent to you all as the Messenger of* Allah,*' you said, 'You tell a lie.' while Abu Bakr said, 'You have spoken the truth." [Narrated by Bukhari]*

(2) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

A father might give his son hard orders and prohibitions, ‘Do this, and don’t do that, don’t go there, don’t sit with so-and-so, do not stay out at night after such-and-such time’; these orders might seem harsh to the son, but we say to the son, 'From where do these difficult orders come? They are from your father who loves you as you know and who sacrifices and toils much to give you a good and comfortable future and strive to make you feel comfortable. So, how can you allow yourself to befriend wretched people who prevent you from obeying your father and drag you into distraction and evil? Look at how your father is bearing such hardships so that you do not have to bear them, and it is hard to him to see you suffering. He is the one whom you should obey.'

Your difficulties weigh heavily upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and there are different kinds of difficulties. Some of the difficulties of this worldly life are found in the assignments which your faith demands of you, but they save you from eternal hardship in the Hereafter. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* grieves that you might encounter any hardship in the Hereafter; for the hardship of this worldly life is temporary and will come to an end, but the hardship of the Hereafter, on the other hand, is what is truly exhausting and tiring.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* depicts this when He says: ‘But [Prophet] Are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this Message?’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) Why is this so? The reason is that you know, O, Muhammad, that if they do not stop, they will endure all manners of suffering in the Hereafter, or this means that the hardships of the Hereafter are the ones which we have to avoid, and we must endure these temporary hardships which will bear fruit in the future.

We might find a man saying to his son, for example, ‘Go out to the field and load the manure onto the donkey, and then plough and water the land.’ The joy of all these hardships will be experienced on reaping day, when the land gives Allah's Bounty to you in abundance. However, if the father were to leave his son idle, this would be the gravest mistake. Therefore, when he encourages his son to work, he avoids the consequences of loss.

A father might take his son to the doctor and find him busy, thus pleading with the doctor to give his son surgery to save him from danger, even though the father knows that the doctor will use surgical tools on his son like a scalpel and so on.

However, the son should know that this scalpel will touch his father before it touches him. So if you are ever commanded to do something difficult, first ask yourself,' Who commands you? Is it someone dear to you and beloved to you and someone who wants the best for you?' If it is so, then you must accept it and avoid thinking badly of it, and you must not cause the one who loves you to suffer.

Also, know that when your father turns you away from bad friends, for example, he is keeping you safe from the evil ways. Likewise, if you work hard, you will reap a good return,; on the other hand, if you follow the ways of evil, you will end up destitute and hungry, and then you will knock on your father's door and hear the wise common proverb: 'The one who eats at my table will do as I say.'

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A Messenger has come to you from amongst yourselves. Your suffering distresses him: he is deeply concerned for you...' (*at-Tawba:* 128). This means that he is eager to take care of you so that you do not fall into the greatest of all hardship. Therefore, we said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* depicted this for us when he said, 'My example and your example is that of a person who lit the fire and insects and moths began to fall in it, and he would be making efforts to take them out. I am going to hold you back from fire, but you are slipping from my hand.'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* also consoles him by saying: 'But [Prophet] are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf:* 6) Allah *the Most High* also says to him: '[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called people to do the best they can in this worldly life so that they attain paradise in the Hereafter, for every believer was dear to him, and he feared that even a single person would suffer in the Hereafter. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says to him: '[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe? If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4) In other words, it is like Allah is saying, 'Do not grieve because of your concern that they believe, for Allah *Glorified is He* could send them a sign which would cause them to bow down and yield to it, but the Lord does not want bowed-down necks, He wants reverent hearts.

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(1) *[Narrated by Muslim]*

'Your suffering distresses him. He is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 128) Kindness and mercy might be alike in a general sense, but there are things which ward off harms, and others which bring benefits; the warding-off of harm always takes precedence over the attraction of benefit. When we are faced with one action which harms and another which benefits, we always give precedence to the action that prevents harm, and only then do we engage in the beneficial action.

Furthermore, when you encounter one harmful thing and one beneficial thing, and you are equally able to deal with either of them, you must first protect yourself from the harmful thing which would upset your equilibrium, and only then you go after the thing which will make your situation better.

To make this easier to understand, I will illustrate it with a tangible example. Suppose that one person wants to throw a stone at you, and another person wants to throw an apple to you. Will you worry about catching the apple or fending off the stone? You will protect yourself from the harm before you go after the benefit.

Another example is to suppose you see someone drowning in the sea before you. Will you rebuke him for going into the sea without knowing how to swim? Or will you first rescue him and protect him from harm, and only afterwards will you rebuke and punish him for what he has done? You rescue him first, and thereby you do what is best by preventing harm first, and when you rebuke and punish him, he will accept that from you, as your action saved him from death.

Allah *Glorified is He* further says: 'Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed. ' (*Al-'Imran:* 185) So, the stages of this triumph are that one is first kept away from Fire, and this in itself is a prevention of harm and an attainment of benefit, and if he remained in his place, neither in the Fire nor Paradise, this would be easy enough. Furthermore, if he is then brought into paradise, this is the whole of goodness.

If some of the attributes of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are that he is 'A messenger from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him. He is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 128), and a person were to think deeply on these attributes, he will be attracted to following him.

Also, in Allah's Words '...full of kindness and mercy towards the believers' (*at-Tawba:* 128), we observe the attributes 'full of kindness', which means to prevent the harms of trial and hardship, and 'full of mercy' which means to bring the benefits of bliss and advancement. Therefore, it is enough to behold the greatness of these two attributes, '... full of kindness and mercy', to know that Allah *Glorified is He* describes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with them and He also describes Himself with them when He says: '...Truly, your Lord is Kind and Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 7)

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not act on his own powers alone, rather, he draws his kindness from the Kindness of *the Most High* and draws his mercy from the Mercy of *the Most High*. It is as though Allah *the Exalted* is telling us that He has given Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* some of the Attributes which He possesses, and just as he conveys difficulties to you in the form of religious responsibilities, he also conveys relief from these difficulties unto you by virtue of his kindness and increases the blessings by virtue of his mercy. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe; as for those who disbelieve' (*al-Isra':* 82). We know that healing only comes after sickness; this means that the Quran removes the harm first, and then brings about benefit: mercy.

Allah's saying, 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him. He is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 128) means that if the believers find hardships in the religious obligations which Prophet Muhammad conveyed to them, they should put into consideration the source of these hardships and remember that he was sent with these obligations in order to save them from other more terrible hardships. The hardships of religious obligations end when this worldly life ends, then the believer will be admitted to Paradise to live without any obligations, and he will find at once anything that crosses his mind, such as food, drink and all the other bounties which Allah has created for the dwellers of Paradise.(1)

If we consider the enjoyments of this worldly life, we find that those who work hard eventually hire people to do the things they used to do for themselves: the rich man who used to cook for himself hires a chef to cook his food after becoming rich. In addition, the farmer who used to build his own house by himself hires someone to build a house for him after Allah has granted him affluent sustenance. Accordingly, how will the Hereafter be, wherein a believer will be surrounded by Allah's Pleasure and so will the secrets of '"Be," and it is' will be embodied before him?

In this chapter, Allah has mentioned the hardships of religious obligations and their reward. Then He reassured believers that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is characterised by all the attributes He revealed: he is a human being, he feels concern for them, he conveys to them religious obligations which involve hardships which will save them from eternal hardships in the Hereafter and he is kind and merciful to them.

Allah *the Exalted* tells Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that if people pay heed to all these matters, they will be welcomed into the folds of the faith; if they turn away and their hearts are not touched by the Quran, they should not think that they support him, as Allah is the One Who supports him. Allah tells His Messenger Muhammad that if people turn away(2) from him and reject faith in Allah and refuse to listen to him, then he should resort to Allah Who is his strong support.(1) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the chapter by saying:

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(1) *'Abullah ibn Mas'ud related that Prophet Muhammad said: 'If a bird in Paradise appeals to you, it will fall into your hands, roasted.' [Related by Al-Bazzar (3532 – Kashfr Al-Astar] The line of transmission includes Humayd ibn 'Ata' Al-A'raj, and Haythami mentioned it in Al-Mujamma' (10, 414).*

(2) The word '*tawallaw*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means 'turn away'. The word '*tawalli*' is one of the words that has two opposite meanings. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people…' (*Muhammad:* 38) The word '*tawallaw*' here means 'turn away from Islam'. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them…' (*al-Ma'ida*: 51). The '*tawallaw*' here means 'takes them as ally'.

فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَقُلْ حَسْبِىَ ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ عَلَيْهِ
تَوَكَّلْتُ ۖ وَهُوَ رَبُّ ٱلْعَرْشِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿١٢٩﴾

If they turn away, [Prophet], say ,'God is enough
for me: there is no god but Him; I put my trust in
Him; He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne'[129]
(The Quran, *at-Tawba:* 129)

Allah *the Almighty* did not say to His Messenger that if they turn away, he should bear in mind that Allah is enough for him. Rather, He told him to say this frankly to all of the people so that they could hear since announcing this saying might alert them to the truth, as he says this out of strong faith. If any of them harmed him, Allah *the Almighty* would punish him.

Also, when the Prophet announced: '…Allah is enough for me…' (*at-Tawba:* 129) after disbelievers belied him; the events which took place afterwards affirmed that He is enough for him. For example–and to Allah belong the utmost example of perfection–sometimes you say, 'So-and-so's help is enough for me' because you are sure that this person is capable of helping you. However, power in the worldly life is subject to changes, but as for the saying, 'Allah is enough for me' (*at-Tawba:* 129), there is no god besides Allah *Glorified is He* who might oppose Him in this or in anything else. Therefore, Allah's saying, '… say, "Allah is enough for me…' (*at-Tawba:* 129) is based on the fact that 'There is no god but Him' (*at-Tawba:* 129). 'There is no god…' (*at-Tawba:* 129) is a negation, whilst 'but Him' is an affirmation, so these words ‘There is no god but Him’ (*at-Tawba:* 129) containing a logical negation and a logical positive affirmation. They negate the existence of any god other than Allah *the Exalted*. May Allah be merciful to Sheikh ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ‘Azzam who translated a line of poetry by the great Pakistani poet Muhammad Iqbal,(1) who said:

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(1) *The Arabic words 'al-rukn as-shadid' which are mentioned in the Arabic text of the following verse mean 'the strong support who supports any person who resorts to him'.* Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He says about Lut peace be upon him: '...If only I had against you some power or could take refuge in a strong support. (Hud: 80) Prophet Muhammad said, 'May Allah have mercy upon Lut, certainly he used to lean toward powerful support. So Allah did not send a Prophet after him except among a high ranking family among his people.' Related by Ahmad in his Musnad (2, 3323), and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan from the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra'*

Monotheism testimony includes affirmation and negation,
Giving the soul resolution and power

The affirmation is in ‘but Him’, and the negation is ‘There is no god’ (*at-Tawba:* 129) and both of the two parts give the soul resolution and power. They are like electrical poles for the soul. This testimony of faith negates the existence of any other deity except Allah *the Most High*.

As we know, people are of three kinds: the atheists who deny the existence of Allah completely, the pagans who believe in the existence of Allah Whom the Muslims believe as the only Deity, but they ascribe partners to Him, as they believe that those partners will benefit them and believers who believe that Allah is One.

When we say ‘*la ilah illah huwa*’, this means that we affirm Allah is the only God Who has no partners. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If they turn away, [Prophet], say, "Allah is enough for me. There is no god but Him. I put my trust in Him …"’ (*at-Tawba:* 129). This conclusion can be reached by reason. The Arabic word ‘*hasbi*’ literally refers to judging. If you judge a matter, you will indeed find that you need nothing but Allah. As long as Allah, Who is the only God, is enough for you, He will protect and support you. Therefore, it is reasonable to obey your Prophet, who has delivered Allah’s Message to completely and to place your trust in Allah *the Most High*.

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* is enough for you and there is no deity except Him, you should remain in His company which involves two stages: the first is to make use of the means which He extends to His creation, and the second represents sincere faith in which you believe that if you lack the means, you seek refuge in the Creator of all means, the Lord of all existence.

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(1) Muhammad Iqbal is an Islamic poet and thinker who strived with his own self and pen in the cause of Allah and for the sake of liberating his country. He had literary and poetic works which had religious trend and are taught in the academic establishments. He had a Pakistani origin, Islamic homeland, and an international thought. In Egypt, Dr. ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ‘Azzam and Al-Sawy Sha’lan translated some of his works.

For example, people need water because it is essential for life, and some people may go to the well but find no water since the water that used to come from the earth core no longer flows to it. This is due to the rainwater which used to flow down from the mountaintops and infiltrate into the earth, having completely run out. Therefore, we are in need of rain in order for it to infiltrate into the earth and for water to return to wells.

If all the wells in our vicinity dry, will we despair? No, we will not since our Lord instructs us to raise our hands in supplication.(1) If we use up all the means, we must turn to the Creator of all means, and I am sure that if anyone uses up all the means Allah *the Almighty* extends to him then seeks refuge in Him, He will never turn him down.

Allah's Hand is outstretched to us, offering us material means, and no one should ever neglect to utilise these means claiming that he puts his trust in Allah in this way. Rather, a person must first utilise all the available means until they are all used up, then he should resort to Allah *the Most High* to help him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him …' (*an-Naml:* 62).

'The desperate' is the one who has used up all the available means and has nothing to do except to resort to Allah. However, if a person says that he supplicates to Allah frequently, glorifies Him and recites the chapter of *Ya Sin* - for example - but He does not answer his supplications,(2) he may not be supplicating to Allah *the Exalted* in the manner that a desperate person does; he may not make use of all the available means. A person should utilise all the possible means first, and then supplicate and resort to Allah *the Exalted*. Accordingly, he will not be tempted by the means; when the means run out, he should resort to Allah. If Allah *the Most High* makes all means available to man, he will be tempted by them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘No! [But] indeed, man transgresses because he sees himself self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7)

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(1) If you raise your hands when offering supplication and beseech Allah while having sincere faith, your supplication will be more likely to be answered.

(2) *Among the etiquette of supplicating to* Allah *is that the person who supplicates should not consider the answer delayed, so he may despair and stop supplicating. He should realize that* Allah *wants for His slave what benefits him most; a person may ask Allah for something which he considers good for him, but* Allah*, the Knower of the Unseen, knows that it is evil for him. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said: 'The supplication of the servant is granted in case he does not supplicate for sin or for severing the ties of blood, or he does not become impatient. It was said: "*Allah's *Messenger, what does: 'If he does not grow impatient' imply? He said: "That he should say like this: 'I supplicated and I supplicated, but I did not find it being responded, then he becomes frustrated and abandons supplication.'" [Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2735), the third narration of the Hadith]*

Allah *Glorified is He* always clarifies that all the means are under His control. A farmer may plough the land, sow seeds and irrigate and cultivate plants, then as the crops are nearly ready for harvest, a heat wave may kill his plants or a heavy rainstorm may destroy them. Therefore, a person should utilise all the possible means while keeping the Creator of all means in mind, and he should place his trust in Allah *the Almighty*.

Many people misunderstand the word *tawakkul* (placing one’s trust in Allah); it means that one should make use of the means which Allah provides him, and if doing so does not bring about any good outcomes, he should resort to Allah, Who says: ‘Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him …’ (*an-Naml:* 62).

We sometimes supplicate to Allah not in the manner of the distressed and neglect the use of the means. There is a clear example concerning this from our daily life: when a boy asks his mother to supplicate to Allah for him to succeed, and his illiterate mother tells him to study first in order for her supplication to be answered. Accordingly, she shows her son the importance of utilising the means. If one uses up all the available means, he should not despair, and he should resort to Allah *the All-Powerful*.

Another example follows: If you are walking in the road and you have only one pound, then you lose it or it is stolen, and you do not have a single penny at home or in the bank, so you may become angry or sad. However, if you have ten pounds in the house, then your anger and sadness will only be slight; likewise, if you have ten pounds in the house and one hundred pounds in the bank, then you will not become angry or sad at all for losing a single pound. In this way, you are confident because you possess many items instead of what you have lost. Therefore, you should put your trust in the One Who gave you things as a substitute for what you have lost.

Therefore, *tawakkul* involves that a person works and utilises all the available means, and his heart trusts Allah *the Almighty*.[1] Only lazy people wish to stop working and put their trust in Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not say in this verse, '*tawakkaltu 'alayh*' (I have put my trust in Him) instead of '*'alayh tawakkalt*' (in Him I have put my trust). If you are blessed with a good understanding of Allah's saying, you will find that if a man says, 'I rely on you', you may add to this sentence 'and on so-and-so and so-and-so.' However, if you say 'On you I rely', you cannot add any person else to the end of the sentence. The use of this style indicates that nothing is like Allah and the people should place their trust only in Him. This style is like the style used in the chapter of *al-Fatiha* in the following verse: 'It is You we worship…' (*al-Fatiha:* 5). Therefore, worship is restricted to Allah Alone.

Allah *the Almighty* should be trusted since He is the Lord of the universe which has received you, and your powers do not match His Power. You plough the earth, plant seeds and water them, and then you receive Allah's bounties, which He bestows on you. This universe is subdued to your will, and you could never have subdued it by your own power. Actually, you can subdue, tie or mount a riding animal, and you can also load its back with fertilisers out of Allah's grace for you. Allah's bounties include the subjection of different beings for you, such as the sun which rises every day, bringing light and warmth, and the same is true of the moon and the clouds. None of these beings is under your power or control, but Allah *the Almighty* has subdued them to serve you.

He manages everything without you seeing this. Therefore, you should look beyond the apparent means which Allah *the Almighty* gives you, as you should consider the numerous causes behind the apparent bestowal of bounties.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne.' (*at-Tawba:* 129) Allah is the Lord of the universe, and He has subdued to you that which you see and that which you do not see. He manages everything

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: '**…**and whoever relies upon Allah - then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent..' (*at-Talaq*: 3).

with His absolute power, and Allah *the Exalted* has dominion over everything in the universe.

Allah has a Mighty Throne, so what is meaning of the word ‘’*arsh*’? On first consideration of the word ’*arsh* is ‘ceiling’;(1) when you build a floor in a building, you cover it with a ceiling to protect you from the sun and the rain. If the land is soft, the building sinks in it, so we build ceilings to protect the walls from the weathering agents.

Allah’s saying: ‘the Mighty Throne’ (*at-Tawba:* 129) means that He arranges things in a balanced manner. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* expresses the idea of dominion in the case of the Queen of Sheba, for example, when the hoopoe said, ‘Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a mighty throne.’ (*an-Naml:* 23)

The throne is a symbol of power. In our daily life–and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection–we find that when someone seizes dominion from the one who ruled before him, he gets rid of those who surrounded the previous ruler first and then searches for advocates, so that he can rearrange the dominion in the manner that suits him. Accordingly, everything can be settled, then he can ascend the throne.

Allah’s sitting on the throne means that all things have been settled and put in order by the Supreme Sovereign. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘those [angels] who carry the Throne and those around it exalt [Allah] with praise of their Lord…’ (*Ghafir:* 7).

The word *’arsh* (throne) indicates the fact that Allah, the All-Powerful, has settled and ordered everything in the universe and that everything is under His control. A ruler does not sit on a throne unless things become settled and stable, so what do we think about how the entire universe has been settled under Allah’s control even before time began?

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is He Who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne …’ (*al-A’raf:* 54).

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(1) The word ‘al-`arsh’ means throne. For example, the king assumes the throne. It has also the meaning mentioned in Allah’s saying, ‘…she has a great throne.’ (*an-Naml*: 23) One of its meanings is ‘ceiling of a house’ or the house itself. All these meanings imply stability. See the meaning of the word ‘’*arsh*’ in ‘Al-Lisan Lexicon’.

This means that everything is settled under His control. Therefore, the word *'arsh* (throne) can refer to Allah's Throne and can also be used in a worldly sense.(1) Allah's Throne indicates that the entire universe is settled under Allah's dominion, so that nothing happens against His Will and nothing escapes His Dominion. Everything in the universe is subject to Allah's control and authority.

Allah says: '…He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne.' (*at-Tawba:* 129) When a throne is described as being mighty, the minds of people turn to the thrones of kings which we see in our lives, such as how the hoopoe described the throne of the Queen of Sheba: '…and she has a mighty throne.'(2) (*an-Naml:* 23)

This is according to human standards. Allah's saying, 'He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne' (*at-Tawba:* 129) refers to the mightiness of the Throne according to the standards of the Lord of mankind. The Throne of the Almighty Creator is beyond all human imagination. Therefore, we should understand this in the light of '…there is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

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(1) The worldly thrones indicate the settlement of matters for a certain king, while Allah's Throne indicates that the whole universe is settled for Allah *Glorified is He.*

(2) The thrones of kings are limited in place and time, while Allah's Throne has not limits, as He is the Owner of Sovreignty.

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EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (10)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (10)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (10)

the chapter of

Yunus

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Yunus*(1) begins with Allah's saying, 'In the Name of Allah(2), the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful' which is considered one of the verses. It raises a question: Is it one of the verses of each chapter or was it revealed as a means of introducing a new chapter and separating chapters? The Quran contains one hundred and fourteen chapters, and 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful' is mentioned at the beginning of one hundred and thirteen chapters and in the middle of the chapter of *al-Naml*: 'Indeed, it is from Solomon, and indeed, it reads: "In the name of Allah , the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful."' (*an-Naml:* 30) Thus, it is part of a verse in the chapter *of al-Naml.* The religious scholars said that it is one of the verses of each chapter that is recited aloud in the daily prayers. It is the first verse of each chapter. Other scholars said that it has been revealed in order to separate between chapters, but if this were the case, it would not appear in chapter *al-Fatiha* as it is the first chapter in the Quran. However, the one who holds such an opinion says that 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful' occurs at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Fatiha* as a blessing. However, I hold the opinion that it is one of the verses of the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, and it is assumed to be so in all the publications of the Quran, as it is numbered as verse number, and '[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds' (*al-Fatiha:* 2) is verse number two; however, in the rest of the chapters of the Quran, it is not numbered as a verse; rather, the verse that immediately follows it is numbered as verse number one. The vast majority of religious scholars consider it as a verse of the Quran, but it is not a verse of each chapter except the chapter of *al-Fatiha*. At the beginning of our commentary on the Holy Quran, we had said that man should begin every action by uttering the Name of Allah because he performs every action depending on Allah's subjection of things to him. For example, when he tills the earth, plants the seeds, and waters the field, , it is Allah Who allows the crops to grow. A person may till land, but he does not cause plants to grow since he does not know how Allah packs all the plants in the seeds. Therefore, Allah says: 'and have you seen that [seed] which you sow? Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64) There are certain actions that man performs not thanks to his own capabilities, but due to Allah decreeing such actions to be fulfilled. Man has no power over the wind, or over any of the other elements on earth. When you think about the simple plant that grows out of a bulb or that grows out of a seed which you planted in a moist soil, you will find that tiny seedlings sprout from this seed. Then the seedlings develop the roots, so how is this fragile little seedling able to penetrate the layers of earth above it? If this seed is found on a rocky mountain, the seedling will sprout forth from any fissure in the mountain- this is the power of that simple seed which human beings regard as insignificant and so fragile. In addition, you are probably unaware of the tremendous waterpower which was previously used before dynamite was invented, when people wanted to break down a rocky mountain. They used to open a hole in the mountain and place a plank of wood inside this hole; then they would soak this piece of wood with water; as soon as wood absorbed the water, the mountain would crumble.

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(1) The chapter of Yunus was revealed in Mecca, and it contains one hundred and nine verses. Some of its verses were revealed in Medina, a point regarding which scholars had controversial opinions. Ibn 'Abbas said that three verses of this chapter were revealed in Medina which are: 'So if you are in doubt, [O Muhammad]…' to '….will not believe' (*Yunus*: 94-96).

(2) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

When you plant a seed in the earth, this seed sprouts into a simple plantlet which forms roots in order to absorb the nutrients from the soil. Before this phase, the seed depends on the nutrients contained within it in order to form the roots which become firmly implanted in the soil. Then the tiny seedling develops two small green leaves. Human beings were unaware of the complexity of this process until very recently as it is one of those bounties granted by Allah to human beings before they learned about it through scientific research. Thus, when you plant your seeds, it is not your own power that makes them grow; rather, it the Power of the One Who has subjected the land to you. Therefore, when you start to plant your seeds by ‘In the Name of Allah’, this indicates that you acknowledge that Allah is the One Who has subjected the land to you. When you start to lift a heavy load by saying, ‘In the Name of Allah’, you make use of the power granted to you by your Creator; furthermore, since you may try to lift a heavy load, the nerve impulses emanating from your brain might not reach your arms, and the reaction of your arms may delay. Therefore, before you begin your work, whatever it is, you should understand that you do not perform it with your own power, but you use that which Allah has subjected to you. Thus, you should begin every action by saying, ‘In the Name of Allah’, as Allah *the Most High* has put everything at your service. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Every matter that does not start with remembrance of Allah is incomplete.’(1)

If you rely on your own power only without mentioning the Name of Allah, nothing will be subjected to you since Allah is the One Who subjects things to you. Therefore, you should begin all your actions with mentioning the Name of Allah. In political terms, a judge issues his verdict by saying: ‘In the name of the constitution, I have reached the following judgment.’ This means that he is not pronouncing a judgment based on his own subjective view, but according to the constitution.

Thus, when you start your work mentioning the Name of Allah, you remind the object which is subjected to you that it helps you out of Allah’s Will. When you start any work with remembering the One Who has granted you and all things around you power, you absolve the belief that you do things due to your might and power.

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(1) The Arabic word ‘al-Abtar’ is a hyperbole which is balanced morphologically at ‘af’al’. The Arabic word ‘*batr*’ literally means ‘cutting off’ in English. The word ‘*al-abtar’* is mentioned in the Arabic text of Allah’s saying, ‘Surely your enemy is the one who shall be without posterity.’ (*al-Kawthar*: 3) The intended meaning is that any deed which does not start with the Name of Allah or glorifying Him will be without posterity.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful’. This refers to the mercy which Allah shows to His living creatures. This formula also removes hardship from the disobedient person who makes use of Allah’s bounty in the Name of the One Whom he has disobeyed. Allah reminds you that He is the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful. The chapter of *Yunus* begins with the following verse:

الٓرۚ تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلۡحَكِيمِ ﴿١﴾

***Alif Lam Ra,* These are the verses of the wise Book [1]**
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 1)

‘Alif Lam Ra’ are three Arabic letters. The chapter of *al-Baqara* and the chapter *of Al-’Imran* start with the letters ‘*Alif Lam Mim’*, the chapter of *al-A’raf* starts with the letters *‘Alif Lam Mim Sad’* and the chapter of *Yunus* starts with *‘Alif Lam Ra’.* We notice that in all these cases, these expressions are names of letters. Everything has a name and *musamma* (the object named). My name is Ash-Sha‘rawi, and *al-musamma* (the object named) here is my outward form. Thus, when a name is uttered, my outward form of the object comes to mind. When we say, for instance, ‘sky’ what comes to mind is ‘all that is above you’, and when we say ‘mosque’ what comes to mind is that place where people offer their prayers.

Thus, there is a difference between the name and the *musamma* (the object named). All human beings, literate or illiterate, can speak, but only a literate person knows the names of the letters. We may ask those who learn English to spell the names of letters. Therefore, a literate person knows that the word *akalt* consists of the following letters: *Hamza, Kaf, Lam* and *Ta*. Some chapters of the Quran begin with *Alif Lam Mim* which are names of letters not *musammas* (the object named) of these letters. Since Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, who taught him the names of these letters? Therefore, these letters indicate that he was illiterate, and no teacher taught him, yet, he uttered the names of letters, *‘Alif Lam Mim’*. When you consider the names of these letters mentioned at the beginning of chapters of the Quran, you will find that they are fourteen of them.(1) Some of them are mentioned many times(2) and in different combinations. In addition, they constitute half of the Arabic alphabet. It is remarkable indeed that the description of the alphabetical letters emerged after the Quran had been revealed. The letters are divided into various categories: *majhurah* (strongly pronounced letters), *mahmusah* (letters pronounced inaudibly), *raqiqah* (letters pronounced softly), and *rakhwah* (the week letters which are not stressed during pronunciation due to their weakness). When exploring these letters, you will find that the fourteen letters that occur at the beginnings of certain chapters represent all the different categories of letters in the Arabic alphabet.

Allah *the Most High* uses different combinations of these letters at the beginning of different chapters; sometime He uses only one letter such as the following verse: '*Sad*. By the Quran with its reminding' (*Sad:* 1), Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '*Qaf.* By the honored Quran' (*Qaf:* 1), Allah *Glorified is He* also says: *'Nun*. By the pen and what they inscribe' (*al-Qalam:* 1). Accordingly, three chapters begin with one letter. There are other chapters which begin with two letters such as *Ta Ha, Ya Sin, Ta Sin* and *Ha Mim*. There are chapters which begin with three letters, *Alif lam Mim* such as *al-Baqara*, *Al-'Imran*, *al-'Ankabut, ar-Rum* and *as-Sajda*. There are some chapters which begin with *Alif Lam Ra*. As well, there are three chapters the first two letters of which are *Alif* and *Lam,* but they differ in the third letter which is *Mim* and *Ra*. The chapters of *Yunus, Yusuf, Ibrahim* and *al-Hijr* begin with *Alif Lam Ra'*. The chapter of *al-A'raf* begins with four letters, *Alif Lam Mim Sad*, and the chapter of *ar-Ra'd* begins with the letters *Alif Lam Mim Ra*.

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(1) Some religious scholars have tallied up these disjointed letters that occur at the beginnings of chapters and found that they are fourteen. Using these letters, they formed the following sentence: *(nass qati' hakim lahu sir)*, meaning 'a decisive sagacious text with a secret'.

(2) The religious scholars held different opinions regarding the meaning of these letters; some say that Allah has kept their secret to Himself, others say that they represent the names of these chapters, and others say that they are related to the Names of Allah and His Attributes: the letter *'Alif'* refers to the first letter of the Name of Allah in Arabic, while the letter 'Lam' refers to Allah's Name *'Al-Latif'*, and the letter '*Mim*' refers to the first letter of the Name of Allah *'Al-Majid'*.

Some chapters begin with five letters such as *Maryam* which begins with *Kaf Ha Ya ‘Ain Sad*, and chapter *ash-Shura* which begins with *Ha Mim ‘Ain Sin Qaf*. Sometime a letter or two letters occur at the beginning of a chapter, but they are not considered an independent verse. Two chapters begin with letters which are regarded as independent verses such as ‘*Ta Ha’* and ‘*Ya Sin’*, while the chapter of *al-Naml* starts with ‘*Ta Sin’*, but these two letters are not considered as an independent verse. This shows that the Quran is *tawqifi*(1) and does not follow a certain pattern in order to draw our attention to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* revealed these letters in this way. For instance, we find the Arabic word *ism* (name) in the Quran in the expression ‘*bism Allah’* (in the Name of Allah) which is written without the letter *Alif*’(2) which is known in Arabic grammar as ‘*Alif wasl*’ (The letter *Alif*’ which is pronounced but not written nor is not dropped while writing in the first verse of chapter *al-‘Alaq*: ‘Recite in the name of your Lord who created.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 1)

Another example: if you look up the word *tabarak* in the Holy Quran, you will find that the letter *ba’* is followed by the letter *Alif,*(3) but sometimes this word occurs without the letter *Alif*’. In addition, the word *al-banat* sometimes occurs with the letter *Alif* included and sometimes not.(1) These examples show that the Quran does not follow a fixed order in regard to writing. Allah has willed the order of the writing of the Quran to be a miracle, just as its linguistic expressions and grammatical structure. Some people said that the Prophet's Arab contemporaries did not master writing, but we see that had they not been familiar with it, so much so that they would not have written the word *bism* without the letter *Alif* where it should occur in this way. They knew that the Quran must be written exactly in the manner which Jibril (Gabriel) had revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the manner which Allah *the Almighty* intended.(2) Another remarkable fact is that all the verses of the Quran are styled according to the principle of *wasl* (ending the word with a vowel), as no Quranic chapter is concluded with a word that ends with *sukun* (a consonant point at the end of a word).

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(1) The word *‘tawqifi’* means that Allah has instructed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding everything in the Quran, including the openings of chapters, the breaks between verses, and the order in which the chapters of the Quran are arranged. Matters relevant to the Quran were not left up to Prophet Muhammad or his Companions to decide, as Allah revealed them to Prophet Muhammad by Jibril (Gabriel).

(2) The word ‘bism’ (in the Name of) is mentioned four times in the Quran with the letter ‘*Alif*’ such as in the following verses: ‘Recite in the name of your Lord who created.’ (*al-‘Alaq*: 1) ‘So exalt the Name of your Lord, the Most Great’ is mentioned in three verses in the Quran. (*al-Waqi‘a*: 74 and 52) and (*al-Waqi‘a*: 96)
The word ‘*bism*’ (in the Name of) is mentioned without the letter ‘*Alif*’ three times in the Quran: *al-Fatiha*, ‘And [Noah] said, "Embark therein; in the name of Allah is its course and its anchorage…’ (*Hud*: 41) and ‘Indeed, it is from Solomon, and indeed, it reads: 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.’ (*an-Naml*: 30) This is in addition to the *Basmalah* (saying, "*Bismillah ar-Rahman, ar-Rahim* [In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful]").

(3) The word ‘tabarak’ is mentioned in the Quran 9 times, two of which are without *‘Alif’*, such as in Allah’s sayings: ‘Blessed is the name of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor.’ (*ar-Rahman*: 78), ‘Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion…’ (*al-Mulk*: 1) and the other seven verses are: ‘…blessed is Allah , Lord of the worlds.’ (*al-A'raf*: 54), ‘…So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 14), (*al-Furqan*: 1, 10 and 61), (*Ghafir*: 1) and (*az-Zukhruf*: 85)

An example of this point is Allah's saying, '… and He is the Lord of the Great Throne.' (*at-Tawba:* 129) in which the last letter ends with a *kasra* (vowel point that sounds like 'i') and not a *sukun* (a consonant point at the end of a word). This allows for a smooth transition with the next chapter which starts with 'In the Name of Allah'. This shows that all of the verses of the Quran are connected with one another. Beware of rendering the Quran *'Idin*, (3) which means tackling the verses of the Quran separately from one another, as it as a whole is connected. There are no instances, when reciting the Quran, where you are obligated to pause, as all the verses of the Quran are based on the principle of *wasl* (connection). Likewise, the last word ends with *Fat-hah* (vowel point that sounds like 'a') and should be read in the accusative case, as it is followed by: ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful’. We do not put a *sukun* (a consonant point at the end of a word) on the last letter of any chapter since it is connected with the following chapter. When it even comes to the rules of *tajwid* (reciting the Quran following the rules of recitation), the letters which necessitate *iqlab* (pronouncing the Arabic letter *nun*, which has no vowel point and *Tawin* as *mim*), if we come across an instance of *izhhar* (pronouncing the letter completely and clearly from its articulation point without a *ghunnah*), we should pronounce it in this manner because the verses of the Quran are linked with each other. A person may say that as the Quran is based on the principle of *wasl*, the verses of the Quran that start with separate letters should be read as one word; for example, they should not be read as ‘*Alif Lam Mim*’, but as ‘*alam*’.

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(1) The word 'al-banat' is mentioned in the Quran 12 times, three of which are mentioned without the letter *'Alif'*, as in the following verses: 'But they have attributed to Allah partners - the jinn, while He has created them - and have fabricated for Him sons and daughters without knowledge…' (*al-An'am*: 100) 'And they attribute to Allah daughters - *Exalted is He* - and for them is what they desire.' (*an-Nahl*: 57) and 'Or has He daughters while you have sons?' (*at-Tur*: 39)

(2) This is an important branch of the sciences of the Quran: calligraphy of the Quran, which the scholars tackled profoundly. They agreed not to deviate from the rules of calligraphy which the earlier predecessors followed. The scholars tackled the secrets and reasons behind the rules of calligraphy. See: *Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum Al-Quran by Az-Zarkashi* (1: 376-431) and *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum Al-Quran* by as-Suyuti (4: 145-166)

(3) *'Idin* means divided into portions.

However, the separate letters of the Quran which appear at the beginning of certain chapters should be pronounced separately. Accordingly, we should pronounce the letter *‘Alif,*’ then ‘*Lam’* then ‘*Mim*’, and each of which is separated by a pause, because these letters were revealed in this way and Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* taught Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to recite them in this way. There is wisdom behind reading them in this way, whether you are able to understand it or not.

The Quran was revealed to Arabs, many of whom remained disbelievers and vehemently resisted the Message of Prophet Muhammad and waited for anything they perceive as error in order to express serious doubt in the authenticity of the Quran. However, did any of the disbelievers ever ask about the meaning of ‘*Alif, Lam, Mim’*? None of them ever brought this matter up, even though they strived to find an error in the Quran. In fact, they were quite aware of the extreme eloquence of the Quran. This indicates that they understood the meaning of such expressions as ‘*Alif Lam Mim*’ thanks to their mastery of the Arabic language. Had they not understood such expressions, they would have immediately impugned the Quran; however, they never did so.

The companions of the Prophet, who were so eager to understand everything about the Quran, did not ask the Prophet about the meaning of ‘*Alif Lam Mim*’. They reacted to such expressions, not with their minds, but with an intuitive understanding of the divine secret in them because the human soul cannot reject anything that comes from Allah *the Almighty*. Even if the mind cannot understand it, it will not reject (1) it and the soul becomes comfortable with it.

We gave the following example previously: When Pharaoh's people kept the Israelite women alive and killed the men, what did Musa's (Moses') mother do? Allah *the Exalted* inspired her to act in the manner described in the following verse: 'We inspired Musa's (Moses) mother by saying, "Suckle him, and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river. Do not be afraid, and do not grieve…."' (*al-Qasas:* 7) If you say to any mother to throw her infant in the river if she fears for him, she will never act on this suggestion. Musa's (Moses') mother could have tried to hide him by any means. However, throwing him in the river in the hope of saving him from slaughter cannot be imagined. This is what the All Gracious inspired her to do so Satan can never interfere in it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* reassured her as explained in the following verse: '… when you fear for his safety, put him in the river ….' (*al-Qasas:* 7). This is in order for her to prepare herself for this incident before it takes place. Then Allah *the Most High* ordered her to do what is revealed in the following verse: 'We inspired your mother by saying, "Put your child into the chest, then place him in the river…. "' (*Ta Ha:* 38-39) The speech in this verse is urgent, for it is the time to act; Allah *Glorified is He* reassured her that He ordered the river to cast Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* safely to the bank: '… and the river will throw it onto the bank….' (*Ta Ha:* 39) Then Allah ordered Musa's (Moses') enemy to take and raise him: '… he will be taken in by an enemy of mine and his ….' (*Ta Ha:* 39) Thus, Allah's order can never be disobeyed. Similarly, a believer accepts expressions such as '*Alif Lam Mim*' as containing Divine mysteries and should not judge them according to his understanding.

I advise anyone who recites the Quran as a form of worship not to preoccupy himself with the meanings of these expressions. This is contrary to the opinion stating that one should recite so as to understand the meaning, for he who wishes to understand the meaning will ask to know the meaning of each expression. Thus, if you recite the Quran for the sake of worship, you should recite it while bearing in mind the Divine mysteries that it contains; thereby, you will avoid limiting the grandeur of the Quran to your limited knowledge as a human being. Therefore, when reading the Quran for the sake of worship, we should tackle its expressions as containing Divine mystery. Not everyone who reads the Quran is an expert linguist who knows the root of every word; many people are illiterate and use the Quran as a means to worship and draw closer to Allah. Therefore, they tackle the Quran as containing divine secrets.

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb who said: 'If the religion were based on opinion, it would be more important to wipe over the under parts of the leather socks than the upper, but I have seen Allah's Messenger peace and blessings of Allah be upon him wiping over the upper parts of his leather socks.'. [Related by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (163) and Ad-Daraqutny in his Sunnan] (1/199)]*

There is an example from our own daily lives–and to Allah belong the utmost example of perfection-we see that the army sometimes uses passwords which do not always have a meaning; however, no one can enter or exit the barracks without uttering this password. Let this password be ‘lentils’, for example. The person who knows this password understands that it can save his life. Upon returning to his battalion, the soldier utters the word ‘lentils’, whereby the guards at the gate recognise him as being one of the army. If someone who does not know the password and tries to enter, he may be killed. Those who know it utter it without asking about its meaning as they learn it from the person who has ordered them to say it, The ancient Arabs understood that the disjointed letters at the beginning of certain chapters have meanings, and there are certain indications for them in their language. For example a poet (1) says:

Wake up and give us a cup of wine in the morning,

He also says:

If any person treats us ignorantly

We will treat him more ignorantly.

What is Arabic word *ala* used in the Arabic version of this line of poetry? The meaning of the verse is quite clear without it. However, the ancient Arab recited this line of poetry and knew that language is a means of communication between the speaker and the listener. The speaker is in control of the discussion, but the listener is the recipient of the speech; when you direct your speech to a listener, his mind might be preoccupied with other things. Therefore, by the time you have the listener's full attention, he may have already missed some of your words, so you draw his attention to what you have said in order for him to grasp what you say.

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(1) ‘Amr ibn Kalthum Abu *Al-Aswad* was a poet who belonged to the pre-Islamic era and was a first-rate poet. He was born in the north of the Arabian Peninsula, led his tribe while he still a young man. He led a long life and died forty years before the *Hijra*. *Al-Mu‘llaqa* is one of these most famous works. (See *Az-Zirikli’s Al-A‘lam,* 5: 84).

Perhaps Allah *the Exalted* uses the expression '*Alif Lam Mim*' to draw our attention to the content of the verses. Perhaps Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who had been illiterate and had not known the names of letters, uttered these letters after receiving knowledge from Allah in this regard. The means of understanding will remain unlimited until the Day of Judgement, since if they were not so, all the meanings of Allah's sayings would be grasped by people. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has willed for us to continue to extract new meanings from the Quran over the ages. The Quran is the sayings of Allah which represent His Attributes. It is well known that Allah's Attributes have unlimited perfection. If you were to know all their significances, it would mean that this perfection is finite, but the meanings of the Quran are unlimited.

The miraculous nature of the Quran, which Allah *the Almighty* has revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lies in the fact that it is in the language at which his people excelled. Thus, Allah challenged them at that which they excelled at, as they were not able to produce something of equal calibre. If Allah *the Most High* had revealed the Quran in a language other than their own, they would have justified their inability to bring about anything similar to it since it contains new alphabetical letters with which they were unfamiliar.

Allah has willed for the Quran to be composed of the same letters which they used during their speech and willed that the letters, words, verses, and expressions of the Quran are such that they are impossible to replicate, for the Speaker is of a completely different level. Thus, the greatness of the Quran is not derived from the letters of the Arabic alphabet, but from its meanings and overall order of these letters as the letters are the same. The Quran is a miracle since it is said by Allah *the Almighty*. In order to clarify this idea, we have previously given the following example: If we want to gauge the skill level of fabric weavers, we will supply each one of them with some wool, cotton and silk which represent different kinds of raw material. Then we ask them to produce a piece of cloth using all three materials in order to know the superior weaving skills.

We will surely hear someone saying that the final product of wool is bound to be rough, and the cotton weaver will produce a piece of cloth with cotton-like qualities, whereas the silk weaver will make a smooth piece of cloth. However, if we give them each the same type of material - wool, cotton or silk-we will truly know which of them is the most proficient weaver, Thus, if the Quran had been revealed in letters and words that were not from the Arabic alphabet, they would have said that if we were conversant with these letters and words, we could have come up with something better.

Therefore, Allah *the Most High* decreed for the Quran to be made up of letters and words with which Muhammad's people were familiar. Many people were preoccupied with the opening letters of some chapters of the Quran; they were seeking some knowledge about them after the intermingling of different cultures and the Arabic language has not had the same status it enjoyed when the Quran was revealed. Those who possessed proficient knowledge of Arabic during the era of Prophet Muhammad heard these letters in the beginning of certain chapters of the Quran and they accepted them. Allah says: *'Alif Lam Ra*. These are the verses of the wise Book.' (*Yunus:* 1) The word *tilk* (These) which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, is a demonstrative pronoun, which should be distinguished from second person pronouns because some people confuse the two. A demonstrative pronoun is that which points to something such as *hadha, dha* and *tilk*. *Hadha* is a masculine form of demonstrative pronoun. For example, *hadha qalam jamil* (this is a beautiful pen), but in the following example, *tilka ad-dawah jamila*, (this inkwell is beautiful), *tilka* is a feminine form of demonstrative pronoun. The letter *Kaf* in the Arabic word *tilka* refers to second person pronoun and the *ta'* in the same word is a feminine demonstrative pronoun which refers to the verses, while the letter *Kaf* refers to the person being addressed: Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, the meaning of this verse is that: these are the verses, O, Muhammad.

In the light of these differences between demonstrative pronouns and second person pronouns, the expressions of the Quran differ. For example, Allah says: '…for those are two proofs from your Lord....' (*al-Qasas:* 32) The word *dhanika* (those) is a dual pronoun indicating the staff. Allah also says: 'And put your hand into the opening of your garment….' (*an-Naml:* 12) Allah also says: 'That is from what my Lord has taught me….' (*Yusuf:* 37) This is what Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* told the two prisoners who shared his cell. The structure of the sentence reveals that he was addressing two people, but he refers to the interpretation with the term *dha* which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse. When Al-'Aziz's wife called the women to witness the beauty of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and gave them each a knife, she said, *'ukhruj 'alayhin'* (reveal yourself to them) since he is a singular masculine, while they are a plural feminine. The verse in which this incident is mentioned contains a plural feminine pronoun as well as a singular masculine demonstrative pronoun. Thus she says, 'That is the one about whom you blamed me...' (*Yusuf:* 32). *Dha is* a demonstrative pronoun referring to Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), and *kunna* is a second person pronoun referring to the group of women. The following verse addresses a group of people: 'And that was your assumption which you assumed about your Lord ....' (*Fussilat:* 23)

Therefore, the difference between the demonstrative pronouns and second person pronouns is clarified. The *Ta'* here refers to the verses, which are considered feminine in Arabic, and the one who is originally addressed by this verse is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The word *al-ayat* is the plural of the word *aya* which literally means a wondrous object. It is common in Arabic that this word is used to refer to extreme beauty and splendour. This word also can refer to many things; it can refer, for example, to the miracles which Allah *the Almighty* granted His Messengers in order to prove their truthfulness: '…No matter what sign you bring us with which to bewitch us, we will not be believers in you.' (*al-A'raf:* 132) It can also refer to the marvellous phenomena of the universe, as in Allah's saying:

'…And a sign for them is the night. We remove from it [the light of] day….' (*Ya Sin:* 37) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And we have made the night and day two signs ….' (*al-Isra':* 12) Allah *the Most High* also says: 'And we made the son of Mary and his mother a sign ….' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50)

Accordingly, the word *aya* may refer to a sign or phenomenon in the universe, or it may refer to a miracle performed by one of the prophets in order to prove that they were sent by Allah in order to convey the Divine Message. It may also refer to the verses of the Quran which challenge disbelievers to produce something similar.

In the following verse, *'Alif Lam Ra,* These are the verses of the wise Book' (*Yunus:* 1), the intended meaning of the word *'ayat*' is the Quranic verses. Since Allah is the Creator of the signs of the universe and the miracles performed by His Messengers, along with being the One Who revealed the Quran, there is no contradiction between all of different significances of the word *ayat*, as their source is the same. In Allah's saying, *'Alif Lam Ra* These are the verses of the wise Book' (*Yunus:* 1), the word *'Al-hakim'* literally means the one who wisely puts everything in its proper place, as he does not consider matters from the apparent perspective and overlooks the negative consequences that may arise in the future. For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - you may attain something, thinking that it will relieve you of other troubles, but it may worsen your troubles. There are various types of medicines from which a doctor prescribes a number of medicines which suit a patient while trying to do his utmost to spare his patient the undesirable side effects of the medicines. There is considered wisdom as the doctor does not prescribe a single medicine, which may cause negative side effects, but he prescribes several medicines, which may mitigate the negative side effects that may occur. Thus, this is a form of wisdom since he is taking precautionary, proactive measures to avoid possible negative side effects.

In the early fifties, scientists tried to reduce the devastating effects which insects had on crops, so they invented a chemical substance known as 'DDT' to combat insects. These scientists boasted about the effectiveness of the pesticide they invented. However, they discovered that this chemical substance also had an extremely adverse effect upon all living creatures, and nowadays people are forbidden from using this chemical substance. The invention was created without wisdom because though this product had benefits, it also had many harmful side effects, as it poisoned farm animals and crops.

Therefore, wisdom means putting everything in its proper place so that it brings about benefits without causing harm in the future. Allah *the Almighty* has disclosed His Doctrine to us through the Holy Book to guide us to that which will rectify our affairs. If we apply this doctrine, we will attain benefits, along with experiencing no harm. We mentioned previously the bounties which Allah *the Exalted* has bestowed upon us in the universe; He has created animals in order for us to benefit from their milk, wool, leather, and meat. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they carry your loads to a land you could not have reached except with difficulty ....’ (*an-Nahl:* 7) This means that these animals provide us with comfort. Man has invented vehicles which carry the load for us and enable us to reach our destination with less effort on our part, but these inventions serve our human welfare. Human beings used to use donkeys and mules to carry the loads and luggage, but now they have invented many vehicles and large trucks which haul tons of materials and merchandise; however, we did not anticipate the fact that these machines emit exhaust which pollute the air, whereas the excretions expelled by donkeys or mules fertilise soil.

Thus, if the automobile industry does not somehow manage to reduce the pollution which vehicles produce, it will be regarded as lacking wisdom; there is a great need for conducting researches on getting rid of the harms caused by fuel combustion. Accordingly, we can benefit from the speed of cars and their capacity to haul large quantities of goods, while removing their harmful side effects. Thus, wisdom means putting everything in its proper place in such a way that involves permanent benefits without causing any harm. Someone may ask what the meaning of Allah’s saying ‘*Al-kitab al-hakim’* is. Does it mean that the Book itself is wise or that this wisdom is derived from the All-Wise Who has revealed the Book? It means that the Quran is full of wisdom derived from Allah *the Almighty*. In other words, it is the Book that has been revealed by the Wise Lord. The word *hakim* (wise) is morphologically balanced to the form *fa’il* and has the same morphological balance of the word *karim* (the All-Generous) and *rahim* (the All-Merciful). Sometimes the word is morphologically balanced to the form *fa'el*, and at other times, it is morphologically balanced to the form *fa'il*. Its position in the sentence determines the form it takes.

The meaning of the word *hakim* (which is an adjective derived from the Arabic verb *Hakama* that means to rule, to judge or to do something perfectly, and the other form of the same verb *Hakuma* which means to be wise) is clarified to us by its context: if we attribute it to the word *hukm* (the infinitive of the verb, meaning ruling), then the 'wise book' means the 'rule' or 'command', and it is clear that the Quran is like a decree issued by Allah *Glorified is He*. If we attribute the adjective 'wise' to the nominative case *Hakim* which means 'judge' or 'arbiter', then it is clear that the Quran is also *hakim* which means one that pronounces judgments in various matters, in order to bring out the truth of these matters. Thus, it can be said that the Quran pronounces judgments in all matters relating to the faith. Furthermore, the highest and the most crucial matter in which the Quran pronounces a judgment is the testament of faith, 'There is no deity but Allah'. Anyone who says something or acts in a way contrary to this principle is an 'offender' *(zalim)*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...for such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong!' (*Luqman:* 13) The Quran resolves all of these issues, and it is the ultimate arbiter in these matters.

If you describe the Quran as *muhkam* (made with wisdom and precision), you, thereby, attribute it to Allah *the Exalted*. If you describe it as *hakim*, this is also correct since the Quran is the ultimate 'arbiter' resolving the ultimate doctrinal issue that is 'There is no deity but Allah'. This is the testament upheld by Allah concerning Himself; it is a witnessed testament to Him by the angels and it is an evidential testament to Him by other created beings; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah [Himself] proffers evidence–and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge ….' (*Al-'Imran:* 18) When the Quran judges this matter, it pronounces a fair judgment that brings to light the truth of this most important creed. The Quran is also the arbiter of all actions, for it shows what is *halal* (allowable) and what is *haram* (prohibited); it actually lays down a clear barrier between what is *halal* and what is *haram*. The Quran is also the arbiter of behaviour and actions. Thus, the word *hakim* (arbiter) means that which brings to light the truth in matters that are disputed and debated.

On the other hand, the word *hakim* can either have the meaning of *fa'il* (subject of a verb), or it can have the meaning of *maf'ul (*object of a verb), or that which has acquired wisdom since it is made by someone who is wise; thus, the meaning of *muhkam is* 'precisely and perfectly made'. If the word *hakim* takes the format of *fa'il,* it then conveys the meaning of *hakim* which implies that there are two parties: one party that is asserting an account of events and another that is contesting this account; it also means a judge who judges the two positions on their respective merits and who pronounces a fair judgment.

Basically, the Quran represents a 'judge' settling the supreme issue of a debate between humans; some of them denying the existence of a Allah (atheists), while others say that there indeed exists a deity that it is not Allah, along with others saying that Allah shares His Powers with certain associates. The Quran comes and decisively settles these matters, pronouncing a clear judgment. The Quran tells those who say, 'There is no deity named Allah' that they are lying; those who say, 'There is a deity other than Allah' that they are lying and those who say, 'Allah shares his divinity with other associates' that they are also lying. He is, in fact, One God. This is the first judgment which the Quran pronounces on the summit of the doctrine.

Furthermore, since the judgment pronounced by the Quran on the essence of this doctrine is true, then the reception of the rest of the doctrine will be one and the same; there are not multiple deities that are vying with each other for power and influence nor are they contradicting each other; there is only One God Who issues a single judgment, internally consistent, Who obligates all human beings with religious duties and Who brings them all out of their subjective whims, thus, unifying them according to His Will. The Quran is also an arbiter of actions, for people might have different opinions regarding any given action; some might say that it is a virtuous action, while others might say that it is abominable. The Quran pronounces the ultimate judgments on matters and defines what good conduct is, and then commands people to abide by it. Furthermore, it determines what actions are vile, and thus, prohibits people from engaging in them. Likewise, the Quran separates between what is *halal* (allowable) from what is *haram* (prohibited). Thus, the Quran has pronounced judgments regarding the ultimate doctrine, regarding actions and behaviour and also regarding what is *halal* and what is *haram*. However, the Quran is also the arbiter of another important matter, almost as important as the essence of this doctrine, which is the truthfulness of the Prophets who deliver Allah's Message on His behalf. A Prophet who is delivering Allah's Message on His behalf must be a truthful Messenger, along with being sincere and speaking the truth. The Quran pronounces a judgment on this matter through the very fact that it is a miracle. Thus, for sceptics who doubt the truthfulness of Muhammad's prophethood, the Quran challenges them to try and produce a writ of similar calibre and quality. Furthermore, if they were to stand incapable of doing so, then the Prophet himself tells them that this Quran is not his own words, rather, it is the words of the One Who has created both the Prophet and them.

Whether the adjective *hakim* is derived from the nominative case or the objective case, it is related to the principle meaning of putting everything in its proper place in such a way that ensures continuous benefit that will always be derived and harm that will always be evaded. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَكَانَ لِلنَّاسِ عَجَبًا أَنْ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ رَجُلٍ مِّنْهُمْ أَنْ أَنذِرِ ٱلنَّاسَ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟
أَنَّ لَهُمْ قَدَمَ صِدْقٍ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ قَالَ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَسَٰحِرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢﴾

Is it so surprising to people that We have revealed to a man from among them that he should warn people, and give glad news to those who believe, that they are on a sure footing with their Lord? [Yet] those who disbelieve say, 'This man is clearly a sorcerer' [2] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 2)

What is it that is strange about Allah *the Almighty* inspiring a man from your own midst to deliver His warning, and His good tidings? What is it that seems to incredible to you? What is the improbable element in this matter? This perceived 'strangeness' of the matter is indicated in the latter part of the previous chapter: 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves.' (*at-Tawba:* 128) This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a human being, and he is also an Arab who descends from their own tribe and whose temperament and behaviour they are fully familiar with.

What is strange about the fact that Allah *the Most High* has selected him as His Messenger to you? You have consulted him regarding numerous matters before he had become the recipient of Divine Revelation; in fact, you had recognised and respected his honourable, sincerity and generosity. You have taken and trusted his advice on many previous occasions. For instance, when you (the Arab Tribe of Quryash) disagreed on the family who should have put the Black Stone inside the Ka‘ba (The Sacred House of Allah), every family of the tribe proclaimed that they were more worthy to have the honour of placing the black stone in its place. What happened was that they decided to consult the first person who entered, and it was Allah’s Will that the first person to enter was Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah. How did he resolve this issue even though he had not yet received Divine Revelation at that point? It was his natural disposition that qualified him for receiving the Divine Revelation. Thus, what did Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* do to resolve this issue? He asked that a large piece of cloth be brought to him, and he placed the black stone on the cloth. Then, he told them that one man of each family should grab part of the ends of the cloth, and they, as a group, carried the stone to its proper place. This kind of decision exemplifies the pure, primordial human nature. We also note the case of the companion Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* when he was returning from a journey. They said to him, 'Your companion Muhammad has just claimed that he is a Prophet.' Thus, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* replied, ‘If he has said so, then it is true.’ Based on what events did Abu Bakr use to decide this? Did he hear the Prophet speaking miraculous words? Did he hear the Prophet reciting Quran? No, he did not; rather, when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* claimed prophethood, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* believed him immediately, for he had tested Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on numerous occasions in the past and had always found him to be honest. He had tested Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on numerous occasions in the past and had always found him to be trustworthy. Thus, it is utterly inconceivable that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be honest with his fellow men, but dishonest with Allah *the Exalted*. We also have the incident involving Khadija Bint Khuwaylid *Allah be pleased with her* whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told (a day at the beginning of revelation) that he is not completely certain if it was revelation or mere delusion. Therefore, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* explained to him that the virtues he has heretofore exhibited in his life preclude the possibility of being disappointed by Allah or deluded by an evil jinn. She said, ‘You keep good relations with your kin, you carry the load of those who are weak and you care for the oppressed, and Allah will never disgrace you.’(1) With these words, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* was the first religious scholar and jurisprudent practising deduction in Islam.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do people deem it strange’ (*Yunus:* 2), this expresses how surprising it is that they were surprised; the Quran itself speaks against the strangeness that disbelievers found in the matter. Since the Quran has spoken against disbelievers' astonishment; it is only logical that they were not surprised, for one is surprised by something because it manifests an extraordinary degree of ‘goodness’. It is the same as if one were to behold a beautiful product, and he says, 'What a beautiful product this is!' Then, one wonders to himself, 'Who is behind the unbelievable beauty of this product?' One says this because the product manifests such a degree of beauty that it is hard to imagine who could have made it. For example: we find those who say, 'How beautiful the sky is'; such a person is expressing his sense of awe and wonder at such a thing since it surpasses the ability of his imagination to conceive it. One can also stand in awe at something negative, something so repulsive that our minds can hardly wrap themselves around it. This is why the Quran says: ‘How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah.’ (*al-Baqara:* 28) This is the same as saying, 'Tell us how you can embrace disbelief? It is an anomaly that is truly contrary to the primordial nature.' Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do people deem it strange that we should have inspired a man from their own midst [with this our message] ….’ (*Yunus:* 2) Therefore, we wonder how you are surprised that this Messenger is from amongst yourselves: ‘…Your suffering distresses him. He is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 128)

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(1) *This is a Hadith concerning the beginning of revelation; it is narrated on the authority of ‘Ai’sha Allah be pleased with her narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (pages 3, 6 and elsewhere in his work) and by Muslim in his (Sahih) (160).*

Is this not the case with all such ‘pioneers’? Why are you then surprised? Your astonishment at this matter proves that your perception and understanding is incapable of passing sound judgment on anything whatsoever. The coming of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should hardly have been received with a sense of surprise; it is we, in fact, who are surprised by your reaction. Furthermore, when you are astonished at the astonishment of another one, you thereby annul the original sense of astonishment: ‘Do people deem it strange that we should have inspired ….’ (*Yunus:* 2) This means that Allah's revelation to one of your own has taken you by surprise, but this should not be surprising to you, for it is quite natural and logical.

What is revelation? We have previously pointed out that revelation is the disclosure of hidden knowledge by hidden means. There is a kind of disclosure by clear and unambiguous means. For example, when you tell your son, 'O, my son, listen to so-and-so and act in such-and-such manner.' This type of disclosure is obvious. On the other hand, the ‘secretive disclosure’ is, for instance, when you are receiving guests, and your servant forgets to serve them properly. You signal to your servant, without the guest knowing about it, that he hurriedly brings out drinks or pastries. This way, your signal to your servant is a secret knowledge or disclosure made in a hidden manner.

In fact, the True Lord *the Most High* inspires even inanimate objects; He *Glorified is He* says: ‘When the earth quakes with her [last] mighty quaking, and [when] the earth yields up her burdens, and man cries out, "What has happened to it?" On that Day will it recounts all its tidings, as your Sustainer will have inspired it to do?' (*az-Zalzala:* 1-5) This means that Allah *the Almighty* had secretly signalled to the earth, and it, in turn, understood His message in a manner to which we are not privy. Allah *Glorified is He* also inspires animals, for He says: ‘and [consider how] your Sustainer has inspired the bee….’ (*an-Nahl:* 68) You cannot say, 'I have heard Allah speaking to the bees' since this kind of revelation or inspiration is done secretly or in an unobvious manner, and Allah *Glorified is He* is more knowledgeable as to how He communicated his revelation. As for bees, they understood Him, and you have no concern in this matter. So do not ask how this revelation takes place. ‘And [consider how] your Lord has inspired the bee: "Prepare for yourself dwellings in mountains and in trees, and in what [men] may build [for you by way of hives].' (*an-Nahl:* 68) What this means is that bees understood their Lord's message thanks to certain instincts with which He has endowed them.

Allah *Glorified is He* also inspires the angels, for He says: 'Lo! Your Lord inspired the angels ….' (*al-Anfal:* 12) The True Lord *the Most High* also inspires human beings who are not prophets; just as he inspired the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'And so, [when he was born,] We inspired [thus] the mother of Musa (Moses): "Suckle him [for a time], and then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river…."' (*al-Qasas:* 7)

Of course, Allah *the Exalted* has inspired all of the prophets. Thus: Allah *Glorified is He* inspires inanimate objects, animals, the angels, the most virtuous of His servants, the prophets, and the messengers. The revelation or the Divine Inspiration, being a form of covert communication, requires a Revealer; this is Allah *Glorified is He*. However, it also requires a receiver of revelation which can be the following: the earth, the bees, the angels, or certain human beings who are supremely virtuous but are not prophets; and it can also be the prophets and the messengers themselves. This inspiration, however, can come from sources other than Allah; for He *the Almighty* says: 'And thus it is that against every prophet we have set up as enemies the evil forces from among humans as well as from among invisible beings that whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind….' (*al-An'am:* 112) Thus, devils communicate with each other covertly.

The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Behold, We have inspired you [O, Prophet]….' (*an-Nisa':* 163) In this verse, the recipient of the revelation is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, the revelation is addressed specifically to Muhammad; so do not say, 'I did not hear what was revealed to Muhammad' or 'I did not know how the Divine Inspiration descended upon him(1) for the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* had come to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and had asked him to convey to people at large what had been revealed to him.' If you were capable of hearing the archangel deliver the revelation to you, then what need is there for a messenger?

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of 'Ai'sha Allah be pleased with her that Al-Harith Ibn Hisham asked the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him: O Messenger of Allah, how does the divine inspiration come to you? The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said: {Sometimes it is like the ringing of a bell, this form of inspiration is the hardest of them all to bear; but this state subsides after I have grasped what is being inspired. Other times the Angel comes in the form of a man and talks to me and I grasp what he says.} Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his book (Sahih) (2) and by Muslim (2333)*

The tremendous weight of the revelation requires the recipient of the revelation to be endowed with a special strength. We have previously shown how, when a human being transfers electrical power from a high-voltage source to a smaller, more delicate device, that he does not transfer that power all at once; otherwise, the smaller device would be incapable of bearing it. This is why we make use of a transformer that can support the high-voltage energy of the source and transfer that power to the smaller device according to its capacity. This is why we invest in such electric transformers, so as to transfer electric power from a powerful source to low-capacity devices. An example of the latter would be the small light bulb that emits a gentle light during the night so that we do not bump into our furniture if we happen to wake up; this is what is known as a nightlight. Thus, the function of the electric transformer is to receive power from a high-voltage source and to transfer it in smaller doses to a smaller electric device.

Allah's Will was not to inspire the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* directly, for he is a human being who is not capable of receiving Direct Revelation from Him; this is why there is a need for an intermediate agent who can withstand the revelation from the highest source and who also has the ability to interact with human beings. It is this quality that the archangel is endowed with. Despite this, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was still overcome with fatigue after he first communicated with the Archangel; sweat was pouring from the Prophet Muhammad’s forehead, and as soon as the archangel had left. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was shivering and calling upon them, 'Cover me up…cover me up.' The companions used to say that when Divine Revelation descended upon Prophet Muhammad when he was seated, sometimes his knee was resting on the thigh of one of theirs, whereupon that companion would feel an immense weight on his thigh as a result of the pressure exerted on it by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Another example is when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* happened to be riding his she-camel, and the revelation descended upon him during that time, the she-camel would slump to the ground. Thus, descending of the revelation was a tiring process for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, after this fatigue eased, the sweetness of the revelation remained in his soul, and so he would look forward to the next revelation. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted to make the Prophet yearn to receive the next revelation. Therefore, once He suspended the revelation for a period of time, and the Prophet's yearning for revelation reached a peak. This was as if he had 'recharged' himself, physically and mentally, for the next episode of Divine Inspiration and for the fatigue which incurs on the body. Allah *the Exalted* knows the best of examples. Consider how much effort is required of you to make a trip to see a loved one, especially if it is raining, and the ground is muddy and filled with thorns. However, despite all of this, you complete the journey without ever mourning the pain and fatigue it causes to you. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted His Messenger Muhammad to look forward to the episodes of Divine Inspiration in spite of the physical stress that they caused, for these episodes are the meeting of the archangel with a human being. Also, this meeting is characterised by two things: either the archangel assumes a human form (in these circumstances only minimal effort is required from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and because, in this case, the process of 'transformation' occurred at a high level for the angel, whereas the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* remained as he had been. For instance, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* once came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was in the company of some of the companions, and the archangel asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'What is faith?' 'What is Islam?' 'What is *Ihsan* (virtue)?' Then the interrogator took his leave, whereupon the companions asked the Prophet about the identity of this mysterious man. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'That was Jibril (Gabriel) who came to teach you issues (the imperative ones) regarding your religion.'(1)

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. This Hadith has been published by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (50) and by Muslim in his (Sahih) (8).*

This is the first form of Divine Revelation in which transformation was on the side of the sending medium, which means that the archangel assumed a human form, causing no hardship to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The second form of revelation, however, tended to cause Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hardship, for the archangel maintained his natural appearance, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had to undergo some kind of a chemical transformation which required such effort on his part that at the end of it he would call upon them, 'Cover me up.' However, the True Lord *the Most High* had Mercy on His Prophet Muhammad, so he suspended the flow of revelation for a period of time. This prompted the disbelievers to say, 'Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him.' This is utter stupidity on their part since by uttering such a statement they are admitting that Muhammad is guided by a Lord. Since they admitted this fact, their continual disbelief is the height of arrogance and stupidity. However, in an attempt to ascribe their own shortcomings to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they said, 'Allah had forsaken Muhammad.'

It was the True Lord’s Will that He suspended the coming of revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during this period so as to expose the disbelievers to themselves and to others, to expose their intentions and to confirm their lack of discernment and foresight, along with their total lack of sound judgment; thus, when they had admitted that Muhammad is guided by a Lord, they should have returned to their right minds and admitted monotheism and the prophethood of Muhammad, rather, they made it a basis for accusing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of a lack of sanity.

If we were to judge them based on their way of thinking given the universe that they were living in and the physical laws that they live by, they would be forced to realise that any ‘event’ requires the two coordinates of time and space, for every speech requires the two coordinates of time and space. Likewise, if there is no event, then there is neither time nor space.

This is why I always say to those who ask, 'Where was Allah during this time?' I say that you derive the sense of ‘when’ from the notion of time and the sense of ‘where’ from the notion of space; this is only valid if you are speaking about an event that occurs in time and space. However, Allah is not an ‘event’, and thus He is not determined by either of two variables of time and space. Time itself is dependent upon Him, and, likewise, space itself is dependent upon Him. Also, when you are speaking of ‘events’, these only concern human beings, for it is they who dwell in space, and it is they who undergo the passage of time. The time during which any event occurs is called *zarf zaman* (the circumstance governing time), and the place where the event occurs is called *zarf makan* (the circumstance governing space); the latter is a circumstance that is spatially fixed, whereas the temporal circumstance is a state. After a while, this 'state’ becomes a past event, while what was in the future becomes present, and then becomes past. Thus, we learn that at any given moment, there is a process occurring whereby the future is becoming the present, and the present is quickly becoming the past. The cycle of day and night is the clearest example of a temporal condition undergoing change, for the night falls and is followed by the day, for Allah *the Exalted* has made the day lightened so as to facilitate movement, action and work; He has made the night dark so as to induce stillness and repose, for if you do not rest during the night, you will have no capacity for work in the morning. Thus, the night is the complement, rather than the opposite, of the day. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* had willed for revelation to take place in a similar fashion, for the first time revelation descended upon the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* it was extremely taxing; then, the revelation subsided for a while so that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* could rest and recover his strength so as to receive revelation anew.

When the disbelievers said, 'Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him', Allah *Glorified is He* answered them with these verses: ‘Consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark. Your Sustainer has not forsaken you, nor does He scorn you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-3) The 'the bright morning hours' (*Ad-Duha* in Arabic) or the forenoon period of the day, as we have said, is the time for activity and work. So, when the night comes, it appears as if it is opposed to the day, but this is not the case; rather, the night complements and completes the day. Thus, the momentary suspension of revelation actually helped the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* recuperate his energy. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* swears by the early morning hours and by the night, this is a testament to the manifested phenomena of the cosmos which all human beings witness, be they believers or disbelievers! Allah *the Exalted* swears by the early morning hours that He has not forsaken His Prophet Muhammad. In fact, Allah had wished for this period of inactivity to be an opportunity for him, Muhammad, to recuperate his strength, so that he might re-double his efforts to spread the Message of Revelation. This way, the True Lord *the Most High* is caring for him even as he goes about his mission. This is the ultimate response to those who say that Muhammad's Lord has abandoned him; it is a confirmation that Allah *Glorified is He* has willed a period of rest from revelation and that this period of rest and repose would be akin to the stillness of the night, so that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* might rest after the intense period during the morning hours in which he received the revelation.

Also, after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* recuperated his strengths, revelation descended upon him once again; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'for, indeed, the life to come will be better for thee than this earlier part [of your life]! And, indeed, in time will your Sustainer grant you [what your heart desires], and you shall be well-pleased.' (*ad-Duha:* 4-5)

Immediately following this chapter, Allah *the Almighty* says in chapter *'ash-Sharh*: ‘Have we not opened up your heart and lifted from you the burden that had weighed so heavily on your back? And [have We not] raised thee high in dignity?’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1-4)

Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* explains how this cycle of momentary suspension of the revelation and then its resumption is a complementary process. It is only foolish people who assume that there is contradiction in the matter; they set the following pairs: light and darkness; day and night, as if they were opposites. In reality these pairs are complementary.

Similarly, you find people who try to spark animosity between men and women; they did not understand that a male is the natural complement of a female and that a female is the natural complement to a male. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do people deem it strange that we should have inspired a man from their own midst [with this our message], "Warn all mankind, and give unto those who have attained to faith the glad tidings….’ (*Yunus:* 2)

Now the word 'warn/warning' *(al-indhar),* as we know, is the act of informing someone of something they still are in a position to avoid. Concerning the word 'glad tidings' *(al-bishara)*, it is the act of informing someone of a good thing that is coming soon and that one should hold on to it. For instance, you would warn someone who neglects his studies that he might fail. By warning him, you are implicitly imploring him to work harder, whereas when it comes to someone who is a hard worker, you inform him that his efforts could bring about success and a brighter future.

Therefore, to warn someone is to urge them to stay away from what will cause them harm. On the other hand, to bring good tidings is to insist that someone keep up his good work so as to earn desirable results. All matters connected with events revolve around what is negative and what is positive.

One might ask why Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the warning before He mentions the good tidings. We would say that the word *al-indhar* (warning) is a term that concerns people in a general sense; it cautions them against acts that would lead them to hellfire. However, the good tidings concern only those who believe. Or, both the warning and the good tidings concern believers, but the True Lord *the Most High* has willed that believers will always be the recipients of good tidings. On the other hand, the warning also applies to them in the sense that it is necessary for purging souls from their flaws, and this process has to take place before a soul becomes ‘perfected’ or ‘whole’.

It is normal that you do away with all those things that inflict harm on yourself. Then, you concentrate on those things that benefit yourself. Truly, one must abandon what is evil before seeking what is good.

We find that Allah *the Exalted* specifies that warning is addressed to people at large: all descendants of Adam *peace be upon him* or the whole of humanity beginning with Adam and ending with the end of time. Some orientalists have used the word *An-Nas* (people) as a means of entering into debate and trying to cause doubt about the Quran. They say that the Quran contains redundant repetition. One of the most important chapters which these orientalists took as an example is the chapter of *an-Nas* where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of men, the Sovereign of men, the God of men, from the evil of the whispering, elusive tempter who whispers in the hearts of men from all [temptation to evil by] invisible forces as well as men."' (*an-Nas:* 1-6)

This group of orientalists thought that the word *An-Nas* means the same thing in each of the verses where it is mentioned, but they did not possess the gift of language; they did not realise that the word *An-Nas* carries different meanings dependent on the context of the verse in which it falls, for the True Lord *the Most High* has wished for every word in the Quran to convey its precise meaning and that every meaning in the Quran makes use of its precise word. Another example of the word *An-Nas* is when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do they, perchance, envy other people for what Allah has granted them out of His bounty?...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 54). Are all people subjected to envy? If that were, the case, then who is the envier? Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘do they, perchance, envy other people….' (*an-Nisa’:* 54) This means that there exists envious people and that there exists others who are the objects of this envy. The word *An-Nas* only has a general, all-inclusive meaning when it comes to a general ruling.

The example is when the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Behold, the first Temple ever set up for mankind….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96) These words uttered by Allah *the Almighty* solve a general problem for us, for the *Ka‘ba* (the Sacred House of Allah) is the sacred sanctuary for all people, from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* and he is the father of all human beings. Thus, it is necessary that the Ka‘ba had been built before Adam exists, and the one who constructed it is not a member of the human family, for the one who built it did so under orders of the True Lord *Glorified is He*; thus, let no one say that it is Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who founded the holy sanctuary that is the *Ka’ba* since the function of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was to raise the foundations of the Ka‘ba. If we were to say that it is Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who was the one who built the Ka‘ba, how can this be compatible with what Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the Temple….’ (*al-Baqara:* 127)

From this verse we can understand that Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* had participated with his father in the raising of the foundations. Therefore, he must have been able-bodied enough to participate in the construction work with his father. We also understand from this verse that the process of raising the foundations of the Ka‘ba did not occur at a time when Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was still a baby since the True Lord *the Most High* quotes Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as saying: ‘O, our Sustainer! Behold, I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Your sanctified Temple …’ (*Ibrahim:* 37), and this means that the Ka‘ba had existed before that time.

This statement of ours is our response to those religious scholars who maintain that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was the first to build the Ka‘ba. We would furthermore ask them the rhetorical questions: 'What about the human beings who lived before the time of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*? Were they not also human beings?' So, how could these people be deprived of a Holy Sanctuary prior to the coming of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*? Thus, Allah *the Exalted* has decreed that there exist a Holy Sanctuary for all descendants of Adam *peace be upon him* and this Holy Sanctuary had been consecrated by non-human agents on behalf of Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, the word *An-Nas* has a wide, all-inclusive connotation when it comes to a general ruling, but in other instances, it is more particular a term, such as in the following: ‘Do they, perchance, envy other people for what Allah has granted them out of His bounty?...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 54).

As for the chapter of *an-Nas* where some orientalists claim there is unnecessary repetition, this is not the case. What is sure is that this chapter exposes their ignorance of the language, along with their inability to grasp the eloquence of these passages. When, in this chapter, we consider the word *An-Nas* carefully, we see that Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of men’ (*an-Nas:* 1). This verse declares Allah’s Lordship over all of creation, for He is the Lord Who created and granted all of the ‘qualities’ into every being. Moreover, do not think that you can escape His dominion, for He *the Most High* says: ‘the Sovereign of men’ (*an-Nas:* 2), which means that He has absolute ownership over all of creation, and although He has given his creation the power to exercise their free will when it comes to certain things, He prevented them from using their free will when it comes to other things. Also, Allah *Glorified is He* does not say,*'malik an-nas'* (Owner), for this would be that His creation is forced to have faith and do not have the power to do otherwise. However, Allah *the Almighty* has given them free will when it comes to matters of faith and its obligations that accompany it; in other aspects of our existence, however, they do not have a choice. Let me say this to anyone who has rejected faith and has rebelled against Allah, 'You have mutinied against your Lord. You disbelieve in Him, and you deny His Divinity, but why did you not be logically consistent with yourself? Why did you not rebel against any and everything, such as illness, for instance? Why did you not say to illness, "No, I refuse to become sick." No one can escape the fate that Allah has willed for him. A person will suffer from events in the measure that Allah has willed.' Thus, every human being is completely owned by Allah *the Exalted*. Thus, we see the difference between this last verse and the first verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of men.’ (*an-Nas:* 1) The word *An-Nas* in the first verse refers to human beings as they stand vis-à-vis their Lord, whereas in the second verse ‘the Sovereign of men’ (*an-Nas:* 2), the term refers to human beings as they stand vis-à-vis their Ultimate Owner, for no one can counteract the power that Allah has over him, for we all return unto Him. The word *An-Nas* occurs again in the third verse: ‘the God of men’ (*an-Nas:* 3) in order to emphasise that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Lord Who is rightly worshiped, and it is He Who has the power to protect you against the evil described in the fourth verse: ‘from the evil of the whispering, elusive tempter’ (*an-Nas:* 4) and the fifth verse 'who whispers in the hearts of men' (*an-Nas:* 5); this is the devil's character, described as *al-wiswas.* It is the one who whispers in your ear and embellishes evil acts. He is also described as *al-khanas* (the withdrawing) since he withdraws as soon as he hears you say: ‘I take refuge from Allah from the accursed devil.’ It is he who whispers evil thoughts into people’s hearts. Thus, we see that the word *An-Nas* is used to denote ‘those who are subject to Allah’s Lordship’, ‘those who are subject to Allah’s Ownership’, ‘those who are subject to Allah’s Divinity’ and ‘those who are subject to evil whisperings’. The latter can come from both jinn and human beings. Thus, there is no redundancy here. The word *An-Nas* is used to express multiple meanings according to the case. Take an example from our own lives. Suppose that there is a distinguished professor who is appointed by his university to become a scout for brilliant students, the president of the student newspaper, the student-trip coordinator, and the person responsible for grading the students’ papers. Thus, the word ‘student’ carries different connotations in the various places it is mentioned.

In the verse which we are currently studying, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘…Warn all mankind, and give unto those who have attained to faith the glad tidings that in their Lord’s sight they surpass all others in that they are completely sincere….’ (*Yunus:* 2) These words are addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the seal of the prophets. Thus, those who are to be warned in this case are all of the people. What is it that is meant by the words: ‘... that in their Lord’s sight they surpass all others in that they are completely sincere…’ (*Yunus:* 2)? The word *al-qadam* (literally the foot), as we know, is the organ that we use to move around, just as the hand is an organ that is used for giving and receiving. For example, you could say that someone has given you a hand, meaning that they have helped you, or you could say that I cannot forget the many offerings that you’ve given me (with your hands) when a friend offers you some gift. The same is true for the feet, as they might have used their feet to walk to you, but they have offered you the gift using their hands. Thus, every organ plays a role in our capacity for movement, in our ability to do work. The feet walk towards things, the hand serves to give and receive, and the ear serves for hearing and the eye for seeing. Thus, the expression ‘…completely sincere…’ (*Yunus:* 2) refers to the good deeds that believers have performed since they listen attentively to Allah’s Doctrine, and performed the obligations which this Doctrine requires, in a manner consistent with Allah’s wishes. It is, therefore, your obligation, O, Muhammad, to bring them the glad tidings that they are destined for paradise; they are guaranteed a place in paradise since they do what is good and virtuous in this life on earth. However, could there be such a thing as we could call *qadam kadhib* (advancing falsehood)? Yes, this is what hoboes do when they distort the histories of people, describing them in ways that are untrue. Thus, we come to discriminate between *qadam sidq* (advancing sincerity) and *qadam kadhib*. The former, then, consists of good works and virtuous actions which make possible the glad tidings, for they have been sincere in their actions and have honoured Allah’s Path, along with given each promise its due. The virtue of sincerity (*sidq)*, as we know, is one which a believer can never forgo since to forgo sincerity is tantamount to forgoing faith itself. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, 'Can a believer be a coward?' He said, ‘Yes.’ He was asked, 'Can a believer be a miser?' He said: ‘Yes.’ Finally, he was asked, 'Can a believer be insincere?' The Prophet said, ‘No.’(1)

Thus, sincerity is the most essential of all good characteristics and actions, and it is around the virtue of sincerity that all other beneficial actions in the universe revolve. When a merchant is honest in pricing his merchandise, when a worker is honest in his work, when a journalist is honest in reporting a story, and when every member of the society applies the principle of honesty and sincerity, the society can then become ‘whole’. Corruption in this world stems from dishonesty and insincerity, and this dishonesty stifles the rhythm of life. This is why this term *As-sidq* (sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness) is mentioned in various places in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says, for instance: ‘And [thereafter], indeed, we assigned unto the Children of Israel a most goodly abode….’ (*Yunus:* 93)

When they said: ‘...O Musa (Moses), indeed we cannot endure but one kind of food....’ (*al-Baqara:* 61) Allah *the Almighty* brought them to a place which satisfied their need for food; thus Allah *Glorified is He* did not deceive them. The True Lord *the Most High* mentions the word *As-sidq* a second time when He says [by the words of Ibrahim (Abraham)]: ‘and grant me the power to convey the truth unto those who will come after me’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 84) which means that You, my Lord, make the people who come after me speak well of me, so that they may not distort my history with lies and attribute falsehood to me.

In addition, regarding human beings, Allah *Glorified is He* has said: ‘Now [among the best of the deeds which] we have enjoined upon man [is] goodness towards his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months. And so, when he attains to full maturity and reaches forty years, he [that is righteous] prays: 'O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Yours with which You have graced me and my parents, and that I may do what is right [in a manner] that will meet with Your goodly acceptance; and grant me righteousness in my offspring [as well]. Verily, unto You have I turned in repentance: for, verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves unto You!"' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is [such as] these from whom We shall accept the best that they ever did, and bad deeds We shall overlook: [they will find themselves] among those who are destined for Paradise, in fulfilment of the true promise which they were given [in this world].' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16)

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(1) *The Hadith has been narrated by Imam Malik in his book (Mu’watta’) (990); it is narrated on the authority of Safwan ibn Slim.*

Why does the True Lord *Glorified is He* describe the 'promise' *(Al-wa'd)* as being 'sincere'? The reason He does is that there are some who make insincere promises, such as making promises on things that one does not have, to make promises on things which you know you would be unable to deliver or to make promises which you know circumstances will not allow you to honour. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: 'and never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow," without [adding], "if Allah so wills."....' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24) Thus, you must begin every promise with a reference to Allah's Will because if you make a promise, you might not have the power to fulfil it. For example, you might promise a person that you will meet him somewhere to discuss some matter or another. However, permit me to ask if you have any guarantees that you will live to see tomorrow. This is the first factor that might be compromised. Also, permit me to ask if you have any guarantees that they will live until tomorrow. This is the second factor that might be compromised. Then, do you have any guarantees that the reason for your meeting with them will remain the same? Furthermore, supposing all of these factors are assured, do you have any guarantees that you will not change your mind regarding the issue which you are getting to discuss together? Therefore, do not take a risk of making a promise whose various factors you have no control over and be sure to entrust all actions to be in Whose hands all of these factors rest by saying, '... "if Allah so wills."...' (*al-Kahf:* 24)

Thus, a 'sincere' promise (*wa'd as-sidq)* is that it is made by He Who is absolutely capable of honouring it, and all of the factors, no matter what they are, remain under His control, for He is ever-watchful of these factors because

He is ever-Present. Furthermore, His opinion never changes; for He is not subject to 'change' in the same way that 'events' are subject to change. In His hands rest all things and He is Omnipotent. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Hence, too,] behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves in [a paradise of] gardens and running waters, in a seat of truth, in the presence of a Sovereign Who determines all things...' (*al-Qamar:* 54-55). Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* has promised His devout servants that they will occupy an esteemed status in His eyes, and He is the Omnipotent Lord of all dominions. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and say [in your prayer]: "... Cause me to enter [upon whatever I may do] in a manner true and sincere and cause me to leave [it] in a manner true and sincere. .."' (*al-Isra':* 80). What this verse means is to allow me to enter this country in sincere fashion, in a manner consistent with my objectives which I will not be ashamed to announce. Thus, let me not say one thing to people while concealing a secret agenda and also allow me to leave this country in a sincere fashion. Thus, the word *As-sidq* is used in all of these various contexts, and the result is that we come to cherish the fundamental value that is 'sincerity' due to life's issues with all of its gifts and blessings. Furthermore, all that people have come to expect in the way of happiness hinge on the virtue of 'sincerity'.

In the verse which we are currently examining, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…and give unto those who have attained to faith the glad tidings that in their Lord's sight that they surpass all others by being completely sincere…' (*Yunus:* 2), which means that they have earned credit with their Lord and they shall be duly rewarded, for they have abided by the principles of this Doctrine. As for the situation of disbelievers, it is different; that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '...they who deny the truth say, "Behold, he is clearly but a spellbinder!"' (*Yunus:* 2)

Why does Allah *Glorified is He* mention the fate of the disbelievers, even though the main concern of this verse is 'warning' and 'bringing about glad tidings'? Our answer is the following: when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* communicated Allah's Doctrine on behalf of his Lord, the believers accepted the message, but the disbelievers reacted differently with some of them accusing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a sorcerer. The True Lord *the Most High* mentions this fact because it is relevant to the context of the verse. To be certain of this, the Quran at times omits certain data, but the attentive listener will be aware of these anyway; this eliminates redundancy in the Quran. Consider, for instance, the story of Bilqis. We find the hoopoe bird telling Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*: '…I have encompassed [with my knowledge] something that you have never yet encompassed [with yours]….' (*al-A'raf:* 22) This is the hoopoe bird speaking, a creature of lesser status than Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. It tells Sulaiman (Solomon): I have come to know what you have not known yet; it is as if this verse has been revealed so as to teach us how to deal respectfully with all creatures, even though they are 'lower' than us, for Allah *the Exalted* can inspire lesser creatures with knowledge which we do not have. After all, was it not crows that taught us how to dispose of the corpses? 'Thereupon, Allah sent forth a crow that scratched the earth….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31) So Allah says that Cain said, '…"Oh, woe is me! Am I then not able to do what this crow did and hide the corpse of my brother?" – and was thereupon smitten with remorse.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31)

Thus, man has learned from a lesser creature than himself; he has learnt from a creature whom Allah has put at man's service. Witness how Allah *the Almighty* shows us that when a lesser creature learns of some news, he cannot but inform a higher creature. Thus, the higher creature can absorb the new information and take appropriate action. The hoopoe bird told Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*: 'But the hoopoe stayed not long and said, "I have encompassed [in knowledge] that which you have not encompassed, and I have come to you from Sheba with certain news' (*an-Naml:* 22). At this point, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* made a decision and ordered the hoopoe bird to execute it: 'Go with this my letter and convey it to them, and thereafter withdraw from them and see what [answer] they return.' (*an-Naml:* 28)

The story continues from then on, and Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[When the Queen had read Sulaiman's (Solomon's) letter,] she said, "O, you nobles! A truly distinguished letter has been conveyed unto me.' (*an-Naml:* 29)

Thus, the hoopoe bird took the book and delivered it to *Bilqis*, and when she had read it, she summoned her assembly and told them about it. Thus, the Quran omits certain details, which, if they had been included, would have made for unnecessary repetition. Rather, the story is narrated in such a way because the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to show us that the delivery of the book took place quickly for there is nothing separating the issuing of the order and its execution; the two are fused together.

Thus, when the True Lord *the Most High* says: '... [Only] they who deny the truth say, "Behold, he is clearly but a spellbinder!"' (*Yunus:* 2), this fact is fused to the general point of the rest of the verse; in other words, the disbelievers only made such an accusation after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had informed them of what Allah *the Exalted* had told him: bring glad tidings and warn people. So, when he did so, their accusation, that he is a sorcerer, soon followed, hence, we see how the mention of the disbelievers fits in with the wider context of the verse, for they only brought forth this accusation after Prophet Muhammad had conveyed the warnings and the glad tidings.

Therefore, the Quran sometimes leaves certain details out of the main text, and it allows the listener's imagination to fill in the unspoken details. Another example of this narrative style can be seen later in the same story of Sheba. The following events occurred: the hoopoe bird received orders from Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* then, it delivered the book to the Queen of Sheba, next, she read it and gathered her assembly to solicit their advice as to how to deal with Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. After the following events occurred, the Quran described the council that she held with her people; then, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* learnt about her intention of coming to him with her people. At this point, our Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* asked those around him: "…O, you nobles! Which of you can bring me her throne before she and her followers come unto me and willing surrender to Allah?"' (*an-Naml:* 38) Thus, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* had learnt that they were on their way to see him and that they were coming to submit themselves to him; and so he wanted to transport her throne from her kingdom to his before she arrived. Since they were already on their way, the one who would be in charge of transporting her throne must have superhuman powers; this is why no human volunteered for this mission; those who volunteered were jinns with extraordinary powers along with being intelligent, for there are some jinns who are intelligent, whereas other jinns are not. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Said a bold one of the invisible beings [subject to Sulaiman (Solomon)], "I shall bring it to you before you rise from your council-seat–for, behold, I am powerful enough to do it, [and] worthy of trust!"' (*an-Naml:* 39)

However, Sulaiman's (Solomon's) meeting with his people could last for an hour, or two or even three. Likewise, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* wanted to expedite the shipment of Bilqis's throne. This is why he ignored this first offer and lent his ears to the offer made by the one who had the knowledge of the Book: 'Answered he who was illumined by revelation, "[Nay,] as for me–I shall bring it to you before the twinkling of your eye ceases!"…' (*an-Naml:* 40).

Did this then not require that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* give the order and say to that person, 'Go and fetch the throne'? Yes, all of this certainly took place, but the Quran recounts the story in an abbreviated manner such that immediately after this offer, news of the throne's arrival is mentioned, and the story remains focused on the events occurring at Sulaiman's (Solomon's) court: '…And when he saw it truly before him…' (*an-Naml:* 40).

Therefore, all of the obvious details are deliberately omitted, and in this case, these details would consist of the events that occurred between the time when the person with knowledge of the book made his offer and the delivery of the Bilqis's throne. Thus, in the verse that we are currently studying, the Quran omits certain details. When Prophet Muhammad conveyed the warnings to disbelievers, then, they said, '…"Behold, he is clearly but a spellbinder!"' (*Yunus:* 2)

The disbelievers had hurled such slander against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* more than once; sometimes they describe the Quran as 'sorcery'; other times they accuse Muhammad of being a sorcerer. Now what is the meaning of the word *sahir* (sorcerer, magician)? A sorcerer is someone who fabricates things, along with being someone who makes up nonsense and tricks you into thinking that it is the truth. This is why we must differentiate between sorcery and the miracle performed by Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; it should not be said that the miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which involved his staff was the same kind of magic which Pharaoh's sorcerers performed; it was not magic since the True Lord *the Most High* actually transformed the 'being' of the staff into a snake, whereas the magic tricks which Pharaoh's people were capable of did not involve altering the nature of things; they merely set up optical illusions to give the appearance of a transformation.

Now, magic requires a magician, it requires an audience and it also requires the magic act itself. As for the magician, since it is he who performs the magic act, he himself will, therefore, not be seduced by it. Regarding magic, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…they cast a spell upon the people's eyes…' (*al-A'raf:* 116) which means that they bewitched the eye that perceives the magic trick even though the magic trick did not succeed in transforming the nature of the object. Thus, they had bewitched the audience's sight without altering the reality of the object; Prophet Musa's (Moses') *peace be upon him* miracle was totally different. His miracle did not consist of tricking the human vision; rather, it actually transformed the nature of the object. The Quran demonstrates the truth of the matter by drawing on practical experience. When Allah *Glorified is He* selected Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and told him: '"Now, what is this in your right hand, O, Musa (Moses)" He answered, "It is my staff. I lean on it, and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep, and [many] other uses have I for it." (*Ta Ha:* 17-18) When the True Lord *the Most High* ordered Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to cast his staff, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* witnessed it as it instantly transformed into a live snake: 'Said He, "Throw it down, O, Musa (Moses)!" So, he threw it – and lo! it was a snake, moving rapidly. ' (*Ta Ha:* 19-20) So, when Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saw that his staff had transformed into a live snake, slithering across the earth, he fled in terror. However, Allah *the Exalted* wanted to calm his fears and prepare him for his eventual encounter with Pharaoh's magicians. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* told him: 'Said He, "Take hold of it, and fear not. We shall restore it to its former state."' (*Ta Ha:* 21) Thus, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not bewitched; rather, it was an actual transformation of his staff into a snake that had taken place. When he reacted with fear, Allah *Glorified is He* reassured and ordered him to pick up the staff, for, with Allah's permission, it would revert back to its original form. In order to further prove that an actual transformation of Musa's (Moses') staff had taken place, consider the magicians whom Pharaoh had summoned from all corners of his kingdom; they all stood there face-to-face with Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and challenged him: 'Said [the sorcerers]: "O, Musa (Moses)! Either you throw [your staff first], or we shall be the first to throw."' (*Ta Ha:* 65) and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* accepted their challenge. The Quran describes the situation: 'He answered: "Nay, you throw [first]." And lo! By virtue of their sorcery, their [magic] ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly' (*Ta Ha:* 66).

Now the words *yukhayal ilayh* (seemed to him) mean that the ropes and the staffs did not undergo a genuine transformation such that they became snakes. As soon as Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* cast his staff, it was transformed into an actual snake which then devoured all of the contraptions which the magicians had created, and this is what prompted them to declare their faith and prostrate themselves in submission, for they had witnessed the true, undeniably real transformation of his staff into a snake. Thus, the magician always perceives the reality of the object, but he succeeds in distorting the vision of his audience; thus, for the audience, the object appears to have been transformed into something else. This is why nobody said that: Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* learnt magic from someone and that it was Musa's (Moses') teacher that defeated them in the contest. No, they realised that the matter transcended human capacity, for the nature of staff itself had been transformed. Thus, they said: '..."We have come to believe in the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!"' (*Ta Ha:* 70) They did not say, 'We submit to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.'

Thus, magic is an illusion in the eyes of the magician's audience. I say this to demonstrate the foolishness of the unbelievers of Quraysh. They accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a magician who was casting spells over people: causing a son to disobey his father and prompting slaves to rebel against their masters. If Prophet Muhammad was a magician, why had he not put a spell on those people who were making this accusation? The existence of those people who actually made such accusations proves that believing in the way of Islam and believing in Prophet Muhammad have nothing whatsoever to do with magic.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* says in response to their astonishment that Allah sent revelation to His Prophet Mohammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in response to the false accusation that Prophet Muhammad performed sorcery:

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ
عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ۖ يُدَبِّرُ ٱلْأَمْرَ ۖ مَا مِن شَفِيعٍ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ إِذْنِهِۦ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ
ٱللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ فَٱعْبُدُوهُ ۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Your Lord is God who created the heavens and earth in six Days, then established Himself on the Throne, governing everything; there is no one that can intercede with Him, unless He has first given permission: this is God your Lord so worship Him. How can you not take heed? [3] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 3)

Allah draws them to contemplate a more serious issue, They should turn their attention to something else rather than Allah revealing a book to a human; they should contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth, and how they were created, Since Allah has created the heavens and the earth and established humans on this universe, where everything was prepared with the utmost care and attention to detail they should give more attention to this fact before anything else

We have previously given the example of a man who was on board a plane. The plane ran out of fuel and crashed into the desert, however this person was destined to survive. He looked around and found that there was no water or food nor any signs of life around him. He then fell asleep, but when he woke up from his slumber, he found a sumptuous banquet of the finest food and drinks. Will he not wonder, before satisfying his hunger and his thirst, about who had prepared and brought him all this food and all these drinks?

Since the universe was prepared for man, is it not necessary that you think about who has prepared it for you. Is it not necessary that you think about who has created all this, which surpasses your capacity to create? Is it not necessary to think about who has put all this at your service? Allah *Glorified is He* has informed you that it is He Who has created the heavens, the earth, the sun, and the stars. When this information reaches you, it can be either true, whereby you should obey the Orders of the Creator, or false. However, if it is false, you are encountered with the begging question, 'Who created all of this?' If there is other deity who has created the universe and you heard such a claim, however such a creator did not do anything in order to prove the truth of this claim; so he will not deserve to be a god at all.

However, since no one else besides Allah has made such a claim, He (Allah) is therefore the Creator. That is because when someone makes a claim and nobody stands up to oppose that claim, the person who made the claim is correct, as long as no one voices an opposing claim.

We previously gave another example when we supposed that a group of your friends came to visit you and then left. You noticed that someone had left his wallet behind, but you do not know whose wallet it is. When you asked your servant to inform those who had just visited you, every one of them said he had not lost his wallet except one who said yes, the wallet was his. As a result, the owner of the wallet is identified until someone can prove otherwise. The same principle is at work here. When Allah *Glorified is He* informs us that He has created the heavens, the earth, the sun, moon, and the stars, and that it is He Who has supplied human beings with their earthly sustenance, we must believe that He is the Creator, since no one else has made such a claim.

And if Allah *Glorified is He* has created this universe and has put it at your service; why do you not give Him the freedom to choose a Prophet from among your own? What is odd regarding that?

Allah *Glorified is He* exposes their stance when He quotes them saying: ‘Why is this Quran not revealed to some great man of the two (chief) cities’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31).

Clearly, they had admitted that there was nothing false or fabricated about the Quran; however, they were disappointed in the fact that it was revealed to the orphaned son of Abu Taleb. Allah *Glorified is He* further exposes their twisted logic when He quotes them as saying: ‘Oh Allah, if this is indeed the Truth from You, rain down on us a shower of stones from the skies’ (*al-Anfal:* 32). They did not say, ‘Oh Allah, if it is the Truth from You, then guides us’.

As such, their hostility directed at the Prophet was a malicious, irrational hostility because when they owned anything precious and dear to their hearts, they could not find a more trustworthy guardian for it than Muhammad. Why have you ignored the fact that they used to trust Muhammad with precious objects? If you do not think he is truthful, then why did you trust him with your valuables? Is his name not Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah who emigrated and left 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* in charge of returning all the valuables to their respective owners? As such, Muhammad is not unworthy of carrying the Message and safekeeping the trust, and the Quran is not subpar. This fact is evident through your words and through your actions, and you have admitted this much yourselves. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Truly your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods [of time]' (*Yunus:* 3).

Allah says elsewhere in the Quran: 'Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the men, but most people do not know' (*Ghafir:* 57).

As He is the One Who has made such a marvellous creation, other works, which are less amazing, must be accepted from Him. And such works are also the product of His Wisdom. Let us judge things according to the logic that you disbelievers have put forth. Allah quotes you as saying: 'Why is this Quran not revealed to some great man of the two (chief) cities' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31). Therefore, there is no doubt in your mind about the Quran; rather, you have an issue with the fact that it was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and you wish that it had been revealed to someone else more acceptable to you. Your attitude towards this matter is completely illogical because you want to intervene in Allah's Will, enter into the fold of His Mercy and have the Quran revealed to an agent of your choice, not His choice. Clearly, what you want to do is to control the Mercy of Allah *the Most High* and force Him to allocate a Messenger of your choice. However, you forget that in this world you are not the ones who allocate the blessings among creatures. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Will they distribute the Mercy of your Lord?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). But if you want to be in charge of distributing the Mercy of Allah, you should know that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). If this simple matter, which is the allocation of sustenance for life, has been taken care of by Allah *Glorified is He*; how can you wish to have a say in the highest of matters, which is the Mercy of Allah *the Most High* in sending a Messenger?

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions in the verse that we are currently studying the word '*Rabb'* (Lord) in the phrase: 'Truly your Lord is Allah'. When we hear the word *'rabb',* the mind conjures up the idea of creation and sustenance.

That is why in our use of this word, we say so-and-so a person is *'rabb'* of such-a-such a family, meaning that he is the head of this household who is responsible for sustaining it. The word *'rabb'* in its most absolute sense denotes 'the Lord', for He is the Creator who created from nothing. Describing Him like this necessitates that He is Lord of all of His creation: believers and unbelievers, and the obedient and disobedient. As long as Allah is the Lord of all creation, He also provides for all of them as it is He who has summoned this world into existence and it is He Who bestows every creature with the sustenance that has been destined for him. It is He who instituted the laws of the cosmos and those means that determine whether a creature will receive sustenance or not. When a human plants and takes good care of the land, Allah orders the earth to provide sustenance to this creature. For every creature that employs the means needed to attain what he wants, Allah *Glorified is He* makes these means successful for him.

For this reason, I always say to those who see the unbelievers enjoying an advanced material civilization and who wonder why they are so advanced in worldly matters, whereas we are so underdeveloped that the unbelievers have taken full advantage of the worldly sustenance of Allah, whereas you have not taken full advantage of what the Lord has given you. It is necessary that you Muslims take full advantage of the Lord's material blessings so that the unbelievers do not beat you to them and so you do not become relegated to the role of spectator. It is in fact your obligation to outrun them to capitalize on the worldly blessings of Allah. However, the spiritual blessings of Allah *Glorified is He* which leads a man to admit that Allah is the One Who deserves to be worshipped alone and the One Whose Commandments of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' should be obeyed, are not enjoyed by any except those who believe in Him.

That is, Allah is the Lord of all but He is only worshiped by those who believe in Him. Therefore, there is a difference between the Blessings of Allah represented in terms of following the Doctrine defined by the commandments of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts', and the Blessings of Allah represented in terms of material sustenance that is allocated to all people alike, both the believer and the unbeliever and the obedient and the disobedient. Again, when an unbeliever takes full advantage of his worldly blessings and works hard, he reaps the rewards. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Whoever desires the gain of the Hereafter, We will give him more of that gain; and whoever desires the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the Hereafter he has no portion' (*ash-Shura:* 20). But, the duty of the believers is to take full advantage of the worldly blessings allocated to them; that they may reap the rewards and be more prosperous than the unbelievers. That is because when an unbeliever surpasses you in worldly affluence and influence, he might exploit this advantage and try to impose on you that which is incompatible with your faith.

In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Truly your Lord is Allah' (*Yunus:* 3), meaning that He is the Lord Who establishes the Doctrine, and therefore it is essential that you heed His Doctrine.

Then Allah says: 'Who [Allah] created the heavens and the earth in six periods [of time]'. The words *'sitat ayam'* ('six periods'; literally 'six days') occur in the Quran whenever the time taken for the creation of the heavens and the earth is mentioned. But there is one verse where this creation is mentioned in detail and where it appears, from the language used in the verse that the creation of the heavens and the earth lasted eight days. This verse is in the chapter of *Fussilat.* Allah says: 'Say, "What! Do you indeed disbelieve in Him Who created the earth in two periods [of time], and do you set up equals with Him? He is the Lord of [all] the Worlds". And He made on it mountains above its surface and He blessed therein and made therein its foods in four periods [of time]: alike for [all] who ask. Then He directed Himself to the heaven and it was a vapor. He said to it and to the earth, "Come both [of you], willingly or unwillingly". They both said, "We come willingly". So He completed them as seven heavens in two periods [of time], and revealed in every heaven its own natural and spiritual order; and we adorned the lower heaven with brilliant stars and [made it] to guard [and be a protection against the devils]; that is the decree of the Mighty, the All Knowing' (*Fussilat:* 9-12).

Here, the total number of days or periods of time amounts to eight. However, this is a superficial understanding of the matter. That is because all the verses that mention the creation in general terms state that it was completed in six periods of time. You should realize that all verses of the Quran which state things in general terms are understood according to other verses on the same topic which explain things in detail, except if numbers are involved. When numbers are mentioned, the verses which explain things in detail are understood by referring to other verses which are general. So, Allah created the earth in two days, and placed great mountains upon its surface and blessed it, however, the second creation that follows is a continuation of the first one. That is, the first two days are included in the four days, while the rest of creation took two more days to complete, making six the total number of days.

In this way, one period of time completes another larger period of time. Similarly, you find that a day on planet Venus is longer than its year. A year on Venus is equal to two hundred and twenty-five earth-days, while a day on Venus is equal to two hundred and forty-four earth-days. Consequently, a day on the planet Venus is longer than a year. The key to this fact is that the rotation of Venus around the sun is faster than the rotation of the earth around the sun, and that Venus revolves around itself very slowly, but it revolves around the sun very quickly. As such, every creature has its own cycle.

What is a day? From our perspective, a day is one rotation of the earth around itself, and this rotation causes days and nights. However, we find that the Quran uses the word '*yawm'* (day) and distinguishes it from the phenomenon of night-time. Allah says narrating a story of an old nation whom He destroyed: 'Travel through them, secure by night and by day' (*Saba':* 18). Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the day as a time of movement and action; whereas the night is reserved for darkness and repose. However, in terms of astronomy, a day includes both day-time and night-time. The Quran also shows us that there is a difference between a day in the life of this world and a day in the Hereafter. A day in this worldly life begins from dawn and ends with dawn the following day, however a day in the sight of Allah is a thousand years of our days. Allah says: 'Truly a day in the sight of your Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning' (*al-Hajj:* 47) and He also says: 'The angels and the Spirit (Angel Gabriel) ascend to Him in a day whose measure is (like) fifty thousand years' (*al-Ma'arij:* 4).

Thus, there are many different types of time-scales which differ from one to another regarding the unit of measurement and according to the planet involved. The various time-scales which Allah *Glorified is He* mentions in the Quran only reveal how they are different; that is, there is no contradiction in them at all.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are studying: ‘He established Himself above the Throne’. The religious scholars have paid much attention to the word ‘*istawa’* (He established/settled Himself). They scoured the entire Quran to count how many times it was mentioned. They found that it occurred in twelve chapters, namely *al-Baqara, al-A'raf, Yunus, ar-Ra’d, Ta-Ha, al-Furqan, al-Qasas, as-Sajda, Fussilat, al-Fath, an-Najm and al-Hadid*. The first chapter which describes Allah being established on the Throne is the chapter of *al-A'raf*. Allah says: 'Truly your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods [of time], and then established Himself above the Throne; He throws the veil of night over the day, which it pursues incessantly; and [He created] the sun and the moon and the stars, [all] made subservient by His Command; surely, His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, the Lord of the worlds’ (*al-A’raf:* 54).

Since Allah is the Creator, do not set yourself up in opposition against His Will and do not oppose His Decision to send whom He wills as a Messenger. And it is no wonder that He has sent a Prophet from among us. If it was someone else who created the universe and thereby says, although he will be lying, that he has the right to give orders to his creation, the situation could be completely different. However, it is Allah Who has created the universe and it is He Who has sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The second verse is the verse which we are currently studying where Allah says: 'Truly your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods. Then He established Himself above the Throne' (*Yunus:* 3). It means that He became the One Who is constantly in charge of all things in His creation.

After that is the verse in the chapter of *ar-Ra’d*, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see, then He established Himself above the Throne. He made the sun and the moon subservient [to you]; each one pursues its course to an appointed time. He regulates all affairs, explaining the signs in detail that you may be certain of the meeting with your Lord’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 2).

As for the attributes which are used to characterize human beings but with which Allah *Glorified is He* describes Himself, it is important to note that these Attributes are not understood according to human's attributes. They do not manifest themselves to their fullest potential in human beings, for humans are created beings whose existence is contingent on other people and things. However, Allah's existence is a necessity and is not contingent on anything else. For this reason, these Attributes should be envisaged in terms of: 'There is nothing whatever like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

To give an example, Allah *Glorified is He* knows that you are reading exegesis right now and He knows the place where you are reading and the people around you also know that. However, is the knowledge of Allah equivalent to the sum of your knowledge and the knowledge of the people around you? No, it is not. His knowledge is of an eternal and unchanging nature, which is a knowledge that has existed before your existence and the existence of those around you. When you know something and Allah knows it, Divine Knowledge is of a totally different order than that of human knowledge. Allah's knowledge is suitable for Allah, and your knowledge is suitable for you. The Divine Attributes are Absolute, but the attributes of humans are relative. That is because Allah's Existence is a necessity which is not contingent on anything and which transcends time; however, your life is a mere event with an existence bounded by the moment of your birth and the moment of your death.

Allah is Rich and you may also be rich, however, your wealth cannot possibly be compared to that of Allah's. Similarly, you have an existence and Allah *Glorified is He* has an Existence; however, your existence cannot be compared to the Existence of Allah. The Essence of Allah is unlike our own, His Attributes are also unlike our own, His Actions are unlike our own and His establishment above the Throne is also unlike our own establishment or settling. We must conceive all His Attributes in the context of: 'There is nothing whatever like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

That is because what is likely to impair the meaning of this verse is to understand the word '*istawa'* (established) as the act of sitting. Rather, we should conceive the notion of '*al-istiwa''* as denoting domination, as Allah *Glorified is He* dominates everything. This term also denotes the meaning of mastery. Allah *Glorified is He* speaking of Musa, says: 'And when he attained maturity and istawa' (became firmly established as was full grown)' (*al-Qasas:* 14).

Here, the word '*istawa''* indicates full maturity. A young man, before reaching puberty, lacks a maturity in his nervous system and his reproductive system, but when he attains puberty, these various bodily organs reach their maturity, hence the term '*istawa''* is used to denote being capable of reproduction and having reached manhood. Similarly, the term is used with fruits. Allah says: 'And it (the fruit) has *istawat* (stood firm/become established) on its own stem' (*al-Fath:* 29). That means the fruit has matured to the point where it is able to reproduce, thereby ensuring the survival of its species.

When the great flood subsided, the ark of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* came to rest, with the believers and Nuh on board. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the ark rested [and became settled] on Mount Judi' (*Hud:* 44), meaning that the ark came to rest on a mountain and the matter was resolved.

Thus, using the term '*istawa''* regarding Allah must be in a manner that is consistent with His Essence and His Attributes–attributes which might be present in human beings but are only relative compared to the Absolute Attributes of Allah. This is because He *Glorified is He* says: 'There is nothing whatever like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Similarly, the Divine Act cannot be equated to the human act. That is why we have said previously while discussing Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey (*Isra'*) to the Sacred House in Jerusalem that when the unbelievers denied this journey of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they asked the Prophet, 'Are you claiming that you traveled to the Holy House in the span of a single night, while we prod our camels for a month before we arrive there?' In reality, these refuting comments show that they understood that Prophet Muhammad said the Night Journey had actually taken place. However, some of our contemporaries, who claim to be enlightened, ask why we did not just say that the Prophet underwent the Night Journey in spirit. We say in response to this that the unbelievers of Quraysh themselves, who were contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say this, but they understood that Prophet Muhammad said he actually underwent the journey in body. That is why they said that they used to prod their camels for a month before arriving there. They did not say that he probably had a vision of the Sacred House in his dreams because nobody denies a vision or a dream. Clearly, their rejection proves that they understood and will continue to understand until the Day of Judgment that a miraculous journey was meant.

I wish to say to those who claim that Prophet Muhammad underwent this journey in spirit that you should realize that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, '*Usriya bi* (I was transported)'. Thus, the act is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* and therefore do not frame it in human terms; rather, conceive it in terms of the Divine Laws. The timing of the Night Journey is a matter that is also attributed to Allah and not to Muhammad. Allah says: 'Glory be to Him [Allah] Who made His slave go on a night journey from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque' (*al-Isra':* 1).

So long as Allah *Glorified is He* has said *Subhana* (Glory be to Him), this means that Allah transcends the natural laws which human beings are familiar with. We have given an example of this when we referred to a father who takes his newborn son up to the summit of Mount Everest. The question that arises is not about whether the infant scales the mountain or not because the act of climbing the mountain is attributed to the father. The summit was reached thanks to the strength of the father, and not his son. In the same way, the speed of the Night Journey and the power that it took for the journey to be completed were all of the work of Allah *Glorified is He* and not Prophet Muhammad. In the human realm, the amount of time needed for traveling distances varies. Someone who is riding on a horse-drawn carriage might cross the distance between Cairo and Alexandria in a few days. Someone driving a car might reach Alexandria in a couple of hours, while someone traveling in an airplane might make the journey in half an hour. Thus, the more powerful the locomotion, the less time needed. What do we think about Allah, the All-Powerful? Will time be a factor in this case? Of course, it will not.

To continue, Allah *Glorified is He* said to Prophet Nuh (Noah *peace be upon him*): 'And when you are firmly settled/established, you and those with you, in the ark' (*al-Mu'minun:* 28), meaning that after you and those who have attained to faith have climbed on board and when you are confident that they will all be saved, then the ark, by the Order of Allah, shall run its course. Consequently, when Allah *Glorified is He* describes Himself that He established himself on the Throne, it means that all matters were fulfilled and everything became stable. We, thereby, learn that anything related to Allah *Glorified is He* must be conceived in the following terms: 'There is nothing whatever like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). Whenever any one of His Attributes are mentioned, this is only to bring their meaning closer to human understanding and not to describe the whole reality of the Attribute, since there is nothing like Him. Consequently, Allah being established on the Throne has an action that is framed in Divine, not human, terms.

When the poet by the name of Abu Tamam wanted to praise al-Mu'tasim, the Abbasid Caliph, he mentioned those attributes which had made some Arabs famous in one poem. He praised him by saying he is like Hatim to denote the height of generosity. He compared him to 'Antarah to denote the height of courage, and compared him to Al-Ahnaf ibn Qays to denote the height of wisdom. And in this way he gathered all the qualities in the person of the Caliph. The poet said:

' Amr's bravery with Hatim's generosity,

And Ahnaf's patience with Iyas' intelligence.

But one of the poet's enviers said that al-Mu'tasim was far above all those whom the poet had ascribed to the Caliph. All of these qualities with which the poet described him were petty. Another poet composed lines criticizing the poet and said, 'The extoller likens in bravery and generosity that which, if one sees it, will turn out to be the lowliest of servants. In his army are fifty thousand 'Antarahs, and in his stores are a million Hatims'.

When the first poet heard these lines, he composed a new poem based on the same rhyme as his first poem, saying:

Censure me not for comparing him to his lessers,

Such aberrant examples of valour and bounty;

For Allah used a lesser thing to symbolise His Light:

A niche, wherein a lamp is shining.

Clearly, there is a big difference between the representation of something and the reality of the same thing. For when Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp' (*an-Nur:* 35), this is a metaphor for the benefit of human beings. Allah *Glorified is He* merely wishes to give us an idea of the reality being described; this is because He is speaking of something which we have never seen. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for example, describes paradise by saying that it contains that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard about and no human imagination can ever conceive. When you use your eyesight to see, human vision has its limits, and when you hear, you are listening to the opinions of others. And what can never come to mind is the ultimate reality of the Hereafter. In his description of Paradise, Prophet Muhammad uses language that soars beyond the limits of what the eye can see, what the ear can hear, and what the mind is able to conceive. That is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that language expresses meanings and that meanings exist first in this physical world before they are named. Therefore, these realities of the physical world can be used to describe realities that do not pertain to realms with which we are familiar.

For this reason, we must take into consideration the different levels of reality when we want to understand the phrase: 'He established Himself above the Throne' (*Yunus:* 3) understanding it in relation to Allah. It does not mean, for instance, that Allah *Glorified is He* came to rest in any particular location in space; for Allah transcends space. His Essence is unlike any other essence, His Actions are unlike any other action and His Attributes are unlike any other attribute.

After that, Allah says: 'He regulates and governs [all] affairs' (*Yunus:* 3) which means that Allah arranges the realm of existence in a wise manner, putting everything in its proper place. Allah *Glorified is He* is characterized by the Attribute of Knowledge, the Attribute of Will and the Attribute of Capableness. It is His Attribute of Knowledge which wisely puts everything in its proper place, while it is His Attribute of Will which allows potentiality to become actuality. And it is His Attribute of Capableness which makes manifest the Divine Intention and the Divine Objectives. That is, there is Knowledge, Will and Capableness which manifest the Divine Intention according to Divine Knowledge. It is only logical that Allah *Glorified is He* governs all things. It is He who has created the heavens and it is He who has created the earth. All things return to Him and are dependent upon Him. No new creation can come into existence unless He gives the order, ‘Be’. It is He who has created the heavens and the earth and created mankind, and put the heavens and the earth at mankind’s service. Allah must, therefore, regulate for men their material and moral needs.

As for man’s material needs, these have been supplied to him through the creation of the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the water and the air as well as those things that sprout from the earth and which provides sustenance for man’s life. Allah has created all these elements before He created mankind and man was created after these in order to act as the vicegerent of Allah *Glorified is He* on earth. Clearly, man was created and placed in the midst of a pre-existing universe. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* had to supply mankind with moral values for man to effectively perform the role of vicegerent. Since it is Allah Who created moral values, do not be amazed that He *Glorified is He* sent a Messenger who does not enjoy a privileged rank as some other men do among their communities, and do not wonder why He chose to send Muhammad specifically. Allah’s selection and sending of a Messenger is all part of His Governance and Planning of all things, because Allah says: ‘Allah knows best where to place His Message’ (*al-An‘am:* 124).

That is, the phrase that says: ‘He [Allah] regulates and governs [all] affairs’ came so as to negate once more their astonishment that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could be the bearer of the Message. Allah says: ‘Is it a matter of wonderment for men that We have sent our revelation to a man [Muhammad] from among themselves’ (*Yunus:* 2). The reason behind this is that Allah *Glorified is He* is our Lord and the Creator, and as such, no one can argue with Allah *Glorified is He* about that which He has created. It is Allah who has created mankind and the universe, and because of this He has to arrange any interaction between mankind and the universe. That is why He chose a Messenger who is worthy of carrying to mankind this valuable Doctrine based on the commandment ‘Do’s’ and ‘Don'ts’. But Allah *Glorified is He* left certain areas of life free for man to exercise his choice, where Allah *Glorified is He* does not specifically command us by either ‘Do’s’ or ‘Don'ts’. These areas constitute permissible acts. If you were to compile all the actions and events that are possible in this world, you will find them far more numerous than those actions connected to both ‘Do’s’ and ‘Don'ts’. Since it is Allah Who has willed all this and has left many things permissible to you, leave all systems of values to Allah, because the physical universe has been created by Him with utmost precision and in a highly organized way. The sun, for instance, cannot refuse to rise, shine or heat us, nor can the moon refuse to reflect its light upon us. Similarly, the clouds cannot refuse to rain down water upon us profusely, nor can the earth refuse to nurture plant seeds and provide food for us. Everything that falls within the natural laws of the cosmos has been made perfect and completely void of flaws.

If you were to look at anything else, you will see that it contains flaws. Things that human beings do not interfere in are always in a perfect order. Things only deteriorate when humans become involved; however, this does not mean that all human work suffers from defects, rather, only those works which are divorced from Allah’s Way for mankind. If we were to select alternatives which are in alignment with Allah’s Way for mankind, all matters will become rectified exactly as the natural laws all around us have been perfected. Therefore, when you see corruption, promptly blame yourselves because everything that you do not have a hand in works perfectly. If you want your actions to work perfectly, abide by the Doctrine of Allah in all that you do and avoid corruption by staying away from the alternatives which are in conflict with the Will of Allah.

That is why I always say that when you detect any blemish, and a community suffers because of it, know that the Laws of Allah *Glorified is He* have been trespassed. If you find a backward community, know that they have encroached on the Laws of Allah. Likewise, when you find a community suffering from serious social disorders, know that they do not abide by the Doctrine of Allah. It is wrong to think that worshipping Allah is limited to simply going to the mosque, observing the fast, paying the poor-due on time or performing the Hajj pilgrimage. All these are the fundamentals of Islam which prompt Allah’s slaves to live according to the dictates of Allah’s Doctrine. Prayer is the reaffirmation of our allegiance to Allah five times a day, and Fasting continues for the entire month of Ramadan. Zakat is taken out of our surplus wealth and the Hajj pilgrimage is our detachment from our wealth, family, and progeny.

All these activities serve to give us more energy; so when you are fully recharged spiritually, channel this energy into some other area of work. Take Prayer as an example. You require energy in order to get up, sit down, survive physically, and have strength to move. And you need all this energy just to pray. You require food, but you cannot feed yourself unless you have a job which allows you to buy food, vegetables from the merchant, meat, fruit and bread. You need a supplier of these commodities, those who produce food products require scientists who study the soil, the seeds, and the climate, and all of these things have to be organized properly to produce foods. Those who plant require tools to plough the earth, and this requires the existence of raw metal, which also requires the existence of others who will melt the iron ore and extract the elements that are suitable for making ploughing tools.

All these things are required when you rise to pray, and what is necessary for the fulfilment of obligatory rites becomes, in turn, obligatory. As such, you find that all the activities that facilitate your religious duties are considered obligatory. To clarify this point, look at the obligation of covering the 'awrah (the nakedness) of the body while praying. That is why you buy cloth so that a tailor can make clothes for you. As a result, all the activities of producing and tailoring clothes are obligatory. These works also include planting cottonseeds or flaxseed, and the construction of factories that make fabric and spinning wheels. As such, all these activities which enable you to perform your religious rites are themselves obligatory, just as covering one’s body is obligatory in the Islamic law. As a result, our understanding of religious worship broadens to encompass any action that upholds what is good or makes what is good even better. The example, which I always give, is the human need to drink water, perform ritual purification, and clean our food, and so on and so forth. Ancient man used to drink from wells. He has progressed to the point where water networks distributed clean water to many different locations. All of these works make what is good even better because you take the rainwater which filled the river and pulled the water up into water towers for storage. You discovered the principles of hydrology and employed these to bring purified water to all those who need it. You make that which is good even better through rational thought and the application of scientific principles which benefit human beings. And this is a religious activity as long as the intention is ultimately for Allah.

Look at market day in any village. You will find people bringing cattle which they are looking to sell and others are coming with fruit and other foods. There are some who are coming with clothes and others with household appliances. You also find people coming to the market empty handed. However, after the marketplace is over, you find that everyone has left with what he needed and not what he came to sell. Allah *Glorified is He* caused some humans to think about what they need to sell at the marketplace and caused others to buy it. When you look at a particular village, you will find one of its members wants to sell his plot of earth and his house to move somewhere else. Consequently, you can begin to see how the Divine Economy works among people. It spreads people over a large area depending on where each one of them wants to live. Such is the Divine Arrangement; an arrangement in the best way possible.

You might find, for instance, that a child writes with his left hand unlike his peers. You might hit him because of it, but then he becomes unable to write with either his left or his right hand. When a doctor tells you that your child was gifted with beautiful writing with his left hand you will be amazed, and then you find that he truly is talented at writing beautiful script with his left hand. I always tell those who complain about their children writing or eating with the left hand that this matter is related to the nervous system of a man. There are some whom Allah *Glorified is He* has created to work with their right hand and others were born to work with their left hand. And there are some whom Allah *Glorified is He* has created to work with both their hands, such as 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who was ambidextrous, that is, he was proficient at working with both his hands.

We must respect things that Allah has allotted to each of His creatures. He *Glorified is He* creates what He wishes–not according to preconceived moulds, but according to any mould He wishes. Every creature has a specific function. Moreover, as Allah *Glorified is He* has perfected the creation of everything in which you have no say or control, know that He has revealed the Doctrine to improve that in which you do have control, so as to make your lives more orderly, and all this is part and parcel of the Divine Order.

On considering what the word *'amr'* (order) means, you will find that it denotes everything which has come into being. But, why does Allah avoid using the word '*shay''* (thing) and use the word '*amr'* instead*?* That is because nothing comes into existence on its own unless the order 'Be' is uttered. Allah says: 'His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it, "Be", and it is' (*Ya Sin:* 82). In addition to this, Allah *Glorified is He* arranges those corporeal matters in which humans play no part. To sum up, if a man wants to rectify and perfect his life, he should abide by the Doctrine which Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed, which is encapsulated in the commandments of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts'. As for the things that are permissible, they are many and man is free to engage in any of them.

If someone were to ask why he should follow the Doctrine or the Path of Allah, I say that Allah *Glorified is He* wished to create man and endow him with two natures: One of them has a compulsory nature and the other is based on freewill. That is, humans are compelled when it comes to many things, but when it comes to other things they have a choice. You are compelled, for example, to breathe. In fact, you breathe automatically without even being conscious of it. You breathe when you are awake and when you are asleep. If breathing were something in which you had a choice, you will need someone to manage your breathing when you are asleep. Clearly, it is a Mercy from Allah that you are compelled in such matters as breathing and the beating of your heart. You are also forced in matters such as the digestion of food, the expansion, and contraction of the stomach and the secretion of the digestive juices. However, you have a choice in other matters such as purchasing merchandise from a particular merchant or from someone else. You are also free to choose between the different types of food that you like.

There are many permissible things in life. You have freedom in so many areas of life. The number of things which Allah *Glorified is He* has labelled under the command of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' are limited. Their purpose is to protect you and protect the society. They also serve to protect the universe in which you live and breathe. You can exercise your freedom of choice in the domain of the permissible in any way you like, and this will not negatively affect the universe. Allah *Glorified is He* wills that you be compelled in certain matters so as not to corrupt the universe. You are free to eat any of the foods which are allowed, and there is nothing preventing human beings from picking and choosing the foods which they like as long as they are permissible to eat.

But all humans are different. As such, Allah wishes to protect human beings and the universe because He knows that human desires are contradictory. He says: 'And should the Truth follow their low desires, surely the heavens and the earth, and all beings therein, will have been ruined' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71). That is why we can see that the Governance of Allah in those things over which we have no influence is perfect. Everything that functions without human interference follows a precise order. Allah *Glorified is He* wishes that the natural laws of the universe function with such accuracy that both the believer and unbeliever are amazed by them. Allah governs His Dominion with infinite precision. Even scientists who do not adhere to the Doctrine of Allah have been able to predict the exact dates of complete and partial solar and lunar eclipses. They have been able to achieve this with unbelievable accuracy because they had based their calculation upon the raw data available to them from the natural world.

Since you Muslims are different from the unbelievers by virtue of your faith in Allah, then abide by His Doctrine in your daily lives to perfect them, just as the laws and functioning of the universe have been perfected by Allah's Laws. And that is why Allah proclaimed: 'He [Allah] regulates and governs [all] affairs' (*Yunus:* 3).

Allah *Glorified is He* adds: 'There is no intercessor (who can plead with Him) except after His Permission [has been given]' (*Yunus:* 3). Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the issue of intercession after having mentioned the issue of Divine Governance. This is because those unbelievers who were amazed at the fact Allah sent Muhammad as a Messenger used to worship that which neither harms nor benefits them. They used to say that those idols will intercede with Allah *Glorified is He* on their behalf. Allah says about them: 'They worship, besides Allah, what cannot hurt them or profit them. And they say, "These are our intercessors with Allah"' (*Yunus:* 18). That is why Allah *Glorified is He* explains the issue of intercession. A man does not need an intercessor with the One Who owns all things unless he commits a sin or shirks his duties in a way or another. This verse clearly shows how they worship that which will not harm them if they ceased to worship it, and will not reward them if they worshipped it. They decided that these idols will intercede on their behalf. The word '*ash-shafa'ah'* (intercession) is derived from the word *'ash-shaf''* (to add, to attach, to supplement, to couple with); and its antonym is '*al-watr'*, which is an odd number.

A person from among those non-believers finds himself in an awkward position vis-à-vis the god that he worships. He is unable to face his god because he (the person) is incomplete. That is, rather than facing his god alone, he brings along someone else to intercede for him. For this reason, the word '*ash-shaf''* has the meaning of seeking the help of another. Thereby, there is a shift from singularity to duality.

Regarding those idols, the unbelievers during the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say they (the idols) were their intercessors with Allah. For this reason He *Glorified is He* says in the verse which we are examining: 'There is no intercessor except after His Permission [has been given]' (*Yunus:* 3).

Intercession requires an intercessor, the one the intercessor intercedes with, one who is interceded for and a particular issue around which the intercession revolves. As for the one on whose behalf this intercession is performed, it is obviously a person who has fallen short of certain objectives. Those unbelievers said regarding the idols that they (the idols) were their intercessors with Allah, and that is an admission on their part that they have failed in some form or other. They also asserted that the one with whom the intercessor intercedes is Allah, while the issue around which the intercession revolves is either a plea for a milder punishment or an elimination of the punishment altogether.

Therefore, the issue around which the intercession revolves is the same as the intercession the Muslims believe in and so is the One with Whom the intercessor intercedes. As for the intercessor itself and the one on whose behalf this intercession is taking place, these two are different from that of the believers. To explain more, you will not ask a random person in the street, for example, to intercede on your behalf to the governor or to the minister if you need any service from them; instead, you will find someone whom you know is dear to them and who enjoys their admiration and respect. This is because it is his status that will enable him to speak to the governor or to the minister on the people's behalf.

Since this is the case with intercession between one human being and another, what about intercession with Allah *Glorified is He*? It is for this reason that Allah declares, in many verses of the Quran, that the intercessor must be approved by Him. Allah says: 'No intercessor (can plead with Him) except after His Permission [has been given]' (*Yunus:* 3) and in the chapter of *al- Baqara*, Allah says: 'Who is he who can intercede in His Presence except after His Permission [has been given]' (*al-Baqara:* 255) and in another verse Allah says: 'On that Day no intercession will avail anyone except for those to whom the Most Merciful has given permission and has accepted his word' (*Ta Ha:* 109). Clearly, the intercessor must enjoy the approval of Allah.

Regarding those whom the intercessor intercedes for, Allah *Glorified is He* stipulates: 'And they offer no intercession except for those with whom He is well-pleased' (*al-Anbiya':* 28). In this way, Allah shows us what the different elements of intercession are. They are the intercessor, the one on whose behalf the intercession is performed, the one who the intercessor intercedes with, i.e. Allah, as well as a particular issue which requires intercession, which in this case, as is well known, is sins.

One might wonder why a person requires intercession on his behalf when Allah *Glorified is He* is already pleased with him. I reply that we should keep in mind that a human encounters numerous activities throughout the course of his life, and he also has shortcomings and weaknesses. These shortcomings might be numerous or they might be few. For this reason, when he succumbs to any of his weaknesses and commits a sin, he must do more good deeds to earn a maximum number of rewards. The principle at work here is: 'Good deeds remove evil deeds' (*Hud:* 114). When a servant increases the number of his good deeds, Allah *Glorified is He* forgives him for his past sins. Every man has to know that when he violates any of the Laws of Allah, he will not elude punishment. He, thereby, must increase the number of his good deeds, beg for Allah's Forgiveness, and pray that his good deeds annul his bad deeds. None shall elude the Infinite Grasp of Allah.

Suppose that a man suffers from a weakness and as a result he commits a sin, however, he also has a strength which enables him to easily obey one of the Laws of Allah *Glorified is He*. This person should know that Allah loves him for his strength and that Allah might forgive him regarding the sin that he committed. Allah *Glorified is He* might allow an intercessor, who enjoys His Approval, to intercede with Allah on behalf of this person.

Why does Allah allow this? Allah *Glorified is He* has willed that things be this way not to deprive the world of the good deeds which this person is easily capable of doing. One Hadith of Prophet Muhammad narrates the story of a man who came across a dog dying of thirst near a well. The man could not find any container to lower into the well and draw water, so he climbed down into the well himself and used his shoe to carry the water. He climbed back up and gave water to the dog. Of course, this man did not do this to show off in front of the dog, rather, he did this because of the mercy he had for the animal: a creature created by Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why Allah forgave this man all of his sins. As such, we understand that Allah *Glorified is He* forgives and annuls past sins.

Allah *Glorified is He* has granted the honour of intercession to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a privilege and an honour to him. Allah also honours others by permitting them to exercise this function as well. That is to let the believer realize that Prophet Muhammad can intercede on his behalf, that a believer can intercede on behalf of his brother, and that a father can intercede on behalf of his son. As a result, the believer strives to cultivate his relationships with these people in order to earn their intercession. A believer, thereby, strives to follow the *Sunnah* (way) of Prophet Muhammad properly, strives to treat his fellow believers in a good way, and strives to treat their parents better. In this way, the whole society will enjoy the honour such intercession brings by encouraging the performance of good works and the purification of intentions.

When you see a man excelling in his religion, you must respect him, for his excellence in his religion might benefit you indirectly. That is why we find that Allah says in the Opening chapter of the Quran: 'You do we worship and You do we beseech for help' (*al-Fatiha:* 5). Allah could have revealed this verse using ‘I worship and I beseech’ instead of ‘we worship and we beseech’; however, He wished to reveal it in this form in the Opening chapter in order to accept this pledge from all who utter it–and thereby accept good deeds from His slaves in order for the shortcomings of others to be overlooked. That is why I always say, ‘If you see a person who is steeped in worship, do not ridicule him or make fun of him; for his earnest obedience and his intense religious activity may benefit you in some way or another’.

When you receive an order from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and find it too difficult to do, remember that he might be your retreat who will intercede on your behalf concerning the matters which you found difficult to carry out.

Allah *Glorified is He* must be pleased with those who have been interceded for because they performed good deeds well, even though they may have committed some sins. A man once had a vision of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* and he asked him, ‘How has Allah treated you?’. ‘Umar responded that Allah *Glorified is He* has forgiven him. The man asked what good deed made Allah forgiven Him. 'Umar answered that he once saw a boy being cruel to a bird, so he purchased this bird from him in order not to rob the bird the boy owned and set it free. One of the people who were listening to this person objected, asking, 'Did 'Umar not perform more good deeds to earn forgiveness from Allah than just this one instance of freeing this bird?' Someone clarified the point to him and observed that this instance of freeing the bird served to erase his sins; however his other good works served to raise his spiritual status.

To continuefrom here, there are two verses in the Quran which are worded similarly. In the first verse, Allah says: 'And be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail another in the least, neither shall intercession be accepted for/from it, nor shall any compensation be taken from/for it' (*al-Baqara:* 48), while the second reads: 'And be on your guard against a day when no soul shall avail another in the least, neither shall any compensation be accepted from/for it, nor shall intercession profit it' (*al-Baqara:* 123). Those who have referred to these two verses in order to undermine the Quran are strangers to the Arabic language. They do not possess any innate aptitude for the language that enables them to grasp the gist of these kinds of expressions. Were they endowed with such a faculty, they will have known that these two verses have a two-fold implication. This is because there is the soul that has earned sufficient reward, which is the one that intercedes, and another soul which is interceded for as it earned somewhat less rewards. The pronoun in the phrases: 'neither shall [intercession/compensation] be accepted from/for it' and 'nor shall any compensation be taken for/from it', and 'nor shall intercession profit it' can be attributed to either the soul that intercedes or to the soul that is interceded for. When one of us, for example, owes a debt to someone else and is unable to pay it back or offer any compensation, he seeks the intercession of someone who is a friend of the creditor. When this friend goes to the creditor and asks whether he accepts his intercession or not, and if the creditor said that he will not accept his intercession, the intercessor may say that he will pay the amount owed to him by so-and-so (as a compensation). Clearly, we find ourselves in front of two types of people, i.e. one that intercedes and another that is interceded for him. The pronoun can be rightly attributed to any of these.

After having given us an idea of how Allah created the universe, informing us that He accepts intercession on behalf of whom He wills and that He gives certain individuals the right to intercede with Him, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying: 'Such is Allah, your Lord, therefore worship Him; Then will you not remember?' (*Yunus:* 3) Allah *Glorified is He* has created the universe and all things have been settled and arranged by Him. He created humans in order to inhabit this universe. We know that He has testified that there is no God save Himself; and when Allah *Glorified is He* testifies for Himself, this means that He is confident that His Will in the universe shall be done.

When Allah says: 'Such is', He refers to all that had preceded, including the creation of the heavens and the earth, His Establishment on the Throne and His Governing of all things. No one intercedes with Him except after He gives Permission to them. Such is Allah *Glorified is He* your Lord, and as He is your Lord, you must worship Him. That is because He is the One Who has created out of nothing, provided for those who have nothing, and is endowed with all the Attributes of Absolute Perfection.

Our worship does not benefit Him in any way. Allah is too great to receive any benefit. Consequently, if you were to worship Him, you will not increase His Dominion, and if you were not to worship Him, you will not diminish His Dominion in any measure. However, the benefits of religious worship affect the believer because by practicing religious worship you are thereby abiding by a Doctrine that will gradually eliminate your profane caprices, and reorient every single one of your desires towards one aim. In this way, your soul will not suffer from any contradictions and internal inconsistencies; rather, all of the world will become an integrated whole.

As such, religious worship makes the desires of all creatures have one single aim, and none of us resents submitting to this one aim as it does not entail one human being submitting to another; rather, it is the submission of a creature before its Creator. In this way, all those areas in which you can exercise your freewill will become in a good state and in order, just as those areas in which you cannot exercise your freewill have been put in order.

Moreover, religious worship is not limited to only the five Daily Prayers. These five Daily Prayers, however, constitute the foundations over which the structure of Islam is built. All of Islam can be summarised by the prescriptions and proscriptions of Allah. That is why, when we examine the processes and sequence of things, we find that the pillars of Islam depend upon all of life’s activities. That which makes it possible for us to perform our obligatory religious rites becomes itself obligatory.

Allah *Glorified is He* says at the end of the verse: ‘…will you not then remember?’ (*Yunus:* 3) One’s mind, or one’s brain, whatever we may call it, is the seat of numerous faculties, such as the faculty of imagination, the faculty of memory and data storage as well as many other faculties among which is this faculty of ‘remembering’ that is referred to in the verse. Remembrance involves what you were previously acquainted with, but then something new occurred in your life and caused you to forget it. When you forget something that is of concern to one of your friends, your friends says to you, ‘O my brother, remember such-and-such a matter'. He does not bring up anything that you were previously ignorant of; rather, he tries to revive the memory of something with which you were familiar, but which you subsequently forgot.

When man impartially contemplates the cosmos, he must arrive at the conclusion that behind this universe there is a deity. This is not a premise which we borrow only from the philosophers, but also from the common man of the street, or even from a simple goat herder. There is a story (1) in common folklore that tells of a shepherd who was walking in the desert when he came across camel droppings on the road. He said, 'If these droppings point to the existence of camels, and these footprints suggest that the animal was walking in the area, does this universe not point to the existence of the All-Subtle, the All-Aware?!'

To give an example from our daily lives, consider the electric washing machine, which itself is not something absolutely necessary in our lives given that our ancestors used to wash their clothes manually—it is a luxury item, not an indispensable item. We find that people know who devised this machine, and who channelled its electrical current to it, and who programmed its wash cycles. Similarly for the electric light bulb which breaks down after a certain number of hours; we find students studying who invented it and when it was invented. So, can we forget the One Who has created the sun which illuminates our entire universe?!

In fact, in our time, even the unbelieving scientist supplies us with evidence that supports our faith; for every invention is patented for no one to steal it and claim it as his own. How about the sun that illuminates and produces warmth, or the moon that marks the months, or the stars that show people the way—and there is nothing in Allah's universe that stands in need of spare parts—should we not admit that this is His creation. This is because here He tells us who the Creator is and informs us He has dominion over what He has created, i.e. His Creation is 'patented'. For this reason He has revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for him to inform us that He *Glorified is He* is indeed the One Who has created everything;

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(1) The story of the shepherd with the traces of camels he found on the road

and He has allowed the unbelievers to continue to exist in order to challenge those who question this issue of creation. The Lord *Glorified is He* has ascribed all that which He has created to Himself, and not one of the unbelievers has ever been able to deny this.

We will not take our clues—regarding the existence of Allah—from the philosophers who reach their results according to the proofs they have which depend on the outward appearance of things. Rather, we will take our evidence from the word '*al-kufr'* (disbelief) itself. *Al-kufr* means *al-satr* (covering up). Can something that does not exist be 'covered up'? Therefore, *kufr* (disbelief) in Allah is proof of the existence of Allah. Since disbelief means 'covering up', it is not the normal situation, but the result of *ghaflah* (negligence and heedlessness). And *Ghaflah* is due to the requisites of faith that confine the actions of a person. This is because man may forget that the restrictions of Allah's Message do not apply solely to him; rather, they apply to all people. Thus, when Allah forbids theft, He does not forbid it for only one person; rather, He forbids it for everyone. Hence, He has obliged everybody else to comply with these restrictions and has forbidden them from stealing your property as well.

When Allah orders you to lower your gaze (on seeing what is illegal to look at) and to refrain from prying into the private lives of others, He is, by the same token, protecting your private life from the prying eyes of others. Thus, faith offers its benefits to all human beings. Since this is the way things are, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O people, remember…' (*Fatir:* 3).

When a man sits down quietly by himself, free from being driven by his vain desires, he will naturally be guided to believing that this universe did not come into existence by chance. The name of the Creator of the universe cannot be known to man through his rational thought because every man's conceptions vary. You find that when the philosophers asserted the necessity for a Creator of the universe, they did not tell us the Creator's Name. In fact, some of them made the mistake of supposing that the Creator of the universe simply created the universe and its laws, and then let the universe run on its own. They forgot that the Creator does not impart His authority on the universe only once. That is why the Prophets *peace be upon them* were supported by miracles which momentarily turn the natural laws upside down. This reminds us that Allah is the Creator and that He takes charge of and is Ever Watchful over His creation. Thus, it is not a case of the natural laws working independently of their Creator; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* willed to show us that the universe is not acting by itself.

We know that the electronic equipment which human beings integrate into certain tools sometimes 'crash'. An electronic mind does not have absolute power or control over all the data that is stored in it; it cannot refuse to give any data you ask for.

As for the human mind, it has complete control over the information stored inside of it. Furthermore, it has the ability of concealing whatever information it wishes; that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not mix Truth with falsehood, or hide the Truth when you know it' (*al-Baqara:* 42). Since man is told not to conceal the Truth, this means that man indeed has the power to conceal it. The vitality of a natural flower—for instance—lies in the fact that it eventually wilts; unlike an artificial flower which remains forever still and lifeless.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '….will you not use your minds' (*al-Mu'minun:* 80), and also says: '…will you not then remember' (*as-Sajda:* 4), He is urging man to remember, to reflect and to consider. If the Quran were to trick man, it will not have asked him to remember, to think, to contemplate, and to consider.

This is an example to explain, although Allah is beyond any comparison. Suppose that you went to a store that sells wool to try and purchase a piece of good quality fabric; you see the vendor cutting off a piece of the fabric and holding it in his hands to demonstrate how strong it is. Then he takes a thread from the wool and burns it in front of you for you to become certain of the purity and fineness of the wool. This vendor was trying to explain to you secret tricks of the trade in the wool industry because he was confident of the quality of his product.

If this is what happens between human beings; then what about when the Creator of the universe exposes the secrets of the universe to His creation and calls them through His Message to remember, reason, think, meditate and consider. The Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to use our minds in this way because He knows very well that by doing this we will fulfil the purpose for which the Lord *Glorified is He* has created us.

Beware! Do not think that Allah has created the universe for you and keeps creating things for you, and then revealed the Doctrine to help you in your lives in this world and in the Hereafter, but after that He withdrew. No, He is always in charge of your lives. No slumber seizes Him, nor does He sleep, and nothing eludes Him; and none is capable of robbing Him of anything.

In a Qudsi Hadith Allah says, ‘O My slaves, if you think that I do not see you, then there is a flaw in your Faith. And if you believe that I do see you, then why do you treat me as though I am the least significant one of those who can see you’.

In our daily lives we know that a no one can easily approach a powerful person if the latter is attentive and is aware of what you are doing. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَيۡهِ مَرۡجِعُكُمۡ جَمِيعٗاۖ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقًّاۚ إِنَّهُۥ يَبۡدَؤُاْ ٱلۡخَلۡقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُۥ لِيَجۡزِيَ
ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَهُمۡ شَرَابٞ مِّنۡ
حَمِيمٖ وَعَذَابٌ أَلِيمُۢ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكۡفُرُونَ ٤

It is to Him you shall all return — that is a true promise from God. It was He who created [you] in the first place, and He will do so again, so that He may justly reward those who believe and do good deeds. But the disbelievers will have a drink of scalding water, and agonizing torment because they persistently disbelieved [4] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 4)

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘To Him you shall return, all together…’ (*Yunus:* 4), this is an announcement to all of creation that He *Glorified is He* is Aware of all things; for He has revealed religious duties which are either obeyed or disobeyed. Those who choose to obey will be delighted by Allah’s words: ‘To Him you shall return, all together…’ (*Yunus:* 4), and those who choose to disobey will grieve; for they will receive the punishment prepared for transgressors upon their return to Allah.

We find that, at times, the Quran states: 'They will be made to return ('*yurja'un*'– passive form)' and at other times it states: 'They will return ('*yarji'un'*–active form)'. Whosoever is virtuous and does good deeds will be delighted by the idea of returning to Allah; and whomsoever disobeys and disbelieves grieves and dreads the idea of returning to Allah—but he shall be made to return, despite his reluctance. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'On that Day, they will be thrust into the Fire of Hell with violence' (*at-Tur:* 13). And when He *Glorified is He* says, in the verse that we are currently examining: 'To Him you shall return, all together…' (*Yunus:* 4), this 'return' or 'place of return' is named in the same verse as: '…Allah's promise, in truth…' (*Yunus:* 4). One might say, 'But '*al-wa'd'* (a promise) is that which denotes a promise of good things to come; if the 'return' refers to those who are obedient, then this is indeed a blessed tiding. However, the disobedient will not consider the "return" to bring any good. As such, why did Allah *Glorified is He* not say that the return for the disobedient is (in fact) a threat?'

The answer is that Allah *Glorified is He* is hereby notifying man to what awaits him in the future and exhorting him while He (Allah) has still given him the freedom to choose. And it is presumed they will choose to do good. Consequently, the whole phrase can be read as a goodly promise (*wa'd)*. Furthermore, the use of this particular form where the prepositional phrase 'to Him' precedes that which it usually follows in normal speech, i.e. 'you shall return', indicates that there is only One to Whom we all will return; for we all will return to Him. This is like Allah's saying: 'You alone we worship...' (*al-Fatiha:* 5).

Hence, the obedient slave feels joyful about Allah's reward for him; but as for the disobedient, he must reform himself before he returns to Allah. I will give this example to explain more: you urge your students to study hard all year long; and those who actually study look forward to the day of the exam because they know that they will do well in the test. However, those who do not study hard might be moved to change his ways and start studying seriously to avoid failure. To remind someone of future consequences is a form of warning; it causes the person to realize the gravity of the situation and it deters him from being heedless. For this reason, reminding a person is a form of promise, and not a threat.

The Lord *Glorified is He* also describes His promise as being: ‘Allah’s promise, in truth’ (*Yunus:* 4). One might ask, ‘Are not all of Allah’s promises true?’ The answer is, ‘Yes, every promise issuing from Allah is true; but by describing His promise here as being a promise in truth, the Lord wishes to emphasize that ‘the Truth’ is enduring; and if at times it appears to you as if falsehood is firmly in control, then know that falsehood cannot endure because it is ephemeral and lacks real authority’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He sends water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools. In this way Allah, illustrates Truth and falsehood—the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind—this is how Allah sets forth parables’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). When rain falls, we find that every valley absorbs as much of the water as it needs. When rain falls and the water accumulates, we see straw and other useless particles rising to the surface; as when rain falls it cleanses the area where it falls. That is why the lighter particles and other useless things float on the surface of the water. Likewise, falsehood floats on the surface; however, it is useless and does not disturb the Truth in the least as the Truth is stable and is beneficial to the earth and the people. The floating of falsehood on the surface alerts the hosts of the Truth. Falsehood is akin to the pain which signals the coming of an illness. The most dangerous of all illnesses is that which does not produce any preliminary pain because it becomes exacerbated to the point when it becomes difficult to be cured or even impossible.

Consequently, falsehood is like a pain which alerts the hosts of the Truth. That is why you notice that when Islam is provoked by outside enemies, fervent ardour spreads among all Muslims, resulting in activity on their part, cooperation and the forgetting of all grudges—all for the sake of defending Islam.

In some virus-related illnesses, the doctors actually give their patients small doses of the microbes or the viruses of a certain disease to stimulate the body’s immune system. In such a way, falsehood is a soldier in the hosts of the Truth, just as pain is a soldier in the army of good health.

If Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘To Him you shall return, all together...’ (*Yunus:* 4), this promise must necessarily be ‘the truth’; for Allah *Glorified is He* possesses what He promises to give. He is also too great to lie or deceive anyone, as He says: ‘And whose word can be truer than Allah’s’ (*an-Nisa’:* 122). This is because He is more powerful than anything and anyone He has created, and because His powers never fail him as He owns the entire universe.

The word ‘*ar-ruju’’* (return)—mentioned when Allah says: ‘To Him you shall return, all together…’ (*Yunus:* 4)—denotes the concept of returning to the same place from which one originally came. Consequently, it implies an initial existence which one then leaves but returns to later. Therefore, if you were in a place and then you travelled to another area, and later returned to the original place, this would be called ‘*ar-ruju’’*. The word ‘*ar-ruju’’* (return) is used in this verse to signify that we are all going to die, as the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘All that is on earth will perish; and there will remain the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Honor’ (*ar-Rahman:* 26-27).

The Quran quotes the disbelievers as having said: ‘When we have died and have become dust, [we will return to life]? That is a distant return’ (*Qaf:* 3). They are, thereby, qualifying as improbable the notion of the resurrection. In addition, Allah relates that they said: 'What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?' (*as-Sajda:* 10) This indicates that they asked, ‘Will there be a resurrection after death, burial, decomposition of the body and it turning into elements that mix with the elements of the earth?’ In the current verse, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘To Him you shall return, all together…’ (*Yunus:* 4), He refers to our coming into existence on the occasion of our birth into the life of this world, leaving the life of this world on the occasion of our death, and finally being resurrected.

The disbelievers had an issue with this particular notion, and they deemed it to be improbable. This is why Allah wanted to make this issue clear for us, for it is an essential element of our adherence to His Message. It is as if Allah is telling us, ‘Beware, do not think that you have taken advantage of your life and lived it to its fullest, and that there is nothing after that. Do you think this will be the case? No; there will be a resurrection and there will be a reckoning’. That is why Allah says: ‘To Him you shall return, all together…’ (*Yunus:* 4).

If one were to ask, ‘How can this be?’ The Lord *Glorified is He* has the answer: ‘Surely, He begins the creation in the first instance, and then will bring it back again…’ (*Yunus:* 4). That is, will He, Who is capable of creating something out of nothing, be incapable of resurrecting those who have previously existed? It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who indeed relates what the angel said: ‘This is what your Lord has said, "It is easy for me: I created you, though you were nothing before”’ (*Maryam:* 9).

Consequently, if Allah wills to give you existence anew, do not ask how this will happen because the atoms of your bodies are still there and the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Were We then worn out by the first creation? No, but some people are (still) lost in doubt about (the possibility of) a new creation!’ (*Qaf:* 15) In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the original act of creation as evidence of His Capacity to effect a second creation; if you are surprised at the prospect of being brought to life a second time, consider the first act of creation, for He has created you out of nothing. Will He then be incapable of bringing you back from something (your remains)? ‘Were we then worn out by the first creation?’ (*Qaf:* 15)

There was uproar among the philosophers about this matter, but the Lord *Glorified is He* offers proofs from the universe itself; He says: ‘You sometimes see the earth lifeless…’ (*al-Hajj:* 5), meaning: a barren, lifeless earth. ‘…yet when we send down water it stirs and swells, and produces every kind of joyous growth’ (*al-Hajj:* 5). Do not be surprised by the fact that, from death, life can re-emerge once more. You are constantly witnessing this fact. The life that you see in front of you is nothing but a cycle because when Allah created the universe, He created all its elements and no new elements are added to these.

Take water as an example of one of these elements; from the time when the Lord *Glorified is He* first created water there has been neither an increase nor a decrease in the amount of water in existence, and every human being and animal drinks from this water. No matter how much water a person consumes during his lifetime, the total amount of water remains constant. For this person gets rid of the water he consumes through sweat and other methods; all excess water leaves his body, and all that remains accounts for his weight.

In this way, all the water which you take in is eventually returned back to the environment through life's biological processes. After that the water evaporates, and this process of evaporation results in the distillation of water. So, if you wish to distil water you will heat the water until it reaches its boiling point. At this stage the water turns into vapour, and then you condense this vapour for the water to revert to its liquid state once again.

Thus, water has its cycles. We use water to irrigate our crops and our crops absorb the moisture and become a luscious green colour, with the extra moisture leaving the plants through the process of transpiration. Later, the plants dry up after all the water has evaporated into the atmosphere. These complex processes take place without anybody ever noticing them.

In order for you to buy water that has been distilled at a pharmacy, you pay a lot of money because preparing this water needs a flame, a vessel and all kinds of tubes, and it also needs additional water in order to condense the steam. However, this process occurs in our world millions of times, over and over again, without anyone really noticing it. After the water evaporates, it forms clouds, and then the rain falls—this is actually distilled water. That is why three fourths of the earth's surface is covered in water—so as to be at the service of the remaining quarter, the dry land because Allah wants the surface of the water to be expansive, and it is this expanse that helps the processes of distillation, evaporation and condensation of water.

Suppose that you filled a vessel with water, placed it in one of the rooms of your house, and left it in that room for a month. When you return to the vessel after a month, you will find that the water level has dropped by half a centimetre, more or less; but if you were to take the same vessel and pour the water all over the surface of the room, you will find that the floor will dry up in a matter of hours. As a result we see that the larger the surface area the easier the water evaporates.

The original amount of water that Allah created at the beginning of time is the same. It has neither increased nor decreased; it undergoes the cycle that the Lord *Glorified is He* intended for it to undergo. Consequently, we can see that things tend to return to their original state once more. This happens in all aspects of life. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'By those [winds] that scatter far and wide, and those that are heavily laden, and those that flow with ease, and those that distribute [rain] as ordained. Truly, what you are promised is true' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1-5). In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* swears by the winds that carry the clouds; and every cloud dispenses its rain at a place precisely ordained by Allah. He *Glorified is He* also calls our attention to the cycle of the water, which is one of the foundations of biological life. And Allah swears by these phenomena in nature that His promise will most certainly be fulfilled.

Consider the flower; you see that it is soft and fresh. This is because it contains a lot of moisture. It also has a beautiful colour and pleasant scent; but if we picked this flower, its petals will fall and it will dry up, because all of its moisture will evaporate. That is, all of the water which the flower had in its store is returned to its original environment. Moreover, the flower's scent will remain in its petals until the latter shrivel up and decompose completely, and the flower's beautiful colour will also remain until the flower dies. After that, a new flower will sprout up and replace it.

Hence, the life of every living being in this world of change is governed by this water cycle; and if water has a cycle, is it really that improbable that the elements which make up your body also have a similar cycle? Imagine that a person was alive and then died. After the soul leaves the body, the body decomposes and all the water that it used to contain evaporates. The physical substances of the body merge with the elements of the earth and turn into earth. But will the Lord be incapable of resuscitating the scattered remnants of this human being? Of course, He will not. Life is thus the perpetual movement of elements in their different cycles; since the original act of creation, no new elements have been added to the equation, nor have any of them been removed.

Read the Quran attentively and you will find that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We know very well what the earth takes away of them: with Us is a book recording' (*Qaf:* 4). That is, the Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that all of the elements are present in the universe; their amounts might vary from one creature to another, but their sum total is fixed. Science has discovered that living beings are made up of sixteen elements, and the total amount of each element is fixed, but if they happen to discover additional elements, the total amount of each of these additional elements will also be fixed.

The scientists assert that these sixteen elements are: Oxygen, Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Magnesium, Potassium, Sodium, and others. All of these elements return to their original state after the living creatures die and their bodies decompose. As such, we see the truth in the Lord's words: 'We know very well what the earth takes away of them: with Us is a book recording' (*Qaf:* 4).

Some philosophers have tried to articulate a second objection. They said, 'Suppose a human being died, and the elements of his physical body disintegrated and dissolved back into the earth. Are these elements not recycled back into other living creatures; like a tree that produces fruit, which is then eaten by a human being and becomes part of his body? Thus, the one who dies and whose elements go into the composition of a fruit, for example, these elements will later become a part of another human being's body; as such, how will Allah resuscitate every human being anew?' The answer is, 'You are aware of certain data, but are ignorant of other data. Look at the phenomenon of obesity and slimness that you see in human beings every day. Obesity means that a certain amount of matter is found in larger quantities in an obese person than in another person who is thin. An obese person might undergo certain changes that could render him thin, and vice versa. Now, does this alter this person as an individual? Of course not; this is why we see that there is a difference between the essential character of a person and the elements that make up his physical corporeality'.

The Lord *Glorified is He* has informed us that no physical quantity is ever removed from the universe; the total amount being equal to the sum of the amounts in all the objects in the universe. In other words, the physical elements found in the universe are available in quantities sufficient enough to make up all living creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* distributes these elements among living beings according to their need. If you were to add up all of these elements, you will find that the aggregate quantity is fixed, regardless of the infinite ways that these elements combine to make up living organisms.

For example, you find a person who weighs one-hundred kilos; but after this person falls sick and his weight drops to seventy kilos. What this means is that the missing thirty kilos of physical matter returned to the earth. Every human body has an optimum weight which it reaches at a certain age; this optimum weight is the benchmark which can either be exceeded or not met, depending on dietary factors and health conditions. You will notice that a child excretes less than what he takes in terms of food—this is for him to grow. If a child were to excrete the same quantity that he takes in, he will not grow. A child continues to grow until he reaches his fixed, optimum weight, at which point he begins to excrete more or less the same quantities that he takes in. After that, old age sets in and his weight begins to diminish, and this is a sign that he is excreting more than he is taking in; consequently, he begins to grow thinner.

Suppose that an ingenious doctor was able to identify the illness that was responsible for one of his patient's emaciation. The doctor administered medication that enabled the patient to recover his health as well as regain the weight he had lost, and the patient's diet becomes better in quantity and quality during convalescence. Now, will there be a change in this patient himself as an individual during these changes (so he will become a different person)? Of course, there will not be a change because the physical substance that he lost as a result of his illness returned to the earth, but he then just replaced the weight he lost by eating a healthy diet during recovery.

Therefore, do not say that 'something has been removed or diminished'; for Allah has a book in which all matters concerning the universe are written. He brings forth certain elements into existence, and with the command of His, 'Be', they arrange themselves such that they become a human being or become any other creature, fulfilling His Will.

We have spoken about chemistry in order to understand this point according to logic and also our Belief, especially since we believe that Allah has set a Way of life for us—but the commandments of this Message may be either obeyed or disobeyed. Those who obey—his freedom becomes determined by that which is contained in the commandments; and for he who does not obey Allah and abandons himself to ruin—he is the loser. This is because logically it is obvious that one who embraces the Doctrine and abides by its principles, and curbs his vain desires—such a person cannot be equated with one who wastes his life away frivolously. Logically, the mind cannot but arrive at the conclusion that there will be a resurrection and a reckoning, whereby those who abide by Allah's Message will receive goodly rewards and those who stray from His Message will be punished.

Since Allah exists, and His Word has been brought to us via Messengers; and since the directives 'Do' and 'Do not do' have been made available to us; and since there are those who obey the directives and there are those who do not—there certainly will be a resurrection after this life where those who have done good deeds shall be recompensed and those who have been guilty of wrongdoing shall be punished. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'To Him you shall return, all together—Allah's promise, in truth. Surely, He begins the creation in the first instance, and then will bring it back again so that He may reward with justice those who believe and do good deeds…' (*Yunus:* 4).

The purpose of such a statement is to reassure those who steadfastly cling and act according to the Message that there will be a resurrection, and there will be a reckoning because the dutiful believer must receive a goodly reward, and the insubordinate, wicked person—whose tyranny caused sufferings to everyone —must receive his punishment. Clearly, there has to be a resurrection, a bringing back to life so that Allah can mete out justice for everyone according to their actions. The word *'al-qist'*—as we have previously explained—means 'justice'. The root of the word is composed of the letter '*qaf*', '*sin*', and '*ta*'; sometime we pronounce it as '*qist*', and at other times we pronounce it as '*qast*'. In the former case, the word means 'justice'; in the latter case it means 'injustice'. This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But those who deviate [from the right Path] (*al-qasitun*) will be fuel for Hellfire' (*al-Jinn:* 15). The word '*al-qasitun'* (those who deviate) refers to those who abuse the rights of others.

Allah also says: '...but if you do judge between them, judge justly: Allah loves the just (*al-muqsiteen*)' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42). In this verse, the word '*al-muqsiteen'* means those who deal fairly and equitably with people.

As such, we have these two words *'qist'* and '*qast'*; there is also '*al-qasat'* (being bow-legged) which is the curvature of the legs. The word '*qist'* is used here in the sense of justice, but the person with this quality is called '*qasit'*, and this word is used to refer to the injustice and its removal. It is taken from the word '*al-qast',* not from '*al-qist'*. You also have '*Al-Muqsit'* (the

Equitable), which is one of the Divine Names. But Allah does not use this name in the sense of justice; meaning, that He in Himself has been Just since the very beginning. Rather, He willed to describe himself as *'Al-Muqsit'* because it is He Who removes injustice and thereby restores justice.

In the verse which we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…so that He may reward with justice those who believe and do good deeds' (*Yunus:* 4), meaning: a just reward from Him, or you could also say He *Glorified is He* recompenses them, for they had justly abided by the Message. This is because the Quran, as we know, lays down judgments and clarifies different doctrinal issues, issues dealing with free will, and issues dealing with manners. And such people have applied the doctrine correctly and in a just manner; for none of them disbelieved in Allah. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong' (*Luqman:* 13).

By virtue of their fairness and their equity in doctrinal matters and because they did not commit the greatest of all sins and wrongdoings, which is setting up associates with Allah —and thereby they did not wrong themselves, nor did any one of them succumb to transient temptations of the moment—Allah saved them from eternal misery. They also did not wrong other people. For all the virtuous deeds that they performed, Allah will certainly reward them because of their fairness and their equity.

It might be said, 'A fair recompense involves neither increase nor decrease; but if the recompense is from Allah, then according to the religious law the reward for one good deed is multiplied by ten, and Allah *Glorified is He* increases it further for whomsoever He wills. Such is Allah's Justice according to the religious law. Or it could be that the reward is given neither without any extra increase nor with any decrease'. However, Allah's Gift is not specified exactly in this particular verse. That is why there arose disagreements among the theologians regarding Allah's Words: 'That man will only have what [deed] he has earned' (*an-Najm:* 39). Some of them have said, 'If man is rewarded only for what he has striven to do, then how can he be credited with a good deed which receives a ten-fold reward? In the same vein, what about the prayers offered at a person's funeral? Does the recently deceased person benefit from our supplications that he be forgiven? If a man is only rewarded according to his actions, then the deceased will not benefit from the funeral prayers; so, why has Allah charged us with performing the funeral prayer as a *fard kifayah* (legal obligations that must be discharged by enough members in the Muslim community to make the remaining Muslims free from the responsibility before Allah), and not a *fard ayn* (legal obligations that must be performed by each individual Muslim)?'(1)

We say that the letter *'lam'* that appears in Allah's words: 'That man' in: 'That man will only have what [deed] he has earned' (*an-Najm:* 39) refers to *al-Mulk* (possession), indicating a right. This verse refers to giving a right to a person, but it does not necessarily preclude an increment. One could also say it this way, 'Do we offer funerary prayers for everyone who dies? We offer funerary prayers for only believers who pass away. Believing is a good deed he performed during his lifetime and he is rewarded for the funeral prayers that we offer at his funeral (because he is a believer); in other words, he is rewarded for this good deed of his'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But the disbelievers will have a drink of scalding (*hameem*) water, and agonizing torment because they persistently disbelieved' (*Yunus:* 4). Consequently, we know that an agonizing torment will be given to them because of their disbelief, just as rewards are given as a recompense for believing and doing good deeds.

To sum up, in this case (for believers) *al-qist* (justice) refers to an Attribute of Allah, that is His Justice. It also refers to their justice; for they had justly and rightly recognized Allah's Divinity. As for the disbelievers, justice is applied to them because Allah makes them taste a scalding drink—as a punishment for their disbelief. It is in this manner that the principle of justice is applied in their case.

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(1) *Fard al-kifa* (communal obligation) means that if the act is performed by some Muslims, other Muslims do not need to perform it; but if no one performs the act, everyone is deemed to have sinned. As for *fard al-'ayn* (individual obligation), it is an individual obligatory rite for all members of an Islamic community. This includes the daily prayers, for example; if there are no exonerating excuses, and the conditions for which it is obligatory are realized, then it is obligatory for every Muslim.

The word ‘*hamim’* is composed of the root letters ‘*ha*’, ‘*mim*’ and another ‘*mim*’; all the words that are derived from this root denote heat and warmth. The Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink! What a painful resting place’ (*al-Kahf:* 29). The phrase ‘*kal-muhl’* (like molten metal) means that it is boiling, and when the element is something other than water, this means that its boiling temperature is higher than the boiling temperature of water; copper for instance has a higher boiling point than the boiling point of water, and so does iron, gold and other elements. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Truly, the tree of Zaqqum will be food for the sinners: [hot] as molten copper. It boils in their insides like the boiling of scalding (*al-hameem*) water’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 43-46).

As we just said, the boiling point temperature of copper is higher than that of water; and all the words derived from this root connote heat. If we look at the words *‘hammam’* (bathroom) and ‘*istaham’* (took a shower), they refer to when water is put on the body. This can take three forms: the first is wiping, the second is ritual purification, and the third is taking a shower. ‘*Al-Mas’h’* (wiping) is to dampen something with water without the water dripping from the body, ‘*al-ghusl’* (ritual purification) refers to pouring water over the body to the extent that it falls off it, and ‘*istihmam’* (taking a shower) also implies the pouring of water over a body. ‘*Al-ghusl’* is for ritual purification, but ‘*al-istihmam’* is for cleaning. If you break wind, urinate or defecate, you get up and perform ablution, i.e. ritual purification. Allah says: ‘…wash your face…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 6) until the end of the description of ablution.

This is an order from Allah for us to perform the purifying ablution. It can be done with dust when water in unavailable; in this case the act is called ‘*at-tayamum*’ (dry ablution). If the situation calls for cleansing, then bathing is needed because the pores in people’s skin can exude secretions that can be quite oily, and when these come into contact with dirt they are likely to become clogged. These clogged pores are caused by the secretions from the human body and pure dust the skin is exposed to, but they do not cause a man to be in a state of ritual impurity. For this reason, when you perform a ritual bath it is sufficient to just pour water over your body, even if particles of dust still remain on your body. This dust does not preclude you having bodily ritual purity. But when a person takes a shower, hot water is used; and this causes all the impurities to be washed off the body and also cleanses the pores of the skin. Out of these pores come particles of dirt as well as thin threads of dead skin cells.

That is, there is a difference between *al-ghusl*—which is ritual purification—and *al-istihmam*—which is for general cleanliness. The latter term is related to the word '*al-hammam'*—which is the place one takes a shower. To sum up, the root verb consisting of the letters '*ha*', '*mim*' and '*mim*' connotes heat and warmth. Here the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But the disbelievers will have a drink (*sharab*) of scalding (*hameem*) water…' (*Yunus:* 4). But the word '*sharab'* (drink) denotes 'quenching', which makes us wonder why Allah uses this term in this context? It is because using this word (*sharab*) makes the punishment worse, for a human being longs to drink in order to quench his thirst; but if he is then given scalding liquid to drink, this liquid brings about even more pain and suffering. Similarly, Allah says elsewhere: 'If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink (*sharab*)…' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Hopes are raised upon reading the beginning of the verse: 'If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water…' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Here, they are hoping for succour; but the relief that reaches them is the kind that they deserve for all their sinful ways: 'They will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink...' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Thus, Allah's words '…But the disbelievers will have a drink of scalding water and an agonizing torment because they persistently disbelieved' (*Yunus:* 4) mean, 'This is due to their disbelief'. And we know that they disbelieved in matters of great doctrinal importance.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ ٱلشَّمْسَ ضِيَآءً وَٱلْقَمَرَ نُورًا وَقَدَّرَهُۥ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا۟ عَدَدَ ٱلسِّنِينَ
وَٱلْحِسَابَ ۚ مَا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ ذَٰلِكَ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ يُفَصِّلُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥﴾

It is He who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light, determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time. God did not create all these without a true purpose; He explains His signs to those who understand [5] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 5)

After the Lord *Glorified is He* makes clear how He has created the heavens and the earth, created the whole universe, and subjected them for mankind—after this He describes the ‘signs’ in the universe, which are also bounties that He has created for our benefit. They are the factors on which depends the continuation of life, for the sun is that which brings everything in our world to fruition; it provides every creature with the heat and light that it needs. The sun also causes water to evaporate—as we have previously pointed out—for the water to come back down to earth as fresh water, distilled and purified. With this water human beings and animals quench their thirst and the crops are irrigated.

The sun is the centre around which a number of planets revolve. One revolution by the earth around the sun constitutes a year, and one revolution of the earth around itself constitutes a day. Here the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is He who made the sun a shining radiance (*diya’a*) and the moon a light (*an-Nur*)…’ (*Yunus:* 5); and if you were to consider the superficial meaning of the terms ‘sun’ and ‘moon’, you will say, ‘The sun gives us light, as does the moon’; however, a deeper understanding requires you to differentiate between the two for the sun radiates light, whereas the moon reflects soft light. The difference is that the light emitted by the sun is accompanied by heat and warmth, whereas the light of the moon glows softer and more gently. That is why the moonlight has been characterized as *‘halim’* (forbearing, lenient), for you did not need to seek shelter from its heat; as for the sun, you need an umbrella to protect yourself from the heat of its rays.

Thus, the word ‘*an-nur’* (light) denotes a light that is devoid of heat; in fact, heat is only generated if the light is coming from a light source. As for the moon, its light is not innate to it; rather, it merely reflects the light rays emitted by the sun. It is like a mirror which reflects any light that comes its way. The moon shines but it is not the source of the light, whereas the sun produces its own light. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is He who made the sun a shining radiance (*diya’a*) and the moon a light (*an-Nur*)…’ (*Yunus:* 5).

As for the word *‘diya’a’* (a shining radiance), it can be considered as being singular—like *‘sam’* (to fast) *‘siyama’* (fasting) or ‘*qam’* (to stand up) *‘qiyama’* (standing up) and similarly *‘da’’* (to shine) *‘diya’a’* (shining); or it can also be considered as being plural—as in *‘hawd’* (basin) and *‘hiyad’* (basins) or ‘*rawd’* (garden) and ‘*riyad’* (gardens), and similarly, the plural of *‘daw’a’* (light) is *‘diya’a’* (lights). Therefore, the word *‘diya’a’* (a shining radiance) can be considered as being plural and singular. If this is the case, there must be a reason why the Most Eloquent cites this word in such a way that it allows for these multiple meanings. Before we discovered the secrets of sunlight, and before we subjected sunlight to our analyses, we simply used to say, ‘It is sunlight’. But after we analysed sunlight, we found the colours of the rainbow to be seven in number; it includes red light, green light, yellow light, and so on and so forth.

Thus, the word *‘diya’a’* (a shining radiance) refers to the plethora of colours that are contained in sunlight. If you consider *‘diya’a’* as the plural of *‘daw’a’*—this brings out the connotation of the sunlight’s various colours; and if you consider *‘diya’a’* to be similar to ‘*qiyama’* or *‘siyam’*—this refers to the general meaning of the word ‘shining radiance’. That is why the Quran uses words which were suitable for the minds at the time it was revealed so as to avoid referring to phenomena whose scientific explanation they did not know. Had the Quran explicitly stated these facts, one of the contemporaries will have said, ‘The sun looks red when it sets, but looks yellow at midday’; this person did not realize that the redness of the sun that he perceived at sunset is due to the length of the red light waves. These red waves are only visible at sunset when the sun is at its furthest point from the earth, and only red light reaches us at that stage; the other colours are dispersed throughout the universe and do not reach us.

To conclude, the word *‘diya’a’* (a shining radiance) can be considered as being either plural, like ‘*sawt’* whose plural is ‘siyat’, *‘hawd’* and its plural *‘hiyad*’, or ‘*rawd’* and its plural ‘*riyad’,* or as being singular. This latter serves the general meaning, whereas the former implies a more detailed analysis. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '*Exalted is He* who made constellations in the skies; and placed therein a radiant lamp (*as-siraj*) and a moon giving light' (*al-Furqan:* 61). '*As-siraj'* (radiant lamp) is that which emits light and radiates heat; and it is an appropriate description for the sun.

In the verse we are discussing here, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'It is He, who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light, determining phases for it (*qaddarahu*)…' (*Yunus:* 5); the word '*qaddarahu'* (determining phases for it) seems, at first look, to be related to the moon, but in reality the sun has its phases as well. Allah *Glorified is He* says '*qaddarahu'* because there is something called (the act of) 'rendering' or 'making' (referred to in the verse by the word '*ja'al*' (made)); thus, He has rendered the sun 'radiant', and has rendered the moon 'a light' (i.e. reflective).

As a result, the act of rendering concerns two things; Allah renders the sun to be radiant and He renders the moon to be a light. This '(act of) rendering' itself Allah renders in order for us to determine time; clearly, it is valid for both the sun and the moon—so that we might know the number of years and calculate time.

As for our religious rites, we are required to determine the beginning of the month of *Ramadan* in order to perform the religious rite of fasting; we also need to determine the months of the Hajj Pilgrimage. A woman, for example, also needs to determine the months of *idda* (the waiting period for a recently divorced woman or a recent widow). All of these calculations depend on the moon, for the latter is a sign clearly visible to all; the moon starts out small in the sky, swells into a full moon, and then gets smaller once again. 'We have determined phases for the moon until finally it becomes like an old date-stalk (*al-'urjun*)' (*Ya Sin:* 39). The word '*al-'urjun'* (date-stalk) in this verse is what we call '*as-subata'* which carries the '*shamarikh'* (date-palm panicles) of unripe dates. In the past, they used to make brooms out of these; these brooms were used to sweep the floors of houses in the countryside and in the mountains. In this simile, Allah alludes to the environment in which the ancient Arab used to live. In the beginning of every month, we can all perceive the new moon which heralds the commencement of the new month; in this manner, human beings learned to calculate the months based on the mansions of the moon. Regarding the entire year, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah decrees that there are twelve months—ordained in Allah's Book on the Day when He created the heavens and earth…’ (*at-Tawba*: 36).

In this case, the year is estimated at twelve lunar months. As for the day, it is determined by the sun; that is why the sun also enters into the calculations involving the phases of time. We see that the Lord *Glorified is He* willed to make ‘the rendering’ applicable to two issues; ‘the rendering’ of the sun, and ‘the rendering’ of the moon, as He confirms in this verse: ‘Determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time. Allah did not create all these except in truth [and for a genuine purpose]’ (*Yunus:* 5).

The truth—as we have previously explained—is that which is ‘fixed’, permanent and unchanging. When we contemplate the paths traversed by the heavenly bodies, the path of the sun and the moon across the sky—we do not find any inconsistencies. Instead, we find that the observatories run by the unbelievers can predict the exact moment when the moon comes in between the earth and the sun, or when the earth will come in between the moon and the sun. This brings about the phenomena known as the solar eclipse and the lunar eclipse. These phenomena can be predicted with great accuracy. ‘The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night precede the day: each float in [its own] orbit’ (*Ya Sin:* 40).

This sagacious statement corroborates one of the beliefs held by the Arabs but refuted by others. The Arabs used to think that the night preceded the day; in fact, the first night of Ramadan indicates the commencement of the month of fasting. And since they had determined that the night precedes the day, it follows that the day does not precede the night. When it comes to this widely agreed upon issue which was well known by the Arabs—that the day does not precede the night—the Quran does not say anything. However, the Quran denies the statement that the night precedes the day. The audience (the Arabs), therefore, were clearly of the opinion that the night precedes the day; and Allah corrects their conceptions by asserting that neither does the night precede the day, nor does the day precede the night.

That is why, in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* offers only a brief overview of natural phenomena because if He had presented a scientific explanation, the Arabs will have given the lie to the Quran. If the Quran were to plainly state that the earth is spherical, people would have rejected this explanation the moment it was revealed. In fact, there are still some who deny this reality at the end of the twentieth century. That is why the Lord *Glorified is He* does not disclose all of the secrets of the natural world; rather, He merely alludes to them in a manner lucid enough to be accepted by the simple Arab.

The night does not precede the day, and the day does not precede the night—but how is this possible? We say, ‘Did Allah first create the sun facing the surface of the earth, and then the sun disappeared and gave way to the night?’ This will be correct if the earth were flat, however, the Lord *Glorified is He* created the earth as a sphere; and this signifies that Allah *Glorified is He* created the sun and the earth in such a way that both day and night occur simultaneously. This is only possible if the earth is spherical, where half of its surface is oriented towards the sun and is experiencing daytime, and the other half that is facing away from the sun is experiencing nighttime. At the same time, the earth is spinning, such that daytime comes to the portion that was experiencing nighttime, and nighttime comes to the portion that was experiencing daytime. As such, in the Holy Quran, the Lord speaks about the natural phenomena—which human minds then discovered long after the Quran had been revealed—and treats these matters wisely and accurately; for example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is He who made the night and day follow each other (*khilfa*)…’ (*al-Furqan:* 62). The justification follows: ‘…so anyone who wishes may be mindful or show gratitude’ (*al-Furqan:* 62). That is, the night succeeds the day as the word ‘*khilfa’* (follow each other) means that which succeeds or replaces something else. Let us take an example from our daily lives to explain this. Consider the patrols and the changing of the guards: we find that someone guards a certain location for a period of six hours, then when his shift is over, he passes the function on to a second guard. Clearly, one guard succeeds the other; but, who was the guard that worked the very first shift—before his replacement succeeded him? It is the same thing with night and day; the Lord *Glorified is He* states that night and day succeed each other. This means that, in the beginning, they were both present; and because the earth revolves around itself, daytime came to the land where the sun was rising, and nighttime came to the land where the sun was setting. From then on, they constantly succeeded one another. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* elaborates

His ‘signs’ in nature for us; for this reason He *Glorified is He* says: ‘He explains His signs to those who have knowledge’ (*Yunus:* 5).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ فِي ٱخۡتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ وَمَا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ فِي
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَتَّقُونَ ٦

In the succession of night and day, and in what God created in the heavens and earth, there truly are signs for those who are aware of Him [6] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 6)

By emphasizing the distinction between night and day, Allah *Glorified is He* confirms that they both were present in the beginning. To this He also adds: ‘…and in [all] that which Allah created in the heavens and earth...’ (*Yunus:* 6); for He *Glorified is He* created the universe and all the elements that serve as sustenance for life—food, water, air and so forth—then He subjected the entire universe to serve His vicegerent, that is, mankind.

If you look at these life-sustaining elements, you will find that they satisfy the most basic of needs, such as the need to breathe air, and the need to drink water and eat food; these are the most important elements that human beings require to ensure the continuation of life. Human beings can tolerate lack of food more than they can tolerate lack of water. They can also tolerate lack of water more than they can tolerate lack of air. In fact, a human being cannot even endure lack of air for as much time as it takes to inhale and exhale. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed the state of affairs to occur whereby the food destined for one group of people sometimes rests in the hands of another group of people because the human body can tolerate a dearth of food for up to a month, during which time the body draws on its internal fat reserves. The machines invented by human beings cannot resort to such measures; a car cannot traverse a distance of one meter without fuel, but the human body can tolerate a similar situation—in the hope that those who control the food supply decide to show some generosity or until the famished find a way to acquire sustenance. As for water, the Lord *Glorified is He* has willed that this resource be harder to monopolize by any one person or group of people because man’s need for water is more urgent than his need for food. And as for breathing air (*nafas*), Allah *Glorified is He* has made it impossible for any one person to control the air because air is one of the basic necessities of life. Hence, the words '*an-nafs'* and *'nafs'* (soul) as well as '*nafas'* (breathing) are derived from this phrase referring to the breathing of air.

If you consider air, you will find that it is a factor that helps in maintaining everything in existence, from the firmness of the earth to the stability of the buildings resting upon its surface, and from the steadiness of towers to the fixedness of the mountains—all of this is thanks to air. This is because it is the air currents surrounding the sides of things which make them stable; if there were any air vacuums anywhere near these man-made and natural structures, they will immediately crumble. For this reason, air is what maintains equilibrium in the universe. That is why we have said, 'If you were to survey the expressions of the Quran, you will find that when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of managing the winds, He is speaking with the precision of a Creator and with the accuracy of an infinitely Wise deity; for He sends forth the winds laden with mercy. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'We send the winds to fertilize…' (*al-Hijr:* 22)

But if wind in the singular is mentioned, then this implies a punishment; Allah *Glorified is He* says, for example: 'Ad was destroyed by a furious wind.' (*al-Haqqa:* 6) Similarly, He says: 'When they saw a cloud approaching their valley, they said, 'this cloud will give us rain!' 'No, indeed, it is what you wanted to hasten: a storm-wind bearing a painful punishment which will destroy everything by its Lord's Command...' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25).

When winds (plural) come from all directions, they balance each other as well as all living creatures (they meet); as for 'the wind' (in the singular), it comes from one specific direction resulting in it destroying all that lies in its path. Here, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…and in [all] that which Allah created in the heavens and earth…' (*Yunus:* 6) meaning that Allah combines the rest of creation in this single reference—and this is after mentioning the sun and the moon as two distinct 'signs'. In this way, He mentions the heavens and the earth and all the 'signs' that they contain, including thunder, lightning, clouds, stars and other elements of the created universe. All of this is contained in the expression: '…and in [all] that which Allah created in the heavens and earth' (*Yunus:* 6) because if Allah was to elaborate, He will have to detail a plethora of ‘signs’ and bounties. It is Allah, indeed, who says: ‘If you tried to count Allah's favors, you could never calculate them’ (*Ibrahim:* 34).

The Quran was not meant to be an encyclopaedia of everything in the universe; rather, it is a Book that holds a Doctrine. It is indeed remarkable that Allah uses the conditional particle *‘in’* (if) which expresses doubt in His Saying: ‘And if (*in*) you count one Blessing of Allah, never will you be able to understand it [all]’ (*Ibrahim:* 34) because no matter how much knowledge a person may acquire, it remains impossible for him to fully conceive or enumerate the unlimited blessings that Allah has placed in the universe. Normally, to start the act of counting means that a full enumeration is theoretically feasible; however, in this case, a full enumeration of Allah’s Blessings in the universe is impossible. That is the reason why the particle *‘in’* is used, instead of the particle *‘idha’* (meaning ‘if’ and denoting high probability) because the former indicates doubt.

What is even more remarkable is that the act of ‘enumeration’ involves repetition; and, in the context at hand, Allah does not merely say: ‘And if you count the Blessings of Allah….’ Rather, He uses the singular *‘ni‘ma*’ (Blessing). Indeed, if you examine a single Blessing, you will find that in reality it contains thousands of Blessings that cannot be counted. The Lord concludes the verse by saying: ‘…in [all] that which Allah created in the heavens and earth, there truly are signs (*ayat*) for those who fear Him and guard themselves [from doing evil]’ (*Yunus:* 6). The Arabic word sign (‘*aya’*, plural: ‘*ayat’*) can have one of three meanings: it can either refer to the verses of the Quran, to a miraculous sign or wonder that supports the veracity of a Messenger of Allah, or to the wondrous, awe-inspiring ‘signs’—clearly perceivable in the universe—which speak of the Greatness of Allah *the Glorious and Exalted*.

Allah has created these ‘signs’ to turn your attention to the Maker of these ‘signs’. Orienting our gaze toward the Maker of these signs is necessary if humans want to be harmoniously integrated with the surrounding universe that has been created for their sake. After this, nothing can disturb this harmony. Suppose that a human leads an easy, relaxing life on earth, but then he faces a miserable, difficult Afterlife; what benefit has he derived from this? Thus, anything that is ephemeral in nature cannot be considered a permanent blessing. A blessing should give you lasting enjoyment, with a certainty that it will never abandon you nor will you abandon it. No matter how long a human being lives, eventually any worldly gifts will expire and leave the person, or the person will expire and leave them behind.

The Lord *Glorified is He* looks after those who are willing to develop the virtue of Allah-consciousness so that they may attain the eternal blessings and delights which neither expire nor are left behind. They must contemplate the signs in the universe. By contemplating the signs of the universe carefully, people achieve two objectives. The first is that they benefit from what Allah has created, and the second is that they realize that Allah has created this world as means to an end, as a bridge and a passageway to something greater. Allah has created this life to be lived by employing means, but after life on earth, He wants to bring mankind into an eternal life in His Company, where ends are not reached by means but are given directly from Allah, the Maker of all means and causes. Those who are consciously aware of Allah are those who pay attention to Allah’s Signs and Messages. Whereas those who live unconscious of Allah pay no regard to the signs they see in the universe. Such people allow things to pass them by in life without taking any notice of them. As Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: ‘And how many signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they give no heed to them’ (*Yusuf:* 105). They fail to open their eyes to the visible signs in the universe which the Lord has placed before them — signs that speak of the Glory and the Greatness of Allah. Therefore, they have a lukewarm attitude towards the life of the Hereafter, and are careless about guarding against the punishment of the next world.

Then Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَرۡجُونَ لِقَآءَنَا وَرَضُواْ بِٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱطۡمَأَنُّواْ
بِهَا وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ عَنۡ ءَايَٰتِنَا غَٰفِلُونَ ٧

Those who do not expect to meet Us and are pleased with the life of this world, contenting themselves with it and paying no heed to Our signs [7] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 7)

The Arabic word *‘raja’’* (hope) means to want something which is desirable and possible to obtain. On the other hand, the Arabic word *‘tamanni’* (wish) is to want something which is desirable but impossible to obtain. However, one can still express such a wish, no matter how distant and improbable it may be. As a poet once said:

If only youth would return for but one day
That I may tell it what old age has done

The poet is saying that youth is something that is loved and highly desirable. But will youth ever return? Of course not, Thus *'tamanni'* refers to hoping for something that is highly desirable but unlikely or impossible to occur. As another poet said:

How I wish that the shining stars would draw near me, that I could arrange them
Into necklaces of honour, for I am not content presenting you [with just] my words

This is also impossible. As for *'raja''*, it means to want something which is highly desirable and is likely or at least possible to happen. Here, in this context, Allah says: 'Verily, those who do not hope (*raja'*) to meet Us…' (*Yunus:* 7) which presents the question: why do they not hope to meet their Lord? It is because those who hope to meet their Lord have prepared themselves for this meeting. They have consecrated their lives to doing good works and therefore they are destined to reap their reward once they meet Allah. As for the one who has not acted in a way that entitles him to rewards, and who has acted in a way deserving of punishment—how can such a person hope to meet his Lord? Indeed, he will not be looking forward to this meeting.

For instance, a person who dies a martyr and so sacrifices his own soul, which is the dearest thing to him, such a person does this only because he is absolutely certain that, for having sacrificed himself by dying for Allah's Cause, he will receive a reward that will be infinitely better than what he left behind in his worldly life.

Hence, a person who wishes to meet His Lord is he who prepares himself for this meeting. He accomplishes this by obeying Allah's Commands and avoiding His Prohibitions. Any human lives through manifold events in his life. These events, measured by the correct and true criteria, fall into one of two categories: good deeds or sins. Everyone is aware of the good deeds which he has performed, as well as of any sins he has committed. Nobody can fool himself. Yet, as long as one is still alive, false hope may cause a person to deceive himself and think he has done nothing but good deeds in this life.

But when a person experiences his last moments before death, all of the pages of his life will run before his eyes. If his life was good, the signs of joy can be seen on his face. And if his life was bad, the signs of bitterness can be seen on his face. That is why we often hear the expression, ‘so-and-so’s end was abominable, and so-and-so’s end was joyful’. There is much truth in this expression; for after the soul has been pulled out of the body, the body remains in the state that it assumed when the soul was departing the body. If the face was smiling and rejoicing, this means that the deceased caught a glimpse of the good that is in store for him.

In the final moments before death, a person can no longer lie to himself. When a person falls sick, he merely rests and hopes that his health will be restored. However, at the moment of death, a person’s past life flashes quickly before his eyes and all his actions are shown to him. If the person has led a virtuous life, he rejoices and becomes serene because he looks forward to the reward that awaits him. It is the same thing with a hard-working student when they tell him that someone has come with his final grades; the student rushes confidently towards the person to hear his grades. But if the student is not hard working, he does not answer the call and prefers to shy away from the bearer of the bad news.

Similarly, those who look forward to their meeting with Allah have made extensive preparations for this meeting. They await their reward from Allah. As for those who do not work towards a happy Afterlife, they are afraid and reluctant to meet their Lord; ‘…but are pleased and satisfied with the life of the present world’ (*Yunus:* 7). It is as though they had satisfied themselves with the pleasures of their life on earth and failed to look ahead to the Hereafter. The name by which Allah calls the life of this world should urge us to adopt a detached attitude towards it—He calls it ‘*al-hayat ad-dunya*’ (literally ‘the lower life’). Indeed, there cannot be a more denigrating description of the worldly life than this; and the opposite of ‘*al-hayat ad-dunya’* (the lower earthly life) is *‘al-hayat al-‘ulya’* (the higher heavenly life).

A human may wonder about the age of the earth and say that the earth has been around for tens or hundreds of millions of years, yet he may not realize that as far as he is concerned; the life of the world is restricted to the span of his own life. Thus, as far as you are concerned, this world is the duration of your own life on earth, and not the real age of the earth itself from the day of its creation until the Day of Judgment. What benefit will you get from the earth when your life has already come to an end? The age of this world for every human being is his own life-span. The duration of human life-span is merely conjecture and is uncertain. A human could die while still in his mother's womb or he could die while still one month old. On the other hand, he could live to see a hundred. But anyone who is content and satisfies himself with something that is so uncertain must be short-sighted indeed. Therefore, listen to the Quran when it says: '…Are you pleased with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is the enjoyment of the life of this world compared with the Hereafter' (*at-Tawba:* 38).

Even if you measure the age of the earth, beginning from its creation right up until the Day of Judgment, you will see that it is also ephemeral. Since this is the nature of this worldly life, and since all that it offers is a few fleeting pleasures, then the one who feels secure in this world and is satisfied with its transient pleasures is evidently heedless. That is why the Lord ends the verse by saying: '…those who are heedless of Our Signs (*Ayat)*' (*Yunus:* 7). This stands in contrast to what Allah says about those who recognize the value of working for the Hereafter. Concerning them, the Lord says: 'In [all] that which Allah created in the heavens and earth, there truly are signs (*ayat*) for those who fear Him and guard themselves [from doing evil]' (*Yunus:* 6).

The Arabic word *'ghaflah*' (negligence and heedlessness) denotes that one is unaware of the meaning of something. So long as a person understands meanings, there will always be vigilance and forgetfulness will be kept at bay. Accordingly, *'ghaflah'* denotes that one is unaware of the meaning of something and *'yaqaza*' (wakefulness*)* is when a meaning remains fixed in the mind and heart.

As we know, the centre of one's consciousness captures any information that is received by the human mind, just as cameras capture images. Take care not to think that a human being learns a piece of information by having it repeated over and over again. All minds capture any piece of information at first sight. Essentially, a person differs from another in his/her capacity to receive the piece of information with a clear, receptive state of mind because the centre of one's consciousness, or of one's perception can only capture a single piece of information at a time. Then this information lodges in the back of the mind, allowing a new piece of information to be captured and stored in its turn. Now, if you are exposed to a piece of information, but the centre of your consciousness is busy with something else, the information fails to register. That is why you sometimes have to read a sentence over and over again until the incoming piece of information coincides with a moment of clarity and receptivity at the centre of your consciousness. For example, consider the student who is trying to memorize a poem. If his mind was ready to receive the poem, he will memorize it after the first reading.

The human mind is like a photocopying machine. That is why the Lord *the Exalted* says: 'Allah has not put for any man two hearts inside his body…' (*al-'Ahzab:* 4); if you want to receive some piece of information, be sure to clear your mind of all other things that preoccupy you in order for the new piece of information to find a receptive centre of consciousness and as a result become instilled therein.

A successful teacher is the one who manages to capture the attention of all his students; and as long as all the attention is focused on him, every word that he utters will be absorbed by his students. There is a sharp contrast between such a successful teacher and a poor teacher whose teaching style is mundane and whose rhetoric is weak and fails to attract the students. The successful teacher not only captivates the interest of his students, but he also often interrupts his presentation to ask the students what he has just told the class. As a result, the students pay close attention to him, because every one of them expects to be asked about the last piece of information that has been said. A successful student is the one who reads his lessons with the aim that he will discuss and analyse their content, and he concentrates well while reading. As for a weak student, he reads his lessons without much attentiveness or presence of mind.

Another example is a farmer who sleeps on the edge of a watering well. He does not fall into the well because even during his sleep, he remains aware of the risk that if he rolls to one side, he will fall into the well. The same thing applies to two brothers who sleep together on the same bed. Each gets up in the morning while being aware of the physical presence of the other. But if he were to sleep on a separate bed, he will wake up to find his head in one place and his feet in another. This process is known as the retention of information and alertness, even while one is asleep. A person can be described as being *'yaqizh'* (vigilant*)*; it expresses the state of being aware. Semantically, it is opposite to the word *'na'im'* (asleep*)*. To be 'vigilant' is to maintain a state of consciousness and awareness.

Thus, heedlessness refers to a person being totally unaware of the meaning of something, or the blurring of this meaning. Those who pass by signs but are heedless of them will not derive the slightest benefit from such signs. In the Hereafter, they will finally confront the outcome of their heedlessness. Regarding such people, Allah says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مَأْوَىٰهُمُ ٱلنَّارُ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكْسِبُونَ ٨

Shall have the Fire for their home because of
what they used to do [8] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 8)

Usually, when you say: 'I went to my abode', you are referring to a place in which you seek protection from the outside world. Here the Lord says: 'Their abode will be the Fire…' (*Yunus:* 8). If hellfire will be their 'shelter' and their 'resting place', this means that what lies beyond hellfire will cause them even more suffering. They will seek shelter in the hellfire: '…because of what they used to earn' (*Yunus:* 8), that is, because of the sins and bad deeds they committed.

After this, the Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ يَهْدِيهِمْ رَبُّهُم
بِإِيمَٰنِهِمْۖ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهِمُ ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ فِي جَنَّٰتِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ٩

But as for those who believe and do good deeds, their Lord
will guide them because of their faith. Streams will flow at
their feet in the Gardens of Bliss [9] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 9)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is speaking about the opposite group—those who believed. He informs us that: 'Their Lord will guide them because of their Faith' (*Yunus:* 9).

As we have previously stated, the word *'hidaya'* (guidance) means to be guided to goodness, which is contained in the Doctrine which the Lord has sent us in which He made clear the different paths that lie before the believer and the unbeliever. Those who respond to Allah with belief obtain additional guidance from Allah in the form of making the obligations of obedience easy for them. Allah, by His Grace, also increases the believer's state of guidance even more. That is why Allah says: 'And seek help through patience and Prayer, and indeed, it is extremely difficult except for the humbly submissive (to Allah)' (*al-Baqara:* 45). Thus the believer loves to take on the hardships of worship. As a result, the Lord *the Exalted* makes these duties easy for His slave and allows him to savour the sweetness of worship. This way, the difficulties of obedience are alleviated, and Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* constantly helps His slave as well.

Allah says: 'Verily, those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, their Lord will guide them because of their Faith…' (*Yunus:* 9).

Since they have believed, Allah provides them with the principles that serve them well in their life on earth and also benefit them in their Afterlife. Another way of interpreting this verse is that the guidance does not pertain to life on earth; rather, it pertains to the Hereafter. That is, since they have believed, they have thereby accepted the Laws of Allah, have acted upon them, and performed righteous works. For this reason, the Lord *the Exalted* guides them to the road that leads to paradise. That is why the Lord says: 'On the Day when you (Prophet Muhammad) see the believers, both men and women, with their light running forward ahead of them and to their right…' (*al-Hadid:* 12).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'On a Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet [Muhammad] or those who have believed with him. Their light will run forward ahead of them and to their right…' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). That is, their 'light' glows in front of them. As for the hypocrites, Allah relates that they will say to those who have believed: 'Wait for us! Let us borrow some of your light!' The same verse states that they will be told: 'Go back and look for a light' (*al-Hadid:* 13). That is, this is no longer the time to ask for light. The time to ask for light was in the worldly life, by following Allah's Doctrine and performing good deeds. Thus, the Lord *the Exalted* bestows light upon light on the believers in the Hereafter.

The verse we are discussing refers to guidance in this world as well as guidance in the next. And then the Lord *Glorified is He* describes the state of the believers in the Hereafter, saying: '…under them will flow rivers in Gardens of bliss (Paradise)' (*Yunus:* 9).

As we have previously said, paradise lies on the banks of rivers. It derives its greenery from water. Wherever you see running water, you will most certainly find greenery. Paradise does not refer to just the dwellings, as is evident in Allah's Words: '…good, peaceful homes in Gardens of lasting bliss' (*at-Tawba:* 72). Also, in another place the Lord says: '…Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise)' (*at-Tawba:* 100).

And in another place He says: '…Gardens from beneath which rivers run' (*al-Baqara:* 25). Allah gives us numerous descriptions of the water there, which shall never run out. Water in paradise is self-emanating and will never cease to flow.

Then the True Lord says:

دَعْوَىٰهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَٰنَكَ ٱللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَٰمٌ ۚ وَءَاخِرُ
دَعْوَىٰهُمْ أَنِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ١٠

Their prayer in them will be, 'Glory be to You, God!' their greeting, 'Peace,' and the last part of their prayer, 'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds' [10] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 10)

The Arabic word *'da'wahum'* means 'their invocations'. Here, a question presents itself, 'Is the Hereafter a place of duties and responsibilities, where one must continue to worship Allah and keep fulfilling religious obligations?' No, the worship in paradise takes the form of pleasure. Every time the dwellers of paradise experience something in it, they will say, 'We have tasted this before'. Then, after eating the fruits of paradise, they will realize that although these fruits bear some resemblance to the fruits of the earth, they are not the same as them. The Quran says: 'Whenever they are given sustenance from the fruits of these Gardens, they will say, "We have been given this before" because they were provided with something that resembles them' (*al-Baqara:* 25).

Or they will exclaim: ‘Glory be to You, O Allah!’ (*Yunus:* 10) in recognition and gratitude to Allah, It is true that whenever you see something beautiful that arouses your admiration, it prompts you to say, ‘Glory be to You, O Allah!’ And after receiving some blessing and you say, ‘Glory be to You, O Allah!’ you are surprised by things you did not expect. Their extreme beauty make you exclaim, ‘All praise be to Allah’. That is, you receive the blessings by saying, ‘Glory be to You, O Allah!’ and after receiving the blessings, your invocation closes with the words, ‘All praise be to Allah’. That is why the Lord says: ‘…and their invocation will close with, “Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds”’ (*Yunus:* 10). Indeed, what gives life its meaning–what gives it a taste and imparts to it a sense of security and stability–is when a person is at peace (*salam*). The meaning of peace is the feeling of tranquillity, satisfaction, and contentment, without agitations or disturbances of any kind. This can only be achieved when there is no clashing between the faculties of the soul, which brings peace within oneself, peace with one’s family–this is the second level of peace–peace with one’s society, and peace with the whole world. All this is called peace. In other words, there are no disturbances coming from oneself, one’s family, one’s community, or the world at large; the wider the circle of peace, the greater the feeling of tranquillity.

Allah says: ‘Their greeting therein will be, “Peace”…’ (*Yunus:* 10), and ‘peace’ occurs several times in the Quran. The Lord says: ‘The people of Paradise that day will be occupied enjoying themselves–they and their spouses–seated on couches in the shade. There they have fruit and whatever they ask for. (It will be said to them): “Peace”, a Word from the Merciful Lord’ (*Ya Sin:* 55-58).

This is the ‘peace’ that is truly meaningful; it is peace bestowed by Allah Himself. Allah has not just said, ‘You shall have peace that shall fill you with tranquillity and make your soul contented’; rather, Allah greets you with the word, ‘Peace’. Imagine the happiness of hearing the Lord *the Exalted* address you directly. There is great a difference between Allah instilling peace in your soul, and the peaceful, rejuvenating effect that His direct Salutation of Peace has on you. This is the reason why Allah says: ‘“Peace”, a Word from the Merciful Lord…’ (*Ya Sin:* 58). This is a greeting of peace from Allah. Next in honour is the greeting of peace from the angels: '…and angels shall enter unto them from every gate (saying), "Peace be upon you…"' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23-24).

Therefore, in the saying of the Lord: 'Their greeting therein will be, "Peace"…' (*Yunus:* 10), we find that the word peace stands for contentment and tranquility in paradise. One of the foremost feelings that everyone loves to have inside themselves is peace, even though everyone may be against you. However, when you calm your emotions and ask yourself, 'What have I done for certain people to be against me?' And when you answer yourself, 'I have not done anything but good'; this means that you feel peace inside of you. And when others welcome and appreciate your actions, life runs smoothly, and all contradictions and all grudges disappear. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said, 'A man from the people of Paradise will now come towards you'.(1) Then a man entered, well known by most of the Companions. After the man left, one of the Companions got up and approached him to find out what was the special thing he used to do. He asked the man, 'What is it that you do that makes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* give you the glad tidings of entering Paradise?' The Companion found the behaviour of the man to be righteous, and his lifestyle conformed to the Sunnah, but there were no any noticeable extra deeds. Therefore, the Companion asked him why the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had given him the glad tidings of Paradise? The man replied, 'By Allah, I pray as you pray. I fast as you fast. I pay the poor-due as you pay it. However, when I go to bed at night, my heart holds no grudges against anyone'.

This is inner peace. Once a person achieves this state, the world can no longer harm him, even if the entire world rises against him. After this state, a person's peace with Allah is guaranteed. Any person who is at peace with himself, with his environment and with his community—such a person receives peace from Allah *the Exalted*. Regarding those who will face a grave predicament on the Day of Judgment, the Quran says: 'and when that Day comes, no soul will speak except by His Permission; some of them will be wretched and some happy' (*Hud:* 105). The wretched ones shall be in great difficulties in the hellfire. As for the happy ones, they shall be in paradise. But what about those who are neither among the wretched nor among the happy, namely, the people of *al-A`raf* (the Heights)? On the Day of Resurrection people will fall into one of three categories. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: 'The one whose good deeds are heavy on the scales will have a pleasant life, but the one whose good deeds are light will have the Bottomless Pit for his home' (*al-Qari`ah:* 6-9). The Lord *the Exalted* does not tell us about those whose scales—one measuring good deeds and the other measuring bad deeds—balance each other; He says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Verily, My Mercy prevails over My Wrath'.(1)

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(1) *Narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik*

Allah gives us a description of His Mercy (towards those in Paradise) when He says: 'The people of Paradise will cry out to the people of the Fire, "We have found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found what your Lord promised you to be true?' They will answer, "Yes". And a voice will proclaim from their midst, "Allah's Curse (hangs) over the evildoers"' (*al-A'raf:* 44).

After that comes the mention of the people of *al-A`raf;* Allah *the Exalted* says concerning them: 'A barrier divides the two groups, with men on its heights recognizing each group by their marks' (*al-A'raf:* 46). The people of *al-A`raf* will recognize the believers by their characteristic marks and the disbelievers by their characteristic marks. They will be sitting waiting on the Heights (between Paradise and Hell). They will look at the people of Paradise and say: '"Peace be upon you!"–not having entered it themselves, but longing (to enter it)' (*al-A'raf:* 46).

After that the Lord presents to us another vivid picture, saying: 'The people of the Fire will call to the people of Paradise, "Give us some water, or any of the sustenance Allah has granted you!" And they will reply, "Allah has forbidden both to the disbelievers"' (*al-A'raf:* 50). From this we can see that the people of *al-*A`raf are happy to witness Allah showering His Gifts upon the people of paradise; and they too yearn for Allah's Forgiveness.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (Book of Authentic Hadiths) (3194) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2751)*

In our own lives, we hear stories from prison guards who say that, before the death sentence is pronounced on a prisoner, the latter tends to lose weight. But after the sentence is issued, the prisoner gains weight. This is because the matter has finally been settled for him. In the Hereafter, such category of people who will be busy wondering where they will be placed, whether paradise or hell, will not forget to say to the believers: ‘Peace be upon you...’ (*al-A’raf:* 46). And their invocation will close with: ‘Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds!’

In the chapter we are discussing, the Lord *the Exalted* says regarding the people of paradise: ‘…their greeting therein will be, “Peace”. And their invocation will close with, “Praise to Allah, Lord of the Worlds!”’ (*Yunus:* 10) The part that says: ‘Their invocation will close with’ could mean their last words. For one of them could say, ‘I used to praise our Lord for such-and-such a thing and for such-and-such a thing. But the last praise is really the ultimate praise’. They used to praise Allah for the blessings of this world which are transient, but then, in the Hereafter, they will praise Him for the blessings that are eternal. Such praise for blessings that are eternal is the ultimate praise.

Then the True Lord says:

وَلَوْ يُعَجِّلُ ٱللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ ٱلشَّرَّ ٱسْتِعْجَالَهُم بِٱلْخَيْرِ لَقُضِىَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَجَلُهُمْ ۖ
فَنَذَرُ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَآءَنَا فِى طُغْيَٰنِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿١١﴾

If God were to hasten on for people the harm [they have earned] as they wish to hasten on the good, their time would already be up. But We leave those who do not expect to meet Us to wander blindly in their excesses [11] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 11)

This glorious verse speaks about a doctrinal issue that is likely a central concern when supplicating Allah. It is how sometimes, despite copious supplications, some people may feel that Allah does not answer them, and they become sad and confused about why Allah did not grant them their requests. Some of them may even fall into despair. To anyone who thinks this way, I say, ‘No; the case is that you supplicate, and at times you supplicate for good things and at other times you supplicate for bad things. Now if Allah *the Exalted* were to answer all your supplications in the way you wish, He will grant you your evil requests as well as your good requests. And if Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* were to hasten for you the evil you ask for as Allah hastens for you the good, you will have been devastated and your life will have quickly come to an end'.

The Quran relates the words of taunt that some disbelievers of Quraysh said, invoking Allah: 'O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment' (*al-Anfal:* 32). Had the Lord *the Exalted* answered such a supplication, it will have been disastrous for those who had uttered it. Clearly, it is in your best interest that Allah does not answer your supplication when you invoke evil upon yourself or upon someone or something. You have to understand that Allah *the Most High* responds wisely. He *the Most High* is far above acting as an employee of His creation. Anyone who supplicates for something shall have an answer from Allah *Glorified is He*. However, it is Allah Who decides the manner and the time of the answer. If the matter were otherwise, Divinity will become reallocated from Allah to the slaves.

The Lord *the Exalted* protects His slaves by closely monitoring what they supplicate for. You may think that the outcomes of your supplication will surely be good for you, but the Lord's Overseeing Knowledge that has embraced all things since pre-eternity tells you, 'No'. If answered, this supplication will not result in any good. Rather, expect that goodness comes to you by not having your supplication answered, as Allah says in the Quran: 'You may dislike something although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you; Allah knows and you do not' (*al-Baqara:* 216). Thus, your own knowledge is not the ultimate judge of what is good and what is bad; therefore, leave it to *the Most High* Lord–Who is your Trustworthy Guardian–to either answer or not answer your supplication. For although you might be under the impression that what you are praying for is good, nevertheless, Allah's Absolute Knowledge is the ultimate judge of what is good and what is evil. When Allah withholds something from you, this very withholding (unanswered supplication) could be a gift in itself. That is why the Lord says: 'And man supplicates for evil as he supplicates for good; man is ever hasty' (*al-Isra':* 11).

You might persistently beseech Allah to grant you a particular request, which, if granted, might result in bad consequences for you. Almighty Allah knows what is good for you. Sometimes He grants the requests of some of His slaves which they have very desperately asked for only to discover latter that what they asked for was not good at all. And sometimes Allah grants you something which you thought was bad for you, but then you discover that it contains much good. Clearly, the Lord, in His Wisdom, rectifies that which human beings freely choose for themselves.

The Quran narrates how the disbelievers tried to taunt Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment’ (*al-Anfal:* 32). These words were uttered by Al-`As ibn Wa’il As-Sahmi, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, al-Aswad ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib, and Al-Aswad ibn `Abd Yahud. These men reached the point when they started to make wild accusations. The first wild accusation was that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a magician, but all the while they failed to recognize the absurdity of such an accusation. This is because if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had the power of magic, then why did he not also put a spell on these disbelievers for them to become believers? The second wild accusation was that they labelled the Quran as poetry or that it had the character of poetry or rhymed prose. This is not true about the Quran. Had such an accusation been made by any other group of people, perhaps they could be excused to some degree, given that they were not well versed in the Arabic language. However, these people belonged to a community that had a gift for language and were expert in the art of eloquent speech. In fact, they used to set up regular gatherings for poetry and oratory competitions. And these people made a third wild accusation when, even though they acknowledged the grandeur of the Quran, they tried to defame the honourable status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man from either of the two cities?’(1) (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Whenever the Lord speaks with regards to a specific incident that occurred during the time of Prophet Muhammad and involved the disbelievers at the time, He does not simply treat the matter as an isolated event. Rather, He addresses the universal significance of such events for all times until the Day of Resurrection. The specific circumstantial factors of the event are merely causal because Allah is interested in the broader principles that are involved, which are applicable to all times and all places. If this was not the case, these events will only be relevant to the specific persons that were involved, and the judgments that were made on the matter will only apply to a few select people, who were Prophet Mohammad’s contemporaries. In essence, the Quran is a revelation to all mankind, and its principles shall continue to resonate throughout the ages. Any matter that was presented to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* must have been for a specific reason; however, the moral implications of the incident transcend the specifics of the event.

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(1) The two cities referred to here are Mecca and At-Ta’if.

Thus, starting from a particular incident in which certain people said certain things, Allah *the Exalted* brings out the broader implications that will retain their relevance until the Final Hour. These people uttered the following supplication against themselves: ‘O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment’ (*al-Anfal:* 32).

Similarly, the people of `Ad said to Hud *peace be upon him*: ‘You have come to us that we should worship Allah Alone and forsake that which our fathers used to worship. So bring us that wherewith you have threatened us if you are of the truthful’ (*al-A’raf:* 70). That is, these people invoked evil upon themselves.

Allah uses this incident to illustrate a principle of supplications, whether it is for good or bad. A human, on account of various circumstances affecting him directly or indirectly, can become distressed. Helpless feelings regarding some kind of personal physical affliction, such as an illness or a handicap that is no longer bearable, can make one say, ‘O Lord, relieve me of this suffering’. In saying this, he is asking for death. If Allah *the Exalted* were to answer his supplication, this person’s life will immediately end. But Allah is *the Almighty* the Wise. He does not take orders from any of His creation nor is He rushed because of the impatience of those who expect immediate answers. Just as Allah defers His Answer to your supplications when you ask for something good, He also defers the granting of your request when you ask for something bad; and this is a Mercy from Allah *the Exalted*.

Consequently, if you say, ‘I supplicate Allah for good things, but Allah does not respond to my pleas’, consider the alternative situation, that is, when you invoke misfortune upon yourself and Allah does not answer you. It also happens that a father sometimes gets fed up with all those around him and says, ‘Please Allah, end my life and take me away from them’. Suppose that Allah were to grant him his wish; what will happen? We might also find someone who says, ‘O Lord, strike me blind so that I may never lay eyes on them again’; or a mother might supplicate against herself or her children, and so on.

All of you wish that Allah will answer your every supplication; but if He were to answer your supplications for harm, injury or misfortune, your lives will end horribly. An example is this mother who utters contradictory supplications, where she says to her son, for instance, ‘O Allah, water me with his fire’. She is asking to be watered with fire, even though watering pertains to plants, and fire pertains to heat. Therefore, at times a person may get annoyed at himself or those around him, and as a result he prays that something bad should happen to him. When a person makes such supplications, one needs to be aware that the Lord is far above granting a request that contradicts His Divine Wisdom. ‘And were Allah to hasten for mankind the evil (they invoke for themselves and for their children etc., while in a state of anger) as He hastens for them the good (they invoke), they will have been ruined…’ (*Yunus:* 11). To sum up, just as you wish that Allah defers your supplications for something bad, resign yourselves to His Decision when He defers your supplications for something good, The good that you perceive in the matters of life is not as Allah perceives and knows; for He is the All-Aware and All Knowing. You might supplicate for something which you think is good, but Allah knows that it is actually harmful. For such a reason, it is in your interest that He does not answer your supplication. And just as you respect His Decision not to answer your supplication for something bad—directed either at yourself or at someone you love—then respect His Decision not to answer your supplication concerning something which you think is good, whether it be for you or for someone you love. For Allah can never be ‘rushed’ merely on account of His slave’s short-sighted urgency. He is your Creator, and He knows what is best for you. He is the One Who says: ‘Man is a creature of haste...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 37).

He also says: ‘I will soon show you My signs, so do not ask Me to hasten them’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 37).

Moreover, if the Lord were to answer the supplication of those who invoked Him: ‘O Allah, if this really is the Truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment…’ (*al-Anfal:* 32), this will have spelled their end. They will have been annihilated in the manner which they had determined; then their final destination will be the torment of Hellfire. But the Lord willed that they should live for those who will choose belief might become believers.

As for those who choose disbelief, they must face the consequences of their tyranny. Because one does not choose to be simply a disbeliever; rather, one oversteps the limits and asks those who have attained to faith to renounce their belief. This constitutes a transgression of the limits, which causes the disbelievers to wander blindly through their unjust course. They become overwhelmed by events and circumstances. Eventually, it is proved, both to them and to those who come after them, that disbelief is powerless. It can never withstand the Power of the Truth.

There are many examples of this in our lives–although Allah is beyond comparison. For instance, a person could gain dominion over his enemy and hit him, yet he refrains from killing him. Then more assaults come from this enemy, and so he hits him again. Then further assaults ensue, but he only hits his enemy and never kills him, to keep him under perpetual humiliation. The strong does not kill his foe. He instead just hurts him for his foe not to raise his head again.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘So We leave those who do not believe that they will meet Us in their transgressions, wandering blindly, stumbling to and fro’ (*Yunus:* 11). That is, the Lord abandons the followers of falsehood to their own ways, letting them gather more and more sins for them to reap the woeful consequences of their enmity towards Islam and consequently dare not raise their heads. Because the followers of Islam will respond to their assaults two-fold. The proponents of falsehood will most certainly despair and realize that they cannot in any way be victorious over the armies of the Truth. No matter what strategies they adopt in their attempts to get the better of Islam, you will find that the Lord *the Exalted* always grants victory to the Muslims.

We can find an example of this in the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Lord *the Exalted* ordered him to emigrate from Mecca to Medina. The disbelievers had sent the strongest young men from the different tribes to completely besiege Prophet Mohammad’s house, but the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* still managed to escape unperceived. Before leaving, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Let these faces be disgraced’. The Lord willed this for them to realize that they were incapable of defeating Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whether through direct confrontation or through cunning and planning.

After that, Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَإِذَا مَسَّ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ ٱلضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنۢبِهِۦٓ أَوْ قَاعِدًا أَوْ قَآئِمًا فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُ ضُرَّهُۥ مَرَّ
كَأَن لَّمْ يَدْعُنَآ إِلَىٰ ضُرٍّ مَّسَّهُۥ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْمُسْرِفِينَ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

When trouble befalls man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble. In this way the deeds of such heedless people are made attractive to them [12] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 12)

Here Allah *the Exalted* describes the state of the humans who do not attach themselves permanently to Allah and do not commit themselves to His Doctrine. They are those who turn to Allah in times of crisis, but after the crisis is over, they quickly lose their faith and forget about their religious obligations. Our lives are full of this type of people.

For example, in my village there used to be a barber-surgeon who used to tend to people’s physical health until one day one of the young men from the village graduated from medical school. The barber-surgeon began to disparage him. But one day the farmers noticed that the barber-surgeon had left his work early while carrying a large cloth in his arms. They wanted to know what was inside the cloth. They found out that the barber-surgeon’s son was sick, and the barber-surgeon was taking him to see the doctor. That is, in the end he could not deceive himself, although he tried to dissuade the other villagers from going to the doctor by spreading malicious rumours about him.

The same is true for man's relationship with Allah. He might be able to deceive others when his life is running smoothly and everything is going well, but he cannot forget about Allah when he is going through difficult times. When the person experiences trying times and stands bereft of all means of support, his only succour are the words, 'O Lord'. In moments of hardships, you will find that even the most prolific sinners or the most intransigent rebels turn to Allah. This is what the Lord is saying here: 'When trouble befalls a man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side…' (*Yunus:* 12).

An example of this can be seen in the lives of those disbelievers who supplicated against themselves when they taunted Prophet Muhammad. Even if we suppose that their wish to end to their own lives was genuine, why should they supplicate to Allah when they have openly professed their disbelief in Him? It is a blatant lie. It is possible that when a person is passing through hard times, he supplicates against himself. As the poet Al-Mutanabbi said:

It is a sufficient affliction that you regard death as a healer

And enough for death that it becomes your utmost desire

The lines mean that it is miserable enough for a person to reach the point where death becomes a desire.

In the Quran, we find that the Lord gives numerous descriptions of the human in difficult times. Sometimes we find a glorious verse providing insight into one perspective of the troubles a human experiences, and then we find another verse exploring a different perspective, and a third verse presenting further depictions of the human. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'When some affliction touches a man he prays to his Lord and turns to Him, but once he has been granted a favour from Allah, he forgets the One he had been praying to before…' (*az-Zumar:* 8).

In the verse which we are currently examining, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'When trouble befalls a man, he cries out to us…' (*Yunus:* 12). And in another place, Allah says: 'whatever good things you (people) possess come from Allah, and when hardship touches you, it is to Him alone you cry out for help. Yet when He has relieved you of your hardship, behold, some of you attribute partners to your Lord' (*an-Nahl:* 53-54).

That is, at times Allah mentions affliction in the individual life, and at other times in the collective life. At times He mentions different types of affliction in the singular, and at other times He mentions different types of affliction in the plural. At times He mentions the affliction that occurs on land, and at other times He mentions the affliction that occurs at sea, such as His Saying: ‘When distress touches you at sea, those you pray to besides Him [Allah] desert you…’ (*al-Isra’:* 67).

Accordingly, these glorious verses cover the various states that a human being might experience. When a person lives through a calamity from which no relief can be expected, either from oneself or from one’s surroundings, he then seeks his Lord as his sole refuge. It is regretful that such a person is a disbeliever in Allah.

The noble verse which we are currently discussing gives as an array of different depictions. The Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘When trouble befalls a man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side…’ (*Yunus:* 12), that is, reclining on his side, and also: ‘…sitting or standing…,’ (*Yunus:* 12). Hence, the noble verse speaks of the different postures that humans can assume in this world. The verse also runs parallel with the stages of human development. A small infant, for instance, cannot roll over by itself; rather, the baby requires the help of his parents to roll him into the proper sleeping position. After he grows more, he becomes able to roll over on its own, and soon he acquires the power to execute the second movement which is to sit upright. Soon after this, he begins to stand up, and then to walk.

The verse at hand gives us an accurate account of three of these movements: ‘When trouble befalls a man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting or standing…’ (*Yunus:* 12). Note that walking is not mentioned here; for the person who is able to walk is not rendered motionless by the force of the calamity. However, the other positions mentioned—standing, sitting or resting on one’s side—usually imply some sort of distressful hardship.

These are the stages of gradual physical decline in the life of human beings. A person lives his childhood, then comes the vitality of youth, and after that weakness creeps in and his hair begins to grey. And although he is able to stand up, he is unable to walk as energetically as he used to in his youth. This is followed by old age when he spends most of his time sitting, unable to stand up. And as he progresses into extreme old age, he will be able to neither walk, stand up or sit; he remains lying on his side, and may depend on his family to roll him over from time to time. Clearly, the gradual deterioration of a thing always proceeds in a manner inverse to the way the thing first developed. As a human being goes through the stages of development—from lying on his side, to sitting, to standing up and finally to walking—his inevitable decline proceeds in an inverse manner; because the process of demolition is the inverse of the process of construction.

From this particular description—where Allah reveals to His creatures some of the secrets of creation—we can deduce the truth of Allah Statements regarding the process of creation, because we have not witnessed the process of creation ourselves; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘I did not call them to witness the creation of the heavens and earth, nor their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray’ (*al-Kahf:* 51).

The Lord has not allowed anyone to witness the manner in which the heavens and the earth were created, nor has He allowed anyone to witness the manner in which the human was created. Therefore, when it comes to these matters, we should not look for answers outside of the Quran. For instance, we should not give any credence to these theories that posit that the earth was once part of the sun and that over time it broke away from the sun and its temperature cooled. All these are merely un-established hypotheses. Allah clearly says: ‘I did not call them to witness the creation of the heavens and earth, nor their own creation…’ (*al-Kahf:* 51).

This verse shows that as long as the human mind is detached from the Doctrine of heaven, it cannot possibly arrive at the knowledge of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor that of humankind. If someone tells you that you have been created in a manner that contradicts what is in the Quran, you should say, ‘This is a lie’. And if someone tells you that the heavens and the earth were created in a manner contrary to what is in the Quran, you should respond, ‘This is a lie’ because Allah alone is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the Creator of humankind. There were no agents or spectators. Since no one has witnessed anything himself, no one can tell you about it.

The Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray’ (*al-Kahf:* 51).

These people who are referred to as ‘leading others astray’ are those who tell you false hypotheses about the evolution of apes into human beings or the earth being once part of the sun and then it broke off from it. The authors of such conjectures are what the Lord has called *‘mudilin’* (those who lead astray). Had Allah *the Exalted* not revealed to us such a Quranic verse, and then these people came to us and claimed that human beings evolved from monkeys, we could have said, ‘The Quran has not dealt with such claims’, and we might have believed them. But Allah has provided us with immunity against this kind of misguided thinking.

The act of creation is a mystery to us. Our only source of knowledge about it comes from what our Creator *the Most High* has taught us. No one was with Allah to witness His Creative Act and recount it to us. Life, which was incepted by the Creative Act, becomes undone by death. Death is something which we all witness. And we know that the process of demolition is the inverse of the process of construction. For instance, if we built a twenty-storey building and then wanted to destroy it for some reason or other, we start by destroying the twentieth floor, and we will continue destroying the building floor by floor, starting from the top. What was built first is the last to be destroyed. For the destruction of an object always proceeds in a manner inverse to the way the object was built.

Since death is the destruction of life, once the soul departs the body and before burial, the corpse stiffens, and then it turns into a decomposing carcass. After that, all the water contained in the dead body evaporates, and the body decays back into the elements of the earth. These are the stages of death.

Allah has informed us about how creation took place. He has told us how He created man from dust mixed with water until it became clay. When the clay became sticky and adhesive, the Lord shaped it into a human being and breathed into him the soul (1). That is, the last step in the creation of man was the entry of the soul into the body. And for this reason, the first step in the process of death is the departure of the soul from the body.

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(1) Allah says in this regard: ‘Then He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him the soul (created by Allah for that person), and He gave you hearing, sight and hearts. Little is the thanks you give!’ (*as-Sajda*: 9)

Here in this noble verse, Allah *the Exalted* describes man as lying on his side, standing or in a seated position, but He does not mention 'walking'. This is because one who walks is one who is not afflicted by any serious illness. If affliction does befall him, it comes from outside himself or from someone else. The opposite of '*durr*' (affliction) is '*naf'*' ('benefit', 'well-being' or 'boon') A beneficial item is that which preserves the goodness of a object, keeping it in its original, natural, enjoyable and comfortable state, whether internally or externally.

When your body is in a state of uprightness, you are in full control of your faculties, and all your organs are healthy and sound; you do not suffer from affliction. However, if weakness or disease arises in any part of your body, the difficulties will begin. That is why it is said that general good health means that you are not aware of the different parts of your body. You become conscious of your eye, for example, when it hurts you. You become conscious of your ear when it aches. You use your teeth to chew food, and you do this inadvertently. The day you become conscious of your teeth is the day when you start having cavity problems. Thus, a person does not appreciate that he is in good health until he becomes conscious of one of his body parts and he starts complaining, 'O my eye!' or 'O my ear!'

We say that if one feels pain in his eye, this pain has arisen due to a specific problem. The same statement applies to any other organ of the body. A person who does not suffer from pain or discomfort in any part of his body will consequently be unaware of them, since they are functioning normally. As to external wellbeing, it is achieved when those around you provide you with joy and peace of mind, without any trouble. This is how their benefit becomes apparent to you.

Every human being harbours a sense of ego, which the Lord refers to when He says: 'Nay! Verily, man does transgress all bounds because he considers himself self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

Man only shows humility when he suffers some harm or difficulty. Man becomes arrogant only after every manner of blessing is bestowed upon him—both outside and inside. But when a man's blessings begin to diminish, his arrogance is immediately driven away. He who used to strut in front of people, showing off his strength, may one day want to stand up to walk a few steps but will be unable to do so. Man only thinks himself to be self-sufficient regarding that which is basic in him, never towards that with which he has been endowed. That is why he should not be conceited; because the Endower—*the Most High*—can strip him of these gifts. He might strip you of your good health, and we have seen many a healthy person fall sick, many a rich person fall into poverty, and many a powerful person lose their power.

Clearly, there is no need for arrogance because it is Allah who has given you everything. There is nothing whatsoever in you that you have given to yourself. That is why one must get rid of all arrogance since everything that you have has been conferred to you by the Bestower *the Most High* He can strip you of that which He has given you. To be sure, when man is stripped of Allah's Blessings, He begins to pay attention. There is, therefore, no need for anyone to be conceited. To act or think as such means one cheaply surrenders oneself to perdition.

For example, you may have a quarrel with a doctor who happens to be the only one in your area. Some will doubtless try to reconcile the two of you, but you refuse. But one day you fall sick, and you seek his help; for Allah has given him sound knowledge in the field of medicine. For this reason, you should not be conceited or arrogant towards anyone.

However, human beings will always be human beings, and human nature is what it is. That is why the Lord *the Exalted* says: 'When trouble befalls a man he cries out to Us' (*Yunus:* 12).

When trouble befalls a disbeliever, he falls into a pit of disgrace. On the contrary, the believer is always supported by his Lord, and if trouble befalls him, he always supplicates Allah *Glorified is He*; the believer never forgets Him. That is why Allah shows His Mercy to him. The disbeliever, in contrast, supplicates Allah *Glorified is He* only in times of distress, but why did the disbeliever not believe when Allah *Glorified is He* sends His Messengers and calls him to have Faith?

The forgetfulness of man was built into his primordial nature. This is because man, by nature, likes to benefit from his surroundings; but if this is not possible, he tries to benefit himself in any way possible. But when he cannot help even himself, he realises and remembers that his only means of refuge is to believe in the One Who has created him. Look at how the Quran expresses this idea: ‘When distress seizes you at sea, those you call to besides Him [Allah] desert you’ (*al-Isra’:* 67). Thus, whosoever worships anything other than Allah *Glorified is He* will be deserted by such a deity; for the latter stands incapable of offering salvation to its worshippers. That is why the polytheist inevitably returns to Allah *Glorified is He* as there is no one who can help but Him (Allah) and He is the only One Who delivers man from impending danger. Being the Creator, He is the Most Merciful towards His creation and His Mercy saves the human being, even if he is a disbeliever. All of this is completely logical; for we have attested to the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* when we were in the pre-eternal world of the unseen — when Allah *Glorified is He* made us take the original vow. He has said to us: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and we replied: ‘Yes, we bear witness [to this]’ (*al-A’raf:* 172). This is the *Fitr* (instinctual) faith which existed before the coming of forgetfulness and blind imitation. For this reason, when all of the false deities disperse and forsake the disbeliever, he thinks again and as a result calls Allah *Glorified is He* and even implores others to supplicate Allah *Glorified is He* for him. A man might call for someone to comfort him when he is sick, but he does not find any of his children or family members near him. However, as soon as he calls Allah *Glorified is He,* he is touched by His Mercy. But sometimes you find that when Allah *Glorified is He* answers a man’s supplications, the man reverts back to his previous state of foolishness and conceit; he utters the words of Qarun: ‘This wealth was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess...’ (*al-Qasas:* 78). This person says, ‘I took my precautions and I put everything in a good order’. Consequently, Allah seizes him with all His Might and Power. When harm befalls any one of you, you will not find anything in the external environment or within yourselves that can replace your Creator; and at a moment of impending danger you cannot lie to yourselves for at that moment, the only one you turn to is Allah *Glorified is He*. At that time, you recall the time of the ‘original vow’ and therefore you return to Him.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘When trouble befalls man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing…’ (*Yunus:* 12).

And when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…but as soon as we relieve him of his trouble' (*Yunus:* 12), He portrays 'trouble' as if it is 'covering' and 'enfolding' the person to the extent that no one can save him from it. This is because *'al-kashf'* (relief) is the lifting of the cover that enfolds the entire human being. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* describes how 'trouble' can overwhelm the entire body, using words that help us to understand this state more. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So Allah afflicts it with the garment of famine and fear, for what its people had done' (*an-Nahl:* 112). It is as if hunger and fear enfolded the entire village to the extent that it is not only the stomachs that are hungry but also every organ in the body is suffering from hunger and fear. And in the verse we are discussing, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble.… ' (*Yunus:* 12) The word *marr* (goes on his way) means that someone comes to a stop; when someone says, 'So-and-so stopped by (*marr)* me', this means that he has stopped to talk with me. We can understand from Allah's Words that the person who was afflicted by trouble paused to supplicate Allah *Glorified is He* and seek His Help—when trouble had overwhelmed him and he had no one else to turn to but Allah *Glorified is He*. However, prior to this incident, he used to take the blessings given to him by Allah *Glorified is He* while not caring at all about believing in Him. And after the harm passes and he abandons his temporary Faith: '…he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to us to remove his trouble' (*Yunus:* 12). It is as if he forgot how humbled he once stood before Allah *Glorified is He*. As such, he passes from a stage of humility and submission, fervently supplicating Allah *Glorified is He* to a stage of arrogance; he fails to pause and give thanks to the One Who has delivered him from harm—this is the ultimate act of treachery.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: 'In this way the deeds of transgressors are made attractive to them' (*Yunus:* 12). A second issue is clear here; although the incident that occurred was particular to a specific time and place, Allah *Glorified is He* has made the principle involved applicable to the entire universe, in general. In ancient times, this is what happened to the transgressors. And the one who encouraged them to forget Allah's Favour was either the devil or Allah Himself by making these people's vices become worse; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘In their hearts is a disease, to which Allah adds more diseases’ (*al-Baqara:* 10). And He says: ‘But as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble’ (*Yunus:* 12). This is how the transgressors acted in the past and what happened to them, and the same will happen to them in the future. Every human action is composed of ‘words’ and ‘deeds’. And an action is anything that happens by the use of a human’s limbs. Even if words are different from deeds, the two make up what are called ‘actions’.

After Allah *Glorified is He* presents this principle in both a general sense and for this particular incident, and illustrates how it is in conformity with the whole universe, He explains why it is necessary that the disbelievers pay attention to the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition, He warns the disbelievers, ‘Do We hand a Messenger over to his enemies—or do We grant every Messenger victory over his enemies? Past events have confirmed that We have always taken every sinner to task for his sins; therefore, be careful not to be one of the sinners’.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا ٱلۡقُرُونَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَمَّا ظَلَمُواْ وَجَآءَتۡهُمۡ رُسُلُهُم
بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ وَمَا كَانُواْ لِيُؤۡمِنُواْۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِي ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ ١٣

Before you people, We destroyed whole generations when they did evil – their messengers brought them clear signs but they refused to believe. This is how We repay the guilty [13]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 13)

Therefore, do not be lured into thinking that you can remain in a state of enmity towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; you will not be able to be victorious over him in any way as Allah *Glorified is He* will perfect His Light and your fate shall be no different from the fate of previous disbelievers. The Arabic word *‘al-qurun’* (generations) is the plural of the word ‘*qarn’* (generation), which itself is related to the term ‘*muqarana’ (*gathering). And every group of people who share something in common are called ‘*qarn’*. The word *‘al-qarn’* can also mean ‘a century’; and the group of people who live through a particular one hundred-year period together are also called '*qarn'*. '*Al-qarn'* can also mean a group of people who share something in common — no matter what age they lived in. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have destroyed whole generations (*al-qurun*) before you when they did evil—their Messengers brought them clear signs but they refused to believe...' (*Yunus:* 13). If Allah *Glorified is He* had postponed His punishment, will they have believed? No, because Allah *Glorified is He* has known all things since pre-eternity and He knows the true state of everything— that which man has no control over as well as that over which he can exercise freewill.

Let us give an example from our own lives and experiences—although Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond comparison. When a person wants to build a house, the nature of this prospective house will depend on the builder's means; a poor person, for instance, will ask for two humble rooms to be built, and for this reason the contractor designs a house with only two rooms. If the person is of average means, he turns to an architect to design a house that is consistent with his means. And if the man is wealthy, he will turn to an architect to build a house for him that suits his means and accords with his tastes. But before the construction can commence, the architect draws up a blueprint for the house; this blueprint illustrates all the details of the house, down to the colour of the windows, the doors, and the rooms.

Before the earth was created, Allah *Glorified is He* had already predetermined how it will look; this was an absolutely perfect calculation which Allah performed. And when the world was created, it took on the exact form that the Creator had predestined for it; thus, even if someone chooses to disbelieve, Allah *Glorified is He* has known about him since pre-eternity. In fact, even concerning matters in which human beings can exercise their freewill, Allah *Glorified is He* has already recorded them in His Book of Decrees. Allah knows about the matters that He has predestined which man is coerced to do and over which he has no freewill. For matters which involve freewill, Allah *Glorified is He* has given His creatures the freedom of choice; but He knows in advance what choices they will make. Thus, all was designed according to His Knowledge. Do not think that Allah *Glorified is He* has designed things this way in order to coerce you; no, as He merely knows in advance what you will choose with your own freewill. This is how Allah *Glorified is He* has known—since pre-eternity—who will be unjust towards himself; He also knew that the previous generations which He destroyed will not have believed.

‘We have destroyed whole generations before you when they did evil [and wrong] (*zhalamu*)...’ (*Yunus:* 13). The word *‘zhulm’,* which the word ‘*zhalamu*’ (they did evil) and ‘*yazhlimoon*’ (they wrong) comes from, means to strip someone of his right and hand over this right to someone else. Human beings might wrong (*yazhlimoon*) each other when it comes to the rights which the Creator has endowed them with; but the ultimate act of injustice (*zhulm*) is when a man abuses the Lord’s Right to be the only One Who is worshipped and hands over this right to some other false deity. This is the epitome of injustice. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong [injustice] (*zhulm*)’ (*Luqman:* 13). These people had committed injustice with regards to the principal Doctrine of Belief. This verse can also refer to them committing injustice towards themselves—as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is they who wrong themselves (*yazhlimoon*)’ (*Yunus:* 44).

Such people who are mentioned in this verse are simultaneously committers of injustice and victims of injustice because human beings possess numerous resources, one of which is the Faith that is innate to man’s primordial substance and another is that which makes them seek their own immediate gratification. When the latter tendency prevails over the former, our self-reproaching soul takes action to return things to their proper state. As for the soul which incites a person to commit evil, for its part, it only asks for carnal desires to be satisfied. This is because it is a soul that incites man to commit evil. But when the soul finds peace and submits itself to Allah’s Commandments, it is then considered a peaceful soul. To commit injustice towards oneself means to pursue one’s carnal desires; he gives instant gratification to himself. However, this ultimately leads to his misery later on; and this is why we can consider such behaviour to be an injustice towards oneself.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have destroyed whole generations before you when they did evil—their Messengers brought them clear signs...’ (*Yunus:* 13). Allah *Glorified is He* has not left them alone, rather He has sent them Messengers backed up by miracles so that they might provide them with insight. Nevertheless, Allah *Glorified is He* knows that they will not believe; that is why He says: '…but they refused to believe' (*Yunus:* 13) meaning that even if He had let them live, they will not have believed. It is He who has created them and He has known—since pre-eternity—that they will not choose Faith. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who knows absolutely everything. But although He knows what will happen, He does not force this to occur as He still gives people a chance to choose. If He had forced things to happen as He knows will occur by not giving choices, there will be no need for man to have freewill. For example—although Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond comparison—let us say you are at home and you and your wife decide to take a trip. If your children are young, you will tell them before you close the door, 'there is food for you in the fridge: there is meat, fish, cheese, and olives'. And after you and your wife leave the house you turn to her and say, 'Our children are only going to eat cheese and olives because they will find that eating these items is easier'. If there had been nothing but cheese in the fridge, you will not have said these words; in such a case, the children will have no other choice. However, since there is still freedom of choice in the matter, you have the ability to predict what your children will do based on their past behaviour. And upon your return, you find that your children have acted in the way you predicted, even though you had given them a choice.

A similar example in the Quran is when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him. He will burn in the Flaming Fire' (*al-Masad:* 1-3). In these verses, Allah's Decision that Abu Lahab(1) will die as a disbeliever is stated. This Decision is announced, and it is repeated when we recite this chapter in our Prayers; we also memorize it. Abu Lahab is Prophet Muhammad's uncle, but he was a disbeliever—one of many disbelievers. But many disbelievers eventually embraced the Faith. Did 'Umar not enter Islam? Did 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl not enter Islam? Did 'Amr ibn Al-'As not enter Islam? Did Khalid ibn Al-Walid not enter Islam? They all entered Islam. But what prevented Abu Lahab from entering Islam like the others? He did not enter Islam and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was informed by his Lord that his uncle will not embrace the Faith. In addition, it will have been impossible for Abu Lahab to announce his faith simply as an act of trickery to undermine the Quran; for Allah *Glorified is He* has known since pre-eternity how Abu Lahab will behave. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have destroyed whole generations before you when they did evil—their Messengers brought them clear signs but they refused to believe. This is how we repay the guilty [sinners]’ (*Yunus:* 13).

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(1) Abu Lahab is one of Prophet Muhammad's uncles.

When Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word ‘*kadhalik’* (this is how), it means that the same punishment that had befallen the previous generations, which had been destroyed centuries ago, will befall the guilty sinners by He Who determines everything. This means that the same rule that has been applied in the universe will always be applied, and matters related to Faith which have existed since the time the very first Messenger was sent will always continue to exist until the world comes to an end.

Afterward, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ جَعَلۡنَٰكُمۡ خَلَٰٓئِفَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ لِنَنظُرَ كَيۡفَ تَعۡمَلُونَ ١٤

Later We made you their successors in the land, to see how you would behave [14] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 14)

The word ‘*khala’if’* (successors) is the plural of the word ‘*khalifa’* which means he who succeeds someone else. One of the very first descriptions that Allah *Glorified is He* gives of human beings is mentioned in the proclamation which He issued to the angels in which He says: “When your Lord told the angels, “I am putting a successor on earth”…’ (*al-Baqara:* 30). Allah *Glorified is He* is Omnipotent, All-Hearing, All Knowing, and He possesses all the Attributes of Absolute Perfection. As for you, you might possess power, and you might use your power as leverage against other people, but you cannot hand over your power to anyone but yourself; you will not, for instance, be able to endow a weak person with your power. The most you can do is to help him with your power. That is, for example, if he is unable to carry a heavy load, you carry it for him, and if he is unable to walk, you take him by the hand. However, you can never give him a piece of your innate power. Therefore, he will remain weak and you will remain strong. This is the case throughout the created universe: you will find one who is rich and another who is poor; the rich person can give a part of his wealth to the poor person, and the knowledgeable person can give some of his knowledge to the ignorant person, but he cannot bestow upon him the ability to acquire knowledge.

As for Allah, He is the Only One Who can grant His creatures limited, temporal power from His Own Absolute Power. He has also bestowed upon them gifts that are a result of His Omnipotence by creating the heavenly bodies—creations which human beings have no power over; such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the winds and the rain. Allah *Glorified is He* has given human beings some of His Own Power for them to affect the world around them. As such, man is able to perform certain actions insofar as the power bestowed upon him permits. This is how Allah *Glorified is He* has given man some of His Power for man to be able to work and exert effort; how Allah has given him some of His Wealth for the rich to give some to the poor; how Allah has given him some of His knowledge for the knowledgeable to give some of his knowledge to the ignorant; and how Allah has given him some of His patience for man to be patient with those who harm him. Creatures cannot impart their qualities to others; however, they can benefit others by using such qualities. In the end, one will remain powerful, and another will remain weak. As for the One, the Unique, He alone is capable of endowing a weak person with some of His Power; as indeed He does. However, is the whole universe like this?

The universe can be divided into two categories: the first category in the universe includes that which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed on man but about which man has no say. Allah *Glorified is He* has established this part of the universe with His Power and set it up such that it is devoid of flaws; this includes, for example: the solar systems, the sky, the sun, the moon and the wind, and so on and so forth. These do not suffer from any defect or flaw. This category of the universe never degenerates or becomes corrupted unless human beings interfere with it.

The other category in the universe includes that which Allah *Glorified is He* has reserved for human beings for them to organise it with the power endowed to them by Allah *Glorified is He*. You will never find corruption in any of Allah's universe unless human beings have had a hand in it. On the contrary, those things in which human beings did not have a hand in, you will find that they function correctly; that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The sun and the moon follow their [precisely] calculated courses’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5).

The astronomical observatory posts can determine the position of the earth relative to the sun and the moon, and also the position of the moon relative to the earth and the sun, with a precision that matches the expression which Allah *Glorified is He* uses: ‘...[precisely] calculated courses’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5), as man is not involved in these matters. When it comes to matters in which we do have a choice, we must act according to Allah's Commands for our actions to become perfect and in line with the perfect movements of the heavenly bodies over which we do not have any power.

Therefore, that which brings about corruption in the universe is human intervention in his surrounding environment in a way that is contrary to Allah’s Commands; it comes about as a result of man’s action upon external elements and their reaction on him. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[He is] the Lord of Mercy [Who] has taught the Quran. He has created man and taught him intelligible speech. The sun and the moon follow their [precisely] calculated courses’ (*ar-Rahman:* 1-5) meaning that this universe has been created with utmost precision, and you can determine your times and make your calculations based on this precision. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The sun and the moon follow their [precisely] calculated courses. The plants and the trees submit to His Designs. And the sky He has raised high and He has set the balance [of justice] in order that you may not transgress the balance (by being unjust). Therefore, weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5-9). That is, in order for the worldly matters to submit to you in your actions in the world, just as the natural world submits to you, you should weigh all things equitably. Do not judge matters unjustly; for corruption in the universe is brought about when you abuse those gifts which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon you—gifts such as power, knowledge, industriousness—and you use these in a way that does not accord with Allah's Commands. Therefore, approach every activity in your lives with His Commands of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’. As such, the life on this earth will be harmonious and work properly just as everything in outer space is harmonious and works properly?

In the verse we are discussing, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Later we made you their successors [being vicegerents] in the land...’ (*Yunus:* 14). Indeed, man is Allah’s vicegerent on earth; for instance, human beings plough the land and irrigate it for the plants to grow. When human beings pursue the means Allah has given on earth, they reap the benefits of their resourcefulness. However, the flaw of man is his conceit; as soon the means start responding to his actions, he begins to think that he reaped the benefits due to his intrinsic powerful, and not due to the means that Allah *Glorified is He* has given him. Allah *Glorified is He* bestows the basic sustenance of life on both the believer and the disbeliever. This bestowal is due to Him being the Lord of everything, for it is He Who has brought man into existence. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has distinguished the believer as He does not only give him the basic sustenance of life, but has also given him His Message and directives in the form of commands and prohibitions involving ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’. If any man makes full use of these two gifts from Allah *Glorified is He,* he benefits from the reward both in this life and in the life to come, but if he makes use of only the second of the two gifts—that is, if he abides by the directives: ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’—then he reaps his reward in the Hereafter, but not in this world. And he who wishes to reap the rewards of both this world as well as the Hereafter, then he should take full advantage of Allah's Bestowal as a result of His Lordship by pursuing the means, and he should also take advantage of Allah’s Bestowal as a result of His Divinity by following His Commands. However, the flaw of Allah’s vicegerent on earth is his assumption that he has control over certain things; as a result he becomes arrogant and supposes that his mastery over the world is intrinsic in himself. We say to him, ‘If you think that you have mastery over the world, then try to preserve your own soul, and try to maintain your health and your wealth. You will not be able to do this. If you rebel against Allah's Commands by being a disbeliever, for instance, why did you not try to rebel against illness or death?!’

Hence, you are compelled by Allah *the Most High* whether it pleases you or not; and you must accept the fate that is handed to you—for it to discipline you and control you until, one day, you start to arrange matters in which you have a freedom of choice in accordance with Allah's Commands. If Allah's vicegerent on earth thinks that he has domination over the world, he must learn from all that is around him in the universe. For instance, you might hire a lawyer and put him in charge of your contracts and legal matters; but this lawyer might make important decisions in your name without ever consulting with you or briefing you on what actions he has taken. In such a case, you take the necessary steps to revoke the authority you had invested in him, resulting in the lawyer then realizing that taking action without authorization is unacceptable. If this is the case among human beings, what about the Vicegerency that Allah *Glorified is He* has invested in human beings?

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Later we made you their successors in the land...’ (*Yunus:* 14). That is, if you, as a generation of human beings, have succeeded previous generations that have been destroyed, you must therefore take their fate as a lesson and admonition for you—that Allah’s Decree always prevails. You must also not give the Prophets such a difficult time and embrace their Message, or, at least, not actively oppose them if it happens that you have personally declined to abide by the Doctrine which they bring from Allah *Glorified is He*. Let them declare the Word of Allah *Glorified is He* to build a community of the faithful that carry out their activities in this world as Allah wants; as for yourselves, you are free to believer or not to believe.

‘Let him who wishes [to believe in it] believe, and let him who wishes [to reject it] reject it…’ (*al-Kahf:* 29). The proof of this is that when Islam was expanding into many new lands, the local populations were always given the freedom to choose between embracing Islam or holding onto their original religion. Islam spread into numerous countries, either by calling people to it or by direct military conquest; but never was the Islamic faith forced onto the conquered people. From those who decided to cling to their religion, Muslims extracted a *jizya* tax (from non-Muslims living in a Muslim state) in return for protection. Had Islam spread by the sword, no one will have been allowed to cling to their religion; indeed, Islam did not force anyone to convert and it even defended the right of religious freedom by the sword. But because those who did not enter Islam found themselves living in a society whose general welfare was being attended to by the state ruled by Islam, and given the fact that the Muslim was obliged to pay the prescribed alms to the public treasury—then it was only fair that non-Muslim citizens who benefit from the services provided by the Muslim society, should pay a tax in return for those services.

If a human being realizes that he is a vicegerent and keeps this in mind, he will always remember that the Power of the One Who invested this authority in him is equally capable of rescinding his vicegerency. As such, heed the call with submission and help Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his mission to spread the Faith. Firstly, you should believe in him, but if you did not, then leave him alone so that he can continue to call people to the Faith; do not openly resist him and do not turn people away from him, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Later We made you their successors in the land, to see how you will behave’ (*Yunus:* 14).

When the verse contains an order and Allah *Glorified is He* indicates the reason for this order by using the expression: ‘...to find out...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 94), or ‘...to see...’ (*Yunus:* 14), we should remember that Allah *Glorified is He* is Omniscient, All Knowing; He knows about all things even before they existed, and He has known what choices people will make anytime. It is He, indeed, Who says: ‘We sent Our Messengers with clear signs, and sent with them the Scripture and the Balance [of right and wrong], so that people may uphold justice: We also sent down iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind, so that Allah may mark out those who will help Him and His Messengers, though they cannot see Him. Truly, Allah is Powerful, Almighty’ (*al-Hadid:* 25).

Allah *Glorified is He* knew about all things in pre-eternity. And if He says: ‘…to find out…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 94), this does not mean that there is new knowledge He used to be ignorant of—something He knows about only after it happens. This is not the case. Rather, this verse means that Allah *Glorified is He* knows the things that you, mankind, will witness when they take place. In this way, no one can say, ‘Why does Allah judge us based on His Knowledge which He has known since pre-eternity?’ Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* submits the slave to a test which will determine the criteria by which a believer may enter Paradise, and by which the disobedient will be judged and punished.

Thus, the human being comes to learn that this is the True Lord’s Will so that every servant becomes aware of the ‘knowledge of actuality', not the knowledge of the expectations. Accordingly, the use of the verbs ‘to know’ and ‘to see/observe’ in the Quran emphasise the knowledge of actuality, such that the servant cannot deny that something has happened. Allah's Words: ‘That Allah knows who it is that will support Him (His religion) and His Messengers in the unseen.’ (*al-Hadid:* 25)

This verse describes the tools which bring about the Divine Judgment: Messengers who brought with them the proofs and the clear, irrefutable knowledge. Allah *the Almighty* created iron to conquer. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘and We brought forth iron wherein is mighty power (in matters of war), as well as many benefits for mankind.’ (*al-Hadid:* 25)

He associated it with the coming of Allah’s messengers; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘That Allah knows who it is that will support Him (His religion).’ (*al-Hadid:* 25) Support can only come about with power, and power is derived from iron which retains its metallic proprieties until the Day of Judgment. It is an element that is known to bring strength, a mineral so strong that they have not been able to invent one stronger.

Allah’s Knowledge of our actions is prior to their occurrence, and we cannot deny it, for if He *the Most High* were to disclose some piece of news without the reality of these pieces of news being witnessed, they would in all likelihood be denied. This is precisely why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘that Allah know who it is that will support Him (His religion) and His Messengers in the unseen.’ There is a beautiful sort of precautionary tone in these words. It would also appear that, from Allah’s Words that He is asking you support Him; however, be careful not to conclude that Allah *Glorified is He* is weak, God forbid. He is the Powerful *the Almighty*. He says: ‘Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands.’ (*at-Tawba:* 14) Allah *Glorified is He* wants to see the enemies of religion lying in front of you disgraced and humiliated, for He is certainly capable over them. Therefore, when the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Then We made you successors in the land after them so that We may observe how you will do’ (*Yunus:* 14), this means that Allah already knows what you would do, not that he will learn of what you would do.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَاتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ ۙ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَآءَنَا ٱئْتِ
بِقُرْءَانٍ غَيْرِ هَٰذَآ أَوْ بَدِّلْهُ ۚ قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِىٓ أَنْ أُبَدِّلَهُۥ مِن تِلْقَآئِ نَفْسِىٓ ۖ إِنْ
أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَىَّ ۖ إِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّى عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٥﴾

When Our clear revelations are recited to them, those who do not expect to meet with Us say, ‘Bring [us] a different Quran, or change it.’ [Prophet], say, ‘It is not for me to change it of my own accord; I only follow what is revealed to me, for I fear the torment of an awesome Day, if I were to disobey my Lord’ [15] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 15)

We know that there are three kinds of signs. One is universal signs which are awe-inspiring and we see around us in the universe. Allah *the Exalted* calls cosmic phenomena ‘signs'. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon.’ (*Fussilat:* 37) Allah *the Almighty* also says: ‘And among His signs is that He creates for you mates out of your own kind’ (*ar-Rum:* 21). All these are examples of the ‘cosmic signs’. Then, secondly there are other ‘signs’ that function to lend credibility and authenticity to messengers *peace be upon them* as they go about conveying Allah’s Word. These types of ‘signs’ are also known as the miracles, for they defy all the natural laws of the universe. Everything has a particular nature, and when something behaves in a way contrary to its nature, this ought to draw our attention. The Quran, for instance, speaks about how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was seized by his enemies and thrown into the fire. The True Lord *the Most High* delivered him from the fire’s heat, and he was able to walk away from it unharmed. In this case, the purpose was not to save Ibrahim (Abraham) from the fire; if the only purpose of the Divine intervention was to deliver Ibrahim (Abraham) from the fire, other things would have taken place. Allah *Glorified is He* could have prevented Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) enemies from catching him in the first place, but the fact is that they did catch him, and they lit up a fire and threw him in it. If Allah wanted it, He could have put the fire out with a little rain, but that is not what happened; Allah *the Almighty* let them carry on with their malice. This is due to that He is the One Who causes fire to burn, since He ordered it: ‘O fire, be coolness and safety upon Ibrahim (Abraham).’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69)

The disappointment of Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) would-be murderers becomes apparent. Thus, the word ‘signs’ applies to the ‘cosmic signs’, the miracles and the verses of the Quran; furthermore, since the verses of the Quran come from Allah, and the miracles come from Allah, and the universe is also Allah’s work—can there really exist ‘signs’ that contradict one another? No, there cannot because He Who has created the universe sent forth the messengers with their miracles and revealed the Quran is the One Allah. Were it otherwise, there would indeed be contradiction and inconsistency among all the signs. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much contradictions.’(*an-Nisa’:* 82) In addition, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when Our Clear Verses are recited unto them.’ (*Yunus:* 15)

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘those who hope not for their meeting with Us, say…’ (*Yunus:* 15). We know that ‘hope’ expresses something possible, within one’s reach. A father, for example, hopes that his son is admitted into medical or engineering school. On the contrary, there is wishing that expresses hope in something impossible. ‘Those who hope not for their meeting with Us’ refers to disbelievers who believe neither in Allah nor in their resurrection, for they assert: ‘There is not but our worldly life; we die and live, and nothing destroys us except time.’ (*al-Jathiya:* 24)· These disbelievers have also said: ‘When we have died and become dust and bones, are we indeed to be resurrected?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 82)

If a man does not believe in the resurrection, this means that he does not believe in his eventual meeting with Allah *the Exalted* for one who believes in the resurrection believes in his meeting with Him and furthermore prepares himself for this meeting by acts of worship and virtuous works. Disbelievers, however, who deny the resurrection, will be surprised to meet Allah Whom they denied. It will be an unpleasant surprise indeed. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing.’ (*an-Nur:* 39)

Mirage happens when a person is walking through a dry, barren desert and thinks that he sees water from afar. He keeps walking towards this perceived water, but he can never close the distance. This perception is connected with the refraction of light, which can result in the illusion of water where there is none: ‘when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him.’ (*an-Nur:* 39) Thus, he is startled to find Allah *Glorified is He* Whose existence he has always denied, for he is one from those who do not wish to meet Allah *the Almighty* It is about whom the following verse speaks: ‘And they say, "When we are lost within the earth, will we indeed be [recreated] in a new creation?" Rather, they are, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, disbelievers.’ (*as-Sajda:* 10)

The universe around us establishes the concept of resurrection. Everything that we see goes through a cycle; the beautiful, blooming flower wilts after it loses its moisture, and all of its former colour fades, and then it turns to dust. When you smell this flower, it means that the perfume which reaches your nostrils is evaporating along with the moisture that is also leaving the flower in the form of water vapour. Thereafter, the flower withers and decomposes. The flower exemplifies this cycle of life. If you were to look at any element of life such as water, you will find that the quantity of water available when Allah *the Exalted* first created the heavens and the earth is still the same as it was: no more, no less. We have explained this concept previously. Everything that you benefit from as a human being has a cycle, and one cycle gives way to another cycle. You are the benefactor of the products of these cycles—be they cycles of growth or cycles of decomposition.

Those who do not believe in Allah, resurrection, nor reward or punishment, do not pay attention to the universe in which they live, for to contemplate the cosmos and to reflect on its processes must lead them to see that their own lives are as cycles which are bound to restart anew. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘As we began the first creation, we will repeat it.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104)

Regarding those who do not wish to meet Allah, the Quran quotes them as saying: ‘Bring us a Quran other than this or change it.’ They are hereby asking for something other than the Quran. However, note that it is Allah Who is the speaker. Therefore, do not think that the two speeches are equivalent! There are two requests: asking for a Quran different from the one that was revealed and in the second instance, they wish to replace one verse with another. To be exact, they wanted to remove the verses that are derisive of their idols in addition to the verses that promise them a dreaded fate. Allah *Glorified is He* answers these demands by specifically addressing the second of these; He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, [O, Muhammad], "It is not for me to change it on my own accord."’ Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* does not answer their other demand: ‘Bring us a Quran other than this.’

The answer to these requests could have been, ‘It is not for me to come up with a new Quran or to alter the current one.’ However, Allah *the Almighty* answers only the second of the two requests—namely ‘change this one,’ since bringing up a new Quran amounts to changing the current version in its entirety. To merely change certain parts of the Quran would, in theory, be the easier of the two requests. Thus, the first and easiest of the two requests is denied so as to indicate that the more difficult request is thereby denied. The True Lord *Glorified is He* ordered His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Say, [O, Muhammad], "It is not for me to change it on my own accord."’ This means that the possibility of altering the Quran is conceivable provided that it is not the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who would be capable of doing so. Only Allah *Glorified is He* could order the Quran to be altered, but the idea of coming up with an entirely new Quran is dismissed. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when we substitute a verse in place of a verse- and Allah is most knowing of what He sends down.’ (*an-Nahl:* 101)

This is exactly what the current verse reiterates. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, [O, Muhammad], "It is not for me to change it on my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me."’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* does not fabricate the Quran from himself, rather, it is revealed to him.

The True Lord *the Most High* finishes the verse by saying: ‘Indeed, I fear, if I should disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous Day.’ This means that if the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* were to invent things of his own accord, this would amount to a grave disobedience of Allah *the Almighty*. We also know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not known as a poet, nor was he a writer or a preacher. After he began receiving revelation from Allah, all of a sudden we see this great outpour of the Quran whose language is of the most eloquent kind. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* began receiving revelation when he was forty years old, and there exists no human genius whose manifestation is delayed until such a late stage in a man's life. It would have been impossible for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to consciously suppress his genius until this late stage in his life, for there was no guarantee- especially in those days—that a man would live past the age of forty. Allah *the Exalted* provides us with the definite proof which affirms the fact that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was only uttering that which was being revealed to him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I only follow what is revealed to me. Indeed, I fear, if I should disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous Day.' Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to answer disbelievers:

قُل لَّوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَا تَلَوْتُهُۥ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَآ أَدْرَىٰكُم بِهِۦ ۖ فَقَدْ
لَبِثْتُ فِيكُمْ عُمُرًا مِّن قَبْلِهِۦٓ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Say, 'If God had so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me. How can you not use your reason?' [16] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 16)

In this verse, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is telling those who were clamouring for the Quran to be altered or altogether replaced, that he lived his whole life in their company, and never has he possessed the gift of eloquence or the gift of poetry or any literary skills whatsoever. A man who does have these talents certainly does not conceal them for forty years of his life. You also know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never studied under a teacher. In fact, he was accused of such when disbelievers said, 'It is but a human being that teaches (all] this to him!' (*an-Nahl:* 103)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* decisively debunked their argument when, in the Quran, He said: 'The tongue of the one they refer to is foreign, and this Qur'an is [in] a clear Arabic language.' (*an-Nahl:* 103)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never had travelled outside of the Arabian Peninsula, nor did he ever read anyone's manuscripts.

So, where did this Quran come from? It came from Allah *Glorified is He*. Disbelievers must realise this fact. There is no reason for them to accuse Muhammad of having fabricated it since they know from first-hand experience that he is neither an orator nor a poet. All which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came forth with—starting from the moment when Allah charged him with spreading the Message—comes from Allah *the Almighty*. Of course, a person cannot deny beautiful qualities if others have attributed these to him. It is customary that a poet, for example, steals a poem from another poet, or that a writer plagiarises a saying from another writer. However, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has explicitly stated that he is did not author the Quran with its beautiful and perfect qualities. He is but a Prophet. They should have taken cognisance of this matter in its principles and in all its ramifications. They should not have let their imaginations run wild, such that they become entrenched in their attitude of denial and antagonism.

The matter is quite simple. The True Lord *the Most High* tells His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Say, "If Allah had willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you, for I had remained among you a lifetime before it. Then will you not reason?"’ Thus, the premise Allah *Glorified is He* wants disbelievers to realise is that He has sent forth a Prophet who is one of their own: ‘When He sent amongst them a Messenger from themselves’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164).

These words mean that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is a human being, not an angel. Furthermore, he is ‘from themselves', which means either that he is Arab, not from a non-Arab ethnicity or that he hails from the same tribe whose people deny the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the Prophet’s life is well known to them. At no point in his life did he leave them to go live somewhere else, such that they might accuse him of being sent forth by someone else or such that they might accuse him of having acquired knowledge from somewhere else. He did not learn from any of their teachers or from any teachers in other lands, nor did he ever read a book. Hence, if this is the case, they must ask themselves, 'Where did this wisdom come from all of a sudden?' They know fully well that genius does not manifest itself in a person when he is forty years old. Rather, the first glimmerings of genius first appear towards the end of the second decade of a person’s life and the early years of the third decade. How was the Prophet’s supposed genius repressed up this point, where all of a sudden he begins uttering this eloquent speech, which they stand incapable of reproducing, even though they are a people long known for being articulate and eloquent?

They should have said, 'We were not aware that he knew any of this.' If he solves this riddle for them and explains that this Quran is not his own, they should obviously believe him, for He is attributing this Quran to His Creator, His Lord *Glorified is He*. What proves that they are internally inconsistent in their argument is that when he tells them that the Quran is conveyed to him from Allah, they deny him. They say, ‘It is your own invention.’ Then, when he goes through times when he receives less revelation than usual, they say, ‘His Lord has abandoned him.’ Why are they convinced that he has a Lord Who reveals verses to him one moment but then abandons him the next? Thus, they have denied the possibility of revelation when the latter was received, but they have admitted the possibility of a Creator when no revelation was forthcoming. They should have paid attention. They should have re-examined their thinking process before pronouncing judgment on such things. The True Lord *the Most High* brings up this issue numerous times in the Quran. He says, for example: ‘And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Maryam (Mary). Nor were you with them when they disputed.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 44) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘and you, [O, Muhammad], were not on the western side [of the mount] when we revealed to Musa (Moses) the command, and you were not among the witnesses [to that].’ (*al-Qasas:* 44) Allah *Glorified is He* further says: ‘And you were not a resident among the people of Madyan.’ (*al-Qasas:* 45)

Finally, He says: ‘And you did not recite before it any scripture, nor did you inscribe one with your right hand. Otherwise the falsifiers would have had [cause for] doubt.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 48) Where then did this eloquence come from? They should have taken these data into account. Had they done so, they would have reached the proper conclusion that the Prophet is truly receiving revelation from Allah. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse which we are currently examining by saying: ‘Then will you not reason.’

When the True Lord commands you to use your intellect, therein lies the certainty that were you to do so, you would draw the correct conclusions. Allah *Glorified is He* is far above tricking His servants; to trick another human being is to cause him to become intellectually negligent. However, encouraging a human being to use his mind means that the questioner is confident that the truth is on his side and that this truth can be reached through the sound application of the intellect. When Allah *Glorified is He* says at the end of the verse: ‘Then will you not reason’, this indicates that the root of their error lies in the fact that they did not use their intellect, for if they had used their intellect to analyse the facts—which they freely recognised as being true—they would have understood that what the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying was true, and they would have become believers. They should have asked him directly, 'Where did you get this from?' So long as he has told them, 'This has come from Allah', they should have therefore believed him. Thus, the function of reason is to control the other faculties of the body, for every organ of the body tends to go about its natural function. The function of the eye is to register visual stimuli, but one’s reason instructs it: ‘there is no need to witness such a thing, for it is a sight that will harm you.' The ears like to hear all that is being said, but one’s reason instructs it: ‘Do not listen to such-and-such a thing, for it will harm you.’ Reason controls the rest of the organs. The True Lord *the Most High* willed that human beings be distinguished with intellect and wisdom so as to establish just principles in the workings of the soul. Therefore, take note of the sensible data which you believe, witness and come to accept. Consider this information carefully and realise that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has come forth with a revelation from Allah *the Exalted*. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ
كَذَّبَ بِـَٔايَٰتِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفْلِحُ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Who could be more wicked than someone who invents lies against God or denies His revelations? The guilty will never prosper [17] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 17)

The Quran hereby explains, in the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as if he is saying 'Shall I be untrue to Allah? If, up to this point, I have never lied in my dealings with you, would I lie in my dealings with Allah?! He who had not lied in his early life certainly cannot become a compulsive liar as an adult, and if I have never lied to you, will I then lie to Allah? If you are happy to accuse me of such, I, on the other hand, cannot unjustly accuse myself of lying. Thus, it is you that are the deniers since you reject the idea that this Quran has been revealed to me by Allah. If I had said that it is I who had authored this Quran, would it be logical for you to deny me since it becomes a false honour. However, I attribute this Quran to someone else. I attribute it to He who is far above you and me.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And who could be more unjust.' (*Yunus:* 17) It means that none can be more unjust than he who deals in falsehood with Allah *Glorified is He*. The reason why a liar lies is to confuse and mislead his counterpart. Would anyone lie to someone who is aware of the truth of all matters? No one is capable of such a thing. He who lies to his fellow man does them an injustice, and the ultimate injustice is in lying to Allah *Glorified is He*. As for fabrication, it represents an intentional subversion of the truth. It is permissible for a person to put forth a statement that is in accord with his own knowledge, even if this statement is false. At the moment when this statement was conveyed, the person was convinced that it was true, but it would later be shown that it was untrue. This can be called 'misinformation', but it is unintentional. As for *fabrication,* this is a case of intentional deception.

When the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And who could be more unjust who invents a lie about Allah or denies His signs? Indeed, the criminals will not succeed' (*Yunus:* 17), the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* explains to them in essence, 'If you say that I claim this revelation is from Allah, whereas it is not true, then this would mean that it is a lie of my own invention. Thus, what is the position of those who deny Allah's verses? These lies are your own, for if you deny me and not only make a false claim that I attribute this is to Allah but also deny the verses and claim it is my invention—when it is actually revealed from Allah— then it is you who are guilty of the sin.' A lie can either come from a speaker or come from a listener, just as the True Lord describes the proper conduct of Prophets when He says: 'And indeed, we or you are either upon guidance or in clear error.' (*Saba':* 24)

There is no way of summing up the situation more proper than this. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* shows that his point of view and their point of view are diametrically opposed, and only one of the two can be true. However, who is it that determines which of the two views are true and which is false? It is the True Lord *Glorified is He* Allah. He *the Most High* tells us What His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘or in clear error'. Herein lies a call for them to examine the matter with their intellect so as to realise which of the two views is ‘rightly guided’ and which is ‘clear error’. This represents an elevation of the argument to a higher level on the Prophet’s part. Allah *the Exalted* also says: ‘Say, "You will not be asked about what we committed, and we will not be asked about what you do."’ (*Saba’:* 25) Everyone shall be held to account individually for his actions. Hence, I will not have to answer for a crime you committed, and you shall not have to answer for a crime I have committed. He relates the possibility of crime to himself for he does not say, ‘You shall not be held to account for our crimes, nor shall we be held to account for your crimes.’ This is indeed the nobler stance to adopt in this argument. He chose words that do not infuriate but appease the opponent. This is the wiser option, otherwise the opponent would be incited to even greater stubbornness, and the argument would go on to no avail. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And who could be more unjust who invents a lie about Allah.’

If any injustice was committed on my part, then Allah will hold me to account for it, and if injustice is committed on your part, then know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says ‘the criminals will not succeed.’ (*Yunus:* 17) Allah *the Almighty* does not specify exactly who the criminal is as this is left to the reader to discern. Just as you would tell someone with whom you have a disagreement, 'I shall explain the matter for you and you judge for yourself.' Once you have presented the matter, he cannot but arrive at the desired conclusion. If this were not the case, you would not have presented the matter to him. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* continues and says:

وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ
هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ شُفَعَٰٓؤُنَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ قُلْ أَتُنَبِّـُٔونَ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَلَا
فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ سُبْحَٰنَهُۥ وَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

They worship alongside God things that can neither harm nor benefit them, and say, 'These are our intercessors with God.' Say, 'Do you think you can tell God about something He knows not to exist in the heavens or earth? Glory be to Him! He is far above the partner-gods they associate with Him! [18] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 18)

The word *worship* requires the existence of a worshipper as well as the existence of a 'worshipped'. It also requires that the act of 'worship' be defined. The worshipper must be of a lower rank than the worshipped, and the act of worship must consist of adhering to what is prescribed and avoiding all that has been proscribed. This is the true meaning of the concept of 'worship'. This is the way to move closer to Allah *the Exalted*. In order that the act of worship is put in its correct place, the worshipper must happily accept that the entity of the worshipped is superior in judgment than himself. However, if both the worshipper and the worshipped are equal in status, then any judgment issued by the worshipped is not absolute but merely one 'view' among others—it is as if one were to solicit a friend for a 'second opinion'.

Thus, we see that there is one who issues the command and one who obeys the command. Were the two parties considered equal in statue, the one who obeys the command would be in need of some persuasion. However, if past experiences have determined that the giver of the command is superior than the recipient of the command — such as a teacher-student relationship or a doctor-patient relationship, for example — then in this case the recipient of the command will obey the issuer of the command because there is an underlying consensus that the issuer of the command knows what he is talking about. It is the same thing when discussing a believer's relationship with Allah, for faith implies that a person believes in the existence of an Omnipotent God Who is endowed with all the qualities of Absolute Perfection. Therefore, if this is what one believes, then a human being obeys what Allah commands him to do so as to earn Allah's good graces, love, and reward. If a person does not obey, he will bring upon himself Allah's wrath and punishment. Thus, if you obey Allah's commands and stay away from all that He has forbidden, you reap goodly reward from Him, but if you disobey His orders, you will be punished. It is obvious now that the deity you worship must be endowed with power greater than yours. This deity must be capable of recompensing and punishing. Such an Omnipotent Being is Allah *Glorified is He*. As for the idols they worshipped, what commandments did they issue? These idols never ordered them to do anything which makes them inappropriate objects of worship since the act of worship requires that there be commandments issued and proscriptions defined. These idols, however, had never issued any commandments, nor had they laid down any prohibitions. In fact, it was disbelievers themselves who put forth various prescriptions and proscriptions. This is totally inappropriate, for it is the worshipped deity that is required to delineate what is prescribed and what is prohibited.

Thus, worshipping idols is absolute foolishness. Idols neither punish the transgressors nor reward the faithful. They are not capable of issuing prescriptions or proscriptions. Those who put themselves in such a situation forget that they each have the power either to benefit the idol or to harm it. Anyone of them could create an idol, for instance, and anyone of them could fix it if it breaks or if he breaks it intentionally by throwing it on the ground. In short, this is a case where the worshipper has the power to either help or harm the worshipped object—and it is the epitome of intellectual failure.

This kind of worship represents a form of foolishness. If the matter were to be presented to the intellect, the latter—assuming it is functioning normally—would reject it outright.

When you try to engage with these people and show them that these idols are incapable of either helping or harming, you will find that some will keep insisting that: 'These are our intercessors with Allah!' (*Yunus:* 18) This is in itself an admission on their part that it is Allah Who truly has the power to help or to harm. If they chose to attach themselves to one who will act as an intercessor with Allah, should they not have at least selected an intercessor who enjoys a privileged status in the eyes of Allah *the Almighty* and who is loved by Him? Furthermore, how can they say that they will seek intercession with Allah Who is explicit in His prohibition of all false deities and Who forbids all forms of idol worship? Can any true intercession take place without the consent of the One Whose Mercy is sought? It is for these reasons that the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* with the following: ‘Do you inform Allah of something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?’

Therefore, where did you get this idea of the idols interceding before Allah on your behalf? There is absolutely no basis for such an idea. Never has Allah *Glorified is He* told you about the possibility of interceding idols, and nowhere in the Quran is there any mention of this which thereby means this is a fabrication and deliberate deception on your part, for it is He *the Most High* Who has created the heavens and the earth. He is aware of everything in the universe. This matter of idol-intercession has no basis in reality. It is in fact completely made up, fabricated. In this verse, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do you inform Allah?’ is very much similar to another verse where the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Say: "Will you inform Allah about your religion?"’ (*al-Hujurat:* 16) This is a direct response to those who have maintained, and who continue to maintain, that what these current times require new legal decrees that are consistent with them. The fact is the more corrupted and degenerate the age becomes, the more they clamour for the alteration of religious laws. Since it is they who are acting as the lawgivers, it is as if they wish to teach their Creator how true religion should be. These are but ignorant musings which are disrespectful of the Power and Wisdom of the Creator of the universe who perfected His creation and instituted order therein. Also, when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Say, "Do you inform Allah of something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?" Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him.’ It is to show that He *the Most High* transcends their petty claims, for He is the Creator of all things, Creator of both the human domain and the realm of the exclusively Divine Dominion, and He is Aware of all things. This idea of idols being intercessors has no basis in reality. It is a complete fabrication, and furthermore, Allah is aware of this matter. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is far above the possibility of there being anything in His Dominion—if it truly exists—that escapes His Knowledge.

Allah *the Exalted* is also far above any associates that are falsely set up in His place, for the function of the associate is to assist the one with whom he is associated. We see, for instance, when someone has enough capital, he invests his money in some trade. However, if he does not have enough money to invest on his own, he will seek an associate with whom to join forces. The truth of the matter is that Allah is Powerful, Omnipotent and does not need any help in the management of His creation. Given this understanding, where do these false associates fit in? The True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Say, [O, Muhammad], "If there had been with Him [other] gods, as they say, then they [each] would have sought to the Owner of the Throne a way."’ (*al-Isra’:* 42)

This wise verse alerts disbelievers to the fact that even if these associates have the power to act, they will not be able to do anything save with the permission of the Lord of the Throne—Allah *Glorified is He*. When they mistakenly believed that every planet influences a sphere of the universe, that the stars influence a sphere of the universe and that the astrological signs exert their influence—they forgot that eventually all things hinge on the consent of the King of kings. How misguided are the people who entertain such ideas? There are also the philosophers who posit that there are things in the universe which human beings cannot possibly create, along with things which man cannot possibly claim to have created, for human beings encountered this world after it had already been created.

Man encountered the sun, the moon, the stars, and the earth after they had already been in existence. Obviously, there must exist a power—superior to human beings—that created all of these phenomena. These creatures require the existence of a Higher Being responsible for bringing them into the realm of existence. There are no factories which can produce the sun, the moon, or the earth. So far, no one has come forth and claimed that he has created these phenomena. However, the philosophers who have come to accept the existence of a Creator have not given Him a name, nor have they been able to decipher His doctrine; the True Lord’s Power is absolute, and He has no need for associates. If we were to contemplate on a mere fraction of the effects of Allah’s Power, we could look at the traces that this Power has left human beings, specifically, how this is apparent in the creation of the electric light bulb? We know that there are no seeds that are planted in the ground which grow into light bulb bearing trees. The creation of the electric light bulb required the efforts of scientists who have studied the science of power through various equations.

These scientists were able to conceive the possibility of creating the electric light bulb. They worked hard to expel all air from inside the glass bulb where the illuminated wire was to be placed. The creation of one light bulb requires the efforts of scientists and the industriousness of the factories—all of this in order to bring light, temporarily, to a single room. Also, if this is the case, what about the sun which illuminates the entire cosmos? If the slightest of things requires massive amounts of theoretical and practical knowledge, research and the development of industrial technology, what about that sun that illuminates half of the globe for twelve hours every day, which no one can turn off and which requires no maintenance on man's part. If you are looking for the Creator Who is behind all of this, the only possible answer is Allah *the Exalted*. In all your ingenuity, in all your industry, you can never forget about Allah; true intelligence is the mark of he who perceives—in his own inventions and creations—evidence of Allah as the ultimate Creator. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* has created the sun—among other things—and if the sun were to set, and everyone were to turn off their light bulbs, it is the sun that is the ultimate light bulb that guides us all. If this were the act of only one of Allah's creations, then what about every single other blessing which He has given His creatures? The light of the sun represents the sensible gift which protects us from bumping blindly into things, such that they do not hurt us and we did not break them. Similarly, the True Lord *the Most High* illuminates for us the ultimate meanings and the deepest of truths.

Beware of saying that so-and-so a philosopher has come up with X philosophical position—so embrace it blindly. Let your intellect examine this philosopher's position in the light of the truths which the True Lord *Glorified is He* articulates in the Quran. Then, if this particular philosophy is put into practical use and becomes evident that runs philosophically parallel with the Quran—then in this case say, 'The True Lord *the Most High* has guided so-and-so, a philosopher, to the discovery of one of the Quran's secrets, for the True

Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to hold up all things to the scrutiny of our intellect.' He wishes that we examine everything thoroughly and that we arrive at the truth through the process of intellection—thus to draw closer to Allah and not—Allah forbid—to stray further away from Him. If Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him', it is due to that seeking an associate amounts to seeking help and one asks only for the help of a peer or the help of a higher power. On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* does not have a peer, nor does there exist any power that is higher than He. In the next verse Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا كَانَ ٱلنَّاسُ إِلَّآ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً فَٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ ۚ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ
سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقُضِىَ بَيْنَهُمْ فِيمَا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

All people were originally one single community, but later they differed. If it had not been for a word from your Lord, the preordained judgement would already have been passed between them regarding their differences [19] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 19)

There is another verse in the Quran that is very much similar to this one, even though the wording might be slightly different. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'Mankind was [of] one religion [before their deviation]; then Allah sent the prophets.' (*al-Baqara:* 213) Those who read the Quran in a superficial manner without delving deeply into its meanings might not notice other verses that are similar to it in their general meaning. The meanings of these verses are harmonious with one another, with no contradiction in the meanings of Quranic verses. This is why we find that there are modern thinkers who say that all of mankind was once engulfed in heathenism, and it was only afterwards that the intellect progressed to the point where it began a quest for more powerful beings to worship. Men found mountains to be the tallest, the highest and most resilient beings, so they began worshipping them. Others believed the sun is the most powerful of all beings, so they began worshipping it, while others worshipped the moon and the stars, whereas other communities considered trees to be deities. Every group turned to one element or other of the natural order and deified it by virtue of its perceived power.

The people who hold this kind of view supposed that man was steered toward the necessity of religion through the mind. They think that the mind continued to evolve until it arrived at the doctrine of Unity. Our response to those who hold this view is that your position cuts creation off from the Creator. It is as if Allah—Who has given form to His creation and Who has extended material sustenance to His creatures—would at the same time deprive His creatures of moral sustenance for their lives. Such a notion is unacceptable and inconceivable, for how can Allah *the Almighty* secure for His created beings material sustenance, while withholding from them the moral sustenance and the principles which guard against barbarism along with all forms of corruption and degeneracy? Consider, for instance, the True Lord's Words: 'Mankind was [of] one religion [before their deviation]; then Allah sent the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warner and sent down with them the Scripture in truth to judge between the people concerning that in which they differed. And none differed over the Scripture except those who were given it - after the clear proofs came to them - out of jealous animosity among themselves. And Allah guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission. And Allah guides whom He wills to a straight path.' (*al-Baqara:* 213) This is the reason why some might have assumed that all of mankind was once seeped in disbelief and that when Prophets came forth, people began to hold divergent views since some of them chose to embrace the faith that was tendered to them, while others rejected it and remained entrenched in their various forms of paganism. However, if those who are of this opinion were to analyse the matter correctly, they would realise that what is meant by the verse which we are currently examining is that all of mankind was once but a single community, but they came to hold divergent views, making the way for Allah to send His Prophets to heal the rifts which had grown between people and to reunite them once again in the name of the original covenant of faith—they all announced in a single voice.

The heart of the matter is that mankind was united upon faith, not in heathenism. Whomsoever takes the above mentioned verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara* as evidence of mankind's original heathenism, we would advise him to read the verse in its entirety, whereby he will find that the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Mankind was [of] one religion [before their deviation]; then Allah sent the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners and sent down with them the Scripture in truth to judge between the people concerning that in which they differed.’ We see that the divergence of views of which the verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* addresses occurs at the end, whereas it occurs in the verse at hand in the beginning. This shows that mankind was a single community united by a singular faith. In the eyes of the Creator, there is no community of people which is worth more than another. Allah’s justice is such that He cannot leave a community of people remain lost in their heathenism, while He sends forth Prophets to guide another community. All people are equal in His eyes.

As long as Allah *the Exalted* has created human beings, He, therefore, must also furnish them with a doctrine based on this, as such when we read the Words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at *Mecca* - blessed and a guidance for the worlds.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96) We find the answer to those who say that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was the first to have built the *Ka’ba* since it is inconceivable that Allah *Glorified is He* had not had a holy sanctuary established from the time of Adam to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* to which people can perform pilgrimage. The True Lord established the *Ka’ba*, so that mankind could perform pilgrimage there from the time when Adam was created until the Day of Judgment. The original builder of the *Ka’ba* was not human. It was rather the Creator of men who laid the foundations. All what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had done was simply to raise the foundations of the Kaaba.

He rebuilt the *Ka’ba* in height after its location and its length and width dimension had been identified as the True Lord says: ‘and [mention, O, Muhammad], when We designated for Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of the House.’ (*al-Hajj:* 26)

It is true what Allah *the Almighty* says about the *Ka’ba* having existed for the benefit of men since before Adam was created. It will remain standing for the benefit of mankind until the Day of Judgment. We see how the True Lord *the Most High* created His servants and provided a doctrine for them. We also see how, in the beginning, all of mankind was united on one faith; however, heathenism and disbelief crept in from two sides: forgetfulness along with the habit of imitating one's forefathers. The proof of this is that when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of the Original Covenant. He says: 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam-from their loins-their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware." Or [lest] you say, "It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would you destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173)

Thus, straying from faith is a result of two things, the first of which is forgetfulness. It is to know something at one point, but you fail to keep that knowledge at the forefront of your consciousness since your mind registers information and soaks it up the first time around unless your mind is unfocused during that time. Therefore, if you are clear-headed and lucid-minded at that time, paying attention to the data that is coming through to you, your mind will record this information thoroughly the first time around—but it is important that the mind be clear of all distraction at the moment when this new information is registered. This is why we find differences among people when it comes to retaining information. One person retains a piece of information while his mind is free of any other irrelevant information; thus, the newly received data is embedded into his consciousness, whereas another person has to keep reading the piece of information over and over again until his consciousness becomes free of all distractions. Only then does the data stick in his mind, and when a new piece of information comes along, the old piece of information is relegated to the back of the mind until it is summoned later.

For example, if a student wanted to retain all of the information he is reading, he must clear his mind of that which preoccupies him so that he can concentrate on what he is studying. If he sits down to study but his mind is preoccupied, he will be forced to re-read the material more than once, until the information he is reading coincides with a section of his consciousness that is not so dispersed; only then will the information be retained. For instance, a student could wake up on the morning of the exam day and might hear from his fellow colleagues that the questions of the test will focus on such-and-such a section of the syllabus. The student will open his book and reads the material from that section once. This information sticks in his mind, and when he sits down to take the exam, he finds that the question is about the very same section which he had read before coming in to the class. Thus, his answer to the question is accurate.

This is why the smart student is the one who studies using the technique known as concomitant. It means that he reads over the lesson and then closes the book. He then asks himself, ‘What new information was on that page that I just read?’ He tries to recall this and identify the new terms that were mentioned on the page and the new concepts that either reinforces what he already knew or corrects any misconceptions he might have had. The student ‘familiarises’ himself with the new information through concentration and diligence. Similarly, an outstanding teacher is one who explains the lesson once and then pauses to quiz his students; this commands their full attention, so that they desist from thinking about anything that is unrelated to the lesson. An outstanding teacher is one who makes his lesson interesting to the students—just as a fascinating story would elicit their fascination, so that the pieces of information given in the lesson are not just dry facts. Thus, minds remain in a state of concentration, not forgetfulness. Forgetfulness overcomes a person when it comes to religious matters since the egoistical desires inside the human soul usually clash with the prescriptive or proscriptive directives of religion, which consequentially drives a person to become forgetful of some of the prescriptions here, and some proscriptions there, until his heart becomes covered over by that rust which the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about when He says: ‘No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they were earning.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 14)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explains the issue further in a Hadith: 'Trustworthiness descended into the innermost root of the man’s heart. Then, the Quran was revealed, and they learnt from the Quran and they learnt from the *Sunnah.'* Then, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us about the removal of trustworthiness. He *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'A man would sleep and trustworthiness is taken away from his heart, leaving the impression of a faint mark.' This means like a blister by fire. This process goes on until the heart is covered over by a thick layer of rust. Thus, forgetfulness creeps into the human soul; a man becomes forgetful of one thing, and soon he forgets about something else, and so on and so forth.

However, he who does not succumb to forgetfulness remains aware of the religious directives. He duly applies them and tastes their sweetness. For instance, a Muslim whom Allah made welcome prayer openly, he feels miserable if he misses it. This is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'Temptations will be presented to a man's heart as a reed mat is woven stick by stick. Any heart which becomes impregnated by them will have a black mark put on it, but any heart which rejects them will have a white mark put on it. The result is that there will be different types of hearts. One is white like a white stone which will not be harmed by any turmoil or temptation, for as long as the heavens and the earth endure. The other is black, dust-colour, like a vessel which has been upset; it will be incapable of either recognising the good or rejecting the evil except that what is consistent with its desires.' (1)

Thus, forgetfulness is the first door which the devil uses to gain access to a man's soul; then a man begins to distance himself from Allah's judgments. When a father becomes forgetful, his children start imitating him, and soon they are overcome by forgetfulness themselves. Thus, a forgetful person is a terrible example for his posterity. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says regarding sons and daughters who continue to emulate the forgetful lifestyles of their parents: 'No, we shall follow that which we found our forefathers doing.' (*al-Baqara:* 170)

This excuse that one is only emulating one's forefathers is a false one because if we trace the roots of faith back to their origin with Adam, who is the father of all human beings, we will find that Adam had obeyed Allah's every order. So, if they were to follow their claim of following their forefathers, this would mean that they cannot stray from the primordial faith, otherwise they would have to be considered one of those who lie and are heedful of the forgetfulness that crept into the primordial faith, by means of blind following. It is the True Lord's Will that every word in Quran possesses a meaning that is precise and purposefully formulated. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* quotes disbelievers as saying: 'indeed, we found our fathers upon a religion, and we are, in their footsteps, following.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) Notice that He does not say *guided*; rather, He says *following* since the latter refers to who takes one's forefather as models of behaviour, whereas the former refers to who thinks one's forefather is on the right path. Therefore, the one who follows is necessarily tolerating whether or not the religion of his forefathers was true. He is happy to emulate them. Now emulating one's forefathers can fall into one of two categories: pure imitation that has no relation with either true or false guidance and emulation with the certainty that the behaviour being emulated is true to Allah's Decree.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (144) and by Ahmad in his (Masnad) (5/386, 405); narrated on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman*

There has been controversy over whether Adam *peace be upon him* was a Messenger or only a Prophet. There have been some who said that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was the first Messenger. We would ask, 'Is it logical for Allah to have left all the human beings who came before Nuh (Noah) without a Messenger?' Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: 'And there was no nation but that there had passed within it a warner.' (*Fatir:* 24) Now what caused these commentators to say what they did—namely, that Nuh (Noah) was the first Messenger—is their superficial reading of the text. They assumed that a Messenger is only sent forth if there is a community to receive his message, and since Adam was the first human being, then how could Adam be a Messenger and to whom was his message addressed? What these commentators failed to realise was that Adam *peace be upon him* was a Messenger and a model for his children. The True Lord *the Most High* tells Adam: 'And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance- there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 38) Allah *Glorified is He* also told Adam: 'And if there should come to you guidance from Me-then whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter].' (*Ta Ha:* 123)

Since Allah *the Exalted* has brought up the issue of 'guidance', He is, by the same token, speaking of the Doctrine. It is the tenets of this Doctrine that

Adam held himself to, and his children followed his example. These commentators also forgot to examine the verses in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And recite to them the story of Adam's two sons, in truth, when they both offered a sacrifice [to Allah].' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27) In addition, Adam's two sons sought 'closeness' with Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, they understood that Allah existed. When Cain told his brother: 'I will surely kill you.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27), this was after Allah *the Exalted* had accepted the sacrifices his brother, Abel, offered; however, Allah did not accept Cain's attempts to ingratiate himself to his Lord. So, Abel said: 'Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27) Abel also said: 'If you should raise your hand against me to kill me, I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 28) Thus, if Adam was not a Messenger, then who taught his sons that there is a God who rewards and punishes?

In the verse which we are currently examining, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And if not for a word that preceded from your Lord, it would have been judged between them [immediately] concerning that over which they differ' (*Yunus:* 19). This verse indicates that, before having sent forth Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah used to punish those who denied any Message conveyed by any Messenger sent by Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So each We seized for his sin, and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the blast [from the sky], and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned. And Allah would not have wronged them, but it was they who were wronging themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40)

Such was the fate of most people who deny their messenger—except for Muhammad's community, regarding which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But Allah would not punish them while you, [O, Muhammad], are among them, and Allah would not punish them while they seek forgiveness.' (*al-Anfal:* 33) This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has deferred the reward and punishment of Muhammad's community until the Day of Judgment. This is the gist of this last verse that Allah *the Almighty* will not hold the members of Muhammad's community to account for their sins in this life; rather, He will postpone this until the Day of Judgment. On that day, Allah *Glorified is He* will settle the accounts of those who followed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who resisted him. Naturally, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will be on the side of Prophet Muhammad whom He had sent forth, not on the side of those who opposed him. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ لَوْلَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ ۖ فَقُلْ إِنَّمَا ٱلْغَيْبُ
لِلَّهِ فَٱنتَظِرُوٓا۟ إِنِّى مَعَكُم مِّنَ ٱلْمُنتَظِرِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

They say, 'Why has no miraculous sign been sent down to him
from his Lord?' Say [Prophet], 'Only God knows the unseen,
so wait – I too am waiting' [20] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 20)

Now a 'sign'—as we have come to know—is either that which is marvellous and awe-inspiring, such as a cosmic sign, a miracle, or a verse of the Quran containing judgments. Why did they not believe in the verses of the Quran — which are in fact a miracle from their point of view? The answer is that believing in the Quran is part and parcel of believing in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Also, they were confused since they thought that the 'signs' are the cosmic ones that can be seen and felt. They did not know that the signs of the previous messengers had come to match the time periods of their messages and their status among their own communities.

All of the messengers *peace be upon them* who preceded Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been sent to a particular community, defined by time and space. This is why the 'signs' which they had brought with them were of the miraculous, tangible variety. Every one of these signs corresponded in one sense or another to the special temperament of the community which witnessed them. As for Muhammad's Message, it concerns peoples of all places and all times. Had Allah *Glorified is He* given Muhammad a sign of the phenomenal order—that is a miracle limited by its time and space—then only those who witnessed it would believe it, and it would come as mere news to everyone else. For example, we, as Muslims, would not believe that Musa (Moses) parted the red sea with his staff, except that the Quran tells us so. Now, every event of the phenomenal order happens once, and those who witness it directly believe in it, and those who did not witness it, when they are told about it, can either deny it or believe it. We, as Muslims, have believed it because it is the True Lord *Glorified is He*; Himself Who has informed us about it in the Quran. It is our faith in the informer that has led us to believe the miracles of the Messengers who preceded Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Some might wonder about the reasons for not endowing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with physical miracles. It was Allah's Will that He sent forth the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* armed with a miracle that will pass the test of time and endure throughout the ages, until the Day of Judgment. We are speaking, of course, of the miracle of the Quran. The early biographies of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* speak of water flowing between his fingers. If you read about it and decide not to believe, then you should know that this miracle has not targeted you. This miracle targeted the Prophet's contemporaries. Its objective was to put in order the faith of the Prophet's contemporaries. The early biographies of the Prophet also mention the fistful of food from which ate a great number of men. Those who wish to believe these accounts, let them believe, and those who wish not to believe these accounts, they should know that these accounts were not meant for them, they are only relevant to the contemporaries of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. This does not exclude the possibility of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* being granted physical miracles—just like other Messengers—which we must believe insofar as the narrators of these accounts are credible.

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'and they say, "Why is a sign not sent down to him from his Lord?"' It is as if they refuse to admit the existence of the Quran, and instead, they ask to see a physical miracle. This is why we find Allah *Glorified is He* saying in another part of the Quran: 'Why was he not given like that which was given to Musa (Moses)?' (*al-Qasas:* 48) This is further proof that they asked to see a physical miracle, for they had known about the physical miracles of the Messengers who preceded the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, this saying of theirs meant that they still clung to their disbelief even as they had witnessed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in all of his states. To be sure, these physical miracles did take place; those who witnessed them believed in them, and their faith was strengthened. Those who demanded that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* perform a physical miracle—akin to the one Musa (Moses) performed—forgot that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had been sent to a specific community: the children of Israel. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other hand, was sent forth for the benefit of all of humanity. This is why his miracle had to be one that could keep on giving. It also had to contain the Doctrine that could be applied to all times and places. The effect of the physical miracles is bound by the constraints of its time and place. These disbelievers were known to have been very specific in their demands for physical miracles. For instance, some of the miracles they asked for include the following: 'And they say, "We will not believe you until you break open for us from the ground a spring. Or [until] you have a garden of palm trees and grapes and make rivers gush forth within them in force [and abundance]. Or you make the heaven fall upon us in fragments as you have claimed or you bring Allah and the angels before [us].”' (*al-Isra’:* 90-93) Thus, they had demanded to see miracles which they themselves had suggested. However, miracles never come according to the suggestions of the intended audience; they depend on the particular gift of the Prophet and his relationship with Allah *the Exalted*.

One might ask: 'Why did the True Lord not bring forth the physical miracles which they asked for?' The answer is that the True Lord *the Most High* has said: 'And nothing has prevented Us from sending signs except that the former peoples denied them.' (*al-Isra’:* 59) Their demand for miracles is empty for Allah *Glorified is He* had brought forth miracles in the past, but these were rejected by the people of ancient times. They had proposed their own miracles and the True Lord *the Most High* states them as saying: 'why is a sign not sent down to him from his Lord?’ This is an admission on their part that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is in contact with a Lord and that he is delivering a Message on His Lord’s behalf. Therefore, how can they keep deny the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*?! We know that they had previously said: 'Muhammad’s Lord has abandoned him.' This was when the flow of revelation from heaven was momentarily suspended. However, Allah

Glorified is He answered them: 'Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O, Muhammad], nor has He detested [you].' (*ad-Duha:* 3) They had contradicted themselves in the sense that when the revelation was forthcoming, they denied the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and rejected the idea that he was being divinely inspired by his Lord. Then when revelation was momentarily suspended, they admitted that he had a Lord. This kind of contradiction regarding the question of Allah’s existence leads to a muddled judgment. Therefore, this is a sign that a person is under the heavy influence of his own desires.

Then, in response to their demand for a physical miracle, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘So say, "The unseen is only for Allah [to administer]."’ Allah *the Exalted* teaches His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* a response which he can give when all else fails. For it is possible that Allah *the Almighty* brings forth a physical miracle. It is also possible for Him not to bring it forth. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* cannot command his Lord to do anything, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the only One concerned with any matter having to do with the unseen. If He so wills, He can make a scene from the world of the unseen manifest itself in the physical world; likewise, if He so wills, He can maintain the world of the unseen in a state of absolute mystery. All you can do is to wait. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* announced he himself is among those who wait: 'so wait. Indeed, I am with you among those who wait.’’

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَآ أَذَقۡنَا ٱلنَّاسَ رَحۡمَةٗ مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ ضَرَّآءَ مَسَّتۡهُمۡ إِذَا لَهُم مَّكۡرٞ فِيٓ
ءَايَاتِنَاۚ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ أَسۡرَعُ مَكۡرًاۚ إِنَّ رُسُلَنَا يَكۡتُبُونَ مَا تَمۡكُرُونَ ٢١

No sooner do We let people taste some mercy after some hardship has afflicted them, than they begin to scheme against Our revelations. Say, ‘God schemes even faster.’ Our messengers record all your scheming [21] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 21)

When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to his wit’s end because of the disbelievers of the Quraysh, he supplicated the True Lord *Glorified is He* to guide them to the straight path by unleashing upon them the same plagues that befell Egypt and which Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was able to see through. The True Lord *the Most High* unleashed a severe drought upon the Quraysh followed by Mercy. Normally, they should have turned to Allah and believed in the Message of His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* especially after they had learnt that what befell them in the way of drought was due to the Prophet's supplication against them, 'O, Allah! Let them suffer from years of drought similar to the drought inflicted during the lifetime of Yusuf (Joseph).'(1) After seven years of drought and hardship ended, Allah *the Almighty* showed them His Mercy in the form of heavy, life-giving rain. Unfortunately, they did not realise their obligation to thank Allah and to have faith in Him and His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Instead, they kept looking for other reasons to justify the rain. Some of them said, 'these rains have fallen because of such-and-such a storm and because the winds began to blow in such-and-such a direction.' They put forth all these theories without taking note of the fact that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had stopped praying that Allah *the Exalted* would punish them. They are like those who would analyse the reasons for victory in battle and determine that it comes down to how well fund an army is, how many men it has and how well equipped it is. No one is denying the importance of making the necessary preparations for war; however, the result—whether one wins or loses—always remains in the hands of Allah *Glorified is He*; this fact is more important than any other consideration. The believers who prepared themselves for battle and entered the battlefield found that Allah's miracles always brought them victory since the True Lord always grants victory to those who fight for the glory of His Name.

As for those who say that the causes of military victory are limited to preparation, they fail to realise that the soldiers who went to war after undergoing intense training know that training alone is not enough to forge the fighting spirit of the soldier. Rather, a zeal for the fight, martyrdom in battle and entering Paradise are the best motivation. In case of victory of non-Muslims over Muslims, which is against the norm, should be absolutely certain that Allah *the Almighty* decided this end result. Also, he who maintains that military victory depends on how advanced a civilisation is, he will find his answer coming from the combatants themselves: civilisation without faith merely results in material progress—and this is unsubstantial and cannot bring about victory. Victory cannot be achieved by material wealth alone. Allah *the Exalted* has commanded us to prepare ourselves materially for battle; however, victory depends on our faith more than it does on our material wealth.

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(1) *Narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

This is why we find that those who waged our victorious war on the tenth of Ramadan, 1393 Hijri (October 7th, 1973), knew that Allah *the Almighty* would help them in battle after they had prepared themselves to the best of their ability. None of the soldiers believed that material preparations alone were sufficient for victory; it is necessary, however, if one only combines both faith and skill in arms, then one can achieve victory; this is why the combatants themselves do not believe that material factors alone can account for victory—this is the strongest counter-argument to those who deny or play down the role of faith in military engagements. Hence, we find that those who achieve victory by virtue of the value of faith serve the cause of faith since to deny faith is to lessen the value of the materialist perspective. It is that Allah grants victory to His religion so as to strengthen the faith of His soldiers and so as to diminish the value and the status of those who belittle the role of faith. An example of this in the history of Islam is when Jews used to implore Allah *the Exalted* for victory over the people of the ’Aws and Khazraj tribes of Medina and that a Prophet was going to appear. They—meaning Jews—would follow him, and would kill the Arab tribes of ’Aws and Khazraj to the last woman and child.

When the time commenced for the appearance of Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdullah in Mecca, the tribes of ’Aws and Khazraj were among the first to believe in him, They said, 'This is the Prophet whom Jews used to threaten us with. Let us pledge our allegiance to him before they do. It was the threats uttered by Jews which pushed the ’Aws and the Khazraj tribes to embrace the faith. Allah *the Exalted* can make His religion victorious through the agency of the profligate, even as the profligate thinks that it is he who is plotting against the religion. Similarly, when they were shown mercy after years of drought, they looked to explain away the rain by positing scientific, materialistic explanations. They did not think of the higher causes connected with faith.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse which we are currently examining: 'And when We give the people a taste of mercy after adversity has touched them, at once they conspire against Our verses. Say, “Allah is swifter in strategy." Indeed, our Messengers record that which you conspire.'

Conspire is deceitful double-talk which refuses to acknowledge Allah’s Mercy. It is the claim that the rain were caused by such-and-such a storm, or that they were precipitated by such-and-such a constellation. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'they conspire against Our verses.' *Conspire* denotes furtive deceit. In this context, more specifically, it means an attempt to explain away such phenomena in order to dismiss the fact of Allah’s creation of the awesome forces of nature. However, even science and its scientific laws are a gift from Allah *the Almighty*. Only the True Lord *Glorified is He* is capable of suspending the natural laws and violating the laws of physics as we know them, for He is the Lord of all these laws. Therefore, attribute all events to Him so that we may not stray into the same misguided ignorance that some philosophers have—those who think that Allah *the Almighty* created the universe and the natural laws, so that He could then retire and let the universe function according to these natural laws alone. We would say that if the True Lord has created the natural laws and left them to manage the universe alone, then nothing could ever violate those laws. However, the miracles of the Prophets—for example—did just that. They momentarily annulled the physical laws. Furthermore, Allah *the Exalted* has retained the right to control the natural laws as He pleases. It is true that, in the beginning, He created these laws and has allowed them to function as they were designed; nevertheless, He remains watchful over them, suspending them whenever He wants, re-establishing them whenever He wants, and directing them any way He wants. One might be able to trick one’s peers, but will not be able to trick the One Who is higher than you. Thus, if disbelievers deceive, then Allah is quicker to deceive and more cunning. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Allah is swifter in strategy.' This kind of statement is known as *mushakalat at-ta‘bir.*(1)

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(1) *(Al-mushakalah)*: a style of rhetoric often used in the Quran. It consists of mentioning or referring to one thing by using the name or description of something else because the two occur together.

What this means is that you must consider the doer and the action in this sentence as a special case; you cannot derive a Name of Allah from this verse. Be careful not to say, for example, that Allah *Glorified is He* is the ‘Deceiver' since conspiring is the furtive, deceitful methods that you would use against your peers; rather, you cannot attempt such a thing against He Who is aware of everything that goes on inside of your soul. One, however, cannot do that to Allah *the Exalted* because of one’s lack of awareness.

Look at any group of people who are conspiring! You will find that they will often be caught because of informers who report them to the authorities and the security forces. The artful machinations of human beings can be unmasked at any moment if one of them were to tell the others. In fact, there are some people who do not conspire, but who can identify and expose a group of conspirators with one glance. The most advanced piece of modern equipment can now listen in on people’s conversations and record them. This sort of sly artifice is used among human beings, but what if Allah *the Almighty* were to plot furtively against someone? There is no one who could inform us of His plot, and there is no one who could alert us to His spying! Allah’s guile, therefore, is infinitely more effective than any human trickery.

Human trickery can be exposed by a traitor; it can be brought to light through spying. However, could anyone expose Allah’s guile? Of course not, this sentence ‘Allah is swifter in strategy’ shows you that there are two parties vying with each other. Furthermore, when you say: 'This person is faster than that person', it means that both of them are competing with each other to try and reach the same goal, However, one is faster than the other and will reach the goal before the other one does. In addition, human ruse is an event that happens in time and space. Allah, nevertheless, exists pre-temporally. He is aware of all things even before they happen. He puts everything in order before it happens. This is why He would be faster to deceive you should you decide to be deceitful towards Him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And when We give the people a taste of mercy after adversity has touched them, at once they conspire against Our verses.' When the True Lord *the Most High* sent down the rain as a Mercy from Him, they did not pause to savour Allah’s Mercy which came in the form of life-giving water after years of terrible drought. They rather suddenly hatched their deceitful plans and so Allah says: '"Allah is swifter in strategy." Indeed, Our Messengers record that which you conspire.'

You see the ways in which the deceitful plans of human beings can be foiled. An informer alerts the authorities to a conspirator’s plot or spying, or it can be through one of Allah’s agents—the angels who record everything those human beings do. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[It will be said], "Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant"…' (*al-Isra’:* 14).

The True Lord *the Most High* relates all the events of the past since He wanted to give the Quraysh a chance to make amends for their vehement opposition to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. They justified this opposition of theirs by saying that they were merely following the ways of their forefathers, but this argument is erroneous. In reality, their ancestors were believers; their going astray was an accidental matter, and the idols which they worshipped were imposed upon them from the Romans. The practice of idolatry was imported to Arabia by a person who used to roam throughout the lands of the Romans whose name was ‘Amr ibn Luhay. If they were to revert to a state of faith after their stubborn intransigence, then this would be the rightly guided path of their forefathers, true as they were to the primordial and unalienable disposition of the human soul and faithful as they were to the original pact between mankind and the Lord.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُسَيِّرُكُمۡ فِى ٱلۡبَرِّ وَٱلۡبَحۡرِۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا كُنتُمۡ فِى ٱلۡفُلۡكِ وَجَرَيۡنَ بِهِم بِرِيحٖ طَيِّبَةٖ
وَفَرِحُواْ بِهَا جَآءَتۡهَا رِيحٌ عَاصِفٞ وَجَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡمَوۡجُ مِن كُلِّ مَكَانٖ وَظَنُّوٓاْ أَنَّهُمۡ أُحِيطَ
بِهِمۡ دَعَوُاْ ٱللَّهَ مُخۡلِصِينَ لَهُ ٱلدِّينَ لَئِنۡ أَنجَيۡتَنَا مِنۡ هَٰذِهِۦ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favouring wind, a storm arrives: waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape. Then they pray to God, professing sincere devotion to Him, ‘If You save us from this we shall be truly thankful’ [22] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 22)

This noble verse represents another stage in Allah’s account of those who opposed the Message of Islam. Allah *the Exalted* began with showing them

Mercy when He postponed answering the supplications they had made against themselves. Had Allah answered their prayers when they said: 'O, Allah , if this should be the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment' (*al-Anfal:* 32), that would have been the end of them. It is a Mercy from Allah *Glorified is He* that He did not answer their prayers. Now, if it is a Mercy from Allah *the Almighty* that He has deferred answering their self-destructive supplications, then they should know that it is also a Mercy from Him if He does not answer their imploring since they might be supplicating for something bad, whilst thinking that it is good. Afterwards, Allah shows them how false and insincere were their self-destructive supplications—for as soon as harm befell them, they turned to Allah and begged Him on their sides, sitting down and standing up. If they had genuinely desired for harm to befall them, they would have accepted their painful ordeal until Allah *Glorified is He* decided otherwise. Then Allah *the Exalted* brings up another issue. If Allah touches them with harm, they should take heed—so that they might acknowledge His Mercy when He delivers them from their ordeal. However, they carry on as if they had never asked for His help when they were afflicted by harm. Therefore, in the verse which we are currently studying, the True Lord paints another picture for us which is enabling us to travel over land and sea. He says: ‘It is He Who enables you to travel on land and sea’

It would seem as if this verse which we are currently studying attributes the ‘enabling’ to Allah *the Exalted*, while some other verse attributes the ‘enabling’ to the human soul. We would say to those who claim that there is contradiction therein that any action eventually traces back to Allah’s Will. For example, when we say, 'So-and-so succeeded', is it really the person who succeeded? Or was it someone else who allowed him to succeed? It was the one who administered and graded the test who allowed him to succeed; they graded his test based on his answers, and his answers are indicators of the efforts he expended in memorisation. When considered in a direct manner, all actions can be attributed to their doer. However, if you were to trace their causes back through time, you would find that all actions have to be attributed to Allah.

For example, if you asked, 'Who made this chair?' You would answer, 'The carpenter.' Furthermore, if you were to ask the carpenter, 'Where did the wood come from?' He would tell you, 'From the merchant.' Thus, the merchant would tell you that he imported it from heavily forested lands, and so on and so forth. Thus, if you want to trace back every action in this world of existence, you will most certainly end up with Allah *Glorified is He*.

Also, when the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And when Musa (Moses) had completed the term and was traveling with his family' (*al-Qasas:* 29), we understand from this verse that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was made to lead his family forth. This act of ‘enabling’ was, in all its aspects, from Allah *the Almighty*.

Another example: when the True Lord *the Most High* says in the Quran: 'And that it is He Who makes [one] laugh and weep.' (*an-Najm:* 43) for it is He Who has created ‘laughter’, and it is He Who has created ‘crying’. We find some who ask how can Allah *Glorified is He* say that it is He Who has created ‘laughter’ and ‘crying’ even though He says in the Quran: ‘Let them, then, laugh a little – for they will weep a lot in return’ (*at-Tawba:* 82)? We would reply that if you look at who acts out the ‘laughter’, we will find that it is human beings who laugh, and if you investigated who it is that created the ‘instinct’ of laughter in human beings; you would find that it is Allah *Glorified is He*. The instinct of laughter is one and the same across the spectrum of existence. It is the same with crying. There is not a laughter that is ‘Arab’ or a laughter that is ‘English’; nor is there a cry that is ‘French’ or a cry that is ‘Russian’. Therefore, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created both ‘laughter’ and ‘crying’. The True Lord’s Words are accurate: ‘And that it is He Who makes [one] laugh and weep.’ (*an-Najm:* 43) However, the ‘laugher’ and the ‘crier’ are the ones that become subject of such descriptions.

The True Lord *the Most High* also says: 'and you threw not, [O, Muhammad], when you threw, but it was Allah Who threw.' (*al-Anfal:* 17) It was Allah's Will to enable His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to throw the pebbles; however, the act of directing each of these pebbles such that they strike their targets in the opposing army, this is a matter of Allah’s Will.

Thus, when the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘It is He Who enables you to travel on land and sea,' this does not contradict the fact that it is they who are performing the act of ‘travelling’. If you were to formulate a definition of ‘travel’ on land and at sea, you would find that travel denotes the movement of the traveller from point A to point B. Furthermore, it is the traveller who, with his mind, determines the final destination of the journey—as he travels over land or through sea on his feet in a car or in a boat. Now this mind was created by Allah, and so were the earth and the sea. All of these are the creations of Allah *Glorified is He*. When you move your feet in order to walk, you do not know how you started your walk, nor do you know how many muscles are involved in your act of walking. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who has enabled your mind to harness the energies of your body and to manage them in harmony so as to perform the act of walking. Thus, the origin of everything is to be found with Allah *the Almighty*. The statement in this verse concerns travelling on land and sea. These two means of travelling are different. For example, when man travels over dry land, the path he is following might come to an abrupt end, and he could seek the help of a passer-by or wait for a passer-by to appear. As for travelling by sea, a person is not likely to find anyone around to rescue him. Thus, travelling by sea is a riskier affair than travelling by land. This is why we find that Allah *the Exalted* says in this verse which we are currently examining, regarding travelling by sea: 'when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein, there comes a storm wind and the waves come upon them from everywhere, and they assume that they are surrounded, supplicating to Allah, sincere to Him in religion, "If You should save us from this, we will surely be among the thankful."'

We see that in this verse there is no further talk about travelling by land since the True Lord *Glorified is He* has spoken about how He has delivered the traveller by sea from impending danger. This implicitly speaks to His coming to the aid of those who travel by land. Now, if the stronger of the two arguments is put forth, it necessarily incorporates in an implicit manner the lesser argument. An example of this is when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And we have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15)

Immediately after this verse, the emphasis is put on one's obligation to one's mother, and nothing regarding one's obligation towards one's father is mentioned. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) Allah *the Exalted* revealed these verses because the mother is weaker and frailer, and so He wants to make a son feel for his mother. His father, however, is a man who is capable of toiling in the world. Also, a father's gift to his son is clearly recognisable by the son, whereas the sacrifices made by the mother when she was pregnant with him were not felt by the child, or when he was an infant. By the time a son becomes conscious of the sacrifices others make for him, he will see that it is his father who goes out into the world and brings back the necessities of life, supplying him with food and clothes. In the eyes of the child, the role of the mother seems negligible, a thing of the past. Thus, what is required is an emphasis upon one's obligations to one's mother since the efforts she expended during the period of pregnancy and weaning were not felt by the child. Similarly, in the verse which we are now looking at, the True Lord *the Most High* puts the emphasis on the dangers of sea travelling rather than by land: 'It is He Who enables you to travel on land and sea until when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind.'

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the wind as being pleasant. It is in the nature of the Quranic style that, when the 'wind' is mentioned as singular, it usually refers to some kind of 'punishment' or 'suffering'. Allah *Glorified is He* says, for instance: 'And when they saw it as a cloud approaching their valleys, they said, "This is a cloud bringing us rain!" Rather, it is that for which you were impatient: a wind, within it a painful punishment, destroying everything by command of its Lord. And they became so that nothing was seen [of them] except their dwellings. Thus do we recompense the criminal people?' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25)

'Winds' is mentioned as plural; it is usually something 'merciful' and pleasant, as Allah says: 'and We let loose the winds to fertilise [plants]' (*al-Hijr:* 22). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And it is He Who sends the winds as good tidings before His Mercy until, when they have carried heavy rain clouds, We drive them to a dead land, and We send down rain therein and bring forth thereby [some] of all the fruits. Thus, will we bring forth the dead; perhaps you may be reminded.' (*al-A'raf:* 57)

The 'winds' mentioned in this last verse is plural. Now when 'wind' occurs as singular, it foretells something bad, and when 'wind' occurs as plural, it heralds something good. You yourself can observe it in the whole universe. Observation will show you that there are stages to the phenomena of wind: a gentle wind passes through almost imperceptibly, like a soft breeze, and sometimes the wind comes to complete standstill such that there is not even a breeze. However, we still breathe the hot, still air when the weather gets hot. Then the wind will pick up a little bit, becoming stronger until it turns into full-blown tornado. Air, as we know, is one of the fundamental elements which sustain living beings. It also supports all inanimate objects. If air is a necessary element in human breathing, it is also essential for the stability of large buildings such as skyscrapers—these are only held in place thanks to the air that surrounds their every side. If an air vacuum were to form anywhere near one of these buildings, these structures would collapse. Thus, air is the element which creates balance in the universe. This is why the Holy Quran speaks about the phenomenon of wind and explains its function. In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'until when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind'; this would seem as if Allah *Glorified is He* is speaking about sail boats which are pushed along by the winds in their sails. Now if industrial technology has advanced beyond the sails which draw upon wind power and invented ways by which to harness the power of steam, and then electricity—when the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘a good wind', this encompasses all the stages of technological progress. To be sure, the word 'wind' is used in the Holy Quran to denote all kinds of power, whether it is wind power or a mechanism that draws upon any other kind of power. Windows are also compatible with all manner of seaborne locomotion. When Allah *the Exalted* says: 'when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein', this verse posits three events: their existence on board the ships, the ships’ moving along with favourable winds and their delight for this fact. These three things are all included under the dependant sentence. Then, comes the second part of the conditional phrase, and it also contains three elements: the first is 'there comes a storm wind’, the second is 'and the waves come upon them from everywhere' and the third is 'and they assume that they are surrounded'. The storm wind is destructive and drowning. 'And the waves come upon them from everywhere'/ the waves come from below, and the wind comes from above. The wind pushes the waves up on to the sea vessel. We know that every day they measure the height of the waves depending on the strength of the prevailing winds. When the winds are light, the surface of the ocean appears rippled, and when there is no wind, you will not find a single ripple or wave on the surface of the water; the water will be completely still.

However, as they were travelling upon the water, they were pummelled with hurricane-force winds, and the waves become increasingly violent. All of this leads them to believe that they have been overwhelmed and surrounded by death with no way out. They could not find any means of escape. Now, when the time comes and they feel themselves to be ‘surrounded’, they refuse to resign themselves to their fate. Nor do they maintain their arrogant attitude, rather, they turn to Allah and supplicate to Him—the same Allah Whom they had rejected. However, at a time of danger, no one can deceive himself and continue to believe that there is no God. This is why we find that our Ja‘far as-Sadiq was asked, 'Is there a proof of the existence of the Maker, Most-High?' He replied, 'What do you do for a living?' The man said, 'I am a merchant. I transport my wares over the seas.' Ja‘far then asked the man, 'Did anything memorable ever happen to you, while you were at sea?' The man said, 'Yes, indeed.' Ja‘far probed him further, 'What is it?' The man said, 'I was transporting my merchandise on my vessel when all of a sudden I was assailed by tempestuous winds and fierce waves. My boat sank, and I clung to some wood debris.' Ja‘far asked, 'Were you not moved at that moment to ask for the aid of some higher power?' The man replied, 'Yes.' Whereupon Ja‘far said, 'That is the Maker, Most-High.' Similarly, these disbelievers who rejected Allah now turned to Him when they were pummelled by tempestuous winds, and battered by large waves. At that moment, they thought that they were ‘surrounded’. Allah *Glorified is He* describes such a state of theirs: 'supplicating to Allah, sincere to Him in religion, "If you should save us from this, we will surely be among the thankful.” ' This means that, not only did they implore Him, but they implored him with fervour. They ardently proclaimed His Oneness and swore that besides Him there is no associate worthy of worship, for they knew, at that moment, that such ‘associates’ could be of no benefit to them. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes the rest of their supplication: 'if you should save us from this, we will surely be among the thankful.’’ Did they honour their promise? No, they did not because Allah *Glorified is He* thereafter says:

فَلَمَّآ أَنجَىٰهُمۡ إِذَا هُمۡ يَبۡغُونَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ بِغَيۡرِ ٱلۡحَقِّۗ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّمَا بَغۡيُكُمۡ عَلَىٰٓ
أَنفُسِكُمۖ مَّتَٰعَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَاۖ ثُمَّ إِلَيۡنَا مَرۡجِعُكُمۡ فَنُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ٢٣

Yet no sooner does He save them than, back on land, they behave outrageously against all that is right. People! Your outrageous behaviour only works against yourselves. Take your little enjoyment in this present life; in the end you will return to Us and We shall confront you with everything you have done [23]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 23)

Now after the True Lord delivered them, the word that comes immediately after is *'*at once*'*, which shows that they had not even waited until they regained their composure. They had not even let some time pass after they had uttered their supplication, to see what results it would yield. They immediately returned to their evil ways: 'When He saves them, at once they commit injustice upon the earth without right' (*Yunus:* 23).

Now the word 'injustice' means to overstep the limits. It is essentially to be corrupt and perverse. If one digs a hole in the middle of a perfectly paved road, then this is injustice. If you throw rubbish down a well from which people drink, then this is injustice. If you ruin anything that was functioning properly, or if you degrade the value of something, this is injustice. Injustice is the highest form of wrongdoing, for Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Indeed, Qarun was from the people of Musa (Moses), but he committed grave injustice towards them.' (*al-Qasas:* 76)

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* described injustice as represented in corrupting and degrading something that is useful in his saying, 'The fastest acts of good deed to receive a reward are kindness and safeguarding family relations, while the fastest acts of evil to receive a punishment are injustice and the severance of one's family ties.' (1)

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(1) *Related by Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (4212) and by Ibn 'Uday in al-Kamel (4/70) Dar Al-Fikr edition; also published by ad-Dahabi in (Mizan al-I'tidal) (3831); narrated on the authority of 'Ai'sha may Allah be pleased with her*

Indeed, the True Lord does not defer the punishment—for injustice and the severance of family ties—until the Day of Judgment. He delivers His punishment for these sins in this world. This restores balance in the society. If you see someone who is unjust but enjoys an easy, pleasurable life but then dies without any punishment—and if everyone witnesses his injustice but they are helpless to punish him in this world —this will only feed his tyranny and cause it to grow.

This is why you see that Allah *Glorified is He* punishes this type of wrongdoer in this life, so that his terrible fate can be witnessed by all. Also, when people see this, they improve their conduct. If they are unjust, they desist from their unjust ways. This is how social balance is restored. Otherwise, if Allah *the Almighty* were to defer the punishment to the Hereafter, society would suffer on the hands of those who do not believe in the Hereafter and who are proficient in their injustice and unrighteousness. This is why people will witness their suffering in this world, and in the next world there will be a place reserved for them in Hell. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* warns, 'Do not commit injustice! Do not be a wrongdoer.'(1)

A wrongdoer creates an imbalance in the general equilibrium of society. One who commits injustice is one who wrongly usurps the rights of others. He enjoys the fruits of someone else's labour; he turns into a person who specialises in extracting tributes from people and who is too lazy to take up any other work than this. You can see this happening in the poorest neighbourhoods, where some forcibly appropriate the rights of others. They have turned into bullies who are hired by some to harm others. Such bullies have become experts at earning a living without ever having to expend any effort at honest work.

Injustice, then, is the work of those who spoil the productive rhythm of life. As for those who are affected by such unjust tyrants, they tend to put less effort into their honest work. Furthermore, when people put less effort into honest work, the productive rhythm of life is dampened, and the general welfare of humanity declines; even the welfare of the unjust witness decline as well. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They commit injustice upon the earth without right.' One might ask if there is such a thing as ‘injustice without right’. I would say that there is since injustice is to violate and corrupt that which is good. When you see someone corrupting that which is good, you ask him, 'Why are you doing this?' He might tell you that his intention is to ‘reform’ or to promote the public good. He will describe the variety of reasons why he is infringing the way he is; this is ‘injustice with a right’. As for those who are unjust without any noble reason or religiously sanctioned motive, this is the epitome of injustice.

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(1) *Related by Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (2/338); narrated on the authority of Abu Bakr... Al-Hakim adds: this strength of this Hadith line of transmission is (Sahih), even though Muslim and Al-Bukhari did not relate it. Adh-Dhahabi concured.*

Would not an example of 'injustice with a right’ be when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* seized the lands of Bani Qurayzha*,* burned their crops and cut down their trees and destroyed their homes? Is that not an outrageous violation of the public good?

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did this in response to an even more outrageous offense. It is clear now that there can be such a thing as ‘injustice with a, right' and 'injustice without a right'. This is why Allah’s recompense for a sin is a sin. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Thus, if anyone commits aggression against you, commit aggression against him.' (*al-Baqara:* 194). The True Lord calls it an ‘aggression’ even though it really is not an aggression. It is rather a response to an aggression.

Allah *the Exalted* defines the issue as one which endures forever once it is perpetrated. He says: 'O, mankind, your injustice is only against yourselves, [being merely] the enjoyment of worldly life.' In this verse, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is addressing the unjust aggressor, 'O, you who covet the rights of others, know that what you gain from usurping these rights is a little comfort in this work, but ultimately, you shall be eternally damned in Hellfire.' Now if you compare the time that one enjoys the fruits of unrighteous exploitation with the eternity of the punishment, you will find that the enjoyment derived from injustice pales in comparison to the suffering that you will have to endure as a punishment. Thus, do not take the life of the physical earth as your reference. The True Lord *the Most High* might allow the earth itself to have a life spanning twenty million years; however, your life on this earth is limited to a period much shorter than that figure.

Thus, take care of yourselves and protect yourselves against punishment and torture in the Hereafter and realise that the enjoyment of this world is very little, especially if this enjoyment is accompanied by injustice towards you. Everyone will eventually suffer the consequences of their injustice. The enjoyment and pleasure which you might get as a result of this injustice is confined to your limited life in this world. You must know that every person lives on this earth for a given age as an individual, not the whole age of humanity. Hence, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘Say to them, "Little is the enjoyment in this world"…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 77).

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* stresses this fact: ‘...your injustice is only against yourselves...’ (*Yunus:* 23). Allah *Glorified is He* may punish a wrongdoer by letting him see before his death the persons whom he has wronged in a very good condition. So, I always say, ‘If wrongdoers learnt about the great compensation awaiting their victims, they would not commit acts of oppression against them.’ While wrongdoers supposedly enjoy being transgressors which is considered a little worldly enjoyment, we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Then to Us is your return...’ (*Yunus:* 23) When we return to Allah *Glorified is He* there will be no injustice; no one will wrong others or be wronged by them. Everyone will get the requital for their deeds from Allah *the Almighty* either with rewards or punishments since the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘…Then to Us is your return, and We will inform you of what you used to do.’ (*Yunus:* 23).

The news about the requital is announced before the occurrence of deeds so that all people know well that every act will be met with a reward or a punishment. Moreover, the fact that the news concerning the requital comes before the actions represents censure of those who wrong themselves by oppressing others.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا كَمَآءٍ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَٱخۡتَلَطَ بِهِۦ نَبَاتُ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مِمَّا
يَأۡكُلُ ٱلنَّاسُ وَٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمُ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَخَذَتِ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ زُخۡرُفَهَا وَٱزَّيَّنَتۡ وَظَنَّ أَهۡلُهَآ
أَنَّهُمۡ قَٰدِرُونَ عَلَيۡهَآ أَتَىٰهَآ أَمۡرُنَا لَيۡلًا أَوۡ نَهَارٗا فَجَعَلۡنَٰهَا حَصِيدٗا كَأَن
لَّمۡ تَغۡنَ بِٱلۡأَمۡسِۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لِقَوۡمٖ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

The life of this world is like this: rain that We send down from the sky is absorbed by the plants of the earth, from which humans and animals eat. But when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, and adorns itself, and its people think they have power over it, then the fate We commanded comes to it, by night or by day, and We reduce it to stubble, as if it had not flourished just the day before. This is the way We explain the revelations for those who reflect [24] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 24)

The water that comes down from the sky is the one suitable for irrigating and drinking since the water that exists on the earth represents storehouses for sustaining life. It is often salty like that of the oceans and seas since the True Lord *the Most High* wants to protect it from being rotted and decayed. Then, the process of water desalination takes place due to the sun rays which cause the water to evaporate and gather to form clouds that turn into fresh distilled water falling from the sky to be used for drinking and irrigating. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…is like this: rain that We send down from the sky is absorbed by the plants of the earth…' (*Yunus:* 24).

The Arabic word *al-ikhtilat*, which means absorption in this verse, refers to the combination of two or more elements in such a way that they can be separated later on. For instance, if you put some seeds of beans together with some seeds of lupin, you can then separate them from each other. There is another kind of putting things together in the form of mixture just like when you squeeze a lemon and mix it with some water and sugar; this causes the particles of the lemon and the sugar to dissolve into the water.

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…is like this: rain that We send down from the sky is absorbed by the plants of the earth…' (*Yunus:* 24). It might be understood from this verse that water and plants become mixed with one another. Actually, plants—as we know—are living beings that are made out of water as Allah *the Almighty* says : '…that We made every living thing from water?...' (*al-Anbiya':* 30).

In this regard, we must pay attention to the difference between the Arabic letter *Ba'* when denoting 'mixing' and the same letter when referring to 'causality' as in this verse in which *Ba'* is translated as 'by' to suit the rendering into English in this instance. Thus, the meaning of this part of the verse reads as follows: plants grow profusely out of the earth thanks to the water sent from the sky. After rainfall, you notice that water covers the surface of the earth; then after a few days or weeks, you see the earth filled with plants that have branches and leaves, becoming closely intertwined. The more they get intertwined, the stronger is the proof that a given piece of land is fertile and well irrigated; this is the result of the interaction between water and soil.

On the other hand, when land is not fertile, you find that plants are few and distant from each other; you find one plant here and another there. This is evident when the people of the Egyptian country grow corn, for instance, at a certain time; they say that 'the corn is going bankrupt' which means that every strand of corn stands isolated from the others since the land is arid. Thus, land fertility is essential for the life and growth of plants; water is necessary for dissolving food elements that nourish plants and make their roots grow.

If you one day visit agriculture-related scientific centres in Tokyo or California, you will find that they grow plants on thin strings and irrigate them with water that contains essential food components required for their growth. The people in such cities have found that all plants take from the earth the elements necessary for life at a rate not exceeding five percent of their weight, whereas they take from air ninety five percent of their weight. Thus, the rain that falls from the sky through the air is what dissolves the elements of the earth, so that they can be absorbed by plants.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* sets forth a simile for us; a simile is an expression that describes something by comparing it with something else. Here, the thing that we bring to clarify the original thing must be well known. So, we cannot liken an unknown thing to another unknown thing; rather, we shed light on an unknown thing by making reference to something that is already known. For instance, when a friend of yours asks you if you know a certain person, you answer that you do not know that person. Then, your friend tells you that the person in question looks like another person whom you know well. Thus, you know the unknown person by making reference to another person who is quite known to you.

Some of those who attack the Quran have argued this way by saying, 'When there is something that is unknown and we wish to shed some light on it, should we not do so by referring to something that is known?' Then, why does Allah *Glorified is He* say concerning the tree of *Zaqqum* ‘This tree grows in the heart of the blazing Fire, and its fruits are like devils’ heads’ (*as-Saffat:* 64-65).

How can Allah *Glorified is He* tell the believers that the emerging fruits of the tree of *Zaqqum,* which is one in the Fire unknown to us, resemble the heads of devils? Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* compares one unknown thing with another unknown thing. The people who have made this claim have overlooked the fact that it is Allah *the Almighty* is speaking. The True Lord *the Most High* intends to describe *Zaqqum* with a horrible thing which is known to us, the devil. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want to restrict this conception of horribleness so as not to limit this simile to a certain picture. You may see a certain thing as terrible, while another person may see it in a different way. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make *Zaqqum* fruits horrible; so He chooses the one thing which we all agree that it is horrid, the heads of devils. Every man can imagine the terrible and disgusting image of the devil from his own perspective. The Greatness of Allah *the Almighty* lies here in the fact that He leaves the image of the devil more or less ambiguous.

Let us go back to the simile which we are now examining in this verse: the life of this world is compared to the rainwater which the True Lord *Glorified is He* sends down from the sky and which causes the plants of the earth to grow so abundantly that their branches and leaves intertwine with one another. Every one of us lives a part of this worldly life, along with playing a part in this long film; none of us has witnessed its beginning and some of us might not live to witness its end. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states a simile which includes things known to us all, namely, crops that are watered by rain. Allah *Glorified is He* intends to depict the picture of this earthly life through talking about something known to all of us; thus, we realise and witness both past and coming events—everything in existence is given its share of growth and prosperity, then all things come to an end. Such is life in this world. Once again, let us recall what the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…is like this: rain that We send down from the sky is absorbed by the plants of the earth, from which humans and animals eat. However, when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, adorns itself and its people think they have power over it, then the fate We commanded comes to it, by night or by day…' (*Yunus:* 24).

The Arabic word *Az-zukhruf* translated as 'finest appearance' refers to something that is beautiful and attractive that pleases the soul when gazed upon. The world adorns itself with a variety of colours arranged in a wonderful manner, then all of that is ruined; this is what we witness in our own lives. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a brief description of the world from its beginning to its end by depicting a familiar picture which can be seen by all of us, so that none may be seduced by the beauty and tempting adornment of this worldly life.

In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Let man consider the food he eats! We pour down abundant water and cause the soil to split open. We make grain grow, vines, fresh vegetation, olive trees, date palms, luscious gardens, fruits and fodder, all for you and your livestock to enjoy. When the Deafening Blast comes—the Day when man will flee from his own brother, his mother, his father, his wife, his children; each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that Day.' (*'Abasa:* 24-37).

Thus, the world with all of its visible beauty is destined to wilt; all the wonderful colours that you see are bound to wither. Even if this world becomes more and more beautiful, it is destined to pass away. Therefore, take care not to be an aggressor. Though you might get some worldly enjoyment through aggression, you will lose everything afterwards as the whole world is destined to come to an end, just as a garden whose flowers grow and flourish due to rainwater, and then all of this ultimately withers away. In this context, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning and made no allowance [for the Will of Allah]. A disaster from your Lord struck the garden as they slept and by morning it was stripped bare, a desolate land.’ (*al-Qalam:* 17-20). Thus, this is the nature and description of this worldly life.

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… But when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, adorns itself …' (*Yunus:* 24). The earth adorns itself by its Lord’s Command. Allah *Glorified is He* attributes perceptions to beings that we would never think of as having minds and wills of their own. Does the True Lord *the Most High*, not say concerning the story of the 'virtuous servant, Khidr': 'And so they travelled on. Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down …' (*al-Kahf:* 77)? Does the wall have the will to fall down? If we look closely at this point, we will find that Allah *Glorified is He* has given every created being in existence a life a will and a power that suit it well. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given us a multitude of examples in this regard; wherever there is something which our minds strain to comprehend; Allah *Glorified is He* sheds light on it through Divine expositions. An example of this is the hoopoe’s knowledge of monotheism *(Tawhid)* in the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and how it informed Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* of the news about the Queen of Sheba whose people worshipped the sun, not Allah *the Almighty*. It is as though the hoopoe intuitively recognised that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who is truly worthy of worship; he says in the Quran: 'Should they not worship Allah Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and earth…’ (*an-Naml:* 25).

Who can think that the hoopoe—which is a mere bird—could have possessed such a great insight concerning doctrines? Allah *Glorified is He* wants to show us that this bird does not have any whims which could corrupt its doctrinal beliefs and that it is our (humans) whims, which corrupt doctrines. The one whom Allah *Glorified is He* has given the freedom of choice is the one who abuses this grace so long as he does not safeguard this freedom with faith and does not make his choices in the light of Allah’s Guidance. We can clearly see that all the created beings other than man can never bring about corruption, for they are guided by their instincts. You can hardly see an animal, for instance, stuff itself over its capacity, while we find that some people satiate their appetite to the point of gluttony. Similarly, we cannot find a donkey attempting to jump over a stream of water that it knows it is too wide; we rather note that the donkey backs away from the water. Meanwhile, you may find a person rolling up his sleeves to jump over a pond, only to fall into it.

Thus, our whims take control of our instincts and rush us into danger unless we protect ourselves with Allah's Guidance. Concerning the example of the hoopoe, we have a form of the clearest and purest understanding of *Tawhid* which is similar to that of the most pious mystics, so to speak. The bird's remark hits the target: 'Should they not worship Allah Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and earth…' (*an-Naml:* 25). The Arabic word *khab'* translated in this verse as 'what is hidden', represents the sustenance of the hoopoe—this bird does not eat from anything which lies visibly on the surface of the earth; rather, he strikes the ground with his beak, digging it up to find the food it needs. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us another example—that of the ant that says in the Quran: '…"Ants! Go into your homes, in case Sulaiman [Solomon] and his soldiers unwittingly crush you"' (*an-Naml:* 18). Look at the fairness of this ant. It does not say that Sulaiman (Solomon) and his soldiers will oppressively crush its fellow ants; rather, it says: 'unwittingly' because they are too small to be seen by the marching army. Thus, every being in existence has its particular life; the problem is that we want to see the life of the other beings in the same way we look at the life of the supreme creature—man. We must realise that plants have their own life; and so do animals, inanimate objects and other beings in this universe.

We have previously pointed out that Allah *Glorified is He* says : '…so that those who were to perish might perish after seeing a clear proof and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof...' (*al-Anfal:* 42). Perishing is the opposite of life, just as life is the opposite of death, and perishing is more or less equal to death. The True Lord *the Most High* describes what will happen on the Day of Judgment by saying: '…Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self…' (*al-Qasas:* 88). So, all inanimate objects are destined to perish after having a special kind of inner life that we know nothing about. The problem, as we have just said, is that man tends to identify the life of these lower beings in the same manner he identifies his.

Notice how the Quran is most accurate when we recite: '…But when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, adorns itself and its people think they have power over it, then the fate We commanded comes to it, by night or by day…' (*Yunus:* 24). This verse had been revealed centuries before science made progress and confirmed that the earth is rather spherical and that it revolves around itself; also, the night and day are alternate in a continuous cycle. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says: 'Do the people of these towns feel secure that Our Punishment will not come upon them by night, while they are asleep? Do the people of these towns feel secure that Our Punishment will not come upon them by day, while they are at play?' (*al-A'raf:* 97-98). Thus, Allah's Commands are carried out at the very moment He wills; it does not matter whether it is morning or night. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and We reduce it to stubble, as if it had not flourished just the day before…' (*Yunus:* 24). It is as if it had never existed.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '…This is the way We explain the Revelations for those who reflect.' (*Yunus:* 24). So, if the life in this world is like the life of plants which grow, multiply and flourish, must we not realise the fact that all beautiful things are destined to pass away? We must not be seduced by the pleasures and delights of this world. We must also be careful not to do wrong on the earth since aggression is a passing enjoyment confined to this mortal worldly life. There are many instances in the Quran that feature such explanation of the verses which is made to those who 'reflect', 'take heed', 'use their intellect' or 'contemplate'. All of these processes are aimed at reaching a single conclusion through a number of different steps. 'Reflection' depends on bringing out premises to draw conclusions. 'Taking heed' means not forgetting or ignoring important matters. 'Using intellect' refers to using one's faculty of thinking whose instrument is the mind. 'Contemplation' is concerned with digging deeper into the hidden aspects of things, not restricting to the outer ones. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Will they not contemplate this Quran...?' (*an-Nisa':* 82). The verse encourages us to use our insight to look into the beginnings and the ends of all events to realise that all things are destined to return to Allah *Glorified is He*. A wise person is the one who prepares himself for the meeting with Allah *the Almighty*; he endures hardships in this mortal world, only to feel secure in the eternal

Hereafter. If we compare this world to the Hereafter, we will find that the latter is much more profitable. An individual cannot determine his age in this life; he does not know whether he will live on this earth for a year, for ten years, for seventy years or for a hundred years. No matter how long this world as a whole endures, it will ultimately come to an end. You enjoy the pleasures of life according to your potential and conception as a human, while the Life to come is endless and everything related to man there is absolutely certain. The blessings and pleasures of the Next Life are matchless as they are bestowed by Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, if you compare this life with the Hereafter, the latter will have the upper hand. In this regard, the True Lord, and *the Most High*, says: '…the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64). Allah's Words 'the true life' underscore that such a life has no end. Therefore, adhere to the Guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* to lead you to the Home of Peace and security. Search for a safe exit from this insecure and ever-changing world and respond to the One Who calls upon you to join the Home of Peace. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱللَّهُ يَدۡعُوٓاْ إِلَىٰ دَارِ ٱلسَّلَٰمِ وَيَهۡدِى مَن يَشَآءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ﴿٢٥﴾

But God invites [everyone] to the Home of Peace, and guides whoever He will to a straight path [25] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 25)

The 'Home of Peace' refers to the Hereafter in contrast with the life of this world which is full of hardships and suffering—this world which adorns itself to seem beautiful, but it ultimately falls into ruin. So, Allah *Glorified is He* calls on us to seek another abode, the Home of Peace. Man may enjoy a share of the delights of this life: power, wealth, and good health. However, this is always accompanied by two permanent worries: the first is that a person may worry about losing these blessings during his life and the second is that he may worry about losing them when he dies. On the other hand, man will enjoy everlasting pleasures in the Hereafter; this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But Allah invites [everyone] to the Home of Peace…' (*Yunus:* 25).

In the Afterlife, no one will cause harm to others; you will not find someone seize another's money as happens in this worldly life. While we live in this life according to the laws that Allah *Glorified is He* has created, we will be in the Hereafter in the company of Him *Glorified is He*. Everything occurs to your mind will be instantly brought before you. Now, while good people's conditions and resources are different in this world, they live in the Hereafter in the shade of Allah's Bounty without any suffering or troubles on their part since the Home of Peace is the Home of Allah *Glorified is He* and Allah Himself *the Almighty* is Peace. Imagine, for example, that your boss invites you for lunch; he prepares for you what he can do as an important man to make you feel at home. Allah has the highest image. Now imagine that you are received by your Creator *Glorified is He*. What will He prepare for you as being a follower of His Path and Guidance? Indeed, He *Glorified is He* says: 'The people of Paradise today are happily occupied—they and their spouses—seated on couches in the shade. There they have fruit and whatever they ask for. "Peace", a word from the Lord of Mercy.' (*Ya Sin:* 55-58). This 'Peace' is not from human beings since there are some people who pretend to be at peace with you but, in actuality, harbour a grudge against you. However, others might faithfully bring you peace at first, and then become unable to do that due to changing life circumstances. However, when peace comes from Allah *Glorified is He* it comes from the Most Powerful Lord Who can do anything, needs nothing from His creation and never changes. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... the angels will go in to them from every gate, "Peace be with you"...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23-24).

When the angels utter these peaceful words, they derive their peace from Allah's Genuine Peace. Likewise, when the People of the Heights in the Hereafter *(A'raf)* who are not admitted into Paradise, see the People of Paradise and the People of the Fire, they pass their greetings of peace to the People of Paradise alone. Thus, the People of Paradise dwell in an all-comprehensive peace that encompasses them and makes them feel secure. This is due to it being Allah *the Almighty* Who calls upon believers to come to this Home of peace; no one can force Him to terminate this everlasting flow of it.

The Call of Allah *Glorified is He* is His Religion that He entrusted His Messengers to convey to humanity to control the movement on the earth in the light of Faith, so that people can live according to the Divine Way of Life. Thus, our world becomes a paradise. What brings unhappiness to people is that some of them ignore a part or parts of Allah’s Religion. If you find that a society suffers from whatever form of misery, be certain that some parts of Allah’s Religion have been overlooked.

If all people were to follow Allah’s Path, there would not be a single flaw in the universe; it is the ignorance of human beings which creates flaws in it. If you come upon some poor people who have nothing to eat, then know well that some people have disrupted Allah’s Religion—either from among the poor themselves because of the laziness of some, or from among the rich who have given up their responsibility towards the poor as decreed by Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, Allah’s Divine Way of Life becomes disrupted. On the other hand, if Allah’s Religion were to dominate our life, it would surely be like a paradise.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘... and guides whomever He wills to a straight path.’ (*Yunus:* 25). We may know that there are two types of guidance and one is that which guides all people to the Straight Path. When people believe in this Path, Allah *Glorified is He* facilitates their journey in this life. Thus, believers amongst them move from the stage of being generally guided to the stage of being particularly assisted. On the Day of Judgment, Allah *Glorified is He* grants believers light to lead them to paradise: ‘... their Lord will guide them because of their faith...’ (*Yunus:* 9). Thus, whoever adheres to the Divine Way of Life after having been convinced through proofs, the True Lord *Glorified is He* grants him light ahead of him: ‘...With their lights streaming out ahead of them and to their right...’ (*at-Tahrim:* 8).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... and guides whomever He wills...’ (*Yunus:* 25) because everything in this universe is tied to His Will. Laws do not control Him, but He controls everything. While Allah *Glorified is He* has shown us that He guides whom He wishes, He has also shown us that He makes whom He wishes go astray for He *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Allah does not guide those who refuse to acknowledge the Truth..’ (*at-Tawba:* 37). Allah *Glorified is He* also says : '... Allah does not guide those who break away.’ (*at-Tawba:* 24).

Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* has shown us those whom He guides to Paradise and those whom He does not. Let nobody ask: for what are the disbelievers and the disobedient guilty?' This is due to the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who has made His Religion clear; whosoever abides by it, Allah *the Almighty* bestows on him an illuminating light ahead of him to show him the way to Paradise.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِّلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا۟ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ وَزِيَادَةٌ ۖ وَلَا يَرْهَقُ وُجُوهَهُمْ قَتَرٌ
وَلَا ذِلَّةٌ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Those who did well will have the best reward and more besides. Neither darkness nor shame will cover their faces: these are the companions in Paradise, and there they will remain [26] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 26)

The Arabic word *al-husna,* translated in this verse as ‘the best reward’, is similar in form to *imra’h fudhla* 'one of the best women' and *imra’h kubra* 'one of the greatest women'. In Arabic, these words ending in *a* are called superlative adjectives, aimed to give nouns special significance. What Allah *Glorified is He* means when He says: ‘Those who did well will have the best reward...’ (*Yunus:* 26) is that these people excelled when doing good deeds. As we know, a Muslim person receives the reward of ten good deeds when he does only one good deed. Let us go on reciting the verse: ‘Those who did well will have the best reward and more besides...’ (*Yunus:* 26). What is meant by ‘more besides’ in this verse? This is extra compensation. It is a special bonus for good deeds starting with a reward for a single good deed which is equivalent to the completion of ten good deeds as a minimum, and may reach as far as the equivalent of seven hundred good deeds. Regarding sins, they are treated as single sins without any multiplication. After all, nothing can restrict Allah’s Bounty and Grace; the True Lord *the Most High* bestows His endless Grace upon whom he chooses. This is why we should not regard Allah’s Justice and His Grace on the same footing: His Justice applies to wrongdoers, while His infinite Bounty and Generosity belong to those who do well. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say [Prophet Muhammad], “In Allah’s Grace and Mercy let them rejoice."' (*Yunus:* 58).

Some of the most pious mystics have said that the ‘more besides’ refers to the reward ranging between ten times and seven hundred times, whereas Grace refers to that which goes far beyond the seven-hundred maximum.

Thus, there are several levels of rewarding: there is the equivalent of ten, the equivalent of seven hundred, *al-husna* ‘the best reward’ and ‘more besides’. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When the People of Paradise enter the Gardens, Allah *Glorified is He* will say, "Do you wish that I give you anything more?" They would say, "Have You not brightened our faces? Have You not made us enter Paradise and saved us from the Fire?" The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Allah will lift the veil, and of things given to them nothing will be dearer to them than the sight of their Lord *the Almighty* and the Glorious."'

Then, Allah Glorified is He: ‘... Neither darkness [nor dust] nor shame will cover their faces...’ (Yunus: 26). This means that their faces are not covered in darkness (or dust); Allah Glorified is He says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘On that Day there will be radiant faces, looking towards their Lord’ (The Quran, 75: 22-23). He the Almighty also says: ‘but some faces will be dust stained and covered in darkness.’ (‘Abasa: 40-41).

The Arabic expression *tarhuquha* means that 'it is covered in'. The Arabic word *qatarah* means ‘darkness’ or ‘dust’, and the latter is related to the word *al-qitar*, which is the smell of burnt fat that fills the air when meat is roasted; this smell may be appetising and mouth-watering. However, when a face is covered in this *qitar*, a layer of black ash is formed. The True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘... Neither darkness [nor dust] nor shame will cover their faces...’ (*Yunus:* 26) for they fear Allah *Glorified is He* and cherish His Divine Way of Life.

Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘On the Day when some faces brighten and others darken’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 106). Thus, the point is not the colour of the skin because you can find a person whose skin colour is black but who is so pious that light illuminates his face and his features are marked by an aura of magnificence. Similarly, there are some people whose faces are white, but as a result of their disobedience of Allah’s commands, their faces have become completely devoid of spiritual light.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... These are the companions in Paradise, and there they will remain.’ (*Yunus:* 26). This means that they have become firmly connected to Paradise as if they are two close friends who never leave each other. Another meaning is that they are the owners of paradise.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَسَبُواْ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ جَزَآءُ سَيِّئَةِۭ بِمِثْلِهَا وَتَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌۖ مَّا لَهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مِنْ عَاصِمٍۖ كَأَنَّمَآ
أُغْشِيَتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ قِطَعًا مِّنَ ٱلَّيْلِ مُظْلِمًاۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

As for those who did evil, each evil deed will be requited by its equal and humiliation will cover them – no one will protect them against God – as though their faces were covered with veils cut from the darkness of the night. These are the inmates of the Fire, and there they shall remain [27]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 27)

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has spoken about those whom He has summoned to the Home of Peace and rewarded them with Paradise for their good deeds, He now speaks about the other side; the gathering of these two parties makes the issue clearer to the mind. The True Lord *the Most High* says in another verse: 'Let them, then, laugh a little – for they will weep a lot.' (*at-Tawba:* 82).

Another example of the comparison of two extremes can be seen when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The good will live in bliss, and the wicked will burn in the Fire.’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14). Thus, when two opposites are mentioned, the issue becomes well understood. Since Allah *Glorified is He* has spoken about the call to the Home of Peace—where those who respond to the call are rewarded with abiding eternally in Paradise, along with never fearing darkness of faces or shame—Allah *Glorified is He* also mentions their opposites, underscoring the grievous consequences of ignoring the call to the Home of Peace; He also mentions the happy end of those who accept the call. The believers must therefore take joy in this offer, for they will not be among the people of the Fire. Meanwhile, some of the disbelievers, if not all of them, must wake up from their oblivion so as to avoid the fire and turn to Faith. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘As for those who did evil...’ (*Yunus:* 27).

We may know that the Arabic word *al-kasb* is related to pure nature and harmonises with doing good deeds since the obedience of Allah through the performance of religious rites is consistent with upright human nature. No one is ashamed to pray, give to the poor, fast or perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage), while many people are ashamed to be recognised as liars, usurers or consumers of alcohol. When a man commits a sin, he experiences contradictory reactions. For example, a person who steals his father's money while he is asleep walks on his tiptoes and is careful not to hit anything in the dark, which could make a sound and expose him. It is the same thing with the one who gazes at others' girls and women. These examples suggest that committing sins is accompanied by unnatural reactions; there is some sort of trouble or uneasiness when sinning. The worst thing that man can do is to continue following the path of sins until it becomes second nature to him, and he becomes accustomed to committing such acts. In other words, he becomes a professional in this regard; it is no longer a matter of occasional sinful acts, but a regular process that is made without having any feeling of guilt. A libertine might even attain a level of stable immorality; he may tell others about his sins and his transgressions in a proud tone by saying, for instance, that he stayed up late last night in a mind-blowing party and that he did such-and such. He recalls that wild party with such a sense of satisfaction that he has committed sins and vices. It is a mercy from Allah *Glorified is He* that He punishes sinners for the sins they commit in an equal way. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... each evil deed will be requited by its equal ...' (*Yunus:* 27).

The True Lord's Mercy can also be seen when He bestows special status upon those who do not commit sins; such people become amongst those whom Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... Neither darkness [nor dust] nor shame will cover their faces...' (*Yunus:* 26). Meanwhile, the True Lord *the Most High* says about those who do not follow the Straight Path: '... no one will protect them against Allah...' (*Yunus:* 27). This means that no one will stand up for them and intercede with Allah *the Almighty* on their behalf; no one will beg Allah *Glorified is He* by saying, 'O, Lord, please do not punish them.' This part of the verse could also mean that Allah *Glorified is He* will not forgive them afterwards.

Their woeful state does not stop at this point; moreover, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '... as though their faces were covered with veils cut from the darkness of the night...' (*Yunus:* 27). It is as if portions of dark night have covered their faces. Their ultimate fate is to reside in the Fire forever: '...These are the inmates of the Fire, and there they shall remain.' (*Yunus:* 27).

This is the state of those who reject the Signs of Allah *Glorified is He* lie about His Messengers, turn down Allah's Call to the Home of Peace, follow their whims and associate partners with Allah *Glorified is He*. It is the True Lord's Will that such transgressions are manifested in their entirety in this world so that the whole universe will stand as a witness in the Hereafter and be aware of what will happen to sinners as a result of what they have done on the earth in this worldly life.

Afterwards, Allah True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَوْمَ نَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ نَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا۟ مَكَانَكُمْ أَنتُمْ
وَشُرَكَآؤُكُمْ ۚ فَزَيَّلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ ۖ وَقَالَ شُرَكَآؤُهُم مَّا كُنتُمْ إِيَّانَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

On the Day We gather them all together, We shall say to those who associate partners with God, 'Stay in your place, you and your partner-gods.' Then We shall separate them, and their partner-gods will say, 'It was not us you worshipped [28] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 28)

The Arabic word *al-hashr* translated in this verse as gathering means taking people who are dispersed over a wide area and bringing them together in one place. These different places will drive the disbelievers therein to be gathered at that one place where Allah *Glorified is He* wants them to be.

The more people draw closer to this designated location, the more crowded and tightly packed it becomes. This is just as you move from outer circles to inner circles until you reach the centre. Now, there is no doubt that the more you get near to the centre, the smaller, and tighter the circles become: this is the idea of *al-hashr*. Thus, we will be tightly packed together; however, it is supposedly understood that we are going to suffer much as a result of this stifling atmosphere so that people will pay no heed to such a situation since they will be fully busy with the horrors of that woeful day—the Day of Judgment.

The Words of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'On the Day We gather them all together...' (*Yunus:* 28) refer to the assured rounding up of all those who have not responded to Allah's Divine Way of Life and His Call to the Home of Peace, those who have lied about their messengers and those who have associated partners with Allah *Glorified is He*. All will be gathered and confronted with their crimes; it will truly be a scene of shame and scandals that are exposed on this horrible day. The polytheists who worshipped false idols will be brought to task and punished for their acts, whether those idols commanded their followers to worship them or they were unaware of the whole process. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... We shall say to those who associate partners with Allah, "Stay in your place, you and your partners (whom you had worshipped)."' (*Yunus:* 28).

Thus, people who worshipped angels finally get to meet those angels, and people who worshipped a prophet will meet him in person; the same thing applies to those who worshipped idols, the sun, the moon, jinns or human/jinn devils. Indeed, there are many false deities that may be worshipped; each of these false idols will have its own judgement and come face-to-face with his/its worshippers in a public confrontation on the Day of Resurrection. Among those worshippers, we find those who used to worship and be fascinated by a false deity, such as an angel or a messenger who was basically sent to guide them to the worship of the One God, Allah *Glorified is He*. Also included are those who worshipped objects which could not have been conscious of their worshippers like idols, the sun, the moon, or trees. Meanwhile, you can find the worshipped deities, who are aware of their worshippers and who actively call upon people to worship them, among the devils of the human world and the devils of the jinn world, in addition to Iblis (Satan) himself.

Regarding angels, Allah will bring them in front of their worshippers and ask them, 'Have you ever enticed these people into worshipping you?' The angels will reply, 'Glory is to You, our Lord.' Thus, they will disown their worshippers as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'When those who have been followed disown their followers...' (*al-Baqara:* 166). Now the angels know nothing about those who take them as deities. If we turn our focus to human beings, especially messengers *peace be upon them,* we find that the most famous example is that of 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon him*. He is addressed by the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '... did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside Allah?"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116). 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is quoted by the Quran as saying: ‘May You be Exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say— if I had said such a thing You will know it...’ (*al-Baqara:* 116). Therefore, he was not aware that he had been worshipped by his people; indeed, he never asked them to worship him.

Similarly, the idols have no knowledge about those who have made them gods. On the other hand, Iblis (Satan) is fully aware of his worshippers. Let us have a look at his story. After he had disobeyed the command of Allah, he turned to Adam *peace be upon him* and tempted him into committing sins. Adam *peace be upon him* then repented of his sins and Allah *Glorified is He* accepted his repentance, while He did not forgive Iblis for he had disobeyed His Command concerning bowing down before Adam. Indeed, Iblis was arrogant and considered himself to be of a higher class. Regarding Adam *peace be upon him* he did not refuse to comply with Allah’s Commands. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We created you, We gave you shape, and then We said to the angels, “Bow down before Adam”, and they did, but not Iblis. He was not one of those who bowed down. Allah said, “What prevented you from bowing down as I commanded you?” He said, “I am better than him. You created me from fire and him from clay.”’ (*al-A’raf:* 11-12).

We can deduce the following conclusion out of this verse: those who cannot bear submitting themselves to Allah’s Divine Way of Life have to admit that Allah’s Divine Way of Life and Laws are the Truth, and they are too weak to follow His Path. By so doing, they safeguard themselves against the great sin of rejecting Allah’s Commands; they can also repent with the intention of never falling into such a sin again.

Thus, Iblis (Satan) wages a comprehensive war against all human beings; he has sworn— by Allah’s Might—that he will mislead all the sons of Adam, except those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen for dutiful worship. Iblis knows well that he does not have power to tempt people of this kind. Thus, it is Allah’s Might that makes Iblis—and all his followers from among the jinns—to either seduce or not seduce the Creation of Allah *Glorified is He*. Devils are rebellious jinns, for we know that the jinn is a species opposite to that of the human beings. Some of the jinns are obedient and virtuous, while others are disobedient *(shayatin)*; these latter serve Iblis by tempting human beings. They exert influence upon humans by targeting their weaknesses: money, beauty, power or whatever, enticing them to use immoral methods that go against Allah’s Divine Way of Life to reach their goals. Every human has a weakness or more which the devil exploits to get hold of his soul. Meanwhile, Iblis and his progeny may also recruit some to seduce and corrupt others. Hence, there are three categories of beings who seek to derail human beings from Allah’s Path and the Call of the Truth: Iblis, disobedient jinns (devils) and human beings who cooperate with Iblis to tempt their brothers into committing sins—these are the human devils who act in a way that contradicts the Messengers’ Divine Way of Life.

Now, this raises two questions: 'Will there be a dialogue—on the Day of Judgment—between angels and their worshippers from amongst the human beings?' and 'Will there also be a dialogue between idols and those who worshipped them without the former being aware of such worshipping?' Also, another question is raised: 'Will there finally be a dialogue between ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and those who took him as a god without his consent?' One of the most pious mystics, so to speak, puts these words into the mouths of the idols by saying:

They worshipped us while we are more worshipful of Allah

Than those who pray before dawn for forgiveness

In this regard, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise’ (*al-Isra’:* 44).

The mystic continues:

They considered our silence as evidence against us

But we became the fuel of the Fire they are going to be thrown into

In this context, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘then beware of the Fire prepared for the disbelievers, whose fuel is men and stones' (*al-Baqara:* 24).

The pious man continues to say:

They levelled false accusations due to their ignorance

Just as they did with son of Maryam (Mary) and his disciples

Then, what will Allah *Glorified is He* do with the two parties? We may say also in a poetic pattern:

Those who exceed limits will get their punishment

While the blameless party will be saved by the Mercy of the Forgiver

Thus, we have learnt the destiny of those who worship false deities or associate partners with Allah *Glorified is He*; these people are included in Allah's Words: 'On the Day We gather them all together' (*Yunus:* 28).

Hence, those who worship idols or planets, those who associate partners with Allah *Glorified is He* and the devils from among the *jinns* and the human beings, will be assembled on the Day of Resurrection. Let everyone in this world remember that all matters will be disclosed, and all idolaters will be exposed during this great assembly. There will be a confrontation between those who worshipped false deities and the false deities themselves—whether these be angels, messengers, planets or idols of stone, for none of them were aware of the fact that they had been worshipped. All will respond to the Command of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'We shall say to those who associate partners with Allah, "Stay in your place"…' (*Yunus:* 28).

When you hear the command *makanak* in Arabic, its translation is 'in your place'; however, the exact meaning is 'stay in your place'. It is not used for greeting, rather, it indicates threatening and menacing. Such an order is not in one's interest when issued. Again, we learn that angels, messengers, planets, and stones have no knowledge about the people who worship them. So, the people to whom this order applies are the polytheists who think that they can evade the Day of Reckoning. However, when they hear the command: '..."Stay in your place, you and your partners (whom you had worshipped)."...' (*Yunus:* 28); does this mean that they will come together with angels, messengers, planets and stones in a single procession? No, it does not; this is due to those slaves adhering to falsehood, whilst the True Lord *Glorified is He* intends to distinguish between the Truth and falsehood. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then We shall separate them, and their partners (those whom they had worshipped besides Allah) will say, "It was not us you worshipped."' (*Yunus:* 28). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* puts the group of idolaters on one side and those who were worshipped without their knowledge on the other. This latter side will announce this fact: '..."It was not us you worshipped."' (*Yunus:* 28). This means that we did not know that you had worshipped us.

Consider the shameful situation that the idolaters will find themselves in; each of them worshipped his respective false deity, while this deity was neither mindful nor aware of such worshipping. Now remember that the whole point of worshipping is the adherence of the worshippers to the commands of the worshipped God. This rule applies to angels and Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* just as it applies to planets and stones since the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who makes man's organs speak on the Day of Judgment—to bear witness against their owners—is capable of making stones speak. In this context, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the Day when Allah's enemies are gathered up for the Fire and driven onward, their ears, eyes, and skins will, when they reach it, testify against them for their misdeeds. They will say to their skins, "Why did you testify against us?" and their skins will reply, "Allah, Who gave speech to everything, has given us speech"...' (*Fussilat:* 19-21). On the Day of Judgment, we will see stone idols damn those who worshipped them, exactly as the skin disowns the sins of its disobedient owner, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'On the Day when their own tongues, hands and feet will testify against them about what they have done.' (*an-Nur:* 24) However, do not allow yourself to dwell on how an idol will speak, for you have believed, as a matter of faith, that your body parts—including hands, feet and skin—will be capable of speech on the Day of Judgment. Be certain that they all will speak in the Hereafter by the commands of Allah *Glorified is He*. You believe in the Hereafter, so do not look at the events of that Day according to the laws of this world since everything changes in the Afterlife. Have you not been told by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that you will eat in paradise as you want without producing excreta. This is illogical as far as the laws of this world are concerned; however, we take this for granted as a matter of creed. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us of things that will happen in paradise, we must not think of them through our finite reason and imperfect worldly knowledge in order not to reach a complete deadlock. A faithful and truthful heart sees the events and scenes of the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter as pertaining to the world of the unseen where the laws and criteria are quite different.

We should know that man lives in a world that lies between the heaven and the earth; this world has its own earth and heaven, while the Hereafter has its own earth and heaven. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘One Day—when the earth is turned into another earth, the heaven into another heaven…’ (*Ibrahim:* 48). Thus, everything changes on the Day of Judgment. If you are told that idols will speak—denouncing that they had been worshipped as partners with Allah—and if you are told that angels will bear witness against those who had worshipped them in lieu of Allah *Glorified is He* do not be astonished.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

فَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيدَۢا بَيۡنَنَا وَبَيۡنَكُمۡ إِن كُنَّا عَنۡ عِبَادَتِكُمۡ لَغَٰفِلِينَ ٢٩

God is witness enough between us and you – we had no idea that you worshipped us’ [29] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 29)

Thus, the created beings that were worshipped instead of Allah will proclaim their disapproval and astonishment of having been deified. The hoopoe(1) of Sulaiman (Solomon) announced with amazement that it saw certain human beings worship deities other than Allah. It said, as Allah tells in the Quran: ‘Should they not worship God, who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and earth…’ (*an-Naml:* 25). The hoopoe was amazed that other deities were worshipped instead of Allah *the Almighty* Who knew all that was hidden in the heavens and earth. If the hoopoe was aware of this truth, then it is logical for other created beings to show disapproval of disbelief, whether they be Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* the angels, stone idols, trees or planets. Allah *the Exalted* will pose the following question to the angels:

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(1) Allah tells us the story of Prophet Sulaiman’s hoopoe in the Quran: ‘I found a woman ruling over the people, who has been given a share of everything– she has a magnificent throne– [but] I found that she and her people worshipped the sun instead of Allah. Satan has made their deeds seem alluring to them, and diverted them from the right path: they cannot find the right path.’ (*an-Naml*: 23-24)

‘…"Was it you these people worshipped?"’ (*Saba’:* 40), and the angels will reply: ‘…"May You be exalted? You are our supporter against them! Really, they worshipped the jinn…"’ (*Saba’:* 41).

Allah *the Most High* gives us numerous examples of this attitude throughout the Holy Quran. By this frequent mention of examples, Allah means to remind us of the truth and prevent us from immersing into heedlessness. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On the Day He gathers everyone together [saying], “Company of jinns (Devils)! You have seduced a great many humans,”…’ (*al-An‘am:* 128). Allah *the Exalted* mentions those who take jinns as allies: ‘…adherents among mankind will say, “Lord, we have profited from one another, but now we have reached the appointed time you decreed for us.” He will say, “Your home is the Fire, and there you shall remain”– unless Allah wills otherwise. [Prophet], your Lord is All-Wise, All Knowing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 128)

One might ask how jinns succeed in luring so many human beings. The answer is that Allah *the Almighty* has given *jinns* a nature different from that of human beings and faculties unlike human faculties. He *the Most High* says, in reference to Satan: ‘…He and his forces can see you from where you cannot see them…’ (*al-A’raf:* 27). Allah *the Exalted* has given jinns powers greater than that which He has given human beings; He has given them the capability of passing through physical barriers, for example. This is natural, for *jinns* have been created from fire, whereas human beings have been created from earth. There is a difference between the fundamental natures of the two elements. That which comes out of earth (or clay) is static, immobile, and opaque, whereas that which comes out of fire is radiant with light and heat. For instance, if you are sitting in a room outside of which a fire is burning, the walls will conduct some of the heat of the fire to the room except if the barrier is insulated from heat. An apple, which is made out of earth, has no such an effect that can reach you inside the room. Thus, fire has special properties, and earth, or clay, has its. The properties of something made of earth are such that the object will not reach you unless you physically transport it to where you are sitting.

We are reminded of these scientific facts in the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. When he learnt that the Queen of Sheba was on her way to his palace to announce her conversion to Allah’s religion, Prophet

Sulaiman (Solomon) wanted her throne to be brought to him before she arrived, so he asked those in his assembly: '…Which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?' (*an-Naml:* 38) This means that there were various kinds of beings present in his assembly, and every one of these species possessed different powers. Carrying the throne from Yemen to the court of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) would require time and strength. Were they all equal in their powers, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* would not have said: '…Which of you can bring me…' (*an-Naml:* 38). The first to come forth and offer to carry out Prophet Sulaiman's order was not just any ordinary jinn, but a powerful and crafty one; some jinns are weak and dim-witted, while others are intelligent and skilful. They are all jinns; all belong to one kind, but they are different in powers. One of the jinns was the first to speak: "I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place' (*an-Naml:* 39). However, Sulaiman's assembly could go on for another hour or even several hours, for he was preoccupied throughout the day with resolving disputes and cases brought before him. The jinn who spoke these words knew that he had powers that surpassed those of human beings. As for any human beings who were present at Sulaiman's assembly, none of them spoke, for the task was beyond their means or capabilities. The jinn who spoke next was one who had knowledge of the Book. He said: '…I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye…' (*an-Naml:* 40). The task was accomplished instantly, and the Quran's depiction of the event is expressive of such extraordinary swiftness: 'When Sulaiman (Solomon) saw it set before him, he said, "This is a favour from my Lord…"' (*an-Naml:* 40).

Thus, jinns have the power to do certain things which human beings cannot.(1) This jinni did not owe his ability and agility to his constitution; rather, it was by the Creator's Will that he was able to perform such extraordinary things. To remind jinns that it is only by His Will that they possess such powers Allah *the Almighty* puts them at the service of human beings who have far less powers. This is why some people try to exploit the powers of jinns so as to gain power over their fellow human beings. However, Allah *the Almighty* has willed that those who engage in these types of activities must suffer from it.(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they followed what the *Shayateen* (devils) chanted of sorcery in the reign of Sulaiman, and Sulaiman was not a disbeliever, but the *Shayateen* disbelieved. They taught men sorcery and that was sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut, yet these two taught no man until they had said, "Surely, we are only a trial, therefore do not be a disbeliever"…’ (*al-Baqara:* 102). Thus, the jinns' teaching people about the ways of magic is a proof that their powers surpass the powers of human beings.

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(1) Jinns have powers far exceeding those of human beings since they are created from fire. However, humankind can be spiritually stronger if they follow the guidance of Allah and ponder the secrets of His Revelation. Two jinns that offered to bring the throne of the Queen of Sheba to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon), but the one who had knowledge of the Book was stronger and abler. Nevertheless, this pertains to spiritual power, but as to physical powers, humankind are created from clay, and clay is not like fire.

However, when the angels Harut and Marut(2) taught magic to human beings, they first warned them not to exploit their knowledge to oppress their fellow human beings and that it was all a test to them to be taught such powers. If you are knowledgeable in the ways of magic, you should use it in a defensive manner to protect yourself against harm, not in order to harm others. Furthermore, a human being is likely to be influenced by whims and desires; you might easily acquire the knowledge of magic, but will you prove yourself to be a responsible practitioner, or will you be tempted to use it to harm others?

Suppose that a person entrusted you with a thousand dollars. Will you honour your trusteeship? Or will you deny that person his right when he asks for his money back? Would you use this money if you were to go through some hard financial circumstances? This is why a wise person would refuse to be entrusted with money, fearing his whims and desires would make him betray a trust.

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(1) Allah says: ‘Men have sought refuge with the jinn in the past, but they only misguided them further’ (*al-Jinn:* 6). They only increased them in humiliation and weakness. Ibn Kathir said in his exegesis, ‘A man would set out with his family and settle in a valley. Then he would say, “I seek refuge with the jinn who rules this valley from harm or damage to myself, my money, my offspring and my cattle!”’

(2) Harut and Marut are two angels that were sent down to earth. It is said they were displeased with the way human beings passed Judgements on one another, so they ruled justly between people. They also taught human beings about the ways of magic. They vowed not to teach magic to anyone unless they proclaimed upfront: ‘… "Surely we are only a trial, therefore do not be a disbeliever."…’ (*al-Baqara:* 102).

It is no wonder one should fear being entrusted with something precious. The heavens and earth were afraid of bearing the trust, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We offered the Trust(1) to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it; mankind undertook it– they have always been inept and foolish.’ (*al-’Ahzab:* 72) When you deposit a trust with someone, the only guarantee is his honesty. It does not mean that you have to have witnesses or documents proving that you have entrusted that thing with him. The only guarantee is the word and honour of the trustee, so he may keep the trust until you restore it, or he may deny having been entrusted with it.

The heavens, the earth and the mountains said to Allah they are not up to such a responsibility; they did not wish to be given free will to obey or disobey Him and asked Him instead to make them submissive to Him without their choice in order to avoid such a heavy responsibility. Allah *the Exalted* has elevated and honoured mankind above all other created beings by virtue of their reason and their ability to make a choice when faced with different options. This is why they accepted to carry the trust. However, when the time came to show how far they would honour that trust, they found themselves less trustworthy than they had initially thought after having accepted the heavy responsibility.

Some perhaps learn magic with the intention of only repulsing any harm that might come their way. Let them think of this advice, though: you cannot guarantee that you will stick to your original intentions; as a human being, you are likely to be controlled by your whims and desires. Someone may enrage you, and you may well use your knowledge of magic to harm him, which means you will only bring suffering upon yourself in the first place.

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(1) Scholars have differed concerning the interpretation of *al-amanah* (the trust). However, the majority of scholars have agreed that it is worshipping Allah by the creatures’ free will. Ibn 'Abbas said, ‘It means worship; Allah has offered the trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they were afraid of bearing it, so Allah offered it to Adam; He said to him, ‘I have offered the trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they could not bear it, so will you accept to bear it?’ Adam replied, ‘What responsibility will it entail?’ Allah said, ‘If you do good, you will be rewarded and if you do wrong, you will be punished.’ Thus, Adam accepted to bear the trust. *[See: Exegesis of ibn Kathir, 3/522.]*

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…" Company of jinns! You have seduced a great many humans"…' (*al-An'am:* 128). The jinns have given to many a human being the weapon which they can use against their fellow humans. Allah *the Exalted* says about them: '…"Lord, we have profited from one another …"' (*al-An'am:* 128). Human beings profit from jinns by virtue of the power that they can gain over other human beings. Meanwhile, jinns profit from human beings by leading them astray, for this is the vow Satan has made: '…"I swear by Your Might! I will tempt all."' (*Sad:* 82)

In the end, however, this mutual profit does not really give either of the two parties any additional powers than those they already have. This is why you will find that all those who work in the domain of magic and the exploitation of jinns suffer from it. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Men have sought refuge with jinns in the past, but they only misguided them further.' (*al-Jinn:* 6)

Those who engage in the business of bewitchment and the calling forth of jinns can only make money by means of those who know nothing about magic. If knowledge of magic really gave a person special advantages or powers over other human beings, they would not resort to exploiting those who are ignorant of the ways of magic to make money. Rather, they would — by those special powers — find other resources to earn their livelihood. Moreover, they have to pay dearly for their works. If you ever see one of these people, you find his face dust-stained and his children blind, crippled or suffering from any given disability. This is due to such a person trying to gain an advantage over others through the services of jinns. However, with this advantage comes great suffering. Therefore, let every human being show respect for his Creator and content himself with the natural ability He has willed for him. Let no one try to unfairly gain an advantage over others and, in doing so, bring suffering upon him. Someone would hire a bully or a thug to strike terror in the hearts of others. They may gain a transient benefit from this bargain, but then the strong thug might turn against his master. Thus, every person must respect the powers with which Allah, the All-Powerful has endowed him. Otherwise, one will only bring suffering to himself, as Allah, says: '…adherents amongst mankind will say, "Lord, we have profited from one another, but now we have reached the appointed time you decreed for us." He will say, "Your home is the

Fire, and there you shall remain”–unless Allah wills otherwise. [Prophet], your Lord is All-Wise, All Knowing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 128)

Therefore, we see that the destiny of those who exploit the powers of jinns is Hellfire, and so is the destiny of the jinns who tempt human beings into sin. Another issue follows this, which Allah *the Exalted* mentions in the Quran: ‘on that Day, friends will become each other’s enemies ─ not so the righteous.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)

'Friends' mean people united by common bonds of affection and companionship and involved in the affairs of each other’s lives. Friends are two kinds, and one of these kinds is those who are bound to each other by their love for Allah. They go to the mosque together, remind one another of Allah, earn their living by lawful means, and recite the Quran, etc. If one of them commits a sin, he will find a friend who offers him sincere advice and assistance to repent to Allah *the Almighty*. They commit themselves to the tenets of Islam. In their relationship, they represent the description Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave in the Hadith, ‘Two persons who love each other out of their love for Allah, so they meet for His sake and depart for His sake…’(1) This is a type of friendship. The other type of friendship includes people who tempt one another into committing sinful acts. They would drink alcohol, engage in gambling, and transgress against Allah’s Law. When the Day of Judgment comes, they will be given their due recompense, for it will be ‘…a Day when there will be no bargaining and no friendship…’ (*al-Baqara:* 254). The only real friendship (or companionship) is the friendship that is based upon love for Allah *the Almighty* and devotion to Him. Such are the friends who will rejoice at each other’s company when they meet again in the Hereafter, for they used to help each other in doing the good and avoiding evil. As for those who used to get together in this world to commit sinful acts, each will curse the other. On the Day of Judgment, they will argue against each other as Allah *the Most High* foretells the situation in the Quran: '…the weak will say to the power-seekers, "We were your followers. Can you protect us from any of Allah's punishment?"…' (*Ibrahim:* 21). The other party will respond: '…"If Allah had guided us, we would have guided you. It makes no difference now whether we rage or endure with patience. There is no escape"…' (*Ibrahim:* 21). Then, Satan will make his confession, as Allah *Glorified is He* foretells in the Quran: 'When everything has been decided, Satan will say, "Allah gave you a true promise. I too made promises but they were false ones. I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me. Blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me …"' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘There are seven whom Allah will shade in His Shade on the Day when there is no shade except His Shade: a just ruler; a youth who grew up in the worship of Allah, a man whose heart is attached to the mosques, two people who love each other for Allah's sake, meeting for that and parting upon that; a man who is called by a woman of beauty and position (for illegal intercourse), but be says, 'I fear Allah', a man who gives money to charity and hides it, such that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives in charity; and a man who remembers Allah in private so his eyes shed tears.’*

This dialogue depicts the scene on the Day of Judgement. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Like Satan, who says to man, "Do not believe!", but when man disbelieves, says, "I disown you. I fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."' (*al-Hashr:* 16) All those are glimpses of the scenes of the Day of Judgment; they come to mind as we study the verse: 'So sufficient is Allah as a witness between us and you that we indeed knew nothing of your worship of us' (*Yunus:* 29). The idols, the angels, the Messengers, and every created being that was falsely worshipped will also speak and disown their worshippers. Thus will the idolaters be exposed and disgraced. Then, they will make their way to their final abode: Hellfire. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Gather together those who were unjust and their associates and what they used to worship.' (*as-Saffat:* 22) The Arabic word used in the original text of the verse and translated as 'associates' also literally means 'spouses'. This draws attention to the fact that spouses can be more dangerous to each other than enemies can be to each, and more influential in tempting one to do wrong. A husband or wife, being a constant companion, can truly drag one into sinning and cause him to stray from the Straight Path. (1) After ordering them to be gathered together, Allah *the Most High* will command: 'And halt them for questioning.' (*as-Saffat:* 24)

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(1) Allah says: 'Believers, even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies– beware of them…' (*at-Taghabun*: 14).

They were companions to each other in the life of this world — the world where one can choose because he has free will. However, on Judgment Day, they find themselves in the world of 'compulsion' where they no longer have the freedom of choice; this is why Allah *the Most High* says: ‘And halt them for questioning: “Why do you not support each other now?” No indeed! They will be in complete submission on that Day—and they will turn on one another accusingly. They will say, “You came to us from a position of power.”’ (*as-Saffat:* 24-28) In the life of this world, they had power by which they compelled the weak to follow them. That power is not necessarily one of coercion or subjugation; the verse refers to any kind of power, even if it is only the power of temptation. The disbelievers will thus be exposed, and it will be the first kind of torment they will have in the Hereafter. Their punishment will start with their disowning and cursing one another even though they were companions and friends in the life of this world. True are the Words of Allah: ‘On that Day, friends will become each other’s enemies — not so the righteous.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)(1)

This shows us the importance of choosing one’s friends well in the life of this world. One should not choose a friend who drags him into sinning. One should choose a friend who helps him commit himself to the Ordinance of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* describes one of the scenes of the Day of Judgment by saying: ‘The disbelievers will say, “Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misled us(2) and we shall trample them underfoot, so that they may be among the lowest of the low.”’ (*Fussilat:* 29) Such will be the state of those who strayed from the Straight Path; they will claim they were misled by others and will ask for permission to punish with their own hands those who led them astray! However, those they falsely held as deities — whether angels, Messengers, or even stone idols — will disown them as Allah foretells in the verse we are currently examining: ‘"So sufficient is Allah as a witness between us and you that we indeed knew nothing of your worship of us.”’ (*Yunus:* 29)

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘If two people love each other out of their love for Allah, one of whom is in the east and the other in the west, Allah will gather them together on the Day of /resurrection. He will say, “This is your brother you have loved for My sake.”’ [Cited by Ibn Kathir in his exegesis (4/134), narrated by Al-Hafez ibn ‘Asakir]*

(2) *‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him said that “those jinn and men who misled us” is meant to refer to Iblis (Satan) who was the first to disobey Allah and defy His order and Cane, the son of Adam who was the first to commit sin on earth. [Exegesis of Ibn Kathir (4/98)]*

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

هُنَالِكَ تَبْلُواْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّآ أَسْلَفَتْۚ وَرُدُّوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ مَوْلَىٰهُمُ
ٱلْحَقِّۖ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Every soul will realize(1), then and there, what it did in the past.
They will be returned to God, their rightful Lord, and their
invented [gods] will desert them [30] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 30)

The Arabic word *hunalik* (translated in this verse as 'then and there') is an adverb of time and place. Every action is associated with a particular time and place, yet sometimes this adverb is used to refer to place only or time only. We find it used in the story of Prophet Zachariah *peace be upon him*; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘*Hunalika* (at that time), Zakaryya (Zechariah) invoked his Lord…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 38). In this verse, it is used as an adverb of time. It refers to the time when Maryam (Mary) gave to her guardian, Prophet Zachariah, an answer to his question, which called his attention to a fundamental truth about faith. Allah *the Exalted* has willed that she would be the one to teach him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Whenever Zakaryya (Zechariah) visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37). Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* used to provide her with what she needed, but he was surprised when he found that she had provisions which he did not give here. This made him ask: ‘…“Maryam (Mary), how is it you have these provisions?”…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37).

This observation expressed Zachariah’s attentiveness as a guardian. His question to her was intended to get an explanation regarding the provisions she received from other than him. This attitude is quite essential for economic security of the whole society. When every guardian asks those under his charge, ‘Where did you such-and-such’, this would guarantee that no one would steal, embezzle or usurp the rights of others since he knows he will be questioned. This is sure to provide protection from corruption. Ponder the reply of Maryam when Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* asked her that question. She said: ‘... "It is from Allah. Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills”’(1) (*Al-‘Imran:* 37). Zakaryya (Zechariah) found with her fruits that were out of season, so his surprise stemmed from two reasons. First, he did not bring her these fruits, and second it was unusual that such fruits were available at that time. For instance, he perhaps found that she had grapes even though it was not the season for grapes, or he found that she had oranges (2) even though it was not the season for oranges. It was natural to any alert guardian to ask such a question to her under his charge, and her answer to him expressed a fundamental fact about faith: ‘"… Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37). In light of this fact, there is no room for logical calculations of human beings. However, was Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) heedless of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* showers His blessings on whomever He wills beyond all reckoning? The answer is that he was not heedless of this fundamental fact; it just was not at the focus of his thoughts at that particular moment, so the words of Maryam (Mary) served to remind him of that fact. Hence, he realised that his old age and infertility of his wife would not prevent their having a child since Allah *the Almighty* showers His blessings on whomever He wills beyond all reckoning. Allah *Glorified is He* describes the inner thoughts of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*: "at that time, Zakaryya (Zechariah) invoked his Lord' (*Al-'Imran:* 38). The adverb *hunalika* can also mean 'there and then'; it can be an adverb of time as well as place in this verse, too. The answer thus came to him from Allah *the Most High*: '…"It is easy for Me. I created you, though you were nothing before."' (*Maryam:* 9)

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(1) *The Arabic word used in the original text of the verse and rendered here as “realise” has been interpreted in many ways. Some say it means: to be recompensed for what it did in the life of this world. Others say it means: to know the truth of what they did, whether it was good or bad. Some say it means: each soul will follow their deeds, good or bad, until they reach their final abodes, and some interpreted it as: each will read their deeds from their records. [Exegesis of Al-Qurtubi (4/3261) and Ibn Kathir (2/416)]*

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(1) Some provisions are limited and some are limitless. The former is dependent on the diligence of each person. It is the provision Allah grants to His servant, out of His Justice, in proportion to his effort and struggle. As for the limitless provision, Allah grants it to those who give themselves over to Him, who act in light of the verse: ‘Say, “My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for Allah, Lord of all the Worlds”’ (*al-An‘am*: 162). Allah has provided limitlessly for Maryam (Mary), and such is a favour He bestows on whoever He chooses of His servants: ‘The life of this world is made to seem glamorous to the disbelievers, and they laugh at those who believe. But those who are mindful of Allah will be above them on the Day of Resurrection: Allah provides immeasurably for whoever He pleases’ (*al-Baqara*: 212). One of the eminent scholars said: Whoever follows a middle course with Allah will receive his reward in proportion to his deeds and whoever devotes himself completely to Him will be rewarded limitlessly for his devotion.

(2) *In their interpretation of the verse: ‘... Whenever Zakaryya (Zechariah) visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food…’ (Al-‘Imran: 37), Mujahid, ‘Ikrima and other exegetes have said it means he found her provided with summer fruits during winter and winter fruits during summer. That was evidence for the special bestowals Allah grants to His devout servants. [Exegesis of Ibn Kathir: 1/360]*

Allah *the Exalted* brings up this issue so as to prevent anyone from questioning the chastity of Maryam (Mary). She would be put to an exceptional situation, so Allah put the following words in her mouth: '…"…Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills."' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) His blessings are beyond all reckoning since they are independent of time, causes, and the knowledge of people. The wife of 'Imran realised this, so she prayed to Allah and He accepted her prayers: 'But when she gave birth, she said, "My Lord! I have given birth to a girl"– Allah knew best what she had given birth to. The male is not like the female ─I name her Maryam (Mary) and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan." Her Lord graciously accepted her, made her grow in goodness, and entrusted her to the charge of Zakaryya (Zechariah)...' (*Al-'Imran:* 36-37).

Hearing that fundamental fact from Maryam (Mary), Zakaryya (Zechariah) prayed to Allah to grant him a child despite all the logical causes that could prevent it. Later, Allah *the Almighty* proves further to Maryam (Mary) that He grants whatever He wills to whomever He wills, so He sends her the news that she would bear a child by the name of 'Isa, son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*. Allah *the Exalted* braced her for the exceptional event of her bearing a child without ever being touched by a man; she knew that the laws of biology were such that there could be no procreation without sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. However, it was Allah's Will that she had a child without going through this process. Allah *Glorified is He* made Maryam (Mary) herself herald the unexpected event by declaring this fundamental fact: '"… Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills."' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) When she wondered: '…"My Lord, how can I have a son when no man has touched me?"…' (*Al-'Imran:* 47) Allah *the Exalted* had already told her that the promised child would bear her name, so he would have no father since no man would touch her: 'The angels said, "Maryam (Mary), Allah gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, 'Isa, son of Maryam (Mary)…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 45). From this, He knew that her spiritual awareness would lead her to understand that the lineage of that child would be traced back through his mother and that there would be no father in his family lineage. This was meant to make her realise that her child would not be conceived as a result of marriage, either then or at some later times. The news of the child could have no explanation except that she had herself declared before: 'Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills' (*Al-'Imran:* 37).

In the verse we are currently reflecting on, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'every soul will realise, then and there, what it did in the past…' (*Yunus:* 30). On the Day of Judgment, every soul will be informed of what it has done and will see the outcomes of its deeds. The righteous and the sinful will be duly recompensed. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…They will be returned to Allah, their rightful Lord…' (*Yunus:* 30). The word 'return' denotes moving to a condition in which one had formerly been. Since disbelievers had in their lives sought lords other than Allah, on the Day of Judgment, they will be forced to return to their True Lord. The word 'return' means they belonged to Allah *the Most High* in the beginning, not to their false gods, and even though they strayed from Him, they still belong to Him in the end. Allah *Glorified is He* says about Prophet Musa (Moses): 'and thus we returned or restored him to his mother…' (*al-Qasas:* 13). It means that he was with his mother, then he left her, then he returned to her once again, so he belonged to her in the beginning and in the end. So, will disbelievers return to Allah on the Day of Judgment, as Allah says: 'They will be returned to Allah, their rightful Lord(1)…' (*Yunus:* 30).

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(1) Allah says in this verse: 'They will be returned to Allah, their rightful *Mawlahum*…' (*Yunus*: 30) He says in another verse: '… the disbelievers have no *mawla*' (*Muhammad:* 11). The Arabic word *mawla* has several correlated connotations. In the first verse, it means "Lord", the One Who provides for them, while in the second verse it means "protector", so Allah provides for those who disbelieve in Him, but He would not protect them. He is their *mawla* (Lord Who provides for them) but He would not be their *mawla* (Protector).

Every person is born with a sound disposition that is submissive solely to Allah. Then, his parents direct him towards becoming a Magian or an adherent of any other religion where associates are worshipped besides Allah.(1) When a person becomes an adherent of a polytheistic religion, he becomes at the service of a false god, a lord and a lawmaker other than the True God and Rightful Lord. 'Every soul will realise, then and there, what it did in the past…' (*Yunus:* 30). Every soul will see the outcomes of what it has done. Disbelievers will generally face the embarrassment of having worshipped false deities instead of Allah, and each will be exposed because of his own individual sins as well.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '…their invented [gods] will desert them.' (*Yunus:* 30) The false gods they worshipped will not know where they are, nor will they realise that they are in danger, so they will not save them from punishment. If these deities they were wont to worship instead of Allah true gods, they would know that their worshippers are in trouble and would save them. However, they were only a flagrant lie invented by the disbelievers, so '…their invented [gods] will desert them.' (*Yunus:* 30)

Thus, does Allah *the Exalted* foretell what will happen in the Afterlife? Having shed light on the severe punishment that is prepared for stubborn disbelievers in the Hereafter, there is hope that they, upon knowing this, might turn back to the Divine Way of Guidance. Furthermore, it is a warning intended to remind them of the absolute necessity of returning to the worship of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. After this, Allah *the Almighty* invites them to ponder the fact that will certainly re-establish faith in their hearts. He *the Most High* says:

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Every person is born with a disposition in which faith in Allah is naturally ingrained. Then his parents turn him into a Jew, Christian, or a Magian. This is like a livestock animal that is born perfectly sound; then, life would strike its body with imperfection.' Then he recited: "This is the natural disposition Allah instilled in mankind– there is no altering Allah's creation– and this is the right religion…" (ar-Rum: 30).' [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4775) and Muslim (2658)]*

قُلْ مَن يَرْزُقُكُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ أَمَّن يَمْلِكُ ٱلسَّمْعَ وَٱلْأَبْصَٰرَ وَمَن يُخْرِجُ ٱلْحَىَّ مِنَ
ٱلْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ ٱلْمَيِّتَ مِنَ ٱلْحَىِّ وَمَن يُدَبِّرُ ٱلْأَمْرَ ۚ فَسَيَقُولُونَ ٱللَّهُ ۚ فَقُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Who provides for you from the sky and the earth? Who controls hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living, and who governs every- thing?’ They are sure to say, ‘God.’ Then say, ‘So why do you not take heed of Him? [31] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 31)

Allah *the Exalted* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask disbelievers this question. Such a question can only be given by one who is confident that his addressee cannot possibly find any answer except the one the questioner already expects. Suppose someone was complaining that his father was neglectful of him, so you asked him, ‘Who has brought you these clothes? Who provides for you and educates you?’ The son would answer, ‘My father.’ You would only ask him that if you were certain that he would inevitably give the answer that you expected from him. If you knew he would give you a different answer, it would sound as if you were asking his opinion on the matter, not teaching him a lesson by eliciting the answer you wanted.

The verse begins with a command to Prophet Muhammad: ‘Say [Prophet]…’ (*Yunus:* 31). This is quite frequent in the Quran; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, "He is the One God”…’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). Suppose a father asked his son to deliver a certain message to his uncle. He would transmit the father’s message without prefixing it with the command, ‘Say’. However, when Allah addresses His creation, it is His Will that His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* should communicate this message to us just as it has been revealed to him. Thus, when Allah *the Exalted* sent him a verse beginning with: ‘Say…’, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was so honest and trustworthy that he communicated the message of Allah without ignoring or failing to deliver even a single word. Since the revelation came from Allah, His Messenger dutifully complied with His commands, so he would not withhold even a single word. He would not deprive the ears of Allah’s creation from a single word revealed by Him.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* commands to pose this question to disbelievers: ‘…“Who provides for you from the sky and the earth" (*Yunus:* 31). Provision is all that one derives benefit from. It consists of the basic necessities that sustain life as well as luxuries. Basic provision is mainly the rain that falls from the sky and the plants that grow because of it from the earth.(1) Therefore, Allah *the Most High* poses a question that already contains its own answer. He does not command Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to give them the right answer that they may know the truth. Rather, He allows them to answer the questions themselves.

Allah poses another question: '…Who controls hearing and sight?…' (*Yunus:* 31). The faculties of hearing and seeing are the two primary ways of perception. The process of keeping information(2) is performed through various ways. Smells are detected by the nose. Smoothness is felt by the skin. We use the tongue for tasting; we use it for speaking too, along with the other organs of speech. Sounds are caught by the ears. The world becomes visible thanks to the eyes. All these senses, together with others, make up one's perception. Chief among these is the intellectual faculty. A little child may see fire as a beautiful and eye-catching spectacle. However, as soon he tries to touch it, it burns him, so he learns to never touch fire again. After experiencing the power of the fire with his senses, the fire's capacity to burn was saved in his mind and became firmly rooted in it. This is how our various senses work. They form the concrete basis for perception and the basis on which the intellectual faculties grasp abstract notions. Thus, the instruments of knowledge for living beings consist of the senses, and these senses provide the mind with information which becomes implanted in it. This information becomes so firmly settled in the consciousness so they turn into beliefs. Therefore, the different stages of perception are the following: recognition through the senses, intellectual analysis and reflection, which all lead to the crystallisation of beliefs.

Allah *the Almighty* describes to us the stages where perception takes place in the human soul so that a human being can gradually acquire knowledge;

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(1) This is the provision Allah Almighty mentions in His words: 'Let man consider the food he eats! We pour down abundant water and cause the soil to split open. We make grain grow, and vines, fresh vegetation, olive trees, date palms, luscious gardens, fruits, and fodder: all for you and your livestock to enjoy' (*'Abasa*: 24-32).

(2) Perception leads to realization on which basis one makes his choices. One's choices direct his thoughts and reflections, and sound reflections must lead to Allah, the Creator of all things.

He says: ‘And Allah has brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing–but He has endowed you with hearing, sight and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78) A newborn has not yet been given the power to utilise his senses. Soon, however, Allah bestows upon him the ability to use the senses for perception.

In the verse we are examining, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions only the primary senses: hearing and sight. Our perception of the world and reception of Allah’s Guidance depend mainly on these two faculties. They are the most important when it comes to conveying the Divine Message, for it is through the eyes that we behold the signs of creation and miracles of the Prophets, and it is through hearing that we receive the Ordinance of Allah as conveyed by His Messengers. ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* directed our attention to these wonders when he said, ‘How full of wonders the creation of the human being is! He sees with a bulk of fat, speaks with a piece of flesh, hears through a bone, and breathes through a hole.’(1) Sound waves strike the ear bone, causing it to vibrate. We see through the fatty membranes of the eye, and we utter words using the tongue. Some have also added, ‘He smells through a cartilage, feels by means of the skin and thinks with dough-like material.’ When a human being is born, his brain is like a piece of dough used for soaking up and storing information from the surrounding environment. Such information later serves as the basis for feelings and spirituality.

When modern science speaks about the functions of the senses, it gives a summary definition of the five major ones. This means that there are other senses which have yet to be discovered. There is, for example, the faculty we use to distinguish the thickness of a material by placing it between two fingers. There is also the faculty that enables us to distinguish between different weights; thanks to this faculty, we can recognise the amount of effort it takes for us to lift one object compared to that it takes to lift another.

It is established that when things supposed to be similar are made different, there must be a reason for their difference. Both hearing and eyesight are senses used for perception. In the verse, the Arabic word used for the former (*sam’* meaning 'hearing') is in the singular form, whereas that used for the latter (*absar* meaning 'eyesight) is in the plural. Why is that? Why does Allah *the Almighty* not mention the two senses in the singular form? Every word of Allah is put right in place; every word is chosen for a purpose and cannot be replaced by another. The ears capture all the surrounding sounds even though they originate from various sources. As for the eyes, they focus on one single direction at a time. If you want to see what the view is like on your right side, you shift your eyes to the right, and if you want to see what is behind you, you change your position. The ears, unlike the eyes, capture sounds from all directions without requiring you to consciously direct it to do that. Also, when it comes to the sense of hearing, you do not have a choice; you cannot prevent your ears from hearing something. As for the sense of sight, you have more control over it because either you can look in a different direction or you can close your eyes to stop seeing something. Allah *the Exalted* mentions the sense of hearing first since it is the first means of perception that starts functioning after birth. As for the eyes, it takes three to ten days after birth before they are able to function.

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(1) *Cited by Ash-Sharif Ar-Radi in his book Nahj Al-Balaghah (4/4), Al-A‘lami Publications, Beirut*

So, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Who controls hearing and sight?…' (*Yunus:* 31). Allah is the One Who possesses both blessings. He is their Creator. He is Capable of preserving them for us just as He is also Capable of causing them to stop. Allah *the Almighty* gives us an example of this in the Quran when He says about the people of the cave: 'We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years' (*al-Kahf:* 11). He suspended their sense of hearing when he sealed their ears, so they fell into a deep sleep that lasted three centuries and nine years. How did this happen? Under normal conditions, a human being can sleep a day and night together. This is why when Allah *the Exalted* brought them back from sleep, they asked one another: '…One of them asked, "How long have you remained thus?" [The others] answered, "We have remained thus a day, or part of a day."' (*al-Kahf:* 19) However, their physical appearance clearly told otherwise: their hair had grown extremely long, and its black colour had changed into pale grey. They looked much too old that Allah *the Most High* says about their description: '…If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away, filled with fear of them' (*al-Kahf:* 18).

It is worth noting that Allah says in the verse we are examining: '…Who controls hearing and sight?' (*Yunus:* 31) In another verse from the chapter of *as-Sajda,* He *the Most High* says: '…He endows you with hearing and sight....' (*as-Sajda:* 9) There is a difference between 'creating', 'endowing' and 'controlling'. We know what the act of creating means, and we believe Allah possesses everything. This is a fundamental fact of faith. As for the act of endowing, it consists of making that which has been created perform its proper function. We, humans, create things and make them function, like creating pots from clay or clothes from cloth. Allah's creation is different, for it is He Who creates the matter then from it creates all things. So, He is the One Who creates, possesses, and endows us with blessings. Reflecting upon another verse, Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to this fact. All the things that are useful to Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny have been created by Him and are possessed by Him, and He is the One who grants them to us. Consider the human body and all its faculties, including hearing and sight. We are endowed with these faculties so we may benefit from them. Still, Allah is the One Who possesses these faculties; He can preserve them in their proper state, take them away, or cause them to stop functioning as a result of illness or the like. (1) He manages them however He wills: the beating of the heart, the feelings of love or hate and all of the unconscious biological functions performed for our benefit—all of these fall within Allah's Dominion. For example, Allah *the Exalted* has given every animal a skin which we can tan and make into leather. Only the skins of two kinds are exempted from this: the skins of human beings and the skins of pigs. It is forbidden to use the skin of a human being because of the dignity Allah *the Exalted* has bestowed upon us, and we are also forbidden from using the skins of pigs due to their impurity.

So, Allah is the Creator, Controller, and Giver of all things. He has granted us life and He is the One Who possesses and governs it. This is why whoever commits suicide is barred from Paradise.(1) Only the Giver of life can take it away. We, human beings, are not owners of our lives. There is no excuse for anyone who receives this message. Whoever receives it and does not ponder it will meet Allah one day and will have to bear their destiny. It is He Who has bestowed blessings on His creatures, and it is He Who owns all things.

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(1) Allah says: 'The lightning almost snatches away their sight: whenever it flashes on them they walk on and when darkness falls around them they stand still. If Allah so willed, He could take away their hearing and sight: Allah has power over everything' (*al-Baqara*: 20).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Who brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living…' (*Yunus:* 31). We know that every being in existence has a life that suits it, for Allah *the Most High* says: '…Everything is bound to perish save His [eternal] self…' (*al-Qasas:* 88). Since there will come a time when everything perishes, this means that everything has a life. Human life seems to consist of perception and movement. A human being consumes vegetables, bread, fruits, and other nutrients. Both the male and female receive the same food, yet the male body produces sperm, whereas the female body produces ova, and the combination of these two produces a new human being. Similarly, chicks hatch from fertilised eggs; an unfertilised egg will not produce a chick, for it is lifeless, and no embryo can be formed in it. There is a difference between the potential for life and life itself. A date pit has to be planted in the soil, and the right conditions have to be present, so it may grow into a date palm.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and who governs everything?...' (*Yunus:* 31) 'Governing' means correct management. It is putting things in place so they would properly perform their functions. Now think about who manages the beating of your heart? Who manages the movement of your bowels? Who orders your body to extract and absorb useful nutrients and discard wastes? No one would dare claim that he manages his heartbeats or breathing mechanism. It is the Creator Who does. Therefore, do not be concerned about those bodily functions which you do not consciously control, for He who has created them in you is Ever Watchful over them. No slumber or sleep overtakes Him, nor does He ever fail to manage all that.

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever kills himself with an iron tool will have it in his hand and will stab his belly with it in Hellfire, there to continue in that state eternally. Whoever kills himself with poison will keep taking in that poison in Hellfire, there to continue in that state eternally. Whoever kills himself by falling off a mountain will keep falling in the depths of Hellfire, there to continue in that state eternally.' [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5778) and Muslim (109); this is Muslim's version.]*

Allah *the Almighty* has commanded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pose these questions, and yet He knows they would have no answer that He has not already specified and foretold: '…They are sure to say, "Allah."…' (*Yunus:* 31) Thus, should we not then use our ears and an eye to contemplate the Power of Allah, the One Who has bestowed upon all of us these blessings out of His Bounty? Should we not ponder the signs of His creation, from the sense of hearing to the sense of sight, from the giving of life, to the causing of death and resurrection from it, along with the managing of everything? Should we not then expect that the One Who has created us wants us to perform a certain mission to make the universe prosperous? Allah is our Creator, so He has sent down to us His guidance and ordinance. How then can some people turn to worship other deities besides Allah, the sun, the moon, angels, Prophets, or idols? How can this be even though worship means obeying Divine Ordinance? Can there really be a deity with no doctrine to reveal to worshippers? Likewise, have the sun worshippers ever received commands from the sun? No, they have not! Does it give any advantages or rewards to its worshippers? No, it is the same for those who worship false deities and those who do not. This is enough to invalidate any false deity worshipped instead of Allah. This is why Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse by saying: '…So why do you not take heed of Him?' (*Yunus:* 31) Since Allah is the Creator of all things and He has revealed His religion to be acted upon, should we not be mindful of Him? Should we not seek to avoid the manifestations of His Attributes of Majesty and hope for the manifestations of His Attributes of Beauty?(1) You must heed the message of the Messengers *peace be upon them* and abide by the commands of the One who has sent them.

Since every human being who is given the questions posed in this verse must certainly acknowledge that the answer points to Allah, then let everyone obey the Creator and seek protection from His punishment. What is strange is that everyone admits that Allah is the Creator; He *the Most High* says: ‘If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, “Allah”…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). He also says: ‘If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, “Allah”…’ (*Luqman:* 25). So long as it is Allah Who has created all things, bestows His blessings on all creatures, and governs all existence, how then can you turn your backs on Him and worship anything else?

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(1) Allah has Attributes of Beauty manifested in His Mercy and Forgiveness and the Good Pleasure He bestows on His servants. As for the Attributes of Majesty, they manifest themselves in His Power over all things, His Might, Control, and Loftiness. One should obey Allah to attain the effects of His Attributes of Beauty and avoid those of His Attributes of Majesty so Allah may make him of His devout servants.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

فَذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّكُمُ ٱلْحَقُّ فَمَاذَا بَعْدَ ٱلْحَقِّ إِلَّا ٱلضَّلَٰلُ فَأَنَّىٰ تُصْرَفُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

That is God, your Lord, the Truth. Apart from the Truth,
what is there except error? So how is it that you are
dissuaded?’(1) [32] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 32)

'That is Allah' is a reference to what has previously been mentioned, His control of hearing and sight, His Power to breathe life into that which is dead and take away life from that which is living, along with the management and organisation of everything in the universe.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘That is Allah, your Lord, the Truth…’ (*Yunus:* 32). The truth always has one side. The truth is one and unequivocal.(2) Falsehoods are many, and anything but the truth is falsehood. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…Apart from the Truth, what is there except error?…’ (*Yunus:* 32). Thus, whoever ascribes divinity to other than Allah has abandoned the Truth. It means he is in error. The Arabic word *dalal* used in the original text of the verse denotes 'error', 'misguidance' or 'delusion'. It means taking the wrong way that, therefore, does not lead to the goal. Whoever takes other than the Way of Allah has therefore strayed into error. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse with emphasis that the only two options before a person are ‘Truth’ and ‘error’. He says: ‘…So how is it that you are dissuaded?’ (*Yunus:* 32) Allah is One, Eternal and Unchanging. Those who worship angels, planets, stars, Messengers or idols are led by their whims and desires into error.

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(1) *It means: how is it that your minds are dissuaded from the One Who provides for all creatures and who causes life and death and worship instead of Him false deities who have no power over anything? [Exegesis of al-Qurtubi 4/3267]*

(2) The Truth is one, not from the perspective of human intellect, but due to the nature of truth. The truth is constant and unchanging. The truth about everything is unequivocal despite the attempts of orators or those who believe falsehood to be truth and truth to be falsehood. Truth is not subject to the peculiarities of human intellect that seek to contradict the truth and propagate falsehoods.

Let us recite and ponder the following Words of Allah:

كَذَٰلِكَ حَقَّتۡ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ فَسَقُوٓاْ أَنَّهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

In this way, your Lord’s word about those who defy
[the Truth] has been proved – they do not believe [33]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 33)

This verse, like the previous one, deals with the concept of the Oneness of Allah. Disbelievers have misunderstood this concept and fallen into error. They deserve punishment, for they ascribe divinity to a false deity. This speech was addressed to the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, some of those contemporaries embraced faith in Allah, so the suffering is reserved only for those who rejected faith. These words are addressed to those whom Allah has already known will not attain to faith. It is also addressed to those who are wont to sin and who will never repent from their disbelief and insistence on straying from the Truth by worshipping deities other than Allah *the Exalted and Almighty*. Allah’s Omnipotent Knowledge encompasses all things; Allah already knows who will believe in Him and who will not: ‘as for those who disbelieve, it makes no difference whether you warn them or not. They will not believe’ (*al-Baqara:* 6).(1) Allah knows who will believe, who will disbelieve and who will persist in disbelief.

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(1) The verse alludes to hypocrites, and these live among two communities: the community of the believers about whom Allah says: ‘Such people are following their Lord’s guidance and it is they who will prosper’ (*al-Baqara*: 5). The other community is that of the disbelievers about whom Allah says: ‘But the deeds of those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a desert: the thirsty person thinks there will be water but, when he gets there, he finds only Allah, who pays him his account in full–Allah is swift in reckoning’ (*an-Nur*:39). Hypocrites are more dangerous than disbelievers. The latter is a well-known enemy, but the former deceives the believers into thinking they belong to them.

The latter will be punished; Allah *the Exalted* has already known, with His Omnipotent Knowledge, that even if they were given a second chance, they would not embrace faith.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* mentions a point one can use to debate disbelievers based on their own logical premises. Inside every disbelieving soul, there exists a primordial disposition for doing the good and calling others to it. This tendency exists even among disbelieving nations; every nation seeks to do good in different ways depending on their ethics and principles. People of different ranks, judges, doctors or scientists, would encourage others to do what they believe to be good deeds. A child acquires his beliefs, habits, and attitudes from his parents; his background is formed by their education. He would get away from fire or electricity since the directions given to him regarding their dangers become firmly ingrained in his psyche. Through the instructions of others, he learns how to deal with such hazardous elements such that no harm would touch him. A stranger would find someone to guide him to a destination he is seeking and the one-way and two-way roads; he would find someone to caution him against the dangerous bends on the road. A volunteer would organise traffic near schools and encourage people to slow their cars down for children. Such people are not necessarily believers. They do not do that for the sake of Allah, but the tendency to do good is a natural instinct all people are created with. If one human being is keen to direct another towards doing good, is not Allah ever Keener on guiding His servants to what is right? It is He Who has created human beings, and it is He Who has created everything that sustains them on this earth. This is why He *the Most High* says:

قُلْ هَلْ مِن شُرَكَآئِكُم مَّن يَبْدَؤُا۟ ٱلْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُۥ ۚ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ
يَبْدَؤُا۟ ٱلْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُۥ ۖ فَأَنَّىٰ تُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

**Ask them, ‘Can any of your partner-gods originate creation,
then bring it back to life again in the end?’ Say, ‘It is God
that originates creation, and then brings it back to life, so
how can you be misled?’ [34] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 34)**

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* asks Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them, ‘Can any of your partner-gods (Allah's so-called partners) originate creation, then bring it back to life again?’ (*Yunus:* 34) Posing this question to them means that its answer is inevitably in accordance with Allah's Will. If someone says, ‘How can Allah *Glorified is He* trust them to deliver the proper answer? Is it not possible that they might attribute all of these actions to a deity other than Him?’ We reply that the question posed to them is asked only when the questioner knows that there can be only one valid answer; thus, the questioned will only be able to answer by saying, ‘Verily the One Who does all of this is Allah *Glorified is He*.’ He will not be able to say, ‘Verily, it is the idols who do all of this’ since they know that they made the idols with their own hands and that these idols have no power to perform such actions. Thus, the answer is already known beforehand: verily, Allah *the Almighty* solely is capable of these things; and this demonstrates that falsehood is a mere cacophony of clashing voices and that the truth is pure light. In fact, the truth will always have the power to expose and undermine falsehood. Therefore, once you utter a word of truth regarding a matter, you we will find that the truth successfully undermined the argument of the one who is in error. The latter will need a long time to come up with a response to what you said; he will even be dazed and surprised, and his argument will be undercut. This is why Allah *the Exalted* does not say what He previously said: '… they are sure to say, "Allah."...' (*Yunus:* 31) Rather, He says: '...Say, "It is Allah Who originates creation, and then brings it back to life ..."' (*Yunus:* 34). So, He expresses the answer in this way because when they had been asked this question, they were dazzled by the truth which left them speechless; they stood incapable of saying anything whatsoever. An example of this—and to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the finest of examples—is when we find a prosecutor tightening the noose around the neck of the accused by asking him a variety of questions; then, at one point, he asks him a question that is so precise that the accused becomes astounded, for there is only one possible answer to that question, which he cannot refuse to answer. Thereby, the accused answers the question and admits his guilt.

Now man—as a being created by Allah *Glorified is He*—has in front of him the possibility of either being a believer or being a disbeliever; at this point, it is man’s free will which involves. As for the rest of his organs, they believe in, worship, and praise Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, the tongue, for instance, which might utter a blasphemy, in reality, believes in, exalts, praises, and thanks Allah *Glorified is He*. However, it is man’s free will which—by Allah's leave—is unique among the human faculties in that it can choose disbelief; so the tongue—Allah forbid—utters the words of disbelief. Similarly, a person’s hand will comply with his orders to steal, or a person’s feet will comply with his orders to go to the place where alcohol is consumed. However, are these faculties pleased with such actions? No, they are not pleased, but they are subject to the will of a human being.

Also, when the question is asked, 'Who originates creation and then brings it back to life?' The tongue, by virtue of the pure condition in which it was first created, wants to speak, but it does not have the ‘will’ to do so. Thus, Allah *the Most High* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to answer on behalf of the ‘believing’ faculties. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Say [Prophet], "It is Allah Who originates creation, and then brings it back to life..."’ (*Yunus:* 34). The formulation hereby emphasises this fact, and it suffices that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys this statement on behalf of his Lord. This speech earns the honour of whom it comes from.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Say, "It is Allah Who originates creation, and then brings it back to life, so how can you be misled?"’ (*Yunus:* 34) Now the word *al-Ifk* refers to the intentional lying and deliberate defamation. There is a difference between intentional lying and unintentional lying. Unintentional lying is when a person transmits a statement he heard to the best of his knowledge and according to the way he understood and believed it. This is a kind of lying since it does not concur with the truth, but a person will immediately retract his statement if he knows the truth. As for *al-Iftira',* it refers to the intentional lying, which means a person is aware of the truth, but he still distorts it. For this reason, some religious scholars have differed regarding this issue. Some have said that there is such a thing as honesty, and there is such a thing as lying. However, other religious scholars have said that there is a grey area between honesty and lying. Take the example of a son rushing to his father, after he had heard from some people that a fire broke out in the house of so-and-so. The son tells his father, ‘There is a fire in the house of so-and-so’, and so the father goes to assess the situation. If he discovers that there is indeed a fire, then his son is saying the truth, but if there is no fire, then the news about the fire is false. However, a reporter only transmitted what he had heard from others. Thus, there is a difference between the verity of the report and the truthfulness of a reporter. Sometimes the report is true, and the reporter is truthful. Sometimes the news is true, but the reporter is untruthful. Furthermore, sometimes the reporter is truthful, but the report is not. There are thus four possibilities. Those who say that there are different degrees between truth and lying hold that truth requires that reality conforms to the report. As for lying, it occurs when reality does not concur with the report. Thus, we must differentiate between the truthfulness of the report itself and the truthfulness of a reporter; for a reporter reports what he knows to the best of his knowledge. As for the truthfulness of a report, this occurs when the content of the report conforms to the reality of the situation. So when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... so how can you be misled?' (*Yunus:* 34), this means, in essence, how can you distort and reverse the truth, or you are well aware of the truth yet you intentionally distort it. We all know the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'It is He Who brought down the ruined cities (*Al-Mu'tafikah*)' (*an-Najm:* 53). The name *al-Mu'tafikah* refers to those cities that were upturned so violently that their tops became their bottoms. Similarly, the liar 'upturns' and distorts the truth.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ هَلْ مِن شُرَكَآئِكُم مَّن يَهْدِىٓ إِلَى ٱلْحَقِّ ۚ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يَهْدِى لِلْحَقِّ ۗ أَفَمَن يَهْدِىٓ إِلَى
ٱلْحَقِّ أَحَقُّ أَن يُتَّبَعَ أَمَّن لَّا يَهِدِّىٓ إِلَّآ أَن يُهْدَىٰ ۖ فَمَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Say, 'Can any of your partner-gods show the way to the Truth?' Say, 'God shows the way to the Truth. Is someone who shows the way to the Truth more worthy to be followed, or someone who cannot find the way unless he himself is shown? What is the matter with you? How do you judge?' [35] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 35)

This is command for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them yet a new question that has an answer dictated by reality which emphasises that guidance can lead only to the truth, as every being is created for a purpose, and nothing is created in vain.

With our own limited capabilities we are able to invent a microphone, the television, and a refrigerator, along with making beds and so forth; all of these have a purpose, and each of them has its own specific procedures for maintenance. The creator is the one who determines what the purpose of this and that. He sets up the procedural steps for maintaining an object so that it might continue to perform its function. Thus, the purpose of an object exists before the existence of the object itself; so it comes into existence according to its purpose that was determined beforehand.

The spiritual disease that afflicts the world today is that people know that Allah *the Almighty* has created them, but they come up with their own laws for regulating the life of human beings. This is a testament to the stupidity and the ignorance of those who do such things. They should have left the question of regulating the life of human beings to the laws that were established by the Creator of them.

For Allah *the Exalted* has determined the purpose of creating human beings, and He has laid down laws for the regulation of their lives. The evil that exists today is the result of an ignorance of what the ultimate purpose of human beings is. It is also the result of straying away from the Way of Allah, which human beings must follow. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, "Can any of your partner-gods (Allah's so-called partners) show the way to the truth?’ (*Yunus:* 35)

In other words: do any of these ‘partner-gods’ guide man to his purpose? Has the sun, for instance, ever stated such a purpose? Have the angels ever stated such a purpose? Have the trees or the stones or the Messengers—which they have worshipped—stated anything that is contrary to the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*? These are false deities that know neither the ultimate purpose of their worshippers nor how to guide them to the path leading to that purpose. This is why the decisive statement is made: ‘Say, "Allah shows the way to the truth."’ (*Yunus:* 35)

Allah *the Almighty* has guided you, O, man, to the truth in your every movement, as long as this movement is in harmony with the Doctrine which Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed completely to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the prime testimony that ‘There is no god but Allah’ down to the instruction of removing harmful objects from a way; this comprehensive Doctrine encompasses every aspect of man’s life. The answer to the question is provided by Allah *the Almighty* Who puts the words in the mouth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for they stood dazzled by the question and, in their stuttering, no one among them could offer a counterargument. The purpose of the creation of man and other created beings is summarised in Allah's Words: ‘I have created jinns and mankind only to worship Me.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56)

Now worship is not restricted merely to the five pillars of Islam; rather, it includes building the universe as the living structure of Islam. The One Who has determined purpose of the creation is the Creator *Glorified is He* and it is He Who has determined the path to reach it. When we want to reach a destination in the desert, for example, we first have to determine the location of our destination, and then we choose the best route to reach it. So, if the straight path to our destination is filled with obstacles and mountains, then we will be forced to deviate from this route in order to reach our destination. Thus, this curved route is the straight path because it helps us avoid all of the obstacles. For example, the rain that falls on the hills of Ethiopia, these have chosen for themselves the easiest possible course, and the result was the Nile River. Unlike the sewers or the Suez Canal, the Nile River is no work of man. Rather, it is the result of large quantities of water falling as rain and then choosing the easiest possible course—and this caused the river to flow between the obstacles, sand dunes and boulders. This is why we find that anything in which man is not involved might turn and swerve so as to find a way out. However, human-made objects cannot do this.

Therefore, every created being must have a purpose, which is why we find our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* saying: ‘It is He Who has created me. It is He Who guides me.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 78) Thus, the One Who creates determines the purpose because He knows it before He sets out to create. There is a remarkable precision in the words which the Quran quotes our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as saying, for he does not say, 'The One created me will guide me.' Rather, he says: ‘It is He Who has created me. It is He Who guides me.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 78) Thus, this is an indication that this issue will be contested, and after the creation of man, some human beings will come forth and, in order to protect their own interests, will establish another path which will completely contradict the original purpose; it is this path that leads to error.

As for Allah *the Almighty* He has revealed the Quran wherein is the true guidance, for the Creator is the One Who codifies and sets down laws. This is why the Quran mentions and quotes our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as saying: ‘He Who gives me food and drink.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 79) These words of our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* show that he had reached the realisation that the One Who bestows sustenance upon parents and has the Power to bestow sustenance—including food and drink— is Allah *Glorified is He*. The Quran also quotes our master Ibrahim *peace be upon him* as saying: ‘He Who will make me die and then give me life again.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 81). Thus, the power to bring about death and the power to bring about life both pertain to Allah *the Exalted*; so no one should question about the One Who owns the power to bring about death and life. As for the curing of the sick, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* says: ‘He Who cures me when I am ill.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 80). Thus, you might go to a doctor thinking that it is he who has the power to heal you; in fact, the doctor can only treat the symptoms, for it is Allah *the Almighty* Who truly has the Power to heal.

Thus, we realise that the words of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘It is He Who has created me. It is He Who guides me’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78) are quite logical since the creator of something is the one who guides it to its ultimate purpose. Thus, the purpose of something always precedes its actual creation; then, the thing is shown the way that leads it to its purpose. Thus, if it is caused to deviate from that way that leads to its purpose, then there is no good in that thing whatsoever. In the Quran, you find our master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* quoted as saying: ‘He replied, "Our Lord is He Who has given everything its form, then has given it guidance."’ (*Ta Ha:* 50)

As long as it is Allah *the Exalted* Who creates, then it is He Who guides His creation along the path that leads to their ultimate purpose; the Quran also says: ‘[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*, Who has created [all things] in due proportion, Who determined their destinies and guided them.' (*al-A'la:* 1-3) Thus, it becomes clear to us that so long as there is a purpose, and there must exist a path that leads us to it, and our Creator must indeed lead us along that path. Likewise, in the verse that we are currently reflecting on, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Allah shows the way to the truth."' (*Yunus:* 35) since it is He Who has created. Therefore, it makes sense that the following question arises: 'Is someone who shows the way to the truth more worthy to be followed, or someone who cannot find the way unless he himself is shown?' (*Yunus:* 35) The reason why there is the letter *lam* (to) in Allah's Words: '... shows the way to the truth...' (*Yunus:* 35) is due to it being a case of looking 'toward' the true purpose. Furthermore, the reason why there is the letter *'Ila* in His Words: '... to the Truth...' (*Yunus:* 35) is to attract our attention to the fact that reaching this purpose requires the existence of a path; thus, Allah *the Most High* wants to combine the two meanings in a single verse.

Now we know that this verse was revealed regarding those who set up associates with Allah *Glorified is He* for they actually admit His Existence, but they associate false deities with Him. Allah *the Almighty* has singled Himself out in His Divinity because of His Lordship over the created cosmos, for He has created out of nothing, and He has bestowed sustenance where there was naught. Also, He has created for us the means of acquiring knowledge and has managed all things in the universe for us; He has brought out the living from the dead, and the dead from the living. Furthermore, He has guided all to the truth. Where, then, are these associates which they had set up with Him? Have any one of these false deities—or even all of them combined—ever created a single one of these aforementioned things? This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Can any of your partner-gods (Allah's so-called partners) show the way to the truth?"' (*Yunus:* 35) Thus, the One Who guides is the same One Who has created, and those who set up false associates have admitted that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator in their testament, as when He says: 'If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, "Allah."' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) Thus, those who set up false associates with Allah *the Almighty* have committed the gravest of sins; these false associates consist of either the angels or the Prophets and the Messengers who were wrongfully idolised by certain people. In addition, there are some who adopted other intermediaries from the ‘higher’ beings such as the sun, the moon and the stars, and some people have taken up other ‘lower’ intermediaries such as trees or stones. Do any of these false deities lead to the truth? Also, what is the doctrine that they set forth, and how have these false deities communicated this ‘doctrine’ to you? All of these people realise that none of these false deities have the power to guide to the truth; rather, they themselves are guided by Allah *Glorified is He*; so from whence did you get the idea that the angels will guide you? Also, how could some people have idolised their Messenger and mistook him for a deity? From whence did this Messenger derive his doctrine in the first place? There is no created being that can guide to the truth unless Allah *Glorified is He* guides it before that to the truth. Likewise, if these things—which are set up as associates—have no power to guide, no doctrine to offer, no mind, no reason (like the sun, the moon and other ‘high’ elements, and also like trees and stones when it comes to the ‘lower’ elements), then what have these things said? Indeed, these things did not utter a single word. Thus, your act of setting up associates with Allah *the Exalted*—even if these associates be angels—can never be right. Verily, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who chooses which of the angels will convey His Message on His behalf. Also, it is He Who selects the Messengers *peace be upon them*: ‘Is someone who shows the way to the truth more worthy to be followed, or someone who cannot find the way (*Yahedi*) unless he himself is shown?’ (*Yunus:* 35) The words *Yahedi* (find the way) is pronounced in this way instead of *Yahtadi* as there is a ‘softening’ of certain words in the Arabic language so as to produce a more correct, pleasant sounding effect. Now we know that the word *Yahdi* means: ‘to find the way’, and its root is *Yahtadi*. However, the word *Yahtadi* includes the letters *h, t, d* and *i*; and the closeness between the areas where these sounds are produced causes the meaning to become clouded and the pronunciation to become heavy; so, the Arabic language proceeds to switch around certain letters and assimilate others. Thus, the effect is that it reaches our ears in the way that Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed it—easy to pronounce and beautiful in meaning, for the Quran which is the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* coming down from heaven, had the effect of taming the

Arabic language such that its sound and its meaning have become 'eternalised'. Thus, if you are on the path of guidance, then know that the guidance comes from Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the noble verse by saying: 'What is the matter with you? How do you judge?' (*Yunus:* 35) What this means is what has tampered with your minds such that you have arrived at such conclusion: that you take up associates who can offer no doctrine nor offer a doctrine they bring it forth on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He*. Whenever you hear the word *kayf* (how), know that its purpose is to find an explanation for a strange act which—in the mind of the sane—should never have happened. It is as if you say, 'How could you strike your father?' or 'How could you curse your mother?' These are matters which our primordial nature instinctively shuns and our temperament and our religion abhor. Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... How do you judge?' (*Yunus:* 35), it is as if He is saying that this is a strange and abnormal act which should never have happened, for Allah *Glorified is He* Alone is God; He is unchangeable and His purpose and path never change. It is He Alone Who has determined our purpose and the path leading to this purpose. He says: 'But Allah invites [everyone] to the Home of Peace...' (*Yunus:* 25).

The Doctrine of Allah *Glorified is He* is the path that leads away from the ever-changing flux of the life of this world to the Home of Peace, for the whole world consists of nothing but a process of change. One day you might have strength, and the next day you might become weak; one day you might be in good health, and the next day you become sick; you might be rich, and then become poor; you might enjoy the power of sight today and lose it tomorrow, or you might have an excellent ear now but turn deaf later. Thus, it is a world that is ever changing. Suppose that a person enjoyed all of the blessings of the worldly life including good health, safety, security, wealth, etc., we will find that he carries a sense of anxiety, and the source of this is two-fold: the first source of his anxiety is his fear of losing of these worldly blessings, while the other source is his fear that he will die and leave these blessings behind; this is what we witness in our lives. Thus, because of the ever-changing nature of the worldly life, no real security can be found therein. For this reason, we should understand that all of the gifts with which a created being is blessed are but blessings bestowed from the Creator *Glorified is He*. Were these gifts ‘innate’, you would be able to hold to them. However, the truth is that they are gifts from Allah *the Almighty* and every gift that is bestowed can be taken back.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ أَكۡثَرُهُمۡ إِلَّا ظَنًّاۚ إِنَّ ٱلظَّنَّ لَا يُغۡنِي مِنَ ٱلۡحَقِّ
شَيۡـًٔاۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمُۢ بِمَا يَفۡعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Most of them follow nothing but assumptions, but assumptions can be of no value at all against the Truth: God is well aware of what they do [36] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 36)

Allah's Words, ‘Most of them follow nothing but conjecture...’ (*Yunus:* 36), imply that some of them used to follow certainty since the opposite of ‘conjecture’ is certainty. Verily, the relationship that exists between things binds together between the subject and its attribute or between that which is judged and the judgment. This is a relationship which we have previously spoken of and about which we are hereby reminding once again. There are things which you can affirm with certainty, and there are things which you are unable to affirm with any degree of certainty. That which you can affirm with certainty and offer its evidence is the knowledge of certainty. On the contrary, that which you cannot provide its proof is not knowledge of certainty; it is merely imitation; such as when a child utters the verse: ‘Say, "He is Allah the One."’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). This is true, but the child is not capable of providing its evidence.

Someone may say something with certainty, but it is not true; this is an example of ignorance. Knowledge refers to matters which have been determined to be true; they are ‘real’ and are substantiated by real proof. Ignorance, on the other hand, is when something has been determined to be true; however, there is no real proof to support it. Now ‘conjecture’ results from the parity of two statements—one positive and the other negative, such that one cannot affirm anyone of them; if one of the two statements were to outweigh the other, the issue becomes outweighed, and an outweighed issue is one that is either ‘conjecture’, ‘doubt’ or ‘illusion’. Thus, ‘conjecture’ is when one statement outweighs the other, and ‘doubt’ is when the two statements are equal.

Allah's Words, ‘Most of them follow nothing but conjecture...’ (*Yunus:* 36), shows us that those who used to oppose Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did so either out of sheer spite—even though they were aware of the truth of what he was conveying. Or they adopted an intransigent attitude out of ignorance, as in Allah's saying: ‘But they are denying what they cannot comprehend...’ (*Yunus:* 39). Were any of them to look carefully at the Message communicated to him on Allah’s behalf and were he to consider all of the supporting arguments, he would announce his faith. However, there were some who looked at the evidence and, nevertheless, remained stubbornly entrenched in their opposition; and those who followed ‘conjecture’ followed that which is of no value against the truth. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* shows them that He is aware of the secrets of their souls, and He knows whether their refusal to embrace the faith is the result of stubbornness or the result of an intellectual inability to grasp the concept of faith; so, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah is well aware of what they do.’ (*Yunus:* 36) Thus, He eternally knows that some of them, in the deep recesses of their souls, are certain about the true value of faith, but they deny it outwardly, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We know well that what they say grieves you [Prophet]. It is not you they disbelieve. The evildoers reject Allah’s revelation.’ (*Yunus:* 36) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* is Omniscient, and it does not escape His Omniscience that they denied what they failed to comprehend and that some of them did not realise the value of faith, along with those who did gain such a realisation and denied it as a matter of intransigence and arrogance. He says: ‘They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true...’ (*an-Naml:* 14).

وَمَا كَانَ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانُ أَن يُفْتَرَىٰ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَٰكِن تَصْدِيقَ ٱلَّذِى
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ مِن رَّبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Nor could this Quran have been devised by anyone other than God. It is a confirmation of what was revealed before it and an explanation of the Scripture – let there be no doubt about it – it is from the Lord of the Worlds [37] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 37)

When you listen to the Quran with all that it contains of secrets of numbers and its divulging of the secrets of the unseen which are subject neither to the logic of time nor to the logic of space, the primordial nature naturally arrives at the certainty that the Quran was not contrived; rather, the Author Who revealed it must be Omniscient and Aware since the Quran was revealed in conformity with the rest of the previous Books. In other words, its content is always on full display for people to see; it faces them, and it is a Book that corroborates the previously revealed Books, before they were distorted, like the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms. These are the Books that are revelations in time that preceded that of the Quran, but the latter conforms perfectly to all of them. In other words, these other sacred Books, before being distorted, and the Quran mutually confirm each other. These sacred Books gave the glad tidings of the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a Messenger. Likewise, the Quran tells us of how 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* announced the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '... and bringing good news of a Messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad...' (*as-Saff:* 6).

So, when Ahmed/ Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did come and the Quran was revealed to him, he confirmed the Gospel in that statement. All of the essential creeds that the Quran mentioned have been revealed previously through the other sacred Books; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Nuh (Noah) and the prophets after him, to Ibrahim (Abraham), *Ismail* (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qub (Jacob), and the tribes, to 'Isa (Jesus), Ayyub (Job), Yunus (Jonah), Harun (Aaron), and Sulaiman (Solomon)— to Dawud (David) We gave the book [of Psalms].' (*an-Nisa':* 163) He also says: 'In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Nuh (Noah), which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus), "Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it."' (*ash-Shura:* 13) Thus, there are certain essential creeds which have been expounded by all the heavenly Books. Furthermore, there are also certain events which these sacred Books tell, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us, through the Quran, about these events; so from where could he have come up with all these sound doctrines and information contained in the ancient sacred Books while he was not from the people of the Book, nor was he taught by any of them?

Thus, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentions that which has been previously said in the sacred Books before the Quran, these Books corroborate his Message, for these events had happened, and this is a confirmation of the truth of what he says. Furthermore, his contemporaries have confirmed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never sat down with a teacher or read a book. His history and his biography are well known to them because he is one of them, and he was never known to have engaged in high-level discourse, nor was he ever known to have addressed his people before the Message was revealed to him, nor did he ever compose or recite poetry. Also, when this splendid revelation descended upon him from heaven, he was just as surprised as you were; so from whence did he get this revelation? You claim that he invented it himself; however, he attributes this lofty Book to its real Author, and he declares that he is but a Messenger; and so he says that which Allah *Glorified is He* commands him to say: ‘Say, "If Allah had willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you, for I had remained among you a lifetime before it. Then will you not reason?"’ (*Yunus:* 16) The Holy Quran orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them the following question: have they ever detect a trace of such eloquence previously in his words? Let us look at the verses which state that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not present when some events had taken place, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you [Muhammad]. You were not present amongst them when they cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Maryam (Mary)...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 44). This is one of the stories that have been confirmed. Allah *the Exalted* also says: ‘You [Muhammad] were not present on the western side of the mountain when We gave Our command to Musa (Moses). You were not there.’ (*al-Qasas:* 44) The revelation to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as well as the place where that revelation was sent down are confirmed stories. In addition, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘We have brought into being many generations who lived long lives; you did not live among the people of Midyan or recite Our Revelation to them. We have always sent messengers to people.’ (*al-Qasas:* 45) In many of these verses, it is as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is asking his contemporaries: how could I have been given news of events that happened in another time and place? It must, therefore, be that Allah has informed me of such events, which, moreover, are corroborated in the ancient sacred Books. Thereafter, the Holy Quran brings forth that which confirms the truth of earlier revelations: '... Jibril (Gabriel) who by Allah's leave brought down the Quran to your heart confirming previous scriptures.' (*al-Baqara:* 97) This means that it is a Book which contains the truth of all future events, for the Quran penetrated the veils and the barriers of the past and future. Now we know that events pertaining to the unseen happened because of two reasons; one of which is when it speaks of something concerning a time that has long past, for it is speaking of the past which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not a part of, nor was he one of those who could research and gain more knowledge about that particular era.

The Holy Quran also penetrated the veil of the present—the time in which the Quran was revealed; this 'present' might be veiled by the particularity 'in space'. I often give the following example—and to Allah belongs the loftiest of examples—some accident might happen in Alexandria at the same time that you are present in Cairo, and you are not aware of this accident because the condition of 'space' veils you from this event; this 'veil of place' is relevant to the present events. As for the future events, they are veiled from us by both the veil of time and the veil of space. Thus, when the Quran informs us of an event which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not witness, and he neither learnt nor read about it. Therefore, the Quran penetrates the veil that separates us from the past. Likewise, if the Quran informs us of an event occurring in the present but in a place far away from where Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is receiving the revelation, this, therefore, is a penetrating of the veil of space; for instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and say inwardly, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?"' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) When the hypocrites and the disbelievers heard the words of this noble verse, they did not deny their inner thoughts—which the Quran speaks of. Thus, the Quran pierced the veil of 'space' within their very selves. Thus, the news of the unseen that is related to us in the Quran pierces either the veil of past events or the veil of present events, or it splits asunder the veil of time and space of the future. Now we know that while the Quran was being revealed, the Muslims were weak, being unable to defend themselves, and nobody could protect anybody else. Meanwhile, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* headed towards At-Ta'f to invite its people to Islam in the hopes of gaining their protection; however, he was met with cynical, even physical, opposition, and he advised some of his companions to emigrate to Abyssinia. And in the midst of all of these crises, the following words of the Quran were revealed: ‘Their forces will be routed, and they will turn tail and flee.’ (*al-Mujadala:* 8) Even ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* wondered: ‘What are these forces that will be defeated? We cannot even defend ourselves.’ Then, when the battle of Badr took place, ‘Umar witnessed the defeat of the Quraysh warriors and their routing. Thus, he came to see, with an eye of certainty, that which the revelation had spoken about earlier. Thus, everyone came to realise with certainty that the Holy Quran had not been made up; so how can Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* be accused of contriving the Quran?

Likewise, if this Quran is merely made up, why did you not try to come up with something like it while there are many poets, men of eloquence and public speakers amongst you? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never claimed that he was a man of eloquence, a public speaker, or a poet. Also, the Quran did not ask them to bring someone who has nothing to do with eloquence—such as Muhammad—to come up with the like of the Quran. Rather, the Quran asks them to rally the finest poets and see if they can say a single verse comparable to the verses of the Quran. Moreover, if you were to say that what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has brought us is sorcery and that he is a sorcerer who mesmerised the poor and the weak and convinced them to embrace Islam, then why did he not mesmerise you as well? The fact that you have not been mesmerised yourselves is proof that your claim of sorcery is baseless.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... It is an explanation of the Scripture–let there be no doubt about it. It is from the Lord of the Worlds.’ (*Yunus:* 37), for the Quran has expounded every virtuous principle that will endure until the Day of Judgment, As for the sacred Books that were revealed prior to the Quran, they contained the principles that were appropriate to the time and place of their respective revelations. It is also a Book about its verity there is no doubt. It exposes disbelievers and makes plain their spiritual confusion and their lying, for they had acknowledged the greatness of the Quran when they said: ‘Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man from either of the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Thus, they realised that the Quran contained neither flaws nor imperfections, and even disbelievers have no doubt about it.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* responses to their claims that the Quran was a human fabrication when He says:

أَمۡ يَقُولُونَ ٱفۡتَرَىٰهُۖ قُلۡ فَأۡتُواْ بِسُورَةٖ مِّثۡلِهِۦ وَٱدۡعُواْ مَنِ
ٱسۡتَطَعۡتُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

Or do they say, ‘He has devised it’? Say, ‘Then produce a sura like it, and call on anyone you can beside God if you are telling the truth’ [38] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 38)

The previous verse mentions the reason why they will not able to live up to this challenge, for it states that the previously revealed Books confirm its revelation. In fact, the earlier revelations give mutual credibility to each other. Thus, disbelievers have already lost the challenge, even before the Quran had been revealed. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Say, "Then produce a chapter like it ..."' (*Yunus:* 38). Allah *Glorified is He* has challenged them at one time to produce the like of the Quran: 'Say, "Even if all mankind and jinns came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other.’ (*al-Isra’:* 88), and they were unable to do so. Then the degree of the challenge was lowered, and they were asked to come up with ‘...ten invented chapters like it…’ (*Hud:* 13). Still they were unable to come up with ten chapters; so they were asked to come up with one chapter that comes somewhat close to the style of the Quran, but they could not ‘…then produce a single chapter like it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 23). Therefore, how can they still claim that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had fabricated the Quran since he was not acquainted with the art of linguistic eloquence?!

The Quran calls upon you to rally all of the poets and all of the men of eloquence so as to compose even one verse that is comparable to the Quran; there is, however, one condition that the Quran stresses when it says: ‘... and call on anyone you can beside Allah...’ (*Yunus:* 38) as Allah *the Exalted* solely has the Power to reveal the Quran; this is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them that they may call upon the help of false gods so that disbelievers and die-hard cynics cannot say, ‘We will call upon the Help of Allah.’ For this reason, the Quran spells out this one exception: ‘... and call on anyone you can beside Allah if you are truthful.’ (*Yunus:* 38) Of course, disbelievers are not truthful about their claims that the Quran was made up. When Allah *the Almighty* sends forth a Messenger into some community—so as to instruct them about His Doctrine—His Will is that people amend their lifestyles so as to conform to their role as Allah’s vicegerents on the earth; this is why the Messenger that is sent forth is always a human being from amongst them because if the Messenger were an angel, for instance, he would be an unfitting role model for human beings. Rather, the Messenger must himself belong to the human species. Allah *the Most High* never sends forth any Messenger but that he is armed with clear, unmistakable proofs that he is indeed a Messenger conveying a Message on Allah's behalf. Furthermore, this clear proof must be analogous with the particular skills of the community in question. The Messenger cannot bring them a miracle that involves some domain of life with which they are not familiar, lest they may claim, ‘Were we familiar with such art, we could have produced something just as miraculous as that which you bring us.’ Now the Quran was revealed in order to confirm their inability to come up with anything comparable to it even though the domain of words—eloquence and poetry and public speaking—are their specialty. The Quran was Prophet Muhammad's miracle amidst a people of eloquence who used to hold poetry festivals and who hung up the name of the winner of the contests on the walls of the *Ka'ba* as a reputation and recognition of his brilliance. Thus, they were a people deeply knowledgeable about the art of eloquent speech, and the miracle which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought forth was one that was based on language—the same art which they were adept at. The Quran challenged them, and every challenge requires that the adversary be given the chance to muster all his strength to meet that challenge, but if he loses the challenge, he must admit his defeat. Allah *Glorified is He* has challenged all Arabs with the Quran: ‘Say, "Even if all mankind and jinns came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other.' (*al-Isra':* 88) They were not able to come up with anything comparable, and so the Quran gradually reduced the difficulty of the challenge; it asked them to come up with what is lesser than that: just ten comparable chapters, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... produce ten invented chapters like it…' (*Hud:* 13). Then, it challenged them to come up with only one chapter like the Quran. Upon close inspection, we find that the manner in which it puts forth this last challenge—that is, to come up with one chapter that is similar to the Quran—has two kinds; in one instance, the Quran says: '... a chapter like it (*suratin min mithlihi*)...' (*Yunus:* 38), and in another instance, it says: '…then produce a single chapter like it (…*suratin mithlihi*….)' (*al-Baqara:* 23). Each of the two kinds are eloquent in its respective position, as the latter verse challenges them to produce a chapter that is comparable in quality and style to one of the chapters of the Quran. As for Allah's Saying: '... a chapter like it (*suratin min mithlihi*)...' (*Yunus:* 38), it means that one should try to produce a chapter such as those uttered by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* considering that he had never sat with a teacher, never had learnt to read and never was known to be capable of speaking in an eminently eloquent manner at any point in his life up until he received the Divine Message. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "If Allah had willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you, for I had remained among you a lifetime before it. Then will you not reason?"' (*Yunus:* 16) Therefore, '... a chapter like it...' (*Yunus:* 38) means to try to make a person, who is an illiterate like Prophet Muhammad, meet that challenge.

However, why does the Quran pose this kind of a challenge? It does so due to the reason that they had said the following about the Quran: 'It is just ancient fables, which he has had written down. They are dictated to him morning and evening.' (*al-Furqan:* 5) In fact, out of their extreme ignorance, they accused him of having studied under a man living in Mecca, and so the Quran pointed out to them that this man—whom they claimed to be Prophet Muhammad's teacher—was a non-Arab, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... but the language of the person they allude to is foreign, while this revelation is in clear Arabic.' (*an-Nahl:* 103)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* categorises these disbelievers by saying:

بَلْ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِمَا لَمْ يُحِيطُوا۟ بِعِلْمِهِۦ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِهِمْ تَأْوِيلُهُۥ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ كَذَّبَ
ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۖ فَٱنظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٣٩

But they are denying what they cannot comprehend – its prophecy has yet to be fulfilled for them. In the same way, those before them refused to believe – see what was the end of those evildoers! [39] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 39)

This is the category of people who ‘are denying what they cannot comprehend...’ (*Yunus:* 39), and they were surprised when they were informed about what they did not know; generally speaking, people are always hostile to that which they had been ignorant of. Thus, they denied the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before they even had the chance of contemplating the beauty of the Quranic language and its lofty ideals. However, if they had the chance to inspect the beautiful style of the Quran, they would incline towards Faith. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* is a prime example of this, for he was a disbeliever when he heard that his sister and her husband had entered Islam. Then, he went to her house to confront her; he hit her so badly that he shed her blood and a blow to one’s sister that leads to her bleeding can only but make one’s heart soften. This is what happened with ‘Umar; so when his anger subsided, he approached the Quran with an open spirit, free of all obstinacy. Thereupon, he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and entered Islam. Before that time, he was amongst those who ‘... are denying what they cannot comprehend–its prophecy has yet to be fulfilled for them...’ (*Yunus:* 39). They were completely ignorant of Prophet Muhammad's Message, and as soon as they had heard about it, they immediately accused him of being a liar—Allah forbid!

Therefore, read Allah's saying: ‘Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge by saying, "What was that he just said?"’ (*Muhammad:* 16) This is evidence that they did not understand the content of the Quran that had been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; so there comes Allah's response: ‘Say, "It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of disbelievers are heavy; they are blind to it.’ (*Fussilat:* 44)

Thus, the Quran is guidance to those who open up their hearts to faith; as for those whose hearts filled with hatred for the Quran and for Islam in general, their view can never be set aright. If any of these people wishes to arrive at a sound judgment, then let him wipe out what goes against the Quran from his heart; then let him put the two views for or against the Quran side by side. Truly, his heart will be convinced by the side that has the stronger argument, and this would be Islam. Therefore, he whose heart has been filled with false doctrine cannot be guided.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But they are denying what they cannot comprehend–its prophecy has yet to be fulfilled for them.' (*Yunus:* 39) The word *ta'wil* connotes 'returning to something', and this shows us that there are issues in the Holy Quran that have not been explained yet; these issues will be explained by events as they happen. The Quran might refer to an issue that has to do with the unseen, then the time comes and events come to pass and affirm this issue. At that point, we shall realise that this issue's interpretation has come. These people had denied the verses of the Quran before their *ta*'*wil* (interpretation) had come to pass. The reason for the delay of Allah's explanation of the issue is that the *ta*'*wil* (interpretation) of this issue had not yet come since the time of the issue occurs later. For example, consider 'Ammar ibn Yasir, a companion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the battle occurred between Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan and 'Ali *Allah be pleased with them* and 'Ammar fought in the camp of 'Ali and was killed. At this point, the companions realised the interpretation of one of the Prophet Muhammad's Hadiths, in which he had said, 'May Allah be merciful to 'Ammar. He will be killed by the rebellious group.'(1) This is how the interpretation of the Prophet's Hadith came about when the actual events took place; this was one of the reasons why some of the companion abandoned their ranks in Mu'awiya's army.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... its prophecy has yet to be fulfilled for them...' (*Yunus:* 39) which means that the interpretation has not yet been made apparent for them. One of the particles of negation is the word *lam* (did not), we can say, for example, 'So-and-so *(Lam)* did not come.' We can also say, ‘So-and-so has not *(lamma)* come yet.' The negation in the first example has no bearing on the present state of affairs; it is a statement referring only to the past. As for negation using the word *lamma*, it is extended to the present times; so-and-so still might show up in the future because the word *lamma* gives the meaning of negation with the expectation that the negated action will happen in the future.

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The desert Arabs say, "We have faith." [Prophet] Tell them, "You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, ‘We have submitted.’"' (*al-Hujurat:* 14). These desert Arabs said, ‘We have faith’, even though they had seen the Muslims and had emulated them outwardly and hypocritically; however, true faith had not yet entered their hearts at that point. Thus, when they heard Allah's Words: ‘... for faith has not yet entered your hearts’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14), they said, ‘Praise be to Allah’ since this means that eventually ‘faith’ would enter their hearts, Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘Did you think you would enter the Garden without Allah first proving which of you would struggle for His Cause and remain steadfast?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 142) When they heard this they said, ‘Thus, we are now certain that Allah *Glorified is He* will come to recognise us among those who struggle in His Cause and as people of patience.’ Therefore, we know that the particle *lamma* means that which is negated is nevertheless expected to occur in the future. Furthermore, *ta’wil*, as we know, is the returning to something. In the Quran, there are numerous pieces of news which, at the time of their revelation, were not likely to happen. However, when they actually happened—and human beings had nothing to do with this—this means that the one who uttered this speech received it from the One Who is Capable of making events happen. Consider, for example, the prediction that the Byzantine Empire would be victorious over the Persians, even though the Byzantines had been defeated at the time. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years’ time—Allah is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice at Allah’s help...’ (*ar-Rum:* 2-5). This prophecy was revealed and the Muslims awaited the fulfilment of this prophecy, and it occurred exactly as the Quran had predicted. Sometimes the prophecy is fulfilled in the Hereafter, and then they will know the consequences of their denial at a later point of time.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘We have brought people a Scripture ─We have explained it on the basis of true knowledge ─ as guidance and mercy for those who believe. What are they waiting for but the fulfilment of its [final prophecy]?...’ (*al-A’raf:* 52, 53) They await the prophecies contained in the Quran, and they await to see whether their own prophecies will come true; if the prophecies contained in the Quran materialise in this life, the people of the Quran will be victorious, and if the prophecies of the Quran materialise in the Hereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says concerning that: 'On the Day it is fulfilled, those who had ignored it will say, "Our Lord’s Messenger spoke the truth. Is there anyone to intercede for us now? Or can we be sent back to behave differently from the way we behaved before?"...' (*al-A’raf:* 53) This is the fulfilment of the prophecy which some had previously rejected. Thus, the fulfilment of the prophecies concerns whoever is left from amongst the disbelievers so that they might see that which the Quran had predicted occurs exactly as the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said while he had no control over the course of events. It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was taking a risk by prophesising about that which might not be fulfilled, and then the believers would abandon him. However, he uttered only that which he was sure and confident would happen, as it was a prophecy coming from the Omniscient and Aware. The other possibility is that the final materialisation of the prophecy will be in the Hereafter. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But they are denying what they cannot comprehend–its prophecy has yet to be fulfilled for them...’ (*Yunus:* 39).

Allah *Glorified is He* directs Prophet Muhammad's attention to the fact that what is happening with him has already happened with Messengers before him; so in the same verse, He says: ‘In the same way, those before them refused to believe. See what was the end of those evildoers’ (*Yunus:* 39). That is, witness the procession of Messengers, one after the other, beginning with the very first message from heaven—was there ever a Messenger whom heaven sent forth only to let him succumb to his disbelieving adversaries? No, this was not the case since victory was always granted to the Messengers of the True Lord *the Exalted* as the following words of His *Glorified is He* confirm: '[For] Allah has thus ordained: "I shall most certainly prevail, I and My prophets!"… ‘(*al-Mujadala:* 21). We know what happened to the unrighteous;

Allah drowned some of them, others were swallowed up by the earth and some were obliterated by the 'shout'. Therefore, the *ta'wil* (explanation) is clear regarding all of the Messengers that preceded the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; if the unrighteous people of the past received the punishment that corresponds to the message of their respective Messenger, then the unrighteous people who deny the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* shall receive the punishment that corresponds to his *peace and blessings be upon him* overall Message. When the True Lord *the Most High* says: '... See what the end of those evildoers was!' (*Yunus:* 39), we must realise the meaning of the word *Azh-zhulm* (injustice, unfairness, inequity, oppression). It consists of transposing the rights of one who deserves to one who is undeserving. Now there are different levels of rights; there are some rights that are supreme, some that are intermediary and some that are 'lower' and not as significant. When it comes to the 'supreme' rights, if you transpose God's Divinity *the Almighty* unto that which is undeserving of this Divinity—this is the height of injustice. Also Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong!' (*Luqman:* 13) If one were to do so, he is taking 'Divinity' away from Allah *Glorified is He* and attributing it to that which is other than He; now if only we could say that this 'other' enjoyed some sort of status with Allah *the Exalted* such that it could act as a mediator, but the truth of the matter is that it does not, However, the unrighteous person will claim that it does, but this is purely arbitrary and has no basis in reality. The unrighteous person sets up false associates in lieu of Allah, but this is injustice of the highest order and these associates never approved of their being deified. Imagine if Allah *Glorified is He* were to say: 'There is no deity but I.' either this is true, or there are indeed other deities. If someone were to deem this statement to be untrue—Allah forbid—then the other deity should speak for himself; it should not let someone else speak on its behalf. Otherwise, one is forced to conclude that such a deity is deaf and clueless. However, there are no other deities that have come forth and announced their divinity; thus, the sole Divinity of the True Lord *Glorified is He* is confirmed. The True Lord *the Most High* has stated to us, 'There is no deity but I. I am the Creator, and I am the Sustainer.' There is no other being that has come forth and claimed these roles. Therefore, the

True Lord in the statement ‘There is no deity but Allah’ is confirmed. The next level of unrighteousness or injustice concerns legal matters. If someone were to make usury ‘lawful’ (*halal*), then this would be a great injustice indeed. However, if a judge orders a borrower to repay his debt, then this is justice. The judge who is unrighteous (or unjust) in his rulings is one who strips the deserving of their rights and hands these rights over to those who are undeserving. Thus, there are different levels of ‘injustice’ depending on the issue wherein the injustice is committed. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يُؤْمِنُ بِهِۦ وَمِنْهُم مَّن لَّا يُؤْمِنُ بِهِۦۚ وَرَبُّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

Some of them believe in it, and some do not: your Lord knows best those who cause corruption [40]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 40)

In this verse, the speech concerns those who denied. How can Allah split the deniers—who by definition do not believe—into two groups: a group that believes and a group that does not believe? We know that belief and faith involves the work of the heart, not the work of the senses. We do not have the ability to see what is in other peoples’ hearts. However, the True Lord *the Exalted* knows who amongst these deniers is hiding his faith in his heart.

Thus, some of these people who, outwardly, deny with their tongues, inwardly, their hearts harbour a secret faith. Then there are some whose statements of denial conform to their hearts’ lack of faith. Of those who have said that this Quran is a fabrication, some of them nevertheless believe that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger sent by Allah. Inwardly, they believe in the message conveyed to them on Allah’s behalf; however, out of their sheer spite, arrogance, and jealousy, they say that they do not believe. There is another category of people who, indeed, do not believe and openly proclaim their disbelief. Thus, the criterion is not the faith that emanates from the heart and is proclaimed by the tongue. The criterion is the faith that is secretly harboured in the heart but which is not expressed. Such faith has not yet developed to the point where it can be proclaimed by the tongue. The reason why some people keep their faith confined in their hearts—an untold secret—is due to their jealousy, their hate, and their inability to control their souls and make them conform to the demands of faith. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Arabs to declare, ‘There is no deity but Allah’, a testament which, if they believed in sincerely, would guarantee that they would become politically dominant over the whole world, some of them refused to utter the statement; since they understood that this formula was not merely an empty statement, they realised the full implication and significance of it. They understood that the principle that ‘there is no deity but Allah’ means equality between human beings. Furthermore, they would loathe losing their eminent position and their dominance over other tribes. What this also indicates is that Allah *the Almighty* wished to incept the religion of Islam in Mecca, where the community openly makes its opinion known. This is why we find that ‘hypocrisy’ began only in Medina, whereas in Mecca, the society there was well homogeneous and well integrated. When the latter proclaimed their disbelief, they did not have to suffer from a loss of material possessions. However, it was the hypocrites of Medina and other places that suffered from the loss of their material possessions. Some of them used to play sides, saying one thing but believing something else. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* consoles His gracious Messenger; Allah comforts him and explains that he should not be sad for those who reject him since he is in fact loved and revered by them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Well do we know that what such people say grieves you indeed. Yet, behold, it is not you to whom they lie to…' (*al-An‘am:* 33); this means that you are, O, Muhammad, far above such lies. Allah’s Words: '… but Allah’s messages do these evildoers deny.' (*al-An‘am:* 33) means that Allah *Glorified is He* exonerates His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from the sins of some of his people for the True Lord *Glorified is He* knows that His Messenger is known to be honest and trustworthy amongst his people. Even while they fought him, some of them still deposited their possessions with him as trusts. Those who believed in His Message did not proclaim their faith, as well as those who did not believe—the fate of both groups is in the hands of Allah *Glorified is He*; their Creator shall be the Judge of their case and the settler of their accounts since He *the Most High* knows more than anyone else those amongst them who denied the Message out of spite and those amongst them who denied the Message as a way of disavowing their association with the new religion. Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who punishes and causes suffering, and every one of those people shall receive his due reward according to the degree of perversion; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying: '… and you Lord is fully aware as to who are the spreaders of corruption.' (*Yunus:* 40)

Now the perverse—or the corrupt—person is he who causes that which is good to become rotten since the world has been created in a state of unspoiled perfection before the coming of human beings. The work of Allah *Glorified is He* was only affected by corruption as a result of the influence of human beings. By default, Allah's creation performs its function properly and in an efficient manner. Likewise you, O, human being, if you wish that all things would be set right in your universe, then look at that higher cosmos in which you have no influence; you will find that everything within that cosmos is set right. In the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And the skies has He raised high and has devised [for all things] a measure, so that you [too, O, men,] might never transgress the measure [of what is right]. Weigh, therefore, [your deeds] with equity and cut not the measure short!' (*ar-Rahman:* 7-9), this means to take charge of your responsibilities and be conscientious thereof and to perfect that which is in within your jurisdiction just as Allah *Glorified is He* has perfected that which is outside of your jurisdiction. What is asked of man—therefore—is that, if he cannot ameliorate that which is good, he should at least allow that which is good to remain so. Thus, so that he might not join the ranks of those who bring about corruption.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُل لِّى عَمَلِى وَلَكُمْ عَمَلُكُمْ ۖ أَنتُم بَرِيٓـُٔونَ
مِمَّآ أَعْمَلُ وَأَنَا۠ بَرِىٓءٌ مِّمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

If they do not believe you, [Prophet], say, 'I act for myself, and you for yourselves. You are not responsible for my actions nor am I responsible for yours' [41] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 41)

This verse brings comfort to the heart of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* for Allah *Glorified is He* does not say: 'when they give thee the lie' (*idha kadhabuk),* rather, He says: '… if they give you a lie …' (*Yunus:* 41), and the True Lord *the Most High* wishes to mention the issue of their denial as one that is 'in doubt'. Also, He follows this up by telling His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…say, "To me [shall be accounted] my doings, and to you, your doings…"' (*Yunus:* 41) which means to inform them of the following: 'I do not wish to hold you responsible for my own actions; rather, I wish for the best and hope that you perform good deeds. If you do not do good deeds, then this, in turn, will not have an effect on the reward I shall receive for my work.' Thus, it becomes clear to us that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is not to be rewarded according to the number of his followers, but depending on whether he conveys the Message in the manner that Allah *Glorified is He* had wished for it to be conveyed. The True Lord *the Exalted* has wished that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* transmit good to his community; if they remain entrenched in their evil ways, this evil will not affect him because he had faithfully conveyed the Doctrine to them and will receive a goodly reward from Allah, for Muhammad holds himself to the tenets of the credo he is conveying, and the evil of those who do not follow him shall come back to hurt them. Likewise, those who refuse to answer the call always think that the caller will benefit. The message from Allah is delivered and applied by the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as a doctrine and a code of conduct. Also, for this he shall be rewarded. There is no room for confusion is such matters '…"To me [shall be accounted] my doings, and to you, your doings …"' (*Yunus:* 41). Then, Allah *the Almighty* puts the following words in the mouth of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: '… you are not accountable for what I am doing, and I am not accountable for whatever you do."' (*Yunus:* 41) The word *bari'* (not accountable or innocent from) means that sin is involved here; these words of the True Lord *the Most High* indicate that there is a sort of rivalry taking place with the enemies. Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to educate His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers in the ways of civilised discourse; He says: '… And, behold, either we [who believe in Him] or you [who deny His oneness] are on the right path, or have clearly gone astray!"' (*Saba':* 24), which means that either we—the Prophet and his followers—or you—the disbelievers—are on the right path, while the other is on the side of error. The Prophet *peace and* *blessings be upon him* is certain that it is he who is on the right path and that disbelievers are on the side of error; however, he still acknowledges their position, as a courtesy and out of His sense of fairness. This is why His Lord *Glorified is He* teaches him to say: 'Say: "Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty of…"' (*Saba':* 25). In other words, he is telling them that suppose that I commit a sin; you are not going to be held responsible for it. The Prophet's courteousness was such that the True Lord *the Most High* decreed for him to say, '"… nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing." (*Saba':* 25) Then, Allah does not say: 'We will not be responsible for your crimes.' Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has willed that, in this verse which we are currently studying, the Prophet would say: '… you are not accountable for what I am doing, and I am not accountable for whatever you do."' (*Yunus:* 41)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَسْتَمِعُونَ إِلَيْكَۚ أَفَأَنتَ تُسْمِعُ ٱلصُّمَّ وَلَوْ كَانُوا۟ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Some of them do listen to you: but can you make
the deaf hear if they will not use their minds? [42]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 42)

Now the word *min* (amongst) might refer to that which is singular and male, and it also might refer to that which is singular and female. It might also refer to that which is dual, and it might refer to that which is plural. Sometimes the sentence is more precise such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And there are amongst them such as [seem to] listen to you …' (*al-An'am:* 25); other times, it is the general meaning that is more important: 'and there are amongst them such as [pretend to] listen to you …' (*Yunus:* 42).

The word *min* can be used in both instances. Now the act of listening, as we know, is when the ear registers sounds; if the sound is jarring and unintelligible like the sounds of animals or the sound of sticks, then these sounds as useful to the body as the tone of some concussion or shudder. Or sounds can have an intelligible meaning such as the sounds of the various languages which people use to speak with one another in various countries. If you were to speak English in a country where people speak English, they would understand you and you would understand them. This is what ‘intelligibility’ means in the context of language; it means that the speaker and the listener are on the same ‘linguistic’ page. Now the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was an Arab who spoke in an Arabic tongue to an Arab audience who understood him; so if the language itself was not the communication barrier, then what was? The communication barrier in this case is the fact that the ear rejects everything that it receives from someone who is perceived as an enemy. Hearing, as we know, depends on the willingness of the listener to understand the ideas of the speaker. If a listener lacks the willingness to understand that which is being spoken to him, then the speech falls upon deaf ears. Thus, on a listener’s side, there must be a willingness to understand what the speaker is telling him. A saying goes as follows. ‘This ear is made of clay, and the other is made of dough.’ Or as a joke goes as follows: 'A person approached his friend and whispered into his ear, ‘I want to tell you a secret.’ The friend became attentive and listened eagerly for this secret, whereupon the man said, ‘I want to borrow a hundred dollars.’ The friend said, ‘It’s as though I have not heard this secret.’ Thus, speech is not just sounds that reach the ear; rather, there must be willingness and attentiveness on the part of the listener. Furthermore, they, it must be said, do not have such a positive predisposition. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '… but can you cause the deaf to hear ...' (*Yunus:* 42); in other words, it is as if their hearing faculty is inoperative. An example of this is when a teacher is explaining a day’s lesson to students; amongst the students there are some who are paying attention, eager to hear more. This is why they end up understanding the lesson; however, for those who were not in a state of attentiveness, it is as if they had not heard anything from their teacher. Disbelievers have surpassed the state of deafness, for even the deaf can understand the gist of a message from hand signals or just by reading the language of the eyes; however, these people neither hear the words nor understand them: '… but can you cause the deaf to hear even though they will not use their reason?' (*Yunus:* 42)

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَنظُرُ إِلَيْكَ ۚ أَفَأَنتَ تَهْدِى ٱلْعُمْىَ وَلَوْ كَانُوا۟ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Some of them look at you: but can you guide the blind if they will not see? [43] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 43)

The act of seeing also requires attentiveness. Sometimes a person approaches that which he wishes to see, and sometimes he is not in a state of full attentiveness since his heart is not in synch with the information being registered by the eyes.

A person was asked,(1) 'You say, that whoever sees so-and-so, the virtuous will be guided by Allah.' The listener responded to him and asked, 'How can you say this?!' The man said, 'Abu Jahl has beheld a person more virtuous than he, and he still remained a disbeliever.' The listener said, 'Abu Jahl did not see Muhammad, the prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* but rather what Abu Jahl saw was the orphaned son of Abu Taleb.' Thus, the man explained that Abu Jahl did not see Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a Messenger, for if he had beheld him *peace and blessings be upon him* in such a light, Abu Jahl would have been overcome by the serenity of faith, the grandeur of reverence and the majesty of piety. We might find a virtuous man with dark black skin, and his virtue beams forth as an aura of light all around him; he has a powerful, captivating presence due his to piety. Furthermore, if Abu Jahl had seen Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a prophet, his state would have changed. Witness Fadalah as he tells the story(2) of the time when he tried to assassinate the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* as the latter was circumambulating the *Ka'ba* during the 'Year of Victory'. When he approached him, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'What were you thinking to yourself?' He said, 'Nothing. I was just invoking Allah.' So, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* laughed and then said, 'Ask Allah for forgiveness.' Then, he put his hand on the chest of Fadalah. When Fadalah heard this, and he saw Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying these words, he said, 'There was nothing in the world I hated more than his face, but when I approached him I was overcome by love, and then there was nothing in the whole world that I loved more than his face.'(1) This is an example of what ‘hearing’ really is and what ‘seeing’ really is; both of these—seeing and hearing—are the most noble of all the faculties since hearing enables us to hear the Word of Allah. Before a man can sit down and read, he first needs to ‘hear’.

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(1) *The story of the man who said: "He who sees a righteous man shall be guided by God" someone told him that Abu Jahl saw the Prophet and was not guided so he replied: "he did not see him, but he saw the orphan of Abu Taleb.*

(2) *The story of Fadalah with the Prophet* peace be upon him *in the year of the conquest of Mecca.*

The concept of ‘blindness’ that is implied in the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: '… but can you show the right way to the blind even though they cannot see?' [*Yunus:* 43] has to do with blindness of the heart.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَظۡلِمُ ٱلنَّاسَ شَيۡـًٔا وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلنَّاسَ أَنفُسَهُمۡ يَظۡلِمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

God does not wrong people at all – it is they who wrong themselves [44] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 44)

The word *Allah* is the proper name for He Who is the One Whom everyone needs, He Who is endowed with all of the qualities which we have come to know from His ninety-nine Divine Names. In fact, the Attributes of Allah are infinite; the attributes that are described by the ninety-nine Divine Names are not enough to describe all of His Attributes *Glorified is He*—for His Attributes are infinite. This is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* used to utter this supplication, 'I beseech You and call upon You with every Name which You have named Yourself, with every Name which You have taught You servants and with any Name which You hast claimed as Your Own in Your Knowledge of the unseen.'(2) Also, if one were to ask, 'Why does Allah claim for Himself—and to the exclusion of all others—certain Names in the world of the unseen?' The answer is because in this way Allah *Glorified is He* will have more Names which we can come to know in the hereafter; this is why we find that the True Lord *the Most High* shall reveal to and inspire His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* with some of His Praises and Glorifications which He had not revealed to anyone before him. These are amongst the gifts that flow endlessly from the Supreme Name of the One Whom everyone needs. These are Attributes that emanate from the Supreme Name of the One Whom everyone needs. The ninety-nine Divine Names that we know suffice us insofar as our lives here on the earth; however, in the hereafter we shall become aware of other Divine Attributes. It is the Name Allah which encompasses all of these other Names—the Names we know of and those which we do not. When a human being sets out to do any kind of work, a host of attributes are required. He needs to have the physical ability, knowledge, wisdom, subtlety, and mercy, along with many other attributes. So, if you were to say, ‘In the name of the Omnipotent’, this means that you are in need of power. On the other hand, if you were to say, ‘In the name of the Capable’, this means that you are in need of capacity. Likewise, if you were to say, ‘In the name of the Clement’, this means that you are in need of clemency, Also, if you were to say, ‘In the name of the Wise’, this means that you are in need of wisdom, Lastly, if you were to say, ‘In the name of Allah ’, this Name will suffice you because it encompasses all of these aforementioned Attributes and more; this is why the inception of all manner of activities should begin with *Bism Allah* (with the name of Allah). Thus, if you are in need of power, you will find it; and if you are in need of wealth, you will find it; and if you are in need of ample sustenance, you will find it. Allah *Glorified is He* has included all of these Attributes of ‘Completeness/ Perfection’ in the formula: *Bism Allah*. Furthermore, when you begin your work with this formula, you are thereby acknowledging that all the power and the agency that you possess have been bestowed upon you by Allah. Also, the things that respond to the power which you exert upon them do as such in the Name of Allah. All things are put at your service in His Name. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Are they, then, not aware that it is for them that we have created, amongst all the things which Our hands have wrought, the domestic animals of which they are [now] masters? And that We have subjected them to men’s will, so that some of them they may use for riding and of some they may eat ' (*Ya Sin:* 71-72). Had Allah *the Exalted* not subjugated the animals and the inanimate objects and put them at our service such that they respond to the power that we exert upon them, we could never ‘own’ these things. To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* has not subjugated certain things, so that we might realise that we cannot ourselves bring them under our control, neither through our knowledge nor through the power that we possess. Indeed, it is the True Lord *the Most High* Who is solely capable of subjugating things. In rural areas, you see a child as he herds camels; he orders them to kneel, and they kneel; and he orders them to stand up, and they stand up. However, if we saw a snake, most of us would flee; only those who are experienced and know how to kill a snake will stand their ground. A small, tiny little mosquito could try to bite you at night, and you would not know how to kill it since it is one of those creatures that Allah has not subjected for you. Similar is the case of fruit from a tree: if you pick it before it is ripe, it will not be tasty. However, if you pick it when it is ripe, you will enjoy its sweet taste. Then you take the fruit’s seed and you plant it again, and thus you ensure the continued survival of the species. In fact, when a piece of fruit is ripe, it will fall to the ground as if it is asking to be eaten by someone. It is the same thing with a human being when he reaches puberty; that is, he becomes capable of procreation. At that point, Allah *the Exalted* charges him with the duties and responsibilities of faith; if Allah were to charge him with these duties at a younger age, he might not be able to carry the burden, especially when the problems of adolescence set in. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* wished to create from naught and to train a person gradually until he becomes fully grown. Then, when a person reaches puberty, the obligation is clearly defined. These become effective when the mind and the body attain maturity, otherwise spiritual illness or insanity could result. There is none stronger or more powerful than Allah *the Almighty* that may force you to go against His wishes; this is why it is the True Lord’s Will that religious duties and cognitive maturity should coincide. As for a person who suffers from mental insanity—Allah *Glorified is He* has not charged him with religious duties. Religious duties are also not applicable to one who has no freedom since the essence of religious duty lies in the freedom to choose between alternatives. Such is the ultimate spirit of justice that pervades Divine legislation.

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(1) *Cited by Ibn Hisham in his (Sira Nabawiyya) (4/4170): {I swear by God, the moment he lifted his hand from my chest there was no creature of* Allah *that was dearer to me than him}*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/391,452) and by Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (1/509), A Hadith narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ud*

When you consider your religious duties, do not focus on those which religion takes away because, in reality, it does not curb your freedom; rather, it ensures the freedom of others. At the same time, others are forced to respect your freedom. If you are forbidden to steal from others, Allah *the Almighty* has protected you by making it forbidden for others to steal from you.

Thus, the apparent restrictions on your liberty end up benefiting you. Imagine if you were given a free hand to take all you wanted from other people. What would happen if people were then given a free hand to take all they wanted from you? When your religious obligations forbid you to peer into the private lives of others, others, at the same time, are forbidden from peering into your private life. Thus, when you are commanded to give alms, you are indeed losing some of your wealth, and this money of yours which Allah has blessed you with is going to the poor. So do not just focus on that which is taken away from you, consider also that which could be given to you if you are destined to go through financial difficulties. In addition, when it comes to wealth that you feel is being stripped from you; Allah intends to reward you many times over for that sacrifice. Furthermore, consider the rhythm of life, along with those things which Allah *the Most High* has made forbidden for you, as well as those things which He has made permissible for you. In the end, you will find that the things that have been made permissible for you far outnumber those things which have been made forbidden. Therefore, overall, the religious obligations end up benefiting you. All of this aside, do any of your actions—involving religious duty—benefit the True Lord *Glorified is He*? No. Do your actions give Him any new attributes that were not there before? The answer is no, for Allah *the Exalted* has created us with all of His Attributes of 'Completeness/Perfection'. There is nothing that we can do that could increase or diminish the essence of His Self.

Thus, it is in your best interest that you perform your religious obligations since you ultimately benefit from them. Consider, for example, a farmer in his field. A farmer tills the earth, transports the fertiliser plants the seeds and irrigates his crops—all of which is quite tiring. However, after it is done, a farmer can sit back and enjoy the fruits of his labour. Therefore, when you carry out the True Lord's directives, you will enjoy similar returns. In your own life, you will note that a lazy farmer suffers a severe crisis at harvest time. Imagine what will happen on the Day of Judgment. A farmer who withdraws a certain amount of grain from his storehouse in order to plant is, in reality, not reducing his overall stockpile because after the season is over he shall reap fifteen times that which he showed. Thus, a person who carries out his religious duties reaps all the benefit. This is why I always say to consider what you get out of Allah's Doctrine, not what you give up. Thus, you see, there is no injustice, for we are, after all, the created beings of Allah, and have you ever seen a creator tarnish his own creation? Thus, the Supreme Creator does not wrong His creation nor does He ever tarnish it. Rather, He improves it, along with making it even more beautiful and splendid; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Verily, Allah does not do the least wrong unto men, but it is men who wrong themselves.' (*Yunus:* 44), which means that people are the ones who harm themselves; such injustice always involves a repudiation of the Truth, and this is the ultimate injustice. Injustice also means that a man goes after immediate gratification, only to suffer punishment later, and thus depriving himself of everlasting felicity. Also, by committing an injustice to himself, he thereby loses the capacity to measure his life on earth, for no matter how long one's life is, human life will always be relatively short. If something is finite, it is by definition short and ephemeral. When Allah *Glorified is He* addresses mankind, He sets up signs that shall endure until the Day of Judgment. They all take part in these signs; they are the cosmic signs, and then Allah gave each Messenger a sign and a special miracle. He revealed a Doctrine comprising the basic directives of 'dos' and 'don'ts' and through the verses of His Book, He showed what is needed to be done as well as what is needed to be avoided; other than that, He left everything else permissible for you. The example that I always give is the following: the one of a student who fails at the end of the year. This student was not wronged by the school because there were others who did succeed. This is why it would not be proper to say it is the school that failed so-and-so. Rather, the proper thing to say is so-and-so is responsible for his own failure, and his classmate is responsible for his own success. All the school does is simply announcing the results.

Injustice can also involve begrudging the blessings of others, where the unjust seeks to strip the victim of his righteous possessions. Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* can never begrudge the blessings of His own servants since He is far above that; moreover, there is nothing that His servants possess which He would ever covet, for it is He, after all, who bestowed these blessings upon them. This is why it is not possible that any injustice should come from Him, and if there is any perceived injustice, it only comes from human beings themselves.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَوۡمَ يَحۡشُرُهُمۡ كَأَن لَّمۡ يَلۡبَثُوٓاْ إِلَّا سَاعَةٗ مِّنَ ٱلنَّهَارِ يَتَعَارَفُونَ بَيۡنَهُمۡۚ
قَدۡ خَسِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِلِقَآءِ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا كَانُواْ مُهۡتَدِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

On the Day He gathers them together, it will be as if they have stayed [in the world] no longer than a single hour, and they will recognize one another. Those who denied the meeting with God will be the losers, for they did not follow the right guidance [45] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 45)

This world which man lusts for, and in which he seeks his fortune, might make him forget about the Hereafter. Furthermore, when the Day of Judgment comes, you will feel as if you dwelled in this world for only an hour. The 'hour' is also when all people shall be gathered together on the Day of Judgment; however, an hour in this world is a period of time, and we know that the day is composed of twenty-four hours. The word *As-sa'a* is also the one which designates the clock that hangs on the wall or the watch that people wear on their wrists—both devices are used to tell time. Now, the rate at which time passes is standard—it is measured by the hour, by the minute and by the second—from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* and continuing through the ages of all those who would come after him. However, time varies from one place to another. The time in Cairo, for example, is two in the afternoon, while in New York it is seven in the morning; in another country the time is three in the morning. The exact time of day will never be the same for all human beings around the world—except on the Day of Judgment. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: '… And when the Last Hour dawns, those who had been lost in sin will swear that they had not tarried [on earth] longer than an hour …' (*ar-Rum:* 55). Therefore, they will be surprised to find out that their long and prosperous lives went by so quickly that it is as if an hour only had passed. Thus, they will discover how short their time on the earth was. That is not all, for they will realise that, since they did not take advantage of it, that time becomes wasted time and of no real value. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Remain, then, [O, believer,] patient in adversity, just as all of the prophets, endowed with firmness of heart, bore themselves with patience. And do not ask for a speedy doom of those [who still deny the truth], on the Day when they see [the fulfilment of] what they were promised, [it will seem to them] as though they had dwelt [on the earth] no longer than one hour of [an earthly] day! [This is our] message. Will, then, any being [really] destroyed save iniquitous folk?' (*al-Ahqaf:* 35) What this means is that while they are preoccupied with their trivial pleasures, distractions and pursuits, their time on earth passes them by, and they did not apply to their lives on earth the serious attitude that it deserves; therefore, it passes them by quickly as if it were only an hour. This is why Allah *the Exalted* hereby says: 'and on the Day when He shall gather them [unto Himself, it will seem to them] as if they had not tarried [on the earth] longer than an hour of a day …' (*Yunus:* 45). Now the people who shall be assembled on that Day fall into one of two categories: the first category of people is those who used to be each other’s companions in good works, and the second category of people is those who used to be each other’s accomplices in sin. Those whose relationship, in this world, revolved around good works shall rejoice in each other’s company, whereas those whose relationship, in their lives on earth, revolves around sin shall shun their former partners and be hostile towards them. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On that Day, friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the God-conscious.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). Regarding those who used to be each other’s partners in crime, Allah *the Almighty* also says: '[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers …' (*al-Baqara:* 166); they shall get to know one another, but their acquaintance with one another will not last long, and it will soon turn to hostility. None of them wishes to be friendly with the one who was the cause of his sorry fate. Their acquaintance with one another shall be marked by violence. The True Lord *the Most High* says: '… [And] lost indeed will be they who [in their lifetime] considered it a lie that they were destined to meet Allah…' (*Yunus:* 45) When you hear the word *khasar* (lost) being used, know that the issue in question has to do with a commercial transaction of some kind. *Al-khusara* means that a merchant loses either a portion or the totality of his capital and holdings. The stages of any commercial transaction—as we know—consist of either an increase in the merchant's capital, or a breaking-even, when the merchant neither gains nor loses; in the latter case, the merchant still feels as though his time and efforts have been wasted. This is all part of and related to commercial transactions.

We find Allah *Glorified is He* describing the religious act in this world in the following verses: 'O, you who have attained to faith! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering [in this world and in the life to come]? You are to believe in Allah and His Messenger and to strive hard in Allah's cause with your possessions and your lives. This is for your own good – if you but knew it!' (*as-Saff:* 10-11) Allah *the Exalted* also says: '[It is] they who [truly] follow Allah's revelation, are constant in prayer and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what we provide for them as sustenance – it is they who may look forward to a bargain that can never fail,' (*Fatir:* 29). A successful trade requires that you only enter into a commercial agreement when you are certain that your returns shall outweigh your investment. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says regarding losing transactions: '[for] it is they who have taken error in exchange for guidance; neither has their bargain brought them gain, nor have they found guidance [elsewhere].' (*al-Baqara:* 16) He also says: 'Yet [it does happen that] when people become aware of [an occasion for] worldly gain or a passing delight, they rush headlong towards it and leave you standing [and preaching]…" (*al-Jumu'a:* 11). It is the True Lord's Will that the word *tijara* would have such a clear and lucid meaning, capable of expressing a variety of situations since the word *tijara* really refers to the sum of all actions that are conducted in the life of human societies. Thus, one person works in his field of expertise, so as to benefit himself and also to benefit others, while another person works in another field thereby benefiting himself as well as others.

Thus, a human being comes to benefit from his own work and the work of others. In fact, a person benefits from the combined work of other people more than he benefits from his own work. Furthermore, it is in the interest of every human being to perfect the work which he performs. This way he does not have to worry because the work of other people—which he will also end up benefiting from—will be perfected in its turn. Trade (*tijara*) is also the link that unites producer with consumer. This is why, when Allah *Glorified is He* wanted us to respond to the call of the Friday Prayer, He said; 'O, you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave all worldly commerce. This is for your own good, if you but knew it.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) Note that Allah *Glorified is He* does not say to desist from both agricultural and industrial activities, nor does He say desist from teaching. Rather, of all the activities of life, He chose to cite that of buying and selling since it involves trade, and trade sums up all of the other activities of life. The merchant is the middleman between the producer and the consumer, and every commercial transaction requires buying and selling. When buying, the merchant pays a certain price, and when selling, the merchant receives a certain price. Therefore, the goal of all work is to make a profit. This is why a merchant prefers to sell rather than to buy. When you buy something, you feel a sense of reluctance to do so, but you know that you are in need of the purchased item. However, when you sell something, you feel highly satisfied. Thus, due to buying involving taking, and selling involving giving, the giving always has a pleasurable effect upon the soul since you reap the fruits of the transaction immediately.

If you happen to be a farmer, you know that you have to prepare the soil by ploughing it; you need to plant the seeds, water and prune them. Then you sit back and watch the plants grow and come to fruition. If you happen to be a craftsman, you know that you have to spend a lot of time perfecting your particular craft, but when you sell your wares, the reaping of profits is a much quicker affair. So, when Allah *the Exalted* uses the example of trade in this verse, it is as if He is emphasising the selling aspect of trade more than the buying aspect. Thus, you must consider your religious obligations as a kind of commercial transaction, where your returns ultimately exceed your investment, with you making a handsome profit. If you neglect certain aspects of your religious obligations, your 'losses' will be proportional to that which you neglected. In fact, you will end up losing more than that which you neglected. In any commercial transaction, you can always make up for the losses you might have incurred. Likewise, even if your losses persist, their effect can only last as long as your time on earth. You can still make a profit after that, and even if you did not, the only thing you will lose is the effort you put into it. Since life in this world is limited, the losses incurred on this planet are also limited. However, any losses incurred in the time that is limitless—eternity—are heavy losses indeed since the Hereafter is not marked by change and becoming such as is the case with the life of this world. In the Hereafter, you will either be in Paradise, where you will enjoy everlasting felicity—and this is the ultimate 'profit'—or in hell, which is the ultimate 'loss'. To incur an ultimate loss, such as this, happens when people deny, not just the blessings of Allah, but also deny their meeting with Him. Allah*'s Words* '… [and] lost indeed will be they who [in their lifetime] considered it a lie that they were destined to meet Allah and [thus]…' (*Yunus:* 45) mean that He was not on their minds; however, when the Day of Judgment comes, these people shall find themselves face to face with Him. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water …' (*an-Nur:* 39).

A mirage, as we know, is that which a traveller sees in the desert. It consists of reflection of light. He thinks that he is beholding water, but if he makes his way towards it, he will find no water. It is thus that Allah *the Almighty* compares the work of a disbeliever to the one who walks in the vastness of the desert and sees a mirage. He thinks that it is water, but it is only a mirage. Once he starts getting closer to the mirage, the following verse of Allah *the Exalted* starts to apply to his situation: '…until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing. Instead, he finds [that] Allah with him…' (*an-Nur:* 39); this means that he is startled and taken aback by the Presence of Allah *Glorified is He* and He thereby settles his account. This is why the one who is a disbeliever and at the same time works towards humanitarian ends shall receive his reward from those whom he helped, but his work will not amount to anything in the Hereafter. You will find that such a person is honoured by others, effigies are built in his honour, and he is granted prizes. It is this kind of person that the Messenger's Hadith refers to: 'You have done such-and-such an action so that your deeds might be circulated among people; and indeed word of your deed has spread.'(1) Furthermore, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says of those who deny their meeting with their Lord: '… and [thus] failed to find the right way.' (*Yunus:* 45); what this means is that they did not actively tread on that Path which their Creator *Glorified is He* had put before them—that Path and that Doctrine wherein are enshrined the laws that protect Allah's Creation. Allah *the Almighty* has created man for a purpose, and it is through this Doctrine that Allah *Glorified is He* and protects human beings— as individuals and communities— in order that human beings may carry out their function successfully. The Path of Guidance is that Path which, if a human being follows faithfully, will enable him to carry out the function that has been assigned to him, for the True Lord *the Most High* has created man as His vicegerent on earth. The man who does not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* Who decreed the Doctrine and Who does not put this Doctrine into effective practice is headed towards certain ruin, or in other words, a state of ruin that is all-encompassing. Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1905) and by an-Nasa'i in his Sunnan (6/23); ed. Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmya – Beirut*

وَإِمَّا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ ٱلَّذِى نَعِدُهُمْ أَوْ نَتَوَفَّيَنَّكَ فَإِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُهُمْ ثُمَّ
ٱللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Whether We let you [Prophet] see some of the punishment We have threatened them with, or cause you to die [first], they will return to Us: God is witness to what they do [46] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 46)

The word, which the True Lord *the Most High* uses is *wa-imma* (and whether), which is composed of *in* and *ma*; both are subject to linguistic elision. In this case, Allah *Glorified is He* is promising those who lie to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He will make them suffer, will punish them and will expose and humiliate them. In other words, O, Muhammad, either you shall witness them suffer such punishment and humiliation in this life, or we shall bring your life to an end before these events come to pass. However, you shall witness all of this in the Hereafter when you will see them mired in everlasting ignominy which they shall be condemned to on the Day of Judgment. This is a consolation for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

As for the Words of Allah *the Almighty* 'And whether We show you …' (*Yunus:* 46), they mean that We shall show you that which We have promised them in the way of humiliation in this life. Furthermore, if you do not see it in this life on earth, you shall surely witness their humiliation in the Hereafter, where all is due to return unto Allah *Glorified is He* since He shall afflict them with things that go beyond the usual sense of humiliation which human beings sometimes feel; they will experience such emotions as deep heartbreak and angst, especially when they behold the believers emerging as victorious. As far as that which is ‘to be seen’ is concerned, it is the issue at hand. What all this is referring to is the humiliation, the defeat, the sorrow, the destruction, the loss of wealth, the capture of women and children and a number of other catastrophes which will befall them while you look on; when your soul returns to Allah, then shall you see them suffer through that which He had promised them. Furthermore, you will not need anyone to testify against them since Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… is witness to all that they do.' (*Yunus:* 46) Furthermore, He is the Supreme Witness such that no other witness is shall be needed: '… and none can bear witness [thereto] as Allah does.' (*an-Nisa’:* 79)

Allah *Glorified is He* continues and says:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولٌ فَإِذَا جَآءَ رَسُولُهُمْ قُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِٱلْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ٤٧

Every community is sent a messenger, and when their messenger comes, they will be judged justly; they will not be wronged [47] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 47)

Now, the True Lord *the Most High* does not act unjustly towards anyone; He does not punish a people until they deny the Messenger whom He has sent to them. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… for there never was any community but a warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst.' (*Fatir:* 24). Allah *the Almighty* has also says: 'And so it is that your Lord would never destroy a community for its wrongdoing so long as its people are still unaware [of the meaning of right and wrong]' (*al-An‘am:* 131). There is thus no inculpation nor the passing of any punishment unless there is a clear mandate which identifies such-and-such an action as a crime, and heaven carries this out by sending forth Messengers; thus, nobody can complain that he did not receive a criterion or a principle by which to judge his own actions. The True Lord *the Most High* is hereby making it clear that for every community there is a Messenger who is responsible for conveying to them all aspects of the Doctrine. Now, Allah *Glorified is He* has created the entire cosmos, and all of the created beings therein were united since the time of Adam *peace be upon him* but then circumstances caused human beings to become more and more dispersed throughout the earth. Encounters between different communities became rare, as the means of transportation were primitive, and there grew to be as many spiritual diseases within human collectives as there were environments. However, with the coming of improved means of transportation, contact between various human communities became more frequent such that today, any event that takes place in the East can be seen live on the television in the West. However, this also spells the coming together of all the various spiritual diseases; thus, there is a need for a Final Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. During earlier times, the spiritual diseases were isolated cases, each community suffering from its own form of spiritual decay far away from other communities. During those times, the need was for one Messenger for every human collective so that the Messenger could address the specific malady of his community. However, in this age when physical distances between peoples have been abolished, the Messenger that is to be sent forth must be capable of curing all of spiritual maladies.

This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Now every community has had a prophet; and only after their prophet has appeared [and delivered his message] is judgment passed on them, in all equity; never are they wronged.' (*Yunus:* 47). History has confirmed this recurring pattern. For every Messenger that is sent forth, some believe in him and others reject him. Those who believed in him were ultimately victorious, and those who rejected him were ultimately defeated. The Words of this verse: 'Now every community has had a prophet …' (*Yunus:* 47) could also be taken in the general sense, that is, that every community shall be referred to on the Day of Judgment by the name of its particular Messenger: O, community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; O, community of Musa (Moses); O, community of 'Isa (Jesus)… etc. The True Lord *the Most High* says elsewhere: 'How, then, [will the sinners fare on Judgment Day,] when we shall bring forward witnesses from within every community, and bring you [O, Prophet] as witness against them? Those who were bent on denying the truth and paid no heed to the Prophet will on that

Day wish that the earth would swallow them, but they shall not [be able to] conceal from Allah anything that has happened.' (*an-Nisa':* 41-42)(2) Thus, Allah *the Exalted* is hereby explaining that for every community there is a Messenger who brought a message on Allah's behalf. Some believed, while others refused to do so. Furthermore, since such positions as 'belief' and 'disbelief' were taken up by people, there must therefore be a process of judging believers and disbelievers. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '... and only after their prophet has appeared [and delivered his message] is judgment passed on them, in all equity; never are they wronged.' (*Yunus:* 47)

Therefore, so long as it is a question of 'judgment', a believer cannot help but look upon a disbeliever as a rival; similarly, a disbeliever cannot help but see a believer as a rival. Thus, the matter becomes one where judgment needs to be passed; this is why the True Lord *the Most High* says: '… is judgment passed on them, in all equity; never are they wronged.' (*Yunus:* 47) which means that a fair judgment shall be pronounced in their case, for believers, Allah *the Exalted* has to take into account their good deeds. As for the disbelievers, they have no good deeds in their name because they had disbelieved in the True Lord *Glorified is He* so he throws them in hellfire. Moreover, they had been warned by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that the day would come when they would be questioned about their actions. They deemed this prospect to be improbable and said: 'Why after we have died and become mere dust and bones, shall we then be raised from the dead? And perhaps also our forebears of old?' (*as-Saffat:* 16-17) They were incredulous at the idea of resurrection; they rejected it. However, they shall most certainly experience the resurrection and realise that it was true. Allah *the Almighty* wishes to explain this issue in terms of faith, and so He says: 'Were We then weary with the first Creation?...' (*Qaf:* 15). So, when you die and your bodies disintegrate into the earth, would Allah *Glorified is He* be incapable of breathing life into you once again? No, this is not the case, for verily He *the Most High* says: 'Well do we know how the earth consumes their bodies, for with us is a record unfailing.' (*Qaf:* 4) and this means that He is capable of commanding the disparate elements of every human body to come together. Such a task is hardly difficult for Allah Who has given all of them life in the first place.

Now they had denied, ruled out, and ridiculed the coming of the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection. So derisive was their mockery that they called for the coming of this Day to be expedited. This is a mark of their ignorance. Every one of them ought to have fled from the terror of that awesome Day. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* continues to quote them as saying:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا ٱلْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

They ask, 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say is true?' [48] (The Quran, *Yunus*: 48)

Such denials and disparaging comments represent the attitude of polytheists, heretics, and sceptics everywhere and throughout the ages. In recent times, this is what the communists claimed when they undertook their seditious revolution where they slaughtered the entire upper class of society under the pretext of stopping the injustices being committed towards the poor. If they had only believed in the concept of reward and punishment and who determines this, it would have been better. Should the unjust pronounce a judgment upon someone else who is unjust? The result can only be the destruction of one oppressor by another, and this is in fact what happened; so where are the communists now? Why did they not realise that there is a Creator to this universe—One Who has punished offenders in the past and Who will punish the offenders of the future. They did not pay attention to this fact because they were materialists who took base 'matter' as their god. They said that Allah (God) does not exist, and the only thing that is real in this life is 'matter'; where are they now? Furthermore, if you have gained political sovereignty over your contemporaries and if you have claimed that you have established justice among them, then what about those who had come before? And those who came later?

Thus, they did not take note of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* does not allow an unjust person to die until He has taken His revenge. Nor did they take cognisance of the fact that behind this world there is another world where the virtuous are rewarded for their good works and the sinners are punished for the sins. Logic says that these people should have believed in the existence of a Just God and that there must come a Day of reckoning when every man shall be rewarded for his actions. However, they ridiculed this idea or concept just as the disbelievers before them had ridiculed it. Allah *Glorified is He* has quoted them as saying: 'and yet, they [who deny the truth] are wont to ask, "When is that promise [of resurrection and judgment] to be fulfilled, [Answer this, O you who believe in it,] if you are men of truth?"' (*Yunus:* 48) However, Allah's promise is true, and it is imminent; Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger from Allah, who conveys the message on His behalf, for there is no part of the message which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has exclusive ownership over. This is why the True Lord says:

قُل لَّآ أَمۡلِكُ لِنَفۡسِي ضَرّٗا وَلَا نَفۡعًا إِلَّا مَا شَآءَ ٱللَّهُۗ لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌۚ
إِذَا جَآءَ أَجَلُهُمۡ فَلَا يَسۡتَـٔۡخِرُونَ سَاعَةٗ وَلَا يَسۡتَقۡدِمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

Say [Prophet], 'I cannot control any harm or benefit that comes to me, except as God wills. There is an appointed term for every community, and when it is reached they can neither delay nor hasten it, even for a moment' [49] (The Quran, *Yunus*: 49)

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* hereby acquits himself of all forms of craftiness and luxury, along with proclaiming that which the True Lord *the Most High* has ordered him to proclaim, for he *peace and blessings be upon him* has the power to bring about neither good nor harm since good and harm lie in the hands of His Creator *Glorified is He*; He is your Creator, and everything depends on His Will. This verse has come as a reply to their question which Allah *Glorified is He* had mentioned in the previous verse: 'and yet, they [who deny the truth] are wont to ask, "When is that promise [of resurrection and judgment] to be fulfilled, [Answer this, O, you who believe in it,] if you are men of truth?"' (*Yunus:* 48) They ridiculed this promise and asked scornfully when this punishment was going to come; it is as if they had, in a sarcastic fashion, expressed their eagerness for the coming of the suffering, and this is indicated by the True Lord's Words: 'Now every community has had a prophet; and only after their prophet has appeared [and delivered his message] is judgment passed on them, in all equity; never are they wronged.' (*Yunus:* 47) This verse does not refer to the Day of Judgment; rather, its purpose was to describe the state of those who rejected the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* while those who would continue to say: '…"When is that promise [of resurrection and judgment] to be fulfilled, [Answer this, O, you who believe in it,] if you are men of truth?"' (*Yunus:* 48) This means that they uttered these words before the coming of the Day of Judgment, and this verse asserts that for every community a Messenger was sent to—this idea is supported by numerous other verses such as the following: '... Moreover, we would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] until we have sent an apostle [to them].' (*al-Isra':* 15) Also, the True Lord's Words *the Most High*: 'And so it is that your Lord would never destroy a community for its wrongdoing so long as its people are still unaware [of the meaning of right and wrong]' (*al-An'am:* 131). Furthermore, this is proven by Allah's Words: 'for [thus it is:] had We destroyed them by means of a chastisement before this [Book was revealed], they would indeed [be justified to] say [on Judgment Day]. "O, our Lord! If only you had sent a prophet to us…"' (*Ta Ha:* 134). All of this supports the principle that any messenger who was sent to the people brought Allah's commandments. Some people have believed in him, while others have rejected him. Allah's ruling was to vanquish the disbelievers while granting the victory to those who believed.

If disbelievers mockingly express their eagerness to meet their punishment, then they shall see it. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the verse: 'Say [O, Prophet]: "It is not within my power to avert harm from, or bring benefit to, myself, ' (*Yunus:* 49). This verse means that if disbelievers are asking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring punishment or reward, he is merely the Messenger of Allah. As a human messenger, he does not possess the power to bring about harm or benefit to himself, let alone bringing harm or benefit for others. All of this is in the hands of Allah *Glorified is He*. For every community, there is a set term when disbelievers shall be punished and the final Divine decision shall be implemented.

The following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '… except as Allah may please. For all people a term has been set.' (*Yunus:* 49) indicate that Allah's Will is decisive. His decision is the final word. It also indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and people do not possess the power to bring about harm or benefit for themselves because human beings have been created in a state of ‘compulsion’ in certain matters, while having the freedom of choice in other matters.

This ‘free will’ applies to all religious matters, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '… let, then, him who wills believe in it and let him who wills reject it,' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Therefore, you are free to either obey or disobey. All of this is well within your rights. When a person leads a life of obedience, he is thereby creating benefit for himself. However, if a person lives a life of sin, he is creating harm for himself. Thus, there is the possibility of either harm or benefit in matters of free will.

An example of this is a person who tries to commit suicide by hanging himself. He is bringing harm unto himself, but he might be rescued by his relatives, if Allah *the Exalted* wills.

Thus, when it comes to matters of free will, man has the ability, by Allah’s leave, to bring about either harm or benefit to himself. Allah *Glorified is He* told us that there is a term limit for every community. Thus, you do not determine these term limits by yourselves. The term limits of extermination or punishment are determined by Allah *the Exalted*. Human beings are always in a hurry, but Allah *Glorified is He* does not operate according to the hasty tendencies of His servants. Matters only pass according to the timeline willed by Allah. He does not act according to the will of His own creation, for He is the Creator *the Most High*. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who says: 'I shall make clear to you (the truth of) my messages. Do not, then, ask Me to hasten (them)!' (*al-Anbiya’:* 37) He also says: 'As it is man who (often) prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for things that are good, for man is prone to be hasty (in his judgments),' (*al-Isra’:* 11). Therefore, Allah *the Most High* postpones His Will as a Mercy for His creation, but when the term limit arrives, there is no possibility of postponing or expediting its date. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: When the end of their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor hasten it.' (*Yunus:* 49) When the end of their term approaches, they cannot delay it by a single moment.

They will also not be able to hasten their term as they please, Allah says:

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَتَىٰكُمْ عَذَابُهُۥ بَيَٰتًا أَوْ نَهَارًا مَّاذَا يَسْتَعْجِلُ مِنْهُ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Say, ‘Think: if His punishment were to come to you, during the night or day, what part of it would the guilty wish to hasten? [50] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 50)

This is an adequate answer to their demand that the day of suffering be hastened. 'When this day arrives, we shall see what your reaction will be.' By calling for the suffering to be expedited, they are thereby demonstrating their own idiocy when they questioned the suffering in the first place. When Allah says: 'Say [O, Prophet to them], "Have you ever considered (how you would feel),"' (*Yunus:* 50), the meaning is, 'Ask them, if they know, what will happen to them.'

It is the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* that the time of suffering be obscured, for He says: '… if His chastisement were to befall you by night or by day? ‘(*Yunus:* 50) The word *al-bayt* (home) refers to night since night is the time when people rest in their homes. On the other hand, the word *nahar* (day) is the time wherein things are exposed and human activity is heightened.

Allah *the Almighty* wished to make the day of punishment and its time vague. If punishment comes by night, human beings are usually unconscious and sleeping. If it comes by day, human beings will be busy and engaged in the rhythms of life. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Can, then, the people of any community ever feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them by night, while they are asleep?' (*al-A’raf:* 97). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Or do the people of the villages feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them in broad daylight, while they are engaged in (worldly) play?' (*al-A’raf:* 98) Furthermore, if you were to look at the reality of this world, you would find that when an event occurs on earth, it happens during the night of one hemisphere and the day of the other hemisphere.

If the suffering comes suddenly and disbelievers tried to quickly proclaim their faith, this sudden ‘faith’ will bring them no benefit. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding those who adopt this hastened position when the torment arrives: '[But Allah said:] "Now (you believe)? You had been rebelling (against us) before this (time) and were amongst those who spread corruption.' (*Yunus:* 91) If the suffering were to befall disbelievers at any moment, they would not be able to dismiss the punishment by uttering their belief in the last second. It would not benefit them to proclaim their faith later than the designated term. Allah *the Almighty* would not accept such a declaration, and they will experience the suffering of this world, in addition to the suffering of the Hereafter. Furthermore, this mocking call they requested, that the punishment be hastened for them, will only increase their final suffering twofold. There will be a punishment in this world in addition to the extended suffering they were promised in the Hereafter, Then Allah says:

أَثُمَّ إِذَا مَا وَقَعَ ءَامَنتُم بِهِۦٓۚ ءَآلۡـَٔـٰنَ وَقَدۡ كُنتُم بِهِۦ تَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَ (٥١)

Will you believe in it, when it actually happens?' It
will be said, 'Now [you believe], when [before] you
sought to hasten it?' [51] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 51)

This statement conveys the following, 'Will you only believe when the suffering befalls you?' Your declaration of faith at that moment will not benefit you. In addition, you shall not earn any credit by undergoing the suffering for which you are destined. Thus, your call for the punishment to be hastened will not benefit you in any way since the proclamation of faith (after seeing the punishment) is of no avail.

We can see an example of this in the story of Pharaoh, who only exclaimed while drowning: 'I have come to believe that there is no deity except Him Whom the Children of Israel believe in,' (*Yunus:* 90). Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

ثُمَّ قِيلَ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ ذُوقُواْ عَذَابَ ٱلۡخُلۡدِ هَلۡ
تُجۡزَوۡنَ إِلَّا بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَكۡسِبُونَ (٥٢)

It will be said to the evildoers, 'Taste lasting
punishment. Why should you be rewarded for anything
but what you did?' [52] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 52)

In this verse, we are informed of the suffering that shall befall those who disbelieved on the Day of Judgment. Through their disbelief, they have wronged themselves in this world, and they shall be made to suffer in the

Hereafter. Moreover, their suffering is described as '…eternal suffering!' (*Yunus:* 52) Their punishment will never end.

Allah *Glorified is He* concluded the verse by saying: '…Are you being (appropriately) rewarded for what you were earning (in falsehood)?' (*Yunus:* 52) This verse means that Allah *the Almighty* has not wronged them, for He had revealed the message of faith to them through a human messenger who was armed with a miracle. The messenger brought to them a clear set of guided commandments. Allah *Glorified is He* offered them the possibility of salvation over a long period of time, but they did not benefit from the Divine offer by believing in the message.

Therefore, eternal suffering awaits them. Allah *the Exalted* specifically mentioned this eternal suffering because the suffering on the earth is limited. Even if it is filled with disgrace and ignominy, earthly suffering is finite and relatively trivial when compared to the perpetuity of suffering in the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* referred to this eternal suffering as the sole result of their earning. Usually, a person’s earning is that profit that he makes over and above his original investment. For instance, an investor who starts out with a capital worth of ten dollars might ‘earn’ an additional five dollars. Does a sinner actually ‘earn’ any profit above and beyond the original investment? Indeed, a sinner earns more than he invested since he declares lawful the activities which Allah *Glorified is He* had forbidden. Thus, he broadens the sphere of legality for himself while reducing the sphere of things that are illegal. He is under the false illusion that he ’earns’ profit since he allows his ego to dictate the terms of legality. This means that he considers only the immediate satisfaction that can be derived from pleasures, while failing to consider the consequences of surrendering to such pleasures.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَسْتَنۢبِـُٔونَكَ أَحَقٌّ هُوَ ۖ قُلْ إِى وَرَبِّىٓ إِنَّهُۥ لَحَقٌّ ۖ وَمَآ أَنتُم بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

They ask you [Prophet], ‘Is it true?’ Say, ‘Yes, by my Lord, it is true, and you cannot escape it’ [53] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 53)

These are the same people who had previously said: 'When will that promise (of resurrection and judgment) be fulfilled?' (*Yunus:* 48) They have started once again with their endless questioning. The Arabic word *yastanbi'unaka* means, 'They are asking you for news.' However, *An-naba'* is an article of news about a great and momentous event. Thus, they wondered about the Day of Judgement, asking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* if it is, indeed, true.

There are multiple elements in this particular verse that could have an influence on the meaning of the word *al-haqq* (the truth). The word *huwa* (this) could refer to the roots of the religion, namely the Quran, the Prophetic mission and the religious law. In this sense, the verse verified that the Quran, the religious law, the Prophetic mission of Prophet Muhammad and the Resurrection are all true. This also means that the eventual suffering of disbelievers and the eventual victory of believers is also true.

Therefore, when disbelievers asked: 'Is all of this (*huwa*) the truth (*Al-haqq*)' (*Yunus:* 53), their question refers to more than just one concept. It is as if they had asked, 'Is this Quran which you have brought forth true? Also, is the prophetic mission which you claim true? Are the laws (which you claim) that Allah has brought down to the earth as clear directives to regulate the lives of men true? Are the Day of Judgment and the resurrection true? Is the suffering in this world true?' Thus, the word *huwa* in the verse is indeed an all-encompassing word that can be associated with more than one question. Then comes Allah's response: 'Say [O, Muhammad], "Indeed (*'Ey*), by (Allah) my Lord, it is most certainly true,"' (*Yunus:* 53).

Someone may ask you, 'Is a man called Zayd present?' As a response, you might say, 'Yes, he is present.' You do not generally reply to him, 'By Allah *Glorified is He* Zayd is present!' There is no need for you to emphasise your answer, for the questioner is not denying Zayd's presence. In the same manner, there is no reason for the verse to emphasise its answer by invoking Allah's name, except that disbelievers' question was asked in a disavowing tone. Thus, you can deduce that they asked the question in a disbelieving tone. This is why the answer that is given begins with the expression, 'Indeed, which is used in Arabic as the starting clause of an oath.

There are different Arabic expressions that can be used to answer a question. Each expression corresponds to a particular context. For instance, the expression *bala* (surely or indeed) appears in the response to a question that is posed in the negative mode, such as in the following verse: 'He (Allah) said, "Am I not your Lord" to which they answered, "Surely, indeed,"' (*al-A'raf:* 172). Thus, the expression 'Indeed (*'Ey*)' means, 'Yes, I swear by my Lord that it is indeed true.' As we mentioned, you would never resort to an oath (of this kind) unless your questioner exhibits a sense of disbelief.

In Arabic, there are other expressions generally used for additional emphasis, like the expression, *inna,* which can be translated as, 'most certainly'. We find an example of this in the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And set forth unto them a parable – (the story of how) the people of the township (behaved) when (Our) message-bearers came to them. Lo! We sent to them two (prophets), and they disbelieved in both. So, we strengthened (the two messengers) with a third messenger, and thereupon, they (the messengers) said, "Behold, we have been sent to you (by Allah)!"' (*Ya Sin:* 13-14)

What was the response of the people to whom the three messengers were sent? '(The others) answered, 'You are nothing but mortal men like ourselves. Moreover, the Most Gracious has never bestowed anything (of revelation). You are only lying!'' (*Ya Sin:* 15) When the disbelievers' denial of the three messengers was obstinate, the messengers told them: 'Our Lord knows that we have 'most certainly' (*inna*) been sent to you,' (*Ya Sin:* 16). The expression, 'most certainly' (*inna*) was duly appropriate to the adamant denial of disbelievers in this Quranic story.

Therefore, the level of emphasis in the response to a question should be proportionate to the level of denial in the questioner's words. If there are no disavowing tones in the question, there is no need for any emphasis in the response. If a question is charged with slight disavowing undertones, then its response will contain a single point of emphasis. If a question is charged with moderate disavowing undertones, then its response should contain two points of emphasis. However, if a question is charged with heavily disavowing undertones, then its response should have three points of emphasis.

In the verse we are examining now, Allah *the Almighty* instructed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to respond to their query by saying: 'Indeed ('*Ey*), by my Lord, it is most certainly true, and you cannot elude (the final reckoning)!' (*Yunus:* 53) The Messenger swore by his Lord’s name, for it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who has charged him with his mission, then he insists the following: '… is most certainly true,' (*Yunus:* 53) since their question was charged with incredulous and derisive undertones. If they still do not believe in his message, then they shall be made to suffer because there is no means for them to elude Allah *Glorified is He* and He is capable of bringing them to justice if they tried to escape. They will not elude Him by seeking the intercession of a third party, nor will they elude reckoning by working out a deal with Him *the Most High*.

Then, at the end of the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… and you cannot elude (the final reckoning)!' (*Yunus:* 53) In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* wants to shed some light on this issue since some disbelievers assume that they can elude His judgment. It is indeed possible that Allah *Glorified is He* accept the intercession of those who are worthy, and He can also accept ransom, but this will not be accepted from disbelievers. This is why an explanation follows in the next verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the next verse:

وَلَوۡ أَنَّ لِكُلِّ نَفۡسٖ ظَلَمَتۡ مَا فِى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ لَٱفۡتَدَتۡ بِهِۦۗ وَأَسَرُّواْ ٱلنَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا
رَأَوُاْ ٱلۡعَذَابَۖ وَقُضِىَ بَيۡنَهُم بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۚ وَهُمۡ لَا يُظۡلَمُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

Every soul that has done evil, if it possessed all that is on the earth, would gladly offer it as ransom. When they see the punishment, they will repent in secret, but they will be judged with justice and will not be wronged [54] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 54)

When the prospect of suffering is imminent, man wishes to escape from it, even if he has to pay a ransom that guards him from the torment. Look at how a sinner will be willing to put up everything which he owns to guard himself, even if he owns the heavens and the earth.

However, no one will have the ownership of the heavens and the earth besides Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, there is no realistic chance that this sort of ransom could ever be possible. Even if a ransom is possible, it will not be an adequate redemption for their sins. The disbelieving and iniquitous person on earth has usurped the rights and assets that others have acquired through lawful means. Thus, this unjust person will stand guilty of seizing the fruit of other people's labour. If such behaviour were made morally acceptable, many people would seek to take the rewards of other people's efforts. This injustice would distort the movement of life. If Allah *the Exalted* does not forbid this injustice in this world before the Hereafter, iniquity would run rampant. This will cause unemployment to become widespread and will undermine the scales of justice. The entire economy of life breaks down. Therefore, Allah made this injustice a grave and irreparable sin on the Day of Judgement.

Suppose that an unjust person managed to seize ownership of everything in the world and sought to buy himself out of suffering on the Day of Judgment. To his surprise, he will realise that these seized possessions will not be enough to buy him salvation. This is indeed the greatest of losses.

This phenomenon exists in the world of man. A misguided person may accept bribes, commit embezzlement, or steal other people's assets. When the law seizes everything he had taken unjustly, he may wish to renounce his illegal merchandise in return for his freedom. Generally, just societies do not allow this bargain to occur. Even if this bargain is allowed in this world, it will not happen in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in chapter *al-Baqara*: 'And remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom taken from them, and none shall be saved (except by Allah's Will),' (*al-Baqara:* 48). Allah *Glorified is He* also says in another verse: 'And remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them, and none shall be aided.' (*al-Baqara:* 123). Some sceptics have said that the two verses are similar to each other, but they did not take note of the fact that each verse has a different sequence in mentioning the ransom-giving and the intercession. These two verses exhibit a sublime level of eloquence. Anyone who reads the beginning of each verse, while recognising the true eloquence of the Arabic language, will realise that the ending of each verse appropriately corresponds to its beginning

He who reads the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'and remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another,' (*al-Baqara:* 48) will realise that there are two souls we need to take into account. The first soul is the one that seeks to intercede, and the second soul is the one on whose behalf the intercession is made. The intercession is not accepted from the first soul who seeks to intercede, nor is any ransom accepted for the disbelieving and the unjust people. In the second verse, neither intercession nor ransom is accepted from the soul on whose behalf the intercession is made, for it tries, at first, to offer a ransom, then when that does not work it brings forth an intercessor. Thus, in each of the two verses, the unique wording of the verse is appropriately placed according to the particular context.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and all human beings that have been doing evil would surely, if they possessed all that is on the earth, offer it as ransom (on Judgment Day),' (*Yunus:* 54). As we mentioned earlier, even if we rhetorically suppose that a single soul could indeed own all of that is on this earth, it would still be impossible for that soul to offer a ransom in exchange for its salvation. Allah *the Almighty* describes the result of this when He says: '… and when they see the suffering (that awaits them), they will be unable to express their remorse,' (*Yunus:* 54) and this means that they will hide the despair that befalls their souls so that there will not be any verbal or physical symptoms of distress. They will hide their worries inside their hearts because when they see the suffering that awaits them, they will be utterly astounded and stunned. It is as if their hearts will come to a standstill, while they are unable to even scream. All they can do is hold their pains within themselves, incapable of expressing their pains in a physical manner.

Nowadays we are taught that physical and verbal expressions are some of the ways in which the mind is able to vent its emotional stresses. When a person is unable to express his feelings in such a manner, he will suffer even more. Thus, disbelievers will suppress their feelings of remorse when they behold the horrid and frightening suffering. Although these words refer to the unjust people and despite their worldly blunders, Allah *Glorified is He* said about their judgment: 'But judgment will be passed on them in all equity, and they will not be wronged,' (*Yunus:* 54) so, despite their disbelief and injustice, they shall be dealt with fairly by Allah *the Exalted*.

Now imagine that someone who does not believe in Allah *the Almighty* wrongs some other disbeliever, would Allah's ruling be indifferent on this injustice? No, it would not, because the rights of one of Allah's created beings has been violated, even if the victim is a disbeliever. Allah *Glorified is He* will inflict a compensatory punishment on the transgressing disbeliever for committing an iniquity towards one of Allah's created beings, even though the oppressed person is also a disbeliever.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* passes judgment on them in all fairness, by decreasing the amount of suffering for the one who was wronged and increasing the suffering of the wrongdoer. This is the meaning of Allah's Words: 'But judgment will be passed on them in all equity,' (*Yunus:* 54) since it is the matter of an unbiased judgment to be passed between all parties.

This judgment will thus render a just ruling between all of Allah's created beings when one of them wrongs the other. Allah *the Almighty* is the Lord and the Creator of all things. According to the principle of Lordship, whereby Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed all His blessings upon believers and disbelievers, by granting sunlight, water, air and all manners of sustenance to all of them equally, He will judge them justly as well. Therefore, if a case of injustice arises, whether it is between two individuals of the same faith or between two individuals who have no faith, Allah *the Most High* will render an equitable judgment.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

أَلَآ إِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ أَلَآ إِنَّ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

It is to God that everything in the heavens and the earth truly belongs: God's promise is true, but most people do not realize it [55] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 55)

The Arabic word *aala* (verily) is a grammatical article that serves to introduce a warning. Its function is to alert the listener that the following matter is of utmost importance. Whereas a speaker is fully aware of the gravity of the matter he is presenting, a listener is in a position of learning and revelation from ignorance. Occasionally, a speaker might express a matter verbally to a distracted listener, who may then miss some of the speaker's words. Allah *the Almighty* wants listeners to be attentive to the entire verse, and so the verse features the Arabic article *alaa* (verily) in order to bring attention to the imminent forthcoming information.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'O, verily, to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on the earth,' (*Yunus:* 55). Thus, Allah *the Exalted* wanted the article of importance *(alaa)* to precede all the following concepts of this verse. These concepts state that He has total sovereignty over everything and that it is He Who created the universe. He also created man as a master in the universe and placed the universe in the service of mankind. In addition, Allah *the Most High* instituted the law of cause and effect, whereby every action produces an effect. Thus, every person who acts in the physical realm, whether they are believers or disbelievers, shall be rewarded by the fruits of their labour.

Now, a person might derive benefits from his efforts in the physical world, but he is forgetful or lacks faith in his Lord. He may think that he achieved these benefits solely due to his own ability, and thus, he becomes infatuated with a sense of power over the physical world. He may even declare what Qarun (Korah) had claimed: 'This (wealth) has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that I possess!' (*al-Qasas:* 78)

Therefore, a person who forgets that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all the natural laws and only puts his faith in the immediate causes will receive punishment in this world or in the hereafter. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* was warning them to discard their ignorance and pay attention to this important matter: 'O, verily, to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on the earth!' (*Yunus:* 55)

Therefore, human beings should beware of being conceited with a false sense of power. They should avoid misusing that power which resulted from Divine physical law of cause and effect. Certainly, they should never use this natural law to achieve ends that are not in line with what Allah has willed for them. It is Allah *the Exalted* Who has bestowed blessings upon them and ordained their fate. The real reason why our actions produce effects is because of the blessing and decrees of Allah *the Almighty*.

The constantly changing events of the universe testify to this fact. For instance, the intellectual capacity with which you make plans could be struck by a bout of madness. Your organs that include the hands, feet, tongue, eyes, or ears can become afflicted with disease. You would be paralysed and incapable without His Will. Anything that is susceptible to change is not part of your innate essence. All the abilities that you possess have been bestowed upon you by the Originator of all causes.

Thus, beware of only relying on the outward physical causes, while forgetting the Originator of all causes. Allah *Glorified is He* is the real possessor of everything which you own and of the faculties which you utilise. When He wills so, He can deprive you of these blessings. Therefore, take heed and beware of assuming that the physical forces are the ultimate causes. Sometimes, Allah *the Exalted* does not allow these causes to render their usual effects. Consider, for instance, a farmer who plants cottonseeds, ploughs the earth, and irrigates the land regularly. An infestation of insects may then ruin the entire crop. Thus, all possessions are ultimately owned by Allah *the Almighty*.

Know that there is a concept of ‘property’ and a concept of ‘ownership’. Ownership is to have sovereignty over the one who has property and is the ultimate form of control. Consider the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Say, "O, Allah, Lord of all dominion! You grant dominion unto whom You will, and You take away dominion from whom You will,"' (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). Thus, in this world, all dominion and sovereignty belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The term *alaa* came in the beginning of the verse which we are currently examining, so as to alert the heedless to the Truth. A misguided person, for whom the law of cause and effect has produced results, may become conceited with a false sense of power. Thus, sometimes, Allah *the Almighty* suspends the natural law of cause and effect, as this helps human beings to remain conscious of the Originator of all causes.

Allah *the Exalted* then said in the same verse: 'Oh, verily, Allah’s promise (*wa’d*) always comes true,' (*Yunus:* 55). If the promise mentioned refers to something that is essentially good, its purpose is to give glad tidings. However, if the promise refers to something which is evil, its purpose is to warn of an impending torment. The Arabic word *wa‘d* (promise) can either denote a promise of good or a threat of forthcoming torment. On the other hand, the word *wa'eed* (threat) always denotes that which is tormenting. The word *wa'd* implies that an occurrence will be brought about by the one who can make such an occurrence come to pass. The execution of a promise requires multiple elements: the first is the active subject, the second is the object that is acted upon, the third is the timing, the fourth is the position in space, and the fifth is law of causality.

Power and ability are required for this promise to be brought about. If you promise someone, 'I shall come to see you tomorrow at such-and-such place in order to speak to you about a certain subject', let us see which elements of this promise you have control over. You cannot guarantee to be alive for that time period to fulfil your promise, nor does your listener have any control over the time he shall die. Similarly, the designated location might be destroyed by a catastrophe, and as far as the subject you intend to discuss is concerned, you might decide, suddenly, prior to the meeting, that you do not need to discuss the matter anymore.

If you suppose that all of these variables regarding the promise go as planned, which of the variables do you, or anyone else, really have control over? You have no control over any of the variables. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* instructed His creation to use proper wording when making promises over that which they do not own or control. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'and never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow," without (adding) "Only if Allah so wills,"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

Thus, when you mention Allah's Will, and later something comes up which prevents you from carrying out what you promised, you will not be considered a liar. Therefore, our Lord taught us how to guard our sayings from falsehood. He wanted us to speak within the limits of our power, and indeed, none of the variables of any particular event are within our control.

On the other hand, when Allah *the Exalted* makes a promise, there is nothing that can prevent what He had promised from being fulfilled. He is far above the possibility of breaking His promise since all of the variables of any event are subject to His Will. It is impossible for any of these variables to disobey Him, and thus, His promise is true and assured.

You are at the mercy of the changing circumstances to which Allah *Glorified is He* subjects you. Suppose that you wanted to construct a house, and you gave the architect the specific characteristics which you would like to see in the final render. However, the architect was unable to buy some of the materials which you had specified. In this case, your plans are not technically feasible or executable from the architect's point of view.

However, the case is different with *the Almighty* Creator *Glorified is He*. It is Allah Who owns all things. When He informs us of a promise, it will most assuredly be executed. However, disbelievers deny this. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'But most of them know it not!' (*Yunus:* 55) They do not recognise this truth, as they had previously said: 'When is that promise (of resurrection and judgment) to be fulfilled?' (*Yunus:* 48) The verse could also be referring to people's lack of control over any of the variables that are involved in the fulfilment of a promise. Only when the human will coincides with the Divine Will shall human plans come to pass, then Allah says:

هُوَ يُحْيِۦ وَيُمِيتُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

It is He who gives life and takes it, and you will
all be returned to Him [56] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 56)

Now, we know that the rhythms of life as well as its properties and ownership are elements of the science of biology. Allah *the Almighty* is the Living Power because He owns the original source of life. He is also capable of rendering created beings' deaths when He takes back all that comes forth from life. Allah *the Exalted* brings about death as He is the Owner of all things, just as He is also the Creator of the physical causes of nature. There is neither a promise that He will not keep nor a threat that He will not execute. We are born into this world by His leave, and we die by His leave. Indeed, we shall not elude Him *Glorified is He*. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: '… and to Him you all must return' (*Yunus:* 56).

Any person, who does not thankfully acknowledge Allah's order to bring him into life, must face the frightening prospect of returning to Allah *the Most High*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ قَدۡ جَآءَتۡكُم مَّوۡعِظَةٞ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ وَشِفَآءٞ لِّمَا
فِي ٱلصُّدُورِ وَهُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٞ لِّلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ٥٧

People, a teaching from your Lord has come to you, a healing for what is in [your] hearts, and guidance and mercy for the believers [57] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 57)

These Words are addressed to all of mankind. When Allah *the Almighty* spoke to the believers who are faithful to His commandments, He used the expression: 'O, you who have believed!' (*al-Baqara:* 104) Sometimes, Allah *the Exalted* addressed all of mankind asking them to adhere to the fundamentals of faith, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'O, mankind! Be conscious of your Lord,' (*an-Nisa':* 1). However, when Allah *the Most High* spoke to believers, He charged them with duties. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'O, you who have believed, fasting is ordained for you,' (*al-Baqara:* 183). We find another example in the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'O, you who have believed, just retribution is ordained for you in the (capital) punishment for murder,' (*al-Baqara:* 178). Therefore, the Words which Allah *Glorified is He* addresses believers always concern the religious law which believers are required to follow. On the other hand, when it comes to basic creed and the fundamental belief in Allah *the Most High* His speech is addressed to humanity as a whole.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: 'O, mankind! There has now come unto you an admonition,' (*Yunus:* 57). In this verse the ‘admonition’ is materialised, as if it were possible for the admonition to ‘arrive’ from a particular place. In reality, an admonition consists of words only, but Allah *the Almighty* employed this literary device to characterise the ‘admonition’ with the power of movement and the capacity to exhort men to faith, along with strengthening their convictions. Admonition and advice are the acts of exhorting a person, by means of poignant rhetoric, to do the good and to stay away from what is evil. When a person is an outstanding preacher and advisor, this means that his words are persuasive and his style is moving and eloquent. A recipient of advice will usually be weaker than the one who is giving it. The recipient’s soul is usually heavy and resistant to such advice, unless the preacher is a skilled orator who can stir his audience by the beauty of his words and the sincerity of his style. In such a situation, the recipient of advice might convince himself, 'The advisor has seen me in a lowly state and wishes to raise me up to his level.' He may then allow himself to be persuaded.

Let us remember the wise saying: 'Words of guidance and advice weigh heavily upon a listener. Therefore, when giving advice, do not adopt an argumentative tone, nor set the bar too high, instead make your point in a subtle and refined manner.' Only when this is implemented will a listener lend you his ear, when you employ eloquent, persuasive and non-abrasive statements which he finds convincing. At this point, you will succeed in conveying your message to the very core of his consciousness.

In Arabic, 'words of advice' (*maw'idha*) are different from 'words of wisdom' (*wasiya*). The Arabic word *wasiya* is used to define several meanings. It could mean the phrases of wisdom that are usually given as summarised recapitulations of fundamental truths. It is also used to mean the will that is written by a person falling sick, with his children gathering around him at his deathbed. This is due to that when a person proceeds to write his will, he entreats his successors to remember the matters which are more important in life.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse we are examining: 'There has now come unto you an admonition from your Lord,' (*Yunus:* 57). Now, one can either accept an admonition or reject it, and since this admonition is coming '… from your Lord,' (*Yunus:* 57), one must be attentive and exhibit presence of mind. It is worth noting that Allah *the Almighty* said that the admonition is coming from our Lord, and not from our God. This is because the word 'God' (*Ilah*) indicates that His obligatory orders are to His servants, whereas the word 'Lord' (*Rab*) speaks of Allah *Glorified is He* as the caretaker and the educator of mankind Who guarantees their sustenance even if they disbelieve in Him. Thus, this admonition comes from our Lord, Allah. It is part of His Divine education to His creation. We know that the various aspects of Lordship fall into one of two categories. The first category consists of the sustenance of life which Allah *the Exalted* bestows upon us in terms of nourishment and material bounty. This sustenance is destined for both believers and disbelievers. The other category consists of the values which uphold the healthy functioning of human activity, and these are primarily directed to believers. Thus, this admonition is Divine education which comes from our Lord since He is our Caretaker. It is He Who has created us from nothing, and it is He Who has extended sustenance to us when our creation was in a state of need. He also benevolently directed these blessings to all of His creation.

Appropriate advice and admonition should come from one who expects nothing from you in return. Allah *Glorified is He* is sublime above any needs from His creation. He shall not gain anything from our servitude as our powers are pale in comparison to His Power.

This admonition concerns conscientious, rightly guided people, whose actions are only performed after they are processed in their minds. These righteous people then choose between various alternatives, whereas the actions performed by insane people have neither rhyme nor reason. They do not think their actions through since their consciousness is disturbed and lacks the capacity for choosing between alternatives.

However, why does a conscientious person sometimes make wrong choices? It is a man’s whims and desires which can compromise the ability of a conscientious person to make the right choice. The root of whims and desires lies in the ego and the proud heart. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse which we are currently examining: 'O, mankind! There has now come unto you an admonition from your Lord, a cure for all (the ill) that may be in men’s hearts' (*Yunus:* 57). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down a cure that will free your hearts from the shackles which affect your judgment, and that which heals your hearts from spitefulness, jealousy and deceit. It cleanses your inner minds. This mind must be healed and restored to good health because the righteous actions of the physical body can only emanate from an inner core that is pure, cleansed, and sound. In that way, every action undertaken by man shall be sound. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… a cure for all (the ill) that may be in men’s hearts and a means of guidance and grace unto all who believe (in Him),' (*Yunus:* 57).

The Arabic word *Ash-shifa’* (cure) is mentioned first to illustrate that true guidance on the straight path requires a heart to be cleaned from whims and desires as a preliminary condition. Truly, it is only then does guidance become effective in directing man towards the straight path. What is the difference between ‘cure’ and ‘mercy’ of the hearts? ‘Cure’ refers to cleaning that ails a heart. As for ‘mercy’, it refers to following Divine guidance so that a heart does not fall ill once again. Look at the Words that Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse; 'We reveal through this Quran all that gives cure (to the spirit) and is a mercy unto those who believe (in Us),' (*al-Isra’:* 82). Thus, we can see that the effects of advice include healing, guidance and mercy. Not only does advice cure the outward symptoms of illness, but it also targets its very roots. Thus, we should start by purifying our hearts. This is why a skilled doctor does not merely cure external symptoms of an illness; rather, he investigates the underlying causes of these symptoms. His inexperienced, hasty colleague will treat the external symptoms without treating the underlying causes.

In the Noble Quran, we come across the story of Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* being subjected to trials in his health. Allah *Glorified is He* told Prophet Ayyub*:* 'Strike (the ground) with your foot. Here is cool water to wash with and to drink!' (*Sad:* 42) When he struck with his foot a particular place on the ground, cold water ran forth. Prophet Ayyub was instructed to wash his body with it, so that the external diseases of his body would be removed. He was also instructed to drink from it so that it would heal the roots of the illness.

Thus, in Allah’s Words, advice took on the characteristics of a tangible cure for it has come from our Lord to heal the hearts, wherefrom all human actions emanate. Then, a heart will be restored to sound health as well as achieving moral rectitude and freeing itself of taint. This advice will also become the light which guides men on the path that leads to the correct objective. It becomes a mercy, for if a man takes it to heart, no harm shall touch him. Finally, it leads to good deeds that are acceptable in the Eyes of Allah *the Almighty*.

However, even if you are granted these four blessings as a result of your acceptance of this advice (healing, guidance, mercy and virtuous words), do not be content with that alone. Above all these blessings are Allah’s Grace, and that is mentioned in the next verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ بِفَضۡلِ ٱللَّهِ وَبِرَحۡمَتِهِۦ فَبِذَٰلِكَ فَلۡيَفۡرَحُواْ هُوَ خَيۡرٞ مِّمَّا يَجۡمَعُونَ ٥٨

Say [Prophet], ‘In God’s grace and mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate’ [58] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 58)

There are no believers, no matter how much they strive to abide by religious laws set down by Allah, who can only hope to ever repay the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* granted prior to His commandments. Let us, therefore, reflect on this saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He said to his companions, 'None of you shall enter Paradise by virtue of his good works.' They said, ‘Not even you, O, Messenger of Allah?’ He (Prophet Muhammad) said, ‘not even me, except if Allah *Glorified is He* bestows His Mercy upon me.’'(1) Thus, the obedience of a servant may benefit him in his life on earth, but he can never hope, through his obedience, to fully repay Allah *Glorified is He* for all the bounties and the blessings that He has bestowed upon him. For example, an average servant of Allah *Glorified is He* is not required to fulfil his religious duties until he has reached the age of puberty. If he were to consider the blessings bestowed upon him by Allah *the Most High* until the age of puberty, he would only be able to list a few of these blessings. Consider then, the innumerable blessings that we enjoy over the course of our entire lives.

When Allah *the Exalted* judges us in the Hereafter, the ruling is not only based on His Justice, but He treats us with His Benevolence. Therefore, avoid any feelings of contentment and pride with the alms you gave in charity or the number of prayers you performed. Your diligent execution of Allah’s directives must not be a source of conceit and self-satisfaction. Remember the words of the proverb: ‘It maybe that sins which bring about humility and modesty are better than acts of obedience that bring about pride and arrogance.’

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *There is unanimous agreement regarding the soundness of this Hadith’s chain of transmission. It has been narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (6463) and by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2816); narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُم مَّآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُم مِّن رِّزْقٍ فَجَعَلْتُم مِّنْهُ حَرَامًا
وَحَلَٰلًا قُلْ ءَآللَّهُ أَذِنَ لَكُمْ أَمْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ تَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

Say, 'Think about the provision God has sent down for you, some of which you have made unlawful and some lawful.' Say, 'Has God given you permission [to do this], or are you inventing lies about God?' [59] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 59)

If a human being in his life on earth can enjoy property and ownership, it is all due to the sustenance which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon us. It is His Grace that makes our life possible in the first place, just as the conjugal life between males and females enables the continuation of the human species.

However, the sustenance which enables us to live as biological organisms must be divinely allowed. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* has specified all the actions that are not lawful, in order that believers take care not to partake in them. Thus, you should abide to what Allah *the Almighty* has specified in this matter. You must not declare as unlawful something that Allah *the Exalted* has declared to be lawful, as He has granted you these foods that enable you to remain alive and which provide energy for your daily life. Therefore, treat your body in the same way that you treat a machine that you build. An energy-producing fuel is required for a machine to fulfil its function. Similarly, Allah *the Most High* has provided you with certain foods that are beneficial to you, by providing you with the necessary energy to perform life's actions.

Allah *Glorified is He* has also made unlawful those things that are harmful to you. Some people ask, 'Why did Allah create these foods if they are harmful for me?' You have to realise that there is a difference between direct sustenance and indirect sustenance. Direct sustenance gives you immediate benefit, like edible, lawful food. On the other hand, an example of indirect sustenance is fire. You are not able to ingest it directly, but you use it to prepare your food. Thus, there are things that have been created to assist you in producing the items that are of use to you.

For example, Allah *the Exalted* has made lawful the meat you obtain from lambs, goats, camels, and cows. However, He has made it illegal for you to eat pork. Some people ask, 'Why did Allah create pigs?' He has created them for purposes other than feeding us. For instance, pigs help gather up waste and ingest it. This is a form of indirect sustenance. Therefore, let it carry out the purpose for which Allah *Glorified is He* created it.

Some people have made unlawful for themselves things which Allah *the Almighty* has made lawful. In that way, they are confining themselves in a way that Allah *the Almighty* has not obliged them with.

Other people seem to think that, by making lawful that which Allah has made unlawful, they are increasing their well-being. To this, Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: 'Say, 'Have you ever considered all the means of sustenance which Allah has bestowed upon you (from above),'' (*Yunus:* 59). If all the sustenance they draw benefit from, directly or indirectly, was bestowed by Allah *Glorified is He* how do they fabricate pronouncements as to what is lawful and what is unlawful, contrary to Divine Commandments?

The Arabic word *anzala* [bestowed upon you (from above)] denotes that all of the sustenance has originated from Allah *the Almighty*. All that you see around you is sustenance from which you draw direct and indirect benefits. The currency, for example, with which most merchandise is purchased, cannot itself be ingested, but it can be used to purchase food. The word *anzala* means to bring an item into being. As long as everything in this universe has been brought into being by the Will of He Who transcends all creation, then everything in existence serves your well-being either directly or through intermediaries.

Do not perceive the word *anzala* in the material sense that these blessings have descended from a higher ground, rather, think of it in the metaphorical sense. Rain, for example, falls from the clouds above in the material sense. The rainwater mixes with the soil so that plants can draw nourishment from it. Thus, Allah's sustenance is present in both rain descending from the sky and the nutrients rising from the earth. Both have been predestined by the Creator Who is *the Most High*.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Indeed, we did send forth Our prophets with all evidence of (this) truth; through them We bestowed revelation from above, and (thus gave you) a balance (wherewith to weigh right and wrong), so that men might behave with equity. We bestowed (upon you) from above, iron, in which there is awesome power as well as (a source of) benefits for man,' (*al-Hadid:* 25).

Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* has conveyed His commandments to the messengers *peace be upon them* so that the lives of man might be rectified. He has also brought down iron which is a mineral that we extract from mountains and deep ores beneath the earth's surface. Thus, the word *anzalna* in this verse could denote the process of showering the iron into the earth, by Him Who is greater than you are, for your benefit, O, human being. Since Allah *the Exalted* Who has bestowed His sustenance from above, had specified what is lawful and what is unlawful to eat and use, why, then, do you seek to interfere in these matters of jurisprudence? Why is it that you declare the lawful to be unlawful, or declare illegal items to be legal? Why did you not leave these decisions to the Creator? Allah *Glorified is He* is surely more knowledgeable about what is best for you.

'Ask (them O, Muhammad), "has Allah given you permission (to do this)?'" (*Yunus:* 59) In other words, has Allah *the Exalted* given you permission to render illegal that which is legal and to render legal that which is illegal? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Or do you, perchance, claim your own guesswork is a ruling by Allah?' (*Yunus:* 59) Why do you wilfully fabricate lies about Allah's rulings? Allah *the Almighty* has set up these two categories to show us the hideousness of their fabrications.

In the overall message of this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is referring to other verses, wherein certain items are described as lawful or unlawful. We have previously reflected on such verses, such as Allah's Words: 'It is not of Allah's ordaining that *al-bahira, As-sa'iba, al-waseela* and *al-ham* (certain kinds of camels) should be marked out by superstition and set aside from the use of man; yet those who are bent on denying the truth attribute their own lying inventions to Allah. And most of them never use their reason' (*al-Ma'ida:* 103).

Al-bahira, as we have noted before, is the she-camel that had given birth to five baby camels, the last of which is male. The Arabs used to cleave the ear (of this she-camel) and announce that it had performed her duty in life. Then, they would leave it to graze freely, unbound by ownership to any particular individual. No one would ride the camel, place burdens upon it, milk it, or shear its wool. Then, the idolaters would slaughter it for the idols which they used to worship. They called it *al-bahira* because they used to cleave its ear as a sign that it had done its duty. *As-sa'iba* (the freely roaming) is the camel which is left to graze freely. Tying up the camels would imply that they are owned. When one of the pagans recovered from an illness or had a desire for a particular wish, they would donate one of their camels to the servants of the idols. The camel would thus become known as *As-sa'iba*. This camel would, similarly, not be ridden, milked, charged to carry any loads, or obstructed from roaming freely. *Al-waseela* (the connected one) is the female camel calf that is born alongside a twin male calf. On this occasion, (the people of that time) would claim that it is connected to its brother. They would therefore not slaughter the male camel for the sake of its sister. *Al-ham* is a male camel that has earned protection for itself after having conceived ten calves. Thereafter, it was not to be ridden or loaded with any burdens and was left to an idol caretaker.

These types of camels are legal to consume by Divine religious law, but the common people of that time made them illegal for themselves, leaving them to be consumed freely by idol caretakers! It was thus a mercy for them that the Quran did not make these types of camels unlawful for feeding.

There are also the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '(His followers would have it that, in certain cases, any of these) four kinds of cattle of either sex (is unlawful to man): either of the two sexes of sheep and of goats. Ask (them), "Is it the two males that He has forbidden, or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females may contain? Tell me what you know in this respect, if what you say is true." And (likewise they declare as unlawful) either of the two sexes of camels and of bovine cattle. Ask (them), "Is it the two males that He has forbidden, or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females may contain? Is it, perchance, that you (yourselves) were witnesses when Allah enjoined (all) this upon you?" And who could be wicked than he who, without any (real) knowledge, attributes his own lying inventions to Allah, and thus leads people astray? Behold, Allah does not grace (such) evildoing folk with His guidance.' (*al-An'am:* 143-144)

Thus, they had made illegal some of that which Allah *the Exalted* has made legal. The Quran said about their false rulings: 'And out of whatever He (Allah) has created of the fruits of the field and the cattle, they (the disbelievers) assign unto Allah a portion, saying, "This belongs to Allah" – or so they (falsely) claim – "and this is for those beings who, we are convinced, have a share in Allah’s Divinity." But that which is assigned to the beings associated in their minds with Allah does not bring (them) closer to Allah – whereas that which is assigned to Allah brings (them but) closer to those beings to whom they ascribe a share in His divinity. Bad, indeed, is their judgment!' (*al-An‘am:* 136)

Allah *the Almighty* has summarised all of this in His Words: 'Say, "Have you ever considered all the means of sustenance which Allah has bestowed upon you (from above), and which you, thereupon, divide into ‘forbidden’ and ‘lawful’?" Ask, "Has Allah given you permission (to do this) – or do you, perchance, claim your own guesswork is a ruling by Allah?"' (*Yunus:* 59) Thus, they interfered with the proscription of certain legal items, while consuming certain unlawful items as lawful. In so doing they committed an ill-advised infringement, because Allah *the Most High* is their Creator and the Creator of their sustenance. Their statements amount to intentional falsehoods about Allah’s rulings.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا ظَنُّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَفۡتَرُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡكَذِبَ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
لَذُو فَضۡلٍ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَهُمۡ لَا يَشۡكُرُونَ ٦٠

What will those people who invent lies about Him think on the Day of Resurrection? God is bountiful towards people, but most of them do not give thanks [60] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 60)

This verse explains that everything is reckoned. Those who calumniate and invent falsehoods about Allah shall find a terrible requital on the Day of Judgment. Allah *Glorified is He* is not susceptible to forgetfulness. If they thought that there was no such thing as the Hereafter or the final reckoning, then they are sorely mistaken. Were they to behold the suffering and punishment that Allah *the Almighty* has in store for them on the Day of Judgment, they would not have done what they had done. However, they thought that Allah *the Exalted* was oblivious of their actions, and that their actions shall be of no consequences as if there was no recording or overseer who takes note of them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us that He is full of bounty to the people, but most of them are not grateful (*Yunus:* 60). This means that Allah is truly magnanimous towards His creation including us. He bestows manifold gifts. So, why do you deprive yourselves of these gifts? If you thank Allah for His Generosity, He will increase His bounty. However, you neglect to exhibit gratitude. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا تَكُونُ فِي شَأۡنٖ وَمَا تَتۡلُواْ مِنۡهُ مِن قُرۡءَانٖ وَلَا تَعۡمَلُونَ مِنۡ عَمَلٍ إِلَّا كُنَّا
عَلَيۡكُمۡ شُهُودًا إِذۡ تُفِيضُونَ فِيهِۚ وَمَا يَعۡزُبُ عَن رَّبِّكَ مِن مِّثۡقَالِ ذَرَّةٖ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ
وَلَا فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَلَآ أَصۡغَرَ مِن ذَٰلِكَ وَلَآ أَكۡبَرَ إِلَّا فِي كِتَٰبٖ مُّبِينٍ ٦١

In whatever matter you [Prophet] may be engaged and whatever part of the Quran you are reciting, whatever work you [people] are doing, We witness you when you are engaged in it. Not even the weight of a speck of dust in the earth or sky escapes your Lord, nor anything lesser or greater: it is all written in a clear record [61] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 61)

The speech in this verse is directed to Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon Him*. It means 'whatever affair you might be engaged in O, Muhammad'. The word *Ash-sha'n* refers to a great, eminent state that occurs to a matter. In our daily lives, we ask one another about our affairs and current state. At this point the addressed person states that important matter that has occurred or what he has done, while overlooking the more trivial matters of the day. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes Himself saying that 'every moment He is in a state [of glory].' (*ar-Rahman:* 29) This requires us not to think that Allah *the Almighty* has created the perennial laws and rules of creation and ordered it to function on its own. On the contrary, He brings about a matter every day. Thus, when one of the scholars was asked what was the state of Allah *the Exalted* at a given moment since it was true that the pen has dried up, he answered, 'They are tasks which He lets continue and not tasks which He begins every day anew.' This means that He has drawn out plans for everything and has set a particular time at which it will manifest. He is All Sustaining; in other words, this means that He is eminently capable of looking after your affairs. This is why Allah *the Exalted* reassures us that since He has created the night for us to sleep and rest, He is the One Who is All Sustaining, Whom no slumber nor any sleep ever overtakes Him and Who is the guard over us.

Thus, the discourse in the verse which we are currently examining is addressed to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon Him*. However, the affairs of the Prophet of Allah that had him preoccupied were not food and drinks; rather, it was conveying the message that contains the doctrine of 'dos' and 'don'ts' that were important to him. Allah uses the Arabic word *min* (of this) to indicate the reason of the recitation, which is meant to immortalise a particular affair.

Similarly, on another occasion Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *min* referring to a reason. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Because of their wrongs they were drowned.' (*Nuh:* 25) This means they were drowned because of their sins.

In the verse which we are examining, we understand that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was preoccupied with given matters and the verses of the Quran were recited for the sake of these matters. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in the midst of a momentous affair, which was the delivering of the message. He, thereby, recited the Quran as a way to sublimate this affair.

One thing that is involved in this duty of the Prophet concerns the authority with which he has been delegated. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'whatever the Prophet gives you, accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back.' (*al-Hashr:* 7) An example of this is the specification of the proper way of praying and the number of units of prayer that to be performed for every prayer in addition to allocating the amount of alms-giving. These are matters which the Quran has not specified in detail; instead they are laid out in the Prophet’s sayings. Therefore, there is a delegation of power from Allah *the Almighty* to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* so that His doctrine be conveyed thoroughly through the Divine writ, along with His delegating the Prophet to legislate.

Thus, the affair of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was either conveying the message of Allah through the Divine writ or applying the Divine writ through prophetic sayings and the example that he has left us in his *Sunnah.* The textual evidence regarding any religious ruling is contained in the Quran, and if these rulings are not provided from Allah in the Quran, it suffices that they are provided by the Messenger of Allah as per the power of legislation with which He has delegated to him. Thus, we can answer the hypocrites who say when they hear the traditions of the Prophet that the Divine writ of Allah shall be the judge. Their goal is to invalidate oral, observed and approved traditions of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then Allah *the Almighty* switches the discourse from singular to plural mode. He *the Most High* says: ‘nor do you do any work but We are witnesses over you.' (*Yunus:* 61). At this juncture, the verse shifts to address the audience who listens to the Quran and to whom the doctrine is addressed. Every action is witnessed by Allah *the Almighty*. The term 'work' includes the totality of events that emanate from human beings. Every single event that emanates from man, even if it consists of a subtle intention, is called work. The work of the heart, after all, is the intention. However, if the work emanates from the tongue it is called speech, and if it emanates from any of the other organs, it is called action. Therefore, work falls into one of two categories: speech and action. The work of the tongue has been designated as speech because the records documenting the religious directives are all oral.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about undertaking these actions. He speaks about the vigour and enthusiasm with which you set about the work. It indicates a pious eagerness to respond to the directives as soon as these are communicated by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Approaching work that is mandated by the religious directives with such eagerness, alacrity, and willingness, as well as performing it with such sincerity, are all connotations contained in the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* 'when you enter into it.' (*Yunus:* 61) As water eagerly pours to the ground from an overflowing vessel, you proceed to do the work mandated by the religious directives swiftly and in a surging and overflowing manner. Allah *Glorified is He* says 'so when you hasten on from Arafat.' (*al-Baqara:* 198), which means you have set about leaving in a hurry because you have performed one phase of the ritual of pilgrimage, you have drawn energy from it and are carrying over to the next phase of the ritual of pilgrimage.

Therefore, Allah witnesses the actions of every one of you, so what about intentions and secret thoughts? Allah *Glorified is He* informs us that everything is known by Him and will be reckoned no matter how small or imperceptible. He, the Mots High, says: 'there does not lie concealed from Allah the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven nor anything less than that nor greater, but it is in a clear book (*Yunus:* 61). This means that everything about you and everything about creation is known to Allah, along with being recorded in a clear decree. Nobody can secrete the subtlest intention of the heart, nor even the subtlest internal thoughts. The word *ya'zub* means to escape and disappear.

Allah *Glorified is He* is informing us that He will never fail to reward the slightest good work or the slightest intention, no matter how small they might be. For Arabs, there existed no object that could be used to denote extreme lightness of weight save the word *Adh-dharra* (an atom's weight). It refers to a very small minuscule ant. Then, the word was designated for the fine particles of dust floating in space. You can see these fine particles when you sit in a dark room, and a ray of light is allowed to penetrate into the room. You can see this light as it passes through the hole as if it were an arrow, composed of these small moving particles of dust that exist in the air. These are the particles which you would not be able to see if you were in regular light or regular darkness; however, the contrast between light and dark reveals them.

You might not perceive things due to either its infinite smallness or largeness because your intellect cannot encompass it. When applied sciences became more advanced, the microscope was invented and enabled very small objects to be magnified thousands, and even millions, of times. If you were to put your own skin under the lens of a microscope, you would see crevices as deep as wells, which you never saw or felt before because they are so fine and small that your eye cannot perceive them. In addition to crevices, you would see folds, highs, and lows, no matter how soft the same skin feels not under a microscope.

Similarly, you are unable to perceive infinitely large objects. You perceive large objects smaller than its real size due to some distance separating you from it. The farther it is, the smaller it becomes. For example, when you see a tall man from afar, he would appear to you as though he was a small child, yet, the closer you get to him the taller he would become in your eyes. Thus, great size, great distance, nor extreme minuteness can prevent the knowledge of Allah from knowing anything.

Allah *Glorified is He* addressed Arabs by that which was the smallest thing they knew, namely *Adh-dharra*, which is a very small ant. If you were to step on an ant on sandy ground, it would not die as it would be pushed into the crevices of the sand and would find its way out to the surface once again. Allah *the Almighty* has explained this issue when He narrated the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* in the valley of the ants. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'One ant said, "O, ants, enter your houses, so that Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts may not crush you while they do not know' (*an-Naml:* 18). They cannot see them because of their incredible small sizes. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* gives us a clear account of every living community on earth and reminds us that amongst them are soldiers who stand vigilant guard like the ant that had warned its community of the coming of Sulaiman (Solomon) and his troops since they would not be able to see the small ants.

Therefore, *Adh-dharra* can refer either to small ants or to small dust specks. Allah *the Almighty* coins a similitude regarding the all-encompassing nature of His knowledge such that not even the slightest particles elude His awareness. The word *ya'zub* means to disappear. One could say, for instance, that the water in this is well is *'azib*, which means that it originates from deep underground and its extraction requires an extensive pulley system. A man who is far away from his family can also be called *'azab*.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says that nothing escapes or eludes Him, not even the smallest nor the largest of things, He wants to reassure us that man’s every passing thought is beheld and known to Him, and it is He Who will judge us and reward us for them. A man might be able to get away with his actions from the law, but he will not be able to conceal his actions from the law of heaven.

Regarding the issue of an atom and all that which is generally minuscule, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'so, he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8)

This pertains to that which is equivalent in weight to an atom, whereas if it is smaller than an atom, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions in the verse which we are currently examining, that that anything less than that or greater is in a clear book. At the time of the revelation of the Holy Quran, nobody knew that there existed that which was smaller than an atom. Nobody knew that there existed that which was smaller than an atom even up until the First World War. Scientists used to believe that an atom was that which cannot be further divided because it is the smallest thing that an eye could ever perceive. However, Allah struck a simile in the Quran with that which was even smaller than the atom.

After the First World War, science made a great progress, and Germany invented a machine for smashing the atom. It was said that such a machine could pulverise a single particle, which was impossible to be physically subdivided any further. This machine was composed of two cylinders like one used to press sugar cane. The space between the two cylinders could barely be seen. When Germany smashed that which was known as a single particle, it broke into even smaller pieces.

Allah *Glorified is He* has defined an atom as the scale of measurement of all minuscule particles. Thus, when Germany invented that machine, religious people were afraid that others would say that Allah has not spoken of that which is smaller than an atom, However, they turned to the verse which we are now studying and read the words of Allah that anything less than an atom or greater than it is in a clear book.

The expression *ma ya'zub* means that there is nothing that can elude or escape. The term *'an rabbik* means from His knowledge, while '*min mithqal dharra'* means an atom's weight. We said before that some people say that the particle *min* could be superfluous. We say, for example, *ma ja'ani min rajul* (I have seen no man); the word *min* is considered a superfluous preposition, whilst *rajul* (man) is a nominative subject marked with an explicit *damma,* which not apparent due to the letter *lam* at the end of the word *rajul* that has a *kasra* on it due to the governing action of the preposition *min*. However, in the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* there are no superfluous letters. The word *min* in the verse denotes a start from the weight of an atom.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse 'And those who disbelieve say, "The hour shall not come upon us." Say, "Yea! By my Lord, the Knower of the unseen, it shall certainly come upon you. Not the weight of an atom becomes absent from Him in the heavens or in the earth.' *(Saba':* 3)

The words *wa rabbi* (by my Lord) indicates an oath, and the letter *waw* is a preposition. There is no mention here of the testament. However, there is mention of the unseen. In the verse which we are currently examining, there is no mention of the unseen. The term *'alim ash-shahada* means that He witnesses all that can be witnessed, even that which humans believe cannot be encompassed due its greatness or due to Allah being of the unseen, so therefore, He only sees the unseen. Allah, however, sees not only the unseen but also that which can be seen.

Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned the expression weight of atom three times. One time occurs when He *the Most High* says: 'so, he who has done an atom's weight.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7) The second time is in the verse we are examining (*Yunus:* 61), where He mentions the word *min* to show that there is nothing that eludes His knowledge beginning from the weight of an atom. Allah *Glorified is He* says in yet another verse: 'it shall certainly come upon you. Not the weight of an atom becomes absent from Him in the heavens or in the earth.' (*Saba':* 3) In this verse, the heavens are mentioned first, while in the verse which we are currently examining, the earth is mentioned first. Allah speaks about His Knowledge of the unseen in both verses. In the former verse, He mentions only, without using *min* that indicates the beginning, the weight of an atom and cites heaven first using the plural mode. However, it is the latter verse where He mentions that which is smaller than an atom and cites the earth.

All of this is part of the miracles of the style of the Quran which some orientalists wanted to criticise. All of their criticisms were the result of their inability to grasp the eloquent locution of the Quranic style. If we were to respond to this issue, we will find that Allah *the Almighty* has cited the earth first in the verse which we are now examining because He is speaking about its inhabitants and the things that they do, likewise he cites the heavens. Heavens, which is the sky which is seen by the inhabitants of earth, is meant in this verse.

In this aforementioned verse, Allah *the Almighty* discusses the topic of the Hour whose timing is known to Him *the Almighty* only; in other words, He *Glorified is He* did not tell any creature whatsoever about this timing.

This is why, in this instance, it is the heavens that are mentioned first because the knowledge of the final hour lies with Allah and shall only occur by His Leave.

Thus, every expression conveys its message, not through the overall meaning, but through the subtlety of its parts. Allah *the Exalted* has spoken in the verse that we are currently examining and in a verse from the chapter of *Saba'* about science, atoms, the heavens and the earth with words placed either in the beginning or in the end depending on their appropriate context.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'but it is in a clear book.' We must pay attention to the fact that the exceptive mode in this sentence does not cancel out that which preceded it. Everything is recorded in that clear book. In this world, we find that if a man owes a debt to another man, he safeguards the written documents wherein is recorded what others owe him and what he owes others. What about Allah? Does He keep a written record of our actions and our intentions as evidence for Him or for us? In spite of the fact that Allah knows everything pre-eternity, He also takes an explicit record of these actions and intentions in order to make us realise what we did. Thus, when he who has done wrong is punished, the evidence against him will be available. Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

أَلَآ إِنَّ أَوۡلِيَآءَ ٱللَّهِ لَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا هُمۡ يَحۡزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

But for those who are on God's side there is no fear,
nor shall they grieve [62] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 62)

This verse occurs after Allah *Glorified is He* describes Himself as One Who knows the unseen. He made it clear that nothing eludes His knowledge. He wants to teach us that He can bestow special graces upon some of His created beings who perform spiritual practices. When Allah *the Almighty* grants you a special gift, be aware not to think that it is from you, rather, it is from Allah Who knows the unseen and from Whom nothing on earth or in the heaven can elude. Accordingly, it should not be said that so-and-so has glimpsed the unseen because he is close to Allah. We have to say that he has been given knowledge of the unseen. The reason behind this is that the unseen is hidden from people, and that which is hidden from you but not from someone else is not unseen in the absolute sense. For example, a man who has been robbed of something does not know the location of the thing that was stolen from him; the robber, however, knows as does the one who offered the robber shelter and helped him hide the stolen goods, in addition to jinns who happened to be present at the crime scene. Thus, the location of the stolen goods is not unseen in the absolute sense.

The secrets of the universe which were temporarily unseen, like the gravity of the earth, the positive and negative poles of electricity and the manner which winds stimulate the clouds to produce rain were all unseen at a particular time. Allah *Glorified is He* specified a time when each would be discovered, and such things became widely known. Allah *the Almighty* has willed that so that man might work and discover the secrets of the universe. A researcher could be working on one thing and stumbles on a completely different discovery because Allah has allowed that unseen thing to be discovered, even if the inhabitants of the earth were not searching for it. The person who discovered penicillin, for instance, observed green material around organic matter, and then began researching that phenomenon, thus discovering penicillin. Archimedes who discovered the law of floatation that helped making ships and submarines travel discovered it by accident.

Thus, there are unseen elements which might become witnessed, either through the initiatives made by men or by a coincidence while doing another research. For example, the age of steam power all started when a man saw a covered pot with water boiling inside. The lid of the pot kept rising periodically to get rid of some of the steam. The man took note of the fact that the steam could be transformed into power, which could be used to pull wheel-based carriages, and thus, the age of steam power was born. Therefore, the birth date of certain secrets of the universe was due to some notes taken of a phenomenon by a servant whom Allah wanted to contemplate and discover one of the secrets of the universe. Most of the secrets of the universe have been discovered by chance so that we might come to understand that the instances when Allah has allowed something to be discovered, without any effort on the part of created beings, are more frequent than the instances when discoveries were made thanks to the efforts of created beings. This is why the manner in which the Quran speaks about the different types of unseen is a very precise so that we might come to understand that there are some unseen things which are hidden from all of creation and for which no amount of effort on our part could reveal since Allah *the Exalted* has not willed a date of birth for them and has kept their knowledge solely to Himself. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases.' (*al-Baqara:* 255) This is the unseen which Allah reveals to them, either due to effort or by chance. He has attributed the Will to Himself, and He has attributed the act of attaining some of that knowledge to human beings, which means that some of the unseen can be unlocked through scientific innovation. In regards to the other category of the unseen that none knows but Him and that which only revealed to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* manifests itself as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Knower of the unseen! Thus, He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a messenger, for surely He makes a guard march before him and after him.' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* imparts some of His esoteric knowledge to His select few from His creation. The Holy Quran itself contains much unseen knowledge, which Allah *Glorified is He* imparted to His Prophet and that which came to pass exactly as it had been predicted in the Quran. So, Allah bestows special gifts upon some of His created beings like Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the above-mentioned verse (*al-Jinn:* 27) indicates. This knowledge, however, is not to be enclosed to the Prophet because he was a model and an example: 'Verily, you have in the Prophet of Allah an excellent model, for him who hopes to meet Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah much.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 21) He who emulates the actions of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and takes him as a model, Allah *the Almighty* shall bestow him a gift that other people can see; likewise, come to know that he who takes the Prophet as a model, Allah shall bestow illuminating gifts. However, these gifts are not of a functioning nature, per se, nor are they a source of knowledge of the unseen; rather, they are amongst the graces bestowed by Allah *the Almighty*. The Quranic way of referring to the unseen is precise. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures, none knows them but He.' (*al-An'am:* 59) This verse means that Allah *the Most High* has not given the keys of the unseen to anyone, while those who are close to Him are the only ones to receive gifts from Him. The key to the knowledge of the unseen, however, is solely with Allah.

When we contemplate the verse which we are examining, we find that Allah uses the word *waliyy*. To take someone as your *waliyy* means to be close to him so that he is the first refuge you seek when you are in need of help from another person, along with implying that this person is the one whom you seek his aid at times of need. He who gets close to a scholar will receive some knowledge. He who gets close to a strong person will receive some strength, and he who gets close to a rich person will receive money (if needed) from him, even if it is in the form of a loan. Thus, the *waliyy* is the intimate, the grantor of victory, the helper, the protector, and the supporter. The term has been used to describe Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Have they taken for themselves protectors other than Him? But it is Allah Who is the real Protector, and He gives life to the dead, and He has power over all things.' (*ash-Shura:* 9) This is because Allah *Glorified is He* is close to all of His creation, unlike the created beings who either get closer or distance themselves from one another depending on their means. He is the absolute Protector Whom nearness to some created beings does not prevent Him from being close to other created beings. His work on one thing does not preclude Him from working simultaneously on another thing. He is the Protector, the True: 'In such a case protection comes only from Allah, the True. He is best in rewarding and the best in respect of the final outcome.' (*al-Kahf:* 44) Thus, he who is in need of true guardianship, let him seek it from Allah for He grants protection to those who are steadfast in His Doctrine: 'Allah is the Friend of those who believe; He brings them out of all kinds of darkness into light.' (*al-Baqara:* 257) Allah draws near to His faithful servants just as the believers draw near to Him.

When we look at the verse being explained, we find that the absolute guardianship rests with Allah even if it is in relation to someone else. Sometimes it is attached to believers, who draw near to Allah, and at other times, it is attached to Allah *Glorified is He* Who draws near to believers. Allah *the Exalted* is not bound by laws. Thus, by virtue of His absolute Power, He perceives a virtuous attribute in a person and ennobles this person, then; as a result, this person becomes a loyal servant. You might hear people say that so-and-so has been made impervious to sin which means that this person used to be a sinner. However, Allah *the Almighty* came to appreciate some virtuous attribute of his and guided him from then on. To clarify this is, the man who gave water to a dog is a good example. The man, in fact, went out of his way to give water to the dog. He filled his shoe with well water to quench the dog's thirst; thereby Allah forgave this man's previous sins. This man did not give water to the dog in order to show off; rather, the man did so because he felt sympathy for the living creature. Things are not, however, always fixed to a systematic or mechanical way in terms of Allah by virtue of His absolute Power; He considers every situation independently as He considers the varieties of men. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours; most surely there are signs in this for the learned.' (*ar-Rum:* 22)

Allah *the Most High* does not create the entire creation from a singular mould, instead, he creates the tall and the short, the fat and the thin, the blond and the dark, and this is corollary of His absolute Power. By His Mercy, He has brought the faithful from among His servants closer first, then, by virtue of His nearness to them: 'Allah is the Friend of those who believe; He brings them out of all kinds of darkness into light.' (*al-Baqara:* 257) Thus, he who follows the Path gleans the light, and when Allah learns about a servant's steadfast effort on the Path, He brings the servant even closer to Himself and bestows special graces upon him, which others around him might perceive and to which they might look up.

Allah *the Almighty* wants from a believer to show respect towards His creation. If one learns of a sin committed by another person, one must keep the sin secret since Allah *the Exalted* loves secrecy and loves those who keep certain things secrets. One could hate a person because of his indulgence in a given sin and, thereby, hates all his good deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want to forbid you from being the recipient of the good deeds of that sinful person, thus Allah conceals a given sin from you so that you might benefit from some of this person’s good deeds. Allah *the Exalted* commands you not look down upon such a sinner since he might be endowed with a virtue, and He ennobles such person first and then this servant comes to obey Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith: 'O, son of Adam, I love you, thus by virtue of My Right over you, love me as well.' He also says in another Divine Hadith: 'I am as My slave thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself, and if he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering better than that.' These words put the responsibility of drawing closer to Allah in the hands of a created being. Allah *Glorified is He* adds: 'If he seeks to draw nearer to Me by a hand span, I draw nearer to him by a forearm’s length, and if he comes to Me by a forearm’s length, I draw nearer to him by an arm’s length. Likewise, if he comes to Me walking, I come to him quickly.' Whosoever wishes that Allah *the Almighty* comes to him swiftly may travel to Him at pace. Thus, faith in Allah *Glorified is He* is the key to closeness to Him.

Whosoever is amongst those who exhibit steadfastness to the Doctrine, Allah will cause him to draw ever nearer. Therefore, there are those who arrive at the realm of Munificence of Allah *the Almighty* through obeying Him *Glorified is He* first and then knocking on His Door until it is opened for them.

However, there are those whose path takes them through Munificence first and obedience second. For example, and to Allah belongs the highest similitude, you as a human being might meet someone who came to your door in need of a charity, whereupon you gave to him. However, there are also people whom you may be charitable to of your own accord. When you give charity to such person, he becomes deferential towards you as a matter of gratitude. Imagine, then, how Allah, gives to His servants!

Thus, there are those who become obedient to Allah due to the Munificence virtue of Allah. Still there are some who arrive at the realm of His Munificence through their obedience towards Allah. When a person draws near unto Allah *the Exalted* He draws near unto that servant. The servant, then, enters into the intimate company of Allah that affects him profoundly.

Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'rri once said to his beloved that she was his beloved, but he did not want to become a lover to someone who did not return his love.

This means that he seeks refuge in Allah from the prospect of being a lover of someone who refuses to acknowledge his affections. However, the love of Allah *the Most High* differs from the love of human beings. He does not treat His beloved in the same manner. When you love Allah, He draws you closer and closer to Himself, and this is what is known as the condition of being elected. Thus, if Allah bestows certain graces on some of His elected servants, the latter must exhibit deferential behaviour vis-à-vis Allah. None should therefore be boastful of the blessings which Allah *the Exalted* has bestowed upon him. Boasting about bestowed graces is tantamount to giving them up. Allah *Glorified is He* withdraws such graces from the person who boasts and brags about them. Thus, whosoever boasts of the graces bestowed upon him enjoys, in reality, no graces at all. Allah wishes for His servant to be near. It is He Who has taken the initiative, demonstrating clearly in the verse that He is the Guardian of the believers, and this is why He shall take them out of the deep darkness and into the light: 'Allah is the Friend of those who believe; He brings them out of all kinds of darkness into light.' (*al-Baqara:* 257) We know that Allah often mentions concrete images so as to elucidate abstract ideas. This is due to human beings being habituated with perceiving sensory reality first, and it is the most effective means of conveying a desired message. Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* strikes a simile of the twin concepts of disbelief and faith, He describes disbelief using the image of darkness and describes faith using the image of light. Allah intends to render the message clearly and more easily understandable by doing so.

Does it not also make sense to avoid the perils of metaphorical darkness since we naturally try to avoid the perils of sensory darkness? Sensory darkness can obscure our vision of things so that we might stumble into a fragile object thus destroying it or else we might stumble into a sturdier object that could hurt us. Therefore, obscured vision causes accidents. However, when light dawns, it has the effect of revealing the outlines of objects, and making us go forth confidently on an illuminated path. Suppose that you were in a dark place and there was some object standing in another lit-up area. You can see that which stands in the lit-up area while you are in the dark area. The pre-Islamic scientists did not have the correct explication for such a phenomenon. They used to think that vision occurred as a result of a ray of light cast from the eye of the beholder onto the beheld object. This was until the Muslim scientist al-Hasan Ibn al-Haytham arrived at the scene and discovered the laws of light refraction. He demonstrated the error of previous scientists in the field of optics and pointed out that it was the beheld object which emits a ray of light in the direction of the beholder. If the beheld object happens to be in a dark place, it will not be seen by anyone. If there really did exist a ray of light emitted by the beholder, the latter would be able to see objects in total darkness.

Thus, the first kind of Guardianship of Allah to believers is His bringing them out of darkness and into light. Figurative darkness is a much graver matter than physical darkness, and figurative light is stronger than physical one. For on a material plane, it is possible to successfully navigate a perilous or labyrinthine landscape. However, on the immaterial plane of values, such a feat is a lot more arduous. This is why a poet has said that battle wounds would eventually scar although such is not the case of the injurious word.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse which we are currently examining: 'Now surely the friends of Allah-- they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.' (*Yunus:* 62) As we have previously explained, the word *'ala* is a rhetoric used to draw the attention of the audience so as to be sure that it retains every word. Allah *the Almighty* says that they shall have no fear from others nor shall they grieve. This is due to fear coming as a result of the anticipation of some harm which has not occurred yet; however, it could happen in the future.

In our daily lives, we find that a father hold hands with his son in a crowded place out of fear. However, you might also find one of those who are close to Allah in a state of serene resignation when his son is in an accident or dying. This is because he understands the wisdom of the actions of Allah, and so should you. Thus, fear arises in relation to the future of some anticipated event. As for sorrow, it is a feeling that arises as a result of some event in the past. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you' (*al-Hadid:* 23).

It is futile to despair over what has happened as it is impossible to change the past. For those who are close to Allah *Glorified is He*; no fear shall visit them, as they are always aware of Allah's hidden wisdom. However, those who are unaware of it might feel sympathy for them because they do not know what the reality of what is happening to them. Sorrow is one of the feelings of the heart which Allah *the Almighty* does not want a believer to dwell upon unduly. Upon losing his son, the Prophet *Peace and blessings be upon Him* said, 'The eye weeps and the heart grieves, but we say only what our Lord is pleased with, and we are grieved for you, Ibrahim.'

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* specifies the requirements for man's closeness to Him and says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَكَانُوا۟ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

For those who believe and are conscious of God [against evil] [63] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 63)

Now faith is that primary creed upon which all action is subsequently built. Faith requires obeying the Doctrine of Allah, including its commandments, its proscriptions, and its prescriptions. Fearing of Allah, as we have come to know, is the attitude of fearing the attributes of Allah's Majesty. It is also the attitude of fearing Hellfire. The Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* has listed related attributes that result from attitude of fearing Allah. This is due to these attributes being considered as stages. He described the pious saying, 'They are people who love one another for the spirit of Allah (i.e. the Quran), without having any mutual kinship and giving property to one. I swear by Allah, their faces will glow and they will be (sitting) in (pulpits of) light.'

'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was asked about the pious people, and he said, 'The looking at one of them causes you to draw closer to Allah.' It is as though he were commenting upon the Words of Allah: 'their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration.' (*al-Fath:* 29) When you see a pious person, you become happy and rejoice in his presence. You only become aware of the source of this happy feeling when someone tells you that particular person is pious. This happiness prompts you to emulate him because the very sight of him reminds you of the attributes of reverence, submissiveness, serenity, gentleness of appearance and gaiety of complexion.

Such a person looks at the universe and perceives in it no fault. Rather, he finds that everything is in its proper place, and he does not perceive any evil in existence. Even when he does come across evil, he would say that evil serves to make the good even clearer, and if error and all its concomitant pains were not there, man would not long for the truth. It is thus that error itself comes to fight alongside the legions of truth. The existence of evil pushes people towards good. This is why it is said, 'Be beautiful in the practice of your faith, and you will see beauty in the universe.' The reason for this is because when you contemplate the universe while acknowledging the might of Allah over it, He, thereby, bestows upon you the highest of gifts. The closer you draw to Allah, the more He draws closer to you and grants you even more wisdom and knowledge of the universal secrets.

Take the virtuous servant whom Allah taught sciences from his bounty, for example. This virtuous servant went on to teach Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The latter considered why the virtuous servant damaged a perfectly good ship, without knowing that there was a tyrannical ruler who seized all passing ships; he was angry and spoke to the virtuous servant wondering why he damaged a perfectly good ship, whereupon the virtuous servant explained that the tyrannical ruler would not seize a ship if it were damaged and that this particular ship was owned by poor people.

Then, the virtuous servant killed a youth. This was a crime in the estimation of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. What Musa (Moses) did not know is that this youth would have wronged his parents, and thus Allah *the Almighty* ordered the virtuous servant to kill the youth before he reached maturity so as not to tyrannise his parents. Thus, the youth would enter paradise like all the other children who die at a young age. It is said that those who die before reaching the age of puberty do not have a specific spot reserved for them in Paradise. However, they are allowed to roam wherever they wish like a young infant who enters a castle and is unable to stay in one spot, rather, he moves to and fro. Therefore, such children can go and see our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Abu Bakr or any of the blessed companions.

In addition, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* entered the village with the virtuous servant, they both asked to be fed. The inhabitants of the village refused even though asking for food is one of the most humble forms of solicitation. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the village refused to feed them.

This was a sign of ignobility, worthy of reproach. However, the virtuous servant redressed a particular wall in that village that was teetering on the verge of collapse.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not aware of that which the virtuous servant informed him later, namely, that a righteous man had bequeathed a treasure for his sons under the wall before his death. This man had built the wall in such a way that it would crumble at the same time that his sons would reach puberty. When the wall would fall, his sons would be able to find the treasure which their father had left for them, and by that time the inhabitants of the village would not dare usurp it.

These are the blessings which Allah *the Almighty* bestows upon His virtuous servants. He has placed such servants as signposts erected to guide people or as lighthouses which guide ships in the darkness.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَهُمُ ٱلۡبُشۡرَىٰ فِي ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَفِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۚ لَا تَبۡدِيلَ
لِكَلِمَٰتِ ٱللَّهِۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ﴿٦٤﴾

For them there is good news in this life and in the Hereafter – there is no changing the promises of God – that is truly the supreme triumph [64] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 64)

The word *al-bushra* (good news) and other words are derived from the term *al-bashra* which means skin. This is because every reaction within the human psyche is reflected in the skin. If you come to a person with happy news, you will see this happiness reflected in his complexion. If you come to a person with bad news, you will see distress reflected on his skin. Thus, the skin is the first to react to events, be they happy or painful. When it is said *bushra*, this denotes news which if heard by a listener causes his skin to produce a happy glow because they are words of good tidings. When the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about good tidings, he said, 'It was the pure vision of a believer which he either sees or which is shown to him.' He further added, 'It represents one part from forty-six parts of prophethood.'

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* received revelation through visions for a period of six months. He, likewise, received revelation in a state of wakefulness for a period of twenty-three years. Therefore, if you compare the period of six months to the period of twenty-three years, you will find that six months represents one of forty-six parts. A vision is not the same as a dream because a vision is not the product of your conscious mental activity during daytime. Thus, a vision is not influenced by Satan. The popular aphorism goes as follows, 'The starving person dreams of the bread market.' Therefore, if what a person sees during his sleep can be directly related to that which preoccupies him during the day, then that is considered a dream and not a vision. Furthermore, if what a person sees during his sleep involves that which runs counter to Allah's Doctrine, then that is the direct influence of Satan. Thus, there is a difference between visions, dreams, and confused dreams. *Al-bushra*, thereby, refers to a clear vision or it is that which is glimpsed in those who are close to Allah and which causes people to turn to them. You might find one whom Allah *Glorified is He* loves in heaven, whereby He tells Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* ‘Verily, I love so-and-so. You should also love him', and then Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* begins to love him. Then he (Jibril) makes an announcement in heaven saying that Allah loves so-and-so, and you should also love him. Therefore, the inhabitants of Heaven also being to love him and then affinity is conferred upon him, upon the earth.

When you see that a man has gained the approval of heaven, then all the people come to agree that the presence of such a man, who is loved by heaven, is a good omen. This is what is known as *al-bushra.* It can also come about at the moment when the angel of death *peace be upon him* visits a person and greets him. Such a person comes to understand that death is in the nature of things, as per the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Those whom the angels cause to die in a good state by saying, "Peace be on you. Enter the garden for what you did.' (*an-Nahl:* 32)

It can be at the moment when the face lightens up as a person takes his book of deeds by his right hand. This is a glad tiding in this world and the next. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah', then continue in the right way. The angels descend upon them by saying, "Fear not, nor be grieved and receive good news of the garden which you were promised. We are your guardians in this world's life and in the Hereafter, and you shall have therein what your souls desire and you shall have therein what you ask for' (*Fussilat:* 30-31) Thus, those who are close to Allah *the Exalted* receive the gifts of Allah via the angels and are distinguished from their fellow created beings. The reason for this is that they most likely imposed upon themselves supererogatory acts of obedience that go above and beyond the basic obligation. Obligations are the bare minimum of the religious directives. Such people might feel that performing the basic religious obligations does not befit his love of Allah; thus, he increases the quantity of such mandated religious rites. Instead of praying only the five obligatory daily prayers, he prays ten other supererogatory prayers or he fasts another month or two in addition to the month of Ramadan. He might fast on Monday and Thursday of every week.

This indicates that he finds the basic religious obligations to be too little compared to his immense of Allah and that He deserves more. What this means is that this servant has entered into the station of love with Allah *the Almighty* whereby He bestows upon him all that he wishes. Such a person becomes so full of what he wants due to the satisfaction of Allah on his part. He becomes the beneficiary of that which is mentioned in the following Divine Hadith where Allah says, 'I will declare war against him who shows hostility to a pious worshipper of mine. Furthermore, the most beloved thing with which My slave comes nearer to Me is what I have enjoined upon him, and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *Nawafil* (prayer or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him. When I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his leg with which he walks. If he asks (something) from Me, I give him, and if he asks My Protection (refuge), I protect him.'

Allah concludes the verse we are examining by saying that His Words do not change, and this is what the great attainment is. As long as Allah said that, you will not find someone who is capable of altering His Words. In addition, all of creation shall be subjugated to Him on the Day of Judgment, and whomever Allah has permitted worldly ownership of something shall own nothing on that Day. All shall hear the Words of Allah, 'to whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer [of all]' (*Ghafir:* 16).

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has promised glad tidings in this world and in the Hereafter, nothing can reverse the decree of Allah in the matter. There is nothing that can refuse the judgment of Allah. Promises of glad tidings in this world and the next are, most assuredly, a great victory. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّ ٱلْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٦٥﴾

Do not let their words grieve you [Prophet]. Power belongs entirely to God; He hears all and knows all [65] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 65)

This verse comes after Allah had shown us what the objections of disbelievers were, their persecution to the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* along with their disavowal of his message and all that they had said in that regard. Much of what they had said had saddened the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* which is why Allah *the Almighty* asks him not to react dejectedly to what they had said. They had accused him of being a sorcerer, a liar, a fabricator, and a madman. However, Allah *the Almighty* has abrogated all that they had said. If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a sorcerer, why did he not put a spell over his naysayers as well? Can the hypnotised subject have a will vis-à-vis of the hypnotiser?!

Thus, what they claimed that the Prophet cast a spell on the disbelievers' slaves and children has been refuted. They also claimed that he was demented. However, the comportment of the Prophet evinced not the least sign of dementia. Allah refuted such accusations by saying: 'Noon. I swear by the pen and what the angels write, By the grace of your Lord you are not mad. And most surely you shall have a reward never to be cut off. And most surely you conform [yourself] to sublime morality.' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4)

Indeed, a madman could never exhibit such excellent comportment as did the Prophet. When they accused him that he had fabricated the Quran, Allah *the Most High* challenged them to come up with a chapter worth of text similar to it. They failed to do so even though they had a natural gift for poetry, literary arts, and eloquent speech. Allah *Glorified is He* orders the Prophet to 'let not their speech grieve you (him)' because their sayings do not stand a chance of interfering with the message. This is because all Might and Glory belong solely to Allah *the Exalted*. The word *Al'izza* means might and predominance. It is said, for instance, that such-and-such a thing is *'aziz*, which mean that there is nothing like it. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Absolutely Powerful, and there is no god, but He. He cannot be vanquished or subjugated. On reading this verse from the Quran, you will notice a small letter *M* on top of the word *qawluhum*. This means that one must make a mandatory pause.

One might ask, 'How can it be mandatory to pause at this juncture when the Holy Quran is built upon the principle of *wasl* (connectedness). The last letter of every chapter has a *tanwin* (punctuation), and there is nothing in the Quran which obligates the reader to stop?' My answer to this question is that when the scholars noticed how most people do not have a deep grasp of the Arabic language, they instituted such mandatory pauses so that the reader, who has but little knowledge of the Arabic language, can understand how to read such verses. Imagine, for instance, a person who does not possess linguistic acumen; relating both phrases together, he would thus mistakenly understand that, Allah forbid, the Might of Allah is a cause for the Prophet's sadness. This is why scholars have instituted a mandatory pause at this particular juncture so that we might read carefully and understand correctly.

This is why we must read 'and let not their speech grieve you' and then pause before going on to read 'surely, Might is wholly Allah's.' Thus we come to understand the meaning of the order not to grieve, which is because their sayings shall not in the least interfere with your destined, imminent victory over them. Allah *the Almighty* wishes to reassure His Prophet regarding the very issue of mission and that his mission is merely to convey the message and that he is not obligated to force them to believe or agree to his doctrine.

The Lord *the Most High* inspires His Prophet not to be grieved by their denial of the Divine Message and their calumnies against it. Their calumnies are groundless and have no evidence to substantiate. In respect of those deniers, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'In their wickedness and self-exaltation, they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth' (*an-Naml:* 14). Their calumnies shall not hinder the way of your message; Allah sees to it that the light of the Divine Message shines to its fullest extent. No one is more powerful than Allah *the Exalted*. No one can overcome Allah—He *the Most High* is the Predominant, the Protector from Whom no one can escape or take refuge. His Might may clearly manifest in overcoming all obstacles and subduing all enemies or in the possession of wisdom. Everyone from Allah's creation may enjoy might in a certain domain or the other. However, only Allah *the Almighty* enjoys the Absolute Might in all domains; His Might encompasses all things entirely.

Why did the Lord *the Most High* not use the rhetorical restrictive style in this verse, e.g. 'Might is wholly Allah's? The restrictive style restricts a specific attribute to a specific person and precludes others from sharing it, e.g. ‘So-and-so is owned by Zayd alone.’ In Arabic, mentioning the possessed object first 'so-and-so' indicates that no one else possesses such a thing. However, when we say, ‘So-and-so has such-and-such’, it means that many others have similar possessions or qualities. Here, the Lord *the Most High* says, ‘surely, Might is wholly Allah's’ (*Yunus:* 65). It is a case of emphasis; the quality of might is restricted solely to Allah *the Almighty* through the affirmed predicate. Simply, no one challenges this fact; it does not need to use the restrictive verbal style 'only'. It is Allah *Glorified is He*—the Creator of the Creation— who says that none can gainsay this fact. If there were—Allah forbid—any challenge to it, the verse would be false. This has not happened, nor will it ever happen when it comes to the Divine verses. He is the Creator of the universe, who reveals its signs. It is impossible that there could be any dissonance between the universe and Allah's Word, as He *the Most High* is the Creator of the universe.

It so happened that some claimed might and glory for themselves by saying, ‘Indeed, when we return to the City, we—the ones most worthy of honour—will surely drive out from it those most contemptible ones!’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) The crux of their saying was to claim might and glory for themselves and attribute lowliness and disgrace to believers. Therefore, might and glory have been claimed, so why has the restrictive style not been used? In response, Allah *Glorified is He* simply says: ‘However, all Might [Honour] belongs to Allah and [thus] to His Messenger and those who believe [in Allah]’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). Thus, Glory and Might belong to Allah alone.

However, Allah *the Exalted* wishes His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and believers to share that honour. In this instance, the Words of the Lord *the Most High* ‘surely, Might is wholly Allah's’ (*Yunus:* 65) declare that all forms of might and glory belong to Allah. If it is the might and glory of wisdom and control, then He is the All-Wise and the Controller. Likewise, if it is the might and glory of clemency, He is the Clement. However, when it comes to the Might of anger and retribution, He is *the Almighty* and All-Compelling. Eventually, all forms of might and glory belong solely to Allah *the Most High* ‘He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing’ (*Yunus:* 65).

Might implies dominance and ability to destroy; Allah *the Most High* 'hears' those who are worthy of destruction. When it comes to speech, He concludes the verse with 'All Hearing', and since He knows their actions, He concludes it with 'All Knowing'. He 'hears' everything said and 'knows' everything done. Finally, all forms of Might belong solely to Allah: ‘And let not their speech grieve you; surely, Might is wholly Allah's. He is the All Hearing’ (*Yunus:* 65). The Lord *the Most High* wills to prove this universal fact by means of the cosmic signs, for there is nothing in existence or in the universe that stands against Allah's Way. In this verse, observe that the Law of 'Might is wholly Allah's’ (*Yunus:* 65) firmly affirms that to Allah belongs everything in the heavens and the earth.

أَلَآ إِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَن فِي ٱلْأَرْضِۗ وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ
مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ شُرَكَآءَۚ إِن يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا ٱلظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ ٦٦

indeed, all who are in the heavens and on the earth belong to Him. Those who call upon others beside God are not really following partner-gods; they are only following assumptions and telling lies [66] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 66)

The entire creation is under His Dominion. When Allah *the Exalted* explains a given thing through its opposite, He will mention the principle and the overall framework: ‘Unto Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth’ (*al-Baqara:* 284). For example, when Pharaoh's legions pursued Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people, Musa's (Moses') people cried out: ‘Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61)

They said as such when they saw the sea in front of them. The Lord *the Most High* willed to show them that the sea will not hinder His Will, nor elude the Divine Power. Simply, unto Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth, including the sea. The sea was split asunder, and each part appeared as if it were an immense mount. Nothing can escape His Dominion. Allah *the Almighty* then shows the opposite sense; the sea remains parted until Pharaoh's legions entered into it, then the All Powerful tells Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'Leave the sea becalmed [between you and Pharaoh's men]. Verily, they are a host destined to be drowned!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24) Allah *the Exalted* orders the sea to resume its natural state, whereby He drowns Pharaoh's legions and saved Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his followers. Thus, the thing—by Allah's Leave—may lead to salvation or to destruction; unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth, and nothing can ever stand up to His Might and Glory.

Again, when Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* told his son, 'O, my son! Embark with us' (*Hud:* 42), but his son replied, 'I shall betake myself to a mountain that will protect me from the waters' (*Hud:* 43). Now, the idea is correct—the mountain rises above the level of the waters. However, Nuh's (Noah's) son forgot that Allah had other means; namely, the waves. He was destined to be drowned. It is true that Nuh's (Noah's) son thought that the ark may come to rest on Mount al-Judey*,* and all those who boarded it would be saved as would those who sought refuge in high mountains. However, he did not think of the waves that stood between him and the mountain. Eventually, he met his doom. To sum up, every living being is subject to the Divine Orders. Since all Might and Glory belong to Allah, then unto Him belongs everything in the heavens and the earth, and no one can challenge the Lord's Power. The entire creation may be used by the Lord as a means for destruction and for salvation.

The word *ala* ('Oh,') is a rhetorical device that has the purpose of alerting listeners so as not to be taken by surprise. Then, they do not miss the wisdom of the forthcoming words and focus their mental powers on perceiving the content of these words. The Lord *the Most High* says, 'Oh, verily, unto Allah belongs whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on earth' (*Yunus:* 66). It may be said that many unreasonable beings do exist. When Allah *the Almighty* says 'whoever', does it mean the reasonable beings only? In response, is there anything in the universe that fails to perceive Allah? Of course there is not! Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘On that Day will she [the earth] recount all her tidings, as Your Lord will have inspired her to do’ (*az-Zalzala:* 4-5). All living beings—mankind and other kingdoms in the universe—perceive and know the signs and existence of Allah. Note that He at times uses the following phrasing, ‘It is unto Him that whatever is in the heavens and on earth surrenders itself, willingly or unwillingly’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 83). Other times, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Verily, unto Allah belongs whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on earth’ (*Yunus:* 66). Such is the case of the verse in question.

For example, the angels do exist in the heavens and in the earth as the executors of orders. The phrase ‘unto Allah belongs whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on earth’ refers to them. Allah *the Most High* also has other living beings in the heavens alone—the enraptured angels on high; they do not exist on earth. Similarly, Allah *the Exalted* has other hosts on the earth alone. Observe that the following verse, ‘Unto Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth’ (*al-Baqara:* 284) fits the angels who are the executors of orders. For the enraptured angels in the heavens and those on the earth, who are unconnected with the heavens, the following verse is most appropriate, ‘Oh, verily, unto Allah belongs whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on earth’ (*Yunus:* 66).

Since everything in the universe lies under the Dominion of Allah *the Almighty* nothing therefore can escape His Will or His Divine Plan. In caves, for example, He can lock all means to salvation and can equally create all means to salvation. He *the Most High* will render blind anyone who approaches the cave. Nothing takes place without the Will of Allah *the Exalted*. The Divine Might and Glory remains His, and none can ever defile them. The Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Hence, what is it that they follow–those who invoke, beside Allah, beings to whom they ascribe a share in His Divinity’ (*Yunus:* 66). This verse is phrased as if there are partners to Him in Divinity, even though in truth there are none who share His Divinity. They follow nothing. The evidence is found in the heart of the matter, for they worship objects other than Allah *the Most High*. In essence, worship is to follow the command and refrain from the proscriptions. The idols, which they worshipped, had neither commands nor proscriptions. They had no doctrine to bring forth. They do not have any deities.

In reality, there is no partner who has the least share in Divinity. If there did exist partners who share in His Divinity, they would have revealed their message and/or issued commands and proscription. He who says, 'worship me' is effectively indicating a manner of worship. Show me one of these deities, which you worship and claim they have messages! But you cannot do so. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say: "If there were–as some people assert–[other] deities side-by-side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His Almightiness"' (*al-Isra':* 42). In other words, if we suppose that other deities with a form of power do exist, e.g. the shining sun, the reflecting moon, the falling rains, the obeying angels, then they will search for the One Unique Lord to receive power which you have thought is inherently their own, from Him. Evidently, the Lord *the Most High* says: 'Nor has there ever been any deity side-by-side with Him. Had there been any, each deity would surely have stood apart [from the others] in whatever it had created and they would surely have [tried to] overcome one another! Limitless in His glory is Allah, [far] above anything that men may devise by way of definition' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91).

Had it been true, there would have been various spheres of influences controlled by each different deity. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'those [saintly beings] whom they invoke are themselves striving to obtain their Lord's favour' (*al-Isra':* 57). They said that they worshipped the angels, but they did not know that the angels themselves worship Allah *the Most High*. As there are no partners, who share Divinity, to worship, so they just follow mere conjectures. Allah *Glorified is He* delivers the following Words: 'They follow but the conjectures [of others] and themselves do nothing but guess' (*Yunus:* 66). We find that those, who endeavoured to find contraries in the Quran and undermine it, said that this verse has an example of antinomy as follows:

The beginning of the verse denies any partners to Allah, 'Hence, what is it that they follow–those who invoke, beside Allah, beings to whom they ascribe a share in His Divinity' (*Yunus:* 66). The concluding part of the verse states that they follow conjecture and guesswork. Thus, the beginning of the verse denies that they follow anything whereas the conclusion of the verse asserts that they do.

Really, this objection reflects the ignorance of those who claimed it. For Allah *the Exalted* rejects the existence of these deities whom the idolaters claim to have a share in Allah's Dominion; He owns all that are in the heavens and all that are on the earth. However, He asserts that they follow mere *zann* (conjectures) and *khars* (guesswork). As previously explained, the *zann* designates a most likely judgment. The degree of certainty as regards to a judgment's verity is either likely or unlikely on equal footing. When a certain idea is balanced evenly between likelihood and unlikelihood, it is a case of 'doubt'. If you incline towards likelihood, it becomes a conjecture, or else, it designates, if improbability is more likely, illusion. To sum it up, *zann* is an opinion or judgment based on inconclusive evidence, whereas *khars* (guesswork) refers to a groundless statement.

In this case, the Lord *the Most High* says; 'They follow but the conjectures [of others] and themselves do nothing but guess' (*Yunus:* 66). The Quranic statements express a wide range of possibilities. In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* asserts that they follow nothing but their opinions and falsehoods. The disbelievers, as known, have two categories: some who have the knowledge of reality, but they alter it into a lie and falsehood, and others who do not have knowledge of reality, but they lend their ear to those who think they know. Thus, there is a follower and a leader. The latter knows that the words he speaks are mere prattle to distort and sully the truth. As for the follower, he believes that he follows the words of conscientiously trustworthy people and takes their words to heart. Thus, the follower just follows mere opinions. As for leaders, they create baseless assertions, lies, and fabrications. Allah *Glorified is He* hereby tells us: 'There are among them unlettered people who have no real knowledge of the Book, [following] only wishful beliefs and depending on nothing but conjecture' (*al-Baqara:* 78).

The unlettered, or followers, therefore, believes in that which is said to them; they are illiterate and what is said to them seems probable. However, if they had a moment of reflection, they would conclude that such words are not probable. Regarding what is said about the following, or sometimes leaders, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Woe, then, unto those who write down the Book, with their own hands, and then say, "This is from Allah", in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby' (*al-Baqara:* 79). The verse refers to the baselessly created statements, lies, fabrications, and falsehoods. If disbelievers are illiterate, they can be considered the folk of opinion and, then, fall under the present judgment, ‘They follow but the conjectures [of others]’ (*Yunus:* 66), whereas if they are of the elite class of leaders, the following Words of the Lord *the Most High* fit them, ‘and themselves do nothing but guess’ (*Yunus:* 66).

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلَّيۡلَ لِتَسۡكُنُواْ فِيهِ وَٱلنَّهَارَ
مُبۡصِرًاۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَسۡمَعُونَ ٦٧

It is He who made the night so that you can rest in it and the daylight so that you can see – there truly are signs in this for those who hear [67] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 67)

In the wake of explaining the meaning of faith and faithful believers and discussing the disbelievers' possible slanders against the Prophet and his Message, the Lord presently wishes to steer the discussion towards His signs of the universe to prove faith by reference to the facts of the cosmos. We are required to believe in the Prophet who communicates the Divine Message for our benefits. If anyone asks for evidence in support of this fact, let him contemplate the signs of the universe brought forth for man's benefits before the religious responsibilities are even imposed; do they work in human favour or not? Since the universal signs—created in order to serve mankind—benefit them throughout their life, why does man not thank the One Who bestows such blessings upon them? Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* graces mankind with many bounties even before the age of maturity, when man shall immediately perform the religious duties. Allah *the Most High* does not expect a person to pay forth the religious duties until after He has bestowed upon that person a flood of beneficial blessings, which man freely admits and to which reality undoubtedly witnesses.

When you reach the age of maturity and the religious duties become incumbent upon you, compare your duties to your blessings. If you believe that the universal signs have benefited you over your life until the moment when you are charged with the Divine Commands and proscriptions, then take it in good faith that what is now being asked of you is true and beneficial. Just as He has benefited you with that series of initial blessings, the Lord shall continue to bestow upon on you beneficial blessings. Just follow religious commands. Let all your actions in life be informed by the light of religious commands to win happiness. We know that it is in the nature of man to rest and ready himself for work, and then he tires and rests again. This is why we find that religious duties given to us in accordance with this same pattern. The Lord *the Most High* allows you rest until you reach the age of maturity—this was a time when you received the blessings of Allah *the Almighty* enjoying them until you reached the age of maturity. During this time, you had free choices and could follow your desires. Then came the Divine Commands 'you shall' and 'you shall not' by which you must abide to set your affairs right. While your religious duties are bound to exact a certain measure of effort on your part, there is nevertheless a resting period. In your daily life, there is a time for rest and a time for work. The time of rest helps you approach your work with vigour, whereas work tires you and makes you look forward to resting afterwards. Thus, work requires a time for rest, and rest requires being followed by work. The Lord *the Most High* mentions the time period called 'day' and shows that He has separated man's life into two periods: One preceding maturation when a person is not obligated to perform religious duties; The other follows maturation when a person has to perform the religious duties. Allah *the Exalted* divides the 'day' into a period of rest and a period of work. He *the Most High* says, 'It is He Who has made the night for you, so that you might have rest therein, and the day, to make [you] see' (*Yunus:* 67). Just as Allah *the Almighty* has created the day with two distinct periods for rest and work, He thas legislated the religious duties for the order of life to be maintained. Man, a divinely trusted steward residing on earth necessarily requires action. His action must submit to the commands and prohibitions. Any action left without a direct command and prohibition is permissible, so one may or may not do it. Acts and proscriptions require actions. Do not think that a proscription requires no action; while acting in a certain way you receive the order to desist. You may think that suspension requires no action since it strips you of the capacity to carry out an action. However, you forget that there is an internal action involved. It is related to the motives urging you to carry out your desires to that which is not in line with Allah's Law. Thus, you are forced to stifle those urges and rein them in since Allah has ordered you to do so.

Since there exists such a thing as work/action, there consequently also exists such a thing as fatigue. This is why Allah *the Almighty* has given us the right to rest. The same goes true for the human life. Allah does not make religious duties incumbent upon a person until they reach the age of maturity. He leaves them free of—and unaccountable for—religious duties, at the beginning of their life. However, in this early period of life Allah *the Exalted* does not free a person entirely from duties as man is left to the simple discipline of parents, who may tell him ‘do not lie’ and may reward/punish him properly for good and bad deeds, respectively. However, man is not accountable for the commands and proscriptions. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* elucidates this matter for us when he says, 'Order your children to pray at the age of seven and punish them for neglecting prayers at the age of ten.'(1) Thus, a father shall command his son to pray and may punish him for neglecting prayers or rewarding if he wishes to endear prayers to his heart. When a father charges his son with the duty of prayer, his son obeys. Simply, a father takes care of his son's needs and looks after his best interests. His son knows that the father will only charge him with those obligations, which are ultimately in his best interest out of his love to his son. As such, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed those in charge of children to guide them, as children will be willing to obey them. Once a person is mature, the commands and prohibitions come from Allah, and so are the rewards and punishments. Pre-maturity commands or proscriptions only intend to rear and habituate children to become accustomed to the Divine commands and prohibitions.

If the lifestyle following the Divine example requires action as per the commands and proscriptions, human beings must also require a period of rest and pause. This is why Allah *the Exalted* divides the ‘day’ into 'night' and 'daytime'. Beware, therefore, of using any of these periods for wrong purposes, to maintain the natural order of life. However, circumstances may force you to do so, for there are those who stay up at night keeping watch. Others may stay up working in bakeries or preparing breakfast for others. There is a certain measure of providential allowance. The Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Among His wonders is your sleep, at night or in daytime, as well as your [ability to go about in] quest of some of His bounties’ (*ar-Rum:* 23) for He knows since pre-eternity that there are certain bounties to be sought at night and whosoever works by night certainly rests by day. If the aforementioned verse has a general application, we will say to he who sleeps by day, 'Do not do it. It is not the time for peace and rest.' However, Allah *the Almighty* wishes to put in place a measure of providential allowance, so that those who work by night might also rest. Presently, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘It is He Who has made the night for you, so that you might have rest therein’ (*Yunus:* 67). It is known that there is a difference between the acts of ‘creating’, ‘making’, and ‘owning’. For example, Allah *the Most High* creates time and makes it into night and daytime. Thus, ‘making’ is the act of charging a created thing with a specific task. You, for instance, find the maker of pottery taking clay so as to create a pitcher out of it. The maker of pottery first creates the clay by mixing water with soil and kneading them together into a paste. Then he takes the clay and makes a pitcher, a flowerpot, or a flower vase out of it. Therefore, he effectively transforms an existing element into something functioning. Likewise, time belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*; He divides it into night and daytime. In the same way, He creates man and makes his organs: eyes, ears, brains, lungs, etc. All parts are created out of that which the Lord *the Most High* created. In other words, He dedicates portions of the original created matter to perform various functions in the service of the creature.

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(1) *Ahmad, Musnad, 2:187; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, (Hadith: 490) on the authority of ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr Ibn al-‘As.*

In our own lives—and Allah knows best—we find a person who spins threads out of cotton, another who weaves a fabric out of the threads and a third who tailors the texture into garments, pairs of pants, shirts or quilts. Thus, the act of ‘making’ is to shape a created thing so that it performs a specific function. Consequently, the act of ‘creation’ results in ‘ownership’; he who creates a certain amount of clay owns it, while he who makes a pitcher out of clay owns it. We find that the acts of ‘creating’ and ‘making’ can bring about a form of ‘ownership’. However, ownership withdrawn after ‘creation’ and ‘making’ results in you benefiting from things while not necessarily owning them; that is we find the following words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Who is it that has full power over [your] hearing and sight?’ (*Yunus:* 31) Allah *the Exalted* creates beasts of burden for us; He makes them subservient to us, giving us ownership over them. If the Lord *the Most High* says, 'ownership', His ownership never ends for anyone, 'created' or 'made'; rather, the object in question eternally belongs to Allah.

In other words, when living beings use and control their organs, these organs are in reality not 'owned' by the living beings; rather, it is the Creator *the Most High* Who owns them. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions night and daytime by saying: 'It is He Who has made the night for you, so that you might have rest therein, and the day, to make [you] see' (*Yunus:* 67). The gist of these words can be summarised as follows:

He has made the night for you to rest therein and the day for work. Allah *the Exalted* wishes to use that miraculous Quranic style, so He says, 'And the day, to make [you] see' (*Yunus:* 67). Is it the day that sees or is it we that see? Evidently, the day has no capacity to see; rather, it is the faculty of sight that is clear during daytime. In earlier times, people had not yet attained the scientific discoveries we currently have. They believed that light emanated from eyes towards the beheld object, making it visible. Then, the Arab Muslim scientist Al-Hasan Ibn al-Haytham used the scientific methods to prove that light is actually reflected off the beheld object and then perceived by the eyes. The evidence to this fact is that you can perceive an object if it is standing in the light, even when you stand in darkness. However, if it is the other way around, you cannot see it. Thus, the Quranic miraculous fact preceded the science of optics. The Quran hereby explains that it is the light of the day which when it is reflected off objects in existence, enables eyes to perceive the seen objects.

To summarise, it is during daytime that we can better see as it brings forth the light that reflects off objects, which is necessary for human eyes to see. Notice that when the Quran broaches the issue of night and daytime, it says, 'Now among His signs are the night and the daytime' (*Fussilat:* 37). And in another verse is mentioned: 'We have established the night and the daytime as two symbols, and thereupon we have effaced the symbol of night and set up [in its place] the light-giving symbol of daytime' (*al-Isra':* 12).

As Al-Hasan Ibn Al-Haytham pointed out, the daytime (light) facilitates sight even if appearances suggest that during the day people can see. The

Lord *the Most High* gives us a live example from the experience of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; He *the Exalted* tells Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘"Now, what is this in your right hand, O, Musa (Moses)?" He answered, "It is my staff. I lean on it, and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep, and many other uses have I for it." Said He, "Throw it down, O, Musa (Moses)!" So he threw it – and lo! it was a snake, moving rapidly’ (*Ta Ha:* 17-20). The Lord willed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* might acquire experiential knowledge of what shall happen to his staff when he faces Pharaoh and sorcerers. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sees his staff, for the first time, transforming into a snake, he would be—Allah knows—frightened; so Allah *the Almighty* reassures him with His Words, ‘Take hold of it and fear not. We shall restore it to its former state’ (*Ta Ha:* 21). The first time it became a snake as a preparatory experience for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to free him from worries or fears when he would actually use it. The intention or purpose was to instil Musa (Moses) with firm confidence, as he prepared to deliver a miraculous feat to Pharaoh. Allah *Glorified is He* told Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘Now place your hand into your bosom’ (*an-Naml:* 12). Now, the word *al-jayb* refers to the collar area. Let no one think that *al-jayb* refers to the pocket where one keeps money. During earlier times, the pocket was located inside one's garments, like the pockets of vests worn by farmers. Therefore, the pocket where we put our money is called *al-jayb* since the hand only can reach the pocket through that aperture. Allah *Glorified is He* tells Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘Now place your hand into your bosom. It will come forth [shining] white without blemish’ (*an-Naml:* 12). The Lord *the Most High* also informs him, ‘[You shall go] with nine [of My] messages unto Pharaoh and his people. Verily, they are people depraved! But when our light-giving messages came unto them, they said, "This is clearly [but] spellbinding deception!"’ (*an-Naml:* 12-13) Signs help mankind see; they are 'light-giving' signs.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says, ‘[Whereas] it is He Who has made the night for you, so that you might have rest therein, and the day, to make [you] see’ (*Yunus:* 67). He did not say: 'so that you might work therein'; rather, He cites that which ensures safety during work operations. He *the Most High* says, ‘to make [you] see’ (*Yunus:* 67). The light reflects off objects and ensures human beings’ safety as they go about their work. However, some contemporaries abuse the blessing of electricity and stay up late at night. When night comes, they stay up until morning in front of the television, videocassette, or other means of entertainment. Then, they sleep during the day and forget that night was made for us to rest in and that day was made for work. It has been proved that light affects the human body. Indeed, the light affects living beings. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* anticipated such a discovery long before its time; He said, 'Turn off your lamps when you retire [sleep] for rest at night.'(1)

This way the body would not be affected by light rays, which bring about chemical reactions within the body. This is why I have advised to enjoy the benefits of civilisation using the basic rules for creating it; we shall allow farmers to go to their fields and workers to head to factories. Staying up late at night is harmful. If a man claims that he has become civilised, he must respect the value of work, which leads to the building of civilisations. The machine a person stays up at night watching is a product of hard work by those who abide by the basic principles of progress and civilisation. This includes a respect for the value of hard work during the day as well as for the value of entertainment when it is allotted an appropriately specific period. We tend to abuse the fruits of civilisation. An example of this is the time that a wife saves by owning a fridge, which helps her save cooked food for three days storing food in it. She also uses the electric washing machine to do the laundry in a mere hour. However, the time saved is wasted in front of the television. She neglects other duties, e.g. educating children. Likewise, some may misuse the products of modern technology. Such misuse is indeed a form of backwardness. It is only when we make rational use of the fruits of modern civilisation that we are truly civilised. For example, I tell car drivers, 'Do not drive so fast if you are driving on a dirt road, otherwise, you will kick up clouds of dust which could then enter into people's lungs causing allergic reactions. Beware of neglecting the regular maintenance of your car, or else, your engine will quickly fall into disrepair and produce harmful exhaust to human health and environment.'

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Saheeh, (5624) and Ahmad, Musnad, (3/388) on the authority of Jabir Ibn ‘Abdullah. The wording is that of Al-Bukhari.*

One should not travel on dirt roads or use a poorly maintained vehicle; otherwise one may cause respiratory illnesses for other people and negatively affect the crops and pollute the atmosphere. Nor must we misuse modern technology for the purposes of spying on others. Rather, we must elevate ourselves to the civilised heights by respecting the principles of civilisation; whoever utilises the products of civilisation without applying these principles remains primitive, despite the sophisticated machines he uses. The machine, in fact, becomes more sophisticated than he is. Thus, when we use things in their proper function, we thereby afford ourselves as well as others a measure of comfort. This is why we have stated in our commentary on the Words of the Lord, 'Consider the sun and its radiant brightness and the moon as it reflects the sun!' (*al-Layl:* 1-2) If someone perceives a contradiction between the veiling of night (concealing the visible world) and the light of daytime (revealing the visible world), it is in reality no contradiction. Rather, it is a case of complete integration.

The movement of the day only follows the rest of the night. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Consider the creation of the male and the female!' (*al-Layl:* 3) The creation of male and female is an act of integration, not contradiction. Allah *the Exalted* is the creator of night and day as well as males and females. The Lord *the Most High* says, 'Verily, [O, mankind,] you aim at most divergent ends!' (*al-Layl:* 4) In other words, human actions lead to their goals. There are various actions at night and daytime for males or females. If we jumble our actions and tinker with the order of life, then life becomes disrupted, and we suffer from bitter experiences until matters become so entangled that we start looking for solutions. We have called women to work part-time, so they can dedicate some time for the household or take care of their home on a full-time basis when their sufficient enough income is guaranteed or if the husband earns enough to support the family. However, nobody pays attention to solutions until problems become so difficult. To further illustrate, some people say that nighttime in advanced countries never ends; people stay up until morning. Now, when I hear claims like this, I say that this is not in the interest of those people. The night must be for rest and the day for productive work. The problem occurs when the function of one thing is transposed onto the function of another, be it in time or human beings. Read the following Quranic Words: ‘Verily, [O, mankind,] you aim at most divergent ends!’ (*al-Layl:* 4) For every single entity in this universe has a function; every single entity goes about this function through means that differ from the means used by others. Thus, the Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse in question by saying, ‘In this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who [are willing to] listen’ (*Yunus:* 67). He did not say, ‘in this, behold, there are messages for people who are able to see!’ Why is that? In response, observe that when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about a given time, He points out the function of this time. He says in the beginning and in the middle of the verse, ‘It is He Who has made the night for you, so that you might have rest therein, and the day, to make [you] see’ (*Yunus:* 67).

The point in the verse is the calmness of night, not the action of daytime. During the night, the eye is not performing its function; rather, it is the sense of hearing that is performing its function. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Say: "Have you ever considered [this]: If Allah had willed that there should always be night about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection–is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you light? Will you not, then, listen [to the truth]?"’ (*al-Qasas:* 71) In other words, no one can move or travel in darkness if night were perpetual, nor could anyone see anything clearly. The Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Say: "Have you ever considered [this]: If Allah had willed that there should always be daylight about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection – is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you [the darkness of] night, wherein you might rest? Will you not, then, see [the truth]?"’ (*al-Qasas:* 72) Thus, in the verse that places emphasis on the night Allah *the Exalted* mentions the sense of hearing. Then, in the verse where the emphasis is on the day, He mentions the sense of sight. After Allah *the Almighty* spoke about the domain of work in daytime and rest at night, He continues by speaking about the source from which work and rest come forth. It is necessary to abide by the orders of the One Lord to have your actions be in harmony. Just as you work in daytime and rest at night, your actions must follow the orders of the One God; namely Allah *the Exalted* Whom you worship to the exclusion of all partners. Anyone who tells you otherwise is disrupting the rhythm of life. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Lo! Each deity would surely have stood apart [from the others] in whatever it had created’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 91).

Allah says:

قَالُواْ ٱتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَدٗاۗ سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥۖ هُوَ ٱلۡغَنِيُّۖ لَهُۥ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي
ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ إِنۡ عِندَكُم مِّن سُلۡطَٰنِۭ بِهَٰذَآۚ أَتَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

They say, ‘God has children!’ May He be exalted! He is the Self-Sufficient One; everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him. You have no authority to say this. How dare you say things about God without any knowledge? [68] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 68)

The same verse rebuts their claims. For example, when you say, ‘So-and-so has taken possession of a house’, it means that so-and-so has an independent identity that ontologically precedes the taking possession of that house. It is by virtue of this independent identity that the person is even able to take possession of the house. If it is said, ‘Allah has taken unto Himself a son’ (*Yunus:* 68), such is an admission of the Divine Perfection and Independent Identity, which ontologically precedes taking a son. Now, they also have held conflicting opinions about the son. Some said that the angels are the daughters of Allah, but Allah *the Almighty* has refuted their claim. Others, namely Jews, said that Ezra *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah, but Allah *the Almighty* also refuted their claim. A group of Christians said that Jesus, the Messiah(1) *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah, but the Lord *the Most High* has refuted their claim as well.(2) Furthermore, what motive would Allah have for taking unto Himself a son? Did His Power run out such that He stands in need of a son for help?! Is it possible for the Lord to be weak—Allah forbid—such that He needs to draw on the power of a son?! Take the example of an old man who faces a young man, and the young man annoys him. It may be said to the youth, 'Be careful! This old man has a son, who is stronger than you.' This may be said to deter the young man. The old man might say, 'My sons are stronger than you.' This is the case of an old man backed up by his sons. Allah *the Exalted* pays no attention to all these claims. Only the order of life must be maintained without conflict. This is why the One Who makes orders must be the One, Unique Lord, Who is the source of all orders. There should be no contradiction among the given orders. If orders come from various sources, the rhythm of life would fall into conflict, dissipating energy and causing its spoil. Therefore, the source of orders must be the Only Lord to Whose Will all submit. He is far above everything in identity, transcendence and attributes. Transcendent, moreover, are His actions, for no other action resembles His. To absolutely ensure this fact, there must be only one God. However, some people set up associates with Allah in Divinity, while others attribute to Him a son. In response, we say that His statement, ‘Allah has taken unto Himself a son’ (*Yunus:* 68) nullifies itself. The act of taking a son implies that 'Divinity' has an ontologically independent existence. By virtue of this Divinity, a son was taken. Some idolaters said that the angels are the daughters of Allah. In response, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Why for yourselves [you would choose only] male offspring, whereas to Him [you assign] female. That, lo and behold, is an unfair division!’ (*an-Najm:* 21-22) Perfection belongs to Allah *the Exalted* in its entirety; He is inherently Perfect. He *the Most High* says in the middle of the verse: ‘Limitless is He in His Glory! Self-sufficient is He’ (*Yunus:* 68).

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(1) Allah *the Most High* says: ‘While the Christians say, "The Messiah is Allah's son."…’ (*at-Tawba*: 30).

(2) Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Such are the sayings which they utter with their mouths, following in spirit assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the truth! [They deserve the imprecation:] "May Allah destroy them!" How perverted are their minds!’ (*at-Tawba*: 30)

S*ubhanahu,* i.e. infinite/limitless in His Glory and Transcendence. *Wa huwa al-ghani,* i.e. He stands in no need of anyone; you rely on your children but He is the Eternal, the Everlasting. He is in no need of sons as human beings do. The life of children is finite; that is why they like to have children as the poet sings: After I expire, I live on through my son!

It is said that a childless person has no further memory. Since man will surely die, he wishes to live further through his son. This is why when an Arab man has a son, he feels overjoyed and happy. Only the ignorant person feels sad when his wife gives birth to a daughter, for—they think—the daughter will not pass on the family name to her progeny, whereas sons and grandsons carry on the name of grandfathers, who feel their legacy is ensured through two generations. In conclusion, taking a son is an act that is done either as a means of support or a means of self-defense. Allah *the Almighty* is far above the need for support just as He is far above the need for self-defence. Indeed, for self-defence one would look to someone who is stronger than one is, but no one is stronger than Allah *the Most High*. Nor does He *the Exalted* stand in need of support; He is the First and the Last.

The idea of attributing a son to the Creator is indefinitely false from all perspectives. In respect of this idea, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Limitless is He in His Glory’ (*Yunus:* 68). Such a statement abrogates all preceding probabilities. It is followed with His Words: ‘Self-sufficient is He’ (*Yunus:* 68); He neither needs a son nor anything else. His Words ‘Limitless is He in His Glory!’ (*Yunus:* 68) tell of His transcendence—the Transcendent Being Who has no partners in Divinity or Acts. Sometime, the same attribute is used to describe Allah as well as His living beings. Thus, beware of thinking that their attribute is similar. If you come across a self-sufficient man, for example, know that the sufficiency of human beings is outward. However, the Divine Sufficiency is inherent. You are living, and Allah *the Almighty* is the Living. However, your life is not akin to His. His life is not preceded by the state of non-existence, whereas your life follows a state of non-existence. His life is not followed by non-existence, whereas your life will be followed by non-existence. Allah does exist, and you also exist. However, His Existence is inherent, independent, and eternal, whereas your existence is dependent and temporal. If the Lord *the Most High* says that He t has a hand ‘the hand of Allah is over their hands’ (*al-Fath:* 10), Allah's hand is not like your own. His identity is not like yours, and His Attributes are not like yours. He is the All-Capable, Most-High. Hence, when Allah *the Exalted* manifests Himself to His creation, He does so through a form of manifestation entirely different from anything that a servant can imagine. Human beings form different imageries; if the image through which Allah *the Most High* manifests himself is grasped, this would mean that there exists a human mind capable of grasping it. Whatever comes to your mind, Allah *the Almighty* is far above that. What comes to your mind is possible to grasp since it is a necessary mental process. Allah, however, never succumbs to those who are subservient to Him.

When you have a maths or geometry problem, for example, you give it to one who can solve. If one gives a geometry problem from a university-level curriculum to a primary school student, his mind is incapable of tackling it. Therefore, if a person apprehends something about Allah, which He has not already declared, it would imply that Allah yields to the will of those who are subservient to Him. However, Allah *the Exalted* is far above such a prospect; He is the All-Capable, the Most-High, Who never succumbs to those who are subservient to Him. This is why the Lord *the Most High* instructs us to utter the following expression, as a means of asserting His Transcendence: 'Limitless is He in His Glory!' (*Yunus:* 68). Such transcendence necessarily applies to everything that comes to human mind with respect to the Lord. The Divine Glory or Absolute Transcendence is an Attribute of Allah; it proceeds before anything else and will continue after creating the universe. Thus, all living beings celebrate Divine Glories. From the moment living beings appeared they began glorifications and have not ceased it.

The proclamation of Divine Glory is a continuously ceaseless act reaffirmed by the arguments in the 'Transcendence' chapters of the Quran. The Lord *the Most High* says, 'Limitless in His Glory is He Who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem] – the environs of which we had blessed' (*al-Isra':* 1).

Never think that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* travelled to Jerusalem following his own will. Rather, it was the Lord Who transported him. Do not think that physical distance, space, or time can impede the Absolute Divine Will. The act is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* and we cannot judge an act attributed to Allah against the yardstick of time or space, or according to the law of relativity; Allah *the Exalted* enjoys Absolute Power. You are a human being, a mere accident limited in time and space. For example, if you walk from Cairo to Alexandria on foot, you would travel the distance in a matter of weeks. However, if you use a riding animal, you might arrive in Alexandria in days. If you ride a car, you will travel the distance in two hours. Finally, if you ride a rocket, you cover the distance in minutes. In other words, the more powerful the means of transport, the less time it takes to reach a certain destination.

This is a brief summary of the law of motion. If the One Who transported the Prophet is Allah *the Most High* the source of all power, consequently it is not possible to compare it with the will of any other power, nor is it possible to measure the matter in terms of near or distant places or time-scales familiar to you. Never think that Allah's act of transporting is anything similar to your act; the act draws its strength from the actor. Since the actor is Allah *the Exalted* nobody can circumscribe His Actions within a timescale. Allah *the Almighty* begins the chapter *of al-Isra'* with the the Glorification of Allah. The opening verses speak of the Prophet's account on his journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. He confirmed the truth about the heavenly ascension and that the natural laws had been suspended for him. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has spoken to us about that which we know, so that we might believe him regarding those matters which we do not, so that we might measure what we do not know against that which we do.

As such, we are convinced of the Prophet's sincerity when he speaks of that which we do not know. Therefore, the word *subhanah* serves to glorify Allah. It pertains to Allah, since the pre-eternal time before the creation of the universe. Allah Himself witnesses that He is the One God, and so do then the angels. All living beings then continue the celebration and glorifications of Allah *the Most High*. You find that the chapters of the Holy Quran celebrating the Divine Glorification in affirmation of the Divine Transcendence, and the glorification of His Name preceded the creation of the universe. Then, all living beings were created to glorify Him.

In the chapter of *al-Hadid*, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘All that is in the heavens and on earth extols Allah's limitless glory’ (*al-Hadid:* 1) and also in the chapter of *al-Hashr*, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extol Allah's limitless glory’ (*al-Hashr:* 1). Did the living beings of the universe extol Allah's Glory once and then cease? No, they do not. Allah *the Most High* says, ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols the limitlss Glory of Allah, the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 1)

In the chapter of *al-Taghabun*, Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols Allah's Limitless Glory. His is all dominion and to Him all praise is due, and He has the power to will anything.' (*at-Taghabun:* 1)

Thus, limitless Glory belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* since pre-eternity, and after He had created them, all living beings, and all of existence has extolled and continues to extol His Glory. This includes the heavens and the earth and all the sentient and non-sentient beings that exist therein—all except you, O, human being. Extol, therefore, the Name of your Lord Most High. In the verse that we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[And yet] they assert, "Allah has taken unto Himself a son!" Limitless is He in His Glory! Self-sufficient is He…' (*Yunus:* 68). Proclaiming Allah's infinite Glory and His Absolute Transcendence is asserted by the negation of wrongfully ascribing a son unto Him, in Allah's own Words: '… Self-sufficient is He …' (*Yunus:* 68). To take unto Him son implies a need for assistance, reliance, defence, or carrying on the family name—all of these do not apply in respect to Allah *Glorified is He* Who is *the Most High*. It is Allah *the Exalted* Who says in another verse: 'And they say, "Allah has taken to himself a son." Glory be to Him; rather, whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His; all are obedient to Him.' (*al-Baqara:* 116) Now 'obedience′ came in the Arabic form as *Qunut* which means to resolve oneself for the worship of Allah *the Almighty* to submit to His Will and to obey Him. In the verse which we are presently studying, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… No evidence whatever has you for this [assertion]! Would you ascribe unto Allah something which you cannot know?' (*Yunus:* 68) This means you have no evidence which proves that Allah *the Exalted* has taken unto Himself a son. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '… Would you ascribe unto Allah something which you cannot know?' (*Yunus:* 68) It means that you have not received any statement from Allah *the Almighty* to this effect, for there can be no statements made about Allah except by Him Himself. Nor is anyone in a position to make a statement about His Lord, for it is He Who makes statements about Himself. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ لَا يُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Those who invent lies about God will not prosper’ [69] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 69)

When Allah *the Exalted* speaks about faith, its (spiritual) fruits, and its denouement, He mentions success as an end result of such faith. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: "He will indeed be successful who purifies it,' (*ash-Shams:* 9).

He *Glorified is He* likewise says: 'Successful indeed are the believers’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 1). He also says: '…these it is that are the successful.' (*al-A’raf:* 157) All of these uses of the term are related to the word *al-falah* which is closely related to the physical (origins) of the life of a living organism. The elements that account for the existence of a living organism are the following: air, water and food.

Breathing draws upon the air that surrounds the earth. Water comes down from the sky or is sought from the (wells) deep in the earth where the rainfall has percolated. Food comes from the earth and (every resource) that originates from the earth is obtained through agriculture. This is why I say that agriculture (or farming) is at the core for the continuation of life. When a man farms land by ploughing, planting it with seeds, and then irrigating it, the seeds eventually germinate into plants which produce fruit. When one says, *aflah,* this means that his labor has produced a good harvest. Allah *the Exalted* wished to describe a good spiritual harvest with the word *al-falah*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has explained that the life of this world is the seedbed for the world of the Afterlife. Thus, if you want to reap fruit, then expend physical effort.

Beware of thinking that by taking something away from you in this world, religion is diminishing your net worth. Rather, it is religion that is increasing your net worth.

The example which I always give—and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection—is a farmer who plants a plot of land with wheat. Basically, he needs to take a certain amount of wheat from his reserves so as to use as seeds in the earth. Now if his wife were stubborn-minded and did not know the basic principles of agriculture, she might tell him, ‘How can you take the wheat and leave your family with less wheat to survive on?’ This woman does not know that although he gave up a certain amount of stored grain, this amount shall be returned to him ten or fifteen fold. Similarly, what Allah *the Almighty* demands of you here on earth might seem like a loss; however, He *the Most High* shall bestow upon you the fruits of the Afterlife many times over. Thus, the word *fallh* is related to *falah*, which means working on the land, ploughing and planting upon it so as to reap a harvest. Just as the harvest which you reap is in proportion to the work and toil that you put in, the same applies to your reward in the Afterlife and your work in this life. Take the example of a farmer who ploughs land and who carries fertiliser on the back of a camel then rises early in the morning for irrigating. You will find this farmer in a cheerful and happy state on harvest day. His state of mind will differ remarkably so from a farmer who neglected his land, who spent his time at the café and who stayed up late at night watching television. When harvest day is due, much to his chagrin, his produce will be poor due to his not tending to it properly.

The Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Say, "Those who forge a lie against Allah shall not be successful."' (*Yunus:* 69) This means that those who attribute falsehoods to Allah *the Almighty* or make statements about Him which He has not Himself declared are the ones who shall never attain success. I have previously explained that everything that is related to Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be known except through Him. Yet what drives them to spin such falsehoods anyway? Every action in life must be motivated by that which is beneficial. The idea of what is beneficial and what its consequences are differs from one person to the other. The lazy student, who roams through the streets, refusing to study flunks, and he sets himself up to be unsuccessful in his future career. As for the diligent student, he is the one who achieves a respectable status in society. The first student was shortsighted and did not realise the great extent of the benefits (of studying hard); rather, his view of what was beneficial was confined to short-term pleasures at the expense of the greater good in the future.

Now what caused these people to peddle lies about Allah *the Exalted* is the collapse of the sense of self, for every self has presence and status; once the status collapses, a man feels as if he is a worthless member of society. The example I have previously given was that of a village quack who used to tend to everyone's medical needs. Then one of the young men of the village graduated from medical school and opened up a clinic. If the village quack were wise enough, he would go to the doctor and seek a position as a nurse in his clinic. However, if his pride were to get the better of him, he will contend stubbornly (against the village's new healthcare provider); however, he will be unable to argue against the doctor's knowledge concerning medical science. Similarly, the groups of disbelievers and the leaders of misguidance were surprised at the coming of a messenger from Allah.. They thought that a messenger would be intent on consolidating political sovereignty for himself, even though every one of Allah's messengers always attributed power and sovereignty to the true owner—Allah *the Most High*. When they were stripped of their authority—by virtue of which they enjoyed status, notability, grandeur, and greatness—they became agitated and tried to escalate resistance against Prophet Muhammad so as to preserve their assumed temporal authority.

One example of such a scenario is the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Medina. At the time, there were some who were trying to nominate 'Abdullah ibn Ubai to be a king. This is why this man resisted Islam, and then when he could no longer continue resisting, he converted to Islam (disingenuously) and remained hostile to the religion inwardly. However, if he had become a good Muslim and gotten close to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he would have achieved an even higher status than that which he had previously aiming for. Thus, the leaders of misguidance and the chiefs of disbelievers are the types of people who feel sorry for themselves and fear the loss of temporal power, for when a messenger comes upon the scene, one of his objectives is to establish social equality. This is why there are those who, fearing the loss of temporal power, take a rebellious stand against the message. This is also why, regarding the reasons for their fabrication of lies, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَتَٰعٞ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا ثُمَّ إِلَيۡنَا مَرۡجِعُهُمۡ ثُمَّ نُذِيقُهُمُ ٱلۡعَذَابَ
ٱلشَّدِيدَ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكۡفُرُونَ ٧٠

They may have a little enjoyment in this world, but then they will return to Us. Then We shall make them taste severe punishment for persisting in blasphemy [70] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 70)

It was thus painful for the leaders of disbelief and the chiefs of misguidance to see their power taken away from them by a new messenger who summoned the people to Allah *the Exalted*. Furthermore, they were afraid that this new messenger who summoned people to Allah *Glorified is He* would strip them all of their authority, claiming it not for himself but rather turning it over to the will of his Lord. Were the messenger who summoned people to Allah, is *the Exalted* to usurp temporal power for himself, we would say that it is a case of one ego overriding another. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* insisted that he return everything—even his personal matters—to Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *Glorified is He* lays bare the negligible gains which these people defended, describing them as: 'It is only a provision in this world …' (*Yunus:* 70); every one of them loved to convince himself of the fanciful idea that such transient gains were truly of value. The word *Ad-dunya* must encapsulate the reality of an object to which it refers, namely ‘the world’ or ‘the life of this world’. All names, as we know, are words that designate objects. When you say, 'So-and-so is tall', you are thereby attributing the quality of tallness to him. When you say *Ad-dunya*, this word comes from *Ad-dunuw* or *Ad-dana’a* which means being either at the lowest point or rather lowly in rank.

Take into consideration *Ad-dunuw* or being in the lowest point near ground. What this really means is to be on the way that leads to a summit, and then this is an acceptable point of view since the first stage in one’s journey to a summit must begin with the lowest point *(Ad-dunuw)*. Then, by remaining steadfast to the doctrine of Allah, you gradually climb higher towards the Hereafter. Thus, concerning he who describes the life of this world as being completely synonymous with *Ad-dana’a,* meaning general lowliness, we say that this is not that case, entirely; rather, it is in one sense, but on the condition that it is considered to be a path leading upward. Whosoever considers this world to be lowly is he whose status is indeed lowly. However, whosoever takes it as a path leading upward is such a person who has indeed achieved victory by following Allah's Methodology. Therefore, the world is not synonymous with *Ad-dana’a,* for the immediate purview of religion is not the Hereafter; rather, its concern is the course of life in this world. In this world, religious doctrine commands you through the directives of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’. It is in the Hereafter that one’s rewards are reaped. Thus, the reward for correct action is not the immediate concern of religion. You can still make good use of your life in this world if you take it as the seedbed of the Hereafter. Be aware not to live your life based on the idea that the world is millions of years old; whether the life of the earth is long or short is of no importance to you as a living being. What matters to you is the length of your own journey on earth. How long you will live is unknown. In fact, how long the world itself shall survive is unknown. There are those who die at the age of six months, and there are those who die at the age of a hundred. Each enjoys the world in proportion to the time he spends in it, but all returns to Allah; *Glorified is He*, in the end. Those people who went astray and made up lies about Allah *the Almighty* will not go unpunished by Him; for like all of His creation, they shall return to Him. These people who are wont to lead themselves and others astray did not pay attention to the consequences of their actions, nor did they pay attention to the One Who oversees the consequences, nor did they prepare themselves properly. However, he who takes the consequences of his actions into account and who leads a virtuous life in this world will have his ultimate destiny to be the happy reward of paradise. He who does not take the consequences of his actions into account and who makes up lies about Allah *the Exalted* will have his ultimate destiny to be suffering, as per the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'It is only a provision in this world, then to Us shall be their return; then, We shall make them taste severe punishment because they disbelieved.' (*Yunus:* 70). Now the degree of suffering depends on the one who is dispensing it. If the one who is dispensing suffering is weak, the suffering will be light. If the one who is dispensing suffering is of average strength, the suffering will be of medium intensity. However, if the one who is dispensing suffering is strong, then the suffering will inevitably be severe. It is Allah; *Glorified is He*, Who says: '…Verily, His punishing grasp is grievous, severe!' (*Hud:* 102) Thus, after Allah *the Almighty* spoke about the principle of Divine transcendence—which precludes the need for Allah *Glorified is He* to take unto Himself a son, for He is, after all, the One Free of Need, to Whom belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth—and after He *the Exalted* explained the need for us to take the doctrine from a single source, namely the Messengers who transmit (the doctrine) on His behalf—(after all of this) He now wishes to speak to us about the succession of messages (from heaven). When the address that is spoken is purely theoretical and ungrounded in any concrete reality, its abstract nature can undermine the argument, whereas if the words that are spoken are grounded in a concrete reality, such that the latter complements and supports the theoretical aspects, this then becomes the evidence that proves the truth of the theoretical aspect. This is why, for example, when seeking to bolster an argument concerning some social matter, we try offer a supposition concerning a real life scenario. What this means is that we try to describe an event that has not happened in reality, but which we assume is real (for the sake of the argument). This allows us to elucidate our abstract idea by means of a hypothetical scenario. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* narrates the stories of the succession of various messengers down the centuries. The purpose of this is to tell the disbelievers that they will not be able to stand in the way of this message; they should witness the historical record and the events that occurred involving the messengers and their people. These messengers were supported by believers and were at the same time resisted by stubborn, ever so intransigent, disbelievers. If previous disbelievers had been victorious over their messengers, then disbelievers (of Prophet Muhammad's time) could rightfully hope that they will also be victorious over the Messenger of Allah. These words must be directed at people who are aware of some of the events that occurred in the context of the succession of messengers throughout history. This knowledge, however, may have faded since such events occurred in a distant past. Allah *Glorified is He* hereby, says:

وَٱتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ نُوحٍ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِۦ يَٰقَوْمِ إِن كَانَ كَبُرَ عَلَيْكُم مَّقَامِى
وَتَذْكِيرِى بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ فَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ فَأَجْمِعُوٓا۟ أَمْرَكُمْ وَشُرَكَآءَكُمْ ثُمَّ
لَا يَكُنْ أَمْرُكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ غُمَّةً ثُمَّ ٱقْضُوٓا۟ إِلَىَّ وَلَا تُنظِرُونِ ﴿٧١﴾

Tell them the story of Noah. He said to his people, 'My people, if my presence among you and my reminding you of God's signs is too much for you, then I put my trust in God. Agree on your course of action, you and your partner-gods – do not be hesitant or secretive about it – then carry out your decision on me and give me no respite [71] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 71)

One might ask why Allah mentions the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and not the story of Adam *peace be upon him* or Enoch *peace be upon him* who were the two messengers who preceded Prophet Nuh (Noah). This is what has given rise to the suspicion that *Adam* was not a messenger; for some people think that a messenger is one who, by necessity, brings forth a message to an established community of human beings. These people do not realise, however, that a messenger is one who, in the first instance, is sent to guide himself. If Adam *peace be upon him* was the first created being, then he was sent forth to guide himself, and thereafter to convey (the message) to his children who would come after him. Allah *the Exalted* had given Adam *peace be upon him* an experience in paradise whereby there was a prescription and also a proscription, namely: 'And We said, "O, Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers."' (*al-Baqara:* 35) He also warned him of Satan (Iblis), but then Adam *peace be upon him* fell prey to the temptation of Iblis (Satan), and Allah *Glorified is He* sent him down to earth and gave him distinction and forgave him. Adam was armed with the experience that he had gained in heaven. Thus, if he transgressed the command of his Lord, punishment would befall him. Allah *Glorified is He* warned him of succumbing to the influence of Satan (Iblis) so as not to deviate from the state of obedience to Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, Allah *the Most High* had given him the doctrine and ordered him to undertake his mission on earth—beginning with himself and thereafter conveying it to those who would follow him. Just as Allah *Glorified is He* taught Adam *peace be upon him* the names of all things, so did Adam *peace be upon him* teach his children; thus, they learned how to speak. Just as Adam *peace be upon him* transmitted to them the names of all things, he also transmitted to them the doctrine. Allah *Glorified is He* has taught Adam the names of all things, so that he might populate the earth. He taught him the doctrine that he might do virtuous works in the world, and in the Hereafter, he would receive pleasurable rewards. Read the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '… And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.' (*Ta Ha:* 121)

These are followed by the words of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘and then his Lord chose him and turned to him in forgiveness and guided [him] …' (*Ta Ha:* 122). Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… there shall, nonetheless, most certainly come unto you guidance from me …' (*al-Baqara:* 38). The word *al-huda* in this instance refers to the doctrine that was given to Adam *peace be* *upon him* from above. The message is nothing other than the transmission of the doctrine and guidance from Allah *the Almighty* to His creation. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says the following Words: '…Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] ere we have sent a prophet [to them].' (*al-Isra':* 15) Thus, the predecessors of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* are those to whom Adam *peace be upon him* had conveyed (the message). The proof lies in the story of Adam's two sons; in the words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'and convey unto them, setting forth the truth, the story of the two sons of Adam – how each offered a sacrifice…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27). They both had offered sacrifices to Allah *the Exalted*.

Thus, the message of Allah's Divinity had reached Adam's sons, as per the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: '… how each offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them whereas it was not accepted from the other? [And Cain] said, 'I will surely slay you!" [Abel] replied, "Behold, Allah accepts only from those who are conscious of Him."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 27) Thus, they had established the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* while they also came to know (the existence) of proscription. In one of the two verses, he says: 'If you should raise your hand against me to kill me - I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 28) Therefore, those who followed after Adam *peace be upon him* knew of the One, Unique God, and also knew of the doctrine. Thus, to those who say that Adam *peace be upon him* was not a messenger, we would say to them to understand Allah's Words correctly. What they should have said is that they do not understand this issue. They should have asked the knowledgeable people, so that they might understand from them that Adam *peace be upon him* was indeed a messenger, that he had sons named Cain and Abel and that they were both conversant in matters of faith. As to the question of why Allah *the Exalted* mentions the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* we should note that Adam *peace be upon him* was the first human being, and that he had transmitted to his sons the doctrine that had been conveyed to him. Furthermore, he had taught them that which was beneficial. Then time passed and forgetfulness set in, whereby Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon him* came forth, and forgetfulness set in once again after he was gone. Thus, it was until the coming of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. In this instance Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* narrates the story of Prophet

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* He says: 'And convey unto them the story of Nuh (Noah) – when he said unto his people …' (*Yunus:* 71).

The Arabic word *An-naba*' means conveying a piece of news that refers to an important piece of one that grabs one's attention, for it concerns a matter that is clearly manifest. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'About what do they [most often] ask one another? About the awesome tiding [of resurrection], on which they [so utterly] disagree.' (*an-Naba':* 1-3) Thus, *An-naba'* refers to a piece of news that is important and that grabs one's attention. Therefore, we read about the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* who addresses his people, even as he had declared, himself to be a messenger delivering a doctrine. The word *qawm* is used to refer to men only. This is explained in the Quran when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…O, you who believe, let not a people ridicule (another] people. Perhaps they may be better than them. Nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent - then it is those who are the wrongdoers." …' (*al-Hujurat:* 11) Thus, the Arabic word *qawm* refers to men, whereas women's role ought to be more discreet. Work and action in this world is the purview of men. We have explained this matter in our discussion of Allah's address to Adam *peace be upon him* regarding Satan (Iblis). Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So We said, "O, Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer.'" (*Ta Ha:* 117) Since these words are addressed to Adam *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'so you would suffer' (*Ta Ha:* 117). In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* addressed Adam only, this indicates that the woman has no business in the work that takes place outside of the household and which requires hardship. Thus, the woman stays at home to rear the children and to maintain the household for the man. Her task is to imbue the household with love, care and peace. As for the act of getting up and working in the outside world, that is the man's task. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer ...' (*Ta Ha:* 117). Thus, the man's job is to exert effort, so he is required to go out into the world and not to stay behind at home. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as saying: '…' And recite to them the news of Nuh (Noah), when he said to his people, "O, my people, if my residence and my reminding of the signs of Allah has become burdensome upon you - then I have relied upon Allah. …"' (*Yunus:* 71). In this instance, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* uses terms of endearment which imply that he is one of them and that they are dear to him. This also means that he has no right to cheat or delude them, for they are his family. These words are echoed by the words spoken by elected officials when they are addressing the members of the community which elected him: 'O, my people, my family, my voters'. These are all terms of endearment. These words are also similar to the words Luqman *peace be upon him* told his son: '…And [mention, O, Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, "O, my dear son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice!" (*Luqman:* 13)

He also says: '[And Luqman said:] "O, my dear son, indeed if wrong should be the weight of a mustard seed and should be within a rock or [anywhere] in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Indeed, Allah is Subtle and Acquainted."' (*Luqman:* 16) Also, He says that Luqman said: '… "O, my son, establish prayer"' (*Luqman:* 17).

When proclaiming something to be great means that, in reality, the object in question is arduous and difficult for a person to tackle. Allah *the Almighty* says, for instance: '…. Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths; they speak not except a lie.' (*al-Kahf:* 5) It means that the saying that came out of their mouths was a difficult, arduous matter. What they said was: 'And to warn those who say, "Allah has taken a son"' (*al-Kahf:* 4). For a believer, such an assertion is grave indeed because it is a problematic matter which cannot be accepted. There is no believer who is capable of accepting the claim made by one of Allah's created beings that He *the Exalted* has taken unto Himself a son. Sometimes the 'gravity' of a matter can be of a different kind such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him] …' (*ash-Shura:* 13). This means that your calls to them that there is but One, Unique God and that all Kingship belongs to Him *Glorified and Exalted is He* are claims of yours that have grown oppressive, unbearable, and onerous from the point of view of disbelievers. Similarly, if a word is contrary to faith, it then becomes oppressive from the point of view of believers. If a word calls disbelievers to faith, it then becomes oppressive and arduous from their point of view. In this instance, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is quoted as saying: '…, "O, my people, if my residence and my reminding of the signs of Allah has become burdensome upon you - then I have relied upon Allah'" (*Yunus:* 71). Now we know that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* lived with his people for nine hundred and fifty years. In other words, he lived a long life amongst his people. Moreover, his condemnation of disbelievers had made his presence among them oppressive. It might also be that the Words, '… O, my people, if my residence and my reminding of the signs of Allah has become burdensome upon you …' (*Yunus:* 71) mean that he demanded from them that which they could not tolerate since Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* wanted them to desist from their old practices of idol worship, and this might have been too difficult for them. Thus, the principle of worshipping a single deity proved to be a hard task for them.

Furthermore, Prophet Nuh (Noah) exerted much effort to preach to them while standing, while the crowd to whom he was preaching to was sitting. Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* used to speak to his disciples from a standing position. Thus, this standing position is the sign that the effort that is required to exhort people to the right path falls squarely on the shoulders of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*; in the meantime, his disciples listened to him while comfortably seated. Therefore, the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* '… O, my people, if my residence and my reminding of the signs of Allah have become burdensome upon you …' (*Yunus:* 71) can be paraphrased as if that which I exhort you to is too difficult for you.

We can rightly interpret this expression in the connection with the long period of time during which this preaching took place — nine hundred and fifty years. Or, the expression could also be understood to mean that we have become two separate groups since the doctrine which I exhort you to is not to your liking, and I would have preferred that we remain united as a single entity.

When ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* realised that the task of governing the Islamic state required a leader must name a successor, some told him, 'Why did not you nominate ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar as the person to govern us (after you)?' Ibn al-Khattab said, ‘It is enough for the family of Khattab to have but one man who is questioned with regards to the (leadership of the) Ummah of Muhammad.' ‘Umar also added, ‘I know that you have become weary of my rule, for I am harsh with you.’ Thus, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* felt that he and his people had parted ways: he had taken the side of Allah *Glorified is He* by exhorting people to worship Him, while they took the side of the idols which they had worshipped in a habituated way. This is why Allah *the Exalted* quotes Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as saying: '… then I have relied upon Allah …' (*Yunus:* 71). You, thereby, limit the depository of your trust solely to Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus did Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* do likewise? He faced his people, armed with nothing but his complete trust in He Who had sent him. He tried to guide his people, but they did not comply (with his calls). He said to them: ‘So resolve upon your plan and [call upon] your associates. Then let not your plan be obscure to you. Then carry it out upon me and do not give me respite. …'" (*Yunus:* 71). He asks them to consolidate all of the various opinions into one. In other words, it is as he said, 'O, people, decides on a single opinion, for you will not, however, be able to harm me.' To consolidate the various opinions of all the generations which Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had tried to guide requires a great deal of effort since every twenty years a new generation with new ideas comes forth.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* preached to each new generation of his people, that is, over the course of nine hundred and fifty years. How many generations, then, did Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* spend reforming? Indeed, the number of generations was large, and still Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was only able to win over a small number of believers who would accompany him in the lone ark. With them there were also animals, but not Nuh's (Noah) son who joined the disbelieving folk. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* called out to him to join him on the arc and become a believer, but he refused, electing to remain on the side of disbelief, despite the destruction that awaited the disbelievers. He thought that he would be able to find refuge in a mountain that would keep him safe from the flood. However, Prophet Nuh's (Noah) son did not take into account another one of Allah’s agents, one that would prevent him from reaching the mountain, namely, the waves. Thus, the words of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: '… then I have relied upon Allah …' (*Yunus:* 71) reveal a deep, underlying faith. There exists no living being of Allah’s that can get the better of Him, for all of Allah’s, created beings—whether inanimate, vegetal or animal—complied with Allah's order that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* should be victorious; thus, none of Allah’s created beings would ever disobey. Such was Prophet Nuh's (Noah) reliance on Allah *Glorified is He* and such was his deep, underlying faith (in Him). This much can be gleaned from the Words: "To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is within them. And He is over all things competent' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 120). Also, He says: 'To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth …' (*al-Baqara:* 284). Nothing will ever stray outside His Dominion.

What is truly remarkable is that, when Allah *Glorified is He* uttered the word ‘Be!’ (thus creating the universe), the only created being to have remained outside of Allah’s Will was man, endowed as he is with free will. Of course, man is not inherently independent from Allah *Glorified is He*; however, Allah *the Almighty* endowed him with free will. If He did not endow man with free will, the latter would simply be unable to stand on his two feet, and all human beings would be Allah's agents (without any possibility of rebellion). Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said, 'so resolve upon your plan and [call upon] your associates. Then let not your plan be obscure to you. Then carry it out upon me and do not give me respite …' (*Yunus:* 71). When a person is faced with a difficult issue, he feels at loss before a variety of options. One tries to evaluate the pros and cons of each option so as to make the best choice. When a person can corral his various options into one, this indicates that the person is set on one option and has resolved himself to carry through with it.

However, if a group of people are contemplating an issue, every one of them will have a different opinion. If after negotiating the matter amongst themselves, they would decide on one position, in other words, to come to an agreement regarding a particular issue, which is dependent upon the temperament of the group. If they are a group of good people, they will disapprove of that which is evil. If they are a group of bad people, they will endorse that which is evil. One example of this is the story of Prophet Ya'qub's (Jacob's) sons, when they begrudged their brother Yusuf's (Joseph's) eminent status. Allah *Glorified is He* quotes them as saying: '[Said one of them:] "Slay Yusuf (Joseph) or else drive him away to some [faraway] land, so that your father's regard may be for you alone …"' (*Yusuf:* 9). This means that the objective of their suggested plot—to kill Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*—was so that Ya'qub's affection would be directed solely towards them. They followed up their suggestion of killing Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with plans of repentance. They told one another: '… and after this is done, you will be [free to repent and to live once again as] righteous people!"' (*Yusuf:* 9) They thought that by repenting, their act of murder would be accepted. Now, at first, some of them would not stand for such evil as was inherent in their conspiracy. After all, they were of Prophetic lineage; indeed, they were of the Asbat who were supposed to eschew evil rather than promote it. One of them, therefore, said for them not to kill him; rather, 'drive him away to some [faraway] land' (*Yusuf:* 9). This means that he mitigated the matter from the level of murder to exile. This was indeed the first step that this (morally superior group) took towards mitigating the sin since they were clearly choosing a lesser evil from a greater one, which was a plain indication that good was still ingrained into them. They would also decline the second sin, which was to exile Yusuf (Joseph), fearing that he might be eaten by wild beasts. Then came the suggestion: 'if you must do something – cast him into the dark depths of this well, [whence] some caravan may pick him up' (*Yusuf:* 10). Then they came to an agreement, and evil was eschewed once again when they realised the possibility of deliverance.

Thus, when morally superior people (those who clearly have some moral conscious) contemplate an evil course of action, they invariably eschew evil. Take the example of a good man who saw his son being beaten up by another boy. In the heat of the moment, he envisages shooting his son's assailant with a rifle, but then he rejects this idea, thinking that he ought to content himself with hitting (the boy) severely with a stick. Then he backs down from this idea, thinking that he ought to give (the boy) two good slaps on the face. Then he backs down from the idea and contemplates chiding the boy. Finally, he backs down from that idea and contents himself with complaining to his father. Thus, this is how evil thoughts are eschewed by morally excellent people. However, if the father, herein, is of a villain, he would begin with the idea of complaining to the parents of his son's assailant. Then he will reject the idea, upping the degree of sin to the prospect of slapping the child himself. Not satisfied with this idea, he would contemplate giving him a severe beating. This idea would also fail to quench his anger, and so he would finally say to himself, 'I am going to shoot him.' Thus, with sinful people, the degree of sin rises ever higher. In this case, Allah *Glorified is He* states Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as saying: '… "So resolve upon your plan and [call upon] your associates. …"' (*Yunus:* 71) This means for them to get together amongst themselves and come to an agreement upon a single course of action, then once they do so, they should execute it faithfully—with help from their allies. He is thereby advising them even though they are his enemies. What he should have done is to sow discord amongst them. However, so firm is he in his trust of his Lord that he knows that, whatever they may do, they will not get the better of him, nor will they be victorious in their attempt to suppress his message—except if they kill themselves. To put it in vernacular terms, they should 'mount the highest of their horses' which means that he is intimidating them. No one would ever dare say such a thing unless he is strengthened by an unshakable trust in Allah *Glorified is He*. Not content to stop there, he continues to say: '… "Then let not your plan be obscure to you. Then carry it out upon me and do not give me respite."' (*Yunus:* 71) What Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* told them was for them not to bother exchanging furtive whispers amongst themselves, rather, have them do as they wish, without trying to conceal their actions. What they have to do is to get together and agree upon a single course of action, both they and their partners upon which they rely and whom they worship or their fellow disbelievers. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* did not seek to kindle any tribal tensions amongst them, so as to play them against each other, for he was completely reliant upon Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Allah quotes him as saying: '…Then carry it out upon me and do not give me respite ' (*Yunus:* 71). This means that he is encouraging them to settle on a single course of action with their partners—either the idols which they worship or their fellow disbelievers—and to resolve themselves to carry out whatever it is that they (eventually) agree upon. A judgment might be pronounced upon a person, but no action ever be taken. However, his words '…Then carry it out upon me …' (*Yunus:* 71) means to pronounce a judgment on the matter and proceed to carry out whatever judgment you have pronounced. Then, he said, '… do not give me respite!' (*Yunus:* 71) which means for them not to give Prophet Nuh (Noah) any pity as they go forth to carry out the plans that they have devised against him.

Anyone who contemplates this verse will note the attitude that greatly challenges therein, for, in the first order, he is asking that they get together—along with their partners—so as to come to an agreement upon a single course of action. Then, he asks that their plans to be fully disclosed and that they should execute whatever plans they had come up with without delay. Can there be any fiercer defiance in the face of a foe than this? They, for their part, were indeed stubborn, intransigent foes. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had, for nine hundred and fifty years showed them lenience and kindness. He was patient with them during all of this time; therefore, decisive action was now called for. This is why his defiant attitude was as intense as it was. He called for them to decide upon a course of action with their partners. Thereafter, he encourages them to execute their plans against him without delay. Such was his challenge to them—a challenge which he kept upping until it was agreed to carry out the judgment. The Arab temperament, for instance, can forgive, forbear and pardon regarding a matter which has nothing to do with Allah’s Doctrine—a matter which, in fact, concerns a worldly dispute. One finds an Arab poet speaking of Bani Dhuhl. Although this tribe persecuted the poet’s people to a great extent, his people forgave them. The poet said:

We forgave Bani Dhuhl,
We said: they are our brothers
O that they would become
the people they used to be
When they professed evil ways,
They showed their true selves
There remains naught but enmity,

We have disdained them as they have us
We have paced to and fro,
Like a lion, livid
Such vituperation, butchery
And wounds gaping like
and stabbing like
The mouth of a brim-full vessel
In wickedness there is salvation
if kindness is to no avail
To the ignorant, tolerance is seen
as an invitation to subjugation

Thus, the contention between Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his people called for a hard stance. For in this lied the only hope that their wickedness would abate, that their arrogance would diminish and that they would proclaim their faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. However, they did not renounce their old, deviant faith. This is why, quoting Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* later says:

فَإِن تَوَلَّيۡتُمۡ فَمَا سَأَلۡتُكُم مِّنۡ أَجۡرٍۖ إِنۡ أَجۡرِيَ إِلَّا
عَلَى ٱللَّهِۖ وَأُمِرۡتُ أَنۡ أَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

But if you turn away, I have asked no reward from you; my reward is with God alone, and I am commanded to be one of those who devote themselves to Him' [72] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 72)

This means that if they rejected his message—to worship the True God—let it then be known that he did not call upon them to worship him, a fellow human being; rather, he called upon them to worship the One Who is above both them and him. He was not seeking to usurp temporal authority by which he might rule over them, nor was he seeking high rank, for all high rank belongs to Allah *the Exalted*.

Now Allah *Glorified is He* does not need high rank from you because He *the Most High* is innately High Ranked. The objective of Prophet Nuh's (Noah) message from Allah was to hold their arrogance in check; its goal was that they lead their lives in the light of the True Methodology, so that their lives might be imbued with virtue—this was all in their interest. 'And if you turn away [from my advice] then no payment have I asked of you. My reward is only from Allah, and I have been commanded to be of the Muslims.' (*Yunus:* 72). Was Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* hereby helping his enemies? One sympathises with his enemy if he senses an impending danger. However, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was not afraid of them because he solely relies upon Allah *the Exalted*. Rather, what Prophet Nuh (Noah) was doing was pointing out their strong points, even though he knew that their power was limited and that their wickedness would remain without efficacy no matter how evil it were to become. Perhaps they harbour no wickedness whatsoever. The point is there any benefit that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* would reap? Was there any benefit of which Nuh (Noah) would be deprived? No, there would not be, since he was hereby announcing that he would be accepting no reward for his proselytizing efforts. Therefore, they could not hurt him, nor could they benefit him in any way, nor does he want any reward from them. Basically, Prophet Nuh's faith in Allah who had sent him forth was strong. He was not asking them for any reward, a recompense that is reward given in exchange for a service. Such earmarked values are usually used in commutative contracts that are based on the principal of reciprocity; in such cases, these values stand either for material goods—such as produce or commodities—or they represent the cost of a service. Consider the example of when a person wishes to buy a room in a house, he goes to the man who owns the house and asks to purchase a number of shares corresponding to the value of the room.

Another person wants to rent a room and so he goes to see the owner of the house; he offers to pay him the value of renting a room in the house. In other words, he will pay him a sum that is equivalent to the value of using the room. Recompense is paid forth only if it is in exchange for an urgent benefit (or need). Now Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* should have asked them for compensation, for he was engaged in guiding them to the truth; this would have been an objective assessment of the value of that essential service that he had been providing them with. However, he declared that he was seeking no compensation, as if to say that his efforts should be rewarded with compensation, since it was they who were ultimately benefitting. Thus, under normal circumstances, he should have exacted payment for his services.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* however, declined any compensation from them, for he was seeking the greater compensation (from above). If he had taken compensation from them, it would, by necessity, be in proportion with their means. However, compensation from Allah *Glorified is He* is in proportion with Allah's means. There is an infinite difference between man, a created being whose capacity to remunerate is limited, and Allah whose capacity to remunerate is unlimited. In this instance, he says: ''and if you turn away [from my advice] …' (*Yunus:* 72). This turning away, or shunning of his message, neither harms nor benefits him; they do not possess the capacity to harm nor benefit him, for he would not be accepting any compensation from them. It is worth noting that all the messengers who have succeeded one another through the millennia have addressed their people thus: '…"No reward whatever do I ask of you for this [message] …"' (*Sad:* 86). The only exceptions to be found are in the stories of both Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Regarding the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And convey unto them the story of Ibrahim (Abraham). [How it was] When he asked his father and his people, "What is it that you worship?" They answered, "We worship idols, and we remain ever devoted to them." He said, "Do [you really think that] they hear you when you invoke them, or benefit you or do you harm?" They exclaimed, "But we found our forefathers doing the same!"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 69-74). In this instance, Allah *the Almighty* does not mention anything about not asking for compensation. Furthermore, in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He answered, "O, my Sustainer! Behold, I fear that they will give me the lie, and then my breast will be straightened and my tongue will not be free. Send, then, [this Your command] to Harun (Aaron). Moreover, they keep a grave charge [pending] against me, and I fear that they will slay me." He said, "Not so, indeed! Go forth, then, both of you, with our messages. Verily, we shall be with you, listening [to your call]! And go, both of you, unto Pharaoh and say, ‘Behold, we bear a message from the Sustainer of all the worlds. Let the Children of Israel go with us!’" (*ash-Shu'ara':* 12-17) In this verse, we also do not find Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* speaking about the fact that he was not asking for compensation. However, in the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* we find the following Words of Allah, Glorified and *Exalted is He*: "And if you turn away (from my advice] then no payment have I asked of you. My reward is only from Allah, and I have been commanded to be of the Muslims' (*Yunus:* 72). The same situation can be found in the story of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* whereupon Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[And the tribe of] ’Ad lied to [one of Allah’s] message-bearers when their brother Hud (Eber) said unto them, "Will you not be conscious of Allah? Behold, I am a prophet [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust. Be, then, conscious of Allah and pay heed unto me! And no reward whatever do I ask of you for it. My reward rests with none but the Sustainer of all the worlds.”' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 123-127) A similar situation can also be found in the story of the tribe of Thamud, whereby Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(And the tribe of] Thamud gave the lie to [one of Allah’s] message-bearers. When their brother Saleh (Shelah) said unto them, "Will you not be conscious of Allah? Behold, I am a prophet [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust. Be, then, conscious of Allah, and pay heed unto me! And no reward whatever do I ask of you for it. My reward rests with none but the Sustainer of all the worlds."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 141-145) Basically, the same wording was put in the mouth of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* when Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: '[And] the people of Lut (Lot) lied to [one of Allah’s] message-bearers. When their brother Lut (Lot) said unto them, "Will you not be conscious of Allah? Behold, I am a prophet [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust. Be, then, conscious of Allah and pay heed unto me! And no reward whatever do I ask of you for it. My reward rests with none but the Sustainer of all the worlds.”' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 160-164) The same wording was put in the mouth of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[And] the dwellers of the wooded dales [of Midyan] lied to [one of Allah’s] message-bearers/ Ehen their brother Shu'aib said unto them, "Will you not be conscious of Allah? Behold, I am a prophet [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust. Be, then, conscious of Allah and pay heed unto me! And no reward whatever do I ask of you for it. My reward rests with none but the Sustainer of all the worlds.'" (*ash-Shu'ara':* 176-180) Thus, most of the messengers down the ages have touched upon the issue of compensation: 'And no reward whatever do I ask of you for it …' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 164). It is as though the messengers *peace be upon them* were telling human beings that they had been sent to give the message and that if they were to think about it, the truth of the matter is that they (the messengers) deserve to be compensated for the service they were rendering to them. However, messengers do not want any compensation from others; rather, they shall take their reward from the Lord of the worlds, for the value of the service which messengers perform for others cannot be appraised by any mere human. The only one who can appraise its value is the Giver of the Methodology; the One Who has revealed the doctrine to His Messengers. In the Holy Quran, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is quoted as saying: '… Say [O, Prophet], "No reward do I ask of you for this [message] other than [that you should] love your fellow-men…'" (*ash-Shura:* 23). Regarding the issue of compensation and why it was not brought with up Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is that we know that the first person that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* proselytized was his uncle. (1) Now the uncle was fortunate to have been responsible for Ibrahim's (Abraham's) upbringing. The uncle, therefore, had the same rights over Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as would a father. Similarly, we notice that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had proselytized the pharaoh. Now the latter is the one responsible for Musa's (Moses') upbringing, and his wife(2) wanted Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to be their dear son. To be sure, the pharaoh later reminded Musa (Moses) of this fact by saying: '… [Pharaoh] said, "Did we not raise you amongst us as a child, and you remained among us for years of your life?'" (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18) Whereas in the case of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his mission, the Quranic narrative describes the way in which he put the matter to his people: 'If you turn away (rejecting my message), neither sorrow nor angst shall overcome me, for neither can you harm me, nor can you profit me. It was not you who asked me to come to you with true guidance—that I might earn a reward from you—rather, it was Allah Who sent me, and it is He Who shall give me my reward.'

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(1) *Azar*

(2) *Asiya*

Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered Prophet Nuh (Noah) to be amongst those who have sincerely surrendered themselves to Him. Take an example from daily life of when a person sends a worker over to his friend's house to fix something. This worker will be compensated by the one who sent him, not by the one he was sent to. This is merely in the nature of things.

Then, Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَنَجَّيۡنَٰهُ وَمَن مَّعَهُۥ فِي ٱلۡفُلۡكِ وَجَعَلۡنَٰهُمۡ خَلَٰٓئِفَ
وَأَغۡرَقۡنَا ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَاۖ فَٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡمُنذَرِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

But they rejected him. We saved him and those with him on the Ark and let them survive; and We drowned those who denied Our revelations – see what was the end of those who were forewarned! [73] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 73)

It is as though this catastrophe—brought about by Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* as a result of their hostility to the true faith—could have easily engulfed Prophet Nuh (Noah) and his companions. To say, 'I saved you from such-and-such (a catastrophe)' means that you were close to succumbing to that from which I saved you. In effect, this was the case with the flood. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'And so We caused the gates of heaven to open with water pouring down in torrents and caused the earth to burst forth with springs' (*al-Qamar*: 11-12). Under normal circumstances, one would expect the earth to absorb the rainwater. In fact, what happened was that water not only came falling from the sky but also gushed forth from the earth. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and caused the earth to burst forth with springs, so that the waters met for a purpose pre-ordained' (*al-Qamar*: 12). What this means is that such an event was pre-ordained, so that nobody should ever say that it was naturally occurring phenomenon. No, it is a pre-preordained event. Also, the ark built by Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was in place and ready to be launched, for Allah *the Exalted* had ordered him to build it as we can conclude Allah's Words in the chapter of *Hud*: 'And construct the ship under Our observation and Our inspiration and do not address Me concerning those who have wronged. Indeed, they are [to be] drowned …' (*Hud:* 37). In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: "And [so Nuh (Noah)] set himself to building the ark, and every time the great ones of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him. [Thereupon] he said, "If you are scoffing at us – behold, we are scoffing at you [and your ignorance], just as you are scoffing at us."" (*Hud:* 38) Then, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* boards the ark and joining him are those who had attained to faith in Allah; there was pair of every species of bird and animal which they carried on board with them, a male and a female. The Words of Allah *Glorified is He* are '… And so We saved him and all who stood by him …" (*Yunus:* 73). It has been revealed that those who boarded the ark were the conscientious human beings. How can we, therefore, understand the issue of animals and birds boarding the ark?

The answer is the following: the (raison d'être) of these animals and birds is to serve human beings, and so they must have been present on board the ark. After all, they are subservient creatures that proclaim Allah's Glory and worship Him. Therefore, how can they possess knowledge that surpasses that of thoughtful beings, some of whom have disbelieved? Furthermore, are there not certain subservient creatures such as the raven which taught Cain how to bury his brother's (1) corpse?! Even as a bird, it knew that which a human being did not! Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31).

In the verse which we are presently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And yet they lied to him! And so We saved him and all who stood by him, in the ark and made them inherit [the earth], the while we caused those who belied our messages to drown. Behold, then, what happened in the end to those people who had been warned [in vain]!' (*Yunus:* 73) The word *al-Fulk* (the ark) is one of those words that can be used for both singular and plural modes. In Allah's Words '…We saved him…' (*Yunus:* 73), we know that the action is attributed to Allah *the Almighty*. When He speaks of any of His actions, He does so in a manner similar to the following: ‘We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9) However, when He speaks about Himself, He utilises a word that emphasises His Oneness; He uses the personal pronoun as in His saying: ‘I am God...’ (*Ta Ha:* 14).

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(1) *Abel*

In the verse we are examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And yet they lied to him! And so We saved him and all who stood by him, in the ark...’ (*Yunus:* 73). The word *anja* (saved) is a transitive verb. The word *najja*, indicates that there is a dire need for salvation and also that the act of saving recurs.

Allah's Words ‘... made them inherit [the earth]...’ (*Yunus:* 73) give the following meaning: that *al-Khalifa* is the one who succeeds someone came before him. The term *al-Khalifa* sometimes designates that which is of higher rank. This is the case in this verse, where virtuous men succeeded those who were also virtuous men. Thus, after Allah *the Exalted* had saved the believers in the ark, He drowned the rest. Therefore, the virtuous men on board of the ark later begot virtuous men who succeeded them. Sometimes the term *al-Khalifa* denotes that which is lower in rank, such as in Allah's following Words: ‘But there came after them generations who neglected prayer and were driven by their own desires...’ (*Maryam:* 59). In this example, the word *khalifa* denotes a lower status. There exists a criterion established by Allah *Glorified is He* to assess the successor *(Khalifa)*; this criterion can be found in His following Words: ‘Later We made you their successors in the land, to see how you would behave.’ (*Yunus:* 14) Since man is free to choose between belief and disbelief, he will, therefore, be ranked based on his choices. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah has made a promise to those amongst you who believe and do good deeds: He will make them successors to the land, as He did those who came before them; He will empower the religion He has chosen for them; He will grant them security to replace their fear...’ (*an-Nur:* 55). Thus, there are two possibilities when it comes to *al-Khalifa* (The successor): either a virtuous *Khlifa* succeeding a virtuous one; or a corrupt *kahlifa* succeeding a corrupt one. In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... made them inherit [the earth], the while we caused those who belied our messages to drown...’ (*Yunus:* 73). Now these signs are those that induce contemplation and lead human beings to embrace faith in the Creative Power—these represent the totality of the cosmic signs, for everything in the universe offers evidence that the universe was created by design and for a purpose. As proof of this, the things in the universe are wisely organised and intricately structured. If you wanted to verify the degree of the universe's precise creation, look at the things in which man intervenes, and that which he does not. You will find that everything in which man intervenes is characterised by an extraordinary level of integrity. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day; each floats in [its own] orbit.' (*Ya Sin:* 40)

As for those things in which man intervenes, they might become corrupted as a consequence of the choices which we make. Thus, we have seen how the cosmic signs point to the existence of the Creator *the Most High*. These signs are the object of intellectual reflection by means of which the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* is verified. The Arabic word *'Ayat* (signs) can also denote the miraculous phenomenon that the messengers *peace be upon them* have performed in order to convince people of their truthfulness regarding the messages they conveyed on behalf of Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, there are the '*Ayat* (verses) of the Holy Quran about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning—these are the cornerstone of the Scripture....' (*Al-'Imran:* 7) These are the verses which contain the Doctrine.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... the while we caused those who belied our messages to drown...' (*Yunus:* 73), He informs us that He has drowned those who rejected the cosmic signs and failed to pay heed to the splendour of His creation and to the wisdom behind the creation of these cosmic signs and their flawless arrangement. They had also rejected the miraculous signs as well as the directive verses which were conveyed by their messengers.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse with His Words: '... Behold, then, what happened in the end to those people who had been warned [in vain]!' (*Yunus:* 73). These Words are addressed to those who can reflect, the foremost among whom is our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the Quran's primary addressee. When you utter the word *undhur* (see), you thereby draw attention to a sensational object. If you turn your gaze toward this object, the light rays reflected off the object will reach you, and it thereby outlines the dimensions of the object in question. This, in effect, enables you to see the object. The object referred to in this verse is about past events which had occurred once, and they lived on as stories. Thus, if someone were to inform you of these stories, your faith in them would be in proportion to the trust that you have in the narrator. Thus, whosoever witnessed the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*—as it devoured the ropes thrown down by the sorcerers—thereby believed in it. Similarly, anyone who witnessed the fire's inability to burn Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* thereby believed in it. Likewise, whosoever saw 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as he healed the blind and the lepers, along with bringing the dead back to life by Allah's Leave—thereby believed in what he saw. As for those who did not witness these miracles first-hand, their belief in them goes only as far as the trust they have in the informer. Therefore, as Allah *the Almighty* informs us about these miracles in the Holy Quran, our belief in these miracles is inevitable because we have complete trust in the probity of he who communicates on Allah's behalf. We understand that the prophetic messages which proceeded that of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were destined for a specific time and place. However, the objective of Islam is to set the order of all people beginning from the moment when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received revelation until the Day of Judgment. This is why the Quran consists of a collection of verses which are destined to remain relevant until Day of Judgment. This is the reason why the Quran represents a perennial intellectual miracle, thanks to which anyone who calls to Islam on behalf of Prophet Muhammad can say: Muhammad is a Messenger from Allah *Glorified is He* and the Quran is his miracle.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... Behold, then, what happened in the end to those people who had been warned [in vain]!' (*Yunus:* 73), this is similar to His Saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) The coming of the army of the elephant occurred in the very same year in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born. Naturally, he did not witness the event himself. However, those who were alive at the time of this incident did witness it. Now this fact should pay our attention to the different levels of perception; for your eyes might perceive something, your ears might hear an account; however, it is possible that your senses deceive you. However, the account coming from Allah *(Glorified is He)*, even if you are currently unable to either see or hear it, consider it as being a source of knowledge even more trustworthy than your sense of vision.

One might ask, 'why does Allah *Glorified is He* not say: "Do you not know?" instead of His saying: "Do you [Prophet] not see?"' The answer is that Allah *the Most High* wishes to inform us that we should accept such accounts of the unseen events that we obtain from Him as being more truthful than those accounts of events which we witness with our own eyes. Thus, the Words: '...Behold, then, what happened in the end to those people who had been warned [in vain]!' (*Yunus:* 73) can be rephrased as the following: realise the matter as though you could see it in front of you since you have such faith in Allah *Glorified is He* that it is as though you could see Him. The person who is communicating the account on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He* is the Messenger—in whose message you believe, No doubt should ever infiltrate your mind regarding any of the accounts coming from Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as doubt can never affect the truthful Messenger.

One might ask, 'Why does Allah *Glorified is He* not say: "See what happened in the end to the disbelievers" instead of saying "... Behold, then, what happened in the end to those people who had been warned [in vain]!"?' In this case, we would say that Allah *the Exalted* has demonstrated how He will never punish before giving due warning. Thus, He has first given warning, and He has not seized the people while they were ignorant about this warning. The word 'see', as we know, is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and any words addressed to him include his Ummah (followers of Islam). The purpose of this account is to provide a measure of reassurance to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If your people, O, Muhammad, behave like the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* rest assured that their fate shall also be the same as the people of Nuh (Noah). Herein lies a warning and a threat for the adversaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ رُسُلًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِمْ فَجَآءُوهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ فَمَا كَانُوا۟
لِيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِمَا كَذَّبُوا۟ بِهِۦ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَطْبَعُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ ٱلْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

Then, after him, We sent messengers to their peoples bringing them clear signs. But they would not believe in anything they had already rejected: in this way We seal the hearts of those who are full of hostility [74] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 74)

The word *ba'atha* (to send) in this verse is worth discussing since the act of 'sending forth' pertains to that which once existed then came to an end, whereby Allah *Glorified is He* sent it forth once again. The Words '...We sent...' (*Yunus:* 74) draw our attention to the fact that when Allah *the Almighty* has created the universe, He has given the Doctrine to Adam *peace be upon him* and the latter thereafter conveyed it to his children. Every distortion or alteration of the Doctrine on the part of human beings amounts to a destruction of the Doctrine. When Allah *Glorified is He* sends forth a messenger, He does not thereby create a new Doctrine, rather, He resends forth that which had already existed, so as to remind human being about his pure, primordial nature. This is the difference between the connotations of the words *al-ba'th* and *al-I'rsal* (to send). In effect, the word *al-ba'th* gives you the feeling that something had already existed and then came to an end, and afterwards it was sent forth once again. This aspect of the word is akin to *al-ba'th* of the Day of Resurrection: human beings used to live out their lives; they will continue to reproduce themselves as the cycle of life and death continues until the Day of Resurrection *(Al-ba'th)*. On that Day, all created beings will die and then be resurrected for the Reckoning.

It would not be conceivable that Allah *the Almighty* creates human beings, gives them vicegerency on earth, and then leaves them without a Doctrine. Now since forgetfulness had set in amongst human beings after the initial revelation of the Doctrine to Adam *peace be upon him* the Doctrine has been sent forth once again through the messengers who communicate it on behalf of Allah *the Exalted*.

Thus, after Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* has sent forth messengers. In this instance, He says: 'Then, after him, We sent messengers...'

(*Yunus:* 74). What this means is that messengers came after Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. His issue, therefore, implies the inception of a series of prophetic missions, as it has been said that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was a messenger sent for all of humanity, like Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was not a messenger who was sent forth for all of humanity. Rather, it was his embarking upon the ark that made him into a messenger for all of humanity, as the inhabitants of the earth back in those days were few. Allah *Glorified is He* punished the disbelievers for their sins while rescuing the believers from the flood. There were two kinds of people: believers and disbelievers. The believers had boarded the ark, while Allah *the Almighty* caused the disbelievers to drown. Thus, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* became a universal messenger with respect to those who survived. They were, in effect, the recipients of a message that was specific to a particular time and place.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then, after him, We sent messengers to their people...’ (*Yunus:* 74). Has Allah *Glorified is He* narrated the accounts of all the messengers *peace be upon them*? No, He has not, for He has said: ‘We have sent other messengers before you— some We have mentioned to you and some We have not...’ (*Ghafir:* 78). Allah *the Almighty* mentions only the accounts of foremost of the messengers *peace be upon them* for He says: ‘We has sent him to a hundred thousand people or more.’ (*as-Saffat:* 147) Therefore, there might be no mention made of those messengers whom Allah *Glorified is He* has sent forth to a people numbering less than a hundred thousand. We also know that a messenger would come to an isolated community; for the communities of world at that time were isolated from one another. A thousand years ago, for instance, we did not know of the existence of the American continent. In fact, we did not gain any definitive knowledge about all the continents until the aerial survey techniques of the modern age. There might be regions in the world which we know only through aerial photographs and not experientially.

We know that Adam’s progeny dwelled on earth and spread out later. The reason for this was that the sustenance—on which Adam’s progeny subsisted initially—became too little after the population began to grow. Therefore, as their livelihoods in that spot on earth began shrinking, some of them spread out to settle in the rest of the world. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Anyone who migrates for Allah’s Cause will find many a refuge and great plenty in the earth…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 100). Thus, some of Adam’s offspring moved to areas of abundant rainfall since emigration of this kind always looks towards places where water is plentiful, as water is the source of life. Historians who study ancient civilisations have observed that some civilisations were born on the banks of rivers and streams. The Bedouin people, on the other hand, would disperse throughout the desert; they are similar to the Arabs in this respect. Originally, they used to live around the dam of Ma’reb. After the dam collapsed, flooding the earth, people were afraid of the flood, for the two enemies against which man is powerless are fire and water. When the people saw the rising waters, they headed into the desert. There, they would dig wells and extract enough water to satisfy their needs for they knew that they were no match for the power of water. Therefore, the isolated Arab tribes came to be. Such was also the case elsewhere in the world. This is why each community suffered a different spiritual disease, so Allah *the Exalted* has sent forth for each community a warner. He says: ‘... Every community has been sent a warner.’ (*Fatir:* 24) Allah *the Most High* tells us the stories of some of these warners, but there are others whose stories He has not told. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…We have sent other messengers before you— some We have mentioned to you and some We have not — and no messenger could bring about a sign except with Allah’s permission...’ (*Ghafir:* 78).

Allah *Glorified is He* hereby says: ‘Then, after him, We sent messengers to their peoples bringing them clear signs...’ (*Yunus:* 74). Is this a reference to the messengers whom Allah *Glorified is He* has not explicitly spoken of? No, this is not since He later sent forth Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* to the tribe of ‘Ad, Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* to the people of Thamud, and Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to, the people of Midyan. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention of these messengers here. Rather, following the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* narrates the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. It would seem that Allah’s intention is to speak to us of the most significant messages.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* sent forth a messenger to their communities, then every community has been sent a messenger, and every messenger has been sent forth to his people. In the aforementioned verse, both the word *qawm* (community) and *rusul* (messengers) are in the plural form. When two plurals are combined, one must break every element down to the singular form. For example, we might say: ‘All of you get into your cars’. This sentence is addressed to a plurality, and the implication is that every individual should get into his car. Every messenger came to his people bearing evidence of the truth. In other words, they came with clear signs which testify to their authenticity as messengers sent by Allah *the Almighty*.

Then, in the same verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then, after him, We sent messengers to their peoples bringing them clear signs. But they would not believe in anything they already rejected. In this way, We seal the hearts of those who are full of hostility.’ (*Yunus:* 74) That is to say that even if all the people were to attain to faith, the continuous procession of messengers would have stopped. Not all people continued to hold firm to their faith, and as time progressed, forgetfulness set in, thus Allah *Glorified is He* sealed the hearts of the transgressors. The word *At-Tab',* as we know, denotes the act of ‘sealing’. This means that nothing can ever come out of the sealed heart, nor can anything ever come into it; so long as some people cherish disbelief, Allah *the Almighty* has therefore sealed their hearts such that no faith can ever enter into them, nor disbelief can ever exit. The act of ‘sealing’ is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He*. There are some people who, in their desire to point out inconsistencies in Allah’s Doctrine, say that their disbelief was caused by Allah's sealing of their hearts. Our response would be the following: notice that Allah *the Exalted* illustrates that He seals the hearts of the transgressors. Thus, they initially committed the act of transgression. In other words, they have taken no heed of the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* and disbelieved in Doctrine that has been revealed to them. Therefore, it is they who, through their transgression and their rejection of the Doctrine, have caused Allah's sealing of their hearts. Such an act of sealing their hearts was due to their clinging to that which they loved and that to which they had grown accustomed. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Sacred Hadith: ‘I am so self-sufficient that I am in no need of having an associate.’(1) Allah *the Almighty* knows the best of examples, but for instance, you would say to one who is deeply indulged in his vice: ‘Since you love such a vice so much, then go ahead and wallow in it to your heart’s content.’ Those whose hearts have been sealed by Allah *the Almighty* are similar to those before them who denied the message and were transgressors, Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *[narrated by Muslim]*

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِم مُّوسَىٰ وَهَٰرُونَ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَإِيْهِۦ
بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا فَٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ وَكَانُوا۟ قَوْمًا مُّجْرِمِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

After them We sent Moses and Aaron with Our signs to Pharaoh and his leading supporters, but they acted arrogantly they were wicked people [75] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 75)

Both Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* were messengers. Their prophetic mission took some stages. Originally, Allah *Glorified is He* told Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘I have chosen you, so listen to what is being revealed.’ (*Ta Ha:* 13) Allah *Glorified is He* also told him: ‘Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds.’ (*Ta Ha:* 43) Then Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked his Lord to allow him to bring along his brother so that the latter could strengthen him, whereby Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Musa (Moses), your request is granted.’ (*Ta Ha:* 36) Furthermore, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* wished that his words would be understood so he addressed the following supplication to his Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘Untie my tongue, so that they may understand my words.’ (*Ta Ha:* 27, 28) Later, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was sent forth with a message along with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Go to Pharaoh, for he has truly become a tyrant.’ (*Ta Ha:* 24)

Therefore, it all began with the message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Then, at Musa's (Moses’) request, Allah *the Most High* paired Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The proof of this is that all of the miracles—which (by Allah’s leave) occurred in the course of that message—were carried out by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Thus, if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is a messenger, and if he is then joined by Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* this necessarily means that the latter, in turn, became a messenger. This is what the Quran expresses in the following verse: '... We are your Lord's Messengers...' (*Ta Ha:* 47). In other words, they are both messengers from Allah *the Exalted*.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Go, both of you, to Pharaoh and say, "We bring a Message from the Lord of the Worlds."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 16) Thus, they were both sent forth in order to carry the same mission. Neither did each have his own particular message, rather, their message was one, not multiple, even if there were two Messengers— Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. To give an example—and Allah *Glorified is He* knows the best of examples—consider when a king or a president sends forth a delegation to another king. The members of this delegation would say, 'We are the messengers sent by king so-and-so.' Now, when it comes to the mission of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*—the former clearly played the prominent role of performing the various miracles. However, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* also had a role to play in the overall mission; this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... We are your Lord's messengers...' (*Ta Ha:* 47).

This was due to Pharaoh having been a haughty, repulsive, and despicable person. Thus, if Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* were to say anything in support of his brother, Pharaoh might say, 'Who are you to have any say in this?' However, if they were to approach Pharaoh as a pair, and they have declared that they are both messengers, then any response Pharaoh were to direct at Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was tantamount to a response directed at Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. I have said that in order to shut the door on those who seek to find fault in the Quran by asking, 'Why does the Quran at time use the word *rasul* (a messenger), while at other times it uses the word *rasula* (The two messengers)? What I have said in this matter is a sufficing rebuttal of the claims made by these trying to find faults in the Quran.

In the verse that we are presently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'After them We sent Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) with Our signs to Pharaoh and his leading supporters, but they acted arrogantly...' (*Yunus:* 75). The word *al-Mala'* (leading supporters) refers to the leaders of the communities, their representatives, their masters and those who are close to the supreme leader. They are known as *al-Mala'* because it they who fill the eyes; in other words, the eyes look up to none but them. Pharaoh, as we know, did not become a pharaoh except with the help of *al-Mala'*, for it is the latter who nominated him as their leader. Haman, for instance, used to promote the idea of the pharaoh and the priesthood used to support the idea that the pharaoh was a god.

Every pharaoh is supported by a group of powerful men who make him who he is. A popular Egyptian saying proceeds forth, ‘They asked Pharaoh, "How did you become like a pharaoh?" He said, "I have not found anyone to rebuff me."’ What this means is that he has not found anyone who would tell him: ‘Be reasonable.’ Were he to find somebody to tell him so, he would not exhibit the haughty arrogance of the pharaoh.

Now the signs that Allah *Glorified is He* sent forth to Pharaoh and his men through Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* represent the miracles that affirm their truthfulness as prophets. In effect, these signs indicate that their message is truly conveyed on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He*. The signs could also amount to the Doctrine which affirms the existence of the Creator *the Most High*. However, Pharaoh and his men acted arrogantly by rejecting the signs. The word *al-Istikbar* means to ask for greatness; the word is similar in structure to the word *istikhraj* which means to ask for extraction and also to the word *istafham* which means to ask for understanding. He who asks for greatness is thereby artificially forcing it upon himself since he knows that his own abilities cannot afford him such greatness.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse with His Words: ‘... they were wicked people.’ (*Yunus:* 75) The gravest kind of criminality is that directed to oneself, for it might be acceptable for a person to harm his enemies. However, to commit a crime against oneself is unpardonable. The crimes of Pharaoh and his men earned them entry into hellfire where they will forever abide in disgrace. This is a great and degrading punishment.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْحَقُّ مِنْ عِندِنَا قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَسِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧٦﴾

When the truth came to them from Us, they said,
'This is blatant sorcery'[76] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 76)

The truth came to them through the messengers *peace be upon them*. Every human being must understand that the message of truth he receives at the hands of a messenger has nothing to do with a messenger's own ideas. Rather, a messenger merely communicates this message on behalf of Allah, the Creator *Glorified is He*. Thus, one who rejects a messenger is not thereby rejecting the opinion of his peer, for a messenger is the conveyer of a message from Allah *the Almighty* Who has sent him forth. One must realise the importance of any message coming from Allah, the True Lord; it is He Who is the True Lord and the Most High, and it is He Who has created all things properly: the sky has been created properly, the earth has been created properly, the sun runs its course properly, the rain falls from the sky properly, and all things—whether standstill or in motion—are governed by the laws willed by Allah *Glorified is He*. If man—unbridled by the Doctrine—were to acquire control over the laws which govern the natural phenomena, he would corrupt them since corruption affects those things which human beings have control over when they approach those beings in the absence of Allah's Doctrine. Corruption happens as a result of human beings choosing to engage in activities while being heedless of the Doctrine of Allah *the Exalted*. So, if you want your lives to enjoy that quality of uprightness which characterises the life of higher created beings—created beings which you have no control over—then, in that case, obey the Allah's Doctrine and abide by the balance which He has set, for He *the Most High* says: 'He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance.' (*ar-Rahman*: 7- 8) That is to say that if you want your life to become upright, if you want it to become as upright as the life of the other creatures—then be sure to submit that free will which you have been created with to the order mandated by the Doctrine of Allah *Glorified is He*. Direct your free will such that it operates within the framework of the Divine Doctrine.

Now when we contemplate Allah's Words: 'When the truth came to them from Us...' (*Yunus:* 76), you find these Words inform us that truth did not come from messengers themselves, for their personal opinion has nothing to do with the matter. Furthermore, beware of rejecting a true message just because it has being conveyed to by someone whom you do not love. Rather, you should consider the truth inherent in the message itself. You should not engage in the labyrinthine search for the one who has brought forth this. Look at those who rejected Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they said: ‘Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) They had thereby involved the person upon whom the Quran was bestowed into their assessment of the truth. The reasonable thinking would have been to consider the Quran itself and to receive the wisdom regardless of its source.

You must learn from this incident: you must be receptive to wisdom regardless of who said it, paying no attention to the one who has brought forth the piece of wisdom. You should not refuse to accept any wisdom only because you do not love the one who issued it, and you should not accept it only because you love him. Rather, you should be receptive to wisdom so long as it is true since if you do not heed the wisdom, then you will merely harm yourself.

The truth is the one thing which is fixed and enduring. Even if the truth appears, at times, to be undermined, and error seems to prevail, this denotes the appearance of corruptive elements, whereby people cry out for the truth to be restored. The prevalence of the corruptive elements is the reason why people call for the truth to be restored and become excited at the prospect of its return. Therefore, when people feel the harmful effects of falsehood, they thereby turn towards the truth so as to cling to it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He sends water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools. In this way, Allah illustrates truth and falsehood–the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind–this is how Allah makes illustrations.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Allah *the Almighty* gives an example of the descending with the flow of water down the face of mountains, whereby every stream at the foot of the mountain absorbs as much water it can take.

Thus, the people drink their fill of water, and the earth becomes saturated with water as well. However, as the water is streaming down the face of the mountain, it picks up certain kinds of debris like silt and straw. This silt then settles as sediment on the riverbeds; this sediment benefits the earth. As for the debris like straw and impurities, they rise to the surface of the water. That floating debris is called *zabad* (froth). When you put this kind of debris in the fire, it produces crackling sounds. For example, when we light a fire so as to smelt iron ore, we find that the impure elements rise to surface, while the unalloyed iron remains on the bottom. This debris that is found on the surface of the water is later dumped on the banks. Look, for example, at the scene on the beach when the ocean waves dump their debris on the beach. This is the debris that was produced by ships which is then carried forth by the waves, whereby it passes away uselessly, whereas that which is useful to human beings stays in the earth; this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... In this way Allah illustrates truth and falsehood.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* allows some free rein for falsehood; however, He does not allow truth to succumb to it. Rather, He allows falsehood to exist so as to encourage people to turn to the truth. If they do not rally passionately around the truth, the truth will rally passionately around them. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When the truth came to them from Us, they said, "This is blatant sorcery."' (*Yunus:* 76) Since they were famous for sorcery, they believed that the miraculous signs brought forth by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were nothing more than blatant sorcery. In other words, they were quite clearly acts of sorcery.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ مُوسَىٰٓ أَتَقُولُونَ لِلۡحَقِّ لَمَّا جَآءَكُمۡۖ أَسِحۡرٌ
هَٰذَا وَلَا يُفۡلِحُ ٱلسَّٰحِرُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

Moses said, 'Is this what you say about the Truth
when it comes to you? Is this sorcery? Sorcerers
never prosper' [77] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 77)

This verse sheds light on the response of master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'Is this what you say about the truth when it comes to you? Is this sorcery?' (*Yunus:* 77). Those who criticise the Quran would say, 'How can the Quran assert that they said, "This is blatant sorcery." Then, in the next verse, it states that they asked, "Is this sorcery?"' These people who seek to find faults in the Quran have mistakenly believed the words: 'Is this sorcery?' (*Yunus:* 77) refer to the words uttered by Pharaoh and his people. However, these are the words uttered by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Thus, it is as though Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had uttered such a question so that they might reconsider their judgment: could that which he had brought forth really be sorcery? This is a rhetorical question whose purpose is to assert that it is not sorcery. It is thus an assertion that is formulated as a question since Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is certain that the honest response to such a question will confirm that that he has brought forth is no sorcery. Now if he expressed his words in the form of a simple statement, this could have entailed the possibility of either truth or falsehood. However, he chose to employ the interrogatory form, since his deniers would then be forced to answer hesitantly. To give an example—and Allah *Glorified is He* knows the best of examples—consider when you go to purchase fabric, the merchant tells you that it is pure, unadulterated wool; so you take a match and light one of the threads on fire. If the material burns as would plastic or some artificial fabric, you would then tell the merchant: 'How can this be pure wool?' At this point, the only option left for the merchant is to agree with you, otherwise he will remain silent, unable to conceal the truth any longer. Therefore, employing the rhetorical question in this instance will have a deeper impact than if you were to simply put your words in a form of a statement since your listener must respond.

Thus, the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* wherein He states Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as saying 'Is this what you say about the truth when it comes to you?' (*Yunus:* 77) highlight the necessity of taking cognisance of the truth regardless of the one who brought it. This is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not say, 'Do you say about the truth when it comes to you that it is blatant sorcery?' The Words of wisdom contained in this holy verse affirm the necessity of considering the truth independently of the messenger who came bearing it.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '...Is this sorcery? Sorcerers never prosper.' (*Yunus:* 77) Thus, our master Musa (Moses) *peace* *be upon him* proclaimed that sorcery is ultimately of no avail. However, the miraculous signs which he delivered on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He* were effective. After turning into a snake, Musa's (Moses') staff devoured every rope that the sorcerers threw at it; it outdid every one of their magic tricks.

Allah *the Exalted* wished that Musa's (Moses') staff would be the vehicle for the miraculous signs of the same kind as that at which his people excelled. Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* delivers a miracle to a given community, He makes the miracle of the same type as that which that community excels at, so that the miracle might represent a challenge for them in the very same area where they have the most expertise and knowledge. For example, you would not challenge someone who has no knowledge of architecture to build you an apartment house. However, you might challenge an architect to build you a pyramid. In effect, modern science has still not uncovered certain discoveries of the ancients—knowledge which they might not have formally recorded in any manuscripts. Modern science has not also come across any discoveries which would explain how the ancients created a vacuum between every rock such that all the rocks were held together in perfect cohesion. In this instance Allah's Words, '... Sorcerers never prosper.' (*Yunus:* 77) reveal that the idea of *al-Falah* (prosper) is related to the physical work performed by a farmer—blowing the earth, sowing the seeds, irrigating the earth and thereafter waiting for his efforts to bear fruit. The term *al-Falah* is also derived of 'cleaving iron' into large masses or small pieces. Such an operation is only successful if the iron takes on a form that is suitable for use.

Allah's Words, '... Sorcerers never prosper.' (*Yunus:* 77), alert us to the fact that sorcery is a kind of illusion; it is not real. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran: '…they cast a spell upon the people's eyes…' (*al-A'raf:* 116). He also says: '…and—lo and behold!—through their sorcery, their ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving.' (*Ta Ha:* 66) Thus, sorcery is nothing but illusion; it does not actually alter reality. Now due to Musa's (Moses') miracle surpassing the abilities of all Pharaoh's sorcerers, Pharaoh therefore mobilised everyone who was connected with sorcery, including those who excelled at it and even those who had only a modest understanding of it. Now, since sorcery is mere illusion, we find that when the sorcerers gathered together and threw down their ropes and staffs, and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threw down his staff—the latter transformed into a snake that devoured their every artifice. What did the sorcerers do at this point? Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *Ta Ha*: ‘[So it was, and] the sorcerers threw themselves down in submission. "We believe," they said, "in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses)."’ (*Ta Ha:* 70) This was due to the sorcerer perceiving his trick for what it really was. Even if they had cast a spell over other people’s eyes, the sorcerers themselves perceived their ropes as mere ropes and their staffs as mere staffs.

As for Musa's (Moses’) staff, it was no illusion. The sorcerers perceived it as a real, living snake which, in effect, snapped up all of their tricks. This is why they fell into prostration and proclaimed their faith in the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. Thus, they did not proclaim their faith in Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* rather, they proclaimed their faith: ‘... in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses).’ (*Ta Ha:* 70) for they had realised from experience that what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had performed was no act of sorcery, rather, it was the act of the Creator *the Most High*.

Musa's (Moses’) composure during this episode stemmed from the training that he had undergone by his Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* Who had asked him: ‘Musa (Moses), what is that in your right hand?’ ‘It is my staff,’ he said, ‘I lean on it; restrain my sheep with it...’ (*Ta Ha:* 17-18). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* replied to Allah *the Almighty* in a detailed and elaborate fashion, for he was happy to speak with Allah *Glorified is He* at his leisure and be in His Company. However, when he felt that he had prolonged the conversation long enough; he wrapped it up and respectfully said: ‘...I also have other uses for it.’ (*Ta Ha:* 18) Thus, at first, he was revelling in the company of Allah *the Exalted* then he realised the need for propriety when speaking with Him. Allah *Glorified is He* has coached him with respect to the staff when He commanded him to, first, throw it on the ground. It thereby transformed into a moving snake. If this action were merely a form of sorcery, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would not have winced in fear, for he would have seen it for what it really was, a simple staff. Thus, the difference between the miracle of Musa

(Moses) *peace be upon him* and the works of Pharaoh's sorcerers is that the latter cast a spell over people's eyes. Due to their sorcery, the people fell under the illusion that their staffs and ropes were moving. However, with Musa's (Moses') miracle—whereby he cast his staff—the sorcerers realised through direct experience that the innate nature of the staff had been altered.

A staff, as we know, comes from the branch of a tree. Now Allah *the Almighty* could have transformed it into a fruit-bearing tree. In that case, however, it would still have remained a vegetal being. So Allah *the Most High* willed to elevate it to a higher station than that of plants, namely that of animals. Thus, it turned into a snake, snatching up everything that the sorcerers had thrown.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوٓاْ أَجِئۡتَنَا لِتَلۡفِتَنَا عَمَّا وَجَدۡنَا عَلَيۡهِ ءَابَآءَنَا وَتَكُونَ لَكُمَا
ٱلۡكِبۡرِيَآءُ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا نَحۡنُ لَكُمَا بِمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

They said, 'Have you come to turn us away from the faith we found our fathers following, so that you and your brother can gain greatness in this land? We will never believe in you' [78] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 78)

In this verse, we see that Pharaoh's sorcerers were attributing the miracle—of the staff transforming into a snake—to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* even though the latter attributed the miracle to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The recipients of the message—namely Pharaoh and his people—ought to have concentrated on the content of the messenger's message and not on the personality of the messenger. If Pharaoh had asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'Have you been sent to us?' this would mean that Pharaoh was proclaiming his faith in the existence of *the Most High* God. However, Pharaoh did not attain to faith at that moment; that is why he says: 'Have you come to us ...?' (*Yunus:* 78) Thus, Pharaoh is quoted as attributing the act of coming to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

Now why did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* come? Allah *Glorified is He* mentions what Pharaoh and his peoplesaid: 'Have you come to turn us away from the faith we found our fathers following?...' (*Yunus:* 78) Now the word *al-Iltifat* means the act of turning the face away from the object that it is facing. So long as a person is facing something, his vision and his orientation is focused upon that thing. Now the people of Pharaoh were indulged in corruption and aberrance. So, there was nothing in front of them except for that corruption and aberrance. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came to them in order to turn them away from such corruption and aberrance, whereby they said: ‘Have you come to turn us away from the faith we found our fathers following...’ (*Yunus:* 78). Thus, they revealed their true position, for they had been imitating their forefathers. Such blind imitation gives the imitator comfort since he does not have to use his brain or his intellect in order to believe in a particular creed nor to model his behaviour accordingly.

The following popular aphorism captures the essence of this situation: ‘like a deaf person at a wedding procession'. In other words, a deaf person does not hear what is being said no matter which party it is coming from. He simply walks with the crowd wherever it goes and completely lacks any sense of direction. An imitator, in effect, underutilises his intellectual capacity. He does not use it to choose between the various alternatives. Thus, he does not take cognisance of what is right so that he might act on it, nor does he take cognisance of what is wrong, so that he might avoid it.

Now, Pharaoh and his leading supporters were indulged in same aberrance of their forefathers. Aberrance does not require any mental effort of a person, nor does it entail making difficult choices. In fact, it satisfies his fleeting desires. As for discerning right from wrong and following the Doctrine of heaven, they help to curb the base desires and prevent a person from erring. Aberrance, on the contrary, only increases the intensity of human desire.

Thus, a person who blindly imitates is in one of the two following situations. The first situation is that he does not use his brain; rather, he just does what those before him have done or what those around him are doing. The second situation is that he realises that by doing what others are doing, he would not by bridled by any Doctrine. However, the messenger who arrives requires that he adheres to a doctrine. By following this doctrine, he could only earn profits in a legal manner; for example, he could not commit any sinful acts, nor could he act iniquitously towards anyone. Thus, the doctrine bridles his actions. However, if he were to follow the actions of his aberrant forefathers, his range of movement would expand such that it would encompass more of his baser desires.

This is why I have always said that this issue of blind imitation must direct our attention to the principle of moral education. You will notice that, as along as a child has not yet reached puberty, he will remain without an independent core self and will simply imitate his parents. However, as soon as he acquires an independent identity, he will start to rebel. He might tell his parents, ‘You follow old, outdate traditions which have no place in today’s world.’ However, if at an early age the child imbibes the proper religious values, he will abide by the principle of the truth and will abstain from indulging his base desires. We find that the families who do not follow Allah’s Doctrine will suffer in the upbringing of their children from the behaviour of them when the latter comes under the influence of bad peers. Thus, they turn towards that which extends the range of desires, like addiction and other such perversions. On the contrary, the children of families who are committed to the Doctrine of Allah *Glorified is He* do not emulate any of the wayward people, for their consciences have learned how to discern right from wrong. Furthermore, blind imitation of parents might turn children into carbon copies of their parents. However, to coach and educate children on the importance of using one’s mind in everything is the kind of upbringing whereby societies progress towards what is best, provided that parents follow Allah’s Doctrine. Therefore, a child’s identity will develop in the light of Allah’s Doctrine. Accordingly, a child does not rebel and take wayward ways. In fact, he might rebel and take that which is virtuous so as to render it even more virtuous. Therefore, imitating someone needs deep research since a person whom you are planning on imitating cannot be held responsible for your actions. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘People, be mindful of your Lord and fear a day when no parent will take the place of their child, nor a child take the place of their parent, in any way...’ (*Luqman:* 33). Thus, a child’s actions must emanate from the conscience within, as should the actions of parents. Every human being must use his mind to choose between right and wrong. This is why you find that the Holy Quran mentions those who blindly imitated their forefathers as saying: ‘But when it is said to them, "Follow the message that Allah has sent down" they answer, "We follow the ways of our fathers…"' (*al-Baqara:* 170). Then Allah *Glorified is He* answers them: 'What! Even though their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?' (*al-Baqara:* 170) Therefore, if a matter is of blind imitation, then why does the child bother to learn? Why did not children just sleep on the ground? Why bother buying mattresses? Why are they attracted towards developing things and tools which make life easier? Thus, blind imitation is the suspension of all brain function and intellectual abilities. To abandon these two things amounts to abandoning the project of development and progressing towards a better life.

Therefore, the Quran insists that we use our brains in order to discern right from wrong. If the Doctrine has come from Heaven, then follow that which has come to you from above. This guidance amounts to marching towards the virtuous life. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When it is said to them, "Come to what Allah has sent down, and to the messenger." They say, "What we inherited from our forefathers is good enough for us…"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104). What this means is that they declared that they had no need for the Doctrine of Heaven, whereby the Quran replies: 'Even though their forefathers knew nothing and were not guided.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104)

Thus, we see that, in two separate places, the Quran describes two situations pertaining to the imitators. The first is wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…"We follow the ways of our fathers." What! Even though their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?' (*al-Baqara:* 170) The second is wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…They say, "What we inherited from our forefathers is good enough for us", even though their forefathers knew nothing and were not guided.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104)

In this verse they announced that it was enough for them to continue following what their forefathers had done. There is a difference between the two verses. The word *al-'Aqil* (one who understands*)* is different from one who does not know since *al-'Aqil* is capable of making rational judgments. However, a person who does not have knowledge merely relies on the rational judgments arrived at by others. Thus, those who were content to follow the ways of their forefathers said: 'What we inherited from our forefathers is good enough for us…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104). These are the people who took extreme pride in the ways of their forefathers; this is why the Quran says that their forefathers knew nothing. This means that their forefathers could not think straight and that they did not have knowledge of anything. They lived in the deep darkness of ignorance.

In the verse we are presently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions Pharaoh and his people as saying: 'Have you come to turn us away from the faith we found our fathers following, so that you and your brother can gain greatness in this land?...' (*Yunus:* 78) What this means is that you have come to turn us away, to orient us away from our way which is that of our forefathers whom we imitate, so that you and your brother might gain greatness in this land. Thus, it becomes apparent that they believed that the greatness they enjoyed in the land is due to their emulation of their forefathers. They wished to hold on to this greatness.

There are two points to consider here: the first is abandoning that which they found their forefathers believing in and doing, while the second is relinquishing the political power that they possess in the land. An example of this is when one warrior tells another: 'Throw down your sword'. This is different from the command: 'Give me your sword' since throwing down a sword amounts to a stripping of power. However, taking a sword means adding another sword to the collection of weapons which the first warrior already possesses. For Pharaoh and his people, the message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* represented a compound disaster. The first was abandoning the doctrine of the forefathers. The second was the stripping away of supremacy, namely temporal power, rank, authority, greatness, consultation and the advantages that come with all of these, for every member of Pharaoh's entourage derived his share of benefit depending upon his closeness to Pharaoh. That is why they declared their disbelief and said that with which Allah *Glorified is He* concluded the noble verse which we are currently examining: '...We will never believe in you.' (*Yunus:* 78) This means that the leading supporters of Pharaoh and his entourage declared their determination to hold on to their worldly gains and their temporal authority. They refused to believe in the message of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ فِرۡعَوۡنُ ٱئۡتُونِي بِكُلِّ سَٰحِرٍ عَلِيمٖ ٧٩

And Pharaoh said, ‘Bring me every learned sorcerer’ [79] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 79)

Pharaoh was well aware of the highly skilled sorcerers in his kingdom. It is enough that he himself succeeded in deluding people into thinking that he was a god. He then gave his aides the order to rally every sorcerer. As soon as he issued the order, the sorcerers were brought to him.

In the following verse Allah *Glorified is He* adds:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَ ٱلسَّحَرَةُ قَالَ لَهُم مُّوسَىٰٓ أَلۡقُواْ مَآ أَنتُم مُّلۡقُونَ ٨٠

When the sorcerers came, Moses said to them, ‘Throw down whatever you have’ [80] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 80)

The period between Pharaoh's issuing of the order and carrying it out was as short as possible. Thus, we should understand that an order issued by a man of great authority does not tolerate any procrastination or delaying on the part of those who execute it. When the Quran treats some issue or other, it always provides a detailed account of reality. The Quran does not refer to anything that could spoil the image of this reality. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when the sorcerers came, Musa (Moses) said to them, "Throw down whatever you have."' (*Yunus:* 80)

This verse effectively summarises the entire situation. When the sorcerers knew that Pharaoh needed their help in a predicament regarding the authority of the state, they knew that this issue was a tough and difficult one. Thus, they knew that they must hurry to his aid. In these verses, Allah *the Exalted* does not give a comprehensive account of the situation since there are other incidents of this story which are found in other passages of the Quran, and every verse sheds light on the incident with which it is concerned. This is why, in this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* does not say that Pharaoh’s aides sent out a call to all of the cities that the sorcerers should come forth. This part of the story can be seen in other passages of the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not tell us here that the sorcerers wanted to take advantage from the situation as they told Pharaoh: ‘Shall we be rewarded if we win?’ (*al-A’raf:* 113) The stipulation of such clause reveals the nature of human relationships in that society; asking for a reward means that, in their previous work with Pharaoh, they did not receive any recompense. Thus, when the opportunity presented itself, and they saw that Pharaoh was in a bind, they asked for a reward. Pharaoh promised to reward the sorcerers and to let them join his inner court because if their sorcery was able to defeat the miracle of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* such a feat would preserve Pharaoh's status as king. Therefore, they would have to be included among the royal entourage who benefitted the most from the royal graces. Pharaoh promised them all of this in order to encourage them to do their best to nullify Moses's miracle so that Pharaoh's throne might be consolidated. In the verse which we are presently reflecting on, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to give a summary account of the events; the rest of them are mentioned in other passages of the Quran. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* presently says: 'When the sorcerers came, Moses said to them, "Throw down whatever you have."' (*Yunus:* 80) The sorcerers thereby threw down their staffs and their ropes.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّآ أَلْقَوْا۟ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ مَا جِئْتُم بِهِ ٱلسِّحْرُ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
سَيُبْطِلُهُۥٓ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُصْلِحُ عَمَلَ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

When they did so, Moses said, 'Everything you have brought is sorcery and God will show it to be false. God does not make the work of mischief-makers right [81]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 81)

We know that, in this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to give a brief account of the situation. However, in another verse, He describes the events in detail. Allah *Glorified is He* says in that verse regarding the sorcerers: 'So they said, "Moses, will you throw first or shall we?"' (*al-A'raf:* 115) We know that in any showdown between two opponents, every side needs to taunt the other so as to lower the other side's morale. In this instance, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* explains to them that what they had contrived is sorcery, amounting to mere illusion. Allah *Glorified is He* has informed His Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that his staff would turn into a real snake, while the transformation of their staffs and ropes would consist of mere optical illusion. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* conveyed to them Allah's verdict regarding such illusions: '…Everything you have brought is sorcery and Allah will show it to be false. Allah does not make the work of mischief-makers right.' (*Yunus:* 81)

Thus came the decisive statement which settled the matter; it was the judgment issued regarding the works of Pharaoh, his entourage and the sorcerers. All of their works were causing mischief on earth. Were it not for this fact, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have sent them a Messenger supported by a miracle which coincided with their own area of expertise. Indeed, they excelled at sorcery, so Allah *Glorified is He* sent forth a real miracle which devoured what they had contrived. If they excelled at creating illusions, Allah *Glorified is He* has created the universe with His utterance of the Word 'Be'. Allah creates realities, not illusions. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse

وَيُحِقُّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَٰتِهِۦ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

He will uphold the Truth with His words, even if the evildoers hate it' [82] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 82)

Thus, Allah's every wish is brought about by the word 'Be'. As soon as He utters this word, His wish is brought into being. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When He wills something to be, His way is to say, "Be," and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82)

Now, the expression *kun fa-yakun* ('Be,' and it is) is a quite lengthy expression considering that it allegedly represents the amount of time that it takes for Allah's Command to be carried out. However, no shorter expression than this exists in the human language. Uttering the Arabic letters *Kaf* (K) and *Nun* (N) requires a certain amount of time. Nevertheless, doing what Allah *Glorified is He* wills does not require the passage of any time. In other words, the command *kun* (be) signifies that a thing is brought into existence even before the word *kun* has been spoken. Every existing thing is brought into existence and made manifest with the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*. Hence, He wills to show us here that the truth is conveyed through the words of the Messengers and that the miracles performed by them are evidence attesting to the authenticity of their Message, so that Allah *Glorified is He* punishes and humiliates the evildoers, while providing the world with relief from their aberrant and corrupt ways.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَمَآ ءَامَنَ لِمُوسَىٰٓ إِلَّا ذُرِّيَّةٌ مِّن قَوْمِهِۦ عَلَىٰ خَوْفٍ مِّن فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَإِيْهِمْ
أَن يَفْتِنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ لَعَالٍ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَمِنَ ٱلْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

But no one believed in Moses except a few of his own people, for fear that Pharaoh and their leaders would persecute them: Pharaoh was domineering in the land and prone to excess [83] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 83)

Now, since the sorcerers—who were the aides of Pharaoh and his primary agents in the showdown with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*—proclaimed their faith in Moses's Lord, Pharaoh therefore punished them, saying: ‘How dare you believe in him before I have given you permission?’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) This indicates that the idea of his own divinity still dominated his thinking; that is why the people were afraid to proclaim their faith, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But no one believed in Moses except a few of his own people...’ (*Yunus:* 83) The word *dhurriyya* refers to the young children who were untouched by the widespread corruption in the land. In addition, young children enjoy the quality of purity, living in a complete detachment from the problems of the world. They have not yet reached the age when a person begins to covet power. They believed, even though they feared that Pharaoh and their leaders would persecute them. “For fear of Pharaoh and his establishment that they would persecute them”. (*Yunus:* 83)

The phrase *‘ala khawf* (for fear) denotes a form of superiority similar to when we say ‘on the horse’ or ‘on the chair’. In this situation, the elevated subject is in a position of superiority compared to what he towers over. The one who rises over something is one who takes possession of that which he rises over; the latter, on the other hand, bears all the weight. However, one of the other uses of the preposition *‘ala* (literally ‘on’) is when it serves to mean *ma‘a* (in spite of). An example of this can be found Allah's Words: ‘They give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves...’ (*al-Insan*: 8), meaning that they give away food in spite of their own love for it. When Allah *Glorified is He* uses one letter instead of another, there is always a reason for that. An example can be found in Allah's Words quoting Pharaoh: ‘I shall certainly cut off your alternate hands and feet, then crucify you *fi* (‘on’, but literally ‘in’) the trunks of palm trees...’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) In this case, Allah *Glorified is He* employs the preposition *fi* (in) instead of the word *‘Ala* (on) in order to indicate that the act of crucifixion shall be severe—so severe, in fact, that the parts of the crucified body shall be firmly fastened to the crucifixion object.

Likewise, witness the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘They give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves...’ (*al-Insan*: 8). It is as though they were the ones who had mastery over the love, and such love could take them anywhere they wished. Also, witness Allah's Words in the verse we are examining: ‘... *'ala* (for) fear...’ (*Yunus:* 83). That is, they are on top of fear which means that fear is leading them to the corridors of anticipation of pain. In this case, they had attained faith for ‘fear that Pharaoh and their leaders would persecute them.’ (*Yunus:* 83)

These words of Allah *Glorified is He* indicate that such fear is not fear of Pharaoh, because Pharaoh wages campaigns of terror through his agents and entourage. They are like the secret police in those countries which have no regard for human dignity. Due to his position and his status, Pharaoh does not torture in person; rather, this is done by his agents. In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...for fear that Pharaoh and their leaders would *yaftinahum* (literally, Pharaoh would persecute them).’ (*Yunus:* 83) Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘…for fear that they (both Pharaoh and their leaders) persecute them.’ This indicates that the agents do not torture the believers because they take pleasure in it; rather, the agents do this because it is Pharaoh who takes pleasure in it.

Thus, the personal pronoun is mentioned in its plural form on one occasion and in its singular form on another occasion. This is so to ensure that every pronouncement in the Quran conveys its meaning in the clearest manner. When the exegetes wanted to shed light on the meaning of the word *dhurriyya,* they said, ‘This word refers to Pharaoh's wife ‘Asiya, Pharaoh's stockist, the wife of the stockist, Pharaoh’s coiffeuse, and all from among Moses’s people who attained faith but kept it a secret. All those people abstained from publicly proclaiming their faith in the Message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon* *him* out of fear of Pharaoh’s punishment. Pharaoh was a tyrant in the land and claimed that he was divine, so, if Pharaoh suspected that someone was threatening his claim to divinity, he would inevitably submit him to the harshest of punishments. This was why they feared such punishment; previously, Pharaoh had, through his agents, slaughtered the newborn children of the Israelites while allowing their women to live. Thus, they lived in perpetual fear of Pharaoh’s agents who carried out his every command. That is why the personal pronoun is employed to denote the plural form—as in the words of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘... and their leaders...’ (*Yunus:* 83). The personal pronoun has also beenemployed to denote the singular form. In the following words of Allah *Glorified is He* the personal pronoun refers to Pharaoh as the giver of orders: ‘... for fear that he would....’ (*Yunus:* 83). Therefore, they feared that Pharaoh persecute and torture them through his agents.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Pharaoh was domineering in the land and prone to excess.’ (*Yunus:* 83) The word *al-musrif* denotes exceeding proper bounds. In his excesses, Pharaoh had gone beyond all the limits, especially when he claimed to be a god. Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Pharaoh as saying: ‘…I am your supreme lord.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 24) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Pharaoh said, “Counsellors, you have no other god that I know of except me”...’ (*al-Qasas:* 38). Pharaoh rose to such great heights of arrogance that he routinely oppressed and terrorised other weak and helpless human beings. Allah *Glorified is He* also quotes Pharaoh as saying: ‘Pharaoh said, “My people, is the Kingdom of Egypt not mine? And these rivers that flow at my feet, are they not mine?”...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 51) Thus, Pharaoh was guilty of the worst kind of excess.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ يَٰقَوۡمِ إِن كُنتُمۡ ءَامَنتُم بِٱللَّهِ فَعَلَيۡهِ تَوَكَّلُوٓاْ إِن كُنتُم مُّسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

Moses said, ‘My people, if you have faith in God and
are devoted to Him, put your trust in Him’ [84]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 84)

There are two stipulations involved in this verse. The first one is in Allah's Words: ‘if you have faith in Allah’ (*Yunus:* 84). The response to this stipulation can be found in Allah’s Words: ‘put your trust in Him.’ (*Yunus:* 84) Then, He mentions another stipulation: ‘If you are devoted to Him.’ (*Yunus:* 84) Thus, the first stipulation and its response are mentioned. Then, another stipulation comes—the latter is identical with the former; that is, the act of devotion to Allah because having faith in Allah *Glorified is He* entails their submission to Him and requires that they surrender to Him. From our own lives, we can give the example of the school principal who wants to punish a student who has violated the rules and regulations. The student tries to appeal to the principal’s mercy, whereby the principal responds to his pleas by saying, ‘If you show up to school on Saturday with your legal guardian, I will admit you’; the presence of the legal guardian is related to the appointment specified by the principal, if the pupil is to be readmitted into the classroom. Thus, we find that the second stipulation is connected to the first stipulation. It is this principle that is at work in the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘...if you have faith in Allah and are devoted to Him, put your trust in Him.’ (*Yunus:* 84)

Faith, as we know, is the inner work performed by the heart. Surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* is an external work. Sometimes, a person does perform the teachings of Islam. At other times, a person might abstain from performing the teachings even though he continues to cling to his faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. Likewise, you might find a person performing the teachings of Islam while lacking the inner faith. That is why we find Allah *Glorified is He* saying: ‘...those who believe and do righteous deeds.’ (*Yunus:* 84). We find that Allah *Glorified is He* elucidates this matter by pointing to that pivotal statement in His Words: ‘The desert Arabs say, “We have faith.”’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14) Faith is work of the heart; that is why the Divine Command follows: ‘…[Prophet], tell them, “You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, ‘We have submitted’”, for faith has not yet entered your hearts.”’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14) It means that, indeed, you perform the outward obligatory rites of Islam, however, faith has not yet entered your hearts.

In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... if you have faith in Allah and are devoted to Him, put your trust in Him.’ (*Yunus:* 84) Thus, we see that trust in Allah *Glorified is He* is one of the requirements of faith: in every situation, a person must surrender his will to Allah *Glorified is He* in whom he has faith. This is why faith is only efficacious when it is accompanied with total surrender to Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, if you surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* along with your faith in Him, then place your trust in Him. However, if you have merely adopted the creedal aspect of faith and have not surrendered your will to Allah's directives— of 'Do' and 'Do not'—this type of trust in Allah *Glorified is He* is of no use. Thus, what we have said previously is being confirmed: if you come across a formulation such that it contains an initial stipulation, followed by a response and then followed by another stipulation—know that the latter stipulation is the one that is in the forefront because it is a stipulation concerning the first stipulation. In the present example, this means that the ability to place one's trust in Allah *Glorified is He* can only be achieved when the outer condition of surrender and the inner condition of faith are both present.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَقَالُواْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ تَوَكَّلۡنَا رَبَّنَا لَا تَجۡعَلۡنَا فِتۡنَةٗ لِّلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

They said, 'We have put our trust in God. Lord! Do not make us an object of persecution for the oppressors [85] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 85)

In other words, they responded positively to the Message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* simply because they had said: 'We have put our trust in Allah.' (*Yunus:* 85). If the preposition is placed before its object, this implies that the matter is exclusive to the object. In this case, the act of placing one's trust is restricted to Allah *Glorified is He*; no one other than Him is a worthy recipient of our trust. Then, their supplication follows: 'Lord! Do not make us an object of persecution for the oppressors.' (*Yunus:* 85) The word *al-fitna* means trial. As we have said before, such trial is not bad in itself. However, what is bad is the end result of the trial if it proves to be disadvantageous for the tested subject. One could also use the word *fitna* as in *fatant adh-dhahab*, meaning 'I smelted gold; I refined it from all impurities'. We also know that goldsmiths mix it with other elements to make it stronger because gold that is not admixed with other elements can be brittle.

However, the word *al-fitna* used in the verse ‘Lord! Do not make us an object of persecution for the oppressors,’ (*Yunus:* 85) denotes the fear of renouncing their faith if Pharaoh were to seize and torture them. It is as if they were saying, ‘O Lord, do not allow Pharaoh to subjugate us through his harsh torture.’ This is if they are the ones being subjected to temptation, but what if they happen to be the tempters? In this case, if they do not follow the religion faithfully, Pharaoh and his people would not know that the people who proclaimed their faith have truly surrendered to Allah *Glorified is He*. If they deviate from the religion, the people of Pharaoh would say, ‘They are not true believers.’ We find Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*—who is the father of the Prophets and enjoys great pre-eminence as a Prophet—saying: ‘Lord, do not expose us to mistreatment [at the hands of] the disbelievers.’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 5) This supplication of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* teaches us the importance of adhering to the teachings of the religion; thus, no one should ever look at a Muslim or a believer and say, ‘This is a person who proclaims his faith and yet his behaviour is contrary to the teachings of his religion.’ That is why Ibrahim (Abraham) used to go above and beyond the call of duty when carrying out orders. Allah *Glorified is He* about him: ‘When Abraham’s Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled...’ (*al-Baqara:* 124) That is, he used to fulfil every task faithfully and perfectly; he was a role model and did not perform his religious duties in a superficial manner. Therefore, if they happen to be the ones subjected to temptation, they ought to resist against these temptations. But if they happen to be the tempters, they must hold steadfast to the teachings of the religion, so that no one should ever accuse them of falling short regarding their religious obligations; otherwise, the disbelievers would fall even deeper into the darkness of disbelief and aberrance. Allah's Words, ‘Lord! Do not make us an object of persecution for the oppressors,’ (*Yunus:* 85) indicate that they are preoccupied with matters of religion, whether they are the ones subjected to temptation or they are the tempters.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَنَجِّنَا بِرَحْمَتِكَ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

Save us, in Your mercy, from those who reject
[Your message] [86] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 86)

This noble verse clarifies that they were concerned with the state of the disbelievers; this means that they were hoping for the enemy to attain faith so that this enemy might come under the influence of the guidance of faith. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘No one of you becomes a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself.’(1) They wished for their enemies to attain faith in spite of the latter’s iniquity. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches His creatures that it is the foolishness of enmity to wish for the misfortune of one’s enemies because it is your enemy’s evil side that makes you suffer, and it is in your advantage to pray for his wellbeing, because the benefit of his wellbeing will also reach you.

The believer must pray that his enemy will be guided to the truth; in becoming guided, you will in turn reap some of the benefit. One of the characteristics of faith is that its benefits extend over to others. When they prayed that Allah *Glorified is He* does not make them an object of persecution for the oppressors, this shows that there are various degrees of oppression and that Pharaoh and his people were guilty of the worst kind of oppression. Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: ‘...attributing partners to Allah is a terrible wrong.’ (*Luqman:* 13) The climax of iniquity lies in stripping away the rights of one person and handing it to someone other than its rightful owner. Pharaoh and his people had attributed partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. Pharaoh thought of himself as a god, and those around him believed him. Therefore, the climax of iniquity consists of attributing partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. Below this grave act of iniquity, there are the major sins, and below them are the minor sins.

They prayed to Allah *Glorified is He* saying: ‘Save us, in Your Mercy, from those who reject Your Message.’ (*Yunus:* 86) Their words can be rephrased as ‘render us immune from the oppression of those people’. One of the biggest fears of the ancients was the gushing forth of floodwater in a way that only those standing on high ground would be saved. The term *an-najwa* means an elevated area of the land; this is in fact the origin of the term *an-najah* (safety). Now in this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* quotes them as saying, ‘Save us, in Your Mercy, from those who reject [Your Message].’ (*Yunus:* 86) Mercy is tantamount to that ‘protection’ which prevents the coming of an illness. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe...’ (*al-Isra’:* 82). The healing is required only if an illness is already present. Mercy, on the other hand, is that which safeguards against the coming of an illness.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (13) and Muslim (45)*

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* has wished to honour Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people, so He says:

وَأَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَأَخِيهِ أَن تَبَوَّءَا لِقَوْمِكُمَا بِمِصْرَ بُيُوتًا وَٱجْعَلُوا۟
بُيُوتَكُمْ قِبْلَةً وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

We revealed to Moses and his brother: ‘House your people in Egypt and make these houses places of worship; keep up the prayer; give good news to the believers!’ [87] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 87)

We have previously explained that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* were two Messengers bearing a single Message(1); a revelation had descended upon the two of them in the form of a single Message. When Allah *Glorified is He* selects a Prophet or a Messenger, He does so based on certain excellent qualities of character and purity of soul. These virtues are what render a person qualified to bear a Message from heaven and to communicate what Allah *Glorified is He* wills.

Now, if Allah’s creatures have successfully crafted automated machines out of inanimate materials, which do not possess the capacity to think and to reflect—machines such as the clock which can make the call to prayer or the radio which broadcasts at specific times—if human beings have created such things, what should we suppose that Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of creating, given that He is the Creator of all the creatures and the universe and the One Who sends forth Messengers? Allah *Glorified is He* selects His Messengers in a way that the inner strength of their character allows them to fulfil their assigned mission regardless of the external conditions.

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(1) Proofreader’s Note: This is the sheikh’s interpretation.

In this instance, Allah's Words, ‘We has revealed to Moses and his brother...’ (*Yunus:* 87) indicate that the revelation was inspired to both Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. Thus, if there arose a situation which required Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to speak, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* would also be able to speak on the same subject, because their core faith and doctrine were the same. The events referred to in the verse took place after Pharaoh and his troops were drowned; thus, after the stifling atmosphere had been lifted, they were ordered to settle in the land of Egypt and to establish their homes therein.

However, we must ask a question here: has Pharaoh been drowned and perished forever? No, he has not because ‘Pharaoh’ is not the name of a person; rather, it is the name given to a particular function. All of the kings of ancient Egypt were known by the title ‘Pharaoh’, so, we need not speculate whether Pharaoh in question was Thutmose the first, Ramses or any of the other kings. Suppose that Pharaoh mentioned in the Quran had drowned, does this not imply that a new Pharaoh would have taken his place? We know from the history books that the ruling families succeeded one another; we know that there were Pharaohs, and that some of them used to persecute the believers. Thus, whoever succeeded the drowned Pharaoh must have been even more ruthless and hostile towards the believers.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the holy verse which we are presently examining: ‘We revealed to Moses and his brother: “House your people in Egypt...”’ (*Yunus:* 87) We come across the word *Misr* (Egypt*)*—a term which, when used, is understood to mean a region. We, who live in this country, have employed the term Misr as a proper noun denoting the region that extends from the Mediterranean Sea to the border of Sudan. In other words, it is the region of the Nile valley. We have also employed the term Misr as a proper noun designating the capital of the Nile valley. We also call the train station in Cairo the Misr station.

From Allah's Words, ‘House your people in Egypt’ (*Yunus:* 87), we can deduce that the term *at-tabawwu’* means the act of consecrating a space for residential purposes. Such a space will, henceforth, be considered *maba’a,* that is, a place to which people return. Therefore, the word *at-tabawwu'* means to settle down at a particular place. Thus, when a person establishes a place as his homeland, he then returns to it after a period of travel through other lands.

Leaving one's homeland is considered to be a mere journey that requires a person to eventually come back. The home plays a similar role for human beings. We might roam through the fields for an entire day, or we might spend it at the factory or at the office, but when the day comes to an end a person always returns home to sleep.

There was a condition concerning the houses which Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* to establish. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and make these houses places of worship (Qibla)...' (*Yunus:* 87). The word *Qibla* denotes the direction towards which we pray. For example, the mosque is the direction marker for those who stand outside of it. When the mue'ghghin gives the call to prayer, the mosque effectively becomes the direction to which we head. When we are inside the mosque, we then orient ourselves towards the prayer direction. It is our orientation towards the prayer direction which determines our position within the linear arrangement of people inside the mosque. In this instance, the Commandment issued by Allah *Glorified is He* is as follows: '... and make these houses places of worship (Qibla); keep up the prayer...' (*Yunus:* 87). In this case, the establishing of houses is stipulated that they turn the houses into places of worship far removed from the eyes of their persecuting enemies. Their situation is akin to that of the early Muslims of Mecca at a time when Islam, still in its early stages, was weak. During that time, the Muslims used to pray inside the houses. This was the underlying reason that prevented their acts of prayer from being disclosed during the daytime. This secrecy helped keep the enemy unaware of the location of those offering prayer. As for the prayers which were conducted openly at night and at dawn, the purpose of these prayers was that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could teach them how to recite the Quran properly.

Allah *Glorified is He* hereby commands them: 'House your people in Egypt and make these houses places of worship...' (*Yunus:* 87). One possible interpretation is that the houses must be facing one another. To this day, if you look at the

Jewish quarters of any city in the world, you will see that they all reside in the same neighbourhood, refusing to integrate into the surrounding neighbourhoods. Thus, in every country they have a neighbourhood where they reside—this is known as the 'Jewish quarter'. In Egypt, they had ghettos; each was called the 'Jewish ghetto'. Allah *Glorified is He* has willed that, and He says in His noble Book: 'They were struck with humiliation and wretchedness...' (*al-Baqara:* 61). By living closely to each other, they can protect themselves, and they can easily get together if a troublesome issue comes up.

Allah's Words, '... and make these houses places of worship...' (*Yunus:* 87) can mean that the plan which determines the position of the streets and the houses should be such that they face the direction of prayer. An error in urban design such as the one in the plaza where the mosque of Imam Al-Hussain is built in Cairo—which makes people slightly skew to the right in order to face the proper direction of prayer—causes some confusion among the worshipers because this slight skewing to the right during the prayer means that every row must be shortened relative to the row in front of it.

Furthermore, when we pray in the sacred Mosque of Mecca, we find that some worshipers want to straighten the lines; their wish is that the rows be straight. Thus, we find some people alerting the others that a straightened line should extend for the length of one of the sides *Ka'ba;* then, the line should be curved.

The same applies to the rows of worshipers praying on the upper levels of the sacred Mosque: we find curved rows facing the direction of the *Ka'ba.* That is why I have always said, when I pray in the sacred Mosque, that when the leader of the prayer says, 'straighten your lines,' this means that you stand shoulder to shoulder. On the other hand, when we are outside the sacred Mosque where the *Ka'ba* is, it is sufficient for us to face the direction of the *Ka'ba* in prayer. When praying outside the Sacred Mosque, we do not face *Ka'ba* itself, we merely pray towards its direction. If we were to pray towards the *Ka'ba* itself, the length of the rows in any given mosque would not extend beyond twelve meters and a quarter—which is the extent of the longest side of the *Ka'ba*.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and make these houses places of worship...' (*Yunus:* 87). This means, in other words, that we should design houses in such a way that they are aligned with the direction of prayer.

Although some people endeavour to apply this principle, the layout of the streets and the neighbourhoods do not often help them. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and keep up prayer...' (*Yunus:* 87). We should understand from this command that prayer represents a renewal of our allegiance to Allah *Glorified is He*. For we proclaim the testament—that there is no god but Allah—once in our lifetime; we give the obligatory alms—if we have enough property—once a year and we fast—if we are not sick—during a single month of the year, namely, Ramadan. Furthermore, we perform the pilgrimage—if we are so able—once in a lifetime. Of all the five pillars of Islam, what we are left with is the prayer; a rite which is repeated five times every day—a person can offer more if he wishes. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* underscores this critical pillar of the religion: prayer.

Who is it that chose the place of the houses mentioned in the verse which we are presently reflecting on? Is it Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*? Or are the words of the verse addressed to the community as whole? We may note that the order of housing the people is directed to Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. As for the order to make the houses places of worship, it is directed not only to Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* but also to their followers; that is why the latter order is formulated in the plural mode.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this holy verse with the words: '... and give good news to the believers!' (*Yunus:* 87) This is a sign confirming that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the original recipient of the Message; that is why he is commanded to give glad tiding to the believers. One might note that Allah employs the dual mode in this verse when it comes to the command of 'housing the people'. He then employs the plural mode when it comes to the command to make the houses places of worship. Afterwards, He employs the singular mode at the end of the verse as to alert us to the fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the original recipient of Allah's Message to the children of Israel.

Giving glad tidings as a result of a person's righteous actions amounts to giving the glad tidings that the person will enter paradise.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ رَبَّنَآ إِنَّكَ ءَاتَيۡتَ فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَمَلَأَهُۥ زِينَةٗ وَأَمۡوَٰلٗا فِي
ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا رَبَّنَا لِيُضِلُّواْ عَن سَبِيلِكَۖ رَبَّنَا ٱطۡمِسۡ عَلَىٰٓ أَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡ
وَٱشۡدُدۡ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمۡ فَلَا يُؤۡمِنُواْ حَتَّىٰ يَرَوُاْ ٱلۡعَذَابَ ٱلۡأَلِيمَ ﴿٨٨﴾

And Moses said, 'Our Lord, You have given Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and wealth in this present life and here they are, Lord, leading others astray from Your path. Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they do not believe until they see the agonizing torment' [88]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 88)

The word *az-zina* denotes any superfluous luxuries that exceed the basic necessities which sustain life. The sustaining life requires eating any food that satisfies hunger and drinking water that quenches thirst. If there are a variety of foods, this amounts to opulence. Other luxuries of life include clothes which do more than just covering the private parts of the body; in other words, we are talking about those fashionable clothes that are characterised by high quality textile, stitching, and design. Other luxuries of life include the place where a human sleeps; that is, the bed which might be furnished with the most luxurious of feathers. However, the basic requirement for a sleeping place consists of a place on the ground—any bed that protects from the cold or the heat of the floor. Thus, what is superfluous with respect to the basic necessities of life can be considered a luxury. Luxuries are brought about by having wealth, and the original standard value of money is gold, with silver occupying the second place.

One of the principles of the economy is that the balance of gold is considered to be the standard for assessing the richness of any country in the world; this is in spite of the fact that they have discovered precious stones to be more valuable than gold. If those precious stones—like diamonds, for example—are broken or scratched, their value diminishes. However, with gold, no matter how much it might break up, you simply melt it down again to create a nugget. Pharaohs of ancient times used to rule over Egypt all the way down to the source of the Nile. They used to put people to work on various tasks, including gold mining—in actual mines or through the process of sifting the sands of certain mountains to extract it.

You could extract gold yourself from certain places. However, the bottom line is always the economic cost of extracting the gold. When a particular mine is plentiful, containing numerous gold veins, in such a case, the extraction of gold becomes a matter of making an overall profit. However, when the cost of extracting the gold exceeds the market value of the gold, then nobody attempts to extract it.

If you contemplate the luxurious lifestyles of Pharaohs, you will see that the mask of Tutankhamen, for example, is a paragon of beauty. Likewise, their palaces reflect the peak of luxury. It would be enough for you to witness the colour pigments out of which the wall paints were made in those days—you would come to realise the refined craftsmanship involved and the extent of opulence the rulers enjoyed. Such luxuries far exceeded the basic necessities of life.

In this holy verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And Moses said, "Our Lord, You have given Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and wealth in this present life and here they are, Lord, leading others astray from Your Path..."' (*Yunus:* 88). Not only were Pharaoh and his chiefs aberrant, but they also wanted to lead others astray as well. That is why they carried not only the burden of their own aberrance but also the burden of leading others astray. Has Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed splendour and riches upon them so that they might go astray and lead others astray as well? No, this was not the reason why they were given splendour and riches. The proposition *lam* (to) is not used to give the reason for giving them splendour and riches; rather, it is used to show the end result of that. Just as, for example, you give your son ten pounds and tell him: 'Do with this money what you please; however, I would prefer it if you used this money for profitable ends.' The child might go out and buy something useless; he might not purchase, for instance, books that could be beneficial. In this example, you gave your son a degree of purchasing power; however, he did not make good use of it. He used his freedom of choice to purchase toys. This is a situation where the son is blameworthy, not because he was free to act as he wished, but because of the consequences of his actions.

When Allah *Glorified is He* has wished to save Moses's life during his childhood, He has inspired the mother of Moses by saying: '... and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river: do not be afraid, and do not grieve.' (*al-Qasas:* 7) There is no mother in the world that would ever accede to such a command, because it would amount to certain death for her son. If the son were to be kidnapped or if he were to go missing, this would amount to probable death. However, if he were to be thrown in the river, this would not amount to probable death; rather, it would amount to certain death—unless he is saved by Allah *Glorified is He*. However, by virtue of her unshakable faith in Allah *Glorified is He* the mother Moses carried out what Allah *Glorified is He* had inspired her to do—because what comes from Allah *Glorified is He* meets no opposition within the pure and sincere soul. As for the whisperings of the devil, they are met with stiff opposition from within the soul; such is also the case with the thoughts of the lower self. That is why the mother of Moses *peace be upon him* carried out that which Allah *Glorified is He* had inspired her to do, even though it ran contrary to all logic and rational thought. When Pharaoh's family picked up Moses out of the water—and despite their continuous slaughter of children—Allah *Glorified is He* has instilled love for Moses in their hearts. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... for I showered you with My love...' (*Ta Ha:* 39). The moment they saw the young Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* they loved him and they did not kill him. Thus, Allah's Will and Promise to the mother of Moses were fulfilled: '... for we shall return him to you and make him a Messenger.' (*al-Qasas:* 7) That is, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was destined for a mission which Allah *Glorified is He* had pre-ordained for him.

This is why we find a series of Commands which the Quran describes with respect to the mother of Moses placing him in the river. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We inspired your mother, saying, "Put your child into the chest, then place him in the river. Let the river wash him on to its bank..."' (*Ta Ha:* 38-39). These are all the Orders of Allah *Glorified is He*. Thereupon, Pharaoh's wife saw him and said to her husband: 'Here is a joy to behold for me and for you!' (*al-Qasas:* 9) Now did Pharaoh know that this child whom his wife had picked up would grow up to be his enemy? No, Pharaoh had taken him out of the river, and they both gave the child a life of luxury, so that he would grow up to be a source of joy for him. This was the reason behind picking up Moses from the river. However, the end result was that Musa (Moses) *peace be* *upon him* grew up to be Pharaoh's enemy; had the enmity between Moses and Pharaoh existed when the former was a child, Pharaoh would not have picked up Moses from the river, or he might have even killed him on the spot. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* places certain things in His universe which undermine the guile of human beings. Thus, Pharaoh took him in and raised him, but the end result turned out to be different from what Pharaoh had expected.

When, in the verse which we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '... They are leading others astray,' (*Yunus:* 88) we should realise that Allah *Glorified is He* has not given them wealth so that they go astray. Rather, they chose to go astray. Many a people whom Allah *Glorified is He* has given wealth and power have used it towards good ends. Thus, we see that it is all up to the choices that human beings make—whether they chose to go astray or to follow the right Path. Thus, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: 'Our Lord, You have given Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and wealth in this present life and here they are, Lord, leading others astray from Your path. Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts...' (*Yunus:* 88).

The word (*at-tams*) refers to the act of hiding the distinguishing marks. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... before We wipe out [your sense of] direction, turning you back...' (*an-Nisa':* 47). In this case, the word *at-tams* means the act of hiding the lineaments of those faces in a way that they become a single whole, devoid of forehead, eyebrows, eyes, ears, lips and chin. Thus, the word (*at-tams)* denotes the act of obliterating the form that a particular thing possesses. So, Moses's supplication in this verse, '... Our Lord, obliterate their wealth,' (*Yunus:* 88) means to spoil their riches. Some authors of books narrating this story have said that their riches were indeed spoiled. Thus, those who owned pieces of gold saw their wealth turn into stone; those who owned precious gems saw their wealth turn into glass. The words, '... Our Lord, obliterate their wealth,' (*Yunus:* 88) could also mean to obliterate their riches for their wealth was the means that enabled them to lead people astray.

Thereafter, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says: '... and harden their hearts so that they do not believe until they see the agonizing torment.' (*Yunus:* 88) This means: O Lord, set a seal over their hearts, such that the disbelief contained therein can never get out, and such that no glimmer of faith can ever enter into them from the outside. For, indeed, they have forged a most blasphemous lie. Thus, may those seals remain forever grafted onto their hearts until they see the agonizing torment? Why did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* utter such a supplication against the people of Pharaoh? Why did he not utter a supplication similar to that uttered by our Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon him*: 'O Lord, guide my people for they comprehend not'? The answer is that Allah *Glorified is He* must have informed Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that calling such people to faith would be of no avail. Moses's main fear was not that the people of Pharaoh would persist in their aberrant ways, but rather that they would continue to lead others astray. Therefore, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* uttered the following supplication against them: '... Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they do not believe until they see the agonizing torment.' (*Yunus:* 88) Elsewhere in the Holy Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... but believing after seeing Our Punishment did not benefit them at all…' (*Ghafir:* 85). Thus, we can distinguish between faith that has been attained as a result of coercion and that which has been attained as a result of freewill. Therefore, when a Messenger comes forth to call people to faith, the audience has the right either to believe the Message or to reject it; for, Allah *Glorified is He* has created human beings, and He has given them freewill. However, faith attained by coercion can be of no benefit to a person. Pharaoh is a case in point: when the time of suffering came upon him, he proclaimed to have attained faith. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…But as he was drowning he cried, "I believe there is no God except the one the Children of Israel believe in. I submit to Him."' (*Yunus:* 90) Moses' supplication against the people of Pharaoh is echoed by that of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. The latter is cited in the Quran as saying: 'Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth [26]—if you leave them they will lead Your servants astray and beget only sinners and disbelievers.[27]' (*Nuh:* 26-27)

Allah *Glorified is He* has accepted Moses's supplication as He says:

قَالَ قَدْ أُجِيبَت دَّعْوَتُكُمَا فَٱسْتَقِيمَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعَآنِّ سَبِيلَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

God said, 'Your prayers are answered, so stay on the right course, and do not follow the path of those who do not know' [89] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 89)

Note that the person who uttered the supplication was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; however, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Your prayers are answered...' (*Yunus:* 89), this indicates that Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* had joined Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in uttering the supplication. We have previously said that if we looked at the original recipient of the Message, we would conclude that it is none other than Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was send to provide Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with support. Looking at the nature of these two figures, we would have to consider both as being Messengers bearing the same Message.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has sent forth the two Messengers to carry out a common objective; then, if one of them reacts to something, the other must be expected to react to the same thing. Therefore, it is conceivable that when Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* heard his brother uttering such a supplication, he also made such a supplication, or he might have made it silently.

Ad-du'a (supplication) means that you seek recourse with someone who has the power to carry out what you cannot. Thus, you would only utter a supplication with respect to a matter whose circumstances you are powerless to tackle on your own. Thus, you would say, 'I have my Lord in whom I believe, and He is Capable of overcoming any circumstances, for He is the Creator of the circumstances. Moreover, He can bestow bounties without any causes or means.' The true believer takes on the events of his life, not with the secondary causes in mind; rather, he tackles them while being mindful of the Omnipotence of the One in Whom he believes and He is the Ultimate Originator.

That is why when Musa (Moses) and his people reached the sea, and Pharaoh and his legions were pursuing them, Moses's people said: 'We shall definitely be caught.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). Whereupon Musa (Moses) replied: 'No, my Lord is with me: He will guide me,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62). In other words, do not assess the situation according to human criteria, for with me is the Lord of human beings. Musa (Moses) thereby received the following words of deliverance: ‘We revealed to Moses: “Strike the sea with your staff.” It parted–each side like a mighty mountain.’ (*ash-Shu'ara': 63*)

Thus, a supplication consists of seeking the help of one who can overcome that which you cannot. The main issue which preoccupied the mind of Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* was the persistence of the people of Pharaoh’s in their aberrant ways, as well as their insistence on leading others astray. Thus, it is only natural that the two Messengers would utter the same supplication. Similar instances of telepathy(1)—that is, when thoughts coincide simultaneously—can be found with other Messengers. In the history of Islam, one example of this phenomenon is when ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* was preoccupied with thoughts of the Muslim army engaged in one of its battles. At the time, he was in Medina delivering a sermon from the pulpit. Suddenly, he uttered the words: ‘O Sariya, to the mountain.’ These words had nothing to do with the subject of the sermon. However, his thoughts were centred on the general who was engaged in combat. Despite being too far away, the general heard the order of ‘Umar and led his troops to the mountain. In such a situation, one could say that one mind telepathically made contact with another mind. This is as when you call someone on the telephone and the person whom you wish to speak to says, ‘I was just about to call you. ’ This means that the two thoughts occurred simultaneously. Now, if these things can happen in our daily lives, then what can we suppose happens on the subtle spiritual realm, which the highest level is prophethood?

It could also be the case that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* uttered the supplication, and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was merely the one who said ‘Amen’. In this case, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* can be considered as someone who participated in the supplication. Since Allah *Glorified is He* has answered Moses’s supplication, He has also answered the prayer of the one who, after the supplication had been uttered, said ‘Amen’. Some people think that, when a prayer is answered, this means that whatever was prayed for is granted immediately. However, the truth is that when a prayer is answered, this means that Allah *Glorified is He* has agreed to grant for whatever was prayed. This, for example, is what happened with the supplication uttered by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* against Pharaoh and his leading supporters: when he uttered the prayer—and after Harun (Aaron) had said ‘Amen’—the answer would come forty years later: ‘Your prayers are answered...’ (*Yunus:* 89). It was then that Allah *Glorified is He* carried out their prayer that Pharaoh’s riches would be wiped out.

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(1) Proofreader’s Note: This is the sheikh’s interpretation.

On the one hand, heaven is not subservient to the one who utters a supplication, nor is it obliged to accept any and all supplications. On the other hand, once a supplication is accepted, then the date of its execution must be specified. These are matters that are subject to Allah’s Will; He is not obliged to answer all prayers. However, He has control over everything, and when He agrees to answer a particular prayer, He will specify an appropriate date whereby the prayer is to be granted, because if the prayer is granted immediately, it might be detrimental to a person.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘yet man prays for harm, just as he prays for good: man is ever hasty.’ (*al-Isra’:* 11) That is why Allah *Glorified is He* specifies the date when the prayer will be answered and carried out on the practical level. He says: ‘... I will show you my signs soon, so do not ask me to hasten them.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 37) Man knows that he might have prayed for things which, when Allah *Glorified is He* granted them, turned out to be detrimental. There are many supplications which human beings have uttered, but Allah *Glorified is He* has not granted them—and this is often a blessing in disguise. Thus, there is a Higher Power which watches over us and knows what is in our best interest. This Higher Power is not a collection of deities whose function is to answer man’s every prayer. This Higher Power above us is none other than Allah *Glorified is He*—the All-Wise, Most High. That is why, in our explanation of Allah's Words: ‘If Allah were to hasten on for people the harm [they have earned] as they wish to hasten on the good, their time would already be up...’ (*Yunus:* 11) we say that the person might pray for what is detrimental. Is it not the case that a mother will sometimes utter a supplication against her son or her daughter, even though she loves them both? Were Allah *Glorified is He* to answer her supplication—which she has uttered against her children—would this not be detrimental for the mother? In a moment of anger, the son might tell his mother, ‘O Lord, I pray that I am stricken in an accident, that way you can finally get rid of me, mother.' Now imagine what would happen if Allah *Glorified is He* answered this prayer. Would this really please the son who supplicated against himself? Would it please his mother? Of course it would not; if Allah *Glorified is He* has abstained from answering a prayer for something bad, this is to your benefit. Similarly, if Allah *Glorified is He* delays answering a supplication for something good, you must assume that there is some good in this. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has wished to tell Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*: 'Your prayers are answered, so stay on the right course, and do not follow the path of those who do not know.' (*Yunus:* 89) In other words, remain steadfast on the Straight Path and do not concern yourselves with which you have no knowledge of. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Noah called out to his Lord, saying, "My Lord, my son was one of my family though your promise is true, and You are the most just of all judges." [45] Allah said, "Noah, he was not one of your families. What he did was not right. Do not ask me for things you know nothing about. I am warning you not to be foolish."' (*Hud:* 45-46) That is, be respectful when praying to your Lord and giving vent to your worries; leave the matter to the All-Wise, for He will decide whether or not to answer your prayer. Answering the prayer might be either granted immediately or delayed to a specific time —either way, it will be good for you.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَٰوَزۡنَا بِبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱلۡبَحۡرَ فَأَتۡبَعَهُمۡ فِرۡعَوۡنُ وَجُنُودُهُۥ بَغۡيٗا
وَعَدۡوًاۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَدۡرَكَهُ ٱلۡغَرَقُ قَالَ ءَامَنتُ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِيٓ
ءَامَنَتۡ بِهِۦ بَنُوٓاْ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ وَأَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

We took the Children of Israel across the sea. Pharaoh and his troops pursued them in arrogance and aggression. But as he was drowning he cried, 'I believe there is no God except the one the Children of Israel believe in. I submit to Him' [90]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 90)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We took the Children of Israel across the sea' (*Yunus:* 90); the act of crossing the sea was not accomplished thanks to human means; rather, this feat was due to the means that transcended those of human beings. If Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had dug a tunnel underneath the sea floor, or if he and his people had embarked on ships, then, in this case, one could say that they had a hand in the feat of crossing the sea. However, this crossing was due to reasons that are imperceptible to human beings. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who has inspired Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* '…to strike the sea with his staff…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63).

The water of the sea is like any other water—they are subject to the laws of liquids, or the hydraulic principles, where the water level tends to equalize throughout. This is in contrast to solid materials which do not tend towards equalization, even if they are in a state of inequality. The hydraulic principles are the basis for those techniques by which water is transported from water towers to residential buildings. Typically, the water towers stand higher than the residential buildings in the area. Water is pumped up into these water towers. The water is thereafter distributed to the houses depending upon the design of the plumbing systems in such houses. However, if there is a building which stands higher than the water tower, the residents of the building must install a pump to push the water up to the highest floors. Now, if the waters of the sea are governed by the laws of liquids and hydraulics, how were these laws suspended?

Allah *Glorified is He* says: "and it parted, and each portion was like a great towering mountain" (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63). How did the water transform into mountains with passages and walkways, and Moses and his people cutting through them; how could they go forth with such reassurance? Surely, it could only have been Allah's Company that protected them. This is the explanation of what Moses said: "No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me" (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62).

However, Pharaoh and his legions pursued them in the hopes of catching up to them. As soon as Moses and his people had made it safely across, He wanted to strike the sea with his staff so that it might return to its original state of liquidity once again. Had he done so, he would not have allowed Pharaoh and his army to travel along the passageways across the mountains of water. Allah, however, had different plans. He wanted to both save Moses and his people as well as destroy Pharaoh and his army using the same tool. Therefore, He inspired Moses *peace be upon him* “And leave the sea in stillness. Indeed, they are an army to be drowned" (*ad-Dukhan:* 24) Allah ordered Moses to leave the sea in its current state so that Pharaoh and his legions might be tricked, and as soon as the last soldier gets to the passageway between the two mountains of water, the sea would return to its original liquid state, whereby Pharaoh and his army would be drowned while Moses and his people would be saved.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: “and Pharaoh and his soldiers pursued them” (*Yunus:* 90) did this pursuit prove that Pharaoh harboured malicious intent? Is it possible that Pharaoh’s intention was to invite Moses *peace be upon him* and his people to return to Egypt and settle therein? The reality is that it was not Pharaoh’s intention, and that is why, Allah *Glorified is He* has described his way of pursuing Moses as “in tyranny and enmity until” (*Yunus:* 90) this means that Pharaoh was pursuing them with the intention of taking his revenge and humiliating them. The Holy Quran depicts the scene of Pharaoh drowning in the following terms: 'until when drowning overtook him, he said: I believe.' (*Yunus:* 90) The word *idrak* denotes the intention of somebody to catch up to something. However, drowning is a verbal noun, so how can this verbal noun be something that is pursing Pharaoh? Actually, it is as though drowning was one of the soldiers of Allah who has an active intellect and is participating in events.

Pharaoh claimed that he had believed. Belief in a general and absolute sense refers to the faith in the Highest Power, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'the dwellers of the desert say: “We believe.” Say: “You do not believe but say, ‘We submit.’”' (*al-Hujurat:* 14) Belief requires the subjugation of the heart vis-à-vis Allah, while submitting in Islam requires that a person abide by the five pillars of the religion.

Regarding belief, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Say: I believe in Allah, and then be steadfast.' These words affirm quite explicitly that true belief is having faith in none other than Allah Most-High. However, when I say, for example, that I have faith that you are a good man, this kind of faith pertains specifically to someone or something, while proclaiming belief or faith in the absolute sense, pertains to Allah; that is why Allah ordered the Bedouin to say that they have submitted. Here, in the verse which we are currently examining, Pharaoh is quoted as saying: 'I believe that there is no god, but He in whom the children of Israel believe, and I am of those who submit.' (*Yunus:* 90) The confrontation was between Pharaoh, who represented the side of disbelief, and Moses, Aaron and their people, who represented the side of faith.

Pharaoh proclaimed his belief in Allah and added that he was among those who submit. Nevertheless, Allah *Glorified is He* did not accept such a declaration of his and says:

ءَآلْـَٔـٰنَ وَقَدْ عَصَيْتَ قَبْلُ وَكُنتَ مِنَ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

Now? When you had always been a rebel, and a troublemaker! [91] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 91)

This can be rephrased as an exclamation of what Pharaoh had said. It is as if Allah tells him that such a proclamation of his is unacceptable since he is saying it now that he has attained faith and that he is among those who surrender themselves to Allah when it is the wrong time. There is a major difference between the faith that has been attained through coercion, and the faith that has been attained through man's own freewill. Are you saying that now, while you have transgressed against us in the past and spread corruption on earth?

It was possible that Allah could have accepted his declaration of faith had he uttered it in some safe place away from the imminent peril that encompassed him. Allah *Glorified is He* does not accept the declaration of faith uttered by one who is on the verge of death because this faith is a coerced one and not one that has been attained out of freewill. If Allah wanted from us a coerced faith, He would have forced all His creatures to be believers, and no one would be able to disbelieve in Him. We see the whole universe is completely subjugated to the Will of Allah, and no one rebels against Allah. The Absolute Power of Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of forcing human beings to believe in Him. However, it is a testament to the Absoluteness of His Power, and it is not used to prove love on the part of a man. Real love for

Allah can only be proved when you have a choice between believing and disbelieving. What Allah wants from you is that faith that has been attained through your own freewill.

Therefore, it was not Pharaoh's words that had been rejected; it was the timing of these words. It has been said: that the declaration of faith of Pharaoh had been rejected even though he uttered it three times, because the people of Moses *peace be upon him* had, at that time, began to distort the attributions of Allah's Essence. They were attributing corporeal attributes to Him and claimed, may Allah forbid, that He had sat down on a rock, lowered His feet into a pond of water and began playing with a fish and such falsehoods fabricated by the children of Israel. Thus, when Pharaoh announced that he had believed in the God as did the children of Israel, this implied that he had not attained faith in the True God.

Thereafter Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱلْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِبَدَنِكَ لِتَكُونَ لِمَنْ خَلْفَكَ ءَايَةً ۚ
وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ عَنْ ءَايَٰتِنَا لَغَٰفِلُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

Today We shall save only your corpse as a sign to
all posterity. A great many people fail to heed
Our signs' [92] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 92)

We know that man is composed of a body which is that material structure that takes on the form we are all familiar with; and within the body, there is the soul. The latter is what provides life and make work possible. When we say *badan* (body), know that we mean the body to the exclusion of the soul. In other words, *badan* is synonymous with *jasad*. Similarly, when we say *jasad*, we mean that material structure considered in and of itself to the exclusion of the soul. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And certainly We tried Sulaiman, and We put on his throne a [mere] body.' Solomon *peace be upon him* enjoyed, thanks to what Allah bestowed upon him, such great dominion that no one would ever enjoy after him. Allah put the Jinn and the wind to his service. Allah taught Solomon all the languages and thereby, he possessed great authority. He issued commands and laid down proscriptions. One day, he found himself seated on his throne, unable to move, lacking his powerful spirit and subject to any challenge from his people. Then, Allah returned his powerful spirit to his body, thereupon he turned to Allah, regained consciousness and realized that everything he possesses is a gift imparted to him from Allah, and that none of it is innate. “And We certainly tried Solomon and placed on his throne a body; then he returned” (*Sad:* 34).

In the blessed verse which we are presently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He would save only the body of Pharaoh so that it be a sign to those who would come after him. Now, if Allah had not ordered the sea to throw out the body of Pharaoh, would it have been possible for them to still believe that he is a god and shall return once again? However, Allah *Glorified is He* wished that the sea would spit out his corpse just as it spits out the corpse of any drowned animal in order to cut any doubt to his drowning. It was to let the survivors from among his people see him for what he was and know that he was merely human. Thereafter, his demise would act as warning to all after he was an iniquitous tyranny proclaiming divinity. “And Pharaoh said, "O eminent ones, I have not known you to have a god other than me” (*al-Qasas:* 38).

Some historians have said that the pharaoh in question is Thutmose, as they have conducted an autopsy on his mummified body and found traces of salt water. We contend, however, that Pharaoh is not the name of a particular person; rather, it is the description of a function. It is as if the mummified bodies of Pharaohs are telling us that the reason for the preservation of these corpses is to serve as warnings; let every human take a warning from their example and realize how civilizations collapse and how these corpses have endured so that we might learn a lesson from them.

Allah *Glorified is He* presented the issue of Pharaoh in the Quran and how tyrannical he was “And [with] Pharaoh, owner of the stakes?” (*al-Fajr:* 10) However, in the same chapter, He says “Indeed, your Lord is in observation” (*al-Fajr:* 14) We note that Allah *Glorified is He* includes in the chapter of *al-Fajr*, while mentioning the pharaonic civilizations, other civilizations of antiquity such as that of 'Ad and Thamud, for example. Allah *Glorified is He* has also spoken about the Pharaoh position during certain scenes from the story of Moses. However, the discourse differs when it comes to the story of

Joseph *peace be upon him*; the position of Pharaoh is not being referenced. Allah rather speaks to us of other kinds of functions, namely, *'Aziz Misr,* which means the prime minister of Egypt, and narrates the story of the king of Egypt not Pharaoh.

It was only with the coming of the French military campaign in Egypt that the difference between the function of pharaoh and that of king was discovered. When Champollion successfully deciphered the hieroglyphic language, thanks to the carvings etched onto the Rosetta Stone, we finally realized that the rulers of ancient Egypt were called pharaohs, except during a period which Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos. They had attacked Egypt, defeated its pharaonic rulers, and established their own rule over the land. Later, Pharaohs would regain their control over Egypt after having expelled the Hyksos. This is why the Quran does not refer to the pharaoh but to the king in the story of Joseph. This indicates that the knowledge contained in the Quran predates all discoveries. Every time a new discovery is made or a new invention is devised, we find that it corroborates the content of the Book of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse that we are presently studying with His words: 'and most surely the majority of the people are heedless to Our communications.' (*Yunus:* 92) This phrase illustrates that there are those who are heedless of the signs of Allah, and there are those who are cognizant of them. They contemplate and reflect on the signs. They wonder about the meaning of things and create new inventions that benefit humanity. They discover such inventions that Allah permitted to see the light of day while doing scientific research in order to manifest the wondrous work of Allah in the universe.

When a person thinks about those discoveries and inventions that humanity has produced over time, he will realize that they are the product of the minds of those who examined things closely and possessed the ability to grasp the fundamental concepts and conceiving innovative new ideas. If the majority of human beings were not so heedless of the signs of Allah in the universe, the heavens, and the earth, more innovations and inventions would see the light of day.

Allah *Glorified is He* Himself has said: 'And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it.' (*Yusuf:* 105) Consider, for example, the law of gravity which was discovered by Newton.

He observed an apple falling from a tree. However, there have been tens of thousands or millions of people before him who witnessed the same scene of a fruit falling from a tree; Newton reflected on the dynamics of such an event, and this led him to discover the law of gravity; the scientists after him applied his principle of gravity as well as other principles to construct spaceships. Similarly, those who designed submarines, as well as huge ships that look like floating cities, relied on Archimedes' principle of buoyancy, which he discovered by noting that the level of a given liquid rises in proportion to the volume of the object immersed in that liquid.

All of these personalities discovered and did not create those secrets that had been deposited in the physical cosmos. They were only keen observers of phenomena. In addition, the scientist who discovered penicillin had noticed that a beaker holding organic matter was exuding drops of putrid water. He also noticed that any insect that came into contact with that water died. He, therefore, took a sample of this water and ran tests on it in his laboratory and discovered penicillin. Thus, the above mentioned verse (*Yusuf:* 105) suggests that that if men had not turned away heedlessly, they might have made numerous discoveries.

Similarly, the stories narrated in the Quran are to prompt people to consider carefully and to contemplate. When Allah sends forth a Messenger, imparting him with the ability to perform a miracle that humans are incapable of reproducing, people must submit to the message and believe. They must not keep repeating past experiences. Humanity has been progressing steadily on the material plane, and every new generation of scientists builds upon the knowledge accumulated by the previous generation. Hence, why does not this process occur when it comes to matters of doctrinal nature? If people were to start from where predecessors stopped, we would find that everyone would be a believer in Allah. If every new born built upon the sum of his father's knowledge, the excellent qualities of Adam would be transmitted to every new generation thereafter. Unfortunately, man is plagued by the desire to experience everything himself.

This is the case with respect to harmful things like alcohol, for example. It is detrimental to anyone who indulges in it, but when such substances are prohibited by religious laws, there are still those who wonder why it has been prohibited. The same is applicable to smoking; there are those who engage in the practice of smoking tobacco even though past experience has demonstrated its extremely detrimental effects. The reality is if every person was to imbibe the lessons learned of his predecessors, he would effectively reach their same level of experience and wisdom. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ بَوَّأۡنَا بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ مُبَوَّأَ صِدۡقٖ وَرَزَقۡنَٰهُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ فَمَا ٱخۡتَلَفُواْ حَتَّىٰ
جَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡعِلۡمُۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَقۡضِي بَيۡنَهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُواْ فِيهِ يَخۡتَلِفُونَ ٩٣

We settled the Children of Israel in a good place and provided good things as sustenance for them. It was only after knowledge had come to them that they began to differ among them- selves. Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding their differences [93]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 93)

The word *tabawwa'* in this verse means to establish a *maba'a* which is a private house. The absolute and general meaning of the word *mubawwa'* denotes a province or a country. The difference between a country and a private house is that you and anyone else can travel at leisure within a country, while a private house is someone's private quarter that is exclusive to him and his family. A rich man could have a private suite in his house reserved for himself, for his son and yet another for his daughter. However, most families reside in an apartment composed of one, two, or three rooms depending on the family's financial means. Thus, there is a difference between *tabawwu'* in terms of houses and *tabawwu'* in terms of countries. When it comes to countries it refers to citizen. Allah *Glorified is He* Says: "And We inspired to Moses and his brother, "Settle your people in Egypt in houses and make your houses [facing the] qibla and establish prayer and give good tidings to the believers" (*Yunus:* 87) This is the case it is pertaining to private houses. However, When it comes to *tabawwu'* pertaining to society at large, the agency of Allah *Glorified is He* is required. In the verse we are discussing, Allah *Glorified is He* enabled them to do so in the time of Moses. Allah allowed them to take up residence in the lands of Egypt and the Levant, as per His words: ‘Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.' (*al-Isra’:* 1) Since Allah *Glorified is He* has blessed the precincts of the House of Worship in Jerusalem, this means that much good is to be found there and that the lands in the vicinity represent a goodly abode.

The word *as-sidq* (truth) signifies the height of goodness and virtue. That is why when the Messenger of Allah was asked about the possibility of a believer being a liar, he said no. It is narrated that the Prophet was asked, 'Can the believer be a coward?' He said, 'Yes.' He was asked, 'Can the believer be a miser?' He said, 'Yes.' He was asked, 'Can the believer be a liar?' He said, 'No.'(1) That is why there is a punishment for adultery in the Islamic law just as there is a punishment to be carried out against the thief. Lying, on the other hand, is a characteristic in which a Muslim does not engage because he is required to be truthful. Every virtuous characteristic is a goodly abode. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And say: “My Lord! Make me to enter a goodly entering, and cause me to go forth a goodly going forth.”' (*al-Isra’:* 80) In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘and give good news to those who believe that theirs is a footing of firmness with their Lord.’ (*Yunus:* 2) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And ordain for me a goodly mention among posterity.' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 84) This means that Abraham *peace be upon him* asks for a good reputation when people mention his name. Thus, they do so in a laudatory manner and do not say that so-and-so was a liar. As for the expression *qadam sidq,* it denotes those virtuous deeds which he seeks to perform. That is why the reward for the virtue of truthfulness is what Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'In the seat of honour with a most Powerful King.' (*al-Qamar:* 55)

Therefore, the honest person will be seated at a seat in the presence of a Lord, Who is no miser and with Whom are only those whom He loves. He is a Lord Who does not withhold His Bounty from those who are in His Presence. Such a seat of truth is the reward of one whose prayers Allah has answered and whereby, He caused him to enter a sound entrance and to exit a sound exit. Allah also granted such a person to a reputation of honour and granted him an elevated rank.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Malik in his Muwatta’*

Hence, Allah had allotted unto the Children of Israel a most goodly abode in the lands of Egypt and the Levant, and after He had answered their call, ordered them to go to a particular place, granted them different types of food. "O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions." (*al-Baqara:* 61) He had also saved them from Pharaoh, and it was presumed that their lives would go back to normal and that they would prosper. However, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'but they did not disagree until the knowledge had come to them.' (*Yunus:* 93) These words refer to their knowledge of the signs of the coming final Messenger of Allah, Muhammad. Some among them eagerly awaited the coming of the Prophet in order to believe in him. There were others, however, who grew tyrannical, and that is why Allah caused them to disperse into splinter communities all across the earth. Looking at the Quranic precise portrayal, we find that it identifies this process of scattering. The Jewish community represents a distinct part in every community. In other words, Allah did not cause them to assimilate into other communities; rather, they represent a distinct social entity in whichever community they had settled, but they do not mingle with outsiders.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We said to the Israelites after him: “Dwell in the land.”' (*al-Isra':* 104) One of the literalists might wonder where else a human can dwell but on earth. Our response is that Allah *Glorified is He* did not specify which area of the earth in which they were to dwell. It would seem as if Allah manifests the ruling that He decreed on them to scatter into splinter communities. Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed his verdict; to be sure, Allah says: 'And We cut them up on the earth into parties.' (*al-A'raf:* 168)

We may note that they have acquired a nation for themselves in our own day and age. However, let us keep in mind the following words of Allah: 'And We had made known to the children of Israel in the Book: Most certainly you will make mischief in the land twice, and most certainly you will behave insolently with great insolence.' (*al-Isra':* 4) Towards the end of the chapter of *al-Isra',* Allah has also said: 'And We said to the Israelites after him: “Dwell in the land: and when the promise of the next life shall come to pass, we will bring you both together in judgment.”' (*al-Isra':* 104) The meaning of gathering them together into a single crowd is that Allah will cause them to amass into a single community, whereby the final blow shall befall them as per the following words of Allah: 'So when the second promise came [We raised another people] that they may bring you to grief and that they may enter the mosque as they entered it the first time, and that they might destroy whatever they gained ascendancy over with utter destruction.’ (*al-Isra':* 7) That is because we wo ill not fight them in all the countries where Allah has dispersed them. However, when they get together in single location, this paves the way for the coming of Allah’s judgment.

When we look at their journey, we find that Yathrib (Medina) was the place that welcomed them after they had been persecuted in the other communities where they had settled. When they gathered in Yathrib (Medina), they acquired a pre-eminent stature, because they were a people reputed for their knowledge and their skill in commerce and warfare. Now, they had gathered in the city of Medina because the faithful from among the people of the Book had informed them that this was the city to which an Arab Prophet and Messenger would emigrate during the end times. Thus, they stayed in Medina waiting for him. They used to tell the disbelievers of Quraysh that the time when a Prophet should appear was approaching, and we should follow him and smite you on his behalf just as the tribes of 'Ad and Aram had been smitten.

It was presumed that they would accept the message of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*; however, as soon as the Messenger of Allah came forth with the light of the message, they denied him, fearing for their political and economic stature. This much is confirmed in the verse which we are presently examining (10: 93). Their discord stems from the knowledge of the coming of the Messenger. Some among them had recognised the signs of his coming and believed in him, while others had not.

In the past, they did not hold divergent views and were all in agreement. They issued bold threats to the idolatrous tribe of Quraysh. As soon as the

Messenger appeared on the scene, and the tribes of al-'Aws and al-Khazraj knew that a Messenger from Allah had come forth in Mecca, they said to themselves that he was the Prophet whom the Jews had been threatening them with, so they should go to him and become his followers before they the Jews got to him, whereupon they might indeed smite us. It is as though the Jews precipitated the Prophet’s migration to Medina because the tribes of Al-'Aws and Al-Khazraj had advanced them to him. Therefore, we might know how Allah grants victory to His cause using His enemies.

That is why 'Abdullah ibn Salam approaches the Messenger of Allah and informs him of their state of internal discord. He said that the Jews were a people who were quick to slander a person. He added that if he embraced Islam, they would advance libellous arguments against him. He asked the Prophet to ask them about him before he pronounces his conversion to Islam. In so doing, Ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* was following conduct that suited his Jewish identity. When the Jewish community got together, the Prophet asked them what their opinion of Ibn Salam was. They said he was their Rabbi, their spiritual leader and the most Allah fearing among them. After having paid such a laudatory tribute to him, Ibn Salam said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I testify that there is no god but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.' At that point the Jews began hurling abuse against him, whereupon Ibn Salam said, 'Did I not tell you O Messenger of Allah that they are a people who are quick to slander?'

Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'they did not disagree until the knowledge had come to them' (*Yunus:* 93), this means that some people persisted in their error, while others believed in the True Messenger of Allah. After that, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: 'surely your Lord will judge between them on the resurrection day concerning that in which they disagreed.' (*Yunus:* 93) This means that Allah shall judge between those who joined the ranks of the believers and those who remained devoted to Judaism that was intolerant to Muhammad’s message.

Let us note that the word *baynahum* (between them) signifies that the personal pronoun encompasses both parties. We might also add that Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Resurrection, shall judge between the believers and the disbelievers, and, moreover, judge between the disbelievers themselves because some among them wronged their fellow disbeliever, others were either embezzlers or accepted bribes and others had acted contrary to the directives of their faith; thus, Allah will judge between them. In addition, the verse above denotes generality regarding the judgment. It shall be passed on people at large whether those of past, present and future. Allah will judge between every believer and disbeliever and every repenter and recusant.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِن كُنتَ فِي شَكٍّ مِّمَّآ أَنزَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ فَسۡـَٔلِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَقۡرَءُونَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ
مِن قَبۡلِكَۚ لَقَدۡ جَآءَكَ ٱلۡحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلۡمُمۡتَرِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

So if you [Prophet] are in doubt about what We have
revealed to you, ask those who have been reading the
scriptures before you. The Truth has come to you from your
Lord, so be in no doubt and do not deny God's signs [94]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 94)

These words are addressed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, we know that the Prophet said, from the outset, that he harboured no doubts as to the authenticity of his message. When his people promised him a position of power in exchange for abandoning his message, He said, 'By Allah if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on the condition that I abandon this course, until Allah has made me victorious or I perish therein, I would not abandon it.' We might also point out that Allah implies an address to the *Ummah* (Islamic community) within the speech addressed to the Prophet. Thus, when the followers of the Prophet read or hear the words that are addressed to the Messenger in such manner, they will not abstain from carrying out any order that is issued to them.

A commander, for instance, issues orders to his two aides who are in charge of leading two groups of warriors. The supreme commander tells them both, 'Beware not to do such and such thing.' By issuing these instructions, the commander is not addressing his two aides; rather, he is addressing all those subordinates who are under their command. Therefore, the above verse contains an order addressed to the Prophet, so that his *Ummah* (Islamic community) might realize that the Messenger is not one to refuse an order issued by Allah and that he executes everything that he is ordered to do with accurate efficiency. Hence, that is a speech addressed to the Islamic community in the in the person of the Prophet.

When Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the Prophet to ask those who have been reading the Scripture before him in case of doubt, this indicates that those, who were familiar with the divine writs from before the coming of the Messenger of Allah, were aware of the self-evident truth of his message. Those who were intransigent and disbelieved in the Prophet of Allah and his message knew Him as they knew their own son. In fact, 'Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'When I first saw Muhammad, I recognised him as I recognise my own son; nay, my acquaintance with Muhammad is even stronger.' Thus, the truth about his coming is plain written in the Torah as due to the glad tiding referring to him. This proves that your message, O Muhammad, is true with the testimony of the people of the Book themselves.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: “The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord, so never be among the doubters” (*Yunus:* 94). The truth that issues forth from Allah is immutable and unalterable. It does not change, for it is real, and that which is real does not take on multiple forms; it manifests as a single form. However, lying can take on a variety of forms. That is why the job of a diligent inspector is to investigate every angle of the testimonials that are presented to him at court in order to reach a final judgement which is of absolute accuracy and free from any conflicting evidence.

The words of Allah that declare that the truth has come unto Muhammad indicate that those who have read the divine writ have realized that he was indeed the Messenger of Allah. Thereafter, some of them have left the Jewish camp behind and come over to join the camp of believers in Muhammad, as the truth that has come is completely untainted by any human interference. It rather came from your Lord; thereby, do not be among the doubters.

Such a manner of speech presented in the verse we are discussing, as I have clarified before, indicates that they are addressed to the *Ummah* (Islamic community) as embodied by the person of the Prophet. Allah warns the

Prophet in another chapter that if he were to associate [with Allah], his work would certainly come to naught. Such words were revealed to the Messenger of Allah, even though it is inconceivable that the Prophet should ever fall into idolatry. Therefore, all of the Quranic verses that contain directives regarding things from which the Messenger of Allah is ontologically immune are particularly addressed to his community.

Allah *Glorified is He* adds in the next verse:

وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾

Then you would become one of the losers [95]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 95)

Allah *Glorified is He* when exhorting to that which is good, often cites the opposite of that good to elucidate things through juxtaposition. In our own daily lives, we find a father tells his son to work hard in his studies and pay close attention to his instructors so that he might succeed, and not to be like so and so, a person who dropped out. In this scenario, the father urges his son to work towards the good and, at the same time, brings up a reference to the counter of that good, which is warning against malfeasance. As one poet has composed, the face is like the morning white, and the hair is like the night black. Two opposites together are comely, and one counter reveals its counter beauty.

We know that the signs of Allah are numerous. *Ayat* (signs) could be the cosmic signs, which are the basis of the creed, positing that their creator is the Most-High Creator. These signs alert us to the splendour of His work, the finesse, and subtlety that are present in the formation of His creation and His All-Encompassing Power. Signs could be the miracles which have been given to the Messengers *peace be upon them* so that each might prove his verity as a communicator of a message on Allah’s behalf. Another type of *ayat* is the ayat of the Holy Quran which embody the Doctrine of Allah. However, the disbelievers were denying all of the signs.

Likewise, the present verse is addressed to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and connected to the preceding verse, where Allah had ordered to ask those who have been reading the Scripture before him in case of doubt.

We must not deduce that the Messenger of Allah was having doubts or that he was among those who have disbelieved in the signs of Allah. The reason why such matters have been brought up is to reject the tendencies of humankind, wherever they may arise. Thus, even if the words of revelation are, by default, addressed to the Messenger of Allah, the ultimate purpose of such proscriptions is to balance the understanding of the *Ummah* (Islamic community) in order to teach and guide them. After all, the Doctrine has been revealed to the Prophet to communicate it to his community as he bears witness to the truth before all the communities.

If the previous verse gives the meaning that Allah asks the Prophet to ask if He is in doubt, Allah asks him whether or not he doubts what was revealed to him, so that He might hear the answer from the Prophet and let the whole *Ummah* hear the answer, ‘I do not doubt nor do I question. That is which Allah has revealed to me suffices me.’ The Holy Quran mentions how Allah *Glorified is He* shall ask the angels, on the Day of Judgment, with the presence of those who worshipped them 'Did these worship you?' (*Saba’:* 40) We know that the angels do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them and that they do what they are bidden to do. Allah says “over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded” (*at-Tahrim:* 6).

Allah *Glorified is He* foreknows the response of the angels negating that they worshiped them “They will say, "Exalted are You! You, [O Allah], are our benefactor not them. Rather, they used to worship the jinn; most of them were believers in them" (*Saba’:* 41) However, Allah wishes to make all those who are gathered on that day hear the response of the angels as they denied being worshiped by other creatures and affirming that those people had worshipped the Jinn.

Thus, the question had been posed to demonstrate its answer. Similarly, when Jesus *peace be upon him* is worshiped by certain members of his community, Allah asks him: 'O Isa son of Maryam! Did you say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah?' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 119) Then, the response comes, 'Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to [say].' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 119) Thus, the purpose of the question of Allah to his Prophet is that the Messenger might say, 'I do not doubt nor do I question.'

The word *ash-shakk* (doubt) means that the scale of denial and the scale of confirmation balance each other out. If one scale outweighs the other, this would be a case of *dhann,* where the heavier scale represents a belief and the lighter scale represents an illusion, a fabrication, and a lie. The word *ash-shakk* is actually related to something concrete. After fishermen make a catch, they attach each fish to a string called *al-mishkak*. In addition, those who make necklaces put a string though every piece; thus, it means to join one thing to another. Likewise, there comes the word *ash-shaka'ik*, which means those houses that stand next to each other in a neat pattern. Hence, the expression *shak as-silah* also means to put on armour. Therefore, the word *ash-shak* denotes joining one thing to another and also connotes denial and confirmation existing side by side, owing to the fact that one is unable to give priority to either one. All the above versions of meaning are invoked whenever one refers to *ash-shakk*.

The verse which we are currently examining speaks of signs, and we know that the Messenger himself represents one of these signs. Thus, the words of this verse are evidently addressed to the Prophet's *Ummah*. It is impossible that the Prophet be among those who are bent on lying about Allah's signs. To reject the signs of Allah is tantamount to turning truth into falsehood and reality into non-reality. Those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah either do not believe in God or believe in God but not in a Messenger. They could believe in both God and a Messenger, but do not believe in the Doctrine which has been revealed to the Messenger. This is corroborated by a verse at the end of the chapter *Yunus,* wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'if you are in doubt as to my religion, then [know that] I do not serve those whom you serve besides Allah.' (*Yunus:* 104) Thus, it is as if the speech is addressed to the *Ummah.*

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِمْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

Those against whom your Lord's sentence is passed
will not believe [96] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 96)

These words demonstrate that Allah *Glorified is He* has foreknown that they would not incline towards faith. This, however, does not preclude their responsibility in the act of choosing. He has foreknown the choice that they would end up making. When the time came, they made the choice that Allah had known they would make. His Judgment incorporates the element of human freewill; however, it is, at the same time, a providential judgment. Consider, for example, and Allah knows best, when the minister of agriculture comes forth and announces the forecasted quantity of cotton to be harvested during a given year. This estimate is based on the area of arable land dedicated to cotton production and the average per-acre output of cotton expected. The estimate might be accurate. It might not be off target due to the various factors that are involved in cotton production. It is possible that the year's crop might succumb to some disaster or other problems such as the cotton bollworm or the pink bollworm.

Thus, in the human domain, estimates may be accurate, or they may miss the mark as human estimates are based on knowledge that is relative and not absolute. However, the predictions of Allah are based on pre-eternal knowledge, and when He puts forth a prediction, it must necessarily come to pass. That is why we must discern between divine judgments that are destined, pre-ordained and in which man has no say, and predictions put forth by Allah, which humans carry out while exercising their freewill. Here the great mystery of the unseen is observed.

Take for instance, the behaviour of Abu Lahab. The Quran says about him: 'Perdition overtakes both hands of Abu Lahab, and he will perish. His wealth and what he earns will not avail him.' (*al-Masad:* 1-2) This chapter was revealed while Abu Lahab was still alive. Allah *Glorified is He* had foreknown that his disposition was such that he would never attain faith. Had Abu Lahab been marginally intelligent, he would have approached the Messenger of Allah and proclaimed, 'you have said that I will have to endure hellfire; however, I now testify that there is no God but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.' Abu Lahab was not a man of such intelligence. Allah had foreknown that his disposition was such that he would never embrace Islam, unlike Hamzah ibn Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet's uncle, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Khalid ibn al-Walid or 'Amr ibn Al-'As *Allah be pleased with them* who have converted to Islam in spite of their initial opposition to the Prophet.

Thus, human beings can predict something, but such is based only on the information that is available to them. Man does not have access to universal, pre-temporal knowledge when making his predictions. Man has a limited knowledge. Therefore, it is conceivable that he errs in his calculations as he does not have dominion over what he predicts. Thus, let nobody say that Allah punishes human beings for acts which He has preordained. The predictions of Allah stem from His pre-temporal knowledge, and human beings have the right to choose. Allah has said: ‘And whenever a chapter is revealed, there are some of them who say: Which of you has it strengthened in faith? Then as for those who believe, it strengthens them in faith and they rejoice. And as for those in whose hearts is a disease, it adds uncleanness to their uncleanness and they die while they are unbelievers.' (*at-Tawba:* 124-125)

In the next verse Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ جَآءَتْهُمْ كُلُّ ءَايَةٍ حَتَّىٰ يَرَوُاْ ٱلْعَذَابَ ٱلْأَلِيمَ ﴿٩٧﴾

even if every sign comes to them, until they see the agonizing torment [97] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 97)

Thus, the coming of the numerous signs will not help them move toward faith; Allah *Glorified is He* knows that they will use their freewill to choose disbelief. Allah *Glorified is He* quotes them as having said: ‘And they say: We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face [with us]. Or you should have a house of gold, or you should ascend into heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending until you bring down to us a book which we may read. Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal messenger?' (*al-Isra':* 90-93)

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were ordering His Messenger to explain that he does not he reveal the signs; rather, these signs are from Allah. The Quran mentions the reason why those signs which they asked for were not revealed and Allah says: 'And nothing could have hindered Us that We should send signs except that the ancients rejected them.' (*al-Isra':* 59) Numerous signs have been revealed to previous generations of sceptics and deniers who oppose the prospect of faith with hearts filled with disbelief. If one is searching for faith, one should do so without any preconceptions. May the person contemplate the matter and let into his heart that which he accepts. This choice of the heart that is free from any previous conditions is the most excellent form of acceptance

Previously, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about His Unity, His miraculous signs, the legitimacy of Prophethood and the Day of Resurrection. He also narrates the stories of some of the Messengers who succeeded one another through history, from Noah *peace be upon him* to a partial account of the story of Moses and Aaron *peace be upon them* and Allah tells the story of Jonah *peace be upon him*. We notice that Allah narrates the story of Noah in great detail and then He mentions the stories of Messengers of whom He does not say anything. He mentions the story of Moses and Aaron after that and later, He mentions the story of Jonah *peace be upon him*. The chapter therefore comprises three messages, which are that of Noah, Moses and Aaron and the message of Jonah *peace be upon them*. The latter is the Messenger after whom the chapter is named.

One might ask why Allah narrates the story of these three Prophets in this chapter. We with many exegetes have become very tired to grasp the wisdom behind including the stories of the three aforementioned Messengers and not the story of Hud, Thamud and Jethro. There must have been wisdom in this. As far as we have been allowed to understand, the wisdom is that Allah presents the succession of messages as well as the deniers of every Messenger. He also presents the fate that befell the enemies and what befell the Messenger and his followers. We find that those whom Allah has mentioned in this chapter have all been destroyed in a similar fashion. The destruction of the people of Noah was through drowning; likewise the destruction of the people of Pharaoh was also effected through drowning. The story of our Messenger Jonah was also related to the sea as he had been swallowed by a whale and had coursed throughout the sea.

Thus, all of the Messengers cited in this chapter have a connection with water unlike the rest of the Messengers. We know that water is both a source for life and for destruction. The One who gave life is capable of giving life by means of some element while also bringing about death by means of the same element. It would seem that Allah *Glorified is He* is imparting us with the following piece of wisdom that He has smitten by drowning in one instance, and He has saved from drowning in another instance. Thus, divine omnipotence is the theme that dominates this chapter; at the same time, Allah's Absolute Power also manifests itself in other domains and through other forms.

This chapter is known by the name Yunus (Jonah) because Allah *Glorified is He* had sent forth this Prophet to a community which was more than a hundred-thousand strong. This community is the only one which, in this context, Allah *Glorified is He* has spared from destruction. He caused the peoples of both Noah and Pharaoh to drown after denying and rejecting the Messengers. However, the people of Jonah saw the terrible fate that was on the verge of befalling them, attained faith, and Allah spared them from the suffering. Therefore, the chapter is named after the Messenger whose people had been saved from suffering for they had turned to Allah before they experienced suffering. In fact, they had witnessed only the early signs of an impending suffering, but that was dreadful enough that they moved to save themselves by attaining faith. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ ءَامَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَآ إِيمَٰنُهَآ إِلَّا قَوْمَ يُونُسَ لَمَّآ ءَامَنُوا۟
كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ عَذَابَ ٱلْخِزْىِ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَمَتَّعْنَٰهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٩٨﴾

If only a single town had believed and benefited from its belief! Only Jonah's people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and let them enjoy life for a time [98] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 98)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* shows us that there have been many communities which only attained faith at the moment when suffering was befalling them; however, such faith was of no avail to any one of them. The people of Jonah, on the other hand, proclaimed their faith before the coming of the terrible punishment and suffering. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* accepted their faith, for He is not unjust towards His servants. He who reaches the very brink and proclaims his faith when the suffering is at hand, repentance will not be accepted from such a person; while for he who senses the early sings of suffering and proclaims his faith at that moment, Allah *Glorified is He* will accept his repentance.

When you hear the word *lawla*, know that it is synonymous with the word *lawma*. If the word *lawla* is used with a nominal sentence, its function is different than using it with a verbal sentence. When it is used within a nominal sentence, such as in *lawla zayd 'indak la'tatytuk* (was there not that Zayd is at your place, I would have come to you.) The term *lawla* here denotes the reason for not coming, which is the presence of Zayd. However, when it is used with a verbal sentence, it functions as a term of exhortation and forceful persuasion. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'why should not then a company from every party from among them go forth that they may apply themselves to obtain understanding in religion.' (*at-Tawba:* 122) It means that there was supposed to be, from every group, a few who would seclude themselves to study the religious matters.

In the verse we are studying, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'wherefore was there not a town which should believe' (*Yunus:* 98). In other words, if there was a community who attained faith before the suffering befell them, We would spare it like We have spared the people of Jonah *peace be upon him*. Thus, the people of Jonah are the exception since they had attained faith before the suffering had befallen them. There is another verse related to this story wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says: But had it not been that he was of those who glorify [Us], He would certainly have tarried in its belly to the day when they are raised.' (*as-Saffat:* 143-144) It means that it was Jonah's prayers that saved him from remaining in the belly of the whale until the Day of Resurrection.

Allah *Glorified is He* points out the exception that was made with respect to the people of Jonah. This means that when the people of Jonah had believed before the suffering befell them, it had benefited them. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says that He removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life and gave them enjoyment for a time.

Now, we know that the word *qarya* means a furnished place whose population resides therein and where, if a visitor were to visit them, he would be offered *qirya,* which is a meal.

There are those who use the word *balad* to describe homelands with a large population who always have plentiful food at hand. Whereas those homelands with small populations often have meagre food reserves which are enough to feed themselves and a one-time visitor. Mecca is called *um al-Qura* (the mother of all villages) as the people of all of the other cities visit it. The Prophet has spoken about the town of the people of Jonah *peace be upon him* Nineveh, in the story of his travels to At-Ta'if. The latter is the town of the virtuous servant Jonah *peace be upon him* who was the son of Matta. The town is located in modern day Iraq near the city of Mosul. It is Jonah *peace be upon him* regarding whom Allah has said: 'And Yunus, when he went away in wrath.' (*al-Anbiya':* 87)

The phrase 'in anger' is different from the word 'angry', for the latter refers to one who gets angry without someone provoking him whereas the former refers to one who has been angered by someone. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And [mention] the man of the fish, when he went off in anger and thought that we would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darkness, "There is no deity except you; exalted are you. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers."' (*al-Anbiya':* 87)

Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* has been called 'man of the fish' because his name is connected with the whale that swallowed him. We all know the story when he exhorted his people to faith and they rejected him at first. A Messenger always comes forth to reform a society's corrupt lifestyle. The Messenger is then persecuted by those who lead such degenerate lives because they want to hold on to the power that allows them to steal, embezzle, and satiate the desires of the lower self. Thus, when they acted in such manner with Jonah *peace be upon him* he became angry and left. In other words, they caused him to be angry.

After Jonah *peace be upon him* became angry and left, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and thought that we would not decree [anything] upon him.' Meaning, he believed that the True Lord *Glorified is He* would not restrict his movement in Allah's vast earth. He thought that Allah would assign him to some place other than the city—of a hundred-thousand and more—to where Allah *Glorified is He* had originally sent him. He was supposed to withstand the malice which they had directed at him. However, Jonah's wish to move elsewhere indicated that the resistance that was put against his message was strong. Indeed, it was cause for anger, and it filled his heart with pain and weariness. He ought to have braced himself for the inevitable hardships of his mission. Nineveh is the city that Jonah *peace be upon him* was sent to. This is the city that was mentioned in the conversation between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Christian young man ‘Addas, whom he had met during his return from At-Ta’if.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had travelled to At-Ta’if to ask its people for their assistance. This was after he had been persecuted by his people in Mecca and had not found anyone who would support his cause. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sat near the wall of a farm. When the owners of the farm— ‘Utaba and Shayba sons of Rabi‘a—saw him and realized what torment he had endured at the hands of the mob, they were moved to compassion. They summoned a Christian servant of theirs named ‘Addas and told him: ‘Take some of these grapes, place them on this tray, take it to that man and offer it to him.’ Thereupon, ‘Addas did what he was told, and when he had placed the grapes in the hand of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he said to him: ‘Eat.’ When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* picked up the grapes, He said: ‘In the Name of Allah,’ and then he started to eat. ‘Addas looked at him and said: ‘These are words which the inhabitants of this land do not generally use.’ Then, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: ‘Where do you come from ‘Addas, and what is your religion?’ Addas said: ‘I am a Christian, and I hail from the people of Nineveh.’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘You belong to the city of the righteous Jonah, son of Matta.’ ‘Addas said: ‘What do you know about Jonah, son of Matta?’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘He is my brother. He was a Prophet and so am I.’ ‘Addas paid homage to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and kissed his head, hands and feet. When the two owners of the farm inquired ‘Addas about the matter, he said to them: ‘This man informed me of that which only a Prophet would know.’

Now, we know that the righteous servant—Jonah *peace be upon him* —was distressed, sad and angry about his people’s lack of responsiveness to his message of faith. However, when they saw the signs of a gathering storm on the horizon, and Allah *Glorified is He* caused them to believe that this storm was the beginning of Allah's punishment for them, they hastened to the wise men of the community, whereupon the latter informed them that these were the initial signs of impending suffering. The elders told them: 'You must please Jonah *peace be upon him* for he has been sent by Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, you should believe in his message so that he may [pray to Allah to] spare you from the coming affliction.'

Then, the people quickly proclaimed their faith in the All-Living Who never dies, He Who Lives when all else is dead—The All-Sustaining. The people went to their Messenger to seek his pleasure. After he was pleased with them, they began to look back at all the past injustices they had committed, to the point that one man among them began tearing apart the walls of his house because it contained a brick which he had stolen from his neighbour. Allah *Glorified is He* thereby spared them from the punishment. He *Glorified is He* hereby says: 'We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life and gave them enjoyment for a time.' (*Yunus:* 98) One related incident with the story of Jonah *peace be upon him* along with his anger incident is his encounter with the whale; after he had become angry and taken his leave of his people, he boarded a ship.

Once at sea, the ship was violently assailed by waves, and it appeared that its passengers were destined to drown. Thereupon, they threw their cargo overboard to lighten the ship's load. However, the turbulence continued unabated; so, they decided to hold a lottery whereby whosoever was selected would be thrown overboard. Lo and behold, the Prophet of Allah, Jonah *peace be upon him* was chosen. Similarly, when we ride an elevator, there is a red light which flashes to warn us that the machine is overloaded beyond capacity and that it will not operate. When this happens, one or two people need to step out so that only the allowable number of people remains in the elevator. Usually, it is the well-mannered people who volunteer to step out, because they want to make things easier for other people. It was a similar situation on the ship that Jonah *peace be upon him* had boarded. The vessel was on the verge of sinking, so they drew the lottery and Jonah *peace be upon him* was picked to jump overboard. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And then they cast lots, and he was the one who lost.' (*as-Saffat:* 141) Thus, Jonah *peace be upon him* threw himself into the sea, whereupon he was swallowed by the whale.

Regarding Jonah's stay inside the belly of the whale, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And had he not been of those who exalt Allah, He would have remained inside its belly until the Day they are resurrected.' (*as-Saffat:* 143-144) Here, in the verse which we a presently examining, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life.' In the life of this world, the 'suffering of disgrace' can be seen manifested in the person who is dishonest and arrogant with other people. Then, the people see him in a state of ignominy and abasement. Such is the 'suffering of disgrace' in the life of this world, and surely, the suffering in the life of the Hereafter is even more disgraceful and insurmountable.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse with His words: 'and gave them enjoyment for a time.' That is, they were spared from the suffering for the remainder of their lives and until they died a natural death.

Thereafter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ شَآءَ رَبُّكَ لَءَامَنَ مَن فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ جَمِيعًا ۚ
أَفَأَنتَ تُكْرِهُ ٱلنَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا۟ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٩﴾

Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed. So can you [Prophet] compel people to believe? [99] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 99)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains that if a battle arises between a Prophet sent forth (from heaven) backed with his followers against those who disbelieved in him, the True Lord *Glorified is He* must, in the end, bring down suffering upon those who disbelieved.

Beware not to think the True Lord *Glorified is He* has any need for the acts of worship that His servants perform; Allah's Existence is pre-eternal in nature, and He possesses all the attributes of Perfection/Completeness even before He created the universe. Out of His attribute of Perfection, He brought His creation into existence. His Omnipotence is an innate feature of His

Essence. He was the Creator before He created the universe, just as He was the All-Sustainer before He created either sustenance or the creatures that require sustentation. The created universe is a manifestation of His Attributes of Perfection/Completeness. It is He Who brought all things into existence.

That is why His Attributes are called the Attributes of Essence, for their existence antedates the existence of the created things that depend upon them. Thus, when you say: The ‘Ever-Living’ and the ‘One Who grants life’, this does not mean that Allah *Glorified is He* becomes characterized as ‘One Who grants life’ only after those to whom He grants life come to exist. Rather, He is the ‘One Who grants life’ and it is by virtue of this very attribute that He has brought creatures to life. Consider for example—and Allah knows best, being that He is far above the possibility of comparison—the photographer or the painter who has created a beautiful piece of art. This is a case where we are witnessing the manifested effects of the art which the artist (spent so many years) mastering. Thus, the painting or the photo is merely the manifestation of the artist’s innate talent. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* possesses all of the Attributes of Perfection even before He created the universe. Beware not to think that something new has been added to Allah’s Essence. There is nothing that is ever added unto what the True Lord *Glorified is He* already possesses. At the same time, Allah *Glorified is He* in no way derives benefit from His creatures; rather, it is He Who benefits them.

We know that faith is something that is required of us as human beings—human beings are the creatures that are visible. Faith is also required of another kind of creature which Allah *Glorified is He* and has informed us of, namely, the jinn.

As for the rest of the cosmos, it glorifies Allah forever. The universe is composed of numerous worlds which have no end, and unto each there is an order which it follows unswervingly. If Allah wanted to incorporate the two special beings—human beings and jinn—into the realm of subjugated creatures (which have no freewill), such a task would not be beyond His reach.

Doing so, however, would indeed reaffirm His Omnipotence, but it would not prove that His creatures love Him. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given human beings freewill, so that they may choose to either believe or disbelieve. If you turn to Him with a believing heart, this would prove that He is loved. Faith of this kind is different from the faith of the coerced. What is asked of both human beings and the jinn is the faith that has sprouted from the soil of their freewill. As for the kind of faith that is forced and compelled—this is demonstrated by everything else that exists in the universe: all are believers, and all proclaim His Glory. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise.' (*al-Isra': 44*)

There is nothing symbolic about the statement put forth in the above verse—these creatures' extolment (of their Creator) is real. As Allah says: 'but you do not understand their [way of] exalting.' (*al-Isra':* 44) If Allah *Glorified is He* were to teach you their languages, you would come to know of the extolment of such creatures. To be sure, He had taught Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* the language of the birds. Solomon *peace be upon him* had also heard an ant saying: 'O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not.' (*an-Naml:* 18) In addition, the hoopoe bird communicated to Solomon *peace be upon him* the news which he had obtained regarding Bilqis—the Queen of Sheba: 'I found her and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds pleasing to them and averted them from [His] way, so they are not guided.' (*an-Naml:* 24)

Thus, everything in the universe extols the Glory of Allah *Glorified is He*. All things conform to (their essential nature as dictated by Allah)—all except for the two special beings: human beings and the jinn. They both are endowed with a mind, and both have the freedom to choose between alternatives. It is a testament to the Greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* that He has endowed man with freewill—such that the believer turns to Allah voluntarily. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* so wished, He could compel all human beings to have faith. I say this so that nobody should ever ask: what is the need for creating the creation, sending messengers to them, the denial of some of them, and eventually damning those deniers? That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?' (*Yunus:* 99) Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has created man and has put all of the other creatures at man's service. At the same time, Allah did not force faith upon human beings, rather, as He *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad: ‘Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was loyal to his people and loved them very much. Having tasted the sweetness of faith himself, he was sad they did not. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds him that his mission is to merely convey the Message. He should not be overly saddened (by their reaction to the Message). The True Lord *Glorified is He* bestowed upon human beings the freedom to choose. Allah has also put the universe at the service of human beings. There are some men who believe, and there are others who disbelieve. There are believers who at times obey Allah but at other times disobey Him. This has all been willed by the True Lord—so that the universe maintains balance. Every virtuous quality is all the more accentuated if there are people who would violate it. This is what Allah has willed for human beings; hence, do not be saddened, O Messenger of Allah—for it is all part of the True Lord’s Will. If someone were to become angry because other people refuse to acknowledge his beautiful attributes, we would tell him: the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the Universe, and He is the All-Sustainer. They may have disbelieved in Him, digressed from the straight path and set up associates besides Him—but did they take on the attributes of Allah? That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?’ What Allah wants is faith that stems from love and man’s freewill. Thereafter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَن تُؤْمِنَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَيَجْعَلُ
ٱلرِّجْسَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ١٠٠

No soul can believe except by God’s will, and He brings disgrace on those who do not use their reason [100]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 100)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* shows us that none shall attain faith except by His leave. Attaining faith means that your faith must stem from the primordial and inalienable essence of the human soul. Such a faith should result from your contemplation of the heavens with its constellations, of the earth with its passes, of the surging seas and of the howling winds—all point to the existence of the Creator *Glorified is He*. However, has Allah left human beings (to search for the truth merely by means of) their original disposition? No, Allah *Glorified is He* has sent the messengers so that they remind them of the signs that exist in the universe hoping for the return of the negligent. Allah *Glorified is He* does not wish to judge people while they are in a state of forgetfulness. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'That is because your Lord would not destroy the cities for wrongdoing while their people were unaware.' (*al-An'am:* 131) This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* alerts them to that fact that there are things which they need to be reminded of. It is as if the True Lord were telling us: beware not to think that a person can leave My dominion except with My permission. By creating him and endowing him with freewill, I have allowed him to either disbelieve or believe, to obey, or to disobey. The reason for all of this is that—by voluntarily submitting himself to me— man will prove my attribute as One Who is worthy of being loved. That is why nobody attains faith except by Allah's leave, neither does anyone disbelieve except by His leave. Allah has created man and endowed him with freewill, and He knows what kind of person each man shall be: the disbeliever was not forced to disbelieve, nor was the believer forced by Allah *Glorified is He* to believe.

When a Messenger comes forth to exhort people to faith, man remembers the faith that is part of his original disposition. He says: 'This Messenger has come forth with such a doctrine so that he might rectify my life affairs. I must, therefore, give him my full attention.' Once the servant turns to Allah, the Lord *Glorified is He* allows him to enter into the realm of faith. There are some servants among us who go to see another servant who enjoys power and prestige. With Allah's help, the prestigious servant realizes the reason why the other servant has come to see him, he tells his aids: do not let him in. He says this because Allah *Glorified is He* gave him a glimpse of what is in the other servant's heart: malevolence, jealousy, and hypocrisy. However, if some other servant knocks on his door, he will tell his aides to let him in and welcome him, because he is aware of the love, sincerity and friendship that is in his heart. Now, if this can happen between servants—who are, as human beings, at the mercy of their own passions and desires—then what can possibly happen when it comes to the True Lord *Glorified is He*?

Allah Himself says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Whosoever makes mention of Me within himself, I shall make mention of him in an even better assembly.' How wonderful is it when a servant attains faith in Allah while being free of any other god save Allah? Thus, turn to Allah and invoke His Name, for if you make mention of Allah within yourself, Allah will make mention of you within Himself, and if you make mention of Allah in an assembly, Allah will make mention of you in an even greater and better assembly. The assembly in which you will make mention of Allah is predisposed to error, but when Allah *Glorified is He* makes mention of you, He will do so in an assembly that is pure. In the same Hadith (1), the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'If He draws near to me an arm's length, I draw near to Him by a fathom's length.' A fathom's length is longer than an arm's length. Allah also says: 'If he comes to me walking, I go to him at speed.' Since walking might tire the servant, the True Lord goes to him at speed. In spite of His Great Majesty, when the Lord witnesses that a servant has purified his heart from all animosity towards Him, He opens the doors of His Love for His servant. Allah makes all of his creatures love the servant. Allah also causes the servant to engage upon all activities with sincerity and to conclude all difficult activities with sincerity. The True Lord Himself says: 'And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness.' (*Muhammad:* 17)

We notice that the verse under study, the True Lord *Glorified is He* emphasises the fact that, if He so wished, all the inhabitants of the earth would attain faith, even Satan —who contended with Allah—could attain faith if the True Lord *Glorified is He* so wished. The True Lord *Glorified is He* emphasises this point so as to affirm that He is in full control of all of His creation—none can ever act contrary to His Will.

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith; it is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7405) and by Muslim (2675). The full Hadith is as follows: 'I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of me to himself, I make mention of him to myself; and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an even greater assembly. If he draws near to me by an arm's length, I draw near to him by a fathom's length. If he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.'*

In the same verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?' The True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to alert Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and all of the believers to the fact that: 'There shall be no coercion in religion.' (*al-Baqara:* 256) To be sure, the requirements of faith are not limited to only those outward requirements, which are obvious. There are other requirements which are not apparent. Suppose you succeed in coercing someone outwardly, do you think you could force him inwardly to have a change of heart? What the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants is the sincere faith of the heart—not the faith (that is limited to) the outward conformity (with religious law). Thus, coercion is inappropriate when it comes to matters of faith. However, one must not misapply this principle, for you might find a Muslim who does not pray, and so his friend reprimands him. He then retorts: 'There shall be no coercion in matters of faith.' This is an inappropriate application of the principle, and it is a case of false reasoning.

Coercion in matters of faith is forbidden when it comes to the fundamental question of creed. However, if one proclaims to be a Muslim, and if he testifies that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah—such a proclamation binds him to all the decrees contained in Islamic law. He, thereby, becomes judged according to Islamic principles. If he violates any of the rules of Islamic law, he must be held accountable. The principle—that there shall be no coercion in matters of faith—applies to the fundamental choice that one has when it comes to choosing a creed. You are free to either embrace Islam or not. However, once you do embrace Islam, you become bound to the decrees of Islamic law—for you have come to believe in the religion of Islam and will, henceforth, be judged according to the principles of Islamic law. Therefore, abide by the legal limits of Islamic law and do not violate them. For example, if you steal, your hand shall be cut off; if you commit fornication, you will be stoned or whipped; if you drink alcohol, you will be whipped; for you have accepted the legal precepts of Islamic law the *(Sharia)*.

Therefore, the principle that 'There shall be no coercion in religion,' means that it is forbidden to coerce someone when it comes to the fundamental question of creed. However, once you attain faith, you are obligated to abide by the stipulations of the faith, and you are to be punished if you violate the legal limits. Furthermore, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘The example of the person abiding by Allah’s orders and restrictions in comparison to those who violate them is like the example of those persons who drew lots for their seats on a boat. Some of them were seated in the upper deck while others in the lower deck; when the latter needed water, they had to go up to bring water. Seeing that this troubled the others, they said: ‘Let us make a hole in our section of the ship (and get water), saving those above us from the trouble we might cause them. So, if the people in the upper part left the others do what they had suggested, all the people of the ship would be drowned, but if they prevented them, both parties would be safe.’(1)

Thus, abiding by the provisions of faith is obligatory upon anyone who embraces the faith freely. If he violates any of the rules, he is to be punished. There are provisions that are even more severe than this, such as the punishment that is incumbent upon the person who abandons Islam, which is death (2). A person might say that such a punishment is rather barbaric. Our answer to him is that the person who has adopted a faith has known from the outset that, if he embraces the faith and then abandons it, he shall be killed. That is why he must not enter Islam except if he is in a state of absolute certainty. This stipulation serves to protect the religion. It is a credit to the religion and should not be held against the religion. You, therefore, embrace the faith only when you are certain of your ability to abide by its directives and keep your own desires in check. You also know that if you embrace the faith and thereafter abandon it, you will be killed. The result is that the decision to embrace the faith becomes a difficult (and serious) one. In principle, no one will embrace the religion except if they have a deep spiritual conviction. Such a stipulation (against abandoning the faith) is a credit to the religion and should not be held against it.

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(1) *This Hadith has been related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2493), by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/268) and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2173). He qualifies this Hadith as being hasan-Sahih.*

(2) *It is narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas may* Allah *be pleased with him that the Messenger of* Allah *said: ‘If a person switches religions, kill him.’ – Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6922), by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/217, 282, 283, 323) and by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2535). The Messenger of* Allah *peace and blessings be upon him said in another Hadith, narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ud: ‘It is not right to take the life of any Muslim who testifies that there is no god but* Allah *and that I am The Messenger of* Allah *except for these three [types]: he who takes another’s life (for reasons other than eye-for-an-eye retribution), he who commits adultery and he who abandons his faith and leaves the group.’ – Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6878) and by Muslim (1676)*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And it is not for a soul to believe except by permission of Allah, and He will place ruin upon those who will not use reason.'

The word 'ruin' means punishment and sin. The True Lord *Glorified is He* lays it upon those who do not use their reason, for if the concept of religion is ever presented to a mind free of desires, there can be no other outcome but that the mind accepts faith. That is why when world-class intellectuals study religion, they turn towards Islam because it is the religion that quenches people's spiritual thirst. As for those who treat religion as something bequeathed to them by their parents, they end up losing their spiritual bearings. Those world-class intellectuals who embraced Islam did not do so because they witnessed the conduct of Muslims; in our day and age, the conduct of many of those who are nominally attributed to Islam is far removed from the ideals of the religion. Nevertheless, such world-class intellectuals embraced Islam and studied the principles of Islam. In doing so, they distinguished between the principles of the religion and the adherents of the religion. Maintaining this distinction represents a kind of justice on the intellectual plane, for when the religion declares a particular act to be a crime, the decree does mean that the religion is sanctioning such an act. The proof of this is that the specified punishment is directly proportionate to the severity of the crime. To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '[As for] the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 38) This injunction implies the possibility that such a crime as stealing should be committed. This is also the case for the punishment pertaining to fornication and other wrongdoings to which the True Lord *Glorified is He* has specified punishments commensurate with the damage they cause to the soul and to society at large. Therefore, if you see a Muslim stealing, remember the punishment that Islam prescribes for the thief. If you see a Muslim committing fornication, remember the punishment that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has prescribed for the fornicator. Such is the case when it comes to all crimes. When those great intellectuals embrace Islam, they study the principles of the religion while disregarding the conduct of contemporary Muslims. The latter have strayed far from the principles of the true religion (of Islam).

Witness the French thinker *René Guénon* who said: 'Praise be to Allah who guided me to Islam before I had become acquainted with Muslims, for if I had come to know Muslims before my embracing of Islam, I would have likely suffered from such cognitive dissonance as to cause me to hesitate about embracing such a lofty religion.' Thus, the cogitation of the brilliant mind will always lead the person to Islam. Clear-headedness reflects that primordial state in which Allah created human beings, and Islam will only serve to grow the mind. Through Islam, the mind will soar to even loftier heights. Reason is the locus where man realizes his religious vocation and accepts his religious duties.

Sin and suffering is what befalls those who do not use their reason. To use the mind in a conscientious and virtuous way precludes the possibility of committing sin or being punished, for Allah *Glorified is He* will permit them to approach their religious duties in a way that they will use their reason. If someone were to ask me: What is the reason? What is the domain of religious duties?

Therefore, reason was given to us by Allah *Glorified is He* so that it might prevent us from seeking to fulfil our desires in an impulsive, wild manner; Allah *Glorified is He* has created the human soul, and He knows that the soul is inclined towards the immediate gratification of desires. Allah *Glorified is He* wants human beings to curb those impulses with the help of reason. When a person thinks about satisfying a particular desire, his mind will whisper to him: you might enjoy this particular pleasure momentarily; you might even have to steal it from someone else—that is, someone else's sacred property or someone else's wealth—however, would you ever let someone satisfy a particular desire of his at your expense? Therefore, you must realize that Allah *Glorified is He* has endowed you with reason so that it hinders your desires and prevents you from satisfying your desires at someone's expense—the consequences of acting on such impulses are always detrimental.

It would be a mistake to think that, in the name of freedom, the reason's function is to open the door to unbridled freedom. To anyone who is of this opinion, we say that the mind represents the centre which handles all issues related to religious duties. It is the mind which notifies you of your responsibilities when it comes to all manners of activities. It is by virtue of the True Lord's Justice that He has not charged the insane person with religious duties because his judgment of things and actions is unnatural since he lacks the faculty of discernment.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* has not placed any religious duties upon the person who has not yet reached the age of puberty, because he has not fully developed his mental faculties yet, nor does he have the ability to reproduce. Previously, we have given the parable of the date. We do not consider a date to be ripe and palatable unless the seed that it contains is able to produce a new tree if planted in the ground. For example, if you cut open a watermelon and find its seeds to be white, you would not eat it. You will make sure to eat only those watermelons whose seeds have turned black, for that is a sign of the watermelon's ripeness. If you were to take the black seeds and plant them, a new watermelon plant would grow. Therefore, when a person reaches maturity, his mind becomes able to weigh various courses of action before proceeding with any of them. The religious duties are required of the person who is mature, in full possession of his mental faculties. They are not required of one who is compelled by some outside force to do what he knows is wrong.

When a person has not yet reached the age of puberty, Allah does not require him to perform any religious obligations. However, the person's family may do so, so as to prepare him for a life of religious obedience. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us: 'Order your children to pray beginning from the age of seven, and punish them if they did not do so beginning from the age of ten, and separate their sleeping places.'(1) In this case, we find that the one who is giving orders is the father—and not Allah. Also, the one who doles out punishment is the father—and not Allah. Once the child reaches the age of puberty, Allah is the one who charges him with his religious duties. However, if someone were to use overwhelming force and compel him to commit a sin, such as if someone held up a gun to him and said: 'if you did not drink this alcohol, I will open fire'—in this case, the person is no longer bound by religious responsibility. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a Hadith: 'Allah forgives the members of my community if they fall into error or forgetfulness or if they are compelled against their will.'(1)

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/187) and by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (490) – The Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr Ibn Al-'As*

Reason is the centre that deals with religious obligations. Its function is to choose between alternatives in all areas of life. When it comes to food, for example, there are those who prefer to sprinkle hot sauce over their food because it stimulates the appetite. After the person finishes his meal, we might find him screaming from heartburn and asking for antacids. In fact, the latter might not help to alleviate his pain: the protective layer of mucus on the inner walls of his stomach might already be damaged. Thus, the hot sauce that he used for one meal might prevent him from enjoying many meals to come. That is why we find his mind telling him: be wary of this kind of appetizing sauce, because it is detrimental to your health. We realize that the reason is the faculty which notifies the person of the consequences of his actions. It is also what prompts a person to deliberate before acting and to apply oneself during the execution of tasks, so that the results of the work might be consistently useful to him and to others. It is not reason's function to make error feel pleasurable.

In short, we realize that reason recognises and discerns the right course of action in all situations. To be sure, reason causes a person to incline towards faith even during the pre-pubescent stage. When a human being uses his reason to contemplate this universe, he will inevitably have to recognise the beauty of the Creator's work.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Related by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2040), Ad-Daraqutni in his Sunnan (4/170) and by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (2/198) – He revised it according to the criteria of the two Sheikhs. The Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas; however, Ibn Majah's chain of narrators (isnad) is discontinued.*

قُلِ ٱنظُرُوا۟ مَاذَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَمَا تُغْنِى ٱلْءَايَٰتُ وَٱلنُّذُرُ عَن قَوْمٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

Say, ‘Look at what is in the heavens and on the earth.’
But what use are signs and warnings to people who will
not believe? [101] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 101)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to us about the corporeal universe which is visible to you. Allah *Glorified is He* is not speaking about the subtle universe which is invisible to you. It is as though you were convinced of the corporeal universe, and said: ‘Behind this universe, there is an All-Capable, All-Powerful, Divine Creator,’ and you come to believe in Him. At this point, portions of knowledge of the unseen will descend upon you like a soft breeze, and you will reach the subtle realm, because you have discovered within yourself the promise that you owe yourself, and you declared your faith in the Creator, and you beheld the beauty of His work in the sky and the stars, and you were amazed by the precision of the stars’ orbital system.

You see the precise timing of the rising of the sun and the moon. You see the precise timing of the partial and total eclipses. You are astounded at the precision of the Creator *Glorified is He*. Furthermore, you will not find the planets passing by each other in tight spaces so that the moon or the earth is ever delayed, and no planet will ever come to a halt because it ran out of fuel. Allah says: ‘It is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming.’ (*Ya Sin:* 40) In our daily lives, when we witness precise craftsmanship—in things not nearly, not in the slightest, as magnificent as the sky, the sun or the moon—we always honour the craftsman in question. Humanity has honoured the creator of the telegraph and the creator of the television set—should not we also honour the Creator *Glorified is He* of the universe? It is enough that we know that the sun is eight light-minutes away from earth—one light-second is equivalent to three-hundred-thousand kilometres. That is the one and only sun which you see—not the thousands of other suns in the other galaxies. Every galaxy contains millions of solar systems. It is enough for you to know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has sworn by the sun. Also, Allah *Glorified is He* has said with respect to the star Sirius: ‘And that it is He who is the Lord of Sirius.’ (*an-Najm:* 49) For the star Sirius is bigger than the sun.

Now, when you contemplate the sky and the earth, you will find that the earth consists of high mountains. When you travel through these mountains, you will be amazed at their impeccable formation and their remarkable cohesion. Inside these mountains, you will find stones and minerals at various depths. You might find the surface of the mountains covered with fertile elements spread out in a crisp manner. When the rain falls upon it, it goes alongside it into the earth, because they are merely shreds that resemble iron fillings; thus, they percolate into the soil which has been cracked open by the heat of the sun. One evident example of this is all the silt which the river Nile used to carry to the delta region during the floods. During this time of annual flooding—before the construction of the High Dam—the water of the Nile used to resemble *Tahini* due to the high levels of silt that it contained. It is within this type of silt that one finds the rich, fertile elements that provide us with sustenance. If all mountains were composed of such crisp materials, the rain would erode them away all at once and, thereby, add half a metre depth to the surface of the earth. Fertile soil would disappear from the face of the earth in a few years. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to make the mountains firm. He created the mountains in such way that only their surfaces are delicate; then, every year, when the rains come, they carry some of the fertile silt to lower ground.

Anyone who studies Allah’s creative work in the field of life maintenance will find that the mountains are the storehouses of sustenance. To be sure, human beings require iron if they are to build the tools and machines that they need. Whether it is machines to plough the earth or other tools that help make life easier, you will find that iron (which goes in to their manufacture) is stored in the mountains. We also find other minerals like phosphate, manganese, marble, turquoise, etc., as well as various gases. Therefore, hidden within mountains is sustenance, the means of acquiring sustenance or the means of acquiring luxuries over and above basic sustenance.

Therefore, when rain falls on the sides of mountains, it takes the fertile topsoil on the mountain surfaces and leaves the remaining materials as resources for humankind to exploit. In Africa, for example, there are mines for coal and diamonds. In other countries, you will find agar wood which consists of the roots of trees. If you were to cut up the world as pieces from the circumference of the earth to its centre, you will find the earth to be fertile whether the surface happens to be desert, water, or mountain—all sections are equal to each other in the measure of their fertility.

The nature of sustenance might vary from region to region. If you counted, from the beginning of creation how much fertile silt from the mountains the rain has transported to the river Nile in Africa; and if you count how much crude oil Allah has placed in the deserts of the Arab Emirates, for example, you will find that the bounty of the Nile is equal to the bounty of the oil—even if oil has only been discovered recently.

Every amount of sustenance is accounted for from the storehouses. Furthermore, every part of sustenance has a set date for when it will be discovered. There is a set date for the discovery of coal, a set date for the discovery of oil—all of this according to a precise system laid down by Allah, the Infinitely-Wise, the Most Exalted.

Since the True Lord *Glorified is He* has used the expression: ‘use their reason?’ in reference to contemplating the heavens and the earth, this signifies an exhortation to reflect upon the wonders of the heavens and the earth. Among these wonders is the fact that the towering mountains have summits and bases, just like the pyramids. You will also find rivers existing in a manner contrary to that of the mountains because rivers run between two mountains. Also, you will find the riverhead at its bottom and the summit of the mountain at its top. When rain falls, it passes by the narrow head of the mountain; then it flows down to the bottom of the narrow river. The more rainfalls, the more sediment from the face of the mountain is eroded; this sediment fills the area of the wide river. The more people there are, the more Allah *Glorified is He* increases the volume of sustenance. You can find an example of this in the silt coming from the sources of the Nile. It flows down the Nile and arrives at the Nile Delta. Formerly, the delta region used to be a collection of salty swamps. The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed it to become a fertile land. When we reflect upon this fact, we realize that everything in the universe has been purposefully brought into existence by the True Lord *Glorified is He*. What destroys our wellbeing on earth is that we do not work proactively towards creating more sustenance and wealth; rather, we wait until the earth becomes overcrowded with all its inhabitants. Only then do we start thinking about acquiring more arable land, whereas we should have been doing this before the crisis began.

The more rainfalls upon the mountains, the more topsoil erodes away bringing hidden minerals to light. This is so that man might discover them and, thereafter, exploit them creatively. When the believer sees this, his faith increases; and as the believer continues to abide by the religious directives which are incumbent upon him, he will find the light of faith dawning in his heart.

Let every Muslim try the following experiment. For one week, let him try to live by the light of Allah's religion. Then, let him evaluate himself and note the difference between the state of his soul before and after. He will find that, during this week that he prayed his prayers on time, he applied himself diligently at work to gain lawful income; he will also find that he only spends his money on what is lawful. Evaluate yourself sincerely at the end of this week, and you will find that you have undergone a wonderful, healing transformation. You will find that the light of faith has begun to create a harmonious synergy between you and the universe in terms of the simplest of details as well as in more profound ways. For example, you might find a man—from among those who, from years of practicing Allah's religion, have been blessed with the virtue of 'limpidity'—if his wife asks him: what shall we cook today? He might say to her: 'let us make do with yesterday's leftovers.' Then a family member from the countryside pays him a surprise visit. The latter comes bearing food and drink. Such a man has reached such a degree of 'limpidity' that he has become completely integrated with the cosmos—Allah's bounty reaches him from an astounding variety of sources. This quality of 'limpidity' can also be found in the most complex of matters. Did Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* not say: 'Indeed, I find the smell of Joseph'? (*Yusuf:* 94)

The brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* were still on their way back from Egypt to meet their father. They had Joseph's shirt, which the latter had instructed them to place over the face of his father so that he might regain his sight. Jacob *peace be upon him* felt the breath of his son in the air because Jacob *peace be upon him* had lived in harmony with the universe. There was no tension in his relationship with the rest of the universe. One patent example of this is the joy expressed by the universe when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born into the world. The universe rejoiced at his coming because the universe is as (a single organism) submitted to its Lord *Glorified is He* and full of praise for Him. Thus, when someone comes forth, exhorting people to recognise Allah's Uniqueness, the universe can only rejoice. Conversely, the universe loathes and scorns the person who disobeys Allah—the two parties are full of hate towards each other. The universe rejoiced at the coming of the Messenger destined to be the recipient of a Divine Message that would re-establish a balance in man's relationship with the universe.

In the present verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Observe what is in the heavens and earth.' The entire universe is in front of them, so why did they not contemplate upon it? They might indeed be able to physically see, but they do not possess the ability to grasp the significance of things. They are like the person who lets words go in one ear and out the other. That is why Allah says: 'But of no avail will be signs or warners to a people who do not believe.' Thus, their lack of faith caused them to lose their insight and their ability to contemplate. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَهَلْ يَنتَظِرُونَ إِلَّا مِثْلَ أَيَّامِ ٱلَّذِينَ خَلَوْا۟ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ
قُلْ فَٱنتَظِرُوٓا۟ إِنِّى مَعَكُم مِّنَ ٱلْمُنتَظِرِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

What are they waiting for but the punishment that came to those before them? Say, 'Wait then, I am waiting too' [102]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 102)

These people who do not believe remain mired and lost in their wicked ways. It is as though they are waiting to relive the events that befell previous generations of unbelievers who came before them. The Messenger had come forth to them with clear evidence like all previous generations of deniers. Now we know that the 'day' is a unit for measuring the duration of time. The next unit is the 'week', then after the week, there is the 'month', and then the 'year'. As a person matures, he looks upon every day as a number of hours, hours as minutes and minutes as seconds. As the events (of human history) become more complex, the measurements which keep track of time become more precise. The day—as we have said—has been created by Allah as a unit of measurement of time. It consists of one day and one night.

Sometimes, however, the word day might be used to denote some significant event that occurred during that day. For example, we might say: day of Dhi qarad(1), or day of Hunayn(2) or day of Uhud. Thus, when the word *day* is used, it might be in reference to the significant event that occurred during that day. When we look at history, we find a book by the name of ‘The History of Arab Days’; in it, we find references to day of Bu‘ath(3), for example, or day of awtas(4). Each *day* represents a particular battle. Thus, the word *day (yawm)* represents duration of time. Yet, it can also refer to an event that took place on a particular day. For example, you might find a contemporary of yours who has lived through some crisis in the past. When he looks back on earlier times, he might say: ‘Prices were lower back then, and everything was readily available.’ Then someone else adds: ‘Those were the days.’ In other words: those were times of plenty. In short, the word *day* might refer to the event that took place during that time.

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘So do they wait except for like [what occurred in] the days of those who passed on before them?’ Among ‘those who passed on before them,’ we can cite the people of Noah *peace be upon him* whom Allah *Glorified is He* had caused to drown. We can also cite the people of the Pharaoh whom Allah *Glorified is He* had also caused to drown. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the blast [from the sky], and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned. And Allah would not have wronged them, but it was they who were wronging themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) They were aware of the events that occurred during that time; were they, then, waiting until times like these befall them? Of course, they ought not to have revelled in their state of disbelief; otherwise, they would incur upon themselves the same calamities that befell their disbelieving predecessors.

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(1) *Dhi qarad*: a place in the region of Najd which has water. It is located about a day away from the city of Medina.

(2) It occurred in the year 8 AH after the liberation of Mecca.

(3) *Yawm bu‘ath*: this was the day when the tribes of ’Aws and Khazraj battled each other. On that day, victory went to the tribe of ‘Aws over that of Khazraj.

(4) *Yawm ’awtas*: this is another name for the aforementioned *yawm Hunayn*. It occurred in the year 8 AH after the liberation of Mecca. The name *(’Awtas)* refers to a river in *Diyar Hawazin* where the battle of *Hunayn* took place.

In our own vernacular, there is a local expression which expresses the innate faith. You might hear a person saying: ‘There will come a day of reckoning, O you unjust one.’ In other words, the day when Allah *Glorified is He* takes revenge upon the unjust person will become famous, for the unjust person oppresses Allah’s creatures. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* will bring upon this person a momentous event wherein Allah *Glorified is He* will get the best of him and make him taste all of the injustice he wrought on people. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then wait; indeed, I am with you among those who wait.’ Allah’s words ‘then wait’ express a defiance, ‘indeed, I am with you among those who wait’ are a herald of good news, because the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* will await this day so that he can witness their punishment. For his part, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* will have achieved victory on that day.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ نُنَجِّى رُسُلَنَا وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نُنجِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

In the end We shall save Our messengers and the believers. We take it upon yourself to save the believers [103] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 103)

The True Lord has saved His Messengers and those who came to believe in them, so that they might remain on earth as beacons of truth and virtue. However, amid such beacons of truth and virtue, there must also remain certain elements of evil because were it not for the evil—which manifests itself in the calamitous events that befall people—mankind would not reach towards the good. As we always say: the pain that a patient suffers is actually a soldier fighting on the side of good health. Pain alerts a person to the fact that there is a deficiency which he must diagnose and cure with the help of a doctor. Now, pain is felt during the waking hours when a person is conscious. However, it recedes during the sleeping hours. Sleep is a natural painkiller. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then We will save our messengers and those who have believed. Thus, it is an obligation upon Us that We save the believers.’ These words affirm that the elements of good shall endure in this world.

The deeper a community falls into disbelief, the more Allah *Glorified is He* holds out opportunities for salvation. In any land where faith is undermined, believers are persecuted, and iniquity abounds. You will find people who are completely devoted to Allah *Glorified is He* and who are dedicated to understanding (and embodying) the virtues; when the evil and iniquity of the world becomes unbearable, the people head towards these devotees of Allah and ask them for their prayers. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has committed Himself to deliver the believers when He says: ‘It is an obligation upon Us that We save the believers.’ Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِن كُنتُمْ فِى شَكٍّ مِّن دِينِى فَلَآ أَعْبُدُ ٱلَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ
وَلَٰكِنْ أَعْبُدُ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى يَتَوَفَّىٰكُمْ ۖ وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

[Prophet] say, ‘People, even if you are in doubt about my religion, I do not worship those you worship other than God, but I worship God who will cause you to die, and I am commanded to be a believer’ [104] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 104)

The word *doubt* is when you consider two possibilities to be equally plausible. In this instance, the True Lord *Glorified is He* orders His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to present the issue of religion for the disbelievers so that they measure it against what they are currently want to worship. Then, the Prophet is ordered to let them make their decision in the matter. Thus, they are in a state of doubt: is this (new) religion true or false? If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has presented the issue of religion so that it might be judged, this means that the disbelievers are somewhat able to recognise the uniqueness of the new religion of Islam. In other words, when they experience occasional states of clarity, they can grasp its value. They are, therefore, in a state of doubt as to whether the religion revealed to Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is true, and whether the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers will be victorious or not.

When the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* presents the issue of Islam to them—leaving it up to them to decide—it demonstrates a confidence on his part that, if a person is left to make a judgement on the merits of the Islamic religion, the person cannot help but incline towards faith. The True Lord *Glorified is He* settles the issue of setting up false deities besides Him. Allah *Glorified is He* also orders the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: 'I do not worship those which you worship besides Allah.' (*Yunus:* 104)

In other words, it is impossible that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* should worship associates (beside Allah) while worshipping Allah at the same time; he only worships Allah: 'but I worship Allah.' Then, Allah *Glorified is He* puts forth the proof which can leave no doubt, the unassailable evidence, which is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* alone is worthy of being worshiped. It is He who 'causes your death.' There is nothing that can object to Allah when He causes them to die. There are two issues involved here: first, the issue of worship, as in when Allah says: 'I do not worship those which you worship besides Allah; but I worship Allah, who causes your death.'

These two issues can only be mentioned together: the issue of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* not worshiping any other deity besides Allah, and the issue of singling out Allah *Glorified is He* alone for worship. The dichotomy here is unequivocal in that there is a complete and unbridgeable chasm between the army of the true faith and the army of idolatry. As the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "O disbelievers, I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship. For you is your religion, and for me is my religion."' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-6) Those who say that chapter *al-Kafirun* contains repetition do not realize that such language serves to sever ties completely, so that the separation remains for all time. It is not a temporary severance of ties. This was the first instance of a severance of ties in Islam; and it was done in a definitive manner so that there was no opportunity for any compromise to be reached. Each camp remained entrenched in its position.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *an-Nasr*: ‘When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest. And you see the people entering into the religion of Allah in multitudes. Then exalt [Him] with praise of your Lord and ask forgiveness of Him. Indeed, He is ever accepting of repentance.’ (*an-Nasr:* 1-3) Here, the matter is confirmed, because after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* severs all ties with the camp of idolatry, Allah’s succour and victory came, whereupon the people abandoned the camp of idolatry and hurried over to join the camp of faith.

Therefore, it is they who ended up embracing the true faith; this is the first issue. ‘Then I do not worship those which you worship besides Allah; but I worship Allah.’ They used to worship idols carved out of rock. Now, if you look at the various species of creatures in existence, you will find that the noblest of them is man since he is the creature to whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made all other creatures subservient. Below mankind, the next creature on the echelon is the animal. Then, there comes the next rank that is lower than man and animal, namely, plants. Finally, the lowest rank of creation consists of inanimate things. Thus, they had taken to worshiping idols made from the lowest form of creation. This is the ultimate instance of failure.

The second issue is mentioned in the following words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘And I have been commanded to be of the believers.’ If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused to worship anything besides Allah *Glorified is He,* this meant that he worshiped Allah *Glorified is He* to the exclusion of all else. This does not represent a negative position, but rather the ultimate positive position. Worship requires a person to accept the path of Allah which is obedience to the directives contained therein as well as abide by the proscriptions. Thereafter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنۡ أَقِمۡ وَجۡهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفٗا وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

[Prophet], set your face towards religion as a man of pure faith. Do not be one of those who join partners with God[105]
(The Quran, *Yunus:* 105)

Since these words are addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it contains the same implications as the other instances when the

True Lord *Glorified is He* has addressed him—such instructions apply to every believer. If the believer worships Allah *Glorified is He*; this means that he accepts Allah's Judgments. That is why, in this instance, the order is stated that a believer's face should be directed towards Allah. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says; 'Direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth.' Thus, while worshipping, a person must turn neither right nor left. Since the believer worships Allah and none else, he should know that there is also a certain subtle polytheism. For example, a person might worship those who are stronger or more affluent than he is. These are but a few examples of the types of people which a believer might be tempted into worshipping or idolizing.

Previously, we have come to know the following words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and follows the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) *hanifa*? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend.' (*an-Nisa':* 125) The word *hanifa* means a state of disinclination from the path of error; in other words, a state of travelling on a straight path. Why is such an expression used? The answer is that religion does not come forth with a new Messenger and a new miracle unless corruption has become rampant. Only then is religion revealed from heaven with the objective of exhorting people to turn away—to disincline—from this corruption and perversion. If the people respond positively to such a message, this would amount to a recalibration of the behaviour of both individual and society.

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warns us from falling into the subtle forms of polytheism—even if we have formally proclaimed our faith in the One True God *Glorified is He*. The reference to this form of polytheism is found in the following words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'and never be of those who associate others with Allah.'

The secondary form of idolatry—which is less severe than the first— is creedal polytheism; it consists of believing that someone or something shares in Allah's Ability. For example, if you see that a doctor or a medicine has the ability of healing, then tell yourself: the doctor is merely the one who prescribes the medication; however, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who heals. To be sure, a doctor might make a mistake; he might prescribe a medication which ends up producing adverse side effects to the patient. The believer must not be seduced by any ‘secondary causes’. Let us put forth another example: some years ago, a country with vast agricultural lands announced that it had planted wheat over such a vast area that it would suffice the entire world population. The wheat spouted and matured—but then the crop was ruined by a storm. That country was then forced to import its wheat from other countries. The True Lord *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَلَا تَدْعُ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنفَعُكَ وَلَا يَضُرُّكَ ۖ فَإِن فَعَلْتَ فَإِنَّكَ إِذًا مِّنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١٠٦

Do not pray to any other [god] that can neither benefits nor harm you: if you do, you will be one of the evildoers [106] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 106)

When these idolaters took to worshipping idols and prayed to them instead of Allah, did the idols respond? When they worshiped these idols, did the latter say: ‘do this!’, or ‘did not do that’? The idols—which the idolaters had deified—had not put forth a doctrine. None of the idols were capable of either helping or harming their subjects. When a person experiences beneficial circumstances, idols know not how to prevent them, and when adversity befalls a person, idols know not how to repel it. Thus, anyone who prays to deities other than Allah *Glorified is He* is, in reality, offering prayers to that which can neither help nor harm. Whosoever does such a thing is, therefore, among the unjust, for injustice is to hand over rights to someone who is undeserving of them. Injustice can be committed at the highest levels and at the lower levels. Thereafter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن يَمْسَسْكَ ٱللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُۥٓ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ وَإِن يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا
رَآدَّ لِفَضْلِهِۦ ۚ يُصِيبُ بِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ١٠٧

If God inflicts harm on you, no one can remove it but Him, and if He intends good for you, no one can turn His bounty away; He grants His bounty to any of His servants He will. He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful [107] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 107)

These are words spoken from a position of absolute lordship, self-sufficiency unto itself and having no need for creation. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has brought human beings into existence. He has exhorted them to attain faith in Him and to love Him—because He loves them. He gives them and does not take away from them, for He has no need for His creation. In this verse, the reference to adversity features the use of the verb *touch*. In this instance, Allah's reference to adversity indicates that it is merely a light adversity. However, do not say: if the adversity is light, creatures will be able to bear it. Nobody is able to bear either misfortune or good fortune, whether this misfortune is light or burdensome, whether the good fortune is copious or sparse—save by Allah's permission.

None can remove those adversities save Allah *Glorified is He*. It is a testament to Allah's Greatness that, when He mentions the state of being touched with adversity, He also mentions the removal of it. This is truly a manifestation of His Mercy. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the counterpart of misfortune, which is the good. When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of the good that happens to a person, He emphasizes that none can turn it away. Now, in describing the coming of good fortune to a person, we find the word *intends*. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* causes it to come to whomsoever He wills of His servants. The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse with a beautiful conclusion. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.' We see a clearer picture of the manner in which Allah's bounty reaches His servants. When it comes to adversity, Allah mentions that it is light, and that He removes it. When it comes to good fortune, Allah indicates that He causes it to come to His servants, and He does not prevent it. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* is the All-Forgiving, the Dispenser of Mercy, for if He were to hold people—even the believers—accountable for what they do, He would surely punish them. However, He is the All-Forgiving, the Dispenser of Mercy; for His Mercy precedes His Wrath. That is why you find Him saying in the verses speaking of His blessings: 'And if you should count the blessing of Allah, you could not enumerate them.' (*an-Nahl:* 18)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* leaves the issue in doubt using 'if.' He does not say: 'Were you to count Allah's blessings,' because such a thing will never happen. The very act of starting to count makes it seem as if such thing is even possible. You might count money, and the principle might count the students in his school. However, nobody can count or compute the total number of grains of sand, for example. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if you should count the blessing of Allah, you could not enumerate them.’ This verse is phrased in such a way as to throw serious doubt on the possibility of tallying all of Allah’s blessings. What a curious thing it is, indeed, that counting implies the existence of multiple things that need to be counted. However, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *blessing* in its singular form. This would suggest that a single blessing contains within itself countless other blessings. Therefore, we will not even be able to count all the blessings that are contained in a single blessing. The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of this issue—counting Allah’s blessings—on two occasions in the Quran. In the first instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if you should count the blessing of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, mankind is [generally] most unjust and ungrateful.’ (*Ibrahim:* 34) In the second instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if you should count the blessing of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 18)

Both verses start identically but differ at the ending. Every blessing is given by a giver. Obviously, every blessing is received by a recipient. Now the recipient—with all his sins—is not deserving of the blessing, for he is most persistent in wrongdoing, and obstinately in denial of the blessing. However, the Giver of the blessing is All-Forgiving and a Dispenser of Mercy. Thus, one verse is about the Giver of the blessing, whereas in the other is about the recipient of the blessing. As far as the recipient of the blessing is concerned, he is in a state of severe iniquity and stubborn ingratitude, as he takes the blessing but shows no gratitude towards Allah for it. Has the sky not exclaimed: ‘O Lord! Give me permission to crash down upon the sons of Adam by way of reprimand. They have relished Your blessings, but have abstained themselves from giving thanks to You.’

The earth also exclaimed: ‘Give me permission to swallow up the sons of Adam, for they have relished Your blessings, but have abstained themselves from giving thanks to You.’

The mountains also said: ‘Give us permission to come crashing down upon the sons of Adam.’ The ocean, for its part, said: ‘Give me permission to drown the sons of Adam, for they have relished Your blessings but have not shown an inkling of gratitude towards You.' This was the reaction of the elements who, in their ardent love for Allah, wanted to rain down punishment upon mankind. However, Allah *Glorified is He* the Lord of all said: 'Leave Me to deal with My servants as I please, for if it was you who brought them into being, you would have mercy on them. Thus, if they repent and turn to Me, I will love them back, and if they do not repent, I will be their spiritual guide.' Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ قَدۡ جَآءَكُمُ ٱلۡحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكُمۡۖ فَمَنِ ٱهۡتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهۡتَدِي
لِنَفۡسِهِۦۖ وَمَن ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيۡهَاۖ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ عَلَيۡكُم بِوَكِيلٖ ١٠٨

Say, 'People, the Truth has come to you from your Lord. Whoever follows the right path follows it for his own good, and whoever strays does so to his own loss: I am not your guardian' [108] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 108)

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has not failed His creatures. He has given them reason. Had you but used these reason, you would have attained faith, and there would not have been a reason for the coming of a Messenger. Reason ought to have contemplated upon the All-Powerful who created the entire universe. It is, in fact, this reason that asked the All-Powerful to send forth a Messenger so that he might communicate what Allah *Glorified is He* wanted of His servants. Thus, when the Messenger does come forth—when he informs them that he is a Messenger from Allah and that he bears Allah's Doctrine—at this point, they ought to have paid their full attention to what the Messenger was saying.

Allah's servants ought to have found guidance with their reason. That is why we find that, when the philosophers searched for knowledge, they said: 'there exists a 'material philosophy', which attempts to collect knowledge about the physical makeup of the universe; then, there is a 'metaphysical philosophy' which attempts to collect knowledge about that which lies beyond the corporeal universe. Who, therefore, informed the philosophers that there is anything behind the corporeal universe? When the uncorrupted reason beholds the meticulous order of the universe, it should realize there is a hidden power behind the visible, physical universe.

The philosophers would not have embarked upon a quest to discover what lay beyond the material universe had they not surmised that, behind the material universe, there was something hidden. What is hidden behind the material universe has a way of making itself known, for it is not something that human beings can ascertain through reason.

Previously, we have given the following example: imagine that we are sitting in a room and the doorbell rings. Thereupon, everyone in the room knows that there is someone at the door, and everyone in the room holds this fact to be true. This is what the philosophers said when they agreed that that there exists superior power behind the material universe. However, they went over and above their mission; they wanted to inform us of the essence, or the reality of this power. They did not take note of the obvious fact that this power is not susceptible to being known by reason. Thus, if we know that there is someone at the door, we should not presume to know his identity, nor should we leave the matter to opinion or conjecture. Rather, we should allow the person at the door to announce his own identity, to make known his wishes. In effect, it is up to the person at door to tell us about himself.

Therefore, let us ask him to reveal his name and to describe his qualities, for this is a matter which we cannot grasp through reason. Thus, the mistake of the philosophers is that, after ascertaining that there is a superior power behind the physical universe, they did not stop there. Seeking to go beyond being reasonable, they attempted visualization. However, visualizations are not borne of the mind. We may only be informed of them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* hereby says: 'Say, "O mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord."' (*Yunus:* 108)

Truth, as we know, is that which is in stillness, never changing. We also know that the truth comes to us from the Lord—He who guides and instructs after having creating; He, who does not impose religious obligations upon us until we have reached the age of maturity; He, who created the whole universe and appointed us vicegerents therein. Therefore, He is our guardian. If the truth comes to us from Him, why should we not incorporate this doctrine into our education? Why have we accepted the education regarding the proper ways of eating, dressing and the proper gender roles? Therefore, we ought to have taken from Our Educator *Glorified is He* that doctrine which will govern every aspect of our lives so that our lifestyles do not become corrupted.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘truth has come to you from your Lord,’ this means that nobody can give the excuse: ‘I have not been informed of Allah’s obligations.’ The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given us reason so that we might comprehend—not so that we may try to visualize every detail. The actual details of Allah’s Message came to us when the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent forth a Messenger who said: ‘I am a Messenger from Allah; He is the Power that has created the universe.’ At his point, and after the Messenger’s miracle had proven itself true, we ought to have welcomed the Messenger and said: ‘you are exactly the man we were looking for.’ Therefore, tell us: what does the High Power want you to convey to us? Then, in the same verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘so whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul.’ This is because man’s reward for following the right path does not benefit He Who created and guided him. Rather, the reward benefits man himself in various aspects [including] living harmoniously with the universe, rehabilitation of the soul, inner tranquillity and attentiveness to what inhabits the universe, not what demolishes it. Such a state is the very opposite of what is experienced by the person who, disregarding Divine guidance, allows himself to go astray.

With respect to this type of human being, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘and whoever goes astray only goes astray [in violation] against it.’ The phrase *going astray* signifies that the person who went astray had been, at first, provided with guidance. However, he chose to shun such guidance. The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse with His words: ‘And I am not over you a manager.’

The only reason why you would put another person in charge of your affairs is if your own time is limited, or if your current capacity for work and action does not allow you to take charge yourself. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *(peace and blessings be upon him)* informs the people: ‘I myself cannot prevent you from going astray, nor can I compel you to follow guidance, for I am not responsible for your actions. All that I am charged with is to convey the message on Allah's behalf. If you listen to this Message with pure hearts, you will surely be guided. Then, if you are rightly guided, the benefits shall rebound upon you, for the reward shall be everlasting bliss, and it shall be given to you in exchange for a life lived in accordance with the doctrine. Now, even if it has restricted the desires of your lower self, the doctrine guides you towards a life of bliss in the hereafter, where every conceivable pleasure can—and shall—be had.'

If a man is willing to exert effort such that he can learn a trade, a craft or a profession—that he might eventually master whatever he undertakes and thereby earn a living from it for the rest of his life—toiling in such a [voluntary] manner—should he not also be willing to exert himself in his religion? A life of worship will serve to rehabilitate his mind, expedite his goal of inward serenity and outward harmony with society. Religion will also serve to re-channel and refine the desires of the lower self; and after all of that, a person will earn an everlasting state of bliss in the Hereafter. When a person deems it to be too troublesome to exert himself for the sake of gaining knowledge, or learning a trade or a craft, such a person lives in a state of constriction and fails to develop himself, for he does not push himself to learn. We see that those who learn new things and apply themselves end up raising their own social and economic status. They might reach the doctorate level, for example, or became specialists in a lucrative field.

The more exalted a person's goals—the more worthwhile they are—the harder he needs to work to achieve them. Now, compare the work that you perform in your professional life to the blissful reward that awaits you in the Hereafter! You will find an enormous gap between the fruits for your professional efforts and the fruits of your religious efforts; the two are not even comparable. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and whoever goes astray only goes astray [in violation] against it.' The word 'against' signifies that a person violates the rights of his soul in a tyrannical fashion and marches forth proudly in to the abyss. In contrast, you will find the words of the True Lord: 'so whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul,' where the phrase 'for his' signifies ownership.

Thereafter, in concluding chapter *Yunus*, the True Lord says:

وَٱتَّبِعۡ مَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَيۡكَ وَٱصۡبِرۡ حَتَّىٰ يَحۡكُمَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡحَٰكِمِينَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

[Prophet], follow what is being revealed to you, and be steadfast until God gives His judgement, for He is the Best of Judges [109] (The Quran, *Yunus:* 109)

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* has quoted His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as saying: 'O mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord,' (*Yunus:* 108) This is a theoretical statement, referring to the Prophet's eventual completion of his mission of conveying Allah's doctrine. The people must believe in the doctrine. They must also know that the Messenger is the first one to practice the doctrine, for, Allah forbid, even if he were to cheat them all, he could not cheat himself. Thus, after communicating the Message on the True Lord's behalf, he explained to people that the rewards of right-guidance do not benefit the True Lord, but rather, they benefit humankind. Thus, man is in charge of his own destiny. He can go through life with peace of mind, confident that he will have earned bliss in the Hereafter. He may also be sure that delusion cannot haunt him ever again—save if a person does himself injustice and leads himself to perdition. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is not responsible for your conduct; he shows you the way to the good at a time when you do not practice the good. He cannot save you from evil if you cling stubbornly to evil ways. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ought to be a model: 'There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often' (*al-'Ahzab:* 21).

In this instance, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And follow what is revealed to you.' That is, you must be a model, and when you follow that which is being revealed to you, you will encounter resistance from those who live decadent lifestyles. They will not be pleased that someone exhorting moral reformation has come forth. Therefore, resolve yourself to follow what is being revealed to you and resolve yourself to be patient.

The Prophet being ordered to be patient implies that the there are numerous obstacles along the path. You must be patient and an example for others. You must also have confidence in the fact that if there was not any good to be had in following the doctrine, you would not be able to bear it until Allah’s judgment came—‘and be patient until Allah will judge.’ There is no one who is more just or wiser than Allah *Glorified is He*. The chapter of *Yunus*—which ends as it does on this blessed verse—has delved into the issue of faith in Allah, the height of the doctrine that Allah is Unique and that we must accept His Message. He is the Lord Who has created out of nothing, Who brought everything into existence, and Who did not charge us with religious obligations until we had lived through our childhood years and reached the age of maturity.

This is so that it might be verified beyond doubt that the one who is charged with religious obligations deserves to be charged, especially after having benefited from every conceivable blessing in existence, and after he has ascertained the truth of Allah’s Lordship. The Meaning of Lordship is education. In other words, the educator takes charge of the education of the disciple until he reaches the degree of perfection required of him. This issue has proved to be true in the universe. We listen to the Lord Who created when He explains to us what our purpose in life is and how we must follow the doctrine so that our lifestyles are rectified.

Moreover, a person becomes at peace with the purpose of his life—a purpose which he is aware of even before he takes his first step. It is unlikely that Allah *Glorified is He* would create a creature and then let him down. Rather, Allah must provide him with a set of principles with which a human being will preserve himself. Every created object has a set of rules and is assigned a purpose by its creator. Thus, if we go against our original vocation, we will effectively alter everything; and as a result, the world becomes an absurd tangle, where every person has his own purpose and doctrine, and every mind thinks differently. The world is then plunged into a state of discord: people’s desires will invariably clash with each other, and the power of the individual will decline. Conflict amongst fellow human beings will diminish the power of the individual to remedy what needs to be remedied. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes for unity of creed as well as unity of doctrine. In addition, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to give us a practical example taken from the stories of the Messengers who succeeded one another.

In this chapter, He has mentioned the stories of Noah, Moses, and Aaron, as well as the stories of other Messengers. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the story of Jonah. Finally, He concludes the chapter with His words: ‘And follow what is revealed to you.’ Furthermore, convey—on Allah’s behalf—that which is being revealed to you to the world at large.

Since you are conveying the Message, your community has been given the honour of inheriting the Prophetic baton. It shall remain until the end of time, for you are, O Muhammad, the seal of the Prophets. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has willed that your community will propagate the doctrine which has been revealed to you.

Thus, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* will bear witness that he has conveyed the Message, and his community must also bear witness that it has been conveyed. His community must also bear witness that it has conveyed Allah’s Message to the world at large—such is the distinguished mission that has been assigned to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. No other community has been bestowed such an honour, for when it comes to the Messengers who preceded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* their messages languished over time, the light of their religious directives faded(1), and the people became forgetful of them.

Allah *Glorified is He* would send forth a new Messenger. However, things changed after the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The chain of prophecy ended with him, and no more messages from heaven would follow. Henceforth, the Muslim community itself is to carry forth Allah’s doctrine. Why is the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* a paragon of excellence? Because it is he who conveys Allah’s doctrine, and he is the exemplar of the manner in which religious directives must be applied if they are to effectively safeguard the life of human beings in this world. He is a practical example such that human beings are not charged with that with which their human nature cannot put up. This is why the Prophet used to insistently remind people that he was human. The Quran also corroborates this fact in unambiguous fashion: ‘Say, O [Muhammad], "I am only a man like you."’ (*Fussilat:* 6)

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(1) That is, with the passage of time, the religions of the previous Messengers became forgotten. The substance of these religions were altered and tampered with, and false innovations were added to them. This process occurred more frequently with the children of Israel.

This confirms that he is a true exemplar because if the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* were not human, but asked people to emulate him, they would answer: we cannot do so because you are not like us. That is why the Quran emphasizes Prophet Muhammad’s humanity. However, he is above other human beings by virtue of the distinction which Allah *Glorified is He* has conferred upon him, namely, that of being a Messenger who receives revelation from on high. Thus, his primary Prophetic Mission is to convey this revelation. His secondary mission as a Prophet is to demonstrate, through his exemplary behaviour, that he is fully convinced of the revealed religion and practices it himself. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone.’

In terms of wealth, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was one of the poorest people. He was not arrogant. He was a paragon of excellent behaviour—one in whom all the virtuous qualities came together in harmony. He never asked anything for himself. In fact, he refused to bestow privileges on the members of his own family, even while he bestowed these privileges on other Muslims. He forbade the members of his family from inheriting anything he owned after his death. This is so that any actions performed by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* or by his kin would be purely for the sake of Allah. This kind of behaviour is the opposite of that exhibited by other powerful families or political authorities. The latter bestow wealth and privilege first and foremost upon themselves, then upon their circle of friends and allies—depending upon their relative proximity to the epicentre of power. Those who are closest are first in line and stand to profit greatly. Those who are in the outer circles benefit less, depending upon how distant they are.

However, the companions of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* received what not even a poor person would receive in the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It would seem that Allah *Glorified is He* was indicating to us that it is improper that the Prophet’s relatives or descendants should be in a position to receive alms. Thus, the obedience that Allah has ordered is that of following the revelation and propagating it. It is to follow the revelation by abiding by its principles and applying its directives. This will certainly entail numerous hardships. He will cross paths with the arrogant strongmen who stand to benefit from the world's corruption. The latter will inevitably resist his moral exhortations so as to maintain their temporal authority.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* orders His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient. Such a command—to exhibit patience—is an indication to the effect that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* will encounter obstacles. He must therefore brace himself such that he endures these obstacles with fortitude. In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* orders him and the believers to be patient, to vie with each other in patience. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'persevere and endure and remain stationed.' (*Al-'Imran:* 200) In other words, if you are patient, your enemy might also exhibit patience. In this case, you must display more patience than them. The phrase 'be patient' indicates that spreading the True Lord's Doctrine will inevitably entail hardships. If there were no need for this Doctrine to be made known—if the world were already in harmony—then what demand would there be for such a Doctrine?

However, the Doctrine has been revealed from on High because corruption had become rampant in the universe. There was a dire need for reform and for confronting the spreaders of corruption. Herein lies the source of hardship for all those who exhort the people to Allah's cause. Since a person has chosen to go forth and exhort people to the Doctrine of the True Lord *Glorified is He* let him therefore brace himself for such trials.

Any exhorter in Allah's Cause who is touched by harm will not receive as much reward from the Prophetic inheritance because he who is harmed is the one who receives reward from the Prophetic inheritance. The amount of harm a person suffers is proportional to the danger that the exhorter in Allah's Cause is exposed to. This danger comes from the spreaders of corruption who join forces to persecute him.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'Allah bestows a radiating glow on the one who, upon hearing my sayings, imbibes them, safeguards them and conveys them to those who did not hear them, for many a transmitter (of knowledge) have conveyed knowledge to one who is more knowledgeable than him.'

As the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we have inherited from him the task of spreading the religion. We have also inherited from him the paragon of excellence: ‘There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often.’

Thus, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And follow what is revealed to you,’ this means that the revelation is in the process of being revealed because the Quranic revelation was not brought down from heaven all at once. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received revelation in stages, until the end of his life. The span of his life of represents the seat of receiving the revelation. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘and be patient until Allah will judge,’ this indicates to us that Allah *Glorified is He* has specified a limit to the time that the Prophet needs to be patient. In other words, the matter shall be concluded soon when Allah gives His judgment. The verb *judge* indicates that there are two parties involved; each party claims to be right; then, there comes the person who shall pronounce a judgment in the matter. The proof can be either their admission or the testimony of a witness.

Of course, the disbelievers will not admit their disbelief, whereas the witnesses might abstain from speaking out, or they might be among those who want their wantonness to pass for justice. Now, if Allah *Glorified is He* is the Judge in the matter, He has no need for witnesses, because He is the best of witnesses. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* does not pronounce a judgment without having the ability to carry out the said judgment. No, He is both the judge and the executor of the judgment. He has witnessed, pronounced a judgment, and carried out the judgment. There exists no power capable of either standing in the way of Allah’s Power or standing in the way of Allah’s judgment. In our own day, we see various forms of power. We find powerful nations that might dominate over weaker ones. Then, the weak nations resort to the United Nations and the Security Council. The latter then issues resolutions. Even if we assume that these resolutions are fair, where is the power that will enforce them? No such power exists.

However, the Power of the True Lord *Glorified is He* corresponds to the power of the most excellent of all judges; it is He *Glorified is He* Who witnesses, and

He has no need for witnesses who might, in any case, try to mislead Him with their testimony. If you succeed in misleading the judge in a court here on earth, you will not be able to mislead the Supreme Judge in heaven. Thereafter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will pronounce a judgment free of sentimentality because the trouble with judgments pronounced by human beings is that they become tainted with sentimentality and thereby end up sympathizing with the guilty party. The True lord, however, has no such biases. He stands to gain nothing from His servants, being the Creator; *Glorified is He* that He is. He will not strip a creature of his rights. The True Lord *Glorified is He* reassures us that, for his part, His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* also does not act or speak out of desire. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed.' (*an-Najm:* 3-4)

In other words, be confident in his judgment, for he does not speak out of his own desire. He wishes to accomplish nothing other than exhorting people to worship the Creator properly. A person might say that the True Lord has corrected the Messenger on certain occasions. We would reply that, as a human being, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to try his best to arrive at a proper judgment regarding those issues for which Allah did not provide him with direction. When Allah did provide him with explicit directives, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would submit to Allah's judgment. Even when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* articulated his own opinion on matters, he would not do so based on mere desire. Rather, he would pass judgments based on what he believed was fair. Then, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* issued a different judgment on the matter, he would promptly inform the Muslims and rectify the judgment. Therefore, the Prophet's amendment of judgment regarding certain issues is a testament to his fidelity as the conveyer of Allah's wishes. When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would formulate a judgment—regarding an issue for which Allah had not pronounced an explicit ruling—he would do so based on his personal opinion. Then, if a different judgment came to Him from Allah, he would communicate it to the community. In this case, he would amend his judgment at the behest—not of some fellow human being—but of his Creator.

In addition, it is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* himself who informs us that Allah *Glorified is He* corrected his judgment. Would anyone else undermine his own credibility and admit that his own judgment has been corrected by another? The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* —the recipient of Divine revelation—was characterized by perfect fidelity in his transmission of Allah’s wishes.

The Prophet has even told us about the time he was admonished by his Lord. This is the ultimate proof of his fidelity as Allah’s Messenger. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would opine solely on those issues for which Allah had not issued a judgment. In doing so, he set an example for us that we might also have the courage to think for ourselves and strive to reach judicious opinions. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had sent Mu‘adh ibn Jabal *Allah be pleased with him* to Yemen. He asked him: ‘How would you proceed if a case was brought to your attention?’ He said: ‘I would apply the principles contained in the Quran.’ The Prophet then asked: ‘What if none of the principles mentioned in the Quran applied to the case?’ He said: ‘I would refer to the *Sunna* of Allah’s Messenger.’ The Prophet then asked: ‘What if none of the principles contained in the *Sunna* of Allah’s Messenger applied to the case?’ ‘He said: I will exercise my own judgment and will make every effort to arrive at a judicious ruling.’ Thereupon, the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* tapped the envoy’s chest and said: ‘All praise is due to Allah, the One Who made the messenger of the Messenger of Allah suitable.’(1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the most excellent of all judges. He is the Witness Who is aware of the deceitful eye, Who is conscious of that which is secreted inside the hearts of men. From Him *Glorified is He* there is no secret that can be hidden, and neither is He ever the subject of desire. It is He Who, by His Grace, pronounces fully equitable judgments. He is also capable of carrying out the judgments which He pronounces. There exists no power that can dominate Him. There is no judge who is capable of all of this, except Allah *Glorified is He*. The True lord *Glorified is He* has wished to honour the believers whose function is to pronounce judgements in people’s affairs. Thus, Allah has tacitly inserted Himself in the process so that human judges tend toward benevolence.

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/230, 236, 242), Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (3592) and At-Tirmidhi (1327) –* He said: ‘Its chain of transmitters is not continuous in my book.’ This is the only version of which we are aware.

The fact of the matter is that there are human beings who pronounce judgments in the case of other human beings. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has judged that He is the best of them. There are judges, for example, who might fall victim to fraud. In addition, desire might influence the decisions of these judges. With Allah, however, there is no secret that can hide from Him, nor can desire ever influence His decision. His judgments are carried out by virtue of His Absolute Power. That is why He is the absolute best of all judges.

When, in the Quran, Allah describes Himself and His creatures using the same noun in the plural, know that this is a sign for you to infer from those qualities that you see in this world, the Attributes of Allah Whom you do not see. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) Allah also says: 'And Allah is the best of providers!' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11) Allah also says: 'O My Lord, do not leave me alone [with no heir], while you are the best of inheritors.' (*al-Anbiya':* 89) Allah also says: 'Is not Allah the most just of judges?' (*at-Tin:* 8) Whenever you find a plural noun by which Allah describes both Himself and His servants, this indicates that those whom He describes are characterized by the aforementioned attributes. However, His attributes are pre-eternal and absolute. Their attributes, by contrast, are accidental—being the mortals that they are, their power wanes; they can succumb to vicissitudes, and become weak. You will find Allah *Glorified is He* describing Himself as: 'the best of creators!' We all know that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all things from nothingness. However, there are creatures that create things from existing things. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* is the best of all creators. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also describes Himself as: 'the best of providers!' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11) Sustenance is that from which we benefit. Your superior might bring you food, drink, and clothing. He might give you that from which you benefit. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all of the universe's sustenance.

In describing Himself, the True Lord *Glorified is He* also says: 'And the disbelievers planned, but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners.' (*Al-'Imran:* 54) When a human being schemes, he might study a situation and still neglect some aspect of it. Allah, however, neglects nothing. Benevolence in human judgments stems from Allah's Absolute Power. Now, we have learned that when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* pronounced judgments upon certain things, Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently corrected him. It was because Allah had not pronounced a judgment upon such matters that forced the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to opine on them.

One example of this is the story of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* owned by Khadija Bint Khuwaylid *may Allah be pleased with her*. She gifted him to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then, his family who had been searching for him, learned that he was in Mecca. He had been abducted as a child and sold into slavery in Mecca—this was a common practice with the Arabs in pre-Islamic times. When they learned of this, they went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to get their son back. He, thereupon, said to them: 'By Allah, I shall give him the choice: if it is you he chooses, take him, but if he chooses me, then he is mine.' Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* chose to stay with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Following this incident, the Messenger of Allah no longer neglected Zayd. In fact, he bestowed upon him the honour of being his son and renamed him Zayd, son of Muhammad.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw that making him his son was a way of honouring him. However, Allah *Glorified is He* willed otherwise. He says: 'Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets. And ever is Allah, of all things, Knowing.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 40)

Making someone your son might create confusion in genealogy. Originally, such a son has the right to marry the daughter of the one who adopted him as a son. How could we deny him this right? Also, such a son could be denied the right to marry the wife of the one who adopted him, if the latter were to pass away or divorce her. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* preserved the integrity of genealogical relationships so as to preserve the rights and responsibilities of the people involved. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets.'

His Mission as a Messenger from Allah is far more important to you than his relationship as a father. The True Lord *Glorified is He* said when correcting the Prophet's decision to adopt a son: 'Call them by [the names of] their fathers; it is more just in the sight of Allah.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 5) This amounts to a refutation of the Messenger of Allah's decision; however, it is done in a manner that honours him. What Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* had done was just and equitable in human terms; however, Allah's judgment in the matter is even more just and equitable. Hence, his lineage as Zayd, son of Muhammad, came to end, and he went back to his original family name as Zayd, son of Haritha.

So as not to sadden Zayd, the True Lord *Glorified is He* conferred upon him honours the likes of which He conferred upon no other companion of the Prophet. He is the only companion who is mentioned by name in the Quran. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'So when Zayd had no longer any need for her, We married her to you.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 37) Thus Zayd's name came to be featured in the Quran; it came to be recited and mentioned aloud in the prayer. Thus, even if Allah had forbidden him from being genealogically related to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He accorded him an eternal, honourable mention in the Noble Quran—which is a great honour.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and be patient in adversity, until Allah shall give His judgment: for He is the best of all judges,' these words imply that Allah's judgement is more than just a judgment in this world and in the next. Allah's judgment in this world represents a victory for Allah's religion; in addition, those believers or disbelievers who die shall have another judgment in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* thus concludes the chapter of *Yunus* with this judgment, and Allah *Glorified is He* has guided every believer with the example of Jonah—as one of Allah's Prophets—when stormed off in anger. Regarding this incident, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and [mention] the man of the fish, when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darkness, 'There is no deity [worthy of worship] except You *Exalted are You*. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.' (*al-Anbiya':* 87) The True Lord *Glorified is He* conferred an honour upon him with His words: 'So We responded to him and saved him from the distress.' (*al-Anbiya':* 88) The True Lord *Glorified is He* has included us in his honour with His words: 'And thus do We save the believers.' (*al-Anbiya':* 88) Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* paid us a great favour when Allah *Glorified is He* inspired him to say: 'There is no deity [worthy of worship] except You *Exalted are You*. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.' Allah *Glorified is He* answered his prayer and saved him from distress. The latter is the most aggressive of Allah's soldiers, because what distresses you is that which you cannot repulse. That is why it is said: ‘the smaller the enemy, the more aggressive it is,’ because if the enemy is massive in size, it is easier to deal with than the enemy who is small and agile. If the enemy is massive, a human being sees his massive size from afar. Then, a person either runs or hides. However, if the enemy happens to be a snake—for example—then a person might not see it; a person might not be able to run away from it either. If the enemy happens to be a microbe or a virus which cannot be seen with the naked eye, then it is even more aggressive and potent in the way it attacks a human being. You can guard yourself against almost every ill in this world save those who scheme against you quietly and subtly, as you do not know from whence such enemies will infiltrate you.

We hear, for example, that so-and-so has been affected by some illness because he caught some virus or another. This person does not know when the virus entered his system. However, he was stunned to see the symptoms of the illness manifesting themselves on his body, after the virus had been dormant for two weeks in his body.

Furthermore, distress is one of the most severe forms of suffering. We all know the story of the ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* who is famous for his ability to pronounce legal opinions. People used to consult him regarding issues for which they were unable to find a solution. Some people got together and said: ‘we want to identify certain difficult things and ask him about them so as to test him.’ When they gathered, they told ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him*: ‘We want to inspect Allah’s universe, so we have sat together to figure out what is the strongest creature Allah has created. However, we each have different opinions on the matter and so each named the creature which, in his opinion, was the strongest. ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* did not deliberate, neither did he utter discontinuous sentences in a way that he paused at intervals, nor did anyone ask him for more clarification. Rather, in a single sentence he indicated the number of powers according to their ranking and their power. He did so to the effect that the number corresponded to the number of things counted. This is proof that he was capable of grasping the issue in a firm manner. He extended all ten fingers and said: ‘The strongest of Allah’s soldiers are the following ten: the firm mountains, iron which cuts through the mountains, fire that melts iron, water which extinguishes fire, the clouds that straddle the area between the sky and the earth which carries water, the wind that cuts up the clouds, mankind who defeats the wind—covering himself with some form of cloth, he goes on with his business. Then, there is drunkenness which gets the better of mankind, then sleep which conquers drunkenness, then distress which overpowers sleep. Thus, the fiercest of Allah's soldiers is distress.

Such were the words of ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him*. Distress and anguish are ones of the fiercest soldiers of Allah. Jonah *peace be upon him* was the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* promised to deliver every believer until the end of time from distress and anguish through the supplication that He inspired Jonah to utter. Allah says: ‘There is no deity [worthy of worship] except You *Exalted are You*. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers. So We responded to him and saved him from the distress. And thus do We save the believers.’

Deliverance from distress went from the grace that is bestowed on a select few to a grace that is bestowed on all. Ja‘far As-Sadiq has taken this supplication and fashioned it into a spiritual reminder for the believer so that the latter might accept all of life's events—even the most frightening ones—in a state of content, for man is haunted by the fear of what he knows. As for anxiety, a person does not realize its danger, nor does a person know how others are deceiving him. A person does not know what guile they have prepared for him. It is man's preoccupation with his worldly life—his desire to live in comfort and luxury to the largest extent possible—that makes him susceptible to anxiety.

Ja‘far As-Sadiq(1) used to possess keen insight into the verses of the Quran and their implications. He once said: ‘I am amazed at those who experience fear and do not seek recourse in the words of the True Lord: ‘Sufficient for us is Allah, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 173) No amazement is needed for the one who, after experiencing fear, finds a way to remove that fear.

A person who suffers from a headache can treat it with a painkiller. When it comes to fear, Ja‘far has prescribed the medicine that is contained in the following words of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Sufficient for us is Allah, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs.' Therein is the cure for all manner of fears. Ja'far As-Sadiq then provides us with the reason because, subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So they returned with favour from Allah and bounty, no harm having touched them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 174) In other words, Ja'far located the justification for his interpretation from the same passage of the Quran. He also added: 'I am also amazed at those who experience anxiety—which is the affliction that we are currently examining—and do not seek refuge in the following words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'There is no deity [worthy of worship] except You *Exalted are You*. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.' Then, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the following words: 'So We responded to him and saved him from the distress.' (*al-Anbiya':* 88)

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(1) His full name was Ja‘far ibn Muhammad Ibn ‘Ali ibn AL-Hussin, Abu ‘Abdullah. He was too preoccupied with the worship of Allah to have any ambition for political power. The following individuals have narrated Hadith from him: Shu‘ba, Ath-Thawri and Malik. He died in Medina in 148 AH.

I have also been amazed at him who, after having been deceived, did not seek recourse in the following words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And you will remember what I [now] say to you, and I entrust my affair to Allah. Indeed, Allah is Seeing of [His] servants.' (*Ghafir:* 44) For I have heard Allah following these words with: 'So Allah protected him from the evils they plotted, and the people of Pharaoh were enveloped by the worst of punishment.' (*Ghafir:* 45)

I am also amazed at him who, seeking the pleasures of this world, has not sought recourse in the following words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Whatever Allah wills [shall come to pass, for] there is no power except in Allah!' (*al-Kahf:* 39) For I have heard Allah *Glorified is He* following these words with: 'It may be that my Lord will give me [something] better than your garden and will send upon it a calamity from the sky, and it will become a smooth, dusty ground.' (*al-Kahf:* 40) Ja'far As-Sadiq located in Allah's Holy Book four verses corresponding to four psychological states that affect human beings. Furthermore, for each situation he provides its corroborating evidence in the Quran. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says at the very end in the chapter of *Yunus*. The words of Allah *Glorified is He* at the end of the chapter of *Yunus* that command the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon Him* to follow what is revealed to Him are related to the very first verse of the next chapter. Allah says, *'Alif Lam Ra* [This is] a Book, whose verses are made decisive, then are they, made plain, from the Wise, All-aware.' (*Hud:* 1) For what is revealed is a Book composed, indeed, of verses that have been made truly clear.

the chapter of

Hud

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Hud* begins with the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*:

الٓر ۚ كِتَٰبٌ أُحۡكِمَتۡ ءَايَٰتُهُۥ ثُمَّ فُصِّلَتۡ مِن لَّدُنۡ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ ١

***Alif Lam Ra* [This is] a Scripture whose verses are perfected, then set out clearly, from One who is all wise, All-Aware[1] (The Quran, *Hud:* 1)**

The verse starts with the disjoined Arabic letters that some chapters of the Holy Quran start with. Each of these letters is pronounced separately as if you were reading them from the alphabet. Every letter, as we know, has a way of pronouncing that is different from the way a letter is pronounced in context. When we use a letter in writing or in speech, we are using the letter in context and we do not pronounce the title of the letter. Some of the Quranic chapters, however, begin with letters which we pronounce by their titles. With the exception of these special letters, all other letters are pronounced normally as elements of the word which they form.

To illustrate the difference between these two ways of pronouncing letters, consider the first verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara*. It reads, *Alif Lam Mim* even though it is written as one word. (*al-Baqara:* 1) So, we pronounce the title of each letter in contrast to the way we would pronounce the word *alam* (Have we not) in following verse where Allah says, ‘Have we not expanded for you your breast.’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1)

Why do we pronounce these letters in such a peculiar way? This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon* him heard them pronounced in this way by Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. The Quran is originally heard. You would not be able to read the Quran without having heard the Quran to recognise how to pronounce those disjointed letters by their titles while reading the rest of the letters of the Quran normally as they are uttered in words. Years ago, we used to have our teacher reading the Quran first before memorizing so as to teach us the correct way to read its verses. People, however, often want to read the Quran on their own, without sitting down with a teacher and without listening to someone reciting it properly.

We must put emphasis on the fact that the Quran is no ordinary book. It has unique characteristics. Its letters can take different forms as we sometimes pronounce them by their titles and at other times we read them as sounds forming a word.

We notice something wonderful when we read '*Alif Lam Mim'* in the beginning of the chapter of *Hud*. We are reminded of how the Quran is always based on the principle of *wasl* (connectivity). That is when we pause at the end of verses, there are diacritical marks. Consider verses like (*ar-Rahman:* 64-66); despite having breaks between the individual verses, the principle of *wasl* is called for there. At the end of chapter *Yunus*, Allah says, 'and He is the best of the judges.' (*Yunus:* 109) The last letter has a diacritical mark. It would be pronounced differently if it does not have diacritics. You would pronounce it with *sukoon* (absence of a vowel sound) instead of being accusative by *fath*. That is because the last letter is connected to the *basmalah* after it.

It is remarkable that the disjoint letters at the beginning of chapters are paused on with no diacritical marks involved. We read every letter individually. We would not say '*Alifun Lamun Mimun*', but rather, '*Alif Lam Mim*'. Similarly, we read the beginning of the chapter of *Maryam* as '*Kaf Ha Ya `Ain Sad'*. We would not read the letters with their inflection and this indicates that there is a hidden wisdom behind that. There are verses in the Quran that begin with only one letter as in the chapters of *Sad, Qaf* and *al-Qalam*. In addition, we notice that the special letters do not constitute whole verses on their own. However, they consist of a full verse in many chapters of *ash-Shura, Maryam, Ta Ha, Ya Sin, al-A`raf, ar-Ra`d and an-Naml.*

Therefore, there is no clear specific pattern for these letters. This means that at every pause and letter there is wisdom. We find wisdom when we contemplate the material world in which we live and thereby, discern the wonders of Allah *Glorified is He* in the sensible cosmos and the infinite wisdom of Allah. For example, when one checks into a luxury hotel, one finds that each room has an assigned key which opens no other room. However, the hotel manager holds a master key which can be used to unlock all the rooms of a particular floor. The manager has done so to let no guest opens any room but his. With the new technological advancements, every room now has its own electronic card which unlocks the door as soon as the card is inserted in a special slit. Similarly, for every floor, the hotel manager holds an electronic card which can open all the doors. Therefore, when you read the openings of chapters, know that each verse has a key and every letter of these opening verses might resemble the key. If you do not have the right key to open the door, then the chapter will not open itself up to you. So there are certain keys to the Book of Allah. At times the disjointed letters constitute independent verses and at other times the letters constitute only a part of a verse. Before you start reading you say, 'I seek refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* from Satan, the accursed' to rid yourself of malevolent influences that might compromise your reading of the Quran. Then you insert your special key, such as the words, *'Alif Lam. Mim.',* (*al-Baqara:* 1) and the door opens.

Thus, we realize that there is a key and that there is someone who opens the door as well. Consider the openings of chapters as keys which are carved differently and has a particular shape that when you transpose the key of one chapter to another, it would fail to unlock it.

Allah *Glorified is He* begins the chapter of *Hud* with '*Alif Lam Ra*' which are three letters just like in 'Alif Lam Mim'. The formula *Alif Lam Ra* is mentioned in five chapters of the Quran and is read as a part of a verse. These chapters are *Yunus*, *Hud*, *Yusuf, Ibrahim* and *al-Hijr*. The formula *Alif Lam*, however, is an independent verse although both are read in the same manner as the other formulae of the chapters of *Yunus*, *Hud*, *Yusuf* and *Ibrahim*. Likewise, the chapter of *al-A`raf* begins with a four-letter verse which is *Alif Lam Mim Sad*. However, the chapter of *ar-Ra`d* begins with four letters which are part of a verse.

Therefore, there is no standard set of rules that apply to these letters that appear in the beginning of the Quranic chapters. Every letter has a speciality that its hidden meaning has not yet been fully discovered. This has led some commentators of the Quran to say regarding these letters that, ‘Allah knows what He intends’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are studying, *‘Alif Lam Ra* [This is] a Book, whose verses are made decisive, then are they made plain, from the Wise, All-aware.’ (*Hud:* 1). He sometimes qualifies the Quran as a *kitab* (book) and sometimes calls it Quran. We note that the word Quran is derived from the root word *qara`a*, which means to read, while *kita*b is that which is read. Allah *Glorified is He* has willed it this way to show you that preservation of the Quran happens in two places, i.e. the breasts of those who have memorized it and the copies of the written script of the Quran. And if the heart forgets, then there will always be the books.

Therefore, when the early Muslims wanted to compile the Quran conforming that what is memorized to that which is written, they laid down certain guidelines to be followed when performing this delicate operation. One of the most important stipulations was that for every verse it was imperative that at least two people could confirm its accuracy. However, the last two verses of the chapter of *at-Tawba* proved problematic as there was only one witness to attest to the accuracy of these verses, who was Khuzayma. They believed Khuzayma and wrote down those two verses because the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had once commended his trustworthiness when he said of him, ‘whoever Khuzayma testify on his behalf, it suffices him.’(1) So, the reason for describing the Quran as *kita*b is because it is written and the reason for describing it as Quran is because it is recited. The act of writing was no simple matter in early Islamic history and thus, only the most precious works were written down. The reason for calling it a Quran could be due to its being engraved on the guarded tablet.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the Quran as a Book whose verses are made decisive. He uses the word *u`hkimat* which is from the letters *h k m* (confirm). This word denotes perfection of a structure so that it precludes any possibility of corruption so there are no flaws, contradictions, discrepancy, or collision.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim and At-Tabarani*

There is a need for architectural balance in the apertures of structures. They do not all fall parallel to each other lest cracks might appear in the walls or the entire structure might collapse. This is what it takes for precise engineering in the physical world.

Allah *Glorified is He* wills to qualify the Quran which is the summation of the Islamic Path as a book of decisive verses. So, use the perfection of the Quran as a shield against the corruption of you since the very structure of the Quran is such that it prevents corruption and promotes reform. In addition, considering that the Glorious Quran is preserved in the Guarded Tablet, conveyed all at once from the Guarded Tablet to the worldly realm, then sent down according to different situations where specific guidance was needed and Allah has scattered such rulings throughout the segmented structure of the Quran, you would see that the Quran was absolute and decisive in heaven then it was partitioned and presented in an ordered arrangement. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…a Book, whose verses are made decisive, then are they made plain.' (*Hud:* 1)

The meaning of the Quran being made plain could be that it was divided into large partitions which are the chapters and the small partitions are the verses. To encourage people to memorize the Quran, Muslims divided it into thirty equal parts which are called *ajza';* they divided every *juz`* into two *hizbs* and every *hizb* into four fourths. The original units of the arrangement of the Quran are the chapters and every one of these being a collection of verses. The implication might very well be that the Quran was perfected then expounded, because it was brought down from Allah *Glorified is He* as a comprehensive guide for the ordering of the life of man.

When you look at the Quran, you find that its themes are widely varied. At times, the Quran discusses the highest summits of Islamic doctrine, other times it talks about prophethood, the succession of Divine Messages and miracles. Sometimes the Quran delves into the details of what is prescribed and what is proscribed and at other times it recounts the stories of other eras and other peoples. It sets down the laws of correct conduct or describes the various cosmic signs. Sometimes it talks about the rules and regulations governing inheritance.

Therefore, the Quran is partitioned both linguistically and contextually as it includes multiple meanings which are all necessary in decree. It is composed of everything from the supreme principle that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger, to the finest detail. The meaning of the Quran being made plain, from another perceptive, could be that the Quran was brought down to the earthly realm all at once, and then it was revealed in parts, depending on what was needed at different times. It was intended to make the soul cherish the particular Quranic piece that descends precisely when it is needed.

For instance, when you prepare a personal pharmacy in your home, you might collect a variety of medicines, but if you get a headache, you might search in vain for aspirin pills. However, if you go to a real pharmaceutical store, you would find it when you need it. Likewise, when you get thirsty, you might open your fridge and not even realize that there is a bottle of water right under your nose due to your zeal for water. Thus, the reason for Allah revealing the Quran in parts is so that the human soul quenches its thirst as it receives the Quran. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And it is a Quran which We have revealed in portions so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees, and We have revealed it, revealing in portion.’ (*al-Isra’:* 106) In addition, Allah reports the disbelievers saying, ‘why has not the Quran been revealed to him all at once?’ (*al-Furqan:* 32) Allah *Glorified is He* responds saying, ‘Thus, that We may strengthen your heart by it and We have arranged it well in arranging.’ (*al-Furqan:* 32)

Had the Quran been disclosed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* all at once, no one would have paid close attention to all its details. Allah willed, however, that He would reveal the Quran bit by bit to His Messenger to make every piece of revelation a means of reinforcement to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* during different situations. The Prophet, and the His *ummah* (followers), are indeed in need of such divine backups on many different encountered occasions. That is why Allah clarifies that it is meant to strengthen the heart of the Prophet therewith. (*al-Furqan:* 32) Thus, when some verses are revealed in a certain situation, the believers are most disposed to receiving them and more likely to internalise and apply the wisdom that they contain.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not reveal just one verse but many verses as evident in the fact that when they came across an issue requiring divine guidance, Allah *Glorified is He* would disclose a fully detailed ruling on the issue. Thus, He affirms, ‘And they shall not bring to you any argument, but We have brought to you [one] with truth and best in significance.’ (*al-Furqan:* 33)

Had the Quran not been piecemeal, how could it satisfy all the questions presented in the Quran under the expression ‘they ask you about’? Allah *Glorified is He* gives the example of a mosquito and they wonder contemptuously how Allah gives such an example. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘surely Allah is not ashamed to set forth any parable-- [that of] a gnat or anything above that.’ (*al-Baqara:* 26) If they were wiser, they would have wondered how Allah has assimilated in this miniscule creature all the necessary components that a living organism requires, including the digestive system and the respiratory system down to the circulatory system and nervous system. They ought to have realized that this creature is a testament to the greatness of The Creator. For the greatness of design can be perceived in two different ways which either are the sheer immensity of the object designed or its extreme minuteness to the point that it is imperceptible to the senses.

For example, and Allah is the Most High, when they designed the Big Ben clock, people marvelled at its size and its precise craftsmanship and when craftsmen in Switzerland began producing marvellously small and compact watches, people were even more baffled at the finesse of its design. Thus, true power lies in the ability to create something that is enormous or subtly miniscule in size. How powerful, then, is The Creator of the universe, from the largest of its contents to its smallest?

Allah *Glorified is He* also gives another example of a fly. He says, ‘surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create fly, though they should all gather for it.’ (*al-Hajj:* 73) If the disbelieves or those arrogant were to gather together and beseech their idols to create a fly, or even if they themselves endeavoured on such a task, they would fail. Their impotence goes even further as Allah says, ‘should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back; weak are the invoker and the invoked.’ (*al-Hajj:* 73) If a fly were to land on some food and then take some of it, would anybody be able to retrieve what the fly ate? No, no one would. Hence, we see the impotence of the seeker and the sought.

Allah *Glorified is He* informs us that the verses of the Quran were decisive and then made plain. There is no contradiction between the acts of making something decisive and making it clear since it is none other than Allah Who has made the essence decisive as well as He is the one who elaborated upon it in detail. He is All-Wise when it comes to what is best expressed implicitly and All-Knowing when it comes to what is best spelled out in detail with infinite eloquence. He is wise such that He perfects that which He creates rendering it immune to corruption, moreover, He is All Knowing and has knowledge of the unseen. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends [all] vision; and He is the Knower of subtleties, the Aware.’ (*al-An‘am:* 103) No eye is able to perceive Allah *Glorified is He* and however, His eye perceives the slightest of things and the most concealed of intentions.

Therefore, the very first verse of the chapter of *Hud* shows us that the Quran is the Word of Allah *the All-Powerful* is flawless in its design. It was perfected and sent down as a whole, all at once to the earthly realm. Then certain events occurred on Earth and the corresponding appropriate Quranic verses was descended piecemeal to each event. The reason for the process mentioned above could not be more crucial. Its purpose is related to the entire religion of Islam and thereby, Allah indicates it in the following verse saying:

أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوٓا۟ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّنِى لَكُم مِّنْهُ نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ ﴿٢﴾

[Say, Prophet], ‘Worship no one but God. I am sent
to you from Him to warn and to give good news [2]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 2)

Thus, the reason for which the Quranic revelation was perfected and then expounded is that we shall worship none other than Allah. The act of worship entails that the worshiper conforms completely to the will of the worshipped as to what has been ordered and to what has been proscribed.

Evidently, the act of worship entails the presence of that which is worshiped and which have a set of commands and proscriptions. If the worshiped object has no such set of do’s and do nots, it is not worthy of worship, Have those who worshiped idols ever received an order or a prohibition from them? Do those sun-worshipers get guidance from the sun? Thus, the act of worship of anything other than Allah is futile because other objects of worship simply cannot issue decrees concerning what to do and what not to do. Moreover, they have no way of rewarding action that is either pleasing or displeasing to them. No religious worship is possible without clear directives for do’s and do nots, neither is any religious worship possible in the absence of recompense for action.

Here we must take note that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘you shall not serve [any] but Allah.’ As opposed to saying, ‘serve Allah.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 72) Had the prophets been sent to people who were not preoccupied with the worship and veneration of any kind of deity, they would have had told them ‘serve Allah.’ However, in the verse we are discussing Allah *Glorified is He* and says, ‘you shall not serve [any] but Allah.’ It is as if Allah was confronting a community whose worship is oriented towards an object that is undeserving of it. Thus, Allah wishes to put an end to this practice and redirect their worship to Him.

Therefore, here we have a negation combined with an affirmation. Just like the formula that we declare that ‘There is no God but Allah’. In this formula, we begin by negating any other deities save Allah and affirm that divinity belongs to Allah alone. So, to testify to the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* is necessary only if a people believe in another deity. We do not testify to this except because there are other people worshipping other than Allah. Had these people already accepted that divinity belongs to Allah Who is The One and Only, then uttering the formula of faith would have been redundant.

The words of Allah ordering us not to serve any but Him consist of an explicit refutation of error and an affirmation of the truth since error was refuted so that all rests on solid foundations. Thus, the known jurisprudential principle say eliminating error must advance bringing about truth. First, desist from the worship of false idols and then, orient worship towards Allah.

As long as the act of religious worship consists of obeying commandments and abiding by prohibitions, thus, it includes everything to be commanded or prohibited. On pondering over the commandments and prohibitions, you realize that they encompass all facets of life, from the supreme principle that is ‘There is no God but Allah'’ down to removing a harmful object from a path. Every action in life which has the effect of reinforcing goodness or even increasing it is part and parcel of worship. So, Islam does not recognise that there are some actions that are lowly and others that are elevated. However, it recognises that there is someone who is inferior and another superior. Every worker who performs a job which life requires, either to maintain that which is virtuous or to increase its goodness and prevent it from being corrupted, is a noble worker. The value of a man can be measured through that he perfects.

To recapitulate, the word worship encompasses all aspects of life. It contains prescriptions for that which is good and is meant to be as well as proscriptions against that which is not meant to be. An action which has no specific directive is left up to you whether to perform or not to perform it. In fact, when you consider all those actions which are either prescribed or proscribed, you find that they make up no more than five percent of all the possible actions you could perform in life. This five percent, however, is the basic guide for all other facets of life.

Accordingly, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Islam is raised on five (pillars), testifying (the fact) that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger, the establishment of prayer, payment *of zakat*, Pilgrimage to the House *(Ka`ba)* and the fasting of *Ramadan*.’(1)

The enemies of Islam try to limit religion to these five basic pillars. However, these pillars are but the foundations upon which the structure of Islam rests. The pillars of Islam reaffirm devotion to Allah *Glorified is He,* however, even the smallest actions in life are part of the religion because they promote virtue. Thus, knowing the basics of one’s religion is obligatory to everyone on this earth. As for the other forms of knowledge, such as the physical sciences, it is incumbent on those who specialize in them and go further to benefit everyone. When it is a Muslim who excels in the sciences, it is a great boon to Islam as a whole.

Therefore, the common denominator in life is knowledge of religion. However, we must give everything what it deserves not to give a chance to someone ignorant of the basic principles of religion to discuss matters of religion since it is limited to the people of knowledge. If it be said that religion is for all, we would say, 'you are right in the sense that all can be religious, however, to know religion fully requires studying jurisprudence for years'.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The scientists of other disciplines also spend years of their lives studying fields of medicine, architecture and the like. Even blue-collar type work takes time and effort to master. So, imagine what it would take someone who establishes the foundation of every facet of people's lives. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Why should then a company from every party from among them not go forth that they may apply themselves to obtain understanding in religion, and that they may warn their people when they come back to them that they may be cautious?' (*at-Tawba:* 122)

Thus, we would not expect every Muslim person to study the science of inheritance and to be knowledgeable in such things as *al-`usba* (1), *ashab al-furud* (2) and *ulu al-arham* (3), *al-`awl* (4) and *ar-rad* (5). That is because man could live all is life without a need to ask about an issue of inheritance or to know who should have a share and who should not and so on. In addition, when someone faces such an issue, we direct him to those who are specialised in such science among scholars of jurisprudence and legal ruling. Exactly as when you feel ill, you would go see a doctor, when you need an engineering issue, you would consult an engineer and when you are exposed to a mathematical equation, you would ask an accountant. Thus, it is exactly the same when it comes to religious issues, you would have to go to a scholar of religion.

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(1) Al-`Usba are the sons of the man and his relatives on his father's side. In this science of jurisprudence, the term refers to those allotted what remains of the inheritance after the people to whom a statutory portion is owed have been given their share. Examples of them include the brother, the uncle, and the father. If anything remains after the allotment of the inheritance it is allotted to these members according to the principle of *ta`ib* (this is over and above what was already allotted to them by virtue of the statutory portion.

(2) Ashab al-furud are those who are entitled to a statutory portion or a lawful share. There are twelve types of people in this category: four of them are male, namely, the father, the grandfather regardless of his age, the brother of the mother and the husband. The other eight types are females, and they are: the wife, the daughter, the full sister, the sister of the father, the sister of the mother, the daughter of the son, the mother, the grandmother regardless of age. To each of these is due their statutory portion that is mentioned in the Holy Quran.

(3) *Ulu al-arham* are those relatives that belong neither to the category of (*fard*) nor to that of (*`usbah*).

(4) *Al-`awl*: the general linguistic meaning is: 'height'. In the domain of jurisprudence, it refers to the increase in the allotment of the recipients of inheritance, and a decrease in their share of the inheritance. This is an issue that comes up when calculating allotments, the judge who presides over this process is sometimes forced to increase one side and decrease another side.

(5) *Ar-rad*: allotting whatever is leftover of the inheritance to those who are lawfully entitled to it and according to their statutory portion, and when no other people are deserving of it. This happens according to the following three principles:
1 – The presence of the person who is entitled to his lawful share =

When you look at religion you will find that it requires and incorporates all the actions which we perform regularly in life. Previously, I had given the example of the man who prays. If he does nothing else but praying, how would he then purchase the garment which he needs to cover his private parts since he has no occupation other than prayer? In order to purchase clothes, he would need to work a regular job where he would get paid, and then he would need to buy his clothes from a retailer, who would have had to purchase them from a wholesaler. The latter would have had to buy them from the factory where it had been merely assembled. It was another factory that actually weaved the cotton or the wool. The cotton was a product of agriculture, and the wool was fleeced off the hides of sheep. Thus, just the act of standing to face your Creator in prayer requires that you be dressed appropriately by covering your private parts, at a minimum, from the belly button to just below the knees. This requires being involved in the world through practical hands-on work.

Just ask yourself this: “what did you have for breakfast today’? Even if a piece of bread was all you had, you must have made the trip to a grocery store to buy it and that store had had it delivered from a bakery which relies on a mill to supply it with flour. Obviously, the flour was produced by grinding the wheat from the fields. Even the grinding machines themselves are produced in special factories, most likely foreign ones.

Thus, the process of making bread required a long and complex production chain. For there is the farmer who tilled the soil, the designer of the grinding

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= 2 – The presence of leftover or surplus inheritance

3 – The absence of a son of the man and his relatives on his father’s side

machine, who studied engineering, the geologist who surveyed the deep layers of earth so that the iron ore could be extracted, then there is the factory where the iron ore was smelted in so that it might become industrial-grade steel.

Therefore, you find that every action in life has, in some way or another, served you in your religious life and made it possible for you to face your Creator in prayer. So, do not think that you can withdraw from the world and consecrate your whole life to prayer alone because every action that is performed in one's daily life is, in fact, part and parcel of the act of worship. If you wanted to desist completely from all worldly work, abstain from the fruits of the labour of someone. This is impossible, because without the work that others perform you would not be able to pray or have the energy to pray. Thus, worship, in its general sense, comprises all the actions that life requires regarding do's and do nots. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'That you shall not serve [any] but Allah; surely I am a warner for you from Him and a giver of good news.' (*Hud*: 2)

A warner is someone who warns of an impending danger so that there would still be time and a chance to rectify that which is wrong, while a bearer of good news is someone who heralds the coming of blessings if man remains steadfast on the road that leads to that blessing. Thus, the act of warning and the act of delivering good tidings are both related to matters which have not come to pass yet.

Warning naturally implies a threat and a kind of lesson to be learned. When you want to make your child be better in school you tell him that if he does not do his homework he will end up like the son of so and so, a person who is a lazy bum and a failure in life. In effect, you warn your son so that he avoids, from now, that thing that led to his poor performance in school. Similarly, you give glad tiding to your son or any other person of the good that awaits him if he continues on the right path.

So, religious worship consists of all actions in life so long as man remains faithful to the directives of truth which take the form of thou shalt or thou shalt not, actions where there are no command of dos and do nots are allowed actions.

It is incumbent on every Muslim to make himself aware that performing an action that is labelled as ‘thou shalt’ is a must. Additionally, he should abstain from actions which are labelled as thou shalt not as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has proscribed the likes of these. The Muslim must apply utmost precision in determining the value of all actions. Although, we are well aware that the religious obligations can be a trial for the soul; it is necessary that we point out to man that the hardship which the soul undergoes will be greatly rewarded. For example, you see farmers carrying fertilizing manure, load it on to the back of his donkey to transport to his field and mix it in with the soil. They do all this work despite all hardships in anticipation of the harvest.

Allah *Glorified is He* emphasises, by way of His Messenger, that the command not to worship any other being except Allah is a command from Allah. Allah also stresses that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is a warner and a bearer of good tidings from Allah. The phrase ‘you shall not serve [any] but Allah’ contains a negation of worshipping that which is not Allah and an affirmation of worshipping of Allah. This is all congruent with the notion of forewarning and the notion of bringing good tidings as the worship of that which is other than Allah calls for a warner, while the worship of Allah in Islam calls for a bearer of good tidings.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of man Who is aware of man’s weaknesses. Since He knows that such weakness could make man decline to a short-term good, distract him from a longer-term good and make him slip into the forgetfulness of the self. He has made it clear that for he who falls into one form of forgetfulness or another of the self, he must ask for forgiveness from Allah, Who is not miserly with His Mercy and dispenses it freely to his creatures.

If a sinner, in a turnabout, asks for Allah’s forgiveness, the way back to Allah is always open, through giving up sins and doing good deeds. No servant of Allah ever falls into sinfulness but that he erred from the path of his Lord. When he repents and asks for forgiveness, he returns to the path of Allah and strives not to fall in sin anew.

Here Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنِ ٱسْتَغْفِرُوا۟ رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِ يُمَتِّعْكُم مَّتَـٰعًا حَسَنًا إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَيُؤْتِ
كُلَّ ذِى فَضْلٍ فَضْلَهُۥ ۖ وَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ كَبِيرٍ ٣

Ask your Lord for forgiveness, then turn back to Him. He will grant you wholesome enjoyment until an appointed time, and give His grace to everyone who has merit. But if you turn away, I fear you will have torment on a terrible Day [3]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 3)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that a servant must ask for forgiveness of past sins, repent from now, and return to the path of Allah to earn grace from Allah. Therefore, what is demanded of a servant is to ask for forgiveness of Allah and turn back to Allah in repentance.

This is what Allah *Glorified is He* asks of the transgressor since eliminating bad advances obtaining good. When a servant turns to Allah in repentance, he knows and admits that he has fallen into sin in the past, thus, he must not postpone the act of repentance, for he does not know whether he will still be alive or not. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And that you ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him; He will provide you with a goodly provision to an appointed term.’ (*Hud:* 3)

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the blessings that await one when one follows His Path when He says, ‘then whoever follows My Guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy.’ (*Ta Ha:* 123). Elsewhere He says, ‘Whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life.’ (*an-Nahl:* 97). Thus, leading a good life here on earth and not going astray or living in misery depends on following the way of Allah.

Some scholars have thought that leading such a good life contradicts what the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has said, namely, that ‘The world is the believer's prison and the disbeliever's *janna*.’(1) The Prophet has also said, ‘Those who are tried most severely are the prophets, then those nearest to them, then those nearest to them.’(2) Those scholars wonder how Allah says that He will provide such people with a goodly provision and enjoyment.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim and Ibn Majah*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*

To clarify what is meant by provision or enjoyment, it is that which you enjoy and receive with joy and elation. The believer knows that for every disaster that befalls him in his worldly life he will be compensated for, infinitely, in the afterlife. So, the believer accepts the will of Allah with resignation because such is his fate and because he will be rewarded for enduring such hardships. Thus, there are even some believers who might pray for such hardships.

Therefore, everything that the believer goes through is good. So, do not ever think that someone who has been struck by a catastrophe in life is stricken. The real catastrophe is to be denied any goodly reward.

We read in the Quran the story of the righteous servant who killed a youth whose parents were devout believers. The righteous servant had feared that this disobedient and rebellious youth would cause his parents grief and drive them to commit every conceivable sin and ultimately lead them to misery. Thus, a true believer is one who immediately remembers the compensating blessings of a catastrophe. Some of us will recall the story of the virtuous believer who was on the road from Medina to Damascus when he injured his foot and the wound became gangrenous. The doctors decided that the foot needed to be amputated. When they tried to administer a pain-killing substance which would render him unconscious and help him get through the painful ordeal, the righteous believer refused. He explained that he did not like to forget about his Lord for even a blink of an eye.

Allah *Glorified is He* bestows upon such faithful servants a super-human capacity for enduring pain. Since they remain ever conscious of the presence of Allah such believers are allowed to share in His infinite power. After the doctors performed the operation, the virtuous believer asked to see his severed limb before it was buried. He held it and said, ‘O Lord! Even if it may be that I have been tested by suffering the loss of a limb, indeed I have been absolved from such suffering in many other limbs.’

Thus, when a tested person recalls the reward he gets during a calamity, he is resuscitated in pleasure. Therefore, do not be surprised when people praise their Creator at times of a tragedy. Usually, one praises Allah for having bestowed blessings, however, even calamities could bring blessings that greatly compensate for what was lost.

Similarly, one hears of the story of the two mystics who competed with one another in piety. One of them asked the other, ‘How are you doing in your hometown, O fuqara’? The word *fuqara’* refers to those servants of Allah who are particularly ascetic and who devote most of their time to the worship of Allah. So, the second one replied, ‘we give thanks when we are blessed with His bounty and when we are patient when denied.’ The first servant scoffed at him saying, ‘That is the disposition of the stray dogs of Balkh.’ In other words, a dog will wag its tail when fed otherwise he will wait patiently.

So the second servant asked the first, ‘how are you doing?’ ‘When Allah gives us anything we offer it to others and when He denies us anything we thank Him.’

Therefore, every believer following the way of Allah remembers that patience and perseverance in times of trial will be infinitely rewarded by Allah. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He will provide you with a goodly provision.’ (*Hud:* 3)

The amount of good acquired differs depending on the loftiness of the ultimate goal. When you gather the goal together with the action, the full significance of the word 'goodly' becomes apparent. An example of this is the student who never leaves his books. To be sure, even during meals he manages to eat while his eyes continue to browse a textbook. Such a student draws endless motivation from the thought of success: he enjoys the sweetness of his end-goal now even while he is still toiling in the hard work that is supposed to get him there.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse, ‘…and bestow His grace on everyone endowed with grace.’ (*Hud:* 3) This means that Allah disproportionately rewards extra things offered to those without it. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* causes the good deeds of a servant to grow. An example of this is the farmer who takes a portion of his seed stock and scatters it over the land. Allah causes these seeds to multiply so that the resulting harvest produces fifteen-fold of what was originally planted, the word *fadl* (grace) in this verse indicates a reward that exceeds the effort expended. For example, you might have an excess of money which is superfluous money to your needs. While another person might not even have enough money to make ends meet. If you offer some of your excess money to him you are investing this gift in yourself through Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* might also grant you physical strength. You can use some of your strength to help someone who is not so powerful. Allah might have blessed you with forbearance. You can share this blessing with someone who is brazen or impatient. Thus, if a man shares his goodly virtues with others then these qualities develop and mature further with Allah. However, if he withholds these gifts from others, they diminish. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And whatever you lay out as usury, so that it may increase in the property of men, it shall not increase with Allah; and whatever you give in charity, desiring Allah's pleasure – it is these [persons] that shall get manifold.’ (*ar-Rum:* 39)

Some of the scholars understand this clause of the verse we are currently examining that a person who shares what Allah has given him of gifts, Allah, will reward him with more than what he gave away make up what he lost. Or that Allah rewards every endower with gifts from Him and this is truly the ultimate gift.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and if you turn back, then surely I fear for you the chastisement of a great day’ (*Hud:* 3). If they turn away, then let them know that you dread the suffering that will befall them on the Day of Judgment. This suffering is sometimes described as grievous, great, and shameful punishment because it is an unending punishment which varies according to the sufferer. Worldly suffering is, on the one hand, tolerable because there is that intuition that it will inevitably come to an end one day. As for the suffering of the next world it is, on the other hand, unending and permanent for the disbelievers and idolaters.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

إِلَى ٱللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤﴾

It is to God that you will all return,
and He has power over everything’ [4]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 4)

This means that it is Allah to whom everything returns, including the creation and the sustentation throughout life and initiating and terminating and the initiation of the final return that never ends. Those who did good deeds will be rewarded and those who did bad deeds will be punished. Thus, every good deed performed is rewarded on earth and will be rewarded in the next life as well. He who has good deeds that outweigh his sins will enter paradise and he whose sins outweigh his good deeds will enter hell. In addition, there are those whose good deeds outnumber their sins and their lives alternate between depression and joy. Such states of depression and joy are the mark of those who seek repentance from Allah by confessing their sins and admission to sin is the beginning of repentance.

As for him whose sins outnumber his good deeds, he will feel constriction in life and his soul will suffer from angst. So, Allah duly gives every doer of favour his favour. Thereby, those who strove to win His favour, Allah bless them through letting them come to His realm of good deeds, whereas those who turned away face the frightening prospect of suffering on the Day of Judgment. ‘He has power over all things.’ (*Hud:* 4) For Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of creating and sustaining, of initiating and terminating and initiating the everlasting life which is either in heaven or in hell, according to the case. He is Omnipotent. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَلَآ إِنَّهُمۡ يَثۡنُونَ صُدُورَهُمۡ لِيَسۡتَخۡفُواْ مِنۡهُۚ أَلَا حِينَ يَسۡتَغۡشُونَ ثِيَابَهُمۡ
يَعۡلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعۡلِنُونَۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيمُۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٥﴾

See how they [the disbelievers] wrap themselves up, to hide their feelings from Him. But even when they cover themselves with their clothes, He knows what they conceal and what they reveal: He knows well the innermost secrets of the heart [5] (The Quran, *Hud:* 5)

Obviously, when you find the particle *ala* in the beginning of a sentence, you know that its purpose is to demand special attentiveness to what is about to be said. If the listener is absent-minded this reminds him to concentrate so as not to miss anything. This rhetorical alarm is effective insofar as it succeeds in alerting the listener. Its role is to mentally prepare him so that he can receive what you are about to say. Speech is a veil between the speaker and his audience. The audience is ignorant of what the speaker will say. The speaker is in control of the situation. He arranges his thoughts in preparation for speaking, while the audience is yet oblivious to the subject matter. To not surprise the listener or make him miss the whole speech the speaker alerts with such a particle.

`Allah *Glorified is He* hereby says that the disbelievers try to turn away and hide from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They fold up their breasts. To fold something is to bend it in half so that one part of it lies on the other part. When a man folds his breast, he bends it forward towards his stomach, thus hiding the gestures of his face. The purpose of hiding one's face in this case is to conceal the facial features as it betrays the state of the human soul. They hated the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and felt envious of him, however they are reluctant to expose the spiteful state of their soul.

A similar disposition can be noted among the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And indeed, every time I invited them that you may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and were arrogant with [great] arrogance.' (*Nuh:* 7)

Now obviously, it is impossible for an entire finger to be thrust into an ear. It is only the tips of the fingers that cover up the ear's aperture. This exaggeration shows the situation of Nuh (Noah). They all wanted to plug up their ears so as not to hear any message. This is ample proof of their odium and a testament against them. For they know that if they allowed themselves to hear the message, their hearts might be swayed by it. The Quran also mentions what the disbelievers of Mecca were saying amongst themselves. Allah says, '…And those who disbelieve say, "Do not listen to this Quran and make noise therein" ….' (*Fussilat:* 26)

It is as if they had conspired to make noise about the Quran because they knew that if its verses reached their ears it might affect their soul. For the human soul is in constant flux and might be drawn to the truth without the person being aware of it. If the Quran really was false, why were they afraid of hearing its verses? There is really an element of stupidity in their obstinate denial.

Here Allah *Glorified is He* describes how they had covered themselves with their garments so as to hide their faces and conceal the emotions that are written on them. These emotions were most likely, but not necessarily, hateful. A few of them might react positively to the words of the Quran, and this is also something worth masking. Thus, such positive reactions are sometime irrepressible. The disbelievers of Quraysh would often steal off to the Prophet's home to hear the Quran being recited, despite their outward hostility against the Prophet. When they would catch each other listening to the Prophet praying, they excused that they were just passing by his house by accident. On that topic, the poet composed lines reminding them how they sneaked away to the room of Muhammad, late at night after they went out of their assembly, to listen to the revelation and how they used lame excuses like claiming that they wanted to keep an eye on him.

Allah *Glorified is He* again employs the particle *ala* when He says, 'now surely, when they use their garments as a covering, He knows what they conceal and what they make public; surely He knows what is in the breasts.' (*Hud:* 5) Having deceived Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are they really capable of hiding from his Lord? That which eludes the Prophet will not go unnoticed by Allah. Since Allah knows their innermost secrets, He, is clearly also aware of what they deliberately divulge. Allah *Glorified is He* is unseen, and thereby, someone might believe that something can hide from Him. However, Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses but is not encompassed. If someone thinks that Allah *Glorified is He* knows only the unseen; because He is unseen, then this idea is wrong as He knows that which is secret and that which is openly announced. He is the Knower of the innermost secrets of breasts. The word *`alim* is a term of hyperbole. It is an entity whose essence is knowledge.

Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *that* which refers to that which accompanies. Therefore, *that as-sudur* means that which accompanies the breasts of men. As we know, the breast is the seat of the heart and lungs. The heart is the seat of those core beliefs and certainties which are firm therein and around which outward life revolves. Thus, what is meant by *that as-sudur* are those innermost thoughts which dwell permanently in the breasts. They are everlasting companions which never leave it be it spiteful and hateful thoughts or feelings and intentions, whether good or bad which do not come up to the surface in normal interactions. Allah *Glorified is He* is so intimately knowledgeable of the thoughts of the heart that it is as if the physical heart itself was known too.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا مِن دَآبَّةٖ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱللَّهِ رِزۡقُهَا وَيَعۡلَمُ مُسۡتَقَرَّهَا
وَمُسۡتَوۡدَعَهَاۚ كُلّٞ فِي كِتَٰبٖ مُّبِينٖ ٦

There is not a creature that moves on earth whose provision is not His concern. He knows where it lives and its [final] resting place: it is all [there] in a clear record [6] (The Quran, *Hud:* 6)

Here the Quran is further illustrating one of the qualities of Allah. When the Quran comes to an attribute of Allah, it mentions what is related to that attribute. While Allah *Glorified is He* has full knowledge of what is in the hearts: in this case, the hidden, negative elements; He also has full knowledge of the positive aspect of things. Therefore, He is also aware, for example, of the good intentions. However, these verses pertain to the group of people who fold their breasts.

Here, the word *daaba* (animal) denotes all those creatures which walk upon the earth. Traditionally, however, it excludes human beings. We can infer this from what Allah *Glorified is He* and says in another verse, ‘and there is no animal that walks upon neither the earth nor a bird that flies with its two wings but [they are] general like yourselves.’ (*al-An‘am:* 38)

It is mentioned that when Allah *Glorified is He* charged Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with carrying His message, He expressed concerns regarding his family and wondered how he could spread the message while his family is unattended. So Allah *Glorified is He* inspired Musa (Moses) to hurl a boulder. When he did, the boulder turned into a small rock. Allah ordered Musa (Moses) to hit that rock that split into two. When he did, inside the rock Musa was able to perceive a miniscule insect that appeared to be feeding off an even tinier morsel of food. Musa realised that Allah who provided for that insect that lived deep in the shadows of this rock, can surely provide for His family. Thus, Musa (Moses) turned his attention to his mission.

This is natural; for Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all human beings, and He must guarantee to sustain their lives with provision and ensure the survival of their progeny by marriage and spousal affinity. Thus, among the arrangements required by creation is that Allah *Glorified is He* provides physical survival through sustenance, and that He ensures the survival of progeny through marriage.

That is why we have always emphasised the distinction between the bestowal of Divinity and that of Lordship. For, while Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of everyone, He is the God of those who believe in Him. Since Allah *Glorified is He* is the 'Lord' of all, He is responsible for everyone. The sun, for example, rises on both the believer and the disbeliever. The latter might benefit from the sun by extracting solar energy from it; so why should not the believer pursue the causes of this phenomenon? Air also is available to both the believer and the disbeliever, for it is a provision bestowed by the 'Lord'. So, if the disbeliever studies the composition of the atmosphere and learns to benefit from it, the believer should also strive and persevere in understanding these phenomena. Therefore, the bestowal of Lordship is shared by everyone, whereas the bestowal of Divinity is confined to the worshippers. And by worshipping Allah *Glorified is He* He directs you away from what your ego desires to what He wills. When your desires tempt you to do something wrong, Allah's law prevents you. In this way, you can control your desires and make better choices. However, as far as basic needs of life are concerned, the bestowal of Lordship is given to all living creatures in order to sustain themselves.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'There is not a creature that moves on earth whose provision is not His concern….' (*Hud:* 6) The word *`ala* indicates that every creature has a right to such provision. However, they did not compel Allah *Glorified is He* to provide for them; rather, He has imposed this obligation on Himself.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He knows where it lives and its [final] resting place….' (*Hud:* 6) Since He provides for all creatures, He knows where they rest and live so that He delivers this provision to them. The word *al-mastaqar* means the place of 'resting', whereas *al-mustawdi* is the place where 'trusts' are deposited. Hereby, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us this to reassure us that everyone's provision knows his place even though the person does not know where his provision is. The provision might come from unexpected sources; but seeking the provision is something different, for you may seek a provision destined for another person. Imagine, for example, that you planted wheat in your plot of land, but you were then forced to travel, leaving your wheat for someone else to eat. You then eat from another's wheat, and so forth.

Allah *Glorified is He* therefore, says, 'He knows where it lives and its [final] resting place: it is all [there] in a clear record.' (*Hud:* 6), meaning all is preordained. There is a difference between acting on the first impulse that comes to your mind and between carrying out a preconceived plan of action where you carry out your actions deliberately and according to what you had previously planned. The Greatness of the Creator *Glorified is He* manifests itself when everything in life happens according to what He has preordained.

The evidence, for example, is that Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed the chapters of the holy Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When the revelation departs him, he would recite the revealed chapter to his companions who would either write it down if they were able, or memorise it. Then, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would come to pray, he would recite every chapter exactly as Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained, with every verse in its proper place that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has dictated to his companions. How could this happen? This happened because Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'We shall teach you [the Quran] and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6)

The chapter of *Hud* continues with Allah's saying:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُۥ عَلَى
ٱلْمَآءِ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ۗ وَلَئِن قُلْتَ إِنَّكُم مَّبْعُوثُونَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
ٱلْمَوْتِ لَيَقُولَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ٧

It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six Days — His rule extends over the waters too — so as to test which of you does best. Yet [Prophet], if you say to them, 'You will be resurrected after death,' the disbelievers are sure to answer, 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery' [7] (The Quran, *Hud:* 7)

The Quran has addressed the issue of creating the heavens and the earth more than once. We have pointed out previously that Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to create the heavens and the earth in six days. He could have, if He has wished, created the heavens and the earth in the blink of an eye by saying, ‘Be!’ We have also come to know that creating something is not the same as combining pre-existing elements into a new form.

An example of this - and Allah *Glorified is He* knows the best example - can be seen in the making of yoghurt: yeast is added proportionally to warm milk (this only takes a few minutes), then this mixture is left to sit for twenty-four hours during which time it transforms into actual yoghurt. A similar process occurs when it comes to human actions, for they require a passage of time. Divine actions, however, do not require the passage of time because they all happen when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Be!’

As some Islamic scholars have said, Allah *Glorified is He* has willed that the heavens and the earth be created in six days. Some orientalists have taken this verse and other verses as an opportunity to criticise the Holy Quran by claiming that there is a contradiction therein, for Allah *Glorified is He* says here: ‘It is He who has created the heavens and the earth in six Days.’ (*Hud:* 7) The orientalists came to the detailed verses of creating the heavens and the earth and they counted the total number of days therein; they concluded that they are eight days. These detailed verses are Allah's Words, ‘Say, “How can you disregard the One who created the earth in two Days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!” He placed solid mountains on it, blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them—all in four Days. Then, He turned to the sky, which was smoke—He said to it and the earth, “Come into being, willingly or not”, and they said, “We come willingly” and in two Days He formed seven heavens, and assigned an order to each. We have made the nearest one beautifully illuminated and secure. Such is the design of the Almighty, the All Knowing.’ (*Fussilat:* 9-12)

Thereby, some orientalists said that if these detailed verses were the story of the creation of the heavens and earth, the general verse narrating the same story should be consistent with these detailed verses. One of these orientalists said, ‘Suppose I have ten measures of grain, and I gave away five measures to one person, three measures to another person and two to another person. I would have nothing left because the portions of grain I gave away to people amount to the total grain I had in the beginning.’

Similarly, some of the orientalists claimed that the six days mentioned in the chapter of *Hud* do not match the days they counted in the detailed verses of the chapter of *Fussilat*. However, they do not realise that the speaker here is Allah *Glorified is He* and that He is addressing people who are intelligent, articulate, and perceptive. These people understood that which the orientalists failed to grasp. Those people who mastered Arabic understood that Allah *Glorified is He* has created the earth in two days, and then He placed solid mountains on it, blessed it, and measured out its varied provisions. All this is a sort of continuation of the description of Allah's creation of the earth. For example, when travelling from Cairo to Alexandria, I know I will reach the city of Tanta is an hour, then Alexandria in two hours meaning the hour that it took me to reach the mid-way city of Tanta is part and parcel of the total of two hours that it took me to travel to Alexandria.

Likewise, creating the earth and the solid mountains and measuring out its varied provisions all took place in four days which include those two days during which the earth by itself was created. Then the heavens were created in two days.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...His rule extends over the waters.' (*Hud:* 7) From all these matters that deal with the unseen world, there is one essential thing that we must retain, namely it is Allah- the Truthful informer - Who tells us about such matters. For nobody doubts that the heavens and the earth were created and no one doubts that the creation of the heavens and the earth is grander than the creation ofman, and no one has ever claimed that it was he who created the earth or the heavens.

We know who the individuals behind human inventions are, like the light bulb, the telephone, the microphone, the television, the car and so forth. But when it comes to the heavens and the earth, no human being claims to have created them. Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us that He is their Creator and it stays as such until someone challenges this fact, and no one ever will.

And the purpose of Allah's creation is to test us, '...so as to test which of you does best.' (*Hud:* 7) meaning that He might test us to see which of us does the best actions; but who determines what action is best? It is Allah *Glorified is He*. But does He really need to test His creatures? No, since He has known pre-eternally all what creation does. However, the purpose of the testing is that His creatures' acts match what He knows pre-eternally, and (on the Day of Judgment) what they did in life will serve as evidence (either of their goodness or of their wickedness).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Yet [Prophet], if you say to them, "You will be resurrected after death", the disbelievers are sure to answer, "This is clearly nothing but sorcery."' (*Hud:* 7) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* is demonstrating the accusation made by the disbelievers that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is lying. They pronounced words without giving them any thought. Had they paused to reflect on what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying, they could not have logically answered him the way they did.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was merely reporting Allah's Message that they will be resurrected after death. He was just informing them that when they die - which will inevitably happen - Allah *Glorified is He* will resurrect them. All they could say in response was, 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery.' (*Hud:* 7) If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is merely delivering to them a message, where does sorcery fit in here? They knew that what he was saying comes directly from the text of the Holy Quran. Therefore, as they labelled the entire Quran as 'sorcery', it is as if the content of the message itself is part of that sorcery.

Previously, we explained how logically their claim that the Holy Quran is sorcery has been refuted. They had claimed that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*— or simply 'Muhammad' as they used to call him—had put a spell on the community of his followers. The sorcerer has an effect over the one who is hypnotized, and the person who is hypnotized is powerless and has no say in the process of sorcery, so if Muhammad had indeed put a spell on those who had followed him, then why did he not also put a spell on those people who adamantly denied his Message? How could he have not put a spell on them in the same manner that he supposedly put on the others?

The fact that there were some people kept on their stubborn opposition to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Message proves that this is not a case of sorcery. If this was the case, he would have cast a spell on all of them.

The words of Allah, ‘This is clearly nothing but sorcery’ (*Hud:* 7), indicate that the alleged sorcery is of an ‘encompassing’ kind, not that whose effect is restricted to a particular group of people. Thus, the words, ‘This is clearly nothing but sorcery.’ (*Hud:* 7), mean that it is sorcery of the type that encompasses and affects all the people who are targeted. The remaining of even one single person in a state of disbelief in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proves that this is not a case of sorcery.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَئِنۡ أَخَّرۡنَا عَنۡهُمُ ٱلۡعَذَابَ إِلَىٰٓ أُمَّةٖ مَّعۡدُودَةٖ لَّيَقُولُنَّ مَا يَحۡبِسُهُۥٓۗ أَلَا يَوۡمَ
يَأۡتِيهِمۡ لَيۡسَ مَصۡرُوفًا عَنۡهُمۡ وَحَاقَ بِهِم مَّا كَانُواْ بِهِۦ يَسۡتَهۡزِءُونَ ﴿٨﴾

If We defer their punishment for a determined time, they are sure to say, ‘What is holding it back?’ But on the Day it comes upon them, nothing will divert it from them; what they mocked will be all around them [8] (The Quran, *Hud:* 8)

In the word *l`in*, the letter ‘*l’* indicates that there is a dropped affirming oath by Allah. So, taking an oath serves as an affirmation of a matter through what is sworn by. Taking an oath for a matter only happens because someone doubts this matter. For example, you would never tell someone you met, ‘I swear by Allah that I visited my friend yesterday’. The purpose of a swearing is to dispel the doubt of the listener, and that is why it is not used initially. The degree of an oath is in proportion with the degree of doubt.

The Holy Quran says, ‘If We defer their punishment for a determined time...’ (*Hud:* 8). So there is the letter *(waw)* which indicates that what follows is an oath. There is also a conditional clause. And they both require a response. When an oath and a clause are combined in a single expression, one response will eloquently suffice for both. As for example when one says, ‘By Allah if you do this, I will do such and such a thing with you’. The response of the oath suffices as a response to the clause. And whichever precedes the other, whether it is the oath or the clause, its response satisfies the response of the other. For instance, when we say, ‘By Allah, if so-and-so shows up, I will treat him with generosity’. The oath in this case comes first, and its response satisfies the response of the clause. And if you had said, ‘If so-and-so shows up, by Allah, I will treat him with generosity’; in this case, the clause comes first.

The two are united, and the purpose of this is that the oath is an affirmation and the clause is a foundation. If new information precedes both the clause and the oath, then we state the answer to the clause immediately, for example, we would say, ‘Zayd, by Allah if he shows up, treat him with generosity’ because the clause is, as we have said, a foundation and the oath is an affirmation. And in this last case the clause takes precedence since the foundation takes precedence over the affirmation.

And here Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If We defer their punishment for a determined time, they are sure to say, ‘What is holding it back?’ (*Hud:* 8) The answer here is to the oath, and it suffices as a response to the clause as well. This means that punishment will be deferred. Allah *Glorified is He* has promised to punish those who disbelieved in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The punishment of the previous people was that of eradication. Allah *Glorified is He* has stuck some of them with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some were drowned, and still others Allah *Glorified is He* has made the earth swallow.

It is indeed as if the mission of the previous prophets was to convey the Message, and then Allah *Glorified is He* takes over the job of punishing those who disbelieved in the Messages. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has favoured the *ummah* (The followers of Islam) of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* over previous peoples and willed that the disbelievers would be punished firstly on the battlefield. And when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* promises that they will be punished, this punishment will come at a certain time. It might be postponed so that the error and the corruption of the disbelievers is brought to light, then when Allah's punishment finally befalls them, no one will mourn them. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to postpone the punishment of the disbelievers and to give them respite. He lets the unjust have free rein such that his iniquity keeps increasing to the point when the community amongst which he lives begins to hate him. Then when a punishment befalls him, nobody feels any sympathy for him.

Now, as we know, the human soul is such that it is deeply affected by what is happening in the present moment. For example, when someone commits murder, and years go by before he is tried, and then he is sentenced to death, people tend to forget about the villainy of the murder that happened so long ago, and they feel sorry for the murderer when he is sentenced to death. That is why I have always maintained that one of the main reasons for the continuation of committing crimes is the slowness of the court system. That is why the public's feelings lean toward the criminal; because the scene of the dead victim has long since left their memories.

However, if people would only recall - when the sentence is pronounced - the circumstances of the crime, they would rejoice in the verdict. That is why, when Allah *Glorified is He* wills that someone should be punished, He says, '...and ensure that a group of believers witnesses the punishment.' (*an-Nur:* 2) So the punishment takes place in full view of the community that suffered from their corruption and injustice. Those who were most directly affected by the crime, by witnessing the punishment, will heal. Here Allah *Glorified is He* tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: you have promised them that they will suffer one day, and We are delaying that day and are, for the moment, giving them free rein. However, they have seized that as an opportunity for mockery and sarcastic ridicule, and they asked where the punishment was. In the Quran, we find that these same people also utter the following, 'They say, 'Our Lord! Advance us our share of punishment before the Day of Reckoning!' (*Sad:* 16) The word *al-qatt* means: the reward of one's work; it is derived from the word *al-qat`* which means: a cut or portion.

Now the degree of punishment is proportional to the crime. If the crime is serious, then the punishment is great, and if the crime is minor, then the punishment is also limited. Thus, the severity of the punishment always depends on the crime.

Strange indeed, that some of them could utter, 'Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32) The Quran also mentions them to have said, 'Or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen....' (*al-Isra':* 92) Certainly, no man wishes that punishment would befall him; the disbelievers, nevertheless, said what they said in defiance and in sarcastic mockery. But Allah *Glorified is He* has willed not to punish the disbelievers who were the contemporaries of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the same way that He has punished the disbelievers who were the contemporaries of previous prophets. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But Allah will not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst....' (*al-Anfal:* 33) Moreover, there were some who concealed their faith simply because neither they were powerful enough to confront the disbelievers openly nor did they have the means of emigrating to Medina. Their circumstances forced them to live amongst the disbelievers.

This is made clear in the chapter of *al-Fath* where Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They were the ones who disbelieved, who barred you from the Sacred Mosque, and who prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been among them, unknown to you, believing men and women whom you would have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account – Allah brings whoever He will into His Mercy— if the [believers] had been clearly separated, We would have inflicted a painful punishment on the disbelievers.' (*al-Fath:* 25) meaning that had the disbelievers been distinguishable from the believers, Allah *Glorified is He* would have inflected an agonising punishment on the disbelievers. However, had the Muslims entered Mecca with their army (which was stationed nearby in Al-Hudaibya, and had a battle taken place, it would have affected all the residents of Mecca, amongst whom there were some believers who were spread out amongst the disbelievers, and were not concentrated in an area so that the Muslims would be able to deliver a blow to the side of the disbelievers only. Thus, had the Muslims attacked the city and stricken its fighters, they would have unwittingly stricken some believers and this is what Allah *Glorified is He* has wished to avert as in 'If We defer their punishment for a determined time....' (*Hud:* 8)

Al-ummah is a group of members of the same species, like a group of people, a group of Jinn, or a group of ants…and other creatures of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'All the creatures that crawl on the earth and those that fly with their wings are communities like you are. We have missed nothing out of the Record— in the end they will be gathered to their Lord.' (*al-An'am:* 38) Thus, *al-ummah* is a group that is united by a singular law and system; its members are equal in everything. *Al-ummah* might also refer to a period of time, such as in Allah's Words, 'But the prisoner who had been freed at last remembered [Joseph]...' (*Yusuf:* 45) meaning he recalled even after a long time had passed; the period referred to as *ummah* might be the amount of time roughly equivalent to 'a generation'.

Ummah then, is a group that is united by the similarity of its members; these members might have distinctive qualities, but they generally share some common qualities. Human beings belong to an *ummah* that can be defined as animals who have the ability to speak and who can think rationally. Although there are common features shared by all humans, there are also differences in talents.

And there is no one human soul that possesses the aptitude for architecture, medicine, business, pharmacy, and accounting. All these kinds of work require years of serious study. And man does not have a long enough lifetime to specialise in all these fields; that is why everyone specialises in only one field; so that through his knowledge he can serve others, and so that others can specialise in other fields and serve the rest, and so on. In such a way, there develop symbiotic relationships in society, so that each member feels that he needs others, and that he is unable to survive independently from the rest of creation. Suppose that one person could have knowledge of all the different professions in the world - medicine, architecture, law, iron-works, carpentry, agriculture and others - then would he care about other people? That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has willed that societies come together out of practical necessity and not as a favour between one person and another. The person who sweeps the streets or the one who cleans the sewage does not perform this work out of graciousness; rather, he does it out of need. He needs to work and he needs money because his body requires food and clothing and because his children need food, shelter and clothing as well. Were it not for this, he would not work that job. And if he works hard at his job, Allah *Glorified is He* will make him love his work. And even if his situation improves, he remains steadfast to his profession because he loves to master and perfect his job.

I once saw a man who worked in this field, carrying loads of sewage on his shoulders. When Allah *Glorified is He* improved his financial situation, he bought a donkey-pulled carriage to carry extra loads. And when Allah *Glorified is He* improved his financial situation even further, he purchased a car which had a suction device so that he could remain seated, all while operating the machine which sucked up the sewage and sent it to a special storage unit in the back of the vehicle.

So, social relationships are born out of necessity, not out of favour. Because favour is not binding, it does not compel one to perform work. Necessity, however, forces one to perform work; it keeps the wheels of daily life moving.

Whosoever loves his work - whatever this work may be – Allah *Glorified is He* grants him more success in it; for such a person respected what Allah *Glorified is He* has destined for him, and was not conceited. And Allah *Glorified is He* grants him all kinds of gifts through this work, since he loves his work, and works sincerely at it. If you look at those who achieved greatness in their professions - however lowly - you will find that their stories start with acceptance of what Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen for them.

As we know, the value of a person lies in that which he perfects. Thus, you will find that society is composed of various talents which complement each other rather overlap with each other such that every man is in need of the expertise of others. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We have raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). One does not solicit another's services unless the one who is solicited is in need of compensation from the work. That is way you will find people knocking at your door asking, 'Do you need a driver? Do you need a servant'? The person in need is the one who offers his services, in the hopes of finding a job that he might perform well. Therefore, the family of a person must not conceive of his work - whatever this may be - as a means of serving the one served. No… he is serving his own needs. And thus, social bonds develop out of necessity, and not out of goodwill.

Allah *Glorified is He* says of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* 'Abraham was truly an example...' (*an-Nahl:* 120) for he *peace be upon him* possessed many virtues which are usually found scattered amongst different people in society. The term *ummah* is used to describe a period of time, or a group of members of the same species and it can also be used to describe a man who combines within himself all the good qualities.

And here Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If We defer their punishment for a determined time....' (*Hud:* 8) Normally, the word *ma`duda* (determined) describes a state of paucity as in Allah's Words, 'and then sold him for a small price, for a few *(Ma`duda)* pieces of silver: so little did they value him.' (*Yusuf:* 20) So long as the price was low, there must have been a limited amount of silver coins.

The reason for taking the word *ma`duda* as signifying scarcity is that we do not proceed to count something unless we are convinced that we will be able to do so, that is because the number is relatively small. We would not proceed to count that which we know is a lot. No one, for instance, has counted all the grains of sand in the world or all the stars in the universe. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If you tried to count Allah's favours you could never calculate them....' (*Ibrahim:* 34) The Arabic word *in* (if), as we know, serves to express doubt; and Allah's blessings are not conceivably countable.

Despite the progress that man has made in the science of statistics, has anyone devoted himself to count the blessings of Allah *Glorified is He*? No, of course not…even though it is possible to calculate population numbers and their distribution according to profession, for example.

In the old days, those who oversaw counting what was in the donation funds would sort all the one-hundred bills together, the ten bills together, and similarly with all the other bills. When it was time to count the coins, they would count them by weight: knowing how many coins were in a kilogram, they would simply calculate how many kilograms there were.

And Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If We defer their punishment for a determined time, they are sure to say, "What is holding it back?"' (*Hud:* 8) It is as if they mockingly and sarcastically ask, 'Why has the punishment promised to us by Messenger Muhammad been delayed?' for no one looks forward to something painful, so such talk is only said sarcastically. The response to this begins with that rhetorical device that we discussed earlier, namely, *`ala*. In other words: pay close attention to what is about to be said. And Allah says, 'But on the Day, it comes upon them, nothing will divert it from them....' (*Hud:* 8) This is an assertive confirmation that the punishment will come, even though man is always impatient, rushing things.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not rush things in the way His servants do; everything takes place the time He has determined; and when the predestined moment arrives, they will indeed get what they were impatient for. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'what they mocked will be all around them.' (*Hud:* 8) The confirmation of their punishment is evident, firstly, because of the term *'ala,* which is a forceful assertion and also because of Allah's Words: 'on the Day it comes upon them' (*Hud:* 8) which is a guarantee that this day is coming, since the informer is Allah *Glorified is He*. Also, this punishment stated clearly in the saying of Allah, '…nothing will not divert it from them.' (*Hud:* 8) is continuous, uninterrupted. And the the danger is inescapble: 'what they mocked will be all around them.' (*Hud:* 8)

Now, the verb *haq* is in the past tense, even though the current discussion concerns that which has yet to pass for which the present tense, which expresses the present or the future, should be used. Thus, how are the disbelievers trying to hasten something that is expressed in the past tense? However, the speaker here is Allah *Glorified is He* and it is He Who determines the rules of discourse. And every action is determined by the power of its doer, and Allah is the source of all power.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah's Judgement is coming, so do not ask to bring it on sooner.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) The verb *ata* (came) is by all grammatical standards in the past tense meaning that the statement came after the event had occurred. As when, for example, we say 'Mohammad passed his exams'; this means that Mohammad's successful passing of his exams has happened.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah's Judgement is coming (literally, has come) ...' (*an-Nahl:* 1), we understand it as a speech preceded by actual happenings. Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards, '... so do not ask to bring it on sooner.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) Thus, this indicated that the event has not yet come to pass. However, the speaker is Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, the overall meaning is that the event is undoubtedly bound to occur because every action depends upon the power of its doer.

To give a real-life example - and Allah *Glorified is He* knows best - that you needed to move a heavy, cumbersome suitcase; so your son who is young says, ‘Let me carry it for you.’ Your son is offering to carry it in your place because he can move it faster as his ability to carry it corresponds, of course, to his strength. If your youngest son came to you and said that he would carry it for you, you know that he could carry it only insofar as his limited strength allows.

Therefore, on the human plane, you can look back and evaluate the past, rightly or wrongly. However, you cannot pronounce any judgment when it comes to the future because you have no hold on future events. But when the speaker is capable of carrying out in the future that which He promises in the present, and there is nothing that can bar Him from doing so, then you can be absolutely certain that the matter shall come to pass.

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* is hereby informing us of that which will come to pass, and nothing in the created universe can thwart His plans. And so long as Allah *Glorified is He* has said that it is a matter that has already come, then it will certainly come to pass. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘what they mocked will be all around them.’ (*Hud:* 8) Even though, in the context of the human plan, the proper formulation would be: they will be overwhelmed by the very thing which they were wont to deride given that they wanted to hasten their own punishment. The word *wahaq* implies, therefore, that no obstacle whatsoever will prevent the fated event from coming to pass.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَئِنۡ أَذَقۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مِنَّا رَحۡمَةٗ ثُمَّ نَزَعۡنَٰهَا
مِنۡهُ إِنَّهُۥ لَيَـُٔوسٞ كَفُورٞ ٩

How desperate and ungrateful man becomes
when We let him taste Our mercy and then
withhold it! [9] (The Quran, *Hud:* 9)

This verse also begins with *(wa la`in)*, where the ‘*l’* indicates taking of an oath. And it is as if He is saying, ‘If we let man taste some of Our Mercy, then

We withheld it, he would sink into despair'. Here again it is a case of the taking of an oath and a clause, with the oath coming first; thus, the response is for the oath. The word *adhaqna* (To let someone taste) implies that the primary place for taste is the mouth: this means that you taste something to find out about its taste: sweet or sour, acidic or alkaline. It is interesting, as far as the precision of human formation is concerned, that every part on the tongue has a corresponding taste that to which it reacts. Thus, the front part of the tongue reacts to a certain food, and the middle of the tongue reacts to another food, and the sides of the tongue react to yet a third type of food, and so on and so forth.

All of this on a single organ, thus Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to create in such precise construction. And every taste bud on the human tongue has a taste that it detects; that is why we find a person tasting food and saying that this dish needs more salt, or when tasting sweets - like *kunafa* - and saying that the sugar in it is just right.

This is similar to body temperature. A person takes his temperature, and if he finds it to be thirty-seven and a half degrees centigrade, he says that this is normal temperature. If man's temperature drops below this level, it is said that one has hypothermia. If it rises above this level, it is said that one has a fever. However, this is the human body's overall temperature. Every individual organ in the body requires a particular temperature which enables it to function correctly.

Thus, if the liver's temperature drops below forty degrees centigrade it stops functioning correctly. The human body has multiple organs; the temperature of the eye for example is a mere nine degrees because if its temperature increases above that level the eye could burst. Similarly, the ear's temperature is eight degrees centigrade. You would be unable to bring together multiple entities of different temperatures together, but Allah has willed as much for the human body.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When We let man taste….' (*Hud:* 9) And to taste is to perceive; when you are shopping for fruits at the market, the vendor will offer you a taste of the fruit he is selling; so you try a piece to enjoy its taste. To taste, then, is the act of putting something to one's tongue to perceive its flavour.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wills someone to be showered with His blessings, then they are taken away from him, the person becomes sad or depressed or struck by panic or despair. Man cherishes blessings from Allah *Glorified is He* however small they might be; and if he is stripped of them, he sinks into despair and ingratitude. And to despair is to lose all hope that something will happen; and because man is incapable of 'blessing himself', for if he were capable, he would not fall into despair. The true believer never despairs; for Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and do not despair of Allah's Mercy—only disbelievers despair of Allah's Mercy.' (*Yusuf:* 87) Thus, despair is when all hope is lost, and you have neither the means nor the power to attain that which you desire. And he who despairs is he who has no God to turn to; for Allah *Glorified is He* is unfaltering Guide, and when the believer loses something he should say, 'Allah will compensate me with something better'. As for he who has no faith in Allah *Glorified is He* he would say, 'This is but an unfortunate coincidence that will probably never occur again'.

For the person who has a pound stolen from him might be sad, but if he knows that he has ten pounds at home he will mourn but a little over the stolen pound. A person despairs only when he has no faith in a source which can replace his loss; however, if a person has faith in a source that is capable of granting him all that he wants, such a person is never despondent or in despair.

The believer knows that for every blessed bounty there is a giver; if blessings do come he gives thanks to Allah *Glorified is He* for them, and if withhold, he knows that Allah *Glorified is He* has done so out of wisdom.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When We let man taste Our Mercy....' (*Hud:* 9) We know that what is meant by 'man' is all humankind, all the descendants of Adam *peace be upon him*; and they are numerous, some are believers, and some are disbelievers. The term 'man' is used in its general sense, but elsewhere Allah *Glorified is He* excludes the believers saying, 'By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe....' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3) Thus, the term 'man' denotes humanity at large, but Allah *Glorified is He* excludes all those who believe in Him. So, if you see the term 'man', then realise that it includes all members of humankind.

And if man drifts away from the path of Allah *Glorified is He* he becomes doomed to perdition - unless he returns to the path of Allah *Glorified is He*; for

His path protects him against going astray, and transforms him such that his very instincts tend towards the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has created instincts for fundamental functions; the hunger instinct drives man to find food, and as for thirst, Allah *Glorified is He* has willed that its purpose be to alert man that he needs to find water to quench his thirst. The instinct of reproduction drives man to get married, and the instinct of curiosity pushes man to discover and invent new things.

Allah *Glorified is He* says the following about those who are oblivious of His signs in the cosmos, ‘And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to.’ (*Yusuf:* 105) The experimental researcher looks to the phenomena of the universe to discover its secrets. Beware, however, that there is a difference between the love for scientific discovery and that unhealthy curiosity about other people’s affairs. Generally speaking, passionate curiosity is a healthy instinct; it is what makes the world go round. However, our instinct to discover should be directed by religion and good conduct. Therefore, instincts have specific functions outside of which they should be allowed to wander. And the directives of religion are here to elevate the instincts and to direct them toward their proper function.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And do not spy on one another.’ (*Yusuf:* 105) meaning not to seek to discover other people’s private lives; for if we allowed someone to expose people’s secrets, we would have to let everyone else expose his secrets. And when Allah *Glorified is He* forbids man from delving into the personal lives of others; He has thereby protected him against others' delving into his.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘When We let him taste Our Mercy and then withhold it....’ (*Hud:* 9) Notice that the word *an-naz`* (withholding) testifies to the fact that man is keenly protective over that which Allah *Glorified is He* bestows upon him like goodness, good health and happiness. When these are taken away from him, he resists. To take away implies the ‘confiscation’ of that which was once ‘possessed’.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *Al-`Imran*, ‘Say, “Allah, holder of all control. You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will…"' (*Al-'Imran*: 26). It is as if he who is present in control is strongly holding on it.

And here Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'How desperate and ungrateful man becomes when We let him taste Our Mercy and then withhold it!' (*Hud:* 9) In the same chapter, the exception to the rule is mentioned, 'Not so those who are steadfast and do good deeds: they will have forgiveness and a great reward.' (*Hud:* 11) And we will give our commentary on this verse shortly.

Going back to those from whom Allah *Glorified is He* has taken His Mercy; those who are desperate and ingratitude, He says about them:

وَلَئِنْ أَذَقْنَٰهُ نَعْمَآءَ بَعْدَ ضَرَّآءَ مَسَّتْهُ لَيَقُولَنَّ ذَهَبَ
ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتُ عَنِّيٓ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَفَرِحٌ فَخُورٌ ﴿١٠﴾

And if We let him taste mercy after some harm has touched him, he is sure to say, 'Misfortune has gone away from me.' He becomes exultant and boastful [10]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 10)

Here, it is harm that is the pre-existing condition, and the state of mercy and plenty is the condition that is introduced - the opposite of the first case, where the pre-existing condition was dominated by mercy, ease, and munificence. In the first scenario, the 'taking away' replaced the state of Mercy. In the second scenario, mercy and ease replaced the state of harm.

There is a difference between *na`ma`* (bliss) and *ni`ma* (a blessing), and between *darra`* (a state of affliction) and *durr* (an affliction). For *durr* is that which harms the soul, and *na`ma`* is that which gives the soul pleasure. However, pleasure or pain might exist in the soul, their effect might not necessarily be visible. However, if noticeable effects of pleasure become apparent in a person, then it is called *na`ma`* (bliss), and if the noticeable effects of pain become apparent in a person, then it is called *darra'* (a state of affliction). So Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And if We let him taste mercy after some harm has touched him, he is sure to say, "Misfortune has gone away from me."' (*Hud:* 10) He who utters this statement does not realise that it is Allah *Glorified is He* who has taken misfortune away; for misfortune does not go away on its own accord. If it were a believer, he would say, ‘Allah has taken my misfortune away.’ But he who uttered the statement quoted in the verse is not a believer; and that is why he sinks into false happiness and baseless conceit. Allah *Glorified is He* describes him as, ‘He becomes exultant and boastful.’ (*Hud:* 10) Overjoyed at such blessed gifts, it is as if he forgot about He who bestowed the gifts and removed the misfortune.

As for pride, we know that it consists of flaunting one’s own qualities; thus, you might find a person touting his virtues and qualities to another person who lacks them. And we know that in society there are certain distinguished people; however, the morals of faith require us not to flaunt our individual qualities. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I am the master of the children of Adam on the Day of Judgment, and I am not boasting.’(1) During one of the battles we find him saying, ‘I am the Prophet, and there is no lie about it; I am the son of `Abd Al-Muttalib.’(2)

In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was forced to utter such a statement because the disbelievers in that battle had thought that they had him and his companions surrounded and that he would try to flee. However, he bravely announced, ‘I am the Prophet, and there is no lie about it; I am the son of `Abdul Muttalib.’ Indeed, among the ranks of the Muslims, he was the closest vis-à-vis the disbelieving enemy on the battlefield.

We find that in sports, for example, among a group of wrestlers or competitors, there will be an individual who will bellow mightily such that he raises the morale of his own side and intimidates his opponent.

A man who is prideful is in effect oblivious of He who bestows those very qualities of which he is proud. And had he been conscious of the majesty of the Bestower, he would show humbleness towards Him. And if the vision of he who is arrogant and boastful would be turned towards Allah, he would shrivel up in His presence, and would attribute everything he had to the Bestower. An example of this in the Quran is when Allah *Glorified is He* quotes the companion of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* as saying, ‘I did not do [these things] of my own accord.’ (*Hud:* 10) Such is the attitude of the modest worshiper.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

As for the prideful and those who are oblivious of Allah *Glorified is He* the Quran portrayed their attitude in the following quote from Qarun, ‘This wealth was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess.’ (*al-Qasas:* 78) His fate was, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We caused the earth to swallow him and his home.’ (*al-Qasas:* 81)

That is why we have insisted that one should cherish every blessing that one has by saying, ‘In the Name of Allah, this is Allah’s will’ so that you might realise that this blessing did not come to you as a result of your own efforts only, but that it primarily came to you because of the will of Allah *Glorified is He*. And if you come to realize this truly, then the Bestower will safeguard for you those blessings which you have. On the other hand, when you forget about the Bestower, He will not safeguard for you those blessings.

Notice that Allah *Glorified is He* has not prohibited that joy that emanates from the expanded breast nor that delight in His blessings. On the contrary, He commands us to display such joy when He says, ‘Say [Prophet], “In Allah’s Grace and Mercy let them rejoice....”’ (*Yunus:* 58) However, Allah *Glorified is He* commands the believer not to express joy over the most trivial of things, lest he become one the gloating people whom Allah *Glorified is He* dispraises.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ
لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

Not so those who are steadfast and do good deeds: they will have forgiveness and a great reward [11] (The Quran, *Hud:* 11)

Here, the word *sabaru* (those who are steadfast) corresponds with the two orders that came before in the two previous verses; for there is a taking away of mercy, and there is also bestowing of mercy after some harms, and both situations call for steadfastness; for each of us will go through predestined events, and must be patient and have faith in the wisdom of the Omnipotent *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* begins this verse with making an exception for He says, ‘Not so those who are steadfast....’ (*Hud:* 11) Were it not for Allah

Glorified is He making this exception, all human beings would fall under the verdict of the previous two verses, that is, despair and disbelief, or prideful joy devoid of any acknowledgement of the Bestower of blessings.

This exception to the rule comes as a reassurance for those who would endure patiently the hardships that might befall them in their struggle to spread Allah's Message or those who would endure adversity in their personal lives which is not caused by the disbelievers; rather, such adversity is the predestination of the Almighty, the All Knowing. They might also endure hardships caused by their fellow believers.

Therefore, patience means to curb one's ego so as to accept the adversity which Allah *Glorified is He* puts before us. The adversity comes from different sources: Sometimes it befalls, not from some external antagonist, but from within, such as when one falls sick. Often, however, it is other human beings who test our patience such as when someone steals something from you, or when someone wrongs you. In such cases, you can become fully busy with a burning desire for revenge, for getting back at this person; this can be even more frustrating than those cases where there is no external opponent to blame, such as when one falls ill. Where there is a desire for revenge, patience that is required in such cases differs from that required when there is no external foe.

Thus, Allah presents to us how to adapt our patience according to these different circumstances. Luqman, for instance, tells his son, '...bear anything that happens to you steadfastly: these are things to be aspired to.' (*Luqman:* 17) Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Though if a person is patient and forgives, this is one of the greatest things.' (*ash-Shura:* 43) The Arabic phraseology of this verse has the function of firmly asserting that such a situation requires a strong will; for there is an antagonist who is drawing my ire in that case. At some point, I might run into the person who hit me, or insulted me, or robbed me or abused me verbally - the situation requires patience, strength of will.

As for when there is no external enemy, Allah *Glorified is He* simply says, '...bear anything that happens to you steadfastly.' (*Luqman:* 17) However, Allah *Glorified is He* added the letter *lam* in the other verse to emphasise the need for forbearance and forgiveness when there is an enemy. So, He says, 'Though if a person is patient and forgives, this is one of the greatest things.'

(*ash-Shura:* 43) These, then, are the exception - the patient ones, in all their different situations. And here Allah says, ‘Not so those who are steadfast and do good deeds...’ (*Hud:* 11) So long as we are discussing patience, we must point out that this virtue is required when one has been harmed. However, beware of letting harm—that has touched you by an adversary who shares your faith, or by one who does not share your faith — distract you from your religious duties to Allah *Glorified is He*; for the virtue of patience does not mean simply keeping your anger inside and tormenting yourself such that all the suppressed anger prevents you from performing your normal functions in life. Allah *Glorified is He* in fact permits you to get rid of your bitterness and resentment through adhering to faith which alleviates some of the anger.

In order to take the sting out of one’s anger, Allah *Glorified is He* permits you to retaliate against he who has harmed you by harming him in like; for Allah *Glorified is He* does not wish that you remain in such a state of fierce anger and suppression that it prevents you from doing your work; rather, He wishes that you devote yourself fully to performing your duties. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* asks of you nothing less than justice when He says, ‘So if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him as he attacked you...’ (*al-Baqara:* 194). There are some, however, who are capable of controlling their anger, hence Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Those who restrain their anger...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 134). The meaning of *kazhm al-ghaish* (restraining anger) is that, even though one feels angry, one does not react vindictively. Just as one would say, ‘I restrained the water bag’, for if the water bearer does not restrain the water bag, the water would splash out, thus, he restrains the water bag to keep the water contained. Though containing one’s rage can be an estimable virtue, it is not always a positive thing; especially if there is still much anger still raging inside; thus, there is yet a loftier way of dealing with anger, and it is presented in Allah's Words, ‘Those who pardon people...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 134) meaning that you expel anger from your heart and forgive.

Thus, you are faced with three options: You repay harm done to you in kind. This option is merely theoretical; for if someone slaps you in the face, how can you gauge the exact amount of pain to inflict when you slap him in return? When seeking exact revenge, anger is a poor judge; anger is unable to fairly gauge how much pain to inflict in return, and so fair justice will not be served. In this case, therefore, patience is a better alternative; for as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...but it is best to bear steadfastly.' (*Al-'Imran:* 134) For if you put too much power in your counter-blow, you would then be the aggressor.

Let us recall Shakespeare's play 'The Merchant of Venice' where the main character is this Jewish merchant who lends out money to a man. Now, part of the agreement stipulated was that the Jewish merchant would cut out a pound of the borrower's flesh, if the latter was late in his repayment. The borrower was indeed late in his repayment, and the Jewish merchant wanted to cut out a pound of the borrower's flesh. The case was brought to a judge—a very wise man—who wanted to issue a ruling that was equitable and just. So the judge said, 'You are justified in taking a pound of this man's flesh; bring forth the knife, and cut out one pound of flesh, no more, no less; for if you cut out more than one pound of flesh we shall cut out the difference from your own flesh and with the same knife; and if you cut out less than one pound of flesh, we will also cut out the difference from your own flesh—as punishment.' The Jewish merchant hesitated because no butcher can steady his hand so much as to cut out a piece of meat weighing exactly one pound; rather, he sometimes cuts out a little more than the exact weight, and other times he cuts out a little less than the exact weight, then he adds a little or takes off a little according to the case. So, the Jewish merchant withdrew his case and dropped the charge; what prompted him to do this was his inability to exact a fair revenge. Had he been able to temper his feelings a little, the situation would have not reached such a verdict.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* encourages us to return harm done to us in in the same way, and if we wish to elevate ourselves, then let us contain our anger. If we wish to elevate ourselves further, then let us expel anger from the heart and let us be among those who forgive; that we may earn Allah's good pleasure; for Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…who restrain their anger and pardon people— Allah loves those who do good.' (*Al-'Imran:* 134) Through such acts, the believer rises by adhering to Allah's path which encourages the one who has been harmed to be the doer of good. When you try to explain Allah's love for those who do good deeds—whether from a philosophical, logical or economic point of view—you will find that it is a sound argument, and Allah

Glorified is He says, '…let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? Allah is most forgiving and merciful.' (*an-Nur:* 22)

So, if your brother in the faith wrongs you, you can either retaliate in kind, suppress your anger or rise to the level of forgiveness; in doing so, you join the ranks of those who do good; for, if you had committed a sin, then, learned that Allah *Glorified is He* intends to forgive you for it, would you not feel joy? Therefore, as long as you want Allah to forgive sins that you have committed against Him, why then would you not forgive the sin that your brother in the faith has committed against you?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…Do you not wish that Allah should forgive you?' (*an-Nur:* 22) Here, the True Lord addresses the human soul; for a servant who forgives the wrong deed of a brother in faith towards him, he will be credited a good deed. Forgiveness earns its author significant credit with Allah *Glorified is He*; for the servant who forgives, shall earn the forgiveness of Allah because you refrain from punishing and retribution for Allah's sake, for comfort lies in submission to Allah.

If you were to take revenge on those who have harmed you, your revenge would be proportional to your strength. However, if you leave the matter to the strength of Allah *Glorified is He* then, your revenge would be much more powerful as you are leaving it to the Power of all powers. Thus; he who forgives a wrongdoer, earns a lofty rank because he brought Allah *Glorified is He* to his side. Some ask: 'how can religion ask people to show kindness to those who wrong them?' Rationalizing this query by saying that such behaviour goes against human nature, We would reply: showing kindness to a wrongdoer is the most supreme of behaviours, and it is not something that is obligatory for the True Lord *Glorified is He* has permitted that we retaliate in kind to an aggression committed against us; at the same time, Allah also encourages the believer to restrain his anger, or even to ascend to the commendable heights of forgiveness and kindness. All of these correspond to degrees of certitude and faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

Take yourself, for example—and with Allah is the highest example—if you want to apply this principle to yourself when one of your children has wronged another, your heart, your feelings and your sympathy inclines towards the child that was wronged.

He who asks: how can the law require that I show kindness towards he who wrongs me? We would say to him: remember what Al-Hasan al-Basri(1) *Allah be pleased with him* once said, ‘Should I not show kindness towards he who Allah has placed by my side?’ If all those who know this principle in theory put it into practice with certitude and sincerity, life will become an earthly paradise, where forgiveness is swift, intimacy between people dominates, and love becomes its creed.

In the verse which we are discussing, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…Not so those who are steadfast and do good deeds: they will have forgiveness and a great reward.’ (*Hud:* 11) If one were to ask: why do they earn forgiveness? We say: because they were patient and forgave; that is why Allah *Glorified is He* grant them His forgiveness because they endured abuse patiently, and forgave those who committed the abuse, so Allah *Glorified is He* cannot but reward them, not only with forgiveness, but also with great credit as well.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَعَلَّكَ تَارِكٌۢ بَعۡضَ مَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَيۡكَ وَضَآئِقُۢ بِهِۦ صَدۡرُكَ أَن يَقُولُواْ لَوۡلَآ أُنزِلَ
عَلَيۡهِ كَنزٌ أَوۡ جَآءَ مَعَهُۥ مَلَكٌۚ إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ نَذِيرٞۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ وَكِيلٌ ﴿١٢﴾

So [Prophet] are you going to abandon some part of what is revealed to you, and let your heart be oppressed by it, because they say, ‘Why is no treasure sent down to him? Why has no angel come with him?’? You are only there to warn; it is God who is in charge of everything [12] (The Quran, *Hud:* 12)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses a rhetorical question when He says, ‘So [Prophet] are you going to abandon some part of what is revealed to you….' (*Hud:* 12) This is a rhetorical question that implies negation. For instance—and Allah has the highest example—you might want to persuade your son to work hard at school, so you would tell him: 'perhaps you are comforted by your classmate's failure?' This is a rhetorical question that implies negation, and at the heart of this rhetorical question is a plea. Here, the One Who makes the plea is Allah *Glorified is He* Who has trusted Muhammad *peace be upon him* with His Message.

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(1) Al-Hassan ibn Yasar Al-Basri, Abu Sa`id, Tabe`i, was the Imam of the people of Basra, an eminent religious authority in his time, and a learned religious scholar, extremely pious and ascetic. He was born in Medina in the year 21 of the Islamic calendar and grew up under the wing of `Ali ibn Abu Ṭalib. He used to counsel the political rulers of the time, advising them on what to do and what not to do; he lived in Basra and died there in the year 110 of the Islamic calendar at the age of ninety.

Thus, the True Lord's statement means to not let your breast (heart) be distressed—O Prophet—by these obstinate and intransigent people who want to dislodge you from your station which you have always insisted strongly on, for you have constantly insisted that you are human, and that which they demand of you ought to have been with the station which you have ascribed to yourself for you have never told them that you were a god wherefore they would ask of you to bend the laws of nature; rather, you are a conveyor of Allah's message.

Let not your breast become distressed such that you intentionally withhold certain parts of that which was revealed to you because the Message represents an incriminating proof against them. Though you might feel distress when they deny the verses, nevertheless, so long as you convey the entire message that you have been charged with, know that Allah *Glorified is He* will increase their punishment in proportion to that which they have denied.

The word *da`iq* (distressed) is the active present principle. It means that he who is thus described will not remain in such a state permanently, but it is just a phase among others. For example, we can say: 'so and so is *najir*' which means he is capable of performing some carpentry work, but that his capacities in this craft are limited and he is not a professional. The word *da`iq* is also indicative of how much obdurate denial the disbelievers directed at the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and how superhuman in nature were the demands they imposed upon him; for in this instance they had asked that treasure would descend upon him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* in fact alludes to this issue of a treasure to illustrate what their values in life are; their most supreme value centres on money; that is why they had wished that the Quran would have descended on someone who is rich, as the following verse from the True Lord *Glorified is He* confirms, ‘and they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Therefore, their objection was not with the Quran, but with he to whom the Quran was revealed. In the verse which we are considering, they ask that a treasure be brought down to him thinking as they did that wealth and riches would distract him and his followers from spreading the message of Allah *Glorified is He*. They had forgotten that they had tempted him with worldly wealth once before. Thereby, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has made it clear to whosoever makes him such offers that he is uninterested in treasure. The Arabic word *al-kanz* (treasure) linguistically—refers to that which is densely rich; if cattle, for instance, were full of meat one would say that they are *muktaniza lahma*. But the word *al-kanz* designates by which the price and value and everything else is determined, namely gold. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in Allah's cause that they will have a grievous punishment.’ (*at-Tawba:* 34)

We know that there is a difference between direct sustenance and indirect sustenance. Indirect sustenance is that, which you benefit from in terms of food or drink, and there is something that brings to you the indirect sustenance; however, it cannot take the place of direct, continuous sustenance.

If a man in the desert has tons over tons of gold but cannot find any food, then what good does all the gold do him? If someone were to offer him a loaf of bread and a drink of water in return for all his gold he would agree immediately. In this case, the assessment of values does not equate a ton of gold to a loaf of bread and a sip of water; rather, a ton of gold is equivalent to basic survival and vital needs.

Thus, *kanz* (treasure) means a hoarded amount of gold and silver; in our own Egyptian dialect, we would say: ‘*nuqud taht al-balata’* (money (stashed) under the floor tile) which corresponds to the phrase ‘money under the mattresses’. But, if the owner of this currency gives away a portion of what he owns for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He,* then it is not considered a *kanz* because the condition of the *kanz* is that it is hidden; and the portion of stored wealth that is given away as a poor-due lets the society know that the owner is not hiding away what he has.

Kanz only applies to that which has been densely accumulated, where Allah's share has not been disbursed. For, if he disburses the portion that belongs to Allah *Glorified is He,* then its *kanzya* status is lifted because the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in Allah's cause that they will have a grievous punishment.' (*at-Tawba:* 34)

From these sacred words of Allah, we can gather that he who possesses money and from that money gives Allah His due, his wealth may not be considered a *kanz*. When, on the surface of things, the giving away of the poor-due appears to cause one's net worth to diminish, this drives the person to better invest his money such that he does not lose it over the course of forty years, for the poor-due is 2.5% of one year's total cumulative wealth; which is why he who possesses wealth invests and grows his money, whereby he also creates an opportunity for unemployed people as well as provides for those incapable of work, and thus unemployment levels fall.

You might happen to be the owner of such wealth, but you are ignorant of the secrets of commerce and industry, so you partner up with those who are savvy in commerce and industry, thereby opening the doors of opportunity to those who seek work and to those who are capable of managing business operations, but do not have the money.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has willed that, through the consolidation of complementary skill-sets, growth and development come about. He has also willed that when capital becomes integrated with labour, economic activity ensues. When the owners of capital and the workers come to an understanding, they share in the profits according to supply and demand because every exchange involves this principle—supply and demand—. The cooperation between capital and labour produces merchandise, and the merchandise has no particular inclination itself, but the party who owns the merchandise and the party who buys the merchandise have their separate incentives. The party who owns the merchandise seeks to sell it at the highest possible price, and the party who wants to buy the merchandise wants it for the lowest possible price; the merchandise itself, however, has no particular inclination one way or the other.

So long as merchandise is controlled by the law of supply and demand, it represents an economic equilibrium. For instance, if you saw meat on sale for a high price, those for whom the meat is beyond their budget would be swayed by their self-pride and would say: eating meat is bad for my health. Then they would turn to foods that are within their budget; because it is the merchandise that has control. However, if someone were to intervene in the pricing of the merchandise, in an attempt to hoard the profits and not withhold the capital from the markets for investment, then the power of he who has capital disappears, and he who is talented finds no outlet for his skills.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in this verse, '…Why is no treasure sent down to him? Why has no angel come with him?' (*Hud:* 12) The word *lawla* indicates a wish, and the disbelievers had first wished for a treasure then they asked that an angel comes with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. How would this angel descend (to earth)? Would he appear in his actual form or would he take on the shape of a man? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger, We would still have sent him in the form of a man….' (*al-An'am:* 9) If he were to appear in the shape of a man, then how would they ascertain his angelic origins? This is a senseless demand. Also, the True Lord says, 'The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, "How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?" Say, "If there were angels walking about on Earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger."' (*al-Isra':* 94-95) Had the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent down an angel, this angel would take on human characteristics, same as their own. He would meet them and talk with them, and they would not be able to distinguish him from among the rest of the people; thus, they would deny him as well.

In the verse which we are presently studying the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in response to their request, 'You are only there to warn.' (*Hud:* 12) These words are addressed from Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to advise him on how to respond to them. The Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had already told them himself that he was a warner and a conveyor of good tidings, and that previous nations had asked for proof (from their prophets), and when the proof that they asked for was furnished they insisted on denying, so, the True Lord *Glorified is He* punished them severely.

Obstinacy of disbelief is not likely to be converted into faith merely because of the ascendance of clear signs. The True Lord Himself says, ‘Nothing prevents Us from sending miraculous signs except the fact that previous peoples denied them…’ (*al-Isra’:* 59) meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* has not sent down the miraculous signs which the disbelievers asked for because the people of previous nations had denied them; that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs the Prophet, ‘You are only there to warn.’ (*Hud:* 12) The Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had received the Quran as part of his function as a warner and bearer of good tidings.

The True Lord concludes the verse by saying, ‘…it is Allah who is in charge of everything.’ (*Hud:* 12) When you put someone in charge of your business affairs—the buying, selling and transporting of goods—and you monitor his performance and his activities closely, then if you like his performance, you will keep him in charge, and if you do not like his performance, you repeal the authority that you put in him. Such is how things go in the human world. However, when Allah invests authority with one of his agents on earth, it is forever, and it does not matter if the disbelievers turn away The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ ٱفْتَرَىٰهُ ۖ قُلْ فَأْتُوا۟ بِعَشْرِ سُوَرٍ مِّثْلِهِۦ مُفْتَرَيَـٰتٍ وَٱدْعُوا۟
مَنِ ٱسْتَطَعْتُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَـٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

If they say, ‘He has invented it himself,’ say, ‘Then produce ten invented suras like it, and call in whoever you can beside God, if you are truthful’[13] (The Quran, *Hud:* 13)

In the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He,* we can discern another aspect of the disbeliever’s opposition to the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They claimed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invented this Quran. *Al-iftira`a* is intentional lying, providing information that is contradictory to actual facts.

If in reality the matter was negative, but you affirmed it is positive, you thereby contradicted the facts; for instance, if there existed some sort of evil, then you said, ‘there exists no evil in this place’, the reality is positive, whereas what you said was denial and what you had said was a negation.

Alternatively, reality might be negative and the statement might be positive; this is also a form of lying. To be truthful is when the given statement agrees with the existential reality; but if the statement is in conflict with the existential reality, then the statement is a lie.

There are two types of lies: intentional and unintentional. Lying is the violation of reality and a fabrication of a false reality. One could say: *kharaqta ash-shay`a* meaning you distorted and manipulated reality. The True Lord says, '…and they attribute sons and daughters to Him without any true knowledge....' (*al-An'am:* 100) The True Lord also says, '…what you invent is nothing but falsehood....' (*al-'Ankabut:* 17) meaning that you refer to things that do not exist when, in fact, it is from yourselves. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '…they are merely guessing.' (*al-An'am:* 116)

When they slanderously accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of concocting the Quran himself, the response that came simply from the Quran; you—O Arabs—are people of eloquence and have the gift of speech; and since the Quran manifests that same type of linguistic genius and since you claim that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has fabricated the Quran and that its verses are not the words of Allah, why cannot you come up with something to match it? So long as fabrication is an easy matter for you, why cannot you come up with just ten verses similar to those of the Quran? You have lived alongside Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since his childhood, and you know that he had no special gift for poetry, nor was he exceptionally eloquent, in fact, he had no connections whatsoever with your language games; he never engaged in any poetry or speech writing, and he never participated in any of the poetry contests which used to take place in famous markets such as `Ukaz during the pre-Islamic era.

If it is possible that someone with no training or experience in the art of rhetoric can come up with such a feat as the Quran, then why cannot you—who are capable of and familiar with the art of rhetoric—come up with a few verses that match the eloquence of the Quran; if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has fabricated the Quran why do you stand incapable of fabricating a literary work to match? You are familiar with the competitions that are held at the poetry (eloquence) gatherings: when a poet stands up and delivers a poem, another poet tries to outdo him with a better poem than the first, then a judging committee analyses the merits and faults of each poem.

In the verse, Allah answers the disbelievers' query as follows, If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had fabricated the Quran —as you claim—then where have you been? Have you not known him since he was a child? That is why the True Lord orders the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to say, 'Say, "If Allah had so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me; how can you not use your reason?"' (*Yunus:* 16)

Had Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ever uttered a word of poetry, given a speech or competed in `Ukaz(1), Al-Marbad, Dhi al-Majaz (2) or Al-Majna(3)—the main venues for art of rhetoric festivals in those days? He never frequented those places as a competitor. Were those not, who competed in those festivals, more capable than he was at forging counterfeit literature? Was Imru`u Al-Qayss not a prodigious poet? He was indeed, and he had peers who would rival him as well. There was also `Amr ibn Kalthum, Al-Harith ibn Hilza Al-Yashkuri, and others would follow down through the centuries like Jarir and Al-Farazdaq.

You (the disbelievers mentioned in the verse) are well aware of those who compose poetry and all their peers who compete with them in eloquence. So, bring forth someone who can forge verses akin to the Quran, and if you cannot, this means that the Quran is no human fabrication. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'If they say, He has invented it himself, say, "Then produce ten invented chapters like it…."' (*Hud:* 13)

Were they able to accept the challenge of bringing forth ten chapters comparable to the Holy Quran in its enthralling, intelligible speech, its eloquence, and its depth of meaning? The True lord, first, challenged them to bring forth something that matches the Quran, and they could not; then He challenged them to bring forth ten chapters, and they could not, and He challenged them to bring forth one surah (chapter) finally, He challenged them to bring forth a mere few sentences that were comparable to the Quran, and they could not.

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(1) *Suq `Ukaz: a market not far from Mecca where the Arabs got together every year where each tribe would show off and take pride in its finest poets. Ta`akuz qawm: they competed and contended with each other. Lissan al-`Arab- `Akz.*

(2) *Dhi al-Majaz: a location in Mina —coinciding, it said, with `Arafat—where a market used to be held in pre-Islamic times. Al-Lissan –under jwz.*

(3) *Al-Majna*: a place a few miles from Mecca, the location of one of the Arabs' markets

Then, the True Lord proceeded to the next phase of the challenge—that they bring forth ten chapters. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not stop there: he allowed them to consult with however many eloquent poets and writers they wished: '…and call in whoever you can beside Allah, if you are truthful.' (*Hud:* 13) meaning summon all your partners and all men of eloquence—other than Allah.

The True Lord, thus, abrogates the possibility of their calling upon Him so that they do not say: we will call on Allah to aid us in this task; that is why the True Lord asks them to count Him out, '…and call in whoever you can beside Allah, if you are truthful.' (*Hud:* 13) meaning if what you say is indeed true, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did invent the Quran, and since you are fluent in the art of rhetoric, then compose ten chapters like the Quran—you and the partners you manage to bring to your cause.

That is why, in the next verse, the True Lord wisely responds:

فَإِلَّمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لَكُمْ فَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّمَآ أُنزِلَ بِعِلْمِ ٱللَّهِ
وَأَن لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ فَهَلْ أَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

If they do not answer you, then you will all know that it is sent down containing knowledge from God, and that there is no god but Him. Then will you submit to Him? [14] (The Quran, *Hud:* 14)

This speech is addressed to those who had alleged that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had invented the Quran, or it could also be addressed to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for the True Lord says in the previous verse, 'Then produce ten invented chapters like it, and call in whoever you can beside Allah, if you are truthful.' (*Hud:* 13) Then He continues in the next verse, 'If they do not answer you…' (*Hud:* 14), meaning if they cannot stand up to the challenge, then they should know and be certain—that the Quran is from Allah which was testified by the opponents from amongst them (through their inability to challenge it).

So, why does the True Lord shift His approach by saying, ‘If they do not answer you…’ (*Hud:* 14)? ‘They’ refers to whom the opponents may be calling to their aid as well as the opponents themselves which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has challenged. Then, Allah says, ‘…then you will all know that it is sent down containing knowledge from Allah….’ (*Hud:* 14) The True Lord says this because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been asked to convey the Message, and what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to the believers, the believers are required to convey, even if the disbelievers do not respond to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or to the believers, and even if no one ever stands up to support the disbelievers in their claim that the Quran is the invention of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It is likely that these poetic and linguistic prodigies are intimidated by the challenge because they realized that the Quran was the truth; and had they tried to come up with something similar, they would have failed. Therefore, all you who do not believe in the Quran, know that, ‘it is sent down containing knowledge from Allah.’ (*Hud:* 14)

In the verse Allah addresses, for once, His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* switches from the singular pronoun (say, O Muhammad- in the previous verse) to the plural pronoun (know – in this verse) when He says, ‘If they do not answer you, then you will all know that it is sent down containing knowledge from Allah….’ (*Hud:* 14) Here the word ‘know’ is in the plural form meaning, be even more certain O believers that the Quran has been bestowed from Allah.

As we know, knowledge has three levels: the knowledge of certainty, the eye of certainty and the truth of certainty.

However, the verse can also be seen as addressing the disbelievers whom the Quran had asked to seek the help of whomever they can in their efforts to subvert the Quran: ‘...then you will all know that it is sent down containing knowledge from Allah….’ (*Hud:* 14)

The highest orders of knowledge are contained with the True Lord *Glorified is He* who has known all knowledge since pre-eternity. We are not privy to such knowledge. In any case, our knowledge changes depending on that Allah *Glorified is He* allows us to know. For you might have knowledge of one thing but be ignorant of many other things. Or you might have knowledge of one thing but many other things have slipped your mind.

That is why you find doctors and the folk who work in the field of precision industry and other researchers and scientists—you find that these people are constantly correcting each other when it comes to the vast quantities of knowledge that they deal with. So, when a sick person goes to visit a doctor, and the patient finds that he does not respond well to the medicine which this doctor has prescribed, he will go and see a second doctor who will rectify the first doctor's prescription and recommend a different medicine. Then, if the patient once more does not respond well to the medicine, then, in this case, a physicians' committee will convene and decide on which treatments work and which do not work for the patient. Thus, each doctor will redress the other doctor's medical opinion until they reach a decision. Every doctor who redress the other's opinion is increasingly wiser and more knowledgeable because the first doctor had prescribed a remedy that did not sit well with the patient—the first doctor made this judgment based on what knowledge he had, and so it is for the rest of the researchers and scientists. So, for every knowledgeable person there is one who is wiser and more knowledgeable. The second doctor corrects the first and so on and so forth….

But, is there anyone who can correct Allah's Knowledge? There is not. Therefore, as long as the Quran is sent down containing knowledge from Allah, then no human knowledge can ever come forth with anything comparable, '…then you will all know that it is sent down containing knowledge from Allah…' (*Hud:* 14). Furthermore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* declares that there is no other deity save Him; so that no one should claim that there is any other deity save Allah. Allah mentions this because the entire Quran was revealed within the framework: 'that there is no deity but Him' (*Hud:* 14). So long as it is the True Lord who makes this ruling, then let us trust it.

An example of this is the True Lord's ruling toward Abu Lahab(1) and his wife(2)—that they shall enter Hellfire. Would it have been possible for Abu Lahab to announce his faith even if it were pure hypocrisy? Of course not, because He Who created Abu Lahab knows how he behaves. That is why we find that in the next chapter after the chapter of *al-Masad*(3)—which condemns Abu Lahab to hellfire—The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Say…"He is Allah the One"…' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), meaning so long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has issued the decree that Abu Lahab and his wife shall enter Hellfire, no one will be able to alter His ruling, for there is no deity but Him. The True Lord concludes the holy verse by saying, 'Then will you submit to Him?' (*Hud:* 14) Questions are usually posed as a means to elicit a response so as to understand something, but this is not always the case. This question is posed by a power that would be capable of imposing Islam on those who are thus questioned. Allah has willed that this question be posed by his Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he might elicit a response; and had the questioner not been certain that Islam is the only reality, he would not have posed the question; and had the questioner not been certain that the only possible response is that the listener become Muslim, he would not have taken the answer to the question as a proof against the listener.

The Creator *Glorified is He* is the One Who says these words—and to Allah belongs the highest example—and He Himself is immune from any comparison—you might listen to a person giving a detailed account of something, then asks you: Am I not right in what I have told you? The reason he asks this question is because he is sure that you will tell him: yes, you are right.

When we look at the verse which prohibits intoxicants and games of chance—for example—we find that the True Lord says, 'With intoxicants and gambling, Satan seeks only to incite enmity and hatred among you, and to stop you remembering Allah and prayer. Will you not give them up?'(4) (*al-Ma'ida:* 91)

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(1) Abu Lahab is one of the Prophet's uncles.

(2) His wife was one of Quraysh's eminent ladies; she was Um Jamil; her name was Arwa bint Harb ibn Umyya and was the sister of Abu Sufyan. She was her husband's accomplice in his disbelief, ingratitude, and intransigence.

(3) *Masad al-habl Masada*: he twisted the rope into strands. *Al-Qamus Al-qawim*.

(4) See Ibn Kathir's Tafsir 2/95.

It is as if the rhetorical question represents a command: desist from the consumption of wine and gambling, and be ashamed of engaging in such activities. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says at the end of the blessed verse, '…Then will you submit to Him?' (*Hud:* 14) meaning: surrender yourselves, and stop your importunity; and refrain from saying that the Quran is fabricated by Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; The Quran is from Allah and there is no deity but Him.

After that, the True Lord says:

مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوَفِّ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا يُبْخَسُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

If any desire [only] the life of this world with all its finery,
We shall repay them in full in this life for their deeds – they
will be given no less [15] (The Quran, *Hud:* 15)

The True Lord says that the disbelievers said, '...Why is no treasure sent down to him?' (*Hud:* 12) In other words, they are preoccupied with the pleasures and extravagance of the life of this world. There are certain fundamentals which life requires, such as clothing for one's body, morsels to eat and a house where one takes shelter. Extravagance, on the other hand, is a different matter, for rather than covering one's body with modest clothing, a man will ask for smooth wool for winter and sleek silk for summer; and rather than asking for a humble abode to shelter him from cold or from heat, he asks for a castle. Regarding this issue, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'The love of desirable things is made alluring for men— women, children, gold and silver treasures piled up high, horses with fine markings, livestock, and farmland….' (*Al-'Imran:* 14) All these things are part and parcel of the enjoyment of life in this world. The True Lord says, '…these may be the joys of this life, but Allah has the best place to return to.' (*Al-'Imran:* 14)

What does the word *zeena* signify (all its finery)? Its meaning is beauty or that which is made beautiful by the beautification of oneself; and there is a difference between inherent beauty and beauty that is the result of made-up or artificial beauty. When a woman—for example—wants to look nice she wears beautiful, flashy clothes, and adorns herself with lustrous gold, for it is the mineral that derives its value from the intense, eye-catching gleam. However, only a woman who feels insecure will overdo these things. As for the woman that is naturally beautiful, she refuses to beautify herself. That is why she is called *al-ghaniyah* meaning, she for whom cosmetics is unnecessary by virtue of her natural beauty, who does not need to hide her ears behind large earrings, nor does she need to hide her neck with a large necklace, nor does she try to hide her wrists with bracelets (1), and she refuses to cover up the natural beauty of her fingers with rings. When a woman overdoes all these adornments she gives off the opposite impression.

The example I am giving now might seem to be far-removed from the original topic, but at least it illustrates how when something is overdone it gives the opposite effect.

As Al-Mutanabbi (2) says, 'You are the perfume, when perfume touches your body -- And you wash the water, if water touches your body.' Here the poet is saying that if perfume touches such a person, it becomes perfumed itself; also, it is the water itself that becomes washed if it makes contact with this person. Likewise, a beautiful woman declines to beautify her chest with a necklace because her neck is more beautiful without it. Such types of women are dubbed *ghanya* (derived from *ghina*: needlessness) because their natural beauty has no need of enhancements.

They say that the beauty of city women is begotten from artificial powders. It is as if these powders are fixed to the face with the help of pastes, the type of pastes that are used to paint walls; it is as if every one of these women is applying these pastes to her face in order to cover up its jagged cracks. The instance these pastes start to run she is in discomfort, as her face turns into a sorry goulash of colours; hence, it is said that the beauty of city women is artificial and fabricated but Bedouin women's beauty is inherent, not acquired.

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(1) *As-siwar*: gold necklace. Plural: *aswar wa iswira. Al- Mu`jam Al-Wassit.*

(2) Ahmad ibn Al-Hussin, a sagacious poet. He was born in Al-Kufa in a place called Kindah in the year 303 of the Islamic calendar and spent his formative years in the Levant. He claimed to be a prophet in a village called As-Sammawah between Al-Kufa and As-Sahm, which is why he is called Al-Mutanabbi. Then he renounced his claim after being imprisoned. He died in the year 354 of the Islamic calendar at the age of 52.

Therefore, *az-zeena* is the enhancement of something with something else, and that which is already good has no need of *az-zeena*.

So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'If any desire [only] the life of this world with all its finery, we shall repay them in full in this life for their deeds, and they therein will not be deprived.' (*Hud:* 15) This means that if you disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He,* He will not cease to accord you with provisions and pleasures of life in this world; for He is the Lord, and it is He who has summoned you to existence, and He has made it obligatory upon Himself to provide for you whatever you desire in the way of life's provisions and pleasures because He is capable of making good on what He has promised.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…We shall repay them in full in this life for their deeds…' (*Hud:* 15) meaning that if they adhere to the basic principle of reaping what they sow, then the True Lord makes it obligatory upon Himself to grant full, undiminished remunerations for actions performed. In their life in this world they will not be cheated of their fair due, and whomsoever perfects an action shall collect the fruits of that action.

This bounteous statement brings up an important issue which concerns us currently, for there are some who say: these Muslims who testify that 'There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger', and are steadfast in prayer, and who erect mosques—their civilization is backward and underdeveloped, while the disbelievers wallow in the luxuries of their advanced civilization. Our response is that the bestowals of Allah *Glorified is He* —as 'Lord'—are governed by worldly principles, for whosoever performs an action properly, he shall receive the worldly rewards of his labour, even if he is a disbeliever. However, he shall receive no credit in the life to come; because the True Lord says, 'and we shall turn to the deeds they have done and scatter them like dust.' (*al-Furqan:* 23)

The True Lord rewards the disbeliever who is good towards people with good in this world, rewards the disbeliever who is sincere with the sincerity of others towards him and rewards the disbelievers who extend a helping hand with assistance in return.

These are all works required by the religion, and even a disbeliever might perform them, then Allah *Glorified is He* will see that he is recompensed justly in this world. If he had performed them so that people would say: he performed such a work, or he was virtuous in that situation, then one could tell him: ‘you performed good deeds to win people’s approval, and indeed you have won their approval.’ So, if the disbelievers perform actions in this world to reap rewards in this world, the True Lord accords them the fruit of their actions.

It must be said to those who accuse the Muslims of being backward: The Muslims were in fact advanced in the early stages of their history, and they were masters when they applied the principles of their religion, outwardly and inwardly, in form and in content. Backwardness is not the imperative of Islam, nor is it its predetermined fate; rather, backwardness crept in because we abandoned the spirit of Islam and stopped applying its principles.

If we were to set up a comparison with the state of Europe during the time when the church was dominant, we would find that innovative intellectuals were punished and executed for their creativity. That period in Europe is called the dark ages. Then the crusades began, and Europe came to know the strength of Islam and Muslims—for they were repelled and their armies defeated. They then tried to shrug off the authority of the pope and the church. When they did that, they started to become more advanced as a civilization. Thus, when they turned their backs to the Pope’s authority, they became advanced, and we, when we ceased applying the teachings of Islam, became backward. Therefore, which of the two options is better? History shows that the Muslims were advanced when they took the teachings of Islam seriously, and they became backward when they abandoned them.

So, the criterion of worldly success is hard work, and whoever applies himself diligently and utilize the means—and is at the same time a believer—earns a goodly reward in this life and a goodly reward in the life to come; and he who is a disbeliever and applies himself earns a goodly reward in this life but not in the next.

The True Lord says, ‘But the deeds of those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a desert: the thirsty person thinks there will be water but, when he gets there, he finds only Allah, who pays him his account in full- Allah is swift in reckoning.’ (*an-Nur:* 39) Thus, the disbeliever will be shocked by the fact that Allah, whom he has denied, is true. The True Lord says, ‘the deeds of those who reject their Lord are like ashes that the wind blows furiously on a stormy day: they have no power over anything they have gained.’ (*Ibrahim:* 18) So, he who desires the world and its pleasures, the True Lord, Most High, remunerates him and will not in the least short change him when it comes to due rights. Hatim At-Ta’i—for instance—took on the virtue of generosity, and Antara took on the virtue of courage, and every man who puts in effort in his actions will reap his rewards, but the rewards of the Hereafter are for those who performed their works for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* and who had faith in Him. Even those hypocrites who entered Islam and fought alongside the Muslims took their share of war booty, but they shall have no reward in the Hereafter. Hence, loyalty implies the existence of a binding contract, and as long as there is a binding contract that connects the worker to the work, and the worker perfects his work, he cannot but receive his full reward—full because any less would be to curtail what is rightfully his.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ فِى ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ إِلَّا ٱلنَّارُ ۖ وَحَبِطَ مَا صَنَعُوا۟
فِيهَا وَبَـٰطِلٌ مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

But such people will have nothing in the Hereafter
but the Fire: their work here will be fruitless and
their deeds futile[16] (The Quran, *Hud:* 16)

Thus, hellfire is the resting-place of those who worked towards worldly goals and did not have faith in Allah, for they had received their due on earth, but all their works counted for nothing in the Hereafter. The word *habita* (is futile) is derived from *al-habat* which refers to the bloating of cattle when they have eaten unripe greens. In the countryside, it is said, ‘*intafakhat al-bahima’* (the animals have become swollen) meaning that there are gases in their stomachs. The ignorant might take this to mean that they have fattened, but this bloating disappears when its real cause is removed. The works of the disbelievers are rendered futile in the Hereafter; for they are useless in the absence of faith.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

أَفَمَن كَانَ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ وَيَتۡلُوهُ شَاهِدٞ مِّنۡهُ وَمِن قَبۡلِهِۦ كِتَٰبُ مُوسَىٰٓ إِمَامٗا
وَرَحۡمَةًۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِهِۦۚ وَمَن يَكۡفُرۡ بِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلۡأَحۡزَابِ فَٱلنَّارُ مَوۡعِدُهُۥۚ فَلَا تَكُ
فِي مِرۡيَةٖ مِّنۡهُۚ إِنَّهُ ٱلۡحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Can they be compared to those who have clear proof from their Lord, recited by a witness from Him, and before it the Book of Moses, as a guide and mercy? These people believe in it, whereas those groups that deny its truth are promised the Fire. So have no doubt about it [Prophet]: it is the Truth from your Lord, though most people do not believe so [17]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 17)

The word *al-bayyina* (have clear proof) denotes that the insight of flawless natural disposition which alerts man to the existence of the Necessary Being; it leads man to the realization that this beautifully designed cosmos must have been brought into existence by that Supreme Being. Thus, through pure, uncorrupted discernment, man is guided.

When the ancient Arabs would be crossing open deserts, and would come across animal droppings, and would also notice animal tracks, they would say, 'these droppings imply the presence of an animal that had recently left the place, and the tracks imply that the animal was moving. Then, what of the sky with its planets, the earth with its mountainous passes and the ocean with its waves, does all this then not testify to The Subtle, The Aware?' Thus, were the Arabs guided through the discernment of his primordial nature; it is the gift of Certainty from Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* has instilled this natural disposition in every human being, and it was with this natural disposition that we all testified that He is our Lord *fi `alam adh-dharr* (primal covenant - in the world before creation).

In this regard, the True Lord says: '[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness"…' (*al-A'raf:* 172). The pure, uncorrupted discernment springs from the primordial faith in Allah which is inherent in the hearts of all things.

Now pleasures and temptations might sully this primordial faith, and so man errs from Allah's path, and so Allah, out of mercy, sends down messengers to remind us of the primordial certainties we once held and to point us towards the underlying causes and deeper wisdom. This is so that the certainty of the prophets *peace upon them* might unite with our own primordial certainty. The True Lord shows us the way to arrive at religious certainty, for the created being might be ignorant of this, so Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that this ignorance is an unnatural ignorance; for the pure, uncorrupted state that is our primordial nature shows us the way even before the existence of any messengers have to remind us of the higher power that governs the universe.

I have given this example before, where a man's plane crashes and maroons him in the desert, and he finds himself without water, food, company or shelter; then sleep overtakes him. When he wakes up he finds a sumptuous banquet with the most exquisite of foods and the finest of drinks. This person must utilize his faculty of thought and ask: who made all of this? In fact, he will ask himself this question before he proceeds to enjoy any of this food and drink, especially as there is no one around to tell him: 'you are my guest'. Therefore, he must use his faculty of thought.

The same applies to the man who finds himself in the realm of existence. None of Allah's creatures has ever claimed that it is he who brought all of this into existence, no one has claimed that it is he who created the heavens and the earth and no one has claimed that he has summoned all that is in the universe to the service of man.

It is necessary that, before taking pleasure in all of this, man should ask: who is it who made all of this for my benefit? If a human messenger tells him: I have come to solve this riddle for you, it is incumbent upon a human being to lend his full attention to the messenger; for he has come to address that concern that was on his mind.

It is out of Allah's Mercy for us that He did not ask of us to give it much thought from the beginning; for a long time, He left us without any obligations in this world, so that man might enjoy the many blessings of his

Lord, and after that, when man reached full maturity, and without being forced, then the True Lord has charged him with the duties of faith.

Man must then ask: everything—no matter how small or insignificant—must have a maker, and the light bulb that illuminates a circle with a diameter of twenty meters, we know its maker, and we have studied the factories which produced it, the bodies of knowledge that were applied to its production and the materials of which it was made. Do we not try to know how old this sun of ours is, and who has made it so that it does not need any maintenance nor fuel nor extra parts, and illuminates half the globe?

This is an issue that we should have researched, so that we might see how wide are the horizons of this certainty, an illuminating certainty and one of strength and primordial nature which Allah bestows upon the thinking human beings so that he might be led to the realization that behind this universe there is an orchestrating Creator.

So, if another human being like him comes to him and says: Allah is the creator of the world, and Allah *Glorified is He* asks of you such and such, we should, quite obviously, listen to this human being and apply what he says based upon our primordial intuition and our vision of the certitudes.

In this way, we come to know what we are ignorant of through our primordial nature. We might also arrive at this knowledge through our intelligence, that is pure and uncorrupted by any doubts, for when you perceive smoke you come to realize, through your intelligence, that there must be a fire; and when you are walking in the desert and you see greenery; do you not then conclude, through your intelligence, that there must be water to sustain it? These, then, are things which are elementary and which you know pre-logically, without the need for research or effort.

There are matters which might require of your intellectual effort to reach certain conclusions based on certain initial premises such as the mental effort which the ancient Arabs applied to conclude that there is a Creator Who runs this universe for they were able to conclude from the droppings on the ground that there must have been a camel which had recently left the area, and who were able to conclude from the footprints that it was in motion. They also inferred from this that the planets with their orbits, and the earth with its mountainous passes, and the sea with its waves—that all these things prove the existence of The Subtle, The Aware.

The mind cannot but take all these things and make a general judgment, even if it might be ignorant of the details. The mind has come to know that behind this universe there is a Creator, a Maker a Being Who is Wise, but he did not know what the name of this Being was, and a human being cannot come to know this matter with his mind; he also does not know what kind of directives this Creator requires that he follow in his life, and the manner in which this Being rewards those who are obedient to Him, and how this Being punishes those who are disobedient towards Him.

There is a need for Divine Revelation which will further establish the existence of that Power which you had accepted prior. Those who inspect the universe, using their minds, know that behind this universe there is a Creator, but they neither know His Name, nor what His commandments are.

You cannot know the Name of Allah unless He reveals it to you, through His revelation to His messengers, and you know what His commandments are only through the messenger who has received the message.

It is out of His Mercy that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the miracle that is with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Quran because even when the mind is guided to the Power of the Fully Capable, the Highest, it will remain ignorant of the specifics of faith, and so when the True Lord revealed the Quran, it was out of mercy for His servants, an illumination for them.

‘Compared to those who have clear proof from their Lord, recited by a witness from Him….’ (*Hud:* 17)

For the Quran is an illuminating proof which guides man’s innate, uncorrupted capacity of discernment, ‘recited by a witness from Him.’ (*Hud:* 17) That is, he who has received revelation, and conveyed to us—on behalf of the True Lord – that which confirmed Allah *Glorified is He* as the Highest Creator, the Absolute Power. Furthermore, the ‘witness’ explained to us that which Allah demands.

We are faced, here, with three witnesses. The first witness is the clear, illuminating proof. The second witness is the clear, uncorrupted discernment that the mind is guided to. After we accept the truth as a whole, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* provides us with the details. Before the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* there was the Book of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* '...and before it the Book of Musa (Moses), as a guide and mercy.' (*Hud:* 17) This is the third witness.

He who does not take note of the evidences furnished by these three proofs is intellectually negligent. For he who possesses the discernment, and he who hears the testament of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the testament that preceded him—that is, the book of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in addition to the Gospels which were given to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* to convey to the Children of Israel—all of this must certainly guide him to true faith.

The True Lord's words, 'These people believe in it' (*Hud:* 17) refer to those who took note of the evidences: Innate discernment, the witness of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the witness of Musa (Moses) who came before.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...whereas those groups that deny its truth are promised the Fire….' (*Hud:* 17) Disbelief—as we have learned—is 'covering up' the truth, and thus disbelief is itself a proof of faith, for one cannot cover up a truth that does not exist. The existence of that which is covered up precedes the act of 'covering up'. The 'covering up' comes later. Thus, belief precedes disbelief because belief is at the origin of the primordial state.

'Whereas those groups that deny its truth are promised the Fire.' (*Hud:* 17) The word *ahzab* (groups) is the plural form of *hizb* which means a group that is united over a common cause; like the political parties we see today, they are human factions that compete with one another over values and principles; they are free to do so since this is an intellectual competition.

As for the first doctrine, the directives of the path of Allah come from the True Lord, the Highest Planner. This way leads to Him, and that is why Allah says of those who follow His way, 'They are Allah's partisans' (*al-Mujadala:* 22) meaning they are part of a league that is different from the other human leagues which vie with each other in the intellectual domain.

Here, the True Lord says, '…whereas those groups that deny its truth are promised the Fire….' (*Hud:* 17) The verse refers to the disbelievers of Quraysh, the idol-worshippers, the pagan animists and the Jews and Christians who did not believe in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Each of these groups represents a league of which the True Lord says, '…but they have split their community into sects, each rejoicing in their own.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 53)

Of these, those who deny the Message of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* or deny His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* their recompense is the Hellfire. Allah shows us that there are two leagues: the league of Allah, and the other leagues; and these two leagues are diametrically opposed to each other.

The True Lord says to His Messenger, and by extension, to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at large, 'So have no doubt about it.' (*Hud:* 17) Do not have, O Messenger of Allah, any doubts about the matter; for your Message and your mission are supported by self-evident, clear proofs, by the primordial state, and by the guidance and light that Allah *Glorified is He* requires; it is also supported by those who attest with you, just as those who came before you attested that yours is the path of the truth, 'it is the Truth from your Lord.' (*Hud:* 17) The True Lord—as we have learned previously—is that which is static and is not subject to change, and this truth cannot but come from a Lord that is consistent in his actions.

The True Lord concludes the verse by saying, '…though most people do not believe so.' (*Hud:* 17) These people do not believe out of spite because the proofs are as self-evident as can be; and he who persists in denying them is merely doing so out of intransigence. The True Lord says of such people, 'They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true….' (*an-Naml:* 14) Even as they formally denied the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they were aware of the undeniable proofs of the Message and of his prophethood. So, their denial was out of spite; for the corroborating evidence was strong and clearly laid out; for, those who refuse faith, given all these proofs, are surely obstinate persons.

In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا ۚ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ وَيَقُولُ
ٱلْأَشْهَـٰدُ هَـٰٓؤُلَآءِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا۟ عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ أَلَا لَعْنَةُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَى ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

Who could do more wrong than someone who invents lies about God? Such people will be brought before their Lord, and the witnesses will say, 'These are the ones that lied about their Lord.' God's rejection is the due of those who do such wrong [18] (The Quran, *Hud:* 18)

This verse begins with rhetorical question which stresses the fact that those people who attribute their own lying inventions to Allah are unjust. The question precedes their acknowledging confession against themselves which represents the best proof. If any of them would disinterestedly contemplate the wrongdoings ever done in this world, he would admit that there is no evil deed worse than fabricating lies to Allah. Thus, Allah expresses this fact in the form of a rhetorical question so that the later confession of the culprits will admit their abominable breach. They will be arraigned before Allah, as He says, 'Such people will be brought before their Lord.' (*Hud:* 18)

The act of bringing people before Allah is done to uncover the hidden misdeeds to be dealt with. In our life, there is an example of bringing soldiers in military parades and war-games so that the army shows strength to the foes, and so that the government shows off military strength to the governments of other countries. Also, the officer lines up his squad so that he can inspect each one, assess their well attiring and their ability to carry out orders.

Another example is illustrated as the principal of a school lines up the pupils on the day of announcing exam results to be able to see the shame on the faces of the negligent and carless.

How awful the arraignment of people before Allah *the Exalted* will be and how ashamed the deniers will be then! Indeed, they will be speechless in the presence of Allah Whom they had previously denied spitefully, as Allah says, 'But the deeds of those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a plain desert:(1)

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(1) Mirage: Something (such as a pool of water in the middle of a desert) that is seen and appearsin the afternoon to be real but it is illusionary. A plain desert: A large area of flat land surrounded by highlands, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'They ask you [Prophet] about the mountains, say, "[On that Day] my Lord will blast them into dust and leave a flat plain, with no peak or trough to be seen.' (*Ta Ha:* 105-107)

the thirsty person thinks there will be water but, when he gets there, he finds only Allah….' (*an-Nur:* 39)

Allah *Glorified is He* discloses the veiled cover-ups as they will be brought before Him, as He says, 'They will be lined up before your Lord….' (*al-Kahf:* 48) Moreover, they are also brought before the Hellfire, as Allah says: 'they will be brought before the Fire morning and evening(1)….' (*Ghafir:* 46) Thereupon, the shame, humiliation and contrition will appear on those who attributed their own lying inventions to Allah.

Allah *the Almighty* knows all things before time begins, but He wills to expose people before each other and before themselves, so that when someone in Heaven sees another in the Hellfire, the scene would not provoke the believer's pity because he knows that the punishment for attributing falsehood to Allah is the Hellfire. Moreover, the matter will not only be limited to such embarrassment. In fact, there is also the testament of the witnesses, as Allah says in the same verse, 'And the witnesses will say, "These are the ones that lied about their Lord."' (*Hud:* 18)

There are angels among the 'witnesses', as Allah *the Exalted* says, 'He (the person) does not utter a single word(2) without an ever-present watcher(3).' (*Qaf:* 18) Allah, also, says, 'Over you stand watchers(4), noble recorders who know what you do!' (*al-Infitar:* 10-12) Furthermore, there are witnesses from the prophets who had conveyed the right path to Allah. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'What will they do when we bring a witness from each community, with you [Muhammad] as a witness against these people?(5)' (*an-Nisa':* 41)

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(1) *This verse refers to the Pharaoh and his people. It is used to prove the concept of 'Punishment in the grave' by Ahl As-Sunna or Sunni Islam (the majority branch of Islam), cited in Tafsir ibn Kathir (Quran exegesis of ibn Kathir), 4/81.*

(2) speaking a word means uttering anything.

(3) *Ever-present watcher: An observing angel recording every uttered word; whether good or bad, in the man's Book of Deeds, cited in Al-Qamus Al-Qawim.*

(4) Watchers: The ever-present angel guarding every man, as Allah *the Exalted* says, 'There is a watcher over every soul' (*at-Tariq:* 4). Also, Allah says, 'He is the Supreme Master over His subjects. He sends out recorders to watch over you.' (*al-An'am:* 61)

(5) *Abdullah ibn Mas`ud narrated, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to me, "Recite (the Quran) to me." I said, "O* Allah's *Messenger! Shall I recite (the Quran) to you while it has been revealed to you?" He said, "Yes." So, I recited from the chapter of An-Nisa` (The Women), but when I recited the verse*, "How (will it be) then when We bring =

Moreover, another type of witnesses is the Muslim believer, who is responsible for the propagation of the Message to others, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘We have made you [believers] into a just community, so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you….’ (*al-Baqara:* 143) ‘Bearing witness’ implies that everything is recorded; their actions after receiving the Message and going astray after being shown the right path. Thus, they commit the crime which entails punishment because punishment is only due when the person is incriminated on the basis of an existing promulgated legislative provision. That is the reason that laws decreed by the government come into effect as of date of publication in the official gazette.

Thus, the job of the witnesses is to attest that those people denied the Message conveyed by the messenger, that they had been acknowledged that denying the right path is the most abominable crime, and that they had been notified that the penalty for such crime is the eternal hellfire.

Due to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is the Ever-Just of judges, no punishment could have taken place unless the crime has been verified by multiple witnesses. Hence, there are the testimonies of the angels, as a dissimilar category of creatures, the testimonies of the prophets, as infallible human species and those of Muslim believers who bear witness that the Message had been conveyed to all. Above all, there is the ample testimony of the partial (body organs) against the whole (human being). Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘On the Day when Allah’s enemies are gathered up for the Fire and driven onward(1) their ears, eyes, and skins will, when they reach it, testify against them for their misdeeds. They will say to their skins, “Why did you testify against us?” and their skins will reply, “Allah, who gave speech to everything, has given us speech— it was He who created you the first time and to Him you have been returned.”’ (*Fussilat:* 19-21) Thus, the human organs bear witness against the sinners.

= from each nation a witness and We bring you (O Muhammad) as a witness against these people.” (*an-Nisa’*: 41), he said, *“Enough for now”, I looked at him and behold! His eyes were overflowing with tears.’ It is related by Muslim and Al- Bukhari.*

(1) Driven onward: They are assembled into groups and gathered collectively (the first and the last).

The sinners should not ask 'how' would their own organs acquire the capacity to talk; but rather, 'why' would they bear witness? The organs are the instruments with which the sinners commit their crimes; it is the hand which is extended to steal, it is the tongue which gives false testimony, it is the heart which harbours malice and they are the feet which walk towards sin. It is known that the organs function together to operate the whole body. The director of the body is the brain; it is the one which either directs the hand to steal or to provide some compassion for an orphan; it also directs the eye either to contemplate the beauty of the nature and the surrounding events, or to forbiddingly gaze on anything prohibited.

However, the body organs are subservient to the person's will and commands in this worldly life; yet, the matter is different on the Day of Judgment, where they will not be subservient to anyone but to Allah, Who has the only power to give commands. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Who has control today? Allah, the One, the All Powerful.' (*Ghafir:* 16) On the Day of Judgment, the parts of the body tell their owners that they had obeyed every order and were compelled to perform sinful acts as they were subservient to human beings in the worldly life. Though, on that Day, they are no longer agents of human will; but rather, they are going to bear witness to every sin they were forced to commit.

Thus, the witnesses testify, as Allah *the Exalted* says, '…And the witnesses will say, "These are the ones that lied about their Lord." Oh, verily, Allah's rejection is the due of those who do such wrong.' (*Hud:* 18) As they had lied about Allah *the Almighty* they deserve to be banished from Allah's Mercy because, undoubtedly, they had committed the most abominable sin. They disbelieved in the Oneness of Allah, fell into heresy,(1) denied Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Message of Islam.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) The person who falls into heresy is the atheist who deviates from the right path and tries to deform the faith, *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim.*

ٱلَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَبۡغُونَهَا عِوَجٗا وَهُم بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ هُمۡ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Who hinder others from God's path, trying to make it crooked, and deny the life to come [19] (The Quran, *Hud:* 19)

In this verse, the Quran mentions that those transgressors did not only deny Allah, His signs or His Messenger Muhammad; but rather, they further lead others astray from Allah's Path. Thus, the crime is doubled; in addition to transgressing themselves, they entice others to commit the crime as well.

Allah *the Almighty* has previously mentioned the people of the earlier Scriptures, who received the Message by messengers antecedent to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, greed and temporal power blinded such people so that they distorted the verses of their Divine Books anticipating the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, they had turned people away from the right path, trying to make it crooked.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "People of the Book, why do you turn the believers away from Allah's path and try to make it crooked, when you yourselves [should be] witnesses to the [truth]? Allah is not heedless of anything you do."' (*Al-'Imran:* 99) Allah *the Exalted* has sent Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to rectify any deviousness resulted from distorting previous Heavenly Books. Deviousness is the lack of straightness and uprightness. It might refer to moral values; the manners or the trustworthiness are said to be devious. As Allah says, 'Praise be to Allah, who sent down the Scripture to His servant and made it unerringly straight.'(1) (*al-Kahf:* 1) The adjective 'crooked' can be applied to concrete objects,(2) as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'They ask you [Prophet] about the mountains, say, '[On that Day] my Lord will blast them into dust and leave a flat plain,(3) with no crookedness or unevenness to be seen.'(4) (*Ta Ha:* 105-107)

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(1) 'Made it unerringly straight' means that Allah made the Munificent Quran upright and unerringly trustworthy, the meaning is transcreated from *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*

(2) Ibn Manzour explained in *Lisan Al-Arab* that crooked can. be applied both to concrete and abstract objects according to different diacritical marks.

(3) A plain: A large area of flat implanted land surrounded by highlands, *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim.*

(4) This verse stresses that the land is plain, flat and even, with no crookedness, *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim.*

The word ‘crooked’ shows the linguistic precision of the Quran because it describes certain curvatures which are noticeably felt. When the man is in the desert; he will find that the road is crooked and uneven, going up and down though flat terrain, such as the agricultural plot of land, is thought to be perfectly even. Nevertheless, this is not the case because when the farmer irrigates the land, some parts are submerged with water while other parts are dry. Thus, by watering the land, it is deduced that it is crooked and uneven because water measures the evenness of all things. Therefore, to determine the flatness of a wall or a plot of land, a water balance is used because it prevents any slightly imperceptible unevenness.

On the Day of Judgment, those who followed the crooked doctrine are brought forth. Allah *Glorified is He* describes them, ‘On that Day, people will follow the summoner from whom there is no escape ;(1) every voice will be hushed(2) for the Lord of Mercy; only whispers will be heard.’ (*Ta Ha:* 108) Thus, they are lined up into perfectly straight lines, such as criminals who are lined up and driven by guards to jail in silent shame.(3)

In the verse under discussion, the reason of hindering others from the right path of Allah is because they wish that others would also lead a twisted and uneven course. The evildoers want to lead people away from faith so that they can secure temporal power for themselves and can spread corruption on earth. Faith and the reformation deeply bother them and nullify every gain of corruption and perversion.

Subsequently, Allah *the Exalted* says:

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(1) *This verse means that on the Day of Judgment, the wrongdoers will follow submissively the summoner after encountering all horrors of this Grave Day. If they had followed the right path in the world, they would have been living in eternal bliss, Tafsir ibn Kathir.*

(2) Hushed means that voices calmed down referring to full horrors of the Day of Resurrection, *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim,* 1/194.

(3) Driven in silent shame: To be disgracefully and submissively humiliated, *Lisan Al-Arab.*

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَمۡ يَكُونُواْ مُعۡجِزِينَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِنۡ أَوۡلِيَآءَۘ
يُضَٰعَفُ لَهُمُ ٱلۡعَذَابُۚ مَا كَانُواْ يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ ٱلسَّمۡعَ وَمَا كَانُواْ يُبۡصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

They will not escape on earth, and there will be no one other than God to protect them. Their punishment will be doubled. They could not hear, and they did not see [20]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 20)

A`jaza means that someone is incapable of carrying out an action. This word manifested the inability of those who denied that the Quran is a miracle, to come up with a single comparable verse. Allah *the Almighty* shows us that there is no disbeliever on Earth invulnerable to Allah’s wrath. There are plenty of examples of the past disbelieving communities who were either blown away by hurricane-strength winds, swallowed up by the earth or drowned. When they move on to the Afterlife, they will have neither fellowship nor protection from Allah’s wrath. It is known that the ‘fellow’ does not lead his friend to torture; but rather, he is the closest friend who benefits and offers him the best.

In case that a close friend is more skilled, so some of his talents will rub off on you; if he is more powerful, his strength will shield you; if he is rich, you will be in welfare; if he is knowledgeable, you will gain from his knowledge; and if he is forbearing, he will help calm you down when you are angry. In fact, every person whose talent surpasses his close friend, then he will benefit from his talent. A fellow can also be a protector as well because when you call out in times of distress, he is the first to respond as he is the closest to you.

However, those who turned others away from Allah’s path will have neither friend nor protector in the Hereafter even if they actually had them in this worldly life. On the Day of Judgment, every soul shall be tending to its own affairs: ‘On the Day you see it, every nursing mother will think no more(1) of her baby, every pregnant female will miscarry, you will think people are drunk when they are not, so severe will be Allah’s torment.’ (*al-Hajj:* 2)

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(1) ‘Think no more’ means that the nursing mother will forget her baby deliberately or unintentionally, signifying the ultimate horrors of the Day of Resurrection.

Also, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘People, be mindful of your Lord and fear a day when no parent will take the place of their child, nor a child take the place(1) of their parent, in any way….’ (*Luqman:* 33) Moreover, Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘On the Day when man will flee from his own brother, his mother, his father, his wife, his children; on that Day, each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own.’ (*‘Abasa:* 34-37)

Thus, those disbelievers, who turned others away from Allah’s path, can neither evade His wrath in the worldly life, nor would have a friend or a protector in the Hereafter; but rather, as Allah says, ‘Their punishment will be doubled.’ (Hud: 20) It is understood that the doubling of punishment implies that it occurs twice and that it entails the idea of power and strength. Yet, this is not the matter; because the concept of the existence of two entities implies that the former is weak relative to the latter. Therefore, this ‘doubling’ process demonstrates the weakness of the entity which had to be reinforced in the first place.

The disbelievers deserve this doubling of the punishment because they targeted to distort faith and turned others away from Allah’s Path in an attempt to lead them astray. There is no contradiction between Allah’s saying, ‘Their punishment will be doubled’ (*Hud:* 20) and His saying, ‘Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another.’ (*al-An‘am:* 164) Those people who tried to lead others astray from Allah’s path have not committed only one sin, but two; that of going astray, and that of leading others astray.

There is another verse in this concern, ‘Those who never invoke any other deity beside Allah, nor take a life, which Allah has made sacred, except in the pursuit of justice, nor commit adultery. Whoever do these things will face the penalties(2). Their torment will be doubled....’ (*al-Furqan:* 68-69)

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(1) ‘No one takes the place of’ means that everyone shall not be able to avail aught for others, As Allah says, ‘Guard yourselves against a Day when no soul will stand in place of another.’ (*al-Baqara*: 48) The verse (*Luqman:* 33) means that both the parent and the child are not able to defend the other or to stand in place of another against Allah’s punishment. Transcreated from *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*

(2) Whoever does these things will face the penalties: means that whosoever does these abominable acts shall be punished for committing sins. The sin means committing forbidden abominable acts. *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*

This means that whosoever does these abominable acts shall be doubly punished because he represented a model for others to commit the same crime.

Allah *Glorified is He* ordains that sins should not be propagated among people; thus, Allah *the Almighty* insists that the punishment of the sinner should be witnessed by several believers. Concerning adultery, Allah *the Exalted* says, '…And ensure that a group of (1) believers witnesses the punishment.' (*an-Nur:* 2) As the believers witness the punishment for a given crime, this implies a warning against committing this abominable act. In fact, this is a means of reducing all crimes.

In this verse under discussion, the punishment is doubled for those who committed two crimes; the former is that they themselves went astray and the latter is that they led others astray. Hence, on the Day of Judgment, some of those who went astray will cry out, as quoted in the Quran, 'Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misled us and we shall trample them underfoot, so that they may be among the lowest of the low.' (*Fussilat:* 29)

They will also say, '…Lord! We obeyed our masters and our chiefs,(2) and they led us astray. Lord! Give them a double punishment and reject them completely.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 67-68) Thus, encouraging people to go astray from Allah's path is a form of misguidance and delusion, and performing any action dishonestly is also a delusion, because it gives a bad example. The doubling of punishment does not mean to be burnt once in the Hellfire because the pain would have an end there; thus, Allah *the Almighty* ordains that suffering will be kept up unceasingly. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…When their skins have been burned away,(3) we shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain….' (*an-Nisa':* 56) Thus, the doubling of punishment is conceivably the constant and endless suffering, or perhaps the punishment may differ according to the kind of crime; one for their disbelief and another for enticing others to go astray.

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(1) *A group of: A section of people. Imam Malik and Ash-Shafei, Allah have mercy on them, assumed that the group of people means at least the existence of four people because adultery is not testified except by the minimum of four witnesses; while ibn Rabia`a conceived that they should be five in number; whereas, Al-Hassan Al-Basri presumed that they are ten. Ibn Kathir, 3/263*

(2) *At-Tawoos said that 'masters and chiefs' refer to the elite and the scholars, Tafsir ibn Kathir, 3/519. Referring to Ibn Abu Hatem*

(3) Skins have been burned away means that they totally burned as a result of utmost torture.

As Allah *the Almighty* says, '…We shall add torment upon torment for those who disbelieved and barred others from the path of Allah.' (*an-Nahl:* 88) The punishment of disbelief does not wipe out the punishment for other transgressions committed by the disbeliever.(1)

For example, on the Day of Judgment, the horned sheep which butts another hornless one(2) will be made to pay justice for its counterpart because the aggressor will be brought to justice even though animals are not held to account as they have no choice. However, they shall be used as a means of demonstrating the principle of Justice.

As Allah *the Exalted* says, '…Their punishment will be doubled. They could not hear,(3) and they did not see.' (*Hud:* 20)

This means that they failed to make use of their sense of hearing even though they were endowed with this ability, because they refused to hear the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Furthermore, they failed to make use of their sense of sight, for they failed to perceive Allah's signs in the universe; they seemed to be deaf and blind. This verse can also be conceived as the punishment shall be doubled many times as long as they were able to hear and see.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'How sharp of hearing, how sharp of sight(4) they will be when they come to Us....' (*Maryam:* 38) This means that the senses of hearing and sight shall be perfectly intact and functional on the Day of Judgment.

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(1) This is done because he does not believe in Islam; that is the reason of his punishment. As well as he is additionally punished for his going astray, whether he was believing in the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* or not.

(2) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The claimants would get their claims on the Day of Resurrection so much so that the hornless sheep would get its claim from the horned one', it is narrated in Sahih Muslim, The Book of Virtue, Enjoining Good Manners, and Joining of the Ties of Kinship.*

(3) This means that they failed to understand or to make use of their sense of hearing even though they were endowed with this ability. Allah says, 'Allah has sealed their hearts and their ears, and their eyes…' (*al-Baqara*: 7).

(4) This means that that the sense of hearing and of sight of the disbelievers shall be perfectly intact and functional on the Day of Judgment. They will see and hear every fact obviously and clearly to witness against himself. *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ خَسِرُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَضَلَّ عَنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَفۡتَرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

It is they who will have lost their souls, and what they invented will have deserted them [21] (The Quran, *Hud:* 21)

Therefore, they are losers because having wronged their souls by indulging themselves in immediate and short-term temptations, led them to deserve eternal suffering.

They transgress against themselves the matter which demonstrates the epitome of blunders, and the imbalance of values. A man might be unjust towards others by usurping their own rights for his own benefit. However, transgressing oneself means that the man gives his soul immediate pleasures while ignoring the longer-term suffering that waits. Short-term enjoyment is temporary; however, suffering is endless.

As Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…And what they invented will have deserted them'(1) (*Hud:* 21). This means that all deities worshipped other than Allah, shall be of no avail to them. If the false idols were to have any power on the Day of Judgment, they would have rushed to save them from the suffering, but these idols are completely powerless. Concerning the disbeliever, Allah *the Exalted* decrees, '…And there will be no one on Earth to protect or help them' (*at-Tawba:* 74).

None of those false idols or alleged gods other than Allah shall come to their aid. Even though the disbelievers had ascribed to them the power to succour, they will neither be able to grant help nor to even remember them at all.

Allah *the Almighty* says, '...And what they invented will have deserted them' (*Hud:* 21). This means that all that which they claimed falsely shall be lost, and forgotten.

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(1) This means that the disbeliever failed to have reasonable causes and that he went astray from the truth.

Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي ٱلْآخِرَةِ هُمُ ٱلْأَخْسَرُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

There is no doubt they will be the ones to lose
most in the life to come [22] (The Quran, *Hud:* 22)

The term *la jaram* is controversial among religious scholars; yet, it generally means that a definite event truly, rightfully, or certainly happens.

Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* says, '…Without doubt it is the Fire that belongs to them…' (*an-Nahl:* 62), it means that truly and certainly they shall earn the Hellfire as a result of the evil deeds committed. Such deeds entail the punishment, as well as combining the word *la jaram* with the sins, entail that Allah *the Almighty* shall rightfully punish them.

Some scholars conceived that *la jaram* means truly or certainly,(1) whereas others maintained that it means undoubtedly and impossibly avoided.(2) The two meanings are related because being impossibly avoided implies that it is firmly set. The scholars should have searched for the root of the word *jaram*, which means cutting or undermining.

In this verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* decrees that the disbelievers shall have the Hellfire; His decrees cannot be breached or undermined. Indeed, they shall assuredly meet this fate; thus, *la jaram* comes to mean undoubtedly and impossibly avoided.

Therefore, the word *la jaram* means assuredly, and that the promised fate shall undoubtedly come to pass. The word *jarima* (crime) which is derived from the root *jaram* means the violation of inviolable laws. If it is decided that one should not steal from another, this would be an inviolable law. When someone does steal from another, he has violated these laws and people's peace of mind. Thus, every crime is a violation and disruption of society's norms.

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(1) *This concept is maintained by Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi, Sibawayh, Al-Farra' and Mohammad ibn Yazid. They dealt with la and jaram as one coherent word, Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (Quran exegesis of Al-Qurtubi), 4/3338.*

(2) *This concept is maintained by Al-Mahdawi as well as Al-Khalil the term signifies 'assuredly' and 'undoubtedly'. Al-Farra' has also the same opinion, cited by Ath-Tha`labi, Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 4/3338.*

It is also said, ‘He had the *jaram* of something’ meaning he earned the sins of a wrongful action. Therefore, if there is a disruption of the principle of order, then there is no crime if Allah punishes with Hellfire those who made false claims about Him, who wrought injustice and turned others away from His path. Punishment is not a crime because the punishment for a crime is a means of preventing the wrongdoing.(1)

Thus, all meanings come together; on saying *la jaram,* it is understood that there is no injustice in the punishment because the real crime is their own heinous transgressions.

Therefore, Allah says, ‘Let harm be requited by an equal harm…’ (*ash-Shura:* 40). Allah calls it a sin because it represents an injustice towards society, or an injustice towards the individual himself. As Allah says, ‘If you [believers] have to respond to an attack, make your response proportionate’ (*an-Nahl:* 126).

It is now obvious that there are several meanings to interpret *la jaram*. It signifies that nothing shall ‘undercut’ Allah’s decree of sending the disbelievers to the hellfire or that these disbelievers shall ‘certainly’ be thrown in the hellfire. It may also signify that sending the disbelievers to hell is just and righteous or that there is no crime at all that Allah *the Almighty* sends them to the Hellfire, for it is they who committed the crime worthy of punishment.

In Allah’s saying, ‘*La jaram* (There is no doubt) they will be the ones to lose most in the life to come’ (*Hud:* 22), the words ‘the ones to lose most’ describe the doer’s deed of losing.

‘Losing’ worldly affairs happens when someone gets an unfair deal,(2) such as when someone sells something less than its original value. Whoever does this is called a ‘loser’, but losses in worldly affairs are limited to this life on earth, and even if one loses today, he may win tomorrow

Assume that the man lost all deals throughout his life; yet, how short-lived is life on earth! Everything that is finite is short-lived; however, the harm of the Hereafter is the eternal real loss. Allah says, ‘Say [Prophet], “Shall we tell you(1) who has the most to lose by their actions, whose efforts in this world are misguided, even when they think they are doing good work?”’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-104) Sometimes, Allah describes them as the ‘greatest losers’ and other times, Allah *the Almighty* describes their fate as being, ‘The most obvious loss’ (*az-Zumar:* 15). It is an all-encompassing loss.

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(1) For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding, so that you may guard yourselves against what is wrong.’ (*al-Baqara*: 179).

(2) Unfair deal: Not based on or not behaving according to the principles of equality and justice, Lisan Al-Arab

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the corresponding fate to that of the disbelievers, to comfort people’s souls. When a ruling is made for or against someone, the man likes to hear the opposite one to satisfy the curiosity for knowing the concept of requital.

On hearing Allah’s verse, ‘the good(2) will live in bliss’ (*al-Infitar:* 13), one necessarily wonders about the fate of the wicked, so Allah says next, ‘and the wicked(3) will burn in the Fire.’ (*al-Infitar:* 14) This technical juxtaposition creates a sense of elation in the first case and a feeling of constriction in the second. Accordingly, the person should consider carefully which of the two fates he decides to face.

Allah *the Exalted* juxtaposes the fate of the disbelievers, who led themselves and others astray from Allah’s Path and consequently earned the punishment of Hellfire, with the likely fate of the believers, the doers of righteous deeds. Thus, Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَأَخْبَتُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

But those who believed, did good deeds, and humbled themselves before their Lord will be companions in Paradise and there they will stay [23] (The Quran, *Hud:* 23)

It is cognisant that faith is a matter of creed,(4) where the person announces his belief in the concept of monotheism and keeps on pursuing Allah’s Message revealed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Whosoever believes in Allah but does not perform virtuous deeds, shall be punished because the essence of faith is embodied in righteous acts.

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(1) To tell somebody of something: communicate information to someone in spoken or written words. *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim,* 2/250

(2) The good: The virtuous, the moral, the upright, and the religious. Transcreated from *Lisan Al-Arab*

(3) The wicked: the sinful, the irreligious, and the vile. Transcreated from *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*

(4) Ibn Manzour said in *Lisan Al-Arab* that the place of faith or creed is the heart

That is the reason of Allah's saying, 'The desert Arabs say, "We have faith." [Prophet], tell them, "You do not have faith."(1) What you should say instead is, "We have [outwardly] submitted."' (*al-Hujurat:* 14) This means that they have merely followed the outward injunctions of Islam.

Thus, the believer is the person who firmly has faith in the Existence and Oneness of Allah, and in the belief that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger conveying revelation from Allah. However, the righteous deeds determine the ranks of believers.

There is a difference between the believer and the Muslim. The former devotedly perfects his righteous deeds; wherever the latter performs deeds lazily and barely perform the minimum religious commitments. Both the believer and the Muslim differ significantly from the hypocrite who feigns enthusiasm when performing religious rites, as well as, who harbours a secret,(2) hatred and animosity towards Islam which he does not actually believe in.

During the era of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the hypocrites were amongst the first to line up in prayer; nevertheless, they harboured an inner hatred and organised conspiracies against him.

In the verse under discussion, Allah shows that the criterion of faith depends on the belief in the Oneness of Allah and on performing the commitments of faith with humility and surrender. It is said that 'Perhaps the sin that humbles you is better than the good deed that makes you arrogant'. This means that the believer should not be arrogant or self-conceited of religious obedience.(3)

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(1) Having faith: strong belief in the doctrines of Islam; based on spiritual conviction such as believing in Allah, the Day of Judgment, the Books and the messengers, whereas, Islam includes apparent acts of worship such as prayer, fasting and others.

(2) Harbours a secret: Organizes a conspiracy secretly. *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*, 1/89.

(3) Arrogance: An attitude of offensive display of superiority or self-importance; manifested in an overbearing manner or in presumptuous claims or assumptions

The term *akhbatu* (humbled themselves) means that they fear and submit themselves to Allah. This term infers that the believers do not merely perform their religious commitments to evade Allah's punishment; but rather, to truly revere Allah.

The Arabic root *al-khabt* is derived from the term *akhbatu* (humbled themselves), that denotes the plain land that is outstretched, good and comforting; therein is the similarity with faith.

Allah describes the humble believers as, 'Will be companions in Paradise and there they will stay.' (*Hud:* 23) This means that paradise will be their destined eternal abode, wherein they shall enjoy everlasting bliss. Conversely, the world pleasures are intermittent and discontinuously ended by death or deprivation.(1) However, in the Hereafter, the believers, who performed good deeds and humbled themselves before their Lord, would enjoy everlasting bliss.

Thus, Allah describes the cases of the two parties; the first group of people, who wronged themselves by alleging false claims about Allah, sent people away from His Path and sought to make the straight path to be crooked, shall be powerless(2) to evade Allah's vengeance, and shall have no helping friend to protect them from the double punishment decreed. They sabotaged and lost themselves, with no help received from the false deities worshipped in lieu of Allah. There is nothing that can make them evade torture; they are the greatest losers.

As for the second group, who believed and performed righteous, virtuous deeds in complete submissiveness, reverence and love for Allah, deserve the eternal abode of paradise. Therefore, each party has its distinctive path and targeted end.

Accordingly, Allah says:

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(1) Deprivation: Man's disposition of blessings

(2) Powerless: unable to evade something

مَثَلُ ٱلْفَرِيقَيْنِ كَٱلْأَعْمَىٰ وَٱلْأَصَمِّ وَٱلْبَصِيرِ وَٱلسَّمِيعِۚ
هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًاۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

These two groups are like the blind and the deaf as compared with those who can see and hear well: can they be alike? How can you not take heed? [24]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 24)

The word party means a group of people joining together to strive towards a common goal, such as the ‘soccer team’ or any other kind of team. It refers to groupings; each has a common goal uniting them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…A party shall be in the Garden and another in the blazing Flame’(1) (*ash-Shura:* 7).

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* refers to the two chief human senses; the hearing and the sight. They are the primary means of registering information for human beings, whether auditory or visual. This allows the human being to have the ability of inference (2) using his senses.

Hence, Allah *the Exalted* tells us, ‘Allah is He who brought you out of your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78) Therefore, as Allah has granted us the sense of hearing and sight and has made them along with hearts to be the source of intellective power used for information collection and analysis ;(3) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* should be thanked.

It is known that great cultural strides and scientific breakthroughs (4) arise thanks to operating the senses of hearing and sight, used to obtain information. Afterwards, inference practically applied this information to serve humanity. For example, steam power was discovered when someone noticed that the lid of a cooking pot started to rise because of the boiling water inside. The discoverer deduced that the water vapour grows increasingly in volume, and thus the lid starts to rise. This discovery led to much advancement which changed many aspects of life.

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(1) Blazing flame: The fierce fire of the Hell

(2) Inference: Deducing the right or the accurate logical conclusion based on evidence and reasoning

(3) Analysis: Scrutiny and meticulously testing something, *Al-Mu`jam Al-Wasit*

(4) Breakthrough: A sudden, dramatic, and important discovery or development. *Lisan Al-Arab*

But for the gift of deduction and conclusion from sense perception beside the gift of hearing and sight, cultural breakthroughs would not have been achieved.

Thus, Allah says, ‘these two groups are like the blind and the deaf as compared with those who can see and hear well: can they be alike?’ (*Hud:* 24) The blind or the deaf has never doubted that he who sees and he who hears would have an advantage over him. They cannot be compared as they are not gifted the same senses.

Once more, Allah *Glorified is He* uses juxtaposition, so that he who hears or he who reads this verse might use his judgment to realise the difference between them to recognise that they cannot be ordinarily the same.

Therefore, Allah concludes the verse as saying, ‘…How can you not take heed?’ (*Hud:* 24) This means that they should, then, reflect on the existence of such juxtaposition.

As Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…It is not people’s eyes that are blind, but their hearts within their breasts’ (*al-Hajj:* 46). This means that the person might possess the capacity for seeing, or the capacity for hearing; however, he does not properly use any of them for acquiring the intended knowledge about unknown matters.

Allah describes each party and its struggle with the counterpart, He, as well, shows the differences of purposes. The ongoing struggle between the two parties is illustrated in the stories of the messengers of Allah all throughout the Quran.

Almost every chapter in the Quran contains a different snippet from one of the stories of the prophets. The story of the same prophet is variously tackled in each snippet. For example, in the chapter of Yunus, Allah *the Exalted* speaks once about Nuh (Noah), Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron) and Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon them*. Moreover, here, in the chapter of *Hud*, Allah *the Almighty* tackles the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* again from a different point of view. As Allah says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِۦٓ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

We sent Noah to his people to say, 'I have come to you to give a clear warning [25]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 25)

The verse illustrates the purpose of sending Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as a messenger to his people. It is incumbent upon Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to fulfil his mission, i.e. delivering his message. Hence, Allah states his saying, '…I have come to you to give a clear warning.' (*Hud:* 25)

In this verse, there are two versions of pronouncing an Arabic vowel; the former means that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* came with the message which he delivered to his people. As for the second way,(1) it means that the message itself warns people and speaks on the tongue of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. Thus, the former is a narration of the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* while he was delivering his message; whereas, the latter is indicating the content of the message.

In the first way of reading the verse, the speech of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is stated directly without prior introduction. This style of omitting the word of saying is a common literary device throughout the Quran. For example, Allah *the Exalted* says, '…The angels will go in to them(2) from every gate "Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23-24)

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(1) The second way is read by ibn Kathir, 'Abu Amr and Al-Kassa`i, cited in *Tafsir Al-Qurtubi* (Quran exegesis of Al-Qurtubi), 4/3340

(2) The pronoun 'them' refers to the believers who will enter Paradise from every gate, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Can someone who knows that the revelation from your Lord is the Truth be equal to someone who is blind? Only those with understanding will take it to heart; those who fulfil the agreements they make in Allah's name and do not break their pledges; who join together what Allah commands to be joined; who are in awe of their Lord and fear the harshness of the Reckoning; who remain steadfast through their desire for the face of their Lord; who keep up the prayer; who give secretly and openly from what We have provided for them; who repel evil with good. These will have the reward of the [true] home.' (*ar-Ra'd*: 19 -22)

This means that the angels will come unto the believers from every gate of Paradise,[1] there, the angels will welcome them and will say, ‘Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast....’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 24)

As previously mentioned, if someone is warned of an impending danger to come, it is so he might be prepared in response to the alert. Thus, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* has been sent by Allah to warn people, as per the discussion began in the previous verse. This means that there is a disobeying and disbelieving group, to whom Allah sent a prophet to warn them. Whereas, as for the other group, the prophet is a bearer of glad tidings who informs them of the coming blissful rewards, to be prepared with peace of mind

As for the group of disbelievers, Allah *Glorified is He* elaborates the warning:

أَن لَّا تَعۡبُدُوٓاْ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَۖ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ عَذَابَ يَوۡمٍ أَلِيمٖ ﴿٢٦﴾

Worship no one but God. I fear you will have torment
on a painful Day [26] (The Quran, *Hud:* 26)

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his people are mutually concerned for each other; that is why he fears for them because he is strongly tied to them as his community.

Therefore, Allah tries to soften the hearts of the people of the messenger to hospitably welcome him. For example, Allah says, ‘To the people of `Ad, We sent their brother, Hud (Eber) …’ (*al-A’raf:* 65). As long as the messenger is their brother, they will be assured that he will not cheat or trick them.

The prominent disbelievers of the people of Nuh (Noah) responded to his message by saying:

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(1) Paradise has eight gates, as per the Hadith, ‘Whoever of you performs *wudu`* carefully and then *affirms: “Ash-hadu an la ilaha illallahu wahdahu la sharika lah, wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan `abduhu wa rasuluhu [I testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah Alone, Who has no partners and that Muhammad, is His slave and Messenger],” the eight gates of Paradise are opened for him. He may enter through whichever of these gates he desires (to enter)’. It is narrated in Sahih Muslim (234) on the authority of `Ubadah ibn `Amer.*

فَقَالَ ٱلۡمَلَأُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن قَوۡمِهِۦ مَا نَرَىٰكَ إِلَّا بَشَرٗا مِّثۡلَنَا
وَمَا نَرَىٰكَ ٱتَّبَعَكَ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ أَرَاذِلُنَا بَادِيَ ٱلرَّأۡيِ وَمَا
نَرَىٰ لَكُمۡ عَلَيۡنَا مِن فَضۡلِۭ بَلۡ نَظُنُّكُمۡ كَٰذِبِينَ ٢٧

But the prominent(1) disbelievers among his people said, 'We can see that you are nothing but a mortal like ourselves, and it is clear to see that only the vilest among us follow you. We cannot see how you are any better than we are. In fact, we think you are a liar' [27] (The Quran, *Hud:* 27)

It is known that the prominent people are the highest representatives; they are the elite who evoke awe and admiration in any gathering. There is a folk proverb tackling the previous meaning: 'He catches the eye'. This denotes that when a dignified person publicly appears, people cannot turn their eyes away from him, as they could not see or be convinced by anyone but him due to his potentials.

The general meaning of the term 'prominent people' is the 'close preeminent circle of elders and leaders'. Thus, they are the first closest group to the centre. Around the circle of leaders there are many concentric circles other than that of the prominent. Instability only occurs when the circle has more than one centre; this causes the dissolution of all circles.

The response of the leading people of Nuh's (Noah's) *peace be upon him* community implies that they alleged that there is no special potential in Nuh (Noah) to be superior to them, so they asked him about the reason that makes him preeminent to be the messenger.(2)

Their reply is an indication of foolishness because once the messenger is human, his comportment is exemplary, and he deserved to be followed. Whereas, if he is not human, they would be justified in objecting him; because they would be unable to take an angel as an exemplary model. (3)

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(1) The prominent people: All preeminent most honoured people.

(2) To make the prophet preeminent means to make him the foremost ordering leader.

(3) *They would be unable to take an angel as an exemplary model because he is a different creature with various capabilities and powers. Thus, the power of the angel cannot be used to verify anything related to man. Transcreated from Tafsir ibn Kathir, 2/124*

Allah sheds light on this issue, as He says, ‘The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, “How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 94)

After that Allah says: ‘Say, “If there were angels walking about on Earth, feeling at home, we would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 95). Therefore, messengers come forth to reveal Allah’s Message and to be comportment exemplary models.(1) But for the messenger’s humanity, he would not have been appropriate as a role model, but as a mere conveyer of the message.

For example, when you see a lion in the zoo, roaring, bellowing, eating meat given by the zookeeper, you would never be tempted to emulate its behaviour. Whereas, if you saw a valiant knight riding his horse with a sword in hand, you might want to be like him. Thus, the role model is only applied to members of the same species. This principle is the key to refute those who ascribe divinity to `Uzayr (Ezra)(2) or to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*.

Then Allah quotes the saying of the disbelieving elite of the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* ‘…We can see that you are nothing but a mortal like ourselves, and it is clear to see that only the vilest among us follow you…’ (*Hud:* 27). The ‘vilest’ means the low, the dishonourable and the debased person, the ‘vilest’ of anything is the residue or the waste.

In the countryside, during the cotton harvest, the process of sorting the cotton is done by young boys and girls; where they separate the clear cotton from the buds which have not been fully opened up. This is done because defective buds usually suffer from slow growth, as they have not yet reached full maturity.

Furthermore, the farmers also perform a similar process during wheat harvest, where they separate the wheat from the chaff. Therefore, the ‘vilest’ of something entails to be thrown away and discarded.

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(1) The exemplary model means the excellent model to be followed, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘The Messenger of Allah is an excellent model…’ (*al-'Ahzab:*21).

(2) *`Uzayr (Ezra): a virtuous man from the People of Israel. He was called, by the Jews, the son of Allah and they worshipped him for his perfect knowledge of every word of the Testament, Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 2/18 and Tafsir ibn Kathir 2/348.*

In this verse under discussion, the disbelieving elite of the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* described the believers as being the vilest and the rejects of society. Additionally, Allah quotes them, elsewhere, as having said, ‘Why should we believe you when the worst sort of people follows you?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 111).

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* does not deny this because many of his followers might be weak, as they are victims of the cruelty of the unchallengeable powerful elite. The strong people do not suffer from the pressures of the unjust; it is the weak people who suffer the brunt of their maliciousness; so that when a saviour who can defend them from their oppressors appears, they naturally tend to cling to him.

However, this does not mean that faith does not enter the hearts of powerful people because there are some powerful and wealthy people of Mecca who believed in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab, ‘Uthman ibn Affan, ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Awf etc. Allah *be pleased with them*.

However, the oppressed is the one who usually answers calls for reform, because he feels the sting of injustice and boils in cauldrons of pain.(1) As soon as a call for reform appears, and a movement to drive out corruption arises, such oppressed people rally around their leader and give him support. If they happen to be freemen, ruled by an unlikely power, they voice their support for the reformer openly, whereas, if they happen to be slaves and subjects, they support their saviour secretly, except those who are strong enough, bear the brunt of persecution and torture.

All Messengers come forth in times of corruption, from which certain people get benefits, whereas many others suffer from the tyranny and corruption of those people. The advent of the messenger is a revolution against tyranny and oppression; that is why the weak and the oppressed earnestly rally around him and heartedly gives him allegiance.

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(1) A figure of speech referring to the suffering of the oppressed who groan with pain from the injustice.

As for those who benefit from corruption, they alleged that the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are merely the bottom of society. This is a trial to ridicule and deride the messenger; however, they show absolute folly because their saying is a sign that the advent of the messenger is needed to liberate those weak, and to angrily fight and to root out corruption.

However, this revolutionary advent of the messenger is not the same as the anger of the common revolutionary, for the latter is always conceitedly seeking the applause of his supporters from the oppressed class.

The only fault(1) made by the common revolutionary is his craving to remain always a revolutionary. However, the true revolutionary is the one who originally revolts to eradicate corruption, and then he peacefully reposes to build the foundations for a glorious future. The true revolutionary should neither indiscriminately avenge all people, nor prefer a group of people to the other, nor humiliate the oppressed, nor be unjust towards the oppressor. He should rather deal with all people justly and mercifully so that everything is made right; old grudges are buried and all people come to know that he does not oppose a particular group of people, but rather only the oppressing one. Thus, if he seizes the property of the oppressor and gives it to the oppressed, he should then deal unbiased with the two parties afterwards. As a consequence, peace and stability can prevail again in society.

Returning to the concerned verse, the words of the prominent disbelieving people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* are a confirmation that corruption plagues society and that those who suffer from the oppression had followed Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*.

Allah then says, '…And it is *badi* (clear) to see that…' (*Hud:* 27) *Badi* means the outward, the apparent which is opposite to the hidden, the esoteric, and the concealed. There is another recitation of reading the word *badi* to be read as *badi'*(2) '…And it is seen *badi'* (at first glance) that…' (*Hud:* 27)

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(1) This fault is a defect in the revolutionary. *Lisan Al-Arab*

(2) *This version is cited in Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (Quran exegesis of Al-Qurtubi), 4/2433: it means at first glance. The disbelievers assumed that the weak believers followed the prophet superficially, at first glance and that if they examined the message deeply they would not have believed. The word, either read badi or badi', has the same meaning.*

Badi` here means at first sight or at first glance. Thus, *badi* means the outward appearance or the first impression. When someone takes a first look at something, the initial impression is a superficial one. It is only afterwards that he can deeply think about it.

When someone hears of a particular case for the first time, he should not rush to judgment based on the outward appearances; rather, he should think deeper and study the case or the message thoroughly and calmly.

They had told Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* that he is a mere human like them and that only the vilest people among them have followed him, only because they had considered his message superficially. The disbelievers assumed that if the believers had examined the message closely and studied its aspects and repercussions diligently, they would not have believed in it.

Allah exposes the folly of the elite people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as they said that the weak people should have examined the message more closely before believing. This is contradicted by the fact that the followers adamantly believed in the message. The matter which actually confirms that their judgment was sound because they do not judge matters superficially with the same standards as those of the rich, nor as those of the empowered, nor as those who owns slaves. Those believers judged matters deeply with their heart, which is given the power to 'perceive' and with their tongues, which proclaimed faith. A man's worth depends on his two smallest organs: his heart and his tongue. (1)

But as for the service offered by the so-called vilest people, their 'masters' would certainly be traumatised and grievously suffer. It is the 'common' people who offer the services; had it not been for the work of the carpenter, there would not be any furnished houses. Similarly, had it not been for the labourers and the constructors, there would not be any sumptuous palaces. Likewise, had it not been for the work of the cook, there would not be any lavish meals; all services rendered by the 'weak' are in the interest of the rich and the powerful.

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(1) This is an Arabic proverb. Ibn Manzour explained its meaning in *Lisan Al-Arab* that the person should judge and deal with matters by using his gifted organs; the heart and the tongue.

Thus, society needs wealthy people, even by the way of inheritance, to spend their money to help the needy who provide services through strenuous work. Therefore, the weak and the poor are an integral essential category for powerfulness and welfare.

On looking closely at wealthy and powerful people, their supremacy refers to the efforts of the so-called 'vilest' Thus, if common people relinquish the service of their masters, the latter will lose his power and authority.

The disbelieving elite of the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* are quoted as saying '…We cannot see how you are any better than we are. In fact, we think you are a liar."…' (*Hud:* 27) Having said this, they had thereby refuted the fact that they owe their power and wealth to the efforts of the so-called 'vilest'; in this manner, they had denied them any importance.

Allah *the Exalted* points out the wrong deeds of certain societies, 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities? (1)" Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace? We are the ones who give them their share of livelihood in this world and We have raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31-32). Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* has allotted each human with his share of wealth. It would be an error of judgment to think that the people who have 'exceptional wealth' are the affluent; rather, they are merely gifted. When someone is distinctly skilled in one field, he will help others in his field of expertise, and others will help him in theirs; it is basically a matter of integration. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* never sustains anyone's wealth forever; rather, He has made the world such that it is in a constant state of flux.

Therefore, had the disbelievers of Nuh's community realised what the word *fadl* (superiority, advantage, favour or surplus) really meant, they would not have uttered it. For the first direct meaning of *fadl* is the surplus of something, whether it is concrete, physical or moral and ethical. The parties involved in the issue of *fadl* are *fadil* (the superior person, the benefactor, or the favour doer) and *mafdul* (the inferior person or the favour beneficiary).

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(1) The two cities are Mecca and Ta`if.

If only every tyrant could tell us what is the advantage or favour in their life, it is some more money or power, yet all those who serve the tyrant are superior to him because the authority of the tyrant is built upon their actions. They are the actual owner of advantage in terms of what is more than necessary.

Thus, the real link between creatures in this world is the ‘need’ to one another, not ‘domination’. Hence, when we see a tyrant abusing his power, we tell him: think about the situation because it is only through ‘abject’ people that you are only able to exert your tyrannical rule; you display your power by means of those who are skilled in the use of weapons, or those who are causing harm to other people. So these ‘abject’ people are the basis of such a power and the means to realise this domination.

The disbelievers from Nuh (Noah’s) people said, ‘…and we do not see that you could be in any way superior to us…’ (*Hud:* 27). This demonstrates that they understood *fadl* to mean material wealth and power. They completely misunderstood the word’s meaning.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying, ‘…on the contrary, we think that you are liars!’ (*Hud:* 27)

The Arabic word *zhann* (thinking) means more likely probability, while the less likely is *wahm* (illusion). This confirms the existence of an innate light of truth that flashes inside the human soul which is called in *fitrah* (sound disposition) for the arrogant will remain steeped in arrogance until their *fitrah* at some point flashes, making them realise truth and falsehood. So, when these disbelievers were hit by one of these flashes they said, ‘…on the contrary, we think that you are liars!’ (*Hud:* 27) They did not say, ‘We believe that you are liars’.

Then, in the next verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ أَرَءَيۡتُمۡ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّي وَءَاتَىٰنِي رَحۡمَةٗ مِّنۡ
عِندِهِۦ فَعُمِّيَتۡ عَلَيۡكُمۡ أَنُلۡزِمُكُمُوهَا وَأَنتُمۡ لَهَا كَٰرِهُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

He said, 'My people, think: if I did have a clear sign from my Lord, and He had given me grace of His own, though it was hidden from you, could we force you to accept it against your will? [28] (The Quran, *Hud:* 28)

When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* says *ara`aytum* (What do you think?), it means: tell me, if I possess a clear evidence from Allah and He has vouchsafed unto me such a grace (the divine message) and the secrets of these matters have been veiled from you, can I force you to accept it? No, because faith must come voluntarily as a result of obvious persuasion, and out of emotional fervour, and a result of clear choice.

When we look at His words, '…can we force it on you even though it be hateful to you?' (*Hud:* 28), it is clear that a messenger cannot force his people to believe, because faith must capture the inner heart and not the outer shell; and coercing the outer shell does not foster faith in the heart.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants submissive, humble hearts from the believers, not just submissive outer shells. Had He wished so, He would have forced them to believe since everything in the universe is subjected to His power. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O men! Are you more difficult to create than the heaven which He has built?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 27)

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has subjected the sky, the sun, the moon, and the whole universe to His will. Allah *Glorified is He* also tells us, 'Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth…' (*Ghafir:* 57). The entire universe is subjected to the will of Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has also created the angels who are a nobler class of creatures than human beings, and Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding them, '…who do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but [always) do what they are bidden to do.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6)

Therefore, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished blocks of obedience, He would have forced all of them to worship Him. However, He wants the loving submissive and humble hearts of His free creatures and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death (with grief) because they (who live around you) refuse to believe (in it)? Had We so willed, We could have sent down unto them a message from the skies, so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 3-4)

Thus, we understand that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is above than to coerce the outer shapes of human beings. Rather, it is His will that we are given a choice and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* does not coerce anyone into faith.

Faith, in principle, should not be out of coercion, but should come because of willingness and satisfaction. As the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘there shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from (the way of) error…’ (*al-Baqara:* 256).

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls upon His creatures to present the issue of faith to their intellects. When their intellects realise the excellence of Allah’s creativity, they promptly choose the certainty of faith. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are indeed messages for all who are endowed with insight.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 190)

Coercion deals with things that are unclear. However, with faith the guidance is clear. For when the Law of Allah requires that you do not steal from anyone, it guarantees in return, that no one shall steal from you. When it orders you not to pry into the private life of others, it thereby protects your own private life, and when it orders you not to cheat or envy anyone, this is a comfort for man.

Therefore, the demands of Allah’s Way consist of things that are comfortable for man. If you were to look at the demands of Allah’s Way, you would find that they are not addressed to you alone, but everyone else is commanded to follow them as well. Allah has intended that such a harmonious exchange will make a world of give and take.

Therefore, the ‘right way’ does not need to force its followers to walk onto it, for its truth is clear and visibly distinct from error. However, the mistake that some people make is that they take this verse out of context, for example when you ask a Muslim to pray, they might reply with this part of the Quran verse, 'there shall be no coercion in matters of faith…' (*al-Baqara:* 256). You should tell such a person that there is no coercion in making someone adopt faith, but once you become a believer, beware not to break its rules and do not be lax towards its commands. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* has prepared a harsh punishment for abandoning faith because The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not coerce anyone to adopt faith. One must think and contemplate because if they enter the realm of faith and then commit a sin, they shall suffer the corresponding punishment for that sin. For they came into faith out of their own free will and they used their intellect to make this choice. Thus, for every transgression there is a corresponding punishment. Therefore, there is no coercion when it comes to adopting faith, but to abandon faith entails punishment to the apostate, and other minor transgressions entail relevant punishment too.

So, when everyone becomes aware of such matters, they realise that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made the adoption of faith arduous, if only because the consequences of leaving faith are arduous.

Then, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is quoted as saying:

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ لَآ أَسۡـَٔلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ مَالًاۖ إِنۡ أَجۡرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱللَّهِۚ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ بِطَارِدِ ٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوٓاْۚ إِنَّهُم مُّلَٰقُواْ رَبِّهِمۡ وَلَٰكِنِّيٓ أَرَىٰكُمۡ قَوۡمٗا تَجۡهَلُونَ ٢٩

My people, I ask no reward for it from you; my reward
comes only from God. I will not drive away the faithful: they
are sure to meet their Lord. I can see you are foolish [29]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 29)

All messengers uttered similar lines. For example, in other parts of the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…No reward do I ask of you for this (truth)…' (*al-An'am:* 90). For the reward might not necessarily be money, it might be dates, or barley, or cotton and so on, and 'reward' can be more than just money. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'No benefit do I ask of you for this (message), my reward rests with none but Allah' (*Hud:* 29).

So, here we find that the True Lord has elevated the matter to a higher status. Nuh (Noah) says, '…my reward rests with none but Allah…' (*Hud:* 29)

This indicates that the matter which the messenger has brought forth is highly propitious since the reward should correspond to the value of the service rendered. We know that to exchange something for money or for its equivalent is called buying, whereas when someone utilises a property or an asset, while the ownership title is maintained to the original owner, then the beneficiary pays a rent fee for it. Here, it is as if Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is saying, 'I deserve a reward since I am offering you this service, but I have not accepted anything from you, not because of any ascetic attitude, but because I hope to receive a reward from He Who is Greater, more Beneficent than you'.

Furthermore, because the disbelievers had described Nuh's (Noah's) followers as being 'the most abject among us', Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* answered by saying, '…And I shall not repulse (any of) those who have attained to faith…' (*Hud:* 29). This response makes it clear that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* cannot possibly repulse a believer from the community of faith just because he is poor. Spiritual certainty has nothing to do with wealth and power or with poverty and need.

Allah's messenger never cast out his poor followers to make room for wealthier newcomers, for all stand equally before Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Hence, repulse not (any of) those who at morn and evening invoke their Lord, seeking His countenance. You are in no wise accountable for them – just as they are in no wise accountable for you – and you have therefore no right to repulse them; for then you would be among the evildoers.' (*al-An'am:* 52)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* had made the so-called 'abject' people a test for others. Let those who would become arrogant because of the poverty and weakness of the messengers' followers, drown in their own conceit! That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'For it is in this way that We try men through one another – to the end that they might ask, "Has Allah, then, bestowed His favour upon those others in preference to us?" Does Allah not know best as to who is grateful (to Him)?' (*al-An'am:* 53)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* also orders His messenger to be kind to the weak, and not to abandon them or neglect any one of them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And contain yourself in patience by the side of all who at morn and at evening invoke their Lord, seeking His countenance, and let not your eyes pass beyond them in quest of the beauties of this world's life…' (*al-Kahf:* 28).

Such commands from Allah came so that no misconduct or animosity should arise between the believers over the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it would not be said that, 'so-and-so is close to him'. That is why when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was surrounded by company he would distribute his looks evenly between the present companions, so that each would feel as if the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was looking solely at him.

In the verse which we are presently studying, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* describing the poorest of the believers, '…Verily, they (know that they) are destined to meet their Lord…' (*Hud:* 29). This is a declaration that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* will not expel those who are weak from among his flock. If he were to expel those who are destined to meet Allah *Glorified is He* would Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* wish it to be said, in front of Allah, that he had repulsed a people who believed in his message? Of course not.

We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* holds His messengers accountable. He says, 'Thus, on Judgment Day We shall most certainly call to account all those unto whom a divine message was sent, and We shall most certainly call to account the message-bearers themselves' (*al-A'raf:* 6). Therefore, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is accountable to his Lord, but the disbelievers of his community are ignorant of this. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says at the end of the verse, '…whereas in you I see people without any awareness (of right and wrong)!" (*Hud:* 29) This means that they do not understand Nuh's mission and they do not realise that he will be held accountable by His Lord.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَٰقَوْمِ مَن يَنصُرُنِي مِنَ ٱللَّهِ إِن طَرَدتُّهُمْۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ٣٠

My people, who could help me against God if I drove the faithful away? Will you not take heed? [30]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 30)

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is clearly revealing to us that he could not face Allah, if he were to expel the weak from among his followers because none shall speak favourably of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* before Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment; for on that day, Allah alone shall have absolute dominion and none shall intercede on another's behalf except with His permission, and none can help or give *nasr* (victory) to anyone else if such is not the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* for He is the All-Dominant over all of His creatures.

Nasr (victory) occurs by overcoming opponents, but intercession occurs by submission; the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not permit anyone to intercede on behalf of one who has repulsed a believer from the flock of faith.

Nuh's words are a reminder to his people. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…Will you not, then, keep this in mind?' (*Hud:* 30) meaning that you must not let yourselves be overtaken by forgetfulness.

Just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the question of remembrance (the practise of which keeps forgetfulness at bay), the True Lord *Glorified is He* also mentions the question of contemplation which is reflection on things to bring about something new by using one's intellect. It is to meditate on the Perfection of the Creator, and to discover those facts which are the landmarks along the path.

Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* encourages us to consider things deeply; meaning that we must not be taken in by the outward appearances of things, rather, we must delve deeply into the truth of matters. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Will they not, then, try to understand this Quran?' (*an-Nisa':* 82) Will they not then explore the treasures hidden in the fabric of the Quran?

The word *tadabur* (contemplation, reflection, or careful consideration) means discovering the meanings behind the verses. People stand at different levels when they contemplate the words of Allah.

`Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* says about the Quran, *thawwiru al-Quran* meaning delve into the meaning of its verses so that you might find its treasures, and do not just look at the external aspect of the verses, for the wonders of the Quran are endless.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

وَلَآ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِندِى خَزَآئِنُ ٱللَّهِ وَلَآ أَعْلَمُ ٱلْغَيْبَ وَلَآ أَقُولُ إِنِّى مَلَكٌ
وَلَآ أَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ تَزْدَرِىٓ أَعْيُنُكُمْ لَن يُؤْتِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ خَيْرًا ۖ ٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِىٓ
أَنفُسِهِمْ ۖ إِنِّىٓ إِذًا لَّمِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

I am not telling you that I hold God's treasures, or have any knowledge of what is hidden, or that I am an angel. Nor do I say that God will not grant any good to those who are despised in your eyes: God Himself knows best what is in their souls. If I did this I would be one of the wrongdoers'[31] (The Quran, *Hud:* 31)

Does Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* refute each reason for which the disbelievers of his community might abstain from faith? If they conceive of faith as requiring wealth, then Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* asserts that he does possess Allah's treasures, and he does not possess more than they do, and if they ask him to reveal the unseen, this is impossible since knowledge of the unseen rests with Allah *Glorified is He* alone.

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* also does not claim that he is super-human. He is no more human than they are and does not possess anything that he could use to force them to comply with the demands of faith, whether this is wealth, power, or knowledge of the unseen.

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* shall not repel the weak under-privileged members of his flock whom the disbelievers look down upon in scorn and contempt because Nuh (Noah) fears being held accountable to Allah were he to close the doors of faith against them. We must pause here and consider the True Lord's words, 'And I do not say unto you, "Allah's treasures are with me, nor (do I say) know the reality which is beyond the reach of human perception, nor (do I say) behold, I am an angel, nor do I say of those whom your eyes hold in contempt, 'Never will Allah grant them any good…' (*Hud:* 31).

We notice that the language shifts to *al-ghyba* (third person), for Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* did not address the poor people directly. In other words, he did not say, 'Allah shall never grant you any good because He knows what is in their hearts', and had Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* uttered such a thing he would have been a transgressor.

The letter '*l*' (usually used as 'for' or 'to' but in this case 'about') in the word *lilladhin* (of those) indicates that Nuh (Noah) is talking about the helpless and not *to* them directly. The letter '*l*' here means 'about'. There are other instances where this has occurred such as when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…And they say, "This Quran is nothing but a falsehood invented by man!" And finally, they who are bent on denying the truth speak thus of the truth when it comes to them, "This is clearly nothing but spellbinding eloquence!"' (*Saba':* 43) In this instance, the disbelievers are not speaking *to* the truth; rather, they are speaking *about* the truth.

Thus, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* demonstrates that if he had expelled these people who are described as 'abject', this would have implied that he was aware of the inner intentions of people's hearts, and Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* knows with absolute certainty, that Allah is the most knowledgeable of what is in people's hearts. Therefore, he refuses to put himself in a position where he is committing an injustice to himself or others.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالُوا۟ يَـٰنُوحُ قَدْ جَـٰدَلْتَنَا فَأَكْثَرْتَ جِدَٰلَنَا فَأْتِنَا بِمَا
تَعِدُنَآ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّـٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

They said, 'Noah! You have argued with us for too long.
Bring down on us the punishment you threaten us with, if
you are telling the truth' [32] (The Quran, *Hud:* 32)

Jidal (controversy) is to say something in response to something else, with each party aiming to make the other abandon their point of view based on some proof or doubt; the goal is to refute the other's position. Thus, *jidal* is an argument between two parties, exchanging debate, each attempting to convince the other to change their views. The noun *jidal* is derived from the verb *jadal* which means to twist together strands of flax or silk or any other similar type of yarn, then to weave a pair of strands together, and continue doing so with every pair of strands around the other until a rope is completed.

A strong man is described in Arabic by the phrase *'maftul al-`adalat'* (a man with twisted muscles) meaning that his muscles are not flabby and weak; rather, they are taut and tightly interconnected.

When you look at the muscular system, you are truly amazed at the power of the True Lord *Glorified is He* who created each muscle in a unique way while allowing it at the same time to coordinate with other muscles to perform the required movement.

For when a human being lifts their head up, they are using more than one muscle, and when using a hand, more than one muscle moves and if the movement of a single muscle stopped, this would prevent the next movement from occurring.

They had told Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* '...You have contended with us in argument, and have (needlessly) prolonged our controversy…' (*Hud:* 32). We know that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* lived for nine-hundred-and-fifty years which means that his contention with them lasted a very long time. An argument is different from a dispute because an argument tries to settle the truth, and a dispute occurs after the truth appears. An argument therefore is required, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...and argue with them in the kindliest manner…' (*an-Nahl:* 125). The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says, 'Allah has indeed heard the words of her who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complains unto Allah…' (*al-Mujadala:* 1).

Then, argumentation is necessary for reaching the truth, on the condition that it is a quiet discussion, not one where tensions run high or where any violent outbursts ensue.

There is a difference between a civilized exchange of views and a clash of opinions, for in the latter there is no desire to reach the truth, whereas in the former the truth is arrived at; just as when we rub flint against a piece of metal and sparks fly and we perceive the truth. But when deeply entrenched opinions clash, the truth is concealed.

Mira` is the disputing argumentation that ensues after the appearance of the truth and the word is taken from *mari ad-dar* which means ‘milking’ a she-camel or a cow. For when they cause the milk to flow from the udder of a she-camel or a cow, the udder is full and overflowing, and the milk flows down profusely, and when the milking is done, the person who did the work tries to extract the last few drops of milk, it is this last phase that is called *al-maryi*. So, they derived the word *mira`* from this process meaning the thing that follows the truth’s appearance.

There is also the word *hijaj* which means trying to find the *huja* i.e. the ultimate proof that would refute the adversary’s argument.

Thus, after the disbelievers of Nuh’s (Noah’s) community got tired of arguing with him, they asked that he bring down the suffering that he had warned them of. They had started finding this punishment slow in coming because Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had been living among them for nine-hundred-and-fifty years. They said, ‘…bring upon us, therefore, that with which you do threaten us, if you are a man of truth!’ (*Hud:* 32)

Having said this, it is as if they had assumed that the matter of bringing down the punishment or withholding it was within Nuh’s (Noah’s) capacity. However, this matter is not in Nuh’s (Noah’s) hands, it is the purview of Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is why Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* warns them:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيكُم بِهِ ٱللَّهُ إِن شَآءَ وَمَآ أَنتُم بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

He said, ‘It is God who will bring it down, if He wishes, and you will not be able to escape [33] (The Quran, *Hud:* 33)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* determines the timing and the coming of punishment, and Allah does not rush things simply to satisfy the wishes of his servants.

However, at the same time, they will not be able to prevent Allah *Glorified is He* from carrying out the punishment when its time does come because no power in existence, no matter how adamant, can oppose the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon* is being quoted as saying:

وَلَا يَنفَعُكُمْ نُصْحِىٓ إِنْ أَرَدتُّ أَنْ أَنصَحَ لَكُمْ إِن كَانَ ٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ
أَن يُغْوِيَكُمْ ۚ هُوَ رَبُّكُمْ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

My advice will be no use to you if God wishes to leave you to your delusions: He is your Lord and to Him you will be returned'[34] (The Quran, *Hud:* 34)

Here, the meaning is that if Allah *Glorified is He* wants to beguile you and keep you lost in error, you will hardly benefit from my good advice if I wanted to give you advice. The verse has a compound conditional clause.

An example of this in our life is when a school principal expels a student as a punishment for having done something wrong. The school principal might take pity on the student and say, 'If you come back tomorrow, I will accept your apology if you are accompanied by your parent.' The principal's saying, 'if your parent is with you'—is a post-positioned condition, but it should have come in advance.

In the verse which we are now studying, the first condition comes later, but does Allah *Glorified is He* really mislead his servants? Absolutely not; Allah *Glorified is He* guides them. *Ghuwaya* is deviation and going astray from the straight path.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'This fellow-man of yours has not gone astray, nor is he deluded.' (*an-Najm:* 2)

Allah *Glorified is He* says of Adam *peace be upon him* when he ate from the forbidden tree, '…And thus did Adam disobey his Lord, and thus did he fall into grievous error.' (*Ta Ha:* 121)

We must not fall into the same error that others fall into, for there are people who take the popular understanding or use of certain terms and apply them to doctrinal ideas; words have more than one meaning. That is why we must take into consideration all the meanings of a given word so that we can apply the meaning that is most appropriate to the context.

For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Yet they were succeeded by generations (of people) who lost all thought of prayer and followed their own lusts; and these will, in time, meet with utter disillusion.' (*Maryam:* 59)

Here, the True Lord's words, '…and these will, in time, meet with utter disillusion.' (*Maryam:* 59), mean that they shall meet their punishment (disillusion in the translation of the verse above) because of their transgression. Thus, the punishment itself was given the same title as the offender.

Also, for example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'But (remember that an attempt at) requiting evil may, too, become an evil…' (*ash-Shura:* 40). The True Lord *Glorified is He* never wrongs his servants, it is they who wrong themselves. Thus, whatever they receive as punishment is itself given the title of 'sin'. The same applies to the term *ghay* (disillusion) which has the connotation of *ighwa`* (to err and to go astray), and simultaneously means the punishment caused by erring and going astray.

Throughout the Holy Book, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives numerous examples of *ighwa`*. Adam *peace be upon him* erred from the path by eating from the forbidden tree despiteteh fact that the True Lord had explicitly warned him not to approach it. In this situation the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…And thus did Adam disobey his Lord, and thus did he fall into grievous error.' (*Ta Ha:* 121)

Of course, what Adam *peace be upon him* had done was due to his human nature, and, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to inform him that if he went astray, by not abiding by the command of 'do' and 'do not do', he will be exposed to shame and disgrace, represented by exposition of his private parts. Thus, Adam *peace be upon him* gained the experience that would prepare him for receiving Divine Guidance and Divine Revelation.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that 'Whereupon Satan said: "O my Lord! Since You have thwarted me, I shall indeed make all that is evil on earth seem goodly to them, and shall most certainly beguile them into grievous error.' (*al-Hijr:* 39) Did Allah *Glorified is He* really trick the devil? The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not trick anyone, but he does leave the choice of either obeying or disobeying open.

Had the True Lord *Glorified is He* created us all as devout believers, He would not have thereby given us a choice in the matter. If man obeys Allah, he earns Allah's reward, and if he errs, it is man's choice, oriented by him towards the bad deeds, even though he can orient it towards the good too.

Then, free will does not necessarily imply that man will go astray, but there is also the possibility that he will be guided to the right way. Man can find the right path as much as missing it.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ ٱفْتَرَىٰهُ ۖ قُلْ إِنِ ٱفْتَرَيْتُهُۥ فَعَلَىَّ إِجْرَامِى وَأَنَا۠ بَرِىٓءٌ مِّمَّا تُجْرِمُونَ ٣٥

If [these disbelievers] say, 'He has made this up,' say [Muhammad], 'If I have made this up, I am responsible for my own crime, but I am innocent of the crimes you commit'[35] (The Quran, *Hud:* 35)

This assertion in the verse comes in the heart of the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. It might be referring to that which Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* or it might be that this is what was said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The word *iftira* is an intentional lie that contradicts actual facts.

If you look at all the obligations which the Law of Allah saddles an individual with, you will also find that it imposes these obligations on everybody, and the benefit which you receive in return is truly great, for if the Law orders you not to steal, for instance, this is also protection from others who might steal from you.

So, when you think of the Path of Allah and all its Laws, do not only think of things that you are demanded to do. Notice rather, all that is given back to you in return. This proves that the Path of Allah is not simply human fabrication.

We know that the Law of Allah determines the criteria for establishing social justice, and when the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes a law, it might appear to limit your freedom. The truth is that it provides you with numerous services, and it protects you from being oppressed by others.

In response to their accusations that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had invented the Quran, they were given the choice: either to come up with a similar invented book with the same quality or to let Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* endure the punishment for the crime of lying. If it turns out that he did not invent it, then they should have assumed the punishment for accusing him of lying.

The style of the first part of the verse precludes the possibility of their innocence by omitting an understood text with the meaning of the words in italics, ‘If I have invented it, upon me be this sin, and you are innocent from my crime.’ (This is a literary device in Arabic that is called *ihtibak*, which may be like juxtaposition in English). Likewise, the second part of the verse contained a corresponding omission of the understood text with the meaning, ‘and if I did not invent it, I am innocent from your crime of accusing me of lying’. This is the style of '*ihtibak*'.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…How often has a small host overcome a great host by Allah’s leave...’ (*al-Baqara:* 249). The small party is that with a small number of men and military equipment. The larger party is characterized by its abundant numbers and a wealth of military equipment. However, with Allah’s help, the small party achieves victory. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* demonstrates that the usual victory is decided by the reasons of physical strength and huge numbers, but with His Will override such reasons and reaches its goal.

That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, ‘You have already had a sign in the two hosts that met in battle, one host fighting in Allah’s cause and the other denying Him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 13).

Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention that the first host is composed of believers, and He also did not mention that the second host fights for the sake of all that is unholy and satanic. This is an example of that literary device known as *ihtibak*.

In the verse that we are currently studying, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...Say O Prophet, “If I have invented it, upon me be this sin, but far be it from me to commit the sin of which you are guilty.’ (*Hud:* 35)

It is the True Lord’s Will however, that he reveals to us what the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said when he addressed his people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Say, “Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty of, nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing.'" (*Saba':* 25) Notice that He did not say, 'nor shall we be called to account for whatever you may have become guilty of'. Thus, He did not react to their offenses, both oral and actual, by offending them orally in return. The True Lord *Glorified is He* notes that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* also says, '…And, behold, either we (who believe in Him) or you (who deny His oneness) are on the right path, or have clearly gone astray!' (*Saba':* 24). What the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is employing is a higher standard of debate, one that is consistent with Prophet Muhammad's mercy which is gifted by Allah to the world.

So, after nine-hundred-and-fifty years of arguing back and forth between Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his people, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells him:

وَأُوحِيَ إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ أَنَّهُۥ لَن يُؤْمِنَ مِن قَوْمِكَ إِلَّا مَن
قَدْ ءَامَنَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

**It was revealed to Noah, 'None of your people will believe,
other than those who have already done so, so do not be
distressed by, what they do [36] (The Quran, *Hud:* 36)**

In this verse, the word *illa* (*except*) does not denote an exception; it has the meaning of 'exclusion', but it means the mere telling of 'other than', i.e. there will be no more who attain to faith other than those who have already attained faith.

There is another example of this and it happens to occur during the discussion of the most cardinal of doctrines. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than Allah, both would surely have fallen into ruin.' (*al-Anbiya':* 22) Here, *illa* means other than. If it were to denote the idea of an 'exception' this would imply that Allah *Glorified is He* would be one among multiple other deities. Therefore, it is inappropriate to conceive *illa* as denoting the idea of an 'exception'; rather, in this case it is equivalent to 'besides' and 'other than'. It implies the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* and it ascribes all Divinity to Him alone.

The verse that we are now studying asserts that no other members of Nuh's (Noah's) community might have attained faith other than the few who already had; Allah *Glorified is He* had put an end to that case. So, this provides us with the justification of why Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was encouraged to pray against those who did not attain faith. '…O my Lord! Leave not on earth any of those who deny the truth, for behold, if You do leave them, they will always try to lead astray those who worship You, and will give birth to nothing but wickedness and stubborn ingratitude.' (*Nuh:* 26-27) The justification for Nuh's (Noah's) invoking punishment on those disbelievers is that he had called them to faith for a long period of time, and they never responded. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* told Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* that they would not believe. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Be not, then, distressed by anything that they may do' (*Hud:* 36). Being distressed means feeling exasperating sadness. Nuh's (Noah's) people had disbelieved in Allah, committing the ultimate sin.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱصۡنَعِ ٱلۡفُلۡكَ بِأَعۡيُنِنَا وَوَحۡيِنَا وَلَا تُخَٰطِبۡنِي فِي ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓاْ إِنَّهُم مُّغۡرَقُونَ ٣٧

Build the Ark under Our [watchful] eyes and with Our inspiration. Do not plead with Me for those who have done evil – they will be drowned'[37] (The Quran, *Hud:* 37)

Thus, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* knew about drowning those disbelievers through Allah's command to build the ark. The command *isna`* (build) in this verse means to make a certain work. This is not the same as 'craft' and 'artistry'. For 'making', implies making from scratch, like the cup-maker, or the shoemaker, or the dike-builder or the furniture-maker, whereas a craftsman is he who looks over the knowledge and the process of craftsmanship.

There is also another kind of occupation, which is the profession of the farmer who ploughs the earth, sows the seeds, and waters them for plants to grow. They are called agriculturalists or farmers because agriculture is a direct means of providing and sustaining life essentials.

On the other hand, a maker deals with life needs, developing them, inventing a machine that had not existed before etc. while a craftsman serves and maintains that machine. A merchant however, brings all these together, being the link between the producer and the consumer; they display products for buying and selling.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* 'but build…the ark' (*Hud:* 37). Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was to build something new that was made from another existing thing. Nuh (Noah) had previously planted a tree which had lived throughout that long time, and its trunk and branches had become extremely large. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* began cutting the tree up to build the ark (it is said its dimensions spanned three-hundred arm-lengths, and its width spanned fifty arm-lengths and its height measured thirty arm-lengths). The ark contained three stories to accommodate the believers and the pairs of all animals on earth.

It is known that the tree that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had planted had become very large indeed since Nuh (Noah) had been preaching his message to his people for a very long time. We also know that the trunk of a tree increases in width every year such that when we cut it down we find that the trunk is composed of numerous concentric circles, each one representing a year in the life of the tree.

Thus, the tree was so large that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* could build the ark. The True Lord *Glorified is He* taught (Noah) *peace be upon him* how to build the ark through revelation and through Divine inspiration. Was it not Allah *Glorified is He* who inspired Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* the industry of metalwork? Indeed, it was. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He ordered the mountains as well as the birds to echo Dawud's invocation, and He also caused metal to become soft and malleable without having to use fire, 'And indeed, did We grace Dawud (David) with Our favour, "O you mountains! Sing with him the praise of Allah! And [likewise) you birds!" And We softened all sharpness in him and inspired him thus, "Do good deeds lavishly…"' (*Saba':* 10-11). Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* informed us the metal became soft and malleable without fire by His Will so that Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* could craft large shields that would protect a man's torso and other vulnerable areas on the body. Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* inspired Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* to build such shields in a remarkable way such that they would extend all the way down to the ankles and interlace. The armour was interlacing, just like matting is interlacing with each piece of straw strewn with another, and they are all bound together in a way that makes them easy to flatten or roll up. In the same verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* reveals how that precise technique was revealed to Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* ‘without stint’ (*Saba’:* 11).

This means that when you weave the rings of soft metal together to make body armour, you must craft that armour with utmost precision so that it does not fit tightly restricting movement and preventing taking full breaths, and consequently, causing rapid tiredness and inability to continue fighting.

Armour should also not be loose fitting around a warrior’s torso lest the size of the shield be a help to the enemy’s sword, with the armour itself striking the warrior’s chest, and the power of the armour doubling the enemy’s sword power. However, the ideal war armour is that enclosing the body without restricting its movement. So, Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* perfected the crafting of those body armours using the precise design revealed to him by the True Lord *Glorified is He*. For, he had built them according to the True Lord’s command when He said, ‘without stint.’ (*Saba’:* 11) The Arabic word *qaddir* (without stint) means calculating and designing to perfection.

For those whose profession is to build things, they should know that when the Holy Quran advises on the question of perfecting one’s work, it is thereby informing us of the way we must perfect and refine everything we do so that we might take such advice as an illuminating guidance that the work might be virtuous. You see someone who perfects his work while invoking, ‘Oh Allah!’ as if the primordial state is acknowledging the power of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to bestow man with the capacity for perfection and ingenuity.

As part of his tutelage of Dawud (David) *peace be upon him,* the True Lord *Glorified is He* also says, ‘And We taught him how to make garments (of Allah-consciousness) for you, O men…’ (*al-Anbiya’*: 80). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* inspires the notion, ‘to do like so’, into the heart of a messenger or a prophet; and he does so.

When we look at the ancient Egyptian’s civilization, we find that all their science and art, including embalming, making and using dyes and sculptures, were the specialty of the priests who represented the religious authority. These priests never wrote down any of the secrets of these sciences so that no modern researcher has been able to discover them. Thus, we see that the origins of all matters are coming from Allah.

Regarding the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him,* we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘but build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark [that shall save thee and those who follow you); and do not appeal to Me in behalf of those who are bent on evildoing – for, behold, they are destined to be drowned!’ (*Hud:* 37) The word *a`yunina* (our eyes) means under our protection and our guardianship. To be sure, it denotes a complete protection; full guardianship.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has already said regarding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘And so, await in patience your Lord’s judgment, for you are well within Our sight…’ (*at-Tur:* 48).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘…and (this) in order that you might be formed under My eye.’ (*Ta Ha:* 39) The True Lord *Glorified is He* rescued Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from Pharaoh who was killing the children of the People of Israel, and Allah *Glorified is He* planted in the heart of the Pharaoh’s wife a deep love for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…And (thus early) I spread My Own love over you…’ (*Ta Ha:* 39) For when he was still a young suckling, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was cast into the waters and was found by the Pharaoh’s men, but Pharaoh’s wife pleaded for Musa’s (Moses’s) life saying, ‘…A joy to the eye (could this child be) for me and you...’ (*al-Qasas:* 9). Thus, we find the very enemy of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people, is adopting Musa (Moses) and taking him under his wing; it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is telling them: I will make you nurture the person who will preside over your destruction.

The True Lord's words, ‘but build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark (that shall save thee and those who follow you)…’ (*Hud:* 37). It means that, if you, Nuh (Noah), are set back by an obstacle, We shall inspire you with knowledge by which you can overcome it.

As Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was busy building the ark, he needed wooden planks, and these had to be tightly bound to each other. Nails had not been invented at that time, so Allah inspired him to bind them together with tightly twisted ropes. This has been done in modern times by one of the explorers of America; he built a ship made from papyrus and tied it all together with strong, tightly twisted ropes.

Regarding the way Nuh's (Noah's) ark was built, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'but him We bore on that (vessel) made of (mere) planks and nails' (*al-Qamar:* 13) meaning that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had crafted planks of wood and tied them together with tightly twisted ropes such that they did not allow water to penetrate inside the boat.

In our time, this is just like the construction of wood barrels where the craftsman uses rectangular pieces of wood and binds them together using a sturdy frame; and when liquid is poured into them, the wood absorbs it and expands, thus closing the gaps and preventing the liquid from leaking from the barrel because wood is the only material that expands with cold, in contrast to all the other materials which expand with heat.

That is why we find that expert carpenters build their furniture, doors or windows in the temperate months; if they are built in summer, and the wood is shrunken during that time, then when winter comes along, the wood expands and this results in doors and shutters not closing properly; similarly, if they are built in winter while the wood is in an expanded state, summer will come and the wood will shrink, causing doors to malfunction, and making it hard to close window shutters tightly.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and do not appeal to Me in behalf of those who are bent on evildoing – for, behold, they are destined to be drowned!' (11: 37) meaning not to speak to Me regarding the question of forgiveness towards those who wronged themselves by disbelieving for they have committed the ultimate transgression; that is, they rejected the summit of the doctrine which is to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* The One and Only besides Whom there are no partners; that is why they deserve the punishment of drowning.

Thus, did Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* come to know that building of the ark was related to the type of punishment that was to befall those who rejected his message; for he and the believers will be saved, whereas those who disbelieved will be drowned.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* further explains this when He says:

وَيَصۡنَعُ ٱلۡفُلۡكَ وَكُلَّمَا مَرَّ عَلَيۡهِ مَلَأٞ مِّن قَوۡمِهِۦ سَخِرُواْ مِنۡهُۚ
قَالَ إِن تَسۡخَرُواْ مِنَّا فَإِنَّا نَسۡخَرُ مِنكُمۡ كَمَا تَسۡخَرُونَ ٣٨

So he began to build the Ark, and whenever leaders of his people passed by, they laughed at him. He said, 'You may scorn us now, but we will come to scorn you [38] (The Quran, *Hud:* 38)

The superiors of Nuh's community used to pass by Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as he was building the ark and scoff at him. For after having claimed prophethood, he now seems to have reinvented himself as a carpenter. Moreover, they wondered how this ship is supposed to get from Al-Mawsil (a small city in the north of Iraq) to the sea.

Little did they know, as Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* knew, that it would be floodwaters that would carry the ark. We notice in the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* 'And so Nuh (Noah) set himself to building the ark…' (*Hud:* 38) that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is executing the command that Allah *Glorified is He* has issued to him in the previous verse, 'but build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark (that shall save thee and those who follow thee), and do not appeal to Me in behalf of those who are bent on evildoing – for, behold, they are destined to be drowned!' (*Hud:* 38)

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says,

فَسَوۡفَ تَعۡلَمُونَ مَن يَأۡتِيهِ عَذَابٞ يُخۡزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيۡهِ عَذَابٞ مُّقِيمٌ ٣٩

You will find out who will receive a humiliating punishment, and on whom a lasting suffering will descend' [39] (The Quran, *Hud:* 39)

We notice in the words 'you will come to know' (*fasawfa t`lamoon*) that the action which Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* knew about concerned the flooding and drowning that would to happen in the future because any event has more than one facet, so that if one speaks about the event after it has come to pass, the verb used will be in the past tense; and if one speaks of an event at the same time that it is happening, the verb used will be in the present tense.

And when one speaks about an event for which the time has not yet come, in this case it is necessary to prefix the verb with the letter ‘s’ (in Arabic to indicate the future tense); for example, we would say, ‘*sa ya`lamoon*’ (will know) about the short-term future. As for the long-term future, we would use the word *fasawfa* (will be knowing). And we know that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* spent many years building the ark. That is why the word *fasawfa* is used to indicate a maximum length of time.

And what is it that they shall come to know? It is punishment and suffering. And who is it that shall suffer this punishment? Is it Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his followers or is it the disbelievers from, Nuh’s (Noah’s) people and the great ones from among his community?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘But in time you will come to know who it is that (in this world) shall be visited by suffering which will cover him with ignominy…’ (*Hud:* 39). Thus, these words confirm Nuh’s (Noah’s) knowledge of the suffering that is to befall them because they had disbelieved and scoffed at him saying, ‘…bring upon us, therefore, that with which you do threaten us, if you are a man of truth!’ (*Hud:* 32)

And the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and upon whom long-lasting suffering shall alight (in the life to come)!’ (*Hud:* 39) We find that the opposite of the word *yahil* (corresponding 'alight' in the description verse*)* is ‘moving’ or ‘fleeting’. So, the word *yahil* denotes ‘settling’ or ‘staying’ after having descended. For example, to say, ‘*hal bimakan*’ means to arrive and settle at a place; this is opposed to moving away and emigrating from a place. And the word ‘long-lasting’ (*muqim* in Arabic) means that the suffering that will alight upon them will be permanent or lasting forever.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَ أَمۡرُنَا وَفَارَ ٱلتَّنُّورُ قُلۡنَا ٱحۡمِلۡ فِيهَا مِن كُلّٖ زَوۡجَيۡنِ ٱثۡنَيۡنِ وَأَهۡلَكَ
إِلَّا مَن سَبَقَ عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡقَوۡلُ وَمَنۡ ءَامَنَۚ وَمَآ ءَامَنَ مَعَهُۥٓ إِلَّا قَلِيلٞ ٤٠

When Our command came, and water gushed up out of the earth, We said, 'Place on board this Ark a pair of each species, and your own family – except those against whom the sentence has already been passed – and those who have believed,' though only a few believed with him [40] (The Quran, *Hud:* 40)

The word *hatta* (till) indicates that the duration elapsed up until an appointed time. The word *amruna* (judgment) refers to the deluge, and the True Lord's command to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* that he places on board the ark a pair of every species of animal in addition to his followers, few as they were.

Therefore, in the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* there is more than one phase. Allah *Glorified is He* orders Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* '…build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark (that shall save thee and those who follow thee).' (*Hud:* 37) And so Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* busied himself with building the ark, and this process took Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* a long time before Allah ordered the waters to gush forth. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and waters gushed forth in torrents over the face of the earth.' (*Hud:* 40)

The word *fara* (gushed) implies that the waters had reached a boiling point. For water contains air, and the proof of this is that fish can breathe in it, And when we boil water we notice air bubbles rising to the surface, then the boiling water reaches such frenzy that it overflows the container.

And the word *at-tannur* (oven, furnace, not expressly mentioned in the above translation of the Quran verse) indicates the place where bread is baked. When the waters gushed forth out of *at-tannur*, it was the sign for Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to bring all those whom he wanted to save on board including his followers and all the animals and life facilities at that time. The signal was when the water gushed forth out of the furnace, a place from which water is not expected to flow.

The religious scholars have different opinions when it comes the meaning of *at-tannur* (the furnace). Some have said that it is the place where Adam *peace be upon him* used to bake bread; others said that it is the place where Eve used to do her chores, and others that it is Nuh’s (Noah’s) home or the home of an old woman. These explanations are neither helpful nor harmful; what is important is that the flooding of the furnace represented a clear sign for Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and that when this happened it was time that he bring a pair of each kind of animal on board the ark.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Place on board of this ark one pair of each kind of animal of either sex’ (*Hud:* 40), it means that he should place on board the ark a pair of every kind of animal and plant species, so that these survivors can ensure the survival of their respective species. Even pigs were among the animals Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* he brought on board.

And those who say that the prohibition of eating swine goes back to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* who supposedly did not place on board the ark a pair of this species; this group of scholars did not realise the importance of pigs as animals which eat waste and thus rid the earth of it; for every species has a function; the role of animals is not limited solely to the providing of food for human beings.

And the words, ‘…one pair of each [kind of animal) of either sex…’ (*Hud:* 40), indicate that the word *zawj* (*pair*) is singular, and the proof of this is, ‘…Be conscious of your Lord, who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1). Therefore, the word *zawj* designates an individual entity with its equivalent, a pair of shoes, for example. I say this so that the term *az-zawj* is not understood to mean ‘two’. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, ‘His followers would have it that, in certain cases, any of these four kinds of cattle of either sex is unlawful to man, either of the two sexes of sheep and of goats. Ask them, ‘Is it the two males that He has forbidden, or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females may contain? Tell me what you know in this respect, if what you say is true. And likewise they declare as unlawful either of the two sexes of camels and of bovine cattle…’ (*al-An‘am:* 143-144). When we count the total number we find it is eight, so if the word *zawj* meant ‘two’ the total number in this verse would be sixteen.

The Holy Quran also shows that the word *zawj* is singular in the following words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘Was he not once a [mere) drop of sperm that had been spilt, and thereafter became a germ-cell – whereupon He created and formed it in accordance with what it was meant to be, and fashioned out of it the two sexes, the male and the female?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 37-39) Thus, a male is a *zawj*, and a female is a *zawj* as well.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* continued carrying out the True Lord’s Order, ‘Place on board this Ark a pair of each species, and your own family–except those against whom the sentence has already been passed–and those who have believed,’ though only a few believed with him.’ (*Hud:* 40) It was the True Lord’s Will that life should be preserved on earth by saving all the elements necessary to sustain life; pairs of each kind of creature were placed on the ark. Some historians and exegetes said they lived on board the Ark for two years.

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

وَقَالَ ٱرۡكَبُواْ فِيهَا بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ مَجۡرٜىٰهَا وَمُرۡسَىٰهَآۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٤١

He said, ‘Board the Ark. In the name of God it shall sail
and anchor. My God is most forgiving and merciful’[41]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 41)

This is the last stage of the story of Nuh’s (Noah’s) Ark which began by Allah ordering Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to build the ark. Throughout its construction, Nuh (Noah) kept trying to guide his people to Allah until he received the sign that marked the beginning of the floods, ‘and the furnace boiled over’ (*Hud:* 40). By Allah’s Command, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* brought on board the ark a pair of every kind of creature, in addition to his family and the believers. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to those who believed, ‘Embark therein. In the Name of Allah, it shall sail and anchor.’ (*Hud:* 41)

The previous statement was attributed to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* because he also added the words, ‘My Lord is most forgiving and Merciful’ (*Hud:* 41). Embarking requires that the person doing the act of embarking places himself on board of something, in a way that makes him on it or above it. This obviously implies that the ship, on which one has embarked, should be in the service of its passengers. It is as if when Allah *the Exalted* commissioned the building of the ark, its purpose was to serve those who would embark on it and be carried by it.

We note here that Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Embark therein' and has not said, 'Embark on it'!The True Lord *Glorified is He* has said it this way to give us an idea of the ark's design; for Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had built it according to divine inspiration in the best possible form. Its design was far from rudimentary. The ark's passengers did not just ride on top of it. It was designed in a way that enabled them to live inside of it, especially as it was supposed to house every variety of wild beasts, insects, and animals alongside humans. Therefore, it was necessary that the ark's design should consist of multiple levels and floors. The True Lord's Words, 'in the Name of Allah it shall sail and anchor' show that the ark was built to be seaworthy and safe from sinking. It must safely carry its passengers to a place impenetrable by water; a place of high altitude which would allow for the ark to become properly anchored, just as the flood waters allowed the ark to be carried afloat. Thus, the sailing of the ark on water and the end of its journeying and its anchoring was in Allah's Name and with His Permission.

Nuh's words, 'in the Name of Allah it shall sail and anchor' inform us that the ark's course through the water was by Allah's Will. Also, those who were allowed to board the ark did so not by virtue of their personal status, but because they believed in Allah *the Exalted and the Glorious*.

To cite an example relevant to our own lives—and indeed Allah is beyond compare—we find that a judge opens a courts session by saying, 'In the name of the constitution and the law' meaning that he will not be pronouncing judgment from a personal point of view, but in the name of the constitution and the law.

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said, 'in the Name of Allah it shall sail and anchor' because the ark was a Command from Allah that was carried out and built by His messenger. That is why the Hadith says, 'every act not begun with the Name of Allah shall remain cut off (from blessings and prosperity; incomplete).'

Before you begin anything, you know that all actions and events require various energies for their execution. For instance, if the action is of a physical nature, it will require physical power. If the action is mental, it will require thought, reflection, and deliberation. If it is an action that involves challenging people in power, it will require courage. If it is an action that aims at purifying souls, it will require clemency and patience. That being said, it is clear that different actions require different approaches. To have the necessary strength, you can say, 'In the Name of the All-Powerful, the All-Able'. To acquire the necessary knowledge, you can say, 'In the Name of the Omniscient'. To find sufficiency, you can say, 'In the Name of the Self-Sufficient Master'. To show clemency and forbearance, you can say, 'In the Name of the Clement, the Forbearing'. And when you need to find courage, you can say, 'In the Name of the Dominant, the Subduer'.

A single action may require seeking out many qualities. In place of all this, you can call on your Lord using His Name Allah and immerse yourself in the blessedness of this Unique Name of the Creator of existence *Glorified is He*. For it is the name indicative and all-inclusive of every Divine Name and Attribute of Absolute Perfection and Glory. Do not be intimidated or shy. Approach every matter with Allah's Name even if you are neglectful of some of His Commandments. The True Lord *the Exalted* is the One Most Merciful and Ever Compassionate.

The True Lord says, relating the words of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* '…My Lord is Most Forgiving and Merciful.' (*Hud:* 41) What is meant by these words is that the believers in Nuh's (Noah's) message were human beings after all. And like most human beings, they did not fulfil all their religious obligations perfectly, as they were not angels. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* evaluated their faith as a whole, overlooking some of the sins they had committed and not punishing them for them. Herein lies the advantage of uttering the formula: 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.'

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* continues describing the ark and its passengers:

وَهِىَ تَجۡرِى بِهِمۡ فِى مَوۡجٖ كَٱلۡجِبَالِ وَنَادَىٰ نُوحٌ ٱبۡنَهُۥ وَكَانَ فِى
مَعۡزِلٖ يَٰبُنَىَّ ٱرۡكَب مَّعَنَا وَلَا تَكُن مَّعَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

It sailed with them on waves like mountains, and Noah called out to his son, who stayed behind, 'Come aboard with us, my son, do not stay with the disbelievers' [42] (The Quran, *Hud:* 42)

And so the ark moved on with them, not through a sea that was merely tempestuous, but a sea where the waves were the size of mountains. This suggests that the ark was guided by a higher power that made it impervious to the waves. Then the verse mentions the fatherly love that the situation brought up in Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* towards his son when he called out to him, 'Come aboard with us, my son, do not stay with the disbelievers.' (*Hud:* 42) But the son rejected his father's advice thinking that one of the mountains would keep him safe and dry.

Revealing the son's intentions, contrary as they were to his father's demands, the True Lord says:

قَالَ سَـَٔاوِىٓ إِلَىٰ جَبَلٖ يَعۡصِمُنِى مِنَ ٱلۡمَآءِۚ قَالَ لَا عَاصِمَ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ مِنۡ
أَمۡرِ ٱللَّهِ إِلَّا مَن رَّحِمَۚ وَحَالَ بَيۡنَهُمَا ٱلۡمَوۡجُ فَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُغۡرَقِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

But he replied, 'I will seek refuge on a mountain to save me from the water.' Noah said, 'Today there is no refuge from God's command, except for those on whom He has mercy.' The waves cut them off from each other and he was among the drowned [43] (The Quran, *Hud:* 43)

Nuh's (Noah's) son thought that he could save himself by taking refuge on a mountain. He assumed that perhaps the high ground would keep him secure from drowning. But Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* knew that no disbeliever shall be safe, and that safety shall only be granted to those upon whom Allah bestowed His Mercy through belief. Thus, the waves came in and separated between Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his son who then drowned.

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* wanted to conclude the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* by showing the ark coming to rest on the mountain of Judi(1). Some say that the mountain of Judi is situated in the Iraqi city of Mosul. Others say that it is near the city of Kufa. At any rate, the knowledge of the mountain's exact location neither benefits the one who possesses it nor harms the one who is ignorant of it.

Afterwards the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

وَقِيلَ يَٰٓأَرۡضُ ٱبۡلَعِي مَآءَكِ وَيَٰسَمَآءُ أَقۡلِعِي وَغِيضَ ٱلۡمَآءُ وَقُضِيَ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ
وَٱسۡتَوَتۡ عَلَى ٱلۡجُودِيِّۖ وَقِيلَ بُعۡدٗا لِّلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٤٤

Then it was said, 'Earth, swallow up your water, and sky, hold back,' and the water subsided, the command was fulfilled. The Ark settled on Mount Judi, and it was said, 'Gone are those evildoing people!' [44] (The Quran, *Hud:* 44)

The word *bal`* (swallowing) means to cause something to pass through the throat down into the stomach. So, when the Quran mentions such a command as this, 'O earth, swallow up your water' (*Hud*: 44), understand that the giver of this order is none other than the One to Whom the earth humbly submits.

Notice that the wording of the verse does not come as, 'Allah said, "O earth swallow up your water' because the Sayer is indicated by the context even if not explicitly mentioned. The True Lord wants to develop in us the instinct of belief and the insight into its meaning. For no one except Allah can order the earth to swallow up its water.

As for His Command to the sky, 'O sky, hold back', it was for it to stop raining. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* brought an end to the flooding that enveloped the earth by stopping its source and ordering the land to absorb the water.

We notice that when it rains, the drainage systems clog up as if there is something that is blocking the water's course. This is because today's cities are surfaced with asphalt that does not absorb the water. That is why we find that the concerned government departments invest all their energies in the repair and maintenance of the city drainage systems to evacuate all the rainwater and city life goes on unhindered.

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(1) A mountain near the city of Mosul [*Kalimat Al-Quran*]

At this point, I should say that the proper use of water is part and parcel of proper faith. I notice that when some people make their ablutions, they open the water taps fully and use more water than they need to perform their ablutions. We must avoid committing the sin of wasting clean water for no reason. People should try and conserve water, and not to be wasteful with it. When water is available, it has the power of reviving the dead earth. We have a great need for water to reclaim desert lands for agriculture. We must do our part to alleviate the immense pressure that is currently being put on the city's sewage networks. In short, we should make a better and more economical use of Allah's blessings so that we can all enjoy and benefit from them.

The saying of the True Lord, 'O sky, hold back' means desist from sending rain. From this sense derives the word *qal`* which is the sail of small boats. One can say, '*aqla`at al-markib*' (the boat took off) meaning: 'The boat left behind the calm of the shore on which it was beached'.

The True Lord also says, 'and the water subsided'. The passive structure of this part of the verse acknowledges to us that the One Who caused the flood water to sink into the earth was Allah *the Glorious and Exalted*. Then Allah says, 'the Ark settled on Mount Judi'. That is, after the flood receded, the ark rested on the mountain called Judi. The True Lord concludes the blessed verse by saying, 'Away with the evildoing people!', this signifies a total and eternal banishment from Allah until the Day of Resurrection.

Then Nuh's (Noah's) fatherly feelings were awakened once again, as demonstrated by the True Lord's Words:

وَنَادَىٰ نُوحٌ رَّبَّهُۥ فَقَالَ رَبِّ إِنَّ ٱبْنِى مِنْ أَهْلِى وَإِنَّ وَعْدَكَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَأَنتَ أَحْكَمُ ٱلْحَٰكِمِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Noah called out to his Lord, saying, 'My Lord, my son was one of my family, though Your promise is true, and You are the most just of all judges' [45] (The Quran, *Hud:* 45)

Now fatherly compassion is commendable, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* fills up the heart of every father with it in proportion to the needs of his offspring. If this love was not there, no father or mother would ever put up with the hardships of raising children. This situation teaches us the principle that there is no filiation to the prophets without fellowship. We find an example of it in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) who was known as the *Khalil* (beloved, close elect) of Allah) and upon our Prophet Muhammad. Concerning him, the True Lord says, ‘And (remember) when the Lord of Ibrahim (Abraham) tried him with (certain) Commands, which he fulfilled...’ (*al-Baqara:* 124).

That is, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* fulfilled his Lord’s Commandments to perfection such as when he wanted him to raise the foundations of the Sacred House, he extended them above their original height through contrivance. So he brought forth a stone and stood on it to raise the walls of the *Ka’ba*. Also, Allah *the Exalted* said to him, ‘Verily, I am going to make you a leader (Prophet) of mankind …’ (*al-Baqara:* 124) because he was faithful to Allah’s Law and was able to fulfil every commandment with utmost precision. Then Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked his Lord, ‘and (will you make leaders) of my offspring as well?’ (*al-Baqara:* 124) Whereupon the True Lord *the Exalted* replied, ‘My Covenant does not embrace the wrongdoers.’ (*al-Baqara:* 124)

From this we learn that prophethood has no filiation but must entail discipleship. This fact is also evident in what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said after having imbibed the True Lord’s Words, ‘My Covenant does not embrace the wrongdoers,’ (*al-Baqara:* 124), when he asked his Lord *Glorified is He* to endow the city of Mecca and its inhabitants with security and provision, Ibrahim (Abraham) said, ‘My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in Allah and the Last Day….’ (*al-Baqara:* 126)

Thus Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked Allah to provide for the believers, but the True Lord *the Exalted* pointed out to him that in this situation his request is misplaced. For Allah, being the Lord of all creatures, provides sustenance to both the believers and the disbelievers. As for the obligations of worshiping Allah, these pertain only to the believers. Therefore, the True Lord says, ‘As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while' (*al-Baqara:* 126). That is, worldly provision is given to both believers and disbelievers—for giving sustenance is one of the acts of Allah's Lordship.

We would also like to add in this respect that fatherly and motherly compassion is always inversely proportional to the need of the children. Thus, if the son or daughter has a strong personality, the fatherly and motherly compassion is relatively diminished. For example, let us suppose there are two brothers; one of whom is well off and can take care of his parents and support them financially, and the other is poor and is unable to support his parents.

We will see that the father and the mother's empathy leans towards the poor son, not towards the one who is well off because fatherly and motherly sympathy is always with the one who is weak, sick or the one who is away. The more need the child has, the more sympathy he draws.

In Nuh's (Noah's) appeal to His Lord, we notice that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had an excuse for asking that his son be saved along with the others because the True Lord had ordered him to carry on board the ark a pair of every kind of creature in addition to his kindred. So Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* asked that his son be saved because he was a member of his family. He said, 'O my Lord! Verily, my son is of my family! And certainly, Your Promise is true, and you are the Most Just of all judges.' (*Hud:* 45)

Accordingly, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had a right to ask as much of Allah, for he was requesting the fulfilment of that which Allah had promised to grant, which was to carry his family with him in the ark to be saved. When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said, '…You are the Most Just of all judges…' this was an acknowledgement of the fact the Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* does not make mistakes. That, even if his son had drowned, there was surely wisdom behind it

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

قَالَ يَٰنُوحُ إِنَّهُۥ لَيۡسَ مِنۡ أَهۡلِكَۖ إِنَّهُۥ عَمَلٌ غَيۡرُ صَٰلِحٖۖ فَلَا تَسۡـَٔلۡنِ مَا
لَيۡسَ لَكَ بِهِۦ عِلۡمٌۖ إِنِّيٓ أَعِظُكَ أَن تَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡجَٰهِلِينَ ٤٦

God said, 'Noah, he was not one of your family. What he did was not right. Do not ask Me for things you know nothing about. I am warning you not to be foolish' [46] (The Quran, *Hud:* 46)

The True Lord *the Exalted* wants to inform Nuh (Noah) that a prophet's family does not consist of his biological progeny; rather, it consists of his followers and appliers of Allah's Message. Thus if Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were to hold his son to this standard, he would find that he was not a son to him at all.

This reminds us of what our own Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about Salman Al-Farisi, 'Salman is a member of our household.'(1) Thus, when it comes to prophets, their true family consists of the people who follow them, and not necessarily their biological progeny.

Notice how concise and exact Allah's Words are when He says, '…Surely, he is not of your family' (*Hud:* 46). Then Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* follows this up with the rationale for such a pronouncement, 'verily, his work is unrighteous'. It is as if filiation focuses on the work rather than the person of the son. There is no mention here whatsoever of 'the person'; what is mentioned is 'work' and 'conduct'. Therefore, the 'actions' of Nuh's (Noah's) son automatically disqualified him from being Nuh's (Noah's) son.

We learn that when it comes to prophets, the criterion for determining filiation is not one's bloodline; rather, it is whether one is a follower or not. The proof of this is the description that the True Lord gives of Nuh (Noah's) son, 'verily, his work is unrighteous.' Were he righteous in his conduct, he would have indeed been considered Nuh's (Noah's) son. The True Lord further says, 'so ask not of me that of which you have no knowledge! I admonish you, lest you be among the ignorant.' The True Lord hereby asks Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to consider carefully before asking anything from his Lord; for the prophets cannot be reproached when their Lord educates and disciplines them.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (vol. 3, p. 598); this part of the Hadith was narrated on the authority of `Amr ibn `Awf. Al-Muzni, Adh-Dhahabi and Al-`Ajluni noted that its chain of transmission was weak*

Then the True Lord says:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّيٓ أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنۡ أَسۡـَٔلَكَ مَا لَيۡسَ لِي بِهِۦ عِلۡمٞۖ
وَإِلَّا تَغۡفِرۡ لِي وَتَرۡحَمۡنِيٓ أَكُن مِّنَ ٱلۡخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

He said, 'My Lord, I take refuge with You from asking for things I know nothing about. If You do not forgive me, and have mercy on me, I shall be one of the losers' [47] (The Quran, *Hud:* 47)

Here Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* asked his Lord *the Exalted* to forgive him for what he had said. Nuh (Noah) recognized that he was unable to hold back the urge to ask Allah to save his son. Only the True Lord Himself could cause such an urge to be suppressed in Nuh's (Noah's) heart. And that is the highest level of submission to Allah *the Most High*.

Nuh's (Noah's) words, 'I seek refuge in You' further tell us that when a person takes refuge in some other power, this can only mean that he is unable to overcome the threat he is facing through his own power. Therefore Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* sought that his Lord would protect him from asking about matters beyond his knowledge, and begged for Allah's Forgiveness and Mercy so as not to be among the lost.

The True Lord then continues:

قِيلَ يَٰنُوحُ ٱهۡبِطۡ بِسَلَٰمٖ مِّنَّا وَبَرَكَٰتٍ عَلَيۡكَ وَعَلَىٰٓ أُمَمٖ مِّمَّن
مَّعَكَۚ وَأُمَمٞ سَنُمَتِّعُهُمۡ ثُمَّ يَمَسُّهُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ﴿٤٨﴾

And it was said, 'Noah, descend in peace from Us, with blessings on you and on some of the communities that will spring from those who are with you. There will be others We will allow to enjoy life for a time, but then a painful punishment from Us will afflict them' [48] (The Quran, *Hud:* 48)

The saying of the True Lord, 'disembark in peace from us' indicates that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had received orders to disembark and to proceed with his religious mission on a land containing the elements needed for life, including the pairs of each kind of creature and all the believers that were saved by Allah *the Most High*. As for those who used to scorn Nuh's (Noah's) followers as low and vile, they were drowned.

The saying of the True Lord, 'on you and on some of the communities that will spring from those who are with you' encompasses Nuh's (Noah's) family as well as those who believed in him, and the communities of all the beasts, birds, animals and beasts of burden that were on the ark. This is reference to the primary community of creatures which comprised the human beings and the classes of creatures that were subservient to mankind. This way the necessities of life were provided for the believers. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his folk were free to devote themselves to their religious mission on Earth.

The word *salam* (peace) in the verse 'disembark in peace from Us' denotes security and peace of mind. There were no more disbelievers around to harass Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* or to speak any such words to him like, 'Nuh (Noah)! You have argued with us for too long. Bring down on us the punishment you threaten us with…' (*Hud:* 32).

And he would no longer face accusations of fabricating this message. The only people left with Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were the believers. They understood well that their deliverance from the flood was due to their adherence to the doctrine which Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had brought to them on behalf of Allah *the Exalted*. The saying of the True Lord, 'with blessings' means that the True Lord bestows His Blessings on that which is few and little until it becomes many times larger. A thing can be described as *mubarak* (blessed) when, for example, a person brings a meal, intending to serve it to two diners. But then five guests show up and the food suffices for all those present. Therefore, something that is *mubarak* is that which, while seemingly little and modest, can offer the same benefits as that which is large and plentiful.

It was necessary, in this context, to use the word *barakat* (blessings) because all what Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* had saved by placing on the ark—the pairs of each type of creature—these now required the blessings of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to multiply and become sufficient.

‘With blessings on you and on some of the communities that will spring from those who are with you. There will be others We will allow to enjoy life for a time, but then a painful punishment from Us will afflict them.’ (*Hud:* 48) These words are consistent with human nature. The original believers who were saved with Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were the best; but with the passage of time, forgetfulness and heedlessness crept up on some of them. Then the later generations who arrived on the scene lacked the guidance they needed from upright role models. Then the next generations grew up under conditions that completely cut them off from the Law and Path of Allah.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The man would have some sleep, and honesty would be taken away from his heart leaving the impression of a faint mark. He would again sleep, and honesty would be taken away from his heart leaving an impression of a blister; as if you rolled down an ember on your foot and it left a vesicle. He would see a swelling with nothing inside.’ The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* then took up a pebble and rolled it over his foot and said, ‘The people would enter into transactions with one another, but there would hardly be any trustworthy persons among them. (And there would be such a paucity of upright, honest people) until it would be said, ‘Among such and such a tribe there is a trustworthy man’, and it would be said of a man, ‘How strong he is, how nice and how wise’, and there is not even a mustard seed of faith in his heart.’(1)

Thus, a state of heedlessness and forgetfulness can come over the followers of Allah’s Path. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, ‘Trials and temptations will be presented to the heart like the weaving of a straw mat, straw after straw. Any heart that absorbs (accepts) them will have a black dot left in it and any heart that rejects them will have a white dot left in it. In the end, there will be two types of hearts left: one white like a smooth and white stone with no temptation able to harm it as long as the heavens and earth endure, and another black and turbid, like an overturned vessel, that does not abide by virtue or reject evil except what agrees with its desire-soaked heart.'(1) I seek refuge in Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* from the prospect of our hearts sliding into forgetfulness.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7086) and by Muslim in his Sahih (143) on the authority of Hudhayfah ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him*

The people that the True Lord is referring to in this noble verse are those who remained with Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* who were the most eminent believers. Yet, some of them would be eventually overwhelmed by heedlessness. Still Allah *Glorified is He* would not withhold from them any of the goods and joys of this world; but in the end, their appointed suffering would befall them.

In such an atmosphere of heedlessness, when a new generation comes forth, it will be influenced twofold: Firstly, by its own heedlessness and forgetfulness, and secondly, by the poor example that has been set by the previous heedless and neglectful generation.

We know that among Nuh's (Noah's) progeny were the people of `Ad, to whom the True Lord had sent Hud *peace be upon him* and the people of Thamud, to whom Allah had sent their own brother Salih *peace be upon him* and the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*. All these were some of the communities whose hearts got rusted with heedlessness and forgetfulness.

After this, the True Lord says:

تِلۡكَ مِنۡ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلۡغَيۡبِ نُوحِيهَآ إِلَيۡكَۖ مَا كُنتَ تَعۡلَمُهَآ أَنتَ وَلَا قَوۡمُكَ
مِن قَبۡلِ هَٰذَاۖ فَٱصۡبِرۡۖ إِنَّ ٱلۡعَٰقِبَةَ لِلۡمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

These accounts are part of what was beyond your knowledge [Muhammad]. We revealed them to you. Neither you nor your people knew them before now, so be patient: the future belongs to those who are aware of God [49] (The Quran, *Hud:* 49)

The demonstrative pronoun *tilka* (this) is used to identify something specific to the one addressed. The addressee here is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and 'the news' that is referred to is if Nuh's (Noah's) ark and the unseen events that followed. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not a contemporary of Nuh (Noah) *peace be*

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 5 pp. 386, 405) and by Muslim in his Sahih (104) on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him.*

upon him. Neither he nor his people knew about these events until this Quranic verse was revealed.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never sat with a teacher, nor was it narrated that he ever read anything. Hence, we find verses of the Quran enlightening and informing about the past, such as, ‘You (O Muhammad) were not present on the western side of the mountain when We gave Our Command to Musa (Moses)…’ (*al-Qasas:* 44) and ‘This is a part of the news of the Unseen which We inspire you with (O Muhammad). You were not with them, when they cast lots with their pens as to which of them should be charged with the care of Maryam (Mary); nor were you with them when they disputed.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 44)

Who taught Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* if he did not study and was not educated by a teacher? It was indeed, Allah *the Exalted* who taught him. Allah *Glorified is He* taught his Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the story of Nuh (Noah) to serve him as a lesson and as an example. He would feel sure that Allah’s Support of every messenger would be present in every step of his mission, and that Allah would not surrender him over to his enemies or adversaries.

That is the reason why Allah says, ‘So be patient (O Muhammad)’ because you know now the result of Nuh’s (Noah’s) patience over the course of nine-hundred fifty years. Then came Allah’s Words, ‘…Surely, the good end is for those who are aware of Allah…’ (*Hud:* 49).

After the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* comes the story of the people of `Ad. We know that the True Lord *the Exalted* does not send a messenger unless corruption reigns in the land. We can conclude, therefore, that heedlessness crept up back on the scene after Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. With every new generation being more forgetful and heedless than the last, those who remained were totally unfit to uphold the waning religious beliefs and principles.

Allah *the Exalted* does not send any new messengers unless there is no one among the people who can uphold the Word of Allah. As we know, the decline of belief and practice in the human soul can issue from within. In other words, a person’s own soul can persuade him to abandon Allah’s Law, but his *nafs al-lawama* (reproaching self) deters him from this by chiding him and bringing him back to faith. However, if the person's moral consciousness is weak, or altogether absent, then the person has no internal defences against disbelief. In this case, it is the society surrounding him that reprimands him.

Yet, if both the spiritual immunity and social (collective) immunity disappear, then Allah *Glorified is He* must send a new messenger, a new revelation, and a new demonstrative proof. This is what happened after the time of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. For this reason, the True Lord says:

وَإِلَىٰ عَادٍ أَخَاهُمۡ هُودٗاۚ قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم
مِّنۡ إِلَٰهٍ غَيۡرُهُۥٓۖ إِنۡ أَنتُمۡ إِلَّا مُفۡتَرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

To the 'Ad, We sent their brother, Hud. He said, 'My people, worship God. You have no god other than Him; you are only making up lies [50] (The Quran, *Hud:* 50)

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* begins the glorious verse by engendering in the people of `Ad's acceptance, compassion and friendliness towards their messenger, Hud. The True Lord *the Exalted* informed them that he was their brother, and it was impossible for a brother to harbour any ill will towards them. Rather, he was an advisor and a trustworthy messenger. His saying to them, 'O my people' is a further expression of amiability. Then Hud entreated them to worship Allah *the Exalted* alone; for they had taken to worshipping false gods, and this is the ultimate falsehood. It was due to rampant corruption that Allah *the Exalted* says regarding them, '… you are only making up lies…' (*Hud:* 50).

Then Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* mentions *Hud* as saying:

يَٰقَوۡمِ لَآ أَسۡـَٔلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ أَجۡرًاۖ إِنۡ أَجۡرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱلَّذِي فَطَرَنِيٓۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

I ask no reward from you, my people; my reward comes only from Him who created me. Why do you not use your reason? [51] (The Quran, *Hud:* 51)

It was as if Hud *peace be upon him* was telling them, 'What is it that you find hard in what I am calling you to. I am bringing you a message from Allah *the Glorious and Exalted*. No reward do I ask of you for this. It is illogical that I ask you to change your habitual ways, then ask you for money as a reward. I cannot ask you to endure the hardship of changing old habits and, on top of that, ask that you compensate me for my efforts. I will not cause you to go through two difficulties: letting go of habitual patterns of thinking and behaving and paying me for guiding you to do so. Since I am not going to accept any reward from you, then I am not laying upon you any hardships. I do not need to be offered any form of reward, as no can reward me except He Who has sent me to you'. '…my reward rests with none but Him Who brought me into being. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*Hud:* 51) That is, my reward is due from none but Allah Who created me so that I can deliver this message. The term *al-fitra* (natural disposition) involves man's fundamental make-up.

The True Lord *the Exalted* had prepared Hud *peace be upon him* to be a messenger, and we already know that reward is usually given in return for services rendered. I have previously mentioned the example of the person who buys a house. The buyer pays the seller what the house is worth, and this is called buying and selling. However, when one rents a house, the tenant pays a monthly fee in return for the convenience of living in that house.

Thus when Hud *peace be upon him* said, 'No reward do I ask of you for this (message)', this implies that he deserved a large compensation for bringing them the message that he did. The compensation that you pay for ordinary services provide you with benefit on a temporary basis, By contrast, the benefit that Hud's people will derive from his message is ever-lasting.

This is also the reason why Hud *peace be upon him* left it to Allah to reward him, as He is the Only One capable of giving him his reward in its full value. Certainly, Allah is Capable of anything.

I have previously pointed out that all Allah's messengers uttered this statement, 'No reward do I ask of you for this (message)' except for Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*. Ibrahim (Abraham) did not say it because of his father, while Musa (Moses) did not say it because Pharaoh said to him, '...Did we not bring you up as a child among us?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18). Therefore, Hud's people should have appreciated the profound blessing in the form of Allah's Doctrine, which Hud brought to them.

Then the True Lord continues with Hud's address to his people:

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ ٱسۡتَغۡفِرُواْ رَبَّكُمۡ ثُمَّ تُوبُوٓاْ إِلَيۡهِ يُرۡسِلِ ٱلسَّمَآءَ عَلَيۡكُم
مِّدۡرَارٗا وَيَزِدۡكُمۡ قُوَّةً إِلَىٰ قُوَّتِكُمۡ وَلَا تَتَوَلَّوۡاْ مُجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

My people, ask forgiveness from your Lord, and return to Him. He will send down for you rain in abundance from the sky, and give you extra strength. Do not turn away and be lost in your sins' [52] (The Quran, *Hud:* 52)

So, we learn that asking for forgiveness involves a confession of negligence and a pledge to cease committing sins; so we say, 'O Allah, forgive us'. When you ask for Allah's Forgiveness, you are thereby reaffirming your sincere commitment to the faith, and are acknowledging that what the True Lord demands of you is a true duty. And, having begged Allah's forgiveness for past sins, a person must not fall into sin again. After such a spiritual turnabout through repentance, the servant must avoid all acts of disobedience and sins.

A human should remember that every blessing he enjoys comes from Allah, and that all the creatures are made subservient to the use of mankind by Allah's Command. We should not allow the monotony of life to make us forget about the Originator and Bestower of all blessings.

The first thing that Allah assigns to a messenger that He sends to mankind is the rectification of the most central of all doctrinal principles, namely, the belief in One Unique God from Whom people should receive the 'Do' and 'Do not do' Commandments.

Thus, Hud's address to his people, the tribe of `Ad was a call to worship and revere One God, and to abide by His Laws, which does not merely consist of performing the rituals of testifying to Allah's Oneness and Uniqueness, offering prayers, fasting, giving alms and performing *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). To truly worship Allah *the Most High,* one must perform the rituals and acts of worship, along with striving to perfect every action in life in the light of Allah's Path, and not to disassociate religion from one's daily life.

Those who fear the integration of Islam into daily life, ask that we limit religion to its basic rituals. We would tell them: when Islam held a prominent role in daily life, it conquered the whole world, and defeated two ancient civilizations, the Persians in the East and the Romans in the West. These people were part of powerful, ancient civilizations, who boasted high culture and sophisticated civil codes. Despite this, they were defeated by unlettered Bedouins, led in their faith by an unlettered man sent by Allah *the Exalted*. He was able to topple these regimes and cultures, and uplift the standards of living to the level of intellectual aspirations.

These people, therefore, want to limit Islam to its five pillars with the aim of isolating it from daily life. We would say to these people: No, you cannot reduce the religion to its five pillars. Worship, in its essence, means that there is a worshipper who worships the True Lord, and obeys the Commandments of the worshipped Lord, which are contained in the principles of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’. Any matters which are not touched upon by the moral guidelines of ‘Do’ and of ‘Do not Do’ are permissible for you to do or refrain from doing. And whether you do such matters or do not do them; either way, the world does not become corrupted.

Accordingly, worship consists of all commandments issued by Allah. So do not try to limit religion to the bare essentials. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained to us that the five pillars are the foundations upon which Islam is built, but they do not represent the entirety of Islam. Islam is a structure that rests on certain foundations; that is why we cannot reduce Islam to its foundations alone. Islam consists of every action in daily life. People’s actions must conform to Allah’s Way, so that life at large can be ordered just as the natural world around us is ordered.

So worship incorporates every action in life. Some have mistakenly conceived of worship as being limited to the religious rituals and acts of worship in terms of juristic classifications, forgetting that the domain of human dealings and translations are also part of religion. When people are upright in their interactions with one another, their own lives become better ordered.

In the current noble verse which we are now contemplating, the True Lord says, ‘O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord’ (*Hud:* 52). Now to ask for forgiveness implies that sins have been committed in the past; and since this one of the first things that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* told his people to do, it means that forgiveness should be asked for having transgressed the laws that were brought down by the messenger who came before him, or for the misdeeds they committed by some derives of instinct. Then he bade them to 'repent to Him'. Repentance entails a pledge not to commit new sins.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the same noble verse, 'He will send you (from the sky) abundant rain, and add strength to your strength'. One may wonder what is the relevance of begging forgiveness to such a natural phenomenon, We would say that everything in the universe—inanimate objects, plants and animals—have an owner. This owner is Allah Who is All-Capable and All-Powerful. No creature can disobey His Order. He is also capable of causing things to behave contrary to or beyond their own nature. You may see a cloud that is heavy with water and think that it will produce rain, but the True Lord may order it not to rain – if He so wills. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* also says in another verse, 'Then, when they saw it as a dense cloud coming towards their valleys, they said, "This is a cloud bringing us rain!" Nay, but it is that (torment) which you were asking to be hastened! A wind wherein is a painful torment!' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24)

Therefore, do not treat the appearances as being monotonous and repetitive. The Originator of all causes and effects owns and controls them. He does whatever He wills. If you worship Allah in such a way as to incorporate this worship in all actions of life, you will begin enriching the world, and supply yourself with the resources that Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* has hidden in the earth.

Sustenance—as we know—comes from the earth. That is why we must sow the land, so that the seeds can grow stems and trunks which praise Allah's Glory and bow to Him. Then the True Lord *the Exalted* brings forth the rain, so that the seedlings can nourish themselves from the water that percolates down to them through the earth, and so that we, also, can satisfy our needs with this water.

The word *as-sama`* (sky) connotes all that rises high above you and provides you with shade; as for '*as-sama` al-`ulya*' (the highest heaven), this is another topic and everything else is below it. Consider the True Lord's Words, 'Whosoever thinks Allah will not help him in the present world and the world to come; let him stretch up a rope to heaven, then let him sever it, and behold whether his guile does away with what enrages him.’ (*al-Hajj:* 15) That is, anyone who thinks that Allah *the Exalted* will not grant his messenger victory then let him who makes this claim hang himself from a high place; he will die, and his spite will remain with him.

Concerning the part of the verse that says, ‘He will send you (from the sky) abundant rain (*midrar*)’, the word *midrar* signifies that which provides copious, unremitting blessings, without causing any harm. Rain that is torrential can cause much damage. Allah had caused great torrents of rain to pour down from the sky in the past. Thus, *midrar* is incessant rain that is always beneficial, and never harmful. That is why, when it rained, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say, ‘O Allah, (let it rain) around us and not on us.’(1) So when Allah *Glorified is He* sends steady, beneficial rain, the earth becomes green, and the world becomes populated, which adds to people’s strength.

As for those who turn their backs on this guidance, his crimes hurt none but himself because the servant’s transgressions always recoil upon him. So, do not think that a servant’s wrongdoing is hurtful to anyone but himself. The True Lord says, ‘it is the people who are wronging themselves.’ (*Yunus:* 44)

Then the True Lord relates the response given by the people of `Ad:

قَالُوا۟ يَـٰهُودُ مَا جِئْتَنَا بِبَيِّنَةٍ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَارِكِىٓ ءَالِهَتِنَا
عَن قَوْلِكَ وَمَا نَحْنُ لَكَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

**They replied, ‘Hud, you have not brought us any clear evidence.
We will not forsake our gods on the strength of your word
alone, nor will we believe in you [53] (The Quran, *Hud:* 53)**

Here they are denying that Hud *peace be upon him* brought forth clear evidence or a miraculous sign.

Now the term *bayyinah* is the clear proof or sign that attests to the truthfulness of a messenger. It is true that Hud *peace be upon him* did not, at this point, mention what his miracle was. But they forgot that challenge is the essence of a miracle. Nuh's (Noah's) miracle, for example, was the flood, and Ibrahim's (Abraham's) miracle was that the fire cooled down and became peaceful and did not harm him when his people threw him into it.

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(1) *Narratedby Muslim in his Sahih (897) and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (933)*

We notice that the central miracle that defines every prophet is found in Nuh's words, 'My people, if my presence among you and my reminding you of Allah's Signs is too much for you, then I put my trust in Allah. Agree on your course of action, you and your partner-gods— do not be hesitant or secretive about it— then carry out your decision on me and give me no respite.' (*Yunus:* 71) That is, if you decide to be defiant, then here I am; fighting corruption right under your nose, though you are a dominant, powerful, and tyrannical people. Devise the best plot you can, still you can never annihilate the Divine Message. No one can extinguish the light that Allah put in the hands of one of his prophets; and none can remove from the world one of Allah's messenger by killing him. Never has this happened.

Based on this, the clear proof that Hud *peace be upon him* brought was his standing alone before his tyrannical people and exhorting them to abandon their disbelief. He defied all those who were more powerful than he was; for his people had proved themselves to be tyrannical and oppressive. Despite this, they were powerless against him. Just as the disbelievers of Quraysh were unable to defeat our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought the ultimate comprehensive miracle, that is the Glorious Quran. The Quran shall remain a miracle until the Day of Judgment. We know that most prophets *peace and blessings be upon them* brought miracles that were of a physical cosmic nature whose term ended as soon as they occurred; and had the Quran not informed us of these miracles we would not have believed in them. These past miracles are like matches whose fire glows bright for a few moments and then burn out. For example, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* healed the blind and the lepers by Allah's Will; anyone who witnessed this sign instantly became a believer. But those who did not witness this miracle might not become believers. Similarly, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff and parted it, and all those who witnessed this miracle became believers. But then those miracles came to an end, whereas the miracle of the Quran is here to stay until the Final Hour.

Any follower of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can say, before the coming of the Final Hour, that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger and his miraculous sign is the Quran. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been sent as a messenger to all mankind and no other messenger will come after him. That is why it was necessary that his miracle be of a permanent and lasting nature; and despite this, his people told him, 'We will not believe in you (O Muhammad) until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us, or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them, or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face.' (*al-Isra':* 90-92)

All that they asked for were material miracles; hence the following response was given to them, 'Is it not sufficient for them that we have sent down to you the Book (the Quran) which is recited to them?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 51) Despite this they persisted in their denial and rejection of the Truth.

The people of `Ad further said, 'we will not forsake our gods on the strength of your word alone, nor will we believe in you.' They had therefore, deceived themselves by calling these idols 'gods' because the function of a real God is to reveal a doctrine specifying how He should be worshipped. These idols spoke not a word to them and never revealed any such doctrine. Every logical standard invalidates the idea of conceiving these idols as 'gods', so why did these people worship them? They worshipped them because the human instinct calls for the worship of a Supreme Being or Power. But when such Transcendent Power that is to be obeyed and worshipped issues commandments which curb the soul's carnal desires, the soul may find difficulty in submitting to these rules. Whereas, if these deities imposed no prohibitions, restrictions or commands at all, they would be easy to obey and worship for those who deluded themselves into believing in them and in their power to avert harm from, or bring benefit to them.

These, in effect, are the allegations made by all claimants of prophethood or being the Mahdi(1) in this age. Any fake prophet claims that he is sent by Allah, and allows free intermixing of men and women, consuming intoxicants, committing obscenities and destructive sins, and calls this a religion. Such false claims to prophecy can be found in movements such as Bahaism[1] and Qadianism[2] and other similar false belief systems. Their saying, ‘we will not forsake our gods on the strength of your word alone’ means that they would not abandon their gods because of what he said. Their further statement, ‘nor will we believe in you’ means ‘We do not believe you are truthful’.

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(1) This is a reference to those who claim themselves to be the awaited Mahdi (Rightly-Guided One); the *Mahdi* is mentioned in Hadiths narrated by Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*. The Mahdi is foretold to appear at the end of time, contemporaneous with the second coming of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

The Arabic word *aman* can have different meaning depending on the context. It can mean, for instance, ‘to safeguard from fear’ as in the True Lord’s Words, ‘…and has made them safe from fear.’ (*Quraysh:* 4) When it is followed by the Arabic letter *ba`a*, it can denote the idea ‘having faith in’ and ‘believing in’; as in the True Lord’s Words, ‘…all those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do good—will have their rewards with their Lord…’ (*al-Baqara:* 62). Here *aman* is related to belief in divinity. When it is followed by the Arabic letter *lam*, it denotes the idea of ‘trusting’ and ‘having confidence in’; such as the True Lord’s Words, ‘But none trusted Musa (Moses) except the offspring of his people because of the fear of Pharaoh and his chiefs, lest they should persecute them…’ (*Yunus:* 83). Here it means to ‘trust’ or ‘have faith in’. Then the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

إِن نَّقُولُ إِلَّا ٱعْتَرَىٰكَ بَعْضُ ءَالِهَتِنَا بِسُوٓءٍ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّىٓ
أُشْهِدُ ٱللَّهَ وَٱشْهَدُوٓا۟ أَنِّى بَرِىٓءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

All we can say is that one of our gods may have inflicted some harm on you.’ He said, ‘I call God to witness, and you too are my witnesses, that I disown those you set up as partners with God [54] (The Quran, *Hud:* 54)

The particle *(in)* by which this blessed verse opens is conditional after which there usually follows a conditional clause, otherwise it usually connotes a

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(1) Bahaism: A sect which espouses corrupt beliefs; founded by Al-Mirza Husain `Ali Al-Mazandarani, who was born in the year 1233 of the Islamic calendar and grew up in Tehran. His ideas were a bizarre mixture of Buddhism, Mazdeism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. See *(Haqiqat Al-Babiyyah wal Al-Baha`iyyah)* by Muhsin `Abd Al-Hamid, 1985.

(2) Qadianism: It was founded by Marza Ghulam Ahmad from Qadian in Lahore, in the province of Punjab, situated between Pakistan and India. He was born in the year 1252 of the Islamic calendar and claimed prophecy. (See *Al-Qadianiyyah – Nash`atha wa Tatawwurha*) by Hassan `Isa – Dar Al-Qalam, Kuwait, 1981.

negation, like when the True Lord *the Exalted* says, '…none can be their mothers except those who gave them birth…' (*al-Mujadala:* 2).

In the verse under discussion, the True Lord says, 'All we can say (*in-naqulu*) is that one of our gods may have inflicted some harm on you…' Here the particle *(in)* is interchangeable with the negative particle *(ma)*. Thus, the particle *(in)* connotes a negation. On this basis, the meaning of the verse becomes: 'The only conceivable explanation for your behaviour is that our gods have harmed you because you have disparaged them and invalidated their status as deities, and brought to us a new god of your own invention. In consequence, our gods have afflicted you with harm—namely, insanity—so you started confusing words and talking nonsense'. In the same verse Hud *peace be upon him* responded to them by saying, 'I call Allah to witness, and you too are my witnesses, that I disown those you set up as partners with Allah.' Hud *peace be upon him* called Allah to witness because he had confidence that Allah was the One Who sent him and was protecting him and his mind. It is a prophet's mental power that is responsible for strategizing how best to call people to Allah. It is impossible that Allah *the Exalted* would dispatch a messenger without protecting him.

Similarly, the disbelievers of Quraysh claimed that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was demented; and so, in response, the True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed the following noble verses, 'You (O Muhammad) are not, by the Grace of your Lord, a madman. And verily, for you (O Muhammad) will be an endless reward. And verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character.' (*al-Qalam:* 2-4) We know that a demented person has no proper manners, and this clear proof that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was perfectly sane because his manners were exceedingly graceful.

In the verse at hand, Hud *peace and blessings be upon him* called his people to witness and exhorted them to revert to their original, pure state of being and then judge whether he was insane. Hud *peace be upon him* also affirmed that he stood clear of the idols which they worshipped instead of Allah.

Then Hud *peace be upon him* was quoted as saying:

مِن دُونِهِۦۖ فَكِيدُونِي جَمِيعٗا ثُمَّ لَا تُنظِرُونِ ٥٥

So plot against me, all of you, and give me
no respite [55] (The Quran, *Hud:* 55)

The words *min dunih* (translated in the previous verse as ‘other than Him’) can mean ‘beside Allah’ or ‘instead of Him’, for Hud’s people had worshiped idols besides or instead of Allah *the Exalted*. In the face of this, Hud *peace be upon him* presented them with the challenge of joining all together in plotting against him. He was just one man, and they were a massive tyrannical force. Clearly, if one oppressive multitude of people united and conspired against one person, it is expected that they should defeat him. Yet, Hud *peace be upon him* defied them, telling them to proceed with their evil plots and cunning schemes, and even try to kill him if they wanted; this was the ultimate defiant stance. This defiance is itself a miracle (attesting to his prophethood) because Hud challenged them while knowing that Allah *Glorified is He* would grant him victory.

In the previous verse, Prophet Hud *peace be upon him* confidently uttered, ‘I call Allah to witness’ as Hud could not possibly have raised this challenge haphazardly (without being sure that Allah would support him). No one would jeopardize his life by a single word. Hud *peace be upon him* said, ‘So plot against me, all of you, and give me no respite.’ only because he had, prior to this challenge, taken refuge with a strong support. He had said so with unflinching faith that the True Lord *the Exalted* would enable him to fulfil his word.

Hud *peace be upon him* called Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* to witness, and Allah *the Most High* was the first to have called Himself to witness. The True Lord says, ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). The angels and those endowed with knowledge also testified to this(1); and so when Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* testifies that there is no god except Him, this represents a reassuring guarantee that, whenever Allah decrees a matter, He will most surely see that His Will be done. Hud *peace be upon him* called his Lord to witness, and he was confident that He would protect him. The True

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(1) The Lord of Might *the Exalted* says, ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge….’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 18)

Lord *the Exalted* could never send a messenger and let a people obstruct him from spreading His Message.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* continues to mention that which Hud *peace be upon him* had uttered:

إِنِّي تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمۚ مَّا مِن دَآبَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ ءَاخِذُۢ
بِنَاصِيَتِهَآۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ﴿٥٦﴾

I put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord. There is no moving creature which He does not control. My Lord's way is straight [56] (The Quran, *Hud:* 56)

Hud peace be upon him thus declared the reality of reliance on Allah, which is entrusting all his affairs to Him. For Allah transcends not only them, and provides sustenance not only for them, but also to all creatures. He is the One who takes every freely moving, living thing on earth by its forelock. The forelock signifies the forepart of the head; it is the lock of hair that grows just above the forehead. To grab a person by his forelock can be a sign of humiliation. The True Lord *the Exalted* says elsewhere in the Quran, 'The criminals will be known by their marks, and they will be seized by their forelocks and their feet.' (*ar-Rahman:* 41) In another verse, the True Lord says, 'Nay! If he ceases not, we will catch him by the forelock.' (*al-'Alaq:* 15)

This provides some insights into the reason why the Tribe of `Ad did not unleash a group of snakes or a pack of wild dogs against Hud *peace be upon him*. They could never do so, and Hud *peace be upon him* had explained why they would be powerless to harm him when he told them, '…for there is no living creature which He does not hold by its forelock. Verily, straight is my Lord's Way!' (*Hud:* 56)

We notice that Hud *peace be upon him* repeated in their hearing the concept of Allah's Lordship. In the beginning of the noble verse, he said, 'my Lord as well as your Lord' and at the end of it, he said, 'verily, straight is my Lord's Way.' This is because they had an irreverent attitude towards Allah's Lordship over all creation. For this reason, *Hud peace be upon him* said concerning dominion, 'my Lord as well as your Lord', whereas at the end of the verse, he said, 'verily, straight is my Lord's Way!' That is, the One True God exercises Absolute Justice. Hud *peace be upon him* was talking here only about the True Lord's Absolute Justice, and mentioned nothing regarding their idols.

The True Lord exercises His Absolute Power with perfect straightness and righteousness in the fullest sense. He is the Possessor of Subjugating and Dominating Power, from which nothing can escape, but despite Allah's Infinite Power, He never uses it to for injustice.

Then the True Lord says:

فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُم مَّآ أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِۦٓ إِلَيْكُمْ ۚ وَيَسْتَخْلِفُ رَبِّى قَوْمًا
غَيْرَكُمْ وَلَا تَضُرُّونَهُۥ شَيْـًٔا ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّى عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ حَفِيظٌ ﴿٥٧﴾

But if you turn away, then I have conveyed the message
with which I was sent to you, and my Lord will bring
along another people in your place. You cannot do Him
any harm: it is my Lord who protects everything'[57]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 57)

This means that if you turn away, then at least I have fulfilled my responsibility and delivered the message that I was delegated with and you will not be able to cite my lack of effort as an excuse. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not punish a people that are ignorant, uninformed of the True Lord, indeed, this is the very reason why He sent me to you.

Or that these words are addressed from Allah *Glorified is He* to Hud *peace be upon him* to explain that if they chose to turn away, then tell them, '…I have delivered to you the message with which I was sent unto you, and [that] my Lord may cause another people to take your place…' (*Hud:* 57). Now the word *al-istikhlaf* means that they are a people that are to replace a previous generation and either it is the case that they are just, and do not stand in opposition to the Laws of Allah nor to Divine Revelations—as did the Tribe of `Ad, or it is the case that they are unjust such those whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes in the following verse, 'Yet they were succeeded by generations [of people] who lost all [thought of] prayer and followed [but] their own lusts…' (*Maryam:* 59).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* promises '…those of you who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds that, of a certainty, He will cause them to accede to power on Earth, even as He caused [some of] those who lived before them to accede to it…' (*an-Nur:* 55). Thus *al-istikhlaf* implies that those who take the place are either doers of good deeds, or those who disregard the Laws of Allah and follow their carnal desires. In another verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Here you are - those invited to spend in the cause of Allah - but among you are those who withhold [out of greed]. And whoever withholds only withholds [benefit] from himself; and Allah is Free of need, while you are the needy. And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people; then they will not be the likes of you.' (*Muhammad:* 38). Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Whereas you will not harm Him in the least' (*Hud:* 57).

The doctrine that was revealed to the creation by The True Lord *Glorified is He* is to rectify His servants, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator endowed with all the qualities of Fullness and Perfection, and none of His servants can ever hope to 'supplement' His Qualities, nor can any of His servants reduce any of His Qualities. That is why we say to those who are recalcitrant towards Allah with their disbelief, those who are disobedient towards His Path with their sinfulness: You are accustomed to being so insubordinate; either by rejecting Allah altogether—which is the ultimate act of disobedience—or by exhibiting resistance towards Allah's Laws by breaking them. Why, then, are not you insubordinate towards other things, such as sickness? Why does not one of you say, for example, 'I will not fall sick'? Why does not one of you rebel against death? Since you demonstrate such defiance towards matter in which you have a choice, can you rebel against Allah's other incontrovertible Laws?

You will not be able to do so because you will be grabbed by your forelock. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished, He could stop the beating of the heart, and you would in no measure be able to make it begin beating again. That is why Hud *peace be upon him* says, '…whereas you will not harm Him in the least. Verily, my Lord watches over all things!' (*Hud:* 57)

Allah *Glorified is He* is vigilant, watchful over everything in His Creation. Some philosophers posit that Allah created the universe and set up the laws of nature and then left the world to operate independently. To these people we would say: No, for you take into account only the qualities of Allah as the Creator, the fully Capable. But what about the quality of vigilance that watches over every soul like when Allah *Glorified is He* describes Himself to His servants as One Who '…neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep…' (*al-Baqara:* 255)? When Allah *Glorified is He* says this, He is reassuring His servants that they might relax and have peace of mind for He is immune to forgetfulness and to sleep. Allah *Glorified is He* is the All-Sustaining.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَمَّا جَآءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا هُودًا وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ مَعَهُۥ
بِرَحْمَةٍ مِّنَّا وَنَجَّيْنَٰهُم مِّنْ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٥٨﴾

And so, when Our judgement came to pass, by
Our grace We saved *Hud* and his fellow believers.
We saved them from a severe punishment [58]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 58)

When you hear the words 'when our judgment came to pass' you know that there is an order and it is obeyed, and at the instant when the order is issued, it is executed because it is an order from He Who is capable of execution. In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'When the sky is split asunder, obeying its Lord, as in truth it must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2) Therefore, the moment the sky heard the True Lord's Command, it carried it out.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to save Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from the slaughter which Pharaoh had ordered, Allah *Glorified is He* told Musa's (Moses') mother, '...when you have cause to fear for him, cast him into the river and have no fear and do not grieve – for We shall restore him to you, and shall make him one of Our message-bearers!' (*al-Qasas:* 7) How could a mother do that?

Every mother cares for her son. The killing of baby Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was imminent, and throwing him into the sea would spell certain death, but Musa's (Moses') mother trusted the words that Allah had revealed to her and did not hesitate. This shows that she did not assess the situation by ordinary human standards, but she carried out what Allah *Glorified is He* had inspired her to do, and neither doubt nor the devil can challenge this divine inspiration. Then Allah *Glorified is He* gives specific orders to the river itself, '…and thereupon the river will cast him ashore…' (*Ta Ha:* 39). The river welcomed the Lord's order since it was the command of the Almighty, just as it would have carried out the opposite.

In the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…when Our judgment came to pass, and waters gushed forth…' (*Hud:* 40). So the flood occurred, and the disbelievers were drowned. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And so, when Our judgment came to pass…' (*Hud:* 58), meaning, that the judgment that came to pass was the punishment of those who were recalcitrant regarding Hud's message *peace be upon him* and the execution of this punishment occurred in a very special and precise way. A precision which does justice to the Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* Who issued this judgment. For the violent wind or fatal blow that descended on them was out of their control, a force of nature directed by Allah, but the deniers of the True Lord *Glorified is He* could have gathered closely around Hud *peace be upon him* and his followers, so how would the howl of the winds affect only the ears of the disbelievers sparing the ears of the believers? This was a precision strike, not an all-out assault. The wind's targets had been predetermined. It was just like the pebbles of dried-up clay that were hurled by the swarms of birds on the armies of Abraha al-Habashi, the same stones spared the armies of Quraysh. So they were not destroyed by a plague as some philosophers have claimed.

This is one of the secrets of the True Lord's Greatness—to single out the disbelievers targeted for punishment and to spare the believers. For every force of nature, no matter how powerful, is governed by an even Greater Power.

Al-Mutanabbi[1] said[2]:

The sun blackens the whiteness of our faces
But does not blacken the whiteness of our beards and our locks [of hair]
And their state would surely be one [and the same] in judgment
If the judge were to be one from this world

Here Al-Mutanabbi speaks of how exposing oneself to the sun can make one's skin turn dark, but will not make one's grey hair dark again. However, if you were to leave any dark coloured object in the sun long enough, its colour would start fading; the result is different in each case even though the actor—that is, the sun—is one and the same. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And so, when Our judgment came to pass, by Our Grace We saved Hud and those who shared his faith…' (*Hud:* 58). So do not ask how they were saved from that suffering which seemingly affected all things indiscriminately because this is Allah's Mercy. Mercy—as we know—is when harm is prevented from ever affecting a person; as for the act of 'healing', that involves remedying a harm that was already done. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Thus step by step, We bestow from on high through this Quran all that gives health [to the spirit] and is a grace unto those who believe [in Us] …' (*al-Isra':* 82).

We notice that in this verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions two acts of deliverance. The first act of deliverance was that they were saved from total suffering—from the raging storm winds, from, the mighty blast, from the obliterating calamity and Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…by Our Grace We saved *Hud* and those who shared his faith; and We saved them [too] from severe

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(1) Abu At-Tayeb Ahmad ibn Al-Hussain; a wise poet. He was born in Al-Kufa in a place called 'Kandah' in the year 303 of the Islamic calendar and spent his formative years in Ash-Sham. He claimed to be a prophet (or in Arabic *nabi*) in a village called As-Sammawa (between Al-Kufa and Ash-Sham), which is why he is called Al-Mutanabbi ('claimer to prophet hood'). Then he renounced his claim after being imprisoned. He died in the year 354 of the Islamic calendar at the age of 52.

(2) Even though Al-Mutanabbi was an eloquent poet capable of integrating multiple meanings, he was open to a source of true knowledge out of which hidden meanings can be drawn; this same source leads the mind to the truth of Allah's Oneness.

suffering [in the life to come].' (*Hud:* 58) The second act of deliverance was that they were spared from the severe suffering of the hereafter, for the suffering in this life on earth, no matter how severe, can last only as long as life itself. As for the suffering of the hereafter, it is one without end. Furthermore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes it as being 'severe'.

Now an object described as being *ghalizh* means it is powerful and harsh, and the suffering is severe insofar as a person's deeds were severe. That is why when the True Lord *Glorified is He* grants a man sexual rights over a woman through marriage, this union is described as a 'solemn pledge'. Even though this pledge is utilitarian in nature, it nevertheless involves the principles of virtue and honour. For the man is not given absolute dominion over the woman he marries; the pledge of marriage simply grants the man the right of sexual contact. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and she has received a most solemn pledge from you' (*an-Nisa':* 21).

So Hud *peace be upon him* and his followers' deliverance from the first punishment foreshadowed their deliverance from the second, more severe suffering.

After this the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَتِلْكَ عَادٌ جَحَدُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَعَصَوْا۟ رُسُلَهُۥ وَٱتَّبَعُوٓا۟ أَمْرَ كُلِّ جَبَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ ﴿٥٩﴾

These were the 'Ad: they rejected their Lord's signs, disobeyed His messengers, and followed the command of every obstinate tyrant [59] (The Quran, *Hud:* 59)

The word *tilka* in this verse refers to the location where the tribe of `Ad lived, for the word is 'feminine', and let us also remember that the speaker here is Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, Allah has distinguished between `Ad—the place, and `Ad —the tribe. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '… [Who] had rejected their Lord's messages…' (*Hud:* 59), for they had disappeared off the face of the earth, but they left certain traces behind. The word `Ad refers either to the place and the location, or to the inhabitants of that location; and so if the word is preceded by the term *tilka*, it then becomes a reference to the village where they lived. To be sure, their houses never rejected Allah's Message. Therefore, the following words from Allah *the Exalted* follow, '… [who] had rejected their Lord's messages…' (*Hud:* 59). Here, the word *jahad* means to deny something by abrogating evidence. The word *ayat* (verses) —plural of the word *aya* (verse)—denotes the marvellous eye catching phenomena which prompt us into faith and reverent obedience.

Some of Allah's signs are concerned with the doctrine's summit, which is to have faith in The Necessary Being—The Lord of creation, The Wise, The Fully-Capable. Among these signs are those of night and day, the sun and the moon, and the vision of the humble earth and many other premier signs of this sort. There are also signs that substantiate the coming of messengers from Allah *the Exalted* these are the miracles. Other signs contain Allah's rules and regulations which are intended to ensure the continued health of the life of His creation. Now the tribe of `Ad rejected all these signs. They rejected faith, refused to accept the messenger—though he came with his miracle—and they neglected and abandoned Allah's Path. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and rebelled against His apostles…' (*Hud:* 59). Hud *peace be upon him* is the one who was sent by the True Lord *Glorified is He* to the tribe of `Ad; so is it him that this verse is referring to here? No, because Allah *the Exalted* says, 'And lo, Allah accepted, through the Prophets, this solemn pledge [from the followers of earlier revelation], "If, after all the revelation and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession, you must believe in him and succour him…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 81). Therefore, every human community has conveyed a message from their messenger, and this message asks that they believe in the story of every other messenger sent by Allah. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says, 'The apostle, and the believers with him, believe in what has been bestowed upon him from on high by his Lord; they all believe in Allah, and His angels, and His revelations and His apostles, making no distinction between any of His apostles…' (*al-Baqara:* 285). Thus, they are split up into two groups; for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and rebelled against His apostles, and followed the bidding of every arrogant enemy of the truth' (*Hud:* 59) meaning that there are those who follow and those who lead. The expression 'every arrogant enemy of the True Lord' refers to the leaders of communities, the lords of tyranny. As for the second category, it includes those who follow these oppressors. It is out of His Mercy *Glorified is He* that when speaking about aberrant groups, he differentiates between those who are astray in and of themselves, and those who lead others astray. He who leads others astray has two sins to answer for; the first is his own aberrance from the straight Path, and the second is his responsibility for leading others away from the Path. As for those who followed these people, they have a mitigating excuse because they had been blinded by power and had been forced through tyranny. They did not follow because of deep conviction or clear proof.

Notice how the Quran addresses this issue. When speaking of those who went astray it says, ‘And there are among them unlettered people who have no real knowledge of the Book, [following] only wishful beliefs and depending on nothing but conjecture.’ (*al-Baqara:* 78) Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about those who lead others astray, ‘Woe, then, unto those who write down, [something which they claim to be] the Book, with their own hands, and then say, “This is from Allah”, in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby…’ (*al-Baqara:* 79).

Going back to the chapter of *Hud*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

وَأُتْبِعُوا۟ فِى هَٰذِهِ ٱلدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ أَلَآ إِنَّ عَادًا كَفَرُوا۟
رَبَّهُمْ ۗ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِّعَادٍ قَوْمِ هُودٍ ﴿٦٠﴾

They were rejected in this life and so they shall be on the Day of Judgement. Yes, the 'Ad denied their Lord – so away with the 'Ad, the people of Hud! [60] (The Quran, *Hud:* 60)

Allah’s creatures go through three major periods of time: the first is their life on earth, the second is the time between death and the coming of the Day of Judgment—known as *barzakh*, and the third begins when they are resurrected.

The life on earth involves work. In the life of the *barzakh* the reward is—not actually experienced—but merely presented or contemplated. Then during the third life—the life of the hereafter—one enters either heaven or hell. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah, seeing that you were lifeless and He gave you life, and that He will cause you to die and then will bring you again to life, whereupon unto Him you will be brought back?' (*al-Baqara:* 28) These are the three periods—life on Earth, the *barzakh* and the resurrection. Each represents a period of time. The Quran describes these periods when it speaks of the suffering of the people of Pharaoh beginning from the moment Allah *Glorified is He* caused the sea to swallow them up, 'the fire [of the hereafter – that fire] which they had been made to contemplate [in vain], morning and evening; for on the Day when the Last Hour dawns [Allah will say], "Make Pharaoh's folk enter upon suffering most severe!"' (*Ghafir:* 46) This verse confirms that during the *barzakh,* the dead shall be made to contemplate the coming reward. As the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The grave shall feel like either one of the gardens of paradise or like one of the pits of hell.'(1) Thus, two time-periods are involved; the period during which they are made to contemplate hellfire, day and night, then the period during which they enter the hellfire.

This confirms that there is such a thing as 'suffering' even during the *barzakh* because the disbeliever will be made to see the hellfire into which he will be thrown. He sees the suffering that he is destined to, and then the Hour comes. He will receive his share of suffering. As for the tribe of `Ad, Allah *Glorified is He* gave them a foretaste of the suffering in their life on earth, then on the Day of Judgment, He will throw them into the hellfire. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the same verse, '...Oh, verily, [the tribe of] `Ad denied their Lord! Oh, away with the `Ad, the people of Hud!' (*Hud:* 60) As we have previously explained, the term *ala* serves to draw the reader's attention to the importance of what the speaker is saying, so that the uttered words do not fly over the listener's inattentive head. The speaker has full rein of the conversation, the listener must not receive his words negligently. Thus, the term *ala* comes as an alarm bell, warning the listener to pay close attention to what is about to be said. Here the subject revolves around the suffering that the tribe of `Ad had brought upon themselves, namely, the annihilating winds. Then they experienced the suffering of the *barazkh*, and on the Day of Judgment they shall be received with even more suffering; thus, suffering three-fold.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi and At-Tabarani and narrated in Al-Kabir of Abu Sa`id. It is also narrated by At-Tabarani and narrated in Al-Kabir of Abu Hurayra. Their chains of transmission are both weak. See also (Mujma' Az-Zawa`id) (3/46) and Ad-Dilmi's (Musnad Al-Firdaws) (3/231).*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* knows that the listener's (or the reader's) heart might cringe at the amount of suffering through which the tribe of `Ad goes. That is precisely why the term *ala* is mentioned to make the reader understand that the tribe of `Ad had rejected their Lord.

Their crime occurred at a specific point in time, and the punishment for that crime has an appointed time. Their rejection of Allah occurred during their life on earth, and since this represents the mother of all crimes, they received their punishment during their time on earth. It is a very risky proposition indeed to delay the punishment until long after the crime has been committed. Do not be foolish and show mercy towards them, for their rejection of Allah is the ultimate doctrinal crime; that is why they will continue to suffer even as they lie waiting in their graves until the Day of Judgment when their full sentence will be carried out. To be sure, it was not Allah's innumerable blessings that they rejected, it was Allah Himself. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not demand that anyone worship Him before they reach the age of maturity, and He had bestowed upon His creation all kinds of blessings; therefore the punishment they received was fair and they fully deserve it. Hud *peace be upon him* had made it clear to them, 'Behold, I have placed my trust in Allah, [who is] my Lord as well as your Lord: for there is no living creature which He does not hold by its forelock. Verily, straight is my Lord's way!' (*Hud:* 56) Or in other words, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is Just. When you hear about their crimes, you reel with disgust and demand that they receive the harshest possible penalty. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…Oh, verily, [the tribe of] `Ad denied their Lord! Oh, away with the `Ad, the people of Hud!' (*Hud:* 60) To curse them once is not enough; you must curse them twice over. One might ask, why does the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...Oh, away with the `Ad, the people of Hud!' (*Hud:* 60)

We would reply that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran, 'and that it is He who destroyed the ancient [tribes of] `Ad' (*an-Najm:* 50). This demonstrates that there are two different tribes of `Ad. The first tribe of `Ad, who were a community of people who lived on earth for a while but were then annihilated by Allah, and then there is a second tribe of `Ad.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says,

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (11)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (11)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY

الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (11)

the chapter of

Hud

Continued

وَإِلَىٰ ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمۡ صَٰلِحٗاۚ قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنۡ إِلَٰهٍ غَيۡرُهُۥۖ هُوَ أَنشَأَكُم مِّنَ
ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱسۡتَعۡمَرَكُمۡ فِيهَا فَٱسۡتَغۡفِرُوهُ ثُمَّ تُوبُوٓاْ إِلَيۡهِۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي قَرِيبٞ مُّجِيبٞ ٦١

To the Thamud[1], We sent their brother, Saleh. He said, 'My people, worship God. You have no god other than Him. It was He who brought you into being from the earth and made you inhabit it, so ask forgiveness from Him, and turn back to Him: my Lord is near, and ready to answer' [61]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 61)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* points out that the messenger who was sent to the tribe of Thamud was one of them. This was Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the word *akhahum* to call attention to the relationship between Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* and his people for he had grown up among them, and they are intimately acquainted with him so that when he brought them the message—the authenticity of which is palpable—they must indeed have put their faith in the doctrine which he had brought. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* calls to them, '*ya qawm*' which comes from *qiyam*, that is, 'O you who undertake actions', or 'O you who carry out actions'. Now carrying out action is normally the role of men because women's affairs are to be kept discreet and veiled, as it were, behind the activities of men, for not every article of faith that mentions women most concern men, the affairs of the women being contained implicitly in the affairs of the men. The men toil and labour, while the women manage the life of the house and the rearing of children. We find many cases of men and women who come to the agreement that, after marriage, the woman will not go out into the world to work. Of course, a woman has every right to work if she needs to do so and does not find someone to care for her. However, if she finds someone who can support her, is it not better for her, then, to focus on the equally important task of caring for the family? There are also those who attack the veil in the name of freedom. Who, we ask, are you doing this for? If you refuse to condemn promiscuous clothing, because you consider that it is a

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(1) The tribe of Thamud: One of the first Arab tribes. Some say they are the descendants of the survivors of the tribe of `Ad. [See Lissan Al-`Arab –under *t h m d*].

‘freedom’, why are you involving yourself in the issue of the veil; is wearing the veil not also a ‘freedom’?

Returning to the Quranic verse, ‘...Worship Allah [alone]: you have no deity other than Him…’ (*Hud:* 61), the word ‘worship’ involves the directives—‘dos’ and ‘do nots’—that are to be received from Allah and applied to all aspects of human life. The first thing that Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* asked of the tribe of Thamud was that they ‘Worship Allah [alone]’.This commandment is incumbent upon every soul, and none can afford to contravene it. ‘...you have no deity other than Him…’ (*Hud:* 61) expresses an incontrovertible fact which you cannot alter as indeed, you have no other deity than Allah, notwithstanding your veneration of other false deities. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon…’ (*Hud:* 61). The notion of *insha`* implies bringing something into being from scratch, i.e. out of nothing. That is why we do not say that one who has invented, has *ansha`* because he made use of other existing materials to come up with his invention. For instance, he might have made use of materials that were mined from under mountains, and he might have drawn on knowledge that was cultivated by previous generations of men. It is only the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who creates out of nothing. Thus, there are two categories of creation: creation that draws on pre-existing things, and creation from nothing. The latter is known as true *insha`* and only Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of such creation.

Exalted is the True Lord’s creation; for He creates man out of the convergence of husband and wife, and if you were to trace this procreation back to Adam *peace be upon him,* you would find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has created him out of the same substance as the earth—and the earth itself is one of Allah’s creations. Both a man’s sperm and a woman’s egg are extracts of human blood, and the latter is what is extracted from food which comes from the earth. So, whether you look back at the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* from the substance of the earth or whether you look at the biological processes by which his progeny continues to multiply—all comes back to earth. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon…’ (*Hud:* 61), note that the word *`amar* is prefixed by the letters ‘*alif*’, ‘*sin*’, and ‘*ta`*’. This indicates that the verb, in addition to its original meaning, also connotes a ‘demand’ or an ‘appeal’. So the word *ista`mar* denotes ‘asking to inhabit’. Therefore, it is a catastrophic error to label colonizing nations as ‘*duwal al-isti`mar*’. I say this because these nations did not really want to ‘inhabit’ other lands; rather, what they wanted was to ‘exploit’ other lands and hinder the development of the peoples of those lands. That is why they ought to be called instead, ‘*duwal al-istikhrab*’ (the nations of destruction).

So *ista`marakum fiha* means that Allah asked you to live there and prosper, and this requires that two conditions be fulfilled: maintain that which is good in its state or make it better. Just as I have previously given the example of the improvements that were made in bringing drinking water into people’s homes thanks to the discovery of water towers. Before the advent of water towers people used to get their water directly from the canals. Now with the discovery of water towers and the improvements of water treatment systems, every home now has its own supply of water.

Thus, now with drinking water reaching every household—this is a situation in which something good became even better. Also, if we succeed in reinvigorating land that is fallow, we can expand the area of agricultural land to produce more food for a growing population. Since population numbers are rising, we must find a way of rejuvenating the land. The current crisis is a result of our inattentiveness to the fact that rapid population growth was not matched by an increase of agricultural land. This is all part and parcel of ‘living and thriving on earth’ that is mentioned in the Quranic verse. The Greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* is that He projects His Exalted Qualities into His creation. The strong helps the weak, and the True Lord’s Power is absolute; He also bestows His Wisdom, His Contraction, His Expansion, and His Wealth. All these Divine Qualities are innate to Allah, and we are merely the recipients.

The proof of this is that the strong among us eventually becomes weak, and the rich among us can easily succumb to a state of poverty. Therefore, we must realise that we do not inherently possess any of these qualities that it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who bestows on us of His Attributes some abilities so that we can function. It is incumbent on him whom Allah *the Exalted* has given the capacity to take action, to realise that he himself is merely the beneficiary of action taken by those who came before him. For instance, if today he eats a date, he must remember that the date palm was planted by someone who came before him. So, he who enjoys the date today should plant a date palm so that, in seven years—the time required for a date palm to bear fruit—he and others can derive benefit from it.

Going back to the current verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* told the tribe of Thamud, '...Ask Him, therefore, to forgive you your sins, and then turn towards Him in repentance – for, verily, my Lord is ever-near, responding [to the call of whoever calls unto Him]!' (*Hud:* 61). For if a person was to ask forgiveness for sins that do not involve violating other peoples' rights, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is Ever-Near; Allah *Glorified is He* responds to those who ask him for forgiveness. So what was the tribe of Thamud's response?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions them as saying:

قَالُوا۟ يَـٰصَـٰلِحُ قَدْ كُنتَ فِينَا مَرْجُوًّا قَبْلَ هَـٰذَآ ۖ أَتَنْهَىٰنَآ أَن نَّعْبُدَ
مَا يَعْبُدُ ءَابَآؤُنَا وَإِنَّنَا لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَآ إِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٦٢﴾

They said, 'Saleh, We used to have such great hope in you. Will you forbid us to worship what our fathers worshipped? We are in grave doubt about what you are asking us to do' [62] (The Quran, *Hud:* 62)

Indeed, they had had high hopes for Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* that is, until he started calling them to worship Allah alone, to the exclusion of any other false deities. The term *marju* means a person in whom there are high hopes because he exhibits the qualities of intelligence, ambitiousness, honesty and any other qualities that are signs of a good future. As soon as Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* started calling them to worship Allah *Glorified is He* they announced that—because of such calls—all their hopes for him were dashed. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* had only done what all previous messengers had done before him, and that is he warned them that worshipping idols, trees or the sun is wrong. True worship consists of following commandments that were revealed as part of a total doctrine, whereas the objects which they were wont to worship lay down no such doctrine, and there is no true worship without a doctrine. The tribe of Thamud said furthermore, '...we are in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about [the meaning of] thy call to us!' (*Hud:* 62)

Now doubt occurs when the two sides—confirmation and denial—balance each other out. Thus, they are not entirely certain that their worship of their forefathers' idols is a valid religion; for Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* made them uncertain about the validity of that kind of worship and this shows that it was Saleh (Shelah)'s virtuous qualities that gave him credibility to cause them to question their old pagan habits.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* states what Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* told the tribe of Thamud:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ أَرَءَيۡتُمۡ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّي وَءَاتَىٰنِي مِنۡهُ رَحۡمَةٗ
فَمَن يَنصُرُنِي مِنَ ٱللَّهِ إِنۡ عَصَيۡتُهُۥۖ فَمَا تَزِيدُونَنِي غَيۡرَ تَخۡسِيرٖ ٦٣

He said, 'My people, just think: if I did have clear proof from my Lord, and if He had given me mercy of His own, who could protect me from God if I disobeyed Him? You would only make my loss greater [63] (The Quran, *Hud:* 63)

Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* wisely responded, 'Tell me, am I not making my stand on clear evidence from my Lord, that He has sent me and endorsed me; and if I have fooled other people I will surely not fool myself; so shall I abandon all that my Lord has blessed me with, shall I abandon the message He has entrusted me to deliver to you? Shall I abandon all of this and, instead, heed your words? Shall I overlook my certainty in that I am His Messenger, that He has, '…vouchsafed unto me grace from Himself…' (*Hud:* 63), the grace of prophecy? '... [if this be true,] who would shield me from Allah were I to rebel against Him?' (*Hud:* 63) When a person poses such a rhetorical question in this kind of a situation, this person cannot be but certain that the response will please him. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* quotes Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* as saying, '...Hence, what you are offering me is no more than perdition!' (*Hud:* 63) We know that the term *al-khusara* is the antonym of the word *maksab* meaning that which is gained. *Al-khusara* on the other hand signifies a decrease, especially when it comes to wealth. So, is it he who will cause them to lose, or is it them who will cause him to lose? The richness of the Quranic language brings out all these meanings. For if Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* were to obey them and disobey his Lord, he would have incurred upon himself an overall loss. At the same time, they would have incurred an even more devastating loss because they were misguided to begin with, and wanted him to become lost as they were, and to worship false deities *(in lieu)* of Allah *the Exalted*. Therefore, either Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* would have led them to perdition, or they would have led Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* to perdition.

Then, Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* further says:

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ هَٰذِهِۦ نَاقَةُ ٱللَّهِ لَكُمۡ ءَايَةٗ فَذَرُوهَا تَأۡكُلۡ فِيٓ
أَرۡضِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوٓءٖ فَيَأۡخُذَكُمۡ عَذَابٞ قَرِيبٞ ﴿٦٤﴾

My people, this camel belongs to God, a sign for you, so leave it to pasture on God's earth and do not harm it, or you will soon be punished' [64] (The Quran, *Hud:* 64)

The tribe of Thamud had asked Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* to perform a miracle that would confirm his prophecy, and so they said, 'If you are truly a prophet then make a she-camel appear out of this boulder, and they pointed to a certain boulder. They were a tribe that was famous for carving their houses out of rock cliffs. Anyone who travels to the region lying between the Levant and the city of Medina can see the remnants of their villages, for they are carved out of mountains. The True Lord *Glorified is He* refers to them in the following verse, 'and that you will [always be able to] hew dwellings out of the mountains with [the same] great skill?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 149)

Thus, it is they who had specified what type of miracle they wanted. They wanted that a she-camel would come forth from within the boulder which they pointed at, and when the she-camel appeared, she was pregnant. After the she-camel was brought into existence, they still did not have the heart to affirm Saleh's (Shelah's) *peace be upon him* prophethood. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* had told them, 'And [then he said], "O my people! This she-camel belonging to Allah…"' (*Hud:* 64). When you hear that something is attributed to Allah *the Exalted* know that this thing is immensely great as a result. Just as we would say, 'the house of Allah', when these words are spoken we know that they are a reference to the Holy *Ka'ba*. If we designate a spot and say that it is 'the house of Allah', we then would build a mosque in this spot—a structured consecrated entirely to the worship of Allah, where no other type of activity takes place. Thus, the *Ka'ba* is Allah's house because Allah *the Exalted* chose the spot, and other spots are also houses of Allah because they were designated by His servants. That is why the house of Allah—at the spot chosen by Him—now becomes the *Qibla* for all the other secondary houses of Allah selected by His servants. Therefore, whenever anything is attributed to Allah *the Exalted* that thing then takes on greatness akin to the Greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* Himself. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* tells them, '...This she-camel belonging to Allah…' (*Hud:* 64), does not belong to Zayd or `Amr. The people of Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* paid little attention to what Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* had said, and they did not realise that anything that is attributed to Allah *the Exalted* becomes endowed with the same Greatness. An example of this(1) is the son of Abu-Lahab who had married the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When Abu-Lahab's intransigence towards the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* increased, Abu-Lahab told his son to divorce the Prophet's daughter(2). Such an action is a mark of utter disdain, so the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* told him, 'I ask that Allah unleash his beasts on him.' Then Abu-Lahab exclaimed, 'Muhammad's prayer fills me with ominous forebodings'. Then, when Abu Lahab took his entourage on a long trip, he asked that his son sleep in the middle of the caravan's camp, out of fear that the Prophet's prayer would be answered. Nevertheless, a lion jumped over the travellers and ate the son, whereby the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* attributed this event to Allah, saying, 'You were eaten by one of Allah's beasts.' Indeed, Allah's beast was a lion.

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(1) The story of `Utba the son of Abu Lahab with Um-Kalthum the daughter of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the latter's accusing him

(2) Um-Kalthum *Allah be pleased with her*

Going back to the verse which we are currently studying, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* explained to them that this she-camel is the product of the miracle which you asked of me, and she has miraculously appeared out of a boulder. Out of that inanimate object he could have brought a higher class of creature such as a plant. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* answered their demands he brought forth a creature belonging to an even higher category, namely, from the animal kingdom. We know that when it comes to earthly creatures, they can either belong to the category of inanimate objects, or they can possess the capacity for growth, and so they are plants, or they can possess the capacity for movement and sensory experience, and are thus animals, or they might possess the capacity for movement, sensory experience as well as rational thought, and are thus humans.

It would have been possible that Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* bring forth a tree. This would also have been a miraculous feat. The True Lord *Glorified is He* affected the miracle exactly as they had demanded: a she-camel, belonging to the animal kingdom, and pregnant at the same time. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* asked them to take good care of her because she was a divine miracle. Thus, they could not harm her. Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* said, '…leave her alone to pasture on Allah's earth, and do her no harm, lest speedy chastisement befall you!' (*Hud:* 64) Thus, did he warn them and asked that they let it graze on Allah's earth. If they harmed it, and grave suffering did not befall them, all those who had come to believe in Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* would then revert to disbelief. Therefore, if they were to harm the she-camel, swift punishment must necessarily follow. In the end, they harmed it, as the following verse explains:

فَعَقَرُوهَا فَقَالَ تَمَتَّعُوا۟ فِى دَارِكُمْ ثَلَٰثَةَ أَيَّامٍ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ وَعْدٌ غَيْرُ مَكْذُوبٍ ﴿٦٥﴾

But they hamstrung it, so he said, 'Enjoy life for another three days: This warning will not prove false' [65] (The Quran, *Hud:* 65)

They stayed in their homes for three days, and then the suffering befell them. One might ask: Why were they spared for those three days? If the punishment would have befallen them immediately, they would have been spared the anxious, unbearable wait. Allah *the Exalted* had willed that they experience that feeling for three whole days, and with every passing day their distress would increase as the fateful day drew closer as they knew that Allah's Wrath was coming, '…a judgment which will not be belied!' (*Hud:* 65) Since this is the True Lord's Judgment, and He being fully Capable of carrying it out—with no power being capable of standing in His way—the promise is therefore a sincere one that will not be belied. This is not the case with human promises, where a person might make a vow, but when the time comes to make good on it he might not be able to. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us, 'And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow, without adding, "if Allah so wills…"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24). If you say, 'I will do this tomorrow', and you promise someone that will do this or that then you should say, 'Allah willing' because Allah *the Exalted* does not prevent actions from being accomplished in the future, but he who intends on performing future action must do so 'by the Will of the Powerful, the Fully Capable', so that even if he does not end up accomplishing what he planned to accomplish, at least he would not have lied about it, since, in that case, it was Allah *the Exalted* who did not will it. When man gives a promise, he is not depending on his own will, but is relying on the Will of Allah *the Exalted* that is above all else.

Every action requires a performer, an object to be performed upon, a time to perform the action in, a motivating cause and finally the actual capacity for a person to carry out the action; does any human being own any of these things? A man has not even the power to guarantee that we will live until tomorrow; he does not have the power to guarantee that there will be a tomorrow, and he has not the power to guarantee the reason for there being a tomorrow. And even if he could guarantee all these conditions, a man has not the capacity of carrying out the action. Therefore, if he says, 'I will do this or that with so-and-so tomorrow' he would have thereby promised something over which he has no power whatsoever. But if he says, 'Allah willing', then he is seeking the help of Allah, who has all these capacities. The True Lord *Glorified is He* demonstrates His Power over his creation every moment. He says for example, 'But they cruelly slaughtered her. And thereupon Saleh (Shelah) said, "Only for three days [more] shall you enjoy life in your homes; this is a judgment which will not be belied!"' (*Hud:* 65) The words "in your homes” indicate that these disbelievers were scattered around a large area and were not all centred in a single village. Some of them were travelling, for example, and others were returning from their travels, and so the suffering befell them wherever they happened to be. The punishment did not target a single location, but befell everyone no matter where they were.

None was spared this fate save an individual called Abu-Raghal, who was on a pilgrimage at the *Ka’ba*. His sentence was not carried out while he was in those holy quarters because Allah *Glorified is He* has asked us, His servants, to give protection to anyone who visits His house. Allah *Glorified is He* also protects whoever enters His house, so Allah held back the stones that were to strike him, or the ‘shout’ that was to overtake him, until he left the holy sanctuary, then his suffering befell him…This suffering had struck all the disbelievers from amongst Saleh’s (Shelah’s) people *peace be upon him*. It befell all those who were in their homes, except for this one man, and the moment this man left the house of Allah, the suffering befell him. That is why anyone who had blood on his hands because of having murdered someone, when they took refuge in the holy sanctuary, they were protected until they left the grounds. The community then used to do what it could to make life unbearable for the criminal. They would not feed him, nor would they give him water, so as to force him out. Only after he came out would they carry out his punishment, so that the sanctity of Allah's house would be preserved. We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has wisely forbidden killing in his house to uphold human dignity.

We also know that every event requires a time and place. The Arabs were always raiding one another, and so the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished that there be a place where such killing was forbidden, and so He consecrated the holy *Ka’ba* for that purpose. Allah *Glorified is He* also wanted that there be a time period during which killing was forbidden; these are the holy months because when two warring parties are equally matched it can bring out of both the feelings of vainglory and pride. Every one of these warring individuals secretly wishes that these wars would end, at the same time he does not want to be seen as a coward in front of other people. So the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give them all an honourable excuse for ceasing hostilities during the holy months. With the coming of these holy months, one of the warriors is always wont to say, ‘If it were not for the holy months I would have dealt a crushing blow to my enemies’; however, he only says as much to satisfy his sense of pride. Deep inside, he wished that the war would be over. Similarly, when a warrior seeks refuge in Allah's house, his enemy announces, ‘Had he not taken refuge in the sanctuary, I would have made him taste the shame of defeat’.

'Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَ أَمۡرُنَا نَجَّيۡنَا صَٰلِحٗا وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَعَهُۥ بِرَحۡمَةٖ
مِّنَّا وَمِنۡ خِزۡيِ يَوۡمِئِذٍۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ ٱلۡقَوِيُّ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٦٦

And so, when Our command was fulfilled, by Our mercy We saved *Saleh* and his fellow believers from the disgrace of that day. [Prophet], it is your Lord who is the Strong, the Mighty One [66] (The Quran, *Hud:* 66)

So when, after the three days had passed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wrought the suffering down of the tribe of Thamud, He saved Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* and those who had believed in his message from the destruction. Allah's Mercy protected them because they had believed in the doctrine which Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* had brought. They were thus spared the humiliation and ignominy suffered by the rest of the tribe of Thamud. That was the humiliation, and such was the ignominy that befell the tribe of Thamud. The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying, ‘…Verily, your Lord alone is Powerful, Almighty!’ (*Hud:* 66) These words are addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a means to bolster his determination. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* is capable of dominating and defeating every disbeliever, and nothing can resist His Will. Herein is a warning to those who rejected the message of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَخَذَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ ٱلصَّيۡحَةُ فَأَصۡبَحُواْ فِي دِيَٰرِهِمۡ جَٰثِمِينَ ٦٧

The blast struck the evildoers and they lay dead in their homes [67] (The Quran, *Hud:* 67)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls the punishment that befalls the tribe of Thamud *as-sayha*, and elsewhere He calls it *at-taghya*, ‘Now as for the Thamud – they were destroyed by a violent upheaval [of the earth]’ (*al-Haqqa:* 5).

Elsewhere He also calls it *sa`iqa*, ‘But if they turn away, say, “I warn you of [the coming of] a thunderbolt of punishment like the thunderbolt [that fell upon the tribes] of `Ad and Thamud!”’ (*Fussilat:* 13) In the chapter of *al-A`raf* He calls it *ar-rajfa*; all of these terms denote an event that occurs suddenly, an event from which there is no escape. One might ask, ‘Why does the True Lord *Glorified is He* say, ‘And the blast [of Allah's punishment] overtook those who had been bent on evildoing…’ (*Hud:* 67), *akhdh* and not *akhadht*? Why is the letter *‘ta*’ denoting the feminine gender omitted? The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And the blast [of Allah's punishment] overtook those who had been bent on evildoing…’ (*Hud:* 76). We would reply that the Speaker in this case is the Lord of His servants; and it is not proper to conceive of the ‘blast’ as having been singular. This would have the effect of weakening the expression. When the letter ‘*ta*’ is omitted, and we understand that there were multiple ‘blasts’, this gives the expression more power. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...and then they lay lifeless, in their very homes, on the ground.’ (*Hud:* 67) meaning that they lay on their faces, motionless.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

كَأَن لَّمۡ يَغۡنَوۡاْ فِيهَآۗ أَلَآ إِنَّ ثَمُودَاْ كَفَرُواْ رَبَّهُمۡۗ أَلَا بُعۡدٗا لِّثَمُودَ ٦٨

As though they had never lived and flourished there. Yes, the Thamud denied their Lord – so away with the Thamud! [68] (The Quran, *Hud:* 68)

The term *ghina* has many meanings which are all ultimately related to each other. *Ghana`* is presence; the presence of something absolves the need for it, so *ghina* (in this case meaning wealth) is the presence of money which absolves you from depending on others; and *ghina* (in this case meaning singing) is what which we hear from singers, and the *ughniya* (song sharing the same root of *ghina*) is that which one becomes enchanted with, its words and melody, and becomes 'occupied' with it. In other words, one's mind dwells on it and excludes all other words it reads and hears despite how many they may be. *Ghana`* is establishment (and exclusion of need). Just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, '…when the earth has assumed its artful adornment and has been embellished, and they who dwell on it believe that they have gained mastery over it – there comes down upon it Our judgment, by night or by day, and We cause it to become [like] a field mown down, as if there had been no yesterday….' (*Yunus:* 24) In other words, it is as if it were never there. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'as though they had never lived there…' (*Hud:* 68) meaning they did not reside there because it had become like a field that has been mown down. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the same verse, '…Oh, verily, [the tribe of] Thamud denied their Lord...' (*Hud:* 68). This is exactly why they suffered such severe punishment.

The words '*kafaru bi rabihim*' mean that they tried concealing Allah's existence. However, this is itself an acknowledgement that He exists. It is just that, outwardly, they deny this. Therefore, the words '*kafaru bi rabihim*' is Allah's rejoinder to those heretics that do not acknowledge His existence; there is no greater sin than to deny the existence of Allah. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…Oh, away with the Thamud!' (*Hud:* 68) meaning that they deserved what befell them—their destruction and their expulsion from Allah's Grace—and no one will have any pity on them given the enormity of their sin. Then, in the next verse, the True Lord begins *Glorified is He* recounting another one of the stories of the Prophets.

The following is part of the story of the father of Prophets—Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him.*

وَلَقَدْ جَآءَتْ رُسُلُنَآ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ بِٱلْبُشْرَىٰ قَالُوا۟ سَلَٰمًا ۖ
قَالَ سَلَٰمٌ ۖ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَن جَآءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيذٍ ﴿٦٩﴾

To Abraham Our messengers brought good news. They said, 'Peace.' He answered, 'Peace,' and without delay he brought in a roasted calf [69] (The Quran, *Hud:* 69)

The word *rasul* means he who is 'sent forth'; any person that you send somewhere is called a *rasul*, but religiously the term means 'he who is sent by Allah'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'In His Almightiness, Allah chooses message-bearers from among the angels as well as from among men…' (*al-Hajj:* 75).

Angels are selected to deliver Allah's messages so as to mitigate the power of receiving direct messages from the Lord *Glorified is He*. The power that receives messages directly from The Creator *Glorified is He* has to be itself great. No human being has the capacity for receiving revelation directly from the True Lord *Glorified is He* that is why He sent us messengers. He elects the most elite of angels and sends them down to deliver the message to select human beings capable of bearing it.

Thus, we learn that not all angels are capable of receiving direct revelation from Allah *the Exalted* and that not all human beings are capable of receiving direct revelation from Allah or by way of the angels. Such episodes in the history of Divine Revelation are intentionally willed by the True Lord *Glorified is He* so that the weak might be empowered through the strong, and human beings resort to such measures during their lifetimes. I have previously given this example, where at night we turn off all the lights in our homes, but we leave a dim light on to delineate the contours of the house, so that if we were to wake up in the middle of the night, we would not bump into the furniture, such that we break it, or we injure ourselves if the furniture in question is made of sturdier stuff than ourselves. The dim light also allows us to locate the switch for the brighter lights. When it comes to revelation, the True Lord *Glorified is He* operates in much the same way such that He conveys His Message to an elite angel who then transmits it to an elite class of human beings.

To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, or [by a voice, as it were,] from behind a veil, or by sending an apostle to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal] …’ (*ash-Shura:* 51).

Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And, indeed, there came unto Ibrahim (Abraham) Our [heavenly] messengers, bearing a glad tiding...’ (*Hud:* 69). A glad tiding is news that causes joy, even before the joyous event arrives; in contrast, a warning is news that causes sorrow before the event occurs. Before the messengers conveyed to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the good news which they came to tell, the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us about the proper manners of entering peoples’ homes—that is, we must begin by greeting its residents. As the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not enter houses other than your own unless you have obtained permission and greeted their owners…’ (*an-Nur:* 27). That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* relates what the angels had said before delivering their message, ‘They bade him peace’ (*Hud:* 69). Then came Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) response, ‘And he answered, “And upon you be peace!”’ (*Hud:* 69) Note how their greeting indicated a renewal of the relationship, and how Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) *peace be upon him* response was firm and insistent. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘But when you are greeted with a greeting [of peace], answer with an even better greeting, or [at least] with the like thereof....’ (*an-Nisa’:* 86). This is how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* welcomed the True Lord’s messengers. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and made haste to place before them a roasted calf.’ (*Hud:* 69) A calf is an offspring of a cow. There are many sections of the Quran which speak about the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*; this is not a case of pointless repetition, for every snapshot in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* contains hidden wisdom so that if all the sections of Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) story are brought together, you will then have a complete understanding of the saga from every angle. To give an example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And thus we gave Ibrahim (Abraham) [his first] insight into [Allah’s] Mighty Dominion over the heavens and the earth...’ (*al-An‘am:* 75), in another part of the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* showcases the education of certitude that He Willed for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*; Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Then, when the night overshadowed him with its darkness, he beheld a star; [and] he exclaimed, "This is my Lord!" – but when it went down, he said, "I love not the things that go down." Then, when he beheld the moon rising, he said, "This is my Lord!" – but when it went down, he said, "Indeed, if my Lord guide me not, I will most certainly become one of the people who go astray!" Then, when he beheld the sun rising, he said, "This is my Lord! This one is the greatest [of all]!" – but when it [too] went down, he exclaimed, "O my people! Behold, far be it from me to ascribe divinity, as you do, to aught beside Allah! Behold, unto Him who brought into being the heavens and the earth have I turned my face, having turned away from all that is false; and I am not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him."' (*al-An'am:* 76-79)

These verses demonstrate the primary function of the senses, that is, realization. They demonstrate the function of the human conscious, that is, to discern. They also demonstrate the function of the human free will, that is, to choose the Oneness of Allah and to choose the knowledge of certainty. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* recounts another episode during which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* addresses his father(1) with a high level of deference. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And call to mind, through this Book, Ibrahim (Abraham). Behold, he was a man of truth, [already] a prophet when he spoke [thus] unto his father, "O my father! Why do you worship something that neither hears nor sees and can be of no avail whatever to you? O my father! Behold, there has indeed come to me [a ray] of knowledge such as has never yet come to you; follow me, then, I shall guide you onto a perfect way. O my father! Do not worship Satan– for, verily, Satan is a rebel against The Most Gracious! O my father! I dread lest a chastisement from The Most Gracious befall thee, and then you will become [aware of having been] close unto Satan!"' (*Maryam:* 41-45) These verses demonstrate the gentleness of the speaker and the beauty of the proposition. When the uncle remains adamant in his disbelief, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* tells him, '…I shall ask my Lord to forgive you…' (*Maryam:* 47). After that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* acquits himself from his father's persistent disbelief. Then there is the episode where some people were debating Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* about Allah, ‘Are you not aware of that [king] who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) about his Lord, [simply] because Allah had granted him kingship? Lo! Ibrahim (Abraham) said, “My Lord is He who grants life and deals death.” [The king] replied, “I [too] grant life and deal death…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 258).

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(1) Azar

This empty argument resulted from the king’s inability to communicate because condemning someone to death and then forgiving him is not the same as killing him and bringing him back to life. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* even takes him to where no one dares to venture. He says, ‘Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east. Cause it, then, to rise in the west!’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). This verse is a testament to the logic of truth and the incoherence of falsehood.

In another part of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* compared the concept of disbelief with the concept of faith. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And convey unto them the story of Ibrahim (Abraham), when he asked his father and his people, “What is it that you worship?” They answered, “We worship idols, and we remain ever devoted to them.” He said, “Do you really think that they hear you when you invoke them. Do they benefit you or do you harm?” They exclaimed, “But we found our forefathers doing the same!”’ (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 69-74)

In this last verse, the questions Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* posed to his people had self-evident answers. Then Allah *Glorified is He* narrated that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, ‘The One (Allah) who has created me and guides me. He is The One Who sustains me with food to eat and water to drink. When I fall ill, He is The One Who restores me to health. He is the One who will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on Judgment Day!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78-82)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Anbiya`*, ‘And, indeed, long before We bestowed unto Ibrahim (Abraham) the awareness of what is right; and We were Knowledgeable of (what moved) him when he said unto his father and his people, “What are these statues to which you are so intensely devoted?” They answered, “We found our forefathers worshipping them.” He said, “You and your forefathers have indeed gone astray!” They asked, “Have you come to us with the Truth, or are you of the ones that play?” He answered, “Nay, but your (True) Lord is The Lord of the heavens and the earth. He is the One who has brought them into existence by breaking them asunder and I am one of those who bear witness to this truth!”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 51-56) This is the knowledge of certainty which Allah *Glorified is He* granted to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in order that we learn what true faith is. Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) people used to worship deities other than Allah *Glorified is He* but Ibrahim (Abraham) turned to worship the One who brought him into existence and created the universe. He is the Supreme Architect who laid down the laws by which His creation functions.

That is why we need to pay close attention to the meaning of Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) words that are narrated in the Quran, ‘He is the One (Allah) who has created me and He is the One who guides me’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 78). In this verse, the Arabic pronoun *huwa* (Who) was used to highlight that guidance was from Allah *Glorified is He* alone. As many people have tried to obtain guidance elsewhere and formulated their own immoral laws in life, the verse placed emphasis on the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator is the Only Guide and Lawgiver. This excluded any other source of guidance such as the false deities that the disbelievers have claimed were their guides.

When it came to matters that can only be directly made by Allah *Glorified is He* the Quranic verses omitted the pronoun, *huwa,* as such issues were uncontested by the pagans. For instance, a following verse that narrates Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) says, ‘And (Allah) will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 81). Thus, this verse spoke of a matter of life and death and omitted the word *huwa* (Who). The emphasis was redundant and unnecessary because the pagans already believed that Allah alone created life.

On the other hand, in verses of coarser conflict with the pagans, the word *huwa* is included to strike emphasis. An example of this is the verse which says, ‘And when I fall ill, He (Allah) is the One who cures me’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 80). This verse highlighted the pronoun *huwa*, as some disbelievers might say, ‘It is the doctor who heals diseases’. This concept is not true, because it is Allah *Glorified is He* who allowed medical knowledge to accumulate and be understood by mankind. It is He Who created the illnesses and it is He Who created their corresponding cures.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* continues the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* 'And remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the *Ka'ba* (*al-Baqara:* 127). Therefore, every occasion where one of the meanings of faith is explained is accompanied by one of the scenes from the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. When you look at all these lessons in faith, you will have looked at his complete story.

Allah *Glorified is He* narrates all these stories to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because He wanted to strengthen the Prophet's heart with certitude, 'And remember out of all the accounts relating to the earlier apostles We convey unto you that wherewith We aim to make firm your heart' (*Hud:* 120). The Prophet *peace be upon him* persevered through many different experiences. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* reminded him of the events that previous prophets had faced. These experiences of the previous messengers were narrated to reinforce his heart.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They greeted him [Ibrahim (Abraham)] with peace (and) he answered, "And peace be upon you"; he did not delay placing before them a roasted calf.' (*Hud:* 69) In another chapter of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'As they entered to him [Ibrahim (Abraham)] and they said, "Peace!" He said, "Surely, we feel tremulous of you"' (*al-Hijr:* 52). In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when he saw that the guests would not eat, he became apprehensive of them, but they said, "Fear not", and gave him the glad tiding of (the birth of) a son who would be blessed with deep knowledge' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 28). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* felt fear from their strange angelic behaviour. This fear is a normal emotion that is found in any heart. Every action begins with a perception and awareness. Then there comes the desire for action, followed by the action itself. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) felt fear when he saw them, but he directed himself to an action that is contrary to fear, which is bidding them peace.

In general, religious law does not interfere with our perceptions or their resulting emotions. However, it does intervene regarding how we react to these feelings. Nevertheless, there is one exception to that rule, which is the male’s perception of female beauty. Jurisprudence orders us to lower our gaze when faced with a woman’s beauty, as this prevents a male’s perception from leading his behaviour in an unbecoming manner. When a man’s senses perceive feminine beauty, he may easily act on impulse. His behaviour in that instant is instinctive and may jump from perception to immediate action without pausing for reflection.

We now return to the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* tells us of Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) feelings in the situation with the angels, ‘But when he saw that their hands did not reach out (towards their meal), he deemed their conduct strange and became apprehensive of them. But they said, “Fear not,”’ (*Hud:* 70). Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrated Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) instinctive reaction in the verse, ‘They greeted him with peace (and) he answered, “And peace be upon you”, (*Hud:* 69). This is an example of insistence and emphasis. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘He did not delay placing before them a roasted calf (*`ijlin haneeth*)’ (*Hud:* 69).

`Ijlin haneeth is a calf that is roasted on hot stones because, as we know, one can roast meat over open flames, burning coals or hot stones. This way of roasting meat is still practiced today in Arab countries when they heat delicate stones over fire and roast meat over them. This is to avoid the reactions that may occur when metal or coal is placed on fire. For them, hot stones are the cleanest way to roast meat. The words *`ijlin haneeth* could also mean that the calf was dripping with fat after being roasted.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* ‘He did not delay placing before them a roasted calf’ (*Hud:* 69). It was in the nature of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) to love and honour his guests. It is a habit of hospitality to hasten when welcoming a guest while offering the guests food as soon as possible. This is the definition of a person who is *kareem* (generous), since the host does not know how much time has passed since his guests had their last meal. After being presented with food, the guests will eat if they were hungry, and will let their host know if they had already eaten.

Allah *Glorified is He* told us what happened after Ibrahim (Abraham) brought them the roasted calf:

فَلَمَّا رَءَآ أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً ۚ
قَالُواْ لَا تَخَفْ إِنَّآ أُرْسِلْنَآ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ﴿٧٠﴾

When he saw that their hands did not reach towards the meal, he found this strange and became afraid of them. But they said, ‘Do not be afraid. We have been sent against the people of Lot’[70] (The Quran, *Hud:* 70)

When Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) noticed that they were not eating, he became fearful of them. Did Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* suspect that they were angels? Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) realised that they were angels from the way they spoke. Allah *Glorified is He* explains this in another verse in the Quran, ‘When they presented themselves before him and bade him peace, he answered, “Behold, we are afraid of you!” They said, “Fear not! Behold, we bring you the glad tidings of (the birth of) a son who will be blessed with deep knowledge.” He said, “Do you give me these glad tidings despite the fact that old age has overtaken me? Of what (strange thing), then, are you giving me a tiding!” They answered, “We have given you the glad tiding of something that is bound to come true, so be not of those who abandon hope!” Ibrahim (Abraham) exclaimed, “And who – other than those who have utterly lost their way – could ever abandon the hope of his Lord’s grace?” He added, “And what (else) may you have in view, O you (heavenly) messengers?” They answered, “We are sent to (punish) people lost in sin.”’ (*al-Hijr:* 52-58)

Therefore, they did not tell him what they told Prophet Lut (Lot) in a later encounter, “O Lut (Lot)! Behold, we are messengers from your Lord’ (*Hud:* 81). Here, when they told Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), ‘Fear not! Behold, we are sent to the people of Lut (Lot)’ (*Hud:* 70), they understood that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) knew that they were angels.

Angels can assume human form, just as the arch-angel Jibril (Gabriel) took on the form of a man when he came to see Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Jinn have the ability to assume different forms as well, but there is a difference between the Jinn and the angels in this respect. When a jinni takes on a different form, the jinni becomes subject to the laws that govern that form. For example, if a jinni resembles the form of a human being, you can physically harm them if you wanted to.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘A highly mischievous demon came to interrupt my prayer last night, but Allah gave me the power to overcome him. So I seized him and intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque so that you all could see him, but then I remembered the supplication of my brother Sulaiman (Solomon), “O my Lord! Forgive me my sins, and bestow upon me the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after me. Verily, You alone are a giver of gifts!” (*Sad:* 35) So, I repulsed him.’(1)

Thus, if one of the Jinn takes on a particular form, they become a captive of that form and it is possible to inflict harm on them. However, when angels take on a particular form, they do not become subject to its physical laws. Thus, since the Jinn become subject to the same physical laws that humans are subject to, they fear us just as we fear them. Jinn may appear in human form for fleeting moments only, and then quickly vanish in the fear that you might physically assault them. Allah *Glorified is He* has willed it to be so, in order that the Jinn do not constantly frighten human beings.

Here Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘But when he saw that their hands did not reach out towards it, he deemed their conduct strange (*nakirahum*)’ (*Hud:* 70). To understand the meaning of the Arabic word *nakirahum,* we must look at the root of the word which comes from the letters *nun, kaf* and *ra.* The words *nakar* and *ankar* are both used in the Quran. An Arab poet once said:

She shunned me, and what she shunned was not,
Of my mishaps, except aging and baldness.

The linguistic manner in which the term is used in this verse indicates that bad behaviour is called *munkarat*. These *munkarat* are the actions that people naturally shun. So, when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) noticed that they did not eat the roasted calf that was placed before them, he stopped to notice their behaviour and became slightly fearful. When they noticed this fear, they said, ‘Fear not! Behold, we are sent to the people of Lut (Lot)’ (*Hud:* 70). Thus, when he realised to whom they had been sent, he took comfort in the fact that his own people had not done anything to warrant punishment.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3426) and by Muslim in his Sahih (541). This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Tradition(1) tells us that Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife(2) had told him, 'Will you not take your nephew(3) under your wing because his people are on the verge of being punished by Allah'. When she heard that the angels had been sent to the tribe of Lut (Lot), she was pleased with her keen intuition, for she had sensed this matter beforehand.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They answered, "Behold, we have been sent unto a people lost in sin, to let loose upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement, marked out in your Lord's sight for (the punishment of) those who have wasted their own selves.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 32-34)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱمۡرَأَتُهُۥ قَآئِمَةٞ فَضَحِكَتۡ فَبَشَّرۡنَٰهَا بِإِسۡحَٰقَ وَمِن وَرَآءِ إِسۡحَٰقَ يَعۡقُوبَ ﴿٧١﴾

His wife was standing [nearby] and laughed. We gave
her good news of Isaac and, after him, of Jacob [71]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 71)

When Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife was preparing the food for the guests, she heard the words of the angels and took comfort in the fact that no suffering was to befall their community. She was also pleased that her intuition was confirmed. Allah *Glorified is He* gave her even more cause for joy when the angels delivered the glad tidings of the coming birth of her son, Prophet Ishaq (Isaac), followed by her grandson, Prophet Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them*.

Thus, after being reassured that the suffering was not to befall their community, but was destined for another wicked people, they were given the good news which Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife(4) had been longing for. It had previously seemed to them that the time (for having children) had passed, as Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife had reached the age of seventy and Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) himself had reached the age of one-hundred-and-twenty. This promise told Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that, in addition to a son, they would also have grandchildren. Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed the blessings of children upon His servants. He says, 'And Allah has given you mates of your own kind and has given you, through your mates, children and grandchildren.' (*an-Nahl:* 72) Man loves to have a child, but he desires to have grandchildren even more because this represents a continuation of his bloodline.

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(1) The prediction of Sara, the wife of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* of a befalling torment on the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*

(2) Sara *peace be upon her*

(3) Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*

(4) Sara *peace be upon her*

These glad tidings were successive. The angels had announced that they had been sent to punish the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot) with whom Ibrahim (Abraham) had previously argued due to their indecent transgressions. However, they reassured Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife *Allah be pleased with them* both that their actions did not displease Allah *Glorified is He*. The third piece of glad tidings was the blessing of a boy, as the wife of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* had for a long time desired a son although she was barren. She received the first piece of glad tidings with joy and received the glad tidings about the son with astonishment. This is clear in the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَتْ يَٰوَيْلَتَىٰٓ ءَأَلِدُ وَأَنَا۠ عَجُوزٌ وَهَٰذَا بَعْلِى
شَيْخًا ۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَشَىْءٌ عَجِيبٌ ٧٢

She said, 'Alas for me! How am I to bear a child
when I am an old woman, and my husband here is
an old man? That would be a strange thing!' [72]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 72)

An event is truly remarkable when it defies natural laws. However, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the natural laws and can change them at His will. Note that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said in another verse, 'Do you give me this glad tiding despite the fact that old age has overtaken me' (*al-Hijr:* 54). Here, however, Allah *Glorified is He* narrated that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife said, 'Woe (to me)! Shall I bear a child, now that I am an old woman and my husband (*ba`ly*) is an old man?' (*Hud:* 72) The use of the Arabic word *ba`ly* (my husband) here is very precise because *al-ba`l* is a husband who performs all the needed matters of his wife so she does not need the help of anyone else. It is the definition of a husband who performs a function for his wife which neither her father nor her brother can perform. This is when he satisfies her sense of motherhood. This is the most important thing a woman can ask for.

A date palm is also called by this term *(ba`l)* if it does not require regular watering after it has been planted. Such date palms are able to survive by making use of the little water that is in the ground or that occasionally falls as rain. The term is also used to describe a type of bean *(fool ba`li)* because it does not require watering. Therefore, *al-ba`l* is the husband who tends to the affairs of his wife so that she is never in need of anyone else.

Here, Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) wife(1) was astonished at the prospect of conceiving a child. Astonishing things usually come up suddenly without warning. That is why the angels answer her question in the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوٓا۟ أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ رَحْمَتُ ٱللَّهِ وَبَرَكَٰتُهُۥ
عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ ٱلْبَيْتِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

They said, 'Are you astonished at what God ordains? The grace of God and His blessings be upon you, people of this house! For He is worthy of all praise and glory' [73] (The Quran, *Hud:* 73)

It would be truly astonishing if a breach of the natural laws was performed by a human being, but Allah *Glorified is He the Fully-Capable* can suspend such laws without awe. Miracles that serve to attest to the authenticity of Allah's messages are the results of such laws being suspended. Indeed, miracles transcend all natural laws.

This story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife(2) has its parallel in the story of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* plentiful fruits. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) asked her, ‘Whence came this unto you?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her responded* ‘It is from Allah; behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning (and without account).’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37)

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(1) Sara *peace be upon her*

(2) Sara *peace be upon her*

Despite it being normal that meticulous accounting be practised between Allah’s creatures, no such accounts are plausible between the Creator and His creatures. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘In that same place, Zakaryya (Zechariah) prayed unto his Lord’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 38). Since Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) had realised the truth of Maryam’s (Mary’s) words, ‘Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning (and without account).’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) It was only right that he ask his Lord, 'O my Lord! Bestow upon me (too), out of Your grace, the gift of goodly offspring.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 38) So Allah *Glorified is He* told him, ‘O Zakaryya (Zechariah)! We bring you the glad tiding of (the birth of) a son whose name shall be Yahya (John). Never have We given this name to anyone before him.’ (*Maryam:* 7) Allah *Glorified is He* blessed him with a son and gave the son a name that no one had ever held before.

Allah’s method in naming is very different from names given by humans. Some people have subsequently named their sons Yahya which means ‘living’ out of optimism and hope that the son would survive. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* named Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* this meant that he would survive to maturity and never die. That is why Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* was martyred because martyrs are always alive with their Lord, forever unaffected by death.

This is not necessarily the case when it comes to human beings naming their children with pleasant names. A parent may name his child Sa`eed (the happy one), but the child could end up living a life of gruelling misery. An Arab poet once said, after naming his child Yahya, hoping that he may live to old age:

I named him Yahya so that he may live,

but it was no measure to reverse Allah’s verdict upon him.

Maryam *peace be upon her* was the one who told Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* about Allah’s countless blessings. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) prayed to his Lord, that he was getting older and that his wife was infertile. This prayer was a mere supplication, as Zakaryya (Zechariah) knew that Allah *Glorified is He* Himself created and had all knowledge of the events of his life. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure Zakaryya (Zechariah) that he would be blessed with a son who He had named. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Thus, it was (decreed); (as) your Lord said.’ (*Maryam:* 9) Since it is Allah *Glorified is He* who has decided this blessing, there is none who can reverse this decision. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘This is easy for Me, just as I have created you before out of nothing’ (*Maryam:* 9).

Thus, as Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* informed Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* that Allah *Glorified is He* can suspend the natural laws for his creation, she was also presented with a similar event. Later, Allah *Glorified is He* suspended the natural order for her as well. An angel came to her in the form of a man and gave her the good tidings of a son. His name was ‘Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*. Maryam (Mary) peace be upon her asked how this could be possible when no human being has ever touched her. The angel reminded her of the words that she had uttered in her conversation with Zakaryya (Zechariah), ‘Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning (and without account).’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) It was necessary for Maryam (Mary) to be comforted because giving birth to ‘Isa (Jesus) with no father was a situation in which her honour might be questioned. It was necessary that she approach the situation with confidence and without apprehension that she might be accused (of wrongdoing).

Now, in the verse which we are currently examining, Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s)(1) wife found herself in a similar situation. The angels explained to her that she should not be astonished in what Allah *Glorified is He* had willed for her, even though it goes against all natural laws. Allah’s Mercy can encompass all that is good and can include the prophetic family in His blessings. Part of this mercy includes the gift of children after the natural time of childbearing. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse, ‘The Grace of Allah and His Blessings be upon you, O people of this house’ (*Hud:* 73).

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(1) Sara *peace be upon her*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concluded the verse by saying, 'Verily, ever to be praised is Allah (*Hameed*) sublime is He (*Majeed*)!' (*Hud:* 73) Allah *Glorified is He* deserves all the praises from His creation for being Who He is and for everything that comes forth from Him. There is no limit to His favours and goodness. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Sublime.

The word *'Hameed'* in this verse has two meanings. One meaning is that it is an active verb which indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* receives praise from those upon whom He bestows His blessings. On the other hand, the word could indicate a passive meaning which is that Allah *Glorified is He* Himself praises those who revere him in their faithful hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* is also the Sublime Lord who bestows His blessings on His servants before His servants even ask for them. For instance, we have a story(1) of the righteous man who was approached by a beggar. The righteous man put some coins in the beggar's hand, but went back to his wife in misery. His wife asked him, 'Why are you in misery. You gave the poor man the money that he needed.' The righteous man replied, 'I am in dismay because I waited until he asked, whereas I should have helped him before he needed the opportunity to ask others.'

Allah *Glorified is He* has given us His blessings before we even knew how to ask for them. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* provides sustenance for the foetus inside its mother's womb even before the foetus learns how to communicate.

Throughout the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* explains how we must approach social situations according to the tenets of faith. In the current verse, for example, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* placed a roasted calf in front of his guests. This is to show us that if we receive guests and they do not eat the food that we have offered, the proper response is not to take the food away immediately. Instead, we should sincerely and generously ask them to eat. At that point, they may insist that they have no desire to eat because, for instance, they may have eaten before coming to see us. In such cases, we may take the food away, only after having encouraged them to eat with fervour.

Some religious scholars have posited that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked the angels, 'Will you not eat?' The angels responded,

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(1) The story of the righteous man and his wife with the beggar

'We would only eat the food if we pay for its price.' Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) said, out of the wisdom bestowed on him by Allah *Glorified is He* 'The food's price is invoking Allah's Name before eating it and praising Him after finishing.' If you were to begin a meal by saying, '*Bismillah'* and finish the meal by saying, '*Alhamdulilah'* (All praises are due to Allah), you would have thereby fulfilled your obligation towards the blessing of food. Allah *Glorified is He* says about blessings in general, 'And on that Day (of Judgment), you will most surely be called to account for (what you did with) the comforts of life!' (*at-Takathur:* 8)

To summarize the previous verses we have studied in this chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* shows us how Ibrahim (Abraham) and his wife (1) rejoiced in the good tidings brought to them by the angels. They were also relieved that the angels did not intend any harm to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* or his people. Rather, they were sent to punish the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبَ عَنۡ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ ٱلرَّوۡعُ وَجَآءَتۡهُ ٱلۡبُشۡرَىٰ يُجَٰدِلُنَا فِي قَوۡمِ لُوطٍ ٧٤

Then, when the fear left Abraham and the good news
came to him, he pleaded with Us for Lot's people [74]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 74)

The Arabic word *jidal* (argument) means that for each argument put forth by an opponent, one should put forth a counter-argument until the truth is reached. This is different from *al-mira`* where one already knows where the truth of the matter lies, but they continue to argue on the side of error while avoiding the truth. Allah *Glorified is He* forbids us from engaging in the latter type of argument. On the other hand, He encourages us to engage in civilized exchanges of opinion, as long as these exchanges serve a greater good.

Allah *Glorified is He* shows us that after Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* regained his composure, with his initial fears turned into joy after hearing that Allah will bless him with a son, he realised that the angels were sent to punish the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot). ‘They (the angels) answered, “Behold, we have been sent unto a people lost in sin, to let loose upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement, marked out in your Lord’s sight.”’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 32-34)

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(1) Sara *peace be upon her*

The argument put up by Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* regarding the punishment of the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was not an objection to Allah’s orders. Rather, it was Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) merciful temperament that prompted him to ask for their forgiveness, in the hope that they will come to believe. Allah *Glorified is He* pointed this out when He says:

إِنَّ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّٰهٞ مُّنِيبٞ ﴿٧٥﴾

for Abraham was forbearing, tender-hearted,
and devout [75] (The Quran, *Hud:* 75)

Thus, the reason why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* ‘contended’ with them is because he was always kind-hearted, never wanting to hasten punishment. Note that the word *awwah,* in this context, means ‘the one having a gentle heart’. If the context deals with a person being *awwah* towards the ‘higher power’ (Allah), the adjective (*awwah*) denotes a fear of not having paid the obligatory dues to the higher power. On the other hand, as in this verse, if the context deals with being *awwah* towards a ‘lower entity’, the adjective denotes ‘mercifulness’ and ‘leniency’. That is why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* implored Allah *Glorified is He* to delay the punishment to the tribe of Lut (Lot), hoping that they would turn to Allah in faith. So, in this case, the term *awwah* denotes both a fear of Allah’s wrath as well as a feeling of pity for those who have earned for themselves severe suffering.

Allah *Glorified is He* also described Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) as *muneeb*. This means that Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) ultimate tendency is to resign himself to Allah’s Judgment. Allah *Glorified is He* described this attribute of Ibrahim (Abraham) in another verse, ‘And Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) prayer that his father be forgiven was but due to a promise which he had given to him (during his lifetime)’ (*at-Tawba:* 114). Then, after Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) had searched for the truth and set his heart to it, he ultimately accepted Allah’s Judgement, ‘But when it was made clear unto him that Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) father had been Allah’s enemy, Ibrahim (Abraham) disavowed him.’ (*at-Tawba:* 114)

In the verse which we are currently studying, Ibrahim (Abraham) resigned to Allah’s decree, but also felt pity for the tribe of Lut (Lot) who refused to believe. The other reason why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) pleaded that Allah *Glorified is He* spare them is mentioned in the chapter of *al-‘Ankabut,* ‘And so, when Our (heavenly) messengers came to Ibrahim (Abraham) with the glad tiding (of the birth of Ishaq (Isaac), they (also) said, “Behold, we are about to destroy the people of that land, for its people are truly evildoers!” And Ibrahim (Abraham) exclaimed, “But Lut (Lot) lives there!”’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 31-32)

Here, Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) question to the angels was, ‘How can you destroy the people of this town when faithful people live among them, including Prophet Lut (Lot)’. The angels responded by saying, ‘We know clearly well who is there. Indeed, we shall save him and his household - all but his wife. She will indeed be among those that stay behind (in punishment).’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 32) Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* assumed that, since the village was inhabited by both believers and disbelievers, he can rightfully plead for the forgiveness of the entire village. The answer to Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) pleas came in the following verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓإِبۡرَٰهِيمُ أَعۡرِضۡ عَنۡ هَٰذَآۖ إِنَّهُۥ قَدۡ جَآءَ أَمۡرُ رَبِّكَۖ
وَإِنَّهُمۡ ءَاتِيهِمۡ عَذَابٌ غَيۡرُ مَرۡدُودٖ ٧٦

Abraham, cease your pleading: what your Lord has ordained has come about; punishment is coming to them, which cannot be turned back’ [76] (The Quran, *Hud:* 76)

When the angels said, ‘O Ibrahim (Abraham), desist from this (pleading)’ (*Hud:* 76), it meant that Allah’s judgment was final. The angels were there to execute the punishment and not to warn or intimidate the people of Lut (Lot). They told Ibrahim (Abraham), ‘Behold, your Lord's judgment has already gone forth.’ (*Hud:* 76) Thus, since Allah’s Judgment has already gone forth, and given that Ibrahim (Abraham) was inclined to resign to Allah’s Will, Ibrahim (Abraham) accepted Allah’s judgment. ‘And, verily, there shall fall upon them a chastisement which none can avert!’ (*Hud:* 76) This meant that no one was capable of reversing Allah’s decision to punish (these people).

Just as there is, ‘A divine promise which will not be overturned’, there is also ‘A chastisement which none can avert’.

It is stated that when Ibrahim (Abraham) was pleading with the angels, he asked them, ‘If there were fifty believers from among the tribe of Lut (Lot), would you still punish them?’ They said, ‘No’. He asked, ‘If there were ten believers from among the tribe of Lut (Lot), would you still punish them?’ They said, ‘No.’ He asked, ‘What if the only believer from among the tribe of Lut (Lot) was Lut (Lot) himself?’ They answered, ‘We know clearly well who is there. Indeed, we shall save Lut (Lot) and his household - all but his wife. She will indeed be among those that stay behind (in punishment).’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 32) Thus, the argument ended and the angels went about their mission which was to bring suffering to the tribe of Lut (Lot).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَمَّا جَآءَتۡ رُسُلُنَا لُوطٗا سِيٓءَ بِهِمۡ وَضَاقَ بِهِمۡ ذَرۡعٗا وَقَالَ هَٰذَا يَوۡمٌ عَصِيبٞ ٧٧

And when Our messengers came to Lot, he was anxious for them, feeling powerless to protect them, and said, ‘This is a truly terrible day!’ [77] (The Quran, *Hud:* 77)

Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* sensed the imminent danger. In the expression, ‘*Daaqa bihim dhar`an*’ (It was beyond his reach to shield them), the word *dhar`an* is taken from the word *dhira`* which means ‘arm’. The meaning, therefore, is all that one can push away with one’s arm. If your arm was unable to reach a certain person to push them away, you would say, ‘*Diqtu bihi dhar`an.*’ which means, ‘My arm was unable to reach that person’. Therefore, it is a matter that is beyond your reach and capacity.

Why was Prophet Lut (Lot) sorely grieved when he was visited by the angels? It is said that the angels manifested themselves, as they usually do, in stunningly handsome forms. The expression, ‘That person is an angel’, is an indication that a person’s appearance is sublime. The evil that plagued Prophet Lut’s (Lot’s) people was sodomy. Prophet Lut’s (Lot’s) wife(1) also welcomed this evil that her people engaged in. It is said that when she noticed the handsome guests, not knowing that they were angels who are intent on destruction, she climbed up to the roof of the house and began clapping in an attempt to draw her people’s attention. When no one paid her any attention, she lit a fire, and people began taking note. Then, she announced that some supremely handsome guests had arrived. At this point, Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* told them, ‘This is a woeful day (*Yawmun 'aseeb*)!’ (*Hud:* 77)

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(1) The story of the wife of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* with the angels

In Arabic, one can say, ‘*Yawmun 'aseeb*’, or ‘*Yawmun asabsab*’ to mean, ‘What a day full of difficulties this is!’ The term *al-usba* is derived from this. It is used to indicate a group of people who swarm over something, where the power of one individual is magnified by the size of the crowd. Prophet Lut’s (Lot’s) deduction proved correct. Allah *Glorified is He* describes this in the following verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَآءَهُۥ قَوْمُهُۥ يُهْرَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَمِن قَبْلُ كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ ۚ قَالَ يَـٰقَوْمِ هَـٰٓؤُلَآءِ بَنَاتِى
هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ ۖ فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَلَا تُخْزُونِ فِى ضَيْفِىٓ ۖ أَلَيْسَ مِنكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَّشِيدٌ ﴿٧٨﴾

His people came rushing towards him; they used to commit
foul deeds. He said, ‘My people, here are my daughters.
They are more wholesome for you, so have some fear of God
and do not disgrace me with my guests. Is there not a single
right-minded man among you?’ [78] (The Quran, *Hud:* 78)

Allah’s words, ‘And his people ran (while being rushed) (*yuhra'una*) to him’ (*Hud:* 78) meant that they scurried towards him in droves. When a person is not accustomed to committing sin, he approaches it with hesitancy and trepidation. However, those in the habit of sinning, like the people of Prophet Lut (Lot), approached their matters with confidence and energy

Traditionally, the word *yahra`una* (with an initial *ya*) is used to indicate a group of people rushing (in the active form). The word used in this verse is *yuhra’una (*with an initial *yu)* which means that the verb assumes the passive tense. This depicts the picture that Lut’s (Lot’s) people were hurrying towards his house, as if by a force that was outside them, or a force that is not specifically mentioned. It is as if these people were not rushing (in the active sense of the verb), but were being rushed to sin (in the passive sense) by their evil desires. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And his people ran (while being rushed) (*yuhra'una*) to him’ (*Hud:* 78). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that in their rush towards Prophet Lut‘s (Lot’s) house, they were neither timid nor hesitant. In fact, they were so habituated with committing the sin of sodomy that they rushed forward eagerly. Each one of them was driven forward by his craving and the craving of the others around him.

Imagine a market where it is announced to the shoppers, ‘We are giving out free rations!’ You would indeed see the people pushing and shoving each other (to be first in line). In the same sense, the people of Lut (Lot) were clearly comfortable with such an obscene sin that they were rushing to it without hesitation. Allah *Glorified is He* said concerning the tribe of Lut (Lot), ‘For they had always been committing (such) abominations’ (*Hud:* 78). They enjoyed committing the sin of sodomy and were used to it. It was not something that burdened their consciousness, nor did it cause any sense of shame in their hearts. To have a sense of shame means that while certain people are engaged in something sinful, they are uncomfortable with the idea of others doing the same actions. However, since the people of Lut (Lot) all shared a love for that sin; no one felt embarrassed from the other members in the group of sinners.

So how did Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* react to this woeful day? They had raced towards his house and surrounded it like swarms, and he knew all too well what their intentions were. They had done this many times in the past. So, in an attempt to get rid of them, Prophet Lut (Lot) sought to redirect their desires. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Lut (Lot) said, “O my people! Take instead these daughters of mine (in marriage); they are purer for you (than men)!”’ (*Hud:* 78) Prophet Lut (Lot) said this because women and men are created for this purpose. Therefore, he wanted to give them the possibility of marrying his daughters. In fact, it was permissible in Prophet Lut’s (Lot’s) day for a believer to allow his daughter to marry a disbeliever. Prophet Muhammad himself *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed one of his daughters to marry `Utba Ibn Abu Lahab and another daughter to marry Abu Al-`As ibn Ar-Rabi`. Shortly thereafter, however, Allah made it unlawful for a female believer to marry a disbeliever.

Whose ‘daughters’ was Prophet Lut (Lot) referring to? Was he referring to his own daughters, the daughters of the community at large or the daughters of his followers? It is said that the only believers from among the tribe of Prophet Lut (Lot) were Lut (Lot) himself and his two daughters. How could these two daughters be married to this large crowd of men? Some say that Lut (Lot) had offered this to prominent men who had political influence. They would have been the only ones capable of putting a stop to all of this. Prophet Lut (Lot) thought that this offer might influence them to desist from their sins and purify themselves, while redeeming his honour in the eyes of Prophet Lut’s (Lot’s) guests.

Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* said, ‘Be, then, conscious of Allah, and disgrace me not by assaulting my guests (*dayf*)’ (*Hud:* 78). The word *dayf* is singular, but can also be used to denote the plural of male or female guests. In another chapter of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And has the story of Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) honoured guests (*dayf*) ever come within your ken?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 24). There are other words in the Arabic language, such as *tifl* which are used to denote the singular and the plural nouns. The word also has a plural which is *atfal*. Allah *Glorified is He* says when describing the males that a woman does not need to wear the full veil with, ‘Or the children (*al-tifl*) that are as yet unaware of women’s privacy’ (*an-Nur:* 31). Therefore, the word *(tifl)* can also be used to denote a group of children.

Here, Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* asked these people not to disgrace him by harming his guests. The word *al-khizy* implies being disgraced or shamed in front of oneself and others. A person might be tempted to commit an evil act so long as no one is watching. However, if they are caught in an act by other people, they are then socially humiliated (*al-khizy*). On the other hand, personal disgrace (*al-hawan*) occurs when the only one who knows about the evil act is the person himself. Prophet Lut (Lot) asked them, ‘Is there not among you even one right-minded man?’ (*Hud:* 78). ‘Is there not even a person among you who is conscientious, virile, noble and can put an end to this’?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوا۟ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا لَنَا فِى بَنَاتِكَ مِنْ حَقٍّ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَعْلَمُ مَا نُرِيدُ ﴿٧٩﴾

They said, ‘You know very well that we have no right to your daughters. You know very well what we want’ [79] (The Quran, *Hud:* 79)

This was how the crowd of people answered Prophet Lut’s plea, ‘We have no use of your daughters, and they are not what we came for. You know exactly what we want’. Thus, they refused to accept Prophet Lut’s (Lot’s) suggestion and instead wanted to commit the sin of sodomy with his guests. They were unaware that these guests were actually angels who had taken the form of handsome men.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ لَوْ أَنَّ لِى بِكُمْ قُوَّةً أَوْ ءَاوِىٓ إِلَىٰ رُكْنٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٨٠﴾

He said, ‘If only I had the strength to stop you or could rely on strong support!’ [80] (The Quran, *Hud:* 80)

When you see the Arabic term *laww* (if that), it denotes a wish, or a longing. Prophet Lut (Lot) wished that he had the strength to cast them all out. It is traditional in Arabic that a conditional statement (such as ‘if that’) is followed with an answer for the conditional element. For instance, one could say, ‘If that Zayd was not there, I would have come’. However, in this verse we only find the condition (if that) without the answer. This indicates the level of dismay that Prophet Lut (Lot) was in. That is why some scholars narrated, that at this point of his sadness, the angels turned to him and said, ‘Your support is mighty, indeed’. Thus, Prophet Lut (Lot) said, ‘Or that I could lean upon some mightier support!’ (*Hud:* 80)

A thing that is described in Arabic as *shadeed* is that which is condensed together tightly such that it is hard to break up. When you add different elements together, they still retain a sense of individuality. However, melting elements together is another matter. For example, when you mix two kinds of beans together you are still able to differentiate between the two because they both retain their individual shape and colour. On the other hand, if you were to mix lemon juice with sweetened water, this mix would be much harder to separate. Similar to that range of difficulty, Prophet Lut (Lot) felt that he had not power in preventing his people from doing what they were about to do. These people are also known by the name of 'Sodom', and some say that these were five villages near the city of Hams.

It was narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was moved by Prophet Lut's (Lot's) response. According to Al-Bukhari, Prophet Muhammad was heard saying, 'May Allah bestow his Mercy on my brother Lut (Lot), for he had sought refuge with Allah (during those distressing moments).'(1) It was the extreme anguish of those moments which prompted Prophet Lut (Lot) to say that statement although he was certain that no support is mightier than Allah's support.

Allah *Glorified is He* then states what the angels had told Prophet Lut (Lot):

قَالُواْ يَٰلُوطُ إِنَّا رُسُلُ رَبِّكَ لَن يَصِلُوٓاْ إِلَيۡكَۖ فَأَسۡرِ بِأَهۡلِكَ بِقِطۡعٖ
مِّنَ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَلَا يَلۡتَفِتۡ مِنكُمۡ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا ٱمۡرَأَتَكَۖ إِنَّهُۥ مُصِيبُهَا مَآ
أَصَابَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ مَوۡعِدَهُمُ ٱلصُّبۡحُۚ أَلَيۡسَ ٱلصُّبۡحُ بِقَرِيبٖ ٨١

They [the messengers] said, 'Lot, we are your Lord's messengers. They will not reach you. Leave with your household in the dead of night, and let none of you turn back. Only your wife will suffer the fate that befalls the others. Their appointed time is the morning: is the morning not near?'[81]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 81)

Thus, for the first time, Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* came to know that they were angels sent by Allah *Glorified is He*. Even though when these angels spoke with Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) in the earlier verses, they never explicitly divulged their nature as messengers from Allah. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had assumed correctly that they were angels, but he did not know exactly why they had come. The angels informed Prophet

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4694, 3375), by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/326, 332, 35) and by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4026) This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

Lut (Lot), ‘Behold, we are messengers from your Lord! Never shall (your enemies) approach you’ (*Hud:* 81). This means that the people will not harm Prophet Lut (Lot) and his family and will, indeed, not approach the angels themselves. The angels ordered Lut (Lot) to take his family and leave during the night, because the ordained punishment was to take place in the morning, ‘Verily, their appointed time is the morning – (and) is not the morning near?’ (*Hud:* 81) The angels told Prophet Lut (Lot), ‘Depart, then, with your household while it is yet night’ (*Hud:* 81). This means that he should travel during the second or third quarters of the night by beginning his journey when the first quarter of the night ends. His aim should be to leave the vicinity of the villages when the fourth quarter of the night begins. His total travel time would amount to half of the night.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And let none of you look back (*yaltafit*)’ (*Hud:* 81). The Arabic word *yaltafit* (to look back) means in the verse to discontinue some current act. In this case, the act is travelling away from the village. The word also has a metaphorical meaning, which is to abandon or to let go of something. So, which of these two meanings is relevant in this case?

We know that Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was to bring the believers with him on this journey. He would take them away from their homes and wealth as well as from the life that they had become accustomed to. That is why the angels warned them not to look back regretfully on what they had left behind. For the time being, they must save themselves and Allah will replace their losses in due time. Thus, both the literal and the figurative meanings of the word *yaltafit* are relevant here. They must not think of physically turning back or remain psychologically attached to the life that they have left behind.

The angels also advised Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* not to bring his wife along, for she had betrayed him by lending a helping hand to those perverted people. She divulged her husband’s secrets. Thus, he must leave her with those who are to be punished. When the time came to leave, she argued that she had been faithful to Prophet Lut (Lot) and said, ‘I will leave with you’. Then she looked back at the people and decided to stay with them. Thus, she was visited by the same suffering that was destined to visit her tribe, at the time which the angels had specified in the morning, ‘Verily, their appointed time is the morning – (and) is not the morning near?’ (*Hud:* 81) The time for their appointed suffering was set in the morning because it is a calmer, more peaceful time. Therefore, the punishment will be much more severe on their hearts. Allah then says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَ أَمۡرُنَا جَعَلۡنَا عَٰلِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمۡطَرۡنَا
عَلَيۡهَا حِجَارَةٗ مِّن سِجِّيلٖ مَّنضُودٖ ٨٢

And so when what We had ordained came about, We turned their town upside down and rained down stones of baked clay on it, layer upon layer [82] (The Quran, *Hud:* 82)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* made it clear that when His Judgment came to pass, all the natural elements complied with His command to destroy the tribe of Lut (Lot). It is said that the tribe of Lut (Lot) included five villages. These were Sodom, Daduma, Da`uh, `Amura and Qatim. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We turned those (sinful towns) upside down’ (*Hud:* 82), this meant that these villages were completely upturned.

The Quran said in another chapter, ‘Just as He thrust into perdition those cities (*al-mu`tafika*) that were overthrown’ (*an-Najm:* 53). The word *al-mu`tafika* is derived from the word *ifk* which means ‘intentional lying’ or ‘purposeful deceit’. In effect, these people intentionally ‘inverted’ the truth into falsehood and contradicted reality. Therefore *al-mu`tafika* is a reference to those villages that were upturned in a state of complete disarray. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* pelted them with waves of hard clay pebbles.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, ‘To let loose upon them stone-hard (*hijara*) blows of chastisement’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 33). The word *hijara* (stones) gives a sense of solidity, whereas the word *teen* (mud) gives the sense of pliability. However, the mud that rained on them that day had solidified and became as hard as rocks, by Allah’s Command. Furthermore, it rained down upon them in systematic waves. It was as if every rock knew exactly who its target was.

Allah *Glorified is He* says;

مُّسَوَّمَةً عِندَ رَبِّكَۖ وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ بِبَعِيدٖ ﴿٨٣﴾

Marked from your Lord. It is not far from the evildoers [83] (The Quran, *Hud:* 83)

The word *Musawwama* means that the stones were 'marked'. It was as if every pebble was pre-destined to strike its respective target as cruise missiles seek out their individual targets. Allah *Glorified is He* had intended these pebbles to punish selected human beings and not to annihilate entire countries. Thus, the clay pebbles were raining down in a highly organized attack. Allah *Glorified is He* used the word *sijjeel* when describing their nature, 'Stone-hard blows (*sijjeel*) of pre-ordained chastisement, one upon another' (*Hud:* 82). Thus, the pebbles were ordered, as the word *sijjeel* was used in this verse. The word also occurs in the following verses describing the punishment of Abraha, the Abyssinian, who had attacked the *Ka'ba,* 'Thus, He let loose upon them (Abraha's army) great swarms of flying creatures, which smote them with stone-hard blows (*sijjeel*) of chastisement pre-ordained' (*al-Fil:* 3-4).

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse we are currently studying by saying, 'And these (blows of doom) are never far from the evildoers!' (*Hud:* 83) These 'evildoers' are those disbelievers who rejected Allah's message which was brought to humanity by the long succession of messengers that was finalized by the mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We know that these stories of past prophets served to reinforce the certitude and the confidence of our own Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They also served as examples of commendable behaviour (on the part of previous prophets), 'We convey unto thee (only) that wherewith We (aim to) make firm your heart' (*Hud:* 120).

These stories narrated the conflicts that arose between Allah's messengers, who were enforced with divine miracles, and the disbelievers that denied them. All these conflicts inevitably ended with the victory of the messenger over the disbelievers.

However, previous prophets were not asked to fight for their faith on the battlefield. They were only responsible for the exposition of the metaphysical proofs and the delivery of their messages. When their people rejected these proofs, Allah intervened to punish the transgressors. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with (the tribe of) `Ad, these were the people of Aram who had many pillars, the like of whom has never been constructed in all the land. And with (the tribe of) Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the (many) monuments? It was they who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein. Therefore, your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering, for verily, your Lord is ever on the watch!’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-14)

With the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* arose new obligations. This is because the religion which Prophet Muhammad brought would be the prevailing religion as the end of time draws near. His community of believers would be responsible for carrying forth the Divine Message after him. Every member of his community must have a basic understanding and knowledge of Allah’s Commands, so that he can share it with others. Every member is, in his own right, a representative of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And thus have We willed you to be a community of the optimal way, so that (with your lives) you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that The Apostle might bear witness to it before you’ (*al-Baqara:* 143). Therefore, every member from the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an extension of the Islamic Message. Instead of defeating the disbelievers through direct intervention from heaven, Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered Prophet Muhammad’s community to defend their religion with strength. The purpose here is not to force their beliefs upon people, for, as a matter of Islamic principle, belief is forbidden to be imposed on others. You can force a person to perform physical actions, but you cannot dictate what they feel in their hearts. Allah *Glorified is He* wants faith that comes from the heart, as a result of people’s free will. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Would you (Muhammad), perhaps, torment yourself (with grief) because they (who live around you) refuse to believe (in the message)? Had we so willed, we could have sent down unto them a message from the skies, so that their necks would (be forced to) bow down before it in humility.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4)

Thus, the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was entrusted with a two-fold mission. Firstly, they are to transmit the message of Prophet Muhammad to the future generations, with every generation being responsible for transmitting it to the next. Prophet Muhammad said, 'Allah bestows a radiating glow on the one who, upon hearing my sayings, teaches them and conveys them to those who did not hear them, for many a receiver (of knowledge) will understand better than the one who heard it first.'(1) Secondly, they were entrusted in standing firm against the disbelievers, not to force faith upon them, but to defend the right of people to choose their religion. In Islam, no swords are to be unsheathed to impose faith on people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.' (*al-Kahf:* 29) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants the hearts that are sincere in their reverence and not the hearts that are forced or compelled.

In fact, if a man chooses to believe in Islam, he is told that he must commit himself to its faith and not break any of its laws. This serves to make entering Islam a voluntary step. Given this, how can it be argued that Islam was imposed on people?

Thus, the believer from among Prophet Muhammad's community should adhere to the following two principles. The first principle is observing the pillars of Islamic faith and the second principle is the spreading of its message. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The scholars (*`Ulama`*) from among my community are equivalent to the Prophets of Israel.'(2)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/437), by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2657, 2658), by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (232) and by Al-Hamidi (1/47). This saying was narrated on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Cited by As-Suyuty in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (293), adding that its source was unknown. According to Ash-Shawkani in Al-Fawa`id Al-Majmu`a) (286), this is also the opinion of Ibn Hajar and Az-Zarkashy. Also, see Al-`Ajaluni's Kashf al-Khafa` (2/83). We can understand from the Hadith, that we must venerate the scholars for their sincerity and their integrity in the transmission of the message, and for their intelligent exposition [of the message].*

Now does the word *`Ulama`* (scholars) refer only to religious scholars? No. The term applies to anyone who has thorough knowledge of at least one issue pertaining to faith. They should then roam the earth conveying this knowledge to the disbelievers while leaving them the free decision to choose their faith. The believer should also stand ready to defend Prophet Muhammad's Message against any power that threatens people's freedom to choose their faith.

Thus, stories such as this story in the Quran, served to strengthen Prophet Muhammad's heart. We know that Allah *Glorified is He* entrusted His Prophet with the Message while he was in Mecca. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proclaimed the message loudly and clearly, directly addressing the chiefs of the Arabian Peninsula and not just the tribes living on its outskirts. Therefore, no one can accuse him of having preached only to the weak tribes (of the outlying provinces), shying away from the masters of the peninsula, who were Quraysh at that time.

Quraysh had risen to prominence having taken up residence near the *Ka'ba* which all the Arab tribes used to visit. Thus, if any member of the tribe of Quraysh were to be harmed, Quraysh could exact its revenge when the members of the offending tribe made their pilgrimage to the *Ka'ba*. Thus, the tribe of Quraysh rose to power due to the strategic value of the *Ka'ba*. It is the *Ka'ba* that lifted Quraysh to their prominent position, and gave value to the deified idols brought in by the various tribes. Those idols were then placed inside the *Ka'ba* in the hopes that the sanctity of the *Ka'ba* would include them. Therefore, Quraysh gained all their power from the *Ka'ba*. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came along and proclaimed the message of Islam clearly to the chiefs of Quraysh, he publicly exposed their ignorance without being intimidated by their power or their prominent status.

Allah willed for the triumph of Islam not to happen at the hands of the leaders of Quraysh in Mecca; it happened in Medina because Allah wanted to let the world know that tribal allegiance to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not cause the people to follow and believe him. Allah willed for the weak people who dwelled near the boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula to be those who advocated the Message of Islam. It was the people's belief in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that caused them to advocate him, not tribal allegiance. Allah has described the tribe of Quraysh as unjust and clarified to them that the place which was turned upside down is not too far from them, and they should learn from these events of the past.

It is well known that injustice means taking someone's right away and giving it to another who does not deserve it. When it is used in the context of religion, it refers to major *shirk* (associating others with Allah in His Divinity or worship). Accordingly, there are different levels of injustice.

The tribe of Quraysh wronged themselves extremely because they associated others with Allah in His Divinity which is the greatest form of injustice. Allah wants to remind them that when He passes His Judgment, nothing can hold it back. Therefore, Allah instructed them to pay attention to the fact that just as suffering befell the other villages which are close to them they were liable to be punished. The distance between Medina and the Levant may seem great, but Allah enabled them to travel to the Levant every summer.

The ruins of these villages lay on the routes they took while travelling. Allah says about their location, 'They are still there on the highway.' (*al-Hijr:* 76) This means that they lie on the routes which they regularly took without being swept away by flood or winds. Therefore, they should have learnt lessons every time they passed by them for them to avoid committing another injustice. Allah also warned them every time they passed by the village of the tribe of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* to whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Do you construct on every elevation a sign, amusing yourselves. Take for yourselves palaces and fortresses that you might abide eternally? And when you strike, you strike as tyrants.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 128-130) As Quraysh saw how the old dwellings of the tribes of Thamud, `Ad and Lut (Lot) were completely vacant, they should not have avoided injustice and learnt a lesson concerning the destiny of those who associated others with Allah in His Divinity. Allah *Glorified is He* alerts them to the fact that not only did they associate others with Allah in His Divinity, but also they were also ungrateful to Allah Who blessed them with the winter journey to Yemen and summer journey to the Levant. Both journeys were for commercial purposes and brought about immense profits to the people of Quraysh, as they used to travel with their capital money to buy goods which they sold to the dwellers of Mecca and the pilgrims of the *Ka'ba*. The people by whom the merchants of Quraysh passed during their journey held Quraysh in high esteem because they lived near the holy *Ka'ba*. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has shown them the bounties He bestowed on them in His saying, 'Have you not considered, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan into misguidance? He sent against them birds in flocks. Striking them with stones of hard clay, He made them like eaten straw. (*al-Fil:* 1-5) If the people who came to destroy the *Ka'ba* - the symbol of power for Quraysh - had succeeded in destroying the *Ka'ba* and the pilgrim's destination had shifted from Mecca to Sana'a, the people of Quraysh would have no longer enjoyed their prominent position. However, Allah protected the holy *Ka'ba* and sent against the aggressors birds in flocks that made them like eaten straw. Why did Allah *Glorified is He* do this? The answer is mentioned in the chapter of *Quraysh* which follows the chapter of *al-Fil*, as Allah says, '[He did this] to make Quraysh feel secure. Secure in their winter and summer journeys. So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.' (*Quraysh:* 1-4)

Therefore, they should have learnt a lesson when they passed by the ruined villages. As they used to pass by these ancient villages for purposes of trade to earn their living without learning a lesson, they committed another injustice. Therefore, Allah says, 'Allah's punishment is not from the wrongdoers [very] far' (*Hud:* 83). The verse may also mean that Allah warns Quraysh that the destruction that befell the previous disbelievers is not too far from them, and that He can strike every disbeliever with a marked rock wherever he may be.

Those who have superficial knowledge of Arabic find fault with the Quran out of misunderstanding. For example, they wonder how Allah says in the Arabic text of the following verse, '…Allah's punishment is not from the wrongdoers [very] far.' (*Hud:* 83) *Ma hiya* which is a feminine form and follows it by *biba`eed* (not very far) in the masculine form, while it is supposed to be *biba`eedah*, i.e. in the feminine form, they have forgotten that this is the saying of Allah. They may not also have a wide knowledge of the Arabic language because when the form *fa`il* of the morphological balance - which refers to the word 'far' in the translation of the verse - occurs as *maf`ul* (the object of a verb), it is permissible to use the masculine or the feminine form. For example, Allah says in another verse, ‘angels, moreover, are [his] assistants.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 4), and, ‘Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to the doers of good’ (*al-A’raf:* 56). Their ignorance of the language causes them to make such a mistake.

Allah *Glorified is He* begins recounting another story of the numerous stories of the prophets; this one is the story of Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِلَىٰ مَدۡيَنَ أَخَاهُمۡ شُعَيۡبٗاۚ قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنۡ إِلَٰهٍ غَيۡرُهُۥۖ وَلَا تَنقُصُواْ
ٱلۡمِكۡيَالَ وَٱلۡمِيزَانَۚ إِنِّيٓ أَرَىٰكُم بِخَيۡرٖ وَإِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ عَذَابَ يَوۡمٖ مُّحِيطٖ (٨٤)

And to Midyan, We sent their brother *Shu`aib*. He said, ‘My people, worship God. You have no god other than Him. Do not give short measure nor short weight. I see you are prospering, but I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day [84]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 84)

Midyan is the name of Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) *peace be upon him* son who was not alive during the era of Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* but the tribe whose members were his descendants was named after him. The village where these people dwelled was also named after him. Thus, if you say that Shu`aib (Jethro) was sent to the tribe of Midyan, this statement will be true; and if you were to say that Shu`aib (Jethro) was sent to a village called Midyan, this statement will also be true, since there must be inhabitants living in that village. Allah quotes the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) as saying, ‘Ask the town in which we were and the caravan in which we came’ (*Yusuf:* 82). Thus, sometimes the word refers to the place and at other times it refers to the inhabitants of a certain place. Shu`aib (Jethro) began preaching his message to his people in the same way that previous messengers had done, as he called them to worship Allah alone without any partners. This is the common element in all prophetic messages. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham), and Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) - to establish the religion and not be divided therein. Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him].' (*ash-Shura:* 13) Therefore, the most important element in creed is to worship Allah Alone without any partners. Allah enjoins commands only on those who believe in Him while those who do not believe in Him receive no commands. Allah prefixes every command with, 'O you who have believed' (*al-Baqara:* 178), whether this commandment concerns the issue of fasting or seeking retribution, for example, it is always preceded by 'O you who have believed'. Therefore, I have always said that underlying reason (for obeying) any commandment is one's faith in the One Who enjoins this command, and there is no need to look for any other reasons. For example, if someone says that the reason for ablution is cleanliness, we say that in case that water is unavailable, we perform *tayammum* (dry ablution with clean earth) using dust or rock. The goal, therefore, is to prepare ourselves for prayer in any way that fulfils the religious objective; worshiping the Creator *Glorified and Exalted is He*. The believer should never delay the performance of a religious rite for merely finding the reason behind it because the reason for performing it is the fact that it has been enjoined by Allah.

Similarly, we follow everything that Prophet Muhamma *peace and blessing be upon him* said without looking for the reason. If we postponed obeying Allah's commands concerning eating pork and drinking alcohol until they are scientifically justified, diseases would spread, as it has been proven that pork is impure as it contains diseases, and alcohol causes damage to the brain and liver.

Muslims obey Allah's Commands concerning these issues the moment they were enjoined due to their belief in the instructions of their creed and their desire to draw closer to Allah. These commands have been proven beneficial.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and to Midyan, We sent their brother Shu`aib (Jethro). He said, "My people worship Allah. You have no god other than Him."' (*Hud:* 84) We have learnt that worship is not limited solely to prayer, fasting, alms giving and pilgrimage, as these are the basic pillars(1) of Islam which involves the construction of the earth through following Allah's commands(1). Therefore, every action, which makes performing the obligatory actions possible, is itself obligatory in turn.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him and his father that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Islam is based on five (pillars): testifying that there is no true god except Allah and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, performing prayer, the payment of zakat (alms giving), fasting during Ramadan and performing pilgrimage to the House of Allah (the Ka`ba).' [Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (8) and by Muslim in his Sahih (16)]*

Any work, which a person performs and the society needs, is an act of worship. If a particular profession is in decline, it is incumbent on the officials to find people who can learn and reinvigorate the craft in question; perfecting one's work or craft is also a form of worship.

Allah quotes Shu`aib (Jethro) as saying, 'You have no god other than Him' (*Hud:* 84). It means, in other words, not to take your religious commands from anyone other than Allah *Glorified is He* as there is no god other than Him with no partner.

A person should never accept rulings from a human being while finding fault with Allah's rulings. In addition, a person should never wrong himself by thinking that Allah overlooked a certain ruling which we should follow.(2) Therefore, beware of supplanting any of Allah's rulings; understand it first, and if it is precise and clear, apply it, and if it is general or nor clear, make juristic effort to infer the most suitable legal ruling.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked his envoy to Yemen, 'How will you judge?' he said, 'We will judge according to what is in Allah's Book.' Prophet Muhammad asked, 'If it is not in Allah's Book?' he said, 'Then with the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah.' Prophet Muhammad asked, 'If it is not in the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah?' he said, 'We will give in our view.' Then he said that Prophet Muhammad gently stroke his chest and said, ‘All praise is due to Allah, Who granted the messenger of the Messenger of Allah success in what pleases the Messenger of Allah.(1)

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(1) The commandments constitute all the prescriptions and the proscriptions. We derive from the prescriptions that which is *fard* (obligations), *Sunnah* (whatever is narrated from the Prophet) and *'mustahab'* (desirable). Prescriptions involve religious and social matters. Proscriptions include that which is *haram* (unlawful) and *makruh* (prohibited). The society will be good so long as the prescriptions are followed and proscriptions are avoided, as Allah says, '…so accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7). Allah also says, 'Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course...' (*Fussilat:* 30).

(2) Allah says, '…This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as your religion...' (*al-Ma'ida*: 3).

After Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* called the people of Midyan to worship Allah *Glorified is He* alone - which is the common denominator between all the Prophetic messages - rulings followed; for every sinner, there is a means of repentance. As for the person who gave short measure, the messenger rectified this matter.

In the past, world communities were isolated from one another; thus, some deficiencies might be prevalent in one area, but did not exist in another. All prophets were sent to treat the shortcomings and a deficiency that was specific to the area to which they were sent except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is a mercy for all people, and is the last Prophet and Messenger. Prophet Muhammad was sent when the world was on the eve of an era of unprecedented religious interconnectedness. With the advent of modern communication, distances between countries were enormously reduced. At present, what happens on the American continent is broadcast in our country on the same day, as the world is closely interconnected. Spiritual diseases have proliferated and prevailed because of the speed at which communication takes place. In addition, there is no longer any discernment between good and evil. Therefore, Allah willed for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be the Seal of the Prophets.

The shortcomings of the people of Midyan were that they did not worship Allah alone, and were guilty of giving short measure. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Shu`aib (Jethro) as saying, ‘do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering’ (*Hud:* 84). When the religious scholars read this verse, they realised that the verse is not only relevant to things measured and weighed.

This is just from the point of view of the seller. The meaning of this verse encompasses the seller and buyer so that the buyer must take his rightful share of the commodity and the seller must take his rightful share of the profit. Therefore, this verse includes both buyer and seller(1).

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/230, 236, 242) and by Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (3592, Book on Judgments, from the Hadith narrated by Mu`adh ibn Jabal*

It is well known that *al-kayl* is the process of measuring something against something else. If we are measuring weight, then we need units for measuring weight. If we are measuring volume, then we need units for measuring volume. Textiles are measured by the metre; land is measured by area etc. Other things are measured by volume which entails calculating the length, width and height and multiplying them.

The important matter is that every person should receive his rightful share. This principle applies even when it comes to compensating a worker for the effort of work he has exerted in performing his work. The most famous case is the measure and weight, and the purpose of other kinds of measurement is to give everyone his rightful due. If a person starts to take other people's rights, he will continue doing so; and if some people usurp the rights of others, the latter would stop doing their work correctly. When you give someone less than what he deserves or if the payment he receives does not suite the effort he has exerted in work, he will become sluggish in his work and will not perform his work properly. This will result in work deficiencies. Therefore, I emphasize that giving everyone his rightful due results in a better quality of work.

Instead of hoarding money, ambitious people must work because when they set up a project or establish a building, they benefit the poor-even if they do not realise it -because he who establishes a building benefits the construction workers and the manufacturers of building materials. Therefore, he benefits the poor workers even before he himself benefits from this building.

Therefore, it is important that every person receives his rightful due before his sweat dries. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Give the worker his wage before his sweat dries.'(2)

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(1) It is deduced from Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi's intention that giving everyone his due right amounts maintaining balance in life.

(2) *Related by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2443) on the authority of Ibn `Umar... Al-Busairi states in his book `Az-Zawa`id, 'Its chain of transmission is weak, as there are two weak narrators.*
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We learn that Islam encourages altruism and emphasises at the same time the rewards that Allah will give to the one who gives preference to other people over himself although he may be poor. When a person has little money, but gives it to another in need this means that this person has given another preference over himself, but he will receive reward from Allah *Glorified is He* double the money he paid.

Islam teaches us the superior usefulness which Allah intends to establish among people. When this principle governs the people's lives, everyone in society will benefit easily.

In this verse, which we are currently explaining, Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* tells the people of Midyan, '...do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering…' (*Hud:* 84). This means that they had no need to do such underhand practises because the sellers owned enough merchandise, and the buyer had enough money. Therefore, they should have been content with what they had and everyone should have received his rightful due. This is an issue which many people ignore; if the seller cheats his customers when they buy a certain commodity from him, other sellers will cheat him when he buys other types of goods that are necessary for his life.

If a person cheats others by giving short measure and weight, other sellers will cheat him when he buys the commodities he needs for his daily life. Therefore, Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told them that they were not in need for such dishonest measures because they were already prosperous. Then, he warned them, saying, 'But I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day.' (*Hud:* 84) when you give a buyer less than his full due or when you take from a seller more than your rightful due, you are not only cheating the person you are dealing with, but also you are cheating yourself. We all know that the seller or the buyer may be inattentive, and a

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= *The Hadith is related by Al-Tabarany in his (Al-Mu`jam As-Saghir) (1/20) on the authority of Jabir; also, Abu Na`im in Al-Hulya (7/142) on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*
By these chains of transmission and narrations, the Hadith has acquired the status of Hasan (a Hadith whose chain of narration contains a narrator with weak exactitude, but is free from eccentricity or blemish). The origin of the Hadith is mentioned in Sahih Al-Bukhari, (Book on Transactions) where it is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah

seller may try to take advantage of the buyer's inadvertence by pressing down upon the scale with his fingers (so that the desired merchandise may seem heavier). The buyer may also try to take advantage of the seller's inadvertence by lifting the scale up with his fingers while the seller is not looking to take more than his fair share. This is a type of self-deception because Allah has ordered us to be honest in our economic dealings with other people as the benefits gained from anything - no matter how copious it is - is limited as human life on earth is limited. Therefore, he who cheats and deceives others exposes himself to Allah's endless punishment in the Hereafter. Thus, a person may earn a meagre profit in this transient world, but he meets endless and overwhelming torment in the Hereafter. This indicates that the tormented person cannot escape from it. In the worldly life, you may escape some suffering by seeking refuge with someone more powerful than you are, but on the Day of Judgment, if you are destined for hellfire, you will face a day on which there will be no trading, friendship or intercession.

Allah continues with what Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) said to the people of Midyan saying:

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ أَوۡفُواْ ٱلۡمِكۡيَالَ وَٱلۡمِيزَانَ بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۖ وَلَا تَبۡخَسُواْ
ٱلنَّاسَ أَشۡيَآءَهُمۡ وَلَا تَعۡثَوۡاْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مُفۡسِدِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land [85] (The Quran, *Hud:* 85)

In the previous verse, Allah says, 'in fairness, give full measure and weight' (*Hud:* 85). Accordingly, we learn that fulfilment of measure and weight is religiously required because Allah speaks about things measured or weighted in the absolute sense, as this includes every transaction that takes place between the buyer and the seller. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Woe to those who give short measure, who demand of other people full measure for themselves, but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1-3) The seller may ask the buyer to weigh for himself regarding him trustworthy, but the buyer may cheat the seller by taking more than his right. The seller may do the opposite, a matter which involves misery for the both. Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) says, ‘My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight…’ (*Hud:* 85). Allah has explained the issue of giving people short measure and weight and that of fulfilment of measure and weight. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs…’ (*Hud:* 85).

This verse has a general meaning which is not limited to things measured or weighed. A buyer may belittle the value of a certain commodity, a person may take a bribe from another, usurp that which is not rightfully his, extort or embezzle, which all amount usurping someone else’s right using in different ways.

Snatching means taking hold of something suddenly and running away, extortion means obtaining something by force, embezzlement means secretly taking something which is in one’s care and bribery means taking money or presents in return for offering a service for a person who is already entitled to this service.

Allah’s saying, ‘...in fairness, give full measure and weight…’ (*Hud:* 85), includes different meanings, and the word *al-bakhs* is to harm someone by giving him less than his full due, whether this be in terms of volume or weight. The word *ashya`* is the plural of the word *shay`* which refers to different things regardless of their gender. Allah instructs us not to be lured by anything no matter how small it is.

In this verse, we notice that the word *an-na*s is plural just as the word *ashya`ahum* is. When two plurals occur together, the meaning of the verse applies to each person of these people and everything of these *ashya`*. In other words, the verse means that no one is allowed to belittle anything possessed by any person.

There is a story of a pious man who leased a riding animal from a lender so that he could ride it from one place to another. As he was riding it, his whip with which he guided the animal fell to the ground, so he stopped the animal and dismounted and returned on foot to the spot where the whip fell. When he had found the whip, he walked back to his animal and remounted it. A person asked him, ‘Why did you not ride your animal back to where you had dropped your whip’? Whereupon the pious man replied, ‘I leased this animal to go from a certain point to a certain destination; my agreement with the lender does not include using the animal to search for my lost whip'

There is a story of another pious man who was writing a book. In the past, people used to help the ink dry faster by soaking up the excess using sand. However, the pious man could not find anything with which he could soak up the excess ink. Therefore, he took a handful of dust from the base of a wall, and then he went to the owner of the wall and asked him to assess the price of the dust he took from the base of his wall. Therefore, the owner of the wall said, 'By Allah, because of your integrity I will not assess the price of the dust.' Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* concludes the verse saying, '…do not commit abuse on earth, spreading corruption.' (*Hud:* 85)

The Arabic word *adha* means committing abuse and spreading corruption, such as sullying water well or digging a hole in a road used by people. Thus, it is something that destroys that which is good.

All members of society are ordered not to spread such corruption. If all were to apply this directive, the whole society would become upright. However, the problem is that some people want other people not to be corrupt, while they themselves are corrupt and do not like other people to stop their acts of corruption.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

بَقِيَّتُ ٱللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ۚ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ عَلَيْكُم بِحَفِيظٍ ﴿٨٦﴾

What lasts with God is best for you, if you are believers: I am not your keeper' [86] (The Quran, *Hud:* 86)

This means that whatever they gain from honest transactions is better for them because the one who takes more than his fair share commits a mistake because unlawful earning removes blessing from lawful earning. In addition, the one who takes what is not rightfully his, Allah will cause him to lose his unfair share. Someone may say, 'so and so is awash with Allah's blessings' which means that even though his income is low, he is well off and able to raise his children in relative comfort as opposed to someone else who has amassed his wealth through unlawful means and leads a distressing life.

This person may have numerous expenses so that his budget cannot afford his expenses, as Allah *Glorified is He* has caused him to fall prey to many evil temptations. A person may succeed in deceiving other people, but he can never deceive his Lord.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘What lasts with Allah is best for you…’ (*Hud:* 86) which means that Allah guards the person who does not usurp other people’s rights against evil temptations and all the expenses that consume their money. Consider negative provision rather than a positive one because most people tend to emphasize positive provision which means seeking large amounts of money. However, they forget that Allah causes the person who gained money unlawfully to lose his money through evil channels of expenses while He protects the person who guards the people’s rights from these evil channels of expenses.

Allah does not bless those who raise their children with unlawful money. We find - for example - that the son of a briber takes private lessons and still fails whereas the son of an upright person, who earns his living from lawful sources, gains knowledge easily and succeeds. In addition, Allah may cause the person who earns his living from unlawful sources to have a greedy wife that is never satisfied with anything whereas He grants the person who guards the people’s rights a wife that is content and appreciative of her husband.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers…’ (*Hud:* 86). This means that if you believe that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Ever-Watchful and the Self-Existing; do not usurp other people’s rights as Allah watches you. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying, ‘…I am not your keeper.’ (*Hud:* 86) Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* has made it clear to the people of Midyan that he will not watch every corrupt person to prevent him from doing any act of corruption because every person must watch over himself as long as he believes in Allah *Glorified is He* and knows that He says, ‘What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers…’ (*Hud:* 86). This means that what lasts will be blessed, and the purpose of faith is to follow what is prescribed and to shun what is proscribed. This is not the case with man-made law which is not concerned with what people do secretly. Therefore, it seems as if it protects people from being subject to legal prosecution. On the other hand, the Divine Law encompasses all that humans do in public and secretly.

Allah says, ‘and to Midyan, We sent their brother Shu`aib (Jethro). He said, “My people worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. Do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering, but I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day. My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land. What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers; I am not your keeper.”’ (*Hud:* 84-86) When one contemplates these verses, he can find the elements that protect the well-being of society; if the society is not protected, it will not corrupt. Allah has willed for the society to be integrated without redundancies, because if the skills are redundant, people will not need each other and will not be interdependent. Public interest necessitates that people depend on the skills of each other. For example, the person who studies for obtaining a PhD needs the person who sweeps the streets, and the person who treats people - with the help of Allah - needs the person who repairs the sewers. What werethe response of the people of Midyan to Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro)?

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُواْ يَٰشُعَيۡبُ أَصَلَوٰتُكَ تَأۡمُرُكَ أَن نَّتۡرُكَ مَا يَعۡبُدُ ءَابَآؤُنَآ أَوۡ
أَن نَّفۡعَلَ فِيٓ أَمۡوَٰلِنَا مَا نَشَٰٓؤُاْۖ إِنَّكَ لَأَنتَ ٱلۡحَلِيمُ ٱلرَّشِيدُ ﴿٨٧﴾

They said, ‘Shu`aib, does your prayer tell you that we should abandon what our forefathers worshipped and refrain from doing whatever we please with our own property? Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man’ [87] (The Quran, *Hud:* 87)

The verse means that the people of Midyan asked Prophet *Shu`aib*, ‘Does your Lord ask us to abandon what our forefathers worshipped’? One may ask why they said, ‘does your prayer’ (*Hud:* 87)? The answer is that Islam is based on five pillars. The first is to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Prophet; it suffices a person to utter this testimony of faith once in his lifetime. Then performing the prayer, giving alms, fasting during the month of *Ramadan* and performing pilgrimage, for whoever can bear the journey. If you consider these pillars, you will find that a person may not be able to give alms or perform the pilgrimage. In addition, a person may be sick, so he may be excused from fasting during *Ramadan*, and he may utter the testimony of faith once during his life. Only the prayer remains; therefore, it is said, 'Prayer is the most important pillar of faith, whoever performs it, establishes the entire faith, and whoever abandons it destroys the entire faith'. Prayer is the only pillar which enables the believer to reaffirm his loyalty to his Lord five times daily.

No person is excused from the daily prayer whatever his circumstances are. If a person is unable to move, he can perform the prayer with his eyes. If he is not able to move the eyes, he must pray with his heart. Even in the condition of war or battle, the Muslim should perform the prayer of fear. Therefore, the prayer is the pillar which is not waived and should be performed five times a day. In addition, Allah has attached due importance to it in the Islamic law.

All religious obligations have been revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* as Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* brought them to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who conveyed them to us. The five daily prayers were the only rituals with which Allah charged Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Night Journey when he was at *sidrat al-muntaha* (a lote-tree of the utmost boundary over the seventh heaven beyond which none can pass) because of its great importance.

For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - you will find that when a president of a country receives his daily briefings he delegates the work to his subordinates while putting in a suggestion as to how the work should be done. However, when the president receives a matter of critical importance, he summons the responsible official and arranges with him the appropriate arrangements and procedures that should be taken. If this is the case with human matters, what will be the case when Allah assigns an obligation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?

Allah *Glorified is He* willed for the obligation of prayer to be the only obligation that has attained this status due to its importance, as it is the only pillar that must be performed five times a day. You may utter the testimony of faith once in your lifetime, but you utter it every time you pray.

Alms giving involves paying a portion of one's wealth; a person may not be born with any money except if he had inherited some. It is obligatory for a person to give alms from his money which can only be attained by hard work. In addition, work itself takes up time, but praying involves sacrificing some time; sacrifice of one's time is broader than giving alms.

During fasting, you refrain from the carnal desires from dawn until sunset, but you continue to practise all the other activities of life. However, during prayer, you do not only abstain from the carnal desires, but also you abstain from the other activities of life which are permissible during fasting.

During pilgrimage, as well as prayer, you direct yourself towards the Holy House of Allah. Thus, all the pillars of Islam are contained in the prayer.

In the verse which we are currently examining, the people of Midyan mocked their Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his prayer, just as the disbelievers of Quraysh mocked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The people of Midyan told Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro), 'does your prayer tell you' (*Hud:* 87) thinking that they were ridiculing him as he was in the habit of praying often; the disbelievers of Quraysh were also ignorant of the fact that prayer can prevent sins.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). Thus, prayer can urge a person to do the good and prevent him from doing evil. Since a ruling has been issued for a certain matter, it entails some repercussions. A person may say to another, 'I know that you pray so I trust you' or 'how you can commit such a sin although you perform prayer'? Many people forget that such analogies can solve numerous dilemmas; they tend to consider only one side of the issue and forget its counterpart. Therefore, so long as Allah *Glorified is He* says that prayer prevents committing sins, it should enjoin good. Another example is Allah's saying about the drowning of Pharaoh's people, 'And the heaven and earth wept not for them...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29). So long as Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* forbade the heavens and the earth from weeping over the people of Pharaoh, then it is clear that they weep over other people because the heavens and the earth were created for the sole purpose of praising Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it…' (*al-'Ahzab:* 72). In this verse, the heavens and the earth chose to be among the creatures who praise Allah, as He says, '…there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise….' (*al-Isra':* 44) Therefore, if the heavens and the earth see a person praising Allah, they will inevitably love him and if they see a disbeliever, they will hate him. The heavens and the earth did not weep over the people of Pharaoh because they were deluded, as the heavens and the earth only weep over the upright people.

'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* settled this issue as he said, 'When a believer dies he is mourned in two places: one on the earth and the other in heaven. The place which mourns him on earth is the place where he used to pray, and the place which mourns him in heaven is the spot where his good deeds ascend to heaven.' The place where he used to pray loses a person who used to pray there, and the place through which his good deeds used to ascend to heaven misses the scent of his good works ascending to heaven. Therefore, prayer may refer to and symbolises the religion. The prayer itself involves commands just as the religion involves commands; it represents sincere faith because false faith has no benefit.

The people of Midyan wanted to mock Prophet Shu`aib's call to faith, so they asked, '...does your prayer tell you that we should abandon what our forefathers worshipped…' (*Hud:* 87). This saying involves their response to his call for them to worship no god but Allah, as there is no other god but Him, not to give short measure and weight and not to deprive people of their dues. This saying also involves their response to their call for them to realise that whatever lasts with Allah is better for them, and not to spread corruption on earth. They asked him, 'Do you also forbid us from using our money in the way we want to'? It seems that they lost their insight because if they allowed themselves to do whatever they wanted with their money, others will also do what they wish with their own money; and interests will clash and everyone will lose. Their saying, '…Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man.' (*Hud:* 87)

They continued to mock Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* as they said at the beginning, '...does your prayer tell you that we should abandon what our forefathers …' (*Hud:* 87). Their situation resembles that of the hypocrites of Medina who said to the Ansar (Helpers from Medina), '...Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of Allah….' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) Their purpose was to stir temptation between the Immigrants and the Ansar. They said, 'the Messenger of Allah' only out of sarcasm, as they were urging the wealthy men of Medina to starve the immigrants.

They also resembled the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) when he forbade them from committing sins; they said ironically, '…Evict them from your town! Indeed, they are men who keep themselves pure.' (*al-A'raf:* 82) Is their purity a valid reason for expelling them from the town? Because they did not want anyone to disturb their life of sin, this saying resembles what some people say in our daily life, 'Do not consult so-and-so as he is strict in religious matters'.

The people of Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) said, '…Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man.' (*Hud:* 87) They mock him because he did not agree with them on worshipping any god other than Allah and giving short measure and weight. He also forbade them from depriving people of their due. When a righteous ruling is pronounced by a person who does not adhere to or believe in it, his purpose of doing so is mockery and ridicule. This type of mocking language is mentioned in the Quran in many verses. Allah *Glorified is He* tells those who were tyrannical and oppressive in their life, and will be tormented in the Hereafter, 'It will be said, "Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!"' (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '…if they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like murky oil, which scalds [their] faces…' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

Both sayings include mockery and sarcasm. The following verse which we are explaining now, '...does your prayer tell you…' (*Hud:* 87) involves mockery of his prayer. Likewise is their saying, '…Indeed you are a tolerant and sensible man.' (*Hud:* 87). They tell him that he is a tolerant and sensible, so he should not say, '...worship Allah. You have no god other than Him' (*Hud:* 84). They said that because they used to worship idols. They also ridiculed him as he called them to stop giving short measure and weight. They also rejected his advice regarding making good use of their wealth, and the reason that justifies Shu`aib's preaching is that he is a tolerant and sensible, so how can he call them to do that which opposes their desires? Allah *Glorified is He* relates what Shu`aib (Jethro) says to them, saying:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ أَرَءَيۡتُمۡ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّي وَرَزَقَنِي مِنۡهُ رِزۡقًا حَسَنٗاۚ
وَمَآ أُرِيدُ أَنۡ أُخَالِفَكُمۡ إِلَىٰ مَآ أَنۡهَىٰكُمۡ عَنۡهُۚ إِنۡ أُرِيدُ إِلَّا ٱلۡإِصۡلَٰحَ مَا
ٱسۡتَطَعۡتُۚ وَمَا تَوۡفِيقِيٓ إِلَّا بِٱللَّهِۚ عَلَيۡهِ تَوَكَّلۡتُ وَإِلَيۡهِ أُنِيبُ ﴿٨٨﴾

He answered, ‘My people, can you not see? What if I am acting on clear evidence from my Lord? He Himself has given me good provision: I do not want to do what I am forbidding you to do, I only want to put things right as far as I can. I cannot succeed without God’s help: I trust in Him, and always turn to Him [88] (The Quran, *Hud:* 88)

In this verse, Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* announced that he was acting on clear evidence from Allah; *Glorified is He* who gave him an authoritative proof. Allah bestowed on him good provision with which he needed no one else, as he lived in well-being. The words *ar-rizq al-hasan* may refer to the blessing of prophethood. Allah *Glorified is He* quotes Shu`aib (Jethro) as saying, ‘...I do not want to do what I am forbidding you to do…’ (*Hud:* 88). This means that he practised what he preached; he did not give short measure or weight and did not deprive people of their due, as he did not worship anyone but Allah.

And the word *ukhalif* (contradict) indicates two opposing directions; if you intend to discourage people from doing something so that you could do it, this is expressed by the phrase *khalafta ila,* but if you intend to encourage a person to do something so that you do not have to do it, this is expressed by the phrase ‘*khalafta `an*’.

Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* clarified to them that he did not forbid them from these actions for him to do them. Rather, he forbade them from doing these actions which he did not do because Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered him not to engage in such actions, as He has revealed to him a divine message.

Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) did not do the actions in which they regarded good, as there is no good in giving short measure or weight or worshiping any god other than Allah. In fact, these actions involve evil. Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* explains to them the mission of prophethood as he said, ‘I only want to put things right as far as I can’ (*Hud:* 88). Allah sent prophets when corruption spread, as prophets were sent with doctrines to guide people and to rectify their affairs by giving those commands and prohibitions. These prophets were sent as models to show people how to apply the doctrine, as the prophets cannot give a certain command without applying it first.

Therefore, Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* said, ‘I only want to put things right as far as I can’ (*Hud:* 88). Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* only charges a soul with that which it is capable of and that which lies within its means. Prophet *Shu`aib* then said, ‘...I cannot succeed without Allah’s help. I trust in Him, and always turn to Him.’ (*Hud:* 88) This verse reveals that there is a difference between work and success because your limbs may be busy with work, but the intention may not be sincere, so success is not granted by Allah. However, if you work with the intention that Allah will grant you success in working sincerely, Allah will draw your intention to any mistake you may make, you will do your work perfectly and will be impressed by the beauty of perfection.

Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* as saying is quoted saying, ‘*`alayh tawakkaltu*’ (I trust in Him) (*Hud:* 88). This means that Shu`aib (Jethro) places his trust in none other than Allah, and it is not appropriate at all to modify such a formula or to add anything to it; for if you do, by saying for example, ‘I have placed my trust in Allah as well as in so-and-so’, then expect that Allah will not grant you success, as you associate someone along with Him. Hud (Eber) is also quoted as saying, ‘*tawakkaltu ‘ala Allah*’ (I have relied upon Allah) (*Hud:* 56). One of the upright people said, ‘O Allah, I seek your forgiveness for any deed which I intended to do for your sake, but other motivations interfered’. Nothing should detract you from complete dependence on Allah because you will eventually return to Him. Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) said, ‘and always turn to Him’ (*Hud:* 88).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ لَا يَجۡرِمَنَّكُمۡ شِقَاقِيٓ أَن يُصِيبَكُم مِّثۡلُ مَآ أَصَابَ قَوۡمَ نُوحٍ
أَوۡ قَوۡمَ هُودٍ أَوۡ قَوۡمَ صَٰلِحٖۚ وَمَا قَوۡمُ لُوطٖ مِّنكُم بِبَعِيدٖ ﴿٨٩﴾

My people, do not let your opposition to me bring upon you a similar fate to the peoples of Noah or Hud or Saleh; the people of Lot are not far away from you [89] (The Quran, *Hud:* 89)

Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told them not to let their antagonism towards him to commit sins that cause Allah *Glorified is He* to punish them just as He punished the peoples that preceded them and who opposed their prophets. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* inflicted torment upon them like floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes. He told them to beware of acting like these people. Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* advised them out of his keenness for their interest although he knew that they harboured hostility towards him because he called them to cease worshipping the idols which their forefathers had worshipped. He also forbade them from giving short measure and weight and depriving people of their dues. Allah tormented the predecessors who opposed Allah's *shar`* (Islamic Law). Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* reminded them of the torment inflicted upon the people who were geographically close to them: the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*. Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says:

وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرُواْ رَبَّكُمۡ ثُمَّ تُوبُوٓاْ إِلَيۡهِۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٞ وَدُودٞ ﴿٩٠﴾

Ask forgiveness from your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance: my Lord is merciful and most loving [90] (The Quran, *Hud:* 90)

This demonstrates that Allah *Glorified is He* never closes the door of repentance even the one who is persistent on committing sins. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Verily, Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His slave than a person who has his camel in a waterless desert carrying his provision of food and drink and it is lost.'(1)

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6308-6309) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2744) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, and the wording is stated by Al-Bukhari.*

Imagine the feeling of the person who lost his camel, which carries all his food and drink, then he comes across his camel. Such a person must indeed be very happy to have found his camel.

Allah *Glorified is He* relates that which Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told his people, ‘Ask forgiveness from your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance…’ (*Hud:* 90). As long as a person asks forgiveness from his Lord for his past sins and turns to Him in repentance, with the intention of abstaining from these sins, Allah will never turn away the one who seeks His Graces, ‘…my Lord is Merciful and Most Loving.’ (*Hud:* 90) His Forgiveness and Mercy repel torment. Allah *Glorified is He* represents the broadest possible meaning of forgiveness, mercy and love. Allah is Most Loving, an attribute which implies compassion for the person loved.

For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - if a mother has two sons, the first is wealthy and provides her with anything she wants and the second is weak and poor. We find that the mother’s heart always leans towards the poor son, and she implores the stronger and wealthier son to feel compassion for him. We find that when an Arab mother in the past was asked, ‘Which of your sons is dearest to you’? She would respond, ‘The youngest until he reaches maturity, the absent until he returns and the sick until he recovers his health’. Therefore, love requires an outpouring of compassion insomuch as needed. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘O son of Adam, have no fear of any powerful person, so long as my Power endures, and my Power never runs out. O son of Adam, have no fear of scarcity of provision, so long as my coffers are full and never run out. O son of Adam, I have created you for worship, so do not dally, and I have guaranteed your sustenance so do not tire after it. Therefore, by My Majesty and Glory, if you content yourself with that which I have allotted for you, your heart and your body will be at rest, you will deserve my praise. If you do not content yourself with that which I have allotted for you, By My Majesty and Glory I will let this worldly life rule over you, you shall strive for your living just as the beasts strive for their living, and still you shall only be able to gain what I have already allotted for you. O son of Adam, I have created the heavens and the earth without being exhausted; would it then lie outside my capacity to bring a morsel of bread your way? O son of Adam, do not ask about tomorrow's sustenance, just as I do not ask you for tomorrow's work. O son of Adam, I have much love for you; therefore, it is my right to expect that you love me in return.' This Hadith shows how deep Allah's love for His creation is which the disbelievers' hearts cannot grasp. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* states the response of the people of Midyan to Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*:

قَالُواْ يَٰشُعَيۡبُ مَا نَفۡقَهُ كَثِيرٗا مِّمَّا تَقُولُ وَإِنَّا لَنَرَىٰكَ فِينَا
ضَعِيفٗاۖ وَلَوۡلَا رَهۡطُكَ لَرَجَمۡنَٰكَۖ وَمَآ أَنتَ عَلَيۡنَا بِعَزِيزٖ ﴿٩١﴾

They said, '*Shu`aib*, we do not understand much of what you say, and we find you very weak in our midst. But for your family, we would have stoned you, for you have no great status among us' [91] (The Quran, *Hud:* 91)

This saying is similar to what the disbelievers of Quraysh said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as they said, 'Our hearts are within coverings from that, to which you invite us, and in our ears is deafness, and between us and you is a partition...' (*Fussilat:* 5). Faith needs a heart that is not cluttered with falsehood so it can warmly embrace faith. However, when a heart is filled with falsehood, it becomes unable to receive faith; if the minds work to rid the heart of this falsehood, it will allow that which it accepts as the Truth to enter the heart. Therefore, Allah seals up the hearts that are full of disbelief, so that He causes disbelief to remain firmly established in the hearts and prevents faith from entering them.

The people of Midyan did not only declare their disbelief, but they also threatened Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* saying, '…and we find you very weak in our midst. But for your family, we would have stoned you, for you have no great status among us.' (*Hud:* 91) Such a threat carries an open challenge as they thought that they were capable of harming him because they detested him. However, they declared that they would kill him but for the rest of his family that still worshipped idols and would be angry if any harm befell him. They forgot that He Who sent forth Prophet Shu`aib

(Jethro) *peace be upon him* is fully capable of protecting him. Accordingly, they carried out Allah's Will to subject disbelief to serve faith. Another example on this point is the Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* uncle Abu Taleb who remained adherent to paganism, a matter which apparently served to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Quraysh.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then relates Shu`aib's (Jethro) *peace be upon him* response to his people:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ أَرَهۡطِيٓ أَعَزُّ عَلَيۡكُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَٱتَّخَذۡتُمُوهُ وَرَآءَكُمۡ
ظِهۡرِيًّاۖ إِنَّ رَبِّي بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ مُحِيطٞ ﴿٩٢﴾

He said, 'My people, is my family stronger in your estimation than God? And have you put Him behind you? My Lord surrounds everything you do [92] (The Quran, *Hud:* 92)

Here Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* condemns them for equating of the Glory of Allah with the clout of his own family. How could they put those two side by side and conclude that the retribution of Shu`aib's (Jethro) family can be more terrifying than the wrath of Allah?! Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* is not at all flattered by the esteem they have for his family, especially in the face of his own reverence for His Lord. Shu`aib (Jethro) had already announced his absolute reliance on Allah, and he knows full well that Glory and Might belong first and foremost to Allah.

Not only did they hold *Shu`aib's* (Jethro's) family in higher esteem than Allah, but they also cast the idea of faith (in Allah) behind their backs because Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* tells them. '…And have you put Him behind you?' (*Hud:* 92) He meant they did not put Allah *Glorified is He* in the forefront (of their lives) and they did not recognize His Greatness nor His ability to protect His prophets since they ascribed to some of His creatures a greatness that exceeds His own. Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* reminds them, 'My Lord surrounds everything you do.' (*Hud:* 92), He meant that everything you say or do is recorded with Allah and can be used against you, for with the True Lord *Glorified is He* there is nothing that goes unregistered. Previously, we have come to learn how our speech is like a vehicle for our deeds (whether good or bad); the deed of the tongue is speaking; just as much as the actions of the rest of the organs are also 'deeds'.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given speaking a special status because it is the primary means of spreading His Word. Then Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* is quoted as saying:

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ ٱعۡمَلُواْ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمۡ إِنِّي عَٰمِلٞۖ سَوۡفَ تَعۡلَمُونَ مَن يَأۡتِيهِ
عَذَابٞ يُخۡزِيهِ وَمَنۡ هُوَ كَٰذِبٞۖ وَٱرۡتَقِبُوٓاْ إِنِّي مَعَكُمۡ رَقِيبٞ ٩٣

My people, do whatever is within your power, and I will do likewise. Soon you will know who will receive a disgraceful punishment and who is a liar. Watch out, and so will I [93]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 93)

This means that *Shu`aib* (Jethro) *peace be upon him* is standing on an opposite platform (than they are); Allah is dearer to him than his family. By cherishing his Lord in such a manner, he has taken refuge with the strongest of 'pillars'. So, it is from the standpoint of such an ardent faith that he announces to them, 'Do whatever is within your power—and you are no more capable than any other human being. I, for my part, will do all that is in my capacity; however, I am not alone; Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is with me and your power will be no match with Allah's Absolute Power. No matter what you do in your attempt to divert me from my reforming mission, I will not be let down by He who has sent me forth. You have put yourselves in the same position adopted by previous nations which have tried to stand in the face of Divine reformation; people whom Allah *Glorified is He* has defeated with earthquakes, hurricanes or other obliterating forces from Him'. So, he said to them: Do all that is in your power, and do not imagine for once that I will beg you to desist; I have taken my stand on clear evidence from my Lord, and I want the best for you, and I wish that you would check yourselves.

By no means did Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* say the above out of weakness; it was rather a response to their threat, '…and we find you very weak in our midst. But for your family, we would have stoned you…' (*Hud:* 91). Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* makes it known that he holds significant status and clout in the eyes of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* who has sent him. He says, ‘My people do whatever is within your power, and I will do likewise…’ (*Hud:* 93).

Thus, Shu`aib (Jethro) makes it clear to them that he will not sit idle, that he shall do all that is in his capacity and, ‘…Soon you will know who will receive a disgraceful punishment and who is a liar. Watch out, and so will I.’ (*Hud:* 93) He meant that time will tell who of us is rightly guided and who of us is misguided and who of us shall be victorious, and who of us shall be humbled in defeat. This meant that the loser will come to hold himself in contempt, and will feel disgraced and humiliated in front of all of Allah’s creation, Time will tell who of us is a liar and who of us is on the side of the truth.

Consequently, the verse that follows reads:

وَلَمَّا جَآءَ أَمۡرُنَا نَجَّيۡنَا شُعَيۡبٗا وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَعَهُۥ بِرَحۡمَةٖ مِّنَّا
وَأَخَذَتِ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ ٱلصَّيۡحَةُ فَأَصۡبَحُواْ فِي دِيَٰرِهِمۡ جَٰثِمِينَ ٩٤

When what We had ordained came about, in Our mercy We saved *Shu`aib* and his fellow believers, but a mighty blast struck the wrongdoers. By morning they lay dead in their homes [94] (The Quran, *Hud:* 94)

We notice that in the chapter of *Hud*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses two different kinds of expressions to describe to the passing of His Judgment and the suffering that ensues. First, He uses *wa-lamma* and then He uses *fa-lamma*. The first comes in ‘so, when Our command was fulfilled…’ (*Hud:* 66). The second which starts with the letter *(f)* is used to state a punishment which arrives instantaneously without any time lapse. Like when the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us He causes man to die then get buried (with no time lapse) (*‘Abasa:* 21).

As for *thumma*, its role is to state an event which will occur after the elapse of a certain period of time; such as when The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that, with His will, He will raise man again from the dead (*‘Abasa:* 22).

The word *falamma* occurs in the story of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* because the True Lord *Glorified is He* had specified the exact time at which the suffering would be brought down from Him. Allah *Glorified is He* said to him that their appointed time is going to be the morning (*Hud:* 81). In this case, *falamma* had to precede the statement of their punishment; so Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that when the time He ordained came about, He turned their town upside down and bombarded them with raining stones made of baked clay, layer upon layer (*Hud:* 82).

As for the verse that we are currently studying, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘When what We had ordained came about, in Our Mercy We saved Shu`aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers...’ (*Hud:* 94). Here, He makes no mention of a specific date for the suffering. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘When what We had ordained came about…’ (*Hud:* 94). Every order requires that there be an issuer, a description, and a receiver upon whom the order will be acted. The giver of the order is Allah, and He is capable of executing all that He orders, and no one ordered by Allah is even capable of refusing the order; the whole universe is subject to the orders of its Creator.

Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us that suffering had befallen them, this means that the order had been given and the suffering did not escape them. The possibility of refusing an order can only occur if the receiver of the order is disobedient, but ‘the suffering’ dares not disobey the Divine Command. It is forced to obey; it has no choice in the matter.

In this instance the speaker is Allah *Glorified is He* – the issuer of both the cosmic order and the legislative order. So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* issues one of His Judgments, and records it in the Quran, you can be certain that it must come to pass. All laws related to the running of the universe fall within the True Lord’s domain, and these are not capable of disobeying His Will; as for His legislative commandments, the one who follows them will live in peace, and the one who disobeys them will surely suffer; either in this life or the afterlife.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an example of this in the story of Musa’s (Moses’) mother. He tells us that He inspired her to suckle him and that if she feared for him, then she must cast him into the river (*al-Qasas:* 7).

Our common sense might wonder, ‘How can one tell a mother to cast her baby in the river if she feared for him? How can you save your son from a potential threat by sending him off to a certain death'? Though such behaviour goes against human nature, the mother of Musa (Moses) hastened to carry out Allah's order; for when Allah issues such orders—through inspiration—to those who are near and dear to Him, the human mind voices no objections. Just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordered her to cast her newborn into the waters, He also inspired her to place him in a cradle and throw it into the river. (*Ta Ha:* 38-39) The True Lord *Glorified is He* also ordered the water to bring the cradle carrying Musa (Moses) to the shore. Therefore, Musa's (Moses') mother knew with certainty that Allah's orders are never disobeyed, and this is what made her hasten to carry out what Allah had ordered her to do. The True Lord *Glorified is He* always wants to nurture and grow the faith of His servants. Imagine, then, if Allah passes some order, and then the universe did not carry out that order properly, what would people think?

Thus, since the Lord has issued an order, this order must necessarily come to pass. Likewise, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that His soldiers are indeed the ones who will be victorious, (*as-Saffat:* 173) then victory must necessarily go to the soldiers of Allah. But when they are defeated, then it must be that the conditions of being the 'soldier of Allah' are no longer fulfilled, and that one of the elements (such as obedience) has dropped from the equation.

For instance, remember those who disobeyed the Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* orders to maintain their position on the mountain during the Battle of Uhud? They had disobeyed the Prophet's order; so what would have been the case had they won that battle despite this disobedience? Consequently, the Muslims suffered defeat on that day because of those individuals in whom the quality of being 'soldiers of Allah' had been disrupted.

Both causes must coincide: the Quranic and the Cosmic because the author of the Quran is (at the same time) the Creator of the universe. So, when the people of Midyan hereby announced their disbelief, suffering had to befall them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls this suffering that befalls them *as-sayha* (literally, the shout or blast). Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…but a mighty blast struck the wrongdoers. By morning they lay dead in their homes.' (*Hud:* 94)

Elsewhere the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls the suffering that befell them *ar-rajfa* (the earthquake) which overtook them till they lay lifeless in their very homes and right on the ground (*al-A'raf:* 91). In the story of the tribe of `Ad, Allah inflicted them with a raging storm (*al-Haqqa:* 6). As for Qarun (Korah), Allah describes the torment He sent upon him as *alkhasf* (earth sinking). It is a testament to Allah's Greatness that the suffering befell the disbelievers only, and not those who attained to faith; as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…in Our Mercy We saved Shu`aib (Jethro) and his fellow believers…' (*Hud:* 94). None is so capable except Allah, the fully Capable, and the One Who runs all the affairs as He wills. The word *najayna* comes from *najah* meaning the act of rescuing, or the condition of being rescued. But it is also related to the word *najwa* which means an elevated ground. The Arabs had come to experience, very early, how destructive the force of water can be since they used to live in Yemen and then they got scattered by the floods. The True Lord *Glorified is He* relates the story of the people of Sheba who had two vast expanses of gardens, to the right and the left, for which they thanked their Sustainer for His provisions. Then they turned away from Allah so He sent upon them a flood that destroyed their dams and turned their gardens into a couple of lands yielding bitter fruits, tamarisks and a few Lote trees (*Saba':* 15-16).

This is how the Arabs started spreading out from Yemen, and became scattered around the Arabian Peninsula. Still, they were fearful of water, even though it is the secret of life. They preferred to exert extra effort in finding drinking water—for themselves and their animals—rather than living close to a ready supply of water. From this primordial fear of water, originated the word *naja* meaning high ground. This word has been used in every situation wherein a man escapes any impending danger. Thus, one can say '*naja min an-nar*' (escaped fire) or '*naja min al-`adew*' (escaped the enemy) and '*naja min al-hayawan al-muftaris*' (escaped the predator); all derived from the word *najwa*—meaning, a high place. The word *naja* implies that the person is able to save himself from the danger depending on himself. But when a man is unable to depend solely on himself in escaping danger, he will surely need someone to save him. In each case the word *anjah* is used where a special effort is required to achieve deliverance.

In this verse, the doer is Allah and so He says *najayna*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses in this particular case the 'We' of divinity, like when He tells us, 'We sent it (the Quran) down on the Night of Glory.' (*al-Qadr:* 1)

The ‘We’ of divinity ‘*inna*’ is used anywhere an action performed by the True Lord *Glorified is He* is involved. When the matter involves any of the attributes of His Divine Entity, the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the first-person pronoun *ana* (I); for example, ‘I am Allah…’ (*Ta Ha:* 14) The True Lord *Glorified is He* saved Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his faithful followers because Shu`aib (Jethro) had said to his people, ‘My people, do whatever is within your power, and I will do likewise…’ (*Hud:* 93).

Shu`aib’s (Jethro) endeavours where backed with a sincere intention and characterized by complete confidence in Allah. That is why Allah saved him and those who shared his faith; for all that Allah asks of His servants is that they turn toward Him with sincere intentions, and when his servants do so the True Lord *Glorified is He* relieves their anxiety and grants them the confidence to carry out any task. For the servant of Allah, the mere act of turning to Allah with full faith and sincerity opens horizons of success and eminence. The key is indeed in the servant’s hand; for the True Lord *Glorified is He* has said in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘Whosoever mentions Me (by name) to himself I will mention his name in a loftier assembly.’(1) Indeed, it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who says, ‘He who draws near to Me an arm’s length, I draw near to him a fathom’s length.’ Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* leaves the question of drawing closer—to Him—to the servant. When the servant draws near to Allah, Allah *Glorified is He* draws near to the servant more. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith, ‘If he comes to Me walking, I go to him running’(2) because walking can tire the servant, but nothing ever tires the True Lord *Glorified is He*; for He is transcendent of such things. Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes that we purify our intentions when seeking His Company so that He may envelop us with the attributes of His Splendour and Beauty.

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(1) *The complete Hadith is as follows, ‘I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of Me to himself, I make mention of him to Myself; and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assembly better than it. If he draws near to Me an arm’s length, I draw near to him a fathom’s length. If he comes to Me walking, I come to him running.’ The Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

(2) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7405) and by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/315); narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

Look, for instance, how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* while he was in the cave with Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* saying to his companion not to grieve because Allah is with them (*at-Tawba:* 40). This means that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was telling his companion not to despair, for they are in the company of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*. Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* must have said something that bespoke of his sorrow; and his sorrow did not spring from nothing, it was a very natural sorrow based on the laws of nature. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If any of them had just looked down at his feet, he would have seen us!' But the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was not worried about the laws of nature, when he said, 'What do you think of two (persons), the third of whom is Allah? (1)', he was referring to the (infinite) ability of the Creator. Thus, by being in the company of Allah, they became endowed with some of His Majesty and His Beauty; no human vision can encompass Him, but He encompasses all human vision.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* rescued Shu`aib (Jethro) and those who followed him out of His Mercy; the Mercy is in being unharmed. A man could get sick, take a medication, and then recover back to normal, or Allah can keep the illness away from him altogether. So, remember that the Quran came with a twofold topic: cure and mercy. If you get afflicted, and you refer it back to Allah's method, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will remove it. As for mercy, it is about not being afflicted in the first place.

Now we come to the unjust people who were overtaken by the mighty 'blast'; or as related in another verse were struck by the mighty blast (*Hud:* 67). Allah says, '…but a mighty blast struck the wrongdoers…' (*Hud:* 94). The whole language of the Quran came very close to the dialect of the tribe of Quraysh, and this was not intended to distinguish the tribe of Quraysh in any way; it was only because their dialect was purer than that of the rest of the Arab tribes. Their dialect incorporated the supreme articulacy of all the other neighbouring tongues. But this does not mean that we should belittle the other Arab tribes.

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(1) *Unanimously agreed upon authentic Hadith... Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4663) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2381); the Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him.*

That is why the language of the Quran pays tribute to some of the dialects of the other tribes so as not to establish a leadership for Quraysh over Islam just because of the leadership it enjoyed over the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era. That is why we find the Quran exhibiting patterns from the different dialects of the Arabs at that time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying, '…By morning they lay dead in their homes.' (*Hud:* 94) We notice that for every punishment, the True Lord *Glorified is He* sets a specific time, like setting the morning for the torment in the verses, (*Hud:* 81), or (*as-Saffat:* 177). The morning is the time when the punishment befalls those who are still light headed with sleep. Like the police forces who are dubbed 'dawn visitors' because they assault the houses at the early hours of the day.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'By morning they lay dead in their homes.' (*Hud:* 94) The word *diarihim* is pluralized to be broad enough to denote places other than the homes. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses this word—as opposed to *darihim* —to explain that some of them might not necessarily have been in their homes at that time, that they might have been visiting someone else or on a business trip.

For example, a man called Abu Raghal was in Mecca at the time, but the stones which slew him by Allah's will were hurled upon him not in Mecca but in Al-Biqa`. It was Allah's will that these stones would not be hurled in the sanctified sanctuary. As if the stones picked him, just as the mighty cry had picked the disbelievers from among the people of Midyan. We notice that in the last word of the verse—*jathimin*—when the letters *j* and *th* are combined—and notwithstanding what letters come after them—they convey the essence of 'destruction' and 'death'; with this very unusual musical or lyrical tone. The word *jathimin* means that they lied motionless on the floor, on their stomachs. Elsewhere, The True Lord *Glorified is He* also tells us that on Judgment Day we will see every nation kneeling on its knees (*al-Jathiya:* 28). A dead body is also called *al-juththa*.

Look at the greatness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* causing the people to utter the word *juththa* to describe any dead person whether the corpse is for a great man or a simple person. Then the corpse is then placed in the grave.

If you want to calm a grieving or agonized person who has just lost a loved one, ask him, ‘Will you feel better if you kept his corpse with you for a week’? He will answer, ‘No’. So, the instant Allah *Glorified is He* extracts the ‘secret’ which makes us human—this secret being the soul—the body becomes a mere corpse then decays and then turns to ash.

Describing those—from among the people of Midyan—who were overtaken by the mighty cry, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا۟ فِيهَآ ۗ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِّمَدْيَنَ كَمَا بَعِدَتْ ثَمُودُ (٩٥)

as if they had never lived and flourished there. Yes, away with the people of Midyan, just like the Thamud! [95] (The Quran, *Hud:* 95)

This means that anyone who passes by the people of Midyan will feel as though they never existed, Elsewhere, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us how His punishment drops at the most unexpected time; when the earth has assumed its full beauty and adornment and when those who lived upon it believed they have gained mastery over it (*Yunus:* 24). Human civilization has reached a level where a man can pour himself a cup of coffee by the press of a button, but if Allah *Glorified is He* so wills, He can wipe out all that in the blink of an eye.

A human being may enjoy such a pleasant life by being served (by others or by machines); but it is nothing like paradise where a man’s desires are instantly gratified the minute a thought crosses his mind. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘As if they had never lived and flourished there…’ (*Hud:* 95). Now from the word *ghina* there are several derivatives; there is *al-ghina*` which is the singing performed by singers. There is also *Al-ghana*` which is something that makes you self-sufficient for example, having enough money not to need what other people have.

As for the word *`l-ghina`* (singing), we use this word because the ear hears a lot, and the eye reads a lot but a human being only repeats the speech which pleases him. The Same is with the singer who sings in a way which pleases him. So, *al-ghina*` is the sweet melody which leaves you without a need for any other.

Al-ghana` also means to reside in a place such that you have no need for going elsewhere; so you settle down in that place that suffices you.

Therefore, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘As if they had never lived and flourished there…’ (*Hud:* 95), it means as if they had never even resided there in the first place; as if it did not leave them needless for going elsewhere.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us in another verse that some of the ruins would stay standing and some others would be mowed down (*Hud:* 100) meaning that the ruins had survived in the form of a few rocks, like the old pharaonic temples for instance. When you visit these temples, you never find them intact, rather, you find that while some pillars have remained upright, others have fallen over and lie on the ground, and you find ruined doors. Had they been all mowed down, they would have completely disappeared, but most of the pharaonic temples have survived in some form or another, while others have vanished without a trace. Here the Quranic content reaffirms the fact that there existed great civilizations in the past; for if these had all vanished, we would not have known that such civilizations existed long before our time.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…Yes, away with the people of Midyan, just like the people of Thamud!’ (*Hud:* 95) The word *`ala* —as we have previously explained—is a linguistic device that serves as a prelude to a statement, or grasps the listener’s attention, to be sure that he is not distracted and prepared to hear what will follow. The word *bu`daa* is not a request for the people of Midyan to go far away, for they had been, in effect, destroyed. The root of the word *bu`daa* consists of the letters *b`ud* and is used in two ways: the first implies parting—parting that assumes reunion at some point in the future. But, when it is certain that such a reunion will never happen, it will be followed, as in the following example by, ‘…just like the people of Thamud!’ (*Hud:* 95) In this case, it implies that there will be no further reunion—at least not until the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings all people together on the day of Resurrection.

The poet says:

As they bury me they say do not go far,
but is there a place farther than where I am?

This is the 'distant' dimension where a human being goes to and never comes back. Why does the True Lord *Glorified is He* single out the tribe of Thamud, even though He says, '*ala bu`dan*' to many other peoples? Because the tribe of Thamud were also destroyed by the blast, so the means by which they were both punished coincides. Thus, the story of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his people(1) comes to an end, and we notice that it overlaps with the times of other prophets such as Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; just as Lut's (Lot's) time overlapped with Ibrahim's (Abraham's) *peace be upon them*.

Thus, we learn that some prophets were contemporaries of each other, meaning that each was sent to a specific environment and a specific place. Since these messengers are all servants of Allah, every one of them was given a methodology that befits the specific moral defects prevalent in the societies to which they were sent . Ibrahim (Abraham) was Lut's (Lot) uncle, and Musa (Moses) was Shu`aib's (Jethro) son-in-law *peace be upon them all*. Musa (Moses) was sent to the people of Midyan even before Allah had sent him to Pharaoh's people.

We know that, in the old days, places used to be isolated from one another, and communication between them was difficult. Every community resided in its specific spot not knowing anything about the other communities. Hence, the moral and social defects were different from one community to the other.

Yet, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent forth Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the seal of prophets, the Lord knew beforehand that the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heralded the dawn of a new age of interconnectedness, where the various defects would be merged. Nowadays, whatever happens in one corner of the world reaches us via satellites in a few seconds; that is why the need for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was of the essence.

As for the multitude of prophets and their various stories in the Quran, there is no redundancy as the literalists would have it; the wisdom behind the mention of the stories of previous prophets in the Quran is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to bolster Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* resolve.

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(1) The people of Midyan.

These verses were revealed from Allah to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so as to correspond to specific instances where he found himself in need of reassurance. The True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to take note of his fellow prophets to remember what happened in their struggle with their people, and ultimately, the victory that Allah helped them achieve.

But when the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to relate an intricate and wholesome story he revealed the chapter of *Yusuf.* So, there is no redundancy in the Quran. Every scene was revealed to address a specific situation which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was going through. We notice that the story of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and his people could not but end with a reference to the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who was incidentally Shu`aib (Jethro) son-in-law.

We notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions two scenes from the story of Musa (Moses). The first scene is sending him with evident signs to Pharaoh. The second scene is the ultimate meeting of Pharaoh with, not Musa (Moses), but with the True Lord on Judgment Day. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that he will be at the forefront of his people on Judgment Day leading them down towards Hellfire; for they were all pursued by Allah's rejection in this life and hence will receive the same treatment on Judgment Day. (*Hud:* 98-99)

One of the roles of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* was to keep Musa's (Moses') heart steadfast and help cure his anxiety. Musa (Moses) had told him that he was afraid from being killed by the people of Pharaoh since he had killed one of them. So, Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* told him (as mentioned in the chapter of *al-Qasas* not to worry and that he was now safe from these evildoing lowlifes. (*al-Qasas:* 25) So, he reassured him and prepared him to a life in which he would live in safety for eight, or even ten years. Allah relates to us how he offered one of his daughters to Musa (Moses) for marriage and how he asked him to remain for eight years in his service, or ten if he wanted to as an act of grace from him. He also told him that he will find him righteous in all his dealings. So, Musa (Moses) accepted the kind offer and requested from Shu`aib (Jethro) that whichever of the two terms he fulfils let there be no injustice against him, as Allah is there witness (*al-Qasas:* 27-28).

That was how, Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* played a role in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Here and there the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us that the pure, innate nature (of human beings) can deduce laws that often coincide with the laws of Allah. Allah does not prevent human minds from reaching the truth because we reach the truth after strenuous experience. See, for example, how the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordered the rules of divorce in Islam, and how other non-Muslim countries have now begun to appropriate these laws for their own societies after having suffered strenuously from the lack of it!

Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* made drinking alcohol forbidden, then, centuries later, science came forth and confirmed its bad effect on health. Should we have delayed the application of Allah's law for all that time that it took the human mind to reach this conclusion? No, because the Quran is the revealed law of Allah which when applied, will save us the troubles of strenuous and life-wasting experiences because He Who has revealed the Quran has also created us and is our trustworthy guardian. Time has proved the wisdom of the laws of Allah that even those who do not believe in the Quran have come to adopt and apply some of its laws; out of experience.

The story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is a clear example of the True Lord's Will, for here was the disbelieving Pharaoh who adopts baby Musa (Moses)—after having found him on the riverbank—in the hopes that he will grow up to become a dear son to him. This is despite the fact the Pharaoh was killing all the baby boys born to that class of society. Then Musa's (Moses') sister recognizes her brother, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* reunited Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with his mother.

A poet describes this scene saying:

> If your child is not in the care of Allah,
> Then your yearning has been betrayed and your hopes disappointed,
> For the Musa (1) who was raised by Gabriel turned a disbeliever,
> And the Musa who was raised by Pharaoh turned a Messenger

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(1) Musa the Samaritan who saw the archangel Gabriel *peace be upon him* disobeyed the commandments of his Lord, and was exiled and destined to great suffering; contrary to Musa the Messenger *peace be upon him*.

The story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was briefed, both in the beginning and in the end, because the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to show us that Shu`aib (Jethro) had a role to play alongside one of the prophets of 'great determination'— Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

Before his revelation, Musa's (Moses) destination was the wells of Midyan, and it is this episode that offers us a cure to the problems of both sexes –men and women –it is based on gender issues that Islamic societies are most criticized because some people want the woman to do her best in exposing herself to seduce men at an age where their interest in women is at the peak.

But the Quran cures this problem for us during this brief episode. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us how Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* arrived to Midyan and he first saw a large group of men watering their flocks and beside them were two women keeping their flocks back, so he asked them what was the matter with them. (*al-Qasas:* 23) They were keeping their cattle from the water; and this was the scene which captivated Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. So, it was only natural for him to ask: did you two not come here to water your cattle?! They told him that they did come to water their flock but that they won't be able to do it until the men leave, and that they are weak and their father is a very old man (*al-Qasas:* 23). Thus, we learn that the reason why the girls left their house and gone out into the world was because the father was an old man. We also learn that the reason that caused them to leave their house does not make engage in pushing and shoving around the waterhole. They only did what was necessary without excess, so they had to wait until all the other cattle had been watered. In fact, they kept a respectable distance, and that is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* stepped up and carried out his role as a man, and watered their flock for them (*al-Qasas:* 24).

Such is the prerogative of the community of faith at large. It is not simply the prerogative of a specific tribe, or the prerogative of an acquaintance or the prerogative of a family member. Rather, it is the prerogative of the community of faith at large. When someone sees that a woman has left her house and gone out into the world, he knows that necessity compelled her to do so, and so a Muslim man must do what he can to help her go about her business.

I remember when I went to Mecca in 1950; my friend pulled over the car in front of a house and stepped out of the car right in front of the house's gate. There was a wooden board in front of it that had on it some dough loaves which had not been baked. So, he took them to the bakery, and then returned with them to that same door after they had been baked. He turned to me and said: this is common tradition among the people of Mecca. If a person finds unbaked loaves of dough (in front of a door), he should take them to be baked because this means that the man of the house is not present. This wisdom is taken from the lesson of Musa who watered the flock for the girls whose father (man of the house) was too old (*al-Qasas:* 24).

`Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* used to order his soldiers to knock on people's doors and ask what they needed. The third and most important matter is that the woman who leaves her house and goes out (into the world) to perform some task must not get used to this type of life. Rather, she must only perform what is necessary, and if she finds an opportunity to fulfil her needs, she must quickly seize it (without delay). This was why the young maiden told her father Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to hire Musa (Moses since the best one to hire is always the strong and trustworthy (*al-Qasas:* 26).

Then, Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* concludes this episode in a wise and resolute manner. He offered one of his daughters to Musa (Moses) for marriage and asked him to remain for eight years in his service, or ten if he wanted to, as an act of grace from him (*al-Qasas:* 27). This means that Shu'aib (Jethro) was not just marrying off his daughters without a dowry. No, there had to be a dowry for her. This offer also meant that marrying her sister would be unlawful to Musa (1).

This story lays out the principles which address most of the criticisms levelled at Islam by its enemies. We now hear modernizers from the West asking that the woman remain at home to care for her family and children; not because a woman is deficient in any way but because she achieves her utmost potential when she is performing her most noble role—raising her children.

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(1) Marrying two sisters is temporarily unlawful and the unlawfulness ceases once its causes cease to exist (if the wife is divorced and after she completes her waiting term, or if the wife dies). The evidence to this is mentioned in (*an-Nisa'*: 23).

We know that human beings undergo the longest period of childhood compared to other creatures, and children who grow up under the care of a dedicated mother turn out to be better than those who are not. This is what we learn from the story of Shu`aib (Jethro), and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا وَسُلْطَـٰنٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٩٦﴾

We also sent Moses, with Our signs and clear authority [96] (The Quran, *Hud:* 96)

The signs that are mentioned in the Quran fall into one of three categories. First, the universal signs which everyone can witness like the turning of day and night, the sun and the moon, the stars and the submissiveness of the earth, which rises and flourishes when water pours down upon it. All these universal signs captivate the minds and lead to the realization that behind this intricately engineered universe there is a Fully-Capable Creator. There are other signs whose purpose is to attest to the sincerity of any prophet conveying Allah’s message to his people—these are the miracles, such as Thamud’s clairvoyant she-camel, and ‘Isa’s (Jesus’s) ability to heal the blind and the lepers, by Allah’s will.

Then there are signs which articulate the commandments of the religious methodology—namely, the directive ‘do’ and ‘do not’. Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* has says, ‘We also sent Musa, with Our signs and clear authority.’ (*Hud:* 96) So, there are signs that prove his sincerity, supported with a clearly manifest power. Either this power can be a forceful, compelling one or it can be a power that wins over the minds through persuasive argument. This mighty power might be able to defeat most people outwardly, but it has no power over the hearts, and Allah *Glorified is He* is interested in the core, not the outward crust. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be tormented with sadness to the point of almost dying out of grief because of those who refuse to believe. Had Allah willed it, He would have sent down upon them a miracle from the skies that would compel their necks to bow down before it in humility (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 2-4).

Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* requests sincere and reverent hearts; not an outwardly compliant crust. He requests the hearts to worship Allah by their own free will. So, the most important dominion is the dominion of persuasive argument, since it persuades a human being to act… and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not possess the dominion of power, he possessed the dominion of persuasive argument. The True Lord *Glorified is He* relays to us how he went to Pharaoh and told him that he is an apostle from the Sustainer of all the worlds, and that he cannot say anything about Allah except the truth. He also added that he came to him with clear signs and requested him to let the Israelites leave with him (*al-A'raf:* 104-105). But the Pharaoh asked him to show any of those signs to prove his truthfulness and to this, Musa (Moses) threw down his staff and it turned into a plainly visible serpent. He also drew his hand from his pocket and it appeared so white and flawless to the viewers (*al-A'raf:* 106-108).

The whiteness of Musa's (Moses) hand was subjective but it was also unforeseen. It was not due to some skin disease like vitiligo because Allah points out that Musa's hand came out 'white' and 'flawless' (*Ta Ha:* 22). As for Musa's (Moses's) staff, its transformation into a serpent was the reason which prompted Pharaoh to bring out the sorcerers so that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could defeat them in full view of Pharaoh and his elite. What happened next was that the sorcerers became followers of Musa (Moses) and they all became believers in the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*.

We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* had sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* forth with nine signs: 1) The staff which transformed into a serpent and devoured what the sorcerers had concocted, 2) the white and flawless hand, 3) the catastrophic years which befell Pharaoh's people, 4) the decline in population and agricultural production till the lands became so barren that no food could be planted, and the fortunes were lost leading to famine, 5) the unleashing of floods, 6) the swarms of locusts, 7) the lice, 8) the frogs and 9) the blood. These are the nine 'signs' which the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent to the people of Pharaoh because of their refusal to believe in the message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

There are also other signs which the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent to the people of Musa (Moses) through Musa (Moses) himself. These are the suspension of the mountain, the splitting of the sea with the staff, the striking of the rock wherefrom twelve springs gushed forth, and finally the descent of the tablets with the Torah. The nine ‘signs’ mentioned earlier refer to the sings with which Musa (Moses) was sent forth to Pharaoh whereas the latter signs occurred after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had left the land of Egypt, or during his exodus; like the parting of the seas with the staff.

What proves the special nature of the story of Musa (Moses) is that he had two messages (to deliver): the first of these was to Pharaoh, and the second was to the Israelites. Thus, we note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* informs us —at the end of the chapter—about the disagreement that came between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Israelites (*Hud:* 110). So, the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Israelites took place after Musa (Moses) had been brought the book; the Torah. But in this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is speaking about the ‘signs’ which occurred earlier when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was confronting Pharaoh, ‘We also sent Musa (Moses), with Our signs and clear authority.’ (*Hud:* 96) ‘*Sultan mubin*’ means an all-encompassing dominion which leaves the enemy with no room to manoeuvre or escape.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَمَلَإِيْهِۦ فَٱتَّبَعُوٓاْ أَمۡرَ فِرۡعَوۡنَۖ وَمَآ أَمۡرُ فِرۡعَوۡنَ بِرَشِيدٖ ﴿٩٧﴾

To Pharaoh and his supporters, but they followed
Pharaoh’s orders, and Pharaoh’s orders were misguided [97]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 97)

The word *al-mala`* refers to those who ‘fill’ the eyes. In other words those who are the center of attention, and are always the head of every assembly, One says, ‘*fulan mil` al-`ayn*’, meaning that people’s eyes are constantly focused on him because he is a celebrity. Thus, *al-mala`* refers to the great ones among the community; the elite. Usually, they are also the ones who reassure the tyrant that it is acceptable for him to belittle his subjects. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us how Pharaoh incited his entourage to levity, and how they obeyed him because they were depraved (*az-Zukhruf:* 54).

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about Pharaoh and his entourage, we find the He sets the entourage on one hand, and Pharaoh on the other. Then He also sets Pharaoh on one hand, and Pharaoh's people on the other. This means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* deals with each one of these three parties in a different way, Here Allah explains how the entourage followed Pharaoh's orders—his directives which the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes as, '…and Pharaoh's orders were misguided.' (*Hud:* 97) At the opposite of *ar-rushd* (guidance) comes *al-ghay* (misguidance) which means that Pharaoh's entourage did not scrutinize his directives carefully. For if they had thought it over carefully, they would have never followed these orders. The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains to us why Pharaoh's orders were by no means guided. He also reminds us of what is to become of him and his people (who followed him); Allah says:

يَقْدُمُ قَوْمَهُۥ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ فَأَوْرَدَهُمُ ٱلنَّارَ ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْوِرْدُ ٱلْمَوْرُودُ ﴿٩٨﴾

He will be at the forefront of his people on the Day of Resurrection, leading them down towards the Fire. What a foul drinking place to be led to! [98] (The Quran, *Hud:* 98)

The root of the word *yaqdum* contains the letters 'q', 'd' and 'm'. When this root is used either in written or verbal forms, it indicates 'direct confrontation'. Thus, to say *qadam qawm* means that these people are all moving in one direction with their leader at the vanguard. Therefore, from this verse we understand that the entourage and elite had followed Pharaoh and that the people at large had followed Pharaoh and the entourage. Since they had (all) followed his lead in this world, they must also follow his lead in the afterlife. Allah relates to us clearly that He shall gather them and the devils together and set them on their knees around Hell. Then, He shall seize out of each group those who were most disobedient towards the Lord of Mercy, and that He knows best who most deserves to burn in Hell (*Maryam:* 68-70).

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* will seize out of each group the most disobedient bullies, and then He will cast them in hellfire, for He knows best who is more deserving of hellfire. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also tells us that every single one of *us* will approach hellfire, and that this is a decree from our Lord which must be fulfilled. But He shall save the devout and leave the evildoers there on their knees (*Maryam:* 71-72). In the verse (*Maryam:* 71), the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the word *(minkum* - us*)* and not *(minhum* - them*)* which mean that we are all addressed, not just the disbelievers apart from the believers.

But in the verse we are explaining the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…leading them down towards the Fire. What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98). When the Noble Book of Allah—which is the book revealed in a clear Arabic tongue—speaks of *al-wurud* in the verse (*Maryam*: 71), the term Allah uses signifies reaching the water, but not drinking from it. Had He wanted to include drinking from the water as well, He would have used the word *wird*; like in the verse we are explaining now. That is why, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98) meaning that they will feel miserable after seeing the water of Hell. Then they will drink from it. Therefore, the word *al-wird* is used to signify the act of drinking from a body of water. The word can also be used about those who move eagerly towards the water to drink from it. That is why the same term is used when Allah tells us that He will drive those who were lost in sin unto hell as a thirsty herd is driven to a well (*Maryam:* 86).

The pre-Islamic poet Zuhir ibn Abu Salma says:

Thus, when we came upon a body of blue water,

We laid down the staffs of (those in our) caravan.

Here, the poet is describing how the people of the caravan—upon seeing the pure, blue waters—laid down their walking sticks. It was customary in the old days for people to carry walking sticks when they walked. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to Allah, when He asked him about his staff, that he leans on it, uses it in herding the sheep and that he has many other uses for it (*Ta Ha:* 18).

Another poet says:

So, she set down her staff and settled upon her destination,

Like a traveller happy to come back to his abode.

Once the travelers saw 'blue' water, this would mean that the water is not stagnant, or polluted. We know that water is transparent and that, technically speaking, it has no colour. However, the attribute of being 'blue' is ascribed to it when it is free of pollutants, crystal-clear and reflective of the blue sky. So, what the poet is describing is that moment when the travelers arrived at this clear water, so they stopped and began setting up their camp.

Thus, we learn that *al-worud* signifies the act of moving towards water without drinking from it. Coming across the water lifts the souls with happiness and joy, but then we drink from the water to quench our thirst and hydrate all the organs of our bodies. But, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98)

This constitutes serious mockery because – when Pharaoh and his people will perceive the water they, will feel happy that their thirst will soon be quenched, but when they drink from the waters of hellfire, they will find it foul. First they will drink from it and then the will be filled with misery. Elsewhere Allah tells us that even when they beg for water, they will be given scalding water like molten lead which will scald their faces (*al-Kahf:* 29). In this latter verse, Allah uses the word *yughathu* (succoured) giving them a false impression that they will be succoured only to end up with the misery of the mocking truth in the form of water as hot as molten lead.

Imagine, for example, if someone invited you to the most delicious and gourmet foods. After you wash your hands, that person proposes desserts, and so you feel hopeful that it must be even better than what you ate. But your host tells the cook to mix hot chili with the desserts, and your mouth is set on fire. Is this not making fun of you? The True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about this water as if it is going to be a cool relief, but upon drinking it (their) insides will be on fire. In addition, the food eaten by the people in hellfire will have the same effect. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that their food will be nothing but filth (*al-Haqqa:* 36). Thus, one disaster becomes a multitude of disasters.

Some people have understood the verse (*Maryam:* 71) to mean that we shall all go to hellfire. They forgot that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says just in the verse before it that He knows best as to which of them is most deserving of hellfire. (*Maryam:* 70) which means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* will present the scenes of hellfire to everyone. So, when the believers see the blazing fire, and are held back from it, they will know that it is their faith that saved them from it and they will praise Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* and thank him for saving them from it.

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأُتۡبِعُواْ فِي هَٰذِهِۦ لَعۡنَةٗ وَيَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۚ بِئۡسَ ٱلرِّفۡدُ ٱلۡمَرۡفُودُ ﴿٩٩﴾

They were pursued by God's rejection in this life and will be on the Day of Resurrection, too. What a foul gift to be given! [99] (The Quran, *Hud:* 99)

This means that this rejection persists, and that we Muslims have been, and are still, rejecting them until they come face to face with the great rejection of the Day of Resurrection, 'What a foul gift to be given!' (*Hud:* 99) Now the word *ar-rifd* means 'gift', so can this rejection really be considered a gift in the hereafter? This, in fact, is another mockery (a very bitter one). Just like when He says, 'What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98)

Then He says:

ذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ نَقُصُّهُۥ عَلَيۡكَۖ مِنۡهَا قَآئِمٞ وَحَصِيدٞ ﴿١٠٠﴾

We relate to you [Muhammad] such accounts of earlier towns: some of them are still standing; some have been mown down [100] (The Quran, *Hud:* 100)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has obliterated those past communities with His punishment because they had rejected their prophets. Such a verse is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to comfort him and to give him courage. The True Lord *Glorified is He* shows him that the disbelievers shall not elude the suffering just as the peoples of earlier times were punished by Allah.

The True Lord's words, 'We relate to you' (*Hud:* 100) urge us to distinguish between the popular meaning of the word '*qasas*' and its true meaning. Some people say that the Quran contains stories which, like many other stories, are dramatized for the sake of a catchy narrative. We say to these people: you have not grasped what the word *qissa* 'story' means in the Arabic language because, in our language, this word means being literally factual about every little detail of the events relayed.

In fact, this word is taken from the word *qass al-athar* which means to follow the tracks of someone or something until one arrives to the desired destination. Therefore, the story (*al-Qasas*) of the Quran contains factual events only. As for the popular concept of the word *qasas*, on which ensue fictional events and characters, these are called *ruwayat* (tales or fables), not *qasas*. The stories of destroying the disbelieving communities represent admonitions for the people, if only they would heed them. People know that the stories which the Quran relates are real and are corroborated by the ruins of the perished civilizations which have kept nothing behind but a few scattered rocks and carved tombstones.

The remnants of ancient civilizations contain some, still erect, carved pillars, and other fallen ones. According to another verse, the Lord says, ‘Verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138), i.e. you witness their remnants; some are still standing and others have been left in complete disarray. Regarding these ancient communities, the Lord says,

وَمَا ظَلَمْنَٰهُمْ وَلَٰكِن ظَلَمُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ ۖ فَمَآ أَغْنَتْ عَنْهُمْ ءَالِهَتُهُمُ ٱلَّتِى يَدْعُونَ مِن
دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِن شَىْءٍ لَّمَّا جَآءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَمَا زَادُوهُمْ غَيْرَ تَتْبِيبٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves. Their gods, which they called on beside God, were no use to them when what your Lord had ordained came about; they only increased their ruin[101] (The Quran, *Hud:* 101)

The Lord explains that when He destroyed these people, He did them no *zhulm* (injustice). *Zhulm* designates the violation of rights of anyone or acting unjustly against them. Those nations disbelieved in Allah and consequently received their due punishment. They did themselves injustice by setting up associates besides Allah. They belied all prophets who had come forth with irrefutable proof of the legitimacy of their prophecy and messages. The disbelievers wronged themselves. Evidently, the Lord never wrongs anyone.

When they associated others with Allah in Divinity, why did these supposed deities fail to act on behalf of their subjects and protect them?! The Lord tells us that the rocks they worshipped curse them. Those disbelieving souls were destined for hell and their rock-gods shall be fuel for their punishment. The Lord mentions the Hereafter saying, 'Then be conscious of the fire whose fuel is human beings and stones which awaits all who deny the truth!' (*al-Baqara:* 24) The people—who unreasonably worship equal human beings or idols—have deteriorated into a demonic ignorance and let themselves be obsessed with those human beings or stones which they venerated and prayed to. A Muslim poet once compared the caves of Hira`a and Thawr—both are made out of rock—and found that the cave of Hira'a witnessed the descent of revelation to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* while the cave of Thawr had the honour of protecting the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* during his emigration from Mecca to Medina, when he sought refuge there with his companion Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him*. The poet muses at how the cave of Thawr had envied the cave of Hira`a, saying:

> How we envied Hira`a when we saw the trustworthy Spirit pervading you with lights
>
> Well Hira`a and Thawr do currently stand equal and intercede for the community of stones

The cave of Hira`a had witnessed the descent of the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* when he brought the Revelation (from Allah) to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. However, the cave of Thawr also earned its prestige for having protected the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* during his emigration. The poet puts these words into the mouths of the [idolized] stones:

> They worshiped us while we are sincere slaves of Allah,
>
> Standing for prayers at the late part of night
>
> They ignorantly alleged that we are gods
>
> As did with the son of Maryam (Mary) and the pure ones
>
> For the extreme wrongdoers their punishment,
>
> But the falsely worshiped innocent ones will receive the Forgiving Lord's Mercy

They derive no good whatsoever from their idols, be they human or mineral. The idols were powerless to protect them from the world's sufferings and will be powerless to protect their subjects from the hellfire of the hereafter. If those people had venerated idols in lieu of Allah, the idols certainly did not come to their succour when they were punished. The Lord concludes this blessed verse by saying, '…and brought them no more than utter perdition' (*Hud:* 101), i.e. the idols, which they had set up as associates with Allah and worshipped instead of Allah, denied them. This desertion causes them even more psychological trauma because—in addition to 'perdition', the word *'tatbeeb'* denotes being 'marooned' and 'cut-off'. The Lord says, 'Doomed are the hands of him of the glowing countenance, and doomed is he!' (*al-Masad:* 1) In a similar way, Allah has dealt with the people who rejected their prophets. That is why the Lord follows up with the following verse:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَخۡذُ رَبِّكَ إِذَآ أَخَذَ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ وَهِيَ ظَٰلِمَةٌۚ إِنَّ أَخۡذَهُۥٓ أَلِيمٞ شَدِيدٌ ١٠٢

Such is the punishment of your Lord for towns in the midst
of their sins: His punishment is terrible and severe [102]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 102)

The way in which Allah dealt with the disbelieving communities, represents a warning to anyone who would disbelieve [i.e. they are in imminent danger of suffering the same fate]. The Lord says, 'Consider the daybreak and the ten nights! Consider the multiple and the One! Consider the night as it runs its course! Considering all this – could there be, to anyone endowed with reason, a [more] solemn evidence of the truth?' (*al-Fajr:* 1-5) Here, the Lord swears by these things. As such, those endowed with sound minds might realise the absolute necessity of having faith. Allah then cites some examples of the past perished nations, 'Are You not aware of how Your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] `Ad, [the people of] Aram—the many-pillared? The like of whom has never been reared in all the land? And with [the tribe of] Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein; and therefore Your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering, for, verily, Your Lord is ever on the watch!' (*al-Fajr:* 6-14) Allah overcame and destroyed those sinful nations, as He is the Almighty and the Omnipotent.

Allah then says, 'And such is...' (*Hud:* 102), i.e. in the same way that the other nations were destroyed, the nations that denied their prophets and wronged themselves met the same end. *Akhdh* designates punishment for actual crimes. See how Allah relieved Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and saved him from the punishment that the rest of his tribe suffered because of their injustices. Man is essentially pure and innocent. It is human actions which incur punishment. For example, when Allah told Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* 'Behold, he was not of your family; for, verily, he was unrighteous in his conduct' (*Hud:* 46). What put Nuh's (Noah's) son in this situation was his unrighteous conduct? That is why Nuh (Noah) should not say that he is my son. Punishment does not depend on one's personality, one's bloodline, or family. It is the concomitant of one's actions. For example, if somebody drinks alcohol, you would not hate him, but you hate his sins. When it comes to prophets, progeny is not determined according to biological criteria; it rather depends on works. We find that the Lord warns Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* against supplicating for all of his progeny. The Lord blessed Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* after trying him, 'And When Ibrahim (Abraham) was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them, [Allah] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people."' Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* then implored his Lord, 'And of my descendants?' [Allah] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers."' (*al-Baqara:* 124) Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* wished that the leadership continues through his bloodline. In response, Allah says, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers' (*al-Baqara:* 124). This matter remained at the centre of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) *peace be upon him* consciousness. He came to know that, for prophets, progeny is not determined by bloodline but by actions. That is why Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* uttered the following supplications after leaving his family in a barren valley, 'O my Lord! Make this a land secure and grant its people fruitful sustenance' (*al-Baqara:* 126). Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* then added, 'such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day' (*al-Baqara:* 126). Then the Lord points out Ibrahim's (Abraham's) misjudgement. Simply, sustenance is a grace bestowed by the

Lord equally on the believers and disbelievers, obedient and disobedient. Do not confuse the Lord's sustenance to all human beings and His Divine Graces; the grace of the Lordship is for all whereas the grace of worship is a duty for humankind. The Lord says, '[Allah] answered, "And whoever shall deny the truth, him will I let enjoy himself for a short while – but in the end, I shall drive him to suffering through fire: and how vile a journey's end!"' (*al-Baqara:* 126)

O Ibrahim (Abraham)! You uttered a supplication for the sustenance of the believers, because your fervent emotions prevented you from deep reflection on the issue. There is a difference between the Gracious Divine Blessings involving Allah's Commands and the natural sustenance of Allah as the Lord and Creator. A disbeliever receives the sustenance from the Lord. He can enjoy worldly pleasures for a short while, but in the hereafter they will be held to account. Therefore, the Lord calls the unjust accountable for their disbelief. He deals with them justly and punishes them for their transgressions. The severe punishment depends upon the severity of the crime. Evidently, the Divine punishment consists with the Power and Might of the Omnipotent Lord. Punishment is a sign of Divine Justice; those who proved unjust to themselves and committed the gravest sin, i.e. disbelief. Doing injustice to oneself or others is sinful; when the Lord makes it unlawful for you to wrong others, He has also implicitly made it unlawful for you to wrong yourself. The Lord describes His dealing with the unjust as follows, 'Verily, His punishing grasp is grievous [and] severe!' (*Hud:* 102)

The pain of His punishment is proportional with His Attribute as the Omnipotent. Imagine that one person wrongs another. In this case, the True Lord has made it lawful for the victim to respond in kind to placate irritating sentiments and pressures. The Lord says, 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack, respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you' (*an-Nahl:* 126). In this manner, your bitter feelings do not fester inside you. For those who have a strong willpower and self-domination, they must look to the Lord's words, 'Those who hold in check their anger' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). There are two possible options; you may retaliate for a wrong in kind or you may suppress your anger in which case you do not translate your bitterness into retaliatory actions. Or else, one may transcend to the highest degree of virtue and forgive the wrongdoer; Allah loves those who exhibit the quality of forbearance.

When they asked Al-Hasan Al-Basri, “How does a person show kindness towards the one who has wronged them?” In response, he said, “If a servant of Allah wrongs you, will that not anger the Lord?” They said, “Yes.” He said, “When Allah is angry with the person who wronged you, will [the Lord] not stand by your side? Will you not then be kind to them who caused the Lord to stand by your side?” That is why it is said that when one of the righteous men heard that a person had backbitten him, he offered him and his servants a platter of fresh dates. Whereupon, the servant asked in astonishment: why are you gifting him dates when he has slandered you? The knower of Allah replied: convey my gratitude to him, for by slandering me he has gifted me with his good deeds; such charity on his part is, doubtless, worth far more than these dates. It is said that he who forgives is wiser than he who punishes; he who punishes can only punish in measure of his own strength. Whoever chooses to forgive leaves the punishment to be carried out by the Lord whose strength is infinite.

It is in this manner that we understand the Lord's words, ‘And such is Your Lord’s punishing grasp whenever He takes to task any community that is given to evildoing. Verily, His punishing grasp is grievous [and] severe!’ (*Hud:* 102) The severity of Allah's punishment is as great as is His Power. The *shiddah* (severity) designates the act of joining two things together insomuch that it is difficult to break them up and it is almost impossible to separate one from the other. In short, it is the most powerful knot of power.

The True Lord then says:

إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً لِّمَنْ خَافَ عَذَابَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ
يَوْمٌ مَّجْمُوعٌ لَّهُ ٱلنَّاسُ وَذَٰلِكَ يَوْمٌ مَّشْهُودٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

There truly is a sign in this for anyone who fears the
punishment of the Hereafter. That is a Day in which all
people will be gathered together, a Day for all to see [103]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 103)

The verse relates the account of past nations and emphasizes—for those who fear the Day of Judgment—the need for faith and belief in the reckoning of human beings for their faith and deeds. He who hears the accounts of past nations and wisely reflects on the lessons contained therein is endowed with insightful vision. The life of past nations represents important signs for us. It is said that 'every verse begets new children—namely, the lessons drawn from it'. Therefore, he who has no faith will never benefit from the messages [provided by these verses]. The Lord says, 'But [then] – how many a sign is there in the heavens and on earth which they pass by [unthinkingly] and on which they turn their backs!' (*Yusuf:* 105). The Lord willed us to note these signs and draw lessons from them. As such, we might be among those who contemplate and will hopefully avoid being among those who have no fear of punishment. These bereft people endure disgraceful suffering in this world and suffer the endless punishment of hellfire in the Hereafter. That disgrace is witnessed by all of Allah's creatures. The Lord says, 'That Day on which all mankind shall be gathered together – that Day [of Judgment] which shall be witnessed [by all that ever lived]' (*Hud:* 103). The scandalous shame of that day will be seen by all human beings from Adam *peace be upon him* to the very last human being. The humiliation will be witnessed, not only by those people who used to know the person, but also by everyone else. The Lord says, 'That Day on which all mankind shall be gathered together' (*Hud:* 103). The word *majmu`* (gathered) require*s* 'someone who gathers'*,* for the numbers of the gathered people depends on the power of the one who gathers them—the Lord and the Creator of the universe. On that day humankind will be gathered awake and attentive. The Lord says, 'He but grants them respite until the Day when their eyes will stare in horror' (*Ibrahim:* 42).

The Lord also says, 'The while the true promise [of resurrection] draws close [to its fulfilment]. But then, lo! The eyes of those who [in their lifetime] were bent on denying the truth will stare in horror' (*al-Anbiya':* 97). In this instance, the Lord says, 'That Day [of Judgment] which shall be witnessed [by all that ever lived]' (*Hud:* 103). In other words, all the creation shall be witness to the dishonourable scandal of those who did not consider the 'signs.' Regarding this fateful Day, the Lord says:

وَمَا نُؤَخِّرُهُۥٓ إِلَّا لِأَجَلٖ مَّعۡدُودٖ ١٠٤

We are delaying it only for a specified period [104]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 104)

We learn that if the coming Day of Judgment is delayed, it does not mean that the day will not come. It will absolutely come, but every event has its appointed time. The fact that carious events follow each other in succession proves that the appointed time of events is determined by Allah. The Lord says, ‘and which we shall not delay beyond a term set [by us]’ (*Hud:* 104). To understand these words, we must know that *al-ajal* refers to the span of human life from birth to death. The Lord says, ‘Every age has had its fixed record’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 38). *Al-ajal* is also used to denote the ‘final moment’ and the ‘term-limit’. The Lord says, ‘…and when [the end of] their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it’ (*al-A’raf:* 34). Let us realise that any affixed time—no matter how long—is always limited. As such, any duration of time, in reality, is short even though it might seem long. Finally, any finite period of time is ultimately short.

Then the Lord says:

يَوۡمَ يَأۡتِ لَا تَكَلَّمُ نَفۡسٌ إِلَّا بِإِذۡنِهِۦۚ فَمِنۡهُمۡ شَقِيّٞ وَسَعِيدٞ ١٠٥

And when that Day comes, no soul will speak except by His
permission, and some of them will be wretched and some
happy [105] (The Quran, *Hud:* 105)

The Lord brings everyone together under a single verdict. Thus, when Allah says, ‘…not a soul will speak…’ (*Hud:* 105), it means that no soul shall speak unless Allah permits it to do so. During their life on earth, they had been speaking freely since Allah had granted them the power to speak and graced them with faculties and senses. The Lord had created human bodily organs and had given human beings the power to control them. The Lord also wishes that a select number of His creatures to stand witnesses to His Power to deprive some of these organs and faculties. For example, you find a mute person who cannot speak, a paralyzed person who cannot move, or a blind person who cannot see. For human beings, these examples reinforce the plain truth that all that human control over bodily organs is a gift bestowed upon them from Allah. These capabilities are not innate to them. When the Lord says, ‘When that Day comes, not a soul will speak, unless it be by His leave’ (*Hud:* 105), He explains to us the true meaning of why, during our tenure on earth, our organs are placed under our command—for they are subject to our will. It is, indeed, the Divine Will that puts these organs under human control. No one ever speaks outside this general leave—the leave which allows our organs to subject to our will. To be sure, Allah could retract this permission such that our organs will no longer react to our will. For example, the Lord says:

- ‘None will speak but he to whom the Most Gracious will have given leave and [everyone] will say [only] what is right. (*an-Naba’:* 38)
- ‘[Since it will be too late,] they will turn upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins].’ (*as-Saffat:* 27)
- ‘That Day on which they will not [be able to] utter a word, nor be allowed to proffer excuses!’ (*al-Mursalat:* 35-36)
- ‘[Be conscious, then, of] the Day when every human being shall come to plead for himself [alone].’ (*an-Nahl:* 111)
- ‘And halt them [there]! [And then,] behold, they shall be asked.’ (*as-Saffat:* 24)

Some might think that it is a contradiction in the Quranic verses. Some verses permit speaking and others deny the power of speech. In reply, we need to understand that the kind of speech that those miserable souls will utter on the Day of Judgment. Some will utter useless and irrelevant sophistry, e.g. accusing one another of evildoing. The Quran describes that scene, ‘They who [in their life on Earth] were bent on denying the truth will [thereupon] exclaim, “O our Lord! Show us those of the invisible beings and humans that have led us astray: we shall trample them underfoot”’ (*Fussilat:* 29). This kind of talk does not in any way benefit the speaker. Therefore, only the useful and beneficial speech is forbidden for them. The ranks of different souls are different on the Day of Resurrection. There is a time when they are talking and another when they are brought to account, at which point they are dumbfounded and speechless. The Lord then orders the organs and human limbs to speak and testify against them. The Lord distinguishes between two different types of human conditions: He says in the concluding part of the verse, ‘some will be wretched and some, happy’ (*Hud:* 105). Allah uses nouns to describe the permanence of wretchedness and happiness. The Lord goes into further detail and describes the conditions of those destined to suffering and misery and those set for happiness. He then shifts from the use of nouns to verbs as follows:

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ شَقُوا۟ فَفِى ٱلنَّارِ لَهُمْ فِيهَا زَفِيرٌ وَشَهِيقٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾

The wretched ones will be in the Fire, sighing and groaning [106] (The Quran, *Hud:* 106)

Those who condemned themselves to misery by straying from the path of Allah will be reunited in their misery, but [in the end] they shall enter Hellfire individually or in groups. The Lord says, ‘And those who were bent on denying the truth will be urged on in throngs towards hell.’ (*az-Zumar:* 71) In another verse, Allah says, ‘Every time a host enters [the fire], it will curse its fellow-host’ (*al-A’raf:* 38). Thus, we learn that the disbelievers—since their description is fixed—are miserable. At the moment when they enter hellfire, they enter it as individuals. Indeed, they accompany the sinful Muslims who have disobeyed the Divine Orders and every one of them receives their punishment according to the sins and the transgressions they did. Each one suffers misery in proportion with their sins. They share misery, even if their suffering varies in nature and quantity according to their sins. Towards no one does the Lord act unjustly!

The Lord uses the verb *shaqu* (brought wretchedness) to emphasize the fact that it was they who chose misery and brought wretchedness upon themselves. The Lord has created His servants and given them freewill to choose. He revealed His Message for them to nurture their souls. For those who have chosen faith, the Lord expects them to be obedient and steadfast. Then, in the same verse, the Lord mentions the state of those who brought misery upon themselves, He says, '[They shall live] in the fire where they will have [nothing but] moans and sobs [to relieve their pain].' (*Hud:* 106) We know that he who breathes in hellfire shall inhale and exhale extremely hot air. The Lord continues describing the conditions of the miserable inhabitants of hellfire:

خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا
شَآءَ رَبُّكَۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ فَعَّالٞ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ ١٠٧

There to remain for as long as the heavens and earth endure, unless your Lord wills otherwise: your Lord carries out whatever He wills [107] (The Quran, *Hud:* 107)

The word *khulood* designates long residence in a certain place. Indeed, an endless tenure is eternal in confirmation that their stay is indefinite. Those who were disobedient shall enter hellfire, 'When that Day comes, not a soul will speak, unless it be by His leave' (*Hud:* 105). For the disbelievers, it is an endless suffering. The punishment of a deviant Muslim for their transgressions begins at the moment when their verdict is pronounced and will last until the appropriate period has elapsed, and then they are allowed to enter paradise. The Lord says, 'unless Your Lord wills it otherwise' (*Hud:* 107).

The Lord then reduces hellfire sentences for the believers; He is 'A sovereign doer of whatever He wills' (*Hud:* 107), and is not compelled by anything. No one has the right to question what Allah does. If He wishes to reduce the tenure of a disobedient person, He does so in the end. Therefore, this person's tenure in paradise is reduced because they only enter it after having received their due punishment in hell. When we conceive of the matter, we resolve that issue over which a hundred-and-fifty religious scholars once differed. Some had imagined that Allah closes the doors of hell on those whom He had put there and their suffering lasts forever. Those whom He decreed to paradise from the beginning will dwell there forever. Some of those scholars believe that Allah will never allow into paradise those who are guilty of major sins [no matter how much they dwell in hell]. This opinion equates major sins with outright disbelief, which is wholly inconceivable.

It clearly takes no account whatsoever of Allah's Mercy. Some religious scholars cited the verse of the chapter of *al-Jinn* in support of this view, ‘If I should fail to convey [to the world whatever illumination comes to me] from Allah and His messages. Now as for him who rebels against Allah and His Messenger – verily, the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide beyond the count of time.’ (*al-Jinn:* 23)

Here, the Lord shows Mercy towards the disbeliever to believe and towards the offender to repent. This is part and parcel of Allah's Mercy. Eternalizing the suffering in hellfire is only mentioned twice in the Quran. It is evidence of the Greatness of Allah's Mercy and His Vast Compassion. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is even declared a mercy for the worlds; namely, for all things other than Allah. Thus, the Mercy is shown to disbelievers through the bounties granted to them by Allah in this world. We learn that Allah has Absolute Dominion over the physical laws of the universe. He did not leave them to operate on their own. Rather, He constantly controls them. Since He is the maker of the Divine Decree; He may alter it in any way He wishes. He is Lord over time, space and movement and the Lord of all things. He does what He wills. In this case, the eternity of time is subjected to His Will. When the Lord says, ‘as long as the heavens and the earth endure’ (*Hud:* 107), we understand that, for both heaven and for hell, there must be that which transcends them and towers above them.

They must exist above some ground or other. If one claims that the Lord says in the Quran that the sky shall be thrown into convulsion and shall break up, we say in response: Do not take a single Quranic verse without referring to other Quranic contexts. The Lord says, ‘On the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens’ (*Ibrahim:* 48).

The Lord allows whomsoever He wills to inherit Paradise, for it is He who quotes the believers saying, on the Day of the Resurrection, ‘…and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion, so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!’ (*az-Zumar:* 74) Noticeably, a man enjoys the services of the inanimate, plants and animals. Generally, human life spans might surpass the creatures which serve them but human life spans are ultimately shorter than that of the sun or the moon. Here, the Lord depicts the human lifespan in the next world. He cites the longest type of life span that we can possibly understand. He says, ‘As long as the heavens and the earth endure’ (*Hud:* 107). Thus, if Allah attaches importance to something, there must be a reason for it. The Lord is talking about the disbelieving dwellers of hell saying, ‘Verily, unto those who give the lie to Our messages and scorn them in their pride, the gates of heaven shall not be opened; and they shall not enter paradise any more than a twisted rope can pass through a needle's eye: for thus do We requite such as are lost in sin’ (*al-A’raf:* 40). A rope will never pass through a needle's eye! We must consider those things—to which Allah attaches importance—in light of His statement, ‘A sovereign doer of whatever He wills’ (*Hud:* 107).

In the Quran, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* says, ‘If You cause them to suffer – verily, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them – verily, You alone are almighty, truly wise!’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 118) From a contextual point of view, Allah should have said, ‘and if You forgive them, verily You are Much-Forgiving, Dispenser of Mercy’. However, this is to take a shallow view of the meaning of the Quran. It expresses the human view, but from the point of view of the eloquence of the Lord it is a different matter. For the question of punishment or forgiveness lies in the hands of Allah alone; it is nobody's right to question it. Here lies the true meaning of *`izza*. That is why Allah is indeed mighty. He is, moreover, Wise in all Judgments, punishment, or forgiveness. Allah concludes the verse in such a manner as to establish, beyond all doubt, that the issue of punishment and forgiveness is in His hands. Concerning the punishment of the disbelievers, He says, ‘A sovereign doer of whatever He wills’ (*Hud:* 107). For those who submitted to His Will and won paradise, Allah says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ سُعِدُواْ فَفِي ٱلۡجَنَّةِ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ
وَٱلۡأَرۡضُ إِلَّا مَا شَآءَ رَبُّكَۖ عَطَآءً غَيۡرَ مَجۡذُوذٖ (١٠٨)

As for those who have been blessed, they will be in Paradise, there to remain as long as the heavens and earth endure, unless your Lord wills otherwise – an unceasing gift [108] (The Quran, *Hud:* 108)

The Lord grants the believers their every wish. In this verse, He confirms that their stay in paradise shall be everlasting and His gifts to them shall be unceasing.

Then the Lord says:

فَلَا تَكُ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِّمَّا يَعْبُدُ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ۚ مَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَعْبُدُ
ءَابَآؤُهُم مِّن قَبْلُ ۚ وَإِنَّا لَمُوَفُّوهُمْ نَصِيبَهُمْ غَيْرَ مَنقُوصٍ ﴿١٠٩﴾

[Prophet], have no doubt about what these people worship: it is merely what their fathers worshipped before them, and We shall certainly give them their share in full, without any reduction [109] (The Quran, *Hud:* 109)

Was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in any doubt or uncertainty? No! This is a general Divine Command of the All-Supreme to all; and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* receives the Command as do all others. Elsewhere, the Lord says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Be constant in [your] prayer from the time when the sun has passed its zenith till the darkness of night, and [be ever mindful of its] recitation at dawn. For, behold, the recitation [of prayer] at dawn is indeed witnessed [by all that is holy]’ (*al-Isra’:* 78). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* already used to pray but the words of the Lord are general to all. Similarly, the Lord also tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Prophet! Remain conscious of Allah, and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites. Allah is truly All knowing, Wise’ (*al-’Ahzab:* 1). The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was conscious of Allah. The verse intends to perpetuate the remembrance of Allah. When Allah issues an order to be followed by the highest created being, this order becomes a general rule for all his followers to be conscious of Allah and to avoid hypocrisy and blasphemy. It is for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and for his community as well to apply this command always.

Likewise, Allah says, ‘O you who have attained to faith!’ (*al-Baqara:* 153) It is a call to the believers who honour their faith, so whosoever of them hears this verse must strive to keep the faith perpetually. A believer who hears these words gets the honour of the Divine Address in affirmation of the lofty status of faith. When Allah mentions a certain quality which a person already possesses, He intends this quality to be perpetual. The perpetuity of such qualities indicates spiritual progress.

The Lord's words, '[O Prophet,] be not in doubt about anything that those [misguided people] worship' (*Hud:* 109). Actually, they do no real worship; true worship means that a worshipper receives orders from the True Lord. They worship idols and they do not supply their subjects with a doctrine to follow. However, the Lord has hereby confirmed that they worship idols. They had previously said, 'We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3). This is the form of faith that has lost its intellectual underpinning. We must mull over the question of faith with intellects. When we have faith, our minds are convinced. However, they adopted their idolatry in imitation of their forefathers. This imitation entails a withering away of the pure, primordial human state. There is no benefit whatsoever in such imitation. The Lord has infused the universe with a host of different 'qualities'. These qualities can be either positive or negative.

'…they but [thoughtlessly] worship…' (*Hud:* 109). Their worship of idols is not real worship; real worship requires prescriptions and proscriptions, but the idols cannot possibly furnish them. Their worship of idols is a mere imitation of the practises of their forefathers. That is why they said, 'Nay, we shall follow [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing' (*al-Baqara:* 170). The Lord decides what their reward shall be, '…and, behold, We shall most certainly give them their full due [for whatever good or evil they have earned], without diminishing aught thereof' (*Hud:* 109). In other words, We shall give them their full, undiminished due, for their corruption in the universe. The Lord had given them the right of choice; to do it or not to do it. If choices are not made in a disciplined manner, the social equilibrium starts to falter. Man has the right to choose; if he chooses faith, the Lord has provided for him—from on high—a doctrine which comprises all the obligations of faith. By imitating their forefathers, they espoused a path which spreads corruption on earth. Then, the Lord promises to give them their full due of punishment. Normally, the term *al-naseeb* stands for blessings, but the Lord uses it ironically to describe their share of misery, then the Lord says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ فَٱخْتُلِفَ فِيهِ ۚ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ
مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقُضِىَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مُرِيبٍ ﴿١١٠﴾

We gave Moses the Scripture before you, but differences
arose about it and if it had not been for a prior word from
your Lord, a decision would already have been made
between them, though they are in grave doubt about it [110]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 110)

The chapter of *Hud* is the only chapter which highlights the account of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* twice (*Hud:* 96-97; 110). The Lord first only mentioned His Command to Musa (Moses) to go forth and present the Divine Signs to Pharaoh. Then, it turns to the fate of Pharaoh, ‘He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection’ (*Hud:* 98). Simply, the context shifts the focus from the very beginning to the culmination of the story where, on the Day of Judgment, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* oversees the entry of Pharaoh and his people into the hellfire. Here, the Lord picks up the account of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* after the latter had begun his mission; Allah says, ‘and, indeed, [similar was the case when] We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses)’ (*Hud:* 110).

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was mentioned in the beginning about Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* when Musa (Moses) came upon the water hole of the town of Midyan. What is strange is that when Allah brings up Shu`aib (Jethro), He does not also bring up the story of Musa (Moses) in his encounter with Shu`aib (Jethro). Rather, he mentions the story of Musa (Moses) with Pharaoh. We knew that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had come to Pharaoh with a single goal in mind; he wanted to take the Children of Israel with him and relieve them form oppression. As for the events that later transpired, where people come to believe in Allah, they followed as natural consequences.

The message of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was oriented solely towards the people of Israel. He comes to them with the Book to deliver the message, whereas in the previous episode, Allah was talking about the signs which He had charged Musa (Moses) to bring to Pharaoh. We know that the chapter of *Hud* talks about the long procession of messengers: Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Shu`aib (Jethro) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*. Two parts speak of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The first deals with Musa’s (Moses') account with Pharaoh and the second with Musa’s (Moses) story with the children of Israel. Every part has an important function in the context of the divine doctrine for human beings at large from the first human being Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Judgment. Whenever a prophet is mentioned, there is a process of healing of a specific ailment which torments a particular community. The common denominator of all prophetic messages can be summed up in Allah's words, ‘Worship Allah alone: you have no deity other than Him’ (*al-A’raf:* 59).

Thereafter, the details of messages diverge from one prophet to another. Some bid people to desist from the worship of idols while other prophets ask their people not to give short measure and weight. In every instance, the messenger heals one of the ailments which his community suffers. For Islam, it heals all social ills. That is why the Quran affirms all good virtues as a doctrine for the entire of humanity. The Lord does not recount these stories for entertainment, nor to kill time or as a history lesson. Indeed, it is for us to take heed of the examples of previous prophets as they delivered their healing messages to their respective communities. Since the community of Muhammad *peace be upon him* shall live to see an age of unprecedented inter-communal contact during which every kind of ill will be prevalent. For this reason, they must take heed of these lessons. The Islamic message contains all aspects of wisdom beyond time and place.

Here, the Lord says, ‘Indeed, [similar was the case when] We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses), and some of his people set their own views against it’ (*Hud:* 110). The grammatical structure of this sentence permits us to conclude that views were set against both the Divine Book and against Musa (Moses) himself. One cannot consider Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* independently of the divine Book which Allah had revealed to him. The two issues intersect with one another: The Divine Message of the Holy Scripture and Prophet Musa (Moses) as divinely chosen. The Lord does not distinguish between the two issues, but rather frames them as one. The messenger is not to be regarded distinctively from his message. When the Lord says, ‘We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses)' (*Hud:* 110). This matter is related to Allah's 'actions'; Allah has His own Essence, Qualities and Actions. In Essence, Allah is far above any comparison and His Qualities are not like other qualities. For example, the Lord exists and you exist, but His Existence is primeval and eternal, whereas your existence is accidental and ephemeral. We understand what is related to Allah considering the verse, 'There is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). When the Lord speaks of His action, consider it in the context of His Infinite Power. Here, when Allah says, 'We vouchsafed the Book unto Musa (Moses)' (*Hud:* 110), we understand that His Action reveals Knowledge and Wisdom, Power, Forgiveness, Omnipotence and Dominance. There are many things that come together to bring about this revelation. A question may be raised: if the people of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* disputed over his message, why did the Lord not punish them as He did with the peoples of Nuh (Noah), `Ad, Thamud or the other peoples whom Allah had taken to task? In response, they did not escape Allah's punishment because of any power they had, but because the Lord postponed their punishment to the Day of Judgment. Allah says in the same verse, 'Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from Your Lord, judgment would indeed have been passed on them [then and there]' (*Hud:* 110). The Lord passed this decisive judgment, just as He had passed judgments on earlier peoples whose prophets were charged with the Divine Missions. The past prophets' mission was only to deliver the Divine Message and not to battle their nations for a call or right. It was Allah that always intervened and pronounced a final judgment. When it came to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* his mission was different. Allah willed to defer the reckoning of his people to the Day of Resurrection. The Lord says, '…for, behold, they were in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about him [who called them unto Allah]' (*Hud:* 110). They doubted the Day of Judgment—the day when all shall be brought to account. This doubt is similar to their doubts—mentioned by Allah in the beginning of the verse—which they harboured about Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Divine Book he brought them, Then the Lord says:

وَإِنَّ كُلًّا لَّمَّا لَيُوَفِّيَنَّهُمْ رَبُّكَ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١١﴾

Your Lord will give everyone full due for whatever they
have done: He is aware of everything they do [111]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 111)

Before Musa (Moses), the disbelievers faced Divine Punishment. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* began his mission, the Lord deferred the punishment until the Day of Judgment. However, never think that you may escape the delayed punishment on the Day of Judgment. Each and every one of us shall be given the full reward for their actions. Goodly rewards for the obedient and punishment for the disobedient, Allah's judgment is certainly coming. This compensation will depend on one's works, whether unbelief or belief, virtuousness or perversity, and the time of this remuneration is the Day of Judgment. There is a brief pause in the Quranic style, so that the meaning can be digested by those who do not have an innate aptitude for the classical Arabic language—unlike the ease with which the early Arabs understood it. Evidently, the old Arabs had no teachers. They just understood and articulated proper Arabic as hailing from a community gifted with highly complex linguistic style and outstanding eloquence. Language, as we know, is not a matter of gender or genetics. It is a social phenomenon. The society in which a child grows up determines their language. The child who grows up in an Arab society speaks Arabic.

And the child living in an English society speaks English. The language is articulated by tongue according to that which is heard by ears. In the old days, the Arab environment was usually isolated and those who grew up in this environment used to speak the language correctly and flawlessly. As for the Arab who lived in a community such as Mecca—the renowned centre of cultures, they used to receive visitors from every corner. As such, the people of Mecca used to send their newborn children out to the countryside to hear nothing but the pure, unadulterated Arabic tongue. In this way, they would not need to be re-taught sound Arabic later in life. Consider, for example, that in our own lives there are two predominant languages: the language used at home and in streets. It is the language we use to communicate with one another. It is the colloquial form of Arabic. There is also the language we learn in schools. It is the polished and refined language that stands for eloquence and correctness. The people of Quraysh used to send their children to the countryside so that their ears could develop a taste for the undiluted Arabic tongue. This pure idiom was the norm in the countryside. A child growing up there had no need of a teacher to learn it. The eloquence was all that his ear ever heard.

This was the language of excellence at that time. This language is different from the language which we acquire nowadays in schools. This latter is almost artificial. Here, what about the orientalists who did not learn Arabic before and only learn the language with an arrogant attitude. These people did not possess the purity of language. That is why they tried to undermine the Quran. Some even tried to claim that the Quran contains grammatical errors. They said this even though it was they who had learned the artificial language whereas those who received the Quran in the Prophet's time were men of unsurpassed eloquence. They did not find any faults with the Quran. Had they detected any linguistic imperfections in the Quran at that time, they would have pointed them out, because the Quran was revealed in a pure Arabic tongue. It was revealed to an eloquent community whose genius manifested itself in the language.

Allah had allowed the disbelievers of Quraysh and the Arabs to remain entrenched in their intense disbelief for a while. Had they discovered any imperfections in the language of the Quran during that time, they would have most certainly announced it. No one could say that he had become a believer and had concealed the imperfections of the Quran. If anyone had any critical remarks about the Quran, their disbelief would certainly motivate them to declare it. Is it possible for the orientalists who lived in the twentieth century to find grammatical mistakes in the Quran when they did not fully master the language (as the early Arabs had)? Rather, their learning of Arabic was mechanical. This precludes the possibility of an intuitive ‘feel’ of the language. For example, their failure to understand the subtleties of the verse in question, ‘and, verily, unto each and all will Your Lord give their full due for whatever [good or evil] they may have done: behold, He is aware of all that they do!' (*Hud:* 111), means that both believers who believe and honour the message, and disbelievers who denied it, shall receive their reward. Good rewards for the believers and punishment for the disbelievers. The word *inna* (verily) serves to emphasize something, especially if the audience is inclined to reject what follows after it. As we know, there are different levels of denial. If you want to inform someone about something new to them, you tell them, for example, 'so-and-so came to see me yesterday'. The listener comes to know about the news for the first time. If they were to tell you, 'but yesterday, so-and-so was somewhere else', you would tell them, *inna* (verily) so-and-so visited me yesterday'. When the listener answers you: 'but yesterday, I saw this person whom you are talking about in another place'. At this point, you might emphasize your words by saying, 'I swear by Allah, so-and-so was with me yesterday'. Therefore, you emphasize your words according to the degree to which your audience contest your claim.

When the Lord postpones the suffering of certain people while on earth, one who is inattentive might say: perhaps Allah is no longer punishing people. That is why the Lord emphasizes that all will be called into account be they obedient or disobedient: 'Verily, unto each and all will Your Lord give their full due for whatever [good or evil] they may have done' (*Hud:* 111). Those who do not have an innate 'feel' of Arabic, like orientalists who have a mechanical understanding of the language, paused at this verse and said: why is there *tanween* in the word *kullan*? They did not know that *tanween* stands for a complete sentence. When the Lord says, 'Why, then, when [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dying man] the while you are [helplessly] looking on' (*al-Waqi'a:* 83-84), the word *kullan* in the verse in question denotes that 'both' the obedient believer and the disobedient disbeliever shall be fairly compensated with either goodly rewards or punishment. The word *lamma*—in the same verse—is used to denote a time, a period, or a moment. When the Lord says, 'And when Musa (Moses) came [to Mount Sinai] at the time set by Us and his Lord spoke unto him' (*al-A'raf:* 143), and 'And as soon as the caravan [with which Ya`qub's (Jacob's) sons were traveling] was on its way, their father said [to the people around him], "Behold, were it not that you might consider me a dotard, [I would say that] I truly feel the breath of Yusuf (Joseph) [in the air]!' (*Yusuf:* 94) When they had left the city behind them and were well on their way out of the land of Egypt, their father said, ‘I truly feel the breath of Yusuf (Joseph) [in the air]!’ (*Yusuf:* 94)

The word *lamma* can also be used for negation. Allah says, ‘The Bedouin says, “We have attained to faith.” Say [unto them, O Muhammad], “You have not [yet] attained to faith”; you should [rather] say, “We have [outwardly] surrendered” – for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts”’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14). In other words, faith had not yet taken root in their hearts.

The term *lamma* connotes the idea that faith shall be allowed to take root in their hearts at a later stage. When the word *lamma* is used in the sense of negation, it is similar to the term *lam*, but it is slightly different from the word *lam* because the latter speaks of the past time and its negation is not connected with the actual moment when the words are uttered, even if the situation might change. As for the term *lamma*, its negation is connected with the actual time during which the word is spoken and its use portends that the situation may change. Thus, we understand the words of the Lord, ‘Verily, unto each and all will Your Lord give their full due for whatever [good or evil] they may have done: behold, He is aware of all that they do!’ (*Hud:* 111) to mean that both the obedient and the disobedient shall be brought to account and rewarded or punished when the moment of remuneration comes to pass—the Day of Judgement.

The word *lamma* puts forth the notion that the punishment expected to occur in this world is divinely postponed for the disbelievers until the Day of Judgment. Then, you come upon the word *la-yuwfiyannahum* in which the letter *la* stands for a swearing article. The True Lord swears that He will compensate them fairly with either goodly rewards or punishments.

And Allah *Glorified is He* is fully Aware of His servants' actions, and He knows these actions before they happen, but when they take place, they cannot be forgotten or overlooked because they are known by the All-Aware Who possesses the precise knowledge. Being aware is different from being knowledgeable for the knowledgeable person might have a general picture of things, but the aware person is the one trained extensively in a specialized field. And that is why the Divine Names of ‘the Aware’ and ‘the Subtle’ usually appear together because ‘the Aware’ is He Who knows the location of things, and the 'the Subtle' is He Who knows how to arrive at the location of those things. For example, you might know the location where some man is hiding in a mountain. This knowledge and this information are not enough to reach the place where this man is hiding. This would require a little more; it would require precision and subtlety.

Allah *Glorified is He* talks about Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to cheer up Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for some people who disbelieved in his Message said, 'If Allah tends to inflict those who reject His Message with a punishment, then why has He not brought a punishment upon us?' Thus, these particular verses of the chapter of *Hud* serve to inform the disbelievers that Allah *Glorified is He* will most certainly bring down punishment upon them. Therefore, be careful not to let them trick you—O Muhammad—in any way; do not let them chaffer with you over anything, such as when they said, 'We shall worship your God for a year, and you shall worship our deities for a year'. Allah *Glorified is He* has previously put an end to this particular matter when He has revealed His Words: 'Say [Prophet], "O Disbelievers! I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship...' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-4). Thus, the matter was decisively brought to an end—for there can be no bargaining when it comes to matters of faith. And we know that faith is a matter connected with the heart, and there can be no negotiation in such a matter, and the complete and final rupture of one's relationship with those who would seek to bargain on such an issue is obligatory, for there can be no chaffering when it comes to faith. It is not a case of human politics, rather, it is a matter that comes from the Lord and is completely dependent on Him. So Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship...' (*al-Kafirun:* 2-4). These verses impart the listener and the reader with a strong sense that the disbelievers will remain steadfast in their worship of false deities, and that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will remain steadfast in his worship of Allah *Glorified is He*. These verses also indicate that the Name of 'Allah' shall be raised high, for immediately following the chapter of *al-Kafirun*, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When Allah's help comes and He opens up your way [Prophet, and when you see people embracing Allah's faith in crowds, celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness; He is always ready to accept repentance.' (*an-Nasr:* 1-3)

Back to the chapter of *Hud*; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱسْتَقِمْ كَمَآ أُمِرْتَ وَمَن تَابَ مَعَكَ وَلَا تَطْغَوْاْ إِنَّهُۥ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١٢﴾

So keep to the right course as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to God with you. Do not overstep the limits, for He sees everything you do [112]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 112)

Al-istiqama (keeping to the right course) means not to swerve or to lean one way or the other—even by a hair—and this is not an easily achievable matter because the grey area—in between maintaining the right course and veering off course—can sometimes be very narrow. For example, when you look at a lighted area and a shaded area, sometimes the shaded area eats into the lighted area, and at other times the lighted area eats into the shaded area. It would be difficult indeed—no matter how precise the measuring equipment is—to determine the line that separates between the shaded area and the lighted one.

Thus, separating something from its opposite can be difficult. And that is why remaining steadfast on the right course is a truly arduous task. When these verses were revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, 'The chapter of *Hud* and its sisters have turned my hair grey.' And had Allah *Glorified is He* not said in His noble Book, 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can …' (*at-Taghabun:* 16), and had this verse not been revealed, Muslims would have been completely exhausted. This above-mentioned verse had been revealed after the following one, '...be mindful of Allah as is His due…' (*Al-'Imran:* 102). And this proved to be difficult for the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following verse that relieved the burden of the *ummah* (followers of Islam) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can …' (*at-Taghabun:* 16). Thus, the Divine Command to remain unwavering on the straight course requires the precise adherence to Allah's orders and proscriptions such that we veer neither to one side nor to the other. Thus, maintaining the straight course requires our full concentration.

We can never be inattentive or forgetful. So Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So keep to the right course as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to Allah with you...’ (*Hud:* 112). This represents Allah’s command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should not feel hopeless by the strong resistance of Quraysh to his message, for they will fall, one after the other, day after day.

Allah's words, ‘...Do not overstep the limits, for He sees everything you do.’ (*Hud:* 112) mean that we must not transcend the boundaries of righteousness, for to oppress others means to have overstepped these boundaries. Therefore, we learn that religion has determined the boundaries of things; however, the boundaries of Allah’s commands differ from that of His prohibition, for if Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to do something, He thereby orders you to remain steadfast to this practise and to never transgress it, as He says, ‘...these are the bounds set by Allah: do not overstep them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 229). These words concern Allah's commands, but concerning His proscriptions, He says, ‘…these are the bounds set by Allah, so do not go near them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 187); that is you should stay completely clear of those bounds. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘He who falls into doubtful things falls into that which is unlawful, just as a shepherd who grazes his cattle near a pasture declared prohibited (by the king); he is likely to stray into the pasture. Mind you, every king has a protected pasture and Allah's involved limit is that which He has declared unlawful.’(1) When Allah *Glorified is He* forbids us from approaching something, it amounts to a precautionary, preventive righteousness. In effect, it allows you to view things, which are not necessarily prohibited, as belonging in the category of forbidden things. Thus, for example, when it comes to the prohibition of alcohol, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to shun it, that is, to stay clear of all that which has to do with alcohol so that a Muslim never finds himself in the same place where alcohol is to be found.

Allah *Glorified is He* also recommends us to be steadfast when it comes to matters of obedience, as He says, ‘...pay what is due on the day of harvest…’ (*al-An‘am:* 141). In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us not to give out too much to protect us from that moment when we recall how bountiful was our harvest, but how, at the present moment, we find that we have nothing to sustain us, for a man might give away much of his harvest if it happens to be plentiful, but then difficult circumstances arise and so he says, ‘I wish I had not given so much away’. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* safeguards us against a situation such as these. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately and know that your deeds will not make you enter paradise, and that the deed most beloved to Allah is the one that is regular and constant, even though it were little.’(1) So the religion is powerful and firm(2) and whoever makes the religion a rigour, it will overpower him.(3) Thus, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are wise and more knowledgeable than us. Allah *Glorified is He* does not only order us against trespassing on that which has been forbidden but He also orders us not to overstep the boundaries of propriety when it comes to that which is lawful. Accordingly, He prescribes kindness, leniency, and clemency, and that a human being allows himself the freedom to choose. For example: a human being commits himself to praying twenty prayers every night, and he vows to perform this rite as a consecration to Allah *Glorified is He,* but when he actually starts practicing this vow, he realises how hard it is, and he draws the ire of his soul. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to remain steadfast and not to overstep the boundaries of propriety when it comes to Allah’s Commandments and Proscriptions. Thus, the precaution applied to matters of worship is more comprehensive for those who wish to be steadfast. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘That which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honour.’(4) And that is why Allah *Glorified is He*—the Wise, Issuer of Decrees—orders us to take preventive action, sometimes by going the extra distance—a positive preventive measure, and sometimes by keeping a safe distance—a negative preventive measure. For when you pray in a place other than the Sacred Mosque, it suffices that you orient yourself towards the *Ka'ba*, whereas when you pray inside the *Ka'ba,* you know that the *Ka'ba* is divided into two parts: one part is built high above the ground, and the other part is called *al-hatim* and that is a part of the *Ka'ba*, but the available funds at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were running short, so they did not build it. That is why you orient your vision towards the high structure that is definitely a part of the *Ka'ba*, and this is a form of negative prevention.

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*
(2) *[Narrated by Ahmad]*
(3) *[Narrated by An-Nisa`i]*
(4) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]*

As for positive preventive measures, consider for example the circumambulation around the *Ka'ba*. People might be densely packed around the *Ka'ba* itself, and thus the circumstances would force you to make the circumambulation around the entire sanctuary. This would mean a longer circumambulation and, therefore, it is a form of positive prevention. Thus, when it comes to the prayer, one takes negative preventive measures, and when it comes to the circumambulation one takes positive preventive measures.

Therefore, we find that the nature of the preventive measure determines the meaning of the notion 'steadfastness'. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying, '...for He sees everything you do.' (*Hud:* 112) And in the previous verse He says, '...He is aware of everything they do.' (*Hud:* 111) We have come to understand what the word *Al-Khabir* (All Aware) means; as for the word *Al-Baseer* (All-Seeing), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* knows about every action performed in the religious context because the actions of worship are visual.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَرْكَنُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ فَتَمَسَّكُمُ ٱلنَّارُ وَمَا لَكُم
مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِنْ أَوْلِيَآءَ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

Do not rely on those who do evil, or the Fire may touch you,
and then you will have no one to protect you from God, nor
will you be helped [113] (The Quran, *Hud:* 113)

The disbelievers, as we know, had proposed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he worship their deities for a year, and that they worship Allah for a year, but Allah *Glorified is He* had put a decisive end to this matter. And here this matter is emphasised when He says, ‘Do not rely on those who do evil...’ (*Hud:* 113).

Now the word *ar-rukun* means to incline towards something or someone. It means tranquillity, peace, and mercy. Thus, to incline towards one who is unjust means that you convince him that his power has sway over your calling. The word also means helping this unjust person and doing his bidding, also to justify his injustice to people. The great evil of the world is that people incline towards the unjust people because when people incline towards those who are unjust this encourages the latter to persist in their injustice, and intensify their efforts in being unjust. And the lowest rank when it comes to inclining towards those who are unjust is not preventing him from wronging another person. And the highest rank of inclining towards an unjust person is to convince him that his injustice is acceptable, and to convince other people that this injustice is acceptable. And if you were to research the state of injustice in the whole world, you would find that the evil that plagues human societies stems from inclining towards those who are unjust, but if you distance yourself from the unjust person, and if you cut off all ties with him, he will think that the reason why you avoid him is because you have confidence in some other sturdy pillar, and so he loses confidence in himself, and takes account of the power which you have sought refuge with. This represents a weakening of his power, isolation for him and a deterring factor so that he might give up his injustice.

To incline towards one who is unjust renders a man liable to be touched by the hellfire since this act of relying upon the unjust has negative consequences as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do not rely on those who do evil, or the Fire may touch you, and then you will have no one to protect you from Allah, nor will you be helped.’ (*Hud:* 113) Therefore, when you incline towards those who are unjust, you put yourself at odds with Allah's Doctrine; and thus, He abandons you and does not grant you victory, for there is no ally and there is no granter of victory except Allah *Glorified is He*.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ طَرَفَيِ ٱلنَّهَارِ وَزُلَفًا مِّنَ ٱلَّيۡلِۚ إِنَّ
ٱلۡحَسَنَٰتِ يُذۡهِبۡنَ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِۚ ذَٰلِكَ ذِكۡرَىٰ لِلذَّٰكِرِينَ ١١٤

[Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during parts of the night, for good things drive bad away – this is a reminder for those who are aware [114] (The Quran, *Hud:* 114)

This is a command to do good deeds issued by Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We notice that these particular verses in the chapter of *Hud* include commands and prohibitions. The commands are always to do good deeds, and the prohibitions are always to stay clear of evil. And we notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So keep to the right course as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to Allah with you...’ (*Hud:* 112). Then He directs the prohibition to this *ummah* (The followers of Islam) as a whole, ‘Do not overstep the limits...’ (*Hud:* 112). Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘Keep to the right course and do not overstep the limits’ because the command to do righteous deeds is directed at Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his community, but in the prohibition of evil, the speech is addressed to the community only, and this emphasises the elevated status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* directs the address to the community of Messenger Muhammad saying, ‘Do not rely on those who do evil...’ (*Hud:* 113). And he does not say, ‘[Prophet] do not rely on those who do evil....’

And in the verse which we are currently reflecting on, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to his community, ‘Keep up the prayer ...’ (*Hud:* 114). And the word *iqama* (keeping up) means to execute the order correctly and perfectly, just as houses are erected, and to renders it conducive to the purpose that is asked for. One says, ‘*aqam ash-shay*` meaning one rendered it conducive to the goal to which it is assigned. And Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Keep up the prayer at both ends of the day.’ (*Hud:* 114) meaning, its ends from one side, and its other end from the other because *at-taraf* of something is its ends, or its sides, The two ends are determined by the middle area of a thing. In other words, the middle area is the buffer between the two extremities. Thus, all that which is to the right of the middle area is considered a *taraf* (one side), and all that which is to the left of the middle area is considered the other *taraf* (side). In fact, any area not pertaining to the middle area is considered a *taraf.*

The middle area is usually considered the point which marks the absolute middle. Everything to the right of this middle point is divided into ten portions, and everything to the left of it is divided into another ten portions, and every one of those segments on either side is considered a *taraf.* So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Keep up the prayer at both ends of the day...’ (*Hud:* 114), we should realise that, for us, the day begins with the dawn of the early morning. This is the first portion of the day where we offer our *fajr* (dawn) prayers. Then comes *adh-dhur* (noon) prayers. If *adh-zhur* occurs before midday, we consider it as occurring before the middle of the day, and if it occurs after midday, we consider it as an occurrence pertaining to after the middle of the day. After *adh-zhur* comes *al-`asr* (afternoon), and this represents another portion of the day. Allah's Words, ‘... and during parts of the night...’ (*Hud:* 114) require that we understand that the word *zulfa* is the plural of *zalfa* which is taken from the verb *azlf* which means to draw close to something. Knowing that the plural form implies at least three or more; and we know that at night we have the *maghrib* prayer and the *`isha`* prayer; that is why we find that Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah rest his soul* considers the *witr* prayer an obligatory rite. He said that the *`isha`* prayer is a ‘must’, and the *witr* prayer is an obligatory rite. There is a difference between rites that are considered a ‘must’ and those that are considered obligatory.

Immediately following this, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘... for good things drive bad away...’ (*Hud:* 114). This remark places prayer at the top of the list of good deeds. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified this point when he said, ‘The five (daily) prayers and the Friday prayer to the Friday prayer expiate whatever minor sins may be committed in between, so long as major sins are avoided.’(1)

The religious scholars have different opinions when it comes to the definitions of *sayye`a* (a sin) and *hasana* (a good deed). Some of them maintain that the *hasana* is that for which Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed a goodly reward, and a *sayye`a* is that for which Allah *Glorified is He* has prescribed a punishment. The very first *hasana* in the Islamic religion is that you testify that there is no other deity worthy of worship except Allah *Glorified is He*. This good deed expiates one's previous state of disbelief; for good deeds drive the bad ones away. That is why some of the religious scholars have said that a Muslim who has committed a minor or a major sin does not dwell eternally in Hellfire; for if the good deed of believing in Allah *Glorified is He* expiates the bad deed of disbelieving, then does his faith not have the power to expiate the sins lesser than disbelief? And thus, a Muslim's punishment is mitigated somewhat in that he receives his punishment in hellfire, but he does not stay there forever for we cannot equate one who believes in Allah with one who does not believe in Him. Belief in Allah *Glorified is He* is the highest kind good deed, and it is one that expiates the sin of disbelief; and it necessarily has the capacity to expiate lesser bad deeds. Some of the religious scholars have wondered: is it the obligatory acts which, in their capacity as good deeds, expiate the bad deeds? Other religious scholars replied: there are some sound hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which mention some good deeds which do not belong to the obligatory acts. Prophet Muhammad said that the fasting of the day of *`arafa* one year, then fasting on the day of *`arafa* the next year, expiates all sins that one had committed in that year. Prophet Muhammad said that a man who accepts Allah's blessings by saying, 'Praise be to Allah *Glorified is He* who has showered me profusely with His gifts, while I have no power nor any strength of my own; and praise be to Allah who clothed me, while I have no power nor any strength of my own.'; will expiate all his sins. Also, that if you utter the following prayer, 'Glorified is Allah, and praised, and there is no god but Allah, and Allah is the Greatest, and there is no power and no strength save with Allah the Highest, the Great'; will drive the sins away.

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(1) *[Narrated by Muslim]*

Thus, the good deeds should be taken in an absolute sense if they be of the obligatory acts. These good deeds drive the bad deeds away. The bad deed is the action for which Allah has promised to punish its doer. Some religious scholars also wondered: the bad deed is an action, and when an action is performed it is registered and recorded, so how is it that a good deed can expiate a bad one? Others answered: driving the sin away occurs through the one who records your actions, and thus Allah *Glorified is He* erases it from your record of sins, or through Allah's Forgiveness; and thus, He does not punish you for the sin. Driving the sins away may also mean erasing the sinful actions and not recording what happened; or Allah *Glorified is He* records it if it happens because it is He who says, ‘He does not utter a single word without an ever-present watcher.’ (*Qaf:* 18) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘Over you stand watchers, noble recorders who know what you do.’ (*al-Infitar:* 10-11) And thus driving the sins away occurs either by erasing them from your record of sins, or that they remain recorded in that record, but Allah *Glorified is He* forgives you for committing them such that you are absolved from the punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘As for those who avoid grave sins and foul acts, though they may commit small sins, your Lord is ample in forgiveness.’ (*an-Najm:* 32) The avoidance of major sins does not prevent the small ones from occurring.

And Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…for prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behaviour…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 45).

And when we look at the times of prayer, we find that they are five. Thus, whosever’s heart clings to the prayers, his heart will be preoccupied with the movements of the prayer whenever he prays, then night time comes and he sleeps. And the mind of those who commit a sin will be preoccupied with this for a time, and were it not for the coming of the prayer time, he would feel a sense of loss, but when the time of prayer comes, his heart concentrates on Allah *Glorified is He* and he asks for His forgiveness.

And when a sin is committed once, it might not be committed a second time; or that the prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behaviour by virtue of the time it takes to get oneself ready for it, for he who sets in the gatherings to gossip about others, or he who acts unjustly towards others, when such a person hears the call to prayers, he gets up and performs his ablution. During the time of making ablution, praying, and concluding his prayer, he ceases to harm people. There are many actions from among the obligatory acts and the good deeds which expiate one’s sins. A Muslim must busy himself with increasing his good deeds, and he should not busy himself with trying to erase past sins because for every one good deed performed, a person is rewarded with the reward of ten good deeds, and he may have it doubled many times if Allah *Glorified is He* wills. As for when a person commits a bad deed, it is written only as a single bad deed. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the noble verse by saying, '...this is a reminder for those who are aware.' (*Hud:* 114) This means that keeping up prayer at the beginning and at the end of the day, and during the early watches of the night—constitutes good deeds which expiate sins. In such a practise, there is a reminder to the soul of that which had been forgotten. In other words, these thoughts existed in the past, but forgetfulness covered it over, and thus receiving the piece of news for the first time removed the ignorance, and receiving it for the second time, reminds you of the commandment because the ill which afflicts human beings is that the things which pass through the human psyche, one after the other, they pass from the centre of one's consciousness and are then pushed to the margins such that a man becomes forgetful of that which is located in the margins of his consciousness. Then, there is a real need for the coming of something new to remind him of what had been relegated to the margins of consciousness. For example, if you throw a stone into a pond, this stone becomes the epicentre of several concentric circles which form around it. These circles then spread out as far as the human eye can see. The proof is that a man might recall events that happened twenty years ago or more. The memory of these events existed in the man's subconscious, and then some new event occurred and brought these memories back. The human mind is like a photographic camera which can capture memories sometimes in the first try, and sometimes in the second try or more. To capture a memory from the first try occurs because the mind is, at that moment, clear of any thoughts. We find that, for those who lost their sight, Allah *Glorified is He* bestows other blessings upon them, namely, an immense capacity for memorising knowledge because when a blind person hears knowledge being spoken, his mind is not preoccupied with the visual stimuli which tend to distract one's centre of consciousness. As for the person who has ability to see, his centre of consciousness might be distracted by what is passing in front of him. Thus, he might have to listen to the knowledge being spoken more than once, until there comes a moment when the centre of consciousness is receptive and is free of distractions, and then the knowledge will have a chance to become fixed in the memory. This is how remembrance operates because it stirs memories that are latent in the subconscious and calls them up to the centre of consciousness. Thus, if you were distracted from obeying Allah *Glorified is He* by turning to disobedience, remembrance can remind you of the responsibility that comes with committing a sinful act, namely, punishment. That is why it is said that, ‘there is no goodness in a good action that leads to Hellfire, and there is no evil in an evil action that leads to paradise’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse which we are now examining, ‘[Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during parts of the night...’ (*Hud:* 114). And when you look at the pillars of the Islamic faith, you will see that, first, you testify—that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah—at least once during your lifetime. The second pillar is prayer, and this is a pillar that can never be waived, for it is required of us five times a day. While offering prayer, you utter the testament of faith, and you sacrifice a bit of your time, so that Allah *Glorified is He* blesses the rest of your time. In prayer, you also abstain from food and drink and all that which breaks the fast, and when you offer prayer, you turn to face Allah’s Sacred House. Thus, all the other rites of the Islamic faith manifest themselves in prayer. Indeed, prayer contains within itself some elements of the five pillars of Islam. That is why prayer can never be dropped, for if you cannot pray standing up, you can pray sitting down and if you are incapable of movement, you can even pray with moving your eyelids. And thus, you will find that in prayer are contained all the pillars of the faith, and due to its importance, it remains with a man until his very last breath. Due to the importance of prayer, it should be offered until the last moments of one's life. It assumed its importance in the Islamic legislation since it is an important part of the religious obligations. All Islamic obligations came about through revelation, except for prayer. The latter came directly from Allah *Glorified is He* Who summoned Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so as to charge him with the commandment of prayer. It is thus a special compliment to the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for it has been prescribed, whilst he was in intimate proximity to His Lord *Glorified is He*. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has made prayer a means for Prophet

Muhammad's *ummah* (The followers of Islam) to get closer to Allah *Glorified is He*; therefore, prayer is the rite that will always remain. It is said that `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* approached a group of people and asked them, ‘Which verse in Allah's Book is dearest to you?’ meaning which verse in the Quran imparts a greater sense of hope, reassurance and glad tiding—that Allah *Glorified is He* will accept us, forgive us and have mercy on us. Some of them said that it is Allah's Words, ‘Allah does not forgive the worship of others beside Him—though He does forgive whoever He wills for lesser sins...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 116). `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said that it is indeed a blessed verse, but it is not the one he had in mind. In other words, this verse truly does give us hope, reassurance and glad tiding, but it is not the one to which he was referring. Others then came forth and said that it is Allah's Words, ‘Yet anyone who does evil or wrongs his own soul and then asks Allah for forgiveness will find Him Most Forgiving and Merciful.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 110) `Ali again said that is indeed a blessed verse, but it is not the one he was looking for. Then others proffered the following verse, ‘My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah’s Mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.’ (*az-Zumar:* 53) `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said once more that it is a blessed verse indeed, but it is not the one he had in mind. Then others suggested the following verse, ‘those who remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins if they do something shameful or wrong themselves– who forgives sins but Allah?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 135) `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* again replied that it is a blessed verse, but not quite the one he was looking for. Then the people became silent and stopped offering their suggestions, whereupon `Ali *Allah be pleased with him*, said ‘What are you thinking O Muslims?’ It is as if he was asking them why they had gone silent. They said, ‘We cannot suggest anything else.’ Thus, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him*, used the suspense as a basis on which he built up what he was going to say. They leaned towards him, ears perked, and he said, ‘I have heard my beloved Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* say, ‘The most inspiring, hope-giving verse in Allah's Book is His saying, ‘[Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during parts of the night, for good things drive bad away— this is a reminder for those who are aware.’ (*Hud:* 114)

Prophet Muhammad then said, ‘O `Ali, when any one of you finishes his ablution, his sins fall away from his limbs such that, by the time he turns to face Allah with a sincere heart, Allah forgives him for all of his sins, and he becomes in a clean state of sins as if his mother had just given birth to him. Then if he commits another sin in between prayers, it gets recorded.’ Then he counted the prayers one by one and said, ‘Between *fajr (dawn)* and *zhuhr* (noon), and between *zhuhr* and *`asr* (afternoon), and between *`asr* and *maghrib* (sunset), and between *maghrib* and *`isha`* (night), and between *`isha`* and *fajr (dawn).*’ Then he said, ‘O `Ali, verily the five prayers are, for my community, as a river running next to someone’s house. If there happened to be an impurity sticking to the body of any one of you, and then he were to bathe himself in the ocean, would there still be any impurities left on him? Indeed, by Allah, that is what prayers are for my community.’

That is why if we look at any righteous deeds, we will find that every deed has a period of time in the life of man. As for prayer, its time is the entire human lifespan. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱصۡبِرۡ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجۡرَ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾

Be steadfast: God does not let the rewards of those who do good go to waste[115] (The Quran, *Hud:* 115)

The word *`isbir* (be steadfast) serves to emphasise righteousness in all its aspects. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘Order your people to pray, and pray steadfastly yourself...’ (*Ta Ha:* 132). There are two types of patience. In the context of religious observances, ‘patience’ is displayed towards the hardships of obedience such as getting up from bed early to perform the *fajr* prayer; one also demonstrates patience when it comes to refraining from carnal pleasures. And thus, we learn that patience is required in two kinds of ways: in an active way to perform our religious duties, and in a passive way to refrain from the carnal pleasures. And we know that the road to paradise is paved with arduous religious duties—therefore, perform them dutifully—while the road to Hell is paved with carnal pleasures—therefore, refrain from them. Imagine, for instance, that someone wants to enjoy a steak, but cannot afford it. He thus remains patient and refrains from begging. That is why the ascetics say that there is no such thing called 'pricey', but there is such a thing as 'cheapness' of soul. That is why we find those who say, 'If the price of something rises beyond my means, I will not buy it, and the cheapest it will be is when it is expensive'.

And Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…bear anything that happens to you steadfastly…' (*Luqman:* 17). And here He says, 'be steadfast: Allah does not let the rewards of those who do good go to waste.' (*Hud:* 115). It is they—through their own works—who earned themselves the rank of *ihsan*, that is, they obliged themselves to follow all that which Allah *Glorified is He* had prescribed, and they performed even more than what was been ordered. This includes prayer, fasting, giving of the prescribed alms and the pilgrimage to Allah's Sacred House because religious rites are not offered randomly from worshippers to the worshipped; rather, it is the worshipped that determines exactly how His worshippers can earn proximity to Him. Try not to attain to the status of *ihsan* through taking a vow because it can then become hard for you to carry out that which you have vowed to perform. Rather, you should make the time of supererogatory worship your own choice such that you do not take a vow to get closer to Allah *Glorified is He* and then you break it. That would be as if—Allah forbid—you had tried Allah's Kindness, but had not found it to be to your liking. This is indeed a transgression on your part.

If you see the abundant light of someone who has reached the stature of *ihsan*, do not deny it, or else you would equalise between one who stopped at what Allah *Glorified is He* has imposed upon him, and he who has done more than what Allah *Glorified is He* has imposed yet from the same kind of His obligations. Try this yourself, hold yourself to Allah's commandments by honouring the times of prayer, and rise in the early hours of the morning and pray the *fajr* at the mosque, then make sure to perfect your work, and when *azh-zhuhr* arrives, go and pray it at the mosque, and try to pray as many supererogatory units of prayer as you can, and you will find that the darkness deep inside your soul has left, and that spiritual light, beyond the perception of the senses, has filled that space. Therefore, do not envy those who engage in such spiritual practise when you find that their insight has been enlightened by Allah *Glorified is He* through His divinely gifted means of perception.

That is why we do not find anyone who has attained such stations of spiritual enlightenment and purity claiming something that he does not have. In fact, one of them might know certain things about another human being who is not religiously disciplined, but he does not tell him about it, because Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed qualities upon him which he must not vainly show off. And when Allah *Glorified is He* presents this matter in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he and his servant found the righteous servant, He wants to put limits on those who engage in this discipline and those who do not. Allah *Glorified is He* describes the righteous servant saying, '…one of Our servants – a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.' (*al-Kahf:* 65) And the righteous servant told Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* 'You will not be able to bear with me patiently.' (*al-Kahf:* 67) Then the righteous servant respectfully explained to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the reason why he might not be able to have patience, and said, 'How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?' (*al-Kahf:* 68). But, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* responded, "God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way." (*al-Kahf:* 69) Whereupon the righteous servant said, 'If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.' (*al-Kahf:* 71). But, events ensued; and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was unable to remain patient, and so the righteous servant told him, 'This is where you and I part company...' (*al-Kahf:* 78). And this is an eternal ruling that those who practise the spiritual discipline—those who have attained to the rank of *ihsan*—cannot be equated with those who are not used to such a discipline. Those who do not practise the spiritual discipline should maintain a respectful attitude, as should those who do practise it; the latter should excuse those who do not practise the spiritual discipline as the former do not know what they know. And if those who engage in the spiritual practise excuse those who do not practise the spiritual discipline; and conversely, if those who do not practise the spiritual discipline maintain a respectful attitude towards those who do—the cosmic equilibrium would be restored.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the status of *ihsan* and the reward of those who attain it, when He says, 'The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs. They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16) And Allah *Glorified is He* explains the different stages of *ihsan* for us, and how they are categorised under what He has ordered; He says, 'They were sleeping only little at night.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17) Allah *Glorified is He* does not make it obligatory in Islam that a Muslim should abstain from sleep at night except for a little time at night, for the Muslim is required to pray the *`isha`* prayer, then he can sleep until *fajr*. Allah *Glorified is He* continues describing the stages of *ihsan* saying, 'They were praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 18). Allah *Glorified is He* does not make such practises obligatory for Muslims. However, those who wish to ascend to the station of *ihsan* should do so. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '...They give a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived...' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19). Here, Allah *Glorified is He* does not indicate a precise amount. Rather, this is left undetermined. He only has obligated *az-zakat* (the prescribed alms) on the Muslim. However, he who aspires to the rank of *ihsan* gives out of his money to the beggars and the deprived. And thus, a Muslim ascends to the rank of *ihsan* and into the love and intimacy of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* has the highest example, we, for example, find that when a person gives someone else, he gives him out of his own private wealth, and he showers him with his talents—whether this be knowledge or money—so what do we think of he who places himself in a position to receive Allah's love?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَوۡلَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡقُرُونِ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ أُوْلُواْ بَقِيَّةٖ يَنۡهَوۡنَ عَنِ ٱلۡفَسَادِ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا
مِّمَّنۡ أَنجَيۡنَا مِنۡهُمۡۗ وَٱتَّبَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ مَآ أُتۡرِفُواْ فِيهِ وَكَانُواْ مُجۡرِمِينَ ﴿١١٦﴾

If only there had been, among the generations before your time, people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth! We saved only a few of them, while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and persisted in sin [116] (The Quran, *Hud:* 116)

Allah *Glorified is He* points us to the fact that only substantial things can withstand the test of time, for time comes to erase those things which are insignificant and what is lower than them. The only remaining thing is the strong one because it transcends time altogether. Therefore, the word *baqeyya* means the good things which remain. Allah *Glorified is He* shows us that He has destroyed the communities that came before because no group among them had forbidden corruption on the earth. Thus, the destruction came when those who enjoin the good and forbid the evil stopped their resistance to the corruption on the earth.

And Allah *Glorified is He* gives us examples of that which is virtuous, that which can withstand the tide of time; for in the story of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and to Midyan, We sent their brother Shu`aib (Jethro). He said, “My people worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. Do not give short measure or short weight. I see you are prospering, but I fear you will have torment on an overwhelming Day. My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land. What lasts with Allah is best for you, if you are believers.”’ (*Hud:* 84-86) This means that giving short measure and short weight could give the trader more, but he pays no attention to that which he has in store. That is why Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* says, ‘My people, in fairness, give full measure and weight. Do not withhold from people things that are rightly theirs, and do not spread corruption in the land.…’ (*Hud:* 85).

So, if you look at something that has gone, and you possess the power to make use of it through your capacity of understanding, you would find it in store and waiting for you in the Hereafter. We have the best example in the attitude of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with `Ai`sha *Allah be pleased with her* when he asked her about an ewe that was gifted to her. She knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to prefer the meat of its shoulder, so she gave away all ewe’s meat except for a part of the shoulder, so when he asked her, ‘What did you do with the meat of the ewe?’ She replied, ‘I gave it all away except for the shoulder.’ This is how realistically `Ai`sha *Allah be pleased with her* looked upon this situation; the only remaining part of the ewe was the shoulder, and she gave away the rest. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a pious religious gesture said, ‘All of it remains except for the shoulder.’(1) This is how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conceived of the situation; he looked to the ultimate goodness of the part of the ewe which was given away. Corroborating this, there is another hadith in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘O son of Adam, is there anything that is your belonging except that which you have consumed and exhausted, or which you wore and was then worn out, or which you gave as charity and sent it forward.’(1) And the Quran emphasises this perspective, and reminds us of that which is stored away, so Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life, but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord...’ (*al-Kahf:* 46). And Allah *Glorified is He* describes this reward that lies in waiting as, ‘...A better reward with your Lord and better grounds for hope...’ (*al-Kahf:* 46). And in another verse He says, ‘…and good deeds of lasting merit are best and most rewarding in your Lord’s sight.’ (*Maryam:* 76) Therefore, you must look at the good deeds of lasting merits because it is that which one can count upon. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this more than once in the Quran; He says, ‘Even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting.’ (*al-A‘la:* 17) And He also says, ‘...that which is with Allah is better and more lasting...’ (*al-Qasas:* 60). Therefore, be wary of looking upon that which has gone and will never return, always look upon that whose value is everlasting. Whenever unfortunate events deprive the believer of something or another, we find that the one whose belief is superficial becomes agitated and worried over what has been taken away, but we find that the one with firm belief is thankful to Allah; *Glorified is He* for what is left over. Here we also have the example of `Abdullah ibn Ja`far *Allah be pleased with him* when he severely injured his leg on his way to Syria. Once he reached the royal castle, the doctors looked at his leg and said, ‘We must give you anaesthesia and amputate your infected leg. He said, ‘By Allah, I would not like to be oblivious about remembrance of Allah even for a blink of an eye.’ This meant of course that he would have to undergo surgery without anaesthesia. And when his leg was amputated, and they wanted to take it out to be buried—so that it may, Allah willing, enter paradise before the rest of him does—he asked them to bring it him, and so they did; and he held it with his hand and said, ‘O Lord! Even if it may be that I have been tested by suffering the loss of a limb, indeed I have been absolved from such suffering in many other limbs.' This is how the believer conceived of his situation.

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(1) *[Related by Ahmad and by At-Tirmidhi]*

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(1) *[Narrated by Muslim]*

And when the Quran speaks about the degrees and stations of faith, it says of some people, '...these will enter Paradise...' (*Ghafir:* 40). And regarding others it says, 'These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord...' (*al-Baqara:* 157). Paradise will remain everlasting because Allah *Glorified is He* will sustain its existence, whereas His Mercy will remain everlasting as He remains Everlasting. And thus, the station of mercy is higher and loftier than the station of paradise. And thus, you find in every situation that which can be called 'the everlasting'.

Here Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If only there had been, among the generations before your time, people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth! We saved only a few of them....' (*Hud:* 116), meaning were it not for a select few people who—unlike the rest—are good, faithful and have certitude and oppose the spread of corruption on earth; were it not for them, Allah *Glorified is He* would have caused the earth to swallow up all those who dwell above it. Thus, that which endures from everything is the result of our choices and the tests that we endure as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind....' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17) And in the modern age we say, 'survival of the fittest'. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* allows life to go on because of these select few who forbid the spread of corruption on Earth; for they act in consideration of Allah's clear directives. To follow these directives adds nothing to Allah's dominion, nor does it enhance any of His Attributes, for He has created the universe and endowed it with all the perfect qualities inherent in it. The role that the Divine directives play is that they regulate the life of the cosmos and the beings living in it. And thus, the directives of heaven end up benefiting Allah's creatures, and not Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created the cosmos with His Perfect Attributes. Read, if you will, His Words, 'He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance.' (*ar-Rahman:* 7-8) Thus, just as Allah *Glorified is He* has raised the sky without using any pillars, and just as He has made things stable and balanced; you ought to apply the principles of moderation in matters where you can exercise your freedom of choice, and you ought to consider matters with a very fine balance, for when equilibrium is disrupted, life on earth becomes corrupted. One of the ways in which equilibrium can be disrupted is when the person who is unemployed usurps the daily bread of the hardworking person. Then people see the unemployed person, living in luxury through robbing the provisions of the hardworking person, and they, therefore, imitate him, and thus corruption starts spreading.

Then we start to see talented people receding into mediocrity, working only to satisfy their basic needs, for if they were to expend any extra effort, there would be no justice to guarantee the fruit of their labour. Thus, life on earth becomes corrupted, the principles of justice become eclipsed, and societies fail to keep up with the pace of life. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If only there had been, among the generations before your time, people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth!’ (*Hud:* 116) It was Allah's Will to make the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the best of all human communities, on the condition that they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘[Believers], you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 110). Allah *Glorified is He* has willed that Prophet Muhammad’s community be the very last, for no other divine messages are destined to come after that of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The earlier divine messages used to be revealed after righteousness had diminished amongst communities, and within human souls. Allah *Glorified is He* has set the Doctrine for the very first human beings. So, the man had internal conscience so that if he committed a sin, he would turn to Allah *Glorified is He* in repentance after having reprimanded himself. However, if he gets accustomed to committing misdeeds, his own self-reproaching soul would give up and he falls under the influence of his evil whisperings. In this case, he will find support among the community, but if the latter also becomes corrupt, Allah *Glorified is He* intervenes by sending messengers, but the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is exempt from all this because Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed that it will always have—until the Day of Judgment—individuals who call on people to be good and who enjoin what is good, and forbid what is wrong. That is why no prophet is destined to come after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emphasised this fact saying, ‘The scholars from amongst my community are tantamount to the prophets of the Children of Israel.’(1) The scholar is anyone who knows even one of Allah’s rulings; and he is obliged to communicate it to people. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, ‘May Allah bestow a radiating glow on the face of him who, upon hearing my sayings, teaches them and conveys them to those who did not hear them; for many a transmitter [of knowledge] is wiser than the receiver [of the knowledge].’(2)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...people with a remnant of good sense, to forbid corruption on the earth! We saved only a few of them, while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and persisted in sin.’ (*Hud:* 116) Allah *Glorified is He* has saved a few of those who forbid the spread of corruption on earth. We find an example of this in the town located by the sea; whose fish would surface for them on the Sabbath, which was the day that they forbade themselves to engage in any fishing activities; then on the other days, all the fish would be gone. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘when some of them asked [their preachers], “Why do you bother preaching to people Allah will destroy, or at least punish severely?” [the preachers] answered, “In order to be free from your Lord’s blame, and so that they may perhaps take heed.” When they ignored [the warning] they were given, we saved those who forbade evil, and punished the wrongdoers severely because of their disobedience.’ (*al-A’raf:* 164-165) And thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has saved those from among that village who forbid evildoing. We may find two elements in societies. The first is that society in which there is no group of people to counter the forces of corruption. The second is when the door of luxury opens for society, which has a debasing effect on human beings; for you might find a person whose means render him incapable of living the high-life of luxury that he desires, so he resorts to bribery, theft, and extortion to supplement his income. All this starts when a human being sees another human being enjoying the luxuries of life, whereas his own means do not allow him to indulge in such luxuries. Allah says, regarding the destruction of societies such as these, ‘When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they [persist in their] disobedience...’ (*al-Isra’:* 16). Some people do not understand the true meaning of this last noble verse. They understand that the disobedience was the result of an order from Allah *Glorified is He*; but the truth is that they had violated Allah’s Order; for He says, ‘Though all they are ordered to do is worship Allah alone, sincerely devoting their religion to Him...’ (*al-Isra’:* 16). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered the most privileged among them to follow His Path, whereby they violated, by their own choice, the Divine Laws; thus, they transgressed their Lord’s orders.

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(1) *Cited by Al-`Ajluni in Kashf al-Khafa` (1744)*

(2) *[Narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Majah]*

The holy verse which we are currently studying, ‘...while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and persisted in sin.’ (*al-Masad:* 16) The word *dhalamu* (those who oppressed) which Allah *Glorified is He* uses, shows that the nature of the opulence which they enjoyed was obtained from wronging others, from usurping the rights of others and from sucking the life-blood of the destitute. The word *taraf* (luxury) denotes the bounty which a man enjoys. Therefore, the derivative term *ataraf* means to be corrupted by such abundant blessings, and to have succumbed to a state of forgetfulness regarding who the Bestower of these blessings really is. *Atraf* means that Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed His blessings upon him only to seize him with all His Might and Power. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, we opened the gates to everything for them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 44) No one should ever think that he who takes hold of his enemy and then raises him is just caressing him. Rather, he raises him only to throw him down from a greater height, such that his pain becomes that much greater. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed worldly blessings on the likes of these people so that they could demonstrate their tyranny. We must pay attention to the word *al-fath* which brings about the joyful expanse of the human soul. We must pay attention to whether it is a case of *fatah `alayk* or of *fatah lak.*

The Arabic word *fath* denotes ‘victory’, so mentioning it generally expresses good news. However, this is only when it is associated with the preposition ‘*l’* (to or for). When it is associated with the preposition *`ala* (against), it denotes an affliction, even if disguised in the appearance of a blessing. Allah says, ‘Truly We have opened up a path to clear *fath* (triumph) for you [Prophet]’ (*al-Fath:* 1). In the verse we are currently reflecting on, the word *fath* is used in the negative sense. The verse mentions people whom Allah has opened up against whom blessings that are actually nothing but harm, blessings intended to immerse them more in the heedlessness of Allah. So, Allah has punished them in this life, for they have grown forgetful of Him. Allah concludes the verse by saying, ‘…and so lost themselves in sinning’ (*Hud:* 116). They violated that which must have been honoured. They disobeyed the ordinance of Allah which they were to abide by. In the original Arabic text of the verse, the word used to denote ‘persisting in sinning’ is *mujrimeen*. It is derived from the word *jurm* which means ‘severance. One who persists in disobedience severs his relationship with his Creator since he has strayed into heedlessness and neglecting His guidance. They have lost themselves by indulging in the finery of this worldly life and usurping the fruits of others’ labour.

Then, Allah says:

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ لِيُهْلِكَ ٱلْقُرَىٰ بِظُلْمٍ وَأَهْلُهَا مُصْلِحُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously [117] (The Quran, *Hud:* 117)

Using ‘would not’ denotes that something is not proper or should not exist, not that it does not exist, There is a difference between stating that something *does* not exist and that something should not exist. Based on this understanding, this verse means that it is impossible that Allah will destroy any town unjustly. Injustice means usurping the rights of others for the benefit of oneself, and there is nothing whatever which human beings possess which could benefit Allah for it is Him Who bestows all blessings on His creatures. Therefore, injustice is completely out of the question when it comes to the relationship between the Exalted Creator and His servants.

It is worthy of mention that the word ‘town’, which is a noun referring to places, is used in the verse, but those addressed by it are the dwellers, not the place. This is also the case in other verses, as in: ‘And ask them about that town which stood by the sea…’ (*al-A’raf:* 163). Allah also says, ‘and ask (the people of) the town where we have been…' (*Yusuf:* 82). As the translation shows, 'the people of' is not part of the structure of the verse. In these two examples, as well as in the verse we are currently reflecting on, Allah refers to the place, while He means the residents of that place. Allah says, 'Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously.' (*Hud:* 117) It means Allah is far above the possibility of destroying them unjustly. If He destroys any town, it is a punishment for the disobedience of its people. If wrongdoers did not receive punishment, the scale of justice would be deficient. For justice to be established, punishment or reward must be administered to those who deserve it. On the level of humans, when we bring an unjust person to justice and punish him, the suffering inflicted on him is a relief to all those who have suffered under his oppression. This is the true meaning of justice. One of the errors occurring in the justice systems applied by people is the delaying of sentences. It would take years before a criminal is sentenced for his crime. Such laxity in carrying out sentences is a failure of justice, for the longer the interval between committing a crime and administering justice, the less sensitive people are to the gruesomeness of the crime. There would be no deterrent to prevent people from sinning. That is why Islamic law is keen on shortening this interval as much as possible. Punishment must be administered while the community is still reeling from the shock of the crime. This is sure to generate general satisfaction from the punishment of the criminal. It also serves to remind everyone of the heinous nature of the crime.

In the verse, Allah says, 'Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously.' (*Hud:* 117) In another verse, He says, 'Your Lord would not destroy towns for their wrongdoing if they had not been warned.' (*al-An'am:* 131) Therefore, Allah has sent prophets to convey to us the Truth that was revealed to them, to bring good news of reward to the obedient and admonition to those heedless of Allah's message. Allah would not punish people for anything unless He has made it clear for them that it is a sin and warned them against committing it.

Thus, Allah has conveyed to us the broad principles by which to manage our life on earth and left it to us to devise based on those principles and regulations to achieve reform and welfare. He says, 'Your Lord would not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously (*muslehun*).’ (*Hud:* 117) The word *islah* literally means ‘reform’, and it has a rather deeper connotation than that conveyed by the word ‘righteous’. It is the act of employing the means and resources Allah has created for us to make our livelihoods and achieve wellbeing. Allah has made for us ample resources for sustenance and commanded us to develop creative inventions to promote our lives. He has secured for us the basic necessities of life- food, water, and air; they exist in abundance in the universe. He has also guaranteed preservation of kinds through reproduction by creating the male and female in living beings. Using these means and resources to achieve wellbeing is what the word *islah* means, and this is what Allah commands. We have previously pointed out that *islah* means maintaining that which is already good to derive more benefit from it and reforming that which is not so it can be useful too. A *muslih* is he who increases the quality or efficiency of something so it can be more suitable for answering human needs and reaching goals more easily. Allah would not destroy a community that commits itself to *islah* by following a system that governs life and manages people’s affairs rightly. In case this system is based on believing in Allah and accepting His religion, the result is harmony and balance between humankind and the universe. In this way, society can continue to exist and prosper. On the other hand, some societies have not accepted divine guidance, but they have devised a system of values that organizes their lives, for Allah does not prevent the human mind from establishing rules and systems to make life easier and more comfortable.

However, when people replace the Law of Allah by their own laws, they must go through difficulty and hardship until they manage to devise a system that governs life. Allah has sent down His guidance to us to spare us difficulty and hardship. He has revealed to us the perfect law that can best govern life without having to incur any effort or toil to devise our own laws. No matter how we try to render perfect the laws we make, there will be flaws and imperfections. Only the law of the All Knowing, All-Wise Creator can set life to rights and meanwhile spare us hardship and suffering from the first.

Thus, we understand that Allah does not destroy any society only because they are disbelievers. Allah would not strip a society from the right to live so long as it follows laws and values that establish the rights and obligations of its members, even though they would have to incur distress and pain in the process replacing the law of Allah. However, it is the inevitable duty of the believers to alert them to the ordinance of Allah. If they accept it, they thus guarantee happiness in this life and the other. If they reject it, let it suffice that, at the very least, they would not fight against the believers or try to block the way of faith before people.

That is why we find that in countries Muslims have ruled, there are people who have adhered to their religions; Muslims have not conquered countries to force their peoples to embrace Islam. Rather, Islam spread in those countries by the power of logic, justice and irrefutable proof. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘and He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes; Allah loves the just.’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 8) Allah would not destroy a society that seeks reform and justice, even if it is a disbelieving society. Rather, He grants them the fruits they deserve in this worldly life. For as He *Glorified is He* says, ‘If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20)

In the following verse, Allah says:

وَلَوْ شَآءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ ٱلنَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً ۖ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾

If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community, but they continue to have their differences [118] (The Quran, *Hud:* 118)

Allah has prepared the universe with all the basic necessities that sustain life before bringing humankind to it. He has created things whose only role is to be at the service of humankind so as to help the latter perform the mission they are created for as vicegerents on earth. These creatures have no will of their own and it is not their choice to accept or reject their role as servants to people, whether believers or disbelievers. Allah has brought humankind into existence and secured for them the sustenance required to maintain this existence. He has guaranteed for us preservation of life and kind. This is a gift Allah grants to His servants be they believers or disbelievers.

So as for sustenance, Allah grants it to all. As for guidance, it is a gift only to the believers. All people receive provisions from Allah whether they believe in Him or not, but only those who believe benefit from His guidance. Those who receive both Allah's provision and guidance are the happiest in both this life and the Afterlife. Allah, with His Infinite Power, compels all creation- except for human beings- to perform the roles they are created for, and they have no choice or free will respecting this. Had Allah so willed, He would have created a single community of human beings that never strays from His path- just as the sun, the moon, the air, or any of the other creatures which are completely subservient to His Will and have no will of their own.

Allah has made his creatures subservient to Him, never faltering in their servitude. This proves His Absolute Power over them. As for His servants' love for Him, this is demonstrated by those of His creatures He has given the freedom of choice: whether to obey or disobey Him. If a servant chooses to embrace faith and obey Allah, this is a proof that he loves Him. Thus, the creatures that have no will of their own and are compelled to remain subservient to Allah demonstrate His Divine Might and Omnipotence. As for those creatures Allah has given freewill, if they obey Him, this demonstrates love for Allah Who says, '… The truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so...' (*al-Kahf*: 29).

However, does freewill mean that we are absolutely free in every respect? No, beware of this self-deception. Besides the fact that this freewill is a bestowal from Allah and a manifestation of His Will, let us also remember that there are aspects where we have no choice. It is true Allah has given us the choice to worship Him or not, but it does not mean we have escaped His Control. Allah has power over the means that preserve human life. He strips us of the ability to choose in some respects to remind us of this absolute truth: we are His servants and He has Absolute Power over us all. He has created animals, plants and inanimate objects for our service and wellbeing and distinguished us from them by the gift we call the 'mind'.

Some fall into the mistake of taking words to have meanings quite opposite to what they are intended to convey. The word *`aql* (mind) is taken from the verb *`aqala* which means 'to tie' or 'to restrain' It denotes control, for the function of the mind is to rein in caprices and conceit, not to go beyond the limits Allah has set. Always remind yourself of the One in Whose Grasp you are and think of those aspects of your life where you have no choice. As long as there are realms where you have no freewill, and then be mindful of Allah in the areas where He has given you choice. Remain steadfast in faith and maintain the right attitude and conduct in relation to Him. Remember that it is He Who has given you the gift of life including the aspects where you have freewill and those where you do not. Allah teaches us lessons to remind us of His Omnipotent Power by stripping us of abilities we perhaps believe we have complete control over. One may lose control over his own leg or arm and fail to move them. If these abilities were solely under our control, they could never let us down. Rather, these abilities are bestowed from Him, and He can take them away if He wills. So long as this is the case, let everyone say to himself: do not become conceited if Allah has given you freewill on a certain level. Allah has only given us this freedom to test us regarding His ordinance. He has sent down to us His guidance which consists of His commands and prohibitions. So long as we are commanded to do something, it means we have the power not to do it. Likewise, prohibitions mean we have the power to do what we are prohibited from doing, or else the notion of obligation would be nonsensical. We have the choice to obey or disobey divine guidance, but in other matters, we have no choice. Had Allah so willed, He would have stripped us of freewill in all matters. Therefore, it befits people of understanding to discipline themselves with the Almighty Creator and show obedience to Him in matters where He has given people freedom of choice.

Allah says, ‘Man is ungrateful to his Lord’ (*al-’Adiyat:* 6). Indeed we are, for we sometimes forget that the first and foremost function of the mind is to make us realise our limits. We do not control the way our bodies function, nor can we modify them to make them resistant to natural laws, for example. Allah gives us no choice there, and in this is a constant reminder of His Might. Therefore, we should submit humbly to Him and abide by His ordinance in what He gives us freedom to choose.

It is worthy of mention that religious obligations and prohibitions constitute a very limited range of life’s activities, perhaps only 5% of them. The remaining 95% fall into the category of permissible things that are neither mandatory nor forbidden. Allah has made obligations and prohibitions to maintain healthy functioning of our life on earth. Compliance with them means setting this life to rights and reaping ample reward in the life to come.

Let us ponder this example. Islam commands the wealthy to give *zakat* (alms). Is it any form of transgression against their properties? No, but this obligation guarantees that they too will sure receive sufficient help if they turn poor. So is the case with all the commands of Islam. They are meant to cure ailments of society and solve problems with justice. They promote compassion and helpfulness among the members of society based on true faith in the Creator and devotion to His religion. Here is another example. Islam forbids one from prying into the private lives of others, so is this a restriction of one's freedom? No, but it is a guarantee that others too would not pry on one's private life. Therefore, if we think deeply about the nature and purpose of duties in Islam, we find that both obligations and prohibitions are to our advantage. In the verse we are reflecting on, Allah says, 'If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community...' (*Hud:* 118). There is a common misconception that this verse contradicts what Allah says in the following one, 'Mankind was a single community, then Allah sent prophets to bring good news and warning…' (*al-Baqara:* 213). The latter gives the impression, at first sight, that humankind were heedless of their Creator at the very beginning and it was only after Allah sent forth His prophets one after another that they took heed. As we said, this is a faulty understanding. Allah has guaranteed for humankind- ever since He brought Adam and his wife on earth- provisions that sustain their lives and guidance that keeps them on the straight path. People have known their Creator ever since their parents were ordered to descend to earth to perform their role as vicegerents. Allah says, '… Whoever follows My guidance, when it comes to you [people], will not go astray nor fall into misery' (*Ta Ha:* 123). Thorough consideration of the Quranic verses that deal with this matter would remove any misunderstanding. Allah says in the verse we are dealing with, 'If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community...' (*Hud:* 118). In the verse wrongly thought to contradict it, Allah says, 'Mankind was a single community, then Allah sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So, by His leave Allah guided the believers to the truth they had differed about; Allah guides whoever He will to a straight path.’ (*al-Baqara:* 213) Divine guidance was revealed concurringly with the descent of Adam *peace be upon him*. After this first reminder, people strayed into heedlessness and disagreement regarding the issue of faith, so Allah sent forth His prophets to remind them of the Truth and judge between them. People were already on the straight path of Allah when He created them and brought them down to earth. Allah could have made them continue in a state of righteousness, all rightly guided and obedient to Him. However, He has chosen to give them freewill to choose their paths and, due to this freedom, they began to disagree regarding faith and will continue to disagree, ‘… but they continue to have their differences’ (*Hud:* 118).

In the following verse, Allah states an exception to this rule. He says:

إِلَّا مَن رَّحِمَ رَبُّكَ ۚ وَلِذَٰلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ ۗ وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ
لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ ٱلْجِنَّةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾

Except those on whom your Lord has mercy – for He
created them to be this way, and the word of your Lord is
final: ‘I shall definitely fill Hell with both jinn and men’ [119]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 119)

So among the servants of Allah are the rightly guided whom He saves from disagreement respecting faith. Allah says about the creation of humankind, ‘I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56). Worship means submission to Allah and adherence to His ordinance. However, people’s caprices and prejudices have caused them to disagree regarding faith and disobey divine commands. Allah has made us different. Were we all alike, there would be no such disagreement. Everyone has a different temperament and tendency. That is why some tend to be right wing or left wing in politics; some choose communism, others capitalism, some existentialism etc.

Therefore, human standards and inclinations cannot be the basis for the truth, as Allah says, ‘But if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the heavens, the earth and everyone in them would disintegrate…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71). The world cannot be governed by the desires of people who forever disagree. Rather, harmony and righteousness can only be achieved when we all follow the law of the Creator and transcend our desires. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you will attain to true faith until he makes his desires compliant with the message I have been sent with.'(1)

In our daily lives, the various professions and activities that help keep life going have been left to us to govern. In this realm, there is great variation based on the different powers and talents of people. Allah could have created us all geniuses in every aspect of life; He could have made us all talented poets, or doctors or philosophers, but who then would perform the other professions? Had we all been doctors or engineers, who then would perform the works of farming or trade? It is the Will of Allah that He has created us different in talents and capacities. This is for the world to be bound together through inter-relationships and inter-dependencies. Life cannot go only by the compassion and goodwill of people.

That is why Allah says, 'Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace? We are the ones who give them their share of livelihood in this world and We have raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). This verse states the wisdom for which Allah has made people different in rank and social status. This is not for the rich to exercise superiority or authority over the poor. Every human being is distinguished in his own station by the skills Allah has given him. Everyone is elevated by his good work in the particular field he masters. One's diligence is what gives him status, whatever his domain is.

This way, human beings all share in the benefits of each other's varying talents. Differences in human talents act as channels for cooperation and exchange of experiences and services. In terms of abilities and talents, everyone's share is just equal to everyone else's. The real worth of a person is determined by the things he masters whatever his field or profession is, and the only thing that makes one person superior to another is devotion to Allah.

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(1) *Cited by Ibn Abu `Asem in his As-Sunnah (12/1) on the authority of `Abdullah ibn 'Amr, and Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in his Jami` Al-`Ulum (460).*

The rich owner of a luxury car is in need of a mechanic in dirty and ragged clothes, even though the latter is less wealthy and socially less advantageous. That is why I insist: if you see someone who is apparently *below* you in appearance or status, do not be conceited for what you have achieved or gained over him. Remind yourself that this person sure masters something you know nothing of; he sure excels over you in some domain or another. Allah has begot no child to prefer him above all the others and endow him with all talents and powers, leaving the rest powerless or devoid of talents that distinguish them.

Allah says, '… but they continue to have their differences, except those on whom your Lord has mercy– for He created them to be this way...' (*Hud:* 118-119). Differences concerning religion result in the existence of believers and disbelievers. The fact that some disbelieve in Allah contains a message in itself. Were it not for the existence of disbelievers, the believer would perhaps be unable to appreciate Allah's favour on them. Were disbelief completely pointless, Allah would have eliminated it from existence. As a matter of fact, disbelief is serviceable to faith. It shows the greatness of faith through the flagrant contrast between them. This is just as pain is serviceable to health; were it not for pain, the illness could not be discovered, diagnosed, or cured. In this sense, pain is like a messenger heralding the advent of good health.

So Allah says, '… but they continue to have their differences, except those on whom your Lord has mercy...' (*Hud:* 118-119). Difference is actually at the core of harmony, the means that leads to general agreement. Take this simple example. If all the members of a family preferred the same part of chicken, this similarity would entail disagreement and dispute. Agreement would be achieved when tastes and preferences vary. The same goes for professions and social statuses: variation leads to harmony whereas similarity would cause dispute. This poses a question: Are people created to be forever entrenched in their divergent views, or are they created for peaceful coexistence and mutual compassion? The answer is that we are created for both difference on the one hand and mercy on the other hand, since each has a role and a reason behind it and there is no contradiction.

Then Allah says in the same verse, '… and the word of your Lord is final, "I shall definitely fill Hell with both jinn and men."' (*Hud:* 119) One of the

Attributes of Allah is Omnipotent Knowledge, so He has eternally known who of His servants would choose faith and who would reject it. This is what it means that '… the word of your Lord is final…' (*Hud:* 119). He has known in advance the choices His servants would make. He has known who would struggle to attain paradise and who would do evil and deserve to abide in Hellfire.

Let me again give the example I have frequently given. It is just for illustration, for Allah is above all comparison. Suppose the dean of a college asks the teachers that the best students of every class should be announced to be awarded for their excellence. Even though the teachers already knew those students, the dean ordered a test to be given before selection. The test results may or may not corroborate the teachers' expectations and knowledge of their students. Some of the students may be out of form due to sickness or the like, so he may not do well in the test. Thus, judgement of the teachers would be thrown into doubt. However, the Judgment of Allah is not subject to error, and what He has eternally known about His servants most certainly comes true. His word must be fulfilled. His Knowledge is eternal, and in several verses of the Glorious Quran, Allah challenges the disbelievers to alter His Judgement or prove it wrong. He says, for example, 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too!' (*al-Masad:* 1) Abu Lahab heard this verse and still did not try to defy fate by declaring faith, or even hypocritically professing faith. Indeed '… the word of your Lord is final…' (*Hud:* 119). What Allah says must undoubtedly be fulfilled for there is none that can go against His Will. Allah commands us, when we promise or announce that we mean to do something, 'And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow" without [adding], "if Allah so wills"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24). This is showing respect for Allah and an acknowledgement of our limited scope. We are subject to the vicissitudes of fate. We have no control over events, their times, places, implications, reasons or results. Allah is the One Who possesses dominance over all things. Thus, acknowledging that one can only do a thing 'if Allah so wills' (*al-Kahf:* 24) protects one from being accused of breaching his promises in case any unexpected event turns up. However, when the Owner of the universe, in Whose Hand all Power rests, promises to do a thing, He is Capable of carrying out that which He has promised with absolute certainty.

It is also worthy of mention that, as we have pointed out before, the actions of Allah are independent of time. In the original Arabic text of the Quran, a verb expressing an action of Allah may be in the past, present or future tense. Still, these tenses encompass only human actions. Divine Actions are not measured by the same standards. When Allah decrees a matter, we must consider it fulfilled. He says, ‘Allah’s judgement is bound to come. Do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent! ...’ (*an-Nahl:* 1). So long as the matter has been decided upon, it will surely occur at its appointed time. No power is capable of preventing Allah’s Will from being executed, for His rule over His kingdom is absolute, uncontested.

Allah concludes the verse by saying, ‘I shall definitely fill Hell with both jinn and men’ (*Hud:* 119). Allah has created humankind and jinn for His worship and charged them with the heavy trust of faith and moral responsibility. Therefore, they will all be recompensed for what they do.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَكُلًّا نَّقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِۦ فُؤَادَكَۚ
وَجَآءَكَ فِى هَٰذِهِ ٱلْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٢٠﴾

So [Muhammad], We have told you the stories of the prophets to make your heart firm and in these accounts truth has come to you, as well as lessons and reminders for the believers [120] (The Quran, *Hud:* 120)

This verse refers to all the prophets whose stories are told to the Prophet Muhammad by Allah in the Glorious Quran.

Some of the actions of Allah correspond to His Names and Attributes and some are not. For example, Allah has ‘created’ all things, and this action corresponds with His Name ‘the Creator’. On the other hand, some actions do not correspond to any of the ninety-nine Names of Allah. He says in the verse we are reflecting on, ‘… We have told you the stories…’, yet we can by no means ascribe to Allah the name of ‘story-teller’! Similarly, it is improper for anyone to say that Allah is ‘the Schemer’, even though He says, ‘…They schemed and so did Allah...’ (*al-Anfal:* 30). Allah also says, ‘The hypocrites try to deceive

Allah, but it is He who causes them to be deceived…' (*an-Nisa':* 142). However, it does not mean we can call Allah 'the Deceiver'! Thus, we understand the proper way of speaking about Allah. We should show reverence for Allah by ascribing to Him only the Attributes of Majesty and Loftiness He ascribes to Himself. When the actions of Allah are described in the Quran using words that do not correspond to His Names, it is only for the purpose of suitability, yet they denote meanings different in quality and degree from those denoted by the same words when referring to human actions.

Allah says, 'So [Muhammad], We have told you the stories (*anba`*) of the prophets…' (*Hud:* 120). The Arabic word *anba`* means 'news of great moment', news capable of altering the state of the mind that receives and comprehends it, Stories of prophets who preceded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are mentioned in several chapters throughout the Glorious Quran. They tell news of the ailments of their peoples that they addressed by their messages and the hardships they had to endure from those who opposed them. Allah tells Prophet Muhammad these stories in the Quran to make firm his heart, for he too was going to encounter hardships in the course of his mission of calling for Islam. Allah says about one of the previous prophets and those who believed with him, '… they were so shaken that even [their] Messenger and the believers with him cried, "When will Allah's help arrive?"' (*al-Baqara:* 214)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims encountered such difficulties too, as Allah says, '[Remember what you felt] when they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when [your] eyes became dim and [your] hearts came up to [your] throats, and [when] most conflicting thoughts about Allah passed through your minds.' (*al-'Ahzab:* 10). When events reach such a point, reassurance is most needed by firming up faith in the hearts of the believers. Allah has sent His prophet to deliver His message, so He would not let that Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* fall victim to his adversaries. Great difficulties had to be faced, so Allah braced the heart of His prophet to be strong enough for them.

The heart is the centre of one's beliefs. The mind stores the information supplied by the senses. Perceptions are formed through the eyes that see, the ears that hear, the nose that smells, the mouth that tastes, and the skin that feels. Information is thus generated for the mind to start its process of storing and analysing them. When this information acquires approval and validation of the mind, they are passed to the heart, there to rest as certainties that doubt cannot interfere with. That is why the Arabic word used to express this meaning is *`aqidah* (creed). It comes from the word *`uqdah* meaning ‘knot’. When thoughts turn into beliefs, it is as if they are knotted to the very strings of the heart so they become inextricable. Once the mind has done its work and beliefs have been firmly rooted in the heart, they serve as the principles around which one’s life revolves. A young man thinking about his future career would consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different professions to choose the one that best matches his talents and aspirations. The senses gather the required information, the mind analyses them, and when results are crystalized, they are sent to the heart as beliefs that govern one’s conduct and choices in life. We all know for sure that fire burns, so where has this certainty come from? The senses encountered the experience which the mind stored and analysed. Due to this process, the heart has grown firm and unwavering in its conviction that fire burns. The heart is the vessel whose role is to be ready to receive the truth, heed reminders and warnings and accept the wise counsel revealed by its Lord. What comes from Allah is the Truth, and it is a quality true of truths that they never change. The Truth Allah has revealed to His servants is the source from which faith springs and based on which humankind are assigned their religious obligations. One must have confidence in the Wisdom of the One Who has decreed laws and obligations before he can accept to abide by them. That is why evidence for the Existence of the True Lord must be first provided so His Ordinance may be heeded. Obedience stems from faith in the Almighty Lord Who is never affected by any change or swayed by caprice or fancy. Religion may command one to commit himself to heavy duties from which he would like to refrain. Only true faith would urge one to comply in such a case. Devotion stems from firm belief that Allah is the One Who has created us, and it is therefore impossible for Him to cheat or deceive His creatures, so whatever He sends through His messengers is true, wise, and just.

One normally dislikes teachings or counsels when they are given by a human being like himself, for they are usually associated with a kind of perfection the advice-giver has and the advised person lacks. In case the former himself lacks that aspect of perfection to which his advice pertains, his addressee would only answer him: do not preach what you do not practise. That is why Allah says, 'Most loathsome is it in the Sight of Allah that you say what you do not do!" (*as-Saff:* 3). When someone preaches something he does not practise, this gives his addressee a pretext to reject his advice, for he would think to himself, 'if there were any good to be found in that advice, he would have applied it to himself'!

The verse we are examining explains the situation Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* faced and his need for reassurance and support. It also underlines the believer's need to be reminded that they too would face hardships as those who believed with the previous prophets.

As a matter of fact, hardships sometimes result from the seemingly arduous nature of religious obligations. This is the outcome of looking at these obligations on the surface and failing to comprehend their deep significance. For example, some perhaps consider the command to lower one's gaze (from looking at what is unlawful) is an unnecessary prohibition of an almost unavoidable pleasure. However, they do not realise that when others also commit themselves to this command, their own privacy would be secured against violation. Some may, likewise, see the obligation of giving *zakat* (alms giving) an injustice that causes to deprive him of some of his money. They do not realise that this obligation will in turn serve them in case they go through tough times and become poor themselves. If the giver of *zakat* becomes the one in need, his fellow believers will rally to his aid to protect him and his family from suffering under poverty. Thus, correct understanding of religious obligations is fundamental to faith. Allah says in the Quran, 'Will they not, then, try to understand this Quran?' (*an-Nisa':* 82) When you consider the matter more closely, you will see that religious obligations are not meant to be restrictions to your freedom. Rather, they are meant to guard your honour and dignity. Allah has enjoined such duties on you for your protection and prosperity, even though, outwardly, they may seem to benefit only others.

Besides religious obligations, among the difficulties the believers encounter is rejection and resistance of those who benefit from corruption. They are people who thrive on the spread of corruption and persecute anyone who oppose their interests. They would sure harbour hatred for those who resist the spread of corruption on earth. Therefore, the attitude of Prophet Muhammad's adversaries was natural, for in their folly, they defined their interests only in terms of the life of this world. They did not consider the possible consequences- of either reward or punishment- they were to incur in the Afterlife. Had they possessed sound judgement, they would have realised that it sure serves their best interests to have someone who calls them to be upright so they will not lose the Hereafter. Had they reflected rationally on the matter, they would have seen that, just as Prophet Muhammad's mission was to stand up for the weak and oppressed, it was also to stand up for them, wealthy and powerful as they were. Had they come to that essential realisation, they would have supported the Prophet's cause rather than oppose it. Had they heeded his admonition concerning the recompense they were to receive in the Hereafter for spreading corruption, they would have been grateful to him for warning them and helping them purify themselves.

Thus, Allah has assured Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was nothing new among the rest of His prophets, for every prophet has encountered difficulties as well in the course of their mission. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sure to expect particularly severe trials and hardships, for he was the final messenger and the message he was sent with would not be followed by any other message. Since it was certain that he would go through trying times, Allah related to him stories of the difficulties faced by the previous prophets to make his heart firm; it was that heart which received the fundamentals of faith, starting from the essence of creed: ‘there is no god but Allah’, until every principle of faith became ingrained in it. Reassurances were therefore essential to make that heart firm and firm up faith in the hearts of the believers who followed him as well, for they too were destined to go through trying times.

Let us ponder what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to *al-ansar* (helpers) when they swore allegiance to him at *`Aqabah*. They said, ‘If we honour our pledge to you, what will we receive in return?’ The Prophet did not tell them, for example, ‘You will rule over the world! Your dominion will stretch from Persia to the Mediterranean’! Instead, his reply to them was, ‘You will be rewarded with Paradise.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that some of them might die before the aspired victories would be achieved, so he did not promise them reward in this worldly life. Rather, he promised them that which everyone who dies as a believer will attain, whether he witnesses the victories of Muslims or passes away before they take place.

The verse we are reflecting on shows the reason why Allah mentions the stories of previous prophets in the Quran. By that, He meant to strengthen Prophet Muhammad’s heart to prepare him to receive the Truth and remind with it those who believed with him.

Now, what about the other party? Those who denied the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and fought against him? Allah also gives an account of them since the aforementioned verse is such that it makes the soul receptive to hearing about the other party that opposes the Truth. After speaking about firming up faith in the hearts of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers at times when they are about to falter, Allah also speaks about the disbelievers and commands His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to face them without fear. He says:

وَقُل لِّلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ٱعْمَلُوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنَّا عَٰمِلُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾

Say to those who do not believe, ‘Do whatever you can: we too are doing what we can’ [121] (The Quran, *Hud:* 121)

Let the disbelievers do whatever they like, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers relied on the solid basis of faith in Allah and therefore any preparation their opponents made did not deter them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers would not face their enemies alone, nor was their confidence derived from their numbers. Rather, they relied on the never-failing Power of Allah. Any military commander engaged in a battle would feel a surge of confidence when news of aids and supporting troops reach him from the nation for whom he is fighting. How much confidence do you think would be inspired then if help were to come from Him whose reserves are never depleted? The One Who compels all and none can compel?

This is how the prophets dealt with their enemies; they sought refuge with the All-Powerful Lord. When Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was about to be overtaken by Pharaoh, when he realised that there was no possible escape where the sea laid in front and the enemy was at the back, his people cried out, '…We shall certainly be overtaken' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). However, Prophet Musa (Moses) reassured them, '…No, my Lord is with me, He will guide me' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 62). He knew he was backed by the power of faith, of reliance on Allah, not the material power of himself or his followers, so Allah rescued them with a miracle, 'Strike the sea with your staff' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63). Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did and the sea parted, each side like a huge mountain, and a narrow path of dry land appeared where Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his followers proceeded. It occurred to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that he must strike the sea with his staff again so it would return to its natural, fluid state. He wanted to prevent his enemy and his soldiers from taking that passages, so Allah revealed to him, 'Leave the sea behind you parted and their army will be drowned' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24). Allah commanded Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to leave the sea as it was so that it might deceive Pharaoh into attempting to tread upon that dry path. Then, Allah would cause the sea to suddenly return to its original state. Thus, the same thing that saved Prophet Musa (Moses) and his followers also destroyed Pharaoh and his soldiers. Only Allah *the Exalted* is capable of that. It is in such a manner that Allah grants the believers strength to stand up to the disbelievers.

Faith is a battle of challenge. The challenge of a prophet is to prove sincere as the conveyer of Allah's message who is supported by a miracle proving his truthfulness. The other challenge faced by a prophet and the believers is to gain victory against the disbelievers in spite of their relatively much smaller numbers and limited material powers. The power of faith is what brings that victory. Allah says, '…How often a small force has defeated a large army with Allah's permission! Allah is with those who are steadfast' (*al-Baqara:* 249). Thus, amid any battle where faith is at stake, an attitude of challenge and perseverance is widespread among those who fight for the Truth.

Every prophet was first supported by a miracle with which he challenged his opponents to prove his truthfulness. Then the role of the miracle would come to an end, and Allah would reveal to His prophet a doctrine to be delivered to his people. However, the case was quite different with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for the miracle associated with his advent is unique in that its role never comes to an end. Furthermore, it is the essence of his message for it contains the fundamentals of faith and the ordinance of Allah. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with the timeless message addressed to all humankind for all times and places, so it was necessary to send with him a miracle that would stand until the Day of Judgement. Everyone who believes in Islam knows that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is Allah's messenger and the Quran is his miracle until the coming of the Hour.

Allah says in the verse we are considering, 'and say to those who do not believe: "Act according to your ability and way (*makanatikum*)...' (*Hud:* 121). The Arabic word *makanah* is derived from the same root of *makan* (place). Every creature has a physical form and a place occupied by this form. As for *makanah*, it denotes 'a prestigious status', a status among people that is indicative of the consequence and authority of its holder. When Allah says, '… Act according to your ability and way…' (*Hud:* 121), it is a challenge to the disbelievers: do all that your powers and numbers are capable of, for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is supported by the Almighty Lord Who has sent him and who would bring him victory. As we said, this is meant as a direct challenge, not a command. Allah would not address any commands to the disbelievers, for they do not believe in Him in the first place so that they would obey Him.

Were they to obey the commands of Allah, they would not be disbelievers anymore, for obedience necessarily entails faith. The challenge reaches a peak when Allah says at the end of the verse, 'We are acting (in our way)' (*Hud:* 121). Let them do what they can; their power is ever so limited, for they are mortals who are subject to vicissitudes. Allah too is acting, and His Power and Capacity to act are unlimited. He is the True Lord Who has ever existed with no beginning and no end and Who has Power over all things and nothing has power over Him. When He decrees something, none can counteract His Will.

Every power possessed by any of His creatures is bestowed by Him in the first place, but the Power of the Creator has eternally been His; it was bestowed by none and none can defeat it or eliminate it. The moment and influence of any action is measured by the power of him who acts. The mistake of most people is that they forget who the actor is when they consider an action. Human beings can well be opposed and their actions counteracted. However, if the action is performed by Allah, then people must humbly acknowledge the limits of their powers. A very good example of this mistake is the attitude of the disbelievers to Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey regarding which Allah says, 'Glory to Him Who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship [in Mecca] to the furthest place of worship [in Jerusalem], whose surroundings We have blessed….' (*al-Isra':* 1) They wondered saying, 'It takes us a month to reach Jerusalem even when riding our fastest camels, so how did he reach it in a single night'?! They forgot that it was not the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who made the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem by his own power. Rather, he was taken there by Allah. Measure, therefore, that miraculous act by the Power of Allah and not that of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَٱنتَظِرُوٓاْ إِنَّا مُنتَظِرُونَ ١٢٢

And 'Wait: we too are waiting' [122]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 122)

In this verse, an even greater sense of threat and defiance is felt. The disbelievers only await fulfilment of the devil's promise to them, whereas the believers await fulfilment of their Lord's Promise to them. The believers will tell the disbelievers on the Day of Judgement, 'We have found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found what your Lord promised you to be true?' (*al-A'raf:* 44) Waiting of the disbelievers is a defiant threat to them, for they only wait for their due punishment. To the believers, contrarily, waiting is soothing and reassurance as they wait for Allah's victory.

Had the future events foretold in the Quran not come true, doubt would have crept to the hearts of the believers. The word of Allah must be fulfilled, so we can be sure that this threat, 'And "Wait, we too are waiting."' (*Hud:* 122) was given in full confidence that what Allah has promised would come true. Indeed, actual events did corroborate everything that has been foretold in the Quran. Did the True Lord *the Exalted* not say, ‘Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee’ (*al-Qamar:* 45)? At the time this verse was revealed, the Muslims were still weak, and this prompted `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Which of the two groups will be defeated?’ He feared the word ‘forces’ referred to the believers for their wanting of material power then made him exclude the possibility of their being the victorious party. A Muslim then was unable even to protect himself. Later, when the Battle of Badr took place, the foretold news of victory came true. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had even marked the very spots on the land of the battlefield where some of the great leaders of Quraysh would meet their end! The Quran foretold even the body parts where some of them would be wounded. Allah has revealed to His Prophet, ‘We shall brand him on the snout!’ (*al-Qalam:* 16) Allah has foretold such events so that when they came true, this would be evidence for Prophet Muhammad’s truthfulness as His Messenger. Thus, Allah has always been on the side of those who follow His straight path. He has related in the Quran certain events from the stories of previous messengers to firm up his *peace and blessings be upon him* heart and grant him courage and strength to bear the burden of the message and help the believers remain steadfast in faith.

Allah concludes the chapter of *Hud* with the following blessed words:

وَلِلَّهِ غَيۡبُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَإِلَيۡهِ يُرۡجَعُ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ كُلُّهُۥ
فَٱعۡبُدۡهُ وَتَوَكَّلۡ عَلَيۡهِۚ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

All that is hidden in the heavens and earth belongs to
God, and all authority goes back to Him. So [Prophet],
worship Him, and put your trust in Him: your Lord is
never unaware of what you [people] are doing [123]
(The Quran, *Hud:* 123)

This verse in question addresses mankind and tells them that they previously knew nothing about those secrets presented to them in the verses of the Noble

Quran which have been revealed down to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Here, we should consider that Allah *Glorified is He* out of the undeniable fact that He encompasses the knowledge of everything, guards this Quran so we will never be doubtful about the absolute truthfulness and veracity of the Quran.

As a matter of fact, there are undoubtedly a lot of secrets which man is still unable to uncover, that is, there are barriers between him and the uncovering of these secrets. One of these barriers may, for example, be that of time. Here, we heavily stress that whenever Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about any topic as well as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself never previously knew about, this falls under the category of uncovering the secrets of the old past.

For this reason, scholars call some verses of the Quran *ma kunnat al-Quran* in reference to these verses which start with the words *ma kunta* (You were not…) such as the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Maryam (Mary). Nor were you with them when they disputed.' (*Al-'Imran:* 44) In actuality, the Quran has many verses of this same stylistic form.

we should know that there were already certain people who had knowledge of the events that occurred long before the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad and his companions, yet the case is totally different with him *peace and blessings be upon him*; for Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who uncovered the knowledge of these unseen secrets to him *peace and blessings be upon him*; that is, no human being told him *peace and blessings be upon him* about any of these secrets; an unshakeable fact which is established by the adversaries of Islam themselves. As such, we can clearly state that Allah *Glorified is He* has uncovered the unseen of time and place to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the extent that he was informed of some of the secrets of the future. Once again, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who revealed these secrets to Prophet Muhammad.

Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has kept some secrets unknown up to the present time because people at the time of Messenger Muhammad would for sure be unable to understand them because understanding such secrets were beyond their mental capacity during that period of time. In the same connection, Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about the occurrence of future events which none of the contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could foresee.

Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; the two greatest empires during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* (the Roman Empire Persian Empires) were in permanent conflicts and wars with each other; each of them aimed at expanding the scope of their authority. During one of these wars, the Persians, worshippers of fire, defeated the Christian Romans. Even though those Romans did not believe in the message of Prophet Muhammad, he *peace and blessings be upon him* felt sad for their defeat because they at least believed in the existence of a god. Whereupon Allah comforted him *peace and blessings be upon him* by revealing down verses of the Quran in which He tells obviously that the Romans will for sure defeat the Persians. Allah says, '*Alif Lam Mim*. The Romans are vanquished. In a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome. Within a few years, Allah's is the command before and after; and on that day the believers shall rejoice. With the help of Allah; He helps whom He pleases; and He is the Mighty, the Merciful. (*ar-Rum:* 1-5) These verses of the chapter of *ar-Rum* precisely define the time when the Romans would be given victory over the Persians; they state clearly that this will for sure take place within *bida` sinin* (a few years), that is, in a period of time from three to nine years, for this is the denotation of the Arabic term *bida` sinin.*

Yet, if someone claims that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who predicted the occurrence of these events between these two empires, we answer him saying, 'How did Prophet Muhammad know about the military situation of each of these two camps? As a matter of fact, he *peace and blessings be upon him* previously knew nothing about the military and the political conditions of these two powers. In the same connection, we find that the Romans had already defeated the Persians exactly as has been mentioned in the Quran, a matter which is viewed as an act of unveiling the unseen secrets of time and place by Allah *Glorified is He* to Messenger Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him*. In other words, Allah, the One Who has the knowledge of the absolute unseen, is He Who revealed this secret to Prophet Muhammad.

We should be perfectly aware of the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who knows the 'absolute unseen'. That is to say, that no one has the ability to uncover it, nor will anyone be able to know about it except when Allah *Glorified is He* wishes; a fact which is definitively proved by the Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The Knower of the unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a messenger….' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27)

We should state that there is a difference between the 'absolute unseen' and the 'limited unseen', as follows: the secrets of the latter can be disclosed and unveiled on condition that man should carry out certain procedures and measures. Today's discovery of the secrets of the universe is a case in point. This point is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* in which He says, 'Allah– there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him, or sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on Earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His Knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain] ...' (*al-Baqara:* 255).

It is thus clear that all the discoveries—that have so far been made—have always existed in the universe but in a hidden form. In addition, we should fully realise that Allah *Glorified is He* has set a specific date for the discovery of each of these secrets; a point which is crystal clear in the fact that the discoveries of steam, electricity, atoms etc. had been made in different times. Here, we should consider that man will, by the Leave of Allah, be able to disclose more secrets of the universe in defined dates, all of which tell clearly about the Existence of Allah *Glorified is He* the All-Wise.

These discoveries may be the result of man's efforts in making researches, or they may even be made by chance. The Law of Buoyancy by Archimedes and the Law of Gravity are two cases in point, for they had been discovered by chance. Allah *the Exalted* allowed one of His servants to discover something, although mans' researches were not primarily meant with the discovery of this thing in particular, a point which clearly tells us why Allah *Glorified is He* ascribes to Himself the Attribute of 'All-Encompassing'.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'All that is hidden in the heavens and Earth belongs to Allah, and all authority goes back to Him' (*Hud:* 123). We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* puts His saying, *wa `ilayhi yurja`u al-`amru kulluh* (and all authority goes back to Him) in the passive form to indicate that everything in the universe is run by due measure. In our daily life, we have numerous examples which are carefully and perfectly arranged such as the setting of an alarm to wake one up at a particular time. In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* plainly states that He runs the affairs of the entire universe by the rule mentioned clearly in the following verse of the chapter of *Ya Sin* in which He says, 'His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says to it, "Be" – and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) Everything in the universe takes place according to what Allah has predestined.

Another possible interpretation for the word *al-`amr* (authority) is that it may have to do with the entire environment surrounding mankind. Here, we should realise that even though Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of all what is in the heavens and the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* allows man to get benefit from them. In other words, even though Allah *the Exalted* possesses all these creatures, He, out of His Infinite Mercy, allows man to benefit from them. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; man gets benefit from the heat and temperature of the sun although none owns it except Allah *the Almighty*. Out of the undeniable fact that the sun is viewed as one of the most essential pillars of life, Allah *Glorified is He* does not grant man, whom He gave the free will to decide on matters, the right to own it so that the course of life will continue running smoothly.

In the same vein, He does not entrust the affairs of all the main constituents of life to any of His creatures, but all authority goes back to Him alone. Considering the earth with its elements, water, air etc., we find that Allah *the Exalted* does not grant any creature the right to own or to take control over these objects so that people will not corrupt the lives of one another. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Infinite Mercy allows none of His creatures to take control over these absolute necessities of life as man is subject to permanent change, which is why he will misuse his authority over these things from time to time.

We should know fully well that Allah *Glorified is He* has subdued all these basic needs of life to all His creatures including man; yet Allah *the Exalted* does not grant man the authority over certain creatures. As for man's power itself, Allah *Glorified is He* predestined that it should be subject to change, that is, the strong become weak, the poor become rich and so on.

As such, we reach the conclusion that all what we own in this worldly life is granted to us by Allah *Glorified is He*, that is, we possess nothing of our own will. In addition, all what we possess today will be under our authority for a particular period of time, and then it will be returned back to Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Resurrection; it is a point which is definitively proved by the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16) It is out of this Divine Absolute Sovereignty on the Day of Resurrection that man's body parts will confess all the sins committed by them in the life of this world.

Even though this verse in question reads, 'All that is hidden in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah' (*Hud:* 123), Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran, 'His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and what is between them two and what is beneath the ground.' (*Ta Ha:* 6) In this verse in the chapter of *Ta Ha*, Allah *Glorified is He* drives our attention to the importance of those treasures placed by Allah under the ground confirming meanwhile that they are His. It is obvious today, we, human beings, make use of these treasures.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…and all authority goes back to Him …' (*Hud:* 123), this implies that man must seek salvation, so as not to blame himself for being among the losers on the Day of Resurrection.

We should be fully aware of the fact that all what we enjoy in this worldly life are but blessings conferred upon us by Allah the Almighty the All-Powerful Who granted man power and the All-Wise Who granted him wisdom. Allah *the Exalted* out of His Bounty, grants man handfuls of these attributes, yet all the matter belongs to Him *the Almighty.*

Here, we should consider that when the Quran tells us about something you have no previous knowledge about, we should firmly believe in its veracity because the One Who has sent down this Quran is Allah the One Who does not lie. That is why we find Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* having full confidence that Allah would give him victory over the enemies of Islam, for all authority belongs to Him *Glorified is He*.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions Allah *be pleased with them* were absolutely sure that the disbelievers would be punished in the Hereafter in case they were not tortured in this worldly life, that Allah *Glorified is He* would take over their properties which they owned in this life, and that Allah *the Exalted* would not allow the disbelievers to decide on matters in the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who will for sure inherit the earth and all what is on it. So, if this is the case, we must offer our acts of worship to Him *the Almighty* alone; we must have firm belief in all the events of the past He told us about, and we must be absolutely sure that all authority goes back to Him *Glorified is He* Alone.

Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Wisdom, divided time into three parts as follows: one part pertains to the period of time before the creation of Adam, whilst the second starts from the creation of Adam to the existence of any of us. As for the third part of time, it pertains to the endless future. As such, man experiences three different periods of time which are the past, the present, and the future. As a matter of fact, each of us has a due role to perform in this existence.

Logic states that man, having enjoyed existence in this life and having matured intellectually, is supposed to wonder about his ancient past that is, the history of mankind. When one wants to investigate such a topic, his acceptance to the narrations is subject to confidence in the speaker, that is, whether or not he speaks the truth, especially if the talk turns to the history of what happened before the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. One should wonder, ‘None can tell me about what happened before the creation of Adam but the One Who created me’! This point is narrated in the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says, ‘There was Allah and nothing else before Him….'[1] This Hadith clearly indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only Who can tell us the absolute truth about what had happened before the creation of Adam. Yet, if someone wonders about his existence in a specific time in particular, we say to him, 'This happens based on the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* Who knows best what benefits man and what causes him harm'.

Yet, one must wonder about what he is supposed to do in this worldly life. The answer is crystal clear in the fact that he is supposed to take part in pushing the course of life forward, for it is undoubtedly this active engagement that marks the line between life and death, a point which is proved by the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon' (*Hud:* 61).

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has equipped man with a mind so as to reflect upon matters and with power by means of which he is able to act. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* subdued the entire universe to man to get benefit from all the different kinds of provision in it. It is thus clear that everything in this universe needs one to exert effort, a matter which cannot be fulfilled except for when man receives power from Allah.

We should know for certain that offering the five prescribed daily prayers is the most important thing in man's life, for by doing so, one recharges his spiritual energy in such a way that makes him show absolute loyalty to Allah *the Almighty*. In this vein, we strongly stress that in case one sincerely offers these prayers to Allah, his future will be positively affected by this.

In the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* giving us a striking example to illustrate this point, says, 'O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the Remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) This particular kind of action

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, 431/4; and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, Hadith no. 3191 on the authority of `Umran ibn Husayn who narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'There was Allah and nothing else before Him and His Throne was over the water, and He then created the Heavens and the Earth and wrote everything in the Book.'*

mentioned in this verse in the chapter of *al-Jumu`a,* i.e. hastening to the Remembrance of Allah, necessitates that man must receive spiritual energy from above. Then, the positive effect of this energy will be shown clearly in the following kind of action which is manifested in the saying of Allah, ‘But when the prayer is ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah’s grace, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10)

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse in question with His saying, ‘…So [Prophet], worship Him, and put your trust in Him: your Lord is never unaware of what you [people] are doing.’ (*Hud:* 123) This part of the verse in question orders the believers to obey the divine commands. Man is supposed to offer the various acts of worship including the performance of prayers, the giving of the prescribed alms, the observing of fasting and making the pilgrimage to Mecca if one is able to do so. Having offered these acts of worship sincerely, one gets higher spiritual energy which enables him to do his due roles by means of which the course of life is run smoothly.

Amazingly enough, the efforts exerted by man in this worldly life helps him in one way or another receive spiritual energy from Allah, the Creator. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. When one wants to offer prayers, he is in need of clothing to cover his private parts. We should consider that we, in pursuit of getting clothing, have to undergo a number of stages including agriculture, weaving, buying, and selling. In this way, one gets benefit from all the different sciences so as to be able to offer prayers and thus gets the spiritual energy from Allah *the Almighty*. As such, one is in constant movement; he receives spiritual energy from Allah and thus can run the affairs of the life normally; he, in the same connection, makes use of the elements of life what enables him to stand before Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, it becomes clear that one’s life is based on two important elements: receiving spiritual energy from Allah *Glorified is He* and making use of the elements placed in the universe so that the course of life is run smoothly. For all this, one is supposed to worship Allah *Glorified is He* in the light of His Divine Way of Guidance sent down to mankind through messengers and prophets, considering that he will be faced with hardships and challenges. Yet, in case one undergoes any of these matters, he has to put his trust in Allah- a great benefit obtained from continuously showing loyalty to

Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why we find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hastening to offer prayers at times of distress.(1)

As for the Arabic phrase *hadhabahu* (while in distress), it means that when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was no longer able to address the matter, he then turned to Allah, the Creator of reasons to ease this distress. If one worships Allah *Glorified is He* and places his trust in Him, Allah *Glorified is He* will undoubtedly help him get rid of this distress for Allah is not unaware of what we are doing.

This verse in question shows man the way to happiness in the present and the future. That is because when one obeys the orders of Allah and does good deeds, he will be rewarded with ten good deeds in return for the one good deed, and Allah *Glorified is He* multiples (the reward) for whom He pleases. As for the evil deed, out of the Mercy of Allah, it is recorded as one evil deed.

As such, it is perfectly clear that this verse under discussion has set the affairs of man in order throughout the entire life including the time before his existence, his present time and his future to the Day of Resurrection. In this vein, it is good to quote the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the Call of Allah and the Messenger whenever he calls you to that which will give you the life...’ (*al-Anfal:* 24). This means showing obedience to Allah and following the perfect, moral example of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him narrated that ‘When anything distressed the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him he prayed.’ Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, 5/388; and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan, Hadith no. 1319.*

the chapter of

Yusuf

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

الٓرۚ تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلۡمُبِينِ ١

Alif Lam Ra, these are the verses of the Scripture that makes things clear(1) [1] (The Quran, _Yusuf:_ 1)

We have previously shed light on the openings of the chapters of The Quran,(2) such as the chapters of *al-Baqara, Al-`Imran,* etc. In this regard, we confirmed that there are several chapters in the Quran that start with the ‘discrete letters’ stressing that these letters must be read in the full form to get the correct recitation of the verse. That is, it is not right just to pronounce the sound of the letter.

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(1) *This chapter is Meccan (revealed in Mecca) that is, before the migration of Prophet Muhammad to Medina. In his Al-Itqan fi `Ulum Al-Quran, Imam As-Suyuti says, 'Abu Hayyan opines that the entire chapter was revealed in Mecca before the migration of Prophet Muhammad, except for the first three verses, yet this opinion is very weak.' (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan; 1/40). The verses of this chapter count 111. It sheds light on several topics including the stories of the prophets, the righteous, the angels, the devils, mankind, livestock, birds, kings, kingdoms, traders, scholars, the ignorant people, men, and women. In addition, it reviews the topics of monotheism, jurisprudence, biographies, the interpretation of dreams, policy, coexistence and running the affairs of the state, as well as several topics by means of which one is prosperous in this worldly life and the Hereafter. (See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Al-Bayan; 4/3441).*

(2) *Imam As-Suyuti who, in his Al-Itqan, is reported to have said, 'Know that Allah* Glorified is He *has opened the chapters of the Quran, using ten different styles, as follows:*

First: Praising His Glory, which is divided into two kinds: praising Him the Almighty *and declaring His Glory. Here, we should know that five chapters of the Quran start with praising him* the Almighty*; two start with His saying, "Blessed is He"; there are yet seven chapters starting with declaring His Glory.*

Second: The discrete letters; there are twenty-nine chapters of the Quran starting with these letters.

Third: There are ten chapters in which Allah calls upon Prophet Muhammad or the ummah (followers of Islam), as follows: there are five chapters starting with calling upon him peace and blessings be upon him *and another five in which Allah* Glorified is He *starts them with calling upon the ummah.*

Fourth: There are twenty-three chapters in which Allah the Exalted *starts with predicative sentences, such as 'They will ask thee about the spoils of war...' (al-Anfal: 1).*

Fifth: There are fifteen chapters in which Allah starts with an oath. =

We should consider that every Arabic letter has both a specific name and a sound that it represents. Only the educated people are the ones who know the names of letters. As for the uneducated which are a majority, they do not know the names of the letters even though they pronounce the sounds represented by them in their daily speech; they are unable to pronounce the letters in their full form. For example, an illiterate person is neither able to spell a word nor to identify its letters because he did not learn how to read and write. In contrast, the literate person knows both the pronunciations and sounds represented by the letters as well as their corresponding names.

We know for certain that the Quran has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in hearing, which is why one must hear the recitation of the Quran before starting to read it himself, otherwise, he will mistakenly recite the opening of the chapter of *al-Baqara in* the same way as he recites the opening of the chapter of *ash-Sharh.* Yet, if one listens to the recitation of the Quran before he starts reading it himself, he will be fully able to read it the way Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* recited the verses to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, for instance, *Alif Lam Mim* instead of *Alam*(1).

= *Sixth: There are seven chapters in which Allah Glorified is He starts with conditional statements, such as, ‘When that which must come to pass [at last] comes to pass.’ (al-Waqi‘a: 1)*
Seventh: There are six chapters starting with Divine Orders, such as the saying of Allah, ‘Say, “He is the One God.’ (al-Ikhlas: 1)
Eighth: There are six chapters in the Quran starting with a question, such as the saying of Allah, ‘About what do they [most often] ask one another?’ (an-Naba’: 1)
Ninth: There are three chapters starting with a supplication, namely; al-Humaza, al-Mutaffifin and al-Masad.
Tenth: There is one chapter in the Quran in which Allah starts with giving justification, which is Quraysh. (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan, 3/316).

(1) Hearing prior to reciting is a necessary condition for correct and clear pronunciation of the words of the Quran. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Even as We have sent to you a messenger from among yourselves to convey to you Our Messages, and to=

Once again, I strongly stress this point in question which is that the recitation of the Quran cannot be done before first listening to its sound recitation from a well-versed scholar so that one is fully able to pronounce its words correctly. Having been well taught to do that, you then are able to recite the verses of The Quran, considering that every letter in it is used in a due measure.(1)

We know fully well that the verses of the Quran are divided into two kinds, namely; *ayat muhkamat* (clear verses) and *ayat mutashabihat* (unspecific verses).(2) As for the clear verses, they tell us about the rules that we are obliged to follow and carry out, that is, we will be punished for not carrying them out. As for the legal wisdom behind sending down of the unspecific verses of The Quran,(3) it is that they could, according to some scholars, be explained in

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= cause you to grow in purity, and to impart to you revelation and wisdom, and to teach you that which you knew not.' (*al-Baqara*: 151) The following meanings are clear in this verse: one makes the first step by correct recitation; he then attains higher spiritual rank. As for education, it purifies the soul. The verse then tells that we should set everything in its due place.

(1) In his book entitled *An-Nashr fi Al-Qira`at Al-`Ashr*, Imam ibn *Al-Jazri* states, 'Undoubtedly, just as understanding the meanings of the verses of the Quran and abiding by its laws are acts of worship, its correct articulation is also viewed as an act of worship. Further, one is supposed to receive the correct articulation of its verses from those well-versed reciters who orally got the articulation from their teachers who, in turn, received it from their teachers, and so on till we reach the end of the chain, which is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this vein, we stress that it is impermissible to recite the Quran in any way other than that received from him *peace and blessings be upon him*.' (See ibn *Al-Jazri, An-Nashr fi Al-Qira'at Al-`Ashr,* 1/210.)

(2) Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them] And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firm in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord." And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.' (*Al-'Imran*: 7)

(3) The unspecific verses of the Quran refer to those verses whose meanings are not known to anyone but Allah *Glorified is He.* Another possible meaning for them is that they are those verses that are eligible to be explained in various ways; this meaning is yet deduced from the seventh verse in the chapter of *Al-`Imran.* As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…Allah has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration…' (*az-Zumar*: 23), it means that all the verses of the Quran are all true and consistent with each other. (See *Abu Yahya Al-Ansari, Fath Ar-Rahman Bi Kashf Ma Yaltabis Fi Al-Quran,* p. 60).

various ways, based on people's different abilities of understanding and perception. Here, we should consider that all people have the same body parts by means of which they can perceive items. For example, they all have eyes, ears, noses, tongues, and hands.

Yet, we should be fully aware of the fact that there are certain natural laws that govern man's sensory organs, as follows: One's eye, for example, is governed by principles which determine sight. Scientists believe that when the light falls on objects, it is reflected to the eye which is thus able to form an image for this object in its pupil. But, as the distance between the eye and the perceived object increases, the image gradually diminishes until it finally vanishes from sight. There are also physical laws that determine the sound waves which reach the hearing mechanisms inside one's ear. In the same connection, one's ability to smell is subject to certain laws, for he is unable to smell a flower that exists in a distant area. The same applies to the human mind, for it is also governed by certain laws.

As a matter of fact, Allah *Glorified is He* has already instructed man how to correctly use our senses. For example, Allah *the Exalted* does not prevent us from smelling the scent of a beautiful flower, yet Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to lower our gazes upon seeing women. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* tells about what we are obliged to do and about that from which we are prohibited. Likewise, the human mind may be able to understand a particular topic but not another. Here, we stress that being unable to understand a particular topic is viewed as an act of understanding.

Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; a high-school student who is presented with a college-level exercise in architecture by his teacher, will for sure respond to the teacher, saying, 'We did not learn the necessary mathematical rules by means of which we can solve this problem yet'; it is a matter which clearly indicates that the student is fully aware of his own abilities. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us how to correctly use our senses. There are certain rules which man can easily understand and perceive by mind; yet there are also others which are beyond one's capacity of understanding, which is why he must unquestioningly obey them.

I often cite the following example in this regard; every room in a large hotel has its own unique key which does not open other rooms. However, each floor of the hotel has a master key that unlocks the doors of all the rooms. Only an expert in designing such keys can understand the intricate mechanisms that enable the master key to work. This is what the Quran does to mankind; it includes all what causes them prosperity in this worldly life and the Hereafter. In addition, it is a comprehensive Book about which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them] And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firms in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord." And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.' (*Al-'Imran:* 7)

This verse tells clearly that deviant people misuse these unspecific verses of the Quran to achieve their goal of denying the Message of the Truth, in one way or another. By doing so, they are given to arrogance. To such people, we declare that the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* decrees that some of the chapters of the Quran should start with these miraculous discrete letters which must be articulated in their full forms. In truth, these openings of the Quran in these forms are viewed as a means of testing the human mind, that is, whether or not it will accept and firmly adhere to the Divine Order although it might be unable to understand it. We should consider that Allah *Glorified is He* will for sure test man in all spheres of life. As for the topic in question, the sending down of these unspecific verses of the Quran is viewed as a test to man's means of perception, that is, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to know how the believers will deal with these verses.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. But those firms in knowledge say, "We believe in it. All [of it] is from our Lord.' (*Al-'Imran:* 7), it may be explained as follows: the well-versed scholars are the ones who know the explanation of these specific verses of The Quran, and thus they will for sure convey this knowledge to mankind. Yet, we should not forget a very important point, which is that the explanation to be given by these well-versed scholars is none but their saying, as mentioned clearly in The Quran, '…All [of it] is from our Lord...' (*Al-'Imran:* 7), they exerted their utmost efforts to make explanation for these verses, yet all the knowledge they get is from Allah *Glorified is He* in Whom they have firm belief. We can quote the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, 'As for the unspecific verses of The Quran, you are obliged to believe in them.'(1)

Let us offer another example to fully illustrate this point; we are obliged, under the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to touch, or point to, or kiss the Black Stone. In addition, we are obliged to stone the rocks that symbolise Satan. Even though both are but rocks, we are obliged to firmly adhere to the Prophet's command out of devotion and faith.(2)

Attempting to judge every matter using the mind's discernment, one will for sure deviate from the right path, because there are undoubtedly certain matters that man's mind will never be able to reach the wisdom behind, which is why Muslims are obliged, under Islam, to act upon the rules of Allah *the All-Wise*. Here is a striking example so that we will correctly understand this point; if someone is told that drinking alcohol severely damages the liver and was meanwhile presented an ultrasound image, he will refrain from doing so because he fully realises the bad result of drinking on the liver.

Here arises a good question, 'Does man's abstention stem from his faith in Allah, or from his past experiences'? Undoubtedly, this man's behaviour is moulded by his experience. There is a great difference between him and a believer who unquestioningly obeys the commands of Allah and abstains from alcohol out of the fact that Allah *the Exalted* has declared it prohibited. One is not allowed, in a way or another to abstain from following the divine command until he realises the wisdom behind them.

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(1) *The full text of the Hadith reads, 'Most surely, the Quran was not revealed down so that its verses may contradict one another. Therefore, comply with that which you have understood from it. As for its unspecific verses, you are obliged to believe in them.' (See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 1/346; the Hadith is narrated on the authority of ibn Mardawih from the authority of `Abdallah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As.*

(2) *`Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him said, 'I know that you are just a stone and that you can neither do any harm nor give benefit. Had I not seen the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him kiss you, I would not have kissed you.' (See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1610; this Hadith is narrated on the authority of ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with them.)*

It is thus clear that we are obliged to firmly believe in these unspecific verses of the Quran despite the fact that the wisdom behind them is not clear to us. We cannot defer believing in these verses until we prove this wisdom.

I often reiterate that man must address the topics of faith in the same way he interacts with his doctor. That is, when an ill person goes to a doctor, he tells him about what causes him pain, whereupon the doctor will prescribe the necessary treatment. In the same way, man's mind has nothing at all to do with the matters of Divine Legislation.

We can quote the statement of some of the most righteous Muslims who used to say, 'The mind is like a riding animal; it delivers you to the door of the Sultan, but it does not pass through that door with you.' As such, we reach the conclusion that those who want to know about the wisdom behind all legislative matters will for sure be disputing with Allah in one of His Attributes, i.e. the All Wise; yet we know for certain that Allah *Glorified is He* has no counterpart. For this reason, we are obliged to believe in these miraculous discrete letters, considering that none will be unable to reveal their secrets but Allah *the Almighty*.(1)

Amazingly enough, all the verses of the Quran are linked together by connecting vowels. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *Hud* with His saying, '…and your Lord [O Prophet] is not unaware of what you [people] are doing.' (*Hud:* 123)

Out of the fact that this part of the verse indicates the end of the chapter, the last letter of the sentence was supposed to be constant, which is not the case here; for we find the Arabic word *ta`maluna* (what you are doing) ending with a vowel on the last letter, and thus it is connected to the *basmala* (in the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful).

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(1) *In his Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, ibn Kathir says, 'The total number of letters mentioned in the beginnings of the chapters of the Quran–discounting those that are repeated–are 14: (Alif, Lam, Mim, Sad, Ra`, Kaf, Ha', Ya', `Ain, Ta, Sin, Ha', Qaf and Nun)–and together they form the following sentence: Nassun Hakimun Qati`un Lahu Sirr, that is, 'a wise and decisive text endowed with a secret.' (See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al- 'Azhim, 1/37.)*

Based on this abovementioned rule, we were supposed to recite these discrete letters in the beginning of the chapter of *Yusuf* this way, yet we did not, because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed us to recite them as *Alif Lam Ra,* that is, without the articulation of vowels. This point clearly indicates that the pronunciation of the words of the Quran has been taught to him *peace and blessings be upon him* through revelation, a matter which also points out that there is great wisdom behind all the Divine orders and commands.

I would like to remind you of the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to recite the Quran one time in the month of Ramadan to the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* yet when it was the year of his death, he *peace and blessings be upon him* recited it twice. It is thus that the Quran has been transmitted to us in the same way it has been revealed down upon the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '*Alif Lam Ra.* These are the verses of the Scripture that makes things clear.' (*Yusuf:* 1) As for the Arabic pronoun *tilka* (these), it refers to what is mentioned after these discrete letters in the very beginning of the chapter that is 'the verses of the Scripture'. You, O believers, must believe that the verses of the Quran contain such letters. This is how some scholars understand the meaning of these discrete letters at the beginning of this chapter.

Let us give an example of our daily life to clarify this point; a tailor wanting to advertise his sartorial skills– displays in his shop window samples of threads that he uses in his work. Analogically speaking, Allah *Glorified is He* by opening some of the chapters of the Quran with these discrete letters, wants to tell us the words of the Quran are made up of miraculous letters like this, which is why you, O mankind, you will be unable to produce something similar to it, even if aided by the jinn.

Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that the miraculous nature of the Noble Quran does not stem from its linguistic style, but rather, from the fact that it is the Speech of Allah *Glorified is He* which is why it must be miraculous even though it uses the same letters we use in our speech.

An interesting observation is how could Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pronounce these discrete letters in their full forms even though he was unlettered?! It thus goes without saying that his *peace and blessings be upon him* articulation of these letters in such a manner clearly tells that he has been actually taught to articulate them this way by Allah *the Most High*. As for the Arabic word *al-kitab* (the Scripture) mentioned in this verse is used to refer to the Noble Quran.(1)

As for the Arabic adjective *al-mubin* (that makes things clear), denotes that the Quran is the Book which elucidates everything to man, who is Allah's vicegerent on earth. Man will find the explanation of everything in The Quran, which is why it is believed that those who think that the Quran misses the mentioning of topic are wrong, for they do not carefully reflect upon it.

In this regard, it is narrated that Imam Mohammed 'Abdu(2) once met an orientalist(3) in Paris, who asked him the following question, 'O Imam, as long as you, O Muslims, have a verse in your Book that reads, '…No single thing have We neglected in Our decree[1]…' (*al-An'am:* 38), allow me to ask you the following question, 'how many loaves of bread does a dry measure of wheat yield?' The Imam, in response to the question, called for a baker and asked him how many loaves of bread can be made from a dry measure of wheat, whereupon the baker answered him the exact number. Yet, the orientalist protested and said, 'I asked you for an answer from The Quran, not from a baker!' Imam `Abduh then told him that Allah *Glorified is He* says in The Quran, 'So ask the people of the message if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43) Imam[2] 'Abduh was fully aware of the fact the human mind can in no way encompass all knowledge, and thus the All Great Wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* decrees to distribute talents among people so that everyone will excel in a particular field of life.

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(1) The word *kitab* has been mentioned 220 times in the Quran; it is used to impart various meanings including The Quran, the Torah, the Bible, and the Guarded Tablet. It may also be used to give the meaning of the Arabic word 'letter' which is deduced from the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Go with this my letter and convey it to them; and thereafter withdraw from them and see what [answer] they return.' (*an-Naml*: 28) It may be further used to refer to the written account of deeds that man receives on the Day of Judgment. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And he will be told, "Read this your record! Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!"' (*al-Isra'*: 14)

(2) The Grand Mufti of Egypt at his time, Mohamed `Abdu *ibn* Hasan Khayrallah At-Turkumani. He was born in 1849 C.E. in the Al-Gharbiyyah governorate, Egypt, and was brought up in the village of Mahallat Nasr, Al-Buhyrah governorate. He received his education at Al-Ahmadi Mosque in Tanta, and then he pursued further education at Al-Azhar. Having reached the age of forty, he mastered the French language, which is why he in collaboration with Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani established the magazine of *Al-`Urwa Al-Wuthqa* in Paris. He died in 1905 in Alexandria, and was buried in Cairo. (See *Az-Zirikili, Al-`Alam*, 6/252.)

(3) Orientalists are western scholars who study the sciences, literatures, religions, and philosophies of the Orient. They are specialized in studying matters dealing with Oriental studies. Among them are those who treat Islam equitably, and those who dedicate their works to defaming it.

In the same connection, we refer the problems of inheritance to those who are well versed in this field of knowledge to exactly tell us how the share of each inheritor will be. Likewise, it is enough for an ordinary Muslim to know that he is obliged to perform pilgrimage. Yet, he should seek the advice of well-versed scholars on how to perform the rituals in the same way it was performed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

There are many other occasions when one is obliged to seek the advice of an expert in a particular field. When one wants to build a house, for example, it is not enough to possess the financial means. One must also consult an architect to prepare the necessary designs. It is thus crystal clear that man’s mind can in no way encompass all the knowledge of life, which is why Allah, out of His Bounty, distributed talents to people so that they are forced to complement each other.

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[1] Commenting on this particular verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Allah *the Exalted* recorded everything in the Preserved Tablet. This verse may also refer to The Quran, and thus it means that there is no one single matter of religion except is explicitly mentioned in The Quran, or is explained in detail by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or by consensus or by sound analogy, which is proved by the texts of the Quran.' (See Al-Qurtubi, *Jame` Al-Bayan*, 3/2505.)

[2] Imam Mohamed `Abduh is one of the great scholars of Islam. He was entitled 'the Renewer of Religion' of his time. He left his mark on Islamic thought and was the founder of a reformist school. He was a contemporary of Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani. He was of the opinion that to edify individuals and societies, it is necessary to begin by educating the individual. Although `Abdu's approach to reforming societies by starting with the individual differed from that of Al-Afghani, there are common features between them both

Allah says:

إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ قُرۡءَٰنًا عَرَبِيّٗا لَّعَلَّكُمۡ تَعۡقِلُونَ ٢

We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran so that you
[people] may understand [2] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 2)

There is a very important point which we should consider; sometimes Allah *Glorified is He* describes The Quran saying, ‘The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 193); that is, Allah *the Exalted* states that the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* is the medium through which the Quran has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* other times Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what has been sent down upon Muhammad…’ (*Muhammad:* 2); the process of revelation includes Allah *Glorified is He,* the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* and the rest of angles. Yet, Allah *the Exalted* says elsewhere in The Quran, ‘And when it is said to them, “Believe in what Allah has revealed”’ (*al-Baqara:* 91), the rulings of The Quran, upon being revealed to Prophet Muhammad must be put in action by the *ummah* of Islam. This verse of *al-Baqara* refers to the fact that the Quran was revealed all at once from the Preserved Tablet to the heaven of this world, and then it was sent down piecemeal to give answers to all the questions offered to or by Muslims.

Once again, we state plainly that it is possible to say that the Quran has been sent down, or that the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him,* the Trustworthy Holy Spirit, had brought it down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In the chapter of *al-Isra`,* Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from above; with this [very] truth has it come down [to you, O Prophet]…’ (*Al-Isra’:*105). Allah *Glorified is He* sent the Quran down from the Preserved Tablet to the heaven of this worldly life, and then it was revealed down piecemeal to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fulfil its mission in the world on the earth.(1)

As for the verse in question, Allah *the Exalted* says, '…We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran…' (*Yusuf:* 2), while the previous verse reads, '…These are the verses of the Scripture...' (*Yusuf:* 1); Allah *the Exalted* once described the Quran as an item which is being read, while another time Allah *Glorified is He* described it as an item which is written; it is a point which indicates the inimitability of the name itself.

Concerning the topic of the compilation of the Quran(2), we should know fully well that the scribe did not record any verse in it except what has already been written and unless two witnesses testify to its ultimate accuracy.

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(1) One of these real examples tackled by the Quran is the case in which some companions stayed too long in the house of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Do not enter the Prophet's dwellings unless you are given leave; [and when invited] to a meal, do not come [so early as] to wait for it to be readied: but whenever you are invited, enter [at the proper time]; and when you have partaken of the meal, disperse without lingering for the sake of mere talk: that, behold, might give offence to The Prophet, and yet he might feel shy of [asking] you [to leave]: but Allah is not shy of [teaching you] what is right….' (*al-'Ahzab*: 53)
In his Asbab An-Nuzul, Al-Wahidi narrated the following Hadith, `Anas said that he was ten years old when the Messenger of Allah *came to Medina. He said, "My mother decided that I would serve him and I served him for ten years. He died when I was twenty. I am the person who knows best about the business of the veil. The first instance that was revealed occurred when the Messenger of* Allah *peace and blessings be upon him married Zaynab bint Jahsh Allah be pleased with her. He celebrated the wedding there, invited the people who came, ate and then left. A group remained with the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. They stayed for a long time and then the Prophet went out and I went out hoping that they would leave. He walked and I walked with him until he came to the threshold of `A`isha's, room. Then, thinking that they would have left, he returned and I returned with him. He went to Zaynab, but they were still sitting there. He left again and I left with him until he once more reached the threshold of `A`isha's room. When he thought that they would have gone, he went back again and I went back with him. This time they had indeed left. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him then put up a curtain between me and him, and the veil was revealed.' (See Al-Wahidi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p. 205)*

(2) *In his Al-Mustadrak, Imam Al-Hakim said, 'the Quran has been complied three times, as follows: the first time took place in the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him, whilst the second was done in the Caliphate of Abu Bakr*=

Undoubtedly, man’s memory may not always be reliable and may differ with temperaments, but written lines cannot be altered.

Out of the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was to convey his message to the Arabs, he must have been supported with a miracle that proves his veracity. Out of the fact that miracles imply challenge, the Quran must have been revealed in the Arabic language which Arabs fully mastered. Had the miracles been relating to a particular field, which is beyond the Arab’s capacity, they would not have accepted their incapability before it. They might have even said, ‘If we had learnt about this, we would have brought forth something which is better than it’. Arabs were masters of eloquence and poetry. They used to gather in markets (1) where poets would recite their poems and where and orators would give their eloquent speeches. They used to compete to select the best from among them in this regard. The Arabs encompassed all the skills of the Arabic language, to the extent that people in the markets were able to judge their rhetorical products. In short, they were masters of eloquence and rhetoric.

It is for this reason that Allah willed the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be from the same field in which his people had excelled in. We should consider that the Arabs were the first people to

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= *Allah be pleased with him. As for the third time, it occurred during the Caliphate of `Uthman Allah be pleased with him.’*

Sheikh Sha’rawi *Allah rest his soul* refers in this regard to the second compilation of the Quran. *In this respect, it is narrated that Abu Bakr had said to Zayd ibn Thabit Allah be pleased with him ‘You are a wise young man and we do not have any suspicion about you, and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for* Allah's *Messenger peace and blessings be upon him. So you should search for (the fragmentary scripts of) the Quran and collect it in one book’, whereupon Zayd said, ‘So I started looking for the Quran and collecting it from (what was written on) palm stalks, thin white stones and from the men who knew it by heart.’ It is narrated that he Allah be pleased with him did not write anything unless two witnesses testified to its veracity and accuracy. Commenting on this act of Zayd, Imam As-Suyuti said, ‘This clearly indicates that Zayd did not suffice with the already written verses unless those who heard them directly from Prophet Muhammad testified to their accuracy. He did this out of taking extra precautions, for he himself memorized the Quran by heart.’ (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan, 1/164-167).*

(1) Arabs had several markets (gatherings), such as *`Ukazh* and *Dhi Al-Majaz*; it was in these markets that poets used to recite their poems by way of competing to choose the best from among them.

hear the Quran from him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Had the Arabs believed in the truthfulness of The Quran, the element of challenge would have made no sense for them.

It is of great importance to know that when the Quran was reavled, the Persians and Romans became fully aware that this Bedouin *ummah* had possessed the constituents by means of which its members could set up an unprecedented civlisation, although they were unlettered and their propeht himself was unlettered.

Moreover, when the Persians and Romans found that the Arabs, masters of eloquence, were unable to produce even one verse similar to that of The Quran, they became fully aware that their own civilisations became at risk because they had to face this advanced civilisation of Islam.

Once again, Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Will decreed that the Quran must be revealed in Arabic; for Allah *Glorified is He* did not send any messenger except in the tongue of his own people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them…’ (*Ibrahim:* 4).

It is clear that the Quran is the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We should stress that there is a difference between the Quran and the rest of all the heavenly-revealed Scriptures. The Quran encompasses both the two qualities of being a miracle and a Book that contains legal rulings of the religion, a point which is not provided in the rest of all the heavenly-revealed Scriptures.

The Quran will continue revealing the Divine Way of Guidance to Muslims to the end of time. I would like to drive your attention to the fact that the promise of Allah on the universality of the Quran has been actually fulfilled at the hands of the early generations of Muslims who went all over the corners of the world to disseminate the Message of Islam embodied in the Quran.

When the disbelievers seek to explain how Islam spread with such amazing speed, they discover that it did not spread through the power of those who believed in it, but rather by the might of those who were drawn to its consistence and cohesion- those who were extremely surprised by its impressive rulings which would, they thought, make them get rid of their problems and alleviate their distresses.

We heavily stress that the Quran contains rulings by means of which people could achieve their happiness. As well, it includes several predictions of what is going to take place in the universe in such a way that makes the believers know for sure that it does not neglect any topic.

An orientalist could pose the following question, ‘How can Muslims assert that the Quran was revealed in a clear and elucidating Arabic tongue when it contains non-Arabic words, such as *Ameen* (Amen)- a word indicating agreement to what the supplication made by the Imam- as well as other Roman(1) and Persian(2) words’? These orientalists are oblivious to the fact that Arabs, as a result of their intermingling with other communities, had used some of their vocabularies, to the extent that these words became already part of the Arabic language, exactly as we today ‘Arabise’ some foreign vocabularies, as long as we properly understand their meanings.(3)

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(1) *The following are examples of words from the Holy Quran that are derived from the Roman language:*
- *Ar-Raqim; Allah Glorified is He says, ‘...do you [really] think that [the parable of] the Men of the Cave and of [their devotion to] the scriptures – Ar-Raqim- could be deemed more wondrous than any [other] of Our Messages?’ (al-Kahf: 9). Commenting on this word in question, Imam As-Suyuti opines that it could be used to refer to the Preserved Tablet, the Book, or the inkwell. (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan, 2/112.)*
- *As-Sirat; the two great scholars An-Naqqash and ibn Al-Jawzi opine that it is a Roman word meaning the Path.*
- *Tafiqa;* Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and they both began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden …’ (*al-A'raf*: 22).

(2) The following is a list of the Persian words that are used in the Holy Quran:
- *Abariq;* Ath-Tha`alibi, in his *Fiqh Al-Lugha,* is of the position that it is derived from the Persian language. Al-Jawaliqi, on his part, holds the position that it is an ‘Arabised’ Persian word meaning either water conduit, or the act of decanting water.
- *Dinar;* Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and among them there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a *dinar* he shall not pay it back to you except so long as you remain firm in demanding it…’ (*Al-‘Imran*: 75). Al-Jawaliqi, among many other scholars, are of the position that it is a Persian word.
- *Sijjil;* Mujahid holds the position that it is a Persian word meaning stone or mud.

(3) *In his Al-Itqan, Imam As-Suyuti states that scholars have different opinions concerning the various linguistic origins of these words. Having mentioned the proofs of each group, he said, `Abu ‘Ubayd Al-Qasim ibn Salam is of the position that both opinions* =

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…so that you [people] may understand…' (*Yusuf:* 2). Allah *the Exalted* wants people to make use of their minds to carefully reflect upon matters. Here, we should consider that truthful people are very keen on urging people to utilise their minds, unlike the liars who want them to set them idle. The same happens in our daily life. For example, when a vendor tries to sell his product, he touts it by means of proving that he is fully confident in its excellence and high quality. On the contrary, if the product at hand is substandard, then the merchant would not induce you to deeply consider the purchase you are about to make, that is, he would not give you the chance to discover his cheating.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

نَحۡنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيۡكَ أَحۡسَنَ ٱلۡقَصَصِ بِمَآ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ هَٰذَا
ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ وَإِن كُنتَ مِن قَبۡلِهِۦ لَمِنَ ٱلۡغَٰفِلِينَ ٣

We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories in revealing this Quran to you. Before this you were one of those who knew nothing about them [3] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 3)

This verse tells that when the subject matter is a Divine Act, Allah *Glorified is He* employs the plural personal pronoun 'We'. The reason for this is that His acts are done in the light of the existence of a number of Divine Attributes including Knowledge, Wisdom, and Power etc.

We strongly stress that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who has such Attributes that can do anything at any time. None but Him *the Almighty* has such Attributes, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who has these Attributes which can do anything at any time.

We should be aware of a very important point which is that when Allah *the Exalted* talks about His Oneness, He does not use the plural pronoun, a fact

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= *concerning the origin of these words are true, confirming that even though these words are of non-Arabic origin, they were used by the Arabs and thus became 'Arabised'. So, when the Quran was revealed, these words had been used by the Arabs, which is why the two group of scholars are true. As a matter of fact, Al-Jawaliqi and ibn Al-Jawzi, among many others, support this opinion.' (See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan, 2/105-108.)*

which is clear in His saying, 'Surely I am Allah, there is no god but I, therefore serve Me and keep up prayer for My Remembrance.(1)' (*Ta Ha:* 14)

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* sheds light on a number of acts which cannot be performed except by Him; Allah *the Exalted* says, '…We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories …' (*Yusuf:* 3). This part of the verse tells that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who recounts these stories to Prophet Muhammad. We stress that we are not allowed to derive Names for Allah *Glorified is He* from all the acts attributed to Him *the Almighty* unless these acts are derived, in essence, from His Most Beautiful Names.

We are obliged to pay great respect to Allah, His Names, and His Attributes. We know nothing about His Divine Essence except that about which Allah *the Exalted* told us. For this reason, it is not right to derive a Name for Allah from the verb *Qassa* (recount), that is, we cannot say that Allah *the Exalted* is *qassas* (narrator).

All told, we may address Allah with the Names that He attributes to Himself. However, we cannot call Him by a name that is derived from a verb corresponding to a Divine Act.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories…' (*Yusuf:* 3). As for the Arabic verb *qassa* (narrated), it gives the meaning of 'following one another', which is why some scholars believe that the word 'story' is given this name because words within it follow each other. It also may give the meaning of 'tracing', that is, following the footprints of someone so that one knows the correct way in such a way that causes him not to lose the way of the person who preceded him in it. This meaning is deduced from the saying of Allah, 'And so she said to his sister, "Follow him," and [the girl] watched him from afar, while they [who had taken him in] were not aware of it.' (*al-Qasas:* 11)

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(1) *Adh-Dhikr* means invocation and meditation with the heart. It gives several meanings including the speech, the story, the Quran, and all the heavenly revealed books. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Behold, it is We Ourselves who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this reminder – (*dhikr*) –: and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it [from all corruption].' (*al-Hijr*: 9) It may further be used to the great honour of a person; a point which is clear in the saying of Allah, 'And [have We not] raised thee high in dignity – (*dhikrak*) –?' (*ash-Sharh*: 4)

It is thus clear that the true meaning of *al-qass* is to trace the events that took place in the past and not for words to follow each other in sequence. In The Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us another striking example to illustrate this point. He says, ‘He said, “Did you see when we took refuge on the rock? Then I forgot the fish, and nothing made me forget to speak of it but *Shaitan* (Satan), and it took its way into the river; what a wonder!” He said, “This is what we sought for”; so they returned retracing their footsteps.’ (*al-Kahf:* 63-64)

In these verses of Al-Kahf*,* the meaning of *al-qass* is to retrace the footsteps of someone. Thus, we conclude that the word *al-qass* means to trace the events and accidents that took place in the past in such a manner that is identical to reality.

Divinely revealed narratives are not akin to works of modern fiction and literature in which the author adds fictitious scenes for the sake of formulating a tightly knit plot. The modern author seeks to create a riveting story that will attract his reader’s attention. Yet, the case is totally different with stories of The Quran which are historical accounts that detail real incidents with the aim of serving as a source of moral teachings(1) for man. Furthermore, they were revealed either to inform us of the events of the past or to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

I repeathere that the stories of the previous prophets, with the exception of the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him,* were deliberately revealed to console and fortify the heart(2) of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) This fact is clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘…Indeed, in the stories of these men there is a lesson – *(‘Ibra)* – for those who are endowed with insight…’ (*Yusuf:* 111). The Arabic word *`ibra* connotes something which serves as a guiding moral for man. It gives the same meaning of *al-idhah.* In The Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…There is surely a lesson – *(`ibra)* – for all who have eyes to see!’ (*an-Nur*: 44) Allah *the Exalted* also says, ‘…Learn a lesson, then, O you who are endowed with insight!’ (*al-Hashr*: 2) (See *Al-Qamus Al-Muhit,* 2/4.)

(2) Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and [remember] out of all the accounts relating to the [earlier], messengers we convey to you [only] that wherewith we [aim to] make firm your heart: for through these [accounts] comes the truth to you, as well as an admonition and a reminder to all believers.’ (*Hud:* 120), the accounts of the Quran were revealed down to make the heart of Prophet Muhammad firm while delivering the Message. See Al-Qurtubi*,* (*Jame’ Al-Bayan,* 4/3435.)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the story of Prophet *Yusuf peace be upon him* in full, which is why whoever claims that the Quran is unable to come forth with a complete and comprehensive narrative is wrong. One can examine the story of *Yusuf peace be upon him* from two different angles; the first, the story of characters that revolve around an event. The second, the events that revolve around a single character

In other words, it is not only the riveting plot that makes the Quranic account of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* unique. This story combines two themes: firstly, an event around which people's lives is centred, and secondly, a person around whom events unfold.

This chapter sheds light on the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) and the events that marked his life: his dream, the machinations of his jealous brothers, attempts by the wife of the sovereign to seduce him into debauchery, his imprisonment, his interpretation of dreams in prison, assuming the authority, meeting with his brothers and finally meeting with his father.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'We tell you [Prophet] the best stories' (*Yusuf:* 3) is a fitting description for the narrative of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* which was also recounted by the previously revealed books. Interestingly, when the Jewish rabbis read the Quran's narrative of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him,* they gave up their own books and relied on what has been mentioned in the Quran in this regard.

The Jews did so for the following reasons: the events that took place in this story are vividly depicted. In addition, the narration masterfully illustrates human psychological states, exposes the secrets of the human psyche, and tells about the fulfilment of the prophecies. All these themes are woven into a plot that is clear in its delivery and is impossible to be challenged. These facts definitively prove that what has been mentioned in the Quran about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is the 'best of narratives'. Another possible explanation for this point is that it is the best of narratives because it encompasses numerous lessons, including friction between childhood and senility, rivalries between jealous siblings, rebellion, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* being thrown in the well, his brothers' machinations, his unjust imprisonment, his reaction to those who mistreated him, his support for the truth until he was granted power and victory, how Allah *Glorified is He* cast love down upon him, so that whoever met with him *peace be upon him* loved him and how he *peace be upon him* protected the legacy of prophethood by pardoning the sins committed by his brothers against him; a fact which is proved by the Quran in which Allah says, '…No reproach shall be uttered today against you. May Allah forgive you your sins' (*Yusuf:* 92)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said something like this to the people of Mecca on the Day of Opening. Ibn Ishaq narrated that he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'Leave freely, for no harm will afflict you.'(1)

Once again, this chapter is a source of admonition because of the events it sheds light on including the imprisonment of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* unjustly, his later release and finally his assuming of authority. It for this reason that it is regarded the best of narratives. Another possible explanation for the fact that it is the best of narratives is that it had precisely told us about the events of this story in the same way it took place and in agreement with what has been mentioned in the previous Scriptures, but in a way which is stunningly attractive. A third possible explanation for the fact that it is the best narrative is that it had completely covered man's different aspects of life including childhood, mental maturity, and emotional maturity.

As for the news of other previous prophets, they are scattered in the Quran in such a way which proves its inimitability. It is thus clear the fact that this chapter includes the best of the narrative stems from the miraculous style of The Quran, which none can produce anything like it.

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(1) *Ibn Ishaq said, 'Some scholars told me that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him stood up on the door of the Ka`ba and proclaimed, "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah; He is one and has no partner. All kingdoms are for Him, and all the praises are for Him, and He is Omnipotent. We are returning with repentance, worshipping, prostrating, and praising our Lord. He has kept up His promise and made His slave victorious, and He Alone defeated all the clans of disbelievers." Then, he peace and blessings be upon him said to them, "What do you think I am going to do with you?" They responded, "We think that you will treat us virtuously, for you are a generous man, and the son of a generous brother," whereupon he peace and blessings be upon him said to them, "Leave freely, for no harm will afflict you."' (See ibn Ishaq, Sirat ibn Hisham, 4/412.)*

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We tell you [Prophet] the best of stories in revealing this Quran to you. Before this, you were one of those who knew nothing about them.’ (*Yusuf:* 3) As for the word *min al-ghafilin* (one of those who knew nothing about them), it means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was unlettered who did not master making eloquent speeches or even composing poetic verses, and that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was only known for his great moral conduct characteristics that must be met in anyone who is supposed to deliver the Divine Message to people. Here arises a very good point; as long as he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not previously tell a lie to people, he would not fabricate a lie against a lie. It was impossible for him *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell a lie before the mission or even after it. Here, we can quote the example of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* who firmly believed in his Message from the first moment, without hesitation. Upon being told about this message of Prophet Muhammad, he *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, ‘You told the truth.’

Also, when the miracles of *al-`israa'* and *al-mi`raj* (Night Journey and Ascension) took place, the people of Mecca wondered how this could happen, especially if we consider that they used to make this long journey within a month! But Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* had a different position, for he said, ‘Muhammad has told the truth.’(1)

In the same connection, some people during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were unable to understand the wisdom behind some of the decisions made by him *peace and blessings be upon him* which is why Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* used to say to them, ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* signed the Treaty of Al-Hudybiya with the polytheists of Mecca, he accepted their unjust terms and conditions, whereupon 'Umar ibn Al-Kattab *Allah be pleased with him* who was reluctant to this Treaty, wondered why Prophet Muhammad did something like this. It is narrated that 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'are we not fighting for the Truth and they for falsehood? Why should we then put a blot upon our religion?'

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(1) *Commenting on this incident, ibn Hisham says, ‘On the morning of his return from Jerusalem, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him imparted the great news of his nocturnal voyage to Quraysh, but his narrative was met with incredulity. Having heard the Prophet’s account, a group of the disbelievers went to Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him to communicate the news. At first, he Allah be pleased with him accused them of ‘fabricating canards’, but they insisted, ‘What we say is true. In fact, he is at this moment in the (Sacred) Mosque recounting details of this voyage.’Abu Bakr then rejoined, ‘By Allah, if he said so, then it is true. And why such are you so astounded? By Allah, he tells me that news is revealed to him from Heaven, be it night or day, and I believe him. This (revelation) is more extraordinary than this journey that has so amazed you.’*

'Umar posed the same questions to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who answered 'Umar saying, 'O 'Umar. Adhere firmly to his (Prophet Muhammad's) instructions and decisions, for he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah'.(1) Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* wanted to draw 'Umar's attention to the fact that Prophet Muhammad did not do anything due to his own desire. Here, we should clarify that the statement of Abu Bakr is based on full confidence in the undeniable fact that Prophet Muhammad was permanently guided by the Support of Allah; that is, it was not a matter of blind obedience.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Before this, you were one of those who knew nothing about them (*al-ghafilin*)' (*Yusuf:* 3). The Arabic word '*al-ghafil'* is used to refer to a person who knows nothing about a particular matter simply because he does not bother to think about it. Another possible explanation for this particular part of the verse is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of the undeniable fact that he was unable to read or write, was not able to learn or hear anything, from any source, about the story of Prophet Yusuf. Yes, this is true, for we all know for certain that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not receive any kind of knowledge before the revelation. In this vein, it is even recorded that this chapter of *Yusuf* was not revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until the Jews urged the disbelievers of Mecca to ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* why the sons of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) left for Egypt?(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Al-Miswar ibn Makhramat Az-zuhari and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam. The full version of the Hadith reads, ''Umar approached Abu Bakr and said, "Abu Bakr, are we not fighting for Truth and they for falsehood?" He replied, "Yes". 'Umar asked, "Are those not killed from our side in Paradise and those killed from their side in the Fire?" He replied, "Of course?" 'Umar (then) said, "Why should we then disgrace our religion and return while Allah has not yet decided the issue between them and ourselves?" Abu Bakr said, "Son of Khattab, truly, he [Prophet Muhammad] is the Messenger of Allah, and Allah will never ruin him"'. See Ahmad, Musnad, 4/323-325.*

As a matter of fact, telling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the events of this story in such minute details is a kind of miracle, for it offers firm and concrete evidence that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who revealed this to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. We previously explained that the act of revelation is a disclosure of something that was previously concealed. Concerning this, we should take into account that Allah *Glorified is He* reveals matters to His creatures, including the angels, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When your Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe…' (*al-Anfal:* 12), those whom He *the Almighty* chooses from among mankind as He *Glorified is He* says: 'And when I revealed to the disciples, saying, "Believe in Me and My Messenger", they said, "We believe and bear witness that we submit (ourselves)"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 111); the mother of Prophet Musa (Moses) who was inspired by Him *the Almighty* to cast her child into the river, when Allah says: 'When We revealed to your mother what was revealed, saying, "Put him into the chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore; there he shall be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him. And I cast down upon you love, from Me, and that you might be brought up beneath the care of My eyes' (*Ta Ha:* 38-39); the inanimate earth as the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Because your Lord will have inspired her' (*az-Zalzala:* 5); and the bees when Allah says: 'And your Lord revealed to the bee saying, "Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build. Then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of your Lord submissively." There comes out from within their bodies a beverage of many colours, in which there is healing for men; most surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect' (*an-Nahl:* 68-69).

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(1) *In his Tafsir of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi quoted the following statement of An-Nahhas, 'It is narrated that the Jews said (to the disbelievers of Mecca), "Ask him, i.e. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him about the reason why the family of Prophet Ya'qub moved from Ash-Sham to Egypt; and ask him also about the story of Prophet Ya'qub", whereupon Allah the Almighty sent down this chapter in Mecca in accordance with what has been mentioned in the Torah and more than this'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3440.*

It is thus clear that Allah *the Almighty* inspires and reveals whatever He wants to whomever He wants including inanimate objects, plants, animals, mankind, etc. He *Glorified is He* addresses them in accordance with the particular means of perception placed in each of them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِذۡ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَٰٓأَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيۡتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ
كَوۡكَبٗا وَٱلشَّمۡسَ وَٱلۡقَمَرَ رَأَيۡتُهُمۡ لِي سَٰجِدِينَ ﴿٤﴾

Joseph said to his father, 'Father, I dreamed
of eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them
all bow down before me' [4] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 4)

This verse in question is the beginning of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*; it states clearly that he called upon his father, Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), saying, 'O Father!' Here, we should take into account that the following Arabic words '*Abi', 'Abati', 'Abatah'* and '*Abat'* all give the same meaning of 'father', although each of them is used in a particular context. Everyone has undoubtedly observed the sun and the moon, and has noticed that they have particular times when they rise and set. Likewise, we have all witnessed the limitless number of stars that dot the night-sky. But we should stress that the dream of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had a special character which is that he *peace be upon him* saw both the sun and the moon at the same moment, and that he saw only eleven stars. How could this happen? As a matter of fact, the statement of Yusuf which is stated in The Quran clearly indicates that he *peace be upon him* was able to count them, and that this sun and moon, as well as the eleven stars had special characteristics. In addition, the verse shows that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had seen them all bow down before him. This means that he, first of all, saw them in their natural, original state and then he saw them bowing down to him. At that point, we stress heavily that their prostration to Yusuf *peace be upon him* was a matter of surrendering to the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. The verb 'saw' (ra'ayt) has been mentioned twice in this verse to indicate the original state and also the bowing of these heavenly bodies.

In the same vein, we notice that the word *Sajidin* (prostrating) is written in the normal masculine plural form. Here, we should be aware that nothing can be written in this form but the masculine, animate, and rational subject. We should take into account that the mind enables a person to make choices. The true believer is the person who makes choices that are in accordance with the Divine Way of Guidance. And the apex of surrender to Allah is apparent when one prostrates before Allah *the Almighty*. As for the family of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* they bowed down before him *peace be upon him* in obedience to the Divine Order; that is, they fully understood how to obey this Divine Command.(1)

We can thereby compare the obedience of the stars in Yusuf's vision to the obedience of the sky which will fully understand how to obey the Command of Allah *the Almighty* on the Day of Judgment, a fact which is recorded in the Quran in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When the sky bursts asunder, and gives ear to [the Command of] its Lord, and it must [do so]' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2). That is to say the sky about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do they not then look up to the sky above them, how We have made it and adorned it and there are no gaps in it?' (*Qaf:* 6) will, on the Day of Resurrection, understand and obey the Order of Allah, as Allah says: 'And gives ear (*Adhinat*) to [the Command of] its Lord, and it must [do so]' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2). In other words, we can say that it is equipped with the sense of hearing, for the Arabic word *Adhinat* ('obeys' or 'gives ear') is linguistically derived from the word *Udhun* (ear); that is, once the sky hears the Divine Command, it responds immediately by bursting asunder.(2)

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(1) *Commenting on this verse in question, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Al-Khalil and Sibawaih opined that when Allah told us that these things obeyed Him by prostrating, which is an action that is carried out by animate, rational beings, He indicates that they can understand His Orders'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3443.*
As for the late Imam Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi, he opined that this verse clearly shows the high rank of Prophet *Yusuf* among his family members and in the sight of Allah. It also indicates that they will eventually recognise his virtue. Here, we should take into account that the characteristics of dreams are totally different from the normal sense of seeing, for the former gives details of what will happen in the future.

(2) The following verse fully illustrates this point; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then He directed Himself to the sky and it was a vapour. And He said to it and to the earth, "Come both, willingly or unwillingly". They both said, "We come willingly"' (*Fussilat*: 11).

As such, we notice that mankind(1) is but one community among many other communities in the world. And we know for certain that people can communicate with each other by virtue of a shared language through using sign language, though seeking the help of a translator or even by learning the language of others.

But man is not able to apprehend the language of inanimate beings, plants, and animals unless Allah *the Almighty* enables him to do so. The mountains' repetition of the Praise and Glory of Allah with Prophet Dawud (David) is a case in point. In this instance, man–the most exalted creature on the surface of the earth–and the mountains–inanimate objects–form a harmonious union, for the man, i.e. Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* used to praise the Glory of Allah first, and then the mountains repeated after him. We know fully well that everything in the universe glorifies Allah *the Almighty* but in a manner that we cannot understand.(2)

However, Allah may choose some from among mankind who He teaches the language of other creatures. Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* is a case in point. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And Sulaiman was Dawud's heir. And he said, 'O men! we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given all things; most surely this is a manifest grace' (*an-Naml:* 16).

This aforementioned verse in the chapter of *an-Naml* clearly tells us that birds have their own language by means of which they can communicate with each other. It also affirms that Prophet Sulaiman *peace be upon him* was taught this language of birds by Allah *the Almighty*. In the same connection, the Quran tells us that Allah *Glorified is He* has also taught Prophet Sulaiman the language of ants. He *the Almighty* says: 'Till, when they came upon a valley [full] of ants, an ant exclaimed, "O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]!"

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(1) This point is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'and there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you' (*al-An'am*: 38).

(2) Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and there is not a single thing but it glorifies Him with all praise, but you do not understand their glorification; surely, He is Forbearing, Forgiving' (*al-Isra'*: 44).

Thereupon [Sulaiman] smiled joyously at her words, and said, "O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Yours with which You have graced me and my parents, and that I may do what is right [in a manner] that will please You; and include me, by Your Grace, among Your righteous servants!'" (*an-Naml:* 18-19)

Clearly, every community of creatures has its own language by means of which its members can understand the Divine Orders. In addition, we now realise that Allah teaches these languages of different creatures to whomever He wants from mankind. Based on this, we know for certain that when the sun, the moon and the eleven stars prostrated before Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* in his dream, they did this as they had understood it to be a Divine Order.(1) Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ يَٰبُنَيَّ لَا تَقۡصُصۡ رُءۡيَاكَ عَلَىٰٓ إِخۡوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُواْ
لَكَ كَيۡدًاۖ إِنَّ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنَ لِلۡإِنسَٰنِ عَدُوّٞ مُّبِينٞ ٥

And he replied, 'My son, tell your brothers nothing of this dream, or they may plot to harm you — Satan is man's sworn enemy [5] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 5)

Referring to the way how fathers call upon their sons, the Quran uses the diminutive form *'ya bunayy'* (O my dear son!) which shows a father's deep affection and love for his son.(2)

Yet, when fathers speak of matters regarding their son, we find the Quran using the form '*i'bni'* (my son); this fact is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…Surely, my son (*ibni*) was of my family…' (*Hud:* 45) This statement was, in fact, made by Prophet Nuh (Noah) about his disbelieving son. Here, we stress that the style *'ya bunayy'* will be very helpful for us in understanding the following events of the story and how his father loved Yusuf *peace be upon him* very much.

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(1) We should stress that the main purpose behind the creation of the entire universe is to offer worship to Allah *the Almighty*.

(2) This special form of calling upon sons has been mentioned six times in The Quran, as follows: three times in the chapters of *Hud, Yusuf* and *as-Saffat*, one time in each of them, and three times in the chapter of *Luqman.*

Furthermore, using this style in particular indicates that Yusuf *peace be upon him* during that period of time was still a young boy, which is why Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), the father of Yusuf, showed him deep love. In addition, this style tells us clearly that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was not qualified yet to decide on matters himself, and that is why he was supposed to follow the instructions of his father; a point which is perfectly clear in the fact that when he, i.e. Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* was in distress, he used to hurry to his father whom he *peace be upon him* viewed as the best one who was able to alleviate his distress. Further, when Yusuf *peace be upon him* related his dream to his father, the latter advised him, saying: '…My son, tell your brothers nothing of this dream …' (*Yusuf:* 5).

As for the Arabic word *'ru'ya'* (dream), it refers to a series of events or images that happen in one's mind while sleeping; this is because the sun, the moon, and the stars never bow down before anyone in real life. This actually indicates the ultimate accuracy of the words used in the Quran. Here, we should differentiate between the following two words, namely; *'ru'ya'* (dream) and *'ru'yah'* (seeing). We have already given the meaning of the first. As for the latter, it refers to what one is able to see while awake.

As such, the two words are derived from the same linguistic root, which is (*r-a'-a),* yet each imparts a different meaning,; for one of them is used to refer to dreams coming to the mind of a person who is asleep, while the other is used to refer to what one sees while awake. Grammatically speaking, both of them are feminine words, as the three Arabic letters by means of which the word can be changed from masculine into feminine are: *ta' marbutah* ('ah' sound), an elongated *alif* (written with an *alif*) and a shortened *alif* (usually written with the letter *ya*).

Concerning these two words in question, the word *'ru'yah'* (seeing) ends with a *ta' marbutah*, while the other word, i.e. *'ru'ya'* (dream) ends with an elongated *alif.* I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the word '*ru'ya*' (dreams) in all places in the Quran refers to what the person sees when he is asleep, except in one verse when Allah *the Almighty* mentions Prophet Muhammad's miraculous Ascension into the heavens: 'And We made the vision (*al-ru'ya*) which We showed you as a trial for mankind…' (*Al-Isra': 60*). Some people claim that this miraculous Ascension into the heavens was shown to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a dream. Yet, we say to them, ‘You are unable to properly understand the meaning of this verse, for it means that what happened was a miracle, not just something which was imagined or seen in a dream; it was something that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* actually experienced. This is proved by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* describes the Night Journey and Ascension as a trial to mankind. As such, if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had declared that he had seen these events in a dream, none will have accused him of fabricating lies. However, he declared that he experienced the events of this journey in reality, and that is why the Quran says that it was a trial for the people’.

Back to the verse in question; Ya’qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* advised his son Yusuf (Joseph) not to tell his brothers about the dream he had seen. As a matter of fact, the main reason behind Ya’qub’s worry was that he felt the rest of his sons, driven by grudge and envy, might harm Yusuf; a matter which was later fulfilled. As for Ya’qub *peace be upon him* himself, he wanted his son not to be harmed, which is why he advised him not to tell the story to them.(1)

Here arises the following question, ‘Why were the brothers of Prophet Yusuf so jealous of such a dream?’ The answer to this question is clear from the fact that Ya’qub *peace be upon him* must have known the interpretation of this dream; he knew for certain that it was a prophecy which will be inevitably fulfilled. In addition, Ya’qub *peace be upon him* must have known that the rest of his sons, i.e. Yusuf’s brothers, had the ability to interpret this dream too, and if Yusuf had told them about it, they will have known its explanation and as a result will have plotted to harm him.

Furthermore, we should not forget the fact that they, i.e. Yusuf’s brothers were already jealous of him, although he was still a young boy; from this we realize they will have been bitterly jealous if they had known about this dream in question.

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(1) *Commenting on this verse, Al-Qurtubi said, ‘This verse clearly indicates that one should not tell his dream to anyone but one who loves him or is able to explain it’. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 4/3447.*

Yet, those brothers of Prophet Yusuf cannot be judged as evildoers, for they are Al-Asbat (heads of the Jewish tribes). Here, someone might reject this idea and say, 'If they were not truly evildoers, why did they plot to harm Yusuf *peace be upon him*?' We answer this question, saying, 'Their jealousy was a natural human feeling which resulted from their father's deep love for Yusuf; they were not truly evildoers. This is because evildoers are extremely insistent on pursuing their wrong ways, but the anger of the doers of good calms down with time'.

Let us offer a example to fully illustrate this point; an evil person might want to slap someone on the cheek. However, this initial desire to inflict harm might increase, and he might want to hit him twice. Then, he might think that two slaps are insufficient, and therefore he threatens his foe with a gun. As a matter of fact, this example shows us clearly how the evildoers are extremely insistent on doing evil, in one way or another.

The case is yet totally different with the doer of good, for we find that he is not insistent on committing evil. For example, a good person might want to hit someone who has harmed him. The good person's vindictive intentions might soon allay, to the extent that he might suffice with only slapping him twice instead of beating him up. With time, however, he might calm down and pardon his foe completely.

If we review the situation of Yusuf's brothers, who are the fathers of the twelve Jewish tribes, (1) in the light of the aforementioned two cases, we will find that their anger evaporated step by step; this shows that they were not evildoers by nature. Here is the explanation of this point: first of all, they plotted to kill Yusuf *peace be upon him*; a fact which is recorded in the Quran; Allah reports them as saying: '…Slay Yusuf (Joseph)…' (*Yusuf:* 9).

Yusuf's brothers were resentful of Ya'qub's love for his youngest son. However, they soon gave up this malicious tone and moved to a lower level of wrong; a fact which is also recorded when Allah *the Almighty* relates them as saying: '…Or banish him to another [faraway] land, and your father's attention will be free to return to you [alone]…' (*Yusuf:* 9).

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(1) The word '*Al-Asbat'* has been mentioned five times in the Quran. In four citations, it is used to refer to Prophets. As for the fifth citation, it has been used to impart the meaning of 'the heads of the Jewish tribes'. Here, we should know that Ya'qub's sons are themselves '*Al-Asbat'* of the Jewish tribes.

However, they were not bold enough to oust him to a remote land, which is why they moved to an even lower level of wrong, deciding to cast Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the dark depth of the well. Referring to this fact, Allah *the Almighty* states that they said: '…Cast him into the dark depths of this well, [where] some caravan may pick him up…' (*Yusuf:* 10). This plainly shows that those brothers of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* had given up the idea of killing him and decided to do something which is less harmful instead, indicating that they took his safety into account.

The verse under discussion continues with Allah *the Almighty* saying: 'Ya'qub (Jacob) replied, "My son, tell your brothers nothing of this dream, or they may arrange a harmful plot for you …' (*Yusuf:* 5). It is worth noting that the Arabic word *'al-kayd'* (plot) is a stealthy machination devised by someone unable to confront his enemy. Clearly, such schemes are weapons of the weak, since someone who is powerful is capable of overtly confronting his foe, hence the popular saying, 'Women's insidious plots are great because their weakness is even greater'.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…Satan is man's sworn enemy' (*Yusuf:* 5). This animosity between man and Satan is not a secret. We all know that Satan was expelled from paradise, for he was cursed by Allah *Glorified is He*. As for Adam, Allah *the Almighty* accepted his repentance, which is why Satan swore by the Might of Allah that he will misguide the sons of Adam, except for the purified slaves among them.(1)

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'There is none among you who does not have a comrade from among the jinn (devil)'. They (the Companions) said, 'Allah's Messenger, with you too?' Thereupon Prophet Muhammad replied, 'Yes, but Allah helps me against him and so I am safe from his hand, and he does not command me but to do good'.(2)

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(1) Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He said, "Then by Your Might I will surely misguide them all, except Your slaves from among them, the purified ones' (*Sad:* 82-83).

(2) See *Ahmad, Musnad,* 1/385

In the verse in question, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* describes Satan as a sworn enemy to man; that is, he (Satan) desperately tries to tempt man by all possible means. This fact is painstakingly recorded in The Quran, as Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the statement of Satan, saying: ‘And [I] shall most certainly assault them from before them as well as behind them, and from their right and from their left...’ (*al-A’raf:* 17).

Here, there is a very important point that we should take into account which is that Allah *the Almighty* in the aforementioned verse in the chapter of *al-‘Araf,* does not mention that Satan will come to man from below or from above him; this is because those purified slaves who are permanently connected to the earth below them in Prayer and the Divine Way of Guidance that came from above cannot be approached by Satan in anyway. Concerning this point, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* tells us about Ya’qub’s advice to his son, saying: ‘…or they may plot to harm you …’ (*Yusuf:* 5) meaning that the plotting of the brothers will be for the good of Yusuf *peace be upon him* because the Quran does not use the expression *‘fa yakiduka’* (they will harm you) for this means that their plotting will surely harm Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This is not the intended meaning. This point is crystal clear in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…In this way did We plan for Yusuf [to attain his heart’s desire]…’ (*Yusuf:* 76).

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِن تَأْوِيلِ ٱلْأَحَادِيثِ وَيُتِمُّ نِعْمَتَهُۥ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰٓ
ءَالِ يَعْقُوبَ كَمَآ أَتَمَّهَا عَلَىٰٓ أَبَوَيْكَ مِن قَبْلُ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسْحَٰقَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦﴾

This is about how your Lord will choose you, teach you to interpret dreams, and perfect His blessing on you and the House of Jacob, just as He perfected it earlier on your forefathers Abraham and Isaac: your Lord is all knowing and wise [6] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 6)

That is to say that just as Allah *Glorified is He* has conferred His Favour upon you, O Yusuf, by allowing you to see this dream, He *the Almighty* tells you that you will attain a superior rank, for He *the Almighty* will choose you from among your brothers. In addition, the Lord *Glorified is He* will make their plot for your good. Furthermore, He will teach you the interpretation of dreams in such a way that will attract the attention of those people in authority.

As for the Arabic word *'ta'wil'* (interpretation), it refers to understanding the concealed meaning of something. Here, we should take into account that not all people are able to interpret dreams, with the exception of those whom Allah *the Almighty* has granted the talent to do so. That is to say that it is not a field of knowledge which is based on rules and maxims, but rather, it is a matter of Divine Inspiration.

The Blessings of Allah *the Almighty* on Prophet *Yusuf peace be upon him* will not end at that point, for the Lord *the Almighty* will entrust Yusuf *peace be upon him* with running the affairs of the treasury of Egypt. Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* will make Yusuf *peace be upon him* the chief of Egypt.

As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and perfect His Blessings on you …' (*Yusuf*: 6), it refers to the blessings of this worldly life topped by being elected as a Messenger. Another possible interpretation for this part of the verse is that Allah *the Almighty* will permanently confer His Blessings on Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This explanation may be viewed in the light of the fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* will be appointed as a chief of Egypt; although it is a position from which he might be ousted, for one reason or another.

A third possible explanation is that the Lord *the Almighty* will confer His Blessings on Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the next life in the same way He conferred them upon him in the life of this world.(1) As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and the House of Ya'qub (Jacob), just as He perfected it earlier on your forefathers Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac): your Lord is All Knowing and All-Wise' (*Yusuf*: 6), it is a Divine Instruction to Yusuf *peace be upon him* not to harbour any enmity towards his brothers for Allah *Glorified is He* will also perfect His Blessings on them in the same way He *the Almighty* previously perfected them on their forefathers, i.e. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them* by taking the first as a friend[1] and by appointing the second as a Messenger. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* out of His Great Wisdom knows best who deserves to be assigned the mission of delivering the Divine Message to mankind. He arranges everything for it to be in the correct state.

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(1) *Commenting on this particular part of the verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'The saying of Allah the Almighty: '...and perfect His Blessings on you ...' (Yusuf: 6) may be explained in the light of the fact that Yusuf has been elected a Messenger, or in the light of the fact that his brothers had driven him away. It yet might mean that Allah the Almighty has saved you from all harm'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Byan, 4/3450.*

He *Glorified is He* then says:

لَّقَدۡ كَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخۡوَتِهِۦٓ ءَايَٰتٞ لِّلسَّآئِلِينَ ٧

There are lessons in the story of Joseph and his brothers
for all who seek them [7] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 7)

This verse tells us clearly that the entire events of this story will revolve around Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* a point which is deduced from using the Arabic preposition *'fi'* (in) which indicates a sequence of events.[2]

Being of a non-Arabic origin, the name Yusuf is non-declinable (i.e. cannot take some case endings), which is why the verse in question cannot be read as *'fi Yusufin'*.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'There are lessons *(ayat)* in the story of Yusuf and his brothers for all who seek [the Truth]' (*Yusuf:* 7), it means that the events of this story of Prophet Yusuf and his brothers clearly indicate the Omnipotent Power of Allah *Glorified is He*; for the story states that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was thrown in the dark depths of the well from which he was taken to be raised up in the house of one of the Egyptian leaders.

As for the Arabic word *'aya'* (singular for '*ayat*', meaning 'lessons' or 'signs'), it is used to refer to extraordinary matters which attract the attention

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(1) *Commenting on this particular part of the verse, Imam ibn Kathir said, 'Allah the Almighty says: "...And Allah took Ibrahim as a friend" (an-Nisa': 125). That is because Allah Glorified is He loves Ibrahim peace be upon him very much because he showed total obedience to Him the Almighty'. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/560.*

(2) *In his Mughni Al-Labib, ibn Hisham Al-Ansari said, 'The Arabic preposition 'fi' (in) can be used to impart ten different meanings including its reference to time and place– two meanings which are clear in the saying of Allah the Almighty: "Alif Lam Mim. The Romans are vanquished, in (fi) a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome, within (fi) a few years" (ar-Rum: 1-4)'.*

of people. Yet, it is used in the Quranic context to impart three different meanings, as follows: first of all, it is used to refer to the signs in the universe, such as the sun, the moon, the day, the night, etc. As a matter of fact, these signs produce conclusive evidence on the Existence of Allah *the Almighty*. That is, if we contemplate how the affairs of the universe are run with such absolute order, we will come to the conclusion that there has to be a Creator of this perfectly balanced universe. Second, this word in question (*aya*) can also be used to give the meaning of 'the miracles' given to Prophets and Messengers that prove their veracity and truthfulness. The fire(1) which did not harm Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the Red Sea which was divided into two huge mountains before Musa (Moses) are two cases in point. This word in question, i.e. *'aya',* is further used to refer to a verse of the Quran.

Back to the verse in question; it tells us clearly about the events of the story of Prophet Yusuf with his brothers and how their plotting to harm Yusuf *peace be upon him* was eventually turned into a blessing for him. It is important here to take into account that Allah *the Almighty* has sent down these verses of the chapter of *Yusuf* as a comfort for His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to strengthen his heart. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* instructs Prophet Muhammad not to pay attention to all the abuses and plots of the disbelievers of Mecca, for they will be in no way able to harm him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to despair, for He *the Almighty* is his Supporter and Protector, which is why Prophet Muhammad and his Companions should not think that Allah’s Victory has been delayed. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘[But] do you think that you will enter paradise without having suffered like those [believers] who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and so shaken were they that the Messenger and the believers with him exclaimed, "When will Allah’s Succour come?" Oh, verily, Allah’s Succour is [always] near!’ (*al-Baqara:* 214).

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(1) *Commenting on this miracle of Prophet Ibrahim, Imam ibn Kathir said that Allah the Almighty says: 'They said, "Burn him and help your gods, if you are going to do (anything)". We said, "O fire! Be cool and [a means of] safety for Ibrahim"' (al-Anbiya': 68-69). The Arabic word 'bard' (cool) is the opposite of hotness. Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talim opined that the fire did not harm Ibrahim peace be upon him. Ibn 'Abbas and Abu Al-'Aliya, on their part, said, 'Had Allah the Almighty not made the fire a means of safety for Ibrahim, he will have been hurt by its coldness'. Juwaiber narrated that Ad-Dahhak explained this verse, saying the town of Ibrahim had made up their minds to collect a huge pile of wood and they set fire to it from all directions, but Ibrahim peace be upon him was not harmed'. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Adhim, 3/184.*

The events of the story continue until Yusuf’s dream come true. They tell us how Yusuf *peace be upon him* was persecuted by his brothers and how Allah *the Almighty* turned their plot into a blessing for Yusuf *peace be upon him*. Some scholars opined that the dream of Yusuf *peace be upon him* came true within forty to eighty years.(1)

At that point, we can affirm that a dream of good tidings takes a long time to come true, while a dream portending an ominous future will not come true according to the Hadith of Prophet of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says: ‘Good dreams are from Allah, so if any one of you sees which he likes he should not disclose it but to one whom he loves. But if he sees something which he does not like he should spit on his left side thrice and seek refuge with Allah from the mischief of Satan and its mischief (i.e. of the dream), and he should not relate it to anyone. Then it will not harm him’.(2)

Here, we should also be aware of the fact that evil, in general, happens quickly and has only one form, while goodness takes time to happen and can take many forms. If we apply this to the interpretation of good dreams, a person can imagine many ways of how he may receive the good.

An example of a supplication for evil to happen is clear in the supplication made by Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* against the people of Pharaoh; a fact which is recorded in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Our

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(1) *Abu ‘Uthman An-Nahdi narrated that Sulaiman was of the opinion that the time span between Yusuf’s dream and its fulfilment was forty years. Al-Hasan, on the other hand, said, ‘Yusuf was separated from Ya’qub for a total of eighty years. During this period, sadness never left Ya’qub’s heart, and tears never ceased to stream down his cheeks’. This latter opinion is identical to that of Ibn Kathir. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 2/491.*

(2) *Narrated by Imam Muslim*

Lord! Destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they believe not until they see the painful punishment' (*Yunus:* 88). This supplication for evil was answered quickly.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'There are lessons in the story of Joseph and his brothers for all who seek [the Truth]' (*Yusuf:* 7). The word *'ayat'* ('lessons' or 'signs') indicates that all of the events of this story are viewed as signs and lessons. Yet, according to another mode of recitation, the word *'ayat'* is read in the singular *'aya'* which thus means that the entire events of the story are viewed as one amazing and wonderful sign. This last meaning is supported by another Quranic verse in which Allah describes both 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and his mother as one *'aya'* (wonderful sign); the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And We made the son of Maryam and his mother a sign (*ayah*)…' (1) (*al-Mu'minun:* 50).

That is to say that we can understand the story of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the light of the fact that it is one wonderful sign that includes different events, or that each event in it represents a single sign.

Allah then concludes the verse with His saying: '…for all who seek [the Truth]' (*Yusuf:* 7). This saying of Allah might be interpreted in two different ways; it may be used to refer to the polytheists of Mecca sent by the Jews(2) to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Yusuf's story.

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(1) *Commenting on this verse, Imam Ibn Kathir said, 'Allah the Almighty made them, i.e. 'Isa and his mother, a wonderful sign that indicates Allah's Omnipotent Power, for He the Almighty has created Adam out of nothing, created Eve from a male when there were no females and created 'Isa peace be upon him from a female, although she never had any relationship with men'. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 3/246.*

(2) *Commenting on this verse in question, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'This saying of Allah established the veracity and truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for the Jews had urged the polytheists of Mecca to ask him peace and blessings be upon him about a prophet whose son was driven away by his brothers from Ash-Sham to Egypt, and who consequently went blind. Whereupon Allah the Almighty sent down the chapter of Yusuf all at once; it contains all the information mentioned in the Torah and even adds further details. That is to say that this miracle was of the same magnitude of 'Isa's (Jesus Christ's) miracle of reviving the dead'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3450.*

The second possible explanation for it is that it refers to those Muslims who seek wisdom and admonition from the stories of previous nations, which is why Allah *the Almighty* revealed this chapter in such a miraculous way which cannot be brought by mankind.

Reading this chapter of Yusuf (Joseph) from the very beginning to the end might take you a total of twenty minutes. Here a good question arises, which is 'Who can continuously speak for about twenty minutes without even forgetting one word of his speech?' It goes without saying that none can do this, yet the case is totally different with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for Allah *Glorified is He* promised that He will teach him *peace and blessings be upon him* so he will never forget. Allah says: 'We will make you [Muhammad] recite so you shall not forget' (*al-A'la:* 6). Thanks to Divine Help, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* committed to memory all that was revealed to him from his Lord. He recited the verses of the Quran to his Companions and recited them in the prayers. It is worth mentioning that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never made a mistake while reciting The Quran, although it is full of verses that are very similar to each other.

Here is a list of some of the verses of the Quran which are very similar to each other; Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these are among (*min*) the acts that require diligent resolve' (*Luqman:* 17); However He *the Almighty* in another verse, says: '… surely these are indeed among (*lamin*) the acts that require diligent resolve' (*ash-Shura:* 43). Another example is when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in the midst of gardens and fountains' (*al-Hijr:* 45), although in another position, He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and bliss' (*at-Tur:* 17).

This makes one wonder how this unlettered Prophet (Prophet Muhammad) was able to recall all of these verses; it is impossible unless Allah *the Almighty* enabled him to do this.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

إِذْ قَالُوا۟ لَيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَىٰٓ أَبِينَا مِنَّا وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّ أَبَانَا لَفِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٨﴾

The brothers said [to each other], 'Although we are many, Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are — our father is clearly in the wrong' [8] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 8)

It is important here to discuss this verse in the light of the different bonds of brotherhood. We know fully well that there are sibling brothers, paternal brothers and maternal brothers. Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* had a total of twelve(1) children; six of them were delivered by one woman, four were the children of Zulfa and Balha, and Yusuf and Benyamin (Benjamin) were the children of *Rahil*.

The verse in question starts with the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The brothers said [talking among themselves], "Although we are many*, Yusuf* and his brother are dearer to our father than we are …"' (*Yusuf:* 8). Here, we should know that using the Arabic the particle *'lam'* before the name of Yusuf denotes emphasis and intensity; that is, the brothers of Yusuf said, 'By Allah! Truly! Our father loves Yusuf and his brother more than the rest of us!' In the same connection, we should be aware that emphasis is used when one wants to deny the opposite case.

This clearly indicates that they, i.e. the brothers, disagreed about Yusuf and also how they should deal with him *peace be upon him*; this is also derived from the fact that some of them suggested to kill him while others thought of just casting him down in the depths of a dark well. They, however, eventually reached the conclusion that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was dearer to their father than them.

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(1) Commenting on the number of Ya'qub's children, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Ya'qub first married Liyya bint Liyyan, his uncle's daughter. She gave birth to six children including Rubil, the eldest of Ya'qub's sons, Sham'un, Lawi, Yahudha, Zayalun and Yasakher. Ya'qub peace be upon him then married two slave girls who gave birth to four children, who were Dan, Niftali, Jad and Ashar. After the death of Liyya, he married her sister Rahil, who bore him Yusuf and Benyamin (Benjamin). Therefore the total number of his sons was twelve. As-Suhili, on his part, opined that the mother of Ya'qub was called Rafqa, adding that Rahil had died shortly after giving birth to Benyamin (Benjamin)'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3451.

As a matter of fact, careful reflection upon the statement of those brothers plainly indicates that they were somewhat fair, for they admitted that their father loved them as well. That is to say that if they had carefully examined the matter, they will have reached the main reason why their father loved Yusuf and his brother more than them.

First of all, Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother were young when their mother died.(1) Ya'qub *peace be upon him* therefore had to compensate for the loss of their mother by providing them with more love and affection. Furthermore, it is Allah *the Almighty* who filled Ya'qub's heart with this deeper love for both Prophet Yusuf and his brother Benyamin (Benjamin). Here, we stress that Ya'qub had nothing to do with this matter, i.e. showing deeper love for Yusuf and his brother, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who plants this affection in people's and animals' hearts alike.

Out of His All-Wise Will, He *Glorified is He* dispenses affection among His creatures according to their need for it. A cat, for example, attacks anyone that approaches its kittens.

It is for this reason that when the ancient Arabs were asked which child was dearest to them, they replied, 'The youngest until he becomes adult; the absent until he returns; and the sick until he recovers'.

We also witness this phenomenon in our daily life. Consider the example of a mother of two sons; one of whom was provided with abundant provision while the other barely meets his needs. The wealthy brother takes care of his mother's needs, and perhaps even financially supports his brother. Yet, the mother always displays more affection to the poor son. We therefore contend that love is a matter of emotions, which cannot be regulated or controlled according to a certain rule or law; a fact which is proved by the Quran which clearly states that 'love' and 'hatred' are nothing but natural feelings, which is why one is allowed to love whomever he wants and to hate whomever he wants on condition that he should not commit injustice against people for the benefit of the person whom he loves. In addition, one is not allowed to commit injustice against whom he hates. This point of maintaining justice in all cases is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '… and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety. And be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is Aware of what you do' (*al-Ma'ida:* 8).

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(1) In his exegesis, Imam Al-Qurtubi stated that their mother, Rahil died shortly after giving birth to Benyamin.

Someone may yet cite the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'None of you truly believe until I am more beloved to him that his own self' in opposition to this point.

We contend that the full form of this Prophetic Hadith provides the answer to this question. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* is narrated to have responded to Prophet Muhammad, saying, 'O Prophet Muhammad, you are truly more beloved to me more than any property and children, but not more than my own self'. Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reiterated, 'None of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self'.(1)

At that moment, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* understood that the love of Prophet Muhammad is a binding Divine Commandment, and that what is meant by this love is following his guidance (intellectual love), and not emotional love.

We previously explained that 'intellectual love' entails man fully realising that which is beneficial and acting upon it. For example, when you take bitter medicine, you are doing this out of intellectual love, seeking to be cured by the Permission of Allah.

Likewise, the Muslim loves Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he knows that without the Prophet's advent, he will have never savoured the gratifying sweetness of Faith. In fact, the Muslim may cultivate his love of Prophet Muhammad until the bond becomes an emotional one as well.

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(1) *The grandfather of Zuhra ibn Ma'bad related the following account, 'We were in the company of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him who was holding the hand of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him when 'Umar said, "By Allah, Oh Messenger Muhammad, you are truly dearer to me than everything except my own self". Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad replied, "By He who holds my soul in His Hand, none of you truly believes until I am dearer to him than his own self", whereupon 'Umar replied, "Now, by Allah, you, O Messenger of Allah, are dearer to me than my own self". Then Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, "Now, Oh 'Umar (you have attained complete faith)"'. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 4/336.*

It is thus clear that the incident of ‘Umar ibn Al-Kattab *Allah be pleased with him* has clearly shown the difference between the two acts of emotional love and intellectual love. Let us offer another example to fully illustrate this point. A man who had slain ‘Umar’s brother walked past the companions. When someone sitting next to ‘Umar remarked, ‘This is the man who murdered your brother’, ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* replied, ‘And what am I to do? He has embraced Islam’. He *Allah be pleased with him* then directed his gaze away from the murderer, who approached him and asked, ‘Why do you turn your face away from me?’ ‘Umar responded, ‘Because I do not love you, for you killed my brother’. When the man asked, ‘Does your lack of love for me deprive me of any of my rights?’ ‘Umar said, ‘No’. The man then exclaimed, ‘You may love whom you want, and hate whomever you want. Only women cry out of love’.

Concerning the story of Prophet Yusuf, his brothers should have realised that Ya’qub’s profound love for his two youngest sons was a natural reaction to the death of their mother.

The events of the story, consisting of good and evil aspects, continue, but here arises a question, which is, ‘Why was the brothers’ anger directed to only Yusuf?’ Some scholars opined that either they wished to make their father not feel the pain of losing both of his favourite sons–Yusuf and Benjamin–or that the contents of Yusuf’s dream had leaked out.

As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…we are many (‘Usba)…’ (*Yusuf:* 8), it indicates that their number was more than ten; this is understood from the Arabic word ‘*‘Usba’* (many). Another possible meaning for this word ‘*’Usba*’ is that it refers to a group of people whose members support each other, whether they are right or wrong. Because Ya’qub *peace be upon him* had become very old, he was unable to run the affairs of the family, and as a result his sons played this role instead. With this burden on their shoulders, they whispered, ‘Since we are the ones responsible for the family’s affairs, we should be the dearest to our father’. Little did they realise that their father did in fact love them, partly because they were a tightly knitted group, but he gave more care to his youngest sons because they were not members of any tightly knitted group. Sadly, the brothers remained unable to discern matters properly to the extent that they said: ‘…our father is clearly misguided [about this]’ (*Yusuf:* 8).

To recap: the brothers’ conclusion was based on flawed reasoning because Yusuf *peace be upon him* and Benyamin (Benjamin) were bereft of their mother, and for this reason were in great need of their father’s deeper and warmer affection. Moreover, his love for them did not exclude his love for the self-reliant older brothers.

As for the Arabic word *‘dalal’* (misguided) mentioned in the verse in question, some people might mistakenly understand it in its general sense. Yet, we stress that there are two types of *dalal,* namely: misguidance which is committed intentionally and another which is done unintentionally. As for the first, it is when a person deviates from the path of righteousness to that of wrong. As for the second, it can be seen in the example of a man who unintentionally follows a road that does not lead him to his intended destination. It could also refer to a person forgetting the true state of any matter. This second meaning is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…So that if one of them should forget (*tadil*), the other can remind her…’ (*al-Baqara:* 282); and in His saying: ‘And find you unaware [searching for the right way] (*dala*) and then guided you?’ (*ad-Duha:* 7) Clearly, the reprehensible act of misguidance is to deviate from the right to that which is wrong.

In short, both the brothers’ assessment of their father’s love for the two youngest sibling brothers as well as the conclusion they reached were wrong. The conclusion is erroneous because they based their reasoning on false precepts. Had they examined their initial assumptions very carefully, they will not have arrived at the wrong conclusion that led them to state, as mentioned in the Quran: ‘…our father is clearly misguided [about this]’ (*Yusuf:* 8).

Allah *Glorified is He* continues to relate what the brothers had said, stating:

ٱقۡتُلُواْ يُوسُفَ أَوِ ٱطۡرَحُوهُ أَرۡضٗا يَخۡلُ لَكُمۡ وَجۡهُ أَبِيكُمۡ وَتَكُونُواْ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦ قَوۡمٗا صَٰلِحِينَ ٩

[One of them said], ‘Kill Joseph or banish him to another land, and your father’s attention will be free to turn to you. After that you can be righteous’ [9] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 9)

This verse in question tells us plainly that they first thought of killing Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. However, being the founding fathers of the twelve Israelite tribes, they moved to a lower level of evil, a point which is clear in Allah's saying: '…or banish him to another land …' (*Yusuf:* 9). It is as if they feared the consequences of committing murder. Nevertheless, they deemed that with Yusuf's absence, Ya'qub's love will be theirs completely, an idea which is deduced from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and your father's attention will be free to turn to you …' (*Yusuf:* 9).

The Arabic word *'wajh'* (face)–here translated as 'attention'–refers to the body organ primarily concerned with showing how man interacts, smiles, and expresses affection or repulsion.

This particular part of the verse means that the attention of your father will be totally free for you, that is, there will be no barrier between them and their father, Ya'qub *peace be upon him*. And as for Allah's saying: 'After that you can be righteous' (*Yusuf:* 9), it may be explained in three ways, as follows: it may give the meaning that they were fully aware of the value of righteousness and thus fully realised that their plot was contrary to the standards of rectitude, which is why they intended to repent once the plot had been carried out. But, what guarantees that they will live long enough to repent?! This reasoning neglects the fact that our appointed time of death is concealed for this particular reason, that is, to prevent us from committing grave sins.

Another possible explanation of the verse is that they, having gotten rid of Yusuf, will be able to pursue the activities of their daily life in a good way, and will not destroy their relationship with their father anymore. According to their reasoning, when their father's attention will be theirs alone, he will finally treat them fairly and devote his love to them.

A third possible explanation is that once the brothers do away with Yusuf, they will no longer be engrossed in this ordeal. Only then will their situation become good and they will be able to get on with their daily lives.

As such, we can reach the conclusion that the actions of Yusuf's brothers were steered by their own understanding of the concept of goodness and righteousness and the concept of life.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ قَآئِلٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ لَا تَقۡتُلُواْ يُوسُفَ وَأَلۡقُوهُ فِي غَيَٰبَتِ ٱلۡجُبِّ
يَلۡتَقِطۡهُ بَعۡضُ ٱلسَّيَّارَةِ إِن كُنتُمۡ فَٰعِلِينَ ١٠

[Another of them] said, ‘Do not kill Joseph, but, if you must, throw him into the hidden depths of a well where some caravan may pick him up’ [10] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 10)

This verse in question indicates that Yusuf’s brothers had moved to a lower level of evil, for one of them suggested the idea of throwing him *peace be upon him* in the dark depths of a well instead of killing him. Here, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* does not specify the speaker in order to protect all the brothers from any low opinion that might be held of them.

The Arabic word *‘al-jubb’* (well) is used to refer to a well that is not stone-lined. We know that once the well’s shaft reaches the underground reserves, water continually streams into its chamber. To prevent the well from collapsing and to ensure that its waters are always accessible, the shaft is often reinforced with stone. This kind of well is referred to in Arabic as *‘bi’r mutawwa’*.

As for the Arabic term *‘ghayabt al-jubb’* (hidden depths of a well)*,* it refers to the hidden part of a well, usually just above the water, and whose contents cannot be spotted with the naked eye. This statement conjures the following question, which is ‘How could a caravan that happened to pass by a well notice a child hidden in its dark depths?!’ We maintain that this statement indicates another form of respite on the part of the brothers, for they refused the act of killing and had replaced it with driving Yusuf *peace be upon him* away, but yet they again rejected this idea, which is why one of them proposed the suggestion in question. Having voiced his opinion, the speaker(1) showed deep sympathy for his brother Yusuf *peace be upon him*, a point which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘…if you must…’ (*Yusuf:* 10). That is to say that he expected his brothers to reject his proposition.

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(1) *Commenting on this part of the verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, ‘Ibn ‘Abbas opined that the speaker was Ya’qub’s eldest son, Yahudha. Other scholars are yet of the opinion that the speaker is Rubil, Yusuf’s maternal cousin, while another group of scholars are of the opinion that the speaker was none but Sham‘un’. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 4/3452.*

As such, Allah *the Almighty* explains how the inimical brothers were mollified. The speaker did not remonstrate vehemently against the idea of killing Yusuf or banishing him to a faraway land, but rather he placated their indignation gradually and tactfully. Here, we should realise that the mere uttering of Yusuf's name, when Allah reports the speaker as saying: 'Do not kill Yusuf', is bound to make them show compassion and sympathy for him *peace be upon him*.

It is as though this unidentified speaker from among the brothers hoped that they will abandon the scheme altogether.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُواْ يَـٰٓأَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأۡمَ۬نَّا عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَنَـٰصِحُونَ ﴿١١﴾

They said to their father, 'Why do you not trust us with Joseph? We wish him well [11] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 11)

Having agreed to the suggestion of casting young Yusuf into a well, they started to implement their plan. One of them speaks to the father while they were all present, saying: 'Why do you not trust us with Yusuf (Joseph)?' (*Yusuf:* 11)

At that point, we should consider the fact that when a person uses the plural form in the presence of others, this means that they all agree on what he is saying, either tacitly or by gesture. To fully illustrate this point, let us read the Saying of Allah *the Almighty* in which He *Glorified is He* tells us about the supplication made by Prophet Musa (Moses) against Pharaoh: 'Our Lord! Destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they believe not until they see the painful punishment' (*Yunus:* 88). Here, let us wonder how Allah responded to that call of Musa. As a matter of fact, He accepted it, saying: 'The supplication of you both has indeed been accepted …' (*Yunus:* 89), that is to say that even though this supplication was made by *Musa*, Harun (Aaron) agreed on it.

In the same way, we understand that the rest of Yusuf's brothers agreed on what the speaker said to their father in this regard. In addition, this Saying of Allah under discussion indicates that they had previously tried to convince their father to allow Yusuf to accompany them, yet he had refused. As for Allah's saying: '…We wish him well' (*Yusuf:* 11), it means that Ya'qub should be rest assured because the brothers will look after Yusuf and protect him from all harm.

Allah *the Almighty* then continues telling us about what the brothers of Prophet Yusuf had said:

أَرْسِلْهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعْ وَيَلْعَبْ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ١٢

Send him with us tomorrow and he will enjoy himself and play–we will take good care of him [12] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 12)

In order to persuade Ya'qub *peace be upon him* into entrusting them with their younger sibling, the brothers needed a compelling argument, as they themselves were herdsmen, and as such they used to go out to look after the cattle. They proposed to take Yusuf to the fields to play, for playing was allowed and even encouraged for the young Yusuf since he was not yet mature or legally responsible. That is to say that no harm could afflict the young boy from recreation and merriment.

Concerning this point, we should take into account that the Islamic Sharia prefers that the child should practise some kind of sport which will benefit him in the future such as swimming, wrestling, or shooting. In this sense, we can state that the term *'la'ib'* unlike *'lahw',* is used to refer to entertainment activities which do not prevent one from fulfilling his duties.(1) There are certain games that are played in groups which engross the competitors even to the point of preventing them from performing Prayers on time. In this case, '*lahw'* has distracted them from carrying out an obligation. Had they stopped their games to pray, they will have had no negative repercussions.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with them narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him passed by some people who were shooting (arrows) and said, 'Shoot, Banu Isma'il, for your father was an archer'. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2899.*

قَالَ إِنِّي لَيَحْزُنُنِيٓ أَن تَذْهَبُواْ بِهِۦ وَأَخَافُ أَن يَأْكُلَهُ ٱلذِّئْبُ
وَأَنتُمْ عَنْهُ غَٰفِلُونَ ١٣

He replied, ‘The thought of you taking him away with you worries me: I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are not paying attention’ [13] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 13)

Surely, the father’s answer displeased the brother’s much because it revealed his deeper love for Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This love, as well as his concern for Yusuf’s safety, made it difficult for Ya’qub *peace be upon him* to allow the young boy to go with them. Ya’qub *peace be upon him* then told them, as shown clearly in this verse in question, another reason for not wanting to allow the boy to go. Ya’qub is quoted as saying: ‘And I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are not paying attention’ (*Yusuf:* 13).

Relying on this verse, a group of scholars (1) have voiced that Ya’qub himself was the one who (unintentionally) gave them the excuse they later used.

In the same connection, we should take into account that Ya’qub *peace be upon him* wanted to remind them of the rights of brotherhood, which is why he said: ‘I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are not paying attention’, and not ‘I am afraid a wolf may eat him when you are resting’. That is to say that Ya’qub *peace be upon him* tried to remind them of the rights of brotherhood under which they are obliged to protect their brother from any harm that might afflict him.

Furthermore, we should know that the brothers were unable to come up with a reply that could dispel the father’s anxiety. That is because his deeper love for Yusuf is what gave rise to their resentment against the young boy in the first place. The only answer the brothers concocted is what Allah makes clear in the following verse:

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(1) *Commenting on this verse in question, Imam Ibn Kathir said, ‘They, i.e. the brothers of Yusuf, got the idea from Ya’qub and used his words to justify their acts’. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Adhim, 2/470.*

قَالُوا۟ لَئِنْ أَكَلَهُ ٱلذِّئْبُ وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّآ إِذًا لَّخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

They said, ‘If a wolf were to eat him when there are so many of us, we would truly be losers!’ [14] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 14)

In this verse, the Lord *the Almighty* tells us how they attempted to reassure Ya’qu*b* and convince him to hand over Yusuf. The conspirers affirmed that a wolf will not devour Yusuf since they were numerous. They added that were an evil to befall him, they will not only be troubled by their conscious, but they will also be disgraced publicly. Such an ignominy, the brothers affirmed, is indeed too high a price to pay.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا۟ بِهِۦ وَأَجْمَعُوٓا۟ أَن يَجْعَلُوهُ فِى غَيَٰبَتِ ٱلْجُبِّ ۚ وَأَوْحَيْنَآ
إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُم بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

Then they took him away with them, resolved upon throwing him into the hidden depths of a well – We inspired him, saying, ‘You will tell them of all this [at a time] when they do not realize [who you are]!’ [15] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 15)

Allah’s saying: ‘(They) resolved to throw him into the hidden depths of a well’ (*Yusuf:* 15) indicates that the brothers came to their final decision after discussion and debate.(1)

Through inspiration, Allah *Glorified is He* told Yusuf *peace be upon him* that he will tell his brothers what they did to him.

This fact is demonstrated later on in the story; for once Yusuf assumes reign over Egypt, and the brothers enter upon him, he will tap on a goblet with his fingers and tell them, ‘Listen to what the goblet has to say: it says that you have a brother, and that you did such and such a thing to him’.(1)

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(1) *Commenting on this verse in question, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, ‘Ya’qub did not entrust the brothers with Yusuf until he took from them a solemn oath that they will look after him. When they did this, he handed Yusuf to Rubil and said, “Oh Rubil, he is young, and you know how dear he is to me. Therefore, if he becomes hungry, feed him; if he becomes thirsty, give him water; and if he becomes tired, carry him. Bring him back to me as soon as possible”. The brothers thus took turns carrying him on their shoulders’. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘Al-Bayan, 4/3462.*

Some commentators opine that Allah *the Almighty* inspired Yusuf that he will tell them what they did with him and his brothers did not notice this. We assert that divine inspiration is revealed subtly, and only its recipient can sense its presence. This explains why they were only aware of what was inspired to Yusuf after the latter assumed power over Egypt. In fact, they did not even realise that Yusuf was their brother at that time; this is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘…If he has stolen, a brother of his did indeed steal(2) before…’ (*Yusuf:* 77).

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(1) *Commenting on this story, it is related on the authority of Ibn Abi Hatim and Ibn Jarir that Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with them said, ‘When the brothers met up with Yusuf, he recognised them, but they did not recognise him. Then a goblet was placed in Yusuf’s hand, which he tapped to produce a clinking sound. He peace be upon him then said, “This goblet informs me that you had a paternal brother. His name was Yusuf and he had the same religion as you. The goblet tells me that you took him away and cast him into the dark depths of a well. After that, you went back to your father alleging that the wolf had devoured him. Along with this claim, you brought forth his shirt spattered with false blood”. After listening to Yusuf, the brothers said to each other, “Truly, this goblet informs him of our deeds!”’. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 4/511.*

(2) *Here, the brothers are referring to Yusuf peace be upon him. Commenting on this verse, Sa‘id ibn Jubayr narrated that Qatada said, ‘Yusuf stole a statue from his maternal grandfather and broke it’. Mohammed ibn Ishaq narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn Abi Nujayh narrated that Mujahid said, ‘I have been informed that Yusuf’s first tribulation came as a result of his aunt, Ishaq’s (Isaac’s) oldest child. In those days, inheritance was reserved for the eldest child, and she had inherited Ishaq’s belt. It had been agreed upon that whoever stole this belt will be enslaved by the person it belongs to. After Yusuf was born, his aunt nursed him and eventually fell in love with the child. Her love for him was so profound that no one was dearer to her than him. A few years later, Ya’qub’s longing for Yusuf was overpowering and as a result he went to her and said, “Oh sister, return Yusuf to me for, by Allah, I cannot bear to be separated from him one more hour”. She responded, “By Allah! I will not leave him”. Then she added, “Allow me to keep him for a few more days. Perhaps living within his proximity a bit longer and looking at him more will help me overcome his loss”. When Ya’qub left, she took Ishaq’s belt and wrapped it around Yusuf’s waste, under his clothes. Then she cried out, “I’ve lost Ishaq’s belt. Who took it?” She then inspected Yusuf and said, ‘Uncover Yusuf, Oh people of the house”. They uncovered him and found the belt wrapped around his waist, whereupon she declared, “By Allah! He is my captive, and I can do with him what I please”. When Ya’qub returned, she conveyed the news to him. Ya’qub replied, “If he took the belt, then he is indeed your captive, and there is nothing I can do”. And in this way she took him, and there was nothing Ya’qub could do to return him until she died’. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Adhim, 486/2.*

It is important to clarify that what is meant by inspiration in this verse in question is companionship and support during times of hardships. Revelation is therefore divinely bestowed and cannot be thwarted by Satan. Furthermore, these types of inspirations are imparted unto individuals who do not have any prophetic function, such as the aforementioned example of Musa's mother who was inspired by Allah to cast her son into the river.(1)

As such, it is clear that the human soul does not refuse such Divine Inspiration. In this regard, we know that Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Yusuf *peace be upon him* what comforted him after being thrown in the dark depths of the well, an act by means of which he *peace be upon him* was deprived from his father's and brother's love and compassion, and which caused him to live in a land far away from where he was brought up and an environment very different from what he was used to.(2)

It was therefore necessary that a heartening heavenly message be revealed, *'Yusuf,* what has befallen you is not intended to alienate you. Rather, it is to prepare you to face more important matters. Your resentful brothers will one day be forced to knock on your door for help, asking for provisions, and you will recognise them but they will not recognise you'.

So far the story has addressed Yusuf's situation and the well into which he has been cast. The story must yet address the brothers' encounter with Ya'qub.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *Allah the Almighty says: 'When We revealed to your mother what was revealed, saying, "Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore…"' (Ta Ha: 38-39).*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Ad-Dahhak narrated that Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him descended upon Yusuf while he was in the well and told him, "Shall I not teach you words, if uttered, will make Allah hasten your escape from this well?" Yusuf responded, "Yes". Then Jibril said, "Oh Creator of all created things, Oh Compeller of all those who have been defeated, Oh Witness of all secrets, Oh One Who is present in every congregation, Oh Dispeller of all troubles, Oh Escort of every stranger and Oh Companion of every forsaken person, grant me relief and hope, and infuse desire for You in my heart for me to desire none but You". When Yusuf repeated this supplication throughout the night, the next morning he was rescued by Allah from the well'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3465.*

وَجَآءُوٓ أَبَاهُمۡ عِشَآءٗ يَبۡكُونَ ١٦

And at nightfall they returned to their father weeping [16] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 16)

This verse reveals the Quran's extraordinary ability to convey in detail impulses of the human psyche. How are Yusuf's brothers to confront their father whom they deceived?! Even worse: they double-crossed their brother and threw him into a well despite Ya'qub's great love for him, and despite the fact that the latter had grudgingly entrusted them with the young boy.

In situations like these, mental distress cannot be fully concealed by anyone. The brothers therefore conclude, 'We will delay our encounter with father until nightfall'. This is because when darkness fully sets in, facial features are undetectable and it will be easier for the brothers to hide their disturbance as well as the contradictions rolling off their tongues. Clearly, they will not confess to their father what truly happened; instead, they will recount a factitious tale. In other words, they might be belied by their fake gestures, uncontrollable stuttering, or other signs of dishonesty in front of their father. Therefore, they thought, 'At night our faces will be more shrouded than during the day, for night hides such shameful acts. So, when we enter upon our father at night, he will not detect our agitation'.

The brothers carefully chose a time to inform their father of their crime. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And at nightfall they returned to their father weeping' (*Yusuf:* 16). The act of weeping is a natural or innate impulse that is inborn in man, in fact, it is uncontrollable. However, to feign this act is referred to in Arabic by the verb '*tabaka'*. One feigns crying either by rubbing or by applying some saliva to his eyes.

However, the light must be dim for these fake tears to be passed off as being genuine. And so, the brothers came to their father pretending to be weeping after nightfall.(1)

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(1) *Commenting on this verse, Imam Al-Qurtubi said, 'Scholars affirm that this verse proves that weeping does not confirm the veracity of the weeper, for there is a possibility that his tears are feigned. Indeed, some people are able to feign crying while others are not. It has also been said that false tears do not completely mask the person's insincerity, as a wise poet once said,* =

When Allah *the Almighty* speaks of His Unique Attributes which only He possesses, He informed us that it is He Who causes death and grants life. Also, it is He Alone Who causes man to laugh and to weep. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And that it is He Alone Who causes [you] to laugh and to weep, and that it is He Alone Who gives death and grants life’ (*an-Najm*: 43-44).

Clearly, there is no fundamental difference between the laughter and crying of an Englishman and an Arab, nor is there a difference between the death and birth of a Chinese man, an Arab or a Frenchman. Why? Because these attributes are shared by all of humanity.

When one pretends to laugh, he is referred to in Arabic as performing ‘y*atadahak’;* and when he pretends to cry, he is referred to as performing *‘yatabaka’*, that is, to simulate laughter or crying. Finally, it is daytime that exposes false laughter or crying from genuine expressions of happiness or sadness.

History (1) bears witness to a multitude of acts that were concealed by the obscurity of night. Take the example of Imam Al-Hussayn *Allah be pleased with him* when the events in Karbala’ took place. He noticed that the enemy had encircled him, and he was also abandoned by the locals after they had invited him to pledge their allegiance to him. In the end, very few were steadfast. Imam Al-Hussayn *Allah be pleased with him* had a great sense of honour and did not let his few followers be slain in an unbalanced battle which he *Allah be pleased with him* was determined to fight.

So, after nightfall, he gathered his followers and said, ‘If you feel ashamed of abandoning me during daylight, then night has come and its darkness has given you cover. Whoever wants to depart let him do so. You may leave me here alone’.(2)

= *“When cheeks are bedaubed with tears, discern between genuine and phony weepers”. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 4/3466.*

(1) The story of Imam *Husayn* with his follower on the night before the battle of *Karbala’*.

(2) *In his book, Ibn Kathir cited that Al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali Allah be pleased with him told his companions, ‘Whoever desires to return to his people tonight, I have given him permission because those people want only me. The darkness of this night has veiled you from their sight, so flee expediently, and let each man take a member of my household surreptitiously to his localities and cities, for those people want only me. If they capture me, that will at least distract them from trying to capture other members of my* =

The Lord *Glorified is He* then relates what happened shortly after Yusuf's brothers faced their father:

قَالُوا۟ يَـٰٓأَبَانَآ إِنَّا ذَهَبْنَا نَسْتَبِقُ وَتَرَكْنَا يُوسُفَ عِندَ مَتَـٰعِنَا
فَأَكَلَهُ ٱلذِّئْبُ ۖ وَمَآ أَنتَ بِمُؤْمِنٍ لَّنَا وَلَوْ كُنَّا صَـٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

They said, 'We went off racing one another, leaving Joseph behind with our things, and a wolf ate him. You will not believe us, though we are telling the truth!' [17] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 17)

As for the Arabic word *'nastabiq'* (to race), it denotes that someone outran someone else in a race. The purpose of this race is to see which runner is fastest. So, when two runners compete to outrun one another, this is called *'al-istibaq'* (racing).

This word in question, however, may also denote a contest to measure one's skill at using a firearm such as a gun. Two people compete to see who can shoot more accurately and whoever strikes closest to the target proves his superiority in that field.

Al-Istibaq may also denote a contest to measure one's skill in archery. The shape of the bow is known to all: it is a flexible branch which can bent and to which a cord is tied to both ends. The arrow, which is placed in the middle of the taut cord, is drawn by the archer and then released for it to fly directly to the target.

The accuracy of the archer is determined by the type of arrow used and the speed at which the arrow is launched. The act of evaluating the archer's precision is called *'tahdid al-hadaf'* which refers to the archer's ability to hit the target.

Sometimes the winner of archery contests is determined by the maximum length the arrow covers. This type of contest gauges the archer's strength.

Such competitions can take different forms, all within the scope of what is lawful. This is understood as the competitors in the chapter of Yusuf were

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= *family. So disperse until Allah the Almighty grants relief from this trial'. See Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah Wa An-Nihayah, 8/178.*

the founding fathers of the twelve Israelite tribes and the children of Ya'qub *Allah be pleased with him*.

There is nothing wrong in playing a game, as long as it does not distract the person from his duties. In fact, such past-times may sometimes prove useful–especially if one faces an enemy. At that moment, his skill in archery or throwing a javelin or any other weapon will be useful. In short, any kind of past-time that does not prevent the person from offering acts of worship to Allah *the Almighty* and which is useful during times of conflict is lawful.

There are certain past-times which people might think are of no use, such as football. But football involves strength and the implementation of clever techniques on the part of the player in order to keep the ball away from his goal.

However, love for football must not divert one's attention from his duties. A case in point is when the call to prayer is made; we must not defer prayer in order to finish the football game. Needless to say, the players should not wear clothes that expose the private parts of their body.

The sons of Ya'qub said, as is stated in the Quran: '…leaving Yusuf behind with our things…' (*Yusuf:* 17). By supposedly leaving Yusuf *peace be upon him* behind with their things, the brothers violated their agreement with Ya'qub *peace be upon him* since the latter entrusted them with Yusuf *peace be upon him* only after they had pleaded: 'Send him with us tomorrow and he will enjoy himself and play….' (Yusuf: 12) Further, they assured him *peace be upon him* by saying: 'We wish him well' (Yusuf: 11), and also by saying: 'We will take good care of him' (*Yusuf:* 13). Here arises a question, which is 'Did the brothers of Yusuf *peace be upon him* take him out with them that he may enjoy himself, play, eat fruits and be safeguarded by them–or to watch over their belongings while they were racing?!'

This is the brothers' first lie, as well as their first violation of the condition stipulated by their father to entrust them with Yusuf *peace be upon him*. The brothers' excuse is reminiscent of the aphorism which declares that 'the suspect all but incriminates himself'. To continue, they said: 'and a wolf ate him. But you will not believe (*bimu'min*) us, though we are telling the truth!' (*Yusuf:* 17)

That is, they said this because they fully knew that their father will not believe them, no matter what they say.

The Arabic word *'aamana'* (from the word '*mo'mun*' in '*bimo'mun*' which means 'to believe' or 'to safeguard') can be associated with the object of the sentence, such as in the phrase 'Allah has safeguarded him from hunger'. An example of this from the Quran is Allah's saying: '…and gives them security (*aamanahum*) against fear' (*Quraysh:* 4).

The word *'aamana'* can also be followed by the letter *'ba'* and thus denote 'to believe or have faith in', or it can also be followed by the particle *'lam'* and thus denote 'accept what someone says as true'.

In the verse in question, the brothers accused their father of doubting their claim, although they were telling the truth, as they said. However, they knew fully well that they were untruthful, but they mentioned the word 'truth' to conceal their dishonesty. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَجَآءُو عَلَىٰ قَمِيصِهِۦ بِدَمٖ كَذِبٖۚ قَالَ بَلۡ سَوَّلَتۡ لَكُمۡ أَنفُسُكُمۡ
أَمۡرٗاۖ فَصَبۡرٞ جَمِيلٞۖ وَٱللَّهُ ٱلۡمُسۡتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ ١٨

And they showed him his shirt, deceptively stained with blood.
He cried, 'No! Your souls have prompted you to do wrong!
But it is best to be patient: from God alone I seek help to bear
what you are saying' [18] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 18)

This verse plainly indicates that when they returned to their father, they brought Yusuf's shirt with them. It has been said that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* upon seeing the false blood stains on the shirt, deduced that the wolf had been clement to Yusuf *peace be upon him* since it had devoured Yusuf's flesh without tearing his shirt. It is as though he fully realised that there had been a plot against Yusuf *peace be upon him* and that Allah *the Almighty* will reveal it to him.(1)

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(1) *In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi cited what is narrated from Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him and others, 'When Ya'qub peace be upon him examined the shirt and did not find any tears or marks that suggested a wolf had attacked Yusuf, he fully realised that the brothers were lying. He expostulated, 'How is it that this wolf happened to be a wise wolf? It ate Yusuf without tearing his shirt!' See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 4/3471.*

Interestingly, certain scholars refer to Yusuf's story as 'The Story of the Shirt'. This is because the brothers presented Yusuf's shirt splattered with false blood. In the middle of the chapter of *Yusuf,* (1) Yusuf's shirt again plays a central role. As we shall see, the shirt will provide evidence indicating the guilt of the governor's wife; having been torn from behind, the shirt will conclusively prove that she was the one who had tried to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

Towards the end of the same chapter,(2) the brothers deliver Yusuf's shirt to Ya'qub *peace be upon him* and the latter's sight is restored.

Therefore, the word 'shirt' has taken on a symbolic significance in the eyes of scholars and men of letters alike.

What the people said about the battle that was waged between 'Ali and Mu'awiya *Allah be pleased with them* may be viewed as a case in point. Mu'awiya grasped the shirt of 'Uthman ibn Affan *Allah be pleased with him* demanding 'Ali to take revenge for the assassination of 'Uthman. For this reason, people referred to, 'The shirt of Uthman' to indicate the vested interest of Mu'awiya', that is, to rule in place of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, Allah be please with them all. That is, 'the shirt of 'Uthman' symbolised hidden ulterior motives.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they showed him his shirt, deceptively stained with blood(3)...' (*Yusuf:* 18).

The brothers had Yusuf's shirt, and they had smeared it with false blood. Clearly, blood does not lie, but the one who smeared the shirt with goat's blood did indeed lie!

Here, we should take into account that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the gerund '*kadhib*' when describing the act of lying to indicate their insistence on telling the lie, as if the blood itself had lied. For example, the person who is just is described as 'the very personification of justice', implying that he is the very embodiment of justice. One might also say, 'so-and-so commits evil', but the listener retorts, 'in fact, he himself is evil'. These two expressions are examples that intensify the act.

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(1) The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But he said, "She tried to seduce me". A member of her household suggested, "If his shirt is torn from the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying, but if it is torn from the back, she is lying and he is telling the truth' (*Yusuf:* 26-27).

(2) The Lord *Glorified is He* states *Yusuf peace be upon him* saying to his brothers: 'Take my shirt and lay it over my father's face: he will recover his sight...' (*Yusuf:* 93).

(3) This is a form of metaphorical speech, suggesting that the blood was contrived.

But this makes us ask, 'Is it possible to describe blood as being "honest"?' We opine that such a statement could be possible if the wolf had actually eaten Yusuf *peace be upon him* and if the shirt was ripped and stained with Yusuf's blood. However, this did not take place; in fact, in this story, dishonesty itself almost cries out, 'I am a liar!'

Had the wolf eaten Yusuf *peace be upon him* the blood will have come out from the inside of the shirt to the outside. However, the brothers brought forth the shirt smeared only on the outside with the goat's blood. If the wolf had actually eaten Yusuf *peace be upon him,* surely its fangs will have torn the shirt to shreds!

In this connection, various accounts relate that when their father discovered their dishonesty, one of the brothers made a discreet gesture and whispered to the rest, 'Tell your father that bandits had besieged Yusuf and killed him'. Upon hearing this, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* replied, 'Surely, the bandits wanted to steal his shirt rather than just his blood!'(1)

This incident clearly illustrates Ya'qub's remarkable astuteness–a quality which any investigator should have in order to solve a murder case. As a matter of fact, the investigator needs this quality when he interrogates the culprits and witnesses because he knows that a liar's answers are not based on reality; rather, they are devised by a person's imagination. At that point, we can quote the following proverb, 'The inveterate liar must have a good memory!'

In our story, the Lord *Glorified is He* tells us what Ya'qub said to his sons, saying: 'He cried, "No! Your souls have prompted (*sawwalat*) you to make up a tale! [For me] patience is good and most fitting: from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying"' (*Yusuf:* 18).

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(1) *Commenting on this point, Al-Qurtubi mentioned the brothers' attempts to justify Yusuf's absence to their father, saying, 'It has been related that the brothers told Ya'qub peace be upon him "In fact, bandits killed him", but their narrations were conflicting, which is why Ya'qub replied accusingly, "You claim that the wolf ate him, but had it done so, his shirt will have been torn before his flesh. However, I see no tears in the shirt. Also, you claim that the bandits killed him, but had they done so, they will have stolen his shirt. Do the bandits want anything apart from his clothes?!"' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Byan, 4/3472.*

As for the Arabic word *'as-sawl'* (from 'sawwalat', translated as 'have prompted' in the verse), it denotes 'relaxation', for when a person is overwrought, he is only at ease physically and emotionally after relaxing for some time. As such, the verb *'sawalat'* implies that Yusuf's brothers found certain ease and relief when their souls prompted them to make up the tale. As for Ya'qub *peace be upon him* his appropriate response to this situation was to patiently endure the difficulty.

Concerning this, adversaries of Islam ask the following question, 'Is it possible to describe patience as being "good"?!' In our response to them, we say that they are unaware of the fact that if the Arabic word *'sabr'* (patience) is followed by the preposition '*'an' (to be away from),* then this patience concerns a desire that could have negative repercussions. This is an example to illustrate this point; when you order someone to control himself from drinking alcohol, gambling or practicing usury, you order him to be patient in avoiding these things.

On the other hand, when the word *'sabr'* (patience) is followed by the preposition '*'ala',* it indicates being patient over a particular thing is painful, As a matter of fact, patience can be good when the person does not complain or tear his clothes etc. in grief.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Mohammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '...and avoid them with a dignified avoidance' (*al-Muzzammil*: 10).

We stress that those who eagerly look for inconsistencies or contradictions in the Quran are people who do not know how to study the Scripture and properly grasp its meanings. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* clearly shows us that good patience is that in which a person does not complain about his difficulties to the people; a point which is proved by the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He said, "I only complain of my grief and sorrow to Allah, and I know from Allah what you do not know"' (*Yusuf:* 86). As such, it becomes clear that there is a difference between complaining about something to Allah *Glorified is He* and complaining about what Allah has predestined for you. That is why Ya'qub *peace be upon him* says in the verse in question: '[For me] patience is good and most fitting...' (*Yusuf:* 18) The Lord continues to state what Ya'qub says: '…from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying' (*Yusuf:* 18).

From this verse, we may infer that the good type of patience is hard for the human soul to bear. In fact, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was unable to believe what his sons told him; for how could he believe such lies? How could he possibly face his sons with what they had done? After all, they are also his children, and as such he could not confront them with their lies.

With regards to this, we can quote the following lines of a poem in which the poet commenting on the reaction of a man who was told that his son had killed the man's brother, said:

'I say to myself, "[Such] sadness and grief!
One of my hands has assailed me, but my soul
Does not want to charge either one for the crime
This one I call brother, and that one I call son"'.

Such situations are difficult and call for compassion, since the one who experiences them does not know whether to be severe or merciful. How can one possibly merge such conflicting positions? Such situations are indeed distressing to all men, and concerning them, one must seek refuge with Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that when anything distressed him (*hazanahu amr*), he used to pray. (1)

As for the expression *'hazanahu amr'* (when anything distressed him), it means to be faced with a matter that is beyond human ability to surmount. In this case, the person afflicted must seek relief from Allah *the Almighty* the One Who creates all means. That is why Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said: '…from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying (*tasifun*)' (*Yusuf:* 18).

The Arabic word *'tasifun'* (what you say) implies that Ya'qub's sons were not saying the truth; rather, they were telling him something which does not conform to reality. This is similar to Allah's saying: 'and do not say what your tongues describe (*tasifu*): the lie, "This is lawful and this is unlawful"...' (*an-Nahl:* 116). That is, your very tongues reveal the falsity of your words. In this connection, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Honor, above what they describe (*tasifun*) (ascribing partners to Him)' (*as-Saffat:* 180). This means that those who described Him in such (false) ways were not telling the truth and that their lies were bound to be exposed.

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(1) *Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him related, 'When anything distressed Prophet Muhammad, he used to pray'. This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad 5/388, and Imam Abu Dawud in his Sunnan, No. 1291.*

Back to the verse in question; the Lord *Glorified is He* relates what Ya'qub said to his sons: '…from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying' (*Yusuf:* 18). That is how Ya'qub *peace be upon him* expressed himself, for although his wounds might not have been outwardly visible, his heart was full of pain and worry, and he longed for peace. Due to this unrest, it was necessary for him to take recourse in Allah *the Almighty*.

In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* has taught us in the chapter of *al-Fatiha* to say: 'You alone do we serve and You alone do we ask for help' (*al-Fatiha*: 5).

As you stand in worship before the Lord *Glorified is He* worldly matters might distract you from worship. Therefore, you should ask for your Lord's Help to make you sincere in your worship.

After presenting the situation of Ya'qub *peace be upon him* with his sons, Allah *the Almighty* turns our attention to the situation of Yusuf in the well.

He *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَآءَتۡ سَيَّارَةٞ فَأَرۡسَلُواْ وَارِدَهُمۡ فَأَدۡلَىٰ دَلۡوَهُۥۖ قَالَ يَٰبُشۡرَىٰ
هَٰذَا غُلَٰمٞۚ وَأَسَرُّوهُ بِضَٰعَةٗۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمُۢ بِمَا يَعۡمَلُونَ ١٩

Some travellers came by. They sent someone to draw water and he let down his bucket. 'Good news!' he exclaimed. 'Here is a boy!' They hid him like a piece of merchandise – God was well aware of what they did [19] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 19)

Here arise two questions that are: 'Where were the travellers coming from?' and 'Where were they heading?' But the Lord *Glorified is He* does not answer these questions in the chapter in question.

As for the Arabic word *‘sayyara’*, it denotes a group of expert travellers, such as the people of Quraysh who used to undertake summer and winter journeys in order to carry out trade and import goods. As a matter of fact, not all the travellers went to the well; rather, they sent one person to bring them water from that well. Such a person is called ‘*al-wared’* (water-drawer) because he brings water for the rest. Here, we should know that Arabs tie a rope to the bucket, and they call this rope *‘ar-risha’’*. When the rope was within reach, Yusuf clung to it and the water-drawer felt the weight of the boy’s tug. Upon looking down, he, i.e. the water-drawer, found a young boy clinging to his rope. Elated, he cried out: ‘Good news! Here is a boy!’ (*Yusuf:* 19)

In other terms, the water-drawer was saying, ‘What good news! This is your lucky moment!’ It is as though he were relating good tidings to his people, for not only did he pull water out from the well, but he also brought them a young boy. The Lord says: ‘They hid him like a piece of merchandise–but Allah was well aware of what they did’ (*Yusuf:* 19). That is, they concealed him and treated him as though he were a piece of merchandise. Fearing that he might be a runaway slave who was sought after by his master, the travellers did not allow Yusuf *peace be upon him* to walk beside them, as they wanted to sell him *peace be upon him* to take a profit.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: ‘But Allah was well aware of what they did’ (*Yusuf:* 19). This part of the verse refers to those who hid Yusuf *peace be upon him* like a piece of merchandise; they are these same travellers who later sold Yusuf.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَشَرَوۡهُ بِثَمَنِۭ بَخۡسٖ دَرَٰهِمَ مَعۡدُودَةٖ وَكَانُواْ فِيهِ مِنَ ٱلزَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

And then sold him for a small price, for a few pieces of silver: so little did they value him [20] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 20)

We know clearly that the travellers themselves did not buy him, but rather found him. We also know that the word ‘*shiraa*” in this verse indicates the act of selling. In other words, we are told that they sold him for a small, paltry price. In those days, the slaves were evaluated by money.

As for the Arabic word *'bakhs'* (small price), it indicates a lack of quantity or quality. For example, a boy is worth one hundred *Dirhams,* but was sold for only twenty. Slaves of Yusuf's young age were sold for a high-price, but they sold him for less than he was worth. The Lord *Glorified is He* sheds further light on this point, saying: '…for a few pieces of silver: in such low estimation did they hold him' (*Yusuf:* 20). The travellers' were content with a small price, selling Yusuf *peace be upon him* for only a few pieces of silver, for they feared that Yusuf's father or friend might come searching for him. They thought to themselves, 'Any price that this child brings us is a gain for us'.(1)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِى ٱشْتَرَىٰهُ مِن مِّصْرَ لِٱمْرَأَتِهِۦٓ أَكْرِمِى مَثْوَىٰهُ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَنفَعَنَآ
أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُۥ وَلَدًا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُۥ مِن تَأْوِيلِ
ٱلْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَىٰٓ أَمْرِهِۦ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

The Egyptian who bought him said to his wife, 'Look after him well! He may be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son.' In this way We settled Joseph in that land and later taught him how to interpret dreams: God always prevails in His purpose, though most people do not realize it [21]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 21)

Yusuf *peace be upon him* was purchased by the Egyptian to be the servant of his wife who was childless and had often urged her husband to seek treatment. Most accounts relate that the buyer was weak in terms of his sexual desires for women.

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(1) *Commenting on this verse in question, Al-Qurtubi said, 'some scholars explained Allah's saying: '…in such low estimation did they value him' (Yusuf: 20) to refer to Yusuf's brothers, the travellers or the water-drawers. In all cases, Yusuf peace be upon him was not a source of joy for them–not for the brothers because the object of their plot was to separate him from his father, not to get money by selling him, and not for the travellers, for they feared that Yusuf's brothers may claim him as their runaway slave. The Arabic word 'az-zuhd' (holding in low estimation) denotes a lack of desire for something. Yusuf was also not a source of joy for the water-drawers, as they did not want to share the money they received from selling Yusuf with the rest of the travellers. Consequently, the water-drawers thought that a paltry price that is not divided among many was more profitable than a high price that is shared among many'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3479.*

As a matter of fact, this incident in the story reveals the immorality that may ensue within households that adopt a child. The parents did not have any foresight as to what might happen when the child, who is used to being coddled and kissed by his adopter, attains adulthood. The adopter may easily become intimate with the boy, and at a certain point it is hard for her to control herself with him. Consequently, as the child grows into a mature man, he may easily fall into the realm of sin.

As for Allah's saying: 'The Egyptian who bought him said to his wife, "Look after him well! He may be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son"' (*Yusuf:* 21), it means that she should keep his lodging clean, which necessarily means that she should take care of the boy himself, hoping that one day they will benefit from him.

Here arises the following question, 'How could the boy be of benefit to a man who is the governor of Egypt and for whom everyone works?' We reply, 'Benefit in this case denotes a sentimental bond which differs from the gain that the potentate derives from the employees who work under his and his wife's command. By virtue of being raised as a son in a household, the bond between both parties changes. That is, one might say that the governor benefitted from Yusuf *peace be upon him* on an emotional level. In reference to this emotional rapport of the Egyptian, Allah says: '…or we may adopt him as a son' (*Yusuf:* 21). The significance of this verse becomes clear once we learn that, according to accounts of the Prophets, the couple were not blessed with children.'(1)

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(1) In his exegesis of The Quran, Al-Qurtubi narrated that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'He was infertile and thus childless'. Likewise, Ibn Ishaq said that he could not sleep with women and did not bear children. If it were said, 'How could he propose to adopt Yusuf *peace be upon him* as their son when Yusuf was his slave, especially if we take into account that slavery and fatherhood are contradictory?' One could answer in the following way, 'He could manumit him, and then he could adopt him *peace be upon him* as his son. Adoption was known among his people, as it was in the early days of Islam'. *See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3482.*

In the same verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘in this way we settled Joseph in that land that We might teach him how to interpret dreams: For Allah has full power and control over His affairs, though most people do not know’ (*Yusuf:* 21).

Yusuf’s earthly empowerment began the moment he entered the house of Egypt’s governor where he began to live a good life. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* taught Yusuf *peace be upon him* how to interpret dreams, that is, He *the Almighty* granted him the ability to explain visions and dreams. As such, Allah has full power and control over His affairs and what He wills.

Had the group of brothers known what became of Yusuf *peace be upon him* they will have realised that their intent was not achieved, and that Allah’s Aim to honour Yusuf prevailed. Moreover, had they known this, they will not have cast him down in the dark depths of the well. This is the case for all evildoers. Thus we contend, ‘Had the evildoer known what the Lord *Glorified is He* had in store for the oppressed, he surely will have renounced his misdemeanour’.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘For Allah has full power and control over His affairs, though most people do not know’ (*Yusuf:* 21), it is a decisive statement, meaning that only Allah *the Almighty* can command something to ‘Be’ and ‘It is’. Further, there is no god other than Him; Glorified is He, who can oppose His Will. That is why we previously said Allah *the Almighty* Himself bears witness that there is no god but He.(1) He possesses the absolute proof confirming the non-existence of a god other than Himself. Indeed, to Him belongs the dominion of everything, and it is He Who has Power over all things.

In fact, only the lowly nature of certain human beings paints the illusion that they are capable of deceiving and beguiling others. They forget or disregard the fact that Allah, the Ever-Watchful, is fully aware of their actions, and that He *Glorified is He* is never overtaken by slumber or sleep. Were these human beings to contemplate such realities, they will know that Allah *the Almighty* empowers those who have been oppressed over their oppressors.

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(1) This fact is recorded in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge. [He always] maintains His creation in justice; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

Throughout our history and our life, we have witnessed how oppressors insisted on oppressing others, which is why they were eventually severely punished.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُۥٓ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُ حُكۡمٗا وَعِلۡمٗاۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِي ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

When he reached maturity, We gave him judgement and knowledge: this is how We reward those who do good [22] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 22)

As for the Arabic word *'bulugh'* (maturity), it denotes attaining one's final objective, and therefore Allah's saying: 'When he reached maturity (*balagha*)....' (*Yusuf*: 22), means that Yusuf *peace be upon him* reached the final state of adult maturity. Furthermore, the juristic term *'bulugh'* is derived from the verb *'balagha'*, that is, to attain puberty. A person becomes fully responsible once he reaches puberty, when he is able to have a child.

In this vein, when a person such as Yusuf *peace be upon him* who was raised in a house full of luxuries, attains maturity, he could easily become foolish and lax in his morals. Only wisdom and knowledge can safeguard him from such baseness, and that is why the Lord *Glorified is He* preserved him by giving him wisdom and knowledge.

As for the Arabic word *'hukm'* (the derivative '*hukman*' being used in the verse, meaning 'wisdom'), it denotes an ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood; two matters which are antithetical and in opposition to each other. As a matter of fact, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has given Yusuf *peace be upon him* wisdom, the latter will be able to discern between right and wrong.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* granted Yusuf *peace be upon him* knowledge which he was able to communicate to others. A part of the granted knowledge is his ability to interpret the visions as well as the skills manifested when he was in charge of Egypt's repository.

At this point in the story, Yusuf *peace be upon him* had attained full manhood and Allah *the Almighty* had safeguarded him with both wisdom and knowledge.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…this is how We reward those who do good' (*Yusuf:* 22). When man devotes himself thoroughly to what is placed before him, the Lord *Glorified is He* rewards him with the fruits of his diligent labour. Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; when a poor person does not complain about what Allah predestined for him, and instead tries to perfect and refine his work, Allah *Glorified is He* rewards him for his work. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* tells him, 'You have accepted what I have appointed to you, and you have perfected your work, so here is your good reward'. Such is the case of the great men of this world.

Thus, Allah's saying: '…this is how we reward those who do the good' (*Yusuf:* 22) does not only apply to Yusuf *peace be upon him* but also to anyone who gratefully accepts Allah's Decree. This is due to the fact that when Allah *the Almighty* issues a specific Decree, and then generalises it, then this Decree is not specific; rather it applies to all mankind. That is, even if Allah *Glorified is He* presents this Decree as a response to a specific incident, He confirms that He gives wisdom and knowledge to anyone who does the good.

As for Allah's saying: 'When he reached maturity....' (*Yusuf:* 22), it reveals that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had reached the prime of his life, a period which clearly marks the beginning of his troubles in the palace of the Egyptian governor. As a child, the governor's wife saw him as a beautiful young boy. Clearly, as a young boy, he did not possess the manly traits that aroused her. However, once he reached puberty, the nature of her affinity for Yusuf *peace be upon him* began to change. She started to realise his charms, and her imagination indulged in matters that were not possible, that is, her heart started to be filled with burning desires. After these two stages comes the third one of the practical fulfilment of her desires. Here, we should take into account that this wife of the governor of Egypt will not have fallen prey to her negative emotions had she veiled herself from Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

This incident brings to light the merits of lowering one's gaze away from sexual temptation. If you do not lower your gaze, your imagination will run unchecked–and you will eventually find what you are looking for. Your last resort will be marriage or simply repressing your carnal urge by virtue of chastity. If you repressed yourself, you might suffer from anxiety and inner tension, and if you fail to have the virtue of chastity, you will commit transgression against other peoples’ honour.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* commands women to reveal their beauty only to certain people whom He *Glorified is He* specifies in the following verse: ‘And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and they should wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants who do not have any sexual desire, or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women...’ (*an-Nur:* 31). The ‘male servants’ referred to in the aforementioned verse are those who have reached a certain age where they no longer have a sexual attraction to women.

Back to the story of Yusuf; the governor’s wife regarded him *peace be upon him* differently after he had reached puberty. Allah *the Almighty* makes this matter clear in the following verse in which He says:

وَرَٰوَدَتۡهُ ٱلَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيۡتِهَا عَن نَّفۡسِهِۦ وَغَلَّقَتِ ٱلۡأَبۡوَٰبَ وَقَالَتۡ هَيۡتَ لَكَۚ
قَالَ مَعَاذَ ٱللَّهِۖ إِنَّهُۥ رَبِّيٓ أَحۡسَنَ مَثۡوَايَۖ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفۡلِحُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ٢٣

The woman in whose house he was living tried to seduce him: she bolted the doors and said, ‘Come to me,’ and he replied, ‘God forbid! My master has been good to me; wrongdoers never prosper’ [23] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 23)

The verb *‘rawada’* (to seduce) used in the beginning of this verse implies that two parties are involved in the action in question. For instance, one may say, *‘Sharaka* Mohamed ‘Ali’*,* that is, Mohammad collaborated with ‘Ali and ‘Ali also collaborated with Mohammad. Mohammad and *‘*Ali are both subject and object.

As for the Arabic word *‘al-murawada’,* it is used to kindly and gently ask a person for something. Logically, if the matter sought after is easily granted, then the suppliant’s cajoling more or less comes to an end. However, if the second party withholds what is sought after, then the seducer’s seduction only ceases when the desired object is granted.

In the same way, the governor’s wife sought to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* cajoling him gently and tenderly and speaking in an enticing voice to convince him to satisfy her desire.

We should take into consideration that as a boy, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was merely her servant, and that she, i.e. the wife of the Egyptian governor, saw him as a child. Once he reached puberty, however, the matter totally changed. Suppose that she asked him to bring her something, and once he brings it to her, she tells him ‘Why do you stand so far away from me?! Come Near!’ Obviously, it was difficult for Yusuf *peace be upon him* to free himself from her because he is in her house. The governor’s wife has authority over him for she is the queen of the castle.

Upon analysis, we see *that Yusuf peace be upon him* was in a complex situation. After all, he was raised in her house, and she cared for him and showed him affection, but when the aspects of the relationship changed, he understood her objective.

Thus, the Lord *Glorified is He* fully and carefully explains the case from the very beginning to the very end. He *the Almighty* says: ‘she in whose house he was living tried to seduce him: she bolted the doors...’ (*Yusuf:* 23).

The expression: ‘she bolted the doors’ highlights this incident or refers to repeated acts, that is she closed more than one door. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; suppose that you want to ensure that a door has been closed properly, what do you do? Of course, you bolt the door and turn the key in the lock. There is a difference between just closing a door and bolting it. By shutting the door with a bolt, we are ensuring that the door cannot be opened from outside. Hence, you describe what you have done as bolting the door. Since great mansions have multiple entrances, the governor’s wife not only closed several doors but also bolted them. When visiting a head of state, for example, you do not find him waiting for you at the entrance of the first door. Rather, a person must pass through many gates before reaching the host.

In this connection, history has preserved the story of the man who refused to give allegiance to Mu‘awiya *Allah be pleased with him* in Medina and therefore Mu’awiya *Allah be pleased with him* summoned him to his palace in Damascus.

This palace was previously visited by ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* who found it excessively grandiose, whereupon Mu‘awiya justified the matter for ‘Umar saying that this extravagance was necessary to display the power of the Arabs to the neighbouring Romans. This justification indicated Mu’awiya’s wisdom which made ‘Umar keep silent about it.(1)

When Mu‘awiya invited the man, he was escorted through the main entrance by a retinue of guards. The man presumed that he will meet Mu‘awiya upon passing through the main entrance, but the guards escorted him through more doors. Instead of being impressed by such lavishness, the visitor calmly entered upon Mu‘awiya. He refused to call him ‘the Commander of the Faithful’, instead, he exclaimed, ‘Peace be upon the Messenger of Allah (Mohammad) *peace and blessings be upon him*’. At that moment, Mu‘awiya *Allah be pleased with him* fully realised that the visitor’s statement was a refusal to give him a pledge of allegiance.

Back to the verse in question; being well aware of the gravity of her sin and seeking to hide it from others, the governor’s wife bolted the doors. She chose a discrete location that was far from the workers and inhabitants of the palace. We infer that her seducing of Yusuf *peace be upon him* has taken some time, but it is clear that he was not responsive to her.

When the governor’s wife said: ‘Come to me,’ (*Yusuf:* 23), she moved from seduction to bluntly requesting her desire. Simply, she was saying, ‘I have adorned myself for you’ but Yusuf’s response was: ‘Allah forbids (*ma’atha*)!’ (*Yusuf:* 23)

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(1) *In his book, Abu ‘Ali Al-Qali narrated that Al-Mughira ibn Shu‘ba said, ‘Whenever ‘Umar looked at Mu‘awiya, he said, “Here stands the Khosrau of the Arabs”’. See Al-Qali, Al-A’mali, 2/136.*

The Arabic word *'ma'atha'* is used to refer to one in whom one seeks refuge. As a matter of fact, you only seek refuge if all solutions have been exhausted and if you have no other alternative. When desperate, you can only hope for someone to save you. It is as if the situation weighed so heavily on Yusuf *peace be upon him* that his only refuge was Allah *Glorified is He*.

As a matter of fact, none can face such a trial but those who have been safeguarded by Allah *the Almighty* and who have wisdom and knowledge that is granted by Him *Glorified is He*. Allah *the Almighty* grants those people the ability to discern between what is permitted and what is prohibited.

To fully illustrate the gravity and power of the act of seeking refuge in Allah *the Almighty,* it is worth relating the following story from the biography of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding his marriage with the daughter of a certain king.(1) The story relates that some of the Prophet's wives were jealous of the new bride's magnetic attraction, which led one of them–perhaps 'A'isha Allah *be pleased with her* to exclaim anxiously, 'If he marries her and he consummated his marriage, he might prefer her over the rest of us'. Having said this, she approached the new bride and told her that Prophet Muhammad loves anyone who utters a specific phrase(2) to him. Upon hearing this, the girl asked what phrase it was, and 'A'isha replied, 'If he approaches you, say, "I seek refuge in Allah from you!"' When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this, he forsook her and said, 'You have sought refuge with Him in whom refuge is sought!'(3) Prophet Muhammad then divorced her in a becoming manner.(4)

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(1) *At-Tabari related that this woman in question was either Malika bint Dawud Al-Laythi or Fatima bint Ad-Dahhak Al-Kelabyya. See Al-Tabari, Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk, 3/123 and 3/139.*

(2) *In his book, Ibn Hajar said that in At-Tabaqat, Ibn Sa'd related that the first time she entered upon 'A'isha and Hafsa, they combed and dyed her hair. One of them told her, 'Verily, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him loves the woman he enters upon to tell him, "I seek refuge in Allah from you"'. See Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 9/359.*

(3) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no.5255.*

(4) *From the Proofreader: The Hadiths which mention that the reason Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him divorced the daughter of a certain king was that Aisha or another of the Mothers of the Believers Allah be pleased with them told the new bride that Prophet Muhammad loves anyone who says, 'I seek refuge in Allah from you' are false. One of* =

Another case in point is the story of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* when the angel appeared to her in the form of a well-made man. She said: ‘Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent Allah, (do not come near me) if you are one who guards (against evil)’ (*Maryam:* 18). Mary sought refuge with Allah *the Almighty*: the Only One Who could save here.

Returning to the verse of our discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…he replied, “Allah forbid! My master has been good to me; wrongdoers never prosper”’ (*Yusuf:* 23).

From this verse we may derive two meanings:

First, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not succumb to her after she had revealed her intent. The second is that he *peace be upon him* sought support from Allah *the Almighty* for it was none other than the Lord *Glorified is He* Who rescued him from the plot of his brothers and from the well, and Who granted him the finest of Egypt’s houses to be raised in. Upon attaining manhood, Allah *Glorified is He* also granted him knowledge and wisdom. After the bestowal of such blessings, is it possible that Yusuf *peace be upon him* responds by disobeying Allah *the Almighty*? Of course, it is not,

Another possible interpretation is that Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: ‘…My master has been good to me...’ (*Yusuf:* 23) to remind the wife of the governor that she has a husband, and that this husband was generous to him. After all, it

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= *the narrators in the Hadith stated here in the discussion of the chapter of Yusuf used to make-up Hadiths. See fatwa. islamweb.net. The authentic Hadith cited by Al-Bukhari states that Abu Usaid said, ‘We went out with Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, to a garden called Ash-Shaut till we reached two walls between which we sat down. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, “Sit here”, and went in (the garden). The Jauniyya (a lady from Bani Jaun) had been brought and lodged in a house in a date-palm garden in the home of Umaima bintun- Nu`man bin Sharahil, and her wet nurse was with her. When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him entered upon her, he said to her, “Give me yourself (in marriage) as a gift”. She said, “Can a princess give herself in marriage to a commoner?” The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him raised his hand to pat her so that she might become tranquil. She said, “I seek refuge with Allah from you”. He said, “You have sought refuge with One Who gives refuge”. Then the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him came out to us and said, “O Abu Usaid! Give her two white linen dresses to wear and let her go back to her family”,’ without any mention of any of the Mother of the Believers.*

was this man, i.e. the governor of Egypt, who told her to: ‘Look after him well! He may be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son’ (*Yusuf:* 21).

This situation is very difficult for several reasons. To begin with, she was inviting Yusuf *peace be upon him* to be intimate with her. Secondly, she has a husband; that is, she is not even a single woman. To make things worse, this husband asked her to look after Yusuf *peace be upon him* and to choose quarters for him when he was a boy that were fitting for a son. After being treated so generously, Yusuf *peace be upon him* could not return these favours with betrayal and ingratitude. As such, when Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: ‘…my master…’ (*Yusuf:* 23), he was referring either to Allah *the Almighty* or to the sovereign of Egypt.

As a matter of fact, encompassing a wide array of meanings is one of the Quranic distinctive features. Here, we should take into account that just as Allah *Glorified is He* rewards those who do good deeds, as He says: ‘This is how We reward those who do good’ (*Yusuf:* 22), He *the Almighty* punishes those who commit misdeeds, and thus they will not succeed. That is to say these two matters are opposite sides of the same coin, a point which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘This is how We reward those who do good’ (*Yusuf:* 22); and His Saying: ‘…wrongdoers never prosper’ (*Yusuf:* 23).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِۦ ۖ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَآ أَن رَّءَا بُرْهَـٰنَ رَبِّهِۦ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ
لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ ٱلسُّوٓءَ وَٱلْفَحْشَآءَ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

She made for him, and he would have succumbed to her if he had not seen evidence of his Lord – We did this in order to keep evil and indecency away from him, for he was truly one of Our chosen servants [24] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 24)

As for the Arabic word *‘al-hamm’* (from which the word ‘*hammat*’ is derived, meaning ‘she desired’), it denotes the act of inwardly debating over whether one should seek a certain matter or not. In this vein, it is out of Allah’s Mercy towards His creatures that when we think about performing an evil deed and then renounce the ill intention, we are rewarded and Allah *the Almighty* writes it down as a good deed.(1)

At that point, this expression, i.e. *'al-hamm'* addresses her attempts to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his refraining from her enticements, a matter which implies a reciprocal struggle between the two parties. One of these two parties is the wife of the governor about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'She desired him...' (*Yusuf:* 24) and the other is Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

In the preceding verse, Allah *the Almighty* reveals to us her affinity for Yusuf *peace be upon him* as she said: 'Come to me' (*Yusuf:* 23), and Yusuf's steadfast attitude came to light when he responded: '…Allah forbid...' (*Yusuf:* 23). Here, it is clear that the idea of desiring her passed through Yusuf's mind, and consequently Yusuf was similarly tempted. However, Yusuf *peace be upon him* soon understood the evidence and reasoning of his Lord. Thus, we may opine that had Yusuf *peace be upon him* not seen the sign and evidence or reasoning of his Lord, he will have also desired her as well. The Arabic particle *'lawla'* used in this verse implies a negation of something. We could use this word in the following manner, 'Were Zayd not at your place, I will have passed by'.

Here arises a question, which is 'How could those who maintain that Yusuf desired her be heedless about the negation implied in this verse? Also, why does Allah *the Almighty* not say that she desired him, but he did not desire her to avert this possible confusion of meanings?'

We say that Allah *the Almighty* relates the story as such for an intended meaning, as the governor's wife desired him; and had He *Glorified is He* revealed this verse as 'she desired him, but he did not desire her', we will have thought that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was impotent. In such a case, a logical conclusion will be that he lost his libido.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He who intended to do good but did not do it, one good is recorded for him, and he who intended to do good and also did it, ten to seven hundred good deeds are recorded for him. And he who had a fleeting intension to do evil but did not commit it, no entry was made against his name, but if he committed that (evil), it is recorded'. See, Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 206.*

In short, had Allah *Glorified is He* stated that he did not desire her, then we might conclude that he lacked desire for biological reasons, or that he was so embarrassed by this woman, who was his master, that he lost all desire for her. That is why the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to clarify that Yusuf's physique was normal, and that he had reached manhood and maturity. Furthermore, had he not seen the sign and evidence of his Lord, he will have desired her.

Clearly, it is not out of lack of normal feelings that Yusuf refrained doing what was asked of him, nor was it that he lost his sexual urge unexpectedly because he was caught by surprise as this is sometimes what happens to grooms on their wedding night. In fact, the groom may even unable to approach his bride, and days pass by before he restores his balance and finally approaches her.

As such, had the Quran wanted to indicate a total lack of desire on Yusuf's part, the verse will have stated, 'She desired him, but he did not desire her.' One might also add that the phrase 'she desired him but he did not desire her' negates there was any seduction, and it does not prove Yusuf's chastity and infallibility; it might suggest that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not desire the governor's wife since he was lacking in some way. Moreover, this expression will lead us to equate Yusuf *peace be upon him* with one of the mansion's servants, since a servant shies away from the beautiful girls of the family that he works for. More often than not, servants might fall in love with a maid that works for his neighbours. This is because emotions are reciprocated between those who have a lot in common.

Out of kindness for His creatures, the Lord *Glorified is He* sparks reciprocal sentimental connections between people who have a similar social status. Rarely will a servant feel emotions for one of the daughters of his master. But he might, on the pretext of going to buy something from the shop, ask permission to go outside with the hope of meeting the neighbour's maid! Perhaps the servant reckoned that were he to desire one of the girls of his employer's household, he will be fired and lose his source of happy livelihood. Thus the Lord *Glorified is He* has willed to distribute these matters in an orderly and harmonious manner.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'She desired him, and he will have desired her if he had not seen a sign and the evidence of his

Lord...' (*Yusuf:* 24). Thus, seeing the sign and evidence or reasoning of his Lord preceded his desire for her, that is, having been imparted with such an understanding in his heart, which he knew from the very beginning, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not succumb to his passions.

In this way, the dispute over this point ends, and it is useless for people to wonder about trivial details. One such triviality is the allegation that he 'sat between her legs',(1) and he did not refrain from doing the act except when the face of his father, Ya'qub, appeared to him, reproaching him for what he was doing.(2) If caught in this situation by his father, even the most dissolute person on earth will surely faint.

Curiously, when you discuss with someone who holds such opinions, he says his interpretation is meant to uphold and prove Yusuf's sexual potency, since he desired her but resisted his own desire. To those who hold this opinion, we ask, 'Are you speaking of the Lord *Glorified is He* or of Satan?!' Upon close analysis, you will conclude that the wife of the governor, Yusuf *peace be upon him,* the governor himself, the witness–who admitted that Yusuf *peace be upon him* tried to extricate himself from the wife–and the women whom the governor's wife invited to admire Yusuf's beauty are the main characters of this story. Furthermore, it is the Lord *Glorified is He* Who protected Yusuf *peace be upon him* from sinning.

All these characters in the story bear witness to the fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was never guilty of misconduct. Yusuf *peace be upon him* himself said: 'She tried to seduce me…' (*Yusuf:* 26), and the governor's wife asserted in agreement: 'I tried to seduce him and he wanted to remain chaste…' (*Yusuf:* 32) Moreover, the wife also exclaimed: 'now the truth is out: it was I who tried to seduce him–he is indeed one of the honest. [*Yusuf* said, 'This was] for my master to know that I did not betray him behind his back...' (*Yusuf:* 50-51).

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(1) It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, '"When (a man) sits between the four parts of his wife's body, then *Ghusl* becomes obligatory'. The phrase '*shabatayha al-a'rba''* (four parts) denotes her two arms and legs. It has also been said that this expression denotes her legs and the area bordering her vagina, and implies inserting the penis inside the vagina. *See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, under the root 'sha'aba'.*

(2) *Commenting on this point, Al-Qurtubi narrated that Qatadah, Al-Hassan, Ad-Dahhak and Sa'id ibn Jubair said, 'On the wall, he saw a picture of Ya'qub peace be upon him biting his fingertips and threatening him. At this point, Yusuf peace be upon him calmed down and his desire left him from his fingertips'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3492.*

Concerning the women, Yusuf said: '…what happened to those women who cut their hands—my Lord knows all about their treachery' (*Yusuf:* 50). Yusuf also proclaimed at that moment: '…If you do not protect me from their treachery, I shall incline (*asbu*) to them and do wrong' (*Yusuf:* 33).

In the aforementioned verse, the Arabic word *'asbu'* (incline) is used to give the meaning of thinking about committing a particular act which proves that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was sexually potent, but Allah *the Almighty* protected him from misguided inclinations, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'His Lord answered his prayer and protected him from their treachery' (*Yusuf:* 34).

Considering the scene in which the women were gossiping about the governor's wife and her story with Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not they say: '…He cannot be mortal! He must be a precious angel'?! (*Yusuf:* 31) This verse tells us that when Yusuf *peace be upon him* entered upon them, all eyes were turned to him. Here, we should be fully aware of the fact that eyes and human impulses communicate subtle messages. Otherwise, why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* say: 'If You do not protect me from their treachery…' (*Yusuf:* 33).

Thus, we know that the other women coveted Yusuf *peace be upon him* just as the governor's wife had. Furthermore, they thought that the governor's wife might fire him and hoped that Yusuf *peace be upon him* will then be theirs. Such are the habits of those in corrupted households.

As a matter of fact, there is no house more corrupt than that of the governor, for after the witness testified that it was the wife who tried to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* the governor brushed the story away, saying: 'Yusuf, overlook this; but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin–you have done wrong' (*Yusuf:* 29). At this point, the governor sought to protect his reputation from being slurred.

In the same connection, when the witness asked the women, what was their answer? Allah *Glorified is He* states that the women acknowledged:

'…We know nothing bad of him!' (*Yusuf:* 51) In fact, He *the Almighty* kept the devil–who always incites evil–away from Yusuf *peace be upon him*. At that point, we should take into account that Satan never combats the Lord *Glorified is He*; he only fights His creatures. Allah *the Almighty* records the oath taken by Satan when Allah relates him saying: 'Then by Your Might I will surely misguide them, all, except Your slaves from among them, the purified ones' (*Sad:* 82-83). As such, Satan himself maintains that he cannot approach or mislead those whom the Lord *Glorified is He* elects as His purified slaves.

And finally the witness, who is a relative of the governor's wife and who was assigned by the governor to uncover the truth of the matter, concluded: '…but if the shirt is torn from the back, then she is lying and he is telling the truth' (*Yusuf:* 27). Thus, after presenting all the aforementioned proofs, no one has the right to ask whether or not Yusuf *peace be upon him* was on the verge of succumbing to the governor's wife.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Almighty* says: '… if he had not seen a sign and the evidence of his Lord...' (*Yusuf:* 24). As a matter of fact, the evidence is what substantiates a judgment, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…nor do we punish until we send a Messenger (to warn)' (*al-Isra':* 15). In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '(We sent) Messengers as the givers of good news and as warners, so that people should not have a plea against Allah after the (coming of) Messengers; and Allah is Mighty, Wise' (*an-Nisa':* 165). We deduce from these verses that Allah *Glorified is He* necessarily sends a Messenger to his people. Moreover, this Messenger should be supported by a miracle that convinces his people to believe in Allah's Divine Way of Guidance for them to live in spiritual harmony and for Allah *the Almighty* to save them from the punishment in the Hereafter.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse in question by affirming: '…We did this in order to keep evil and indecency away from him, for he was truly one of Our chosen slaves' (*Yusuf:* 24). In this verse, the Arabic word *'al-fahshaa''* (indecency) refers to committing adultery, while the word *'as-su''* (evil) denotes the possibility of succumbing to the wife.

Some moderate interpreters said that after attempting to make him yield to her, her enticement escalated to the point of insanity. As they rushed to the door, the wife considered killing Yusuf *peace be upon him*. However, the latter sensed her intention and even tried to kill her in self-defence. But had he done this, he will have been prosecuted as a murderer.(1) That is, the Lord *Glorified is He* turned him away from the idea of murder which is what Allah *the Almighty* here means by ‘evil’. However, I am personally inclined to understand ‘evil’ as the idea of succumbing to the wife’s enticements, which is an impulse that precedes the act.

At that point Allah *the Almighty* affirms that Yusuf *peace be upon him* is one of the purified slaves of Allah *the Almighty*. In a sense, this declaration is a response to Satan who had said: ‘Except Your slaves from among them, the purified ones (*al-mukhlaseen*)’ (*Sad:* 83). Here, Allah’s saying: ‘…for he was truly one of our chosen slaves (*al-mukhlaseen*)’ (*Yusuf:* 24) emphasises Satan’s assertion that he will not come near Allah’s chosen slaves. There is a difference between the two Arabic words *‘mukhliseen’* (sincere) and *‘mukhlaseen’* (chosen). As for the sincere slave, he is one who struggles and attains the level of truly obeying the Lord *Glorified is He,* while the chosen slave is one who struggles in the Way of the Lord *Glorified is He* and who is finally chosen by Him *Glorified is He*.

That is, on the one hand, there are people who, by obeying Allah *the Almighty* are blessed by His Grace. On the other hand, there are those who receive Allah’s Grace and as a result they obey Him. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point, although Allah is beyond any comparison. Someone asking you to give him from what the Lord *Glorified is He* has given you might knock upon your door, whereupon you invite him in and treat him generously. On a different occasion, however, you might be walking down the street and this time you call upon someone and give him some of the bounty Allah has bestowed on you. As such, there are those who ask and are granted their demands, while there are others whom you seek out in order to offer charity.

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(1) *Commenting on this point, Al-Qurtubi mentioned that among the possible interpretations of the thoughts that crossed Yusuf’s mind regarding the governor’s wife was to strike her and push her away from him. However, the evidence and reasoning of his Lord turned him away from doing this, for had he hit her, he will have been accused of sexually harassing the woman. Moreover, it will appear that she refused him and consequently Yusuf peace be upon him struck her. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 4/3488.*

After discussing the wife's trials to tempt, entice, and coax, the Lord *Glorified is He* describes what took place next, saying:

وَٱسۡتَبَقَا ٱلۡبَابَ وَقَدَّتۡ قَمِيصَهُۥ مِن دُبُرٖ وَأَلۡفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَا ٱلۡبَابِۚ
قَالَتۡ مَا جَزَآءُ مَنۡ أَرَادَ بِأَهۡلِكَ سُوٓءًا إِلَّآ أَن يُسۡجَنَ أَوۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ٢٥

They raced for the door – she tore his shirt from behind – and at the door they met her husband. She said, 'What, other than prison or painful punishment, should be the reward of someone who tried to dishonour your wife?' [25]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 25)

We previously explained that both of them raced to the door, trying to arrive there before the other. At that point, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* only mentions the existence of a single door, but that the governor's wife had previously bolted several doors. However, Allah's saying: 'And at the door they met her husband…' (*Yusuf:* 25) proves that she caught up with Yusuf *peace be upon him* at the last door. That is, she raced after Yusuf *peace be upon him* until they reached the last door. The wife wanted to shut this door, thereby locking his last possible exit. Here, we should take into account that each of them was racing for a different reason: the governor's wife was chasing after Yusuf *peace be upon him,* while the latter was running away from her. That is how she tore his shirt from the back.

The fact that she tore his shirt from the back proves that he outran her to the door. In fact, the shirt was torn in her hand, and the witness–who was a member of her own household (1)–used this as evidence to show what had truly happened.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And at the door they met her husband…' (*Yusuf:* 25). This means that both of them were surprised when the governor of Egypt appeared suddenly before them. Therefore, the situation turned into a three-person scenario: the governor's wife, her husband, and Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

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(1) This is referred to in Allah's saying: 'A member of her household suggested, "If his shirt is torn from the front, it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying, but if it is torn from the back, she is lying and he is telling the truth' (*Yusuf:* 26-27).

At this moment, the woman accused Yusuf *peace be upon him* by posing a question that implies her innocence, thus evading her guilt and turning Yusuf *peace be upon him* into the culprit; a point which is recorded in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘She said, “What is the [fitting] punishment of someone who tried to dishonour your wife?”’ (*Yusuf:* 25) Then, she specified the form of punishment: ‘[What] other than prison or a painful punishment?’ (*Yusuf:* 25)

Afterwards, The Lord *Glorified is He* relates the response of Yusuf: ‘But he said, “She tried to seduce me”. A member of her household suggested, “If his shirt is torn from the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying”’ (*Yusuf:* 26). Here, the governor of Egypt finds himself faced with two contradictory claims: each accuses the other of sexual harassment. It is therefore necessary for someone who is judicious and discerning in such matters to evaluate the two claims.

Allah *the Almighty* continues:

قَالَ هِيَ رَٰوَدَتۡنِي عَن نَّفۡسِيۚ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٞ مِّنۡ أَهۡلِهَآ إِن كَانَ
قَمِيصُهُۥ قُدَّ مِن قُبُلٖ فَصَدَقَتۡ وَهُوَ مِنَ ٱلۡكَٰذِبِينَ ٢٦

But he said, ‘She tried to seduce me.’ A member of her household suggested, ‘If his shirt is torn at the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying [26]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 26)

As for the Arabic word *‘shahida’* (to witness), it takes on many meanings in the Quran. At times, this verb denotes the act of being present, as in Allah’s saying: ‘…and let a party of the believers witness (*yash-had*) their punishment.’(1) (*an-Nur:* 2) In some cases, this verb concerns knowing something, as in Allah’s saying: ‘…and we do not bear witness (*shahidna*) except to what we know….’ (*Yusuf:* 81) It may furthermore be used to mean ‘to assess and make a judgment’, that is, the witness weighed their differing claims to deduce the truth of the matter. In the verse in question, the Quran asserted that the witness was a member of the household of the governor’s wife, who is the culprit. Were he a relative of Yusuf *peace be upon him,* his judgment will have been rescinded.

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(1) This verse refers to the chastisement of the adulterer and the adulteress, and how the punishment should be carried out. This is stated in Allah’s saying: ‘(As for) the fornicatress and the fornicator, flog each of them (giving) a hundred stripes, and let not pity for them keep you from (carrying out) this Law of Allah, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of the believers witness their punishment’ (*an-Nur*: 2).

To continue we say the scene now involves four people: the governor’s wife, Yusuf *peace be upon him,* the governor of Egypt and the witness. The verse in question relates half of the witness’s comments: ‘If his shirt is torn from the front, then it is she who is telling the truth and he who is lying’ (*Yusuf:* 26). We can deduce from this statement that had Yusuf *peace be upon him* been the one who approached her, his shirt will have fallen to the ground, and when he supposedly stumbled, it will have become torn. But clearly this contradicts what really happened.

Allah *the Almighty* continues with the witness’s remarks, saying:

وَإِن كَانَ قَمِيصُهُۥ قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٖ فَكَذَبَتۡ وَهُوَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ٢٧

But if it is torn at the back, then she is lying and
he is telling the truth [27] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 27)

The verse indicates that if Yusuf’s shirt was torn from the back, then he is speaking the truth and the governor’s wife is lying. Concerning this, we should take into account that the witness made this remark before seeing the shirt. In fact, it is on the basis of this statement that the witness will inspect the shirt. That is to say that he was establishing the basis to substantiate his verdict.

The following makes this crystal clear, for Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَلَمَّا رَءَا قَمِيصَهُۥ قُدَّ مِن دُبُرٖ قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ مِن كَيۡدِكُنَّۖ إِنَّ كَيۡدَكُنَّ عَظِيمٞ ٢٨

When the husband saw that the shirt was torn at the back,
he said, ‘This is another instance of women’s treachery:
your treachery is truly great [28] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 28)

Allah’s saying regarding the judging witness: ‘When he saw that the shirt’ definitively proves that he had established a criterion of judgment and had decided on the principles prior to examining the shirt; that is, he did not see the shirt except after laying down these principles. Thus, his reflections prior to examining the scene are his basis for evaluating the case at hand. In charging the governor's wife, the witness said: 'This is another instance of women's treachery: your treachery is truly great' (*Yusuf:* 28).

It is worth noting that the Arabic word *'al-kayd'* ('treachery' or 'plot') denotes a stealthy machination devised by someone unable to confront his enemy. Due to the fact that women's weakness is great, their plotting is even greater.

Afterwards, the verses of the chapter of Yusuf turn to shed light on the reaction of Egypt's governor; Allah *the Almighty* states the governor's response to the incident, saying:

يُوسُفُ أَعۡرِضۡ عَنۡ هَٰذَاۚ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرِي لِذَنۢبِكِۖ إِنَّكِ كُنتِ مِنَ ٱلۡخَاطِـِٔينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Joseph, overlook this; but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin – you have done wrong [29] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 29)

With this statement of the governor, Allah *Glorified is He* puts an end to this four-member scene in which the governor ruled that his wife was at fault, and in which he asks Yusuf *peace be upon him* to overlook what happened and to keep it a secret.

As a matter of fact, the governor's reaction clearly shows how the elite people address the problems that face them in their houses. This phenomenon continues in our contemporary time. This matter is clear in the case of a powerful man turning a blind eye to malefactions committed by his own family. In fact, a potentate will refuse to let outsiders know of events–such as the one at hand–and he will try to hide his family's blunders. In short, the governor has been disgraced and does not want to be humiliated by his foes and enemies.

Here, we should take into account that the matter of faith is still rooted even in the hearts of deviants and those who conceal sinful acts. This fact is clearly manifested when the governor of Egypt told Yusuf *peace be upon him*: '…overlook this…' (*Yusuf:* 29); and when he told his wife: '…but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin–you have done wrong' (*Yusuf:* 29). In saying this, the governor is asserting the fact that a sin had taken place; an acknowledgement that he could not make without being aware of the Divine Way of Guidance. In fact, the governor's only choice is to ask her to plead for forgiveness from Allah *the Almighty*.

At first, the scene included four individuals, as follows: Yusuf *peace be upon him* the wife, the governor and the witness who solved the case and made the judgment. Afterwards Allah *the Almighty* broadens the scope, casting light on the social class in which the case took place.

This proves that there is no such thing as a secret within a palace, since 'secret' events that take place within palaces are always spied on by stealthy observers. Moreover, people always speak of these secrets. That is why no one should think that he can stop his crime from becoming known. Inevitably, the secret will be disclosed, no matter how well the owner of the secret covers it up and conceals it. In the incident under discussion, some of the servants of the palace had spied on its people and told the story to others until the women began to speak of it. The Quran describes this situation in the following manner:

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي ٱلْمَدِينَةِ ٱمْرَأَتُ ٱلْعَزِيزِ تُرَٰوِدُ فَتَىٰهَا عَن
نَّفْسِهِۦ ۖ قَدْ شَغَفَهَا حُبًّا ۖ إِنَّا لَنَرَىٰهَا فِي ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ٣٠

Some women(1) of the city said, 'The governor's wife is trying to seduce her slave! Love for him consumes her heart! It is clear to us that she has gone astray' [30] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 30)

As for the two Arabic words '*niswah'* and *'nisaa''* which refer to women, they are used to refer to the plural. However, the roots of these two words completely change when transformed into the singular form, as their singular form is '*imra'ah'* (a woman). Interestingly, this singular form has a dual form, namely '*imra'atan'* (two women), but it does not have a plural in Arabic. Simply put, we refer to a group of women as '*niswah'* or '*nisaa'',* and to one single woman as '*imra'ah'*.

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(1) In his exegesis of The Quran, *Al-Qurtubi* narrated that *Ibn 'Abbas* and others said, 'The women referred to in the verse are the wives of the governor's cupbearer, his baker, his shepherd and his prison guard. It is also said that among the women was the doorkeeper's wife'. See *Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan,* 4/3498.

In the verse in question, the women said: ‘The governor’s wife is trying to seduce her slave!...’ (*Yusuf:* 30). In fact, these women said the truth, but they were not saying it out of love for truth or virtue. Allah *Glorified is He* willed to negate that they upheld truth and virtue, and therefore He discloses the ulterior objectives behind their words when He says: ‘When she heard their malicious talk, she prepared for them a cushioned couch (to lie on at the feast) and sent for them, and [then] gave each of them a knife. She said to Yusuf (Joseph), “Come out and show yourself to them” and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty and cut their hands, exclaiming, “Allah preserve us! He cannot be mortal! He must be a gracious angel!” She said, “This is the one you blamed me for…”’ (*Yusuf:* 31-32).

The Arabic word *‘al-makr’* (malicious talk) implies disguising a matter behind something else. At this point, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the motivation behind the malicious talk of the women was not to uphold the truth or for the love of virtue. Rather, they sought to harm the governor’s wife and expose her dishonourable act to the public’s attention. Furthermore, they wanted to injure the pride of the governor’s wife by making her blunder known to everyone. In this way, they showed that they wanted to uphold the truth but in reality they wanted the opposite–an evil which is only carried out by the most uncouth characters.

After all, she is the wife of the governor, and therefore the most important female figure in society. However, her high standing as the wife of the victorious governor that could not be overcome had been shaken.

It is interesting to note that the Arabic word *‘al-‘aziz’* (governor) is derived from a word that has a tangible, physical meaning. For example, one can describe the earth as being *‘al-i‘zaz’* (cannot be overcome), that is, a ground that is rocky and difficult to walk upon.

It is debasing for the governor’s wife to be the subject of gossip. Even worse, she tried to seduce her slave-boy, which makes the rumour more ignominious and disgraceful because a slave-boy is among the lowest of the low.

The women also said: ‘Love for him consumes her heart!’ (*Yusuf:* 30) As a matter of fact, there are different stages of love, the first of which is *‘al-hawa’* (attraction). This stage can be likened to a sprouting plant. It is said, ‘He saw something and was attracted (*hawa*) to it’. In some cases, attraction ceases at the moment the person encounters the other individual. However, if a person becomes attached to that individual, then a relationship forms. After forming this relationship, one’s fondness for the other person grows deeper, that is, the person seeks to achieve what is demanded in the relationship. After deep fondness, love manifests itself and both parties’ reciprocally express their feelings. At this point, both parties express their deep fondness to each other and that is why they are referred to as ‘lover and beloved’. After these stages of love comes the stage of *‘at-tadlih’* which denotes being on the verge of losing one’s sanity. At this point, the body itself becomes physically affected, and the person loses himself completely in love. In the next stage, man burns and becomes totally consumed by passionate love. This stage is called *‘al-huyam’* in which the lover becomes an aimless wanderer with no particular destination. If this leads to committing a crime, then this stage is called *‘jawa’*.

These are the different degrees and stages of love that the heart may pass through.(1) As we know, the heart, i.e. the physical organ, is considered to be the place of firm creeds; those which man has already investigated and believed in.

As a matter of fact, the human being perceives things with his external senses; he sees, smells, hears tastes and feels. When he grasps certain matters, the mind assesses them and selects the soundest idea. Following this assessment, the selected ideas are transferred to the heart where they remain as inviolable creeds.

Concerning concepts that pertain to the mind, they can be removed by other different concepts. That is why things firmly settled in the heart are called ‘beliefs’ (*aqa’id*), and they derive their meaning from the word *‘ma‘qud’*, that is, something which is tied tightly and cannot be unfastened. In the same connection, beliefs that settle in the heart are reflected in one’s behaviou because when an idea is rooted in the human soul, all the person’s actions take place within the fold of these beliefs.

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(1) In his book, *Ibn Al-Qayyim* mentioned around sixty names for love, each name corresponding to a special stage or level of love. See, *Ibn Al-Qayyim, Rawdat Al-Muhibbin,* p. 25.

Therefore, we are now fully aware of the various stages that belief goes through before taking root in the soul. The first thing that occurs is the perception of ideas,(1) then comes the stage of reasoning, and finally man reaches the stage of believing in these ideas, which then are reflected in all of the person's actions.

Back to the verse in question; the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Love for him consumes her heart (*ash-shaghaf*)!' (*Yusuf:* 30) means that the emotions evolved from a simple perception to an acute mental awareness, and finally the feeling became fixed in the heart of the governor's wife. Interestingly, the Arabic word *'ash-shaghaf'* (consumes her) refers to the thin skin that envelops the heart. This expression therefore denotes that love had completely seized her heart.

Concerning the women's words: 'It is clear to us that she has gone astray' (*Yusuf:* 30), this was a true statement but was uttered with wicked intentions. That is why Allah *the Almighty* discloses their malevolent intentions saying:

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكَـًٔا وَءَاتَتْ كُلَّ
وَٰحِدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ ٱخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ ۖ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُۥٓ أَكْبَرْنَهُۥ وَقَطَّعْنَ
أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَٰشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَٰذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

When she heard their malicious talk, she prepared a banquet and sent for them, giving each of them a knife. She said to Joseph, 'Come out and show yourself to them!' and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty, and cut their hands, exclaiming, 'Great God! He cannot be mortal! He must be a precious angel!' [31] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 31)

Here arises a good question, which is 'How were they informed of the private incident that occurred between Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the governor's wife?' The only people present during the palace incident were the governor, his wife, Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the witness. Therefore, the one who related the happenings to the people from outside the palace must have had a relationship with both the people living in the palace and the people outside it.

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(1) Imam *Ash-Sha'rawi's* opinion is further corroborated by psychologists who affirm that when choosing anything, one must first perceive it, then an impulsive reaction takes place, and finally one makes a selection.

In this vein, scholars have looked into the social contacts of the women who disclosed the secret happenings. They generally opine that there were five women who were responsible:(1) the cupbearer's wife, the baker's wife, the chamberlain's wife, the stable keeper's wife, and the jailer's wife. Here arises another question, which is 'Who disclosed the palace secrets to these women who live inside their respective houses?' Without a doubt, one of their husbands was talking to his wife casually, and he happened to relate the situation of the governor's wife with Yusuf *peace be upon him* and then his wife spread the news to the other women.

When the governor's wife became fully aware that the women were spreading gossip and became aware of how they maliciously talked about her: 'She prepared for them a cushioned couch (*muttakana*) and sent for them, and [then] gave each of them a knife…' (*Yusuf:* 31).

As for the Arabic word *'muttaka''* (from which the word '*muttakana*' is derived), it denotes a comfortable cushioned couch which prevents one from becoming bored of sitting down.

This verse is therefore implying that the meeting will be long. Furthermore, the governor's wife planned to reveal how they will react upon seeing Yusuf *peace be upon him* and that is why she gave them all knives which also suggested that food will be served.

Allah *the Almighty* continues: 'She said to Yusuf, "Come out and show yourself to them!" and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty (*akbarna*)…' (*Yusuf:* 31).

The expression *'akbarta ash-shay''* (to be stunned by something) from which the word '*akbarna*' is derived, is used to refer to the case when the object is depicted in a beautiful way by your imagination before you actually see it, but when you see the object, you find that it is even grander than the picture you had previously imagined. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. Someone might speak to you of another person in high terms, but when you encounter him, his positive qualities outshine even your highest expectations.

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(1) *This is mentioned by Ibn 'Abbas and others. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3498.*

A poet once said:

When I asked Ja‘far ibn Habib’s retinue about the man’s outstanding virtues,

I was related an almost complete description.

But by Allah, when we met, the sight of him was even more splendid

Than the good accounts that I had heard.

However, there is a counter proverb to this expression, which is, ‘It is better to hear descriptions of someone from the tribe of *‘Ma’add’* than to see him for yourself!’(1) In other terms, it is better if you only heard of a person without ever encountering him because when you meet him, you will be disappointed because your expectations were too high.

Back to the verse in question; when the women were causing damage to the wife’s reputation by spreading news of her attempts to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* they imagined that he had a rather attractive appearance. Nevertheless, when they saw him, they were astounded because his beauty far outshone their expectations. The first stage of amazement is bewilderment when you forget what you were doing at that moment; you might even drop whatever is in your hand. That is how the women cut their hands with the knives which were given by the governor’s wife for the purpose of paring fruit or cutting food that was served to them. Concerning this matter, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty and cut their hands’ (*Yusuf:* 31). Could there possibly be a depiction that describes this scene with more accuracy?(2) Allah *the Almighty* continues:

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(1) *This maxim is said with regard to someone whose reputation exceeds his worth. For example, a man might be renowned or he may even be a celebrity, but when you meet this person, you despise him. The word ‘Ma‘add’ denotes a neighborhood or the name of a tribe. This expression is generally used to undermine the subject concerned. See. Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-‘Arab, the root ‘Ma’ad’.*

(2) *In his Tafsir of the Quran, Ibn Kathir said, ‘More than one scholar have mentioned that she told the women, after they were each given a knife, “Do you want to see Yusuf peace be upon him?” to which they responded “Yes”. Then she sent for him and ordered* =

'…exclaiming, "Allah preserve us! He cannot be mortal! He must be a gracious angel!"' (*Yusuf:* 31)

The expression: 'Allah preserve us' (*Yusuf:* 31) is a way of exalting Allah *Glorified is He*; that is to declare that He *the Almighty* is great enough to be able to create such ideal beauty. Another possible interpretation is that the women recognised that Yusuf *peace be upon him* is too noble to commit an indecent or vile deed with the governor's wife.

A third possible interpretation could be that the appearance of Yusuf *peace be upon him* was more handsome than any human they had ever known,(1) which is why they exclaimed that he could only be a gracious angel. At this point, we should take into account that the image of the angel is a figment of our imagination, as images correspond to impressions within the human mind. Similarly, when we envisage Satan, we visualise the most hideous image. In fact, ugliness itself is conceived differently by different people; what you consider to be ugly might not be seen as such by others, since the criterion of beauty and ugliness differ from one community to another.

Let us give an example to properly understand this point; men from central parts of Africa consider a woman with very fat lips or frizzy and wavy hair to be beautiful. In passing, it is interesting to note that modern society confirms that this is a type of beautyto which men are sometimes attracted. In fact, some women with smooth hair go to a hair stylist to make their hair curly.

Thus, we might say that beauty is measured by people's tastes. What one person perceives as beautiful is seen differently by another, and another person's

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= *him to appear in front of them, and when they saw him, they started to cut their own hands. While the women were still slashing their hands, she ordered him to go back inside. When they finally felt the pain, they began to wail. The governor's wife then retorted, "You do all of this after only one gaze, so why am I to be blamed?"' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/476.*

(1) *Al-Qushayri Abu Nasr said, 'The women mentioned that Yusuf's physical appearance was more beautiful and perfect than that of any human. In fact, they said that he looked like an angel'. But Allah* Glorified is He *says: 'We create man in the finest state' (at-Tin: 4). When these two verses are considered together, one may infer that their exclamation 'Allah preserve us' confirms that Yusuf* peace be upon him *did not succumb to the enticements of the governor's wife'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3505.*

understanding of beauty might not be shared by someone else. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* makes the human soul appreciate some beauty to which this person normally tends to be attracted. For this reason, one sometimes hears the following expression in rural Egypt, ‘For every bean, there is a particular person who is attracted to it’

Let us offer an example to clarify this matter; one may find a young man who proposed to a woman and, upon seeing her, became revolted by her. However, another young man might go to ask for the same woman’s hand in marriage and as soon as he sees her, he falls in love with her and hurriedly marries her. This suggests that the criterion of beauty of the latter differs from those of the former.

When Allah *the Almighty* wills to join two individuals, no one is able to stop the attraction they both have for each other from developing. We are not able to understand how this phenomena happens since it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who decrees this affinity. He does so by uncovering a beauty in the woman that attracts one man but not another. Clearly, this also applies to women.

Back to the verse under discussion; when the women saw Yusuf *peace be upon him* they exclaimed: ‘He cannot be mortal! He must be a gracious angel!’ (*Yusuf:* 31) We can deduce from this statement that Yusuf *peace be upon him* represented the highest form of human beauty, and that such magnificence cannot be found in any other individual.(1)

Following this incident, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the wife’s response to the stunned women, saying:

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(1) *Anas Ibn Malik narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Yusuf and his mother were endowed with half of (all the) beauty (in the world)’. See, Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 3/286; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, 2/570. In his book, As-Suyuti narrated that Ibn Mas‘ud Allah be pleased with him said, ‘Yusuf’s countenance was like a flash of lightning. Whenever a woman approached him for a certain matter, he covered his face lest she be drawn to him’. As-Suyuti attributed this narration to Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi in his Nawadir Al-Usul, as well as Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, Abu Ash-Sheikh and At-Tabarani’. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 4/532.*

قَالَتْ فَذَٰلِكُنَّ ٱلَّذِى لُمْتُنَّنِى فِيهِ ۖ وَلَقَدْ رَٰوَدتُّهُۥ عَن نَّفْسِهِۦ فَٱسْتَعْصَمَ ۖ
وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَفْعَلْ مَآ ءَامُرُهُۥ لَيُسْجَنَنَّ وَلَيَكُونًا مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰغِرِينَ (٣٢)

She said, 'This is the one you blamed me for. I tried to seduce him and he wanted to remain chaste, but if he does not do what I command now, he will be put in prison and degraded' [32] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 32)

After the women had admitted that Yusuf *peace be upon him* has been granted a beauty which has no likeness among humans, the governor's wife found in this acknowledgement a justification for her attempts to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

The saying '*fadhalikunn',* that is, 'This is the one ...' (*Yusuf:* 32) which the governor's wife utters includes the demonstrative pronoun 'this' which refers to Yusuf *peace be upon him*, but the entire word *'fadhalikunn',* addresses the women.

What concerns us here is the linguistic style used by the speaker because when words are uttered or even written for reading purposes, they may take on different forms and styles. Sometimes, the words simply make up prose devoid of any rhythm or rhyme. Other times, ideas may be expressed either in loosely rhyming prose, or even as disciplined, rhythmical, and rhyming poetry.

There are examples of rhyming prose in The Quran, and the following saying of Allah *the Almighty* is a case in point: 'By the mountain,(1) by a Scripture inscribed in unrolled parchment, by the much-visited House' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1-4). These aforementioned verses are an example of loosely rhyming prose, each verse ending with the same sound 'or'. In this connection, when you read or hear a text, the more eloquently sounding the prose the more you can visualise the scene portrayed. And when you move from one text to another, your ear notices the stylistic difference between both texts.

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(1) The mountain referred to in the verse is called *'At-Tur'* which is located in Sinai, where Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* stayed with his people after they were driven out of Egypt. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We made the mountain (*At-Tur*) tower high above them…' (*an-Nisa':* 154). It is also called *'Tur Sayna'*, as in the following verse: '…Mount Sinai…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 20) and also called '*Tur sini'n'* in Allah's saying: 'And Mount Sinai' (*at-Tin:* 2). See *Al-Qamous Al-Qawim*, 1/407.

A good example of a change from one style to another can be found in the letters in which Ibn Zaydun(1) implored Ibn Jahwar, ‘The painful consequences of this criticism are worthy of praise, for this hardship exalts (the individual) only after having debased (him). My high esteem for you, my lord, will not diminish if the cause (of this criticism) is protracted or delayed, for you are not sparing and never withhold things (from those who regard you in high esteem). And so I (shall) lower my water drawer and fill it with bounty (that is like) the heaviest roaming cloud that I can recall. Each day is tied to the next, and each appointed moment is recorded in the Book. Praise be to Allah for putting us to the test, and never (should He be) criticised for His Leniency.

For if one of His Actions saddened me,
His Actions that delight us are thousands’.

In this communication, you can clearly notice Ibn Zaydun’s transition from straightforward prose to poetry. However, when reading The Quran, you can hardly distinguish between poetry and prose as you move from standard prose to loosely rhyming prose, and then to rhyming and rhythmic poetry.

Let us give an example from the verse under discussion: ‘This is the one you blamed me for…’ (*Yusuf:* 32). This part of the verse has a rhythm, but one is almost entirely oblivious to the fact that the verse has transferred from prose to poetry. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* also says: ‘Allah guides whoever He wills to a straight path(2)…’ (*an-Nur*: 46). He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘[Prophet], tell My slaves that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful…’ (*al-Hijr:* 49). These verses come after prose as well which proves that there is no dissonance in the intonation of The Quran, be it verse, poetry or prose. In fact, the style of the Quran is so harmonious that it appears as one single flow of words. Such eloquence can only emanate from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, you may not even be aware of these poetic subtleties if no one were to bring them to your attention. However, in ordinary human speech, however, your ear easily feels the transition from rhyming words that are followed by prose. The same is true when you read prose and then move to poetry. In both cases, the ear of the reader easily senses the shift from one form of expression to another.

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(1) He is *Ahmad ibn Abdullah ibn Zaydun Al-Khawarizmi Al-Andalusi, Ab Al-Walid*. He was a minister, author and a poet from Cordoba. Born in 394 AH, he served as ambassador for *Ibn Jahur* (a king of one of the confederate states of Andalusia) who sent him to different parts of Andalusia. He died in Seville in 463 AH in the reign of *Al-Mu‘tamid ‘Alallah Ibn Al-Mu‘tadid*. Paraphrased from *Al-A‘lam* by *Az-Zirikli* 1/158.

(2) *Al-Azhari said, ‘Ibn Kathir, Nafe‘, Abu ‘Amr, Ibn ‘Amir, ‘Asim, and Al-Kisa’i read the verse: “Guide us to the Straight Path” (al-Fatiha: 6) pronouncing the word ‘as-sirat’ with the letter ‘sad’ instead of the letter ‘sin’. Ya‘qub, on the other hand, read this word with the letter ‘sin’, and explained that the letter ‘sad’ in this word is derived from the letter ‘sin’ but the word was pronounced with a ‘sad’ to ease the pronunciation because of its proximity to the letter ‘ta’. Al-Jawhari said, ‘‘As-siraṭ’ with the letter ‘sin’, and ‘as-sirat’ with the letter ‘sad’ are both legitimate ways of reciting this word’. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-‘Arab the root ‘sarata’.*

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘She said, “This is the one you blamed me for. I tried to seduce him and he wanted to remain chaste...”’ (*Yusuf:* 32). The governor’s wife uttered this statement audaciously only after noticing the impact Yusuf’s presence had on the women. Moreover, she declared that he had remained chaste which implies that he restrained himself and repressed his carnal desire with great effort. Furthermore, this statement proves that Yusuf’s manhood is in no way lacking, for he struggled against his own ego to prevent himself from performing the dissolute act. Further the wife is related to have continued saying: ‘… but if he does not do what I command now, he will be put in prison and degraded’ (*Yusuf:* 32). We should take into account that she proclaimed this with the tone of someone who was decreeing orders. She is declaring to the listeners–who were stunned by Yusuf *peace be upon him* when they saw him–that if he refuses to obey her and satisfy her desire, she will surely imprison, disgrace and dishonour him.

As for the women who heard her, each one of them secretly wished that the governor’s wife will expel Yusuf *peace be upon him* from the palace so that one of them could be alone with him.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* narrates Yusuf’s response, saying:

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱلسِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِيٓ إِلَيْهِ ۖ وَإِلَّا
تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُن مِّنَ ٱلْجَٰهِلِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Joseph said, 'My Lord! I would prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do. If You do not protect me from their treachery, I shall yield to them and do wrong' [33] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 33)

Here arises a question, 'Why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* use the plural form (women) in his statement?' After all, he did say: 'I prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do...' (*Yusuf:* 33) despite the fact that it is only the governor's wife who said: '… but if he does not do what I command now, he will be put in prison and degraded' (*Yusuf:* 32). Here, we should stress that there is no doubt that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had sensed the innuendos or winks from the women. Through these insinuations, the women were advising him to avoid the complicated situation that will lead to his imprisonment. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* included the female guests in his speech about the governor's wife. It is the women who gave him discreet signs and hints for him to avoid imprisonment.

One may suppose that more than one woman looked at him and attempted to earn his affection.(1) Indeed, eyes, physical gestures and facial expressions communicate better than words, and perhaps the signs given by their eyes told Yusuf *peace be upon him* of the intentions of each and every one of them. In such meetings, eyes play a great role in communicating ideas and intentions. Let us offer an example to clarify this point; there is an account of the poet Abu Dalama who sat in the court of a caliph. Abu Dalama was famous for his prowess in ridiculing others through his satiric poetry. Knowing this, the Caliph asked him to deride one of them for fun.

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(1) *In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Each woman asked to be alone with Yusuf peace be upon him and to give him advice on how to act with the governor's wife. Their ulterior motive, however, was to rebuke Yusuf peace be upon him and ask him to succumb to her rather than to the wife. With the hope that Yusuf peace be upon him might be open to their allures, each woman went up to him peace be upon him inviting him and inveigling him by saying, "Yusuf, fulfill my need, for I am better than your mistress". Yusuf peace be upon him responded, "O Lord, she was one and now there are many!"' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3507.*

The eyes of the people present began circulating around the room, and all of the attendees stealthily indicated to Abu Dalama that they will shower him with gifts if he spared them public derision. Since Abu Dalama was known for his greediness, and he feared being denied any of the gifts that were being tacitly offered to him, he decided that he will deride himself. He said:

In reality, the most hideous of your company is Abu Dalama,
for he is neither of the generous nor of the noble-hearted.
When he dons a turban he resembles a monkey,
and a pig when he takes it off!'

In this way, the poet fulfilled the oath of the Caliph and also gained the gifts that he was promised by those who were attending the gathering.

In the verse under discussion, we find that Yusuf *peace be upon him* included the women with the governor's wife when he said: 'My Lord! I prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do...' (*Yusuf:* 33). In other words, imprisonment was more preferred to Yusuf *peace be upon him* than to agree to commit the sinful act with the governor's wife, or to consent to the women's advice to free himself from prison by answering the wife's desire and then staying with them outside the castle.

Instead, Yusuf *peace be upon him* called to his Lord, saying: 'If You do not protect me from their treachery, I shall yield to them and do wrong' (*Yusuf:* 33). Here, someone may ask, 'Why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* not say 'O Allah', instead of 'My Lord'?' After all, Yusuf *peace be upon him* knows for certain that Divine Obligations which come in the form of 'Do' and 'Do not do' are a result of Allah's Divinity which is represented in His Name 'Allah'.

We contend that Yusuf *peace be upon him* wanted to call Allah *the Almighty* using the Name 'Lord' as he wanted to acknowledge Allah's Bounty and Generosity towards him. Indeed, He, Glorified is Him, is the One Who protected him and took care of him. By invoking Allah by the Name 'My Lord', Yusuf *peace be upon him* is asking Allah not to forsake him in this calamitous situation.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* was aware that he was weak, like every human being, and he knew that unless his Lord turns away their guile from him, he might succumb to their request, thereby becoming one of the ignorant who ignore the consequences of their acts. Despite the fact that prison is a detestable place to be, he still prefers it to disobeying his Creator. Moreover, since Yusuf sought refuge in the Primary Protector, Allah *Glorified is He* answered his *peace be upon him* plea. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَٱسۡتَجَابَ لَهُۥ رَبُّهُۥ فَصَرَفَ عَنۡهُ كَيۡدَهُنَّۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٣٤

And his Lord answered his prayer and protected him from their treachery – He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [34] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 34)

Clearly, Allah *Glorified is He* Who created, nurtured and safeguarded Yusuf *peace be upon him* has once again bestowed His Bounties upon him by freeing him *peace be upon him* from the threat of their guile. This threat came in the form of both asking him to give in to the wife's demand as well as their subtle demands and insinuations. As a matter of fact, their enticement is clear in the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The king asked the women, "What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?" They said, "Allah forbid! We know nothing bad of him!"' (*Yusuf:* 51) This way, Allah *the Almighty* saved Yusuf *peace be upon him* from the evil scheming of the women, for He *Glorified is He* is All-Hearing and All Knowing; nothing is hidden from Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* surely answers the pleas of the truthful.

Allah *the Almighty* then says

ثُمَّ بَدَا لَهُم مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا رَأَوُاْ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لَيَسۡجُنُنَّهُۥ حَتَّىٰ حِينٖ ٣٥

In the end they thought it best, after seeing all the signs (1) of his innocence, that they should imprison him for a while [35] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 35)

Thus, the signs proving Yusuf's innocence became clear to the governor and his royal advisors. Moreover, the wife's aberration and her audacious and foolhardy insistence that Yusuf *peace be upon him* commit the sordid act with her also became clear. That is why the governor and his advisors deemed it necessary to put Yusuf *peace be upon him* in prison and thus separate the latter from his wife. In this way, the scandal will be forgotten and people will be convinced that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was responsible for the indecent act at the palace.

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(1) *In his Tafsir of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi quoted Ibn 'Abbas as saying: 'The shirt is one of the signs; the testimony of the witness is one of the signs; the women's cutting their hands is one of the signs; and the women's exaltation of Yusuf* peace be upon him *is also one of the signs'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3508.*

However, the Arabic word *'layasjununnahu',* that is: '…that they should imprison him...' (*Yusuf:* 35) reveals a certain affection that the governor had for Yusuf *peace be upon him*. After all, the governor did not order him to be executed or exiled to a distant land. Rather, he just kept him away from his wife who adamantly wanted to betray him and from the people who were constantly talking about these shameful events.

Prison, as we know, is a place that confines one's movements in this world. A judge may deem it necessary for a person to be put in confinement as a punishment to disgrace the guilty, or to protect society from his wickedness. Furthermore, we know that a man only breaks a law when he thinks or is certain that he has the power to do so with impunity. Afterwards, a judge or a ruler announces the end of this transgressor's power and might, and orders him to be imprisoned. In prison, a jailer ensures the transgressor's confinement and the latter might even be beaten or disgraced.

This is prison according to both ancient and modern times. It is a place where the detainee is detached from society. Perhaps some members of society might feel compassion for the detainee. Maybe some of his relatives will even visit him and bring food or other needed provisions.

In the same connection, there is also what might be called a 'religious prison' which was established by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he alienated three people from the believing society. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prevented anyone from speaking to these three individuals(1) who had failed to appear for battle under insubstantial pretexts. This isolation was intensified to the point where their own kin did not speak to them, until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered this seclusion to be lifted after its objectives had been accomplished.

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(1) *These three are: Ka'b Ibn Malik, Marara ibn Ar-Rabi' Al-'Amri and Hilal ibn Umayya Al-Waqifi. In his Sahih, Muslim related the Hadith of Ka'b who narrated their entire story of failing to go to battle with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in Tabuk. See Imam Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2769.*

To continue, we ask: what happened to Yusuf *peace be upon him* in prison?

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ ٱلسِّجۡنَ فَتَيَانِۖ قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَآ إِنِّيٓ أَرَىٰنِيٓ أَعۡصِرُ خَمۡرٗاۖ وَقَالَ ٱلۡأٓخَرُ إِنِّيٓ أَرَىٰنِيٓ
أَحۡمِلُ فَوۡقَ رَأۡسِي خُبۡزٗا تَأۡكُلُ ٱلطَّيۡرُ مِنۡهُۖ نَبِّئۡنَا بِتَأۡوِيلِهِۦٓۖ إِنَّا نَرَىٰكَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ٣٦

Two young men(1) went into prison alongside him. One of them said, 'I dreamed that I was pressing grapes'; the other said, 'I dreamed that I was carrying bread on my head and that the birds were eating it.' [They said], 'Tell us what this means – we can see that you are a knowledgeable man' [36]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 36)

Two individuals accompanied Yusuf *peace be upon him* when he entered the prison, allegedly the baker and the cupbearer. It has also been alleged that the reason for their imprisonment was the governor's desire to distract the people from the great scandal which had broken out in the palace; namely, his wife's enticement of Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the latter's refusal to succumb to her. The governor wanted to distract the people by spreading the news that the cupbearer and the baker had plotted against the governor and were caught while trying to poison him. (2)

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(1) *In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Al-Mawaridi opined that Allah the Almighty says 'Fatayan' (two young men) because they were slaves and the slave is referred to a 'fata', be he young or old. Al-Qushayri said that perhaps it was customary to call a slave 'fata', as in Allah's saying: "The governor's wife is trying to seduce her slave (fataha)!" (Yusuf: 30)'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3511.*

(2) *On this subject, it has been said that the king was upset with his baker and the wine maker. These two had lived under the rule of the king for such a long time that they longed to see him replaced by someone else. However, while the baker agreed to poison the king, the wine maker changed his mind and told the king of the conspiracy. The king, in turn, ordered both plotters to be incarcerated, and the two joined Yusuf peace be upon him in prison. Abridged from Al-Qurtubi's Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3511.*

After spending some time with Yusuf *peace be upon him* in prison, and after living with him on a daily basis, the two became fully aware that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was a righteous man. It happened that each one of them saw a dream, and they asked him to interpret their dreams. As a matter of fact, a prisoner is often inclined to be anxious since he has no guarantees for the future. This is perhaps why they entreated Yusuf *peace be upon him* to interpret their dreams, saying: ‘One of them said, “I dreamt that I was pressing grapes”. The other said, “I dreamt that I was carrying bread on my head and that the birds were eating it.” [They said], “Tell us what this means–we can see that you are one of those who do good”’. (*Yusuf:* 36)

From this verse, we have two persons who had seen dreams; the first saw himself pressing wine, while the second saw himself carrying bread on his head from which birds were eating. As such, both of the prisoners addressed Yusuf *peace be upon him* perhaps each one separately asking him for an interpretation of this dream.

Moreover, the reason why they sought Yusuf’s advice specifically is clear in their saying: ‘We can see that you are one of those that do good *(Al-Muhsineen*)’ (*Yusuf:* 36). This verse ascertains that *ihsan* (goodness) is something known to all people even malicious souls. Clearly, no one can deem another person to be a *Muhsin* (‘righteous’, plural ‘*Muhsineen*’) except if his actions are in accordance with the criterion of *ihsan* (goodness) conceived in the evaluator’s mind.

As a matter of fact, each soul knows what is evil as well as what is good. However, people tend to judge good and evil according to their own needs and benefit. But, had they considered these two qualities from a holistic point of view, where all creatures of the world are considered, and had they deemed a matter that concerns someone else to the same level as something that concerns them directly, they will have realised that what is considered good is the same for all people.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this matter; we may come across a thief who is not disturbed when he steals from someone, but who is greatly bothered when someone steals from him. Thus, we see that he is able to recognise goodness in his heart when he himself is targeted by evil.

Ironically, he acknowledges the true value of goodness only when he is hurt. However, when he is stealing–thus channelling evil from himself towards other people–he is somehow oblivious to the meaning of goodness. In short, if you want to know the value of *ihsan* (goodness) concerning virtues and righteous behaviour, you must understand it when it results in both negative and positive consequences for you.

In the same connection, I always give the following example: if you consider it normal to violate the religious limits by looking at women who are forbidden to you, you should consider normal the case when all eyes are turned to your female relatives. To recap, if you want to evaluate your actions in a sensible manner, you must consider the impact other peoples' deeds have on you, without neglecting the impact that your acts have on others. Also, examine the inner inclination of your soul; therein you will find an accurate and reasonable judgment of matters. I often stress that when Allah *Glorified is He* has forbidden you from stealing, He has not constricted your freedom. On the contrary, Allah *the Almighty* has constricted the freedom of millions of others, lest they steal from you–a matter which is in your interest. Hence, he who is aware of the value of *ihsan* considers the repercussions of both other peoples' actions on him and his own actions on others. By doing this, this person takes everything into consideration. In short, just as a person hates to be harmed by others, he should also hate to harm others.

Back to the verse under discussion; the two prisoners were innately aware that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was among those who do good deeds in this world. Furthermore, Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised that the two prisoners also understood the value of goodness, and that is why he agreed to answer their questions. Moreover, he seized this chance to extract what he sought from the former while granting them what they had asked for. As we said, Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised gleams of goodness in these two men, for they trusted virtuous people. Moreover, there was no reason that prevented him *peace be upon him* from benefitting from this situation to attain what he wanted from them before he gave them what they wanted.

It is as if Yusuf *peace be upon him* was telling the prisoners, 'What do you see in my virtuous behaviour? Have you not seen how benevolently I have treated you? Perhaps one of you has recognised my righteous way of speaking! Perhaps neither of you knew that I possess–thanks to Allah's Grace–even greater qualities!' This is what Allah *the Almighty* refers to in the following verse in which He says:

قَالَ لَا يَأۡتِيكُمَا طَعَامٞ تُرۡزَقَانِهِۦٓ إِلَّا نَبَّأۡتُكُمَا بِتَأۡوِيلِهِۦ قَبۡلَ أَن يَأۡتِيَكُمَاۚ ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا
عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّيٓۚ إِنِّي تَرَكۡتُ مِلَّةَ قَوۡمٖ لَّا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَهُم بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ هُمۡ كَٰفِرُونَ ٣٧

He said, 'I can tell you what this means before any meal arrives: this is part of what my Lord has taught me. I reject the faith of those who disbelieve in God and deny the life to come [37] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 37)

In this verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* makes it clear that the two prisoners are only cognisant of his external demeanour, and that there are still other hidden realities which they are unaware of. Moreover, it is as if Yusuf *peace be upon him* were inculcating in them an awareness of his great spiritual position, the excellence of his character and also his ability to inform them of their upcoming meal before it even arrives.(1)

This gift of foretelling future events is not an intrinsic attribute of Yusuf *peace be upon him*; rather, it emanates from the knowledge he received from Allah *the Almighty*. In other words, unveiling certain secrets before their eyes is something that Allah *Glorified is He* grants to His righteous slaves. In fact, these two prisoners could be like Yusuf *peace be upon him* if they had only perfected their belief in Allah *the Almighty*. Hence He *Glorified is He* relates Yusuf as saying: '…this is some of what my Lord has taught me. I reject the faith of those who disbelieve in Allah and deny the life to come' (*Yusuf:* 37).

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(1) In his exegesis of The Quran, *Al-Qurtubi* said, 'The statement "…before any meal arrives…" (*Yusuf:* 37) means that before any food comes to you from your homes, "I can tell you the interpretation…" (*Yusuf:* 37). In other words, this prediction of your upcoming meal will give you certainty that my interpretation of your dreams is correct. The latter are some of the knowledge of the unseen that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was given. Moreover, he *peace be upon him* explicitly said that this knowledge is Allah's Gift, since he abandoned the religion of a people who do not believe *in Allah. Note that the religion that Yusuf peace be upon him is referring to is the king's religion'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3512.*

Through this response, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was guiding the prisoners to the path of the virtuous who are given some Divine Gifts by virtue of which they can see things that others cannot.

Hence, when a believer sees in a man a glimmer of goodness, let him cultivate this goodness so the man will do more good deeds. By doing so, the believer will not keep this goodness he sees in another limited, but he will make it grow to achieve more good. Moreover, by recognising–potential and actual–virtues in others, the believer encourages these people to improve until they then become guides for others who will then seek Allah's Pleasure in order to, like them, receive His Great Blessings.

That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* made it clear to the prisoners that he had rejected the religion of a people whose beliefs are not befitting Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, these people believed neither in the Resurrection nor in the Final Judgment which bring about the rewards of Paradise or the torments of the Fire.

Allah *the Almighty* continues relating what Yusuf said to the prisoners:

وَٱتَّبَعۡتُ مِلَّةَ ءَابَآءِيٓ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسۡحَٰقَ وَيَعۡقُوبَۚ مَا كَانَ لَنَآ أَن نُّشۡرِكَ بِٱللَّهِ مِن
شَيۡءٖۚ ذَٰلِكَ مِن فَضۡلِ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡنَا وَعَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَشۡكُرُونَ ٣٨

And I follow the faith of my forefathers[1] **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Because of God's grace to us and to all mankind, we would never worship anything beside God, but most people are ungrateful [38] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 38)**

In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* made it clear that he rejected the religion of the people who worship others beside Allah and those who denied that there was a Hereafter, stressing that he chose to follow the faith of his forefathers Ibrahim, Ishaq and then Ya'qub *peace be upon them* all. These three

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The honorable, the son of the honorable, the son of the honorable (was) Yusuf (Joseph), the son of Ya'qub (Jacob), the son of Ishaq (Isaac), the son of Ibrahim (Abraham)'. See Imam At-Tirmidh, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3116; Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 2/332, 416; and Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 2/346.*

figures were sent by Allah *the Almighty* to guide people to believe in His Oneness, and also to believe in the Hereafter which entails being rewarded with Paradise or punished by the Fire.

It is out of the Benevolence of Allah *the Almighty* that He revealed this Divine Way of Guidance. Moreover, thanks to His *the Almighty* Grace, He assigned the great honour of prophecy to Yusuf's forefathers; and he who knows all this has no right to worship anything besides Allah *Glorified is He* for polytheism denotes taking recourse in other false gods.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with him any (other) god-in that case each god will have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them will certainly have overpowered others; glory be to Allah above what they describe!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) We can deduce from this verse that were there any other gods aside from Allah, each will have created something which the other gods were incapable of doing. Moreover, there will be a conflict among these differing gods in the end.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* explains that out of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed His Divine Way of Guidance on the Prophets–among whom are Yusuf's forefathers Ibrahim, Ishaq, and Ya'qub *peace be upon them*–to deliver this Way to Allah's creation. The Prophets, on their part, did not restrict this Merciful Guidance emanating from Allah *the Almighty* to them; instead, they faithfully delivered it to their respective peoples.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse by saying: 'But most people are ungrateful' (*Yusuf:* 38). When you come across phrases such as '…are ungrateful' (*Yusuf:* 38), you should take into consideration that the object one is ungrateful about is something one should justly and rightly, according to a man's innate nature and sound mind, be grateful for. As a matter of fact, gratefulness is only expressed in return for a blessing.

Were people to contemplate on the matter of sending Prophets to guide them, they will be grateful to the Prophets and Messengers for Allah's Way of Guidance that they communicated to them. Indeed, the Divine Way of Guidance teaches man how to successfully manage his worldly affairs, and, moreover, it guides him to paradise.

Allah *the Almighty* continues to state Yusuf's discourse with the prisoners, saying:

يَٰصَٰحِبَيِ ٱلسِّجۡنِ ءَأَرۡبَابٞ مُّتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيۡرٌ أَمِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡوَٰحِدُ ٱلۡقَهَّارُ ٣٩

Fellow prisoners, would many diverse gods be better than
God the One, the All Powerful? [No indeed!] [39]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 39)

As for the Arabic word *'sahib'*, it denotes a companion or fellow. As we know, Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the prisoners are linked by a common bond: prison. In this vein, the word *'sahib'* denotes something that links two or more things together, as when it is said, 'So-and-so is my fellow pilgrim or student'. Clearly, a thing which binds two or more individuals together is attributed either to a particular place or to a circumstance which binds a particular group in friendship.

In the verse in question, Yusuf *peace be upon him* posed the following question: 'Are many diverse gods better–or Allah, the One, the All Powerful?' (*Yusuf:* 39) When Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked this question, he knew fully well in advance the listener's response. He knew that the prisoner will acknowledge that the diverse gods were not better than only one God. Thus, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was sure that their answer could only be, 'Worshiping a single God is better'. In fact, Yusuf *peace be upon him* only posed this question as he was sure that, after considering the matter, they will answer him the way he wanted.

Both prisoners had worshipped various gods. However, were these gods real, it will have been reasonably unnecessary for the prisoners to resort to the only one God. That is, while plurality on the human plane brings about wealth and achieves success in one's work, associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He* renders a person's worship null and void.

Concerning this there is the *Sufi* saying, 'Devote your works to Allah Alone, and He will satisfy all your needs'. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* told his follow prisoners: 'Are many diverse gods better…' (*Yusuf:* 39).

Clearly, if the essence of these gods differed from each other, they will be imperfect and unworthy of worship. Furthermore, if they were multiple yet identical, then their existence will be redundant. Finally, if they had different abilities, then each of them will have both strong and weak points, and this multiplicity will be a sign of the deficiency of the gods.

Consequently, out of His Mercy toward us, the believers, Allah *the Almighty* commands us to worship Him Alone, as He says: ‘Allah sets forth a parable: a slave belonging to (several) partners [who] are at variance with one another, and a slave belonging entirely to one man. Are the two equal [as regards to their condition]? (All) praise is due to Allah. Nay! Most of them do not know’ (*az-Zumar:* 29).

Indeed, Yusuf *peace be upon him* tried to guide the prisoners to worship Allah *the Almighty* Alone. He also told them what Allah *the Almighty* says in the following verse:

مَا تَعۡبُدُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ أَسۡمَآءٗ سَمَّيۡتُمُوهَآ أَنتُمۡ وَءَابَآؤُكُم
مَّآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلۡطَٰنٍۚ إِنِ ٱلۡحُكۡمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِۚ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعۡبُدُوٓاْ إِلَّآ
إِيَّاهُۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلدِّينُ ٱلۡقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ (٤٠)

All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented, names for which God has sent down no sanction. Authority belongs to God alone, and He orders you to worship none but Him: this is the true faith, though most people do not realize it [40] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 40)

We should take into account that up to this point Yusuf *peace be upon him* has not spoken to the prisoners about their request: namely, the interpretation of their dreams. Had he first interpreted their dreams, he will have lost their attention since each one will be thinking of his personal needs rather than the lasting universal truths that concern each aspect of human life and for which Yusuf *peace be upon him* was calling.

In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* shows altruistic behaviour towards the prisoners. Rather than simply addressing the secondary matters which they were asking about, he *peace be upon him* wanted to bring to their attention the essential issue of Faith. In other words, he sought to correct their worldview and turn their gaze to a religion which teaches man how to live every aspect and facet of his life correctly. Needless to say, Yusuf's strategy ensues from altruism rather than selfishness. At this point, Yusuf isquoted saying: 'All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented...' (*Yusuf:* 40). In other words, the gods that you worship other than Allah are nothing but meaningless names that do not indicate any actual being in reality. These gods are just names that you either have inherited from your forefathers or invented yourselves. Accordingly, you have disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* by having concocted these names of unreal deities, just as your forefathers disbelieved by either forgetting the Divine Obligations or turning their backs on them.

As a matter of fact, a name is used to refer to the named object. When we utter a name, we mentally envision the image of the named object. That is why when a baby is born, he is given a name that distinguishes him from his other siblings and therefore when his name is called, it only refers to his entity. Moreover, when the same name is given to many different people, it is necessary to distinguish between the identical appellations; otherwise, it will be difficult to differentiate between the named individuals.

Let us give an example to further clarify this point. When a father from the Egyptian countryside is particularly fond of the name '*Mohammad',* he calls all of his children by this name. However, he distinguishes between them by saying 'old *Mohammad',* 'middle *Mohammad',* and 'young *Mohammad'.*

Returning to our verse under discussion, it is unreasonable and unacceptable to give a name to something that is unreal. Yet, the people that Yusuf *peace be upon him* were addressing had given a name to non-existent gods. In other words, they based their faith on names of illusory entities. On the Day of Judgment, these people will be asked: '"Where now are those you called upon besides Allah?" They will say, "They have abandoned us: those we called upon before were really nothing at all". This is how Allah leaves disbelievers to go astray' (*Ghafir:* 73-74). That is, on the Day of Judgment the people will admit that they were no gods; they were only empty names. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: 'All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented...' (*Yusuf:* 40).

It is as if Yusuf *peace be upon him* was asking, ‘If you have a need of something from heaven, why will you ask these names that, in reality, do not stand for any actual being? Do these empty names show you any favour?’ Yusuf *peace be upon him* knew that a God that deserves to be worshipped cannot be an empty name. Furthermore, Yusuf *peace be upon him* knew for certain that Allah, the only One worthy of worship, has a Name which He has communicated through His Messengers, and through those to whom He reveals His Divine Way of Guidance which comes in the form of Commands and Prohibitions. These people, on the other hand, had given a name to non-existent gods, while non-existent beings cannot reveal any way of guidance, nor can they satisfy peoples’ dire needs. That is why the Quran narrates Yusuf’s discourse with the prisoners about these names, saying: ‘All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented, names for which Allah has sent down no sanction...’ (*Yusuf:* 40). We deduce from this verse that Allah *Glorified is He* has not given any justification for such an act.

In the verse, Yusuf continues saying: ‘Authority belongs to Allah alone, and He orders you to worship none but Him...’ (*Yusuf:* 40). In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* said to them, ‘If you hear me saying anything, I am simply communicating Allah’s Decree. The words I speak do not ensue from myself or from my desires. It is Allah Himself Who ordered mankind to worship only Him; that is, do not obey any order or keep away from any prohibition except Allah’s Orders and His Prohibitions–commandments which have been laid down in His Divine Way of Guidance’.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes this verse by saying: ‘This is the true faith, though most people do not realise it’ (*Yusuf:* 40). In other words, this faith is the only religion that guides to the Right Path. Most people, however, do not realise this; that is, Messengers have communicated Allah’s Way of Guidance, but most people have not applied these teachings in their lives and actions.

Then, Yusuf *peace be upon him* began to interpret the dream for them as they had demanded.

Allah *the Almighty* then mentions what Yusuf said:

يَٰصَٰحِبَيِ ٱلسِّجۡنِ أَمَّآ أَحَدُكُمَا فَيَسۡقِى رَبَّهُۥ خَمۡرٗاۖ وَأَمَّا ٱلۡأٓخَرُ فَيُصۡلَبُ
فَتَأۡكُلُ ٱلطَّيۡرُ مِن رَّأۡسِهِۦۚ قُضِىَ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ ٱلَّذِى فِيهِ تَسۡتَفۡتِيَانِ ﴿٤١﴾

Fellow prisoners, one of you will serve his master with wine; the other will be crucified and the birds will peck at his head. That is the end of the matter on which you asked my opinion [41] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 41)

At this point, Yusuf *peace be upon him* returned to the initial question of the prisoners. He explained that the prisoner who had dreamt of himself pressing grapes will be freed from prison and will return to the palace to pour wine for his master. As for the other prisoner, he will be crucified and birds will peck at his head. The image of a bird pecking at his head is metaphorical and means that his head will be food for birds.

As for the interpretation of dreams, it is a type of knowledge that Allah *the Almighty* sends into the hearts of those whom He taught the interpretation of dreams. In other words, it is the art of deciphering the coded language of dreams and it is only granted to those whom Allah *the Almighty* chooses.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* informed the prisoner who had said: ‘I dreamt that I was pressing grapes…’ (*Yusuf:* 36) that, according to his dream, he will be granted absolution. As for the other dreamer, the birds will peck at his head; that is, he will be crucified, according to the interpretation of his dream.

We should take into consideration that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was completely absorbed in assessing the two dreams of the prisoners. This indicates that the mind of the judge must focus intently on giving a verdict, and not on the person to be judged. Consequently, Yusuf *peace be upon him* while listening to both parties, did not prematurely conclude who will be found innocent and who will be punished. Accordingly, he *peace be upon him* detached himself emotionally from the prisoners’ cases, thus preventing any feelings from negatively affecting his judgment. This is because sentiments can make a decision maker biased. What is even more alarming is that once feelings become involved in a case, they cannot be tempered or ignored. That is why it is absolutely necessary for a judge to be free from any desires or emotional inclinations when he issues his decree.

Allah *the Almighty* teaches us this lesson by revealing the story of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* in the Quran: ‘And has the story of the litigants reached you, when they climbed over the wall of the private chamber? When they entered in upon Dawud (David) and he was frightened of them. They said, “Fear not; [we are] two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other. Therefore decide between us with justice, and do not act unjustly, and guide us to the right path. This is my brother; he has ninety-nine ewes and I have a single ewe, but he said, ‘Entrust it to me’, and he overcame me in the argument”. He [Dawud] said, “Surely he has been unjust to you in demanding your ewe (to add) to his own ewes; most surely most partners act wrongfully towards one another, save those who believe and do good, and very few are they”. And [suddenly] Dawud was sure that We had tried him, so he sought the Forgiveness of his Lord, fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned time after time (to Him)’ (*Sad*: 21-24).

In these aforementioned verses, the speaker who mentioned the number of ewes that his brother owned was not only trying to depict his brother’s transgression but also attempting to earn Dawud’s sympathy and pull him to his side. Thereupon, Dawud *peace be upon him* decreed that the one who had taken the ewe was the transgressor. However, he, i.e. Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* then felt that his judgment was not completely sound because he, in his decree, only considered the fact that the one who had many ewes sought to pull the sole ewe from his brother; that is, Dawud did not consider the case in detail. In Prophet Dawud’s eyes, the fact that he took the other brother’s sole ewe was the only reason for deeming the brother–who had appropriated his brother’s right–to be guilty. For this reason, Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* considered this case to be a test that he failed, and that is why he sought Allah’s Forgiveness by bowing down and repenting.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* by contrast, had passed a wise judgment when he interpreted the dreams because he detached himself completely from the case. Yusuf *peace be upon him* concluded his interpretation of the dreams by stating: ‘The matter on which you asked my opinion has been decided [by Allah]’ (*Yusuf:* 40). Yusuf’s statement implies that there is no space for reassessing or reconsidering whether or not his interpretation will take place because his interpretation of the dream was in accordance with divinely revealed teachings.

There are many narratives which allude to the hardships which Yusuf *peace be upon him* had to bear, even before being cast into the well and before being imprisoned. For instance, there are accounts of his aunt–the daughter of Ishaq (Isaac) and the eldest of his children–who raised Yusuf *peace be upon him* after his mother's death; the aunt grew more and more attached to him so that she loved him more than anyone she had ever loved.

With time, however, Ya'qub's longing for Yusuf *peace be upon him* became unbearable and he went to the aunt to take Yusuf *peace be upon him* back. However, the woman responded, 'By Allah, I cannot bear to be away from him for an hour and I will not abandon him'.

Therefore, when Ya'qub *peace be upon him* left her house, she fetched an heirloom(1) that she had inherited from Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and which was inherited only by the eldest of his family. The aunt then strapped the heirloom under Yusuf's clothes.

During that time, it was common law that if someone was caught guilty of stealing something, he was no longer free but instead became the slave of the owner of the object. Consequently, when Ya'qub *peace be upon him* and his son Yusuf were returning home, the aunt announced that she had lost the heirloom that her father Ishaq *peace be upon him* had given her. She inspected Yusuf *peace be upon him* and found her lost heirloom. The aunt said, 'By Allah, he is my slave!' As we have already mentioned, it was common law that whoever steals something becomes the slave of the owner of the stolen object. In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* stayed with his aunt and was separated from his father for some time, and his father was unable to reclaim him *peace be upon him* until the aunt died.

After that, *Yusuf* was tested by being cast into the well. This was followed by the attempts of the governor's wife to seduce him and, despite the governor being certain of Yusuf's innocence, him being thrown into prison. Yusuf *peace be upon him* was known in prison for his benevolence, trustworthiness, veracity of speech, rightfulness in both worldly and spiritual actions, intense piety, his ability of interpreting dreams and his kindness towards the prisoners.

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(1) *In his Tafsir of the Quran, Ibn Kathir said that the heirloom was Ishaq's belt. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim 2/486. Al-Mantiqa (belt) is anything that straps around the waist. The verb 'intataqa' means 'to strap a belt around the waist'. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, the root 'nataqa'.*

When these two young men were put in prison with Yusuf *peace be upon him* they grew close to him and began to love him very much. They said, ‘By Allah, we love you very much’. As such, he responded, ‘May Allah bless both of you. But, verily, all those who have loved me have harmed me in one way or another. My paternal aunt loved me and I was hurt because of her love; my father loved me and I was harmed because of his love; and the governor’s wife loved me and I was harmed by her love as well’.

That is to say that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was harmed by the governor’s wife’s love for him since he was imprisoned with the two young men for no valid reason. The prisoners replied, ‘Our love for you is beyond our control’.(1)

Afterwards, Yusuf *peace be upon him* is quoted saying to the prisoner who he thought will be released from prison:

وَقَالَ لِلَّذِى ظَنَّ أَنَّهُۥ نَاجٍ مِّنْهُمَا ٱذْكُرْنِى عِندَ رَبِّكَ فَأَنسَىٰهُ
ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنُ ذِكْرَ رَبِّهِۦ فَلَبِثَ فِى ٱلسِّجْنِ بِضْعَ سِنِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Joseph said to the one he knew would be saved, ‘Mention me to your master,’ but Satan made him forget to do this, and so Joseph remained in prison for a number of years [42]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 42)

In this verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* addressed the prisoner who saw himself pressing grapes in a dream. This man was the person to whom Yusuf

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(1) *In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said that the prison supervisor loved Yusuf peace be upon him and this is why he made his cell more spacious. The admirer exclaimed, ‘Yusuf, I love you more than anyone I have ever loved’ whereupon Yusuf peace be upon him retorted, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from your love!’ When the former asked why, Yusuf explained, ‘My father loved me, and because of this my brothers did with me what they did. Moreover, my master’s wife loved me, and you see what has happened to me as a result’. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 4/3511.*

peace be upon him interpreted the dream predicting that he will be released and will thus resume his job as cupbearer for his master.

As for Allah's saying: 'Yusuf said to the one he thought will be saved...' (*Yusuf:* 42), it implies that this man's release from prison was not yet certain. At this point, Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked the prisoner: '…Make mention of me to your master…' (*Yusuf:* 42).

As for the Arabic word *'dhikr'* (make mention), it means to recall something, and it is specifically used with recalling something in the future. *Al-Dhikr* is to recall a matter that you know, stored in the memory, forgot for a while, and then recalled it once again. That is, we understand that man has the ability of storing and recalling certain pieces of information. Such pieces of information do not dwell in man's immediate consciousness at all times because the mind is only capable of focusing on one thing at a time. For this reason, when another topic or idea comes up, the mind pushes aside the first object to the sub-consciousness for the new topic to settle in one's consciousness.

I often give an example of this process referring to the image of ever-expanding and growing concentric circles that result when you throw a rock into still water. Man's consciousness when processing new data can be compared, analogically speaking, to these ripples. To further clarify this point, we say that the new centre of attention has the effect of distancing other mental thoughts from the centre to the sub-consciousness. Eventually, however, one comes across something that is reminiscent of a fact at the fringe of one's consciousness and, consequently, recalls it in details. As a matter of fact, the human memory has two primary functions: it both stores and recalls information.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* addressed the man he thought will be freed, saying: '…Make mention of me to your master…' (*Yusuf:* 42). In other words, tell your master what a good and righteous person I am. In the same vein, some Quranic exegetes said that when Yusuf *peace be upon him* uttered these words, the Lord *the Most High* willed for him to remain in prison for a few more years. The reason is that as a Messenger, he should not have deputed another person to tell others of his virtues, even if this man has the power to free Yusuf *peace be upon him* from prison.

As a Messenger of Allah, Yusuf *peace be upon him* receives knowledge through revelation, as he told the two prisoners: ‘I can tell you what this means before any meal arrives: this is some of what my Lord has taught me...’ (*Yusuf:* 37). Yusuf received his inspiration directly from Allah *the Almighty* and as a result he should have kept relying only on this Divine Source of inspiration. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: ‘But Satan made him forget to do this, and so Yusuf remained in prison for a number of years’ (*Yusuf:* 42).

The freed man’s forgetfulness is a form of a punitive action for Yusuf *peace be upon him*; it may also be viewed as a way of educating him. Interestingly, we find that Satan–who caused the freed man to forget Yusuf’s request–himself plays a role in fulfilling Allah’s Will regarding His creation.

This explains why Yusuf *peace be upon him* remained in prison for several years. The Arabic word ‘*bida‘*’ (some) ranges from three to ten years. However, some scholars exactly pinpointed the numbers of years that he remained in prison, namely seven years.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

وَقَالَ ٱلْمَلِكُ إِنِّىٓ أَرَىٰ سَبْعَ بَقَرَٰتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعَ سُنۢبُلَٰتٍ
خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَٰتٍ ۖ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِى فِى رُءْيَٰىَ إِن كُنتُمْ لِلرُّءْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

The king said, ‘I dreamed about seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones; seven green ears of corn and [seven] others withered. Counsellors, if you can interpret dreams, tell me the meaning of my dream’ [43] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 43)

The story of Yusuf *peace be upon him* took place in Egypt. This is deduced from Allah’s saying: ‘The Egyptian who bought him said to his wife, “Look after him well!”’ (*Yusuf:* 43)

At this point, we should take into account that the Quran states that in Egypt–at that time–there was a king and there was also a governor. But we know that the ancient rulers of Egypt were called pharaohs. However, after the Rosetta Stone was discovered and the hieroglyphic language was deciphered, we found out that the rule of the pharaohs disappeared for a while. This temporary disappearance of the pharaohs happened when the kings of the herdsmen–called Al-Huksus–conquered Egypt. During this period, Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brothers worked for these kings. When the pharaohs once again re-took power in Egypt, they expelled Al-Huksus and killed those who had supported their rule.

Clearly, the Quran mentioning the existence of a king in Egypt during the time of Yusuf *peace be upon him* is an example of one of the miracles of the Quran.

When we read Allah's saying: 'The king said, "I dreamt about seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones..."' (*Yusuf:* 43), we learn that the king had a dream in his sleep which he asked to be interpreted. In this verse, the Arabic word *'seman'* (fat) means that the cows which the king dreamt about were plump and healthy. As for the Arabic word *'i'jaf'* (lean), it indicates that the cows were scrawny and weak, as the laymen say, 'skin and bones'. Here arises a question, which is, 'How could the lean cows eat the fat ones? Is not the opposite more conceivable?'

The king also added: '…seven green ears [of grain] and [seven] others withered....' (*Yusuf:* 43) However, the king did not specify any action related to the ears of grain. The king then consulted the leading figures of his people who often frequent his royal gatherings, saying: 'Counsellors, if you can interpret (*ta'burun*) dreams, tell me the interpretation of my dream' (*Yusuf:* 43).

The Arabic word *'ta'burun'* (you can interpret), literally means to cross. Arabs used to say, '*'Abartu an-nahr',* that is, 'I crossed a river from one shore to the other'. Here, the king was asking them about the meaning embedded or hidden in his dream.

In addition, the Arabic words *'i'brah'* (beneficial experience) and *'al-i'barah'* which means to express an idea that is buried within the mind, are both derived from the Arabic word *'a'bar'* (to cross). Furthermore, the word *'al-a'barah'* is also derived from the verb *'a'bar'* and denotes a tear that one sheds to express a certain emotion, be it happiness or sadness. We should note that all these words revolve around the idea of identifying unknown matter through something already known.

Because of this, we understand that interpreter of dreams crosses from imagination to reality by deciphering the meaning of the images in dreams.

However, members of the king’s entourage were incapable of explaining the meaning behind the dream he had seen.

In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions their response to the king, saying:

قَالُوٓاْ أَضۡغَٰثُ أَحۡلَٰمٖۖ وَمَا نَحۡنُ بِتَأۡوِيلِ ٱلۡأَحۡلَٰمِ بِعَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

They said, ‘These are confusing dreams and we are not skilled at dream-interpretation’ [44] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 44)

Thus, they proclaimed that the king’s dream was confusing and devoid of any meaning. As for the Arabic word *‘adghath’* (confusing), it is related to the word ‘*addaghath*’ which refers to a bouquet assortment of different plants. This description indicates that the kings’ retinue were unqualified to explain the hidden meaning behind dreams, and that they could not interpret the king’s dream.

At this point, we should take into consideration that it is a sound attitude for the king’s retinue not to say something they were ignorant of. In fact, it is not shameful that anyone admits his ignorance of something he does not know. By admitting one’s ignorance to a questioner, the former encourages the latter to inquire about his question somewhere else. However, if the person who is asked provides any sort of answer, perhaps the questioner’s curiosity will be satisfied and he will not search for the correct answer.

In order to encourage the scholars to give correct *fatwas* (religious rulings), scholars have stated that if one says, ‘I do not know’ (regarding a religious ruling), then this itself is a *fatwa* because by acknowledging his ignorance, the scholar thereby pushes the questioner to search and ask others.

The Lord *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِى نَجَا مِنۡهُمَا وَٱدَّكَرَ بَعۡدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا۠ أُنَبِّئُكُم بِتَأۡوِيلِهِۦ فَأَرۡسِلُونِ ﴿٤٥﴾

but the prisoner who had been freed at last remembered [Joseph] and said, ‘I shall tell you what this means. Give me leave to go’ [45] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 45)

The released prisoner was listening to the king’s request and the retinues’ response which made him recall what had happened to him in prison, that is, the dream he had seen and how Yusuf *peace be upon him* had interpreted it. As for Allah's saying: 'But the prisoner who had been freed and remembered after a period of time...' (*Yusuf:* 45), it indicates that he made a concerted mental effort to recall the incident of Yusuf's interpretation of his dream, as a considerable amount of time had passed since he had last seen him.

As for the word *'ummah'*, it signifies a period of time, a point which is clear in Allah's saying: 'If We defer their punishment for a determined time (*ummah*), they are sure to say, "What is holding it back?" But on the Day it comes upon them, nothing will divert it from them; what they mocked will be all around them' (*Hud:* 8).

In the same connection, the word *'ummah'* can also denote a group of people, or even a man, who embodies all virtuous qualities. The latter meaning of this word is used to describe Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in Allah's saying: 'Ibrahim (Abraham) was truly an example (*ummah*): devoutly obedient to Allah and true in faith. He was not an idolater' (*an-Nahl:* 120). This verse means that every sort of virtue was found in Ibrahim *peace be upon him* and upon our Prophet Muhammad.

Back to the verse under discussion; after struggling to recall his memories of prison and of the time he had a dream which Yusuf *peace be upon him* interpreted, the cupbearer said the following to the retinue and the king about the latter's dream: 'I shall tell you what this means. Send me (to Yusuf)' (*Yusuf:* 45). In this way, the cupbearer excused himself and sought out the person who could interpret the king's dream.

When the cupbearer said: 'Send me (to Yusuf)' (*Yusuf:* 45), he was indicating that he himself could not interpret dreams, but he knew a person who was capable of doing this.

We should notice that the Quran does not explicitly state the man whom the cupbearer will seek to interpret the dream, as the person referred to is known not only by the cupbearer but also by us–readers who are reading the chapter of *Yusuf*.

The Quran then moves from relating that the cupbearer sought permission to meet Yusuf *peace be upon him* to relate their meeting together. The Quran relates the cupbearer's conversation with Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the following verse:

يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا ٱلصِّدِّيقُ أَفْتِنَا فِي سَبْعِ بَقَرَٰتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ
وَسَبْعِ سُنۢبُلَٰتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَٰتٍ لَّعَلِّيٓ أَرْجِعُ إِلَى ٱلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

'Truthful Joseph! Tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, seven green ears of corn and [seven] others withered [46] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 46)

Describing Yusuf *peace be upon him* as *'as-siddiq'* (man of truth) implies that the cupbearer tested him in many situations and verified his truthfulness. His truthfulness does not only include his speech, all his actions and how he acts in every situation, but the meaning of truthfulness is broader than that in the case of Yusuf *peace be upon him*; it signifies that truthfulness always accompanies his words and actions, i.e. it is something inborn in him. Yusuf's veracity of speech was plainly evident, since what he uttered was subsequently corroborated by other incidents. As for his veracity of actions, it was substantiated when his deeds were in conformity with his words. Such a person merits the description of *'siddiq'* (man of truth).

In this vein, we know that man's deeds in life are divided into two categories: words and actions. Words are expressed by the tongue, while actions are conveyed by all of the parts of the body.

Thus, there are two fundamental types of deeds: those that are performed physically, and those that are expressed verbally. Both, however, can be categorised as 'human actions'. Thus, speaking is an action, seeing is an action, hearing is an action and similarly touching with one's hands is an action. However, speaking is an action that is specifically carried out by the tongue, while the other actions are performed by other parts of the human body. It is through speech that the speaker communicates with the listener.

From this, it is clear that human deeds are divided into two categories: verbal and bodily.

Concerning the word *'as-siddiq',* it refers to someone who speaks the truth, and what he utters corresponds to reality. In addition, he is sincere in his actions, that is, he never says something upon which he does not act. That is why The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not do' (*as-Saff:* 3).

Back to the verse in question; we know that the king's cupbearer had experienced two unique incidents with Yusuf *peace be upon him*. The first experience is when the cupbearer and the baker accompanied him in prison. At this stage, they told him: 'We can see that you are one of those who do the good' (*Yusuf:* 36). This statement was their justification for seeking Yusuf's interpretation of their two dreams which were as follows: 'One of them said, "I dreamt that I was pressing grapes." The other said, "I dreamt that I was carrying bread on my head and that the birds were eating it." [They said], "Tell us what this means–we can see that you one of those who do the good' (*Yusuf:* 36). As for the second experience that the cupbearer had with Yusuf *peace be upon him* it is when the soundness of the latter's dream interpretations were confirmed by the subsequent events. That is why the cupbearer tells Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the verse in question: 'O Yusuf, O man of truth! Tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears [of grain] and [seven] others withered. That I may return to the people and that they may know' (*Yusuf:* 46). In other words, tell us about the meaning of a dream in which seven fat cows were being eaten by seven lean ones, and in which seven green ears of grain appeared next to seven others that had dried up. If you tell me the interpretation of this dream, I can go back and inform the people of the court that they may know its significance.

When the cupbearer said: '…Tell us the meaning of....' (*Yusuf:* 46), he was making it clear that the dream he was enquiring about was not his dream; rather, it was the dream of someone he did not identify. However, the reader knows that it was the king's dream.

Moreover, when the cupbearer says: 'That I may return to the people and that they may know' (*Yusuf:* 46), he is being cautious and circumspect because he is referring to an unknown future event (him returning to the people) whose fulfilment depends on what Allah has destined for him. The inquirer is using a cautious tone so as not to appear a liar since he knows that he does not have the power to return to his people unless Allah *the Almighty* decrees this.

That's why Allah *the Almighty* teaches us this lesson in the following verse: 'Do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow", without adding, "Allah willing", and whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say, "May my Lord guide me closer to the right course"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

By definition, the moment you say *'in shaa' Allah'* (if Allah wills), you will avoid lying. As long as you invoke Allah *the Almighty* in your speech, He will guide you to the correct choice, no matter in what circumstance you may find yourself. By saying 'in shaa' Allah', Allah *the Almighty* teaches His slaves to protect themselves from sinning by being truthful in their speech and actions. For, no matter how much you plan for something, you are planning using a mind conferred by Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, when you carry out even the smallest of actions, it invariably involves different and numerous factors that you have no power over. That is why you must attribute all matters to the One Who owns all things. At this point, the cupbearer said: 'That I may return to the people' (*Yusuf:* 46). With this statement, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us not to be overly confident regarding future events.

Moreover, He *Glorified is He* mention the man's wish: '…and they may know' (*Yusuf:* 46). It is as if the cupbearer knew that he had no way of predicting the people's reaction regarding Yusuf's interpretation of the dream when he returned to them; will they be receptive to the interpretation of the dream, or will they dispute regarding it? Will they accept Yusuf's explanation as being true and thus recognise his supreme spiritual rank, and consequently free him from the torments of prison?

Allah's saying: 'That I may return to the people and that they may know' (*Yusuf:* 46) may make someone ask the question, 'Who ordered the cupbearer to go to Yusuf *peace be upon him*? Was it the king himself, or was it his retinue?'

We contend that the answer lies in the cupbearer's all-embracing statement which included both the king and his court.

Allah says:

قَالَ تَزۡرَعُونَ سَبۡعَ سِنِينَ دَأَبٗا فَمَا حَصَدتُّمۡ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنۢبُلِهِۦٓ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا مِّمَّا تَأۡكُلُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Then I can return to the people to inform them.' Joseph said,
'You will sow for seven consecutive years as usual. Store all
that you reap, left in the ear, apart from the little you eat [47]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 47)

Thus begins the interpretation of the king's dream. The Arabic word *'ad-da'ab'* (as usual) denotes constancy. It is as if Yusuf was asking the people of Egypt to farm industriously and without indolence.

Afterwards, the Lord continues to relate what Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: 'Store all that you reap, leaving it in the ear, apart from the little you eat' (*Yusuf:* 47). In other words, you should eat only a little portion of what you harvested through diligent and hard labour, and store the remainder of the untouched ears of grain.

The fact that Yusuf specifies that the ears should be preserved untouched indicates the miraculous nature of the Quran and of the Omniscience of Allah *the Almighty* Who revealed this Holy Book. Moreover, this sheds light on the great amount of knowledge Allah *the Almighty* conferred on Yusuf *peace be upon him* concerning all aspects of life. This knowledge ranged from economic issues to ways of storing grains, in addition to other fields.

As for the matter of storing grains, modern science has proved that if the ears of grain are stored in their entirety, the grain is protected and safeguarded from grain-eating weevils. Some scholars explained that this verse implies the grain should be stored not only in untouched ears, but also while the stems are attached. I contend, however, that the meaning of this verse is to leave only the ears untouched because the stems are used as animal fodder.

We know that a grain of wheat has two covers, as follows: the protective wrap which is separated from the seed during the process of threshing and the chaff which is then removed through winnowing. In fact, the grain of wheat also has a cover which unwraps and is separated from wheat during grinding. This wrap is called *'ar-radah'* and appears in two different forms: a rough wrap, and a smooth wrap.

Some people separate *'ar-radah'* from the flour, but they neglect or are ignorant of the scientific studies which have proven that eating bread that is made of white flour from which '*ar-radah*' has been removed can cause stomach problems. This covering that wraps around the grain not only protects the grain but also has great nutritional value.

The wealthy class in the Egyptian countryside used to remove *ar-radah* from the flour, and they called this *'ad-daqeeqah al-'alamah'* (pure flour). However, if you were to put this refined flour in your mouth, you will feel that it is unwholesome. On the other hand, you do not have the same feeling when you put whole-wheat flour in your mouth.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* refers to His Bounty on His slaves in His Saying: 'Its husked grain, its fragrant plants' (*ar-Rahman:* 12).

Modern scientists have discovered the value of grinding wheat while preserving the outer covering. They have found evidence to prove that those who consume bread that is made from refined white flour suffer from nutritional imbalance and must eventually eat bread that is made from only the husk of wheat, *'al-khubz as-sin'*, to restore the body's nutritional balance.

In the verse in question, Allah says: 'Store all that you reap, leaving it in the ear, apart from the little you eat' (*Yusuf:* 47). Thus, Yusuf *peace be upon him* told the cupbearer, who asked him to interpret the king's dream, that they must save as much harvest as possible during the upcoming seven fruitful years in preparation for seven years of drought. They should do this while eating the bare minimum during the first seven years of saving: '…apart from the little you eat' (*Yusuf:* 47). Allah continues to state Yusuf's interpretation of the king's dream:

ثُمَّ يَأۡتِي مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ذَٰلِكَ سَبۡعٞ شِدَادٞ يَأۡكُلۡنَ مَا قَدَّمۡتُمۡ لَهُنَّ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا مِّمَّا تُحۡصِنُونَ ٤٨

After that will come seven years of hardship which will
consume all but a little of what you stored up for them [48]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 48)

In this way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* predicted the seven years of drought that will follow seven years of productive and work-demanding harvest.

When Allah *the Almighty* describes the seven years as entailing '…hardship...' (*Yusuf:* 48), He implies that the years of drought will be taxing on the people and could even lead to famine if no portion of the harvest from the first seven productive years is stored. Furthermore, people are advised to eat only what is necessary during the first seven years so as to ensure their wellbeing during the following years of drought.

As a matter of fact, man depends on breathing, eating and drinking to survive, and food nourishes man and gives him the power to go through life. However, we eat food out of pleasure; most of what we eat is not consumed for energy. Obviously, if man wanted only to satisfy his hunger, he will be satisfied with boiled food, or simple bread and sauce dishes. However, we eat for enjoyment.

Referring to this fact, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…then eat it with enjoyment and good cheer' (*an-Nisa':* 4). In other words, He *the Almighty* tells the believers in Paradise to enjoy the food and not be worried about harmful side effects, nor about having to seek recourse to medicines to digest the food properly. This is what is meant by Allah's saying: '…with enjoyment...' (*an-Nisa':* 4). As for: '…good cheer' (*an-Nisa':* 4), it strictly refers to food that is both energising and beneficial to the body, but is not necessarily very tasty.

Back to the verse in question; the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'after that will come seven years of hardship which will consume all but a little of what you stored up for them' (*Yusuf:* 48). Obviously, the years of hardship did not literally consume what is stored; rather, it was the people who lived at that time. We clearly understand this because every event involves a time and place. Moreover, the action is sometimes attributed either to a time or to a place. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; in the following verse, the action is attributed to a place: 'Ask(1) [in] the town where we have been; ask the caravan we travelled with…' (*Yusuf:* 82). Clearly, we understand from this verse that what is intended is questioning the residents of the town that they were in as well as the members of the caravan that were accompanying them. On the other hand, the verse under discussion ascribes the action to a particular period. The people of Egypt will eat all their storage during the difficult years, except for a little, because after eating, they must save a certain amount of grains to be used as seeds in the year that follows the seven difficult and dry years.

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(1) *Al-Jurjani* opined that this command is metaphorical in which there is an ellipsis. See *Al-Jurjani, Dalai'l Al-I'Jaz.*

In Allah's saying: '…what you stored up (*tohsinoon*) for them' (*Yusuf:* 48), the Arabic verb *'tohsinoon'* (you store) is derived from '*hasana'* which denotes abstention. The noun is '*hisn'* which is literally used to refer to a stronghold which prevents the attack of the enemies. One can say, 'They dwelled within a fortification ('*al-hisn*')' to mean that they were protected by an impenetrable stronghold from the assailing enemy.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And all married women (*muhsanat*)…' (*an-Nisa':* 24). The word '*muhsanat*' comes from '*hasana*' and refers to the married women who abstain from committing fornication. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And [remember] she who guarded (*ahsanat*) her chastity…' (*al-Anbiya':* 91). This verse refers to Maryam (Mary), *al-batul* (the virgin)(1), peace be upon her, who guarded her chastity. Therefore, it is clear that *'hisn'* implies abstention.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* continues to state what *Yusuf* told the cupbearer by saying:

ثُمَّ يَأۡتِي مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ذَٰلِكَ عَامٞ فِيهِ يُغَاثُ ٱلنَّاسُ وَفِيهِ يَعۡصِرُونَ ٤٩

After that will come a year when the people will have abundant rain and will press grapes [49] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 49)

We should take into account that what Yusuf *peace be upon him* said in this verse is not a part of the interpretation of the dream, for the king's dream consisted of seven emaciated cows that were eating seven fat ones, as well as seven green ears of grain and seven dried ones. Therefore, after concluding his interpretation of the dream, Yusuf *peace be upon him* informed the cupbearer of what will logically happen after the years of hardship; namely, the lands will be productive and fruitful once again.

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(1) *The Arabic word 'al-batul' describes a woman who is a virgin and who does not have a husband. It is used to refer to that woman who has detached herself from this world and attached herself to Allah the Almighty. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, root 'batala'.*

This phenomenon can be called *'al-ghawth'* (rescue), as one sometimes says, '*Agheth fulan* (help that person)' when he is in need of aid. Interestingly, the Arabic word *'ghaith'* refers to rain which brings a drought to an end. As such, Allah's saying: '…will have abundant rain (*yughath*)...' (*Yusuf:* 49) implies that they will suffer in the seven years of hardship from a lack of indispensable Divine Bounty from which they derive their nourishment and sustenance.

He *the Almighty* concludes this verse by stating: 'After that will come a year when the people will have abundant rain and will press grapes' (*Yusuf:* 49). That is to say that they will press their grains and crops such as sesame, olives, grapes, sugarcane, and dates. Clearly, you only press such grains or fruits when there is enough to feed yourself and your dependants. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* has made it clear to us that they will be showered with bounties more than what was necessary to save them from the drought and what will give rise to a plentiful harvest that they can store.

The past few verses concerning the dream and its interpretation shed light on the dialogue between Yusuf *peace be upon him*–the man of truth–and the king's cupbearer. Furthermore, we have seen how the Quran made a transition from the scene in which the retinue was unable to unveil the hidden meaning of the dream, to the cupbearer asking permission to seek the interpretation of this dream, and finally to the conversation between Yusuf *peace be upon him* and the cupbearer.

Next, the Quran narrates what happened after the king knew about Yusuf's interpretation of his dream. Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلْمَلِكُ ٱئْتُونِى بِهِۦ ۖ فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُ ٱلرَّسُولُ قَالَ ٱرْجِعْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَسْـَٔلْهُ
مَا بَالُ ٱلنِّسْوَةِ ٱلَّٰتِى قَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّى بِكَيْدِهِنَّ عَلِيمٌ (٥٠)

The king said, 'Bring him to me,' but when the messenger came to fetch Joseph, he said, 'Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands – my Lord knows all about their treachery' [50] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 50)

This verse implies that the cupbearer returned to the court immediately after having been told the meaning of the dream, which he then conveyed to the court. Thereafter, the king insisted that the man who interpreted the dream be brought before him, for he was certain that a man of such insight could benefit him greatly. Upon the royal request, the cupbearer returned to bring Yusuf *peace be upon him* out of prison, but was surprised that the latter refused to leave and, instead, said to the one who came to take him to the royal court: ‘Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands–my Lord knows all about their treachery’ (*Yusuf:* 50).

Thus, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was not responsive to the man who had come to free him from his torments in jail. He made it clear that he will only be responsive if his innocence is proved and recognised by the king, for it is possible that this had been hidden from the king during all this time. For this reason, Yusuf *peace be upon him* wanted the king to investigate the matter of his innocence with regard to what had happened with the women who had cut their hands and had tried to seduce him into debauchery.

We should pay attention to the fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* made a subtle allusion to his innocence by saying: ‘…my Lord knows all about their treachery’ (*Yusuf:* 50). This statement is implicitly referring to what the women had told Yusuf *peace be upon him* regarding the necessity of responding to the lustful desire of the governor’s wife.

We should note that Quranic stories supply us with lessons that serve us in our daily lives. These narratives are not for entertainment; rather, their wisdom is meant to be a guiding light to the decisions that we make in life.

As a matter of fact, a man’s complete innocence is very important; that is, all unfounded doubts about someone must be discarded before tackling anything. In the same connection, Yusuf *peace be upon him* demanded that all accusations against him be lifted, such that no one may claim overtly or secretly that he had moral shortcomings. Someone could have said about him, ‘Is this not Yusuf who was involved in the affair with the governor’s wife and who made him yield to her?’

In the same vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I marvel at the patience of my brother Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his generosity–may Allah pardon him–for someone was sent to him to interpret the dream, and were I (in Yusuf’s place) I will have only told him (the interpretation) after being released (from prison). I marvel at his patience and generosity [a second time]–may Allah pardon him–for someone was sent to release him (from prison) and he refused to leave until his innocence was made known. Had I been in his place, I will have hurried through the door. But, he wanted first to be exonerated'.(1)

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emphasised Yusuf's remarkable patience, self-respect, uprightness and dignity by stating, 'The honorable, the son of the honorable, the son of the honorable, (was) Yusuf, the son of Ya'qub (Jacob), the son of Ishaq (Isaac), the son of Ibrahim (Abraham)'. Prophet Muhammad also said, 'Were an envoy to seek me out after having dwelled in prison for a long period like that of Yusuf *peace be upon him* I will have been responsive'. He *peace and blessings be upon him* then recited the following verse: 'But when the Messenger came to fetch Yusuf, he said, 'Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands….' (*Yusuf:* 50)(2)

In these Hadiths, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* illustrated Yusuf's extraordinary patience and uprightness, as well as his fear of having fingers pointing at him after being released from prison, saying, 'That is the one who seduced his master's wife'.

Moreover, this Prophetic Hadith alludes to Yusuf's insistence on proving his innocence, for it is more seemly for him to work towards establishing his innocence after being released from prison. This also means that an honourable person, by nature, does not foolishly take advantage of a situation; rather, he addresses each situation on its own terms and plans accordingly. Clearly, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was sure about his innocence, but he wanted to ascertain that the king will not be the last person to realise this.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir (11640). Al-Haythami said in his book Majma' Az-Zawid (7/40), 'Ibrahim Ibn Yazid Al-Qurashi Al-Makki's narrations are classified as discarded Hadiths.' As-Suyuti also narrated this Hadith in his book Ad-Dar Al-Manthur (4/548), and ascribed it to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Hatim, At-Tabarani, Ibn Mardawaih on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (2/332) and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (3116). At-Tirmidhi opined that this Hadith is classified as good. Likewise, this Hadith was narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (2/346). All these narrators related this Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayrah. Al-Hakim said, 'This Hadith is authentic according to the stipulations of Muslim, but neither Al-Bukhari nor Muslim have narrated this Hadith as the (above mentioned) version'. Adh-Dhahbi did not comment on Al-Hakim's statement.*

In this connection, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he affirmed, ‘Give up what is doubtful to you for that which is not doubtful; for truth is peace of mind and falsehood is doubt’.(1) Therefore, he saw that avoiding questionable affairs was an integral part of faith in Allah *the Almighty*. On the other side of the coin, some become envious when they see an eminent person, and their envy may cause them to speak badly and spread lies about who they are jealous of, making people unfairly doubt the eminent person’s integrity. Out of caution, you must therefore protect yourself by avoiding all circumstances that may raise suspicion; and when you come across anything doubtful or any form of doubt, you must shun it completely.

We have a lofty example in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is narrated that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was observing *‘i‘tikaf’* during the last ten days of *Ramadan* when his wife Safiyah Bint Huyayy visited him one night and talked with him for some time. After that, she stood up to return to her room, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accompanied her until she reached the door of the Mosque which faced his wife Umm Salama’s dwelling. At that moment, two members of the *Ansar* (Supporters) who were passing stopped to greet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then they departed. As they were leaving, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, ‘Do not run away. She is (my wife) Safiyyah Bint Huyayy’. Both of them said, ‘Glory be to Allah (how could we think something evil of the Prophet)’. Whereupon he explained, ‘Satan circulates in man’s body just like blood circulates in [his] body, and I was afraid lest it should instil any evil [thought] in your minds’.(2)

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi in his Musnad (1178), Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (1/200) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (2518) on the authority of Al-Hassan ibn ‘Ali. At-Tirmidhi graded this Hadith as a good, authentic Hadith.*

(2) *The soundness of this Hadith is agreed upon by both Al-Bukhari and Muslim, who narrated it on the authority of Safiyyah Bint Huyayy. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6219; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.2175.*

In the story we are discussing, the king summoned the women who had cut their hands and who had attempted to make Yusuf *peace be upon him* yield to their enticements. This is what the Lord *the Most High* says in the following verse:

قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُنَّ إِذْ رَٰوَدتُّنَّ يُوسُفَ عَن نَّفْسِهِۦ ۚ قُلْنَ حَٰشَ لِلَّهِ مَا عَلِمْنَا عَلَيْهِ مِن سُوٓءٍ ۚ
قَالَتِ ٱمْرَأَتُ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْـَٰٔنَ حَصْحَصَ ٱلْحَقُّ أَنَا۠ رَٰوَدتُّهُۥ عَن نَّفْسِهِۦ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَمِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

The king asked the women, 'What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?' They said, 'God forbid! We know nothing bad of him!' and the governor's wife said, 'Now the truth is out: it was I who tried to seduce him – he is an honest man' [51]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 51)

We know that the first attempt to seduce Yusuf *peace be upon him* was carried out by the governor's wife, but that the former remained chaste. After that the wife invited the women to her banquet, and the female guests cut their hands when they saw Yusuf's dazzling beauty. We also know for certain that the women almost overwhelmed him with sexual innuendos about which Yusuf said: '…If You do not protect me from their treachery, I shall yield to them and do wrong' (*Yusuf:* 33).

Next, the king called for the women and asked, 'What was this (past) concern of yours (*khatbukun*) when you tried to seduce Yusuf?' (*Yusuf:* 51) As for the Arabic word *'al-khatb'* from which '*khatbukun*' (this concern of yours) is derived, it denotes a great event or an unusual circumstance that is a subject of conversation among the people; it is not something that simply took place between two people. On the contrary, it is an event that shakes the city at the time it happens.

What Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to a group of angels is a case in point. Allah states: 'He [Ibrahim] said, "What, then, is your concern (*khatbukun*), O messengers?!" They said, "Surely we are sent to a guilty people"' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 31-32). In other words, the angels reassured Ibrahim *peace be upon him* of their mission; they were sent to punish the guilty community.

Likewise, upon returning to his people and finding that As-Samiri had fashioned a calf out of the gold taken from the people of Pharaoh, Allah states that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked As-Samiri: ‘He said, “What, then, was the reason [that made] you do this (*khatbuka*), O Samiri?”’ (*Ta Ha:* 95)

Back to the story of Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the verse under discussion; the king asked: ‘What was this (past) concern of yours when you tried to seduce Yusuf?’ (*Yusuf:* 51) This statement proves that the story was narrated to the king in detail, that he was greatly shocked, and that he deemed it to be a great event. The king’s reaction also sheds light on the universality of ethical principles which always remain the same and do not alter with time or place. The verse states that the women replied: ‘Allah forbid! We know nothing bad of him!’ (*Yusuf:* 51) Here, we notice that they failed to mention their own attempts at seducing Yusuf *peace be upon him* because the central point was to establish the latter’s innocence before the king. As for their proclamation: ‘Allah forbid!’ (*Yusuf:* 51), it is a way of affirming that Yusuf *peace be upon him* is too righteous to perform any misbehaviour, as Allah *the Almighty* had protected him from sinning. At that moment, the governor’s wife interjects: ‘…and the governor’s wife said, “Now the truth is out…”’ (*Yusuf:* 51). The admittance of the governor’s wife implies that it was no longer possible to hide her culpability, and that the hidden truth of the matter had finally been revealed. Truth had triumphed over falsehood, and it was necessary for her to confess what had truly taken place: ‘…it was I who tried to seduce him–he is surely [one] of those who are truthful’ (*Yusuf:* 51). The king’s wife continues her confession in the following verse saying:

ذَٰلِكَ لِيَعۡلَمَ أَنِّي لَمۡ أَخُنۡهُ بِٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِى كَيۡدَ ٱلۡخَآئِنِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

[Joseph said, ‘This was] for my master to know that I did not betray him behind his back: God does not guide the mischief of the treacherous [52] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 52)

This wife’s statement was intended to announce Yusuf’s innocence, and to communicate that she did not take advantage of his being away from them in prison to seek revenge on him for having refused her seduction. Moreover, she implies that she did not conspire, plot or even connive against him while he was locked up in prison.

This proves that wicked elements in the human soul can be triggered by a certain object, but when the possible interest disappears, the soul regains its natural agreeable character. In fact, the initial act of wrongdoing can sometimes be positively utilised by the transgressor as a means that encourages him to act virtuously afterwards in areas where he has no weak points. By doing so, the good act covers the misdeed, as the Lord *the Most High* states: ‘Surely, good deeds take away evil deeds. That is a reminder for the mindful’ (*Hud:* 114).

In fact, if a person exposes a transgressor’s misdeed, the exposer deprives society of the latter’s potential good deeds. It is for this reason that I often advise others to cover the misdeeds of wrongdoers, for this very sin may inspire the wrongdoer to perform good deeds that will wipe out his sins. In the same connection, it has been said, ‘If you examine human history, you will notice that even men of virtuous characters and principles have foibles and shortcomings. However, these great figures try to compensate for their shortcomings by performing good deeds that erase their sins. That is because they keep remembering their weaknesses, and this pushes them to do even more good’.

Having admitted her guilt, the governor’s wife said: ‘Allah does not guide the mischief of the treacherous’ (*Yusuf:* 52). In other words, she acknowledged that Allah *Glorified is He* thwarts the conniving traitors and prevents them from reaching their aims.

The governor’s wife continues, as stated in the Quran:

وَمَآ أُبَرِّئُ نَفۡسِيٓۚ إِنَّ ٱلنَّفۡسَ لَأَمَّارَةُۢ بِٱلسُّوٓءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّيٓۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ (٥٣)

I do not pretend to be blameless, for man’s very soul incites him to evil unless my Lord shows mercy: He is most forgiving, most merciful [53] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 53)

With this statement, the governor’s wife concluded her discourse. Here, she explained why she attended the royal gathering: she did not attend to absolve herself, since she said: ‘I do not pretend to be blameless, for man’s very soul incites him to evil...’ (*Yusuf:* 53)

Affirming the fact that the human soul, in general, incites man to do evil leads us to conclude that Yusuf *peace be upon him* as a human being, has desires.

A number of scholars(1) opined that the verse under discussion relates the speech of Yusuf *peace be upon him* in response to the governor's wife's confession: '…it was I who tried to seduce him–he surely is [one] of the truthful. This [I say] so that he may know I did not betray him behind his back: Allah does not guide the mischief of the treacherous' (*Yusuf:* 51-52).

According to this opinion, it is suitable for Yusuf's response to be: 'I do not pretend to be blameless, for man's very soul incites him to evil except when my Lord showers His Mercy [protecting a person from sinning]...' (*Yusuf:* 53). Upon reading the text in this context, one may interpret Yusuf's mention of the evil-inciting soul as a warning against being proud of one's own faith. Being a divinely ordained Messenger, he knows that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who saved him from the women's plots.

In the same connection, Yusuf's Prophethood was a form of Divine Mercy towards him, for the divinely conferred infallibility and Way of Guidance protected him from deviation into which any normal human being may fall.

Furthermore, it is out of Mercy that Allah *the Almighty* affirms that the inner self incites man to evil. This pithy statement amply clarifies the nature of the human soul; the desire does not simply disappear after inciting man to do one evil deed. On the contrary, you should be mindful, man, of the nature of the inner self! It continually urges man to do evil deeds.

In this connection, we know that all the Divine Obligations are either orders or prohibitions, and man may very well view these orders as a heavy burden. We also know that Divine Prohibitions may prevent man from actions that appear to be desirable; they appear to satisfy the person and please certain instincts within man.

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Paradise is surrounded by hardships, and Hellfire is surrounded by temptations'.(1) In this Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refers to the fact that sinful acts may be alluring, but a person with a sound mind has enough self-control to assess the long-term repercussions of his acts. Such a person only considers the immediate pleasures that result from his action after having contemplated its final outcome. In fact, some of what the person derives immediate short-lived pleasure from might be a cause of long-term difficulties.

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(1) *This opinion is held by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari and Ibn Abu Hatim. The most common interpretation which most appropriately fits the context of the story and its meanings is that the speaker in the verse was the governor's wife. We maintain this because the words of the verse were uttered in an unbroken manner in front of the king while Yusuf peace be upon him was not present, rather he was brought before the king only after the meeting had taken place. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/581.*

Hence, we say that the one who wrongs himself by following his lower desires is neither aware of the immense reward of obeying Allah *the Almighty* nor of the punishments of disobeying Him. Had this person considered the reward of obedience and the punishment that results from disobedience, he will surely be careful not to sin.

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The one who commits illegal sexual intercourse is not a believer at the time of committing illegal sexual intercourse, a thief is not a believer at the time of committing theft, and a drinker of alcohol is not a believer at the time of drinking'.(2) As such, at the moment a person commits a sin, he hides his faith and ignores the fact that his life may come to an end before he can repent or expiate for his wrongdoing. Man errs when he thinks about how long he will live, for no one knows when his appointed time will come, nor does anyone know how long it will be until Allah punishes him for his wrongdoings on the Judgement Day.

Each one of us should remember the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* '(A person's) death is (his) Day of Judgment, and he who dies faces his own Day of Judgment'.(3)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Anas Ibn Malik. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 3/153, 254; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2822; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunan, Hadith no. 2559.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in the book of Iman, on the authority of Abu Hurayra* Allah *be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2475; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 57.*

(3) *In his book, Al-'Ajluni mentioned this Hadith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik. The Hadith continues in the following manner: 'Mention death frequently, for if you remember it half-heartedly, [Allah the Almighty] will make it difficult for you, and if you remember it seriously [Allah the Almighty] will render it easy for you'. See Al-'Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa', Hadith no. 2618.*

We find a fine example in 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, the third Caliph after Prophet Muhammad, who used to stand in front of a grave and weep until his beard became wet with tears. Someone asked him the reason behind this, 'Why do you not weep when you mention Paradise and the Hellfire, but you weep when you stand in front of a grave?' He responded, 'I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* say, "Indeed, the grave is the first stage among the stages of the Hereafter. So, if one is saved from it, then what comes after it is easier than it. And if one is not saved from it, then what comes after it is worse than it".'(1) To sum up, let no one consider his appointed time of death is far-off.

The verse in question continues: '…except when my Lord showers His Mercy [protecting a person from sinning]: He is All Forgiving, Most Merciful' (*Yusuf:* 53).

We know that there are certain medications which cure, and that there are certain things which strengthen man's resistance to disease and fortify his immune system. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* is All Forgiving, and He overlooks one's sins and erases them. Moreover, He is Most Merciful: He offers man the ability to resist the spiritual diseases for man not to be afflicted by any ailments. In other words, He gives man power to resist evil so he does not fall into sin.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We send down the Quran as a healing and a mercy to those who believe' (*Al-Isra':* 82). The very act of hearing the Quran cures you from psychological ailments and fortifies your resistance to spiritual illnesses. In fact, listening to the Quran releases potential therapeutic energies in the depths of your being.

Furthermore, the Quran is a mercy for you when you embrace it as your Way of Guidance and apply it to your life. It makes you resistant to disease: it is both a medical treatment and a preventive care at the same time.

Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Imam Ahmad, Ibn Majah and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. At-Tirmidhi graded it as Hasan, Gharib (good but with only one narrator in one of its levels). See Ahmad, Musnad, 1/63; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no.4267; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunan, Hadith no. 2308.*

وَقَالَ ٱلۡمَلِكُ ٱئۡتُونِي بِهِۦٓ أَسۡتَخۡلِصۡهُ لِنَفۡسِيۖ فَلَمَّا كَلَّمَهُۥ قَالَ إِنَّكَ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ لَدَيۡنَا مَكِينٌ أَمِينٞ ﴿٥٤﴾

The king said, ‘Bring him to me: I will have him serve
me personally,’ and then, once he had spoken with him,
‘From now on you will have our trust and favour’ [54]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 54)

We notice that the king said: ‘Bring him to me…’ (*Yusuf:* 54) twice:(1) the first time was when he heard the interpretation of the dream, but Yusuf *peace be upon him* refused to leave the prison prior to having his innocence proven. Another possible interpretation of this part of the story is that he left prison and attended the meeting with the women, including the governor’s wife.

The king saw that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was endowed with high moral qualities and vast knowledge. After the first meeting between them, the king had a chance to think over the man’s qualities. Indeed, his first encounter with Yusuf *peace be upon him* assured the king and gave him peace of mind. Subsequently*, Yusuf peace be upon him* found a place in the king’s heart.

The second time is when the king wanted to draw Yusuf *peace be upon him* close to him and make him a royal advisor. Allah *the Almighty* conveys this idea in the verse under discussion: ‘…Bring him to me: I will draw him close to me’. Then, once he had spoken with him, he said, ‘From now on you dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position and our trust’ (*Yusuf:* 54).

This attachment or bond only occurred after the king had spoken with Yusuf *peace be upon him* and after the latter had created a good impression on him. After speaking with him, the king was sure that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had protected himself from the most irresistible instinct: sexual attraction.

Moreover, the king became certain that Yusuf *peace be upon him* accepted his fate in prison in which he dwelled for such a long period of time. The king also realised through the interpretation of the dream that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was a man of great learning and insight into the nature of things. He interpreted the dream despite the fact that he was imprisoned, and he only left prison to prove his innocence or after his innocence was confirmed.

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(1) The first time occurs in the following verse: ‘The king said, “Bring him to me”, but when the messenger came to fetch *Yusuf,* he said, “Go back to your master and ask him about what happened to those women who cut their hands—my Lord knows all about their treachery”’ (*Yusuf:* 50); and the second time is when the Lord *the Most High* says here: ‘The king said, “Bring him to me: I will draw him close to me”. Then, once he had spoken with him, he said, “From now on you will dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position and our trust”’ (*Yusuf:* 54).

For all the above-mentioned reasons, Yusuf *peace be upon him* became one of the king's close trustees. The king declared his trust in him by proclaiming: '…From now on you will dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position (*makeen*) and our trust' (*Yusuf:* 54). This statement puts an end to all possible plots and schemes against Yusuf *peace be upon him* for a place that is '*al-makeen*' (a secure and honourable position) is a place where no harm can reach a person because of his high position.

That is why the Lord *the Almighty* describes Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who descended with the Divine Revelation, by saying: 'This is the speech of a noble messenger, who possesses great strength and holds a secure and honourable position with the Lord of the Throne' (*at-Takwir:* 19-20).

Consequently, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was one of the ruler's confidants. In fact, it was he who was executing orders, and he had a bond with the subjects. Yusuf was endowed with power by the king, and he was also trustworthy with his people.

Problems in our contemporary societies occur when the ruler prefers the people he trusts over the experienced, honest people. That is how the delicate balance of justice is upset. The astute ruler should elect those endowed with both qualities: those who are worthy of the ruler's trust and who are, at the same time, honest with the people; and in this way, the balance of life is restored according to the Divine Way of Guidance.

When Yusuf *peace be upon him* heard the king make the declaration: '…From now on you will dwell with us, having a secure and honourable position and our trust' (*Yusuf:* 54), he decided to ask the king for something related to the interpretation of the dream: 'You will diligently sow for seven consecutive years as usual. Store all that you reap, leaving it in the ear, apart from the little you eat. After that will come seven years of hardship which will consume all but a little of what you stored up for them, After that will come a year when the people will have abundant rain and will press grapes' (*Yusuf:* 47-49). This is an economic agenda that demands planning, implementation, supervision, sound management, determination, and knowledge. Moreover, Yusuf's demand implied that the future will surely unfold in accordance with his interpretation of the dream. The verse reads:

قَالَ ٱجۡعَلۡنِي عَلَىٰ خَزَآئِنِ ٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٞ ٥٥

Joseph said, 'Put me in charge of the nation's storehouses:
I shall manage them prudently and care- fully' [55]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 55)

This statement confirms Yusuf's certainty that the impending years will require sound governance. There is no doubt that the upcoming years will be fruitful; however, the harvest of these years must not be squandered as they will provide the means to survive the approaching difficult years. The task (of ensuring that the grain is stored during the first seven years) demands both honesty and knowledge.

Clearly, Yusuf *peace be upon him* proved himself to be both honest and knowledgeable. Here arises a good question, which is, 'Is not Yusuf's demand an indirect way of asking for power?' But the rule(1) states that: he who asks for power should not be granted a position of authority'. We answer that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not ask for power, rather, he asked to reform (the agricultural planning of) Egypt in order to preach his Call and fulfil his Message. He was put in a position of authority and will therefore be obeyed, not being subservient nor forced to yield to the commands of others because he was completely confident and certain in his beliefs.

Certain dire situations arise in which the consequences of an inexperienced person taking power and failing are unbearable. In such situations, the person who is confident in his ability to resolve a problem must bring himself to the fore.

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(1) A proof of this principle is in the Hadith on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari who narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By Allah, we do not appoint someone to this post (public office of authority) who seeks it or someone who contends for it'. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.1733.

Let us offer an example to clarify this point; assume that a ship full of people is suddenly assailed by a storm. Imagine that the captain does not know what to do, and that someone claims he is able to get all out of the storm and lead them to safety. Clearly, the captain should let him take command of the ship if he has proof that the man is indeed competent. After the complicated situation is solved, the captain must thank the man who saved them and take command of his ship once again.

Clearly, one has the right to ask for power if such situations arise. If one sees that another inexperienced person is unable to solve a problem, one should offer to remedy the situation. In such a case, it is in fact a collective obligation to intervene for the sake of society at large. In this case, the person who asked for authority possesses two courageous traits:

Firstly: he asked for authority because he is confident in his ability to accomplish the task. Secondly: he prevented the person who does not have enough experience from assuming a position for which he had no administrative skills, as this will result in matters being governed in ignorance. That is, when the trustworthy, experienced people replace those who is incompetent, truth prevails and ignorance has no control over anything.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked the king: ‘Put me in charge of the nation’s storehouses: I shall manage them prudently and carefully’ (*Yusuf:* 55). The provisions in the storehouses will enable the ruler (Yusuf) to manage the economy. Some said he asked the king to place him in charge of the storehouses because he wanted to put economic policies into practice. These policies will make it possible for them (Egyptians) to subsist during the upcoming seven years of drought. Such an undertaking requires wisdom, diligence, and knowledge.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* charged people gold or silver for their food provisions. Those who did not own gold or silver bartered food with precious rocks or livestock. The poor who did not have such valuables sold their children into slavery. The head of the impoverished family used to say, ‘Take my child as a slave, and in return give me enough food to feed the rest of my family’.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* excelled in the management of affairs during the period of drought. Each person had to not eat excessively, thereby filling 'only one intestine rather than seven'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in the following Hadith, 'the believer fills one intestine (is satisfied with a little food), and the disbeliever eats to fill seven (eats much)'.(1)

During these years of hardship, administering provisions demanded meticulous planning and the avoidance of any wasteful spending. Each item was worth a particular value, and each person collected whatever was within his means. After the prolonged drought was replaced by abundant rains, Yusuf *peace be upon him* returned all things to their rightful owners. When Yusuf was asked, 'Why did you seize things from the people if you were going to return them anyway?' He replied, '(I did this) for each person to take only the minimum needed to survive through the years of drought'.

We witness this sort of phenomenon among those who feed their cattle with the subsidised bread. When the price of bread rises, each person purchases within his means and ascertains that none of the loaves goes to waste.

The economic power of Egypt during these times of drought was limited; therefore each person had to work hard for his or her livelihood.

This sort of struggle can be still witnessed in our lives: when someone does not have the means to buy meat, he might stop yearning for it. In fact, some may put on a show by conceitedly proclaiming, 'My stomach no longer tolerates meat!'

Moreover, a poor person might assert that he loves smaller sized fish because they are tasty, unlike the foul-smelling flesh of larger fish. This same person might claim to love fresh radish because it is delicious.

Many years ago, we used to study far away from our homes. In our study dormitories, we sometimes had only one piece of falafel which we used to split into parts to be enough for the last morsel of bread we ate. But if we had five pieces of falafel, each person ate half a falafel per bite. Thus, it is clear that each man acts according to his means and resources. A poet once said:

The soul desires things when it is tempted

but it is content when given little.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in the book of drinks on the authority of Jabir and Abdullah ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with them. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2060.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ يَتَبَوَّأُ مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَآءُ
نُصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَن نَّشَآءُ وَلَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

In this way We settled Joseph in that land to live wherever he wished: We grant Our mercy to whoever We will and do not fail to reward those who do good [56] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 56)

Thus Allah *the Almighty* established Yusuf's authority in the land of Egypt and the latter administered the affairs of Egypt in a diligent and just manner. When the time of drought came, it did not only afflict Egypt but also the surrounding regions. This is proven by the fact that some people came to Egypt from other regions asking for provisions. Yusuf's brothers, who travelled from Ash-Sham (northern area of the Arabian Peninsula) asking for food not only for themselves but also for their families who were waiting for them, is a case in point. This demonstrates that the area inflicted with drought was very vast.

We can understand from the Lord's saying: 'In this way we settled Yusuf in that land to live wherever he wished...' (*Yusuf:* 56) that although Yusuf *peace be upon him* owned houses in many places, no one should think of him as an extravagant squanderer of public funds; but one should remember that people in authority take good care of the region where the ruler's house is located.

This fact can be seen in the modern world: when a head of state visits a certain part of his country, local authorities repave the streets, mend the facilities and sometimes beautify the surroundings by planting flowers. As a matter of fact, if local authorities labour so intensively when a head of state is on a visit, how well maintained do you think a place will be if the ruler had a mansion therein? There is no doubt that local authorities will take good care of maintaining the public facilities in such a region.

Hence, the saying of Allah: 'In this way We settled Yusuf in that land to live wherever he wished...' (*Yusuf:* 56) implies that the public facilities of the entire country where Yusuf *peace be upon him* lived were well maintained. For this reason, no one should misinterpret this verse to mean that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was living luxuriously and squandering extravagantly. Rather, we should understand that these expenditures benefitted those around him, whether intentionally or coincidentally.

That is to say that Yusuf's full mastery over Egypt was not only a form of mercy for him, but for the people of Egypt as well. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the same verse: 'We grant our mercy to whoever We will and do not fail to reward those who do good' (*Yusuf:* 56).

In this way, whoever did not have access to potable water will enjoy a clean source of water, and whoever had difficulty finding a comfortable environment in which to live will find that his district will become comfortable, being fully endowed with the facilities of that time. This is because the house of Yusuf *peace be upon him*–who had been granted complete authority over Egypt–was next to his home. Consequently, the needs of that neighbour will be met thanks to the administrative structure and the authorities which cared for all the people living therein. Hence, granting Yusuf *peace be upon him* mastery over the land of Egypt was a form of Mercy from the Lord not only towards Yusuf, but also towards those around him.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes this noble verse by asserting: '…and do not fail to reward those who do good' (*Yusuf:* 56). The Arabic word *'al-mushin'* (a doer of good) refers to a person whose performance exceeds what is demanded of him.

In this verse, it is clearly noted that the act of *'ihsan'* (doing good) is attributed to Yusuf *peace be upon him*; this is because having built houses in different parts of Egypt, he treated the people around his houses well by ensuring high standards of public facilities and other services.

As a matter of fact the Lord *the Most High* fully and copiously rewards the people of *ihsan*, just as He rewarded Yusuf *peace be upon him* by establishing his authority in the land of Egypt and making his subordinates love him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَأَجۡرُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ خَيۡرٞ لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَكَانُواْ يَتَّقُونَ ٥٧

The reward of the Hereafter is best for those
who believe and are mindful of God [57]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 57)

Here, the Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that His Reward to *'al-muhsineen'* (the people who do good) is not confined to this world. Rather, He confers a better and everlasting reward on them in the Hereafter.

As for the Arabic word *'khayr'* (the best), it can have two distinct connotations: firstly, it may denote that one thing is better than another thing, yet both of them possess the quality of goodness. This is the intended meaning in the verse under discussion. A case in point is Prophet Muhammad's Hadith in which he said, 'A strong believer is better (*khayr*) and dearer to Allah than a weak one, and both are good. Adhere to that which is beneficial for you. Keep asking Allah for help and do not refrain from it. If you are afflicted in any way, do not say, "If I had taken this or that step, it will have resulted in such and such", but only say, "Allah has determined this and did as He willed". The word 'if' opens the gates of satanic thoughts'.(1)

Secondly, this word, i.e. *'khayr'* (the best) can be used as the antithesis of evil. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So he who has done an atom's weight of good (*khayran*) shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8).

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* wants to indicate that there has to be a balance in this life. However, this balance is not achieved if you were to say to man in general that he will be rewarded for his good deeds in the Hereafter, for at that time only the true believer will be rewarded for his good deeds. The disbeliever, on the other hand, transgresses the rights of others, sheds blood, steals, and/or causes corruption on earth as he does not believe in the Hereafter.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Muslim and ibn Majah on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/366, 370; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.2664; and ibn Majah, Sunan, Hadith no.79.*

This is precisely the reason why Allah *the Almighty* has decreed that rewards take two forms, as follows: a reward in this world as a recompense for any good deeds the doers of good may have performed, be they believers or disbelievers; and a reward in the Hereafter that the Lord *the Most High* prepares for those who believe in Him *Glorified is He*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: 'The reward of the Hereafter is the best for those who believe and are mindful of Allah' (*Yusuf:* 57). This verse clarifies that the reward of the life to come is far better than the reward of this worldly life because the reward of the former is eternal, whereas the reward of the latter is temporal. In fact, man will lose the reward of this worldly life either when it expires or when death overtakes him.

The different natures of both rewards are of particular importance because man's time in this world is confined to the length of his life span, whereas the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that life in the Hereafter shall be eternal.

Allah *the Almighty* then speaks of Yusuf's brothers, saying:

وَجَآءَ إِخۡوَةُ يُوسُفَ فَدَخَلُواْ عَلَيۡهِ فَعَرَفَهُمۡ وَهُمۡ لَهُۥ مُنكِرُونَ ٥٨

Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves
before him. He recognized them – though they did
not recognize him [58] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 58)

This verse tells us clearly that Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised his brother, whereas they did not recognise him. This is understandable because they threw him into the well when he was still a young boy. After the travellers found him, the journey of life took its course and he was sold to the governor of Egypt. Then, Yusuf experienced the events that we have examined, including the governor's wife's trying to seduce him and his seven years in prison. During these long years, Yusuf *peace be upon him* became physically mature and strikingly beautiful.

Clearly, such events leave their mark on a man's physical features. Moreover, Yusuf's brothers came after Yusuf had assumed a very high position within the government, and this prestige obliged him to be royally arrayed and regally posed.

On the other hand, Yusuf *peace be upon him* recognised his brothers because he was separated from them when they were young adults and when the effects of time had already left an impression on their physical features. We know that, with the passing of time, a person's physical traits become more clearly delineated. However, the physical changes that happen to an adult are much less than the changes that happen to a child when he grows.

The brothers were compelled to seek Yusuf's help because of the drought which not only afflicted Egypt, but also the surrounding areas. Yusuf's fame became widespread because he had saved food provisions for the time of drought. That is why his brothers were sent by their father to ask for provisions and food.

The brothers did not imagine for a split-second that the person in front of them was their brother Yusuf whom they had cast into the well.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُم بِجَهَازِهِمْ قَالَ ٱئْتُونِي بِأَخٍ لَّكُم مِّنْ أَبِيكُمْ ۚ
أَلَا تَرَوْنَ أَنِّيٓ أُوفِي ٱلْكَيْلَ وَأَنَا۠ خَيْرُ ٱلْمُنزِلِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

And once he had given them their provisions, he said,
'Bring me the brother [you left with] your father!
Have you not seen me giving generous measure and
being the best of hosts? [59] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 59)

There is no doubt that they spoke to him of their condition, of their father and brother, Benyamin (Benjamin), nor is it not clear that he ordered for them to be fully furnished with provisions after they asked for them.(1) In this verse, the Arabic word '*jihaz*' refers to the provisions for which they, i.e. Yusuf's brothers, had left their country and come to him in Egypt.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, ibn Kathir mentioned that As-Suddi and others said that when Yusuf peace be upon him addressed his brothers, he asked them, 'Why have you come to my country?' They replied, 'Governor, we are here (to ask) for provisions'. He then asked, 'Are you spies?' Having said, 'By* Allah*, we are not (spies)!' Yusuf responded, 'So, where have you come from?' The brothers replied, 'From the land of Kan'an, and our father is Ya'qub, the Prophet of Allah'. Yusuf then asked, 'Does he have other children?' 'Yes, we used to be twelve brothers, but our youngest brother, who was the dearest to our father, perished in the wilderness. However, our half-brother is still alive, and our father kept him to help him forget his grief about his lost son', they replied. So Yusuf peace be upon him ordered them to be housed and served generously. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/483.*

Having provided them with provisions, Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked them to bring their brother, Benyamin, with them the next time. He said to them: 'Have you not seen me giving a generous measure and being the best of hosts?'(1) (*Yusuf:* 59) This statement is a reminder that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was generous and gave them a generous measure. Apparently, the brothers asked him for more provisions under the pretext that they had a younger brother whom they had left with their elderly father. Upon hearing this, Yusuf *peace be upon him* asked them to bring their brother in return for an extra measure of provisions. Being a just ruler, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not like to give out provisions without clear proof of need. Each of the brothers came to Egypt on camels, loaded with goods that they intended to give in exchange for food. Yusuf *peace be upon him* made it clear that if they brought Benyamin with them the next time, they will be granted an extra load of food provisions.

The brothers related Yusuf's condition to their father when they asked him to let Benyamin go on the journey with them. The following verse makes mention of their plea; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We shall be entitled to another camel-load of grain…' (*Yusuf:* 65).

As for the statement: '... I have been the best of hosts' (*Yusuf:* 59), it means that Yusuf *peace be upon him* warmly welcomed his guests and treated them generously. His brothers were cognisant of this when they were treated kindly and were housed in luxurious guest quarters. In these guestrooms, anything that a person could possibly need was at their disposal.

The Arabic word for host which is used in this verse is *'munzil'*; it is derived from the verb *'nazala'*, that is, 'to descend'. This appears to be antithetical to the idea of exalting or honouring a guest. In reality, however, a *'munzil'* is someone who furnishes a guesthouse with all the necessary provisions. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* describes Paradise as being *'nuzul'* in the following verse: 'A hospitable gift (*nuzulan*) from the Forgiving, the Merciful' (*Fussilat:* 32). Therefore, due to His Absolute Clemency and Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* has fashioned Paradise to be beyond man's imagination. As long as Allah *the Almighty*

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(1) *The Arabic word 'an-nuzul' implies dwelling in a place. The words 'an-nuzul' and 'nuzul' also refer to what is served to the guests. See ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, the root 'nazala'.*

Himself is the One Who prepares paradise, then it is for certain beyond all human imaginations.

In the same vein, I once told my brothers and friends who were amazed by the luxury of a grand hotel in San Francisco, ‘When a person sees something that is sumptuous, lavish or beautiful that someone else owns, he reacts in two possible ways which reflect the state of his soul; he either reacts enviously and therefore with a degree of hatred and odium, or, if he is a believer, he feels happy and says, “This worldly blessing that I behold with my eyes makes me filled with a longing for Paradise because I am looking at what was created by one man for another. And if this was the creation of man, how will the Lord’s Creation of paradise be?” After all, it is He Who created the universe and all men therein!’

I often say that every time I meet someone who has been gifted with a bounty, my belief in Allah *the Almighty* grows more steadfast. Things which are fashioned by one person for another cannot be compared to those that the Creator of mankind has fashioned for the believers.

As for the person who regards someone’s blessing enviously, he is depriving himself of the happiness that this blessing brings to others, himself included. This is because the Lord’s Bounty is propitious not only for its bearer but also for the person who delights in the blessings of others. If you delight in the fortunes of others, be sure that a blessing will come to you. However, if you resent the fortunes of others, then blessings will stay away from you.

For this reason, you must delight in a blessing that someone else has been granted, in order for blessings to come to you. If you act accordingly, you will not burden yourself trying to obtain or maintain blessings because they will come to you through Divine Grace.

Back to the verse in question; when Yusuf said: ‘I have been the best of hosts’ (*Yusuf:* 59), he asserts how justly he treated them; a point which is proven by the fact that he has given them full measure and treated them generously. Furthermore, there is no doubt that when they bring their younger brother, they will be met with the same warm welcome.

Afterwards, The Quran mentions Yusuf’s discourse with his brothers:

فَإِن لَّمْ تَأْتُونِى بِهِۦ فَلَا كَيْلَ لَكُمْ عِندِى وَلَا تَقْرَبُونِ ﴿٦٠﴾

You will have no more corn from me if you do not bring him to me, and you will not be permitted to approach me [60] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 60)

Yusuf *peace be upon him* was aware of the fact that it was difficult for the brothers to bring Benyamin (Benjamin) with them to Egypt. Clearly, their father will be reluctant to entrust the brothers with him. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* gave them the following warning: ‘You will have no more wheat from me if you do not bring him to me...’ (*Yusuf:* 60). As a matter of fact, *peace be upon him* gave this warning to his brothers and he also knew fully well that they had no choice but to obey him. After all, their country was barren and afflicted by both drought and famine. Furthermore, he added: ‘…and you will not be permitted to approach me’ (*Yusuf:* 60). This implies that they will not be allowed to approach the land of Egypt over which he has total authority. As we shall see, the brothers will tell their father: ‘Father, we have been denied any more wheat [unless we take our brother with us]; so send our brother back with us that we may be given another measure. We shall guard him carefully’ (*Yusuf:* 63).

Having been warned by Yusuf *peace be upon him* the brothers replied saying what is told to us by Allah *the Almighty* in the following verse:

قَالُوا۟ سَنُرَٰوِدُ عَنْهُ أَبَاهُ وَإِنَّا لَفَٰعِلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

They said, ‘We shall do all we can to persuade his father to send him with us, indeed we shall’ [61] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 61)

The statement: ‘We shall do all we can to persuade(1) his father’ (*Yusuf:* 62) implies that it will not be easy to convince his father to hand over the son to them. Moreover, the brothers recalled how they treated Yusuf *peace be upon him* beforehand. We should also take into account that the act of persuasion often requires negotiation, give and take, or even manipulation. Previously, we have discussed this idea in Allah’s saying: ‘The woman in whose house he was living tried to seduce him’ (*Yusuf:* 23).

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(1) *In other words, we will do everything within our means to ensure that he is brought to you. Indeed, we will spare no effort to prove that we mean what we say. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 2/483.*

In the verse under discussion, the brothers underlined their intention to persuade their father saying: '… indeed we shall' (*Yusuf:* 61). In other words, they will exert their utmost effort to convince their father to send Benyamin with them, knowing well that it is a great favour to ask of their father and at the same time a difficult thing to accomplish. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالَ لِفِتْيَٰنِهِ ٱجْعَلُوا۟ بِضَٰعَتَهُمْ فِى رِحَالِهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْرِفُونَهَآ
إِذَا ٱنقَلَبُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰٓ أَهْلِهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ٦٢

Joseph said to his servants, 'Put their [traded] goods back into their saddle- bags, so that they may recognize them when they go back to their family, and [be eager to] return' [62] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 62)

In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* ordered his servants to pack the merchandise–which they had intended, in their first meeting, to barter in exchange for wheat and foods–into his brothers' saddlebags. Moreover, Yusuf's servants were instructed to do this in secrecy, thereby providing them with an incentive to return once again.(1) After relating this incident, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَلَمَّا رَجَعُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰٓ أَبِيهِمْ قَالُوا۟ يَٰٓأَبَانَا مُنِعَ مِنَّا ٱلْكَيْلُ فَأَرْسِلْ
مَعَنَآ أَخَانَا نَكْتَلْ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ٦٣

When they returned to their father, they said, 'Father, we have been denied any more corn, but send our brother back with us and we shall be given another measure. We shall guard him carefully' [63] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 63)

This was the first thing that the brothers told their father after their return with the provisions. They wanted to clarify to Ya'qub p*eace be upon him* that they will be denied re-entrance to Egypt if they did not bring Benyamin with them.

Furthermore, the brothers told their father how generously they were treated by the governor of Egypt. They made it clear to him that they will be given another measure only if he allowed Benyamin to go with them to Egypt. They further assured their father that they will take good care of him. Clearly, the brothers were trying to allay their father's suspicions, given what they had done to Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the past.

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(1) *Regarding this issue, ibn Kathir mentioned many different opinions. One of these opinions is that Yusuf peace be upon him feared that the brothers did not have other goods to exchange for food. Yet others opined that he was too ashamed to charge his brothers and his father for food. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/483.*

At that point, the Lord *the Most High* states Ya'qub's response, saying:

قَالَ هَلْ ءَامَنُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا كَمَآ أَمِنتُكُمْ عَلَىٰٓ أَخِيهِ
مِن قَبْلُ ۖ فَٱللَّهُ خَيْرٌ حَٰفِظًا ۖ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

He said, 'Am I to entrust him to you as I did his brother before? God is the best guardian and the Most Merciful of the merciful' [64] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 64)

Here, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* is reminding his children that due to the fact that they had previously lost Yusuf *peace be upon him* and alleged that a wolf had devoured him, they were not worthy of his trust this time. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* added: '…Allah is the Best Guardian and the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 64). This statement alludes that he had agreed to let Benyamin accompany them to Egypt, for he was praying to Allah *the Almighty* to guard his son during their journey.

After this conversation ended, Ya'qub's sons started unpacking their provisions. Allah *the Almighty* says regarding this incident:

وَلَمَّا فَتَحُوا۟ مَتَٰعَهُمْ وَجَدُوا۟ بِضَٰعَتَهُمْ رُدَّتْ إِلَيْهِمْ ۖ قَالُوا۟ يَٰٓأَبَانَا مَا نَبْغِى ۖ هَٰذِهِۦ
بِضَٰعَتُنَا رُدَّتْ إِلَيْنَا ۖ وَنَمِيرُ أَهْلَنَا وَنَحْفَظُ أَخَانَا وَنَزْدَادُ كَيْلَ بَعِيرٍ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ كَيْلٌ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٦٥﴾

Then, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their goods had been returned to them and they said, 'Father! We need no more [goods to barter]: look, our goods have been returned to us. We shall get corn for our household; we shall keep our brother safe; we shall be entitled to another camel-load of grain – an extra measure so easily achieved!' [65] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 65)

Thus, they discovered that the merchandise that they had brought to Egypt with the intention of exchanging them for food provisions had been returned to them. Moreover, they declared to their father that they could not possibly desire more, for they had actually received the food provisions they needed to sustain themselves and their families.

The brothers recapitulated: they had to bring their younger brother on their next trip to Egypt, and they will surely take good care of him and will return to their homes with an extra camel-load of grain. This is something easily granted by the governor of Egypt.

In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the condition Ya’qub laid down for his sons, saying:

قَالَ لَنْ أُرْسِلَهُۥ مَعَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ تُؤْتُونِ مَوْثِقًا مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لَتَأْتُنَّنِى بِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ
أَن يُحَاطَ بِكُمْ ۖ فَلَمَّآ ءَاتَوْهُ مَوْثِقَهُمْ قَالَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ ﴿٦٦﴾

He said, ‘I will never send him with you, not unless you swear by God that you will bring him back to me if that is humanly possible.’ Then, when they had given him their pledge, he said, ‘Our words are entrusted to God’ [66]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 66)

Here, we notice how kind-hearted Ya’qub *peace be upon him* is, for he accepted to send Benyamin (Benjamin) with the brothers to Egypt. This kindness is also expressed in his saying: ‘…Allah is the Best Guardian and the Most Merciful of the merciful’ (*Yusuf:* 64). He, however, demanded that the brothers pledge solemnly to return Benyamin safely. The only possible justification for returning from Egypt without him could be if they were faced with circumstances that could not be resolved by human means, such as being surrounded by enemies who wanted to kill them all. One might say that Ya’qub’s saying: ‘…if that is humanly possible...’ (*Yusuf:* 65) is a form of prophetic cautiousness.

Afterwards, Ya’qub’s sons gave him their pledge, and swore to return Benyamin back safely from Egypt, declaring the Lord *Glorified is He* a witness over them.

When Ya’qub *peace be upon him* said: ‘…Our words are witnessed by Allah’ (*Yusuf:* 66), he was referring to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* was fully aware of this oath and guaranteed it, and if his sons were to break this oath, Allah *the Almighty* will punish them.

Afterwards, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* gave further advice to his twelve children:

وَقَالَ يَٰبَنِيَّ لَا تَدۡخُلُواْ مِنۢ بَابٖ وَٰحِدٖ وَٱدۡخُلُواْ مِنۡ أَبۡوَٰبٖ مُّتَفَرِّقَةٖۖ وَمَآ أُغۡنِي عَنكُم مِّنَ
ٱللَّهِ مِن شَيۡءٍۖ إِنِ ٱلۡحُكۡمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِۖ عَلَيۡهِ تَوَكَّلۡتُۖ وَعَلَيۡهِ فَلۡيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلۡمُتَوَكِّلُونَ ٦٧

He said, 'My sons, do not enter all by one gate – use different gates. But I cannot help you against the will of God: all power is in God's hands. I trust in Him; let everyone put their trust in Him' [67] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 67)

We should take into account that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* made this statement prior to the brothers' second journey to Egypt, that is, after having known of both Yusuf's generous hospitality towards them and the fact that their merchandise had been returned to them. In short, he knew that the brothers had gained the favour of the governor of Egypt.

In general, when someone assumes a high position, it is expected that he will have rivals. This explains Ya'qub's wariness and fear that someone might plot against his sons who were, after all, foreigners in Egypt.

Thus he, i.e. Ya'qub *peace be upon him* ordered them to enter Egypt through different gates. In the past, the travellers used to access the old Egyptian cities through various gates which were opened and closed at appointed hours. By entering the city through separate gates, the brothers attracted the least attention possible.

For fear that his sons will be envied by others, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* ordered them to enter from different gates. We should note that envy (and its potentially malicious consequences) is a reality (which should not be denied).

That is why Allah *the Almighty* has taught us to seek refuge in Him from envy, since He knows that human means cannot defend oneself against the harms that envy can sometimes cause. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn; From the evil of what He has created; And from the evil of the utterly dark night when it comes; And from the evil of those who blow on knots; And from the evil of the envious when he envies' (*al-Falaq:* 1-5). When it comes to matters of envy, it is impossible to seek refuge in a fellow human being. This is because the source of envy (that is, the envious person who is casting the evil eye) is often hard to identify. Indeed, the 'radiations' of the envious person's eye can assail anyone who has been blessed. Moreover, since we live in an age of unprecedented material development in which radiation has been used to split things, it is conceivable that envy also has 'radiation' which Allah *the Almighty* gives to certain individuals. In these cases, a simple look may be as piercing and harmful as an arrow or a bullet.

In the same connection Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and none knows the hosts of your Lord but He Himself' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). So, why, someone may ask, does Allah *the Almighty* give such abilities to some of His creatures?!

We contend, 'He *Glorified is He* endows some of His creatures with gifts which they misuse. In addition, each human being is endowed with this injurious gaze to a certain degree. However, it is envy that generates the deleterious effects of this evil look. Keep in mind that one can admire things without being envious simply by saying, "Allah's Will (be done); there is no power but from Allah. O Allah, bless this thing or person!"'(1)

In this way, one puts out the flame of envy which fuels the evil eye. You should also seek refuge in Allah, the Creator of mankind and of all wonders, by reciting the following verse: 'Say "I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn; From the evil of what He has created; And from the evil of the utterly dark night when it comes; And from the evil of those who blow on knots; And from the evil of the envious when he envies"' (*al-Falaq:* 1-5). You could also recite the words that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say when supplicating Allah *the Almighty* for protection of Al-Hassan and Al-Hussayn*, Allah be pleased with them*. These words are, 'I seek refuge with Your Perfect Words from every devil, from poisonous pests and from every evil, harmful, envious eye'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, ‘Your forefather (i.e. Ibrahim (Abraham)) used to seek refuge with Allah for Ishmael (Ismail) and Ishaq (Issac) by reciting these words’.(1)

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And why did you not say when you entered your garden, "Allah's Will (be done); there is no power but from Allah?"' (*al-Kahf*: 39)

It is also known that ‘When anything distressed the Prophet, he prayed’.(2) He used to do this because such a problem that distresses him or one of his followers could not be resolved by human means. When such problems befall man, one must take refuge in the Lord, the Powerful Supporter, but of course after taking the secondary means into consideration. In this way, your invocation will be that of a distressed person who is urgently in need of help; rather than that of an indolent person who does not consider the secondary means.

In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Who [other than Allah] answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes evil…’ (*an-Naml:* 62). A distressed person is one who has no solutions to his problem, and only implored Allah *the Almighty* after having made use of everything that was available to him. So, you should not ask for Divine Help before making full use of what He *the Almighty* has provided for you.

In the verse under discussion, we find that Ya’qub *peace be upon him* had advised his children, in fear of envy, not to enter as a group through one gate, but to enter through different gates. However, firm faith in Allah *the Almighty* and submission to the Divine Decree are clear in Ya’qub’s words when he said: ‘But I cannot help you against the Will of Allah....’ (*Yusuf:* 67). In other words, my advice to you cannot protect you from anything that is willed by Allah *the Almighty*. My words are merely cautionary, but it is Allah *the Almighty* Who decides whether or not you will reap the fruit of taking such cautionary steps. It is for this reason that Ya’qub *peace be upon him* added: ‘…all power is in Allah’s hands. I trust in Him; let everyone put their trust in Him’ (*Yusuf:* 67). The destiny of each creature depends on Allah *the Almighty* and clearly Ya’qub

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas* Allah *be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi graded this Hadith as good and authentic. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 1/270; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2060; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4737.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 5/388; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no.1319.*

peace be upon him places his trust in Allah. Indeed, it behoves every believer to place his trust in Allah *the Almighty*.

Ya'qub's sons heeded their father's advice as shown in the following verse in which the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا۟ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَهُمْ أَبُوهُم مَّا كَانَ يُغْنِى عَنْهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن شَىْءٍ إِلَّا حَاجَةً فِى
نَفْسِ يَعْقُوبَ قَضَىٰهَا ۚ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَذُو عِلْمٍ لِّمَا عَلَّمْنَٰهُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

And, when they entered as their father had told them, it did not help them against the will of God, it merely satisfied a wish of *Ya'qub*. He knew well what We had taught him, though most people do not [68] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 68)

In other words, the brothers' entry through different gates could not prevent the unfolding of Allah's Predestination, since nothing can thwart His Decree. Perhaps the father wanted to prevent the plots, suspicions or the evil eye of enviers from afflicting his children; but even after taking all precautions, there is nothing that can resist Allah's Decree.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…it merely satisfied a wish of Ya'qub…' (*Yusuf:* 68). Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was fully aware of the reality that nothing can go against Allah's Will; for any cautionary measures cannot help people avert Allah's Predestination.

The Lord *the Most High* says the following about Ya'qub *peace be upon him*: '…For he was, due to what we had taught him, full of knowledge' (*Yusuf:* 68). In other words, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* fully understood the fact that one must utilise the means at hand. He was also fully aware that pursuing the secondary causes and means does not go against putting one's trust in Allah *the Almighty* for Allah has created these means and causes as a mercy for the people.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes this verse by His Saying: '…though most people do not know' (*Yusuf:* 68). That is to say that most people are unable to identify the fact that they must both utilise the means at hands while seeking the Help of Allah *the Almighty* at the same time. This is precisely what makes life difficult for such people.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا۟ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ ءَاوَىٰٓ إِلَيْهِ أَخَاهُ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّىٓ أَنَا۠
أَخُوكَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

Then, when they presented themselves before Joseph,
he drew his brother apart and said, 'I am your brother,
so do not be saddened by their past actions' [69]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 69)

When the brothers presented themselves before Yusuf *peace be upon him* he welcomed them warmly and graciously. This hospitality was granted because they fulfilled their promise to him by bringing his full brother Benyamin. It is clear that Yusuf *peace be upon him* longed to see his brother Benyamin. We have learned previously that Benyamin is Yusuf's only full brother since they share the same mother (Rahil), while the rest of the brothers were born to different mothers.

The Lord's saying: '…he drew his brother…' (*Yusuf:* 69) indicates that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was longing to see his brother once again.

Moreover, saying: 'I am your brother, so do not be saddened by their past actions' (*Yusuf:* 69) makes it clear that his brothers had ostracised and mistreated Benyamin for some time. That is why Yusuf *peace be upon him* tried to cheer his younger brother up and to relieve the pain caused by his brothers' actions.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَلَمَّا جَهَّزَهُم بِجَهَازِهِمْ جَعَلَ ٱلسِّقَايَةَ فِى رَحْلِ
أَخِيهِ ثُمَّ أَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنٌ أَيَّتُهَا ٱلْعِيرُ إِنَّكُمْ لَسَٰرِقُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

And, once he had given them their provisions, he placed the
drinking-cup in his brother's pack. A man called out, 'People of
the caravan! You are thieves!' [70] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 70)

This verse indicates that Yusuf *peace be upon him* had supplied them with food provisions as he had promised and as he had done in the past. But he wanted his brother Benyamin (Benjamin) to stay with him in Egypt. Moreover, how could he take him from his brothers who had taken a solemn oath to return him to their father and not to lose him or fall short of their duty regarding him, as they had previously done with Yusuf *peace be upon him* in the past?

Clearly, a stratagem was necessary to be able to keep Benyamin with Yusuf. This plot was to be indirectly carried out by his brothers who had mistreated Yusuf *peace be upon him* and who were very envious of him and of his brother, Benyamin.

Here, the story of the king's drinking-cup which was used as a measuring instrument and which was placed in his brother's camel-pack, comes to the fore.

As for the Arabic word *'as-siqayah',* it denotes various meanings, all of which are derived from the root *'saqa'* (spelled with the letters *sin, qaf* and *ya'*). It refers to the act of providing pilgrims and people with drinking water.

In this connection, the Quran says: 'What! do you make (one who undertakes) the giving of drink to the pilgrims and the guarding of the Sacred Mosque like him who believes in Allah and the Last Day…' (*at-Tawba:* 19).

As-Siqayah may also refer to the water storage from which people drink, or even the bucket that is used to pull water from a well. In the verse in question, *'as-siqayah'* refers to the king's drinking-cup that was also used as a measure for the food provisions; it indicated the value of what is measured.

In the same connection, the Arabic word *'saa''* is a synonym of the word *'siqayah',* and therefore it also refers to a drinking-cup, a measure for provisions and a utensil to draw water from wells.

Allah *the Almighty* relates the stratagem used by Yusuf *peace be upon him* to keep Benyamin with him, saying: 'He placed the drinking-cup in his brother's pack' (*Yusuf:* 70). In other words, he, i.e. Yusuf, ordered one of his servants to place the royal drinking-cup in Benyamin's camel-pack. A pack which is carried by camels and which contains a traveller's belongings is referred to in Arabic as *'ar-rahl'.*

Having mounted their camels and prepared to return to Ash-Sham (northern part of the Arabian Peninsula), they were surprised by the herald's outcry. Allah *the Almighty* relates this episode: '…A man called out, "People of the caravan! You are thieves!"' (*Yusuf:* 70) In other words, you owners of the camels, verily, you are thieves. Clearly, theft is a particularly heinous act for which the thief must be punished, especially when the stolen object is valuable.

Apparently, Benyamin agreed beforehand to this plot in order to stay with Yusuf *peace be upon him* until his parents come to Egypt. Here arise two good questions, ‘Why did Benyamin agree to be involved in this plot if his absence will only deepen Ya’qub’s sadness?’ And, ‘How could Yusuf *peace be upon him* accuse his brothers of a theft that they did not commit?’

I contend, ‘Let us examine the subtle meanings of the Quran and try to understand its verses in depth. If we study the Quran carefully, we will understand that Ya’qub’s sadness for having lost Yusuf *peace be upon him* had totally overwhelmed him, and so the loss of Benyamin could not affect him greatly. This is substantiated by the fact that when the sons of Ya’qub *peace be upon him* returned and recounted to him the story of the drinking-cup and Benyamin’s detainment in Egypt, his only response was, “Alas for Yusuf!” (*Yusuf:* 84), and he did not mention Benyamin’.

‘As for the accusation of theft, this verse does not explicitly state what exactly was stolen. From Yusuf’s point of view, the brothers had stolen him from Ya’qub *peace be upon him* and cast him into the well’.

At this point, the Quran states Yusuf’s brothers’ response to the herald’s outcry:

قَالُوا۟ وَأَقْبَلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِم مَّاذَا تَفْقِدُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

And they turned and said, ‘What have you lost?’ [71] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 71)

In other words, Yusuf’s brothers turned towards those who had accused them of theft and asked, ‘What have you lost? Why do you accuse us of larceny?’

Here, the Quran states the accusers’ reply:

قَالُوا۟ نَفْقِدُ صُوَاعَ ٱلْمَلِكِ وَلِمَن جَآءَ بِهِۦ حِمْلُ بَعِيرٍ وَأَنَا۠ بِهِۦ زَعِيمٌ ﴿٧٢﴾

They replied, ‘The king’s drinking-cup is missing,’ and, ‘Whoever returns it will get a camel-load [of grain],’ and, ‘I give you my word’ [72] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 72)

In other words, Yusuf’s servants exclaimed, ‘The king’s drinking-cup, which is called ‘*as-suwa‘*’, is missing. The person who finds it will be rewarded with a camel-load of food provisions, for perhaps it was placed unintentionally in one of your bags'. The heralds' chief pledged to reward the person who found the drinking-cup before their bags were inspected. This reward, as previously stated, was a camel-load's worth of food provisions and supplies.

To this accusation of theft, the brothers of Yusuf *peace be upon him* answered:

قَالُوا۟ تَٱللَّهِ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُم مَّا جِئْنَا لِنُفْسِدَ
فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا كُنَّا سَٰرِقِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

They said, 'By God! You must know that we did not come to make mischief in your land: we are no thieves' [73] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 73)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'By Allah!' (*ta Allahi*) is an oath in Arabic. The letter *'ta''* generally precedes the Divine Name when an oath is accompanied by a sense of surprise or amazement. That is, Yusuf's brothers swore by Allah *the Almighty* in astonishment for having been accused of theft for such an accusation had never been levelled against them before. Moreover, everyone knew that they did not come to Egypt to make mischief.

In the following verse comes the response of the heralds who had declared that the king's drinking-cup had been stolen:

قَالُوا۟ فَمَا جَزَٰٓؤُهُۥٓ إِن كُنتُمْ كَٰذِبِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

They asked them, 'And if we find that you are lying, what penalty shall we apply to you?' [74] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 74)

This question, which was addressed to the brothers of Yusuf *peace be upon him* was posed by his servants regarding the pre-established punishment of thieves. That is to say, 'What should they, i.e. the servants of Yusuf, do if they were to find the royal drinking-cup in one of the brother's camel-packs– thereby proving that their claims to innocence were untrue?'

It was known during that time that a person who was caught stealing remained a captive of the owner of the stolen object. This law was employed by Yusuf's paternal aunt who loved him and who had raised him after his mother's death. Remember when Ya'qub *peace be upon him* wanted to take his son back, the aunt hid a cherished heirloom,(1) which had been passed down to her from her father Ishaq (Issac) *peace be upon him* under Yusuf's clothes. Having claimed that Yusuf had stolen it, she kept him with her. Consequently, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was only able to take his son back after the aunt's death.

Yusuf's objective was therefore to keep his brother with him. Clearly, he was aware of this law (before hiding the drinking-cup in Benyamin's camel-pack). In this way, he made his brothers unknowingly decide to let Benyamin stay with him, which was exactly what he longed to do.

The Quran mentions their response, saying:

قَالُوا۟ جَزَٰٓؤُهُۥ مَن وُجِدَ فِى رَحْلِهِۦ فَهُوَ جَزَٰٓؤُهُۥ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ٧٥

And they answered, 'The penalty will be [the enslavement of] the person in whose bag the cup is found: this is how we punish wrongdoers' [75] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 75)

Hence, the brothers themselves decreed the judgment, and even added emphatically: '…this is how we punish wrongdoers' (*Yusuf:* 75). In this way, the brothers indirectly helped Yusuf *peace be upon him* to achieve his goal; that is, to keep his full-brother with him in Egypt. With his brothers' acting in accordance with his plan, Yusuf *peace be upon him* ordered for their belongings to be inspected.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *The precious object is in reference to the belt that Ishaq peace be upon him used to wrap around his waist. Yusuf's paternal aunt was Ishaq's eldest child. She fetched Ishaq's belt and strapped it around Yusuf peace be upon him under his clothes. In this way, she was able to retain him and not return him to Ya'qub peace be upon him. Consequently, Yusuf peace be upon him remained with her until her death. See ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/486.*

فَبَدَأَ بِأَوْعِيَتِهِمْ قَبْلَ وِعَآءِ أَخِيهِ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَخْرَجَهَا مِن وِعَآءِ أَخِيهِ ۚ
كَذَٰلِكَ كِدْنَا لِيُوسُفَ ۖ مَا كَانَ لِيَأْخُذَ أَخَاهُ فِى دِينِ ٱلْمَلِكِ إِلَّآ أَن
يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُ ۚ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَٰتٍ مَّن نَّشَآءُ ۗ وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِى عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٦﴾

[Joseph] began by searching their bags, then his brother's, and he pulled it out from his brother's bag. In this way We devised a plan for Joseph – if God had not willed it so, he could not have detained his brother as a penalty under the king's law – We raise the rank of whoever We will. Above everyone who has knowledge there is the One who is All Knowing [76] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 76)

The plan was to begin by inspecting the bags of his ten half-brothers before searching through those of his full brother. This way, Yusuf *peace be upon him* allayed in advance their suspicions that he had asked for Benyamin to be brought to Egypt in order to carry out this plan. The inspection of the full-brother's bags resulted in the discovery of the king's drinking-cup, and as a result, the law of the people of Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was imposed and Benyamin was 'condemned' to stay with Yusuf *peace be upon him*. This clever plan proves Yusuf's intelligence and wisdom.

Clearly, we see that the Lord *Glorified is He* willed for a plot to be carried out in Yusuf's interest; a fact which is proved by the Saying of Allah: '…In this way We devised a plan for Yusuf…' (*Yusuf:* 76). This clearly means that He *the Almighty* contrived a plot to Yusuf's advantage.

Allah *the Almighty* continues: '…if Allah had not willed this, he could not have detained his brother according to the king's law...' (*Yusuf:* 76). In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* could not have retained his brother under the Egyptian king's law if the brothers had not accepted in advance that their law for theft entailed confinement of the thief.

Allah *the Almighty* continues: 'We raise the rank of whoever We will. But above everyone who has knowledge, there is One Who is All Knowing' (*Yusuf:* 76). It is clear that Allah *the Almighty* endowed Yusuf *peace be upon him* with an exalted position, devised a plot for him and enabled him to achieve his goal. It goes without saying that Yusuf merited these rewards. Moreover, it is worth repeating that the Lord *the Most High* had raised Yusuf's rank of knowledge and wisdom.

This scheme was not carried out for the sake of harming Benyamin (Benjamin) or causing him any harm. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* wanted the best for both Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother. Let me mention in passing that there are many calamities which befall people, but the victims rarely perceive the blessings that are born out of such trials.

The believer must realise that unexpected trials do occur in life. When these happen, he must believe that the trial he was inflicted with is ultimately beneficial for him. For example, Yusuf's brothers had previously plotted against Yusuf, but what was the ultimate result of their plot? Allah *the Almighty* willed for their plot to ultimately benefit Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

Furthermore, the verse tells us that Allah *Glorified is He* endowed Yusuf *peace be upon him* with deep knowledge, as He *the Almighty* says: 'But above everyone who has knowledge, there is One who is All-Knowing' (*Yusuf:* 76).

The Arabic expression *'dhi 'ilm'* used in the verse refers to someone who is endowed with knowledge. Here, we should take into account that this expression entails both a subject and an object: first of all there is the person who receives knowledge, and second the knowledge which is received. Combined together, they give rise to a man of learning *(sahib 'ilm)* above whom there is always '…One Who is all Knowing' (*Yusuf:* 76). In other words, this verse denotes that Knowledge is one of Allah's Attributes.

Here arises a question, which is, 'How did Yusuf's brothers respond to Benyamin's captivity?' They were clearly dumbfounded and their first reaction was to reprimand Benyamin for having the drinking-cup in his bag. We should note that it was not out of pity that they defended him and tried to prevent him from being detained by Yusuf *peace be upon him*. Rather, they just wanted to keep their promise to their father that they will guard him.

The following verse sheds light on the brothers' previous attitude toward Benyamin: 'Although we are many, Yusuf and his brother are dearer to our father than we are...' (*Yusuf:* 8).

Obviously, the brothers knew that Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother were born to a different mother, namely Rachel. Had Benyamin been their full-brother, they will have undoubtedly shown more compassion toward him.(1) Benyamin exclaimed to his brothers, ‘Verily, he who packed my bags is also the one who packed yours’.

At this point, one of the brothers said, ‘By Allah! The children of Rachel, none has brought down more calamities upon us than you!’ to which Benyamin retorted, ‘The children of Rachel have suffered more on account of your deeds than you have suffered on account of theirs!’

The Quran states the reply of the brothers:

قَالُوٓا۟ إِن يَسْرِقْ فَقَدْ سَرَقَ أَخٌ لَّهُۥ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ فَأَسَرَّهَا يُوسُفُ فِى نَفْسِهِۦ
وَلَمْ يُبْدِهَا لَهُمْ ۚ قَالَ أَنتُمْ شَرٌّ مَّكَانًا ۖ وَٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَصِفُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

[His brothers] said, ‘If he is a thief then his brother was a thief before him,’ but Joseph kept his secrets and did not reveal anything to them. He said, ‘You are in a far worse situation. God knows best the truth of what you claim’ [77]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 77)

This verse clearly indicates that the brothers claimed that the seeds of thievery were planted in Benyamin just as they were planted in his full-brother beforehand. This statement, which was an attempt by the brothers to distance themselves from Benyamin’s apparent misdeed, brought to light their resentment of Yusuf *peace be upon him* and Benyamin.

Their saying: ‘If he has stolen, his brother stole before him’ (*Yusuf:* 77) is referred to in technical linguistic terms as a conditional statement. A conditional statement means that one incident occurs in response to a previous one. There are some events which take place all by themselves, while others occur as a result of another happening.

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(1) *In his exegesis of the Quran, Al-Qurtubi said, ‘When they saw that (the drinking-cup was discovered in Benyamin’s camel-pack) Yusuf’s brothers lowered their heads and approached the youngster, saying, “Woe unto you, Benyamin! Never have we seen such a day. Your mother Rachel gave birth to two children who are both thieves”. But Benyamin retorted, “By Allah! I did not steal it (the cup) and I have no idea who put it in my camel-pack”.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 5/3569.*

Let us offer an example to fully clarify this point; you may tell a student, ‘If you study your lessons, you will succeed’. Here, two distinct events are involved: studying and succeeding. According to this statement, succeeding is dependent on the act of studying, and studying must take place before the second event occurs.

Here, the brothers’ statement: ‘If he has stolen, his brother stole before him…’ (*Yusuf:* 77) is intended to clarify the reason why Benyamin was involved in the theft.

Another example of a conditional statement is found in the following verse: ‘But if they reject you, indeed Messengers were rejected before you…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 184).

That is Allah *the Almighty* made the following clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: if they refuse to believe the Revelations that you communicate from on high, do not then be saddened or distressed, for all the Messengers before you were also rejected by many of their people. This is because previous Prophets conveyed a Message that the people denied, and therefore their present rejection of your Message, Prophet Muhammad, is almost inevitable. It is through this reasoning that one understands how the conditional statement in this verse is met.

In the verse under discussion, the Lord *the Most High* relates the brothers’ statement: ‘If he has stolen, his brother stole before him…’ (*Yusuf:* 77). In other words, ‘Governor of Egypt, do not be astonished by Benyamin’s theft for it is a trait which is characteristic of the children of Rachel’. The irony of this statement is that the brothers were unknowingly addressing Yusuf *peace be upon him* the son of Rachel!

Any unjust misfortune that befalls righteous people is prone to cause a certain degree of imbalance. We witness this when a righteous person, for example, is angered or upset by someone’s slanderous words. Such libels harm him and stimulate him to respond angrily to such slanderous words.

It is precisely for this reason that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* advised us how to deal with anger in the following Hadith in which he said, ‘When one of you becomes angry while standing, he should sit down. If the anger leaves him, well and good; otherwise he should lie down’.(1) This will help the angry person to constrain his anger. Moreover, this position of the body helps channel the energy of one’s anger into other directions.

In the verse in question, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not respond to their insults; hence Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Yusuf kept his secrets…’ (*Yusuf:* 77). Clearly, he could have told the brothers about what had happened with his aunt who, out of love, had accused him of stealing the belt in order to keep him by her side. However, he wanted to conceal his identity and let events take their natural course: ‘…Yusuf kept his secrets and did not reveal anything to them...’ (*Yusuf:* 77).

We should take into consideration that Yusuf *peace be upon him* kept his secrets and did not reveal anything to his brothers despite the fact that he was hurt by their comments. He, nevertheless, thought to himself: ‘You are in a far worse situation. Allah knows best the truth of what you claim’ (*Yusuf:* 77). This is due to the fact that they, i.e. the brothers, were the ones who took him as a young boy to play and then threw him into the well, leaving his father forlorn. In addition, he did not steal anything from his aunt–in fact, he himself was stolen; they stole a son from his father.

If these were the thoughts that were going through Yusuf’s mind, there is no doubt that they were reflected in his bodily demeanour. His inner thoughts which were reflected on his facial and bodily expressions might have communicated his feelings to his brothers. After all, speech is merely a series of words which carry a meaning to the listener, and the content of Yusuf’s thoughts must have been communicated through his non-verbal reactions.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘…Allah knows best the truth of what you claim’ (*Yusuf:* 77), it denotes that He knows best the truth of what Yusuf’s brothers were claiming, either by their words or gestures.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Abu Dawud and ibn Hibban on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him. Al-Haythami said, ‘This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad. Its narrators are upright, and attentive’. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 5/152; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4782; ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 5688; and Al-Haythami, Majma‘ Az-Zawa’id, 8/71.*

As for the word *'tasifun'* (you claim), it is often used referring to speech, as in Allah's saying: 'But do not say, for the lie that your tongues describe (*tasifu*), "This is lawful and this is unlawful"…' (*an-Nahl:* 116). In other words, the falsity of your words is clearly manifest. Upon close analysis, we understand that the word *'tasifun'* (you claim) used in the verse under discussion is often used to refer to the speech whose falseness is self-evident.

The Quran then relates the brothers' response to Yusuf *peace be upon him*,

قَالُواْ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلۡعَزِيزُ إِنَّ لَهُۥٓ أَبٗا شَيۡخٗا كَبِيرٗا فَخُذۡ أَحَدَنَا
مَكَانَهُۥٓۖ إِنَّا نَرَىٰكَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ٧٨

They said, 'Mighty governor, he has an elderly father.
Take one of us in his place. We can see that you are a very
good man' [78] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 78)

With these words, they began negotiating with Yusuf *peace be upon him* and appealing to his merciful nature by saying: '…he has an elderly father...' (*Yusuf:* 78).

We notice that the Arabic word *'kabir'* (old or great) can be used in many different ways. For example, an elderly person is referred to as *'kabir'*. In addition, it is used to refer to someone of high position.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* also says: '…a grievous word (*kaburat kailmah*) it is that comes out of their mouths; they speak nothing but a lie' (*al-Kahf:* 5). Furthermore, the Arabic word *'kibr'* denotes 'majesty', whereas the expression *'al-kibar fi as-sin'* denotes old age.

In the verse in question, Yusuf's brothers said: '…he has an elderly/great father...' (*Yusuf:* 78). Thus, they asked him to deal leniently with Benyamin because his father was either dignified or aged.

That is to say that his father was a great man and the chieftain of his tribe, and when he hears that his son was detained for having stolen something, he will be greatly hurt. So, please take this fact into consideration, governor of Egypt, and protect his father's honour, might, and reputation by concealing his son's misdemeanour for the sake of his father.

Another possible interpretation is that the brothers’ words refer to the fact that the father is an old man who does not have the strength to hear the shocking news, especially since he had already lost one of his children.

So, they made him an alternative offer: ‘…Take one of us in his place…’ (*Yusuf:* 78). In other words, they asked Yusuf *peace be upon him* to complete his hospitality, for he had hitherto welcomed them warmly, had given them a nice place to stay and provided them with food provisions for free. After all, anyone who treats someone with such kindness will surely be responsive to their plea by taking one of the other brothers instead of the young boy.

These appeals were intended to speak to Yusuf’’s heart, but the law decreed that only the culprit could be punished for his wrongdoings. This is precisely why the brothers’ appeals to Yusuf *peace be upon him* fell on deaf ears. In the following verse, the Lord *the Most High* relates Yusuf’s response, saying:

قَالَ مَعَاذَ ٱللَّهِ أَن نَّأۡخُذَ إِلَّا مَن وَجَدۡنَا مَتَٰعَنَا عِندَهُۥٓ إِنَّآ إِذٗا لَّظَٰلِمُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

He replied, ‘God forbid that we should take anyone other than the person on whom we found our property: that would be unjust of us’ [79] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 79)

In this verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* seeks refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from the sin of detaining someone who did not steal the kings drinking-cup. After all, what wrong will such a person have done? Clearly, no one deserves to be punished for a sin committed by someone else.

When we come across the word *‘i’dhan’* with ‘nunation’ at the end, we may infer that a part of the sentence has been omitted. In other words, Yusuf *peace be upon him* said, ‘If we were to detain someone with whom the royal drinking-cup was not found, then, behold, we will be among the evildoers’.

The letter *‘nun’* at the end of *‘idhan’* serves as an ellipsis in the sentence above.

We come across an analogous example from the Quran in Allah’s saying: ‘And you at that time (*hina i’thin*) (sit) looking on’ (*al-Waqi‘a*: 84). That is, when one becomes a helpless onlooker at the moment of someone’s death when the soul reaches the dying person’s throat. The letter *‘nun’* at the end of the word *‘hina i’thin’* (at that time) replaces the above-mentioned sentence.

So Yusuf *peace be upon him* wanted to remind his brothers that he had no right to detain any of them other than Benyamin (Benjamin) since the royal drinking-cup was found in the latter's bags. Nor will it have been right for Yusuf *peace be upon him* to wrong or punish someone on account of another person's offenses. By this stage, Ya'qub's sons understood that the quandary could not be easily remedied, especially since theft is a serious form of misconduct.

Allah *the Almighty* describes the brothers' state in the following verse, saying:

فَلَمَّا ٱسۡتَيۡـَٔسُواْ مِنۡهُ خَلَصُواْ نَجِيّٗاۖ قَالَ كَبِيرُهُمۡ أَلَمۡ تَعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ أَبَاكُمۡ
قَدۡ أَخَذَ عَلَيۡكُم مَّوۡثِقٗا مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَمِن قَبۡلُ مَا فَرَّطتُمۡ فِي يُوسُفَۖ فَلَنۡ أَبۡرَحَ
ٱلۡأَرۡضَ حَتَّىٰ يَأۡذَنَ لِيٓ أَبِيٓ أَوۡ يَحۡكُمَ ٱللَّهُ لِيۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡحَٰكِمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

When they lost hope of [persuading] him, they withdrew to confer with each other: the eldest of them said, 'Do you not remember that your father took a solemn pledge from you in the name of God and before that you failed in your duty with regard to Joseph? I will not leave this land until my father gives me leave or God decides for me – He is the best decider [80] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 80)

The verb *'ya'isa'* denotes the loss of hope. Note that the Quran uses the verb *'istay'asa'* here rather than *'ya'isa'* which implies that they had not merely lost hope, but they were in fact completely disheartened.

In short, the brothers pleaded in different ways for Yusuf *peace be upon him* to change his position, but their pleas were of no avail, and their petitions were met with closed doors. It is as if the brothers had lost so much hope that they begged for 'hopelessness' itself to befall them. This degree of desperation only ensues from circumstances that are devoid of the slightest flicker of hope.

Moreover, every time they had some hope, their means of attaining a solution were blocked. In their despair, they asked for hopelessness, as it were, to convince Yusuf *peace be upon him* to let Benyamin return with them to their father.

The verse continues: ‘They withdrew to hold a conference with each other…’ (*Yusuf:* 80). In other words, they retired to discuss in private, away from the onlookers: Yusuf *peace be upon him* the governor, his assistants and their brother Benyamin who was the object of the quandary.

It is worth pointing out that the act of ‘*al-munajah’* (holding a conference in private) denotes communicating something secretly, which in turn implies that the issue under discussion should not be disclosed to others.

We should note that the verb *‘khalasu’* (to withdraw) ends with a plural pronoun, while *‘najiyyan’* (the state of holding a conference) is singular. This is actually one of the issues about which a reader, who does not possess a deep knowledge of Arabic, may be unable to understand and thus question, ‘How does the Quran place a plural verb with a singular noun?’ We contend, ‘If the inquirers who posed this question were endowed with a deep understanding of the Arabic language, they will have known that this grammatical structure is entirely acceptable in Arabic’. A case in point is Allah’s saying: ‘And the angels, moreover, are [Prophet Muhammad’s] assistants or support’ (*at-Tahrim:* 4).

Clearly, such questioners are oblivious to the fact that there are certain Arabic words whose form does not change when they are used in the singular or the plural form. In the aforementioned verse, we can say that describing the angels (plural) using the word *‘zhahir’* (‘assistants’ or ‘a support’ which can be both singular and plural) implies that they were uniting their strength into a single cohesive force.

Let us offer another example to clarify this point; the Quran relates what Ibrahim (Abraham), ‘The Friend of the All-Merciful’, said in the following verse: ‘He said, “Have you then considered what you have been worshipping; You and your fathers before you. Surely they are enemies to me; but not (so) the Lord of the worlds’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 75-77).

In these aforementioned verses, the word ‘*‘aduwun’* is translated ‘enemies’ although it is in the singular, that is literally the enemy. In other words; Ibrahim’s statement incorporated all the deities that the idol worshipers venerated, and considered them one single enemy.

Likewise, words like *‘siddiq’* (the trustworthy person) or even ‘*‘adl’* (a just person) can be used to refer to both the singular and the plural.

Let us look at the word '*'adl'* (a just person) more closely. In the Egyptian judicial system, for example, when a decree is being decided, the judge does not issue it individually; rather, he comes to a decision after consulting with two other judges. Accordingly, the decree is issued by three individuals: the head of the court and two other judges sitting on his right and left, and serving as advisors. Afterwards, when the decree is issued, one says, 'The judges rule is just (using '*'adl',* in the singular form)'. That is to say that one does not say, 'Each judge has made a just ruling'.

The same applies to the word *'najiyya'* in the verse under discussion. Having lost all hope of leniency on Yusuf's part, the brothers withdrew from the people around them, forming one group separate from everyone else, to counsel each other.

Normally, the eldest brother gives the first opinion, for he usually has enough experience and wisdom to make the right decision.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* relates the eldest brother's opinion: '…the eldest of them said, "Do you not remember that your father took a solemn pledge from you in the name of Allah and before that you failed in your duty with regard to Yusuf? I will not leave this land until my father gives me leave or Allah judges for me—He is the best to judge' (*Yusuf:* 80).

From this verse, it can be inferred that the speaker is oldest of the other brothers, or that he is the leader of the caravan. Having noticed that his brothers were resigned to the idea of returning to their father without Benyamin, who was detained by the governor of Egypt, the eldest brother expressed his opinion. He reminded his brothers that their father had taken a solemn pledge from them to bring Benyamin back to him if that were humanly possible. He also reminded them that their history with their father was blemished, for he had once entrusted them with Yusuf *peace be upon him* but they did not keep their word.

Based on this line of reasoning, the eldest brother decided to stay in Egypt and not to return to his father until the latter gave him leave; until Allah *Glorified is He* wills for the governor of Egypt to return Benyamin to him; or until he, i.e. the eldest brother, dies in Egypt. The position adopted by the eldest brother is in fact a defensive one for he is too ashamed to return to his father without Benyamin. One might say that he chose to let his brothers bear the burden of facing Ya’qub *peace be upon him*.

In fact, it appears that the one who suffered the most from this quandary was the father, Ya’qub *peace be upon him*. After all, he had lost Yusuf *peace be upon him* during the youngster’s first trip, and now in the second trip he has not only lost Benyamin but also the eldest brother who was the leader of the caravan.

In a word, the eldest brother’s decision to stay behind only increased the torment of their father. During their private meeting, the brothers should have discussed and examined the dilemma from different angles. Unfortunately, the eldest brother who is the leader of the caravan put an end to the much-needed discussion. When they asked their eldest brother about what they should do, he gave the following answer which is stated in the following verse:

ٱرْجِعُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰٓ أَبِيكُمْ فَقُولُوا۟ يَـٰٓأَبَانَآ إِنَّ ٱبْنَكَ سَرَقَ وَمَا
شَهِدْنَآ إِلَّا بِمَا عَلِمْنَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِلْغَيْبِ حَـٰفِظِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

So go back to your father and say, “Your son stole.
We can only tell you what we saw. How could we guard
against the unforeseen? [81] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 81)

Thus, the eldest brother–or the leader of the caravan–ordered his brothers to return to their father and to relate to him the details of what had happened, ‘Benyamin was accused of theft and we only recount this story after the servants of the governor found the royal drinking-cup in his bags. Furthermore, we do not know whether someone had put it secretly in his bag or it was a plot or an intrigue’.

‘O father, we are only telling you what was conveyed to us. The governor punished him in conformity with our law. Based on our interactions with Benyamin, we do not accuse him of theft, but the undeniable fact that the royal drinking-cup was discovered in his bags lies at the root of this problem’.

However, the eldest brother knew that Ya’qub *peace be upon him* might not believe his sons, since their history with their father gave the latter reasons to doubt the story. That is why the eldest brother–or the leader of the caravan–advised his brothers to tell the father the following:

وَسْـَٔلِ ٱلْقَرْيَةَ ٱلَّتِى كُنَّا فِيهَا وَٱلْعِيرَ ٱلَّتِىٓ أَقْبَلْنَا فِيهَا ۖ وَإِنَّا لَصَٰدِقُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

Ask [in] the town(1) where we have been; ask the people of
the caravan we travelled with: we are telling the truth [82]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 82)

In other words, they said to Ya'qub, 'Father, if you doubt what we say, then you can ask the people of the town where Benyamin (Benjamin) was captured; for the incident drew much attention, as it took place in front of a crowd of people. Moreover, the caravans that we travelled with also witnessed the incident. Above all, one of the palace servants announced publicly that the king's drinking-cup had been lost, and the camel-packs were inspected in public'.

'Therefore, if you want to ascertain that what we say is true, ask the people of the caravan we travelled with, for they are just as aware of the incident as we are. You can also confirm our report with the people of the town where the incident happened'.

One point is worth noting in the discourse of Yusuf's brothers to their father; which is related in Allah's saying: 'Ask [in] the town where we have been and the people of the caravan we travelled with…' (*Yusuf:* 82). We know that every action has a doer, object, spatial location, time, cause, and an amount of energy which allows it to actualise.

In some cases, the particular spatial location is the primary factor of an action. In such cases, an Arabic speaker attributes the action to its spatial location, as in the verse in question: 'Ask [in] the town…' (*Yusuf:* 82).

Clearly, this means, 'Ask the people of the town'. One might also say that the news of Benyamin's theft was so widespread that even inanimate objects knew of the episode in detail. Another possible interpretation is that Yusuf's brothers asked their father to order the earth itself to inform him of the episode; for, after all, he was a Prophet who was inspired by Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) *In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Al-Qaryah (the town) in this verse implies Egypt. However, it has also been suggested that it denotes one of Egypt's towns where the brothers stopped and were given provisions'. Note that there is a rhetorical style in the beginning of this verse, that is, the true subject of the verb 'ask' is omitted. The original sentence is as follows, 'Ask the people of the town'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 4/3580.*

Then Yusuf's brothers said to their father: '…and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with…' (*Yusuf:* 82). The Arabic word *'al-'r'* (caravan) denotes riding animals, including she-camels, camels, donkeys and mules, which carry loads.

The brothers' saying: '…and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with…' (*Yusuf:* 82) implies that the caravan had a more important role to play other than that of a simple mount.

What happened at the battle of *Badr* is a case in point. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* set out to intercept the caravan which was coming from *Ash-Sham* and was carrying bales of merchandise. This assault was intended as a payback for the properties of *Al-Muhajirun* (the migrants) that the disbelievers of Mecca had appropriated. Moreover, the caravan was inadequately protected by guards and shepherds.

However, the warriors who came from Mecca were called by a special name, *'an-nafir'*, that is, the fighters who fled (*nafaru*) [to the caravan] to ward off the battalion of believing Muslims, and not just warriors (*al-muqatileen*). Thus, every major detail of an event is named after a significant episode that took place during the unfolding of that event.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* narrates the conversation between Yusuf's brothers and their father when the former returned without both Benyamin and their eldest brother or the leader of the caravan. Allah *the Almighty* states: '…and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with…' (*Yusuf:* 82). It may be expected that the inspection of the brothers' bags took place at a slight distance from any built-up area.

The palace soldiers–or Yusuf's servants–inspected the brothers' camel-packs in which the king's drinking-cup was discovered. This location where that happened was called '*qaryah'* (town), just as nowadays we designate an area as 'customs' in which all packages entering or leaving a country are inspected.

Thus, the statement: '…Ask in the town where we have been…' (*Yusuf:* 82) implies, 'Ask the people of the town in which our bags were inspected'.

Likewise, their saying: '…and [ask the people of] the caravan we travelled with...' (*Yusuf:* 82) implies, 'Ask those travellers in other caravans who accompanied us on the trip'.

It worth noting that the brothers repeated their assertion: '…we are telling the truth' (*Yusuf:* 82) because they were aware of the fact that they had previously lied to their father. Thus they wanted him to verify the veracity of their words this time, for if their father asked about the incident, he will find out that they were indeed telling the truth. In short, the brothers suggested for their father to ask others because this time they were telling the truth.

Allah *the Almighty* narrated their statement using the following nominal sentence: '…we are telling the truth' (*Yusuf:* 82). The brothers knew well that their father was once suspicious of them when they brought the shirt of their younger brother, Yusuf, stained with false blood, claiming he had been eaten by a wolf.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* relates Ya'qub's response to his sons:

قَالَ بَلۡ سَوَّلَتۡ لَكُمۡ أَنفُسُكُمۡ أَمۡرٗاۖ فَصَبۡرٞ جَمِيلٌۖ عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن
يَأۡتِيَنِي بِهِمۡ جَمِيعًاۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ﴿٨٣﴾

Their father said, 'No! Your souls have prompted you
to do wrong! But it is best to be patient: may God bring all
of them back to me – He alone is the All Knowing,
the All-Wise' [83] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 83)

As a matter of fact, any action that is opposed by the conscience, whose consequences one fears and from which one naturally shrinks in shame, are actions which weigh heavily on the human soul. Moreover, in order to undertake such hideous actions, the soul must undergo a process of stimulation and incitement. This act of incitement is called *'sawwal'* in Arabic. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* states Ya'qub's response: 'No! Your souls have prompted (*sawwalat*) you to do wrong!...' (*Yusuf:* 83). In other words, your own souls had incited you to commit a terrible act that no upright person could approve of. This is not the first time that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* addressed his sons in this (reprimanding) manner. When they came with Yusuf's shirt stained with false blood, Ya'qub retorted: '…Nay, your souls have prompted (*sawwalat*) you to make up a tale! [For me] patience is good and most fitting; from Allah alone I seek help to bear what you are saying'' (*Yusuf:* 18). Having heard their account, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* prayed to Allah *the Almighty* for help. This plea suggests that the brothers' claims and the events of the story had not yet come to an end. Rather, they will be followed by incidents which require a great amount of patience as well as Divine Succour.

Notice that the verse under discussion is different from the latter verse, for while they both mention the evil soul's incitement and Ya'qub's imploring Allah *the Almighty* for patience, one senses in the verse under discussion that the winds of relief and respite were drawing near. This is because Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said: 'May Allah bring all of them back to me...' (*Yusuf:* 83). In this verse, he was praying for a hope which indicates the approaching relief, which took place soon after this.

Certain absentminded people ask, 'Why did Ya'qub *peace be upon him* state: "May Allah bring all of them back to me..." (*Yusuf:* 83) when the only absent individuals were Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his full brother?' We answer, 'Have you forgotten the eldest brother who refused to leave Egypt without Ya'qub's explicit permission or Allah's Relief?'

To recapitulate: Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was, at that time, missing three of his sons: Yusuf *peace be upon him* Benyamin and Sham'oon (Simon). For this reason, he said: 'May Allah bring all of them back to me...' (*Yusuf:* 83) rather than 'May Allah bring both of them back to me'.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes this verse with His saying: 'He alone is the All Knowing, the All-Wise' (*Yusuf:* 83). Undoubtedly, Allah *the Almighty* knows the whereabouts of Ya'qub's missing sons, for He is the Omniscient. Moreover, He is All-Wise in His Actions regarding us.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* continues to state Ya'qub's response:

وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَٰٓأَسَفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَٱبْيَضَّتْ
عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ ٱلْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ﴿٨٤﴾

And he turned away from them, saying, 'Alas for Joseph!' His eyes went white with grief and he was filled with sorrow [84] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 84)

Ya'qub *peace be upon him* withdrew from them and sought refuge in solitude, for the news that they imparted to him caused him great sadness. This is because he was, after all, a human being and so he was distressed by Yusuf's absence, for his longing for Yusuf *peace be upon him* was at the root of his calamities.

In Arabic, one often expresses grief using phrases such as *'wa huznah', 'wa asafah' and 'wa musibatah'*. Such expressions imply that one is deeply troubled by some event, as if he were calling out, 'Sadness, come to the fore, because this is your moment!'

Another possible interpretation is that Ya'qub exclaimed: 'Alas for Yusuf!' (*Yusuf:* 84) because Benyamin was the one, from all his children, who was the most similar to Yusuf *peace be upon him*.

Ya'qub's loss of Yusuf *peace be upon him* was the first calamity that befell him. But this (heartbreak) was followed by a second, namely the absence of Benyamin.

Allah's saying: '...His eyes became white...' (*Yusuf:* 84) means that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had shed so many tears that the black pupils of his eyes began to take on a white colour. Ya'qub's eyes 'became white' as a result of his extreme grief which he was concealing from others and constraining within himself.

We should take into account that it is possible for Ya'qub *peace be upon him* to suppress his anger–triggered by the tragic loss of *Benyamin*–toward his sons. However, physical reactions to grief cannot be controlled by anyone.

For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wept and shed tears because of the death of his son Ibrahim (Abraham). Abd Ar-Rahman Ibn 'Awf *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, 'You are crying? Did you not prohibit (your followers) from crying?' He said, 'No. But I prohibited two foolish immoral voices: a voice during a calamity while clawing at one's face and tearing one's clothes, and *Shaitan's* scream'.(1)

In the same vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'The eyes shed tears and the heart is grieved, but we will not say [anything] except what pleases our Lord. O Ibrahim! Indeed, we are grieved by your departure'.(2)

Consequently, we realise that Allah *the Almighty* does not want man to be tough and hard like a rock that never reacts to external events. Rather, He *Glorified is He* wants man to respond (emotionally) to events; for this human quality should be in one's very nature. After all, Allah *the Almighty* calls for compassion and this is why the believer should value this quality.

Allah *the Almighty* created man's emotions and instincts. Had He willed to create humans without these two qualities, He will have clearly done this. However, He endowed mankind with feelings and an innate disposition (towards sentimentality) for specific reasons.

However, when feelings and human nature deviate from their intended function, the Divine Way of Guidance deters them, as this Guidance is intended to regulate and moderate one's impulses that spring from emotions or from human nature. Man's love for food is a case in point. In this case, the Divine Way of Guidance orders you to eat beneficial food, but it prohibits gluttony. The inborn human passion of seeking knowledge is another example that further clarifies this point. The Divine Way of Guidance commands you to know useful things, but not to apply this instinct to spy on others. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* has endowed us with sexual instincts for the preservation of the human species so that we may multiply and bear children. This does not mean, however, that we should use our sexual instincts to unlawfully satisfy our desires. Hence, we conclude that the Divine Way of Guidance preserves and regulates the natural instincts and emotions for them to be in line with their specific functions. Emotional bonds–for example–cause a father to treat his young child kindly and to care for him. It could therefore be said that the believer should value his natural instincts and emotions.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah* Allah *be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi graded it as a good Hadith. This Hadith is narrated in this form by At-Tirmidhi, but in Fath Al-Bari it adds, 'the sound produced by singing, distractions or play, and the wind instruments of the devil'. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1005; and Fath Al-Bari, 10/174.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1303; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2315.*

Allah describes Ya'qub *peace be upon him* saying: '…he was filled with sorrow (*kazhim*)' (*Yusuf:* 84), which suggests that he tried his best to control his feelings. This is because the Arabic word *'kazhim'* (filled with sorrow) is derived from the expression '*kazhamtu al-qirbah'*, that is, 'I closed up the water skin'. In other words, I sealed the mouth of the water skin tightly, thereby ensuring that no water will pour out. This is similar to one's constraint of anger or sadness, etc. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُوا۟ تَٱللَّهِ تَفْتَؤُا۟ تَذْكُرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّىٰ تَكُونَ حَرَضًا
أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْهَـٰلِكِينَ (٨٥)

They said, 'By God! You will ruin your health if
you do not stop thinking of Joseph, or even die' [85]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 85)

Here arises the following question, which is, 'Who posed the question in this verse, since Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had withdrawn from his children?'

We contend, 'Ya'qub *peace be upon him* not only lived with his sons, but also with his grandchildren. In addition, certain accounts state that a group of people entered upon him and said to him, "By Allah! You have grown frail, Ya'qub even though you have not attained the age of your father Ishaq (Isaac)!"'

In other words, they said to Ya'qub *peace be upon him* 'Ya'qub, you have become old, weak and in poor health', whereupon Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said, 'I have become weak because of Yusuf's absence'. Allah *the Almighty* then reprimanded him for this statement and said, 'Do you complain of your deep sadness to Allah's creation?' This is why he lifted his arms in reply, 'I have made a mistake, my Lord; forgive me!' 'I forgive you' said Allah *Glorified is He*.(1)

As such, it is clear that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* was addressed by one of his children or grandchildren, who said: 'By Allah! You will ruin your health (*haradan*) if you do not stop thinking of Yusuf, or even die' (*Yusuf:* 85). In other words, you will continue to recall Yusuf *peace be upon him* and what happened to him until you ruin yourself and die. As for the Arabic word *al-harad'* (ruining your health), it refers to someone who is on the verge of dying or has already perished.

Ya'qub's response was recounted as:

قَالَ إِنَّمَآ أَشۡكُواْ بَثِّي وَحُزۡنِيٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَأَعۡلَمُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ٨٦

He said, 'I plead my grief and sorrow before God.
I have knowledge from God that you do not have [86]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 86)

As a matter of fact, the act of complaining about one's grief or sorrow to Allah *the Almighty* is regarded a form of worship. The Arabic word *'bath-th'* denotes a calamity that one cannot contain within himself, and therefore shares with someone else.

When a person of great standing does something apparently harmful to an ordinary person, the latter reacts in two possible ways: the first typical reaction is to deal with the great person gently by imploring his kindness and leniency and seeking his forgiveness and pardon. The second possible response on the part of that person in question is to rebel against the person of great standing, while thinking, ‘Let him do as he pleases, I do not care’.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti mentioned this account on the authority of Talha ibn Masriful-'Ayyami. As-Suyuti ascribed it to ibn Jarir At-Tabari. Talha said, 'I was informed that a neighbor entered upon Ya'qub and said to him, 'Ya'qub, why is it that you are in such a state of physical weakness and decrepitude. You have not even reached the age of your father?' (The grieving father) replied, 'I have become physically weak and debilitated because of my concern for Yusuf which* Allah *has inflicted me with'. At this point*, Allah *revealed the following to Ya'qub, 'Ya'qub, do you complain (of your deep sadness) to one of My creatures?' Ya'qub said, 'Lord, I have made a mistake; forgive me!'* Allah *then answered, 'I have forgiven you'. Ever since that day, when asked about his state, Ya'qub said: 'I complain of my grief and sorrow before* Allah' *(Yusuf: 86). See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 4/571.*

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says in His Noble Book: ‘Yet, why did they not, when Our Punishment came to them, humble themselves…’ (*al-An‘am:* 43). When a misfortune befalls us and we invoke Allah *the Almighty* the misfortune itself cleanses us from our sins and our forgetfulness of Him. In addition, it reminds us of Him *the Almighty* for it is He Alone Who can remove grief.

On the other hand, woe unto the person who acts pompously and deems himself to be above all vicissitudes! Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* showers His Mercy upon those who call out to Him in times of misfortune. At this point, one may ask why Ya’qub *peace be upon him* did not repeat the words that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us in this regard: ‘Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say, “Surely, we belong to Allah and to Him we shall surely return”’ (*al-Baqara:* 156). We assert that this prayer is one of the blessings that have been conferred to the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The following anecdote is pertinent in this respect; when some Muslims entered upon ‘Ali Ibn Abu Taleb *peace and blessings be upon him* who was suffering from an illness and was moaning in pain, they asked him, ‘Abu Al-Hassan, are you in pain?’ He answered, ‘I seek support and solace (only) in Allah’.

In the verse in question, Ya’qub *peace be upon him* stated that he only complains of his sorrow and misery to Allah *the Almighty* for He is Able to remove all harm. This noble behaviour on Ya’qub’s part sprang from the knowledge that was revealed to him and not to his sons and grandchildren. Ya’qub *peace be upon him* intuitively felt that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was still alive, as he doubted the fictitious story of the wolf. He had a presentiment that the vision which Yusuf *peace be upon him* had (secretly) told him will be realised by Allah’s Grace.

Ya’qub’s words stated in the following verse:

يَٰبَنِيَّ ٱذۡهَبُواْ فَتَحَسَّسُواْ مِن يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَاْيۡـَٔسُواْ مِن
رَّوۡحِ ٱللَّهِۖ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يَاْيۡـَٔسُ مِن رَّوۡحِ ٱللَّهِ إِلَّا ٱلۡقَوۡمُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

My sons, go and seek news of Joseph and his brother and do not despair of God’s mercy – only disbelievers despair of God’s mercy’ [87] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 87)

We notice that the ones who were absent in this situation were three: Yusuf *peace be upon him*, Benyamin (Benjamin) and the eldest brother who insisted on staying in Egypt until his father gave him permission to return or until Allah *the Almighty* granted him relief.

We should pay attention to the fact that this verse makes mention of Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother, and excludes the eldest brother–or the leader of the caravan. One may ask why? We opine that the reason for this is that Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his younger brother were the weaker party who had suffered from the mistreatment of their brothers. Moreover, they were separated from their father at a young age, while no one prevented the eldest brother from leaving Egypt and returning to his father at any time. That is why Ya’qub said: ‘My sons, go and seek news (*tahasasu*) of Yusuf and his brother…’ (*Yusuf:* 87).

As for the Arabic word *‘tahasasu’* (seek news), it is derived from the word *‘hassa’* which in turn denotes a sense of perception. These senses of perception are means by which man receives data from the outside world. In fact, information is only gathered if it is perceivable through the senses. Only after being perceived by the senses, is the information transferred to the mental sphere. Thus, we learn that our sense organs are channels which enable us to know about matters. Note that our senses are not limited to the five outward physical senses; in fact, modern scientists have discovered other inward senses which we have discussed on numerous occasions.

Hence, Ya’qub’s command: ‘My sons, go and seek news of Yusuf and his brother…’ (*Yusuf:* 87) means, ‘Employ your senses to the best of your ability in order to reach the truth of this matter’.

It is known that the word ‘spy’ (*al-jasus*) refers to someone assigned to undertake reconnaissance and gather information–using many of his senses–

of the movements of the enemy. In Arabic, the word 'spy' is referred to as *'jasus'* and also '*'ayn'*.

In common vernacular, one addresses an eavesdropper by saying, 'Look into (literally: smell out) the story behind this or that matter'.

Ya'qub's statement continues: '…and do not despair of Allah's Mercy—only disbelievers despair of Allah's Mercy' (*Yusuf:* 87). In other words, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said to them, 'Beware of telling me, "We searched for them, we employed everything within our means and exhausted all of our energy, but we did not find them", for Allah *the Almighty* is Ever-Present, and He is Ever-Merciful'.

People of the past used to say, 'There is no calamity as long as You are our Lord'. This means that when you are afflicted with something unbearable, you must seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty*. In this connection, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is our example; 'When anything distressed him (Prophet Muhammad), he stood up and prayed'.(1) By doing this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sought refuge in the Lord of all means and causes; for Allah is above all causality. Test this for yourselves: when dealing with a dilemma, pray, and you will find a solution to your problem before the prayer ends.

As for the Arabic word *'rawh',* translated as mercy in the verse at hand, it can be pronounced in two different ways: *'rawh'* and *'ruh'*. '*Al-Rawh'* is literally a scent or a gentle wind that blows and produces a cooling effect. We experience this, for example, while resting during a scorching summer day, when a gentle breeze blows past and refreshes us with its cool winds and pleasant scent. Allah *the Almighty* refers to this meaning when He says: 'Then happiness (*rawh*) and bounty and a garden of bliss' (*al-Waqi'a*: 89) .As mentioned, we can truly appreciate *'al-rawh'* on a hot day, when we are resting in a garden, for example, and a gentle breeze blows past, carrying with it the lovely perfume of flowers. As for the Arabic word *'ar-ruh'*, it is the spirit which

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/388; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1319.*

Allah *the Almighty* blows into inanimate things, and through which He gives them life and enables them to move.

Here, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* mentions an important principle which every believer should try to act upon, namely: '…only disbelievers despair of Allah's Mercy' (*Yusuf:* 87). This guiding principle of never losing hope in Allah's Mercy is central to our belief because only those who disbelieve in the Existence of Allah *the Almighty* are at risk of losing hope. This reason is also believed to be the main factor behind the high rate of suicide among atheists; a true believer, by contrast, does not commit such an act, for he knows that there is a Lord Who helps His slaves.

As long as the believer makes use of the available means and causes, Allah *the Almighty* will confer bounties on him that are beyond cause and effect. This fact is plainly stated in Allah's saying: 'And whoever is careful of [his duty to] Allah, He will make for him a way out, And give him sustenance from [sources] he never expected. And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him; surely Allah will bring about what He decrees. Allah indeed has appointed a due measure for everything' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3).

All of these blessings are conferred on the believer who is conscious of Allah *the Almighty*. I challenge anyone to find a person of faith who has never been gifted by these blessings. As long as a man carries out his duties and is conscious of Allah *the Almighty* he will find that unanticipated relief was granted to him after a period of hardship. In short, Allah *the Almighty* is the believer's Ultimate Refuge. Let us give an example to fully clarify this point; although Allah is beyond comparison. Assume that you are walking down a street with nothing more than one Egyptian Pound in your pocket, and then you lose your one and only pound. Will you feel troubled? Yes. But if you have saved ten pounds in your house, then your sadness over the lost pound will be less intense. Moreover, if you have saved one thousand pounds in your bank account, then you will not be upset for having lost one pound.

Whoever believes in Allah *Glorified is He* and makes use of the means in this world, will undoubtedly find a solution to his problems and relief from all troubles that he cannot bear relying only on human means. Here, we should pose the following question, 'Why should man lose hope?'As a matter of fact, only atheists lose all hope since they do not believe in God. Moreover, if someone believes in a god that is unaware of his pain; or a god that perceives his worshiper's pain but does not help him–either because it is unable or unwilling to do this–then this god is not a true deity and is not worthy of our belief.

However, the true believer, on the other hand, knows for certain that he worships the Omnipotent God, Allah, Who rewards the believer that makes use of the earthly means and causes by giving them results that are beyond causal circumstances. Moreover, when He withholds something from the believer, this is in itself a Divine Bestowal, for He, the All-Merciful, withholds what will bring harm to him.

Allah *the Almighty* then draws our attention to another episode in the story, that is, when Yusuf's brothers presented themselves before him in his palace in Egypt. The verse reads:

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِ قَالُوا۟ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلْعَزِيزُ مَسَّنَا وَأَهْلَنَا ٱلضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِبِضَـٰعَةٍ مُّزْجَىٰةٍ
فَأَوْفِ لَنَا ٱلْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَآ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَجْزِى ٱلْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

Then, when they presented themselves before Joseph, they said, 'Mighty governor, misfortune has afflicted us and our family. We have brought only a little merchandise, but give us full measure. Be charitable to us: God rewards the charitable' [88] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 88)

Note that Allah *the Almighty* does not name the person whom the brothers addressed. This is because he is the protagonist of the story: namely, Yusuf *peace be upon him*. Instead, he is addressed with the following honorary title: 'Mighty governor, misfortune has afflicted us and our family…' (*Yusuf:* 88). In other words, they, the brothers, said to him, 'Hunger has assailed us to the point of emaciation'. Having addressed Yusuf *peace be upon him* with this honorary title, the brothers then began to appeal to Yusuf's emotions. After all, he was in power and they were in need.

The brothers' discourse continues: 'We have brought only a little merchandise, but give us full measure. Be charitable to us: Allah rewards the charitable' (*Yusuf:* 88). We know that they came to Egypt in order to seek news of Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brother. And the investigators cunningly chose to flatter and evoke sympathy in order to acquire their needs. By praising the governor as ‘the mighty one’, they were suggesting that he is capable of granting them what they came for, as it was within his power. By complaining of their hunger and emaciation, the brothers were stirring the governor’s sympathy. Furthermore, they declared that they had only a little merchandise to barter for food.

The Arabic word *‘muzjah’* (little) suggests a sum that is to be tendered by the buyer or the seller. A derivative of the word *‘muzjah’,* i.e. the word ‘yuzji*’* also appears in Allah’s saying: “Do you not see that Allah drives along (*yuzji*) the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up…’ (*an-Nur:* 43). That is, the verb *‘yuzji’* denotes ‘to move onwards’. In the light of this verse, what does the word ‘*muzjah’* denote?

Let us offer an example from our daily lives–which you can test for yourself–that will shed light on the verse in question. Imagine that you have an amount of money that is made up of old and new bills. When making a purchase, you instinctively pay with the old rather than with the new notes; you will find yourself content to spend your worn bills, and keep your new bills. In some cases, the seller might ask you to exchange one of the old bills for a new one. When spending money, you prefer to get rid of your tatty paper-bills. It is in the light of this human tendency that we may understand the following part of the verse: ‘…only a little merchandise...’ (*Yusuf:* 88). The word *‘muzjah’* suggests that the merchandise is of low quality. Thus, the hardship that they underwent has made them unable to barter for provisions with high quality merchandise which they had previously done.

Allah *the Almighty* continues to relate the brothers’ plea, saying: ‘…but give us full measure. Be charitable to us: Allah rewards the charitable’ (*Yusuf:* 88). In other words, they were begging for the governor to give them a full measure of provisions and not to shorten the measure, despite the fact that their merchandise was disproportional to the provisions they were asking for. Furthermore, they asked the governor to consider the disproportion in the transaction as a form of charity. Thus, they offered him a price higher than their little merchandise: namely, the reward of giving charity. After all, no human being could possibly compensate someone for his charitable acts, as the act of providing a reward for this is the Absolute Right of Allah *the Almighty*.

At this point, a very good question arises, which is, 'Were they not descendants of a Prophet, and therefore could not accept charity?' To answer this question, we should note that forbidding the progeny of a Prophet to accept charity is a law that only applies to the family of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and therefore only concerns his followers. This legal ruling is derived from his saying, 'Indeed, *zakat* should not be given to the family of Muhammad; it will be like giving them [something] from the impurities of the people'.(1)

Back to the verse in question; the brothers' appeals had a great impact on Yusuf *peace be upon him*. The latter looked at them and smiled, thereby revealing his front teeth. Yusuf's front teeth were unlike any front teeth that they had seen.

Allah *the Almighty* continues:

قَالَ هَلۡ عَلِمۡتُم مَّا فَعَلۡتُم بِيُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ إِذۡ أَنتُمۡ جَٰهِلُونَ ٨٩

He said, 'Do you now realize what you did to Joseph
and his brother when you were ignorant?' [89]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 89)

The inclusion of the above-mentioned question at this point in the dialogue compelled the brothers to contemplate and ponder carefully in order to discover the true identity of the speaker. The question was accompanied by the following clement words: '…what you did to Yusuf and his brother when you were ignorant?' (*Yusuf:* 89) These words imply that Yusuf *peace be upon him* excused his brothers on the grounds that their wrong actions stemmed from ignorance. Furthermore, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not address them smugly or arrogantly which is the way that often characterises the people who have such a stature as his. In short, Yusuf's objective was to mitigate the shock of discovering that the speaker was Yusuf himself. That is why he mentioned that their actions were the result of ignorance.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Muslim in the book of zakat on the authority of 'Abd Al-Mutalib ibn Rabi'a, as follows, 'Indeed, Zakat should not be given to the family of [Prophet] Muhammad, it will be like giving them [something] from the impurities of the people'. See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 4/166; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.1072.*

Let us give an example to clarify this point; assume that you are mistreated by someone in the past. With time, your resentment towards the transgressor allays, and you remind him about his previous actions by saying, 'Your actions in those days were simply the result of your immaturity, but you are now mature and are able to understand the true nature of things'.

The fact that Yusuf *peace be upon him* addressed the brothers with this benevolent tone implies that he felt sorry for all the calamities that had befallen them. And, when he smiled, the brothers saw Yusuf's four front teeth and so recognised him.(1) The verse below recounts the dialogue which followed; Allah *the Almighty* says:

قَالُوٓاْ أَءِنَّكَ لَأَنتَ يُوسُفُۖ قَالَ أَنَا۠ يُوسُفُ وَهَٰذَآ أَخِيۖ قَدۡ
مَنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡنَآۖ إِنَّهُۥ مَن يَتَّقِ وَيَصۡبِرۡ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ
أَجۡرَ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

**And they cried, 'Could it be that you are Joseph?' He said,
'I am Joseph. This is my brother. God has been gracious to
us: God does not deny anyone who is mindful of God and
steadfast in adversity the rewards of those who do good' [90]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 90)**

They, the brothers, recognised Yusuf *peace be upon him* and discovered the speaker's true identity, whereupon they said: 'Could it be that you are Yusuf?' (*Yusuf:* 90). We should notice that this is a rhetorical question which serves to highlight their astonishment, bewilderment and delight in having accomplished the mission that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* had assigned to them.

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(1) In his *Tafsir*, *Al-Qurtubi* said that when *Yusuf peace be upon him* smiled, his four front teeth resembled stringed pearls. ibn *'Abbas* said, 'When *Yusuf* smiled, they were reminded of him and exclaimed in their astonishment, "Could it be that you are *Yusuf*?" (*Yusuf:* 90)' *Al-Qurtubi* mentioned other accounts of this incident in his *Tafsir*. See *Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan,* 5/3591.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* responded: ‘I am Yusuf, and this is my brother’ (*Yusuf:* 90). Obviously, they were well aware of the fact that Benyamin was Yusuf’s full brother, but Yusuf *peace be upon him* included his brother in his answer to imply that Benyamin had also been blessed by Divine Grace, and that Allah *the Almighty* had honoured them both.

In the verse, Yusuf *peace be upon him* expressed his gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* for having been blessed so graciously, saying: ‘Allah has been gracious to us: Allah does not deny anyone who is mindful of Him [Allah] and steadfast in adversity the rewards of those who do good’ (*Yusuf:* 90). He uttered this general principle for the benefit of his brothers and anyone who listens or reads the Quran. Indeed, he was a living proof of this truth; given everything that he experienced from the day he had his dream to this point in the story.

To recapitulate, Yusuf *peace be upon him* was the embodiment of these words; for Allah *the Almighty* had conferred His Grace on him and his brother by relieving them from their calamities. In the end, the two brothers were united.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* presented the reason for Allah conferring Blessings by saying: ‘…anyone who is mindful of Allah...’ (*Yusuf:* 90). The one who is mindful of Allah is the one who avoids displeasing Him, fears Him on account of His Majestic Attributes, follows His Divine Way of Guidance, bears any adversity patiently, does not fall short in worshipping and obeying Him, and avoids all sinful acts, no matter how appealing they may seem. Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* does not fail to reward those who do good and fear Him. It is they who merit His Mercy and Grace both in this world and the Hereafter, on the grounds of being mindful of Him.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* states the brothers’ response to Yusuf *peace be upon him* saying:

قَالُوا۟ تَٱللَّهِ لَقَدْ ءَاثَرَكَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَإِن كُنَّا لَخَٰطِـِٔينَ ﴿٩١﴾

They said, ‘By God! God really did favour you over all of us and we were in the wrong!’ [91] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 91)

The expression *‘ta’llah’* (by Allah) is a form of swearing by Allah *the Almighty*. As for their saying: ‘Allah really did favour you over all of us…’ (*Yusuf:* 91), it means that Allah *the Almighty* favoured Yusuf *peace be upon him* over them, but He did not do this unjustly. Rather, Yusuf merited the kingship and high standing and position that Allah *Glorified is He* had conferred on him.

Thus, the brothers admitted their wrongdoing to Yusuf *peace be upon him* and confessed that they had mistreated him when they sought to be loved to the same level as him by their father. In the end, Yusuf gained the love of the Lord of their father, the Lord of the Worlds, which is why they confessed that the state and condition in which they lived was a conclusive proof that they were in the wrong.

We should pay attention to the difference between the word *'khat'in'* and *'mukht'in'* which both refer to wrongdoers. In order to illustrate the difference, we should recall what the governor of Egypt told his wife: '…but you [wife], ask forgiveness for your sin–you are one of those who do wrong (*al-khat'in*)' (*Yusuf:* 29).

Note that the governor said *'khat'in'* instead of *'mukht'in'*. Both have the same root, but there is a subtle difference in the meanings imparted by the two words; A *'khati''* is someone who knows what actions should be taken but nevertheless transgresses, but the *'mukhti'* is someone who acts wrongly despite his intention to do the right thing. It is out of ignorance that the *'mukhti''* errs, while the *'khati''* consciously does wrong.

Having admitted that they were at fault, Yusuf *peace be upon him* said what Allah *the Almighty* mentions in the following verse:

قَالَ لَا تَثْرِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْيَوْمَ يَغْفِرُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

But he said, 'You will hear no reproaches today. May God forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful [92] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 92)

The word for bitter reproach in Arabic is *'at-tathreeb'* which is derived from the word *'ath-tharb'* which refers to a thick layer of fat that one finds enveloping the stomach of an animal after it has been slaughtered. If the animal was lean and was not fed adequately, one does not find this layer of fat, *'ath-tharb'*, because it is consumed by the animal's body for energy.

Therefore, *'at-tathrib'* literally suggests that the bitter reproach melted away the fat inside his stomach and caused him to bleed. In fact, the human body, as it were, almost collapses under the weight of reproach.

There is a Hadith which relates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When the slave-woman of any of you commits adultery and this (offence of hers) becomes clear, she should be flogged (as a prescribed) punishment, but hurl no reproach at her. If she commits adultery again, she should be punished again by flogging, but hurl no reproach upon her. If she commits fornication for the third time and it becomes clear, then he [her master] should sell her, even if only for a rope of hair'.(1) In other words, they should not say to her, 'You who have done this or that act'. Rather, let her be penalised only according to the divinely revealed law. But if she does not refrain from this act, then it is better for the owner to sell her. Thus, we understand that a bitter reproach or scolding can give rise to stubbornness.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf *peace be upon him* said: '…Today, may Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 92).

At this point, someone may pose the following question, 'Why did Yusuf *peace be upon him* pray that Allah forgive them on that day? After all, they might have sought His Forgiveness earlier!' We answer, 'Yusuf's praying for their forgiveness was uttered within the limits of his knowledge to put his brothers' hearts at peace'. His statement: '…He is the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 92) implies Yusuf understood the fact that every form of mercy in this world, including that which a person shows to another, is ultimately derived from the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty*. Yusuf *peace be upon him* made this statement with certitude that his supplication will be answered since he himself had pardoned their past mistreatment towards him; clearly, it befits Allah to forgive them for Allah *the Almighty* is more Merciful to them than *Yusuf*.

The discourse between Yusuf *peace be upon him* and his brothers is subsequently focused on their father, Ya'qub *peace be upon him*. Having been informed of what had happened to his father after being separated from him,

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra* Allah *be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1703.*

Yusuf *peace be upon him* said to his brother what Allah *the Almighty* relates in the following verse:

ٱذْهَبُوا۟ بِقَمِيصِى هَٰذَا فَأَلْقُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِ أَبِى يَأْتِ
بَصِيرًا وَأْتُونِى بِأَهْلِكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

Take my shirt and lay it over my father's face:
he will recover his sight. Then bring your whole
family back to me' [93] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 93)

Yusuf *peace be upon him* knew that his father used to close his eyes tightly out of grief, and that he was about to lose his sight. He therefore ordered his brothers to take the shirt that he used to wear to his father.

Some books of history relate that the eldest brother who once refused to depart from Egypt and had said: 'I will not leave this land until my father gives me leave or Allah judges for me—He is the best to judge' (*Yusuf:* 80), addressed Yusuf saying, 'Governor of Egypt, I am the one who carried the shirt stained with false blood to my father. As such, allow me to carry this shirt to my father in order for the reward of this action to erase my past sinful deed'.(1)

Regarding the shirt which was to be taken to the father, Yusuf *peace be upon him* specifically instructed his brothers to: '…lay it over my father's face: he will recover his sight' (*Yusuf:* 93). Notice that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not say, 'your father's face', rather, he said: '…my father's face...' (*Yusuf:* 93). This clearly shows the fatherly warmth which Yusuf *peace be upon him* had missed since his absence from his family which caused his father's deep sadness. As for the phrase: '…he will recover his sight' (*Yusuf:* 93), it means that either his sight will be restored or that the father will be able to see Yahudh (Judah) in front of him in full health.

Yusuf *peace be upon him* added: '…Then bring your whole family back to me' (*Yusuf:* 93). This command is a very precise Quranic expression. In other words, Yusuf is commanding them to return with anyone who is related to them or who works for them.[1] Note that Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not command to 'Bring your immediate families'; this was so that they do not come back with only the people of great standing.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi said, 'As-Suddi related that Yahudh (Judah) carried the shirt. The latter addressed Yusuf in the following manner, "I am the one who presented the shirt with false blood (to my father) and caused him so much grief, and I am the one who will carry (this second shirt) to bring him joy and to restore his sight". For this reason, Yahudh carried the shirt'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3593.*

It is also worth pointing out that in his instructions to his brothers to come back to him with their family, Yusuf *peace be upon him* did not make mention of his father. This is because he was the governor of Egypt, and such a command necessitated that the father will come. But by not mentioning Ya'qub *peace be upon him* by name, Yusuf *peace be upon him* is, in fact, exalting him.

Allah *the Almighty* continues:

وَلَمَّا فَصَلَتِ ٱلْعِيرُ قَالَ أَبُوهُمْ إِنِّي لَأَجِدُ رِيحَ يُوسُفَ ۖ لَوْلَآ أَن تُفَنِّدُونِ ﴿٩٤﴾

Later, when the caravan departed, their father said,
'You may think I am senile but I can smell Joseph' [94]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 94)

The verb *'fasalat'* (set out) literally denotes that a thing which was attached to another became unfastened. The expressions *'fasalat al-'ir'* means that the caravan had left the city and had begun its journey. That is to say that the caravan had left the borders of Egypt and was heading toward Ya'qub *peace be upon him*. At that time, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* told his grandchildren who were present: '…I can smell Yusuf…' (*Yusuf:* 94).

We know that the shirt which was sent with the eldest brother carried the smell of Yusuf *peace be upon him*. However, Ya'qub's grandchildren did not believe him, which is why the latter added: 'You may think I am senile...' (*Yusuf:* 94). In other words, I smell the scent of Yusuf, even if you might call me senile. The word for senile in Arabic is *'tafnid'* which is the period of mental decay which is caused by aging.

Among the remarkable discoveries that modern science has made is that sounds and images leave traces in the air. This is in spite of the fact that our human senses inform us that sounds or images vanish instantaneously in air. In addition, modern scientists are now attempting to use various radiations to piece together the image of, say, a group of people who were seated somewhere one or two hours beforehand. Such attempts prove that images emit radiations and shadows which hover around their source for some time before dispersing.

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[1] *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi related that Masruq said, 'The relatives of the brothers added up to ninety-three, including all males and females'. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3593.*

The same is true for sounds. Modern scientists are trying to piece together the sounds that were emitted in the past. They affirm that nothing in the universe is lost, as everything in the universe is preserved in one form or another.

If images and sounds cannot be lost, the same is true for smells. Note that a dog, for instance, detects a scent from far distances. Nowadays, dogs are even used by police to detect drugs. It is precisely for this reason that dogs are trained to work at airports and the borders of countries. The animals are created with a divinely gifted ability to recognise someone's smell among thousands of other smells.

In addition, modern science, which has been bestowed by Allah *the Almighty* on man, is now searching for a means to construct past images or retrieve sounds from surrounding spaces. Based on these two points, it should not be difficult to believe that when the caravan left the city gates and began its journey back to Ya'qub's home, he was able, through divinely imparted means, to smell the scent of Yusuf *peace be upon him* emanating from the shirt which was carried by the caravan.

If someone should ask, 'Why is it that Ya'qub *peace be upon him* detected Yusuf's fragrance only after the caravan had left the city walls and was en route to him?' We answer: 'This is because when the caravan was moving within the city, the scent of Yusuf's shirt was mixed with other city odours. Indeed, any city has many different smells, and rarely does one smell dominate over others. In contrast, in the open countryside, a gust of wind can carry a fragrance over long distances without being impeded by other smells and obstacles'.

We, Muslims, believe that everything in the universe is conserved in some form and cannot simply disappear; a fact which is proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And most surely there are keepers over you: honourable recorders' (*al-Infitar:* 10-11).

Every action that you carry out is recorded in your book of deeds, which is why your record will be put in front of you and you will be commanded to read it. At that time, your own self will be sufficient as a reckoner against you.

Back to the verse under discussion; those who were in the company of Ya'qub *peace be upon him* responded to his statement by saying:

قَالُوا۟ تَٱللَّهِ إِنَّكَ لَفِى ضَلَـٰلِكَ ٱلْقَدِيمِ ﴿٩٥﴾

But [people] said, 'By God! You are still lost in that
old illusion of yours!' [95] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 95)

It is as if they were tired of listening to Ya'qub *peace be upon him* speaking of Yusuf, and thus dismissed his words by retorting, 'How long are you going to be lost in your old illusion?' By using the word *'dalah'* (illusion), they do not mean deviation from the Divine Way of Guidance; rather, they were referring to Ya'qub's actions which are unrelated to piety, such as his extreme love of Yusuf *peace be upon him*, his attachment to him, longing for his return, frequent mentioning of his name and anticipating that he will meet him, etc. Those who were with Ya'qub did not understand his attitude towards Yusuf, as they thought that the latter had died.

Finally, the bearer of good tidings came to Ya'qub *peace be upon him*; Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَلَمَّآ أَن جَآءَ ٱلْبَشِيرُ أَلْقَىٰهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِۦ فَٱرْتَدَّ بَصِيرًا ۖ قَالَ أَلَمْ
أَقُل لَّكُمْ إِنِّىٓ أَعْلَمُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

Then, when the bearer of good news came and placed the
shirt on to Jacob's face, his eyesight returned and he said,
'Did I not tell you that I have know- ledge from God that
you do not have?' [96] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 96)

Finally, the bearer of good tidings arrived. According to some narrations, the bearer of good tidings was either Yahudh (Judah) or the eldest brother who refused to depart from Egypt without his father's permission or a solution from Allah *the Almighty* for the problem of Benyamin's detainment.

As we have seen, Yusuf's servants accused Benyamin of theft to realise Yusuf's desire to keep his brother by his side.

So, the bearer of good tidings came to the father with Yusuf's shirt, and he placed it over the father's face as Yusuf *peace be upon him* had instructed. Having done this, Ya'qub *peace be upon him* no longer had any reason to weep, and he became ecstatically happy. He reacted with great joy because during his days of deep sorrow over Yusuf *peace be upon him* when he cried so often that his eyes turned white, Allah *the Almighty* inspired to him that Yusuf *peace be upon him* was still alive, and this resulted in Ya'qub weeping due to his intense longing to see his son again.

Likewise, Yusuf *peace be upon him* had received a Divine Inspiration wherein he was informed that laying the shirt over his father's face will, by Allah's Grace, restore Ya'qub's eyesight. Needless to say, the joy also had a deep psychological impact on Ya'qub's health. Thus, the victory of truth and Prophethood was eventually realised.

Ya'qub *peace be upon him* said: '…Did I not tell you that I have knowledge from Allah that you do not have?' (*Yusuf:* 96) This rhetorical question was not intended to humiliate the brothers, but rather to affirm the veracity of the prophecies and news communicated by Prophets, for the reality corroborated Ya'qub's previous words: 'My sons, go and seek news of Yusuf and his brother, and do not despair of Allah's Mercy—only disbelievers despair of Allah's Mercy' (*Yusuf:* 87).

Therefore, when you receive a piece of information from someone who is infallible, you should not doubt it, for the normal mind grasps the realities which are only within its capacity. However, there are realities that are beyond a person's mental grasp.

Furthermore, when someone infallible speaks to you of realities that are beyond a person's mental grasp, be sure not to dismiss his words, regardless of whether you have understood him or not, and even if his words are beyond your mental capacity to understand.

At this point, Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers confessed their sins; their confession is related in Allah's saying:

قَالُوا۟ يَـٰٓأَبَانَا ٱسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَآ إِنَّا كُنَّا خَـٰطِـِٔينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

The [brothers] said, ‘Father, ask God to forgive
our sins – we were truly in the wrong’ [97]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 97)

Thus, the brothers admitted their sins and addressed Yaqub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* with the title of ‘father’ so that he might pray to Allah *the Almighty* to forgive their numerous sinful acts. After all, the brothers harmed their father and caused him to grieve. Such offenses are not forgiven unless the wrongdoer confesses their sins. Notice that the brothers said, ‘…we were truly in the wrong.’ (*Yusuf:* 97) This statement clearly indicates that they were aware of the right course of action but chose to act otherwise.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* rstates Yaqub’s response, saying:

قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّىٓ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٩٨﴾

He replied, ‘I shall ask my Lord to forgive you:
He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful’ [98]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 98)

We should notice that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had previously told them: ‘You will hear no reproaches today. May Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful’ (*Yusuf:* 92). However, in the verse under discussion, their father states, ‘I shall ask my Lord to forgive you...’ (*Yusuf:* 98). Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* did not say, ‘I will soon ask my Lord to forgive you’. The reason is that it takes elderly people more time to carry out an action than youths. That is why their father delayed invoking Allah to forgive them for a later time.

In his exegesis, Imam Al-Alusi explains why the position of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with regard to asking Allah *the Almighty* to forgive his brothers differs slightly from that of his father, saying, ‘Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* delayed asking for their forgiveness because asking for a brother to forgive his siblings is different from asking a father to forgive his sons. A brother does not have the same rights as a father, and a father's anger is greater than that of a brother.'

Moreover, the sins referred to in the verse are the brother's major sins from which Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* suffered over very long years. Interestingly, some opine that Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* delayed asking for their forgiveness until dawn because Allah *the Almighty* answers the supplications at that time.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the moment when Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was reunited with his entire family after they had moved to his dwelling in Egypt. Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَلَمَّا دَخَلُوا۟ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ ءَاوَىٰٓ إِلَيْهِ أَبَوَيْهِ
وَقَالَ ٱدْخُلُوا۟ مِصْرَ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ ءَامِنِينَ ﴿٩٩﴾

Later, when they presented themselves before Joseph, he
drew his parents to him – he said, 'Welcome to Egypt: you
will all be safe here, God willing' [99] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 99)

We know that Yusuf's (Joseph's) grandfather, Ishaq (Issac) *peace be upon him* was not present, and that it is the father's side and not the mother's which predominated during that period of time, which is why the word 'parents' in this verse refers to Yusuf's (Joseph's) father and his maternal aunt because his mother had passed away.(1)

It appears that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* received them ceremoniously in Egypt, for they were welcomed by Egypt's dignitaries and officials before they entered the country. This first welcome was intended to alleviate their travel fatigue, and it is during this reception that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* drew his parents to him.

He *peace be upon him* then accompanied his family as they entered Egypt and said, 'Welcome to Egypt: you will all be safe here, Allah willing.' (*Yusuf:* 99) Thus, Yusuf's (Joseph's) family was officially welcomed twice.

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(1) *In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi stated that Rachel is the mother of Yusuf (Joseph) and Benjamin, and she died while giving birth to Benjamin. See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 5/3598.*

When Allah *the Almighty* says: he drew his parents to him (*Yusuf:* 99), He is describing the warmth with which Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his parents – who had long been separated – greeted each other. After all, the father was longing to see his son. Moreover, there is no doubt that he had heard from his sons of Yusuf's (Joseph's) high standing and stature. Likewise, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was yearning to meet his father again.

Being left to our instinctive emotions, our reactions when we meet people have no rules. They are emotional reactions stemming from feelings of longing, love, respect etc. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point. There are certain individuals that you simply greet with a handshake, while there are others whom you hug and welcome warmly upon meeting them, for you are overcome by joy. All these reactions have no specific rituals. A proof of this fact is that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* drew his parents to himself and hugged them.

An analogous instance from the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took place at the Battle of Badr. Prior to the fight, he was holding a pointed spear in his hand and lining men in rows. He passed by Sawad ibn Ghaziya from the tribe of Bani `Uday ibn An-Najjar who happened to be standing out of line – in other words, being out of line from the other warriors, and he was making the line of men uneven. Seeing that Sawad ibn Ghaziya was out of line, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* poked him in the belly with his spear and said, 'Stand in line, Sawad.' Sawad replied, 'You harmed me! Yet Allah has sent you with Truth and Justice, so grant me retribution for causing me this pain.' Thereupon, Messenger Muhammad exposed his belly and said, 'Take your revenge,' but Sawad hugged him and kissed his belly. Prophet Muhammad asked, 'Why are you doing this, Sawad?' The latter responded, 'Messenger of Allah, we are where we are – meaning at the threshold of mortal combat – and I wanted my last interaction with you to be for my skin to touch yours.' So, Messenger Muhammad prayed to Allah *the Almighty* to confer His Bounty on Sawad.'(1)

Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *See ibn Hisham, Sirat ibn Hisham, 2/626; and ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa An-Nihayah, 3/271.*

وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيۡهِ عَلَى ٱلۡعَرۡشِ وَخَرُّواْ لَهُۥ سُجَّدٗاۖ وَقَالَ يَٰٓأَبَتِ هَٰذَا تَأۡوِيلُ رُءۡيَٰيَ مِن قَبۡلُ قَدۡ
جَعَلَهَا رَبِّي حَقّٗاۖ وَقَدۡ أَحۡسَنَ بِيٓ إِذۡ أَخۡرَجَنِي مِنَ ٱلسِّجۡنِ وَجَآءَ بِكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡبَدۡوِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ أَن
نَّزَغَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ بَيۡنِي وَبَيۡنَ إِخۡوَتِيٓۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَطِيفٞ لِّمَا يَشَآءُۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ١٠٠

And took them up to [his] throne. They all bowed down before him(1) and he said, 'Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true and has been gracious to me – He released me from prison and He brought you here from the desert – after Satan sowed discord between me and my brothers. My Lord is most subtle in achieving what He will; He is the All Knowing, the Truly Wise [100] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 100)

Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* took his parents up to his throne because he did not want to be situated in a symbolically superior position. This act reflects his love, reverence, and respect towards his parents.

As for the Arabic word *al-a`rsh* (throne), it refers to the seat from which the king handles his political affairs. The family bowed down in worship to Allah *the Almighty* for having been united once again. We should consider that they did not bow down in worship to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*; rather, they bowed down in worship to the only One worthy of that; Allah *the Almighty*.

In the same connection, I say to those who tried to argue about why Ya`qub's (Jacob) family prostrated to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* 'Are you more zealous of caring for Allah's rights than Allah Himself'? In other words, it is Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who inspired Ya`qub (Jacob) and his children to do so.

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(1) *Al-Hassan Al-Basri maintained that the prostration was not in the form that we Muslims know; in fact, it was a custom in which the person saluting would tilt his head forward; such was their way of greeting. Ath-Thawri, Ad-Dahak and others said, 'The prostration resembled the traditional Muslim prostration, the difference being that this prostration was a form of salutation rather than worship. In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi explains that the exegetes of the Quran unanimously agree that the prostration, whichever form it took, was a salutation and not a form of worship.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 5/3600.*

After all, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who states the fact that Yusuf's (Joseph's) family prostrated to him. Moreover, it is He Who ordered the angels to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him*.(1) Why then do some people interpret these verses to mean that the angel bowed down in worship to Adam? The true believer understands that the prostration of the angels before Adam was a form of obedience to a Divine Command. In addition, Adam was created by Allah *the Almighty* from clay and He blew His Spirit into him. Therefore, commanding the angels to prostrate before him is meant to show their gratitude for Allah's creation of humankind.

The same is true for the prostration of Ya`qub's (Jacob) family to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*; it is a form of giving thanks to Allah *the Almighty* for reuniting them. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* states this fact in the verse in question, and He does not declare Ya`qub's (Jacob's) family sinful for doing such an act.(2) Thus, their prostration was meant to offer their salutations to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* as he was perfectly capable of returning their greetings in the same way.

Once again, it must be emphasised that their prostration before Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was not intended as a form of worship, for worship is an act that is carried out by an inferior who is trying to approach his superior, but the worshipped being does not reciprocate the worship. If the act of prostration in worship was to anyone other than Allah *the Almighty* then its doer is punished for this misdeed, for prostrating in worship to anyone other than Him *the Almighty* is absolutely forbidden.

Worshiping Allah *the Almighty* implies following His commandments and avoiding His prohibitions. Therefore, the prostration in the verse in question is a group reaction stemming from their gratitude for being granted relief after hardship and sadness. Allah *the Almighty* rewards for such act of worship.

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(1) *`This is a reference to Allah's saying: 'And when We said to the angels: Make obeisance to Adam they did obeisance…' (al-Baqara: 34)*

(2) *Allah the Almighty has abrogated this (custom) in our Shari'a. Furthermore, He replaced the custom of genuflection with exchanging words of salutation. Qatadah said, 'Such was the salutation reserved for kings in their time, and* Allah *the Almighty has given this community of the faithful (that is, the Muslims) greetings of peace, that is, As-Salamu `Alaykum, which is the greeting of the people of paradise.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jama' Al-Bayan, 5/3600.*

The greeting offered by a servant, which can be reciprocated by another or even answered in a better manner, is something which Allah *the Almighty* does not prohibit and it has nothing to do with worship.(1)

We must, therefore, realise that the family's prostration to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* can be reconciled by means of reason which agrees with the language of The Quran, while considering the circumstances of the story.

If we ponder Ya`qub's statement and the sadness that he suffered, as well as Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers' compunction for their past actions and for the hardship that they underwent, we will surely conclude that the prostration was intended to show their gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* Who controls all things. This way of comprehending the matter is better than making unjustified claims. Let us ask the following question, 'Did they perform this prostration without Allah's Knowledge of it'? Of course, they did not.

After this part of the verse, we come across words addressed by Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to his father, 'Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true....' (*Yusuf:* 100). The dream referred to in this verse is the first scene in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* relates the latter's words as follows, 'I dreamed of eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them all bow down before me.' (*Yusuf:* 4)

In the verse under discussion, Yusuf (Joseph) said, 'My Lord has made it come true (*Yusuf:* 100). This statement indicates that his dream has been fulfilled. Indeed, Yusuf's (Joseph's) father and brothers realised this when they prostrated to him in salutation and gratitude. As stated above, they– the eleven brothers, the father and the aunt who replaced the mother – did not prostrate with the intention of worshiping Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. Finally, this means that the dreams of prophets are inevitably fulfilled. In the same connection, someone may pose the following question, 'What about the unfulfilled dream of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in which, Allah *the Almighty* orders him to sacrifice his son"? After all, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was on the verge of carrying out the command, and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was resigned to Allah's Decree. We contend; 'Only prophets are legally obliged to undertake the commands which are revealed to them in dreams. This is because Satan cannot penetrate their dreams. In other words, prophets are infallible with regards to demonic attacks in the dream-state.

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(1) *`Anas ibn Malik narrated 'We asked, 'Messenger of Allah should we bow to each other if we meet?' He responded, 'No.' Then we asked, 'Should we hug each other?' He again responded, 'No.' Then we asked, 'Should we shake each other's hand?' He responded, 'Yes.' This Hadith is narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir and he ascribed it to ibn A`bd Al-Barr in his book At-Tamhid. See Al-Qurtubi, Jam` Al-Bayan, 5/3600.*

However, if a normal human being were to claim that he had a dream in which he was ordered to carry out some specific action, we would say, 'You are not obliged to carry out this order which you dreamt of. After all, Islamic law does not oblige you to do so, not to mention that Satan is able to penetrate into your dreams.'

In contrast to normal mortals, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) performing the command– which came to him in a dream – of sacrificing his son, and his attempt to do so stem from his legal binding to orders which come to him in dreams.

Allah *the Almighty* speaks of this incident to show us the great tribulation which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* faced. In addition, this anecdote reveals his utter submission to Allah's Decree and his willingness to meticulously carry out every order. Allah *the Almighty* states this fact in the following verse, 'And when his Lord tried Ibrahim (Abraham) with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said, "Surely I will make you a leader of men."' (*al-Baqara:* 124) The hardest of tests which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* passed through was to obey the command of sacrificing his son with his own hands. That is why I always insist that only the prophets are obliged to obey the commands that they receive in dreams. Normal people, however, must consider dreams that are contrary to the Divine Way of Guidance to be of demonic origins.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *Glorified is He* continues to state the remainder of Yusuf's (Joseph's) speech, saying, 'and has been gracious to me— He released me from prison...' (*Yusuf:* 100). Here arises the following question, 'Why did Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* not chronologically mention the misfortunes which he had to endure, such as when his brothers cast him in the well'? We contend: 'He did not want to bring up past incidents which would spoil his long-awaited reunion with his family. However, he mentioned other calamities which he endured after the incident of the well, including his enslavement and incarceration after refusing to succumb to the desires of the governor’s wife. He also recalled how Allah *the Almighty* has been gracious toward him and released him from prison. Furthermore, after being liberated, he was blessed in many ways, including his ascension to power.

Someone might also proclaim that the story is not harmonious since some incidents are mentioned while others are omitted. We answer that the story is in perfect harmony because we should make a distinction between historical accounts whose purpose is to relate historical facts and stories whose purpose is to relate morally and spiritually significant narratives of the past.

The verse in question is centred on the union of the brothers, the father, and the aunt. Therefore, there is no need for stating chronological facts which would cause dissention. This is especially true since Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had previously said, ‘You will hear no reproaches today. May Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful’ (*Yusuf:* 92).

Moreover, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had previously addressed them with benevolence by attributing their misdemeanour to ignorance on their part; a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah, ‘He said, “Do you now realise what you did to Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother when you were ignorant?”’ (*Yusuf:* 89)

In the verse under discussion, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* evokes the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* bestowed upon him, saying, ‘this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made come true’ (*Yusuf:* 100). Furthermore, he gratefully acknowledges Allah’s Grace by saying, ‘and has been gracious to me— He released me from prison’ (*Yusuf:* 100). The previous part of the verse only mentions the grace that was bestowed upon Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him,* whilst the next part mentions Allah’s Grace to his family, ‘and He brought you here from the desert’ (*Yusuf:* 100).

The verb *ahsan* (to be gracious) is sometimes followed by the particle *ila* (to) and thus means that someone has been gracious to me. Other times, it is followed by the particle *ba`* as in the verse in question. In other words, the Graciousness of Allah *the Almighty* permeated all aspects of Yusuf’s (Joseph’s) life; He made him a ruler and brought his family from the desert.(1) On the other hand, when the word *ihsan* is followed by the particle *ila,* this means that graciousness is bestowed specifically upon Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* for only the latter may benefit from it.

To recap, Allah *the Almighty* has endowed Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* with two types of graciousness: one type which is specifically bestowed upon him, and another restricted to his family.

He considered their arrival from the desert as a form of Divine Graciousness because people of the desert live in a secluded and primordial state. They do not settle in a fixed location. They do not belong to a society, nor have solid houses to live in. Furthermore, they subsist on flora and rainwater, and they carry their belongings on camelback, roaming from one region to another. People of the desert are deprived of the blessings offered by civilisation. In urban areas, everything that you need is within your grasp. However, life in the desert compels man to seek his livelihood in different places of the earth. Therefore, life in civilised cities is more settled than life in the desert.

The Arab poet Ahmad Shawqi(2) *Allah rest his soul* portrays the difference between life in the desert and in the city in the following fictitious argument between someone who zealously defends life in the desert, and another who is equally passionate about defending city life. The poet says:

'Behold, ibn Jurayj, for I am the arid desert,

And (I carry on) in this parched subsistence.

And (I subsist) from he who is drawing milk from the goats,

And from he who is igniting the fire somewhere else.

(Unlike) those who listen to the songs of Ma`bad and Al-Ghariq,

We are tormented by howling hyenas!

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(1) *In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi says, 'It is related that Ya`qub (Jacob) lived in Can`an, and that he belonged to a people who were rural herdsmen. Some opine that Ya`qub (Jacob) was not born in the desert, but that he moved to the desert where he lived.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3602.*

(2) Ahmad Shawqi is an innovative poet and was the 'prince of (Arab) poets' of his time. He is still looked up to as the greatest Arab poet of the modern age.

They (city dwellers) eat exquisite meals,
And we drink our livestock’s milk.’

Ibn Jurayj is complaining of the hardships and monotony of desert life in which he only sees the usual sights such as of goats being milked and fires being lit. Unlike the people of the city, the desert people are not enjoying the voices of the famous singers of their days. Rather, they listen to the sounds of howling hyenas. The desert people do not eat meals prepared by cooks; rather, they drink milk that is produced by their livestock.

Layla, who is zealously defensive of the desert, then retorts:

‘O ibn Jurayj, Hind has wrongly abused the desert!
And (unduly) critical in her judgment was she!
For the desert is naught but the abode of the generous,
And the dwelling place of (men of) pure conscience.
To her belongs the horizon where the sun dawns,
And city dwellers possess the place where dusk begins.
(The desert women) are like sweet basil extending to the horizon,
But (so few are) city women that they (resemble) basil sprouting from a flowerpot!
Consumed by love are they, while the city ladies
Are more attentive to their wellbeing than to love!’

The Arabic word *i`tasafat* in the first line means ‘to wrongly abuse’. In other words, Hind has wrongly abused the desert. Then the speaker numerates the virtues of the desert, pointing out that the desert women are like sweet basil stretching as far as the eye can see, while the women of cities evoke the image of a basil sprout growing in a flowerpot or any other container.

Then the poet speaks of the virtues of desert people, and he takes pride in the fact that desert women are passionate lovers who are consumed by their love, even though their beloved cannot assure them material comfort. The poet alleges that the desert woman is so consumed by love that she becomes inflicted with tuberculosis and dies. By contrast, the city women’s good health follows her falling in love.

Back to the verse in question, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* expresses his gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* for having been so gracious to him and to his family who was brought from the desert to live in the civilised land of Egypt. The newly arrived family beheld the stark contrast between the parched life of the desert and the easy and soft life of the city.

Thereafter, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* briefly mentions the animosity that his brothers had once felt toward him, saying, '…after Satan sowed discord between me and my brothers…' (*Yusuf:* 100). Clearly, this is a conciliatory reference to the conflict between Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his brothers for he attributed it to the discord that was sown by Satan. In other words, the dispute did stem from a shortcoming within their souls. This verse suggests that the brothers' discord was the result of Satan's whispers that had the effect of a painful prick which triggers the person to act harmfully. This image is derived from a goad with which a horse trainer commands his horse. Unlike a stab, a prick is a poke which stirs someone into action.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* warns us against the works of Satan in the following verse, 'And if a false imputation from Satan afflicts you, seek refuge in Allah.' (*al-A'raf:* 200) Everyone knows that the animosity of Satan towards mankind has long existed, and by seeking refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from Satan, you obtain protection from demonic forces. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'surely, those who guard (against evil), when a visitation from Satan afflicts them they become mindful, then lo! They see.' (*al-A'raf:* 201) This verse clearly shows that when man recalls the animosity between him and Satan, he should safeguard himself against dark satanic whispers by strengthening himself with faith in Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question: '… My Lord is most subtle in achieving what He will; He is the All Knowing, the Truly Wise.' (*Yusuf:* 100) Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* is the Omniscient Who manages all things.

As for the word *lutf,* it implies lightness, and its antonym is *kathafa*, that is, heaviness or density. Something which is *latif* (light) has very light body mass. However, when *lutf* is understood in its aspect of subtleness, one could say that the subtler something is, the more rigorous it is, as it cannot be impeded by any obstacle.

When we consider Allah's attribute of having Subtle Knowledge, we understand it in the sense that there is nothing that can stand in the way of His Divine Will and that He knows the location of all things. Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* is the All-Aware and the Knower of subtleties. Thus, nothing can escape Allah's Sublet Knowledge, nor can anything be hidden from Him.

I repeat, there is nothing in this world which can prevent the Divine Will from unfolding, and Allah *the Almighty* knows the locations of all entities in existence. In other words, Allah's *Glorified is He* Knowledge is absolute. Furthermore, He is All-Wise and handles every event with precision. No person can contribute anything to Allah *the Almighty* for He has Absolute Perfection.

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* states Yusuf's (Joseph's) prayer in the following verse, saying:

رَبِّ قَدْ ءَاتَيْتَنِى مِنَ ٱلْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِى مِن تَأْوِيلِ ٱلْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ فَاطِرَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ
أَنتَ وَلِىِّۦ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۖ تَوَفَّنِى مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِى بِٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١٠١﴾

My Lord! You have given me authority; You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams; Creator of the heavens and the earth, You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous' [101] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 101)

We know that Lordship implies creating something from naught, supplying dependent creatures with sustenance and providing a setting in which procreation is possible to ensure the survival of the species. Moreover, these variables must interrelate in a harmonious manner.

Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* created things from naught, ensured the continuation of life by supplying creatures with sustenance and He sustained the life of the human species through marriage and reproduction. In the same connection, we should note that every human receives their share from the bestowal of Lordship, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever. Moreover, everything within creation is subservient to all human beings, for Allah *the Almighty* has brought human beings into existence, and therefore ensured their subsistence.

As Islam teaches us, Allah *the Almighty* not only imparts upon His believing servants the blessings of Lordship but also grants them with the bestowal of Divinity embodied in the Divine Way of Guidance. So, when Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* proclaims, 'My Lord! You have given me authority…' (*Yusuf:* 101), he implies that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who granted him dominance, power and authority. This is so because no one – including the wicked oppressors – can overpower Allah *the Almighty*. It is precisely for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, 'Say, "O Allah, Master of the Kingdom! You give the kingdom to whomsoever You pleases and takes away the kingdom from whomsoever You pleases, and You exalts whom You pleases and abases whom You pleases in Your Hand is the good; surety, You has power over all things."' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) Obviously, the act of granting dominion is never met with resistance by rulers; however, taking away dominion is often resisted by whoever is losing power. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* honours and humbles whom He wills.

When a believer truly grasps the meaning of this verse, he realises with certitude that there is no fleeing from Allah's predestination. The believer will realise that granting or taking away of power are both blessings from Allah *the Almighty*. Likewise, being honoured or humbled by Allah *the Almighty* is a blessing, because humility, far from being a privation, prevents man from falling into vanity and pride and from harming other people's faith.

Concerning the above-mentioned verse, some people said, 'We must refer to an implicit meaning, that is, while the act of granting dominion and honouring is good, the act of taking away dominion and humiliating is evil'. Such people say this because their statement is based on the assumption that this verse contains two blessings and two privations. We contend: 'What you deem to be a privation is in fact a blessing from Allah *the Almighty* since everything He wills is good'.

Back to the verse in question; Yusuf's (Joseph's) statement, 'My Lord! You have given me authority (*al-mulk*) …' (*Yusuf:* 101) requires that we distinguish between the meaning of *al-mulk* and *al-milk*. Everyone possesses certain things such as clothes, a pen, house, furniture etc. Such items are called *al-milk* (possessions). As for *al-mulk* (dominion), it is to have control over those who possess things.

Allah *the Almighty* has granted certain people dominion over His creatures. He firstly granted the people ownership of their possessions and then granted some of them dominion over their possessions. Allah *the Almighty* grants and withdraws power from people in such a way, for power is never absolutely in one person's possession.

Consider, for example, the fate of the Shah of Iran who was invested with tremendous power and ruled over a civilised nation and a powerful army. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* withdrew power from the Shah through certain people who began to undo the basis for his political authority. Eventually, the Shah was overthrown.

In this fleeting world, you have authority over the outer parts of your body: you command your hand to hit someone, and it does so. Man persists in this state until the Final Day when he has no power over his body. On this day, Allah *the Almighty* has dominance over things Alone. He proclaims in the following verse, 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16)

On the Day of Judgment, men of power are stripped of their authority, and dominance belongs to Allah Alone.

Note that aside from *mulk* (authority) and *milk* (possessions), we have the word *malakut* which is the world that is not perceived by our senses. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And thus did We show Ibrahim (Abraham) the kingdom (*malakut*) of the heavens and the earth...' (*al-An'am:* 75).

This verse clearly tells us that Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the world of secrets that are hidden in His creatures. When witnessing modern scientists uncovering the mysteries of the plant and animal realms, one is bewildered by the precision of Allah's creation.

Moreover, whoever Allah *the Almighty* has granted the subtle knowledge and the insight of the scholars, penetrates the outer world and sees the intelligible realm with the eyes of knowledge. This vision allows him to uncover secrets and unveil hidden truths.

In his prayers to his Lord, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* adds, 'You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams...' (*Yusuf:* 101).

Here, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is acknowledging Allah's Graciousness to him for having granted him the knowledge of the interpretation of dreams. It is through this knowledge that he *peace be upon him* could interpret the dreams of the two prisoners who were incarcerated with him in jail, as well as the dream of the king which caused Yusuf's (Joseph's) rise to power; a fact which is by no means surprising considering Allah's Almightiness.

Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* gratefully exclaims, 'Creator of the heavens and the earth...' (*Yusuf:* 101). Since Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of all things, it is not surprising that He should teach Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* many forms of knowledge. It is as if Yusuf's (Joseph's) faith had attained the rank in which he knows with certitude the contents of the following verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.' (*al-Mulk:* 14)

In our daily life, we witness inventions benefiting not only the inventor but also other beneficiaries. The inventor of the threshing machine or a plough, for example, instructs us how to use these machines or tools. Clearly, his instructions are meant to ensure that the device operates properly.

Let us offer another example to further clarify this point; when our car breaks down, we call a mechanic to look at it. If the mechanic is a trustworthy person, he informs you of the mechanical problem with exactitude and thus fixes it. However, if the mechanic is dishonest, he will damage engine parts that were intact, and will make unneeded reparations for the car. Thus, we see that each inventor is cognisant of the secrets and intricacies of his invention. Considering this conclusion, what are we to say of Allah *the Almighty* the Greatest Creator of all? Surely, He is the All-Aware and the Knower of all things.

Given what we just explained, why did Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* speak of Allah *the Almighty* as, 'Creator of the heavens and the earth.' (*Yusuf:* 101)? The reason for this is that he *peace be upon him* knows for certain that Allah *the Almighty* has created man, and that man has a beginning and an end. Only Allah *the Almighty* knows when our end will be, for man may die a day old, he may perish in his mother's womb or he may die after having experienced life and its vicissitudes for one hundred years.

In contrast, the heavens and the earth are long-standing creations. The sun has never needed any spare parts, for it has never fallen! The sun heats the earth, while it is far above it. Moreover, it is because of Allah's Will that the sun does not fall upon the earth. Allah *the Almighty* stated, '...And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission; most surely Allah is Compassionate, Merciful to men.' (*al-Hajj:* 65) Consider the following verse as well, 'Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of men, but most people do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57) Man undergoes changes and he dies, but the heavens and the earth, on the contrary, are unchanging, unless Allah *the Almighty* wills otherwise.

Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* continues his supplication to Allah *the Almighty* saying, 'You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter...' (*Yusuf:* 101). Allah *the Almighty* is indeed Yusuf's (Joseph's) Protector in this world for He granted him victory, drew him closer unto Himself and supported him when he was faced with hardship. This verse clearly shows how he is invoking Allah *the Almighty* for His Blessings in this ephemeral world, and for His Reward in the Hereafter.

Since Allah *the Almighty* is Yusuf's (Joseph's) Protector in this world and in the next, the latter also asks, '…Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous.' (*Yusuf:* 101) By asking, 'Let me die in true devotion to You… (*Yusuf:* 101), Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is invoking Allah *the Almighty* to make him a beneficiary of His Reward in the Hereafter, just as he enjoyed Allah's Bounty in this worldly life.

Muslim scholars have remarked that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is unique in having desired to depart this life. After all, when man is granted success in this world, his aspirations are never-ending and he always craves for more bounty.

The annals of Islamic history record that when `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz,(1) the Commander of the Believers, was presented with a soft piece of clothing, he would ask for one that was even smoother. Likewise, when offered a tender dish, he would demand for another that was even tenderer. However, when he became Caliph, people offered him clothing, but he would ask for clothing that was rougher in texture. This went on to the point that the members of his retinue began to think that he was no longer sound in the way he treated himself. These people did not understand that his soul always longed for better things; when he yearned for the rank of Emir, he was granted it, and when he desired to be Caliph, he assumed that position. Finally, after having ascended to the heights of power, he could long for nothing other than Paradise.(1)

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(1) *He is Abu Hafs, the righteous caliph who ruled over the Umayyad dynasty in Ash-Sham. He was born in 61 A.H. and was raised in Medina and Al-Walid gave its Emirate to him. After Al-Walid, he became a minister for Sulayman ibn `Abd Al-Malik in Ash-Sham. He then became Caliph in the year 99 A.H., but his reign was short because he died in 101 A.H. at the age of 41. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A`lam, 5/50.*

One of `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz's companions, Ma`mun ibn Mahram *Allah be pleased with them* relates that he once entered upon `Umar and found him praying to Allah *the Almighty* for death. He asked him, 'Commander of the Believers, why do you ask your Lord for death when he has made you a cause of such goodness (on Earth)? You have revived the practices of Prophet Muhammad; you have put an end to religious innovations, and your presence is a blessing to all Muslims.'

`Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz responded, 'Should I not be akin to the righteous servant of Allah who, after receiving His full bounty, prayed, '…Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous' (*Yusuf:* 101)?'

We should note that the supplication, '…Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous.' (*Yusuf:* 101) is composed of two parts; the first part is asking Allah *the Almighty* to let him die; while the second is to let him die as one who has submitted himself to Him *the Almighty*.

Clearly, each person dies regardless of whether he asks for death. Therefore, the first part of this prayer is not asked for itself, for each one inevitably dies. Thus, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* asked for the second part of this prayer, namely; to die in a state of perfect submission to Allah *the Almighty*. It is for this reason that upon visiting graves we utter, ‘May you be safe, O inmates of the abodes of the believers and the Muslims, and if Allah pleases, we shall follow you.’(1)

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(1) *In his book, Abu Nu`aym Al-Asfahani relates that `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz said, 'My soul is unrelentingly desirous. Each time the worldly life offers it something, it desires something better. When offered the greatest thing on earth, namely; to be a Caliph, my soul still longed for something superior. Sa`id ibn `Amir said that paradise is better than being Caliph.' See Al-`Asfahani, Hilyat Al-`Awliya`, 5/331.*

In this connection, if someone were to ask, ‘Why does one say ‘If Allah wills, we shall follow you,’ even though death is inevitable’? We say, ‘We say “If Allah wills” out of our desire to join as believers the ranks of the dead who have preceded us’.

Someone may also pose the following question, ‘Why would a prophet say to Allah *the Almighty* ‘Join me with the righteous’ (*Yusuf:* 101)? After all, righteousness is only possible in this world by following the Divine Way of Guidance that a Prophet of Allah is sent with’. We answer, ‘The word ‘righteous’ in this verse encompasses all of the prophets and others who have believed in the Message revealed by Allah *the Almighty*.’

The verse in question brings an end to the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*.(2) Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* turns our attention to the moral of the story. This story is different from other Quranic stories because it is completely related in one chapter of The Quran, whereas the rest of the stories are dispersed throughout various places in it.

Another exception to this general trend in the Quran is the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* which is also narrated from beginning to end in one chapter. Certain critics have superficially observed that the stories of the Quran are redundantly repeated in various scattered thereof. In response to this observation, I always insist that this apparently repetitive narrative is a synthesising of the various events of each story which, if reassembled, would amount to the complete story.

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(1) *Buraydah Al-Aslami Allah be pleased with him narrated, ‘Prophet Muhammad used to teach them (i.e. the companions) whenever they came out to visit the graveyard to say, “May you be safe, O inmates of the abodes of the believers and the Muslims, and if Allah pleases, we shall follow you, we pray to Allah for well-being for ourselves and for you.”’ See Imam Ahmad, Musnad, 5/353, 359; and Muslim, Hadith no. 975.*

(2) Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* lived his last days in Egypt, and died when he was 107 years old. In his *Tafsir*, Al-Qurtubi narrated that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was buried by the Nile river in a marble coffin. The reason for this is that each group of people desired to bury him in their graveyard to be blessed by being buried by his side. This escalated to the point where a fight was about to break out. Finally, the people decided to bury him at the source of the Nile, allowing the water to pass over his body and to be diffused throughout Egypt. Four hundred years later, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* left Egypt with the people of Israel, he exhumed Yusuf's *(Joseph's) body from the Nile and transported his casket to Jerusalem where he lies buried with his fathers.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/3605.*

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* wanted certain events of each story to be retold for a specific purpose. Generally, the Quranic narratives were revealed to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Throughout his twenty-three years as a Messenger, he suffered great calamities and needed reassurance at every moment. So, Allah *the Almighty* revealed these stories to strengthen his heart.(1) In some instances, Allah *Glorified is He* tells him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be sad, for what he is facing is similar to what the messengers before him had suffered.(2)

In fact, one sometimes comes across a single narrative that is made up of two elements, such as the story of the enmity between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh in which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And Pharaoh’s family took him up that he might be an enemy and a grief for them...’ (*al-Qasas:* 8).

In this verse, the hostility is prompted by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. About this subject, Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him…’ (*Ta Ha:* 39).

Here, enmity is reciprocated because it arises from two parties. In fact, opposition or enmity is not sustainable when there is only one party involved. A short fight may take place when there is a one-sided enmity, but the reciprocal enmity between two parties prolongs the duration of that fight.

A second example is to be found in the same story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* relates an event which took place in the early days of his life; that is, prior to his mother’s casting him into the river in accordance with Allah’s Decree. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And

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(1) Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith; and in this has come to you the truth and an admonition, and a reminder to the believers.’ (*Hud:* 120)

(2) Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And if they call you a liar, truly apostles before you were called liars, and to Allah are all affairs returned.’ (*Fatir:* 4)

We revealed to *Musa*’s (Moses’) mother, saying, “Suckle him, then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve”’ (*al-Qasas:* 7).

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* is heartening *Musa*’s (Moses’) mother before she casts her son into the river. Allah *the Almighty* is also foreshadowing the incident prior to its unfolding. At the moment she was about to place her son into the river, Allah *the Almighty* revealed to her, ‘Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore; there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him…’ (*Ta Ha:* 39).

Those who proclaim that the stories of the Quran are told in a haphazard manner are oblivious to the fact that the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* appears in a single chapter of the Quran. Nor do they recall that the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is related continuously and in chronological order, from Yusuf’s (Joseph’s) first dream to his ascension to power and ending with reuniting with his family.

Furthermore, the story was revealed in one chapter after the disbelievers of Mecca asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. They knew well that he was not tutored by a teacher, nor could he read from a book. Furthermore, they were aware of his life before being a prophet; however, when he proclaimed to them that Allah *the Almighty* had revealed the Quran to him, they refused to believe, claiming that he hears anecdotes from hither and thither. Yet, when they asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to recount them the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* he recounted it in full and from beginning to end.

Concluding the story, Allah *the Almighty* says:

ذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلۡغَيۡبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيۡكَۖ وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيۡهِمۡ إِذۡ أَجۡمَعُوٓاْ أَمۡرَهُمۡ وَهُمۡ يَمۡكُرُونَ ١٠٢

This account is part of what was beyond your knowledge [Muhammad]. We revealed it to you: you were not present with Joseph’s brothers when they made their treacherous plans [102] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 102)

The demonstrative pronoun ‘this’ in this verse is about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*. The verse is addressed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This verse clearly shows that he was not present with Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers when they said, 'Although we are many, Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother are dearer to our father than we are...' (*Yusuf:* 8).

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* of things which he was not present to witness.

As we have said previously, *al-ghayb* (the unseen) is what is absent from your sight but not from someone else's. Note that this type of *ghayb* is a relative one. However, there is also an absolute *ghayb* which refers to what is absent from your knowledge and from other human beings as well. In fact, there are three obstacles which veil the unseen world from our sight: The first is the obstacle of the past time which you did not experience, or of the future which has not yet come to pass. The second is the obstacle of spatial location. The third is the obstacle rendered by the present moment. In other words, there are things which are currently taking place in one location or another, but you are oblivious to these events by being in a different position in space.

Allah's saying, 'We revealed it to you…' (*Yusuf:* 102) means that Allah *the Almighty* secretly reveals unto you, O Prophet Muhammad, the incident of when the brothers gathered together to decide whether to kill Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* or to cast him into the dark depths of the well.

In this way, Allah *the Almighty* lifted the veil of the past and gave Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* insight into a story which He had not known previously. Obviously, he was not a direct witness of what had happened between the brothers. He was not instructed by a teacher, and nor did he read of this story in a book, for he was unlettered and could neither read nor write.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* describes him *peace and blessings be upon him* as, 'And you did not recite before it any book, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand, for then could those who say untrue things have doubted.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48)

The disbelievers of Mecca were fully aware of Messenger Muhammad's movements – including where he lived, the places he travelled to, and the people he met – prior to his prophetic mission. Had they known that he had read a book, it would surely have been a reason for them to accuse him of lying. They foolishly claimed, '…Only a mortal teaches him.' (*an-Nahl:* 103). In response to their fallacious claim, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The tongue of him whom they reproach is barbarous, and this is clear Arabic tongue.' (*an-Nahl:* 103) In this way, Allah *the Almighty* refuted their claim.

Furthermore, He has informed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of many things of the unseen world. We have previously elaborated extensively on verses which state that he was not present when certain events took place. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to you; and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Maryam (Mary) in his charge, and you were not with them when they contended one with another.' (*Al-'Imran:* 44)

Another example is Allah's saying, 'And you were not on the western side when We revealed to Musa (Moses) the commandment, and you were not among the witnesses.' (*al-Qasas:* 44) Thus, this verse implies that Messenger Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* knowledge of the above events comes originally from Allah *the Almighty*.

Having received instructions from the Jews, the disbelievers went up to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and inquired about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in their vehemently and obstinately sceptical manner. In response to their inquiry, he *peace and blessings be upon him* related the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in one chapter of The Quran, unlike most of the other Quranic narratives, which were revealed in the form of dispersed narratives.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related the story in its entirety since they asked for the whole story rather than a specific segment from it. Moreover, the disbelievers expected him to refuse to answer their question out of ignorance, but he answered them in full.

After hearing of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* the disbelievers should have realised that it is Allah *the Almighty* who sent Messenger Muhammad and taught him this story. However, the disbelievers refused to believe. This saddened Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so Allah *the Almighty* told him not to be upset or despondent, ‘Perhaps you will kill yourself with grief because they do not believe.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* explains to him that he should only convey the Message.

Allah has revealed these consoling words to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he realised that the disbelievers were obstinate in their disbelief even though he had satisfied their inquiries. The disbelievers, nevertheless, rejected the Truth; a fact which is recorded in The Quran, ‘And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them; consider, then how was the end of the mischief-makers.’ (*an-Naml:* 14) They denied the Message sent to them because they were concerned solely with temporal power. They should have believed in that which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought to them, but it was stubbornness which came between them and certain truth and faith.

When a person is stubbornly clinging to an idea, neither an undeniable proof nor a flawless logic can persuade them to think otherwise. Similarly, the disbelievers denied Prophet Muhammad’s message after having heard the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in its entirety. They wanted to maintain dominion over their helpless servants and to maintain tyrannical control over other people. Since they hated the idea of being equalised with other people, they rejected the religion of Islam because it addresses all of humanity in a just and equal manner.

In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions a principle of universal significance, saying:

وَمَآ أَكۡثَرُ ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَوۡ حَرَصۡتَ بِمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

However eagerly you may want them to, most men
will not believe [103] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 103)

This verse clearly shows that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not be able to guide all the people to Islam, no matter how strongly he might desire it. In fact, he had a burning desire for his people to believe in his Message; after all he was one of them.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* speaks of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers (he is) compassionate.’ (*at-Tawba:* 129) Despite Prophet Muhammad’s concern for them, they rejected his Message which caused him to grieve.

On the other hand, there is a particular verse that shows what the Jews – who incited some people of Mecca to ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*– are concerned about. Allah *the Almighty* states, ‘And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life (greedier) than even those who are polytheists…’ (*al-Baqara*: 96).

In short, the people of Mecca should have believed in his *peace and blessings be upon him* Message since they were presented with irrefutable proofs that he was indeed a Messenger of Allah.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘However eagerly you may want them to, most men will not believe.’ (*Yusuf:* 103) Allah *Glorified is He* revealed this verse to console Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to remind him that the impoverished spiritual state of the people of Mecca is not limited to them; rather, it is the state of most people. Here arises the following question, ‘Why do most people disbelieve?’ The reason is that most people are unable to properly measure that which the Divine Way of Guidance is offering in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. So, when man adopts Allah’s Way of Guidance, he must take account of the rewards that he will reap in the Hereafter. In this way, one will fully realise firstly that no matter how much he tries to please his soul with worldly pleasures, their time in this world is confined to Allah’s Decree, and secondly that life could come to an end at any moment.Unlike what many people believe, Allah *the Almighty* did not veil the durations of our lives in this world to be unknown to us. On the contrary, the uncertainty of our life span is a basis for clarity because the possibility of departing from this world at any given moment makes man vigilant regarding their spiritual duties.

Thus, there is wisdom in sudden deaths, for they serve as reminders to man that death has no cause. Rather, death is a cause in itself which should induce piety. Furthermore, this is the case even when death results from sickness or an unanticipated happening. In short, man takes pleasure in this world for an amount of time that has been preordained by Allah *the Almighty*. In contrast to the ephemeral nature of worldly pleasures, man delights in the pleasures of the Hereafter eternally with Allah's unlimited bestowals.

The rewards that the believer enjoys in the Hereafter correspond to Allah's unlimited Omnipotence. In other words, the believer's reward in the Hereafter is not according to the limited capacity of the creature, but according to Allah's Absolute Power.

Consider a person who is oblivious to the reality of the Hereafter, that is, a person who denies the Hereafter and only lives for the pleasures of this fleeting world; we would say to such a person, 'Reflect on what Allah *the Almighty* prohibits, and what He commands you, and consider the fact that these proscriptions and commands do not only apply to you, but that they apply to millions of other believers'.

If you were to carefully reflect on this fact, you would realise that if Allah's prohibitions forbid you from engaging in activities that could harm others, they at the same time prohibit others from doing the same to you. When seen from this angle, the benefits of such prohibitions can be measured in worldly terms, regardless of the religious advantages.

In short, we should consider the above in light of the maxim that 'averting things which cause corruption or harm should take precedence over reaping benefits'. Let us offer an example to clarify this maxim; imagine that a person who loves you is about to toss an apple at you, and at the same time, someone who hates you throws a stone at you. If the two objects were cast at you simultaneously, you should obviously dodge the rock before catching the apple. Thus, we come to understand that 'the act of averting things which cause corruption or harm should take precedence over reaping benefits'.

Man should take account of this principle in all his affairs because some the modern devices, civilizational innovations and scientific inventions which benefit us to a certain extent, had proven to be devastatingly harmful.One example is the invention of the insecticide DDT which killed not only unwanted insects but also important birds.

It is precisely for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge.’ (*Al-Isra’:* 36) Prior to putting an invention into operation, you must first assess its benefits and harms. Only after these experiments should modern inventions be used.

For example, when installing electricity in their homes, some people place electric outlets far above the ground and beyond the reach of children. The reason for this precaution is to prevent infants from placing their fingers in the sockets and being electrocuted. In fact, some engineers have invented a device which automatically cuts the electric current when electricity comes into contact with a human hand.

This abovementioned precaution is also an example of ‘averting things which cause harm before reaping benefits’. In short, one should always be cautious when dealing with modern inventions.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘However eagerly you may want them to, most people will not believe.’ (*Yusuf:* 103) When Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘most people will not believe’ (*Yusuf:* 103), does this mean that the believers are a minority?! We contend, ‘No, the believers are not a minority because Allah *the Almighty* is referring to the disbelievers as *akthar* (most/more), which is not only used in comparison with *aqqal* (less) but also with *kathir* (many). That referring to the disbelievers as ‘most of the people’, does not mean that the believers are the minority.

Consider the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* proclaims, ‘Do you not see that Allah is He, Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many (*kathir*) of the people; and many (*kathir*) there are against whom chastisement has become necessary…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18). In this verse, the pronoun *kathir* (many) is repeated twice about two distinct sets of people pertaining to the same group.

Thus, in the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* made it clear to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that no matter how strongly he desires for people to believe in Allah’s Message, most of them will reject it. The verb used in this verse to show his eagerness is *harasa* which denotes attaching oneself and exerting great effort to retain or accomplish something which we deem to be either beneficial or something which wards a harm. *Al-hirs* therefore denotes the attachment of the soul to an objective and this demands great effort.

Allah *the Almighty* therefore explicitly tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will not guide those whom he longs to be guided. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘If you desire for their guidance, yet surely Allah does not guide him who leads astray...’ (*an-Nahl:* 37). This verse clearly shows us that every messenger must be mentally prepared to confront people who will assess the advantages and apparent disadvantages of embracing the Message, and will not take account of the long-term blessings that are brought by believing in the Message. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* explains to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should be mentally prepared to confront similar types of injudicious people.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has brought the Message to them and asked them to believe for their own interests without seeking any recompense from them. If they truly understood this matter, they would have offered him recompense for guiding them to Allah’s Righteous Path because a salary is allotted to a person who provides you with a useful service. Furthermore, man makes a point of paying those who offer him useful services. A service is defined in limited temporal and worldly terms, or it stretches out unto the infinite and brings us ease in this world and bliss in the Hereafter.

The Quran relates the following statement which was uttered by all the messengers(1) – excluding Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses), *peace be upon them* both, ‘I do not ask you for any reward for it…’ (*al-An‘am:* 90).

Logically speaking, had the people of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reflected on the blessings brought about by his prophetic mission, they would have rewarded him for not only expounding on the nature of reality, man's fate in the Afterlife and the Path to Truth, but also for being a living and exemplary prototype of righteousness that should be emulated.

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(1) *This statement was asserted by Prophet Nuh (Noah) peace be upon him (Yunus: 72, Hud: 29 and ash-Shu'ara': 109), Prophet Hud (Eber) peace be upon him (Hud: 51 and ash-Shu'ara': 127), Prophet Saleh (Shelah) peace be upon him (ash-Shu'ara': 145), Prophet Lut (Lot) peace be upon him (ash-Shu'ara': 164), Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) peace be upon him (ash-Shu'ara': 180) and Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him (Saba': 47).*

In our modern world, there are countless families that pay high prices for their children to attend private schools where they learn the basics of reading and writings. What is the adequate price to pay therefore to he who illuminates our spiritual vision and intellectual discernment with Divine Guidance? In short, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* offered us an everlasting benefit, but never asked for worldly compensation in return.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَمَا تَسْـَٔلُهُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

You ask no reward from them for this: it is a reminder for all people [104] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 104)

This noble verse makes it clear that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not ask his people to recompense him for having guided them; for his reward is only with Allah *Glorified is He*. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Or do you ask them for a reward, so that they are overburdened by a debt?' (*at-Tur:* 40) In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* relates the following saying of Prophet Muhammad, 'Whatever reward I have asked of you, that is only for yourselves; my reward is only with Allah...' (*Saba':* 47).

In the above verse, we should take into account that he *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying so, increases his reward; that is, instead of accepting a limited reward in proportion to the capacity of the human beings, he is asking to be compensated by Him Whose Ability to reward is unlimited. One might also say that his work is so great that it can only be rewarded by Allah *Glorified is He*. After all, it is Allah Who has sent him to convey His Way of Guidance to mankind.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse in question, '… it is a reminder for all people.' (*Yusuf:* 104). The Arabic word *dhikr* (reminder) has many connotations. The root of this word is derived from *dhakira* (memory). We have previously explained that humans have receptive faculties embodied in the sensory organs. The information and the data that are perceived by these senses are transferred to the consciousness. This assimilated data is then processed and contained for some time in one's consciousness. Afterwards, it is transmitted to the subconscious part of the mind until it is prompted by external events to return to consciousness. It is for this reason that you say, 'I remember'! When you recall a long-forgotten piece of information, It is as if the idea was stored somewhere in the mind other than one's consciousness. However, when the information is brought back to memory, it moves from the subconscious level to the seat of consciousness. Therefore, 'remembrance' is the act of recalling information from the subconscious level to the central of consciousness.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…And remind them of the Days of Allah...' (*Ibrahim:* 5). In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* commands Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to remind his people about events which took their course according to Allah's Will, as these events are not at the centre of their consciousness.

Moreover, the Quran itself is called a reminder since it reminds every believer about Allah Who has blessed us with His Way of Guidance that leads us to happiness in this life and in the Hereafter.

Therefore, the reminder helps the sensible person, and it is one manifestation of Allah's Mercy toward His creatures, for He has not let man delight in blessings without being aware of the One Who bestowed them.

Allah *the Almighty* has created this universe with meticulous precision wherein man's sustenance is to be found. Furthermore, one of Allah's Graces conferred on the human beings is sending messengers to remind them about His Bounties. Thus, the word *dhikr* which means at once 'remembrance, recollection, meditation, and invocation' points to the fact that man, in his innate nature, should be in constant remembrance and consciousness of Allah *Glorified is He*. However, He has decreed for distracting events to unfold in certain times; and that is why He includes all forms of *dhikr* (reminder) in the Noble Quran.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَكَأَيِّن مِّنْ ءَايَةٍ فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to [105] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 105)

When you hear the word *ka`ayyin* (many), you should know that it denotes a very large number, that is, a number that is so large that it cannot be numerated. A synonym of *ka`ayyin* is the word *kam* (many). It is important to understand that we proceed to count that which we think it is countable, but not, obviously, what is countless. For instance, no one can calculate the grains of sand in the desert, but everyone counts the change from a money transaction. When numeration is impossible it is because that which we are trying to numerate is countless. For example, no one can calculate or determine the number of stars. It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* reminds us repeatedly in the Quran about the blessings that He has showered upon His creatures. He says, ‘and if you count Allah’s favours, you will not be able to number them’ (*Ibrahim:* 34).

In the above verse, the Arabic word *in* (if) introduces an uncertain matter. So, this verse clearly shows that we will not be able to count Allah’s blessings – even if we try to – because the Divine Blessings are beyond calculation. We should note that what can be computed inevitably repeats itself. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned only one blessing in this verse, because if you were to contemplate a single Divine Blessing, you would realise that it contains a countless and innumerable number of blessings within its fold.

Therefore, the word *ka’ayyin* is synonymous with *kam* (many times). For example, when you admonish your child to study, you tell him, ‘How many times have I urged you to study’? Clearly, you only make this statement when you lose hope. We should notice that the word *kam* highlights the great numerical quantity to the listener and not the speaker. It is as if you were confiding in the listener and urging him to speak truthfully. Or again, it is as if you were recalling your pieces of advice to him and found that you had many pieces of advice to give. This question of numerical quantity implied by the word *kam,* can be answered by the speaker, or it can be posed to the listener to provide the answer. Asking the listener to answer the question of the numerical quantity of the matter at hand implies that he will confess his misdeeds, and this confession constitutes the key evidence.

When Allah *the Almighty* says ‘many’ (*Yusuf:* 105), this means that what will follow is great in number. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And how many a prophet has fought with whom were many worshippers of the Lord; so they did not become weak hearted on account of what befell them in Allah’s way, nor did they weaken, nor did they abase themselves; and Allah loves the patient.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 146) So, we understand that *ka’ayyin* denotes a very large number- so large that one is justified in not attempting to numerate it.

As for the Arabic word *ayat* (verses)*,* it is the plural form of *aya* (a verse) which denotes a wondrous marvel which attracts one’s attention. One can say, for example, ‘So-and-so is a marvel (*aya*) of intelligence’, that is, he is the supreme example of intelligence; or that his intelligence is stunning and outshines that of other individuals.

One may also say, ‘So-and-so is a marvel of bravery’, and so on. Therefore, the wonderful thing is that which is extraordinary and unforgettable.

Allah *Glorified is He* has filled His universe with wondrous signs from which one derives wisdom. Allah’s signs are, in fact, divided into three categories: Firstly, the cosmic signs which we have spoken of earlier. Such signs are wonders and proofs – if contemplated – of Allah’s Existence, as He is the One Who fashioned these wonderful signs. Moreover, they point to the reality that He Who created them is of Great Wisdom and Exactness. They also allude to the truth of Allah’s Oneness and the necessity of believing in Him.

Allah *the Almighty* has scattered these signs in His universe and He proclaimed through His messengers that He is their Creator. As long as no one objected by saying, ‘I am the one who created them!’, then this proves that the act of creating belongs only to Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, He is the Only Creator, and all other beings are creatures. Thus, Allah’s signs in the universe were created for a purpose and a goal.

In the chapter of *ar-Rum*, we come across verses which encompass most of the cosmic signs. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Therefore glory be to Allah when you enter upon the time of the evening and when you enter upon the time of the morning. And to Him belongs praise in the heavens and the earth, and at nightfall and when you are at midday. He brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living, and gives life to the earth after its death, and thus shall you be brought forth. And one of His signs is that He created you from dust, then lo! You are mortals (who) scatter. And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours; most surely there are signs in this for the learned. And one of His signs is your sleeping and your seeking of His grace by night and (by) day; most surely there are signs in this for a people who would hear. And one of His signs is that He shows you the lightning for fear and for hope, and sends down water from the clouds then gives life therewith to the earth after its death; most surely there are signs in this for a people who understand And one of His signs is that the heaven and the earth subsist by His command, then when He calls you with a (single) call from out of the earth, lo! You come forth.' (*ar-Rum:* 17-25)

All these wondrous signs should lead man, who is living in this world, to the realisation that he is benefiting from this universe according to divine laws upon which man's existence is mainly built. Therefore, man must be aware of the One Who originated these laws.

Having fully realised the existence of a transcendent Being, man should have asked himself, 'What does this Exalted Creator want from me?' The aforementioned signs compel us to mentally deduce the existence of someone who could teach us about the requirements of this Exalted Being. Moreover, when a messenger comes forth and declares, 'Surely, the Exalted Being that you are seeking is called Allah, and He has sent me to order you to worship Him, to follow His commands and to avoid His proscriptions,' you were supposed to believe in his Message.

The second category of signs is those of a miraculous nature which confirm the veracity of a prophet's message. It is behoved upon each messenger to bring forth such miraculous signs to authenticate his veracious transmission of the Divine Message because each messenger is a human being, and he needs a sign which breaks the boundaries of natural laws. Such are the miracles with which the messengers were endowed.

The third category is yet the verses which contain the teachings of The Quran, the final way of guidance.

Such verses are of a wondrous, miraculous nature as well, for you never come across a legal ruling in religion which does not judiciously address one of the many needs of the human soul. Moreover, those who deny religion will resort to religious solutions for many problems they are facing, as there is no solution to such problems outside of religious laws.

The issue of divorce in the Islamic context is a case in point. The disbelievers criticised Islam for sanctioning divorce. They argued, ‘This solution to the relation between a man and a woman will be detrimental to family bonds’. However, these people took recourse in divorce after suffering from the vicissitudes of life. Thus, we see that the human mind endorses rulings which were initially opposed. The same applies to usury. The abovementioned people are trying to create an economic system that is dependent on interest to make usury permissible. They contend, ‘Nothing should prevent the human mind from drawing from something beneficial’.

Thus, the cosmic signs are wondrous by any measure. In addition, the miraculous signs which were performed by the messengers were supra natural. The same is true for Quranic verses whose rulings protect man from harm. Furthermore, the vicissitudes of life compel those who deny the validity of Islamic laws to resort to Quranic rulings.

The disbelievers, however, are heedless of all the aforementioned types of signs. They reject cosmic signs which, if contemplated, would convince them that there is a Creator. Moreover, they would receive a divine bestowal which would help them in upbringing their families and raising their standard of living.

Let us not forget that all modern discoveries are merely the result of observing external phenomena of the cosmos. I have previously given the example of a man who sat down to cook a meal in a pot. After some time, he noticed that the pot's lid was rising under the pressure of the steam, and so he wondered, 'What is it that compels the lid to rise'? This man dedicated himself to observing the activity in the pot as well as the transformation of water into steam. By means of observation, he was able to discover that when water evaporates, it expands. In other words, water in the form of vapour occupies more volume than water in liquid form. This man's observations led to the discovery of vapour energy which mobilised boats and trains, and which gave rise to an era which is called the 'Age of Steam'. Moreover, the man who observed the pot's lid being elevated by steam pressure coined a principle which is called the 'Archimedean principle'.

Thus, any person who ponders over the universe will discover things which benefit him in this world, just as the world benefited from the observations of some people like Archimedes. Those people put forth their analyses and observations, which were eventually used by scientists to invent devices that benefit mankind.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* does not prevent a disbeliever from inventing what helps humanity so long as he is observing and deriving benefit from cosmic phenomena. Thus, Allah's saying, 'And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by...' (*Yusuf:* 105) means, on the one hand, if you regard these signs as a means for seeking belief in Allah, then they will guide you to have faith in Him. On the other hand, if you look upon them as possible benefits for your worldly existence, then Allah *Glorified is He* does not deprive the disbelievers of the worldly reward for their efforts.

Furthermore, this verse clarifies that we should not heedlessly overlook cosmic signs. On the contrary, man must approach them as an attentive observer. By doing so, the cosmic signs must either lead you to faith which enriches you in this life and grants you an ever-lasting life in the Hereafter, or your observations result in inventions which make you and others happy in this world.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُم بِٱللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُم مُّشْرِكُونَ ١٠٦

Most of them will only believe in God while also joining others with Him [106] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 106)

Here, we note the various stages of faith which man passes through. The first stage corresponds to the verse, ‘However eagerly you may want them to, most men will not believe.’ (*Yusuf:* 103) This verse clearly shows that many people will not attain to faith, no matter how strongly Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desires for them to become believers.

We previously explained that the opposite of the Arabic word *kathir* (most) in this context can be either *qalil* (few) or even *kathir* (most). This is because the faith of a believer can be tainted by a degree of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He*). It is true that they believe in one God, but their belief is not characterised by certitude. Rather, their faith is wavering and they are susceptible to associating gods with Allah *Glorified is He*.

The second stage corresponds to the verse, ‘Most of them will only believe in Allah while also joining others with Him.’ (*Yusuf:* 106) The polytheists of Quraysh are a case in point; Allah *the Almighty* says about them, ‘And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say, Allah.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) Allah *the Almighty* also speaks of them in the following verse, ‘and if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say, Allah.’ (*Luqman:* 25)

Despite such proclamations on the part of the abovementioned people, they have ascribed intercessors between them and Allah *Glorified is He*. They claimed, ‘Surely, the angels are Allah’s daughters’. In this way, they ascribed partners to Him *Glorified is He*. We should note that this verse refers also to those among the people of the Book, who claimed that Allah *Glorified is He* has a son.

Falling under the same category is also those Muslims who try to gain the favour of men of power by being unduly subservient and crossing all acceptable boundaries of kindness and love. Such attempts to gain the favour of others are disgraceful because they think that the men of power have a say in any harm or aid that comes their way. In fact, this is a form of associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He*. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; one of these subservient people approaches the one whose favour he is trying to gain and says, ‘I would like to ask you to kindly handle this or that affair’. The man of power respond, ‘Put your trust in Allah, and He will satisfy your need’

However, the subservient one stoops even lower in his obsequiousness and replies, ‘But, I am also depending on your open-handedness for this affair to be handled’. Perhaps the man in a position of power will respond, ‘I will take care of your request, and the rest depends on Allah’. When I hear such things, I ask myself, ‘What about that which is not ‘the rest’? Does it not depend on Allah as well’?!

It may happen that someone may be given his needs, but then it turns out to be harmful. On the contrary, certain desired things sometimes do not come into being, and one eventually realises that it was a great blessing that they were not granted.

A line of poetry comes to mind:

Seek all things in an honourable fashion;
For indeed everything proceeds in accord with Providence

You may hate that Allah *the Almighty* has deprived you of something, yet this very deprivation results in the good that Allah *the Almighty* had predestined for you. Thus, deprivation is viewed also as some kind of bestowal. Hence, it behoves man to always realise that Allah *Glorified is He* is the real Doer and He is the Prime Causer.

I always remind others that when we perform the major or the minor pilgrimage, we walk between *as-safa* and *al-marwa*(1) in remembrance of the act of Hajar.

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(1) *As-Safa and Al-Marwa are two mountains situated between the valley of Mecca and the Sacred Mosque. The word as-safa literally means a broad area covered with smooth rock. As for al-marwa, it is a fragile white rock. Al-marwa is also the walkway which is near as-Safa. Specifically, al-marwa is one of the two points that mark the end of the walking between As-Safa and Al-Marwa. See ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-`Arab, under the root safa and marwa.*

Having exhausted all her means, she ran between *As-Safa* and *aA-Marwa* asking for water for her thirsty baby. She then found water under the foot of her new born Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*. Having sought sustenance to the best of her abilities, the Provider of all sustenance granted her what she sought. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* did not cause water to spring forth from the points of *as-safa* and *al-marwa.* This was intended to prove to her the truth behind the words of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he left her in that desolate place. Hajar asked him, 'Are you leaving us at this spot out of your own judgment? Or did Allah; order you to do so?' He replied, 'Yes, Allah ordered me to do so,' whereupon she replied, 'In that case, Allah will not abandon us.'(1) So, Hajar did the best she could to find sustenance for herself and for her son, but she found water through the Power of the Ultimate Causer.

Allah's saying, 'Most of them will only believe in Allah while also joining others with Him.' (*Yusuf:* 106) requires that we understand how the act of associating others with Allah *Glorified is He* can taint one's faith. We must ask ourselves, 'Since genuine faith exists, from whence does the act of associating others with Allah originate'? Allah *the Almighty* provides an answer to this question in the following verse, 'So when they ride in the ships they call upon Allah, being sincerely obedient to Him, but when He brings them safe to the land, lo! They associate others (with Him); Thus they become ungrateful for what We have given them, so that they may enjoy; but they shall soon know.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 65-66)

Therefore, they were sincere in their faith when they are on the ship, and they began to pray to Allah *Glorified is He* when they were faced with a tempest.(2) However, as they approached the shores of safety, they associated partners with Allah *the Almighty* in His Divinity.

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(1) *In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi says, 'At that moment, Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him faced the direction of the qibla and supplicated, "O our Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, our Lord! That they may keep up prayer; therefore, make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful." (Ibrahim: 37) See Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/3707.*

(2) Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, 'He it is Who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships, and they sail on with them in a pleasant breeze,=

When a person asks them, ‘What happened to you at sea’? They reply that they had taken their precautions and were equipped with safety boats. They forgot, however, that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who saved them. It is thus that the following verse became applicable to them, ‘And they set up equals with Allah that they may lead (people) astray from His path. Say, “Enjoy yourselves, for surely your return is to the Fire.”’ (*Ibrahim:* 30)

In your daily life, you may go out of your way to do someone a favour. But after Allah *Glorified is He* enables you to achieve the task, you cannot find the person who asked you for the favour and he even does not thank you for your favour. When you meet that person, he tells you, ‘the favour that I asked of you has already been granted to me by so-and-so’. The reason why he addresses you in such a way is to belittle the grace by which Allah *Glorified is He* enabled you to fulfil his favour, for when he asked you for help, he had to lower himself in humiliation. However, upon the granting of his wish, he acts with the pride of Pharaoh and pretends to have forgotten that he once asked you for help.

Only upon direct contact is the latter’s arrogance removed because he knows for certain that you have been kind to him. Despite this acknowledgment and the fact that you treated him kindly, he may still wish for something evil to happen to you. Why is this so? The answer is that this is human nature. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Nay! Man is most surely inordinate because he sees himself free from want.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7)

At that point, the proverb, ‘Ward off evil issuing from someone to whom you have done a favour’ is very impressive. This means to be wary of someone’s evil by not boasting about the favour you have done to him. This way, he will not cultivate hatred towards you. In fact, the wise person who aids others awaits his reward from Allah *Glorified is He*. He reaps this reward from his Creator at the moment of the righteous act. This person does not

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= and they rejoice, a violent wind overtakes them and the billows surge in on them from all sides, and they become certain that they are encompassed about, they pray to Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience: If Thou dost deliver us from this, we will most certainly be of the grateful ones. But when He delivers them, lo! they are unjustly rebellious in the earth.’ (*Yunus:* 22-23).

expect anything from the one whom he has assisted. This is due to the fact that you cannot know what the beneficiary was thinking at the moment when you were helping him. Indeed, when he realises that you are more welcomed than he is by other people, he may well ask himself, 'Why do they respect this person more than me'? He may even do so even though you are in his presence to help him. That is why people say, 'Do good and then cast it into the ocean'! Out of the undeniable fact that there is no similarity whatsoever between Allah and His creatures, Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who will provide us with reward. Therefore, let your actions be sincere for the Sake of Allah *Glorified is He* and forget that you have done favours to others.

The disregarded favours that you have done are your greatest merits because it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who rewards you from His Bounty for these favours. It is precisely for this reason that you should pay no attention to those whom you have treated benevolently. By doing so, Allah *Glorified is He* will reward you for the good that you have done.

It has been related through tradition that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, 'Lord, do not allow others to attribute false things to me', whereupon Allah *Glorified is He* clarified, 'Musa (Moses), I did not will such a thing for Myself; so why should I will it for you?'

Allah *the Almighty* describes this phenomenon in the Quran in different terms; He says, 'And when distress afflicts a man he calls upon his Lord turning to Him frequently; then when He makes him possess a favour from Him, he forgets that for which he called upon Him before, and sets up rivals to Allah that he may cause (men) to stray off from His path. Say: Enjoy yourself in your ungratefulness a little; surely you are of the inmates of the Fire.' (*az-Zumar:* 8) The moment man is afflicted with a misfortune; he invokes the Lord Who is responsible for his interests, saying, 'Lord, You are my Creator, and You are responsible for my nurturing. I place my trust in You for my wellbeing, so save me from what has afflicted me'. Such a person is analogous to the captain of a ship who is miraculously saved from perishing in a storm, and, once he reaches the shores of safety, he gives credit only to himself for saving the ship.

That is why I always say, 'Believers, take care lest you forget the Bestower and the Ultimate Causer of all things. Moreover, beware not to be deluded by the accidental causes of bounty, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the Giver of all causes'. I say this lest you do wrong to yourselves by associating partners with Him *Glorified is He*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'those who believe and do not mix up their faith with iniquity, those are they who shall have the security and they are those who go aright.' (*al-An'am:* 82)

Azh-zhulm (iniquity) – as we know – is to assign something to the wrong owner. How could one dare to ignore Allah's Graces and Bounties? It is by doing so that one falls into the hidden form of *shirk* (associating others with Allah) which is the greatest of all iniquities. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'do not associate aught with Allah; most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.' (*Luqman:* 13)

Allah *the Almighty* then states:

أَفَأَمِنُوٓاْ أَن تَأۡتِيَهُمۡ غَٰشِيَةٞ مِّنۡ عَذَابِ ٱللَّهِ أَوۡ تَأۡتِيَهُمُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ بَغۡتَةٗ وَهُمۡ لَا يَشۡعُرُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

Are they so sure that an overwhelming punishment from God will not fall on them, or that the Last Hour will not come upon them suddenly when they least expect it? [107]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 107)

Did they not consider that Allah *Glorified is He* might punish them in this world with an overwhelming punishment? The Arabic word *al-ghashya* (overwhelming punishment) implies an all-encompassing and surrounding punishment. Or else, did they reckon that death, the Day of Judgment, and its punishments were far-off even though death is prescribed on all people? After all, no one knows his appointed date of death. It is for this reason that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When a person dies, his Day of Resurrection begins'(1) So, what is slowing them down from attaining to faith in Allah and having sincere acknowledgement of His Oneness, without ascribing other gods along with Him, before their Day of

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(1) *In his book, Al-`Agluni narrated this Hadith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik* Allah *be pleased with him. The rest of the Hadith is as follows: 'Mention death frequently. Surely, if you regard it as something superfluous, it will make your grueling; and if you regard it apprehensively, He will make yours easy. Death is the beginning of one's Day of Resurrection.' See Al-`Agluni, Kashf Al-Khafa`, Hadith no. 2618.*

Resurrection suddenly irrupts? After all, death and the Day of Resurrection are not preceded by a warning bell.

We also know that those who have gone before us in this life do not wait long for the Day when everyone is resurrected. This is because time moves slowly only for the person who is experiencing events while they are unfolding. A sleeper, for example, does not know how many hours he has slept; he is unconscious and therefore oblivious to the passing of time.

Based on this verse, we deduce that those who have preceded us in this life do not sense the passing of time, ‘On the day that they see it, it will be as though they had not tarried but the latter part of a day or the early part of it.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 46)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ هَٰذِهِۦ سَبِيلِىٓ أَدْعُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ عَلَىٰ بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا۠ وَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَنِى ۖ
وَسُبْحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

Say, ‘This is my way: based on clear evidence, I, and all who follow me, call [people] to God – glory be to God! – I do not join others with Him’ [108] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 108)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to his people, ‘This is my way’. The word *sabeel* denotes a way. Allah’s saying, ‘This is my way’ (*Yusuf:* 108) proves that the word *sabeel* can either take on a feminine form – as in the aforementioned verse– or the masculine form, as in the following verse, ‘…and if they see the way of rectitude they do not take it for a way, and if they see the way of error. They take it for a way…’ (*al-A’raf:* 146).

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim that the calling to which he has been assigned consists in believing in Allah *Glorified is He* the only God. Moreover Allah *Glorified is He* derives no benefit from the way of guidance to which His servants are invited to follow. Rather, this divine way of guidance will enable them to draw benefits for their own lives.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the First Who precedes all things and has no beginning, and He will remain eternally after everything perishes. It is He Who has created all human beings, even if they were to disbelieve in Him. In short, the responsibility of following the divine way of guidance rests on man's shoulders, and whoever wants to believe, let him do so, and whoever wants to disbelieve, let him do so.

Let us cite the following verse, 'When the heaven bursts asunder, And obeys its Lord and it must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2) When the sky split asunder upon hearing Allah's command, this marks the beginning of the Day of Judgment.

Back to the verse in question; Allah's saying, 'Say, 'this is my way: based on clear evidence…' (*Yusuf:* 108) means that based on clear evidence, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invites people to the way which leads to Allah *Glorified is He* through faith and acceptance of His way of guidance while seeking His Reward in the Hereafter.

The Arabic word *al-basar (*eyesight*)* –as we know– pertains to the sensorial faculties, while *al-basira (*insight*)* corresponds to comprehending the abstract meanings.

Sensorial sight does not perform the same function as the spiritual insight, since the latter is a certainty that is associated with a light which instils wholehearted conviction in the human soul. This wholehearted conviction is cast into the heart even though the apparent situation does not compel someone to have conviction.

Consider the example of Musa's (Moses') mother who was inspired by Allah *Glorified is He* to cast her son into the river. Clearly, had she assessed the matter mentally, she would not have accepted to perform such a task. However, it is through the spiritual insight that she consented, since the inspiration is from Allah *Glorified is He* and cannot be resisted by the human spirit.

Therefore, *al-basira* is the certitude and the light which is based on a proof put forth by the heart. The servant with this insight obeys and puts his trust in Allah *Glorified is He*. It is therefore said, 'Faith is obedience based on clear evidence'. We can read Allah's saying, 'Say, 'this is my way: based on clear evidence…' (*Yusuf:* 108) as forming one complete sentence, which is then followed by, ‘I, and all who follow me…’ (*Yusuf:* 108). Or again, we can read the verse from beginning to end as one sentence, ‘Say, “This is my way: based on clear evidence, I, and all who follow me, call [people] to Allah—glory be to Allah!— I do not join others with Him.”’ (*Yusuf:* 108).

As for Allah’s saying, ‘glory be to Allah!’ (*Yusuf:* 108), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* is absolutely exalted; there is no nothing similar to Him. Moreover, He, unlike mankind, is not limited in a physical body wherein the spirit is blown. Furthermore, His Actions are exalted –in the absolute sense of the word –above all acts, and no action can be compared to His Actions. So, when you realise that Allah *Glorified is He* hears and sees, you must understand it considering the following verse, ‘There is nothing like Him.’ (*ash-Shura:* 11); nor is there any comparison between Allah’s Existence and yours, for His Existence is Eternal – hence without beginning nor end –while your existence is contingent and manifests in the material order which Allah *Glorified is He* created.

Therefore, when some people assessed the wonders of the Ascension and Night Journey according the powers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they neglected the fact that he said, ‘I was taken on the Night Journey.’(1) In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.’ (*al-Isra’:* 1)

Considering this verse, you understand that the Night Journey was not made possible through the power of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but through the Power of He Who created the whole universe and whose Power dominates all things. No true believer could associate any deities with Him.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *The Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abddullah Allah be pleased with them. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no 4710; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.170.*

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالٗا نُّوحِيٓ إِلَيۡهِم مِّنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡقُرَىٰٓۗ أَفَلَمۡ
يَسِيرُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَيَنظُرُواْ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن
قَبۡلِهِمۡۗ وَلَدَارُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ خَيۡرٞ لِّلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوۡاْۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ١٠٩

All the messengers We sent before you [Muhammad] were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? For those who are mindful of God, the Home in the Hereafter is better. Do you [people] not use your reason? [109]
(The Quran, *Yusuf:* 109)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the position of the messengers who preceded Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* states in another verse, ‘and nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said: What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be an apostle?’ (*al-Isra’:* 94)

Thus, the people referred to in this verse demanded to be sent a messenger who was not a human; a phenomenon which clearly has no precedence. Nevertheless, had it happened previously, they would have contended, ‘But, why has Allah sent a non-human prophet to a people before us’? That is why Allah *Glorified is He* wants to bring them back to their senses by stating, ‘Say, “Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as an apostle.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 95)

By their very nature, angels are not suited for life on earth, just because they are not meant to serve as moral examples for human beings. Allah *the Almighty* describes the angels in the following verse, saying, ‘…they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6)

Therefore, they are not meant as models for humans, since an angel is an unseen creature that is not perceived by normal human faculties. Moreover, had Allah *Glorified is He* wished for an angel to be a messenger and clothed the angel in human form, their demand would not have been satisfied.

Another possible interpretation is that this verse is intended to pre-emptively invalidate possible pretexts which later generations would use to justify their actions during the Wars of Apostasy when Sijah claimed to be a prophetess sent by Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* begins the verse in question with His saying, ‘All the messengers We sent before you [Muhammad] were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns…’ (*Yusuf:* 109). This verse is intended to make it clear that a woman cannot be a messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because a messenger is sent forth on a mission to struggle in guiding people to faith through communicating Allah’s Message to them. In contrast, the function of a woman is to be a source of tranquillity for her family.

Moreover, one of the prerequisites of one’s being a messenger is that he must, at all times, be in a state of ritual purity in which he can worship Allah *Glorified is He*. As we know, a woman no longer has the obligation to perform certain acts of worship during her menstrual cycle. Clearly, a prophetic mission presupposed that the messenger is able to worship at any given moment.

In any case, how is it possible that the abovementioned people ask for a prophetess to be sent to them? After all, Allah *Glorified is He* has not sought the permission of any prophet prior to assigning him to convey His Message. Rather, these prophets were involuntarily charged with the task of spreading the Message. As we know, it is by means of revelation that a messenger receives commands to convey the Message to his people.

As we know, *al-wahy* (revelation) means to communicate something secretly, and it generally refers to conveying a message on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He*. As a matter of fact, the Messenger was not sent forth to communicate his own desires or to establish his own religious laws. Rather, every messenger is responsible for communicating Allah’s revelation. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is an exception to this rule, for he was appointed by Allah *the Almighty* as a law-giver, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and whatever the Apostle gives you, accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back…’ (*al-Hashr:* 7).

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* refers to these previous messengers as being chosen, saying, ‘from the people of their towns’ (*Yusuf:* 109). The town in this verse corresponds in our modern context to cities. When you visit the people of the city, you find that unlike the people of the desert, the former are equipped with many luxuries. The people of the desert might not even have the means to welcome you as his guest, for his goats might be out of milk, or he might not even have goats to slaughter in the first place.

The difference between people of the city and those of the desert is that the former are settled and are able to coexist in a friendly manner with each other. Moreover, their interests are interconnected, they are kind to one another; their knowledge is vast and they are not characterised by the hard heartedness of the latter.

Indeed, the only belongings of a Bedouin are the provisions mounted on his camel. He awaits the advent of rain and seeks green pastures for his goats.

Due to their conditions, people of the city are marked by softness, a wide knowledge and refined mannerisms. Therefore, a messenger was never sent from among the Bedouins, lest he be unduly hardhearted, rude in speech and lacking in conduct and manners.

A messenger of Allah is expected to receive everyone he encounters with kindness, gentleness, and refined manners. For this reason, messengers are generally men of cities, since they are not generally hard hearted, nor are they unaware of matters pertaining to social interaction.

Allah *the Almighty* continues, '…Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them?' (*Yusuf:* 109) The people referred to in this verse do not believe in the Hereafter to which they will return; and as long as they do not know when they are appointed to depart this world, let them use this physical world as their yardstick; let them roam the different corners of the earth and ponder the destiny of those who previously had rejected their messengers. If they were to contemplate the fates of these peoples, they would realise that destruction and perdition overwhelmed all the disbelievers. Were they to travel through the land and ponder on the bygone events, they would see that the towns of those who hewed their homes in the mountains(1) were wiped out by Allah *the Almighty*. They would also realise that Allah *the Almighty* punished the tribe of `Ad and the people of Pharaoh. Indeed, if you fear not the Hereafter, you should fear punishment in this world.

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(1) Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi is referring to the people of *Al-Hijr*. Allah *the Almighty* speaks of them in the following verse, 'And the dwellers of the Rock certainly rejected the messengers; And We gave them Our communications, but they turned aside from them; And they hewed houses in the mountains in security. So the rumbling overtook them in the morning; And what they earned did not avail them.' (*al-Hijr*: 80-84)

Therefore, Allah's saying, '…Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them?' (*Yusuf:* 109) is an example of cosmic phenomenon in the Quran.

In the days of old, we did not know that there was an atmosphere which encompasses the earth, nor did we know that this atmosphere contains oxygen which is so vital for our survival. We were also ignorant of the fact that the atmosphere is an integral part of our planetary system.

Moreover, when you tread on dry land, the atmosphere is above you; and it is thus that you travel through the earth because that which is above you is also included in the earth. One travels across the earth to discover new places for either contemplating or gaining financial benefits.

Contemplative or spiritual tourism is described by Allah *the Almighty* in the following verse, 'Have they not travelled through the earth and observed how was the end of those before them?' (*ar-Rum:* 9) Allah *the Almighty* also speaks of business motivations for travelling in the following verse, 'Say, "Travel in the earth and see how He makes the first creation, then Allah creates the latter creation; surely Allah has power over all things."' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20)

Thus, spiritual tourism turns your gaze towards Allah's Creative Power, whilst business travel is conducted for the sake of reaping the earth's resources. Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'And whoever flies in Allah's way, he will find in the earth many a place of refuge and abundant resources…' (*an-Nisa':* 100).

Therefore, you have been assigned the abovementioned responsibility, that is, if you do not make a comfortable living in one place, and then seek out other locations; Allah says, 'Was not Allah's earth spacious, so that you should have migrated therein?' (*an-Nisa':* 97) You should invest and strive to ameliorate your standard of living to the best of your ability on the condition that worldly pursuit does not prevent you from contemplating your inevitable meeting with Allah *Glorified is He*.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* continues, ‘Have the [disbelievers] not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them?’ (*Yusuf:* 109) Alas, if only the forewarning punishment which the deniers of truth were afflicted with were limited to the worldly life, the punishment of the Hereafter is even more severe.

Allah *the Almighty* then continues, ‘For those who are mindful of Allah, the Home in the Hereafter is better. Do you [people] not use your reason?’ (*Yusuf:* 109)

The descriptions given by Allah *the Almighty* of the destiny of those who denied the truth of Revelation are contrasted by that which awaits the believers. The verse above did not make direct mention of the fate of those who denied the truth; this indirect allusion is referred to in Arabic as *al-ihtikak* which is a kind of ellipsis. For example, Allah *the Almighty* states, ‘Do they not see that We are bringing destruction upon the land by curtailing it of its sides?’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41) Each day, the abode of disbelief shrinks as the realm of faith expands.

Thus, while Allah’s punishment is inflicted upon the deniers of truth, and they suffer thereof in this world, the believers are rewarded and so delight in Allah’s reward in the Hereafter.

Here arises the following question, ‘Why does Allah not say that the punishment that He will afflict upon them in the Hereafter will be more severe than the punishment of this world’? We contend, ‘It is by means of simple human thought – deliberation that is not directly related to Allah *Glorified is He*– that they can realise that the punishment of the Hereafter is more severe than the punishment of this world’. Although Allah *the Almighty* does not explicitly mention this fact, He addresses the blessed fate of the believers at the end of the verse in question, ‘the Home in the Hereafter is better. Do you [people] not use your reason?’ (*Yusuf:* 109)

Given that the disbelievers were punished in this world, and that those who are conscious of Allah are rewarded in the Hereafter, one deduces that the disbelievers will undergo a harsh reckoning. By not referring to this fact directly in the verse in question, man is pushed to examine the Quran closely and thereby understand how the Quranic verses are closely interwoven.

Allah says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا ٱسۡتَيۡـَٔسَ ٱلرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوٓاْ أَنَّهُمۡ قَدۡ كُذِبُواْ جَآءَهُمۡ
نَصۡرُنَا فَنُجِّيَ مَن نَّشَآءُۖ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأۡسُنَا عَنِ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ ١١٠

When the messengers lost all hope and realized that they had been dismissed as liars, Our help came to them: We saved whoever We pleased, but Our punishment will not be turned away from guilty people [110] (The Quran, *Yusuf:* 110)

The Arabic particle *hatta* (until) implies that there is an objective. Moreover, an objective is always preceded by a starting point towards its end. When we say, ‘I ate the whole fish including (*hatta*) its head’, this implies that I start with eating the fish’s body, and that I finished the meal with the fish’s head’.

In the verse under discussion, the previous action which precedes messengers’ losing hope is crystal clear in Allah’s saying, ‘All the Messengers We sent before you [Muhammad] were men to whom We made revelations.’ (*Yusuf:* 109)

Since it is Allah *the Almighty* the One Who has sent the messengers, their victory was certain. However, victory was slow and the messengers had lost all hope. Thus, this protraction was done on purpose by Allah *the Almighty* because He wants to assign the believers to guide mankind in their lives on earth until the Day of Judgment. Clearly, the one who is destined to convey this divine revelation must be meticulously tested.

The messenger, who serves as a model for his companions and followers, must undergo many trials. Furthermore, only those who endure the hardships and emerge successfully are qualified to carry out the mission of conveying Allah’s Message.(1)

In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Or do you think that you would enter the garden while yet the state of those who have passed away before you has not come upon you; distress and affliction befell them and they were shaken violently, so that the Apostle and those who believed with him said, "When will the help of Allah come?"" (*al-Baqara:* 214) Therefore, a testing period is necessary to distinguish the good people from the bad ones. Let us offer an example to fully illustrate this point; in our daily life, teachers prepare the student academically until he is ready to present himself for the test which proves that he has completed his primary studies. Then, we qualify the student to complete middle school which is followed by his secondary studies, after which he joins university. So, his studies continue year after year until he finally graduates from college. If he wants to continue to earn a Master's degree or a Ph.D., he must exert even more effort.

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(1) The following verse provides an example of this, ‘So when Talut departed with the forces, he said, “Surely Allah will try you with a river; whoever then drinks from it, he is not of me, and whoever does not taste of it, he is surely of me, except he who takes with his hand as much of it as fills the hand”; but except for a few of them they drank from it. So when he had crossed it, he and those who believed with him, said, “We have today no power against *Jalut* and his forces.”’ (*al-Baqara*: 249)

All this effort is exerted with the goal of making the student fully qualified to bear the responsibilities of his future job. Considering such effort which a student exerts, what are we to say of the effort of a messenger sent to a specific people? It is precisely due to the weight of this responsibility that the Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* and his followers must be severely tested. In this way, those who will take the oath to convey the Divine Message will be endowed with an unshakeable certainty that the pleasures and goods that they gave up in this world will be greatly compensated by Allah *Glorified is He* in the Hereafter.

In this vein, someone may pose the following question, 'Is it reasonable that a messenger should ever lose hope'? We contend, 'Let us first understand the true meaning of the verb used in this verse to express losing hope, namely; *istay`asa*. There is a difference between *ya`asa* and *istay`asa*. The former is to lose hope of something, while the latter means to insist on losing hope of something'. That is to say that the messengers have not completely lost hope. A person who is utterly despondent is one who does not have recourse to anticipate a brighter future; and only a man who relies on secondary causes, apart from the Original Causer, can be completely cut off from hope.

However, if Allah *Glorified is He* puts certain causes which give rise to hope before the believer, and the causes are subsequently cut off and the desired result is not achieved, the one who believes in Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The causes are not what matters because I am seeking refuge in the Originator of all causes'.

It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and despair not of Allah's Mercy; surely none despairs of Allah's Mercy except the unbelieving people.' (*Yusuf:* 87)

Hence, we find that the highest suicide rates are to be found among the atheists who disbelieve in Allah *the Almighty*. After all, they do not have faith in a Lord Who is above all causes; the One Who is Able to surpass all natural laws. In sharp contrast, the believer seeks recourse in a strong support, that is, the Infinite Power of Allah *the Almighty* Who creates all causes and is fully capable of shattering all causes.

Here arises a good question, which is 'Why do messengers go to the brink of losing hope'? This is due to their eagerness to be granted victory which pushes some of them to ask for it, just as the believers did, 'When will the help of Allah come?' (*al-Baqara:* 214) Not to mention that those messengers also found out that they had been dismissed as liars, a point which is mentioned in the Quran; Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and realised that they had been dismissed as liars...' (*Yusuf:* 110).

This trilateral root composed of the letters *kaf, dhal* and *ba*' gives rise to the verbs and expressions *kadhaba* (to lie) or *kudhiba `alayh* which means that someone has been told a lie; as for *kudhiba*, it indicates that the subject has been branded as a liar. As for the Arabic word *al-kadhib* (telling lies), it is a statement that is contrary to the truth. Clearly, a sane person is one who assesses his ideas mentally before expressing them in words. As for one who is misguided and unable to assess his ideas cogently, he typically speaks in a senseless manner. His words are not evaluated mentally, and he is therefore referred to as a foolish prattler.

We have previously explained the exact meaning of the word *as-sidq* (truthfulness), describing it, unlike telling lie, as a statement which corresponds to reality. As for the person who intentionally makes statements which do not correspond to reality, we say that he is an inveterate liar. In addition, those who attribute statements to others while being almost certain that the statements do not correspond to reality, they are indeed lying but do not look upon their lies as falsehood. Finally, a man, who is intent on reporting someone's words with precision and attributes statements to their proper speaker and says, 'so-and-so told me that…' is not counted among the liars. That is why I always say, 'Religious scholars need to distinguish between the lies of narrators, the error within the narrated statement and the lies of the relator.' Thus, one should blame the liar for a false statement that he intentionally makes. As for the relator of the false statement, as long as he attributes to statement to its correct speaker, he cannot be accused of being a liar.

In the verse in question, we find that it has two different recitations. The first one implies that messengers realised that they had been lied to, whilst the second(1) means that they thought that what they were told regarding their victory were lies.

Someone may ask, 'How could the Messengers have such a thought'? (2) I contend, 'When a messenger asks his people to believe in Allah *Glorified is He,* he is fully aware of the fact that victory is what will confirm the truth of his message to them. The messenger sometimes has his moments of doubt when he fears that his followers who are fighting by his side will say, 'He has lied to us'!

However, the idea that Allah *Glorified is He* breaks His Promise – Allah forbid – never crosses the mind of a messenger. Nevertheless, the messengers may have anticipated that the victory would be granted promptly, but its slow advent was taken to mean that they would never be triumphant. Another possible interpretation is that they feared that others would call them liars. Thus, we find that Allah *the Almighty* tells His messengers that victory would be granted at a certain time which He has appointed. This time is unknown to everyone, for Allah *the Almighty* does everything according to a due measure.

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(1) *In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi mentions a third possible recitation for this verse; he says, 'Mujahid and Humaid recited this part of the verse as follows: 'Qad Kadhabu' with an open vowel on the letter kaf and the letter dhal. The meaning of the verse would thus be: 'The people to whom messengers were sent thought that the messengers had lied to them because Allah had taken a long time before punishing them, that is, the people (were the ones to lie).' See Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/3611.*

(2) *`Urwa ibn Adh-Dhubair narrated that when he asked `Aisha about the statement of Allah, 'Until when the Apostles gave up hope (of their people)' (al-Baqara: 110), she told him its meaning). `Urwa added, I said, 'Did they (messengers) suspect that they were betrayed (by Allah) or that they were treated as liars by (their people)?' `Aisha said, 'They suspected that they were treated as liars by their people.' I said, 'But, they were sure that their people treated them as liars and it was not a matter of suspicion.' She said, 'Yes, upon my life they were sure about it.' I said to her. 'So, they suspected that they were betrayed by Allah.' She said, 'Allah forbid! The messengers never suspected their Lord of such a thing.' I said, 'What about this verse then?' She said, 'It is about the messengers' followers who believed in their Lord and trusted them, but the period of trials was prolonged and victory was delayed till they, i.e. messengers gave up all hope of converting those of the people who disbelieved them, which is why they thought that their followers treated them as liars; thereupon Allah's Help came to them.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4695; Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/3611.*

Allah's saying, 'When the messengers lost all hope and realised that they had been dismissed as liars, Our Help came to them' (*Yusuf:* 110), implies that victory is granted to them after they had undergone severe calamities. In fact, the joy experienced by their followers at the moment of triumph can be compared to water that is given to a man who is extremely thirsty. To understand this extreme jubilation, we must imagine how delightful a thirsty person will be upon receiving a glass of water.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that delaying the time of victory causes the disbelievers to be more self-conceited. Therefore, at the moment of triumph, the joy and pride of the believers in their messenger intensifies, while the grief of the disbelievers is also amplified.

Clearly, the victory of the believers implies the defeat of the disbelievers. This is due to the Will of Allah *the Almighty* Who afflicts His chastisement and punishment on those who disbelieve in Him.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

لَقَدۡ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمۡ عِبۡرَةٞ لِّأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِۗ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثٗا يُفۡتَرَىٰ وَلَٰكِن
تَصۡدِيقَ ٱلَّذِي بَيۡنَ يَدَيۡهِ وَتَفۡصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ وَهُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٗ لِّقَوۡمٖ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand. This revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it; an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe [111] (The Quran, SurahName: 111)

This verse, as we know, is part of the chapter of *Yusuf*. It shows us that if we want to know about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his brothers, we will find the entire narrative with its objectives, moral lessons and final outcomes in the Quran. In short, the story of Yusuf (Joseph) contains within its fold that which constitutes the essence of all the stories of the Prophets revealed in the Quran.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith...’ (*Hud:* 120).

The Arabic word *qasas* (stories), as we know, derives its meaning from the expression *qas al-athar*, that is, to follow someone’s footsteps. In other words, telling a story implies following the sequence of events of the narrative without adding or omitting elements. At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand.’ (*Yusuf:* 111)

Considering the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘…Explain to me my dream, if you can interpret the dream’ (*Yusuf:* 43), we know that the root of the word *i`brah* (lesson) is composed of three Arabic letters: *`ayn, ba`* and *ra`*. This word denotes moving from the apparent to the hidden.

The lessons derived from the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* as well as the accounts of other prophets in the Quran help us overcome both the external and the internal challenges which we face in this world and thus avoid falling into base acts.

In fact, we only apply our understanding of the highest meanings of the Quranic stories when we act in an upright manner by following the moral lessons of any of the Quranic stories, and when we distance ourselves from depraved deeds described therein.

Let us offer an example to clarify this point; we often come across characters that oppress others in the stories of the Quran. In fact, the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* specifies the nature of the transgressor who relapses in his wrongdoings. When one of us takes the morals of this story as a guiding example, this helps to refrain from doing wrong to others. Moreover, when you derive from the Quranic stories the moral lesson that the oppressed people will ultimately be triumphant, you should not be saddened if you are oppressed, since you know for certain that, by Allah’s Permission, you will eventually be granted victory.

As for the word *i‘barah*, it denotes crossing the river from one bank to another. It also denotes the interpretation of dreams. Clearly, ‘dreams’ which are seen during one's sleep are metaphorical and their interpretation means to elucidate, to bring them from ambiguity to clarity and to shed light upon them.

Furthermore, we can refer to a tear as *a'brah.* Sadness which is concealed within the human soul is manifested in the form of tears.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'There is a lesson in the stories of such people for those who understand.' (*Yusuf:* 111) The lessons of the stories are not understood by some people, but they are only considered by the discerning individual who penetrates into the meaning of things with care. As for the person who heedlessly goes through life, he is unable to draw benefit from such lessons. In this verse, the expression 'those who understand' refers to people of brilliant intellect. You should note that *al-`albab* is the plural of *lub* which refers to the essence of what is sought after. As we know, the shell exists to protect the essence within, so the intellect is referred to as *Lub* (essence) because it does away with the external veneers of things and penetrates into the essence and the most exalted aspect of things.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'this revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it...' (*Yusuf:* 111) This part of the verse tells us that the revelation which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to the people is not a fabricated discourse. Rather, it is the truth which confirms the previous Books.

The expression used in this verse to describe the Books which preceded the revelation of the Quran is *bayna yadayh.* This expression could be illustrated in the following example: if you are waiting in a line, you refer to the person in front of you as *'bayna yadayk'*, and to the person behind you as *man khalfak.*

We should consider that it is not the Previous Books which confirm the truth of the Quran; rather, it is the Quran which confirms the truth of them. This is due to the fact that the Quran is the 'Guardian Book'; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian over it…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48).

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* adds that the Quran is: '…an explanation of everything...' (*Yusuf:* 111). Thus the Quran confirms the truth of the previously revealed Books and clearly explains everything, that is, it addresses everything –down to the minute details– according to its appropriate nature. That is to say that the Quran is not a compilation of merely general statements; rather, it explains every ruling pertinent to one of the many aspects of human existence.

When we say, ‘So-and-so has purchased a bespoke outfit’, this means that the outfit exactly fits the buyer’s body and suits him well when he wears it. In the same manner, the Quranic rulings appropriately fit their respective issues.

In matters pertaining to creed, we find people who – may Allah protect us from such aberrations – proclaim, ‘There is no God whatsoever’, while others say, ‘Surely, there are multiple gods, since the tremendous variety of creatures in existence could not have possibly been created by a single God. Thus, there is a god for the heavens, a god for the earth, a god for plants and a god for animals’.

To those who believe in the multiplicity of gods, we ask the following question, ‘How is it possible that a true God is able to carry out one action but not another?’

Were they to answer that these multiple gods work in collaboration, we would respond, ‘Your gods do not have divine attributes whatsoever’. Hence Allah *Glorified is He* states, ‘Allah sets forth an example, there is a slave in whom are (Several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition? (All) praise is due to Allah. Nay! Most of them do not know.’ (*az-Zumar:* 29)

This verse tells us that when owners of a slave are at variance with one another as to who has the right to give orders to him, the slave lives in a state of distress and chastisement. In contrast, the state of the man who is owned by a single master is completely different, since he heeds the orders of one person and leads a content life.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the issue of the multiplicity of gods in the following verse, ‘Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with him any (other) god— in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others; glory be to Allah above what they describe!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 91)

As for the atheist who claims that there is no God whatsoever, to him we contend, ‘Is it reasonable to hold that there is no Creator who designed the perfect and precise creation which surrounds us’? Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* willed to clarify these creedal matters, namely; the existence of God and His Oneness, to prove that there is no God other than Him.

Therefore, the Quran explains various rulings and gives an appropriate ruling to each matter pertaining to human existence. Therefore, no ruling which is addressed to a particular matter can be transposed to another.

The same applies to the verses revealed in the Quran; some are decisive in their meanings, while others are allegorical. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…they strive with one another in hastening to good deeds…' (*Al-'Imran:* 114). Elsewhere in the same chapter He says, 'And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord…' (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

We notice that the latter verse includes the preposition *ila* (to), while the former one includes the preposition *fi* (in). This variation is due to the fact that each of these prepositions is inserted into the verses in the light of their appropriate positions within the overall sentence. Thus, the act of hastening to Allah's Forgiveness implies, on the one hand, that its seeker is deprived of the Divine Forgiveness at that moment, but he will eventually attain his goal. On the other hand, the one who strives with one another in hastening to good deeds experiences Allah's Bounty here and now, and asks Him to confer on him more of His Bounties.

We also come across the following verse, '…and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these acts require courage.' (*Luqman:* 17) Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'And whoever is patient and forgiving, these most surely are actions due to courage.' (*ash-Shura:* 43) The former verse specifically involves calamities that are not afflicted by an enemy, such as sickness which is an ailment that is not caused by a foe. In contrast, the latter pertains to harm which comes by way of a malevolent enemy, since the act of forgiving is mentioned.

Let us offer the following example, 'If someone should strike me or do harm to one of my sons, that person would be my foe and an enmity between us would be created. In fact, his very presence before me would kindle ill will in my soul, and I would need a strong will and self-control to constrain the seething ego'. Therefore, this distinction between the two verses is a clear example of the elucidative nature of the Quran.

In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* states, ‘A Book of which the verses are made plain…’ (*Fussilat:* 3). This verse clearly shows that every minute part of the Quran corresponds appropriately to a specific instance for which a certain verse was revealed. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us, saying, ‘And do not kill your children for fear of poverty; We give them sustenance and yourselves (too)…’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) He also says in another verse, ‘…and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty— We provide for you and for them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) We should consider that each of these two verses is aptly positioned in the Quran that their meanings are interconnected within their respective verses. Moreover, each verse has been positioned appropriately according to the nature of its ruling. Thus, Allah’s saying in the latter verse, ‘…and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty...’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) implies that poverty exists, and that this person is worried trying to maintain his own livelihood rather than his children’s.

By contrast, Allah’s saying, ‘for fear of poverty’ (*Al-Isra’:* 31) implies that poverty is non-existent, and that the person fears that he becomes poverty-stricken. Thus, he is anxious about something which has not happened yet.

In short, we find that the Quran specifies rulings pertaining to each matter of human life in this world and in the Hereafter. These Quranic rulings are beyond man’s attainment through mental or rational means.

We can properly understand the fact that the Quran is an explanation of everything when we quote the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* relates the words of the hoopoe regarding the Queen of Sheba, Balqis: ‘…she has been given [a share] of everything…’ (*an-Naml:* 23). This verse does not mean that the Queen of Sheba had been given all things of this world. Rather, she was granted all things that could possibly be owned by a queen of her opulence in this world.

Therefore, Allah’s description of the Quran as, ‘an explanation of everything’ (*Yusuf:* 111) does not mean that we should expect the Quran to answer, for example, ‘How many loaves of bread can be made out of a certain measure of wheat’? In fact, Imam Mohammad `Abdu was once asked if the Quran contained an answer to this question. Thereupon, the Imam fetched a baker who answered this question. The inquirer then protested that the answer was not derived from The Quran to which Imam `Abdu answered, ‘Why do you not recall the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know’ (*an-Nahl:* 43)?’ So, we understand that Allah *the Almighty* has not neglected anything in the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse in question by saying, ‘…an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe.’ (*Yusuf:* 111)

We know that guidance is the way which leads the believer to what is good. This way is divided into two types: The first pertains to those who have not fallen into harm form committing sins. The second corresponds to curing those who have fallen into the disobedience of Allah *the Almighty*. Let us offer an example to clarify this point; assume that some people are committing misdeeds, and we turn them away from their devious actions and cure them of their spiritual disease. This is an example of how the way of guidance deals with those who fall into sins. Further, the way of guidance is a kind of mercy towards those who have been safeguarded from falling into the spiritual disease.

So, we have two remarks which are pertinent to the abovementioned ways of guidance: The first remark is that the Quranic way of guidance was revealed as a shield for those who have not fallen into disobedience of Allah *the Almighty*. The second one is that this very way contains the cure for those who have already disobeyed Him *the Almighty*.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* identifies those who benefit from the protection and cure of this Quranic way of guidance by stating, ‘…a guide and a blessing for those who believe.’ (*Yusuf:* 111)

Thus, the Quranic way of guidance benefits only those who believe in the uniquely One God Who has created them as well as the world, and Who has also revealed for mankind laws which serve them in their lives. It is logical that the believer should listen and obey Allah’s Commands since He has set the Way of Guidance which preserves every aspect of one’s life. So, if you are a believer in Allah *the Almighty,* then you should seize the guidance and mercy. We ask Allah *the Almighty* to grant us all of this.

the chapter of

ar-Ra'd

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

الٓمٓرۚ تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِۗ وَٱلَّذِيٓ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ ٱلۡحَقُّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١

***Alif Lam Mim Ra,* These are the signs of the Scripture. What your Lord has sent down to you [Prophet] is the truth, yet most people do not believe [1] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 1)**

We have previously expounded at length on of the discrete letters with which some verses of the Quran begin. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, *'Alif Lam Mim.'* (*al-Baqara:* 1), *'Alif Lam Mim Ra.'* (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) and *'Alif Lam Mim Sad'* (*al-A'raf:* 1). These examples are among many other instances with which the chapters of the Quran begin. But, what I want to stress here is that the verses of the Quran are linked to one another rather than being disjointed. It is precisely for this reason that one finds that the final letter of each chapter is connected with that which comes after it through the vowel diacritic.

Were we to apply this general principle to the opening verse of the chapter of *ar-Ra'd,* we would have read the first discrete letters by pronouncing each letter individually in the following manner: *alifun, lamun, mimun, rau`n.* However, Allah *Glorified is He* willed for the opening verse of this chapter to be disconnected, so we pronounce each letter in the following manner: *alif, lam, mim, ra.*

It is in this way that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* recited this verse to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so we recite it in the same manner described above.

Allah *the Almighty* continues, 'These are the signs of the Scripture.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) This part of the verse tells us that the chapter is among the verses of the Noble Book, the Quran. These verses are added to what has been previously revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Scripture starts with Allah’s Saying, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*al-Fatiha:* 1) which is located at the beginning of the Quran, and ends with the last verse of the chapter of *an-Nas.*

Grammatically speaking, *al-idafah* construction, that is, when two Arabic nouns are added together in one construction, takes on three different meanings. Sometimes it can imply the preposition *min* (of), such as ‘a dry measure of wheat’. Sometimes, it implies the preposition *fi* (in), as when you say, ‘A meeting in the house’. Finally, it could further denote the preposition *lam*, and this can take on two different forms. The *idafah* which either expresses ownership, such as ‘The money of Zayd is his property’, or that which may designate a specific relationship, such as ‘the bridle of the horse’. In other words, the bridle specifically pertains to the horse; notwithstanding the fact that it is not conceivable that a horse would literally own a bridle.

Thus, Allah’s saying, ‘These are the signs of the Scripture.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 1) refers to the verses of the Quran since the word ‘Scripture’ in the Islamic context always denotes the Noble Quran.

Consider, for example, when we say, ‘So-and-so is the man’, then ‘so-and-so’ is truly the man. It is as if his demeanour is the touchstone by which one measures manhood, or as if the traits of manliness in others do not amount to the same degree of his perfection in particular. Likewise, you might say, ‘So-and-so is the poet’, that is, he indeed has a unique gift for poetry.

Thus, we come to understand that the word *kitab* (Scripture) in the context of Islamic creed always denotes the Noble Quran. Likewise, when dealing with Arabic grammar, *al-kitab* generally denotes the famous book of the rules of grammar composed by *Sibawayh,* the grammarian.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* continues His description of the Noble Quran, saying, ‘…What your Lord has sent down to you [Prophet] is the truth, yet most people do not believe.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 1)

Obviously, the ulterior motive pushing a person to turn against Allah *the Almighty* is to acquire something by means of his disobedience of Him. Towards the end of the chapter of Yusuf, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And most men will not believe though you desire it eagerly.’ (*Yusuf:* 103) In addition, He describes the Noble Quran as, ‘this revelation is no fabrication: it is a confirmation of the truth of what was sent before it; an explanation of everything; a guide and a blessing for those who believe.’ (*Yusuf:* 111)

So, we see that Allah does not want to derive any profit from you; rather, He has revealed this Scripture for your own benefit: ‘yet most people do not believe.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 1) This verse clearly shows that most people who are invited to faith do not believe that this Truthful Scripture was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from His Lord. This is due to the fact that they did not contemplate its verses; rather, they submitted to their whims and sought after the temporal worldly power while neglecting the fact that this Scripture grants them the best of this world and that of the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى رَفَعَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ۖ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ ٱلشَّمْسَ وَٱلْقَمَرَ ۖ كُلٌّ
يَجْرِى لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ يُدَبِّرُ ٱلْأَمْرَ يُفَصِّلُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُم بِلِقَآءِ رَبِّكُمْ تُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢﴾

It is God who raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then established Himself on the throne; He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and makes the revelations clear so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord [2]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 2)

The Name ‘Allah’ denotes the Creator of all things who encompasses all the Attributes of Perfection. Thus, when you say ‘Allah’, it is as if you called Him *Al-Qadir* (the Fully Capable,) *Ad-Daar* (the Harmer), *An-Nafi`* (The One Who benefits), *As-Sami`* (The All-Hearing), *Al-Mu`ti* (The Giver) and all the other Most Beautiful Divine Names.

It is for this reason that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Every action that does not begin with the Name of Allah is cut off from good.’(1) This is due to the fact that in such action you do not bring to mind that it is Allah Who has made everything possible for you; for ultimately you did not make anything possible through your own power.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. It is narrated as follows, ‘Every speech or affair that is not begun by mentioning Allah the Almighty is incomplete or cut off from good.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/359.*

Therefore, the true believer embarks upon any task by uttering '*Bismillahi Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim'*, that is, 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy'; for it is He Who made all things within man's grasp, and had He not made things subservient to man, they would have never responded to his authority.

Allah *Glorified is He* has made this point clear through many simple examples. We find, for instance, a young child who takes a rope and ties it around a camel's neck, and orders it to kneel. Thereupon, the subservient camel kneels on its four legs, heeding the young boy's command. In contrast, we find a small mosquito may keep a man up all night when it hides between his clothes. The man exerts a great effort to catch the mosquito, yet he may succeed or fail.

Therefore, we realise that things are not rendered easy by man's will or power. Rather, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who makes the creatures subservient to mankind. Furthermore, He says, 'And We have subjected them to them, so some of them they have to ride upon, and some of them they eat.' (*Ya Sin:* 72)

Therefore, when you engage in an activity that requires power, you should say, 'In the Name of Allah, the All-Capable, Who endowed me with some power.' Likewise, before taking part in something which requires money, you should say, 'In the Name of Allah, the Rich, Who granted me some money so that I can handle this affair'.

Each action which you embark on demands power, wisdom, wealth, bliss and other Divine Attributes with which Allah *Glorified is He* makes things possible. Out of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* willed for every action that we engage in to be rendered easy by pronouncing His Name which encompasses all the Names of Beauty and Perfection: 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy'. It is for this reason that the Divine Name 'Allah' refers to the Creator of all things.

The rest of Allah's Beautiful Names are Divine Attributes; they are only perfect in an absolute sense when they are attributed to Allah, and that is why they are used as Names for Him *Glorified is He*.

The Divine Name *Al-`Aziz,* for example, in its absolute sense, refers only to Allah *Glorified is He*. Nevertheless, we sometimes call a person 'the mighty one or chief of his tribe'. Moreover, only Allah *the Almighty* is *Al-Ghaney* (The Rich) in the absolute sense of the word; however, we say 'So-and-so is rich', and 'So-and-so is poor'.

Thus, these Divine Attributes are employed as Divine Names; when used in an absolute sense, they only point to Allah *the Almighty*.

We have previously explained that the Divine Names pertain either to His Divine Being or to His Attributes. Moreover, if a Name has no contrary, then it pertains to the Divine Being. The Name *Al-`Aziz the Almighty* is a case in point.

However, if the Name denotes both an Attribute and an Action, such as *Al-Mu`iz* (the Exalter), then it must have an opposite pertinent to the Divine Attributes and not to the Divine Being, which in this case is *Al-Mudhil* (who Humiliates).

Were Allah *the Almighty* only capable of exalting, and not humiliating, then He would not be the true God. Likewise, were He only *Ad-Daar* (the Inflictor of Harm) and not *An-Nafi`* (the One who benefits), He would not be the true God. Further, was He only Able to grant relief *(Al-Basit)*, and not Able to withhold(1) *(Al-Qabid),* He would not be the true God.

In short, each of these abovementioned Attributes have opposites, and their effect extends to His creatures. So, for example, Allah is Almighty in His Being; He exalts some people and humiliates some others.

The Name 'Allah' encompasses all of the Attributes of Perfection. Furthermore, there are other Names which Allah *the Almighty* has taught some of His creatures, and others of which we will know– if Allah wills– when we meet Him, '(Some) faces on that day shall be bright, Looking to their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'Al-Hulaymi explains that the Divine Name Al-Basit means that Allah outspreads His Bounty among His servants, bestowing it upon those whom He wills, while widening, exalting, favouring, enabling, bestowing and giving far beyond what is needed. As for the Divine Name Al-Qabid, Al-Hulaymi explains that* Allah *deprives those whom He wills of His Kindness and Favour. He constricts and retains His Bounty, and prohibits and impoverishes whom He wills.' See Al-Qurtubi, Al-Asna Fi Sharh Asma` Allah Al-Husna, 1/360.*

Back to the verse in question; we should note that Allah *Glorified is He* begins the verse by discussing the higher realms of existence, and that He does not mention earthly existence; He says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2).

When employed in a human context, the verb *rafa`a* (to raise up) denotes something that was raised from a lower location to a higher one, as in Allah's saying, 'And he raised his parents upon the throne…' (*Yusuf:* 100). The above verse shows that Yusuf's (Joseph's) parents were in a lower position and Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* raised them to a place of honour that is higher than where they were.

So, was the heaven located in a lower position in space before being raised by Allah *the Almighty*? No, it was not. He has created the heavens in an elevated state.

May Allah have Mercy on our sheikh 'Abd Al-Jalil `Isa, who said, 'When I say "Glory be to Allah Who made the elephant in such a large size", does this mean that the elephant was small, only to be enlarged by Allah *the Almighty*? Or was it created in a large state from the very beginning? Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* has created it, i.e. the elephant in such a big size from the very beginning. So, when I say "Glory be to Allah Who made the mosquito so small", does this mean that the mosquito was large and then Allah *the Almighty* reduced it in size? No, Allah *the Almighty* has created it small in the first place.'

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2), it means that the heavens were created in their elevated state in the first place. It is commonly known that when something is hoisted, it is supported by pillars which maintain its stability in a high position. However, Allah's creation is different, for we see for ourselves that the heaven stretches out to the horizon and it even appears to us that it touches the earth at the horizon, while they, obviously, do not touch. Moreover, we do not find a single human being who, while roaming in any direction, bumps into pillars which he deems to be the supports of the heavens. Clearly, no such thing is visible to the naked eye. So, are there invisible supports; or are there no supports in the first place?

As we said previously, when something is raised, this is because of the existence of something which maintains it in that place or supports its weight. Speaking about the heavens being raised aloft, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission; most surely Allah is Compassionate, Merciful to men.’ (*al-Hajj:* 65)

So, if the heavens are held from above, they are clearly in no need of pillars. When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He withholds the heaven’ (*al-Hajj:* 65), it means that He has determined their laws which we have not yet discovered.

Modern scientists have conducted surveys of the earth and of space by means of satellites and other modern inventions, and they did not find any supports which raise the heavens or hold them in place.

Furthermore, architects have tried hard in our modern world to create roofs without supporting pillars. However, to this day, they are still dependent on walls that act as pillars to counter the gravitational pull. So, we conclude that Allah *the Almighty* either maintains the heavens aloft by means of supports that are so subtle that the naked eye cannot perceive them – which is why the heaven appears to be standing in place without pillar support – or that the heaven is raised without any support whatsoever.

As for the Arabic word *`amd* (pillars), it is the plural of *`amud* or *imad* (a pillar). Moreover, the verse in question was revealed as a commentary of the verse in the chapter of Yusuf in which Allah *Glorified is He* states, ‘And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it.’ (*Yusuf:* 105) In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* explains, ‘It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 2).

This verse shows that we do not see these supports because of the limitations of human eyesight. In passing, you should not be surprised by the fact that there are creatures which you cannot see, since the human eye is one of the sensory organs which is governed by its own laws. It is able to perceive things but it is blind to others. Let us offer an example to prove this point; when you are looking at a person who is two metres tall and is walking away from you, you find that he gradually grows smaller until he finally disappears from your sight. Despite the fact that your eye no longer sees him, in reality he has not disappeared. This indicates that your visual power of perception is bound by certain laws.

Furthermore, there are other laws like the law of hearing, the law of gravity, the law of electricity etc. that we derive benefit from these phenomena without seeing them with the naked eye. Thus, you should not be surprised by the fact that there are things which you cannot see because your power of perception is confined to certain laws.

Allah *Glorified is He* has willed for the truth of this fact to be confirmed by the modern scientists' discoveries in the cosmos. Their discovery of forces, which we used to benefit from without being aware of, proves that man's sensorial perception is not capable of grasping all things. It is in the light of this fact that we may understand why the heaven appears to us to be raised without any visible support, for this either mean that there are in fact supports for the heavens which are not visible to our naked eye, or that it is suspended without any pillars whatsoever.

So, Allah's saying, '…with no visible supports…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2), is an informative statement. Let us give an example from our daily life; when you tell your son, 'I am off to work, be sure to do your homework.' Your instruction 'be sure to do your homework' is a clear directive. This is what we call an informative statement. However, the motivation behind the statement is constructive.

Indeed, a 'constructive statement' can be integrated into an informative statement in certain cases. For example, when you say, 'So-and-so died, Allah had Mercy on him', your prayer: 'Allah *the Almighty* had Mercy on him' is an informative statement, for you let it be known that Allah *the Almighty* had Mercy on that deceased person. You did that even though you cannot be certain of whether or not Allah *the Almighty* bestowed His Mercy upon that person. Nevertheless, you said 'Allah had Mercy on him' with the hope that Divine Mercy is indeed being bestowed upon him. Clearly, you could have said, 'So-and-so died. O Allah, have Mercy on him'; thus, praying for Allah *the Almighty* to shower His Mercy upon the person at hand.

The same is true for the verse, in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…with no visible supports…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). This part of the verse in question commands us to consider carefully and contemplate the matter of the heavens' pillars, and to do researches to invent tools that would aid us in perceiving them. Clearly, when a speaker turns your attention to what he has made and urges you to concentrate your sensorial faculties on it, one may deduce that the speaker is certain of what he has made.

Let us offer the following example from our daily life; when you enter a store to buy wool, and the seller hands you a sample. You ask him, 'Is this pure wool?' 'Yes, it is one hundred per cent wool. Give me a lighter and we can set a piece of it on fire so that you can see for yourself', replies the vendor. By analogy, Allah *Glorified is He* is substantiating the fact that the heavens are aloft without any supports, and He is suggesting for you to see for yourselves with your own eyes. You will not find any pillars stretching to the heaven. In fact, your own vision – and that of those endowed with eyesight – which stretches out to the horizons confirms the absence of pillars.

Each person has his own visionary horizon, which is restricted to the limits of his eyesight. Some people have very limited vision and it seems to them as though the heaven met the earth in front of their eyes. To these visually disabled individuals, we say, 'You need medical glasses to increase your eyesight'.

Thus, the visual horizons differ from one person to another. In our common, daily speech, it is said, 'So-and-so has limited 'horizons' (that is, visual capacity) for he only sees objects below his feet'.

Here arises the following question, which is 'If no person is able to see pillars which lift the heavens, will this matter be different for those who will come after us'? We contend, 'Satellites have surveyed the entire surface of the earth from outer space, and none of them have found a single pillar supporting the heaven'. This fact confirms the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2).

As for the Arabic word *as-samawat* (heavens), it is the plural of *sama`* (heaven), which encompasses everything that is positioned higher than you. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…sends down rain from the cloud…' (*al-Baqara:* 22).

We know that the rain falls from clouds which are high up in the sky and which appear to be suspended from the sky. However, the word *sama`* generally refers to the high heaven which covers the objects beneath it.

Modern scientists failed to reach unanimous agreement when people sought to know the nature of the heaven, whether it has a form or does not have one, and whether it is a large expanse composed of atmosphere and air or not.

Allah *Glorified is He* has scattered proofs of His Existence, Power, Wisdom, and Creative capacity throughout His creation. Having done this, He has placed these proofs, O mankind, in your own being. He states, ‘And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

When you ponder on your own soul, you will realise that modern scientists discover new things and marvellous secrets every day, be it in anatomy or physiology, or otherwise.

You will be amazed by your own formation when you see the discoveries currently being made on things that were previously unknown to man. Admittedly, some knowledge of our own formation is known to us at the present moment, but much remains to be understood and discovered in the future.

Discovering what has been unknown in the past leads one to suppose that new things are to be further understood in the future.

When you look beyond yourself, the following verse is pertinent, ‘We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth.’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

Allah’s saying, ‘We will soon show them Our signs...’ (*Fussilat:* 53) clearly shows that Allah’s display of His signs has no end, since the verb used in the verse denotes the future. Furthermore, those who witnessed the Quran being revealed read it in this way, just as we do today. Therefore, until the Day of Resurrection, there will be new signs and bestowals of Allah to be discovered.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the men, but most people do not know.’ (*Ghafir:* 57) When you contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth, you will realise that it is awe-inspiring. It is sufficient for you to wonder in bewilderment at your own formation and fashioning even though you are merely a limited individual, confined to a lifetime with a beginning and an end. What are you therefore to say of the creation of the heavens and the earth which existed prior to your own existence, and which will continue after you are gone until they are finally torn apart by Allah's command?! There is no doubt that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind, for the heavens and the earth include the entire universe.

When you hear about the creation of the heavens and the earth, beware of getting involved with your delusions and mental appraisals, for such matters cannot be solved in a factory, and it is impossible to conduct analyses to know how the heavens and the earth were created. You should be satisfied with knowing what the Creator of the heavens and the earth demands of you, and what He says of His creation. You should also recall the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge…' (*al-Isra': * 36).

Allah *Glorified is He* has made two matters beyond the reach of the limited human mind, so there is no need for you to preoccupy yourself trying to uncover them. The first one is how man was created, and whether man was originally an ape that evolved into a human being. This matter is not of your concern, so do not get involved in it by making conjectures which may well lead you to deviate from the Truth. The second one concerns the creation of the heavens and the earth. Beware lest you say, 'The earth was originally part of the sun', and other such matters which is not based on factual findings.

Moreover, recall the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls…' (*al-Kahf:* 51). Clearly, if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted you to have knowledge of the creation of such matters, He would have made some humans witness their creation. However, He denied us this possibility, and that is why such matters will always contain an element of mystery, and will never be resolved by means of human intellect. The matter of creation is only resolved by means of Divine Revelation from Allah Who has created all things.

Allah *the Almighty* has told you that He created you from clay, and that He blew His Spirit into you. So, you should pay close attention to this Quranic description of the creation of man as well as the entire cosmos.

The miraculous eloquence of the Quran led some people who have undue intellectual ambitions to derive some Quranic proofs of the veracity of the theories which some modern scientists have put forth concerning the creation of man and the earth. However, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us in advance not to believe them. He says, ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls; nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders.’ (*al-Kahf:* 51)

The Arabic word *al-Mudil* refers to the person who leads people astray and puts forth false information. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states that there will be some people who lead others astray by presenting their speculations which have no grounding.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that no human being ever secretly witnessed the creation of the sun or the earth, and whoever claims to know such things is among the *mudillin,* that is, those who lead people astray. This is because they concerned themselves with things of which they have no certain knowledge. So long as this statement is made by Allah *Glorified is He* we believe that it is ultimately true.

Scientific inquiries have proven the truth of what Allah *the Almighty* says regarding the creation of man. Allah *Glorified is He* first fashioned the cosmos, and then created man as a master in this world. The entire earth is subservient to man, Allah’s vicegerent on Earth. Moreover, everything in creation is maintained in order and regulation.

The only disobedient being in creation is man; so Allah *Glorified is He* turns to this rebel and makes him one of His signs so that he may bear witness to the world of the unseen on earth.

Allah *the Almighty* clearly states that He created Adam *peace be upon him* from clay. Man is the progeny of Adam who was fashioned by Allah *the Almighty* and in whom He has blown His Spirit. Having blown the Divine Spirit into Adam, Allah, ordered the angels to prostrate to him, including those who execute Allah’s commands and the angels.

This act of prostration is the angels’ declaration of obedience to Allah’s Will by serving mankind. This is how the story of man’s creation begins. The earth is then mixed with water, and so it turns into clay which is then left until it gains a darker complexion and finally dries up and turns into dry clay that is akin to pottery, in which Allah’s Spirit was blown.

Furthermore, when man's life comes to an end, the first thing that happens is the exiting of the spirit from the body. Once this happens, the body stiffens, and after returning to the earth, the body decomposes into the soil. At this stage, the moisture of the body is absorbed back into the soil, and the bones remain for some time until they themselves crumble into dust.

It is thus that the destruction of every form takes place. So, that which is the last thing to be constructed is the first thing to be destructed, that is, blowing the Spirit was the last stage of man's creation and seizing it is the first stage of his destruction. Therefore, the truth of Allah's saying is confirmed when we contemplate the origin and ends of human creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the way of creating the heavens and the earth is beyond our mental reach, but He has previously provided us with the proof of His saying by revealing to us how He has created mankind.

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'It is Allah Who raised up the heavens with no visible supports…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). We should notice that the word 'the heavens' is in the plural form. In a different verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods, and revealed in every heaven its affair.' (*Fussilat:* 12)

In the days of old, people used to say that the seven heavens are the seven planets: the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars and Jupiter. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has wanted to invalidate such assumption while its supporters were still alive. Thus, the astronomers have discovered other planets like Neptune and Pluto. This was a divinely willed rebuttal of the assumption that the seven heavens mentioned in the Quran refer mainly to the seven planets.

Admittedly, such assumption was made in good intention and was instigated by a desire to harmonise between the Quran and modern science. However, such people fell short of a deep understanding of the Quran since Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that the sun, the moon and the planets are adornments of the lower heaven, so what are we to say of the nature and beauty of the other heavens?

Allah *the Almighty* continues, '…and then established Himself on the Throne...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). The issue of '*Al-Istwa` `Ala Al-`Arsh*' (Allah's Establishment of

Himself on the Throne) is the most important theological issue that was debated by theologians. In order to gain an understanding of any issue, we must analyse the words carefully in order to come to an agreement as to their meaning. After that, we may understand the words in the context of a complete sentence. However, it would be inappropriate for us to sit down and argue over the nature of this sentence without clear contextualisation or agreement on basic definitions.

Let us look at the meaning of the verb *'istawa* as well as the word *al-`arsh* (throne) in the Quran. By following the inductive approach, we will find that these words appear in many verses. In one verse, the verb *'istwa* denotes the attainment of maturity, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when he attained his maturity and became full grown, We granted him wisdom and knowledge…' (*al-Qasas:* 14). This verse tells us about one stage of Prophet Musa's (Moses's) life when he reached full maturity, and was sexually potent to sustain his species. Moreover, if he should get married, he would bear children with similar characteristics. Such are the attributes which define a fully mature human being.

In a different instance, the Quran states, 'The Lord of Strength; so he attained completion, And he is in the highest part of the horizon.' (*an-Najm:* 6-7). The meaning of *'istawa* in this context is 'to rise'; it thus denotes the rising of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* to the horizon's loftiest part.

In a different verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and He directed Himself to the heaven, so He made them complete seven heavens…' (*al-Baqara:* 29). This verse informs us that Allah *the Almighty* directed Himself to the heaven; beware of supposing that this Divine Action is equal to the human action. This is because, as we have previously explained, everything that pertains to Allah *the Almighty* must be understood within the context of the following verse, '…there is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Thus, when we say that Allah *the Almighty* directed Himself to the heaven, we should understand this action in a manner that befits Him. Moreover, *al-`istawa'* (to rise) in a general sense differs from the act of establishing oneself on a throne.

Thus, we deduce that *'istiwa`* (establishing oneself on something) can refer to a being other than Allah *the Almighty* – namely; man, or even a king. Moreover, one also finds instances in which *'istiwa`* refers to Allah's directing Himself to something like the heaven, while in some other verses it refers to Allah's Establishment of Himself on the Divine Throne.

Allah's Establishing Himself on the Divine Throne has been mentioned in the Quran seven times, namely; in the chapters of *al-A`raf, Yunus, ar-Ra`d*, *Ta Ha*, *al-Furqan*, *as-Sajda* and *al-Hadid*.

Moreover, there are twenty-one references in the Quran to Allah's Throne, and the throne of the Queen of Sheba, *Balqis*, is mentioned four times. Allah *the Almighty* says regarding her throne, 'and she has a mighty throne' (*an-Naml:* 23), 'which of you can bring to me her throne' (*an-Naml:* 38), 'Alter her throne for her' (*an-Naml:* 41) and 'is your throne like this?' (*an-Naml:* 42)

Furthermore, in reference to Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And he raised his parents upon the throne' (*Yusuf:* 100).

You should beware of interpreting *'istiwa`* pertaining to Allah *the Almighty* to mean 'maturity.' This is because maturity denotes a perfection that develops after a certain deficiency.

Thus, meticulous religious scholars, knowing that Allah's establishing Himself upon the Throne was mentioned seven times in the Noble Quran, said:

Passages of the Quran concerning Allah's Establishing Himself upon
The Throne appears in seven chapters. So, count these chapters:
In the chapter of *al-A`raf,* and in that of *Yunus,*
And in *ar-Ra`d* and *Ta Ha.* Be certain of your count!
And in the chapter of *al-Furqan*, then in that of *as-Sajda,*
In addition to *al-Hadid*. Understand this with complete certainty.*'*

As for the meaning of *'istwa`*, the scholars have composed the following rhythmic poem:

'They have composed treatises (regarding the meaning of *'istiwa`*) in which four meanings are listen, Which appear in Al-Faris At-Ta`an

These four definitions are: ‘He resided’ and ‘He ascended’

In addition to ‘He is above all imperfections’

In addition to ‘He mounted;’ this latter being the fourth,

Thus (the poet has) completed this matter and is seeking the protection of the All-Gracious.’

`Istawa’ Ala Al-`Arsh (ascending to the throne) is the act of moving from one place to another. So, we find that our common definitions of *‘istawa`* do not befit Allah’s Divine Perfection.

The scholars of religion have differed on this matter. One of them said, ‘I will interpret this term to mean literally what is stated by Allah *the Almighty*’.

To those who hold such opinions, we contend by asking the following question, ‘Can you possibly overlook the verse which states: ‘There is nothing like Him’ (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Clearly, no one has the right to do such a thing. Moreover, one must interpret every verse concerning the Divine Being in the light of Allah’s saying, ‘There is nothing like Him’ (*ash-Shura:* 11).

It is noteworthy to mention that scholars of precision(1) say, ‘The act of *al-`istiwa`* is evident, the ‘how’ — that is, the exact nature of *al-`istiwa'* is unknown, and inquiring about its nature is a *bid`a* (innovation).’ In other words, we know what *al-`istiwa`* means, but the way in which Allah does it is beyond our ken. Moreover, to inquire into the exact nature of *`istiwa`* is an (objectionable) innovation

There are many verses(2) in the Quran which begin with the True Lord *Glorified is He* saying, ‘They will ask you’ (*al-Baqara:* 189).

The early Muslims posed many questions to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* but being native speakers of a pure form of Arabic, they understood

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(1) *This most commonly refers to Imam Malik.*

(2) This type of verse appears fifteen times in the Quran: (*al-Baqara*: 189, 215, 217, 219, 220, and 222), (*al-Ma’ida*: 4) (*al-A’raf*: 187), (*al-Anfal*: 1), (*al-Isra’*: 85), (*al-Kahf*: 83), (*Ta Ha*: 105) and (*an-Nazi’at*: 42).

al-`istiwa` as being something that befits the Divine and therefore did not ask about its exact nature.

This question concerning the exact nature of Allah's residing on His Throne was only asked by later generations of Muslims who were arguing over various theological issues contained in the Quran. One of them said, 'I will interpret the Quranic expressions literally.' If Allah says, 'verily He (that is, Allah) ascends,' then Allah ascends. Likewise, if it is stated that He makes *al-`istiwa`*, then I understand this to mean that He makes *al-`istiwa`*.'

To those who hold this opinion, we contend that what you are saying applies to transient existents, but cannot be said of the Unchanged Changer. Moreover, if you look for the meaning of *al-`istiwa`*, it means the order of things depends on Him. Considering this definition, we ask rhetorically: was there a time in which the order of things did not depend on Allah?

We add the following: it is well known that Allah *Glorified is He* has numerous Attributes, which were present prior to Allah's creation of the world and existence. Allah *Glorified is He* has been described as Creator prior to the making of creation. He is the Exalter before the creation of someone who can be exalted, and He is the Humiliator before the conception of someone who is to be humiliated. To Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the Attributes of Absolute Perfection. It is with these Attributes that He created the world. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Our Lord is He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it].' (*Ta Ha:* 50)

Accordingly, we believe that the nature of creation was in the Divine Essence before manifestation. When Allah *Glorified is He* created the heavens and the earth, He projected the Attribute into manifestation. This Attribute of creation which corresponds to Allah as Creator was within the Essence without having an evidence of its existence. And so, Allah *Glorified is He* brought this evidence into being. It is in this way that we can say that the order of things depends on Him.

In short, when one hears the expression *al-`istiwa`* with reference to Allah, it implies an understanding that is proportional to the meaning of Allah's words. This expression therefore applies to the Attributes within the Divine Order, and is distinct from all contingency and determinations.

Moreover, such attributes are to be found among human beings, as the Queen of Sheba of whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And hers is a mighty throne.’ (*an-Naml:* 23) This existent is different in nature from a Divine Attribute, since she did not sit on the throne until Allah created it. Nor do worldly affairs succumb to a king or a queen’s power without great endeavours and battles on his or her part. Such a person of power may be engaged in battles and wars, and only then do affairs of this world succumb to his will.

And so, the `*istiwa*` of Allah is fundamentally different from that of Allah’s creatures, When one comes across phrases that mentioned Allah residing on the throne, we raise Allah above all human actions and state the following formula of transcendence: ‘There is nothing like unto Him.’ (*ash-Shura:* 11)

Allah’s `*istiwa*` marks the completion of the abovementioned projection of the Divine Attribute which issues from the Divine Essence. In other words, the conclusion of this issuing forth which takes place at His appointed moment is the ending point of this phenomenon.

As for the word throne, we also come across verses in the Quran which mentions it in reference to Allah. ‘And there will bear the throne of your Lord.’ (*al-Haqqa*: 17), ‘The throne of His almightiness has rested upon water.’ (*Hud:* 7), ‘so exalted is Allah, Lord of the throne, above what they describe.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 22)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the same verse which we are examining, ‘and made subject the sun and the moon.’ ‘Made subject’ is defined as the subjugator demanding the subjugated to act according to the subjugator’s laws, in such a way that the subjugated loses all individuality that is marked by desire, opinion, and emotion. It is therefore the opposite of free will. A subjugated being has no free will. As for one who is free, he has a choice whether to accept or refuse an order.

We have previously stated that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given man choice.

‘Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72) Man accepted to bear the sacred trust and to return this trust to Allah at the appointed time – and not to return this sacred trust prior to this appointed time, when he is supposed to bear its responsibility. There is a clear distinction between returning a trust and bearing it. To clarify this distinction, I have previously given the example of a person who tells his friend, ‘I have one thousand pounds, and I am afraid of losing them. So, keep them safely for me, and when I am in need, I will ask you to return them to me.’ The trustworthy friend says, ‘Hand your money over to me, and I will return it to you upon your request.’

Now this trustworthy friend is being honest with you when you asked him to bear this responsibility. However, difficult circumstances might push him to spend this money, and when the owner asks for it, the former might be unable to pay them back. Thus, the trustee gave you his word when he was entrusted with the one thousand pounds, but he failed to live up to his trust when the time came for him to pay you back.

The trustee should have told his friend when asked to save the considerable sum of money, ‘Please leave, for I cannot guarantee to pay you back when you ask me for your money.’

In the above verse, the Quran tells us that when the sky, the earth, and the mountains were offered to carry this sacred trust, they refused to do so. Neither the mountains nor the heavens nor the earth have free will. None of these abovementioned existents are endowed with this power of freewill, and this limitation applies to all the species in creation save mankind. It is for this reason that we do not find any corruption on Earth resulting from these existents that are subjugated to man.

Man, however, accepted to carry this trust, since he is endowed with an intellect with which he is able to think and make choices. Corruption in the world is the result of both this freedom of choice and man’s desires. Were man to perform his actions as if he were subjugated and submitted to Allah’s norm, his actions on earth would be upright just like that of the other creatures that are submitted to Allah’s commands.

Thus, if you want the worldly affairs – over which you have control – to be upright, then you must apply the following verse in which the True Lord

Glorified is He says, ‘That you not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance.’ (*ar-Rahman*: 8-9)

Pay attention to what the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks of you in His religion, for if you apply religious principles to your life, your worldly affairs will be in accord (with Allah) like that of other existents (that are not endowed with freewill).

Our shortcomings result from the fact that we are human beings and perform certain actions out of our own choice which are sometimes contrary to the law of religion. However, if we were to carry out our actions and were attentive to the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘That you not transgress within the balance’ then our actions will be in harmony with Allah’s religion. Moreover, we will derive joy in our actions just as we derive happiness from knowing that the celestial bodies are created in order and precision.

In short, corruption only results from choices that are contrary to the law revealed by Allah who gave us freewill. If you want to be among those who are chosen by Allah, then you must remain true to the religious norm revealed by Allah, who exalted you by giving you the power of freewill.

We notice that the men of righteousness whom Allah created follow the religion of their Lord. They willingly chose to live in accordance with their Lord’s expectations (of man) in those domains wherein choice is possible. And so they lived, as it were, in complete harmony with the divine will. These are called servants, not slaves. All creatures belonging to Allah are slaves of Allah, be they believers or disbelievers, obedient or disobedient of His commands. As for servants, they are the ones who adopt Allah’s commands as their choice. Allah says, ‘And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace.’ (*al-Furqan:* 63) These are the ones who freely choose to live in accordance with what Allah chooses.

Note the True Lord’s description of the angels in the following verse, ‘Rather, they are [but] honoured servants. They cannot precede Him in word, and they act by His command.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 26-27)

If a servant voluntarily chooses to comply with the religion of his Lord, he not only attains the spiritual status of the angels, but also may even elevate to a superior rank than the angelic one. This is because the angels are subjected to Allah's Commands, while you have the choice to obey or disobey Him. In short, by willingly following the religion of your Lord, you may potentially exceed the rank of the angels.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the verse at hand, 'and has subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term.' (*Luqman:* 29) Running its course for a specified term, we must understand the verb 'run' in the context of this verse to mean 'the shortening of time that it takes to cover a certain distance'. For example, when you want to arrive at a certain destination, you might walk at a slow pace to arrive within say, one hour. However, you could also run to your destination and cover the same distance within half an hour. Obviously, running is noticeable to the observer.

Does anyone notice the sun 'running its course'? No, since this 'running' takes place within the proportions of the sun. This type of running is called 'streamline running'; that is, it is a running that is not perceivable by the naked eye. Note that there is a different kind of moving called movement of leaping and streamlined movement. Take the movement of the hands of a clock, for instance. You will notice that the hand marking the seconds is faster than the minutes' hand which seems to be unchanging although it is in fact in constant movement. You can perceive the movements of the seconds' hand because it moves in leaps. However, you cannot see the movements of the minutes' hand because it moves in accordance with the subtle rotation of the disks inside the clock. Every part of the disk which moves the minutes' hand is connected to the revolving of the disk which controls the seconds' hand. And so, the leap-motion of the seconds' hand is rendered into a subtle movement of the minutes' hand.

Now the combined movement of both the seconds' and the minutes' hands of the clock create a subtler movement of the hours' hand. This means that every split second contributes to a slight movement of the hours' hand.

The same applies to the growth of human beings, animals, or plants. You notice that the actual growth takes place without being noticeable to the eye because the growing creature develops in a subtle and imperceptible way throughout the whole day.

If you want to understand this concept in greater depth, look at a shadow. You will notice that the shadow is conspicuous during the rising of the sun, but that it gradually loses its shape as the sun sets.

Notice the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, ‘Have you not considered your Lord - how He extends the shadow, and if He willed, He could have made it stationary?’ (*al-Furqan:* 45) That is: a shadow is in constant movement and unfixed in one place. Moreover, the perpetual movement of the sun at every moment changes the position of the shadow.

Considering this explanation, we should distinguish between leap-movement of existents and the constant yet streamlined movement of certain things. With scientific progress, we find scientists discussing possibilities such as ‘increasing the intensity of the streamlined movement over the leap-movement’.

Returning to the chapter of *ar-Ra’d,* at this point, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, ‘and has subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term.’

‘Specified term denotes a fixed duration, which can either be a set duration in time or a limited distance in space. In this verse, the word term either means a set duration of the sun and the moon’s existence, which will occur on the Day of Judgment when the sky will be rent asunder, the sun, will be rolled up and the stars will lose their luminescence,(1) or again, it may denote the daily function of these two celestial bodies.

We have previously discussed that even though the sun sets in one general location, it rises at different points on the horizon. A proof that the sun has varying rising points is that the ancient Egyptians established certain temples with certain windows and openings (in the walls of the edifice).

Each day when the sun rises, it rises at one of the points onto which the windows look. Thus, each day the sun rises at a different point from the previous day, and continues to do so until it completes the cycle and sunrise takes place at the original point where it started. This sun's cycle continues daily for a set term.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And when the stars lose their light’ (*at-Takwir*: 2), that is, its colour changed and is no longer unobstructed brightness. Or again, the stars scattered about and fell on the Day of Resurrection like hawks attacking their prey. (*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim* 2/155).

We refer to these points of sunrise as *al-buruj*, that is, signs of the zodiac. We have, for example, the sign of the Ram, the Capricorn, the Bull, the Lion, Virgo, Sagittarius (the Archer) and the Fish. Such signs of the zodiac are used as a means of knowing the weather conditions, including heat, cold, rain, and other matters pertaining to the weather. In short, every sign of the zodiac marks a specific time, and we can identify the weather conditions with precision in relation to this time marked by the rising sun.

Unfortunately, however, certain human actions render difficult the precise measuring of weather conditions on earth through the zodiac points. For example, the burning of forests which consumes so much oxygen that is necessary for man and animals to breathe.

As a result, the ozone layer attempts to maintain its balance by transferring quantities of air from another region to the region where oxygen is being consumed by forest fires, thus causing an imbalance in the temperature scale for a few days.

The atmosphere is also damaged by nuclear experiments that are conducted by countries in possession of atomic weapons. These nations detonate their weapons in the air, thereby creating an instability and imbalance in the atmosphere, which in turn renders the abovementioned zodiac points less accurate means of measuring the changes in temperature.

A poet once listed these zodiac points in the following verses:

'The Bull bore Cancer's axis,

And the Lion gave way to Virgo of the Balance.

Scorpio, the Archer, Aquarius and Pisces,

Never have we known the people of as-suryan)'

'He details the signs that you may, of the meeting with your Lord, be certain.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2) In the opening of this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified the concept of the skies being raised without any (visible) pillars, His residing on the Divine throne, the subservience of the sun and the moon to His commands and how all things run their course for a set term.

All the above-mentioned phenomena require disposal of its affairs after manifestation of power has become evident, for just as He determined all things before creating them, He disposes their affairs with His existence. Allah watches over all things, and He manifests Himself in a different way each day.(1) I will cite the following example for the sake of elucidation, and not to draw an analogy between Allah and contingent things for Allah is above all similitude. We say, ‘so-and-so first meditated upon something, and then he went to action.’ Thought or meditation upon something is to research a certain matter so as to extract necessary information from it. This is akin to gathering grains of wheat and rubbing them against one another in your hand to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Analogously, one can understand the process of contemplation that is demanded of you when researching a topic: you persist at what you are doing until you reach the heart of the matter. Deliberateness is to lose confidence in one’s first thought, but considering at the heart of the matter to perceive the possible consequences of applying one’s ideas to concrete situations.

Perhaps the ideas that one came up with might save or help in the present situation; however, they may also be injurious on the long term. About this possibility, I always cite the example of the invention of insecticides. Its inventors failed to realize that they were poisonous not only to the harmful insects but also to the animals that helped the farmer. They became so dangerous they were banned. This ban was issued from people who boasted to be greater than all the others on earth for having invented these insecticides. They mistakenly thought that the good derived from these insecticides vastly outweighed the harm that resulted from using them. This means that they did not thoroughly test their new insecticide product. Rather, they created it in a hurried fashion without paying attention to the long-term harms. Clearly, they should have done their research properly before releasing their product into the market since ‘deliberation’ means to look at something back to front. The

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(1) *`Abdullah ibn Munib Al-Azdi said, The Messenger of Allah peace and blessing be upon him recited the following verse, ‘(and) every day He manifests Himself in yet another (wondrous) way.’ (ar-Rahman: 29). We asked: ‘Oh Messenger of Allah, what way is that (in which Allah manifests Himself?’ He responded, ‘To forgive a sin, relieve a hardship, elevate some people and down rank others.’ Cited by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir) (4/273).*

True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Then do they not reflect upon the Quran, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?’ (*Muhammad:* 24)

In other words, do not consider only the outward facet of the Quran, but ponder its deeper meanings as well. It is precisely for this reason that `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Deliberate deeply in the Quran.’

In other words, unearth treasures buried within the Holy Book by means of deliberation and close inspection of its verses. After all, deliberation prevents one from erroneous thinking. A simple example (of careful thought) which is witnessed in every household is that we wash our mouths with water to rinse out any food left from the meal. Among these leftovers, we find chunks of food that are somewhat solid.

Then we rinse out the basin with flowing water from the tap, and we are surprised when, after some time, the drain is clogged. When we open the conduit pipe, we find that it is filled with leftovers.

Now when you rinsed out your mouth, you were only thinking about cleaning it. You did not consider that the food crumbs will accumulate over time in the conduit pipe. Had you thought carefully about the consequences of rinsing your mouth in the sink, you would have installed a conduit pipe that is wider than the traditional one. Moreover, you would have set up a larger water-flush that is attached to the sink.

Thus, we understand that deliberate thought pushes you to look carefully into things. You must inspect and examine your subject of inquiry: does it really bring about what your mental calculations have predicted? Or again, does it benefit or harm you?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, ‘He details the signs that you may, of the meeting with your Lord, be certain.’

‘Details the signs’ means that Allah has laid down an appropriate decree for all things in the universe, By extension, to those people who ask me for a *fatwa* which is in agreement with their own wishes, I always respond, ‘We do not create *fatwas* in conformity with your whims. My *fatwas* were constructed (on principles that are) prior (to your whims), and it is you who must conform to their stipulations, rather than tailor the *fatwa's* decrees to conform to your desires.’

I make such statements because life in this world is not the end. Rather, it is followed by another life in which a man is judged for his actions on earth. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And we will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed.’ (*al-Furqan:* 23)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘Their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day; they are unable [to keep] from what they earned a [single] thing.’ (*Ibrahim:* 18)

Therefore, you must carry out your actions in this world with the certainty that their ramifications do not end in this world but also have an impact in the life-to-come. For if the earth provides you with temporary comfort or passing hardship, the relief in the life-to-come is everlasting, while the castigation (reserved for the evildoers) has no end.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى مَدَّ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَٰسِىَ وَأَنْهَـٰرًا ۖ وَمِن كُلِّ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ جَعَلَ فِيهَا
زَوْجَيْنِ ٱثْنَيْنِ ۖ يُغْشِى ٱلَّيْلَ ٱلنَّهَارَ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَـٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

it is He who spread out the earth, placed firm mountains and rivers on it, and made two of every kind of fruit; He draws the veil of night over the day. There truly are signs in this for people who reflect [3] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 3)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* further elaborates on the cosmic signs: ‘spread the earth’. In other words, the earth is established and laid out before you. Some people understand the verb ‘spread’ to mean ‘flattened’. We contend that the flattening of something follows its spreading.

It is for this reason that some scholars asked: how does one understand this verse considering those who say that the earth takes a spherical shape?

After all, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states that the earth is flattened and He also says, ‘He has spread the earth.’ My response to these scholars is as follows: let us first understand the verb spread correctly, and let us understand what Allah means by the earth as well. The latter is that on which you and others stand, and on which creatures live. It stretches northward to the North

Pole, and southward to the South Pole. The earth is spread out no matter at which part of it you happen to be located.

The meaning of ‘spreading the earth’ is if you were to stand on one point of the earth’s surface and walked toward another point, you will notice that the earth is spread out before you and that there is no cliff marking the ‘end of the earth’. Now if the earth were ‘flattened’, then by definition its surface would have an end. We would have those who walk to the end of the earth and say, ‘I have reached the limit of the earth’s surface, and in front of me there is nothing but empty space’. Obviously, not a single human being has ever rightfully made such a claim.

If a man were to follow the equator, for example, he would keep on walking on land or traversing the sea and the ocean by boat until he reaches his initial point of departure. Thus, we can say that the earth is spread out without any limits; and this is only possible because of the earth’s spherical shape. In fact, if you were to follow any of the earth’s longitudes or latitudes, you would end up at your initial point of departure.

This was the initial proof presented by scientists for the spherical shape of the earth; that is, prior to coming up with the idea of taking a picture of the earth above the planet’s ozone layer. We derive yet another meaning from the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘And it is He who has spread the earth’ namely the necessity of man’s acknowledging the vastness of the earth and, if his circumstances are not favourable, of moving to a different location. Indeed, Allah’s Earth is wide-ranging, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 97)

We know that corruption in our modern world is born out of corruption in policies and an escalation in calamities around the world. Political tensions have, as it were, put a limit to the earth’s spreading; the moment a person tries to leave the borders of his country, he is confronted with guards and other barriers at the frontier of his neighbouring nation. Everyone has forgotten the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* proclaims, ‘And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 10) Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has placed the earth at the service of all living beings. If this Quranic principle is not achieved, the world will stay in a state of conflict. Some countries will lack human workforce and others will have meagre economies due to overpopulation and extracting more resources and energy from the earth than it is meant to provide.

In short, because of the artificial barriers that are drawn between countries, parts of the earth will remain under-populated, while some humans will not even possess a plot of land from which to derive a livelihood. For this dilemma to be solved – as we mentioned in a speech addressed to the United Nations – the following Quranic principle must be applied, ‘And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures.’ A person whose living conditions are difficult in one part of the earth must be allowed to migrate elsewhere.

Allah *Glorified is He* carries on in the same verse, ‘and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers.’ And so, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has decreed the specific nature of the mountain. In another verse, He elaborates on the cause for their being firm. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and (are they not aware that) We have set up firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with them.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 31) In other words, lest the earth becomes unstable, for were the earth created in a fixed manner, we would not have needed firm mountains to serve as reinforcement. However, the earth’s surface by nature is unstable, and it is prone to seismic activity. Were it not for the mountains, the earth’s surface would have been less steady.

Someone may ask: what about when we raze mountains to the ground; we quarry some for granite that we use to lay the foundations of buildings in some parts of the world, we extract marble from others to make bathrooms, reservoirs and stairs, and we cut certain types of rock out of mountains to obtain Uranium? We contend: observe the Wisdom of the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He created the earth, and when He ordered the cosmos. Notice that the earth is enveloped in an atmosphere and that it has a bore projecting from the core of the earth to its surface, and that the closer you get to the centre of the planet, the smaller the bore.

The structure of the earth is analogous to that of, for example, a watermelon. If you were to separate the inner core of the watermelon from its outer peel, you would end up with a ball made by the green outer peel, and another made of the eatable watermelon fruit. Moreover, if you were to create another sphere out of the same red watermelon, you would end up with another ball that has a smaller diameter than that of the green one. The more spheres you make out of the watermelon, the smaller the diameter since you are approaching the centre of the fruit. In addition, the green peel that surrounds the watermelon is similar to the crust which covers the earth's surface. Our planet's crust is composed of solid material, but its core is made up of various substances which may be either in solid or in liquid form.

The more we draw unto the centre of the earth, the more the temperature increases. This is demonstrated by the hot and burning steam which gushes from the mouths of volcanoes.

Out of mercy for mankind, the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed for the core of the earth to be in liquid form, for when we build houses, dig out rocks from mountains, or use materials from mountains for any other purpose we are simply transferring the earth's material from one place to another.

Moreover, when ponderous matter is moved from one location on the earth's surface to another, the liquid underneath the surface is transferred from the region that is bearing more weight to the one which is carrying a lesser load, thus recreating balance within the earth. Were this shifting of liquids inside the earth's surface not to take place, the sky scrapers would simply tumble with the earth's rotations.

The following example makes this concept easier to grasp: if you placed a piece of dough on the surface of a rotating watermelon or that of a ball, the chunk of dough would drop off the surface. Scientists who study the science of motion have explained this phenomenon by showing that due to their rotation; all spherical objects which are in movement generate a force which is called self-centrifuge. The piece of dough – or any object placed on a rotating sphere – causes relatively more density and weight on the surface of the sphere, and is felt at the centre. To maintain its balanced rotational movement, the sphere casts out any superfluous mass accumulated on its surface.

Consequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* designed the earth in such a way that when bisected, the two halves of the earth are always equal in weight

– regardless of the line of bisection and of the shifting of materials on the earth’s surface. Hence, the weight of the earth is always in balance because of the shifting of the liquids underneath the earth’s surface.

This self-equilibrating mechanism of our planet is a proof of the Glory of the Creator who created the cosmos with such precision. It suffices us to observe the Glory of the True Lord *Glorified is He* who created the mountains as anchors which prevent the earth’s surface from shifting. Allah created the mountains and the deserts as sources of livelihood for us when our subsistence is threatened. And so, we extracted raw materials from mountains and exported them to other nations, using their revenue to buy wheat.

We notice around us deserts whose inhabitants, a long time ago, were suffering from thirst and could not even find a tree under which to seek shade. Yet the True Lord *Glorified is He* created wells in these deserts from which petrol comes gushing forth. Thus, we see that every plot of land on this earth is laden with bounty that is equal to other parts of the world, and that Allah has set a time in history in which people may benefit from the bounty of that land. It is for this reason that the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes the mountains in the following way, ‘Say, ‘Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals?” That is the Lord of the worlds. And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance in four days without distinction - for [the information] of those who ask.’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10)

In other words: Allah has bestowed his blessings upon the mountains, which are part and parcel of the earth, and He willed for the means of subsistence to be distributed among the mountains and throughout the earth. It suffices us to know that when rains from the heavens shower down on mountains, the rainwater carries alluvial mud from the mountain peaks to lower regions of the earth, thus fertilizing the soil below.

Moreover, were the mountains not solid, they would have crumbled after a few rainfalls, thereby depriving plants that we cultivate in the earth from the fertile soil which is their source of nourishment.

Nonetheless, Allah *Glorified is He* willed for the weather patterns to unfold successively and to be varied and diversified – ranging from heat to humidity –

causing the earth to crack and the solid surface of mountains to dissolve and pour down with the rainwater. This softened mountain crust then nourishes the soil and makes like possible and allows us to carry on cultivating crops.

Note that Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse, 'and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers.' Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* is including two opposites in the same verse: firm mountains, which are solid and stable, and rivers which carry water. A river is that which carries fresh water. In contrast, the sea is a body of salty water. If you were to trace all the earth's rivers, you would find that they empty out into the oceans. Were the opposite to occur, seawater would have dominated fresh water and we would be unable to drink or cultivate land. It is for this reason that the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed for fresh water to be located at a higher level than salt water. After all, fresh water has a function to fulfil before emptying out in the ocean. I give this explanation so that we may grasp the wisdom of the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, 'Between them is a barrier [so] neither of them transgresses.' (*ar-Rahman:* 20)

It is remarkable that the barrier of earth which separates rivers from oceans is slanted. The gradation of this obstacle enables fresh water to travel to the ocean. It is also astonishing that when you dig a hole on the shores of a beach, you sometimes find sweet water.

When we visit the town in northern Egypt on the Mediterranean called El-Arish, we find groves of palm trees bordering the shoreline. Now we know that palm trees need fresh water. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* has endowed this type of palm tree with the quality of being able to draw fresh water from this beach abutting the sea; or again, one has the impression that there might be fresh water undercurrents.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky and makes it flow as springs [and rivers] in the earth.' (*az-Zumar:* 21) Note that in Lower Egypt, some people dig a well and come across fresh water, while others dig wells only to find salt water. This proves that fresh and salt waters underneath the earth are not mixed. Rather, both fresh and salt waters flow through distinct underground channels.

In the same verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the ripening of fruits because of the firm mountains from which soil is nourished, as well as the rivers and tributaries which carry necessary water for irrigation. Thus, the ripening of fruits or crops in general is a natural process. As we know, the fruit or the crop is the incentive for engaging in agricultural activity.

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* keeps on listing the bounties which He bestows upon us. Allah says, ‘and from all of the fruits He made therein two mates.’

Note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not create anything without endowing it with the ability to multiply. This fact is confirmed by the following verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, ‘Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36) For anything to multiply there is need of two corresponding parts of a pair. In the days of old, we used to believe that reproduction by means of grafting was a phenomenon that was particular to plants only. For example, we would graft a female palm tree with a male one. In the animal kingdom, the male animal would fertilize the female. However, we have discovered through modern science that electricity – this example is not exclusive – is also engendered by the meeting of two opposing elements, one positive and the other negative. This principle of duality is also witnessed in other cosmic phenomena. All these scientific discoveries confirm the veracity of the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Limitless in His glory is He who has created all opposites.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36)

In the same verse, Allah *Glorified is He* continues, ‘He causes the night to cover the day.’ In other words, the darkness of the night covers the light of day (in a sheet of obscurity). In a different chapter in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* states, ‘We erased the sign of the night and made the sign of the day visible.’ (*al-Isra’:* 12) This is in accordance with Allah’s Will, ‘And He it is who causes the night and the day to succeed one another.’ (*al-Furqan:* 62)

If someone were to ask, ‘Which was created first, the day or the night?’, we would respond, ‘From our human perspective, we witness both night and day successively. Each one carries out its function in one half of the globe, and each succeeds the other. This is what it must have been like when Allah first created the heavens and the earth.

And so, had Allah *Glorified is He* spread out the earth and caused it to face the sun, the day would clearly have preceded the night. However, if the earth were not facing the sun at the time of its creation, then night would obviously have preceded day.' The True Lord clarifies this matter to a certain extent in the following verse in the chapter of *Ya Sin*, 'It is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming.' (*Ya Sin:* 40)

Since they had devised the lunar calendar, we may deduce that the ancient Arabs used to believe that night was created by Allah before day. The month would therefore start at night and not during the day. We know for example that the month of *Ramadan* begins at night. And so, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies the cyclical nature of night and day to the early Muslims to the extent that their knowledge of the solar system permits. Later, we discovered that night and day were created at the same time, thanks to pictures of the spherical shape of our planet. We now understand that Allah *Glorified is He* created the heavenly bodies in this fashion. Thus, the side of the earth which is facing the sun is experiencing daylight, while the opposing side of the earth is covered in darkness of night. Moreover, each of the two sides alternate. It is in this manner that we discovered that both night and day were created at the same time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* puts emphasis on the Noble Quranic verse by stating, 'Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought.' In other words, man has the duty to study his surroundings in order to arrive at the heart of the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَفِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ قِطَعٞ مُّتَجَٰوِرَٰتٞ وَجَنَّٰتٞ مِّنۡ أَعۡنَٰبٖ وَزَرۡعٞ وَنَخِيلٞ
صِنۡوَانٞ وَغَيۡرُ صِنۡوَانٖ يُسۡقَىٰ بِمَآءٖ وَٰحِدٖ وَنُفَضِّلُ بَعۡضَهَا عَلَىٰ بَعۡضٖ
فِي ٱلۡأُكُلِۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَعۡقِلُونَ ٤

There are, in the land, neighbouring plots, gardens of vineyards, cornfields, palm trees in clusters or otherwise, all watered with the same water, yet We make some of them taste better than others: there truly are signs in this for people who reason[4] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 4)

This verse points out details which are referred to in general terms toward the end of the chapter of *Yusuf,* 'And how many a sign within the heavens and earth do they pass over while they, therefrom, are turning away.' (*Yusuf:* 105) Moreover, this verse reminds one of Allah's statements, 'It is Allah who erected the heavens without pillars that you [can] see.' As well as, 'He arranges [each] matter; He details the signs.' Or again, 'And it is He who spread the earth and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers; and from all of the fruits He made therein two mates; He causes the night to cover the day. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought?"

When we meditate upon the verse where the True Lord *Glorified is He* states, 'And within the land are neighbouring plots', we find ourselves falling short of defining the earth properly, for land is the material from which our fellow humans and creatures derive their livelihood. Note that had we tried to give it a more precise definition, we would only come up with one that is more obscure. From this perspective, one could say that the meaning of earth is so evident that it does not call for a definition.

The word 'plots' means that the entirety of the earth's landmass is divided into tracts of land, This sum, entails both the entirety of the soil's surface as well as the distinct tracts of land into which this total is divided.

You have heard of modern scientists speaking of the existence of 'strips of wheat' (that is, a swath of land where wheat grows easily and abundantly) 'banana strips', 'hot regions' and 'cold regions' of the earth. The verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'neighbouring plots' speaks of the dazzling Creative Power of Allah. Even though these tracts of land are neighbouring each other, the climate in which they are located gives rise to immense variation: wheat, for example, can only grow in a particular type of weather, and the same is true for bananas.

And so, the agricultural production that is particular to each region of the world corresponds to the diversity in climate patterns. The earth's soil is not simply one homogenous mass of clay. Rather, each soil is moulded by the climate that surrounds it.

It is indeed stunning to contemplate the earth, for it provides man, as well as other creatures, with the nourishment needed to sustain life on earth. As stated above, the earth is not one homogenous whole; rather, it differs according to varying conditions. Some regions of the world are barren and unproductive, while others are lush and fertile.

In fact, soil fertility differs from one region and tract of land to another. Note that a guava fruit which grows off a particular tree in a particular region differs from guava fruits which grow off of trees in a different region of the world. Likewise, the types of wheat vary from one part of the world to another. People often tell you: 'this is the wheat of so-and-so'. This happens even though all soils are irrigated by the same water.

Modern scientists who deny the wisdom of revelation say, 'This variety within a single species of plants is due to processes of natural selection and preference.' It is as if these modern scientists were oblivious to the fact that a choice requires a chooser, and that the latter demands a brain with which he can make his selection. The same is true for preference or election. Do the seeds have a brain with which they choose and select their preferences? The answer is obviously in the negative.

Modern scientists further proclaim, 'Plants obtain their nutrition through minuscule hair-like tubes.' Now we know that the artificial hair-like tubes in factories are made of a special type of glass. When placed in a water-filled container, the water rises inside these artificial glass tubes to the level of the container.

If we were to accept this position maintained by the abovementioned scientists, how is it tenable that two trees draw the same amount of water and produce the same type of fruit, while each differs in taste from the other? We contend: each individual tree draws from the earth the amount of nutrition which it requires, and this gives rise to variety among the same species of plants. Yet, all of this happens through the Power of Allah, who determined all things, then guided mankind through revelation.

The earth is made up of tracts of land which are adjacent to each another, and each gives way to a distinct agricultural product. Some atheists might argue that this variety among the same species of plants is simply the result of nature and the climate.

Such people feign ignorance of the fact that 'nature' adds up to the sun which provides light, heat and radiation; the moon which reflects a certain percentage of the sun's light; the stars which act as guiding compasses for those roaming wide open spaces, and wind currents which alternate and have courses that follow different cycles.

Despite the abovementioned phenomena of nature, we find tracts of land which are fertile and productive, and others which are barren and unproductive. Moreover, soil can be red, black or sandy, yet they are all close by one another. Therefore, there must be an All-Powerful Mover and Determiner causing such diversity in creation.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in the verse mentioned above, 'and gardens of grapevines and crops and palm trees, [growing] several from a root or otherwise.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* first lists foods of secondary importance, namely fruits. Then He speaks of staple crops which are chief providers of nourishment. In fact, we imitate this order in our daily lives: when you are invited for a meal at the house of an eminent person, you find an assortment of fruits placed to the side of the main course.

After mentioning grapes and grain – the latter being a staple source of nourishment, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of date palms. It denotes a type of palm which bears fruit and sometimes accompanies a main course. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '[growing] several from a root or otherwise', one may ask, what does this mean? It means 'two equivalents'. This is clearly demonstrated in palm-trees; you often see one root from which two or three palm-trees stem. Sometimes, one finds four or five palms growing out of a single root.

It is amazing to consider the fact that each tree draws a certain amount of water from its roots. It also obtains the nourishment which enables it to bear fruits of different forms and tastes. It is precisely this fact which impels us to contend that the speculations made by scientists – who are specialized in botany – that plants draw their nourishment through hair-thin capillaries, is not completely accurate.

If these postulations were true, then the same type of nourishment would be absorbed by the hair-thin capillary roots of different kinds of plants. However, this is not the case, since each plant derives from the soil only the sustenance that is particular to it, disregarding all other types of sustenance. And yet, the fruits produced by each plant are different and diverse. In fact, one finds variety among fruits of the same tree.

Consider, for example, the mango tree or the fruit-bearing palm-tree. You will invariably favour some mangos over others, even though they were born from the same tree. Or again, you might choose dates and turn down others, even though they are from the same palm.

When you buy fruits from the market, the purchase you make is generally determined by either your fondness or your dislike of fruits which have been previously stored and frozen. And so, if you like fruits which have been previously stored, then you will purchase second-rate fruit. However, if you like to enjoy freshly picked fruit, then you will buy only high quality products.

I challenge each of you to stand in front of a fruit store and to pick out fruits which are not good looking and first-rate. Obviously, every person tries to buy the most beautiful and the finest fruit available. Moreover, when he pays, the buyer will generally pay with the oldest paper bill in his pocket and will keep the newly printed-paper bills for himself. Such is the condition which dominates over human nature. Under common circumstances man refuses to accept objects of low quality, and is inclined to keep articles of superior quality for himself.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* proclaims, ‘Say [to them], “If you possessed the depositories of the mercy of my Lord, then you would withhold out of fear of spending.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 100)

Indeed, one cannot find fruits that are completely identical to one another. Rather, fruits differ in taste from one type to another. Each is consumed differently: no one eats a whole date, for example. Instead, we eat the date after separating the flesh from the pip. In contrast to the date, the fig is eaten whole, while the apricot is eaten after the kernel is extracted from its centre.

Each fruit has its particular form and standards. Allah did not simply create fruits in a mechanical way; rather, there is a great diversity reflected even in the smallest details of the fruit. When you eat a bundle of grapes, you will find that there is a difference from one single grape to another. Moreover, we not only favour one kind of fruit over another, we also have preferences among the same kind of fruit.

When you come across the follow verse, ‘We make some of them exceed others in [quality of] fruit.’ Know that there is no matter or thing which is endowed with absolute preference over other things. Likewise, one does not find a thing which is unfavourable in an absolute degree. When one thing is given preference over another, one may understand that the two objects in question both possess redeeming qualities, as well as other aspects which are less preferable.

Consider the following clear example: when we sit around a table, and a turkey is served, your hand might reach for a plate of pickled vegetables before reaching for the turkey. This is because you might desire the plate of pickled vegetables first and prefer to eat the turkey second. Therefore, do not assert that certain things are invariably preferred over others.

The same goes for individuals. Beware lest you think that some people are righteous in an absolute sense, while others are absolutely depraved. Rather, people possess traits which are redeeming and others which are far from being ideal. Consider, for example, someone who owns a sports car and is driving down a road when suddenly his wheel bursts. He then prays for Allah to send him a person who would change his wheel. Sooner or later, a man donned in shabby clothes passes by and is able to change his wheel. In this case, the unkempt man is superior to the man owning a fancy sports car in that he is able to use the spare tire to change the deflated wheel. It is in this way Allah spreads His bounty among His servants, causing people to need and depend on each other. I therefore state: when you recognize your superiority over others in something, beware lest you fall into vanity. Ask yourself: in what way are others superior to you? Moreover, recall the verse in which the True Lord says, '…no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

So, the True Lord willed for His bounty to be distributed amongst mankind, so that each may depend on the other, which leads to social integration. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* endows some foods, fruits, and crops with qualities over others. Notice your own reaction when you are presented with a plate of different fruits; you may reach for a banana before an apple. The moment you desire the banana, you assess the qualities of the fruits and compares between them to determine one you prefer most. Clearly, each person is entitled to his preferences and predilections. The True Lord states, '…everything has its measure with Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 8)

People are very creative and original in their cooking. People differ in their preference of various kinds of food. You might come across two individuals who love chicken, yet one of them prefers breast meat while the other favours the drumstick. A third person may be fond of pigeons, and a fourth of fish. In fact, you will find diversity in the way people consume fish. Some of them love the fish's head, while others fancy the fish's flesh itself. It is truly remarkable to note that no one knows why there is such diversity in our preferences for various kinds of foods. When you contemplate such things, you might recall the verse in which the True Lord says, 'How can you disbelieve in Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 28). The question posed in this verse marks Allah's 'astonishment'. Now astonishment is generally a reaction to something, the cause of which is unknown. Is there a cause which is unknown to Allah and which would cause Him to become astonished? The answer to this question is obviously in the negative. Allah *Glorified is He* sure knows the cause of something in His creation and He knows the reason why certain people refuse to acknowledge His reality. However, Allah reproaches them for their refusal to acknowledge Him. One example which is drawn from our daily life – and to Allah belongs the greatest example – is that you find yourself asking ‘how can you insult your father?’ to a person who addresses his father disparagingly. This question implies that you are surprised at the refusal of this person to acknowledge his father’s rights. The same applies for the rhetorical question: ‘how can you refuse to acknowledge Allah?’ since *kufr* (the act of covering) and which means in this case ‘denying the truth’, is not the position that can be held by a sane person. One of my teachers, the esteemed Ahmad At-Tawil,(1) used to tell us about one of his teachers who, when reading the verse, ‘How can you disbelieve in Allah’ *(al-Baqara:* 28) used to say: this verse is addressed to mankind as a whole, since the verse is followed by the generalizing statement, ‘when you were lifeless and He gave you life’ (*al-Baqara:* 28).

Note that this statement is also addressed to humans at large. Our sheikh would tell us that his teacher spoke of a man—who acted extravagantly against his own soul—was suddenly guided to the path of Allah. When the people who knew him noticed that he had made a complete turn-around in his spiritual life, they inquired as to the reason for his sudden conversion. The man recounted, ‘I was resting in a garden one day, and I desired to eat a bundle of grapes. So, I picked a bundle of grapes off the vine. Then, I began to contemplate these grapes, and noticed the thin and delicate covering – referring to the peel enveloping each individual grape – protecting the fruits’ juicy flesh. When I put the grapes in my mouth, they became a soothing juice. I was amazed at how these grapes had preserved their coolness and freshness despite the heat of Ba`un (the tenth month of the Coptic calendar.) Then, I looked at the grape seeds which to my senses tasted like musk. I was filled with joy by the taste and beauty of these grapes, when suddenly I heard a voice within me exclaiming, “How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah who created these grapes?” Thereupon, I cried out, “now, oh my Lord. Truly I believe in You.”’

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(1) The story of Ash-Sheikh Ahmad At-Tawil *Allah bless his soul*

Each one of us has the right to look at something which he appreciates, for he will find that the object of admiration, as it were, asks him: ‘how can you refuse to acknowledge Allah who created me? So, each human being is thus asked this question, since there is no human who does not marvel at something in this world. Hence, we can understand the verse in which the True Lord says, ‘some of them We make more excellent than others to eat’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 4). Anything may be preferred when it is needed and demanded, and anything may be preferred over at some point, even if it is needed by somebody. This variation in preference pertains to eating and tasting.

Al-ukul is that which is consumed not only now but also in the future. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…are like a garden on a hill: heavy rain falls and it produces double its normal yield; even if no heavy rain falls, it will still be watered by the dew…’ *(al-Baqara:* 265). Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘…perpetual food and shade…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 35). He also says, ‘Yielding constant fruit by its Lord's leave…’ (*Ibrahim:* 25). *Al-ukul,* therefore, refers to food which is consumed either now or in the future.

The True Lord ends this verse by adding, ‘...there truly are signs in this for people who reason.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 4) Some people think that having a mind implies that man should simply take pleasure in matters of this world, and that the mind grants man absolute freedom. This type of thinking is fallacious. In fact, man has been given a mind and the faculties of reason to comprehend the consequences and final outcomes of every action that he takes in this world. It is the mind that tells man: ‘Beware lest this or that matter allures you, for the consequences will be dreadful’. Note that *al-`aql* (the mind) is derived from the trilateral root *ayn, qaf and lam.* We say, *`aqaltu al-ba`ir*, that is, I hobbled the camel.

One of the primary functions of the mind is to sort and to contemplate things so as to extract what is necessary. The mind is also responsible for pondering matters. Cognitive reception and research are mental processes the mind uses to draw out facts and results. Pondering matters of every sort is also a mental process the mind uses to avoid whatever harm they may enclose.

Consider, for example, the medications which some scientists have come up with and which are used in the market for a certain amount of time. After a while, however, the same scientists declare that these medications are no longer to be used, since their side effects are very harmful. This incident points to the fact that the scientists did not conduct a thorough study of the medications, and that they made certain arbitrary assumptions while lacking full knowledge of their sample.

The True Lord says, '...there truly are signs in this for people who reason.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4) Note that this entails that minds should assist one another to search for the signs of the Lord of all minds. Therefore, no one should make a decision that is based only on his mental faculties; rather, he should consult the opinion of two or three other minds. This way, the person making the decision can consider the possible outcomes of his decision, and so that various minds come together to draw out useful facts which will not cause harm on the long-term. He who relies solely on his opinion inevitably fails and he who seeks the opinion of other men benefits from their mental capacities.

The True Lord says:

وَإِن تَعۡجَبۡ فَعَجَبٞ قَوۡلُهُمۡ أَءِذَا كُنَّا تُرَٰبًا أَءِنَّا لَفِي خَلۡقٖ جَدِيدٍۗ
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بِرَبِّهِمۡۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلۡأَغۡلَٰلُ فِيٓ أَعۡنَاقِهِمۡۖ
وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِۖ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٥﴾

If anything can amaze you [Prophet], then you should surely be amazed at their asking, 'What? When we become dust, shall we be created anew?' These are the ones who deny their Lord, who will wear iron collars around their necks and be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain [5]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 5)

Al-`ajab* (translated above as amazement) is to be astonished by something that you do not know the cause of. Thus, *at-ta`ajjub (amazement) does not come from Allah, since Allah *Glorified is He* is Omniscient. Therefore, if one comes across a verse from the Quran in which Allah expresses amazement, such as, 'How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 28), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* rejects that man would disbelieve despite the existence of proofs. Yet, despite these proofs, some people still refuse to acknowledge divine reality.

The True Lord says, ‘If you are amazed [Prophet]…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 5). Allah is addressing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was often astonished by the fact that they called him *as-sadiq al-amin* (the truthful and trustworthy one) prior to his receipt of the revelation. However, once he became a prophet, they started calling him *sahir kadhab* (a lying sorcerer). After all, how could he be a truthful and trustworthy man in his core, and once the True Lord charges him with the mission of prophecy, you accuse him of lying? Would it not be more appropriate for you to say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had become even more upright? Could it be possible that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had been honest with you, then, suddenly, he lied about the revelation from Allah?

Another source of astonishment is that they denied resurrection after death even though Allah *Glorified is He* laid out the proofs. In the final analysis, it is only the believers who received Allah’s revelation with open hearts. They readily believed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* when he related to them the divine revelation.

The True Lord respects the inquisitiveness of the human mind by the very fact that He put forth His arguments and proofs of His existence, and informed us that He did not fail to accomplish the first creation, and will, therefore, have no difficulty in resurrecting those whom He created in the first place.

The True Lord created us from nothing and on the Day of Resurrection; He will not create us from nothing, but out of something which has already existed. It is therefore unwise for a person to doubt the possibility of resurrection. It is the person who acts extravagantly against his own soul who denies resurrection after death. This is because he is unable to control his passionate soul and thinks that by denying resurrection, he will not have to face his dire fate in the Hereafter.

Therefore, those who act extravagantly against their own souls, contest resurrection The True Lord speaks of this in the following verse, ‘They say, 'There is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys us...' (*al-Jathiya:* 24). If one of them were only to gain certitude in resurrection after death, he would have turned his back to his vain desires, but he wants to satisfy his worldly passions and vain desires. That is why he and his like say, 'What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?' (*as-Sajda:* 10) By this, they mean that once they die their bodies will return to the earth, turn into particles and dust that are blown in the wind. So how could Allah resurrect them and recreate them in bodily form once again?

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'producing arguments against us, forgetting his own creation. He says, "Who can give life back to bones after they have decayed?" Say, "He who created them in the first place will give them life again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation.' (*Ya Sin:* 78-79)

Some disbelievers said: we will become dust which will blend with the earth. This soil—composed of our desiccated body particles and the soil—will be cultivated, and particles from our body will mingle with the agricultural produce of the land including fruits, vegetables, and trees. Then, a child will eat from a fruit-bearing tree which was nourished by our particles, and some of our particles will penetrate inside this child's body. In short, common sense tells us that our remains will become scattered across the earth. Therefore, how could Allah possibly resurrect us in bodily form? Naturally, such discourse ensues from the words whispered by the devil into the ears of these people, 'The devils incite their followers to argue with you' (*al- An'am:* 121). I say: suppose someone fell sick and became emaciated. He lost a total of thirty kilograms of body weight. There is no doubt that the lost weight was ultimately returned to the earth from whence it had originated. Now suppose that a doctor visited the patient, diagnosed his illness, and prescribed a medication, and that Allah willed for his health to be restored; and for him to gain back his original body weight. The question is: were these thirty kilograms that he regained, the exact same body mass atoms and particles that he lost originally? The answer is clearly in the negative. Thus, we see that the composition of something is relative, with regard to the components, and this pertains to iron, sodium, magnesium, and other elements.

Therefore, the concept of the reckoning which will take place in the Hereafter is necessary and rational. The True Lord says, 'How can you ignore

Allah when you were lifeless and He gave you the life, when He will cause you to die, and then resurrect you to be returned to Him?' (*al-Baqara:* 28)

So long as there are divine commandments, prohibitions and a spiritual methodology by which man may lead his life, the reckoning of the Hereafter cannot but be true. And if you are astonished, oh Muhammad, by the deniers of Truth and by their false claims, then your feelings are fitting, for such things are indeed astonishing.

When the True Lord addresses mankind, He focuses on a problem which people have doubt about, or matters which no person doubts. To take an example from our daily lives—and to Allah belongs the greatest metaphors —when you address someone about a matter which he has doubts about, you try to validate it from all possible angles. Likewise, there are people who deny resurrection and the Day of Judgment. The True Lord reminds these people of their truth and insists upon the reality of such matters through His prophets *peace be upon them*.

The True Lord, also, addresses mankind concerning matters which they do not doubt, such as death. Allah says, 'Every soul will taste death and you will be paid in full only on the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 185). Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I have not known a certainty that is closer to doubt than peoples' certitude of death (the inevitability of it).' Indeed, the inevitability of death is beyond doubt, yet no one contemplates its imminence. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Then after that you will most surely die.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 15) This verse affirms a fact which all people acknowledge to be true. However, because of their heedlessness with regard to death, they act and live in such a way that makes them appear to be deniers of the reality of death. This explains why Allah addressed them in this verse as deniers.

Then He says, 'And then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will be raised up again.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 16) Note that Allah did not say, '*wa la tub`athun*', that is, 'and verily you shall be raised from the dead', rather He said, '*tub`athun*', that is, 'you will be raised up again'. *Al-ba`th*, (resurrection) is a matter which does not even call for emphasis. The reason for this is that the lack of emphasis on the reality of resurrection in this case accentuates the certainty of being raised from the dead more than words of emphasis could.

This is because death is very obvious, despite people's heedlessness of its consequences. In contrast, resurrection is a reality that is so inexorable that it does not necessitate emphasis.

To take an example from our daily lives—and to Allah belongs the greatest of metaphors—a man consults his doctor, and after the doctor diagnoses his patient, he says, 'go back home, I will not prescribe a medicine for you.' This means that the patient is in good health, and were the doctor to prescribe a medicine for him, it would seem as though he were indeed sick. The same goes for when the True Lord speaks to man regarding something which is evident yet which he denies. In this case, Allah addresses mankind without accentuating the subject of the verse. Allah makes it clear to man that the latter is wrong in denying such truths. As for a matter which they are certain yet heedless of, Allah stresses its exigency so that they may not be oblivious to it.

The same is true when Allah swears by something. Note that we find that Allah *Glorified is He* has sworn by *at-tin* (figs), by *az-zaytun* (olives), by the Quran and by other things as well. However, in other sections of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Nay, I swear by this city and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city [I swear] by parent and offspring.' (*al-Balad:* 1-3) It is remarkable that the answer to this oath is as follows, 'That We have created man for toil and trial.' (*al-Balad:* 4)

Someone may well ask: why does Allah *Glorified is He* say, *la uqsim*, 'Nay, I swear…' (*al-Balad:* 1) followed by an answer to this oath? I contend that the expression *la uqsim*, is a clarification that you do not possess the right to deny what will come in this chapter. Therefore, it was not correct for Allah to swear to you. To make this point clear, imagine that Allah were saying, if I were to swear, I would swear by this, and by that, and by that…etc.

In the verse which we are examining, the True Lord says, 'If you are amazed [Prophet], amazing, too, is their saying "What? When we become dust, shall we be created anew?"' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5) In this verse, Allah reminds them of that which they should not have forgotten. Indeed, He created them from earth, and He created clay from nothing. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Were We then fatigued with the first creation? But they are in doubt with regard to a new creation.' (*Qaf:* 15)

Allah is amazed by their condition. It is even more astonishing that they rejected Muhammad after acknowledging his uprightness and experiencing his trustworthiness. In fact, they acknowledged these traits in the character of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prior to his being charged of spreading the Islamic revelation, but they still denied the revelation despite the overwhelming evidence pointing to its truth. The True Lord describes them in the following verse, 'These are the ones who deny their Lord' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5).

In other words, Oh Muhammad, these deniers of what you convey and of the resurrection did not only disbelieve in Allah who ordained man to be His servant, but they also denied Allah's lordship (divine providence), by which He gives provision to the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the rebellious alike; and by which He subjugate the means for those who are diligent and pay heed to the more rigorous divine laws in their thorough exertion. By virtue of their diligence, they benefit from divine providence. This ennobling bounty is that which secures man's *rizq* (livelihood). In contrast, the bounties of His Divinity are the obligations concerning worship, which are embodied in Allah's commands (do) and prohibitions (do not do).

Allah *Glorified is He* does not make man accountable for His commands until he attains a certain degree of maturity which qualifies him for this responsibility. This age is defined by puberty, that is, when a person is biologically capable of reproduction. Moreover, the True Lord has given man the right to enjoy the blessings which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon him. Man should have clung to faith as soon as he heard the call of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who spoke on behalf of Allah, since this Messenger was renowned for his veracity and for his trustworthiness.

For this reason, the True Lord described the deniers of faith in the following way, 'These are the ones who deny their Lord…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5). Then, He adds, who will wear iron collars around their necks and be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5)

Al-ghull is a neckband that is made of metal and which has handles on both ends, which are used to tie a person's hands. *Al-ghull* also has a grip for the neck which limits the movement of the hands and further debases the captive.

Such are *as-hab an-nar* (the people of the hellfire). The word *sahib* refers to a person that you know to the point that you are connected on the levels of spirit and soul. Bonds between people take on many levels: there are those that you take on as a companion (*tusahib*), others you befriend (*tusadiq*), some you consider as a brother (*tu`akhih*) and some you know superficially without establishing a deep relationship with (*ma`rifa sathiya*).

Thus, there is a hierarchy of connections between two persons. *As-suhba* is a connection and an attraction between two people. Those who have this connection with the hellfire are yearned for by it. Moreover, they also yearn for Hell: each longs to connect with the other. After all, does the hellfire not tell its Lord on the Day of Judgment? ‘On the day that We will say to hell: Are you filled up? And it will say: Are there any more?’ (*Qaf:* 30) That is, punishment itself longs to reach the person who disobeys Allah’s Commands.

The True Lord says following this verse:

وَيَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَكَ بِٱلسَّيِّئَةِ قَبۡلَ ٱلۡحَسَنَةِ وَقَدۡ خَلَتۡ مِن قَبۡلِهِمُ ٱلۡمَثُلَٰتُۗ
وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو مَغۡفِرَةٖ لِّلنَّاسِ عَلَىٰ ظُلۡمِهِمۡۖ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَشَدِيدُ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ﴿٦﴾

They ask you to bring on the punishment rather than any promised rewards, though there have been many examples before them — your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing, but He is truly severe in punishment [6] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 6)

Al-isti`jal* (hastening)—here in the verse *yasta`jilunaka ‘They ask you to hasten on’—with which the verse above begins, is to ask for something to take place prior to its appropriate time, to shorten the time before it takes place. Indeed, when you are going after something, it takes time to go through all the steps that will lead you to your object of desire. However, when your quest is characterized by *isti`jal*, you hasten and try to arrive at it before the time that it would normally require.

In fact, every act of *isti`jal* (hastening) or *istibta`a*, (slowing/delaying) has its qualities and shortcomings. In the context of this verse, does *isti`jal* pertain to something beneficial? The deniers of truth are hastening the coming of evil instead of that of the good, which proves their defective and injudicious thinking. Such people have previously stated, ‘They say, “We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-92)

These deniers of truth seek to hasten evil before good. They also sought to hasten for rocks to fall upon them, while ignoring the fact that each form of punishment has a specific duration as well as an appointed time. It did not occur to them to say—instead of adopting the ostentatious attitude captured in the verse above— ‘If this alleged revelation is indeed the truth from you, then, O Allah, guide us to it.’ Rather, they said, ‘…O Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.’ (*al-Anfal:* 32)

And so, the True Lord sheds light on the spiritual vacuum and the moral corruption which they have arrived at, such that their criterion for judging things have themselves turned to denial of Allah. The greatest testimony of this corruption is their seeking to hasten evil before good. Clearly, when a sane person is deciding between two things, he not only hastens to the good option since it is beneficial to him, but also stays away from the bad one.

Since the souls of these deniers of truth are corrupt, and since the means by which they judge things, namely their intellects, are also in the wrong, the root of this misguidance must be their very rejection of the truth. Hastening evil before good, whether committed by a person or a group, is a proof of foolishness when it comes to discerning between alternatives. If they wanted true beneficial hastening, they would have hastened good rather than evil. At this point, the True Lord says, ‘They ask you to hasten on the punishment rather than any promised rewards, though there have been exemplary punishments before them...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 6). Why do they want to hasten their punishment? Did they not look at the fate of previous peoples who rejected the teachings of their messengers? When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Beware lest Allah afflicts you with punishment’, or again: ‘beware from this or that matter', is this a lie? Why did they not take as an example the fate of the peoples who had previously rejected their messengers?

Al-mathulat (exemplary punishments) is the plural of *muthla.* Some, however, say *mathula*. The True Lord tells us, 'If you [believers] have to respond to an attack, make your response proportionate…' (*an-Nahl:* 126). Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Let harm be requited by an equal harm…' (*ash-Shura:* 40). Thus, *mathulat* is derived from *al-mathal*, (similar), and implies that the punishment in question is proportional to the action that was carried out.

The True Lord says, 'though there have been exemplary punishments before them' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6) meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* has previously inflicted His punishment upon peoples who rejected their messengers. Divine punishment was in the form of eternal damnation when embracing faith by them is hopeless, or inflicting overwhelming force upon them and conquering them.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, 'your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6). In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* does not hasten to punish those who deny the truth, lest perchance one of them happens to be good at heart. Moreover, Allah was patient with Abu Jahl, and the latter begot `Ikrama ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* who was a righteous companion of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah was also patient with Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* who was once a vicious fighter of the disbelievers but later became *sayf* Allah *al-maslul* (the Unsheathed Sword of Allah).

Accounts of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relate the way in which `Ikrama ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* fought until he was wounded severely. He looked at Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* and asked, 'Does dying in this manner earn me the favour of the Messenger of Allah?' Other accounts tell us how some of the companions were greatly saddened after one of the Muslim warriors missed the chance to kill Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* during his days of disbelief. Little did the Companion know that the True Lord had destined Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* to embrace Islam and earn the title of *sayf Allah al-maslul* (The Unsheathed Sword of Allah). Thus, the True Lord willed that some of the brave men of Quraysh escape getting killed during their days of disbelief, for He knew that later on they would be among the finest of Muslims.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, ‘your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 6). Despite their evildoing and transgressions, Allah *Glorified is He* forgives His servants since He is more pleased with a repentant believer than one of you would be pleased when he finds his camel after losing it in a barren; wild land.(1)

Therefore, I believe that it is sinful to criticize a person for a misconduct for which he has repented. If he repents for his sins, no one should get involved in a matter which is between him and his Lord.

The True Lord says in this verse, *`ala zhulmihim*, that is, ‘despite their wrongdoing’. (*ar-Ra’d:* 6) Some scholars have noted that Allah uses *`ala* (on) instead of *ma`a* (with). Note that *`ala* is composed of three letters, and that *ma`a* is made up of two only. Why did the True Lord replace the shorter word *ma`a,* with the longer *`ala*? There must certainly be a reason behind this use of diction. We opine that the True Lord uses the word *`ala* in the verse, ‘your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 6), to emphasize that people’s transgressions called for retribution, but that Allah’s Mercy takes precedence over His punishment. Thus, the word *`ala* connotes *ma`a* as well as conveys that the True Lord *Glorified is He*, determines whether or not someone will be punished, and that Allah’s Mercy is greater than the evil of mankind. An example of this is illustrated in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘they give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves….’ (*al-Insan:* 8) That is they have a great love for food, yet their will to be generous and hospitable is greater than their love of food.

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(1) *Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (an-Naml: 47) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik who related that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Allah is more pleased with the penitence of His servant when he repents, than with a person among you who was traveling across an arid expanse, and his camel ran away with all of his food and water. Having given up hope (of finding his camel,) he walks to a tree and sits under its shade for he has lost hope of retrieving his camel. As he is sitting there in that (despondent) state, the camel stands by his side. And so, he seizes it by the muzzle and out of ecstasy he exclaims (by mistake), “Oh Allah, thou art my servant and I am thy lord!”’*

However, people should not think that Allah’s Mercy always surpasses His punishment, for if those who are presumptuous were to adopt this thinking, and were they to believe that this rule applies universally, it would be a cause for decadence on earth. It is for this reason that the True Lord ends the noble verse by stating, ‘...but He is truly severe in punishment.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 6) In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of inflicting severe retribution. Thus, we note that the verse at hand incorporates both elements of hope and those of fear.

Allah *Glorified is He* then states:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَوْلَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦٓ ۗ
إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مُنذِرٌ ۖ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ ﴿٧﴾

The disbelievers say, ‘Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?’ But you are only there to give warning: [earlier] communities each had their guide [7] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 7)

We know that when the compound expression *lawla* (were it not for) is introduced into a nominal clause, it denotes the absence of something. Consider the following sentence for example, ‘*lawla Zayd `indaka lazurtuka* (If Zayd were not at your house, I would have paid you a visit.) In other words, the presence of Zayd is preventing you from visiting the person who is being addressed. However, when *lawla* is introduced into a verbal clause, the speaker of the phrase wishes for a certain matter to subsequently take place, You say, for instance, ‘*lawla attafta ala fulan*’ (If only you were kind to so-and-so). Or again, ‘*lawla safahta an waladika*’*,* that is, (If only you were to pardon your son). In other words, there is a chance that the desired incident may take place in the future.

Apparently, the disbelievers’ words, in this verse state that they are asking for a sign which confirms the truth of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and of the Revelation. It is as if the disbelievers are denying, by these words, the miracle which the Messenger presented to the world, namely the Noble Quran. This is although they are a people renowned for their eloquence, literature, and articulation. The pre-Islamic Arabs had even allotted prizes for literary brilliance, hanging long poems over the walls of the *Ka'ba*. In addition, each of their tribes would take pride in their poets and orators.

And so, when the Quran was revealed in a form that you could relate to and appreciate, and when the Revelation far outshined your literature in eloquence, such that you were unable to come up with a single verse that would match a Quranic one, how did you still deny the truth of Islam? How could you ask for another miracle similar to that of Musa (Moses) or of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*?

You should have cherished the perfect miracle, namely the Quran, which encompasses a spiritual way for those who want to obey Allah's commands until the Day of Judgment. It is foolishness which caused them to ask for a miracle other than that of the Quran. However, they turned a blind eye to the other miracles which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* displayed. They did not notice that water once flowed from between his fingers; that a small ration of provisions imparted more food than what was needed by a large congregation of people; that a cloud had followed him in the desert and provided shade for him and that the trunk of a palm-tree moaned in an audible voice when he *peace and blessings be upon him* changed the position of his podium after having conducted many a sermon on top of the trunk.(1)

However, they may be justified in their demand: being disbelievers, they were not witnesses of these physical miracles. Only those who believed in the Prophet's Message witnessed such miracles. Thus, we see that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not denied cosmic miracles, which take place only once and which are a proof to those who witness it. These miracles took place to strengthen the faith of a suffering minority. When this distressed minority witnessed the water gushing forth from between his fingers, their attachment to him *peace and blessings be upon him* increased in fervour.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Bukhari in his (Ṣahih) (Al- An'am: 601 Fath Al-Bari), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan Salat Al-Jumu`a), the section ma ja`a fi`l khutba `ala al-minbar (that which as related during the sermon on the podium), and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala`il An-Nubuwwa (al-Baqara: 557). The Hadith was related by ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him who said, 'The Messenger of Allah used to preach on top of a tree trunk. However, when he changed to a podium, the tree trunk moaned (in sadness,) and so the Prophet embraced the trunk and it was silent.'*

However, the disbelievers did not witness these miracles. They should have been content with witnessing the miracle which was described by the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in the following words, 'the Quran suffices me'.

The Quran is a miracle of a type which you, oh Arabs, were familiar with yet incapable of surpassing. Moreover, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a messenger 'from among yourselves'. He was born into your tribe, and he speaks your native language. Moreover, you know well that he was not instructed by a teacher, nor was he known to have preached to you before. He did not compose poetry, nor was he famous for being one of the great Arab orators. Therefore, the True Lord revealed the following verse, 'Say, "If Allah had so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me. How can you not use your reason?"' (*Yunus:* 16) In other words: I have lived among you and I did not speak in poetic Arabic, nor did I compete among the bards in the market places. Therefore, you should have believed that the Quran was the word emanating from the Wise, the Omniscient. Yet, among them were those who said, 'he used to hide his talent and he delayed it from public view until he was ready to claim prophecy'. To these people we contend, is it tenable for a young boy who lost his father while he was still in his mother's womb, and who lost his mother at a young age, followed shortly by his grandfather, who saw many adults around him pass away without any apparent order, sickness or reason, to be certain that he will live until the age of forty so that he may make his literary gift known to the public?

As for those who say that, 'genius only manifests itself at the age of forty', we contend: that everyone knows that genius is displayed toward the end of the second year and the beginning of the third year in a person's life.

Even though you do not accept the miraculous nature of the Quran, the True Lord is causing you to express things which were hidden in your hearts, and He reveals them to mankind in His Holy Book, the Quran: ‘They said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’(1) (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Thus, you—addressing the disbelieving Arabs during the time of the Prophet—have admitted the greatness of the Quran, but you tried to demean its recipient. Allah *Glorified is He* also, says in this verse which we are examining, ‘Those who disbelieved say, “Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?”’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 7)

Why, then, have you said and admitted that he has a Lord? Should you not have acknowledged his message and testified your faith in Islam? The deniers of truth have previously stated, ‘verily, the Lord of Muhammad has abandoned him.’ These words imply that they accept that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has a Lord. Why did they recognize Muhammad’s Prophecy when he seemed forsaken while rejecting him when Allah’s verses were frequently being revealed?

If they were asking to be witnesses of miracles other than the Quran, then know, oh Muhammad, that your Lord is He who grant miracles, and that He decrees—according to what his people excel in—when a prophet should display miracle. Oh Muhammad, you are but a warner—or a cautioner— ‘…But you are only there to give warning; and every people have a guide.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 7)

Every people have been sent their guides who direct them through signs which correspond to what that in which they excel. The Children of Israel, for example, excelled in the practice of magic, which is why Musa’s miracle addressed the Israelites’ magic which as we have already stated, was their forte. Or again: the peoples to whom `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was sent excelled in the practice of medicine. Thus, the medicinal aspect of `Isa’s (Jesus’s) miracles corresponded to what his people excelled in.

So, every people have a guide, and each prophet performs a miracle that is appropriate to the recipients of that divine revelation. This explains why the True Lord put the disbelievers to silence with His response to their contentions,

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(1) *Al-qaryatan refers to Mecca and At-Ta`if. Many have said, including Qutada, that they meant Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and ‘Urwa ibn Mas`ud Ath-Thaqafi. In his Tafsir, ibn Kathir says, ‘It is obvious that they mean a man of great standing from one of the two (abovementioned) cities – (Al-baldatayn) (an-Nisa': 127).*

‘They say, “We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face; or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky— even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-93)

The True Lord, then, says, ‘Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?” The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, “How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?” Say, “If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 93-95)

The response from the True Lord is given in the following verse, ‘Nothing prevents Us from sending miraculous signs, except the fact that previous peoples denied them…’ (*al-Isra’:* 59). In other words, a people who preceded you asked for various signs to be sent forth. Therefore, Allah responded to their demands, but they still disbelieved (in His revelation). This is because disbelief wraps a person’s mind in obstinacy, for a disbeliever persists on denying the truth.

The True Lord then states:

ٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ مَا تَحۡمِلُ كُلُّ أُنثَىٰ وَمَا تَغِيضُ ٱلۡأَرۡحَامُ
وَمَا تَزۡدَادُۖ وَكُلُّ شَيۡءٍ عِندَهُۥ بِمِقۡدَارٍ ٨

A God knows what every female bears and how much
their wombs shrink or swell – everything has its
measure with Him [8] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 8)

To which circumstance is this verse responding? The True Lord wants to emphasize that each people have their prophet, and that His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is a warner. The disbelievers’ request to witness miraculous signs is born out of their desire to prove Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be incapable of performing miracles.

Were the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring forth one of the signs which they requested, they would still have clung obstinately to their disbelief. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* is aware of their future actions, since He knows things which are even subtler than the future behaviour of disbelievers. Allah knows—to cite one example—what females bear in their wombs, as well as how much their wombs shrink or swell.

We know that when Allah wills for any female to become pregnant, then she carries the baby inside her womb since *ar-rahim* (the womb) is where the baby rests inside the mother's belly. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and what the wombs lose [prematurely] or exceed' (*ar-Ra'd:* 8), in other words, the increase or decrease in the gestation period. Or again, this verse may be interpreted to mean babies that do not survive birth because they are born prematurely. *Ghadat ar-arhim* means the baby is born prior to its full development. For example, a baby may be born with a missing eye or lacking a finger. In contrast, the bodies of some new-borns have added parts, such as an extra finger or two heads. This exceeding (mentioned in the verse above) may also denote an increase in number. In other words, a woman may bear twins or more (such as triplets). This may also denote that the period of pregnancy exceeds the usual nine-months. Thus, we understand that Allah *Glorified is He* knows how much the wombs may fall short, or the lacking or superfluous body parts of the newborn. This verse may also refer to time, thus denoting that a foetus may be born a day, a month, or two-months old. Note that when a foetus reaches six months, it is not referred to as *ijhad* (miscarriage), but as *wilada* (parturition).

There are infants that are born after six, seven or eight months of gestation. The period of pregnancy may extend to two years according to Abu Hanifa, *Allah rest his soul*, or four years according to Ash-Shafi`i *Allah rest his soul* to five according to Imam Malik *Allah rest his soul*. This is because the time of pregnancy may increase or decrease in relation to the normal period of nine months.

It is said that Ad-Dahhak was born after being in his mother's belly for two years.(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir ibn Kathir mentions that Ad-Dahhak said, 'My mother gave birth to me after having carried me (in her belly) for two years. She had me when I had reached my second year. (al-Baqara: 502)*

In addition, Haram ibn Hayyan(1) was born after four years while the mother's family noted the large size of her belly and the suspension of her menstruation. Following the four years of pregnancy, she gave birth to the latter, who was called haram, (old and decrepit man) since he was already a youngster in her stomach.

Thus, we understand the meaning of the verb *taghid* whether it refers to shrinking or swallowing, decrease or increase in either the new-born's body form or gestation period.

The True Lord says, 'and everything with Him is by due measure.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 8) *Al-miqdar* (due measure) refers either to quantity or quality that is spatial or temporal, to talents or unique characteristics.

The True Lord specifies the five fundamental keys known by Allah of the unseen world when He states, 'Knowledge of the Hour [of Resurrection] belongs to Allah; it is He who sends down the relieving rain and He who knows what is hidden in the womb…' (*Luqman:* 34).

Some people have tried to raise objections to the divine Scripture on this issue by pointing to the civilizational and scientific progress that has taken place in the last century. The scientific advances in question merely result in tentative results, and anything which is questionable cannot be presented as indubitable proof. We are here specifically referring to knowing the exact nature of the baby prior to its birth: is it a male or a female? The scientists have turned a blind eye to the fact that science cannot answer if the baby will turn out to be tall or short, intelligent or stupid, unhappy or happy. Up to our own day, doctors and researchers have been unable to come up with a response to such questions, and thus the ambiguity will persist in the years to come.

If you were to ask me: how does the doctor know the gender of the unborn baby in the first place? I would answer in the following: he knows the baby's gender only after the pregnancy takes place. Moreover, he takes a sample from the liquid which surrounds the baby and analyses it. However, Allah knows such things without taking a liquid sample. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses one of His servants in the following verse, ‘Zakaryya (Zechariah), We bring you good news of a son whose name will be Yahya (John)…’ (*Maryam:* 7).

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(1) *Haram ibn Hayyan Al-`Abdi was a servant of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. He died on a day of severe heat, and when the people attending his funeral*) *cleaned their hands from the dust of his grave, a cloud came upon them and showered them with rain, which yielded grass on that day. (Hilyat al-Awliya` 2/119)*

Thus, we realize that Allah’s knowledge is not dependent upon samples and experiments. His knowledge is pre-eternal and beyond all limitation. He has knowledge of what is inside the wombs of females, their form, colour, gender, intelligence, happiness, discontent, or number.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* wished for the extent of His Power to be revealed by having the wife of Zakaryya (Zechariah) carry Yahya (John) *peace be upon them*. Moreover, it is Allah *Glorified is He* who created Adam *peace be upon him* without a father or a mother. He also created `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from a mother without a father, and the rest of humanity from both a father and a mother. When Allah wills something, He simply *Glorified is He* says, ‘Be – and it is.’ (*Ya Sin:* 82)

One manifestation, as I have previously stated, (of Allah’s Power) is when Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* enters upon Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* in the prayer niche, only to find that she had received her food. He asked her, ‘…how is it you have these provisions?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) Her response was, ‘...They are from Allah: Allah provides limitlessly for whoever He will.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37)

Clearly, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* knew that it is Allah who grants sustenance unto whom He wills. However, this knowledge was at the back of his mind at the time of their encounter. The words uttered by Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* brought this awareness to the forefront of his consciousness. Let it be repeated that, after all, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* knows with certainty that Allah alone grants sustenance unto whom He wills. This statement, transferring this faith-based truth from the edge of consciousness to the centre of consciousness, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* called onto his Lord in the same place, asking to be granted a child. And so the True Lord conveys to him the good tidings of a son who will be born in the near future.

When Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* remembered that he had attained an old age and that his wife is infertile, the True Lord reminded him that granting a boy is an easy accomplishment for Him *Glorified is He* 'This is what your Lord has said, "It is easy for me: I created you, though you were nothing before."' (*Maryam:* 9)

Allah says:

عَٰلِمُ ٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ ٱلۡكَبِيرُ ٱلۡمُتَعَالِ ﴿٩﴾

He knows what is not seen as well as what is seen;
He is the Great, the Most High [9] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 9)

Nothing escapes the Awareness of He who creates all things according to their measure. All that is beyond the reach of man's perception is that which occurs to a person in the future, following his or her birth. Such knowledge is only known to Allah.

It is as if there was a miniature model known by Allah in the first place. If man were to discover it toward the end of his life, he would realize that it matches that which Allah willed and knew in the first place. Indeed, there is nothing which Allah *Glorified is He* is not capable of carrying out. Moreover, as we have previously mentioned, everything has its measure with Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* knows what is not seen as well as what is seen. This means He knows that which is hidden behind the veils of the past and the future, and everything that is beyond the ken of mankind. Allah—in the first place—knows that which man is aware of for His Knowledge is not limited to the world of the unseen. Rather, He knows the unseen and that which is known to man, 'He knows what is not seen as well as what is seen; He is the Great, the Most High.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 9)

Al-Kabir (the Great) is one of Allah's Beautiful Names. Some have asked: why is the name *Al-Akbar* (the Greatest) not among Allah's Beautiful Names, though we repeat the formula, Allah *Akbar* (Allah the Greatest) in our daily prayers? I contend: this is because the antonym of the word *al-kabir* (the great) is *as-saghir* (the small). Every creation is small from the Creator's point of view. During the call to prayer, we say *Allah Akbar* because this expression pulls you out of the work which you—Allah's vicegerent—have been assigned, namely *i`mar al `ard* (building the earth and harnessing its resources) so that you may seek Allah's help during your period of worship and pray to Him to render following His path easy. Thus, Allah grants you the power to achieve what you need in this world in terms of food, clothing, and the covering of one's private parts.

In short, all the above-mentioned actions are required not only in order to maintain a normal life but also in order to worship Allah. Therefore, beware lest you say: 'verily, Allah is the Great One and everything else is small and insignificant'. Things other than Allah are also great since they are blessings bestowed upon us by *Al-Mun`im* (the Bestower of blessings). However, Allah is Greater than us, and we bear witness to this when we are asked to pull ourselves out of the world of actions and seek His succour through worship (prayer).

We know that action is required to build the earth and harness its resources, and required for worship. Moreover, you will not have the strength to worship your Lord if Allah does not give you the strength to do so.

Indeed, it is ultimately Allah alone who preserves your strength by providing you with nourishment in the form of food and liquids. Moreover, you will neither eat nor drink if you do not plough, reap, and construct edifices to work and live in. All of this supplies you with the energy to pray, give alms and perform the great pilgrimage. And anything that obligations depend on—to be carried out—is itself an obligation.

I have previously said: verily, when the True Lord calls upon us to fulfil the obligation of the Friday Prayer, He states, 'O Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading — that is better for you, if only you knew.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) Thus, the True Lord pulls us from our daily occupations to perform prayer at a specific time. The True Lord, then, says, 'Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) Allah *Glorified is He* pulls us away from our worldly activities toward prayer. And so we move from something great namely, worldly activities to something which is even greater: performing the canonical prayer.

When the True Lord describes himself as *Al-Mut`aal the Most High* it means that His Divine Essence, Attributes and Acts are above all things of this world. And so there is no essence that is akin to His Essence, nor is there an attribute that is akin to His Attribute or an act that is akin to His Act. Moreover, the characteristics and attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* are only proper to Him, and He never resembles other beings.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

سَوَآءٌ مِّنكُم مَّنْ أَسَرَّ ٱلْقَوْلَ وَمَن جَهَرَ بِهِۦ وَمَنْ
هُوَ مُسْتَخْفٍۭ بِٱلَّيْلِ وَسَارِبٌۢ بِٱلنَّهَارِ ﴿١٠﴾

It makes no difference whether any of you speak secretly or aloud, whether you are hiding under cover of night or walking about in the day [10] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 10)

When you come across the word *sawa`*, (it is the same to Him whether) it implies a number that is not less than two. One might say, '*sawa`* Zayd *wa* `Amr (Zayd and `Amr) or, '*sawa* Zayd *wa* `Umar *wa* Bakr *wa* Khalid' (Zayd, `Umar, Bakr and Khalid.)

The meaning of *sawa`* in this context is: so long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has knowledge of both the tangible and the unseen realms, any secret that is in existence must be known by Allah *Glorified is He* since it is He who said, 'The Most Gracious, established on the throne of His almightiness. Unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, as well as all that is between them and all that is beneath the sod. And if thou say anything aloud, (He hears it –) since, behold, He knows (even) the secret (thoughts of man) as well as all that is yet more hidden (within him).' (*Ta Ha:* 5-7)

In this context, is the *sirr* (secret) information that you convey to someone else in confidence? If one defines *sirr* in this manner, then *al-akhfa* (that is yet more hidden within him) is the information which you are hiding within yourself. However, if one defines as-*sirr* as information which you keep to yourself, then Allah *Glorified is He* is aware of it before you are.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, '…whether he lie hid by night or walk forth freely by day.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 10)

It is thus that the True Lord includes in this verse actions of all sorts. Now an act as we know, is when a sensory organ processes information from external phenomena. The function of the tongue, for example, is to speak and to taste. The hands are made for manipulating physical things, the ear picks up sounds, while the heart is the seat of man's intentions. Moreover, we know that acts either take on the form of speech or of action.

Thus, we find that speech, takes half the role of action, since conveying Allah's Words is a form of speech. Moreover, the functions performed by the sensorial faculties are influenced by the Word of the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us that every action is related to man's sensorial faculties. Moreover, an act takes place partially on the level of speech, and to some extent on the level of one of the sensorial faculties. This is because the sensorial faculties correspond to man's understanding of divine revelation. It is for this reason that the word *`amal* in the verse which we are examining encompasses both physical acts and speech, 'It is the same to Him whether any of you conceal his speech or declare it openly; whether he lie hid by night or walk forth freely by day.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 10)

A person who hides his evil deeds under the cover of night is necessarily plotting something. It is as if this person wants to listen in secret to every action that is taking place around him, or to spy on his surroundings. Allah not only knows the affairs of such people, but He is also aware of those who walk boldly in the light of day.

The disbelievers should have paid attention to a remarkable fact, namely the Quran's pointing out something hidden within themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…They say to themselves, "Why does not Allah chastise us for what we are saying?"' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

How could Allah be aware of such hidden thoughts without knowing things which are both secret and more hidden?

The True Lord states:

لَهُۥ مُعَقِّبَٰتٞ مِّنۢ بَيۡنِ يَدَيۡهِ وَمِنۡ خَلۡفِهِۦ يَحۡفَظُونَهُۥ مِنۡ أَمۡرِ ٱللَّهِۗ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوۡمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُواْ مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمۡۗ وَإِذَآ أَرَادَ ٱللَّهُ بِقَوۡمٖ
سُوٓءٗا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُۥۚ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن دُونِهِۦ مِن وَالٍ ﴿١١﴾

Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by God’s command. God does not change the condition of a people [for the worse] unless they change what is in themselves, but if He wills harm on a people, no one can ward it off — apart from Him, they have no protector [11]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d*: 11)

The word *lahu* denotes either something which is utilizable or a right. Therefore, when you say ‘*laka kadha*’ (this or that is your right or your possession), it is the opposite of ‘*alayka kadha*’ (this or that is your duty). Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘for each (such person) there are (angels) in succession…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 11), it is as if these hosts of helpers work for the benefit of mankind. In other words, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has angels that take turns in guarding mankind and protecting him day and night from things which he is unable to protect himself from if he were to use his own powers.

One statistic which sheds light on this reality concerns people who are bitten by snakes. Studies have proven that venomous snakes generally do not bite them while they are sleeping, but rather when the victims are awake. This means that someone is looking over them while they are asleep. However, when they are in a conscious state, people may behave carelessly and inattentively and are therefore prone to be bitten by snakes.

It is interesting to note that there is a popular idiom which states: ‘the eye has its guardian.’ We also witness many incidents which seem extraordinary, such as when a child falls from a top floor and is not harmed. The child survives this accident because the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed for His hosts of angelic helpers to protect that child from injury; the function of the former being to protect humans from harm.

Thus, we see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* prepared the world for mankind prior to both his creation and to his being made Allah’s vicegerent on earth. He fashioned the heavens and the earth, subjugated the sun and the moon, brought forth fruits of all kind and caused the night and day to alternate.

All of this was prepared for the vicegerent, namely mankind who represent Allah on earth, prior to his existence. Allah *Glorified is He* is ever watchful over His vicegerent on earth, and He cares for man, not only before his existence but also after his creation. Allah does not simply let man rely on his own limited power to defend himself from harm which he is incapable of stopping. Rather, He places hosts of angelic helpers in charge of watching over him.

The word *al-mu`aqqibat* might denote the angels that watch over man's acts, keeping a record of his good and bad deeds. In fact, *al-mu`aqqibat* could easily perform both actions at the same time: that of protecting him and recording his actions. If the angels write down good deeds in a person's book of deeds, this is clearly to the person's advantage.

Someone may remark: however, these *mu`aqqibat* will not only keep record of man's good deeds but will write down his bad deeds, and this does not benefit mankind. I contend: on the contrary, it is better for us to have a deep understanding of the ways of the Great Law-Giver that is, Allah. We must realise that if man were to know that he will be held accountable for every evil deed, and that these actions are not only counted and inscribed, but that he will hold his book on the Day of Judgment and read its contents out loud, he would clearly stay away from sin.

Thus, when viewed from this perspective, the writing down of evil deeds on the part of the *mu`aqqibat* is to man's advantage. Such angels inscribing keeping record of man's actions can be compared to a student who, while taking his exam, sees an invigilator watching over the class. The student does not loathe the test inspector, since the latter is ensuring that the test-taker receives an accurate score. Without an invigilator others may cheat and therefore have more chances of receiving a higher score and a passing grade than the person who studied for the exam. It is better if all the students are aware of the presence of an alert invigilator, thus spurring them to study for the exam. It is for this reason that I always say: do not hate the fact that you have enemies since a person who induces you to act in a degenerate way is in reality acting hypocritically toward his companions. In contrast to such hypocrites, an enemy is watching you at every moment, and you are therefore careful not to err.

A poet once said in this context:

My enemies treat me munificently and with kindness,
Therefore, very grateful I am for their assistance.
Indeed, they are like a remedy and a cure for the elderly,
so do not stave off my enemies, oh Compassionate One!
They hunted for my shortcomings, and so I steered clear of them,
Thus, avoiding things which the Arabs deemed disgraceful

Therefore: the recording of good deeds and of sins serves man's own benefit. Moreover, when the angels watch over mankind, they alternate, as it were, in shifts to protect each individual. Hence the Hadith in which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Angels are assigned to watch over you during the night and others during the day. They gather during the Morning Prayer and during the afternoon prayer (*`asr*). Those who spend the night watching over you go back up to Him (that is, up to Allah) – who is most knowledgeable of your state – who asks them, "In what state did you leave my servants?" they respond, "we came upon them while they were praying and we departed from them while they were praying.' (1) The angels are, as it were, patrol guards.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…Behold, the recitation (of prayer) at dawn is indeed witnessed (by all that is holy).' (*al-Isra': 78*) In other words: the night angels bear witness to this recitation and they are accompanied by the day angels.(2)

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(1) *Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (632), and Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (555), on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/474), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (3135), and Ibn-Majah in his (Sunnan) (670). Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him relates that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said regarding the following Quranic verse, '…and (be ever mindful of its) recitation at dawn: for, behold, the recitation (of prayer) at dawn is indeed witnessed (by all that is holy).' (al-Isra': 78), means that Quranic recitation at dawn is witnessed by night angels and by day angels.'*

The abovementioned Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* takes account of the temporal movement of humanity. Indeed, each of man's movements and activities takes place between the Morning Prayer and that of the afternoon prayer (*`asr*). After this period of activity, men generally retire to their homes and then go to sleep.

Now these *mu`aqqibat* (or patrolling angels) are both within man's perception and beyond his vision as well. Those who are visible to man perform the task of watch-guards. That is why we find that during the Prophet's migration (from Mecca to Medina,) Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* would sometimes walk in front of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and sometimes he would follow him from behind.

Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* would go ahead of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to ensure that no one was spying on the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* would then survey the land behind the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to make sure that they were not being trailed by anyone. It is thus that Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* ensured the safety of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and protected him from the patrols and from spies. (1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession, before and behind him: They guard him by command of Allah...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). Superficial understanding of this verse may lead one to believe that these hosts of helpers protect man from that which is willed by Allah. We contend: verily, Allah did not bring down the angels so that they may oppose His Will. The form of protection referred to in this verse is not the act of shielding man from his own passionate soul, nor is it an angelic protection from Allah's Will. This verse in fact means that the angels protect man by the Will of Allah.

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(1) *In his (Sunnan) (2/476), Al-Bayhaqi relates that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him said, 'By Allah! There is a single night in the life of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him which is worth more than all of `Umar's people combined, and there is a single day in the life of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him which is worth more than all of `Umar's people combined. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him set out on the night of his journey to the cave, with the company of Abu-Bakr Allah be pleased with him. The latter would sometimes walk in front of him and sometimes behind him. He persisted in alternating his pace in this way until the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him noticed him and said, "Oh Abu Bakr, why is it that you at times walk in front of me and sometimes behind me?" He responded, "Oh Messenger of Allah, I think of those that are chasing us, and I walk behind you, then I recall those lying in wait for us, and I walk in front of you."'*

This is why we come across verses in the Quran in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'and so, because of their sins, they were drowned (in the great flood) …' (*Nuh:* 2). In other words, they were drowned because of their wrong deeds. Therefore, do no assert that the angels protect man from that which is willed by Allah, since we know that if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wills for something, it cannot be prevented from happening.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, '…Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

It is Allah *Glorified is He* who created the earth with its diversity; including inanimate things, plants, animals, celestial bodies, and dominions of all sorts. All these components that make up existence were created to serve mankind. Then the True Lord guards man, and cares for him with uninterrupted protection.

However, someone may ask, 'Why do tragedies befall certain people despite the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* said that He protects them'? We contend: these tragedies only happen when man strays from the Way of Allah, since Allah's care is directed toward those who cling to Allah's religion.

Read the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And Allah propounds (to you) a parable: Imagine a town which was (once) secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all (the evil) that its people had so persistently wrought.' (*an-Nahl:* 112)

Thus, we know that so long as he is walking upon the straight path of Allah, man is cared for, protected, and accommodated even before his birth. However, if a person strays away from the straight path, Allah corrects him with certain morals and lessons so that he may return to the straight path.

Now the change which Allah brings about in the states of men once they change their inner selves include provisions which are engendered by primary sources of sustenance. However, He does not cut these sinners from primary sources of sustenance, such as the sun, the moon, the stars and air, nor does He prevent the earth from gushing forth with water.

Allah afflicts them with things which do not jeopardize the world's existence, such as financial or psychological hardships. It is for this reason that a philosopher once said, 'Verily, Allah does not conform to you, but you should conform to Allah.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has previously stated, '...And he who follows My guidance will not go astray, and neither will he be unhappy. But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me – his shall be a life of narrow scope…' (*Ta Ha:* 123-124).

In our modern world, you witness certain societies which live in luxury, and which supply us with modern technology, yet they live in a state of severe psychological constriction. This proves that material opulence, whether in the form of money or of technology, is not the cause of psychological balance or happiness. The following verse composed by the 'prince of poets' Ahmad Shawqi(1) *Allah rest his soul* applies to such societies:

A burden is not something which is carried by back,

A burden is none other than that which is contained in the breast.

Material wealth may be the ultimate goal (of life) in the eyes of some. In fact, a person might be successful in his errant path, earning money and overcoming risks. Yet, despite the money which he might accumulate, he nevertheless is tormented by psychological or physical illnesses.

Thus, we find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* changes the states of people, but He does not change. Indeed, He is the Changer and not the changed. The True Lord *Glorified is He* say, 'Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). This sheds light on the fact that man’s outward facets are dependent on his psychological movements. When the soul is healthy, man is also healthy on the external plane. Likewise, when the soul is ill, the outward plane also suffers.

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(1) Ahmad Shawqi is among the most famous poets of his day, and was nicknamed the 'Prince of Poets.' He was born in Cairo in 1868 A.D., and died in 1932 A.D. at the age of 64. He was a beneficiary of the Royal Family, and he studied law in France where he explored French literature. His writings include poetry and short stories. (*Al-A`lam Li-Az-Zirikli* 1/136).

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has placed man’s body parts and their corresponding functions at the command of the soul. And so, when the soul is in opposition to the path of Allah, the person’s tongue also acts in accordance with it; that is, in accordance with the rebellious soul. It is despite itself that the tongue of such a person does not express the truth of divine unity – *(at-tawhid)* – because the soul which commands it is resistant to faith.

Take, for example, the followers of certain divinely chosen messengers. These followers claimed to be sons of Allah, when in fact Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond such attributions. Now if their souls were firmly rooted in faith, their tongues would have been commanded to utter the formula of divine unity. In fact, the speakers themselves would rejoice in such a testimony. However, in both abovementioned cases the speaker is only expressing the state of his divinely imparted soul.

Thus, the body parts act in accordance with a person’s will, and man’s body is only freed from the shackles of human will on the Last Day when Allah orders them to bear witness against man at the moment of truth.

At this moment of truth, no one will have control of his body parts. Power on that Day belongs to the One Subduer. On this Day, the individual will not have control over his body parts, and the latter will testify to what they were ordered to do when they were under the person’s command. Hence, we know that all change occurs at the level of the soul which has command over the body parts.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 11), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* does not interfere in men’s affairs except when things are in a dire state, and when all of society becomes decadent. Such is a state when the blaming soul is no longer present in men, and when those who can stop the corruption – even with a word – disappear from this society. This is when the True Lord *Glorified is He* interferes.

Peoples’ actions are rectified when they change what is in their inner selves and address the will which has total command over their body parts. Now beware lest you think that there is something to which Allah is oblivious. It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, ‘…But when (once) Allah wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 11).

You must consider both sections of this verse together, ‘Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 11), And ‘But when (once) Allah wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 11). The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, ‘…nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 11) Do not think that there is an authority which effects changes without Allah’s consent. Such people mentioned in the verse above will not find a single caring individual to stroke them if Allah wills for them to suffer evil. Nor is there someone who could protect them from Allah, who could watch over their affairs, seek the good for them, and stave evil from their path. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 11)

Following this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of a phenomenon in creation which has two aspects and which is received in two possible ways. The first possible reaction is that of joy, while the second is fraught with fear. Note that each of these reactions applies on the level of the individual soul and of society at large.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* states:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُرِيكُمُ ٱلۡبَرۡقَ خَوۡفٗا وَطَمَعٗا وَيُنشِئُ ٱلسَّحَابَ ٱلثِّقَالَ ﴿١٢﴾

It is He who shows you the lightning, inspiring fear and
hope; He builds up the clouds heavy with rain [12]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 12)

Each of us is familiar with lightning. When we see lightning, our response is either one of fear, which is worrisome, or we wish for that which is desired and longed for. In other words, when lightning strikes, we fear thunderbolts, since they generally follow lightning, or we hope for the coming of rain clouds.

It is in this way that a single phenomenon can be the source of both fear and hope. Or again, the reaction of one group of people might be one of fear, while another might be one of hope and desire.

In this context, I always cite the example of an Arab fighter who described his sword as ‘victory in the eyes of his beloved, and death in the eyes of his enemies’. Another example which I use to convey the meaning of this verse is a story that was told to me by a ruler of a province called Ash-Shari`a, which is situated between At-Ta`if and Mecca. The sovereign of Ash-Shari`a related to us in 1935 the story(1) of a righteous woman called Amena who had memorized the Quran by heart. This woman had two daughters who were both wedded. Each groom accompanied his bride back to his home. One of the husbands laboured in agriculture, while the other was specialized in the fabrication of snares. Amena told her husband, ‘Why do you not go check up on our two daughters?’ And so, the father went to find out how the two girls were managing. The first person that he met on his journey was the daughter who was married to the farmer. He asked her, ‘How are you? And how is your husband? How are you and your husband’s worldly affairs?’ She responded, ‘Oh father, we both get along well with each other. As for our worldly affairs, pray for Allah to bring rain, because we ploughed the earth and planted the seeds and we are waiting for the sky to bring rain clouds.’ And so the father raised his arms to the sky and prayed, ‘Oh Lord! I ask you to bring about rain for her!’

Then the father went to the other daughter and asked her, 'How are you? And how is your husband?' She responded, ‘We are well. But I beg you oh father, to pray for Allah to prevent the rain from coming. We build the snares from mud, and if it were to rain, our snares would be ruined by the water.’ So the father made a prayer for her as well.

Then he returned to his wife who asked him to go and check on the two daughters. He looked perturbed. He said, ‘This will be a difficult year for one of them.’ Then he told her the story of the first daughter. He added once more, ‘...and it will be a treacherous year for one of them.’

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(1) Story of *Amena* with her daughters

Amena replied, 'If you were patient, I would have told you: 'verily, what you are saying might not be true, for Allah *Glorified is He* has the Power to bring joy to both of our daughters this year if He so wills.' The father asked, 'By Allah! Tell me how this is possible?' 'Did you not read the verse,' responded Amena, 'in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, "Are you not aware that it is Allah who causes the clouds to move onward, then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, until you can see rain come forth from their midst? And He it is who sends down from the skies, by degrees, mountainous masses (of clouds) charged with hail, striking therewith whomever He wills and averting it from whomever He wills..." (*an-Nur:* 43).

And upon hearing this verse, the man prostrated to Allah, grateful for having been given a wife who supports him in his spiritual life. He prayed, 'Oh Allah, prevent rain from pouring down on the first son-in-law who makes snares, and cause it to rain on the farmlands of the second.' And his prayer was answered.

This anecdote sheds light upon the opposing feelings of fear and hope that lightning can give rise to, 'He it is who displays before you the lightning, to give rise to (both) fear and hope…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 12).

Mixed feelings can be experienced either in a single soul, such as when a person fears the advent of thunderbolts but hopes for rain, or as shown in the story above, they can be shared by two different people. One hopes for rain because it benefits him, while the other fears rain because it would harm his livelihood.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* adds, '…And calls heavy clouds into being. (*ar-Ra'd:* 12) We know that clouds are made up of condensed vapour. Moreover, they are either laden with water vapour, or they are light; in which case, they appear as tufts of cotton in the sky.

The Arabs say, 'The bucket which takes the longest time to empty of its contents is the most filled, and the slowest moving cloud is that which carries the most water.'

After lowering a bucket down the shaft of a well, you pull it back up. Now the bucket that is filled with the most water is the hardest to retrieve. As for the empty pail, it is light and easy to draw from the well. In terms of speed, the same applies to heavy clouds which move slowly across the sky, for they are transporting large amounts of water.

After this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states:

وَيُسَبِّحُ ٱلرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِۦ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِۦ وَيُرْسِلُ ٱلصَّوَٰعِقَ فَيُصِيبُ
بِهَا مَن يَشَآءُ وَهُمْ يُجَٰدِلُونَ فِى ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْمِحَالِ ﴿١٣﴾

The thunder sounds His praises, as do the angels in awe of Him; He sends thunderbolts to strike whoever He will. Yet still they dispute about God – He has mighty plans [13]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 13)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has previously spoken of lightning, which emits a great amount of light. In this verse, He is referring to thunder which is heard rather than seen. Now we know that the speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. This explains why Allah mentions lightning in the beginning of this chapter, followed by thunder.

It is interesting to note that when a layman is bothered by someone, he tells him, 'May you hear thunder.' In other words, he is wishing that this person hears the annoying sounds of thunder because they disturb the listener. We must bear in mind that one should not be irritated by disturbing sounds that are emitted by certain elements of the world, especially when these reverberations are glorifying their Lord. Do not think that such elements are not in harmony with the rest of creation; rather they are harmoniously woven into the other sounds of this world.

We commonly understand glorification to be a form of prayer that is particular to a sane person who is capable of speech. However, this form of glorification which characterizes mankind is also to be found albeit on a different level, in creatures of this world. Non-human creatures were also taught by Allah to communicate, just as Allah taught man to convey his thoughts to fellow human beings. Like man, other creatures were also taught to communicate among themselves.

We have all read in the Quran what the ant said upon seeing Solomon's troops, '...O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you without (even) being aware (of you)!' (*an-Naml:* 18) Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* heard the ant's cry since Allah had taught him their language. We also know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* taught Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* the language of the birds. Allah *the Exalted* said, '...We have been taught the speech of birds' (*an-Naml:* 16). Did Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* not converse with the hoopoe? Indeed, this conversation did occur after Allah *Glorified is He* had revealed the language of the hoopoe to him. The hoopoe told Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* 'I have encompassed (with my knowledge) something that you have never yet encompassed – for I have come to you from Sheba with a tiding sure! Behold, I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given (abundance) of all (good) things, and hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 22-3)

Thus, all creatures have their particular language with which they interact in this world. Moreover, a person to whom Allah has disclosed secrets of His creatures is able to understand such languages. Now Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* has been endowed with such gifts, which is why he understood the language of the birds and was able to address the hoopoe in his form of speech. Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* told the latter, 'Go with this, my letter, and convey it to them; and thereafter withdraw from them and see what (answer) they return.' (*an-Naml:* 28)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* acquaints us with the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the Queen of Sheba, Bilqis. We also got an idea of how Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* understood the language of the birds, and how he was able to converse with the hoopoe. We have learned how a person may acquire various languages. When someone lives in a foreign society for an extended period of time, he picks up the local language. Indeed, man is able to learn multiple languages.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* touched on the question of the languages spoken among various kinds of creatures in the story of the ant as well as the story of the hoopoe and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Both the ant and the hoopoe's languages are secondary to human language. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also addresses the question of the existence of a language for each of His creatures in the following verse, '…And We caused the mountains to join Dawud (David) in extolling Our limitless glory, and likewise the birds: for We are able to do all things' (*al-Anbiya':* 79). It is as if the mountains understood Dawud’s extolling of Allah’s limitless glory, and were echoing his prayers. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says, ‘and for this, behold, We caused the mountains to join him in extolling Our limitless glory at eventide and at sunrise and (likewise) the birds in their assemblies: together they all would turn again and again unto Him (who had created them.’ (*Sad:* 18-19)

Allah *Glorified is He* also addresses the earth and the heavens, exclaiming, ‘…He (it is who) said to them and to the earth, “Come (into being), both of you, willingly or unwillingly!”’ (*Fussilat:* 11)

Note that they willingly obeyed Allah’s command, ‘…to which both responded, “we do come in obedience.”’ (*Fussilat:* 11)

Thus, we understand that every species has a special language which is used as a means of communication. We also note that each type of animal produces a unique sound. In fact, scientists are currently studying the sounds produced by certain types of fish such as whales, and are trying to decode their language.

Therefore, when you come across the following words, ‘The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise…’ (*al-Isra’:* 44). You should understand that there is not a single being which does not have a language with which it praises the Great Creator(1)Allah *the Exalted* then states, ‘...But you (O men) fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!’ (*al-Isra’:* 44)

This is analogous to a person who does not speak English and therefore cannot understand English when he hears it being spoken.

Some have contended: what is meant by ‘glorification’ in this verse is the glorification made by the inner essence of things to the Creator, and Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that we be incapable of grasping such subtle forms of divine glorification. I say: verily, modern science has studied and proven the existence of the languages used among different species. Therefore, the very act of communication between the speaker and the listener is the glorification in question. Moreover, these creatures are endowed not only with language, but also with emotions.

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(1) *Anas Allah be pleased with him related that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him entered upon a group of people who were seated on their riding animals and female riding camels and he said to them, ‘Mount it gently, and dismount it gently. And treat them not as chairs for you to sit upon while conversing in the streets and in the market places, for perhaps that which is ridden is better than he who rides, and more frequent in remembering Allah.’ Cited by Imam Ahmad in his (Musnad) (3/439, 440) and ibn Hibban (2002 – Mawarid Az-zam`an)*

We hear of modern scientists who study the emotions that trees have for the person who waters them. An experiment was conducted in which scientists measured the inner vibrations of plants when they were being tendered by a farmer who was responsible for them. When the man died, they (the modern scientists) measured the vibrations of these plants, only to find that they were disrupted. It is as if the plants were mourning the loss of their caretaker. Thus, the scientists concluded that plants also have feelings.

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made it clear to us that even inanimate things have feelings. That is why Allah says regarding the people of the Pharaoh, 'And neither sky nor earth shed tears over them…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29).

Indeed, the heavens and the earth were relieved by the disappearance of these evildoers off the face of the earth. In fact, the heavens and the earth are in harmony with the rest of creation in such a way that they do not will anything other than Allah's Will. And so, when a disbeliever comes along and tries to spread his corruption on earth, the heavens and the earth rejoice when he departs, and they do not grieve whatsoever. And since the heavens and the earth do not shed tears over a disbeliever when he departs, one may therefore conclude that they are in fact delighted by his departure. Moreover, they must mourn the departure of a believer.(1) This explains the saying of `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* 'When the son of Adam dies, his loss is mourned in two places: one is in the sky and the other is on earth. As for his place on earth, it is where he used to pray. As for his place in the sky, it is where his good deeds used to ascend.'(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, ibn Kathir (4/142) cites Mujahid's commentary on verse 29 of the chapter entitled Ad-Dukhkhan, 'Whenever a believer dies, the sky and the earth cry for forty mornings.' He said, 'And I asked him does the earth cry as well?' 'Are you surprised?' he answered, 'why should the earth not mourn the loss of a servant who filled it with bows and prostrations? And why should the sky not cry over the loss of a servant whose exaltations and glorifications of Allah resounded (in the heavens) like the reverberations of bees!'*

Thus, we understand the meaning of the verse in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And the thunder extols His Limitless Glory and praises Him...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13) as the thunder exalts and extols the name of the True Lord *Glorified is He* in a prayer that is accompanied by praise.

Now, when we extol the Divine Essence as being unlike any other essence, or the Divine Acts as being unlike any other acts or the Divine Attributes as being unlike other attributes, your extolment must be accompanied by praise and gratitude for Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because He transcends all contingent entities, and we must rejoice in our knowledge of His transcendence.

Allah *the Exalted* says, 'and the thunder extols His Limitless Glory and praises Him and (so do) the angels, in awe of Him…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13). Someone may well ask: why is it that the angels are in awe of Allah? After all, the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes them as those, '...Who do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but (always) do what they are bidden to do.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6) I contend: verily, the angels are in awe of Allah and of His Majesty. In our daily lives, we are acquainted with people that love their ruler or captain, and whose fear of the latter stems from their awe. What are we therefore to say of the True Lord *Glorified is He* Who is loved by His angels? Needless to say, they are struck by His Majesty and Absolute Perfection. It is true that the angels are under Allah's command; nevertheless, they fear their Lord Who resides above them. And so, when the angels hear the sound of thunder, they are not afraid of a harm that may afflict them. Rather, they fear for humanity. This is because angels are our guardians, and view their function as vigils over mankind. They worry about harms which may afflict mankind, and they seek forgiveness for those on Earth.(2)

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(1) *Cited by ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (4/142) and attributed correctly to `Ali ibn Abu Taleb* Allah *be pleased with him. Ibn `Abbas also relates a similar saying attributed to `Ali ibn Abu Taleb.*

(2) Allah says, 'They who bear the throne of (Allah's) Almightiness, as well as all who are near it, extol their Lord's limitless Glory and praise, and have faith in Him, and ask forgiveness for=

Therefore, the verse, ‘and the thunder extols His limitless Glory and praises Him and (so do) the angels, in awe of Him…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 13) clearly denotes that the angels apprehend the possible harms that may be caused by thunder, since they are charged with protecting humanity. However, their fear of Allah stems from their awe before Divine Majesty.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Every morning, when the servants of Allah wake up, two angels descend (upon them) and one of them says, “Oh Allah, compensate he who gives in charity”, and the other says, “Oh Allah, lead the miser to ruin.”’ Someone may suppose that this Hadith reprimands the miser. However, I contend: why do you not read this Hadith as a call to perform good acts (in this world)? After all, the charitable person is compensated for his good acts in the form of good deeds. Likewise, when Allah deprives the miser from his money, the latter is compensated on the condition that he endures Allah’s punishment patiently.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse, ‘...And He (it is who) lets loose the thunderbolts and strikes with them whom He wills. And yet, they stubbornly argue about Allah, notwithstanding (all evidence) that He alone has the power to contrive whatever His unfathomable wisdom wills!’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 13)

Moreover, painful experiences in this world are necessary, for they serve to remind people of their heedlessness. Picture the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when two of his greatest challengers,(1) Arbada ibn-Rabi`a, the brother of Lubayd ibn Rabi`a, and `Amir ibn Tufayl approached him with the intention of disputing his claims and finding flaws in his arguments or deficiencies in his knowledge. These contenders argued along the following lines, ‘…What! After we have died and become mere dust and bones, shall we, indeed, be raised from the dead?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 82)

= all (others) who have attained to faith, "O our Lord! You embrace all things within (Your) Grace and Knowledge: forgive, then, the sins of those who repent and follow Your path, and preserve them from suffering through the blazing fire!”’ (*Ghafir:* 7)

(1) The story of Arbada ibn-Rabi`a and `Amir ibn Tufayl with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Another argument put forth by these contenders was: if the Prophet's message was true, then why does Allah not hasten to punish them for their wrong actions?(1)

These two arguers came up to the, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Is our Lord made of steel or of brass?' They posed this question to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because they were worshipers of stone-idols, and steel or brass are stronger materials than stone. Upon hearing their question, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* made a prayer which brought down lightning that burned them.(2) Now the calling forth of lightning in this context is a Quranic symbol, and there must be a cosmic symbol which corresponds to it. And this corresponding cosmic symbol occurred indeed.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…And yet, they stubbornly argue about Allah…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13). Note that arguing about Allah take on many forms. One may argue over His Essence, or His Attributes. Arguments about Allah may also revolve around good and sinful deeds. The contenders referred to in the verse above also argued for the bringing forth of a material proof(3) because they were not satisfied with the Quran as a sign of Allah. This is even though the Quran is a miraculous sign of Allah that was revealed in a form that the revelation's recipients excelled in, namely language.

They also argued over thunder, 'Verily, thunder does not have a mind which would enable it to extol Allah, nor are the angels allocated with such a function, so how could they extol Allah?'

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(1) Allah *the Exalted* says, 'As it is, they say (mockingly), "O our Lord! Hasten on to us our share (of punishment even) before the Day of Reckoning!"' (*Sad:* 16). Allah also says, 'Now they challenge you to hasten the coming upon them of (Allah's) chastisement: and indeed, had not a term been set (for it by Allah), that suffering would already have come upon them! But indeed, it will most certainly come upon them of a sudden, and they will be taken unaware.' (*al-'Ankabut*: 53)

(2) This anecdote was cited by Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir* (5/3631, 3632) and was attributed to ibn `Abbas. Also, it was cited by ibn Kathir in his *Tafsir* (2/506), and attributed to Al-Wahidi in *Asbab An-Nuzul.*

(3) Allah speaks of them in the following verses, 'And so they say, "We shall not believe you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth; or have a garden of date-palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush; or cause the skies to fall down upon us in smithereens, as you have threatened; or (till) you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us; or have a house of gold or ascend to heaven – but nay, we would not believe in your ascension unless you bring down to us (from heaven) a writing which we could read!"' (*al-Isra'*: 90-93)

However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says He is able to send forth bolts of lightning and has the power to strike whomsoever He wills. And so, bounty is imparted to whomever Allah wills, and harm afflicts whoever Allah wills. Considering this fact, one may ask: how could their arguments stand, after the True Lord *Glorified is He* has created this world? Do you even have time for such contentions which are raised for the sake of argument and sour quarrels? Cleary, an argument as such can be put to good use, but it can also be misused. Note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us, ‘And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 46). He also says ‘Allah has indeed heard the words of her who pleads with thee concerning her husband, and complains unto Allah…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 1). Clearly, the motivation behind this quarrel is to reach the truth (of the matter.) Allah *Glorified is He* underlines the verse in the chapter of *ar-Ra`d* by stating, ‘He alone has the power to contrive whatever His unfathomable wisdom wills!’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 13)

It is said, ‘one person plotted against another’. In other words, he schemed and contrived secretly against him. *Al-mihal* is a scheme or a machination that is secretly conspired. People who seek to resort to such schemes are weak because they are incapable of direct confrontation. That is why they conceal such harmful (and secretive) ways.

This phenomenon occurs between people, since humans cannot perceive the world of the unseen. However, when Allah contrives against a person, no one is able to withstand His plots. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Behold, they (who refuse to accept it) devise many a false argument (to disprove its truth), but I shall bring all their scheming to nought. Let, then, the deniers of the truth have their will: let them have their will for a little while!’ (*at-Tariq*: 15-17) This verse points to the fact that Allah’s plots are insurmountable. Moreover, they are unknown to anyone; hence the verse, ‘...Thus have they (always) schemed: but Allah brought their scheming to nought – for Allah is above all schemers’ (*al-Anfal:* 30).

They (the schemers in question) were plotting against His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and sought to assassinate him. They came forth with a young man from every tribe, and each was to strike him with his sword at once so that the blood responsibility would be shared by all the tribes. They lied in wait for him, but the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was being protected. He *peace and blessings be upon him* walked by them inspired by Allah's verse, '...And We have enshrouded them in veils so that they cannot see.' (*Ya Sin:* 9)

Through this event, he made it clear to the enemies of Islam that they will not be able to stop the spread of Islam secretly nor by overt confrontation. Neither plotting against the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* nor lying in wait for him would stop him from accomplishing his mission. Even if they were to seek the intervention of jinn, they would still fail. Indeed, either a person may plot secretly, or he may resort to direct combat. However, when his attempts at destroying his enemy fail, he sometimes resorts to the powers of a different species such that of the jinn. However, even the powers of the jinn were unable to stop the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* for they tried to cast a spell upon him but Allah revealed to him the place where the black magic was hidden. Some of the companions of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* went to the location where the black magic charms were hidden as described by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. And thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* made it evident to them (the enemies of Islam) that all of their actions would not cause harm to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as, 'For Allah always prevails in whatever be His purpose…' (*Yusuf:* 21). This is how the True Lord *Glorified is He* was and always will be until He inherits the earth and its dwellers. Furthermore, He contrives whatever His Unfathomable Power wills. Allah says:

لَهُۥ دَعۡوَةُ ٱلۡحَقِّۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ يَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦ لَا يَسۡتَجِيبُونَ لَهُم بِشَيۡءٍ إِلَّا كَبَٰسِطِ كَفَّيۡهِ
إِلَى ٱلۡمَآءِ لِيَبۡلُغَ فَاهُ وَمَا هُوَ بِبَٰلِغِهِۦۚ وَمَا دُعَآءُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَٰلٖ ﴿١٤﴾

The only true prayer is to Him: those they pray to besides Him
give them no answer any more than water reaches the mouth
of someone who simply stretches out his hands for it – it
cannot do so: the prayers of the disbelievers are all in vain [14]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 14)

Allah *Glorified is He* has called upon us to believe in a single God; such is the message of the Ultimate Truth. The beings or powers that men invoke other than Allah are false deities. Note that the personal pronoun in this case refers to Allah, and it is as if Allah were calling His creatures to repeat and adhere to the formula of Ultimate Truth, namely ‘there is no deity but Allah’. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* and His angels have declared that there is no deity other than Him. Moreover, people who are endowed with knowledge also proffered evidence of the Unity of Allah.(1) Such is the prayer aiming at the Ultimate Truth. Or again, *lahu* (translated above as ‘unto Him’) could also denote man who calls unto the Truth. When a person calls unto Allah, it necessarily means that some aspect of his prayer cannot be attained by him individually and is beyond his power. Man, therefore calls unto Allah to assist him in his difficulty.

The act of calling unto Allah is a form of request, with the distinction being that the request varies according to the appealer as well as the nature of the request. Now if the appealer is inferior to the person being asked for a favour, then the request is not referred to as an order, such as ‘forgive me oh my Lord’! Such a phrase is not an imperative order but a request or an appeal.

Thus, we see that in the case of an order that is made by an inferior to his superior, it is not called an imperative order but merely an appeal. The intelligent student must pay attention during answering the grammar question, and note that if the request is made by the inferior to his superior, then it is not referred to as an imperative order but an appeal. For example, the servant of Allah calls unto His Lord saying, ‘Oh Lord, forgive me!’ However, if the person who is appealed to is simply an equal, then he says, ‘*iltimas*’ i.e. ‘request’. Or again, if the request is issued by a superior to his inferior in rank, then the request is an order rather than an appeal.

When man calls unto His Lord, this means that the servant has exhausted his possibilities and is seeking the succour of Allah, the Transcendent and All-Powerful. That is why each of us prays to Allah, since Allah *Glorified is He* has the Power to satisfy, without any difficulty, His servants’ requests.

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(1) Allah says, ‘Allah (Himself) proffers evidence – and (so do) the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him, the Upholder of Equity: there is no deity save Him the Almighty, the Truly Wise.” (*Al-‘Imran*:18)

However, if you make a request to a powerless being, then clearly this request does not benefit the appealer. The idol worshipers used to call unto idols which neither harm nor benefit mankind. A statue can help neither itself nor others for the simple reason that it is made of stone. Clearly, calling unto such idols does not accomplish anything, since these inanimate objects have no power. Thus, we know beyond any doubt that the prayer aiming at the Ultimate Truth is to call unto He Who has Power. As for those who call unto false deities, their prayers remain unanswered. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in this verse, 'Unto Him (alone) is due all prayer aiming at the Ultimate Truth, since those other beings or powers whom men invoke instead of Allah cannot respond to them in any way – so that he who invokes them is…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 14). This is because they do not possess anything in the way of power, since an idol built by the hands of these people is incapable of even hearing the prayers addressed to them. So how is it possible for them to answer such prayers? The True Lord *Glorified is He* cites an example that is tangible and familiar to everyone. He says, '…So that he who invokes them is but like one who stretches his open hands towards water, hoping that it will reach his mouth, the while it never reaches him…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 14). When a thirsty person sees water, he stretches his open hands towards it to draw some back to his mouth. However, the water does not reach his mouth since it simply trickles out between the cracks of his fingers. Such is the state of someone who calls unto deities other than Allah, for he has appealed to a thing which does not have the power to fulfil his request. This is what happens when someone makes a prayer to a deity other than Allah; it is a prayer that is in error and is deprived of Divine Grace.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says,

وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَظِلَٰلُهُم بِٱلْغُدُوِّ وَٱلْآصَالِ ⑮

All that are in heaven and earth submit to God alone,
willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the mornings
and in the evenings [15] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 15)

As we know, prostration is a movement that is performed during the canonical prayer. In addition, prayer is the act carried out by the servant when he stands before his Lord and calls upon him. Prayer consists of a series of recitations and acts which begin with evoking the formula of transcendence '*Allahu Akbar*', (Allah is the greatest and is greater than the description of Him as the greatest). Finally, prayer is concluded by evoking peace (upon the guardian angels).(1) Note that prayer consists of obligations (and may include) supererogatory or other highly recommended acts

Prostration symbolizes man's complete submission before the Divine, for it consists of placing the highest part of the human being's body (namely the forehead) in the place of that which is lowest, namely the human foot. People often say proverbially: 'Do not lift your head above me', in other words, do not act presumptuously, since lifting of the head denotes arrogance, while lowering it through bowing or prostrating is a sign of modesty. And so when Allah says, 'And before Allah prostrate themselves, willingly or unwillingly, all (things and beings) that are in the heavens and on Earth…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15). You must understand that this is what happens in reality. Now if you cannot mentally grasp the full meaning of the prostration which you perform, try to at least comprehend that it denotes ultimate submission and humility before Allah the Commander.

Now you know the world was created through the command of Allah and for Allah. Creation is under His sway, and if man responds to Allah's commands by having faith in Him, then this is for his own good. However, if he does not answer to Allah's commands – just as the disbeliever does – then he will pay dearly for his misconduct. If you were to understand this matter on a deeper level, you would find that the disbeliever rebels against Allah by means of his will which has control over his body. However, his limbs and bodily organs are fashioned by Allah, and each one of them performs its function by Allah's command. Each one of man's body parts heeds the commands of Allah. And so, even if the disbeliever defies Allah in one respect, he is nevertheless in complete submission to Him in another. When Allah wills for the disbeliever to fall sick, is he able to disobey Allah's Command?

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(1) *It is related that `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him said that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The key to prayer is (ritual) purification, it is made sacred through evoking the formula of transcendence 'Allahu Akbar' (Allah is the greatest and is greater than the description of Him as the greatest) and is concluded by evoking peace upon man's guardian angels.' Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) 1/123, 129), Ad-Darami in his (Sunnan) 1/175), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) 1/8). The latter said: 'this Hadith is the most authentic one of this category and (hasan).*

The answer is clearly in the negative. Or again, when Allah wills for his heart to stop, is he able to challenge Allah's Will? Of course, he is not able to do so.

Thus, the person who frequently rebels against Allah's command to worship Him, and is accustomed to doing so should try to rebel against Allah's commands which he has no power over. Such a person will be disappointed by his own powerlessness.

A disbeliever must understand that he did not rebel against Allah with his disbelief without Allah having given him the option to do so. A proof of this is that ninety-nine percent of his powers are presided over by Allah, and only one percent of his power is left to his own choosing. It is thus that Allah's command over all things is demonstrated beyond doubt.

The disbeliever's submission – in most cases – or his exceptional defiance of Allah's commands (exceptional since one of the few things in which man has the power to choose is precisely the question of belief or disbelief in Allah) only serves to extol Allah's Limitless Glory. After all, the disbeliever cannot dare defy the commands which Allah has not enabled him to challenge.

Someone may well ask: why did Allah say, 'And before Allah prostrate themselves…all (things and beings) that are in the heavens and on Earth' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15), rather than 'that which is in the heavens and that which is on Earth'? We contend: given that what is in question here is prostration, this verse is a proof of the supremacy of the mind. Allah *Glorified is He* has made prostration in this verse a proof of the fact that all creatures on earth grasp in their own way the truth of Allah's Lordship, and they worship the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And before Allah prostrate themselves, willingly or unwillingly, all (things and beings) that are in the heavens and on Earth' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15). Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* is teaching us that all creatures submit to Allah in prostration, whether willingly or unwillingly, just as the body parts of the disbeliever – which are used by the latter to defy Allah – prostrate to Allah. These limbs of the disbeliever nevertheless prostrate to Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues, '…As do their shadows in the mornings and the evenings.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15) In our daily lives, we often hear people saying, 'so and so is following someone like his shadow', in other words, he never gives him respite, and he follows him as if he were his shadow. We know that the shadow of the human being follows a person's movements. And so we realise that shadows themselves are in submission to Allah, since the people whom the shadows are following are in submission to Allah. In short, a shadow follows your movements, so beware lest you think that the shadow submits to your command. Rather, your shadow submits to the command of Allah *Glorified is He*.

In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* is defining the matter in terms of mornings, and evenings. *Al-ghuduw* is the plural of *ghudat* and denotes the beginning of the day, while *al-`asal* is the period between afternoon prayer (*`asr*) and that of sunset (*maghrib*) prayer. Now when you measure your shadow in the morning, you notice that it is relatively long. However, as it approaches the sun it becomes longer, and as midday approaches it becomes shorter and shorter until it all disappears. The shadow of a person stretches out most noticeably during the morning and the afternoon.

The True Lord states:

قُلْ مَن رَّبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ ۚ قُلْ أَفَٱتَّخَذْتُم مِّن دُونِهِۦٓ أَوْلِيَآءَ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ لِأَنفُسِهِمْ نَفْعًا
وَلَا ضَرًّا ۚ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِى ٱلْأَعْمَىٰ وَٱلْبَصِيرُ أَمْ هَلْ تَسْتَوِى ٱلظُّلُمَٰتُ وَٱلنُّورُ ۗ أَمْ جَعَلُوا۟ لِلَّهِ
شُرَكَآءَ خَلَقُوا۟ كَخَلْقِهِۦ فَتَشَٰبَهَ ٱلْخَلْقُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ خَٰلِقُ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ وَهُوَ ٱلْوَٰحِدُ ٱلْقَهَّٰرُ ﴿١٦﴾

Say [Prophet], 'Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth?' Say, 'God.' Say, 'Why do you take protectors other than Him, who can neither benefit nor harm even themselves?' Say, 'Are the blind equal to those who can see? And are the depths of darkness equal to the light?' Have the partners they assign to God created anything like His creation so that their creation is indistinguishable from His? Say, 'God is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the All Compelling' [16] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 16)

Qul (say) is a command ordering the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to relate (the contents of the verse above) to the disbelievers. In other verses, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Now if you ask those (who worship any being other than Allah) as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, “Allah”. How perverted, then, are their minds!’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87)

Someone may well ask: why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* provide an answer to the question posed in this verse instead of allowing the disbelievers to provide an answer to this question? We contend: verily, the answer provided by the True Lord *Glorified is He* in this verse regarding who created the heavens and the earth is a more effective answer than that with which they would have come up. To cite an example from our daily lives – and to Allah belongs the greatest of examples – you might ask your youngest son who is quarrelling with his older brother: ‘who bought you these new clothes?’ The youngest son then trembles timidly for he knows that his older brother – with whom he was quarrelling – is the one who brought the new clothing for his younger brother. At this point, you interject for the sake of emphasis: ‘it is your older brother with whom you were squabbling who gave you the new clothes.’

Now when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys to the disbelievers what he was ordered to relate, namely, ‘Say ‘Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 16), they will be dumbfounded. After that, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* insists upon the words that he was ordered by Allah *Glorified is He* to relate, ‘Say, ‘(It is) Allah…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 16)

Allah’s Command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say, ‘Why then, do you take for your protectors, instead of Him, such as have it not within their power to bring benefit to, or avert harm from, themselves?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 16) Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* discloses the extent of their ignorance through the words of Allah *Glorified is He*. Now they (the disbelievers) have previously admitted that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. None of them dared to credit their idols for the creation of the heavens and the earth. At this point, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sheds light, as he was ordered to, on the following matter: indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has created the heavens and the earth, so how could you take for your protectors, instead of Him, false deities which do not have within their power to bring benefit to, nor avert harm from themselves? A proof of the powerlessness of these idols is that they were constructed by the polytheists and yet have no power over the latter.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, ‘Say, ‘Can the blind and the seeing be deemed equal? – or can the depths of darkness and the light be deemed equal?’ Or do they (really) believe that there are, side by side with Allah, other divine powers...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 16). Clearly, a blind man is not equal to one who sees.

When you come across *em* in the Quran (which is translated above as or do...?), what is in question is a transitive analogy, Allah *Glorified is He* rejects their actions by expressing (as it were) His astonishment. It is indeed disgraceful to hold such a belief: ‘Or do they (really) believe that there are, side by side with Allah, other divine powers that have created the like of what He creates, so that this act of creation appears to them to be similar (to His)?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 16) In other words, if these divine powers that have been placed side by side with Allah *Glorified is He* had created something that was equal to Allah’s creation, then they would justifiably believe that there are similarities between Allah’s creation and that of the partners that they associate with Him. However, these partners that have been placed side by side with Allah *Glorified is He* and which supposedly share in His Divinity do not have the power to create a single thing. So why do they choose them (the idols) as partners unto Allah?

The order from Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is expressed in the following words, ‘Say, ‘Allah is the Creator of all things; and He is the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 16)

In a different verse, Allah *Glorified is He* comments upon this phrase, ‘Behold, those beings whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create (as much as) a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end!’ (*al-Hajj:* 73)

Indeed, these partners that have been placed side by side with Allah *Glorified is He* did not create a single thing, and no one can claim that they even have the intention of doing so. The word *lan* (cannot) emphasizes the fact that even if they were to demand their idols to create something they would be incapable of doing so. This is because negating the possibility of a future event, as expressed by *lan* in the verse above, calls for a challenge:

even though their deities are multiple in number, even if they were to join their ‘forces’ they would be incapable of creating a single thing.

The challenge continues in the verse, in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And if a fly robs them of anything, they cannot (even) rescue it from him! Weak indeed is the seeker, and (weak) the sought! No true understanding of Allah has they (who err in this way): for, verily, Allah is most powerful, almighty!’ (*al-Hajj:* 73-74) In other words, if the fly were to rob them of anything of their possession with one of its hind legs, they would be unable to recuperate it.

Thus, it becomes clear that Allah *Glorified is He* is the only Creator of all things, and it behoves upon us to worship Him solely without attributing any partners unto Him. Moreover, only Allah *Glorified is He* is characterized by Divinity and Lordship. He is the Subduer and the Majestic Who is ever controlling over His affairs. So how could there be another god who is equal to Him? It is precisely due to the characteristics described above that He never has any equal and rival partners.

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءٗ فَسَالَتۡ أَوۡدِيَةُۢ بِقَدَرِهَا فَٱحۡتَمَلَ ٱلسَّيۡلُ زَبَدٗا رَّابِيٗاۖ وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ
عَلَيۡهِ فِي ٱلنَّارِ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ حِلۡيَةٍ أَوۡ مَتَٰعٖ زَبَدٞ مِّثۡلُهُۥۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡحَقَّ وَٱلۡبَٰطِلَۚ فَأَمَّا ٱلزَّبَدُ
فَيَذۡهَبُ جُفَآءٗۖ وَأَمَّا مَا يَنفَعُ ٱلنَّاسَ فَيَمۡكُثُ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡأَمۡثَالَ ﴿١٧﴾

He sends water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools: in this way God illustrates truth and falsehood – the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind – this is how God makes illustrations [17]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 17)

Moreover Allah *Glorified is He* brings down water from the clouds in the sky. Now we know that particles of water evaporate from the seas, rivers, and plots of land where natural springs gush forth. These particles condense to form clouds, which pile up on top of each other and, as they pass by a cold region, condense and cause the water to precipitate.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He sends down from the sky, rain, and valleys flow according to their capacity’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 17). The valley is an elongated depression of the earth's surface between two mountains. When rain descends upon a mountain, it flows along these depressions or valleys, each transporting the amount of water that it can bear. It is interesting to note that in His Wisdom, Allah *Glorified is He* determined this quantity of water in such a way as to minimize the rainwater creating floods. If the water carried by these valleys were to flow over them, surrounding villages would drown, the agriculture would be spoiled, and houses would be destroyed. An example of this is the flooding of the Nile which used to occur in proportion with the amount of water that was normally carried by the Nile’s valleys. In fact, the people of Egypt were rejoiced by floods when they were within reasonable proportions. However, when the river flooding went overboard, the abutting villages ran the risk of being inundated or wiped out by the floods.

Hence, we find that out of His Mercy, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wills for the water which descends from the sky to be distributed according to the capacities of the valleys; save when He wills otherwise.

In this verse, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to draw a parable which is useful for mankind. That is why He cites the falling of rain according to the capacities of riverbeds.

Anyone who observes this amount of rain falling from the sky can notice that rain is in fact cleaning the surface of the earth from shrub and impurities. This extraneous material gives rise to foam on the surface of the river. As the river water pushes onward, it deposits the foam along its riverbanks until the water becomes pure and glistening. ‘He sends down from the sky, rain, and valleys flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries rising foam.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 17)

This is a parable that is understood mostly by nomads because they live in areas made up of desert, mountains, and rivers. If this parable speaks mainly to urban people, to what example can city dwellers relate? Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* provides us with a parable that is suitable for city folk. He states,

'…And from that [ore] which they heat in the fire, desiring adornments and utensils, is foam like it.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

When you visit the workplace of a metallurgist or a goldsmith – who works with gold and silver – you notice that he uses fire to melt his metals. When exposed to the fire, foam – consisting of extraneous elements which seeped into the metal – is released by the molten liquid, yielding a pure metal.

Likewise, a goldsmith exposes his gold to a flame to remove blemishes. Then he adds other elements which reinforce the gold. The goldsmith may also change the gold from a pure to a sullied state. Note that unalloyed gold is referred to as 24 Karat, and that gold which is of an inferior quality is 21 Karat. An even less refined gold is 18 Karat. In fact, pure gold is soft, which is why other strengthening metals are mixed with it. Having been strengthened, the goldsmith then makes jewellery ornaments from this hardened gold.

The making of jewellery is a suitable parable for people of the city. In fact, those who work with metal also make other instruments, such as swords, which are used by urban people. Now swords, for example must be made from solid metal. Moreover, each instrument that a metallurgist creates is made from a metal that is endowed with an appropriate degree of solidity. When a metallurgist wants to make a sword, he must select a metal with a density and hardness that corresponds to its function as a weapon.

To return to our previous point, the foam that is to be found on the surface of water – the latter originating from rainfalls – is the result of its flowing across the surface of mountains. This water then pours into valleys, and the foam carried by it generally gathers on riverbanks. With time, however, the water which flows becomes purer.

When you look at the Nile River, for example, you observe foam which collects on either side of the river shores. The same is true for the water in the ocean: you often find material that has been discarded from boats floating on the surface, only to be washed on the beaches by waves.

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* has set forth a parable for both dwellers of the desert and city as well. These parables are helpful in their daily lives, and make use of the image of either ornaments that they adorn themselves with or weapons with which they combat. Moreover, these examples do not exclude other instruments that are used in other daily activities. In short, these examples involve purification of metals and extracting extraneous elements – such as foam – from metals to create jewellery or daily utensils. ‘Thus, Allah sets forth [the example of] truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth. In this way does Allah set forth the parables.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 17)

When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* sets forth the parable of truth and falsehood, it means that Allah *Glorified is He* is selecting elements which benefit mankind and at the same time which prevent him from harm. When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘being cast off’, it means that He wards it off.

Allah *Glorified is He* underlines this noble verse by stating, ‘…In this way does Allah set forth the parables.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 17)

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wanted to teach us abstract concepts by means of sensible parables. In this way, man may know that even when injustice prevails and rules temporarily eclipse the truth, it is doomed to be washed away just like foam.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* then states:

لِلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَجَابُوا۟ لِرَبِّهِمُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لَهُۥ لَوْ
أَنَّ لَهُم مَّا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُۥ مَعَهُۥ لَٱفْتَدَوْا۟ بِهِۦٓ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
لَهُمْ سُوٓءُ ٱلْحِسَابِ وَمَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمِهَادُ ١٨

There will be the best of rewards for those who respond to
their Lord; those who do not respond would willingly give
away the earth’s contents twice over, if they had it, in order
to ransom themselves, so terrible will be their reckoning.
Hell will be their home, and their bed wretched [18]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 18)

The first sentence of this verse addresses those who respond to the Lord Who created from naught, and Who provided them with their necessary livelihood and the possibility of survival and reproduction by the wedding of pairs. If the Lord enjoins them to do something, they must realize that what is demanded of them is for their own benefit, for He *the Glorified and Exalted* has provided them with everything they need in the first place.

Those who respond to their Lord receive a goodly response. After all, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has created this world to be a place of sowing good deeds which are recompensed in the Hereafter. In this world, you are responsible because you have authority over your affairs. However, in the Hereafter, you are commanded by the Lord of all things.

In the here below, you strive, sow, irrigate and reap. Moreover, your living conditions may range from penurious to luxurious according to the way you manage your worldly affairs.

But if you respond to your Lord and follow His path, then upon death you pass on to a new life where, rather than struggling in the world of causality, you live anew with the first cause. A person in this posthumous state is granted anything that his mind can imagine. This is because cause and effect no longer stand in the Hereafter the way they do in this world, rather, you are nurtured by the Divine Essence. He who is provided for by the Divine Essence is Eternal like the Essence Itself. That is why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘And as for those who have attained to faith in Allah and hold fast unto Him – He will enfold them within His grace and bounty.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 175).

Some Quranic exegesis opines that the grace and bounty referred to in the verse above is Paradise. This explanation is acceptable, since paradise is an element of Divine Mercy. However, paradise is eternal as long as Allah *Glorified is He* wills it do remain, while Allah’s Mercy is Eternal as a result of Allah’s Eternity. Here Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘For those who answered Allah’s call is bliss’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 18).

Allah *Glorified is He* says in a different verse, ‘For those who persevere in doing good there is the ultimate good in store…’ (*Yunus:* 26).

Now Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has created certain things in this world to make life possible, on the condition that we exert our efforts to earn a living. However, in the Hereafter you are resurrected in a world where everything you desire is at your disposal without having to labour for it. This is bliss.

Admittedly, much of the material world (in modern times) has become more comfortable. Those who travel to developed countries and who stay in fancy hotels are told that they can have coffee by pressing one button, and tea by pressing another.

Moreover, any kind of food you wish is prepared for you by others in restaurants of these developed countries. However, no matter how comfortable the world becomes, it will never reach the point where anything you desire is instantaneously brought before you. Such will only occur in the Hereafter.

Note that the fate of those who do not answer Allah's call is evident. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…And for those who answered not His call, if they had all that is in the earth, and there with the like thereof, they would proffer it as ransom…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 18). In other words, they say, 'take everything that I own and save me!' But their plea will not be answered. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Such will have a woeful reckoning, and their habitation will be hell, a dire abode.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 18)

This is because reckoning is at times favourable and at others dire. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the expression 'a dire abode' because one of the two individuals (mentioned in this verse,) Allah forbid, will not know what to do when he is cast into the hellfire. This is analogous to a baby who moves around haphazardly in his cradle. Surely, the hellfire is a dire abode.

Allah *Glorified is He* then states:

أَفَمَن يَعۡلَمُ أَنَّمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ ٱلۡحَقُّ كَمَنۡ هُوَ أَعۡمَىٰٓۚ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ﴿١٩﴾

Can someone who knows that the revelation from
your Lord is the Truth be equal to someone who is
blind? Only those with under- standing will take it
to heart [19] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 19)

The believer knows that the Quran – which bears the path to Allah – was revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Such a person cannot be equalled with a disbeliever who is described in this verse as, 'One who is blind'.

Knowledge and blindness are contrasted here because the verses emphasize the (God-given) power of insight (which man has into spiritual matters). Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Only they who are endowed with insight keep this in mind.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 19) In other words, this is directed to men of sound minds who are capable of contemplation, reflection, and discernment.

Speaking of 'those who are endowed with insight,' Allah *Glorified is He* then states:

ٱلَّذِينَ يُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا يَنقُضُونَ ٱلْمِيثَٰقَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Those who fulfil the agreements they make in
God's name and do not break their pledges [20]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 20)

Now, when a man of good judgment gains faith in Allah *Glorified is He,* he knows that he has made a covenant not to worship a deity other than Him, nor to submit, approach, look or expect bounties from anyone other than Allah *Glorified is He*. This is the foremost covenant of faith.

Moreover, the sacrosanct nature of this initial covenant extends to other pledges which are made with either Allah Glorified is He or His creatures. This is because that which springs from the covenant with Allah *Glorified is He* is, by virtue of its ultimate source, analogous to a covenant with Allah *Glorified is He*. If you have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* then you believe in the religion which was bestowed upon His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Moreover, if you are true to His religion, then by extension you are faithful to your foremost covenant with your Lord.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* dictates a specific way by which the believer must go about addressing his most salient and important duties (in life). These decrees are referred to in the passive form; for example, 'Fasting is ordained for you' (*al-Baqara:* 183), 'Just retribution is ordained for you in cases of killing' (*al-Baqara:* 178) and 'Fighting is ordained for you, even if it be hateful to you…' (*al-Baqara:* 216).

All the ordainments are preceded by, 'it has been ordained for you'. The commander of their decrees is Allah *Glorified is He* and He only ordains those who have faith in Him. Therefore, the moment you declare your faith in Allah is also when you make a covenant with Him wherein you pledge to be faithful to His decrees.

You are free to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* or not to believe in Him. However, when you believe in Him it behoves upon you to obey His commands. In other words, you have assumed a faith-based covenant between you and Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘it has been ordained for you’ instead of ‘I have ordained’. This is because a covenant between you and Allah *Glorified is He* entails that you do not associate partners unto Allah *Glorified is He* and as previously mentioned, Allah *Glorified is He* only addresses His decrees to those who believe in Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘they who are true to their bond with Allah and never break their covenant.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 20) In other words, the faith-based covenant substantiated by the responsibilities which you assume.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues describing such people who are true to their covenant with Him:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَآ أَمَرَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦٓ أَن يُوصَلَ وَيَخۡشَوۡنَ رَبَّهُمۡ وَيَخَافُونَ سُوٓءَ ٱلۡحِسَابِ ﴿٢١﴾

Who join together what God commands to be joined;
who are in awe of their Lord and fear the harshness
of the Reckoning [21] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 21)

The first bond which Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered to be maintained is the family bond. In other words, to uphold relationships with those whom one is related to by blood, however, if a true believer were to link between the various family groups, he would include all the believers in this family bond. This is because all the believers are (distantly) related by virtue of their remote family bonds. If you know, for example, ten believers, then you relate them through a bond of kinship. If every believer were to do the same, imagine the interrelatedness of these bonds and their harmony. If this scenario were to actualize, you would find that all the believers are included in this (all-encompassing) circle.

That is why we find that Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘I am *Ar-Rahman* (the All-Compassionate,) I created *ar-rahim* (the womb or kinship) and I designated a name for it which is derived from My Name. Therefore, I will maintain a close relationship with he who maintains close relationships with his kin, and I will sever my relationship with he who cuts his relationships with his kin.'[1]

I have previously related the story[2] of Mu`awiya whose chamberlain came to him announcing that a man at his gate was saying, 'Verily, it is your brother oh Commander of the Faithful.'

There is no doubt that the chamberlain knew that Mu`awiya ibn Abu Sufyan had no siblings, but he did not want to intrude in what the man (at the gate) was saying. Mu`awiya then asked his chamberlain, 'Do you not know my brothers?' The latter responded, 'Thus claims the man (at the gate.)' And so, Mu`awiya gave permission for the man to enter, and he asked him, 'Which one of my brothers are you?' The man responded, 'Your brother from Adam.' Mu'awiya said, 'Ours is a severed kinship, and by Allah, I will be the first to rebind it!'

Al-Fadil ibn `Ayyad[3] entered upon a group of people who wanted to ask him for a favour. He asked them, 'Where are you from?' they responded, 'From Khurasan.' He said, 'Fear Allah and hail from wherever you want!'

Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered us to maintain close ties first with family, then with close ones, followed by one's circle of contacts; circles which become more and more distant. Maintaining close ties with the neighbour is also commanded by Allah and all of this is because Allah *Glorified is He* wants kinship to exist among His creatures. This way, those who are in need may be assisted by those who are well off, and the weak may be protected by the strong. If you uphold close ties with a poor neighbour or someone who is close to you, Allah *Glorified is He* in turn will be close to you.

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/191 – 194), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (1907) who judged this as Sahih'. This Hadith has also been cited by Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (1694.) All these citations relate the Hadith through `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Awf.*

(2) The story of the man who claimed to be Mu`awiya's brother.

(3) He is Al-Fadil ibn `Ayyad At-Tamimi, the father of `Ai, Sheikh of the *Ka`ba* and one of the great servants of Allah and men of righteousness. He was a respected authority of Hadith, and was born in Samarqand (105 A.H.) and lived in Mecca where he died (187 A.H) at the age o 82. *(Al-A`lam)* (5/153)

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and through him all those who believe in His Message, ‘Say (O Prophet), ‘No reward do I ask of you for this (message) other than (that you should) love your fellow-men.’ (*ash-Shura:* 23) Some people who heard this verse said, ‘your strong bonds should be maintained with your close fellow-men.’(1) Others contested, ‘no, strong ties are maintained (first and foremost) with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since the Quran speaks of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as follows ‘The Prophet has a higher claim on the believers than (they have on) their own selves...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 6).

Thus, for the believer, upholding strong ties with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* takes precedence over ties with his own fellow-men.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues describing men who are endowed with insight: ‘…And stand in awe of their Lord and fear the evillest reckoning (which awaits such as do not respond to Him)’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 21). Fear is felt by those who may be harmed by something, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* is the Source of fear. In other words: they fear Allah, their King, Creator, and Protector out of awe and reverence.

Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed the most severe punishment (namely, the hellfire) to be a source of fear. You may say, ‘I fear Zayd’, or ‘I fear illness’. In both cases, there is something which you fear and something which compels you to be fearful.

Men who are endowed with insight fear the evillest reckoning of Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, this fear impels them to keep together what Allah *Glorified is He* has bidden them to join, and to stay away from things which may anger Him.

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(1) *In his Musnad (1/268), Imam Ahmad cites a Hadith related by Ibn `Abbas in which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘No reward do I ask of you for the elucidations and guidance that I have brought to you other than that you should love Allah – Exalted ad Glorified is He – and that you should draw near unto Him through obedience (of His Commands).’ Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) (4/112), ‘In other words, other than that you should engage in acts of worship which bring into the proximity with Allah in utter humility.’*

We know that the evillest reckoning takes place after contesting (man's actions which are being weighed) and after the servant has been granted all his rights. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is so Exalted and will not wrong anyone. However, those who contest their reckoning are those who are cast into the hellfire[1], and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from such a fate for no one is able to withstand such divinely inflicted tortures.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues describing men of insight in the following verse,

وَٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُواْ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ وَجۡهِ رَبِّهِمۡ وَأَقَامُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنفَقُواْ مِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡ سِرّٗا
وَعَلَانِيَةٗ وَيَدۡرَءُونَ بِٱلۡحَسَنَةِ ٱلسَّيِّئَةَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ عُقۡبَى ٱلدَّارِ ٢٢

Who remain stead- fast through their desire for the face of their Lord; who keep up the prayer; who give secretly and openly from what We have provided for them; who repel evil with good. These will have the reward of the [true] home [22] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 22)

We find that this Quranic verse is more clement in its descriptions of men of insight who remember (Allah) and who recognize His Presence with their intellects and by means of proof. Such people are true to their faith-based covenant by virtue of their belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and in His Unity.

Such followers also adhere to the commands which flow from this creed (of Divine Unity.) Allah *Glorified is He* makes this doctrine of Divine Unity as the basis for establishing (as it were) a contract between Allah *Glorified is He*

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(1) *`Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, 'The Messenger of Allah said, "He whose actions are accounted for on the Day of Resurrection will be punished." Having heard this, `Abdullah ibn Abu Malika asked, 'Did Allah not say, "He will in time be called to account with an easy accounting" (al-Fath: 8). Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him answered, 'That is not the definition of accounting for man's actions rather, what is referred to in this verse by accounting–means to be shown one's actions. Those whose accounts are disputed on the Day of Judgment are punished.' Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2876). An-Nawawi comments on this Hadith: 'It means that most servants (of Allah) will be accounted for with expediency. As for those whose reckoning is drawn out and who are not pardoned, they will perish and enter the hellfire. However, except for those who associate false partners unto Him, Allah pardons and forgives whosoever He wills.'*

and the believers, as stated in the following verse, ‘Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties (in exchange) for that they will have Paradise. They strive in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. It is a true promise [binding] upon Him.’ (*at-Tawba:* 111) This is a deal that is both reciprocal and (characterized by mutual) consent. Or again: it is a pledge between Allah *Glorified is He* and the believers that is reciprocal and characterized by mutual consent. This pledge is substantiated firstly by proofs that are of a primordial order, and secondly by intellectual arguments.

This verse is addressing those who have been patient in adversity out of longing for their Lord’s Countenance. Note that patience in the face of adversity is to endure hardships which affect the human soul and cause it to lose its dignified bearing, tranquillity, and felicity. And everything which pulls the human spirit away from its state of harmony and balance calls for such patience.

Moreover, patience refers to the patient believer and the cause of affliction that befalls him and he is patiently enduring. During moments of hardship, the latter can manifest within the soul. For instance, a person may endure patiently the burdensome orders of someone who tells you, ‘do this’ and ‘don’t do that’.

Note that to be assigned a duty entails giving up something that you love, and to perform something which can only be achieved through hardship. A person who is being bossed around must obey orders by passing up certain things. All the above calls for fighting against one’s concupiscent soul, and the patience that is called for regarding one’s own soul depends on the difficulty of the task that one has been put in charge of. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes prayer, for example, as follows, ‘And this,(1) indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit.’ (*al-Baqara:* 45)

This form of patience which we have been speaking of above is patience in the face of adversities which manifest in the soul. However, there is another type of patience, on your part in the face of a harm that is directed toward you by someone else. This harm also causes you to lose your poise and felicity.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir says in his Tafsir (1/87), ‘And this, indeed, is a hard thing’ (al-Baqara: 45), is about prayer. This has been quoted by Mujahid and adopted by ibn Jarir. Moreover, this (expression) possibly refers to the meaning of the verse and is a counsel recommending it (prayer.)’*

One can divide this type of patience into two categories: the first is when you have an opponent, and the second in which there is no adversary. For example, there is no adversary in an illness which debilitates one's health and causes you pain. However, you will have an opponent when someone, for example, hits you. In this case, the person who strikes you is your antagonist.

For every patient, there is a corresponding faith-driven power which can withstand it. And so, the patience of a person who endures a hardship that is not instigated by an enemy is within reason, since there is no enemy to stimulate his feelings of rage. As for the patience of a person in the face of a person who has caused him pain, this requires a great amount of self-control. Only with this self-restraint will a person not lapse into fury and consider revenge.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* distinguishes between two forms of (hardship): one which afflicts you but is not instigated by an opponent, and another which is caused by an enemy.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of patience, in which there is no opponent, '... and bear in patience whatever (ill) may befall thee: this, behold, is something to set one's heart upon!' (*Luqman:* 17)

As for patience in which there is an enemy and which calls for repressing one's anger and controlling one's rage, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives – this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon' (*ash-Shura:* 43).

When Allah *Glorified is He* wants you to endure patiently in the face of adversity, it is important to keep in mind that He does not ask this of you alone. He also asks all your adversaries to react with patience to your attacks. It is as if He asked you to endure patiently the harm that others have inflicted upon you; and you are a single individual around whom these individuals revolve.

Asking others to tolerate the harm that you afflict upon them is the peak of social security on the level of the human soul. For if Allah *Glorified is He* asked you to tolerate those who harm you, He also asked everyone else to put up with you when you harm them. For if you are overcome by haste and happen to wrong and hurt somebody, you benefit from a certain amount of patience on the part of others. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* asked for your counterpart to also bear in patience and to forgive (those who transgress him).

Moreover, if you have an enemy, then patience calls for three levels on your part: initially you endure patiently by means of self-restraint – even though your anger does not disappear. Now if you repress your vindictive instinct and prevent it from expressing your anger by not striking or cursing (your opponent), this is referred to as those who 'Hold in check their anger' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

The word *kadhm* (anger) is derived from the tying of the water skin (*al-qirba*) which we use to carry water. If we do not fasten it properly, water spills from it. One says, '*kazhama al-qirba*', that is: he tightly fastened his water skin.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* presents the second phase which comes after restraining anger. Allah *Glorified is He* states, '…And (those who) pardon their fellow-men…' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). Here we are at a higher level, namely cleansing one's breast of anger followed by attaining the level of the truthful. The initial reaction of such a (spiritually accomplished) person is not to look (vindictively) toward the person who caused him to become angry. Instead of cursing (his malefactor,) he pardons him and looks upon him with an eye of faith. This faith-driven glance amounts to the realization that he who harms you is actually transgressing one of your Allah-given rights thereby placing Allah *Glorified is He* in your favour and on your side. Thus, we find that whoever wrongs or harms you places you under Allah's care and protection, and you should therefore treat him (your adversary) kindly.

There are various reasons to be patient. Some tolerate others to gain a reputation for being patient and thick-skinned. Such people want to parade themselves as being above worldly tribulations. This type of patience is not born for the sake of Allah's countenance. Rather, it is a patience that is motivated by a desire to be protected from one's enemies. Another type of patience is born because a person has deduced that anger will not benefit him. If such a person were judicious, he would endure patiently for the sake of

Allah’s countenance since patience for the sake of Allah’s countenance lightens the force of Allah’s punishment. He who endures patiently in the face of adversity out of longing for Allah’s countenance knows that Allah’s Wisdom is above that which caused him harm. If he were to choose between what should have happened and what had happened, he would have chosen the latter. Moreover, he who endures patiently in the face of adversity out of longing for the Divine countenance in fact perceives the wisdom and the causes behind the events which he finds himself in. Such a person says, ‘I praise and give thanks to You, my Lord, for everything that You have willed and for Your dazzling Splendour. I praise and give thanks to you with a praise and gratitude that ensue from my contentment with your inexorable decree flowing from Your Wisdom.’

He who bears poverty with patience, and addresses his concupiscent soul by saying, ‘Endure with patience until Allah grants you ease’, and does not ask others for help, will find that felicity has been brought to him by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Ponder the words of the poet who says:

If you seek money in order to spend it

On the soul’s passions in times of hardship,

Then solicit your soul to draw from its rich supply of patience,

And to consecrate (itself to Allah) until the hour of relief (is granted.)

For if you do so, you will prosper, and if you refuse (to act upon your passions,)

Then all impending events will be readily justified.

In other words, if you are drawn to spend money on things which satisfy your soul’s lower passions, but (in the last minute) you abstain from such a temptation and are patient, then you are rich (in the sight of Allah) by virtue of your self-domination.

The person who only pays heed to external events is consumed by them. On the other hand, he who sees events considering the divine reality, and says, ‘there must be Divine Wisdom behind these (events)’, and is patient in the face of adversity for the sake of Allah’s Countenance knows that there is a

Divine Wisdom which underlies the events of this world. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to receive those who endure hardship out of longing for His Countenance in a glorious station.

Allah's description of men who are endowed with insight continues, '…And are constant in prayer, and spend on others, secretly and openly…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22).

We have commented extensively in the past upon the various dimensions of prayer.

We have said that he who performs his prayers and fulfils its requirements realizes that prayer is a direct link between the servant and his Lord, and that the servant is in His Presence.

Analogously, when a work of art is presented, five times per day, to the artisan (who created it), there is no doubt that the handiwork earns the affection and care of he who designed and fashioned it. Moreover, just as Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond your visual perception, so are the deep reasons for your recovery from times of difficulty.

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us the following: 'When something troubled him, he got up and prayed.'(1) One of the remarkable aspects of faith is that Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins you to pray (during certain times of the day), but He does not prevent you for drawing near unto Him at any hour. Rather, you are the one who determines when you will stand between His Hands, at any time, to pray supererogatory prayers after having performed the canonical prayers. Unlike people of worldly power, Allah *Glorified is He* does not limit the amount of time that you can spend with Him privately; rather, you are the one who ends the meeting at the time of your choosing.

Now Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* acquired the qualities of his Lord and assimilated supreme virtues. Consequently, when a person held the hand of Prophet Muhammad, the latter would not (be the first to) withdraw his hand from the person who shook his, until the former withdrew his hand.(1)

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(1) *Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him said, 'When a matter troubles Prophet Muhammad, he would pray.' Cited by Imam Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/388), and Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (1319).*

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And spend on others…out of what we provide for them as sustenance.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22)

In other words, you should focus on the money that the person is receiving from you. Rather, understand that if you reach a state in which you are dependent on (the generosity of others,) you will be provided for. This is true insurance. Moreover, a person who is afraid of not being able to provide for a child after his death will find the following verse to be particularly pertinent – on the condition that he is raised in a society in which faith is still a living reality – 'And let them stand in awe of Allah, those legal heirs – who, if they themselves had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account – and let them remain conscious of Allah, and let them speak (to the poor) in a just manner.' (*an-Nisa':* 9)

This way, an orphan will not feel abandoned, nor will a parent fear for the wellbeing of his children, or will anyone be discontent with (or have any doubts regarding) Allah's Power to do what He wills. Allah *Glorified is He* is establishing economic equilibrium when He asks us to give money in charity. Note that money that is meted out in charity is cash that is extra, or which has reached the minimum amount of property (or money that is) liable to payment of the *zakat*. It is for this reason that you should manage your worldly affairs in a productive manner; in such a way that others may benefit from you and so that you may have money to allocate for charity. Finally, your wealth should be enough to sustain you and others.

There are those who give in charity from what Allah *Glorified is He* has provided for them as sustenance. Such people reserve enough money to sustain their livelihood, and give the rest to charity out of longing for Allah's Countenance. This is because he has absolute certainty that there is deity who is the All-Capable and can support his livelihood. In fact, the assurance which is in Allah's possession (in the form of money to be dispensed in the future and bounties to be rewarded in the Hereafter) is far greater than what he owns.

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik said, 'If a slave girl belonging to the people of Medina took the hand of the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad, he would not retrieve his hand from hers until she had taken him to wherever she wanted in the city to (ask Him for) a favour.' Cited by Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (1398), and by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (33/174, 216)*

Recall when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* about his spoils: ‘What did you do with (your spoils,) oh Abu Bakr?’ He responded, ‘I gave all of my spoils away in charity.’ Then the Messenger asked, ‘And what did you retain?’ ‘I retained Allah and His Messenger’, responded Abu Bakr.’(1)

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad asked 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* ‘And what did you do, oh 'Umar (with your spoils)?’ He replied, ‘I gave half of it to charity, and I kept the other half for myself.’ It is as if he was telling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘if there is something that you would like me to spend the other half on for the sake of Allah, then I will do so’.

Thus, we have seen examples of those who charitably offer of that which Allah *Glorified is He* has given them, and an example of someone who gives to charity everything that Allah *Glorified is He* has provided for him; namely Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him*. We also find those who offer of that which Allah *Glorified is He* has provided them with, and who are ready to provide the rest if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deemed that someone needed charity.

Among the teachings of Islam, we find that whoever takes care of an orphan should not take any of the latter’s money if his patron happens to be wealthy. However, if the orphan’s patron is poor, let him partake of his ward's property in a fair manner.(1) Someone may well ask: why should a poor person oversee an orphan's property? I contend: so that he (the poor person) does not deprive society from the benefit of someone who has experience raising children. Therefore, if a poor person has experience in raising children, let him partake of the orphan's property in a fair manner. We note that Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…But let them have their sustenance therefrom…' (*an-Nisa':* 5). He did not say 'and have their sustenance thereof'. In other words, take from what belongs to their stored possessions to ensure his or her sustenance.

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(1) This anecdote was cited by Al-Kandahlawi in *Hayat As-Sahaba* (2/137). Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi, Ad-Darami and Al-Hakim relate that `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* once ordered us to give (of our possessions) for the sake of charity. This coincided with an amount of money that I happened to possess, and I said (to myself), “Today, if any, is the day that I will surpass Abu Bakr (in generosity.)” And so I gave up half of my money, and Prophet Muhammad asked me: “How much did you set aside for your family?” I answered half. Then Abu Bakr came and gave away everything that he owned. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “What did you set aside for your family?” He responded, “I set aside Allah and His Messenger for my family.” I said, “I will never surpass Abu Bark in anything.”’

Thus, we understand how a believer should spend on others of what has been allotted to him from Allah *Glorified is He*. There are those who donate everything that belongs to them since they are sure of the provisions which will be granted from their Lord. Others, however, donate some of what Allah *Glorified is He* has given them. Such people might be overtaken by an impulse of open handedness and generosity and in such a state, would provide for everyone who asks. Consider, for example, a person who sits in his granary and seeks to give in the way of charity on the harvest day; he gives everyone who asks (for help,) until he has nothing left.

That is why we come across verses in which Allah says, '…And do not waste Allah's bounties: verily, He does not love the wasteful!' (*al- An'am:* 141)

Here we find a description by Allah *Glorified is He* of those who donate out of yearning for Allah *Glorified is He* 'And are constant in prayer, and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them as sustenance...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22).

A secret form of charity is recommended, while spending on others openly is a conspicuous good deed. The reason for this (difference) is that when you only donate secretly, people may get the impression that you are rich, or you may develop this reputation and they speak badly of you. However, when they witness you spending on others and giving money to charity, they know that you are giving Allah *Glorified is He* His due, thereby encouraging them to donate from the Bounty that Allah *Glorified is He* has given them.

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(1) Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, 'And test the orphans (in your charge) until they reach a marriageable age; then, if you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions; and do not consume them by wasteful spending, and in hate, ere they grow up. And let him who is rich abstain entirely (from his ward's property); and let him who is poor partake thereof in a fair manner. And when you hand over to them their possessions, let there be witnesses on their behalf – although none can take count as Allah does.' (*an-Nisa'*: 6)

Deciding on whether to spend on others secretly or openly is a decision that is left to the individual's discretion. Some people donate money to their country, and these donations are spent according to the country's policies. Having donated to their country, they secretly give money to the poor. This is what it means to spend on others openly and secretly. Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned both secret and open forms of charity, since He does not want to deprive His servants of His bounty for any reason. Someone may interject: 'Verily, this or that person spends on others out of pride!' I contend to whoever speaks in such a way: did the poor not benefit from the proud man's charity? Indeed, he did, and no one should pass judgment on the level of intentions.

Allah continues, 'And (who) repel evil with good' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22). Repelling is to fend off something with force. In other words, they forcefully fend off evil with good. Now the quintessential good deed is belief in Allah *Glorified is He* by virtue of which one fends off the sin of disbelief. Or again, to repel evil means to repel a sin which you have committed by repenting for that sin. This is (a possible interpretation of this verse) because penitence is a good deed. Moreover, when you see something which is evil and (therefore) sinful, you repel it with goodly advice.

Or again, the meaning of the verse could be if you were to commit a sin and to follow it up with a good deed. Clearly, absolute perfection only pertains to Allah *Glorified is He*. Suppose that someone committed a grave sin in one way or another, in this case Allah *Glorified is He* bids him to fend off this evil by carrying out a good deed to counter balance it. Allah says, 'For, verily, good deeds drive away evil deed' (*Hud:* 114).

Contemplate the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* when he told Mu`adh(1) *Allah be pleased with him* 'Be conscious of Allah wherever you are, and follow up a sin with a good deed so that your sin may be erased by the good deed. And treat people with good manners.'(1) That is why you find that most acts of charity in society do not ensue from a refined person who does not commit sins. After all, there is no sin that is compelling such a person to carry out good deeds in the hope of erasing transgressions.

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(1) *He is Mu`adh ibn Jabal Al-Ansari, the foremost Imam in the science of the permissible and the proscribed in Islamic law. He was one of the most beautiful men, and he witnessed*=

When a sin disturbs the offender's conscience, – (the reason for the latter's compunction being) that he is unable to repel it since he has committed it – the latter tells himself: 'verily, I will build a school.' or 'I will build a mosque', or 'I will create a hospital' or 'I will spend on the poor'. Thus, we find that most philanthropic activities are carried out by those who have committed (grave) sins; for men know that no one can perform anything without Allah's awareness. He who commits a sin must feel guilty. This guilt in turn drives him to the point where he feels compelled to do good deeds with the hope that they might replace his offences.

To repel evil with good can also mean to control your anger and to forgive when you have been wronged by someone else. By doing so, you will have treated him with goodness and compassion. You find that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Repel thou (evil) with something that is better – and lo! He between whom and thyself was enmity (may then become) as though he had (always) been close (unto thee), a true friend!' (*Fussilat:* 34) If you have tested this in your own life by treating an enemy with kindness, you will find that the latter also responds with compassion and becomes a true friend.

However, there are those who say: 'I have tried this and it came to no benefit'. I respond to these contenders: you thought that you have repelled evil with something that is better, while in reality you were focusing on your reaction toward your enemy. Thus, you did not truly repel (evil) with something that is better. Instead, you were merely testing Allah's words, and you lost the power of sincerity, and the enemy thus remained hostile toward you.

= *all the battles of Islam – (al-mashuhid) –, and was sent by Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him as a teacher and jurisprudent for the people of Yemen. He died victim of a plague which struck the Levant on the 18th year of the Islamic calendar at the age of 34. (Al-Isaba 6/106).*

(1) *Cited by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/228, 236) and Abu Nu`aym in Hilyat al-Awliya` (4/376), and related by Mu`adh Ibn Jabal.*

However, if you were to repel (evil) with something that is better, you would find that the Quranic verse contains the entire truth. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* does not state something in the Quran which can be contradicted in His creation. A poet says:

Oh you who are disturbed by (hostile) actions from him or her,

Pay your ransom ‘with something that is,’ until we may behold ‘and lo! He.’

In other words, oh he who is bothered by an enemy, you must sincerely repel evil with something that is better until you notice that that enmity which was between you and what Allah *Glorified is He* states in the verse, ‘And lo! he between whom and thyself was enmity (may then become) as though he had (always) been close (unto thee), a true friend!’ (*Fussilat:* 34) Allah *Glorified is He* continues, ‘…It is these that shall find their fulfilment in the hereafter’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 22). This verse is referring to those who are spiritually advanced and who are endowed with insight. Such people are characterized by the following nine traits: they remain true to their bond with Allah, they do not betray their pact, they keep together what Allah *Glorified is He* has bidden to be joined, they stand in awe of Him, they fear the most dire reckoning, they are patient in adversity out of a longing for their Lord’s countenance, they are constant in prayer, they spend on others secretly and openly and they repel evil with good: these shall find their fulfilment in the hereafter. Thus, *al-`uqba* is that which follows in the wake of something. Note that the abode of the world is followed by the abode of the Hereafter.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* expands on *al-`aqiba* in the following verse:

جَنَّٰتُ عَدۡنٖ يَدۡخُلُونَهَا وَمَن صَلَحَ مِنۡ ءَابَآئِهِمۡ وَأَزۡوَٰجِهِمۡ وَذُرِّيَّٰتِهِمۡۖ
وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَدۡخُلُونَ عَلَيۡهِم مِّن كُلِّ بَابٖ ٢٣

They will enter perpetual Gardens, along with their
righteous ancestors, spouses, and descendants;
the angels will go in to them from every gate [23]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 23)

Thus, for those who are endowed with insight, the abode of the Hereafter which follows this world consists of gardens of perpetual bliss. Note that *al-`adn* from *(jannat `adn)* in the verse above denotes something which is perpetual, while *jannat `adn* are gardens of perpetual bliss. In contrast, this world is not everlasting.

Moreover, every form of felicity in this world is followed either by death or by challenges of life. As for the perpetual gardens of bliss, they are the abode of permanence since *`and* denotes being forever in the gardens.

As for *al-jannat* (gardens), they denote gardens which have trees, fruits and everything that the soul may possibly desire. Note that these gardens are not the dwelling places of the people of paradise. Rather, there are dwelling places in those gardens, as shown by the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss’ (*at-Tawba:* 72).

Thus, *al-jannat* are the gardens in which there are homes. In this world, we witness villas which are surrounded by gardens. What are we then to say of the goodly dwellings which Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for us in the middle of heavenly gardens? We must understand this considering the description of Paradise provided by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the part of Allah *Glorified is He* in the following Qudsi Hadith: ‘I have prepared for my righteous servants that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and which has never been desired by the heart of a person.’(1)

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* exposes the fulfilment of the Hereafter as being: ‘Gardens of perpetual bliss, which they shall enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses, and their offspring…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 23).

The gardens of perpetual bliss are populated by men of insight and their parents who are righteous followers of Allah’s way. If someone were to ask: and where are the mothers? I would contend: when counterparts are mentioned in pairs, the male always takes grammatical precedence. That is why the verse denotes both the mother and the father. After all, did Allah *Glorified is He* not say in the chapter of *Yusuf,* ‘And he raised his parents to the highest place of honour’ (*Yusuf:* 100)?

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(1) *Cited by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2824), Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/466), and Abu Na`im in Al-Hilya (2/262) this hadith was related by Abu Hurayra*

These are the ones who enter paradise among the men of insight who are characterized by the nine conditions which we previously spoke of. Have the parents, spouses and offspring achieved these nine prerequisites?

We state: verily, Allah *Glorified is He* treats His creatures in this world in accordance with the emotional attachment that bonds (the latter) with his children. Now we love our children, spouses and parents, and so long as we love them, and so long as the latter are righteous to the extent that they can be, then Allah joins them with their loved ones. This explains the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* proclaims, 'And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste: (but) every human being will be held in pledge(1) for whatever he has earned.' (*at-Tur:* 21)

Here the Quran touches on a subject that can be grasped by the mind, namely uniting one who is complete with another who is lacking. If the latter were equal to the former regarding deeds performed in this world, then this (uniting) would not be called a proper unity. Each person is granted his rightful compensation (in the Hereafter). Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* has laid down one condition for uniting offspring with their parents, or (conversely) joining the parents with their offspring in paradise, and that is faith. Further, He has made it clear in this verse that the parents are distinguished by their faith-based deeds, since Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…And We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste…' (*at-Tur:* 21).

Allah *Glorified is He* did not combine and average out the (numerous) deeds carried out by the father with those of the son who did not perform any (good deeds in this world.) This is not the way of Allah *Glorified is He* because He does not wrong the parents or the sons who perform good actions. Moreover, if this were to be the case (on the Day of Reckoning,) then the uniting of the parents with their children in paradise would not be considered a proper unity, since the latter involves compensating each person for their actions. Having done so, Allah *Glorified is He* in His Generosity, unites the parents and the children within the limits of a proper unity, on the condition that the person who is being united (with his parents or offspring) be a believer.

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(1) In other words: he has a pledge with Allah so that he is reckoned for whatever he has earned. (*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*) (1/278).

Thus, we understand the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith’ (*at-Tur:* 21). In other word, offspring, spouses, family and parents who believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. However, he who is united with his loved ones is united by virtue of Allah’s Generosity. Allah *Glorified is He* does so to please the hearts of the believer (in paradise) when the latter sees his children – who (as we said) were believers in the first place – with him. This is the zenith of justice. Why? The example which I always cite in this context is as follows: imagine that a father has meticulously ensured that he feeds his family only of that which is legally permissible in Islam. At first, this person might live in constraint and hardship. At the same time, you might find the dishonest person’s offspring leading a life of ease and comfort. Thus, the children of the impious father enjoy the pleasures of life because they are being fed from illicit sources, while the trustworthy father is suffering and may even be accused of narrow-mindedness for respecting Allah’s commands and for refusing to eat from what is prohibited (by Islamic law.) Moreover, the latter’s children may lack some luxury in their father’s lifestyle because he abides by the Islamic economic rulings. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* will have them join their father into his dwelling in Paradise, where neither the children nor their father will lack anything.

Thus, the children are finally granted true, everlasting happiness. This is the fruit of a believing man’s struggle to live righteously; this indeed happens even though some people in this life have accused him of being rigidly narrow-minded.

Someone might yet question, ‘does not the matter of uniting the person with their offspring in paradise contradict the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…a father shall not make any satisfaction for his son, nor shall the child be the maker of any satisfaction for his father.’ (*Luqman:* 33)? In fact, there is no contradiction whatsoever. After all, Allah, the Lawgiver, commands us to pray the funeral prayer for the believing dead person to bring mercy upon them. Due to the deceased’s belief, Allah *Glorified is He* adds all the Mercy He wills to their good deeds because of the funeral prayer, which is performed by Muslims.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They will enter perpetual Gardens, along with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and descendants; the angels will go in to them from every gate.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23)

The Arabic word *zawj* (spouse) denotes either a man's wife or a woman's husband. So, it is actually a common mistake to say *zawja* to denote a wife. The correct term in Arabic is *zawj*;(1) it is a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'And his wives (*azwaj*) are their mothers…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6).

So, in the perpetual Gardens everything is systematic. There are various gates that will be open; each corresponding to a different form of obedience that is divinely recompensed. For example, certain people will enter through the 'gate of prayer', while others will enter through the 'gate of *zakat* (prescribed alms)' or through the 'gate of patience'. The various gates may also be corresponding to rewards of good deeds, not the deeds themselves. They may be portals through which the dwellers of the Gardens receive the blessings of Paradise. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say, "This is what was given to us before; and they shall be given the like of it."'(2) (*al-Baqara:* 25)

As a gate remains open, fruits and bounties are brought forth in various forms. Sometimes mangos, for example, might be brought through a gate and maybe followed by apples. As I mentioned, these gates either to correspond to the divine rewards or to forms of obedience performed in this world. Moreover, the verse under discussion declares clearly that the angels come in from every gate. So, what do they say to the people of paradise?

Allah *Glorified is He* relates what they are going to say:

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(1) *The word zawj (spouse) denotes both male and female for the people of Hijaz. However, the word zawja is used by Bani Tamim who would say, 'She is his wife (zawja).' Al-Asma`i said, 'Only the word zawj is valid in Arabic.' He supported his opinion by the Quranic verse, "...dwell you and your wife (zawj) in this garden...' (al-Baqara: 35). He was told, 'Indeed, Allah says so. But did He say, 'Never use (zawja) for wife?' Thus, Al-Asma`i's opinion is considered too stern. See, Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-`Arab, under zawj.*

(2) *One interpretation is that they enjoy each meal so much that they are delighted to see their favourite dishes again. Another interpretation is that the food of paradise resembles the delicacies of this world in appearance.*

سَلَٰمٌ عَلَيۡكُم بِمَا صَبَرۡتُمۡۚ فَنِعۡمَ عُقۡبَى ٱلدَّارِ ﴿٢٤﴾

P Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast.
What an excellent reward this home of yours! [24]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 24)

Here, peace denotes an unchanging state of tranquillity and contentment which is contrary to worldly peace, which is often disrupted by the vicissitudes of fortune. But you, believers who have been admitted into Paradise, are spared such vicissitudes of fate. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described the situation after the Reckoning as either: 'Forever Paradise or forever hellfire.'[1] Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the bounties of Paradise as, 'Neither intercepted nor forbidden.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 33)

There are two types of angels: First, there are roaming angels who are preoccupied with invoking Allah *Glorified is He* and they do not realise human existence, nor are they even aware of the story of creation. Moreover, they are completely disconnected from everything that occurs in the world, for their consciousness is immersed in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. Such are the exalted angels who are referred to in Allah's following question to Satan when he refused to prostrate to Adam; 'Are you proud or are you of the exalted ones?' (*Sad:* 75)

The 'exalted ones' here refers to the angels who were not commanded to prostrate and who have no relation to the creation of man; those angels whose only role is to utter the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. The second type of angels is those who carry out the commands of Allah *the Almighty*. We know that Adam and his descendants came into existence after Allah *the Almighty* had prepared all sustenance; the earth was created, the sky was raised, the

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(1) *The Hadith is narrated by At-Tabarani in his book Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir and Al Awsat and narrated by Al Hakim who authenticated it on the authority of Mu`adh ibn Jabal who was sent by Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to Yemen. When he arrived, he said, 'O people, surely the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him informs you that the ultimate return is to Allah, and to Heaven or to Hell. Such a state is perpetual and without death; it is a station with no exit and with bodies that do not deteriorate.' See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir and Al-Awsat; see also Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 1/83.*

stabilising mountains with their provisions were fashioned. The sun, the moon, the stars, the water, and the clouds were all brought into being for Adam even before Allah *the Almighty* created him.

These kinds of angels that carry out the commands of Allah *the Almighty* have a relationship with man, Allah's vicegerent on earth.(1) They are the ones(2) to whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Bow down before Adam' (*al-Baqara:* 34). Moreover, they are the ones who have to do with the affairs of human beings. They unconditionally obey the commands of Allah *the Almighty*. Among these angels are the guardian angels whom Allah *the Almighty* describes in the following verse, 'Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah's Command.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11)

This verse clearly shows us that the command is issued by Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, after they fulfil their function as guardians and watchers over mankind, and once they will have nothing more to record in man's book of deeds after the final Reckoning and rewarding of the Day of Judgment, these angels will enter upon the people of paradise carrying Allah's Bounties and Rewards. Their exclusive function is to take care of man, Allah's vicegerent on earth.

Moreover, when Allah *Glorified is He* includes a word in the Quran, – taking into consideration its illustrative and explicatory function within the Holy Scripture – it thereby carries the meaning which He intends for it. The word *salam* (peace) is a case in point. Allah *the Almighty* relates how Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the angels, who were his guests, greeted each other, saying, '…They said Peace (*salama*). Peace (*salam*), said he...' (*Hud:* 69). It would have been more fitting for him to respond by saying *salama.*

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(1) The term *khalifa* is normally translated as 'vicegerent' or 'deputy'. While this is one meaning of the term, its basic meaning is 'successor'– the Quran often talks about generations and individuals who are successors to each other.

(2) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir explains that the angels, who were commanded to prostrate before Adam, are the same angels that were sent with Satan to fight those who spread corruption throughout the earth and caused blood-shed before Adam's creation. The angels and Satan chased them to islands in the sea and over mountain cliffs. Satan was taken over by pride, and Allah Glorified is He has seen the vanity in his heart, while the angels could not. Ibn Kathir provided evidence to that with a long Hadith narrated by Ibn `Abbas and recorded by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari in his Tafsir. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 1/75.*

However, this response brings out a subtle point regarding faith. *As-salam* in this verse does not end with an open vowel, rather, it , grammatically speaking, ends with the vowel ‘u’ rather than with ‘a’; so why? This is because angels are in a permanent state of peace *(salam)* which is why Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) answer to their greeting is better than the greeting with which he was addressed. In other words, when we greet other people, we say *salama*, implying that we wish their state to be one of peace. However, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* realised that peace is a permanent state for the angels and so he used the word ‘*salamun’*. Similarly, when the angels enter upon the blessed servants of Allah *the Almighty* in Paradise, they say, ‘Peace (*salamun*)…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 24).

Grammatically speaking, *salam* is in the nominative case– *(marfu`)*– since peace is a permanent state for the believers in Heaven. Moreover, the angels greeted them in this way because they know that peace is eternal in Heaven, and unlike worldly peace, it is not susceptible to change. The peace of the people of paradise is the result of their steadfastness and perseverance in the worldly life, as Allah *Glorified is He* relates that the angels will tell the dwellers of the paradise, ‘Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 24) Steadfastness/Patience is conjugated in the past tense. This is the appropriate tense to use here, since the believers were patient in this world, and the time requiring patience ended with the lifting of human responsibility after the coming of the Hereafter.

Here, the believers dwell in the abode of heavenly reward which is why it is appropriate for the verb *sabar* (to remain steadfast) to be conjugated in the past tense. After all, they were patient in the face of adversity in this world which is the abode of duty. Moreover, they endured the pains and the divinely willed trials which afflicted them.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 24) Steadfastness is also one of the abovementioned nine virtues of the people of understanding. Steadfastness in this verse is mentioned in the past tense even though they are still residing in the world where man is responsible for his own actions. Note that the meaning is broadened to include a wider range of possibilities by virtue of the present tense, exactly as

Allah *the Almighty* says, '…those who fulfil the agreements they make in Allah's Name…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 20). This is a matter which calls for constant renewal. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and do not break their pledges…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 20); He also says, 'Who join together what Allah commands to be joined…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 21) and, '…who are in awe of their Lord and fear the harshness of the Reckoning…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 21). Thus, we see that all these verbs are conjugated in the present tense, and that the tense switches to the past in the following verse, '…And those who remained steadfast, seeking the pleasure of their Lord …' (*ar-Ra'd:* 22); so why?! He who contemplates these verses realises that all the above-mentioned qualities depend on steadfastness. It is as if steadfastness took precedence over all these actions. In fact, it underlies all the above-mentioned covenants with Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, in the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the past tense when relating the angels' conversation with the people of paradise to turn our attention to this hidden meaning.

Thus, using the verb *sabra* (to remain steadfast) in the past tense is appropriate in the context of the verse, since the angels greet them in the abode of eternity. Moreover, out of the fact that Allah is the One Who speaks here, He is shedding light on the beauty that surrounds these believers in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes this noble verse by adding, '…What an excellent reward is this home of yours!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 24)

The Arabic word *`uqbah* denotes that which follows in the wake of something. Furthermore, when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of matters related to faith and the qualities of the believers who embody spiritual virtues, He does so with the aim that the human soul longs to be among them. In doing so, the soul must shun those things which are contrary to virtue. Let us offer an example to clarify this point; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Most surely the righteous are in bliss.' (*al-Infitar:* 13) This verse is followed by mentioning the opposite fate of the wicked people, 'And most surely the wicked are in burning Fire.' (*al-Infitar:* 14)

When one assesses the fact that if the former would have been in the burning fire if not truly righteous, he recognises what a blessing Allah's guidance is, for it is owing to His guidance that they are people of faith.

Thus, we are faced with two matters: evading harm and obtaining benefit. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says of the hellfire, ‘And there is not one of you but shall come to it; this is an unavoidable Decree of your Lord.’ (*Maryam:* 71) This verse tells us that we will all see the hellfire. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘You will see it with the eye of certainty.’ (*at-Takathur:* 7)

In this way, every Muslim may know, before entering paradise, what the blessing of faith has brought about. Therefore, he will comprehend that Allah *the Almighty* has protected them from the torments of hell, and has bestowed upon them a heavenly blessing. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* fended off that which causes pain and imparted them with that which delights. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185)

Having described the people of insight with the above-mentioned qualities, Allah, then sheds light on the vices of their opposites, saying:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَنقُضُونَ عَهۡدَ ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مِيثَٰقِهِۦ وَيَقۡطَعُونَ مَآ أَمَرَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦٓ أَن
يُوصَلَ وَيُفۡسِدُونَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمُ ٱللَّعۡنَةُ وَلَهُمۡ سُوٓءُ ٱلدَّارِ ٢٥

But there will be rejection for those who break their confirmed agreements made in God’s name, who break apart what God has commanded to be joined and who spread corruption on earth: theirs is the dreadful home [25]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 25)

Someone may well ask, ‘Did these people mentioned in the verse above believe in Allah, but subsequently broke a covenant with Him after it had been confirmed?’ We contend, ‘It may be that they used to have faith in Allah *the Almighty* but then ceased to believe in Him. Another possible explanation is that this verse refers to the pre-eternal covenant that man made with Allah *the Almighty*.’

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, “Am I not your Lord?” and they replied, “Yes.”’ (*al-A’raf:* 172)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that those who break their covenant with Him after its establishment and confirmation through cosmic signs, which point to the reality of a Single Creator, are, '…breaking apart what Allah has commanded to be joined...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 25).

Their opposites are men who are endowed with insight and who join what Allah has commanded to be joined. As for these disbelievers, they break their covenant with Allah *Glorified is He* and '…spread corruption on earth…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 25). Here, we should note that Allah *the Almighty* does not contrast every sinful act carried out by the disbeliever with the good deeds of the men of insight. For example, He does not say, 'And they fear not their Lord', since the former do not believe in Allah *the Almighty* in the first place, nor does He say, 'and they fear not the harshness of the Reckoning', since they do not also believe in the Resurrection.

Thus, it becomes clear to us that every word that is mentioned in the Quran fulfils a specific function and has been placed in its appropriate location within the Revelation.

Spreading corruption on earth, as we know, is to spoil what is good on it. To clarify this point further, we say, 'You were born into a world which had been created and prepared to ensure your survival. The earth provides you with nourishment, water, oxygen and other bounties. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* has made the reproduction and survival of the human species possible through marriage between man and woman'.

The act of spreading corruption on earth is therefore to corrupt that which is good. We often repeat the following, 'If you do not know how to improve something which is already good, then leave it in its original state and recall the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge…' (*al-Isra':* 36). Therefore, you should not look to the immediate benefits of something. Rather, examine its long-term effects; do they bring about harm or benefit?

After all, long-term harm may become manifest or discernible only gradually. However, once entrenched, you cannot get rid of its insidious effects. At the end of the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…upon them shall be curse and theirs is the dreadful home.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 25)

We should note that this verse is expressed using the emphatic letter *lam* which connotes that Allah's curse yearns for them just as a master yearns for his slave: '…theirs is the dreadful home.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 25) This verse makes it clear that they will be punished in the hellfire – we seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from the hellfire! Allah says:

ٱللَّهُ يَبۡسُطُ ٱلرِّزۡقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيَقۡدِرُۚ وَفَرِحُواْ بِٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا
وَمَا ٱلۡحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنۡيَا فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ إِلَّا مَتَٰعٞ ٢٦

God gives abundantly to whoever He will, and sparingly to
whoever He will – and though they may revel in the life of
this world, it is but a fleeting comfort compared with the
Life to come[26] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 26)

The Arabic word*, al-bast* means to grant in abundance. Religious scholars have debated extensively over the meaning of *ar-rizq* (sustenance); is it only that which is within the limits of what is lawful from the viewpoint of Islam? Or is it any source of a person's wellbeing, regardless of whether that source is religiously sanctioned or not?

Some scholars said, 'Strictly speaking, *ar-rizq* is sustenance that is derived from a legitimate source'. Others yet contend, '*Ar-rizq* is any source of wellbeing – be lawful or unlawful – because if you confine the sustenance to the limits of Islamic law, then where does a disbeliever derive their sustenance from'?

Does Allah *the Almighty* not address the arrogant people saying, 'Say, "Who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth?"' (*Yunus:* 31) He also says, 'Surely Allah is the Bestower of sustenance, the Lord of Power, the Strong.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 58) Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And in the heaven is your sustenance and what you are threatened with. And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth! It is most surely the truth, just as you do speak.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 22-23)

Thus, after having granted us substance, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Do this' and 'Abstain from that'. So, when Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Allah gives abundantly to whoever He will, and sparingly to whoever He will' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26), this implies that He extends His Bounty to whoever He wills.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '…gives sparingly to whoever He wills.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26) This statement shows that Allah *the Almighty* grants sustenance according to the needs of the individual. The Arabic word *al-qadar* denotes dividing something according to a certain proportion. So, Allah *the Almighty* imparts His Bounties upon the needy person according to the latter's needs. Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded us to give alms to the poor; yet the latter generally remains in a state of poverty because he only receives what meets their basic needs.

There is another possible interpretation of *yaqdir;* it could denote that Allah *the Almighty* constrains the sustenance of someone. When He constrains the sustenance of a poor person, you should not think that this constraint is not to their benefit. After all, being granted a large sum of money may lead the latter to disobey Allah *the Almighty* and it is therefore a blessing that he remains poor.

Yet a third possible explanation is that *yaqdir* means to constrain the sustenance in a general sense, a meaning which is deduced from the saying of Allah, 'Let him who has abundance spend out of his abundance and whoever has his means of subsistence straitened to him, let him spend out of that which Allah has given him.' (*at-Talaq:* 7) Since Allah *Glorified is He* has granted the latter ample means; this means that He has willed for him to meet his needs.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *Glorified is He* continues, '…they may revel in the life of this world…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26). Naturally, those who are wealthy will rejoice in the life of this world. However, the believer looks at his wealth and says, 'This is but one of the attractions of this world, but what Allah *the Almighty* has in store for the believers is greater and everlasting'.

In contrast to the believers, the disbelievers said, 'Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Allah *the Almighty* responds to them in the following verse, saying, 'Will they distribute the mercy of your Lord? We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We have exalted some of them above others in degrees…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

When you seek to define the number of individuals who have been given an abundance of wealth, and those whose means are limited, you will not find a fixed answer. This is because the ever-changing circumstances of this world could impoverish a rich person, or they could enrich a poor one.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* has assured the allotted substance of every individual, regardless of whether he is a believer or a disbeliever, an obedient servant of Allah or a disobedient one. Each one of us who is born into this world has personally benefited from His Divine Bounties. If a person's means of sustenance are lacking, this is simply because he neither benefited from nor took advantage of his Divine allotted sustenance.

Ironically, a disbeliever may know how to obtain and benefit from their share in this world more than a believer.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Whoever desires the gain of the Hereafter, We will give him more of that again; and whoever desires— the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the Hereafter he has no portion.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

Thus, constraint in one's livelihood only exists because of what Allah *the Almighty* has willed. For example, a person may harvest his land, exerting much effort in watering and ploughing it. Suddenly, a storm or an icy wind may blow through, consuming and spoiling the crops. This deprivation is a reminder to mankind; the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has deprived this person of their harvest is a hidden blessing. This trial draws man attention to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* may take away one's sustenance so that he does not depend only on the apparent means of sustenance. Moreover, a person's sustenance may be granted in another region, and it may even take on a different form: 'Allah gives abundantly to whoever He wills, and sparingly to whoever He wills–and they revel in the life of this world...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26).

Rejoicing for one's abundant wealth is neither forbidden nor prohibited by Islamic law. However, what is proscribed is conceited happiness, like that of Qarun whose story is recorded in the Quran, 'Surely Qarun was of the people of Musa (Moses), but he rebelled against them, and We had given him of the treasures, so much so that his hordes of wealth would certainly weigh down a company of men possessed of great strength. When his people said to him: Do not exult, surely Allah does not love the exultant.' (*al-Qasas:* 76) This verse refers to the conceited exultation which Allah *the Almighty* does not love. Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, ‘Say, “In the Grace of Allah and in His Mercy— in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather.”’ (*Yunus:* 58)

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* makes mention of their happiness as well as the cause of the disbelievers’ exultation, namely; the worldly life. It is thus implied that this worldly life is a foolish reason to rejoice, since it could be taken away from them, or they could be taken away from it when death overtakes them. However, the happiness of the Hereafter is different; it is the real, everlasting happiness. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather.’ (*Yunus:* 58)

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to a comparison between the happiness of the worldly life and that of the Hereafter, saying, ‘…though they may revel in the life of this world, it is but a fleeting comfort compared with the Life to come.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 26)

A person’s *mata`* (fleeting comfort) denotes the luggage that a traveller prepares prior to a short trip. For example, a traveller may pack some clothes and personal tools into a small suitcase before embarking on his short trip.

A person of insight is one who takes into consideration the highest degree of what he can attain in this life; he may learn until attaining to the peak of knowledge, and he may travel across the earth. However, he must die. Therefore, the believer associates his actions in this world with the consequences of the Hereafter, thus attaining true bliss. The true believer strives to save his soul through Allah’s Mercy; for, being Divine, His Mercy is also eternal. Moreover, a true faithful person knows for certain that any objective that is not permanent is not a worthy one.

Therefore, the world as such is not a worthy objective for the believer, which is why the only true objective for him is to dwell in Heaven eternally, and to avoid eternal hellfire.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَوۡلَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيۡهِ ءَايَةٞ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦۚ قُلۡ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَآءُ وَيَهۡدِيٓ إِلَيۡهِ مَنۡ أَنَابَ ٢٧

The disbelievers say, ‘Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?’ [Prophet], say, ‘God leaves whoever He will to stray, and guides to Himself those who turn towards Him [27] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 27)

We know that when the Arabic word *lawla* is followed by a nominal clause, it has a function that differs from its function when it is followed by a verbal clause. For example, when we say, ‘Were it not (*lawla*) that *Zayd* was at your place, I would have visited you’. *Lawla* here signifies the precluding of something from happening because of another cause. Moreover, when we say, ‘Why do you not (*lawla*) revise your school work’, it denotes encouragement to do the act.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Why did they not (*lawla*) bring four witnesses of it? But as they have not brought witnesses they are liars before Allah.’ (*an-Nur:* 13) In this verse, *lawla* is followed by a verbal clause.

So, Allah *the Almighty* commands us to contemplate the greatest sign which was revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* namely, the Quran. By contrast, the disbelievers asked – untruthfully – for a tangible miracle after the revelation of the Quran. By doing so, they were lying and contradicting themselves. After all, they said, ‘Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Thus, they admitted that the Quran represented the supra-human summit of linguistic eloquence, and wished for this Sacred Scripture to have been revealed to one of the eminent men of the two cities – *Mecca* and *At-Ta`if.*

Moreover, it is they who said, ‘You to whom the Reminder has been revealed! You are most surely insane.’ (*al-Hijr:* 6) Thus, they once more deny the miraculous nature of the Quran even though it was revealed to challenge them in the field in which they excelled. After all, the pre-Islamic Arabs were great connoisseurs of Arabic literature, elucidating language and eloquent speech. They would also set up markets in which their poets would display their linguistic productions in the form of eloquent prose and poetry. In short, the pre-Islamic Arabs had a sharp ear for spoken language.

Here, nevertheless, they are asking for a cosmic sign such as the one which was revealed to the previous messengers. They forgot that a sign of this nature is limited to the time of its manifestation, and that only the witnesses of such miracles – or those who are informed about them from a trustworthy source – believe in them.

However, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to establish order in the lives of people until the Day of Judgment, and had Allah *the Almighty* provided him with a cosmic sign, its efficacy would have been limited to the duration of its manifestation.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* has willed for him to bring forth a miraculous sign which would remain until the Day of Judgment, not to mention that he also brought forth tangible miracles. His tangible miracles include: the gushing forth of water from between his fingers,(1) the small ration of food which fed an entire army, the cloud which followed him throughout his journey to provide him with shade, the tree trunk which moaned so that he would stand on top of it during his sermon and the lizard which approached and greeted him.(2)

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(1) *In his book, Al-Bayhaqi mentioned that Jabir ibn `Abdullah Allah be pleased with him related that this miracle occurred on the day of the Pact of Hudaybiyya. The people told Messenger Muhammad, 'We do not have any water to drink or to make our (ritual) ablutions with, except for the water that is before you. So, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him placed his hand in a container, and water gushed forth from between his fingers like springs.' See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala`il An-Nubuwwah, 4/116.*

(2) *In his book, Al-Bayhaqi narrates: '`Umar ibn Al-Khattab relates that a man from the desert told Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him "By al-Lat and al-`Uzza, I will not believe in you until this lizard believes in you by declaring faith explicitly." So, he pulled a lizard from its hiding place and set it in the hands of the Messenger of Allah, who said, "O lizard!" Thereupon the latter responded to him in a clear Arab tongue which could be heard by everyone, "At your service and I do as you wish, O master of mankind till the Day of Resurrection!"– He asked, "Who do you worship, o lizard?" The latter responded, "He Whose Throne is in the heaven, and Whose Kingdom is also in the earth, and Whose Path is laid down in the sea, and Whose Mercy is in Paradise, and Whose Punishment is in Hell." Prophet Muhammad asked, "And who am I, O lizard?" "You are the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds, and the seal of the Prophets. Successful is he who has faith in you, and miserable is he who does not believe in you." Dala`il An-Nubuwwah, 6/36.*

All these are cosmic miracles which are indubitable proofs of the truth of Prophet Muhammad’s Message for those who witness them. The same applies for the miracles of the previous messengers. Had the Quran not recounted them, we would not have believed in them. Moreover, the cosmic signs which the previous messengers came with served as a confirmation of their truthfulness in what they conveyed to their respective people.

Allah *the Almighty* has explained this to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in His saying, ‘And nothing could have hindered Us that We should send signs except that the ancients rejected them.’ (*al-Isra’:* 59) This verse clearly tells us that the previous messengers, who were sent to their respective peoples and who brought about miraculous cosmic signs, were also accused of mendacity. Likewise, the people of Messenger Muhammad said, ‘We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us).’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-92)

In another verse of the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And even if We had sent down to them the angels and the dead had spoken to them and We had brought together all things before them, they would not believe unless Allah pleases, but most of them are ignorant.’ (*al- An‘am:* 111)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that they are submerged in stubborn defiance and will not believe in Prophet Muhammad’s Message. Moreover, their challenges are weak excuses which they gave to avoid believing in Allah *the Almighty*.

In the verse in question, the disbelievers asked, ‘Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 27) Thus, they admit that Prophet Muhammad has a Lord; a point which clearly contradicts their accusations of being a sorcerer, or that he – Allah forbid – is a liar. When the revelation temporarily ceased to descend upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* they said, ‘Surely, Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him.’(1) Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* revealed the following verse, ‘Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased, and surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before. And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased [5].’ (*ad-Duha:* 3-5)

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(1) *In his exegesis, Ibn Kathir relates that Jundub ibn `Abdullah Allah be pleased with him said, ‘Jibril (Gabriel) was slow to descend with the revelation to Messenger Muhammad* =

These verses clearly assured Prophet Muhammad that the revelation of the Quran would continue. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has exposed the falsity of their claims throughout the years of Prophet Muhammad’s mission.

Here, the disbelievers insist on being presented with a miraculous cosmic sign that is tangible to and perceived by the physical senses. As we have previously pointed out, the word *aya* (miraculous sign) is used to refer to either a cosmic miracle which points to the existence of the Creator, or to a verse of the Quran which explains the Islamic teachings. However, the Quranic verses were not the type of signs that they were demanding. Finally, a miraculous sign could refer to a miracle which confirms the authenticity of the Islamic Revelation.

Their asking for various tangible miracles to be displayed before them was a proof of their rejection to the verses of the Quran. This demand proves their foolish response to the indubitable confirmations of the veracity of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. After all, the Quran itself is a miracle as well as a divine way of guidance.

As we have previously explained, miraculous phenomena typically manifest in a domain in which its witnesses excel. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* does not bring forth a miracle in the area in which they have no experience but rather in an area in which they excelled.

Thus, those who practiced sorcery(1) were challenged by a miracle from the same kind of that in which they excelled– through a divinely sent messenger.

= *peace and blessings be upon him and so the idolaters said, “Muhammad has been forsaken by his Lord”, which is why Allah the Almighty, revealed the following verse, “I swear by the early hours of the day, [2] And the night when it covers with darkness. Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased.” (ad-Duha: 1-3)’ See Ibn Kathir, Tasfir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 4/522.*

(1) What is meant here are the sorcerers of Pharaoh. Allah *the Almighty* narrates the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his confrontation with Pharaoh’s sorcerers, saying,=

In addition, those who had deep knowledge of medicine were sent a Messenger (1) who worked miracles in the field of their expertise.

In the same way, the major miracle of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was manifested in a domain in which the pagan Arabs excelled. It is no less remarkable that the Quran is at the same time a miracle and a Path to Allah *the Almighty* unlike the previous miracles displayed by the previous Prophets which were bound to time.

Despite all of this, the disbelievers of Mecca rejected the Message of Islam, and were not content with the Quran as a miracle and guidance to the straight path. Instead, they asked for a miracle which agrees with their passionate souls, and that is why they went astray. Allah *the Almighty* then says, '[Prophet] say, "Allah leaves whoever He will to stray, and guides to Himself those who turn towards Him."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 27)

This verse should be carefully reflected, since some people try to do away with human responsibility by claiming that it is Allah *the Almighty* who denies guidance to the disbelievers. We contend, 'If we carefully examine the verses of the Quran, we will find the statement in which Allah *the Almighty* says, '…Allah does not guide the unbelieving people.' (*al-Baqara:* 264) Allah *Glorified is He* also says, '…surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 51) Similarly, He says, '…and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108)

According to these verses, we fully realise that the past actions of the evildoers result in their deprivation of Allah's Guidance. By virtue of their belief in the divine message, man – who is duty-bound to Allah's Exalted

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= 'Musa (Moses) said to them, "Cast what you are going to cast." So they cast down their cords and their rods and said, "By Pharaoh's power, we shall most surely be victorious." Then Musa (Moses) cast down his staff and lo! it swallowed up the lies they told. And the magicians were thrown down prostrate; they said, "We believe in the Lord of the worlds: The Lord of Musa (Moses) and Haroun."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 44-8)

(1) This is about `*Isa* (Jesus) *peace be upon him* son of Maryam (Mary) peace be upon her. Allah *the Almighty* tells him, '…and when you determined out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the leprous by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead by My permission…' (*al-Ma'ida*: 110).

Rulings –benefits from Allah's Succour. However, a person who rejects divine foundations of these teachings is denied the assistance of Allah *the Almighty*.

As for those who turn to Allah *the Almighty* He guides them and helps them in every way. In the following verse, Allah *the Almighty* resumes His descriptions of the serenity which is granted to those who turn to Him, saying:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُم بِذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ ٱلْقُلُوبُ ﴿٢٨﴾

Those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of God – truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace[28] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 28)

The meaning of *al-itmi`nan* is the peace and serenity of the heart, as well as its satisfaction with a firm belief that is no longer questioned by the mind.

We know that man is endowed with sensorial faculties which gather data from the sensorial world. Moreover, he is endowed with a mind which absorbs, identifies, and inspects this data. Following the process of assimilation, the mind assesses whether this collected information is true or false, thereby deriving some clear facts which one keeps in this heart and adopts as a creed. In this way, the data that is collected through the senses plays a central role in developing a person's belief system because the information that has been accepted by the mind has attained to a level similar to that in which a lover is inclined to seek after his beloved.

Thus, a person's beliefs pass through many stages before their final crystallisation in the heart. Beliefs start out as a sensorial recognition, followed by mental contemplation and verification of the matter. Finally, these truths settle in the heart in the form of belief. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…whose hearts find peace…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28). The peace of heart that is mentioned in the verse above springs from certitude in one's belief. However, the heart may undergo different trials and phases which shake one's faith. We say to the person who goes through such challenges, 'You have not given the Lord His due, so you are to be blamed for any hardship that befalls you. If you had gracefully accepted what Allah *the Almighty* predestined for you in this world, you would realise that not only your shortcomings but also that what befalls you is the result of your own acts. As for trials which befall you without any fault on your part, you should know that they are due to Allah's predestination, which He decreed out of His Divine Wisdom and which you might not be aware of it. Furthermore, these trials are in your own ultimate interest'.

Therefore, accepting one's fate is to your spiritual advantage if the ego is not involved. However, it is to your disadvantage when the ego is involved.

If you were to count the benefits that result from divinely willed hardship, you would realise that they far outweigh their harms. Let us offer the example of a youth who prepares his lessons and is ready for a test, but is then unable to take the test because of an illness which suddenly befell him.

This youth tried his best, but Allah *the Almighty* has willed for this illness to befall him for a divine wisdom. Perhaps Allah's Will was to ward off the envy of the student's neighbours, or the envy of those who resent his mother or father. It may be that Allah *the Almighty* wanted to protect him from self-conceit and corruption–lest he believes that his livelihood is dependent on phenomena of this world and not on the Original Causer. Further, delaying your interests for the sake of satisfying Allah's commands can be for your own good. Thus, the human being who has faith in Allah *the Almighty* must be consciously connected to the Original Causer; he must rely only upon Him. Furthermore, he must realise that reliance upon Allah *the Almighty* implies performing outward action as well as having inward trust in the heart. After all, putting one's trust in Allah *the Almighty* pertains to the inner activity and state of the heart and not only to outward action of the body.

Let each one of us turn our attention to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* may deprive us of certain worldly objects in order to prevent us from being beguiled by them. It is in this way that your faith, and that of others, finds its equilibrium.

You may find an intelligent young man who is fully capable of grasping his field of studies. However, he does not obtain the grade point average that allows him to join the college he was hoping for. Nevertheless, he prostrates before Allah *the Almighty* in gratitude for what he has been granted, and in resignation to what He has predestined and willed. In return, Allah *the Almighty* grants him success to a different college where he flourishes, only to become one of the eminent experts of his new field.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know.' (*al-Baqara:* 216) Thus, regardless of the vicissitudes of this world, serenity will fill the hearts of those who accept the fate that Allah *the Almighty* has willed for them, and recall that they have a Lord Who is above all worldly phenomena.

In this way, the heart finds rest in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, the earthly causes lose their glamour because if they are ineffective, Allah, the Original Causer, is not.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* discusses the doubt that is cast by the disbelievers. Now when Muslims hear of these doubts, certain thoughts and questions may well rise: 'Why did Messenger Muhammad not present a miracle that is perceptible to the physical senses, just like the previous messengers? After all, had he done so, this problem would no longer exist, and the disbelievers' stubborn rejection would cease'. However, these questions do not shake the faith of the true believers whose hearts are at rest in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. That is why He says in the following verse, 'Those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28)

The Arabic word *dhikr* (remembrance) has multiple meanings. Sometimes this word denotes the Book, that is, the Quran; Allah says, 'Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its Guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9). Other times, it denotes celebrity, fame and distinction; Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you shall soon be questioned…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44). This verse tells us that revealing the Quran to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a great honour for him that will be recorded in the annals of history. Likewise, it is a mark of distinction for the Arabs that the Quranic miracle was revealed in their language.

Furthermore*, adh-dhikr* may denote recollection. Allah *the Almighty* says, '…but You made them and their fathers to enjoy until they forsook the reminder, and they were a people in perdition.' (*al-Furqan:* 18) This verse clearly shows that they forgot the calamities of the previous communities which should have served as lessons for them. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* made religion triumphant despite their opposition.

Adh-dhikr can also denote all that is revealed by Allah *the Almighty* through one of His messengers, '…so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43)

Moreover, *adh-dhikr* can refer to any good fortune that is imparted by Allah *the Almighty*. It is also used to signify the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* always; Allah says, 'Therefore remember Me, I will remember you…' (*al-Baqara:* 152). This verse implies that we should remember Allah *the Almighty* through acts of obedience, and He will remember us with His Bounties and Rewards. In short, the word *adh-dhikr* encompasses many different meanings, yet we find our rest in each one of them. For example, when *adh-dhikr* denotes the Quran, it gives rise to serenity of the heart.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O you who believe! Remember Allah, remembering frequently, and glorify Him morning and evening. He it is Who sends His blessings on you, and (so do) His angels, that He may bring you forth out of utter darkness into the light; and He is Merciful to the believers.' (*al-Ahzab:* 41-43)

Indeed, every verse of the Quran used to comfort Messenger Muhammad by affirming that he is faithfully communicating Allah's Message. Indeed, Muslims were an oppressed minority who were capable neither of self-defence nor of defending their families. In such circumstances, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

`Umar(1) *Allah be pleased with him* asked, 'What host will be routed? We are not even able to defend ourselves, and some of us have immigrated to Abyssinia out of fear of repression.'

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Kathir who ascribed in to Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of `Ikramah who said, 'When the verse, "Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs." (al-Qamar: 45) was revealed, `Umar said, "What host will be routed?" (That is, which group will be defeated?) `Umar continued, "And on the day of the Battle of Badr, I witnessed the Messenger of Allah putting on his coat of mail and saying, 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.' (al-Qamar: 45), and on that day, I understood the meaning of this verse." See Ibn Kathir, Tasfir Al-Quran Al-`Adhim, 4/266.*

After some years, however, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* set out for the Battle of Badr, and identified the places where the prominent leaders and notables of Quraysh would fall. He *peace and blessings be upon him* would say, ‘This is where so-and-so will die, and this is where so-and-so will die.’(1)

The Quran also foretold the way in which these notables, such as Al-Walid ibnul-Mughirah, will be slain; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘We will brand him on the nose.’ (*al-Qalam:* 16). After being killed, Al-Walid’s head was brought forth and it was discovered that he was indeed struck in the nose just as the Quran had prophesised.

Here, we should pose the following question, ‘How could Prophet Muhammad determine where and how these disbelievers die’? Such power only ensues from Allah *the Almighty*. It is He who informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* of the following: ‘Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.’ (*al-Qamar:* 45)

Moreover, this verse gave assurance to his *peace and blessings be upon him* followers who do not have knowledge of the unseen world, and who have no knowledge of how a disbeliever or a tyrant dies. Nevertheless, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* foretold how these disbelievers were to die even though he and his followers were in a weak position.

These fulfilled prophecies offer a definitive proof that he *peace and blessings be upon him* draws his strength from the Knower of the unseen worlds.

Therefore, Allah’s saying, ‘Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 28), means that the hearts find their rest with the Quran and the truthful information therein, which confirms that Prophet Muhammad was a faithful Messenger for his Lord, and that the Quran is not contrived by him; rather, it has been revealed by Allah *the Almighty*.

It is thus that the believers received Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accepted the authenticity of the revelation which he related.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 3/219, 258; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1779.*

For example, even before listening to the Quran, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* told him *peace and blessings be upon him* upon expressing his fears that the being who was visiting him might be a jinn, ‘You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones. By Allah, never will Allah disgrace you.’(1)

Similarly, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* is a case in point. He believed that Muhammad was a messenger sent by Allah as soon as he was told so. Thus, we find that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had good qualities, and Allah *the Almighty* had bestowed upon him exalted virtues which led everyone around him to immediately believe everything he said.

We also notice that many of those who believed in Prophet Muhammad’s Message did not attain to faith because of their attraction to the Quran, but because they believed that he would never lie to them. Moreover, his life prior to receiving the Revelation is miraculous. His pre-prophetic life led the first of his followers to believe in him.

As for the disbelievers, they were affected by the Quran, and their hearts inclined towards it.(2) However, they wished that it had been revealed to someone other than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari in seven locations of his book, and was also narrated by Muslim on the authority of `A`isha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 160.*
Tahmilu al-kall means ‘you support the weak’. It also denotes helping the poor, orphans and the needy; Tuksibu al-Ma`dum) means to recuperate the lost money. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was lucky in his trade. Taqri ad-Dayf means to feed the poor as if they were guests; and (Nawa`ib Al-Haqq) refers to misfortunes which come about sooner or later. See Al-Nawawi, Al-Minhaj, 2/561; Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 1/24.

(2) *In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Hisham relates that Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, Abu Jahl ibn Hisham and Al-Akhnas ibn Shorayq went out one night to listen to what Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was reciting while he was performing the night prayer in his house. Each of the three men hid in a corner listening to him, and neither of them was aware of others’ hiding places. They remained there listening to him throughout the night, and when dawn arose, they departed. On their way back, they crossed paths and reproached each other saying, ‘Do not return to listen to his recitation of the Quran, for if one of the fools among your people were to spot you, he would have doubts* =

When the believers found that the Quran informed them of unexplainable circumstances that they experienced, and when they witnessed the unfolding of events which were predicted in it, they gained certitude that the Quran was not a product of Prophet Muhammad, but rather than it was revealed from his Lord *Glorified is He*.

It is for this reason that when the disbelievers raised their lies to cast doubt on the veracity of Messenger Muhammad's prophethood, the Quran puts the believers' hearts at rest, so that the lies of disbelievers do not have an effect on the sincere believers.

Moreover, the believer recalls Allah *the Almighty* through the blessings which he receives in this world and takes heed of every event he experiences and of every verse revealed in Allah's Book. Having attained to true faith, the believer's heart is at rest in the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* when he recites the Quran.

Furthermore, the believers at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* remarked that the prophecies which he foretold them had gone beyond their immediate surroundings, and had stretched to the outside world of his time; his prophecies spoke of Persia in the east and of Byzantines in the west. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had foretold the victory of Rome over Persia when Allah *the Almighty* revealed the following verse: 'Alif Lam Mim. The Byzantines are vanquished. In a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome, within a few years.' (*ar-Rum:* 1-4) Show me an ingenious power in the world which can determine the result of a battle between two clashing conflicting empires, and which can specify who will be victorious. Moreover, how is it possible that such an ingenious power can determine who will be defeated after a period of time which ranges from five to nine years?

= *regarding you. Then they left. But on the second night, each of the men returned to their hiding places and they remained there listening to Prophet Muhammad until dawn. After leaving, they met once again on the road and exchanged the same words that they had the previous night…' And the same happened on the third night. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah, 2/315.*

There are also the world events which were beyond the ken of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but which were accurately expressed in the Quran.

All these proofs give peace of heart to the believers that the Quran is truthful and is revealed by Allah *the Almighty*. This fact is confirmed by the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah— truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 28)

We know that the world had been prepared to host the first human being, namely, Adam *peace be upon him*. All necessary provisions were arranged for him, and man’s life depended on Allah’s Bounties, from which we receive our livelihood and raise our standard of living according to the effort which we exert. If our actions in this world were righteous and our faith in Allah *the Almighty* was strong, we experience the loftiest form of life after death. Having depended on Allah’s granted sustenance in this world, the pious people live in the Hereafter in paradise which was created by Allah, the Establisher of all causes. So, Allah’s saying, ‘Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 28) means that the peace appeases all hearts. After all, there is a corner within the heart of each person which experiences distress. Upon invoking Allah *the Almighty* however, one will inevitably find rest and peace of heart.

The orientalists tried to give rise to a controversy over this verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 28). They asked, ‘How is it possible that the Quran alleges that the remembrance of Allah grants peace of heart when it states in another passage, “Those only are believers whose hearts become full of fear when Allah is mentioned.” (*al-Anfal:* 2)? Which of the two verses is true’? Had the orientalists examined the Quran with an accurate knowledge of Arabic, they would have realised the difference between Allah’s saying, ‘Truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 28), and His saying, ‘Those only are believers whose hearts become full of fear when Allah is mentioned.’ (*al-Anfal:* 2) The latter verse indicates that if Allah *the Almighty* was mentioned in front of men who were at that moment heedless of Him, they turn their attention to the Divine reminder with awe. Another possible interpretation is that Allah *Glorified is He* is addressing all His creatures, taking into account their instincts, emotions and individual circumstances. There is no perfect human being, and each person has a flaw, save those who were made infallible by Allah *the Almighty*.

Now when a man remembers his sinful shortcomings, he goes into a state of awe. Conversely, when he remembers Allah's Mercy, Forgiveness and accepting the repentances, he finds peace of heart.

Allah says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ طُوبَىٰ لَهُمْ وَحُسْنُ مَـَٔابٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

Those who believe and do righteous deeds: joy awaits these, and their final homecoming will be excellent [29]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 29)

The Arabic word *tuba* (joy) is derived from *tayyib*, that is, that which is agreeable. This verse shows us that the believers who do righteous deeds will receive something that is delightful in every aspect; including form, colour, taste, disposition, and the pleasure which it induces. Thus, everything that they desire will be found delightful. It is as though all delightful things are at their disposal.

Allah's saying, '…and their final homecoming will be excellent.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 29), means that the believer's final homecoming to Allah, Who created and granted them sustenance, will be excellent. He returns them to Him so that they live by Him *Glorified is He*. All of this is done through the force ensuing from the divine command: 'Be, and it is'.

After this verse, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he is a messenger among many messengers. Now every messenger who was sent to a community is endowed with the power to work a miracle that surpasses the greatest accomplishments of his community in a domain wherein they had excelled. Allah *the Almighty* had sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a miracle that was fitting for his people. After all, the pre-Islamic Arabs had excelled in articulacy, rhetoric, and oral literature. They were also renowned for reciting long poems, the most famous of which being *Al-Mu`alaqat As-sab`* (Seven Hanged Poems). They also held literary markets, such as *Suq `Ukazh* and *Dhi Al-Majaz.* That is why the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is supported with was in the same field in which his people had excelled, so that it may be an undeniable proof and an unsurpassable miracle. Moreover, had the miracle not taken the form of that which they excelled in, they would have argued, ‘We have never laboured in something like this before, and had we done so we would have surpassed your so-called miracle’.

Thus, it becomes clear to us that each messenger is sent forth with a miracle that challenges his people in their field of expertise. Moreover, the distinction of the miracle of Messenger Muhammad has been firmly established. Thus, we see that sending Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Quran – even though it did not convince the disbelievers – was in accordance with the principles of the Divine Revelation which dictated all the Revelations.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says:

كَذَٰلِكَ أَرْسَلْنَٰكَ فِيٓ أُمَّةٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهَآ أُمَمٌ لِّتَتْلُوَاْ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ وَهُمْ
يَكْفُرُونَ بِٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ۚ قُلْ هُوَ رَبِّي لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ مَتَابِ ﴿٣٠﴾

So We have sent you [Prophet] to a community – other communities passed away long before them – to recite to them what We reveal to you. Yet they disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy. Say, ‘He is my Lord: there is no god but Him. I put my trust in Him and to Him is my return’ [30]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 30)

This verse made it clear that as Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Muhammad to your community, just as Allah *Glorified is He* had designated other messengers to other previous communities. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* has not sent forth a miracle which did not correspond to what the community had excelled in, so that none of them would contend that the miracle that the messenger had displayed had taken shape in a domain that they were not accustomed to; and had they laboured in it, the messengers would not have surpassed them.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So we have sent you [Prophet] to a community–other communities passed away long before them…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 30), this means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been sent to his community just as other messengers have been sent to theirs.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* cites a Divine Name which they should have grasped its true measure, namely, *Ar-Rahman* (the Lord of Mercy). Note that Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘They disbelieve in Allah’. Rather, He says, ‘Yet they disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 30) After all, they live – despite their disbelief – by the bounties of Allah, the Lord of Mercy. All their surroundings, sustenance, and sources of pleasure are His bestowals. Despite benefiting from Allah’s bounties, they do not act in accordance with any of the divinely-ordained commands. It would have been more befitting for them to acknowledge the bounties which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon them and to believe in Him. After all, Allah's Divinity requires that we worship Him.

Now Allah *Glorified is He* mentions His Name *Ar-Rahman* (the Lord of Mercy) which indicates that He reaches out to the disbelievers with goodness and generosity. In return, they should have acknowledged these divinely bestowed bounties which were given to them, whilst they have neither might nor power. They should have contemplated these generous bestowals and declared their turning to Allah *Glorified is He* in worship. Moreover, they should have dutifully observed the demands of servitude to Him.

During the Pact of Hudaybiya, negotiations between the Muslims and the disbelievers of Quraysh took place. Despite having forbidden Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from entering Mecca, the disbelievers of Quraysh assented to signing a pact with him. By signing a treaty with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they acknowledged him and his companions as a power which engaged in give-and-take truces. That is why Abu Bakr said, ‘There was no greater victory for Islam than the victory of Hudaybiya.’

At Hudaybiya, Quraysh began to acknowledge Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his *ummah* (the followers of Islam). Moreover, they ensured an extended armistice which enabled Messenger

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions to extend their influence among the surrounding tribes of Quraysh; as expeditionary forces of the Muslim army were dispatched and accompanied by callers to Allah's religion. Accordingly, the tribes embraced Islam one after another. Thus, Hudaybiya was the greatest triumph of Islam, for Quraysh had been pacified and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers began to call the surrounding tribes of Quraysh to embrace Islam.

Yet, people did not fully grasp the greatness of the relationship between Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Lord. For servants of Allah *Glorified is He* always rush things, and Allah *Glorified is He* does not act in response to the winds of human haste. Rather, He allows for things to take their natural course, letting events unfold according to His Will.(1)

Now when the time came for the pact between Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Quraysh to be signed in Hudaybiya, 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* began to write the formula of the treaty. He wrote: 'This is what Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, has agreed to.' But Suhayl ibn `Amr dissented and said, 'Had I borne witness that you are the Messenger of Allah, I would not have fought against you. Nay, but write: 'This is what Muhammad ibn `Abdullah and Suhayl ibn `Amr have agreed to.' However, the companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* insisted that Muhammad be titled 'Messenger of Allah'. Nevertheless, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By Allah, I am truly the Messenger of Allah, even if the people of Quraysh denied me. Write Muhammad ibn `Abdullah.'(2)

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(1) *On this subject, As-Suyuti cites in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (7:509) a prophetic tradition among which is the account which Al-Bayhaqi attributed to `Urwa Allah be pleased with him. He recounts that some companions of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'By Allah, this is no victory! We have been barred from the House of Allah and our offerings had been prevented from reaching their place of sacrifice...' And so Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him answered back, 'Mistaken are your words. This is the greatest of victories, for the idolaters have consented to turn you away from their land peacefully, seeking a truce with you, and inviting you to return to the House of Allah in the future. And Allah has granted you victory over them, and He has returned you to your homes in good health, laden with booty and with Allah's reward. This is indeed the greatest of victories.'*

(2) *Cited by Ibn Hisham in his (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya) (3/317) .*

Ali ibn Abu Talib, however, insisted that Muhammad be titled ‘Messenger of Allah’. At that moment, Allah *Glorified is He* inspired His Messenger to tell Ali *Allah be pleased with him* ‘The same will be demanded of you, and you will consent.’ And so, when Ali *Allah be pleased with him* became the caliph after Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman Allah *be pleased with them* and the battle between Ali and Mu`awiya was waged, and it was followed by an agreement by both parties to sign a treaty, the scribe of the treaty’s terms wrote: ‘This is what `Ali ibn Abu Taleb, the Commander of the Faithful, has agreed to.’ But `Amr ibn Al-`As, who was the deputy of Mu`awiya, retorted: ‘Write his name and the name of his father, for he is your commander and not our commander.’ At that moment, Ali remembered what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The same will be demanded of you, and you will consent.’ And `Ali consented and said, ‘Erase ‘the Commanders of the Faithful’, and write this is what `Ali ibn Abu Taleb has agreed to.’(1) Thus, the statement of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was realised.

Among the events which deepen the faith of the listener is the story of `Ammar ibn Yasir *Allah be pleased with him* who fought among the ranks of `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* in his battle against Mu`awiya *Allah be pleased with him*. `Ammar ibn Yasir was slain by Mu`awi*ya*’s troops. Thereupon, the Muslims cried out, ‘May Allah be merciful to `Ammar. He will be killed by a rebellious aggressive group.’ This is what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had proclaimed. Thus, the Muslims understood that the unjust party was that of Mu`awiya, and many Muslims who were fighting for Mu`awiya switched to the ranks of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb. When this happened, `Amr ibn Al-`As went to Mu`awiya and said, ‘something has occurred in our army, and if it continues no one will fight on our side anymore: we have killed `Ammar ibn Yasir, and the companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* cited his saying, ‘May Allah be merciful to `Ammar. He will be killed by a rebellious aggressive group.’ Our fighters have understood that the unjust party is ours.’ Now Mu`awiya was very cunning, and he replied, ‘Go around the army and declare, ‘Nay, he who sent him out to fight is the one who killed him’; namely, `Ali. When this statement reached Ali, he retorted, ‘Who killed Hamza ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib, who was sent out to fight by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?!’

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(1) *Cited by Ibn Kathir in (Al-Bidayah wa An-Nihayah) (7:287), published by Dar Ar-Rayyan Li At-Turath, First edition,1988, The events of year 38 A.H.*

Returning to the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So We have sent you [Prophet] to a community–other communities passed away long before them...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 30). Here, it means that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent you, Muhammad, with a miracle which corresponds to what your community has excelled in. Therefore, to ask for anything else would amount to ignorance of the reality of Revelation and adopting a stubbornness which only distances them further away from faith.

Allah’s words, ‘Yet they disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy. Say, “He is my Lord...”’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 30) mean that when they declare their disbelief in Allah *Glorified is He* you, Messenger Muhammad, should confront them with a declaration of faith in Him by stating, ‘He is my Lord: there is no god but Him....’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 30) Now the word ‘my Lord’ is consistent with the Name *Ar-Rahman* (The Lord of Mercy) Who showers us with all His graces. Moreover, He nurtures me, and were He to only create, nurture, bestow me with life, and sustain me, these would have been sufficient reasons for me to worship Him alone without associating any partners with Him.

Were man to associate false deities and partners with Allah *Glorified is He,* he would turn to a certain deity, and at other times to another one or even to a third. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has wished to grant peace to man by disassociating him from this dispersion through the doctrine of His Oneness.

Moreover, the Quran was revealed to give rest to hearts and to serve as a reminder: ‘Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to Allah, though most of them don’t know.’ (*az-Zumar:* 29) Thus, the Quran sets forth two scenarios: The first scenario is one in which a man is a servant to more than one master, and these masters are all at variance with one another. The second scenario is of another man who is owned by one master. Human intellect must undoubtedly know that it is better to have a single master than to have many, for the multiplicity of masters results in corruption and ruin. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins: Allah, Lord of the Throne, is far above the things they say.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 22) Moreover, a sane person is one who only submits to a single master whom he deems to be trustworthy. In our daily lives, we say, ‘Whatever decision so-and-so makes, I am content with, for I have entrusted him with this or that’. Moreover, none of us submit to another person unless we know that he is worthy of such a trust. The latter must be sincere, strong, and capable of fulfilling his duties.

During the violent clash against the notables of Quraysh, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘In Allah have I put my trust.’ Now this is a testimony that he has relied upon the Mighty, the Trustworthy, and the Wise. Notice that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, ‘I put my trust in Him’. Rather, he said, ‘In Him have I put my trust’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 30). The difference between the two expressions is great. When you say, ‘In Allah have I put my trust’, you limit your trust to Him alone. However, if you were to say, ‘I put my trust in Him’, then you may add or include several other parties in whom you place your trust as well.

It is for this reason that we say, ‘It is You we worship.’ (*al-Fatiha:* 5) Thus, we limit worship to Him alone, thereby excluding all other objects of worship. Were the order of this expression reversed as ‘We worship you’, adding further objects of worship would have been possible. So, the expression of the verse is limiting the worship to Him. The same is true for putting trust in Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Say, “He is my Lord: there is no god but Him. I put my trust in Him and to Him is my return.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 30) In other words: I do not receive orders from anyone but Him, and my ultimate return is to Him.

Allah says:

وَلَوۡ أَنَّ قُرۡءَانٗا سُيِّرَتۡ بِهِ ٱلۡجِبَالُ أَوۡ قُطِّعَتۡ بِهِ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ أَوۡ كُلِّمَ بِهِ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰۗ بَل
لِّلَّهِ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ جَمِيعًاۗ أَفَلَمۡ يَاْيۡـَٔسِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَن لَّوۡ يَشَآءُ ٱللَّهُ لَهَدَى ٱلنَّاسَ
جَمِيعٗاۗ وَلَا يَزَالُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ تُصِيبُهُم بِمَا صَنَعُواْ قَارِعَةٌ أَوۡ تَحُلُّ قَرِيبٗا مِّن
دَارِهِمۡ حَتَّىٰ يَأۡتِيَ وَعۡدُ ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُخۡلِفُ ٱلۡمِيعَادَ ﴿٣١﴾

If there were ever to be a Quran with which mountains could be moved, the earth shattered, or the dead made to speak [it would have been this one], but everything is truly in God’s hands. Do the believers not realize that if God had so willed, He could have guided all mankind? As for the disbelievers, because of their misdeeds, disaster will not cease to afflict them or fall close to their homes until God’s promise is fulfilled: God never fails to keep His promise [31] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 31)

The Arabic word *law* (if) is a conditional particle that is followed by a conditional statement which requires a response, Here, Allah *Glorified is He* does not draw the logical conclusions of this statement, rather, He leaves the listener to do so through his discernment. Even if such a sentence construction would sound lacking when uttered by a human speaker, it is not the case when issued by Allah *Glorified is He*; this expression is perfect by virtue of the Perfection of its Speaker. As stated, Allah *Glorified is He* has left the answer to be discovered by the intelligence of the listener of the Quran who contemplates its meanings, and recalls – alongside this verse– the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Even if We had sent down to you [Prophet] a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say, “This is nothing but blatant sorcery.” (*al- An‘am:* 7) The same is true for Allah's Words, ‘Even if We sent the angels down to them, and the dead spoke to them, and We gathered all things right in front of them, they still would not believe, unless Allah so willed, but most of them are ignorant [of this].’ (*al- An‘am:* 111) To conclude: when analysed in the light of other similar verses, one can discover the answer to the conditional clause in the verse which we are examining. The meaning is as follows: If there were ever to be a Quran with which mountains could be moved, the earth shattered or the dead made to speak, they who are bent on denying the truth would still refuse to believe in it!

It is related that some of the idolaters of Quraysh, such as Abu Jahl and `Abdullah ibn Abu Umayya sat by the *Ka'ba* and sent for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. `Abdullah addressed him, 'If it would please you that we should become your followers, then make the mountains of Mecca move for us through by the Quran. Remove them so that the land of Mecca may increase, for it is a small tract of land. And cause springs to gush from it and rivers to flow through it, so that we may plant and cultivate. For you are not– as you claimed –lesser in your Lord's Eyes than Dawud (David) when He subjected the mountains to follow him and subjected the wind to us so that we carry out our affairs, and trade our goods in the Levant and return on the same day. After all, the wind was subjected to Sulaiman (Solomon), son of Dawud (David) *peace be upon them*, and you are not lesser in the Eyes of your Lord than Sulaiman (Solomon). Bring back to life the bones of your grandfather. Or whomever you wish among our dead that we may ask him, 'Is it true what you say or is it false?' After all, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* raised the dead, and you are not inferior in the Eyes of your Lord than him.' And so, Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed this verse and the one that preceded it in response to their challenges.(1)

They provided all these pretexts for cutting themselves from faith; for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has worked a miracle which manifested in a realm in which they had excelled, and the Quran was revealed to him bearing the Message of Allah until the Final Hour.

They asked for the mountains of Mecca to be removed to increase the width of the valley to farm and to cultivate. They also demanded that the earth be shattered, that is, for one piece of land to be severed from another. Such geological activities would normally happen by digging a water channel. The disbelievers also said, 'We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us.' (*al-Isra':* 90)

By *taqti` al-ard,* (severing of the earth), they mean the shortening of the distance between one region and another, allowing for the walker to rest at many stops, as the traveller covers a certain distance bit by bit until he reaches his final destination. Moreover, the length of each person's journey varies according to his strength and means of transportation. The wealthy individual prefers to cover longer distances during his travels, since he owns steeds that can travel lengthily with ease. As for a person who does not have a mount, he prefers to travel shorter distances so that he may pause for rest.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5:3655). The author stated: the meaning to the effect of what was mentioned by Az-Zubayr ibn Al-`Awwam, Mujahid, Qatada and Ad-Dahhak. See: (Asbab An-Nuzul) (p. 157, 158).*

We notice this phenomenon in our modern age: with the increase of luxury, cars are now able to travel from Cairo to Alexandria without stopping. In the past, however, cars were obliged to stop midway to allow travellers to rest. The same happened in the Kingdom of Sheba –Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…but [still] they said, "Our Lord, make our journeys further apart!" They wronged themselves...' (*Saba':* 19). In other words: they asked Allah *Glorified is He* to render the distance between one place and another far, so that the wealthy traveller may enjoy seeing the landscapes during his journey.(1)

We also notice that the idolaters of Quraysh were insistent in asking for supernatural miracles. They went so far as to ask for the dead to be raised in Allah's following words, 'or the dead made to speak' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31). Some of them asked for Qusay ibn Kilab, the great grandfather of Messenger Muhammad and of the tribe of Quraysh, to be revived. They wished to ask him, 'Are Muhammad's claims true?' But it is important to understand that the Quran was not revealed for such matters, and even if He was to satisfy their demands, they would not attain to faith.

The primary purpose of the Quran is to be the final path, suitable for all ages. This, precisely, is the miracle of the Quran.

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(1) That is because Allah *Glorified is He* has blessed them by making the villages conspicuous and the distances between them short. He, therefore, says, 'Also, We had placed, between them and the towns We had blessed, other towns within sight of one another to which they could travel easily–Travel safely in this land by night and by day.' (*Saba':* 19). But they also asked Allah *Glorified is He* to make their travel distances longer. They said: 'But [still] they said, 'Our Lord, Lord, make our journeys further apart!' They wronged themselves, in the end, We made their fate a byword, and scattered them in countless fragments. There truly are signs in this for every patient, thankful person.' (*Saba':*19).

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘but everything is truly in Allah’s hands*’* (*ar-Ra’d:* 31). The word *amr* (one matter) implies that there is but a single subject in this verse, while *jami`a* (all) means multiplicity. Thus, we realise that the multiplicity of divine messages and miracles points to the fact that all matters pertaining to these Messages are issued from Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, it is He Who has chosen the miracle that is fitting for the people to whom the Messenger is to be sent.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, ‘Do the believers not realize that if Allah had so willed, He could have guided all mankind?*’* (*ar-Ra’d:* 31) It has been said that the verb *yay`as* means ‘to know’, is an expression that is peculiar to Quraysh. In other words, this verse denotes: ‘Do believers not know that these disbelievers have not been guided because Allah *Glorified is He* has not wished for them to be guided’?

The believers wished for the notables of Quraysh to embrace Islam so as to relieve the Muslims from the pressure under which they were. This way, the disbelievers would not repress them, nor would they stifle their earnings or oppress their families.

Now Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that what is at issue is not related to the believers’ wishing for them to adopt their faith. Rather, faith is something which requires man to cleanse himself of the false beliefs that occupy his heart, and to look at things objectively. After this objective analysis of reality, the concepts which he has gained certitude of must penetrate his heart. Thus, the heart would be occupied by that which is noble so that no false creed find its way into one's heart, only to be replaced by another and so that one's heart may not abandon his faith. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah does not put two hearts within a man’s breast.*’* (*ar-Ra’d:* 31) The heart-container is exactly analogous to the physical container: it can never be filled by two different bodies. So when two bodies meet in the container, the stronger one drives out the other. Suppose, for example, that we have a container that is filled to the brim. If someone tried to place a small metal ball inside this filled container, an amount of water that is equal in volume to the metal ball will spill from the sides. This is what happens in a material container, and the same is true for the spiritual container. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Divine Hadith: ‘Love for Me and love for the world do not meet in one heart.’

Thus, we realise that there is a space for spiritual meanings just as there is one for physical objects. And if you – earnestly – seek to assimilate the correct creedal concepts within your heart, you must first drive out the contradicting concepts from that cardiac space. Afterwards, you must evaluate the extent to which these concepts are true in the light of indubitable proof. Only then must you assimilate within your heart whichever view you find to be supported by coherent reasoning and strong proof.

The disbelievers did not follow this course of action. Instead, they went on in their state of falsehood and stubbornly clung to their corrupt creed. As for the person among them who embraced Islam, he pulled his heart away from his old beliefs. He did not insist on his former creed; rather, he studied and compared the pagan beliefs with Islamic ones, and so he hurried to embrace Islam.

As for the person whose heart was filled by the former corrupt creed, and yet he seeks to assimilate the Islamic doctrine into his heart, he will fail to attain this spiritual state because his heart is taken up by the old creed.

If you, Messenger Muhammad, want them to believe, and then know that it must issue from their will power. Moreover, they must drive out the corrupt beliefs from their hearts and seek the sounder and the better of the two creeds.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us how to easily attain these realities. He tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Say [Prophet], “I advise you to do one thing only: stand before Allah, in pairs or singly, and think: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet].”’ (*Saba’:* 46) In other words, say, Prophet Muhammad, to those who deny you: ‘I offer you one counsel’. Now you do not give genuine advice to a person unless you want him to be on the right path. This fact explains the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him: he is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 128)

That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wants you all to be believers. That is why he calls you to stand before Allah *Glorified is He* and for no other eminent individual besides Him. This is because the glory of every person will be taken away no matter who that person is. You should not tell yourself, ‘Verily, I and the servants will be of equal standing’. Rather, you should stand before Allah *Glorified is He* in pairs, that is, in the company of another person. Or again: that others may stand up in pairs to discuss with their partners. During this discussion, no one should have a pre-conception, but all should focus their thoughts only on Allah *Glorified is He*.

Moreover, each of you may inquire: this is Muhammad, these are his traits, he accomplished this and that, and the Quran which he delivered says this and that etc. Upon sincere examination, each one of you will find himself guided to the Truth, either on one’s own initiative, or jointly with the person with whom one is discussing and examining the history of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Message which he brought with him.

When two people are holding a discussion, neither will fear that the other will surpass him. However, if a third person were added to this discussion, each discussant will take pride in his opinion while rejecting the other individual’s outlook. Moreover, he fears to be considered as defeated in the discussion, and does not allow himself the risk of being belittled by anyone else. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...stand before Allah, in pairs or singly, and think: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet].’ (*Saba’:* 46) Madness denotes the state mental disorder. In other words, a person who is demented and acts in a way that is not accepted by the rational mind.

Allah *Glorified is He* combines between the one's mind and his character saying, ‘Truly you have great moral character.’ (*al-Qalam:* 4) It is sometimes said, ‘So and so has a good moral character’. In other words, he possesses traits which rank him among those of the most exalted and noble virtues. Such virtues include truthfulness and trustworthiness, and they are determined by mental deliberation. Clearly, it is the intelligence which determines whether sternness, gentleness, or wisdom, for example, should be employed in a particular situation. All these matters are determined by the mind.

Now an exalted moral conduct does not have roots in a mad man because the latter cannot make a wise choice in the face of multiple options. That is why he is held accountable neither by us nor by Allah *Glorified is He*.

And when Allah *Glorified is He* commands them to inquire as to whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* suffers from mental disorder, He knows in advance that they admit that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is endowed with a perfect nature. By way of proof, it is sufficient to mention that they used to entrust him with their most important possessions. Another confirmation of the exalted nature Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is that the various tribes accepted him as an arbiter when they quarrelled over how to rebuild the *Ka'ba*.(1)

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Noon; By the pen and all they write! Your Lord's grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman.' (*al-Qalam:* 1-2) Thus, we realise that the disbeliever was not going to attain to faith and that Allah would not have guided them because they were not in the least prepared to receive guidance. It is as if – Allah forbid – they were obsessed with disbelief, and Allah *Glorified is He* has sealed their hearts and they had their disbelief increased. And so the disbelief in these hearts will never get out nor will the external light of faith enter them.

Now some of the Muslims thought that the disbelievers' rejection of the Message of Islam would take its toll on the believers because their oppression of the Muslims would grow stronger. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear to the people of faith that His victory is imminent when He says, 'As for the disbelievers, because of their misdeeds, disaster will not cease to afflict them or fall close to their homes until Allah's promise is fulfilled:

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(1) *At the time, Prophet Messenger peace and blessings be upon him was thirty-five years of age. That is, this incident occurred five years prior to the beginning of his Prophethood. The tribes of Quraysh argued among themselves over who would have the honour of placing the sacred black stone in its place. They were even on the verge of drawing arms, when they gathered in the Sacred House to discuss. Abu Umayya ibn Al-Mughira told them to nominate as a judge the first person to walk through the gate of Bani Shayba. And surely enough it was, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him who walked through this gate. When they saw him, they exclaimed, 'This is the trustworthy one. What a joy! This is Muhammad!' And so he said, 'Fetch me a piece of cloth.' When he was brought one, he placed the stone on the cloth, and said, 'Let each tribe hold a corner of the cloth, and raise it together.' And so they did, and when they reached the recess for the rock, he positioned it with his own hands. Then the construction was built around it. See (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya) by Ibn Hisham (1:196, 197).*

Allah never fails to keep His promise.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31) In other words: be at peace, believers, for the state of the disbelievers will not carry on much longer. On the contrary, disasters will afflict them in their own homes, and they will witness with their own eyes how faith will spread into their strongholds. The realm of faith will expand, the territory of the disbelievers will shrink, and Allah's victory will then take place. Surely enough, the victory of Allah *Glorified is He* took place, and only those who proclaimed, 'There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', remained on the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, this verse predicted the advent of hope after despair so that the latter would not overwhelm the psychological states of the Muslims. Allah *Glorified is He* has also answered the prayer of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he called upon Him saying, 'O Allah, cause them a famine like that (which broke out at the time) of Yusuf (Joseph).'(1) And so, the notables of the disbelievers were slain one after the other, but their opposition towards the Muslims continued. This hostility grew to the extent that the daughters of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were married to the sons of Abu Lahab. But when Prophet Muhammad declared his prophethood, Abu Lahab and his wife said, 'Our sons must divorce the daughters of Muhammad.' When the first son divorced the daughter of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he prayed to Allah *Glorified is He* saying: 'As for me, I ask Allah to set His dogs upon him.'(2) At this juncture, Abu Lahab, the disbeliever, said, 'Muhammad's prayer against my son occupies my mind and troubles me, and I fear sending him on a trip to the Levant, lest Muhammad's prayer come true.'

It would have been suitable for him not to worry. And so the time for his trip to the Levant came, and Abu Lahab departed with his sons. And when it came time for sleep, Abu Lahab ordered men to stay up guarding over his son. It is as if the men around him were like the Bar Lev Line that was built by Israel on the Suez Canal to muffle the cry of victory that was carried by the exclamation: ‘Allah is the Greatest!’ And when it dawned, they discovered that a monster had torn the son of Abu Lahab to pieces. People said that Abu Lahab feared the prayer of Muhammad, and despite this, it was realized. One person said, ‘But Muhammad prayed that a dog would tear him to pieces. He prayed, ‘May you have one of the dogs of Allah devour you’; and he did not say, ‘you will be devoured by a lion’. But the one who overheard him retorted, ‘If one dog were attributed to Allah, does it mean that it is a ‘dog’ in the sense that we are familiar with? What is attributed to Allah must be a huge beast.’

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

(2) *Cited in full by Al-Bayhaqi in (Dala`il An-Nubuwwa) (2:338,) and related by Al-Haythami in (Majma` Az-Zawa`id) (6:19) and attributed to At-Tabarani who said, 'It is related by Zuhayr ibn Al-`Alaa', and cited by Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (2/539.) and authenticated it from a Hadith narrated by Abu `Aqrab. This Hadith was deemed good Hadith by Ibn Hajar in (Al-Fath) (4:39).*

Thus, a calamity has befallen the man who stubbornly clung to disbelief, and Allah's following words came true, ‘As for the disbelievers, because of their misdeeds, disaster will not cease to afflict them or fall close to their homes...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 31). Indeed, they were deeply sunken in their disbelief and opposition to Islam. Therefore, a disaster afflicted them. Note that *al-qar`a* is that which knocks fiercely upon the door of someone peacefully resting in his house. It is from *al-qar`a* that *qara` al-bab* (to pound on a door) is derived. Moreover, there is a difference between knocking on the door and pounding on it.

Allah’s words, ‘...or fall close to their homes...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 31), are clarified by the Treaty of Hudaybiya which was Allah’s good news for the Muslims: the disbelievers were now obliged to negotiate with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he began to send envoys to the surrounding regions of Mecca. Soon, the tribes presented themselves in crowds before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to declare their belief in Islam. The news that the continuing spread of Islam reached Quraysh, only to be followed by the catastrophic news of the entry of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* into Mecca. Finally, Allah's promise that the disbelievers of Quraysh themselves would enter the fold of Islam was fulfilled.

Or Allah's promise in his words: ‘...until Allah’s promise is fulfilled...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 31), signifies the advent of the Day of Resurrection on which Allah’s promise to punish the disbelievers with what they deserve will come true.

These last words are a source of comfort for those whom Allah *Glorified is He* addresses in the beginning of the verse saying, ‘...Do the believers not realise?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 31) Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* does not break His promise so He concludes this verse by saying, ‘Allah never fails to keep His promise.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 31) We know that the word *wa`id* (promise), generally refers to a latent good, while *wa`id* (threat) often connotes an evil that will take place.

A poet once said:

And when I give my word to cause him hardship or promise him something good,

I certainly fulfil my word and break my promise!

Thus, the threat always denotes something evil, while the promise refers to something that is good. Nevertheless, some Arabs use the two words interchangeably. Or again, we could say that the believers understand this verse to mean that Allah *Glorified is He* will grant them victory through the calamity which will befall the disbelievers. This calamity might also alight around their homes. Through this promise, Allah *Glorified is He* encourages the believers to be more patient while at the same time conveying ominous tidings to the disbelievers.

Allah’s words, ‘Allah never fails to keep His promise.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 31), is a Quranic fact that will certainly be realised, regardless of the age or epoch, on the condition that Muslims adhere to the stipulations of their faith. This matter differs from the auspicious or dreadful promises made by man. After all, an individual can either make a promise, or threaten someone else, but the vicissitudes of life, and its ups and downs may prevent him from fulfilling his promise or carrying out his threat. On the contrary, a promise made by Allah *Glorified is He* is different, since His promise is an absolute one. This is precisely the meaning of, ‘Allah never fails to keep His promise.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 31).

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدِ ٱسۡتُهۡزِئَ بِرُسُلٖ مِّن قَبۡلِكَ فَأَمۡلَيۡتُ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ثُمَّ أَخَذۡتُهُمۡۖ فَكَيۡفَ كَانَ عِقَابِ ٣٢

Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked,
but I granted respite to the disbelievers: in the end, I took
them to task – how terrible My punishment was! [32]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 32)

One can say, ‘He derided so-and-so’. As for, ‘He mocked so-and-so’, this denotes that someone asked someone else to deride a certain person. This individual bears not only his sins, but also those of the person who asked him to disparage a certain person.

Allah's words, 'Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 32) mean that it is not something new that some disbelievers adopt such attitude towards you. Consider for example Al-Hakam ibn Abu Al-`As, the father of Marawan,(1) who used to mock the gait of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who used to walk as if he were descending from a high place,(2) with his eyes always pointed to the ground. People were unaccustomed to this humble bearing, for they would saunter about arrogantly displaying their physique.

Once, when Al-Hakam imitated Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the latter perceived him through the eye of the insight and He said, 'Remain as such.'(3) As of that day, Al-Hakam's gait became disfigured while that of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* continued to reflect his serenity in Allah *Glorified is He* and personal humility.

Moreover, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* banished Al-Hakam to At-Ta`if where he herded goats.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did waive this punishment; neither did Abu Bakr(4) nor `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah *be pleased with them* during their caliphate. However, `Uthman ibn `Affan pardoned him, for he was one of his relatives.(1)

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(1) He embraced Islam on the day Mecca was conquered, and he lived in Medina. He was banished by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to At-Ta`if but was brought back to Medina during the Caliphate of `Uthman. He died on the 32 nd year after the *Hijra*. (*al-Isaba fi tamyiz as-Sahaba* 2: 28, 29).

(2) It is narrated that 'Ali said, 'When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* walked, it appeared that he was descending from a high place.' Ali says, 'I did not see anyone like him *neither before him, nor after him.' [Narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/96, 116) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3637) who deemed this Hadith to be good and sound].*

(3) *Consult (al-Isaba fi tamyiz As-Sahaba) (2:28, 29). Al-`Asqalani related the Hadith of `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr who said, 'Al-Hakm ibn Abu Al-`As would sit near the Prophet, and when the latter spoke Al-Hakam would make a mocking gesture, and when the Prophet noticed him he said, 'remain as such.' And thus, he remained until his death.' Al-`Asqalani said: 'the chain of transmission is open to debate.'*

(4) *At-Tabarani relates in a Hadith of Hudhayfa: 'When Abu Bakr assumed political leadership, he was asked to permit Al-Hakam to return to Medina. The latter replied: 'I am not one to undo a knot that was tied by the Messenger of Allah.' Cited by Ibn Hajar Al-`Asqalani in (Al-Isaba) (2:28).*

`Uthman ibn `Affan swore, 'By Allah, I asked permission from Messenger Muhammad to pardon him, and he responded: 'if one day you have the power to pardon him, then do so.' So when I became ruler over the Muslims, I pardoned him.

Years later, `Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan assumed leadership of the Muslims, and he had a son, Al-Walid, whose horses would compete against those of Yazid ibn Mu`awiya's sons. One day, the sons of Yazid tried to win this competition by cheating, so they placed an object which hindered the horse of Al-Walid.

Soon, a quarrel broke out among the two parties, and Al-Walid insulted the sons of Yazid. Thereupon, the sons of Yazid went to `Abd Al-Malik to complain about his son's offenses. However, the speaker who was complaining often made grammatical errors when speaking in Arabic. `Abd Al-Malik said to him, 'Why does your tongue not articulate correctly?' The complainer replied sarcastically: 'By Allah, I am fond of the eloquence of Al-Walid.' By this he meant that the tongue of the son of 'Abd Al-Malik is no less articulate than that of the plaintiff, for both spoke falteringly and often made grammatical mistakes.

`Abd Al-Malik retorted, 'Do you dare insult me by mocking my son 'Abdullah who cannot speak without making grammatical mistakes? Lo! His brother Khalid is articulate.' He continued, 'Be silent, for you were not part of the caravan or of the troop!'

This is an expression – that we continue to use – which was passed down to us through the tribe of Quraysh, for it was governed by two sources of power: firstly, the caravans which refer to the trades carried out through the caravans which were coming from the Levant and were led by Abu Sufyan. Secondly, the troop which refers to the group of people who set out to save Abu Sufyan at Badr, and who were led by `Utba. So the son of Yazid said, 'And who has more right to claim the caravan and troop than me?' By this he meant that he was the grandson of Abu Sufyan through his father, and of `Utba from his mother.

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(1) *In (Al-Isaba) (2:28), Ibn Hajar related that he was the uncle of `Uthman ibn `Affan.*

Then he added, ‘But perhaps you had better speak about the disgraces, the little flocks of goats and At-Ta’if. May Allah have mercy upon `Uthman who exonerated your grandfather and brought him back from exile.’

Moreover, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* has told Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘We are enough for you against all those who ridicule your message.’ (*al-Hijr:* 95) It is as if a divine punishment befell any person who derides Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked, but I granted respite to the disbelievers: in the end, I took them to task—how terrible My Punishment was!’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 32)

For you, Messenger Muhammad, are not the first one to be sent with a message and you have an exemplary model in the messengers sent before you. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* promises you: ‘...but I granted respite to the disbelievers...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 32). In other words: Allah *Glorified is He* has given rein to the disbelievers. Let it be stressed that what is meant here is not that sins of the disbelievers are left unpunished; rather, what is meant is that the punishment is put off to a later time so that they commit more sins. For example, you may overlook a person’s transgressions two or three times, but then you punish him at an unexpected moment.

If such types of reprisals occur among human beings, what are we to say of the boundless power of Allah *Glorified is He* Who says, ‘But We lead on those who reject Our messages, step by step, without them realising it’ (*al-A’raf:* 182). Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘The disbelievers should not think that it is better for them that We give them more time: when We give them more time they become more sinful— a shameful torment awaits them.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 178) This is precisely analogous to someone who sets a trap for his enemy into which to fall. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Many messengers before you [Muhammad] were mocked, but I granted respite to the disbelievers: in the end, I took them to task—how terrible my punishment was!’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 32) The expression ‘How terrible my punishment was!’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 32) puts in plain words that it is a tremendous retribution; that is why Allah *Glorified is He* elsewhere in the Quran says: ‘The wicked used to laugh at the believers —

they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own people, and say, when they saw them, “These people are misguided,” though they were not sent to be their keepers –so today the Believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36) Thus, those who mock the messengers will be severely punished.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَمَنۡ هُوَ قَآئِمٌ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ نَفۡسِۭ بِمَا كَسَبَتۡۗ وَجَعَلُواْ لِلَّهِ شُرَكَآءَ قُلۡ سَمُّوهُمۡۚ أَمۡ تُنَبِّـُٔونَهُۥ
بِمَا لَا يَعۡلَمُ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ أَم بِظَٰهِرٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡقَوۡلِۗ بَلۡ زُيِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مَكۡرُهُمۡ
وَصُدُّواْ عَنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِۗ وَمَن يُضۡلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِنۡ هَادٖ ٣٣

Is He who stands over every soul marking its action [in need of any partner]? Yet they ascribe partners to God. Say, ‘Name them,’ or, ‘Can you tell Him about something on the earth He does not know to exist, or is this just a display of words?’ But the things they devise are made alluring to the disbelievers and they are barred from the [right] path: no one can guide those God leaves to stray [33] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 33)

Someone might ask, ‘Since Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Is He who stands over every soul marking its action...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 33) should He not cite the opposing possibility, namely, is He like he who does not stand over every soul marking its action’?

We answer this inquirer as follows: one of the glories of the Quran is that it gives space, when possible, for the mind to infer meanings according to its own capacity.

Thus, He puts forth statements which call for reflection, deduction, and research, so that man may be conscious of the fact that he is in the presence of the words of his Wise Lord. That is why 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* says, ‘Plumb the depths of the Quran.’ Or again: examine it closely so as to extract its inner treasures.

We know that the expression ‘to stand for something’ implies that Allah *Glorified is He* has authority and control over all things, and that He is aware of all concealed objects. Note that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the imagery of ‘standing’ in this expression, so that we know that He does not passively manage the affairs. Rather, we insist, He watches over things actively, and for Him all things are clear rather than hidden. Moreover, He stands over every soul marking its action, whether it be good or bad. However, you idolaters can neither cause harm nor benefit to your own souls without Allah’s permission. Thus, could a sane person possibly equate He Who watches over every soul with any existent that does not?

Despite the arguments that we have put forth, there are those that are described by Allah *Glorified is He* in this verse above as, ‘Yet they ascribe partners to Allah.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 33) In other words: they have associated partners – who do not even have control over themselves, and therefore do not have any authority over others – unto He Who stands for every soul. Moreover, one of these idols may even crack, and its worshippers exclaim that their deity has fissured and needs nails to be fixed! So how could they possibly equate this idol with Allah *Glorified is He* the Infinite, Whose Power is unlimited?

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Yet they ascribe partners to Allah.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 33), this proves that the implicit text of this verse goes as follows: ‘Is He equal to the one who does not stand over every soul’? Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is unlike these impotent idols, for He oversees every soul: yours, that of others and of every human who has lived or will come to be.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* follows this sentence by stating: ‘Say, “Name them,” or, “Can you tell Him about something on the earth He does not know to exist, or is this just a display of words?”’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 33) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask those who disbelieve in Allah, ‘Cite the names of those whom you worship aside from Allah’. These deities are mere rocks, and rocks do not have any specific names. However, they have given names, such as Al-Lat, Al-`Uzza and Hubal to their deities; names which do not add any power unto these idols. After all, these rocks have no power whatsoever. And had they named the idols themselves, they would have attributed them to `Amr ibn

Luhay who brought them to Quraysh in the first place.(1) However, the names were given to these idols when they were carved.

A true deity is not named by anyone save Himself. However, since the idol worshipers are clearly lying, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asks them to name their deities. He asks them, 'Will you inform Allah, the Creator of universe, of something which He is unaware of in His universe, which He has created from nothing'?

Allah *Glorified is He* knows everything that He has created, whereas you worship mere idols whose names are just a display of words. That is, the names of your idols are meaningless, for they gave names to things which had neither inner reality nor power. The idol worshipers are content with mere exterior objects, while the named is non-existent.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But the things they devise are made alluring to the disbelievers and they are barred from the [right] Path.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 33) In other words, they thought that they were deceiving Allah *Glorified is He* and they claimed that their idols were deities. However, the statues were far from being so.

Allah *Glorified is He* then states, 'No one can guide those Allah leaves to stray.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 33) In other words, the punishment which they suffer from in this worldly life is a means of protecting society from corruption. Moreover, they must be punished in this world, for he whose punishment is delayed until the Hereafter necessarily experiences a foretaste of the punishment which will befall him in the Hereafter. Thus, the punishment of this world serves to protect the movement of this life. This explains the laws set to be applied to wrongdoers. Additionally, those who commit criminal acts are afraid of being witnessed in action. If someone were to spot the criminal in action, he would report him to the police. By this way, the wrongdoer is punished for his crime. Accordingly, justice is maintained in this life.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham said in (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya) (1/77): 'Some erudite men related to me that `Amr Ibn Luhay left Mecca for the Levant to carry out some of his affairs. There, he saw the `Amaleeq worshiping idols and asked them, "What are these idols that I see you worshiping?" They responded, "These are idols which we worship. We pray to them for rain and so we receive rain, and we pray to them for victory and we are granted victory." He said, "Will you offer me one of them that I may bring it to the land of the Arabs so that they may worship it?" So they gave him a statue called Hubal, which he brought to Mecca where he erected it and ordered the people to worship it and glorify it.'*

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter *of al-Kahf,* '[Prophet], they ask you about Dhu Al Qarnayn. Say, "I will tell you something about him." We established his power in the land, and gave him the means to achieve everything. He travelled on a certain road; then, when he came to the setting of the sun, he found it [seemed to be] setting into a muddy spring. Nearby he found some people and we said, "Dhu Al-Qarnayn, you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to." He answered, "We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their Lord He will punish them [even more] severely."' (*al-Kahf:* 83-87) In other words, he has been entrusted to rule over these people, and he exercised his authority on the basis of reward and punishment. He who did good deeds will receive a goodly recompense, while he who misbehaves will be castigated. Thus, we understand that worldly punishment is necessary for maintaining a balance in life and for protecting society from the oppression of those who do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is why Allah says:

لَّهُمْ عَذَابٌ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ أَشَقُّ ۖ وَمَا لَهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَاقٍ ﴿٣٤﴾

There is a punishment for them in this world, but the punishment of the Hereafter will be harder – no one will defend them against God [34] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 34)

These idolaters who do not believe in the Hereafter are punished in the life of this world by killing, captivity, calamities and overwhelming disasters. Moreover, their punishment in the Hereafter is even more severe than that of this world. This is because they have no one to protect them or to stand between them and Allah's punishment.

In contrast to the fate of the disbelievers, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّثَلُ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ ٱلَّتِي وُعِدَ ٱلۡمُتَّقُونَۖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُۖ أُكُلُهَا دَآئِمٞ
وَظِلُّهَاۚ تِلۡكَ عُقۡبَى ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَواْۖ وَّعُقۡبَى ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ٱلنَّارُ ٣٥

Here is a picture of the Garden that those mindful of God have been promised: flowing streams and perpetual food and shade. This is the reward that awaits those who are mindful of God; the disbelievers' reward is the Fire [35]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 35)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* is the primary source Who promises those who are mindful of Him to be rewarded with the paradise. Moreover, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related this promise which in turn was passed on by the religious scholars who convey the teachings of the messengers.

Now when you notice that an action is performed by many doers, you can search for the primary one. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah takes the souls of the dead...' (*az-Zumar:* 42). In a different verse of the Quran, He says, 'Say, "The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you..."' (*as-Sajda:* 11). Thus the act of taking the souls is ultimately attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* and to the Angel of Death. Specifically, the task of taking lives has been assigned to the Angel of Death by Allah *Glorified is He*. So, attributing this task to the former clearly demonstrates to whom Allah *Glorified is He* has assigned this task.

In certain instances, Allah *Glorified is He* specifies the original source of the command ordering the angel to perform his function of taking life.

In this noble verse, we note that Allah *Glorified is He* states, '...those mindful of Allah have been promised...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). This clause is in the passive voice in which the subject is not mentioned. Now we know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also made promises. Consider, for instance, the account of the allegiance of *Al-`Aqaba* when he accepted the allegiance of *Al-`Ansar*. They told him, 'Claim whatever you wish for yourself,' and so he made his claims. Then they asked, 'And what do we have in return for this?' He replied, 'You shall have Paradise as a reward'(1)

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(1) *[Narrated by Ahmad]*

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made this promise because he knew well that the action that they performed could only be adequately recompensed by paradise. It was conceivable that anyone present at *Al-`Aqaba* was putting his life at risk after pledging allegiance to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Had he assured them a worldly pleasure, to be allotted in the future, the one destined to die before the realization of the recompense must benefit in some way from his promise. That is why he promised them to be rewarded with that which never runs out: Paradise. In the verse which we are examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Here is a picture of the Garden...’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 35). In other words, He is only drawing a parable because the expressions that we use to communicate correspond to certain meanings that we know beforehand. However, if there are bounties in the Paradise which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has perceived, we do not have any words to express these bounties. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* draws parables, making use of worldly pleasures that we perceive, while excluding the irritating or repelling factors from these pleasures.(1)

Thus, we know that there is a distinction between ‘the parable of Paradise’ and ‘Paradise’. A parable is that which provides me with a description of a reality that I do not grasp. One might define drawing a parable as the act of describing an unknown entity with one that is known so as to attain an adequate conceptualization of the former. For example, when you tell a friend, ‘Do you know so-and-so’? ‘No’, responds the friend. So you say, ‘He is similar to so-and-so that you know’. You use parables to point out similitude between an unknown and a known entity, thus bringing an image to the mind of the listener.

Messenger, Muhammad explained the following Quranic verse, ‘… [in the Paradise] all that their souls desire and their eyes delight in.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 71) He added, ‘Therein there are bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has perceived.'(1) Upon contemplation of these noble prophetic words, you will realise that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentions the pleasures in an elevating order. The clause 'That which no ear has heard' was inserted, because he knows well that images perceived by the eye are limited in comparison to the sounds perceived by the ear. After all, the ear detects that which the eye does not perceive. It hears that which others see in addition to what you see. To explain further, the ear hears the close and distant phenomena, conveying their sounds and discerning between their various sources. However, the eye is more limited than the ear because of the distance of its perception is proportional to the power of one's eyesight. In sum, the blessings of the paradise surpass all the above.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure...’ (*Muhammad*: 15). In another verse, He says, ‘A drink will be passed round among them from a flowing spring: white, delicious to those who taste it, causing no headiness or intoxication.’ (*as-Saffat*: 45-47)

Finally, the loftiest manner in describing paradise comes through his words, 'And what no human heart has perceived.' The word 'thoughts' encompasses more than what the ear and eye can perceive. Indeed, the thoughts can be things which do not exist in reality. Thus, we apprehend the incapacity of language to express the delights of paradise. No one of us has directly witnessed the blessings of paradise. Therefore, as long as none of us has seen paradise, and as long as Prophet Muhammad said, 'Therein lie bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has perceived', then we must be aware of the limitations of language in expressing the wonders of paradise. When Allah *Glorified is He* wants to describe such things, he employs parables rather than direct descriptions. This is because He knows that our language expresses things of this world and lacks the words to depict the pleasures of paradise. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure...' (*Muhammad:* 15).

Although Allah *Glorified is He* presents an example, He clears it of all earthly impurities we know. Flowing water, for example, is generally fresh and pure, but when it stills, it quickly alters and degenerates. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that waters of Heaven never alter and that the paradisiacal rivers are free from all corrupting agents. Similarly, the taste of the rivers of milk never changes. Milk, as we know is the staple of Bedouins. They milk their cattle and store its yield in canteens for long periods. This causes the taste of their milk to change. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* presents the example of rivers of milk whose taste never alters.

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(1) *[Narrated by Muslim]*

The parable of purified honey is also noted in this verse. Honey, as we know, was originally produced by bees dwelling in mountains before being cultivated in bee farms. Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'And your Lord revealed to the bee saying: "Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build"' (*an-Nahl:* 68). When entomologists studied the early developmental stages of bees, they found that bees dwelling in mountain caves first made honey. Bees after being acclimatized and kept in beehives and apiaries then produced honey. Moreover, the entomologists identified the type of honey by burning the different types and the carbon released identified the dating of each type of honey. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there are rivers of purified honey in paradise and thereby, offers us the best of honey without its undesirable elements.

Moreover, Allah asserts that there are rivers of wine. However, heavenly wine differs from that of this world, as it does not affect the lucidity of the mind. The wine of this world is not tasteful to those who drink as it contains alcohol that stings and burns the mouth. That is why you notice that those who drink it swallow it quickly not to feel its sting in their mouths and to let it travel directly to the stomach causing irritation. Unlike beverages such as mango, orange or sugarcane juice, which the soul finds them tasteful and those who drink them do so slowly to enjoy its taste in their mouths. Allah *Glorified is He* states that wine rivers of Paradise have no bad effects (*as-Saffat:* 47). This means that Allah took all the offensive elements which are found in the worldly wine.

Therefore, when you hear the description of paradise, know that it is merely an approximate depiction since it is impossible to portray the delights of Paradise, as we have no words that can express it. It is completely unknown to us. Allah only addresses us using words that we know, thereby, He gives us some examples to get an approximate idea of paradise.

Speaking about the rivers of paradise, we know that water was the lifeblood of Arabs during the time of revelation of the Quran. Did they not ask the Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* to make rivers gush forth aplenty (*Maryam:* 90-91)? We find that Allah *Glorified is He* uses to different expressions regarding the rivers of Paradise in the Quran. The first expression is *tajri min tahtihal anhar* which is cited in the verse we are studying (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). In a different expression, Allah says, *tajri tahtahal anhar* without using the preposition *min*. The difference between these two phrases implies the abundance and perfection of water in Paradise. This means that the expression *tajri min tahtihal anhar* clarifies that the sources of these rivers are directly below Paradise and so the waters never dry up.

It is said that the difference between the rivers of this world and those of Paradise is that those existed on earth flow in furrows with banks preventing the ordinary rivers from overflowing. In contrast, rivers of Heaven flow freely without banks preventing them from overflowing. In addition, you find flowing rivers of wine running on the surface of Paradise without being mixed with the flowing rivers of water or milk. All these marvels are the creation of Allah, the Wise and fully Capable.

As for the second expression which is *tajri tahtahal anhar,* it means that their sources are not directly situated underneath; rather, they gush forth in abundance from a place that is unknown to you. After all, Allah is Capable of everything.

Allah goes on His description of the Garden saying that its fruits are perpetual. The Arabic word *al-ukul* which is translated as fruits, literally refers to that which is eatable. Allah says, ‘Yielding its fruit in every season by the permission of its Lord.’ (*Ibrahim:* 25) In other words, Heaven never runs out of food. We know that man eats with an eye to satisfying his hunger. Once satisfied, he might demand for the food that is in front of him to be taken away until, once more, he feels hungry again. Those who love eating might comment saying that they feel a bit angry because they got full. Such people are fighting between a craving ego and an unquenchable stomach. It is as though they wish to consume food without ceasing.

When Allah *Glorified is He* proclaims that the fruits therein are everlasting, it caught the attention of the Byzantines who were rulers of a great empire that was brought to its feet by the nascent Islamic civilization. The Byzantine emperor sent an envoy asking for a representative of Islam who could explain the verse where Allah says its food is perpetual (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). A Muslim scholar was sent to the inquiring Byzantines and was asked, 'Your Quran claims that the fruits of Paradise will be everlasting, while we both, the Muslims and the Byzantines, know that when you take something from any mass, it must decrease in quantity. How is the fruit of Paradise everlasting?' The scholar responded, 'Fetch me a lamp.' They fetched him a lamp, which he lit in front of them and asked each of them to bring his lamp. When they did, the scholar ordered each to light their lamps using the flame from the first lamp. At this point, he asked them, 'Did the act of lighting your lamps attenuate my flame?' They responded negatively. 'Thus, Allah presents the example of the everlasting fruits of Paradise,' responded the scholar. Obviously, they should have realised that the lamp's flame draws its strength from the oil stored therein. Thus, the lamp is sustained by the oil, whereas Paradise is sustained by Allah.

Once, someone asked if we defecate in paradise. Another scholar responded, 'No, we do not.' The inquirer continued, 'so what happens to the remnants of the food that we eat in Paradise?' The scholar said, 'the remnants of paradisiacal food are similar to the remnants of the nutrients that are consumed by a baby in its mother's womb, which are burned in the placenta. A baby is in the womb of its mother is constantly growing depending on nutrients from the mother which are transferred through the umbilical cord.

All these analogies are mere approximate reflections of paradise. They help us close the gap between what we know in our daily lives and that which Allah has prepared for those who are conscious of Him. Indeed, He is the Sustainer of all things. Now, Allah goes on saying that the shade of Paradise is perpetuating as well (*ar-Ra'd:* 35). This means that food and shade are both available and everlasting. To shade is to keep a source of light from reaching a place or to hide a place from direct contact with the source of light. Clearly, no one knows whether there will be a sun in Paradise or not since the human mind is incapable of imagining such a heavenly sphere. After all, it is one of the creations of Allah and He is the Capable of everything.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'As for those who disbelieve in Our communications, We shall make them enter fire; so oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement; surely Allah is Mighty, Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 57) Moreover, Allah says, 'And extended shade' (*al-Waqi'a:* 30).

Allah goes on saying, this is the requital of those who guarded [against evil], and the requital of the unbelievers is the fire.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35) This calls for those who fear Allah, shelter themselves from the Divine Attributes of Majesty, do not come close to the things, which Allah has proscribed and you follow His Path. You will find that Allah will recompense you with His Attributes of Divine Perfection and Beauty by giving you abode into the Garden, which He had promised you. Thus, if you find that your religious duties are taxing, know that the reward of your efforts is a most beautiful one. You believed your Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said, 'Paradise is surrounded by hardships and the Hell-Fire is surrounded by temptations.'(1)

Rational people, on seeing a religious duty limiting their freedom, bear in mind the reward of their efforts. Similarly, when they notice something that appears, at first glance, to be an urgent desire, they bear in mind the punishment that such a passionate desire will provoke and stay clear from it. In addition, either the reward hereafter or it the punishment can take place abruptly for death knows no rendezvous. We believe the words of our Prophet when he says, 'Death is resurrection, so he who dies, his resurrection starts.'(2)

This way, Allah *Glorified is He* aggrandises the reward of the Allah-fearing believer such that he yearns to perform righteous deeds and endures the hardship of his duties to be rewarded the best of rewards. This prize of the Hereafter is the ultimate compensation for the good deeds preformed in the worldly life. The ultimate goal of existence is to reach a goal that has no subsequent and the goal of eternal life has no subsequent. Since paradise guarantees eternity, it is therefore, worthy of being the goal of a believer and the recompense for both his righteous deeds and conformity to the duties of faith exactly as the hellfire is the end of the disbelievers and deniers of truth. They witness the goodly recompense of the believers and their own dreadful fate. This scene is a double torment, for they witness the reward of the people of faith and the punishment that is their due. That is why Allah says, ‘and the requital of the disbelievers is the fire.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 35)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi.*

(2) *Cited by Al-`Ajluni in (Kashf Al-khafa) (Hadith number 2617) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik. The Hadith continues as follows: 'Remember death frequently, for if you remember it in a state of wealth, it will disturb your transient peace of mind, and if you remember it in a state of deprivation, recalling it will relieve you.'*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ يَفۡرَحُونَ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكَۖ وَمِنَ ٱلۡأَحۡزَابِ مَن يُنكِرُ بَعۡضَهُۥۚ
قُلۡ إِنَّمَآ أُمِرۡتُ أَنۡ أَعۡبُدَ ٱللَّهَ وَلَآ أُشۡرِكَ بِهِۦٓۚ إِلَيۡهِ أَدۡعُواْ وَإِلَيۡهِ مَـَٔابِ ﴿٣٦﴾

Those to whom We sent the Scripture rejoice in what has been revealed to you [Prophet]; some factions deny parts of it. Say, ‘I am commanded to worship God, and not join anything with Him in worship: to Him I call [others] and to Him I shall return’ [36] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 36)

We know that Islam was preceded by two religions which are Christianity, the religion of the Christians who are the followers of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and before it was Judaism, the religion of the Jews who are the followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Moreover, each of these two religions is endowed with a Holy Book. The Gospel is the Scripture of Christianity and the Torah is the Scripture of Judaism. Furthermore, the Quran is the guardian and seal of the scriptures. It is the scripture of Islam. There are also other Holy Books such as the Scripture of Ibrahim (Abraham), the Psalms of Dawud (David) *peace be upon them*, and so forth.

The recipients of the Torah and the Gospels should have maintained their belief in the grace of heaven and the blessings emanating thereof. Moreover, Allah had previously accepted the solemn pledge of their prophets concerning this as Allah says, ‘And when Allah made a covenant through the prophets: Certainly, what I have given you of Book and wisdom-- then a messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him. He said, “Do you affirm and accept My compact in this [matter]?” They said, “We do affirm.” He said, “Then bear witness, and I [too] am of the bearers of witness with you.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 81)

Thus, we know that Allah *Glorified is He* willed that each previous religion should receive the next one by believing in it. Moreover, the Holy Scriptures of each religion insist upon the necessity of accepting the forthcoming messenger so that no struggle between the abrogating and abrogated religions ensues. Therefore, anticipating a future revelation is in the very nature of every religion. In addition, when the new religion comes, it is wholly accepted and not seen as opposing the previous one.

Since the religion of Islam marks the end of the long line of messengers, then the previous revelations most certainly anticipated its advent and commanded every follower of the previous revelations to adhere to it. Allah *Glorified is He* states, ‘He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Nuh and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim and Musa and 'Isa that keep to obedience and be not divided therein.’ (*ash-Shura:* 13)

Here in this verse, Allah proclaims that the People of the Torah and of the Gospels rejoice in the Quran, which you have received. One only celebrates something when it causes the achievement of something delightful, which is necessarily pervasive and famous. They rejoiced in what was revealed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* because it confirmed the prophecies foretold in their Scriptures. This means that their Holy Books were true and subsequently that the messenger of the final revelation spoke the truth, thus, they should have been first in hastening to recognize him. After all, happiness is a demonstration or a means of expressing the ecstasies of love, and one rejoices upon the fulfilment of an anticipated blessing.

It is for these reasons that they should have hastened to embrace the new religion and declared their conversion to Islam as did Ka`b Al-Ahbar, `Abdullah ibn Salam and Salman Al-Farisi, who wandered long distances searching for the true religion. Those mentioned above are just a few examples of the people who desired to express rejoice and acceptance of the blessing of the coming of the final Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. They pledged their allegiance to the new Messenger as foretold in the previous Scriptures. They declared their enmity to those who did not celebrate the new Messenger and who subsequently altered their Holy Books out of greed for worldly influence.

Moreover, those who embraced the religion of the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* knew well that the deniers of the prophecy of Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him* had cheated themselves and deceived others. They knew that they produced passages which were not part of the original revealed scriptures to their messengers, such as proclaiming that Allah has sons, exalted and beyond such false claims is He.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And those to whom We have given the Book rejoice in that which has been revealed to you, and of the confederates are some who deny a part of it. Say, “I am only commanded that I should serve Allah and not associate anything with Him, to Him do I invite [you] and to Him is my return.”’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 36)

Such is the impartiality of the Quran. It does not reject the previous Holy Books as such: rather, the Quran rejects the falsification of the creeds. It also stands against the stance of those who distorted it and falsely alleged that Allah had sons. The corruption of the texts of Old and New Testaments did not cause the Quran to reject the Holy Scriptures totally; only the falsified passages were rejected. Thus, the Quran confirmed that which belongs to Allah and to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and denied the falsifications introduced by people who sought worldly power, claimed sanctity, traded in forgiveness, sold paradise, heard to peoples’ confessions and other things which were not originally part of a Holy Book.

When Islam came to forbid these scriptural forgeries, they fought for the power with which they traded in things, which are foreign to religion. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* orders the Prophet to say, ‘Say, I am only commanded that I should serve Allah and not associate anything with Him.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 36) This testifies that the forgers of the previous Holy Scriptures and those who deny the Oneness of Allah were addressed by the Quran in an incontrovertible manner. In other words, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is asserting that there is a religion that was chosen by a divine Mentor and that He did not choose an object of worship based on personal proclivities. He is, rather, a divinely sent Messenger, who is honoured to affiliate himself with the command which was revealed to him from heaven and not to associate partners unto Allah.

We notice that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would get furious regarding that which is Allah due, but He is indulgent on personal matters. That is why the Prophet was not riled when certain heretics proclaimed that they believed in Allah, Heaven, revelation, and all things pertaining to religion except Him. Clearly, had he been involved on a personal or egoistic level, he would have been infuriated. This is proved by the supportive sentiment expressed by Him for the Byzantines, who were believers in a divinely revealed Scripture, when they countered the Persian polytheists, who did not accept any religion from Heaven. He was saddened by the defeat of the Byzantines and so the verse of Allah *Glorified is He* was revealed, as a consolation, foretelling a victory of the Byzantines within a few years: *'Alif Lam Mim.* The Romans are vanquished, in a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome, within a few years. Allah's is the command before and after; and on that day the believers shall rejoice, with the help of Allah; He helps whom He pleases; and He is the Mighty, the Merciful.' (*ar-Rum:* 1-5) The latter were dearer to the heart of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* than other factions. That is because they were followers of a divinely revealed faith. Therefore, he wished victory for them on hearing that they were threatened by an evil one. Moreover, Allah gave him good news of their victory within a few years. For the victorious Byzantines carry the scent of righteousness even though they did not believe in the Messenger of Allah.

When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said that he had been commanded to worship Allah and not associate anything with Him, it means that he shall worship Allah alone, without compromise and that He shall call others to worship Him alone. After all, the Prophet knew very well that he and every person shall return unto the Lord. None can escape his Lord and Creator and each person must therefore, prepare for this ultimate encounter.

Allah then says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ حُكْمًا عَرَبِيًّا ۚ وَلَئِنِ ٱتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَآءَهُم بَعْدَمَا
جَآءَكَ مِنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ وَلَا وَاقٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

So We have sent down the Quran to give judgment in the Arabic language. If you were to follow their desires, after the knowledge that has come to you, you would have no one to guard you or protect you from God [37] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 37)

Allah *Glorified is He* alludes to sending forth of the previous messengers with miracles willed only by Him, through using the word thus at the beginning of the verse. In other words, as we have sent previous prophets with miracles, thus, we send you O Muhammad as well. When we hear the expression *anzal nahu*, (We revealed it), we know that there is an elevated place from which something descends to a lower level. This theme is commonplace in both physical phenomena and metaphorical speech. In fact, there might be something existing on earth and have not reached the sky, but Allah still uses the word reveal as the case of iron (*al-Hadid:* 25). This is a revelation because Heaven originally determines it even though it belongs to the earthly realm.

The Arabic word *al-hukm* (true judgement) refers to the meaning and content of the Quran. The act of revelation in this context refers to the Quran which is a Book and it comprises both form and content. Allah chose to portray the Quran using hyperbole so that the description represents the Quran itself. In other terms, He revealed the Quran as a true judgement and this means that the Quran itself is a true judgement. To elaborate on this point further, in Arabic, when you describe a judge, who is impartial, you would say he is *`adl* (just). In other words, it is as if the judge were the very embodiment of justice or that every aspect of his is fairness. Here, Allah is stating that the Quran is the just and true in judgement (*ar-Ra'd:* 37).

Allah says that the Quran is in Arabic because the tongue with which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* addresses people listening to what he says must articulate in the Arabic language. That is why Allah says in a different verse, 'And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you shall soon be questioned.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44) In other words, the fact the Quran was revealed in the tongue of the Arabs is a great honour for you and for your people. The Quran has preserved Arabic in its pristine and refined state. Other languages of the world, however, splintered, at first, into dialects and each established as independent languages afterwards. Consider Latin, for example. Most European languages were driven from it including English, French, and Italian. Each of these developed as an autonomous language with its own rules. In fact, English has branched off into British English, which is spoken by the British and Americans.

If we Arab Muslims were to communicate by means of our different dialects, we would fail to understand each other. Thus, we refer to classical Arabic when we wish to communicate with each other. What happens in the lands of North Africa? One finds a person raised speaking French or speaking a language that gathers different dialects and languages including Berber, French and vestiges of classical Arabic. When you speak to a North African in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, he does not understand. Nevertheless, he can converse with you in classical Arabic since he has a natural receptivity for the language.

Thus, we have seen how the Noble Quran preserved the Arabic language and the Arab tongue. Therefore, among the meanings implied by the statement of Allah: ‘And thus have We revealed it, a true judgment in Arabic’ is that the Noble Quran preserves the Arabic tongue. Allah continues saying, ‘and if you follow their low desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you shall not have against Allah any guardian or a protector.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 37) That is a speech addressed by Allah to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* reveals to the Prophet the harms and dangers of following desires. Furthermore, this verse points to the fact that the religions that were revealed to Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*, which preceded the Messenger of Allah, are no longer in their original states. They were tainted by desires and were no longer preserved in the original form in which they were revealed from Allah.

That is why Allah says in another verse that if the truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth would have been ruined (*al-Mu’minun:* 71). In other words, were Allah to abide by their passions, the order of the universe would surely have fallen into ruin. Did they not ask the Messenger of Allah to, ‘cause the skies to fall down upon them fragments’ (*al-Isra’:* 92)? Had Allah responded to such requests; would the heavens not fall into ruin?

Thus, having been revealed from Allah as a true judgement, knowledge and an easy-to-understand way of life since it is in their language, as well as, it contains the right way of life until the Day of Resurrection and a way to access true happiness in this life and the Hereafter, no one should follow his inclinations as desires and inclinations differ from one person to another.

The speech is addressed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* however, it is addressed to his *ummah* implicitly. Furthermore, he who follows his own caprices shall not have Allah as his Supporter, Grantor of victory or Protector from His retribution that is represented in torment in this world and hellfire in the next.

Allah *Glorified is He* goes on saying:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا رُسُلٗا مِّن قَبۡلِكَ وَجَعَلۡنَا لَهُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗا وَذُرِّيَّةٗۚ وَمَا كَانَ
لِرَسُولٍ أَن يَأۡتِيَ بِـَٔايَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۗ لِكُلِّ أَجَلٖ كِتَابٞ ﴿٣٨﴾

We sent messengers before you and gave them wives and offspring; no messenger was given the power to produce a miracle except with God's permission. There was a Scripture for every age [38] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 38)

O Muhammad, you are no exception with regard to having wives and offspring. This verse is a refutation of those who wondered how the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ate and walked in the markets (*al-Furqan:* 7). There are also those who asked, 'Why does the Messenger marry women? Is it not more befitting of him to dedicate himself wholly to spreading his faith'? People of such claims did not take account of the previous messengers. Had they done so, they would have found that most of them married and bore children.

Moreover, when the life of the messenger is closer to the lives of his followers, he thereby, becomes a role model to be emulated. After all, an exemplar is one who displays traits that can be imitated. So, when the life of a messenger resembles that of any other human in its general features, such as carrying out the function of father or husband, then the paradigm becomes manifest for his followers. We know that there were people who went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* asking for permission to dedicate themselves wholly to acts of worship like fasting, prayer and celibacy. However, the Prophet proscribed this lifestyle and said, ‘I fear Allah more than you do, and I am most obedient and dutiful among you to Him, but still I observe fast and break it; perform prayer and sleep at night and take wives. So, whoever turns away from my *Sunnah* does not belong to me.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* goes on saying, ‘it is not in [the power of] a messenger to bring a sign except by Allah's permission; for every term there is an appointment.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 38) This means it was not for anyone to propose the miracle that this or that messenger will bring forth. No messenger had the freedom to choose the nature of the miracle that he would produce. With these words, Allah *Glorified is He* puts an end to the query of polytheists about asking for miracles done by the Prophet. After all, every prophet was sent forth for his time and people. Moreover, each miracle was the choice of Allah and each messenger carried out the commands of His Lord. It is not the place of a messenger to suggest a miracle because the Exalted Creator knows best what fits such an environment of a messenger.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that every term has a decree. This means that each revelation has its messenger and that each message has its station and miracle. If this is so then do not question Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* nor the message that Allah chose for him nor the time, place or accompanying miracle. One may wonder whether there is any type of change that takes place after Allah says that. The answer is yes, there is an alteration. Notice the following verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَمْحُوا۟ ٱللَّهُ مَا يَشَآءُ وَيُثْبِتُ ۖ وَعِندَهُۥٓ أُمُّ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ﴿٣٩﴾

God erases or confirms whatever He will, and the source of Scripture is with Him [39] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 39)

The act of passing away of something, as we know, means abrogation, while establishment of something means that Allah confirms what He wants constant. Some people erroneously understood that every ruling revealed in the Quran was intended to be forever valid. However, on the practical level, as these people claim, it became clear that some decrees had to be changed by others under Divine sanction and for the benefit of humankind.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

We say, no, it is not so. Rather, these rulings were transitory in nature and were binding for a certain period only. That is why Allah says that He has the basis of the Book which is the Guarded Tablet where the temporary rulings were inscribed. Upon the termination of their appointed times, these temporary decrees were replaced by other rulings. Based on this understanding, we can state that there is no such thing as abrogation of rulings, for abrogation means removal of a decree at a certain time. In reality, no rulings are removed at a certain time, but rulings are given a determined period of validity and once that period comes to an end, it is replaced by a new ruling. I say this to draw the attention of scholars of religion for the need to sit together and study this matter. To preclude any disagreement whether there was abrogation of rulings or not, I say, let us define abrogation first. That is because there are those who opine that certain rulings should have been valid forever and were changed by others for the sake of human wellbeing.

Overall, no ruling removed another and intervened just like that. Rather, all the rulings were determined in pre-Eternity. It is based on this that we argue that no rulings were ever abrogated, although the divinely appointed time of certain decrees to come to an end and be replaced by rulings which are pre-determined to let men abide by them. Therefore, we can say that there is no such thing as abrogation.

Let us look at the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it.’ (*al-Baqara:* 106) It is clear from the words and meaning of this verse that abrogated rules are replaced by better or similar ones. Therefore, there is no abrogation per se. In fact, we have rulings that perform their respective functions for a certain period. They are replaced by an improved or akin ruling when a new time that requires a new ruling comes. This new ruling, however, is in conformity with considerations of public interest as well as Allah’s objective.

Someone may say that it is better as long as Allah intends to bring forth a verse that is more beneficial to mankind than the abrogated or forgotten one, then why does He reveal rulings that are similar to those destined to be abrogated in the Quran? That is because when a new decree that is more suitable to your interests comes, you might have no problem, however, when it corresponds to the latter verses, then our faith is truly put to the test. An example is the command to change the direction of prayer toward the *Ka'ba* after facing the direction of Jerusalem in prayer during the initial stages of the revelation. Clearly, there is no physical hardship in this command. Yet it tests the commitment of the believers to the new command through abiding by the newly revealed, yet determined in pre-Eternity divine command. This tests the strength of a believer's faith in the Regulator's desire to direct the Muslim's practices in that course.

Similarly, during the pilgrimage, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* kissed the black rock and stoned the rock which symbolizes Satan. Now we perform these rituals out of desire to emulate the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Both objects are mere stones but we, nevertheless, perform these rites *of Hajj* to heed His instructions. Therefore, kissing the black stone and pelting the rock symbolizing Satan is done out of desire to obey the commands of our leader, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'eliminates what He wills or confirms, and with Him is the basis of the Book.' This means that Allah ends the period of the former ruling, which ends in the Guarded Tablet and lays down the new law. One revealing example is the ruling against alcoholic beverages. Allah *Glorified is He* dealt with it within the abilities of the society. The vital principal, after all, was to accept the Islamic creed. Only once this had taken affect could other rulings be laid down.

There is a difference between creeds, which is the principle, and rulings, which express abiding to the creed. Rulings regarding creed were permanently binding. However, rulings such as prohibiting alcohol were gradually instituted according to the mores and customs of the people. Allah *Glorified is He* first restricted the times when alcohol could be consumed. After that, the prohibition and the command to shun and stay away from alcohol altogether were set forth.

To take an example from our daily lives, one may come across someone who wants to stop smoking. Such a person might begin by decreasing the number of cigarettes that he smokes daily, until finally he is able to refrain from smoking altogether.

Speaking of intoxicants, we find the Quranic verse, ‘And of the fruits of the palms and the grapes- you obtain from them intoxication and goodly provision.’ (*an-Nahl:* 67), here, Allah is reaffirming his blessings to humankind. However, the people of intuition take account of the fact that He did not describe intoxicants as a goodly provision as He referred to dates and grapes, for their consumption does not incur any harm on man.

Thus, the people of intuition may surmise that a dictate proscribing the consumption of alcohol may be imminent. Later, Allah *Glorified is He* advances the following admonition: ‘They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say, “In both there is a great sin and benefit for men, and their sin is greater than their benefit.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 219) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that intoxicants and games of chance cause more evil than good for man. Following this revelation, Allah brings the following preliminary ruling to light: ‘O you who believe! do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated until you know [well] what you say.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 43) The intention behind this edict is to lengthen the time between each drinking session, so that no one drinks throughout the day and for a portion of the night. This is a way to accustom the believers to teetotalism. Finally, the complete banning of intoxicants took effect with the following verse: ‘O you who believe! do not forbid [yourselves] the good things which Allah has made lawful for you and do not exceed the limits; surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 90)

Thus, we see that the banning of alcohol took place gradually according to the social norms of pre-Islamic Arabia. In other words, intoxicants were proscribed slowly and piecemeal.

Therefore, we understand that abrogation denotes the ending of a rule’s period and the beginning of a new one. This means that the first edict was not one destined to be valid for all ages, annulled and replaced with another. Rather, the period of the first ruling, determined in pre-Eternity, came to an end and a new one was instituted.

Thus, there is no space for arguing over the meaning of abrogation. That is Allah *Glorified is He* ascribed the annulment and establishment of edicts to the Mother of the Book, where the assigned periods of legitimacy pertaining to various rulings and the time when their replacements shall be revealed are specified. As long as matters are determined in pre-eternity, those who object that Allah cannot vacillate on a matter, must realise the fact that the annulment of old rulings and the affirmation of new ones do not constitute an oscillation on the part of Allah. Oscillation means that one undertakes an action, realises its flaws and replaces it with a new one. However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not come to realise the flaws in His rulings or His verses once they were revealed to the Prophet, but He determined all things in pre-Eternity in the Mother of the Book. He prescribed a period of validity, that is, a beginning and end of every rule.

In addition, the meaning of the verse could expand to include the abrogation of one revelation with another that it is the abrogating verse will have erased one thing and confirmed another. Everything that is bound to changes for the better, elimination, and confirmation is positive when this change is brought about by the Watcher, the Ever-Present: ‘He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand.’ (*Qaf:* 18) In other words, Allah is able to command those two observers to confirm the obligations and prohibitions and to disregard things which are permissible. Moreover, He is the One capable of erasing sins as He sees fit and He can confirm the repentance of His servants.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن مَّا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ ٱلَّذِى نَعِدُهُمْ أَوْ نَتَوَفَّيَنَّكَ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ ٱلْبَلَٰغُ وَعَلَيْنَا ٱلْحِسَابُ ٤٠

Whether We let you [Prophet] see part of what We threaten them with, or cause you to die [before that], your duty is only to deliver the message: the Reckoning is Ours [40]
(The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 40)

This verse identifies the mission of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* namely conveying the way of Allah and letting he who wishes to believe do so and letting he who wishes to disbelieve do so. However, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of His Messenger saying, ‘Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers [he is] compassionate.' (*at-Tawba:* 128) This verse made the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* clung to the guidance of every member of his people. He wished that everyone be guided to the straight path. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to His Messenger in another verse: 'Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.' (*al-Kahf:* 6)

In other words, you are not responsible for their faith and do not need to grieve if they refuse to join the ranks of the believers. All that is required of you is to call and preach them to the necessity of belief. Furthermore, it is Allah, Who will hold them accountable for their actions, either in this world by overlooking their sins and casting them aside, or in the Hereafter by hurling them into the hellfire.

We understand from the verse we are discussing, that good messages increase with the passing of time, while evil callings eventually fade out. Those who call unto good love yearn to see the fruits of their message. However, in some instances, the time needed for these results to emerge exceeds the lifetime of the preacher. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells His Prophet, 'And we will either let you see part of what we threaten them with or cause you to die.' In other words, plant the seeds of the message and do not concern yourself with reaping the fruits thereof. When you devote yourself wholly to sowing the seeds of the message, you will find that the rewards and fruits come forth when Allah wills them be that during your own lifetime or after your death.

If you were to examine the callings that are proclaimed around you, you will find that they are sustained by supporters or enthusiasts. Moreover, the sponsors of these missions might be impatient to see the fruits. Were they to wait and let the subsequent generations do so; their missions would have been accomplished posthumously.

In rural areas, we observe a farmer planting the earth and we can tell his intent whether he is working for himself or for someone who will reap the fruits of his efforts after him by the way he performs his task. One who plants wheat, for example labours faster than one who plants a date palm or a mango tree which bear fruit long after being planted. This period may reach seven years in some cases. Thus, the fruits of his efforts are enjoyed by future generations.

In fact, we enjoy the fruits of trees that were planted by people who have passed away. Those planters thought of those who will succeed them. Such person who performs this action necessarily has an abundance of the earth that he laboured. After all, a person who does not possess an abundance of land thinks only about himself and his dependents and that is why he plants crops that will bear immediate fruit However, one who possesses an abundance of earth and patience to act according to long-term goals devotes himself to the well-being of those who will come after him. He returns the favour of the past generations who laboured for him by endeavouring for those who will succeed him.

The mission of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness to the fact that he did not seek out immediate benefits. We find that his mission met one challenge after another. He faced affliction, oppression, and hostile efforts after having spoken about his revelations to his closest kin. Yet the message of Islam began to spread among the kinsfolk and clan of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* until it prevailed over the very hub of disbelief that is, Mecca was established as the sacred House of Allah as Allah has willed. The Arabian Peninsula submitted to the divinely ordained way of life. Then the Messenger sent out epistles to the kings and Caesars, each including the formula: *aslim taslam* (submit to be in safe).

These epistles bore witness to the universality of the Islamic revelation, in accordance with what Allah *Glorified is He* said to His Messenger that he is a Messenger to humankind at large (*Saba':* 28). Thus, people understood the difference between his message and the previously revealed messages. As for Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was sent to the people of `Ad (*al-A'raf:* 65). In addition, Allah says that He sent Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to the people of Midyan (*al-A'raf:* 85). And Musa (Moses) to the children of Israel. (*Al-'Imran:* 49)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has specified the time and place of the religions that were revealed prior to the mission of Muhammad ibn `Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, the case is different when Allah sent forth Muhammad as a messenger for humankind at large. Allah knew from pre-Eternity that this religion namely, Islam would be the seal of religions. That is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sent to the rulers of his time an invitation to embrace the final revelation. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* placed his successors in charge of this mission. The Arabian Peninsula, which was once made up of multiple contending tribes, was finally united under the banner of ‘There is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’

Each tribe would not oblige itself to worship the deity of the other tribe and each tribe would not require itself to raid the other tribe. The state of affairs was never united, nor were they permanently settled except in certain villages. Most were roaming Bedouins who carried their dismantled tents on camelback in search of grazing fields and water for their goats and livestock. They had no form of national affiliation, for the tribes were often engaged in vicious confrontations, some of which would last for up to forty years.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* could channel their skills, accoutrements and equipment into bringing about victory for the religion of Allah. While preparing battle or electing members to be part of raiding parties, he would find fully trained fighters at his disposal. When he called them to fight for Islam, he did not train them for all of his followers were skilled warriors. It is thus that the various tribes became a single community, after having been united by Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, in a unity of complete creed and under the banner of Islam.

This unlettered community was described by Allah as follows: ‘He it is Who raised among the inhabitants of Mecca a Messenger from among themselves.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 2)

Being unlettered was an honour for them, lest anyone say, ‘the newly converted Arabs are possessors of a civilizational flowering originating in an urbanized society’. Indeed, the unletterdness of the pre-Islamic Arabs was astounding, for the legislations which ensued from their community did and continue to inspire the wonder and respect of other societies. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* destined the *ummah* to assume the banner of the Divine Message for the world.

After the revelation of the verse, ‘This day have those who disbelieve despaired of your religion, so fear them not, and fear Me. This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 3)

Some individuals understood that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was announcing his imminent death to his followers. After he left this world to heaven, his Companions spread Islam throughout the globe. Within half a century, the Islamic world comprised of two wings: one stretching east and the other stretching west. It defeated the two most powerful contending empires: the Persian civilization and the Byzantine Empire. After fighting both empires at the same time, whole societies began to embrace Islam as a way of life. People turned to the new religion, ascertaining its miraculous nature, which they felt through not only the demeanour of those who propagated the Quran and its Message, but also by way of the just rulings on life as laid out in the revelation.

Thus, they realized that the miracle of the Quran lies in its appeal to the mind and that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Seal of Messengers, who was not granted an enduring miracle that is perceptible by the senses. Now if the Quran amounts to a miracle for the Arabic speaking people, among whom the Messenger of Allah was sent on the other hand, the Quran for those who did not understand its language was a miracle in its justice and the values springing from it. People at large were rushing to Islam due to the powerful backing of its faithful adherents and the force of its appeal to the non-believers as they observed that there is no difference between ruler and the smallest minion under his authority and tasted the inherent justice and equality of all men proclaimed by the new faith.

Islam was not only a miracle for the community in which it was revealed, but for the world at large. The following statement by Allah *Glorified is He* is continuously reaffirming itself: ‘We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth.’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

We hear of a great modern western thinker declaring Islam even though he never read the Quran. He just examined the principles laid down by Islam and the inherent solutions therein which subsequent civilizations and lawgivers worldwide were unable to solve. Moreover, it is well known that these laws were revealed to a Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* who belonged to an unlettered society, which only excelled in eloquence and literature. However, these divinely revealed laws provide solutions to problems that torment the world at large. Furthermore, we have seen how a scholar sought to identify the hundred greatest men in human history and how he ranked Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* foremost among them. This scholar has not read the Quran, rather, he analysed the impact of the application of the Quran. After recognizing the great value of the Quranic way of life, we find that he grows to admire the Quranic text itself.

Consider, for example, the studies conducted by the Germans on man’s sense of touch and the process by which physical pain is felt. These studies sought to explain why it is that a person becomes happy when his skin encounters a soft surface and why one is disturbed by the feeling of a harsh surface. Research went on for years. The Germans wanted to understand how and where the feeling of pain is engendered. Does it occur in the brain, or not? They finally concluded that the feeling of pain is engendered by every person in the skin and that there is a layer of sensitive cells located directly under the skin. That is why when a person is pricked by a pin; pain is only felt at the place where the pin pierced through the skin.

This fact caught the attention of one of these scientists who proclaimed that the Quran spoke of this fact in the following verse, ‘so soft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56) If their skins were to be burnt off completely, the punishment would cease to be painful. That is why Allah replaces their skins with new ones, so that the suffering may continue. This is but one of among many of the discoveries found in the Quran.

Among the contemporary examples of discoveries related to the criminal science is the story of a young Muslim from the Egyptian province of Sohag. He went to Germany to pursue a Ph.D. degree in law. During his studies, they were once examining the matter of misusing right, deeming the solution, supposedly found in the modern West, to be one of the greatest legal accomplishments of the twentieth century. The young man clarified to them that Islam had already treated this problem and found its appropriate solution fourteen centuries ago. He told them the story of a man who went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'so and so owns a palm-tree that grows in my courtyard. He enters my house frequently under the pretext of caring for it. Sometimes he claims to want to pollinate it, reap its fruits or else to make sure it is in good condition. This went on to the point where the tree became his chief preoccupation.

The man complained to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was bothered by the man's intrusion upon the sanctity of his private life. So, the Messenger sent for the owner of the palm-tree and informed him that he had three options, to either donate the palm to him, which was the pinnacle of generosity, or sell it to him or cut it down.' Thus, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* employed what was later to be called 'misusing of rights'.

In England, they discovered that commercial law was filled with loopholes. Engagement in the market place, for example, would require a degree of flexibility on the part of the merchants. One merchant would send a message to another asking to borrow one thousand pounds and another paying off his debt or exchanging. The harsh reality is that some merchants deny the existence of their debts. In the days of old, when a merchant wanted to take a loan from another fellow merchant, he would write out the loan in the form of an official agreement.

However, in day-to-day activities at the market, this may not necessarily be the case. Someone may need cash urgently, for example, and his counterpart trusts that he will pay him back and settle the loan. In fact, the latter may eventually need the former for quick cash and trusts that the one he borrows money from today will lend him cash later on. This is the origin of what is called a commercial loan, where the debts are recorded in a roster so as to ensure that such transactions are legalised and not forgotten.

A young Muslim, who was pursuing his studies on a scholarship there, explained to his colleagues that Islam devoted a lot of attention to the issue of monetary loans to the degree that the longest verse of the Quran is that which lays down the way to go about distributing a loan and started translating it to them (*al-Baqara:* 282).

It may appear that only a creditor is protected by this verse, whereas in fact the borrower is safeguarded as well. This is because when a borrower knows that a loan is documented, he will strive to pay it back on time. Moreover, this verse ensures that deceitful people are not granted a chance to escape from repaying a loan. Thus, the Quran protects both the creditor and the borrower, so as to ensure the continuity of commercial activity in society.

Allah, notwithstanding, does not exclude faith-driven generosity and chivalry to exist in a spirit of friendship and brotherhood. So, if you have a relative or a person to whom you are close, and you trust that he will repay his loans, then Allah *Glorified is He* tells you: ‘But if you decide to trust one another, then let the one who is trusted fulfil his trust; let him be mindful of Allah.’ (*al-Baqara:* 283) With this verse in mind, the one entrusted by another person carries a feeling of shame and makes every effort to pay back his debt. Allah *Glorified is He* adds: ‘But if the merchandise is there and you hand it over, there is no blame on you if you do not write it down.’ (*al-Baqara:* 282)

Thus, Islam came out with laws which could not have possibly sprung from an unlettered community, for these laws were centuries ahead of their time. They are laws which emanate from a divinely revealed and final religion. This is why when I was asked about Islam’s position towards progress and retro-gradation, I retorted, ‘The analogy itself is flawed, for it is impossible to compare mere human thought with that which was revealed by the Lord of all humans. If people of the world, whether they be in the east or west, seek that which is best for their lives and discover that the roots of that good are in Islam, then this stands as evidence to the fact that the world inclines towards moderation.

This was manifested, for example, during the bloody communist revolution in 1917. The revolutionaries said that it is the dawn of communism. Yet, the system fell after the society became ossified and stagnant, was along with being overcome by fear of the regime of the ruling communist party. We also notice that capitalism and its aggressiveness is becoming tempered, entitling the worker to his rights and to insurance. Thus, the world is moving towards moderation to which Islam calls.

Indeed, Islam was revealed by an All Knowing who is aware of all passions of the human soul and all phases of history. It is for this reason that we come across instances in which Allah *the Exalted* consoles Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was hurt by an insult that was cast against the message which he brought forth. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would take no notice of anyone trying to harm him personally, and he would never get angry as a result of an attack directed at him personally. However, if someone were to insult his message, his anger would manifest itself as a result.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded to those who stood against his message with preaching. Those who believed in his message from amongst them attained the sweetness of faith. As for those who rejected his message, calamities befell them from all sides. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed some of the deaths of those who rejected his message.

Thus, we find Allah *Glorified is He* telling His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Either We shall take you away and punish them– indeed We will or We shall let you witness the punishment We threatened them with; We have full power over them.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 41-42) In other words, Allah *the Almighty* will either join Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the highest company, along with taking revenge on those who confronted him or else He will let Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witness their punishment with his own eyes.(1)

It is as if the above verse explains the following verse in which Allah says: ‘Whether We let you [Prophet] see part of what We threaten them with, or cause you to die [before that], your duty is only to deliver the message. The Reckoning is ours’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 40).

No matter how grave, the punishment of this worldly life — as we believe — will not reach near in severity with the punishment of the Hereafter.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ أَنَّا نَأْتِى ٱلْأَرْضَ نَنقُصُهَا مِنْ أَطْرَافِهَا ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ
لَا مُعَقِّبَ لِحُكْمِهِۦ ۚ وَهُوَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٤١﴾

Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders? God decides – no one can reverse His decision – and He is swift in reckoning [41] (The Quran, *ar-Ra’d:* 41)

The Arabic word *Yaraw* (they see) in this verse denotes ‘they know'. Allah *the Exalted* however, does not employ this latter expression since the knowledge in question may entail knowledge of the unseen. In contrast, the expression ‘they see’ means that they know what is described in the verse above with the certitude of an onlooker or a direct witness, for the eye does not deceive.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) (4/128): ‘Allah has not taken the life of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him until He has given him the joy of witnessing the fall of his enemies; and has given him power over them and given him what was cached behind their fortresses. This was the opinion of As-Suddi and it was favored by Ibn Jarir. ’*

If Allah *the Almighty* reveals a verse in which He informs us of an event which took place in the past or will take place in the future, and He employs the verb ‘to see’, then this means that we must believe in such event with the certitude of a direct witness. This is due to the fact that Allah’s Words are more certain than our own eyesight, and His Knowledge is more exact than that which our eyes perceive.

Allah *the Exalted* has previously(1) told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41) We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, and it is impossible for him to have witnessed what had happened to the army of the elephant. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believed what was revealed to him as if he had seen it with his own eyes.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Do you not see how your Lord lengthens the shade? If He had willed, He could have made it stand still.’ (*al-Furqan:* 45) When the Quran speaks of things pertaining to the world of the unseen, the verb ‘to see’ is used, as in Allah’s Words: ‘[Prophet], if only you could see the wrongdoers hang their heads before their Lord …’ (*as-Sajda:* 12). When addressing contemporary circumstances, the Quran states: ‘But do they not see?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 44)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41) This utterance addresses the contemporaries who witnessed the Quranic revelations. Furthermore, in this verse, the word ‘land’ is undefined, for when we seek to describe it, our thoughts might turn toward the surface on which we stand. A broader definition, however, may encompass the sphere-shaped planet in which humanity as a whole lives.

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(1) By *sabaqa* (a verb denoting the occurrence of something in the past) the eminent sheikh Sha‘rawi means the time and place of the revelation of the chapters of *al-Fil* and *ar-Ra‘d*, and not their order in the Quran. The chapter of *al-Fil* is Meccan, whereas *ar-Ra‘d* is Medinan.

Yet, 'the land' may refer to a specific plot of land where an incident unfolded, such as the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of Qarun: 'We caused the earth to swallow him and his home.' (*al-Qasas:* 81) Allah *Glorified is He* says of the earth as a whole: 'Allah has made a promise to those amongst you who believe and do good deeds. He will make them successors to the land...' (*an-Nur:* 55). Naturally, they will not accede to power all over the earth. Nevertheless, they will have control over it.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '... So let her graze in Allah's land.' (*al-A'raf:* 73) Thus, we understand that 'the land' denotes a plot of land of a special incident. However, when referred to in general terms, it refers to the earth as a whole. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He set down the earth for His creatures.' (*ar-Rahman:* 10)

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* tells the children of Israel: 'After his death,(1) We told the Children of Israel, "Live in the land."' (*al-Isra':* 104) Despite the fact that He has told them in another verse: 'Go into the holy land which' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21). After having named a land for them, the Most High has used the word 'land' in general terms in order to confirm that it is not His Will for the children of Israel to have a homeland. Moreover, they will remain in diaspora for having refused to enter the land which was previously designated to them. They said, 'We will never enter while they are still there.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24) This is why Allah *Glorified is He* states elsewhere in the Quran: 'We dispersed them over the earth in separate communities.' (*al-A'raf:* 168) In other words, Allah rendered the unity of each of their lands separated from the other lands. Such is the state of the Jews around the world today, for they are to be found in particular neighbourhoods in every country, and they did not integrate themselves into their respective societies.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) This verse is addressed to the tribe of Quraysh, for they were endowed with the power that was centred in Mecca. After the advent of Islam, they found that their situation was changing day by day, for every day a tribe would present itself to Prophet

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(1) *In other words: after the drowning of Pharaoh. 'the land' in this verse denotes Levant and Egypt. Cited by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5/4067)*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina to declare its faith and pledge allegiance to him. This is how the circle of disbelief shrank before their eyes until they themselves declared their embracing Islam.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* willed for the lands of disbelief to decrease, while the lands of faith expanded. Moreover, they saw this unfold before their eyes, but they did not draw a lesson from the fact that the message of Islam was expanding, and would never recede, for no territorial expansion would take place without the existence of a powerful person therein.

Moreover, when a person of power shrinks the territories of disbelief, he simultaneously enlarges the sphere of faith. This was the case until Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed the following verses: ‘When Allah’s help comes and He opens up your way [Prophet]. When you see people embracing Allah’s faith in crowds, celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness. He is always ready to accept repentance.’ (*an-Nasr:* 1-3)

Now, there are certain people who are sincere in their devotion to the religion of Allah and who try to prove that His religion contains some meanings of certain facts which have not been discovered yet. For example, they proclaimed after man’s ascent to the moon that Allah *Glorified is He* has spoken of this when He says: ‘Jinn and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so. You will not pass without Our authority.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33)

They said that the authority referred to in this verse is that of science. However, what are they to do with the verse which follows the aforementioned one: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you, and no one will come to your aid.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33) Does this mean that He has allowed the ascent (to the moon) through the power of knowledge, as they proclaim? To such people we say that we are grateful to you for your attempt to establish a link between modern scientific phenomena and the Quran. However, where is the moon located with regard to the regions of the heavens and the earth?

It seems like an extremely small a place in comparison to the vast universe. How can the moon be compared to that star called Sirius or the series of spatial bodies called ‘Andromeda’? Or again, how can it be compared to the Milky Way which fills outer space?

When you look at the stars above you, you find that they are one hundred light years away. Now, if your purpose is to link the authority of modern science to the Quran, then you need to be cautious. After all, if you were able to pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth with the authority of science, then Allah *Glorified is He* would not have followed the above mentioned verse by the following Words: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you...’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33).

If you were to ask, what the value of the verse which speaks of this authority is, the answer is that it was revealed because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had told the people of Quraysh that he had ascended to the heavens. In other words: he had ascended through that authority of Allah *the Almighty*.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41) The word ‘borders’ denotes that all forms have a length and a width which determine its surface area, as well as a height which determines its volume. Furthermore, we know that every length has two endpoints and that the endpoints of all surfaces are made up of a number of sides.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: ‘… of its borders?’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41) In other words: every point in the circumference of the circle is considered a side. The meaning of this is that Allah *Glorified is He* has willed for the territory of the disbelievers to close in on them, and for the realm of believers to surround that of disbelievers from every side. Furthermore, this statement suggests that the event at hand only recently took place and it was not the case before that event.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: ‘Allah decides, and no one can reverse His decision.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41) In other words, the subject has been decided and settled. Moreover, in our daily lives we say, ‘This subject has been concluded since the chief leader has passed his judgment on it.’

In juridical cases, we find a decree issued by the lower court and then the court of appeal supports the judgment or rejects it. One does not say that the court of appeal has reversed the decree of the lower court. Rather, we say that the judge has issued a decree which accepted or declined the decree of the lower court. What are we then to say of the Decree of Allah *Glorified is He* Who never becomes oblivious, and from Whom nothing is hidden, nor can anyone reverse His Decree?

An example that is pertinent to this is what Allah *Glorified is He* says of Sulaiman (Solomon) and Dawud (David) *peace be upon them*: ‘And remember Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon), when they passed judgment regarding the field into which sheep strayed by night and grazed. We witnessed their judgment [and made Sulaiman (Solomon) understand the case [better], though We gave sound judgment and knowledge …’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79-89). This story stems from a disagreement which broke out as a result of a person’s sheep that strayed into the field of another. They sought the judgment of Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*, who decreed that the owner of the sheep must relinquish his flock to the land owner.

Meanwhile, our master Sulaiman (Solomon) was seated listening to the conversations. He interjected, ‘No! It is the owner of the sheep who must relinquish his flock to the landlord for an assigned period during which he may benefit from its milk and yield. Let him profit from it until their owner harvests the land produce which was eaten by the sheep.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘… and We made Sulaiman (Solomon) understand the case [better] …’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79-89). This is the meaning of a legal appeal. This term, after all, does not imply that a judge in the court of appeal defames the former judge. Rather, it amounts to a quest for the core of justice. If a case were to be assigned once again to the former judge, he might decree the same judgment of the court of appeal, after reconsidering the whole circumstances which surrounded the case.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Allah decides…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41). When Allah *Glorified is He* issues a judgment, there is no possibility of appeal. This is the meaning of His Words: ‘…no one can reverse His decision…’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41). It is as if this wise verse foretold the possibility of appeal that was established by our man-made legal system. None can reverse Allah’s Judgment, for one who reverses a judgment must have more knowledge than the judge. Moreover, the former must have insight into things to which the latter was oblivious. Indeed, none is the Overseer save Allah, and none is capable of knowing all things except Him.

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(1) See *Ibn Kathir’s* exegesis (3/186), as well as *(Ad-Durr Al-Manthur)* of *As-Suyuti* (5/645).

The flaw of every legal judgment is its implementation. In the reality of our daily lives, we find that those in whose interest decrees have been issued have trouble in executing them. This is due to the fact that the judge who issues the decree and the one who executes it are on different grounds; the former belongs to a government department, while the latter belongs to another.

In contrast, the Decree that is ordained by Allah *Glorified is He* is implemented by His Power. None has absolute power save Him. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… and He is swift in reckoning.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) It is as if Allah *the Exalted* were making us aware of the fact that fair judgment must be implemented swiftly.

Moreover, we witness in our daily lives the affliction suffered by those who have just decrees. If we were only to hastily put into practice such decrees, the hearts of the members in society would be at peace.

We notice the widespread tribal loyalties where people seek retaliation by their own means as a result of long delays of a judge's decree. Indeed, legal investigations and decrees often take years to be brought to a close which causes hatred to build up. However, if a judge's decision were to be implemented upon establishing the identity of the murderer in the midst of the heated emotional reactions to the brutal crime, then the number of personal retaliations would decrease, and people would be appeased.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَقَدْ مَكَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَكْرُ جَمِيعًا ۖ يَعْلَمُ مَا
تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ۗ وَسَيَعْلَمُ ٱلْكُفَّٰرُ لِمَنْ عُقْبَى ٱلدَّارِ ﴿٤٢﴾

Those before them also schemed, but the over- all
scheme belongs to God: He knows what each soul does.
In the end, the disbelievers will find out who will have
the excellent home [42] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 42)

In this verse, Allah speaks to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to all listeners who behold the host of previous messages. A beholder will find that every community which received a messenger had schemed against him and conspired to invalidate its messenger's call. No community has ever benefited from such schemes or machinations, for all of the heavenly messages were triumphant in the end.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah has written, "I shall most certainly win, I and My messengers."’ (*al-Mujadala:* 21) He also says: ‘Our Word has already been given to Our servants the messengers. It is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41)

When Allah *the Exalted* puts forth a Decree, He does so through the Quran. Moreover, it is He Who has preserved the Quran, and there is no worldly affair which can abrogate a Quranic ruling. If you examine the stories of all messengers, you will find this principle clearly manifested. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* has emphasised this principle in the preserved Quran, and He has preserved it only on the basis that created beings cannot violate its rulings.

Indeed, every community has schemed against its messenger, but overall scheme belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah’s subtle plans are better for humanity than the machinations of those communities, and His are the triumphant schemes. Moreover, if such was the fate of the previous messengers, then your destiny, Prophet Muhammad, must be different. After all, you are sent for all of humanity, and no messenger will come after you.

Such verses concerning the inevitable triumph of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and of his Call were reassuring for him. For Allah *the Most High* overwhelms all machinations devised by His created beings, and He has the Power to thwart such schemes.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse: ‘He knows what each soul does.’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41) He knows the created beings’ inmost secrets—be they good or evil—which the eyes do not perceive. Moreover, He protects whom He wills from the schemes of conspirers, and He casts His Punishment upon those who maliciously plot against messengers and believers.

Undoubtedly, disbelievers will know that their fate is hellfire, along with how dreadful the dwellings which they will enter on the Last Day will be. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* grants victory to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this worldly life, while disgrace will befall disbelievers therein.

Thus, their retribution in this world is both being disgraced and increasing in their knowledge of the punishment which will be inflicted upon them in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* brings chapter *ar-Ra'd* to a close with the following verse:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَسْتَ مُرْسَلًا ۚ قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ
شَهِيدًۢا بَيْنِى وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَمَنْ عِندَهُۥ عِلْمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ﴿٤٣﴾

They say, 'You have not been sent.' Say, 'God is sufficient witness between me and you: all knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him'[43] (The Quran, *ar-Ra'd:* 43)

We take the claim 'You have not been sent …' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43) to mean that disbelievers obstinately refuse to admit the prophethood of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as if all of their aspirations revolved around denial of the fact that he is a messenger who is singled out by Allah *Glorified is He* with the final message. The proof of this is that they said, 'Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Then they proclaimed: 'Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32) In other words: they are receptive to the idea of having a messenger being sent forth to them. What they reject, however, is the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: 'Allah is sufficient witness between me and you. All knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43)

A witness, as we know, causes the balances of justice to incline to the right side. When an issue that demands a decree comes up in our worldly lives, we refer it to a judge who would say, 'Bring me the witnesses.' The judge then interrogates the witnesses so as to make a judgment based on their testimonies. So what are we to say when the Witness in this verse is Allah *the Almighty*?

But we may ask if Allah *Glorified is He* bears witness in the ordinary sense of the term? Who would He utter His testimony before? After all, disbelievers reject Allah's Words which were revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him*. We contend that Allah *Glorified is He* has brought him forth with a miracle which proves beyond doubt the truth of his message that he has delivered on behalf of Allah *the Exalted* this miracle is supernatural in character. Indeed, Allah *the Most High* has entrusted this message to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and caused it to flow from his tongue. This means that He has testified to Prophet Muhammad’s truthfulness.

Now a miracle is a phenomenon which disrupts natural order, along with being manifested through the Divine Will at the hands of a person who is sent forth by Allah *the Almighty*. This miracle amounts to the statement: ‘My servant has truthfully conveyed My message.’

When a miracle is willed by Allah, it is manifested in the full—and not limited—sense of the term. One example of a manifest miracle is the fire into which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was cast. Had the Divine intention behind this happening been simply to save Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from the fire, then this could have happened in a thousand different ways. For example, rain could have poured down from the sky, or else Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* could have fled and they would have been able to capture him.

However, after having caught him, tied him up with a rope, and cast him in the fire, Allah *Glorified is He* has showed them that through His Command the fire would not burn Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Rather, the fire would be cool and safe: ‘But We said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham)"’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 43).

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has disrupted and altered the natural laws, so that the veracity of Ibrahim's (Abraham’s) Divine message could be confirmed beyond doubt. To restate, Allah’s disrupting of the laws of nature proves the truth of His Prophet’s message.

He states in the verse which we are examining: ‘They say, "You have not been sent." Say, "Allah is sufficient witness(1) between me and you…"’ (*ar-Ra’d:* 41).

The testimony of the veracity of the Message conveyed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is expressed in the fact that he was brought up among the people of Quraysh, but he had not uttered a single letter which could be designated as eloquence, a sermon, or poetry for the first forty years of his life. After all, it is impossible for the signs of genius to be delayed until the age of forty.

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(1) *In other words: I rely upon Allah, the Witness of both of us. He witnesses my delivery of His Message, and your lies, o fabricators of lies. See Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (2/521).*

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* willed for the Quran to be conveyed by the tongue of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the age of forty, so that he could spread the message to all of humanity. This in itself is a testimony by Allah *Glorified is He* to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad's message.

Allah *Glorified is He* adds: '… all knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43) The Scripture, in this context, refers to the Quran. He who recites the Quran with close scrutiny can clearly see its inimitable nature, and he who contemplates its meanings and analyses its style realises that it stands as a testimony to the veracity of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah's Words, '… all knowledge of the Scripture comes from Him.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43), could be referring to those who knew the prophecies concerning the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the Torah and the Gospels. This is due to the fact that the description and the attributes of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are contained in these Holy Books which had preceded the Quran. In fact, 'Abdullah Ibn Salam,(1) who was a rabbi of the Jews said, 'Verily, I knew Muhammad when I saw him just as I know my own son. In fact, my knowledge of Muhammad is more firm.' This is why he presented himself to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him, 'Messenger of Allah, verily my soul inclines toward Islam, but the Jews are given to lies, and if I were to declare my Islam, they would insult, curse and accuse me of false things. I would like you (therefore) to ask them about my status.' So, Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him* called forth the leaders and elders of the Jewish community. They suspected that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might incline towards them and would cease to call them to Islam. So, they came to him, and he asked them, 'What have you to say of Ibn Salam?'(1) They showered their praise upon him and spoke of him in the highest of terms.

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(1) *He is 'Abdullah ibn Salam ibn Al-Harith Al-Isra'ili, Abu Yusuf: a Companion who embraced Islam upon the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to Medina. His [pre-Islamic] name was Al-Hasin and so Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him renamed him 'Abdullah. He witnessed the conquering of Jerusalem with 'Umar, and lived in Medina until his death in 34 A.H. (Al-A'lam li-Az-Zirikli 4/90)*

At this point, Ibn Salam proclaimed, 'Now I stand before you, and I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' So they began to slander Ibn Salam, and the latter told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Did I not tell you that the Jews are a lying people?'

Moreover, we know that those amongst the people of the Book who would rejoice by the revelations given by the Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are forty individuals amongst the Christians of Najran, thirty-two Abyssinians and eight Yemenis.

We also know that those who denied the Call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to discourage each other from listening to the Quran. The Quran relates their words, 'Do not listen to this Quran. Drown it in frivolous talk. You may gain the upper hand.' (*Fussilat:* 26) This means that they were certain that the act of listening to the Quran affects the soul by reviving the primordial nature of man which yearns to believe in Allah *the Almighty*.

As for those who are endowed with knowledge of the Books that foretell the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they know that the news of his arrival and his description are contained in their Books. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those We gave the Scripture know it as well as they know their own sons, but some of them hide the truth that they know.' (*al-Baqara:* 146) He also says: '… even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it: Allah rejects those who disbelieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

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(1) *[Narrated by Al-Bukhari]*

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (12)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (12)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (12)

the chapter of

Ibrahim

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Ibrahim*(2):

الٓرۚ كِتَٰبٌ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ إِلَيۡكَ لِتُخۡرِجَ ٱلنَّاسَ مِنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ
إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ بِإِذۡنِ رَبِّهِمۡ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطِ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡحَمِيدِ ١

***Alif Lam Ra,* This is a Scripture which We have sent down to you [Prophet] so that, with their Lord's permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light, to the path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy One [1]**
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 1)

Allah *the Almighty* commences the chapter with the disjointed Arabic letters: *Alif, Lam and Ra*. As we have previously pointed out, these disjointed letters were revealed as such and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed them exactly as he had heard them from Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. However, it is worth noting that in the chapter of *Ibrahim,* these disjointed letters do not appear independently as a separate verse, unlike that in the chapter of *Qaf*, for instance: 'Qaf'. (*Qaf:* 1) The letter 'Qaf' constitutes an independent verse. There are several other examples in the Quran such as this one where the disjointed letters constitute independent verses. However, in the chapter of *Ibrahim*, the disjointed letters are a part of a larger verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says: *'Alif Lam Ra,* This is a Scripture which We have sent down to you [Prophet]...' (*Ibrahim:* 1).

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) *The chapter of Ibrahim is the fourteenth chapter of the Quran. The chapter contains eighty-two verses and is a Meccan chapter according to al-Hasan, 'Ikrama, and Jaabir. Ibn 'Abbas and Qatada, on the other hand, view that it is was revealed in Mecca except for the last two verses which were revealed in Medina. Others say that the only verses that were revealed in Medina are the three that are addressed to those who fought against Allah Glorified is He and Messenger Muhammad, namely: '[Prophet], do you not see those who, in exchange for Allah's favour, offer only ingratitude and make their people end up in the home of ruin, [28] Hell where they burn? What an evil place to stay! [29] They set up [false deities] as Allah's equals to lead people astray from His path. Say, 'Take your pleasure now, for your destination is the Fire.' (Ibrahim: 28-30). (See Al-Qurtubi's Tafsir 5/3675).*

Now when the word 'Scripture' is mentioned, it is meant to refer to the Quran which is called Scripture, Quran and Revelation, along with many other names. The word 'Scripture' implies that the Quran is written, whereas the word 'Quran' implies that it is recited. Of all the names by which the Quran is known, these last two are essential, for they signify that the Quran is a Scripture that is written and recited. Thus, the Companion(1) who compiled the Quran would only write down (or record) a verse after he had found it written. In addition, the verse would have to be corroborated orally by two other companions. Therefore, the Quran contains proof that it has been written since the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is also a Book that is recited as the word Quran indicates.

Allah's Words, '…a Scripture which We have sent down to you [Prophet]...' (*Ibrahim:* 1) indicate that the Quran has come from above. In another place of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have sent the Scripture down to you explaining everything, and as guidance and mercy and good news to those who devote themselves to Allah.' (*an-Nahl:* 89) Elsewhere, He also says: 'We sent down the Quran with the truth, and with the truth it has come down…' (*al-Isra':* 105).

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(1) *The Companion in question is Zayd ibn Thabit Al-Ansari Allah be pleased with him, a Companion who was charged with writing down the Quranic revelation. He was born in Medina in the year 11 before the Hijra and grew up in Mecca. He was one of those Ansar who compiled the Quran at the time of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and thereafter present it to the latter. It was Zayd who wrote the first copy of the Quran at the behest of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him then at the behest of 'Uthman Allah be pleased with him as part of the effort to send copies of the Holy Book to the major cities. (Az-Zirikli's A'lam 3: 57)*

At times the revelation of the Quran is attributed to Allah *the Most High* Who brought it forth. At other times the revelation of the Quran is attributed to the created being—Gabriel *peace be upon him* — who was sent forth by Allah *the Exalted* to convey the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, Allah's Words, '… We have sent down ...' (*Ibrahim:* 1), refer to the revelation of the Quran from its location of the Guarded Tablet to carry out its mission in the universe.

Now the reason why the Quran has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the following: '… so that, with their Lord's permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light...' (*Ibrahim:* 1). Let it be noted here that the Quran has been revealed for all of mankind. Allah *Glorified is He* does not describe Prophet Muhammad's mission in the same manner that He described the missions of previous messengers. Theirs were messages addressed to specific people. Allah says, for instance: 'To the people of 'Ad, We sent their brother, Hud (Eber).' (*al-A'raf:* 65) He also says: 'To the people of Madyan We sent their brother, Shu'aib (Jethro).' (*al-A'raf:* 85) Similarly, He says about 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'He will send him as a messenger to the Children of Israel.' (*al-A'raf:* 65) Thus, Allah *the Exalted* sent previous messengers to specific locations, for specific people and at specific times throughout history—all except for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* for Allah *Glorified is He* sent him forth to all of mankind.

A case in point is when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pronounced a judgment in the dispute involving a Muslim and a Jew. On this occasion, he was just with the Jew, for the truth was on his side(1). Prophet

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(1) *Ibn 'Asakir (al-A'raf: 354 (Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq)) has narrated the following on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Abu Hadrad Al-Aslami. The latter owed four Dirhams to a Jew, and he asked to have them back. He said, 'O Muhammad I owe this person four Dirhams and he did not pay them back. Prophet Muhammad said to Abdullah, 'Give him his rightful due.' He said: By He who sent you forth with the truth, I am unable to repay him.' He said once again, 'Give him his rightful due.' He said, 'By He in whose hands rests my soul, I am unable to repay him. I have informed him that you are dispatching us to Khaybar. I am hoping that this expedition will enrich us somewhat whereby I will repay him on my return.' He said once more, 'Give him his rightful due.' Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him would never go back on his word if he made three pronouncements like this. Thus Ibn Abu Hadrad went out to the* =

Muhammad's upholding of the truth is more important to him than favouring those who belong to Islam.

Thus, we realise that Allah's Words, '…so that, with their Lord's permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light...' (*Ibrahim:* 1) indicate the universality of the Islamic message. This principle is further confirmed by His Words: 'Say [Muhammad], "People, I am the Messenger of Allah to you all…."' (*al-A'raf:* 158) This effectively invalidates the argument of those who say that he had been sent as a messenger only to Arabs. In this instance, there are two honourable privileges that are conferred upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The first privilege is that Allah *the Almighty* chose him as a messenger. The mere fact that he had been chosen for such a task implies a lofty rank. The second privilege is that he is a messenger sent to all of mankind; this is another mark of high status, for it means that his message concerns all times and places, along with people of all languages and cultures. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says His Miraculous Words: '… so that, with their Lord's permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light ...' (*Ibrahim:* 1). Note that Allah *Glorified is He* does not say 'From the depths of darkness into the lights'. In effect, He employs the term 'darkness' in its plural mode, while the word 'light' is used in its singular mode. This is due to that there are no multiple lights; there is only one light. As for 'darkness', there are as many of them as there are whims. Indeed, there are numerous paths of 'darkness'.

Now when Allah *Glorified is He* brings us out of these various paths of darkness—which are as numerous as human caprices—this is a Grace and a Blessing on His part, for we all come out into a single light.

Thus, Allah *the Exalted* wills to make clear the abstract meanings by the sensory ones which are within everyone's grasp. There is no doubt that darkness veils

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= *marketplace wearing a headdress and an outer garment. He thereby took the headdress of his head and wrapped himself in it. Then he took off the garment and said, 'Buy this garment off me.' Thus, he sold it for four Dirhams. Meanwhile, an old lady was passing by and said, 'What is the matter O companion of the Prophet?' So he informed her of what happened. Whereupon she said, 'Take this garment. Thus, she dressed him in the garment that she was wearing.' This is how the story has been narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (3: 423). Cited by Al-Kandahlawi in his (Hayat As-Sahaba) (2: 81).*

those objects which human beings might bump into, thereby preventing them from walking with peace of mind. For if a person runs into something in the dark, he might break the object, or else the object will cause him injury. In this way, darkness prevents man from attaining that which he desires. On the other hand, light serves to illuminate things. With the help of light, man is able to distinguish between various possible routes and avoid that which is harmful while heading towards that which is beneficial. Moreover, light provides human beings with discernment and right guidance. This is the sensory meaning; and both light and darkness are sensory phenomena. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* makes the meanings clear for us. However, life requires not only the illumination of sensory phenomena with light, but it also requires a light capable of elucidating the abstract phenomena—such as, for instance, grudges, envy, fear, security, serenity, trustworthiness and loyalty.

In every aspect of life, we find a thing and its counterpart; this is why abstract meanings must also be elucidated. Now the light brought by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* illuminates both sensory and spiritual phenomena at the same time so that we can avoid those things that are engulfed in darkness and travel through our spiritual paths with discernment and certainty. By doing so, we will not run into obstacles. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* explains the spiritual dimension of the verse. Allah says: '… to the Path of *the Almighty*, the Praiseworthy One.' (*Ibrahim:* 1) This is the Straight Path to its light Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brings us forth from darkness. Allah *the Exalted* wishes to illuminate the way that leads to this Path since it might be arduous for some. Thus, He wants to illustrate the two alternatives: one is the clear, self-evident Path by which a man can arrive at the destination with ease, while the other is a path that is obscure, where things are not clear. Allah *the Most High* gives the parable of darkness and light so as to elucidate this meaning. Thus, the Straight Path is the shortest way to arrive at the desired destination in our worldly life and in the Hereafter. On the other hand, the path of darkness is the path that is not safe. Regarding the Path to which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* leads us, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… to the Path of *the Almighty*, the Praiseworthy One.' (*Ibrahim:* 1) Now 'the Almighty' is He Who dominates and is never dominated, whereas the Divine Name of *'Al-Hamid'* (the Praiseworthy) is One to

Whom the quality of ‘Praiseworthiness’ has been confirmed by His creation. Likewise, if no praise is forthcoming from them, Allah *Glorified is He* is nevertheless ‘Praiseworthy’ for His own Being. He must nevertheless be praised, but whether you praise Him or not, He deserves the Attribute of ‘Praiseworthiness’.

To Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the finest example, and He is exalted far above anything that is compared to Him. In our daily lives, for example, there are people who are sometimes described as having praiseworthy attributes. Even if there is nobody around to sing one's praises, he makes sure that everything he does is worthy of praise. However, the quality of praiseworthiness in human beings is circumstantial. On the contrary, the Praiseworthiness of Allah *the Almighty* is absolute. One’s character can only be praiseworthy if it contains the virtues that make it capable of bestowing gifts for which human beings must praise it.

The primordial human nature admires this universe which has been created before the existence of anyone to admire it. The primordial human nature likes to praise the Creator of this universe, but whether the human beings praise Him or not, this adds nothing to the One Who has created and prepared this universe, for Allah’s Attribute of Praiseworthiness is innate. It is in your interest to praise Him, as you will be guided to the Path of *the Almighty* Who can never be defeated. He is the Praiseworthy Who is deserving of all praise, even if there exists no one to praise Him, for His Attributes are pre-eternal in nature.

Thus, Allah *the Exalted* is the Creator even before creation had been created. He is the Provider even before the created beings in need of sustenance had been brought into being. He is the One Who grants honour even before the existence of those whom He exalts. He is Praiseworthy even before the existence of those who praise Him. Furthermore, He is the Most-Relenting even before those towards whom He relents came to be. Therefore, Allah’s Actions emanate from His Attributes. On the other hand, human beings only acquire certain qualities if they act in the light of these qualities. For example, you would not know whether so-and-so is generous unless you actually see him giving generously and abundantly. Allah, however, has possessed the Attribute of All-Generosity even before those to whom He is generous came to exist.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِى لَهُۥ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ
وَوَيْلٌ لِّلْكَٰفِرِينَ مِنْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ ٢

Allah, to whom everything in the heavens and earth belongs.
How terrible will be the torment of those who ignore [Him] [2]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 2)

Now if you read this verse continuously with the verse that precedes it, you would read it thus: *'Alif Lam Ra.* This is a Scripture which We have sent down to you [Prophet] so that, with their Lord's permission, you may bring people from the depths of darkness into light to the Path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy One, Allah, to whom everything in the heavens and earth belongs.' (*Ibrahim:* 1-2) However, if you were to read it separately from the verse that precedes it, you would read it thus: '…Path of *the Almighty*, the Praiseworthy One, Allah, to whom everything in the heavens and earth belongs, How terrible will be the torment of those who ignore [Him].' (*Ibrahim:* 1-2) Thus, you would pronounce the word 'Allah' as (Allah) in the latter case, whereas in the former case you would have to pronounce it as *Elah*.

The rules of the Arabic language require that the proper name should precede its description. Thus you would say, for example, 'I met so-and-so the poet, the writer or the scholar.' In this verse, however, the pattern is different: '…the Path of *the Almighty*, the Praiseworthy One, Allah ...' (*Ibrahim:* 1). In other words, the Attributes 'Almighty' and 'Praiseworthy' are placed first, then comes the Divine Name 'Allah' which is the proper noun of the One Who must necessarily be present. This happened because the proper noun refers to a named thing regardless of its qualities; afterwards the qualities of that thing appear.

There are some scholars who have said that 'Allah' is a derivative noun, meaning that it refers to the One Who is worthy of worship. The Attributes of Almightiness and Praiseworthiness are considered to be a reason why Allah *the Exalted* should be worshipped with devotion. There are some scholars who have said that the word 'Allah' is a proper noun and it is not a derivative noun.

Allah *Glorified is He* has absolute dominion over all things: '…to Whom everything in the heavens and earth belongs.' (*Ibrahim:* 2) Nothing happens in His dominion except what He wishes. He who has attained to faith has done justice to himself, his life, and his Afterlife. As for he who did not believe, his fate is the opposite of this, reflected in Allah's Words: 'How terrible will be the torment of those who ignore [Him].' (*Ibrahim:* 2) This terrible state is not confined to the Hereafter; rather, it extends to this world as well. When a person is faced with difficulties, obstacles, and disasters which he has no control over, a believer—in this situation—can remember that there is a Lord Who stands above secondary causes. He can therefore be confident in the help that Allah *the Exalted* gives him. Thus, he can feel that in this world he possesses a Source of Power on which he can rely when faced with great events. On the other hand, the disbeliever can only resort to despair. This is why suicide rates are high amongst disbelievers, for there are events which are out of their control and which they are helpless to prevent. At the same time, they do not have faith in a Lord which they can turn to. Therefore, when I read the works of Quranic scholars who say that the word *Al-Wayl* refers to the punishment of the Hereafter, I find myself saying that *Al-Wayl* can also occur in this life. Indeed, there are many events that are beyond the control of human beings. If a person has no faith in Allah, he would go into panic and sink into despair. This is why we find that some of them have no other refuge than to utter the words 'O, Lord'. In doing so, they are effectively articulating the cry of the human innate nature which they tried so hard to resist by adopting atheism and refusing to attain to faith. This woe becomes even more severe in the Hereafter.

In describing those who do not believe, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَسۡتَحِبُّونَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا عَلَى ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ وَيَصُدُّونَ
عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَبۡغُونَهَا عِوَجًاۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ فِي ضَلَٰلِۭ بَعِيدٖ ﴿٣﴾

Those who prefer the life of this world over the life to come,
who turn others from God's way, trying to make it crooked:
such people have gone far astray [3] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 3)

We find that the root of the word *Habb* (to love), namely *ha' and ba'* are quite interesting, as the verb is used in a four-letter format; thus we say *'ahabba fulan,* while referring to the one whom he loves, we say *mahbub.*

This means that there is a point of contact between the two; when there is no contact, it is said that he is *hab* and *muhib*. The difference between *'ahabb* (to love) and *istahabb* (to prefer) can be seen in the letters *sin* and *ta'*. These letters signify 'asking' for something. Therefore, the verb *'istahabb* means that the person who loved was not content with any sort of ordinary love; rather, he loved in a fastidious and intense manner.

A patent example of this can be found in our daily lives: there are some who drift into deviousness, however, at the same time they resent the fact that they enjoy being devious. They perform devious actions while hating themselves, and they might come down hard on themselves for drifting into such deviousness. There are others who deviate off the Straight Path because they love to indulge in devious behaviour. They love this indulgence and boast about this deviousness; furthermore, they admire themselves taking pleasure in such transgressions, for they gratify their immediate desires. Such is the definition of one who has preferred the worldly life since he has gone beyond the ordinary limits of 'Love'.

When you look closely at this blessed verse, you will find that it does not prohibit you from loving the pleasures of this earthly life; however, what it is warning you against is loving the life of this world over that of the Hereafter—it is this case that is considered blameworthy. On the other hand, if you love this world because it assists you with your religious obligations and because you have used it as field wherein you plant the seeds of your Afterlife—this is something required, for you are using this world to perform actions which will bring you happiness in your Afterlife. You are thereby engaging yourself in this world while seeking after the Hereafter. This is why, in the chapter of *al-Mu'minun*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those who pay the prescribed alms.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 4) Thus, he is not only paying the prescribed alms, but also working to provide himself and his family with sustenance. He exerts effort in order that he might end up with surplus out of which he can give out alms. Thus, he does not work merely to satisfy his own needs; rather, he works to the greatest extent of his capacity so as to earn enough to give away to those who are unable to work for themselves. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* does not say: 'and those who pay forth the poor-due'. Rather, He says: 'Those who pay the prescribed alms.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 4) However, in this case, these are not people who love the world because they would like to make it a staging ground for the Hereafter; rather, they prefer this worldly life over the Hereafter:

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They turn others from Allah’s Way.’ (*Ibrahim:* 3) In other words, they are not content to merely love this worldly over the life to come nor are they satisfied with fulfilling their desires, seeking pleasure and ruining their souls. Rather, they go even further in their transgression and bar others from the Way of Allah *the Almighty*.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Why do you turn the believers away from Allah’s Path and try to make it crooked…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 99). It is as if they themselves have gone astray and, not being satisfied with this, they tried to lead others astray and bar them from the rightly guided Path.

Then there comes a new phase: ‘… trying to make it crooked …’ (*Ibrahim:* 3) which means that they would like for Allah’s Law to be crooked such that they might satisfy their desires. Thus, we find that there are three phases when it comes to going astray: preferring the life of this world over that of the Hereafter, turning others away from the Path of Allah and defiling His Doctrine so as to rouse an aversion of it. Allah *Glorified is He* describes such people in the following words: ‘such people have gone far astray.’ (*Ibrahim:* 3) What this means is that those who occupy the first rank in terms of perversity are those who prefer the life of this world over that of the Hereafter. Those who have indulged even more into perversity are those who turn others away from the Path of Allah *Glorified is He*. Those who have indulged the most are those who defile the Doctrine of Allah *Glorified is He* so as to stir an aversion of it in other people’s hearts or in order that it might satisfy their desires. Thus, the latter have reached the climax of perversion.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوۡمِهِۦ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمۡۖ فَيُضِلُّ ٱللَّهُ
مَن يَشَآءُ وَيَهۡدِي مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ﴿٤﴾

We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people's language to make things clear for them. But still God leaves whoever He will to stray, and guides whoever He will: He is the Almighty, the All-Wise [4] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 4)

We know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed the Doctrine on Allah's behalf; moreover, he is supported by a miracle that confirms the veracity of what he conveyed to those to whom he was sent forth. Previously, Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about that which happened to those earlier communities that preceded the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, every messenger spoke the language of his people.

There is a difference between a community that is destined to be proselytising in nature—that is, the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* — and between a community that is destined to merely receive Divine revelation, namely the communities that preceded Prophet Muhammad's community. Previous communities were not asked to spread the message of their prophets. However, Muhammad's community has been tasked with such an assignment since Allah *Glorified is He* has sent forth Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and has informed us in the Quran that amongst His many signs is that He has made human beings speaking different tongues.(1) It would not make sense for Allah *Glorified is He* to send forth a messenger who spoke all languages. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to the Arab community, and when they received him and the love of faith was planted in their hearts, it thereby became their duty to go forth and spread the message, so as to transmit the Quran as undisputable proof, after having accepted it as a miracle. The Quran is evidence since it organises all the affairs of life. These affairs are not all different amongst the various peoples of the earth: every civilisation adopts the scientific achievements of other civilisations by translating them into their native tongue. The translation of ideas from one language to another is a well-known practice in all the civilisations of the world since the matter is essentially one of ideas, and ideas do not vary from one community to another. The Quran consists of ideas and contains a Doctrine that is suitable for all of humanity. It was revealed in Arabic because the Arab community excelled in the linguistic aspects and rhetorical speech. Thus, it became the duty of the Arab community to recognise the Doctrine of Allah *the Exalted* as a rhetorical miracle and, thereafter, to spread it to other societies. This is why it is instructive to set up a comparison between the lands that were liberated by the sword and the lands that were liberated peacefully, due to the native people's admiration of the Muslims' exemplary behaviour; you will find that those who spread Islam to many parts of the world did so by being exemplars of excellence. Furthermore, you will find that they spread the religion by exhibiting praiseworthy qualities and by applying the principles of the religion in their dealings with others. This is why people embraced the religion of Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, we find that the doctrine of Islam has carried forth miraculous new ideas. In addition, the Quran is a miracle in terms of the language in which it was revealed, namely the Arabic language.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know.' (*ar-Rum*: 22)

There are people who are unable to read a single Arabic letter unless it is written in a copy of the Quran. This is due to the fact that it was through the Quran that they had learnt to read; they relied on understanding the meanings contained in the Quran through the translations made by Muslims who loved the Quran and translated it into other languages. This is why we find the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran. Will anyone take heed?' (*al-Qamar:* 17) Thus we learn Allah *Glorified is He* has made the Quran easy for remembrance in its original Arabic, then He made it lucid in that the people to whom it was revealed spread Allah's Words on His behalf. This is due to the fact that Divine messages require to be conveyed. The primary means of conveying the Divine message is oral; the second means by which the Quran is received is by the ear. Thus, firstly, must come oral communication, then the ear must recognise the meanings of words to grasp the message and also to put it into practise. We also know that whosoever hears the speaker must be cognisant and knowledgeable of the meanings of the words; that which the ear hears is spoken by the tongue.

We also know that the ability to use a language derives from one's sense of hearing; every person speaks the language that he heard in his environment. Likewise, if you were to retrace the history of how speech was acquired, you will arrive at the original root from which all human beings learned to speak, namely Adam *peace be upon him*. So Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He taught Adam all the names [of things]'(1) (*al-Baqara*: 31). We know that language started from a Divine origin when Allah *the Most High* taught it to Adam; then Adam spoke the language and those surrounding him heard it from him. From then on, language had a human origin, and it varied from one community to another. In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says 'We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people's language...' (*Ibrahim:* 4). Immediately after this statement, the reason follows: '… to make things clear for them…' (*Ibrahim:* 4). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* explains the reason why each messenger was sent forth speaking the language of his people. There is another verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If We had sent it down to someone who was not an Arab, and he had recited it to them, they still would not have believed in it.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 198-199) He also says: 'If We had made it a foreign Quran, they would have said, "If only its verses were clear! What? Foreign speech to an Arab? Say, "It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it, it is as if they are being called from a distant place."' (*Fussilat:* 44) There is a person who receives the Quran as a way of guidance and purifies himself from spiritual impurities. On the other hand, there is a person who hears the Quran, but he is blind to it, his hearing is sealed over, he is gripped with fear and cannot find peace—this is due to the fact that he is a disbeliever. The reason for this, as we know, is that any event that takes place due to the order of one, requires one initiating the action and an object that receives the action.

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(1) *Ibn Jarir narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him regarding Allah's Words: 'He taught Adam all the names [of things]' (al-Baqara: 31). These are the names with which human beings come to know one another: Man, beast, earth, sea, hill, mountain, donkey, and the equivalent of these words amongst various communities. (Cited by As-Suyuti in (Ad-Durr Al-manthur) (1/121).*

Previously, I have given the example of one who drinks tea; he blows on it and thereby makes it a little cooler. On a cold winter morning, when this same person goes out, he uses his breath to blow on his hands to make them warmer. Thus, sometimes he uses his breath to make something cooler, while at other times he uses his breath to create heat. The issue is not about using of his breath; rather, it is about the object that receives the air blown out of the mouth. The temperature of tea is higher than that of the body and therefore becomes cooler on contact with the breath. However, in winter, the temperature of the hand is cooler than that of the body; thus, it reacts to the breath being blown onto it by elevating its temperature such that becomes equal to that of the body.

Similarly, there is only a single Quran; when a believer hears its words, he is happy but when a disbeliever hears its words, he suddenly becomes tired and frustrated. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and among them, [O, Muhammad], are those who listen to you, until when they depart from you, they say to those who were given knowledge, "What has he said just now?"' (*Muhammad:* 16) There are people, who hear the Quran, but they fail to grasp its meaning, whereas there are those who upon hearing the Quran, they feel reverence in their hearts and promptly respond to the instructions of the True Lord *Glorified is He* embedded in it. We now know that language began in a conciliatory manner and ended up conventionalised. We have taken from Allah *the Almighty* that which He had taught to Adam *peace be upon him* concerning the names of things; then languages began to splinter along communal lines.

Thus, the languages spoken by the various messengers were different according to the people to whom they had been sent. Every messenger explains the Doctrine of Allah to his people. Once he puts forth this doctrine, there are those who respond to it by believing in it and becoming rightly guided; then, there are those who respond to it with disbelief and perversion. For he whom Allah *the Exalted* has guided, his heart will look towards this doctrine, and he purifies his heart from any other creed, examines that which the messenger brought and fills his heart with the doctrine which he has attained understanding and has full confidence in. This is contrary to what happens to the person whose heart is filled with a different creed, one of which he is adamant—not because of any strong conviction—but merely because of an inability to analyse, examine and study it. He ought to have cleared his heart of the erroneous creed that dwells therein. He ought to have searched, compared, sought treatment, and mulled over things more carefully. Then may he let into his heart the most acceptable creed. However, the truth is that this is not what he does—contrary to whom Allah *the Most High* has guided. Let nobody say, ‘Since Allah has led us astray, He will not subject us to suffering.' Every man should know that the will to accept faith is present, yet he failed to let it penetrate his heart. The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness.' (*Muhammad:* 17) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And He misleads not except the defiantly disobedient.' (*al-Baqara:* 26) In other words, the disobedience was ingrained in them since they filled their hearts with false creeds, and hence there was no room for the creed of Allah.

Now, in the verse which we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: But still Allah leaves whomever He wills to stray and guides whomever He wills. He is the Almighty, the All-Wise. ‘Thus, whosoever seeks to deviate from the straight path, Allah *the Almighty* will cause him to deviate even further. His faith will in no way benefit Allah’s dominion. He who attains faith guarantees his safety in this world and after his death. He is, in this life, a force for good, and after his death, he will find a life full of blessings from the Bestower of Blessings—*the Almighty* Who can never be defeated, the All-Wise Who has determined the destiny of all things according to His Will.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مُوسَىٰ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أَنۡ أَخۡرِجۡ قَوۡمَكَ مِنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى
ٱلنُّورِ وَذَكِّرۡهُم بِأَيَّىٰمِ ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٖ شَكُورٖ ٥

We sent Moses with Our signs: ‘Bring out your people from the depths of darkness into light. Remind them of the Days of God: there truly are signs in this for every steadfast, thankful person’ [5] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 5)

Numerous are the signs that Allah *the Exalted* sent with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as well as the miracles that occurred with him and which he brought and showed to his people. Our own messenger *peace and blessings be* *upon him* came forth bearing a single miracle which is the Quran. As for the other physical miracles that occurred with the Messenger of Allah, their function was to strengthen the faith of the believers in his message.

The only remaining trace of such miracles is to be found in the spiritually motivating memories which virtuous servants of Allah are fond of remembering and reflecting upon. The sheer number of miracles that happened during Musa's (Moses') mission indicates that the people he had been sent to were loquacious about unimportant matters, along with being argumentative. Now, when scholars tallied the miracles that happened during Musa's (Moses') mission, some put the number at nine, while others put the number at thirteen, yet others put the number of miracles at fourteen. To ascertain the true number of miracles we must distinguish between the miracles that occurred with respect to Pharaoh and those that occurred for the benefit of the Children of Israel. The staff that transformed into a snake, for instance, or the hand that emerged radiant-white—these were miracles for Pharaoh. The Quran puts the number of miracles that were performed for Pharaoh at nine. The True Lord *the Most High* says: '[These are] among the nine signs [you will take] to Pharaoh and his people' (*an-Naml:* 12). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not asking that Pharaoh attain faith; the purpose of Musa's (Moses') mission was not to guide Pharaoh. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had been sent, on one hand, to silence Pharaoh (through the miracles) and, on the other, to take the Children of Israel away with him—for he had been sent to them. The miracles that occurred were the following: the staff (which transformed into a snake), the hand that emerged white from his cloak, the dwindling of population and harvest levels, the flood, along with the swarms of locusts, lice and frogs, as well as the reddening of the Nile with blood. These are the nine miracles that occurred with respect to Pharaoh.

As for the other miracles that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* brought for the benefit of the Children of Israel, their numbers were plenty. They were mentioned in the following verses. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [mention] when We raised the mountain above them as if it was a dark cloud.' (*al-A'raf:* 171) Also, Allah says: 'And We shaded you with clouds.' (*al-Baqara:* 57) The True Lord *Glorified is He* likewise says: 'and sent down to you manna and quails.' (*al-Baqara:* 57)

This is why, in the following verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* summarises the miracles that occurred during Musa's (Moses') mission to his people: 'And We certainly sent Musa (Moses) with Our signs, [saying], "Bring out your people from darkness into the light and remind them of the days of Allah."' In other words, bring forth their consciousness that which was lingering in the back of their minds and have them summon the memories of the 'Days of Allah', that is, the events that transpired in those days of yesteryear. The expression 'Days of Allah' is similar to some of the other expressions which we use like the 'Day of Badr', or the 'Day of Dhi Qar', along with the 'Sixth of October', or the 'Tenth of *Ramadan*'.

This blessed verse is a reminder of one of two things. It can be a reminder of those days during which specific events occurred to the communities of old, such as the people of Nuh (Noah), 'Ad and Thamud, for example. Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* would thereby be reminding them of the stories of the communities, or nations, that preceded them, specifically, the manner in which every community, or nation, acted towards the messenger that Allah *the Exalted* had sent to them.

The other possibility is that this verse is a reminder of those days during which Allah *the Almighty* showered His blessings upon the Children of Israel or during which He afflicted them with grievous trials, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '"…and remind them of the days of Allah." Indeed in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful.' The word 'patient' refers to a person who is steadfastly patient in the face of the various events that occur during his life. The term therefore suggests that certain trials have occurred which require that patience. Similarly, the word 'grateful' suggests blessed occurrences that require the gratitude of a person.

Thus, we can see that a believer needs to embody two virtues: patience in the face of adversity and gratitude for that with which he has been blessed. When these two virtues are present in a believer, his faith is complete.(1)

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(1) *Suhaib ar-Rumi narrates that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: 'How propitious is the believer's state of affairs—verily he is fortunate in every situation—and this much can only be said of the believer: if joy visits him, he gives thanks and it is good, and if suffering afflicts him, he endures it patiently and it is good.' See Muslim's (Sahih) (2999).*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has said that these signs are indictors that help shed light upon the road that stands before a believer. They are moral lessons; thus, when he comes to know and gain understanding about the history of previous communities, or nations, he will discover that those who attained faith nevertheless suffered from certain trials. At the end, however, they enjoyed Allah’s contentment with them and His blessings. As for those who disbelieved, they were allowed some enjoyment, but ultimately, they suffered Allah’s indignation and wrath.

Upon realisation of such fact, a believer prepares himself to bear the trials that come with faith, for he is confident that Allah *the Exalted* will always compensate him and that the army of faith will always be victorious. Then the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ ٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَةَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ أَنجَىٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ
فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ وَيُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ
نِسَآءَكُمْ ۚ وَفِى ذَٰلِكُم بَلَآءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٦﴾

And so Moses said to his people, ‘Remember God’s blessing on you when He saved you from Pharaoh’s people, who were inflicting terrible suffering on you, slaughtering your sons and sparing only your women — that was a severe test from your Lord! [6] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 6)

We see that Allah *Glorified is He* has brought up an instance from their past wherein they suffered at the hands of Pharaoh’s overweening might. Allah *the Almighty* reminds them of how He saved them from such tyranny. Pharaoh used to subject them to the worst forms of suffering. The phrase 'afflicting you with the worst torment' means that they sought to cause you a grave suffering.

Pharaoh slaughtered their male children, but he spared the lives of the females such that they ended up with no male guardian—so that, then, they might violate them. This amounts to severe ignominy.

Some orientalist has a say about this verse, 'There is a similar verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara* that reads: 'And [recall] when We saved your forefathers from the people of Pharaoh, who afflicted you with the worst torment, slaughtering your [newborn] sons and keeping your females alive. And in that was a great trial from your Lord.' (*al-Baqara:* 49)

So which one of them is more expressive? The same orientalist adds, 'I will make no mention of the other verse in the chapter of *al-A'raf* when the Quran says: 'And [recall, O, Children of Israel], when We saved you from the people of Pharaoh, [who were] afflicting you with the worst torment - killing your sons and keeping your women alive. And in that was a great trial from your Lord.' (*al-A'raf:* 141)

Typically, this orientalist did not possess a strong grasp of the Arabic language. Had he possessed a solid understanding of the language, he would have known that the words in the two verses are spoken by two different speakers.

Thus, in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, the speaker was Allah *Glorified is He* which is why He said: 'We saved you' (*al-Baqara:* 49). However, the speaker in the chapter of *Ibrahim* is Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; the latter does not claim to be the one who saved them, rather, he enumerates the blessings which Allah had bestowed upon them. To clarify, when a great person wishes to remind another person of the favours that he has bestowed upon him, he reminds the person of only the greatest of favours. A person who is not as great might remind his counterpart with favours that are not as great.

I give the following example, not so as to draw a parallel, but merely for the sake of clarity, for Allah *Glorified is He* stands far above any parallel. Thus, with this in mind, suppose that a rich person has a brother of meagre means. The rich brother might support his poor brother in manifold ways: he might take care of his children, and he might look after him and his children to the fullest. Then, if the son of the poor brother tells the son of the rich brother, 'Why do you not care about us?' The son of the rich brother will say, 'Was it not my father who paid for this pen of yours, these clothes and the apartment where your family lives?'

His father, on the other hand, will only say, 'I do indeed care about you, for it is I who have provided you with the apartment in which you live.' Thus, the person with the larger spirit will remind him about only those things which are truly significant; the lesser person, on the other hand, will tend to enumerate a variety of things, both small and large.

Typically, in this verse Allah *the Almighty* describes the ignominious suffering and the slaughtering of the children as a great trial. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And in that was a great trial from your Lord.' Thus, we see the fortunate aspect of the hardship which Allah tried them with; that is, He saved them from the slaughtering of the children and the sparing of the women, which were evil aspects of their trial. It was a difficult trial.

Previously, we have explained that trials can be either good or bad. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We test you with evil and with good as trial.' (*al-Anbiya': 35*)

A trial through good times is no mark of honour, nor is a trial through bad ones a mark of humiliation. Allah *Glorified is He* proves this point when He says: 'And as for man, when his Lord tries him and [thus] is generous to him and favours him, he says, "My Lord has honoured me." But when He tries him and restricts his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me."' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16)

A trial is a form of test which you can either pass or fail. A person can only be judged according to the end result that he achieves.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذۡ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمۡ لَئِن شَكَرۡتُمۡ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمۡۖ
وَلَئِن كَفَرۡتُمۡ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٞ ٧

Remember that He promised, "If you are thankful,
I will give you more, but if you are thankless, My
punishment is terrible indeed"[7] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 7)

The meaning of the verse is that it is an emphatic reminder on behalf of your Lord that if you are grateful, He will shower even more of His blessings and gifts upon you; certainly, gratitude is a sign of one's attachment to the Bestower. Also, you must rid yourselves of any arrogance that could have be caused due to the blessings you had been given, and then you have come to know that He is the sole Giver and the Bestower.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* Himself says: 'No! [But] indeed, man transgresses because he sees himself self-sufficient.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7) If a person maintains a strong connection with Allah *the Most High,* he will not dissociate the truth from His blessings. He would remain cognisant of the Lord Who bestowed the blessings upon him. This is why I always say to be wary not to let a gift make you forgetful of the giver of the gift, for the gift has been given to you, and it is not something innate in you.

The counterpart is immediately mentioned. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe.' There must be punishment for ingratitude, and Allah's punishment must be severe since the severity of the punishment is always in proportion to the power of the punisher, and there is no one more powerful than Allah. We ask Allah *Glorified is He* to spare us from His punishment, for it is unbearable.

Thereafter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰٓ إِن تَكۡفُرُوٓاْ أَنتُمۡ وَمَن فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ جَمِيعٗا فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَغَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ ٨

And Moses said, 'Even if you, together with everybody else on earth, are thankless, God is self-suffcient, worthy of all praise' [8] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 8)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had said as much so that nobody from amongst his people would think that Allah has any need for their gratitude, along with reminding them that He will punish them by subjecting them to suffering if they fail to show gratitude. Thus, he wanted to expunge this idea from the minds of his listeners.

Moreover, he explained to them that their faith will not profit the True Lord *the Most High* at all. Their faith, and that of all the inhabitants on earth, will not affect Allah's Dominion in the slightest, for when He created His Dominion; He imparted it with the qualities of perfection and completion. Allah's creation is borne out of His own, pre-existing attribute of Perfection and Completion.

This is why the True Lord's next Words are the following:

أَلَمۡ يَأۡتِكُمۡ نَبَؤُاْ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ قَوۡمِ نُوحٖ وَعَادٖ وَثَمُودَۛ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِنۢ
بَعۡدِهِمۡۛ لَا يَعۡلَمُهُمۡ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُۚ جَآءَتۡهُمۡ رُسُلُهُم بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ فَرَدُّوٓاْ أَيۡدِيَهُمۡ فِيٓ أَفۡوَٰهِهِمۡ
وَقَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا كَفَرۡنَا بِمَآ أُرۡسِلۡتُم بِهِۦ وَإِنَّا لَفِي شَكّٖ مِّمَّا تَدۡعُونَنَآ إِلَيۡهِ مُرِيبٖ ٩

Have you not heard about those who went before you, the people of Noah, ′ Ad, Thamud, and those who lived after them, known only to God? Their messengers came to them with clear proof, but they tried to silence them, saying, ‘We do not believe the message with which you were sent. We have disturbing doubts about what you are asking us to do’ [9]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 9)

This blessed verse has allowed us to understand another verse, namely 'Indeed, We have sent you with the truth as a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And there was no nation but that there had passed within it a warner.' (*Fatir:* 24). It has also shed light on the following verse: 'And We have already sent messengers before you. Among them are those [whose stories] We have related to you, and amongst them are those [whose stories] We have not related to you. And it was not for any messenger to bring a sign [or verse] except by permission of Allah. So when the command of Allah comes, it will be concluded in truth, and the falsifiers will thereupon lose [all].' (*Ghafir:* 78)

We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* had inspired Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to relate to his people the stories of some of the prophets who preceded him. This much is clear in the Words of the True Lord: 'Has there not reached you the news of those before you, the people of Nuh (Noah) and 'Ad and Thamud?' Regarding the people who came after them, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and those after them? No one knows them but Allah. Their messengers brought them clear proofs.'

What this means is that messengers had come forth bearing the doctrine of Allah. They had also come with miracles that attested to their verity for the benefit of those who came later. the Quranic term ‘clear proofs’ can either mean, in effect, the ‘miracles’ that attest to their verity, or they are the signs that embody the clear principles which help them by lending order to the rhythm of their lives.

But did those communities, or nations, accept such clear proofs? No, for Allah *Glorified is He* says with respect to these people: 'but they returned their hands to their mouths and said, "Indeed, we disbelieve in that with which you have been sent.” Thus, we come to understand that disbelievers are those who had covered their mouths with their hands. Now, either they had grit their teeth because they could not bear the hardships of applying the doctrine of Allah, along with being unable to assert control over themselves.

Or, they had covered their mouths with their hands as a way of telling messengers, ‘Hush’, or be quiet and do not speak of the Divine Message which you have come to communicate. Or, some of them had told the messengers: ‘There is no point of you talking to these people.’

The richness of the Quranic language supports all of these interpretations. At the same time, all of these meanings come together harmoniously in this verse. A single expression in the Quran comprises a wealth of meanings—and this is commensurate with Allah’s attribute of Perfection and Completion. The riches of the Quran shall always endure; some will be revealed to us, while others might only be revealed to us by Allah on the Day of Judgment.

Thus, they say: 'Indeed, we disbelieve in that with which you have been sent.' This gives us an idea of their stupidity. They are hereby admitting that these are messengers from heaven, while at the same repudiating the Doctrine and being completely open about it. This much is clearer as revealed by Allah: 'and indeed we are, about that to which you invite us, in disquieting doubt.' This means that they had made known their opinion of the Doctrine. They said that they are in a state of apprehension and doubt in regards to this Doctrine.

Then the Quran moves on to messengers’ responses. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَتْ رُسُلُهُمْ أَفِي ٱللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِيَغْفِرَ لَكُم
مِّن ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرَكُمْ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنْ أَنتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا
تُرِيدُونَ أَن تَصُدُّونَا عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ ءَابَآؤُنَا فَأْتُونَا بِسُلْطَٰنٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Their messengers answered, ‘Can there be any doubt about God, the Creator of the heavens and earth? He calls you to Him in order to forgive you your sins and let you enjoy your life until the appointed hour.’ But they said, ‘You are only men like us. You want to turn us away from what our forefathers used to worship. Bring us clear proof then, [if you can]’ [10] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 10)

The following Words of Allah. 'Can there be any doubt about Allah?' amount to a rhetorical technique whereby the addressee is left with no other choice but to answer in a manner that validates your point. Now you would only employ such a technique in a situation when you are sure that your addressee —assuming he allows himself to entertain the truth of the matter— will answer in the manner which you want.

Therefore, the verse does not say, 'There is no doubt in Allah.' The Words of the verse are intrinsically significant. Even though one might say that these words are untrue, but such an audience is the group of disbelievers; the issue is formulated in such a way as to guarantee that they will think about the issue and will eventually reach that answer which they cannot deny; that is, that ‘There is no doubt about the [oneness] of Allah.’

Thus, we find that the speaker has, in the first order, remained silent regarding their declaration of disbelief; he then poses the rhetorical question to which the only answer can be, ‘There is no doubt about the [oneness] of Allah.’ The speaker then provides the proof that removes all doubt, namely, the words of the True Lord: 'Creator of the heavens and earth.' The word 'Creator' means one who has created in a completely original manner. This Quranic description is similar to the following Words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'The Originator is He of the heavens and the earth' (*al-Baqara:* 117).

To clarify, there is none who can create anything comparable to the heavens and the earth; they are completely original and are not based on any previous prototype. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who willed that man should be master over all the living created beings and that these created beings should be subjected to, and in the service of, man.

Man might believe his creations to be grander than that of the heavens and the earth. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* warns him with the following words: 'Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth' (*Ghafir:* 57).

If you were to contemplate the sun and ask yourself how many generations have enjoyed its warmth and benefited from its light. Certainly, you can never know the number of generations since the sun was created before the creation of mankind. A person would enjoy the sun, would derive benefit from it during the years he is destined to live, and then he would pass away and die.

Let it be noted that the great commentator of the Quran, Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi(1) gives the parable that cannot be denied by anyone. He shows how faith is actually a function of man's primordial condition. He points out that the True Lord *the Most High* grants man enough time until his mind matures, and he becomes aware of the need for faith. He gives the example of a small child who sneaks up to his sibling and hits him. At this point, the sibling must turn around to find out who hit him; a person knows intuitively that no action can occur without there being one initiating the action behind it.

Imagine if a child finds his sibling sitting on a chair, but he wants to sit on the very same chair. The child will grab his brother and pull him down from the chair so that he may sit on it himself. It is as though, intuitively, he had realised that the chair cannot accommodate two people at the same time.

Similarly, through the primordial awareness of the human soul, a person comes to the realisation that there is a single creator. Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The Originator of the heavens and the earth' (*Ibrahim:* 10), this is a vast cosmic sign.

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(1) His full name: Muhammad ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-Hasan Abu ‘Abdullah. He was the great commentator on the Quran, the most eminent scholar of his time in the field of logic and the transmitted sciences of the ancients. He was of Persian ancestry and hailed from Tabaristan. He is also known as ‘Ibn Khatib Ar-Ray’. He moved to Khawarizm and the lands beyond the river and Khurasan. He died in Herat in the year 606 AH. *(See Az-Zirikli’s (Al-A‘lam) 6: 313).*

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* continues with the Words: ' He invites you that He may forgive you of your sins.' These Words are a testament of mercy, wisdom, omnipotence, and love. Allah *Glorified is He* hereby says: 'that He may forgive you of your sins.' He does not say: 'that He forgives your sins', for He is addressing the disbelievers. However, when He *the Most High* addresses the believers, He says: 'O, you who believe, shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment? [It is that] you believe in Allah and His Messenger and strive in the Cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That is best for you, if you should know. He will forgive for you your sins.' (*as-Saff:* 10-12) Thus, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to mankind in the Quran, He does not equate believers with disbelievers.

Or it is possible that what is meant by the Words: 'that He may forgive you of your sins,' is forgiveness of the major sins. Minor sins are forgiven through the performance of the obligatory religious rites. We know that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The five prayers, and from one Friday prayer to the next, these are a form of expiation for the sins committed in between their intervals; so long as no major sins have been committed.'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'and He delays your death for a specified term.' If Allah *the Exalted* wishes to will complete annihilation, there are passages in the Quran which document this possibility as well, for instance: 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling' (*al-Qasas:* 81). This was what Allah did to Korah (Qarun). Or Allah’s Words, 'for a specified term', might refer to the Day of Judgment.

However, disbelievers are extremely antagonistic and obstinate people. This is why we come across the following words of theirs: 'They said, "You are not but men like us who wish to avert us from what our fathers were worshipping. So, bring us a clear authority.”'

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (233) and by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/484) and by Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (1086). Related on the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

Thus, disbelievers announce to their messengers that they would rather imitate their forefathers. Had they thought about the matter, they would have realised that if blind imitation were to become rampant in societies, no one would ever surpass the achievements of his parents and grandparents. The world continues to progress, thanks to the rebellion of every new generation against the old one. Therefore, why are these disbelievers adamant on imitating their parents and grandparents? Likewise, if the young generation is being innovative in every domain, why do these disbelievers cling to the creed of their forefathers?

Disbelievers do not stop there. Rather, they ask that a messenger with clear proof of his authenticity be sent them. The word 'authority' can sometimes refer to the state of being ‘compelled’, where the compelled subject is forced to act against his will.

At other times, it can refer to the proof that prompts the undertaking of action. The one initiating the action, in this case, enjoys the action which he is about to perform. Now the religion cannot be spread by compelling people against their will. Rather, a person must be drawn to the faith on the level of the heart, and this cannot be brought about through compulsion. This is why the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'There shall be no coercion in religion. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error.' (*al-Baqara:* 256) Since the right way has made itself manifest, there is no need for coercion; if someone is coerced into something, he can never fully espouse that which he has been coerced in to. However, once a person embraces the religion, he must abide by that which the religion imposes upon him. This is why a person cannot adopt a religion out of coercion. Rather, he must come to embrace it after having discerned the truth with his heart.

Allah *Glorified is He* then moves on to the messengers’ response to the disbelievers;

قَالَتْ لَهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ إِن نَّحْنُ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَمُنُّ
عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ ۖ وَمَا كَانَ لَنَآ أَن نَّأْتِيَكُم بِسُلْطَٰنٍ
إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Their messengers answered, ‘True, we are only
men like you, but God favours which- ever of
His servants He chooses. We cannot bring you
any proof unless God permits it, so let the
believers put all their trust in Him [11]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 11)

Thus, the messengers explained to their people: we are human beings like yourselves, and the authority which we possess is a miracle which the True Lord *the Most High* has exceptionally bestowed upon every messenger. It is the Truth that He bestows gifts upon His servants however He pleases. He chooses the appropriate messenger for every community; He then grants this messenger the miracle that testifies to the verity of the message; and this messenger goes about communicating all that Allah has asked him.

Every messenger carries out his mission with the complete trust that the Truth will not fail him. The messenger goes forth with the confidence that Allah will grant him victory. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'and that, verily, Our soldiers – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 173)

Allah *the Exalted* informs us of the reassurances given to the messenger and his followers during those times when they were overwhelmed by unfavourable circumstances, and when they were on the verge of despair, they would ask themselves, 'When will Allah’s victory come?' (*al-Baqara:* 214) Then came the news of the True Lord *Glorified is He* granting victory to His previous messengers—thus 'And upon Allah let the believers rely.' (*Ibrahim:* 11) These are the words proclaimed by every messenger to his followers. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us the rest of what the messengers said to their people:

وَمَا لَنَآ أَلَّا نَتَوَكَّلَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ وَقَدۡ هَدَىٰنَا سُبُلَنَاۚ وَلَنَصۡبِرَنَّ
عَلَىٰ مَآ ءَاذَيۡتُمُونَاۚ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلۡيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلۡمُتَوَكِّلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

Why should we not put our trust in God when it is He who has guided us to this way we follow? We shall certainly bear steadfastly whatever harm you do to us. Let anyone who trusts, trust in God [12] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 12)

Let us note that Allah *the Almighty* has, at the end of the previous verse, described those who put their trust in Him as 'believers'. Furthermore, at the end of this verse, He describes them as *Al-mutawakkilun*, which means those who put their trust in Him, for the quality of having faith is part and parcel of the quality of putting one's trust in Allah.

We also know that there is a difference between the words *At-tawakkul* and *At-tawakul*; the former means to make full use of the resources Allah has made available to you, as it is a state of the heart. It comes about after a person's physical faculties have performed their duties, after they have made full use of all available resources; thus, the function of the outward faculties is to perform work, whereas it is the role of the hearts to maintain an attitude of trust..

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us the rest of the conversation between the messengers and those, from amongst the past generations who disbelieved. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لِرُسُلِهِمۡ لَنُخۡرِجَنَّكُم مِّنۡ أَرۡضِنَآ أَوۡ
لَتَعُودُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَاۖ فَأَوۡحَىٰٓ إِلَيۡهِمۡ رَبُّهُمۡ لَنُهۡلِكَنَّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

The disbelievers said to their messengers, 'We shall expel you from our land unless you return to our religion.' But their Lord inspired the messengers: 'We shall destroy the evildoers [13] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 13)

We see that when the principle of the good is propagated through society, it angers those who stand to profit from corruption and who lead corrupt lives. Invariably, the perverse people come to the conclusion that it is necessary to expel the elements of the good from the land, a land whose decent inhabitants are being exploited by the corrupt people.

And if the land is to spare the elements of the good, the latter must promise to revert back to the evil ways of the disbelievers. One does not say, ‘You returned to something’ unless you starting off in that something, then you left it, and then you returned to it.

Now these messengers—whom the disbelievers were threatening to expel from the land—were they ready to revert to the ways of disbelief? Of course, they were not. We understand that the following words: 'or you must return to our religion.' In other words: ‘or you return to our creed,’ the Messengers did not accept such a deal as the True Lord *Glorified is He* instils the spirit of indomitability, confidence and serenity into the hearts of His messengers and the believers; the messengers and their followers will not be affected by such talk. This is what is expressed by the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* at the end of the verse: 'So, their Lord inspired to them, "We will surely destroy the wrongdoers."' Thus, with the destruction of the wrongdoers, heavenly justice would prevail. The belief in the principle (that evil shall ultimately be defeated) is a perennial pillar of faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues with His promise to His messengers and their followers of believers:

وَلَنُسۡكِنَنَّكُمُ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡۚ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَنۡ خَافَ مَقَامِى وَخَافَ وَعِيدِ ﴿١٤﴾

And leave you to dwell in the land after them. This
reward is for those who are in awe of meeting Me,
and of My warnings [14] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 14)

Allah *the Almighty* hereby affirms that whosoever remains steadfast upon the faith, stands in awe of His presence and fears the Day of Judgment and reckoning, simultaneously without turning back from the Doctrine of the truth, He shall cause them to inherit the lands of those who disbelieved in Him, for such is the law of heaven. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: 'And He made you heirs to their lands, and their houses and their goods – and [promised you] lands on which you had never yet set foot' (*al-Ahzab:* 27).

We know that whosoever fears Allah, stands in awe of Him and believes that Allah watches (and judges) every soul, then He will reward whosoever leads his life with the faith that He will cause him to inherit the land of he who disbelieved. The True Lord *Glorified is He* said to His Messenger: 'And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed.' (*al-A'raf:* 137)

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَٱسْتَفْتَحُوا۟ وَخَابَ كُلُّ جَبَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ ﴿١٥﴾

They asked God to decide, and every obstinate
tyrant failed [15] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 15)

They asked for victory. Thus, this was the failure of disbelievers, for they had asked for victory believing that they had access to someone who could grant them as such. How could Allah grant them victory when they are disbelievers? This is why Allah failed them and condemned them to the fate that is becoming of anyone who exhibited arrogance during his life on earth, which was along with being too proud to submit himself to the worship of his Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'disappointed, [therefore], was every obstinate tyrant.'

Now the word 'tyrant' refers to one who bends others to his will. In this context, the reference is to those who are too proud to submit themselves to the worship of the True Lord *the Most High* and who question the utility of having faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. What is it that awaits them thereafter? Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مِّن وَرَآئِهِۦ جَهَنَّمُ وَيُسْقَىٰ مِن مَّآءٍ صَدِيدٍ ﴿١٦﴾

Hell awaits each one; he will be given foul
water to drink [16] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 16)

We know that hell is a condition which shall come in the future. In other words, it is in front of him, but it also awaits him and stalks him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues: 'and he will be given a drink of purulent water.'

Now the word 'purulent' refers to that thin fluid that is found around flesh wounds; it is the pus that drips from the bodies of those who are destined to hellfire where their skins shall be roasted. Let us try to imagine the amount of pain experienced by these people when, upon asking for water to quench their thirst, they are presented with the pus dripping out of the burning of their skin. Pus is already something that rouses disgust in us; how disgusting would it be then if the inhabitants of hellfire were made to drink it—may Allah protect us from that. Allah *Glorified is He* and then proceeds to describe what these people will experience when they drink pus:

يَتَجَرَّعُهُۥ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُسِيغُهُۥ وَيَأۡتِيهِ ٱلۡمَوۡتُ مِن كُلِّ
مَكَانٖ وَمَا هُوَ بِمَيِّتٖۖ وَمِن وَرَآئِهِۦ عَذَابٌ غَلِيظٞ ١٧

Which he will try to gulp but scarcely be able to swallow;
death will encroach on him from every side, but he will not
die; more intense suffering will lie ahead of him [17]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 17)

The verb 'gulp' means that he imbibes it little by little. It is so bitter that it is thick and viscous. It barely passes down the throat. A person only swallows something if he can no longer continue to gulp; however, this drink made of pus does not go smoothly down the throat of he who drinks it. When Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'but will hardly [be able to] swallow it.' It means that he cannot swallow it easily for its taste and its appearance are repelling. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: 'And death will come to him from everywhere, but he is not to die. 'What this means is that: he looks around him, and all he sees is death surrounding him from every direction; still, he does not die. To his surprise, he sees that suffering surrounds him from every direction as per the words of the True Lord *the Most High*: 'And before him is a massive punishment.'

This is how the arrogant person suffers; he was so obstinate towards faith. If we compare severe suffering with the mildest form of suffering that a person experiences in hellfire, we would find that even the latter is unbearable, for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* himself said: 'The least suffering for the inhabitants of Hell on the Day of Resurrection would be for the man under whose soles would be placed two embers, and his brain would boil on account of them.'(1) How terrible would the 'severe' suffering be then? May Allah protect us from such suffering? Then, Allah *Glorified is He* describes an existential condition:

مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ بِرَبِّهِمۡۖ أَعۡمَٰلُهُمۡ كَرَمَادٍ ٱشۡتَدَّتۡ بِهِ ٱلرِّيحُ فِي يَوۡمٍ عَاصِفٖۖ
لَّا يَقۡدِرُونَ مِمَّا كَسَبُواْ عَلَىٰ شَيۡءٖۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلضَّلَٰلُ ٱلۡبَعِيدُ ١٨

The deeds of those who reject their Lord are like ashes that the wind blows furiously on a stormy day: they have no power over anything they have gained. This is to stray far, far away [18] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 18)

Certain thoughts—which are corrosive to the tenets of the faith—might creep into a person's mind, whereby he might ask: how can so-and-so be thrown into Hell even as he had given humanity the wonderful inventions that changed the course of civilisations and helped people? How can Allah punish those who exerted so much effort in order to advance the arts and sciences? Will He make them suffer just because they were disbelievers? The answer is that yes, He will. Allah causes them to suffer, even if, in principle, He does not deny those who performed good works their reward. That being said, Allah is capable of rewarding them in this life with glory, fame, and wealth. These are, after all, the goals towards which they worked. The following saying of the Prophet applies to these people: 'You have performed such a deed so that such-and-such may be said about you, and such-and-such has indeed been said about you.'(2) They earned their reward through the fame and fortune which they coveted, for as they worked, they did not have Allah in mind.

Does the Quran describe the notion of reward? Even if such disbelievers receive severe suffering for their disbelief, the True Lord will, nevertheless, reward them for the good which they did. They receive their reward in this world by having their inventions or their discoveries bear his name.

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(1) *There is a unanimous agreement regarding the authenticity of this Hadith. It has been related by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (6561) and also by Muslim in his (Sahih) (213). Narrated on the authority of an-Nu'man Ibn Bashir may Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1905) and by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2: 322) and by an- Nasa'i in his (Sunnan) (6/23, 24). Narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him . This Hadith has also been commented upon by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi in his book (Al- Ahadith Al-Qudsiyya) (1/135-151). I have verified this myself.*

We all know the following saying of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Whosoever emigrated for worldly benefits, or for a woman he wished to marry, the reward for his emigration shall be that which he emigrated for.'(1) However, in the Hereafter, his reward shall be suffering, for during his life on earth, he lived in denial of Allah. All of these deeds which they performed in this world—deeds which they thought were of humanitarian and philanthropic value—will turn to dust on the Day of Resurrection. On a windy day, a strong wind will blow on them, scattering them far and wide. 'The example of those who disbelieve in their Lord is [that] their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day; they are unable [to keep] from what they earned a [single] thing. This is what extreme error is.'

At that time, they will not be given the opportunity to resume their lives and learn from their experience; rather, suffering will be all around them, and their tongues will speak: 'My Lord, send me back so that I might do righteousness in that which I left behind.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 99-100)

However, were he allowed to return to his life, he would merely revert to that which he had been forbidden from doing. As the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And even if I should be brought back to my Lord, I will surely find better than this as a return.' (*al-Kahf:* 36).This disbelief is the extreme aberrance which rendered all their deeds—which they thought were virtuous—in vain. Thus, they remained in a state of denial regarding the path that leads to happiness in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

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(1) *There is unanimous agreement regarding the authenticity of this Hadith. It is published by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (1) and by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1907). Narrated on the authority of 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab The first part of the Hadith is as follows: {(The correctness and the rewards for) deeds depends upon original intentions; and every person* will be rewarded with that which he intended}.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ
إِن يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَأْتِ بِخَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴿١٩﴾

[Prophet], do you not see that God created the heavens and the earth for a purpose? He could remove all of you and replace you with a new creation if He wished to [19]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 19)

Allah *Glorified is He* hereby informs us that He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with a principle of balance. The sky will never crash down upon the earth, for Allah says: 'And He restrains the sky from falling upon the earth, unless by His permission.' (*al-Hajj:* 65)

Now when you walk outside you find the sun over you, it is kept in place by virtue of a precise architectural system. Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* wishes to lay special emphasis upon a universal, corporeal principle; He begins with the words: 'Have you not seen?', which actually means, 'Have you not known?'

Allah *the Exalted* uses this expression in this context so as to explain to us that that which He teaches us as truth is truer than that which we perceive with our eyes. If Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Have you not seen …', this means: do you not know with certainty? Your eyes can deceive you. Now when the True Lord *the Most High* calls our attention to the heavens and the earth, we must learn now that they would not exist were it not for He bringing them into being. It is He Who has informed us that He is their Creator; no one else has claimed to have created them. Therefore, until someone else comes forth and claims to have created the heavens and the earth, this means that it was Allah who created them.

Previously, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth' (*Ghafir:* 57). As we know, the life of a single human being cannot be compared with the life of the sky; an individual human being dies, while others are born. All human beings come and go; however, the sun remains, and so does the earth.

What is indeed awe-inspiring about the All-Merciful creation is that He created it all such that it is subservient to man; there is no created being that can deviate from its God given nature of being subservient to man. However, when it comes to man and the duties that he has been charged with, he has a choice in the matter, either believe, if he so wishes, or he can disbelieve; he can either obey, if he so wishes or he can disobey.

However, the created beings that have been made subservient to man are not endowed with free will. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it, but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) This blessed verse teaches us that Allah's Mercy has been shown towards us human beings even before we were brought into being. Allah's Mercy brought us into a world that has been prepared for us.

It is indeed an amazing fact that the universe that has been created for us—a universe which helps sustain us and helps sustain our kind—revolves around things which we have nothing to do with; things which never change. I am referring to the great phenomena of creation like the sun, the moon, and the earth.

There are other things which are subject to change, and this occurs in one of two ways: on the one hand, there are things which change and are replaced by new things, like the plants which cease to exist (qua living creatures) and become harvest (for human beings), or like the animals whose flesh we consume or which die off on their own.

On the other hand, there are elements of creation which change, but their basic substance remains the same, even if their form changes. These consist of the inanimate objects which we see—like the mountains, the earth and their constitutive elements—every day we discover new elements. Thus, the elements of the created universe which witnessed mankind's entrance upon the scene are of two kinds: one kind remains unaffected by the passage of time, while the other kind is affected by the passage of time; however, its basic constitutive elements remain unchanged. These are the inanimate objects. There is yet another kind of created being whose form and gender changes over time. All of this indicates that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has two attributes:

One is His attribute of Omnipotence and All-Dominance; Allah *Glorified is He* has the power to subjugate any created being of His choice to another one of

His choice; this attribute of His is everlasting. The other attribute of His is His free will—and it is this very same attribute which He has made manifest in human beings.

His quality of Omnipotence—through which Allah *the Almighty* has made the various elements of the created universe subservient to man—is absolute and applies to every single thing that He has created. There is nothing that can ever go against His Will.

The wisdom behind Allah's endowing human beings with free will is such that man returns to Him as a loving servant who abides by all of His religious obligations. When a person is obedient towards Allah—even while having the choice of disobeying Him—this, in the end, proves that such a person truly loves his Lord. At the same time, it proves that essential quality of Allah's, namely, that He is the One Who is 'worthy of being loved'.

In the aforementioned verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'have you not seen that Allah created the heavens and the earth in truth?' (*Ibrahim:* 19) Let us note that the word *bil-haq* (with truth) has been mentioned on numerous occasions throughout the Holy Quran. For instance, in the Quran we find the following Words of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We did not create the heavens and the earth and everything between them but in truth' (*al-Hijr:* 85). We also find His Words: 'We were not playing a pointless game when we created the heavens and earth and everything in between.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 38)

This indicates that the heavens and the earth have been created with the quality of immutability. This has caused the philosophical schools of thought to engage this idea in two ways: the first manner of perceiving this idea is held by those who wish to adhere to faith, while the other is held by those who wish to disbelieve. The latter category is itself split into two subcategories. The first subcategory considers the immutability of the natural laws—which govern the sun, the moon and the earth—as evidence that there is no creator of the universe. They claim that if a creator did exist, He would change the nature of the heavens and the earth; however, all of those planets and heavenly bodies follow their orbital courses according to a precise, internal system. The second subcategory—of those who wished to disbelieve—posit that the abnormalities in the universe, in addition to the physical flaws that exist in certain kinds of created beings, prove that there is no Allah. How could Allah create a living being that is blind; another who is crippled or one born with only one eye?

Thus, this latter subcategory of disbelievers took the existence of flaws in the universe as proof that there is no Allah. What is interesting is that the group that wanted the nature of the heavens and the earth to be changed—wanted it as a necessary requirement for confirming the existence of a creator. Whereas the other group—the one that observed that physical flaws existed in certain created beings—the immutability in creating all people with the same semblance (without flaws or abnormalities) would be the only incentive to make them admit the existence of a creator if He created.

What all of this tells us is that each of the two groups took one of two opposing issues as the basis for their disbelief. The two groups could not come to an agreement upon either issue, and this reveals the contradiction that exists between the two.

If the two groups were to think deeply about the issue, they would come to the realisation that faith is a necessary requirement for understanding the universe—whether in terms of its immutable nature or in terms of the flaws that it contains.

Thus, if you are one of those who expect the universe to be governed by the principle of immutability, consider, then, the immutability inherent in the orbital movements of the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon. Let this fact be your evidence for the existence of a creator, an Omnipotent Divine Force.

If, on the other hand, you are one of those who—if the existence of a creator is to be believed—expects the created universe to be in constant flux, then consider the inherent variety of created beings. Let this variety—by virtue of which no two created beings are alike—be the evidence that confirms the existence of a Divine Creator, Whose Power is Absolute.

The True Lord *the Most High* has pointed out to us that He has not created the heavens and the earth as mere idle play; rather, He created them in accordance with an inner truth. There is a difference between idle play and inner truth. A plaything can be devised by one who is dallying with a random object; all of a sudden, he uncovers its entertainment value and thereafter he and others can use it for their amusement.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He created the heavens and earth in truth, and He is far above whatever they join with Him!’ (*an-Nahl:* 3)

As for the act of creating in truth, this implies that the Creator brings His creation into being in accordance with strict, precise principles. Thus, He fashions it according to an ordered, immutable system based upon wisdom and truth. Since the higher reaches of the cosmos are immutable, then it is the True Lord *the Most High* Who created the heavens and the earth. Furthermore, since you seek to imbue your freedom of choice with stability and order, then adopt the Doctrine which Allah has revealed. By doing so, your life will become ordered just as the movement of the heavenly bodies is ordered. When you deviate from the Doctrine of truth, corruption is all that you will find.

If you wish that all manner of corruption disappear from society, then seek the decrees of Allah that has values man has wasted by deviating from His Doctrine. What you will find is that man’s neglect of these decrees is the reason why corruption exists in human societies. In addition, consider the Words of the True Lord, in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, when He says: ‘It is the Lord of Mercy Who taught the Quran. He created man and taught him to communicate. The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses; the plants and the trees submit to His designs. He has raised the sky up. He has set the balance so that you may not exceed in the balance. Weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 1-9)

Thus, when you look at the sun, for example, you notice that sunrise and sunset—as well as its eclipse—are precise, ordered events. The same applies to the moon when it shines fully in all its splendour, when it wanes or when it is eclipsed.

Just as Allah *the Almighty* has raised the skies high and has established a balance, you too must weigh your actions with equity so that your lives might become ordered, for when the material and moral scales become balanced, and this translates into a stable rhythm of life. In contrast, if you remain on such a deviant course, know that Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of doing away with you and bringing forth a new creation: ‘… If He wills, He can do away with you and produce a new creation.’ (*Ibrahim:* 19) The wording of this verse as well as the concept of removing people and replacing them with a new creation is not what Allah wants, for He has created and endowed man with the freedom to accept Him, even though He has also endowed him with the freedom not to accept Him.

On another occasion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Though now you are called upon to give [a little] for the sake of Allah, some of you are grudging. Whoever is grudging is so only towards himself. Allah is the source of wealth, and you are the needy ones. He will substitute other people for you if you turn away, and they will not be like you.’ (*Muhammad:* 38) Allah *Glorified is He* says in regards to the issue of Jews denying the manner of the Messiah’s birth, that is, 'Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*: ‘When the son of Mary is cited as an example, your people [Prophet] laugh and jeer, saying, "Are our gods better or him?", they cite him only to challenge you. They are a quarrelsome people, but he is only a servant we favoured and made an example for the Children of Israel. If it had been our will, we could have made you angels, succeeding one another on earth.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 57-60)

The absolute Power of Allah which created 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* in the absence of a father is the same power that is capable of doing whatever it pleases. There is nothing that can refuse to comply with the Will of the True Lord *the Most High* or can counteract His infinite Power. Allah *Glorified is He* says on another occasion: ‘And, by the Lord of every sunrise and sunset, We have the power to substitute for them others better than they are— nothing can prevent Us from doing this.’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 40-41) Thus, there is nothing that can prevent Allah from doing what He wills.

To emphasise the point that He is capable of bringing forth a new creation—and that, indeed, this is not in the realm of the impossible—Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ بِعَزِيزٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

That is not difficult for Allah [20]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 20)

When something is described as '*Aziz*, this means it is dear, impossible, or difficult. However, Allah *the Exalted* can never be denied what He wills. He might reveal His Power—through which He can do away with a living being and bring forth a new one in its stead—when He does away with a plant and brings forth a new one or when He does away with an animal and brings forth a new one; He also does away with communities of human beings and brings forth newer communities in their stead.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَبَرَزُوا۟ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا فَقَالَ ٱلضُّعَفَٰٓؤُا۟ لِلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَكْبَرُوٓا۟ إِنَّا كُنَّا لَكُمْ تَبَعًا فَهَلْ
أَنتُم مُّغْنُونَ عَنَّا مِنْ عَذَابِ ٱللَّهِ مِن شَىْءٍ ۚ قَالُوا۟ لَوْ هَدَىٰنَا ٱللَّهُ لَهَدَيْنَٰكُمْ ۖ
سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْنَآ أَجَزِعْنَآ أَمْ صَبَرْنَا مَا لَنَا مِن مَّحِيصٍ ﴿٢١﴾

When they all appear before Him, the weak will say to the power- seekers, 'We were your followers. Can you protect us from any of God's punishment?' They will reply, 'If God had guided us, we would have guided you. It makes no difference now whether we rage or endure with patience: there is no escape' [21] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 21)

The word *Al-buruz* refers to the appearance of that which was hidden. It is said, for example, *rajul bariz* is an eminent man who inspires awe in others, the only man who the world gives in to his power. It is also said *imra'ah bariza* which means a woman who intermixes with men and who does not cover herself appropriately.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And you will see the earth as an open plain' (*al-Kahf:* 47). He says *'barizatan'* which means as an open plain. What this means is that every one of us will, on the Last Day, see the entire earth in a state of completion. In other words, we will not see a mere portion of it as is the case in our day-to-day lives, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But today we have removed your veil and your sight is sharp' (*Qaf:* 22).

It is also said *faras bariz*. This is a reference to a horse that wins races with other horses. No other horse is able to catch up with it. Therefore, it is the horse that is most clearly visible to the eye during a race. We know that during races, the galloping horses create clouds of dust. This dust obstructs the vision such that nobody can really see in detail what is happening with the horses in the thick of the race. However, if there emerges a single horse that eludes all the others; there will be no other horses in its vicinity to create clouds of dust such that could prevent spectators from seeing it clearly. In this instance the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘When they all appear before Him (on the Day of Judgment…’ (*Ibrahim:* 21). One might ask if there is anything that is hidden from Allah *the Almighty* such that it will not appear to Him on that Day? The answer is that Allah *the Most High* is far too Great for anything—whether on earth, in the sky or anything in the universe—to hide from Him. In this context, the meaning is that they shall appear to themselves, that is, they shall clearly behold their own existence in the presence of Allah *the Exalted*.

In the past, He says: ‘They try to hide themselves from people, but they cannot hide from Allah. He is with them when they plot at night, saying things that do not please Him. He is fully aware of everything they do.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 108)

They used to believe that they could hide their deeds from their Lord. They were wont to deceive, and they were furtive at that. On the Day of Resurrection, however, we find them completely exposed in front of their Creator. They shall be seen for all they are worth, just like all other created beings. The verse may also mean that each of them will appear before himself, and see himself facing Allah.

We know that Allah *the Exalted* brought created beings into existence according to one of two possible states. One is a state wherein man is compelled and has no free will. The other state is that wherein man has a choice. The ratio of things in which man has free will is relatively small compared to those things in which he does not have free will. The True Lord *the Most High* has willed it to be this way since He has pre-eternally known what a person who becomes accustomed to rebelling against Allah would do. He, thus explain it to man. ‘You have become accustomed to rebelling and saying "No", and you might publicly proclaim your disbelief, and you might even go to war for its sake. You want to rebel against the Will of the True Lord. Therefore, if what you say—to the effect that your capacity for rebellion is innate—is true, then try rebelling against those compulsory things which haunt you.'

Man knows, through experience, that he is unable to rebel against such things. A poor man cannot become rich without Allah’s Leave, nor can a sick person become well again without Allah’s Leave, nor can a weak person become strong if this is incongruous with the Will of Allah. All of this indicates that Allah’s ownership of you still remains a compulsory fact. Furthermore, there shall come a day when even the little free will that you have shall be stripped from you.

‘The Day when they will come out and nothing about them will be concealed from Allah. "Who has control today?" [Allah will say] "To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all)."’ (*Ghafir:* 16) On that Day, you see yourself for all you are worth, and you will find the True Lord the Most High before you. At the moment when you stand before your Creator, either you will see yourself for all you are worth, or the meaning of Allah’s Words might be that all of creation will stand before Him on that Day completely exposed, whether they be followers or leaders.

At that moment, the following Words of the True Lord shall come true: ‘…The weak will say to those who are arrogant, "We were your followers…"’ (*Ibrahim:* 21).

Thus, we see a dialogue unfold between two kinds of human beings: on the one side there are the arrogant people who were the leaders along with the masters who used to issue orders to the weak so that they might carry them out. To their surprise, however, the weak people will find that, on the Day of Judgment, their status will become equal with that of the powerful, arrogant people. They will then behold the suffering that awaits them all. Thereupon, the weak will ask the arrogant: ‘…Can you avail us anything against Allah's punishment?’ (*Ibrahim:* 21) Previously, these arrogant people had flaunted their power and sovereignty so as to subjugate the weak people. Alternatively, they might have displayed insolence towards the messengers when the latter exhorted them to faith, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* points out elsewhere in the Quran: ‘And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

These words amount to arrogantly scorning the faith, for it is as if—Allah forbids—they are questioning Allah’s Will and infinite Wisdom which He exercises when selecting His messengers.

Alternatively, the meaning of this verse might be that they displayed arrogance towards themselves, hence their failure to attain to faith. Another possibility is that they had used their power and influence so as to act arrogantly towards the followers, whereby the latter were not able to disobey them. That is why, when they were all rendered equally powerless, the followers said to them: '… Can you avail us anything against Allah's punishment?' (*Ibrahim:* 21) This is evidence of the rebuke, disgrace and ignominy suffered by the follower.

We know that in another place of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* has quoted the followers as saying: 'Lord! We obeyed our masters and our chiefs, and they led us astray. Lord, give them double punishment and reject them completely.' (*al-Ahzab:* 67-68) Allah *the Almighty* brings up this issue so that we might understand the criterion we should use to decide about whom to follow. Therefore, before following the orders of someone else in a matter, be sure that there is good in it for you and that it will not bring you harm. Let us all pay close attention and never hand over the reins of our lives unless we have a clear rationale for doing so.

Let us all remember the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Like Satan, who says to man, "Do not believe" However, when man disbelieves, he says, "I disown you, I fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."' (*al-Hashr:* 16)

If you are faced with a matter that goes against Allah's Doctrine, you must uphold Allah's Doctrine over all else. Allah *the Exalted* has stated this for us so that we might pay close attention, for we must not hand over the reins of our lives to those whom we follow without having considered the matter wisely. Will he lead us to the good, or will he lead us to the bad; furthermore, can he stave off evil and save us from misfortune?

Therefore, let all of our actions be guided by a clear rationale. To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 16)

The word *Al-ala'a* means Allah's blessings. Among the most precious of these blessings are those values which the True Lord *the Most High* has brought out so that we might lead our lives on earth in the light of their wisdom and so that we might not adopt an ignorant approach to life; rather, we should adopt a clear and rational approach.

These are the principles which the follower should abide by in his dealings with his superior, lest they both find themselves equally disgraced on the Day of Reckoning. Thereupon, the followers will say to the followed: ‘We were your followers. Can you avail us anything against Allah's punishment?’ (*Ibrahim:* 21)

This Quranic passage is spoken by the Lord of the worlds. Therefore, each letter has a purpose and a meaning. For instance, when He says ‘… avail us anything against Allah's punishment’ (*Ibrahim:* 21), this means that they will be unable to mitigate even the smallest portion of Allah’s punishment. It is as if they are making it easier for them, by asking them to bear some of the punishment or reduce their suffering by at least a small fraction.

A similar situation occurs when one person asks another for a pound; this other person then says, 'One pound is all I have.' As a result, the first person says, 'Then give me at least a fraction of it.' He is in effect asking for one quarter of the pound or even a ten-piaster-fraction of it.

This is similar to that which the followers will ask those whom they followed; what then is the response from those who disobeyed Allah with their disbelief? The following is their response to those who asked them to lessen—if only by a fraction—the amount of suffering due to them: ‘They will reply, "If Allah had guided us, we would have guided you. It makes no difference now whether we rage or endure with patience. There is no escape."’ (*Ibrahim:* 21) Thus, their falsehood becomes manifest, for they claim that ‘guidance’ entails Allah instilling faith into their hearts. They forget that ‘guidance’ means the clear proof that leads one to such goal.

The following Words of Allah *Glorified is He* help to elucidate the meaning: ‘And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil).’ (*Muhammad:* 17) Whosoever embraces faith with a breast that expands to contain it will find every avenue of good open to him. However, if a person disbelieves, how can Allah ever guide him, when he has preferred blindness over right-guidance? Obviously, he will fail to find any sort of guidance.

The disbelievers will admit, on the Day of Judgment, to those who followed them—for on that Day they will see with their own eyes that heaven is real and that Hell is real and Divine Reckoning is real—that if only the True Lord had taken them by hand and led them to faith, they would have led their followers to faith as well. Such a view of theirs is fallacious. They claim: 'If Allah had guided us, we would have guided you' (*Ibrahim:* 21).

We know that when a person finds himself in an impasse that is beyond his ability to surmount—an impasse from which there is no escape. There are two possible attitudes which one can adopt: the first attitude is one of despondency and desperation, while the second attitude is that of steadfast patience. At this juncture, we find the disbelievers saying: 'It makes no difference now whether we rage or endure with patience. There is no escape.' (*Ibrahim:* 21) This means that whether they grieve desperately or endure patiently—either way Allah will not save them from their terrible fate; there is, therefore, no escape and no prospect for riddance.

The expression *hasa*—in a place—means that he paced to and fro, yet, he could not find relief. In our own colloquial Egyptian Arabic, there is an expression that illustrates this meaning, that is, *fulan hayis*, which means that so-and-so cannot find a place where he can rest. They also say *nabat bihim al-'ard,* which means that every spot on earth refuses their entry. This point is explained by Allah *Glorified is He* when He says: '… when the earth, for all its spaciousness, closed in around them, when their very souls closed in around them …' (*at-Tawba:* 118). This is an illustration of the state of those to whom the expression *nabat bihim al-'ard* applies; their own souls become too narrow for them, thus, they become constricted. We often hear from those upon whom the True Lord has inflicted hardship, in their life on earth: *ana la atiq nafsi* (I cannot endure myself). This is indeed what happens to people in times of angst; their soul cannot stand itself. It is as if each person has two souls, two identities. One soul seeks carnal pleasures, but when it goes too far, the person reverts back to the soul that abhors carnal pleasure. Neither of these two states brings him any happiness—whether in loving pleasure or in hating it.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ لَمَّا قُضِيَ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَعَدَكُمۡ وَعۡدَ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَوَعَدتُّكُمۡ
فَأَخۡلَفۡتُكُمۡۖ وَمَا كَانَ لِيَ عَلَيۡكُم مِّن سُلۡطَٰنٍ إِلَّآ أَن دَعَوۡتُكُمۡ فَٱسۡتَجَبۡتُمۡ لِيۖ فَلَا
تَلُومُونِي وَلُومُوٓاْ أَنفُسَكُمۖ مَّآ أَنَا۠ بِمُصۡرِخِكُمۡ وَمَآ أَنتُم بِمُصۡرِخِيَّۖ إِنِّي
كَفَرۡتُ بِمَآ أَشۡرَكۡتُمُونِ مِن قَبۡلُۗ إِنَّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ﴿٢٢﴾

When everything has been decided, Satan will say, ‘God gave you a true promise. I too made promises but they were false ones: I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with God before.’ A bitter torment awaits such wrongdoers [22] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 22)

At this juncture the dialogue takes on a broader scope; it started out as a conversation between the followed and their followers; presently, the dialogue is carried out between Satan and mankind. Given the manner in which the True Lord *the Most High* has phrased this verse, we can note that the state in which the dialogue is taking place is one of finality; the final resolution of all matters has been determined. There can be no further discussion in the matter, and there is no opportunity to go back and change the events that have already transpired.

That ‘everything will have been decided’ means that each person shall meet his fate. Whosoever has been destined for Paradise shall enter it, and whosoever has been destined for hellfire shall likewise enter it; in effect, events have reached their ultimate, unalterable denouement.

It is only now that Satan exposes himself and, ‘Satan will say, when everything has been decided, "Allah gave you a true promise. I too made promises but I deceived you."’ (*Ibrahim:* 22) A promise given by Allah cannot but be true, for it issues from the One Who has real sovereignty over things, whereas a promise given by Satan, on the other hand, is a completely different matter, for it issues from one who does not have sovereignty over things. This is why it is a false promise. Only the True Lord can give promises that are fixed and unalterable.

When you—a human being—promise to render a future service to another human being, can you guarantee that your future situation will still enable you to fulfil your promise? This is why Allah *the Exalted* advises us to begin any such promises with the words '*in sha'a Allah'* (Allah willing). In so doing, we acknowledge that the matter hinges upon Allah's Will, for He is the One solely capable of making a promise and carrying it out. If one of us is about to make a promise, he should protect himself from uttering falsehood by saying '*in sha'a Allah*.' Thus, if for some reason you find yourself unable to make good on that which you promised, you would have at least protected yourself from accusations of dishonesty.

In the Hereafter, we find Satan saying: '… I too made promises, but I deceived you …' (*Ibrahim:* 22). This is due to Satan's promise being a false one, and falsehood is *lajlaj* (never lasts and its defeat is inevitable). When you base your knowledge upon falsehood, reality will later prove the incorrectness of your assumptions and will cause you to disbelieve that upon which you based your knowledge. This is why we find the True Lord *the Most High* illustrating the vast gulf that separates truth and falsehood. He says: '…the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind. In this way does Allah set forth the parables' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17).

Thus, Satan tries to exculpate himself even though he did make promises which he had no power to keep. This is why he tries to lay the blame upon those who followed him. In this respect, he can be likened to those who said: '…"If Allah had guided us, we would have guided you."' (*Ibrahim:* 21) Thereafter Satan says: '…"I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call …"' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

Power—as we know—can consist of either the power to compel or the power to persuade. The power to compel means that a person has enough power to compel others to do things against their will even if they abhor that which they are forced to do. As for the power of persuasion, it means that a person possesses a convincing logic that causes you to happily do that which he asks you to. Thus, on the Day of Reckoning, Satan confesses to human beings and says: 'I want to ask you. Did I possess the power to force you to do my bidding? Or was it that I had the power to persuasion by which I seduced you to follow my ways?'

During your earthly journeys, I had neither the latter nor the former power over you, so do not accuse me of anything, nor make a scapegoat out of me and blame me for all of your mistakes. I was the first among you to stray from the right way. I disobeyed my Lord's command. I had no power over you but that I called you and you responded. 'The only influence I had over you is that I stirred up the lower tendencies within your own souls, and when these tendencies had been awakened, you began engaging in sinful acts.'

Thus, Satan either can stir up the tendencies of the lower self or can let the lower self-follow its own desires and sin on its own accord. The lower self has sufficient self-motivation to sin on its own.

Previously, I have pointed out how a particular sin can be identified as either being independent or caused by self-motivation or as being caused by seduction from the devil. If the soul becomes, on its own accord, attracted to a particular temptation—whereby the more the person distances himself from it the more his soul clamours for it—then this sin can be said to originate from the lower self, for the latter is innately disposed towards it.

As for the whisperings of the devil, they consist of the devil moving from one sin to the other trying to tempt a person. If the devil finds a person to be resistant to a particular sin, he moves on and tries to tempt him into something else. It is Satan's wish that a person commits sins, regardless of which sin this happens to be—what is important is that man sins. This is why he targets a person's weaknesses, and if he finds him to be impregnable in one area, he shifts the point of attack to another. Satan proclaims that he is not to be blamed for this: '…I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me. Blame yourselves…' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

The guilt lies on the shoulders of the one who actually committed the sin, not the one who did the tempting. The True Lord *the Most High* continues with Satan's words, on the Day of Judgment, to those whom he seduced: '… It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine…' (*Ibrahim:* 22). These are the words that come from Satan—who, previously, had shown arrogance towards Adam *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* ordered him, along with all the other angels, to prostrate to Adam—The present situation, however, is one of parity between him and those whom he seduced. He makes it known that he can be of no benefit to them, nor can they be of any benefit to him.

The word *Al-musrikh* (the one who responds to the cries of someone else and helps him) is related to the verbal noun *As-surakh*, from the root *sarakh*, which means the raising of one's voice in order that others might hear it. He who cries out thus is asking for none other than help. If one were to find a treasure under one's feet, one would not cry out so as not to draw attention. Rather, one would look around to see if anyone noticed or not. In contrast, if a person were attacked by a lion, obviously he would cry out for help. Thus, the objective of crying out is to ask for help, and this act is not performed unless a person fears some imminent danger.

The word *musrikh* indicates that the verb *asrakh* is affected by what is known in grammatical terms as *hamzat al-'izala*, Another example of this is the word *mu'jam* (dictionary); it means that which explains the meaning of a term such that it removes the mystery surrounding it. One could say. '*a'jam al-kitab*', which means that he explained it and brought it to light. This *hamza* that has been applied, in effect, redresses the word's ambiguity.

Another example of the application of this *hamza* is the word *atab,* which means he reproached him. When the *hamza* is applied to the word, it becomes *a'tab*, which means he removed that which was blameworthy. We also find the word *atab* in the Prophet's supplication: 'To you are all supplications until You are pleased. There is no power and no might except in You' In essence, this means the following 'O, Lord, if you find me blameworthy in any way, I supplicate to you to remove the cause of such blameworthiness.'

We find that the technique of *Al-'izala* can be affected either through the addition of the *hamza* or through *At-tad'if*; for example, we might say '*marrad at-tabib maridah*', which means that the doctor—by Allah's leave—treated his patient's illness.

So, the word *musrikh* denotes one who removes the cause behind another's cries. It is as though there were a person who cried out for help, whereby another person came to his rescue. Thus, Satan announces, on the Day of Judgment, that he and those he seduced are in a predicament. Furthermore, he is unable to do anything about the cause of this predicament. They (the people who responded to his seduction) are not able to remove the cause of such a predicament; neither party is able to help the other.

Satan, then, adds: ‘I reject the way you associated me with Allah before’ (*Ibrahim:* 22). What this means is that you have ascribed to me a share of Allah’s Divinity in the way of obedience, when you submitted yourselves to my temptation, and you were not of Allah’s sincere and true servants whom I swore by the Majesty of Allah not to seduce.(1) Furthermore, each and every one of you carried out that which I seduced him to. I called you and you obeyed, whereas Allah called you and you disobeyed or disbelieved, and so you became like me, for I too were once commanded by Allah and disobeyed.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says that which Satan will utter to those who disbelieved and sinned: ‘…A bitter torment awaits such wrongdoers.’ (*Ibrahim:* 22)

This is a public affair, the issue of disbelief at the summit, for just as you obeyed Satan and gave him a share of Allah’s Divinity, he shall be there to tell you the final evaluation of this situation, and he will declare his refusal to share in Allah’s Divinity or to ascribe it to anyone. For at that day of Gathering, Allah’s Words about him will be realised: ‘"You have respite," said Allah, "until the Day of the Appointed Time."’ (*al-Hijr:* 37-38)

Satan will, till the Day of Judgment, be sneaking, whispering and enticing, but on that day all shall manifest, whether it be the actions of humans, Jinn, or any of all other created beings, before the One, the Superb Vanquisher, and there will be nothing that will remain hidden from sight.

Indeed, this is what they have deluded themselves and thought that they could hide what they have done from the Eyes of Allah, and therefore, we find in the Qudsi Hadith,

‘O, son of Adam, if it were that you believed I could not see you, then the deficiency is in your faith, and if it were that you believe that I could see you, then why have you relegated me to the lowest of your witnesses?’ For in one's daily life you do not find people stealing from one another face to face, and no one burns down another's house right before their eyes, so if it were mankind that you would not do such things with one another, then how can you do such things with your Creator and disobey Him as such?

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(1) As is found in Allah’s words: ‘(Whereupon Satan Iblis] said: ‘Then (I swear] by Thy very might: I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error (*Sad:* 82) (all] save such of them as are truly Thy servants!’[83]’ (*Sad:* 82-83)

Furthermore, if you were doubtful that He can see you, then the deficiency is in your faith, and if you believed that He does see you, then why have you belittled His witnessing of you; if a person were to observe you, you would not dare do to him that which he hates.

Thus, Satan says in admission and confirmation that the evildoers will face grievous suffering and that evildoing at the summit is the association of Allah's Divinity with others, as it is stated by Luqman when he said to his son: '…"My son, do not attribute any partners to Allah. Attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong."' (*Luqman:* 13)

When we read, 'A bitter torment awaits such wrongdoers' (*Ibrahim:* 22), either we take it as a confirmation from Satan that attributing partners to Allah is a terrible wrong and that's why a bitter torment awaits him and his followers; or we take it as a conclusion of this public issue stated by Allah after Satan said: '…I reject the way you associated me with Allah before." …' (*Ibrahim:* 22) What this means is that after the True Lord speaks of the manifestation of all creation and created beings, followed by the dialogue between the weak and the elite, then the dialogue between Satan and the people of disbelief and sin, finally He brings forth the final judgment in this matter: '…"I reject the way you associated me with Allah before."…'' (*Ibrahim:* 22)

Indeed, special occasions are reflective of their corresponding states, so that the soul is yearning and looking forward to that appointed time, such as in the Words of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'The good will live in bliss.' (*al-Infitar:* 13) Then He brings forth its opposing state: 'And the wicked will burn in the Fire.' (*al-Infitar:* 14)

Then, just as He declares the state corresponding to the evildoers, it is necessary to expand the hearts with joy of the state and compensation due to those who have been made felicitous with faith.

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأُدْخِلَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا
ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ تَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَٰمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

But those who believed and did good deeds will be brought into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain with their Lord’s permission: their greeting there is ‘Peace’[23] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 23)

Here the Arabic verb *udkhila* (indicated by the phrase ‘will be brought into’) can be ascribed in three ways, and each one of these ways is noteworthy (in its meaning). First, the verb can be ascribed to Allah; second, it can be ascribed to the angels who receive the command from Allah to bring a believer into the gardens; finally, it can be related to believers who enter the gardens by Allah’s permission. For Allah brought them in through His permission, the chosen angels opened the gates to the gardens to them, and the believers actively entered. Such is the meaning for each possible way.

There is also another reading for this verse that clarifies this in which the verb is read as *udhkhilu* (with the vowel sound ‘u’ applied to the end of the word). Here the speaker is clearly Allah, and we notice that the True Lord *the Most High* in this verse says: ‘But those who believed and did good deeds will be brought into Gardens …’ (*Ibrahim:* 23).

In order to apply the vowel sound ’u’ to the ending of the word *udkhil,* it must be that Allah permitted their being brought in since He also said in the same verse: ‘…with their Lord's permission…’ (*Ibrahim:* 23). Indeed the angels that are responsible for this act, opened the gates; and believers entered, all this by Allah’s Leave.

We notice that all this talk is of gardens; so what are the gardens? We say that *janna* ‘garden’ in its linguistic origin is a shelter or covering; from this same root meaning is the word *junun* ‘madness’. In other words, the covering of reason and the root for this word are the letters ’j’ and ’n’. The *janna* is therefore a shelter because of its fullness of trees through which a walker could not be seen due to the sheltering of its tress. Or in other words: that whomever enters it abides in it without anyone seeing him, for every provision and blessing in it is one that one would not want to ever leave.

The word *jannat* ‘gardens’ is also applied to parts of our world too, and Allah *Glorified is He* is the One who says: ‘Would any of you like to have a garden of palm trees and vines …’ (*al-Baqara:* 266). It is for us to also know that the *janna* is distinct from the dwellings we find in it since Allah says: ‘…The good, peaceful homes in Gardens of lasting bliss …’ (*at-Tawba:* 72).

Janna—and to Allah belongs the supreme example—is also a vast garden, and this vastness is distributed to everyone in its sight. Man—in the mystery of his creation—loves to both have a special space as well as to go into many other places as well. For example, some people rent an apartment or build an independent house or even mansion for themselves and in that house or mansion they like to have one room that is special to them, one which no one else enters.

People act and value things upon these principles; those who want to buy some land will wonder: Is it situated upon a small alley or upon a main street? Can I raise the building to several stories high or not? Can I allot a portion of the land to a garden or not?

If the land is situated upon open space, then the price per meter is not just standard price, but includes the value of vertical spaciousness and surrounding openness whether in fields or upon the sea, for example, and in which case there is no one to intrude upon you in such a place.

Jannat are, thus, vast spaces, and everyone who enters them has in them goodly dwellings and through these gardens rivers run and those who are brought into them are: ‘…to remain with their Lord's permission…’ (*Ibrahim:* 23).

Thus, we know that mankind loves to live in luxury, but for every luxury in this world there is cause to ruin it, and does it last or does it not last? Every one of us has seen people who live in luxury and it was taken from them by virtue of vicissitudes of this life, or they abandoned it by virtue of death.

Yet, the *janna* of Allah and its luxuries are a different matter; indeed in it luxury does not miss you, neither do you miss it, as it is based on the capability of your Lord.

We notice that the True Lord’s Words ‘to remain’ (*Ibrahim:* 23) clarify that abiding in these gardens is for eternity by Allah’s Leave. He follows these Words with: ‘… Their greeting therein is "Peace."’ (*Ibrahim:* 23)

Welcoming or greetings are that which one gives their brother in humanity as a testament of their joy for their meeting. Thus, greetings or welcoming are commensurate with the amount of joy. For sometimes a greeting can simply be the raising of the hand in acknowledgement without shaking one another's hand, or this may not be enough when one feels greater endearment towards another, so one shakes their hand, or even embrace them. In such ways, welcoming can go to higher levels, and it is the declaration of joy at the encounter of others.

The welcoming in *janna* is that of peace since peace is the security of every human being; peace with oneself is such so that you are not inundating it with the type of self-dialogue in which you are constantly reprimanding it about what has passed or daydreaming of future actions. For in the peace of *janna* you will not find disturbances from the past, present or future. Rather you are in harmony with all that surrounds you in the universe: whether it be inanimate, plant, human or angelic.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said as conclusion for this verse: '…their greeting therein is "Peace."' (*Ibrahim:* 23)

This is indeed the greatest blessing: living in peace and security. After that, the angels shall enter upon them in accordance to what the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

'… The angels will go in to them from every gate, 'Peace be with you because you have remained steadfast. What an excellent reward is this home of yours."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23-24)

Then they will deliver the highest of greetings of peace, from Allah, and He is the declarer of: '"Peace," a word from the Lord of Mercy.' (*Ya Sin:* 58)

After Allah has described the states of the people of proximity and felicity, and the people who are distant and evildoing, He wanted to strike a parable to clarify for us the difference between the creed of the felicitous who lived by Allah's Word and the creed of the evildoers who followed a range of ways and not the way of Allah.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا
ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِى ٱلسَّمَآءِ (٢٤) تُؤْتِىٓ أُكُلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍۭ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا ۗ
وَيَضْرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ (٢٥)

[Prophet], do you not see how God makes comparisons? A good word is like a good tree whose root is firm and whose branches are high in the sky [24] Yielding constant fruit by its Lord’s leave – God makes such comparisons for people so that they may reflect [25] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 24-25)

A parable is that which makes a subtlety manifest. For example, you would say to a friend of yours, 'Have you seen so-and-so?' Thus, he tells you, 'No, I have not seen him. So you say to him, 'He looks like so-and-so.' In such a way you materialise or clarify a picture which is absent or hazy in his memory using one which is clear to it. Allah *the Exalted* uses parables particularly in regards to sensory matters in order to convey their meanings to our minds. Man has a deeper inclination for that which is sensory. The receptors of his senses introduce to him things of a sensory nature, first, whereas their meanings are comprehended later.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or larger …’ (*al-Baqara:* 26). To this, disbelievers said, 'How is it that Allah would propound a parable of a gnat?' This means that they have not fully realised that a gnat has life and movement like any other created being, and that its biological structure is similar to the biological structure of all living beings in its details, along with carrying out all the necessary biological functions for survival. None but entomologists—those who study the science of insects—can know how it breathes, digests its food, how its circulatory system functions or where its particular glands are; despite all this, it is an insect that is minute in its make-up.

He draws many parables to clarify that which is mysterious with that which is manifest. After that, the parable becomes popular and is used frequently among people. We say that the word *daraba* (indicated by the word ‘set forth’) is used as it is in the saying *darb al ‘umla*, which means ‘minting coins by stamping metal’. People of yesteryear used to come forth with a piece of silver or gold and mould into a certain form and weight to designate a certain value, which it would become exchangeable currency. It is also said *duriba fi Misr* which means that it has become conventional or matter of fact. The same goes with parables when they become frequently used by people and matter of fact amongst them.

The parable that Allah *the Almighty* sets forth is that of a good word. It has four characteristics: '…Like a good tree…' (*Ibrahim:* 24). In other words it is a source of good in which you take comfort, whether in the way it looks, in its scent, with its fruits or all of it collectively. His Words, 'like a good tree' (*Ibrahim:* 24), imply that all your senses find comfort in it. The word 'good' is derived from the many ways in which one can sense goodness. The first characteristic is that it is a good tree. The second characteristic is that its roots are firm, as the faith of a loving believer. The third characteristic is that its branches are in the sky which is a proof of its rootedness in a healthy foundation and of its fine blossoming. As for the fourth characteristic it is that it consistently brings forth fruit and provision by its Sustainer's Leave. In other words, it will continuously be supplied—by the Sustainer—and thus will continuously give with no limitation or finitude. These are indications of the traits of loving believers.

Since it is a good tree, then it is of the category of plants and vegetation which require nourishment to sustain its functions of survival, and its survival is based on its foundation in the earth, so if the tree is unstable it would not be able to receive its nourishment. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says about this tree: '…whose root is firm and whose branches are high in the sky.' (*Ibrahim:* 24)

We all think that a tree receives its nourishment only from its roots, but the scientific reality confirms that it only takes five percent of its nourishment from its roots. The rest, it takes in through air. So, the cleaner the air the more able a tree to grow to its full potential, and its branches can reach up to the heights of the sky.

However, if the environment is not clean and is polluted, then the air is not clean enough to allow the tree to grow to its full potential. Unsuitable changes in the environment and conditions keep the tree from being able to extract the appropriate nourishment. It does not grow as it should, unless Allah brings the rain down upon it, hence washing its leaves.

Thus, the True Lord’s Words, ‘…whose root is firm…’ (*Ibrahim:* 24) mean that it derives stability and nourishment from the earth. Also, His Words, ‘… whose branches are high in the sky …’ (*Ibrahim:* 24) clarify that it takes from above. Then He *the Most High* follows with ‘Yielding constant fruit …’ (*Ibrahim:* 25).

Al-ukul ‘fruit’ is all that which is consumed and enjoyed. We should not take this to mean only that which we consume with our mouths only, for there are trees and plants which are good because the dispositions of different parts of the universe, and its people need it. Shade, for example, is something from which we benefit; also there are trees with which ether interacts to bring about a beautiful scent.

An example of this is in the incident of the Bedouin child who saw his neighbour’s palm trees rich in dates, while the palm tree that his family owned was without fruit. He wondered why. Then, he went to cut it down, but his father caught up with him and prevented him from doing so and said, 'Our palm tree is the male which produces the necessary pollen for the other palm trees to bear fruit.'

Therefore, I do not agree with scholars who have gone to interpret the True Lord’s Words: ‘… a good tree …’ (*Ibrahim:* 24) as an apple tree or any other of those that bear sweet fruits. This is because every tree—even if it were a bitter colocynth tree—is good due to the benefits with which the True Lord has imbued it. For it is from the colocynth tree that we are able to derive the medicine colocynth—it may be bitter tasting—but it can cure some from their ailments by the Leave of Allah.

Thus, all that can be described as a tree has its own good role in this universe. The True Lord’s Words, ‘Yielding constant fruit …’ (*Ibrahim:* 25) indicate that there is value to all trees, whether we see it bearing sweet fruits or not.

Furthermore, modern science has alerted us to the fact that all greenery contributes to the purification of the air, as it extracts from it carbon dioxide, and adds for us oxygen. All greenery does so consistently during the day and transforms their role by sending carbon dioxide during the night and absorbing oxygen, as though they are programmed based on the understanding that daytime requires more movement.

Living beings require more fuel for their movement and that is oxygen, and human beings require a great amount of oxygen for movement. We find, for example, that whoever climbs stairs starts breathing heavily because their lungs are trying to absorb the greatest possible amount of oxygen to oxygenate the blood and create the needed energy to climb up the stairs. Thus, all greenery has its own specific role which is given to it by the Creator *the Most High*. It is because of this that the scholars have differed in their interpretation of: 'Yielding constant fruit …' (*Ibrahim:* 25).

There are those who said that *Al-heen* indicates a moment; such as in the Words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'When the soul of a dying man comes up to his throat, while you gaze on' (*al-Waqi'a:* 83-84). Another scholar said that *Al-heen* is that which implies morning and evening, and Allah says: 'So celebrate Allah's Glory in the evening, in the morning.' (*ar-Rum:* 17) I say, let us pay attention to the fact that *Al-heen* is the time when that which is decreed becomes a reality. If *Al-heen* is when the last of your soul reaches your throat—for that moment is synonymous with *Al-heen* here—and if it was supposed to mean something longer than that, such as morning or evening for example, then such a time is included in the meaning of *Al-heen.* Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… Who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity and times of danger …' (*al-Baqara:* 177). In this verse, 'danger' means a time of war, and the time of war could be long. The True Lord *the Most High* then says: '… having on earth your abode and livelihood for a while' (*al-A'raf:* 24). Hence, the meaning of *Al-heen* in this verse is the unknown period of time which extends until the earth is replaced and is no longer the earth we know, and the sky unlike the sky we have. So, there is no set time with which we can define the meaning of *Al-heen.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* follows this sacred verse which we are about to reflect upon with His Words: '… Allah sets forth such parables for people so that they may reflect.' (*Ibrahim:* 25) The meaning of setting forth a parable is to strike the example of a small thing to indicate something which is great or to manifest something to bring to light that which is a mystery or to bring closer the meanings of things to one's first means of consciousness and comprehension, which are the sensory channels including your hearing, eyesight and the rest of the senses. When the meanings which are commensurate with the mind’s ambition are brought forth, man transcends the stage of sensation to intellectual knowledge. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings it closer by setting forth parables which communicate to us the meanings that are necessary for our understanding.

Allah *the Exalted* does not shy away—as He says—to set forth a parable of a gnat and that which is above it. Some orientalists have said, 'Why did He not say "that which is below it"?' We say to those who say that: you have not understood the Arabic language, so you have not been able to receive the Quran with the ownership of Arabic. For a parable is set forth with that which is minute, and what is ‘above the minute’ is the more minute.

The True Lord *the Most High* sets forth a parable to us of the life of this world. It is the life for which Allah created human beings, but there were other species before man. Allah clarifies for us, with the parable, that which concerns life from the moment of Adam’s creation till the coming of the Hour. So, He encapsulates it—this long and wide ranging life which consists of the lifetimes of generations—and presents it to us in an image like a summary, and He says to us: ‘And set forth to them parable of the life of this world: like water which We send down from the cloud so the herbage of the earth becomes tangled on account of it, then it becomes dry broken into pieces which the winds scatter; and Allah is the holder of power over all things.’ (*al-Kahf:* 45) In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* summarised the likeness of life in this parable. The descending water revitalises plants, which are then blown away by the wind.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Know (O mankind) that the life of this world is but a play and a passing delight, and a beautiful show, and (the cause of) your boastful vying with one another, and (of your) greed for more and more riches and children. Its parable is that of (life-giving) rain: the herbage which it causes to grow delights the tillers of the soil, but then it withers; you can see it turn yellow, and in the end, it crumbles into dust.' (*al-Hadid:* 20) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* gave an example of the deep and far reach of life in this simple parable so that we may see the subtle meanings of it in an image that we can grasp with our senses. Our simple minds may then be able to comprehend what Allah *the Exalted* wishes from us.

We know that we need our senses to grasp certain concepts first before they are elevated to the degree of imagination and conception. Thus, these are the stages through which we can comprehend subtle ideas. The first stage is the sensation *Al-hiss*, the second is the imagination *At-takhayul* and the third is the phantasm of fantasies *At-tawahum*.

Imagination is to draw together a complete image that does not exist externally, even if it was based on elements that do exist externally. An example of this is the words of the Arab poet who wanted to describe the inscription on the skin of his beloved woman's hand. He said:

Like pearls her fingertips were,
Amidst the design of interlocking rings
Fish of crystals that exist,
In nets of emerald woven

If anyone was to search for the image presented by these verses of poetry, he would not find it in reality. However, the poet created it from distinctive elements and meanings that are available for the mind to perceive. Fish, crystals, nets, and emeralds are all existing objects and elements. The poet painted a metaphorical image from things that do exist. This is the type of imagination that brings meanings closer to our understanding.

Conception is different from imagination since it paints an image that does not exist in reality, being formed of individual elements that are also not real. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Garden (of Eden): 'And there will be found all that the souls might desire, and (all that) the eyes might delight in.' (*az-Zukhruf*: 71) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this by saying, 'In it (the Garden) is what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what has not been imagined in the heart of any person.'(1) The eyes and the ears are means for sensory realisation, but that which the heart cannot reach could only be explained by mere conception and fantasy. Thus, we know why Allah *Glorified is He* presented such parables for us. They are to summarise and explain unseen concepts, using things that are closer to our human understanding.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2824) of the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him of the Prophet may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him who said: "Allah has said: I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what has not occurred to the heart of any person; which is affirmed in the book of Allah: "And [as for all such believers,] no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them [in the life to come] as a reward for all that they did," (as-Sajda: 17).*

When you want to write to a friend, you might take a piece of paper and pen and start composing a long letter. However, if brevity was of utmost importance, you would work harder and spend a longer time to focus all the meanings in a few words. Sa'd Zaghlul, the leader of the Egyptian revolution in the year 1919, wrote to one of his friends at the end of a five page letter, 'I apologise for having lengthened this letter, for I had no time to be succinct.' The reason for this is that to summarise means to force many meanings into a few words.

When one of the Muslim army generals asked for military help from Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* after being besieged, he sent a message with only a few words, 'It is your help I need!' In these few words, the besieged general summarised what he wanted to communicate, to whoever might help him, with great conciseness.

An Arab poet once said:

When Allah wants the propagation of a virtue (that) was lost,
He enforces its reprisal through a person's envious tongue.
(For) if it were not for the burning of the fire,
The scent of incense would not be known.

This means that if a dormant virtue is forgotten by the people, Allah *the Exalted* allows the envious tongues of human beings to gossip speculate and disparage it so that it can become clear and manifest. This is similar to placing a stick of incense in the fire, thereby diffusing its scent among the people. So, the poet used this parable to clarify a matter for the reader or listener.

Another Arab poet also said the following verses, presenting another parable:

If a man praises others for their bounties,
And lengthens the praise, he has surely insulted them.
He sees the praised ones as miser watering wells,
To drink from them, they need longer ropes.

Ordinary measures of evaluation tell us that lengthy praises imply honour and nobility. However, when we understand the verses of this poet, our opinions may change by their meaning. The poet posed the concept that a generous drinking well in the desert only needs a short rope for a bucket to get water from it. If the water is at a lower level and the well is stingy, it would require a longer rope out of which to get the water. This means that lengthening the rope indicates the well’s emptiness. In the same sense, lengthening praises to a person is, in fact, an expression of their stinginess. It indicates that the person will not give away his favours except after many praises. Had the praised person been truly generous, they would have been satisfied with a word or two of praise, or even less.

Thus, such parables can be used to bring meanings closer to a receiver’s mind. In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And (thus it is that) Allah propounds parables unto men, so that they might remind themselves (of the truth),' (*Ibrahim:* 25). To 'remind' someone is to present a fact that they knew naturally, but have forgotten with time. The Quranic parable is brought forth to remind people of issues they had already known.

Thus, Allah *the Exalted* presents this parable of the good word that resembles a fruitful tree. Through this parable, He clarifies the state of righteous people who are in close adherence to His commands. In the next verse, He wants to remind us of the contrasting state of the evildoers who have opposed Allah’s Way. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَثَلُ كَلِمَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ ٱجْتُثَّتْ مِن فَوْقِ ٱلْأَرْضِ مَا لَهَا مِن قَرَارٍ ٢٦

But an evil word is like a rotten tree, uprooted from the surface of the earth, with no power to endure [26]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 26)

If we were to compare the corrupt word with the good word, we will discover a startling contrast. The corrupt word resembles a tree that is 'torn up (with its roots).' The Arabic word used is *ujtuthat,* which is related to the word *juttha,* meaning carcass or a body which has been separated from its soul. Later, the carcass becomes debris and disintegrates to its most basic primary elements.

Thus, the process of *ijtithath* is the uprooting of something from its origin and tearing it up by its roots. In the case of the good tree, its foundation is strong and unaltered by any circumstance or event. On the other hand, a corrupt word, like a corrupt tree, has no roots and resembles a carcass on the face of the earth, with no foundation to anchor it steadfastly.

When scholars were interpreting the meaning of the verse describing the good tree, some of them said that it was the palm tree since it is a bountiful tree and its leaves do not fall. It always remains as a source of shade and all its elements provide benefits. For example, we can use the branches of the palm tree to make pillars for village homes. We can shape chairs from its fronds and use the fibres between its branches to weave ropes. We can also use the straw to make baskets.

Some scholars mistakenly interpreted the verse of 'the corrupt tree' to refer to the colocynth or the *figor the Kurrat* tree (Egyptian leek). Regarding all of these interpretations, we say that Allah *the Almighty* has created these trees to be beneficial according to the situation in which we need them. When you look at the universe, you find that its items have varying natures. The basic elements of life are not just food and drink, but include the elements that keep the environmental balance that Allah *Glorified is He* has designed. He has the most sublime knowledge of what He created. Allah *the Exalted* has not created anything but good.

Furthermore, everything in this universe provides a continuous stream of benefits that radiates into the world. For example, the falling of leaves brings about fertility to the earth once again. These are all things that are manifested to us long after they had been created by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *the Most High* raises some people and abases other people. He is the One Who says of His Essence: '(And) every day He manifests Himself in yet another (wondrous) way.' (*ar-Rahman:* 29)

Different geographical locations have different days with varied beginnings and endings. Thus, we can observe closely the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Surely, Allah extends His forgiveness by night, offering repentance for the sinner of the day, and expands His forgiveness by daytime, offering repentance for the sinner of the night, until the rising of the sun from the West.'(1) The meaning of this is that the Allah's Forgiveness is always extended for his servants since night starts at every minute for some people, and daytime starts at the same moment for other people. The birth of night and day is continuous as the earth revolves around itself.

In the same manner, we must never consider the garlic tree, the colocynth tree or any other tree in Allah's creation as a corrupt tree, for His creation has no faults. When we find a young man moulding a piece of iron, only an uninformed mind might think that this is misuse and corruption. A reasonable person would deduce that bending the iron will help manufacture a tool of benefit.

The best of all good words is the testimony that there is no god but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad is His Messenger. This testimony drives all righteousness. Accordingly, the most corrupt of words is the denial of this testimony, disbelieving in its principals and being obstinate against the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad's miracles.

One might say that since Allah *the Almighty* has described a corrupt tree, such a tree must exist. We say that any object that causes harm to a person at any given moment is corrupt at that moment. Excess sugar, for example, can damage the health of a diabetic person. Thus, every form of creation has virtues that are beneficial in certain circumstances and harmful in others. It rests upon man to discern that which is harmful and that which is beneficial concerning different situations.

In Allah's description of what a corrupt word resembles, He did not say that this corrupt tree has any branches leading to the sky. The tree is torn up from the ground, with no roots to form any foundation or anchor in the ground and no branches to reach the guidance of the sky. Allah *Glorified is He* described it as: 'completely unable to endure,' (*Ibrahim:* 26). This means that it has no stability or fortitude. Such is the state of disbelief in Allah *Glorified is He* for whoever denies Him will have no rising good works, as there are no foundations for virtue in his efforts.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2759) from the Hadith of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari may Allah be pleased with him*

Thus, the corrupt word has been described with three characteristics. Firstly, it is essentially harmful and malicious. Secondly, it is unstable and has no foundations. Thirdly, it has no endurance or fortitude due to its shaky grounds. Then Allah *the Most High* clarifies the results of both types of words. The words of virtue and good will lead to peace and security in this life and in the Hereafter. The words of evil and malice will lead to oppression, misguidance, anxiety, and hardship in this world. Then, in the Hereafter, they will be faced with grievous suffering.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

يُثَبِّتُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱلْقَوْلِ ٱلثَّابِتِ فِي ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَفِي ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۖ وَيُضِلُّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ۚ وَيَفْعَلُ ٱللَّهُ مَا يَشَآءُ ﴿٢٧﴾

Allah will give firmness to those who believe in the firmly rooted word, both in this world and the Hereafter, but the evildoers He leaves to stray: God does whatever He will [27]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 27)

In this verse, the Arabic word *yuthabit* (strengthens) is a natural description of a believer's sincere speech, especially after the last verse describes the contrasting and opposing traits of falsehood: 'Torn up (by its roots) from the face of the earth, completely unable to endure.' (*Ibrahim:* 26) The word 'strengthens' also implies that man is prone to change. People are under the effect of varying circumstances, events, and decisions that may influence them in choosing a correct judgment or overturning it. When Allah *the Almighty* commands his servant to uphold a certain judgment, the servant may implement Allah's command or he may disobey.

Additionally, a responsible servant may find himself in a situation where a fellow human opposes Allah's directives. Some fellow humans may even harm a servant who follows His command. Here, a faithful servant must trust that Allah *the Almighty* will not let him down in the face of such circumstances and that he will emerge victorious, whether sooner or later.

In this way, the changes and varying events will not control a believer's choices, confirming the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* in this verse: 'Allah strengthens (*yuthabit*) the believers with unshakable speech.' (*Ibrahim:* 27) Indeed, they have believed in His Existence and Power, and furthermore, He will strengthen them and grant them stability in the face of turmoil. This is due to the fact that a believer knows with certainty what Allah *Glorified is He* has said and affirmed: 'Verily, (people's) hearts do find their rest in the remembrance of Allah,' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28). As long as a believer sets his heart firm with faith and unwavering speech, he will not be susceptible to deflection from the true path.

Naturally, the magnitude of the firmness depends on the source of the firmness and stability. When a pillar in a house becomes unstable, the owner of the house may ask an engineer to work on supporting the pillar, instead of asking an inexperienced person to carry out the job. The engineer will indeed guarantee greater strength and stability to the work. What do you think, then, about the stability and firmness that the Creator of man can grant?

Furthermore, Allah's Words, 'Allah strengthens (*yuthabit*) believers.' (*Ibrahim:* 27), bring us back to Him, the Source of all stability Who is not affected by any defects. The conclusion is that man is prone to change. He can be afflicted by misfortunes that are not in line with what he wants in life. Thus, a believer must not lose heart since his Lord *Glorified is He* is grasped by no sight while He grasps all insight. Allah *Glorified is He* strengthens believers with unshakable Words. These Words are firm because they emanate from unchanging Truth. They strengthen believers who are faced with harm from disbelievers who have chosen to disobey Allah's Way.

This verse made it clear that believers should necessarily be calm in life by leaving themselves in the company and care of Allah *the Most High* at all times. If oppressors learn about the compensatory rewards that Allah has prepared for the oppressed, they would indeed withhold their transgressions towards the oppressed people out of stinginess. They would probably stop their transgressions when they think, 'Why should we allow them all this reward that is prepared for their patience?' Indeed, many believers who have been persecuted for their faith endured the torture of the disbelievers and did not lose their certainty in Allah's reward. When disbelievers tortured them, they remembered the Gentleness of Allah's compensation and endured the afflictions with perseverance.

Allah's compensation can actually be eminent in this world or it can be fulfilled in the Hereafter. Believers are strengthened by Allah's Will in this world, a world that is characterised by change and needs constant effort. You need to work hard in it in order to achieve its benefits. People strive to learn, to find jobs, to get married and to form families. You need to serve other people to be served by them and you fulfil your needs through others. In this world, you can only reap the fruits of your labour. Every luxury that you acquire is the result of serious effort on your part, despite people trying to reduce their efforts while increasing their pleasures.

The Hereafter is different. Its efforts are free of charge and need no physical cause. Everything in it has been divinely prepared for mankind in advance. Believers will be compensated with constant pleasures in a garden that is as wide as the heavens and the earth and that contains all that their souls could desire. Others will be punished for their disbelief and sins with grave punishments.

If Allah *Glorified is He* strengthens believers in this world with firm and unshakable Words, He will indeed strengthen them in the Hereafter by providing them these effortless pleasures. We find that Allah *the Almighty* does not mention the Hereafter in this verse, rather, He says: '… in the life of this world as well as in the life to come,' (*Ibrahim:* 27). This is because the aspirations and ambitions in this life are related to the efforts exerted in it, but this matter is entirely different in the life to come. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who compensates people according to His Divine Will. He strengthens believers during the questioning in the grave and continues strengthening them until they are finally granted compensation for the good they did in His Divine Way.

After Allah mentioned the good reward for believers, He brought forth in this verse the opposite reward for disbelievers. He says: 'But the wrongdoers He lets go astray, (1) for Allah does whatever He wills,' (*Ibrahim:* 27). Allah *the Exalted* has given man the ability to choose. Then, he leads the wrongdoer astray because he chooses to do that which is wrong. Thus, those who chose to do this evil must be punished.

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(1) *Allah will let them go astray, from being able to answer the questioning in their graves, just as they were astray in this world due to their disbelief and did not comprehend the word of truth. So, if they are asked in their graves about their beliefs, they will answer, 'We do not know.' So it will be said to them, 'You have neither known nor followed the path.' At this point, they will be punished, as the narrations have narrated to us. (Al-Qurtubi's Tafsir) 3702/5]*

Allah *Glorified is He* created mankind and rendered the universe at their disposal. Then, He provided believers and disbelievers ongoing bounties from His Lordship. Disbelievers choose the wrong path and do not carry out Divine directives sent down by Allah *the Almighty* as doctrines for the guidance of people.

Furthermore, disbelievers transgress against themselves. Since they are inclined towards disbelief, despite being allowed the choice to the good path, Allah places a seal upon their hearts, so that disbelief does not leave their hearts and faith does not enter them. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of the worlds and He does what He wills.

Thus, since Allah *Glorified is He* gives every person his basic desires, if the disbeliever desires to be a disbeliever, Allah will extend the causes of his disbelief and will punish him later with these causes. In the same way, Allah *the Most High* extends to a believer the causes of faith, as in Allah's Words: 'All (of them) – these people as well as those people – do We freely endow from your Lord's bounties, since your Lord's giving is never confined (to one kind of people),' (*al-Isra':* 20). Thus is the vastness of Allah's Will and He does what He wills. This is due to there being no other deity than Him *Glorified is He*.

Allah has honoured us with servitude towards Him only, as we have all seen and witnessed the effects of servitude of man to another man. In mankind's servitude, a master seizes the good of a slave, and mankind has indeed tasted much of its afflictions. However, servitude to Allah *Glorified is He* differs completely, where the slave is the one who seizes the good of his Master. He gives His bounties abundantly upon His servants, Allah *Glorified is He* and then said:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ بَدَّلُوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ كُفْرًا وَأَحَلُّوا۟ قَوْمَهُمْ دَارَ ٱلْبَوَارِ ﴿٢٨﴾

[Prophet], do you not see those who, in exchange for God's favour, offer only ingratitude and make their people end up in the home of ruin, Hell [28] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 28)

When a verse in the Quran starts with the question, 'Do you not see…?' (*Ibrahim:* 28), this indicates how Allah's Words have higher truth than what we see with our eyes. This verse shows the contrast between the disbelievers' acknowledgment of the blessings they have and their subsequent denial of these blessings. Their response to His endless bounties is disbelief. Allah *Glorified is He* said in another verse: 'Would you take a lesser thing in exchange for what is (so much) better,' (*al-Baqara:* 61)?

Before your age of adulthood, Allah *the Most High* has given you His blessings without requiring any obligations of faith from you. Thus, we find that blessedness is the original state, while the responsibilities of faith are only subsequently assigned. Thus, the servant should not transgress against Allah *Glorified is He* Who has provided him with every blessing. Instead, a servant is obligated to approach Allah's Commands with love so that he does not return Allah's Blessings with acts of disbelief.

The verse could be referring to the people of Quraysh whom Allah *the Exalted* had granted many blessings and had provided security for their sanctuary. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Have We not established for them a sanctuary secure, to which, as a provision from Us, shall be gathered the fruits of all (good) things? But most of them are unaware (of this truth),' (*al-Qasas:* 57). He also blessed them by making Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* (the final Prophet) one of them. He is the Prophet whose commandments will reach the whole world in every place and time, so why would they exchange such a blessing for disbelief? Was such a blessing not enough to be met with the deepest of gratitude and most virtuous servitude to Allah *Glorified is He*? Allah had said of Prophet Muhammad's message: 'and, verily, this (revelation) shall indeed become (a source of) eminence for you and your people, but in time you all will be called to account (for what you have done with it),' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44).

He is also the One Who Says of His blessings upon them: 'So that (the tribe of) Quraysh might remain constantly secure in their winter and summer journeys. Let them, therefore, worship the Lord of this Temple, Who has given them food against hunger and made them safe from fear,' (*Quraysh:* 1-4). How then, can they respond to the blessings of Allah *the Almighty* with disbelief? How could they mistreat Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions, to the point that Prophet Muhammad would pray: 'O, Allah, make their years difficult like the (famine) years of Yusuf (Joseph).'(1) He also had fought them in the Battle of Badr. They brought this upon themselves due to their disbelief. Why did they accept Allah's Provisions and Blessings upon them while refusing His Doctrine?

If they had been sincere with themselves and true to their beliefs, they would have asked their idols to provide for them or refused the provisions of Allah *the Almighty* after refusing His Doctrine. Allah *Glorified is He* had blessed them with material support and then added His commandments as a source for spiritual support.

In the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* 'and (thereby) made their people settle (*ahalu*) in the abode of utter desolation (*dar al-bawar*),' (*Ibrahim:* 28) we understand the Arabic word *ahalu* to come from the word *ihlal* which means to 'settle' in a place of residence. We know that this condition (of *ihlal*) can be divided into two parts. The first is the condition of place and the second is the condition of time. In the first condition, you can 'settle' an event in the place of another event. In the second condition, you 'settle' an object in the place of another object.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and (thereby) made their people settle (*ahalu*) in the abode of utter desolation,' (*Ibrahim:* 28). This means that the condition of concern is a condition of place.

A question might be posed, 'How can they take their people to settle in an abode of utter desolation?' We say that this has happened as a result of their trickery and deceit of their people. On the other hand, their people did not utilise their reason and did not realise that their leaders and authorities were adopting reprehensive ways that they should not emulate. Thus, these authorities dragged them into a series of offenses until the crimes and misdeeds overwhelmed and engulfed their hearts. It was due to this that Allah *the Almighty* wanted for the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to have certain immunities against such temptations into misdeeds. Thus, the reproaching and righteous self-orders a believer to increase his good deeds and to annul his bad deeds. However, when the blaming self turns into a self that commands the mind with sinful acts, someone in the wide Muslim community should denounce its actions. In this way, the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is protected against schemes that remove faith from hearts. Allah *Glorified is He* said about the community of Muslims: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for (the good of) mankind. You enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong,' (*Al-'Imran:* 110).

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and blessings be upon him, used to say, when he raised his head in the last prayer unit, "O Allah, strengthen Your stranglehold upon Muḍar. O Allah, make their years (difficult) like the years of Yusuf (Joseph)." This Hadith was published by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1006) and by Ahmad in his Musnad (470/2, 502, 521).*

Allah *the Exalted* also reminded us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be our witness and that we will be witnesses over other people. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* obligated each one from the community of Prophet Muhammad to have a portion of that knowledge so that he may become an extension of Prophet Muhammad's message. Furthermore, just as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* testified that he has delivered the message, it will be incumbent upon every one of his community to testify that he has delivered what he knows of his message.

We have all learnt that the first misguidance took place through blind imitation. Indeed, the role models within society fell into temptations and were overwhelmed by sin. When their inner selves forgot Divine Guidance, they committed sin. When people saw their role models committing sin, they imitated them. Thus, the forgetful role models carried their own burdens as well as the sins of the ones who followed them through imitation. They were led astray and carried the burden of those who followed the wrong path. Thus, the verse means that disbelievers will lead their people to settle in a desolate state. *Dar al-bawar* means 'the place of utter desolation'. This means that when the elders of societies behave in opposition with Allah's Doctrine, they leave their followers an inheritance of sheer despair. In conversational Arabic, we describe a field that is no longer suitable for cultivation as a field that has become '*buur*'. When it is said, 'We have rendered the land *buur*' it means 'We have destroyed its greenery and made it barren.'

In addition, when we read the Words of Allah *Glorified is He* 'And (thereby) invited their people to settle in the abode of utter desolation,' (*Ibrahim:* 28), we find in the phrase ‘their people’ an indication of these disbelievers’ treachery and contemptible behaviour. Whoever brings forth devastation upon their people must be treacherous and skilled in deceit and lowliness. The phrase ‘their people’ indicates that these disbelievers were cheating those they were living with, instead of protecting them from evil, deception and trickery, Allah *Glorified is He* then describes this abode of utter desolation by saying:

جَهَنَّمَ يَصۡلَوۡنَهَاۖ وَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡقَرَارُ ﴿٢٩﴾

Where they burn? What an evil place to stay! [29]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 29)

We would not find anyone who would desire hellfire as a place of settlement. People desire to settle in places of comfort and leave any place that does not provide them with it. Hellfire, which they will have to endure, will not be a place of comfort; rather, it will be an abode of established suffering. Thus, Allah Glorified is He described it as: 'and how vile a state (it is) to settle in!' (*Ibrahim:* 29)

It is as though they are held in hellfire with hooked chains from which they are unable to escape. Hellfire will torment them, as if asking: 'Is there yet more (evil-doers) (for me) (to punish)?' (*Qaf:* 30) It is as if they have longed for hellfire, thus it longed for them. If they had a way to escape from it, they would have, but they are bound to it and it is the vilest of settlements. None can escape this torment except that whom Allah wills. Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَجَعَلُواْ لِلَّهِ أَندَادٗا لِّيُضِلُّواْ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦۗ قُلۡ تَمَتَّعُواْ فَإِنَّ مَصِيرَكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٣٠﴾

They set up [false deities] as God’s equals to lead people astray from His path. Say, ‘Take your pleasure now, for your destination is the Fire’ [30] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 30)

A rival is that which is similar or has identical authority with its equal. Thus, they ascribed associates to Allah *Glorified is He* in worship. Any associate they had claimed neither informed them of any blessings nor offered them a clear way of living. These associates were idols, trees, the sun, the moon, or the stars. Did any of these created beings clarify to the pagans why they should worship it? Furthermore, we know that worship requires the institution of commandments and prohibitions. None of these associates they had claimed ever brought forth commandments they may follow, any reward for their worship or any punishment for their disobedience. Thus, we find that such pagans gravitated to worshipping these idols because they did not bring forth any doctrine for them to which they adhere.

In a similar fashion, we find charlatans who claim that they had seen Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while they act in arrogant ways that differ from his teachings. These impostors even try to elevate their own status above other created beings. May Allah *the Almighty* grant us refuge from them.

The stranger aspect is that we find some intellectuals following these impostors, while simple people may show better instincts in staying away from them. It is more often that the simpler and purer souls adhere to living in a state of purer faith. On the other hand, the entangled souls that want an easier path in life, away from Allah's commandments, may follow the impostors who dilute the pure directives of religion. In this way, these followers make these impostors rivals to Allah *the Exalted* as they follow their path instead of Allah's commandments and are led astray from faith in this manner.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: 'they had claimed that there are partners that could rival Allah, to misguide (people) (*le-yudilu*) from His Path,' (*Ibrahim:* 28). This verse means that they lead others astray from Allah's Path. In this case, the Arabic letter 'li' is known as *lamul-ta'leeliya* (an explanatory *lam*) which is used to indicate the reasons for a verb. In this case, the verb is the disbelievers misguiding their people.

There is also another Arabic pronunciation for this same verse: 'They had claimed that there are partners that could rival Allah and to misguide (*li-yadilu*) from His Path.' This pronunciation means that disbelievers themselves were being misled from Allah's Path. In this case, the Arabic letter *'li'* is known *as lamul-'aqiba,* which is used to indicate that its verb is a consequence of the former sentence. In this case, when they claimed other partners with Allah *the Almighty* they were becoming misguided from His Path.

According to the second pronunciation, is it possible for these disbelievers to voluntarily mislead themselves? In essence, they assumed that they were on the right path. However, some actions are not desired by their doers, as in the case of Pharaoh who pulled Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* out of the water so he can make him his son. In this case, Allah *Glorified is He* had willed it that Prophet Musa (Moses) will later become Pharaoh's enemy. This was to prove to Pharaoh that he is unable to control any events, even though he claimed divinity and slaughtered male children of Israel. He rescued Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from the water assuming that he would become a source of joy for him, but Musa (Moses) grew up to become his enemy. Thus, not all actions have desired consequences for their doers!

Allah *Glorified is He* then follows this verse: 'Say (O Muhammad to the disbelievers), 'Enjoy yourselves (in this world), but, verily, the Fire will be your journey's end!' '(*Ibrahim:* 30) This is a commandment from Allah *the Exalted* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell believers: 'Enjoy yourselves,' (*Ibrahim:* 30). This is a commandment from Allah *the Almighty*. Does this mean that if disbelievers enjoyed themselves according to this command that would be obedience to Allah's orders? This command was only meant to mock the disbelievers' short sight since Allah *Glorified is He* followed the command with the Words: 'Verily, the Fire will be your journey's end!' (*Ibrahim:* 30) Based on that, we deduce that either this command was used to obligate a command, or it was used to repudiate a request in a mocking way.

We find one of the sayings of 'Ali that explains this concept, 'there is no evil in an evil followed by Paradise, and there is no good in a good followed by hellfire.' So, anyone who says that the directives and responsibilities (of faith) are difficult must remember that they will be followed by Paradise. On the other hand, anyone perceiving sins and disbelief as easy matters must know that hellfire is the final point on that path. Do not separate the preludes from the final results.

A father who finds his son constantly studying day and night to build his future may be overly sympathetic towards him. He may even take away the book from his hand and command him to get some rest so that he does not become sick. If his son follows his father's sympathetic commands, he will become disconnected from the causes of success. Thus, we find that both the father and the son had each perceived the good from different perspectives.

When they hear the Words of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Say, "Enjoy yourselves (in this world), but, verily, the Fire will be your journey's end!"' (*Ibrahim:* 30), they may assume that this grave result will occur only after a long time. They may also assume that, before the journey ends, they will probably find a solution for this problem.

We say that every one of us should remember that a matter which is not bound by a particular timing may come forth suddenly. Does he who lives in sin till he is ninety, think that he will escape the fire? If that is the case, he is surely delusional and deceiving himself. This is due to Allah's concealment of the date of death being the most violent indication of death's critical nature. Then, if the end of this life's journey is in the hellfire, no enjoyment will have come from its pleasures. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُل لِّعِبَادِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ يُقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُنفِقُواْ مِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡ
سِرّٗا وَعَلَانِيَةٗ مِّن قَبۡلِ أَن يَأۡتِىَ يَوۡمٞ لَّا بَيۡعٞ فِيهِ وَلَا خِلَٰلٌ ﴿٣١﴾

Tell My servants who have believed to keep up the prayer and give, secretly and in public, out of what We have provided them, before a Day comes when there will be no trading or friendship [31] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 31)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to inform His servants of specific commandments. Does this mean that all those servants who will hear these commandments will perform the due prayers? Some of them have actually heard it and did not perform these prayers.

Those who will adherently follow these commandments are the ones who fulfilled the condition of faith. Thus, we must look at the elements of the Words, 'My servants,' for the servants of Allah *the Almighty* who have believed will express their faith through obedience. This is how we understand the meanings of the Quranic phrases so that their meanings are aligned with their forms.

That being said, we know that all the creation of Allah *Glorified is He* are His servants. This is due to the fact that there are many decrees that Allah has desired in the way of their creation that his created beings have no control over. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* has subjugated them in certain ways, along with giving them autonomy in others.

Those who are rebelling against belief in Allah *Glorified is He* have the ability to rebel only with their minds. Their own physiological natures refused to rebel against Allah’s laws. If these disbelievers are really sincere with their disbelief, they should similarly rebel against breathing, for it is something that is out of their control. They should rebel, if they can, against disease and the timing of their deaths. Indeed, they will never be able to.

Therefore, they have only rebelled against the divine laws that they have a choice in disobeying. They forgot that Allah *Glorified is He* wants them to follow His way.

If a believer chooses to follow the way of Allah *Glorified is He*, he becomes one of Allah’s righteous servants, but if he does not willingly obey Allah’s commandments, then he becomes one of Allah’s subjugated servants, who are still dominated by the physical commandments of Allah *Glorified is He* which they have no choice in disobeying.

When you look at the Arabic words that are used to indicate the meaning ‘servant’ in the Quran, you will find the words *‘ibad* and *‘abeed*. Allah *Glorified is He* said in one verse: 'For (true) servants (*‘ibad*) of the Most Gracious are (only) they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with (words of) peace.' (*al-Furqan:* 63) In this verse the characteristics of the *‘ibad* (true servants) who choose to follow the way of Allah *Glorified is He* are numerous.

In the verses of the Quran, you will find that the word *‘abeed* is only used to describe those servants who have rebelled against Allah’s Way, except in one verse where the disobedient servants are also described as *‘ibad.* In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is informing us of his speech to those who have lead people astray on the Day of Judgment. He will say to them: 'Was it you who led My servants (*‘ibady*) astray, or did they by themselves stray from the

Right Path?' (*al-Furqan:* 17) As we mentioned, notice that the timing of this dialogue is in the Last Day, when no one will have any other chance to disobey Allah's commands.

Thus, no one can deny that the word *'ibad* is only used in describing those who have chosen to serve Allah *the Exalted* by obeying His Way in this world. These servants have truly submitted the reins of their will to Allah *Glorified is He* and obeyed His commandments and prohibitions.

We can also notice that the Words of this verse are commandments from Allah *the Almighty* that are to be immediately followed by believing servants" '(And) tell (those of) My servants who have believed, to be constant in prayer (*yuqeemu*) and to spend (in Our way), secretly and openly,' (*Ibrahim:* 31). The believers are awaiting these commandments to obey them immediately especially since they love obeying Allah's commands.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is telling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'So long as you have conveyed this commandment, they will carry it out immediately.' Allah *the Most High* has brought forth the word *yuqeemu* ('to be constant in prayer') without the commanding prefix '*le*' (as it is usually used as '*le-yuqeemu*'). This affirms the idea that the true believers will rush to carry out the command as soon as they hear it.

We usually find that establishing prayers and dispensing the alms of charity are commanded together in many Quranic verses. This is because the establishment of prayers requires energy and demands fuel. The fuel requires motion and demands time. Giving alms also utilises some of the fruits of labour that have been gathered over time. We find that those who are lazy in performing their prayers say, 'Work takes up all of our time and so we combine all of our obligatory prayers at the end of the day.' Thus, they carry them all out tardily as though they had missed them. They do not realise that when each obligatory prayer is carried out in its appointed time, it will not actually take as much time as they perceived it would.

Furthermore, while it may seem that the performance of prayers slightly reduces the time available for fruits of our labour, the reality is that it provides a surge and energy that prompts the self to work more scrupulously. A person who maintains their prayers (in their appointed time) will approach his work with a contented soul because, in their prayer, he stands in the presence of Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created him, provided for him and supported him. Thus, they leave their prayers feeling calm, serene, alert, and contented. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Billal *Allah be pleased with him* his appointed caller for prayer: 'Revive us with it, O, Billal.'(1)

In addition, the obligatory prayers and their ablutions do not take more than fifteen minutes. If you were to evaluate the time needed for all the obligatory prayers in relation to the time you allocate for work, you would find that it only takes up a small portion of time and that it gives you more benefits than the time it takes.

Such is also the case of the giving of alms which might take up some of your time to give to those who are needy. However, it will give the entire society incomparable social security.

Thus, you will find that prayers are linked to the giving of alms in the verses of the Quran, for the performance of prayers is the accumulation of all virtues, while the giving of alms is the accumulation of all physical efforts.

Therefore, prayers cure one ailment, while the giving of alms cures another. Both acts of worship improve the essence of man, thereby serving the soul and its components as well as the body and its components. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'the comfort of my soul has been bestowed (upon my eyes) in praying.'(2)

When you look at the acts of praying and the giving of alms in charity, you will find that they gather all the benefits of this life and its branches.

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(1) *Published by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (364/5), and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (49850), as narrated by one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him.*

(2) *Published by Ahmad in his Masnad (128/3, 199, 285), and an-Nisa'i in his Sunnan (61/7) and Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (160/2) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him. Al-Hakim says: "This Hadith is accurate on the condition of Muslim and they did no publish it, and Adh-Dhabai agreed with him, and its totality is that Prophet Muhammad may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him said: "It has been made beloved to me in this world: women, perfume and the comfort of my eyes has been bestowed in praying."*

These benefits of life have been summarised by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the five pillars of Islam. They are the following: the testimony that there is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Prophet Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the performance of prayers, the giving of alms, the fasting of Ramadan and the performance of the pilgrimage to the Sacred House, for those who are able to take such a journey(1).

We have come to learn how prayers have combined all of these pillars in a smaller time, as it contains the testimony that there is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He*. It also entails the sacrifice and purification of time as well as fasting from all that you would uphold while fasting. In addition, you face the direction of the Sacred House of Allah during prayers. Thus, we see how the motions of life and its beneficial virtues are linked to prayer and the giving of alms.

Allah *the Almighty* also commanded us in this noble verse to spend of our wealth secretly and publicly. With such directives, Allah *the Exalted* is spreading the habit of giving in two opposing methods. Giving in secret is essential to prevent us from falling prey to boastfulness, while giving publicly allows some people to serve as positive role models for others who are able to give. It also prevents others from talking about one's wealth in envy or jealousy towards Allah's bounties and provisions.

Thus, I recommend that you make your voluntary charity discrete in secrecy. Give it away as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has described: 'So that your left (hand) knows not what your right hand has given.'(2) Then, make your giving of obligatory alms public, so that people know that you fulfil the rights of Allah *Glorified is He* upon you and you can become a role model for them.

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(1) *Published by Muslim in his Sahih) (16) the book of faith, and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (8), from the Hadith of Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with them.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1031), from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra, as part of the Hadith where Prophet Muhammad may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him said: "(There are) seven people who are Shaded under the Shade of Allah on the Day in which there is no shade but His Shade. (These are) the just ruler, a young man who has been brought up in the worship of Allah, a man whose heart is attached to the mosques, two persons who love each other only for Allah's sake, and they meet and part in Allah's Cause only, a man who refuses the advances of a beautiful and rich woman (refusing illicit relations with her) while saying, 'Indeed I fear Allah,' a man who gives charity so discreetly to the extent that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given and a man who remembers Allah while alone and his eyes overflow with tears."*

Make the pillars of Islam behavioural sermons to others. Indeed, we see that in some villages and towns, no one comes forth to perform the pilgrimage because those who are eligible to perform it have already carried out this obligatory act. On the other hand, we find that a person who is financially able to build a mosque provides others who are financially able with model behaviour to build other mosques. Similarly, in *Ramadan* those who are able to fast serve as role models for their children. Thus, we make all the responsibilities of Islam public and clear before all society.

We learn from this verse, that there are acts which one can postpone, while other acts of worship have no substitutes. Thus, one must seize every opportunity to implement them immediately. This is due to the fact that the Last Day will allow no bargaining to happen between people. No one will be able to give alms or pray, and there is no friendship or intercession which can make up for what you should have done during this worldly life.

Indeed, intercession on the Last Day will only be for whom the Merciful has given permission.(1) Thus, the commandment in this verse orders us to perform our prayers and give our alms discretely and publicly, before the Day comes in which there is neither bargaining nor friendly favours.

Bargains are transaction of exchange. One person pays a price, while the seller gives the product. Befriending is to support one another in times of distress. In this world, loyal friends can rely upon one another and be relied upon.

A poem clarifies the meaning of the word ‘friend’ when he says:

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(1) Allah said: “On that Day, intercession shall be of no avail (to any) save him in whose case the Most Gracious will have granted leave thereon, and whose word [of faith] He will have accepted,” (*Ta Ha:* 109). Allah also said: “And, before Him, intercession can be of no avail [to any] except one in whose case He may have granted leave (thereon)…,” (*Saba’:* 23). Intercession is a truth affirmed by the text of the Quran, on the condition of a permission being given by Allah to the intercessor to intercede, and permission to the one who was interceded for, based on Allah’s knowledge of him. However, intercession is denied for the disbelievers and the hypocrites.

When we met, longing grew in its intensity,
Two friends mutual in need and blame
As if each friend dissolved in friendship,
Seeping through the embraces into one person

This clarifies that friendship gives an indication of unity. On the Last Day, you will not be able to buy yourself a place in paradise nor save yourself from hellfire. There is no friendship in which a friend may give his good deeds to save you.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'on that Day, (all) friends will be enemies unto one another – (all) except the (friends who were) pious,' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). Some people with superficial understanding may want to make a case against the Quran claiming that it proved friendship then denied it. In the verse we are currently examining, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When there will be no bargaining, and no friendly gestures,' (*Ibrahim:* 31). Another verse also said: 'and no friendship,' (*al-Baqara:* 254). Then, the Quran told us that the only friendship that will be true is that of the pious people. These are the people who did not embellish the sins of one another.

If we reflect upon the Quran's verses closely, we will understand that the friendships that are denied on the Last Day are those that had lead into sins and misdeeds. Those were indeed wicked friendships that will not last on the Day of Reckoning.

As we mentioned before, bargaining in this life is the external exchange of a product for a price. Friendship, on the other hand, involves apparently generous offerings of favours. However, even in friendships, friendly hearts subtly expect reciprocity, for if someone was to do you a favour, he would require that you return the favour one day. Only pure and righteous generosity has no precondition and expects no compensation.

After Allah *the Exalted* clarifies those who are blessed and those who are evil and propounds the parable of the good word and the parable of the corrupt word, He brought forth a verse that incites great joy in the soul of the believer since a believer has believed in Allah *the Most High* Who has fashioned all of these blessings. In the next verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the blessings that no partners can be associated with Him, for bestowing. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the next verse:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَأَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً
فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلْفُلْكَ لِتَجْرِىَ
فِى ٱلْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِۦ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَنْهَٰرَ ٣٢

It is God who created the heavens and earth, who has sent down water from the sky and with it brought forth produce to nourish you; He has made ships useful to you, sailing the sea by His command, and the rivers too [32] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 32)

The heavens and earth are two conditions of life that we all share. Allah *Glorified is He* describes their creation when He says: 'Greater (indeed) than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth,' (*Ghafir:* 57).

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* describes the creation of the heavens and the earth in their totality. He does not use similar descriptions as in other verses of the Noble Quran. For instance, He does not describe the heaven as being created, ‘without support’ and that the heaven is ‘without any breaks or gaps’. He does not mention in this verse that He creates firm mountains on the earth so that they do not sway and that He bestows blessings on earth and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* offers but a glance at the creation of the heavens and the earth.

When He speaks in this verse of the creation of the heavens and the earth, He mentions it in relation to something that no one has ever claimed, despite the vast number of those claiming atheism. This is so that it can be more binding of proof for those who are opposing His message. He reveals to them the reality of their disbelief and makes them see that they have disbelieved as a result of intense animosity, unresponsiveness to logic along with their disbelief being without solid reasoning.

When Allah *the Exalted* issues an argument that leaves no objection or opposition, it means that all the reasoning against the argument has submitted to His Glory. Not one of the disbelievers dared to claim against what Allah *the Most High* says. Certainly, no one of them has ever claimed the creation of the heavens or the earth. They realised that there is no escape from the fact that they were the creation of a Supreme Power.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(And remember that) it is Allah Who has created the heavens and the earth,' (*Ibrahim:* 32), the word 'Allah' in this verse indicates the Higher Power Who commands His creation. These commands assign responsibilities that deter people's harmful whims. Disbelievers may be angry at these commands. However, the truth is that these commands protect humans from one another and provide them with security and moral lives.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* does not use the word 'Lord' since it is an indication of His Bountiful giving to all mankind alike, including disbelievers. The word 'Allah *Glorified is He*' indicates the Powerful Who is worthy of all worship and praise and Who brings forth His commandments and prohibitions. The word indicates that this life that He creates is a life of trials and tribulations. Therefore, He mentions that He created the heavens and the earth and brings down water from the sky.

When we hear the word, 'the heavens', we assume that the heavens are the skies that stand opposite to the earth. However, physical reality affirms that the heavens are all that matter that towers over us.

Rain as we know descends from clouds. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'Are you not aware that it is Allah Who causes the clouds to move onward, then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, until you can see rain come forth from their midst,' (*an-Nur:* 43)?

We have come to learn from experimental knowledge that a plane, by way of example, flies over the clouds. Thus, rain does not descend from the heavens; it descends from the clouds that rise over us. If we choose to describe the rain as descending from the heavens, we should mean it in the sense of all sustenance coming to us from the heavens.

Thus, you will find that Allah *Glorified is He* describes the iron which is in the mountains and which matures in their core: 'And We bestowed (upon you from on high) iron, in which there is tremendous power(1) as well as (a source of) benefits for man.' (*al-Hadid:* 25) Therefore, we will find that it has either descended from the skies, as the rain, or that the matter in its makeup has descended from the sky.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir says in his Tafsir about the verse: "...in which there is tremendous power...," (al-Hadid: 25), that it could mean, 'Weaponry such as swords, spears, sharpeners,* =

Here in this verse which we are reflecting upon, Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the creation of the heavens and the earth and how He sends down water from the clouds: 'And thereby brings forth (all manner) of fruits for your sustenance,' (*Ibrahim:* 32). The fruits are the results of what the earth provides, including vegetation from which we may eat. For example, we eat grapes, but we do not eat the branches of the grape tree; similarly, we eat oranges, but we do not eat the leaves and branches of orange trees.

Allah *Glorified is He* then said: 'And Who has made ships (*fulk*) subservient to you, so that they may sail through the sea at His behest' (*Ibrahim:* 32). To make ships subservient means to make them submissive to the service of another being in creation. Making ships subservient might therefore bring to mind the question, 'How does Allah *Glorified is He* make a ship subservient, when man has constructed it?' The questioners should ask themselves, 'From where do we acquire the woods which we use to form the slabs from which we construct ships? Who rendered the liquid water flowing so that the ships may float upon it? Who governs the winds that drive the sails of a sailing ship?' Indeed, all of this is from the original creation of Allah *the Most High*.

The word *foolk* may be used to indicate the plural or singular of the word ship. An example is found in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And in the ships (*foolk*) that speed through the sea with what is useful to man.' (*al-Baqara:* 164) He also said in the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: 'But build, under Our Eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark (*foolk*)' (*Hud:* 37).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'and has made the rivers subservient (to His laws, so that they be of use) to you,' (*Ibrahim:* 32). Naturally, we understand that rivers have fresh water, while seas have salt water. Allah *the Almighty* thus,

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= *ploughshares, armor and such.' The verse that said: "...as well as [a source of] benefits for man," (al-Hadid: 25) could be interpreted as meaning, "In their daily lives such as the railway, axe, saw, chisel and other tools which people cannot do without." (Ibn Kathir's Tafsir 315/4).*

makes all things subservient to us by His command. He is the One Who created the rivers with fresh water. He has made some of these rivers deep enough to allow for the passage of ships, while creating the seas with greater depths. He also creates the forces that allow these ships to float upon the water's surface. All these forces were made subservient by His Commands. He is the One Who says: 'If He so wills, He can make the winds still, and then they (the ships will) lie motionless on the sea's surface.' (*ash-Shura:* 33) Yet, if we read another verse of the Quran, we can see the word *reeh* (wind) being used with another meaning. In the other verse, He says: 'and do not (allow yourselves to) be at variance with one another, so that you do not fail and lose your wind (*reeh*) (strength).' (*al-Anfal:* 46) The word *reehukum* means 'your strength and energy'. Thus, the intended meaning of the word 'wind' regarding ships can also indicate the power and energy that is derived from the wind, steam vapour or other sources of power.

This verse that we are now reflecting upon, comes after Allah *Glorified is He* informs us of the blessed believers who appreciate these blessings from Him and the state of the disbelievers who will live a miserable life. Thus, this verse honours believers for the purity of their chaste nature that has not become blunted and their minds that have pondered the universe. These believers observe this universe thoughtfully and contemplate its outward forms to conclude that there is a Supreme Power, Allah *the Exalted* Who is All-Wise in His Creation.

The verse is also a condemnation of disbelievers who had accepted Allah's Blessings without directing their worship to Him. They have not heard anyone of their idols claiming to have created these blessings for them, nor did they create them themselves. Yet, they stand arrogantly and stubbornly in their disbelief of the Lord of these blessings.

The first of these blessings is the creation of the heavens and earth. Then, if you observe the rest of these blessings, you will find that they came after the creation of the heavens and earth. Some of these blessings are linked to the heavens, such as the clouds, while some are linked to the earth, such as the fruits that it provides. Thus, there is congruence between the first and the second blessings.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Who has made ships subservient to you, so that they may sail through the sea at His behest …' (*Ibrahim:* 32). Why has this matter followed the first two? The reason is that ships sail in the seas and take their course through water.

Allah says that He created the heavens and the earth, which contain land and water. The wonderful fact is that water covers an area on the earth that equals three times the area covered by land; therefore, the area of water is much more expansive than the area of land.

Since Allah *the Almighty* says that He has brought forth fruit from the earth as a source of provision for us, there must be a link between that the two points. Since the seas represent three quarters of the earth, they must include benefits for man.

Allah clarifies in other verses that He has subjected the sea to us so that we may acquire tender meat(1) which is considered among the basic necessities of life, and we can extract from it ornaments to wear which are among the elements of luxury in life.

The ships plough through the sea so that we may seek Allah's bounties. The seas include many benefits other than fish and pearls, but they are mentioned in general. Perhaps people were not able at the time of the revelation of the Quran to comprehend and realise all the bounties which can be found in the seas and oceans; in fact, scientific researches continue to reveal more of the bounties of the seas. When we now ponder over the bounties of the seas, we become impressed by the beauty of created beings these seas contain.

Thus, Allah's says: '…so that you may seek of His bounty…' (*al-Isra':* 66). This concise saying indicates that there are many things other than fish and ornaments, such as pearls, corals and others. When we see the created beings that live in the depth of the seas, we become impressed by them more than by those on dry land and those that roam the skies.

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(1) This is included in Allah's saying: 'Not alike are the two bodies of water. One is fresh and sweet, palatable for drinking, and one is salty and bitter. And from each you eat tender meat and extract ornaments which you wear, and you see the ships plowing through [them] so that you might seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful.' (*Fatir:* 12)

Therefore, Allah’s Saying: ‘… so that you may seek of His bounty …’ (*al-Isra’:* 66) is one of the concise verses which is clarified by the signs of the universe. This is due to the fact that if Allah *the Exalted* was to elucidate every detail, people would not have believed it at the time when the Quran was revealed. For example, when Allah *Glorified is He* tackles the means of transport, He says: ‘[He created] the horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment. And He creates that which you do not know.’ (*an-Nahl:* 8) Allah’s saying: ‘… He creates that which you do not know.’ (*an-Nahl:* 8) includes all that which the human beings have invented concerning means of transport and communication such as the devices that transfer data using simple buttons like faxes and other devices.

When Allah *Glorified is He* tackles the seas, He clarifies that which complements His saying about the earth: ‘…Who has made ships subservient to you, so that they may sail through the sea at His behest …’ (*Ibrahim:* 32).

If people had fully comprehended the meaning, they would have called ships ‘the camels of the seas’ as they called the camels ‘the ships of the desert’. However, they used what was known to them to understand what was unknown to them.

One should not attribute any of his achievements to his own self because it is Allah Who has granted him the ability, the thought and the materials that he uses to accomplish these achievements.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘… has made the rivers subservient (to His laws, so that they be of use) to you.’ (*Ibrahim:* 32) Rivers generally contain fresh water to irrigate the trees which produce fruits and vegetables that generally need fresh water.

Allah decrees that the seas and oceans become huge reservoirs of water, occupying three quarters of the space of the earth and allowing evaporation, in which water changes by heat into vapour that rises to the sky and becomes clouds. Then the clouds gather and rain falls after getting rid of salts during the evaporation process, irrigating the trees which produce the fruits we need. Salts found in seas preserve them from being spoiled.

We also know that most of the water of rivers comes from rain. The cycle of water in the universe is as follows: seawater evaporates due to the sun heat then forms clouds which gather causing rain to fall in order to fill up the rivers and the seas.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلشَّمۡسَ وَٱلۡقَمَرَ دَآئِبَيۡنِۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلَّيۡلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ ﴿٣٣﴾

He has made the sun and the moon useful to you, steady on their paths; He has made the night and day useful to you[33]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim*: 33)

The sun - as we know - is a daytime sign as the moon is a nighttime sign, and there is a relation between the water that we drink and the sun, as it evaporates water from the seas. We also irrigate the land with water in order for it to produce sustenance for us. As for the seas, everything pertaining to it is connected to the development of the moon.

Did the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* know all this while he was an illiterate prophet? Certainly, he did not know these facts, but Allah revealed to him the Quran which includes all the realities of the whole universe.

Allah says that the sun and the moon are *da'ibayn* (steady on their paths), and the literal meaning of this word is performing an action regularly. For example, the sentence 'so-and-so is *da'ub* in studying' means that this person is diligent and exerts constant effort in studying without wasting his time. Accordingly, Allah *the Exalted* has made for the sun and moon a precise system. For example, we calculate the day starting at nighttime then the daytime, and we divide the day into 24 hours. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5)

Allah also says: '… has made the night for rest and the sun and moon for calculation …' (*al-An'am:* 96). This means that man will use the appearance and disappearance of either of them as a means for calculation. He also makes their movement so precise that they facilitate for us the calculation of time. They do not collide with each other, as each of them has a certain orbit and a precise movement. They are not like the clocks which need fixation.

As we make progress, we find that our inventions deepen our faith in the Creator, the Most Exalted.

In the same verse, Allah says: '… He has subjected the night and day to you.' (*Ibrahim:* 33) Since the sun is a daytime sign, and the moon is a night time sign, and daytime precedes night time in existence from our perspective, then we might regard it more appropriate to say: 'He has subjected the day and night to you.' (*Ibrahim:* 33) Allah decrees to teach us that the moon is the nighttime sign which shines at night, and night is made for quietude. However, this quietude is not the reason for the existence of man on earth; rather, man has been created in order to be active, reconstruct the earth, work hard and exert efforts. Thus, He first mentions the rising of the sun, from which the moon derives its light, then He mentions the night and day. This indicated that Allah *the Almighty* includes two lights in this verse.

The first light comes from the sun, and the second comes from the moon, so man knows that his life on earth is prepared for labour. He should not think that the real purpose of life is to repose and sleep because Allah *the Most High* has created sleep for people to have rest, then wake up and work hard.

We notice that the word *taskhir* (subjecting something) is mentioned within the context of material elements, as animals, plants, sky and all that which it contains have been subjected to us. However, night and day result from material elements, the sun and the moon, and the night and day result directly from the sun and the moon.

Subjecting something — as we know — involves denial of choice, When Allah *the Exalted* subjects something, this indicates that it is precise and contains no error or disorder. However, created beings that have not been subjected may be liable to disorder as they may follow the right path or err.

The issue of predestination and choice has been tackled seriously by scholars. The philosophical schools — especially in Germany — have adopted two perspectives which seem in contradiction with each other, but they both lead to one purpose: justification of atheism. It would have been acceptable that one of them would justify atheism and the other would justify faith, but the philosophers of both schools tended to justify atheism.

The philosophers of one school hold the opinion that the Muslims say that universe is governed by a Wise Power and that all is the universe's components work regularly and precisely.

However, there are some abnormalities in some created beings as there are people who are extremely short or tall, some people are born with one eye or with a lame arm. Therefore, if the Power that governs the universe was indeed Wise, such anomalies would not exist. We refute this opinion saying that if there is no God, then what is the wisdom behind such anomalies? If those who hold this opinion deny the Wisdom of the Creator in whom we believe, can they prove that any other deity has such wisdom? Certainly, they will not be able to answer this question because their opinion has simply been rejected.

The other school of philosophy views that the system of the universe proves that there is no creator, as it is fixed and automated, and no deity can overturn the system of this universe

Accordingly, the two schools hold different and contradictory opinions, but both of them lead to atheism. We refute the opinions held by the followers of both schools by saying, ‘Those who take the constancy of this system as a proof of the existence of a god should know that this constancy is found in the basic components of the universe. Those who take anomalies as a proof of the existence of a creator should know that these anomalies occur in the created beings that live on earth. If anomalies were to occur in the basic components of the universe, the heavens and earth would have been corrupted.’

Allah *Glorified is He* has willed for the abnormalities to occur in some cases of individuals, so that one may be abnormal in some way, while the majority are normal. Accordingly, the existence of abnormalities in individuals does not contradict with the existence of a Supreme Creator. The constancy of the system is revealed in the basic elements of the universe and proves that no person is involved in this matter.

Allah *the Exalted* subjects to the man night and day which have resulted from the subjection of the sun and the moon where each of which is steady in its path. We calculate our time according to this precise and regular system; for example, we determine the beginnings of the seasons, the terms for agricultural activity and time of prayers.

Furthermore, if you have observed any disorder in some phenomena, you should know that it has occurred due to the interference of man, who has been chosen as a vicegerent on earth. For example, the ozone hole which exists in the atmosphere has developed from the experiments intended to improve our lives on earth.

However, we look at the experimentation within a limited scope, and we do not attach due attention to the observation of all that surrounds us in the world. Thus, this zeal for experimentation results in the ruination of many of the essential elements of our life on earth, so that we have reached the point of constant complaining of the disorder of the weather, which has become frigidly cold or hot beyond endurance.

Man has interfered in matters in which he should not have interfered except after studying them from all perspectives. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned …’ (*ar-Rum:* 41).

Therefore, the preludes and consequences of each experiment should be studied thoroughly before conducting it in order to avoid harming people. In addition, the side effects of each scientific invention should be studied in order to protect humanity from any harm that may take place. We must also remember Allah’s saying: ‘Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge …’ (*al-Isra’:* 36).

The challenges that we encounter at present pertaining to the climate and health result from our interference without full knowledge and understanding. This affirms the Wisdom of the Creator *the Most High*. We have been impressed by the superficial advantages of some scientific inventions, thinking that they would bring about great benefits. However, they have turned to be harmful because of their side effects.

Therefore, Allah uses the verb *kasabat* (earn) and not *iktasabat* (acquired) in the Arabic version of the following verse: ‘Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned …’ (*ar-Rum:* 41).

In the verse that we are currently reflecting upon, the Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He has subjected the sun and the moon to you, steady on their paths; He has subjected the night and day to you.’ (*Ibrahim:* 33) The verse indicates that the successive appearance of the sun and the moon causes the succession of night and day. The appearance of the sun and its bright shining does not mean that the moon does not exist, as it does, but the light of the sun prevents you from seeing it. However, there are times when you can see both the sun and the moon together.

As for nighttime and daytime, they follow each other in succession. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is He Who has made the night and the day in succession…’ (*al-Furqan:* 62). This means that they never appear together, as night falls in one country and day breaks in another. Both of them move steadily and in succession from the moment Allah *the Exalted* created the universe. When Allah created it and placed the sun opposite to the earth, the side which faces the earth experiences daytime and the other side experiences nighttime. When the earth rotates, the side that faces the sun experiences daytime, whereas the other side experiences nighttime. Accordingly, Allah willed for each one of them to succeed the other.

Allah has stated in the above-mentioned verses a few of his bounties that He has endowed on his servants, such as the heavens, the earth, the rain, the fruits and vegetables that sprout from the earth. In addition, Allah subjected to his servants the sun, the moon, the night and day and stated this in the Quran in a manner that enumerates some of His bounties.

A pious person said about Allah’s bounties, ‘I can state some of them, but I cannot reckon them.’ Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the basic elements of the universe, and then moves to other bounties which cannot be enumerated.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَءَاتَىٰكُم مِّن كُلِّ مَا سَأَلۡتُمُوهُۚ وَإِن تَعُدُّواْ نِعۡمَتَ ٱللَّهِ
لَا تُحۡصُوهَآۗ إِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ لَظَلُومٞ كَفَّارٞ ٣٤

And given you some of everything you asked Him for. If you tried to count God’s favours you could never calculate them: man is truly unjust and ungrateful [34] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 34)

Actually, Allah has given us that which we have asked him for and has given us many things before we ask Him. In addition, He has prepared the universe for us before creating us. Accordingly, He has given us bounties before we ask for them, as they preceded the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* who found the universe prepared for him.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* has given each one of us bounties even before he knows how to ask Him; for example, the embryo in his mother's womb.

In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And given you some of everything you asked Him for …' (*Ibrahim:* 34). This means He gives you what you ask for and what you have not asked for, whether you have uttered it or not, and even if it is merely thoughts in one's mind. In addition, you may ask Allah for things and He gives you what you have asked.

Some people, whom Allah has granted many bounties, may call others out of desire for a challenge — and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection — to ask them for anything they want. I have encountered this situation when I was hosted by someone whom Allah has endowed many bounties, and we were on a trip in the desert of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He told me to ask him for anything, and he would bring it to me. I thought to ask him for something which he might not have, so I asked him to bring me a needle and thread, but he replied: 'Do you want white or red thread?' Therefore, if this takes place among people, what do we think of Allah's Ability to give His servant what they ask for?

It is due to Allah's Wisdom that He says: 'And given you some of everything you asked Him for …' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

There is wisdom behind everything Allah gives as well as everything Allah withholds; indeed, Allah *the Exalted* is far beyond from giving people what they ask for without wisdom. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Man supplicates for evil as he supplicates for good, and man is ever hasty …' (*al-Isra':* 11).

Thus, He says: 'And given you some of everything you asked Him for…' (*Ibrahim:* 34). This means that Allah gives people some of that which they ask for since there are foolish supplications which Allah does not answer, such as a mother's supplication against her stubborn son. If Allah *the Exalted* were to answer her supplication, what would be her status?

Therefore, it is out of Allah's Magnificence that He gives us that which is in line with His Wisdom and withholds that which is not in line with His Wisdom. Therefore, withholding things is also considered a bounty. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… I will show you my signs, so do not impatiently hasten Me.' (*al-Anbiya':* 37)

Therefore, no one should say that he has supplicated to his Lord, but he has not answered him. Rather, he should remember Allah's saying: 'And man supplicates for evil as he supplicates for good, and man is ever hasty.' (*al-Isra':* 11) Allah *the Exalted* gives and withholds things due to His Wisdom, and no one can enumerate Allah's Bounties. Enumeration — as we know — is reckoning of individual units of a whole. The people who work in the field of logic — known as logicians — know that a whole thing corresponds to a part. For example, all people are created from similar elements, but they differ in names. For example, take a chair; it is made of different materials such as wood, nails and an adhesive material, and we cannot name only the wood as a chair, neither can we name nails as chairs.

Thus, the Arabic word *kulli* can refer to a matter whose individual units are all alike, even if their names are different, while the Arabic word *kul* refers to a matter whose parts are not alike and are different in nature.

If you want to count *kulli*, you call out the names of its individual units such as Mohammad, Ahmad and 'Ali. This is what we call counting. Therefore, counting is the aggregation of the units of a sum or the parts of a whole.

We call counting as *ihsa'* because in the past people used to count things using *hasa* (pebbles), and the word *ihsa*' applies to counting in order to calculate the total and identify the number of parts of the sum or whole.

In the past, man used to count till number one hundred and refer to every one hundred by one pebble. If he gathered ten pebbles, then he would know that he reached number thousand. This is how the word *ihsa*' is used to refer to counting. Nowadays, we still use old names to refer to different things; for example, we describe vehicles power by horsepower.

If you scrutinise Allah's saying, '… if you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them ...' (*Ibrahim:* 34), you will find many meanings, However, those who try to find faults in the Quran say that the meaning of this verse is not accurate because as long as counting is possible, how could calculation not be achieved? These people forget that what is meant here is not the counting itself, but it is the desire or willingness to count.

If a person wants to count Allah's bounties, he will not be able to calculate them. Therefore, there is no contradiction in Allah's verses, as they form an integrated structure. You will not tend to count something unless you think that you are able to count it, but counting Allah's bounties is beyond man's capability.

Another example concerning proceeding to do something can be found in Allah's Saying: 'O, you who believe, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces …' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). We do not wash our faces the moment we rise to perform prayers, but we wash them and complete the steps of the ablution when the muezzin calls to prayer. Therefore, and the verse means that when you proceed to perform the prayers, do such-and-such.

We also know that mentioning something by stating its cause indicates that you have mentioned it. Therefore, if the muezzin has called for prayer, and you have come out of your home intending to pray, do not run to catch up with the imam(1) since you have started the prayer the moment you have completed your ablution and have left your home proceeding to the mosque. Therefore, do not do any action that should not be done during the prayer and enter the mosque quietly and solemnly to perform the prayer with the imam.(2)

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(1) *This is indicated by the Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Bakra Allah be pleased with him who arrived at the mosque while Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was bowing, and bowed outside of the row (of praying men) then walked to the row. When Prophet Muhammad completed his prayer, he said, 'Who among you bowed outside the row then walked to it?' Abu Bakra replied, 'I did.' So Prophet Muhammad said, 'May Allah increase you in keenness, but do not do this again.' [Related by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (679, 680), Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2/199- 267 – Fat-h Al-Bari) and by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/39, 42)]*

(2) *This meaning is derived from the Hadith related by Muslim in his Sahih (603 – the Mosques) on the authority of Abu Qatadah who said, 'While we were praying with Messenger Muhammad, he heard tumult. (At the end of the prayer) he (Prophet Muhammad) said, "What is the matter with you?" They said, "We hastened to prayer." Prophet Muhammad said, "Do not do that; when you come for prayer, there should be tranquility upon you. Pray (along with the Imam) what you can catch up and complete what preceded you."'*

When we scrutinise Allah's saying, '…if you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them ...' (*Ibrahim:* 34), we will find that the Arabic article *in* (if) is usually used in the case of referring to something doubtful, while the article *idha* is used when we refer to something certain, such as Allah's Saying: 'When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest.' (*an-Nasr:* 1)

Allah *Glorified is He* uses the article that indicates doubt when He says: '…if you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them ...' (*Ibrahim:* 34). The reasonable person already knows that he cannot calculate Allah's bounties. We all know that there is what is called statistics, which is studied in colleges.

Despite scientific advancement and the manufacture of computers, no one has tried to calculate Allah's bounties or is able to do so because counting and calculation require a sum that has units or a whole that has parts.

If we ponder any of Allah's bounties, you may think that it is only one, but if you ponder the details of any bounty, you will find that it includes different and various bounties. Therefore, there is no contradiction in Allah's Saying: '… If you tried to count Allah's favours you could never calculate them ...' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

If you scrutinise the bounty of water, you will find it includes various ones, as it is made up of elements; each of which contains a bounty. In addition, if you scrutinise the bounty of the earth, you will find that it contains many, and so is the case of each of Allah's bounties. Therefore, Allah's bounties cannot be calculated.

When you scrutinise Allah's saying, '… if you tried to count Allah's favours you could never calculate them...' (*Ibrahim:* 34), you will find three elements: namely Allah *the Almighty* Who is the Bestower of all bounties, the bounties themselves which He *the Almighty* endows people with and the people upon whom He *Glorified is He* bestows these favours and blessings. In addition, people have not busied themselves with calculating these bounties, as they are countless, and no reasonable person would try to calculate them.

Concerning the third element which is the one who receives the bounties, namely man, he is unable to calculate the favours his leader does for him, so what about Allah's bounties which cannot be calculated, His limitless Perfection and His Giving which does not run out? To Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…man is truly unjust and ungrateful.' (*Yusuf:* 34)

In this chapter of *Ibrahim*, Allah clarifies man's oppression towards himself and his ingratitude which implies his ingratitude to the Bestower of these bounties. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: 'Have you not considered those who exchanged the favour of Allah for disbelief and settled their people [in] the home of ruin? [It is] Hell, which they will [enter to] burn, and wretched is the settlement.' (*Ibrahim:* 28-29) These are the ones who have committed wrongdoing the creed of monotheism and faith. Man, the one who receives Allah's bounties, should show not ingratitude after realising Allah's bounties. Fairness involves giving every person his due right, but some people offer ingratitude in exchange for Allah's favour. Therefore, they are considered as wrongdoers and as being ungrateful since they show ingratitude in exchange for Allah's bounties.

Furthermore, wrongdoing involves taking the right from its owner and giving it to the one who does not deserve it. If you do not believe in Allah, then you have denied Allah's right as God; if you worship deities other than Allah, then with that you have transferred Allah's right to be worshipped to another, an action that is considered as the ultimate wrongdoing.

Read carefully Allah's saying in the chapter of *an-Nahl*: 'And He has subjected for you the night and day and the sun and moon, and the stars are subjected by His command. Indeed in that are signs for a people who reason. [He has subjected] whatever He multiplied for you on the earth of varying colours. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who remember. It is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear. You see the ships ploughing through it, and [He subjected it] that you may seek of His bounty; so perhaps you will be grateful. He has cast into the earth firmly set mountains, lest it shift with you, and [made] rivers and roads, that you may be guided, and landmarks. And by the stars they are [also] guided. Then is He Who creates like one who does not create? So will you not be reminded? And if you should count the favours of

Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 12-18) No one can calculate Allah's limitless bounties. The previous verses include both miracles and show man's inability which implies that Allah's perfection never ends.

Some of those who try to find fault with the Quran wonder why Allah says in one verse: 'If you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them. Man is truly unjust and ungrateful.' (*Ibrahim:* 34) and in another verse: 'If you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 18)

The answer is that they have not observed the context of each verse, as the context of the verse we are reflecting upon now includes Allah's bounties and man's ingratitude which has resulted from man's extreme oppression against himself.

On the other hand, in the verse, which is mentioned in the chapter of *an-Nahl*, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the bounties which He bestows upon man. Despite man's oppression, Allah's Mercy encompasses him and He has not withheld His bounties. Allah instructs man not to stop asking Him of His bounties even if man has oppressed and showed ingratitude with regard to certain matters, Allah is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful. Accordingly, there is no contradiction between the two verses, but each verse has a suitable end; in the first verse, Allah treats us with His Justice and in the second verse, He treats us with His Grace.

Allah says: '…man is truly unjust and ungrateful.' (*Ibrahim:* 34) We know that there are people who believe in Allah and acknowledge His bounties, so why does Allah describe man as unjust and ungrateful? When the word 'man' is used without any exceptions, it refers to those who are misguided, follow no religion, and do not reflect upon the universe. Allah has clarified this point in His Saying: 'By the declining day. Man is [deep] in loss.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-2) Then he has mentioned an exception after this verse, as He says: '… except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and recommend one another to steadfastness.' (*al-'Asr:* 3)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِيمُ رَبِّ ٱجْعَلْ هَٰذَا ٱلْبَلَدَ ءَامِنًا وَٱجْنُبْنِى وَبَنِىَّ أَن نَّعْبُدَ ٱلْأَصْنَامَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Remember when Abraham said, ‘Lord, make this town safe!
Preserve me and my offspring from idolatry [35]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 35)

Allah says in the Arabic version of the verse *idh* (remember when), then He quotes Ibrahim (Abraham) as saying, ‘O, Lord’ and not ‘O, Allah’ because Ibrahim (Abraham) was making his supplication to the Creator and the Lord. This is because the bounties granted by Allah involve religious obligations regarding which a servant is given a choice either to fulfil or not. An example on these obligations is His saying: ‘And establish prayer …’ (*al-Baqara:* 43). On the other hand, the bounties of the Lord are given to those to establish prayer or not.

The issue of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* has not been mentioned in this verse haphazardly. We know that when the Quran descended, the first people who heard it are the masters of Quraysh, who enjoyed reverence and leadership on the Arabian Peninsula, and no one dared to harass their caravans on the winter and summer journeys to Yemen and the Levant. The masters of Quraysh derived their reverence from the Sacred House.

Allah *the Exalted* has stated first His bounties which He bestows on for every creature in general, and then He has stated the bounties relevant to them specifically, so He says: ‘… O, Lord, make this town safe!…’ (*Ibrahim:* 35) This phrase has been mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in a different way. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord, make this a secure city…"’ (*al-Baqara:* 126).

The difference between the Arabic words *Al-balad* and *balad* needs explanation; the word *balad* means that a place that was once empty, then Ibrahim (Abraham) supplicated for this place to become secure and to be inhabited by people who can fulfil their needs in it and find means for maintaining their livelihood. He supplicated also for the place to be secure and free from any threat for their lives and their means of livelihood.

Allah has answered Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) supplication, so the land has become a secure and peaceful *balad*. Man does not settle in a place unless he has secured his means of livelihood and has ensured the absence of any source of terror that may disturb him. Every person needs this security. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* made this supplication when he arrived in this place which was a valley without vegetation and other essential elements that sustain life. This supplication is mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara*.

However, in the second verse, the place has already become vivid, so the second supplication for security is very specific and special. In any other place, you can cut down a tree or hunt any game, but this place enjoys a particular type of security, as it includes vegetation and animals; even the criminal cannot be harmed.(1)

Accordingly, the first supplication for security differs from the second one, as the first one is for general security, whereas the second one is for a particular type of security. Any place may enjoy general security, but the city of the Sacred House enjoys security that encompasses all created beings.

Some shallow-minded people may wonder why the Sacred House was attacked by some people some years ago although Allah has made it secure. The answer is that this security is not a universal phenomenon, but it is a religious obligation which may be fulfilled or not. Allah's Saying, '…And whoever enters it shall be safe…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) means that those who follow Allah's religion should render the Sacred House secure and safe for those who enter it. Therefore, there is a difference between the religious obligation and the universal phenomenon.

Allah *Glorified is He* states Ibrahim's (Abraham's) saying: '… Preserve me and my offspring from idolatry.' (*Ibrahim:* 35) This statement includes

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him and his father said that Messenger Muhammad said on the day of the Liberation of Mecca: 'Allah made this town sacred on the day He created the earth and the heavens; so it is sacred by the sacredness conferred on it by Allah until the Day of Resurrection. Fighting in it was not lawful to anyone before me, and it was made lawful for me only during an hour on one day, for it is sacred by the sacredness conferred on it by Allah until the Day of Resurrection. Its thorns are not to be cut, its game is not to be molested, and the things dropped are to be picked up only by one who makes a public announcement of it, and its fresh herbage is not to be cut.' Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, 'O Messenger of Allah, exception may be made in case of rush, for it is useful for their blacksmiths and for their houses. He (Prophet Muhammad) conceding the suggestion of 'Abbas said, 'Except rush.' [Related by Muslim in his Sahih (1353)]*

Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) prediction of what happened in the Sacred House at the hands of ‘Amr ibn Luhay who brought the worship of idols into the Sacred House.

A person may ask why Ibrahim (Abraham) made this supplication although he is an infallible Prophet or why did he ask Allah to protect him from worshiping idols.

My answer is the following: Does this prevent a person from asking his Lord to perpetuate this infallibility? We receive religious obligations from Allah, such as: ‘O, you who believe, believe in Allah and His Messenger …’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136). This is a command for the believers to have continuous belief in Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* states what Messenger Shu’aib (Jethro) said: ‘We would have invented against Allah a lie if we returned to your religion after Allah had saved us from it. And it is not for us to return to it except that Allah, our Lord, should will …’ (*al-A‘raf:* 89).

This saying includes humbleness before the Bestower of the bounty of faith. In addition, the Quran clarifies Allah’s Omnipotence.

Allah says in this verse: ‘… Preserve me and my offspring from idolatry.’ (*Ibrahim:* 35) The word *sanam*, which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, differs literally from the word *wathan* for the idol which takes the human shape is called *sanam*, whereas the indistinct rock which was worshipped by some of the people in the pre-Islamic times is called *wathan*.

Some people who wished to clarify this matter said that there are two types of disbelief: manifest polytheism and hidden polytheism. The former refers to worshipping any deity other than Allah while the later refers to idolising the intermediaries between him and Allah, giving them more than their due and ascribing to some of them Allah’s Attributes.

Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) supplication to Allah to preserve him and his offspring from the worship of idols necessitates understanding to what the Arabic word *baniy* refers. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* intended with the prophets and messengers from his offspring, as we know that some of his offspring worshipped idols and other objects of worship.

The Arabic word *abna'* is mentioned in other verses, such as Allah's saying: 'Remember when Ibrahim (Abraham) was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them …' (*al-Baqara:* 124). After Allah informed Ibrahim (Abraham) of some obligations, and he fulfilled them completely, He made him the leader of people. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '… Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people…' (*al-Baqara:* 124). Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* has become the leader of people, as he fulfilled all the obligations Allah assigned to him perfectly, accurately and honestly. We should apply Allah's rule concerning the living beings; we should not charge a person with the responsibilities of a leader unless he is qualified and can perform them proficiently.

We must also remember the Prophet's saying, 'When honesty is lost, then wait for the Hour (Doomsday).' He said when someone asked him about the time of the Doomsday and how honesty will be lost, 'When the power or authority comes in the hands of unfit persons, then wait for the Hour (Doomsday).'(1)

Charging unfit people with authority causes corruption, because assigning responsibilities to any person is intended in order for them to be fulfilled properly. If the choice of the person is bad, then he will be a bad example to be followed, and inefficiency will spread and the society will be corrupted. However, if authority is assigned to a fit person, the situation will be entirely different, as everything will be balanced, a matter which involves stability in different aspects.

For example, the children who are raised in Saudi Arabia and see that the hand of a thief is severed, they do not commit robbery because they understand that Allah has set a harsh punishment in order to prevent people from committing this crime.

Some people who claim civility ask how the Quran states: 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion…' (*al-Baqara:* 256) and the person who apostatises is arrested in order to be executed. This matter should not be counted against Islam since keenness to protect dignity causes the people to embrace Islam only after reaching the level of certainty which means embracing the true religion after finding the evidence that supports it.

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(1) *[Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (59, 6496) from the Hadith of Abu Hurrayra Allah be pleased with him]*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is …’ (*Fussilat:* 53).

Apostasy may cost one’s life because he renounces the religion which he embraced after finding the evidence supporting it.

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* supplicated to his Lord, ‘…O, Lord, make this town safe! Preserve me and my offspring from idolatry.’ (*Ibrahim:* 35) when he passed Allah’s test and succeeded perfectly in accomplishing what was assigned to him, Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* willed for him to become a leader, and he asked Allah for this leadership to continue to be conferred upon his offspring, as he said: ‘…and my offspring…’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). Allah *Glorified is He* answered him by saying: ‘… My covenant does not include the wrongdoers.’ (*al-Baqara:* 124) Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that that the progeny of a prophet does not mean real sons, but it refers to the followers of this prophet. Allah has said to Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* about his son(1): ‘…so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge …’ (*Hud:* 46). In addition, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about Salman who was Persian, ‘Salman is of us, the members of my family.'(2) This affirms the previous point.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir said in his exegesis (2/446), ‘This is Nuh’s (Noah’s) fourth son whose name is Yam and he was a disbeliever.’ Allah says: ‘...Noah called to his son who was apart [from them], "O my son, come aboard with us and be not with the disbelievers.” [But] he said, "I will take refuge on a mountain to protect me from the water." [Noah] said, "There is no protector today from the decree of Allah, except for whom He gives mercy." And the waves came between them, and he was among the drowned.’ (Hud: 42-43) Then Nuh (Noah) asked his Lord a question about the state of his son who drowned, saying: ‘My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges. He said, "O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant." (Hud: 45-46)*

(2) *It was narrated on the authority of ‘Amr ibn ‘Auf Al-Mazani, who said: ‘Messenger Muhammad drew the parameters of the trench in the year of al-Ahzab (the confederates)* =

Then Allah completes Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) supplication which indicates Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) awareness of what idolatry does to a person.

رَبِّ إِنَّهُنَّ أَضْلَلْنَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ ۖ فَمَن تَبِعَنِى فَإِنَّهُۥ
مِنِّى ۖ وَمَنْ عَصَانِى فَإِنَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

Lord, the [idols] have led many people astray! Anyone who follows me is with me, but as for anyone who disobeys me – You are surely forgiving and merciful [36] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 36)

We know that idols in themselves do not lead one astray because they do not speak and do not charge people with any obligations, but those who ascribe divinity to them lead people astray and leave them without any discipline. This type of misguidance is welcomed by those who hate following the directives of the One and the Creator.

Then, Allah states what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said after his supplication: ‘Anyone who follows me is with me, but as for anyone who disobeys me – You are surely forgiving and Merciful.’ (*Ibrahim:* 36) These are commentaries on the matter of Allah’s Forgiveness and Mercy after a person commits a sin. Allah *Glorified is He* says in one verse: ‘…and He is Exalted in Might, the Wise.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 118) In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… and He is Exalted in Might, the Wise.’ (*az-Zumar:* 53) The reason for this is that crimes differ in degree. For example, when a person claims to be a god or the one whose followers consider him a god without him claiming so, this is considered the most horrible crime.

When Allah will say to ‘Isa (Jesus): ‘O, 'Isa (Jesus), Son of Mary, did you say to the people, “Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?"…’

= *from the black fortress located at the side of of Banu Haritha until he reached Al-Midad, then he divided the digging place among men, giving each ten forty feet. Therefore, the Ansar (Medinan Helpers) and the Immigrants disagreed with regard to Salman, the Persian, who was a strong man. The Ansar (Medinan Helpers) said: ‘Salman is one of us’ and the Immigrants said, ‘Salman is one of us.’ Then, Messenger Muhammad said, ‘Salman is of the members of my family.’ [Related by Al-Bayhaqi in ‘Dala’il An-Nubuwwa’ (3/418) and Al-Hakim in ‘Al-Mustadrak’ (3/598)] Ad-Dhahabi regarded it as a weak Hadith because its chain of transmission includes Kuthayr ibn ‘Abdullah.*

(*al-Ma'ida:* 116) He will say: '… I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) Then 'Isa (Jesus) will say: 'If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants, but if You forgive them - indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118)

Thus, mightiness and wisdom follow the mention of punishment. There are situations to which might and wisdom are appropriate, and others to which forgiveness and grace are appropriate. No one is capable of preventing Allah's Command of forgiveness or mercy, as He is the Exalted is Mighty and the Most Wise.

Allah's Saying, 'O Lord, the [idols] have led many people astray! ...' (*Ibrahim:* 36), reflects characteristics that suit the beginning of the verse and confirms that the Quran is revealed by the Most Wise and the Most Acquainted. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We will make you recite, [O, Muhammad], and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6) Why does Allah *the Most High* say in one verse, '… the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful' (*az-Zumar:* 53), and in another verse, '…the Exalted in Might and the Most Wise' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118), although the moral context reflects otherwise?

After reminding us of His countless bounties, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… man is truly unjust and ungrateful.' (*Yusuf:* 34) although He says in another verse after reminding us of His bounties: '… verily, Allah is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 18) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'No! Indeed, these verses are a reminder. So whoever wills may remember it.' (*'Abasa:* 11-12) Allah *the Most High* says in another verse: 'Indeed, this is a reminder, so he who wills may take to his Lord a way.' (*al-Insan:* 29)

All these verses reveal that there is wisdom and reason behind the descent of every verse. This affirms Allah's saying: 'We will make you recite, [O, Muhammad], and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6)

Allah *the Almighty* willed for the Quran to descend upon His Messenger, and He ensured that His Messenger would memorise it and would not forget order of any verse. This is due to the One Who says, 'We will make you recite, [O, Muhammad], and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6) is Allah the Omnipotent Creator.

Then, Allah states what Ibrahim (Abraham) said:

رَّبَّنَآ إِنِّيٓ أَسۡكَنتُ مِن ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيۡرِ ذِي زَرۡعٍ عِندَ بَيۡتِكَ ٱلۡمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ
فَٱجۡعَلۡ أَفۡـِٔدَةٗ مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ تَهۡوِيٓ إِلَيۡهِمۡ وَٱرۡزُقۡهُم مِّنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَشۡكُرُونَ ٣٧

Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer. Make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful [37] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 37)

We can understand from this verse that the place is not suitable for cultivation, because it is a rocky land that can reclaimed. Ibrahim's (Abraham's) saying, '… an uncultivated valley…' (*Ibrahim:* 37), which means that there is no hope of cultivating it with human effort; nothing can bring about provision in this place except our Lord. Indeed, the place was not selected by Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* but Allah *the Almighty* commanded him to head towards this place in order to raise the foundations of the Sacred House. As Ibrahim (Abraham) said: '… close to Your Sacred House …' (*Ibrahim:* 37), this indicates that he was content with this obligation. As long as this matter is a religious obligation, it must be carried out with fervour; the one who does so earns two rewards: the reward of loving the religious obligation and the reward of carrying it out.

We have an example in this regard which is the story of the man who was met by Al-Asma'y (1) at the Sacred House, and was saying: 'O, Allah, verily I have disobeyed you, but I love those who obey you, so consider it a good deed for me.' Al-Asma'y said that Allah is most likely to forgive this man due to his good manner of supplication, as he has found joy in the religious obligations, even if he did not fulfil them himself and other people did, that caused him to rejoice.

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(1) Al-Aṣma'ay is the epithet of 'Abd Al-Malik ibn Qurayb Al-Bahli, Abu Sa'id; he was born in Basra in 122 A.H. and was one of the famous Arab orators, and one of the proficient experts of language, poetry, and knowledge of countries. He traveled frequently from a town to another. He died in Basra in 216 A.H. at the age of 94. *Al-A'lam* by Az-Zirikli (4/162).

When any person fulfils the religious obligations, this matter will be in the interest of all mankind. When we offer prayer, we recite the following verse in the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, ‘It is you we worship and you we ask for help’ (*al-Fatiha:* 5), this means that everyone should keep himself with the worshippers so that Allah may accept one of the worshippers and all the worshippers may be accepted along with. Thus, I say to anyone who commits a sin not to be angry and hopeless because there are others who obey Allah. He should be glad about them because your rejoicing in their obedience proves that you love the religious obligations although you are unable to fulfil them yourself. Loving the religious obligations involves honour.

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said about the valley in which Allah commanded him to establish the foundations of the Sacred House that it is an uncultivated valley. He came to this place to fulfil Allah’s Command to the extent that when his wife Hajar found out that they settled in this place according to Allah’s Command, she said, ‘Then surely He will not lead us to loss.’(1) Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* presents the reasons for settling in this place and establishing the foundations of the Sacred House, as he says: ‘… make people’s hearts turn to them …’ (*Ibrahim:* 37). This means that people will visit this place not for a touristic purpose, but for worshipping Allah. As long as the place has been established as Allah willed, He should be worshipped in this place.

Thus, it becomes completely clear that the basis of the command is staying in a place that has no means for sustenance. However, as Allah *the Almighty* enjoined this command, a person who establishes prayer should have the basic necessities of life, the first of which is food and water.

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(1) *Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him brought Hajar and his nursing son, Ismail (Ishmael), to Mecca, which included no one and no water. He left them there with a container of dates and a flask of water and walked away. Hajar asked Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) why he would leave them in this uninhabited valley. She repeated this question many times, but he did not look back. Therefore, she said, ‘Has Allah commanded you with this? He said, ‘Yes.’ She said, ‘Then He will not lead us to loss.’ This is mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (5/3707).*

Therefore, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* supplicated Allah: '…people's hearts turn to them…' (*Ibrahim:* 37). The word *af'ida* (literally people's hearts), which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, is used to describe a group of people. There is a strong relationship between *fu'ad* and pilgrims, since pilgrimage is an act of worship relevant to hearts and not to material matters. A person may tend to save money by depriving himself of many things in order for him to perform pilgrimage.

The Arabic word *hawa* which consists of the letters *ha', waw, and ya',* has many meanings. It may be pronounced as *hawa* or *hawiya*, and if it is pronounced as *hawiya*, it means falling from a high place unwillingly, and if it is pronounced as *hawa*, it means falling in love as a result of feeling great affection.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… Make people's hearts turn to them, and provide them with produce so that they may be thankful.' (*Ibrahim:* 37) They are in a place that cannot be cultivated, but Allah *the Most High* answered Ibrahim's (Abraham's) supplication, a fact which is proved by Allah's saying: '… Have we not established for them a safe sanctuary to which is brought the fruits of all things as provision from us?' (*al-Qasas:* 57) This is before the discovery of petroleum or any other resources. The Arabic word *yujba* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse indicates that the type of provision which Allah grants is something that is collected and is an obligatory matter. For example, when you try to buy some grapes and pomegranates from *Taif*, the seller may say that they are allotted for Mecca; if you want it, you have to go there. You also find something surprising and wondrous in the words: '...every kind of produce...' (*al-Qasas:* 57) for you find in Mecca all sorts of goods whether cultivated or manufactured. It has the fruits of all four seasons coming from all over the world, as a result from the fact that every type of environment exports some of its produce to Mecca.

In our modern age, we also see the product of civilisational development and thinking minds presented in the market of Mecca or Jeddah; you see the fruits of planning and modern capabilities as they have been translated into a materialised reality in all facets of life.

During olden times, when we used to carry out the obligation of pilgrimage, we would take with us even the sowing needle and salt for our food. After the majority of the Arabian Peninsula was unified under the rule of Al Sāud and the discovery of petroleum, we now go there and come back with all the goods needed for life.

We should observe Allah’s Words: ‘Make people’s hearts turn to them,’ (*Ibrahim:* 37) for the word *min* (of) indicates that those whose hearts turn to this place are a portion of all the groups of people. Some who truly know Allah said that if the text had been revealed as saying: ‘Make the hearts of all people turn to them’, we would have found that the followers of other religions would have been included in the pilgrimage, but it was from the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* that the text actually says: ‘Make people’s hearts turn to them’ (*Ibrahim:* 37). Thus the pilgrimage became restricted to Muslims only.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* completes what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said:

رَبَّنَآ إِنَّكَ تَعۡلَمُ مَا نُخۡفِي وَمَا نُعۡلِنُۗ وَمَا يَخۡفَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ مِن شَيۡءٖ
فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ ﴿٣٨﴾

Our Lord, You know well what we conceal and what we reveal: nothing at all is hidden from God, on earth or in heaven [38] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 38)

After Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was assured that this town is characterised by general safety as well as a particular one, and he was assured that the sustaining elements for life will be there and that all this will come from Allah *Glorified is He*; after all this, the issue which had preoccupied him initially returned to occupy his mind, namely leaving Hajar and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*, in this place.

Some scholars said that the plural pronoun ‘we’ in His Words: ‘You know well what we conceal and what we reveal’ (*Ibrahim:* 38) is meant to show the love that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* conceals for Hajar and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*, and also to show his indifference to them that he reveals in the company of Sara. It is as though his emotional struggle returned to him as he began to bid farewell to Hajar and his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*.

We also say that Hajar herself was experiencing a difficult situation, for she found herself in a place bereft of vegetation and water, and it is as though she has repressed all her human instincts throughout the whole time and was patient.

Then at the moment of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) farewell, she said to him, 'Where are you leaving us? Furthermore, are you leaving us following your own volition or a Command from your Lord?' So Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, 'No, it is Command from My Lord.' So she said, 'Then He will not lead us to loss.' Thus, Hajar was certain that what she said is the truth, and that Allah *the Exalted* would certainly not lead them to any loss. Thus, when her only child grew thirsty, she ran between As-Safa and Al-Marwa searching for water, but then she saw the gushing of water under the feet of her son where she left him. Since that moment in history, the well *of Zamzam*(1) has begun to provide humanity with its water which does not dry up.

Therefore, the words of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* have been realised, that is, Allah *Glorified is He* knows what we conceal and what we reveal, for everything that has come into the open was once hidden. Despite of the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is beyond our perception, His bond is not limited to that which is beyond our perception, and rather, it encompasses the outward and the inward world. Every condition and circumstance in the heavens or the earth are known to Allah *the Most High* because what you may deem as beyond perception in your mind, is known to Him before your mind even begins to perceive it.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place in the Quran: 'Whatever you may say aloud, He knows what you keep secret and what is even more hidden.' (*Ta Ha:* 7), for if a secret is what you tell someone and you only share it with him because you trust him not to reveal it, or if the secret is that which you hid within yourself, Allah *Glorified is He* knows it in both cases.

The Quran says: 'The Prophet told something in confidence to one of his wives.' (*at-Tahrim:* 3) This means that the secret was with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it was told to some of his wives. What is ‘more hidden’ is what you have not yet announced what you have contained without revealing. Allah *the Almighty* knows that secret and all that you hide, that is, the secret which you have not shared with anyone, indeed He knows of it even before it becomes a secret.

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(1) It is said: the water of *Zamzam* is much between salty and fresh. *(Lisan Al-'Arab)* – under root—*(Zamzam)*.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said in reverence and gratitude to Him *Glorified is He*:

ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى وَهَبَ لِى عَلَى ٱلۡكِبَرِ إِسۡمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسۡحَٰقَۚ إِنَّ رَبِّى لَسَمِيعُ ٱلدُّعَآءِ ﴿٣٩﴾

Praise be to God, who has granted me Ishmael and Isaac in
my old age: my Lord hears all requests! [39]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 39)

Al-Wahb refers to the bestowal given by the Provider without expecting anything in return. Every offspring is a bestowal, for if it were not a bestowed gift, then it would become perfunctory between the spouses, and wherever there are spouses, you find it. Thus, you find that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has control of the heavens and the earth; He creates whatever He wills — He grants female offspring to whomever He wills, male to whomever He wills, or both male and female, and He Makes whomever He wills barren: He is All Knowing and All Powerful.' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

The evidence that offspring is a bestowal is what Allah *the Exalted* has willed with Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*. He asked Allah *Glorified is He* to provide him with a child to inherit him, despite the fact that he had grown very old and his wife was barren. He was surprised because he was able to sire a child, and of this Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He said, "This is what your Lord has said: 'It is easy for Me. I created you, though you were nothing before.''’ (*Maryam:* 9) This means that Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* should not become occupied with causes, means and natural laws.

Allah *the Almighty* has named ‘offspring’ a bestowed gift, so we should thank him for this bestowed gift. Thus, if He grants you females, you should accept that with pleasure since he who accepts Allah’s Bestowal of having females, He will provide him with young men to marry his daughters, and they will indeed become more obedient to him than his own children are, despite the fact that he did not toil concerning their upbringing. Every one of us sees this in their own surroundings, for he who has male children keeps thinking: 'Will my son marry a woman who will take him away and make him more dutiful to someone other than me?'

Furthermore, if He bestows upon you sons, then you must be accepted with pleasure as well. Additionally, you must ask Allah *the Most High* that your son becomes virtuous offspring, and if He should grant you both males and females, you must thank Him and ask Him to help you in raising them.

Finally, whomever Allah *Glorified is He* makes sterile should also thank Him since sterility is also a gift bestowed from Him, for we have seen sons who have killed their own mothers and fathers, and we have seen daughters who have been disobedient to their fathers and mothers. If he who is sterile has accepted this bestowal from Allah *Glorified is He* and declared this acceptance to himself and those around him, then *the Almighty* will render people’s perception of him as that of children towards a father and will make every youth that he comes in contact with him ask, ‘Is there anything that you need Uncle so-and-so?’ Furthermore, everyone will serve him with pure affection.

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* praises Allah *Glorified is He* by saying: ‘Praise be to Allah Who has granted me Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) in my old age ...’ (*Ibrahim:* 39). Gratitude for this gift which is bestowed upon us –as we know—forms the provision of offspring in youth or in old age.

Scholars say that Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) words: ‘… in my old age ...’ (*Ibrahim:* 39) mean that he is showing gratitude to Allah *Glorified is He* for granting him Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them* despite his old age. Why does Allah *the Almighty* use the Word *‘ala* (in) which is made up of three letters instead of using *ma’ (*with) by saying, ‘Praise be to Allah Who has granted me Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) with my old age’. I respond that *‘ala* indicates rising above, for old age is a weakness, but the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* is more powerful than this weakness, and so if He had said ‘with my old age’, this linking would not signify power. On the contrary, His Words,‘… Who has granted me Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) in my old age ...’ (*Ibrahim:* 39) place Allah’s Power of bestowing over aging. When Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said this, he was showing his gratitude to

Allah *Glorified is He* for answering what he had said before: ‘Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley …’ (*Ibrahim:* 37). In other words, he prayed for having offspring.

Thereafter, Allah *the Exalted* ends this verse with the words of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘… My Lord hears all requests!’ (*Ibrahim:* 39) Allah *Glorified is He* says after this:

رَبِّ ٱجۡعَلۡنِي مُقِيمَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِيۚ رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلۡ دُعَآءِ ﴿٤٠﴾

Lord, grant that I and my offspring may keep up the prayer.
Our Lord, accept my request [40] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 40)

Ibrahim’s (Abraham's) supplication about keeping up the prayer is pertinent to the Path of Allah *the Almighty*. He was asking Allah *Glorified is He* to accept his prayers, for the other requests were motivated by his human nature so they may be good or bad. On the other hand, the request that Allah *the Most High* makes him and his offspring committed to keeping up prayers is a request for goodness. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* continues his supplication in Allah’s Words:

رَبَّنَا ٱغۡفِرۡ لِي وَلِوَٰلِدَيَّ وَلِلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ يَوۡمَ يَقُومُ ٱلۡحِسَابُ ﴿٤١﴾

Our Lord, forgive me, my parents, and the believers
on the Day of Reckoning [41] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 41)

We know that the request for forgiveness from He Who is infallible is a declaration of Allah’s Power in the universe, for His choosing of a messenger –any messenger—does not exempt His chosen messenger from being cautious and asking for forgiveness. For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Verily, I seek Allah’s forgiveness each day and each night a hundred times.’(1) Asking for Allah’s forgiveness, if it were not for a sin – as in the case of the infallible messengers—is out of respect for Him as the Creator deserves from us more than what He has charged us with. So if we are unable to fulfil all the recommended and supererogatory deeds, and then let us supplicate to Allah *Glorified is He* that He forgives us. There are those of us who are unable to fulfil the obligatory religious duties, let them supplicate that Allah *Glorified is He* forgive them, and so it is said, 'The virtues of the righteous are the sins of those who are close to Allah.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Darami in his (Sunnan) (302/2) and Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (457/2) and he said: it has an authentic chain of transmission, also narrated by Ahmad in his (Masnad) (394/5) in the Hadith of Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him that he said: ‘I have wronged my family with my tongue, but no one else so I asked the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and he said, ‘Where are you with regards to seeking forgiveness, indeed I seek seeking Allah’s forgiveness a hundred times every day.’*

Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'So that Allah may forgive you your past and future sins, complete His grace upon you, guide you to a straight path.' (*al-Fath:* 2)

Thus, I always say that Allah *the Almighty* deserves to be worshipped with more than what He has charged us with, for if we are to limit ourselves to only what He has charged us with, it is as if we have not shown our complete gratitude to Him. Therefore, what should we think of the state of the messengers, especially after Allah *Glorified is He* has increased them in purity from amongst all of His creation? Should they not then increasingly show their gratitude to Him and seek His forgiveness? We also notice that the request for forgiveness here has encompassed the parents and believers: 'Our Lord, forgive me, my parents and the believers on the Day of Reckoning.'' (*Ibrahim:* 41) Man's existence, as we know, has two sources: one that originates from Adam *peace be upon him* and one that directly comes from his parents. Therefore, as long as man has entered into the world by means of his parents and he has become a believer, then he must supplicate for their forgiveness, or as their example guided him, he should supplicate for their forgiveness. Man also supplicates for forgiveness for believers because they were company to him and provided him with role models, for believers support one another in upholding justice and patience. Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who made this supplication was praying for the believers of his offspring. This is indeed a supplication and intercession on his part for those who have believed, and he implored Allah *the Almighty* that He accepts it. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) The righteous and those of proximity are both of the people of paradise, but the righteous are at a lower degree than proximate ones, and Allah *Glorified is He* has spoken of both, of the proximate ones He says: 'And those in front—ahead indeed! [10] For these will be the ones brought nearest to Allah [11] in Gardens of Bliss: [12] many from the past [13] and a few from later generations. [14] On couches of well-woven cloth [15] they will sit facing each other; everlasting youths will go round among them' (*al-Waqi'a:* 10-17). While He says of the righteous ones: 'Those on the Right, what people they are! They will dwell amid thornless lote trees and clustered acacia [29] with spreading shade.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 27-30) Due to the great degree that those who are in proximity to Allah have attained, it is said: that the virtuous acts that the righteous perform and for which they deserved their place in Paradise, are sins in comparison to what those of proximity had done.

وَلَا تَحۡسَبَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَٰفِلًا عَمَّا يَعۡمَلُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَۚ إِنَّمَا
يُؤَخِّرُهُمۡ لِيَوۡمٖ تَشۡخَصُ فِيهِ ٱلۡأَبۡصَٰرُ ﴿٤٢﴾

Do not think [Prophet] that God is unaware of what the
disbelievers do: He only gives them respite until a Day when
their eyes will stare in terror [42] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 42)

After Allah *Glorified is He* mentions and clarifies the general blessings upon the world and the particular blessings that He has bestowed on the inhabitants of Mecca, from whose descendants were some who stubbornly opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; after all that Allah *Glorified is He* brings forth this verse as a condolence and assurance for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Do not think [Prophet] that Allah is unaware of what the disbelievers do...' (*Ibrahim:* 42).

The landscape of imagery that preceded this verse captured the beginnings of forming the place where they existed and how the inhabitants of this place came to enjoy a variety of blessings and goods that came to them, including the blessing of respected among the tribes, as Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed anyone who attacked them such as Abraha and those who were with him and 'He made them [like] cropped stubble.' (*al-Fil:* 5) Allah *Glorified is He* then says directly after this verse: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. So let them worship the Lord of this House Who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.' (*Quraysh:* 1-4) Despite these blessings, they took a stance against the Call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; their stance was that of denial, animosity, opposition and ingratitude. Furthermore, they attempted to rally all of Islam's adversaries to fight against the religion of Islam. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the following fact as source of reassurance for the Noble Messenger: 'Do not think [Prophet] that Allah is unaware of what the disbelievers do ...' (*Ibrahim:* 42). Why is that? The answer is found in the second half of the verse: 'He only gives them respite until a Day when their eyes will stare in terror.' (*Ibrahim:* 42)

Allah's Words 'Do not think…' (*Ibrahim:* 42) mean that you should not speculate, for the word *hasiba* (to think or calculate) does not here mean to calculate or count, rather, it means to think; the following Words of Allah *Glorified is He* clarify this matter: 'Do people think they will be left alone after saying "We believe" without being put to the test?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 2) In other words, did people assume? Thus the word *hasab* in this verse is not related to counting but to speculation. *Al-Husban* (speculation) is thus an expression of no complete certainty, but of prevalent likelihood.

The unawareness that Allah *Glorified is He* denies concerning Himself is the inattention of something due to drowsiness or lack of alertness, and certainly and most obviously, this cannot be in the case of Allah *Glorified is He* for He is the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful Who does not slumber, nor sleep overtakes Him.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers who follow him, for when He speaks to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He simultaneously speaks to all who have believed in Him. However, did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* think that Allah *Glorified is He* is unaware? Of course, he did not, for we notice that when Allah *the Exalted* gives a Command of something, it may be that one man is already obeying it, and in that case Allah *the Almighty* wants that one to keep on obeying such Command. For example, when you tell someone who does not drink any intoxicants, 'Do not drink intoxicants', and indeed he does not, what you are thus doing is asking him to keep on abstaining from drinking. In other words, you command him to continue doing what is ordered and keep on abstaining from what is prohibited. So, can Allah *Glorified is He* become unaware? I say that when you find a quality in people that is not attributable to Allah *Glorified is He* then you should explain it within the context of the perfection that belongs to Him.

When someone commits an act of oppression, he will receive punishment for this act, and when the punishment is delayed, people who witnessed this act begin to question and murmur, ‘Has the evildoing of so-and-so been forgotten? Is there unawareness of this matter?’ In their questioning they are trying to make known their stance against the evildoer and the necessity of their punishment. So, we should understand that the word ‘… unaware …’ (*an-Nur:* 42) means that Allah *Glorified is He* will just delay the punishment of evildoers. For those who are questioning about when justice will come, must remember Allah’s Words: ‘I will give them respite, but My plan is sure.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 183) Therefore, there is no unawareness or forgetfulness, but there is a postponement of punishment for these evildoers, for injustice means that someone appropriates the right of one person and giving it to another, or seizes it for himself.

Furthermore, if this injustice is with regards to doctrinal matters, then it is a form of disbelief, and that is indeed the gravest crimes. If one did injustice by committing a major sin, that is considered a transgression, and if it is injustice in the form of a minor sin, then it is evildoing. Thus, we find Allah *Glorified is He* putting forth a judgment that is commensurate to each of the three situations; for He says about those who condone the crime of disbelief: ‘… those who do not judge according to what Allah has sent down are rejecting [Allah’s teachings].’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 44) He says about committing one of the major sins: ‘… Those who do not judge according to what Allah has revealed are lawbreakers.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 47) Furthermore, He says about those who condone making minor sins what is appropriate regarding religious judgment: ‘…Those who do not judge according to what Allah has revealed are doing grave wrong.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 44) If there is one who has been deemed guilty of several of these judgments, then the judgment rests upon how he himself judged.

Furthermore, when we examine this issue of evildoing we observe that the evildoer requires someone against whom to do evil. If that injustice is — may Allah *Glorified is He* grant us refuge from such — the ultimate injustice of disbelief, then such evildoing can be divided — as per the understanding of the scholars — into three kinds: The first type: is to deny Allah's Existence and Divinity without ascribing it to another and that is atheism, and it is injustice against the necessary existence of Allah *Glorified is He*. The second type is to concede to Allah's Divinity, and to associate others with Him in His Divinity, and this polytheism is an injustice against the Essence of Allah and His Oneness. The third type is to say that Allah *Glorified is He* is made of many parts; this is an injustice against the Oneness of His Essence.

Some of those who truly know Allah say that the first right to exist is the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*. A poet also once said:

The first right of existence is His existence

And all the rights of the universe from it [were] derived

For He is no plural as one idolater claimed

O my fine creed, nor is He [found divided] in parts

The injustice that is mentioned in the verse which we are reflecting upon is the gravest kind of injustice, an injustice against the doctrine of divinity. Besides this injustice, there is another one against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the poet also summarised their injustice against him by saying:

You called him the Sincere in his youth

Yet no Sincere one is accused for the [falsity] of their claims

For they had named Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before he received the message, 'the sincere', and after the message, they stripped him of this epithet. They also used to describe him before the coming of the message as 'the truthful', and they neither once said of him before the Message that he was a magician, nor had they accused him of insanity. Then how could they have described him of sincerity, possessing truthfulness of speech and talked of his wisdom in judgement? How could he have had all these characteristics before the message, and yet you strip him of them after it? This is the injustice of denying perfection, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was indeed a perfect human being even before He was sent to with the message. So you committed injustice against him after the message and denied him his perfection, and it is a twofold injustice. For you had already recognised his sincerity before the message, then after the message, you denied his sincerity, and similarly, he was indeed truthful before the message and you claimed that he was not truthful after it.

He had not a single characteristic of deficiency before the message, so you came up with one, such as your claim that he is a magician, soothsayer and insane, and this is great injustice against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is also injustice against the community in which you live in since the one who wants the tyranny of infidelity to continue, and wants to continue to rule over others and exploit and control them, all this is injustice against society. Above all, there is injustice against oneself, for whoever does so may derive a small pleasure from it, but in reality they are depriving themselves from a greater one and that is the pleasure of life in the light of Allah's Path: upon such a person applies Allah's Words: 'We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 118)

Furthermore, beyond the injustice against oneself and the injustice against society, there is also an injustice that this type of person commits against the universe and what it contains other than human beings, including inanimate things, animals, and plants. When a person does not follow the Path of his Creator, while the universe is made to serve this Path, then that person will not take this into account in their treatment of the universe. Allah *Glorified is He* says about this: '…There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44). When everything in this world celebrates Allah's praise and a man who does not follow His Path becomes aberrant, the whole universe hates him. In this way, this man wrongs himself and the whole universe as well.

So we have come to understand the ultimate injustice refers to the denial of Allah's Divinity, associating others with Him and imagining that He is made up of parts. In addition, there is the injustice of stripping Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of his human perfection even though he is the medium through which the goodness of faith was delivered, and finally injustice against the universe as a whole, for every one of its inhabitants celebrates Allah's praise.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not think [Prophet] that Allah is unaware of what the disbelievers do ...' (*Ibrahim:* 42). We find the word *ya'mal* (do), and we know that there is a difference between *'amal* (work) and *fi'l* (act); the *(fi'l)* is the activity of all the limbs and the body, except for the tongue, for its activity we call 'speech'.

Thus, the actions of all the limbs and body are described in one word, and the activity of the tongue alone is described in a word, for nothing throws people into the hellfire on their noses except the harvests of their tongues.(1) So *fi'l* (action) and speech are combined in the word (*'amal)*.

Furthermore, in this verse that is currently being reflected upon, Allah *the Exalted* uses the word *ya',* and this is due to the idolaters who had received the Quran but spread rumours that caused agitation amongst the people against Islam and Prophet Muhammad. They did this by using speech, and all their actions that were carried out against Islam were the consequences of incitement through words.

Then comes the other part of this noble verse to confirm that Allah *Glorified is He* enables them to commit sins so that He punishes them for these sins, and so He says: 'He only gives them respite until a Day when their eyes will stare in terror.' (*Ibrahim:* 42)

We also know that there were a series of phenomena that made clear to the idolaters the imminence of victory for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: the death of their valiant heroes and some of their leaders in the battle of Badr along with the capture of their leaders. Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* has wished to mention His promise or His threat, He brought forth the matter which all the listeners are included in, and that is the punishment of the Hereafter, should they continue in their idolatry and fight against the Message.

Allah's Words, '…when their eyes will stare in horror ...' (*Ibrahim:* 42) mean that their eyes will be open wide with no movement left or right from the horror of what they see. It is possible that one's eyes do not turn about because of staring at something that is exceedingly beautiful, and what distinguishes between them is but a subtle current created by Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *[Narrated by Ahmad and At-Tirmithi]*

For when we see a person who is in a state of panic due to his exceeding fear, his face captures that fear, while when a person looks at that which is beautiful and his eyes open wide at its beauty, his features take on an expression of being in harmony and calm receptivity to the beauty he is seeing; a poet says:

The beauty of what I love has captured my sight
[I wish] that it may to a different thing turn

So we can differentiate between one who is fearful and one who is joyful from the expression on the face, whether it is terrified or content.

We know that eyesight is subservient to sights, for when there are many sights to be seen, the eyes turn from one to the other; the seeing person's sight is constantly diverted and distracted by a variety of sights, so his mind travels from one thought to another as well.

However, those whom Allah *the Almighty* has blessed with the blessing of removing their eyesight – visually impaired – such sights do not preoccupy them: so we find them most talented in learning, for their minds are not distracted by anything else, and they perceive the thoughts which stay in their minds through hearing.

Therefore, it is said that they are 'treasuries of knowledge' if they should seek knowledge, for none of them who seeks knowledge is ever empty, much like a treasury that never empties.

No one controls the feelings that arise from the passions except for Allah *the Exalted* for you cannot tell yourself 'rage' or 'laugh' because it is He Who owns this Power, so He says: 'And that it is He Who makes people laugh and weep.' (*an-Najm:* 43), for laughter and crying is naturally occurring things that no one can interfere with. We find Allah *Glorified is He* saying elsewhere in the Quran: '…your eyes rolled [with fear]…' (*al-Ahzab:* 10). For at that point when eyes stare, and terror overwhelms a person, it is then that they cannot look away from the terrifying scene, while at another point, the eyes shift in seeking to find an escape or way out but do not find it. Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* completes this image of those whose eyes turned dull by saying:

مُهْطِعِينَ مُقْنِعِي رُءُوسِهِمْ لَا يَرْتَدُّ إِلَيْهِمْ طَرْفُهُمْ ۖ وَأَفْئِدَتُهُمْ هَوَاءٌ ﴿٤٣﴾

They will rush forward, craning their necks, unable to divert their eyes, a gaping void in their hearts [43]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 43)

The one who rushes forward is he who can be seen speeding, and it is as though his neck has been elongated since he is running long. It is as though the punishment of suffering is drawing in the punished to bring him closer, thus thrusting him forcefully and intensely towards that suffering. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On a Day when they will be punished by the Fire.’ (*at-Tur:* 13) It is as though there is someone who is thrusting them forcefully towards their painful destiny and they are ‘craning their necks’ (*Ibrahim:* 43). In other words, their heads were raised from shock at the terror of the suffering that awaits them.

In another situation, Allah *Glorified is He* gives the following image of them: ‘[It is as if] We had placed [iron] collars around their necks, right up to their chins so that their heads are forced up.’ (*Ya Sin:* 8) Thus, their image will be horrifying for their excessive humiliation, as the sight of each one is staring straight towards the suffering that draws him quickly and ever so forcefully, and his head is forced up from terror; he is utterly humiliated and shackled. Not one of them can let his eyelids fall, and it is as if they were opened out of his control; there is a gaping void in their heart, which means that there is nothing that can enter it.

We notice for example that when we place an empty bottle in water, air bubbles come out as water enters through its mouth. We know that the heart of a believer is full of faith, while a disbelieving atheist at that same moment recalls his history with Allah *the Almighty* and religion, and he finds nothing comforting therein. Thus, he finds his heart empty for not being reassured concerning what he faces at the moment of judgment.

We have seen those who have witnessed the last moments of someone’s life have said of a believer’s end ‘his face was bright with his facial features full of light’. On the other hand, what they say about a disbeliever’s end are stories of how ghastly his facial features were in that moment.

The reason behind this is that one is at that moment surveying his history with Allah *Glorified is He* and witnessing the course of his whole life. So, he who spent his life doing what pleasing Allah *the Exalted* must feel comfort, and he who spent his life in disbelief and atheism cannot help but realise the terrifying fate that awaits him: 'On that Day there will be radiant faces, looking towards their Lord, and on that Day there will be the sad and despairing faces of those who realize that a great calamity is about to befall them.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-25) Allah *Glorified is He* says after this:

وَأَنذِرِ ٱلنَّاسَ يَوۡمَ يَأۡتِيهِمُ ٱلۡعَذَابُ فَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ رَبَّنَآ أَخِّرۡنَآ
إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ قَرِيبٖ نُّجِبۡ دَعۡوَتَكَ وَنَتَّبِعِ ٱلرُّسُلَۗ أَوَلَمۡ تَكُونُوٓاْ
أَقۡسَمۡتُم مِّن قَبۡلُ مَا لَكُم مِّن زَوَالٖ ٤٤

So warn people of the Day when punishment will come to them, and when the disbelievers will say, 'Our Lord, give us a little more time: we shall answer Your call and follow the messengers.' Did you [disbelievers] not swear in the past that your power would have no end? [44] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 44)

This command from Allah *the Most High* is directed at Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to warn people of the necessity of preparation for the Day of Judgment, for it is inevitably coming. The word 'Day' is a condition of time and any condition of time must have an event which takes place in it; the Day of Judgment is not a time for warning or glad tidings, rather warnings and glad tidings must come at the time of this life while we are bearing the responsibility of religious duties. Thus, what they are warned of is the fear of the punishment that will befall them on this Day, as though it was a time bomb, which at the coming of the Day of Judgment will explode in their faces.

Here, evildoers who committed the greatest of injustices against the creed, the message with its components and the universe which celebrates the glory of Allah, will say: 'Our Lord, give us a little more time. We shall answer Your call and follow the messengers.' (*Ibrahim:* 44) They ask that the punishment be postponed for a short period of time, so that they can prove that they will answer the message and obey the messenger, and this means that they are asking for the postponement of their judgment. So, the answer of Allah

Glorified is He is the following, ‘Did you [disbelievers] not swear in the past that your power would have no end?’ (*Ibrahim:* 44), for you have sworn previously that Allah *the Almighty* does not resurrect the dead, and He has conveyed what you said: ‘They have sworn by Allah with their strongest oaths that He will not raise the dead to life.’ (*an-Nahl:* 38) When you see the words ‘Yes, indeed’ after a declaration or oath, then it means that what preceded it was in fact falsehood.

Indeed those who are referred to in this verse that we are currently reflecting upon thought that they would not be resurrected, along with thinking that after death they would merely become dust, and it is they who have said: ‘There is only the life of this world. We die, we live, but we will never be resurrected.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 37) So they assured themselves that there will be no Resurrection after this life, but after the resurrection we will hear each one of them says: ‘If only I were dust!’ (*an-Naba’:* 40) Or disbelievers thought that those who were given blessings by Allah *the Almighty* in this world would not be deprived by Him in the Hereafter, as it was put forth by Him in the following simile in His Words: ‘Tell them the parable of two men: for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between; both gardens yielded fruit and did not fail in any way; We made a stream flow through them, and so he had abundant fruit. One day, while talking to his friend, he said, "I have more wealth and a larger following than you." He went into his garden and wronged himself by saying, "I do not think this will ever perish or that the Last Hour will ever come– even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there."’ (*al-Kahf:* 32-36)

Indeed whoever says this believes that they will die, but they have imagined that his garden would stay as it is, and denied the coming of the Hour by saying, ‘Even if the Hour should come, and I was returned to Allah, I will find an even better garden than this one of mine.' He supplicates for this even though he has had faith in Allah *the Almighty* to have its reward in the Hereafter. Therefore, he is one of those who have denied that their worldly blessings will perish and denied the Resurrection. He has fallen into the same circle of people who did not believe in Resurrection, and Allah has previously mentioned what these people had said: ‘They say, "What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?"’ (*as-Sajda:* 10)

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us of His dialogue with those who denied the Resurrection, for He says: ‘They will say, "Our Lord, twice you have caused us to be lifeless and twice you have brought us to life. Now we recognise our sins. Is there any way out?"’ (*Ghafir:* 11) Thereupon, Allah *Glorified is He* replies to them: ‘This is all because when Allah alone was invoked you rejected this, yet when others were associated with Him you believed [in them]. Judgment belongs to Allah the Most High, the Most Great.’ (*Ghafir:* 11)

In addition, there is another part of the Quran that we find a dialogue which includes their imploring of Allah *Glorified is He* by saying: 'Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard, send us back and we shall do the good. [Now] we are convinced.’ (*as-Sajda:* 12) Allah replies: ‘So since you ignored the meeting on this Day of yours, now We shall ignore you. Taste the lasting suffering for all you have done.’ (*as-Sajda:* 14)

Furthermore, in a third place of the Quran, they each say at the moment of death: ‘‘My Lord, let me return so as to make amends for the things I neglected.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 99-100) So Allah *the Most High* responds: ‘Never! This will not go beyond his words. A barrier stands behind such people until the very Day they are resurrected.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 100) Then after they enter the hellfire they will say: ‘Lord, take us away from this and if we go back to our old ways, then we shall really be evildoers.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 107) So, Allah *Glorified is He* replies: ‘He will say, "Away with you! In you go! Do not speak to Me!"’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 108)

Then in another place, they say as they cry out loud pleadingly in the hellfire: ‘Lord, let us out, and we will do righteous deeds, and not what we did before!’ (*Fatir:* 37) So Allah *the Most High* responds to them: ‘"Did We not give you a life long enough to take warning if you were going to? The warner came to you, now taste the punishment." The evildoers will have nobody to help them.’ (*Fatir:* 37)

Notice that in all of the verses in which they beg and implore Allah *the Almighty* to return to this life they said, ‘Our Lord’, forgetting that they are taken to their punishment for their transgressions against His Divinity, for Allah's bestowal of His Lordship was bestowed on you in the worldly life, and indeed He has not deprived you of any of it despite your disbelief.

Thus is the state of those who have sworn that Allah *the Exalted* will not raise them back from the dead, along with denying the Day of Judgement and saying that there is no end for their power, that is, there is neither Resurrection nor raising the dead to life. Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* follows with this noble statement:

وَسَكَنتُمْ فِي مَسَٰكِنِ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَتَبَيَّنَ
لَكُمْ كَيْفَ فَعَلْنَا بِهِمْ وَضَرَبْنَا لَكُمُ ٱلْأَمْثَالَ ٤٥

You lived in the same places as others who wronged
themselves before, and you were clearly shown how We
dealt with them — We gave you many examples [45]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 45)

The word *sukun* (comfort*)* means to find peace and serenity in something away from disturbance, and we know that the woman in a marriage is considered 'a source of comfort' and the home is also *sakan* (a dwelling). In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is speaking of the dwellings of the evildoers who wronged themselves, for they did not pay heed nor learn from the lessons of those before them while they should have been aware of them. In their journeys and caravans in the summer and winter, they passed by the cities of Saleh*,* and they saw the remnants of those who did themselves injustice through disbelief and idolatry, and they have passed by Al-Ahqaf and seen what has befallen the people of 'Ad.

All of these peoples received their punishment from Allah *the Almighty* whether through a furious wind or He has sent upon them an intense storm from the sky, or He has destroyed them through a violent upheaval of the earth, or by drowning them, as He has done with the people of Pharaoh. He has punished each one of these people for their sins. Allah *the Most High* has thus been Truthful in fulfilling His Promise to punish disbelievers in this world, so why then did you not take heed of this, and learn that He has been Truthful when He has spoken about the punishment of the Hereafter?

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘You lived in the same places as others who wronged themselves before ...’ (*Ibrahim:* 45). In another verse, He says: ‘You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night. Will you not take heed?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) In other words, you pass by these places that had been settled by those who came before you and had wronged themselves by their disbelief and Allah *the Almighty* has inflicted them with punishment. Thus, He says in the verse that we are reflecting upon: ‘… you were clearly shown how We dealt with them—We gave you many examples.’ (*Ibrahim:* 45)

Indeed when you walk through the land of the people of *‘*Ad*,* you see the civilisation of which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land.’ (*al-Fajr:* 7-8) It is a civilisation which we have not yet discovered its remnants, and it remains among the buried, and all that has become enveloped by the earth as such resulted from the anger of Allah *Glorified is He* Who appoints a time to reveal these remnants so that the people on earth could pay heed; this type of revelation of anger occurs whenever atheism increases and spreads.

It has happened that we discovered the civilisation of Thamud, and the civilisation of the pharaohs, and it is this latter one which outreached all others in science and technology. However, despite that, the people of this civilisation were not able to preserve it from the destruction that Allah *the Almighty* has willed.

People still wonder why the ancient Egyptians did not leave their civilisation’s expertise and knowledge written and documented in ways that the rest of humanity which followed could understand.

‘You lived in the same places as others who wronged themselves before, and you were clearly shown how we dealt with them—We gave you many examples.’ (*Ibrahim:* 45) This means that Allah *the Exalted* is showing in this verse that His Will in bringing punishment was clear to the contemporaries of the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the state of the dwellings of the people who came before them and disbelieved in the messages of messengers. Additionally, Allah *the Almighty* has given them many examples of such people and what happened to them. He uses the sensuous things to give examples of the abstract meanings to bring the latter closer to our minds.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* continues His saying:

وَقَدۡ مَكَرُواْ مَكۡرَهُمۡ وَعِندَ ٱللَّهِ مَكۡرُهُمۡ وَإِن كَانَ
مَكۡرُهُمۡ لِتَزُولَ مِنۡهُ ٱلۡجِبَالُ ﴿٤٦﴾

They made their plots, but, even if their plots had
been able to move mountains, God had the answer [46]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 46)

Al-Makr – as we know – means plotting or scheming against someone secretly. This understanding has its roots in the tree which is called *Al-Makmura*, which means a tree that hides itself. Moreover, we see in large fields a tree that is as thick as a finger wrapped around another bigger tree so closely that you could not distinguish its leaves or its roots from the branches of the other tree unless you were to separate it from the tree it is enveloped around.

Anyone who schemes against someone testifies to his own cowardice, weakness, and inability for confrontation, and perhaps it is acceptable that you scheme against someone who is your equal, but to do that against the Ever-Living, the Ever-Watchful from Whom nothing can be hidden neither on earth nor in the heavens is indeed the very meaning of foolishness. Thus, regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah is the Best of Schemers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 54) He also said of their plotting: ‘The plotting of evil only rebounds on those who plot.’ (*Fatir:* 43)

We also know that when we attribute a Quality to Allah *Glorified is He* we must understand it within the context of the following verse: ‘… there is nothing like Him. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.’ (*ash-Shura:* 11) We usually attribute all of Allah’s Actions to goodness, such as His Saying: ‘You are the best of heirs.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 89) Also, the same could be said concerning His Saying: ‘Allah is the Best of Schemers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 54).

His saying in the verse, ‘They made their plots …’ (*Ibrahim:* 46) means that they schemed in proportion to their thinking, strength and conniving, but when Allah *the Almighty* responds to this, He will do so with what is commensurate with His Power and unlimited Omnipotence, for He has always known of what they were going to scheme, and He left them to do so.

The triumphs of the messages are derived from the strength of its messenger and his followers, and they face adversaries who are the very reason for the existence of this message; the reason for this is their having spread corruption on earth and their wanting to uphold this corruption which maintains their power. In essence, the new message will strike at their authority and shake its very foundations. This is why it is essential to spare no effort in plotting and bringing down Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to eliminate his message.

They tried this through confrontation in the beginning of the message of Islam. They took those who are weak from among the converts to Islam and began torturing them, and not one of them turned back on his religion.

Then, disbelievers tried war, and Allah *the Almighty* granted believers victory over them, while leaving disbelievers no other option but scheming, as He says: ‘Remember [Prophet] when the disbelievers plotted to take you captive, kill or expel you. They schemed and so did Allah. He is the best of schemers.' (*al-Anfal:* 30) Thus, they tried corrupting that first recipient of faith, namely Prophet Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him* and they thought that if they succeeded in that, then his message would disappear, and so they tried buying him out with money, but they did not succeed.

They also tried to buy him off with offers of power and kingship, but they also did not succeed, and he declared his famous saying: ‘By Allah, if they were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand to leave this matter, I will not until Allah makes manifest His Cause, or I perished in the attempt.'(1)

Then they decided to kill him and divide the responsibility for his murder amongst clans, so they took from each clan a young man and all went to strike Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with their swords as one man, but he emigrated that night and so their scheming was not fulfilled.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They made their plots, but Allah had the answer.’ (*Ibrahim:* 46) which means that He *the Most High* knew of their plotting Then He follows with this saying: ‘…even if their plots had been able to move mountains.' (*Ibrahim:* 46) In other words, be comforted O, Prophet Muhammad, for even if their scheming was so powerful that it could move mountains, they still would not be able to capture you. The mountains were considered by Arabs as the powerful of all creation and so even if their scheming was powerful enough to move them, they could not succeed in harming you, O, Prophet Muhammad, and they would not be able to keep you from achieving your goal and mission.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Hisham in His (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya) (266/1) attributed to Ibn-Ishaq.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If We had sent this Quran down to a mountain, you [Prophet] would have seen it humbled and split apart in its awe of Allah. We offer people such illustrations so that they may reflect.' (*al-Hashr:* 21) So if their scheme is so great that it can move mountains, then know that Allah's Will is far greater.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* presents the reason for the ineffectiveness of their plots, so He says:

فَلَا تَحۡسَبَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مُخۡلِفَ وَعۡدِهِۦ رُسُلَهُۥٓۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٞ ذُو ٱنتِقَامٖ ٤٧

So do not think [Prophet] that God will break His promise to His messengers: He is mighty, and capable of retribution [47] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 47)

If their scheming had any effect or influence, Allah *the Exalted* would not have said that His Promise to His messengers would not fail to be fulfilled, rather, their scheming is indeed ruined from the very beginning and has no effect, for He is the One Who says: 'Our Word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: It is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winner [173].' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) Thus, Allah cannot break His Promise to His messengers.

Furthermore, there are many promises in the Quran, for there is Satan's promise to his loyalists as Allah's following Words confirm: 'Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and commands you to do foul deeds; Allah promises you His forgiveness and His abundance.' (*al-Baqara:* 268) There is also a promise from Allah *Glorified is He* to believers: 'Allah has made a promise to those among you who believe and do good deeds; He will make them successors to the land …' (*an-Nur:* 55). Thus if Allah *the Almighty* does break the Promise He makes to the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then would He break His Promise to Prophet Muhammad? Of course, He would not, since this Promise is made by Allah *Glorified is He* so He will certainly keep His Promise. What if His Promise is made to messengers and believers? He says: 'We support Our messengers and the believers, in the present life and on the Day when witnesses arise.' (*Ghafir:* 51) Allah's granting victory necessitates the defeat for the opposition, and this victory needs one of His fitting attributes, namely that it is granted by *the Almighty* Who cannot be defeated, and defeat for those who disbelieved also needs a fitting attribute which causes their defeat by the Command of the Avenger, the All-Compeller.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

يَوۡمَ تُبَدَّلُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ غَيۡرَ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُۖ وَبَرَزُواْ لِلَّهِ ٱلۡوَٰحِدِ ٱلۡقَهَّارِ ﴿٤٨﴾

One Day – when the earth is turned into another earth, the heavens into another heaven, and people all appear before God, the One, the Overpowering [48] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 48)

Allah *the Exalted* in this verse is making them fearful of the Day of Judgment after He has brought them the image of what they will ask for; that is, He postpones their judgment and returns them to the worldly life so that they might do good deeds and answer the Call of the messengers. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that the world that He has created and brought Adam and his offspring into was made subservient to them. They live in this universe by Allah's provision which exists in their own being and are dispersed all over this universe for all His creation – believers and disbelievers – and those who pursue these means of provision will ultimately triumph.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share. (*ash-Shura:* 20) Thus, Allah *the Exalted* has granted His creation the ability to rise in this world through a variety of causes, but living in the life to come is by direct means of the Causer, and so as soon as a believer has but a fleeting thought of a particular wish, he finds it immediately realised. This matter does not require an earth for which Allah *the Exalted* has portioned provision, placed solid mountains on it and sent rain down from the heavens. In other words, there will be an earth other than this earth and a heaven other than this heaven, for the earth that we know here is an earth of causes and means and similarly its heaven that we know is also of means and causes.

However, the paradise of the Hereafter has no causes or means, and thus it is necessary for the earth to be changed into another and the heavens as well.

Allah's Words, 'and people all appear before Allah, the One, the Overpowering' (*Ibrahim:* 48), mean that no one will be with them except for their Lord, for in this verse to 'appear before Allah' means to emerge and face Him.

A believer finds his Lord through faith in the unseen of his world, and he believes in Him and all that He has brought forth, including the coming of the Hour and the existence of paradise and hellfire.

Furthermore, we all remember the conversation between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and one of his companions when the former asked him, 'How did you arise today?' Thus, the companion said, 'I arose a true believer in Allah.' So Messenger Muhammad said to him, 'For every truth there is a reality, what then is the reality of your belief?' So the companion said, 'I detached myself from this world so that its comings and goings are the same to me (This means that gold is no more to me than dust), and it is as if I [already] see the people of Paradise blissful in it, and the people of the hellfire suffering in it.' So the Noble Messenger said to him, 'You have come to know [the truth] so hold firmly [to it]'. (1)

This is the state of a believer; whereas a disbeliever's state is different. He emerges to find Allah *the Almighty* Who he denied, and it is a confrontation he was not expecting, and so Allah *Glorified is He* describes Himself in this event as: 'the One, the Overpowering.' (*Ibrahim:* 48), for there is no other God to tell him, 'leave him for my sake'.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Haythami in (Majma' Az-Zawa'id) (57/1) and he attributed it to At-Tabarani in (Al-Kabir) of the narration of Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari.*

In another verse, He also says of such people: ‘But the deeds of those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a desert; the thirsty person thinks there will be water, but when he gets there, he finds only Allah Who pays him his account in full—Allah is swift in reckoning.’ (*an-Nur:* 39) This means that they will be surprised by this situation for which they were not ready. Likewise, His Words, ‘the One, the Overpowering’ (*Ibrahim:* 48) mean that He is capable of dominating any created being and compelling it towards that for which it does not wish.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَتَرَى ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّقَرَّنِينَ فِى ٱلْأَصْفَادِ ﴿٤٩﴾

You [Prophet] will see the guilty on that Day, bound together in fetters [49] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 49)

The guilty is the one who has committed a sin, and here it meant for those who have committed the gravest sin of disbelieving in Allah *the Almighty* and also those who have committed sins other than disbelieving; you will see them all bound with a rope or a fetter tying them up. The ‘fetters’ refer to the chains or handcuffs put on a person's hands, ankles or necks. Every gang of criminals are bound together. Simply, those who commit a particular sin are most likely kind and empathetic to one another. Yet, in this situation we find them repelling each other, showing animosity to, cursing, harassing and offending one another with mutual displeasure declared in confirmation of the Lord's Words *the Most High* ‘Close friends on that day will become enemies of one another, except for the righteous’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). Each one of them will torture the other before they all experience the painful suffering. They would say:

- ‘O, our Lord! Show us those of the invisible beings and humans that have led us astray; we shall trample them underfoot, so that they shall be the lowest of all!’ (*Fussilat*: 67)
- ‘O, our Lord! Behold, we paid heed unto our leaders and our great men, and it is they who have led us astray from the right path! O, our Lord! Give them double suffering and banish them utterly from Your grace!’ (*al-Ahzab:* 67-68)

Allah adds more elements to the image of sinners by saying:

سَرَابِيلُهُم مِّن قَطِرَانٍ وَتَغْشَىٰ وُجُوهَهُمُ ٱلنَّارُ ﴿٥٠﴾

In garments of pitch, faces covered in fire [50]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 50)

The *sarabeel* (garments) is the plural of *sirbal* (garment), which are clothes worn next to the skin beneath one's outer clothing. When a garment is made from ‘black pitch’, it is black, disgusting and repelling with a rotten smell, yet very flammable. *Qatiran* is originally a liquid substance that oozes out from certain trees and is used to cure camels of rabies. Allah *the Exalted* usually uses similes with things familiar to the Arab minds and environment. Allah *Glorified is He* also says of them, ‘with fire veiling their faces’ (*Ibrahim:* 50). When a person is exposed to danger, the first thing he tries to protect is his face because the face is the noblest part of human body. How would it be like when disbelievers have their faces veiled with fire? The mere image is painful. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, ‘Is he who will shield with his face the worst punishment on the Day of Resurrection [like one secure from it]’ (*az-Zumar:* 24). They will be so keen to avoid the painful punishment even by using their faces. Allah *the Most High* also says, ‘On the Day when they shall be dragged into the fire on their faces’ (*al-Qamar:* 48). Evidently, the mention of face comes in several images to reflect the scenes of suffering.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

لِيَجْزِيَ ٱللَّهُ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٥١﴾

[All will be judged] so that God may reward each soul
as it deserves: God is swift in His reckoning [51]
(The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 51)

Indeed the Lord *the Most High* would not give a physical punishment except for violent sins. His Words, ‘Allah will recompense every soul for what it had earned. Allah is swift in reckoning’ (*Ibrahim:* 51) mean that believers and disbelievers alike will receive their recompense for what they did.

Earning is to acquire something more than what one has. When you deprive yourself of something in this world, you will be requited a reward for it. Furthermore, whosoever earns a penalty for a sin, will be punished for it. It is said *kasaba* to express a personal harmful behaviour in which a person usually enjoys. This is different from *iktasaba* which expresses things hard for a person to do. Then the recompense is necessary and must be based on reckoning, but the reckoning needs scales and balance. A believer might say, 'I believe in my Lord, and my Lord would not wrong anyone.' In response, the balance refers to the evidence as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Then, he whose weight [of good deeds] is heavy in the balance shall find himself in a happy state of life, whereas he whose weight is light in the balance shall be engulfed by an abyss’ (*al-Qari`a:* 6-9). This mental portioning of the balance is clear; it is either ‘heavy’ or ‘light’. Those for whom both sides of the balance are equal, their state is made clear in the chapter of *al-A‘raf* in which Allah *the Most High* says, ‘On the Heights will be men who will recognise each person by his mark.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 46) Since the Lord will judge every soul according to what it has earned, some may think that this would take time. So He *the Most High* says, ‘Allah is swift in reckoning!’ (*Ibrahim:* 51) It shows us that He will judge every created being from Adam *peace be upon him* to the Final Hour in a speed commensurate with His unlimited Power. When people asked ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* how is it that Allah will judge every creature at once, he gave this clear and evident answer, ‘In the same way He provides for all of them at once.' Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذَا بَلَٰغٌ لِّلنَّاسِ وَلِيُنذَرُوا۟ بِهِۦ وَلِيَعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَٰهٌ وَٰحِدٌ وَلِيَذَّكَّرَ أُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ (٥٢)

This is a message to all people, so that they may be warned by it, and know that He is the only God, and so that those who have minds may take heed [52] (The Quran, *Ibrahim:* 52)

This verse is the concluding verse of the chapter of *Ibrahim*. It defines the Message as a Divine Declaration from Allah to be delivered by His messenger whom He aided through miracles to draw the way of human life and stewardship over the earth. Furthermore, when the laws governing the progress of human life as vicegerents on the world are disclosed, it became incumbent that no one may claim any addition to complete or perfect them. The Creator is the Lawmaker and this matter must be in mind of every responsible person. When you read the saying of the All-Wise, 'This is a Message unto all mankind' (*Ibrahim:* 52), it refers to the entire Quran since the Message covers all the revelations from Allah the Exalted.

The Words of Allah: 'This is a Message unto all mankind.' (*Ibrahim:* 52) undertake the same function of the modern legal text, which clarifies that no punishment is there without a law criminalising an act and that law must be made public to all people. It is important for the laws to be disseminated in the official national newspapers so that no one says, 'I did not know about the law.' We all know that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We never punish any people [for the wrong they did] until we have sent a messenger [to them]' (*al-Isra':* 15). The Prophet's mission is to deliver Allah's way of life to preserve its natural progression. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Your duty is no more than to deliver the Message, but the reckoning is Ours' (*ar-Ra'd:* 40).

- 'Those who convey Allah's Messages [to the world], and stand in awe of Him and hold none but Allah in awe…' (*al-Ahzab:* 39).
- The Lord *the Most High* states the statement of the Messenger,(1) 'Indeed, I delivered unto you my Lord's Message' (*al-A'raf:* 93).

He also says, 'I have delivered to you the Message with which I was sent unto you' (*Hud:* 57).

There is no excuse for one who says, 'I committed a sin, but I did not know it was one.' Simply, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the same verse, 'Let them be warned thereby' (*Ibrahim:* 52). A warning alerts people against any expected harm that may befall them before it happens and clarifies the horror that follows disobedience. Similarly, the glad tidings alert the people of good to prepare for the coming reward. The Lord's Statement 'This is a Message unto all mankind' (*Ibrahim:* 52) encompasses the glad tidings as well. However,

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(1) The messenger mentioned here is Shu'aib *peace be upon him*; Allah says, 'They who had given the lie to Shuʿaib, as though they had never lived there; they who had given the lie to Shuʿaib – it was they who were the losers! He turned away from them and said, "O my people! Indeed, I delivered unto you my Lord's Message and gave you good advice: how, then, could I mourn for people who have denied the truth?' (*al-A'raf:* 92-93).

He confirms the warning ‘let them be warned thereby’ (*Ibrahim:* 52) since the real failure will befall the sinners.

For me, 'warning' in this verse is a real blessing; it discourages man from committing sins when one thinks of the consequences of evil deeds. Therefore, it is a blessing and a great favour. Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘Let them know that He is the One and Only God’ (*Ibrahim:* 52). Such is the primary doctrinal matter which is basic belief. He is but One God whose command is incumbent upon all the creation for life in order to achieve harmony.

The main point of this life is that all living movements interlink and reinforce one another apart from conflict. If they conflict, there would be no development or growth if one builds and another destroys! The goal behind the motions of life is to carry out the mission of human stewardship over the world and strengthen one another without conflict, so the society progresses in harmony following the same Lord and the same Divine Command. When Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘This is a Message unto all mankind’ (*Ibrahim:* 52), He elucidates the essence of the religion as revealed to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Whoever hears of this Message should deliver it to those who have not. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah blesses a person who hears my message and understands it, then delivers it to those who have not heard it.'(1) Therefore, the chain of transmission continues; if people did not hear the message, the burden lies on those who have not delivered it, who deprived themselves from the honour of following the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Whoever knows a command of the religion shall transmit it to others. The Lord *the Most High* commands His Messenger to deliver His commandments. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Thus We have made you a just and central community that you may be witnesses over the people, and the messenger will be a witness over you’ (*al-Baqara:* 143). The Messenger bore witness that he has delivered the message unto you and every Muslim who knows of any commandment must deliver it to those who do not know it to extend benefits from it to others. After hearing the commandment, they may live by it while the one who delivered it might not. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'It may be that a listener is more learned than a transmitter.'(1) I always say, 'Do not ever confuse the knowledge given to you with the behaviour of the one who transmits it to you.' A poet once said,

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(1) *Ahmad, Musnad, 1: 437; Al-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, (Hadith, 2657, 2658); Ibn Majah, Sunnan (Hadith, 232); Al-Humaydi, Musnad, 1: 47; from ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud may Allah be pleased with him.*

Take my knowledge and overlook my deeds
Like you enjoy fruits and leave twigs as firewood

A Muslim must assume the responsibility of transmitting religious knowledge to others, so the message continues. We know that the Lord *the Most High* says, ‘You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind; you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 110). In other words, you have taken on the mission of prophets. The message first came from Allah to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger honestly transmitted the message. This message is free from conflict for it comes from the All-Wise Lord. Conflict only arises from differences or absence of wisdom. Let us look closely at Allah's Words, ‘Let them know that He is the One and Only God’ (*Ibrahim:* 52). The word ‘One’ is used to deny any form of association or plurality as there is none like Him; He is One Who is not composed of parts. He does not have systems and organs like humans; if He has systems, then He would be in essence need for those various parts, a matter which is unthinkable and unfathomable when it comes to Allah *the Almighty*.

Ulu Al-Albab (those who are endowed with insight) receive this message and understand it perfectly. *Al-Albab* (hearts, which in the singular form is *lub*—the core/insight/heart of something) has outer layers or crusts for protection. That which is protected is the purest part is *lub*. *Ulu Al-Albab* is the people who perceive faith intellectually and have their minds occupied with constant remembrance. The world's demands, enjoyment, and desires may lead one astray from the Way of Allah, so Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Let those who are endowed with insight take this to heart!’ (*Ibrahim:* 52) In other words, those endowed with sound minds and insight remember that Allah is One and the Only God; there is no deity but He. He bore witness for Himself before anyone testifies to His Oneness. He says, 'Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). Then comes the testimony of angels and scholars, '[so do] the angels and those of knowledge' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). The testimony of angels tells of the reality they themselves witness and the testimony of *Ulu A-Albab* is based on deduction. The Lord also witnesses that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a messenger. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* also testifies for himself; he says just like all of us 'I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' It is a responsibility upon *Ulu Al-Albab* to remember that He is Allah, the One and the Sovereign.

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(1) *The Hadith continues as follows, “Allah blesses a person who hears my Message and understands it, and then delivers it to those who have not heard it.”*

the chapter of

al-Hijr

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The beginning of this Chapter of *al-Hijr*(2) speaks of the main principles of transmission and provides a programme—the Noble Quran—for human life; it teaches the doctrine of the Oneness of God, which people with insight, as seen at the end of the previous chapter, receive with their minds and hearts. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the beginning of the chapter:

الٓرۚ تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَقُرۡءَانٖ مُّبِينٖ ١

***Alif Lam Ra*(3) These are the verses of the Scripture, a Quran that makes things clear [1] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 1)**

As seen, the chapter begins with stand-alone letters about which we said that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* revealed and recited in this way, and then the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* memorised and conveyed to us in the same way. The early people who first received them were highly skilled in language, talented in speech and gifted with eloquence, yet no one amongst them disapproved of these letters. They are isolated letters that are recited as the names of letters. We know that each letter has a name as well as something named after it. When we say or write the word *kataba*, for example, we take the letters *kaf*, *ta* and *ba* and place them side by side in order to put them in the form of that word as we voice or write. They together form a word and become what we refer to as ‘What is named by the letters'. However, as for the names of the letters, they are *kaf*, *ta* and *ba*. The only ones who know these names are those who have learnt them. This is why when you want to test someone’s reading and writing skills, you say to them, ‘Give me the spellings of the words you write.’ If he gives us the names of letters, we know that he can read and write well.

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) This Chapter is the fifteenth chapter in the order of the Noble Quran. It is a Meccan chapter and has 99 verses. Its beginning falls at the beginning of the 14th Part of the Quran. It had this name following the people of *al-Hijr*, who are mentioned in the 80th verse of the same chapter. They were the people of Thamud to whom Allah sent Prophet Saleh as a Messenger. However, they denied him. The Hijr are the houses of Thamud.

(3) *As-Suyuti said (al-Itqan, 3/21) that some people of knowledge tried to explain its meaning. Ibn Abu Hatim and others transmitted form Abu al-Duha that Ibn 'Abbas said "Alif. Lam. Ra...' (al-Hijr: 1) mean, 'I am Allah and I see.' Abu Al-Sheikh narrated that Muhammad ibn Ka'b Al-Qurazi said, 'A. L. R' for the first three letters from "Ar-Rahman" (i.e. the All-Merciful). In his Ghara'ib, Al-Karmani said that 'Alif. Lam. Ra...' refer to 'I am Allah; I know and I raise up.' He then said, 'But the preferable view is that it is one of those secrets that none know except Allah.' Al-Sha'bi said, 'Every book has a secret and the secret of the Quran comes in the beginnings of its chapters.'*

The Quran, as we know, was sent down to show the Arabs that they were incapable of matching it. The Arabs were a people who were exceptionally talented in language insomuch that they would set up markets to honour those gifted in language, just as we today set up trade fairs and conventions to show off our advanced products. Allah *the Almighty* wanted the miracle of His final Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to be in the same field in which they excelled. Simply, if the miracle had been in some other fields unfamiliar to them or in which they did not excel, they would have said, ‘If we ourselves had learnt this, we would have brought something superior to it.’ The miracle of the Quran came to them in the same field in which they were experts using the same Arabic language and words made up of letters that they themselves used in their own words. However, the thing that made the Quran miraculous was that the One Who spoke its Words was the Creator.

The letters *‘Alif-Lam-Ra’* are elements of the Arabic alphabets which constitute the language of Arabs. This hint summarises the discussion of scholars about the beginnings of the chapter. We must know that Allah *the Most High* has secrets in His Words; He says, ‘He it is Who has bestowed upon you from on high this Book, containing messages that are clear in and by themselves—these are the essence of the Book, as well as others that are allegorical. Now those whose hearts are given to swerving from the truth go after that part of the Book which has been expressed in allegory, seeking out [what is bound to create] confusion, and seeking [to arrive at] its final meaning [in an arbitrary manner]; but none save Allah knows its final meaning. Hence, those who are deeply rooted in knowledge say, "We believe in it. The whole [of the Book] is from our Lord."' (*Al-'Imran:* 7)

In other words, the Quran has verses with decisive and clear content. These are the legal texts of laws, which speak of reward or punishment. As for the allegorical ambiguous verses, they are much like these letters that appear at the beginning of some Quranic chapters. The deviants ask themselves, 'What do they mean?' It is not because they actually search for their meaning, rather, they say as such out of a desire to create mischief and strife. To those people, we say, 'Do you want to understand everything with your faculty of reason?' The intellect is but a means of perception, exactly like the eye and the ear. Do your eyes see everything? Of course, they do not! There are rules and limits to human sight. For example, if something is at a great distance away, you will not see it; the eye cannot see beyond the limit of the horizon.

However, the horizon of every human being varies according to the strength of his vision. There are some whom Allah *the Exalted* blesses with exceptionally strong and keen eyesight, whereas there are others whose eyesight is so weak that they need glasses to help them see things properly. If the eye, a person's means of visual perception, has limits and so is the ear, a person's means of aural perception, then there must also be limits for human intellect which understands some things and fails to understand many others. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said about the verses of the Quran, 'Whatever you know of it, act by it, but whatever is ambiguous in it, then believe in it.'(1) This preserves the fixed times and places for the birth of Quranic secrets. Were the Quran to give away all secrets in the first generation of people to whom it was sent, how would it address the coming generations without new secrets? With any advancement that human intellect makes, Allah *the Almighty* permits some of the Quranic secrets. For the legal verses, no one can argue against them. For the ambiguous verses, the Lord *the Most High* says, '… but none save Allah knows its final meaning. Hence, those who are deeply rooted in knowledge say, "We believe in it. The whole [of the Book] is from our Lord."' (*Al-'Imran:* 7) Some read this verse in the following way: 'but none save Allah and those who are deeply rooted in knowledge know its final meaning.' Those who recite it in this way(1) forget that the ultimate level of being deeply rooted in knowledge is to believe in these verses exactly as they are.(2) Allah *Glorified is He* says, *'Alif-Lam-Ra.* These are messages of revelation–of a discourse clear in itself and clearly showing the truth' (*al-Hijr:* 1). The word *tilka* (these) indicates what came before as well as that of the Book that is following. *Ayat* is a plural and its singular is *aya* (a message of revelation) which refers to an amazing thing that draws people's attention. Either it may be existential, such as the night, day, sun, and moon, to prove the existence of a Higher Power, or it may be miraculous to prove the truth of the message conveyed from Allah such as the miracles of the messengers. These messages are also identical with the Quranic verses that deliver the Divine programme for the entire humanity.

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(1) *The complete version of this Hadith is as follows, 'the Quran was not revealed in a way that some of it conflicts with other parts. Rather, whatever you know of it, act accordingly and whatever is ambiguous believe in it.' Ibn Kathir ascribed it in his Tafsir (1/346) to ibn Mardawayh on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As. As-Suyuti ascribed it to Nasr Al-Maqdasi in Al-Hujja, see Al-Durr al-Manthur, 2/154.*

Allah *Glorified is He* adds: 'of a discourse clear in itself and clearly showing the truth' (*al-Hijr:* 1). Is the Book something different from the Quran? We say that when the word 'Book' is used, it refers to the entire revelation from Allah *the Exalted* to His messengers, including the books of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the Psalms of Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*, the Torah of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Gospel of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. All these are Books; so we refer to the people who follow them as the ‘People of the Book’. However, when we use the word ‘Book’ in the definite form, it only refers to the Quran and nothing else since it is the final Book revealed inclusive of what is in all other Books.

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(1) This recitation necessitates the obligatory pause after the word (*'ilm*). In other words, the meaning of the verse is that those who are deeply rooted in knowledge know the correct interpretation of the ambiguous verses. As for the first recitation, it stops at the Majestic Name (*Allah*); it means that it is Allah alone who knows the correct interpretation of the ambiguous verses. *See, Ibn Katheer, Tafsir, 1/247.*

(2) *'A'ishah may Allah be pleased with her said, 'Their deep rootedness in knowledge lies in the fact that they believe in its clear verses and its ambiguous ones, despite the fact that they do not know their correct interpretation.' As-Suyuti ascribed it to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim. See, Al-Durr Al-Manthur, 2/151.*

In this context, Allah *the Almighty* emphasises the Quranic characteristic conjoining a specific meaning to a general meaning; the Book itself is Quran i.e. recitation. It indicates that it will be written down as a book as was first written down in the Preserved Tablet. If someone says, ‘The previous Books were also written down’, our response is the following, 'Unlike the Quran, these Books were written down a long time after having been revealed. The Quran was written in the very moment when Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* brought it. In that sense, the Quran is unique. It was not left unwritten for generations like the rest of Books. The Quran is described as 'clear in itself and clear for others'. It encompasses all things. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘No single thing have we neglected in the Book.’ (*al-An‘am:* 38). Therefore, the answer to any question is that you either find it explained in detail in the Quran or ask the scholars about it. The Lord *the Most High* says, ‘If you do not know, then ask *Ahl al-Dhikr* (i.e. the scholars) who know.'(1) (*al-Anbiya’:* 7) Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رُّبَمَا يَوَدُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَوۡ كَانُواْ مُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

The disbelievers may well come to wish they
had submitted to God [2] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 2)

Rubba is a particle whose usage depends on the context; it may either mean ‘How few!’ or ‘How many!’ It comes before singular words. We say *rubba akhin laka lam talidhu ummuka* (How many a man is like a brother to you, yet your mother did not give birth to him!) Similarly, we say *rubbama yanjahu-l-kasul* (a lazy man might succeed), but the statement *rubbama yanjahu-dh-dhakiy* means ‘How many! Many a clever man succeeds. In this way, the same word is used to express two opposing meanings just to keep minds awake and attract attention. In this verse, the Lord *the Most High* attaches the particle *ma* to the end of *rubba* (*rubbama*) and places a verb(1) after it. It is wrong to say that *ma* is superfluous, since the speaker is Allah *the Exalted* Who says, ‘It will come to pass that those who are [now] bent on denying this truth will wish that they had surrendered themselves to Allah [became Muslims in their lifetime]’ (*al-Hijr:* 2). Will there come a time when the disbelievers wish to be Muslims? The word *yawaddu* means 'to love, wish and hope'. Everything you wish for and desire is a form of *talab*. In Arabic, when you wish for something, it is either possible or impossible to come true. Your wish ‘Would that my youth come back!’ is an example of impossible wishes. Your saying ‘Perhaps I will visit so-and-so!’ is an example of something that is called a ’hope’; it is possible for you to visit so-and-so. You might say, ‘How many are with you?’ to form a mental picture of all those sitting with the one asked. It is called a ‘question’.

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(1) *The “dhikr” means the Quran and all other revealed Books. In other words, ‘Ask the scholars of all nations.’’ See, Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 1/174.*

Thus, whenever you request something that is difficult and unobtainable, it is called a wish, but when it is attainable, it is called a hope. Finally, when you ask about the scenario of something, it is called a question. Sometimes you request a thing just to avoid doing a certain action. In this verse, the disbelievers' wish ‘that they had surrendered themselves to Allah [became Muslims in their lifetime]’ (*al-Hijr:* 2). Is it attainable? Let us see when they want it. They will declare that wish when their stubborn disbelief comes to an end by means of the horrible events, so they start to weigh up matters in the right manner. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘They rejected them [the signs/messages/miracles]; they justified transgression and arrogance for themselves. Note the consequences for the evildoers’ (*an-Naml:* 14).

Their wish to be Muslims even occurred at the Battle of Badr when Muslims overcame them. They then said, ‘Would that we were Muslims to win some of the booty!’(2) In other words, the wish occurred in this world, but it will take place again when they die. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘[As for those who will not believe in the life to come, they go on lying to themselves] until, when death approaches any of them, he prays, "O, my Lord! Let me return [to life], so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed!"’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 99-100) The Lord *the Most High* Himself comments on this statement by saying, ‘Nay, it is indeed but a [meaningless] word that he utters’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 100). They will also wish that they were Muslims, thereby affirming the Words of Allah *the Exalted* ‘If you could but see [how it will be on Judgment Day] when those who are lost in sin will hang their heads before their Lord, [saying,] "O, our Lord! [Now] we have seen, and we have heard! Return us, then, [to our earthly life] that we may do good deeds. [Now], behold, we are certain [of the truth]!"’ (*as-Sajda:* 12) There will come a time in which disbelievers wish that they were Muslims. It happens when they witness what removes their denial and stubborn disbelief. At that time, it becomes clear that this world which they clung to so desperately was transient; they wish to be Muslims when it is too late and all opportunities are lost. It is enough pride for Muslims that they followed Allah's religion and undertook their duties. Conversely, it is enough shame for disbelievers that they suffered that open loss and felt misery that they were not Muslims.

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(1) Al-Qurtubi said (*Tafsir*, 5/2725) that ‘(*rubba*) does not come before a verb, but by attaching (*ma*) to it, you enable it to come before a verb.’ Ibn Hisham said (*Mughni Al-Labeeb,* 1/120), ‘If (*ma*) is added after (*rubba*), it is usual for it to stop it from actively affecting the word after it, to prepare it for coming before verbal sentences, and for the verb to be in the past tense both in form and in meaning.’

(2) *As-Suyuti narrated (Ad-Durr Al-manthur, 5/61) that Ibn Mas‘ud may Allah be pleased with him and a number of other Companions said, ‘On the Day of Badr, when their* =

On the Last Day, Allah *the Exalted* punishes disobedient Muslims who did not repent after their sins and ask for forgiveness from their Lord as well as those who failed to have their sins forgiven since they lacked sincerity and determination. There are also hypocrites about whom the Lord says to His Prophet, ‘Whether you seek forgiveness for them, or do not seek forgiveness for them; if you even seek forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them’ (*at-Tawba:* 80). Each will suffer punishment equivalent to his disobedience. Disbelievers will look towards them and say, ‘Your witness that there is no deity but Allah has not been of any benefit to you; here you are with us in the Fire!’ The Lord *the Most High* will then relieve those who said, ‘There is no deity but Allah’ and say, ‘Take them out [of the Fire], clean them up and go back with them to Paradise.’ Whereupon, disbelievers will

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= *necks were being struck and they were being presented to the Fire, the idolaters wished that they were among those who believed in Muhammad.’*

say, ‘Would that we had been Muslims, so that we could now leave the Fire and join the people of Paradise.’(1) Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

ذَرۡهُمۡ يَأۡكُلُواْ وَيَتَمَتَّعُواْ وَيُلۡهِهِمُ ٱلۡأَمَلُۖ فَسَوۡفَ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٣

So [Prophet] leave them to eat and enjoy themselves. Let [false] hopes distract them: they will come to know [3] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 3)

Dharhum is a command to forsake and leave them. On some occasions, He says *dharhum* and on other occasions He says *dharni* (i.e. leave me): ‘Leave Me alone [to deal] with those who give the lie to the truth, those who enjoy the blessings of life’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 11). In other words, leave them to Me; I am the One Who will punish them, and I am the One Who knows how long a respite they will be given and when their punishment will come. The present tense verb of *dharhum* is *yadhar*; it is used in the Lord's saying, ‘and *yadhar-uk* (forsake you) and your gods?’ (*al-A‘raf:* 127) The past tense of this verb is not used in Arabic except in one prophetic statement in which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave the people of Yemen so long as they *dharaw* (leave) you.' There is another verb that shares many qualities with this verb, which is *da‘a* (leave it be). It is said that Arabs neglected the past tense of *yada‘* and *yadhar* except in one recitation(2) of Allah’s Words, ‘Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He scorn you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 3) In another verse, the Lord *the Most High* says, ‘Leave them alone; let them eat and enjoy themselves.’ (*al-Hijr:* 3)

Normally, we eat, but there is a difference between one who eats to take the necessary energy to carry out the daily duties and one who eats for pleasure and enjoyment. Animals eat to receive and use energy. Then, when they are full, no one can force them to eat even a single sprig of clover more. Conversely, a human being may eat after being full and after washing hands when, for instance, he sees a new type of food. Sometimes, the food we eat is not healthy; it may tire us out, and we may use some laxatives to aid digestion, such as fizzy water and various medications. Therefore, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'It is sufficient for a human being to eat a few mouthfuls to keep his spine straight.'(1) In other words, he discouraged us from eating with the sole purpose of pleasure and sating our appetite.

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(1) *Al-Suyuti, Al-Durr Al-Manthur, (5/62) from Abu Musa Al-Ash‘ari may Allah be pleased with him. Al-Suyuti ascribed it to Ibn Abi ‘Asim in Al-Sunna, Ibn Jareer, Ibn Abi Hatim, Al-Tabarani, Al-Hakim who graded it as authentic, Ibn Mardawayh and Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Ba‘th wa Al-Nushur.*

(2) *It is the recitation of ‘Urwa ibn Az-Zubayr. Both recitations (wada‘aka) and (wadda‘aka) convey the same meaning i.e. Your Lord has not left you alone. See, Lisan Al-‘Arab, (entry: و د ع).*

Let us note the difference between the food of this world and that of paradise. There we will enjoy healthy food, while here in this world we sometimes eat food raw and without salt to live healthy and avoid troubles. It is healthy, yet unpleasant and tasteless. The food of paradise is both healthy and tasty. It is through this that we understand the Words of Allah *the Almighty* 'Leave them alone; let them eat and enjoy themselves' (*al-Hijr:* 3), i.e. Let them eat food solely for the purpose of enjoyment. Then Allah *Glorified is He* continues to say, 'the while the hope [of vain delights] beguiles them' (*al-Hijr:* 3). They set happy goals for themselves which distract them from the means which bring them benefit. This is why the Arab proverb says, 'Hope without action is meaningless!' As long as you hope for something, you must act to achieve it. For an example of mistaken hopes, Allah *the Exalted* quotes a conceited person who lets himself be deceived by vanities by saying, 'I do not think that this will ever perish! And neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come' (*al-Kahf:* 35-36). Ultimately, the Last Hour will inevitably come despite all false hopes and self-delusion. The Lord *the Most High* says, 'the while the hope [of vain delights] beguiles them: for in time they will come to know [the truth]' (*al-Hijr:* 3). The word *sawfa* indicates the late occurrence in the future. Verbs such as 'know' mean that human beings already know or they will know in a short time. When we say *sawfa ya'lamun*, it includes all these possible meanings. Believers will prove triumphant forever by Allah's permission, whereas disbelievers will hope for belief as made clear earlier. In the same way, we see that Allah's Words, ‘for in time they will come to know [the truth]’ (*al-Hijr:* 3), include all times.

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(1) *Ahmad, Musnad, 4/132; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, (Hadith, 3349) from Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'd Yakrib may Allah be pleased with him as follows, 'There is no worse vessel a human being can fill than his stomach. A few small mouthfuls to help him keep his strength is enough for a man. If a human being can overcome himself, then he should set aside a third [of his stomach] for food, a third for drink, and a third for air.'*

The Lord's creation in this world is a mean of signs for the truth of His Promise. Those who think that they take control of all worldly matters are shocked by sudden destructive earthquakes that destroy what they have built, despite the advances achieved, e.g. ‘remote sensing’ and other applied sciences. Meanwhile, we see donkeys, cattle and some other animals which we think they have no sense, getting up before an earthquake and going out to open areas far from enclosures that might collapse on top of them. This sort of instinctive behaviour in animals destroys human illusion of having achieved great advancements in science. It shows human ignorance and absurdity. Similarly, some say about a rainy country that it is a land whose water never runs out and that is why it will always remain fertile. Then that country suffers drought for no good reason. It is a warning to mankind not to become prisoners to illusion and self-deception, Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَآ أَهۡلَكۡنَا مِن قَرۡيَةٍ إِلَّا وَلَهَا كِتَابٞ مَّعۡلُومٞ (٤)

Never have We destroyed a community that did not have a set time [4] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 4)

Allah only commands the destruction of a community when the time fixed comes after all possible means for guidance fail, so He makes that community is an example for future generations to take lessons and identify the essence of belief. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings. Therefore, Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought.’ (*an-Nahl:* 112) For a recent example, Lebanon before the fifties was a country in which one could scarcely find a passable hotel. Then, it flourished greatly in the sixties and seventies, but corruption became rampant everywhere. People with true knowledge of Allah *the Most High* said, ‘It is inevitable for it to suffer the distress that old corrupt countries which refused to show gratitude for Divine Blessings, suffered.’ It was exactly what happened; it suffered a bloody civil war and the Divine Word came true: ‘Let you taste the fear of one another’ (*al-An‘am:* 65).

Such is the living evidence of this world which predicts and affirms the truth of the Hereafter. The Lord *the Most High* Himself says, ‘There is no city but that We will destroy it before the Day of Resurrection or punish it with a severe punishment. This has been written in the Decree.’ (*al-Isra’:* 58) Naturally, of course, this is what happens to those towns whose inhabitants are wrongdoers. Allah *the Almighty* does no wrong to anyone. I recall that the *Tafseer* (Quranic exegesis) of An-Nasafi(1) was impounded in a previous age since the author commented on this verse by saying, ‘So-and-so told me that such affliction will happen to such-and-such a place, and such-and-such will happen to such-and-such a place.’ He went on to say, 'A man from Juhaynah will enter Egypt, so woe to its people, woe to the people of Syria, woe to the people of Ramla and woe to the people of Palestine. But he will not enter Jerusalem.’ The Lord *the Most High* says, ‘All this is laid down in Our Decree’ (*al-Isra’:* 58).

In other words, Allah *the Exalted* may teach some of His creation about some of His secrets. There is nothing to prevent us from these secrets. When that account of Al-Nasafi came to the then president, they said to him, ‘You are from Juhaynah and the reference is made to you’, the Tafseer was then impounded and denied circulation. Allah *the Exalted* leaves examples for us in this world to affirm that He speaks the truth about the threats made against certain towns and peoples. He *the Most High* left those examples to affirm the events of the Last Day. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Never have We destroyed any community [for its wrongdoing] unless a Book had [previously] been made known to it’ (*al-Hijr:* 4), no one can say it did not happen to such-and-such a place since everything happens in its fixed time.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

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(1) He is Abu Al-Barakat ‘Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad An-NasafI (d. 710 AH), a Hanafi jurist and exegete from Idhij, the place where he also died. He was named after “Nasaf”, a place in the lands of Sind between Amu Darya and Samarqand. See *Khayr Al-Deen Az-Zerikli, Al-A‘lam,* 4/67.

مَّا تَسۡبِقُ مِنۡ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلَهَا وَمَا يَسۡتَـٔۡخِرُونَ ٥

no community can bring its time forward,
nor delay it [5] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 5)

He has given each community a respite. When that period ends, the end of that community becomes a reality. There is no one who can bring that appointed time forward, nor is there anyone who can delay it beyond the time fixed. Then, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَالُواْ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِى نُزِّلَ عَلَيۡهِ ٱلذِّكۡرُ إِنَّكَ لَمَجۡنُونٞ ٦

They say, Receiver of this Quran! You are
definitely mad [6] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 6)

In this verse, they make fun of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and of the Quran; if they had believed in the Quran and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* they would not have described him as crazy. Four leading masters of Quraysh said it: ‘Abdullah ibn Abu Umayyah, An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, Nawfal ibn Khuwaylid and Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira. However, Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that they were Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira Al-Makhzumi, Habeeb ibn ‘Amr At-Thaqafi. Mujahid said that they were ‘Utbah ibn Rabi‘a and Kinana ibn ‘Abd Yaleel. Anyway, their statement is clearly contradictory. They first admitted that the Quran is *dhikr*. The word *dhikr* has a number of meanings in Arabic, including eminence, dignity and nobility. The Quran is declared a source of eminence for Arabs in Allah's Words, ‘Verily, this [revelation] shall indeed become [a source of] eminence for you and your people: but in time you all will be called to account [for what you have done with it]’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 44). They previously searched around for flaws in the Quran but found none. How can they describe the one to whom that Quran was revealed as crazy when they themselves bore witness to its truth and honesty? Allah *the Exalted* declares the high morality of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, ‘You are on a high moral standard.’ (*al-Qalam:* 4)

In their rush to accuse the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* they did not pay heed to the fact that they addressed him with the Words, ‘O you’, which is the very same way that Allah addresses him. In that way, the Lord *the Most High* let His Prophet's esteem and respect even come out from their mouths without them even being aware of it. When stubborn disbelievers unknowingly speak the truth, it is a sign of the Divine Will. Allah *the Almighty* says about the hypocrites who said, ‘Do not spend anything on those who are with Allah's Messenger, so that they [may be forced to] leave.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) What this means is that they do not give them any support, so they starve and are forced to leave him. When hypocrites described him here as the Messenger of Allah, did they do so because they believed it or because they inadvertently blurted out the truth? Allah *Glorified is He* continues their words as follows:

لَّوۡ مَا تَأۡتِينَا بِٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ٧

Why do you not bring us the angels, if you are telling the truth? [7] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 7)

In Arabic, there are a number of words used for encouragement, whereby speakers motivate listeners to predict what follows. The words *lawla* and *lawma* belong to this category. *Lawla* is used to indicate one’s wish and desire for what comes after it. If what comes after it is in the negative, it indicates your desire for that thing not to be, e.g., ‘If Zayd had come, I would have honoured him.’ Since Zayd had not come, he received no honour. The disbelievers said as seen in a verse, ‘Why do You not bring before us angels’ (*al-Hijr:* 7). They also said, ‘Why has not an angel [visibly] been sent down unto him, to act as a warner together with him?’ (*al-Furqan:* 7) They were asking for an angel to accompany the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* so that they could affirm that he was a messenger from Allah *the Most High*. Now, do they believe the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* or the angel? the Quran already discusses this matter as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Yet, whenever guidance came to them [through a prophet,] nothing has ever kept people from believing [in him] save this their objection, "Would Allah have sent a [mere] mortal man as His Messenger?"’ (*al-Isra’:* 94) It was as if they made their disbelief in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* dependent upon being a human, not an angel. In reply, Allah *the Most High* says, ‘Say: "If angels were walking about on earth as their natural abode, We would indeed have sent down unto them an angel out of heaven as Our Messenger."’ (*al-Isra’:* 95) In other words, if a messenger was sent down from heaven in the form of an angel, he could not walk about the earth with confidence, let alone be an example for mankind to follow. Simply, he is not a human being and is entirely different. If an angel came to them according to their desires and said, ‘Do this and do not do that. Go straight, ask forgiveness of your Lord and glorify Him morning and evening,’ they would say, ’You are an angel to whom the Words of Allah *the Almighty* apply: ‘who do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6) You are not an example for us!’ Furthermore, how can they speak to an angel when his nature is totally different from men? This is why Allah *the Exalted* chose to send a human messenger. In this way, the Lord *the Most High* nullified the argument they put forward as a reason for disbelief in the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: that he was not angel. Allah *Glorified is He* also refutes their argument and request that angels should come with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to aid him in conveying the Divine Message. Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

مَا نُنَزِّلُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَمَا كَانُوٓاْ إِذًا مُّنظَرِينَ ﴿٨﴾

But We send down the angels only to bring justice and then these people will not be reprieved [8] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 8)

This way the Lord *the Most High* teaches us about His Wisdom of not sending us angels. Were He to send down an angel—as requested, to help the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying the message, the angel would either take a human form, in which case people cannot differentiate him from human beings or take an angelic form, in which case no man would see him. If they could see him in that state, then they would all perish. Evidently, human beings cannot interact closely with the unique powers that Allah placed in angels. The Lord *the Most High* Himself says, ‘Had We sent down an angel, all would indeed have been decided, and they would have been allowed no further respite [for repentance]’ (*al-An‘am:* 8). If the Lord sent an angel in a human form and they were to form a close connection with him, things would have become very confusing for them. They might think that angels are merely human beings like themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And [even] if We had appointed an angel as Our message-bearer, We would certainly have made him [appear as] a man – and thus We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves’ (*al-An‘am:* 9). Allah *the Almighty* did not send down any angels since He did not will to destroy them while a messenger was amongst them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘But Allah did not choose thus to chastise them while You [O Prophet] were still among them, nor would Allah chastise them when they [might yet] ask for forgiveness.’ (*al-Anfal:* 33) Later, most of them believed and sought forgiveness for their sins. Allah *the Most High* was Merciful and Forgiving since Islam erases all past sins.

Now, look at the first part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘[Yet] We never send down angels otherwise than in accordance with the [demands of] truth’ (*al-Hijr:* 7); if the angels were to have come down, it would have been a punishment for mankind. When Allah *the Exalted* gives people a miracle they asked for, either they believe or He destroys them. This is why the Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And nothing has prevented Us from sending [this message, like the earlier ones,] with miraculous signs [in its wake], save [Our knowledge] that the people of olden times [only too often] gave the lie to them’ (*al-Isra’:* 59). Allah *the Exalted* did not show them physical signs and miracles of their desire since those who came before them rejected them, and they themselves only asked for them as a form of challenge, for they would reject them as well. Now, if a sign requested came true, there remains no option but to destroy them. If they rejected a sign sent down by Allah *the Most High*, He would have given them respite for a time. If We sent them angels as they wished, We would only send them down in accordance with the demands of the truth. The truth is that We would destroy them if they rejected them. Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse as follows, ‘and [were the angels to appear now,] lo! they [who reject this Book] would have no further respite!’ (*al-Hijr:* 8) The appointed time of the idolaters had not come yet, for Allah *the Most High* to send them angels and destroy them as past communities who had asked for signs, yet they were destroyed. Allah says:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا ٱلذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾

We have sent down the Quran Ourself, and We Ourself will guard it. Even before you [Prophet] [9]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 9)

The Quran came after many other Books. Each of these Books had a version of the Divine Programme for human life. However, none of these Books was a miracle in its own right. Rather, the miracle came down with each of the messengers who preceded the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and that miracle was usually related to the field in which that messenger’s people excelled. So long as the programme was separate from the miracle, Allah *the Exalted* demanded that the bearers of the books in which that programme was contained be the ones who preserve them. It was an obligation that Allah *the Most High* ordained on them. Evidently, one may obey or disobey that obligation. But none of the past peoples perfectly undertook the duty of maintaining the Books sent down to them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Verily, it is We Who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the prophets who had surrendered themselves unto Allah, deliver judgment unto those who followed the Jewish faith; and so did the [early] men of Allah and the rabbis, inasmuch as some of Allah's Book had been entrusted to their care’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 44).

In this verse, the Lord *the Most High* obligated them with maintaining their Books which contained His Divine Programme. That responsibility was one that they could either obey and take on, or disobey. They chose to disobey the Divine Command and failed to maintain them. Instead, they changed and distorted the words of their Books and even omitted much of their content. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them: 'but, behold, some of them knowingly suppress the truth.' (*al-Baqara:* 146)

They further interpolated words of their own and said that they were from Allah *the Almighty*. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says about them: 'So woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn.' (*al-Baqara:* 79) In this way, they committed the crime of lying and being untrustworthy. They have not preserved the scriptures that carried within their pages the Doctrine of Allah *Glorified is He* as it had been sent down by Him to the prophets and messengers who came before the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Hence, the True Lord *the Most High* decreed to discharge mankind from preserving the Quran. Such responsibility is liable to be obeyed or ignored. However, that is to say nothing of the fact that the Quran differs from all previous scriptures in the sense that it carries the Doctrine, while at the same time being the miracle that proves the truthfulness of what was conveyed by the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, it is We Who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9) It is the Book that carries the Doctrine within its pages, and Allah *the Almighty* wants it to be preserved since it is the everlasting miracle that proves what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to be true.

The Companions used to write the Quran down immediately after each part of it had been sent down to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. In the present day, however, we find people who do not believe in the Quran and yet are specialists in the various ways of preserving it. There are some who print the entire Quran on a single page, and in order to do that, make use of the talents of people who have no belief in the Quran.

Similarly, when the Book was recorded, it used contemporary means of recording. In Germany, for example, there is a library in which every little thing that is connected with every single verse of the Quran is kept preserved in one specific place.

While in Muslim countries, we find those who have not memorised the whole Quran since their childhood, completing it when they were only seven; if you were to ask them about what the words that they recite mean, they would not know how to answer.

One of the secrets of the greatness of the Quran is that some of those who memorise lack proper intellectual education, and so if one of them were to stop at a word— not remembering what came after— he would not be able to put in a word with a similar meaning, but must wait until some other memoriser of the Quran corrects him.

In order to better comprehend the precision with which Allah *the Exalted* has preserved His Noble Book, we recount the following story. There were some people who tried to insert into the Quran what was not part of it. They tried to do so by inserting something that they thought was close to the heart of every Muslim - that is to say, esteem for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. So they came to the Words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful amongst themselves.' (*al-Fath:* 29) They inserted a word that was not a part of it. Then they printed a version of the Quran in which they changed what was written in this verse, writing instead, ‘Muhammad is Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful amongst themselves.’ By doing that, they wanted to steal the affections of the Muslims, but when the men of knowledge got their hands on this version of the Quran, they commanded that it be destroyed by saying: ‘It contains an interpolation.’ So the one who printed that version of the Quran responded by saying: ‘But that which is added is something that you love and hold in high esteem.’ However, the men of knowledge replied: ‘the Quran is set - we recite it and print it exactly in the way that it came down.’

There was an uproar which the people of knowledge brought to an end by declaring that any addition, even out of love and esteem for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is not permissible in the Quran, since it is incumbent upon us to preserve the Quran in the same form as that which Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* read to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ فِي شِيَعِ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

We sent messengers among the various
communities of old [10] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 10)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* offers consolation to His noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and makes it clear to him that when he was greeted with rejection and denial, this was nothing new, rather, it was something that happened to other messengers, regardless of whether it took the form of non-acceptance, total disregard or ridicule.

If you are the master of the messengers and the seal of the prophets, then the difficulties and hardships that confront you must be equivalent to the size of your task, and the weariness that comes your way must be equivalent to the importance of the final message.

As for the word 'sects', it means groups of people who have come together around a common cause, regardless of whether that cause is a misguided one or a true one. An example of those who are joined together upon falsehood is found in Allah's Words: 'or to confuse you [so you become] sects.' (*al-An'am:* 65)

An example of those who are joined together upon truth is found in Allah's Words: 'And, verily, among those who followed his way was Ibrahim (Abraham).' (*as-Saffat:* 83)

The verse under discussion means that things are not going to be any less hard for you than the messengers who came before you. Rather, your journey as a messenger will be hard in a manner suitable with the greatness of the task, along with being suitable to the fact that you are the leader of the messengers and the seal of the prophets.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* completes His account of what happened to the messengers whose messages preceded that of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying:

وَمَا يَأْتِيهِم مِّن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا كَانُوا بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿١١﴾

But they mocked every single messenger that came to them [11] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 11)

The word 'ridicule' is expressed in the previous verse: 'And they say, "O, you upon whom the message has been sent down, indeed you are mad."' (*al-Hijr:* 6) It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were making it clear to him that their ridicule of him may increase, but that is an indication that they have come to the end of their plots. If their plot was something little, then they would lessen their own plotting. However, they have brought something that is very hard on them and shattered their beliefs. They have destroyed their hegemony and power, and they can find no way of resisting him (the Prophet) except with ridicule.

This means that they are totally unable to fight against his Doctrine, so they try instead to wear him out with ridicule and make him weaker, relying upon the fact that every man loves to be honoured and revered amongst his people and to be seen by them as being noble.

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* wants His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to brace himself to the fact they he is going to be ridiculed, abused and fought against, since the task he has is a difficult one. Therefore, he should know that every time their rejection and abuse of him gets worse, it is a necessary consequence of his task.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* before he had become certain of his task, being taken by his wife Khadijah bint Khuwaylid *Allah be pleased with her* to see Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who knew that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would be met by abuse, saying to him, ‘If I were to remain alive when your people force you out!’ So the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* inquired, 'Are they going to force me out?' Waraqa replied, ‘Yes, for no man has brought the like of what you have brought except that he has been met with enmity. If your day comes and I am still alive, then I will give you my full support!'(1)

In this way, the True Lord *the Most High* decreed it that the revelation of the message be accompanied by providing him with protection against what was going to happen to him, so that he would have the necessary immunity to withstand future events. We know that immunity is something that is present within a human being and that it is by means of that immunity that he is able to live in a place in which there is a disease that requires him to take a vaccination to prevent himself catching it. This is what happens in the physical world, but the same thing also applies in the metaphysical world. For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* makes this matter clear to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* so that his trust in the truth with which his

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(1) *It is transmitted by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala’il An-nubuwwa (2/139, 140) in a (Hadith) from Muhammad ibn An-Nu‘man ibn Bashir Al-Ansari. See Dala’il An-Nubuwwa of Abu Nu‘aym (168)*.

Lord sent him would become even greater, and he would take even greater care in putting into practice the Doctrine entrusted to him.

Ridicule, as we know, is a form of passive warfare. They were not able to face up to what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with any seriousness or to drive back his elevated Doctrine. Instead, they resorted to making fun of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, their mockery did not benefit them nor enabled them to cause any damage to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or Islam. Therefore, in order to convey that, Allah *Glorified is He* says to us about what will become of those who mock Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

كَذَٰلِكَ نَسْلُكُهُۥ فِى قُلُوبِ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

in this way We make the message slip through
the hearts of evildoers [12] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 12)

'Insert denial' means as we put disbelief, denial, and derision in the hearts of previous generations or former people, so too, do we put them in the hearts of sinners, or these criminals.

By 'criminals', He *Glorified is He* means the polytheists of Mecca since they had put themselves inside the circle of idolatry which prompted them to do this action, and so they brought the same retribution down upon themselves exactly like those who came before. Some of these people affirmed the message with their hearts at the same time as their tongues rejected it, as Allah *Glorified is He* indicates when He says: 'They rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth.' (*an-Naml:* 14)

They were a people of eloquence with a fine grasp of language, and the Quran had affected deeply with the sweetness and beauty of its language, but their stubbornness prevented them from accepting it. Indeed, we find one(1) of them saying, 'It has a sweetness and beauty to it. Its heights are full of fruit and its roots are well-watered.'(2) The one who said this rejected

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(1) He is Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughirah Abu 'Abd Shams. He was one of their elders and one of the most influential men among them.

(2) It is mentioned by Ibn Hisham in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (1/270).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his message.

We know that those who listened to the Quran were of two types. The True Lord *the Most High* Himself is the One Who says about one of those types: 'And among them, [O Muhammad], are those who listen to you, until when they depart from you, they say to those who were given knowledge, "What has he said just now?" Those are the ones of whom Allah has sealed over their hearts and who have followed their [own] desires.' (*Muhammad:* 16)

What he said did not please them, and what he recited to them did not deserve to be listened to. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* responded to them, saying: 'Say, "It is, for those who believe, a guidance and cure." And those who do not believe - in their ears is deafness, and it is upon them blindness.' (*Fussilat:* 44)

This is a matter, as I have always said, connected to the receiver of the message; either his heart is pure so that it can receive the Quran, or his heart is filled with disbelief, so it does not receive anything whatsoever from the Book of truth, and we seek protection with Allah *Glorified is He* from having such hearts!

It so happened that Allah *the Almighty* put His heavenly scriptures in the hearts of peoples who came before the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* but because their hearts were so rotten and their intellects so dark, they received those books with mockery, ridicule, and disbelief.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes these sinners with His Words:

لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِۦ ۖ وَقَدْ خَلَتْ سُنَّةُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

They will not believe in it. That was what happened with
the peoples of long ago [13] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 13)

In this way, the True Lord *the Most High* makes it clear that the hearts of disbelievers will never soften to belief, along with never receiving good reception to the Quran. Because the reason for this is due to their hearts being completely full of disbelief, just as was the case of previous people.

A *sunnah* is the manner that is typically of results produced by certain causes. On one occasion, we find Allah *Glorified is He* saying: '[This is] the established way (*sunnah*) of Allah with those who passed on before, and you will not find in the way of Allah any change.' (*al-Ahzab:* 62)

The *sunnah* of ancient people refers to those universal laws that Allah *Glorified is He* decreed for His servants, while the *sunnah* of Allah *the Almighty* is the *sunnah* that is ascribed solely to Him. Thus, part of Allah's *sunnah* is to destroy those who reject messengers and continue in disbelief after having asked for a sign which they were granted.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَلَوۡ فَتَحۡنَا عَلَيۡهِم بَابٗا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَظَلُّواْ فِيهِ يَعۡرُجُونَ ﴿١٤﴾
لَقَالُوٓاْ إِنَّمَا سُكِّرَتۡ أَبۡصَٰرُنَا بَلۡ نَحۡنُ قَوۡمٞ مَّسۡحُورُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

And even if We opened a gateway into Heaven for them and they rose through it, higher and higher [14] they would still say, 'Our eyes are hallucinating. We are bewitched' [15] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 14 -15)

They had requested that an angel be sent down to them from heaven, which is why we find Allah *the Exalted* bringing them a stronger proof than the one they have asked for; it would be much easier to send an angel down from heaven than to lower a ladder down from heaven which they could then climb up. This is a progression in terms of the proof, but they had also progressed in their disbelief and said: 'If that were to happen, then it would simply be an act of magic.'

However, if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were a magician as they claim, then he would have bewitched and made them all believers, but despite the fact that something like that should have been obvious to them, they persisted in disbelief and said that if a stairway to heaven were to have been sent down and they were to have ascended it. This would have simply been an act of magic, and it would have been Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who had bewitched them, blinded their eyes to reality and caused them to imagine as such.

It is as if the meaning of these Noble Words was 'If we were to give them more than they asked for and send down to them a staircase by which they could climb to the highest heavens so that they might say that the True Lord *the Most High* was the One Who sent Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the message rather than sending them an angel as they requested, they would still not believe in him, rather they would say instead that it was merely a piece of magic used by Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against them.' In such a way, they increased in stubbornness and denial.

The verb 'continue' indicates that Allah *the Almighty* will not send them down that staircase by which they can ascend to heaven except in the middle of the day, but they still persisted in their disbelief.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'they continued therein to ascend.' It means that we are not going to take them during the night so that they can say that it is dark, and they cannot see anything. No, rather, it is going to be in the clear light of day. In other words, even if Allah *the Almighty* was to open a gateway to heaven, and they were to go up through it to the highest assemblies in the clear light of day, they would still reject.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* transports us back to creation in order to show us how wondrous His Signs are:

وَلَقَدۡ جَعَلۡنَا فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ بُرُوجٗا وَزَيَّنَّٰهَا لِلنَّٰظِرِينَ ١٦

We have set constellations up in the sky and made it beautiful for all to see [16] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 16)

The meaning is that an adornment that draws people's gazes on account of either its elevated body or its compelling beauty.

'Great stars' refer to the phases of the sun and moon; every time the sun moves through the sky, it goes from one phase to another and the same thing happens with the moon, proving the truth of Allah's Words: 'all of them floating through space.' (*al-Anbiya':* 33)

Furthermore, He is the One Who says: 'It is He Who made the sun a shining light and the moon a derived light and determined for it phases - that you may know the number of years and account [of time]' (*Yunus:* 5). By means of it, we can precisely determine all our times in the light of the movements of the sun and the moon. When we open any newspaper, we read what is called a ‘horoscope’, in which the names of the different phases (i.e. the signs of the zodiac) are mentioned: Aries, Capricorn, Virgo, amongst others. These are the Syriac names for the different astrological phases. A poet has said:

Aries and Taurus, Gemini and Cancer
And Leo protecting Virgo, Libra,
Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn and Aquarius,
And Pisces, all we have learned from the Syrian nation.

They are twelve signs of the zodiac, and each sign has its own measurement of climate and weather. When we read the Quran, we find the following Words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'and landmarks. And by the stars they are [also] guided.' (*an-Nahl:* 16)

Some people try to find an impact for each zodiac upon those who are born in the times when that particular zodiac is in orbit. Perhaps those who say that they have managed to gain some understanding of some of Allah’s secrets in creation, for Allah *Glorified is He* Himself swears an oath by where the stars fall, saying: 'Then I swear by the setting of the stars. And indeed, it is an oath - if you could know - [most] great.' (*al-Waqi‘a:* 75-76)

There are those who say that every human being has a star in whose company he is born and in whose company he dies. This is why it is said, ‘So-and-so’s star has fallen.’ We are not certain whether matters such as these are true or not since they are not likely to be proven scientifically. Allah *the Exalted* best knows their secrets, and it might be His Will to give knowledge of them to some of His creation.

In the verse which is the topic of our commentary, we find Allah *Glorified is He* saying: 'And We have placed within the heaven great stars.' He is emphasising the fact that these star signs and constellations exist in the sky. These great constellations were not placed there because of the effect they have on the weather, or because they are signs by means of which we can navigate, not to mention the effect they have on temperature, humidity and the plants. No, above all, they have been placed there because of their great aesthetic value, for they are an object of beauty that can be enjoyed by everyone who looks up at them. Hence, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'and have beautified it for the observers.' (*al-Hijr:* 16)

There are some things that are useful without having any aesthetic value. However, as for the stars, Allah *the Exalted* wanted to endow them with aesthetic value, and He did so because He created man and knew that his soul was endowed with numerous faculties, and that each of these faculties had things by which they were nourished.

So, for example, the nourishment of the eye is a beautiful sight, and the nourishment of the ear is a melodious sound, while the nose is nourished by what smells good, the tongue is nourished by what tastes good, while the hand is nourished by what feels smooth. This is what we know with respect to the faculties of the five senses that we all are aware.

There are, however, other faculties within the human being, each of which needs its own specific form of nourishment. Each of these faculties can be spoiled by giving them an overdose of their respective nourishment, while denying them that nourishment can ruin a person’s essence.

The well-balanced human being is the one who nourishes his faculties in a balanced way. Psychological illnesses sometimes appear as a result of a particular faculty of the psyche being undernourished. Furthermore, curing that illness requires laborious work to spot which faculty it is in the human psyche that is lacking in nourishment. One of the faculties that we find in the human soul is that of seeing beauty, which attracts the human soul. One representation of this matter is to be found in the decorators’ work to distribute light across the house in a various artful appearances.

Something we have found that it clearly exemplifies the existence of interior decorators that use different forms of artistry to distribute the lighting about a house.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* says about the constellations of stars: 'and have beautified it for the observers.' We find Him saying about some of the blessings that He *the Exalted* bestowed upon us: 'and [He created] the horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment.' (*an-Nahl:* 8)

Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* blesses us with the beauty of what He has created and made subject to us. His Blessing does not stop there, since He also makes them serve mankind in other ways: 'And they carry your loads to a land you could not have reached except with difficulty to yourselves. Indeed, your Lord is Kind and Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 7)

Allah is the One Who made the beasts beautiful to gaze upon, for He is the One Who says: 'And for you in them is [the enjoyment of] beauty when you bring them in [for the evening] and when you send them out [to pasture].' (*an-Nahl:* 6)

Allah *the Almighty* not only created livestock to serve us in the tasks for which they have been intended, but made some of them feed the feeling for beauty that He created within us. The more we are affected by beauty, the more we are able to find the Beautiful. Through Monotheism, we single Him out with Majesty.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says about heaven and the great constellations:

وَحَفِظْنَٰهَا مِن كُلِّ شَيْطَٰنٍ رَّجِيمٍ ﴿١٧﴾

And guarded it from every stoned satan [17]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 17)

We know that the devils used to listen stealthily to parts of the Divine Revelation which had been sent down to the messengers who had been sent prior to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and they used to try to create falsehoods to corrupt those messages. However, as soon as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, they were prevented from ever again doing anything like that by a command from Allah *Glorified is He* for He says: 'And indeed do the devils inspire their allies [amongst men] to dispute with you.' (*al-An'am:* 121)

This is why we find the devils saying what they are recorded as having said by the True Lord *the Most High* in His Mighty Book: 'And we have sought [to reach] the heaven but found it filled with powerful guards and burning flames. And we used to sit therein in positions for hearing, but whoever listens now will find a burning flame lying in wait for him. And we do not know [therefore] whether evil is intended for those on earth or whether their Lord intends for them a right course.' (*al-Jinn:* 8-10)

Thus, we know that they used to listen stealthily and take some of the word of the Divine Revelation. Then they would add their own words to it, so that there might be one word of truth in it, surrounded by a thousand lies.(1)

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to deny that that was the case for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so He *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have protected it from every devil expelled [from the Mercy of Allah].'

Devils, as we know, are those amongst the jinns who are disobedient. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

إِلَّا مَنِ ٱسۡتَرَقَ ٱلسَّمۡعَ فَأَتۡبَعَهُۥ شِهَابٞ مُّبِينٞ ١٨

Any eaves- dropper will be pursued by a clearly visible flame [18] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 18)

The disobedient ones amongst the jinns before the time of the Messenger of Allah, used to listen stealthily to the Divine Revelation that was revealed to the messengers who had been sent prior to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

However, after his noble message was first sent down, things were different, since Allah *the Almighty* decided to guard heaven against that: thus, no sooner had one of them approached heaven, he was pursued by a burning flame.

Notably, heaven is protected by flaming embers, smokeless fire and fire blackened by soot.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

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(1) *Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5762); Ahmad in his Musnad (6/87); and Muslim in his Sahih (8); all transmitted a (Hadith) from 'A'isha may Allah be pleased with her in which she said, 'Some people asked the Prophet peace and blessing be upon him about the soothsayers, and he replied, 'They are nothing.' So they said, 'Messenger of Allah, they say something and it then turns out to be true.' So the Prophet peace and blessing be upon him said, 'That truth is one that a devil has stolen and which he then clucks into the ear of his friend like the clucking of a chicken so that they mix in it with it more than one hundred lies."*

وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ مَدَدۡنَٰهَا وَأَلۡقَيۡنَا فِيهَا رَوَٰسِيَ وَأَنۢبَتۡنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ مَّوۡزُونٖ ١٩

As for the earth, We have spread it out, set firm mountains on it, and made everything grow there in due balance [19]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 19)

The True Lord *the Most High* draws our attention to the point that if the earth were square, rectangular or triangular, we would have found that it had edges past which you could go no further, but when we travel about the earth, we find that it stretches out, and this is why it must be round. They proved empirically that the earth was spherical by showing that if a man were to travel in a straight line, he would eventually arrive back at the place at which he started. The curves of the earth are manufactured in such a precise way that no eye is capable of perceiving the degree to which it is curved but instead always sees it as being straight.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and cast therein firmly set mountains,' He means the things that keep it stable. It is possible that someone might ask, ‘Given that the earth is created in a stable form, does it really need other things to keep it firm?’ We reply that since it was necessary for the True Lord *the Most High* to create it in motion and make it susceptible to being shaken up, He created what keeps it firmly in place. So, from this one verse, we have gained knowledge of two of the realities of the earth - that it is spherical and that it is turning.

There is another verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And you see the mountains, thinking them rigid, while they will pass as the passing of clouds.' (*an-Naml:* 88) We understand from these Noble Words that the movement of the mountains is not some intrinsic motion of their own; rather, it is simply a result of the movement of the earth itself, just as the movement of the clouds is simply a result of the movement of the wind.

Allah *the Exalted* willed to make the mountains deeply rooted so that they provide stability to the earth, to stop it shaking violently and to stop it swaying from side to side as the earth moves.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and caused to grow therein [something] of every well-balanced thing.' Allah *the Exalted* made every species grow upon the earth in a balanced manner and with a precision that corresponds to the climate and environment in which they are found, bringing together all of the necessary ingredients for the continuation of life.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَٰيِشَ وَمَن لَّسْتُمْ لَهُۥ بِرَٰزِقِينَ ٢٠

We have provided sustenance in it for you and for all those creatures for whom you do not provide [20] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 20)

In these words, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that He blessed us by placing all the means for us to live upon the earth, and He continued to place upon it the provision of all those things that serve us and that we rely on for our food: plants, animals and fuel as well as the methods and advancements in agriculture and manufacturing with which He inspires us for improving our quality of life. Thus, over and above all of that, He gives us our offspring which bring joy to our lives. All of these things are subject to His Will and do what He wants.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِن مِّن شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِندَنَا خَزَآئِنُهُۥ وَمَا نُنَزِّلُهُۥٓ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ ٢١

There is not a thing whose storehouses are not with Us. We send it down only according to a well-defined measure [21] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 21)

'A thing' means that there is no species of any sort except that their storehouses are with Allah *Glorified is He* so these things that you might consider small and insignificant have storehouses, as do things which are precious. Allah *the Exalted* sends down everything by a preordained decree - even our scientific discoveries come about by a preordained decree.

When we need something that is stored away within the secrets of existence, we make use of the intellects given to us by Allah *the Almighty* to uncover such a thing. An example of this is fuel, for in old times, we used to use tree wood and firewood. Allah *Glorified is He* Himself is the One Who says: 'And have you seen the fire that you ignite? Is it you who produced its tree, or are we the producer?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 71-72) Then mankind's needs became more extensive, and so they discovered coal, a substance that was originally plants or animals that came to be buried under the ground. Then, they discovered oil and so on and so forth.

In other words, Allah *the Exalted* does not create anything new, rather, He prepared for us everything that we are going to need in the earth and apportioned within the means of our subsistence before Adam *peace be upon him* was even sent down to the earth from the garden to live upon the earth and be Allah's vicegerent, he and all of his descendants until the coming of the Final Hour.

So, if we have any complaints, this is due to our own laziness and our not making the best use of what Allah *the Almighty* has created for us, and the provision that He has apportioned to us from the earth. We see misery on planet earth despite the scientific and technical advances we have made and this is due to us having used what Allah *Glorified is He* stored up to be a source of happiness for us in our conflicts and wars instead. If everything that was spent on wars were directed instead towards helping the different communities grow, everyone would live in true plenty, but the poor planning and poor distribution that we, as human beings, are guilty of is the primary cause of the wretched state of parts of humanity on the earth. Furthermore, this is due to He making the earth in its entirety for mankind, so whoever finds one place on the earth constricted should simply go somewhere else.

However, political factors, as well as the other differences that exist between people, have caused there to be, in some areas of the earth, men without work, and in other areas of the earth, wealth that is not being exploited. We ignore Allah's Words: 'And there is not a thing but that with us are its storehouses.' Thus, there are storehouses for everything on the earth, a storehouse being somewhere where precious things are stored away. The entire creation is created on the basis that Allah *the Exalted* has apportioned the means of every existing being's subsistence from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Final Hour.

So, if things become tight for you in terms of your provision, then you should know that one of the rights due to Allah *Glorified is He* has been neglected: either because you have neglected to properly cultivate the land and bring life to the dead earth to a degree sufficient to feed the number of inhabitants of the earth or because you have stored away what you have taken out of the earth and withheld your stores from everyone else.

If you see a poor man who has lost everything, you should know that there is a rich man somewhere who has withheld from others the rich pickings and plentiful provision granted to him by Allah *the Almighty*.

If you see someone who is incapable of obtaining the means to sustain his life, then know that someone else has withheld his sustenance from him. Likewise, if you see someone who is ignorant, then know that there is someone with knowledge somewhere who has withheld his knowledge from him. We know that Allah *Glorified is He* prepared existence and everything in it for us before He created us and did not make us responsible for any action we do before puberty. It is due to this that He knew in the time before time that responsibility limits man's freedom to do many things connected to the faculties and desires of his soul, whether that be in food, drink, clothing, accommodation or reining appetites, thereby ensuring that we are not driven to satisfy our impulses at the expense of our values.

The True Lord *the Most High* decreed that such responsibility is in effect after puberty, when a person's faculties are at full strength and he is capable of begetting one just like him, so that this responsibility can then be a proof against man. This is the one for whom Allah *Glorified is He* stored up everything in the earth, either by burying it in the earth, or by its type or species being kept under wraps.

Everything in existence is in balance, whether it is species, a type or individuals. The balance brought about by all of these gifts was only decreed into existence by the True Lord *the Most High* for all so that mankind could live in the warm embrace of faith. Thus, Allah's gift to us contains both a gift of Lordship and a gift of Divinity. The truly intelligent one is the one who takes both gifts together to set his life straight.

Allah *Glorified is He* Himself is the One Who says: 'Say [to them], "If you possessed the depositories of the Mercy of my Lord, then you would withhold out of fear of spending." And ever has man been stingy.' (*al-Isra':* 100) By this, Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear to us that man thinks that everything is about himself and bringing benefit to himself. Even in matters pertaining to religion, a servant might follow the principle outlined in Allah's Words: 'but rather give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot.' (*al-Hashr:* 9) At first glance, the one who follows this principle is doing that due to his preferring others to himself, but the reality is that he is doing as such because of his desire for the fine reward that Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for him in this world and the Hereafter.

The basis for doing religious acts is also to benefit oneself. This is why we find those who say, 'I love belief since it is what is best for me, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'for, verily, to the love of good is he most ardently devoted.' (*al-'Adiyat:* 8)

This is a clever form of selfishness since it brings the one who has it a reward for every action he does for someone else. This type of selfishness is both clever and beneficial since it is a lasting form of selfishness and brings a person profit in terms of his belief.

We know that if Allah *Glorified is He* had wanted, He could have made everyone wealthy, but He did not will it in order to make people subject to circumstance and weigh them up against one another on the basis of belief; also, He does as such so that one person's illusions might quash another's illusions. Ultimately, that man might learn that his deluded view of his Lord will not get him anywhere with Allah *Glorified is He* and will bring no benefit to himself.

All of man's manifestations of power do not stem from something intrinsic in him; rather, they are gifts granted to him by Allah *Glorified is He*. In this way, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to refine human beings so as to teach them how to interact in the best way with one another.

He makes it clear to mankind that the storehouses for everything are with him, and if He had so wished it, He could have given them all to mankind in one full swoop. However, He willed otherwise so as to emphasise to man that he is a subject of circumstance, and so as to direct his attention to the One Who gave them the blessings.

However, the monotonous repetition of a blessing can sometimes cause a person to forget the sweetness that he enjoys from it. For example, you do not find many people who spend any time thinking about their eyes except when they pain them - it is only then that they remember the blessing of sight. Indeed, it is often the loss of a blessing that draws one’s attention to it, and this is to be certain that no one ever forgets Who the Bestower of blessings is.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَرْسَلْنَا ٱلرِّيَـٰحَ لَوَٰقِحَ فَأَنزَلْنَا مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً
فَأَسْقَيْنَـٰكُمُوهُ وَمَآ أَنتُمْ لَهُۥ بِخَـٰزِنِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

We send the winds to fertilize, and We bring down water from the sky for you to drink – you do not control its sources [22] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 22)

When Allah *the Almighty* says that He does an action of (sending to) the winds, we find that they are sent from every place into every other place. In this way, every place becomes a place from which winds are sent and received. We find the winds blowing in a constant cycle, one after the other. If they were to stop moving, the air would stop moving and mankind would be afflicted by all manner of diseases, for it is the winds that renew the air and cleanse places of the stagnation which might otherwise come to them.

We know that when the Quran refers to ‘winds’ in the plural, it is talking about something bearing good, as is exemplified by the Words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'And it is He Who sends the winds as good tidings before His Mercy.' (*al-A‘raf:* 57) As for when it uses the word ‘wind’ in the singular, it is talking about something bearing punishment, like in His Words: 'And as for 'Ad, they were destroyed by a screaming, violent wind.' (*al-Haqqa:* 6)

The word 'fertilising' sometimes used to describe a she-camel that is carrying an embryo in its womb, and sometimes to describe one who impregnates another, causing an embryo to form within that other. The True Lord *the Most High* wanted what is in existence to multiply and proliferate; thus, He made everything in pairs, either for them to multiply and proliferate or for them to generate energy, like negative and positive in electricity. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'Limitless in His glory is He Who has created opposites.' (*Ya Sin:* 36)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* enumerates them for us, by saying: 'in whatever the earth produces, and in men's own selves, and in that of which [as yet] they have no knowledge.' (*Ya Sin:* 36)

There are things that are outside the perception of human beings such as the sycamore tree. Those who have not studied botany have no idea how it multiplies itself in order to grow and bear fruit, but botanists know that there is one sycamore tree that plays the role of the female, while another that plays the role of the male. The same is true of the mulberry tree. There is another tree that you cannot distinguish its female from its male since it contains both, but you may not know that because Allah *the Almighty* has made its pollen extremely light so that the wind can carry it from one place to another. We also do not see how olive trees are pollinated or mango trees or guava trees. Thus, the reason for that is that we can learn a lesson about the precision with which Allah *Glorified is He* made things.

The example I always use to illustrate this is that of the water that falls in the form of rain on some mountain, and then only a few days later, we find the sides of that mountain carpeted in green grasses and other plants. What that shows is that the seeds of the grasses and plants were already there on the mountain, lying there awaiting water to allow them to grow.

Scientists have discovered that after the male part of a plant reaches maturity, it exposes itself awaiting the appropriate winds and appropriate weather to transfer it from one place to another. This is why we find some mountains that turn green after winds have blown across them and rain has fallen on them. This is on account of the fact that the pollinating seeds have been transferred to them by the winds, and then the rain came, giving the plants the opportunities to grow. Indeed, you can find some mountains with one side covered in green and the other side barren and lifeless. It is due to winds carrying pollen to the green side of the mountain, but they did not carry any to the opposite side. Thus, this is why we find the True Lord *the Most High* making winds circulate, taking things from one place to another, and blowing through every place.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues in the same verse by saying: 'and sent down water from the sky.' This makes it clear to us that the water comes about as a result of the process of pollination and contains both the male and the female. In this sense, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and given you drink from it. And you are not its retainers.' You cannot store away the water because you cannot be trusted with it. If Allah *the Almighty* had guided us to store away water, that is one of His gifts to us, no one should say, ‘We have built dams’, rather, he should say, ‘Allah *Glorified is He* has guided us to build them after having made the rain fall.’ The reason is if the rain were to have not fallen, we would not have been able to store them up.’ Following this understanding, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who has water stored up when He sends it down from the sky after having inspired man to build dams.

When you want a cup of distilled water, you go to the pharmacist and get him to heat the water with a specific appliance that turns it into steam. Then that steam condensates until it becomes distilled water. All of that happens in existence, and yet you know nothing of it.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ نُحْيِۦ وَنُمِيتُ وَنَحْنُ ٱلْوَٰرِثُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

It is We who give life and death; it is We who inherit [everything] [23] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 23)

On the surface, one would think that it was possible that Allah says, ‘We deal death and bring life’ since He is addressing us while we are alive, but, by means of these words, the True Lord *the Most High* wants to direct our attention to the first death—the state of absolute non-existence from which we were first created. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'when you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you [back] to life, and then to Him you will be returned.' (*al-Baqara:* 28)

When speaking in detail about death, we must distinguish between absolute non-existence and the non-existence that follows existence. Absolute non-existence is the state before we were created. Then Allah *Glorified is He* brought us in existence so that we could become living beings. Then, He causes us to die after that, and then resurrects us after that for the Reckoning.

In the verse which we are currently discussing, it is talking about the death that comes after Allah *the Exalted* has granted us life, and we have reached the end of the time He appointed to us.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* finishes off the verse by saying: 'and We are the Inheritor.' These Words mean that there is a great inheritance, and it is this cosmos that Allah *the Almighty* created and over which He made us His viceregent. We ourselves have not added anything whatsoever to this cosmos that Allah *Glorified is He* created, for if you were to look at the total amount of water or food stuffs in existence, or any of the other component of life, you would find that they have not increased or decreased at all. The water that you drink to quench your thirst comes out of your body as sweat and urine. Then, after you die, your body decomposes, allowing any remaining water to evaporate. Likewise, the same process happens to all other things in existence.

When Allah *the Exalted* deals in this verse with the matter of death, life and then finally everything in existence returning to the One Who brought it into existence; He speaks of two alternating matters in the life of every existent thing: its life and its death. Both of these phases affect every single thing in existence, for everything has a period of time for which it lives. Everything begins its task of life when it is born, and everything completes its task of life - according to the span apportioned to it by Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Face.'(1) (*al-Qasas:* 88)

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(1) *Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir (3/403), 'This is Him telling us that He is Everlasting, the Eternal, the Living and the Self-Sustaining Who does not die when all creatures die. It is as He says: "And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor." (ar-Rahman: 27), where He uses 'face' to refer to His 'Essence'. And the same is true in His Words here: "Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Face." (Al-Qasas: 88), i.e. except for Him*
Mujahid and Ath-Thawri said: "Except for what is done desiring His face.' This interpretation was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih as an established opinion. This opinion does not contradict the first opinion since it simply informs us that all actions are worthless except for those right actions that are done for the face of Allah Glorified is He and that are in keeping with Allah's Law. As for the first opinion, it means that all essences are transitory and come to an end except for His Essence, for He is the First and the Last, who was before everything and after everything.

So, the ultimate fate of everything that is referred to as ‘thing’ is to perish, which means that it was living. Our proof that everything had life is Allah’s Words: 'that those who perished [through disbelief] would perish upon evidence and those who lived [in faith] would live upon evidence.' (*al-Anfal:* 42) By means of this, we know that everything has a task in life. As soon as that task is complete, it perishes and dies. Then the True Lord *the Most High* inherits everything after everything that has life passes away. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'Indeed, it is We Who will inherit the earth and whoever is on it, and to Us they will be returned.' (*Maryam:* 40)

There is a difference between the way Allah *the Almighty* inherits and the way creation inherits, for when a created being inherits from another, he first puts that other person into the ground and then inherits what he has left behind. However, as for the True Lord *the Most High* He inherits both together: the created being and what he has left behind.

Some of those who cannot bear the sight of death of their loved one cling tightly to the coffin in which the body is being carried or refuse to let the body out of the house because of their excessive love for that person. However, if you were to leave them for a week and the body were to start to decay, they would contact the undertaker to come and take it away and bury it in the ground, and then they would start to discuss what they are going to inherit from the deceased. By that, they inherit what is left after placing the one who left it in the ground. If the one who left things to be inherited was a person of strong belief and good action, then he enters a new life which is much more pleasant than his life in this world, for in that new life he will eat and drink without ever becoming tired, and every desire that passes through his head will be manifested on the spot. It is because he will be a guest of the Bestower of Blessings *the Most High*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ عَلِمۡنَا ٱلۡمُسۡتَقۡدِمِينَ مِنكُمۡ وَلَقَدۡ عَلِمۡنَا ٱلۡمُسۡتَـٔۡخِرِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

We know exactly those of you who come first
and those who come later [24] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 24)

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us that He knows everyone before they are even created and everything about us after we leave this existence. His Knowledge is complete and timeless. The benefit of this knowledge is the recompense that will result from it, for when we live our lives and take our provision we do not view them from afar; rather, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* knows of everything that each of us is going to do before we come to exist.

There is an alternative interpretation that maintains that the True Lord *the Most High* writes down those who hurry to the prayer, having made their way to it as soon as they heard the call; also, He knows those who are late when it comes to offering the prayer.

The phrase '*Allahu Akbar* - Allah is the Greatest has a profound effect in terms of changing people and waking them up to the fact that Allah *the Exalted* is greater than everything that distracts you and occupies your time.

We know that one of the miraculous aspects of the *adhan* is that it uses the phrase '*Allahu Akbar'* and does not say, *'Allahu Kabir* - Allah is Great'. This is due to respect for the things that occupy our attention in this world, and which we see as being large or great. Notably, belittling this world is not required in Islam since it is a bridge to the recompense promised in the Hereafter.

I always say that this world is too important to forget while at the same time being too trivial to be our aim and objective. In this world, you go out into the world and work hard to obtain food for yourself and those who rely on you, and then that food helps you to offer your acts of worship.

No one should look down upon this world, instead he should thank Allah, ask Him to grant you success in it and expend every effort to succeed in one's actions since for every good action, a servant obtains the best of rewards. However, as soon as he hears the *mu'adhdhin* say, '*Allahu Akbar'*, he should direct himself to what is indeed greater. There are some scholars who see various points of interest in this noble verse, since its meaning may be general in the sense that it is timeless, and may be specific like that related to those who come early and late to the prayer.

The meaning might well even be more specific than that since when we pray we stand in rows— men stand in the first rows, then the children and finally the women. Furthermore, amongst those men, there are those who hurry to the very front so as to avoid their eyes falling upon any woman, and there are those who use every trick at their disposal to ensure they are standing in the rows at the back so that they can see the women. So, the True Lord *the Most High* makes it clear here that even such matters as this do not escape his notice,(1) for He knows all secrets and even things that are more hidden than that.

Or, it might mean those who are the first to fight in *jihad* in the way of Allah *Glorified is He* and those who hold back are the last to fight in *jihad*. As for those who die due to natural causes are not included.

As for when one is called to *jihad*, and puts himself forward to fight, and then fights until he obtains martyrdom, the True Lord *the Most High* knows those who come early to meet Him out of love, and through fighting in *jihad* to raise high the banner of Islam.

Apparently, he who aspires to martyrdom may be thought of as a life hater. As a matter of fact, they are the people who appreciate the value of life more than those who claim that they do. On the one hand, they love the One Who has created life and believe that He is worthy of fighting for. On the other hand, they want life to be prosperous, so they sacrifice for the Creator for His religion that He has sent down to set life right and maintain balance in the universe.

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(1) *A (Hadith) about this has come down [from the Prophet] about which Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir (2/551), 'This is a very strange (Hadith) and there is a lot of disapproval about it.' Al-Wahidi mentioned the following Hadith in his Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 158) upon which there is the huge disapproval that Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him said, "A beautiful woman used to pray behind the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him' Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him went on, 'I have never seen the like of her [in terms of beauty]. When they went to the prayer, some of the Muslims used to go right to the front so as to avoid seeing her, while others used to stay at the back and then when they were in prostration, they would look at her from between their legs.' The (Hadith) is narrated in the Musnad of, and the Sunnan of An-Nasa'i and At-Tirmidhi.*

Their reward for sacrificing themselves for this sublime cause will be Paradise; there they will abide forever and enjoy eternal bliss. This reminds me of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq who expressed to Prophet Muhammad his aspiration to attain martyrdom. Hence, the noble Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘Give us the pleasure of your company, O, Abu Bakr!’(1)

This proves that those who do not attain martyrdom are not necessarily less honoured in the sight of Allah. Rather, just as faith needs those who sacrifice for it to prove that it is more precious than life itself; it also needs true believers who establish it on earth and protect it against adversaries.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ إِنَّهُۥ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

[Prophet], it is your Lord who will gather them
all together: He is All-Wise, All Knowing [25]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 25)

This verse implies a reassurance to Prophet Muhammad that He Who has sent down His guidance to him would not let his stubborn opponents who ridicule and harm him to go unpunished.

The Words of Allah '... gather them all together...' (*al-Hijr:* 25) imply a strong admonition to disbelievers, which means that they will certainly return to Allah to be held accountable for their evildoing. They have denied resurrection even though none of them has dared deny death. Allah *the Exalted* has introduced the notion of resurrection as the inevitable outcome that follows death: ‘Then you will die and then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will be raised up again.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 15-16) They are sure death will come upon them, yet they do not bother to prepare for what comes after death. In the original Arabic text of the verse, the subject 'your Lord' is followed by a pronoun which has the same referent, which literally translates into English: 'Your Lord, He it is Who will gather them all together…'. This pronoun, called 'the separating pronoun' (as it separates the subject from the verb) is used for emphasis. Resurrection is certain, for Allah Who has brought us to life after we were nothing is able to raise us from death, so there is no room for doubt or denial. Allah *the Exalted* disposes all affairs with absolute Wisdom and Might, for His Knowledge is Omnipotent, All-Encompassing.

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(1) *Al-Hakim narrated in his Al-Mustadrak (3/474), ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr continued to be an idolater and took part in the Battle of Badr. There, he challenged Muslims for one of them to engage against him in a single combat. Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him wanted to accept his challenge and fight against him. Hence, the Messenger of Allah said to Abu Bakr, “Give us the pleasure of your company, O Abu Bakr!”’*

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِن صَلْصَٰلٖ مِّنْ حَمَإٖ مَّسْنُونٖ (٢٦)

We created man out of dried clay formed from dark mud [26] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 26)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* is speaking about the creation of man, after having talked earlier about the creation of the universe and what has been laid in store in it so it can be ready to receive the vicegerent.

In this chapter, Allah *the Most High* tells us about the process of creation, including the stretching out of the earth, veering of the winds, sending down of water from the sky, allotting provisions in the earth, making firm mountains in the earth and how balance has been struck in the system of the entire universe.

Allah *Glorified is He* begins the chapter with His Words: '...These are Messages of revelation–of a discourse clear in itself and clearly showing the truth' (*al-Hijr:* 1). So He opens the chapter by speaking about the Quran, the guidance sent down to people to establish the fundamentals and values by which human life can be set right. Then, He speaks about the material from which this human life has been created. Thus, the chapter deals with the source of values, that is the Quran, as well as the material source of life. Allah *the Almighty* has created mankind and sent down to them His Guidance to manage their lives in the right way. To Allah belongs the Highest Similitude, but let me give this example again: an inventor of any machine, after creating its body, must define the purpose it is made of, the way of maintaining it and its manner of operation. The same is true of Allah’s creation of mankind whom He has willed to be vicegerent on earth. He has given them their physical forms and revealed to them His guidance so they may prosper both, in this life and the Hereafter.

Since mankind has been created to be vicegerents, this means that Adam *peace be upon him* was not the first to settle on earth. Rather, there were created beings on the earth before him. Geologists and archaeologists have discovered buried fossils of created beings that lived on this planet more than fifty thousand centuries ago, which proves there was life on earth before mankind existed.

Some would question the truth of that scientific statement and think that the fossils must date back to the time of Adam's existence and not by any means to any earlier time. However, they are perhaps ignorant of the fact that Allah *the Exalted* never says that Adam *peace be upon him* was the first one to inhabit earth. Rather, He has brought us to this life as vicegerents of those who lived before on earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If He wills, He can do away with you and bring in a new creation- that is not difficult for Allah.' (*Fatir:* 16-17) This verse proves the possibility that other created beings existed before mankind, just as other created beings can be brought to earth after us.

Allah *the Almighty* mentions glimpses of the story of Adam's creation in the Noble Quran. If we consider them all, we get a complete account with all its details and essential elements. The Quran is free from redundancies; rather, it mentions each part of a story in the context most suitable for it. The Quran is not meant as a history book detailing every event in the history of mankind. It is meant to convey Divine Guidance and outline for people the fundamentals, which life should be governed or based on. Its purpose is to instill in the hearts of mankind mindfulness of Allah and teach them the values that guard them against deviation.

Allah mentions the process of man's creation in many chapters of the Quran: *al-Baqara*, *al-A'raf*, *al-Hijr*, *al-Isra'*, *al-Kahf* and *Sad* (1). For example, Allah says in chapter *al-Baqara*: '[O, Prophet], when your Lord told the angels, "I am putting a successor[1] on earth," they said, "How can[2] You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed, when we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your holiness?" However, He said, "I know things you do not."' (*al-Baqara:* 30) Thus, did the angels exclaim when Allah told them He would create mankind? This was before Adam *peace be upon him* was ready to descend to earth.

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(1) This is not the English word "sad" (unhappy), but one of the letters of Arabic alphabet which is pronounced as *sad* and it is also the name of the Quranic chapter number (38). [Reviewer's Note]

Some question the precision of the Quran regarding the accounts given in it about the creation of man. They ask: how can the Quran say on one occasion that man has been created from water, on another occasion from clay and on another occasion from dried clay like pottery? The answer is simple: Allah mentions in the Quran the different stages of the process of man's creation. Allah *the Exalted* knows best what He has created. He has created the heavens and earth and all this is in them and has not made any of His created beings witness how He created them. He says: 'I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

Even though the process of creation belongs to the Unseen, Allah *the Almighty* has given us, out of His Mercy, tangible proofs in existence that point to such unseen matters and support what He reveals in the Quran. Allah *the Exalted* says in the Quran that every living being is made up mainly of water, which is true since water makes up the greatest proportion of the human body, for example. The statement that man has been created from dried clay like pottery is also true, for when water is mixed with earth it becomes clay, and when clay is left for a time, it dries and turns into a hard material like pottery. Thus, did Allah *Glorified is He* create Adam *peace be upon him?* About his creation He says: 'When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, bow down before him.' (*al-Hijr:* 29) This process of man's creation is actually evidenced

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(1) The term *khalifa* is normally translated as "vicegerent" or "deputy". While this is one meaning of the term, its basic meaning is "successor"– the Quran often talks about generations and individuals who are successors to each other– or a "trustee" to whom a responsibility is temporarily given. [the Quran, *A new Translation by M. S. A. Abdel Haleem*]

(2) In Arabic, this is not an interrogative but an exclamatory statement normally expressing disapproval, best rendered in English by 'How can you'. There are numerous examples of this in the Quran. [the Quran, *A new Translation by M. S. A. Abdel Haleem*]

by the very act that brings life to an end, namely death which is the reverse of life. The creation of man was started by water that was mixed with earth and turned into clay. Then, when the body had been formed, the soul was breathed into it. When one dies, this process is quite reversed. The first thing to leave the body is what was last breathed into it, namely the soul. Then, there comes the turn of the physical form. When life seeps out of it, its tissues soon come to resemble dried clay. Then, water evaporates from the body until it eventually turns into earth, from which creation was started. Thus, through this reversal of life by death, Allah *the Exalted* gives us material evidence for the process of creation which proves that what is revealed about it in the Quran is the truth.

Some argue that the sun was created before the earth, and the earth was a part of the sun which then split off from it. Have they witnessed the creation of the sun and the earth? Can experiments be conducted to prove the truth of either statement? Since the creation of both belongs to the Unseen, the answer to both questions is in the negative. Allah *the Almighty* says about those who get their minds involved in matters beyond their reach: 'I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) Such attempts have only served to emphasise the miraculousness of the Quran, for they constitute material evidence for the statement Allah *the Most High* makes about them in His Glorious Book. Indeed, they 'lead others astray' (*al-Kahf:* 51); they dissuade others from the truth Allah has revealed and get them involved in needless pursuits of matters beyond their limited capacity.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَٱلۡجَآنَّ خَلَقۡنَٰهُ مِن قَبۡلُ مِن نَّارِ ٱلسَّمُومِ ﴿٢٧﴾

The jinn We created before, from the fire of scorching wind [27] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 27)

The Arabic word translated here as 'scorching wind' is *samum* which denotes 'the smokeless flame of fire'. *Samum* is derived from the same root of *masam* (pores) since it refers to hot winds that penetrate stealthily into the pores of the human body.

Thus, we see that mankind and jinns have been created from different materials, which certainly affects the characteristics and abilities of each. The human physical form resembles in its characteristics those of clay, and the characteristics of jinns also incarnate the fiery constituents of their forms. Jinns are lighter and of fiercer natures than mankind whose physical forms are subject to the laws of clay. Allah *Glorified is He* says about Satan: '... He and his forces can see you from where you cannot see them …' (*al-A'raf:* 27). The extraordinary abilities of jinns are attributed to their creation from the fire of smokeless flame. This is where the difference between them and mankind originates.

Allah *the Almighty* has made jinns this way to suit the nature of their mission in this life, which is somewhat different from that mankind has been assigned. It is not a matter of one being better or preferable to the other, but different roles and assignments require different tasks. Therefore, there is no room to compare one species with another.

This brings to mind the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* when he asked for the throne of Balqis to be brought to him: 'Then he said, "Counsellors, which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?"' (*an-Naml:* 38) One of the skilled jinns offered to bring Sulaiman (Solomon) her throne before he got up out of his council-seat, but the one who had knowledge of the Scripture said he was able to bring the throne of Balqis before his eye re-opened after blinking. In that way, the one who had knowledge of the Scripture exceeded with this knowledge the power of capable jinn.(1) Allah relates this story in the Quran; He says: 'A powerful and crafty jinn replied, "I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place. I am strong and trustworthy enough," but one of them who had some knowledge of the Scripture said, "I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye." (*an-Naml:* 39-40)

Allah says in the following verse:

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(1) Jinn vary as to power and ability. The jinn that offered to bring the throne was a '*efrit* which means one of the strongest jinn. The word literally means "one who brings things about through his skill and cunning." [*Al-Mu'jam Al-Wajiz*, entry: *'afrata*]

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي خَٰلِقٌۢ بَشَرًا مِّن صَلْصَٰلٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ ﴿٢٨﴾

Your Lord said to the angels, 'I will create a mortal out of dried clay, formed from dark mud [28] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 28)

We have already provided basis for understanding this verse. For a statue to be made, earth is mixed with water until it becomes clay then left to turn into a material like sounding clay. Such is the material that can be shaped into a statue with distinct features. However, statues remain stuck in one form and have no power, unlike human beings created by the Hand of Almighty Allah. Human beings, due to the fact that Allah blows into them of His spirit, have powers that no being created by the ingenuity of man may ever have. It is impossible for Allah's created beings to compete with the Omnipotent Power of Him Who has created them.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah has created Adam in his image, sixty cubits.'(1) Scholars have disagreed regarding the referent of the pronoun in 'his image'. Does it refer Adam or Allah?

Some scholars have said the pronoun refers to Adam *peace be upon him*. Given this interpretation, the hadith means that Allah did not create him as a child who then grew up, rather He created him in his adult form. When created, Adam *peace be upon him* examined himself and found that he was a full human being even though he had not existed even one hour before that, so he turned to the One Who has brought him into existence in that image.

Other scholars have said that 'Allah' is the referent of the pronoun, which means Allah has created Adam *peace be upon him* in His Image. This implies no likeness between Allah and His creation. Rather, Allah has made man a vicegerent on earth and gave him power from His Power, knowledge from His Knowledge, wisdom from His Wisdom and might from His Might. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Imitate the Attributes of Allah in your behaviour.’[1]

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(1) *Imam Muslim cites this Hadith in his Sahih (2841). An-Nawawi said in his commentary on it, 'This narration apparently shows that the pronoun in "his image" refers to Adam peace be upon him. It means that when Adam was created, his physical form was the same as when he was brought down to earth and also when he died. In other words, the very moment he was created, he was sixty cubits long and he did not go through the same stages of physical growth as his offspring do. His physical form in Paradise is also the same as when he was on earth. No change has occurred to him.'*

The miraculous creation of Adam *peace be upon him* is the work of Him Who says to anything, ‘Be!’ and it is. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘In Allah’s Eyes, ‘Isa (Jesus) is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, ‘Be’, and he was.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 59) When Allah wills something to take place, no explanation is needed- all that remains for us is to simply believe in the Creator *the Exalted and Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says after that:

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُۥ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِى فَقَعُوا۟ لَهُۥ سَـٰجِدِينَ ٢٩

When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, bow down before him [29]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 29)

The Arabic word *taswiyah* (translated in this verse as 'fashion') means making something fit a task it has been made for. Allah has willed to make man in a form suitable for a spirit to be blown into him. The fact that Allah 'blows' of His spirit into man does not mean that giving life to a human being is by breathing air into his mouth. The word 'blow' is meant to represent the process whereby a spirit spreads to every part of the human body.

Scholars have had a debate around the definition of *ruh* (spirit). Personally, however, I believe it safer not to immerse ourselves in such a debate at all, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[O, Prophet], they ask you about the spirit. Say, “The spirit is part of my Lord’s domain. You have only been given a little knowledge.”' (*al-Isra’:* 85)

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* gave His command to the angels to bow down before Adam *peace be upon him*:

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(1) *Scholars have classified this Hadith as da’if (weak) or mawdu’ (forged). [Reviewer’s Note]*

فَسَجَدَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ ٣٠

And the angels all did so [30]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 30)

They all made obeisance in a single motion, for the angels do not have free will ─ they have no choice but to do what Allah *the Exalted* commands them. After Allah *the Almighty* created Adam *peace be upon him* He bestowed great honour on him by commanding the angels to bow down before him. The angels, whom Allah has entrusted with managing and taking care of this new creation, obeyed the command. Allah *the Most High* has made those assigned the mission of disposing the affairs of the new creation and guarding over them bow down before Adam *peace be upon him*.

The structure of the verse shows that the act of prostration happened immediately. Once they received the command, the angels obeyed in a swift and decisive manner. It is worthy of pointing out that prostration of the angels was not any form of worship or obedience to Adam, but they did so only out of obedience to the One Who has so commanded *Glorified is He*. The angels to whom the command to bow down was given are those who are immediately above mankind, for there are other angels who are higher still, namely those who are totally lost in love of their Lord and who do nothing but glorifying Him and singing praises of His Name. This is the act of worship to which they devote every moment. Thus, the angels promptly responded to their Lord's Command.

إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰٓ أَن يَكُونَ مَعَ ٱلسَّٰجِدِينَ ٣١

But not Iblis: he refused to bow down like
the others [31] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 31)

Therefore, the command was given to the angels, yet this verse mentions Satan and his disobedience on that occasion, which means the command to prostrate before Adam included him as well. This point has been the source of great debate amongst Islamic scholars, and such debates are governed by two rules. First, in cases where there is an explicit text in the Quran or Sunnah, the text rules. Second, when there is no direct text pointing to the issue under discussion, the scholars derive rulings by means of analogy and logical inference. When the text and logical inference are apparently contradicting, then reasoning applied to achieve logical inference should be guided by what the text conveys.

Satan was punished for noncompliance with the command of Allah *the Almighty*. He refused to prostrate himself before Adam *peace be upon him* out of defiance and arrogance. Thus, does that mean that Satan was one of the angels? The answer is no, for there is a text in the Quran explicitly telling otherwise: '… and they all bowed down, but not Iblis. He was one of the jinns, and he disobeyed his Lord's command …' (*al-Kahf:* 50). Thus, Allah *the Exalted* clearly states that Satan (Iblis) was not one of the angels,(1) rather, he was one of the jinns. The jinns, like mankind, have been given free will, so they can obey or disobey the commands of Allah *the Most High* based on their choices, unlike the angels whom Allah has made totally subservient to Him, so they have no choice but to obey Him *Glorified is He*.

Satan too was addressed by the command to prostrate to Adam, which tells he was present among the angels. This is an indication of one thing: before this occasion where he disobeyed Allah, he had committed himself to be devoted to Him and that caused him to be raised up to such an elevated status that he was allowed to be in the presence of angels.(2) Allah *the Almighty* thus honoured him because, even though he was given free will and could obey or disobey Him, he committed himself to obedience. It was this devotion that placed him among the ranks of angels.

Books of Islamic traditions and narratives report that Satan was given the appellation of 'the peacock of the angels' since he used to swagger with an air of self-important on account of the worship to which he willingly committed himself. He was the only one amongst them whom Allah *the Almighty* has given free will, so he had the power to choose whether or not to be obedient, and he chose to submit to his Lord. Thus we understand that Allah *the Exalted* made him in the company of the faultless angels in order to honour his obedience to Him, but he was not an angel.

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(1) *Al-hasan Al-Basri said, 'Satan (Iblis) was never an angel, not even for the blink of an eye. Rather, he was the father of all jinn just as Adam peace be upon him was the father of all of humankind.' [Cited with an authentic chain of transmitters by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari and mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Quranic Exegesis (3/88)]*

(2) Ibn Kathir said in his Quranic Exegesis (2/88), 'He committed himself to be as good as the angels, devoting himself to worship and righteousness. That was why he was in the presence of the angels and was addressed by the same command. Then, he turned disobedient by refusing to comply. At times of trials, everyone reveals what truly lies inside him and his real disposition betrays him.' [Quoted with a certain amount of adaptation to the order of the sentences]

Some scholars hold that he was at a higher status than the angels(1) while others say he was below them. The fact they have all agreed about is that he was never an angel, as the Quran explicitly states. Regardless of whether he was higher or lower in status than the angels were, he was honoured for his obedience to whatever his Lord commanded.

In His depiction of Satan's disobedience, Allah once uses the word *aba* which denotes 'rejection', another time He uses *istekbara* which denotes 'rejection mixed with arrogance or defiance' and on a third occasion, He uses both.(2) The punishment decreed for him was on account of his rejection to comply with Allah's Command and his arrogance, which is expressed in several verses of the Quran. In one verse, Allah *the Almighty* states Satan as saying: '... I will not bow to a mortal You created from dried clay, formed from dark mud' (*al-Hijr:* 33), and in another verse, He is quoted as saying: '... I am better than him. You made me from fire, and him from clay' (*Sad:* 76). Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

قَالَ يَٰٓإِبۡلِيسُ مَا لَكَ أَلَّا تَكُونَ مَعَ ٱلسَّٰجِدِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Allah said, 'Iblis, why did you not bow down like the others?' [32] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 32)

In the Arabic text of the verse, Allah *the Exalted* uses the expression *malaka* which is used in interrogation to denote surprise at something which has gone against the normal state of things. Allah has given Satan the privilege of having free will, and the latter chose to be obedient to his Lord, so his disobedience for this occasion was unusual. However, it is Allah Who speaks here, so to suppose that He posed it out of surprise is out of the question, for His Omnipotent Knowledge encompasses what was, what is, what will be, and what would or would not be! He is the One Who has created Satan and granted him freedom of choice, so He knows he is able to obey or disobey Him. Allah *the Almighty* has eternally known what Satan would do, and He just willed to establish evidence against Satan on the Day of Resurrection. This is why Allah gave Satan that question. This was Satan's reply:

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(1) *Ibn Kathir cites a number of narratives in his Quranic Exegesis concerning this issue (1/77). He narrates that Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, 'The name of Satan was "Azazel". He was one of the noblest angels- one of those with four wings. Then, he was banished from Allah's Mercy.' He is also narrated to have said, 'He was one of the noblest angels and belonged to one of their greatest throngs. He was guardian over paradise and had sovereignty over the lowest sky and the earth.'*

(2) The word *aba* is used in the verse: 'Save Satan (Iblis): he *aba* (refused) to be among those who prostrated themselves' (*al-Hijr:* 31). The word i*stakbara* is used in the verse: 'Save Satan (Iblis): he *istakbara* (gloried in his arrogance), and [thus] became one of those who deny the truth' (*Sad:* 74), and both are used in the verse: '... They all prostrated themselves, save Satan (Iblis), who *aba* (refused) and *istakbara* (gloried in his arrogance): and thus he became one of those who deny the truth' (*al-Baqara:* 34).

قَالَ لَمْ أَكُن لِّأَسْجُدَ لِبَشَرٍ خَلَقْتَهُۥ مِن صَلْصَٰلٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

And he answered, 'I will not bow to a mortal You
created from dried clay, formed from dark mud' [33]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 33)

Satan thus gives expression to the faulty understanding that was hidden within himself concerning the nature of elements, for he thought that clay had a lower rank than fire that which Allah has created him. Therefore, his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam was, in his eyes, a justified refusal. He seemed to think that the element from which a being has been created is what gives him preference over another being. He overlooked the fact that the command was the Will of the One Who has created all elements and put everything in place according to His Wisdom, not according to the whims or preferences of anyone of His created beings.

Who can say that fire is better than clay especially since both are used for different purposes, and therefore, there is no room for comparison? Each of them has a task that the other cannot perform.

In the Eyes of Allah, he who gilds objects with gold is not preferred over him who fashions clay to make pottery. Neither one of them can be said to be better than the other except with regard to him perfecting the task allotted to him. So Satan has revealed that his disobedience stemmed from a conviction that he was created from the best element.

Having thus expressed his defiance of the Divine command, Allah has decreed this punishment for him:

قَالَ فَٱخۡرُجۡ مِنۡهَا فَإِنَّكَ رَجِيمٞ ٣٤

Get out of here! said God. You are an outcast [34]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 34)

This command was issued to expel Satan from the presence of Allah, from the place he had occupied in the Highest Assembly and deprive him from all that was good. It is worthy to mention that the Arabic word *rajim* (translated in this verse as 'outcast') linguistically denotes punishment by stoning. Satan has incurred that punishment because of his rejection of the command of Allah, his arrogance and his erroneous belief that fire from which he was created was better than the clay from which Adam *peace be upon him* was created. He did not take into account the fact that every created being has an appointed task, and no being is preferred over another except with regard to how far he perfects that task.

Allah *the Almighty* has willed that every being should pursue the means that had been brought into existence in order to assist him in his mission. He created Adam to be a vicegerent on earth, for Allah *the Exalted* puts means and causes in the hands of His created beings to affect the outcomes He has willed. Take fire for example; it causes food to be cooked, for Allah has willed that to be the case. Allah *the Most High* has created means and causes of various natures to be employed for various purposes. A true believer sees causes and means a gift from Allah and that through them; Allah's Hand is extended towards him.

After banishing Satan from His presence(1), Allah *Glorified is He* confirms the sentence He has passed on him, so he is 'an outcast' and:

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(1) *About Allah's Words: '"Get out of here!" said Allah. "You are an outcast"' (al-Hijr: 34), Ibn Kathir said in his Quranic Exegesis (2/551), 'Allah has banished Satan from the station he had occupied in the Highest Assembly.' Al-Qurtubi said about this verse in his Quranic Exegesis (5/375), 'It refers to banishment from heavens, from the Garden of Eden, or from the company of the angels.'*

وَإِنَّ عَلَيۡكَ ٱللَّعۡنَةَ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٣٥﴾

Rejected until the Day of Judgement [35]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 35)

This verse implies that jinns also die. The life of each of them must come to an end on an appointed day. It also confirms that Allah *the Exalted* will never give Satan a chance to repent, nor will He ever pardon him. However, Satan tries to win some respite, so he is quoted in the following verse as saying:

قَالَ رَبِّ فَأَنظِرۡنِيٓ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ يُبۡعَثُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Iblis said, ‘My Lord, give me respite until the Day
when they are raised from the dead’ [36]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 36)

These words indicate that Satan (Iblis) was trying to escape from death, but Allah *the Exalted* would never be tricked. He knew what Satan was after. He said in response to that request of Satan:

قَالَ فَإِنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُنظَرِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

‘You have respite,’ said God [37]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 37)

The moment Satan heard that, he thought that escaped from death since there is no death after resurrection. He thought that his request had been answered. It seemed to him as if he had escaped through his deception and he had been granted ample time to take his revenge on the descendants of Adam since it was his refusal to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* that had placed him in that difficult predicament. If Satan had even the smallest amount of understanding, he would have realised that it was his own arrogance and wrong conviction that fire was better than clay that caused him to be banished from Allah’s Mercy. Furthermore, immediately after this comes the verse that makes it clear that he has not escaped death, for Allah *Glorified is He* says he will have respite:

إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْوَقْتِ ٱلْمَعْلُومِ ﴿٣٨﴾

Until the Day of the Appointed Time [38]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 38)

This means that Satan will also meet death since it is the destiny of every being that is created to die before the Final Hour comes, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Trumpet will be sounded, and everyone in the heavens and earth will fall down senseless except those Allah spares …' (*az-Zumar:* 68). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Everyone on earth perishes.' (*ar-Rahman:* 26) Thus, Satan will not escape from death.

Someone may well wonder, 'How is it that Allah spoke to Satan?' In fact, Allah *the Exalted* did not speak to him to honour him, but to make his punishment all the more severe, for He has angels that He uses to convey whatever He wills to whomever He wills. The following verse tells as such:

قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَآ أَغْوَيْتَنِى لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

Iblis then said to God, Because You have put me
in the wrong, I will lure mankind on earth and put them
in the wrong [39] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 39)

Satan's words: '… O, my Lord …' (*al-Hijr:* 39) are an acknowledgement that he believes Allah *the Most High* to be the Lord. Nevertheless, this acknowledgement is followed by his confession that he brought upon himself the curse of Allah, for he said: '... because you misled me...' (*al-Hijr:* 39). It was not Allah Who misled him, in fact. Rather, Allah only gave him freedom of choice- freedom either to obey or disobey Him then be held accountable for what he does. So Allah *the Exalted* gave Satan free will which he used to go against His commands.

Satan continues to say: '… I shall indeed adorn the path of error for them (mankind) on the earth …' (*al-Hijr:* 39). This makes it clear that the whisperings of Satan are limited to the finery of this life; he makes transient pleasures dazzling in the eyes of people, like drinking alcohol or taking drugs. He tempts people by means of such enjoyments to make them deviate and follow paths that incur Allah’s Wrath. This is why I believe that people who have just enough money to cover basic needs are safe in the sense that they cannot afford unlawful enjoyments. What does one get when he deviates from the Straight Path? Nothing but loss of righteousness and money as well!

As for the basic needs, Satan's insinuations would not approach them, for Allah *the Almighty* has already made it permissible for us to enjoy them. Allah *the Exalted* has not forbidden anything that we essentially need in our lives. Rather, Satan always tempts us into things that are far from essential, and we can well do without them, for He does not charge us beyond our capacities. Thus, by following Satan, one at once disobeys Allah and also wastes his money on mere extravagances.

Often times, those who exceed the limits in sinning envy the righteous to the extent of trying to tempt them into deviation from the Straight Path. One who persists in sinning often thinks to himself, ‘Why should I fall into deviation alone?’ Consumed by feelings of grudge and self-loathing, he would heartily love all the upright to be persistent sinners like himself. Such was the case with Satan when he made his foolish response to Allah, but he was at least aware of his weakness and the Might of his Lord. Would he enter into a direct war with Allah, or with the descendants of Adam whom He has created to be vicegerents on earth? Satan thus determined his position in the fight: '... give me respite until the Day when they are raised from the dead' (*al-Hijr:* 36). He has thus decided that his battle would be with the creation not the Creator: '…I shall indeed adorn the path of error for them (mankind)(1)…' (*al-Hijr:* 39). This declaration of Satan seems to include all mankind. However, he knew that would be above his ability; he has already acknowledged his weak station and the Might of his Lord, so after he declares that he would lead all mankind astray, he adds this exception:

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudri, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Satan said, “My Lord, by Your Might and Majesty, I will continue to lead the descendants of Adam astray so long as their souls remain in their bodies.” Allah replied, “By My Might and Majesty, I will continue to forgive them so long as they ask for My forgiveness.”’ [Cited by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/39 & 41) and Ibn Lahi’ah is present in its chain of transmitters. See: Majma’ Az-Zawa’ed (10/207).]*

إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

All except Your devoted servants [40]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 40)

Satan admits that he can have no power over those sincerely devoted to Allah since they are rightly guided and guarded against straying. Faith is firmly established in their hearts, and they have reached the station of true sincerity in worship, a station which makes it next to impossible for Satan to misguide them. The people of knowledge and insight have stated, 'Devotion to Allah makes one honoured in His Sight.'

If Allah *the Almighty* willed that all of His creation should be rightly guided, no one would be able to misguide them. However, Allah *the Exalted* has given us freedom to decide and choose whether to be obedient to Him or otherwise, for He is in no need of us or of our worship. This is why Satan admits his inability to misguide those who are sincere in their worship of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Having made his declaration in full, Satan receives a clear reply from Allah *the Almighty* to make it known to him that it is not his choice that he would not lead astray those who are devoted to Him; it is not a favour from him to Allah or His sincere servants. Rather, it is the Will of Allah *the Exalted* that they shall be safe from Satan's insinuations:

قَالَ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطٌ عَلَيَّ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٤١﴾

Allah said, [Devotion] is a straight path to Me [41]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 41)

Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear that it is His guidance that leads His servants to devotion, and it is not a favour from Satan that he allows some to be devout. Satan has described the directions where he would come to mankind in order to misguide them, as he is quoted saying: 'I will come at them– from their front and their back, from their right and their left(1)– and You will find that most of them are ungrateful.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 17) So Satan comes at one from all directions except from above or below. So long as one is mindful of the Exaltedness and Might of the One *above* and his own status as a servant who is definitely *below* His Creator, Satan can never find a way to him.

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(1) *Qatada said, 'He come at them from their front, telling them that there would be no resurrection, no Paradise and no Hellfire. He comes at them from their backs, making=*

Having thus declared to Satan that it is He Who guards His servants from deviation, Allah *Glorified is He* further emphasises this truth, by saying:

إِنَّ عِبَادِى لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَٰنٌ إِلَّا مَنِ ٱتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ ٱلْغَاوِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

You will have no power over My servants, only
over the ones who go astray and follow you [42]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 42)

This verse makes it absolutely clear that Satan is in no position to lead astray those who are sincere in their devotion to Allah *the Exalted* for He protects His servants from deviation except for those who choose to be misguided by forsaking His ordinance; such are the only ones whom Satan can deceive. He will say to them on the Day of Resurrection: ‘… Allah gave you a true promise. I too made promises but they were false ones. I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me. Blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with Allah before …’ (*Ibrahim:* 22). It is a Mercy from Allah that He has revealed all that to us in this worldly life, and Satan is going to admit it all on the Day of Judgment. As the verse states, Satan has no power over us; he can neither compel us by force nor persuade us by reason to do anything; all he can do is make insinuations to us.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us the destiny of Satan and those who follow him:

= *the finery of this worldly life seem dazzling and calling them to it. He comes at them from their right, trying to make them reluctant to do good deeds. He comes at them from their left, making sins and unlawful things luring to them. He comes at you, son of Adam, from every direction, except from above, for he can never prevent the Mercy of Allah from coming down to you.’ [Cited by Ibn Kathir in his Quranic Exegesis (2/304)]*

وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمَوْعِدُهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Hell is the promised place for all these [43]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 43)

So long as the recompense awaiting those who follow Satan are so grievous, people of understanding should always have this final destiny deeply in mind whenever he is on the verge of doing a certain deed. Recalling punishment prevents one from yielding to the evil insinuations of Satan or those of his own self. If one heeds the unwelcome outcomes of his wrong actions from the first, he would not dare fall into them.

Suppose a man was aroused. He found access to a suitable place furnished with all that he needed and a beautiful woman was ready for him. Still, he was shown a hot furnace right there and was told that, after indulging himself in that unlawful pleasure, he would have to throw himself in that furnace. What do you think that man would do? No doubt, he would give up entirely the idea of even touching that woman for fear of the burning furnace. It is heedlessness of punishment that makes one easily fall into sinning. It befits people of understanding to remember well this Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Death is the herald of Judgment, so when someone dies, his own judgment day has come.'(1) No one knows when he is going to die.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the different levels of hellfire:

لَهَا سَبْعَةُ أَبْوَٰبٍ لِّكُلِّ بَابٍ مِّنْهُمْ جُزْءٌ مَّقْسُومٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

With seven gates,(2) each gate having its allotted
share of them [44] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 44)

Those who have gone astray and persisted in their disobedience of Allah will meet their severe destiny in hellfire. With them will be Satan who arrogantly rejected Allah’s Command and plotted to misguide the human race. Types of punishment in hellfire will differ, for each throng of sinners will be gathered together and given their due punishment. Those who were addicted to alcohol, for example, will all be gathered in one place, gamblers in another, and so on. Each of the gates of hell will be specified for a group of people bound together by an act of disobedience all of them used to commit in the life of this world. As they shared that sin and persisted on doing it together, they also share the same torment and punishment. By that, the Words of Allah will be fulfilled: ‘On that Day, friends will become each other’s enemies. Not so the righteous’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67).

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(1) *Cited by Al-'Ajalunu in Kashf Al-Khafa' (Hadith no. 3618), on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him with this addition, 'Remind yourself of death a lot, for if you remember it at times of prosperity, it will guard you against its lure, and if you remember it at times of distress, it will help you bear it more easily.'*

(2) *'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him said, 'Do you know what the gates of Hell are like?' They replied, 'They are like our gates.' Ali replied, 'No, they are like this, one above the other.' Ath-Tha'labi cited a version with this addition, 'And he ['Ali] placed one of his hands on top of the other.' [Cited by Al-Qurtubi in his Quranic Exegesis (5/3753)].*

In Hell, there are different depths, each specified for a certain group of sinners: *Ladha* (the Blaze), *Hutama* (the Crushing Fire), *Saqar* (the Scorching Fire), *Sa’ir* (the Flaming Fire) and *Hawiya* (the Burning Abyss) (1). Each of these depths has sections, for just as there are different levels in Paradise, Hellfire has levels too, one below the other.

After speaking about the recompenses of disbelievers, Allah *the Most High* speaks about the reward of believers, for the striking contrast between the two to bring grief to disbelievers and great joy to believers. So He *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّٰتٖ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

But the righteous will be in Gardens with springs [45] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 45)

The Arabic word rendered here as 'righteous' is *muttaqun*, an adjective derived from the noun *taqwa* which means 'righteousness' or 'mindfulness of Allah'. It is forsaking one’s own desires and complying with Divine commands no matter how hard or heavy this can be. It is to prefer what Allah *the Exalted* loves to what one loves. *Taqwa* has outcomes that Allah mentions in the Quran. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(Be mindful of) Allah and He will teach you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 282) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '... (Be on your guard against) the Fire of which men and stones are the fuel...' (*al-Baqara:* 24).

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(1) These are different names of hellfire mentioned in the Glorious Quran. [Reviewer’s Note].

We have previously explained that Allah *the Most High* has Attributes of Majesty and Attributes of Beauty. Blessings are the manifestations of the Attributes of Beauty, while trials are the manifestations of the Attributes of Majesty. Allah is the All-Forgiving and the Compeller; He is the Pardoner and the Avenger (the One Who executes retribution against wrongdoers). As for the Attributes of Majesty, we should seek protection from their manifestations by avoiding what displeases Allah *the Almighty*. As for the Attributes of Beauty, we should seek to attain their manifestations by doing acts of righteousness to get closer to Allah. The way to achieve both is to abide by the guidance of Allah to protect ourselves from the Fire, which is one of His forces.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But the righteous will be in Gardens with springs’ (*al-Hijr:* 45). They are the ones who believe in Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) and follow His guidance. Even if they fall prey to weakness at times and commit sins, they soon repent and implore Allah’s Forgiveness, so He accepts their repentance, forgives them and changes their misdeeds into good deeds.

So in paradise there are *'uyun*: '…Gardens with *'uyun* (springs)’ (*al-Hijr:* 45). It literally means 'springs', yet in the verse we are reflecting on, it refers to the rivers of paradise, for Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh …' (*Muhammad:* 15). Still, there may be springs and fountainheads that no one knows about except for Allah *the Exalted and Almighty*.

After describing the Gardens of Paradise, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses those who will be admitted to it, by saying:

ٱدْخُلُوهَا بِسَلَٰمٍ ءَامِنِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Enter them in peace and safety! [46]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 46)

The definition of 'peace and safety' in the life of this world is different from that in the Hereafter. Peace in this life is temporary and must be interrupted by disturbances, by the fear of losing what one has or the fear of death. We know that every blessing in this world will inevitably come to an end. In the Hereafter, contrarily, happiness is pure, undisturbed by any fears and never coming to an end.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the relationship that will bind the people of Paradise, by saying:

وَنَزَعۡنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِم مِّنۡ غِلٍّ إِخۡوَٰنًا عَلَىٰ سُرُرٖ مُّتَقَٰبِلِينَ ٤٧

And We shall remove any bitterness from their hearts: [they will be like] brothers, sitting on couches, face-to-face [47]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 47)

No feelings of rancour or grudge will ever find a way to their hearts. Friends who disobey Allah together in this life will turn into enemies in the Afterlife. The righteous, on the other hand, will have their hearts purified from any negative feelings. Each will enjoy eternal bliss in his level in paradise, with purified wives, and they will feel no envy toward each other. Some will be at higher levels and some will be at lower levels, yet there will be no competition or lamentation; everyone will have pure, unending happiness.

Rancour may steal into the hearts of some because of differences in viewpoints for example, even though they are brothers in Islam and all believe in Allah and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. An example of that is when ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* faced Talha(1) and Az-Zubayr *Allah be pleased with them* at the Battle of the Camel. As we know, all three companions were among the Ten Promised Paradise. Each of the two conflicting sides had their viewpoint and their proof of being in the right. The moment that the battle began, the companion ‘Ali came face-to-face with the Companion Az-Zubayr and said to him, ‘Do you remember what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said when the two of you were passing by me? The Prophet greeted you and you said, "Ibn Abu Taleb's youthful radiance has not left him." Hence, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* looked at you and said, "You will fight against 'Ali and you will be the one in the wrong [when you do so].'" Remembering this, the companion Az-Zubayr[1] *Allah be pleased with him* put aside his weapon and stopped fighting. Later, the son of Talha ibn 'Ubaydullah came into the presence of 'Ali, so 'Ali said, 'May Allah make me and your father among those this verse speaks about.' One of those who were present said, 'Allah is Just. He would not make you and Talha together in Paradise.' Hence, 'Ali replied, 'about whom, then, do these words of Allah speak: 'and we shall remove any bitterness from their hearts...' (*al-Hijr:* 47)?

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(1) *He is Talha ibn ‘Ubaydullah Al-Qurashi Allah be pleased with him. He was one of the first eight people to embrace Islam and one of the five who became Muslim at the hands of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him. He was also one of the six Companions who made up the Shura (Advisory) Council which was established by ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. He was killed in the year 36 AH by Marwan ibn Al-Hakam at the Battle of the Camel. [Al-‘Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba 3/291]*

The Arabic word *naza'na* (translated in the verse as 'remove') denotes removal of a thing that is deeply rooted in its place. This indicates that these unwelcome feelings are embedded deeply in the human psyche, and when they are removed on the Day of Judgment, they are pulled out by the roots so that no traces remain. Thus, believers who had viewed each other with discord or rivalry in this world will look on one another with the eyes of gratitude, for that very rivalry had caused each of them to be ever so cautious not to fall into error or misconduct.

That is because the believers in the Hereafter remember things they were given. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* makes them beloved brethren; commonly we describe the sincere friendship and loyal relationship between two persons who are not having any familial ties by saying 'one may have a sibling that does not share the same mother'. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says in other verses of the Quran: '...And remember the blessings which Allah has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren; [how, when] you were on the brink of a fiery abyss, He saved you from it...' (*Al-'Imran:* 103).

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(1) *He is Az-Zubayr ibn Al-'Awwam Allah be pleased with him cousin of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. He was one of the ten promised Paradise, one of the six Companions who made up the Shura Council, and husband of Asma' bint Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with them all. He was killed at the Battle of the Camel in 36 AH by 'Amr ib Al- Jurmuz. [Al-'Isaba 3/ 5-7). Ibn Hajar cited this Hadith in Al-'Isaba on the authority of Abu Ya'la from the way of Abu Jaruw Al-Mazini.*

You might have a brother whom you do not bear a grudge against, but you are not familiar with him; that is because there are different types of brotherhood (1). It may be a good and respectful brotherhood, but you do not meet each other. Then, in the Hereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* gathers you together on thrones, facing one another.

Someone might, then, ask, ‘But what if a believer’s place in paradise is higher than that of their keen friend or brother?’ We reply that Allah’s unlimited bounty raises the level of the lower until they reach the level of the higher when they visit one another.

Thus, things in the Hereafter differ from the things in this world, for man lives in this world in the way the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes in the Quran verse: '[then,] O man – you [that] have, verily, been toiling towards your Lord in painful toil – then shall you meet Him!' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 6)

But, the Hereafter is different, it is what Allah *Glorified is He* says in the next verse:

لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَمَا هُم مِّنْهَا بِمُخْرَجِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

No weariness will ever touch them there, nor will they ever be expelled [48] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 48)

Your life in the Hereafter, if you are a righteous believer, will differ from your life in this world. For, in this world, you know that you live by making use of the means that Allah *Glorified is He* gives to you: you work hard and exhaust yourself to earn a living and in order for Allah to grant you the gifts dependent on those means and causes.

Then, you become among the successful whom Allah *Glorified is He* grants paradise. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and who believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon you, [O Prophet,] as well as in that which was bestowed before your time: for it is they who in their innermost are certain of the life to come! [4] It is they who follow the guidance [which comes] from their Lord; it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state! [5]' (*al-Baqara:* 4-5)

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(1) What we understand from these musings of the Imam is that brotherhood is of two types: brotherhood through family and brotherhood through faith. And that brotherhood through faith is stronger than brotherhood through family, since the True Lord says: 'All believers are but brethren...' (*al-Hujurat:* 10). So, every believer is a brother, but not every brother is a believer.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the term *muflih*, (successful), to describe the believers in paradise because believers are those who have ploughed the lands of this world with their right actions and have made great efforts to establish Allah's way on the earth and worn their bodies out. We know that a person's body being worn out indicates that he has exhausted himself through work, and that only happens in this world.

As for paradise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'No weariness shall ever touch them in this [state of bliss], and never shall they have to forgo it' (*al-Hijr:* 48). In paradise, they are not afflicted by tiredness, nor will they ever be expelled from it, that is because they have been granted eternity therein.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* first speaks of those who are astray, and who were close friends in this world, rejoicing in their wrong actions; they are the ones for whom the punishment of the hellfire awaits. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about His sincere slaves who are going to enter paradise; among them, there are people who held different opinions to one another in this world and between whom was neither affection nor love. But when they enter Paradise, their hearts are purified of all the differences that divided them in this world.

After that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

نَبِّئۡ عِبَادِيٓ أَنِّيٓ أَنَا ٱلۡغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ٤٩

[Prophet], tell My servants that I am the Forgiving,
the Merciful [49] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 49)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is addressing His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* The verb 'nabbi'' (tell) means to tell someone a matter of great importance and significance. The word *nabbi'* is not used for a trivial matter. Previously, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said about the tiding of resurrection: 'About what do they [most often] ask one another? [1] About the awesome tiding [of resurrection] [2]' (*an-Naba':* 1-2). He *Glorified is He* also said about this tiding: 'Say: 'this is a tremendous message: [67] [how can] you turn away from it?'[68]' (*Sad:* 67-6) We understand from these Noble Words that they are telling the tidings of the Hereafter and what is going to happen therein. Here, however, Allah also mentions the tidings of His forgiveness and the mercy He *Glorified is He* reserves for His sincere believers who have *taqwa* (piety); those who are going to enter paradise and enjoy its blessings forever.

Someone might, as well, ask, 'Does not forgiveness implies committing sins that need forgiveness?' We reply that the True Lord *Glorified is He* created us and know that there are whisperings and misgivings in every self; it is not possible for a person to be totally free from error, sin or whisperings. The proof is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has banned many actions for the Muslim to do in order to protect the rights of the individual and protect the rights of society so that a society can live peacefully.

For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* forbids Muslims from stealing, fornicating, drinking alcohol and other grave sins, wrong actions and ideas that lead him to spread corruption throughout the earth. However, the fact that Allah has made all those things unlawful indicates that they can happen. So, He *Glorified is He* sent down His Divine Message prohibiting those things and classifying them as crimes for those who do them, just as He *Glorified is He* obligates the Muslims to know of the necessity of steering clear of these wrong actions.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us that those believers who forget and commit wrong actions, but then repent and ask forgiveness, may not keep reprehending themselves about those wrong actions, since Allah *Glorified is He* is Compassionate and Merciful.

When we read Arabic, a language whose speakers have been honoured by Allah *Glorified is He* revealing His Quran in it, we find that its writings may be divided into two categories: poetry and prose. Poetry is that which has rhyme and meter, that which has rhythm and melody. As for prose, it has none of those characteristics, although it can be in the form of rhymed prose.

If you were to speak in prose and then quote a line of poetry in the middle of what you were saying, anyone who was listening to you would be capable of noting the difference between the prose and poetry. But the Quran is the speech of the All-Powerful Lord, and that is why you find that when you read this verse which we are in the process of musing about, it is almost as if it is a line of poetry with its rhyme and meter:

nabbi' 'ibadi anni *ana-l-ghafuru-r-rahim*

Its meter is the *mujtath*(1) meter, but it comes in the midst of a number of verses before it and after it, and so you do not notice the disparity. You do not notice that you have been taken from prose to poetry, and then from poetry back to prose, and that is because the solidarity of meaning along with the beauty of expression gives you the majesty of the miraculous effect. And that is one of the secrets for the greatness of the Quran.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says regarding what specifically relates to the unbelievers and those who are astray:

وَأَنَّ عَذَابِي هُوَ ٱلْعَذَابُ ٱلْأَلِيمُ ﴿٥٠﴾

But My torment is the truly painful one [50]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 50)

Thus, the tiding is completed by telling about the forgiveness for those who believed, and the punishment for those who disbelieved and were astray. And we note that He *Glorified is He* did not emphasise the punishment too strongly, and that is because His mercy precedes His anger, as is made clear by the words of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: 'On the day that Allah *Glorified is He* created mercy, He created it as one hundred mercies, and kept ninety-nine of those mercies with Him. Then he sent that one [remaining] mercy to the whole creation. If the unbelievers were to know the extent of the mercy that was with Allah, none of them would have despaired of Paradise. And if the Muslims were to know the extent of the punishment that is with Allah, none of them would have felt safe from the Hellfire.'(1)

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(1) This type of poetic (sea,i.e. the system of a group of poetic meters is so-called in Arabic) is called mujtath (cut-off) because it is cut from the khafif (light) poetic sea by placing the meter (*mustaf'ilun*) in front of (*fa'ilatin*), and it was not used except in isolated verses. It has one complete prosodic form, which reads: *(mustaf'ilun fa'ilatin mustaf'ilun fa'ilatin)*. See the book, (fī 'Ilmay Al-'Urud Wa-l-qafiya) by Doctor Amin 'Ali As-Sayyid. Printed by Dar Al-Ma'arif in 1982.

And we notice that the meaning of the two previous verses is explained in Allah's Words: '...Now, behold, your Lord is full of forgiveness unto men despite all their evildoing: but, behold, your Lord is [also] truly severe in retribution!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6)

By this, we can see that the two verses alert us to the two statuses of fear and hope, and let us know that believers must combine both; they should not put off good deeds and the responsibilities of belief to a later time, and must ask for Allah's forgiveness for the wrong deeds. That is because Allah *Glorified is He* deals with people according to His bounty when their intention is correct and sincere, and that is quoted in the Qudsi Hadith: 'When the True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed creation, He wrote in the Book that was with Him above the throne, 'My mercy precedes My anger.''(2) Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* after talking about His attributes of mercy and majesty in the form of His forgiveness, mercy and vengeance, moves on to a real and tangible matter which clarifies these attributes to us; He *Glorified is He* speaks about Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*, giving him the good news, and then moves on to his nephew, Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*, giving him salvation and afflicting his people by punishment. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَنَبِّئْهُمْ عَن ضَيْفِ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ ﴿٥١﴾

Tell them too about Abraham's guests [51]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 51)

The word *dayf (guest* in English) indicates someone who seeks hospitality or sociability from another. He is also called in Arabic (*mundawi)* which is someone who attaches himself to another in order to ask for his hospitality, accommodation, and security. Another meaning of *mundawi* is to lean in the direction of light.

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(1) *It is transmitted by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6469). And Muslim transmitted part of it in his Sahih (2755) in Kitab At-Tawba in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) It is transmitted by Muslim in his Sahih (2751); and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3194) in a *(Hadith)* from Abu Hurayra *may Allah be pleased with him*. There is also a wording that says, 'overcomes' instead of 'precedes'.

The generosity of the Arabs was not limited to receiving those who knock on their doors, but they announce themselves by means of a lit fire so that those who are travelling could see them easily and find the way towards them.

All of us have read about what Hatim At-Ta'i' (an ancient Arab man famous for generosity) said to his slave-servant:

Light the fire, for it is a bitterly cold night,
And the wind, my boy, is a piercing one,
And if you bring us a guest, you will be free!

From this, we know that the original meaning of *mundawi* is to make one's way to the light.

The word *dayf* is a singular word that can have a singular, dual or plural meaning, and can be both masculine and feminine. When using the word *dayf*, 'A (*dayf*) (guest) came to me and I hosted him'; and you say, 'A (*dayf*) came to me and I hosted her'; and you say, '(*Dayf*) came to me and I hosted them both'; and you say, '(*Dayf*) came to me and I hosted them all.' That is because the word *dayf* takes the place of the verbal noun. But there are some tribes of Arabs who pluralise *dayf* as *adyaf*, some who pluralise it as *duyuf*, and some who pluralise it as *difan*. We should be aware that when *dayf* is used to refer to a group of people, it means that one person has come accompanied by others. If one group comes and then another group comes later, then we would say that another *dayf* has come.

Here in the verse which we are in the process of discussing and musing about, we know that they were not truly guests. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِذْ دَخَلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا۟ سَلَٰمًا قَالَ إِنَّا مِنكُمْ وَجِلُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

When they came to him and said, 'Peace,' he said,
'We are afraid of you' [52] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 52)

We note that the word *salama*, (peace), is in the accusative form here, and that is because it means we bid you 'peace', and means that the greeting is newly started one. But then in another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: 'When those [heavenly messengers] came unto him and bade him peace, he answered, '[And upon you be] peace!' – [saying to himself] 'They are strangers.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 25)

We know that the Quran often mentions the story of an event with various different extracts scattered in verses throughout the Quran. So, in order to understand all the different aspects of a story, one must gather them all together. And that is why we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* not mentioning here that Ibrahim *peace be upon him* returned their greetings of peace or the fact that he set before them a roasted calf, for those things were mentioned in other verses in the Quran.(1)

So, from those other verses, we learn that Ibrahim *peace be upon him* returned their greetings, and the word *salam* (peace) was in the nominative case. Then, why does the word *salam* in the verse in question comes in the accusative case?

It is because they are who greeted him first saying *salam*. Of course, he should respond to the greeting, and that is case in the second verse: '...he answered, '[And upon you be] peace!' – [saying to himself,] 'They are strangers.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 25)

The greeting the angels gave Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was one that newly started, while the greeting that he gave was given in the form of a positive nominal sentence that is used to indicate permanence. The greeting of Ibrahim was stronger than that of the angels because it has been made clear to us that the courtesy of the Way of Allah is for the believer to return someone's greeting with one that is better than it, not to simply return it as it is. So, the response Ibrahim gave contained a continuous peace, while their greeting was one of a newly formed peace. The difference between the *salam* of Ibrahim *peace be upon him* and the *salam* of the angels was that the latter was defined by the circumstances while the former was the Way of his message and the message of all the other Prophets. Then, after that, come the words of Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: 'he answered: 'Behold, we are afraid of you!’' (*al-Hijr:* 52) And, in another verse, it is mentioned that he: '...became apprehensive of them...' (*Hud:* 70). Also in another verse in the Quran, he says: 'They are strangers.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 25)

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(1) That is in the verse: 'And, indeed, there came unto Ibrahim Our [heavenly] messengers, bearing a glad tiding. They bade him peace; [and] he answered, '[And upon you be] peace!' – and made haste to place before them a roasted calf.' (*Hud:* 69)

Why did he become apprehensive of them, why did he say to them that they were strangers, and why did he say: '...‘Behold, we are afraid of you!’' (*al-Hijr:* 52) They had come to him, but he did know who they were, and when he put food in front of them, he noticed that their hands did not reach out to it and they did not eat from it, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But when he saw that their hands did not reach out towards it, he deemed their conduct strange and became apprehensive of them. [But] they said: ‘Fear not! Behold, we are sent to the people of Lut [Lot].’' (*Hud:* 70)

That was because Ibrahim *peace be upon him* knew that if someone came as a guest and was offered food, but refused to eat from it, one should not expect that they come with good in mind, but rather that they had come with bad intentions. However, when he knew that they had been sent to the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*, and after they had set his heart at rest by telling him the good news that Allah *Glorified is He* had sent them with, he felt at ease. That part of the story is dealt with in the following verse:

قَالُواْ لَا تَوۡجَلۡ إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِغُلَٰمٍ عَلِيمٖ ٥٣

‘Do not be afraid,’ they said, ‘We bring you good
news of a son who will have great knowledge’ [53]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 53)

Thus, the angels set the heart of Ibrahim *peace be upon him* at rest, calmed him and took away his fears. They had brought him the good news that the True Lord *Glorified is He* was going to provide him with a son(1) who would become a great man of knowledge. Ibrahim *peace be upon him* received that news with great astonishment; he said:

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(1) The one who is alluded to by the word ‘son’ here is Isaac *peace be upon him*, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…[But] they said: ‘Fear not! Behold, we are sent to the people of Lut.’ [70] And his wife, standing [nearby], laughed [with happiness]; whereupon We gave her the glad tiding of [the birth of] Ishaq (Isaac) and, after Ishaq, of [his son] Ya’qub (Jacob). [71]' [*Hud:* 70-71] Ibn Kathir says in his Tafsir (2/452), ‘It is based on this that some scholars use this verse as proof that the one who was offered as a sacrifice was Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*, and that it was impossible for it to be Ishaq *peace be upon him*, since he had been given the good news of him and the good=

قَالَ أَبَشَّرْتُمُونِي عَلَىٰٓ أَن مَّسَّنِيَ ٱلْكِبَرُ فَبِمَ تُبَشِّرُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

He said, ‘How can you give me such news when old age has come to me? What sort of news is this?’[54]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 54)

We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* created in many different forms so that created beings should know that they did not necessarily have to be created in one particular defined manner. Rather, Allah creates beings in whatever forms He wishes by His absolute power.

The usual thing is for a child to be born to a mother and a father, a female and a male. Or without either of them, as was the case with Adam *peace be upon him*. Then He *Glorified is He* created Eve from only a male, created Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from only a mother, and Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* from a male and a female.

In the verse which we are in the process of discussing, we find Ibrahim *peace be upon him* feeling amazed that he would be a father, given the fact that he was getting very elderly at the time as is mentioned in this verse: '...despite the fact that old age has overtaken me?' (*al-Hijr:* 54)

The Arabic preposition (*‘ala,* equaling *'on'* in English) (corresponding to 'despite' in this verse) meaning 'with', so it means that it is difficult, for him, to beget children with his old age. I always say that the word *‘ala* gives a wide variety of meanings in the Noble Quran. Sometimes, it is replaced by another preposition to convey a specific meaning, like when He *Glorified is He* says: '…and I shall most certainly crucify you in great numbers on trunks of palm-trees…' (*Ta Ha:* 71) Crucifixion is on trunks of palm-trees, or alike thing, and yet the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic preposition (*fi, meaning 'In'*) instead of (*‘ala, 'on'*). And He *Glorified is He* does that in order

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= news that he in turn would give birth to Ya’qub *peace be upon him*. So, how could Ibrahim *peace be upon him* be commanded to sacrifice him when he was still a young boy and had not yet begot Ya’qub *peace be upon him* whose existence had been promised?’

to indicate how violently they were crucified, with their crucified hands and feet almost being forced inside the trunks of wood.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...Do you give me this glad tiding despite the fact that old age has overtaken me?' (*al-Hijr:* 54)

Do you give me the good news of being a father to a learned boy despite the fact that I am an old man? What is understood by that is that it is almost inconceivable for being old and advanced in years to go hand in hand with having the capacity to sire children.

Therefore, the Arabic preposition *'ala* is being used with the meaning of 'with', i.e. how can you give me the good news of a boy despite the fact that I am an old man. However, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* said these words having complete faith in the power of Allah. In another verse, Ibrahim said: 'All praise is due to Allah, who has bestowed upon me, in my old age, Ishmael and Isaac! Behold, my Lord hears indeed all prayer' (*Ibrahim:* 39). It is as if, for Ibrahim, old age is something that does not go with the ability to sire children. Then, the angels responded to Ibrahim *peace be upon him*, the most beloved one (after the Prophet Muhammad) to the Most Merciful:

قَالُوا۟ بَشَّرْنَـٰكَ بِٱلْحَقِّ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ ٱلْقَـٰنِطِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

They said, 'We have told you the truth, so do not despair'[55] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 55)

It is as if the angels were saying to him, 'We are not those who have done that. Rather, we are simply giving you the good news of what Allah *Glorified is He* wants for you. So do not be of those who despair.'

The same story was repeated, after Ibrahim *peace be upon him*, with Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and Yahya (John), when Zakaryya *peace be upon him* called on his Lord to grant him a son, saying: 'who will be my heir as well as an heir [to the dignity] of the House of Ya'qub [Jacob]; and make him, O my Lord, well-pleasing to You!' (*Maryam:* 6)

Then the good news about Yahya *peace be upon him* came to him; Zakaryya *peace be upon him* said to his Lord: '[Zakaryya] exclaimed: 'O my

Lord! How can I have a son when my wife has always been barren and I have become utterly infirm through old age?' (*Maryam:* 8)

If you want to know an example of the secrets of the literary style of the Quran, you should read Allah's response to Zakaryya *peace be upon him*: 'And so We responded unto him, and bestowed upon him the gift of John, having made his wife fit to bear him a child...' (*al-Anbiya':* 90).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say that he had made both of them fit [so as to have a child], and that indicates that it was the wife of Zakaryya who had been barren, not he. Later in our days, it was proven by science that a man's fertility and ability to sire is not limited by age, while the ability of a woman to conceive is limited and does not extend beyond a particular age.

Then, if we reflect on Allah's Words: '...and bestowed...' (*al-Anbiya':* 90), we find that it proves that Allah's power is unrestricted in terms of gifting and fixing what has been spoilt and ruined. Nothing is beyond His ability; He *Glorified is He* is able to give and to make necessary arrangements for His gift to take place. Here the angels say to Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: 'they said, "We have given you good tidings in truth"' (*al-Hijr:* 55), i.e. they were not responsible for fulfilling the good news, but only for passing it truthfully to him. That is why they said after that: 'so do not be of the despairing' (*al-Hijr:* 55).

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* states what Ibrahim *peace be upon him* replied to the angels:

قَالَ وَمَن يَقۡنَطُ مِن رَّحۡمَةِ رَبِّهِۦٓ إِلَّا ٱلضَّآلُّونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

He said, 'Who but the misguided despair of the mercy of their Lord?' [56] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 56)

Here, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* announces that he does not despair of the mercy of his Lord, and that his amazement is at the unrestricted nature of the power that is suggestive of the powerful Oneness. His amazement was not at the event that took place itself, but rather, at the manner in which it took place, for anyone who reflects will see that there is something in the way it happened. And that is because Ibrahim *peace be upon him* knew with absolute certainty that Allah's power was unrestricted, for he had already said before this: '...Show me how You give life unto the dead!…' (*al-Baqara:* 260)

We notice that he did not ask, ‘Can you bring the dead to life?’, but instead asked about the process by which Allah *Glorified is He* brings the dead to life. And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks him: '...Have you, then, no faith?…' (*al-Baqara:* 260) So Ibrahim *peace be upon him* replied: '...Yea, but [let me see it] so that my heart may be set fully at rest...' (*al-Baqara:* 260). Then Ibrahim *peace be upon him* experienced how it happened(1) by Allah *Glorified is He* commanding him to take four birds, then cut them into pieces and place each piece separately on each hill, and then summon them and they will come walking to him. That is why Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was not despairing of the mercy of his Lord, but rather was simply asking about the process by means of which Allah *Glorified is He* implements His mercy.

That conversation was not only between Ibrahim *peace be upon him* and the angels, for his wife Sara *peace be upon her* also participated in it; the True Lord *Glorified is He* has quoted Sara in the chapter of *Hud:* '...Oh, woe is me! Shall I bear a child, now that I am an old woman and this husband of mine is an old man? Verily, that would be a strange thing indeed!’[72] Answered [the Messengers]: ‘Do you deem it strange that Allah should decree what He wills? The grace of Allah and His blessings be upon you, O people of this house! Verily, ever to be praised, sublime is He!’[73]' (*Hud:* 72-73) By this, we see that some parts of the Quran complete what is said in other parts of the Quran, with every extract coming in its specified place. Then, when we gather all those extracts together, we find that they give us the complete story.

Here in the chapter of *al-Hijr,* we find Ibrahim *peace be upon him* questioning the angels who brought him the good news of a son about the basic task for which they had come and which had caused him a degree of apprehension. For he had looked upon them and felt that they had come for some purpose other than giving him the good news of a son, for the passing on of such good news would only have required the presence of a single angel.

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(1) *Allah Glorified is He says: '...Take, then, four birds and teach them to obey you; then place them separately on every hill [around you]; then summon them: they will come walking to you. And know that Allah is almighty, wise.' (al-Baqara: 260), so Ibrahim peace be upon him got hold of four birds, slaughtered them and cut them up into pieces, plucking out their wings, tearing them up and mixing them up with each other. Then, he divided them into segments and placed one segment on each hilltop. Then, he took their heads in his hand, and Allah Glorified is He commanded him to summon them to him, and so he summoned just as Allah Glorified is He had commanded him to do. Then, he began to see feathers flying towards feathers, blood towards blood, and flesh towards flesh until each bird was standing on its own. Then they came back to him swiftly. (Ibn Kathir mentioned it in his Tafsir 1/315).*

But as for these angels who had come, there were too many of them for such a task, and so Ibrahim *peace be upon him* asks this question:

قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكُمْ أَيُّهَا ٱلْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

And then asked, ‘Messengers, what is your errand?’ [57] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 57)

What is the great matter for which you have actually come? For the word (*khatb, mentioned* in the Quran verse, meaning great matter or issue, ' what other issue may you have in view?') is used for an important event that happens to people. It is called *khatb* because it is so significant that it occupies the minds of everyone and becomes the main topic of their conversations to the extent that they speak about that matter whenever they meet one another.

That is why the desire for marriage between a man and a woman, and he going to her family to ask for her hand, is called a *khitba*, for it is an important and significant matter. That is because if someone were to look at a woman, and one of her family were to see him looking at her, her relative’s jealousy would cause them to take vengeance on her behalf. But, as soon as the person who wants to marry her knocks on the front door and asks for her hand, the matter becomes very different because a woman’s family gives a good reception to those asking for her hand in marriage. It is an Arabic saying that ‘The lawful conduct cuts the nose of jealousy right off.’

Here, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* says to the angels, ‘And what [else] may you have in view, O you [heavenly] messengers?’ That is: 'What important matter has brought you here?' The answer from the angels comes in the following Words of the The True Lord *Glorified is He*:

قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّآ أُرۡسِلۡنَآ إِلَىٰ قَوۡمٖ مُّجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

They replied, ‘We have been sent to a people who are guilty’ [58] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 58)

We know that the word *qawm* (people) is derived from the word *qiyam*, (standing); *qawm* means the people who stand up and manage hard events. The word generally refers to men and not women, since women do not tend to stand up and manage such events. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who settles this issue clearly when He *Glorified is He* says: '...No people (men) shall deride [other] people (men): it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves; and no women [shall deride other] women: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves...' (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

If the word *qawm* could be used for women, then the True Lord *Glorified is He* would have used it to describe women as well, and the reason he does not is so that we know that it is men who stand up for events, and that it is a woman’s place to look after her family, and so she does not stand up except for those things which are specifically related to her home.

Here the angels inform Ibrahim *peace be upon him* that they are messengers sent to a sinful people, namely, the people of Lut (Lot) who put a heavy burden on Lut *peace be upon him* by denying him and committing the wrong actions to which they had become addicted. But, the True Lord *Glorified is He* excludes the family of Lut *peace be upon him* from committing the crimes of the people of Lut, the majority of whom were corrupt deviants. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَّآ ءَالَ لُوطٍ إِنَّا لَمُنَجُّوهُمۡ أَجۡمَعِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

But We shall save the household of Lot [59] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 59)

This excludes the household of Lut from the sinners(1). A sinner is one who is cut off from the truth, so a sin is cutting oneself off from the truth in order to support falsehood. The word *qawm* is often used for the group of sinners. Thus, the family of Lut were excluded from these sinners who sinned against the Path of Allah and the values which Lut *peace be upon him* was calling them to. So, the angels were sent to save those who believed and destroy those who turned aside and kept aloof both in a single mission. Then, a new exemption comes, whereby the True Lord *Glorified is He* decides that the wife of Lut *peace be upon him* will be among those who are destroyed; so He *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi says, posing a question, ‘Is this exemption *(muttasil)* (i.e. one whereby she is considered to be connected to those she is being exempted from), or is it *(munfasil)* =

إِلَّا ٱمْرَأَتَهُۥ قَدَّرْنَآ ۙ إِنَّهَا لَمِنَ ٱلْغَٰبِرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

All except his wife: We have decreed that she will be one of those who stay behind [60] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 60)

We know, in terms of language, that when exception clauses follow on, one after the other, the first exemption is exempted from the original statement, the second exemption is exempted from the first exemption, and the third exemption is exempted from the second exemption. An example of this is when someone owes you money and says to you, ‘There are ten pounds for you barring four’, i.e. he admits that he still owes you six pounds, then you look at him so that he may remember how many he has actually paid you, so he then says, ‘barring one pound.’ In this way, he admits to you that he owes you seven pounds after previously having admitted to six. And that is because he said, ‘There are ten pounds for you barring four’, and then added, ‘barring one pound’. In this way, he excludes one pound from the four pounds that he said that he paid you, meaning that what he actually paid you was three pounds, and that seven pounds remain due.

= (i.e. one whereby she is considered separate from those she is being exempted from)? The author of Al-Kashshaf says, ‘If this exemption from the people was *munfasil* then it is the people who are described as being sinners and the household of Lut *peace be upon him* are not sinners - they are two different categories of people, so here the exemption is *munfasil*. But if the exemption from the pronoun implicit in the word ‘sinners’ was *muttasil*, then it is as it were being said that all the people were sinners except from the household of Lut *peace be upon him* alone. *(See Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi’s tafsir of the aya).*

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* excludes the wife of Lut *peace be upon him* from those whom He *Glorified is He* had excluded from destruction and to whom He had granted salvation, namely the household of Lut *peace be upon him*.

The angels who said that did not decree that the wife of Lut would be destroyed; they were simply carrying out the highest decree, for it was the True Lord *Glorified is He* who decreed and commanded that: '...she should be among those who stay behind!' (*al-Hijr:* 60)

Here the word (*ghabir,* meaning 'who stay behind') means one who enters a place, or it is one of those words that can convey two opposite meanings. The wife of Lut will not be saved because those whose salvation was decided were those who were going to leave the town, while those who stayed behind in it were to be destroyed. The wife of Lut was among those to stay behind in the punishment. Exemption from a negative statement is an affirmative statement and exemption from an affirmative one is a negative one; the fact that the wife of Lut was exempted from those saved means that she was one of those to be destroyed.

Then the chapter moves on from the story of Ibrahim *peace be upon him* to that of Lut *peace be upon him*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَ ءَالَ لُوطٍ ٱلْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّنكَرُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

And when the messengers came to the household of Lot [61]
He said, 'You are strangers' [62] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 61-62)

This is what Lut *peace be upon him* said to the angels when they came to him; in terms of appearance, they were as beautiful as could be, and he knew that his people were given over to homosexuality and abnormal obscene sexual acts. And that is why we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* saying elsewhere in the Quran about how Lut interacted with the angels: '...he was sorely grieved on their account, seeing that it was beyond his power to shield them...' (*Hud:* 77). That was because Lut *peace be upon him* knew that his people would covet these beardless young men, and that is why he announced to them, no sooner had they arrived, that their presence was not really welcome. That was due to the fact that they had come to him in the form of young men with exceptional good looks, and that would prove too alluring to his people. As well, the angles entered to Lut without any signs of travelling appearing on them and they are not natives from the area where he was residing in. Therefore, he was not at ease in their presence.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions what the angels said in the moment that they set the mind of Lut at rest and revealed their task to him:

قَالُواْ بَلْ جِئْنَـٰكَ بِمَا كَانُواْ فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

They said, ‘We have brought you what they said
would never happen [63] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 63)

Thus, they announced to Lut *peace be upon him* why they had come to him and that was to bring punishment down upon the people who had oppressed him. For those people had doubts about the ability of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to afflict them by unavoidable torture. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* was consoling him about that.

Then, they further emphasised the upcoming truth in the next verse, saying:

وَأَتَيْنَـٰكَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَإِنَّا لَصَـٰدِقُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

We have brought you the Truth.
We speak truly [64] [the Quran, *al-Hijr:* 64]

We have come to you by a command from the True Lord *Glorified is He* to punish them; there is no room for doubt about it, for we are speaking the truth in terms of what we have conveyed to you. Then, they say to him:

فَأَسْرِ بِأَهْلِكَ بِقِطْعٍ مِّنَ ٱلَّيْلِ وَٱتَّبِعْ أَدْبَـٰرَهُمْ وَلَا
يَلْتَفِتْ مِنكُمْ أَحَدٌ وَٱمْضُواْ حَيْثُ تُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

So leave in the dead of the night with your household, and
walk behind them. Let none of you look back. Go where you
are commanded’ [65] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 65)

Go, you and your household, while there is still part of the night left. Sometimes the form sara (to go, to transit) is used and sometimes the form *asra* (to make to go, to transport) is used, with the two words being very close in meaning. However, the word *asra* has been used elsewhere in the Quran with a transitive meaning such as in Allah’s words: 'Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night...' (*al-Isra’:* 1). The expression they use here, ‘Go, then, with your household’ is courteous way of saying ‘go in the company of your womenfolk and your children. Here in the Egyptian countryside, we find some people who never directly mention women or daughters when they speak. They say, for example, ‘The children did such-and-such.’ It is as if the basic state of naming a woman is to be always kept hidden. That is why in many cases, we find rulings do not explicitly mention woman, but by implying, except in the cases specific to women. Here, the True Lord Glorified is He says: 'Go, then, with your household while it is yet night' (*al-Hijr:* 65).

The word *'qit' (*in the Arabic Quran verse, meaning part of night) is a collective noun. The meaning here is either that Lut *peace be upon him* go out with his household in part of the night, or at the end of the night.

This is the way to salvation that the angels told Lut about, so that he, his household, and the believers could then follow it. They advised him to follow immediately after them, saying: 'with yourself following them in the rear' (*al-Hijr:* 65), i.e. that he be at the back, in order to encourage them to go quickly. It was a custom of the Arab, that when they travelled out of a place, each of them would carry his own luggage with his family on the back of a camel. Then they would commence the journey, and the leader of the people, commonly called the *mu‘aqqib*, would stay back so that he could see whether any of the people had been left behind, fallen over or left any of their luggage behind. They called this person the *mu‘aqqib*.

Here, the angels command Lut *peace be upon him* to be the *mu‘aqqib* for his family and the rest of those who believed in him, in order to urge them on to travel more quickly, and then to carry out another command that the angels conveyed to him: 'and let none of you look back' (*al-Hijr:* 65).

Carrying out the order by not letting any of them look back, required Lut *peace be upon him* to follow behind the people; Looking around takes time, making those who look back travel less quickly. As well, looking back at their home might stir up longing in their hearts for the places of memories and the land of their birth. This would have hampered the movements of the entire group. That is why Lut was given the Divine Command: 'and let none of you look back, but proceed whither you are bidden' (*al-Hijr:* 65). Or, it may be that the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want any of them to turn around because they might set eyes on the punishment, or the initial phases of the punishment, that was going to descend upon the people and then might feel pity for them.

We all know what the True Lord *Glorified is He* says with respect to carrying out any of the hard punishments that He legislated: '...and let not compassion with them keep you from [carrying out] this law of Allah…' (*an-Nur:* 2). If one of the believers were to have looked back at the punishment, or the initial stage of the punishment, he might feel tenderness or pity towards them, despite the fact that their punishment was as a result of a major sin, for they had committed a terrible action. We all know how disgusting the deeds they had done were, and yet still the immense painfulness of a punishment may still leave its mark on one in the moment that the wrongdoer is being punished. Or it may be that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the saved people to hurry away before the punishment comes, even if it were only the terror accompanying the first stage of the punishment afflicting the disbelievers.

Thus, the command to travel by night was directed at the people whom Allah *Glorified is He* had decided to save. The way it was to happen was for them to go out in part of the night, with Lut *peace be upon him* following behind them, and none of those who were saved to look behind, so that they could go where Allah *Glorified is He* had commanded them to go. It is said that the destination was the Levant. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَضَيْنَآ إِلَيْهِ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْأَمْرَ أَنَّ دَابِرَ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ مَقْطُوعٌ مُّصْبِحِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

We made this decree known to him: the last remnants of those people would be wiped out in the morning [66] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 66)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And [through Our messengers] We revealed...this decree…' (*al-Hijr:* 66), it means, ‘We revealed to him’.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* firstly spoke about saving the believers from the people of Lut, and then about punishing the deviant unbelievers and His decree of wiping them out. *qat‘ ad-dabir* (Cutting of the last remnant) is pulling something out by the roots. And that is why it says in the Quran: 'and [in the end,] the last remnant of those folk who had been bent on evildoing was wiped out...' (*al-An‘am:* 45).

Thus, we understand that *qat‘ ad-dabir* means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* completely destroyed them so that none of them remained on the earth. The appointed time for that destruction was the early morning; after Lut *peace be upon him* and those with him left during the night and reached a place of safety, Allah’s Command came to destroy the deviants in the early morning.

Starting in the early morning is one of the main principles of warfare. It is said that the majority of wars start with emergence of the first rays of the sun. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But then, once it alights upon them, hapless will be the awakening of those who were warned [to no avail]!' (*as-Saffat:* 177) Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to take them while they were relaxed and had no capacity whatsoever to resist.

What the True Lord *Glorified is He* says here: 'The last remnant of those [sinners] shall be wiped out in the Morn’ (*al-Hijr:* 66), does not contradict what He *Glorified is He* says about them in another verse: 'And thereupon the blast [of Our punishment] overtook them at the time of sunrise' (*al-Hijr:* 73). It is as if the blast began in the early morning, and only finished at sunrise. In this way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes the matter very clear to Lut *peace be upon him* before the event takes place; the angels told Lut *peace be upon him* about what was going to happen.

Then, after this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* goes back to the people of Lut who did not know what was going to happen to them, saying:

وَجَآءَ أَهۡلُ ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ يَسۡتَبۡشِرُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

The people of the town came along, revelling [67]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 67)

When the inhabitants of the city from among the people of Lut learnt that a delegation of handsome beardless young men had arrived in the house of Lut, they came to him in a state of happiness and joy, for the beauty of those young men was the stuff metaphors are made from. It was as if the words that were spoken about Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* applied to each of them: '...This is no mortal man! This is nought but a noble angel!' (*Yusuf:* 31)

Allah’s Words: 'And the people of the city came [unto Lut], rejoicing at the glad tiding' [*al-Hijr:* 67] combine various different elements of the disgusting practice that was prevalent amongst them, a practice in which they use to rejoice. They were the ones to whom Allah’s Words apply: 'they would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did: vile indeed was what they were wont to do!' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 79)

Lut *peace be upon him* knew that this practice was prevalent among them and knew what would happen to them, so he wanted to block them from doing that deed with the angels who were in his neighbourhood and were guests of his. Tradition necessitates that a guest be honoured by his host, and any humiliation that happens to a guest also humiliates the host. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states what Lut *peace be upon him* said:

قَالَ إِنَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ضَيۡفِي فَلَا تَفۡضَحُونِ ﴿٦٨﴾

And he told them, ‘These are my guests, do not
disgrace me [68] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 68)

Shame and disgrace is disclosing defects and exposing hidden matters about which people are embarrassed, for a human being might do things that he would be embarrassed for others to know about. When The True Lord *Glorified is He* orders that we follow the good manners indicated by His attributes, He has already given His creation a portion of each of His attributes of beauty and majesty.

But there are some of His attributes that He mentions without also mentioning its opposite. For example, He *Glorified is He* has said, ‘The One who brings harm’ with its opposite being, ‘The One who brings benefit’; He has also said, ‘The Reliever’ with its opposite being, 'The Constrictor'; and ‘The One who Bestows of Honours’ with its opposite being, ‘The One who humiliates’.

And one of His Names is ‘The One who covers up’(1), and He does not mention its opposite which is, ‘The One who exposes’. But why does He *Glorified is He* not mention this opposite? It is because He *Glorified is He* wants to protect creation so that every individual can derive enjoyment from the good deeds of wrongdoers. For if you know the bad actions that a man commits, you may spit on him, That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to cover up the wrong actions of wrongdoers and only make their good actions apparent to others.

Then Lut *peace be upon him* said to his people, after forbidding them, from approaching and disgracing his guests:

وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَلَا تُخۡزُونِ ﴿٦٩﴾

Fear God, and do not shame me [69]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 69)

Put a barrier between you and Allah's wrath and do not cause me humiliation and shame before my guests due to the atrocity you want to commit. *Ittiqa* (being conscious, protecting oneself) derives from the Arabic word *wiqayah* which means taking care of oneself against evil and avoiding it; the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have attained to faith! Ward off from yourselves and those who are close to you that fire [of the hereafter] whose fuel is human beings and stones…' (*at-Tahrim:* 6).

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his book ‘Al-Asna fi sharh asmaa Allah Al-husna’ (1/167), ‘Among the Names attributed to Allah Glorified is He are (As-Sattar) and (As-Satir) (The One who shelters, protects and covers), but I have not seen who it was who mentioned these names, or who numbered them amongst the Names of Allah Glorified is He although the action to which they refer has been mentioned in a number of Hadiths, including that of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him in which he narrates the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him saying, ‘Whoever covers up the fault of a Muslim, Allah Glorified is He will cover up his faults in this world and the Next.’ It is transmitted by Muslim.’*

place a barrier between yourselves and the hellfire, and take care that you do not fall into it by keeping well away from those things that are forbidden, for doing that which you are warned against is a path to the fire, while keeping well away from it is a protection against it. One of the remarkable things about this *taqwa* (synonym of ' *ittiqa'*) is that you find the True Lord *Glorified is He* saying in the Noble Quran, and the entire Quran is the Word of Allah: '...have *taqwa* of Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 194). And He also says: 'have *taqwa* of the fire...' (*Al-'Imran:* 131) How can we conduct ourselves in the same way towards the True Lord *Glorified is He* and against the Fire in which the unbelievers are going to be punished?

The meaning is, 'Do not do what will make Allah *Glorified is He* so angry with you that you will be punished in the hellfire.' It is as if you have placed a barrier between yourselves and the fire by avoiding acts of disobedience. But if you have done what is required from you, been content with what the pre-determined actions for you and kept clear of the things you have been warned against, then you have had (*taqwa*) of Allah.

But they did not comply with his requests as they remained entrenched in their sinful ways and said what the True Lord *Glorified is He* states them as saying:

قَالُوٓاْ أَوَلَمۡ نَنۡهَكَ عَنِ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٧٠

They answered, 'Have we not told you not to interfere [between us and] anyone else?' [70] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 70)

'Did we not warn you before about taking young men as guests whose beauty is unsurpassed? But since you have offered your hospitality to these young men, you must then let us do whatever foul acts we want to do with them.' They used to subject every stranger to evil. Lut *peace be upon him* tried his utmost to stop them, but they refused to grant his guests safe asylum from their shameless oppression, and asked to leave them to their own devices so that they could spread corruption throughout existence just as they wanted. So, they said, 'Do not speak, and do not object to anything we are going to do.’ This is the language used by people of misguidance and corruption. Lut *peace be upon him* tried to dissuade them from doing that by saying to them:

قَالَ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ بَنَاتِىٓ إِن كُنتُمْ فَٰعِلِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

He said, ‘My daughters are here, if you must’ [71]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 71)

If you are going to insist on doing these disgraceful acts, then why do you not marry my daughters instead? Some have tried to say here that he offered them his daughters to commit adultery with them, but of course it is impossible that such an offer be made by a messenger of Allah. No, what happened was that he offered them to marry his daughters. Then, there is the fact that Lut *peace be upon him* had two daughters, but used the plural when he said: '...‘[Take instead] these daughters of mine...' (*al-Hijr:* 71), i.e. he spoke about a large number, although he had two daughters who could only marry two men from the large number of men in the city. That is because all the daughters of all the people to whom a messenger is sent may be considered daughters of his. And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in another verse, clarifying the matter: 'Must you, of all people, [lustfully] approach men, [165] keeping yourselves aloof from all the [lawful] spouses whom your Lord has created for you? Nay, but you are people who transgress all bounds of what is right!’ [166]' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 165-166), i.e. Lut *peace be upon him* wanted to push these young men in the right direction and get them to do what was right. Then, he finishes his statement with the words: '...if you must do [whatever you intend to do]!’ in order to raise doubt in their minds that they will demean his guests in such an abominable manner. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

لَعَمْرُكَ إِنَّهُمْ لَفِى سَكْرَتِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

By your life [Prophet], they wandered on in their wild
intoxication [72] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 72)

Here, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is the one being addressed. As for the word *‘amruka* ('*as you live*'), it means the appointed age for a person to live normally in this world. Sometimes, the Arabic word is pronounced *'umruka* and sometimes it is *'amruka*, but whenever the Arabs made an oath they always chose the word *'amruka*. It is similar to when we say in day-to-day life, *wa hayatika* that is (I swear on your life).

It is in these Noble Words in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* that the people of illumination and gnosis find the proof that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has honoured the Messenger of Muhammad in that He *Glorified is He* did not call him by his public name, saying, 'O Muhammad!' or 'O Ahmad!' as He addressed all the other Messengers, but instead only addressed him by saying: 'O Apostle...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67). Or: 'O Prophet...' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12) and that is a great mark of honour.

And here in this verse, we find another mark of honour, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes an oath by the life of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. We know that the True Lord *Glorified is He* swears by whatever He wishes to swear by; He swears by the sun, the places, the stars positions, and the star when it descends. He *Glorified is He* is the Creator who has full knowledge of everything He has created; indeed, the only one who knows the greatness of a creature is the One Who created it, for He knows the task of every being He created. But, still, He *Glorified is He* commands us to not swear by anything except for Him, since we do not know the complete picture or the true reality of things.

Allah *Glorified is He* has sworn by everything in existence, but He has not sworn by any human being except for Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*, for He says here: '...'As you live…' (*al-Hijr:* 72) i.e. 'By your life, Muhammad, they are stumbling blindly in their (*sakra*).'

Sakra is the mental stupefaction that happens to someone whose perception is rendered faulty by some perverted belief or deviant practice, or simply by imbibing a substance that badly affects the consciousness. As for: '...they are but blindly stumbling to and fro!' (*al-Hijr:* 72), it means that they were confused with respect to their choices. Then the punishment comes, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَخَذَتۡهُمُ ٱلصَّيۡحَةُ مُشۡرِقِينَ ٧٣

And the blast overtook them at sunrise [73]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 73)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* previously told us that the last remnant of them would be wiped out in the morning, while, here, He tells us that the blast took them at sunrise. These days, we see certain games and sports such as karate in which the participant lets out a cry when facing his opponent in order to make him more frightened. And similarly, we see certain types of shouting in the military training of commandos, the purpose of which is to instil fear in the hearts of enemy combatants.

Everything that requires one's opponent to be terrified starts with a shout that causes him to lose his mental equilibrium. And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'Behold, We let loose upon them one single blast [of Our punishment], and they became like the dried-up, crumbling twigs of a sheepfold.' (*al-Qamar:* 31) On another occasion, the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls it 'a violent upheaval': 'Now as for the Thamud – they were destroyed by a violent upheaval [of the earth]' (*al-Haqqa:* 5) Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

فَجَعَلۡنَا عَٰلِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمۡطَرۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ حِجَارَةٗ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ ٧٤

We turned their city upside down and rained on them a
shower of clay stones [74] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 74)

If its upper parts have been overturned to become its lower parts, that is an organised and directed form of vengeance. If it had not been an organised vengeance, then some of what was in that city would not have been toppled to the right or to the left. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give us a picture of what happened in order to show us that He has the power to do whatever He *Glorified is He* wants in whichever way He wants. The True Lord *Glorified is He* rained down upon them stones of hard-baked clay just like those that He rained down upon those who attacked the *Ka'ba* in the year in which the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was born. These stones were made from the clay of a substance known only to the True Lord *Glorified is He*. When clay is hardened, it is known as *sijil*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who says about exactly the same incident in the chapter *adh-Dhariyat:* 'to let loose upon them lumps of clay' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 33). The True Lord *Glorified is He* sent these stones down upon them to wipe them out completely until no one of them remained. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَٰتٍ لِّلْمُتَوَسِّمِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

There truly is a sign in this for those who can learn [75] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 75)

Thus, the punishment which the True Lord *Glorified is He* unleashed upon the people of Lut *peace be upon him* was a clear sign for the *mutawassimin* (*'those who can read the signs'*). *mutawassim* is someone who discerns the reality of things that are hidden by means of reading things that are readily apparent. One might say, ‘I discerned such-and-such in so-and-so’, meaning that he concluded form someone's outward disposition their inner disposition. And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration...' (*al-Fath:*29), i.e. in the moment that you see them, you see in their features what clearly shows you the faith that lies in the depths of their being. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says: '... [but] you can recognize them by their special mark: they do not beg of men with importunity....' (*al-Baqara:* 273)

Thus, we know that the *mutawassim* is the one who possesses *farasa* that is the ability to read the inside of other human beings and uncover aspects of their nature that are kept hidden deeply within them. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* Himself was the one who said, ‘be wary of the *farasa* of the believer, for he sees with the light of Allah.’(1)

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(1) *It is transmitted by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3127) and he said, ‘It is a ghariib (Hadith), and Mus‘ab ibn Salam is in the isnad.’ Al-Manawi said in ‘Fayd Al-Qadir’ (1/142), ‘Adh-Dhahabi transmitted it among the weak traditions.’ And Ibn Ḥibban said, ‘It is full of mistakes and may not be used as proof.’ The (Hadith) is narrated from Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudri may Allah be pleased with him.*

Imprinted into the Arab consciousness is the story(1) of a nomad who lost his camel, so he went to the leader of his district and said to him, ‘My camel is lost. I am afraid someone has stolen it from me.’ While he was in the process of speaking to the leader, a man came up to him and said, ‘Is your camel one-eyed?’ The owner replied that it was, so the man asked, ‘Is your camel without a tail?’ The owner of the camel replied that it was, so the man asked him a third question: ‘Does your camel have a limp?’ The owner of the camel replied, ‘Yes, that is my camel!’ The leader of the district wanted to know how the man who had come into his presence had come to know of all the distinguishing characteristics of the camel, so he asked him, ‘And how have you come to know of all these distinguishing characteristics?’ The man replied, ‘I saw it on the road. I knew that it had only one eye because it was eating the dry grass on one side and did not turn to the green grass on the other side. If it had been able to see with both eyes, it would have seen the green grass. And I knew that its tail had been cut off by the fact that its droppings were not scattered about the road like the droppings of camels who do have uncut tails. And I knew that it had a limp because its right hoof-prints left a deeper mark in the ground than its left hoof-prints.’ By this, the collective Arab memory explains what a *mutawassim* is.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes clear the place in which the city of the people of Lut was situated, saying:

وَإِنَّهَا لَبِسَبِيلٍ مُّقِيمٍ ﴿٧٦﴾

It is still there on the highway [76]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 76)

It is on an established road which you yourselves pass along when you go in the direction of that place. In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time' (*as-Saffat:* 137). So, this city is on an established route which will never be destroyed through erosion or changeable factors of this world. None of those things will have any effect on it except if the True Lord

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(1) The story of the one eyed lost camel.

Glorified is He wills it to be well-formed and well-established. It is what was called Sodom. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

There truly is a sign in this for those who believe [77] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 77)

While beforehand He *Glorified is He* says: 'There truly is a sign in this for those who can learn' (*al-Hijr:* 75), it is as if one of the responsibilities of a believer is to investigate the factors that lie behind things, come to know things by their special marks and signs, and possess the faith-based *farasah* (insight that God casts into the hearts of His faithful ones), about which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Beware of the spiritual insight of a believer, for he sees with the light of Allah.'

In this way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* completes the story of the people of Lot *peace be upon him*. Believers must learn a lesson from the punishment that seized them, for they received their just recompense for the perverted acts they had performed.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He*, takes us to a new story: the inhabitants of Midyan, who were the people of Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*. They are the companions of the thicket, the dwellers of the wooded dales about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن كَانَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلْأَيْكَةِ لَظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

The forest-dwellers, too, were wrongdoers [78] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 78)

An *ayk* is a tree with many closely intertwined branches. We know that Shu'aib *peace be upon him* was sent to the inhabitants of Midyan and to the companions of the Thicket, a place close to Midyan. These people of Midyan(1) had wronged themselves by associating others with Allah (God). The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And unto (the people of) Midyan (We sent) their brother Shu’aib’ (*al-A‘raf:* 85). He also says about the Companions of the Thicket: ‘The forest-dwellers, too, called the messengers liars. Shu'ayb said to them, ‘Will you not be mindful of Allah?’’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 176-177) By this, we know that Shu'aib *peace be upon him* was sent to two neighbouring peoples(1). The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about these two peoples:

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(1) *`Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir 2/231, 'The word Midyan was used both as a name for the tribe and a name for the city. It was located close to Ma'an on the road to the Hijaz.' He also said 2/455, 'They were a tribe of Arabs who lived in the area between the Hijaz and the Levant, in a place near Ma'an.'*

فَٱنتَقَمۡنَا مِنۡهُمۡ وَإِنَّهُمَا لَبِإِمَامٖ مُّبِينٖ ٧٩

And We took retribution on them; both are still there on the highway, plain for all to see [79] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 79)

It is said that the thing which separated Midyan from the companions of the Thicket was these trees with many thick closely intertwined branches that were close to the sea. That is why we find here the proof that Shu'ayb *peace be upon him* was sent to two separate peoples, for Allah *Glorified is He*, says: ‘...both are still there…’ (*al-Hijr:* 79).

Allah *Glorified is He* took retribution on both these wrong-acting peoples: Midyan and the companions of the Thicket. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘...both are still there on the highway.’ (*al-Hijr:* 79)

Imam is what is followed in terms of verdict and opinion, in terms of movement and stillness or in the way that takes you to the goal. Such a way is called an *imam,* because it leads us to the places and destinations which we wish to get to. That is because every part of that way is known. What seems to be the case is that the companions of the Thicket persisted in their wrongdoing and disbelief(1). If Allah *Glorified is He*, took retribution on Midyan by means of a blast and an earthquake, He *Glorified is He* took retribution on the companions of the Thicket by subjecting them to intense heat for a period of seven days during which they could find nothing to shade them from it. Then He *Glorified is He* sent them a cloud, and when they wished that it would bring rain, it, instead, rained down fire upon them and devoured them utterly, as the books of *Hadith* have told us(2). This is the punishment about which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...so the torment of the Day of Shadow came upon them—it was the torment of a terrible day.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 189)

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(1) *`The gist of what the Sheikh is saying here is that Midyan and the companions of the Thicket were two separate peoples to whom Shu'aib peace be upon him was sent. And that is indicated by a Hadith traced back to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him which As-Suyuti transmitted in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 5/91: in a Hadith narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As, the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Midyan and the companions of the Thicket were two peoples to whom Allah sent Shu'aib peace be upon him.’ And he ascribed it to Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn ‘Asakir. And that is why the Sheikh considers the pronoun in Allah’s Words: ‘...And, behold, both these (sinful communities) lived by a highway, (to this day) plain to see.’ (al-Hijr:79) to refer back to these two peoples, But as for Al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir, they both considered the pronoun to refer back to the people of Lut peace be upon himand the people of Midyan, according to the understanding that the people of Midyan were themselves the companions of the Thicket. Refer to Al-Qurtubi 5/3768 and Ibn Kathir 2/556.*

Thus, these lessons are very much like the *Imam* who leads us to see clearly what the consequences of wrongdoing and association with Allah *Glorified is He* are.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* moves on to the account of another people, saying:

وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلْحِجْرِ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

The people of al-Hijr also rejected Our messengers [80] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 80)

The people of *al-Hijr* were the people of Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*, and the area in which they lived was all made of stone. The place they lived is still known today, in the area between Khaybar and Tabuk (cities in Saudi Arabia). The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them: 'How can you be so vain that you set up monuments on every high place? 129 Do you build fortresses because you hope to be immortal?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 128-129)

They had rejected their Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him*. Their rejection of him implied the rejection of all the Messengers, since the Messengers came, one after the other, to proclaim the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*. They all agreed with one another with respect to their general universal principles. For the Prophets *peace be upon them* only differed with one another with respect to the small details appropriate to the environment in which they lived.

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(1) *The wrongdoing of the people of Shu'aib peace be upon him lay in the fact that they associated others with Allah, committed highway robbery and gave short measure. The Tafsir of Ibn Kathir 2/556.*

(2) *It is transmitted by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr al-Manthur 5/92 in a statement from Qatada, and he ascribed it to 'Abad ibn Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim.*

So, if the environment was one in which the worship of idols was prevalent, their Prophet would prove to them that idols did not deserve to be worshipped. If the environment was one in which people were defrauders who give less than what is due when they measure or weigh, their Messenger would come with what would forbid them from doing so. If the environment was one in which obscene acts were committed, their Prophet would warn them against such acts.

Thus, the Messengers *peace be upon them* differed from another with respect to small details of the law that corresponded to the environment in which they lived. Yet, they did not differ with respect to the wider message which specifically related to declaring the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord said about the people of Saleh *peace be upon him* that they rejected the Messengers, meaning that they rejected Saleh *peace be upon him* with respect to call to the Oneness of Allah that all Messengers came with.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them after that:

وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُمْ ءَايَٰتِنَا فَكَانُوا۟ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

We gave them Our signs, but they turned their backs [81] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 81)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions in brief the signs with which He sent His Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* calling them to belief in the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* and the truth of the Message that Saleh *peace be upon him* conveyed to them. This was best represented by the she-camel, which Saleh *peace be upon him* warned them against harming in any way, so that they might not be seized by a painful punishment.(1) Yet, they rejected him and turned away, not paying any attention to the signs that the True Lord *Glorified is He* had created for them in existence, such as the night and the day, the sun and the moon and the variety of languages and colours found within the human race.

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(1) Allah says: 'And unto (the tribe of) Thamud (We sent) their brother Salih. He said: 'O my people! Worship Allah alone: you have no deity other than Him. Clear evidence of the truth has now come unto you from your Sustainer. This she-camel belonging to=

We know that the word *Ayat* either means the miracles that accompanied the Messengers and proved them to be speaking the truth, the signs of the universe, or the verses explaining the Divine Path conveyed from Allah *Glorified is He*. The sign a Messenger brought was always in an area in which the people to whom he had been sent excelled, but at such a level that none of them were able to match it.

Usually, these signs stirred up the competitive nature of human beings, but none of the people of the Messengers was successful in bringing anything like that which the Messenger sent to them brought.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about the people of Saleh *peace be upon him*: ‘We gave them Our signs, but they turned their backs.’ (*al-Hijr:* 81) meaning, they were arrogant and turned aside from the Divine Program Saleh *peace be upon him* had brought them. *I’rad* is turning your side or back on something to distance yourself from it and not going near it. If you were to have gone to it, you would have found that it was good for you.

When you accept the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* you will find that they call you to reflect, and through that reflection you come to believe that there is a Creator Who sent these signs and so you undertake to put into practice the teachings that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought. Thus, when you reflect upon the wisdom of obeying, you will find that it relieves you from the anxiety of having to rely on someone other than your Creator, whereas if you were to take things purely on a superficial level, you would never end up believing.

That is why we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* saying elsewhere in the Noble Quran: ‘And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to.’ (*Yusuf:* 105) This means that every believer has to look closely at Allah’s signs in existence so that perhaps he

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= Allah shall be a token for you: so leave her alone to pasture on Allah’s earth, and do her no harm, lest grievous chastisement befall you.’ (*al-A’raf:* 73) can extract from that what will be of benefit to him. If you were to look at all of things that have been invented in the universe, you would find that they came about as a result of them being approached by people of knowledge who sought to discover what there was in those things that could be of benefit to others.

An example of this is the discovery of steam power, which heralded the start of an age of energy, and led to the invention of appliances that could make use of that energy. It was by this steam power, that ships and trains were able to move. Moreover, that inventor was preceded by another, the one who invented the wheel and made it easier for mankind to transport and move heavy weights.

If this is how it is with respect to existential phenomena, then if you were to reflect also on the signs that lie in the laws of ‘Do’ and ‘Do not do’, you will find that they too bring benefit to your lives, and make your futures brighter. An example of this is *zakat* (mandatory alms): you pay a tiny amount of the proceeds of your work to another who is unable to work, and you find that others give to you when you are in need. That is because you yourself belong to the changeable world and are apt to vicissitudes of fortune.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues to speak about the people of Saleh *peace be upon him* saying:

وَكَانُوا۟ يَنْحِتُونَ مِنَ ٱلْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا ءَامِنِينَ (٨٢)

They carved out dwellings in the mountains,
and lived in security [82] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 82)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* blesses them by granting them a high civilisation and giving them great skill and expertise when it came to building. So, they took to building their houses in stone, using the stone that was present in the valley in which they lived. They cut those stones in a manner that allowed them to put them together and build great houses and palaces that kept them safe from the vicissitudes of the weather and other such things.

We know that those who live in tents suffer from a lack of security, while those who build their houses from baked bricks enjoy a greater level of security, but their level of security is beneath that of those whose houses are built from reinforced concrete. Thus, the degree to which a person feels safe in his house depends upon the strength of the substance which surrounds him and from which the house is built.

So, if the people of Saleh *peace be upon him* constructed their houses from stone, it means that those houses were most certainly safer than those of others. So, we find their Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* saying to them what the True Lord *Glorified is He* states him having said: ‘Remember how He made you heirs after 'Ad and settled you in the land to build yourselves castles on its plains and carve houses out of the mountains: remember Allah's blessings and do not spread corruption in the land.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 74) However, they acted badly and went to excess and rejected that which Saleh *peace be upon him* had brought. The only thing that remained for the True Lord to do was to unleash upon them a blast that would seize hold of them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ ٱلصَّيْحَةُ مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

The blast over- whelmed them early in the
morning [83] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 83)

If the mountainous nature of the place in which they lived made them feel safe and secure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent a blast that caused everything they had built to collapse onto their heads. In a former verse in the chapter of *Hud,* the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about them: ‘The blast struck the evildoers and they lay dead in their homes.’ (*Hud:* 67) He *Glorified is He* also says about them: ‘An earthquake seized them: by the next morning they were lying dead in their homes’ (*al-A‘raf:* 78).

A *rajfah* is an earthquake, while a *sayha* is one of the things that happen as a consequence of earthquakes. That is because an earthquake creates a wave in the air that leads to the creation of strong sounds that blow away those who hear them.

According to what the True Lord *Glorified is He* has said, they had the enjoyment of three full days before the blast took them, just as was promised to them by their Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him*: '…so he said, 'Enjoy life for another three days. This warning will not prove false.'' (*Hud:* 65)

The True Lord *Glorified is He*, then speaks about their state after the blast had taken them, saying:

فَمَآ أَغۡنَىٰ عَنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَكۡسِبُونَ ٨٤

What they had gained was of no use to them [84]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 84)

Thus, their citadels did not benefit them or protect them from Allah's Decree. We know that no one can stop Allah's Decree or Punishment from happening no matter who he is. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: 'An earthquake seized them: by the next morning they were lying dead in their homes.' (*an-Nisa':* 78)

Thus, it is not possible for a person to protect himself from what Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed for him, or from those punishments that Allah wills to afflict upon him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One who says: '...Tell them, 'Even if you had resolved to stay at home, those who were destined to be killed would still have gone out to meet their deaths.'' (*Al-'Imran:* 154) Thus, they all fell into the abyss of destruction, and their fortresses did not protect them from the punishment which the True Lord had decreed for them.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* moves on to the signs in the universe, saying:

وَمَا خَلَقۡنَا ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ وَمَا بَيۡنَهُمَآ إِلَّا بِٱلۡحَقِّۗ
وَإِنَّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ لَأٓتِيَةٞۖ فَٱصۡفَحِ ٱلصَّفۡحَ ٱلۡجَمِيلَ ٨٥

We did not create the heavens and the earth and everything
between them without a true purpose: the Hour will
certainly come, so [Prophet] bear with them graciously [85]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 85)

Al-haqq is that immoveable and constant thing that is not influenced or affected by anything else. An example of that would be the solar systems and galaxies, or the movements of the sun and moon - such things you find to be perfectly regulated. This is because human beings are unable to meddle or interfere in them. Human beings—who are apt to change—have no choice or influence over such things. That is why corruption is not caused by higher laws. Rather, it happens when human beings interfere. That does not mean that people should refrain from taking action to build the earth, but rather that it is incumbent upon them to be mindful of Allah's Path. That is they should refrain from what Allah has forbidden and obey His commands.

If you were to put into practice the commands of the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He says to you 'Do', or 'Do not do', then the world would be put straight with respect to those matters over which you have influence, just as it is right and well-regulated with respect to those things which you have no hand in. Read if you like His True Words: 'It is the Lord of Mercy (1) who taught the Quran. (2) He created man (3) [and] Taught him to communicate. (4) The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses (5) the plants and the trees submit to His designs (6) He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance (7) so that you may not exceed in the balance. (8)' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-8) So, if you want your affairs to be well-ordered and regulated in this world, do not transgress the balance of anything.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us not to fall into the error of imagining that we will take the blessings of this world without any check or binding. The Reckoning is coming, for there is no escaping it. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Either We shall take you away and punish them— indeed We will [41] or We shall let you witness the punishment We threatened them with; We have full power over them. [42]' (*az-Zukhruf:* 41-42) This means: what Allah has decreed will happen, and nothing, no matter what it is, will be able to stop it. Either you will see that in your life, or you will see it in the Day of Resurrection. The proof of this is what befell those who rejected, wronged and denied their Messengers and spread their corruption around the earth, and whom the True Lord destroyed through the punishment He afflicted upon them, thereby purifying the earth of their corruption. That is their recompense is in this world, and there is another recompense for them on the Last Day. In these words, there is consolation for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* because when Allah *Glorified is He* tells him about what befell the previous peoples who rejected the Messengers *peace be upon them*. The problems and troubles that were facing him from his own people seemed slight in comparison. It became easier for him to make use of beautiful patience until the promise of the True Lord *Glorified is He* comes to pass. So, it is not necessary for you, Muhammad, to overburden yourself. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ ٱلْخَلَّٰقُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٨٦﴾

Your Lord is the All Knowing Creator [86]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 86)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions here the Name denoting His power to create everything from nothingness as well as to provide from nothingness. It is the maintenance of creation which the Divine Lordship entails that provides the whole existence with its provision and takes care of it.

As for the words addressed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...your Lord...' (*al-Hijr:* 86), they mean: even if something happens to you as a result of your call and a result of your people rejecting you and standing against you, your Lord will never abandon you.

The Lord, as we know, is the One Who undertakes to develop a thing until it reaches its full maturity and potential. This is not limited to this world, but applies to both this world and the Hereafter.

As for His Words: '...All Knowing Creator.' (*al-Hijr:* 86), *Al-khallaq* is an intensive form of *khalaqa* (created). It entails the attribute of creation being extended to everything that it is possible to create. This is because He is the One Who makes ready every substance and material from which things are created. He, then, makes ready the intellect which thinks about creating. After that, He makes ready the energy to do things. Finally, He makes ready the interplay and interaction between substance, energy and the intellect which plans for all of this.

What the created human being is capable of is just synthesizing the materials which Allah *Glorified is He* has created. If there is a person who has the capacity to create, the True Lord, alone, is the One Who gives him/her the ideas on how to do it. Then, He *Glorified is He* brings cleverer persons who develop it. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Above everyone who has knowledge there is the One Who is all knowing’ (*Yusuf:* 76).

Thus, all human inventions develop and evolve. An example of this is the sewing machine which today works mechanically, but in the past required a woman to sit at it and work hard to adjust it. The same is true of the washing machine, dishwasher, cars, and aeroplanes.

We notice that one can derive benefit from the waste of everything that Allah *Glorified is He* has created, such as the dung of livestock which can be used as fertiliser. By contrast, the waste that comes from cars and the like, it pollutes the environment. Some of the rays that emanate from television sets harm people’s eyes. Indeed, research has been done into the destructive side effects of appliances like this that make people’s lives easier.

As for the things Allah that creates, they do not have any side effects. This is because the knowledge that Allah *Glorified is He* has is not acquired or given to Him by another, but is one of His intrinsic attributes. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَٰكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ ٱلْمَثَانِي وَٱلْقُرْءَانَ ٱلْعَظِيمَ ﴿٨٧﴾

We have given you the seven oft-recited verses and the whole glorious Quran [87] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 87)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of what He conferred upon him, i.e. it is sufficient for him that Allah revealed the Quran, the miraculous Book to him. In addition, He sent down to him the Divine Path which falsehood cannot reach, either from the front, or from behind. The Quran contains all the eternal and perfect qualities of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. So, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave all that to you, then He *Glorified is He* will also relieve you of the burden of everything that brings you pain. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One who says: ‘We are well aware that your heart is weighed down by what they say’ (*al-Hijr:* 97). He also says: ‘We know well that what they say grieves you [Prophet]…’ (*al-An‘am:* 33). The True Lord *Glorified is He* removed from him the worries caused by his people’s accusations of being a magician or a madman. Allah *Glorified is He* says to him: ‘...It is not you they disbelieve: the evildoers reject Allah's revelation.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33) The True Lord *Glorified is He* reveals to him that, ‘they believe that you, O Muhammad, are truthful, but they outwardly act as if they reject you.’

The blessing that the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of is that He *Glorified is He* has sent down to him the seven oft-repeated verses. People of knowledge are in agreement that the word *mathani* (oft repeated) refers to the *al-Fatiha* since it is the only chapter that is repeated often in the prayer.

We find Him describing the Quran as being ‘glorious’, and He *Glorified is He* is the One Who judges the Quran to be glorious in the light of His absolute standards of measurement. They are His standards of measurement for gloriousness.

The other example of this is the way He *Glorified is He* describes His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality’ (*al-Qalam*: 4). This is a judgement of sublimity based on the highest standards of measurement. In this way, all the pleasures of this world are less than that which the True Lord *Glorified is He* granted to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, no one should look at what has been given to anyone else, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave it to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the Quran in conjunction with the seven oft-mentioned verses, which is an example of something general, being conjoined to something specific, similar to that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Attend constantly to prayers and to the middle prayer….’ (*al-Baqara:* 238) We understand from these words that the middle prayer is included as part of the obligatory prayers. That is also similar to the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He* that came on the tongue of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Lord, forgive me, my parents, and whoever enters my house as a believer. Forgive believing men and women…’ (*Nuh:* 28). By this, something general is conjoined to something specific and something specific being conjoined to something general. Alternatively, the word ‘Quran’ refers to the entire Noble Book which was sent to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the very first verse to the very last. It can also refer to a single verse within it. So, the statement of the True Lord: ‘Both of deepest green’ (*ar-Rahman:* 64) is a verse of the Quran, yet it is also called a Quran. The True Lord also says: *‘inna Quran al-fajri kana mash’huda’* ‘…dawn recitation is always witnessed…’ (*al-Isra’:* 78). At dawn, we do not recite the whole Quran, only some of it, but we still call what we recite ‘Quran’. The True Lord *Glorified is He* also says: *‘wa idha qara’ata al-Quran…’* ‘[Prophet], when you recite the Quran, We put an invisible barrier between you and those who do not believe in the life to come.’ (*al-Isra’:* 45) The verse shows that Muhammad does not recite the whole Quran, only some of it. So, every verse of the Quran is referred to as Quran.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gave His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the oft-repeated seven and the glorious Quran—the very pinnacle of bounties. Allah *Glorified is He* has innumerable bounties which He gives to both believers and unbelievers, and to both those who are obedient and those who are disobedient. Yet, there are bounties that are exclusively given to those who believe in him. Those are the bounties of Divinity that are given to those who hear and obey the words of the True Lord when He says, ‘Do’ or ‘Do not do.’

The bounties that He grants His creation extend even to a sip of water, a morsel of food, clothing, and shelter. Every one of these has a life span. The longer the life span of that bounty, the more exalted the bounty with mankind. Moreover, the longer the life span of the bounty, the more it brings happiness.

If the bounties of Lordship are connected to material things and basics of life, then the bounties, in the Quran, encompass both this world and the Hereafter. In addition, while the bounties of this world are spoilt by a person by leaving them through death or by they themselves withering away, the bounties in the Quran do not run out in this world or in the Hereafter.

We know that there is no end to the Hereafter, unlike this world in which your life span is not measured by its life span, but rather by the life span that is appointed for you in it. If the bounties in the Quran protect the values that grant to you the bounties of a life that never ends, that is the life of the Hereafter, then this is the most exalted form of bounty. So, beware of a strong desire for temporary transient blessings that have been granted others in this world. For the one who is granted the Quran, and yet still thinks that what someone else has been given is better, actually belittles something upon which Allah Himself confers honour and glory.

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* has given you this glorious bounty, O Muhammad, what He says next comes as a consequence of this:

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِۦٓ أَزْوَٰجًا مِّنْهُمْ
وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَٱخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

Do not look longingly at the good things We have given some to enjoy. Do not grieve over the [disbelievers], but lower your wings over the believers [88] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 88)

La tamuddanna (Do not look longingly) is derived from *madd* which means stretching something out and extending it. There are distances at which an eye is able to see things, and every eye differs in that according to the capacity that it has been given. There are some who enjoy keen strong eyesight, while there are others who do not. People vary with respect to the strength of their eyesight. This is determined by doctors, in order to enable the latter to treat deficiency as best as their scientific know-how would allow them. In our daily lives people say: ‘so-and-so is far-sighted’ meaning that he has the ability to weigh up the consequences of his actions, and anticipate what is going to happen and what the results of any given action are going to be.

Madd al-'ayn (literally: stretching the eyes out) do not mean taking out the eyeball and stretching it, but rather means staring at something and looking at it for an extended period of time. The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses this particular expression in the Quran because it is almost as if a person will take out his eyeball to make use of it and look long and hard. This is what is understood from the wording of the verse, and the wording indicates the desired meaning. That is the very essence of the inimitability of the Quran.

As for the word *mata'a*, it indicates enjoyment that will come to an end. That is why the enjoyments of this world are described in the Quran as being illusory. In other words, they are enjoyments that only last for a moment.

As for the Words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '...We have given some to enjoy…' (*al-Hijr:* 88), *azwaj* (literally: pairs) is the plural of *zawj* (one of a pair), and we have previously made it clear that the word *zawj* is a singular word. Then, when a male and female get married, they come to be known as *zawjayn* (two married to each other). The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One who says: 'Glory be to Him who created all the pairs of things...' (*Ya Sin:* 36). All the *azwaj* means all of the individuals with whom there is another individual of the same type. As for the meaning of *azwaj* in the verse we are discussing, it means that those who opposed the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were several coteries or pairs. In each coterie there was the one who was astray and the one who led astray. At the time of Reckoning, each and every one of them will say: 'A speaker from among them shall say: Surely I had a comrade of mine.'' (*as-Saffat:* 51)

Thus, the word *azwaj* indicates the many different types of people who stood stubbornly against the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and rejected the Path that he brought.

In another part of the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* reveals that those whom the devils led astray will be gathered together with the devils and sent into the hell-fire: 'On the day He gathers everyone together [saying], 'Company of jinn! You have seduced a great many humans,' their adherents among mankind will say...' (*al-An'am:* 128) meaning: company of jinn, you have been able to inspire many human beings to disobey, go astray and become your allies. Thus, every coterie in which members agree upon something is called *azwaj* (comrades).

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that, 'you should beware of extending your eyes to what we have given certain groups of them to enjoy, since we have given you the highest of gifts, the miraculous Quran, the guardian of the values that form the straight Path.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* continues, saying: '...Do not grieve over the [disbelievers]…' (*al-Hijr:* 88). We say: *hazintu minhu*, (I was saddened by him), *hazintu alyhi* (I grieved over him) or *hazintu lahu* (I grieved for him). When someone becomes sad, and you are not the cause of his sadness, you tell him: 'I grieve for you'. If someone does something bad to himself, you say that you 'grieve over him', using the preposition. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* grieved over them since he wanted them to believe and enjoy the blessing that he himself was enjoying. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him: he is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 128)

Due to his compassionate nature, it was very hard for him to see his people suffering hardship. The source of that mercy and compassion was the understanding—which Allah had given him—of the immense value of the blessing of belief. In another verse, He says to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'But [Prophet] 'Are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf:* 6) It means: their lack of belief will not diminish your reward in any respect, nor will their belief increase the reward that awaits you. That is because your only duty is to convey, so why grieve at their lack of belief. The Words that the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses here: '...Do not grieve over the [disbelievers]…' (*al-Hijr:* 88) prove that the Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was eager for his people to believe because of his love for them, and to get to know the sweetness of belief in Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to feel pain and cut-up as a result of their disbelief to the extent that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to him in another verse: '[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe? [3] If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility. [4]' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that their belief is not something that would be difficult for Him to bring about. That is because He *Glorified is He* is able to send down a sign from the sky that would make them bow down in submission and believe in Him. Instead, Allah wants His creation to come to Him out of love and use well, the quality of free choice with which He *Glorified is He* has endowed them.

Glory be to the One Who does not compel anyone to believe in Him. For belief is an action of the heart. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want vessels, but rather only wants submissive hearts. If He had wanted His creation to come to Him of their own free will, compelling them to do that would prove He *Glorified is He* is Powerful. By contrast, for creation to come to their Creator of their own free will, that proves that He *Glorified is He* is loved. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants belief to spring from the worshipper's love of the One Whom He worships. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...Do not grieve over the [disbelievers]…' (*al-Hijr:* 88). Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands him to direct the tenderness and love that lies in his heart towards those who deserve it, namely those who believe in his Message. In other Words, he should spread the wings of tenderness over the believers.

Every movement a person makes is a desire put into motion after it initiates as a sentiment. This sentiment produces internal energy that prepares him to put that desire into motion and propels him towards it. So, if the Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* felt sadness on account of the leaders of Quraysh's disbelief in his Message, this sadness drained his energy. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded him to save his energy and direct it towards those who believed in him, lowering the wings of tenderness over them.

Lowering the wings of tenderness—means: being modest. This is because the word *janah* (literally: wing) means (side). When a man comes to you and act haughtily towards you, you say: 'he turns his side to me.' Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be* *upon him* to be modest with the believers and to turn towards them, not with his body ramrod straight, but rather with his body inclined towards them a little.

The Words: '...lower your wings over the believers...' (*al-Hijr:* 88) are derived from the way a bird lowers its wings, for a bird raises its wings when it flies, but no sooner does the bird come to its small hatchling than it lowers its wings over it to embrace it. So, Messenger of Allah, take the energy you used to waste on those who did not deserve it, and direct it towards those who do deserve it. It is enough for you to convey your Message to all people. Then those among them who believe are those who deserve the energy of your tenderness and mercy. Lowering the wings over those who believe in your Message does not cause them to be arrogant towards you, but rather makes them even more courteous towards you.

There is a *Hadith* that says, 'If your brother is in difficulty, then make things easy for him.' In other words, if you see your brother in a state that pains you, make things easy for him. In the pre-Islamic period, an Arab poet(1) said:

We pardoned the tribe of Dhuhl after their mistreatment
And we said the people are brothers.
Perhaps the days shall bring
Back the people as they once were.
Yet, when evil spoke out openly (and they exceeded the limits),
And bared all of it in the evening,
Nothing remained but enmity,
Which we brought close to them—just as they deserved.
We walked the walk of a lion,
That goes out in the morning angry from hunger,
Striking a blow debilitating,

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(1) He is Al-Fand Az-Zamani, whose name was Shahl ibn Shayban. He was a pre-Islamic poet from the people of Al-Yamama. He was called Al-Fand because of how huge he was, comparing to the *fand* of a mountain, which means a portion of it. He died approximately 70 years before Hijra. Al-A'lam of Az-Zirikli 3/179

Overpowering and continuing relentlessly
And a thrust, as wide as the opening of a water-skin (with a lot of blood spilled),
That starts off full, in the morning.
In evil, one can find salvation when,
Goodness will not save you.
Sometimes forbearance in the face of rudeness,
Means: submitting to humiliation.(1)

When the Quran gives a believer's conduct the color of the True Lord and His Path, it does not just mention one single way of acting and ask everyone to stick to it. Rather, it makes this moral color (behavior) matching to the different situations and people's attitudes in them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54).

The True Lord also says in His description of the believers: '...Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other...' (*al-Fath:* 29).

Thus, it does not imprint the believer with the quality of hardness or pride, but rather makes him react to the situation. If the situation is one that requires him to be hard, then he takes on hardness, but if the situation requires him to be soft, then he takes on softness.(2)

A poetic aphorism says:

Acting magnanimously in a situation that merits a sword is harmful to one exalted
Just as using a sword is harmful in a situation meriting magnanimity.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

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(1) *Abu 'Ali Al-Qali transmitted these verses in his Amali 1/309-310.*

(2) *Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir 2/70, 'These are the qualities of perfect believers - that he is humble towards his brothers and friends, but proud towards his opponents and enemies.'*

وَقُلْ إِنِّيٓ أَنَا ٱلنَّذِيرُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿٨٩﴾

And say, ‘I am here to give plain warning’ [89]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 89)

We know that the Messengers *peace be upon them* came bringing good news and a warning. Someone might ask here, ‘why is a warning expression always used?’ I say: it is only those who believe who receive the good news, whereas those who expect the warning are the denying disbelievers.

Warning involves making people afraid of something bad that could happen to them in the future. So, to protect yourself from experiencing this bad thing, you must make the necessary preparations. On the other hand, bringing good tidings involves telling people of something for which their heart wishes. It is through these two things— warning and bringing good tidings—that a person’s position becomes perfectly clear and he is able to see all the affairs of his life in full, and see the directions in which his choices take him.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has blessed His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in the two previous verses by giving him the oft-repeated seven and the glorious Quran. That is why He *Glorified is He* instructs him not to covet the fame and wealth that some of the disbelievers have been given since the Quran that He gave him is the glory of this world and the Hereafter. He *Glorified is He* also instructs him not to grieve for them on account of them refusing his call since the only thing he is required to do is to convey. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* instructs him to act humbly and modestly towards the believers to strengthen their connection with him, for they are better than all the disbelievers and more deserving of his Message. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* instructs him to tell everyone that he is a warner and a bearer of good news, in order to clarify the good which the Quran brings to the believers and the punishment it promises the disbelievers.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘My example and the example of what I have been sent with is that of a man who came to some people and said, ‘O people! I have seen the enemy's army with my own eyes, and I am the naked warner; so protect yourselves!’ Then a group of his people obeyed him and fled at night proceeding stealthily till they were safe, while another group of them disbelieved him and stayed at their places till morning when the army came upon them, and killed and ruined them completely So this is the example of that person who obeys me and follows what I have brought (the Quran and the Sunnah), and the example of the one who disobeys me and disbelieves the truth I have brought.'(1)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

كَمَآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَى ٱلۡمُقۡتَسِمِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

Like the [warning] We have sent down for those who divide themselves into bands [90] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 90)

We know that He *Glorified is He* sent His Book down to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and that people received it in one of two ways: some listened to the Quran, saw in it the words of the True Lord and so believed. About those people the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognize the Truth [in it]. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so count us amongst the witnesses.'' (*al-Ma'ida:* 83)

By contrast, another group listened to the Quran, but their hearts were like stones and thus it had no effect on them. About those people, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, 'What was that he just said?' These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed, those who follow their own desires.' (*Muhammad:* 16) That is because their hearts were full of disbelief. They went in to listen with a preconceived notion of how things were, and so they did not use a just measure to weigh up the benefit of what they were hearing.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should not grieve over them, for the same thing happened with previous Messengers *peace be upon them*. Every Messenger came with a Book containing the Divine Path, but people received those Books in the same way that your people received what was revealed to you. That is, some believed and some disbelieved. They disagreed in respect with the Books that were revealed to their Messengers *peace be upon them*.

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(1) *It is transmitted by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 6482, 7283; and Muslim in his Sahih 2283 in a Hadith from Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari may Allah be pleased with him.*

Their division was like the division of your people due to their different attitudes toward the Book that was revealed to you. So, do not feel sad when they accuse you of being a magician, claim that the book you have brought is a book of poetry, accuse you of being a soothsayer and practising divination, or lose their ability to judge and accuse you of being insane.

Thus, they divided up the Quran sent down to you by Allah *Glorified is He* into different sections: sorcery, soothsaying, poetry, and insane ramblings. What they did is just like what many peoples before them had done (with the Books brought by their Prophets). For some of them(1) said, as is mentioned in the Quran: '...'This messenger who has been sent to you is truly mad.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 27)

By this you will know, O Messenger of Allah, that this is nothing new among the Messengers(2). That is because no Messenger comes to a people unless corruption and strife have become prevalent amongst them. The nature of corruption is that one benefits from it while others suffer harm.

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(1) They were the people of Pharaoh, and this statement was made by Pharaoh when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* confronted him with the fact that he was neither an Allah nor a Lord. The dialogue between them is mentioned in the Quran when Allah says: 'Said Pharaoh: 'And what (and who) is that 'Sustainer of all the worlds'?' (23) (Moses) answered: '(He is) the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them: if you would but (allow yourselves to) be convinced!' (24) Said (Pharaoh) unto those around him: 'Did you hear (what he said)?' (25) (And Moses) continued: '(He is) your Sustainer, (too,) as well as the Sustainer of your forefathers of old!'(26) (Pharaoh) exclaimed: 'Behold, (this) your 'apostle' who (claims that he) has been sent unto you is mad indeed!' (27)' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 23-27).

(2) Allah says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Say: 'I am not the first of (Allah's) apostles; and (like all of them,) I do not know what will be done with me or with you; I only follow what is revealed to me: for I am nothing but a plain warner.'' (*al-Ahqaf:* 9), i.e. I was not a stranger or a foreigner, nor was I unlike anything else that had come before. Rather, I am just like the earlier Messengers.' Al-Qamus Al-qawim 1/57.

Then, when a Messenger comes to sort out that corruption and put things right, those who benefited from that corruption move to oppose him and impede him in any way they can, just like what happened to you, Muhammad. Like when some of them said to you: '...The disbelievers say, 'Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk…' (*Fussilat:* 26).

Statements of this sort indicate that if they were to have lined themselves up and listened to the Quran, they would have been guided by it. That is why one of their leaders said to them: '...The disbelievers say, 'Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk: you may gain the upper hand.' (*Fussilat:* 26) *Walghaw fihi* means: make it confused (by drowning it in frivolous talk).

Thus, the way the unbelievers divided up the Quran when they heard it was nothing new and had already been done with the Messengers who came before you.(1)

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(1) *There are seven different opinions with regard to who these people were who divided up the Quran in this manner:*

The first is that they were a group of sixteen men sent by Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira during the Hajj festival. They divided up amongst themselves the roads leading into Makka and said to those whom they found travelling along them, 'Do not be deceived by this man who has come out from us claiming to be a Prophet, for he is a madman.' This was what Muqatil and Al-Farra' said.

The second is that they were a group of people from the unbelievers of Quraysh who divided up the Book of Allah and declared that one part of it was poetry, another part sorcery, another part divination and another part myths and legends of the ancient peoples. This was what Qatada said.

The third is that they were the people of the Book who believed in some of it and rejected some of it. This was what Ibn 'Abbas said.

The fourth is that they were the people of the Book, and they were called 'those who divided up' because they were people who mocked, some of them saying, 'This sura is for me and that sura is for you.' This was what 'Ikrima said.

The fifth was again that they were people of the Book - they divided up their own Book, split it up and altered it. This was what Qatada said.

The sixth that it was referring to the people of Saleh peace be upon him- *they made an oath amongst themselves to kill him, and so they were called the muqtasimin. This was said by Zayd ibn Aslam.*

The seventh is that they made oaths amongst themselves to which they committed one another. This was said by al-Akhfash.

Al-Qurtubi mentioned all these opinions in his Tafsir 5/2782.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

ٱلَّذِينَ جَعَلُوا۟ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ عِضِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

Those who made the Quran into shreds [91]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 91)

The word *idin* means cutting: when a butcher slaughters a sheep or a calf, it is said that he has made it into *idin*. In other words, he has separated each of the limbs from each other and cut up its upper legs. That is to say, he has made the sacrificed animal be in pieces, after all its limbs and body parts had been—by nature—joined together.

In the same way, when the Quran came down as a single thing, some of the unbelievers wanted to cut it up into bits. The ones who are being referred to here were a group of Jews and a group of Christians who lived in the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They wanted to cut the Quran to pieces just as they had done to the two Books that were revealed to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*, which are the two Books comprising the Torah, and the Injil (Gospel) that was brought by Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says about these two groups: '...and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13) meaning: some of the Jews have forgotten some of the Torah, just as some of the followers of Isa *peace be upon him*, have forgotten some of the Injil (Gospel) that was revealed to him.

Even if we can find some excuse for them in the fact that they have forgotten, what excuse can there be for the things they deliberately concealed in those Books? Also, what excuse can they have for altering them and distorting the words that they found written in them, for adding words to them that were not part of the revelation of Allah? The True Lord *Glorified is He* exposes all of the things that they did to their Books in the Quran.(1)

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(1) The people of the Book interacted with the Quran in a number of different ways:

1. Concealing and withholding in it: Allah says: '...but, behold, some of them knowingly suppress the truth' (*al-Baqara*: 146) =

Alternatively, it may be that the Jews received the words of Allah in such a way that they affirmed the truth of those parts which entailed no hardship for them, and denied those parts that did entail hardship for them. For example, they denied that their Book had brought to them the good tidings of the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. By this, we can see how they tried to divide the Quran to *idin*, i.e. into pieces separated from each other. They tried to do that after it had become clear to them that the Quran was affective and influential.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed that the Quran contains both warnings and good tidings. So, through the medium of the clear Quran, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a warner to those who split up into different factions with regard to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. One group devoted themselves exclusively to mocking Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believed in him. Another group distributed its members to sit at the gates of Mecca during the *Hajj* days. Their role was to meet all those who came to the pilgrimage from different lands, and warn them against listening to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Among these people, there were those who described Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as being insane, those who described the Quran as being poetry and those who described the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as being a magician.

= 2. Altering and reverting its words: Allah says: ‘But those who were bent on evildoing substituted another saying for that which had been given them:…’ (*al-Baqara*: 59), and He says: ‘...seeing that a good many of them were wont to listen to the word of Allah and then, after having understood it, to pervert it knowingly?’ (*al-Baqara*: 75)

3. Distorting it with their tongues: Allah says: ‘And, behold, there are indeed some among them who distort the Bible with their tongues, so as to make you think that (what they say) is from the Bible, the while it is not from the Bible; and who say, ‘This is from Allah,’ the while it is not from Allah: and thus do they tell a lie about Allah, being well aware (that it is a lie).’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 78)

4. Adding words: Allah says: ‘Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, (something which they claim to be) divine writ, and then say, ‘This is from Allah,’ in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby; woe, then, unto them for what their hands have written...’ (*al-Baqara*: 79).

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

فَوَرَبِّكَ لَنَسْـَٔلَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

So, by your Lord, We will question them all [92]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 92)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes an oath by the attribute of Lordship that guaranteed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He *Glorified is He* would look after him and educate him in such a way as to make him worthy of carrying the message. By this attribute, He *Glorified is He* swears to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He *Glorified is He* will never surrender him to anyone. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who says addressing Musa (Moses): '...and planned that you should be reared under My watchful eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 39) This means every Messenger is brought up and kept safe by Allah's Will, and that care is for the protection of that Path, and to look after those who have been chosen to convey His Message to creation. Allah gave provision to all of His creation and then only sent the Messengers *peace be upon them* to convey to them the Message that would allow them to properly manage their lives. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* had to grant them a special type of care. As for what the True Lord *Glorified is He* says here: 'So, by your Lord, We will question them all.' (*al-Hijr:* 92) He makes it clear to us that He will ask them about the smallest of details. Just by directing such questions at them, He will subject them to a form of punishment.

Some of those who desire to find any contradiction in the Quran try to say here, 'How can Allah say in one place: 'On that Day neither mankind nor jinn will be asked about their sins.' (*ar-Rahman:* 39), then, affirms in more than one place in the Quran that He *Glorified is He* is going question the disbelievers on the Reckoning Day? How can He say that He will ask them in one place, yet, say that He will not in another place? We say to these people: 'you read the Quran in the most superficial of ways. What you say is a contradiction may outwardly appear that way, but in truth, it is not.

We know that there are different purposes for asking questions. The first is to learn something of which you are ignorant. The second is to acknowledge something you already know. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that they will not be asked, He clarifies to us that no one will be able to tell Him anything that He does not already know. Whereas, when He *Glorified is He* says that they will be asked, what is meant is that He will ask them something in order to elicit their acknowledgement.

By this, we know that whenever the Quran affirms an action in one place and negates it in another, this means that it refers to two separate directions. In other words, the thing which is being affirmed is different from the thing that is being negated. Moreover, the two things have different meanings.

So, what He *Glorified is He* says here: ‘On that Day neither mankind nor jinn will be asked about their sins.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 39), means that both the one who is astray and the one who leads astray, both the follower and the followed, will be questioned about what they did.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

عَمَّا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

About their deeds [93]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 93)

'Amal (an action) as we know, is a body organ carrying out its function. So, the job that is connected to the eye is that of seeing, the job that is connected to the tongue is that of speaking and the job that is connected to the hand is either that of caressing or that of striking. Thus, anything carried out by any of the faculties of perception of the human creature is called an *amal* (an action). We have previously learnt that an action may be divided up into words and deeds. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘...He is not unaware of what you do.’ (*al-Baqara:* 74) This means: remember that there is nothing that escapes Allah’s attention; that He *Glorified is He* knows everything that you know and that you will meet Him on the Day of Resurrection, when you will be in dire need of His mercy and forgiveness. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

فَٱصۡدَعۡ بِمَا تُؤۡمَرُ وَأَعۡرِضۡ عَنِ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

So proclaim openly what you have been commanded [to say], and ignore the idolaters [94]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 94)

It means: devote yourself to your task. *Sad'a* is making a crack in something solid, just as we split glass with a glasscutter, or make a split in a wall. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to split disbelief and destroy the strong, well-organized corruption that gave the leaders of Quraysh their strength.

This technical term *sad'a* is most commonly used with glass, since it is possible to fix cracks in almost anything except for glass. That is because it is very difficult to gather all of the fragments and tiny pieces which result from the glass being broken. Similarly, belief has come to shatter the wall of disbelief and the highly coordinated corruption.

As for the words of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '…and ignore the polytheists.' (*al-Hijr:* 94), they mean: O Muhammad, present the side of your shoulders to them (turn aside from) and do not ask about them, for they will never submit to you. That is because they benefit from the corruption that you have come to destroy. Yet, they will consecutively come to you as followers when your call has become firmly established, and their hearts will achieve the certainty that what you have brought is the truth.

An example of this is Khalid ibn Al-Walid and 'Amr ibn Al-'As (*may Allah be pleased with them*) becoming Muslims. They said, 'Muhammad has now fully consolidated his position and there is no longer any use or benefit in opposing him.'(1) So, they both embraced Islam.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

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(1) *Al-Kanidhalwa transmitted something of this sort in his book, 'Hayat As-Sahaba' 1/140 in the story of Khalid ibn Al-Walid may Allah be pleased with him becoming Muslim. He narrated that Khalid may Allah be pleased with him said, 'We have remained here firmly rooted like wisdom teeth, while Muhammad has gained power over the Arabs and non-Arabs alike. But if we were to go to Muhammad and become his followers, then the honour and glory of Muhammad would become our own honour and glory.'*

إِنَّا كَفَيۡنَٰكَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَهۡزِءِينَ ٩٥

We are enough for you against all those who ridicule your message [95] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 95)

This is said after the True Lord says to him: '…and ignore the polytheists' (*al-Hijr:* 94), and after it had become clear to everyone who was living in that time that a punishment from heaven had descended on all those who mocked Muhammad. Take Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira(1), for example, who used to strut around in his fine clothes: one day, he walked over a piece of metal, but was too proud to bend down and remove that piece of metal when it became tangled in his clothes, and that piece of metal then cut open his foot. That foot then became gangrenous so they had to cut it off. But the gangrene continued to spread throughout his entire body until he died from it.

Another example is that of Al-Aswad ibn 'Abd Yaghuth who was afflicted by an eye disease and became blind. Similar things happened to Al-Harith ibn At-Talatala and Al-Aas ibn Wa'il.(2)

Everyone who mocked the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was subjected to some form of punishment. Those who did not contract some sort of disease or affliction was laid low by the swords of the Muslims at Badr (a battle ground between Mecca and Medina), to the degree that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described the exact place in which each one of those leaders of Quraysh would meet his fate. He said: 'Here is where So-and-so will be killed, and there is where So-and-so will be killed.'(3)

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly had described those places before the battle started. We know that war involves a lot of toing and froing and a lot of advancing and retreating. However, what the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had predicted happened exactly as he had described.

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(1) The story of the death of Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira from gangrene.

(2) *al-Qurtubi mentioned some of these things that happened in the end to these people who mocked the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him in his Tafsir 5/2785.*

(3) *Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him said, 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him showed us where the people of Badr would be killed yesterday, saying, 'This is where So-and-so will be killed tomorrow, Allah Willing.' 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him said, 'By the One who sent him with the truth, they did not fall outside the boundaries that The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him had set.' It is transmitted by Muslim in his Sahih 2873; and Ahmad in his Musnad 3/219.*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes what kind of person those people who mocked the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were.

He *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَجْعَلُونَ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَـٰهًا ءَاخَرَ ۚ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

Those who set up another god beside God – they will come to know [96] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 96)

Those idolaters who mock you will receive their punishment. That is because they associated others with Allah *Glorified is He*. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...so they shall soon know' (*al-Hijr:* 96), the words he uses apply to all times. In other words, they will know now and will also know after now. The word *sawfa* (will/shall) is inclusive of all times and phases. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not seize them all in one go, but seized them at different intervals. When the True Lord seized those who have twisted minds in torture, they—who formerly persisted on abusing—might be deterred, and so they stop their abuse. So, some of them might even turn to belief. So the strength that some of them had directed against the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to be directed for him and on his behalf.

We have a clear example of this in `Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl(1) *Allah be pleased with him*. When he was badly wounded in the Battle of Yarmuk, he laid his head on the thigh of Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* and asked him, 'O Khalid, is this a death that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings*

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(1) *Ibn Hajr said in Al-Isaba (vol. 4, p. 258), 'He was, like his father, one of those most strongly opposed to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him. Then 'Ikrimah Allah be pleased with him became Muslim in the year of the Conquest of Mecca and moved to Medina. Then he went to fight against those who had apostatised, and Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him sent him to fight against the army of `Uman, whom he defeated. Then he came back and again set out to strive in Allah's Cause in the year in which he died. He was martyred at the Battle of Yarmuk.'*

be upon him would be pleased of?' Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'Yes', so he gave up his soul in peace.

These mockers set up false gods in place of Allah *the Exalted*; however, these false gods which they worshiped instead of Allah will not benefit them one iota. Once they realize this, they become convinced of the truthfulness of everything that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed on behalf of Allah.

Then the True Lord says after this:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ يَضِيقُ صَدْرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

We are well aware that your heart is weighed down by what they say [97] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 97)

These Noble Words manifest the True Lord's appreciation for the feelings of His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The True Lord assigns certain tasks to His Prophet, but at the same time He knows the hardship he endures in carrying out his prophetic commission.

This same meaning is also expressed in His Words: 'we know indeed the grief which their words cause you (O Muhammad): it is not you that they deny, but it is the Verses (the revelations) of Allah that the wrongdoers deny' (*al-An'am:* 33).

You, O Messenger of Allah, are too noble to be denied, for they bore witness to how truthful you were by how they lived and interacted with you before you received the Message. In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Indeed, We know that your breast is straitened at what they say.' (*al-Hijr:* 97)

A tightened or constrained chest means that only a small amount of air has been brought into the lungs by the process of breathing. From the air drawn in, the lungs extract oxygen and expel carbon dioxide from the body. Oxygen then works to oxidize the food in order to release energy. So, when a person feels a constriction in his chest, this indicates that his body is running short of energy.

This point is even clearer to those who have climbed up a long flight of stairs in a house or some other place and found themselves short of breath. The reason for this shortness of breath is that the lungs want to take in a greater supply of oxygen than that which they are receiving, so the heart has to work harder in order to allow the lungs to draw in larger quantities of oxygen. When the chest is expanded, one can inhale as much air as he wants, which allows the lungs to draw in as much oxygen as they need. So a person with an unburdened, expanded chest does not suffer from shortness of breath.

So, it is as if the chest of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to become tightened whenever anyone denied or mocked him, which compressed and constricted the amount of air he needed to move and act. That is why the True Lord assured him by telling him that His Strength and Support shall never cease.

You can notice in yourself that when someone annoys you and you get infuriated, you become short of breath. So he exclaims to you, ‘Why has your chest become constricted? Expand your chest a little (i.e. try to be more tolerant and patient)!’

Also, the True Lord says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘So whoever Allah wants to guide, He expands his breast to (contain) Islam…’ (*al-An‘am:* 125). That is, Allah opens up space in his heart and increases his ability to understand the meanings brought by the upright religion of Islam.

Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* also says: ‘and whoever He wants to leave astray, He makes his breast tight and constricted as if he were climbing into the sky’ (*al-An‘am:* 125). Here, we find the True Lord *the Exalted* explaining the act of climbing as being arduous which is contrary to the common belief that the higher you go in altitude, the purer the air becomes. It has been proven by science that the higher you go into the atmosphere, the less air there is.

The True Lord then guides His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to how best to heal the tightness in his chest when he was saddened or pained by someone denying or mocking him. Allah points the way, saying:

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُن مِّنَ ٱلسَّٰجِدِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

Celebrate the glory of your Lord and be among those who bow down to Him [98]
(The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 98)

This is the way through which you can rid yourself of any constriction you are experiencing – just glorify Allah *the Exalted*. Whenever someone treats you unkindly or annoys you, know that you can find the solace and companionship with Allah by means of glorifying Him. You will never find anyone more merciful to you that Him. When you glorify your Lord, you acknowledge Him to be transcendent and above absolutely everything and you praise Him so that you may live in the warm embrace of His mercy. That is why we find the True Lord saying elsewhere in the Quran: ‘Had he (Yunus, Jonah) not been of them who glorify Allah, he would have indeed remained inside its belly (the fish) till the Day of Resurrection.’ (*as-Saffat:* 143-144) So, whenever your chest tightens and you are left depleted of all means, go to the Creator of these means, the Causer of all things.

We always combine glorification and praise, for *tanzih* is declaring Allah *the Exalted* to be exalted above having any shortcomings in His Essence, Attributes or Actions. Allah’s Essence, Attributes and His Actions are all-prefect since His Self is unlike any other self. His Attributes are timeless and absolute unlike the attributes of creation, which are originated and bestowed upon them by Allah.

There is nothing that governs Allah’s Actions except His own Will. This is why we find Allah saying concerning glorification: ‘Glory be to Him, Who has created all the pairs of that which the earth produces’ (*Ya Sin:* 36). He is the One Who also says: ‘So celebrate Allah’s Glory in the evening and in the morning’ (*ar-Rum:* 17).

Both the morning and the evening are signs from Allah *Glorified is He* When the sun sets, that is a token from Allah to mankind that they should rest; and when the sun rises, that is a token from to Him to go out energetically to work. Glorification and exaltation of the Creator by the creation is something that belongs solely to Allah and none of His creatures should receive any share of it. It is as if the only way a believer can attain relief when his means of living becomes narrow and straitened is in turning wholeheartedly to his Lord, away from the harshness of mankind. Only there he can find peace of mind because he is taking recourse to the most powerful support.

Some knowledgeable believers have offered an explanation for this matter from their own prospective, which gives comfort to a believing soul in the face of harshness and estrangement from people. They say, 'If you are shunned by Allah's creation, then know that it is because Allah wants to give you His Own Companionship.'

By glorifying Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* you are acknowledging that His Essence is unlike your essence, His Attributes are unlike your attributes, and His Actions are unlike your actions. All this is in your own best interests, for your power or the power of other human beings is characterized by inadequacy and changeability. But as for Allah's Power, it is intrinsic to His Nature and both eternal and infinite. It is He Who brings you all the blessings.

Therefore, it is necessary for you to combine your declaration of His Transcendence with praise of Him. You praise your Lord because He is above and beyond any similarity to you. It is obligatory to praise Allah at all times, since it is He Who created all of the gifts that serve you as you go through life. So when you see someone who has been gifted with a skill and feel pleased for his sake and thank Allah for bestowing this gift upon him, you will receive a share of this bounty.

Any time you glorify and praise Allah, He will never break His Promise to bestow on you all that is good. Despite our best intentions, sometimes all of us break promises because we are changeable. As for the True Lord, He never breaks His Promise. Therefore, every time you glorify and praise Allah, many blessings shower on you.

Then show more humbleness and humility towards the Bestower of all blessings and favours by prostrating yourself to Him in obedience to His Command: 'and be of those who prostrate themselves (to Him)' (*al-Hijr:* 98). Prostration is the most comprehensive manifestation of submission. The face is the locus of identity and prestige. It is with your face that you meet people, and your face is the first place you try to protect and keep clean and in good appearance.

So, by prostrating and placing the most honourable part of you on the ground(1), you are humbling yourself in a way that endows you with dignity. Anyone who humbles himself and prostrates before Allah as an expression of gratitude for all the blessings that Allah has bestowed on him, Allah will give him enough honor and power to suffice for all other different purposes of prostration.

We all recall the words of the poet:

The prostration in which you dislike to remain,
Is one of thousands of forms of prostration wherein lie salvation.

Prostration is the pinnacle of submission to the True Lord. Some people hate the word *`ubudiyyah*; (worshipful servitude and slavery to Allah) because the history of humanity contains endless examples of grave injustices done by one human being enslaving another. This type of slavery, as we all know, transfers all that is useful and good in the slave to the possession of the master. Slavery to Allah, on the other hand, transmits His Blessings to his slaves, and that is the greatest possible honour conferred upon the human being. Then the True Lord says after this:

وَٱعۡبُدۡ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأۡتِيَكَ ٱلۡيَقِينُ ﴿٩٩﴾

And worship your Lord until what is certain
comes to you [99] (The Quran, *al-Hijr:* 99)

We know that worship lies in the worshipper obeying the commands and prohibitions of the One Whom he worships, and applying His Law of 'Do this' and 'Do not do that.' Yet, many people think that worship only consists of bare outward performance of rituals through the observance of the Five Pillars of Islam, such as testifying that there is no god but Allah, establishing the prayer, paying the obligatory charity, fasting during *Ramadan* and performing pilgrimage to Mecca, if economically and physically possible.

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'There is no prayer for the one who does not place his nose on the ground.' It was transmitted by Ad-Daraqutni in his Sunnan (vol. 1, p. 348) and Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak (vol. 1, p. 270), and he said, 'It was classed as authentic according to the criteria of Al-Bukhari, although neither he nor Imam Muslim transmitted it.' It was also transmitted by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (vol, 11, p. 333) through a different chain of narrators in the following wording, 'If someone does not stick his nose to the ground along with his forehead when he prostrates, his prayer will not count as valid.'*

But we say that the matter is not so. These pillars are simply the foundations upon which worship is established. In other words, they are the building blocks upon which the rest of worship is built. Everything that must be put in place for an obligatory act to be done is itself obligatory, so worship joins all these components together. That is to say, all the activities of life become worship, even sweeping the street and removing harmful objects from the road. Any action that is done for the benefit of others is considered an act of worship in itself which keeps the Muslims from being dependent on others. The performance of these pillars it is an outward sign of the strength of the Muslims through which they demonstrate the perfection of their devotion to Allah by offering the prayer five times every single day. Upon hearing the words '*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest),' Muslims immediately leave whatever tasks they are doing and put behind them the struggles of everyday life to announce their devotion to the Creator and Bestower of all blessings.

And by fasting during one month every year, Muslims announce their devotion to the Most Generous Creator. The Muslims practice abstention from many permissible things. As soon as the start time of fasting begins, which is shortly before the Dawn Prayer, Muslims immediately refrain (from food, drink and all things that break the fast).

This compliance with the Commands of the True Lord reminds you of the blessings of Allah upon you. In the course of a normal day, you would not think of doing any of the actions that were prohibited over time at the beginning of Islam. For example, no Muslim would think about drinking alcohol or gambling. Prohibitions of this sort have become so deeply impressed into our conduct and identity that they have become, for the majority of the Muslims who apply Allah's Law, something that is completely ordinary and habitual. They spontaneously put 'Do!' and 'Do not do!' into practice.

When the fast of *Ramadan* comes, you refrain from things that are lawful for you through the rest of the year, and spend every day in *Ramadan* eagerly waiting the sound of the *adhan* of Sunset Prayer that allow you to break your fast.

Thus, you comply with the command to refrain from anything that constitutes a breach of fasting, and also comply with the command to break your fast. And that is to make you accustomed to these many acts of obedience that have almost become second nature to the believers, for the True Lord wants the pleasure you experience from worshipping Him to last and last.

However, some people use faulty reasoning and follow their whims and desires when explaining the True Lord's Words: 'And worship your Lord until there comes unto you the certainty (i.e. death)' (*al-Hijr:* 99). One of these people might say, for example, trying to deceive someone else, 'I have already reached the station of certainty,' and so refrains from carrying out the obligatory pillars of Islam such as praying, fasting, paying *zakat* (obligatory alms), and making pilgrimage to the Sacred House of Allah despite his ability to do so claiming that he is no longer held responsible for his actions since certainty has come to him. We say to these people who make such a claim, 'Do you think you can deceive Allah and His Messenger? We all know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spent his days carrying out the obligatory acts of Islam, and continued to do so right up to the last day of his life. Also, we all know that the one certain thing this is universally agreed upon by all of mankind without disagreement or doubt is death.'

Certainty of the matters of the Unseen is one of the qualities of a believer. As soon as the Quran tells a believer of the existence of an issue, he believes in it and does not inquire how such a thing could possibly be. The clearest example of this is Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him*. Whenever people would tell him about something astonishing the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had proclaimed, he would reply, 'If he has said this, he has spoken the truth.'

As for unbelievers – we seek refuge in Allah from this – they have doubt about absolutely everything that is Unseen. They even doubt material things, if they have not personally experienced them themselves. But no sooner does death come than they know that it is the one certainty.

And that is why we find `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz saying, ‘I have not seen any certainty more closely resembling doubt than people’s certainty in the coming of death.’(1) We are all certain that we are going to die, but we distance ourselves from our certainty regarding this matter even though it is an inescapable reality. Then, when death comes, we say, ‘Here is the moment where nothing is of benefit to a human being except what he has done previously in his life as a believer who is dutiful to Allah.’

And that is why I always say, ‘Certainty is total conviction that allows no new thoughts to surface, after you have learned that the truth involved has been conveyed to you by authentic and fully reliable sources.’

But as for seeing with the eye of certainty, it is the certainty that comes from viewing an incident with your own eyes, or something real and true that enters straight into the heart and so you affirm it as true. Thus, there are different stages of certainty: one is a matter that you affirm totally and the mind never questions it since it comes from sources in whose truthfulness you have full confidence or because it is the consensus of a group of people who never agree upon a lie. This type of certainty is called ‘knowledge of certainty.’ But if you see the matter with your own two eyes, that type of certainty is called ‘truth of certainty.’

Believers base their affirmation and certainty upon what has been conveyed to them by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Take `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* for example, whom we find saying, ‘If the veils were to have been lifted from the Unseen matters which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* has told us about, my certainty would not have increased.’ Or Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* whom we find saying, ‘It is as if I were looking directly at the inhabitants of Paradise being rewarded and the inhabitants of Hell being punished.’ So Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘You know, so hold firm.’(2) That is the level of certainty which marked the belief of the Companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *It was narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (vol. 5, p. 3787). The statement concludes, ‘...but still not preparing for it.’*

(2) *It was narrated by Ibn Hibban in Al-Majruhin (vol. 1, p. 150) in a (Hadith) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah peace be upon him, In the biography of Ahmad ibn Al-Hasan ibn Aban Al-Misri, Ibn Hibban said, ‘It is not permissible to use this as proof.’*

the chapter of

an-Nahl

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

أَتَىٰٓ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ فَلَا تَسۡتَعۡجِلُوهُۚ سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥ وَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشۡرِكُونَ ١

God's Judgement is coming, so do not ask to bring it on sooner. Glory be to Him! He is far above anything they join with Him! [1] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 1)

This is how this majestic chapter of the Quran begins; it clarifies that Allah's Decree and Judgement regarding the victory of the Messengers and the believers is not to be doubted in the slightest, and the defeat of the unbelievers is certainly coming. There is no escape from it, if they do persist in disbelief.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had previously warned them with the verses of the Book that had been revealed to him. He warned them in the previous chapter of the Quran of some of the punishments in the life of this world, such as the victory of faith over disbelief. He also warned them before about some of the punishments in the Hereafter such as the True Lord's Statement: 'And whether We show you (in this world) something of what We hold in store for those (deniers of the truth), or whether We cause you to die (before that retribution takes place – know that, in the end), it is unto Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir:* 77). Likewise, the True Lord's Statement: 'Their assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs (in retreat)' (*al-Qamar:* 45). This is how the True Lord promised His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that He would destroy the camp of disbelief and give victory to the camp of faith. Either he would see this with his own eyes, or if the True Lord took his soul, He would see it in the Hereafter. Regarding the position of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah says: 'We are enough for you against all those who ridicule your message.' (*al-Hijr:* 95)

The True Lord *the Exalted* warned the people who ascribed partners to Him (*mushrikin*) that they would be destined to hell on the Last Day. In this regard, Allah says: ‘The Command of Allah has come’ (*an-Nahl:* 1). This is a clarification of one of the stages of giving warning, as Allah says in one place in the Quran: ‘The Hour has drawn near, and the moon has been cleft asunder.’ (*al-Qamar:* 1) That is, the Hour of the Resurrection is drawing near after which there will be the Reckoning of the Hereafter; punishment for whoever has disbelieved and paradise for whoever has believed and acted righteously. Thus, the drawing near of the Hour is not something to be intrinsically feared, but rather, it should be feared because of the judgement and punishment therein.

It has been said that the moment the disbelievers heard the True Lord’s Statement: ‘The Hour has drawn near’ (*al-Qamar:* 1), they said: ‘Let us wait for a while and see; maybe what Muhammad is informing of is true.’ After they waited for some time and the Hour did not come as the Noble Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had stated, they said: ‘We have waited and the Hour has not come.’ Then the True Lord revealed His saying: ‘Ever closer to people draws their reckoning’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1). This came as a statement about something that would happen immediately at the arrival of the Last Hour, so they refrained and waited a little while. Then they said: ‘Where is the judgement, then?’ At this point, Allah revealed His Words: ‘The Command of Allah has come’ (*an-Nahl:* 1).

When everyone heard this, they became frightened, including the Muslims. Then relief came in Allah’s saying afterwards: ‘...so seek not to hasten it...’ (*an-Nahl:* 1). That is, the matter that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was declaring would come at a time that only Allah knew; and the Muslims felt soothed.

Every event, as we know, is governed by two circumstances; the circumstance of time and the circumstance of place. The verbs that indicate these circumstances are either the perfect verb, which means that the event took place before the time of speaking, or the imperfect verb, which means that the event is happening currently, unless it is prefixed with the letter *(sin)* or preceded by *(sawfa)*. It expresses that the action will take place in the near future if it is prefixed with the letter *sin*, or the unspecified distant future if it is preceded by *sawfa*. This shows how an action can be in the past, the present, or the future.

The verb (*ata,* has come) indicates that the One informing you, Who is Allah, is telling you about something that took place before the time of speaking, and He is informing you of it. Human beings may talk about things that have already happened and inform one another of them. However, the One speaking here is the True Lord *the Exalted* and He speaks in the Quran with complete, perfect and infallible knowledge. His Knowledge is eternal and He is fully capable of bringing the future in accordance with whatever He has said. He has appointed the time and place for everything before creating it. Creation is an essential attribute of Allah; He is the Creator before having created anything. He is transcendent above everything. For this reason, He says: 'The Command of Allah has come, so seek not to hasten it…' (*an-Nahl:* 1). That is, He is the All-Knowing of the time and place of every event. The glorification of Allah has been established eternally even before He brought the creation into existence. Allah is the One Who says: 'They glorify Him tirelessly night and day' (*al-Anbiya':* 20).

Then Allah created the heavens and the earth and the rest of the universe. That is, Allah was glorified even before He created the heavens and the earth; Allah is the One Who says: 'Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorified Allah' (*al-Hashr:* 1). But has this glorification ended? No, because glorification continues forever. Allah is the One Who says: 'Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is exalting Allah' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1).

Therefore, it has been established that Allah has always been, and will always be, glorified. Then the angels came into being, to engage in ceaseless glorification of Allah by night and by day, without ever slackening. Then Allah created the heavens and the earth, and everything that is in them and between them started glorifying Him. Then all other creatures came into existence to glorify Him as well. So O you who have accepted Allah as your Lord, glorify Allah as the entire universe glorifies Him

Someone might wonder about the connection between the part 'Exalted is He and high above…' and the rest of the verse '…what people used to associate with Allah.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) We can explain it by saying that we know that these people ascribed divinity to objects and beings instead of or along with Allah. These idols which they took as gods did not assign to them any duties or responsibilities as part of worship, and did send down to them a law from heaven. Rather, these deities permitted them that which was forbidden and prohibited them from some of that which was lawful and permissible. With that these people withdrew from following the Messengers, who were conveying the truth from Allah because of the burden of legal responsibility that was attached to true faith.

These are the ones who will meet Allah and the angels will ask them: ‘Where are these partners whom you worshipped alongside Allah?’ But none will be able to protect them from the horror of the punishment they shall receive in consequence of joining gods with Allah.

So we have learned that the Transcendence of Allah – in terms of His Essence, Attributes and Actions – is essentially eternal. It has been timelessly established for Him, before He brought anything into existence and after the creation of the angels and the creation of the heavens and the earth; and then it became enjoined on every human being, endowed with the ability to choose. All mankind is divided into two groups, one believing and glorifying Allah, and anothert not glorifying Him. And indeed, the True Lord is sublimely exalted above all that they associate with Him.

The True Lord says after this:

يُنَزِّلُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ بِٱلرُّوحِ مِنْ أَمْرِهِۦ عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ
عِبَادِهِۦٓ أَنْ أَنذِرُوٓا۟ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنَا۠ فَٱتَّقُونِ ﴿٢﴾

He sends down angels with inspiration at His command, to whichever of His servants He chooses, to give [His] warning: ‘There is no god but Me, so beware of Me’ [2]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 2)

When we read Allah’s saying ‘He sends down,’ it suggests and clarifies that there is a height from which it is possible for something to come down. The example that I love to give here to explain this matter is the True Lord’s Statement: ‘Say, ‘Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you….’

(*al-An'am:* 151) That is, draw near so that you can hear from me the commandments that have been sent down to you from the One Who is higher than you. Do not remain in the lowliness of earthly life and its laws. Rather, be elevated and take command from the One Who has no personal desires regarding your affairs, and He is indeed the True Supreme Lord.

As for those who descend with the revelation, they are the angels. We know that the angels are unseen beings that we believe in because Allah *the Exalted* has informed us of their existence. Any unseen matter is unperceived by the mind's eye; the proof for it is hearing about it from a trusted person. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of what the Quran came down to reveal. He told us of the existence of the angels and that the True Lord *Glorified is He* had created them. Even though we do not see them, we believe in what has been conveyed to us from the True Lord through His Honest and Trusted Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

When the True Lord says: 'He sends down angels with inspiration at His command, to whichever of His servants He chooses…' (*an-Nahl:* 2), we know that it is not possible for something to come down from above (heaven) to below (earth) except by means of those who are near unto Allah. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* chose one of the angels(1) to convey the revelation to His messengers. The angels, as the True Lord has informed us, are described to be: 'honoured servants. They speak not until He has spoken, and they act on His Command' (*al-Anbiya':* 26-27). Allah says in another glorious verse: 'angels who never disobey Allah's Commands to them, but do as they are ordered' (*at-Tahrim:* 6).

The angels are created from light, and are not affected by changing circumstances. They have no desires of their own and they do not marry one another or have progeny. They are closer to serenity, which allows them to receive from above and convey to those below.

Therefore, we find the True Lord saying concerning the revelation of the Quran: 'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193).

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(1) *The angel meant here is Jibril (Gabriel peace be upon him). Allah the Glorious and Exalted says: 'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down.' (ash-Shu'ara': 193) Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) (vol. 2, p. 247): 'It was Jibril peace be upon him as stated by more than one of the Salaf (righteous predecessors). This is an undisputed matter.'*

In the verse under study, the True Lord says: ‘He sends down angels …’ (*an-Nahl:* 2). The comprehensive verse that explains this issue is the True Lord’s statement: ‘Allah chooses messengers from among the angels and from among men. Verily, Allah is All-Hearer, All-Seer’ (*al-Hajj:* 75). That is, He chooses angels that are able to receive from Him and give to those who have been elected from among mankind so that these elected individuals can convey from Allah to the rest of mankind. This is because beings of lower spirituality and capacity lack the power of enduring heavenly truths coming down through heavenly beings and directly from the True Lord *Exalted is He*.

I compared this before to the transformers we use in electricity to transfer from a higher voltage to a lower voltage in lamps. We all know what happened to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the first time he received the divine revelation through Angel Jibril (Gabriel *peace be upon him*). He recounted, ‘He (Jibril) pressed me so hard that I could not bear it anymore,’ and his pure forehead was dripping with sweat. He *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to his house and said: ‘Cover me, cover me!’ and ‘Cloak me, cloak me!’ This is because a higher power descended upon a human power, even though the Messenger of Allah’s power is an elected power. Then Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* grew accustomed to the reception of revelation and such hardships became mitigated. Then he received the following divine words: ‘Did we not relieve your heart for you (O Prophet), and remove the burden that weighed so heavily on your back, and raise your reputation high? So truly where there is hardship there is also ease; truly where there is hardship there is also ease’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1-6).

Then there was a pause in the revelation for some time until Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* began to miss it; so why did he miss the revelation when he had said, ‘Cloak me, cloak me’?

The pause in revelation was so that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could get used to the hardships associated with the angel’s descent; and so the hardships ceased and the sweetness of what he conveyed remained. Yet some of foolish disbelievers said: ‘Indeed, the Lord of Muhammad hated him.’ In response, the True Lord revealed: ‘Your Lord (O Muhammad) has neither forsaken you nor hated you. And indeed the Hereafter is better for you than the present (life of this world). And verily, your Lord will give you (all that is good) so that you shall be well-pleased' (*ad-Duha:* 3-5).

The word *ruh* is found in the Quran with numerous meanings, as sometimes it refers to the spirit through which material substance has life and consequently has sense and motion. As in the Words of Allah: 'So, when I have fashioned him completely and breathed into him (Adam) the soul which I created for him, then fall (you) down prostrating yourselves unto him' (*al-Hijr:* 29).

This breathing into the material substance happens to both the believer and the disbeliever. Another use of the word *ruh* means attainment of a life higher than the temporal life: 'Verily, the home of the Hereafter is the life indeed (i.e. the eternal life that will never end), if they but knew' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64).

Therefore, the angels come down with revelations from Allah about a life that is more elevated than the life that we are living and the world with which we are interacting. This is how the word *ruh* has two significances, not just one; the spirit that endows the human being with sense and motion, and the spirit that endows the human being with moral values that in turn lead to another, more elevated life than the life we live in; a life that will never be extinguished.

Therefore, the True Lord calls the Quran a *(ruh*; spirit), as He says: 'So we have revealed our revelation (*Ruh*) to you (O Muhammad) by our command; you knew neither the Scripture nor the faith' (*ash-Shura:* 52).

Also, the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls the angel that came down with the Quran a (*ruh*), as He says: 'The Trustworthy *Ruh* (Spirit) has brought it down upon your heart (O Muhammad) that you may be (one) of the warners' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193-194).

The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* explains that the Quran is a *ruh* that gives us a more elevated life, for He says: 'O Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal:* 24). That is, it takes you to the eternal life that contains no death and where there is no fear of a blessing being lost or taken away from you.

In the verse under study, Allah informs us that the Quran was brought down by the angels: 'He sends down angels with inspiration at His command, to whichever of His servants He chooses…' (*an-Nahl:* 2). That is, it was sent down at Allah's Command. The True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* says in another place: 'For each (person), there are angels in succession, before and behind him. They guard him by Allah's Command' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

The word (*amr*; command or decree) mentioned at the beginning of the verse that we are currently discussing hold this same level of meaning: 'The Command of Allah has come' (*an-Nahl:* 1). This *amr* is the result of what Allah wills for mankind's life on the earth. We know that the True Lord has numerous commands that all share the element of bringing a non-existing thing into existence. Allah is the One Who says: 'When we will something to happen, all that we say is, 'Be,' and it is' (*an-Nahl:* 40). When He wants to bring about a partial matter, He says to it 'Be!' and it is; and when He establishes a law, He sends it down. When He decides to bring about the appointed Hour, the judgement, and the punishment, He says: 'The Command (*amr*) of Allah has come' (*an-Nahl:* 1).

From this we can discern that the meaning of '*Amr* (Command) of Allah' is 'Be – and it is' (*an-Nahl:* 1). In other words, it is bringing the non-existent into existence, whether it is a partial non-existence, a total non-existence or eternal non-existence. All this falls under the word (*amr,* command or decree). The moment Allah commands something to happen; we have absolute certainty that what Allah has commanded will manifest itself. Therefore, Allah says: 'When the sky is ripped apart, obeying its Lord as it rightly must' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2). That is, the sky not only hears but also fulfils the command as soon as it has been issued, without any delay whatsoever. Allah's Command is carried out as soon as it is issued. As for the commands of human beings, they are liable to being obeyed or disobeyed.

Allah *the Exalted* and the Glorious sends down the angels with His Words to whomever He wills of His servants so that they can warn mankind. The True Lord *the Exalted* did not bring glad tidings in this context because His Statement: 'The Command of Allah has come...' (*an-Nahl:* 1) is directed to the disbelievers.

Then He declared His Essence to be incomparably transcendent by stating: 'exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him' (*an-Nahl:* 1).

Or, the True Lord may be here alerting His Messenger to explain to the people whom he would come across whatever they could not understand; for they could not perceive the manner and criteria of choosing. The True Lord alone knows whom to choose as His Messengers. The will of choosing and selecting is fulfilled according to the criteria of the True Lord; He is the One who says: ‘Allah knows best with whom to place His Message....’ (*al-An‘am:* 124) It was known to Allah that the disbelievers had said: ‘And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities (Mecca or Ta’if)?"’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) The True Lord answered them, saying: ‘Are they the ones who share out your Lord’s Grace?...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) It is the True Lord Who has apportioned among the creation their material provisions, and has raised some of them above others in rank. He is the One Who causes the abased to be exalted and the exalted to be abased. How then can these people have any say regarding divine revelations and laws? They were trying to modify Allah’s Decree, and they said: ‘we want so-and-so,’ and ‘we do not want so-and-so.’ Or the True Lord is making it clear to His Messenger that after having explained to these people the matter of revelation he must inform them of His Words: ‘…There is no god but Me, so beware of Me.’ (*an-Nahl:* 2)

Since there is no other god except Allah, the Messenger must advise them; they should spare themselves the confusion of searching for a god. Allah makes it clear to them there is no god but He, and they must be conscious and in awe of Him. This shows how the True Lord is full of compassion toward the creation. He is the True Lord Who dismissed the request of other created beings, when they expressed their astonishment at and rejection of the disbelief shown by some of humanity, and invoked Allah’s vengeance on them. But Allah said to them: ‘If you had created them, you would have been merciful toward them. Leave Me with My creation. If they repent to Me, then truly I am their Beloved. If they do not repent to Me, then truly I am their Doctor’

The True Lord’s statement: ‘….to give (His) warning: ‘There is no god but Me, so beware of Me’ (*an-Nahl:* 2) is a summation of the doctrines of the heavens and the earth. It is also a summation of the acts of worship that Allah has demanded from His creation so that their lives’ activities can proceed in a way that is mutually supportive and not mutually antagonistic.

It is as if Allah’s saying: ‘….to give (His) warning: ‘There is no god but Me, so beware of Me’ (*an-Nahl:* 2) is an explanation of the *ruh* that Allah sent down to the angels, as we clarified earlier. It expresses the second significance of the word (*ruh*; spirit) which brings the divine revelation and conveys Allah’s Way that guarantees for those who adhere to it a life whose delights last and never end and so does the one who enjoys them. It is different from the first significance of the word *ruh* which the True Lord breathed into the human being. Life flows into the human beings, giving them sense and motion, but this kind of life will surely end.

Indeed, it is out of the True Lord’s Mercy towards His creation that He has sent them the way that guides them to everlasting life instead of remaining prisoners to this temporal, fleeting life. It is also out of His Mercy that He has warned them of the evil end that awaits those who disbelieve in Him. Such a warning only comes from One Who cares. Allah loves His creation and He loves for them to be sincere believers in Him. He loves for them to live a joyful life in the Hereafter without employing means because they will live therein with the power of the word: ‘Be!’ coming from the Causer of all things.

When Allah says to them: ‘...There is no god but Me …’ (*an-Nahl:* 2), He is making it clear that there is no god along with Him, so do not associate any partner with Me and do not deny My Messengers. You must implement my way which will organise your life, and I will reward you for it in the Hereafter. Beware of being deluded by the means that I created and subjugated them to you because I am Able to take away all these means. I willed for the life of this world to be a trial and a test, and in the Hereafter these means will have absolutely no authority. ‘To whom belongs (all) sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing’ (*Ghafir:* 16).

The outward reality is that sovereignty belongs to Allah in the Hereafter, but the reality is that sovereignty always belongs to Allah, both in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. However, He willed to make the means – created with His Will – respond to mankind. Beware of thinking that you have become fully capable; because in the life of this world you have sovereignty over certain things, but a king or ruler like you has sovereignty over you. The standard procedure for the universe is that there is a system that governs everything in it.

But the situation is different in the Hereafter, as there is no sovereignty for anyone besides Allah. Even the limbs will not move according to the will of their owners but rather according to the Will of the True Lord. In the Hereafter, you will have no control over those limbs that used to submit to you in the life of this world. Rather, they will bear witness against you. Since Allah has given you the power to move your limbs in the life of this world, and you align your movement with Allah's Commandments, you are one of Allah's (*'ibad* ; sincere, devoted worshippers).(1) If you do not direct them towards what Allah has asked then you are one of His (*'abid;* literally, slaves).

After this, Allah *the Exalted* presents to you the key aspects that consolidate His command of being worshipped alone and His Declaration that there is no god except Him. Allah did not ask us to worship Him until after He had created for us the heavens and the earth. The entire universe is prepared to receive mankind in truth; that is, for a firm purpose and a law which no one besides Allah has any choice in deciding it. Allah *the Exalted* says:

خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بِٱلْحَقِّۚ تَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣﴾

He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose, and He is far above whatever they join with Him! [3] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 3)

That is, Allah *the Exalted* is transcendent above anything to which humans may ascribe a share in His divinity. No one assisted Allah in the creation and arrangement of the universe. How can you set up another god alongside Him? Allah is Supreme and far Exalted above having any partners or rivals. He created for us before He created us. He created the heavens and the earth and apportioned to each living being its share of sustenance. If you contemplated your creation, you would find that the world is contained within you. Allah is the One Who says: 'on earth there are signs for those with sure faith — and in yourselves too, do you not see?' (*at-Tur:* 20-21)

You have been created from what? The True Lord gives us the answer:

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(1) The *('ibad)* are the true servants of the Most Merciful, while the *(`abid)* are all of mankind. All *`Abid* can be elevated to the rank of *`ibad* by working righteous deeds.

خَلَقَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مِن نُّطۡفَةٖ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٞ مُّبِينٞ ٤

He created man from a drop of fluid, and yet man openly challenges Him [4] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 4)

The drop of fluid that we come from is a sperm that unites with the ovum found in the uterus of the female to produce the `*alaqah* (something which clings; a leech-like structure that attaches itself to the uterine wall). Allah is the One Who says: ‘Does man think he will be left alone? Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm which became a clinging form (`*alaqah*), which Allah shaped in due proportion, fashioning from it the two sexes, male and female?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 36-39) Indeed, every ejaculation contains enough sperms to create millions of humans. Due to its extremely minute size a sperm cannot be seen by the naked eye. This minute size can only be seen with a microscope. Hidden within every male’s sperm are all the properties that are then united with the properties hidden within the female’s ovum in order to form a human being.

Al-`Aqqad – may Allah have mercy on him – spoke the truth when he said: ‘Indeed, the size of a thimble filled to its half with sperms could produce the equivalent of the entire world’s population.’ The True Lord has willed that only the strong sperms can make it through to the ovum, to affirm for us that nothing lasts except the fittest. If the living sperm is carrying the hereditary traits that give birth to a female, a female will be born. If it is carrying the hereditary traits that give birth to a male, a male will be born.

You can observe something similar in plants, as the first grain of wheat was like Adam *peace be upon him* who was the first human to exist in the way that we know. Within this first grain the True Lord embedded the content of all future wheat grains until the Hour is established. This is the magnificence of the True Lord’s Creation.

In more than one place in the Noble Quran, the True Lord has explained to us the stages of human creation, such as His saying: ‘Then He made his posterity out of the extract of a liquid disdained’ (*as-Sajda:* 8).

The stages of human formation include the *nutfah* (male and female seminal fluids), then the *`alaqah* (a leech-like clinging clot), then the *mudghah* (a chewed-like lump of flesh), some formed and some unformed.(1)

The fertilized ovum, referred to as *nutfah*, carries either the (hereditary) female or male traits as have been confirmed by modern science. The woman has nothing to do with determining the baby's gender. As if this is intended to point to a woman's role as a dwelling and a shelter because the ovum receives the sperm and embraces it so that growth can be accomplished until it develops into a full human being. 'Glory be to Allah, the Best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) It is the True Lord Who says: 'Does man think he will be left alone? Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm, which became a clinging form (*`alaqah*), which Allah shaped in due proportion?' (*al-Qiyama:* 36-39)

The *`alaqah* stage derives its name from its function; it attaches itself to the uterine wall as has been confirmed by contemporary science. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Then we made that drop into a clinging form (*`alaqah*), and we made that form into a lump of flesh (*mudghah*)' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14).

The Arabic word (*mudghah*) signifies a chewed substance. Then Allah *the Exalted* describes the *mudghah* as being: 'a lump of flesh, formed and unformed' (*al-Hajj:* 5). Someone might ask: 'We can understand that a completely formed embryonic lump contains what is possible to become an eye or an arm, but what about the incomplete one?' We say that this a pre-cautionary balance in order to maintain the body. When man, who is a created being, starts building a house, he will buy some additional building supplies; for example, because he is taking into account any accidents that may occur; so what do we think about the True Lord who has created the human being?

Allah has made the unformed part a balance for the sake of maintenance or renewal in case of any circumstances that may occur to the human being. It remains a surplus in the body as a sort of depository for any repairs.

An example would be the wounds that occur and then the human body treats the wounds itself. We find that the wounds heal without leaving any scar or mark. This is because the treatment was carried out by the interior pharmacy that was placed in the body by the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

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(1) Allah *the Exalted* says: 'People, (remember,) if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, formed and unformed…' (*al-Hajj:* 5).

The surprise is that after all this, the human, who is created by Allah rebels against his Creator: ‘He (Allah) created man from a drop of fluid, and yet man openly challenges Him’ (*an-Nahl:* 4).

Some humans go as far as denying that there is a God, ignoring the fact that they, solely by the power that Allah has placed in them, are arguing about Him. The (*khasim,* contender in argument) is the one who argues and denies realities. If a matter of the Unseen is discussed with him, he tries to disprove its rationality.

Allah says in the chapter of *Ya Sin*: ‘Can man not see that we created him from a drop of fluid? Yet – lo and behold! – he disputes openly’ (*Ya Sin:* 77) It may be acceptable to argue with someone who is your equal, but it is not acceptable to argue with the One Who has created you, shaped you, proportioned you, in whatever form He chose.

The True Lord says after this:

وَٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمَ خَلَقَهَاۗ لَكُمۡ فِيهَا دِفۡءٞ وَمَنَٰفِعُ وَمِنۡهَا تَأۡكُلُونَ ٥

And livestock — He created them too. You derive warmth
and other benefits from them: you get food from them [5]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 5)

The word *(dif’*, warmth*)* is heat provided to someone who is cold. This is analogue to what air conditioning does in modern homes. We find the True Lord *the Exalted* speaking here about warmth and not speaking about coldness. This is because the opposite is known. In another noble verse, He says: ‘and has made for you garments which protect you from the heat’ (*an-Nahl:* 81).

This is what happens when we walk in the hot sun; as we put a cover over our heads to protect ourselves from the heat of the burning sun. In the winter, we wear a hood, i.e. something that wraps around our heads. This is how we know that clothes are fit for certain purposes and their opposites, on the condition that people choose appropriate clothes for appropriate weather. In cattle, there are numerous benefits; we drink their milk, we make cheese and butter from it, we shear off the wool in order to spin and weave woollen clothes, they carry our loads and we benefit from their progeny. We also eat their meat.

We know that cattle were described in detail in another place of the Quran in which the True Lord says: '… (Allah gave you) eight animals, in (four) pairs: a pair of sheep and a pair of goats...' (*al-An'am:* 143). These animals are sheep, goats, camels and cows.

We know that warmth comes from wool, fur and hair. If one looks at the hair of goats, one finds that each hair is separate; but the fur that we shear off camels is stuck together. This is proof of the minuteness of its fibres. As for wool, each hair is a hollow cylindrical tube.

The True Lord says after this:

وَلَكُمۡ فِيهَا جَمَالٌ حِينَ تُرِيحُونَ وَحِينَ تَسۡرَحُونَ ٦

You find beauty in them when you bring them home to
rest and when you drive them out to pasture [6]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 6)

In addition to the necessities provided by the cattle, here we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* giving us luxury as well. Warmth, food, and the other benefits are necessities of life. As for beauty, it is among the luxuries of life. Beauty is what the eye sees and brings happiness to the soul. Warmth, food and the other benefits are matters that are particular to the owner of the cattle. As for beauty, it is widespread and general for all of mankind. When you see a beautiful horse or a very healthy cow, you are seeing a bounty of Allah that He created to please the onlookers.

We notice this beauty when the cattle go out to pasture and when they come back to rest. In the countryside, we say: 'The cattle (*saraha*) have gone out to graze freely, i.e. they have left the barn to go out to graze and eat. We notice that the True Lord *the Exalted* mentioned driving them home first, i.e. their return to their enclosure after pasturing. This is because when the cattle return to their enclosures after grazing their bellies are full and their udders are replete with milk. Whoever sees them will feel pleased, even before he tries their milk. Anyone who takes his beasts out to pasture in the morning, and he accompanies them from their barns to the field, finds beauty mixed with awe and vigour in their voices. This brings prestige to their owners. While those who do not own these cattle are still able to witness their beauty.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after this:

وَتَحۡمِلُ أَثۡقَالَكُمۡ إِلَىٰ بَلَدٖ لَّمۡ تَكُونُواْ بَٰلِغِيهِ إِلَّا
بِشِقِّ ٱلۡأَنفُسِۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكُمۡ لَرَءُوفٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٧

They carry your loads to lands you yourselves could not reach without great hardship — truly your Lord is kind and merciful [7] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 7)

We know that during this life the human beings are in one of two states; either travelling or resident. When living in homeland, the cattle provide them with warmth, food, and clothing. Usually, people of average or poor means settle in their place of residence.

As for rich and well-off people, you find them in Cairo one day, in Alexandria or Tanta the next, or they may travel abroad. All this is easy in the age of modern transportation. In the past, the transport means were difficult. No one could travel except those who had healthy camels or strong horses. As for those who only owned an emaciated donkey, they could only think of traversing short distances.

Therefore, we find the Quran, when it talks about the People of Sheba, saying: ‘But (insolently) they said, "Our Lord, lengthen the distance between our journeys."’ (*Saba’:* 19) They said this out of pride in the horses which they owned and the strong and healthy beasts that they had as means of travel, which ensured them comfortable journeys. This betokened their might, power, and wealth.

The True Lord’s statement: ‘They carry your loads to lands…’ (*an-Nahl:* 7) means to put something heavy on something that is capable of carrying loads. This is why we do not find a man carrying his riding animal. Rather, we find him making his riding beast carry his loads so that he does not have to burden himself with an unbearable weight.

We know that weight depends on density, just as size depends on area. When you look at a kilogram of iron and a kilogram of cotton, you find the kilogram of cotton is bigger in size than the kilogram of iron. This is because the particles of iron are tightly packed. Cotton fibres are fluffy and this is what makes cotton require a bigger space.

The True Lord *the Exalted* continues in this noble verse: 'They carry your loads to lands you yourselves could not reach without great hardship....' (*an-Nahl:* 7)

Those among the orientalists who examine the style of the Quran might claim that the end of this verse is inconsistent with its beginning. We say to such people: 'You have not understood the gifts that Allah bestows upon His creation. Even without heavy loads, they could only reach this place with difficulty; so what about the difficult burden of having heavy loads of merchandise and goods with them?

Indeed, it is a great blessing that they can find something that will carry them and their heavy loads in order to get to wherever they want to go.

Concerning the part of the verse '…great hardship (*bishiqq*)…,' the Arabic word (*shiq;* literally split) mean a (*sad`*; fissure) between two objects that cause them to be disconnected. Allah says in one verse: 'So proclaim openly (*fa-isda`*) what you have been commanded (to say)' (*al-Hijr:* 94).

There are also the derivative nouns *shaqq*, which means exertion, and *shuqqah*. As we know, the human is always in one of three states. Either he is sleeping, and in this state, he does not require a great deal of energy in order to stay alive; or he is awake, and in this state he does not need a great deal of energy either. Rather, he needs a medium amount of energy in order for his body to function. However, when the person is carrying heaving things, he needs a greater amount of energy.

We also find the True Lord *the Exalted* saying: 'They would certainly have followed you (Prophet) if the benefit was within sight and the journey short, but the distance seemed too great for them (*al-shuqqatu*)' (*at-Tawba:* 42).

The meaning of *shuqqah* here is the distance that is difficult to cover. The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the noble verse under study by saying: '...truly your Lord is Kind and Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 7) The two attributes here are kindness and mercy, and both are suited to what the verse contains. The Lord is responsible for sustenance and provision, and this applies to any journey that has a destination, whether it is for financial gain, reflection, or both.

If the journey is for financial gain, then your animal riding must be strong enough to carry your heavy loads that you are taking with you as well as the goods that you will be bringing back. If the journey is for reflection, then through this journey you can remove the discomfort of not knowing and the desire to arrive at the place that you have intended.

This is how we find that kindness is suited to bringing about a benefit, fulfilling a need, and eliminating hardship. And the word (*Rahim*; Merciful) is suited to preventing discomfort by making one reach their aim.

Some scholars have paused to consider the intention behind a journey; whether one is travelling for trade or travelling for reflection. One kind is voluntary and the other is obligatory; like the necessary journey to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* relieves us of the pain of carrying heavy loads, and this is how His Compassion is realised. And He is Merciful because He achieves our aim of getting to a certain destination.

The True Lord *the Exalted* says after this:

وَٱلۡخَيۡلَ وَٱلۡبِغَالَ وَٱلۡحَمِيرَ لِتَرۡكَبُوهَا وَزِينَةٗۚ وَيَخۡلُقُ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٨﴾

Horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and use for show, and other things you know nothing about [8] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 8)

As Allah *the Almighty* refers to the livestock from which we get food, He, in this verse, mentions those used for transportation or for the enjoyment of beauty but not to be eaten; i.e. horses, mules and donkeys. He reminds us that they are used for riding and for show because there is beauty in them; thus, man is embellished by them such as the people of our time who boast about the embellishments they make to their cars.

The verse indicates the disparity of mankind in rank; every rank rides what suits it. Horses are for the elite, cavaliers and the wealthy. Those of the lesser rank ride mules while those who cannot afford a horse or a mule have a donkey.

People differ as there is a person who may own the three kinds of livestock used for riding, another may own two of them, a third may own just one mount and a fourth cannot even afford to hire any mount at all.

Allah *the Exalted* differently distributes livelihood among mankind, whether it is more or less. If there had been an equality in the distribution of livelihood, there would not have existed the mistakenly so-called menial jobs, i.e. the jobs taken on by people who sweep streets, carry bricks for buildings and service cars.

All these jobs are indispensable; but for the desire for providing livelihood, there would not have been anyone to do these jobs or to be pleased by them. Such jobs eliminate begging.

But for the need for food, the workers would not have tolerated the burdens of these jobs. By examining the life of the poorest person in the world, there should be a time when he has realised some of his dreams.

It is found that there may be someone who works hard for ten years, and then relaxes for the rest of his life. Another person may work hard for twenty years and then he and his children relaxe for the rest of their life. There may also be a person who toils for thirty years, and then his children and grandchildren relax after him. What is important is the value of the skilled job and the satisfaction with Allah's destiny for him. Thus, Allah bestows blessings upon man as long as he accepts His destiny.

By overlooking the life of those whom Allah has given wealth and luxury, it is found that, in the beginning of their lives, they arduously worked hard, yet they were pleased with His destiny. Moreover, they did not harbour any resentment towards anyone. Finally, they were presented Allah's guidance towards serenity and peace of mind.

Allah *the Almighty* decrees the diversification of the standards of living amongst humanity so that no one would refrain from offering services to others as long as he needed theirs.

The verse under discussion expressively mentioned mules amidst horses and donkeys because they are not pure species but rather, they are the hybrid offspring of two different ones. In the end of the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that this is not the end of the matter. Rather, there are more creations, as He says: '… And other things you know nothing about' (*an-Nahl:* 8).

Allah *the Exalted* has subjugated *Al-Buraq* (a white animal, half-mule is said to have transported Prophet Muhammad to heaven) to serve Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the wind to serve Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. As miracles happened to the Prophets, humanity has been guided to invent several means of transportation; from horse-drawn carriages to cars, trains, and planes.

Although science has made great strides in developing means of transportation, yet there are still people who breed, lead, and ride horses because they are beautiful to behold.

These are the means of transportation and inventions developed to serve us in the worldly life, then what about transportation in the Hereafter? There should be luxurious means suited the lavish unprecedented pleasures of the Afterlife. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse:

وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ قَصْدُ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَمِنْهَا جَآئِرٌ ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ لَهَدَىٰكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ٩

God points out the right path, for some paths
lead the wrong way: if He wished, He could guide
you all [9] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 9)

The path is the road, and *qasd* (points out) means that He *the Almighty* shows you the destination. It is a verbal noun derived from the Arabic statement *tariq qasid;* i.e. the road that has no turns and no bends. Allah *the Exalted* shows us the destination to be reached with minimal efforts.

In local dialect, we ask the traffic officer, 'Is this road running?', even though the road itself does not run, but rather, we go on it. However, the question means whether the road leads to the required destination. When the person cannot devise a means to overcome the problem, he says: 'Leave it to Allah', i.e. he raises unresolved issues beyond human capabilities to Allah the Most High Originator.

Therefore, the believer desires to use his means; i.e. worshipping Allah to reach the destination, the Paradise as a reward for faith and righteous action in this worldly life.

By comparing the bending meandered course of the River Nile, to the straight Tawfiki Rayah Irrigation Canal, there is a difference because the former is naturally led by the running water; whereas, the latter is straightforwardly built by human beings for a specific objective.

Since the straightforwardness of the path is laid down by Allah, it could not be slightly curved; as He has no whim, no consort, no son, and no special favour to anyone and treats the entire creation equally. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Guide us to the straight path’ (*al-Fatiha:* 6); i.e. the straight unbent way for any purpose. Rather, the purpose is to reach the destination in the easiest way.

Allah’s saying: ‘Allah *qasd* (points out) the right path…’ (*an-Nahl:* 9) recalls Iblis’ (Satan’s) conversation with Allah: ‘Iblis said, “I swear by Your might! I will tempt all [82] but Your true servants” [83]’ (*Sad:* 82-83). Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah says: “This is, with Me, a straight way”’ (*al-Hijr:* 41). Allah also says: ‘Our part is to provide guidance’ (*al-Layl:* 12), i.e. when He has created man, He has made the path of guidance clear to him. Likewise, Allah says: ‘And point out to him the two clear ways [of good and evil]’ (*al-Balad:* 10), i.e. Allah *the Almighty* shows the man both the paths of truth and falsehood.

Thus, Allah’s saying in this verse: ‘Allah *qasd* (points out) the right path…’ (*an-Nahl:* 9) shows that the destination of the decreed path is laid down by Allah, the Ever-Just, Who does not have any whims and Who treats the entire creation equally. For this reason, the thinkers should not greatly exhaust themselves in an attempt to lay down their own legislation to control life’s activities because Allah, the Originator of this life has already laid down the law of maintenance. The irrefutable evidence of the incapacity of thinkers to lay down laws organising human life is the fact that they change the laws in every age; however, Allah’s law is permanent, perfect, and unchangeable.

Thus, humanity should relax and live according to Allah’s decreed Path that should be applied. As for other life matters that have not been settled by Allah, they can use their own *ijtihad* (legal reasoning).

According to Allah's saying: 'Allah *qasd* (points out) the right path…' (*an-Nahl:* 9), He is the One Who has laid down the path of faith leading to the targeted destination because there are other deviating paths leading to the wrong way. For that reason, He says: '...For some paths lead the wrong way…' (*an-Nahl:* 9). In order to prevent deviation, He has pointed out the path of faith, as He says: 'But if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the heavens, the earth, and everyone in them would disintegrate...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

Nevertheless, the straight and even path is that of faith laid down by Allah *the Almighty*. There are other deviating paths; i.e. they increase the distance to be cut, expose man to dangers, or erratically misguide him to be led away from the straight path. It is cognisant that any path has two ends and each point lying on it has also two ends. Allah *the Exalted* does not force man to lead one path; but rather, He gives him the ability to choose. Thus, Allah subjugated other creatures to serve man.

As for man, Allah bestows upon him the ability to choose to differentiate between he who obeys and he who disobeys His commands. All mankind will certainly be gathered for reckoning; thus, whoever chooses the path of obedience is he who reveres Allah. Being in awe of Allah is the established target for which Allah endows the man the ability of choice. Undoubtedly, if He had wanted to attest absolute domination for Himself, He would have coerced humanity into obedience just as He has subjugated other beings.

Yet, Allah *the Exalted* is concerned with people's hearts, rather than superficial outward acts. Hence, He says in the conclusion of the verse: '... If He wished, He could guide you all' (*an-Nahl:* 9). It is known that all creatures prostrate to Allah *Glorified is He*: '... There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra':* 44). In another verse, Allah says: '[Prophet], do you not see that all those who are in the heavens and earth praise Allah, as do the birds with wings outstretched? Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification...' (*an-Nur:* 41). Therefore, if Allah had otherwise decreed, He would have guided the humans and the *jinn* just as He has guided all other beings, but He is concerned with people's hearts, rather than their outward acts.

Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً ۖ لَّكُم مِّنْهُ شَرَابٌ وَمِنْهُ شَجَرٌ فِيهِ تُسِيمُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

It is He who sends down water for you from the sky, from which comes a drink for you, and the shrubs that you feed to your animals [10] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 10)

Allah's saying: '… Sends down water from the skies…' (*an-Nahl:* 10) appears to be a simple statement; yet the processes of filtering and purifying water from dirt at the laboratories show the amount of work carried out to send down pure water as rain.

It is perceptible that the sky is everything above us, and that the clouds are formed as a result of water evaporated by the sun from oceans and seas. Thus, water vapour is formed, rises upwards, condenses in the form of rain and then rain falls to the earth.

Oceans and seas cover three quarters of the earth surface, while land makes up only one quarter. It is observed that the three quarters of the earth's surface were made to serve the remaining quarter.

It is amazing that rain falls on places that might not be benefitted from it, such as the highlands of Ethiopia. Yet, rainwater soon mixes with alluvium from these highlands to form the River Nile so that we can benefit from it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see that Allah drives the clouds, then gathers them together and piles them up until you see rain pour from their midst? He sends hail down from [such] mountains in the sky, pouring it on whoever He wishes and diverting it from whoever He wishes...' (*an-Nur:* 43).

As Allah says in the concerned verse that but for the process of evaporation and the ongoing condensation of water vapour after it has become clouds, man would never be able to drink the saltwater that is found in the seas. As a result of Allah's wisdom, He *the Almighty* creates the water of the seas and oceans salty because salt acts as a preservative substance.

As the sun evaporates the water to become clouds and then the rain falls, man can drink such water feeding rivers and wells and also causing shrubs to grow to be eaten.

Allah *the Exalted* uses the word '... *Shajar* (Shrubs)...' which indicates the bushy plant that intertwines. The Arabic word has the derivative '*mushajara'* which means that there is an internal quarrel that broke out between people.

There are different kinds of *shajar* (shrubs) those which are implanted and owned by the proprietor. Furthermore, there are plants that grow without being humanly implanted; they are public property where animals were allowed to graze freely.

As Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... That you feed to your animals' (*an-Nahl:* 10). When someone pastures their animals in public property, they leave traces of their presence; such as tracks and marks. They pasture the 'untouched meadows' where no one has pastured, as if it has been abandoned and nothing is taken from it. Subsequently, Allah *the Exalted* says:

يُنۢبِتُ لَكُم بِهِ ٱلزَّرۡعَ وَٱلزَّيۡتُونَ وَٱلنَّخِيلَ وَٱلۡأَعۡنَٰبَ وَمِن
كُلِّ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةٗ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ١١

With it He grows for you grain, olives, palms, vines,
and all kinds of other crops. There truly is a sign in this
for those who reflect [11] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 11)

Allah informs us that plants do not grow themselves, but that He is who makes them grow. Furthermore, He *the Exalted* exclusively mentions the most-needed kinds of crops; such as olive trees, date-palms, grapes and others. Olives are made up of oily substances while grapes are made up of sugary substances and the same goes for the date-palms that produce dates. It is well known that human's nourishment comes from starches and proteins. Therefore, Allah's former mention to the cattle and current reference to the crops make it clear that man has been given the fundamental components of food, as He says: 'By the fig, by the olive, [1] by Mount Sinai, [2] by this safe town, [3] We create man in the finest state [4]' (*at-Tin:* 1-4). Thereby, Allah endows man with proteins, fats, starches, and vitamins which maintain man's life.

When physicians want to provide fundamental nourishing components to a patient, they dissolve the nutritional supplies in liquids injected into his veins. However, they are concerned about nourishing someone like this for a long time for fear that the intestines may shrink.

The breeders who feed animals know that nourishment is divided into two types; the kind that fills the stomach and another that supplies the necessary elements. Hay, for example, fills the stomach and provides fibres helping the intestines work properly. However, processed soybean residue nourishes and ensures abundant animal flesh.

Allah's Power of making plants grow in the current verse is then emphasised in His saying: 'Is it you who make them grow or We?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 64) The man only ploughed the earth, but Allah is the One Who makes plants grow; the farmer plough the land with the axe-head made of iron created by Allah and extracted by man. Furthermore, he grasps the axe-handle made of wood grown by Allah, he uses Allah's gifts to plough the land created by Allah. Moreover, the energy needed to plough the land is granted by Allah.

Conclusively, Allah *the Almighty* reminds the people that all crops are His gifts; thus, He uses the specific-to-general pattern where He *the Exalted* begins with the details and leads the listener to the generalization; i.e. the known specific yields to man are a part of the whole limitless innumerable crops.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse: '... There truly is a sign in this for those who reflect' (*an-Nahl:* 11), i.e. man should use his rational faculty to think properly with regards to the given surrounding facts, and then he should observe and determine his position of these facts. Doing this, he would find that he is not the doer, but he is liable to do.

Allah *the Exalted* notifies that thinking is not only the task of a specific person but rather the task of everyone; so that each rational faculty would complement the other. Thus, whoever has a deep reflection leading to the existence of Allah is inevitably responsible to communicate this to the others.

There are many Quranic verses ending with words calling for; *tadhakkur* (remembering), *tafakkur* (rationally thinking), *tadabbur* (trying to deeply understand) and *tafaqquh* (precisely comprehending). Each expression denotes certain knowledge; because *tadhakkur* (remembering) means that they had knowledge beforehand but forgetfulness wiped it out; thus, it is their duty to remember.

As for the expression *tafakkur* (rationally thinking), it is the umbrella term because when the man thinks rationally, he needs to look at the facts given outwardly and inwardly. As Allah says: ‘Will they not think rationally about this Quran?...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 82). This means that the person should not look at the facts only outwardly, but rather inwardly as well to exactly understand the matter. As he properly understands, he comes to know; thus the path of perception is made up of four phases; thinking, reflecting, understanding and then acquiring knowledge.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلَّيۡلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ وَٱلشَّمۡسَ وَٱلۡقَمَرَۖ وَٱلنُّجُومُ
مُسَخَّرَٰتُۢ بِأَمۡرِهِۦٓۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

By His command He has made the night and day, the sun, moon, and stars all of benefit to you. There truly are signs in this for those who use their reason [12]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 12)

It is known that the night and the day are two clear evidences on the existence of Allah. The moon is well matched to the night, while the sun is suitable to the daytime and they are all subjected to Allah’s Command in one system. To make something subservient to someone means that a creation is coerced to benefit another so that both would carry out their function. The night, the day, the sun and the moon have been made subservient and have given a function. The purpose of the night is repose and tranquillity.

As Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘In His mercy, He has given you night and day, so that you may rest and seek His bounty and be grateful’ (*al-Qasas:* 73).

The function of the day is to undertake arduous work, seeking sustenance and bountiful graces from Allah. The sun is created to be the permanent source of energy and warmth; it is subservient to other creatures continuously and submissively to Allah’s Command. It does not belong to anyone but to Allah. Moreover, it is an integral part of the universe system organised only by Allah *the Exalted* so that no person can control others’ life. Likewise, the same applies to the moon, which is created for another purpose.

Beware of presuming that there might be two contradictory functions incoherently opposing each other; rather, they are complementarily consistent. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘By the enshrouding night [1] by the radiant day [2] by His creation of male and female [3] The ways you take differ greatly [4]’ (*al-Layl:* 1-4). Even though the night and the day are opposites, yet they are not contradictory; just as the varying tasks of male and female which are complementary rather than contradictory.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives an example to clarify this complementary relationship: ‘Say, “Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual day over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than He could give you night in which to rest?” Do you not see?’ (*al-Qasas:* 72) If man stays awake for two consecutive nights, he will not be able to resist sleep, even if he is undertaking a challenging task. Later on, he may need repose for a week. Thus, Allah says: ‘The night as a cover [10] and the day for your livelihood? [11]’ (*an-Naba’:* 10-11)

Whenever someone prays *Isha* (the fifth nighttime prayer of the day) and goes to bed, he will inevitably wake up before dawn fully energetic because he has deeply slept and spent a relaxing night.

However, Muslims have assimilated themselves to the scum and dregs of the Western culture, such as the inventions that make them awaken all night, watching television, films, and satellite channels; thus, they wake up in the morning exhausted. Despite the fact that the Western people themselves use these inventions properly and at appropriate times. Therefore, they go to bed early and wake up at dawn active and energetic.

Allah *the Exalted* switches to a new miraculous sign: ‘... And stars all subservient (to benefit you)’ (*an-Nahl:* 12). He has not mentioned the stars in conjunction with what comes before; rather, He has singled them out with a new sentence even though they are smaller and unnoticeable because they are numerous and are found in so many various places. However, Allah takes oath on them: ‘I swear by the positions of the stars [75] a mighty oath, if you only knew [76]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 75-76).

Each one of these distant stars has a specific function; such as in daily life, when the lights go out, the person checks the fuse box in home. However, ordinary people do not know how electricity comes into their home, how the science has advanced to make electric lights under their service, or how the electric circuit is extended after being generated to the house.

Ordinary people do not have an idea of one item inside their homes and affecting them in their daily life; however, Allah does, as He says: ‘I swear by the positions of the stars’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 75). He, also, says: ‘And landmarks and stars that they are guided by’ (*an-Nahl:* 16).

Allah *Glorified is He* has, specifically, singled them out with a new and independent sentence where He stresses the concept of being subjugated. This is done because they all have positions and are too many to be counted; some of them are so far that their lights take millions of years to reach the earth. Additionally, this is done because Allah has created everything between the Heavens and the earth with a hidden secret.

He attracts the people’s attention to the fact that the structure of items created to directly serve people, have other hidden items to also serve them.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse, by saying: ‘... There truly are signs in this for those who use their reason’ (*an-Nahl:* 12).

Allah’s signs are the miraculous matters that should not be tackled briefly; rather, the person should think about them because this reflection benefits him. Moreover, it enables him to benefit humanity from the deduced lessons on unveiling unknown matters with ease and pleasure.

The words ‘…use their reason’ means using the intellectual faculty properly. It is known that the intellect has a unique potential that derives abstract meanings from physical matters. Thus, it achieves a previously unknown outcome from the known data to be satisfied and satisfies others. Afterwards, it uses the previously unknown data to come up with a new result.

Therefore, the man deduces matters from the unveiled secrets of the universe as per Allah’s Will. Allah *the Almighty* says after that:

وَمَا ذَرَأَ لَكُمْ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَٰنُهُۥٓ ۗ إِنَّ
فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

He has made of benefit to you the many-coloured things He has multiplied on the earth. There truly are signs in this for those who take it to heart [13] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 13)

The word *dhara'a* means that Allah has created reproducing living organisms; which are multiplying, either by impregnating the female, or by hatching eggs as in the case of birds. Thus, *dhara'a* does not only mean creation in the absolute sense, but rather, the multiplying creation. Allah *the Exalted* has first created Adam *peace be upon him* and then has succeeded him by descendants who in turn reproduced as the male mates the female. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... Glory be to Allah, the Best of Creators!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14)

This verse shows that Allah is generous towards His slaves; by giving them the power to create even though their creation is not like His. Allah has created Adam *peace be upon him* and then brought people into existence from his progeny. Man may create using tools and devices of everyday life, but he cannot create the way Allah does because he does not create out of nothing, but rather, he uses the already existing bounties. On the contrary, Allah creates out of nothing; therefore, He is the best of creators.

The most recurrent example held is that of the grain which grows seven ears and in each ear there are one hundred more grains. Allah *the Exalted* draws this example to make man yearn to spend out for His sake.(1) This is the tangible and material creation; that Allah has made all this grow from one grain. Hence, Allah says: 'He has made of benefit to you the many-coloured things He has *dhara'a* (multiplied) on the earth…' (*an-Nahl:* 13). This means that Allah's creation of several hues which multiplies itself is a proof of His absolute power in creating innumerable miscellaneous beings. Allah gives us an illustration of this matter in His saying: 'Have you [Prophet] not considered how Allah sends water down from the sky and that We produce with it fruits of varied colours; that there are in the mountains layers of white and red of various hues, and jet black; [27] that there are various colours among human beings, wild animals, and livestock too? It is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of Allah. Allah is Almighty, Most-Forgiving [28]' (*Fatir:* 27-28).

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those who spend their wealth in Allah's cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. Allah gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes: He is limitless and all knowing' (*al-Baqara*: 261).

Actually, mountains are found to have various colours and the same mountain can have lines separating between a number of strata. This shows that there are different hues amongst inanimate objects, plants, and human beings.

Allah's saying: '... It is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of Allah...' (*Fatir:* 28) refers to every scholar who studies a particular conventional issue or an issue that has come down directly from the Creator. In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* does not only mean the scholars of religion; but rather, every scholar who carries out researches to derive knowledge from the unknown and who reveals Allah's secrets in creation. Allah *Glorified is He* makes a clear distinction in this regard, so that religious scholars do not delve into the matters of empirical scientific research which benefit mankind. For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* found some people pollinating date palms;, i.e. they were taking the spadix of the male and pollinating the female date palm. He said: 'If you were not to do that; nevertheless, they would bear fruit.' When they abandoned this practice, there was a decline in the yield. As the Messenger knew this, he revoked his opinion and said the decisive statement: 'You have better knowledge of the affairs of your worldly life.'(1) That is, you have better knowledge of empirical scientific matters. It is noticeable that the major hindrance to civilization and development in Europe, for many centuries, was the attempts of the clergymen to cease any scientific research, and they accused every empirical scientist of blasphemy.

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(1) *It is narrated in Sahih Muslim (2362) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him that {Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him passed by a people who were pollinating and he said: 'If you did not do this it would flourish.' He said: 'The result was shisa (bad dates) and he passed by them and said: 'What happened to your date palm?' They said: 'You said such and such.' He said: 'You know best about the affairs of your world.'}*

Islam is distinguished by encouragingly allowing research into all Allah's signs in the universe. Due to Allah's Compassion, He *the Almighty* makes clear to His creation the importance of researching and revealing the secrets of the universe. He says: 'And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to' (*Yusuf:* 105). This verse disallows the believer from turning away from any of Allah's signs in the universe; rather, he should use his intellect and capacity to reflect and get benefit from them in his creed and life. Allah says: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (*Fussilat:* 53). Whereas, the matters related to the reckoning of the Hereafter, lie under the purview of the jurists.

Allah *the Exalted* concludes the verse under discussion: '... There truly are signs in this for those who take it to heart' (*an-Nahl:* 13). It means that the people can grasp the unknown by analogy to the known matters.

Afterwards, Allah returns to the matter of subservience, saying:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى سَخَّرَ ٱلْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا۟ مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا۟
مِنْهُ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى ٱلْفُلْكَ مَوَاخِرَ فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا۟
مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

It is He who made the sea of benefit to you: you eat fresh fish from it and bring out jewellery to wear; you see the ships cutting through its waves so that you may go in search of His bounty and give thanks [14] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 14)

Subjugation, as previously tackled, is achieved when the being is brought into existence for an obligatory inevitable mission. The entire universe has been made subservient to man before he was brought into existence. Afterwards, Allah has created man with the ability to choose.

Some people assume that the beings that have been made subservient, have no choice whatsoever. This is a mistake; because such beings were given a choice that they denied at the beginning of their existence. As Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it...' (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

This verse shows that Allah lets His creation choose between subservience and the ability to choose, where all beings, except man, used their right to choose only once. Thus, it should not be alleged that Allah has forced them; rather, they chose at the very beginning to be subservient. This is because they were capable at the time of executing work but were not capable at the time of undertaking trust, as compared to man. It is supposed that they preferred remaining blameless to oppressing themselves.

Accordingly, Allah describes mankind: '... They have always been inept and foolish' (*al-Ahzab:* 72). Man indeed oppressed himself because he was capable at the time of assuming trust, but he was not capable at the time of executing work. Furthermore, he is ignorant because he does not know the difference between execution and assumption while the other beings restrained themselves from assuming the responsibility of the trust; thus they did not oppress themselves.

Thus, the meaning of subservience is exactly clarified that the being is brought into existence for an obligatory inevitable mission. However, it is clear that the beings that have been made subservient were given a choice at the very beginning, but they chose to be made subservient and to refuse the trust. Meanwhile, man took up the mission, relied on his intellect and capacity to think and accepted to arrange the affairs of his life in light of this.

However, Allah makes man subservient in some cases so that the entire universe and man would both be subservient in some cases and having choice in others. Therefore, the man may encounter some events he has no choice in, such as getting sick, getting into an accident or going bankrupt. Thus, the disbeliever is foolish of his choice; he denies the existence of Allah and rebels against faith even though he is not able to avert himself from getting sick or death.

In the verse under discussion, Allah says: 'He is Who made the sea of benefit to you…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). This means that He is the One Who created the sea as He created the heavens and the earth. He has created the land to be one quarter of the earth's surface and seas and oceans has the remaining three quarters. He is tackling here the three quarters of the earth's surface which give people some kinds of food.

Among Allah's gifts are the signs of tide and ebb; the former is followed by the latter; some fish remain on the shore. Moreover, strong waves carry and throw some fish onto the shore.

This gift is granted to man without any effort. Furthermore, the presence of some thrown fish onto the shores is the matter that draws man's attention to the importance of thinking to make fishing hooks and nets. Then he moved on from these primitive means to recent modern techniques of catching fish.

However, the jewellery that is extracted from the sea which is pearls, require that man should dive to the seabed in order to obtain them. Allah draws our attention to the secrets of His treasures by saying: 'Everything in the heavens and on earth, everything between them, everything beneath the soil, belongs to Him' (*Ta Ha:* 6).

All the treasures of nations are found beneath the surface of the earth. If the globe is split the same way the melon is split into slices, the treasures in each piece are found to be equal in terms of beneficial value. However, every gift beneath the earth will be discovered at a set time determined by Allah *the Exalted*.

There are places on earth which has been gifted of cultivation by Allah, whereas, there are other desert places that are assumed to have no benefit, but oil bursts forth afterwards from them, and so on.

Not only does Allah make the sea subservient in the way that it appeared, but rather, it may have other tasks, such as the sea which is split by the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and each part appeared like a vast mountain. Moreover, the river had previously carried Musa *peace be upon him* after his mother had cast him into it with inspiration from Allah: '... Let the river wash him on to its bank...' (*Ta Ha:* 39). Thus, Allah commanded the river to carry Musa *peace be upon him* immediately after his mother had cast him into it.

It is made clear that the river has been made subservient to perform other tasks, along with containing fish and jewellery. It is known that seawater is salty, contrariwise to the fresh water of rain and rivers. Thus, water is of two types; fresh and saline. As Allah says: 'The two bodies of water are not alike– one is palatable, sweet, and pleasant to drink, the other salty and bitter— yet from each you eat fresh fish and extract ornaments to wear...' (*Fatir:* 12). Rivers and seas are generally referred to as the two bodies of water, as Allah *the Exalted* says: 'He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet' (*ar-Rahman:* 19).

The intended meaning of the two bodies here is the freshwater and the seawater and the way they mix together. However, it is the freshwater that seeps underground; were we to drill at the seabed, we will find freshwater. Allah *the Almighty* states this in His saying: 'Have you not considered that Allah sends water down from the sky, guides it along to form springs in the earth...' (*az-Zumar:* 21).

Here, Allah says: 'He is Who made the sea of benefit to you: you eat fresh *lahm* (fish) from it…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). When the term *lahm* is used in an absolute sense, it refers to the meat of cattle, but when it is restricted with the word 'fresh' it refers to the meat of fish. This is part of the Quran's inimitable miraculous expression because the edible fish is always fresh.

Hence, those who buy fish will bend it to see whether it is fresh, if it is inflexible then it is unsuitable to be eaten. If a fish is taken out of the sea, its meat is fresh and if it is thrown back into the water, it will resume swimming and moving about. However, if it is dead, then it will swell and float on the surface.

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade eating any dead floating fish on the surface of the water. When the word *lahm* 'meat' collocates with the word 'fresh', it means fish meat; thus, it is distinguished from cattle meat. Therefore, the scholars say: 'Whoever vows not to eat meat and then eats fish, has not broken his vow' because the customary understanding of meat is that it is cattle's.

In the same verse, Allah says about making the sea subservient: '... And bring out jewellery to wear…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). Thus, we find that extracting jewellery requires effort; for it is a matter of luxury. As for fish, Allah *the Exalted* speaks about it directly: '… You eat fresh *lahm* (fish) from it…' (*an-Nahl:* 14).

Eating is a necessity; thus, Allah undertakes the responsibility of providing food and has in fact made fishing easy for people. As for ornamentation, people need to toil in order to extract it because it is a luxury. The necessities of life are abundant; whereas, the luxuries of life require that the man should dive into the water and toil in order to obtain them.

This represents an indication that whoever wants to raise his standard of living, should sweat and toil, rather than living luxuriously dependent on others.

He says: '... And bring out jewellery to wear…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). It is well-known that ornaments are worn by women; yet, the underlying observation is that they are worn to please men. As if the man is the one who enjoys this jewellery or who ornaments. Ornamentation that are extracted from the sea are not impermissible for men, as in the case of gold and silk because gold and silk are specie while pearls are not. These things are predominantly worn, but there is nothing wrong with making a stick out of them or something else of which you can make use.

Allah *Glorified is He* resumes the verse: '...You see the ships cutting through its waves…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). These are not the recently known big steamships; rather, they are smaller ships. It is known that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was the first person to make ships, and was mocked by his people. If he was making something normal, they would not have mocked him. Of course, there were not any nails at that time so it was held together by ropes. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We carried him along on a vessel of planks and *Dussur* (ropes)' (*al-Qamar:* 13).

The course of the vessel of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was drawn according to Allah's Will. Science had not yet been advanced to the extent where it was possible for human beings to make a huge vessel that the Quran foretold of in Allah's saying: 'His are the moving ships that float, high as mountains, on the sea' (*ar-Rahman:* 24).

This verse shows the miraculous power of the Quran to foretell human's inventions. The Quran knows everything; not only things that will be coercive matters but also new things chosen by human beings. Allah says: '... You see the ships cutting through its waves…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). The front part of the ship has something sharp, like the head of a spear, that cuts through the water with a ripple.

In this verse, Allah favours His slaves with three things; catching fish, extracting ornaments and the ships travelling on the seas. Afterwards, He informs them of other new bounties that can come into existence, as He says: '… So that you may go in search of His bounty…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). The man finds pleasure on seeing the huge vessel that splits the gentle water, in addition to its function in carrying people from one place to another.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '… And give thanks' (*an-Nahl:* 14). This is only said when a blessing is perceptible that deserve gratitude from a normal person. Allah leaves human beings to choose to be grateful for these blessings, rather than coercing them to do so.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَلۡقَىٰ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ رَوَٰسِيَ أَن تَمِيدَ بِكُمۡ وَأَنۡهَٰرٗا وَسُبُلٗا لَّعَلَّكُمۡ تَهۡتَدُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

He has made mountains stand firm on the earth, to prevent it shaking under you, and rivers and paths so that you may find your way [15] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 15)

Hence, Allah shows that the earth was created in phases, as per His saying: 'Say, "How can you disregard the One who created the earth in two Days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!" [9] He placed solid mountains on it, blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them—all in four Days [10]' (*Fussilat:* 9-10).

The general mass of the earth was created first, in a state of motion; thus, this motion keeps the earth swinging right and left and prevents it from being stable. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* created solid mountains on the earth in order to make it firm and settled. Because of the motion of the earth, Allah has created the mountains to be like firm pegs for it. In another verse, Allah says: 'You will see the mountains and think they are firmly fixed, but they will float away like clouds...' (*an-Naml:* 88). The words '… He has made…' indicates that the mountains are something solid that has been placed in order to be firm and stable. Then He conjoins to the mountains: '... And rivers and paths' (*an-Nahl:* 15). Allah does not mention an action for rivers, and it is amazing that the Quranic style joins the inanimate nature of the mountains with the fluidity of the rivers, and paths, i.e. roads. All of this is made so that people might find their way: '... So that you may find your way' (*an-Nahl:* 15). It is acknowledged that the Arabs used the mountains as landmarks to find their way. For example, the mountain of Tawbad and that of Harsha were considered guiding landmarks, as the poet said:

Take guide of any side of Harsha Mountain

As each flank is a guiding landmark lane

As Allah says: ‘We called to him from the right-hand side of the mountain’ (*Maryam:* 52); thus, among the marginal tasks of the mountains is that they are used as guiding landmarks to roads and places, Or else, they are also created to learn people lessons and guide them to the Path of Allah *the Almighty* Who created these mountains for their benefit, as He says: ‘... So that you may find your way’ (*an-Nahl:* 15). Allah says afterwards:

وَعَلَـٰمَـٰتٍۢ ۚ وَبِٱلنَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

And landmarks and stars to guide people [16]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 16)

The verse means that Allah’s creations are signs that show the necessity of looking at their benefits; thus, you will be guided to believe in Allah who brings all these things into existence for your benefit. The aforementioned signs; mountains, rivers or paths, are found on earth.

In this verse, Allah mentions an additional sign that is found in the sky; i.e. the stars. It is recognisable that everyone travelling on the sea is only guided by the stars. Allah *the Exalted* mentions them as a distinct subjugation; He did not include them amongst other numerous ones because there is a star that leads to another one, and there are stars whose light has not reached earth yet. Thus, people get benefit from their effects via other stars. The people of Quraysh had two journeys in the year, one in the winter and another in the summer. They travelled along different routes and were guided on their way by the stars. Thus, they should have had some knowledge regarding the positions of the stars.

As Allah says: ‘... And stars that they are guided by’ (*an-Nahl:* 16). Allah uses this linguistic style preferably than others that can also convey the meaning but are less effective; such as ‘They are guided by the stars’ and ‘By the stars they are guided’. Whereas, Allah’s used style: ‘... And stars that they are guided by’ (*an-Nahl:* 16) confirms that the people of Quraysh had knowledge regarding the positions of the stars because they made two journeys every year and no one else had this knowledge.

The pronoun ‘they’ is mentioned to stress two specific points; the first is that they were guided by the stars and nothing else. The second is that the people of Quraysh were exclusively guided by the stars while no other tribe was able to be guided by them.

Allah says after that:

أَفَمَن يَخْلُقُ كَمَن لَّا يَخْلُقُ ۗ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Can He who creates be compared to one who cannot create? Why do you not take heed? [17] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 17)

The speech that the speaker conveys to the listener takes on various forms; he may use the informative style, such as: ‘Whoever does not create is not like the One Who creates.’ This informative speech may perhaps be admitted or not. However, when the speaker wants the listener to affirm his speech and wants him to express his admittance, he asks him an affirmative-form question. Thus, the listener has no choice but to definitely confirm the objective of the speaker.

The people of Quraysh used to worship idols and set them up as deities, despite those idols did not speak or send down a Message to be followed. Allah *the Almighty* states their alleged words: ‘... “We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allah”...’ (*az-Zumar:* 3). The key question is: why, then, do they not worship Allah directly without any intermediary? Why do they not relieve themselves of the burden of worshipping others and turn to Allah directly?

The crucial brought up question is: what is worship? Worship means obedience in commands and prohibitions issued by the worshipped. Of course, there are no commands or legal responsibilities given by the idols for their worshipper. The idols are worshipped without having a Message, a punishment for those who contravene or a reward for those who obeys. Thus, they are not apt to be worshipped.

This issue can be tackled from another perspective that Allah demonstrates that He is the One Who created the heavens, the earth, the night, the day, the sun, and the moon. Furthermore, He has subjugated all these beings to serve man whom He entrusted to be Allah's vicegerent on earth.

None of these creations has been claimed by anyone other than Allah. Indeed, if the disbelievers and idol-worshippers have been asked who created them they would answer 'Allah'. Allah says: 'If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, "Allah"...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). No one has dared to claim the process of creating and bringing into existence, since he is not the originator. On being asked, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' they would answer, 'Indeed, He is Allah'. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed them that Allah is the One Who created the heavens and the earth and that His way of managing the universe starts with worshipping Him. As long as Allah has made this undisputable claim and no one has refuted Him; thus, the claim is affirmed until someone objects, and no one has ever been found.

In the verse under discussion, there is wisdom in sentence formulation. This verse was sent down to the people, who were worshipping the idols as if they were Allah; who imagined that Allah was created just like these idols. Thus, this appropriate saying came down. Allah *the Exalted* totally refutes this whim; thus, He clarifies that the worshipped idols are made by their own hands according to their imagination and abilities from a material substance; i.e. from stones. In this case, the worshipped idol is inferior than and subordinate to the worshipper; additionally, these idols are incapable of harming or benefitting their worshippers.

Accordingly, why do they call on Allah when they are afflicted with any harm? Indeed, man calls on Allah in the state of detriment, because at that moment he would not dare to deceive himself. As for the deities being made and worshipped, they do not hear their supplication: 'If you call them they cannot hear you; if they could hear, they could not answer you; on the Day of Resurrection they will disown your idolatry. None can inform you [Prophet] like the One who is all aware' (*Fatir:* 14). Consequently, how can they liken those who do not create to Allah who does? Indeed, they should think, contemplate, and use their intellects in their benefit. Allah says after that:

وَإِن تَعُدُّوا۟ نِعْمَةَ ٱللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَآ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

If you tried to count God's blessings, you could never take them all in: He is truly most forgiving and most merciful [18]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 18)

This verse was previously mentioned in the chapter of Ibrahim (Abraham). Allah says there: 'And given you some of everything you asked Him for. If you tried to count Allah's favours you could never calculate them: man is truly unjust and ungrateful' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

Both verses tackle those who stubbornly denied Allah, the Divine Creator, the Lord of all existence and the Supplier of rights. Thus, Allah explains for people that if they try to count His blessings, they could not be enumerated. This is because the countable items should be individually separable objects. However, the blessing comprises infinite others; furthermore, they are all gathered together. Or else, Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed only one blessing that can be broken down into several others.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '... He is truly most forgiving and most merciful' (*an-Nahl:* 18). Despite their disbelief, He will give them more blessings from the anchor of mercy. Oppression and disbelief are results of people's deeds, whereas, Allah brings forgiveness and mercy.

The conclusion of this verse resembles that of the verse of within the chapter of *Ibrahim* where Allah says: '… Man is truly unjust and ungrateful' (*Ibrahim:* 34). Allah *Glorified is He* is much forgiving of people's stubborn rejection and disavowal of His favour. He is also the Dispenser of mercy, for He continues to bestow blessings upon people even though they are oppressors and disbelievers.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ مَا تُسِرُّونَ وَمَا تُعۡلِنُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

He knows what you conceal and what you reveal [19]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 19)

A secret – as we know – is what is hidden within yourself, or what you confide to someone else and then ask them not to tell anyone. The True Lord *Glorified is He* knows one's secrets and what is beyond. He says: 'He knows [even] the secret [thoughts of man] as well as all that is yet more hidden [within him].' (*Ta Ha:* 7) He knows what we hide within ourselves and He knows what can be a secret before we keep it a secret. He *Glorified is He* does not only know what is secret but He also knows what is open.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ لَا يَخۡلُقُونَ شَيۡـٔٗا وَهُمۡ يُخۡلَقُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Those they invoke beside God create nothing; they are
themselves created [20] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 20)

They are not able to create anything. Rather, they are created, and the idols, as we said before, are of a lesser rank than those who create them. How can that which is worshipped be of a lesser rank than the worshipper? This exposes the foolishness of their worship. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, as expressed by Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he destroyed the idols and his people asked him, 'Who did this to our gods?' He responded: 'No, it was this one, the biggest of them' (*al-Anbiya':* 63) They said to him, 'The biggest is only an idol and you know that it cannot do anything.' We find the Quran saying to people like this, 'Do you worship something that you [yourselves] have carved' (*as-Saffat:* 95) These gods, therefore, do not create but rather are created. However, Allah is the Creator of everything and He says: 'O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued'. (*al-Hajj:* 73) After that the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the attributes of these idols:

أَمۡوَٰتٌ غَيۡرُ أَحۡيَآءٖۖ وَمَا يَشۡعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبۡعَثُونَ ٢١

They are dead, not living. They do not know when they will be raised up [21] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 21)

They are in fact dead because they have no sense and no motion. His statement: ‘not alive’ means that they did not have life beforehand. Life cannot be affirmed for them in the past, the present, or the future. They do not create anything, but rather, they are created by means of you carving them. These idols and statues will not have life in the Hereafter. Instead, they will be fuel for the Fire. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘[The angels will be ordered], Gather those who committed wrong, their kinds, and what they used to worship.’ (*as-Saffat:* 22) Of course, these idols will never be aware of the resurrection of those who worshipped them. After that the True Lord *Glorified is He* settles this creedal issue by saying:

إِلَٰهُكُمۡ إِلَٰهٞ وَٰحِدٞۚ فَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ قُلُوبُهُم مُّنكِرَةٞ وَهُم مُّسۡتَكۡبِرُونَ ٢٢

Your God is the One God. As for those who deny the life to come, their hearts refuse to admit the truth and they are arrogant [22] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 22)

The True Lord’s statement: ‘Your god is one God,’ declares it impossible for there to be anyone besides Him that are like Him. Some people imagine that it is equal to the word ‘single’. I say that the word ‘single’ means that He is not made up of constituent parts as He is transcendent above being repeated or partitioned.

In this statement, the believers are given confidence that they have reached the peak of understanding and believing that Allah is one.

Or, He is making it clear to the disbelievers that He is One to spite them, and you will return to Him by force. With this statement the True Lord *Glorified is He* reveals the natural disposition found within the human soul which bears witness in the atomic world that Allah is One, He has no partner and that the Standing and the Resurrection are true. However, those who do not believe in Allah and the Hereafter are the ones who veil their natural disposition from themselves. The word disbelief, as we explained previously, is a veil that necessitates something being veiled, and it veils the faith of one’s original natural disposition.

Those who deny the Hereafter are only forbidding themselves from imagining what will inevitably happen which is the reckoning that will bestow reward and blessings as a recompense for good deeds, and perhaps their evil deeds are few in number; and the True Lord *Glorified is He* will overlook them, thus entering Paradise.

Those who transgress against themselves hope that the matter of religion is a lie because they want to distance themselves from having to imagine the reckoning and they hope that there is not a reckoning. The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes them: ‘their hearts are disapproving, and they are arrogant’. They are not content with merely denying the Hereafter. Rather, they are arrogant and haughty without any right to be so.

The word *arrogant* means that they set themselves up as great without possessing the essential qualities of greatness. This is because someone who is great must innately have the essential qualities of greatness, and he must guarantee for himself that these essential qualities will always remain within him.

But we, human beings, are subject to changing circumstances, and thus it is not right for us to be arrogant; one of us may become sick, or he may be deprived of his wealth and rank. Thus, the attributes and perfections of greatness are not essential to any one of us. They may be stripped from whomever Allah has blessed them with. It becomes befitting for each one of us to be modest, remember our Lord and have humility before our Creator.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* alone is worthy of having pride. He *Glorified is He* is the One whose attributes and essential qualities are of the utmost perfection, and He will never be deprived of them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعۡلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعۡلِنُونَۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُسۡتَكۡبِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

There is no doubt that God knows what they conceal and
what they reveal. He does not love the arrogant [23]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 23)

When you see ‘assuredly’, the meaning is that whatever comes after it is an established truth.

Some of the scholars have said that the True Lord's statement 'Assuredly' carries the meaning of inevitability, and this means that the True Lord's statement: 'Assuredly, Allah knows what they conceal and what they declare' means that it is inevitable that Allah knows all that they keep secret as well as all that they bring into the open, and it is unavoidable that those who disbelieve will lose. The scholars have analysed this term in order to arrive at its most subtle secrets. Allah's knowledge does not only apply to that which is brought into the open. It also applies to that which is kept secret. This is because He will take them to account for all of their actions. The True Lord *Glorified is He* finishes the verse by saying: 'Indeed, He does not like the arrogant.'

If we ask, 'What is the connection between Allah's knowledge and punishment?' We say, 'did not they say amongst themselves: "Why does not Allah punish us for what we are saying?"' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

Whenever the True Lord's statement came down to inform them of what they had said amongst themselves, it was a proof that one conveying to them is truthful in what he conveys from Allah. Despite that they were given to arrogance, they stubbornly rejected, denied and they were overwhelmed in sin. In their arrogance, they wanted to flee from adhering to the way that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُم مَّاذَآ أَنزَلَ رَبُّكُمۡ ۙ قَالُوٓاْ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

When they are asked, 'What has your Lord sent down?'
they say, 'Ancient fables' [24] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 24)

In the True Lord's statement: 'And when it is said to them,' He makes the reprisal clear on the tongue of the speaker; so that they know that they have a Lord. If they did not believe in a Lord they would declare as such, but out of their heedlessness they objected to what was sent down, not to the fact that they have a Lord. This is proof that they believe in a Lord and Creator, but they object to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and what has been sent down to him from Allah.

And: ‘Fables of the former peoples’ ‘Fables’ are lies. If they had been true to themselves, they would not have affirmed the existence of Allah, and they would have also rejected the statement that was sent down to them. Amongst them are those who said: ‘And they say, "Fables of ancient times which he has caused to be written down, so that they might be read out to him at morn and evening!"’ (*al-Furqan:* 5)

However, there is another side that has a different position which will be explained shortly. They are the opposite side to these people and the True Lord *Glorified is He* said of them: ‘But [when] those who are conscious of Allah are asked, “What is it that your Lord has bestowed from on high?” They answer, “Goodness” For those who do good in this world; and the home of the Hereafter is better. And how excellent is the home of the righteous.’ (*an-Nahl:* 30)

There is a story that clarifies the aspects of difference between the believing party and the disbelieving party. When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called on his people and his clan to have faith in Allah, the One, Who sent down to him a way in an inimitable book, news of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* began to spread amongst the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. Each tribe sent a delegation to become familiar with and investigate the issue of this Messenger. However, the disbelievers of Quraysh wanted to bar others from Allah’s path. They split themselves up amongst the four entrances to Mecca, and when someone from one of the tribes’ delegations asked: ‘What has your Lord said, who has sent a messenger to you?’ The disbelievers who received them would say: ‘He is a false messenger. He makes up lies and he is ungrateful.’ Obviously, the objective of the disbelievers was to bar the delegations of the tribes.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* informs His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of what happened. When it is said to those standing at the gates of Mecca by the delegations that have come to examine the news of the Messenger: ‘What has your Lord sent down?’ They respond: ‘He is repeating the fables of ancient times’.

This sole response from those standing at the four gates of Mecca shows that they had agreed upon a response that had been prepared beforehand. With this, they wanted to turn away the tribes’ delegations from listening to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and they likened the reminder that had been sent down from Allah to the stories that used to be related to them – for example – by An-Nadar ibn Al-Harith, whose stories of the ancients were similar to the stories of ‘Antara and the stories of Abu Zayd Al-Hilsli, which are told in our villages. This was their initial position in the dispute.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* comments on this statement of theirs:

لِيَحۡمِلُوٓاْ أَوۡزَارَهُمۡ كَامِلَةٗ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ وَمِنۡ أَوۡزَارِ ٱلَّذِينَ
يُضِلُّونَهُم بِغَيۡرِ عِلۡمٍۗ أَلَا سَآءَ مَا يَزِرُونَ ٢٥

On the Day of Resurrection they will bear the full weight of their own burden, as well as some of the burden of those they misled with no true knowledge. How terrible their burden will be! [25] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 25)

Look at His statement: ‘That they may bear their own burdens in full.’ This is so that you can see how the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that the human soul has various states. If the human soul transgresses against itself in these aspects then it may transgress in moral aspects, socials aspects, and other aspects, and thus it takes on the burdens of everything it does.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that the human soul that perpetrates sins when it misguides another soul will only bear the burden of the sins perpetrated afterwards of the soul that it misguided. He says: ‘and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge.’ This is because the soul that has been misguided may commit sins irrelevant to the aspect at which they were misguided.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is Most Just, such that even the person who leads others astray does not bear the burden of the sins of which he is not the cause. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says here: ‘and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge.’ The one who misguides others bears the burden of his own sins and also some of the burden of those whom he led astray, and these are the sins that resulted from being led astray.

As for the sins and evil deeds that they committed themselves without being prompted by those who misguided them, they alone will bear the consequences. In this way, every person bears the burden of sins that he commits.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* settled this matter when He said, ‘By Him in Whose Hand my life is, whoever takes anything illegally will bring it on the Day of Resurrection by carrying it over his neck: if it is a camel, it will be grunting; if it is a cow, it will be mooing; and if it is a sheep it will be bleating!’(1)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge,’ He is only alerting us to the need of not letting this life distract us from the most important issue that preoccupies the mind of the creation, which is to seek out the Creator Who has ennobled the creation and prepared the universe to receive them.

It was obligatory upon these people who had heard from the disbelievers of Quraysh to seek out the Messenger and to hear from him; as they were unlettered and no messenger had come to them previously. The True Lord *Glorified is He* said about them: ‘And among them are unlettered ones who do not know the Scripture except in wishful thinking, but they are only assuming.’ (*al-Baqara:* 78)

Thus, if a messenger comes to them, then they must seek him out, and they must hear from him directly, not via the disbelievers. This is why Allah will punish them because they neglected the issue of religion. However, the severe punishment will be for those who had knowledge of writing.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘So woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," in order to exchange it for a small price.’ (*al-Baqara:* 79) The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes those who bear their own burdens and some of the burdens of those whom they led astray: ‘Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear.’ How evil are the sins that they bear? They were not content with their own burdens. Rather, they barred others from Allah’s path and prevented them from listening to faith. As a result, these people deemed some of what Allah had forbidden to be lawful, and those who barred them from Allah's path bear the burden of leading them astray.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1832) and Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (7597) from the Hadith of Abu Hamid As-Sa‘adi*

Therefore, we find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'The evilest of you is the one who sells his religion for the sake of this life, and even more evil than him is the one who sells his religion for someone else's life in this world.'(1) If someone sells their religion, then let them enjoy themselves for a while, they deserve punishment. Whoever sells their religion so that someone else can enjoy it will receive an even greater punishment from Allah.

He *Glorified is He* says after that:

قَدْ مَكَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَى ٱللَّهُ بُنْيَـٰنَهُم مِّنَ ٱلْقَوَاعِدِ فَخَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ
ٱلسَّقْفُ مِن فَوْقِهِمْ وَأَتَىٰهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Those who went before them also schemed, but God attacked the very foundations of what they built. The roof fell down on them: punishment came on them from unimagined directions [26] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 26)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the stories of those who lived before and the standard practices that Allah *Glorified is He* carried out against them in order to give His Messenger solace. He makes it clear that what has happened to him is nothing new. Rather, the same happened to every other Messenger. He informs him that He did not send any messenger until after tribulation had become widespread and corruption was overflowing, and humanity had lost the power of resistance that faith had given them as a result of the loss of those who believe, do righteous actions, and advise one another in truth and patience.

A clear example of this is what happened to the children of Israel, about whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: 'They used not to prevent one another from wrongdoing that they did.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 79) Allah's punishment was directed at them, and this is the outcome of every nation in which the people do not prevent one another from the wrongdoings taking place in front of them.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (118) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra peace and blessings be upon him.*

He *Glorified is He* says here: 'Those before them had already plotted.' To plot means to secretly devise something hid it from the one who is plotted against. However, when one of the Messengers is plotted against, they are plotting against someone who is assisted by Allah, the Omniscient, the All Knowing.

Whenever Allah informed His Messenger of the plot, He would render the effects of this scheming to be null and void. The One Who informed him is the One Who is able to nullify it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has thus ordained: "I shall most certainly prevail, I and My messengers!"' (*al-Mujadala:* 21) He also says: 'for, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers; that, verily, they – they indeed – would be victorious.' (*as-Saffat:* 171-172)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* applied this to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When the disbelievers of Quraysh plotted against Him and gathered the youth of the tribes to kill him, Allah veiled them and they did not see him setting out for the migration. The camp of disbelief was unable to gain victory over him by any means; neither the aggressions of the tongue nor the aggressions of the limbs. These people who plotted against the Messengers were not left alone by the True Lord *Glorified is He* without any punishment. 'But Allah came at their building from the foundations.' They made their plot to be like a tall building. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* left them with a false sense of security and it opened up from beneath them and fell in upon them from above. This is how the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives an abstract example with something that is perceptible.

In the True Lord's statement: 'so the roof fell upon them from above them,' He makes it clear that they are inside this structure and the roof is above them in this case, and Allah willed for it to come upon them from above: 'and the punishment came to them from where they did not perceive' This is how Allah's punishment came about suddenly. This is because they plotted and they thought that this plotting was secret and hidden from the Ever-Living, the All-Sustaining.

If only the matter was restricted to this; no, rather, Allah will punishes them in the Hereafter as well:

ثُمَّ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ يُخْزِيهِمْ وَيَقُولُ أَيْنَ شُرَكَآءِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ كُنتُمْ تُشَـٰٓقُّونَ فِيهِمْ ۚ
قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمَ إِنَّ ٱلْخِزْىَ ٱلْيَوْمَ وَٱلسُّوٓءَ عَلَى ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

In the end, on the Day of Resurrection, He will shame them,
saying, ‘Where are these “partners” of Mine on whose
account you opposed [Me]?’ Those given knowledge will say,
‘Shame and misery on the disbelievers today!’ [27]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 27)

This is how the punishment will be in this life and the Hereafter. They will suffer disgrace on the Day of Resurrection. Disgrace is humiliation. It is more severe than beating and physical harm. No one can bear it. It is that trembling that envelops the entire body, and no one who is afflicted with it ever escapes it.

Many may be able to suppress pain, but disgrace is an inner feeling which is outwardly apparent. No one is able to suppress its effects because it is killing the nucleus of false pride that the one who plotted and schemed lived in. The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes this clear in His statement about the village that received sustenance from Allah and then showed ingratitude to Allah’s blessings. He says: ‘And Allah presents an example: a city which was safe and secure, its provision coming to it in abundance from every location, but it denied the favours of Allah. So Allah made it taste the envelopment of hunger and fear for what they had been doing’ (*an-Nahl:* 112). It is as if the body comes to possess the sense of taste and it is as if hunger has become a garment; the one wearing it suffers from it. The back of his head feels hungry. His face feels hungry. His arms, skin, and feet all feel hungry, and everything that they contain.

When this disgrace happens, all the feelings of false pride come to an end, and especially for the person who claimed his arrogance, presumption, and snobbery were everlasting and self-sufficient.

He *Glorified is He* continues with a challenge: ‘Where are My “partners” for whom you used to oppose [the believers]?’ Where are these partners that you were worshipping? The phrase “for whom you used to oppose [the believers]" means that you have made the believers and those with the Messenger to be a party that you oppose. You have taken the side of falsehood and you have abandoned the side of truth. Here, the people whom Allah *Glorified is He* has given knowledge say: 'Indeed disgrace, this Day, and evil are upon the disbelievers.'

It is as if the matter will become an assembly with the presence of the True Lord *Glorified is He* between those who plotted against Allah's Messenger and those whom Allah gave knowledge will also be present.

Knowledge, as we know, comes from Allah directly. Then it is transmitted to the angels, to the Messengers and then from them to their respective nations.

Just as this life has borne witness to the fall of various ways that people have followed out of their personal desires, and the fall of those who worshipped them besides Allah, the Last Day will bear witness to the disgrace and calamity that will engulf them. The disgrace could be from the horror of the great standing, and Allah will protect those who believed in Him with tranquillity.

We know that the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He* said, 'Have I not conveyed? O Allah, bear witness!'(1)

Just as the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to his nation and they responded to him; he also asked them to be an extension of his Message and to convey it to mankind. This is because the True Lord *Glorified is He* has prevented the possibility of there being any messages after the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It then became the responsibility of Muhammad's nation to convey to whomever has not received the Message. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'May Allah make the person who hears from me and spreads it, and conveys it to whoever has not heard it, shine. And perhaps the one who conveys is more aware than the one who hears'.(2)

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(1) *This statement is found in several Hadiths, such as the Hadith of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud which has been related by Muslim in His (Sahih) (378). He said, 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him addressed while leaning his back on the dome of Adam peace be upon him. Then he said, 'Indeed, only a soul that has believed will enter Paradise. O Allah! Have I conveyed? O Allah, bear witness!'*

(2) *Related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/438), At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (2658, 2657), Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (232), Al-Humaydi (1/47) from the Hadith of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who says: ‘So how [will it be] when We bring from every nation a witness and we bring you, [O Muhammad] against these [people] as a witness? That Day, those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Messenger will wish they could be covered by the earth. And they will not conceal from Allah a [single] statement’. (*an-Nisa’:* 41-42) They wish to become dust, as He *Glorified is He* said in another place: ‘Indeed, We have warned you of a near punishment on the Day when a man will observe what his hands have put forth and the disbeliever will say, "Oh, I wish that I were dust!”’ (*an-Naba’:* 40)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that:

ٱلَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ ظَالِمِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ ۖ فَأَلْقَوُا۟ ٱلسَّلَمَ مَا كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ
مِن سُوٓءٍۭ ۚ بَلَىٰٓ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

Those whose lives the angels take while they are wronging themselves will show submission: ‘We were doing no evil.’ ‘Yes you were: God knows fully everything that you have done [28] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 28)

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘The ones whom the angels take in death [while] wronging (i.e. oppressing) themselves.’ They gathered them in death while they were in a state of sinning against themselves. In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘and no wrong did we do to them, but it was they who persistently wronged themselves.’ (*an-Nahl:* 118)

It is known that man may oppress someone else for his own personal gain and benefit, so how can he oppress himself? This is what they call foolish oppression; when you oppress your own soul. But how can this be? We know that if the enemy is external, it is easy to resist him, as opposed to when it comes from your soul. This enemy is dangerous and difficult to resist. Here, we raise a question: what is oppression? It is to deny someone his right. Therefore, what can you do to your soul such that it can be said that you oppressed it by denying it its right? We say, ‘when you are hungry, do you not eat? When you are thirsty, do you not drink? When you are exhausted from your work, do you not sleep?’ Therefore, you give your soul its requirements which please it and you hasten to do so. Likewise, when you sleep and they try to wake you up for work, you do not wake up, or they try to wake you up for prayer and you are sluggish. In the end, the result is failure at work or loss in trade, etc. This is an accumulated loss, and the loser is the soul. By depriving the soul of certain benefits in this life, man oppresses his soul. Compare this to the matters of the Hereafter.

Look here at the particulars of this life when they are fulfilled for you. Do they end? Or do they end and something else begins? It is the latter indeed. We ask regarding this thing that will begin; is it a repeated image of what came to an end? It is not so because the end in this life is intermittent, and I have taken my portion of it according to my abilities, and my abilities have limited capacities. As for that which will begin (i.e. in the Hereafter), it has no end. It is eternal and will never be cut off, and all the blessings that it contains come about according to the capacities of the Bestower of Blessings; your Lord *Glorified is He*. Therefore, when you give your soul a gratification in this life, which is ceasing and intermittent, you cause it to lose out on the eternal gratification in the Hereafter. This is the end of oppressing the soul.

We return to Allah’s statement: ‘The ones whom the angels take in death.’ This verse affirms causing death for the angels. In reality, causing death belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* as we find in His statement: ‘It is Allah [alone that has this power – He] who causes all human beings to die’ (*az-Zumar:* 42). However, as long as angels are commanded, then it is as if Allah is the One Who causes human beings to die even though He *Glorified is He* did say: ‘It is Allah [alone that has this power – He] who causes all human beings to die’. He also said: ‘Say, "The angel of death will take you who has been entrusted with you.” Then to your Lord you will be returned.’ (*as-Sajda:* 11) Therefore, the causing comes from Allah *Glorified is He* at one time, from the chief of the angels at another time and from his helpers amongst the angles at another time. The matter is either applied directly, or via an intermediary, or from the source of the matter.

‘And [who] then offer submission, [saying], "We were not doing any evil."’ They will humble themselves and surrender, and their arrogance and haughtiness will no longer benefit them as it did in this life. All of this will have left them along with this life which will have departed in front of them.

As long as they are offering their submission now, then it means that they were at war beforehand. They were at war with their own souls and they are people who committed wrongdoing against themselves. It is as if the verse is saying, ‘They have raised the white flag and said, “We can no longer endure the war.”’

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘[saying], "We were not doing any evil"’. This is similar to His statement in another verse: ‘Then there will be no [excuse upon] examination except they will say, "By Allah, our Lord, we were not those who associated.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 23) The reality is that after offering their submission and raising the white flag, they are then faced with punishment. Thus, they say, in an attempt to defend themselves: ‘We were not doing any evil.’ It is astonishing that these people are lying in this situation. Who are they lying to now? The True Lord *Glorified is He* responds to them: ‘But, yes! Indeed, Allah is Knowing of what you used to do’ It is from Allah’s mercy that He is not content with only knowledge. Rather, He records and writes down everything in a book which will be presented to them on the Day of Resurrection, as He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And sufficient are We as accountant.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 47) He also said: ‘And [for] every person We have imposed his fate upon his neck, and We will produce for him on the Day of Resurrection a record which he will encounter spread open. [It will be said], "Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 13-14)

Some people are happy to negate the possibility of actions being recorded and written down, and we say to these people: Look at what the human intellect has achieved today in terms of recording pictures, sounds, prints and other things. All of these should make it easy for us to move on from the capabilities of the human intellect and look at Allah’s capabilities, which are unlimited. There is no basis for denying the power of the angels, as ‘watchers’ and ‘ever-present’(1), to record deeds in a book that preserves them and counts every major and minor action.

Then He *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) He *Glorified is He* says: ‘When the two receivers receive, seated on the right and on the left. Man does not utter any word except that with him is an observer prepared [to record].’ (*Qaf:* 17-18)

فَٱدۡخُلُوٓاْ أَبۡوَٰبَ جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۖ فَلَبِئۡسَ مَثۡوَى ٱلۡمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

So enter the gates of Hell. There you will remain – the home of the arrogant is evil indeed [29] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 29)

We previously stated, while commenting on His *Glorified is He* statement which describes Hell: ‘with seven gates leading into it, each gate receiving its allotted share of sinners.’ (*al-Hijr:* 44) Every group from the disobedient will have a specified gate. There will be the gate of usury, the gate of bribery, the gate of hypocrisy, and so forth. It is left to you to imagine what suffering will happen to the person who has committed all these acts of disobedience. Indeed, he will enter through this gate and then come out again in order to go through another gate. How truly miserable will these people be! Here: ‘enter the gates of Hell.’ This is also in the form of a plural. Therefore, each one of you will enter from the gate that has been specified for you.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘how wretched is the residence of the arrogant’ This arrogance of theirs is not essential because the one who truly deserves to be proud is he who has it essentially which cannot be taken away from him. Someone who is proud of something that they do not possess has a false sense of pride. How quickly are these people deprived of what they are boasting of in this life and then made contemptible. It is not appropriate for anyone to be proud because true pride belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقِيلَ لِلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوۡاْ مَاذَآ أَنزَلَ رَبُّكُمۡۚ قَالُواْ خَيۡرٗاۗ لِّلَّذِينَ أَحۡسَنُواْ فِي
هَٰذِهِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا حَسَنَةٞۚ وَلَدَارُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ خَيۡرٞۚ وَلَنِعۡمَ دَارُ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

But when the righteous are asked, ‘What has your Lord sent down?’ they will say, ‘All that is good.’ There is a reward in this present world for those who do good, but their home in the Here- after is far better: the home of the righteous is excellent [30] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 30)

We previously talked about His statement: ‘And when it is said to them, "What has your Lord sent down?" They say, "Fables of the former peoples.”’

(*an-Nahl:* 24) These acts and scenes clarify the position that ended with them professing they were disbelievers.

This verse was sent down regarding the group that was entering Mecca. At its gates, from which the people of the countryside came, the disbelievers divided themselves up in order to bar those entering from hearing the news of the people who believe in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Muslims waited for their opportunity and went out to the hills surrounding Mecca under the pretence of grazing their sheep, for example, in order to meet these questioners and give them news of the Prophet and his call.(1) This shows that the one asking about something should not be content with the first passer-by that he asks. Rather, he should continue asking until he finds a contrasting view. When they asked the disbelievers, they said, "They say, "Fables of the former peoples."' But they were not satisfied with this, so they asked the people of faith and their answer was: 'Goodness!' (*an-Nahl:* 30) This is so we can understand that when man comes across something that has two opposing sides, he should not be satisfied with just one side. Rather, he must listen to the opposing side and then use his intellect to choose between the two. We notice here in 'And it will be said to those who feared Allah' that the True Lord does not explain to us who they are, and He does not let us know their identity. This shows us that they were unable to meet face to face. They were making themselves discreet because they were still weak and unable to meet face to face. This position is repeated – this position of asking until one arrives at the correct viewpoint – when the True Lord *Glorified is He* censured one of His Prophets, Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* in His statement: 'And has there come to you the news of the adversaries, when they climbed over the wall of [his] prayer chamber. When they entered upon Dawud and he was alarmed by them? They said, "Fear not. [We are] two adversaries, one of whom has wronged the other, so judge between us with truth and do not exceed [it] and guide us to the sound path. Indeed this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes (Female sheep), and I have one ewe; so he said, 'Entrust her to me,' and he overpowered me in speech."' (*Sad:* 21-23) What did Dawud

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5/2824) and As-Suyuti in (Ad-Durr al-Manthur) (5/125).*

peace be upon him say? ‘He has certainly wronged you in demanding your ewe [in addition] to his ewes’ (*Sad:* 24). It is clear in the judgement of Dawud *peace be upon him* that he was influenced by the statement ‘he has ninety-nine ewes’. Let us suppose that he did not have anything. Would he be oppressing his brother by taking one ewe? Therefore Dawud *peace be upon him* was influenced by the claims of the opponent, as he inserted another context. This is a procedural error in presenting the case because these ninety-nine ewes have nothing to do with the case. Rather, it is a means of currying favour with the judge and playing on his emotions by stating that the opponent is wealthy and despite that he is greedy and oppressive.

Dawud *peace be upon him* realised his mistake in judgment immediately, and that it was a test and trial from Allah: ‘And David became certain that We had tried him.’ (*Sad:* 24) We tested him in order to teach him the lesson in a practical way. Would he judge in truth and consider all sides of the case, or would he not? Look here at the intelligence of prophethood. Look how quickly Dawud *peace be upon him* realised and acknowledged what had happened to him. He asked his Lord for forgiveness, fell down in prostration, and turned to Him in repentance. He *Glorified is He* said: ‘and he asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allah].’ (*Sad:* 24) Therefore, the testimony here is that it was obligatory for Dawud *peace be upon him* to listen to the second party in this dispute before making a judgment.

In His statement: ‘And it will be said to those who feared Allah, "What did your Lord send down?" They will say, "[That which is] good.”’ What is ‘good’? It is everything that the soul is fond of in all of its dispositions and faculties, but being fond of something might only be temporary, and then it leads to sorrow and regret. Hence, this is not goodness because there is no good followed by the Fire. Likewise, there is no evil followed by Paradise. We must know that true goodness remains as permanent goodness in this life and likewise in the Hereafter.

If we take the example of a drug addict, we find that he engages in temporary enjoyment and spurious intoxication, which quickly comes to an end. Then, in his view, this goodness quickly becomes immediate evil in this life and delayed evil in the Hereafter. Therefore, look at the life span of goodness in yourself and how it is and how it will end. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains it in His statement: ‘For those who do good in this world is good; and the home of the Hereafter is better.’ We understand from this verse that it is obligatory for the believer not to abandon this world and its means, for may be the disbeliever will take them and overcome you with them, or he will weaken you in your religion because of them. Whoever worships Allah has more right over His secret in existence, and Allah’s secrets in existence are for the believers. It is not appropriate for them to leave the means of this world to the disbelievers.

Strive, o believer, in the means of this life in order to protect yourself from tribulation on behalf of the disbelievers. It is not lost on anyone how much we are in need of others in this day and age such that we have given them the opportunity to take control over our politics and our capabilities. This is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘For those who do good in this world is good.’ They take their good deeds and they will be an upper hand for them in what they strive for and what they do in this life. This is how the man benefits himself and benefits others, and whenever your sphere of benefit increases for the sake of mankind, you have the upper hand, and your reward is tied to goodness in the Hereafter. This is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘There is no Muslim who plants a plant, or cultivates a crop, and then a bird or person or beast eats from it except that an act of charity is written for him.’(1)

This verse also clarifies the other side for us, which is one of the fruits of persevering in doing good in this life and it is security. You will find that whoever lives upright in this life and does not do anything that he can be punished for, will be secure and reassured, such that if he is afflicted with something evil or despicable, he still feels secure without fear. This is because he has not done anything that would invite fear.

Take the example of the thief. You can see that he is always anxious and scared. His eyes keep moving from left to right. If he sees a police officer, he becomes restless, looks around, and then departs telling himself, ‘Maybe he is after me!’ As for the upright person, he is secure and reassured. One of the fruits of this perseverance in good action and uprightness in this life is that man lives according to his capacities and he does not exhaust himself in what he is incapable of. In the past, they used to say to one of them, ‘The meat is expensive.’ He would respond, ‘Make it cheaper’. They would say, ‘How can we do that?’ He would again respond, ‘Do without it.’

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(1) *Agreed upon. Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (2330) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (1553) in the chapter of Drinks from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him.*

The poet composed this by saying:

If something is too expensive for me, I leave it
Then it will be much cheaper after it was expensive
Do not say that the soul is aspiring for it and desiring it.

In our practical lives, someone may come home from work and no food has been prepared and the table has not been set. He is hungry, so he eats whatever he can find and the problem is solved. The soul is content with what it has obtained. In order for man to live according to his capabilities, he must strike a balance between his income and his expenditure. Whoever is experiencing difficulty with regards to his income, or his outlets of sustenance are being restricted, must restrain himself in what he spends and restrain the desires of his soul. This is how he can live blamelessly and easily, pleased with himself and happy. Some people, when in this kind of situation, resort to asking for loans in order to gratify the desires of their soul. Maybe they will borrow enough money to enjoy themselves for a month, but then live in humiliations for ages. Therefore, it is wise, before asking people for a loan, to ask your soul first. Request that it be patient with you and wait for you until you are in a state of ease. Do not let it make you resort to the humiliation of begging. Before you blame whoever denied you blame your soul which misguided you in the first place. How original is the poet who summarised these values in his statement:

If you intend to ask for a loan in order to spend it
On the desires of the soul in a time of difficulty
Ask your soul to spend out from the treasures of its patience
To be patient with you and wait for a time of ease

If you do that you will be wealthy, and if you refuse

Whoever denies you after that will have every excuse to do so

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘and the home of the Hereafter is better.’ Goodness in the Hereafter is from Allah, and the blessings therein are according to the Bestower of Blessings *Glorified is He* without any toil, trouble, or work.

However, if it is said, ‘this is better than this’, then goodness is abundant in both, except that one has more goodness than the other. This is the meaning of Prophet Muhammad’s statement, ‘The strong believer is better than the weak believer, and there is goodness in both of them.’(1) This is why when He said: ‘For those who do good in this world is good.’ (*an-Nahl:* 30) He also said: ‘And the home of the Hereafter is better.’ The good fortune of this life is good, but the good fortune of the Hereafter is better. The True Lord *Glorified is He* finishes the verse by saying: ‘And how excellent is the home of the righteous.’ i.e. the abode of the Hereafter.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give us a brief of illustration of the abode of the Allah-conscious, as a sort of synopsis. He *Glorified is He* said:

جَنَّٰتُ عَدۡنٖ يَدۡخُلُونَهَا تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُۖ لَهُمۡ فِيهَا مَا
يَشَآءُونَۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَجۡزِي ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

They will enter perpetual Gardens graced with flowing streams. There they will have everything they wish. This is the way God rewards the righteous [31] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 31)

Gardens that have trees, flowers, fruits and vegetables, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being. But this is not it. This is paradise in a general sense which everyone who enters it will see. Additionally, everyone will have their own palace, as indicated by His statement: ‘And admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence. That is the great attainment.' (*as-Saff:* 12)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2664) in the chapter on Destiny, from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra peace be upon him.*

Therefore, here we have something that is shared by all: 'Gardens of perpetual residence, which they will enter, beneath which rivers flow.' The meaning of His statement: 'Gardens of perpetual residence' is gardens of permanent residence because they contain everything that man needs. There is no need for anything else. Imagine entering one of the greatest parks and gardens in the world, such as Hyde Park, for example. The most you could do is walk around for some time. Then you would feel tired, bored, and exhausted and you would want to take a break from your walk. As for the Paradise, it is a garden of perpetual bliss and you will love residing there on a permanent basis. The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes these gardens by saying: "beneath which rivers flow." In another verse He *Glorified is He* says: 'under which rivers flow' (*at-Tawba:* 100). The meaning of 'under which rivers flow' is that they flow underneath it, and maybe they come from another place. Someone might say, 'the flowing of these rivers could be cut off from you'. This is why the verse came: 'beneath which rivers flow.' They are an essential part of Paradise and no one can cut them off from you. Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'They will have therein whatever they wish.' 'Wish' here is not the same as wish in this life. Rather, it is the desire of a vivid imagination that is appropriate for the Hereafter and its blessings. For example, if you enter upon someone with poor means, then you have a wish that is according to his state. If you enter upon one of the rich and powerful, then you have a wish that is higher, and so forth.

The wish of oneself differs according to what is desired. If is the object of desire is Allah Who is not incapacitated by anything then your desire is absolute. The wish in the verse is not the same as wish in this life because wish in this life is limited by the environment of this life. As for that in the Hereafter, it is unfolded, ascending, and elevated, and in the same way that wishes are elevated from human being to human being according to their ranks and positions.

It is narrated that when one of the daughters of the kings of Persia was taken by a man, and they wanted to pay a ransom to get her back they offered him whatever he wanted. Thus, he said: ‘I want one thousand dinars,’ and they gave him one thousand dinars and he accepted it. One of them said to him, ‘She is the daughter of a king. You could have asked for anything and he would have given it to you.’ He then said: ‘By Allah, if I knew any numbers after one thousand, I would have asked for it.’ Thus, he had asked for the maximum amount according to his knowledge. This is why, when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to explain this Quranic passage to us: ‘And therein is whatever the souls desire and [what] delights the eyes, and you will abide therein eternally.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 71) He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘It contains what no eye has seen, no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being.’(1)

The framework of the verse is defined according to what it contains with their Lord. ‘Thus does Allah reward the righteous?’ This is the reward that they deserve for what they put forward in this life and forbidden pleasures that they denied themselves. Now the time for reward has come, and is a reward that is longer lasting and more extensive. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* said in another verse: ‘[They will be told], “Eat and drink in satisfaction for what you put forth in the days past.”’ (*al-Haqqa:* 24)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ ۙ يَقُولُونَ سَلَٰمٌ
عَلَيْكُمُ ٱدْخُلُوا۟ ٱلْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Those whose lives the angels take in a state of goodness. They will say to them, ‘Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden as a reward for what you have done’ [32] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 32)

Those who were conscious of Allah are the ones whom the angels gathered in death while in a state of inner purity. The meaning of: ‘take in death’ is that they come to reclaim their souls, and here the angels are in a group, as if they are the soldiers of the original angel of death. His statement: '[being] good and pure' is the opposite of the previous verse: 'The ones whom the angels take in death [while] wronging themselves.' Inner purity is the thing that brings about everlasting goodness that will never be cut off and will never be turned into evil. It is the thing that the soul is pleased with in a way that is harmonious with all of its faculties and dispositions, but on the condition that it continues on to that which is better than it. Nothing continues on to that which is better than it and more excellent except inner purity in values and inner purity in religion. As for what is besides this, it is only temporary and it will quickly vanish.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2824), Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/466), and Abu Na‘im in (Al-Hilya) (2/262) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him* from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who said, Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what has not occurred to the heart of any human being.”

When two people claim to love each other for the sake of Allah, we say that these are words that are confirmed when the love involved begins to grow bigger one day after another. That is because worldly love is contaminated by greed and desires. Thus, you see such love decreases as each party takes from the other. Those who love each other for the sake of Allah, however take from a gift that is never depleted, which is the gift of Allah. When you see two people whose love is increasing, know that it is a love for the sake of Allah. On the other hand, love, which is shown for worldly reasons, is a kind of love that quickly fades.

Is there anything purer than their true love that is free from the filth of association? Is there anything purer than their sincere actions for the sake of Allah? Is there anything purer than that they have not transgressed against themselves? Due to their inner purity, they see the record of their deeds, the summary of everything they have sent forward and are pleased, when the angel of death comes. You see them rejoicing and exulting. This appears on their faces at the time of their death. You see their faces shining, radiating, and smiling. On their faces are the signs of good, purity, and bliss as they observe the purity of their actions and the good news of the reward of Allah. On the contrary, we have the people of wretchedness and their state of dark faces and evil end, God forbid.

The angels greet them, at the time of death, saying, peace be upon you. (*an-Nahl:* 32) They say peace because they are exiting the life of this world in peace and coming to the Hereafter in peace. Therefore, the peace of those in a state of inner purity is a kind of peace that goes from this world to the Hereafter. Their peace is due to their sound religion in the life and their peaceful turn to Allah with no fear in the Hereafter.

There is another peace said to those who are careful of their duty to their Lord and after they are admitted to the garden. The doors open and the keepers of it shall say to them, peace be on you. (*az-Zumar:* 73) Then the sublime peace comes to them from Allah, the Merciful Lord. All the kinds of peace are taken from it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is there anything better and purer than that peace that comes directly from Allah?’ (*Ya Sin:* 58)

Surprisingly, people of the Elevation greet the pure believers while they are in Paradise. We know that people of the elevation are those whose good deeds and bad deeds are equal. They are detained sequestered on the Elevation which is a place between Paradise and the Fire. Ordinarily, the balance has two scales. As for ones whose scales are heavy with good deeds, he will be in a pleasant life. As for those whose scales are light, their refuge will be an abyss. (*al-Qari`a:* 6-9) These are two states. Where is the state of equilibrium between the two scales? It is mentioned in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And on the most elevated places there shall be men who know all by their marks.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 46) This means that they know the marks of the People of Paradise and Hell fire. They recognise and call out to the dwellers of Paradise saying peace be upon you. (*al-A‘raf:* 46) It is surprising that they are happy for the people of paradise and glad to greet them, even though they are facing a dilemma and a critical situation that preoccupy them.

Therefore, the people of paradise get greetings of peace from the angels as they die and when they enter paradise. They get greetings of a sublime peace from Allah as well as a peace from the people of the elevation who are concerned with their own affair. The angels tell them, ‘Enter the garden for what you did due to their good deeds.’ (*an-Nahl:* 32) That is because you have paid the price. The price is your righteous deeds in the life of this world and your adherence to the way of Allah. Some people might see a contradiction between this verse and the Noble Hadith where Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon Him* say, ‘there is none whose deeds alone would entitle him to get into paradise. It was said to Him, And Allah's Messenger, not even you? Thereupon He said, not even I, but that my Lord wraps me in mercy.'(1)

Actually, there is no contradiction between both of them. How do we reconcile between the verse and the Hadith? Allah *Glorified is He* reveals the Hadith to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* just as He reveals the verse to him. Thus, both of them come from the same source. It is evident at the following verse as Allah speaks of the hypocrites saying: 'And they did not find fault except because Allah and His Messenger enriched them out of His grace.' (*at-Tawba:* 74) The event here is one. Allah did not enrich them with what suited Him and the Messenger with what suited him; rather, it is one act of enrichment and one event. Likewise, there is no contradiction between the verse and the Hadith. How? Allah *Glorified is He* made man legally responsible after reaching the age of maturity and reason. He has been bestowing blessings upon him since his young age. When Allah demanded him to do something, He charged him with what yields good and profit that none of it goes back to Allah. After that, Allah awards him for this legal responsibility with paradise.

Every obligation is for a servant's own good in the life of this world and the Hereafter. Thus, legislating reward from Allah in the Hereafter is merely a favour from Allah. If a servant obeys his Lord as he has been required to regarding the obligatory actions, he would still be unable to compensate the blessings of Allah sent to him and thereby, reward in paradise is a favour from Allah and a bounty. The meaning of the words of the angles could be that their deeds is a normal reason for entering paradise and they acquire it by Allah's favour afterwards. Thus, the verse gathers between both deeds and favour and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* reinforces this when He says: Say: 'In the grace of Allah and in His mercy–in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather.' (*Yunus:* 58) They are not rejoicing because of their actions, as it does not fully make up the blessings they acquire. The true joy is due to the favour and grace of Allah. We say in the supplication, 'O Allah! Treat us with favour and not with justice.'

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

In addition, were they deeds of such and such from themselves? No, they were not. Their deeds were based on a way that their Lord laid down for them. Therefore, it is by favour and not merely action. To give an example, a father says to his son, if you work hard this year and excel, I will give you such and such.’ When the son excels, everything becomes his, including success and the gift.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَلۡ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّآ أَن تَأۡتِيَهُمُ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ أَوۡ يَأۡتِيَ أَمۡرُ رَبِّكَۚ كَذَٰلِكَ فَعَلَ ٱلَّذِينَ
مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡۚ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ يَظۡلِمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Are the disbelievers waiting for the angels to come to them,
or your Lord’s Judgement? Those who went before them did
the same. God did not wrong them; they wronged
themselves [33] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 33)

After the previous verses presented the reward of those who are conscious of Allah and those who said that Allah sent that which is good, they return to those who said that Allah sent ‘Fables of the former people.’ They return to those who oppose calling people to Allah and adopt a stance of hostility, deception, lying in wait, and harm. This is a question from Allah to those people. It is as if Allah asks them, ‘what are you waiting for after what you have done to the *Da’wa* and after you barred people from it? What are you waiting for? Do you wish to see with your own eyes? You have only any of the two inevitable matters that will befall you, which are either that the angels will take you in death or that the command of your Lord will come, which is the Day of Resurrection. Nothing will save you unless you believe. Or else, are you waiting for good? Good is never going to happen to you. Allah has said in other verses: ‘Allah’s commandment has come, therefore do not desire to hasten it.’ (*an-Nahl:* 1) He also said: ‘The hour drew nigh and the moon did rend asunder.’ (*al-Qamar:* 1) Further, He said: ‘Their reckoning has drawn near to man’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1).

Therefore, they are waiting for events that will bring evil to them. The angels will come to them to reclaim their souls while they are sinning against themselves, whereupon they will reluctantly proffer their submission or the overwhelming event will come to them, which is the Resurrection. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says that those who denied the Messengers were before them did the same. This means that this issue was known of them from before. Allah did not wrong them when He requited them with such and such. The meaning of Allah wronging them here does not refer to punishment, as the punishment has not taken place yet.

Allah says that they were wronging themselves. This is what we call foolish oppression. Wronging someone else could be done by the oppressor to get some sort of benefit, while wronging one's self bears no benefit. They transgressed against themselves in the life of this world by contravening the way of Allah and thereby, they caused themselves to miss the blessings of the worldly life and the blessings of the Hereafter. This is how they wrong themselves.

Then Allah says:

فَأَصَابَهُمۡ سَيِّـَٔاتُ مَا عَمِلُواْ وَحَاقَ بِهِم مَّا كَانُواْ بِهِۦ يَسۡتَهۡزِءُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

So the evil they had done hit them and they were surrounded by the very thing they had mocked [34] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 34)

This means that since they were transgressing against themselves the requital of this hit them. Allah names what will befall them in return *sayi'a* (evil) because He calls the retribution for an evil act a *sayi'a* (an evil act) like it. (*ash-Shura:* 40) Similarly as He, says: 'And if you take your turn, then retaliate with the like of that with which you were afflicted.' (*an-Nahl:* 126) That is what is called *mushakala*, which is verbal resemblance, i.e. this and that are from the same genus.

Allah says: 'that the retribution of what they did shall afflict them.' An action is a direct application of any of the functions of man's limbs. Every limb has a function including the leg, the hand, the eye, the ear etc. The function of the tongue is to speak and the function of other limbs is to carry out an action. Therefore, the tongue itself gets the half and all other limbs take the other half. That is because the yields of the tongues are centric. The word of the testimony of faith, 'There is no God but Allah' must be articulated so that we know that a person is a believer. The role of action comes into play to back up this statement afterwards. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?’ (*as-Saff:* 2-3)

It is through statements that ways and methods are conveyed to the ears. How can the limbs act without a way? That is why the Allah gave the ears a special place amongst other senses. It is the first of human organ that carries out its task and it is the one whose task is never finished. No limbs, for example, function during sleep, except the ear and it is through them one is woken up from sleep. If you examine the verses of the Quran and ponder at the signs of creation you see Allah *Glorified is He* say: ‘And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers–you did not know anything–and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78)

Ears are among the organs that shall bear witness on the Day of Resurrection. (*Fussilat:* 20) This is why Allah says that He veiled their ears of the people of the cave for many a year. (*al-Kahf:* 11) This means that He caused their ears that never rest to stop so that they could sleep peacefully and be able to remain in their cave. Had Allah not rendered something specific in the formation of their limbs, they would not have been able to sleep continuously for 309 years.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that they will be overwhelmed by the very thing which they mocked. (*an-Nahl:* 34) What were the disbelievers mocking? They were deriding the resurrection, the reckoning and the punishment that is awaiting them. The Quran narrates that they mocked the possibility of being resurrected after they die and become mere dust and bones. (*as-Saffat:* 16-17)

They said: ‘What! When we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation?’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) Their derision led them to ask for the punishment to be hastened if Prophet Muhammad is truthful. (*al-A‘raf:* 70) They also said: ‘Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think.’ (*al-Isra’:* 92) Would anyone ask his enemy to send down a punishment unless they were mocking? However, Allah *Glorified is He* tells them that they will never afford the punishment that they are mocking and that which is going to overwhelm them. It will surround and afflict them.

They will be unable to escape it or find any way out, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And Allah encompasses them on every side.’ (*al-Buruj:* 20)

Then Allah says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَشۡرَكُواْ لَوۡ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَا عَبَدۡنَا مِن دُونِهِۦ مِن شَيۡءٖ
نَّحۡنُ وَلَآ ءَابَآؤُنَا وَلَا حَرَّمۡنَا مِن دُونِهِۦ مِن شَيۡءٖۚ كَذَٰلِكَ فَعَلَ
ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡۚ فَهَلۡ عَلَى ٱلرُّسُلِ إِلَّا ٱلۡبَلَٰغُ ٱلۡمُبِينُ ٣٥

Those who worshipped others alongside God say, ‘If God had willed, we would not have worshipped anything but Him, nor would our fathers. We would not have declared anything forbidden without His sanction.’ Those before them said the same. Are the messengers obliged to do anything other than deliver [their message] clearly? [35]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 35)

We notice that the verb here is mentioned without its related phrase attached. Allah did not say that those who associate with Allah say. It is because the meaning of *Ishrak* is to associate partners with Allah. That is why Allah says: ‘And they who give associates say.’ (*an-Nahl:* 35) Then Allah mentions their statement. They say that if Allah had willed, we would not have worshipped anything other than Him. Here they are defending themselves using the rack that the disbelievers hang their mistakes on. That is Allah prescribed and decreed for us such and such things.

The one who transgresses against himself says that it is our Lord Who willed such and such for me. It is He Who guides and misguides. He is the One Who made me commit sins and such statements that are void of any truth. They end up asking, ‘So why is He punishing me, then?’ Let us discuss the kind of person who says these things because he has cognitive dissonance and the issue is not clear to him. In order to avoid this obscurity, we ask him why he does not wonder why Allah rewards him in return for good deed even though He willed this obedience from Him and prescribed it for me. This is the other side of the coin. Why do you say the first and not the second? Apparently, the first brings about evil and punishment for him, so he bears it in mind, while the other brings about good, so he pays no attention to it. We also ask him whether all his deeds are all good and all evil or mixed. The answer to this is clear. Thus, you are not innately good and you are not innately evil. You are capable of good just as you are capable of evil. Therefore, there is a difference between Him creating you with a capability to do something and its opposite and creating you restricted to doing one thing and not its opposite. Since He created you with the ability to do good and evil, He made either way clear to you and explained their rewards and requitals. He told you to do good and the reward is such and such, do evil and the retribution is such and such and here is the way.

The one who transgresses against himself likes saying, ‘Allah ordained that I should do that. I wonder if he has been shown the Preserved Tablet, looked at it and found out that Allah had ordained that he should drink wine, for example, so he did because Allah had ordained it for him. If that was the case you would be obedient to the orders. However, the case is different to what you imagine. You do not know that it has been ordained for you until after you do it and the action you carry out is preceded by your determination to act. So, have you examined the Preserved Tablet in order to know what Allah has ordained for you?

To give an example -Allah is the highest-: a father observes how his son study and finds that he is neglectful and not serious. He expects that he will fail in his exam. Is the father going to go to the exam with his son and force him to make mistakes? No, he is not going to do so. He rather, expects him to fail because he knows his state and that he does not deserve to pass.

Therefore, Allah prescribed in advance and in pre-eternity because He knows what a servant will do from the very beginning. Allah *Glorified is He* illustrated that when he directed the believers towards the *Ka’ba* after making Jerusalem their destination. (*al-Baqara:* 144) He informed the Prophet Muhammad that: ‘Those weak-minded among people would say, “What has turned them from their qiblah which they had?”’ (*al-Baqara:* 142)

The verb is mentioned in the future tense; will say. They have not said this statement yet at that time. The Quran was recited to everyone and was not hidden from any of these weak-minded people. Had those people had any intellect, they would have remained silent and not said this statement. They would thereby, miss the opportunity of truthfulness of Muhammad and the Quran. It was within their capacity to remain silent and accuse the Quran of lying. None of this happened, however. Thus, the will of Allah and his command regarding the disbelievers, who were looking for contradictions in the Quran, were fulfilled.

In the verse under discussion, Allah uses the past tense narrating what those who associate others with Allah said. (*an-Nahl:* 35) This verse comments on and explains the other similar verse where Allah uses the future tense. (*al-An'am:* 148) Allah uses both tenses to let us know that no one can oppose Allah's statement or change His judgment. Allah states that they said: neither they nor their fathers would have served anything besides Allah. Why did they not just talk about themselves? What is the wisdom behind defending their ancestors here? The wisdom is that they will need this claim afterward and will use it as their argument when they say: 'Nay! They say, "We found our fathers on a course, and surely we are guided by their footsteps."' (*az-Zukhruf:* 22) Therefore, there is no argument for those people who hang their transgressions against themselves on the rack of predestination and that Allah ordained disobedience for them. We see even some Muslims say the same and incline towards these fallacies. Some of them have the courage to and they liken this issue to a statement of a poet that says he (God) threw him into the sea shackled and said to him, beware of letting the water wet you. No one would do this except an oppressor! May Allah be exalted and transcendent above the statements of the ignorant and the disbelievers! Some people say that man is the one who creates actions and others oppose them and say No, our Lord is the One Who creates the action. We say to all of them that they have to understand that there is no contradiction. We ask what action is. Action is the instruction of a limb to do something. When you instruct a limb to do something, what is it that you do? Have you given your hand the power to move by itself or have it been your will that instructed it to move? The limbs are created by Allah and so is the will that governs the limb. Therefore, you did nothing but instructed the creation of Allah to do what Allah does not love, in a state of disobedience, and what Allah does love, in a state of obedience.

In addition, we must take note that Allah *Glorified is He* has a universal will and a legislative will. The universal will is what actually happens. Everything you see in the universe is what Allah has willed to be. The legislative will is that which He demands and loves. Let us take an example to clarify this. The disbelief of a disbeliever is universally willed by Allah for He created him with the ability to choose. Allah says: ‘so let him who please, believe, and let him who please, disbelieve.’ (*al-Kahf:* 29) As long as Allah has created you with the ability to choose, you are able to go towards faith or go towards disbelief but you disbelieved. So, have you disbelieved in defiance of Him and opposition to His will? Allah forbids! Thus, a disbeliever’s disbelief is a universal will, not the legislative will.

By the same standard, the faith of a believer is both a universal will and a legislative will, while, the disbelief of a believer is not disbelief. Therefore, it is a legislative will as well as a universal one. Thus, we must differentiate between the universal will and the legislative will.

When that strife took place, in the Sacred Mosque of Mecca some years ago, shots were fired there and people were frightened, some of them said, ‘How can this happen when Allah said that whoever enters it shall be safe. (*Al-‘Imran:* 97) They exclaimed about the act of killing and frightening those who were safe inside. Actually, those people mixed between the universal will and the legislative will. The intended meaning of the verse makes safe whoever enters it. This is what is sought by Allah and that is a legislative will that may or may not happen. The universal will, on the other hand, is what actually happens. Thus, what happened in the Sacred Mosque was a universal will and not a legislative will.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions what they say about not prohibiting anything without an order from Allah. A clarification of this phrase is to be found in the verse (103) of the chapter of *al-Ma’da.* Then, Allah said in affirmation that those who lived before did the same, i.e. this is the standard practice of those from before who were stubbornly resistant. However, the job of the apostles is to deliver the message clearly. (*an-Nahl:* 35) The clear delivery means conveying what is between Allah’s servants and Allah which is the notification the Messengers. This refers to the way of Do’s and Don’ts. Allah would not order you unless you were capable of doing and also capable of leaving.

Thus, we see Allah *Glorified is He* lift the legal obligation from a forced person and attach no judgment to him. That is because under compulsion one may do what he does not want or desire to do. The same applies for the insane and the child who has not reached puberty yet. No judgment is attached to any of these people. Why? It is because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to secure the well-being of the tool that makes choices, which is the intellect.

A legal responsible man must make that clear notification of the messengers his decisive criterion. That way is represented in do's and do nots. Due to this, the Quran condemns those people who come up with a statement from themselves without any account from Prophet Muhammad. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding them: 'And they make the angels–them who are the servants of the Beneficent Allah–female [divinities). What! Did they witness their creation? Their evidence shall be written down and they shall be questioned. And they say: If the Beneficent Allah had pleased, we should never have worshipped them.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 19-20) Allah rebuked them for this and asked them whether they have been given a book before the Quran to which they are adhering. (*az-Zukhruf:* 21) He addressed them in another verse exclaiming if they have a scripture in which they learn. (*al-Qalam:* 37)

A clear notification means that the one who is legally responsible must be clearly informed. If there is any shortcoming and the legally responsible person has not been informed, the shortcoming is attributed to the truly religious people, those affiliated to the religion and those entrusted with conveying the way to those whom it has not reached. There are many Hadiths encouraging spreading the religion of Allah to those who have not received the religion. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Convey from me even one verse.'(1) He also said, 'May Allah freshen the affairs of a person who hears something from us and communicates it to others exactly as he has heard it, for it may be that the recipient of knowledge understands it better than one who has heard it.'(2)

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

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(1) *Narrated by Bukhari, Ahmad Ad-Darami, and At-Tirmidhi*

(2) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi*

وَلَقَدۡ بَعَثۡنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٖ رَّسُولًا أَنِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱجۡتَنِبُواْ
ٱلطَّٰغُوتَۖ فَمِنۡهُم مَّنۡ هَدَى ٱللَّهُ وَمِنۡهُم مَّنۡ حَقَّتۡ عَلَيۡهِ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةُۚ
فَسِيرُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَٱنظُرُواْ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

We sent a messenger to every community, saying, ‘Worship God and shun false gods.’ Among them were some God guided; misguidance took hold of others. So travel through the earth and see what was the fate of those who denied the truth [36] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 36)

Here, Allah said that He raised in every nation a messenger, while in another verse He said that He raised from every nation. (*an-Nahl:* 84) Each one of them has a meaning. As for the latter it means from among themselves. He emerged from them, was raised and grew up amongst them and they knew his qualities, his veracity and his position amongst his people. Regarding the former, the preposition in regard is a locative pronoun, which refers to the whole community. It indicates an immersion within the entire community so that the notification does not reach just one group and not any other. Rather, it must be a general delivery for the entire community.

In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* says at one point, that He has sent messengers, (*al-Hadid:* 26) while at another time He says that He has raised messengers (*an-Nahl:* 36). There is a difference between the two meanings. As for the former, it indicates the act of sending which is comprised of something being sent and a recipient. As for the latter, it refers to the previous existence of something, which was wiped and needs to be raised up again.

To clarify this matter, let us return to the story of Adam *peace be upon him* where Allah taught him the names of everything and then caused him to go down from Paradise to earth. Allah told them that there shall come to them guidance from Him and those who would follow His guidance shall have no fear and neither shall they grieve. (*al-Baqara:* 38) He also said that whoever followed His guidance would not go astray or be unhappy. (*Ta Ha:* 123) Therefore, this is the way sent from Allah; *Glorified is He* to Adam. The obligation of Adam was to convey the way to his children and similarly his children are obliged to convey the way to their children and so forth. However, heedlessness may get the better of the one conveying the way or he may have a lack of concern for the way that leads to the obliteration of the ways so, Allah raises them up again. Thus, the issue of the message did not come about like this all of a sudden to one of the groups. Rather, it has existed since the beginning of creation.

The messages are a resurrection of a divine way that must have remained in the collective memory of humankind and being passed on to the next generations. However, heedlessness may afflict the one who is conveying it and thereby, does not convey or may make him not committed to it. That is why Allah sends messengers again. There are several verses that give this meaning. Allah says: ‘There are not a people but a warner has gone among them.’ (*Fatir:* 24); another verse says: ‘This is because your Lord would not destroy towns unjustly while their people were negligent.’ (*al-An‘am:* 131) And another verse says: ‘nor do we chastise until We raise a messenger.’ (*al-Isra’:* 15)

That is why we see those who do not believe in the way revealed from heaven, lay down laws for themselves to regulate their lives. Do they not have a law that defines crimes and punishes them? There is no punishment without incrimination, no incrimination without a text and no text without a conveyance. At this juncture, the importance of laying down laws and publishing them in public journals and newspapers comes so that everyone can be aware of them. It is not right to punish someone for a crime that he does not know that it is a crime. He has to be informed first so that he knows that the punishment for this act is such and such and the proof against him is established.

Here, we also notice that two messengers may be contemporary with one another. Were Ibrahim (Abraham) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* not contemporaries? Were Moses and Shu’aib (Jethro) not contemporaries? What is the reason behind this? The world in the past was in a state of isolation and seclusion. Each group was secluded in its place from the other groups due to the lack of means of communication. All the various groups on earth were unaware of one another and did not know anything about each other.

Thus, each group had its own specific environment that included customs, traditions, and reprehensible acts that were specific to it. Some people would worship idols, others would give less than due weights and measures, and others would engage in homosexuality. Therefore, distinct messengers had to be sent to deal with each group that lived in a specific environment and committed a specific crime.

Nevertheless, the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is during an age when places came into contact with one another due to the existence of means of communication to the degree that a crime happens in America, for example and we know about it on the same day. Therefore, all the environments and situations turned into one. Thus, it is logical that the Prophet is sent to all humanity and ages. The Quran expressed this universality when Allah says that he has not sent the Prophet but to all humankind as a bearer of good news and a warner. (*Saba':* 28) This means that He was sent to everyone with no one excluded. When a tailor says that he *kaffa* the clothes, he means he has gathered it together so that nothing ravels.

Then, Allah mentions the task of the Messengers namely; to serve Allah and shun the Shaitan (Satan). The act of worshipping is to adhere to the command to do something and the prohibition not to do something. Thus, if someone comes, claims divinity and does not have a way we ask him: how can we worship you? What is the way that you have brought? What do you command us? What do you prohibit us from?

In the verse we are discussing, there is a command to worship and a prohibition against the powers of evil. This is what they call *tahliyyah* (embellishment) and *takhliyyah* (leaving). To embellish by worshipping Allah and to leave by avoiding Shaitan, the issue of faith is based on these two elements. It consists of a negation within the words I bear witness that there is no God' and an affirmation in 'but Allah.' The one who articulates the testimony of faith is negating plurality and affirming oneness for Allah. Thus, he has left idolatry and embellished himself with oneness.

Thus, the reward in the Hereafter will be similar to this embellishing and leaving. This is why we find Allah says: 'then whoever is removed far away from the fire gathered together and is made to enter the garden he indeed has attained the object.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185) This means that whoever is drawn away from punishment and embellished with blessings, he has attained his desire.

The second thing the messenger call to is to shun the Shaitan. This means to distance yourselves from the powers of evil and do the opposite which is draw closer to Allah. The word *taghut* contains a hyperbole which indicates that one has reached the peak of transgression and gone beyond it. There is difference between a simple word like *tagha* (transgress) and a hyperbole form such as *taghut* which is the person who is over transgressing actions lead him to overstep the bounds of Allah and engage in greater wrongdoing.

To give an example, a young man rebels against his society. He starts by being a petty thief and he finds that people curry favour with him and treat him gently in order to protect themselves from his evil. He advances in his wrongdoing, buys a weapon for himself, kills people, and steals valuable amounts of money. Thus, he arrives at the peak of oppression and transgression. If the people had reprimanded him at the very beginning, he would not have reached this state. Thus, the indemnities are borne by the people. They pay it in place of the criminal because they neglected the responsibility of controlling and reprimanding him.

We also notice that the word *taghut* is a hyperbolic adjective that does not change according to the noun that it is describing. It is as if it is has over indication in its word and meaning. It is the same whether it is used with a singular, dual or plural, male or female. Thus, we say that is a *taghut* man, a *taghut* woman or those are two *taghut* men, two *taghut* women as if it has passed the limits of its word and all morphological forms. Therefore, a *taghut* is a person whose oppression will increase if people submitted to him. Allah says about the Pharaoh that he bluffed his people and they obeyed him. (*az-Zukhruf:* 54) His situation took him to the point where he claimed divinity and he said he knew no other deity but himself. (*al-Qasas:* 38)

It is related in the stories of those who claim prophecy that one of the caliphs received news of someone claiming prophecy. He commanded them to pay no attention to him and leave him alone so that perhaps he would desist. After a while, someone else claimed prophecy. The people went to the former to see what he thought about the new prophet. They asked him, what do you think about this person claiming prophecy? Which of you is the Prophet? He replied, ‘He is a liar. I have not sent anyone.’ He thought that they had believed his claim of prophecy, so he went a step further and claimed divinity and this is how *taghut* is.

The word *taghut* occurs eight times in the Quran. Six of them can be both a masculine and a feminine, one time with a female. (*az-Zumar:* 17) and one with a male. (*an-Nisa':* 60) In the Arabic language, there are words that can be applied to both a masculine and a feminine, such as the word *sabil* (path). It is used with a masculine as in (*al-A'raf:* 146) and with a feminine as in (*Yusuf:* 108). Thus it occurs with a masculine and a feminine.

Next in the verse we are discussing Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'of whom Allah guided and there were others against whom error was due.' (*an-Nahl:* 36) Some people use this verse as an argument to proclaim that guidance is in the hands of Allah and therefore, there is nothing we can do about not being guided and so forth.

We tell them come and let us read the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way, but they chose error above guidance.' (*Fussilat:* 17) If the meaning of guidance was as you understand, they would not have preferred blindness. Allah merely showed them the right way. They had the right of choice and they are capable of both this way and the other. The act of shoeing the right way is for both the believer and the disbeliever. Allah showed everyone and thus, whoever comes to Allah in faith, He increases his guidance and gives him his righteousness. (*Muhammad:* 17)

Some people see a contradiction between the statement of Allah to the Prophet that He does not guide everyone He loves (*al-Qasas:* 56) and the other statement to the Prophet that He guides to a straight way. (*ash-Shura:* 52) Allah negates the act of guidance for his Messenger in the former and affirms it in the latter. We notice that the action here is the same, which is guidance and the one being addressed is the same, which is the Messenger of Allah. Thus, how can one action be affirmed to a person at one time and then be negated to same person at another time?

There must be a difference in meaning. When Allah says that the Prophet does not guide everyone He loves, He means that He is unable to put faith into the hearts of those whom He loves. Rather, He can only direct and show the way. As for the guidance of faith, it is in the hands of Allah. He guides to it whoever is prepared to believe and turns away whoever rejects and refuses guidance. It is that Allah is in the service of His slaves. If someone loves something, He gives and facilitates it to him. This is how Allah guided a believer to faith and sealed the heart of a disbeliever with disbelief.

Therefore, guidance comes with two meanings, i.e. showing and directing to the way as in the previous verse and supporting and opening one's bosom to faith as in the statement of Allah: 'but Allah guides whom He pleases.' (*al-Qasas:* 56) Similarly, it has that meaning in the verse: 'And [as for] those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance.' (*an-Nahl:* 36)

Thus, the meaning of the first part of the verse we are discussing refers to the guidance of faith and support. He firmly establishes the way within them, facilitates it to them and opens their bosom. As for the second part, the word *haqqat* means that it became their right and it was necessary due to the deeds they had put forth that necessitate falling into grievous error. Error was deservedly decreed and became their due only because of what they did.

This is similar to the statement of Allah where He says that He does not guide the unjust people. (*al-An'am:* 144) What is that which comes first, the lack of guidance from Allah or their evildoing? Obviously, their evildoing happens first and thereby, Allah called them evildoing folk. The result was that they were denied guidance.

In this regard, we often mention an example so that it can be firmly implanted in our minds, and to Allah belongs the highest example: imagine that you are driving on a road heading towards some town and you come across various junctions and signs pointing to different directions. When you ask the traffic officer to tell you how to go to such and such town, he says 'Go from here'. You might say 'Praise be to Allah! I almost got lost. May Allah reward you!' When he finds that you have accepted his advice happily and with love and have thanked him for what he has done, he wants to do more for you and says, 'however, there is a tricky obstacle in the road, so I'll accompany you so that you get past it safely.'

Thus, the first advice was directing, while the second instance was a support. When you trusted his directions he helped you reach your destination. This is how the Messengers direct people to the truth and how people accept it. It is up to you to imagine what would happen if you said to the traffic officer, ‘It seems that you do not know the way’ He would say to you, ‘Fine. Direct yourself and go wherever you want.’

The word *dalala* (error) is an exaggeration of the word *dalal* as if it is a great misguidance. It contains both hyperbole and emphasis of the verb. It is mentioned again in the verse: ‘Say: As for him who remains in error, the Beneficent Allah will surely prolong his length of days.’ (*Maryam:* 75)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* proves to us sending Messengers in previous nations. Thereby, we become certain of what He is informing us of and know that humankind was divided into two groups, those who denied, and those who believed. He orders us to proceed through the earth and observe how the end of the deniers was. (*an-Nahl:* 36) There are proofs and testimonies that show that there were people in a certain place and that they had a civilization that was crushed and obliterated. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse that we pass by them in the morning. (*as-Saffat:* 137)

Allah *Glorified is He* commands that we travel in the earth, behold, and reflect on the previous nations such as ‘Ad, Thamud, the people of Saleh (Shelah), the people of Lut (Lot) and other nations. Allah tells us to proceed through the earth. Are we walking in or on the earth? We are travelling on the earth and that was our understanding of the verse. However, it is Allah Who speaks in the Quran whose gifts will remain until the Hour is established. As time passes, realities are revealed to us and science confirms the veracity of the Quran and its miracles. Years ago, we used to think that the earth was the Terra-firma that we lived on. Then science established that the air that is surrounding the earth (the atmosphere) is the elixir of life on earth and that there would be no life on earth without it. Thus, the atmosphere is a part of the earth. In this sense, we travel in the earth, as Allah *Glorified is He* articulated in His Mighty Book.

In the verse we are discussing, we also notice that Allah uses the letter *Fa* after ordering us to travel in the earth, while in another similar verse He uses the conjunction *thumma*. (*al-An‘am:* 11) This is not just a difference in expression; rather, each verse indicates a specific thing. When the letter *Fa* is used as a conjunction, it indicates sequence and immediate succession, i.e. beholding comes immediately after travelling. When *thumma* is used as a conjunction, it also indicates sequence but with a delay. In other words, some time passes between the two events, as in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Then He causes him to die, then assigns to him a grave, then when He pleases, He will raise him to life again. (*‘Abasa:* 21-22)

Allah commands us to see. Thus, the purpose behind travelling is to reflect and take admonition. Therefore, there must be remains and ruins that indicate the existence of these previous deniers who had these civilizations that were completely ruined. Today we boast about the stone structures that we have, such as the pyramids. Tourists from all the countries of the developed world come to see the development and progress of this ancient civilization which confounds them and bewilders them. Even now, they cannot solve its cryptic characters. Despite this, the Pharaohs did not leave behind anything to show how the pyramids were built or how they mummified their dead. This shows that these people were taken so forcefully that these sources and this information were obliterated along with them, as He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And how many a generation have we destroyed before them! Do you see any one of them or hear a sound of them?’ (*Maryam:* 98)

The Quran narrates several stories of these previous peoples. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with ‘Ad, [The people of] Iram, possessors of lofty buildings, the like of which were not created in the [other] cities. And [with] Thamud, who hewed out the rocks in the valley, And [with] (Pharaoh), the lord of hosts, who committed inordinacy in the cities, so they made great mischief therein? Therefore your Lord let down upon them a portion of the chastisement’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-13) this is what happened to the deniers in the past and beware of thinking that who comes after will flee from this outcome. No they are certainly not, as Allah is ever on the watch. (*al-Fajr:* 14)

Then Allah says:

إِن تَحۡرِصۡ عَلَىٰ هُدَىٰهُمۡ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِى مَن يُضِلُّۖ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن نَّٰصِرِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Though you [Prophet] may be eager to guide them, God does not guide those who misguide [others], nor will they have anyone to help them [37] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 37)

Allah *Glorified is He* is comforting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and affirming for him his concern for his *ummah* (his followers).

He tells Him that He does more than Allah has commanded him for the sake of guiding them to the degree that He would kill himself '…through grief due to their disbelief.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) He *Glorified is He* says: 'certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous [and] respecting [to] you; to the believers [he is] compassionate,' (*at-Tawba:* 128).

After that, Allah cuts off all hope for the stubborn deniers and says that He does not guide whoever leads astray. This means that He does not misguide except those who have not accepted faith, so He leaves them to their disbelief and expunges their hearts. They are not lamented over because this is what they want and Allah has responded to them with what they want. Thus, they have no helpers. Therefore, the issue is not just a lack of guidance, rather, there is a battle where they will not find any aid, helper or anyone to rescue them from it, as Allah *Glorified is He* narrates what they will say: 'So we have no intercessors, Nor a true friend.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 100-101) Therefore, Allah does not guide who has chosen misguidance for himself. He will, however punish him so that he will not find anyone to help him.

Then Allah says about them:

وَأَقۡسَمُواْ بِٱللَّهِ جَهۡدَ أَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡ لَا يَبۡعَثُ ٱللَّهُ مَن يَمُوتُۚ بَلَىٰ وَعۡدًا
عَلَيۡهِ حَقّٗا وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

They have sworn by God with their strongest oaths that He will not raise the dead to life. But He will – it is His binding promise, though most people do not realize it [38]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 38)

Amazingly, they swear by Allah. How can you swear by Allah when you do not believe in Allah? What does the word Allah mean to you? That is a sign of the ignorance of the disbelievers and a proof that the subject of faith is unclear in their minds. The word Allah itself is a proof of faith in Him. No word exists in the language until after there is something to which it refers. The television, for example, did not have a name before it existed. After it came into existence, they found a name for it. Therefore, meanings of things exist first and names are given to the meanings afterwards. Does the meaning of a word come before it or after it? It comes before it. When they say that Allah does not exist, we tell them that they are lying because the word Allah is a term that exists in the language and it must have a meaning before it exists. Therefore, faith precedes disbelief. Disbelief is logically coined, as the meaning of *kufr* (disbelief) is a cover. The question then is; what does it cover? It covers faith and only something that exists can be covered. Thus, we say that disbelief is a proof of faith.

They swear by Allah with the most energetic of their oaths, which means that they exaggerate in emphasising the oath. Their stupidity, here, is similar to what they said in another verse where they ask Allah to rain down upon them stones from the sky or bring them a grievous punishment. (*al-Anfal:* 32) That is not something an intelligent person would say. They swore by Allah that He would never raise who has died. This is a denial of the resurrection, as they have wondered before whether they and their ancestors would be resurrected after having died and become mere dust and bones. (*al-Mu'minun:* 82) Allah responds to them saying: *bala* (Yes indeed!) which is a tool of negating that which came before it. The linguists say that the negation of a negation is an affirmation. Therefore, *bala* negates the negation that came before it, which is their statement that Allah will never raise anyone from the dead. Thus, the meaning becomes, yes indeed Allah will raise anyone who has died.

Allah says that is a promise binding on Him. A promise means to give information about something whose time has not yet come. When a promise comes that something will happen afterwards, we look at the one who made the promise. Is he able to bring about what he promised or not? If he is not able to carry out what he has promised due to his inability to secure all the means needed to bring his promise, we tell him say 'if Allah wills'. That is so when the time for him to carry it out comes and he has not fulfilled his promise, we can find an excuse for him and do not call him a liar as you attributed the matter to the will of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not prohibit us from planning the future out, working and building such and such plan as we wish. Prepare everything for it, but you must complement this by saying, 'If Allah wills.' That is because you do not possess all the means which enable you to do what you want in the future. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘and do not say of anything: Surely I will do it tomorrow, unless Allah pleases.’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24) To give an example, suppose that you wanted to visit someone tomorrow to talk to him about something. Do you guarantee that you will be alive tomorrow? Do you guarantee that this other person will be there tomorrow? Do you guarantee that your reason for going will not change? Maybe all of these conditions will be available for you and then when you are about to go some impediment befalls you and prevents you from going. Therefore, we must complement our actions regarding the future by saying: ‘If Allah wills.’

However, if the Promise is from Allah *Glorified is He* it will be certainly fulfilled, because He *the Almighty* is fully Capable of carrying out what He promises. There is no power that can oppose or challenge His Will. Nothing in the heavens or the earth can incapacitate Him. Thus, the Promise from Allah *Glorified is He* is an absolute truth that He will for sure fulfil.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...but most people know it not.’ (*an-Nahl:* 38) In other words, they do not know that Allah *Glorified is He* is fully Capable of resurrecting them, as He says: ‘They say, “What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?”’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) He says about them: ‘They also say, “What? When we are turned to bones and dust, shall we really be raised up in a new act of creation?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 49)

The disbelievers deemed that the Resurrection will unlikely happen because they could not imagine how Allah *Glorified is He* will resurrect the entire creation that lived from the time of Adam, *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Hour. But why did the disbelievers deem it unlikely while Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Creating and resurrecting all of you is only like creating or resurrecting a single soul.’ (*Luqman:* 28) The matter is not some operation in which Allah *Glorified is He* gathers together all the particulars of each individual human being. No, there is no operation or process that takes up time, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘When He wills something to be, His way is to say, “Be” — and it is!’ (*Ya Sin:* 82)

Let us give an example of this –and to Allah belongs the highest similitude– for we see examples of these commands in the human world when a teacher or trainer comes to train the soldiers. We see him teaching and training first and then, whenever he wants to implement these commands; all he has to do is to stand in front of all the soldiers, say one word, and they all obey and stand in the way they are commanded. Does the trainer have to grab each individual soldier and make him stand the way he wants? No. With one word he gets what he wants.

It is as if the discipline and obedience of those commanded are the basic state. Likewise, all the particulars of the universe are properly ordered under Allah's command. It is with one Word that everything is completed. There is no process in His Command because a process means that the one doing it has to apply the particulars of his power to the particulars of the object, and the Resurrection is not like that. Rather, it is a command that is under His Order: '…Be! And it is!' This is why He says: '...but most people know it not.' (*an-Nahl:* 38) We say: Praise be to Allah *Glorified is He* that there are a few people who know the command of resurrection and believe in it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلَّذِى يَخْتَلِفُونَ فِيهِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ كَٰذِبِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

In order to make clear for them what they have differed about and so that the disbelievers may realise that what they said was false In order to make clear for them what they have differed about and so that the disbelievers may realize that what they said was false [39] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 39)

In this verse in question, Allah's saying: 'In order to make clear for them what they have differed about…' (*an-Nahl:* 39) means that He will clarify for them what they have differed about, namely, the matter of Resurrection because the Hereafter cannot be carried out properly without Resurrection and Reward. When I had a debate with the Communists, that is, why I told them, 'you have witnessed fierce and fabricator capitalists who caused people to suffer enough and did such and such, so what have you done regarding them?' They said, 'We have done such and such...' to which I responded, 'Before Communism came to existence in 1917, were there not oppressive people similar to them?' They said, 'Yes, indeed.' I then said, 'Therefore it is in your interest that there be a Resurrection, a Reckoning and a Punishment from which those who preceded you cannot escape and by no means you were unable to punish them. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* concludes that matter saying that the disbelievers will come to know that they were false regarding their speech that Allah *the Almighty* will not raise the dead again. That knowledge is based on certainty and examination, but it will be too late. The time will be only for Reckoning and Reward but not to accept or reject it because it will be of no benefits. At that time they will acknowledge that they were lying when they swore that Allah *Glorified is He* would never raise the dead, and that they exaggeratedly emphasized their oath. That is why He *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘and persisted in great sin’. (*al-Waqi‘a:* 46)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّمَا قَوۡلُنَا لِشَيۡءٍ إِذَآ أَرَدۡنَٰهُ أَن نَّقُولَ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٠﴾

When We will something to happen, all that We say is,
‘Be,’ and it is [40] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 40)

Therefore, the matter of Resurrection is not a process in which the particulars of every individual, from Adam *peace be upon him* until the Hour is established, are gathered together and their parts are formed as they should be. Rather, it is completely controlled by the Divine command: ‘Be’

Merely by the command being issued, without the need for any time or operation, everyone will be compliant and obedient. Each individual will be waiting his turn and waiting for instructions. That is why the statement has been related: ‘Allah only manifests matters but does not commence it from the very beginning’, Allah has already written these matters in the Preserved Tablet. Thus, He *Glorified is He* manifests them as they are written therein.

The command depends on the permission: ‘Manifest!’ And it becomes manifest.’ Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; if someone sets a Timer it for a specific time and it remains as it is until the time of that has been set for it. Then it goes off without any intervention on behalf of the one who initially set it.

Even the Arabic word *kun* (Be) itself requires time, and it is the simplest and the nearest time-form of giving permission even though He *the Almighty* has no need of *kun* or anything else when He commands.

Allah *Glorified is He* and then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ هَٰجَرُواْ فِي ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا ظُلِمُواْ لَنُبَوِّئَنَّهُمۡ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا حَسَنَةٗۖ
وَلَأَجۡرُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ أَكۡبَرُۚ لَوۡ كَانُواْ يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

As for those who emigrated in God's cause after being wronged, We shall give them a good home in this world, but the reward of the Hereafter will be far greater, if they only knew it [41] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 41)

The Arabic word *Muhajirun* (The Emigrants) means people who believed in Allah *Glorified is He* with faith that reached such a degree of certainty which made them capable of bearing hardship, oppression, and persecution for the sake of their faith. It is not possible for someone to sacrifice his or wealth, family and his self unless he certainly believed in something.

The verse in question affirms the Resurrection which the disbelievers firmly denied. They exaggerated and persisted in their denial that Allah *the Almighty* says:' they have sworn by Allah with their strongest oaths that He will not raise the dead to life.' (*an-Nahl:* 38)

They are well-aware that amongst the creation are those who do evil and those who do good; so the question is, 'Do they believe – rationally – that Allah *Glorified is He* will leave those who do evil and cause chaos in the world without giving them their due punishment?' This means that they are scared of the Resurrection. If they had been people who persevered in doing goodness, they would hope for the Resurrection. However, they have transgressed against themselves. It is, thus, natural for them to deny the Resurrection. But they resort to promising themselves with false hopes so that they can feel reassured that they will not be taken into account for their transgressions committed against people, their blood, their honour, and their security.

If they had already denied the Resurrection, while there was a messenger with whom there were believers who believed in Resurrection and Retribution to a degree of certainty that pushes them to make sacrifices for the sake of that faith, there must, therefore, be a fierce battle between the people of faith and the people of disbelief, a battle between truth and falsehood.

Allah *the Almighty* puts wisdom behind spreading Islam, initially, amongst the weak, so that no one can think that the believers imposed their faith by force. No. They are the weak who are unable to defend even themselves. The disbelievers are the rulers. Therefore, Islam came to oppose the arrogant notables of the disbelievers.

It was possible for Allah *Glorified is He* to give victory to these weak people and to elevate the word of the religion uppermost from the beginning, but Allah *the Almighty* willed the call of faith to be in Mecca at first because it was the centre of leadership in the Arabian Peninsula. Quraysh were the people of respect, of influence and of authority. No tribe on the peninsula had the power to oppose them, and it is widely-known that they held this position because they were the custodians of Allah's Sacred House and they served the delegations that came to visit it.(1) If the beginning of Islam was in a location other than Mecca, the enemies of Islam would have said that, 'Islam considered some people as weak and enticed them with words until they become Muslims'. The call of faith came to strike the ears of the chiefs of Quraysh, the rulers of the peninsula whom Allah *Glorified is He* had made safe from danger in their winter and summer journeys, but also they were the possessors of power and wealth.

Logically, if this was the case, then why did not Allah *Glorified is He* give victory to His religion in the land of the rulers? We would say that: No…the call of Islam, firstly, should strike the ears of falsehood in the land of the chiefs of Mecca, but the victory of the religion was not to come at the hands of these chiefs. Rather, it was to come in Medina.

Consequently, that was from Allah's wisdom that no one can pretend afterwards that Muhammad's family had imposed and compelled people to adopt Islam. No, rather, He *the Almighty* willed that believing in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in his Message initially give him power, so he *peace and blessings be upon him* sought power that was so far of Quraysh in Mecca whereupon they finally submitted to his own.

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(1) That is proved by Allah's saying: 'Do you consider giving water to pilgrims and tending the Sacred Mosque to be equal to the deeds of those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and who strive in Allah's path? They are not equal in Allah's eyes. Allah does not guide such benighted people.' (*at-Tawba*: 19)

As long as there was a battle, then who are the ones being defeated? Surely, the ones being defeated are the weak who are unable to protect even themselves, i.e the ones who have been oppressed in the place in which they live. That was inevitably why Allah *Glorified is He* had to lift this oppression.

The process of removing the oppression upon those weak people should be done in stages. In the first stage, the weak and the oppressed were moved out from Mecca, not to an abode of faith that would protect them and help them spread their religion, but to an abode of security only, in which they would be secure with their religion, merely to give them the opportunity to perform the commands of their religion. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* surveyed all the lands looking for places that could be an abode of security for those who believe in his call to emigrate to where no one there would oppose them. He *peace and blessings be upon him* only found Abyssinia as a secure place for his followers, and this is why he said about it, 'Indeed in the land of Abyssinia there is a king under his leadership no one oppressed. Enter into his country so that Allah *Glorified is He* can grant you an opening and a way out from what you are in'.(1) These characteristics of the king of Abyssinia were enough encouragement for the believers to emigrate to him. At that stage of giving victory to the religion, nothing more than this was sought and, thus, the first emigration to Abyssinia was made.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* supported his religion with followers and helpers who met with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave him a pledge of allegiance with support and assistance. These were the Helpers from the people of Medina who pledged allegiance to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in 'Aqaba and paved the way for the second emigration to Medina. The emigration – this time – was to an abode of security and faith. The Muslims felt safe with their religion and they also found the opportunity to spread it to the four corners of the world.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Baihaqi in his book Dala'il An-Nabuwwa (2/301), and also mentioned by Ibn Hisham in his book As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah (1/321).*

We pause here elaborating upon the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'As for those who emigrated…' (*an-Nahl:* 41). The root of this Arabic verb *hajra* (to forsake), and there is a difference between *hajra* and *hajara*. The meaning of *hajra* is that someone hates living in a certain place, so they leave it for another place that they see as better. The place itself does not force them to leave, i.e. they leave the place voluntarily. As for the second meaning *hajara*, it indicates a mutual action on behalf of two parties. The subject here does not hate the place, but rather, the mutual action on behalf of the people is what compelled him to emigrate. This is what happened when the believers emigrated from Mecca. They did not leave it for another place until they had suffered persecution and oppression on the side of Quraysh. If the Muslims had not suffered and had not been oppressed by them, they would not have emigrated.

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…after being wronged…' (*an-Nahl:* 41) This meaning also applies to Al-Mutanabbi(1):

If you have to leave a people and they were able
To stop you from leaving them, then they are ones who are leaving

Tha is to say, if you are in a group and you want to leave them, and they have the capacity to offer you help and facilitate your residence amongst them, but they did not do so, and they let you go despite their ability, then the ones leaving are in fact them because they are not helping you stay.

Likewise, this was the situation when the believers emigrated from Mecca; for it does not make sense for these people to hate Mecca as a place when it contains the Sacred House whose neighborhood every Muslim desires to live in its side. Therefore, the Emigrants did not leave Mecca by their own free will. Rather, they were forced and compelled to leave it and it was natural for them to seek another abode until their power was being strengthened. Then they could return to live in Mecca a second time in a normal and natural way.

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(1) *He is Ahmad ibn Al-Husayn, Abu At-Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi, born in Kufa of 302 H. He poetized as a youth and claimed prophethood in the countryside. He was imprisoned by the prince of Homs until he repented and gave up his call. He travelled to the entourages of rulers and governors and praised them in poetry and enjoyed their favors. He visited Aleppo, Egypt, Baghdad, and Persia and he was killed in An-Nu'maniyah at the hands of Fatik ibn Abu Jahl in the year (253 H) at the age of 51. Al-I'lam, 1/115*

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘As for those who emigrated in Allah’s Cause.’ (*an-Nahl:* 41) We notice in the Noble Hadith which clarifies the meaning of this verse: ‘The emigration of one who emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is for the sake of Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; and the emigration of one who emigrates for gaining a worldly advantage or for marrying a woman is for what he has emigrated’

Is there a difference between emigrating for the cause of Allah *Glorified is He* and emigrating to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The explanation is: emigrating to a place means that the place one is emigrating to is better than the place one has left, as if the latter is not suitable. As for emigrating in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He,* this indicates that one’s previous residence was also in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He*. Their residence in Mecca, in and of itself, while bearing hardship, oppression, and persecution, was also in the cause of Allah *Glorified is He*. If the verse stated above urged the people of Mecca to emigrate to Allah, which may give an indication that their previous residence was not in the sake of Allah *the Almighty*. But then, the meaning that the verse illustrates is that their settlement and the emigration were in the sake of Allah

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Hurry towards your Lord’s forgiveness.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 133) That means if you are in a situation that may not lead you to Allah’s forgiveness, then change this situation and hurry towards his forgiveness. In another verse Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘These hasten to good things.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 61) They were doing good things and they were ordered to hurry to do more, i.e from the better to the best. Also another indication is when Allah *the Almighty* says ‘As for those who emigrated…’ (*an-Nahl:* 14); the pronoun came in its plural form so the question is: is it referring specifically to those at that time or is it a general statement that can be applied upon anyone oppressed, in the sake of Allah, and then he emigrated?

In this vein, the fact is this issue is generally applied with the same circumstances and not only referring to this specific incident; we know that this verse revealed for a number of the companions of prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, Suhayb, ‘Ammar, Khubbab and Billal, but this verse can be applied for anyone oppressed and wants to save his faith.

We know the story(1) of Suhayb *Allah be pleased with him*; he was a blacksmith. When he wanted to emigrate in order to save his religion, he presented an offer to Quraysh, ‘By Allah *Glorified is He* I am an old man. If I stay with you I am of no benefit to you, and if I go with the Muslims I will not be of any trouble to you. I have wealth...take it and leave me to emigrate. They were happy with this and they took Suhayb’s wealth and gave him a leave to emigrate.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘Your sale was profitable O Suhayb.’(2) i.e. it was a profitable transaction. ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said about him, ‘What an excellent slave Suhayb is. If he did not fear Allah *Glorified is He,* he would disobey Him.’ It is as if his lack of disobedience was not because he feared punishment, but rather because he loved Allah *the Almighty*, for Allah *Glorified is He* does not deserve to be disobeyed.

Then Allah *the Almighty* turns to inform us of their reward; He says: ‘We shall give them a good home in this world.’ (*an-Nahl:* 41) The Arabic word *Nubaww’* (we shall give them) also mentioned in another verse therein Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when we assigned to Ibrahim (Abraham) the place of the House...’ (*al-Hajj:* 26). That is, we showed him his place. When we say that a man *ba’a* to his house it means that he returned to it because man goes out to endeavour in various parts of the earth, in agriculture or commerce, and then he seeks shelter and returns to his house. Therefore *ba’a* as a verb means ‘to return’, but as a noun refers to man’s abode and what Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for him.

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(1) *This story was narrated by Al Wahidi in his book Asbab An-Nuzul, p.160. Narrated also by Al Qurtubi in his Tafseer, (5/3831)*

(2) *Narrated by Abu Na'im in (Hilyat ul-Awliya’) (1/151-153) from the Hadith of Suhayb Allah be pleased with him, and likewise Al-Hakim in his (Mustadrak) (3/298)*

If the believers are now going to leave Mecca defeated and persecuted, then we will grant them stability in a place that is better than the place in which they were persecuted, and they became secure in Medina. If they have left only their homeland then We will facilitate the life of this world for them, all of it, so that they can spread Allah's way therein, and they will get the best of this world. Then, afterwards, we will return them to their homeland as powerful rulers after Mecca has become a land dedicated to Allah *Glorified is He* and purified of idolatry and paganism. This is the good fortune in the life of this world. Then Allah *the Almighty* refers to another meaning, and says: 'But the reward of the Hereafter will be far greater…' (*an-Nahl:* 41).

The good fortune of this worldly life and its goodness for the believers which we have mentioned are both short-term benefits of their actions. However, the good fortunes of the life of this world, whatever they are, will eventually come to an end. Either you will leave them or they will leave you. Allah *Glorified is He* fulfilled His promise to the believers in the life of this world, therefore, they returned to Mecca victoriously. Indeed, the entire Arabian Peninsula submitted to them and then the entire world. They widely spread out to the east in Persia and to the west in Roman held territory. Finally, and within half a century they were ruling the entire world.

If this is the immediate good fortune of the life of this world, then the deferred good fortune of the Hereafter is greater about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But the reward of the Hereafter will be far greater…' (*an-Nahl:* 41), i.e. the blessings of the Hereafter that have been prepared for them are more magnificent than what they have found in the life of this world. This is why our master 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* used to say when giving one of the emigrants his due share of booty, 'May Allah *Glorified is He* bless you with it. This is what Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for you in the life of this world and what He has stored for you in the Hereafter is greater than this.'(1) This is the good fortune of the life of this world. When you hear the Arabic word *akbar* (greater), you must know that its opposite is not *asghar* (smaller) or

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(1) Al-Qurtubi has mentioned this tradition in his Tafsir 5/3832, Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir 2/570 and also by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 5/132 and he dated it back to Ibn Jarir At-Tabari and Ibn Al-Mundhir.

saghir (small). Rather, its opposite is *kabir* (great) and therefore the good fortune of the life of this world that Allah *Glorified is He* granted them is great, but what awaits them in the Hereafter is greater.

Likewise, the superlative form mentioned above may contain less praise than the normal adjective. *Al-Kabir* (The Great) is one of Allah's most beautiful names and at the same time *Al-Akbar* (The Greatest) is one of Allah's attributes, but it is not one of His names. When we call to prayers, we always say, 'Allah is Greater!' We do not say, 'Allah is Great!' This is because what is other than great is small, while what is other than greater is great because the affairs of the life of this world, for the believer, are great as they are a means to the Hereafter.

Beware of thinking that the activities of the life of this world which you leave in order to pray are small. Rather, they are great because they are means that help you obey Allah *Glorified is He* and with them you eat, drink and become strong. With them you gather wealth and you meet your needs and you pay your alms to others. This is how the activities of the life of this world are considered great matters and the prayer and standing before Allah *Glorified is He* is greater. In the same connection, this is why, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9).

Through the previous verse, Allah *the Almighty* gave us a leave from the bond of worldly activities and its action, afterwards He, turns our attention, says: 'Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) Thus He *Glorified is He* commands us to return to the activities of life because they are a means to the abode of the Hereafter. They are a field in which we prepare our provision to meet Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, the life of this world is important for the reason as a support for the Hereafter, but it is naïve to be asked for itself as an ultimate purpose.

At the conclusion of this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…if they only knew it.' (*an-Nahl:* 41) Who is being referred to here? There are three possibilities: Commenting in this verse in question, firstly, is the disbelievers, and thus the meaning would be: if they could but understand the outcome of faith and the reward of the believers they would prefer it to disbelief. Secondly is the Emigrants, and, thus, the meaning would be: if they could but understand, they would increase in good works. Finally are the believers who have not emigrated, and, thus, the meaning would be: if they could but understand the result of emigrating, they would hasten to it.

These three possibilities, that these verses of the Quran speak of contain proof of the rich rendering and rhetoric of the Noble Quran, and this is what they call an order of advantages that clearly outline the varying degrees of benefit from emigrating. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُواْ وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمۡ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

They are the ones who are steadfast and put their trust in their Lord [42] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 42)

Contemplating on this verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* gives us an analysis of the state of the Emigrants who were oppressed, persecuted, and harmed for the sake of Allah Glorified is He and none of these afflictions turned them away from their religion. Rather, they were patient with forbearance; moreover, they preferred to leave their homeland and lose their wealth so as not to be harmed of the religion, all for the sake of religion and faith believing that Allah Glorified is He would not neglect them.

Therefore, the Quranic expression came in the past tense as if it already happened; Allah *the Almighty* says: '...those who were steadfast...' (*an-Nahl:* 42). It is as if the period in which they had to be patient with hardship had passed and come to an end. What remains for them is might, power and strength and no one will be able to persecute them after this, and this is out of the glad tidings of the Quran rendering.

As for placing trust in Allah *the Almighty* He says concerning them: '…and put their trust in their Lord.' (*an-Nahl:* 42)

The present tense used in this verse indicates that their trust in Allah *the Almighty* has begun in the past, and will continue to do so in the present and into the future. This is the state of the believer.

Afterwards, the Quran talks about the issue of sending messengers; explaining the process of sending messengers whom the disbelievers resist by denying them with arrogance and disbelief.

Allah *the Almighty* then discusses a new issue, and says:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالٗا نُّوحِيٓ إِلَيۡهِمۡۖ فَسۡـَٔلُوٓاْ أَهۡلَ
ٱلذِّكۡرِ إِن كُنتُمۡ لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

[Prophet], all the messengers We sent before you were simply men to whom We had given the Revelation: you [people] can ask those who have knowledge if you do not know [43] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 43)

Some resisting people amongst disbelievers objected to the Messenger being a human being, therefore, they said, ‘If Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to send a messenger it would be appropriate for it to be an angel.’ They said: ‘Allah would have sent down angels if He had wished…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 24). It is as if they were undervaluing the message coming via a human being. This is also of the outcome of stupidity of disbelief and the idiocy of the disbelievers because when a messenger conveys from Allah *Glorified is He,* he bears two responsibilities on his shoulders; the responsibility of conveying knowledge and the responsibility of carrying out the actions and setting an example. Thus, he enjoins the prayer and he prays, he enjoins the payment of alms and he pays, he enjoins patience and he is patient. Conveying the message of Allah *the Almighty* is not just about words but also about actions and setting a good model.

At this point Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* used to say about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘His character was as that of the Quran and, His character and morals were as if the Quran was a being walking on the earth, which means that he was a complete application of the way brought from Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* concerning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘The Messenger of Allah is an excellent model…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 21).

How can we imagine the Messenger to be an angel? How could an angel convey the message amongst human beings? He may be able to carry out the task of merely conveying, but how would he carry out the actions and set an example? How, when we know that the angels are creations that have been moulded to obey Allah *Glorified is He*? Allah *the Almighty* mentions their concern; He says: ‘angels who never disobey Allah’s commands to them, but do as they are ordered.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6) Reasonably, the angles do not eat, drink or procreate so where would his desires come from? If an angel came with a message from heaven and he wanted to forbid his people from a specific sin, what would we expect? One of the disbelievers would say: 'No. I am not able to, you are an angel, and you have a higher nature so you are able to leave off the action. As for me, I am not.

Therefore, the nature of being an exemplar necessitates that the Messenger must be a human being so that when he commands his people, he will be the first to carry out the command and when he forbids, he will be the first to abstain. Consequently, it is a conferment of Allah *the Almighty* upon Arabs that He *Glorified is He* raised amongst them a messenger from amongst themselves; in this point Allah *the Almighty* says: 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves…' (*at-Tawba:* 128).

First of all, Allah *the Almighty* bestowed us with a messenger directly from amongst ourselves who was not only a human being but also from among the Arabs and not from a foreign nation. Indeed he is from your own environment, from the same city of Mecca, and from the same tribe of Quraysh. Thereby, that you can have complete knowledge of his history, his manners, his conduct, and you know all his doings. You have already acknowledged that he is truthful and trustworthy and you entrust him with every expensive and precious thing that you have because you know that he is trustworthy. Thus, how can you disbelieve in him and accuse him of lying?!

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* refutes their accusation in another verse, and says: 'The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, 'How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?' (*al-Isra':* 94) The thing that is blocking them from having faith is that he is a human being! In the same connection, illogically they speak, i.e. in one place, they reject the issue of sending a messenger in the form of human being, but in another place, they accept it; Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"'(1) (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

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(1) *The two tribes mentioned above are; Mecca and Ta'if. Some of the scholars said that the two men are Al Walid ibn Al-Mughirah and Urwa ibn Mas'ud Ath-Thaqafi, see Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir, 4/127. The apparent meaning is that any old man of the two tribes.*

This verse indicates an astonishing amount of hesitation from the disbelievers, and a lack of sticking to one position. In the past they used to say, 'If you are going to be a liar, then you should be a man of retentive memory.'

The Quran responds to them by saying: 'Say, "if there were angels walking about on earth, and feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger."' (*al-Isra': * 95) If there had been angels on the earth, then We would have sent down an angel messenger so that the benefit will be achieved.

Therefore, the exemplary one must be of the same species. Let us set an example to illustrate this point; imagine that you see a lion raging and roaming through the jungle, devouring everything it might see and no one is able to stop it, would you think, at that moment, to be a lion? No, but if you saw a knight holding his sword and smiting the necks of his enemy, you would not mind being that knight? I certainly would. This is the real, beneficial exemplar, but, if the species are different one cannot be an example for the other.

In this scope, Allah *the Almighty* refutes the accusations of the disbelievers; He says: '[Prophet], all the messengers We sent before you were simply men to whom We had given the Revelation.' (*an-Nahl:* 43) That is, O Muhammad, you are not the only man unprecedented with regards to the Messengers because those who preceded you throughout the past centuries were mortal men, all in the same field of prophethood.

The Arabic word *Rijalan* (men) here firstly indicates humanity. Secondly it indicates the sex as male. This is because the nature of the Messenger is based on dealing and socialising with his people. He presents himself to everyone and he talks to everyone. On the other hand, women's nature is based on being veiled and, thus, she cannot carry out the role of being an example for mankind. If we look at the nature of a woman, we find that her nature contains many things that are not suited to the role of prophethood and that are not compatible with the mission of a prophet, such as stopping prayer and worship while she is in a menstruating period or in childbed.

With deep contemplation on the verse, we find that the word 'Men' is restricted to a following meaning which is the revelation; in this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'To whom We had given the Revelation...' (*an-Nahl:* 43).

Thus, the Messenger is a man with no resemblance to any of us, for he has a higher advantage and distinguishing feature which is that Revelation sent to him and this is a high rank that we must preserve for the Prophets *peace and blessings be upon them all*.

In the same connection with new guidance Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…you [people] can ask those who have knowledge if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43) That is to say, if this matter has been hidden from you, which is sending messengers from amongst human beings – and I do not think it is hidden from you – because it is something common for all messages. It should not be hidden from you especially, for you have amongst your people those who have knowledge of the previous religions, such as Waraqa ibn Nawfal and others, you have people who have the knowledge of biographies and history, and there are Jews and Christians amongst you,; therefore, it is possible for you to ask these people about the humanity of the Messengers. This matter is clearly undeniable and cannot be rejected. What will the Jews and Christians say regarding the humanity of Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus)? When questioned about their humanity.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse saying: '…if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43) The verse indicates that they had nothing of knowledge. And that they have no doubt in this matter, i.e. you tell someone to ask about things which are unknown to him, but until this moment he knows well. And if there is a doubt in that issue, we will tell him to ask directly. Therefore, they are aware of the truth but will deny it with arrogance. Allah *the Almighty* says:

بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ وَٱلزُّبُرِۗ وَأَنزَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ ٱلذِّكۡرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ
مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ٤٤

We sent them with clear signs and scriptures. We have sent down the message to you too [Prophet], so that you can explain to people what was sent for them, so that they may reflect [44] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 44)

Allah *Glorified is He* begins the verse by saying: 'We sent them with clear signs and scriptures…' (*an-Nahl:* 44). The linguists say that a preposition and a noun of preposition must be attached to something; the question here is, to what are the preposition and noun of preposition attached here? They said: it is attached to the verb of the previous verse *Nuuhi* (we reveal) and the context would be: We never sent any but mortal men whom We inspired with all evidence of the truth and with clear signs and scriptures.

The preposition and noun of preposition could also be attached to the followers of earlier revelation, and the meaning would be: ask the people of earlier revelation about the evidence of truth, and about the clear signs and scriptures. These are two possibilities to which the preposition and noun of preposition can refer.

The Arabic word *bayinat* (clear signs) is a matter that is clear and obvious and no one has any doubt about it. Either it can be a sign that affirms the truthfulness of the message such as a miracle that challenges the deniers to bring something like it, or it can be universal signs that draw the attention of the creation towards the existence of the Creator, such as the signs of the night, the day, the sun, the moon and the stars.

As for the Arabic word *zubur* (Scriptures) i.e. the written books; none can be written except what is valuable in order not to be lost and there is nothing more precious than that which comes to us from Allah's way in order to regulate the activities of our lives.

We know that Arabs –in the past– used to ask about everything, no matter how inconsiderable it is. They had knowledge of arrows and were the first to make them, and they also knew about bows and saddles and other similar simple things. So did they not ask about Allah's signs in the universe, the secrets that they contain and the wonders in their creation that indicate the Creator?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have sent down the message to you too [Prophet], so that you can explain to people what was sent for them...' (*an-Nahl:* 44). The Arabic word *dhikr* (Message) which means to remind, is found many times in the Noble Quran with numerous meanings. The original meaning of *dhikr* is something that kept in mind and that is never absent; its opposite is forgetfulness. Therefore, we have been remembering and forgetting, and the word *dhikr* here means something that is already present in mind and we should not forget it…what is it?

With replying to the previous question Allah *Glorified is He* says that He created Adam *Allah be pleased with him* and took a covenant from every atom he had. Allah *the Almighty* illustrating this truth says: '[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness." So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were not aware of this,"' (*al-A'raf:* 172).

The covenant taken from Adam *Allah be pleased with him* was a covenant taken from all of his progeny as well. This is because each of the progeny of Adam contains an atom from their father Adam, a living part of him as a result of reproduction and procreation from Adam until the Hour will come to exist. As long as this is the case so we have witnessed and taken the covenant. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Am I not your Lord…?' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

As a matter of fact, the word *dhikr* came to remind us of the covenant that is hidden within our creation and which we must not forget. When forgetfulness happens, messengers then have to be sent and books have to be sent down to remind us of Allah's covenant with us, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Am I not your Lord? 'and they replied, "Yes,"' (*al-A'raf:* 172). For this reason, the Books that were sent down are called *dhikr*, but the process of *dhikr* comes gradually and in stages. Each messenger comes to remind his people according to the extent of their forgetfulness. As for the seal Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* who has come to all of mankind until the establishment of the Hour, he has come with the true *dhikr* after which there is no *dhikr* i.e. the Noble Quran.

Another possible meaning that the word *dhikr* contains, is eminence and honour; this meaning is also mentioned in the Quran; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We have certainly sent down to you a book in which is your mention…' (*al-Anbiya':* 10).

The Arabs, by the Quran, occupied a high position; their language, by Quran, prolonged, and held a position of pre-eminence amongst all other nations.

Let us contemplate more in this rich word *dhikr;* the slave of Allah can remember Allah and vice versa, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So remember Me; I will remember you…' (*al-Baqara:* 152).

The intended meaning is: remember Me with obedience and faith and I will remember you with vast gifts, blessings, goodness, sustenance and with My reward.

When the word *Ad-dhikr* (the reminder) is unrestrictedly used, it refers exclusively to the Quran because it is the Book that comprises everything that was sent down to the previous messengers as well as everything that humanity will need until the Hour is established.

Likewise, the indefinite word *kitab* (book) can refer to any book, but when it is definite as in *al-kitab* (the Book), it refers exclusively to the Noble Quran. This is what we call ‘known by preponderance’.

The dhikr (reminder) is the Quran that was revealed to Muhammad and at the same time it is his everlasting miracle. It is both a way of life and a miracle. In contrast to the previous messengers who came with miracles for their own circumstances and books for their own, and, thus, the book is separate from the miracle. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point, the book of Musa (Moses) was the Torah and his miracle was the staff, the book of Isa (Jesus) and his way is the Gospel, but his miracle was curing the blind and the leper(1) and bringing the dead back to life by Allah’s leave.

As for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, his miracle is also the book of his way; they are inseparable, that is to say, that the miracle can support the way until the Hour is established.

This is the secret behind preserving and protecting the Quran by Allah *the Almighty* who says: ‘We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We ourselves will guard it. Even before you [Prophet]’ (*al-Hijr:* 9).

As for the previous books, the followers of each messenger were entrusted with preserving each book; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We revealed the Torah with guidance and light, and the prophets, who had submitted to Allah, judged according to it for the Jews. So did the rabbis and the scholars in accordance with that part of Allah's Scripture which they were entrusted to preserve,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44).

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(1) The Arabic word *Akmah*: i.e. a person born or after his birth becomes blind. The second word is *Baras* / leprosy: i.e. a skin disease causing some white spots defames in the skin.

The Arabic word *istuhfizhu* (entrusted to preserve) means that Allah *Glorified is He* asked them to preserve the Torah. This is a command of responsibility that can be either obeyed or disobeyed, but what happened was that the Jews disobeyed, changed, and distorted the Torah. As for the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* took it upon Himself to preserve it and He left it not to anyone else because it is the seal Book that will accompany humanity until the coming of the Hour.

There is another meaning of the exuberant Arabic word *dhikr* (The reminder); it is also that which the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought along with the Quran, i.e. Hadith. The Messenger has another mission, which is his approach of speech by using Hadith with the magnificent light of guidance from the Quran; therefore, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Beware! I have been given the Quran and something like it, yet the time is coming when a man repletes on his couch will say, "Keep to the Quran"; what you find in it to be permissible treat as permissible, and what you find in it to be prohibited treat as prohibited, but the matter is not like that...'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…so that you can explain to people what was sent for them,' (*an-Nahl:* 44). Therefore, the Quran was revealed as both a miracle book and as book containing a way, but it goes through establishing the foundations of this way only, without any methodological definitions or necessary explanations to elucidate that way to keep the Quran with broad lines of instructions and not to be massive and possibly far removed from its intent.

For more illustrations we can say that, the Quran came with firm foundations and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was left with the task of explaining to mankind, elucidating and clarifying what it contains.

Some people may think that everything that comes from *Sunna*, we are not obliged to stick to and abide by it; for *Sunna* rewarded the one who abides by it and unpunished the one who does not abide by it; that matter is not so simply understood in that scope. We must distinguish between evidence based on *Sunna* and ruling based on *Sunna* so that the matter may not be obscured for people.

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(1) *See Ahmad in his Musnad, (4/131). Abu Dawud in his Sunan, (4591). And Ibn Hibban in his book Mawared Az- Zam'aan, p. 97, from the Hadith of Al- Miqdam ibn Ma'd Yakrab.*

Commenting on these two terms, we say that, firstly, evidence based on *Sunna* means that there is an obligation, but its evidence is affirmed by *Sunna*. An example to illustrate this point; the number of *Raklas* (units of obligatory prayers), i.e. Dawn, Noon, Afternoon, Sunset and Night prayers, are obligatory by *Sunna*.

Secondly, a ruling based on *Sunna*: these are juristic matters and rulings that have been related to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* rewarded is the one who does it and unpunished is the one who does not do it. When the Messenger explains a ruling to us via his conduct and his example, we should elaborate: is its evidence based on *Sunna* as in an obligatory act or is it a ruling based on *Sunna*, i.e. a mere *Sunna* voluntary prophetic act? The permanent practices of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* give us a clear understanding which one of the previous meanings is correct, i.e. if he was persistent in something and adhered to it, then it is an obligation. If he was not persistent in the act, so it is a *Sunna* act.

Therefore, the task of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not just to deliver the Quran and convey it to mankind. Rather, he must explain what he has brought of the Divine way. The conveying cannot be carried out properly without explaining...and we must distinguish between two sources of ruling: Quranic source and Prophetic source.

To identify this point we have to know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has one of the distinguishing features over the rest of the previous messengers *Allah's peace and blessings be upon them all* which is that he is the only Messenger whom Allah *Glorified is He* entrusted with legislation. In terms of the previous messengers, they only conveyed the commands of the Allah *the Almighty*. As for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning him Allah *the Almighty* says: '…so accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

Therefore, he *peace and blessings be upon him* received the privilege of legislation and his *Sunna* is regarded as the second source of legislation after the Quran.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…so that they may reflect.' (*an-Nahl:* 44) The Arabic word *Yatafakkaruun* (to reflect), poses the question: on what should they reflect? They should deeply think of the state of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before his ministry, for it is not related that he was an orator, a writer or a poet. Also, it has not been related that he was a student or a teacher for the first forty years of his own life, therefore Allah *the Almighty* asked them to have a reflection on this matter.

What Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought is not some genius that burst forth at once, just like that, when he was forty years old. Usually, glimpses of genius tend to appear in one's late teens and early twenties.

It does not make sense for the Messenger of Allah's genius to be delayed until such an age while he was seeing people around him dying. His father died while he was in his mother's womb. Then his mother died while he was still a small child. Then his grandfather died; so who can guarantee that he would live to forty years, when this genius of his would burst forth?

Therefore, you must think! This genius is not of Muhammad's own will. Rather, it is a matter from the heavens. Therefore, his Lord *the Almighty* commanded him to inform them; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say, "If Allah had so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me. How can you not use your reason?"' (*Yunus:* 16)

That is, it is obligatory for you to think about this matter. If you had thought about it you, would have had to fall over yourselves to become Muslims. You know best who Muhammad is and you have never experienced any lying or treachery from him, nor have you ever seen him engaged in poetry or oration. Therefore, he would never be truthful with you nor would attribute lies to Allah *Glorified is He*.

We must make a distinction between the intellect and thinking. The intellect is the instrument that receives tangible entities and differentiates among them, and general matters are derived from them that then become the principles that man lives according to, which are considered accumulated information. As for thinking, i.e. that you think of these things to deduce a specific ruling out of them.

Allah *Glorified is He* has left us with freedom of thought and freedom of intellect regarding matters related to our lives in this world. However, He controls us in compulsory matters without which the world would be ruined, for that which ruins the world is us who do not fall in line with His *Sharia*. Regarding the remaining matters from which no harm results, He gives us some scope in which to think and experiment because failing therein will not cause any harm.

When Allah *Glorified is He* sets a compulsory ruling and makes it obligatory via a clear text over which there is no disagreement. But if an issue bears multiple interpretations, it will be left for us to sort out what is correct, as making a mistake therein does not lead to ruin.

Thus, the issue is a scale of thinking that holds sway over tangible entities and regulates matters, primarily, we must distinguish between what is obligatory and what can be taken through the process of intellect. If the issue was deduced through *Ijtihad* (using reason for proper deduction) by which there is no blame to worship Allah *the Almighty*, but the problem is that people may accuse that person, with a different methodological process of *Ijtihad*, of disbelief, Allah forbid.

Concerning this issue, we admonish those people to fear Allah *the Almighty* because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, '…but when he uses his judgment and commits a mistake, he will have a single reward(1). In contrast, there are knowledgeable scholars who are well aware of the nature of controversial issues, and they admitted that their opinion is correct despite the possibility of it being wrong, while another opinion is wrong, but there exists a possibility of it being correct. This is how different opinions co-exist and co-respect.

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(1) *'Amr ibn Al-'As may Allah be pleased with him said, 'I heard the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him saying, "When a judge utilizes his skill of judgment and comes to a right decision, he will have a double reward, but when he uses his judgment and commits a mistake, he will have a single reward.' See Muslim in his Sahih, (1716). Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, (7352).*

In the same connection, we find that Allah *the Almighty* blessed his slaves by giving them leave to use their thinking, contemplation and reflection because He destined that His creation are better than to go astray or become disbelievers. Not only were they blessed with creation and reasoning but also Allah *the Almighty* blessed them with obedience and faith.

In this vein Allah *the Almighty* reproaches those people who do not use their mind and critical thinking to get rid of their disputes and problems, and if you do not believe in the resurrection in the Hereafter and the punishment that has been prepared for the evildoers, be mindful concerning what punishment was brought down upon the wrongdoers in this world.

Reflect upon those who preceded you from the denying communities and what their fate was; are you safe from the punishment, have you distanced yourself enough?!

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَفَأَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ مَكَرُوا۟ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ أَن يَخْسِفَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِمُ ٱلْأَرْضَ
أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Are those who plan evil so sure that God will not make the earth swallow them up, that punishment will not come on them from some unimagined direction [45] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 45)

The Arabic syntax in the first Arabic word *Afa'mina* '…so sure…' indicates that there is a sentence implied before this verse, which implies that they ignorant of the punishment that happened to those who opposed the previous prophets. Did they feel safe from Allah's scheme? That is, their feeling from Allah's scheme because they are ignorant of what happened to the deniers of the previous communities. Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Are those who plan evil' (*an-Nahl:* 45). The Arabic word *Makr* (scheme) is secret plotting to cause harm against someone whom you are not capable of truly confronting and stating as such openly. You would not secretly plot against somebody unless you were incapable of speaking out against him directly. The fact that you are plotting and scheming is proof of your ineptitude and therefore scheming is considered the first stage of cowardice; the schemer does not scheme unless he is incapable of confrontation, and the greater the scheming the greater the weakness.

Allah *the Almighty* indicates to that notion which concerns to women, says: '…This is another instance of women's treachery: your treachery is truly great.' (*Yusuf:* 28)

In the contrary, Allah *Glorified is He* regarding Satan, says: '...Satan's strategies are truly weak.' (*an-Nisa':* 76) Therefore, scheming is a proof of weakness, and as long as women's guile is awesome then their weakness is also awesome, and the same goes for Satan's guile.

In the past, they used to say, 'Beware of being defeated by a weak person.' This is because when he is able and the opportunity suits him he will not let you escape because he knows his weakness well, and he cannot guarantee that the opportunity may come to a second time. Therefore, he will not waste it, which is the opposite of the strong person as he does not desire revenge when he is given the opportunity and he may even let it slip because of his power and ability over his adversary, which means that he can do what he wants whenever he wants to. An Arab poet expressed the same meaning in his statement:

If the weak woman is given the opportunity
She kills, and that is the power of the weak

Therefore, the power of the weak may kill in contrast to that of the strong.

Then we have another notion regarding scheming, that scheming may give you victory over your equal adversary of mankind. Whenever you are exposed to someone who is stronger than you, more prudent than you and wiser in scheming than you, then maybe your scheming will be fruitless. Indeed, maybe he will overcome you with his scheming and his prudence. Thus, how the case if the One scheming against you is the Lord of all the Worlds *the Almighty*?

Allah *Glorified is He* the Ever Truthful, says: '…they schemed and so did Allah: He is the best of schemers.' (*al-Anfal:* 30) And He *the Almighty* says: '…the plotting of evil only rebounds on those who plot…' (*Fatir:* 43) The scheming of the slaves is fully disclosed before Allah *Glorified is He*. As for His scheming, no one has any power against it and from which no one can protect themselves. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* is above all schemers.

The evil scheme is the oppressive scheme that is only done for evil, as if the case with the scheming of those who have denied the Messengers throughout the ages. It is that you hatch a plot wrongly against innocent one that is truly oppressive.

The Messenger was confronted by his people who denied him with scheming and deception, which is to prove that they were incapable of confronting him directly; i.e. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was exposed to various phases of guile, scheming and deception, and this was for wisdom that Allah *the Almighty* willed which is that the disbelievers despair of gaining victory over Him. Against him they had plotted and conspired to kill, and they had devised plans to do so, but their plans ended in failure on the night of the Emigration.

In the similar fashion another conspiracy they tried to bewitch Him(1) but Allah *Glorified is He* disclosed their affair and wasted their efforts. Therefore, whatever means you employ to abort this *Da'wa* (call) will be fruitless because Allah *Glorified is He* has given him victory over you, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah has written, “I shall most certainly win, I and My messengers...”’ (*al-Mujadala:* 21).

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(1) 'Aisha narrated that 'Magic was worked on the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him so that he began to fancy that he was doing a thing which he was not actually doing. One day he invoked (Allah) for a long period and then said, "I feel that Allah has inspired me as how to cure myself. Two persons came to me (in my dream) and sat, one by my head and the other by my feet. One of them asked the other, "What is the ailment of this man?" The other replied, 'He has been bewitched" The first asked, 'Who has bewitched him?' The other replied, 'Lubaid ibn Al-A'sam.' The first one asked, 'What material has he used?' The other replied, 'A comb, the hair gathered on it, and the outer skin of the pollen of the male date-palm.' The first asked, 'Where is that?' The other replied, 'It is in the well of Dharwan.' "So, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* went out towards the well and then returned and said to me on his return, "Its date-palms (the date-palms near the well) are like the heads of the devils." I asked, "Did you take out those things with which the magic was worked?" He said, "No, for I have been cured by Allah and I am afraid that this action may spread evil amongst the people." Later on the well was filled up with earth. See Al-Bukhaiin in his (Sahih) (3368) and Ahmad in his (Musnad) (6/96,50)

In the contrary Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…that Allah will not make the earth swallow them up…’ (*an-Nahl:* 45). The Arabic word *Al-khasf* (to swallow) i.e. the earth causes what is on its surface to disappear…so if something is swallowed it means that it is hidden within the earth. Another Arabic word from the same root is *khusuf*, (a lunar eclipse), i.e. the moon’s light is hidden. In the same regard concerning Qarun, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘We caused the earth to swallow him and his home’ (*al-Qasas:* 81). This is one type of punishment, of which there are various forms as the Quran has mentioned, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And we punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40)

These are the kinds of punishment that have befallen the deniers, and it was better for those people to take a lesson and warning from those who preceded them and to take precaution against the same thing happening to them.

Back to the verse in question Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…that punishment will not come on them from some unimagined direction.’ (*an-Nahl:* 45)

The purport is that if they take precaution against Allah’s scheme and the punishment that will befall them. Allah *Glorified is He* will still come upon them from a direction that they do not perceive and has not occurred to them, therefore, they will be defeated and punished with an easy way. In this point Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… Allah came up on them from where they least expected and put panic…’ (*al-Hashr:* 2). Allah *Glorified is He* continues to say:

أَوۡ يَأۡخُذَهُمۡ فِي تَقَلُّبِهِمۡ فَمَا هُم بِمُعۡجِزِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

That it will not catch them suddenly in the midst of their
comings and goings – for they cannot frustrate Allah [46]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 46)

The Arabic word *At-taqallub* (comings and goings) means to move from one state to another, or from one place to another, and moving from a place of residence to another place is proof of power and ability; when someone moves from his place carrying their equipment and possessions and everything he owns in order to establish a new life for himself in a new place.

Therefore, coming and going in life is one of the manifestations of power; that one is able to establish a new life and preserve one's wealth throughout the journeys of coming and going. There is no doubt that this is one of the manifestations of might, dignity, and wealth only done by the strong.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us another example concerning the people of Sheba, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Also, We had placed, between them and the towns We had blessed, other towns within sight of one another to which they could(1) travel easily – "Travel safely in this land by night and by day" – but [still] they complained, "Our Lord has made the distance between our staging posts so long!"' (*Saba':* 18-19)

These are a people for whom Allah *Glorified is He* gathered all kinds of blessings and He made them safe in their own lands and travels, He also gave them places to rest during their journeys. However, astonishingly, they asked Allah *Glorified is He* to lengthen the distances between their journey-stages, as if they wanted to be distinguished from the weak that are not able to cope with the difficulty of travelling and journeying. They said, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Our Lord has made the distance between our staging posts so long!' (*Saba':* 19) so that the weak amongst them would not be able to embark upon such distances.

Therefore, those who come and go in the earth are proving that they can either remain in a place or they can travel and they have the ability to take what they own in order to set up residence in another place. This is why they said: 'Away from home your wealth is your homeland'...and those who are able do what they want.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Let it not deceive you that those who are bent on denying the truth seem to be able to do as they please on earth' (*Al-'Imran:* 196).

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(1) *'We made distances of travel suit what the travelers need to', see Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (3/533).*

Do not let their moving about, in their journeys in the winter and summer, make you afraid, for Allah *the Exalted* is able to take them to task in their comings and goings. The purport could also be their comings and goings in their thoughts and evil schemes against the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions, as in His *the Exalted* statement: ‘Indeed, even before this time have they tried to stir up discord and devised all manner of plots against you...’ (*at-Tawba:* 48). They used to sit planning, scheming and plotting, to put an end to the call in its early stages.

He *the Exalted* says: ‘...without their being able to elude [Him],’ (*an-Nahl:* 46) *Al-mu‘jiz* ‘...being able to elude...’ is the one who does not allow you to overcome him, and these people will never be able to elude Allah *the Exalted* and they will never be able to escape from His punishment because whenever they plot, their plot and their guile are known to Allah... as for Allah’s scheming, if He wants to scheme against them they will never perceive it. ‘...they scheme: but Allah [also] schemes...’ (*al-Anfal:* 30).

And He said: ‘Behold, they [who refuse to accept it] devise many a false argument [to disprove its truth] [15] but I shall bring all their scheming to nought [16] Let, then, the deniers of the truth have their will: let them have their will for a little while! [18]’ (*at-Tariq:* 15-17)

The one who is not able to overcome you will submit to you, and as long as he submits to you, then the way that you have brought has power over him.

Incapacity in front of someone strong can also be a proof of strength, as Quraysh were incapable when confronted with the Quran’s challenge. Their incapacity with regards to Allah’s Book is proof of their strength within the field in which the Quran is challenging them. This is because when Allah challenges and contests He does not contest the weak. Rather, He contests the strong within the field of this challenge.

أَوۡ يَأۡخُذَهُمۡ عَلَىٰ تَخَوُّفٖ فَإِنَّ رَبَّكُمۡ لَرَءُوفٞ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٤٧﴾

Or that it will not catch up with them gradually?
Indeed your Lord is kind and merciful [47]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 47)

At-takhawwuf '… apprehension…' is fear of something that has not yet happened, and thus the imagination runs wild and one expects all kinds of evil to afflict them while the reality is that only one thing will occur.

Imagine that you are waiting for a loved one and they are late for your appointment. Your imagination then starts thinking about all kinds of possibilities. I wonder if this could have happened, or maybe that happened. These thoughts have an effect on you and they cause pain to the soul. Thus one's fears multiply, but if you wait in order to know the truth of the matter, you find that there is just one fear.

This is why they say as a proverb, 'The occurrence of the tribulation is easier than waiting for it', and this is because it occurs in one form. As for awaiting it, this spreads various kinds of fear and anxiety within the soul. Therefore, apprehension is more severe and greater than the occurrence of the event itself.

This fear would seize the disbelievers whenever they learned that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had sent out a raiding party and each group from amongst them feared that it was coming for them. This is how Allah spread fear amongst all of them, even though the raiding party was heading in a specific direction.(1)

Some of the Quranic commentators say that *at-takhawwuf* means a decrease such that Allah decreases the terrain of disbelief by way of the tribes entering Islam one after the other. Each one of them decreases the terrain of disbelief...as is mentioned in His statement: 'And most certainly shall we try you by means of danger, and hunger, and loss of worldly goods, of lives and of [labour's] fruits' (*al-Baqara:* 155)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (438,335) and also Muslim in his (Sahih) (531) in the Book of Mosques from the Hadith of Jabir ibn-'Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him* who narrated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: {I have been given five things that were not given to anyone before me...} which included {...and I have been supported by fear (by which the enemy is overwhelmed) from the distance that takes one month to cover...}

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* concludes the verse by saying: '...And yet, behold, your Lord is Most Compassionate, Most Merciful!' (*an-Nahl:* 47)

Does this conclusion to the verse suit the threat and warning that preceded it? The intellect would say that the more suitable conclusion would be, 'Behold, your Lord is Severe in Retribution!' for example.

However, here we must know that this is a gift of Lordship that encompasses all of the servants; the believers amongst them and the disbelievers, for indeed Allah *the Exalted* summoned them all into the life of this world and He took it upon Himself to maintain their lives by way of a sun, air, earth, sky; these things were not created for one person to the exclusion of everyone else. He *the Exalted* said: 'To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come' (*ash-Shura:* 20).

It is as if there is a kind of mercy of His *Glorified is He* in the verse as well as His eagerness that they attain salvation because He *Glorified is He* is alerting them to what could happen to them if they persist in their disbelief and He is informing them of the consequences of their disbelief. The informing is an admonition, and the admonition is a mercy and grace towards them so that they do not have to receive the fulfilment of this threat and this warning.

Examples of this kind of conclusion to a verse are found several times in the chapter *of ar-Rahman*. The True Lord *the Exalted* says: '[He is] the Lord of the two farthest points of sunrise, and the Lord of the two farthest points of sunset. [17] Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? [18]' (*ar-Rahman:* 17-18)

This is a blessing that suits His statement: 'Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 18)

And in His *the Exalted* statement: 'He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they might meet: [19) [yet] between them is a barrier which they may not transgress. [20]' (*ar-Rahman:* 19-20)

This is one of Allah’s blessings that suit the conclusion of the verse: ‘Which, then, of your Lord’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 21) As for His *the Exalted* statement: ‘All that lives on earth or in the heavens is bound to pass away [26] but forever will abide thy Lord’s Self, full of majesty and glory [27] Which, then, of your Lord’s powers can you disavow? [28]’ (*ar-Rahman:* 26-28)

What is the blessing in ‘All that lives on earth or in the heavens is bound to pass away’? Is death a blessing? Yes, death is one of Allah’s blessings towards His servants because it says to the one who perseveres in goodness, ‘Death will come and you will receive the recompense for your perseverance in goodness and the reward for your actions.’ It says to the disbeliever, ‘Pay attention and take heed...death is coming.’ It is as if He *Glorified is He* is alerting the disbelievers and warning them so that they desist from what they are in. Is this not a blessing from Allah and mercy from Him *Glorified is He* towards His servants?

Likewise, look at the True Lord’s statement: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! [35] which, then, of your Lord’s favours do you deny? [36]’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36)

What the blessing is in: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you and smoke...’? (*ar-Rahman:* 35) What blessing is in this punishment? Yes, the one who reflects on this verse will find a great blessing in it, because it contains a threat and a warning of punishment if they persist in the disbelief that they are upon. Its contents contain a warning and eagerness for their salvation, in the same way that you would threaten your son, ‘If you are neglectful in your studies you will fail and I will do such-and-such to you.’ You only say this because of your eagerness for him to succeed and do well.

Therefore, the conclusion of the verse: ‘...And yet, behold, your Lord is Most Compassionate, Most Merciful!’ (*an-Nahl:* 47) is a conclusion that suits the threat and warning that precedes it. It contains an elucidation of Allah’s mercy to which He calls both the believer and the disbeliever.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ إِلَىٰ مَا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ مِن شَىْءٍ يَتَفَيَّؤُا۟ ظِلَٰلُهُۥ
عَنِ ٱلْيَمِينِ وَٱلشَّمَآئِلِ سُجَّدًا لِّلَّهِ وَهُمْ دَٰخِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

Do the [disbelievers] not observe the things that God has created, casting their shadows right and left, submit- ting themselves to God obediently? [48] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 48)

His statement: ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never considered…’ (*an-Nahl:* 48) means: Have they been blind and never seen or reflected on what Allah has created? ‘…any of the things…’ (*an-Nahl:* 48).

The word *shay’* (thing) is what they call the genus of genera (*jins al-ajnas)* and ‘any of’ *min* indicates the starting of what is called a ‘thing, i.e. the tiniest thing in existence. This is what they call the lowest of genera...and it also indicates generality and thus the meaning of: ‘...any of the things...’ (*an-Nahl:* 48) is: everything.

Look at anything in the universe, regardless of how small it is, and you will find that it has a shadow. ‘…– [how] their shadows turn…’ (*an-Nahl:* 48) *Yatfiya’* ‘...turn...’ comes from the root word *fa’a*, which means to return. What is meant here is the shadow returning to the sun once again, or the sun returning to the shadow.

If we were to look at shadows we would find that they are of two kinds; a fixed continuous shadow and a changing shadow. The fixed shadow is always in the places that never receive any of the sun’s rays, such as the bottom of the sea and the depths of the earth. The moving shadow is that which is called a *fay’* (returning) because it returns from the shadow to the sun or from the sun to the shadow. Therefore, it can only be called a *fay’* if it goes back to the way it was.

But how is a shadow formed? A shadow is formed whenever an opaque object blocks the sun’s rays; and thus it creates a shadow that goes in the opposite direction of the sun. This shadow has two states of elongation and one state of evenness.

It is elongated towards the east until it reaches the west. Then it starts shrinking as the sun rises and when the sun is at its zenith in the sky the shadow becomes the thing itself. This is the state of evenness. Then the sun inclines towards the west and the elongation of the shadow becomes the opposite of the first elongation towards the west because it is now pointing towards the east.

The True Lord *the Exalted* draws our attention to this universal sign when He, says: ‘Are you not aware of your Lord [through His works]? – how He causes the shadow to lengthen [towards the night] when, had He so willed, He could indeed have made it stand still, but then, we have made the sun its guide; [45] and then, [after having caused it to lengthen,] we draw it in towards ourselves with a gradual drawing-in. [46]’ (*al-Furqan:* 45-46).

This is because if you were to look at the shadow and how it extends and how it shrinks and disappears you would find something truly amazing… because you do not notice the shadow in these two states because it is moving in a linear fashion.

What is the meaning of ‘smooth’ *insiyabi*? It is a kind of motion; motion is either smooth, or it is motion that comprises successive stops between movements.

We notice the latter in how the hands of a clock move. It is more obvious with the second hand than the minute hand, but you can barely notice it with the hour hand. If you were to observe the second hand you find that it moves with a regular beat; i.e. stop, start, stop, start etc.

What this means is that it gathers its motion while it is still, and then it releases it. This is how it experiences a moment in which it is motionless. This is what we call ‘periodic motion’. We cannot observe the motion in the hour hand because the beats are so subtle that the naked eye is incapable of observing it and noticing it. As for smooth motion, it means that every portion of time contains a portion of motion, i.e. it is continuous motion that is distributed over time.

Let us use the example of child’s growth… a newborn baby grows constantly but its mother, due to her close attachment to it, does not notice this growth because she is always looking at it. How is the movement of growth in the child? Is it periodic motion in which the child’s growth accumulates every week or every month and then it grows in one leap?

If the child's growth was as such, we would notice it, but it is not like that. Rather, it grows in a form of smooth motion which distributes the period of growth over time. So, we barely notice its growth.

Likewise, the movement of the sun is linear, such that it distributes the particulars of motion according to the particulars of time. The sun's movement is not dependent on a gears-based mechanism, as is the case with a clock, for example. Rather, it is dependent on the command of Allah, connected to a constant 'Be!'

It is as if the True Lord *the Exalted* wants to turn His creation towards a universal phenomenon within the tangible realm of existence, which each one of us can comprehend in our essence and which we can see. Amongst these manifestations is the phenomenon of the shadow whose motion man is incapable of noticing. In another verse Allah *the Exalted* says: '...as do their shadows in the mornings and the evenings.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15)

Thus the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to spread the idea of glorification throughout the universe, as He *the Exalted* said: '...and there is not a single thing but [that it] extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!...' (*al-Isra':* 44) Thus everything that is called a 'thing' glorifies, regardless of how small it is.

In His *the Exalted* statement: '... [how] their shadows turn right and left…' (*an-Nahl:* 48) there is something to be noted about the Quranic rendering, as the word *yamin* ("…right…") is singular while the word *shama'il* ("…left…") is plural. This is because when the True Lord *the Exalted* said 'Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never considered any of the things that Allah has created…' (*an-Nahl:* 48).

He mentioned the smallest thing that could be imagined from amongst His *Glorified is He* creation; '…any of the things (*min shay'*)…" which is singular. Then He *Glorified is He* said: "...their shadows..." (*an-Nahl:* 48) which is plural, i.e. the sum total of these things, as man does not turn the shadow of one thing but rather, the shadow of numerous things.

Here "...any of..." indicates generality. "…any of the things…" (*an-Nahl:* 48) i.e. everything, so it is appropriate for the right to be singular and the left to be plural.

Then He *the Exalted* says: ‘prostrating themselves before Allah and utterly submissive [to His will]?’ (*an-Nahl:* 48)

What is the connection between the movement of shadows and prostration? The meaning of prostrating is to be in submission to Allah, and it is as if the movement of the shadow and its extension alongside time is proof that it is connected to its Sublime Mover, the Sublime One Who says ‘Be!’, and the shadow is one of His signs, that is subjugated to Him *Glorified is He* prostrating submissively because of His statement: ‘Be!’ and it is.

We said: there is a difference between something you arrange in a universal arrangement and something you arrange in a divine arrangement. The maker of a time bomb arranges it so that it explodes at the time that he wants, but the case is different with the arrangement of the universe.

Allah arranged the universe in a divine arrangement, based on His statement: ‘Be!’ and it is constantly waiting for this divine command: (‘Be!’ and it is), and so forth, so this is not a mechanically controlled matter. No, it is a divinely controlled matter.

This is why some people are happy to say, ‘The sun is to remain as such for several years and then its light will finish,’ and many things have resulted from this judgment. We say: no, the matter is not like that. The sun is subject to a divine, controlled arrangement and it constantly waits for ‘Be!’, which the entire universe heeds. This is why He *the Exalted* says: ‘[and] every day He manifests Himself in yet another [wondrous] way.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 29)

This is how the noble verse has made it clear that that everything that is called a ‘thing’ prostrates to Allah *the Exalted* and the word ‘thing’ *shay’* is singular and it indicates generality. We know about prostration from the prayers that Allah has made us legally responsible for, and it is the utmost limit of submission; the submission of the essence of the slave to the One Who is worshipped, for we submit while standing, we submit while bowing, and we submit while sitting but the most complete submission is when we prostrate to Allah... and why is the most complete submission when we prostrate to Allah?

We say: it is because man has a general essence, and in this essence is the chief of the essence, such that when it is referred to one is referring to the essence itself. What is meant is the face. When the True Lord *the Exalted* describes the passing away of existence, this is why He says: '...Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self (*wajh*)...' (*al-Qasas:* 88). Likewise He said: 'but only out of a longing for the countenance of his Lord, The All-Highest: [20] and such, indeed, shall in time be well pleased. [21]' (*al-Layl:* 20-21) The word *wajh* (face) is used but what is meant is the essence. Thus, whenever the face prostrates to Allah *the Exalted* it shows that the entire essence is in submission because the most honoured part of a man is his face. When he presses it against the earth he is in the state of utmost submission, with his entire essence, to the One Who is worshipped *Exalted is He*.

The verse also shows that the shadow, too, prostrates to its Lord and Creator *Glorified is He*. The shadows can belong to inanimate objects like trees, for example, or a building or a mountain, and the shadows of these fixed things are also fixed and do not move. As for man's shadow, or that of an animal, it is a moving shadow. The True Lord *the Exalted* has given an example of complete submission in shadows; because the shadows of everything are never separated from the ground. This is an example of perfect submission.

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* takes the matter of prostration from the shadows of inanimate objects one-step further, and He says: '...as do their shadows in the mornings and the evenings.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 15)

This means that the essences prostrate, and likewise the shadows prostrate. This is why some of the Gnostics are astonished by the disbeliever and they say: 'O disbeliever! Your shadow prostrates but you are refusing!'

This progression is found in His *the Exalted* statement:

وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ مِن دَآبَّةٍ
وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

It is to God that everything in the heavens and earth submits, every beast that moves, even the angels – they are free from arrogance [49] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 49)

The genera of the universe that man knows of are four: inanimate objects; plants, in which one finds the property of growth; animals, in which one finds the properties of motion and sense; man, in which one finds the property of thought; and angels, in which one finds the property of essential, luminous light. These are the genera that we know of.

The True Lord *the Exalted* takes us from the prostrating shadows that belong to fixed, inanimate objects to the things that move, and when they move their shadow also moves on the earth. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘For before Allah prostrates itself all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth’ (*an-Nahl:* 49).

He then broke down this summarisation into detail by saying: ‘every beast that moves, and the angels…’ (*an-Nahl:* 49) i.e. from the least of moving things, which is the beast, to the highest of things, which is the angels.

Someone might say: ‘do all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth prostrate to Allah?’ We say to this person: Yes, because you have interpreted prostration to be the placing of your forehead on the earth, to show that the essence, in its highness and in its lowness, is prostrating to Allah and submitting completely, since you have made your forehead level with your feet.

The True Lord *the Exalted* wants us to be aware of the equality of slave-hood that is found throughout all of existence. The disbeliever, even if he is rebelling against Allah in what Allah has given him a choice in; to believe or disbelieve, to obey or disobey, but Allah has given him the choice.

We say to him: indeed, you have become accustomed to rebelling against Allah, because He has asked you to believe and you have disbelieved. He has asked you, o believer, to obey and you have disobeyed. Therefore, you are used to rebelling against the True Lord. However, do not think that you have left prostrating and submitting to Allah. This is because Allah makes things you hate happen to you, but they happen to you despite you and you are submissive.

This is the meaning of His *the Exalted* statement in the previous verse: ‘...and utterly submissive [to His will]?’ (*an-Nahl:* 48) i.e. servile, humiliated and yielding, even though they are accustomed to rebelling against the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

And if not, this person who is used to going against what Allah wants in what he has a choice in, is he able to refuse when Allah wants to make him sick, or impoverish him, or cause him to die?

No, he is not able. Rather, he is utterly submissive and servile in the measures that Allah makes happen to him, even though he rejects it and even though he has become used to going against what Allah wants. Therefore, there is nothing in Allah's universe that is able to go against what Allah wants because he who goes against Allah's legislative will in what He has made him legally responsible for can only do so because of the choice that Allah has given him. If not, and if he had not been given the ability to choose, he would not have been able to rebel, as is the case with His universal will, in which there is no choice. This is what we say to the disbeliever who is rebelling against the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'Rebel when He afflicts you with illness and say: "I will never get sick." Rebel against poverty and say: "I will never be poor."' As long as you are not able and you are submitting reluctantly, then submit with pleasure and you will benefit. Your life's problem will come to an end and you will receive a life that is purer than this life.

His statement: 'every beast that moves' (*an-Nahl:* 49) is referring to everything that crawls on the earth, and the meaning of crawling (*ad-dabb*) is moving and walking... and His statement: '...and the angels...' (*an-Nahl:* 49). That is to say, the angels are not referred to as beasts that move on land because He made their fulfilment of commands to be fulfilled via use of their wings, for He *the Exalted* said: '...endowed with wings, two, or three, or four...' (*Fatir:* 1). And He said in another verse: 'although there is no beast that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which is not [Allah's] creature like yourselves' (*al-An'am:* 38).

Thus, Allah created the bird that flies with wings which is the opposite of the beast that moves on the earth. Thus, He has taken possession of both matters; the moving beast and the angels.

The '...no...' (*ma)* in the verse is used to refer to non-sentient and non-rational beings. This is because most things in existence in the universe do not have knowledge or cognizance. This is why He *the Exalted* said in another verse: ‘Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* finishes the verse by saying: ‘... [Even] these do not bear themselves with false pride’ (*an-Nahl:* 49) i.e. the angels, who are the highest thing in Deity’s creation, do not bear themselves with false pride. Their high rank in the creation due to luminosity does not make them conceited towards their Creator *Glorified is He* because the One Who gave them this honour is Allah *Glorified is He and Exalted is He*.

As long as Allah is the One Who has given them this honour then one cannot be conceited about it because the one who prides himself can only pride himself in essential qualities, not ones that are given to him. As for the thing that is granted by someone else, it is not possible for you to pride yourself in it and be conceited towards the one who gave it to you.

This is why the True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘Never did the Messiah feel too proud to be Allah’s servant, nor do the angels who are near unto Him...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 172).

They will never refuse to worship Allah and prostrate to Him even though Allah has honoured them and given them a high rank.

Then He *the Exalted* says:

يَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُم مِّن فَوْقِهِمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ ۝٥٠

They fear their Lord above them, and they do as they are commanded [50] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 50)

What is fear (*khawf*)? Fear is fright and dread, and fear, fright and dread can only be of someone who is higher than you and observing you and there is nothing you can do about it. If you were able to do something about it, there would be no reason for you to be afraid. Therefore, you are not scared of any matters that fall within your sphere of influence. You say: ‘If such-and-such happens I’ll do such-and-such.’

If the noble angels: ‘…do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6) then what reason do they have to fear? We say: indeed, the fear could be because of some shortcoming on your behalf and you fear the consequences, and the fear could be out of awe, reverence and exaltation of the One Who is feared, without any sin or shortcoming. Therefore, we find the Arab poet saying the following in order to justify this fear:

I stand in awe and reverence of you, though you have no authority over Me
But the eye is filled with its beloved

Therefore, fear could sometimes be due to expecting some harm as a result of a shortcoming on your behalf, and other times due to nothing but awe, reverence and exaltation.

In His statement: '...high above them...' (*an-Nahl:* 50) what is meant by being above? We know that there are six directions: above, below, right, left, front and back. Above is the direction that remains dominant and this is why, even in the building of fortresses, people construct them in high places so that they can use the advantage of height to control all the other directions. Therefore, being above is a position of highness, and being above could refer to a physical place or it could refer to a rank.

The one(1) who says that it refers to a physical place holds the opinion that Allah is in the sky, and the evidence is the slave girl who was asked, 'Where is Allah?' She pointed to the sky and said, 'In the sky.'(2)

She pointed upwards because it is not correct for us to say, 'Indeed Allah is below', for Allah *Glorified is He* is transcendent above place, and as long as He is transcendent above space then He is also transcendent above time. Allah

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(1) The story of the slave girl who was asked about Allah and answered 'He is in heaven'

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/448), Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi in his (Musnad) (1105), Ibn Abu 'Asim in the book (As-Sunna) (1/215), and Al-Bayhaqi in (Al-Asma' wa As-Sifat) (p.423) from the Hadith of Mu'awiya ibn Al-Hakam As-Salmi* who said: 'I said, "I had a slave-girl who used to herd sheep for me. One day, I discovered that a wolf had killed one of her sheep, and Iam only human, I get upset like humans get upset, and I slapped her in the face. Then I went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who impressed upon me the seriousness of my act. I said, "O Messenger of Allah, should I not set her free?" He said, "Bring her to me." He asked her, "Where is Allah?" She said, "In the sky." He said, "Who am I?" She said, "You are The Messenger of Allah." He said, "Free her, for she is a believer."'

the Exalted is transcendent above being confined within both space and time because space and time were both created, and who is the One Who created time and space?

Therefore, as long as they have been created then He *Glorified is He* is transcendent above time and space.

They said that being above here is in the literal sense. Being above in a physical place, i.e. He *the Exalted* is higher than us. We say to whoever says about this 'being above' that Allah is higher than us; 'From which angle, from this one or that one?'

Therefore, being above here means a rank above, and the proof is that when we see guards who guard fortresses and castles the guard is always higher than those being guarded. The guard is above in a physical sense, but is he above in rank? Absolutely, He is not.

In His *the Exalted* statement: '...and do whatever they are bidden to do.' (*an-Nahl:* 50) This is obedience, and it is that you do what you have been commanded to do and that you avoid that from which you have been forbidden. However, the verse here has mentioned only one side of obedience, which is: '...and do whatever they are bidden to do.' (*an-Nahl:* 50)

The verse did not say, for example, 'and they avoid whatever they have been forbidden from', why? We say that it is because the verse contains what is called logical correlation, and what is meant by logical correlation is that every forbiddance of something is in actuality a fact commanding to do the opposite, so every forbiddance is interpreted as a command to do the opposite.

Thus, His *Glorified is He* statement: '...and do whatever they are bidden to do.' (*an-Nahl:* 50) Correlates logically with: 'and they avoid whatever they have been forbidden from' and thus the verse has included both sides.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* created the angels and they have no function except that they fervently adore Allah's essence, and they include the angels who oversee the creations of Allah. They are: 'and thus they fulfil the [Creator's] behest!" (*an-Nazi'at:* 5)

And He *the Exalted* says: 'For him are angels ranged before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah's command...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

They also include: ‘and yet, verily, there are ever-watchful forces over you, [10] noble, recording [11]’ (*al-Infitar:* 10-11).

Therefore, there are angels that have a connection to us, and they are the ones whom the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* when Allah created him, and fashioned him with His hand and breathed into him of His spirit. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to them, ‘This is the human being that you will be in the service of.’ Thus, prostrating to him by Allah’s command is a declaration that they are to protect him by His command, and they will write this for him, they will do this for him; they will prepare this for him and so forth.

As for the angels that have no connection to man, they are not aware of him and they do not know a thing about him; they are the ones who are meant in His *Glorified is He* statement to Satan (Iblis): ‘...Are you too proud [to bow down before another created being], or are you of those who think [only] of themselves as higher ranking angels?’ (*Sad:* 75) Are you too proud to prostrate, or are you of the upper category of angels? This category of the angels do not have a connection to man. Their only function is to glorify and remember Allah and they are the ones meant in His statement: they extol His limitless glory by night and by day, never flagging [therein].’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 20)

Everything – therefore – in existence is submissive to what the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants from it, except for the exception that Allah has made for man by giving him choice, for Allah *Glorified is He* has not forced anyone, neither man nor the universe that he lives in. Allah *Glorified is He* presented the trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. It is as if they said, ‘We do not want to have the ability to choose. We would rather be subjugated and have nothing to do with trust and legal responsibility!’

Why, then, did the universe, with its heavens, and earth, refuse to assume this responsibility? We say: There is a difference between accepting something at the time of its assumption and the power to do something at the time of its execution. There is a difference; we have assumption and we have execution, and before we gave an example of assuming a trust when we said: Imagine someone wants to deposit an amount of money with you because the fears that he will waste it. They want you to keep it for them until a time comes when they actually need it. At that particular time you are able to assume the trust and you intend to carry it out whenever they ask you for it. Your determination is strong and your intention is sincere.

This is the time of assuming the trust, but when the time of execution comes maybe circumstances will force you to spend the money, or there is some obstacle that prevents you from carrying it out or your determination changes.

Therefore, the time of execution is something else. Therefore, the one who wants to free his determination does not guarantee the time of execution. He refrains from taking on the trust and he says: No, if I guarantee myself at the time of assumption, I will not guarantee myself at the time of execution.

This is an example of what happened with the heavens, the earth and the mountains when they refused to assume the trust. This is because they appreciated its responsibility and burden and the lack of guaranteeing that they would fulfil its right. This is why they refused to assume it from the very beginning.

Likewise, man must be intelligent when he takes on trusts and this is why He *the Exalted* says: '...Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most oppressive, most ignorant.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

What is it of which man is ignorant? He is ignorant of appreciating his state at the time of executing the trust, and thus He oppresses himself. If he had taken the easy way out, as they say, he would have said, 'O Lord! Make me like the heavens, earth and mountains, and whatever you cause to befall me I will obey your command.'

Therefore, from amongst Allah's servants are those who accepted choice and assumed legal responsibility, but they also left their choice and their desire and will in favour of their Lord and Creator's will. They say, 'O Lord! You created us with choice. We are able to do and not to do, but we have renounced our choice in favour of your choice, and our will in favour of your will, and we obey your command. These are the servants of Allah who deserve to be attributed to Him *Glorified is He* in this way.

Therefore, there is a difference between doing something voluntarily while one has the ability not to do it and doing something under compulsion and subjugation. The former, while he is able not to do, has placed His Lord's will regarding legal responsibility over the will of his own soul regarding his ability to choose.

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* moves on to the summit of creedal issues with regards to man. He *the Exalted* says

وَقَالَ ٱللَّهُ لَا تَتَّخِذُوٓاْ إِلَٰهَيۡنِ ٱثۡنَيۡنِۖ إِنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَٰهٞ وَٰحِدٞ فَإِيَّٰيَ فَٱرۡهَبُونِ ﴿٥١﴾

God said, 'Do not take two gods'– for He is the One God —
I alone am the One that you should hold in awe' [51]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 51)

The prohibition in the verse has come as a result of man going against what His Lord, wants. It is amazing that, human beings and the jinn as well – meaning the Arabic term *thaqalayn* – i.e. the two species in the entire universe that have choice. They have choice in some things and they are forced in other things and despite that, no genera besides them from Allah's creation stand out.

The heavens, earth, and mountains had the ability to choose, and they chose to be subjugated. The matter came to an end at the very beginning. Despite that, they are subjugated and they carry out their tasks to serve man. The sun has never protested or refused on any day. It rises over the believer as it rises over the disbeliever, and the same goes for air, earth, and dairy cattle. Everything in Allah's universe has been subjugated for everyone. Therefore, all of these things have a task and they carry out their task in the most perfect way.

This is why He *the Exalted* says regarding these things: 'Are you not aware that before Allah prostrate themselves all [things and beings] that are in the heavens and all that are on earth – the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the beasts?' (*al-Hajj:* 18)

This is unanimity. Nothing contradicts what their Lord wants.

What about man's state? He *the Exalted* says: '... And many human beings...' (*al-Hajj:* 18).

He did not say, 'human beings'. Then He said: '...whereas many [others, having defied Him,] will inevitably have to suffer [in the life to come]…' (*al-Hajj:* 18).

This is the state of ennobled man whom Allah gave the ability to choose and left him to choose. All the genera carry out their duties, because they took their lot when they were given their first choice. They chose to be subjugated and to be forced.

As for humans, one of them may say, ‘There is no deity in existence; the world was created like this naturally.’ Another one will say: ‘rather, there are numerous deities, because the world contains many interests and things that cannot be controlled by one deity’, meaning: a deity for the sky, a deity for the earth, a deity for the sun and so forth.

Therefore, this person sees many things in the world and thinks that one deity cannot oversee all this. We say to him, ‘You have understood the power of Allah to be like your power as an individual. No, you must understand His power from: “...there is nothing like Him...” (*ash-Shura:* 11). This is because divine power does not deal with things the way you deal with things. You need work and effort, while He *the Exalted* does all of this with the word ‘Be!’ and that’s the end of the matter.

We are astonished at the contradiction of these people. One of them will say, ‘The universe was created just like that, without a deity.’ Another will say, ‘Rather, there are numerous deities.’ We say to them, ‘You are contradicting each other. Come to the religion of Allah and come to the middle way which says that there is one God. It does not negate divinity and it does not affirm plurality.’

If you think that the machinery of the universe requires numerous tools to be managed then know that Allah *the Exalted* does carry out the management of the universe by means of a process, but not by doing this and doing that, the way human beings apply themselves to their actions. Rather, He does it with ‘Be!’, and this is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith:

(O My servants! If the first of you and the last of you, your living and your dead, were to gather on one plateau and each person amongst you was to ask for whatever he wished for, I would give each asker whatever he asked, for it would not decrease Me in my dominion except in the way if one of you were to dip a needle into the ocean and then take it out. This is because I am Generous and Glorious. I do whatever I want. My giving is speech and my punishment is speech. When I command something that I want, I just have to say ‘Be!’ to it and it is.)[1]

So, you who reject the idea of One Deity and think that He would tire from managing the universe in all its aspects, raise the level of divinity above examples of human beings because Allah *the Exalted* does not carry out His authority in the universe via a process. Rather, He carries it out with the word ‘Be!’

Therefore, one deity is sufficient, and as long as we have submitted to one deity then beware of saying that there are numerous deities. If the True Lord *the Exalted* has negated that there be two deities then He has also negated the possibility of there being more because two is the starting point of plurality.

The meaning of “...two deities...” is two objects of worship. Thus, they would have commands and prohibitions and the commands and prohibitions would require obedience. The universe needs management, so which of the two deities would take care of managing the affairs of the universe, or would he need an assistant? If he needs an assistant, then this is a deficiency, and thus he does not deserve to be a deity. Likewise, each one of them would specialise in some action; one would do this and one would do that such that one of them would be incapable of doing what the other one does. Which aspect of life would then be dominant? It is known that the various aspects of life are shared and intertwined. This is why the True Lord *the Exalted* says: ‘...nor has there ever been any deity side by side with Him: [for, had there been any,] lo! Each deity would surely have stood apart [from the others] in whatever it had created...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 91). And He said: ‘had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than Allah, both [those realms] would surely have fallen into ruin!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 22)

What would happen if the first deity wanted something and the other one did not want it? If the thing does come about, then the second deity is incapable. If it does not come about, then the first deity is incapable. Thus, the ability of one of them is the incapability of the other. We notice in His *the Exalted* statement: ‘And Allah has said: “Do not take to worshipping two [or more] deities…”’

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(1) *Narrated by at-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (2495) and Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/77,154) from the Hadith of Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him*

(*an-Nahl:* 51), a profound admonition. It is as if He *Glorified is He* calls us to His Oneness, says to us: 'Put yourselves at ease with Oneness.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* explained this ease when He said: '[To this end,] Allah sets forth a parable: A man who has for his masters several partners, [all of them] at variance with one another, and a man depending wholly on one person: can these two be deemed equal as regards their condition? [Nay,] all praise is due to Allah [alone]: but most of them do not understand this.' (*az-Zumar:* 29) This means a man who works only for one master and a man who has many masters; and they are partners that differ with one another. If one of them is pleased the other is angry. If one of them needs him the other is contentious. Thus, he is always tired and burdened. As for the one who belongs to one master, the ease he is in is not lost on anyone.

In His *Glorified is He* Oneness there is ease for us. It is as if He *Glorified is He* is saying: 'You have one objective that spares you from all other objectives and it guarantees for you that pleasure and anger are from the same source.' Therefore, His demand is ease for us. This is why, before demanding it from us, He bears witness to it for His Essence. He said: 'Allah [Himself] bears witness – and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him...' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). If someone were to object and say, 'How can He bear witness for His Essence?' we would say, 'Yes, He bears witness for His Essence *Glorified is He* because there is no one other than Him, no one with Him, so the testimony of the essence for the essence here is something natural...it is as if He *Glorified is He* is saying: 'There is no one other than Me, and if there is a deity besides Me, then let him show himself. Let him declare his existence.

'I am Allah. I created the universe and I took it and I did such-and-such. Either I am truthful in what I have said and the matter is settled or I am not being truthful and there is another deity who is the one who created... so where is he? Why does not he oppose me?' This has never happened and no one from Allah's creation has ever challenged Him. When a claim is made and no one opposes or objects to it, then it is granted to the one who made it. If someone says, 'Maybe there are other deities that do not know that someone has taken divinity from them.' If that were the case, then they are not worthy of divinity because of their lack of knowledge. If they knew and they did not object, then they are cowards and they do not deserve this rank.

By bearing witness for His Essence, that there is no Allah but Him, He has turned towards the creation of the creation because if He knows that there is no deity besides Him, then when He says ‘Be!’ He is confident that it will be.

When Allah gives an unseen ruling this is why He says: ‘I have given this ruling even though you are capable of doing or not doing, but I have given a ruling for you not to do. As long as I have given a ruling for you not to do, but you have the ability to do and you do not do it, then this is proof that there is no deity besides Me who assists you in doing.

Then the angels bear witness to the testimony for the Essence and those endowed with knowledge give a testimony with proof, as He *the Exalted* said: ‘Allah [Himself] proffers evidence – and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

We have a point to discuss in His *the Exalted* statement: ‘...two [or more] deities (*ilahayn ithnayn*)’ (*an-Nahl:* 51) We have a number and we have that which is counted. If we said, for example, ‘I met three men.’ ‘Three’ indicates the number while the word ‘men’ indicates the genus of that which is counted. This is the case with all numbers except for the singular and the dual since the term for each of them indicates both the number and that which is counted.

If I were to say: ‘deity’ (*ilah*) it indicates that it is one and it indicates the genus. The same goes for *ilahayn* (two deities), as it indicates the dual and it indicates the genus of that which is counted. This is why it would have been sufficient for Him *the Exalted* to say in the noble verse: ‘Do not take to worshipping two deities (*ilahayn*)’ without saying *ithnayn* because the one word indicates both the number and that which is counted. However, the True Lord *the Exalted* wanted to emphasise this creedal issue because of its importance.

It is from the rhetorical styles of the Arabs that when they want to emphasise a word they mention a word after it which carries the actual purport that is sought.

Thus, they say: ‘So-and-so is qasim wasim (good-looking and handsome)’ and ‘so-and-so is *hasan basan* (beautiful and handsome)’ and ‘so-and-so is *shaytan laitan* (witty devil)’. They want to emphasise the adjective...and likewise His statement *ilahayn* (‘...two deities...’) only affirms divinity, and to emphasise this creedal issue because it is the most important issue that concerns man and it is the peak of the matter, He *the Exalted* says: '...two [or more] deities (*ilahayn ithnayn*)…' (*an-Nahl:* 51). Likewise, He also says: '...He is the One and Only Allah (*ilah wahid*)…' (*an-Nahl:* 51) He *the Exalted* mentions '...Only...' (*wahid*) to affirm Allah's Oneness. There is something else in the verse that we have to consider, and it is that the speech here is in the third person: '...He is the One and Only Allah (*ilah wahid*)…' (*an-Nahl:* 51). And thus it would make sense in the language for Him to say here: 'hence, of Him, of Him alone stand in awe!'

However, He changes the thread of the conversation from the third person to the first person and says: '…hence, of Me, of Me alone stand in awe!' (*an-Nahl:* 51) There is wisdom behind this, and a rhetorical note because after emphasising divinity with His *the Exalted* statement: '...He is the One and Only Allah (*ilah wahid*)…' (*an-Nahl:* 51).

It was correct to confront them with His Essence because as long as the matter is one of awe then awe from the first person is better than awe from the third person. It is as if the thread of the conversation says, 'This is Him *Glorified is He* in front of you', and this induces awe to a greater extent.

Likewise, in the chapter of *al-Fatiha* we read: 'All praise is due to Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds, [2] The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, [3] Lord of the Day of Judgment! [4]' (*al-Fatiha:* 2-4). He did not say: 'Him alone do we worship' and continue with the third person. Instead, He changed the pronoun into the second person and said: 'You alone do we worship; and unto you alone do we turn for aid.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5) This is because after the servant has called to mind the attributes of majesty and augustness he then becomes worthy of facing and directly addressing Allah *Exalted is He*. His statement: '…hence, of Me, of Me alone stand in awe!' (*an-Nahl:* 51) comes after the servant has called to mind the augustness of his Lord, affirmed His oneness, and knows that He is Only One God, not two deities; in which case one of them would say, 'We will punish him' while the other deity would say, 'No.' This is not the case. Rather, One Deity holds the power to punish and the power to pardon, and thus it suits the context here for Him to confront them by saying: '…hence, of me, of me alone stand in awe!' (*an-Nahl:* 51)

Then He *the Exalted* says:

وَلَهُۥ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَهُ ٱلدِّينُ وَاصِبًا ۚ أَفَغَيْرَ ٱللَّهِ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him: everlasting obedience is His right. Will you heed anyone other than God? [52] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 52)

We have here the letter *(lam)*, and the *(lam)* can indicate possession as in the verse, or as in, 'The money belongs to Zayd (*al-malu li Zayd*). It could also indicate designation if the *(lam)* is attached to something that does not possess, such as when we say: 'The bridle is for (*li*) the horse' and 'The key is for (*li*) the door'. The horse does not own the bridle and the door does not own the key, so this is designation.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says here: 'And His is all that is in the heavens and on earth…' (*an-Nahl:* 52). In another place He says: '…unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth!...' (*Yunus:* 68) And likewise in: '...All that is in the heavens and on earth extols His limitless glory...' (*al-Hashr:* 24). Another time He says: 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols the limitless glory of Allah...' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1).

When the *(lam)* is for possession that which is owned could be different, as in His statement: 'And His is all that is in the heavens and on earth…' (*an-Nahl:* 52). This means that which is present in both of them, i.e. the things that are present in the heavens and on earth.

As for His statement: '…unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth!...' (*Yunus:* 68), it means the things that are present in the heavens but not on earth and the things that are present on earth but not in the heavens, i.e. that which is designated for the heavens and that which is designated for the earth. This is what they call 'ownership capacity.'

If all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs to Him *Glorified is He*, then no one besides Him has independent ownership. As long as no one besides Him has independent ownership then no one has essential existence. This is because their initial existence is a gift and the sustaining of their lives is also a gift. This is why they say, 'Whoever wants to stubbornly oppose with regards to divinity must have essential existence', But this is not the case except for Allah *Exalted is He*.

We wil give you an example. A small boy goes against his father, but he is still dependent on him, so he says to him, 'Wait until you grow up and become independent.' When the boy becomes a young man and matures and starts earning his own money, he can then rely on himself and he thus becomes independent of his father.

Therefore, we say to the person who stubbornly opposes with regards to divinity, 'You are not capable because your existence is a gift and the sustaining of your existence is a gift. Everything can be taken away from you.' Accordingly the True Lord *Glorified is He* draws our attention towards this matter in His statement: 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening [6] whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient [7]' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7). This person sees himself as independent from everyone else – from his point of view – but is he really independent? No, he is not independent, and the proof is that he is not able to retain what he owns.

Regarding his statement: 'And His is all that is in the heavens and on earth…' (*an-Nahl:* 52) The One to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth, and He sustains His own existence with His infinite sustainment. He *Glorified is He* assuages you and says to you: 'I am All-Sustaining' – meaning: managing your affair, but not just managing (*qa'im*) but rather sustaining (*qayyum*), with hyperbole. As long as He *Glorified is He* is managing your affair, bringing you into existence out of nothing and providing you out of nothing, then your obedience must be to Him *Glorified is He* and no one else.

There is a proverb which says, 'The one who eats my food must listen to what I say'. If you are dependent in your existence, and your existence is from Allah, your provision is from Allah and the maintaining of your life's essentials is from Allah; this is why He *the Exalted* said: '... and to Him [alone] obedience is always due…' (*an-Nahl:* 52), i.e. this is the result because to Allah belongs everything that is on the heavens and on earth, and to Him alone obedience is always due, i.e. constant and continuous submission. Allah's kingdom is constant and He *Glorified is He* will never surrender His kingdom to anyone. He still holds sway over His kingdom, and if that is the case the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks them: '...will you, then, pay reverence to other than Allah?' (*an-Nahl:* 52)

The questioning here is for the purpose of rejecting and censuring. It is not possible to pay reverence to other than Allah because it is a form of idiocy that simply is not appropriate. You have learned that all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belong to Allah and constant obedience and constant compliance belong to Him. By Him the heavens and the earth are sustained and from Him *Glorified is He* everything is brought into existence out of nothing and everything is provided for out of nothing.

Therefore, it is a form of idiocy to pay reverence to other than Him. He is the most worthy of being revered. If you revere other than Him, then this is foolishness on your part, and it will lead to ruin and destruction. You have become deluded by the countless blessings that Allah has given you. One of the blessings that He guarantees for His servants is the well-being of their aptitudes and that which is connected to them. When the intellect is sound, for example, all other matters that are attached to it are also sound and healthy. One's life is orderly, one's behaviour is sound and one's transactions are sound... and this is a blessing.

The blessing is for the heart as well as for the outward form. The outward form has material pleasure. The heart has abstract pleasure, and the most important abstract pleasure which brings ease to the outward form is having one religion to guide us. Mankind has one Lord who is Omnipotent, and nothing incapacitates Him. If the life of this world becomes difficult for man, and the means becomes difficult for him, he indeed has a Lord with Whom he can seek refuge, Who will help him and suffice him. This is true ease.

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* guaranteed that we have everything we need for the soundness of our bodies by measuring the essentials of our lives in the universe. He says that He measured out the varied provision for all who seek them. (*Fussilat:* 10) In other words, Allah is assuring us that He wants nothing from us other than that we use our intellectual creativity in pondering the material substance that has been created by Allah, and to interact with it using the capability Allah has granted to our limbs, and then we will find everything facilitated for us. He does not need us to bring our own provisions into creation; He only wanted us to use our brains in interacting with the universe.

But how can man interact with life? There are things in existence that Allah has created out of His mercy and bounty; these things serve us without us asking them to do anything; they do so by default. We do not ask the sun to rise nor the wind to blow, and so forth.

But, there are other things that serve us only when we interact with them such as the earth; if we plough, cultivate and irrigate it, it will give us what we want.

Yet, when it comes to interaction there is disparity amongst mankind, and this disparity is not in the things that serve us by default. Rather, the advancement of mankind and their disparity comes from the things with which they interact. Because the default things serve all of mankind; the sun, the air and the water, all serve the believer and the disbeliever, alike.

Therefore, man advances through the things Allah has created for him and if he interacts with them, they interact with him. But if he is negligent they will not serve him and he wil not get any benefit from them. This is why someone might say, ‘The disbeliever has such and such, and he owns such and such, even though he is a disbeliever...’ and he might be amazed at the success this person has been given, whereas the believer, who believes in Allah’s Oneness, has been denied.

We say to him: Yes, he has been granted this because the two of you are equal with regards to the things which serve all mankind without any need for interaction. But he has gone way ahead of you by working hard and exerting himself and interacting with the universe using the essentials and capabilities which Allah has given him. He interacted with these things so they served him, while you sat around caring for nothing.

The progress of man can go even further when he makes the thing that serve him by default – i.e. the things that have been subjugated for him – interact with him. This is what we see now with the use of solar energy, for example, to heat water. This energy is subjugated for us already, but we needed to tap into it. So, it was the progress of man and his strong endeavour that made him reach this height of development. All of these blessings are from Allah and this is why He says:

وَمَا بِكُم مِّن نِّعۡمَةٖ فَمِنَ ٱللَّهِۖ ثُمَّ إِذَا مَسَّكُمُ ٱلضُّرُّ فَإِلَيۡهِ تَجۡـَٔرُونَ (٥٣)

Whatever good things you possess come from God, and when hardship afflicts you, it is to Him alone you cry out for help [53] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 53)

Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with these blessings as a mercy from Him and a bounty, blessings that you see but cannot count or compute. However, when the blessings take a constant tempo, we start taking them for granted. Then we become distracted from the Bestower of Blessings *Glorified is He*. I can give you an example for this. Let us say you have a child to whom you give a regular allowance, for example, on the first day of every month. You find that after giving him the allowance he is not keen to see you until the beginning of the next month. If you get him accustomed to receiving his allowance every day, you will see him in the morning hovering around you and showing you himself to remind you of this ‘thing’ which you both know.

So, the regular tempo of the blessing may cause you to be distracted from the Bestower of Blessings, and you will not remember Him unless you need Him. This is why the True Lord alerts us, if I give you a blessing, beware of being deluded by it. Beware of letting the blessing distract you from the Bestower of Blessings; you will testify against yourself that there is no Bestower of blessings besides Me because once I strip you of this blessing you will not find anyone besides Me to seek refuge in and you will say, ‘O Lord, O Lord!’ You will testify against yourself. You will not lie to yourself. So, who will you turn to if you are afflicted with poverty? Who will you turn to if you are afflicted with illness? You will turn to none but Allah, Who told us clearly that when hardship afflicts us, it is to Him we cry out for help. (*an-Nahl:* 53)

It is when man goes through hardship that he turns to Allah, and it is the need that makes us seek refuge in the true source of provision. If the blessings have distracted us and caused us to forget, then hardship will remind us of the

Lord Who alone has the power to relieve us of this hardship. This is why when the people, who have unswerving belief in Allah, are afflicted with hardship, they say: ‘You have reminded me of You, O Lord.’ They take it as a blessing, as if it is saving them from the heedlessness in which they were. O Lord! You have reminded me of you... I was forgetful and distracted... I was heedless.

When man starts reflecting on the past and realizes his shortcomings, Allah relieves him of his tribulation; therefore the affliction is lifted from the slave if he embraces it and realizes that it conceals a blessing for him within its silver lining. This is why prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* draws our attention to these events that afflict us; so beware of receiving them with anxiety and apprehension; instead receive them with faith and conviction that your Lord is watching over you. With these events He is forcibly turning you back to Him so that you go back to Him and seek refuge in Him and say ‘O Lord!’

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* quotes the Lord of Might in this Qudsi Hadith: {I test those of My slaves whom I love so that they say ‘O Lord!’...}

Allah exclaims in another verse that if only people had learned humility when suffering came from Him! (*al-An‘am:* 43) it means that He wants us, when afflicted with a test or some tribulation, to humble ourselves before Him because being humble before Allah is proof of our vigilance. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* guides us to this reality. The one who is truly afflicted is not the one who meets hardship or trial. No. The one who is truly afflicted is the one who is denied reward.

Therefore, we say to whoever has a blessing, ‘Beware of letting the blessing distract you in such a way as to forget the Bestower of Blessings.’ As for whoever is going through tests and hardship, we say, ‘This test jolts you from your slumber, and reminds you of Allah. You will never find anyone besides Him to seek refuge in’.

When Allah tells us that it is to Him alone we cry out for help, (*an-Nahl:* 53) it means we cry out in a high voice like the bellowing of cows. No one keeps it a secret and no one is ashamed to publicly declare it even in front of those we treated haughtily. If only, when afflicted with something like this, you would consider and take heed and say at some point, ‘These events will make us seek refuge in the Lord!’ Unfortunately, the opposite happens. When He relieves you of this hardship you go back to whatever it is you were doing:

ثُمَّ إِذَا كَشَفَ ٱلضُّرَّ عَنكُمۡ إِذَا فَرِيقٞ مِّنكُم بِرَبِّهِمۡ يُشۡرِكُونَ ٥٤

Yet when He has relieved you of your hardship – lo and
behold! – some of you attribute partners to your Lord [54]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 54)

Amongst mankind there are those who, when Allah afflicts them with some hardship or misfortune, they humble themselves and cry out and seek refuge in Allah and supplicate to Him. Their tears may flow, and they start praying and saying, ‘O so-and-so, ask Allah to do such-and-such for me’, and when Allah relieves them from their hardship the cycle starts all over again. This is why He tells us in another verse that when trouble befalls man, he cries out to Allah, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as He relieves him of his trouble, he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Allah to remove his trouble… (*Yunus:* 12)

It is from the subtlety of the Quranic rendering that here Allah says: ‘...some of you attribute partners to your Lord.’ (*an-Nahl:* 54) So, it is a group from amongst you and not all of you. As for the rest, it is possible that they are firmly established upon the truth and they consider what has happened to them and thus they do not go back. Mankind – therefore – are different with regards to this issue. One type will humble them and turn back to Allah because of one hardship that afflicts them; another will return to Allah because of two hardships, and so forth.

We have seen within the events that have happened in our countries great incidents that have caused the leaders of the people to return to Allah. We have seen those who do not know the way to the mosque praying, those who never think about making Hajj to Allah’s house rushing to it, circumambulating and crying there at the *Multazam*(1) (place of clinging). They would not have sought refuge in Allah and turned to Him had these incidents not befell them. So, are these events, these crises and these afflictions not good for them? Surely, they are good for them.

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(1) *It is recommended to supplicate at the (Multazam) after drinking from the well of Zamzam. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr Ibn Al-‘As said: ‘I saw prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him placing his face and chest against the (Multazam)’, as narrated by Ibn ‘Uday in (Al-Kamil) (6/2418).*

Also, man could be afflicted with an illness causing him great pain that lasts for a long time. So, he goes to the doctors and he supplicates to Allah and seeks refuge in Him. He also asks people to supplicate on his behalf and ask Allah to cure him. He does many good acts and once Allah relieves him of this illness, he says something like, ‘I consulted a skilled doctor, a useful doctor, and I did this and I did that; so glory be to Allah!’ Why do you not just attribute all to Allah and remove yourself completely from this equation?

When Allah says that some people attribute partners to Him once Allah has relieved them from their hardship, (*an-Nahl:* 54), this comes as a guarantee of social security in the universe, It is like saying to mankind, ‘If you offer a favour to people and they deny what you did, then do not let this discourage you from offering favours to others. People even deny the favours from The One Who is Higher than you; they have denied the favours of Allah *Glorified is He*. So, do not let their denial weaken your resolve to keep doing the good. You should persist in offering goodness so that you can deserve to be one of His selected few.

The True Lord gives us an example of denying favours in the story of prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. He tells the believers not to be like those who insulted Musa, but Allah cleared him of their allegations and he (Musa) became highly honoured in Allah’s Eyes. (*al-Ahzab:* 69) His people accused him and they sat down telling lies about him and slandering him, so Musa *peace be upon him* said, ‘O Lord! I ask you to stop the untruths that are being said about me…’ and Allah responded to Musa: ‘I have not even done this for Myself, so how can you ask Me to do it for you Musa?’

Why does the True Lord not stop the untruths that are being said about Him from being said in the first place? The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not do this in order to give us an example of how to tolerate the denial of favours. He has created His creation and provided for them and accommodated them, and despite that they have disbelieved in Him, and yet the True Lord *Glorified is He* is still their Creator and their Provider, and He still accommodates them.

Therefore, the verse contains legislation for a safety feature protecting the society from the spreading of abstaining from doing acts of goodness.

The True Lord’s statement: ‘...attribute partners to your Lord.’ (*an-Nahl:* 54), includes those who deny favours from amongst the believers and the disbelievers. But why do they associate partners with Allah? The True Lord says:

لِيَكۡفُرُواْ بِمَآ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمۡۚ فَتَمَتَّعُواْۖ فَسَوۡفَ تَعۡلَمُونَ ٥٥

Let them show ingratitude for the favours We have shown
them; ‘Enjoy your brief time – soon you will know’ [55]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 55)

So, they are arrogant like Korah (Qarun) who said that his wealth was given to him only by virtue of his knowledge. (*al-Qasas:* 78) Like when you say, ‘I got this because of my own effort and work. Or like when you say to someone, ‘Praise be to Allah who granted you success in your exam’ and he says, ‘I studied hard and stayed up all night.’ Yes, you studied, but someone else studied hard to but he came down with an illness the night of the exam and had to stay at home. Same thing could have happened to you! This is what we mean by denying favours and being arrogant towards the Bestower of Blessings.

In His statement: ‘Let them show ingratitude…’ (*an-Nahl:* 55), did they do this in order to prove their ingratitude, and is the letter *(lam)* (meaning: so that) is to indicate purpose? No. This *(lam)* is to indicate the sequence of events, meaning that you do something with no purpose in mind but the consequence befell you anyway. You were not thinking of it; it just happened that way.

An example of this *(lam)* can be found in Allah’s statement regarding the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Pharaoh, when He said that some of the Pharaoh’s household picked Musa from the river, ‘so that’ he could become (by Allah’s will) an enemy to them and a source of grief… (*al-Qasas:* 8). When the Pharaoh took Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* out of the river and adopted him and raised him, did he adopt him so that he could become an enemy? No, this was just what happened so that the True Lord *Glorified is He* can affirm they were heedless and that Allah stood between them and their hearts. So, it was not the Pharaoh’s intention to raise his own enemy; he just took him and raised him at a time in which children were being killed. It never even occurred to him that maybe someone feared for the child and thus cast him into the river. This is why Allah tells us that He intervenes between man and his heart (i.e. desires), (*al-Anfal:* 24).

Likewise, the mother of Musa *peace be upon him* was inspired by Allah, if she feared for him, to suckle him and then cast him in the river. (*al-Qasas:* 7) How can this be possible? How can a mother cast her child into the river if she fears for him? How can this even be conceivable? Allah *Glorified is He* came in between her and her heart's fears, so her compassion and her affections subsided. She did not reject the instructions that were given to her and thus believed that her child could be saved by casting him into the river.

His statement: 'Enjoy your brief time- soon you will know' (*an-Nahl:* 55) means 'show ingratitude for the blessings that I have given you and the hardships that I have relieved you from and enjoy yourselves in this life; because I have not made this life to be the abode of reward. Reward is in the Hereafter.' The word '…Enjoy…' here indicates that Allah continues to give blessings even to those who deny His blessings. Otherwise, if He had denied them these blessings, there would be nothing to enjoy.

He says: '...soon you will know.' (*an-Nahl:* 55) That is, you will see the consequences of your actions, and this is a threat and a warning.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَجۡعَلُونَ لِمَا لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ نَصِيبٗا مِّمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡۗ تَٱللَّهِ لَتُسۡـَٔلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنتُمۡ تَفۡتَرُونَ ٥٦

They set aside part of the sustenance We give them, for [idols] about which they have no true knowledge. By God! You will be questioned about your false inventions [56] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 56)

This means those who disbelieve in Allah and set up idols and partners with Allah, and they attribute things to them. In the True Lord's statement: '...they have no true knowledge...' (*an-Nahl:* 56) what is knowledge?

Knowledge means that you are aware of something and this thing is true. So, it coincides with reality and you can corroborate it with evidence. But, when one of these conditions goes missing it is not knowledge. When these people attribute a share to the idols they brought things that have no existence into reality and knowledge. They are not real things…do the idols even exist? What proof corroborates them? Allah says that they are nothing but void names which they and their forefathers have invented and for which Allah has bestowed no warrant. (*an-Najm:* 23) These idols do not actually have any existence, and in another verse Allah says that they apportioned to Him a share of the produce of the livestock He created, saying and claiming that, ‘This is for Allah’- and ‘This is for our idols.’, and claiming that their idols’ share does not reach Allah, whereas Allah’s share does reach their idols! (*al-An‘am:* 136)

Even when they assign a portion to the idols it is from what Allah has provided them. How come the idols’ portion is not from what the idols provided since Allah’s portion is from what Allah has provided? This is an admission on their behalf that their idols are inept. So, they took Allah’s provision and assigned it to the idols! This is proof that their idols do not give you anything, and it is a testimony against them. So, were the idols aware of this? Therefore: ‘...about which they have no true knowledge...’ (*an-Nahl:* 56) speaks of the idols because they do not actually have any existence. The disbelievers take what Allah has provided them and they assign it to the idols.

Then the True Lord says: ‘...By Allah! You will be questioned about your false inventions.’ (*an-Nahl:* 56) The *(ta’)* here in ‘…By Allah…’ is for an oath, i.e. I swear by the Might of Allah that you will be asked about the idols that you have invented. And *iftira’* is a deliberate.

وَيَجْعَلُونَ لِلَّهِ ٱلْبَنَٰتِ سُبْحَٰنَهُۥ وَلَهُم مَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

They assign daughters to God — may He be exalted!
and the [sons] they desire to themselves [57]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 57)

When you hear the word ‘…may He be exalted…’ (*subhanahu*) then know that it is a declaration that Allah is transcendent above that which does not befit Him, namely here that He is transcendent above the attribution of daughters to Him. Allah is truly exalted and transcendent above having daughters.

In that case, can they ascribe to Him male children? They ascribed the females unto Allah and they males unto themselves, and Allah rebukes them mockingly about the rationale from choosing for themselves the males and then assigning the females to Him. What kind of unjust discrimination is this? (*an-Najm:* 21-22) They have not done the allotment in a just manner, meaning I have a son and you have a son, and I have a daughter and you have a daughter. But when you ascribe unto Allah what you dislike, the females, and you ascribe unto yourselves what you like, this allotment is flawed for two reasons:

First, they attributed the males to Allah – and this is still a deliberate lie which Allah is transcendent above. Second, they chose the lesser of the two sexes. This is, of course, just their own point of view at that time, since no one can claim that females are the lesser of the two sexes…why? Because the females are the only means for the survival of the human species, This is why Al-‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘If Allah were to hear what mankind says about mankind there would be no mankind’, i.e. if Allah were to respond to the desires of mankind (that they do not want girls), if He were to respond to them, what would happen? Mankind will perish. So, this is an idiotic request. It is the female that gives birth to the male and because of her progeny mankind continues.

His statement: ‘…may He be exalted…’ (*an-Nahl:* 57), is a declaration that He is transcendent above having a child and a declaration that He is transcendent above having the lesser of the two sexes (from their own view). Allah tells us in the following two verses: ‘When one of them is given news of the birth of a baby girl, his face darkens and he is filled with gloom. (58) In his shame he hides himself away from his people because of the bad glad tidings he has been given… (59)’ (*an-Nahl:* 58-59) This is why Allah tells us that he has control of the heavens and the earth, that He creates whatever He will, and He grants female offspring to whoever He will, and male to whoever He will, or both male and female, and He makes whoever He wills barren…. (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

We see above that Allah first started with the females, and then He gave us this illustration of the creation: female, male, male and female, barren. So, these are Allah’s gifts and they come in four packages. From here we can see that infertility is also a gift from Allah for a wisdom that He intended. However, people do not see infertility as a gift. Instead they see it as wrath and affliction.

But, why consider it an affliction when you could have a disobedient son like the one who became a tribulation for his parents and was calling them to disbelief?(1) If barren people saw this as a gift that Allah has given them and they were content with their portion, they would then see every child in the community as their own, without going through the toil of pregnancy or rearing. They would see all the children around them as their own children and Allah would attach the children's hearts to them as if they were their own parents. It is as if the True Lord is saying to them: 'As long as you are content with Allah's gift, then I will make every child yours.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '...and the [sons] they desire to themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 57) This is because a son is an aide to his father and he benefits him in war and combat and he benefits him in growth, and so forth.

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِٱلْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُۥ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

When one of them is given news of the birth of a baby
girl, his face darkens and he is filled with gloom [58]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 58)

We know that glad tidings *bishara* come for something good which means they were expected to receive a girl as they would receive glad tidings, but instead they would be indignant and hateful of the glad tidings they had been given and you would find that the face of one of them: '…darkens…' (*an-Nahl:* 58) Darkening is to be contorted with fury, and this is why He says: '...and he is filled with gloom.' (*an-Nahl:* 58)

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(1) *This is in the story of Musa and Al-Khidr peace be upon them. Allah says, 'And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Moses said, "How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone!" What a terrible thing to do!'[18: 74]. Al-Khidr peace be upon him explained the rationale for this, 'The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, we wished that their Lord should give them another child, purer and more compassionate, in his place'. (al-Kahf: 80-81)*

In another verse Allah speaks about those who can control their ‘fury’. (*Al-‘Imran:* 134) The term used here is driven from plugging (*kazm*) a waterskin when it is so filled with water as if about to burst. This is what a furious person is; his veins pop out and the blood rushes to his face, but once he controls his fury he cools down.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes his state:

يَتَوَٰرَىٰ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْمِ مِن سُوٓءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِۦٓۚ أَيُمْسِكُهُۥ عَلَىٰ
هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُۥ فِى ٱلتُّرَابِ ۗ أَلَا سَآءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

In his shame he hides himself away from his
people because of the bad news he has been given.
Should he keep her and suffer contempt or bury
her in the dust? How ill they judge! [59]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 59)

Allah says: ‘hides himself away from his people…’ (*an-Nahl:* 59) i.e. he hides from them because he is scared of them saying: ‘he had a girl.’ ‘…because of the bad glad tidings he has been given…’ (*an-Nahl:* 59).

We notice that ‘glad tidings’ is repeated in this verse as well, as if Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* is softening their hearts towards the baby girls and inviting the fathers to be gentle towards them. But the father is indecisive and unaware of what has happened. Therefore Allah says: ‘…Should he keep her and suffer contempt or bury her in the dust?’ (*an-Nahl:* 59), meaning: what would he do with this child of his? Is he going to keep her and suffer contempt – i.e. disgrace – or is he going to bury her in the dust – i.e. bury her alive? ‘…How ill they judge!’ (*an-Nahl:* 59) meaning that both options they consider are ill and evil; either keeping her in contempt or burying her in the dust. Some of those people, if a girl was born to them, would hate her and if they kept her, they would keep her in contempt and she would be despised and loathed her whole life, without any mistake of her own. The Arab women who were contemporary to these events were aware of something that we only learned recently when modern science discovered that the sex of the child is determined by the man and not the woman. Abu Hamza used to often abandon his wives and become angry with them because they only gave him daughters. What did this Arab woman say who had been abandoned by her husband? She said:

Why does Abu Hamza not come to us?
Angry that we have not given birth to sons
By Allah, this matter is out of our hands
We are like the earth in which something is planted
We only give them the likes of that which they plant

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* establishes equilibrium in the universe via the necessities of the human soul. One of these necessities is the need for honour and dignity. But when man makes a mistake in forming his honour and dignity, he thinks that he is able to realize what he wants through his own means. If he knew that forming honour and dignity was something beyond his own means, something created by Allah and according to Allah, he would go about the matter correctly.

So, honour is not in what you give birth to, honour is to Allah, the Messenger and the believers and they are made honourable by the bond of faith. Be honourable because you are in a situation of faith and mutual responsibility; if some harm afflicts you everyone else will be by your side.

Do not hinge your honour on kinship and offspring because a disobedient child can never be any help to his parents when they are in difficulty, nor any assistance when they are in need. When you seek refuge in the bond of blood, the bond of blood can sift, as for the bond of conviction, faith, and religion, it persists.

Let us take an example of this: the solidarity and mutual assistance that occurred between the *Ansar* (the Medinan Helpers) and the *Muhajirin* (the emigrants) was beyond the imagination of any human being. There was nothing between them except the bond of solidarity and of faith...so, what happened between these amazing people? They sacrificed that which was most precious to them and that which they would normally withhold from others. We could imagine something like giving them whatever surplus they had in their houses or possessions; whoever had a mount or a house would say to his Emigrant brother, ‘Go ahead and take this mount’ or ‘take my house’ and do this is all as though it was perfectly normal.

But within the human soul, a man would always feel instinctively protective of his wife and would never pass on that particular blessing to another man! Yet, look at how faith reshaped those people! In an isolated and unprecedented incident, one of the *Ansar* (1) said to an Emigrant, ‘I am ready to divorce one of my two wives so that you can have a wife to marry.’ It is amazing of course, but what made him do this is not the solidarity of blood or race, but rather the solidarity of conviction and faith.

This is why all other forms of solidarity are disproved in the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* – and his son the disbeliever when he called on him and asked him to join the arc and not to be with those who deny the truth. His son refused and said that he will take refuge in the mountain, but Nuh (Noah) told him that nothing whatsoever will stand between anyone and Allah’s judgment, except for those who have earned the mercy of Allah. (*Hud:* 42-43)

Nuh was so eager to have his son saved and he asked Allah to save him since he is his family and Allah’s promise is always true. (*Hud:* 45) But Allah said to him that this boy is not of his family since his conduct was not righteous, and He told Nuh not to ask Him anything he has no knowledge of, and admonished him not to be one of those who are unaware. (*Hud:* 46) So, this son is not from Nuh’s family because real filiation is the filiation of actions, not the filiation of blood and lineage.

It is true that man loves honour and he seeks it for himself, but he must always examine how this honour got established and upon which basis. Always draw your honour from Allah, the Messenger and the society of faith;

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad from Anas that ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf came to Medina and the Messenger of Allah paired him with Sa‘d ibn Ar-Rabi‘a Al-Ansari Sa‘d said to him: ‘My brother! Among the people of Medina I have the most wealth. I have two orchards and two wives. See which of the two orchards you like and I shall vacate it for you, and which of my two wives is pleasing to you and I will divorce her for you. 'Abd Ar-Rahman said in reply, ‘May Allah bless you in your family and your wealth, but just show me where the market is.’ He then went and bought and sold and his profits grew. This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in (Al-Bidaya wa An-Nihaya) (3/228) and Al-Kandahlawi in (Hayat As-Sahaba) (1/362).*

and all children will become yours because they share your conviction of Allah and your faith in Him. As for pursuing honour from within your own actions or seeking it in your son, how do you guarantee that you will find in him honour, support, or growth?

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ مَثَلُ ٱلسَّوْءِ ۖ وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَثَلُ ٱلْأَعْلَىٰ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦٠﴾

Those who do not believe in the Hereafter should have the contemptible image, and God should have the highest one: He is the Mighty, the Wise [60] (the Quran, *an-Nahl:* 60)

His statement: '...the contemptible image...' (*an-Nahl:* 60) means the contemptible and despicable attributes of disbelief, stubbornness and denial, blind insight and other attributes of evil.

Why do those who do not believe in the Hereafter have a contemptible image? It is because the equation they chose to work with is faulty because the one who does not believe in the Hereafter has shortened his timeline. If it is all about 'this' life, then it must be too short. We said before: never look at this life from the perspective of its overall duration, but rather, from the perspective of your own timeline. The duration of the life of this universe, to you, is equivalent to the amount of time you spend in it. Whatever remains after you or whatever took place before, is relevant to other people not to you. You will have no share in it after your life ends. Hence, life is all about your own timeline: a month, a year, ten years, a hundred. This is life as it is relevant to you.

Despite that, regardless of how long the life of this universe lasts, it will come to an end. Whoever does not believe in Allah and the Hereafter has chosen badly because he cannot guarantee that he will last even beyond the average life expectancy. Even if you did live till the average life expectancy, or until you were so old, or even if you enjoyed all kinds of disobedience while in this life, how long will all this last? You will lose everything when you die.

Compare this – then – with the state of the one who believes in Allah and the Hereafter. We say to the person who does not believe in the Hereafter:

Your life here is uncertain; you can live it, or you can die. No matter how old you will get, it will all come to an end. The pleasures you take from this life are just up to your own abilities. So, you will take a portion from something limited and uncertain, and leave the entire unlimited and certain portion. If this is not a bad deal, then what is it?

As for the one who believes in the Hereafter, his deal is good because he chose a perpetual life that is prepped with pleasures according to the abilities of the Bestower of Blessings *Glorified is He and Exalted is He*. Therefore: '...the contemptible image...' (*an-Nahl:* 60) means the attributes of intense evil, and this is because they are undoubtedly losers.

His statement: '...and Allah should have the highest one…' (*an-Nahl:* 60), and to Allah belongs the most sublime example. As if the verse is saying to you, 'Leave the contemptible image and take the most sublime attribute in which you will find pleasure according to the abilities of the True Lord *Glorified is He and Exalted is He*.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* ends the verse saying: '...He is the Mighty, the Wise.' (*an-Nahl:* 60) The Almighty is the One Whose Command is never overruled. There could be someone whose command is never overruled true, but Allah, Almighty and Wise, is the one who uses power and domination wisely.

Then the True Lord says:

وَلَوۡ يُؤَاخِذُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلنَّاسَ بِظُلۡمِهِم مَّا تَرَكَ عَلَيۡهَا مِن دَآبَّةٖ وَلَٰكِن يُؤَخِّرُهُمۡ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ
مُّسَمّٗىۖ فَإِذَا جَآءَ أَجَلُهُمۡ لَا يَسۡتَـٔۡخِرُونَ سَاعَةٗ وَلَا يَسۡتَقۡدِمُونَ ٦١

If God took people to task for the evil they do, He would not leave one living creature on earth, but He reprieves them until an appointed time: when their time comes they cannot delay it for a moment nor can they bring it forward [61]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 61)

In the True Lord's statement: 'If Allah took people to task for the evil they do…' (*an-Nahl:* 61), we have *Al-akhdh* (taking) and *Al-mu'akhadha* (taking to task). *Al-akhdh* means to take something and encompass it fully. It reflects that the one doing the ‘taking’ action has the ability to hold on to himself and to something else. For example, you can carry a pebble but cannot carry a large stone; or it could be something small but attached to something else so it is ‘taken’ from it by force. Taking and encompassing means that you are stronger than its adherence to itself, or its adherence to something else attached to it.

As for *mu’akhadha*, it means when someone takes something from you and you take something from him, and from this we have the statement, ‘No *mu’akhadha* please!’, meaning, ‘Excuse me, for I have done something wrong and I deserve a recompense for it *mu’akhadha.*’ Then I say, ‘Pardon me *la tu’akhidhni*. I did not mean to.’

Therefore, the True Lord says here: ‘If Allah took people to task for the evil they do (*yu*ʾ*akhidhu*)…’ (*an-Nahl:* 61). He says ‘took to task’ and not ‘took’ *ya’khudhu*. In another verse (*Hud:* 102), Allah speaks about His punishment ‘overtaking’ the towns in the midst of their sins: His punishment is terrible and severe. But why did He take them to task? He did so because they took His right to be the One Allah and denied it, and they also denied His right to legislate.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that if this *mu’akhadha* takes place, it will be because of the people themselves. He says: ‘...for all the evil (*zulm*) that they do…’ (*an-Nahl:* 61). The first evil is that they denied His Oneness. He tells us that attributing any partners to Him is a terrible wrong (evil). (*Luqman:* 13) Thus, it is as if they took from Allah His right of Oneness, and they also took from prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by calling him a liar and they took from the Book by calling it a ‘spellbinding deception’ All of this is evil.

If the True Lord were to take them to task for what they have done; taking from them as they take from Him. If Allah were to deal with them in this way, He would not leave a single living creature upon the face of earth. Therefore; we find in the verses the supplication: ‘... “O our Sustainer! Take us not to task if we forget or unwittingly do wrong!”’ (*al-Baqara:* 286) meaning, we have taken a lot from You, O Lord, by way of our negligence, shortcomings and actions that go against what You have commanded, so do not take us to task for what we have done. For if Allah *Glorified is He* were to take mankind to task for the evil that they have perpetrated. '...He would not leave one living creature on earth…' (*an-Nahl:* 61).

Someone might say, 'Allah will take humankind to task for their evil, but what have the other creatures done wrong?' We respond by saying, 'All other creatures were created for the sake of mankind and were subjugated for them and they are Allah's blessings to mankind. Hence, the matter is not about punishing the other creatures, but about the ones who benefit from them; however, it could also mean the whole creation.

If Allah does not take mankind to task for their evil in this life, is He just going to leave them as such? No: '...but He reprieves them until an appointed time…' (*an-Nahl:* 61). This appointed time is the end of life as we know it, and the establishment of the Hereafter, even for those who do not believe in the Hereafter. Allah just gives us respite, and in another verse, He tells us that another type of punishment is in store for the evildoers. (*at-Tur:* 47)

There could actually be goodness in this appointed time. Many Companions used to go to battle with the intention of killing the disbelievers one by one, but then they would not be able to do it and it saddened them. But the appointed time of these people had not yet come, and it was in Allah's knowledge that these disbelievers would believe and that their faith would benefit the Muslims. Thus, Allah was keeping them in store: either they would believe or their progeny would believe.

Indeed, 'Amr Ibn Al-'As *Allah be pleased with him* believed, as well as 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* and others, and from amongst these people who attained salvation was Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* the unsheathed sword of Allah. '...when their time comes they cannot delay it for a moment, nor can they bring it forward.' (*an-Nahl:* 61) i.e. when the end comes it is not delayed, and this is something logical, but how could they hasten it? It is something inconceivable and impossible. If the appointed time has come already, then how can it be advanced? All the pieces will fall into place when we know that: '…nor can they bring it forward.' (*an-Nahl:* 61) is not the apodosis of the conditional clause. The apodosis ends with 'for a moment' meaning: if their appointed time comes they will not be able to delay it by a single moment, and if it has not come yet, they will not be able to hasten it, and Allah knows best.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَجۡعَلُونَ لِلَّهِ مَا يَكۡرَهُونَ وَتَصِفُ أَلۡسِنَتُهُمُ ٱلۡكَذِبَ أَنَّ
لَهُمُ ٱلۡحُسۡنَىٰۖ لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّ لَهُمُ ٱلنَّارَ وَأَنَّهُم مُّفۡرَطُونَ ٦٢

They attribute to God what they themselves dislike while their own tongues utter the lie that the best belongs to them. Without doubt it is the Fire that belongs to them: they will be given priority there! [62] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 62)

'They attribute to Allah what they themselves dislike…' (*an-Nahl:* 62). It is most appropriate that whatever one gives out for the sake of Allah has to be from the best of what Allah has granted. If you want to give in charity then give the best of what you have, or at least something decent, but do not give the most worthless and despicable thing you have...do not give away what you hate, like giving away stale bread, or meat that has gone bad, or shabby clothes. This is called ascribing what we dislike to Allah.(1)

The truth is that if people were certain of the reward that Allah will give to them, they would give their Lord the best of what they love. Why? Because this is proof of your love for the Hereafter, and that you are going to be a winner on that day. So, you fill your register with the things you love. As for those who love this short life and are of its people, they give the least of what they have; for this life, in their view, is more important than the Hereafter.

Hence, we can evaluate ourselves according to what we give for the sake of Allah– are we of the people of the Hereafter or of the people of this mundane life?

The statement: 'They attribute to Allah what they themselves dislike…' (*an-Nahl:* 62) is explained in the previous verses: '...They assign daughters to

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(1) He says: 'You who believe, give charitably from the good things you have acquired and that We have produced for you from the earth. Do not give away the bad things that you yourself would only accept with your eyes closed: remember that Allah is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.' (*al-Baqara*: 267)

Allah…' (*an-Nahl:* 57). So, they said that the angels are Allah's daughters, and they assumed a kinship between Him and the jinn, and many other things that they fabricated. They ascribed daughters unto Allah while they themselves hated daughters. This is why Allah says: 'When one of them is given news of the birth of a baby girl, his face darkens and he is filled with gloom.' (*an-Nahl:* 58)

The issue here is not about ascribing daughters unto Allah, but that they are ascribing to Allah anything which is not to their liking. If they had ascribed unto Allah what they loved, such as boys, that too would not be accepted because they would have ascribed unto Allah that which He has not ascribed unto himself. The statements of those who said, 'Ezra is the son of Allah' and those who said, 'The Messiah is the son of Allah' are not accepted from them because they ascribed unto Allah *Glorified is He* that which He has not ascribed unto Himself.

Thus, we keep for Allah that which we love from among what Allah has permitted. He tells us that none of the believers shall attain to righteousness unless they spend out of what they cherish the most. (*Al-'Imran:* 92) He also speaks of those who give food to others even though they love it so much. (*al-Insan:* 8)

This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to his people that if the Most Gracious Allah truly had a son, then he (prophet Muhammad) would be the first to worship him. (*az-Zukhruf:* 81) If He were to have a son I would believe in that son, but the truth is that He does not have a son. Therefore, the issue again is not in ascribing unto Allah that which they hate but the concept of ascribing. This is because we are slaves and we draw closer to Allah with worship, and the worshipper draws closer to the object of worship via the means the object his worship loves the most. So, when Allah urges us to spend out from what we love and from the best that we own; we should obey. Particularly after He tells us that none of the believers shall attain to righteousness unless they spend out of what they cherish the most. (*Al-'Imran:* 92)

Respect the rights of the poor and the necessity of treating them as you would treat yourself, do not let them be the least of your concern and give them the most worthless thing you have. The True Lord wanted us to draw closer to Him by way of the acts of worship, ritual slaughter, guidance, and sacrifices. He tells us to eat, and then feed the unfortunate poor. (*al-Hajj:* 28) This is because if you know that you are going to eat from it you will choose the best of what you have.

His statement: '...while their own tongues utter the lie…' (*an-Nahl:* 62) A lie is something that is uttered by the tongue and it does not have any bearing in reality; it contradicts the reality that the heart bears witness to…but why does the heart bear witness to it? Because one's speech may coincide with reality but we judge it to be a lie, as with Allah's statement about the hypocrites who came and took the testimony of faith in front of the prophet, *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*, and Allah bears witness that Muhammad is His prophet and that the hypocrites are indeed false. (*al-Munafiqun:* 1)

Is this a matter of truth or not? It is of course! Muhammad is indeed the Messenger of Allah and their speech corresponds with what Allah says, so why does the True Lord bear witness against them that they are liars? What is it that they are lying about? Actually, they are being truthful in what they are saying; you are the Messenger of Allah, but their testimony is a lie because they are not really bearing witness. Bearing witness requires that the heart be aligned with the tongue and consolidated by it, but their testimony is only an utterance that is not supported by the heart. Man is liable to say the truth at one time and lie at another, but these people, merely by saying '...We bear witness...' are liars, and this is the meaning of: '...while their own tongues utter the lie…' (*an-Nahl:* 62). This is because when they say, for example: 'Ezra is the son of Allah' or 'Messiah is the son of Allah' or 'the angels are the daughters of Allah', all of these are falsehoods uttered by the tongue with no bearing on reality; so, they are uttering lies.

If you want to know a lie that has no bearing on reality, then listen to it carefully, and you will realize that it is a lie. Like what happened with Musaylama, who claimed prophecy. Once he said: 'I am a prophet' the Muslims said: 'Musaylama is a liar.'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...that (by doing so) they earn supreme merit!' (*an-Nahl:* 62) meaning that their lies will help them earn the supreme merit, and this is being impertinently over-presumptuous about Allah. An example of this kind of statement is found in *al-Kahf* chapter in the story of the owners of the two gardens, when one of them went into his garden and wronged himself by saying, ‘I do not think this will ever perish, or that the Last Hour will ever come, and even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better!’ (*al-Kahf:* 35-36) These are three false statements:

The first: ‘I do not think this will ever perish.’ Can he not see how everything is in a state of constant change? Who can guarantee that what you have will remain with you? Allah tells us in another verse of the owners of a certain garden who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning and made no allowance [for the Will of Allah], but then a disaster from Him struck the garden as they slept and by morning it was stripped bare, and became a desolate land. (*al-Qalam:* 19-20)

The second: ‘The last hour will never come.’ So, he has denied the last Hour, too.

The third: ‘Even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better.’ This is the point from the verse: it consists of delusional over-presumptuousness about Allah without any foundation, such as those who claim that they have earned supreme merit when they are not worthy of it.

In another verse, Allah tells us that man never tires of asking for good, but if evil touches him he loses all hope and becomes despondent. But whenever Allah lets him taste some of His mercy after he has been afflicted, he will surely say, ‘This is all my own doing: I do not think the Hour will ever come, but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, the best reward would await me with Him.’ But Allah declares that He shall most certainly inform the disbelievers of what they have done and give them a taste of severe torment. (*Fussilat:* 49-50)

This is the natural disposition of mankind! He never gets tired of asking for the good things of life and once the aspired status is achieved, he aspires for an even higher status. Yet, when misfortune befalls him, he despairs. If Allah relieves him of it and shows him mercy, he says ‘This is my own doing. I deserve it. I am worthy of it.’ Did you not say: ‘This is a favour and blessing from Allah'? Why then do you become over-presumptuous about Allah and assumed that the ultimate good awaits you? (*Fussilat:* 50)

{It is related that prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* despite the kingdom and augustness that Allah had given him, climbed on to the roof of his house one day and Allah tested him with a swarm of gold locusts. When Dawud *peace be upon him* saw them, he started gathering them in his garment, so his Lord said to him: 'O Dawud, have I not made you wealthy?' He said: 'Yes, but I have no wealth in comparison to your bounty.'}(1)

His statement: '...Without doubt it is the Fire that belongs to them…' (*an-Nahl:* 62) 'Without doubt' (*la jarama*) means that they indeed earn the fire because they ascribed to Allah what they hate and their tongues uttered lies. These actions make them deserving of the Fire. The phrase *la jarama* ('…Without doubt…') comes from the word *jarim* which is a criminal (*mujrim*). Thus, the meaning is: there is no crime (*jarima*) in punishing these people because no one says that punishing a criminal is a crime. Therefore, it has two meanings; there is no doubt that they have earned the Fire and there is no crime in making the Fire the reward for their actions. '...they will be given priority there!' (*an-Nahl:* 62) The word *mufratun* ('... they will be given priority there!') has various recitations in the Quran: *(mufratun*, *mufritun*, *mufarritun*, *mufarratun)*, and they all mean the same thing.

In funeral prayer (*janaza*), for example, when the deceased is of the age of legal responsibility we say in our supplication for him: {O Allah, forgive him. O Allah, show him mercy. O Allah, if he persevered in goodness then increase him in that, and if he was persistent in evil then overlook his evil deeds.} But if the deceased is young and below the age of legal responsibility, we say in our supplication for him: 'O Allah, make him *farata* (a prelude) and *dhukra* (a treasure).'(2) What is the meaning of *farata* here? It means; let this child be 'a prelude' for his parents towards paradise. He will go ahead of his parents as if paving the way for them to be forgiven by Allah and to enter Paradise. So, the meaning of *mufratun* is to precede ahead – but in this case to the Fire.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (972) and Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/413) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him, but it is about Ayyub (Job) not Dawud peace be upon them and Allah knows best.*

(2) *Mentioned by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (Fath Al-Bari 2/302), Book of Funerals, chapter on Reading the Fatiha of the Book in Funerals from the statement of Al-Hasan Al-Basri: 'He reads the Fatiha of the Book over the child and he says: 'O Allah, make him (farata) (a prelude), (salafa) (advance payment) and (ajr) (reward) for us.'*

Allah says about the Pharaoh that he shall go ahead of his people on Judgment Day (*Hud:* 98) meaning he will go into the Fire before them...just as he was in front of them and was their leader in this life, he will be in front of them and will enter the Fire ahead of them in the Hereafter.

تَٱللَّهِ لَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أُمَمٖ مِّن قَبۡلِكَ فَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ
أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ فَهُوَ وَلِيُّهُمُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ٦٣

By God, We have sent messengers before you [Muhammad]
to other communities, but Satan made their foul deeds seem
alluring to them. He is the patron of these present disbelievers
too, and a painful punishment awaits them all [63]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 63)

We know that the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He*s wears by whatever He wants for whatever He wants. As for us, we only swear by Allah. There is a Qudsi Hadith that says: {if someone is making an oath then let him make an oath by Allah or remain silent.}(1) Here, the True Lord swears by His essence, 'By Allah...' An oath is used to empathize a meaning, and this is why one of the righteous said when he heard this verse, 'Who angered the Bountiful Lord so much that He resorted to making an oath?' The True Lord *Glorified is He* may emphasise the oath with His essence, or He may emphasise the oath with some part of His creation, or He may negate the oath to affirm it, as in: 'Nay! I swear not by this city.' (*al-Balad:* 1), and: 'Nay, I swear not by the setting of the stars (75) and, indeed, that is a most mighty oath, if you only knew! (76)' (*al-Waqi'a:* 75-76) 'I swear not' is used to affirm that this matter is so clear and obvious that I do not need to make an oath of it. If I were to make an oath I would swear by it, and that is why He says: ‘and, indeed, that is a most mighty oath, if you only knew!’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 76)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1646) in the Book of Oaths, the second narration from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar from the Messenger of Allah that he found 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab amongst the riders and he was swearing by his father.* Allah's Messenger called them and said: {Indeed Allah has forbidden you from swearing by your fathers. If someone is making an oath then let him make an oath by Allah or remain silent.}

Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* swears by His essence in order to emphasise this matter for us. Emphasising a matter when a verdict is given in judgment, for example, is done either by admission or by oath. Once you make an oath you intend to shut out the possibility of being called a liar.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have sent messengers before you [Muhammad] to other communities…’ (*an-Nahl:* 63) meaning, being denied by your people is nothing new, as this is the nature of those who receive the call from Allah (God) on the tongues of the Messengers *peace be upon them*, because Allah only sends the Messengers when corruption has become widespread and rampant.

Therefore, sending messengers, means that there is no other solution than the intervention of the heavens. This is because man has within himself certainty-based immunities. They include his *an-nafs al-lawama* (the self-reproaching soul) that reproaches him when he does something wrong and straightens out his conduct. It is a check that comes from within his soul. If this soul becomes stolid and accustomed to doing wrong then the society around it has to carry out this task. Thus, whoever is not checked by his self-reproaching soul should be checked by the society around him. In case that the society has also become corrupt what, then, is the solution? The solution is that the heavens must intervene to save these people. So, the heavens intervene by sending messengers whenever corruption has become widespread throughout the entire society. The community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is distinguished by this honour from its Lord. Therefore He says to them, ‘You are entrusted with taking care of My way in your souls, by reproaching yourselves, enjoining the doing of what is right and forbidding the doing of what is wrong to others. This is why I will never send another messenger amongst you, as you will be carrying out this task.’ This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘[Believers], you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 110).

The community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been entrusted with being guardians over Allah’s way; either via the self-reproaching soul or via the society which enjoins the doing of good and forbids the doing of wrong. This is an immense honour for this community.

Therefore, a messenger comes whenever *fasad* (corruption) is widespread, but what is the meaning of corruption? Corruption means that the interests of one group are maintained at the expense of another group. Thus, how would the people of corruption and those who benefit from it react to a messenger coming in order to free the people from their corruption? Are they going to welcome him with open arms? No, absolutely not. They will inevitably receive him with hatred and rejection. They will declare war against him in order to defend their interests.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues by saying: '...but Satan made their foul deeds seem alluring to them…' (*an-Nahl:* 63).

Here, Satan intervenes. He makes the actions of the people of corruption seem goodly to them and he encourages them to wage war against the Messengers. It is as if he says to them, 'these (the messengers) are the people who will put an end to your influence; they will deprive you of whatever enjoyments you have in the life of this world; they will snatch your positions and they will diminish your rank amongst the people. These are the people who will raise lowlifes and slaves over you.' This is how the people of corruption and oppression cling to their oppression, and they grab hold of it with their premolar teeth. They take up an attitude of hostility towards the Messengers. So, you must make yourself firm as you will receive nothing from the leaders except for disavowal, rejection and the waging of war. Then, He *Glorified is He* says: '...He is the patron of these present disbelievers today too…' (*an-Nahl:* 63). 'Today' means the Hereafter, for as long as Satan is close to them in the life of this world, makes their deeds seem goodly to them and encourages them to be hostile towards the Messengers, then let him be close to them now and let him defend them on the Day of Resurrection. The Noble Quran describes this situation in His statement: 'Like Satan, who says to man, "Do not believe!" but when man disbelieves, says, "I disown you; I fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."' (*al-Hashr:* 16)

In their argument with Satan on the Day of Resurrection, they will say to him, 'You misled us and you made our deeds seem goodly to us.' What will he say in response? He will say: ‘I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves’ (*Ibrahim:* 22). The meaning of *sultan* (power over others), here, is either with a proof that convinces or with force, domination and strength that impose what you want. Satan does not have either of these. He does not have any proof to convince you to do something and he does not have any strength with which to force you to do something reluctantly.

This is how Satan argues with them and responds to their claims by merely indicating he got them into disobedience, for he has no power over them. In another verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Satan made their foul deeds seem fair to them, and said, “No one will conquer you today, for I will be right beside you,” but when the armies came within sight of one another he turned on his heels, saying, “This is where I leave you: I see what you do not, and I fear Allah— Allah is severe in His punishment.”...’ (*al-Anfal:* 48) By Satan’s statement: ‘...and a painful punishment awaits them all.’ (*an-Nahl:* 63), he describes the punishment here as being *alim* (grievous), and *muhlik* (ruinous). In general, Allah describes the punishment as being *alim* (grievous), *azhim* (great), *muhin* (shameful) and severe. Punishment is a feeling and sensation of pain. Scientists have learned that all sensation is in the skin. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* in order to perpetuate the punishment of these people, states: ‘…When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56). Thus, the punishment is continued by the continued existence and replacement of the skin. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلَّذِي ٱخۡتَلَفُواْ
فِيهِ وَهُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٗ لِّقَوۡمٖ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ٦٤

We have sent down the Scripture to you only to make clear to them what they differ about, and as guidance and mercy to those who believe [64] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 64)

The divine writ is the Noble Quran. The True Lord’s statement: ‘...than that thou might make clear unto them all (questions of faith) on which they have come to hold divergent views…’ (*an-Nahl:* 64) is proof that different views emerged amongst the followers of the previous messengers, but what disagreement can this be when they are all following the same prophet? What is the cause? They said: The result of this disagreement is what they call temporal authority, and in order to clarify the meaning of temporal authority we will give you the example of a sheikh of a spiritual order, for example. When he dies, his sons fight over who his successor should be, as each one of them wants it. Each one of them gathers a group of his father's followers around him. If this issue of succession had been clear in their minds this disagreement would not have started.

Likewise, temporal authority started amongst the followers of the Messengers who started writing documents and deeds, mentioning what they loved and stating what they saw as correct from their point of view. All of these people had influence with regards to what we call temporal authority. Therefore, how could they leave Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to take this authority from them and deprive them of the leadership that they had. The Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them to make clear unto them: i.e. to return them to the way of Truth and to the straight path. The True Lord says: 'and (thus offer) guidance and grace' (*an-Nahl:* 64) *Huda* (guidance) means to demonstrate the clearest path towards a beneficial destination. The path can only be clear if it is free of difficulties and obstacles, as well as dangers. It is a clear path that is secured and easy, as well as short. It takes you to your destination via the shortest route. The opposite of *huda* (guidance) is *dalal* (error), when you are lead astray. So, if you want a path, it directs you somewhere else and it points to another, or it shows you a path that contains dangers and obstacles.

As for *rahma* (mercy), the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes the Quran as being a grace when He says: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe; for those who disbelieve, it only increases their loss.' (*al-Isra':* 82) How is the Quran a *shifa'a* (cure) and how is it a grace? A cure is when we are afflicted with a malady and our Lord *Glorified is He* says to us: 'Get rid of your malady and treat your illnesses with such and such, and leave the decision to Allah.' This is a cure. As for mercy, it is that which prevents the malady from coming back. Thus, it is a protection that exterminates the illness at its source so that it does not return. An example of this occurs is in the world of medicine. You might go to a doctor, so that he can treat you for a specific malady, like pustules in the skin, for example, and he is only concerned with that which is outward. He prescribes to you something that will treat these pustules. Yet, after a while, they come back to you once again.

As for the skilful and proficient doctor, he does not just look at the outward. Instead, he looks for the inward cause and he tries to exterminate the causes of the illness from its roots so that the illness never comes back.

If we consider the story of Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* and what Allah tested him with, we can see an excellent example of treating both the outward and the inward. His Lord tested him outwardly in a way that clearly affected his body. Then, when Allah *Glorified is He* allowed for him to be cured He asked him to: ‘Stamp your foot! Here is cool water for you to wash in and drink.’ (*Sad:* 42) The meaning of *mughtasal* ‘...to wash in...’ is to wash and remove the outward effects of this test. The meaning of *sharab* ‘to drink’ is a drink that will cure you of the causes of this test so that it does not return.

The same goes for treating the society. The Noble Quran came when there was great corruption and numerous maladies in the world. There must be a way to cure these maladies and provide immunities that will prevent these illnesses from returning. His statement: ‘...to those who believe,’ (*an-Nahl:* 64) means that this Quran contains guidance and mercy for those who believe in you and your message (O Muhammad). The doctor whom we have previously mentioned as an example does not treat every patient. Rather, he treats whoever has confidence in him, and this person goes to the doctor and presents his complaints to him. Then, the doctor examines him and knows his sickness.

This is how the Noble Quran is heard by whoever believes in it, and that is why it is guidance and grace for believers. It leaves within you illuminative insights that elevate you and raise you up to the highest degrees. On the other hand, someone else hears it and he does not understand any of it and he says, as the Noble Quran narrates:

‘Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, 'What was that he just said?'' (*Muhammad:* 16) And He says: 'Say, 'It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it, it is as if they are being called from a distant place.' (*Fussilat:* 44)

Therefore, the Quran is one and the same, but how it is received is different. Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱللَّهُ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَحۡيَا بِهِ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ بَعۡدَ مَوۡتِهَآۚ
إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةً لِّقَوۡمٖ يَسۡمَعُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

It is God who sends water down from the sky and with it
revives the earth when it is dead. There truly is a sign in this
for people who listen [65] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 65)

In this verse the True Lord is turning our attention towards a tangible, material sign that is not denied by anyone, which is the sending down of rain from the sky. The dead earth is brought back to life with this rain. This is a concrete evidence of His power and that He is the Only One on which His creation rely. It is as if He *Glorified is He* is saying to them: 'If I give you such-and-such and I provide you with your material needs, which shows that I take care of you, then when I send a way down to you that benefits you and make right your condition, you must believe in it.' This is a tangible, material proof that leads them to affirm the metaphysical way that has come at the hands of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in His statement: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe...' (*al-Isra':* 82)

His statement: 'It is Allah who sends water down from the sky' (*an-Nahl:* 65) is a tangible, cosmological sign that no one denies. Then, He says: 'and with it revives the earth when it is dead' (*an-Nahl:* 65). The death of the earth means the state of it being barren and desolate with no crops or plants. To people, this is sheer destruction. Whenever the earth becomes barren, they look up for clouds which would bring rain and revive the dead earth with plants and herbage after being dead and lifeless.

If the water of the sky was withheld from the earth you would all have died of hunger. So, consider the evidence provided in this tangible sign, as a proof of the veracity of the incorporeal sign, i.e. Allah’s way that has been conveyed to you by His Messenger *peace be upon them*. Just as you have trusted Me with the former, trust Me with the latter. Then, He says: ‘...There truly is a sign in this for people who listen.’ (*an-Nahl:* 65) However, this sign is seen with the eyes and not heard. The True Lord says: ‘...for people who listen.’ (*an-Nahl:* 65) Why? Some said: ‘Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this sign in order to turn their attention towards the way that will come to them at the hands of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This way will be heard from the one who will convey it, i.e. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. There is another example of this in His statement: ‘Say [Prophet], ‘Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual night over you until the Day of Resurrection, what Allah other than He could bring you light? Do you not listen?’’ (*al-Qasas:* 71)

Light is seen, not heard, but He says: ‘...Do you not listen?’ This is because He mentions the night, and at night (in the darkness) hearing is the means of awareness.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَإِنَّ لَكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ لَعِبۡرَةٗۖ نُّسۡقِيكُم مِّمَّا فِي بُطُونِهِۦ مِنۢ
بَيۡنِ فَرۡثٖ وَدَمٖ لَّبَنًا خَالِصٗا سَآئِغٗا لِّلشَّٰرِبِينَ ٦٦

In livestock, too, you have a lesson – We give you a drink from the contents of their bellies, between waste matter and blood, pure milk, sweet to the drinker [66] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 66)

The universe that Allah has created contains numerous genera and the lowest of them is inanimate objects that are exemplified in the earth, the mountains, water, and other things. Then we have plants, then animals and then man.

In the previous verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an example of an inanimate object which stirs and swells with the rain and it gives us plants. Here He turns us towards a sign in a higher genus, which is the animal species. ‘In livestock, too, you have a lesson…’ (*an-Nahl:* 66). The meaning of *al- an’am* (cattle) is camels, cows, sheep, and goats. They have been mentioned in the chapter of *al-An'am* in His statement: '[Allah gave you] eight animals, in [four] pairs: a pair of sheep and a pair of goats— ask them [Prophet], "Has He forbidden the two males, the two females, or the young in the wombs of the two females? Tell me based on knowledge if you are telling the truth." [144] And a pair of camels and a pair of cattle— ask them [Prophet], "Has He forbidden the two males, the two females, or the young in the wombs of the two females? Were you present when Allah gave you these commands?" So, who is more wicked, than he who fabricates lies against Allah with no basis in knowledge in order to lead people astray? Allah does not guide the evildoers' (*al-An'am:* 143-144) These are *al-an'am* (cattle).

In His statement, *ibra* 'a lesson' is something that you consider and from which you deduce what shows you the power of the Wise Maker *Glorified is He*. These *'ibar* (lessons) provide you with the proof for the veracity of His way so, you believe in it.

One of the related meanings of *'ibra* is *'uboor* (traversing) and moving from one thing to another, i.e. you take a lesson from one thing and it benefits you in something else. We also have tears *al-'abra* with which you show and manifest things that are hidden inside you. The meaning of a lesson in creating cattle is: 'In livestock, too, you have a lesson— We give you a drink from the contents of their bellies, between waste matter and blood, pure milk, sweet to the drinker.' (*an-Nahl:* 66) The root letters *saqa* (give drink) appear in the Quran as *saqa* and as *asqa.* Some said that their meaning is the same, but it is a matter of fact that each of them has its own meaning, yet their general meaning is the same. We have *saqa* in His statement: 'their Lord will give them a pure drink' (76: 21) meaning: He gave them something to drink. The present tense is *yasqi* (gives). We also have His statement in the story of Moses *peace be upon him*: 'He watered their flocks for them…' (*al-Qasas:* 24).

As for *asqa*, as in His statement: '...and we bring down water from the sky for you to drink—you do not control its sources.' (*al-Hijr:* 22) This means that He *Glorified is He* sends water down from the sky which people do not drink while it is coming down. Rather, it goes into the earth for whoever wants to drink. The True Lord does not make people open their mouths while rain comes down so they can drink it. No. Rather, it is stored in the earth for whoever wants it. The present tense of *asqa* is *yusqi.*

Therefore, there is a difference between the two words, even if they have the same general meaning, and there is a difference between you being given something which you benefit from on the spot, such as His statement: ‘their Lord will give them a pure drink’ (*al-Insan:* 21) and you being given something that you can benefit from afterwards, such as in His statement: ‘...and We bring down water from the sky for you to drink—you do not control its sources.’ (*al-Hijr:* 22)

This is why they say that a person who does goodness may do it immediately, and give a needy person a piece of bread, for example. Alternatively, he could delay it by giving him something that will give him a constant income and thus he can eat from his income whenever he wants. The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us this idea in the chapter of *al-Kahf* in the story of the two-horned one. He says: ‘…when he reached a place between two mountain barriers, he found beside them a people who could barely understand him.’ (*al-Kahf:* 93) If they did not understand a word of what he was saying how did Dhu ‘Al-Qarnayn (Two-Horned One) communicate with them and how did they say: ‘...They said, “Dhu ‘Al-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?”’ (*al-Kahf:* 94) We say: the one who wants to do what is good and right will strive and make efforts on his own to do so. It is as if he is striving to understand them and he is being patient with them in order to arrive at a way of communicating with them. At the same time, he could have abandoned them and left them on the pretext that they do not understand and they do not speak. When Dhu ‘Al-Qarnayn (Two-Horned One) wanted to build a barrier for them, he did not build it by himself. Rather, he taught them how to build so that they could do it themselves whenever they wanted to, and not have need of him. He said: ‘“Bring me lumps of iron!” and then, when he had filled the gap between the two mountainsides [he said], “Work your bellows!” and then, when he had made it glow like fire, he said, “bring me molten metal to pour over it!”’ (*al-Kahf:* 96) Therefore, he taught them and did a favour for them that would never end. His statement: ‘...the contents of their bellies…’ (*an-Nahl:* 66) means what is in the bellies of cattle. This is because the pronoun is the third person masculine singular because it is being used in reference to the genus.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* willed for this milk to be extracted: '...between waste matter and blood, pure milk…' (*an-Nahl:* 66) *Farth* is the food waste in the tripe of the cattle. The lesson here is that Allah has given us that which is between the excess, which is the dung of the cattle and the remnants of food in their stomachs, and it has a repugnant smell and dirty, repulsive form, and the blood, which has a red colour. It is also not palatable. From these two things, the Creator *Glorified is He* extracts pure milk for us to drink that is untainted by the colour of blood or the smell of dung.

Who is able to do such a thing other than the Creator *Glorified is He*? The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by describing this milk: 'pure milk, sweet to the drinker' (*an-Nahl:* 66) i.e. the one drinking it likes its taste, enjoys it and does not choke on it. Rather, it is palatable and when it is drunk it goes down easily because there are foods and drinks that are pleasing to you and they go down pleasantly and you enjoy them, but they might not be wholesome. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...then eat it with enjoyment and with wholesome result.' (*an-Nisa':* 4) The word *hani'an* ('...with enjoyment...') means that you enjoy it and *mari'an* ('...with wholesome result.') means that it is beneficial for the body. It is good for you because you could find pleasure in something while eating it or drinking it, but then it causes you hardships afterwards. Thus, it brings you pleasure, but it is not good for you.

Milk is one of Allah's blessings that indicate His *Glorified is He* power. There is a lesson in His extracting it from between the dung and the blood. It is as if the True Lord is giving us this lesson in order to take us from the tangible meaning that we witness to the values-based meaning that is found in His way. Thus, the One Who made this lesson for us to rectify our outward form is capable of making a way for us that will rectify our hearts.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِن ثَمَرَٰتِ ٱلنَّخِيلِ وَٱلْأَعْنَٰبِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْهُ سَكَرًا
وَرِزْقًا حَسَنًا ۗ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

From the fruits of date palms and grapes you take
sweet juice and wholesome provisions. There truly is
a sign in this for people who use their reason [67]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 67)

The fruits of the date palm are obviously Dates. Grape plants are known as *karm* (vines). The Quranic expression here is that when Allah has favoured His servants with wholesome sustenance, He did not favour them with it so that they could be intoxicated by the grapes, or make intoxicants from them. Rather, the True Lord gives us a lesson here, as this verse was revealed before the prohibition of *khamr* (vintage/wine).

It is as if the verse is bearing a prelude for the prohibition of intoxicants which they now sanction and commend. This is why the scholars said, ‘Indeed the one who reads this verse with perspicacity of the future will know that Allah has a ruling regarding intoxication that will come.’

How did they conclude that Allah has a ruling that will come regarding intoxication? They said: ‘Because He describes the sustenance as being wholesome whereas He did not describe intoxicants as being wholesome which means that they are not wholesome. This is because we eat the fruits of the date palm, i.e. dates, as they are and likewise we eat grapes directly without any interference from us in what Allah has created for us. However, if we alter the nature of something that it becomes an intoxicating substance, we corrupt the nature of something that Allah has chosen to be wholesome sustenance for us. It is as if the True Lord is alerting His slaves. I do not favour you with what I have prohibited, and I have not yet prohibited it. So, regard this intoxication—as you see it —as a source of enjoyment for you. However, take a lesson from the fact that I have not described it as wholesome; if it is not wholesome it is then harmful. So, if ever the prohibition comes I have already alerted you from the very beginning. Then the true Lord says: ‘...There truly is a sign in this for people who use their reason.’ (*an-Nahl:* 67) This is because the intellect demands that we compare between two things, and that we ask:

how come He did not describe intoxicants as being wholesome? Does it not mean that Allah does not love this matter and He is not pleased with it? It is as if the verse contains the intention of the prohibition, so if ever the prohibition of intoxicants is sent down this was paving the way for it.

The message in the verse is: the astonishing matter that informs you that Allah, the One Who has created things for you that are for the well-being of your constitution and your material from, is fully Capable and in charge of legislating for you that which will guarantee the well-being of your morals as well as your spiritual, ethical hearts.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَوۡحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى ٱلنَّحۡلِ أَنِ ٱتَّخِذِي مِنَ ٱلۡجِبَالِ بُيُوتٗا وَمِنَ ٱلشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعۡرِشُونَ ٦٨

And your Lord inspired the bee, saying, ‘Build yourselves houses in the mountains and trees and what people construct [68] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 68)

The bee is one of Allah’s creations, and Allah has placed within each of His creations, and within their natural inclinations that which brings about their benefit. He explains this in His statement: ‘Who created [all things] in due proportion; (2) who determined their destinies and guided them. (3)’ (*al-A‘la:* 2-3) This means: He *Glorified is He* created this to be such-and-such and that to be such-and-such according to what is suitable for the nature of each. Therefore you find every creation besides man going its way without any divergence. Man, for example, may eat beyond his capacity, and he may reach the limit of indigestion. Then, he complains about being sick and asks for medicine. As for animals, whenever they eat their meal, they always eat what suffices them and nothing more, even if you force them to eat. This is because they are governed by a mechanical natural inclination. They do not have intellects with which they can choose.

We have mentioned donkeys as an example of the natural inclination in animals. They are always accused and mentioned as an example of stupidity. For example, when you urge a donkey to cross over a stream, it will look at the stream as if it is measuring the distance very precisely. If it finds that it is within its capacity, it jumps across without any hesitation. If it finds that it is beyond its capacity and ability it turns back and does not dare do it, even if you hit it and shout at it. You cannot force it to do something that is beyond its capacity. This is because it is governed by an instrumental natural inclination that Allah *Glorified is He* has put within it, as opposed to man who thinks about matters like this to choose which one suits him; this would lead to such-and-such and that would lead to such-and-such. We can liken this natural inclination in animals to the electronic brain that only gives you the information that you have fed it. As for the sublime, human intellect, it is able to think, choose, and compare and prefer between alternatives.

The True Lord *Glorified is He:* 'And your Lord inspired the bee…' (*an-Nahl:* 68). The True Lord may favour some of His servants and teach them the language of birds and animals. They are, thus, able to communicate with them and address them, as in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*.(1) Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created them and originated them. He inspires them with whatever He wills. What is *wahy* (inspiration)? *Wahy* is when someone higher informs someone lower via hidden means that of things we do not know. If one informs the other by obvious means, then this is not *wahy* (inspiration). *Wahy* (inspiration) requires that the one inspiring is higher, that the one inspired is lower, and the inspiration itself which is what is normally meant by *wahy* (inspiration). The True Lord *Glorified is He* has the absolute power to inspire whatever He wants to whatever He wants from His creation. The True Lord *Glorified is He* inspired inanimate objects in His statement: 'When the earth is shaken violently in its [last] quaking, when the earth throws out its burdens, when man cries, "what is happening to it?" on that Day, it will tell all because your Lord will inspire it [to do so].' (*az-Zalzala*: 1-5)

Allah taught it via secret means that are specific to the Creator's power regarding His creation. Here; He *Glorified is He* inspires the bee. He also inspired the angels: ‘Your Lord revealed to the angels: “I am with you: give the believers firmness...”’ (*al-Anfal:* 12). He *Glorified is He* also inspired the Messengers: ‘We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Nuh (Noah) and the prophets after him, to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya’qub (Jacob), and the Tribes, to Isa (Jesus), Ayyub (Job), Yunus (Jonah), Harun (Aaron) and Sulaiman (Solomon)...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163).

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(1) The True Lord, *The Most High* says: 'And [in this insight] Sulaiman (Solomon) was [truly] Dawud's (David) heir, and he would say: "O you people! We have been taught the speech of birds..."' (*an-Naml:* 16) He also said about Sulaiman *peace be upon him* and his hosts: 'till, when they came upon a valley [full] of ants, an ant exclaimed: "O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]!" [18] Thereupon [Solomon] smiled joyously at her words... [19]' (*an-Naml*: 18-19).

He inspired those who draw near amongst His slaves: ‘And how I inspired the disciples to believe in Me and My messengers...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 111). He inspired them with illuminative insights that passed through their hearts. He also inspired the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘We inspired Moses’ mother, saying, ‘Suckle him...’ (*al-Qasas:* 7).

This is Allah’s inspiration to whatever and whomever He wants from His creation: the angels, the earth, the Messengers, His servants who draw near, the mother of Musa *peace be upon him* the bees and so forth.

The inspiration can also be from other than Him *Glorified is He* and it is also called *wahy*, as in His statement: ‘The evil ones incite their followers...’ (*al-An‘am:* 121). He also says: ‘...In the same way we assigned to each prophet an enemy, evil humans and evil jinn. They suggest alluring words to one another in order to deceive...’ (*al-An‘am:* 112).

However, when the word *wahy* (inspiration) is used in an absolute sense without any restriction, it refers to the revelation from Allah that is given to the Messengers *peace be upon them*. Therefore, the scholars of jurisprudence say, ‘*Wahy* is Allah’s informing each of His Prophets of His way.’ The scholars of jurisprudence leave aside all the other kinds: the inspiration of natural inclinations, the inspiration of the creation, the inspiration of one’s natural disposition and so forth.

Allah says: ‘…“Build yourselves houses in the mountains and trees and what people construct.”’ (*an-Nahl:* 68)

There are many researchers, since time immemorial, who have been obsessed with studying bees and the stages that they go through in life. Among them was a researcher who followed the historical phases of bees and learned that when bees were first found they were living in mountains. Then, they dwelled in trees and made nests in them. After that, they dwelled in apiaries that were made by man and they are what we now know as industrial cells or beehives. What is amazing is that this researcher does not know the Noble Quran, and despite that what he learned corresponds exactly with what is in the Quran. Likewise, He discovered that the most ancient kinds of honey are what are found in the caves of mountains. This fact was reached by way of burning honey and transforming it into carbon. Then within this carbon formed from honey, the content of radioisotope carbon-14 was measured, in order to determine its age. This is how they discovered that the honey in the caves was the oldest kind of honey, followed by the honey of trees and then the honey of beehives.

Therefore, Allah inspired the bee via hidden means that we do not know. The process of inspiration differs according to the one inspiring and the one being inspired. We can find an example of this process in the astute servant whose master merely gives him a quick glance from which he understands everything, whether his master wants something to drink, something to eat, or anything else?

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ كُلِي مِن كُلِّ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ فَٱسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلُلًا ۚ يَخْرُجُ مِنۢ بُطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ
مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَٰنُهُۥ فِيهِ شِفَآءٌ لِّلنَّاسِ ۗ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

Then feed on all kinds of fruit and follow the ways made easy for you by your Lord.' From their bellies comes a drink of different colours in which there is healing for people. There truly is a sign in this for those who think [69]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 69)

The effective cause behind honey being a cure for man is that the bee eats from all kinds of fruit. The variation of fruits makes honey rich in beneficial elements. Whenever man consumes it each element goes towards a part of the body, and thus it has a cure by Allah's leave.

Yet, what happens nowadays? We see some people saying, 'I consumed a lot of honey and I did not feel any benefit.' We say, 'It is because we have interfered with the process and we have corrupted the nature that Allah created for us. Initially we left bees to eat all manner of fruit, but in brief we put sugar, for example, in the place of natural flowers and blossoms. This is why the taste of honey changes and it loses its characteristic that the Noble Quran has mentioned. Therefore, the person who follows the prices of honey finds a clear disparity in price from one kind to another, in accordance to the quality of the honey and the extent to which it conforms to the natural type that the Noble Quran has mentioned.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘and follow the ways made easy for you by your Lord’ (*an-Nahl:* 69) meaning: roam freely amongst the flowers here and there. This is why we cannot build houses for bees to reside in. They must be allowed to roam freely from one garden to another. Whenever the crops dry bees eat from their own honey, but now people take all the honey and leave nothing behind, and put sugar in its place from which the bees eat throughout this period.

The True Lord says: ‘...made easy for you...’ (*an-Nahl:* 69) i.e. humbled, facilitated and compliant. A bee goes out and speeds along these various paths and nothing stops it or prevents it. It flies here and there, from one flower to another. Have you seen a tree, for example, that rejects a bee? No, because everything has been subdued for the bee and facilitated for it.

It is due to His wisdom and His mercy that Allah has subjugated the paths of life for us, and subjugated that which we benefit from. If it was not for his subjugation of these things we would not have benefited from them. You can see a huge camel being herded by a small boy, and he makes it kneel down and carry loads. He leads it wherever he wants. On the other hand, when the camel gets angry or flies into a rage no one is able to control it. The small boy was not controlling it out of his own power, but because Allah had subjugated it for him.

As for a snake, for example, despite its small size it represents a danger that causes everyone to be scared of it and afraid of getting close to it. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* has not subjugated it for us, and it scares us even though it is so small. Likewise, if we reflect on the flea, for example, how small and paltry it is, and despite that it deprives us of sleep and denies us the pleasure of sleeping peacefully. Is anyone able to subjugate the flea for himself?

There is profound wisdom in this and it is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to us: 'If I subjugate something for you, even if it is one of the biggest creatures like camels or elephants, you are able to benefit from it. If I do not subjugate it for you then you have no power to subjugate, no matter how small and paltry it may be. Therefore, the matters are not in your power. Rather, you should take them as Allah *Glorified is He* has created them for you.

'...From their bellies comes…' (*an-Nahl:* 69). This is because the bee sucks up nectar from here and there and then a divine, cooking process takes place within it which turns this nectar into pure honey. This is because someone might think that it takes the nectar and then purifies it as it is, but the Quran did not say 'from their mouths' but rather 'from within'. This is the divine laboratory that gives us honey which contains a cure for mankind.

'...a drink of different colors…' (*an-Nahl:* 69). As long as the bee eats from all manner of fruit and the fruits have differing gifts according to their different substances, different colours and different tastes and smells, then the fluid must be of many hues '...in which there is healing for people…' (*an-Nahl:* 69).

Therefore, we find many doctors, may Allah reward them with goodness, who are very interested in bees' honey. They have performed several experiments to know its medicinal value but these efforts are hindered because they cannot find the natural honey that Allah created. Despite this and despite man's interference in the bees' nourishment there is still some benefit in it and it maintains the quality of being a cure. The most important of these is the absorption of water from the body. If there is any microbe that you want to get rid of, suck the water out of it and it will die immediately.

If ever there is a supply of the natural honey that Allah has created, the Creator's wisdom becomes manifest through its cure. However, if man interferes in this process he corrupts it. The parts of the universe that man has no say in, continue as normal without any divergence, such as the sun, the moon and the celestial bodies and so forth. Man is the only creation that goes against Allah's way.

The thing you do have a say in, you can interfere in according to the way of its Creator, or you leave it. This is because when you interfere in it according to the way of its Creator, it gives you well-being and goodness and if you interfere in it according to your own way, you corrupt it.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘When it is said to them, “Do not cause corruption in the land”, they say, “We are only putting things right.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 11) It is because they do not know. They cannot distinguish between corruption and rightness. The Quran contains examples of people who spread corruption in the earth and think that they are doing good works. He says: ‘Say [Prophet], “shall we tell you who has the most to lose by their actions, whose efforts in this world are misguided, even when they think they are doing good work?”’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

Whoever invented the car and these other machines that emit toxins and pollute the environment that Allah has created-it is true that they saved us time and effort when we need to move and transport things- yet, look at the damage that people have done because of these machines. Look at car exhausts and their effects on human health. Inventors of these machines should have weighed up the benefits and the harms that would result from their invention. Add to this the horrific crashes and collisions that cost lives. By Allah, have you ever seen two camels in a collision? Therefore, we must weigh up the benefits and the harms before we embark upon something, so that we do not corrupt the natural state that Allah has created for us.

In His statement: ‘in which there is healing for people’ (*an-Nahl:* 69) *an-nas* (people) is an aggregation that has different maladies from one individual to the next as well as their different ways of dealing with the causes of maladies. So, how can this fluid be a cure for all maladies in their various forms? We say: it is because this fluid that Allah has prepared for us with His power has come in many colours; from nectar that has numerous kinds, forms, tastes and elements. It is not just one mixture that all of mankind drinks. Rather, it comes in different and various kinds, according to how people differ, or the maladies they have would vary. Every element within it treats one of these maladies. The True Lord says: ‘There truly is a sign in this for those who think.’ (*an-Nahl:* 69)

At-tafakkur (pondering) means to think about what you are concerned with to derive something with which you are not concerned. This is how information becomes rich because if information does not cross-pollinate and if no propagation happens to it, it stops and becomes frozen. Man is then afflicted with apathy with regards to his ambitions. When man is afflicted with this kind of apathy progress stops: the progress that we see in the world is the result of thinking and using the intellect.

Therefore the True Lord *Glorified is He* alerts us when we pass by the phenomena of the universe. He warns us not to pass by them in heedlessness and turn away. Rather, we must think about them and reflect on them. He says: ‘And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to’. (*Yusuf:* 105) This verse is prompting us to contemplate on the phenomena of the universe. Moreover, it is warning against turning away and being heedless of Allah’s signs because by thinking we derive from the universe that which we benefit from.

If we take the example of the person who invented the steam engine and how he arrived at this invention that has benefitted humanity, we find that he arrived at it while boiling water. He noticed that the lid was being raised above the pan, so he asked himself: why is the lid being raised? He thought about it and used his intellect until he discovered steam power. He was then able to use this power to propel and move vehicles.

Likewise, Archimedes—and several others—by thinking and reflecting on the phenomena of the universe, learned about laws of nature that led to beneficial inventions that we enjoy today. Consider the person who invented the wheel. How difficult was it for man to carry loads? What was the maximum that he was able to carry? After they invented the wheel and used it to carry things man became capable of carrying and moving several times the weight than he could before.

As for the person who invented reservoirs, how difficult was it to extract water from wells, or from rivers? After the work of the reservoirs and pumping the water, we have come to find water in our homes merely by opening a tap.

These are all fruits of using the intellect for pondering and contemplating on the phenomena of the universe. The intellect uses the raw materials that Allah has created, about which He prompted us to think and from which to derive benefit. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to us: ‘I have given you the necessities of life. If you want the luxuries of life and its conveniences then use the blessings of your intellect, pondering and contemplating to reach these luxuries.

Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* draws our attention towards another point, which is that He *Glorified is He* makes out of tangible matters that which makes us understand abstractions, in order to draw our attention towards His way. This is why we are taken from the tangible to abstract, as He says:

وَٱللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ يَتَوَفَّىٰكُمْ ۚ وَمِنكُم مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰٓ أَرْذَلِ ٱلْعُمُرِ
لِكَىْ لَا يَعْلَمَ بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْـًٔا ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

It is God who has created you and in time will cause you to
die. Some of you will be reduced, in old age, to a most abject
state, so that, after having knowledge, they will know
nothing at all: God is truly all knowing and all powerful [70]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 70)

Here He says: ‘It is Allah who has created you...’ (*an-Nahl:* 70). This is a fact that no one denies, and no one has claimed it for themselves. He has provided you with the essentials for your life on earth as well as plants and animals, the cattle that give you pure untainted milk that is pleasant to drink and the bees that contain a cure for men.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given us life and He has given us the essentials of life. He has also given us that which removes the hardships of life. As long as you have affirmed these tangible realities then hear: ‘It is Allah who has created you and in time will cause you to die. Some of you will be reduced, in old age…’ (*an-Nahl:* 70).

When we hear ‘…has created you…’ we acknowledge that Allah has created us, but how did He create us? This is something we do not know because it is not an industrial process. The One Who created is the True Lord *Glorified is He* alone. He is the One Who informs us about how He created. Yet, man interferes and involves himself in matters that he knows nothing about. Therefore, you see those who say that man comes from monkeys, and other such nonsense that has no basis in reality. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘If you want to know how you were created then listen to the One Who created you. Beware of listening to anyone else. This is because: ‘I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation...' (*al-Kahf:* 51). This is a process that Allah *Glorified is He* has not shown to anyone: '...I do not take as my supporters those who lead others astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) That is, I did not take any assistant to help me with creating.

Mudil is that who leads men astray. A *mudil* is the person who says something to you as if it was true, but he is misleading you. Therefore, our Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an idea in advance here: 'Be warned. People are going to come who will try to mislead you regarding the subject of creation, and they will alter reality. Beware of believing them because they were not with Me when I created you and thus they are only claiming to have knowledge of this issue.'

The same can be said of the creation of the heavens and the earth, as Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created them and He *Glorified is He* is the One Who informs us of how He created them. When He *Glorified is He* says: 'And Allah has created you' (*an-Nahl:* 70), we have to say: 'We hear and we obey, with pleasure. O Lord, You created us and You know how You created us. We do not ask anyone else about this and we do not ask anyone but You about this.'

Then, He says: '...and in time will cause you to die…' (*an-Nahl:* 70), i.e from Him *Glorified is He* was the beginning and to Him *Glorified is He* is the return. If the beginning is from Him and the return is to Him, and your life is between these two parentheses, then do not rebel against Allah in what is between these two parentheses because it does not befit you. You came from Him and you will return to him, so why rebel?

Here, our Lord *Glorified is He* gives us proof of His absolute power regarding death. This is because death does not follow any rule. Someone may die as an embryo in their mother's womb, as a child, as a youth or an old man. They may even be reduced to a most abject state, meaning, living a long life. What do we mean by a most abject state? Man is reduced, after strength and youth, dignity and rank, commanding and forbidding and going about in the earth arrogantly. He is reduced to weakness in everything, even in the most distinguishing aspect of his formation: his thinking. After gaining knowledge and memorizing using a powerful memory, he goes back to being like a small child. He does not remember anything and He is unable to do anything. This is so to know that the issue is not inherent in you. Rather, it is a gift to you from your Creator *Glorified is He* to know that when He decrees death for us it is a mercy for us. Moreover, it veils us from weakness and senility, before we need people to help us and assist us in the simplest of life's tasks and to be commanded by those whom we used to command.

From this angle, death is one of Allah's blessings upon us. In order to be convinced of this fact look at the people who have been granted long lives such that they have reached what the Quran called '…a most abject state…', and how they suffer from weakness and how their families suffer from taking care of them, such that the closest people to them wish for them to die. Death is therefore a blessing, especially for the believer who acts righteously and longs for his reward from Allah. You see him being happy about death; for he has furnished his Hereafter and he would love to proceed towards it. This is the opposite of the person who squandered himself and did not prepare for this day. You see him scared and apprehensive, because he knows what's in store for him.

Thumma '...and in time...' is a connector that indicates sequence with delay; i.e. time elapses between the two events. Thus, He *Glorified is He* created you. Then, after some time and delay, the second event happens; He causes you to die. This is different to the particle *fa* (will) which indicates sequence with immediate succession; that is, the two events happen successively without interruption, as in His statement: 'then He causes him to die and be buried' (*'Abasa:* 21). After death, the burying takes place without any delay.

The True Lord says: '...Some of you will be reduced, in old age, to a most abject state…' (*an-Nahl:* 70). A most abject state means the worst state, the vilest and the most worthless. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* brought man out of his mother's womb while knowing nothing. He says: 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds…' (*an-Nahl:* 78).

These are the means of knowledge that man has. When he is reduced to a most abject state these senses lose their ability and their functioning becomes weak. Man, then returns to how he began, knowing nothing, after being afflicted with senility and decrepitude. The tools of cognizance have stopped working. Man starts forgetting and his memory becomes weak and incapable of retrieving what he used to know.

The true Lord says: ‘…ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well…’ (*an-Nahl:* 70).

Thus, they call these senses *al-warith* (that which inherits).The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: ‘...Allah is truly all knowing and all powerful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 70) This is because He *Glorified is He* has the creation in His hand from the beginning and in His hand, He has their death and return, and this requires knowledge, as He *Glorified is He* said: ‘How could He who created not know His own creation…’ (*al-Mulk:* 14). Thus, there must be knowledge because the one who makes something must know what is good and what is bad for it. This requires the ability to realize, for knowledge alone is insufficient.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱللَّهُ فَضَّلَ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ فِي ٱلرِّزْقِ ۚ فَمَا ٱلَّذِينَ فُضِّلُوا۟ بِرَآدِّى رِزْقِهِمْ
عَلَىٰ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُهُمْ فَهُمْ فِيهِ سَوَآءٌ ۚ أَفَبِنِعْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

Allah has given some of you more provision than others. Those who have been given more are unwilling to pass their provision on to the slaves they possess so that they become their equals. How can they refuse to acknowledge God’s blessings? [71] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 71)

If we contemplate on the universe and what is around us, we find that we are only equal in one thing which is that we are slaves of Allah. We are only equal in this. As for everything else, we are different. We have different colours, different bodies, forms, talents, and provisions.

What is amazing is that this divergence is the essence of conformity; for divergence can arise from conformity and conformity can arise from divergence. In example, if you and your friend go to a restaurant and order a chicken, and you naturally like the breast of the chicken, while your friend prefers another part, this is a difference. When the food comes you find that this difference is the essence of agreement. You have what you like and so does he. This is a difference that leads to agreement. If we were to suppose that both of you like the breast, for example, this is an agreement that could lead to a conflict. When the food comes, we would sit and ask: who gets the breast? The True Lord *Glorified is He* has created us to be different concerning some things, and He wanted this divergence to be a kind of integration between us. How can integration be?

Do you imagine, for example, that there is someone who possesses all talents such that if he wanted to build a house, he would be the engineer that designs, the builder who builds, the worker who carries, the carpenter, the blacksmith, the smelter and so forth? Do you imagine that there is someone like this? No.

However, the Creator *Glorified is He* distributed these talents amongst mankind so that each one of them would need someone else for the things that they are not talented in, and this is how integration is achieved in the world. Therefore, the differences between us are the essence of conformity. Moreover, they form one of His signs as well as a wisdom that the Creator willed. He says: '...but they continue to have their differences…' (*Hud:* 118); this is how He created us.

Otherwise, had we all been created with the same talents and abilities, would it make sense for us all to be philosophers, doctors, or scientists? Who would build? Who would farm? Who would manufacture? Thus, it is due to Allah's mercy that He made us different yet complementary to each other.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has given some of you more provision than others…' (*an-Nahl:* 71).

People look at sustenance from only one angle, as it is wealth according to them. This person is rich and this person is poor. The truth is that sustenance is not just in wealth. Rather, everything that you benefit from is your sustenance. The sustenance of this person is his intellect. The sustenance of this person is his muscular strength. This one thinks and that one acts.

Therefore, we must not look at sustenance as if it is only one kind. Rather, we must look at the different gifts that Allah has created for His creation: health, power, intelligence, wisdom, courage etc. These are forms of sustenance in which there is disparity amongst mankind.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* undertook the matter of sustenance, He made the disparity therein ambiguous. The verse has not defined who the preferred is and who the preferred over is. The word *ba'd* (some) is ambiguous so that we can understand that each part *ba'd* is preferred in some aspect, and preferred over in another aspect. The strong is preferred over the weak in strength, and the weak person is preferred in the knowledge and wisdom that he has. Therefore, Allah has given every individual He created a gift that does not recur among people in order to interact with one another. Finding a gift presented to one person and not the other necessitates that the two persons come together out of need and not out of favour. How is that? A strong man working for a weak man who has no strength to work excels due to his strength, while the weak excels due to the money or wage he pays to the strong in order to allow him to provide for himself and his children. Allah *Glorified is He* has not willed to make it a matter of superiority of someone over the other; rather, He made it a mutual exchange of needs required by men to preserve life.

Thus, it is a matter of necessity and not a matter of one person conferring a benefit upon another. Doing a favour is not compulsory, as not everyone is able to give away without receiving something in return or work without a wage. It is only the necessity that governs this issue. Since what binds the society is the necessity, not the superiority, and as long as the world continues to be connected by necessity, each individual who sees himself superior in one aspect should not be deluded by his superiority. He should consider the favours of others over him. Thus, arrogance amongst humankind is wiped out as each person complements the other.

We gave the example of a wealthy man of nobility and a high rank. He might need the help of a simple worker to fix some installations in his house. He may be unable to find a worker or he may find the worker busy. This wealthy man remains unhappy and sleepless until this simple worker comes to help him and do what he needs. This is how the possessor of wealth and dignity needs someone who gained no gift of this life other than carrying out such simple tasks within houses. At the same time, he is preferred over the wealthy man in this aspect. Thus, all in this universe are equal. No one has some familial relationship with Allah that causes Allah to flatter and pay him compliments. We are all servants of Allah, and He has distributed these gifts among all humankind so that they interact with one another and each one of them can remain dependent on the other. Thus, interconnection is established in the society. This issue has been presented in another verse wherein Allah says: ‘Will they distribute the mercy of your Lord? We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We have exalted some of them above others in degrees, that some of them may take others in subjection.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) Some understand that the poor is subjugated to the rich; however, the truth is that both of them are subjugated to the other. The poor is subjugated to the rich when he works for him, and the rich is subjugated to the poor when he pays him. Regarding this, an Arab poet said that a man is for a man, whether Bedouin or urbanite. Some are serving some even if they do not perceive it.

We give the example of what people believe to be the lowest occupation, even though all occupations are honourable. There is no low occupation as long as someone is using it to provide for himself and his family in a lawful way. Baseness is found in a person who is idle, useless, and not proficient in anything. People look down at a shoeblack as that he is less than they are. If they look at the tin of varnish that he uses, they would find many workers, scientists, engineers, and wealthy people working for him to produce this tin. He excels all of them when he buys this tin of varnish. People, however, do not look at how all these people are subjugated to this simple worker.

Regarding the statement of Allah: ‘that some of them may take others in subjection.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) Who subjugates the other? Each one of us is subjugated to the other. You are subjugated to me concerning what you do proficiently and so do I regarding what I do proficiently. This is the wisdom of Allah among His creation so that harmony and integration is established between the individuals of the society.

Allah *Glorified is He* has not made these professions innate within us. He has not rendered such and such a person to such and such a profession. However, he who is satisfied with the profession that Allah has decreed for him–no matter how low it may seem in the eyes of people–excels in it, works hard and exerts his effort for it, Allah *Glorified is He* elevates him in a way that makes people wonder due to his acceptance of this job. Actually, you see people look at, point to and wonder at someone who was a porter or a labourer. Indeed, he was, but because he was pleased with what Allah had foreordained for him, and he perfected and exceled in his craft, Allah compensated him, elevated and raised his rank.

This is why they say that whoever works sincerely in any job for ten years, Allah will make him a master for the rest of his life, whoever works sincerely for twenty years, Allah will make his children masters and whoever works for thirty years, Allah will make his grandchildren masters. That is because nothing goes to waste with Allah. There is no one higher or lower amongst us. Beware of thinking that you are higher than people. We are all equal, but some master their work and some do not. This is why it is said that the value of every person is estimated by how they excel.

Do not look at someone from one angle only. Consider all angles instead and you will find that Allah *Glorified is He* is Just with distributing His gifts amongst humans. We said that if you were to compare between people, you would find the sum total of each individual is equal to the sum total of every other individual. This means that when you take, for example, the health, wealth, children, strength, courage, peace of mind, a righteous spouse, dignity, rank and so forth you will find that the total share of each one of us is equal to the other, at the end of the comparison. You beat me in strength and I beat you in knowledge and so on. That is because we are all servants to Allah and none of us have any familial link or relationship with Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those who have been given more are unwilling to pass their provision on to the slaves they possess.' (*an-Nahl:* 71) He refers to the owned slaves. The meaning is that We have not ever seen any of you, whom Allah has favoured with provision, take it and distribute it amongst his servants. You have never done this. However, Allah is not blaming them for this behaviour and He is not demanding them that they distribute the provision of Allah among their servants. Rather, the verse is a proof against them as well as an evidence of their evil actions towards Allah.

It is as if the Quran is asking them if anyone ever amongst those whom Allah has given more provision than others gives out voluntarily and distributes from that provision amongst his servants. Since no one has ever done this, how can you take the right of divinity and lordship of Allah, in addition to His right to be worshipped and given vows and invoking His name when slaughtering, and assign these rights to the idols and statues? You have never done this with what you own, so how can you allow yourselves to take the rights of Allah and give them to the idols and statues?

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘He sets forth to you a parable relating to yourselves: Have you among those whom your right hands possess partners in what We have given you for sustenance?’ (*ar-Rum:* 28) This means that you have not done this in terms of yourselves, so how can you do this in terms of Allah? That is a point that refers to the differentiation between the way you deal with Allah and that with your own selves.

Then Allah says: ‘so that they become their equals.’ (*an-Nahl:* 71) This means that you, O disbelievers, have made your idols equal to Allah, set them up as His partners, and worshipped them alongside Him *Glorified is He*.

Despite that, Allah *Glorified is He* has given us provision and favoured us; He has preserved our wealth and its ownership. He has not commanded us to give our wealth to people for no work or exchange of benefits. When He asks you to give your needy brother more than what He has obliged you to, He says ‘who is it that will offer Allah a goodly gift, so He will multiply it to him.’ (*al-Baqara:* 245) Even though it is Allah who grants provision and blessings, He asks you to offer a gift. It is as if He respects your work and effort and respects your private ownership over what He has granted you. He says, ‘offer Me a loan’ due to His Awareness of the place that wealth possesses in the souls and how careful the lender is to ensure that the debtor can pay it back. Thus, He attributed that gift to reassure the lender that the act of paying back is guaranteed.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: ‘How can they refuse to acknowledge Allah’s blessings?’ (*an-Nahl:* 71) This means that after Allah has blessed them with provision and has not asked them to distribute it among others; they denied this blessing and rejected the bounty of Allah. They set up idols and statues as partners to Allah, took His right of divinity and lordship, and gave it to the idols and statues. Such is the essence of denial and rejection.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنۡ أَنفُسِكُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗا وَجَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنۡ أَزۡوَٰجِكُم بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةٗ
وَرَزَقَكُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِۚ أَفَبِٱلۡبَٰطِلِ يُؤۡمِنُونَ وَبِنِعۡمَتِ ٱللَّهِ هُمۡ يَكۡفُرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

And it is God who has given you spouses from amongst yourselves and through them He has given you children and grandchildren and provided you with good things. How can they believe in falsehood and deny God's blessings? [72]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 72)

In the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* legalised the peak of the matters, which is the matter of creed. He decreed that we do not give something that Allah has designated for Himself, such as His right of being worshipped and His right of Divinity and obedience and so forth. We must assign these to no one besides Allah. If this creedal matter is sound, all the matters of the universe are sound.

Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He created us from one, and from that one He created a spouse for him in order to give birth and multiply as survival is dependent on two matters. The first matter is represented in preserving life. Allah has guaranteed this by blessing us with various forms of provision so that we eat, drink, and retain life.

After discussing the retention of life via provision in the previous verse, Allah mentions the second thing which is the preservation of life through the survival of the species. He says: 'And it is Allah who has given you spouses.' (*an-Nahl:* 71)

The word *Al-azwaj* is the plural of *zawj*, which does not just refer only to a man. It refers to both a man and a woman. This is because the word *zawj* refers to something that has an equal like it. Thus, each one of them is a *zawj* in itself, the man is a *zawj* and the woman is a *zawj*. Therefore, it refers to a singular entity that has an equal like it.

The words of Allah, ‘from amongst yourselves’ means from one living entity, as He says in another verse: ‘He has created you from a single being, then made its mate of the same.’ (*az-Zumar:* 6) This means that He took a piece from the male and created the female there from as He created Eve from Adam. It could mean that He created its spouse of the same kind as mentioned in the verse: ‘created its mate of the same [kind]’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1). Moreover as Allah says in another verse: ‘Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves’ (*at-Tawba:* 128), i.e., from your same kind.

Thus, the matter could be of both meanings. It is fine that some accept the idea that Allah created Eve from Adam’s rib, i.e., from a part of him. In addition, there is no objection to those who say that Allah created Eve independently as He created Adam and brought them together. The first opinion adopts the meaning of partitive, while the second adopts the meaning of the same kind.

We have stated that when a plural meets a plural, it entails a division into units. For example, a teacher addresses his students and says, ‘Take out your books.’ They are a plural and their books are a plural. Will each student take out all his books and others’? No, they will not. Rather, everyone will take out his own book. Therefore, it entails a division into units exactly as in His statement: ‘And it is Allah who has given you spouses from amongst yourselves.’ (*ar-Rum:* 21) This means that He created a spouse for each one of you. In order to make sure of this fact and that the creation began with Adam we shall take things back to the past. We will find that everything that increases in the future was less in the past. For example, the population of the world today is greater than it was last year. The further we go into the past, the more the numbers decrease until we arrive at one man, Adam *peace be upon him* and with him his wife Eve. That is because giving birth starts with two. Therefore, the words of Allah that say: ‘Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same [kind]’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1) is a true statement that is supported by deduction and statistics. This is why our Lord bestows blessings upon us by creating spouses for us. He also bestows blessing upon us by making them from our own kind and not from another species. Man’s intimacy and companionship can only be attained by his own genus. That is one of the greatest blessings which Allah has conferred upon us. Can you imagine what it would be like if Allah had made spouses for us from another genus? How would that be? This spouse has things in common with us and differs from us in one thing. We share the same shape, the same outward form, the same intellect, the same parts including two eyes, two ears, two hands, two legs, etc. All this helps to foster tenderness, intimacy, and companionship.

We differ in one thing, which is the gender; this is a male and this is a female. Therefore, we are all one kind, but different in gender so that we can complement one another in the way that Allah willed to populate the earth. It is possible for a male to be transformed to a female or vice versa. That is why Allah has put precautionary measures in place for this phenomenon. The man, for example, has a small breast and other organs that could be transformed in case a transformation is needed. This is a wise composition and a sublime power.

Therefore, Allah has given us spouses from amongst ourselves so that love, tenderness, intimacy, and companionship increase between us. We read in the story of our master Solomon *peace be upon him* and the hoopoe, that when Solomon was checking on the birds, he noticed that the hoopoe was absent. He said, 'I will most certainly punish him with a severe punishment, or kill him, or he shall bring to me a clear plea.' (*an-Naml:* 21) This is the authority of the kingdom, which Allah gave to Solomon. The scholars said that this verse means that He would place him amongst other than his kind. Therefore, placing him amongst other than his own species is a kind of punishment. Being (from your own kind) is a blessing and mercy from Allah.

In another verse, Allah mentions three components for maintaining the marital relationship. He says: 'And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.' (*ar-Rum:* 21) When we reflect on these three phases, we find the first one is tranquillity between the two mates. Each one of them finds happiness in the other feels relaxed and pleased and fulfils each other's needs. Whenever this level of tranquillity is disturbed and one of them dislikes the other, the role of love and tenderness comes into play. It holds fast to the reins of the marital life and provides both the husband and the wife with a sufficient degree of acquiescence. Whenever one of them neglects his duties towards the other, the role of mercy comes in. It makes each one of them show mercy toward his partner, forgive his weakness, have pity for his sickness and thereby the marital life continues and beats the storms that come along the journey of life.

When all these phases are exhausted and there is no tranquillity and tenderness between them any longer and no one shows mercy to the other, it is impossible for them to stay together, and it is wise of them to leave one another. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* made divorce lawful as a solution to these kinds of situations. Nevertheless, He has made it the most disliked permissible act so that we do not venture into it unless it is necessary.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and through them He has given you children and grandchildren.’ (*an-Nahl:* 72) Children are the first circle of family that preserves the life and the grandchildren are the second circle. Man, by his very nature, loves life and hates death. He sees it claiming souls around him every day. Thus, he believes that death is inevitable, and he is certain that life will leave him; therefore, he wants to keep life going through his children. This explains why so many of us love having sons who represent an extension of their fathers. A man looks forward to seeing his grandchildren whenever Allah grants him children and guarantees the first generation. He wants to preserve the life for him and his children after him. This is why a poet addressed his son saying, my son, O me, after I am gone. This is how people view their children; they are a reminder of them when they pass away as if his name goes on without an end.

This phrase shows us the necessity of taking care of generations by integrating the generations. We have two mates, the children, and grandchildren. What is the benefit of the generations integrating? What is the benefit of the grandparents and their grandchildren being contemporary and mixed with one another? We notice that a little kid begins to realise things when his senses start functioning. He starts picking up things from those around him and learns from them. If he has older siblings, he learns the words mom and dad from them, for example, and if he does not have siblings then we teach him these words. This is why we see that the second child is more intelligent than the first; the third is more intelligent than the second is and so on because he learns from those before him as well as those around him. His realization, experiences and information increases.

Let us imagine that this son becomes a father and a grandchild who is contemporary to the generations of the father and the grandfather, comes along, and grows up in their arms. You thereby see him learning from his father how to be active in life and how to earn a livelihood. At the same time, he learns religious values from his grandfather as he stays constantly home after getting old and dedicates his time to obedience and worship. Thus, the young boy can hear him reciting the Quran, calling him to fetch a copy of the Quran, and bringing him his prayer mat and other phrases through which the boy learns these values.

Therefore, the grandson picks up from his father a kind of movement and activity, while he learns some values from his grandfather's generation. Thus, a distance between the generations leads to defects in the formation of children. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the generations to stick together so that the educational aspects of both moral values and movement and activity integrate in terms of the child.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'provided you with good things.' (*an-Nahl:* 72) He provided us with good things in terms of the provision that Allah has made for the preservation of life, as well as the marriage that Allah has made for the survival of the species. Then, He asks how they believe in falsehood and deny the blessings of Allah. The word falsehood refers to the idols that they have set up besides Allah.

The verse contains a question of both astonishment and rebuke. How can you deny Allah's blessings and it is He Who created you in the beginning from one living entity and created his spouse from it? It is He Who created spouses from amongst yourselves and placed between you tranquillity, tenderness and mercy. It is He Who gave you children and grandchildren and conferred upon you the blessings of provision to maintain your lives, as well as the blessing of spouses in order to maintain your species. He has given you blessings and comfort. In addition, it is He who created you from nothing, and it is He Who has provided for you from nothing. Are you going to deny His blessings after all? Are you going to turn to the worship of idols that cannot benefit or harm you instead of turning to Him? Have the idols done any of this for you? Have they blessed you with any of these blessings? These idols are in need of you. They take from you and do not give you. This one starts leaning and you have to stand it up again while that one is broken and you have to fix it.

This is why He says in the following verse:

وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَمْلِكُ لَهُمْ رِزْقًا مِّنَ
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

**Those they worship beside God have no power to
provide anything for them from the heavens or the
earth: they can do nothing [73] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 73)**

The act of worshipping means that the worshipper obeys the object he worships. This obedience requires that commands are carried out and prohibitions are avoided. But does the act of worshipping consist of nothing more than this? No, it does not. Every movement in life that assists worship is also an act of worshipping, and the things that are needed to fulfil an obligation are an obligation as well. To clarify this matter, suppose that you want to perform the obligatory prayers that Allah has prescribed. You need strength to carry out this obligation. You only obtain this strength from food and drinks. Consider the simplest kind of food you can imagine, a loaf of bread. Consider how many men gave a hand to make it from the time it was a grain of wheat placed in the earth until it became a tasty loaf of bread.

Indeed, all of those people who took part in this process are carrying out a positive function in life. This function is considered an act of worship in itself because it helps you with your worship. Moreover, when you want to pray, you have to cover yourself. Look at a garment that a prayer cannot be performed without it. Everyone who took part in cultivating it and manufacturing it until it reached you are all engaged in an act of worship by being involved in making this garment. Therefore, everything that helps you worship Allah is also considered as worship, and every activity in the universe that leads to one of these things is also an act of worship.

When Allah *Glorified is He* summons the believers to the Friday Prayer, He says: ‘O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) He did not take them out of a vacuum, but rather from their work. Why did He mention trading specially? They said it is because trading is the objective of all the activities of life. It is the medium between the producer and the consumer. In addition, the Quran did not say Leave the factories or the fields. That is because there are things that do not bear their fruits immediately. The farmer has to wait months before he can reap what he has sown. The manufacturer has to wait until he can sell his goods. However, trading is a transaction that takes place on the spot, and it is the centre of attention. Likewise, it did not say leave off buying because the seller must sell, but the buyer might buy reluctantly. Thus, the Quran uses the most precise thing that attaches you to time, which is trading. When we finish the prayer, we have been commanded to return to work and strive throughout the earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those they worship beside Allah.' (*an-Nahl:* 73) He wanted to talk about the authority that they prefer over Allah, which are the idols. Allah is the One Who created them, provided them with the good things of life, favoured them with spouses from their own kind and gave them children and grandchildren. It was obligatory for them to worship Him because of His blessings and His bounty. The one who does not worship Allah for His sake, has to worship Him for His blessings and his need of Him. Thus, we have the act of worshipping Allah because He deserves to be worshipped and another act of worshipping because of the outcomes of His attributes. Whoever does not worship Him because of who He is, worships Him because of His Blessings.

Since the act of worshipping requires that commands are carried out and prohibitions are avoided, how can there be worship with regards to those idols that they have taken? How can you worship them when they do not command you to do anything and do not forbid you from anything? This is the first criticism regarding worshipping other than Allah, such as the sun, the moon, an idol or a tree. Moreover, what do the idols or other objects of worship give to those who worship them? What kind of reward have they prepared for them? How do they punish those who have disbelieved in them? Therefore, it is a deity without a way.

Religiosity is a natural inclination in the soul and man resorts to it in times of weakness and need. Allah is the One Who loves that we seek refuge in Him, supplicate to Him, and ask Him to fulfil our needs. He has a way that entails requirements that destroy the control and oppression of the soul and it also entails legal commandments that are difficult on the soul. Therefore, the disbelievers resort to worshipping idols and statues because they are deities without any legal commandments and objects of worship without any requirements.

How easy it is for someone to draw close, cling to a deity and say that he is his servant without him commanding me to anything or forbidding me from anything! How easy it is to please the natural inclination in the soul towards religiosity by worshipping a deity like this! However, you must not forget that such a deity that demands no legal responsibility cannot be asked of for anything, nor can you take refuge in him in times of adversity. Such thinking is illogical; exactly as they do not demand anything of you, they are incapable of bringing you any benefit or harm.

This is why we have found those who claim prophecy are those liars who make the ways of worship easy for people. They allow for them what the religion has prohibited, such as the casual mixing of men and women and other things, and they do it to attract the greatest possible number of followers. For example, Musaylama, the liar, came and wanted to make legal responsibilities easy for people and thus, abolished the prayer. Someone else came and abolished the *zakat* (alms). This facilitation has attracted many gullible people who feel constrained by legal responsibilities and they thus incline towards an easy religion that suits their worldly concerns. Therefore, we have found that those liars have many supporters and advocators. However, the facts are quickly revealed and these deceived people discover the truth about their prophets!

In the statement of Allah: 'Those they worship beside Allah have no power to provide anything for them,' (*an-Nahl:* 73) we notice that this verse goes one-step further in showing the falsity of worshipping idols. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* said about them in another verse: 'have not created anything while they are themselves created.' (*an-Nahl:* 20) Allah negates the power to create from them. Rather, they are the ones who are created. One would go outside, like a particular rock, work on it with a pickaxe and fashion it to look like something. He then would take the rock as a deity and worship it besides Allah.

When Allah negated from them the power to create, He wanted, here, to elevate the proof one-step further. Thus, He negates their ability to own even something because it happens that someone can own something that he has not created. Thus, the verse affirms here that they merely own nothing at all. Allah says that those false deities have no power to provide anything from the heavens or the earth. Sustenance comes from the sky in the form of rain and from the earth in the form of plants. It is from these two sources that Allah's sustenance comes. With this water of the sky and the plants of the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* secures the essentials of life and its necessities for us. Thus, if you want the luxuries of life, strive with the essentials of life that Allah has given you in order to arrive at these luxuries. The real, direct sustenance lays in the rain that Allah sends down to us from the sky and the plants that He causes to grow from the earth. To clarify this, suppose that you have a mountain of gold or silver. One day you are starving. Are you able to eat the gold or silver? You are in need of a piece of bread, not a mountain of gold or silver. A loaf of bread that saves your life in this situation is better than all that wealth. This is the direct sustenance, which Allah has provided for His servants. As for money, it is indirect sustenance. You cannot eat it or live off it.

The word *shay'a* (anything) is the minutest thing to which can be referred. The idols and statues do not possess any sustenance, regardless of how small. This is because someone might say, 'They do not possess enough sustenance to suffice them'. No, rather, they do not possess anything at all.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* tells us something else in His statement: 'they can do nothing. (*an-Nahl:* 73) This means they do not possess any sustenance at the present, and they will not possess any in the future. This cuts off all hope for them. They do not possess anything today and they will not possess anything tomorrow. This is because there are things whose ruling is decisive yet temporary and there are suspended rulings that can be resumed afterwards. However, this phrase 'they can do nothing' is a decisive ruling that will not be resumed afterwards. This is why we find these people who love to find faults in the Quran arguing about the verses 'Say: O unbelievers! I do not serve that which you serve, Nor do you serve Him Whom I serve. Nor am I going to serve that which you serve, Nor are you going to serve Him Whom I serve.' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-5)

They see the repetition in this chapter as incompatible with the eloquence of the Quran. We say if you were to contemplate, you would see that there is no repetition in the chapter. This chapter contains a cutting of relations that is constant and permanent. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You shall have your religion and I shall have my religion.' (*al-Kafirun:* 6) This refers to the present, in the future and until the Day of Resurrection. The verses 'I do not serve that which you serve, Nor do you serve Him Whom I serve' is a cutting off of relations in the present, but who can reassure that perhaps other relations will be resumed afterwards? Thus, we have the next statement: 'Nor am I going to serve that which you serve, Nor are you going to serve Him Whom I serve.' There is no repetition; rather, it is cutting off hope that there will be any resumption of relations in the future. Therefore, the issue is concluded now and it is ending decisively. Likewise, the meaning of the statement of Allah: 'they can do nothing' (*an-Nahl:* 73) is that they cannot do anything now or in the future.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَا تَضْرِبُوا۟ لِلَّهِ ٱلْأَمْثَالَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

So do not make up images about God: God knows and you do not [74] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 74)

The word *Al-amthal* is the plural of *mithal*, which means an equal or a peer. The verse prohibits us from likening Allah to something else because Allah *Glorified is He* is One in His essence, One in His attributes and One in His actions. Beware of saying that any essence is similar to His essence or that any attributes are similar to His attributes. If you ever find that an attribute of Allah has a similitude in human beings then you must understand in the light of the verse that states: 'nothing like a likeness of Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11)

Allah *Glorified is He* is forbidding us from coining similitudes for him. It is He Who gives the examples because He is Wise and He does it in the correct place to clarify an obscure issue by way of an observed issue. This is why He says: ‘and Allah’s is the loftiest attribute.’ (*an-Nahl:* 60) This means that to Allah is the most sublime attribute in everything. If you find attributes that are shared between you and Allah, declare that Allah is transcendent above any likening or any partner or equal and say that there is nothing like unto Him.

You exist and Allah exists; however, your existence was preceded by non-existence and it is followed by non-existence. His existence, on the other hand, was not preceded by non-existence and it will not be followed by non-existence. Allah gave an example of Himself to us in order to explain His illumination to the universe and it is not an example of His light, as we may think. Rather, it is a similitude of His illumination, not His light.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, [and] the glass is as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not–light upon light–Allah guides to His light whom He pleases, and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is Cognizant of all things (*an-Nur:* 35).

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth because tangible or spiritual light causes guidance. Tangible light is like the light of the sun, the moon, and other sources of radiance. This tangible light is what clarifies things for you so that you can go about in the universe with vision and guidance. If you were to try going about at night without light and radiance to guide you, you would bump into things around you that might be stronger than you and break you and harm you or you might be stronger than it and break it. Thus, that which guides your steps is tangible light. Light can also be spiritual and this is the light of values and morals. This light also allows you to go about in life with vision and guidance, and it protects you from getting lost in the unexplored territories of ideas and theories. This is the value-based light that Allah sent down for us in His Noble Book, about which He says: ‘indeed Our Messenger has come to you making clear to you much of what you concealed of the Book and passing over much; indeed, There has come to you light and a clear Book from Allah. With it Allah guides him who will follow His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by His will and guides them to the right path.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 15-16) the Quran is a light, but it is spiritual with values, morals and virtues.

Do not say about this example that it is an example of the light of Allah. Rather, it is an example of the power of His illumination of the universe. If we were to reflect on the rest of the verse, we would realise this. Allah says: 'a likeness of His light is as a niche.' (*an-Nur:* 35) Some people say that the *mishkat* (niche) is a lamp. However, it is not. It is an aperture or blocked window in the wall that is known by rural people who have them in their old buildings. It is a non-penetrating cavity in the wall in which the lamp is placed. However, the subject lamp is not a normal lamp. It is in a glass and the glass protects the radiance of the lamp from being scattered by the wind from every direction. At the same time, it allows for a sufficient amount of air to get in so that it can continue burning. This is how the radiance is–constant and pure–and it does not emit any smoke that would ruin the purity of the glass.

People of the countryside know about gas flames that do not have any glass and the black, harmful smoke that they emit. Therefore, the lamp in this case is of the utmost purity and strength. That is because the glass is also not a normal glass. It is a glass that is like a brightly shining star that consequently illuminates by itself.

This lamp is fuelled by oil that is not normal. Indeed, it is oil from an olive tree in a moderate climate, which is neither eastern nor western. This oil is so pure and immaculate that it shines, even though fire has not touched it and this is why it gives us the maximum extent of power. This is why He described the lamp as light upon light.

After you have learned about the qualities of this lamp and that it is placed in a small aperture, then by Allah, is it possible for there to be a speck of darkness in this aperture? Therefore, this is not an example of His light, as His light cannot be encompassed. Rather, it is an example of His illumination of the universe, which is the aperture and the energy in this example. Thus, the meaning of His statement that He is the Light of the heavens and the earth is that He is the One Who illuminates them. In addition, as it is illogical for there to be a speck of darkness in this aperture, the same goes for His light and His illumination of the universe. This is the tangible light, which Allah has provided for the universe.

After that, the Quran talks about the spiritual light that is sent down on the righteous servants of Allah illuminating manifestations and sublime inspirations that we receive in Allah's houses. Allah says, 'In houses which Allah has permitted to be exalted and that His name may be remembered in them; there glorify Him therein in the mornings and the evenings, Men.' (*an-Nur:* 36-37) Thereby, we gather between tangible light and the spiritual light, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is why when Abu Tammam wanted to praise the Caliph he likened him to the Arabs who were famous for their courage, generosity, wisdom, and intelligence, and he said that he had the fearlessness of 'Amr shaped in the magnanimity of Hatim and in the wisdom of Ahnaf, as well as the intelligence of Iyas. An envious person objected to this likening of Abu Tammam and he said to him, 'How can you liken the Caliph to the worst of the Arabs? He claimed that the Caliph had 1,000 like 'Amr in his army, and amongst his guards he had 1,000 like Hatim. In order to get himself out of this dilemma and extricate himself from this trap that had been set by his envier, Abu Tammam spontaneously said: do not rebuke my parable of him. Who besides him is exceptional in magnanimity and courage? For Allah has given the least parable of His light which is a similitude from the niche and the lantern.

However, Allah has forbidden us from giving examples of Him because of our lack of knowledge; He is fully capable of giving examples of even the smallest and most trivial of created things from our point of view. He says: 'Surely, Allah is not ashamed to set forth any parable –[that of] a gnat or anything above that.' (*al-Baqara:* 26)

Thus, do not undervalue the affair of this gnat and do not look down on the fact that Allah is using it as an example because He does not disdain to use it as an example. This is because the gnat contains all the apparatuses of life formation that are found within you and in the largest of animals, such as elephants and camels. In addition, a gnat that you look down on may be stronger than you are and incapacitate you concerning your strength, manoeuvring, and power.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it.' (*al-Hajj:* 73) I ask you by Allah, are you able, with all your strength and capacity, to retrieve that which the fly has taken from your food? Are you able to do this? Therefore, when Allah gives an example for you, you must respect it. You must also look for the wisdom that is behind it and know that He mentioned this example of this vile creature, from your point of view, in order to clarify an obscure matter for you and draw your attention to it.

Because of the importance of coining similitudes in order to clarify obscure matters, poets resort to this method in order to facilitate the process of understanding. A poet may come across a complicated matter that only intelligent people can comprehend and wants to make the lay people understand it, such as the case of the envier who manifests through his envy the merits and noble traits of the one he envies, as the innocent person may be accused unjustly and leads him to be elevated amongst his people.

An Arab poet took this meaning, put it into poetry and gave an example of it in order to clarify it. He said: When Allah wants to proclaim a hidden virtue, He places it on the tongue of the envier. If it were not the fire burning that which is around it, The sweet scent of the incense would not be known.

Look at how he turned a spiritual matter into a general matter that is known by the common people. You may have a virtue that is hidden, concealed, and unknown to anyone, until you come across an envier who accuses you and tries to distort your image. Thereby, you are exposed to everyone, and all your talents and virtues are manifested. This is similar to sweet-smelling incense whose scent we cannot smell unless we burn it.

The reason behind this poetic similitude is that one of the people of good used to visit, from time to time, one of the houses in the town in which there was an infirm, old woman who needed help. He would help her as much as he could. Located within the vicinity was the home of a beautiful young woman, who was coveted. One of the enviers took advantage of the situation and accused the righteous man of visiting this beautiful young woman. The people actually started following him and saw him going to the house of the infirm, old woman. Thus, the people came to know of one of his virtues that had not been known to anyone previously. We have seen throughout history those who have been wrongly accused and disgraceful things were said about them. Then justice exonerated them, and they became known as heroes who deserve to be honoured. If they had not been subject to those accusations, we would have never known about their merits and noble traits.

Allah mentions the rationale behind the prohibition of giving examples. He says: ‘Allah knows and you do not’ (*an-Nahl:* 74). It is because we do not know, while Allah *Glorified is He* gives examples to us because He knows and places them in their appropriate place. After Allah has prepared us to receive the examples and has made our minds ready to accept them from Him, He mentions the following example.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلًا عَبْدًا مَّمْلُوكًا لَّا يَقْدِرُ عَلَىٰ شَىْءٍ وَمَن رَّزَقْنَٰهُ مِنَّا رِزْقًا حَسَنًا فَهُوَ
يُنفِقُ مِنْهُ سِرًّا وَجَهْرًا هَلْ يَسْتَوُۥنَ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

Allah presents this illustration: a slave controlled by his master, with no power over anything, and another man We have supplied with good provision, from which he gives alms privately and openly. Can they be considered equal? All praise belongs to God, but most of them do not recognize this [75] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 75)

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of two parties. The first party is a slave whom Allah describes as being restricted in his movement and he is not able to do any kind of work. This is because a slave may be a slave but he works, as one whom you allow to work in commerce, for example, even though he is a slave. There is also the literate slave who agrees with his master that he will pay a certain amount of money in order to buy his freedom. Thus, the master gives permission to let him to work so that he can acquire the agreed upon amount of money. However, this slave mentioned in the verse is owned and unable to do any sort of work or endeavour.

The second party is a free master whom Allah has bestowed goodly sustenance that is lawful and good. Allah enables him to give out in all kinds of ways; secretly and openly. Such is a high rank as he has sustenance from Allah that is described as being lawful with no suspicion in it and Allah enables him to spend out from it. Spending occurs according to what suits the situation. Sometimes, it is appropriate to do it secretly and other times it is appropriate to do it openly. Allah says: 'If you give alms openly, it is well, and if you hide it and give it to the poor, it is better for you.' (*al-Baqara:* 271)

These are the two parties of the example, which has been given to us. We see that the Quranic context leaves it to us to make the judgment as if Allah is saying that He is pleased with our judgment. Are they equal? Allah *Glorified is He* does not let us provide the answer unless the answer is going to agree with what He wants. The only logical answer to this question is that no, they are not equal. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* made us articulate this judgment.

Allah gave this example to the idol-worshippers who eat from Allah's sustenance and worship other than Him. Allah *Glorified is He* likened the idols to the owned slave who is unable to do anything. In addition, He gave the other example to the master whom Allah has provided with goodly sustenance and spends out from it secretly and openly. Have you not seen the statement of Allah in another verse: 'and made complete to you His favours outwardly and inwardly' (*Luqman:* 20) that clarifies their mistake in renouncing the worship of Allah, despite the sustenance He has bestowed upon them, in favour of worshipping idols, who do not give them anything?

Here, the wisdom behind Allah leaving the judgment in this similitude is made clear. It comes in the form of a question so that the judgment can be taken from their mouths; bearing witness against themselves and thereby putting an end to their denial and disputation.

There is another point we should make about the phrase: 'Can they be considered equal?' The discussion is about two people, so it would be logical to say, 'are the two equal?' So why does He go from the dual to the plural? We observe that it is because the example, even though it is a singular being compared with a singular, generally applies to a number of owned servants and another a number of masters who possess goodly sustenance thus to generalise the given example. Therefore, the fact that the pronoun differs here does not contradict the rhetoric of the Quran. Rather, it is a subtle rendering because the Speaker is Allah *Glorified is He*.

Likewise, in the verse where Allah says: ‘And if two parties of the believers quarrel make peace between them.’ *(al-Hujurat*: 9) Some people see a defect in the verse because it starts by talking about a dual, uses a plural pronoun afterwards in the word *iqtatalu* (fighting) and then it goes back to the dual in *baynahuma* (be twen them). We say to those people that if you were to ponder on the meaning, you know that what you have assumed to be a defect and what you have considered a discrepancy in the style is in fact the utmost limit of precision in the Quran’s expression. This is because the discussion is about two groups which means that it is a dual, indeed. However, will each group hold onto one sword when the two groups fight each other? No, they will not. Rather, each soldier from each group will hold on to his own sword. Thus, the fighting occurs between the sum totals of a group versus the sum total of the other group. Thus, it is appropriate to use a plural because fighting is an action that is essential to each individual within the two groups.

When the time comes to make a treaty, does every soldier from this group make an agreement with every soldier from the other group? No, they do not. Rather, the treaty is the prerogative of the chiefs, rulers, and leaders of each group. Thus, we return to the dual regarding the treaty, as these people represent one group, these people represent the other group, and then the treaty is concluded between the two of them. Therefore, the change in the pronoun here is a sign of rhetorical inimitability, because the Speaker is Allah *Glorified is He*.

Regarding the statement: ‘All praise belongs to Allah’ (*an-Nahl:* 75), it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying, ‘Praise be to Allah that your judgment has agreed with what I want, for you have spoken and you have given your judgment.’ Then Allah says that most of them do not recognize this. This shows that the minority understands and this is what they call ‘maintaining the possibility’ because when the Quran was sent down, there was a group from the disbelievers and a group from the People of the Book who were thinking about attaining faith and embracing this religion. If the Quran had negated knowledge and understanding from everyone, these people would have been shocked and maybe have dissuaded from thinking about faith. Thus, the Quran maintains the possibility that people amongst them have knowledge and understanding and that they desire to have faith.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَّجُلَيْنِ أَحَدُهُمَآ أَبْكَمُ لَا يَقْدِرُ عَلَىٰ شَىْءٍ
وَهُوَ كَلٌّ عَلَىٰ مَوْلَىٰهُ أَيْنَمَا يُوَجِّههُّ لَا يَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ ۖ هَلْ يَسْتَوِى هُوَ
وَمَن يَأْمُرُ بِٱلْعَدْلِ ۙ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٧٦﴾

Allah presents another illustration: two men, one of them dumb, unable to do anything, a burden to his carer – whatever task he directs him to, he achieves nothing good – can he be considered equal to one who commands justice and is on the straight path? [76] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 76)

This is another example of two men. One of them is dumb, which means that he cannot speak. Being dumb must be preceded by being deaf because speech is a product of hearing. If we take a small Arab child and raise him in an English environment, we will find him speaking English and the opposite is true. This is because speech is not a genus, blood, or flesh; rather, it is a product of the environment. If one does not hear anything, how can one speak? This is why Allah describes the disbelievers and says: 'Deaf, dumb and blind – so they will not return [to the right path]' (*al-Baqara:* 18).

This deaf person cannot do anything in terms of work or that which will bring a benefit. Allah says that he is a burden to his caregiver, which means that he is dependent on his master and does not even benefit himself. Despite that, he could have some wisdom that allows him to provide something to his master, but he does not even have this. Whatever task his master directs him to, he achieves nothing good. Therefore, he is of no good and absolutely of no benefit, neither to himself nor to others. These are the qualities of the first man.

What about his opposite? Allah asks, 'Can he be considered equal to one who commands justice?' (*an-Nahl:* 76) This is the first attribute of the second man. He enjoins doing what is right. This attribute of enjoining what is right necessitates that he has heard a way, his ears paid attention to it and his tongue articulated it enjoining doing what is right. This attribute is the opposite of the dumb person who is incapable of doing anything. In addition, he is on the straight path, i.e. he heads towards the target directly and takes the shortest of routes. That is the opposite of being of no good to any task. The question here is, are these two equal? The logical answer is no, they are not.

This is another example of the idols, as they do not hear, do not speak, do not state anything clearly and they are incapable of doing anything for themselves or for those who worship them. Rather, the idols are dependent on them as those who worship it are the ones who bring them from mountain rocks, sculpt them, erect them and fix them when they break and so forth. This is how they are the ones who serve the idols and gain no benefit whatsoever from them.

Thus, if you do not regard the first man and the other man, who enjoins what, is right and follows a straight way, equal, how can you regard a deity that has the attribute of absolute perfection to be equal to idols that have no capacity to benefit or harm you? It could be an example of the believer and the disbeliever as indicated by the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* in the previous example, ‘Allah presents this illustration: a slave controlled by his master.’ And opposes him, ‘and another man we have supplied with good provision.’ (*an-Nahl:* 75) However, here, Allah did not say a slave or a man, but rather, He said ‘two men’.

Regarding His opposite, He says: ‘and another man We have supplied with good provision’ (*an-Nahl:* 75) and He *the Almighty* does not say ‘slave’ or ‘man’. Only here, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…two men…’ (*an-Nahl:* 76). It is possible to understand from this that He *the Almighty* has likened the dumb person to the disbelieving man and the one who enjoins what is right and follows a straight way to the believing man.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلِلَّهِ غَيْبُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَمَآ أَمْرُ ٱلسَّاعَةِ إِلَّا كَلَمْحِ ٱلْبَصَرِ
أَوْ هُوَ أَقْرَبُ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

All that is hidden from view in the heavens and earth belongs to God. The coming of the Hour of Judgment is like the blink of an eye, or even quicker: God has power over everything [77] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 77)

Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that the world is either a *mulk* or a *malakut*. The world *mulk* is used to refer to the world that we sense and touch while the word *malakut* is used to refer to what is hidden from us and we do not see it.

When Allah *the Almighty* graciously bestowed upon Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* He said: ‘In this way We showed Abraham [Allah’s] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be a firm believer’ (*al-An‘am:* 75). Therefore, in His Universe, Allah *the Almighty* has that which is manifest and that which is unseen. The manifest has universal laws that all mankind can see. It also has unseen things that no one sees and they are not shown to anyone. There are even things within your own essence that are hidden and not known to any human being. Likewise, people have things that are unseen that you do not know. This unseen is what we call ‘the hidden reality of man’. Therefore, certain things are hidden from me and certain things are hidden from someone else. This unseen that we do not know is considered by some people to be a deficiency within us, while in actual fact it is a type of perfection in the human soul, because if you want to know what is hidden within other people, then let them know what is hidden within you.

If you had to make a choice in this matter, you would choose that each person to maintain what is hidden within them and not shown to anyone. I do not know what is hidden within people and they do not know what is hidden within me. This is why they say: ‘That which is covered is beautiful’.

Veiling the unseen is an aspect of perfection in the universe because it nurtures and enriches the benefit therein. How? Imagine that you know an upright man who has many good deeds; then you come to know of one evil deed of his that was veiled. You see this evil deed and it is enough to arouse a dislike in you towards his good deeds, to make you despise and avoid him and thus you do not benefit from him at all. If this evil deed had been veiled from you, you still would have been able to benefit from his good deeds. This is how the unseen spreads benefit throughout the universe.

In some narrated traditions Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O son of Adam, I have veiled you from others and I have veiled others from you. If you want, I can reveal you to others and I can reveal them to you. Also, if you want, I can leave the veil down until the Day of Resurrection.'(1) Now, put yourself in the place of the one being addressed in this *Hadith*. What would you choose? I believe that everyone would choose to be veiled, for as long as you love to be veiled and you hate for your secrets to be exposed to people, then beware of trying to know the secrets of others.

Al-ghayb (the unseen) is that which is hidden from the senses, such as hearing, seeing, smelling, and tasting, as well as what is hidden from the intellect, such as spiritual realisations.

There is an unseen element that Allah *the Almighty* has placed in His universe for which there are preliminary steps, or means, that lead to it not being unseen, such as electricity, gravity and other things. They were unseen before they were discovered, and the same goes for all discoveries and secrets that science discovers for us. They were hidden from us at one time and then they became witnessed at another time. This is because Allah *the Almighty* does not give us all the secrets of His universe at once. Rather, He sends them down according to a measure and He unveils it for us according to a reckoning. He *the Almighty* says: 'There is not a thing whose storehouses are not with Us. We send it down only according to a well- defined measure.' (*al-Hijr:* 21)

That which was unseen in the past has become manifested and witnessed today, because Allah *the Almighty* unveiled the means for us that allowed us to arrive at it. This is an unseen for which Allah *the Almighty* laid down preliminary steps in order for it to be arrived at by whoever explores the universe. Thus, whenever Allah *the Almighty* allows it and the time has come for it to emerge, Allah *the Almighty* then enables one of the explorers to discover it, either by way of exploring, or even by way of a mistake in an attempt or by coincidence.

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(1) *I have not found this tradition despite an extensive search. However, Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi narrated from Al-Hasan, and Al-'Aqili from him from Anas that Allah* the Almighty *says: 'I am more generous and greater in pardons than that I should veil a Muslim slave in the life of this world and then reveal him after I have veiled him. I do not cease to forgive My slave as long as he seeks forgiveness from Me. Al-'Albany mentioned it in (Al-Jami' As-Saghir (4/4050) and degraded it as weak.*

This is why, when you look at all the inventions and discoveries, you find that 90% of them were made by coincidence. The exploration was not trying to or even concerned with arriving at it. This is what they call 'unseen occurrences'.

The unseen is a case in point: if you assign your child to solve a geometric exercise, and the meaning of solving the exercise is that the child arrives at the point that you want him to arrive at, what will the child do? He will take the given figures that you give him and he will use the theorems that he has and whatever intelligence he has in order to derive what is sought. The child here has not brought anything new. Rather, he has used what has been given to him. In the same way, the secrets and hidden things of the universe are arrived at when someone explores that which is given in the universe.

Allah *the Almighty* says about this kind of unseen: 'Allah *the Almighty*: there is no Allah, but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills.' (*al-Baqara:* 255)

Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* allows it, secrets are unveiled for them; either by exploring, by mistake, or even by coincidence. When the time comes for something unseen to emerge and be discovered, and it coincides with some human exploration, the two then meet. If not, Allah *the Almighty* then manifests it for us without any exploration and without any effort from us.

There is another type of unseen, which is the absolute unseen. It is hidden from every human being as Allah *the Almighty* has exclusive possession over it. There are no preliminary steps or means for arriving at it, as there are with the first type. Allah, *The Almighty*, has said regarding this unseen: 'He is the One who knows what is hidden. He does not disclose it except to a messenger of His choosing.' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27)

If the Messenger informs us of something of the unseen, we do not say: 'He knows the unseen' because he only knows what Allah *the Almighty* has informed him of from the unseen. Therefore, this is an unseen that no one ever encompasses by themselves.

A part of this absolute unseen is an unseen that Allah *the Almighty* has exclusive possession over, and He does not even show it to Messenger Muhammad. When Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the Hour, whereupon he said: 'The one being asked about it knows nothing more than the one asking.'(1) In the Night Journey and Ascent, he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*, tells us that Allah *the Almighty* gave him three vessels; the vessel that He commanded him to convey, which is the vessel of the Message; a vessel in which He gave him a choice and he only gives it to the people who have prepared their conduct, those who accept Allah's Secrets and whose intellects do not deny them; and a third vessel that is particular to Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is why the narrator of the Hadith says: 'Indeed the Messenger of Allah *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*, gave me two vessels. As for one of them, I disseminated it, i.e., I narrated it and told it to people. As for the other, if I were to disclose it, my throat would be cut. This is from the secrets of which Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*, chose certain people to preserve.

Allah's statement: 'And for Allah (alone) is the knowledge of the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth…' (*an-Nahl:* 77). This is what we call a mode of restriction, by placing the preposition and the object of the preposition first. This means that the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth is restricted to Him *the Almighty*. If we said, for example: 'the knowledge of hidden reality of the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah *the Almighty*' it would then be possible for someone to add 'and other than Allah *the Almighty*.' As for: 'And for

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(1) *In the Book of Faith from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him in the Hadith of Gabriel peace be upon him that he said to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him whilst in the form of a man: 'O Messenger of Allah the Almighty when will the Hour be established?' He peace and blessings be upon him said: 'The one being asked about it knows nothing more than the one asking.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (50) and also Muslim in his (Sahih) (10).*

Allah (alone) is the knowledge of the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth…' (*an-Nahl:* 77), it means that it belongs to Him alone and He has no partner. The meaning of the heavens and the earth is what is between them and what is behind them, but what are popularly known from Allah's creations is the sky and the earth. Then He says: '...The coming of the Hour of Judgment is like the blink of an eye, or even quicker …' (*an-Nahl:* 77).

The verse only mentions this hidden reality because it is the hidden reality that Allah *the Almighty* has exclusive possession over and no one knows its time except for Him. Thus, it suits the discussion about the unseen that this absolute unseen is mentioned which only Allah *the Almighty* knows about.

What is the meaning of *lamh al-basar* (like the blink of an eye)?' We have numerous verbs that all indicate seeing in a general sense, even though each verb has its own specific meaning. We say: *ra'a* (to see), *nadhara* (to look), *ramaqa* (to glance), *lahadha* (to notice), and *lamaha* (to behold). *Ra'a*, for example, means the whole eye. *Ramaqa* is done above; *lahadha* is done to the side; and all of them are connected to some movement of the pupil. This movement is what we call *lamaha*.

Therefore, 'the blinking of an eye' is the movement of the eye's pupil towards the thing that is being seen. If you want to see what is above you, you move your pupil upwards. If you want to see what is below, you move your pupil downwards, and so forth. The movement is the twinkling of the eye. The pupil moves from place to place.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* likened the Hour, according to Him, to be like the twinkling of the eye. However, the twinkling is an event, and events need stretches of time. The stretches of time may be lengthy in and of themselves, but be short according to the one seeing.

Modern science has enabled us to understand this issue through the production of slow-motion replays. We have the opportunity to watch the event again very closely. We see them, for example, repeating a scene from a football match so that you can see every single detail. You see the scene that passed by like the twinkling of the eye presented in front of you slowly, taking a much longer time.

When the time moves quickly, it accumulates and you cannot measure it according to any scale, neither minutes nor seconds.

Therefore, actions take place within particular periods of time; and the same applies to the twinkling of the eye during which the eye's pupil moves within a particular period of time. This is not the case with the Hour. Rather, this is the best approximation that man has and the closest likening there is to understanding how the Hour is according to Him *the Almighty*.

If someone said to you: 'What's up with so-and-so? What's he up to?' you would start with a rendition of events...such-and-such happened. If we said: 'What is the affair of the Hour? What will happen when it is established, when the living die, first of all, and then everyone is revived from Adam *peace be upon him* onwards, and then everyone is gathered, reckoned and finally we receive reward and punishment?'

Events that are numerous and great happen to great numbers of the creation, amongst both human beings and (jinn), and this all happens like the blinking of the eye according to us. However, beware of thinking that this needs time with regards to Allah *the Almighty*.

Things according to Him, *The Almighty*, do not need to be subject to a process. They are only subject to 'Be!' and it is. Even the expression *kun* (Be!) is comprised of two letters: *kaf* is an utterance and it has a stretch of time; *nun* is an utterance and it has a stretch of time. The affair of the Hour is closer than the *kaf* and the *nun*, but there is nothing more minute in our understanding.

When Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the people of the grave He says: 'On the Day they see it, it will seem they lingered (in this life) an evening (at most,) or its morning.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46)

At the same time, we see that they missed a lot while in their graves. Therefore, how can they measure the time? It is measured according to your tracking of events. When there is no event, there is no time. This is what we see with the sleeping person who cannot determine how long he spent sleeping unless it is according to how it is with the majority of human beings.

This is why, in the story(1) of the People of the Cave who slept for 309 years, they said: '...We have spent there a day, or part of a day...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 113).

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(1) The story of the men of the cave

This is the predominant norm amongst people because they woke up and they did not find anything around them that indicated a lengthy passage of time. The situation as it was for them had not changed at all. If they had woken up and found themselves to be old men after they had been young they would have realised that time had passed. Therefore, time in relation to the lack of an event is invalid time.

Or we say that it is the affair of the Hour, in that Allah *the Almighty* makes it gather mankind except for the twinkling of the eye because everything that happens therein we cannot measure according to time. This is because that which is measured according to time is only an event that comes from a doer who has power and strength that can be distributed over time.

If you want to transfer this thing from here to here, then time and effort is required of you. If you assigned a child to transfer this thing, it would take more time and require more effort. Therefore, the time corresponds conversely to the power of the doer.

This is why when the Messenger *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* related the Night Journey and Ascent(1) to the people they said: 'Do you claim that you made the journey in one night, which we strike the livers of camels for one month?' This is because their movement requires a process and practical application. It takes an amount of time that corresponds to their abilities to move with camels from Mecca to Jerusalem. Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*, did not say: 'I travelled by night'. Rather, he said: 'I was taken by night.' The One Who took him was Allah *the Almighty* so the period of time is measured according to Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *The Hadith of the Night Journey has been narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (162) in the Book of Faith from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik, and is also narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in his Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/362), from the Hadith of Ibn 'Abbas that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: 'I was taken by night.' They said: 'Where to?' He said: 'To Jerusalem.' They said: 'You then woke up amongst us?' He said: 'The Messenger of Allah The Almighty peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Yes.' There was no one left except he clapped his hands, or held his head in amazement, or clamoured and considered it an enormity. He said: 'There were some amongst the people who had travelled there and seen the mosque and one of them said: 'Are you able to describe the mosque for us?' and the Hadith continues.*

Likewise, if the time of the Hour is measured according to His Power, then it is like the blinking of the eye, or it is closer than that. It is only a comparison to facilitate your understanding.

His statement: '…Allah has power over everything,' (*an-Nahl:* 77), i.e. the affair of the Hour is like this because Allah *the Almighty* is fully capable of doing anything. As long as events differ according to how capabilities differ, then Allah's power is the Sublime Power that does not need a period of time to bring about events.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُم مِّنۢ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَـٰتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْـًٔا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ
ٱلسَّمْعَ وَٱلْأَبْصَـٰرَ وَٱلْأَفْـِٔدَةَ ۙ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

It is God who brought you out of your mothers' wombs
knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds,
so that you might be thankful [78] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 78)

The saying of Allah '…out of your mothers' wombs...' (*an-Nahl:* 78), i.e. the wombs because they are on the inside, and the covering on a covering is considered a covering, as if you were to say: 'in my pocket is such-and-such cash, or 'in my wallet is such-and-such cash'. The two expressions mean the same thing.

Ummahatikum '…your mothers…' is the plural of *umm* (mother), and it would be logical to assume that the plural of *umm* is *ummahat*, i.e. mothers. However, He said: 'It is Allah who brought you out of your *ummahatikum* (mothers' wombs)...' (*an-Nahl:* 78) and added the letter [(*ha'*) i.e. in the Arabic word*: ummahatikum*].

When the foetus is in the womb of its mother, its life is one of subordination, as all of its functions are subordinate to its mother. When Allah *the Almighty* wills for it to be born, He makes its life essential and independent. At the time of birth, the obstetricians say: 'the foetus is in a natural position' or 'the foetus is in an unnatural state'. What is the meaning of the foetus being in a natural position at the time of birth?

The natural position means that at the time of birth the head of the foetus is pointing downwards. This is the natural position because Allah *the Almighty* wanted to bring it out as a new creation: '...and then We bring (all) this into being as a new creation…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14).

It is as if it was a creation, but it was subordinate to its mother, so Allah *the Almighty* brings it out as a new, independent creation in and of itself. Then, the head is thus pointed downwards, and it is the first part of the newborn that emerges, and merely by emerging the process of breathing starts.

From this moment, the foetus is separated from its mother. By breathing, it comes to have an identity. If there is difficulty in getting the rest of its body out, it still has the opportunity to breathe, and this is from Allah's kindness because the foetus, in this situation, does not choke while the rest of its body is coming out.

If the opposite takes place, then the head is pointing upwards and the foetus comes out with its feet first, and merely by its legs emerging, it is separated from its mother. It needs an essential life and it needs to breathe. If ever the process of childbirth is difficult, the foetus can choke and may even die.

Science took an issue from the universe that was settled and proven. He said: 'knowing(1) nothing' (*an-Nahl:* 78).

This is because the means of knowledge and realisation are not yet functioning. When Allah *the Almighty* wants it to be known, He creates means of knowledge for it, which are the five senses: hearing, seeing, smelling, touching and tasting. These are the outward senses with which man acquires knowledge and information and realises what is around him.

Even though modern science has manifested some other senses for us, physiologists say: 'If you carry two pieces of iron, for example, what sense do you use to distinguish between them in terms of weight?' This cannot be known by touching, hearing, seeing, tasting or smelling. Therefore, there is a new sense that feels weight, and this is the muscular sense.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi* gives three opinions about this in his *(Tafsir)* (5/2877):

1) You know nothing about the covenant being taken from you while you were in the loins of your ancestors.
2) You know nothing regarding whether felicity or wretchedness has been decreed for you.
3) You know nothing regarding that which benefits you.

Likewise, there is the sense of difference which enables us to know how thick a fabric is, for example, when you are in a clothing store by rubbing the fabric between your fingers, you are able to distinguish between thick and thin.

The newborn child, therefore, does not know anything, and this is something natural because the means of knowledge and realisation that it has are not yet carrying out their function.

His statement: ‘and gave you hearing and sight and minds...’ (*an-Nahl:* 78). Physiologists have made it clear to us that this Quranic order is a natural one. After birth, the child hears first. Then, after about ten days, it sees. You can try this out yourself. You can see that the child is scared of a high voice a few days after birth, but if you put your finger in front of its eyes, it does not blink because it cannot see yet.

From seeing and hearing, which are the masters of all the senses, information is formed that is located in the minds. This is the existing Quranic order, and it is the natural order that agrees with modern science.

We notice in the verse that hearing is singular, while *absar* (sights) and *af’ida* (minds) are plural: ‘...and gave you hearing and sight and minds...’ (*an-Nahl:* 78).

Why is not hearing mentioned in the plural? The One speaking here is Allah *the Almighty*. This is why there are expressions that are subtle and inimitable. Let us look at why hearing is singular here.

He has distinguished between hearing and the other senses, for when there is a sound in this place, everyone hears it. There is nothing in the ears that prevents hearing and there is no lock that we can lock if we do not want to hear. It is as if hearing is one and the same for everybody. As for seeing, it differs because we do not all look at one thing. Rather, that which is seen differs amongst us. This person looks at the roof, this person looks at the pillars, and so forth.

Therefore, that which is seen is different for us, as the eye has a natural lock that can be lowered over the eye so that it does not see. Thus, it is as if *absar* (sights) with us differs and varies.

The same goes for minds. They are mentioned in the plural because they differ and vary; one person is aware and he realises, while someone else is unaware and does not realise, and one person may be more aware than someone else.

Therefore, hearing being singular here is one of the signs of the Quran's subtlety in its inimitable expression because the One speaking is the Lord of Might.

We also notice that hearing is mentioned before the other senses because it is the first tool of realisation, and it accompanies man from the moment he is born until he leaves this world. It is never absent from him, even when he is sleeping because by way of hearing, he is summoned from his sleep.

We have said that in the story of the people of the cave, they could not have slept such a deep sleep for 309 years unless Allah *the Almighty* had veiled this sense from them, and thus they were not roused by any sounds. He *the Almighty* says: 'And thereupon We veiled their ears in the cave for many a year' (*al-Kahf:* 11), i.e. We told the ears to be inactive during this period of time so that they would not be disturbed by the sounds of the desert and roused from their sleep. Allah *the Almighty* wants them to have rest and a deep sleep.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and gave you hearing and sight and minds' (*an-Nahl:* 78). Are these tools of realisation found after birth or are they present beforehand? We must distinguish between hearing and its instrument. Before birth, the instruments of seeing, hearing, tasting, and so forth are formed for the foetus, but they are instruments that do not function. The foetus in its mother's womb is subordinate to her and does not have an essential life. Whenever it emerges in the life of this world and has an independent life, Allah *the Almighty* makes these instruments carry out their function.

Therefore, the meaning of: '...but He has endowed you with hearing…' (*an-Nahl:* 78) is that He endowed you with listening, and not the instrument of hearing.

His statement: '…so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78) is revealing that hearing, sight and minds will give us a lot of new information and several realisations that will benefit us in our lives and in the essentials of our existence. We will also use them to benefit others, and these are blessings that deserve gratitude from us.

Whenever you hear a sound, praise Allah *the Almighty* for bestowing you with ears that hear; whenever you see an exceptional view, praise Allah *the Almighty* for bestowing you with eyes that see. Whenever you smell an immaculate scent, praise Allah *the Almighty* for bestowing you with a nose that smells. This is how the blessings necessitate that gratitude is shown to the Giver of Blessings.

In order to know Allah's Blessings upon you, look at those who have been denied them. Reflect on your state and their state, the blessings of life and pleasure that you have and what they have been denied.

Then Allah *the Almighty* moves us on to something else in His Statement:

أَلَمْ يَرَوْاْ إِلَى ٱلطَّيْرِ مُسَخَّرَٰتٍ فِي جَوِّ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَا
يُمْسِكُهُنَّ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ (٧٩)

Do they not see the birds made to fly through the air in the sky? Nothing holds them up except God. There truly are signs in this for those who believe [79] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 79)

Here Allah *the Almighty* moves us towards another indication of the universe. After telling us about man and what is around him, for before Allah *the Almighty* created him in this existence, He prepared the essentials of his life for him, including the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the sky, the water and the air; all these things existed before man so that they could pave the way for his existence in this universe.

After guaranteeing to maintain our lives by way of sustenance, Allah *the Almighty* wants us to maintain the species by way of marriage and proliferation. He wants us to enrich our beliefs by looking at Allah's dominion and the wonders that it contains so that we can conclude that Allah *the Almighty* has engineered His Universe in an exceptional and interlocking way and He has ordered it masterfully without there being any collision. Allah says: 'The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day: each floats in [its own] orbit.' (*Ya Sin:* 40)

Look at Allah's vast universe; how many stars and celestial bodies it contains and how it is full of movement, stillness, and orbiting. Despite all of this, there are no collisions. There is never any harm resulting from it. The entire universe moves along in a precise order and wondrous harmony. In order to make this reality clear, look at what man has made; how many collisions and accidents happen that cause thousands of deaths.

This is an example that everyone witnesses: the birds in the sky; what is it that prevents them from falling down to earth? It is as if Allah *the Almighty* must turn us towards a greater issue: ‘Allah keeps the heavens and earth from vanishing; if they did vanish, no one else could stop them. Allah is most forbearing, most forgiving.’ (*Fatir:* 41)

We must affirm and believe in this issue as we cannot encompass with our eyes the mass of the earth, or the mass of the sun and the stars. We are not capable of knowing everything that is in the universe. Therefore, we must affirm and believe in our Lord’s statement and not argue about it.

Here is an example that you see every day: ‘Do they not see the birds made to fly through the air in the sky? Nothing holds them up except Allah. There truly are signs in this for those who believe.’ (*an-Nahl:* 79)

Beware of saying that it is the flapping of the wings, as we can see birds holding their wings firmly in the air. Despite that, they do not fall to the ground. There is, therefore, something else preventing them from falling and this is why He says in another verse, ‘Do they not see the birds made to fly through the air in the sky? Nothing holds them up except Allah...’ (*al-Mulk:* 19) This means that they are in a state of spreading their wings, and in a state of drawing them in, and they remain suspended and do not fall down. Likewise, we find birds that have long wings but they do not fly, such as the goose and other birds. Therefore, the matter has nothing to do with wings. Rather, it is one of Allah’s signs that holds this bird in mid-air. You see it flying freely without any restriction. Nothing attracts it towards the earth and nothing attracts it towards the sky. Rather, it is free to ascend when it wants to ascend and descend when it wants to descend.

This is a tangible sign that we can use as proof of Allah’s Omnipotent Power of which only Allah *the Almighty* can inform us. Whenever He says, ‘Allah keeps the heavens and earth from vanishing; if they did vanish, no one else could stop them. Allah is most forbearing, most forgiving’ (*Fatir:* 41), we believe and we affirm. In addition, His statement: ‘… through the air in the sky?’ (*an-Nahl:* 79) refers to the air that surrounds the earth. The one who reflects on the universe finds that air is the principle factor behind things being established in the universe such as mountains, buildings, and so forth. What is it that prevents them from falling?

Beware of thinking that it is cement, iron and the engineering of the building. No. Rather, it is the air that surrounds them from all sides. The proof is that if you remove the air from one side, it will collapse immediately towards that side because the air has pressure. If you remove the air on one side, you decrease the pressure and thus it collapses. The air, therefore, is what governs this matter. Because of the air, the birds are able to balance themselves in the sky, fly as they wish and move as they wish.

Then, He *the Almighty* says: ‘there truly are signs in this for those who believe.’ (*an-Nahl:* 79), that is, the bird that flies in the sky has signs, i.e. wonders, wonders in how it has been made and how it has been created, and you must think about them and contemplate them.

In order to know about this sign in birds, we can look at what happened to the first man who tried to fly. He was an Arab called ‘Abbas ibn Firnas(1), the first person to attempt to fly in Andalusia. He made wings for himself and threw himself off from a high place; so what happened to the first human aviator? He flew a short distance. Then he fell on his posterior and it broke because he forgot that the issue is not just flying. There is also descending, which he forgot to prepare for, and it escaped him that it is the tail that maintains balance whilst descending.

The same goes for those who make airplanes. How much does it cost? How many instruments and devices do they need for the sake of measurement and control? After that it needs a pilot to control it or a dispatcher to direct it. When they wanted to make an airplane, they made it in the shape of a bird in the sky, with two wings, a nose and a tail, but despite that, what happens if the engine fails or there is a lack of balance?

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(1) An Andalusian inventor from the people of Cordova; He lived during caliph ‘Abd Ar-Rahman, the Second, in the ninth century CE. He was a philosopher and a poet, and he had knowledge of astronomy. He was the first person to make a device for measuring time and in his house he made models of the sky, the stars, and other things, as well as lighting and thunder. He died in 274 AH. (*Al-‘A'lam; Al-Zirikli)* (3/264).

Therefore, the bird in the sky is a sign that deserves to be looked at and contemplated so that we can know the power of the Creator. He *the Almighty* says: ‘for those who believe.’ (*an-Nahl:* 79) They believe in the existence of He who exists by necessity, and they believe in His Wisdom and the precision of His making. There is nothing like it in the human manufacturing, regardless of the degree of precision and mastery.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنۢ بُيُوتِكُمۡ سَكَنٗا وَجَعَلَ لَكُم مِّن جُلُودِ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ
بُيُوتٗا تَسۡتَخِفُّونَهَا يَوۡمَ ظَعۡنِكُمۡ وَيَوۡمَ إِقَامَتِكُمۡ وَمِنۡ أَصۡوَافِهَا
وَأَوۡبَارِهَا وَأَشۡعَارِهَآ أَثَٰثٗا وَمَتَٰعًا إِلَىٰ حِينٖ ﴿٨٠﴾

It is God who has given you a place of rest in your homes
and from the skins of animals made you homes that you find
light [to handle] when you travel and when you set up camp;
furnishings and comfort for a while from their wool, fur,
and hair [80] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 80)

His statement: ‘It is Allah who has given you a place of rest in your homes’ The word *sakan* “…rest…” is taken from *sukun* which is the opposite of movement. Thus, we call the house a *sakan* because man seeks refuge therein and he takes a rest from life’s activities outside the house. Therefore, outside there is movement and inside the house there is rest.

A *sakan* can be material, like the house, which is an outward *sakan*, or it can be spiritual, as He *the Almighty* says regarding spouses: ‘...He creates for you mates out of your own kind, so that you might incline (*taskanu*) towards them.’ (*ar-Rum:* 21) The wife is a spiritual *sakan* for her husband, and this is what they call the *sakan* of the heart. If someone were to say that: ‘…your houses…’ (*an-Nahl:* 80), it means that we are the ones who build them and erect them, so how can Allah *the Almighty* make them for us?

We would say: how did you make them? What did you use to build them? Did you make them from a forest or wood, or did you build them from clay or brick? All of these materials are from the material of the earth that Allah *the Almighty* has given you. The same goes for the intellect that thinks and designs and the strength that builds and constructs. All of it is from Allah *the Almighty*.

Therefore '...has given you...' can be done either directly or indirectly, as He created all these materials for us. This is direct creation. Then He helped us and made us strong enough to build, and this is indirect creating.

However, in which places are houses built? Houses are only built in places of settlement which provide the essentials of life. Thus, before we set up a city for people to live in, we must first of all make sure that it has the essentials of settlement, such as food, drink, facilities, services, water, sanitation, and so forth. If these essentials are available, then there is no objection to building here, and if you do not find facilities in the desert or countryside, then this place is not suitable for houses or permanent structures. Rather, they are suited to: '...and from the skins of animals made you homes that you find light (to handle) when you travel and when you set up camp…' (*an-Nahl:* 80).

We see the people of the countryside using animal skins to make houses, such as tents and pavilions, where we see them moving frequently, seeking places of pasture and grass and travelling in order to find places for grazing and water. This is how their life is constantly in transit from one place to another, so it suits them to have a house made out of animal skins or wool or fur; something that is easy to carry. They set it up wherever they encamp, and they take it with them wherever they go. *Adh-Dha'n* (travel) means to be in transit from one place to another.

Therefore, the word *sakan* indicates settlement as well as all the essentials of life being available. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says to Adam *peace be upon him*: 'dwell you and your wife in this garden' (*al-Baqara:* 35), i.e. the place in which you find rest and in which you have blessings. Thus, it was designated for him as a place of residence and *sakan*. This place of residence could be general or it could be specific. For example, if I said: 'I *askun* (live in) Alexandria.' This is a general *sakan*. If you intended an actual *sakan* that is specific to you, you would say: 'I live on such-and-such street, in building number such-and-such, in apartment number such-and-such'. Maybe you have a private room in this apartment.

Therefore, this *sakan* is specific to your actual *sakan* in which you find tranquillity, relaxation, and privacy. A *sakan* needs essential stability that no one else can share with you. This is why we see some residents in buildings complaining about the inconvenience and the noise. They wish to live in separate houses that guarantee sufficient rest for them and in which no one can bother them.

Therefore, when we look at *sakan* and *sukun*, we need a confined space that guarantees absolute privacy for us, and it could even just be a room. However, it means the actual *sakan* that is specific to you. Privacy could even mean that we make a specific bed for each child within the same chamber.

Whenever we look at activity in life, we find that man, on the contrary, requires space because activity requires space within a place. Whoever has a farm requires a country estate, and whoever has a country estate wishes for a second and a third and so forth because the activities of life need vast and ample space.

This is of the first type, which is the material and outward *sakan*, and it is of the greatest of Allah's Blessings towards His slaves that they have a *sakan* that they can find shelter in and in which they can have a rest from the fatigue and activity of life.

When Allah *the Almighty* wanted to punish the children of Israel, this is why He made their *sakan* to be the entire earth and He denied them the blessing of having an actual, private *sakan*. He said: 'and after that We said to the Children of Israel: dwell now securely on earth...' (*al-Isra':* 104). The earth is a general place in which all of mankind lives, and they do not have one country that gathers them together. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* dispersed them throughout the earth and did not give them a specific homeland, as He said in another verse: 'And We dispersed them as (separate) communities all over the earth...' (*al-A'raf:* 168). Even in the countries in which they live, we see them isolated from other people in places that are specifically theirs and they do not assimilate with others. This is how they have inhabited the earth and no country has been designated for them.

As for the second type of *sakan*, which is the spiritual *sakan* or the *sakan* of the heart, it is the *sakan* of the husband that he gets from his righteous wife who mitigates his fatigue and his concerns in life. She smiles in his face when he is happy, she assuages his anger when he is angered, and she embraces him with the love, compassion, and sincerity that she has. This is the spiritual *sakan*, which is the *sakan* of the heart.

As for His *the Almighty* statement: 'Furnishings and comfort for a while from their wool, fur, and hair' (*an-Nahl:* 80), the word *aswaf* (rough wool) is that of sheep; *awbar* (soft, furry wool) is that of camels and *ash'ar* (plain hair) is that of goats. What is the difference between these three in terms of use? People use both rough wool and soft, furry wool because its hair is very fine and can be combed, woven and used to make mattresses, carpets, quilts, clothes and other things that man needs. As for the plain hair of goats, its hair is thick and cannot be combed or woven, so it cannot be used in these textiles. He says: 'furnishings and comfort for a while…' (*an-Nahl:* 80). *Al-Athath* (furnishings) is what is found in the house and is required for life's activities, such as carpets, mattresses, clothes and curtains.

Al-Mata' (comfort) is used to refer to things which you enjoy and benefit from, and the difference between them and furnishings is that furnishings do not change very much. As for goods, they change according to one's needs. So, for example, you need to change your old television so that you can get a new one, a colour television, for example, but you rarely change your refrigerator, or washing machine, for example.

This is because man may become deluded when he has all that he needs in life, and these blessings may distract him from what is required by the Giver of Blessings. Thus, he is preoccupied by the blessings that he has been given from the Giver of Blessings who has blessed him with them. This verse comes as a warning.

Beware of being deluded by goods and furnishings because goods are only temporary. They do not last. No matter how fortunate you are with goods in the life of this world, it will all inevitably come to one of two things: either you will leave them when you die or they will leave you when you become impoverished and needy. Therefore, they are going, so you must always remember His Statement, '…for a while...' (*an-Nahl:* 80) The comfortable blessings of this worldly life are temporary, but the comfortable blessings that the Giver of Blessings bestows are eternal.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّمَّا خَلَقَ ظِلَٰلٗا وَجَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡجِبَالِ
أَكۡنَٰنٗا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمۡ سَرَٰبِيلَ تَقِيكُمُ ٱلۡحَرَّ وَسَرَٰبِيلَ تَقِيكُم بَأۡسَكُمۡۚ
كَذَٰلِكَ يُتِمُّ نِعۡمَتَهُۥ عَلَيۡكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُسۡلِمُونَ ٨١

It is God who has given you shade from what He has
created, and places of shelter in the mountains; garments to
protect you from the heat, and garments to protect you in
your wars. In this way He perfects His blessings on you,
so that you may devote yourselves to Him [81]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 81)

After Allah *the Almighty* talked about the people who have houses that are suited to settlement, and the essentials of life are at hand, He then talked about the people who are constantly travelling and in transit and what suits them, such as lightweight houses that can be carried while travelling. Then, here, He talked about those people who do not own anything, not even animal skins. What do these people do? Allah *the Almighty* has made shade for them so that they can shade themselves from the glare of the sun. He has made caves and tunnels for them in mountains that they can seek shelter in and live in. This is how the verses have encompassed all the states in which human beings can possibly be. Allah *the Almighty* has distributed His blessings amongst mankind such that each one of them has blessings from Allah *the Almighty* that suit him or her.

As for the people who do not have a house to shelter them, and they do not have any cattle from which they can take animal skins and make a house, Allah *the Almighty* has made trees for them that give them shade from the sun's heat and He has made caves for them in mountains in which they can seek refuge and shelter.

We notice here that the verse has mentioned the shade that protects us from the sun's heat and it has not mentioned the cold, for example. This is because the Noble Quran was sent down in the Arabian Peninsula, which is a hot country, so its need of shade is greater than its need of warmth.

Regarding His statement: ‘shade…’ (*an-Nahl:* 80), z*hilal,* i.e. shade, is the plural of z*hill*, and it offers protection from the sun and from its rays, and the *dhill* can be described as being *zhill zhalila*, i.e. shade that is also shaded. This is what we see in the making of tents, for example, when they make a roof for it from one layer which receives the sun’s heat. If you block the sun’s rays, you cannot block the sun’s heat, and at this point they resort to making a roof comprised of two layers with some distance between them in order to mitigate the sun’s heat. Here we say that the shade itself is shaded, and the same goes for the shade of trees when the leaves shade one another. Under the shade of trees you feel cool, pleasant air. You are protected from the sun’s light and you can feel a breeze, so you do not feel constricted. This is why one poet described a garden by saying:

In the heat of the sun-baked ground the valley protected us

Copious, abundant rain watered it

It blocked the sun wherever we turned

For it obstructs the sun and allows for a breeze

This is how the trees protect us from harm and give us benefits.

Regarding His statement: ‘...places of shelter…’ (*an-Nahl:* 81) the word *aknan* ‘…places of shelter…’ is the plural of *kin* which is a cave or hollow that can be a place of residence and privacy for whoever seeks refuge and shelter in it. The word *kin* is from veiling because it veils people. We say *anknun!* to a child, for example, and it means: ‘Be still and cover yourself.’

He *the Almighty* says: ‘…garments to protect you from the heat, and garments to protect you in your wars…’ (*an-Nahl:* 81). *As-sarabil* ‘...garments...’is that which is worn, such as clothes or armour, ‘...protect you from heat...’ (*an-Nahl:* 81), i.e. they give you shelter from the heat; so He has said heat here as well. This is why we have found some scholars trying to find a way out of this verse by saying that the meaning is protection from the heat and protection from the cold. The verse is sufficient in only mentioning heat and not cold because if one thing is mentioned, its opposite is also implied. There is no need to mention both, as one of them implies the other.

Such an argument is commendable on their behalf, and it is accepted regarding this verse, but if we were to think about the other verses that talk about this subject, we would find that one of them is talking about heat which is this verse. Another one talks about cold which is His statement: ‘And livestock, He created them too. You derive warmth from them...’ (*an-Nahl:* 5), i.e. from the skins of cattle and their wool we take that which protects us from the cold and warms us up. This is how the verses complement each other and the meaning is harmonious.

An examination of how man warms himself will find that wearing clothes does not give man heat that warms him up. Rather, it only maintains that heat that is already in the body because man’s heat is essential and from within him and with this the Creator maintains man. The doctors say that a healthy body temperature is (37) degrees and it does not differ whether someone lives at the equator or lives with the Inuit in the Arctic. This is the general temperature of the body.

At the same time, the various organs of the body may have different temperatures, each according to what suits it. The liver, for example, has a temperature of (40) degrees and its function is disrupted if its temperature decreases. At the same time, the temperature of the eyelid is 9 degrees. If it were to be increased by 1 degree, the eyeball would dissolve and the person would not be able to see. Thus, He *the Almighty* maintains the temperature of these organs in the body and not a single one of them overcomes the other.

When I travelled to America and went to one of the extremely cold regions, this is why the first advice they gave me was not to cover my ears with my hands. Why? They said: ‘Because the hands’ temperature is lower than the ears’ temperature. Placing a cold hand over the ear could cause a lot of harm.’

Therefore, everything that we use to protect ourselves from the cold of winter, such as clothes and covers, does not provide us with heat. Rather, they preserve our natural heat and prevent it from seeping out. This is how heating works. You can place your hand on your bed before you sleep and you find that it is cold, but in the morning you find that it is warm. Thus, the bed acquires heat from your body heat, and not the other way around.

As for His statement: '…and garments to protect you in your wars...' (*an-Nahl:* 80), the Arabic word *Al-ba'̓s* means war, and the clothes that protect you from violence are the armour that soldiers wear in war to protect themselves from blows.

However, this verse, within the context of discussing some of Allah's blessings given to us, such as settlement and rest (*sakan*), and the things He has made for us, such as houses and other means of shelter, provide a life of calm, peace, and blessing. What is the reason, then, for mentioning war here? It is because life has a maxim of security for all. If this maxim of security is disrupted, then the people must stand against whoever it is that is disrupting the society's security, and to be prepared for this at all times. In times of peace we must be prepared for war, and this is why it talks about war and being prepared for it, as well as talking about tranquillity, settlement and blessings.

When Allah *the Almighty* sends down signs with all the evidence of the truth that bring the way of the heavens to us, He says: 'We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance, so that people could uphold justice...' (*al-Hadid:* 25). This is the way that is based on proof and conviction, and if this way is not suited to some people and they rebel against it, then force and compulsion are used. He says: 'We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind (*al-Hadid:* 25) He says: '... In this way, He perfects His blessings on you...' (*an-Nahl:* 80).

It is from the fullness of Allah's blessings that He protects the blessings from those who try to deprive us of them. We lie in wait for them and we strike their hands because if we left alone those who sow corruption in our society, they would deprive us of these blessings, and we would remain under threat and never experience the joys and pleasures of life. Therefore, there can be no blessing unless the general security of the society is maintained.

He says: '…so that you may devote yourselves to Him…' (*an-Nahl:* 80). To surrender yourselves means that you give the reins of surrender to Allah *the Almighty to* whom you have submitted. You would only give your reins to someone you trust, and man may give his reins to someone like him who is good at something that he himself is not good at. Whenever you are in need, you hand over your reins to someone else like you. He is equal to you in the fact that he has only a little information, and in that he has a little bit of wisdom, but despite that, you submit your affair to him simply because he is good at something that you are not. Thus, will you not hand over your reins and submit your affair to your Lord and Creator, the One Who created all these blessings for your sake? Therefore, these blessings are mentioned and then the command to submit and surrender to Him so that we submit out of certainty and conviction. Allah *the Almighty* derives no benefit from our obedience, and He is not harmed by our disobedience. If we obey Him, it does not add anything to His kingdom, and if we disobey Him, it does not take anything away from His kingdom.

Therefore, submitting the reins and the affair to Allah *the Almighty* is in our interest. Thus, when man submits his reins to someone else, that person may have an interest that distorts his opinion of the matter. When Our Lord *Glorified is He* instructs us with a ruling, He has no interest, so there is no distortion. It is only for our benefit.

After enumerating the blessings that are within oneself, one's surroundings, one's place of rest and one's impressions, He said: 'After this, beware of submitting your reins to other than Me. If I cause something to happen to you that takes you out of the benefit of security, then I do not cause something to happen to you that takes you out of the same security unless it is for a purpose that is safer.' This is why we say there is no worship like submission because submission to a ruling is submission to the Wise, submission to One Who does not benefit. As long as you have submitted your reins to your Lord, the wisdom behind these events happening to you becomes clear to you so that you can know your pleasure regarding His ruling according to His wisdom. Thus, you say, I am pleased with your ruling, O Lord! This is why we say in our supplications: 'I praise you for everything You have decreed and everything you have predestined, praising with pleasure for Your ruling and with certainty of Your wisdom,' i.e. You have wisdom, O Lord, in making these events happen to me, even though I do not see it.

The one who knows the rank of submission to Allah *the Almighty* in what He makes happen to him and the tests that befall him is never displeased or angry because by doing so he would prolong the duration of the decree since Allah *the Almighty* does not lift the decree from His slave until he is pleased with it, as Allah *the Almighty* does not force him. If you want the decree to be lifted from you, then be pleased with it, first of all. If the decree is not lifted from you, then know that the place of pleasure within you has not been accepted. Maybe you are showing pleasure on your tongue, but your heart is still angry and displeased.

The one who submits his reins to Allah *the Almighty* and returns every event that happens to him or test that befalls him to Allah *the Almighty* and to the wisdom of the One Who causes it to happen, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to him "You have understood what I mean" and the test is lifted from him.

Regarding the station of submitting to Allah *the Almighty* we always remember the story of our master Abraham *peace be upon him* when he was commanded to slaughter his son Ishmael *peace be upon him*. Is there any test greater than that a man having to slaughter his son who was given to him in old age, and to slaughter him with his own hands? Indeed it is a test at different levels and from different sides, and if only the command had come via clear revelation. However, it came while he was sleeping, and it could have been interpreted, but the visions of prophets are true. We see Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* relating the matter to his son for fear that his heart would turn away from his father when he takes him in order to slaughter him, and also so that his son can share in the pleasure for Allah's predestination and not be denied the reward of this test. He said to him: '...I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you…' (*as-Saffat:* 102). The purpose here was not to alarm or scare him, rather he says to explain to him this matter of worship that our Creator has commanded us to do so that he can also have insight and so that his heart does not turn away from his father. This is why the son was wise in his response. He said: 'O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast.' (*as-Saffat:* 102) As long as the command is from Allah *the Almighty* then apply it, and this is how Isma'il (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* submitted just as Abraham *peace be upon him* had submitted. He said: 'When they had both submitted to Allah, and he had laid his son down on the side of his face...' (*as-Saffat:* 103).

‘..When they had both submitted…’ means the father and son, and they were pleased with Allah’s decree. The respite came and the decree was lifted. Both of them understood the command from Allah *the Almighty* and it was not just the decree that was lifted from them. Rather, ‘We ransomed Him with a tremendous sacrifice, but not only this. We also granted him another son: ‘...And (in time) We gave him the glad tiding of Isaac…’ (*as-Saffat:* 112).

Therefore, maybe you will submit your reins to Allah *the Almighty* and know that He created the entire universe for you before He brought you into existence therein and provided you with all the necessities of life in order to guarantee that your life continues and that your species survives, and He gave you all these pleasures to enjoy.

Thus, the One Who has blessed you with all of this without having any need of you is worthy of you submitting the reins of your affair to Him and submitting to Him.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَإِن تَوَلَّوْاْ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ ٱلْبَلَٰغُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿٨٢﴾

But if they turn away [Prophet], your only
duty is to deliver the message clearly [82]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 82)

It means, do not be sad, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* if your people turn away from you, as you are only commanded to clearly deliver the message. Allah *the Almighty* addresses him in another (verse): ‘(Prophet), are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

The Arabic word *bakhi'* means to destroy yourself, He said: ‘If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4) However, the religion is not based on controlling the outward, and the difference between controlling the outward and controlling the heart is that it is possible for you to take a gun and force me to do what you want, but you can never force my heart onto something that it does not believe in. Allah *the Almighty* wants our hearts, not our outward forms. If He had wanted our outward forms, He would have forced them and subjugated them, and not a single person would deviate from His will.

When Allah *Glorified is He* sent Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* as a messenger and a king, no one was able to oppose his power due to the authority that he had as a messenger from Allah. However, his call was based on the clear delivery of the message to the people without exerting any compulsion on them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: ‘A clear delivery of the message (is entrusted to you),’ (*an-Nahl:* 82). Thus, the messengers are only obligated to deliver the complete and perfect message that details the necessary activities of life. The divine commandments of Allah *Glorified is He* are comprehensive guides for our lives. They start with the statement, ‘There is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He*’ and even include the commands to remove harm from the road of others. Nothing of importance in our societies has been left out of these commandments. Allah’s rules perfectly encompass all of mankind’s interests. If you do not embrace it as a religion, you should embrace it as a way of life.

The nations that show animosity towards Islam face problems in their daily activities that have no solutions within their own legal statutes. Thus, they are forced to resort to other solutions that agree in many terms with the solutions present in the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

يَعۡرِفُونَ نِعۡمَتَ ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنكِرُونَهَا وَأَكۡثَرُهُمُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

They know God’s blessings, but refuse to
recognize them: most of them are ungrateful [83]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 83)

The Quran has narrated the following description about them in other verses: ‘Now if you ask those (who worship any being other than Allah) as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, ‘Allah.’ How perverted, then, are their minds (not to submit to Him)!’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) Allah *Glorified is He* also says about them: ‘And they rejected the verses in their wickedness and self-exaltation, although their minds were convinced of their truth.’ (*an-Naml:* 14) This is because they are fully aware that Allah *Glorified is He* had created them and created the heavens and the earth. If they are fully aware of Allah’s blessing upon them, why do they still refuse to acknowledge these blessings? It is because having faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and acknowledging His blessings has to be followed by the performance of specific tasks. Certainly, it would have been easy for them to utter the testimony of faith, ‘There is no deity but Allah,’ but they knew the requirements of that testimony. If you believe that there is no deity but Allah *Glorified is He* then no one should issue your legislations but Him. No one should command your life but Allah, and only Allah can forbid certain forms of sustenance and declare other forms as lawful.

Therefore, the requirements of the testimony of faith were to restrict the whims of the polytheists and diminish their leadership status. These words would have prevented them from acting oppressively and tyrannically, as this new order transformed the former masters and slaves into equal men. Therefore, the truth that this religion presented would have restricted their activity. Thus, despite them being fully aware of Allah’s presence, they did not believe in His Message, as they knew the requirements of such a religion.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: ‘Since most of them are disbelievers in the truth,’ (*an-Nahl:* 83). The words of the verse say, ‘…most of them are disbelievers,’ but we know that all of them were disbelievers. The reason behind this wording was that the Quranic style always maintained the possibility and provision that a minority of the disbelievers were contemplating Islam. Therefore, we must keep this minority in mind and leave the door open for them to potentially embrace the truth. If the Quran had said that all of them were disbelievers, it would have excluded these few people who were thinking about becoming Muslims. Likewise, this phrasing takes into consideration the children of these disbelievers who have not yet reached the age of legal responsibility.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا ثُمَّ لَا يُؤْذَنُ
لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَلَا هُمْ يُسْتَعْتَبُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

The day will come when We raise up a witness from every community, when the disbelievers will not be allowed to make excuses or amends [84]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 84)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* drew our attention that this life is not a mere matter of religious opinion, where believers and disbelievers just have different choices. The reality is that we will all experience a resurrection and a reckoning. We will return to Allah *Glorified is He* and be rewarded or punished after we stand before Him. If you do not remember Allah's past blessings, then bear in mind your future meeting with Him. The witness (*shaheed*) is the nation's prophet, who will testify that he conveyed Allah's message to his people.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And thus have We willed you to be a community of the optimal way, so that (with your lives) you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you,' (*al-Baqara:* 143). It could be that Allah *Glorified is He* assigned the nation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as witnesses upon the rest of the people because they conveyed Allah's message to them. Thus, all the believers in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are required to convey what Prophet Muhammad has conveyed to them so that they can be worthy witnesses on that Day of Judgment.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Whereupon the disbelievers will not be allowed to plead (ignorance),' (*an-Nahl:* 84). When the witnesses testify against them, the disbelievers will not be allowed to offer any excuse, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Nor (will they) be allowed to offer excuses,' (*al-Mursalat:* 36).

Some of the disbelievers will say: '...O my Lord! Let me return (to life), so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed (in my time)!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 99-100) This plea will not be answered because if they were to be returned to the life of this world, they would only repeat their previous sins. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if they were brought back (to life), they would return to the very thing which was forbidden to them,’ (*al-An‘am:* 28).

In Allah’s words: ‘And neither will they be blamed (*la yustaʿtabun*) (to give an excuse),’ (*an-Nahl:* 84). The Arabic words *la yustaʿtabun* are used to indicate that these disbelievers will not even be blamed for their sins, as this may give them the luxury of making excuses for their actions. This Arabic phrase comes from the Arabic word *ʿitab* (rebuke). The *‘itab* is the anger and resentment that you may feel towards someone who has committed an unexpected offence. If this type of anger is directed towards a dear person, you will probably direct blame at them and make it clear why you are angry at their actions. They may have an excuse or explain that their actions were unintentional. If their explanation satisfies you and your anger fades away, it is said that they ‘have answered and removed the blame’ (*‘atabak*). At that, you will have essentially forgiven that person. Therefore, people only rebuke others who are dear to them, with whom they are eager to continue a relationship and from whom they did not expect any intentional offense.

In the case of this verse, disbelievers will not be given that opportunity on the Day of Judgment, to excuse themselves from the disbelief that necessitated rebuke. There is no more time for blame to be directed to them because the Hereafter is the abode of reckoning and not the abode of action and repentance. The time of legal responsibility has come to an end. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا رَءَا ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ ٱلْعَذَابَ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

When the evildoers face punishment it will not be
lightened for them nor will they be given any respite [85]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 85)

In the first part of the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when the transgressing evildoers behold the suffering (that awaits them, they will realize that),’ (*an-Nahl:* 85). It is as if the punishment will be displayed in front of their eyes before they have direct contact with it. This is how Allah will inflict various kinds of punishment upon them because the soul can feel pain on witnessing the coming punishment before the body experiences the tangible pains of the senses. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...it will not be lightened for them (by virtue of their pleading),' (*an-Nahl:* 85) and says '…and neither will they be granted respite,' (*an-Nahl:* 85). They will not be granted any deferral or delay. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا رَءَا ٱلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا۟ شُرَكَآءَهُمْ قَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَا هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ شُرَكَآؤُنَا ٱلَّذِينَ
كُنَّا نَدْعُوا۟ مِن دُونِكَ ۖ فَأَلْقَوْا۟ إِلَيْهِمُ ٱلْقَوْلَ إِنَّكُمْ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾

When the idolaters see the partners they joined with God they will say, 'Our Lord, these are the partners we used to invoke beside You,' but the partners will retort, 'You are liars' [86] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 86)

This is when Allah *Glorified is He* will gather all the polytheists and those false gods they attributed as partners with Allah, such as devils, human beings, jinn, or idols. On the Day of Resurrection, these polytheists will face the false deities they had worshipped and will be confronted by them. When the polytheists see that these partners had led them astray and made disobedience, idolatry and disbelief seem acceptable to them, they will say, "They are the reason behind our disbelief and going astray." This is also the way Allah *Glorified is He* had described these false deities in another verse: '(On that Day) it will come to pass that those who had been (falsely) followed (or worshipped) shall disown their followers, and the latter shall see the suffering (that awaits them), with all their hopes cut to pieces!' (*al-Baqara:* 166)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those (of them) who had been weak (on earth) will say unto those who had taken pride in their arrogance, "Had it not been for you, we would certainly have been believers!"' (*Saba':* 31) Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse we are studying: 'Thereupon (those beings) will fling at them the retort,' (*an-Nahl:* 86). This means that they will respond to them in the same coarse manner, while answering them with undisputable proof.

Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding what Satan (Iblees) will tell the disbelievers on that Day of Judgment: 'Yet I had no power at all over you, only that I called upon you and you responded to me. Hence, do not blame me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine,' (*Ibrahim:* 22). Therefore, they will respond to them with the statement, "We had no power over you. We incited you and you responded to us. We had no strength with which to force you to do your sins, nor any proof to convince you of disbelief." This is why they accuse them of lying, regarding their claims of ignorance: 'Behold, you have indeed been lying (to yourselves)!' (*an-Nahl:* 86)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَلْقَوْا۟ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ يَوْمَئِذٍ ٱلسَّلَمَ ۖ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

And on that Day they will offer total submission
to God: their false deities will desert them [87]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 87)

To offer their surrender (*as-salam*) means to submit fully to His Power, as the time to make a choice has ended and the period to make a decision has passed. Either you fulfil your actions in this world, or you will not be able to fulfil your duties into eternity. Allah *Glorified is He* will ask His creation: 'With whom does sovereignty rest on this Day (of Judgment)?' Indeed, the command and sovereignty will all belong to Allah *Glorified is He* and as long as they have not submitted voluntarily and out of choice, then let them submit reluctantly and by force.

A distinguishing factor of faith will become clear at this point. Embracing the true faith in this world made us surrender to Allah *Glorified is He* voluntarily. On the other hand, disbelievers will be made to submit by force on the Day of Judgment, when the truth is finally unveiled. Allah *Glorified is He* will confront His creation on a day when they will have no choice.

Allah says: 'And all their false illusions (that they had worshipped) will have forsaken them (*dalla 'anhum*).' (*an-Nahl:* 87)

In this verse, the word *dalla* has numerous meanings. One of these meanings is that their intercessors (or false idols) will be hidden from them. They will actively seek to find them for support, but they will not find them. This meaning of the word *dalla* can be found in Allah's statement: '(The polytheists say,) "What! After we have been (dead and) lost in the earth (*dalalna fel ard*), shall we indeed be (restored to life) in a new act of creation?'" (*as-Sajda:* 10) Here, the words *dalalna fel ard* mean "hidden in the earth." According to the polytheists' false arguments, they assumed that the earth will eat up their atoms and conceal them from any resurrection. Thus, *dala* here means "hidden." Another application of the word *dalal*, in the Arabic language, is when we use the word *daalla*, to mean a beast of burden that is lost from its owner.

The meanings of *dalal* also include "or getting", as in Allah's words: 'So that if one of them should forget (*tadil*), the other could remind her.' (*al-Baqara:* 282) Its meanings also include "the confusion of a person," as in Allah's words to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And (Allah) found you lost on your way (confused) (*dalan*) and guided you,' (*ad-Duha:* 7). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was never misguided and separated from Allah's way. Then, what does this verse mean? This verse indicates that the Prophet was confused regarding what the chiefs of the people (who were supposed to have superior intellect) believed in. The actions they were committing were incompatible with a sound intellect and an illuminated natural disposition.

Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* says in our current verse: 'And all their false illusions (that they had worshipped) will have forsaken them,' this means that their false deities and intercessors, which they claimed and lied about in this world, will be hidden from them. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَصَدُّواْ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ زِدۡنَٰهُمۡ
عَذَابٗا فَوۡقَ ٱلۡعَذَابِ بِمَا كَانُواْ يُفۡسِدُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

Because of the corruption they spread, We shall
add torment upon torment for those who
disbelieved and barred others from the path
of God [88] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 88)

There is a great difference between disbelief and turning others from the path of Allah *Glorified is He*. Disbelief is a grave sin that is connected to an individual person. It does not affect anyone else. So, refuse to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* if you wish. We seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from your beliefs, but you are free in this world!

On the other hand, calling others to disbelief and turning them away from the path of Allah *Glorified is He* are transitive sins that affect other people and are thus twofold. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'They will certainly have to bear their own burdens, and other burdens besides their own' (*al-'Ankabut:* 13).

If someone asks, "How can that be when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden' (*al-An'am:* 164), we say that there is no contradiction between the two verses. Each individual still carries his own burdens. Those who turn others from the path of Allah *Glorified is He* will carry their followers' burdens as well as their own. As for the followers, they will only have the burdens of their own disbelief.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: 'We will heap suffering upon suffering.' (*an-Nahl:* 88) The first punishment is the punishment of disbelief. The second punishment is for the sins of turning others from Allah's path.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "Whoever lays the tradition of a praiseworthy act will have the reward for it and the reward of whomever else does it until the Day of Resurrection. Whoever lays the tradition of a blameworthy act will bear the burden of it and the burden of whomever does it until the Day of Resurrection."(1)

So, beware of the eyes and ears of society falling on you, whilst you are in a state of contravening Allah's way because this contravention will have an influence on others, and it will be a cause for sins in which you will have a share. If this happens, you will be bearing your own evil deeds and the evil deeds of others following you.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'In return for all the corruption that they wrought.' (*an-Nahl:* 88) To make corruption (*ifsad*) is the intention and action of ruining what is beneficial to society. If you had left it without interference, it might have been guided to Allah's way. Therefore, you may have corrupted that which was right and prevented that which is rectifiable from being corrected, Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (4/361.362), Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (207) and at-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2675) from the narration of Jareer ibn 'Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi said, 'It is a good, authentic (hasan sahih) Hadith.'*

وَيَوۡمَ نَبۡعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٖ شَهِيدًا عَلَيۡهِم مِّنۡ أَنفُسِهِمۡۖ وَجِئۡنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِۚ
وَنَزَّلۡنَا عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ تِبۡيَٰنٗا لِّكُلِّ شَيۡءٖ وَهُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٗ وَبُشۡرَىٰ لِلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

The day will come when We raise up in each community a witness against them, and We shall bring you [Prophet] as a witness against these people, for We have sent the Scripture down to you explaining everything, and as guidance and mercy and good news to those who devote themselves to God [89]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 89)

Allah's statement: 'A witness against them from among themselves' (*an-Nahl:* 89) could mean that the witness will be from their own kind and tongue. Therefore, the people who convey Allah's way to mankind, such as the preachers and Imams, will testify before Allah *Glorified is He* against the people who were negligent and sinful.

Another meaning of the words: '...from among themselves' (*an-Nahl:* 89) could also be that their own body parts and organs will testify against their sinful actions. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: 'On the Day when their own tongues, hands, and feet will bear witness against them by (recalling) all that they did!' (*an-Nur:* 24) Another verse says: 'And they will ask their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?"' (*Fussilat:* 21) If the witness is a part of the person's own body, it will provide strong evidence and indisputable proof. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And you (O Muhammad) We will bring forth to bear witness regarding these people (whom your message has reached).' (*an-Nahl:* 79) Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be a witness over his own nation and as a witness over all the witnesses.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have bestowed upon you this (Divine) Book to make everything clear' (*an-Nahl:* 89). This Divine Book is the Noble Quran that clarifies everything that mankind needs in their societies. In the science of logic, the word *shay'* (thing) is known as the genus of genera. Anything that can be called a thing is clarified in Allah's Book. Someone may argue, "If that's the case, then why do we ask scholars and scientists to use independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) in order to extract specific rulings?" The answer is that the Quran has come as a miracle that lays the foundations and principles (of healthy reasoning). Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* gave Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the right to legislate, by Allah's guidance. Allah says: 'Hence, accept (willingly) whatever the Apostle (Prophet Muhammad) gives you (thereof), and refrain from (demanding) whatever he forbids you.' (*al-Hashr:* 7) Therefore, the customary practice (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whether in his verbal statements, physical actions or consents and confirmations (regarding the actions of others) is affirmed by the Noble Book. In addition, his traditions explain the Noble Book and clarify its meanings. The sunset prayer, for example, consists of three units. This is not specifically mentioned in the Noble Quran. 'Hence, accept (willingly) whatever the Apostle gives you (thereof).' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this matter when he wanted to send his companion, Mu'adh ibn Jabal *may Allah be pleased with him* as a judge for the people of Yemen. He wanted to ascertain that Mu'adh's judgments would be righteous, and therefore asked Mu'adh, "With what will you judge?" Mu'adh responded, "With the (decrees of the) Book of Allah." Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "And if you do not find (the decrees) that which you need (in Allah's Book)?" Mu'adh answered, "Then with the traditions *(Sunnah)* of Allah's Messenger (Prophet Muhammad)." Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "And if you do not find (the decrees) that which you need (in the Prophetic traditions)?" Mu'adh answered, "I will employ my independent legal reasoning, and I will spare no effort (in reaching the most righteous judgment)."To these answers, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Praise be to Allah, who has granted insight to the messenger of His Messenger, to carry out that which pleases Allah and His Messenger."(1)

Therefore, independent legal reasoning can be used to deduce rulings from Allah's Book. In the new matters and events that confront us, for which there are no clear judiciary texts in the Quran or in the Prophetic traditions *(Sunnah)*, we are permitted to use independent legal reasoning to reach the righteous judgment.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (5/220, 226, 242), Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (2587) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (1327) from the Hadith of Mu'adh ibn Jabal may Allah be pleased with him.*

Here, we should mention the story(1) of Imam Mohammad ʿAbduh(2) *may Allah bestow mercy upon his soul* regarding a conversation he had in Paris with an orientalist (a Western academic who studies the Eastern cultures). The orientalist said to the Imam, "Is there not a verse in the Quran that says: 'No single concept have We neglected in Our Book?'" (*al-An'am:* 38) Imam Mohammad responded, "Indeed!" The orientalist asked him, "Show me from the Quran, then, how many loaves of bread are found in an *ardab* of wheat? Imam Mohammad answered, "We ask the baker, as he has the answer to this question." The orientalist argued, "I want the answer from the Quran which has not neglected a single concept." The Imam answered, "This Quran taught us to ask the people of knowledge regarding that which we do not know, as Allah says: 'So ask the people of remembrance (and knowledge) about that which you do not know.' (*al-Anbiya':* 7) Therefore, the Quran has given us the way to solve all our problems, even if we cannot find specific verses in Allah's Book that detail particular answers. The Quran has mentioned the principles and foundations of knowledge. We are then allowed to exercise independent legal reasoning regarding the contemporary branches of knowledge and the new matters that appear before us. If a general ruling is found in the Quran, then it is obligatory to take with it the rulings that have been issued by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because Allah has authorised him to issue and interpret rulings.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Hence, accept (willingly) whatever the Apostle (Prophet Muhammad) gives you (thereof), and refrain from (demanding) whatever he forbids you.' (*al-Hashr:* 7) The same applies for the consensus (*ijma'*) between the scholars of Islam because Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(Whoever) follows a path other than that of the believers, shall We leave unto him that (misguidance) which he himself has chosen.' (*an-Nisa':* 115) Therefore, every exercise of independent legal reasoning should be referred to the people who have the necessary knowledge that allows legal reasoning: ‘Whereas (regarding their argument,) if they would but refer it unto the Apostle (Prophet Muhammad) and unto those from among the believers who have been entrusted with authority, such of them who are engaged in obtaining intelligence would indeed know (the legal ruling of) it.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 83)

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(1) The story of Imam Mohammad 'Abdu being asked, in Paris, on the number of loafs of bread made from one *ardab* of wheat (nearly 78 kg of wheat).

(2) The former Mufti of Egypt (1849 - 1905), one of the most senior figures of reform and renewal in Islam. He was born in 1849 in one of the villages of Western Egypt. He studied at the Ahmadi Mosque in Tanta and then Al-Azhar. He wrote Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Karim and Risalat-At-Tawheed. With Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani, he published the magazine named Al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqa. He died in Alexandria in 1905, at the age of 56. (Al-ʿAlam lil-Zirikli, 1/302)

Therefore, the Quran certified the legal rulings that are issued from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If Prophet Muhammad did not mention a particular issue, the Quran directed us to the ruling that is reached by consensus between the scholars of Islam. If such consensus is not available, the Quran ordered us to follow the rulings attained by independent legal reasoning by eminent scholars. Such rulings will therefore be authentic and set according to reasoned Quranic methodology.

Here we must distinguish between the mention of everything and the mention of essential issues in the Quran. What exactly does the Quran turn our attention to? The Quran directed us to the rulings that require legal responsibility from a servant who believes in Allah *Glorified is He*. There are universal matters that man can benefit from without prior and exact knowledge. For instance, if man knows about the earth having a spheroid shape and that it revolves around the sun as well as other matters of the universal laws, then that knowledge is indeed well and good. However, many men who are ignorant in these aspects of knowledge still benefit from their laws.

An illiterate person who lives in the countryside, for example, can benefit from electricity without knowing its nature and physical principles. He can benefit from its laws by merely pressing a light switch with his finger.

If Allah *Glorified is He* had explained the physical laws of the universe in a very forthright manner in the Quran, this would have turned the Arabs away from its meanings. They did not know anything about the movements of the universe and did not have the educational refinement that allowed eminent scientific contemplation. When the Arabs asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the crescent moons, the Noble Quran answered: ‘They will ask you about the crescent moons (*al-ahilla*). Say (to them, O Muhammad), “They indicate the periods of time for (various dates of) mankind, and the (time for) pilgrimage.'" (*al-Baqara:* 189) *Al-ahilla* (crescent moons) is the plural of *hilal*. This is the part of the moon that appears at the beginning of every month, when it looks like a lunar clipping. Then it gradually increases in size until it becomes a full moon, when it is completely round. Then it decreases gradually until it returns to its original shape. This is a wonder that the Arabs saw with their eyes, and so asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. How did the Quran respond to them? The Noble Quran did not explain to them that a crescent moon is formed because the sun's light only illuminates a smaller part of the moon. This detail was not to be encompassed by the contemporary minds of that time. That is why the Quran directed them to look at the Creator's wisdom behind crescent moons. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say (O Muhammad), "they indicate the periods of time for (various dates of) mankind, and the (time for) pilgrimage."' (*al-Baqara:* 189) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* directed their attention to their traditional activities by explaining the wisdom behind the changing moon. At the same time, the Quran left the scientific principles behind this phenomenon to be explained to the Arabs by later scientific discoveries. They will find in the Quran that which will help them to understand this subject.

Therefore, Allah's statement: 'No single concept have We neglected in Our Book' (*al-An'am:* 38) is referring to all the concepts that produce legal responsibility. It is these concepts that will deserve reward or punishment in the Hereafter. As for scientific matters of the universe, the Quran mentioned them only in simple terms that can be understood in simple times, leaving the task of meticulous explanation to the following periods of scientific knowledge.

This is why the secrets of the Noble Quran were not all divulged in the century of its revelation. If that had happened, the following centuries of people will not have found reason to contemplate its verses, looking for deeper meanings. Thus, the minds contemplating the Quran gradually became more responsive to its meanings with the passing of ages. New ideas were brought forth in every century. These new depths of contemplation were suited to humanity's progress in discovering the scientific phenomena of the universe.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once saw some people artificially pollinating date palms. This is the biological process of fertilization, in which they use the male gametes to fertilize the female parts of the trees. The Prophet said, “(Even) if you had not done that, it would still bear fruit.” These people mistakenly abandoned the process in the next season and the date palms did not bear adequate fruits. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about this, he said, “You know more about the affairs of your life in this world.”(1)

The issue of pollination is a worldly affair that is subject to experimentation and research. It is not part of Prophet Muhammad’s revealed tasks to change these matters that mankind’s minds agree upon scientifically. He only directed us to the rulings of legal responsibility in which desires differ. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* settled these issues with divine rulings.

There are material surges in this world concerned with inventions and discoveries that subjugate the secrets of the universe to serve mankind. Does mankind differ over the benefits of these material inventions? Do we say, for example, that electricity is an American or a Russian phenomenon? Do we attribute chemistry to a particular country, naming it as English or German chemistry? These inventions and discoveries are products of laboratory experiments that are widely agreed upon by all mankind. However, at the same time, we find mankind arguing over theoretical principles and fighting with each other to uplift them. Thus, we have socialists, capitalists, existentialists, secularists and so on. Religion has come to put an end to these quarrels, laying down the absolute and divine truth in such matters.

We see the countries in each ideological camp trying to steal the inventions and discoveries of their opponents. They send their spies to keep an eye on the latest technologies that others have devised. Do they invest the same efforts to steal theoretical principles? On the contrary, they actually construct barriers and precautionary measures so that these principles are not transferred to their countries and citizens!

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made himself an exemplar role model to clarify this matter. Some people might say, “It is not fitting for Allah's Messenger to suggest an action to the people that later turns out to be amiss." Here, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to establish a principle in the minds of the people who will talk about matters of religion: beware of involving yourselves in applied material scientific matters without prior study and proper procedure. These scientific issues earn the same results for the believers and the disbelievers.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2362) from the hadith of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him.*

When scientists discovered that the earth is spheroid and that it revolves around the sun, some theologians objected and tampered with a concept that has nothing to do with religion. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in effect, through this story, had warned these theologians about this error.

What can these theologians claim after scientists have already invented methods of travel to celestial distances, from which the earth was clearly photographed as a spheroid body? We say to these theologians that they should not have placed material claims in the name of religion that they are unable to prove.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And (this Book is) a guidance, a grace and a glad tiding to all who have surrendered themselves to Allah *Glorified is He*.' (*an-Nahl:* 89) Allah *Glorified is He* described the Quran as being "a guidance". If the Quran was sent to make everything clear to mankind, some people might think it would have been more suitable if Allah *Glorified is He* had described the Quran as 'a guide'. Instead, He described it as "a guidance" in itself which indicates that it is the core and essence of guidance. "A guide" is someone who may have established guidance temporarily. In a similar manner, you may describe a person as being "just" in their rulings. However, when you say that a person is "justice," this means that the characteristic of justice is permanently embodied in their character. Similarly, there is a difference between the Arabic words *ʿalim* (one endowed with knowledge) and *ʿaleem* (one who knows everything). Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But above everyone who is endowed with knowledge, there is One Who knows all (*aleem).*' (*Yusuf:* 76)

What is the meaning of guidance? Guidance is the sign to the shortest route that leads to one's destination. Then, in the same verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Quran: '... a grace.' There is a verse in another chapter in which the Quran is described as a grace: '(It is) a cure (to the spirit) and is a grace.' (*al-Isra':* 82)

“A cure” (*shifa’*) means that the Quran treats certain maladies. “A grace” (*rahma*) means that it also prevents affliction with maladies. Therefore, whoever acts in accordance with the Quranic way will have glad tidings of immense and eternal reward from Allah; *Glorified is He* in permanent blessings. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأۡمُرُ بِٱلۡعَدۡلِ وَٱلۡإِحۡسَٰنِ وَإِيتَآيِٕ ذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ وَيَنۡهَىٰ عَنِ ٱلۡفَحۡشَآءِ
وَٱلۡمُنكَرِ وَٱلۡبَغۡيِۚ يَعِظُكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَذَكَّرُونَ ٩٠

God commands justice, doing good, and generosity towards
relatives and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and
oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may take heed [90]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 90)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* gave three commandments: justice, the doing of benevolent good and generosity towards (one’s) close people. He *Glorified is He* also gave three prohibitions: doing all that is shameful or all that runs counter to reason, as well as harbouring envy towards others. When this verse was revealed, Ibn Mas‘ud *Allah be pleased with him* said, “The most comprehensive verse in the Quran, regarding being good, is this verse.”(1) This is because the verse combined all the virtues that can possibly be in the Noble Quran.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was eager to guide our master ‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un(2) to embrace Islam. This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was very eager to present Islam to people in which he saw sublime morals and qualities that would enhance the Muslim community. It is as if he mourned seeing these transcendent qualities in a human being that had not yet embraced Islam.

‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un wanted to take his time to contemplate Islam. Then, one day, he was sitting with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon*

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafseer (5/3892)*

(2) *He is ‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un Al-Jumahi, Abu As-Sa’ib, a Companion. He was one of the leaders of the Arabs in the age of ignorance (al-jahiliyyah). He became Muslim after thirteen other men and he emigrated to the land of Abyssinia twice. He was martyred at Badr. When the Prophet may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him came to him, he kissed him while he was dying, until his tears were seen flowing down ‘Uthman’s cheek. (4/214)*

him in a gathering and saw the Prophet raising his eyes towards the sky. Ibn Mazʿun asked him, “What happened?” Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* answered: “Indeed (Angel) Gabriel has just revealed to me this statement of Allah: ‘Behold, Allah orders justice (*al-‘adl*) and benevolence (*al-‘ihsan*), and generosity towards (your) close people (‘*etaa’ dhil-qurbaa*); and He forbids all that is shameful (*al-fahsha’*) and all that runs counter to reason (*al-munkar*), as well as envy; (and) He exhorts you (repeatedly) so that you might bear (all this) in mind.’” (*an-Nahl:* 90)

Ibn Mazʿun *may Allah be pleased with him* later narrated, “Then (on hearing that), the seed of faith was firmly planted in my heart with this verse that combined all the qualities of goodness.”(1)

He went on to inform Abu Talib about the verse. When Abu Taleb heard the verse, he exclaimed, “O’ Quraysh! Believe in that which Muhammad has brought, for indeed he has come to you with the best of morals.”(2)

It is also narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to present his message to the Arab tribes, while Abu Bakr and ʿAli *may Allah be pleased with them* accompanied him. ‘Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated, “The Messenger of Allah (Prophet Muhammad) met a gathering of people who looked respectful and dignified. He called unto them to bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad was the Messenger of Allah. Maqrun ibn ʿAmr, who was from Shayban ibn Tha’laba’s tribe stood and asked him, ‘O brother from Quraysh. What is it that you are calling us to?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Behold, Allah orders justice (*al-‘adl*) and benevolence (*al-‘ihsan*), and generosity towards (your) close people (‘*etaa’ dhil-qurbaa*); and He forbids all that is shameful (*al-fahsha’*) and all that runs counter to reason (*al-munkar*), as well as envy; (and) He exhorts you (repeatedly) so that you might bear (all this) in mind.’

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(1) Mentioned by As-Suyuti in *Ad-durr Al-manthur* (5/159) and attributed to Ahmad, Al-Bukhari in *(Al-Adab)*, Ibn Abu-Hatim, At-Tabarani, and Ibn Mardawayh from the narration of Ibn ʿAbbas *may Allah be pleased with them*. It was also mentioned by Al-Wahidi in *Asbab an-Nuzul*. (166).

(2) *Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (5/3891). Abu Taleb said, “Follow my nephew, for by Allah he only enjoins the best of morals.”*

(*an-Nahl:* 90) ‘Uthman responded, “Indeed you have called us to the best of morals and the most righteous of actions. Quraysh were wrong when they opposed you and united their forces against you.” Uthman ibn Mazʿun conveyed the verse to ʿIkrimah ibn Abu Jahl, who in turn recited the verse to Al-Walid ibn Mughaira. Al-Walid thought about what he had heard and said, “By Allah, indeed, it has sweetness and upon it is beauty. Its highest verses bear fruit and its simplest verses flow abundantly. Its words are elevated above all other words and it is not the speech of human beings.”(1) Despite this testimony of Al-Walid about the Quran, he did not believe in its message. They said about him, “It suffices him that he was a positive witness to the Quran, despite remaining a disbeliever.”

This is how this verse entered the hearts of these people and became firmly established therein. The verse is comprehensive and complete. It calls to every act of goodness and forbids every act of evil.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse: ‘Behold, Allah *Glorified is He* orders justice (*al-‘adl*).” (*an-Nahl:* 90) What is justice? Justice (*al-‘adl*) is equality (*insaf*), fairness and a lack of biased inclination. This justice can only be exercised between two mutually contradictive forces. In the Arabic language, a just human being is described as a *munsif* (fair person). This is because when two opponents are stood before him, he gives each of them half (*nisf*) of his interest. It is as if he divides himself into two equal parts, without inclining to any of them in the slightest form. This is fairness.

The scale which is used to measure weights was introduced for the sake of fairness. It differs in its precision according to the value of what is being weighed. The sensitivity of a wheat scale does not have the same sensitivity as a jewellery scale, for example. Utmost precision is required in the scales of drug manufacturers as the smallest errors can turn medicine into poison. We have witnessed a massive development in scales to the extent that we can now weigh smaller things than were ever imagined.

Justice is present in all matters of life. Its peak is testifying that there is no deity but Allah. Its simpler forms include removing harm from people’s roads.

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (5/3897)*

Justice is required in all matters of legal responsibility. It is essential in matters of creed, which are the functions of the heart, and in practical matters, which are the actions and functions of the limbs.

So, how is justice present in matters of creed? Some of the disbelievers are atheists, who deny the presence of any deity in existence, thus denying the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*. Other disbelievers are polytheists who believe that there are multiple deities. These opinions and views contradicted each another and justice came with the advent of Islam. There is only one God, Allah *Glorified is He* and He has no partners. He is transcendent and His attributes are above being likened to anything in His creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* has hearing, but it is not like the hearing of created beings. We do not deny any of His attributes, as this is the misguided belief of *al-muʿattila* (who deny Allah’s attributes). Also, we do not compare Him to anything else in His creation because that is the misguided belief of *al-mushabbiha* (who liken Allah’s attributes to His creation). Rather, we say that there is nothing like Him *Glorified is He* and we adopt the position of justice and the middle ground.

Likewise, one of the matters of creed, in which the justice of Islam is evident, is the issue of pre-determination and free will. Islam takes the middle ground between two groups of people. The first is those who say that man does all of his actions out of his own free will without any divine intervention by Allah *Glorified is He* thus earning reward and punishment as a result. The second group claims that all of man’s actions come from Allah *Glorified is He* and are forced upon His slaves. Islam comes with justice and the middle ground in this issue by saying, “Man carries out his actions voluntarily with the ability that Allah *Glorified is He* has created within him to choose the right from the wrong.”

In legislation and rulings there is a big difference between the Revealed Law of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Revealed Law of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* regarding the law of just retribution (as capital punishment for murder) (*qisaṣ*).

For example, in the time of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* materialism had become so predominant amongst the children of Israel that they said to Musa (Moses): ‘Allow us to see Allah, face to face.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 153) They did not understand the idea of unseen punishments and were not convinced by it. Therefore, it was appropriate, and even necessary for them, to have just retribution in their legislations. If Allah *Glorified is He* had left them without such laws, there would have been a lot of killing amongst them. They could only be deterred by the materialistic ruling, “Whoever kills is to be killed, and killing annuls out killing.”

The children of Israel transgressed appropriate bounds in their demands to see Allah *Glorified is He* as seeing Allah contradicts with His transcendence and divinity. If you were to see Him with your eyes, you would be defining Him within a limited space. Therefore, not being able to see Allah *Glorified is He* is part of the essence of His perfection. How can we desire to see Him *Glorified is He* when we cannot even see some of His creation. For instance, what do we know about the nature of the spirit that exists in our bodies? How do we intend to carry out our actions? How do we think and live? Where do our souls exist? Whenever a person dies, the spirit, the Divine Secret, is separated from the body. The body turns into a corpse and the people rush to bury it into the ground. Has anyone seen the spirit or heard it? Have you been able to perceive it with any of your senses?

If the spirit, which has been created by Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be perceived by the intellect, then what about Allah Himself, the One Who created this spirit? It is from His divinity that no human vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all human vision.

Likewise, there are things that religion requires, such as truth. It is one of the ideals that all human beings call for and require actions to adhere to. What is the shape of this truth or its colour? Is it long or short? If we are incapable of imagining truth, which has been created by Allah *Glorified is He* then how can we imagine Allah Himself and desire to see Him?

It was from the excessive materialism of the children of Israel that in the Talmud they set up a group of searchers for Allah *Glorified is He*. The children of Israel, relying on their absolute belief in materialism, portrayed Allah *the Almighty* in their Talmud as someone sitting on a rock and putting His legs in a large, marble bowl at which a whale came, Glory be to Allah!

As a result of this materialism, the world needed overwhelming spiritual energy. This spirituality had to be overflowing to achieve balance in this world. The Revealed Law of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* came to provide such spirituality after the exaggerated materialism and excessiveness in what the commandments of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had taught. So, how can the law of just retribution be applied here when the Revealed Law of Prophet ’Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* wanted to establish the spirituality of the people?

The Law of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) was revealed to impose serenity between the victim’s family and the murderer. In this law, it suffices that one person was killed in the dispute, and we should preserve the life of the other person without stirring up any quarrels, rancour, or hatred among the people. Thus, this Revealed Law of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) called for the killer to be pardoned.

After that, Islam was revealed to adopt the position of justice and the middle ground in this ruling. Islam affirmed just retribution (capital punishment), but additionally, allowed the calls for pardon to be made. It gave the guardians of the murdered person the right to have just retribution, but at the same time, called unto them to pardon the murderer. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if something (of his guilt) is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this (remission) shall be adhered to with fairness and restitution to his fellow-man shall be made in a goodly manner.’ (*al-Baqara:* 178) We can notice here that the Quran called them brothers in order to soften their hearts and remove their malevolence.

Just retribution in Islam has an exalted wisdom. Its objective is not to propagate the crime, but rather to preserve the lives of other people in society, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘For, in (the law of) just retribution, O you who are endowed with insight, there is a life for you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 179) Thus, whoever wants to preserve his life should not threaten the lives of others. When Allah *Glorified is He* gave the right of just retribution to the guardian of the deceased victim, it enabled his anger to be cooled and his rage to be calmed. He is given a chance to think about pardoning the murderer, while he also has the right to exact revenge. This is how this ruling removes rancour from the hearts and puts out the fire of vengeance between people.

This is why, in some countries, where the practice of revenge for murder is prevalent, the murderer asks the guardians of the deceased for pardon by approaching them with the burial shroud in his hand. He places himself before the deceased victim's family and confesses his crime, "Here I am, in front of you. You have the right to kill me (in retribution for your victim) and this is my burial shroud." The guardian of the deceased's rights, or the person in the legal position to exact revenge, usually pardons the murderer in most of these cases. This is the justice that Islam has brought. It is the religion of moderation and optimal rulings.

This pardon, by the guardian, is a tool of reconstruction and a means of love. When they have the right of just retribution, but choose to forgive the murderer, pardoning the murderer's life becomes a gift from the family of the deceased victim. This is a favour that the family of the murderer will remember. They will choose to say, "The blood of our son has been spared."

We can see another example of the justice of Islam and its optimal stances in the jurisprudence concerning the issue of menstruation. In the Revealed Law of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the woman leaves the side of her husband during the period of menstruation. In the Revealed Law of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* the wife could remain beside her husband, but was also allowed complete physical intimacy during that period.

Islam gave the just ruling in this issue and allowed the menstruating woman to stay in the same place as her husband and her family, but without her husband approaching her intimately throughout this period. 'And they will ask you (Muhammad) about (woman's) monthly periods. Say, "It is a vulnerable condition. Keep, therefore, away from (marital consummation) with women during their monthly periods, and do not approach them (intimately) until they are cleansed. When they are cleansed, approach them as Allah has bidden you to do." Verily, Allah loves those who turn unto Him in repentance, and He loves those who cleanse themselves.' (*al-Baqara:* 222)

The same principles of justice apply if we look at the economic aspects in our lives. Economy is the channel through which life is maintained, as it provides our food, drink, clothes, and other items of livelihood, and maintains the survival of the species through the economies of marriage. The provision of these items needs the activities of production and consumption, through which life continues. If one of them were to stop, society would fall into inactivity and idleness.

Based on that, Allah *Glorified is He* has distributed His blessings amongst His servants. Thus, I serve everyone with the knowledge I have and everyone serves me with their knowledge and skills. Therefore, the activities of life can prosper, when the world that you live in contains benefits for you, as well as hopes that entice you. If you partake in these activities, you earn wealth that drives your livelihood. Then, you must strike a balance between your immediate needs and your hopes for the future.

If you spend everything that you earn on your present expenses, then you ruin your chances of realising your hopes for the future. You will not find what you need to build a house, for example, or buy a car, or increase your standard of living with some of life's luxuries. This is what we call waste and blunder. On the other hand, it does not suit a normal human being to be stingy and miserly, by saving everything they earn without any spending. Such a person would not be partaking in the process of consumption and would thus be a cause of inactivity and corruption in society. The Quran dealt with this matter in a subtle way in Allah's words: 'And neither allow your hand to remain shackled to your neck, nor stretch it forth to the utmost limit (of your capacity), (so that you do not) find yourself blamed (by your dependents), or even destitute.' (*al-Isra':* 29) Therefore, do not withhold your hand from appropriate spending, out of miserliness and stinginess, as you will be rebuked by your wife, children and people around you. Everyone will dislike that attribute of miserliness. Likewise, do not waste and squander your wealth without account, as you will fall short of realizing your hopes. If that happens, you will be grieved when you see the economically thrifty people fulfilling their roles in life, while you are not able to fulfil these roles due to poverty, poor planning and having wasted away all of your earnings.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, the squanderers are, indeed, of the ilk of the devils.' (*al-Isra':* 27) He also says: 'And (the righteous are) those, (who) are neither wasteful nor niggardly whenever they spend on others, but are (always) mindful of the just level between those (two extremes).' (*al-Furqan:* 67)

Therefore, justice is an essential principle in all the elements of the divine commandments, whether these commandments are related to creed or to the daily activities of man. This justice is based on optimization and moderation. This is the concept behind the common Arabic saying: “The best of solutions is the one between two extremes.”

Allah *Glorified is He* also says in this verse: ‘...and benevolence (*al-ihsan*).’ (*an-Nahl:* 90) What is meant by the doing of good in benevolence (*al-ihsan*)? To clarify the definition of benevolence, let us compare it with the meaning of justice.

Justice means that a person should receive their deserved rights with ultimate precision. If they are guilty of sin, they should be punished with just retribution. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Thus, if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 194) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Hence, if you have to respond to an attack (in retribution), respond only to the (equal) extent of the attack directed against you.’ (*an-Nahl:* 126)

On the other hand, benevolence means that you abandon your deserved rights and relinquish your fair shares for Allah’s pleasure. If you observe this principle, you will act according to Allah’s statement: ‘And (those righteous people who) hold their anger in check, and pardon their fellow-men and Allah loves the benevolent doers of good.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 134) There are several levels of benevolence in people, each level according to the person’s capabilities and willingness for moral development. The first of these stages is to keep one’s anger in check (*qazhm al-ghaydh*) which comes from the Arabic word for closing a water bag after it has been filled (*qazhm al-qerba*). In this state of benevolence, the person is to contain the anger within their heart, enduring the troubled feelings that they have towards the others who have wronged them. In addition, they should not let this anger lead to any retributive reaction, but instead, they should suffer the pain of this anger without compensation. This is why it is better to move on to a higher stage of benevolence which is the stage of pardon.

In the second state of benevolence, the believer should ask the question, “Why do I allow myself to be a victim of this anger? Why do I have to suffer its pain and bitterness?” Then, he should relieve himself from this anger by pardoning the wrongdoer. If someone makes progress in pardoning, they can then strive to reach the third stage of benevolence, which is the stage of doing good to the one who has wronged them. Thus, in the third state of benevolence, which is doing good to those who have harmed us, the believer can go beyond what is required of them and ascend to the rank of those who truly know Allah *Glorified is He*. Transgressors act according to their capacity and exact revenge according to what suits them. The one who progresses to the rank of high benevolence leaves the matter to Allah's capacity, and what is our capacity compared with the capacity of Allah?

Therefore, benevolence is more suited to the believer than exacting revenge. However, how can a person be able to pardon those who have done wrong to them, or even respond in kindness towards them? Imagine that you have two children and one of them transgresses against the other. What position would you take regarding their dispute? Towards Which one of them would your heart incline? There is no doubt that your heart would incline towards the one who had been transgressed against, and the transgression could lead you to cheer that child up with a gift or act of kindness. You will show that child compassion and generosity in order to make them feel better. The cause of your kindness is their sibling's offence against them. So, it is the offence that caused your compassion towards the child and led you to be gentle in bringing them mindful gifts. Therefore, it should be natural for the person who was wronged to be benevolent towards the transgressor and to thank them for being the cause of similar blessings from Allah. This is why Al-Hasan Al-Basri *Allah rest his soul* said, "Should I not show thanks towards the one who placed Allah at my side (and support)?"

Benevolence means to go beyond what Allah *Glorified is He* had obliged you, in the same nature of worship that Allah had commanded. For example, we worship Allah by performing five daily obligatory prayers. A benevolent believer can perform more prayers than obligated. The same principle of benevolence applies to paying the charity alms, fasting, and performing the Pilgrimage. Benevolence, in these cases, involves doing more than what Allah *Glorified is He* had obliged us to do.

Benevolence can also be practiced by refining the quality of the acts of worship, without actually increasing the quantity of these acts. For example, you can perform the obligatory daily prayers without increasing their number, but working to excel in your piety and reverence during those five prayers, according to the famous tradition of Angel Gabriel. In this tradition, Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* was sent to teach the companions about Islam by asking questions to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this tradition, Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the acts of benevolence (*ihsan*). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, answered: "*Ihsan* (benevolence) is that you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him. You cannot actually see Him, but you should realize that He sees your actions."(1) Thus, you must be mindful of Allah's presence during your acts of worship, constantly reminding yourself of His majesty, beauty and perfection *Glorified is He*. If you are not able to reach this stage of servitude and piety, then you should realize and believe that Allah *Glorified is He* sees your every action. This belief will allow you to reach these levels of benevolence because you will be giving the acts of worship their due rights without faults or neglect.

A burglar will not rob a house if he knows that its owner can see him. If humans respect and fear other people when they witness their crimes or laxity, is it then right to commit such crimes knowing that Allah *Glorified is He* watches our every action? This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: "O My servants! If you believe that I cannot see you, then there is a fault in your faith. If you believe that I can see you, then why did you consider My Sight lesser than the sight of others?"

Some scholars have set definitions for the words *al-'adl*, *al-ihsan* and *al-munkar*, mentioned in the verse we are studying: 'Behold, Allah orders justice (*al-'adl*) and benevolence (*al-'ihsan*), and generosity towards (your) close people (*'etaa' dhil-qurbaa*); and He forbids all that is shameful (*al-fahsha'*) and all that runs counter to reason (*al-munkar*), as well as envy; (and) He exhorts you (repeatedly) so that you might bear (all this) in mind.' (*an-Nahl:* 90)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (50) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him and narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (8) in the Book of Faith from the Hadith of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him.*

They said that *al-'adl* (justice) means that your inward thoughts resemble your outward actions. *Al-Ihsan* (benevolence) means that your inward thoughts transcend your external actions. *Al-munkar* (disavowed actions that run counter to reason) means that your inner thoughts are lower than your outer actions.

They defined *'etaa' dhil-qurbaa* (generosity towards your close people) as giving away what you have to your surrounding circle of people. They said, "The world is made up of connected relationships. If every able person chooses to help the poor and needy people around him, with everyone giving abundantly as Allah *Glorified is He* has given to them, goodness would spread throughout society. We would not find anyone who is penniless and needy. This is because these spheres of goodness will encompass all of society and may even interlock so that several givers complement each other. In that manner, there would not be any poor people in our societies."

The verse has urged people to give those closer to them because distant people who are far from your reach are still within someone else's sphere of giving. Some poor people may be close to several benevolent circles. Thus, they may receive amply from multiple charitable sources. In this manner, life will be perfected as the resources of life are equally distributed to all mankind.

Some scholars have said that the words: 'And generosity towards (your) close people ('*etaa' dhil-qurbaa*)' is concerned with the relatives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in particular. These scholars saw that meaning because the relatives of Prophet Muhammad are forbidden from taking the alms which are permitted for other poor people. Therefore, any poor relatives of Prophet Muhammad's progeny would be at a disadvantage that distinguishes them from other poor people. These scholars saw that it does not befit us to allow the relatives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fall into need of alms. Even though you are encouraged to aid your relatives, you must not forget that the relatives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have a higher claim to your support, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Prophet has a higher claim on the believers than (they have on) their own selves.' (*al-Ahzab:* 6)

These are all the commands that we can find in this verse. If a society implemented these commands and its individuals adorned themselves with these attributes, it would develop morally to a sublime extent. Man would leave his rights for retribution and revenge in the favour of forgiveness, pardoning and transcendent benevolence. Blessings will be prevalent in this society and goodness will be made equal for everyone.

A society that implements these qualities is a happy and safe society that is led by love, faith, and excellence. Indeed, it would be worthy of eminence among the earth's nations.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says in this verse: 'And He forbids all that is shameful (*al-fahsha'*) and all that runs counter to reason (*al-munkar*), as well as envy.' (*an-Nahl:* 90) These are the prohibitions, which along with the aforementioned commands uphold an upright Quranic way that guarantees the welfare of society.

The first of these prohibitions is the prohibition of that which is shameful or an abomination (*fahisha*). Anyone who follows the Noble Quranic verses will find that adultery (*zina*) is the only sin that the Quran has called an abomination. Thus, this word can be defined as adultery, or an action that violates Allah's rulings. Why is adultery particularly prohibited in this verse? This is because sins, other than adultery, are connected to the surroundings of the human soul. On the other hand, adultery distorts the human soul itself. It leads to confusions in lineage and tarnishes people's honour. It could lead a man to doubt his wife and children and causes corruption of a grave magnitude in society. This is why the Quran clearly mentioned this sin in another verse, in which Allah says: 'And do not approach adultery, for, behold, it is an abomination and an evil way.' (*al-Isra':* 32) One of the things that the scholars have said regarding abominations is that they are the grave sins which put their perpetrators to shame. They hide these sins from other people and are unable to declare them openly because they know, within themselves, that these sins should not be disclosed to others.

Bad conduct is a sin whose perpetrator commits it daringly and openly, and people reject it. Based on this, we have two stages of sin:

The first is that the perpetrator is afraid society would find out about it, so he keeps it to himself, and this is called *immorality*. The second is that the perpetrator does it openly and society rebukes him for it. This is *bad conduct*.

Injustice is oppression in all of its forms, and it has connections to several things, the gravest of them is what happens in creed when one associates partners with Allah, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice.’ (*Luqman:* 13) The meaning of *injustice* here is that you strip the True Lord *Glorified is He* of one of His attributes and set up others as partners with Him when He has created you and provided for you. There is also the wronging of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in that it was never known of him to give a sermon or recite poetry, just as he was never known to lie or possess any other blameworthy qualities. Despite all of this, when the Quran was sent down to him, they said that he was a liar, a magician and insane. What wrong can be greater than this wrong?

Injustice also includes wronging oneself when he fulfils his immediate passions and spurious pleasures, which lead to regret, grief and pain in the long term. Such a person has gravely wronged oneself and brought upon oneself what one cannot bear, let alone man wronging someone else with all kinds of oppression and its various forms.

The verse has classified all the commands and prohibitions which guarantee the welfare of society such that it covers the qualities of noble conduct, and conduct is more general than creedal doctrines, more general than a miracle that is believed in, more general than some part of legal responsibility and more general than something that has no limit, a ruling, or a sin.

His statement: ‘He exhorts you.’ Exhortation means to remind people of a ruling, as we have already been informed of the ruling so that we can know it. However, there is a chance we may be heedless of it, thus the exhortation and the reminder of it. We need it to be repeated so that we do not become heedless again. Usually, an exhortation is only given regarding something that has value, and as long as the thing has value, then you will only choose it for someone you love. Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* loves His creation. This is why He exhorts them and reminds them to persist so that they can always be on the Straight Path in order to enjoy His blessings in the Hereafter, just as they have enjoyed the blessing of causes and means in this life. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَوْفُوا۟ بِعَهْدِ ٱللَّهِ إِذَا عَـٰهَدتُّمْ وَلَا تَنقُضُوا۟ ٱلْأَيْمَـٰنَ بَعْدَ تَوْكِيدِهَا
وَقَدْ جَعَلْتُمُ ٱللَّهَ عَلَيْكُمْ كَفِيلًا ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٩١﴾

Fulfil any pledge you make in God's name and do not break oaths
after you have sworn them, for you have made God your surety:
God knows everything you do [91] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 91)

Fulfil means to deliver what you pledged to do. Pledges are not made on an obligatory matter, but rather on a permissible one only. You are free to meet me tomorrow and I am free to meet you. However, if we agree and we pledge to one another to meet tomorrow at a certain time and a certain place, then the matter has been transformed from the permissible to the obligatory. Each one of us is now required to fulfil his pledge, because each has put his interests on hold and organised his affairs in accordance with this meeting. Thus, it is not right for one of us to fulfil a pledge, while the other backs out since this will cause a lack of equal opportunity. It is known that the interests of the servants in this life are based on pledges being fulfilled.

Some people may regard fulfilling pledges as being required of oneself only or that it is a burden upon oneself and no one else. However, the truth is that it is upon you and others. Just as someone else asks you to fulfil a pledge, he also asks others to fulfil pledges. Therefore, do not look at every matter of legal responsibility in this way. Rather, look at it as being for your benefit.

Whoever regards Allah's Commandments and Rulings as only applying to him will become tired, for just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given you commandments for the benefit of mankind, He has given mankind commandments for your benefit. When He forbids you from stealing, for example, beware of thinking that He has restricted your activity with regards to others because He *Glorified is He* has forbade all of mankind from stealing from you. Who is the winner, then? I have restricted your freedom with a ruling, and you are one individual, but I have restricted all of creation for your sake.

Likewise, when the Revealed Law commanded you to lower your gaze from what is inviolable with regards to other people, it commanded other people to lower their gazes for what is inviolable with regards to you.(1)

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(1) He *Glorified is He* says: 'Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what=

Hence, do not understand legal responsibility to be against you. Rather, it is for you, and in your interest.

Many wealthy people avoid spending out, and they are very restrained in doing so. Amongst them are those who consider it a loss because they do not know the wisdom behind the rich being commanded to help the poor. They do not know that we are insuring their lives for them. Here we see this life constantly being in flux. How many wealthy people become poor and how many powerful people become weak? Therefore, when money is taken from one who is wealthy, we assure him: Do not be scared if circumstances restrict you, or if your wealth becomes poverty. Just as we took from you when you were rich, we will give to you when you are poor. This is how we should look at matters of legal responsibility.

“The covenant of Allah” is the object of one’s pledge to Allah, and the first is to have faith in Him. As long as you believe in Allah, then look at what He has commanded you. Beware of violating one of His commands because inadequacy in any matter of legal responsibility is considered a deficiency in your faith. Belief in Allah means that you testified to what Allah testified for Himself in His statement: ‘Allah witnesses that there is no deity [worthy of worship] except Him.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18) The first to bear witness is Allah *Glorified is He* for Himself, and this is a testimony of The Essence for The Essence. “And the angels” is the testimony of witnessing and “all who are endowed with knowledge” is with proof and evidence.

Therefore, the first pledge between you and Allah is that you believe in Him as a deity that is Wise and fully Capable as well as a Creator and a Nurturer; so listen to what He is demanding of you because if you do not listen and implement, then know that your initial pledge of faith has been violated. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not make disbelievers legally responsible; as there is no pledge between Him and them. He only makes those who believe legally responsible, and you find that every verse that gives a ruling begins with this call of faith: ‘O you who believe!’ (*al-Baqara:* 183).

= they do. And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts.’ (*an-Nur*: 30-31)

As in His statement: ‘O you who believe! Fasting is ordained for you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 183) O you who believe in Me as a Lord and are pleased with Me as a deity, listen to Me because I am giving you the law of maintenance for your lives. This law will make you happy with Allah in the Hereafter after it has made you happy with causes and means in this life.

Regarding His statement: ‘and do not break oaths after their confirmation.’ *Oath* is used to swear and confirm by saying, “By Allah” and “I swear to Allah,” etc. It is not befitting for you to violate the oaths that you have confirmed. You are required, instead, to fulfil them because if you do, others will fulfil theirs with you. Do not look at the command as only applying to you. Look at it from the other side as well.

Likewise, pledges between mankind are taken from within the pledge of faith to Allah *Glorified is He* because when we make this pledge, we have Allah bear witness to this pledge and we say, “Between me and you is Allah’s pledge,” and we include the True Lord *Glorified is He* between us in order to consolidate what we have pledged. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘While you have made Allah, over you, a witness,’ Allah is a witness, an observer and a guarantor.

Regarding His statement: ‘Indeed, Allah knows what you do.’ Know that Allah is watching over you, and He knows the secrets of consciences and what the hearts conceal. Beware when making a pledge of making it while intending to break it. Beware of making a pledge deceptively, as your Lord *Glorified is He* knows all that you do. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* continues by saying:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّتِى نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنۢ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ أَنكَٰثًا تَتَّخِذُونَ
أَيْمَٰنَكُمْ دَخَلًۢا بَيْنَكُمْ أَن تَكُونَ أُمَّةٌ هِىَ أَرْبَىٰ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ ۚ إِنَّمَا يَبْلُوكُمُ
ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦ ۚ وَلَيُبَيِّنَنَّ لَكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ مَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

Do not use your oaths to deceive each other – like a woman who unravels the thread she has firmly spun – just because one party may be more numerous than another. God tests you with this, and on the Day of the Resurrection He will make clear to you those things you differed about [92] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 92)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is giving us a clarifying example of those who violate pledges and oaths. The example is the foolish Qurayshi woman

Ritta bint ‘Amir. She used to command her slave-girls to spin wool from dawn to noon. Then she would command them to untwist the yarn they had spun from noon until mid-afternoon.(1) The one who reflects on this example will find many lessons.

First of all, what is spinning wool? Spinning is a process that women used to do in ancient times. They would bring a material that could be spun, such as wool or fur, or cotton nowadays, and these things consist of fine hairs that differ in length from one kind to another. They call them fibre and they say, ‘this is a short fibre,’ and ‘this is a long fibre’.

Spinning means that from these hairs we form a long, extended, streamlined thread without any knots in it so that it can be used for fabric afterwards. This process is done by a primitive device called a spindle. Women mix these fine hairs and then twist them using the spindle so that in the end there is a long, streamlined, consistent thread without any knots in it.

The verse here has mentioned women doing this job because it was an exclusive job to women in that era. Women would be in their homes practicing these simple handicrafts that can be used to make furniture for the house, such as mattresses, as well as clothes and other things.

Even now, we see women still doing this feminine job, protecting their honour from the crush of life and the battleground of free mixing. Nowadays, the spindle has developed into a knitting machine or sewing machine, which makes it easier for women to do these jobs. It maintains them in their homes and spreads an atmosphere of co-operation in the home between the mother and her children. Here we have an example of a productive families’ project in which the women play a significant part in the advancement of society, as there is no objection to women working as long as the work is noble and it preserves her honour and her sanctity.

The Quran has given us an example of women working in the pre-Islamic Ignorance. This job needs effort and time with regards to spinning, and it needs even more with untwisting and unravelling. This is a very difficult process. Maybe she commanded the slave-girls to unravel as well as weave, and this is why they called her the foolish woman of Quraysh.

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5/2898) and attributed to Al-Fara’. Al-Qurtubi said: “This was narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn Kathir and As-Suddi, and they did not name the woman. Mujahid and Qatada said: “This was an example, not a reference to a specific woman.”*

The word strong in His statement: '…after it was strong' indicates the stages that the process of spinning goes through, and how difficult it is, beginning with a piece of wool from a sheep or fur from a camel. Then there is the mixing of the parts of each fibre from these hairs such that a part of each fibre from these hairs is in the middle of the other so that they can be joined together in this mixing. Then the women turn the spindle between their fingers so that in the end we have some centimetres of thread. If we were to compare this primitive process to the manufactured spindles that we have today, it would become clear to us how difficult it was for them.

It is as if the Noble Quran is likening the person who makes a pledge and consolidates it with a firm oath (and then makes Allah a trustee and witness over what he says) to the women who spun this yarn and bore such difficulties. Then she began to untwist what she had accomplished and unravel what she had spun.

Likewise, the word also indicates that every job requires strength, and this strength is in either moving that which is still, or stopping that which is moving. This is why He *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Take what We have given you with determination.' (*al-Baqara:* 63) This is because we want to move you towards what is stationary and good, and we want to hold you back from that which is moving and evil.

This is what they call, in physics, *Law of Inertia*. A moving object will keep moving until something forces it to be stationary. Likewise, a stationary object will remain stationary until something propels it.

Many are astonished at how satellites can keep going around in space for several years. What is the fuel that propels these satellites for all these years? The truth is that there is no fuel that propels them. Fuel is only used in the phase of release, until it has gone beyond the range of air and gravity. If the satellite or spaceship stabilises itself beyond the range of air and gravity it keeps going round and moving by itself without any fuel. Thus, the moving object keeps moving and the stationary object remains stationary.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is using this observed example to warn us against breaking pledges and untwisting them because He *Glorified is He* wants to maintain the interests of creation. They are based on mutual contracts and pledges established between them. Whoever violates a pledge or breaks an oath is not to be trusted. There is no confidence in his activity in life. Society turns away from him and isolates him from co-operation that is based on reciprocal confidence between people.

Regarding His statement: '[by] taking your oaths as [means of] deceit between you' (*an-Nahl:* 92), the word deceit means that you insert something into the thing that is of the same kind but of lesser quality in order to cheat and deceive, such as inserting some 18-karat gold into a standard measure of 24-karat gold, or putting kernels that have been exposed to the sun, for example, amongst almonds to make it look like they are also almonds. It is as if oaths are based on sincerity and fulfilment, but the one making the oath intends to cheat and deceive. He makes a vow, but he intends to deceive with it '…because one community is more plentiful [in number or wealth] than another community.'(1) This is the rationale behind using oaths to deceive one another: a deceptive, false oath. This is because the one who sells kernels that have been exposed to the sun as if they were almonds has made an increase (i.e., he has taken more than his right and depreciated the rights of others). The rationale behind deceptive oaths is greed and the demand for more at the expense of others.

The increase could also come about in another way. For example, you make a pledge to a person to do something and you carry out your pledge, oaths, and contracts for him. Then you come across someone who is more powerful than the first person is, whether it is in terms of strength, or authority, but you thus break the former pledge because the latter is more profitable.

In situations like this, man must be on his guard; who knows? Maybe this person will do to you what you did to him, and you will be meted out with that which you meted out to others. Beware, for if you dare to do something to Allah's creation, Allah may encourage someone to make you taste from the same medicine. If you run a trade or have a profession, beware of cheating people. Remember that you have interests that lie with them. In their hands, you have trades and professions, and if you dare to do something to them, Allah will encourage them against you because He *Glorified is He* says: 'I am the All-Sustaining'; You sleep whereas I do not sleep. This is a matter to which we must pay close attention.

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(1) *Mujahid said regarding the occasion why this verse was revealed: "It was sent down regarding the Arabs who had a tribe amongst them that made an oath with another. Then a more numerous and powerful tribe approached one of these two tribes and it betrayed the oath it had made to the first in favour of this greater tribe. [Tafsir Al-Qurtubi) 5/2898]*

Whoever dares do something to people, Allah encourages people against him, and whoever is sincere in his work and proficient, Allah places it in the hearts of creation to tend to his needs. His statement: 'Allah only tries you thereby' means that Allah tests you with this pledge, as He *Glorified is He* knows what you think when you make a pledge and whether are you planning to fulfil or break it?

Imagine that you intend to fulfil the pledge but then something happens between you and him which prevents you from doing it. Allah *Glorified is He* knows the true realities of matters and nothing is hidden from Him.

Therefore, the test here does not mean a disaster or affliction. Rather, it is merely a test, but a disaster and affliction for those who fail the test. The consideration here is of the consequences. 'And He will surely make clear to you on the Day of Resurrection that over which you used to differ.' On the Day of Resurrection, adversaries will come together and the fact will be made plain, and the judgment will come regarding what we differed over in this life. Imagine that someone was blind about justice in this life in certain things. We say to him, "You were blinded regarding justice here, but you will not be blinded regarding the justice of the heavens. Wait for the day in which we will be gathered and everything will be sorted."(1)

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(1) Narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1713) in the Book of Judicial Decisions (4) from the Hadith of Umm Salama who narrated Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him as saying: "You bring to me, for (judgment) your disputes, some of you perhaps being more eloquent in their plea than others, so I give judgment on their behalf according to what I hear from them. If I judged anything for him which is from the right of his brother, he should not accept it, for I would have sliced off a portion of the Fire for him."

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً وَلَٰكِن يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَآءُ
وَيَهْدِى مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَلَتُسْـَٔلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

If God so willed, He would have made you all one people,
but He leaves to stray whoever He will and guides whoever
He will. You will be questioned about your deeds [93]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 93)

If Allah had willed, He would have made the entire world one single community that is upon truth, not upon misguidance, one single community upon faith and guidance, just as He made all the other creation one single community in submission to what Allah wants from them. This is because the entire universe was created even before the creation of man. Out of His Wisdom, Allah *the Almighty* subjugated all the creatures to mankind, to the extent that we find no creature whatsoever objecting to that act of subjugation; the inanimate objects did not object, nor did plants nor did animals.

All of these beings go along unimpaired just as Allah has willed them to. It is amazing that man is the one and only creation in the universe that is defective, and this is because man has freedom of choice: to do or not to do.

This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified.’ (*al-Hajj:* 18)

This is how all these creations prostrate to Allah without exception, except man. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified.’ Why is there this difference with mankind? It is because mankind has the ability to choose. Each one of them is capable of doing and not doing. Is this matter outside of Allah’s will or is this what Allah wants?

They have said that Allah applies His absolute power in creating subjugated things, such that nothing acts out of the purpose for which it was created. It would have been possible for man to be in this form of subjugation, but in this state he does not add something new to the universe. Are angels not in a state of subjugation? Subjugation affirms Allah's power, as nothing exits from His power and His will. However, the ability to choose affirms one's love for Allah *Glorified is He*. This is a difference that we must contemplate.

For example, if you had two servants, one of them called Sa'eed and the other Mas'ud, and you take the former and tie him to you with a rope and at the same time you let Mas'ud go about freely; when you command both of them— and both of them obey and comply— whose obedience is more beloved to you: obedience due to compulsion and subjugation or obedience out of choice?

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* created man and ennobled him by giving him the ability to choose whether to obey or disobey. Whenever he is voluntarily obedient while being capable of disobedience, this affirms his love for his Lord *Glorified is He*.

It is inescapable that conditions for free will must be fulfilled. The first of them is the intellect, as it is the tool that is used to make choices. Likewise, insane people are not regarded as legally responsible. If the intellect is present and functioning properly, then there must be maturity, and this is achieved when man becomes capable of reproduction and comes to have a distinct identity. This is a feature of maturity because one is deficient in formation prior to it, nor is one qualified for legal responsibility. If one has a mature intellect, then he must have the ability to choose. If he is forced to do something, he will not ask about it. If one of these three conditions is missing, then the ability to choose has no meaning, and with this the True Lord *Glorified is He* guarantees the wellbeing of man with regards to the ability to choose.

Even though the True Lord *Glorified is He* has honoured man with the ability to choose, it is from His mercy towards him that He has placed within him some organs that are forced and subjugated and man has no say regarding them.

If we contemplated these organs, we would find that they are essential, and the life of man is based on them. It is from Allah's mercy towards us that He has made these organs function and carry out their tasks without us feeling anything.

The heart, for example, works regularly whilst we are awake and asleep, without us feeling it. The same goes for breathing, the kidneys, the liver, the intestines and other organs that function in a state of subjugation to His power, just like inanimate objects, plants, and animals.

It is from Allah's benevolence towards His creation that He made these organs to be subjugated because, by Allah, if you had to choose with regards to the function of these organs, how would you breathe, for example, while sleeping?

Therefore, it is from Allah's mercy that He has made you with the ability to choose with regards to actions that are presented to you. This why they say, "Man is the father of options." Animals, for example, which are the closest species to man, do not have these options, and they are not aware of them. If you harm an animal, it will harm you back. It does not have any other option. However, if you harm a human being, then it is possible that he could respond similarly, or do more than what you have done, or less. Or, he could pardon and forgive. It is the intellect that prefers one of these options.

Therefore, had the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to make mankind one single community, He would have done so, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'Had Allah willed, He would have guided the people, all of them.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31) But He *Glorified is He* did not will that, and the proof is His statement: "However, He leads astray him whom He wills and He guides aright whom He wills.' (*an-Nahl:* 93) This verse is used by those who like to quarrel and bicker, and those who are shortsighted with regards to understanding Allah's Book. They say: "As Allah is the One Who leads people astray, then why does He punish them?" We are amazed at this understanding of Allah's Book, and we say to these people: 'Why do you look at leading astray and pay no attention to guidance? How come you do not say, "As Allah is the One Who has guidance in His hand, and He is the One Who guides, then why does He enter us into Paradise?" Therefore, this is something that is said by immoderate people because the meaning of the previous verse is that He judges this on the basis of one's actions of misguidance and one's actions of guidance similar to what happens in an exam committee. We do not say that the committee passed so-and-so and they failed so-and-so. This is not their job. Rather, their job is to look at the answer sheets and based on them, they decide whether someone has passed or failed.

Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not make a servant go astray. Rather, He judges from his actions that they are actions of misguidance. The meaning, therefore, is that He judges to be astray whomever He wills and He judges to be guided whomever He wills. No one can turn this matter into the opposite meaning, and the proof is what He *Glorified is He* says afterwards: "…and you will surely be asked about all that you ever did!' (*an-Nahl:* 93)

The servant is only asked about his actions. The meaning of questioning here is the freedom of choice with regards to action. How can you be asked about something that you have no say in? Therefore, let us understand this verse according to what the True Lord *Glorified is He* intends by it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوٓاْ أَيۡمَٰنَكُمۡ دَخَلَۢا بَيۡنَكُمۡ فَتَزِلَّ قَدَمُۢ بَعۡدَ ثُبُوتِهَا وَتَذُوقُواْ
ٱلسُّوٓءَ بِمَا صَدَدتُّمۡ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِۖ وَلَكُمۡ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿٩٤﴾

Do not use your oaths to deceive each other lest any foot should slip after being firmly placed and lest you should taste the penalty for having hindered others from the path of God, and suffer terrible torment [94] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 94)

The word *deceit* here clarifies the consequence of deceiving, which is: '…lest a foot slip after it was [once] firm.' The verse contains a prohibition against taking oaths with the purpose of cheating, deceiving and fraud because the consequence of this action will be corruption that will destroy society from its foundations. Mutual trust, which is the basis of co-operation and life's activity, will be lost between people. The one who makes pledges and violates them, and make oaths and breaks them will become well known for breaking pledges and violating contracts.

Because of this, people will take back their trust in him, and no one will dare do a transaction with him. He will become despised by people, after he had been regarded as trustworthy and upright and held in high esteem. This is the meaning of His statement: '…lest a foot slip after it was [once] firm.' With this, his right in society is lost. He is punished for his evil actions and he reaps the fruits of the corruption that he sowed in society. When this evil behaviour spreads, life's activity becomes idle, and confidence and trust are lost.

Therefore, this is a slip and fall after firmness and strength, after being trustworthy and after being someone whose pledges and contracts were accepted by people. They loved to co-operate with him because of his word of honour and his sincerity in promises, before he regressed and degenerated and lost this rank.

This is why we find the people of finance and commerce saying, “so-and-so’s position in the market has been shaken,” i.e. his foot has slipped because he violated pledges and broke oaths and other things that do not befit someone worthy of trust in the market. Someone like this ends up declaring their bankruptcy in the world of co-operation with people.

As for being true to one’s pledge, contracts, and oaths, this makes your feet firm and unshakeable in the activities of life. You see the wealth of all people as His wealth, and you find those who own wealth approaching you and placing their wealth in your hands because of the good reputation you enjoy and your integrity and trustworthiness in co-operation.

When Islamic legislation legalized partnerships for us, it took into consideration these kinds of people who only have a good reputation, trustworthiness, integrity, and fidelity. This is their capital. If a partner goes into the agreement with the capital that he has, then this is a partner who has a word of honour and noble conduct, and he has a reputation amongst people and a distinguished past with regards to co-operation. This is what they call ‘the company of the elite’, and this distinguished person in the world of finance and trade did not get this esteem except by earning the respect and trust of the people, and because of the virtues and noble characteristics that he already had.

Likewise, we might see this trust, not in some individual, but in some brand or trademark. We see it being bought and sold, and it has a high value in the market because of the respect and appreciation of the people that it has earned. This is also the result of sincerity, commitment, and trustworthiness.

His statement: ‘…and you would taste evil [in this world] for what [people] you diverted from the way of Allah.’ *Evil* is the punishment this person is afflicted with due to being despised and held in contempt amongst people in this life, and the depression of his state due to loss of trust.

His statement: ‘…for what [people] you diverted from the way of Allah.’ The discussion here is about those who violate pledges and oaths and do not fulfil them, so does this entail turning away from Allah’s way? First of all, the meaning of Allah’s way is everything that makes the activity of life orderly and makes it continue in honour, trustworthiness, and sincerity. Based on this, the one who violates pledges and does not hold true to contracts gives society a bad example that makes the possessors of wealth hold on to their wealth, and the people of goodness withdraw. If you lent someone money and they did not pay you back, I do not think you would lend to someone else. Therefore, there is no doubt that this is turning away from Allah's way, and making people abstain from doing goodness. His statement: '…and you would have [in the Hereafter] a great punishment.' In addition to the loss that afflicts them in this life, after their foot has slipped, and all other kinds of punishments that will befall them in this life, there is still the tremendous suffering that awaits them in the Hereafter.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَشۡتَرُواْ بِعَهۡدِ ٱللَّهِ ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلًاۚ إِنَّمَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ هُوَ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡ إِن كُنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

Do not sell for a small price any pledge made in God's name:
what God has [to give] is better for you, if you only knew [95]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 95)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is forbidding us and warning us. Beware of making Allah's covenant, which you have affirmed for people, and you have made Allah a guarantor over it, as merely by making the pledge, its execution becomes obligatory upon you.

Or, it is Allah's covenant (i.e. His legislation) – that you have pledged yourself to act according to and preserve, which is belief in Allah and the veracity of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying from Allah and to the *ummah* the rulings that he has brought. Beware of deeming something else to be more valuable because if you violate your pledge with Allah for some of the temporary pleasures of this life, then you have made this thing to be more valuable than your pledge with Allah, because the price, regardless of how much, will be small.

Then the justification for this comes in His statement: 'Indeed, what is with Allah is best for you.' What is best for you, in truth, is not the pleasures of this life, regardless of how many they are. Rather, it is that which is with Allah and

He made this clear in His statement: '…all that is with you is bound to come to an end, whereas that which is with Allah is everlasting.' (*an-Nahl:* 96)

What makes man break his pledge? It is seeing some superficial benefit beyond what he has pledged himself to, and this takes him away from what he pledged himself to in favour of this superficiality. However, if he used his intellect and reflected on the matter, he would know that what he is striving for is very low in value, and a small, temporary profit when compared with what has been stored away for him if he holds true to the pledge. This is because whatever share he has taken from this life must come to an end.

The intellect says that if something is small and everlasting, it is better than something that is great but does not last, so what do you think about something that is small and ceasing, as opposed to something that is great and unceasing?

Here is an example: if I were to give you enough fruits to remain with you for a week or a month, and you ate them all in one day, you would have only enjoyed them one time and you would miss out on numerous meals that you would have had if you had eaten the fruits over a longer period of time. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* alerts you to the fact that what is with Allah is truly the best for you, and He makes your scales of faith to be exact. It is foolish to sell that which is great and everlasting for the small and ceasing: '…if only you could know.'

The verse contains precision in calculating and precision in comparing, as well as precision in solving economic equations. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

مَا عِندَكُمۡ يَنفَدُ وَمَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ بَاقٖۗ وَلَنَجۡزِيَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ
صَبَرُوٓاْ أَجۡرَهُم بِأَحۡسَنِ مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٩٦

What you have runs out but what God has endures,
and We shall certainly reward those who remain
steadfast according to the best of their actions [96]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 96)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that man's share in this life is a temporary contingent. Either you will leave it when you die or it will leave you via trials that are made to happen to you. As for that which is with Allah, it is everlasting and has no end. ‘And We will surely give those who were patient their reward.’ The word “patient” indicates that man will be exposed to agitations within the soul that will result in him hesitating between holding true to the pledge and violating it, when he sees the shining glimmer of wealth and the passion of the soul are provoked within him. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says to him: ‘Be patient. Be patient. Don not be hasty. Compare the matter calmly, bear every psychological difficulty, and overcome the passions of the soul in order to arrive at a praiseworthy result.’

The student who works hard, toils and bears the difficulties of studying and learning is patient with regards to immediate passions because he desires something that is longer and deferred. Behind the studying and learning, there is a greater objective and a loftier goal. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We will surely give those who were patient’ with the difficulties of holding true to pledges. ‘Their reward according to the best of what they used to do.’ A reward that is an increase according to the best reward there is because when man does something that is obligatory or recommended he earns a reward. As for the merely permissible, the presumption is that there is no reward, but Allah’s bounty also rewards him for it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَـٰلِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهُۥ حَيَوٰةً
طَيِّبَةً ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and
has faith, We shall give a good life and reward
them according to the best of their actions[97]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 97)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is giving us a general issue of equality between men and women, as pledges were customary between men and women, and it is not for women to participate in giving pledges, such that even they partook in a pledge with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* on the day of the oath of allegiance at ‘Aqaba, he made one of the Companions receive the oaths of the women on his behalf.(1)

Therefore, women are far from this battleground because this is from the particular customs of men. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to say to us: ‘We do not prevent the female from having righteous actions.’

Do not assume that the matter is applied to men and not women, as righteous actions are accepted from both the male and the female in equal measure, as long as the condition of faith is fulfilled. This is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…while he is a believer.’ This is what causes the action to have some benefit and to be accepted by Allah. Therefore, faith is a condition for the acceptance of righteous actions. Whenever the condition of faith is fulfilled, the male and the female are equal with regards to reward and recompense.

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘We will surely cause him to live a good life.’ This is the natural consequence of righteous actions through which the person who does them seeks Allah’s countenance and the abode of the Hereafter. Allah gathers two shares of reward for him: a share in this life by giving him a good, happy life(2) and a share in the Hereafter. ‘We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.’

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Ibn Hisham mentioned in (As-Sira) (2/466) that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him would not shake hands with women. He would only take the oath of allegiance from them and when they had affirmed it, he would say: “You are free to go for you have pledged your allegiance.”*

(2) *In his (Tafsir), Al-Qurtubi relates five opinions regarding the interpretation of a ‘good life’:*
   1) *Lawful provision. This is the opinion of Ibn ʿAbbas, Saʿid ibn Jubayr and ʿAtaʾ*
   2) *Contentment. This is the opinion of Al-Hasan Al-Basri and ʿAli ibn Abu Taleb.*
   3) *Enabling success to carry out acts of obedience, as it leads to pleasing Allah. The meaning of this was stated by Ad-Dahak.*
   4) *Paradise: this is the opinion of Mujahid, Qatada and Ibn Zayd. Al-Hasan Al-Basri said: ‘Life is not good for anyone except in paradise.’*
   5) *The sweetness of obedience: this is the opinion of Abu Bakr Al-Waraq.*

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ فَٱسْتَعِذْ بِٱللَّهِ مِنَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ٱلرَّجِيمِ ﴿٩٨﴾

[Prophet], when you recite the Quran, seek God's
protection from the outcast, Satan [98]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 98)

Seek refuge means to seek recourse and cling to Allah from something that you fear, and you do not seek recourse and you do not cling, nor do you seek protection or help unless you sense within yourself that you are weak with regards to struggling against your enemy. If your enemy is Satan (Iblis) because of the power and authority that Allah has given him, and the means that he has to get through to the human soul, then you have no strength and no power in your struggle against him unless you seek recourse in Allah, the Powerful Who created you and created this Satan. He alone is the Fully Capable when it comes to protecting you from him; as Satan is in battle with man until the Day of Resurrection. Satan swore an oath to the True Lord *Glorified is He* and He said: '[Iblis] said, "By your might, I will surely mislead them all. Except, among them, Your chosen servants."' (*Sad:* 82-83)

All you have to do is throw yourself at the mercy of your Lord *Glorified is He* and cling to Him, as He is the Powerful and the fully Capable when it comes to defending you from that which you cannot defend yourself. Do not struggle against him with your own power because you have no ability regarding him. Do not let him be alone with you because if he is alone with you, he will take you away from Allah and he will have predominance. This is why we always say: 'there is no power and no strength except in Allah'; no power: there is no departure from disobedience. No strength means that there is no ability to obey except with Allah.

We can see a young boy walking down the street, for example, and he may come across someone of a similar age who transgresses against him. However, if he is in the company of his father, no one dares do anything to him. So, what do you think about him being in the company of his Lord *Glorified is He* and he throws himself into the protection of Allah *Glorified is He*? When addressing seeking refuge in Allah, we remember a principle of faith that was taught to us by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his Noble Hadith: “If someone seeks refuge in Allah, give him refuge.”(1)

Thus, it is necessary for the believer to give refuge to whoever seeks refuge in Allah, even if it is regarding the things most beloved to him. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is giving us an example in this when He married a girl (2) who was very attractive and beautiful, so much so that his wives were jealous of her and they started plotting against her and trying to get rid of her so that she would not have precedence over them in the Prophet’s heart, but how could they do this? They tried to take advantage of the fact that this girl was still young and inexperienced. She had sound intentions and a pure conscience. She did not have any of the experiences of life from which she would have learned about wickedness and plotting. Furthermore, she was still in the euphoria of her delight at becoming a mother of the believers. She was trying her hardest to please the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Prophet’s wives took full advantage of this. One of them said to her: “When you are with the Messenger of Allah say to him: ‘I seek refuge in Allah from you’ because he loves this statement.” The girl took this statement because of her sound intentions, her love of Allah’s Messenger, and her eagerness to please him. She said to him: “I seek refuge in Allah from you” and she did not know the meaning of this expression, so he said to her: “You have sought refuge in a refuge. Return to your family.”(3) In other words, as long as you have sought refuge in Allah, then I accept this seeking of refuge because you have sought refuge in One Who makes it obligatory for us to leave you for His sake. Then the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* divorced her in compliance with this seeking of refuge.

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/250), Abu Dawud in His (Sunnan) (5108), and An-Nasa’i in his (Sunnan) (5/82) from the Hadith of Ibn ‘Abbas may Allah be pleased with them both* that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: “If someone seeks refuge in Allah give him refuge, and if someone asks you by Allah’s countenance give to him.”

(2) *She is the daughter of Al-Jawn. Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalani said in (Al-Fath) (9/357): “The truth is that her name is Umayma bint An-Nu‘man ibn Sharahil Al-Kindiyyah.”*

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (5254-5257) and Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (2050) from the Hadith of ‘A’isha Allah be pleaed with her*

Therefore, whoever seeks refuge in Allah must be given refuge by the believers. The believers must be Allah's soldiers for whoever seeks Allah's protection, and must grant them asylum until they are safe.

If you want to read the Quran, then seek refuge in Allah from Satan, the accursed because the Quran is Allah's speech. If we were to believe that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who is speaking, then we would know that reading the Quran is different from any other reading. When reading the Quran you must be engaged in the following things: The first: call to mind the sanctity of the One Who sent it down *Glorified is He* Whom you believe in and Whose speech you have accepted. The second: call to mind the veracity of the Messenger in conveying the Quran that was sent down to him. The third: call to mind the greatness of the Noble Quran because of its various aspects of inimitability and the rulings and good manners that it contains.

Therefore, you have three things that you should prepare when reading Allah's speech in His Noble Quran and each one of them is a righteous action that Satan will not leave you to carry out without interfering, whispering to you, and attempting to turn you away from what you are engaged in. At the same time, you will not be able to prevent him unless you seek Allah's help against him, and seek refuge in Allah from him. Based on this, we must seek refuge in Allah from Satan before reading the Quran.

Despite that, there is no objection to understanding the meaning of seeking refuge to be after reading the Quran, and the purport would be: if you have read the Quran, seek refuge in Allah (i.e. after reading). This is because after reading Allah's Book, you leave it with a provision of faith and sublime manifestations, and you have come across the good manners and rulings that are required of you. Thus, you must seek refuge in Allah from Satan so that he does not ruin this provision and these manifestations, or turn you away from implementing these morals and rulings.

'Satan, the expelled [from His mercy],' the one who is damned and banished from Allah's mercy is not a new creation that we need to try out in order to know his nature and how to deal with him. Rather, he has a long history of enmity with us, beginning with our father Adam *peace be upon him*.

Allah warned Adam *peace be upon him* about him when He says: ‘O Adam! Verily, this is a foe unto you and your wife.’ (*Ta Ha:* 117) And before he was cursed, damned and banished from Allah’s mercy, he threatened us by saying: ‘I shall most certainly cause his descendants – all but a few – to obey me blindly!’ (*al-Isra’:* 62)

Therefore, there is a long history of enmity between us and him that began with the creation of man and will continue until the Hour is established.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّهُۥ لَيۡسَ لَهُۥ سُلۡطَٰنٌ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمۡ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

He has no power over those who believe and trust
in their Lord [99] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 99)

Due to some wisdom that the Creator *Glorified is He* intended, He gave Satan some power and authority. Either authority can be the power of proof which actually convinces you and you are pleased with it and convinced of it, or it can be the authority of compulsion and domination which forces you and makes you do something under compulsion, without you being convinced.

Therefore, the implementation of what is sought has two powers: the power of proof which illuminates and clarifies the marks of truth for you, and the power of compulsion which forces you to implement what is sought without you being convinced, even if you do not see it.

The truth is that Satan does not possess either of these powers. This is clear in the True Lord’s statement on the tongue of Satan on the Day of Resurrection: “And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded: ‘Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I deny your association of me [with Allah] before. Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment.’ (*Ibrahim:* 22)

This is a dialogue that takes place on the Day of Resurrection after the matter has come to an end and the truth has been revealed, and the time for openness and confrontation has come. Satan will say to his followers, disavowing any responsibility: 'I had no power at all over you.' In other words, I had no power of proof with which to convince you to do something out of pleasure, nor did I have the power of compulsion with which to force you to do something you were reluctant to do. I merely indicated and whispered and you came to me obediently.

'I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid.' We are in an equal state of failure. I cannot help you and you cannot help me. This is because a cry is from someone who is in a critical situation or adversity and they are not able to get themselves out of it. Thus, they cry in a loud voice in the hope that someone will come and rescue them. Therefore, the meaning is that I cannot remove the reason for your cries and you cannot remove the reason for my cries.

Likewise, in another dialogue that took place between the people of falsehood who supported one another in this life, and this is the confrontation on the Day of Resurrection: 'And stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned. [They will be asked]," "What is [wrong] with you? Why do you not help each other?" But they, that Day, are in surrender. And they will approach one another blaming each other. They will say, "Indeed, you used to come at us from the right. The oppressors will say, "Rather, you [yourselves] were not believers, And we had over you no authority, but you were a transgressing people."' (*as-Saffat:* 24-30) The meaning of the phrase: "from the right" is that man carries out his action with both his hands, but the right hand is the support, so he comes to him from the right, i.e. from the direction of the active hand.

So, who did Satan have power over, along with this dominance and compulsion? The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that Satan has no mastery over those who believe in Him as their Lord, and who seek refuge in Him and hold fast to Him. As long as you believe in Him, then you are in His Company and under His protection, and Satan, who is a creation of Allah, cannot have dominance over you.

Therefore, the fortress that protects us from Satan's scheming is faith in Allah and putting one's trust in Him. Who, then, does Satan have dominance over? The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that it is the opposite side, as He says:

إِنَّمَا سُلْطَٰنُهُۥ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُۥ وَٱلَّذِينَ هُم بِهِۦ مُشْرِكُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

His power is only over those who ally themselves with him
and those who, because of him, join partners with God [100]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 100)

The meaning of ‘who take him as an ally’ is that they take him as a guardian and they obey his command. They submit to his whisperings and they follow his footsteps. ‘Those who take him as an ally and those who through him associate others with Allah,’ or the meaning is they associate partners with Allah because Satan has commands and prohibitions and they obey him therein which is the essence of worship. It is as if they worshiped him instead of Allah by obeying him in what he commanded and prohibited. Allah *Glorified is He* has called Satan’s method of misguidance and enticement ‘whispering’, and whispering is actually the sound of jewellery when women move their hands; a gentle sound that has attraction and seduction which stirs up the desires of the soul. Likewise, Satan gets through to you by way of enticement and embellishment. Whenever he has stirred up the desires of your soul and it has talked you into disobedience, he leaves you with it because at this point his task is finished.

However, does the soul only commit disobedience due to the whispering of Satan? No, because the soul that incites to evil can commit disobedience by itself without whisperings from Satan, who may whisper, incite and encourage an act of disobedience for it.

How, therefore, does one distinguish between these two acts of disobedience? When the soul desires some act of disobedience, or a passion that it sees, it persists in pursuing it until fulfilled. If you struggle against your soul and try to turn away from this passion, it urges you towards it and demands that you give in to it.

However, when Satan whispers some passion to you and finds that you have some resistance, he turns your attention towards something else because he wants you to be disobedient in any way, shape or form.

An example of this is what we see with bribery, and we seek refuge in Allah because if you refuse to be bribed by money, he embellishes bribery by way of gifts for you. If you refuse to be bribed by gifts, he embellishes the idea of being bribed by having some interest taken care of. This is how this accursed creature remains behind you until he finds one of your weak spots. Therefore, he is not like the soul which desires one passion. Rather, he wants to attack you with whatever means are available.

In order to prevent Satan from getting through to us and to be on our guard against him, we must know that Satan has a great deal of knowledge with which he reached the ranks of the angels. Indeed, they called him 'the peacock of the angels,' and it is possible to know something of Satan's knowledge by looking at the subtlety of his oath, when He swore to the True Lord *Glorified is He* that he would entice the children of Adam into grievous error by saying: '[Iblis] said, "By your might, I will surely mislead them all. Except, among them, your chosen servants."' (*Sad:* 82-83)

This is how Satan knew how to swear an appropriate oath. He did not say, "…by my power" or "…by my proof I will beguile the creation into grievous error." Rather, he knew that Allah *Glorified is He* has the attribute of might, and He is Almighty and never defeated. This is why He gave His creation the freedom to believe in Him. He said: 'Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.' (*al-Kahf:* 29)

The meaning is thus, by Your might over Your creation, whoever wants to believe, believes, and whoever wants to disbelieve, disbelieves. I will use this as a means to beguile humanity into grievous error, but I will not to dare approach those whom You have selected and chosen. I will not interfere with those who are truly Your servants. I have no say regarding them, and I have no power over them.

Likewise, we must know that Satan is exact in his planning. This is one of his means of getting through to people, and his deceit, which calls on us to be on our guard against this accursed creature. Satan has no need to go to taverns, for example. The people there have spared him the effort and trouble of having to whisper to them. These people are his followers and loved ones, and they relieve him through their disobedience of Allah. However, he needs to go to the mosques to ruin whatever the people of obedience are doing.

This issue was clarified and understood by the revered Imam Abu Hanifa An-Nu'man, who was well-known for his intelligence, and he was fully aware of

Satan’s deceit and means of getting through to people, all of which made him very capable in giving legal verdicts. Someone came and presented this issue to him: He said: “O Imam, I had some money that I buried in some place, and I put a sign over it. Then a torrential stream came and wiped out the sign, so I have not been able to find it. What should I do?” Abu Hanifa smiled and said: “My dear son, this has nothing to do with knowledge.” In which chapter of jurisprudence will Abu Hanifa find this issue? “However, I will give you something clever to do.” And, indeed, the Imam’s genius came up with a clever idea that showed his level of knowledge and understanding. He said to him: “Get up in the night, perform your ablutions, stand before your Lord and do the night prayer (*tahajjud*). In the morning tell me what happened.”

At the dawn prayer, the man met him with a smile on his face, and he said: “I found the money.” He said: “How?” The man said: “While I was standing before my Lord in prayer, I remembered the place and I went there and I found my money.” The Imam laughed and said: “By Allah, I knew that Satan would not let you spend your night with your Lord.”

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا بَدَّلۡنَآ ءَايَةٗ مَّكَانَ ءَايَةٖ وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا
يُنَزِّلُ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مُفۡتَرِۭۚ بَلۡ أَكۡثَرُهُمۡ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

When We substitute one revelation for another – and God knows best what He reveals – they say, ‘You are just making it up,’ but most of them have no knowledge [101]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 101)

Substitute: to take away a verse and remove it and I put another verse in its place.

One meaning of the word ‘verse’ is the one in the Noble Quran, which we call the bearers of rulings. If another verse is something amazing, then what aspect of wonder is there in the verses of the Quran? The aspect of wonder in the verses of the Quran is that you find these verses amongst an unlettered nation. It was sent down to an unlettered prophet amongst nomadic Bedouins who were good at nothing but eloquence of speech. Then you find these verses bearing laws, rulings, and good manners that intimidated the two most powerful, civilizations at the time: Persian in the East and Roman in the West. You see them looking attentively at Islam, and they desire the rulings that can save them. Is this not amazing?

This is the final kind of verse, which is the verses of the Noble Book and which we call the bearers of rulings. Do they change, like the others kinds of verses? We say: the verses of the Book do not change because Allah's rulings are required of whoever was contemporary to Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* just as the rulings are required of whoever is alive when the Hour is established.

Islam was preceded by Judaism and Christianity, and we have the command of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to change the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to the honoured *Ka'ba*. The Jews(1) objected to this and said: "What is with Muhammad? He does not stick to anything. He commands one thing today and tomorrow he will command the opposite. If the correct House is the *Ka'ba,* then their prayer towards Jerusalem is invalid. If Jerusalem is the correct one, then their prayer towards the *Ka'ba* is invalid." This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: 'And when We substitute a verse in place of a verse – and Allah is most knowing of what He sends down – they say, "You, [O Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies]."'

The purport of the True Lord's statement: '…substitute a verse in place of a verse" is that We brought a verse that showed a ruling that contravenes what came in the Torah, for indeed facing the *Ka'ba* in the Quran replaced facing Jerusalem in the Torah.

His statement: '…and Allah is most knowing of what He sends down.' Every verse is sent down according to its context: the nation, the environment, the place and the time.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bayhaqi in (Dala'il An-Nubuwwa) (2/574), in a chain of transmission that is discontinued at the level of a Companion (mursal) from the Hadith of Az-Zuhri that the direction of prayer was changed towards the Sacred Mosque in Rajab, sixteen months after the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him had left Mecca.* The Jews started saying: 'The man misses his hometown, and his father's house. What is with these people? They abandon their direction for prayer and then pray in another direction.'

'You, [O Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies].' They accused Allah's Messenger of deliberately lying, and that this change was from him, not revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* because Allah's rulings do not contradict one another. We say: yes, Allah's rulings do not contradict one another within the same religion. However, if religions differ, then there is no objection if rulings differ.

Therefore, the verses of the Noble Quran do not change, but abrogation does take place, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: 'We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it.' (*al-Baqara:* 106)

Here are a few examples of abrogation in the Noble Quran: When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Remain, then, conscious of Allah as best you can.' (*at-Taghabun:* 16)

He made ability the standard of action. When the Legislator *Glorified is He* saw that ability was insufficient, He mitigated the ruling for us, such that He did not make us legally responsible for that which is beyond our capacity, like [the exemption] from fasting for the sick or the traveller, for example. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah does not burden any human being beyond its ability.' (*al-Baqara:* 286)

And He says: 'Allah does not burden any human being with more than He has given him.' (*at-Talaq:* 7)

After that, it is not for us to distort the verses and say, "Indeed, the soul can no longer bear and endure such-and-such ruling." The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who knows what the soul can bear, and He charges it according to its capacity. If He charges it, then He knows what it can bear. The evidence is that when there is difficulty, He automatically lessens the load for you, as He *Glorified is He* said: 'Now, Allah has lightened [the hardship] for you, and He knows that among you is weakness.' (*al-Anfal:* 66)

Because, in the beginning of Islam, when the courage of the Muslims and their strength was strong, He *Glorified is He* says: 'If there be twenty of you who are patient in adversity, they might overcome two hundred.' (*al-Anfal:* 65) Meaning a proportion of one to ten, and when He *Glorified is He* saw that there was weakness within them, He says: 'Now, Allah has lightened [the hardship] for you, and He knows that among you is weakness. So if there are from you one hundred [who are] steadfast, they will overcome two hundred,' (*al-Anfal:* 66), i.e., a proportion of one to two, as Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who knows the truth of our capacity. He charges us according to what we are capable of, and He lessens the load for us when there is a need. Thus, it is not correct for us to involve ourselves in this issue and measure our capacity according to our own whims.

One of the examples of abrogation is that the Arabs, in the past, would not give parents any wealth based on the consideration that parents are approaching the end of their lives. Instead, the entire share would go to the children based on the consideration that they are just starting out in life.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give a share to the parents, He made it a bequest. He says: 'Prescribed for you when death approaches [any] one of you if he leaves wealth [is that he should make] a bequest for the parents.' (*al-Baqara:* 180)

When faith had settled within the souls, He made it a fixed inheritance, and He changed the ruling from being a bequest to something better, which is inheritance. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And as for the parents [of the deceased], each of them shall have one-sixth.' (*an-Nisa':* 11)

Therefore, whenever the True Lord *Glorified is He* changes a verse, He abrogates it and replaces it with something better. This is clear in the prohibition of wine, for example, where we see this solid gradualism which takes into consideration the nature of the human soul, and that this matter is one of the habits that have taken souls captive; hence the gradualism. This is not a creedal matter that needs a decisive ruling over which there is no argument. Look at this gradualism in the prohibition of wine. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And from the fruits of the palm trees and grapevines you take intoxicant and good provision.' (*an-Nahl:* 67)

The people of perception and understanding of what Allah means heard this verse and said, "Indeed, Allah has planned something in this verse, and this is because He described sustenance as being wholesome, and He did not say anything about intoxicants. He did not describe them as wholesome. This indicates that there will be further discussion about wine later on."

When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about wine in the Quran, he answered them: 'They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, "In them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit."' (*al-Baqara:* 219)

This came in the form of advice and instruction, not in the form of a ruling or legislation. All believers must trust the speech of their Lord that He will make a way out from the prison of this evil habit.

Then it was noticed that some people were praying while they were intoxicated, such that some of them would say in their prayer, "I worship what you worship."(1) The ruling then came: 'O you who believe! Do not pray while you are in a state of drunkenness, [but wait] until you know what you are saying.' (*an-Nisa':* 43)

The requisite of this ruling is to keep them away from wine most of the time, as they cannot pray without being intoxicated unless they abstain from it for a sufficient amount of time before the prayer. This is how they got used to abstaining from it most of the time, just as doctors nowadays treat their patients who smoke, for example. They advise them to cut down gradually so that they can eventually overcome this habit.

This is how the Wise Legislator *Glorified is He* made the souls arrive at the stage in which they were accustomed to leaving off wine, and they started to turn away from it. Then the souls became ready to receive the absolute prohibition. He *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90)

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* abrogated a verse and a ruling and replaced it with what is better.

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(1) In his (Tafsir) (1/500) Ibn Kathir mentions the reason for revelation behind this verse, which is that 'Ali ibn Abu Talib said: "Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf prepared some food for us and invited us, and we drank some wine and the wine was taken from us. We then started to pray and the person leading us said: 'Say: O you who deny the truth! I do not worship what you worship and we worship what you worship.' Then Allah Glorified is He sent down: 'O you who believe! Do not pray while you are in a state of drunkenness, [but wait] until you know what you are saying.' (*an-Nisa':* 43)

What is astonishing is that we see some scholars who are bigoted about the Quran, and they do not accept the opinion that there is abrogation in it. How, when the Quran itself has said: 'We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it.' They said, "It is because there is something called (*al-budaa'*)(1) because abrogation requires, according to them, that Allah legislated a ruling, then it appeared to Him that it was an error and therefore He substituted it." We say to these people: you have missed the mark with this statement because the meaning of abrogation is to declare that a previous ruling no longer applies and a new and better ruling has taken its place. This is the meaning of abrogation that is found in the Noble Quran. Amongst them are those who stop at the True Lord's statement: 'We replace with a better or a similar one.'

And they say that 'We bring forth [one] better than it' provides rationale for the change, and a necessity that requires abrogation, which is that something else is better, so what is the rationale behind the change in His statement: '…or similar to it'?

First of all, regarding His statement: 'We bring forth [one] better than it,' someone might say, "Why did not He bring the better one from the beginning?" We say, it is because when the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared.' (*Al-'Imran:* 102)

This is a high station of Allah-consciousness. No one can do this except the elite from amongst Allah's servants. This verse troubled(2) the Companions and they said, "Who is able to do this, O Messenger of Allah?" Then this verse came down: 'So fear Allah as much as you are able.' (*at-Taghabun:* 16) Allah *Glorified is He* made Allah-consciousness to be according to ability, and this is how the first verse was abrogated in terms of what it required. However, the possibility for progress remains. Whoever wants to make progress in fearing Allah will find blessings therein. Allah will increase the number of people like them and reward them with goodness, and whoever is incapable takes the second verse.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) (1/151), "All the Muslims agree that abrogation is possible in Allah's rulings because of the profound wisdom therein and all of them say that it happens."*

(2) Sa'id ibn Jubayr said, "When this verse was sent down, action became unbearable for the people. They stood until their veins swelled and their foreheads festered. Then Allah *Glorified is He* sent down this verse to make things easier for the Muslims." 'So fear Allah as much as you are able.' The first verse was thus abrogated. This has been mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his *(Tafsir)* (4/277).

If we were to look at these verses again, we would find that the first: 'O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared.'

Even though it calls for a great deal of fear of Allah, those who act according to it are only a few. Meanwhile, the second: 'So fear Allah as much as you are able.'

Even though it has made fearing Allah to be according to ability, those who act according to it will be many.

From this angle, the second is better than the first, as we say, "Something small and constant is better than something great that is discontinued."

As for His statement: '…or a similar one,' i.e. the first is like the second, why the change here? What's the reason?

We say that the reason here is to test those who are legally responsible in terms of their obedience and submission, to see if they move from one matter to something like it in which there is no difficulty in this one and no facilitation in the other. Will they comply and obey, or will they argue and debate?

A clear example of this is what happened when the direction for prayer was changed. It was not difficult for the people to face Jerusalem, and it was not easier for them to face the *Ka'ba*. The matter was a test of their obedience and submission to Allah.(1) There were those amongst the people who would say, "We hear and we obey," and they would carry out Allah's Command without any argument. There were also those amongst them who would object, deny and accuse Allah's Messenger of lying about Allah.

Another example is what we see in the rites of the pilgrimage, such as the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which he taught us, of kissing the black stone, even though it is a stone. We also throw pebbles in Mina, even though they are just stones. Therefore, these are matters for which the intellect has no scope.

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(1) He *Glorified is He* says: 'And We did not make the *qiblah* which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels.' (*al-Baqara*: 143)

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘But most of them do not know.’ The True Lord *Glorified is He* negates their previous statement: ‘You, [O Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies].’

And He says to them: “No. He is not inventing and he is not lying. This is false accusation. The fact is that most of them do not understand.”

The phrase ‘most of them’ does not necessarily have to be the opposite of the least. Thus, it is possible for us to say, “most of them do not know,” as well as “most of them know,” as in the True Lord’s statement: ‘Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified.’ (*al-Hajj:* 18)

This is by consensus. All creatures prostrate to Allah *Glorified is He* except for man. Amongst man are many who do prostrate and there are also many who will inevitably have to suffer in the life to come. The Quran did not say: “a few will inevitably have to suffer.”

On the premise that: ‘most of them do not know.’

Therefore, there is a minority who know the veracity of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying from his Lord, and they know that these people are lying and fabricating when they accuse Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of lying. They also know the veracity of every verse in its place, and the wisdom that Allah intends through each verse.

So, who are these people who know from amongst the ranks of the disbelievers and idol-worshippers?

They said, “There were amongst them people who had superior intellects and an understanding of matters, and they knew what was true and correct in this matter. However, they denied it, as the True Lord says: ‘And they rejected them, while their [inner] selves were convinced thereof, out of injustice and haughtiness.’ (*an-Naml:* 14)

Amongst these people were those who were thinking about guidance, and Islam was enticing them. It is as if they had a plan to submit, and they were preparing themselves for it, and they knew that what the disbelievers were saying, along with their accusations of Allah's Messenger, were false and fabricated.

Also amongst these people were actual believers, but they lacked the essential strength to defend themselves and tribal solidarity which could protect them from the scheming of the disbelievers. Furthermore, they did not have the ability to emigrate. Thus, they were still living amongst the people of Mecca except that they were believers, and they knew the veracity of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and what the disbelievers were fabricating about him. However, they were unable to openly declare their faith.

Regarding these people, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and it is He who withheld their hands from you and your hands from them within [the area of] Mecca after He caused you to overcome them. And ever is Allah seeing what you do. They are the ones who disbelieved and obstructed you from *al-Masjid al-Haram* while the offering was prevented from reaching its place of sacrifice. And if not for believing men and believing women whom you did not know – that you might trample them and there would befall you because of them dishonour without [your] knowledge.' (*al-Fath:* 24-25) They would have entered upon the people of Mecca and gotten into an utter state of confusion, between believer and disbeliever, and they would have unknowingly killed their own believing brothers.

'[This was so] that Allah might admit to His mercy that He willed. If they had been apart [from them], We would have punished those who disbelieved among them with painful punishment.' (*al-Fath:* 25) If they had been distinguished in some way, the disbelievers on one side and the believers on the other, We would have imposed grievous suffering upon those who were denying the truth.

Therefore, even though most of them do not understand and they accuse you of lying and inventing, there is still the non-majority who know that they are liars when they say: 'You, [O Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies].' As long as they accuse you of inventing, then respond to them by saying:

قُلْ نَزَّلَهُۥ رُوحُ ٱلْقُدُسِ مِن رَّبِّكَ بِٱلْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ ٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا۟ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

Say that the Holy Spirit has brought the Revelation with
the Truth step by step from your Lord, to strengthen the
believers and as guidance and good news to the devout [102]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 102)

In this verse the True Lord *Glorified is He* is responding to the fabrications of the disbelievers regarding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and their accusation that he is deliberately lying and invented those verses himself. Thus, He did not say to him: "O Muhammad, say to these people." Rather, He sent down the Pure Spirit.

"Holy" means "purified". The meaning of "Pure Spirit" is the ambassador of revelation, Gabriel *peace be upon him*. In another verse, He says about him: 'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193)

And He says about him: '[That] indeed, the Quran is a word [conveyed by] a Noble Messenger, [Who is] possessed of power and with the Owner of the Throne, secure [in position], Obeyed there [in the heavens] and trustworthy.' (*at-Takwir:* 19-21)

Regarding the True Lord's statement: '…to make firm those who believe.' Gabriel *peace be upon him* did not bring this Quran from himself. Rather, it is from Allah setting forth the truth. Neither Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought this Quran from himself nor did Gabriel *peace be upon him*. The Quran is from Allah.

His statement: '…to make firm those who believe and as guidance and good tidings to the Muslims.' (*an-Nahl:* 102) Meaning: to make those who have believed firm in their faith in the verses that the Messenger has brought. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* knows best about the verses that are sent down, and that every verse is suited to its time, place and environment. There is proof that the believers are obedient and submitting to Allah *Glorified is He* and they affirm everything that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed from his Lord *Glorified is He*.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُۥ بَشَرٌ ۗ لِّسَانُ ٱلَّذِى يُلْحِدُونَ
إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِىٌّ وَهَٰذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِىٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

We know very well that they say, 'It is a man who teaches him,' but the language of the person they allude to is foreign, while this revelation is in clear Arabic [103]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 103)

In this verse, there is another accusation of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* yet the Quran willingly discloses it because whoever hears an accusation or fabrication must hear the response. The Quran wants to expose the reality of these people, manifest the invalidity of their arguments and how confused they are.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And We certainly know that they say, "It is only a human being who teaches the Prophet."' (*an-Nahl:* 103)

Prior to that they said that Allah's Messenger was a madman and Allah *Glorified is He* cleared him of this by saying: 'And indeed, you are of a great moral character.' (*al-Qalam:* 4)

Someone who is upon a sublime character cannot be a madman because a virtuous character is only found within its proper place, and the proof is His statement: 'You are not, [O Muhammad], by the favour of your Lord, a madman.' (*al-Qalam:* 2)

Prior to that, they also said that he was a sorcerer, which reflects their utter confusion in their own misguidance. If the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is indeed a sorcerer, then how come he has not bewitched them just as he has bewitched the believers and brought the matter to an end?

Furthermore, they also claimed that he was a poet, even though they were the most knowledgeable of people in the arts of speech, be it poetry, prose or oratory. They had never noticed any of these things from him. Rather, it is merely falsehood when they persist in their stubbornness and are too arrogant to accept the truth.

Here, they come with something new with which they deny Allah's Messenger. They said: 'It is only a human being who teaches the Prophet.' They claim that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would frequently visit one of the people of knowledge who would teach him the Quran. They said, (1) "It is a boy from Banu 'Amir ibn Lu'ay, and his name is 'Ya'ish." He knew how to read and write, and he would get books from the markets and read the stories of previous peoples, such as 'Antara, Dhat Al-Humma and others. When it came to identifying this individual whom they claimed that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was learning from, their opinions contradicted one another. Some of them said that his name was 'Addas'. Others said it was Salman Al-Farisi *may Allah be pleased with him*. Others, still, said it was Bal'am ar-Rumi, who was a European, Christian blacksmith who knew a lot about the People of the Book, and so forth. The True Lord *Glorified is He* answers these people and manifests the emptiness of their fabrications and their persistence in denying Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: 'The tongue of the one they refer to is foreign, and this Quran is [in] a clear Arabic language.'

The tongue is the language that is spoken. They pointed towards someone whose speech is not eloquent or rhetorical, such as when we see foreigners speaking Arabic, for example.

We notice here that the Noble Quran did not say non-Arab because there may be some of the non-Arabs who can master eloquent Arabic, as we have seen with Sibawayh(2), the author of *(Al-Kitab)*, which is the greatest Arabic grammatical reference work and it is still used today. He was non-Arab.

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(1) Al-Mahdawi stated this on the authority of 'Ikrimah (mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his *(Tafsir)* 5/2904), and other opinions have been mentioned:

1) It was a boy belonging to Al-Fakih ibn Al-Mughayra whose name was Jabr, and he was a Christian.
2) It was a boy belonging to 'Utba ibn Rabi'a whose name was 'Addas.
3) 'Abis, a boy belonging to Huwaytab ibn 'Abd Al-'Uzza.
4) Yasar Abu Fukayha, the slave of Ibn Al-Hadrami, and the two of them had become believers.

(2) Sibawayh: He is 'Amr ibn 'Uthman Al-Harithi Bilwala', the leader of the grammarians. He was born in one of the villages of Shiraz (148 AH). He went to Basra and learned under Khalil ibn Ahmad and surpassed him. The word *(sibawayh)* in Persian means =

Therefore, how can the Quran originate from these people who are not eloquent and can barely speak the Arabic language? How can these people be teaching Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he has brought a miracle in eloquence and rhetoric?

How could he have learned from these people, when it is not confirmed that he met any of them apart from ‘Addas, of whom it is said that he met once, and it is also not confirmed that he *peace and blessings be upon him* frequently visited a teacher, either from these people or anyone else?

Likewise, the Noble Quran contains verses, rulings, miracles and information that would have required the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to spend a long time with these people in order to learn and acquire this knowledge. But they never knew him to be doing any of these things.

Is it logical that everything in the Quran could be with any one of these people? If that were the case, this person would have the same rank and position amongst his people that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had. They would have pointed their fingers at him, and his prestige would have become widespread, but none of this happened.

Allah’s statement: ‘this Quran is [in] a clear Arabic language.’ The Prophet Muhammad’s language and that of the Noble Quran are clear, plain Arabic language in which there is no ambiguity or obscurity.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ لَا يَهۡدِيهِمُ ٱللَّهُ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٠٤﴾

If people do not believe in God’s revelation, God does not guide them, and a painful punishment awaits them [104]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 104)

In His statement: ‘…those who do not believe in the verses of Allah.’ The True Lord *Glorified is He* strips the attribute of faith from these people, so how can He say afterwards: ‘Allah will not guide them’? Are they not unbelievers and misguided? We say: guidance is of two types: The first type is that of

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= ‘the scent of apples’. He died in Shiraz in the year 180 AH at the age of 32. (*Al-’A‘lam* by Az-Zirikli 5/81) indicating and showing the way; both the believer and disbeliever share it because Allah has clarified the path for everyone. For example, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance.’ (*Fussilat:* 17) The second type is that of support and enabling success; this is exclusive to the believer. For example, He says: ‘and those who are guided – He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness.’ (*Muhammad:* 17) Therefore, the meaning of ‘Allah will not guide them’ is the guidance of support and enabling success.

It would also be correct for us to suggest an alternative interpretation whereby it means that Allah does not guide them to the Path of Paradise, but rather, He guides them to the Path of the Fire, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, those who disbelieve and commit wrong [or injustice] – never will Allah forgive them, nor will He guide them to a Path. Except the Path of Hell’ (*an-Nisa’:* 168-169).

The proof is what Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards: ‘…and for them is a painful punishment.’

In return, He *Glorified is He* says regarding the believers: ‘…and will admit them to the Paradise which He has promised them.’ (*Muhammad:* 6) He guided them and defined its Path for them.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا يَفۡتَرِي ٱلۡكَذِبَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِۖ
وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

Falsehood is fabricated only by those who do not
believe in God’s revelation: they are the liars [105]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 105)

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: “If you invent things about Allah’s Messenger and accuse him of lying, then indeed the real lie is that you deny Allah’s signs and you do not believe in them.”

We notice in the conclusion of the verse that the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say: “It is they who are disbelievers.” Rather, He says: “lying” to indicate the repulsiveness of lying and that it is an attribute unfit for believers.

This is why, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, “Does the believer steal?” He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: “Yes,” because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Now as for the man who steals and the woman who steals.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 38) As long as He has legislated a ruling and specified a punishment for it, then the matter is found and likely to happen.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was also asked, “Does the believer commit adultery?” He said, “Yes,” because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘As for the adulteress and the adulterer…’ (*an-Nur:* 2). He *peace and blessings be upon him* was then asked, “Does the believer lie?” He said, “No.”(1) This Hadith clarifies for us the repulsiveness of lying, and how it can be weightier than other wrong actions. Allah has specified a known punishment for each of them, while at the same time has not specified anything for lying in order to indicate that it is a crime that is weightier and beyond punishment.

Therefore, lying is an attribute that does not befit believers, and it is not conceived that they would do such a thing. This is because if someone has become known for being a liar because people have become accustomed to his lies, then we fear that if he were to say, “I bear witness that there is no deity [worthy of worship] but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah,” someone will say, “He’s a liar, and this is just another one of his lies.” Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

مَن كَفَرَ بِٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ إِيمَٰنِهِۦٓ إِلَّا مَنۡ أُكۡرِهَ وَقَلۡبُهُۥ مُطۡمَئِنُّۢ بِٱلۡإِيمَٰنِ وَلَٰكِن
مَّن شَرَحَ بِٱلۡكُفۡرِ صَدۡرٗا فَعَلَيۡهِمۡ غَضَبٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ١٠٦

With the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous punishment awaiting them [106] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 106)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* previously spoke about the ruling for the believers and the ruling for the disbelievers. Then He talked about those who violate oaths and do not hold true to them. Then He talked about those who invent things about Allah's Messenger and those who deny Allah's signs. All of these are issues of faith that must be raised.

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(1) *Related by Imam Malik in his (Muwatta’) (p.99) from the Hadith of Safwan ibn Salim, which is discontinued at the rank of a Companion (mursal)*

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us that faith is not merely something that is spoken: 'There is no deity [worthy of worship] but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' The statement by itself is insufficient. We must bear witness to it, which requires that both the heart and the tongue are in agreement with each other regarding this statement.

The one who contemplates this issue will find that logical division requires that we have four states. The first is that the heart and the tongue are in affirmative agreement with each other regarding faith, and this is why we say, "Indeed the believer is logical in his faith; because he says what his heart conceals."

The second is that the heart and the tongue are in negative agreement with each other in disbelief; and thus the disbeliever is also logical in his disbelief, just like the believer.

The third is that one believes on their outside but conceals disbelief within his heart, and this is the state of the hypocrite. The hypocrite is illogical in his faith because he manifests the opposite of what he conceals within himself in order to benefit from the privileges of faith.

The fourth is that one believes in their heart and articulates statements of disbelief on their tongue. This fourth state is what is intended in this verse. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is giving us a detailed exposition here of someone who disbelieves after faith. What is the cause of this disbelief? What is its reward?

His statement: 'Whoever disbelieves in Allah after his belief?' This is a conditional sentence whose apodosis is not mentioned until the end of the noble verse. First, let us look at a detailed exposition of this disbelief, as it is either under duress in which man has no say and he is forced to make a statement of disbelief, while at the same time his heart remains true to his faith. 'Whoever disbelieves in Allah after his belief... except for one who is forced [to renounce his religion] but his heart is secure in faith.' Then the Noble Quran goes quiet regarding this person in order to show that there is nothing held against him, and there is no harm in a believer using dissimulation, which is a concession that protects a person from the sources of destruction in circumstances like these.

Throughout the history of Islam, there are numerous examples of this concession being used. A statement of disbelief is articulated while one's heart remains true to faith. And, in the honoured Hadith, "My nation is excused from what they do by mistake, out of forgetfulness, and what they are forced to do."(1)

History mentions that Yasir Abu 'Ammar *may Allah be pleased with him* and his wife Sumayya *may Allah be pleased with her* were the first martyrs in Islam; and how were they martyred? They were amongst the very first Muslims, and they were subjected to a great deal of torture until the disbelievers presented them with the option of articulating a statement of disbelief in exchange for being pardoned. What did these two martyrs do? They came out openly with the truth, and they persisted in faith until they attained martyrdom for Allah's sake, without resorting to the concession of dissimulation.

Their son 'Ammar *may Allah be pleased with him* was the first person to take it, when he was subjected to the torture of the idol-worshippers.

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was told that 'Ammar ibn Yasir *Allah be pleased with him* had disbelieved, but He refuted this and said, "Indeed, the faith of 'Ammar is from the top of his head to the tips of his toes, and the faith in 'Ammar is admixed with his flesh and blood."(2)

Then 'Ammar *may Allah be pleased with him* approached the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he was crying. He told him what the idol-worshippers had done to him and he said, "By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, I was not freed from their hands until I insulted you and said good things about their gods." The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did nothing but wipe away 'Ammar's tears with his noble hands and say to him, “If they return to you, let them hear again what you told them.”(1) This concession made some of the Companions angry, and they went back to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask about it: “What about Bilal?”(2) He said, “‘Ammar used the concession while Billal came out with the truth.”

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his (Tafsir) (5/2909): "Even though the chain of transmission of this narration is not authentic, its meaning is authentic according to the consensus of the scholars." This is the opinion of Al-Qadi Abu Bakr ibn Al-'Arabi. Abu Muhammad 'Abd Al-Haqq mentioned that its chain of transmission is authentic. He said: "Abu Bakr Al-Asili mentioned it in (Al-Fawa'id) and Ibn Al-Mundhir in (Kitab Al-Iqna')."*

(2) *This is mentioned by Al-Wahidi in (Asbab An-Nuzul) (p.162).*

There is no doubt that of these two positions regarding confronting falsehood and its people, the position of declaring the truth and being patient in adversity is superior, and a more exalted rank than taking the dispensation because in the first, one believes with their heart and tongue, while in the other, one believes in their heart only and articulates disbelief on the tongue.

This is why, in the apostasy movement, Musaylamah, the Liar tried to go about the tribes in order to extract a testimony from them regarding the veracity of his prophethood. He said to one man, “What do you say about Muhammad?” The man said, “He is the Messenger of Allah.” He then said, “What do you say about me?” The man said cleverly, “You are the same,” which means that he got himself out of this tricky situation without openly acknowledging the Prophethood of this liar.

He met another man and asked him, “What do you say about Muhammad?” The man said, “He is The Messenger of Allah.” He then said, “What do you say about me?” The man said mockingly, “Speak up, because I have just become deaf.” He denied what Musaylama was claiming, and as a result he was killed. When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* learned about these two men, he said, “One of them used the concession. The other spoke out with the truth.”(3)

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(1) *Mentioned by As-Suyuti in (Ad-Durr al-Manthur) (5/170), and he attributed it to ‘Abd Ar-Razzaq, Ibn Sa’ad, Ibn Jarir and Al-Hakim, and it was declared authentic by Al-Bayhaqi in (Ad-Dala’il).*

(2) *This was because Bilal may Allah be pleased with him lowered himself for Allah. Thus, they started torturing him and saying to him, “Renounce your religion” while he would say, “One, one” until they became bored of him. Then they shackled him and placed a fiber rope around his neck, and they pushed him toward their youth who played with him between the two mountains that surround Mecca.*

(3) *Mentioned by As-Suyuti in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (5/172), and he attributed it to Abu Shayba on the authority of Al-Hasan. Ibn Kathir has mentioned a narration in his (Tafsir) (2/588) showing that the first of them was Habib ibn Zayd Al-Ansari.*

The scholars have spoken about coercion in Allah’s statement: ‘…except for one who is forced [to renounce his religion] while his heart is secure in faith.’ They have clarified the various aspects of coercion and the ruling respective to each one. They are as follows.

- If someone is forced to do something that affects them personally, such as if it was said to them, “Drink wine or I will kill you” or “torture you.” In this situation, one has to drink the wine in order to save oneself because it is a matter connected to oneself, not to mention there are those who disobey Allah by drinking it. If it is said to someone, “Disbelieve in Allah or I will kill you” or “torture you,” they said, “This person has a choice: either resort to dissimulation and use the concession that Allah has legislated for them or they can come out with the truth and be defiant.”
- If the coercion is connected to the rights of someone else, such as forcing you “Kill so-and-so or I will kill you,” it is not permissible for you to kill this person because if you were to kill him, you would be killed out of just retribution, so what’s the point?

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* talked about the ruling of those under coercion while their heart remains true to faith, He then talks about another type: ‘But those who [willingly] open their breasts to disbelief.’ It refers to a person who gladly articulates a statement of disbelief. Indeed, he is happy with it and his heart opens up to it. This is the type that is intended in the apodosis: ‘Upon them is wrath from Allah, and for them is a great punishment.’

Even though the verses made no mention of the person being coerced, and there is no punishment specified because the person is under duress, they have made it clear that the one who opens his heart to disbelief will have Allah’s condemnation fall upon him in this life, and they have a tremendous suffering in the Hereafter.

Just as we have seen, throughout Islamic history, examples of the first type who were under duress yet their hearts remained true to faith, we have also seen those who opened up their hearts to disbelief, and they are the hypocrites. Amongst them are those who later submitted and made good their Islam, and amongst them are ‘Abdullah ibn Sa‘ad ibn Abu As-Sarh from the tribe of ‘Amir ibn Lu’ay. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمُ ٱسْتَحَبُّوا۟ ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَا عَلَى ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ
وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ ١٠٧

This is because they love the life of this world more than the one to come, and God does not guide those who reject Him [107] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 107)

"That is" refers to the above-mentioned suffering that they deserve. The word *preferred* means to prefer and love something more than necessary because if an intelligent person were to look at the life of this world in relation to his life span, he would find that it is short and too low to be loved for its own sake, and he would find that it has many changing circumstances that befall its people, and thus no state is constant. He would look and see that states change from wealth to poverty, from health to sickness, from strength to weakness, so how can one prefer this life over the Hereafter?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to give both this life and the Hereafter the love that each of them deserves. We love this life without any exaggeration. We love it because it is a field that we can cultivate for the Hereafter. If not, then how can we seek recompense and reward from Allah? This is why we say, "Indeed the life of this world is too important to be forgotten, yet too paltry to be the ultimate objective. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…without forgetting your [rightful] share in this world.' (*al-Qasas:* 77) A partial understanding of the verse shows that it is calling to action in this life and taking one's portion from it, but the one who reflects on the meaning of the verse will find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is making the like of this world something insignificant and likely to be forgotten and neglected, so He reminds us of it and encourages us to take our share from it. Reminding someone, "Do not forget such-and-such" implies that it could be forgotten, and this is one of the aspects of moderation and balance in Islam.

It suffices us that this life has been described as "the lowest" as there is no description lower than this description. The opposite must necessarily be "the highest," which is the Hereafter. Yes, we do not deny the value of this life, and we do not disregard its right because it contains life, sense and activity, righteous actions, good memories and so forth.

However, despite all of this, it will come to an end, while the Hereafter is the true, everlasting and permanent life that will never come to an end and will never be threatened by death, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life.’ (*al-Anfal:* 24) What is the meaning of ‘gives you the life’ when the Quran is addressing people who are alive and who have their sustenance? They said that: ‘gives you the life’ means the true, everlasting life that has no end.

Regarding His statement: ‘…over the Hereafter,’ someone might say, “The verse is talking about those who do not believe in the Hereafter, so how can it say about them that they: ‘…preferred the worldly life over the Hereafter’? We say: amongst those who do not believe in the Hereafter are those of whom Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘As it is, they swear by Allah with their most solemn oaths, “Never will Allah raise from the dead anyone who has died!”’ (*an-Nahl:* 38)

There are also those of whom He says: ‘But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!’ (*al-Kahf:* 36) Therefore, amongst these people are those who believe in the Hereafter, but they prefer the life of this world.

Allah’s statement: ‘And that Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.’ (*an-Nahl:* 107) He does not provide them the guidance of support and enabling success. It is as if their disbelief precedes their lack of guidance, or we can say that because they are disbelievers, Allah has not guided them.

This is why Allah judges against them with His statement:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ طَبَعَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَسَمْعِهِمْ
وَأَبْصَٰرِهِمْ ۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْغَٰفِلُونَ (١٠٨)

These are people whose hearts, hearing, and sight
have been closed off by God: they are heedless [108]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 108)

Sealed means that He has stamped them and the purport of the stamp is to retain inside something that remains inside and does not come out and something outside remains outside and does not enter.

The difference between a human stamp and our Lord's seal is that the most we can do is stamp important things like private letters, for example, or we want to close off some place, and we stamp it with red wax in order to be certain of who closed it despite that we find people who are crafty and are able to pry open the stamp and maybe even put it back the way it was.

As for when the True Lord *Glorified is He* stamps something, no one is able to be crafty. The meaning, therefore, is that the disbelief in the hearts will never come out, and the faith outside of it will never come in. This is because the heart is the vessel that the senses pour into, and the senses are the means of grasping information, the most important of them being hearing and seeing. Hearing is for hearing revelation and what has been conveyed from Allah. Seeing is so that you can see proofs of Allah's power in His universe and the wonder of His making such that it draws your attention towards Allah's power, and it calls you to have faith in Him. Whenever these senses deviate from what Allah wants from them, and they provide the heart with other than the proofs of faith, their function shuts down.

The ears are the instruments of hearing that may hear empty talk, as they do not hear something specific. Likewise, the eyes are the instruments of seeing that may see what Allah has forbidden, as they do not see something specific. Therefore, what will reach the heart via these senses?

As long as the heart does not hear the guidance and does not see proofs of Allah's Omnipotence in His universe, it will never contain anything apart from disbelief. If someone seeks faith, he should remove disbelief from his heart, as it is not possible for disbelief and faith to be gathered in one heart. There is a law relevant to materialism called the Pauli Exclusion Principle, which can be noticed when we fill an empty bottle with water, as the amount of water that enters the bottle is equal to the amount of air that comes out. The same applies to moral matters.

Therefore, if a person seeks belief, he should remove disbelief and all vain desires from his heart. Then, he should use his intellect to search for both proofs of disbelief and faith, and open his heart to that which convinces him. However, he should not look for proofs of faith while having disbelief in his heart. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah does not put two hearts within a man's breast....' (*al-Ahzab:* 4) It is mentioned in *Athar* (narrations from the Companions): "Love of the worldly life and the love of Allah do not gather together in the same heart." This is because man has one heart in which two opposites cannot come together, according to Allah's will, so a person should not make it overcrowded with what it contains.

As Allah *Glorified is He* seals the hearts of the disbelievers, this indicates that He gives His slaves what they want, even if it is disbelief. This means that as the disbelievers seek and feel at ease about disbelief, Allah seals their hearts in a manner that makes disbelief implanted in their hearts, so faith will never enter them. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* will intensify disbelief in their hearts, as He says: 'There is disease in their hearts, so Allah has increased their disease...' (*al-Baqara:* 10).

Allah increases their disbelief and does not care about them. Allah says: '…they are heedless.' (*an-Nahl:* 108) The heedless person is the one who should pay heed to a matter, but does not do so. He needs something to alert his heart. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the discussion about these people with His saying:

لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي ٱلْآخِرَةِ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

And there is no doubt that they will be the losers in the Hereafter[109] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 109)

The Arabic word '*la jarama,'* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means 'there is no doubt.' Therefore, the verse means that there is no doubt that these people will be losers in the Hereafter owing to the sins they committed and lead to their loss. Accordingly, their loss has been affirmed.

When we reflect on the previous verses, we will find the reasons for their loss, beginning with their saying about Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You are just making it up' (*an-Nahl:* 101). And their saying: 'It is a man who teaches him.' (*an-Nahl:* 103) In addition, they did not have faith in Allah's verses, fabricated lies about Allah, felt at ease about disbelief, and preferred the worldly life to the Hereafter. All these reasons entail their loss in the Hereafter, the Day on which all people will be held to account.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لِلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا۟ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا فُتِنُوا۟ ثُمَّ
جَٰهَدُوا۟ وَصَبَرُوٓا۟ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهَا لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١١٠﴾

But your Lord will be most forgiving and most merciful to those who leave their homes after persecution, then strive and remain steadfast [110] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 110)

His saying: '...after persecution...' (*an-Nahl:* 110) refers to the believers' subjection to trials and painful torment because they became Muslims. His saying: '...But your Lord will be most forgiving and most merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 110)

It is out of Allah's Mercy that He allows His slaves who have transgressed against themselves to repent, and He accepts their repentance because if He does not allow the sinners to repent, they would despair of Allah's Mercy. In addition, those who have committed minor sins may turn into criminals that cause troubles in the society because they have lost hope in turning to the path of righteousness and have not found any motivation to stop sinning.

However, Allah accepts the repentance of the sinners and forgives the wrongdoers, as mentioned in the Hadith: "Allah *Glorified is He* will continue to stretch out His Hand in the night so that the sinners of the day may repent, and continue to stretch His Hand in the daytime so that the sinners of the night may repent, until the sun rises from the west."(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* increases the bounties He bestows on the repentant if he repents sincerely and regrets the sins he has committed as He will change their evil deeds into good deeds, as He says: 'Except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.' (*al-Furqan:* 70)

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2759) from the Hadith of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari. Imam An-Nawawi mentioned in 'Sharh Muslim', 'Al-Mazari said that what is meant by the Hadith is the acceptance of repentance.* The expression 'stretches out His hand' is used because when the Arabs were pleased with something, they would stretch their hands out to show pleasure and satisfaction. If they hated it, they would keep their hands clenched. Thus, they were addressed in the manner they could understand. This expression is figurative because the real hand as a limb when referring to Allah is impossible to express.'

If the sinners considered this fact, they would reform themselves and save themselves from sins. Therefore, Allah's legislation of repentance is considered mercy and His acceptance of the sinner's repentance is also considered mercy. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...then He turned to them so they could repent...' (*at-Tawba:* 118). This means that Allah has legislated repentance in order for them to repent.

If the deluded person, who wants to misuse Allah's Mercy and Grace, decides to commit many evil deeds in order for Allah to change them into good deeds, he should realise that he may not meet the conditions set for the sinners whom Allah transforms their evil deeds into good deeds. In addition, he cannot guarantee that Allah will give him respite so that you can repent, as death comes suddenly.

Then Allah says:

يَوْمَ تَأْتِي كُلُّ نَفْسٍ تُجَٰدِلُ عَن نَّفْسِهَا وَتُوَفَّىٰ
كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself, every soul will be paid in full for all its actions – they will not be wronged [111] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 111)

The meaning of this verse may be connected and related to the previous verse, so that the purpose of this verse is: 'But your Lord will be most forgiving and most merciful…' (*an-Nahl:* 110). Then, He says: 'On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself…' (*an-Nahl:* 111). This will take place on the Day of Resurrection. Another meaning of the verse is that Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself…' (*an-Nahl:* 111) does man have more than one soul so that one can plead on behalf of the other? The truth is that man has one soul in this worldly life and the Hereafter, but the soul he has in the worldly life differs from the one he will have on the Day of Resurrection. This is because Allah has granted it in the worldly life freedom to choose what to do; so some souls are obedient, others are disobedient, submitting or haughty.

On the Day of Resurrection, the soul will face Allah Whom it has disobeyed in the worldly life, so haughtiness will be of no benefit in that situation. It will only plead and defend itself for what it has done in the worldly life while Allah says: '...To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing.' (*Ghafir:* 16)

The Noble Quran states examples of the soul pleading on the Day of Resurrection. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…By Allah, our Lord, we did not associate with Allah anything in His Divinity.' (*al-An'am:* 23) '[As for] those who choose other protectors beside Him, saying, "...We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allah…"' (*az-Zumar:* 3) and '...Our Lord, show us those who misled us of the jinn and men [so] we may put them under our feet...' (*Fussilat:* 29).

Therefore, it is one soul that pleads for itself on a day on which no soul will avail another; it will be preoccupied with its own anxiety and will be held to account for its own sins. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the Day a man will flee from his brother, his mother and his father, his wife and his children, each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that Day.' (*'Abasa:* 34-37) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '...every soul will be paid in full for all its actions – they will not be wronged.' (*an-Nahl:* 111)

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a brief view about the reckoning and reward on the Day of Resurrection, as Allah's scale is that of justice and uprightness that does not oppress anyone. 'So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8)

Allah's saying: '...will be paid in full...' (*an-Nahl:* 111) shows that Allah's scale is just and involves no shortage or injustice, as all people are slaves of Allah and have no precedence over one another except by their deeds. If He shows them mercy, then this will be out of His bounty, and if He punishes them, then this will be out of His justice. Allah says: '...We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 118)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلٗا قَرۡيَةٗ كَانَتۡ ءَامِنَةٗ مُّطۡمَئِنَّةٗ يَأۡتِيهَا رِزۡقُهَا
رَغَدٗا مِّن كُلِّ مَكَانٖ فَكَفَرَتۡ بِأَنۡعُمِ ٱللَّهِ فَأَذَٰقَهَا ٱللَّهُ لِبَاسَ
ٱلۡجُوعِ وَٱلۡخَوۡفِ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَصۡنَعُونَ ١١٢

Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places. Then it became ungrateful for Allah's blessings, so Allah afflicted it with the garment of famine and fear, for what its people had done [112] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 112)

Allah has tackled belief in Allah and the veracity of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying His Message, the implementation of Allah's religious instructions mentioned in the Book and the Sunnah. On the other hand, He has also tackled disbelief, obstinate disputation and stubborn disobedience of Allah, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the religious instructions. Then He has willed to give us a tangible example from our life on this point, so He has given us this parable. The word "parable" refers to two matters that are similar in a specific aspect, so that a person can say, "So-and-so is just like so-and-so."

The objective behind giving parables is to clarify something unknown by mentioning something known. For example, if you do not know a certain person, we can say about him that "he is like so-and-so" – who is known to you – in height and complexion…etc. After collecting all the information about this person, you will have a complete image of this person that you do not know.

Therefore, you must beware of making up images about the One to Whom there is no equal, as Allah says: 'So do not make up images about Allah...' (*an-Nahl:* 74). This is because Allah does not have any equal or peer, with regard to His Entity, Attributes or Actions. He is the One Who gives examples, but we may make up images only for created beings.

There are many examples in the Quran that clarify unknown matters by giving examples of matters known to us, and explain moral and intangible matters using tangible and perceptible matters. An example on this point is the parable that Allah *Glorified is He* gives concerning spending in His cause, and that He multiplies the rewards many times for the one who does so. Consider how the Quran illustrates this meaning: ‘Those who spend their wealth in Allah’s cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. Allah gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes: He is limitless and all knowing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 261)

Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the unseen and unknown matter by something tangible and known to everyone so that this unknown matter becomes clear in our minds. Whoever reflects on this example will find that the matter which Allah has clarified entails more bounties than those stated in the example He has given. If these multiplied bounties are earned from the earth, which has been created by Allah *Glorified is He* then what about the bounties bestowed by the Creator?

The word “*daraba*” which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is derived from the concept of coining a currency, as in the past, currencies were made of gold and silver for fear of fraud, as people would mix gold with copper. Experts in the field of currencies coined them by stamping them so that they would be approved, trusted and could be exchanged.

Likewise, if Allah “*darba mathalan*” (gives an example) by something known, it settles in the mind and becomes acknowledged. Allah says in the following example: ‘Allah presents the example of a town…’ (*al-An‘am:* 112). The objective behind presenting this example is that Allah wants to clarify that when He grants man with all kinds of bounties, but he does not show gratefulness, does not fulfil Allah’s right regarding them, and instead uses these bounties to disobey Him, he makes himself liable to be deprived of these bounties. In addition, he exposes himself to a disastrous and evil end. Thus, a person should show gratitude to Allah for His bounties and fulfil His rights regarding them so that the bounties can be maintained. A poet said in this regard:

If you enjoy a bounty, take care of it,

As acts of disobedience remove the bounties,

Preserve them by thanking Allah,

As Allah is severe in retaliation.

Is the town that Allah presents as an example a specific town or any town in general? Some scholars said that this town may refer to Mecca or any other town. In any case, the identification of this town has no effect on the objective behind presenting the objective.

The Arabic word "*qaryah*," which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to the town in which the passers-by settle. It also refers to the people who settle in this town, as stated in Allah's saying: 'Ask the town in which we were and the caravan in which we came...' (*Yusuf:* 82). The intended meaning is, "ask the people of the town," because the town as a place cannot be asked. The Quran exegetes held the view that the verse contains a metaphor that is related to a place.

However, with the advancement of modern science, Allah gives us a new aid, as He says: 'We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth...' (*Fussilat:* 53).

Nowadays, new discoveries enable us to take pictures and record the voices of people. For example, it is possible to make a video record of a meeting and display it even after the attendees of the meeting leave the meeting place.

This means that we can keep the images and sounds of people from many years ago. Accordingly, we may say that a town may be asked and may answer because it has a conscious memory that records things, and it retains what it has recorded. In addition, scientists attempt to bring back the images and sounds from the beginning of creation in view of the fact that they are present in the atmosphere in the form of waves that never go away or disappear. These waves are similar to the rippling of the water after throwing a stone into it. The circles formed as a result move away until they gradually disappear.

Therefore, asking the town can be understood literally. There is no doubt that asking the town would be more significant than asking its people because people may lie while the town itself does not lie. Understanding the noble verse in this way shows the miraculous nature of the Quran.

Allah says: '...that was secure and at ease…' (*an-Nahl:* 112). The word "*aminah*," which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means that the town was safe and secure from aggression or attack, and security is one of the greatest bounties which Allah bestows on countries and His slaves.

The word "*mutma'innah*," which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means that it has the essentials of life, so it does not need anyone or anything else. Life therein is stable and comfortable, and man feels at ease only in a place that is free of disturbances and that contains all the essentials of life. Thus, security and ease are the secret of happiness and stability in life. Allah shows the bounties He bestowed on Quraysh, saying: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3)

When man feels sated and secure, he enjoys a stable life. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives an exemplary image of worldly life, saying, "Whosoever begins the day feeling family security and good health; and possessing provision for his day is as though he possessed the whole world."(1) Allah *Glorified is He* describes this town in the following verse: '...with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places…' (*an-Nahl:* 112). It is well known that people seek sustenance, but this town is provided with sustenance, a point which gives preponderance to the opinion that this town is Mecca because Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Have we not established for them a safe sanctuary to which are brought the fruits of all things as provision from Us? But most of them do not know.' (*al-Qasas:* 57)

Whoever manages to live in Mecca can see that it contains fruits and products from all over the world. As such, the people of Mecca have gained all bounties and enjoyed all the essentials of a secure and happy life. Did they respond to these bounties by thanking Allah? Did they use Allah's bounties in showing obedience to Allah and seeking His pleasure? However, what happened was that: '...it became ungrateful for Allah's blessings…' (*an-Nahl:* 112). They showed ingratitude for these bounties and used them in opposing Allah's religious instructions and *sharia* (Islamic Law). Therefore, the result was: '...so Allah afflicted it with the garment of famine and fear, for what its people had done.' (*an-Nahl:* 112)

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(1) *Related by Abu Na'im in 'Al-Hilya' (5/249) and Ibn Hibban (2503 – 'Mawarid Azh-Zham'an') from the Hadith of Abu Ad-Darda' Allah be pleased with him. Al-Haythami mentioned it in 'Majma' Az-Zawa'id' (10/289), and attributed it to At-Tabarani, saying, 'Some of the narrators in the chain of transmission are proved to be weak.'*

This verse contains a warning from Allah *Glorified is He* for every community that refuses to show gratitude for Allah's bounties and uses them in opposing Allah's religious instructions, as their end will be like the end of these people, as follows: '...so Allah afflicted it...' (*an-Nahl:* 112).

The Arabic word "*dhawq*," which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means putting the food or drink on the tongue to find out the flavour it has. Therefore, the word "*dhawq*" is specific to the flavour of things, but Allah did not say that He caused this town to taste the flavour of hunger. He said: '... so Allah afflicted it with the garment of famine and fear…' (*an-Nahl:* 112). Allah assimilates hunger and fear to a garment that man wears, and the one who reflects on the verse will find that the Quranic style is very accurate, as hunger and fear have turned into a garment that is worn by a hungry and scared person. How can this happen?

Hunger first appears as a feeling in the stomach. If there is no food, the fats stored in the body are consumed. If the fats run out, the body consumes the flesh, then the bones in cases of severe hunger. We notice that the person who suffers from severe hunger has pale face and his skin is withered and lean, then it becomes wrinkled and dry. This is how hunger leaves an effect on the skin and looks like a garment that the hungry person wears. Hunger can be noticed from the outward appearance of the hungry person not from his stomach, as the paleness of his complexion appears. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the poor who are not able to travel in the earth: '...you will know them by their [characteristic] sign. They do not ask people persistently [or at all]...' (*al-Baqara:* 273).

The same applies to fear, even though its place is the heart, but it does not manifest itself on the body in the same way. When fear increases, the limbs and the whole body shake. Therefore, fear manifests itself on the body like a garment that a person wears.

The Quranic expressions embody the internal feelings and make them tangible in a manner that can be seen by the eyes, but Allah *Glorified is He* expresses them using the sense of taste because it is the strongest sense. Likening hunger and fear to a garment shows how they cover the entire body, just as a garment covers it. Thus, hunger is not just in the stomach and fear is not just in the heart.

In addition, lovers and those who talk about love say that love is located in the heart. They talk about hearts as one poet said:

The thoughts of your memory enjoy my love,

I feel them in my heart.

When love increases and feelings are promoted, love moves from the heart to all the limbs of the body, as one poet said:

I have no organ except that it contains ardent love,

As if my organs have been created as hearts.

Allah's saying: '...for what its people had done.' (*an-Nahl:* 112) means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not oppress them or act unfairly towards them. Rather, what befell them resulted from their deeds, their turning away from Allah's path and their ingratitude towards His bounties. Therefore, Allah deprived them of these bounties. They rejected Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* denied him as a Messenger, harmed his Companions and plotted to kill him so that he supplicated against them saying, "O Allah, be harsh and severe with Mudar and afflict them with years like those of Joseph."(1) Allah answered Prophet supplication and He dressed them in the garments of hunger and fear so that they were eating dead animals and mixing hair and fur with blood to eat them.

They remained in this state for seven years until they roared, fed up, and reached the utmost state of tiredness and fatigue. They sent a delegation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, "This is what you have done to the men of Mecca, so what do you think of its women and children?" Then he sent some lawful and good food for them to eat.

As for the garments of fear, this was embodied in the detachments that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent from Medina in order to scare and frighten them, and to let them know that the Muslims had strength and might.

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(1) *[Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1006) and Ahmad in his Musnad (2/470, 502, 521) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him]*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ جَآءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ وَهُمْ ظَٰلِمُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

A messenger who was one of them came to them, but they called him a liar. So punishment overwhelmed them in the midst of their evildoing [113] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 113)

We have seen how the people of Mecca enjoyed all bounties which were embodied in the fact that the town was secure and at ease. This is considered a material bounty with which Allah preserves man's outward form, but he still needs something to preserve his values and morals.

This is considered as the most important bounty which Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed on them when He sent a Messenger from among them. What is the benefit of having material bounties in a land in which values are unstable and morals were shaken? Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them to reform their moral behaviour and corrupt principles.

Allah's saying: '...who was one of them…' (*an-Nahl:* 113) means that he belonged to their race from their kind and was not alien to them. In addition, he was not only from the Arabs, but he belonged to Quraysh which was the best Arab tribe. Then, Allah says: '…but they called him a liar…' (*an-Nahl:* 113). They should have believed him due to his good and perfect qualities they knew about him, and the truthfulness and trustworthiness of which he was known. However, they not only denied the material bounties, but they also denied the moral bounties represented in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah says: '...So punishment overwhelmed them …' (*an-Nahl:* 113) The verse does not say: 'Allah overwhelmed them with punishment'; rather, it says: '...So punishment overwhelmed them …' (*an-Nahl:* 113) This means that punishment yearns for them and rushes to take them. The verse contains a form of personification that indicates the severity of their suffering.

In addition, Allah says in another verse: 'On the Day We will say to Hell, "Have you been filled?" and it will say, "Are there some more?"' (*Qaf*: 30)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَكُلُوا۟ مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ حَلَٰلًا طَيِّبًا وَٱشْكُرُوا۟
نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿١١٤﴾

So eat of the good and lawful things God has provided for you and be thankful for His blessings, if it is Him that you worship [114] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 114)

We said that when the people of Mecca experienced severe conditions to the extent that they were eating corpses, Messenger Muhammad sent good and lawful food to them out of his mercy. Allah says: ‘So eat of the good and lawful things Allah has provided for you ….’ (*an-Nahl:* 114). This means that the sustenance is not from Messenger Muhammad, but from Allah ‘…good and lawful things ….’ (*an-Nahl:* 114). This is because before the coming of Islam, people indulged in eating what is unlawful and impure. Messenger Muhammad wanted to draw their attention to the fact that Allah’s sustenance was lawful, good and wholesome, so he replaced the unlawful with the lawful and the impure with the pure.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and be thankful for His blessings…’ (*an-Nahl:* 114). This is a warning to them not to be ungrateful for Allah’s bounties, as they experienced the consequences of this ingratitude, as Allah deprived them of security and dressed them in the garment of fear. He deprived them of their satiation and affluence, and afflicted them with the garment of hunger. Therefore, they should have taken a lesson from what happened previously ‘…if it is Him that you worship.’ (*an-Nahl:* 114) Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْمَيْتَةَ وَٱلدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ ٱلْخِنزِيرِ وَمَآ أُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ بِهِۦ ۖ
فَمَنِ ٱضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١١٥﴾

He has forbidden you only these things: carrion, blood, pig’s meat, and animals over which any name other than God’s has been invoked. But if anyone is forced by hunger, not desiring it nor exceeding their immediate need, God is forgiving and merciful[115] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 115)

After Allah says: ‘So eat of the good and lawful things Allah has provided for you…’ (*an-Nahl:* 114). He has repeated one of the notions previously mentioned in *al-Baqara* and *al-Maʾida*. Allah says: ‘He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Most-Forgiving and Most-Merciful.’ (*al-Baqara:* 173)

Allah says in the chapter of *al-Ma’ida*: ‘Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 3). They used to eat unlawful food, but as long as Allah sent to them a Messenger for them to have faith, they should have eaten lawful and good food. Why is this notion repeated here? There are two reasons: The first is that Allah *Glorified is He* does not want to give them a general illustration of the ruling, but a personified image of the situation because they were hungry and were willing to eat anything even if it was corpses. However, Islam forbids eating carrion and clarifies that they should eat lawful and good food. The second is that the texts differ. In the chapter of *al-Baqara* Allah says: ‘…and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah...’ (*al-Baqara:* 173). In the following verse, Allah says: ‘…over which any name other than Allah’s has been invoked…’ (*an-Nahl:* 115). This is not just diversity in style, as the meaning is completely different. This is because ‘*ihlal*’ means mentioning the Name of Allah when slaughtering, but people used to say, ‘In the name of al-Lat’ and ‘In the name of al-‘Uzza’. Thus, they invoked the names of false gods that they took as partners besides Allah, and did not mention the Name of Allah, the Bestower. They sometimes mentioned the names of other than Allah when slaughtering, and sometimes they invoked any name other than Allah over the animals.

How can this happen? Scholars said that there are two types of slaughtering: sometimes people slaughtered in order to draw near to the idols so that they invoked other than Allah (idols) over the slaughtered animals. At other times, they slaughtered animals just to eat without drawing near to anyone, so they did not invoke Allah over these animals.

Therefore, the verse is repeated for certain wise reason, and Glory be to the One Who said these meanings. Allah says: ‘...But if anyone is forced by hunger, not desiring it nor exceeding their immediate need…’ (*an-Nahl:* 115).

People may be forced when they do not find anything to eat and to keep themselves alive.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a concession to eat unlawful food when we are forced by hunger in order to preserve our lives. The meaning of *'ghayra baghin'* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means that we should not exceed our need. If you were driven by necessity and had some carrion and lawful food, you should not eat the carrion in the presence of the lawful food.

'…nor exceeding their immediate need…' (*an-Nahl:* 115). This means that we should take only the amount that preserves one's life but without satiation. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Allah is forgiving and merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 115)

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*: '…there is no sin upon him....' (*al-Baqara:* 173). The meaning is the same, but in the verse which is mentioned in the chapter of *an-Nahl,* Allah's Forgiveness and Mercy are mentioned, and in the verse mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqara,* the reason behind this mercy and forgiveness is mentioned.

Some atheists want to find fault in the Quran and say that if Allah has forbidden these things, then what is the reason behind their existence in the universe? Do you think that everything in the universe is created to be eaten? Is there not any another function? Is there any another benefit besides eating? If Islam has forbidden eating something, it has allowed gaining benefits in other ways.

For example, Allah has forbidden eating pigs, but He created them for another purpose; they play a role in cleaning the environment because they eat rubbish. Therefore, they are useful in our life. Likewise, snakes are not eaten, but they play a role in life: the preparation of poison which is used in treating certain diseases. There are many other examples.

We must know that Allah *Glorified is He* has not forbidden any of these things except for some wisdom. Man must learn from his material formation and experiences that which helps him understand religious values. If he considers the devices around him, such as machines, cars, and planes and so on, he would find that each of them is operated by a certain type of fuel which may not suit other devices. For example, the type of fuel that is used for operating cars–benzene–does not suit planes, as they use a more refined type of fuel. Therefore, everything has an appropriate type of fuel. Likewise, Allah has made certain foods suitable for man, as he is created by Allah Who determines the food he is permitted to eat and that which he is forbidden from eating. In addition, He knows what is good for him and what may harm him.

That which is forbidden, such as carrion due to the harm it contains, may be permissible in itself, but forbidden for a specific person, such as a sick person who is not allowed to eat a certain food. This is because it may harm his health or delay his recovery. It is a temporary prohibition until its reason is cleared.

Another type of prohibition is that when something is lawful in itself and involves no harm, but it may be prohibited as a punishment; for example, when punishing a child for being naughty by denying them sweets.

Therefore, prohibition has many reasons, and we will soon find other examples.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَقُولُوا۟ لِمَا تَصِفُ أَلْسِنَتُكُمُ ٱلْكَذِبَ هَٰذَا حَلَٰلٌ وَهَٰذَا حَرَامٌ لِّتَفْتَرُوا۟
عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ لَا يُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾

Do not say falsely, 'This is lawful and that is forbidden,'
inventing a lie about God: those who invent lies about God
will not prosper [116] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 116)

The phrase '*tasif alsinatikum al-kadhib*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means that lies are clearly manifested, as their speech does not only include lies, but it describes them. The meaning of lying is manifested by their saying: '…This is lawful and that is forbidden…' (*an-Nahl:* 116). This is a lie and a fabrication against Allah *Glorified is He* because He alone is the One Who declares things to be lawful and unlawful. Therefore, beware of declaring something to be permissible or impermissible based on your own desires because this is a fabrication against Allah: '...inventing a lie about Allah…' (*an-Nahl:* 116). Allah also says: '…those who invent lies about Allah will not prosper.' (*an-Nahl:* 116)

If some people were deceived by their lies and acquired some immediate benefit, their lies will be revealed and these interests will cease. Allah *Glorified is He* describes what those people will receive from the worldly life:

مَتَٰعٞ قَلِيلٞ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ١١٧

They may have a little enjoyment, but painful punishment awaits them [117] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 117)

This means that what they obtained by fabricating lies about Allah is a temporary enjoyment, and He will deny them the great and everlasting enjoyment about which Allah says: ‘Whatever you have will end, but what Allah has is lasting…’ (*an-Nahl:* 96). Allah also says: ‘…but painful punishment awaits them.’ (*an-Nahl:* 117)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَعَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ حَرَّمۡنَا مَا قَصَصۡنَا عَلَيۡكَ مِن قَبۡلُۖ وَمَا
ظَلَمۡنَٰهُمۡ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ يَظۡلِمُونَ ١١٨

[Prophet], We forbade the Jews what We told you about. We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves [118] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 118)

After the verses have tackled what Allah has allowed and What He has prohibited, and have clarified that Allah is the only One Who has the right to declare things lawful or unlawful, Allah has prohibited things as a punishment and not because it is unlawful in itself. An example on this point is when preventing a child from taking sweets as a punishment for his bad behaviour.

Allah punished the Jews by making these things impermissible for them though they are lawful for other people. This punishment was specific for them.

Allah’s saying: ‘...what We told you about …’ (*an-Nahl:* 118) refers to what is mentioned in the chapter of *al-An’am*: ‘And to those who are Jews We prohibited every animal of uncloven hoof; and of the cattle and the sheep We prohibited to them their fat, except what adheres to their backs or the entrails or what is joined with bone. [By] that We repaid them for their injustice. And indeed, We are truthful.’ (*al-An‘am:* 146) ‘...every animal of uncloven hoof...’ (*al-An‘am:* 146) means animals whose fingers are not separated. The Arabic word ‘*al-hawaya*’, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means the intestines. All these things that are mentioned in the verse are permissible to all people except the Jews, as Allah has made them impermissible for the Jews as punishment because of their oppression and transgression. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘For wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We made unlawful for them [certain] good foods which had been lawful to them, and for their averting from the way of Allah many [people]. And [for] their taking of usury while they had been forbidden from it, and their consuming of the people’s wealth unjustly…’ (*an-Nahl:* 116). This means that because of their oppression, Allah had made these good and lawful things impermissible for them.

This is because whoever invents a ruling and fabricates lies about Allah, prohibiting what Allah has permitted or permitting what Allah has prohibited, must be punished in a manner appropriate to their sin. Therefore, that which is permissible for other people is made impermissible for them. The Jews had committed oppression because they transgressed against the limits and instructions set by Allah. The first and severest act of oppression is associating partners with Allah in His Divinity: ‘...surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.’ (*Luqman:* 13)

Oppression refers to giving someone’s right to someone else. An example of their oppression is what they said to Musa (Moses) after crossing the sea and finding people who were worshipping idols. They asked Musa (Moses) to make a god for them as those people had gods. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We took the Children of Israel across the sea; then they came upon a people intent in devotion to [some] idols of theirs…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 138). Another example of their oppression is that they worshipped the calf instead of Allah. In addition, they oppressed Musa (Moses) because they did not believe him, as Allah says: ‘But no one believed Moses, except [some] youths among his people, for fear of Pharaoh and his establishment that they would persecute them. And indeed, Pharaoh was haughty within the land, and indeed, he was of the transgressors...’ (*Yunus:* 83). Another example of their oppression: ‘And [for] their taking of usury while they had been forbidden from it, and their consuming of the people’s wealth unjustly. And we have prepared for the disbelievers among them a painful punishment....’ (*an-Nisa’:* 161)

Because of their oppression and taking other people’s rights, Allah prohibited for them what is lawful for other people. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

'We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 118) They oppressed themselves by accepting to earn little and immediate enjoyment and denied themselves the true and everlasting enjoyment.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لِلَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا۟ ٱلسُّوٓءَ بِجَهَٰلَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابُوا۟ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوٓا۟ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهَا لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١١٩﴾

But towards those who do wrong out of ignorance, and afterwards repent and make amends, your Lord is most forgiving and merciful [119] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 119)

Allah *Glorified is He* gives His slave a chance to repent and seek Allah's Forgiveness. It is out of Allah's Mercy that He has legislated for them repentance from sins, and accepts it from them. If He did not accept the people's repentance, the sinner, who has committed even one sin, would become a criminal that causes trouble in the society. By allowing repentance, Allah protects society from these troubles.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained the status of repentance, saying, 'Verily, Allah is more pleased with the repentance of His slave than a person who has his camel in a waterless desert carrying his provision of food and drink and is lost. He, having lost all hopes (to get that back), lies down in shade and is disappointed about his camel, when all of a sudden he finds that camel standing before him. He takes hold of its reins and then out of boundless joy blurts out: "You are my slave and I am Your Lord. He commits this mistake out of extreme joy."'(1)

The word '*thumma*' which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, indicates their numerous sins. Despite this fact, Allah forgives their sins in order to clarify the vast difference between Allah's mercy and the disobedient people's insistence on ingratitude toward Allah and disobedience.

Allah's saying: '...out of ignorance…' (*an-Nahl:* 119) refers to their recklessness, foolishness and weak-mindedness, which are all categorized under ignorance, as they believed in something that is not real. Ignorance here does not refer to lack of knowledge, but it refers to insistence on an issue that contradicts reality. The intended meaning is that one looks for some immediate goodness, according to one's opinion, and leaves off postponed goodness according to *sharia* (Islamic Law). This meaning is indicated by Allah's saying: 'The repentance accepted by Allah is only for those who do wrong in ignorance [or carelessness] and then repent soon after...' (*an-Nisa':* 17) '...out of ignorance…' (*an-Nahl:* 119) refers to their foolishness and rashness, as the disobedient person knows the ruling, but they are heedless of it and do not think about the consequences of their acts of disobedience. If they thought about these consequences, they would not commit these acts. Accordingly, the person who commits an act of disobedience only does so absent-mindedly.

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(1) *[Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2747) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik]*

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The one who commits an illegal sexual intercourse is not a believer at the time of committing illegal sexual intercourse, a thief is not a believer at the time of committing theft and a drinker of alcoholic drink is not a believer at the time of drinking.'(1)

If the sinner pays heed to the severity of the punishment, he would not approach an act of disobedience, but his foolishness and stupidity make him unable to consider the punishment and embellish for him the transient enjoyment and pleasure.

For example, a person has a pressing sexual instinct, which is the most mischievous human instinct. He thinks of committing adultery – we seek refuge in Allah from it – and before he commits it, we show him an oven and we remind him of the punishment of this crime. What is he going to do? Will he insist on his crime? No, because he was forgetful and heedless, but when you remind him of the punishment, he will back down. Therefore, his stupidity and foolishness turned him away from considering the consequences of the crime, distracted him from taking the right action, and caused him to look at matters in a superficial and hasty manner.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (57) in the Book of Faith from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him also Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2475)*

Allah's saying: '...and afterwards repent and make amends …' (*an-Nahl:* 119). Repentance, which is referred to in this verse, is the sincere repentance, which entails that the sinner determines to desist from committing his sin. If he does so, Allah will accept his repentance. The sinner may commit the same sin again if he is too weak to stop or hold himself back. However, he should repent again because one of Allah's Names is the Acceptor of Repentance, which means that He frequently accepts the repentance of His slaves. Thus, Allah's slaves should not stop repenting, whatever numerous their sins are, but when they commit a sin they must repent.

In addition, if the slave repents properly and sincerely, does righteous deeds instead of the evil ones, Allah will turn their evil deeds into good deeds. This shows how Bountiful, Forgiving, and Merciful our Lord is. Allah's saying: '...your Lord is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful' (*an-Nahl:* 119) indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is concerned with the believers, and that Allah's Forgiveness of their sins pleases him.

In this verse, Allah addresses Prophet Muhammad and informs him that He will forgive the sinners from among his nation. Then Allah *Glorified is He* describes Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* saying:

إِنَّ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةٗ قَانِتٗا لِّلَّهِ حَنِيفٗا وَلَمۡ يَكُ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ١٢٠

Abraham was truly an example: devoutly obedient to
God and true in faith. He was not an idolater [120]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 120)

After the previous verses state some of the history of the Jews and some of the history of the people of Mecca, they tackle Allah's close elect, Ibrahim (Abraham).

Why has Allah mentioned Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) in particular? Because he is the father of the Prophets. In addition, he is loved by all people, even the idolaters say that they follow Ibrahim's (Abraham) religion, the Christians say that he was a Christian and the Jews say that he was a Jew.

This noble verse analyses the identity of Ibrahim (Abraham), clarifies his specific characteristics, and refutes and invalidates those people's claims regarding him. These are his characteristics: 'Abraham was truly an example…' (*an-Nahl:* 120).

The word *'ummah',* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means a group from the general sense, and the context defines its number. For example, *'ummah'* of poets' means a group of poets, which can also be small in number. Allah says: 'When he came to the well of Midyan, he found there a group of people watering [their flocks]...' (*al-Qasas:* 23). In this verse, a group of shepherds are called an *ummah* because they had set out for the same purpose, which was to water their animals. The word *'ummah'* can also refer to a nation in a specific place, such as the nations of Persia and Rome. In addition, it can refer to a group that follows one of the Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…there was no nation but that there had passed within it a warner.' (*Fatir:* 24)

The word *'ummah',* which is stated in the Message of Prophet Muhammad, refers to all nations because he was sent to all mankind and gathered all the nations in one *ummah.* Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Messengers], this community of yours is one single community and I am your Lord, so serve Me...' (*al-Anbiya':* 92)

The meaning of one community is that it gathers all the communities. Therefore, Ibrahim (Abraham) held the rank of an entire community because absolute perfection belongs to Allah alone, and the perfect qualities given by Allah to His Messengers are called human perfections.

As for people other than the Messengers, these perfect qualities–such as forbearance, courage, and generosity–are distributed amongst them, and every person obtains one of them. These perfect qualities are only gathered in Messengers.

When reflecting on the character of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), we will find that he has perfect qualities that are only found in an entire community. Likewise, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* defined his position amongst Allah's Messengers, he said, 'Goodness is in me (which is the human perfection that Allah gave him) and in my *ummah*'(1) This means that each member of this *ummah* has taken a part of his perfect qualities, which are distributed amongst his entire *ummah.*

When you follow the history of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) in Allah's Book, you will find a good attribute in each situation. If you gather all of these attributes together, you will find that they can only exist within an entire community, as he is the leader and good example who comprises all the attributes of goodness. The word '*ummah'* indicates that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* acts as a whole community in terms of his worship and obedience to Allah.

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(1) *Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani said, 'I do not know it, but its meaning is authentic.' It has been mentioned by Al-Qari in 'Al-Asrar Al-Marfu'ah' (457), As-Suyuti in 'Ad-Durar Al-Muntathirah' (220) and Al-'Ajluni in 'Kashf Al-Khafa'' (1/476).*

Allah's saying: '...devoutly obedient to Allah and true in faith.' (*an-Nahl:* 120) means that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was humble and submissive to Allah in his worship '...and true in faith.' (*an-Nahl:* 120) The original meaning of '*hanaf*' means inclination in the literal sense. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) came when the world was in a state of corruption and crookedness concerning values. Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) deviated from this crookedness and corruption.

Allah *Glorified is He* only sends Messengers when corruption has become widespread. Therefore, his deviation from crookedness and corruption means that he was an upright person who deviated from crookedness and corruption.

Then Allah concludes the verse by saying: '...he was not an idolater.' (*an-Nahl:* 120) This is the fourth attribute of Allah's close elect, Ibrahim (Abraham), after He had described him as being *ummah*, devoutly obeying Allah. All these characteristics negate the possibility of him associating partners with Allah, so what is the point of negating idolatry saying: '...he was not an idolater' (*an-Nahl:* 120)? We must distinguish between the different kinds of idolatry. Major idolatry refers to associating partners with Allah, which is considered as the most grievous degree of idolatry, and minor idolatry which refers to the belief that things created by Allah can also form and create things. The verse: '...he was not an idolater' (*an-Nahl:* 120) refers to minor idolatry because the aforementioned qualities negate that he was involved in major idolatry. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* willed to negate that he was involved in minor idolatry, too.

Therefore, when he was thrown into the fire, he did not turn to the available means, even though they were brought by Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. When Jibril (Gabriel) offered to help him, he said: 'I will receive no help from you.'(1) Thus, he was not involved in any minor idolatry and has no reason for it.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned it in his Tafsir (6/4183) while explaining Allah's saying: 'Allah said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham"' (Al-Anbiya': 69) from the Hadith of=*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

شَاكِرًا لِّأَنْعُمِهِۚ ٱجْتَبَىٰهُ وَهَدَىٰهُ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١٢١﴾

He was thankful for the blessings of God who chose him and guided him to a straight path [121]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 121)

Allah’s saying: ‘He was thankful for the blessings of Allah’ (*an-Nahl:* 121) contains an allusion to the people of Mecca who showed ingratitude to Allah’s bounties while their town was safe and at ease. They should not have been ungrateful because they claimed that they followed the creed of Ibrahim (Abraham) who was grateful to Allah for His bounties.

Allah’s saying: ‘...who had elected him...’ (*an-Nahl:* 121) means that Allah chose him to be a prophet and tested him, as He says: ‘…when Abraham was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them....’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). This means that Allah tested him with some commandments which he fulfilled in the most perfect way, so his Lord said to him: ‘... [Allah] said, “Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). However, out of his love for leadership to be passed on to his offspring, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) said: ‘...And of my offspring’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). Then, Allah corrected and clarified the matter for him, stating that there will be wrongdoers from among his offspring, so He says: ‘…My covenant does not include the wrongdoers…’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). Therefore, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) learned from this situation and practiced caution thereafter. When he wanted to ask his Lord to provide sustenance to the people of Mecca, he said: ‘and [mention] when Abraham said, “My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits – whoever of them believes in Allah and the Last Day....”’ (*al-Baqara:* 126) Allah also corrected this request, as the situation in this verse is different from the one stated in the previous verse which was concerned with leadership in values and religion, a mission which cannot be fulfilled by a wrongdoer. As for sustenance provided by Allah as Lord, it is bestowed on the believer and the disbeliever,

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= *Ubay ibn Ka’b. He mentioned that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) said, ‘Allah’s knowledge of my state makes me dispense with asking.’*

the obedient and the disobedient. Allah provides all people with sustenance. Therefore, He says: '... And whoever disbelieves...' (*al-Baqara:* 126). This means that He will also provides sustenance to the disbeliever.(1) Here, the greatness of Lordship, which nurtures the Prophets, becomes manifest, and it makes them a reflection of the essence of Lordship. All the situations of the Prophets give us a summary of human perfection.

An indication of Abraham's precision in carrying out what was asked of him can be seen in his attitude towards building the House. After Allah had shown him its place, He removed from it the effects of floods and uncovered its foundations. It would have been sufficient for Abraham *peace be upon him* to fulfil his Lord's command by making the building as high as his hands could reach, but he eagerly wanted to fulfil the command in the most perfect way, and execute it with precision and caution. So, he thought about bringing a high stone that he could stand on in order to make the building higher, and thus he brought the stone that is known as the place (*maqam*) of Abraham *peace be upon him*. His son helped him throughout the process; and this is why he brought a stone only two men could lift.

Likewise, there is his position of faith and his relinquishment of means when he left his wife Hajar and his young son Ishmael in a valley that had no vegetation and none of the essentials of life or means of living.(2) This is because he did not believe in means but rather in the Original Cause of those means, and as long as Allah *Glorified is He* will provide them with the necessary means to stay alive. This is why Hajar asked him, 'Was this place chosen by

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(1) *Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him said: 'Abraham wanted to restrict sustenance only to the believers, then Allah sent down: '...And whoever disbelieves...' (Al-Baqara: 126). Allah gives them sustenance just as He gives the believers. He lets them enjoy themselves for a short time, but in the end He will drive them to the torment of the Hellfire, wretched is the destination. Then Ibn 'Abbas recited: 'To each [category] We extend - to these and to those - from the gift of your Lord. And never has the gift of your Lord been restricted.' (al-Isra': 20) This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (1/175).*

(2) This is why we have His statement about Abraham that he said: 'Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful.' (*Ibrahim*: 37)

Allah or by you?' When she learned that it was from Allah, she said, 'Then, He will never abandon us.' It is as if Abraham's faith had affected his wife, and her heart became full of certainty in Allah *Glorified is He*.

'And guided him to a straight path' How, after all these characteristics of faith, can the verses say 'and guided him'? Are these not all characteristics of guidance? We say: what is meant is that his guidance was increased, as He *Glorified is He* said: 'And those who are guided – He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness.'

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً ۖ وَإِنَّهُۥ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ لَمِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

We gave him blessings in this world, and he is
among the righteous in the Hereafter [122]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 122)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is explaining that Abraham's reward is immense in this life, before the reward of the Hereafter. The meaning of good in this life is the fact that he is loved by the people of all religions, the multitude of prophets amongst his offspring, his noble biography, and that he is always mentioned in goodness. Here we talk about his attributes, virtues and we boast about him. This is Allah's gift to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in this life because he attained a high degree in his obedience and worship of Allah. Abraham *peace be upon him* requested this rank from his Lord, as he said: 'My Lord, grant me right judgement and join me with the righteous. And grant me a reputation of honour among later generations.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 83-84)

The ability to judge means the wisdom to put things in their proper place. His statement: 'in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous.' If this is his reward in this life, then there is no doubt that his reward in the Hereafter will be even greater.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ أَنِ ٱتَّبِعۡ مِلَّةَ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفٗاۖ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ ١٢٣

Then We revealed to you [Muhammad], 'Follow the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith who was not an idolater' [123] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 123)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* had mentioned some of the attributes of His dear friend Abraham *peace be upon him* such as being one *(ummah)*, devoutly obeying Allah's will, turning away from all that is false and being free of lesser idolatry, in addition to being grateful for His blessings, being elected and chosen by his Lord and so forth, He said: 'follow the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth.' It is as if the peak of Abraham's virtues and rewards is that we have revealed to you, O Seal of the Messengers, to follow his creed. The creed of Abraham is the Revealed Law of Allah's Oneness. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* reaffirms Abraham's innocence with regards to idolatry by saying: 'and he was not of those who associate with Allah.'

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا جُعِلَ ٱلسَّبۡتُ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ٱخۡتَلَفُواْ فِيهِۚ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَيَحۡكُمُ
بَيۡنَهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُواْ فِيهِ يَخۡتَلِفُونَ ١٢٤

The Sabbath was made obligatory only for those who differed about it. On the Day of Resurrection your Lord will judge between them as to their differences [124] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 124)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* had talked about Abraham, the father of the Prophets, and mentioned some of his attributes and virtues, He talked about the children of Israel with regards to an issue in which they contravened Allah's Command after they had requested it themselves. It is as if the Quran is saying to them: 'You claimed that Abraham was a Jew, so here are Abraham's attributes. How do your attributes compare? Where are you in comparison to Abraham *peace be upon him*?'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us examples of their contravening what Allah had commanded, and that they were not like Abraham *peace be upon him*. So, He mentions what happened with them concerning the Sabbath. The

Children of Israel asked for a day in which they could rest and take a break from work and be free to worship Allah. Their prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* suggested to them that this day be Friday, as it is the day in which Allah completed the creation of the universe in six days, as well as being the day in which he chose His dear friend Abraham *peace be upon him*. However, they refused Friday and chose Saturday instead. They said: ‘Indeed, Allah created this life in six days beginning on Sunday and finishing on Friday. Then He rested on Saturday. Likewise, we want to rest and be free to worship Allah on Saturday’, and this was their desire and choice.

As for Christians, they refused to follow the Jews with regards to Saturday, or Abraham *peace be upon him* with regards to Friday, so they chose Sunday based on the fact that it is the day creation began.

As for the nation of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah chose Friday for them as the day of the completion of blessings.(1)

Therefore, the Jews asked for Saturday and they chose it as a day to rest from work and be free to worship. This is what they asked for and their Lord *Glorified is He* acceded to their request and commanded them to free themselves for worship on this day. He acceded to their request in order to manifest their bickering, stubbornness and that they would not fulfil what they had undertaken even though they had chosen it themselves. He also did so in order to put an end to their arguments. If He had chosen a day for them, they would have objected to it, but instead they chose a day for themselves.

The story of the Sabbath with regards to the Jews came to serve a general creedal issue, which is that the signs that come to affirm the veracity of the Messengers in conveying from Allah *Glorified is He* can be from Allah or those who receive a messenger. The habit of the children of Israel was to deny everything, and this is why He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And nothing has prevented Us from sending signs except that the former peoples denied them.’ (*al-Isra’:* 59) They would suggest a sign and then deny it every time.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (847) in the Book of Friday from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra and Hudhayfa may Allah be pleased with them that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘It was Friday from which Allah diverted those who were before us. For the Jews, it was Saturday and for the Christians it was Sunday. Allah turned towards us and guided us to Friday. In fact, He made Friday, Saturday and Sunday as days of prayer. In this order, they come after us* on the Day of Resurrection. We are the last of the people in the life of this world and the first among the creation to be judged on the Day of Resurrection.’

The story of the Sabbath is mentioned in many places, such as His statement: ‘And ask them about the town that was by the sea – when they transgressed in [the matter of] the sabbath – when their fish came to them openly on their sabbath day, and the day they had no sabbath they did not come to them. Thus did We give them trial because they were defiantly disobedient.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 163)

The Jews violated their pledge with Allah–as was their habit–went against what they had pledged themselves to and went fishing on Saturday. Allah plotted against them and infuriated them, as various kinds of fish would appear on the surface of the water like sailboats, and they would gain nothing from this except grief and regret. They would say, ‘maybe they will come tomorrow;’ but then Allah would dash their hopes.

“…and the day they had no Sabbath they did not come to them.” The Noble Quran described what they were doing as transgression because they transgressed what Allah had legislated. He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And you had already known about those who transgressed among you concerning the Sabbath, and We said to them, “Be apes, despised.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 65)

And His statement: ‘The Sabbath was only appointed for those who differed over it.’ The phrase ‘who differed over it’ reveals the existence of two opposing groups regarding this issue, and the truth is that this differing was not between the Jews themselves, but rather between them and their Prophet who had chosen Friday for them. They differed with him and chose Saturday; so Allah attributed the differing to them. The meaning is that the Sabbath was only ordained as proof against those who hold divergent views about it because it affirms their hostility towards a day of worship. After they had suggested and chosen it, it became evidence of their guilt.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ٱدۡعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلۡحِكۡمَةِ وَٱلۡمَوۡعِظَةِ ٱلۡحَسَنَةِۖ وَجَٰدِلۡهُم بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحۡسَنُۚ
إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦۖ وَهُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِٱلۡمُهۡتَدِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

[Prophet], call [people] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided [125] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 125)

After the verses had talked about the most sublime exemplar of faith that can be found in man, embodied in the person of the Father of the Prophets, Abraham *peace be upon him* they then made the greatest of his virtues to be the fact that Allah commanded the Seal of His Messengers (Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) to follow him, and then they explained some of the general features regarding the way of calling to Allah. His statement: ‘Call to the way of your Lord.’ The True Lord *Glorified is He* would not instruct Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with this command unless He knew that he would implement what he had been commanded; he will call people and he will bear the responsibilities that such action entails.

‘With wisdom’ meaning wisdom is to put something in its proper place, but why does calling to Allah require wisdom? It is because you only call to Allah’s way someone who has deviated from this way. When someone has deviated from Allah’s way, you find that this person has become accustomed to disobedience. Therefore, you have to be gentle with him in order to extract him from what he has become accustomed to. Severity and harshness in this kind of calling will just chase him away, because you are being harsh in two aspects: The first is the severity and harshness of the call itself, and the second is the severity of getting him to leave off the ways of life that he loves and has become accustomed to. If you treat him with gentleness and you present the call to him properly, he will yield to you by leaving off whatever he was doing against the divine way.

Generally speaking, it is known that advice is a heavy matter for people, especially in matters of religion. Beware; do not make the person you advise think that you are more knowledgeable than he is or that you are better than he is. Beware of confronting the person because of some deficiency he has, and do not embarrass him in front of others, because if the caller does any of these things, it will be counterproductive. This method will make the person defensive and may even make him haughty and stubborn.

This method of calling is what is meant by His statement: '…with wisdom and good advice." With regards to this stage of wisdom and advice, a story is related that happened between Al-Hasan Ibn ʿAli and Al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. This story is a true embodiment upon which the caller must be:

It is related that they saw a man who was not performing his ablution properly and they wanted to teach him how to do it properly without hurting his feelings. So, they pretended that they were having a disagreement, and they were both saying to each other, 'You do not perform your ablution properly.' They then asked this man to arbitrate for them by watching each of them perform his ablution, and then he would decide who was better. So, both of them did it and they performed properly. The man gave his decision by saying, 'Both of you have done it properly. I am the one who hasn not done it properly.' Indeed, it is an advice in the most sublime and wisest of examples.

Another example of calling is given to us by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when a young man came to him who was in the peak of his youth, and he was complaining about his lack of patience with regards to his sexual desire, which is, as we have said, the most petulant of man's natural inclinations.

The young man came and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Allow me to commit fornication!' This is how bold he was. He did not hide his illness. This is how he sought the help of the doctor in order to clearly demand some medicine, and knowing the illness is the first step towards the cure. What did the Messenger of Allah say? Look at the way of calling. How is it? How did the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* gently rid him from the illness? He did not scold him, rebuke, nor harmed him. Rather, he took him and gently patted him on the shoulder. Then He said, 'Would you want that for your mother?' He said, 'No, O Messenger of Allah. May I be ransomed for you?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Likewise, people would not want that for their mothers.' Then he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Would you want that for your sister? He said, 'No, O Messenger of Allah. May I be ransomed for you!' He said, 'Likewise, people would not want that for their sisters.'

In the same manner, he went to mention paternal and maternal aunts as well as wives. Then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* placed his noble hand on the young man's heart and supplicated for him: 'O Allah, purify his heart and fortify his private parts.' Then the young man stood up and he despised the fornication that he had intended, and said, 'By Allah, my soul has no concern for this except that I remember my mother, my maternal aunt and my wife.'(1)

Think about this gentleness in explaining the correct ruling, as treating illnesses in society requires understanding, good manners, tenderness, and mindful conduct. We even see the disbelievers, when they give someone some bitter medicine, they encase it in something soft and sweet so that the patient can swallow it and take it easily. In this matter, how similar is the treatment of bodies to the treatment of hearts?

The experts in calling to Allah say, 'Advice is heavy, so do not send it as a weapon, and do not make it an argument. The realities are bitter, so use it with soft speech.'

When He *peace and blessings be upon him* heard of something that displeased him, some sin or abomination from the nation of faith in Medina, He *peace and blessings be upon him* would get on his noble pulpit and say, 'Why would people say such-and-such?'(2)

It suffices to give a general instruction without hurting any of the people. An example of this is what the intelligent people in the countryside would resort to when one of them had been robbed or something of value had gone missing. They would declare that the missing or stolen object was lost and then say, ‘On such-and-such night, after the moon has set, we will throw the dust.’ The meaning of ‘we will throw the dust’ is that each one of them would bring an amount of dust and throw it in front of the house of the person who owned the lost item. In the morning, they would look through the dust until they found what they had lost. They would achieve their goal without making the matter public and without offending anyone. Maybe, if they had confronted the thief, he would have denied it and the matter would have become more complicated.

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/206,207) and At-Tabarani in (Al-Muʿjam Al-Kabir) (8/190,295) from the Hadith of Abu Umama may Allah be pleased with him in which the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'O Allah, forgive his sin, purify his heart and fortify his private parts.' After that the young man* did not *go anywhere near this act.*

(2) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1401) in the Book of Marriage from the Hadith of Anas may Allah be pleased with him who narrated that some of the Companions of Allah's Messenger asked his wives about what he did in private.* Someone of them said, "I will not marry women." Someone among them also said, "I will not eat meat," and someone else among them said, "I will not lie down in bed." He praised Allah and glorified Him, and said, "Why would people say such-and-such, when I observe prayer and I also sleep, I observe the fast and leave off fasting, and I also marry women? Whoever turns away from my standard practice (*Sunnah*) is not of me."

‘And argue with them in a way that is best.’ An argument is a discussion of proofs regarding some matter, and both sides must present their proof in the kindest manner with gentleness without being rude or haughty. In the course of an argument like this, you must not make your opponent angry because he might bicker about one word from you and then use it as a pretext to get up and leave.

His statement: ‘Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way.’ Some people might ask, ‘How is this conclusion to this verse connected to the subject of calling to Allah?’

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to explain the sensitivity of this mission to us, and that it is based on sincerity for Allah in giving advice. The caller should never be fraudulent when he is calling, and have some ulterior motive in mind. Also, you could be advising someone but harbour arrogance towards the one being exhorted, or feeling that you are better or more knowledgeable than he is.

Amongst mankind – and we seek refuge in Allah – there are those who gather the outward trappings of some subject and then they think that they are scholars. They harm people more than they benefit them.

Therefore, even if fraud is accepted in some things, it is never accepted in the field of calling to Allah, so beware of cheating with Allah while doing something for Him, because He *Glorified is He* knows best those who lead mankind astray and bar them from Allah’s path, and He knows best as to those who are rightly guided.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

وَإِنۡ عَاقَبۡتُمۡ فَعَاقِبُواْ بِمِثۡلِ مَا عُوقِبۡتُم بِهِۦۖ وَلَئِن صَبَرۡتُمۡ لَهُوَ خَيۡرٞ لِّلصَّٰبِرِينَ ١٢٦

If you [believers] have to respond to an attack, make your response proportionate, but it is best to stand fast [126]
(The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 126)

We notice that an identical meaning is found in Allah's statement: 'So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you.' (*al-Baqara:* 194) Therefore, even though the True Lord *Glorified is He* has legislated that we respond to an attack to the same extent that we have been attacked, He made it difficult for it to be carried out. Who can measure the response to make sure that it is to the same extent as the original attack, such that it is absolutely like for like without any transgression? It is as if the difficulty in measuring and making sure that the attack and the response are the same is an indication that it is recommended to leave it for that which is better, as He *Glorified is He* said: 'But if you are patient – it is better for those who are patient.'

Allah made room for patience and made it better than responding to the attack and the difficulty in measuring and making sure that the attack and the response are the same, let alone the fact that patience unites hearts and removes enmity, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: 'And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend." (*Fussilat:* 34)

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(1) *The occasion for revelation behind this verse: Ad-Daraqutni relates from Ibn ʿAbbas who said, "When the idolaters retreated from those who were killed at the battle of Uhud, the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him went there and saw a scene which he strongly disliked. He also saw Hamzah may Allah be pleased with him with his stomach ripped open, nose burnt and ears cut off. He said, "If it were not for the fear of causing more grief to the women or that it becomes a standard practice after me, I would leave him until Allah resurrects him from the bellies of predatory animals and birds. I shall kill seventy men of them [of the disbelievers of Quraysh] in revenge." Then this verse came down: 'And be patient, [O Muhammad], and your patience is not but through Allah.' (an-Nahl: 127) Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was patient and did not seek equal retribution for Uhud.' Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his (Tafsir) (5/2927) as well as Al-Wahidi in (Asbab An-Nuzul) (p.*162).

In this the impulses of the self are repelled and the outlets of revenge are blocked, thus putting an end to hatred and resentment. And His statement: '…it is better for those who are patient.' It is better for a few reasons:

1. By being patient and not responding to an attack in a similar manner puts an end to quarrelling and allows the society to be relieved of having to fear a never-ending cycle of hostility.
2. Whoever is oppressed, and they are patient with that oppression, they guarantee that Allah *Glorified is He* will be with them because Allah is vigilant over His oppressed servants, and He places them in His company and custody. This is why they said that if the oppressors knew what Allah prepared for the oppressed, they would withhold their oppression.

The one who follows the verses of patience in the Noble Quran finds similarity in how some of these verses finish. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*Luqman:* 17) In another verse: 'And whoever is patient and forgives – indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.' (*ash-Shura:* 43)

Do not forget that the One Speaking is Allah. Therefore, the meaning is not the same, as every letter has a meaning, and the situations are different. Look at the subtlety of the Quranic rendering. The afflictions that befall man are of two types.

The first type: there are afflictions that befall man out of Allah's decree and destiny, and he has no adversary therein, such as someone who is afflicted with regards to his health, or the loss of wealth, or home destruction, and so forth. With these kinds of afflictions man feels the pain of loss and the agony of deprivation, but he does not have any resentment towards anyone. Hence, patience with these events is relatively easy because it is a decreed and destined trial. There is no need to emphasise patience. The following verse suits this situation: 'And be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.'

The second type: these are the afflictions that are brought about by someone's actions, such as killing, for example. It is a loss in which you do have an adversary, and it provokes your resentment and anger. It pushes you to seek revenge whenever you see the killer. Patience with this is more difficult for the self to bear it because it requires endurance, as in the second verse: ‘And whoever is patient and forgives – indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.’ Patience here is hard and there is an open opportunity for Satan to turn hearts and incite resentment and hatred.

We also notice in the first verse that He said: ‘be patient,” while in the second verse “is patient and forgives,” because he has an adversary in front of him who is calling him to forgive him.

A story is related about a Jewish moneylender who gave a man some money on the condition that he returns it at a specified time. He further stipulated that if the man did not pay him back on time, he would cut out a piece of his flesh. The man agreed and when the time came to pay the money back, the man was unable to do so. The Jew brought the matter before the judge and told him about the agreement that they had between them. The judge was a man of intelligence, so he said, ‘The contract between you is sound and legally binding.’ Then he ordered him to bring a knife and he said, ‘Take a lump of his flesh, but do it with one blow, but if you take more or less we will take it from your flesh.’ When the Jew saw how difficult it would be, he preferred peace and reconciliation with his enemy.

The question now is: what is the connection (1) between this verse: ‘And if you punish,’ and that which comes before it: ‘Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice.’?

Calling to Allah is a way that draws the attention of man – Allah’s vicegerent on His earth – to adhere to Allah’s way that He has appointed him to be the vicegerent of, and He has laid down this way for him so that he can organise his activities in life. The caller confronts these people who sow corruption in the earth and realise benefits for themselves at the expense of others. Whoever realises benefits for himself at the expense of others must have strength and power, which enable him to transgress, oppress, and have mastery.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his (Tafsir) (5/2928): ‘The meaning is rightly connected to the Meccan event that precedes it because the degrees gradually proceed from the one who calls and advises – to the one who argues – to the one who is rewarded for his action, but what the majority have related is affirmed’, which is that this verse was revealed in Medina.*

When the way of Allah *Glorified is He* came to set right the activity of these people and extract them from what they had become accustomed to, deprive them of their power to transgress and oppress, and strip them of this whip that they were benefiting with, it was inevitable that they would dispute it and oppose it. This is because they were confronted with the natural intensity of advice and rectification, as well as the difficulty of leaving off that to which they had become accustomed.

The caller, therefore, must be characterised by wisdom, gives good advice and must argue with them in the most kindly manner. If ever their affair turns into aggression against the caller; if ever corruption is rampant and the wickedness of people's character is overwhelming, we will then need a different method, since the method of wisdom no longer works.

We must assume the position that is required by conventional integrity even if we have the power to respond in the way that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has legislated for us, without us having a violent dispute or being excessive in attacking. Then His statement comes: 'And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed.' The verse contains a warning against going beyond the extent to which one was attacked when responding, and this is how your adversary learns that you are subject to a divine, just way before which everyone is equal. Even though they have deviated and committed a crime, the punishment is to the same extent and does not transgress that extent. Perhaps that will turn them towards the fact that the One Who commanded it did not give free rein to the wickedness of revenge. Rather, He guided it and called it towards pardon and forgiveness so that this could be more conducive to their guidance.

This divine instruction of restricting the punishment to be of the same extent as the inflicted harm was directed at a believer who was beloved to Allah's Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and one whom he held in high esteem–his uncle and Companion, Hamza ibn ʿAbd Al Muttalib, the master of the martyrs, *may Allah be pleased with him*.

The disbelievers mutilated him at Uhud, and Hind split open his abdomen and bit into his liver. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was extremely troubled and saddened by the matter and it affected his soul. He faced this situation bearing two kinds of emotional attachment: the attachment of faith and the attachment of kinship, as Hamza ibn ‘Abd Al Muttalib was his uncle who had supported him and stood by him. Being affected by these emotions Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “If Allah grants me victory over them, I will mutilate 30 of their men.”(1) However, the True Lord, the Just, Who had sent down the scales of justice and truth to creation, calmed him down and straightened out this matter for him and his community after him. He said: ‘And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed.’

The one who reflects on the Quranic style in this verse will notice that it contains an invitation to have sympathy and compassion towards one’s adversary, for the One speaking is Allah, and every letter has a meaning, so do not try to understand the speech merely in a general sense. Rather, reflect on it and you will find that behind every letter there is a purport and a meaning that is sought.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to fill hearts with compassion and place the response to an attack, which has to be to the same extent, within the narrowest scope. This is mercy, even with one’s enemies. This mercy causes them to have love for Islam, calls them to it, and this is how these enemies can turn into soldiers in the ranks of those calling to Allah. Likewise, His statement, ‘And if you punish,’ is an indication that responding to an attack requires strength and preparedness, as He *Glorified is He* said: ‘Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster, so that you might deter thereby the enemies of Allah, who are your enemies as well, and others besides them of whom you may be unaware, [but] of whom Allah is aware.’ (*al-Anfal:* 60)

It is as if He is saying: ‘Always be prepared and in a state of strength so that you are able to respond when someone attacks you.’ Also, in the presence of strength and preparedness, the enemy is deterred, frightened and would not dare attack from the outset. With strength and preparedness, balance is maintained in society, as no one thinks about attacking someone who is strong.

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(1) *Mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (3/592) and he attributed it to Muhammad ibn Ishaq in (As-Sirah).*

This is what we see nowadays between the countries of the world in their frantic conflict over arming themselves with destructive weapons.

Someone may ask regarding this issue: ‘As long as Islam is instructing pardon in this matter, then why does not it affirm it from the beginning? What is the point of talking about responding to the attack in a similar fashion? We say: It is because a society cannot be sound in its formation unless every person in the society is safe in his person, honour, wealth, and so forth. This security can only come about with some form of strength that maintains it, just as the society has balance, and this balance can only be maintained by some strength that guarantees that rights and responsibilities are carried out and fulfilled, as well as guaranteeing that people can carry out their activities without being oppressed.

Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has an exalted wisdom in legislating punishment for crimes, as the goal of the Wise Legislator is to limit crime and prevent it from happening. If the killer knew that he was going to be killed, he would not dare commit the crime. In legislating punishment, there is mercy for the society, and its safety and security are preserved.

We see some people objecting to the punishment for apostasy. They say: ‘How can you kill someone who apostates from your religion? Where is freedom of belief, then?’ We say: By legislating that, the ways of entering this religion are restricted such that no one enters it unless they are absolutely convinced and their belief is firmly established. If the person knows this ruling from the beginning, then they are free to enter or not enter, and no one can force them. However, when they enter, they should know the ruling for apostasy.(1)

Therefore, Islam has legislated punishment in order to preserve the society’s equilibrium and to be a deterrent so that crime does not happen from the outset. However, when it does happen, one resorts to another form of treatment that uproots hatred, enmity and resentment from society.

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(1) *From Ibn ʿAbbas may Allah be pleased with him who said, ‘The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: “If someone changes their religion, kill them.”’ Related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/282,283), Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (12/267- (Fath Al-Bari’)), Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (2535) and also At-Tirmidhi (9458)*

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

وَٱصۡبِرۡ وَمَا صَبۡرُكَ إِلَّا بِٱللَّهِۚ وَلَا تَحۡزَنۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡ
وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَيۡقٖ مِّمَّا يَمۡكُرُونَ ١٢٧

So [Prophet] be steadfast: your steadfastness comes only from God. Do not grieve over them; do not be distressed by their scheming [127] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 127)

The verse mentions the virtue of patience as if to pave the way for the command here: ‘be patient’ so that everyone can follow Allah’s command, after presenting to them the considerations and reasons that make patience a form of bravery, not weakness: ‘It is courageous to be a coward sometimes.’ If ever Satan whispers to you, and he entices you to seek revenge and you become filled with rage, then it is courageous to be patient and not obey Satan. His statement: ‘And be patient, [O Muhammad], and your patience is not but through Allah.’ It is from Allah’s wisdom and mercy that He has made you patient in adversity because in patience there is goodness for you, and Allah is the One Who helps you to be patient, and He protects you from Satan’s whispering and evil thoughts that provoke your anger and drag you towards revenge. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants His servants to direct themselves towards complying with His commands, and if He knows that this is in their intention He takes charge of their affair and He helps them.

Beware of believing that patience comes from you, from within yourself, as Allah wants you to direct yourself towards patience by merely having the intention to do so. When you direct yourself towards it, Allah mobilises good thoughts for you that help you, make the matter easy for you, and make you pleased with it; and then your patience becomes beautiful, free of anger or opposition towards it.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And do not grieve over them.’ Allah favoured the Arab nation which received the call to Allah on the tongue of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by sending a Messenger amongst them who was from them. They knew of his descent and lineage as well as his history and character, as He loved his people and full of concern for them to be guided. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful.’ (*at-Tawba:* 128) Their difficulty heavily weighs upon him, and he is saddened by their suffering and toil. He is full of concern for them and he wants to bring about all kinds of goodness for them. He clarified this meaning in the Noble Hadith: ‘The similitude of how I am with regards to my community is like that of a man who stoked a fire, and then flies and butterflies started falling into it, so I am holding on to you by your trousers and you are still falling into it.’(1)

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(1) *Ibn Zayd said, ‘It is abrogated by the permission to fight,’ while the majority of people hold the position that it is reinforced, i.e. be patient in pardoning as opposed to responding to an attack in like manner. [(Tafsir al-Qurtubi) 5/2930]*

This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* grieved for his people when he saw their disbelief, stubbornness, and haughtiness towards accepting the Truth, as he wants guidance and goodness for them. When you love someone, you want them to have what you see as goodness, such as someone who goes to a market and finds that it is successful and doing well, so he tells those whom he loves about it, such as his family and his friends. Likewise, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tasted the sweetness of faith, he wanted to share its pleasure and enjoyment with them.

Here the True Lord *Glorified is He* is comforting His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and relieving him of that which is distressing him about his people. He says to him: ‘Do not grieve over them, and do not make your soul take on more than it can bear. All you have to do is convey the Message.’ His Lord addresses him in another verse: ‘Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) Do not destroy yourself by grieving over them. And His statement: ‘…and do not be in distress over what they conspire.’ The meaning of distress is that something vast shrinks in front of you, and it is smaller than what you had measured it to be. It happens to man in various degrees, as someone could feel unwelcomed by their own country and thus they move to another country.

Maybe the entire life of this world has become constricted for someone, and in this situation, his soul is able to give him space. If his soul becomes constricted, then he has reached the utmost limit of constriction, as He *Glorified is He* said about the three(1) who stayed behind from fighting for Allah's cause (*jihad*) with Allah's Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And [He also forgave] the three who were left behind [and regretted their error] to the point that the earth closed in on them in spite of its vastness and their souls confined them.' (*at-Tawba:* 118)

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2284) in the Book of Virtues, from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with them*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* prohibits His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from being in a state of distress because of what the disbelievers are devising because the one who is constricted by something is the one who will not find any option within his scope of thought that will get him out of this distress. It is only the person who knows that he has an exit and a way out that will never be distressed.

The meaning thus: O Muhammad, Allah is with you. He will make a way out of this distress for you, and He will respond to what these people are devising. 'But they plan, and Allah plans. And Allah is the best of planners.' (*al-Anfal:* 30)

This is why he said, 'There is no worry when You are the Lord.' When this life becomes constricted for you, as well as your family and loved ones, and even your soul becomes constricted, Allah opens things up for you so that you can be in His Company. This is why He *Glorified is He* said afterwards:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَواْ وَّٱلَّذِينَ هُم مُّحۡسِنُونَ ١٢٨

For God is with those who are mindful of Him
and who do good [128] (The Quran, *an-Nahl:* 128)

This is the issue of being in Allah's company for those who are conscious of Him. Those who are conscious of Allah are in His custody and company. When you are in your Lord's company, who dares to scheme or plot against you?

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(1) *They are Ka'b ibn Malik, Hilal ibn Ummayah and Marara ibn Ar-Rabi', and they stayed behind from fighting with Allah's Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in the military expedition of Tabuk without an excuse. They were punished by being avoided by the Muslims for approximately fifty days and nights. Their souls became constricted and the earth became constricted for them, but they were patient with Allah's Command and they were firm until Allah made an opening for them because of their honesty with Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him in admitting that they stayed behind without an excuse. [summarized from (Tafsir Ibn Kathir) 2/399]*

During the journey of emigration from Mecca to Medina, Allah's Company was manifested and embodied in the cave, when the disbelievers had surrounded them. Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'If one of them were to look under his feet, he would see us.' The Messenger Muhammad, being certain of this company, responded to him by saying: "O Abu Bakr! What do you think of two and Allah is the third of them?"(1)

How is this response from Allah's Messenger connected to what Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* had said? The meaning is that as long as Allah is the third of them, then they are in Allah's Company, and Allah is not encompassed by human vision. So, whoever is in His company is also not encompassed by human vision.

His statement: '…who are conscious of Him' The general meaning of "being conscious of Allah" is to obey Allah by following what He has commanded and avoiding what He has prohibited. The meaning of 'Be conscious of Allah!' is that you must place a defence and a barrier between yourself and Allah's punishment which will protect you, and this is done by following what He has commanded and avoiding what He has prohibited because the True Lord *Glorified is He* has the attributes of mercy, as He is the Most Compassionate, the Dispenser of Mercy, and the Much-Forgiving. He also has the attributes of Might, as He is the Lord of Retribution, the All-Compeller, and the Almighty, so place a defence between yourself and these attributes of retribution.

His statement: '…and those who are doers of good.' The doers of good are those who obligate themselves in worshipping Allah to do more than what Allah has obligated them to do. It is of the same category as that which Allah has obligated them. Thus, if the Revealed Law has prescribed five prayers for you which are to be performed in the day and at night, then to do good would mean to increase and do whatever optional prayers you are capable of. If it is obligatory to fast in the month of *Ramadan,* then to do good would mean to fast some days in other months, and the same goes for *zakat* and everything else Allah has made obligatory.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (4663) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (2286) from the Hadith of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq may Allah be pleased with him.*

This is why we find that doing good (*ihsan*) is the highest rank in the religion, and this is clear in the Hadith of Gabriel *peace be upon him* when he asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about *(islam)*, *(iman)*, and *(ihsan)*, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: '*(Ihsan)* is that you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, and even though you cannot see Him, He certainly sees you.'(1)

The noble verse reveals to us that those who are conscious of Allah have a reward and they have company, and that those who do good also have a reward and company. Everyone is according to their level because the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives to His creation from His attributes of perfection according to the extent of their company with Him *Glorified is He*. Those who are content with what Allah has obligated them are not equal to those who do good and increase. The latter must have some merit and distinction.

In the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and springs, accepting what their Lord has given them. Indeed, they were before those doers of the good.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16) He did not say 'believer' because believers only do what Allah has obligated them to do, but what aspect of *(ihsan)* do they have? He *Glorified is He* says: 'They used to sleep but little of the night. And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness, and from their properties was [given] the right of the [needy] petitioner and the deprived.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19)

All of these are optional matters that go beyond what Allah has obligated them to do. We must be aware of the fact that the purport of His statement: 'And from their properties was [given] the right of the [needy] petitioner and the deprived,' is not *(zakat)*, but rather, optional charity because regarding *(zakat)* He *Glorified is He* has said: 'a due share.' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24)

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (16/4777), as well as Muslim in his (Sahih) (9) in the Book of Faith from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him. Ibn Hajar said in (Al-Fath) (1/230): 'To do good (ihsan) in worship is to have sincerity, humility and one's mind free of thoughts whilst engaged in it and to be observant of The Object of Worship, such that in being overwhelmed by witnessing the True Lord Glorified is He with one's heart, it is as if one is seeing Him with one's eyes, which is the meaning of his statement: "as if you are seeing Him." You call to mind that the True Lord Glorified is He is watching over you and seeing everything that you do, and this is the meaning of his statement: "He certainly sees you."'*

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (13)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (13)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (13)

the chapter of

al-Isra'

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

Introduction:

If we consider the conclusion of chapter *an-Nahl* carefully, we find that it is a natural introduction for what occurs in chapter *al-Isra'*.(1) We observe agreeability and harmony in the arrangement of these two chapters; *an-Nahl* ends by clarifying the principle of 'reciprocating punishment with its like,' after which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to remain patient as the chapter elucidated the reward of those who adhered to patience and thereby removed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* from the distress caused by the plots of the disbelievers.

From this, we uncover that indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would soon encounter events that would require patience, composure and equanimity. It is as if these instructions were fortresses of faith, fortifying and preparing him for the coming events that would unfold in the chapter of *al-Isra'*. They are equivalent to signposts, signalling the approaching difficulties that lie ahead so that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not be taken unaware or caught off guard.

---

(1) *The chapter of Al-Isra': it is the 17th chapter in the arrangement of the Quranic text. It contains 111 verses and was revealed in Mecca with the exception of three verses:*
'And [remember, O Muhammad], when We told you, "Indeed, your Lord has encompassed the people." And We did not make the sight which We showed you except as a trial for the people.' (al-Isra': 60)
'And indeed, they were about to drive you from the land to evict you therefrom. And then [when they do], they will not remain [there] after you, except for a little.' (al-Isra': 60)
'And say, "My Lord, cause me to enter a sound entrance and to exit a sound exit and grant me from Yourself a supporting authority.' (al-Isra': 60)
The Quran is divided into 30 parts, and chapter Al-Isra' begins at the 15th part of the Quran, and it also has some additional names, such as chapter Subhan and chapter Banu Israil, to name a couple of them.

This fortification that occurs during the ending of the chapter of *an-Nahl* is very similar to the means we employ to preserve the soundness of our physical make-up and wellness when we fear disease. We call this process vaccinating against disease: the body derives fortification from this vaccine in the event of a viral attack.

In this manner did the True Lord *Glorified is He* give His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* these fortifications so that he could face the coming tumultuous times and challenges with patience and poise, assured that Allah *Glorified is He* would never disown nor forsake him. For Allah *Glorified is He* has never abandoned a messenger after dispatching him, even if the people desert him and even if this world, for all of its expansiveness, becomes constrained for him, he finds refuge in the accompaniment of Allah.

In the truest sense, adversity did befall the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the nadir of these trials being the deaths of his uncle Abu Taleb and his wife Khadija *may Allah be pleased with them* within the same year. It was the harshness of that year that led the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call it ‘The year of sadness.’

With the demise of his uncle, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lost the external protection that defended him against the aggression of the idolaters and warded off the notables of Quraysh. With the passing of his wife, he lost his internal protection and safe haven to which he would retreat. It was she who had calmed and soothed him during the first revelatory experience and who ultimately explained to him with insight that without doubt, he had witnessed the signs of prophethood in the cave and that Allah would never forsake him. ‘You honour your relatives, aid the one in straits, assist the orphan, and help the doers of good,’ she told him(1).

A year of sadness indeed, one in which he lost his inner and outer sanctuaries at once. In which direction could he now turn? No longer sensing security in Mecca, his thoughts shifted to the people of Taif. Perhaps he would find safety and security among them; however, he was like someone seeking relief from intense heat with fire, undeniably. They caused him great harm. They threw stones at him until his noble foot began to bleed profusely, and they incited the children and fools amongst them to chase him. So, he left there melancholic and dejected, again returning to Mecca, and with the exception of Mut’am ibn ‘Adi, he had found no one willing to support him.

---

(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [3] in the Book of Early Revelation from the narration of ‘Aisha may Allah be pleased with her*

Indeed, we know that the conclusion of the chapter *of an-Nahl* is appropriately positioned. It is as though, the True Lord *Glorified is He* was instructing His prophet: ‘Truly the world with all of its expansiveness has converged upon you until your very soul has become a straightened place; nevertheless, your refuge is Allah. He will show you that the unwillingness of the land and misfortunes that you have witnessed will all be exchanged for blessed salutations. This lies within the heavenly reception I will extend unto you, after what you experienced in Mecca and Taif: ‘…and do not be in distress over what they conspire. Indeed, Allah is with those who are conscious of Him and those who are doers of good.’ The Night Journey and Ascension took place to demonstrate the heavenly election of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after the abuse he encountered from human beings. But before He issued His celestial invite to Prophet Muhammad, He altered the balance of creation for him. For He *Glorified is He* said:

سُبْحَٰنَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِۦ لَيْلًا مِّنَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ إِلَى ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْأَقْصَا
ٱلَّذِى بَٰرَكْنَا حَوْلَهُۥ لِنُرِيَهُۥ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِنَآ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْبَصِيرُ ﴿١﴾

Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs: He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing [1]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* opened this chapter with His saying “the Exalted” because it discusses an occurrence of tremendous magnitude, squarely outside the normal chain of events. It means: the absolute Exaltedness of

Allah (Exalted above). There has never been a likeness or similarity to Him amongst His creation–neither in essence, for there is no essence like His essence, nor in attributes, for there exists no attributes like His attributes. Further, not in action because the actions of His creatures do not resemble His actions whatsoever.

So if it was said to you 'Allah exists and you exist,' Allah is exalted above His existence being like your existence. This is because your existence sprang from non-existence; hence it is not essential to your being. As for His *Glorified is He* existence, it does not emanate from non-existence, it is essential to His being.

Therefore, there is no similitude for His essence or any likeness amid the essences of His creation. Likewise, if it were repeated to you, 'You possess the faculty of hearing and Allah also possesses the faculty of hearing,' Again, Allah is exalted above His hearing resembling your hearing. Just as if it were said to you, 'Allah wields the ability to act and you too are capable of action.' Once more, Allah is exalted above His action being like your action.

Consequently, the meaning of 'the Exalted' is equivalent to saying, 'I am awe-struck by the might of Allah.' Accordingly, it was put forward in order to indicate that indeed, the coming discussion pertains to a matter clearly outside the realm of human ability. As such, by no means should you, upon learning of it, reject it or say, 'How could this occur?' Rather, Allah is exalted above there being any resemblance between His action and the action of human beings. Therefore, if it is said to you, 'To be sure, He took His Prophet during the hours of darkness from Mecca to Jerusalem in the span of a single night, in spite of the fact that the same journey would have taken his contemporaries a month's time travelling upon the sturdiest camels, you should in no way disbelieve.

Your Lord did not say, 'Muhammad journeyed by night', rather, He took him. Consequently, the action is not attributed to Muhammad; it is attributed to Allah. And as long as the action is attributed to Allah, it is not amenable to the standard measurements of time with which you are familiar. Allah's actions are not limited by anything.

If we carefully consider 'the Exalted' we discover that its usage is reserved for matters that limit the role of logic, and attempts to realize them leave minds befuddled–wondrous things. Like His saying: 'Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know’ (*Ya Sin:* 36).

From the pair of male and female does the process of proliferation begin in plant life and humanity alike? Modern science explained His saying: ‘…and from that which they do not know.’ Expressing the point we have now arrived at, with breakthroughs in electricity and the atomic world, for they are composed of the negative and the positive which are equivalent to the male and the female. For this reason He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And of all things We created two mates; perhaps you will remember.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49)

In that connection, He *Glorified is He* mentioned: ‘Extol, then, Allah’s limitless glory when you enter upon the evening hours, and when you rise at morn’ (*ar-Rum:* 17). Whoever peruses creation at the rising of the sun and its setting, and witnesses how darkness is illumined and light is dimmed can only halt in front of this verse and say. ‘Exalted is Allah.’ He *Glorified is He* also mentioned: ‘Exalted is He who has made [all] this subservient to our use—since [but for Him,] we would not have been able to attain it.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 13) ‘Exalted is He’ indicates continuance and permanence. As though this suggests that Allah’s exaltedness was established before there was anyone to exalt Him. Just as it is said in respect to creation, Allah is the Creator and that was an element of His description before He ever created anything.

Likewise, if you were to say so and so is a poet, he was a poet before he composed a poem for if he were not a poet, he could not compose a poem. In view of that, Allah’s Exaltedness was established before there was anyone to exalt Him *Glorified is He*. Fittingly, when one who exalts Him, the form of expression is transformed from a designation to a ‘describing action.’ He *Glorified is He* stated: ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth Exalted Allah.’ (*al-Hashr:* 1)

Did all that the heavens and earth contain glorify Allah and then cease and remain silent? Not in the slightest; on the contrary: ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth exalts Allah.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 1) Perpetual and uninterrupted, this has not changed at all, and His glorification is established. All created beings of past and present glorify Him. So, do not be reluctant to glorify and exalt your Lord, O you who are accountable for your actions. He *the Exalted* says: ‘Extol your Lord’s name, the All-Highest’ (*al-A‘la:* 1). As for His saying: ‘He who took His Servant by night,” the True Lord *Glorified is He* took his servant by night. Again, the action is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* not to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As a consequence, do not survey the action according to the conventional measures of human beings. Exalt and elevate the action of Allah from your action. The people of Mecca received the news of this occasion with denial: ‘How can this be, when the same journey takes us a month’s time travelling upon sturdy camels?’ they hastily offered. However, the way they framed their denial was disingenuous, for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not claim to have made the journey himself, rather he said, ‘I was taken.’

It is well known that covering distances requires an amount of time inversely proportioned to the amount of energy expended. As a result of the inverse relation of time to energy, if we wanted to travel to Alexandria, the time the journey would take would vary according to our means of transport–walking or travelling by car, or by plane. As we increased the amount of energy being expended, the amount of time would decrease.

So, what do you think if the action and its speed are attributed to Allah? If the action was performed by Allah, it did not require any time! If someone were to say, for instance, ‘In light of the fact that Allah was responsible for the action and it did not require any time at all, why did not He conclude the Night Journey in the span of an eye blink, why did it require a night?’ We respond by stating that there is a stark difference between the distances covered within Allah’s Law and the sights that were shown to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* along the way. For he witnessed sites, conversed with people, and beheld verses and wonders, this is what consumed time.

On the question of the Night Journey and the Ascension, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘I took my servant by night.’ So whosoever desires to view the possibility of such an affair with disbelief or reject its occurrence, let him deny the capability of Allah, the Commissioner of the act, not Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Nonetheless, how did the disbelievers of Mecca fail to comprehend this? From the disbelievers of Mecca — in their denunciation of the Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a liar in the case of the Night Journey and the Ascension — we acquire a timely rebuttal against some of our contemporaries, who are being led by their limited intellects and shallow faith, heedlessly plunge into interpretations of this matter. They seek to instruct us with ill-conceived ideas for which Allah has sent down no authority.

Some of them, we hear saying, ‘The Night Journey was a dream,’ or ‘it was an out-of-body experience’. We must question the proponents of such ideas, ‘If Muhammad had informed his people: I saw Jerusalem in a vision, would they have declared him a liar?’ Or for that matter, if he had said, ‘Indeed, my soul journeyed last night until it reached Jerusalem.’ Would they have disavowed his truthfulness? Does anyone deny the possibility of dreams or out-of-body experiences?

Hence, their disavowal and rejection of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* establishes the Night Journey as an actual journey completed by the Messenger of Allah in body and soul. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* preserved the sceptical stance of yesterday’s doubters in order to respond to the sceptics of today. As for His saying: ‘His servant,’ when used, the word ‘servant’, it encompasses the body and soul. This is what is indicated by its usage, so it is not possible that the soul is being exclusively intended here.

In any event, why did the True Lord *Glorified is He* choose to describe His Messenger Muhammad in this precise manner? We answer by stating that, indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* enacted a general law in creation for the benefit of mankind. Although rare, at times this natural law or normative code may be broken—as a miracle—for that exclusive set of individuals whom Allah wishes to privilege among creation. It is as if the word *‘servant’* is an aspect of the Night Journey which implies: He took him by night because he sincerely actualized his servitude to Allah.

In as much as he is sincere in his realization of servitude to his Lord, as His servant, he deserves distinction and preferment to others. The Night Journey and the Ascension were well-deserved gifts from Allah for His Messenger Muhammad in exchange for the sincerity with which he realized his servitude to Him.

The difference between servitude to Allah and that to human beings is that it contains honour and dignity for the former. By virtue of his servitude, the servant reaps the bounty of his Master. One poet said:

And from that which has increased my honour and dignity

So that I am nearly able to tread upon heaven

Is my inclusion in your saying ‘O my servants’

And that my prophet, Ahmad you’ve made

As for human beings’ servitude of one another, it contains inferiority, subjugation, and slight. The master consumes the harvest of the servant’s effort and prevents him from reaping the fruits of his labour. As such, one who reads the verses of Quran with avidity will recognize that, indeed, the concept of servitude is only used in places that express loftiness. For example: ‘Exalted is He Who took His servant by night!’ Or His saying: ‘and that when the Servant of Allah stood up’ (*al-Jinn:* 19).

In terms of honour and dignity, it is enough to consider the following: Whenever you desire a meeting with your Master, you are at liberty to set the terms. The only thing you are obliged to do is perform the ritual ablution and make a firm intention to meet, which is expressed by saying, ‘*Allahu akbar’* (Allah is the Greatest). After which you are in the accompaniment of Allah *Glorified is He* in a meeting in which you set the time, the place, and the duration. Furthermore, you even get to choose the topic of discussion. You are in the presence of your Lord, in a meeting that will only be adjourned when you decide. One poet expresses this so well:

There is enough nobility for me in being a servant

For without appointment, I enjoy my lord’s reception

In His holiness indeed, He is mightier than I

But I meet Him at times and places of my selection

What do you think the scenario would be like if you attempted to schedule a meeting with one of the world’s more prominent figures? How cumbersome and laborious would it be for you! How many aids and guards would you need to get through? Finally, even if you endured all of that, you still would not be able to select the time, place, or topic of your discussion nor anything else for that matter.

The ethical standard of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was influenced by the standard of Allah. This was so to such an extent that when someone shook his hand, greeting him, he would not withdraw his hand until the other party first withdrew their hand.(1)

'By night' The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to re-emphasize this. Perhaps someone might ask, 'Why did the Night Journey not take place during the day?' We respond: The Night Journey occurred at night so that it could remain an unseen miracle; those who believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believe in it. Had he travelled during the day, the people would have seen his departure and return. In which case, it would have been a perceptible affair; witnessed with the physical eye and thus would not necessitate belief in the unseen.

For this reason, when Abu Jahl received news of the Night Journey, he hurried to the mosque, announcing; 'Now your companion is claiming to have been taken by night from Mecca to Jerusalem.' Some people fidgeted with their hands in disbelief, while others outright denied it. In fact, some people even became apostates.

Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* on the other hand, received the news in a manner befitting the believer and affirmer of the truth. This occasion was the source of his being granted the nickname (As-Siddiq*)*, and it was during it that he uttered those famous words, 'If he said it, then it must be true.'(2)

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(1) *Related on the authority of Anas may Allah be pleased with him he said, 'Never in all my life have I seen a man take The Messenger of Allah by the hand, except that the Messenger of Allah did not release his hand until the man had released his.' [cited by Abu l-Shaykh Asbahani in (Akhlaq An-Nabi) (p. 29)]*

(2) *Cited by Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (al-Baqara: 361) on the authority of 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her that she said, 'When the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was carried by night to the Most Remote Mosque, people arose that following morning talking about it. Some people who prior to this occasion were believers became apostates. The people then carried the affair to Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him. They questioned, 'Do you know that your companion is now claiming to have been carried to Jerusalem last night?' He responded, 'Did he say that?' 'Yes,' they*=

His principle criterion of judgment then was: Did the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* say it? As long as he said it, it was true. In respect to Abu Bakr as-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* this was an axiom. He then asserted, 'In fact, we attest to his truthfulness in a matter more astonishing than this; we believe that he is informed by the heavens (revelation), so why would we fail to affirm his honesty in this affair?'

Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* made this a critical test in faith and an examination of certainty. In order that only those possessing firm faith and unwavering certainty would remain in the company of the Prophet Muhammad, the others, of course, being weeded out. For this reason, He stated in another verse: 'And we did not make the sight which we showed you except as a trial for the people.' (*al-Isra':* 60) This is the second evidence that the Night Journey was not a dream. For the Night Journey is not a trial and a test unless it takes place in reality, as opposed to being a dream There is no rejection or difference of opinion among people with regards to dreams.

Nevertheless, why was the Night Journey referred to as a vision within sleep? Why did He not say a physical vision? The Quranic exegetes have mentioned: Vision, when encompassing a wondrous sight becomes as though it is being beheld in a dream state.

Much has been said by the scholars in reference to the Night Journey: was it in body or spirit? Was it a dream or was he awake? Was it from the Inviolable Mosque or the home of Um-Hani?(1) We do not disagree with the fact that there is diversity of opinion; we would, however, like to clarify those mutual approaches.

= *rejoined. Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him then said, 'If he did in fact say this, then it is true.' They asked in disbelief, 'You mean you believe that he went to Jerusalem last night and returned before dawn?' 'Yes,' he said, then offering, 'Indeed, I believe something more far-flung than that. I believe that he receives revelation from the heavens in the mornings and the evenings.' This is why he was named Abu Bakr As-Siddiq may Allah be pleased with him. In this form, it was recorded by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak [3/62-63]. He said concerning it, 'Although Al-Bukhari and Muslim did not narrate it, its chain of narrators is sound.'*

(1) *Um Hani is Um Hani bint Abu Taleb Al-Hashimiyya, the paternal cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. It is said that her name is Fakhita or Fatima or Hind although the first name is the most widely known. And she was the wife of Habira ibn 'Amr Al-Makhzumi (Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba) [8/287].*

In regard to whether the Night Journey only took place in spirit or within body, we have already clarified the correct approach; it was within both body and spirit. This is the realm of miracle. If it were exclusively in spirit, it would not have been miraculous and hence the disbelievers of Mecca would not have denied it.

As for those who maintain that the Night Journey was a dream, it is incumbent that we recognize that Prophet Muhammad's first revelation was a true dream, because the Prophet never witnessed a dream except that it came to pass like daybreak.(1) The Prophet Muhammad's dreams are not like our dreams. Rather, his dreams are truthful and must be actualized. This is similar to what took place when Allah desired to show him a vision of The Victory. (*al-Fath*) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Certainly has Allah showed to His Messenger the vision in truth. You will surely enter al-Masjid al-Haram, if Allah wills, in safety, with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone].' (*al-Fath:* 27)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relayed this news to his companions and when they were rebuffed by the disbelievers at Hudaybiya, the companions asked the Messenger of Allah, 'Did you not inform us of our entrance into the Inviolable Mosque?' He replied, 'However, I did not say this year.'(2)

This is why they term this vision 'The dream of familiarity.' When the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would witness something in a dream, and then it took place in reality, he would not be surprised by it because he was already familiar with it. If, when he saw dreams, they would come to pass like the break of dawn, this dream, too, would occur in reality. So, he witnessed the vision again as a reminder of the first dream, with which he was intimately familiar.

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(1) *On the authority of 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her she said, 'The first revelation that began the mission of the Prophet Muhammad was the true dream. He never witnessed a dream except that it came to pass like daybreak.' narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [3/3392] Kitab Bad'Al-Wahy.*

(2) *Ibn Kathir adduced this in his exegetical work [4/201] with this wording: 'On the authority of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab, he said to Allah's Messenger Muhammad, 'Did you not inform us that we would approach the Holy House and circumambulate it?' He responded, 'Did I tell you that you would reach it this year?' 'No,' said `Umar. The Prophet Muhammad then said, 'Then you will reach it and circumambulate it.'*

As a result, whoever says that the Night Journey was a dream finds our response: Correct, it was a ‘dream of familiarity’ that was actualized. This leaves us with first, ‘the dream of familiarity,’ second, ‘the vision that reminds of blessing;’ and thirdly, the occurrence of the event in reality. In this manner, we satisfy all sides of the debate surrounding the issue of whether the Night Journey occurred in a dream or a wakeful state.

In fact, even after the occurrence of the Night Journey, the true dream remained a type of consolation for the Prophet Muhammad. Each time the vicissitudes of fate bore heavily upon him, Allah *Glorified is He* would show him what would take place in order to demonstrate the heavenly and earthly receptions awaiting Him *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Messenger of Allah would be inured to the hardship he would encounter.

As for he who says the Night Journey began at the home of Um Hani. This also is not a contentious issue because the home of Um Hani was attached to the place of circumambulation within the Inviolable Mosque; the place of circumambulation is considered a section of the Mosque.

In the final analysis, there is no reason to doubt or dispute this miraculous affair. Indeed, the action was commissioned by the True Lord *Glorified is He* and its occasion was narrated to us by Him, so there is no room for disputation.

His saying: ‘…from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa.’ The al-Masjid al-Haram refers to the House of Allah – the Majestic *Ka’ba*. It is named so to reflect that within its precincts; some things that are normally lawful inside other mosques are forbidden there. Additionally, we refer to every place consecrated for the worship of Allah as a (*masjid*). Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah.’ (*at-Tawba:* 18)

The Inviolable Mosque, though, is different from the others. Indeed, it is the House of Allah by His own choice. Other places of worship are also the Houses of Allah, but by the selection of the creatures of Allah. For this reason, the House of Allah chosen by Allah is the direction of prayer for the Houses of Allah chosen by Allah’s creatures.

What is intended by the word (*masjid*) is the place in which we prostrate or a place that is suitable for prayer, as is mentioned in the Prophetic tradition, ‘The whole of the Earth has been purified for me and made a place of prayer.’(1) The import here is that it is suitable for prayer.

Nevertheless, we must distinguish the place of prayer consecrated and specifically designated as a house of worship from an area in which it is suitable to pray and engage life’s duties. The labourer can pray in his factory and the farmer can pray in the field because these places are suitable for prayer and the engagement of life’s responsibilities.

As for the (*masjid*), its sole purpose is prayer or some other devotional act, such as explaining a verse of Quran, clarifying a ruling of the Sacred Law, reciting the Quran, etc. It is not permitted to engage in worldly transactions in the mosque.

This explains why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* upon seeing a man announcing his lost property in the mosque, exclaimed, ‘May Allah not return it to you!’(2) “He also said to someone sitting in the mosque completing a transaction, ‘May Allah make your transaction devoid of His blessing.’(3)

This is only because the mosque is specifically designated for acts of devotion and obedience; it is the place in which the servant meets his Lord *Glorified is He*. As such, by no means should you occupy yourself with worldly affairs within its quarters, for you already spend enough time and money attempting to secure them.

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(1) *On the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘I have been given five things that weren not given to anyone before me: my adversaries have been made to fear me at all times; the earth has been purified for me and made a place of prayer, so that wherever a man from my nation finds himself during the time of prayer he is able to pray; the spoils of war have been made lawful for me and they were not made lawful for anyone before me; I have been given the right of intercession; and whereas every other prophet was sent to his people, I have been sent to all people.’ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [335] and Muslim in his (Sahih) [521].*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) [568] Kitab Al-Masjid from the narration of Abu Hurayra, who said that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Whoever hears someone announcing his lost property in the mosque should say, “May Allah not return it to you.” Indeed, the mosques were not built for this purpose.’*

(3) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘If you see someone buying or selling in the mosque, say to them, “May Allah make your business unprofitable.” Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) [1321]. He said concerning it hasan gharib.*

Additionally, a place of worship is not referred to as a mosque unless it is a freestanding structure–from the ground to the sky. Its soil is considered the mosque and what is above it is also considered the mosque. It stands entirely apart from places in which worldly benefit is derived. This is like someone who builds a mosque at the base of a residential property. What was his objective when he designated this as a place of prayer: Is your intention solely for Allah? Or do you intend to secure a worldly gain?

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [He revealed] that the mosques are for Allah, so do not invoke with Allah anyone.' (*al-Jinn:* 18)

The likes of this place are not referred to as mosques because it does not fulfil all of the relevant criteria of being a mosque. It is attached to a residential dwelling in which speech that is inconsistent with the sanctity of the mosque takes place. Furthermore, because this is out of step with the inviolability of the prayer, offering prayer in a place like this is like offering prayer anywhere else. This is why it is unlawful for a non-Muslim aircraft carrier to hover above Mecca, because the air above the sacred precincts is also sacred.

As for Allah's saying *'Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa,'* it refers to the house of worship at Jerusalem. Allah's saying: '…whose surroundings We have blessed.' Blessing is for something to be given fruit in measure, above and beyond that which was hoped from it, or above that which was believed could amount from it. This is like food that is considered enough for two sufficing five. You would say that food contained blessing, hence the saying of the True Lord: '…whose surroundings We have blessed.' This is a proof of exceeding amounts of blessing. For if Allah *Glorified is He* granted the immediate vicinity of the Most Remote Mosque blessing, then the blessing within the mosque itself is even more intense. This is similar to saying, 'Those living around so and so are experiencing blessing.' The corollary is that so and so himself is experiencing more blessing. Nonetheless, what kind of blessing did Allah grant the immediate vicinity of the Most Remote Mosque?

Allah blessed the sacred precincts of the Most Remote Mosque with worldly blessings and religious blessings. Worldly blessings in the sense that he made the land in its vicinity fertile and arable it contained gardens and orchards that yielded various types of fruit. This was a divine bestowal from which believer and disbeliever alike could enjoy.

As for religious blessings, they are exclusively for the believers. These blessings are represented in Jerusalem being the land of the divine Messages and the cradle of the Prophets. Its land had been made redolent by the feet of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, Moses, Zechariah, and John, the Baptist *peace be upon them*. Upon it, angels descended and revelations were sent down.

‘To show him of our signs’ this is tantamount to saying that the underlying purpose of the Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem was to show the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* Our verses. Allah *Glorified is He* possesses numerous signs. Among them are the manifests, which are witnessed by all humankind as conveyed by His saying: ‘Now among His signs are the night and the day.’ (*Fussilat:* 37) ‘And among His signs are the ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas.’ (*ash-Shura:* 32)

Allah *Glorified is He* desired to grant His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exclusive access by showing him the signs of the unseen realm which had not been witnessed by anyone prior to him. This happened so that he could see the heavenly reception awaiting him and witness his station with his Lord, who had proclaimed to him: ‘…and do not be in distress over what they conspire,’ because you are in the spaciousness of your Lord’s bestowal. If the people on earth hold you in contempt, Heaven’s people in the highest realm celebrate your mention. If you are constrained among creatures, you are accommodated by the Creator.

As for His saying: ‘Indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.’ Of course, this refers to the True Lord *Glorified is He*. The mention of the All Hearing and the All Seeing are directed toward whom? This appears in the conclusion of the verse of the Night Journey which clarified that the True Lord *Glorified is He* made the Night Journey a consolation for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* after the humiliation he experienced at the hands of the idolaters. It is as though a battle had ensued between the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the disbelievers, with both sides making decisive statements and actions.

Consequently, it is possible that the meaning of All-Hearing is directed toward the statements of the Messenger Muhammad and the All Seeing toward his actions. His people had persecuted him, denounced him as a liar, and exiled him to Taif. Its inhabitants, though, proved to be more hard-hearted than their brothers in Mecca. Thus, he returned dejected and bloodied, and the supplication he offered was as follows: 'O' Allah, I place before you my powerlessness, my lack of ploy, and my insignificance before men. 'O' Most Merciful of those who show mercy, You are The Lord of the disempowered and You are my Lord. So unto whom will You entrust my affair? Perhaps, a distant stranger who will deal harshly with me or an enemy who will gain an advantage over me? If You are not angry with me I do not care. However, Your favour contains more vastness for me. I am in need of the light of Your face, with which darkness is illumined. All is well in the life of this world and the Hereafter as long as Your anger has not descended upon me and I am not engulfed in Your wrath. It is for You to delay until You please. There is no power nor might save by You.'(1) Allah hears His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and sees his actions. Even in the most trying circumstances, *he peace and blessings be upon him* remained dedicated to prayer. In fact, while returning from Taif, he gave a servant that he came across a bunch of grapes. After conversing with him about prophesy, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "You are from the land of Jonah, the Prophet of Allah.'(2)

The alternative meaning, however, offers: Allah hears the statements of the idolaters when they denigrate the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* declaring him a liar and scowling at him. And Allah sees their actions when they harm him (The Prophet Muhammad), pelting him with stones.

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(1) *Adduced by Ibn Hisham in As-Sirat an-nabawiyya (the Quran, 2/419,420]. Also Al-Bayhaqi in (Dalail An-Nubuwwa) (Al-Baqara: 415).*

(2) *The name of this slave is 'Addas, he was a young, Christian man. The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said to him: 'You are from the people of which land 'O' Addas, and what is your religion?' He said, 'I am a Christian from the land of Nineveh.' The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him then commented, 'The town of Jonah peace be upon him the righteous man.' 'Addas then responded, 'How do you know of Jonah, the son of Mata? That is my brother; he was a prophet and I am a prophet.' 'Addas then pledged his allegiance to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and kissed his head, hands and feet.' [Ibn Hisham, (As-Sirat An-Nabawiyya) 2/421]*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* displayed the occurrence of the Night Journey within this verse cosily. He mentioned its point of departure: The Inviolable Mosque. He mentioned its destination: The Most Remote Mosque. Then, in between the point of departure and the destination, He mentioned the term signs. This is a summary in the truest sense.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then came to exhaustively detail this summary for us. He mentioned the verses that he witnessed. If the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had not explained to us what he witnessed of Allah's verses, he would have left us to question: Where are these verses? The Quran then brings together for us the fundamental elements of Prophet Muhammad's explanation: 'For, behold, it is for Us to gather it [in your heart,] and to cause it to be read [as it ought to be read]. Thus, when We recite it, follow its wording, and then, behold, it will be for Us to make its meaning clear.' (*al-Qiyama:* 17-19)

As a result, the portrayal of the Night Journey as it exists in the souls of the believers must find completion in Prophet Muhammad's commentary—which is to be found in the Prophetic Hadith about the Night Journey—concerning the matter.

Nonetheless, the sceptics and those of weak faith probe the Prophetic Hadiths seeking a discrepancy in order to reject the narrations of what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed and asked the Angel Gabriel *peace and blessings be upon him* about.

The critical point of their rejection being: If these events are to take place in the Hereafter, how can they be viewed by Prophet Muhammad?

We respond to them by saying: Indeed, your ability to understand the power Allah wields in originating creation is severely limited. Creation is not originated in this manner. On the contrary it was originated with His eternal command. We present the following analogy in hope of added clarity: Imagine if you wanted to build a home. Of course, you would go to an architect and request a blueprint. If you were in favourable circumstances, you would say: 'Make me a model of the home,' upon which he would construct a miniature model of the home you wanted.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* completed the creation pre-eternally, so all things are created in respect to Him (as the mini model alluded to above). He *Glorified is He* then manifests them in accordance with what He has measured for them.

Consider well the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, "Be," and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) It is as though the object is already in existence and Allah is merely exposing it. He is not creating it anew. By no means, rather, it is created and awaiting command in order to be made manifest in the world of events. This explains the saying of the people of direct knowledge of Allah: 'Affairs, He is only exposing them: He is no longer originating them.'

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* made overt mention of the Night Journey in this verse, indeed, by commitment, He also mentioned the Ascension in the chapter of *an-Najm,* in His saying: 'Near it is the Garden of Refuge. When there covered the Lote Tree that which covered [it]. The sight [of the Prophet] did not swerve, nor did it transgress [its limit]. He certainly saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.' (*an-Najm:* 15-18) In respect to the Night Journey, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'To show him of Our signs.' Then, in respect to the Ascension, He says: 'He certainly saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.' (*an-Najm:* 18) This is because the Night Journey is a terrestrial verse in respect to which the Messenger Muhammad—with the inspiration Allah granted him—was capable of demonstrating his truthfulness that he was carried by night from the Inviolable Mosque to the Most Remote Mosque for his people were well aware of his history; they knew he had never travelled to Jerusalem or seen it. Fittingly, they confronted him: 'Describe it,' they jeered. This contestation of theirs affirmed the fact that they knew he had never seen Jerusalem.

Consider for a moment, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after experiencing something of that nature, do you think that he emerged from it with a completely preserved picture of Jerusalem, given the fact that his visit took place during the night hours? So, as its picture was not entirely clear before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, Allah with His immense power resolved to bring the picture (of Jerusalem) before him; and he (The Prophet) began to describe it to them as though it was placed before his eyes.

In identical fashion, he informed them of one of their caravans on the road. He described it in detail and told them it would arrive at sunrise on the specific day of its arrival. The road between the Inviolable Mosque and the Most Remote Mosque was travelled by and well known among the Arabs. It was one of their trade routes to the Levant.

In fact, they did gather in the early morning hours of that day, awaiting the caravan. So, at sunrise one of them said, ‘Here is the sun rising.’ At that moment, another responded, ‘and there is the caravan, it has appeared.’(1)

Thus, he was able to demonstrate the truthfulness of the Night Journey. As it was a terrestrial sign that made such a demonstration possible on account of what they knew about Jerusalem and what they knew about their travelling caravan.

As for what took place during the Ascension, those were magnificent and heavenly signs which the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not —before his people—be able upon which to furnish evidence. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make the verification of the terrestrial signs that could be evidenced a means toward believing that which cannot be evidenced, such as the verses of ascending to the heavens. Is there anyone who has ascended to 'The Lote tree of the farthest limit' so that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could describe it for him?

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(1) *Adduced by Ibn Hisham in (as-Sirat an-nabawiyya) [1/402] from the narration of Um Hani: The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Indeed, as I was passing by the caravan of some clan in some part of the desert, they were put to flight by the sound of an animal and one of their camels got away, so I pointed it out to them. At that time, I was heading toward the Levant. I then shifted direction until I was in Dajnan. I then passed the caravan of another clan and found them asleep. They had a vessel filled with water with them which they had covered with something. So, I removed its cover, drank from it and recovered it, leaving it how I found it. The proof of this is that now their caravan is heading toward (Thanyat at-Tan’im). It is led by an excellent camel which is adorned with two bags: one black and the second as white as lightning.’ She then continued, ‘The people of Thanya set out early the next morning. At first, they did not encounter the camel he had described to them. Upon this they asked about the vessel, to which they were informed (by the members of the caravan) that they had left it filled with water and covered it, but later on when they awoke, they found it covered as before, only it was empty. While they (the members of the caravan) were in Mecca, they were questioned by others. “He has spoken the truth,” they replied. We were put to flight in the valley that he mentioned and one of our camels got away; then we heard the voice of a man guiding us to it, in order that we might retrieve it.’*

The upshot of all this is that the terrestrial signs can be evidenced. So when it is proven and established that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* engaged in an action securely outside the normal chain of events in terms of time and space, when he tells you of something else that supersedes natural law, you should believe him unhesitatingly. The sign of the Night Journey came to draw the verse of the Ascension closer to the minds of mankind.

Therefore, He who allowed him (The Prophet) to supersede the natural laws of the earth in pursuit of its verses could also enable him to supersede the laws that govern the sky in pursuit of its signs. So Allah *Glorified is He* draws the affairs of the unseen closer (to man's understanding); affairs which are imperceptible by logic and the unaided senses. Additionally, the similes He employed—which used a perceptible object—to express the manifold (up to 700 times) increase upon wealth expended in the way of Allah, falls under this category. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to make this clear and draw it closer to the human intellect, so He mentioned in that connection: 'The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and knowing.' (*al-Baqara:* 261)

It is then, from Allah's subtle kindness in dealing with the minds of His creatures, that He reinforced the signs of the Night Journey with clear and compelling scripture. The verses of the Ascension, on the other hand, while compelling, occur in the chapter of *an-Najm* (and are not entirely clear in meaning). This explains the judgment of the scholars: 'He who rejects the Night Journey is a disbeliever, while he who rejects the Ascension is simply guilty of deviance.'

Nevertheless, later authorities in their revisionary capacity have also concluded that one who rejects the Ascension becomes a disbeliever. For although it is undeniably true that the Ascension occurs in language that is not entirely clear, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his noble Prophetic Hadith clarified its meaning. And the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and refrain from anything he prohibits you.' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

One who reflects deeply upon the Night Journey and the Ascension recognizes that in addition to consoling the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and alleviating his burden, they (the Night Journey and the Ascension) serve an objective of more lasting impact. They stand as proof that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was supported by Allah and was given miracles. Natural laws and normative codes were defied on his account in order that the sincerity of his prophethood be honoured and established. Miracle: an extraordinary affair that takes place in creation, manifested by Allah on the hand of His Messenger Muhammad in order to demonstrate his truthfulness. One such occurrence is that which happened in respect to Abraham *peace be upon him* 'the dear friend of Allah'; in which his people flung him to the fire. The most obvious characteristic of fire is that it burns, so, was the purpose (of this miracle) rescuing Abraham from the fire? If the purpose had been his rescue, then surely Allah would not have allowed them to apprehend him in the first place. And even if they did apprehend him, Allah could have caused rain to descend from the sky and extinguish the fire.

Therefore, the point here is not Abraham's rescue. The point is establishing the contravention of natural laws on Abraham's account. As a result, Allah desired that the fire would remain ablaze and that they would seize him, and cast him to the flames. All of the necessary causes of his being incinerated were present.

It is at this point that Allah's will to display the miraculous—something that defies natural laws—intervened. So, combustion is from the natural characteristics of fire, but fire is a created thing from among Allah's creation. It, too, complies with its orders. Allah commanded the fire not to burn and divested it of this characteristic. As in His saying: 'Allah said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham."' (*al-Anbiya':* 69)

Perhaps those sceptical of the validity of the Night Journey and the Ascension will find that that which draws these miraculous occurrences closer to their intellects is what we now witness in terms of advancement in transportation technology. Remote distances have been made closer for us. Indeed, humans are able to traverse space and ascend to other planets in measured amounts of time. Consequently, if it is within the reach of humankind to descend on the moon, do you deem the Night Journey and the Ascension to be far-flung and they were acts of Allah?

Similar to this, among the things that stand affront of those who reject the Night Journey and the Ascension is the affair of the chest incision, which was related by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for he who properly surveys it, he finds it a natural stage in the preparation for what he was about to encounter: entirely new horizons in a realm completely different from that of human beings.

How (is this disputable) when we prepare in like manner while travelling from one country to the other? The purpose is to help you get acclimated and accustomed to your new environment. Do you think any differently about Prophet Muhammad? He was about to meet the Angel Gabriel and others from the angels, all of whom possessing natures which are at complete variance with those of human beings. He was about to meet his brothers from among the Prophets during their posthumous existence. He was about to be separated from his Lord *Glorified is He* by merely two bows' lengths or perhaps less. Thus, it is not strange that a change would take place within His physical complexion in order to enable him to directly engage these events.

If we read the Quran inductively, we come upon something that establishes Prophet Muhammad's truthfulness in connection with what he related about meeting the Prophets during this journey. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Ask any of our messengers whom we sent forth before your time.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 45)

When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was given a command from his Lord, he hastened its execution; so how would he execute this command in the above verse? There is no means of implementing this order except by way of direct contact—a vis-à-vis meeting—with the Prophets. Hence, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proclaims this to us, in the form of the Night Journey and the Ascension, our response should be: You have spoken the truth. Doubt will only abound in weak hearts, those lacking faith and certainty.

The critical and underlying theme in this case—that of the Night Journey and the Ascension—is recognizing the believer's certainty in the sincerity of Allah's Messenger and that of the mind's dictates. Is your intellect able to grasp everything in creation?

Many indeed are the affairs which confound the intellect, making it incapable of understanding their essence. However, with the passage of time and the steady progress of knowledge, those things begin to unravel gradually. As a result, those affairs that Allah wills to uncover for us—from among creation's secrets—He enlightens us to their worldly causes by way of discovery, invention, or maybe even simply by chance.

Moreover, the intellect is nothing besides a means of grasping and perceiving phenomena, similar to the eye or the ear. It has its limitations which it is unable to exceed. By no means then, should you regard your mind as limitless in its ability to comprehend everything. Rather, it is also governed by limits.

In order to explicate this, take the eye for instance. It is the means of capturing sight and is controlled by the laws of vision. As such, when you see a person, for example, you are able to see all his facial features clearly. But as more and more distance separates you, he will gradually become smaller and smaller until he disappears from view. The sense of hearing is identical to this. With your ear, you are able to hear sounds, but as you move further away from the source of the sound, your ability to hear it steadily decreases until your ability to perceive the sound is cut-off and you hear nothing.

The intellect functions like other vehicles of sensory perception; it too has limitations. Its ability to grasp things is not unrestricted. Herein lies the point at which the scientists, when they desire to overcome the natural limitations of the eye or the ear—when these prove incapable of performing their functions—employ the use of spectacles or a microscope. These newly invented objects are means that enable the eye to see what it would not have been able to see. It is the same with respect to the ear; they employ the use of the hearing aid to help the ear if it is weak and unable to perform its function.

All vehicles of perception have limitations and the mind is no exception. By no means should you consider your mind capable of encompassing everything. However, if you are presented with something, you investigate it.

If you are assured that its source is truthful, the matter is concluded. Accept what you have been presented with on the basis that it is sound. This is what happened with Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* when they approached him, blabbering their mouths about his companion: He was taken by night from Mecca to Jerusalem! He was left with no response except, 'If he said it, then it's true.' The words of the Messenger Muhammad were the criteria he used to judge the truth. As long as it was said by the Messenger it was true; hence, the function of the intellect had no share in the matter. He then said, 'How could I fail to affirm his truthfulness in this affair when indeed, I believe him concerning a matter greater than this: I believe he receives revelation from the heavens'.(1)

Fittingly, the verse of the Night Journey was a terrestrial verse that can be evidenced. It is possible for humankind to understand that within the Night Journey, the natural laws that govern creation were defied on account of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

One who carefully reflects upon this chapter recognizes that it is named the chapter of *al-Isra* and Bani Isra'il despite the fact that only the first verse treats the Night Journey while the majority of it treats the children of Israel. What then, is the wisdom behind mentioning the children of Israel after the Night Journey?

Previously, we mentioned: To be sure, the wisdom behind conversing about the Night Journey after the conclusion of the chapter of *an-Nahl* was that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced consternation from the plots (of the idolaters). The True Lord *Glorified is He* desired to alleviate his burden and console him through the Night Journey.

The children of Israel were familiar with a particular understanding of prophethood; one in which a prophet is exclusively dispatched to his own people. This is how they viewed Moses. So when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* steps forward and proclaims: I am a messenger to all of humanity, of course, these people will oppose him and say, 'If you really were a prophet and we granted you that, you would only be a prophet for Arabs and none besides them. You have nothing to do with the children of Israel for we have our own message, and Jerusalem represents a standard for us.'

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(1) *Cited by Al-Bayhaqi in (Dala'il An-Nubuwwa) [2/360] from the narration of 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her. It was also cited by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak [3/62]. He said concerning it: 'Its chain of narrators is sound, but Al-Bukhari and Muslim did not narrate it.' Ad-Dhahabi agreed with him.*

This explains why the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to turn the attention of the children of Israel to the generality of Muhammad's Message. This was the underlying factor in the Muslim's early direction of prayer being made Jerusalem. This was followed by his being taken there during the night hours in order to show that Jerusalem had become one of Islam's holy sites and thus authentically claimed by Muslims.

Next, the address shifts to Moses and the children of Israel. Allah says:

وَءَاتَيۡنَا مُوسَى ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَجَعَلۡنَٰهُ هُدٗى لِّبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ أَلَّا تَتَّخِذُواْ مِن دُونِي وَكِيلٗا ٢

We also gave Moses the Scripture, and made it a guide for
the children of Israel. Entrust yourselves to no one but Me[2]
(The Quran, *al-Isra': 2*)

His saying '…we gave' means We revealed its meanings to him, like Allah's saying: 'And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He wills.' (*ash-Shura:* 5) So there is not any direct contact in this matter. 'Scripture' referred to here is the Torah, if mentioned in connection with Jesus, the intended meaning becomes the Gospel, and if mentioned in isolation, without connection to anyone, the implicit meaning is the Noble Quran.

Divine inspiration (revelation) is given in the form of essential meanings. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then selects the utterances that correspond with these meanings, or that role is assumed by his disciples or followers. This is like the Prophetic Hadiths, the meanings of which are from the True Lord *Glorified is He*, but their mode of expression is from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is how the Torah and Gospel were revealed.

If someone were to inquire: Why was the Quran revealed in a divine mode of expression and source of meaning, whereas the Torah and the Gospel only have divine sources of meaning? We respond by stating that while the Quran was sent down as a book of instruction like the Torah and the Gospel, it was also sent down as a miracle that cannot be duplicated by anyone. No second party has any share in it. Accordingly, its mode of expression must remain as it was revealed by Allah *Glorified is He*.

The meanings and utterances of the Noble Quran were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he was given only the meanings of the Prophetic Hadiths. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And made it guidance for the children of Israel.' This scripture did not descend for Moses *peace be upon him* exclusively; rather, it was delivered to the whole of the children of Israel in order to show the path of guidance to Allah. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned: 'And We certainly gave Moses the Scripture, so do not be in doubt over his meeting. And we made the Torah guidance for the children of Israel.' (*as-Sajda:* 23)

Guidance: the path that leads to the destination in the shortest possible distance and with the least possible hardship. It is the Straight Path. Among engineers, it is well known that a straight line constitutes the shortest distance between two points. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to clarify the purity of this scripture and the purity of the guidance given to the children of Israel in His saying: '…that you not take other than Me as Disposer of affairs.' This is an expression of the incorruptible nature of the guidance and rootedness of its methodology.

'Disposer of affairs' is the one who acts on your behalf. You do not entrust your affair to someone else unless you are unable to discharge it yourself; hence, the one to whom your affair in entrusted is stronger and more capable than you. As you begin to observe those around you, you notice them being beset by calamities and sometimes even being overcome by them, for the rich do become poor, the strong become weak and those in good health deteriorate. In the same way, you observe death 'touching' humankind one after another. You conclude that none of these (persons) are suitable to dispose your affair or serve as your guarantor. Perhaps you would entrust your affair to one of them only to be taken by news of his death.

Therefore, if you are discerning, you will entrust your affair to one who is not liable to changes of neither fate nor death. For this reason, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* instructs us to be fully cognizant and aware of the essential reality of things, He says: ‘Place your trust in The Living One who dies not.’ (*al-Furqan:* 58) This is a constant, so in no way should you ever elect anyone besides Allah as a guarantor. This proviso holds even if that guarantor is a medium between you and your Lord, such as the Prophets. For they (the Prophets) never issued anything based on independent authority. They, on the contrary, conveyed what is sent from Allah *Glorified is He*. This explains the saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘And if we so willed, We could indeed take away whatever We have revealed unto you’ (*al-Isra’:* 86). Or perhaps, if we had so desired, We would not have ever inspired you (with Our message). In such case, how would you gain instruction? The scholars have spoken at length concerning the verse: ‘…that you not take other than Me as Disposer of affairs.’ Some of them have said this statement is proscriptive, while others have maintained that it is negative. The most likely correct opinion offers that it (the statement contained within the verse) should be interpreted in light of what precedes it: ‘And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance.’ The scripture and the guidance are explained and subsequently condensed (in a statement). Just as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘But Satan whispered unto him, saying: "O Adam! Shall I lead you to the tree of life eternal, and [thus] to a kingdom that will never decay?’ (*Ta Ha:* 120) His saying (he whispered unto him saying, ‘O Adam!’) then, explains to us the content of Satan’s insinuation. This is similar to His saying: ‘And so, [when he was born,] We inspired the mother of Moses: Suckle him [for a time].” (*al-Qasas:* 7) It is as though the meaning is: and We revealed to him: Do not take any as a guarantor besides Me. Or the meaning of the verse: We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a source of guidance for the children of Israel in order that you would take none besides Me as a guarantor. Continuing, the True Lord *Glorified is He* goes on to say:

ذُرِّيَّةَ مَنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا ﴿٣﴾

You descendants of those We carried with Noah: he was truly a thankful servant [3] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 3)

The meaning becomes: You! O descendants of Noah! I have preferred you above others. However, why were the descendants of Noah singled out for mention? That is because Allah rescued the believers who were with him from flood and drowning and spared their lives. You—the descendants of those people—must call to mind this immense favour of Allah *Glorified is He* for your present existence is only an extension of your ancestors' (existence). It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is reminding them of His favour upon them—in rescuing their forefathers who were with Noah. Accordingly, they should listen intently and adhere to the Way of Allah, which their forefathers knew experientially; they found that salvation and security from Allah's wrath are for those who believe in Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, he was a grateful servant.' Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* conferred honour upon his descendants because he was a grateful servant. Righteous action benefits the descendants of one who works for it. Allah says what means, this is why We have afforded the descendants of Noah our special consideration. We shall never abandon them, allowing them to wonder blindly in the maze that is life. We will send unto them guidance which will illustrate the correct way and steer them clear of pitfalls and deviation.

Fathers always work for the well-being of their children. If he possesses abundant resources for the day, he strives to accumulate enough for the entire year. If he has in his possession abundant resources for the entire year, he says, 'I am working for my children.' Thus, he considers the welfare of his children more than he considers his own welfare. They always busy his thoughts; he chooses them over himself; he persistently sets about accumulating the good for them; and his ardent wish is to shoulder every burden and hardship they will encounter in life.

Even with this, the human being is subjected to changes of fate. And at last, the appointed time of his death overtakes him, leaving everything behind him. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* directs us to the correct course of action whereby which we are able to benefit our children: 'And let those [executors and guardians] fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice.' (*an-Nisa':* 9)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* while teaching us that the blessing of fearing Allah is transferred to your children, gives us a practical example in the story of Moses and Khidr *peace be upon them* which the Noble Quran narrates in full. The intended moral of the story is that when they passed a township and solicited its citizens for food, the citizens of the township declined to host them. A request for food is a sign of the earnestness of the need. If someone, for instance, asks you for money, you might accuse him of hoarding it. On the other hand, if he asks you for a loaf of bread to eat, no doubt, he is a sincere solicitor. This proves that the township was ignoble and niggardly; they failed to accommodate (the stranger), and they did not appreciate the need of the one in straits. It was at this point that Moses was amazed when Khidr made his way to the dilapidated wall (without being asked) that was on the verge of collapse and mended it for these miserly people without requesting wages. 'So they set out, until when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality. And they found therein a wall about to collapse, so Al-Khidr restored it. [Moses] said, "If you wished, you could have taken for it a payment."' (*al-Kahf:* 77) Upon which Al-Khidr revealed to Moses the reality of the affair; he displayed (for Moses) the hidden interpretations of events, that Allah *Glorified is He* had apprised him of the true nature of things Moses could not fathom.

'And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous. So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord. And I did it not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of that about which you could not have patience.' (*al-Kahf:* 82) The wall was the property of two adolescents that were (at the time) unable to protect their fortune from the avaricious populace. Due to their father being a righteous man (in his life), Allah appointed for their use someone who would help them preserve their fortune. The bottom line of this occasion is that their father had been a righteous man, so Allah honoured them on his account and placed them in His care and under His supervision. This gives rise to the question: As these two youths reach puberty, how will they know about the hidden treasure?

Apparently, Al-Khidr, with the divine wisdom Allah imparted unto him, built the wall to remain standing only temporarily. After they reached puberty, it would begin to give, at which time they would be capable of protecting and defending the treasure.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* spells this case out for us once more in an alternate verse: ‘And those who believed and whose descendants followed them in faith - We will join with them their descendants, and We will not deprive them of anything of their deeds. Every person, for what he earned, is retained.’ (*at-Tur:* 21)

In order to honour fathers, We (Allah speaking) join them with their children. Even in the event of those children having scant good deeds when compared with their fathers—We increase the good deeds of the children without diminishing the reward of the fathers. His saying: ‘Indeed, he was a grateful servant.’ He is unfailingly and habitually thankful. They said concerning Noah ‘that he would not acquire anything which enhanced his living condition except that he would thank Allah, nor would he experience any of Allah’s blessings, which make life enjoyable, except that he would praise Allah.’ They also said, ‘when he ate, he would say: Praise be unto Allah who has fed me without the slightest bit of exertion or tiredness from me.’ And when he drank: ‘Praise be unto Allah who has quenched my thirst without the slightest bit of exertion or tiredness from me.’ This was his state in all of his affairs.(1)

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned it in his exegetical work [5/3941] in the words of ‘Amran ibn Salim: Noah was only called a grateful servant because when he ate he would say, ‘Praise be unto Allah who has fed me, and if He so chose, could have allowed me to go hungry.’ And when he drank, he would say, ‘Praise be unto Allah who has given me drink, and if He so chose, could have allowed me to go thirsty.’ And when he dressed he would say, ‘Praise be unto Allah who has clothed me, and if He so chose, could have allowed to make me go naked.’ And when he placed his shoes on, he would say, ‘Praise be unto Allah who has given me shoes, and if He so chose, could have allowed me to go about unshod.’ And when he relieved himself, he would say, ‘Praise be unto Allah who has relieved me of that which harms me, and if He so chose, could have forced me to bear it.’*

Some of those given knowledge say, ‘How many are the blessings the human being is heedless of!’ Some people, we observe, exerting the utmost effort to invoke Allah’s name at the onset of a meal and offer Him praise at its conclusion. However, despite this they are heedless of innumerable blessings which deserve gratitude and praise. As such, when a person discerns, he comprehends the favours of Allah and knows that divine favour necessitates praise. You will observe him performing what we call ‘substitute praise’—which is similar to substitute prayer—namely: Praising Allah for those blessings he enjoyed without remembering Allah. So he says: ‘Praise be unto Allah for every favour You have afforded me ‘O’ Lord, and those which I neglected to praise You for at the time of their occurrence.’ He is persistent in this supplication, making it a practice.

He might even transcend praising Allah due to personal gratitude and praises Him on behalf of others who were blessed by Allah but neglected praising Him. He says, 'Praise be to Allah on behalf of everyone blessed with favours but has failed to praise You concerning them.' Thus, it is said that a person will not be asked on the Day of Judgment about the blessing that he praised Allah for because he has fulfilled its due praise and veneration.

However, praise and gratitude that go to the Divine Benefactor *Glorified is He* are profitable trade for the person who praises and shows gratitude, for Allah has said: 'If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more.' (*Ibrahim:* 7) This means that whoever desires good for himself and would like the blessings to continue flowing should persist in praising and thanking Us.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَضَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ
فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا ﴿٤﴾

We declared to the children of Israel in the Scripture,
‘Twice you will spread corruption in the land and become
highly arrogant’[4] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 4)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that He declared, which means that He enacted an irrevocable judgment and declared it to those subjects. The judge here is

Allah. The Arabic word *Qadaa'* (adjudication) means to settle disputing parties. This decisive settlement requires a duly qualified judge who has intimate knowledge of the system of law upon which his judgments are based. He must be able to properly weigh different types of evidence. Thus, the judge must be qualified, according to the standards of the disputants at least. All of them might be illiterate and know absolutely nothing about the law. Nonetheless, they have confidence in someone because they know he tells the truth and judges with justice among them. As a result, they raise their cases before him, seeking adjudication, content with him as their judge.

In addition, a judge does not rule exclusively according to his knowledge. A testimony must be provided by the claimant or else the defendant takes an oath. The testimony must be attended by attentive witnesses and the execution of the judgment is not carried out by the judge himself, rather, it falls to the responsibility of another entity. Moreover, the judge is subject to deception, fraud, perjury, or underhanded evidential posturing on behalf of a disputant.

Some perpetrator of injustice might be able to pull the wool over his eyes. He might be a clever speaker and ingratiates himself with the judge, and wins him over. All of these things happen within the world’s legal systems. What do you think if the judge in question is Allah? He is a just Judge who does not need a testimony or witnesses. No one is able to deceive or mislead Him. He possesses total authority and thereby is not in need of anyone else to enforce His judgments. In summary, every aspect of the process is entrusted to Him.

This actually took place in a case of judgement administered by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Are there any judges superior to the Messenger of Allah? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am only a human being, and you people have disputes. Maybe someone amongst you can present his case in a more eloquent and convincing manner than the other, and I give my judgment in his favour according to what I hear. Beware! If ever I give (by error) somebody something of his brother's right, then he should not take it as I have only given him a piece of Fire.’(1)

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad assigned the ruling to the conscience of the claimants and advised the one seeking judgment to take account of himself and see what he deserves. Messenger Muhammad is a human and decides matters like them. Nonetheless, if you are able to make things vague to the judges of the earth, that trickery will not serve you at heaven's tribunal. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, in reference to a person who seeks a judgment of others and is subsequently awarded a ruling that contravenes the truth and misses the right, 'ask your heart, even if they give you verdicts (and he repeated it three times)'.(1) He repeated it three times in order to draw our attention to the importance of being alerted and having a discerning mind in determining the lawful and the illicit. He must take account of himself and contemplate his affairs.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

Allah says that He declared a decree to the children of Israel in the Scripture, i.e. the Torah. It is their book which was revealed to their prophet, and they are its custodians. So, Allah ruled concerning them: He handed down His Judgment and informed them of its content by revealing it to Moses and delivering it in the Torah. Further, He informed them, on the tongues of the Messengers, of the conditions attendant to their countenancing the Way of Allah. Would they acknowledge it and exercise its prescriptions or would they desert it and sow corruption in the land?

If their Messenger had informed them of their future activities that they come to commission of their own free wills, they should have felt reserved before their Lord and desisted from contravening the Way of Allah and transgressing His Instructions. They had to believe their Messenger in what he had conveyed to them; they should have obeyed him.

Allah says: 'Twice you will spread corruption in the land.' The Arabic particle *lam* is used here for emphasis. This implies that the verse includes a concealed oath whose presence is proven by the presence of this declaration. It is as though Allah is saying, 'By My very Existence, you will spread corruption in the land.' The oath must only be sworn by Allah. An alternative meaning could be that Allah is saying: 'Since we have decreed a decisive emphatic judgment whose dictates are inescapable, then you will surely cause corruption on the earth twice'. This hidden declaration has the meaning of the oath. An oath is only issued for emphasis that is embodied in His saying: 'We declared.' (*al-Isra':* 4)

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(1) *Wabisa ibn M'abad Narrated that the Messenger Muhammad said to him, 'Ask your heart regarding it. Piety is that which contents the soul and comforts the heart, and sin is that which causes doubts and perturbs the heart, even if people pronounce it lawful and give you verdicts on such matters again and again.' Narrated by Ahmad and Ad-Darimi*

Corruption (*Al-Ifsad*) is to intend to remove something from its specific good that it is suited for it. Allah has created everything in the universe for specific purposes. If you leave them undisturbed, they will fulfil those specific purposes, but if you remove them from those specific purposes, they will lose their suitability, purposes, and objectives for which they were created by Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* before creating and placing us on this planet, has created for us things that make our lives valuable, such as the earth, atmosphere, sun and sky, etc. However, He did not stop at that. He also placed within His creation objects, which human beings are capable of enhancing their Allah-given virtue through using their intellect. Thus, at least, if you are not capable of enhancing the virtuous in virtue, allow them to retain their Allah-given virtue.

For instance, if you own a well from which you derive water, you can preserve its natural state by leaving it undisturbed or you can enhance its benefit by hedging it in to protect it from the sand around it. You could also make deriving its benefit easier for people by adding a pump in order to extract water hidden deep in its base. These are but some of the many ways in which the good of the well can be enhanced. This is why Allah says: 'He brought you into being from the earth and made you dwell in it.' (*Hud:* 61) This means, He *Glorified is He* brought you into being out of the earth and made for you the things that are necessary for your life. Fittingly, if you would like to enrich your life, the only thing required of you is to use your created mind to contemplate and to let the created power that exists in your organs work within the material world that He created. You are not the natural source of anything you bring forward; rather, you employ the use of your intellect and utilise the power that exists in creation for the sake of Allah. You interact with the created planet of earth and it grants you accesses to all that you are looking for and the things that enrich your life and increase it in opulence and splendour, as a result.

Those who invented the water cistern employed the use of their minds and increased the innately good in goodness. Its benefits are innumerable as it enables us to lift large amounts of water to high heights. The inspiration for the invention of the water cistern was drawn from the phenomena of the universe. Its inventors recognised the down flow of water from mountain peaks to the depths of valleys. They derived the initial thought from this source and were successful in serving humanity.

Just as corruption occurs in the material realm, such as those who pollute the water or the air, it also occurs in the non-material realm. For example, your failure to implement the Divine Way, which was revealed by Allah for the guidance of creation and was ordered to be implemented, the act of concealing it or perverting it all constitute corruption within the Way of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says to the children of Israel, 'Twice you will spread corruption in the land.' (*al-Isra':* 4) Was the corruption of the children of Israel limited to just two occasions? By Allah, if this were so, they would have been freed of blame and this then is a charitable mention. However, they repeatedly spread great corruption in the land. Why did Allah say 'twice', then? Scholars have dedicated a great deal of attention toward these two times when they took place. They have concluded that they were in the pre-Islamic period, however, the one who reads the chapter of *al-Isra'* recognises steadfastly that it binds relating them to the time of Islam. It would appear that these are two recent events that took place in the bosom of Islam.

Allah mentioned the story of the children of Israel after mentioning the miraculous Night Journey. This establishes that Islam had extended to their holy lands as Jerusalem became the direction of prayer for Muslims, and the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was carried there by night afterwards. This implies that Jerusalem was authentically claimed by Islam. This is because Islam came for all people, as a protector of past religious traditions.

Therefore, it is more suitable that they say that these two times were in the bosom of Islam. This is because they were responsible for much corruption before Islam and Islam had nothing to do with their past corruption. Allah says, 'We declared to the children of Israel in the Scripture, "Twice you will spread corruption in the land and become highly arrogant.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 4) If this refers to their corruption generally, i.e. before the dawn of Islam, then their corruption is compounded. Is there any enormity grosser than what they said after traversing the sea when they came upon a people devoted to worshipping a calf? They said to Moses, 'O Musa! Make for us a god as they have [their] gods.' (*al-A‘raf:* 138)

Is there any corruption more nefarious than murdering the Prophets, who Allah made the living embodiment of the Divine Message and a moral example? Not to mention distorting Scriptures. The one who observes the scriptural distortion of the children of Israel within the Torah finds that they distorted many aspects of the scripture and in myriad ways. So, there were elements of the Torah that they forgot, as Allah says: 'They neglected a portion of what they were reminded of.' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 13) As for what they remembered, they did not leave it as it was revealed. Rather, they concealed some portions. Concerning what they did not conceal, they failed to leave as it had been revealed and distorted it, as Allah says: 'They altered the words from their places.' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 13)

Nonetheless, they did not stop at forgetting, distorting, and concealing the scripture. They transgressed to the point of contriving their own messages and claiming that they emanated from Allah. Allah says: 'Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands and then say: This is from Allah, so that they may take for it a small price.' (*al-Baqara:* 79) Is there any greater corruption in the Way of Allah than this?

Some authorities understand what occurred in the story of Goliath and Saul to constitute the first act of corruption, as Allah says: 'Have you not considered the chiefs of the children of Israel after Musa, when they said to a prophet of theirs: Raise up for us a king [that] we may fight in the way of Allah. He said: May it not be that you would not fight if fighting is ordained for you?' (*al-Baqara:* 246) Therefore, they requested, courted, and accepted fighting. However, when fighting was mandated for them, they disavowed it and refused to take up arms.

As for the second act of corruption, in the view of the previously mentioned authorities, it occurred after they gained their political power and their territorial expansion controlling large swaths of land from north to south. This time they were raided by *Bakhtunassar*, who defeated them and committed many atrocities among them.

These interpretations adopt the view that the two acts of corruption were committed before Islam. However, it is more fitting to consider them to have occurred after the emergence of Islam. Thus, we would find a link between the story of the children of Israel and the chapter of *al-Isra'*. One might ask, 'how is that?'

Scholars said, when Islam emerged onto the scene, it called upon the people of the Book to attest to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad. These were the same people of the Book who had erstwhile been seeking victory over the disbelievers by his arrival. 'Verily the shadow of a new prophet's day has risen and when he arrives, we will follow him and subsequently kill you as 'Ad and Iram were killed,' they would say when arguing with the idolaters of Medina.

This explains why Allah said to His Messenger Muhammad that indeed, they rejected him that Allah and those given knowledge of the Book are witnesses for him. Whoever possesses knowledge of the Book, from among them, knows of his coming, truthfulness as well as distinguishing marks. That the truthful among them believed in him *peace and blessings be upon him* is evident in their foreknowledge of Prophet Muhammad.

One of them said, 'When I first laid eyes on him, I recognised him as I recognise my very own son. In fact, my knowledge of (Prophet) Muhammad is more certain.' For indeed, there could be some doubt about the paternity of his son. However, he has no doubt at all as for the person of the Messenger Muhammad due to what he had read in their scriptures and had known of his defining characteristics. Prophet Muhammad is described in their Scriptures and they fully knew him as they knew their own children. Therefore, they had been seeking victory over the disbelievers through the arrival of the Messenger of Allah. They were to be honoured by his coming and they arranged for his dispatch. In spite of that, 'when there came to them [Prophet] that which they did not recognise, they disbelieved in him.' (*al-Baqara:* 89) What was the stance of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they disbelieved in him after his migration to Medina? Once in Medina, he enacted a treaty with them to live thereby. He *peace and blessings be upon him* faithfully upheld the terms of the treaty. On the other hand, when they acted treacherously and transgressed the inviolable rights of the Muslims and defamed them by way of calumny, Messenger Muhammad probed into their homes, killed, and banished them from Medina to the Levant and *Kahyber*. This was the commandment of Allah to his Messenger Muhammad as expressed in the verse: 'He it is Who caused those who disbelieved of the followers of the Book to go forth from their homes at the first banishment you did not think that they would go forth, while they were certain that their fortresses would defend them against Allah; but Allah came to them whence they did not expect, and cast terror into their hearts; they demolished their houses with their own hands and the hands of the believers; therefore take a lesson, O you who have eyes.' (*al-Hashr:* 2)

This act, which was performed by the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir, Banu Qaynuqa' and Banu Quraydha constitutes the first act of corruption. These tribes were responsible for treacherously betraying the treaty with Messenger Muhammad after they sought victory over the disbelievers through his advent. The text of the following verse corroborates what we have arrived at about the two acts of corruption: they occurred after the emergence of Islam.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعۡدُ أُولَىٰهُمَا بَعَثۡنَا عَلَيۡكُمۡ عِبَادٗا لَّنَآ أُوْلِي بَأۡسٖ
شَدِيدٖ فَجَاسُواْ خِلَٰلَ ٱلدِّيَارِۚ وَكَانَ وَعۡدٗا مَّفۡعُولٗا ٥

When the first of these warnings was fulfilled, We sent against you servants of Ours with great force, and they ravaged your homes. That warning was fulfilled [5]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 5)

It is well known that the word *idha* is an adverb denoting a future time. Just as you could say: If (*idha*) so and so comes I will honour him. This stands as proof that the first of the corrupt actions had yet to occur. As such, the assertion that the first act of corruption took place within the story of Talut (Saul) and Jalut (Goliath) while the second occurred in the story of *Bukhtanassar* is fraught with difficulty.

As for His saying 'prediction', a prediction is not granted for things that happened in the past. Rather, a prediction specifically involves the future. His saying 'the first of two' is understood to imply the first act of corruption. His saying: '…We sent against you some of Our slaves…' (*al-Isra':* 5). This expression contains yet further evidence that indicates that the two acts of corruption occurred in the lap of Islam (its emergence and spread). For indeed, the word *'ibad* is only applied to believers, while Jalut—who was killed by Talut—and Bakhtanassar were both disbelievers.

Concerning His statement *'ibadan lana*, the scholars have addressed it; some have averred that the terms *'ibad* and *'abid* are synonyms. They add that His saying *'ibad* encompasses believers and disbelievers alike. They then offer evidence to support their claim. Among the proofs they offer is the True Lord's saying (within the story of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*) 'And lo! Allah said: "O 'Isa, son of Maryam! Did you say unto men, 'Worship me and my mother as deities beside Allah'?" ['Isa] answered: "Limitless are You in Your glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [say]! Had I said this, You would indeed have known it! You know all that is within myself, whereas I know not what is within Your Self. Verily, it is You alone who fully knows all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception. Nothing did I tell them beyond what You did bid me [to say]: 'Worship, [who is] my Lord as well as your Lord.' And I bore witness to what they did as long as I dwelt in their midst; but since you caused me to die, You alone have been their keeper: for You are witness unto everything. If You cause them to suffer – verily, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them – verily, You alone are Almighty, Truly Wise!"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116-118) The specific point of reference here is His saying '…If you cause them to suffer—verily, they are Your servants…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118). The word *'ibad* means disbelievers here. Upon the basis of this address it would not be implausible for Jalut and Bukhtanassar, (to be referred to with the same appellation) for they were two disbelievers given authority over the children of Israel. Furthermore, they deduce (the same conclusion) from a separate verse which narrates some of the Day of Judgment's happenings. Addressing the idols—who were taken as partners besides Allah—Allah *the Exalted* says: '…Was it you who led these slaves of Mine *(‘ibad)* astray, or did they by themselves stray from the right path...’ (*al-Furqan:* 17).

Again, the term ‘slaves’ (*‘ibad*) is applied to disbelievers.

So as for His saying ‘…We sent against you some of Our slaves…’ (*al-Isra’:* 5).

It is not absolutely necessary that they (those being referred to) be believers. They could just as well be disbelievers. Here, we would like to offer: Indeed, the True Lord *the Exalted* when He desires to requite them, He empowers and installs someone like them—disbelievers and oppressive tyrants—over them. When He *Glorified is He* desires to requite the actions of an unjust oppressor, He places over that oppressor, one more harsh and oppressive than himself. As indicated by His saying: ‘And in this manner do We cause evildoers to seduce one another by means of their [evil] doings.’ (*al-An‘am:* 129)

While the proponents of this position have evidences which bolster their claims—that the word (*‘ibad*) is applied to believers and disbelievers alike—we will now begin surveying the evidence that suggests that its application is strictly reserved for believers.(1)

To begin with, His saying: ‘For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace; and who remember their Lord far into the night, prostrating themselves and standing; and who pray: “O our Lord, avert from us the suffering of hell – for, verily, the suffering caused by it is bound to be a torment dire: verily, how evil an abode and a station!” And who, whenever they spend on others, are neither wasteful nor niggardly but [remember that] there is always a just mean between those [two extremes]’ (*al-Furqan:* 63-67).

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(1) al-Azhari said: People have generally settled upon maintaining some difference between the slaves of Allah (*‘ibad)* and bondsmen. So they say, ’this is a slave from among the slaves of Allah (*‘ibad*).’ While they say, ‘these are slaves, (*‘abid*) owned by people. Al-layth has mentioned: the polytheists are referred to as (*abadat at-taghut*) slaves of idols, while the believers are referred to as (*‘ibad ar-Rahman*) slaves of the Merciful. [*(Lissan al-‘arab)* under the entry ع ب د]

Described within these verses—from their beginning until their conclusion—we find the characteristics of sincere believers. The term applied to them is *‘ibad ar-Rahman* (slaves of the Most Merciful). The saying of the True Lord *Glorified is He* as He rebuked Iblis, provides additional support: ‘verily, you shall have no power over my servants…’ (*al-Hijr:* 42).

The believers are being specifically mentioned here: ‘[Whereupon Iblis] said: “Then [I swear] by Your very might: I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error, [all] save such of them as are truly Your servants!”’ (*Sad:* 82-83)

Everyone has advanced their proofs and corroborating evidence; yet, the conundrum doggedly persists. In order to escape this conundrum, we must analyze the following: Both the words *‘ibad* and *‘abid* are pluralized forms of the word *‘abd*, what then is their difference? If you surveyed all creatures—the believers among them as well as the disbelievers—you would find that all of them exercise choice in some matters and are compelled in others. The term *‘abid* is understood by everyone, in this manner, the believer and the disbeliever are the same in relation to the things in which they are compelled, To that effect, all creatures are slaves *‘abid* in relation to that which leaves them no room to exercise their wills.

After this, we are capable of separating them in two categories: slaves *‘abid* that remain slaves and do not gain inclusion under the umbrella of *‘ibad*, and slaves *‘abid* whose righteous actions and willing surrender to Allah’s Commandments elevate them until they come under the umbrella of *‘ibad* Allah’s servants.

How is that (one might be prompted to ask)? To be sure, Allah has made a realm of free-will within your actions. He has made you capable of acting and reacting. Although He has made you fit for belief and fit for disbelief, He *the Exalted* has ordered you to be faithful as your responsibility.

It is within this realm of free will, that the slaves (*‘abid*) and the servants *(‘ibad)* become distinct personalities. Those who believe in Allah consign their free will to the will of their Lord, and forfeit what they desire in exchange for what their Lord desires from them within their discretionary actions. You will observe them faithfully implementing all that Allah has commanded. They make those things in which they have been allowed to exercise free will as though they are being compelled. (If one could personify their actions) Their actions are a clearly pronounced declaration of ‘We hear and we obey’. These are the slaves (*‘ibad*) who have entirely consigned their affair to Allah within the realm of free will. There is no will for them besides the will of Allah *the Exalted*.

The word *‘ibad* then, is applied to one who forgoes the realm of free-will, and makes himself subjugated before Allah even in matters in which he has been allowed to exercise choice. As for those who disbelieve, they give preference to what they want and abandon what Allah wants. They engage in the exercise of free will and are unmindful of the will of Allah. When He allows them to use their free wills: ‘Do you believe or disbelieve (Allah says to the servant)?’, ‘I disbelieve,’ he responds. ‘Will you consume liquor or will you abstain?’, ‘I will consume it,’ he answers. ‘Will you steal or will you refrain?’, ‘I will steal,’ he replies. These are the slaves (*‘abid*). They are never to be referred as *`ibad* (servants), for they are unfit for such a noble designation.

To complete our treatment of that which makes this issue problematic we must be aware that the range of free will is limited to the life of this world and the realm of obligation and responsibility. These are the places of free-will, so accordingly, within their parameters we are able to distinguish among the servants (*‘ibad*), who humbly surrender to their Lord and relinquish what they desire in exchange for what He *Glorified is He* desires, and the slaves (*‘abid*) who rebel and choose other than the will of Allah *the Exalted*. In terms of the things in which they are compelled, there is no way to escape this ambiguous issue.

When the Hereafter arrives, there will be no room for free will or responsibility. All will be subjugated before Allah *the Exalted*. The demarcation between slaves and servants will have no relevance. Hence, all will essentially be slaves *(‘abid*) and servants (*‘ibad*) at once. Summarily, we can say: indeed, all will become servants (*‘ibad*) in the Hereafter, whereas in the life of this world not all people fit that designation. With this as our foundation we can understand the meaning of (*‘ibad*) in the following verses: ‘If you cause them to suffer—verily, they are Your servants…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 118) ‘…Was it you that led my servants astray…’ (*al-Furqan:* 17).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is referring to them as servants (*‘ibad*) because the ability to act and subsequently rebel was not returned to them. In that case, they are equivalent to the believers in their lack of choice in what Allah *the Exalted* wants.

As such, the True Lord’s saying: ‘Hence, when the prediction of the first of those who [periods of iniquity] came true, We sent against you some of Our servants…’ (*al-Isra’:* 5). What is intended here is the first act of corruption committed by the Jewish tribes in the shade of Islam; when they broke their covenant with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. The servants (*‘ibad*) referred to here are the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who investigated their (the Jewish tribes) homestead with them. They banished some of them from Medina, executed (for treason) some of them, and took others captive.

His saying: ‘…of terrible prowess in war…’ (*al-Isra’:* 5) is might and vigour. This was the state of the Muslims in Medina. After they had established their own community and were imbued with bravery, they used that to confront the people of falsehood. This was not the weakness they had known in Mecca.

His saying, ‘…and they wrought havoc throughout the land…’ (*al-Isra’:* 5) (*Jasa*) means to investigate, to survey an area, to pursue those dwelling in it. This is what is referred to in police jargon as combing an area.

It is a technical term that implies a detailed and deliberate search for criminals in an area. It is likened to combing the hair because the comb separates the individual hairs. Once more, this is indicative of a highly detailed search. For, sometimes the comb merely separates the hairs at the surface, whereas at other times it is used to part with a depth that reaches the scalp and removes anything lodged at the roots of the hair.

So, *jasa* implies that they pursued them vigorously until none from among them were able to hide. This is what occurred with the Jewish tribes in Medina: Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Qurayzha, Banu Nadir and the Jewish tribes of Khaybar. We observe that the Quran chooses the expression ‘…We sent…’ (*al-Isra’:* 5). This ‘sending forth’ is an indication of magnanimity and mercy. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was not acting aggressively. On the contrary, he was acting in defence of Islam in front of those who betrayed the treaty and broke the covenant.

The word '...against you...' (*al-Isra':* 5) connotes supremacy and dominance.

Allah's saying '…and so the prediction was fulfilled.' (*al-Isra':* 5) That is to say: A promise that must be realized, because it is a promise from One who is capable of its fulfilment. There is no might capable of interfering with the fulfilment of what He has promised. By no means should it (His promise) be considered like the promise which may or may not be fulfilled, such as the promise made by a person that they will be able to meet you tomorrow.

In order for a promise to find fulfilment you must possess the lasting capacity to follow through and make good on your promise. However, some unexpected occurrence could take place and come between your ability to follow through. A true promise then can only be issued by one unaffected by unplanned happenings, one who possesses the enduring ability to make good on his promise. His promise is the unfailingly realized promise.

Perhaps one might question: A promise is only offered for future events which contain good; how can the Quran term these events in such a way? As in His saying: '…We sent against you some of Our slaves of terrible prowess in war…' (*al-Isra':* 5).

They say that the notification of impending evil is expressed as a *Wa'id* (threat), while the term promise (*w'ad*) can encompass both the fortuitous and the ominous. This is because something could appear outwardly bad and be good inwardly. Also germane to our discussion is that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to chastise those who deviated from His way (He punished them in this manner). Although we might see that as being outwardly negative, it is in actuality positive for them, if they attempt to benefit from it.

We offer as an example of this: One who is chastised by his father as the result of his (the child's) negligence or lack of effort. His father punishes him severely because he longs to see his improvement. The poet spoke truthfully when he said:

He was harsh, so they were restrained. And so he who acts judiciously
Must at times be harsh with the one who often shows clemency

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

ثُمَّ رَدَدۡنَا لَكُمُ ٱلۡكَرَّةَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَأَمۡدَدۡنَٰكُم بِأَمۡوَٰلٖ
وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلۡنَٰكُمۡ أَكۡثَرَ نَفِيرًا ٦

But then We allowed you to prevail against your enemy.
We increased your wealth and offspring and made
you more numerous [6] (The Quran, *al-Isra’*: 6)

The address in this verse is directed toward the children of Israel. Additionally, the verse represents a (chronological) point of transformation and change of fate. After what we discussed about the triumph of the Muslims and Allah granting them authority (over the children of Israel) in order to chastise the children of Israel, we recognize here that this was not a continuous state of affairs. This is due to the fact that the Muslims subsequently relinquished the Way of Allah that had been the source of their elevation. They now renounced their earlier status as the servants *(‘ibad)* of Allah and were beset with tribulation. In a reverse of fate, the Jews were now granted authority over them. The awakening of the Jews, an emerging group-awareness, after they were chastised by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims in Medina, is to be accounted for this phenomenon. They began to analyze their condition and the breaches of faith and conduct that had contributed to it.

To be sure, during this time they acquired a modicum of steadfastness upon the Way of Allah. Or perhaps, at the very least, the Muslims deviated from the Way of Allah and veered from the straight path. The matters of faith had unravelled within the souls of the Muslims, they splintered into various nations, each nation possessing its own geographical borders and political system — related in some way to Islam—in short, their characterization as Allah’s servants became unwound.

So after their might and probity upon the Way of Allah, after they deserved to be servants (*‘ibad*) of Allah in the truest sense, they regressed and repudiated the Way of their Lord. They began to consult codes of positive law within their litigation and (unsurprisingly) their enemies were given power over them in order to chastise them. The Jews were granted triumph, which explains Allah's saying: 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again…' (*al-Isra': 6*).

Thumma is a subjoined particle within the Arabic language. It serves as an indication of succession which is separated by intervals of time, whereas the particle (*fa*') indicates immediate succession. As expressed in the saying of Allah *the Exalted*: 'And in the end, He causes him to die and brings him to the grave; and then, if it be His will, He shall raise him again to life.' (*'Abasa:* 21-22)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say 'We allowed you to prevail against them once again.' Rather, He said, 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again.…' This is because between the first times —which involved the Muslims during the era of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*— and the time in which the Jews were triumphant there was a long interval of time.

No wars raged between us and them for many centuries; since the age of the Messenger until the Declaration of Balfour [He is the political figure that granted them the right to establish a national sovereign state in Palestine]. The time of their victory over us occurred in 1967, hence the appropriate use of the subjoining particle *thumma*, which expresses that elapsed time.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again…' (*al-Isra': 6*). That is to say: We granted the children of Israel victory, might, prominence, and authority over the Muslims. This is due to the Muslims abandonment of the Way of their Lord and their disregard for the conditions that made them the servants of Allah.

The word *Karra* connotes the attack and retreat formations used by soldiers during the course of fighting. Advancing to engage at times and deescalating the attack at others. Allah's saying: '…and aided you with wealth and offspring, and made you more numerous [than ever].' (*al-Isra': 6*) Allah empowered them economically until eventually they became major shareholders in capital markets all over the world. He also empowered them by way of their children, who would come to teach them and refine them in all fields at considerably high levels of erudition.

Nevertheless, this is not what gives them the ability to attack Muslims. In spite of the immense amounts of wealth and children they possess they are essentially weaklings. In their quest for establishment, they have no alternative besides dependence on foreign allies and supporters. This is sufficiently clear, and has not needed additional explanation since the preliminary steps were taken to establish their nation state or so called 'national homeland' in Palestine.

This is what is understood by Allah's statement: '…and made you more numerous'. 'And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again, and aided you with wealth and offspring, and made you more numerous [than ever].' (*al-Isra':* 6)

The term *Nafir* means the one who is called upon to aid someone. Here, in the scope of our discussion it would apply to the superpowers that support the Jews and fight the Muslims.

And they are still attacking us, and will remain so until we return to being as we were: servants to Allah, steadfast upon His Way, governing according to His book. This promise will be fulfilled if Allah so wills, as the following verse mentions:

إِنۡ أَحۡسَنتُمۡ أَحۡسَنتُمۡ لِأَنفُسِكُمۡۖ وَإِنۡ أَسَأۡتُمۡ فَلَهَاۚ فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعۡدُ
ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ لِيَسُـُٔواْ وُجُوهَكُمۡ وَلِيَدۡخُلُواْ ٱلۡمَسۡجِدَ كَمَا
دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٖ وَلِيُتَبِّرُواْ مَا عَلَوۡاْ تَتۡبِيرًا ﴿٧﴾

Whether you do good or evil it is to your own souls — and when the second warning was fulfilled [We sent them] to shame your faces and enter the place of worship as they did the first time, and utterly destroy whatever fell into their power [7] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 7)

The address is still being directed toward the children of Israel. Great indeed, are the many principles which Allah enacts in creation, principles that in their effect equalize the believer and disbeliever: Whoever acts with good shall have good and whoever acts with iniquity shall be burdened with his iniquity, is one such principle. So before us are the Jews, who gained triumph on the basis of a simple modicum of steadfastness upon the Way of Allah or at least an amount of steadfastness commensurate with the regression of the Muslims from the Way. This is an established norm in creation: Whoever desires triumph will be given triumph. This stands because the True Lord *Glorified is He* is far-removed from ever being an oppressor, even in dealing with those who oppose His religion and His Way.

Evidence of this can be found by observing what became of the Muslims after their shrinking from the Way of Allah.

His saying: '[And We said:] If you preserve in doing good…' (*al-Isra':* 7). This contains an indication that they were experiencing doubt, whether or not to do right. It is as if one of them was saying to the other: Can we not just forget about this issue of doing right?

If, at the moment, the Jews are ruling the day, will it remain theirs down the long road? No, their predominance will not last and their aggression against Muslims is not permanent. This is proven by the True Lord's saying: 'And so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true…' (*al-Isra':* 7).

That is to say: When the time of their second act of corruption arrives. For it has already been stated that the True Lord *Glorified is He* says '...Twice indeed, you will spread corruption in the earth…' (*al-Isra':* 4).

We have already clarified the first act of corruption, in which they broke their agreement with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina.

This verse contains a promising sign for us; we will return to our former prominence and we will experience an awakening and a revival in which we will return to the Way of Allah and the straight path. In its midst, we will regain our strength and power, and go on the offensive against the Jews.

His saying '…to disgrace you utterly…' (*al-Isra':* 7). That is to say: We will disgrace them in a way that will leave its mark upon their faces. This is because the face is the distinguishing mark of the human being. The emotions and the feelings are expressed by the countenance and even the last agonies of death experienced by the human soul appear on the face. The face is the noblest part of man and mutilating it is the most abominable form of mutilation.

His saying: '…and to enter the Temple as [their forerunners] had entered it once before…' (*al-Isra':* 7) which means: To be sure, the Muslims will re-enter the Most Remote Mosque and rescue it from the clutches of the Jews '…as [their forerunners] had entered it once before…' (*al-Isra': 7*). One who carefully reflects upon this expression will find that the Muslims first entered Al-Aqsa (the Most Remote) Mosque during the reign of Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him*. During that time the land was not inhabited by Jews; rather, it was under the governance of Roman Christians.

This first entrance inflicted no damage to the Jews. The only affront it contained was for Christians. Nevertheless, this next entrance of Al-Aqsa Mosque will occur while it is in the possession of the Jews and at its core it will contain disgrace—which will be shown on their faces—for the Jews. This will culminate in our entering Al-Aqsa Mosque and cleansing it of their filth.

We also recognize this in His saying, '…as [their forerunners] had entered it once before….' (*al-Isra': 7*) Without doubt, the Quran would only articulate this reality in such fashion if there was to be an occasion of exiting in between the two entrances.

As such, our latest exit from Al-Aqsa Mosque is the fulfilment of Quranic prophecy. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to turn to us and proclaim: If you desire to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque once more, return to the way of your Lord and collectively make amends with Him.

His saying, '…and so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true…' (*al-Isra': 7*). The word *akhira* implies finality the time after which there will be no repetition; the Jews will never again triumph.

His saying, '…and to destroy with utter destruction all that they had conquered.' (*al-Isra': 7*) The word *Yutabbiru*: implies that they might raze or destroy in order that they might topple what the Jews had constructed, erected, and built as monuments of their civilization. We presently observe these things among them.

Nevertheless, we observe the wording of the Quran; the Quran does not say 'You raised' but rather, 'They raised' as an indication that that which they raised was not the product of their independent endeavour. Those things the monuments have only accrued because their backing from allies and supporters. Independently, the Jews are essentially weak and are unable to endure. This is clearly expressed in the True Lord's statement: 'Overshadowed by ignominy are they wherever they may be, save [when they bind themselves again] in a bond with Allah and a bond with men…' (*Al-'Imran:* 112). They are debased wherever they reside. Without protection, this is their lot except when living beneath the shade of a treaty. They are now as they were within the Prophet's era in Medina. Additionally, they experience some comfort when enjoying the protection of others sworn to defend them and cooperate with them.

Jews are an isolated people with an identity and personality which do not meld with others from among the nations. Regardless of the country in which they reside, they do not seek enfranchisement or inclusion into that society's mainstream. This example explains why we find them—in every host country in which they reside—living in areas specifically designated as 'Jewish neighbourhoods'. They are averse to settling down and building community. They are; as He *the Exalted* has mentioned concerning them: 'And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth…' (*al-A'raf:* 168). Every group among them—throughout the world community—lives in isolation. It is only now, after the establishment of their so-called nation-state in Palestine, we see them inclining toward nation building and founding settlements.

At present, we are awaiting Allah's promise. We live with the hope of seeing our condition rectified so that we can return to our Lord's sanctuary. Only within that sanctuary will the promise of our Lord—that we will re-enter the Most Remote Mosque –be fulfilled, and at last we will have the upper hand on them. When we engage them in a battle whose basis are faith and Islam opposed to Arab nationalism and political partisanship, this promise will be realized. We will have regained our characterization as servants of Allah and as a result we will deserve His assistance.

Accordingly, in so far as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has said, and so, 'when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true…' (*al-Isra':* 7). It is a promise that will be fulfilled without doubt. This is evidenced by the fact that this same expression occurs verbatim at the chapter's ending in Allah's words 'And after that We said unto the children of Israel: "Dwell now securely on earth—but [remember that] when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!"' (*al-Isra':* 104)

The one who reflects upon this verse finds within it a promising verse signalling the fulfilment of Allah's promise. He also finds within the current assemblage-taking place among the Jews in Palestine, a sign of Allah's Will being done.

The meaning of the verse then, is: after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* We said to the children of Israel, 'Inhabit the land.' If someone tells you to inhabit any place, they also must specify the place you are to inhabit. For instance, 'inhabit Port Said, inhabit Cairo, or inhabit Jordan', they would say. On the other hand, if someone says to you: inhabit the land what could possibly be intended thereby! This implies that Allah desires for them to remain dispersed throughout the world, separated among the nations. As He has said concerning them 'And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth…' (*al-A'raf:* 168). Thus, you find them isolated from others, scattered about here and there. Many times, you will find them the source of problems. People raise complaints about them and out of their anguish even murder some of them. He *the Exalted* has mentioned: 'And lo! Your Lord made it known that most certainly He would rouse against them, unto Resurrection Day, people who would afflict them cruel suffering…' (*al-A'raf:* 167).

This is the manner in which the Jews will remain; a nuisance among the earth's citizens, isolated, despised and unwelcome until the Day of Judgment. At the same time, this isolation can also be an element of the formation of good and faith because the people of Islam do not resort to isolation except during a time when Islam needs to be reinvigorated. Afterwards, after the inclination towards faith has been re-instilled, they promptly begin propagating Islam among the people. Therefore, the presence of the Jews as an element of provocation contains wisdom. Its wisdom is that it provokes vital and strengthened faith within our souls, for if faith ceased to be awakened and stirred within us, Islam would fade into oblivion.

This message of theirs is the message of disbelief and falsehood. By its nature then, it must contain wisdom. For the disbelief through which some of mankind suffers turns people to faith, they are unable to perceive tranquillity except through faith in Allah. If it was not for disbelief which vexes people and creates uneasiness in their lives, they would not have turned to faith. The same can be said of falsehood within creation; it disturbs some people and they consequently turn to the True Lord *Glorified is He* seeking Him.

After Allah caused them to inhabit the land and had dispersed them within it, He incited their supporters from among the ‘armies of falsehood.’ They inspired them with the idea of establishing a national homeland. Essentially, He had made fair seeming to them the primary steps leading toward their demise. Thus, it was decreed for them to choose Palestine as the place of their undertaking; establishing a national homeland to which they would migrate from various countries.

To be sure, some people viewed the establishment of the nation of Israel and the assembling of the Jews within its territories as a setback for Islam and Muslims. The reality, however; reveals something different. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* desires that we deliver unto them a faithful blow issued by armies described as ‘…Our Servants…’ (*al-Isra’:* 5).

Previously, we alluded to the fact that this blow could not be issued, while they were spread and dispersed throughout the earth; for we could never make war in every part of the world simultaneously. We could never send military detachments to every country in which there is a Jewish area or section of town. How then, could we pursue them, while they were scattered throughout the land in small bands?

Fittingly, the ideas of assemblage and establishing a national homeland which were claimed by the Balfour Declaration and sustained by the major powers throughout the world in support of the Jews and flagrant opposition to the Muslims are in reality services to the cause of Islam. It eases our effort to pursue them and makes it possible to lay siege to them. This explains the meaning of Allah’s words: ‘…when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!’ (*al-Isra’:* 104)

That is to say: we have collected them; we have caused them to converge upon each other. This is therefore a glad tiding for us as Muslims; that the upper hand in the struggle against them will be returned to us and that in the end the triumph will be for Islam and the Muslims. The only barriers we must overcome to realize this promise is returning to Allah and redirecting ourselves toward

Him, as He *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'yet when the misfortune decreed by Us befell them, they did not humble themselves…' (*al-An'am:* 43).

What is intended by His saying here: 'when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity]…" (*al-Isra':* 7). It is the promise that Allah *Glorified is He* has said in its regard: '…And so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true, [We raised new enemies against you, and allowed them] to disgrace you utterly, and to enter the Temple as [their forerunners] had entered it once before…' (*al-Isra':* 7). The verse is followed by Allah's saying:

عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمۡ أَن يَرۡحَمَكُمۡۚ وَإِنۡ عُدتُّمۡ عُدۡنَاۘ وَجَعَلۡنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ حَصِيرًا ٨

Your Lord may yet have mercy on you, but if you do the same again, so shall We: We have made Hell a prison for those who defy [Our warning] [8] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 8)

The word *`asa* is a particle that indicates hope and expectation; it is as though the verse contains a suggestion that they will remain deprived and destitute. No head from among them shall rise except when being shaded by a treaty or contractual agreement from Allah or a treaty from people contracted to support, protect, and assist them.

In His saying 'Your Lord…' (*al-Isra':* 8). Observe the divine grandeur and The Lord's mercy in the statement which unceasingly addresses the disbelievers, atheists, and those stubbornly rejecting His messenger. He is the last of the heavenly messengers, and despite their rejection of him, Allah addressed all of them with His saying, 'Your Lord…' (*al-Isra':* 8). This is because the Lord is responsible for mankind's cultivation and the underwriter of those things that make life valuable. He is never sparing in their distribution, even with a disbelieving slave. Thus, all stand upon equal footing in relation to this divine bestowal; the disbeliever and the believer as well as the obedient and the disobedient.

All enjoy the blessings of Allah; the sun, the air, food, and drink. He *Glorified is He* is still their Lord despite all that has resulted from their actions.

In His saying '…may well show mercy unto you…' (*al-Isra':* 8), mercy is given to the human being if he is in a position in which he deserves mercy.

The Jews will never have an independent nation state or any other political entity. Rather, they live within the divine mercy fostered by Islam which will grant them an opportunity to co-exist among the Muslims in an Islamic environment. This is what they experienced as a community living alongside the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina when he honoured them and enacted a treaty with them.

The level of this co-existence evolved to such an extent that when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* desired to take out a loan he would not borrow from Muslims. In contrast, he would borrow from the Jews. This contains a wisdom we should be cognizant of: that the Muslims were reserved about demanding their due balances from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* if he, for instance, failed to remember. On the other hand, a Jew would persistently demand his rights and remind the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* if he overlooked the debt. This explains why the Jews would frequently argue with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and repeatedly sought to involve him in errors. On one occasion(1), the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* settled a debt he owed to one of them. However, the man denied it and came requesting that the debt be cleared up a second time. He began to reiterate his request and involve the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in error. The man rejected that the debt had been cleared up the first time and demanded that witness be brought forward to attest to the fact that debt had already been paid.

There was no witness present during the time in which the debt was settled who could corroborate the Prophet's truthful claim. In this manner, the presence of one of the companions became critical. His name was Khuzayma, and he ascended saying, 'I was a witness O Messenger of Allah, and the Jewish fellow certainly did receive the balance of his outstanding debt.' The Jew maintained his silence without argument or dissent. This suggested that he was not telling the truth. This occurred just as doubt was about to cast its shadow. Nevertheless, after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* retired with Khuzayma, and the would-be creditor had departed he asked him,

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(1) *The story of the Jew who wanted to reimburse his debt to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him twice unfairly and Khuzayma vouching in favor of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him.*

'Khuzayma, what caused you to say such a thing? There was no one with us when I settled the debt with the Jewish fellow.' Khuzayma laughed and then stated, 'O Messenger of Allah, I confirm your truthfulness in conveying the reports which emanate from heaven, could I then declare you untruthful in a dispute concerning a paltry sum?'

This effort on behalf of the man pleased the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* so he said, 'Khuzayma's testimony suffices whoever is given it on their behalf.'(1)

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* threatens the children of Israel; He says '…but if you revert [to sinning], We shall revert [to chastising you]…' (*al-Isra':* 8). If you return to corruption, we will return to our recompense. This is the punishment within the life of this world, but suffering it will not rescue you from the punishment of the Hereafter. This is one situation and that is another. Thus, we must clarify in order that they do not apprehend that punishment for sin in the life of this world exempts them from punishment in the Hereafter. Worldly punishment only exonerates from future accountability in the Hereafter the perpetrator of wrong action who enjoys the protective hedge of Islam. If this were not so, those guilty of wrong action who were requited with the divinely legislated punishments would be equal in status with those whose actions went unpunished.

If someone commits a theft and consequently has his hand amputated, while someone else commits a theft and goes without having his hand amputated, their suffering equal retribution in the Hereafter would cause one of them to exceed the other in punishment. How could the situation be regarded otherwise, when one individual's hand was severed, with him being forced to live in ignominy in its aftermath, while the other slipped away reprisal? This is if the guilty party is a believer.

As for a situation in which the commissioner of wrong action is not a believer, the fundamental basis upon which we have been building this case is gone, nowhere to be found. Worldly punishment in this instance does not absolve the perpetrator of wrong action from additional retribution in the Hereafter. This explains the statement of Allah *the Exalted* when he said: '…We have ordained that [in the Hereafter] hell shall close upon all who deny the the truth' (*al-Isra':* 8). *Ja'alna,* which is represented here as we have ordained, it is a verb that indicates transformation. It is as you would say, 'I made (*ja'altu*) the dough into bread.' Or for that matter, 'I made (*ja'altu)* the cotton into a garment'. That is to say, 'I transformed it or I changed it'. So, what was Hell in relation to the disbelievers before the True Lord *Glorified is He* transformed it?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim in (Al-Mustadrak) [2/18] and At-Tabrani in (Al-M'ujam Al-Kabir) [4/101]. From the tradition of Khuzaym ibn-Thabit. Haythami mentioned in (Al-M'ujam) [9/320], 'All of its narrators are reliable.'*

Allah's saying *Ja'alna* in this verse is not indicative of transformation then. The only suitable meaning that can be assigned to it is 'We created'. Which means, We created it in this manner. This is identical in a semse to our saying, 'Glory be unto He who made milk white'. Milk has never been known to exist as any other colour besides white from which it was changed into white by Allah *the Exalted*. Quite the reverse, he created it in that way from the beginning.

The meaning of '…close upon…' (*al-Isra':* 8) (*hasira*) which is represented here as close upon: is a well known mat made out of straw or from plants referred to as *samr*. They now manufacture them from plastic and they are likewise called *hasira*. This is because the word *hasir* is derived from the word *hasr* which means to constrict things in one place for reinforcement. In manufacturing this mat *hasir,* they press the individual pieces of straw together until it becomes as a firm solid mass without leaving a gap between one piece of straw and the next.

However, why do we use the mat (*hasir*)? We make use of the mat (*hasir*) because it holds off filth and dirt by preventing them from ruining our linens. The meaning of the word *hasr* then is constriction and containment.

The steadfast reader who pursues the meanings attached to the trilateral root (hasir) as it is used throughout the text of the Quran finds the following meanings: 'And so when the sacred months are over, slay those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah wherever you may come upon them, and take them captive and besiege them…; (*at-Tawba:* 5). That is to say: constrain them.

In relation to the pilgrimage, which is an obligation for Muslims, Allah *the Exalted* has said: '…and if you are held back, give instead whatever you can easily afford…' (*al-Baqara:* 196). Which in this case means: if you are prevented or barred from performing the rites of The pilgrimage.

Therefore, the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: "…We have ordained that [in the Hereafter] hell shall close upon all who deny the truth" (*al-Isra':* 8) means restricting their movement not allowing them to leave and containing them therein. For it is an inescapable prison because it encloses them on all sides. In identical fashion, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…Verily, for all who sin against themselves [by rejecting Our Truth] We have readied a fire whose billowing folds(1) will encompass them from all sides…' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

So they are unable to escape, if they try to mount an escape they are forced back into its confines. As Allah *the Exalted* says: '…as oft as they try to come out of it, they will be thrown back into it…' (*as-Sajda:* 20).

Within His saying: '…We have ordained that [in the Hereafter] hell shall close upon all who deny the truth' (*al-Isra':* 8) is an indication that in order to perpetrate the criminal acts they commit in the life of this world, they need the assistance of their aids and supports from among the powerful. By this means, they enter the fosterage of the people of falsehood, as for in the Hereafter, they will not find any defenders or supporters.

Allah *the Exalted* says: "'How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?" Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to Allah]' (*as-Saffat:* 25-26).

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* concluded his discussion on the Night Journey of the Final Prophet of Mercy, Prophet Muhamad *peace and blessings be upon him*, He made it a terrestrial verse that could be evidenced although it superseded the natural laws with which his people were accustomed. This was established so that when the occurrence of The Ascension—which also superseded the natural laws of creation, but in relation to that which is unknown to human beings—is announced, it is even more worthy of being believed.

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(1) *Ibn Al-'Aarabi interpreted (suradiq) to mean 'Its gates.' The narration on Ibn-Abbas authority mentions a wall of fire. Al-Kalbi mentioned, 'that it is a part of the fire which encircles the disbelievers as though they are in a pen. Ibn Al-Mubarak takes his conclusion from the Hadith which is narrated by Abu-Said Al-Khudri that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said 'Every gate of the Fire is made up of four walls. The Thickness of each wall would take someone walking forty years to clear it.' Within his work of Quranic exegesis [5/4123] Al-Qurtubi said, 'this indicates that the gates are billows of smoke and fire that tower above the disbelievers, the actual wall of hell was not described.'*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to clarify that it was in fact Muhammad’s submission to his Lord that caused him to be granted such immense rank. And so was Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* a grateful servant. So, there is a contrast between the servitude of people to Allah and their servitude of some of them to others. This is because to be enslaved to a creature is despicable; the master reaps the benefit of the slave’s labour. On the other hand, when one is enslaved to Allah, the slave reaps the benefit of the master.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* discusses the children of Israel and the corruption they succumbed to within their dealings. With that, He gave us examples of those that conduct themselves excellently and those that comport themselves wickedly. Each is rewarded the outcome of his action without being oppressed or wronged.

This explains why the Quranic context directs us to a clarification of the Divine Way which descended from on high to make clear how the human being realizes servitude to his Lord and to clarify how to be a sincere slave to Allah *the Exalted*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then moves on to state:

إِنَّ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ يَهْدِى لِلَّتِى هِىَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ٱلَّذِينَ
يَعْمَلُونَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٩﴾

This Quran does indeed show the straightest way. It gives
the faithful who do right the good news that they will have a
great reward and [9] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 9)

Whoever desires a consummate example of servitude to Allah needs to look no further than the servitude displayed by the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was this servitude that caused him to be carried by night to Jerusalem and then subsequently raised to the heavens. Whoever desires to take on the likeness of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* within his servitude to his Lord and honour his descendants thereby must proceed according to how they proceeded and follow their patterns of conduct in servitude. Additionally, he must be cautious not to assume the likeness of the Jews who twice made mischief in the land.

The Noble Quran is that which illustrates and explains the truth for us making it distinct from falsehood 'Verily, this Quran shows the way to all that is most upright…' (*al-Isra':* 9). The statement of the True Lord *the Exalted* 'Indeed, this Quran…' (*al-Isra':* 9). At the time of this revelation, had the entire Quran been revealed? As is readily understood from his saying: Indeed, this Quran? We respond by stating, that the Quran in its entirety had yet to be revealed. However, every verse of the Quran is referred to as Quran, as Allah *the Exalted* has said: 'Thus, when We recite it, follow you its wording [with all Your mind]' (*al-Qiyama:* 18).

So, the entire Quran is not what is being intended here. Rather, a verse from the Quran is Quran. It follows that, at the time that the revelation was completed and the questions upon which the ability to lead an upright life are hinged were answered Allah *the Exalted* said '…Today I perfected my blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3).

If some deluded seeker of nobility seeks to make additions to the Book of Allah or advance something new, he should be aware that the Way of Allah is far-removed from ever containing deficiencies and is thus, in absolutely no need of his additions. There is nothing required of you besides searching in the Book of Allah, you will find the good to which you incline. The Quran according to His saying, '…shows the way…' (*al-Isra':* 9).

Guidance is the path that leads to the objective in the most expedient and efficient manner. It is the straight path in which there is no crookedness. We stated that the True Lord *Glorified is He* guides all people and clearly illustrates for them the Way. Whoever takes heed and is guided, is subsequently increased by Allah in guidance, as Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned, 'just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in God-consciousness.' (*Muhammad:* 17)

The meaning of the phrase '…most upright…' (*al-Isra':* 9) is explained as: more upright and an experience of more peace. This literary pattern, i.e. the figure of speech being employed here is called 'the verb of superlative expression.'

Therefore, the way have the word upright (*aqwam*), and the word *qayim* which is lesser than it is. In like manner, we would say knowing (*'alim*) and (*a'lam*) or more knowing. So, His *Glorified is He* saying: 'Verily, this Quran shows the way to all that is most upright…' (*al-Isra':* 9).

This suggests the presence of a plainly upright way of conducting affairs in peoples' civil planning and codes of positive law. The True Lord has not prohibited humans from enjoying the protections of positive legal codes when confronted by oppression which they would be forced to unhappily endure if they failed to enact laws to redress those wrongs.

There is no objection to this, if nothing detailing how to handle the matter from the Way of Allah has been revealed to them from Him. So, if what they legislate is upright (*qayyim),* what Allah has brought forward is more upright (*aqwam*). Additionally, you do not introduce the upright until after you have been exposed to the crooked, the warped. If not this exposure, then what has turned your attention to the upright?

As for the Heavenly Way, it endows us with the means to protect against and prevent the root causes of illness. There is a stark difference between the prevention of illness and curing illness. Positive law provides mechanisms for curing the social ills that afflict the community.

In terms of Islam, it provides us with a means of protection. If the Muslims slip into heedlessness or are badly affected by some ailments, it is the result of their deviation from the Way of their Lord. To them, we say: 'Return to the Way at once!' 'Verily, this Quran shows the way to all that is most upright…' (*al-Isra':* 9).

In order to explain that the Way of Allah is more upright, we narrate what we experienced in San Francisco. Indeed, one of the orientalists(1) questioned us concerning the verse of the True Lord *the Exalted*: 'They want to extinguish Allah's [guiding] light with their utterances: but Allah will not allow [this to pass], for He has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth.' (*at-Tawba:* 32)

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(1) *The story of the San Francisco orientalist who asked Ash-Sheikh about how Islam overshadowed all other regions.*

In another verse, He says: 'He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with the [task of spreading] guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religion – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 33)

How did the Quran say: '… to the end that he may cause it to prevail over all [false religion]' (*at-Tawba:* 33) when undeniably, Islam is now kept within bounds, and other religious traditions are currently excelling it in terms of number of adherents? I responded to him, 'If you reflect closely upon the verse you will find that it addresses your question. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…however hateful this may to all those who deny the truth.' (*at-Tawba:* 32) He also states: '…however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to other than Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 33)

Hence, the disbelievers and the idolaters were present. In other words, the prevalence being referred to here is not materialized through having plenteous followers. The Quran did not say that all people would become believers.

The meaning of prevail here is the confirmation of the truth of Islam, and (the meeting of) needs and a prevalence that is manifest in providing law and order. Life's trials and tribulations will compel them to cast aside their legal codes and adopt the laws of Islam because within it they will find the goal of their persistent search.

Take for instance, the much criticized and maligned divorce law of Islam, which they claimed contained things unbefitting to the matrimonial bond. However, with the passage of time, the painful truth began to reveal itself and many from among them suffered from the absence of this solution within their legal codes. In this manner, marital strife forced them to resort to drafting legislation to deal with divorce.

It is well known, that indeed, their enacting laws to settle divorce cases was not motivated by a love for Islam nor contentment with it as a belief system; rather, they were beset with problems that could only be resolved with divorce. This is the prevalence that is intended in the two noble verses. It is a prevalence that you all can attest to, for you will be forced to resort to the laws of Islam or something that resembles them to resolve the problems with which you are confronted.

The prohibition of usury in Islam is also one of these matters. Once again, they opposed and denounced this prohibition until Keynes(1), who is their leading economist came and announced to them: pay close attention because money does not perform its most complete function unless the interest rates are reduced to zero. Glory be unto Allah, the obstinacy of these people in their opposition to Islam is unfathomable. Does the prohibition of usury mean anything besides reducing the interest rates to zero? To be sure, they return to the Way of Allah in spite of themselves and nonetheless still refuse to acknowledge it.

The negative effects of dealing in usurious policies are not hidden. Have we seen one country which borrowed from another able to completely square its debt or merely pay the interest instalments not to speak of the principal of the loan? Then, we see them in error saying: Germany and Japan took loans after WWII and this was the path of their development and progress. We respond to them by saying: Indeed, you have been duped. Germany and Japan did not receive interest bearing loans, they only received aid that was non-interest bearing. This aid was referred to as the Marshall Plan.(2)

Also, from among those things which the trials and tribulations of life forced them to resort to, is the inheritance of women. After they were troubled by this matter, they enacted laws to deal with it. Accordingly, the prevalence of the Religion of Allah being referred to here is the elevation of order and laws which they are forced to adopt to meet life's demands. The prevalence being referred to here is not displayed by having an abundance of followers.

Consequently, the Way of Allah is more upright. The laws of the True Lord *Glorified is He* are greater and offer more guidance than the laws of human beings. The contents of the Quran make it sufficiently clear that the judgment of Allah as well as His laws are the most upright of all judgments and laws. In fact, they are even more upright than the judgment His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) John Maynard Keynes, 1st Baron Keynes (5 June 1883 – 21 April 1946), was a British economist whose ideas fundamentally changed the theory and practice of macroeconomics and the economic policies of governments. He built on and greatly refined earlier work on the causes of business cycles, and is widely considered to be one of the most influential economists of the 20th century and the founder of modern macroeconomics. His ideas are the basis for the school of thought known as Keynesian economics and its various offshoots.

(2) The Marshall plan was a legislation instituted by the U.S government to aid countries that were decimated by WWII, specifically it offered financial aid to boost economies of Western European countries.

This is expressed in the story(1) of his client, Zayd ibn-Haritha.(2) Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* was not a slave until some slave traders abducted him and sold him into slavery. His rounds came to conclusion under the ownership of Lady *Khadija may Allah be pleased with her* who in her role as his owner placed him at the service of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* was in the service of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* until his family learned of his presence in Mecca. Soon after, his family came to reclaim him. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was left with no recourse besides allowing him to choose to remain with him or to go with his family. Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* preferred to remain in the service of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* rather than return to his family. After that, He said, 'It is inappropriate for me to choose anything over he who has chosen me.'(3)

This story contains evidence that slavery was permissible at that time. In fact, slavery was an institution of mercy and compassion. The slave lived as his master lived; eating from the same food, drinking from the same drink, and wearing the same clothes. Moreover, the master was not to assign the slave work beyond his capacity and if he did assign the slave difficult labour he was to assist him: the slave and master were hand in hand.(4)

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(1) *The story of Zayd ibn-Haritha may Allah be pleased with him with his people and with the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him*

(2) *He is Zayd ibn-Haritha ibn-Sharahil Al-Kalbi, the Companion. He was abducted while in his youth and purchased by Khadija bint-Khuwaylid may Allah be pleased with her who presented him to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him after he married her. He then adopted him and granted him his freedom. Eventually he married him to his cousin. He made him a leader during the battle of Mu'ta, in which he was martyred. He died in the 8th year after the Hijrah.*

(3) *Narrated by Ibn-Hajar Al-'Asqalani within a text entitled (al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaaba). Bio # 2884 under the title Zayd ibn-Haritha Al-Kalbi*

(4) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [6050] and Muslim in his (Sahih) [1661] within the narration of Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him which states that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said to him, 'They are your brothers whom Allah has placed under your jurisdiction. So feed them from what you eat, clothe them from what you wear, and do not assign them to work which is overwhelming. If you do so (assign them to work which is overwhelming) assist them in it.'*

This describes the connection that existed between Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him*. Unsurprisingly, this is what caused him to choose to remain in the service of the Messenger instead of going with his family. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* thought it would be fitting to reward Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* for the pure commitment he had displayed when he chose him over his family, so he said, 'No longer refer to him as Zayd ibn-Haritha. Rather, call him Zayd ibn-Muhammad.'(1)

Adoption was widespread at that time. So when the True Lord *Glorified is He* desired to proscribe adoption (the actual laying claim to parentage of a child birthed to some else) and thereby prohibit a child from being included in the lineage of anyone besides his own father, he began with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* He said: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah; and if you know not who their fathers were, [call them] your brethren in faith and your friends…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5).

What concerns us here is: '…this is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). So it is as though the judgment that effectively suspended adoption upon the above stated meaning and returned to Zayd his former title of Zayd ibn-Haritha was more just and equitable. Correspondingly, the judgment of the Messenger was not wrong, rather, we should conclude that it was just and equitable. Nonetheless, it was justice and equity based on human reckoning. That which the True Lord *Glorified is He* has excelled it.

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(1) *This is expressed in the Prophetic Hadith in which the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Be witnesses to this testimony: Zayd is my son. I will inherit him and he will inherit me.}'Narrated by Ibn-Hajar Al-'Asqalani, (Al-Isaba fi tamyiz As-Sahaba). Bio # 2884. He was called Zayd ibn Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him up until the statement of Allah the Exalted was revealed '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (al-Ahzab: 5) Afterwards, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him wed him to his paternal cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh, not long after the revelation proclaimed 'And Lo, [O Muhammad,] you did say unto the one to whom Allah had shown favour and to whom you hadst shown favour, "Hold on to your wife, and remain conscious of Allah!" And [thus] would you hide within yourself something that Allah was about to bring to light- for you did stand in awe of[what] people [might think], whereas it was Allah alone of whom you should have stood awe! [But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union wither, We gave her to you in marriage, so that [in future] no blame should attach to the believers for [marrying] the spouses of their adopted children when the latter have come to the end of their union with them. And [thus] Allah's will was done' (al-Ahzab: 37).*

In this manner, Zayd *may Allah be pleased with him* was returned to his original lineage. People began saying, 'Zayd ibn-Haritha' which caused Zayd great sadness because he was now barred from being affiliated with the noble lineage of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, Allah *the Exalted* counterbalanced that by granting him a merit which no other companion attained. This merit was having his name mentioned in the Noble Quran. People had begun reciting his name and worshipping Allah with it in His saying: '…[But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union wither, We gave her to you in marriage…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). In other words, the course of action taken by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was equitable: Allah's course of action was more equitable. His *the Exalted* saying: '…shows the way to all that is most upright…' (*al-Isra':* 9).

The one who pursues the Quranic methodology finds that it unfailingly presents us with the most just, equitable, and balanced ways of proceeding in all things, this includes: creed, law, and stories. In creed, for example, Islam came to decisively settle a dispute between a community in contradiction. Some of them disavow the existence of a deity in the process of creation and others claim the existence of multiple deities. The arrival of Islam represented the middle course between the two extremes. It settled the question by presenting the most upright resolution, 'There is only one God Who is without partner'; this it came to declare.

Furthermore, when it discussed the attributes of this God (Allah) *Glorified is He*, it also adopted a more balanced, more upright course. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* possesses attributes which are reflected by human beings; His hand, His hearing, His sight. However, His hand is nothing like our hands, His hearing is nothing like our hearing, His sight is nothing like our sight. 'The Originator [is He] of the heavens and the earth. He has given you mates of your own kind just as [He has willed that] among the beasts [there be] mates – to multiply you thereby: [but] there is nothing like unto Him, and He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.' (*ash-Shura:* 11)

This wise divine guidance refutes the allegation that the Attributes of Allah are like the attributes of human beings. It also leaves no room for the other extreme view that Allah does not possess these Attributes and the words referring to these Attributes should be interpreted to carry subtle meanings other than their linguistic denotations.

The Quran also instructs us to engage in a general observation of Allah’s creation: ‘And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to’ (*Yusuf:* 105). It directs our attention to the many wonders of creation of which we are heedless, the signs we neglect instead of ponder. Pondering the miraculous signs of Allah’s creation remind us of the Creator’s Magnificence and meanwhile opens for us new channels that help make life more prosperous. Conscious reflection on the wonders of creation can be our way to explore much of life’s splendour.

Allah has created in the universe the means and resources required to keep life going. Out of His Mercy, He has provided us with all the basic needs essential for the continuation of our existence. Whosoever then desires welfare must employ his intellect to explore the treasures and secrets Allah has endowed the universe with and use them in the right way to achieve what he desires.

Examples of this are numerous. Many people have been guided to reflect on the universe. They have made discoveries and breakthroughs that served humanity and made life easier in many aspects. Invention of the wheel was a great one. The inventor found out that heavy loads were transported with greater facility when something capable of moving in a circular motion was placed beneath them. Reflection on this phenomenon led to that valuable invention that has made life far easier. This can also be said about the steam engine. The inventor may have discovered the locomotive power of steam when he found it capable of raising the lid of a boiling pot. This perhaps guided him to the idea of using steam to power means of transportation and heavy machines. The discovery of penicillin was a huge scientific breakthrough. It is owed to the precious chance by which the discoverer saw a green mould that caused inhibition of bacterial growth. The discoverer perhaps by chance had that mould contact his eyes where he had been experiencing some inflammation, so the mould caused his eyes to heal(1). This led to the discovery of this medication that changed the history of medicine.

Wonders and secrets of Allah's creation are endless. We just ignorantly neglect them. We pass by them, but instead of reflecting those signs, we just turn aside from them.

Those scientists and others were able to have a profound impact on human life because of their penetrating insight. They employed their intellects to explore and benefit from the creation of Allah. They did not bring to existence something totally new, but they only uncovered what Allah has created in the universe. When Allah created humankind to be vicegerents on earth, He prepared for them the necessary means of subsistence and basic requirements for preserving their life and kind. Besides guaranteeing basic needs, Allah has endowed the universe with unending resources that man can use to achieve welfare as well. Such resources require us to employ our minds to make good use of them.

Moreover, Allah says: '… It was He Who brought you into being from the earth and *esta'marakum* (made you inhabit) it…' (*Hud:* 61). The word *esta'mara* does not just mean 'to inhibit' but also to make the place where you exist prosperous and thriving. Thus, Allah has brought us to earth for a mission that requires collaboration between the various talents and powers He has gifted us with. We need all to work in concert. Life would not be set to rights when each destroys what the other builds. We are ordained to collaborate, not conflict. To let our powers and efforts complement each other, not destroy each other through unhealthy rivalry. To achieve this, the only way is to follow the divine guidance which is absolutely wise and just. Allah says: 'It is Allah who has sent down the Scripture with Truth and the Balance…' (*ash-Shura:* 17).

There is a point worth underlining. Allah has made the universe for us all to share and commanded us to explore its wonders and delve into its secrets. Meanwhile, He strictly forbids us from prying on the secrets and private lives of one another. The world belongs to us all, but the private life of everyone belongs to him only. The ordinance of Allah has been sent down with Mercy. It aims at enriching human life and preserving the rights of all. Respecting each other's privacy serves a good purpose: maintaining healthy relationships among people. One may be generally good, yet may have a secret defect or failure he cannot overcome. By prying into his life, we may find out about that hidden imperfection and because of it, wipe out all the good qualities of that person, and block before him every channel through which he can be useful to himself or society. Violation of the privacy of others can thus be excessively harmful to the object of that violation and society at large. Attempting to explore the secrets of others would entail wronging them by exposing them to censure or disdain or blocking opportunities before them. This is a general principle for all, for just as Allah forbids you from prying on others, He enjoins on others to respect your privacy too. Indeed one of the most precious blessings Allah has granted us is that He only is the Knower of secrets. He is our Lord and Creator Who covers our secrets out of His Mercy and Bounty. As for people, they are generally wanting in such elevation, so they would only criticize rather than sympathize and expose whatever they know about the private failures of one another rather than keep them private.

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(1) This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha'rawi *Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true. [Reviewer's Note]

Allah wants us to be in a continuous process of useful exchange which cannot be attained except through honourable competition to build civilization and make life more prosperous, seeking by this to please Allah and win His reward: '… Let those who strive, strive for this' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26). Like students in a classroom, we should engage in an honest competition to excel over one another. Competition here is not one based on animosity, envy, hatred or gloating at the misfortunes of others. Quite the reverse, it is based on mutual respect and wishing others success just as one wishes it for himself. This is what Allah urges us to do.

In some instances, one's enemy may be the very person that causes him to keep moving forward. We generally look on enemies as an unmixed source of evil and harm from which no good may be expected. Let us look, however, at Allah's Wisdom in bringing forth that enemy. An enemy can be even more useful than a friend! The latter may flatter you into thinking you have no imperfections to overcome. Your enemy, on the other hand, lies in wait for the slightest mistake or failure on your part to find fault with you or defeat you. He is anxious for your slightest misstep so that he can expose you. Knowing this, one may be well motivated to avoid even slipping not to give his enemy an advantage over him. Also, one would always love to outdo his enemy in doing good, which would push him to be an assiduous seeker of success in this realm. A poet has expressed this meaning in the following superb verses:

My enemies confer on me such a favour!
May Allah always keep them by my side!
They seek my failures and envy my glamour,
So I make my successes ever more bright!

If we consider everything from a positive perspective, we will see the wisdom of Allah behind it. Fruitful competition enriches life, which contains evidence that Allah's guidance is the most upright and suitable way to govern life. Furthermore, to maintain equality and peace, there must be laws that protect the vulnerable from the unmitigated force of the powerful. This is why Allah has prescribed punishment for every crime to preserve the rights of everyone and protect them against the transgression of others. Besides establishing justice through setting clear laws and rulings, Allah leaves the door of clemency open and encourages forgiveness among people. He warns the powerful against transgression, to avoid punishment on one hand, and avoid oppression themselves in case they in turn become the weak party. Power is not inherent in any mortal. It is a gift from Allah that he may remove any time. Everything in this life is temporary; both power and weakness will come to an inevitable end. Remember that Allah protects the weak from your power now and will protect your weakness from the power of others tomorrow. Does all this not bear testimony to the fact that Allah's religion indeed shows the straightest way of life?

Another aspect of perfection in Islam is so obviously seen in the laws it sets for spending. We are cautioned against both extravagance and niggardliness. Love of finery is intrinsic to the natural disposition of humankind. Everyone would like to raise his standard of living and enjoy the elegance of luxury. This is unattainable to one who frivolously squanders his income and saves nothing of it. One has to make balance in his spending to have enough savings to enhance his life by affording luxuries for himself and his family as well as securing its necessities. This wise strategy is expressed in these words of Allah where He praises His truly devout servants: ‘They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance’ (*al-Furqan:* 67). Allah also says: ‘Do not be tight-fisted, nor so open-handed that you end up blamed and overwhelmed with regret’ (*al-Isra’:* 29). Throughout his life, one experiences a medley of unending aspirations. This is especially true in this modern age when life is so rife with temptations. No sooner does one reach a goal than he starts reaching for a greater one. This necessarily requires spending one’s energy as well as resources wisely so he can achieve his goals. Just as Islam forbids extravagance, it also forbids tight-fistedness. A miser is disliked even by his own family and children. Miserliness breeds stagnation and idleness and therefore causes the entire society to decline, for a miser tightly clings to his money and does not employ it in the exchange process by which people’s businesses thrive. Rather, he contributes to recession by abstention from buying. A miser is an inert element of society who, by his behaviour aggravates social ailments, which makes his presence loathsome to everyone.

Extravagance and miserliness are undesirable characteristics and are both equally harmful. The best behaviour is to commit oneself to a middle course. This is the straightest way to which Allah commands us to adhere.

Moderation is not only recommended in spending, but also in the sphere of eating and drinking. Allah illustrates for us the balanced way that preserves health and wellness and protects us from illness. He says: ‘… Eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful’ (*al-A‘raf:* 31). Islam recommends that we eat and drink just as much as is required to build the energy the body needs to function. It cautions against excessiveness in this regard to gain the benefits of food and avoid drawbacks.

Consuming too much food has accumulating side effects that appear as one ages. If one fails at youth to control his eating habits, he must pay for it as he progresses in years. You would find a wealthy master who owns a fancy house and a complete staff of servants, yet he cannot enjoy the foods his poor servants enjoy! Having exceeded reasonable limits when young, he has no choice but to obey his doctor who restricts him to quite limited food choices. True are the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as he said, 'Eat, drink, give to charity and dress (as you like) but without extravagance or showiness.'(1)

Of the guidance of Islam is that it teaches us how to maintain this balance is to eat only when hungry. Doing otherwise would exhaust the stomach and cause damage and sickness. Besides, one finds delight in food when they are hungry. Hunger makes any food delicious, even a dry piece of bread.

Thus, in every respect, Allah's Guidance shows us the straightest way. It is the way that ensures a life of wellbeing and peace and the best disposition of all our affairs. The wisdom and uprightness of this divine guidance shows clearly in every aspect of its creed, rituals, ethics, and laws governing dealings among people. It has set the broad principles for managing life and has left nothing unsettled, as Allah says: '… We have not neglected anything in the Book…' (*al-An'am:* 38). Allah's Guidance contains the most upright way, and how could it be otherwise when it is the way of the Creator Who knows what He has created and knows what is good for them. To Him belongs the Highest Similitude, yet I always like giving this example for further illustration. An inventor is the one who can provide instructions for efficient operation and maintenance of his invention. Following those instructions helps an operator avoid misuse or breakdown. Likewise- even though Allah is above all comparison, He Who has created us knows best what sets our lives straight and makes us prosper. This is why He has sent down to us his commands and prohibitions. 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware' (*al-Mulk:* 14). What brings difficulties and misfortunes on people in this life is that they voluntarily abandon the guidance of Him Who has made them and govern their lives by laws set by fallible mortals like them. These are contrived and limited laws that, in any case, can never match the loftiness and wisdom of the laws set by *the Almighty* Creator. There is no room for comparison between the two. Therefore, life cannot be set straight unless we abide by the Way of Allah.

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(1) *Cited by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (2/181-182), Ibn Majah in his Sunan (3605) and An-Nasa'i in his Sunan (5/79), on the authority of Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As, Allah be pleased with both.*

Allah then says in the same verse: '… It gives the faithful who do right the good news that they will have a great reward' (*al-Isra':* 9). Obedience to the Creator means peace and uprightness in this life. A believing heart derives security from faith in his Almighty, All-Merciful Lord. Furthermore, Allah gives His devout servants good news of a reward far superior to this: deliverance and eternal bliss in the Hereafter. The believers thus reap the fruits of true faith both in the life of this world and in the Hereafter.

Allah has created us and created life, so it is logical that whoever acts upon His guidance enjoys peace and success in life. Allah says: '… When guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve' (*al-Baqara:* 38). He says in another verse: '… Whoever follows My guidance, when it comes to you [people], will not go astray nor fall into misery' (*Ta Ha:* 123). Allah also says: 'To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, We shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions' (*an-Nahl:* 97).

So this is what the believers expect in this life and the Afterlife. On the other hand, Allah says about the disbelievers: 'But whoever turns away from it will have a life of great hardship. We shall bring him blind to the Assembly on the Day of Resurrection and he will say, "Lord, why did You bring me here blind? I was sighted before!" Allah will say, "This is how it is: You ignored Our revelations when they came to you, so today you will be ignored."' (*Ta Ha:* 124-126) Just as Allah rewards His believing servants, both in their life and the one to come, He also makes the disbelievers taste the outcomes of their disobedience in this life before they are given their due recompense in the Afterlife. There is no injustice in the case. Exalted is He above injustice. Rather, this is their fair recompense for treating the signs and revelations of Allah with neglect and derision.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on; Allah says: '… the faithful who do right…' (*al-Isra':* 9). To do *as-salehat* rendered here as (do right) means increasing the good already existing in things or at least retaining the good in them and not corrupting it. So Allah promises those who believe and do good ‘… that they will have a great reward’ (*al-Isra’:* 9). It is worthy of notice that Allah describes their reward as *kabir* (great) and does not use the comparative form *akbar* (greater). The use of *kabir* (great) is more expressive, for it gives the impression that this reward is matchless indeed. If Allah used the word *akbar* (greater) which is used in the case of comparison, this would give the impression that their reward is great, yet there are others who will receive great rewards too, even if less than theirs. This is what the use of the comparative form conveys in Arabic. It denotes a comparison between things all sharing the stated adjective, but with different degrees. On the other hand, the word *kabir* (great) denotes no comparison. It means that all, apart from the thing it describes, is just the opposite: ‘small’, “little,” etc. This precision confirms the grandeur of the reward Allah has prepared for the believers who do right, and such is the eloquence of the language of the Quran.

As we have previously pointed out, *Al-Kabir* (The Great) is one of the Names of Allah. As for *Akbar* (greater), however, it is not among His Names, but only a modifier sometimes associated with His Name to convey particular meanings. As we said, using the comparative form implies that other things are comparable to that modified by the adjective. Undoubtedly, this does not apply to Allah: He is “The Great”; all Greatness belongs to Him and all but Him have no share whatever of greatness.

In the Call to the prayer (*adhan*), we hear the caller announce *Allahu Akbar* which literally translates as: ‘Allah is Greater. However, the meaning intended by this sentence is: observing your duty to Allah by performing the prayer (*salat*) is greater than any worldly gain. Use of the comparative form is meant to imply that some worldly activities can be described as ‘great’ in the sense that they also entail reward in the Hereafter. Still, observing the prayer is greater.

Doing one’s duty to Allah requires physical strength which is derived from possessing the basic needs of life; food, clothing, etc. Thus, even seeking worldly gains, in this sense, meanwhile contributes to the Hereafter. People of understanding therefore intend by whatever they do to draw closer to Allah and their deeds contribute both to the life of this world and the Afterlife. In the Quran, Allah hints at the necessity of worldly activities and their importance in assisting a Muslim along his journey to Allah. He says about the *Jumu'a* (Friday) Prayer: 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading––that is better for you, if only you knew— then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9-10). Allah mentions 'trading' in particular, for it is the kind of business that involves immediate reward. Moreover, it is quite tempting that other kinds of business. A seller just needs an eligible buyer to almost immediately replace his commodity by money. The command to leave off trading implies that other kinds of business are even more worthy of being left off.

So, observing *salat* (prayer) has a greater priority over any worldly activities. Allah calls us to gather in His house (the mosque) to stand before Him, pray to Him and derive spiritual strength that will help us resume our worldly activities with assiduity and sincerity. When the prayer is concluded, we are ordered to return to our activities and seek out provisions. Thus, work is *kabir* (great), yet *salat* (prayer) is *akbar* (greater), hence *Allahu Akbar* in the call to the prayer. Allah says in the following verse:

وَأَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ أَعۡتَدۡنَا لَهُمۡ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا ﴿١٠﴾

Warns that We have prepared an agonizing punishment
for those who do not believe in the world to come [10]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 10)

This verse is an extension of the previous one. Allah says: '… It gives the faithful who do right the good news that they will have a great reward' (*al-Isra':* 9). Then says: 'and warns that We have prepared an agonizing punishment for those who do not believe in the world to come' (*al-Isra':* 10). Here we have one subject 'it'- mentioned in the previous verse- and two verbs: 'give'" in the first verse and 'warns' in the second. The subject 'it' has been repeated in the translation of the second verse only for clarification. In the Arabic text, the verb *bashshir* is used in the first verse yet its meaning extends to include both verses. This verb literally means ‘to give good news of’. The first verse does bear good news of reward for the believers. Still, the second verse gives news of punishment to the disbelievers, so how can this be treated as ‘good news’? Sure punishment is not good news, but Allah announces it using the verb *bashshir* to produce a sarcastic effect. This style is used in other verses of the Quran, like: ‘… *fabashshirhum* (give them [good] news of) grievous suffering’ (*at-Tawba:* 34). Allah also says: ‘Taste this, you powerful, respected man!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) This verse is also sarcastic, for the disbelievers in the Hereafter will be neither powerful nor respected. This is like telling an idle student who has failed his exams, ‘I would like to congratulate you on your failure!’ Or, ‘Let me give you the good news of your failure!’

The use of the verb *bashshir* (give good news of) may be also interpreted in another way. It may be considered in the sense that the news of punishment- even though bad news for the disbelievers- is actually good news to the believers, just as the news of reward for them is too. The news of paradise delights the believers as it gives them knowledge of the Bounty of their Lord they are to expect in the Hereafter. Likewise, the news of punishment to the disbelievers is good news to the believers, for it makes them thankful that they have not fallen prey to the snares of disbelief. Meanwhile, it deters anyone against deviating from the Straight Path, which is also a favour and a mercy from Allah, and hence the good news.

This meaning is also conveyed through the following verse: ‘He is Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two settings. Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet, yet there is a barrier between them they do not cross. Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? Pearls come forth from them: large ones and small, brilliant ones which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? His are the moving ships that float, high as mountains, on the sea. Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 17-25) These verses of the Quran speak about blessings Allah has bestowed on us from His Bounty. It is appropriate, then, that Allah concludes each verse with: ‘which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you deny?’

However, Allah says afterwards in the same chapter: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid. Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) What type of blessing is there to have ‘a flash of fire and smoke be released upon us’? It is a blessing indeed! This verse, when considered with precision, contains one of the most precious blessings Allah has bestowed on us; namely, that He sends punishment to deter the disobedient and meanwhile gratify and appease the obedient.

Allah says in the following verse, speaking about the nature of human conduct:

وَيَدۡعُ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ بِٱلشَّرِّ دُعَآءَهُۥ بِٱلۡخَيۡرِۖ وَكَانَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ عَجُولٗا ١١

Yet man prays for harm, just as he prays for good:
man is ever hasty [11] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 11)

The word *yad’u* (prays) means to beseech one capable of assisting you concerning a matter over which you have no power. Arabic grammarians classify imperative verbs into categories. The first is that of commands. A command is that given by a superior to his subordinate. Every request made by Allah to his creation is a command. The other category is that of requests. These are issued by one to his peers. it is taken to be solicitude or an appeal. Finally, if the request is issued by an inferior to his superior, like that made by a servant to his Lord, this is called *du’a’* (prayers; supplication).

The Arabic language is so keen on using terms that show reverence for Allah *the Exalted*. Thus, if we analyse the verb used in this sentence, for example, ‘Forgive me O my Lord!’ we would say: ‘Forgive’ is a verb which is indicative of supplication. We would not call it ‘imperative’, for this is not showing enough respect for our Lord. No one wields the authority to command Allah.

A command is expressive of power whereas the first and foremost association of the word ‘supplication’ is incapacity and weakness expressed by a servant through his entreat of his Lord. *Du’a’* (supplication) is a proof that conceit that leads to self-deception has been crushed. It is the outcome of a servant’s acknowledgement that he has no power over a particular matter and no one has power over it except Allah, so he turns to him in supplication.

According to the verse, 'man prays for harm, just as he prays for good', which means he is just as anxious to be answered with haste. In a fit of anger, one would pray to Allah against himself, his children, or his wealth. Fury causes one to forget the dictates of good conduct and makes him do things quite alien to his sound nature. They strip one of discretion, so he would hasten to pray for evil to befall people or things that matter most and even entreats Allah to respond to him. It is a mercy from Allah that He does not respond to such prayers that, if indicative of anything, are only indicative of the foolishness of him who utters them. A mother would pray to Allah against her own child. If Allah were to respond to perhaps just one of these prayers, that would be enough to break her own heart. It is out of Allah's Mercy that He causes such prayers, which we utter thoughtlessly and hope to be answered hastily, to be of no effect. Allah says: 'If Allah were to hasten on for people the harm [they have earned] as they wish to hasten on the good, their time would already be up' (*Yunus:* 11). If Allah were to answer their prayers for evil, it would be the cause of their ruin.

There is a point worth reflecting on here. It sure pleases us that Allah lets our foolish prayers for harm go unanswered. We know He does that out of His Absolute Wisdom. Why then do we dislike it that Allah does not respond to some of our prayers for good? Is it not for a reason He knows, too? We need to understand that just as Allah does not respond to our prayers for harm for our own good, He does not respond to some of our wishes also for our own good. Allah's Wisdom dictates that He sometimes prevents you from something you wish for since if it came true, it would turn out to be devoid of any good. Therefore, we should treat Allah's response in both cases based on the same standards. We should be pleased with whatever Allah decrees. We should resign ourselves to His Wisdom when He denies us some of our prayers for good just as we feel thankful to Him when He spares us the outcomes of our prayers for harm. Both are manifestations of His Mercy and Wisdom.

The disbelievers, at the time of Prophet Muhammad, prayed against themselves, as Allah tells us in the Quran: 'Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens' (*al-Anfal:* 32). They also said: 'Make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen' (*al-Isra':* 92).

Had Allah responded to these supplications, He would have completely exterminated the disbelievers. However, He has willed, out of His Wisdom, not to respond to their prayers, so they exist until the present day and will remain until the coming of the Final Hour. It would have been more plausible had they said, ‘O Allah if this really is the truth, then guide our hearts to accept it.’ They did not care about faith, nor were they keen on attaining it. They were consumed by hatred of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his message to the extent of wishing to die- if that message was the truth- instead of believing with him!

Humankind are naturally inclined to haste, as Allah says: ‘Man was created hasty: I will show you My signs soon, so do not ask Me to hasten them’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 37). One would pray heartily for something he believes is good for him. However, much trouble and misery may be lurking behind it. On the other hand, your Lord may send upon you something that, at first glance, would seem a misfortune, yet then appears to be a blessing in disguise. In essence, nobody truly knows where good lies, so resign your affair to your Lord *Glorified is He*. Whenever you pray to Him, let your primary intention to show humility before your Exalted Lord, and whether or not your prayer are answered, be grateful to Him for His favour.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَجَعَلْنَا ٱلَّيْلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ ءَايَتَيْنِ ۖ فَمَحَوْنَآ ءَايَةَ ٱلَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَآ ءَايَةَ ٱلنَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً لِّتَبْتَغُوا۟
فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا۟ عَدَدَ ٱلسِّنِينَ وَٱلْحِسَابَ ۚ وَكُلَّ شَىْءٍ فَصَّلْنَٰهُ تَفْصِيلًا ﴿١٢﴾

We made the night and the day as two signs, then darkened
the night and made the daylight for seeing, for you to seek
your Lord’s bounty and to know how to count the years and
calculate. We have explained everything in detail [12]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 12)

Allah has made time in the form of day and night and has given each a distinct role, so they are complementary, not conflicting. Night is not opposed to day or vice versa. Rather, each is created for a purpose that completes the role of the other.

In several verses of the Quran, Allah likens the creation of the night and day to that of the male and female human beings. Men and women are, likewise, complementary and are not created different to be adversaries. Conflict arises among fanatic members of both sexes who look on difference as a source of conflict. This is the outcome of misunderstanding the nature of the relationship between men and women. Like the night and day, men and women have different roles to perform in life, so they cannot be identical in everything. They are different, not conflicting. Let us ponder these verses: 'By the enshrouding night, by the radiant day, by His creation of male and female' (*al-Layl:* 1-4). Allah mentions the day and night then the male and female to direct our attention to the fact that each pair is complementary. Just as the day and night are equally essential due to their difference, men and women are created different to collaborate, not act as rivals of one another.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on; Allah says: 'We made the night and the day as two signs…' (*al-Isra':* 12). Do we need a definition of the 'night' or 'day'? We witness these two miraculous signs of Allah's creation every day, which makes presenting a scientific definition of these recurrent phenomena here quite needless, if not absurd.

Allah has created the night and day for us and has assigned a special task to each. He once mentions the day first, as in His words: 'Consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark' (*ad-Duha:* 1-2). In another chapter, He begins with the night: 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it rises bright' (*al-Layl:* 1-2). In the following verse, He mentions neither of the two, but speaks instead about the two predominant characteristics of both: '… and brought into being deep darkness as well as light…' (*al-An'am:* 1). Importance of the night consists in its darkness and that of the day in its light. Darkness means tranquillity, stillness, and relaxation, for during the night, the nerves are soothed by the absence of light, and the body renews its energy. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Extinguish lamps when you go to bed.'(1)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari Narrated in his Sahih (3280), on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah, that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said "When it is evening, stop your children from going out, for the devils spread out during that time. When an hour of the night has passed, release them. Fasten your doors while mentioning Allah's Name.* =

Many people see the dazzling lights that characterize modern nights a manifestation of a mature civilization, even though Allah has made darkness of the night a blessing for His servants to rest. Light is for movement and action. Whoever rests at night rises the next morning reinvigorated, ready to resume his work. Every undertaking one performs requires energy. Therefore, the body requires an adequate amount of rest to be able to resume their task the following day. Therefore, Allah says: 'In His mercy He has given you night and day…' (*al-Qasas:* 73), but why? '… So that you may rest…' (*al-Qasas:* 73) during the night, and 'seek His bounty' (*al-Qasas:* 73) during the day.

We all know that some jobs need to be done at night, like works related to security and surveillance, which means the night is not always for rest and sleep, so we find that Allah also says: 'Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day…' (*ar-Rum:* 23). Allah, who knows us best, knows that some of us may need to stay up during the night, for certain jobs require this, and sleep during the day. However, this does not make it a rule, but it is only an exception of the rule that the night is for rest and the day is for activity. Whoever deliberately contradicts this rule without having the need to do will get his own body to rebel against him. Out of His Mercy, Allah has created in the human body several mechanisms for our protection. When one exposes himself to the strain of overwork his body organs react to save him. For example, if one runs too fast, his respiratory system alerts him to the lack of air, so he becomes short of breath. His muscles alert him through pain to the lack of blood in them. Signs of fatigue generally send one the message that his body is unable to bear that level of physical exertion. This is what happens when one is going up the stairs, for example. Force of the gravity counters the weight of the body, which requires more energy to be expended while climbing the stairs. This means that more blood needs to be pumped throughout the body and a higher breathing rate is needed.

Allah has made fatigue and the subsequent inclination towards rest a natural checking mechanism that works within the human being when he exceeds the limit in physical effort.

= *Extinguish your lamps while mentioning Allah's Name. Cover your water vessels while mentioning Allah's Name, and cover your food containers while mentioning Allah's Name. If anything occurs (while you are asleep), this will be protection to you.'*

Another mechanism is sleep. When one overburdens his body with too much effort, ignoring its need for rest, the irresistible sleep mechanism Allah has created in us does its job. One does not choose to fall asleep, but is forced to do when his body needs it. It is almost as though his natural disposition were saying to him, ‘Rest, or else you will not be fit to resume work.’ Thus, Allah does not leave the human being to his own desires, but protects him from his exaggeration by endowing his body with such powers. This explains why one’s body would rebel against him after, for example, two days without sleep. On the third day, your exhausted body must inevitably tyrannize over you and force you to sleep almost double your usual hours to make up for that exertion.

Back to the verse we are dealing with, Allah says: ‘We made the night and the day as two *ayat* (signs)…’ (*al-Isra’:* 12). We have previously pointed out that *aya* (the singular form of *ayat*) means something remarkable that spells the Might and Majesty of the Creator and which He, therefore, commands us to reflect on. To elaborate, the word *aya* (sign) is used to refer to three things.

First, it means a wonder of the creation. The various blessings Allah has created in the universe and made in the service of human beings, both the believers and the disbelievers, like those mentioned in the following verses, for example: ‘And from among His *ayat* (signs) are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon…’ (*Fussilat:* 37). Allah also says: ‘And among His *ayat* (signs) are the ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas’ (*ash-Shura:* 32). Such *ayat* (signs) call our attention to the Might of the Creator *the Exalted*.

Second, the word *ayat* is also used to refer to the miracles Allah has given to the Messengers to serve as proofs of their truthfulness. Their purpose was to convince people that those Messengers were truly sent by Allah to deliver His Message. The *aya* (miracle) that was given to each of Allah’s Messengers was necessarily in the area where his people excelled. That was to defy them, for even though the miracle was always in the field of excellence of the people it was sent to, they were never capable of matching, let alone surpassing, it. Allah says: ‘… Nothing prevents Us from sending *ayat* (miraculous signs) except the fact that previous peoples denied them…’ (*al-Isra’:* 59).

Third, the word *ayat* is also used to refer to the verses of the Glorious Quran. They are the words of Allah that convey His ordinance and guide humankind to the best way of life.

As it appears through examining all the three meanings of the word, *ayat* denotes something magnificent and therefore worthy of reflecting on. The unending signs of the wondrous universe, the miracle that were given to Allah's Messengers, and the verses of the Quran are all characterized by unique grandeur and precision. Thus, when Allah says: 'We made the night and the day as two *ayat*…' (*al-Isra':* 12), He means two 'signs of the universe' which meanwhile offer tangible interpretations of the *ayat* (verses) of the Quran.

In the verse, Allah says: '… then [We] *mahawna* the night…' (*al-Isra':* 12). The Arabic verb *mahawna* denotes (efface) or (remove). Here it refers to the fact that Allah removes light by making the sun set for darkness to take its place. The word may also be intended to refer to the nature of the night, not the wiping out of daylight. This is like saying, 'Glory is to Him who has made milk white,' so this does not mean that milk had another colour which Allah has turned white! Likewise, *mahawna* may also be intended to mean 'We have created the night dark, without allusion to the nature of the day.

Allah then says: '… and [We] made the daylight *mubsira*…' (*al-Isra':* 12). The word *mubsira* literally denotes (capable of seeing). Is the daylight really capable of seeing? Does it possess eyesight? The meaning intended here is that the light enables us to see, for it makes things visible to us. In this sense, the word *mubsera* is used to describe the miracles Allah has given to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '… But when our *mubsira* signs came to them…' (*an-Naml:* 13). Here the word *mubsera* is used to describe the signs. Still, it does not mean the signs themselves have the ability to see, but it enables others to see [the truth] by providing evidence for it.

Another deeper meaning may be also inferred from the usage of this word. At one time, scientists believed that we are able to see things since rays from our eyes fall on them. This was held as a fact until the Muslim scientist Ibn Al-Haytham proved it wrong. He pointed out that if things became visible due to rays falling on them from our eyes, we would be able to see objects in the dark so long as we are in the light. It follows then that rays do not emanate from the eyes. Rather, they are reflected off the object at which the eyes look. This explains why we are able to see things only when they are in the light.

They are objects that allow the eyes to see. Accordingly, describing daylight as *mubsira* (literally: "able to see") may be an allusion to the aforementioned scientific fact, and this represents the height of the unsurpassed verbal precision of the Quran. True are the words of Allah: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (*Fussilat:* 53).

So Allah has created day and night: '… for you to seek your Lord's bounty…' (*al-Isra':* 12). This is the first reason mentioned in the verse, and we understand that it refers to the day. As we have stated earlier, the day is for work and seeking livelihood. Allah says in another verse: 'In His mercy He has given you night and day, so that you may rest and seek His bounty…' (*al-Qasas:* 73). Logically, '… so that you may rest…' is mention in reference to the night, and '… seek His bounty…' refers to the day.

Work means a process of interaction between a person and the material world around him, like a farmer working with his land and resources or a craftsman with his tools. The day is the best time for this purposeful interaction, for darkness enshrouds objects and obscures them. This also makes the night the best time for sleep and relaxation. Both the day and night are creatures of Allah that have a purpose and a role to fulfil. Allah has '… made darkness and light…' (*al-An'am:* 1). The world and all that is in it shows clearly in the light of the day, which enables us to disperse through the land for activity and struggle. For one to afford this exertion, he must take his share of rest, hence the wisdom behind creating the night.

Another reason why Allah has created time in the form of the day and night is for us '… to know how to count the years and calculate…' (*al-Isra':* 12). Passage of the day and night are the means by which we measure time. For anything to be counted, it has to be made up of units. Were it not for the recurrence of the day and night, all time would be a single unit unable to be divided into days, months, and years.

Counting days and years is absolutely necessary in order for us to carry out our worldly activities. In farming, for example, rainy or windy seasons are determined by the calculation of time. Determination of time is also indispensable for performing acts of worship. The time of *Hajj* (Islamic Pilgrimage), *Ramadan* (the month of mandatory fasting), the times of the Five Daily Prayers, the *Jumu'a* (Friday Congregational Prayer), etc. have specific times when they have to be observed. Knowledge of these times would be impossible were it not for the passage of day and night.

Allah *the Exalted* has created a magnificent, unerring system where the moon appears at night and the sun appears during the day. Each has a determined role in the calculation of days, months, and years. Rising of the sun marks the beginning of a new day and its setting heralds the end. As for the moon, its stages of development determine months (lunar months). When it is a crescent, it marks the beginning of the month. Afterwards, it grows larger until it is a full moon then starts to decline again until it reaches its waning stage at the end of the month. Thus, the sun serves a necessary purpose in determining days, and the moon in determining months. The night the crescent appears is the first night of the new lunar month. This is why we start practicing the rituals of *Ramadan* the very night when the crescent appears; we do not wait the following day to come. True are the words of Allah who says: 'It is He Who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light, determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time…' (*Yunus:* 5). Thus, the different phases of the moon constitute the means by which we determine the beginning of each lunar month. This is the most precise system for calculating time on which astronomers, oceanographers and others still rely until today.

One cannot know the time if the hands of his clock go too fast or too slow. As well life would be a state of exemplary chaos if we were not able to calculate time. Allah has created the sun and the moon and makes them run according to a precise system that is never altered. None of the two can ever deviate from its orbit. Allah says about His magnificent creation: 'The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses' (*ar-Rahman:* 5). This is an inalterable system Allah has made for us to rely on to determine time. Allah concludes the verse by saying: '… We have explained everything in detail' (*al-Isra':* 12). The Arabic word *tafsila* here translated as (in detail) is derived from the stem *fasl* that denotes separating two things so they are seen distinctly from one another. Thus, *fasl* is done for the sake of clarity. In the Quran, Allah explains everything related to faith and life in such a precise and clear way that it is almost as if every news told in it were separated from the other so it stands firm and clear, devoid of any ambiguity.

Examples of this unique clarity and precision are numerous in the Quran, so I choose that about ritual cleansing (in preparation for the prayers), even though it is quite irrelevant to the subject matter of the verse we are reflecting on. Allah Almighty says: 'You who believe, when you are about to pray, washing your faces and your hands up to the elbows…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). The word 'face' is used without any modification, for no one dIsagrees about the meaning of this word and the part of the body it is used to refer to. As for the 'hand' it may refer to the part until the wrist, the elbow, or the shoulder. This is why Allah specifies the part of the hand that should be washed in ritual ablution (*wudu'*): '… your hands up to the elbows…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). Allah then says in the same verse: '… wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). The appropriate action for the head is 'wiping' as opposed to washing. The word *rijl* here translated as (feet) may be used to refer to any part of the leg. This is why Allah specifies the very part of it concerned with ritual ablution, so He says: '…Feet up to the ankles…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). In the total absence of water, or if it is difficult or unaffordable to obtain, Allah permits us to resort to dry ritual cleansing (*tayyamum*), as He says: '… and if you cannot find any water, then find some clean *sa'id* (dust, earth, soil or sand) and wipe your faces and hands with it…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) This dry ritual cleansing is valid in case of inability to observe ritual cleansing with water. This poses a question: Can wiping the face and hands with dust be in any way a form of 'cleaning'? No, in fact even ritual cleansing with water (*wudu'*) is not really meant for maintaining hygiene, for even if the body is already clean, one must observe this ritual before *salat* (the prayer). Otherwise, it would be fine to observe ritual cleansing with perfumes, as some might suggest! The reason why we are observing ritual cleansing is actually to brace ourselves to enter into the state of solemnity associated with *salat*. We do this only in obedience to the One Who commands it to show submission to Him as we are about to stand before Him in the Prayer. This understanding is what made ‘Ali Zayn Al-Abedin *Allah be pleased with him* turn pale whenever he was observing ritual cleansing. When asked about that, he said, ‘Do you know Who I am preparing to stand before right now?!’ He turned pale with awe of Allah before Whom he was about to stand in the Prayer. *Salat* cannot be treated as a habit or an ordinary occurrence. It is the solemn event of standing before our Lord and Creator, so a believer must prepare for it in the manner Allah has enjoined on him.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَكُلَّ إِنسَٰنٍ أَلْزَمْنَٰهُ طَٰٓئِرَهُۥ فِى عُنُقِهِۦ ۖ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُۥ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ كِتَٰبًا يَلْقَىٰهُ مَنشُورًا ﴿١٣﴾

We have bound each human being’s destiny to his neck.
On the Day of Resurrection, We shall bring out a record for
each of them, which they will find spread wide open [13]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 13)

The word *Ta’irah* (one's destiny depending on their conduct) means one's conduct and deeds. It originally goes back to the superstitious tradition of prediction the Arab, via flying birds. That is to say, when one of them wished to take some action, he would collect a bird and release it. If that bird passed from left to right they called it *‘Sanih*(1). This would be a cause of optimism among them.

If, on the other hand, it flew from the right to the left, they would call it *Barih*, being a sign of pessimism among them. Thus, they accuse the bird of causing the negative outcome and attribute the action to it, despite the fact that the bird was absolutely innocent and blameless.

Then, they took the right direction as a good omen and the left as a bad one. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loved optimism(2) and disliked pessimism. This is because optimism invigorates the body systems and prepares them for movement. But, pessimism leads to stagnation, retreat and destroys movement and interaction in the world.

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(1) Sanih: something which comes to you on your right hand side; such as a gazelle, bird or anything else. Barih: something which comes to you on your left hand side. [Lissan Al-‘Arab, component: س ن ح]

(2) *On the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him, the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him said, ‘I am pleased by a positive outlook. The positive outlook is expressed by a good word.’ Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/118, 153) and Abu Ash-Sheik Al-Asbhani in a work entitled Akhlaq An-Nabi (Hadith # 794)*

At this point, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states: Do not attribute to a bird or accuse it of what it has nothing to do with. Rather; your 'omen' is your actions, to which you are inextricably bound; they remain with you and don not depart from you. No one else will be accountable for your actions just as you will not for theirs. Allah *Glorified is He* has said in another verse: '…and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden…' (*al-Isra':* 15). Therefore, do not cast the responsibility for your actions onto a blameless animal.

For the other part of this verse, saying: '…and on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring forth for him a record which he will find wide open' (*al-Isra':* 13).

That is the book in which man's actions are recorded by the angels recording our actions, and about which Allah has said: 'And the record [of everyone's deeds] will be laid open; and you will behold the guilty filled with dread at what [they see] therein; and they will exclaim: "Oh, woe unto us! What a record is this! It leaves out nothing, be it small or great, but takes everything into account!" For they will find all that they ever wrought [now] facing them, and [will know that] your Lord does not wrong anyone.' (*al-Kahf:* 49) This book will be received outspread on the Day of Judgment. That is to say: opened and prepared to be read. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

ٱقۡرَأۡ كِتَٰبَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفۡسِكَ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ عَلَيۡكَ حَسِيبٗا ١٤

Read your record. Today your own soul is enough to calculate your account [14] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 14)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* depicts a scene from the Day of Judgment; when each human being will stand before his Lord *Glorified is He* and will be called to read their own book in order to bear witness to themselves(1). They will confess to all that they have committed. Confession is the best evidence. This is a situation where there is no chance for intransigence, argumentation, or rejection. If someone challenges these records, Allah will make their organs bear the witness against their lies by giving their organs the ability to tell the truth.

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(1) *Some of the virtuous have mentioned that this book is inscribed by your tongue (as if it were a pen), your saliva serves as its ink, and your organs are its pages. You stand and dictate it to the Angels recording your deeds. It contains no additions or deletions. If any of its contents are rejected by you, the witness will be part of yourself (the body part used to commit the sin) against yourself. (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 5/3958)*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'on the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did!' (*an-Nur:* 24] He also says: 'And they will ask their skins, “Why did you bear witness against us?”- [and] these will reply: “Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]…' (*Fussilat:* 21].

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given the human beings control over some of their body organs in the life of this world, making these organs submissive to their command; they do not disobey him whether they are commanded to do good or iniquity. For example, hands can be used to commit acts of violence and aggression, but also can give charity and support to relief the burden of the indigent. Legs can be used to go to either a mosque or a bar or other places of immoral practices. In all of these cases, body organs are obedient and submissive to us; they do not disobey us, even if they do not like some of our actions. The fact that they carry out your orders is not evidence that they are pleased with you. This compliance may be lacking contentment in part of it.

For example, a brigade commander's order is quickly effectuated by his troops even if there is something wrong with it. Nonetheless, when they come under review of the supreme commander, these troops disclose everything about the decisions of the inferior commander. This is also the case in the life of this world; Allah has given man control over his limbs, which are never slow in executing his command. However, when executing that command, limb may be resentful or even malevolently cursing the doer. But, on the Day of Judgment, limbs will be released from man's control and then will testify to his deeds. '…Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!' (*al-Isra':* 14) That is to say: It is definitely fair enough, from our part to provide you with a witness from yourself.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

مَّنِ ٱهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِى لِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَن ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۚ وَلَا
تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۗ وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾

Whoever accepts guidance does so for his own good; whoever strays does so at his own peril. No soul will bear another’s burden, nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger [15] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 15)

His saying: 'Whoever chooses to follow the right path, follows it but for his own good' (*al-Isra’:* 15). This should be accounted to the fact that no benefit devolves upon the True Lord *Glorified is He* as a result of obedience, as much as disobedience does not pose Him any harm. Hence, He has no need for His creatures. With His attributes of perfection, Allah has granted man, whom He made his vicegerent in the earth, guidance. As well, He has prepared these worldly life components, such as the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the air, mountain ranges, water, etc. even before creating man.

Thus, the attributes of perfection are established for Him *Glorified is He* before He brought all creatures into existence. That is their obedience does not increase Him in anything and their disobedience does not harm Him at all.

At this point, perhaps someone might ask, ‘How do you explain the duties human beings have been assigned?’ We respond by stating: Indeed, the duties which are issued by Allah to His creatures are for their favour and benefit, for their life to continue in harmony not in contradiction. For this reason, the Creator *Glorified is He* has made a system for us to follow. The implementation of this system is mandatory because it is from Allah, The Creator, who intimately knows both His creatures and the things that keep their life correct and in sound order. If it were a man-made system, you could have the option to reject it. As for the Way of Allah, departing from it cannot be countenanced by any means.

A common saying among the countrymen is, ‘a finger cut observing the rules of Allah, causes you no pain.’ That is to say if the religious law has established a rule, it must be followed without objection. On the other hand, if it were a human legislation, the world would rise to halt it from being carried out and not sit idly by.

A sign of Allah's perfection and His self-sufficiency is that He patiently forbears all prejudice, false accusations, and omission committed by His creatures against Him and against one another. That is because He *Glorified is He* manages things wisely and precisely according to how significant each matter happens to be. No matter is decided on earth until it is first decided upon in the heavens. If you asked someone to do you a favour, but they did not care about, refused to do it, or they might have made an earnest effort but in vain and then you become angry and enraged. In such a situation, the Creator *Glorified is He* tolerates His creatures' omission and relieves them from difficulty. Furthermore, he teaches them that their needs are fulfilled according to His determination and allotment; so, they should not blame each other if things are not going as desired. Each thing has a certain point of occurrence. No need to be hasty. It would be better to seek relief from Allah first.

Thus, Islam teaches us that, before we promise doing something for someone, we should first say, 'If Allah wills'; that is to protect ourselves from getting into trouble and being accused of lying, in case we are incapable of fulfilling promise. This way, we make our capability of implementation conditional on Allah's Will, if we managed the issue, thank Allah, if not, we are not to blame.

Accordingly, the legislation of Allah aims to protect people from one another. It serves eradicating causes of animosity between people when they fail in satisfying their needs. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is proclaiming to you: Relax, things have their pre-planned times, so do not oppress people. When your need is satisfied, you should note that it is Allah who fulfilled it for you, and the person you seek support from is a mere means to achieve the task in this worldly life.

The matter becomes even clearer within the realm of medicine and treatment of disease. A physician is the means that Allah decided to bless mankind with in order to attain cures. When Allah grants success to a physician, their intervention coincides with Allah's will that a cure be found or developed.

Doctors who are convinced with this reality confirm it in their saying, 'We are merely from among the lucky ones.' That is they are lucky by treating the most likely cases to be cured. The poet has spoken truthfully in his words:

Doctors, indeed the people do berate
But the doctors' mistakes are just the strokes of fate

The part of the noble verse, saying: 'Whoever chooses to follow the right path follows it but for his own good…' (*al-Isra':* 15) means that they are making favour for themselves, not for Him *Glorified is He*.

Following the right path (*al-ihtida'*) is to be consistently devoted to the way of Allah. The benefit of your devotion devolves upon you, as much as the benefit of the devotion of others (to the way of Allah) also devolves upon you. In all cases, you are benefitting from this way. For this reason, whenever you see someone following Allah's way, you should praise Allah and be pleased with their uprightness. By no means should you behave sarcastically toward or make fun of him because his uprightness is a source of welfare that returns to you, leading a good life.

On the other hand, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…and whoever goes astray goes but astray to his own hurt…' (*al-Isra':* 15). That is to say: the end result of his deviance from the way of Allah returns to him. That is because a person's evil, as expressed in his failure to abide by the way of Allah, negatively affects you and everyone else in his direct vicinity. Both the deviant and their community suffer the calamity of their evil. Strangely enough we see some imbeciles looking upon a deviant or someone with bad manners with disgust and hatred. Rather, they make things even worse when cursing them. This deviant person is in need of someone to pray to Allah for their guidance. First and foremost so that community may be relieved of his evil, and, secondly, to enjoy the felicity of his guidance. On the contrary, cursing them will encourage them to increase in evil and consequently increasing community suffering.

From this starting point, Islam teaches us that whoever possesses useful knowledge should pass it onto others. For whenever useful knowledge is circulated among people, they all would benefit from it. Islamic teachings prohibit concealment of knowledge because concealment harms not only the individual but also the community at large.

The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* has said: 'Whoever conceals knowledge will be bridled by Allah with reins of fire on the Day of Judgment.'(1)

Another aspect of perfection, that the Divine System encourages us to embody, is that every professional should master their profession and every artisan should perfect their work. Indeed, a human being can often master one pursuit in his lifetime but his demands are numerous and varied. For instance, a tailor may not master but only his or her specific work, while they are, no doubt, in need of many other services and specialties: the physician, the educator, the engineer, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the farmer etc. When they do their work precisely, Allah will provide them with those who will satisfy their needs perfectly; no matter if the latter is wishing so or not.

Therefore, being excellent yourself ensures the others being excellent. If you perform your work with excellence; essentially, you are benefiting even if the people around you are mean and good-for-nothing. In time, Allah will ease the way toward securing your needs from them; perhaps in ways they neither want nor are able to sense.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden…' (*al-Isra':* 15) means: None will be required to carry the sin of others, nor will anyone be taken to account for the felonious deeds of others. And so the phrase: '…bearer of burdens…' (*al-Isra':* 15) is derived from the Arabic word (*Wizr)* which is a heavy load. In fact, the word (*Wazir*) or minister is a derivative of this word because holder of this position carries weighty burdens on behalf of the president, king, or emir he represents.

The justice of Allah necessitates that a human being be accountable for their own actions and everyone be questioned about their own account. As a result, none can foist his action upon another, as Allah *Glorified is He* states in his noble book: '…no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child will in the least avail his parent…' (*Luqman:* 33).

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Hibban (Mawarid Az-zam'an—96), Hakim in his Mustadrak (1/102), he said: The chain of narrators is sound, it is a tradition that was related by the Egyptians, it meets the criteria of the Two Imams and contains no hidden defect. Imam Dhahabi concurred with his findings.*

This has been a contentious issue, attracting a great deal of attention among the orientalists; those who probe the Quran for defects. They pause at this verse: '…and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another’s burden…' (*al-Isra’:* 15). They asked, how they could reconcile this verse with the other verse, saying: 'Yet most certainly will they have to bear their own burdens, and other burdens besides their own…' (*al-’Ankabut:* 13). And the third, saying: 'Hence, on Resurrection Day they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray: oh, how evil the load with which they shall be burdened!' (*an-Nahl:* 25)

We respond by saying: The reconciliation between the first verse and the two other verses is simple if they understand the difference between *wizr* (sin) in the first verse, and *wizr* (sin) in the last two verses. In the former, *wizr* is a personal burden clinging to single individual and not affecting others. In which case, because the individual chose misguidance, they must shoulder the burden of their own misguidance. However, in the latter, the individual is a source of misguidance. That is they lead others to corruption and deviance. Therefore, that specific individual must bear responsibility for his own sin and for sins of those whom they misguided.

This issue is further clarified for us, by a Noble Prophetic Hadith which reads: 'Whoever initiates a good practice in Islam will have his reward and a reward for all those who take up the practice after him; without reducing their rewards in the least. Conversely, whoever initiates an evil practice in Islam will carry his burden and the burden of all those who follow his example after him; without reducing their burden in the least.'(1)

As for the part of the verse saying: '...Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We have sent an apostle [to them]' (*al-Isra’:* 15).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1017) from the tradition of Jarir ibn ‘Abdullah Al-Bajli.*

Al-'Adhab (Chastisement, torture) refers to punishment for non-observance. However, before you punish me for committing it, you must instruct me that such is a non-observance, a crime; an affair which disrupts the harmony of the community. There is no crime in the absence of a definitive legal pronouncement which outlines the criminal behaviour and stipulates its punishment. Then afterward, such criminal law enactment must be circulated in the official press, so that people can learn of it. By this means, evidence is established against perpetrator and they are exposed to punishment. For this reason, even within positive law, we say: There is no punishment without a criminal charge; no criminal charge without a definitive legal pronouncement and even with the pronouncement secured it must be publicized.

As these precepts become clear within peoples' minds, the term punishment is given concrete meaning. Again, evidence is established against those who fail to comply with the law. On the contrary, punishing a perpetrator who is ignorant of their crime punishment, gives them the right to challenge the same on the basis of the logic presented within this verse.

But if behaviour is first criminalized and then released in the official press, there can be no recourse to excuse by ignorance afterward. Indeed, ignorance after publicity does not absolve from punishment. It is as though Allah's statement: '...Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We have sent an apostle [to them]' (*al-Isra':* 15) joins all of the previous precepts: crime, punishment, definitive legal pronouncement and notification. In view of that, Allah has sent His Messenger Muhammad (*peace and blessing be upon him*) to teach the people the way of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to clarify for them what the divine law has proscribed as well as the punishments attendant to those crimes. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '… for there never was any community but a warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst.' (*Fatir:* 24)

He also states: 'O followers of the Bible! Now, after a long time during which no apostles have appeared, there has come unto you [this] Our Apostles to make [the truth] clear to you, lest you say, "No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us, nor any warner…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19). That is, the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* leaves you no pretext of ignorance.

In this regard, some scholars raised the issue that, ‘If this evidence is established against those who believes in the message of the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* what then is to be said of the disbeliever, who neither believes nor knows anything about the Way of Allah?’ It is as though they are seeking a pardon for their disbelief. We respond by stating: First, man knows His Lord *Glorified is He* through the use of his intellectual faculties. Here, we are referring to that faithful criterion which the Creator *Glorified is He* has endowed to man and it is called in Arabic, *Fitra* or instinct. This *Fitra* is responsible for guiding to a belief in an irresistible force behind existence; even if it had not been for a messenger. Examples are so many. Imagine that you have become distanced from all exit paths in a vast expansive desert. You do not find any remnants of life within it and you are overtaken by sleep, so you sleep. When you arise from your slumber you are surprised to find that a table containing the choicest food and drink has been erected for you. By Allah, would you not contemplate the affair before extending your hand to the table? Would your attention not be turned; your curiosity sparked, as to who brought it to you? In this manner, the human being with his mind and his instinct must be guided to the conclusion that existence has an intelligent creator. It is not possible that this wondrous most perfected of systems is simply the outcome of coincidence. Did Adam know his Lord with anything besides these tools which Allah has created within us? Undeniably, we came into being and found a world amenable to adaptation and possibility. We found before our eyes many signs which indicate the presence of the Creator *Glorified is He*. Each is a thread, that if followed would deliver you. Take for instance, the sun which, despite its distance, illuminates the universe, rising in the morning and setting in the evening without delay for a day or even a moment from its destination. Would that creational sign not attract your attention?

Previously, we cited the example of Edison, the inventor of the electric lamp. In view of all the tools, components, and capital required to create electric lighting, he must have offered the project great consideration and study, taking into account the potential failures and risks. What, then, do you think about the ‘divine lighting lamp’, which does not require effort, money, maintenance, or replacement?

Take also the example of the primitive Arab person who knows nothing but the desert; when he saw the droppings of a camel and its footprints, he would use those impressions to figure out who had made them. In the primordial simplicity of the Bedouin, he says, ‘Camel droppings indicate the existence of a camel and the footprints are an indication of travelling. Then, the sky with its constellations, the earth with roads made between mountains, the stars that are glowing, and the seas that are filled with water and various types of creatures; do not all of these indicate the presence of the Subtle and the All-Aware Creator?

So, with the natural disposition which Allah has placed inside the human being, man is prepared to be guided aright and arrive at the conclusion that the universe must have a creator. Even if it is not known who He is exactly, it is known that a hidden power is there.

When a messenger is sent, by Allah, to help approaching such power, instructing man about the True Lord, the Creator, and that the unseen power, that has confounded you, is Allah, the Creator who created you and the whole world including everything whatsoever.

He *Glorified is He* is One and without partner. He, Himself, has testified that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Him.(1) No one proclaims otherwise, nor does anyone claim that there is a deity with Allah. With that, this claim to deity is solely reserved for Him *Glorified is He* because every claimant is awarded that which he claims if there is no one present to oppose their assertion.

It is this natural inclination to faith in the human being which is meant by Allah's saying: 'And whenever your Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: “Am I not your Lord?” –to which they answer: “Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!...' (*al-A‘raf:* 172)

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah [Himself] proffers evidence—and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge—that there is no deity save Him, the Upholder of Equity: there is no deity save Him *the Almighty* the Truly wise' (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

This is the Divine Covenant which Allah enacted for His creation while they were in the particle phase, in the sense that they were all contained within Adam *peace be upon him*. All the various lineages return to Adam. All human beings that were created from the very start of human life and that will be created till the end of this world, each has, in its being, a particle from Adam. This particle belonging to or forming the beginning of each individual had attested or witnessed that covenant, affirming that there is no deity except Allah. Indeed, this testimony has been completely absorbed by the innate disposition of every human being. Therefore, we call it 'the believing incline'.

Accordingly, we say to the disbeliever, who neglects their innate disposition, which invites them to faith and to the realization of Allah: How do you feel hunger and seek food? How do you feel thirst and seek water? Have you seen hunger, or touched it, or even smelled it? It is known through your instincts which Allah has placed within you. Why do you use your instincts in one respect and then neglect to use them in another?

It is really amazing how a thinking human being can turn away from His Lord and Creator while the entire created order, with every atom of it, inside of which he is situated, is celebrating the praises of their Lord. In fact, the individual molecules that make up the believer and the disbeliever alike are celebrating the praises of their Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '…and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! …' (*al-Isra':* 44). O Custodian of the created order! How do you insolently neglect Allah, while the very molecules that comprise your body are celebrating His praises? Indeed, the molecules that make up the physical constitution of the believer are in harmony with the person themselves; there is accord and consistency between them in believing in and paying praise to their Lord. Fittingly, you observe the believer at peace with himself and the material world around him as a result of a unity of faith that exists among the particles that make up his body and his will. This harmony that exists among the will of the human being, his organs, and the atoms that make up his body, appears in the phenomenon of sleep. The atoms and organs of the believer are pleased with him, love remaining with him, and do not wish to separate from him. This is because his will is in submissive obedience to Allah. As such, you observe that the believer does not sleep much; his eyes might shutter a few brief moments throughout the night or during the day and that suffices him. This is due to his organs being in harmony with his will. In respect to these people, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'they would lie asleep during but a small part of the night' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17).

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is a human being who is normally overcome by sleep, but they were his eyes, not his heart(1), that were overcome by sleep, because he was in complete harmony with his will.

In this case, the human being rather resembles an unsociable and ill-mannered slave-owner possessing numerous slaves who all suffer from the maltreatment of their master; they are all longing for the opportunity to dissociate from him and flee his evil actions. This is the case of the disbeliever; their body molecules believe in their creator, but they (the disbeliever’s consciousness) disbelieve. There is no consistency or harmony between their spiritual will and physical structure. Their restlessness is very visible because there is no harmony between their body molecules and their incorporeal will. Indeed, their body organs hate the very person, curse them, and wish to part away from.

If it were not for the fact that the Creator *Glorified is He* has made one's body organs subservient to them, these organs would not obey them. They eagerly anticipate the Day of Judgment when they can separate from the disbeliever's will and be released from their prison; they will speak lucidly and give evidence of all of the acts of unfaithfulness and denial committed by the disbeliever in the life of this world. For this reason, it may be noted that the disbeliever sleep excessively. It is as if the organs of their body seek relief from their evil.

You must be cognizant of the fact that praise paid by the molecules of the human body and the universe to the Creator *Glorified is He* is beyond human perception. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '…but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him! …' (*al-Isra’:* 44)

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(1) *On the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him who said ‘The Prophet’s eyes would sleep but not his heart’.Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Musatdrak (2/431). He said concerning it, ‘It meets the criteria of Muslim, but he chose not to narrate it.’ Muslim did narrate a Hadith on ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her (738) which reads: ‘O ‘Aisha my eyes slumber but not my heart.’*

So, none is able to grasp or comprehend this kind of praise, save the ones granted the ability by Allah to do so, such as Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* as explained in the verse: '… And We caused the mountains to join Dawud in extolling Our limitless glory, and likewise the birds: for We are able to do [all things].' (*al-Anbiya':* 79)

Perhaps someone might ask here, where is the distinction, while the mountains and the birds already pay praise to Allah *Glorified is He* without Dawud *peace be upon him*? The distinction here is for Dawud. Allah allowed him to hear the praise of the mountains and the praise of the birds. He made them share with Dawud in his praise, as if it was a chorus chanting praise in a symphony for Allah. Did the True Lord not say in another verse: '…O you mountains! Sing with him the praise of Allah! And [likewise] you birds!...' (*Saba':* 10) In other words, repeat and return the praises with him.

Allah *Glorified is He* also granted this distinction to His Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* whom He granted the ability to understand the dialect of the birds and ants, that is to say, their method of communication. Thus, he was able to hear an ant, while it conversed with its comrades.(1) He understood its request. This is a favour from Allah which He grants to whomever He chooses from among mankind. This is why when Sulaiman *peace be upon him* understood the language of the ants and understood its request for warning, he smiled and laughingly remarked: '…O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of yours with which you have graced me and my parents…' (*an-Naml:* 19). Therefore, every creature from among Allah's creatures has a language and a dialect. However, none understands or comprehends them except those who Allah has enabled to acquire that knowledge and understanding.

When discoursing about this issue, we find some authors of the Prophetic biography, for instance, stating that pebbles glorified Allah in the hand of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We say to them: your wording is imprecise because the pebble celebrates the praises of Allah in the hand of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just as it celebrates the praises of Allah in the hand of Abu Jahl. Nonetheless, the mark of distinction was located in that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to hear the praises of the pebble in his hand. That was one of his miracles.

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(1) Indeed, this occurred when Sulaiman *peace be upon him* came upon the valley of the ants, he and his army, which was comprised of human beings, jinn, and birds. The ant said: '…O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]' (*an-Naml:* 18).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to turn our attention to one of the realities of creation. Namely, you have a particular life experience, similarly, you should recognize that other creatures also possess their own lives as evidenced by the statement of the True Lord: '…Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self…' (*al-Qasas:* 88). That is to say that every entity that is encompassed by the word ‘thing’, no matter how minute, will perish. The word *halak* (perishing) is the opposite of life; Allah *Glorified is He* has said: '… that he who would perish might perish in clear of evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth…' (*al-Anfal:* 42); this indicates that every being has their own life style.

Returning to the True Lord’s statement: '…Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] before We have sent an apostle [to them]' (*al-Isra’:* 15).

If a human being is guided to the existence of Allah by their natural disposition of faith, who will assume the responsibility of teaching them the teachings and orders of Allah? Therefore, the role of a messenger, who speaks on behalf of Allah, is indispensable, reminding the heedless conscience about the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The True Lord says:

وَإِذَآ أَرَدۡنَآ أَن نُّهۡلِكَ قَرۡيَةً أَمَرۡنَا مُتۡرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُواْ فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيۡهَا ٱلۡقَوۡلُ فَدَمَّرۡنَٰهَا تَدۡمِيرٗا ﴿١٦﴾

When We decide to destroy a town, We command those corrupted by wealth [to reform], but they [persist in their] disobedience; Our sentence is passed, and We destroy them utterly [16] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 16)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an example on the consequence of deviating away from the Way of Allah. When He *Glorified is He* sends a messenger to convey His Way to His creatures, no pretext is left for the rebellious. It is the way of the Sustaining Creator who grants blessing to all in existence. Indeed, He is worthy of obedience and submission. Is it acceptable that the human being basks in the blessings of his Lord and then disobeys Him? No, it is absolutely not. This is ingratitude to the grace flowing onto us day and night, rather, every breath you inhale. Even if this were the way of a fellow human being, there would be no excuse for the one who rebels, as supported by the adage: 'those whom I feed must take heed of my words.'

Moreover, the Benefactor *Glorified is He* did not foist responsibility upon you while you were unprepared. Quite the reverse, He charges you with responsibility for your actions at an appropriate time when your abilities and faculties are fully developed, you became an adult and ready for assuming this responsibility. For the first fifteen years of your life, He leaves you undisturbed, basking in His blessings and enjoying His favour. Then, you would rather pay homage to the Way of your Lord and rush to effect His commandments and prohibitions. For He *Glorified is He* has indeed brought you into to existence and shields you from privation.

The one who attentively observes the affair of Allah's Commandments to the believers, notices that Allah has also ordained that some of us shall issue commandments to some others, as His word indicates: 'And bid thy people to pray, and preserve therein…' (*al-Isra':* 132). The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has already explained this matter to us in his Hadith, 'Order your children to pray at the age of seven, and chastise them for non-performance of prayer at ten.(1)

This Hadith seems to represent a command from parents to children, but, in the truest sense, it is from Allah, the Commander of all. However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted a responsibility given at such a tender age to be issued by the closest visible person to the child. The father is the visible benefactor in the child's life, in that he secures the child's food, drink, and other necessities. As such, the child is more likely to listen to and obey a command that is issued by their father. A child at such a young age does not possess the depth of perception to grasp that the true benefactor is Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, fathers were ordered to get their children accustomed to carry out the divine commandments and to punish the child if they prove negligent at certain age. It is normal and acceptable that a commandment issuer is the punisher in case of default. Then, when child reaches the actual age of discernment as set by the Highest Benefactor *Glorified is He*, they have become already accustomed to assume such a commandment and responsibility easily and conveniently.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (495) and Ahmad in his Musnad (2/187) with the wording, "command your kids to." This is based on the Hadith of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As.*

On the other hand, if you enjoyed yourself by Allah's favours and grace while turning your back to His Way and violating the divine rules, then, wait His vengeance. Wait His unfailingly and inalterably dealing with the iniquitous in the life of this world before the Hereafter. Be aware that this vengeance is necessary in order to preserve and maintain the life safety. For indeed, when people observe that the wrongdoers, disobedient, and vainglorious are basking in the blessings of Allah; enjoying peace and security, this prompts them to desire to emulate the bad ones, taking them as role models. Consequently, corruption and mischief prevail and the community is basically destroyed.

On the other hand, when people see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* casts wrath on the offenders, they would view them as depraved scoundrels. Conversely, in this situation they would take them as a lesson and a reminder. The sagacious individual is one who takes lessons from the examples of others and benefits from their experiences.

Therefore, Wrath of Allah is intended for a wisdom that He *Glorified is He* desires to manifest. Undeniably, we have witnessed many people and countries that have been engulfed by the evil of their own actions to such an extent that they have become examples for others. In fact, the one who fails to take heed of the reminder is an example, even to someone who does not believe. This way, the movement of life is balanced; all can observe what happens to those who work corruption in the earth, how they are ruined and destroyed. If you examined the history of countries throughout the world, you can easily identify this divine principle in certain territories and simply deduct that they have been afflicted by destruction because of the obvious divergence from the Way of the True Lord.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* spoke truthfully when He said: 'And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which as [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought.' (*an-Nahl:* 112)

By no means, should you ever be given to the idea that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is negligent concerning the rebellious and those who have deviated from His Way. There surely must come a day when they are seized with aggression. If this was not the case, then their permanence would be an evil example which invites to corruption in life transactions. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But when [this has been done, and] it is Our will to destroy a community, We convey Our last warning to those of its people who have lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures; and [if] they [continue to] act sinfully, the sentence [of doom] passed on the community takes effect, and We break it to smithereens.' (*al-Isra':* 16)

The problem is that those who approach this Quranic text misunderstand it. They wrongfully surmise that the verb *fasaqu* (translated in the phrase: *'lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures*') is resulting from the command preceding it. This understanding would mean that Allah *Glorified is He* ordered them to act sinfully. This understanding of the noble verse is rather strange. Indeed, the commandments of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to the believers are clearly stated in the following Quran verses, among other: 'And withal, they were not enjoined aught but that they should worship Allah, sincere in their faith in Him alone…' (*al-Bayyina:* 5), 'I have been bidden to worship the Lord of this City…' (*an-Naml:* 91), '…I have been bidden to be among those who have surrendered themselves unto Him.' (*Yunus:* 72)

Therefore, the commands of Allah are reserved for obedience and good deeds. Allah does not command to perversity and deviance; this is explicitly mentioned in many verses of the Quran. Upon that basis, the objective of the verse in question becomes: We commanded its affluent members to obedience and adherence to Our Way; however, they contravened, disobeyed, and ultimately, acted sinfully. For this reason, they were justifiably punished.

A command is a request from a superior, which in this case is Allah, to an inferior which in this case is creation. He requested obedience and devotion from them but they misused the opportunity, He gave them, of having freewill, and they act sinfully contravening His commandment. Then Allah’s statement: 'But when [this has been done, and] it is Our will to destroy a community…' (*al-Isra’:* 16). It is an erroneous understanding that Allah desired their destruction first and, subsequently, they deviated from His path. The right understanding of the verse is that they first deviated and then Allah desired their destruction.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…The sentence [of doom] passed on the community takes effect…' (*al-Isra’:* 16) means that it has become mandatory that they be punished. Similarly, He says: 'Thus is your Lord’s word proved true with regard to such as are bent on sinful doings...' (*Yunus:* 33). That is Allah has mandated their punishment in order to restore soundness to life affairs and to protect the believers from the mischief of those who do not believe in the Hereafter. His saying: '…We break it to smithereens' (*al-Isra’:* 16) means: We bring about its ruination, leaving but traces of it. This is not a unique event-taking place but once. Rather, if you examine history or to be more precise, the histories of stubborn disbelieving peoples, you find many communities, either cities or villages, which have been decimated by Allah. At present, nothing remains of them except a scant number of personal artefacts which prove their former presence there, the statement of Allah comes as following:

وَكَمۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا مِنَ ٱلۡقُرُونِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ نُوحٖۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ بِذُنُوبِ عِبَادِهِۦ خَبِيرَۢا بَصِيرٗا ﴿١٧﴾

How many generations We have destroyed since Noah!
Your Lord knows and observes the sins of His servants
well enough [17] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 17)

So, where are the peoples of ‘Ad, Thamud, Lut (Lot) and Saleh (Shelah)? Then, the verse is a verbal case verified by several corroborating realities. Allah’s statement, '…after [the time of] Nuh…' is an indication that this punishment did not take place before Nuh *peace be upon him* because people were living in a time close to the time when Adam was created by Allah and instructing them the teachings of Allah as well as the divine rules to maintain safety and harmony in life. On the other hand, after Nuh, corruption and disbelief began to appear. As a result, an unprecedented punishment descended upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Consider the daybreak. And the ten nights. Consider the multiple and The One! Consider the night as it runs its course! Considering all of this—could there be, to anyone endowed with reason, a [more] solemn evidence of the truth? Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] 'Ad? The people of] Iram the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? And with [the tribe of] Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein: and therefore your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering: for, verily, your Lord is ever on the watch!' (*al-Fajr:* 1-14)

We will discuss these verses from the chapter of *al-Fajr* cursorily; indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is addressing His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* with His words: 'Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] ʿAd' (*al-Fajr:* 6). The Arabic phrase '*A lam tara*' (translated above into '*Are you not aware"*) means, '*Did you not see?'*. This is because the Prophet Muhammad did not witness how Allah dealt with the people of ʻAd. So, why does the Quran's context use the verb 'see or witness' instead of 'know'? Some scholars explained that Allah's say to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is more truthful than seeing an event by his physical eyes. Another example of this issue is in the verse: 'Are you not aware of how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) The birthday of the Prophet Muhammad was in the year called then *ʻam al-fil*, the Year of the Elephant; of course, he did not see anything regarding the army of the elephant.

The verses of the chapter *al-Fajr* (the Dawn) contain evidence that the civilization of the ʿAd people, which we hardly know about, was more glorious than Pharaonic civilization which has attracted the world's attention. This is understood from the verse describing the civilization of ʻAd: 'the like of whom has never been reared in all the land?' (*al-Fajr:* 8) That is to say it is without parallel among the world's civilizations. But concerning the Pharaonic civilization, Allah *Glorified is He* gave a brief description: 'and with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles?' (*al-Fajr:* 10) Then He said: 'And how many a generation have We [thus] destroyed' (*al-Isra':* 17).

The word 'how many' (*kam*) is an indication of overabundance. As well, the word *'generation' (qurun* is the plural of *'qarn')* which, in terms of time, refers to a period of one hundred years, in Arabic. It is used to describe the people who are linked because they live in the same age and share at least one principle that is transmitted by succession. Although rare, the word *qarn* is sometimes used to refer to a period that exceeds one hundred years. For instance, we say the generation *(qarn)* of Nuh (Noah), of Hud, or the generation of Pharaoh. In these instances, we are simply referring to the time periods lived by these persons.

Allah's statement: '…For none has the like of thy Lord's awareness and insight into His creatures' sins.' (*al-Isra':* 17) means that is He *Glorified is He* needs none to inform him about the sins of His creation, among human beings and jinn. Indeed, He is most acquainted with them, for nothing, no matter how insignificant, in the heavens nor on earth escapes Him: '[for] He is aware of the [most] stealthy glance(1), and of all that the hearts would conceal.' (*Ghafir:* 19)

He is not in need of anyone to inform Him because He is the Aware, the All-Seeing. This is delivered in a literary style that lends it amplification. This is the point at which someone might ask: In so far as Allah *Glorified is He* knows everything, and nothing not even the most trivial thing, escapes Him, why are people questioned on the Day of Judgment concerning their deeds? We respond by stating that a question is posed for one of two purposes: The first is like when a student asks a teacher about something which the former does not know. The purpose is to gain knowledge of something not known.

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(1) *On the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him in reference to Allah's saying, '[for] He is aware of the [most] stealthy glance (1), and of all that the hearts would conceal.' (Ghafir: 19)*
He said: an example of this is when a man is sitting among his community and a woman passes by, he shows them that he is averting his glance from her. However, when they are unaware he casts a furtive glance at her but when they look at him once more he again averts his glance. Allah is well aware of the state of his heart; that he would in fact, like to marvel her beauty. [cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 7/282]

The second is like when a teacher questions a student during a test. The teacher does not ask to learn from the student; rather, they ask to confirm what the student knows. Similarly, the example befitting Allah is much loftier, the True Lord questions His creatures on the Day of Judgment concerning their deeds, to confirm they have committed such and such actions and consequently makes them witnesses against themselves. Just as He said: '[and he will be told:] “Read this your record! Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!”' (*al-Isra’:* 14) Also, His statement: '…For none has the like of your Lord’s awareness and insight…' (*al-Isra’:* 14) is like when you say about someone that they are proficient for such and such task. This implies that you are confident in and pleased with them being appointed for doing it. Then, the meaning of the verse is: Your Lord suffices you so you are not in need of anyone besides Him. Previously, we clarified that all forms of authority rest within the grasp of Allah *Glorified is He*; when He issues a judgment He holds the legislative authority, the judicial authority and the executive authority. Moreover, He is not in need of witnesses, testimony, or evidence. Thus, He is sufficient as a ruler, a judge, and a witness. For indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is aware and observant of the sins of His creatures. The punishment meted out by Him is just and contains no oppression.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to state:

مَّن كَانَ يُرِيدُ ٱلْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُۥ فِيهَا مَا نَشَآءُ لِمَن نُّرِيدُ
ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُۥ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَىٰهَا مَذْمُومًا مَّدْحُورًا ﴿١٨﴾

If anyone desires [only] the fleeting life, We speed up whatever We will in it, for whoever We wish; in the end We have prepared Hell for him in which to burn, disgraced and rejected [18] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 18)

That is, before Allah created the human being, who He made His vicegerent in the earth, He made the entire creation subservient to man, created all things needed in this life. The consequent favours of Allah have been flowing down onto man, from creating and bestowing life, providing for living needs and subjugating other creatures without requesting, such as the sun, moon, atmosphere, rain, etc. These things set your life in motion and you have nothing to do with them. There are also other constituents of life which you must interact with for them to effectuate their purposes, such as the earth. It does not produce its yield unless you harvest within it and plant your seeds. If you do this, you will find that it has effectuated its purpose and granted you bounteous production.

A careful observer of human civilization and advancement will find that they are the outcome of human interaction with life elements. This is how progress and refinement are hatched. The human being is also further refined by benefiting from the first and most obvious of life essential elements, which effectuate their purpose without human intervention, in yet a new way. An example on this is the scientific scholars being able to make use of the solar power in new ways not know before.

As such, there are laws in this life which whoever masters their use is given the desired results. This is the way the human being enriches life and makes further advancements. Previously, we named this phenomenon the divine grant (*'ata ar-rabubia*); where the believer and the disbeliever, or the obedient and the disobedient, are all equal in relation to accessing it. This explains the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'unto him who cares for [no more than enjoyment of] this fleeting life...' (*al-Isra':* 18). That is the grant of the life of this world, its delights, its refinement, and its progress. 'We readily grant thereof as much as we please, [giving] to whomever it is our will [to give]' (*al-Isra':* 18). We respond to them by granting them that which they request from the world's delights. It is incumbent upon us that we pay very close attention to the divine grant that Allah has made for the believer and the disbeliever. Indeed, a believer might neglect this kind of grant, be heedless to life essential elements and the means of acting efficiently in the world, while the disbeliever is interacting with them and elevating their standard of living on their account. In this way, the latter might excel the believer, and in fact, end up owning the foodstuffs that are the basis of the believer's life. To be more precise, they could wind up possessing all the essentials of the believer's life. It follows naturally that they would have the final say in the matter, dominance, and the power to subdue their foes. They may create a trial for you in your religion due to what they possess of the essential means of survival. This is not befitting for the believer. It is despised and unacceptable to the Creator *Glorified is He* for his believing creatures. Consequently, it is not enough that you happily receive the divine grant in the areas of commandment and prohibition, accountability before Allah, and devotion, while leaving and neglecting the means of engaging the world and life most essential material elements without which life would be unsustainable. This happens even though the believer had better be more interested in life's essential elements, which have been made by the Creator of existence, than the disbeliever who does not believe.

It is recommended by our religion that those among the Muslim community do not allow the enemies of Allah to gain dominance over life essential elements to such an extent that the unbeliever outstrips the believer.

Allah's statement: '...as much as we please, [giving] to whomever it is our will [to give]...' (*al-Isra':* 18). That is to say that things in this world, do not respond spontaneously by themselves to the human interaction with them. Rather, The Divine Will intervenes in this issue. You might take action but achieve no outcome for some kind of divine wisdom or greater purpose dictates that you will not get an outcome. All are not equal in relation to Allah's wisdom. This contains evidence of the limitless nature of Divine Power.

The meaning of *Ma nasha'* (as much as we please) refers to the delights of the life of this world and *liman nurid* (to whomever it is our will to give) refers to the individual that is seeking those delights. The individual described above is seeking the delights of this world and striving to reach the point of efflorescence within the world and its beauty. Then, the Hereafter is not a consideration of theirs nor do they take it into account. For this reason, they do not work for it. So, when they come forward on the day of judgement, they will find their account completely empty, having no share in the eternal bliss. This is due to the fact that the compensation or reward a man is entitled to is depending on work they made in advance. The seekers of earthly delights already take their rewards in this life through fame, distinction, progress, and refinement.

Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39)

A Mirage is a natural phenomenon experienced by travellers through the desert during the midday. The traveller sees something in front of them that appears to be water until they arrive at the spot. Once there, they find nothing. In the same sense, the disbeliever who does good deeds in the life of this world, when they come upon the Hereafter, they find no reward for their good deeds because they have received their reward in the life of this world. Then the surprise comes: '...he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him...' (*an-Nur:* 39). This is a result of the fact that Allah was not a consideration when he did those good deeds in the life of this world. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* describes it as such: '[This, then, is] the parable of those who are bent on denying their Lord: all their works are as ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day: [in the life to come,] they cannot achieve any benefit whatever from all [the good] that they may have wrought: for this [denial of Allah] is indeed the farthest one can go astray.' (*Ibrahim:* 18)

On one occasion, He compared the good deeds of a disbeliever to the water that appears in a mirage, and, on another occasion, He compared their deeds to ashes. This is because when water is mixed with ashes it becomes mud. Mud is soil that is essential for growth and fertile. Hence, it is one of the essential elements of life. Also, He has described it in His words: '...parable of a smooth rock with [a little] earth upon it—and then a rainstorm smites it and leaves it hard and bare. Such as these shall have no gain whatever from all their good works: for Allah does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the truth' (*al-Baqara:* 264).

This verse of the True Lord *Glorified is He* embodies the frustrated hopes of the disbeliever at the coming of the Hereafter in a clear and captivating example. The good deeds of the disbeliever are like a large flat boulder that is caught in a heavy downpour of rain. What then, do you expect from it? What good lies hidden within it? The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to say: 'Unto him who cares for [no more than the enjoyment of] this fleeting life We readily grant thereof as much as We please, [giving] to whomever it is Our will [to give]; but in the end We consign him to [the suffering of] hell, which he will have to endure disgraced and disowned! (*al-Isra':* 18) This means that Hell-fire has been created and prepared for this disbeliever. He will be despised by the people and people generally despise those who are guilty of grave sins. He will also be, 'disowned' (*al-Isra':* 18) and banished from Allah's mercy.

Allah *Glorified is He* gave us this portrait of a person who desired the transient life of this world while neglecting the Hereafter and the punishment he will earn for his misdeeds. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* offered us the alternate picture by describing a person who is more intelligent and logical in preferring the Hereafter over this worldly life, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَمَنْ أَرَادَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ
كَانَ سَعْيُهُم مَّشْكُورًا ﴿١٩﴾

But if anyone desires the life to come and strives
after it as he should, as a true believer, his striving
will be thanked [19] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 19)

The attentive reader of the Quran will find that, in many instances, it presents contrasting pictures to clarify its concepts. The colours of an image stand out when they are presented alongside their alternate colours. This is also why human adversaries reveal the strongest attributes of each other.

We see this usage of lexical polar opposites in many verses in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* such as the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Behold, (in the life to come) the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, indeed, the wicked will be in a blazing fire,' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14).

In the verse we are studying, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted the words: 'But as for those who want the (good of the) life to come,' (*al-Isra':* 19) to be in stark contrast with the words: 'As for him who only wants the enjoyment of this fleeting life,' (*al-Isra':* 18).

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'But as for those who want the (good of the) life to come and strive for it as it ought to be strived for' (*al-Isra':* 19). These are the people who desire the reward of the hereafter and work for it ‘and are true believers’ (*al-Isra’:* 19) because faith is an essential necessity for one’s good deeds to be accepted.

All of the efforts undertaken by human beings in the movements of life must be based on sound faith and intention. In order for a person to earn a reward for his deeds on the Day of Judgment, their mind must be conscious and considerate of Allah *Glorified is He*. This is the only way for the worker’s physical deeds to be accepted in the Hereafter, just as a factory worker can only receive his rewards from the manager he works for.

There are many disbelievers, who have served humanity with their inventions and discoveries, but they were not mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* during their efforts. They presented these accomplishments to earn rewards or recognition from other people for their march to develop humankind. For this reason, they deserved what they rightfully received from humanity, in the form of fame and honour. Statues may have been sculpted to tribute them or books were written to record their biographies. In these cases, they have worked and received their rewards from their fellow men.

If an individual builds a mosque, this great deed can potentially take him to paradise if he possesses sincerity and faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whoever builds a mosque for Allah’s sake, even if it is the size of a bird’s nest, Allah *Glorified is He* will build for him a house in paradise.’(1)

However, sometimes we see a manifest sign on the door of a mosque which declares, ‘This mosque was built by so-and-so.’ Sometimes, the finance to build the mosque might have even been acquired from the alms of charity (*zakat*)! In this manner, that person may have willingly ruined their own good deeds or carried out an action that decreased their reward. Therefore, if a person does a good deed with the intention of garnering fame and publicity, then actually gains such fame and recognition; they will have received their compensation in this world. The reward has been concluded and they will not find further rewards in the Hereafter.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (738) from the tradition of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him. Imam Al-Busiri mentioned in az-Zawa’id that its chain was sound and that its narrators are trustworthy and reliable.*

Allah *Glorified is He* also described those who do the good for the hereafter and said: ‘They are the ones whose efforts will be rewarded (by Allah),’ (*al-Isra’:* 19). It is well known that gratitude causes an increase and abundance in the flow of Allah’s blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And (remember the time) when your Lord made (this promise) known, “If you are grateful (to Me), I shall most certainly give you more (blessings)”’ (*Ibrahim:* 7). How pleasant will a servant’s life be, when Allah *Glorified is He* Himself, expresses gratitude to his servant for obedience?

The faithful doers of good deeds will always receive their deserved gratitude. They even receive gratitude from those who differ with their beliefs. Take, for example, a thief who possesses a valuable item that needs protection. Will he place it in the trust of another thief, or with a person of trustworthiness who will protect it with their heart? In essence, the thief does not respect another thief nor do gang members completely trust each other. However, they may fully respect the honesty of a trustworthy individual, even though that individual opposes their actions. In a similar manner, a liar or a treacherous person will respect a truthful and a faithful individual. In the same light, despite the hostility that the disbelievers of Mecca harboured for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and their disbelief in his message, they still entrusted him with their valuables and precious goods. This is because they were confident in his trustworthiness. In fact, they gave him the nickname *al-ameen* (the trustworthy man) despite the fundamental differences in belief that existed between them. They did not accept his message regarding the matters of creed, but when it came to preserving their valuable trusts, they could never cheat themselves. The most reliable and dependable person they could trust was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*.(1)

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(1) *This happened during the migration of the Prophet Muhammad to Medina, as Ibn Hisham mentioned in As-Sirah An-Nabawiyya (2: 485). Prophet Muhammad ordered ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah be pleased with him, to remain behind in Mecca to fulfill some promises that Prophet Muhammad had made to various people. When Prophet Muhammad was in Mecca, none its people feared placing their precious possessions in his trust. This was a result of his truthfulness and trustworthiness.*

We have already offered the example of a false witness helping you win a lawsuit that you do not deserve. Even if you use their false testimony to get out of difficulty or an unfavourable judgment, you will still lose all respect for them. Furthermore, you would not consider them worthy of your confidence afterwards. This explains the meaning of the expression, ‘Every person aided by your treachery in their plots and tricks, will lose respect for you. If you aide their affairs by being a false witness and assist them in oppressing others with mischief, you have also helped their foot to trample your honour.’ Allah said concerning both groups of people:

كُلًّا نُّمِدُّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ وَهَٰٓؤُلَآءِ مِنْ عَطَآءِ رَبِّكَ ۚ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَآءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا ٢٠

To both the latter and the former, We give some of your Lord’s bounty. [Prophet], your Lord’s bounty is not restricted [20] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 20)

This means that both of the previously mentioned groups, those who desire the transient life of this world and those who desire the permanence of the Hereafter will be showered with Allah’s blessings. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* supplies everyone with life’s essential elements, despite the fact that some of these people will use these essential elements for obedience and some of them will use them for disobedience and disbelief. This is akin to giving two men money. The first person may give the money in charity while the second person squanders his money on buying wasteful distractions like alcohol. However, although the divine grant from Allah’s Lordship supports the obedient believers as well as the sinners, the ability to worship Allah *Glorified is He* according to His commandments is also a blessing that is only granted to the observant and adherent believers.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘…since your Lord’s bestowal is never confined (to one kind of man)’ (*al-Isra’:* 20), it means that Allah’s blessings are not prohibited from anyone of His creatures, even those who have disbelieved. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who summoned them into existence and will, therefore, secure the essential elements of their lives. In the same sense, if you invite a guest to your home, you are obligated to host your guest in the appropriate manner.

Here, we observe that Allah *Glorified is He* chose the expression: '...your Lord's bestowal' (*al-Isra':* 20). The bestowal that is being mentioned here includes the nurturing blessings that are provided by Allah's Lordship. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of all that exists, which means that He cultivates and takes care of them. Thus, it was befitting for the word 'bestowal' in this verse to be attributed to the Lord *Glorified is He* Who said:

ٱنظُرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍۚ وَلَلْءَاخِرَةُ أَكْبَرُ دَرَجَٰتٍ وَأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٢١﴾

See how We have given some more than others – but the
Hereafter holds greater ranks and greater favours [21]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 21)

Allah *Glorified is He* has given us theoretical concepts which require faith, but can be deduced through deep insight into His natural creation. If we look closely, we will be convinced with the truth of these concepts.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Behold how We bestow (on Earth) bounties favoring some of them more than others' (*al-Isra':* 21). The attentive reader will notice that Allah *Glorified is He* has not specified which group of people was favoured more than the other groups. The verse did not say, 'We have favoured the wealthy people over the poor people,' or, 'We have favoured the healthy people over the sick people'. This means that all of these groups have been favoured in some areas and disfavoured in other aspects.

People tend to narrow their focus on some favours only. They only recognize the favours of excessive wealth, high-priced possessions, or lofty ranks. This view is certainly mistaken. In order to survey a person's life properly, we must view it from all of its angles. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want us to be redundant copies of each other. Instead, He wants all the people to be complementary in their transactions and interactions. If we were all complete, inert individuals, with every person perfect in every type of talent, this would sever our ties in society.

Part of Allah's mercy is favouring some people with certain characteristics and favouring other people with different traits. In this way, you will need the skills of other people which you have been disfavoured in, while other people will need the blessings that you have. This leads to mutual completion in communities to make life's transactions sound and flowing.

We may be able to escape this short sight by focusing on an important principle. This principle states that the aggregate sum of talents given to each person in mankind is equal to the sum of talents in every other individual. For instance, if one person possesses more money, then perhaps a poorer person has better health. In this way, the end result is complete equality between people in their worldly talents. Thus, the true competition between them is in their piety and good deeds.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, Allah is all-knowing, all-aware' (*al-Hujurat:* 13). For that reason, a true Muslim is obliged to observe the manners of Islam in respecting the significance of other individuals. Never look down upon others in whatever amount you have been favoured over them. You must recognize that other individuals have been favoured in different ways than you. A day will surely come when you will direly need their talents.

We have already offered an example for this principle. A man of distinguished status may surely be forced, as a result of urgent circumstances, to request the services of plumbers or other labourers who can perform tasks a rich, notable person, is unable to perform. In this situation, the labourer has been favoured above that man of famous status. Try to imagine the catastrophic results on a community if their street sweepers decided to stop working for a number of days. Even if an individual's job appears simple or lacks glamour, they will still possess roles to fulfil better than other people will. Consider a tailor's craft, regarded modest by most people, but indispensible for sewing notable people's garments before the 'eid celebration.

In this way, we can understand what Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Is it they who distribute your Lord's grace? (Nay, as) it is We who distribute their means of livelihood(1) amongst them in the life of this world. (And) we raised some of them in degrees above each other, so that they cannot save themselves from each other's subjugation.(1) Your Lord's grace is certainly better than all (the worldly wealth) that they may collect' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). This means that each one of us has been subjected to the service of others, through the same skills they excel at, by Allah's favour. An Arab poet spoke truthfully when he stated:

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(1) *Qatada said, 'You may find a person whose speech is disabled and has not talents, but has abundant provisions. On the other hand, you may find a person with vigorous strength a vicious tongue, but had restricted provisions.' (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 1: 375)*

People are for the service of other people,

in Bedouin lands or lands that are urban,

They are all here for each other's utility,

Even if they don not sense their subjugation.

Therefore, it is necessary for us to focus on all the angles of an individual's life before assessing their significance, for indeed, all of us are equal before Allah *Glorified is He*. No one among us can claim to be attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* in terms of lineage or familial relation. Nothing links us to Him *Glorified is He* except being His servants. We are all equally granted His gifts of provision. No one is more entitled to His provision than anyone else is.

A logical individual looking upon life should never consider himself distinctly superior than other people. He should recognize his need for the talents of others and effectively cease his self-conceit. An apparently simple person may show natural gifts that allow them to excel within particular fields and intelligence becomes evident when work fortuitously merges with talent. Some individuals whom people look upon with condescension, could perhaps be geniuses if their work casually intertwines with their skills.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: 'But (remember that) the life to come will be higher in its degrees and greater in its merits and bounties' (*al-Isra':* 21). If the rivalry and competition in this life is based on its natural laws of causality, the matter is different in the Hereafter. In the Hereafter, the laws are not relating to causality, but are related to the pleasure of Allah *Glorified is He* Who created the laws of this world. This is the standard of competition in the Hereafter.

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(1) *(Sakhkharah, yusakhkhiruh)*: He subjugated it, He subjected it, or He subdued it. [*(Al-Qamus Al-Qawim)* 1: 307]

If you contemplate your life in this world and compare it with the Hereafter, you will find that the Hereafter is more dignified and prominent. Your years in the life of this world are numbered and this period will ultimately end with your death. The world remains after your death as a test for other people. In the same respect, all of life's blessings will dissipate, being exposed to the vicissitudes of fate which occur to human beings. Rich people can become poor and healthy people can fall ill. Since this life's blessings come according to your efforts and interactions with its forces, its good fortune will not be guaranteed or assured for any person who was initially blessed. Even if you are given good fortune and a high standard of living in the life of this world, this fortune can still be disturbed by advent of death or the exposure to the vicissitudes of fate.

On the other hand, your years in the Hereafter are endlessly lengthened. Its blessings and pleasures will not diminish because they are granted to you according to the Lordship of the Giver *Glorified is He*. Evanescence will not occur in this eternal realm of guaranteed existence. Therefore, which of these two worlds is more superior? Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* called upon us to contemplate, reflect, and choose the more profitable of these two transactions. Once you realize that, exert yourself in its trade and accept no substitute! There is no ground for comparison between the good fortune of this life and the blessings of the Hereafter as the Hereafter is superior and grander.

Some time ago, I travelled with a group of people to San Francisco. We passed by a hotel, not for residence, but to view its splendid spectacles of beauty, elegance and aesthetic brilliance. The place was a marvel of creativity and luxury. When I noticed some of my esteemed travelling companions captivated by its magnificence, I asked them, ‘If human beings have prepared this place for other humans, what would the Lord of humans prepare for them?”

The blessings of this life and the manifestations of its beauty should entice our yearning for the everlasting blessings of paradise. They should not give rise to feelings of envy and animosity. We must use the material icons of grandeur and brilliance that are possessed by others as a means to embrace more faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. Then, we are obligated to increase this faith with proper deliberation.

If all the elements of advancement and sophisticated engineering in this world’s technologies and architectural structures are the products of human designers and labourers, the wonderful blessings of their Creator in the Hereafter will certainly be more transcendent. The blessings of this life were prepared by human beings and the blessings of the Hereafter were prepared by Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator, Himself.

In addition, although luxurious human technologies have evolved to provide your needs in response to slight verbal or tactile commands, these worldly machines still demand an initial command to serve you. On the other hand, the delights of paradise, which the Creator has prepared for His righteous servants(1), will present themselves to you as a result of your mere intentions and pre-thoughts!

Thus, if the Hereafter is more exalted and prominent, you are obliged to hasten toward your Lord’s straight path. This path is the Way of the One, Allah *Glorified is He* Said:

لَّا تَجۡعَلۡ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ فَتَقۡعُدَ مَذۡمُومٗا مَّخۡذُولٗا ٢٢

Set up no other god beside God, or you will end up disgraced and forsaken [22] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 22)

Allah *Glorified is He* granted you provisions in this world and provided you the means to access these provisions. He gave you the necessary essentials in life, started your creation into existence, and uplifted you from poverty. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* has provided these blessings to everyone, including disbelievers. Furthermore, He has prepared the highest stations for you in the Hereafter, in everlasting blessings that do not expire or dwindle away.

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him, Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Allah Glorified is He has promised: “I have prepared for my righteous slaves, things which no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and that have not been the object of any human being’s imagination.”’ The confirmation of this occurs in the Book of Allah Glorified is He where Allah Glorified is He said: ‘And (as for all such believers,) no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them (in the life to come) as a reward for all that they did’ (as-Sajda: 17).*

After these considerations, it is only natural for a servant to persevere to obey Allah's Commands and to direct himself toward Him. The heedful servant should strive to stay in Allah's constant company. Therefore, do not direct worship to any other deity besides Allah *Glorified is He* for this would cost you the goodness of these blessings.

Polytheists will only find lowliness and renunciation in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. These disbelievers will be astonished with their deprived outcomes on the Day of Judgment, as they meet the Lord Who had called upon them to believe in Him. 'Instead, he finds (that) Allah (has always been present) with him' (*an-Nur:* 39). Then, they will express regret, at a time when regret will not benefit them. The opportunity has slipped from their hands, as Allah *Glorified is He* said, regarding the polytheists: '…so as not to sit (forcibly) (*taq'ud*), disgraced and forsaken' (*al-Isra':* 22). Indeed, their sitting here is not a voluntary action. An individual is not obligated to sit unless he has no energy to stand. This expression implies the meaning that their power is depleted. Their legs have surrendered and can no longer support them.

When the Quran addressed the state of the person who has lost their power and hope, it used the word 'sit' (*qu'ud*). The Quran did not use the phrase, '…so as not to lie down,' because the punishment of the Hereafter does not allow for rest. The Quranic expression, '…so as not to sit (forcibly),' accurately depicted the degree of the punishment. It is a punishment that does not affect the limbs and the physical constitution, but it affects the conscious soul that is able to perceive and sense pain. Doctors anaesthetize patients before proceeding with surgical operations, as the process of anaesthesia deprives the body of its conscious state and is thus unable to sense pain, when this component of pain is removed.

Allah *Glorified is He* used the word 'sitting' in another sense, when He said: 'Allah has exalted those (believers) who strive hard with their possessions and their lives far above those (believers) who remain passively sitting' (*an-Nisa':* 95). He also said in another verse: 'And (those) elderly sitting women, who no longer ask for any marital relations' (*an-Nur:* 60). In essence, the word 'sitting' in these verses indicates a lack of power. At the same time, the word *taq'ud* does not indicate a state of rest, as the person is not lying down in sleep, but remains in a perpetual state of pain and disturbance.

A poet once expressed their contempt for a particular person in the following couplet:

‘Leave all the traits of good character, without striving to attain them.

Sit, for indeed you are the one who dresses (fashionably) and dines.’

Allah has described the people who enjoin partners with Him in worship as being: ‘…disgraced (*madhmuman*)’ (*al-Isra’:* 22). Their disbelief will earn them disgrace among the people. Allah *Glorified is He* also said that they will be: ‘…forsaken (*makhdhula*)’ (*al-Isra’:* 22). Being forsaken means being in a state where there is no aid or assistance available. That person will be in the most remote location, where they cannot be helped or defended by anyone. Allah said concerning this group: ‘How is it that (now) you cannot support one another? Nay, but on that Day, they would willingly surrender (to Allah)’ (*as-Saffat:* 25-26).

Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِيَّاهُ وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَٰنًا ۚ إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِندَكَ ٱلْكِبَرَ
أَحَدُهُمَآ أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُل لَّهُمَآ أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُل لَّهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ﴿٢٣﴾

Your Lord has commanded that you should worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say no word that shows impatience with them, and do not be harsh with them, but speak to them respectfully [23] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 23)

After Allah *Glorified is He* directed us to the most critical sin that disrupts belief: ‘Do not worship any deity other than Allah’ (*al-Isra’:* 22), Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that faith is not complete until good deeds are performed. In addition to knowing Allah and directing oneself towards Him, you must observe the obligations for which He made you responsible. This explains why faith and good deeds are mentioned together in many verses throughout the Noble Book. This includes Allah’s statement: ‘’Woe unto every slanderer, faultfinder! (Woe unto him) who amasses wealth and counts it as a safeguard, thinking that his wealth will make him live forever!’ (*al-Humaza:* 1-3)

The benefits and fruits of faith are righteous actions. When you take this righteous path, you should expect opposition from the people of falsehood, corruption, and misguidance. They will never invite you to their friendship or establish peaceful relations with you. As a result, you must fully arm yourself with truth, strength, and perseverance so that you can oppose their attack.

Thus, religion is not only a word of faith articulated by the tongue. Evidence for this can be seen in the disbelievers of Mecca, who undeniably failed to attest, ‘There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah’. If the matter of faith was simple, they could have easily attested to the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* and easily voiced their allegiance to it.

However, they knew very well that faith had its imperative rulings and practical responsibilities. The logical consequences of faith in Allah are to live as He wishes and to implement His Way. This was the vantage point from which the disbelievers rejected faith in the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, they rejected the idea of emulating Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who come to deliver Allah’s will to them.

The Way of Allah *Glorified is He* is only revealed to a messenger, who then carries it and conveys it to the people, just as Allah *Glorified is He* has said: ‘And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, or (by a voice, as it were,) from behind a veil, or by sending an apostle to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills (to reveal): for, verily, He is Exalted and Wise’ (*ash-Shura:* 51) .

The first principle within the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned in the verse we are studying is: ‘For your Lord (*Rabbuka*) has ordained that you shall worship none but Him’ (*al-Isra’:* 23). Allah *Glorified is He* chose to use the word *Rabbuka* (your Lord) as opposed to the word *Allah*, as He has created, nurtured, and educated us, through the attributes of His Lordship. He oversees our affairs and gives us blessings out of His bounty. Therefore, this expression is more likely to elicit the servants’ obedience, because human beings should feel embarrassed at disobeying their Benefactor and Lord.

‘For your Lord has ordained’ (*al-Isra’:* 23); in this statement, the address is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he is the individual who has attained the highest standard of cultivation and decorum. This cultivation was eminent because it is Allah *Glorified is He* who taught and nurtured his character. In the Noble Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My Lord has educated me and He did so with benevolence'.(1)

The meaning of the word *qada* is (ordained) or (ruled) because only a judge is able to issue a ruling. It also entails the connotation of a command or an order. In this verse, it makes use of both meanings. Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered, with emphasis and without equivocation, that no deity should be worshipped besides Him. This judgment is interminably binding. The word *qada* can also be used to indicate the meaning of the words (decreed) and (created). We can see this in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* said: '(He) decreed (*qada*) that they become seven heavens' (*Fussilat:* 12). It can also indicate that a person has reached one's objective. This is expressed in the verse: '(But) then, when Zayd had concluded (*qada*) the union with her, we granted her marriage to you' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). The word *qada* can also mean 'completing a period of time', as seen in the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And when Musa (Moses) had fulfilled (*qada*) his term' (*al-Qasas:* 29). It also occurs with the meaning of 'willed, intended and decreed to do something', as exemplified by Allah's saying: 'It is He who grants life and deals death; and when He wills (*qada*) a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be," and it is' (*Ghafir:* 68). Therefore, the word *qada* has many meanings. Nonetheless, all of these meanings indicate the occurrence or the finalization of a binding or an emphasized ruling.

As for Allah's saying: '…that you shall worship (*ta'budu*) none but Him' (*al-Isra':* 23). The Arabic word *ta'budu* (to worship) means the performance of *al-'ibada*. *Al-'ibada* is the observation of obedience to a commander's orders and prohibitions. You should listen attentively to these orders, with the intention of effectuating his commands and avoiding his prohibitions. If he has not issued a command or a prohibition for a particular matter, then he has made the matter essentially lawful for you, while giving you the elective preference to engage or abstain from it.

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(1) *'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Ali As-Shafi'i As-Shaybani said in his book Tamyiz Al-Tayyib min Al-Khabith feema Yaduur-u 'ala Alsinat An-Nas min Al-Hadith (pg. 17), concerning this tradition: 'It was presented by Al-'Askari in Al-Amthal on the authority of 'Ali may Allah be pleased with him, with a chain of narrators that extends to the Prophet in an extended narration. Also, our sheikh has mentioned that the chain of narrators for this tradition is weak, but its meaning is true.'*

The polytheist disbelievers worshipped idols, engaged in gathering pieces of stone from the desert and worked diligently with their tools to fashion these stones into effigies and statues. They would mend these idols if they broke and prop them up if they fell. Despite these actions, they knew the loathsome lowliness of these pieces of stones. For instance, one of them witnessed a fox urinating on the head of an idol. The man said in utter contempt for the foolishness of those who worshipped the idols:

Can that be a lord with its head urinated upon by foxes?!
Indeed, degraded is the head that is urinated upon by foxes.

When the idolaters were asked difficult questions regarding these false deities they claimed to worship, they responded, ‘These (idols) do not possess the power to harm or benefit us. We only worship them because they draw us nearer to Allah’.

How can they worship (perform *al-‘ibada*) towards such idols, when the definition of worship is attention to the worshipped one’s commands and prohibitions? What have these idols commanded them to do or ordered them to abstain from? Their words were only compounded lies.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: ‘…that you shall worship (*ta’budu*) none but Him’ (*al-Isra’:* 23). In Arabic, this method of speech is referred to as a method of limitation *(qasr)*. The sentence means that worship has been limited to Allah *Glorified is He* alone and no other deity shares this attribute with Him. If the verse had been, ‘For your Lord has ordained that you should worship Him,’ someone might have added, ‘We may also worship other deities alongside Him,’ because the verse’s wording would have allowed the method of lexical attachments (*‘atf*). However, this verse did not allow for such attachments.

To clarify the difference between the Arabic methods of lexical attachment (*‘atf*) and lexical limitation (*qasr*), we can look at the following two sentences.

The sentence, ‘I fought the first person, as well as the second person, as well as the third person’, uses the Arabic method of lexical attachment (*‘atf*), by using the phrase ‘as well as’. Conversely, the sentence, ‘I did not fight anyone beside the first person’, uses the method of lexical limitation and effectively rules out the possibility of further lexical attachments.

Therefore, the Arabic method of lexical limitation (*qasr*) was utilized within this verse we are studying, to convey the following message, ‘Limit your worship, strictly, to Allah *Glorified is He* alone and never direct your worship to anyone beside Him.’

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* assigned a responsibility to us. This is the second commandment we must observe after worshipping Him: ‘And (do good) benevolently unto (your) parents’ (*al-Isra’:* 23). Allah *Glorified is He* has linked the act of worshipping Him and the act of being benevolent and dutiful towards one’s parents in many verses in the Quran. For instance, He said in another verse: ‘And worship Allah (alone), and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to anyone beside Him. And do good benevolently unto your parents’ (*an-Nisa':* 36). He also said: ‘Say (to them), “Come and let me convey unto you what Allah has (really) forbidden you from doing: Do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. (Do not offend your parents) but rather, do good unto your parents benevolently”’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). He also said: ‘We have enjoined upon man benevolent goodness towards his parents,” (*al-’Ankabut:* 8).

However, this begs the question. Why has Allah *Glorified is He* linked the act of worshipping Him and the act of being benevolent towards one’s parents? Is it the former act of worship that logically leads to the latter act of kindness towards the parents, or does the latter kindness towards the parents logically obligate the primary devoutness to Allah *Glorified is He*?

Our answer is that both possibilities have equal validity. The fact is that Allah *Glorified is He* is the unseen source of existence and belief in Him requires the use of the mind in consideration and reflection. On the other hand, one’s parents are effortlessly perceived by human senses as they are the immediate causes of his existence. They have raised and educated you, furnished all your life’s necessities and are the constant sources of tenderness and compassion for you.

Therefore, fundamentally, parental care and nurturing is clear and lucid to the healthy senses. In contrast, Allah's care and nurturing is clear and lucid to the sane minds. Thus, Allah's order that people should be benevolently dutiful towards their parents is clear evidence that the worship of Allah *Glorified is He* alone, without associating partners to him, is an obligation. Undeniably, Allah *Glorified is He* is responsible for your existence in the ultimate sense. He alone cultivated your existence and is the One who nurtured and cared for you, while granting you infinitely greater favours than your parents. Furthermore, your parents have not nurtured you with their own energy, but with the provisions that actually originated from Allah's bestowal.

In effect, the right of Allah *Glorified is He* to be worshipped alone without associating partners with Him must be bound with the right of parents to be respected and treated with reverence. We should take each one of them as evidence for the other.

When Allah *Glorified is He* commanded us to worship Him in this verse, He introduced the clause using the method of negation. He said: '…that you shall worship none but Him' (*al-Isra':* 23). This means that He prohibited us from worshipping any other deity beside Him. However, when mentioning the rights of the parents, He did not use the method of negation. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'Do not offend your parents'. This is because the rights of the parents are clear and do not need additional emphasis or intellectual proof.

If the sentence was, 'Do not do mistreat to your parents', it makes their mistreatment a presumable possibility, while in nature, any mistreatment of one's parents is unfathomable and inconceivable. Even if you deny that a respected individual has committed an inappropriate action, and that respected individual is not in need of such negation, you may have defamed that person lexically by linking the inappropriate action with his name. For example, if a man is widely known for his righteousness and piety, and you say, 'That righteous man is not a drunkard', this may be perceived as an inadvertent gesture of ridicule. Linking the man's name with drunkenness, even by negation, implies that some people suspected him of being so. This is the basis for the Arabic adage, 'Denying that a respected person has done a disgraceful action can be a disgrace to them'. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention 'mistreatment' in association with the parents because it should not cross any person's mind that a child can mistreat their parents in any sense. However, after understanding the immense favour and tremendous good your parents have done for you, never forget that the favour of Allah upon you is greater. Parents give birth to their child but could choose to place the child in the care of someone else. However, your Lord, Allah *Glorified is He* is your constant Provider and will never place you in someone else's care. When Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And [do good] benevolently (*ihsan*) unto [your] parents' (*al-Isra':* 23), He omitted the phrase, '...do good,' in the verse (1) and used the noun *ihsan*, instead of using a verb *ahsinuu*, as the noun exerts greater emphasis. Allah *Glorified is He* then said: 'Should one or both of them attain old age in your care, never say, 'Ugh,' to them or scold them, but [always] speak unto them with reverent speech' (*al-Isra':* 23). Allah *Glorified is He* has instructed us to behave benevolently towards our parents in many verses in the Quran. Some of the verses do not mention a justification for this divine commandment. Other verses mention a clear justification, such as the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'We have enjoined upon man [among the best of deeds] benevolence towards his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give birth to him' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). Allah *Glorified is He* also said in another verse: 'His mother carried him by bearing strain upon strain' (*Luqman:* 14).

In the two previous verses, Allah *Glorified is He* based the rationale for benevolence towards one's parents by mentioning the role of the mother in particular. These verses did not address the father's favours and rights. Why is the father's role not mentioned? Where is the acknowledgement of his continuous efforts throughout the years to raise his children?

If we closely study the verses that ordered benevolence towards one's parents, we will find a general consideration for the roles assumed by both parents in the verse: '…as they cherished and reared me when I was a child' (*al-Isra':* 24). However, to understand the difference in the roles of each parent, we have to consider the following concept. Before the father's role even begins in nurturing the child, the mother will have already played a larger role in the child's arrival to this world. A mother once argued in a dispute over the custody of her child, 'He (the disputant father) carried him while he was weightless and I carried him while he was weighty. He released him with pleasure and I released him with pain'.

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(1) Translator's note: Hence, the placement of the word 'do' between brackets in the translation of the verse.

This explains why the Quran mentioned the special role of the mother in many verses. There are special issues which she has to confront alone without her husband's involvement.(1) In addition, these maternal efforts take place before the child reaches the age of discernment and thus, the child is unable to sense his mother's earlier efforts. Allah *Glorified is He* desired to remind us of the sacrifices of the mother because a large portion of them were made before we are able to sense or perceive them.

This differs entirely from the role of the father, although this role should still be acknowledged and appreciated by the child. His father is responsible for securing all the essentials of his life. When he is in need of something as a child, he is clearly told, 'Wait until your father comes home (from work)'. Thus, the father's role is clear to the children and needs no further elaboration.

The verse instructs us to treat our parents with benevolence and makes specific mention of the period of their old age. The verses mention this particular period because when the parents are in the prime of their lives, they are not objects of neglect and mistreatment by their children. Disrespect or impropriety towards them is not the natural assumption. This is because they are able to confront life's challenges in the physical and mental prime of their lives. In fact, during this period, children adhere very closely to their parents, earnestly hoping for their pleasure to reap from their good fortunes.

On the other hand, after the onset of old age and the appearance of senility, they become weaker and need other people's help. The mother, who was once a giver, will become a receiver of help, while the father, who was once the family's main source of income, will become a dependent. This explains the actions of Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* in the Hadith of the *Al-Aminat* and *al-Maraghim*. He was upon the pulpit giving a sermon when the Companions heard him saying, 'Amen!' He remained quiet for a short while and then said, 'Amen!' After a few moments, once more, he said, 'Amen!' After he descended from the pulpit, the companions asked him, 'We heard you say Amen three times.'

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(1) *In his work of Quranic exegesis (5/3967), Al-Qurtubi said 'The referents here are the difficulties of pregnancy, child-labor, nursing and child-rearing. All of these are shouldered by the mother without the father's help. These represent the three domains from which the father has been restricted'.*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'The Angel Gabriel visited me and said, "Woe unto the one who is present when you are mentioned (in front of him) and they fail to pray for you! Say Amen!" So I said, Amen. He (Angel Gabriel) continued, "Woe onto the one who passes the month of Ramadan without being forgiven! Say Amen!" So I said, Amen. He (Angel Gabriel) finally said, "Woe onto the one whose parents, or one of them, reaches old age and he fails to enter Paradise on account of his good treatment of them! Say Amen!" So I said, Amen.'(1)

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* specifically mentioned the period of old age because it is marked by a state of limitation and weakness. This explains what one of the philosophers meant when he said, 'The best marriage is the early marriage, because it is the only way to have a child who will be your father when you reach the infancy of old age.' This philosopher compared infancy with old age because both of them entail weakness and need the care and concern (of others).

Allah *Glorified is He* said in His true words: 'It is Allah who creates you (all) in a state of weakness, and then, after weakness, ordains strength (for you), and then, after (a period of) strength, ordains weakness and grey hair (in old age)' (*ar-Rum:* 54). Those who get married and bear children at an early age will have someone from their offspring to undertake the responsibility of helping him in their old age.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/346) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him, who recalled that the Prophet said, 'Woe unto him! Woe unto him! Woe unto him, who has seen his parents reaching old age and fails to earn paradise on account of his good treatment of them.' Its long version (which had no mention of Angel Gabriel peace be upon him) has been narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3545). At-Tirmidhi said regarding this Hadith, "It is a Hadith that is classified as hasan and gharib."*

The individual who intently studies Allah’s saying: ‘Should one or both of them attain old age in your care’ (*al-Isra’:* 23) will notice the phrase, ‘…in your care’. This means that they have no one else to look after them, like a brother, sister or relative that can share this responsibility. In that case, you should regard this responsibility highly without any evasion. Indeed, it is a dignified responsibility to attend to.

The concept of devoutness to one’s parents extends even after they have passed away. You should constantly pray to Allah to forgive them. Then, you should fulfil any contractual agreements that they might have made without completion. In the same sense, we must maintain the familial bonds that would not be maintained without them, by maintaining constant relations and ties of affection with their relatives, friends, and loved ones.

Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* continued to maintain the ties of respect with the friends of his first wife, Lady Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* after she had passed away. He always received them warmly and showed them great reverence.(1)

We direly need to study this exalted standard of Islamic character, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even extended these interactions with disbelievers. In fact, Lady Asma’ bint Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with them both* came to Prophet Muhammad to ask about helping her disbelieving mother who had come to ask her for aide. The Prophet said to her, ‘Maintain the ties with your mother.’(2)

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(1) *On the authority of ‘Aisha may Allah be pleased with her who said, ‘Hala bint Khuwaylid, the sister of Khadija may Allah be pleased with them asked to enter to Prophet Muhammad’s house. Thereupon, he remembered the way of Khadija in asking permission may Allah be pleased with her and how it had given him comfort. He said, “O Almighty Allah. Hala bint Khuwaylid!” So I felt jealous and said, “Why are you mentioning one an old woman from Quraysh who has passed away, especially when Allah Glorified is He has given you a better wife in her place.”’ This narration was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2437). Another narration (2434) mentioned that whenever he would slaughter a sheep, he would say, ‘Send some of it to the friends of Khadija.’*

(2) *On the authority of Asma’ bint Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with them who said: “My mother had come to me while she was an idolatress, after the agreement between Prophet Muhammad and Quraysh was signed. So I sought the counsel of Prophet Muhammad and asked, “O Messenger of Allah! My mother has come to me (expecting my company or=*

The scope of this concept extends further than that. In addition to treating our parents with kindness if they are disbelievers, we are even ordered to treat them benevolently when they are actively engaged in calling us to disbelief. With all of these considerations, Allah *Glorified is He* has said: ‘(Revere your parents,) Yet, if they force you with great effort to ascribe divinity to any deity with Me, in something which your mind cannot accept (as divine), do not obey them; but (even then) bear their company in this world’s life with kindness’ (*Luqman:* 15).

This concept of benevolence to one’s parents expresses the grandness of this religion and the Mercy of the Creator towards these parents, even in their state of unfaith and hostile disbelief. It is narrated (1) that the Friend of Allah, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), was once visited by a guest at night. He wanted to host the guest and questioned him about his religion. The man replied that he was a Magian (Fire Worshipper). Thereupon, Prophet Ibrahim turned away from him and the guest left. As soon as he did that, Allah *Glorified is He* reproached his conduct with that guest, ‘O Ibrahim! I have provided him with bounteous support within My dominion. I feed him, give him drink and clothe him while he is a disbeliever in Me. Do you then turn away from him and desire to change his religion in order that he might remain with you for a night?’

Prophet Ibrahim hurried behind the man and told him about Allah’s revelation. The man replied, ‘Indeed, Great is a Lord who will reproach his loved ones on account of his enemies.’ At this point, the man embraced faith in the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* and that Ibrahim was a messenger of Allah.

Some academic researchers of oriental studies have truncated understandings and limited grasps regarding the graceful Quranic style. They claimed that there is a contradiction between Allah’s verses: ‘…bear them company in this world’s life with kindness (*ma’ruf*)’ (*Luqman:* 15) and His statement: ‘You will not find people who (truly) believe in Allah and the Last Day and (at the same time) love (*yuwaadun*) anyone who contends against Allah and His

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= *aid) and she is still refusing Islam. Should I receive her with care?” He responded, “Yes, receive her and maintain the ties with your mother.” This was a narration by Muslim in his sahih (1003) and Al-Bukhari in his sahih as well (5979).*

(1) The story of the fire-worshipping guest who visited Ibrahim

Apostle, even though they be their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers or (others of) their kindred' (*al-Mujadala:* 22).

These researchers of oriental studies asked, 'How can the Quran issue a command to honourably accompany our parents and to extend courtesies unto them while prohibiting us from adoring those who are at odds with Allah and His Messenger?' Had these individuals understood the provisions of the Arabic style embodied within the Quran, they would have known that the words *ma'ruf* (good treatment and courtesy) are different from the word *yuwaadun* (adoring and loving).

Good treatment and courtesy are extended by a person to those whom he loves as well as those whom he does not like. Whether they are believers or disbelievers, you should feed all people if they are hungry, give them drink if they are thirsty and clothe him if they are not clothed. Adoration, on the other hand, is only for those whom you love because it is of the affairs of the heart.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…and never say, 'Ugh,' to them and do not scold them, but always speak unto them with reverent speech' (*al-Isra':* 23). This is an instruction of divine origin which takes the mental condition of the aging parents into account. It advises the children to use a measure of intelligence and astuteness as well as good manners and tenderness in their interactions with their parents during this period.

The father, who once generously provided for his children, is currently in need of their help. After he was strong and capable to earn a living, he is now confined to his home or even bedridden. Care for him requires awareness, good judgment, and tact, in order to avoid injuring him emotionally in this delicate situation.

Think critically about Allah's words: '…never say, "Ugh," to them' (*al-Isra':* 23). This is a simple word that can be uttered as an involuntary response to frustration or aggravation without the slightest bit of forethought. Allah *Glorified is He* has prohibited us from using this involuntary expression, as this is not a word that you can have in your dictionary while dealing with your parents.

The word is a verbal noun in the Arabic language, which means, 'I am irritated and frustrated.' It is a natural human state in many settings, but Allah

Glorified is He has warned you of its consequences and ordered you to control this emotional state by avoiding the use of this expression.

If Allah has prohibited us from using this slight expression of discontent with one’s parents, He has prohibited us from any greater expressions of annoyance with our parents. The prohibition of this word represents the proscription of all disdainful speech and actions. Allah *Glorified is He* then added emphasis to this command with His statement: ‘…and do not scold them’ (*al-Isra’:* 23). The Arabic word used here is ‘*tanharhuma’*, which comes from the word ‘*nahr’*. *Nahr* is harsh rebuking or lambasting of a person. It is an emotional response that results from frustration and is clearly harsher than the slight expression, ‘Ugh’.

We occasionally see these scenes of discontent in many families. Imagine, for instance, a son giving his father a cup of tea. If the father’s hand trembles and spills the tea all over his son’s expensive rug, the son may utter, ‘Ugh!’ in his frustration. He may even utter harsher remarks of disapproval that hurt the feelings of the father. Therefore, you must be careful not to sigh in frustration or scold your parents at any moment. Be very wary of expressions like these which flow from the tongue instantly, leaving you without time to reflect upon their consequences.

After that clear prohibition, we are given a new command that emphasizes the concept of benevolence, ‘…but (always) speak unto them with reverent speech’ (*al-Isra’:* 23). This is a fitting moment to mention the story (1) of a young man whose father spilled a container of food upon his garment. The son started taking the food that had fallen upon his garment and ate it while saying to his father, ‘May Allah *Glorified is He* feed you as you have fed me!’ In this manner, he had taken a mishap and turned it into a praiseworthy favour. There is also the story of another young man who had thrown himself at his mother’s feet in respect until she said, ‘Enough, my son!’ He responded by saying, ‘If you truly love me, do not prevent me from an action which will deliver me to Paradise, by revering you!’ This kind of reverent speech is a manifestation of good behaviour and intelligence. This is especially true if they have reached a disabling age or have fallen in illness, as these states place people in the need of others. Children are the persons most obligated to take care of the parents during situations such as these. This is particularly important in private situations where a person may be inappropriately uncovered. In these moments, the parents should be sheltered from the eyes of all people, except their children and beloved family members.

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(1) The story of the son who licked the food that his father spilled over him and pray for his father

Imagine an elderly father who is in a state of infirmity. He may need someone to help him relieve and clean himself at the washroom. In a situation such as this, the appropriate response of the son towards his father should be, ‘Take it easy, my dear father! Grant me an opportunity to reciprocate the favours you have granted me earlier, as you have helped me in this situation many times when I was a child!’ In this manner, the son is behaving lovingly and gently with his father. He is not showing any frustration or annoyance, but actually, commiseration and sympathy.

This is the reverent speech that children must use at all times. For instance, your father may visit your home and accidentally break one of the accessories in your house. In such a situation, you should offer the following consolation, ‘It is nothing important, my dear father. I had actually been thinking of buying a new one’. You can then choose to say other expressions that would be classified as examples of reverent speech. This speech maintains the dignity of parents and is not injurious to their feelings.

In many instances, sickness accompanies the onset of old age. Indeed, you may see either parent bedridden or completely disabled during this period (May Allah grant mental and physical soundness to them all). For this reason, they will be in the most demanding need of someone who will alleviate their difficulties and console them. Moreover, they will need someone by their side to offer hope of a speedy recovery and to remind them that others who shared this condition were cured by Allah *Glorified is He* and are now in a healthy state.

Additionally, you need to mention the favours that your parents have granted to you during your infancy and childhood. Remember the loving tenderness and compassion they showed you, and that this parental affection increased when you were weaker or in sickness. You will see that the poorer son is given more consideration by his parents than his rich brother and that the sick or disabled child is given more attention than the healthy. Those who are absent are considered more than those who are present and the young are cared for more than the old are. In this manner, the extent of the child's need dictates the level of the caregiver's compassion.

Therefore, there is a very important conclusion we cannot neglect. If filial piety is an obligation during the period of the parents' health, capability, and strength, it is even more binding during their old age, incapacity, and sickness, Allah *Glorified is He* said, concerning good manners with parents:

وَٱخۡفِضۡ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ ٱلذُّلِّ مِنَ ٱلرَّحۡمَةِ وَقُل رَّبِّ ٱرۡحَمۡهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرٗا ٢٤

And lower your wing in humility towards them in kindness and say, 'Lord, have mercy on them, just as they cared for me when I was little' [24] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 24)

The word *ikhfid* comes from the Arabic word *khafd* (lowering) and this is the opposite of the Arabic word *raf'* (lifting or raising). Regarding the verse's phrase, 'the wings of tenderness,' it is well known that a bird raises and flutters its wings as it prepares for flight. In contrast, when it envelops its youngsters with kindness to embrace and feed them, it lowers its wings.

Therefore, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with an animated depiction that we are ordered to imitate in our interaction with our parents. We should envelop them with kindness and lower our wings for them. This expression implies obedience, kindness, humility, and compassion. Likewise, you should never imitate the bird which raises its wings in order to soar past others.

On many occasions the Wise Lawgiver, Allah *Glorified is He* grants us examples and parables of mercy and gentleness from the behaviour of birds. Allah *Glorified is He* has made them a role model and an example for us. If you observe a bird enveloping its brood under its wings to feed them, you will witness a wondrous sight. The young birds are not able to masticate or pulverize their food. They may also lack the function which aids them in swallowing the food, and so, their parents fulfil this function by preparing their food for easy digestion. During this process, you will see the parent bird and its young offspring dancing with joy and happiness. Therefore, Allah's saying: '…the wings of your tenderness (*dhull*)' (*al-Isra':* 24) is a metonymical reference to humility.

The Arabic word *dhull* (tenderness) can be used to mean 'subjugation to conquest' or to mean 'mercy and compassion'. Allah *Glorified is He* stated in another verse: 'O you who have believed, if you ever abandon your faith, Allah will bring forth, in time, people whom He loves and who love Him, humble (*adhilla*) towards the believers, superior over the disbelievers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). If the intended meaning of the word *adhilla* here meant 'subjugation to conquest', Allah *Glorified is He* would have said, '…humble under the believers.' However, the intended meaning here is 'humility'. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said, '…humble towards the believers.' This meaning is also emphasized by the remaining part of the statement: '…superior over the disbelievers' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) which means that they are forcible and stronger in attitude towards the disbelievers. In another verse with a similar meaning, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Muhammad is Allah's Apostle; and those who are (truly) with him are firm and unyielding towards the disbelievers, (yet) full of mercy towards one another' (*al-Fath:* 29).

Indeed, the Creator has not created human beings as unconditionally gentle or unconditionally firm creatures. Rather, the believer should have the flexibility and pliancy which enables him to assume the more appropriate stance in every situation that he encounters. If he encounters an arrogant disbeliever, he is firm. On the other hand, if he encounters a believer, he is modest and humble.

We can clearly observe this phenomenon by looking upon the biographies of Prophet Muhammad's companions, Abu Bakr and 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them*. The mercy, tenderness and gentleness of Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* are well known in his biography. In contrast, 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* was known for his bravery, forcefulness and sternness in the matters of truth. 'Umar frequently asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deal with people violently for antagonizing his message, with the Prophet refusing these suggestions.

When the Apostasy Wars erupted after the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* each one of these two companions assumed a stance that was at variance with his earlier nature. It was the opinion of 'Umar that they refrain from fighting the enemies of Islam during this critical period, while trying to persuade them instead. At the same time, Abu Bakr's opinion was to engage them on the battlefield, so that they would return to the fold of Islam and submit to the command of Allah *Glorified is He*. Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* said concerning them, 'I swear, if they do so much as prevent me from a single camel's leash that they used to give as part of the poor people's charity to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* I will argue their case with a sword. By Allah *Glorified is He* even if nothing remains beside the vegetation.'(1)

These positions were articulated by Abu Bakr and 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them* for a high purpose. If 'Umar had expressed the opinion that Abu Bakr had held during the issue, it would have been viewed as a natural result of 'Umar's sternness and boldness. However, this stern position was voiced by the possessor of a tender heart, Abu Bakr, as everyone would know that his stern actions were not being pursued simply for the sake of severity. The war was initiated for the preservation of faith and to defend its integrity. It was the crucial situation at hand that dictated *Abu Bakr's* position and demanded his firmness to surpass his natural disposition of softness.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And lower (*ikhfid*) to them, humbly, the wings of your tenderness (*dhull*)' (*al-Isra':* 24). Therefore, as we discussed above, the connotation of the word *dhull* is showing humility and mercy towards one's parents.

However, your own mercy will not be sufficient compensation for the favours they have done to you. Therefore, it is also your obligation to pray for the greatest Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* to be bestowed upon them: 'And say, "O my Lord! Bestow Your grace upon them, as they cherished and reared me when I was a child,"' (*al-Isra':* 24).

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(1) *Agreed upon; Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7284, 7285) and also by Muslim in his Sahih (20) in the Book of Faith. It is from the tradition recorded on the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

The one who initiates the doing of good is not to be equated (in status) with the one who reciprocates the good action. The parents initiated the doing of good towards you and you are only reciprocating that good. For this reason, you must pray that Allah *Glorified is He* bestow His Mercy upon them. Thus, Allah will bestow sufficient Mercy to compensate the favours they have done for you.

The True Lord says:

'Just as they cared for me when I was little' (*al-Isra':* 24) *Kama* (as they) implies similarity. Thus, the verse means: show them mercy like the mercy they showed me when they cherished me and reared me as a young child. *Kama* might also serve as an explicative purpose, i.e. show them mercy because they cherished and reared me as a child. This construction is similar to Allah's saying: '…and remember Him as He has guided you…' (*al-Baqara:* 198) As for the phrase 'they cared for me', it is a phrase which includes every educator or nurturer of the human being, even if other than the parents; for indeed, a child might be raised by other than his parents for some reason or another. A judgment is inextricably linked to its underlying basis. When the basis is present, the judgment is present and when the basis is absent, the judgment is also absent. So, if you were raised by other than your parents, those persons should enjoy the same privilege as the biological parents in terms of excellent conduct, wholesome interaction, and prayer.

This is a sign of good tidings for anyone who raises a child who is not his own. This is especially true if the child who is raised is an orphan or someone to be considered as an orphan. Within the expression: 'they cared for me when I was little' (*al-Isra':* 24) is an acknowledgement on behalf of the child for the favour and beautiful conduct shown to him by his parents: a favour that should be reciprocated. Afterward, the True Lord concludes this judgment by citing an issue which ties the way a child treats his parents to the way this child treats his Lord *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رَّبُّكُمۡ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا فِي نُفُوسِكُمۡۚ إِن تَكُونُواْ صَٰلِحِينَ فَإِنَّهُۥ كَانَ لِلۡأَوَّٰبِينَ غَفُورٗا ﴿٢٥﴾

Your Lord knows best what is in your heart. If you are good,
He is most forgiving to those who return to Him [25]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 25)

Previously, we discussed faith and hypocrisy. We said that the believer is logical with himself, because he believes with his heart as well as his tongue. The disbeliever, also, is logical with himself because he disbelieves with his heart as well as his tongue. As for the hypocrite, he is not is logical with himself because he believes with his tongue but flagrantly rejects faith within his heart. This verse necessitates that we discuss hypocrisy because it is one of the phenomena that is an adjunct to faith in Allah. We do in fact know that hypocrisy did not appear in Mecca, which had adamantly opposed Islam, stubbornly refused it and attempted to suffocate it. In contrast, it appeared in Medina which had played host to the faith; Al-Medina which, throughout all of its various parts, had opened to Islam. Some people have asked: How did this take place? We respond by stating: Hypocrisy is a salubrious occurrence when it appears beside faith; for to be sure, only that which is strong can be the object of hypocrisy. Islam was weak in Mecca. The disbelievers were boldly defying Islam, not dealing with it hypocritically. When Islam reached Medina, it began to strengthen from its root and develop at its core. As this took place, the weak-hearted began to duplicitously deal with the believers. For this reason, some ask: How could Allah speak disapprovingly about the people of Medina, and say concerning them: ‘…as are some of the people of Medina— they are obstinate in their hypocrisy…’ (*at-Tawba:* 101). We mention here, that the Quran has praised the people of Medina in terms that cannot be surpassed. Allah *Glorified is He* says in respect to them: ‘Those who were already firmly established in their homes [in Medina], and firmly rooted in faith…’ (*al-Hashr:* 9). It is as though He has made faith a place for those who dwell in it.

‘…show love for those who migrated to them for refuge and harbour no desire in their hearts for what has been given to them. They give them preference over themselves, even if they too are poor…’ (*at-Tawba:* 101). So, if Allah says: '…as are some of the people of Medina— they are obstinate in their hypocrisy…' (*at-Tawba:* 101). The presence of hypocrisy in Medina is a sign of the faith's soundness. For indeed, if the faith was not strong, there would be no reason for the Hypocrites of Medina to deal with it in a duplicitous fashion. From this standpoint, Allah has made the hypocrites the occupiers of the lowest tier in the fire of hell. This is because the hypocrites intermingle with the believers as though they are among them and they interact with them, living with them and learning of sensitive information in the process. All the while, the believers are unable to fully encompass the hypocrites' machinations. Hypocrites are internal enemies and it is very difficult to identify them. In this, they differ markedly from the disbelievers. The latter's antipathy for Islam is clear, present, and articulated. This makes it possible to defend against them and take precaution.

However, why are we discussing hypocrisy in the context of our discussion around singular devotion to Allah and filial piety? The True Lord *Glorified is He* wills to give us a precise indication; that just as hypocrisy can stealthily invade our faith in Allah it can also do so to filial piety. Consequently, we observe some children who behave excellently with their parents ostentatiously to gain a reputation and not with sincerity—which amounts to hypocrisy. They are not motivated by recognizing the favour of the parents upon them, nor the parents' protectiveness over them. It is these who are being addressed when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Your Lord knows best what is in your heart…' (*al-Isra':* 25).

Indeed, there are some children who treat their parents with kindness, while cannily praying to be rid of them. The address was issued in the plural *rabbukum* (literally: the Lord of all of you). That is to say: the Lord of the child as well as of the parents. All of your benefit is given equal consideration with me. Just as We defend the father, We also defend the son. So that neither of you would commit anything that has dire consequences. As for His saying: '…If you are good…' (*al-Isra':* 25). That is to say: if you meet the conditions of righteousness, Allah will soon grant you an assured reward. If, alternatively, you are unrighteous and insincere at heart, then return to the correct course of action at once and do not persist in this lack of righteousness. Instead, return to Allah *Glorified is He* and repent to Him. '…He is most forgiving to those who return to Him.' (*al-Isra':* 25); those who turn to Him again and again: are the individuals who acknowledge their sins and penitently return to Their Lord.

Previously, we clarified the legitimacy of repentance to Allah for those who engage in wrong actions. It is mercy from the Creator unto His creation. This is because if the servant committed an offence, failing to pay heed to either his religion or his conscience, and repentance were illegitimate, that single misdeed would track him. He would express grief over it his entire life. Even more, it would beckon him to another misdeed. In this manner, the entire community would suffer with the commission of a single sin! This explains why the Creator has laid down repentance: to preserve the well-being and security of the community so that it can be rich with multi-faceted good.

The Quran then expands the circle of relation from the direct family members—which are the parents—to a circle that is more encompassing. After evoking the servant's compassion toward his parents, Allah *Glorified is He* turns the servant's attention to those who are related to the parents in terms of kinship.

The True Lord says:

وَءَاتِ ذَا ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُۥ وَٱلْمِسْكِينَ وَٱبْنَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَلَا تُبَذِّرْ تَبْذِيرًا ﴿٢٦﴾

Give relatives their due, and the needy, and travellers – do not squander your wealth wastefully [26] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 26)

The True Lord, evoking man's compassion toward his parents, He goes further to ask him to extend his compassion his parents' kinship. He says: 'Give relatives their due…' (*al-Isra':* 26). The expression 'Their due' states that Allah has made financial support a right for relatives if they are in difficulty. If they are not in any difficulty, giving should take the form of mutual exchanges of gifts between you and them. Thus, relatives exchange gifts. The True Lord *Glorified is He* intends to spread the spirit of mutual communal responsibility among the populace.

For this reason, some of the Muslim jurists of Andalusia would order a man's hand to be severed as though he was guilty of theft if he refused to give his relatives the mandated amount of the poor-due. This is because Allah

Glorified is He did refer to it as a *haqq* (right), and whoever withholds the right of whoever is entitled to it is as though he has stolen from him. This was the course of action pursued by the Muslim jurists of Andalusia because they were living in an efflorescent society of great wealth. As a result, they exaggerated the scope of this particular legal question because no one had an excuse to neglect it.(1)

Therefore, one of their *khulafa'a* (caliph) went to Al-Mundhir ibn Sa'id(2) and said, 'I have betrayed an oath and I want to atone for it.' So, Al-Mundhir ibn Sa'id judged that he should fast for three days. One of the learned men who were present said, 'You have unnecessarily narrowed what is vast. Indeed, Allah has also enacted—for the atonement of betraying oaths—feeding or clothing ten indigent persons or freeing a slave. Al-Mundhir responded by saying, 'Is someone like the commander of the faithful reprimanded by feeding ten poor people or clothing them? In truth, he does that every day for a thousand or more. The only thing that will reprove him is fasting.' In this respect, they took from the spirit of the law rather than its letter; to conform to the ability of the caliph, and prove more effective at reprimanding him and deterring him from wrong action.

The word *haqq* has occurred in the Quran indicating two meanings: The first appears in Allah's words: 'Who give a due share of their wealth,' (*al-Ma'arij*: 24); in this case the *al-haqq al-ma'lum* (a due share) is the poor-due. As for the other use of the word *haqq*, it is not acknowledged or described. It is voluntary charity and making good. This means that you make a voluntary action similar to the obligatory one—like the voluntary charity and the poor-due—for the sake of Allah. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before: sleeping only little at night, praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness, giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16-19) Here, Allah did not say ‘due’ because the verse is promoting *Ihsan* (doing good deeds to the extent of excellence) which constitutes excellence and supererogatory good action. This is beyond what Allah has made an obligation upon us. The one who gives this *haqq* should feel happy, considering it an endowment rather than a burdening debt. This is because the life of this world—as we learned—is made up of fluctuations which change and alternate along with its people. So, the healthy can become infirm, the wealthy, indigent and so forth. Thus, your giving today is a guarantee for you in the future. Moreover, it is also a guarantee for your children after you. In essence, *haqq* (what is due) that you pay today is the same that you will be in need of tomorrow if you are visited by hard times. Therefore, the poor-due you give to their rightful owners today are security for you in the future. They allow you to respond to the demands of life with power: without growing spiritless or weak. You know that your due is preserved in the community. It would be the same circumstance if you left your children in neediness and poverty: The community would shoulder the burden of taking care of them. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truthfully when He says: ‘Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if they were to die, show the same concern [for orphans]; let them be mindful of God and speak out for justice.’ *(an-Nisa’:* 9) Because of this, people of affluence and wealth—due to their *wara’* (self-restraint: keenness to refrain from that which you suspect may be a sin)—do not give to their family members out of the poor-due. Quite the reverse, they especially choose to give to indigent people who are distanced from them and they set aside money specifically designated for their relatives, with the goal of expressing good conduct through aiding them. *Al-miskin* (the needy one): He is the one who does own some things and has some money but not enough to suffice him. This is proven by the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘The boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea…’ (*al-Kahf:* 79). He says *limasakin* (belonged to needy people). As for *al-faqir* (the indigent or needy), he is the one who owns nothing. Some people conflate the words *al-miskin* and *al-faqir,* but this is a misunderstanding. As for the term *ibn as-sabil* (wayfarer), *sabil* refers to the road. It is quite normal for a person to be affiliated with the land of his residence; so you would say: son of Cairo or son of Port Said, for instance. If he is stranded on the road and is faced with difficult situations which place him in need of aid and assistance—even if in reality he owns massive wealth and resources—it is as though he has lost his money. It is his right to take money from the Muslims in the amount which will deliver him to his land. If the wayfarer requests help, do not ask him about the truth of his situation because he has a dutiful right to be provided with money. So, do not place him in a position of embarrassment or discomfiture.

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(1) *This is narrated in the text Al-Mughni which was authored by Ibn Qudama 2: 435 in the chapter entitled the Ruling Concerning the One Who Refuses to Pay the Poor-Due: 'if he purposely refuses to pay the poor- due while acknowledging it's mandatory status, and the ruler is able to forcibly take it, he takes it by force and enacts some type of punitive measure. Most of the people of knowledge including Abu Hanifa, Malik, Ash-Shafi'i, and their companions agree that he does not take an additional amount on top of the poor-due. However, in a similar situation, if he has abundant resources and conceals them in order that the authorities will not take the poor-due from him, the authorities should take the poor-due and half of his net worth.*

(2) The story of Al-Mundhir ibn Sa'id with the Andalusian Caliph who swore and wished to atone his swearing.

'…do not squander your wealth wastefully…' (*al-Isra':* 26): This mirrors what Allah *Glorified is He* says in a different verse: '…It is He who produces both trellised and un-trellised gardens, date palms, crops of diverse flavors, the olive, the pomegranate, alike yet different. So when they bear fruit, eat some of it, paying what is due on the day of harvest, but do not be wasteful: God does not like wasteful people.' (*al-An'am:* 141) Therefore, senseless squandering is extravagance. *Tabdhir* (squandering) is taken from the word *yabdhur* which describes the process that is undertaken by farmers when they take seedlings that they desire to harvest and spread them throughout their farming lands by hand. They excels at this process, when they spread the seeds evenly throughout the land which means that the seeds have been dispersed throughout the land that was designated for their cultivation at a ratio which gives each of the seeds an equal amount of land. In this manner, the crop succeeds and the grower is given the desired harvest. On the other hand, if they plant the seeds in a haphazard way—without a clearly defined system—the seeds will be strewn about the field in an unbalanced way. They are overflowing in one place and scant in another place. This is what we refer to as *tabdhir* (squandering) because they have placed the seeds in the wrong place. The seeds are insufficient in one place and overcrowded in another. This is an impediment to their growth. This explains why the True Lord chooses to express the act of wasteful spending through the word *tabdhir* because the extravagant person puts his money in the wrong places. He spends haphazardly, without a well-defined system. Indeed, he spends lavishly on things which are not necessary and is niggardly when it comes to the necessities. Thus, *tabdhir* is spending money in inappropriate places or spending with neither the onset of need nor exigency.

The prohibition of squandering, as it appears here, might seem to proscribe wastefulness as it exists in relation to giving charity. By charity here is that when you give the poor-due; do not allow yourself to be taken by a faith-based temporary generosity which inspires you to give more than you are obligated. Perhaps you hear the praises of the people and their thanks and increase your giving as a result. Then afterward; after you retreat to your privacy, you might regret what you have done and blame yourself for this extravagance. Alternatively, the meaning might be: 'Give to your relatives, the needy, and wayfarer; nonetheless, do not be extravagant in other matters. Negation, here, is not for the giving. Rather, it refers to the paltry affairs for which money is unnecessarily spent.[1] The True Lord then goes on to state:

إِنَّ ٱلْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوٓا۟ إِخْوَٰنَ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينِ ۖ وَكَانَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ لِرَبِّهِۦ كَفُورًا ﴿٢٧﴾

Those who squander are the brothers of Satan, and Satan is most ungrateful to his Lord [27] (The Quran, *al-Isra': 27*)

Here, the word *akh* (brother) is pluralized on the form of *ikhwa* or *ikhwan*. The word *ikhwa* refers to brothers of the same patrilineal or matrilineal line. As Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'Joseph's brothers came…' (*Yusuf:* 58). It also indicates brothers in good action, *wara'* (self-restraint) and being conscious of Allah, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The believers are brothers…' (*al-Hujurat:* 10).

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his Tafsir 5/3976: whoever spends his money on that which delights him in amounts that exceed what is necessary to such an extent that he depletes his resources is a prodigal spender. The person who spends his expendable cash on that which delights him and preserves his base wealth for his responsibilities is not wasteful. Whoever spends a single cent in that which is unlawful is a wasteful spender. He is forcibly deterred from spending a single cent toward that which is unlawful. On the other hand, if he wants to wastefully spend his money on delights, he is not forcibly deterred unless he is in danger of totally depleting his resources.*

The word occurs with the same connotation in Allah’s statement about the Noble Lady Maryam (*peace be upon her*): ‘O sister of Harun [Aaron]...’ (*Maryam:* 28). Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* the brother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is the one intended here. Between Harun and Maryam *peace be upon them* is a very large interval of time which approaches eleven generations. Despite this, the Quran calls them siblings: they were siblings in *wara’* (self-restraint) and *taqwa* (being conscious of Allah).

As for the term *ikhwan*, it indicates that a people have gathered around a certain principle; whether it is positive or negative. At times, it is used as an indication of assemblage around good. This is exemplified in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘…Remember Allah's favour to you: you were enemies and then He brought your hearts together and you became brothers by His grace….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 103) It can also be used to refer to an assemblage around evil as understood from Allah’s saying: ‘Those who squander are the brothers of the devils….’ (*al-Isra’:* 27) It is as if the prodigal spenders and the devils share in one characteristic and one fondness. As a result, they have been attributed with the same evil traits.

Thus, the word *ikhwa* indicates the bond shared by people of the same parentage in its basic meaning. It might also transcend to indicate brotherhood of faith, which supersedes relationships of all kinds in its ability to bind people. This gives us a suitable occasion to mention what took place during the battle of Badr between two brothers from the same family. After Mus’ab ibn ‘Umayr *may Allah be pleased with him* had professed belief in Islam and migrated to Medina, he set out with the Muslim forces for Badr. At this time his brother Abu 'Aziz was still a disbeliever. So, he set out from Mecca with the army of the disbelievers. The two brothers encountered each other; one a Muslim and the other a disbeliever. It is well known that Mus’ab ibn ‘Umayr *may Allah be pleased with him* was one of the wealthiest men of Mecca and that he only wore the most luxurious and finest garments. He would perfume himself with the most expensive cologne. This was known of him to such an extent that it earned him the title ‘the Bon Vivant of Mecca.’ Then, he accepted faith and his condition began to change. The effects of faith in Allah began to make itself manifest within all of this wealth and affluence. The

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then sent him as an emissary to Medina to teach the people the affairs of their religious lives.(1) Then during the battle of Uhud, Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* upon seeing him dressed in a rough sheep skin said, 'Look at what faith has done to your brother'(2). So, what happened between the two brothers; the believer and the disbeliever? Which of the two bonds was stronger; that composed of faith in Allah or that based on blood ties? As the battle wound down Mus'ab *may Allah be pleased with him* looked and recognized that his brother had been taken as a prisoner of war by one of the Muslim soldiers named Abu Al-Yasar(3) *may Allah be pleased with him*. He then looked at him and said, 'O Abu Al-Yasar be stern with your prisoner! Indeed his mother is rich and will pay handsomely for his ransom.' At that moment, Abu Al-Aziz(4) *may Allah be pleased with him*, looked at him and said, 'O Mus'ab, is this what you advise to be done to your brother?' Mus'ab *may Allah be*

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(1) *Narrated by Abu N'aim in Al-Hilya 1:107: In fact, the people of Medina had sent Mu'adh ibn 'Afra' and Rafi'ibn Malik to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to deliver the message that they desired that a man be sent before the Prophet's, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him arrival. They asked for someone who could convey Allah's Book unto the people because they acknowledged that it was the truth that should be followed. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him dispatched Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr unto them.*

(2) *Narrated by Abu N'aim in Al-Hilya 1: 108: from the Hadith narrated on the authority of 'Umar ibn al Khattab may Allah be pleased with him: ''The Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him looked at Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr may Allah be pleased with him, approaching him while he was clad in a ram skin that he had used to cover himself. The Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him then said, 'Look at this man whose heart has been illumined by Allah. I used to see him being pampered among the notables, being given the choicest of food and drink. Only the love of Allah and His Messenger has brought him to what you see today.''*

(3) *His name: K'ab ibn 'Umar Al-Ansari As-Salmi. He was present for the campaigns of 'Aqaba and Badr. He was the one responsible for taking Al-'Abbas captive. Mada'ni said that he was short in stature and corpulent with a protruding belly. He died in Medina in the fifty-fifth year after The Migration (The Quran, Al-Isaba fi tamyiz As- Sahaba, Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani 7/218: Biography # 1243 in the section of Al-Kina)*

(4) *His name: Zarara ibn 'Umayr may Allah be pleased with him. He was a companion and received the distinction of listening to the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him speak. The historians of war agree that he was taken prisoner at the battle of Badr. (The Quran, Ibid. 7/130)*

pleased with him responded by saying, ‘He is more my brother than you are.’ So, the brotherhood of faith is stronger and more resilient than the brotherhood of shared parentage. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truthfully when he says: ‘The believers are brothers…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 10).

Taking a closer look at His saying: ‘Those who squander are the brothers of the devils….’ (*al-Isra’:* 27) The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made them cohorts in one trait: squandering and wastefulness. If the squandered goes overboard in spending his money and spends it inappropriately on unnecessary things, then Satan goes to extremes in disobedience. It is not enough for him to be a disobedient soul. On the contrary, he spreads this disobedience among others; deceiving others with it and making it seems fair. For this reason, the True Lord has described him saying: ‘…and Satan is most ungrateful to his Lord.’ (*al-Isra’:* 27)

He is not simply a *kafir* (an infidel), rather, he is *kafur* (most ungrateful). This is a style of superlative expression within the trilateral root *k-f-r* (Arabic letters). He is described thus because he is faithless and works to make others faithless. The True Lord then goes on to say:(1)

وَإِمَّا تُعۡرِضَنَّ عَنۡهُمُ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ رَحۡمَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّكَ تَرۡجُوهَا فَقُل لَّهُمۡ قَوۡلٗا مَّيۡسُورٗا ﴿٢٨﴾

But if, while seeking some bounty that you expect from your Lord, you turn them down, then at least speak some word of comfort to them [28] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 28)

We must ask: Turning away from whom? Previously, the discussion revolved around parents, relatives, the needy, and the wayfarer. Turning away from them does not suit the context of the verse because it would constitute turning away from the obedience of Allah. This is evidenced by Allah’s saying: ‘…while seeking some bounty that you expect from your Lord…’ (*al-Isra’:* 28). Obviously, Allah is in your thoughts. You are looking for Allah’s mercy, provision, and largesse to result from this ‘turning away.’ This implies that the ‘turning away’ being referenced here could not refer to disobedience or defiance. What then, is the point of mentioning this ‘turning away?’ We respond by stating: sometimes a relative, a needy person, or a wayfarer will make their way to you in order to request something of you during a time that you cannot fulfil their need. As a result, you might feel embarrassed to confront them with a negative response: you feel reticent to face that individual and reject him. What is left to do in a circumstance like this one besides to turn to your Lord *Glorified is He*, to ask with sincerity that you be given a way out; that your needs as well the need of the one who sought your favours be met. The meaning of the verse then becomes: Indeed, if you turn away from them out of embarrassment and diffidence because you are reluctant to face them while you do not have what is necessary to meet their needs, then you must retreat to your Lord in such a situation. He will show you abundant mercy; mercy that will encompass you as well as them. The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘…then at least speak some word of comfort to them.’ (*al-Isra’:* 28) This is like what Allah has said in another place to describe a similar state of affairs: ‘A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]: Allah is self-sufficient, forbearing…’ (*al-Baqara:* 263). Even in the event of turning someone down, the Muslim must remain firmly committed to displaying good manners. He does not injure the feelings of the questioner. He responds carefully and with gentleness; exposing the fact that his not being able to provide the requested help is actually a source of embarrassment and awkwardness for him. In no circumstance does he project an attitude of arrogance or conceit. He must thank Allah that he was the one asked not the one asking.

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(1) *The circumstance occasioning the revelation: Zayd may Allah be pleased with him mentioned that the verse was revealed about a group of people who were requesting charity from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. The Prophet declined to grant their request because he knew that their habit was to spend their money on indecent things. So, he turned away from them because he desired to gain the reward of preventing them, of refusing to assist them in their indecency. Al-Qurtubi mentioned this explanation in his Tafsir 5: 3976.*

All of this implies that in such situations, if one desires to use the correct expressions and act righteously, it is not enough to simply say: ‘I do not have it.’ Indeed, the one requesting the favour will accuse you of behaving snobbishly, lacking concern for him, or treating him with reticence. This is where the role of the exalted and generous standard of character which is borne out of faith plays its part. It is this standard of character which elevates the human soul to the loftiest ranks.

Reflect upon the way in which this faith-based exalted standard of character is reflected in the statement of Allah concerning those who have legitimate excuses not to engage in armed struggle: ‘And there is no blame attached to those who came to you [Prophet] for riding animals and to whom you said, “I cannot find a mount for you”: they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they had nothing they could contribute.’ (*at-Tawba:* 92)

Here is a story of some of the companions(1) who came to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because they wanted to go out with him for a military campaign. They desired to place themselves in his charge and at his command. However, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was forced to apologize to them because he did not have any mounts that they could ride upon while going to battle. What was the response of this contingent of believers as a consequence of this? Did they depart thinking: ‘Let the record show, we did what was required of us’, while they were secretly pleased with the outcome of this situation? No; quite the reverse. Their response was: ‘…they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they had nothing they could contribute.’ (*at-Tawba:* 92) This is the way in which faith elevates its people and raises its possessors. If they are unable to perform actions that require direct engagement they offer the good word. If they are unable to do even this, there is nothing less that follows but being moved with feelings that express the true faith which causes tears to flow because of one’s meagre resources. The True Lord then goes on to say:

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(1) *Muhammad ibn K’ab Al-Qurazi has mentioned: These Companions were Salim ibn ‘Auf, Harmi ibn ‘Amr, ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn K’ab Abu Layla, Fadlullah of the Al-M’ala tribe, ‘Amr ibn ‘Atama, and ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr Al-Muzani may Allah be pleased with him. They came to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him so that he could supply them with gear and arms in order to prepare them go out in Allah’s path. His response to them was as follows: ‘...I cannot find anything whereupon to mount you…’ (at-Tawba: 92) Allah had sent down their excuse in His book with His words: ‘[But] no blame shall attach to the weak, nor to the sick, nor to those who have no means [to equip themselves], provided that they are sincere towards Allah and His Apostle: there is no cause to reproach the doers of good, for Allah is much-forgiving and a dispenser of mercy’ (at-Tawba: 91).*

وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ ٱلْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا ٢٩

Do not be tight-fisted, nor so open-handed that you end up blamed and overwhelmed with regret [29]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 29)

In a previous verse, the True Lord discusses the squanderers and warned us not to assume this trait. In this verse the True Lord establishes the economic balance that enables the human being to carry out life’s transactions in a wholesome manner. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And do not make your hand to be shackled to your neck…’ (*al-Isra’:* 29). The word *yad* (hand) is usually used to express donating and granting. We say, for instance: ‘so and so has a hand in with me’ or ‘he has countless hands in...’ This last expression means that his favours have been plentiful. This is because donating or granting, most of the time, is given with the hand. So, Allah says: ‘do not allow your *yad* (hand)—which is used for giving—to remain shackled—that is to say—fastened to your neck. When you fasten the hand to the neck you are unable to spend. Hence, its usage here suggests that it is a metonymical reference to miserliness and stinginess. The counter picture offers: ‘…nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth…’ (*al-Isra’:* 29). The prohibition of stretching the hand to the utmost limit as it appears here implies that ‘stretching the hand’ somewhat is permissible. Spending on the necessities and the absolute requirements is representative of ‘somewhat stretching the hand.’ ‘Stretching the hand’ is a metonymical reference to giving and expenditure.

In this manner, this meaning coincides with all of the definitions mentioned earlier for the words *badhdhara* and *badhra*. As for *badhdhara*, it describes the process of taking a handful of seeds and releasing them from the hand all at once. After this, the vegetation which grows from these seeds will be heaped about, some of it eating from other parts of it. This is the *tabdhir* that has been proscribed. In terms of the other type, it occurs when the experienced planter—who is familiar with this method of seeding—takes a handful of seeds and clasps them a little bit; he clasps them with the amount of pressure that allows him to release the seeds gradually; one after the other upon plots of land that are of similar dimensions. This method is referred to as *badhra*. This is symbolic of the just balance which the Wise Lawgiver desires that we observe. This is moderation. Hence, both of its extremes are reprehensible. This meaning has also occurred within the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He*: 'They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance.' (*al-Furqan:* 67)

This is a reference to moderation and balance. Thus, do not extend your hand to its fullest extent by spending all that you own. However, extend it somewhat which means that something of your savings will remain with you. This bit of your savings should enable you to raise your standard of living.

Beforehand, we clarified the wisdom that underlies moderation in spending. We said: it is undeniable that balanced spending enriches life's transactions contributes to its growth and promotes its enhancement. This is different from tightfistedness and miserliness; indeed, they cripple life's movement and give rise to inactivity, unemployment, and idleness economic depression in the markets, which negatively affects life and hinders its development.

Therefore, the circulation of currency is absolutely necessary so that you can participate in turning the wheels of life. Also, there must be moderation in spending with the aim of saving something of your earnings. This is the money that will enable you to develop your way of life and raise your living standard in the material world.

Speaking of the wasteful extravagant spender *mubadhdhir*, you will find him socially immobile. He does not advance in life by a single step. How can he make such advances while he neglects to save anything? With this sensible instruction; divine in its origin, we are able to secure the smooth progress of life and revive societal and individual enhancement. Here, we are given the natural consequences of extravagance and prodigal spending: '…lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, overwhelmed with regret.' (*al-Isra':* 29)

Earlier, we shed light on the fact that the posture of *Qu'ud* (Sitting down) in the Quran indicates a lack of ability to stand up and confront the challenges of life. This is an appropriate way to describe the person given to extravagance, in as much as nothing returns to him from what he spends. The expression 'sitting down' serves the purpose of revealing the deceleration of life's development; for moving in life depends on standing to face its trials and taking action therein. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those believers who stay at home, apart from those with incapacity are not equal to those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in Allah's way…' (*an-Nisa':* 95).

Maluman '…Blamed…' (*al-Isra':* 29) indicates that he has done something for which he was blamed and reprehended. The first people to upbraid a wasteful spender are his children and family. The same applies for the niggardly miser. Both of these are held accountable for their imbalanced spending.

Mahsuran '…overwhelmed with regret…' (*al-Isra':* 29) indicates the feeling of regret at that which has become your lot in terms of poverty and neediness. An alternative understanding of the expression offers: It is from their saying, 'an overwhelmed camel' which is a camel that is incapable of standing with its cargo. In identical fashion, the extravagant wasteful spender is neither capable of improving his life nor undertaking its responsibilities. Moreover, he is completely devoid of the potential to realize the opportunity the future contains for him as well as his children. To put it concisely, if you are excessively tight fisted, this is reprehensible and if you are excessive in your spending you will be forced to 'sit' restricted from accessing life's potential because you are unable to actualize it.

In essence, both extremes are blameworthy. They both entail vice and neither of them leads to endings that will leave the community or the individual pleased. Therefore, what is the objective of this lesson? The objective of this lesson is for the human being to traverse life's path, established between excessiveness and self-deprivation. This is like Allah's statement: 'They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance.' (*al-Furqan:* 67)

The Quran provides us with a conclusive, balanced constitution which allows for economic development in the community. Its bottom line reads: Extend your hand in spending so that you can participate in the community's progress and market activity. However, don not extend your hand to the utmost. Preserve something of your income so that you can move to realize your aspirations in life. Moreover, do not be tight-fisted and niggardly to yourself and your family for this will make them reproach you and detest being with you. In fact, this will make you an inert member of your community: you do not interact with it or enrich its life.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* the possessor of infinite stores of all that is beneficial says: ‘What you have runs out but what Allah has endures…’ (*an-Nahl:* 96). If the True Lord gave every member of His creation all that they desired it would not decrease His dominion in the least. As He says in the Qudsi Hadith: ‘O My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you, your living and your dead, your present and your absent; the humans among you and the Jinn all gathered in one plain ground and each of them were to ask for all that he wishes for, that would only detract from My dominion as much as if one of you were to pass by the edge of the sea and dip a needle in it and withdraw it. That is because I am the Most Generous, Majestic. My conferral is indescribable and My punishment is indescribable. I give with a word; when I will something, all I do is say to it “Be!” and it is.’(1) The True Lord then goes on to say:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِۦ خَبِيرًۢا بَصِيرًا ﴿٣٠﴾

Your Lord gives abundantly to who- ever He will, and
sparingly to whoever He will: He knows and observes His
servants thoroughly [30] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 30)

Allah is the One whose stores do not expire. He gives His creation in exact measure. He does not extend their provision without restriction nor does He unconditionally restrict it. On the contrary, He extends it unto a people and restricts it from others in order to further life’s development. This is due to the fact that if Allah were to extend and enlarge the provision of all people, they would be freed of their need for each other. This would consequently sever the ties that bind them, and thus ruin their collective life.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2495 from the Hadith of Abu Dharr peace be upon him. He said concerning this Hadith: it is a solid narration. It was also narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad 153 5: 77 Ibn Majah also narrated it in his Sunnan 4257.*

The developmental structure of life necessitates that someone who owns capital needs labour and the one in possession of labour needs capital. The varying needs of people coincide and converge. This is the way in which people complete each other. Every member of the community is able to sense his importance and the significance of his function in life.

Beforehand, we mentioned that the True Lord has not created any single human who has all kinds of talents. On the contrary, the talents are widely dispersed among the whole of creation. You are the possessor of a specific talent in a particular field while the talent that I possess may relate to a different field. The aim of all of this is that people remain in need of each other. Therefore, Allah places the wealthy individual who might—if the circumstances were different—exult in his wealth and use it to project an attitude of superiority above others, in need of something that is simple, but something that he would nonetheless detest performing himself. In such a situation, it is absolutely imperative that he acquire that object or service so that he can pursue life’s development with diligence. It is not the objective of the True Lord that some people confer a benefit upon others. Rather, the mutual benefit of all of humanity is inextricably linked to their incessant need of one another.

So, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* neither extends the provisions of His servants to them in an unrestricted manner nor unconditionally restricts their provisions, but instead, extends and restricts simultaneously, His tremendous wisdom must lie behind this process. This explains the reason why he has chosen moderation as the Way for His servants: To give arrangement to their lives. The servant must be pleased with that which has been designated for him in both situations, and traverse the developmental path of life at a pace that is in concert with the provision that Allah has given him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…But let him whose provision is restricted spend according to what Allah has given him…’ (*at-Talaq:* 7).

Whoever is given constricted means is directed to spend in accordance with his ability. He is not given the command to spend over his head and to venture outside of his means. This economic theory assures humanity some measure of comfort as well as integrity within the life of this world. Allah has mercy on the person who is well aware of his standing. For indeed, people observe a source of exhaustion in this life and a cause of unhappiness, when they see an indigent person with constricted means attempting to live as a rich person, who has been given abundant provision. He is venturing outside his means into that which Allah has favoured others above him.

For instance, imagine two colleagues working in the same field being paid the same salary. The first is from a wealthy background and enjoys a comfortable lifestyle made possible in part due to the money he receives from his father in addition to his salary. The second is from an underprivileged background and might be forced to spend part of his salary assisting his father with the duties of the family. If they enter the store in order to purchase something, the person from the underprivileged background should not focus on his profession salary. Rather, he should direct his attention to his real wealth profile and social position, and purchase accordingly. He should not desire to emulate his colleague because each of them has a certain potential and boundary that should not be exceeded.

This is a combination of precise economic theory and balanced conduct that is rooted in faith. For this reason, the person who respects the judgment of Allah and is pleased with what Allah has apportioned for him; living inside those parameters without attempting to transgress them, is told by the True Lord: ‘Because you have been pleased with what I have apportioned for you, I will raise the measure of your provision to the level of your consideration for Me.’ Then, He will make his provision bounteous after it had been constricted.

This is something we observe in life, its examples are sufficiently clear. How many people have been impoverished and in straightened circumstances only to end up experiencing a change of fortune and a raise in living standard which lands them in affluence and comfort, only after they expressed satisfaction at what Allah had decreed for them.

The True Lord extends the provision of whomever he chooses and strains His provision of whomever he chooses. This is because Allah always desires to place people in the earth as his vicegerent and to have them always remember this reality, for if they forget they begin to believe that they are inherent in this world.

What a gross mistake for the human being to forget that he is the vicegerent of Allah on earth, and traverses life as though he is inherent in this world. By no means, you are nothing more than a vicegerent of the One who appointed you, and you depend on what the Provider provided you with. By no means should you be deluded nor should you attempt to live at a standard that exceeds that which Allah has apportioned for you.

If you consider yourself inherent in this world, the whole of the created order will be thrown into misguidance. To be certain, Allah has made the world a collection of vicissitudes. Which means that the individual who is being abundantly provided for today can be in for scant measure tomorrow; while the person whose resources are meagre today can be amply provided for tomorrow. This is one of the ways of Allah which He effectuates in His creation; its purpose is suppressing the human being's proclivity toward the delusional idea that he is independent of Allah.

If Allah granted the human being a perpetual state of opulence, creation would cease to enjoy the pleasure of paying to Allah: 'O my Lord! Grant me provision with abundance!' If He granted the human being an unending state of good health, creation would discontinue enjoying the pleasure of paying to Allah: 'O my Lord! Heal me!' This is why the human being remains tied to his Benefactor; in constant need of Him and calling upon Him. Allah *Glorified is He* has says: 'But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient...' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

It is need that connects the human being to his Lord. It makes him inseparably bound to Him. Therefore, extension and restriction of provision are from Allah *Glorified is He* and each contains wisdom. He does not unrestrictedly extend the provision of His slaves by giving them everything they want, nor does He unconditionally restrict their provision by barring them from enjoying comfort and giving them only what they detest. On the contrary, He gives with a well-determined measure so that progress within life can come to fore, as He *Glorified is He* has said in another verse:

'If Allah were to grant His plentiful provision to [all] His creatures, they would act insolently on earth, but He sends down in due measure whatever He will…' (*ash-Shura:* 27). Also, the statement of Allah: '…He knows and observes His servants thoroughly' (*al-Isra':* 30) for if the True Lord had neglected to distribute wealth in this way with wisdom, the balance of the world would be disrupted. The one amply provided for would have declared himself independent of all others in that which his provision allowed, while the one managing constricted means would have rebelled against all of creation; jealous and envious of others, he would have been a constant source of animosity.

Only when everyone knows that everything is being given according to Allah's determination and wisdom, will the entire created order remain bound to its Creator. Allah's saying: 'Your Lord…' (*al-Isra':* 30) contains an interesting point: It means that you, Muhammad are the most dignified of Allah's creatures. Nevertheless, you have been given provision so abundant that you were able to give charity like someone who did not fear impoverishment, and you have experienced provision so restricted that you were forced to fasten a stone to your stomach to stave off hunger.(1)

If this is what the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced, no one should find it unreasonable that Allah would restrict his provision. Who amongst us has fastened a stone to his stomach to stave off hunger?

After the True Lord speaks to us about wealth—a legitimate branch of life—and illustrates a way of dealing with it that facilitates the development of life, and enables people to traverse life's path in a manner that ensures decency and happiness—the way that assures that they will be able to attain their aspirations and elevate their living standard—He now turns to the topic of life in its most direct sense. Allah has ordered that we preserve our lineage and He has prohibited us from destroying it.

Indeed, He *Glorified is He* has said:

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(1) *This was a practice of some of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him like Abu Hurayra. Al-Bukhari 6452 and Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Musnad Ahmad 3/44*

وَلَا تَقۡتُلُوٓاْ أَوۡلَٰدَكُمۡ خَشۡيَةَ إِمۡلَٰقٖۖ نَّحۡنُ نَرۡزُقُهُمۡ وَإِيَّاكُمۡۚ إِنَّ قَتۡلَهُمۡ كَانَ خِطۡـٔٗا كَبِيرٗا ٣١

Do not kill your children for fear of poverty — We shall provide for them and for you — killing them is a great sin [31] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 31)

The nexus between this verse and that which precedes it is clear. Indeed, the topic of discussion is still provision. The Creator is issuing us a warning: By no means should you consider the distribution of provision as being under your control; for to be sure, you were not responsible for your own creation nor did you create your children or descendants.

Quite the reverse, the Creator, is the only One responsible for you and your descendant’s creation. Moreover, He is the One Who summoned them forth into existence and in the same manner summoned you. This has not changed, He remains the Creator just as He remains the One who summons into existence and ensures the provision of all of His creatures. As a result, be sure not to move beyond your sphere of influence by sticking your nose into this matter. This is especially true if the matter concerns children. Observe Allah’s statement: ‘Do not kill your children’ (*al-Isra’:* 31).

The word *qatl* (killling) means to annihilate a life. This is similar to death but among the two there is a marked difference that should be highlighted: As for *al-qatl* (killing): it is the annihilation of life in a manner that involves destroying the human body. The human being is composed of a body which the Creator *Glorified is He* has constructed—as the house for his soul. It consists of the organs of the human body. The Creator then placed a soul within the body, and it is thus given life. If one person strikes another on the head for instance, the brain is damaged and his life ends. Nonetheless, his life ends with the destruction of the exoskeleton which houses the lively soul. To be sure, the soul only dwells in a body which has certain characteristics. When these characteristics undergo some type of change, the soul leaves the body.

On the other hand, *al-mawt* (death) begins at the onset of the soul’s separation from the body. The body begins to decompose after that; the various members of his body subsequently rot. In the final analysis, death is completed, while the exoskeleton is in a state of soundness. This bears a striking resemblance to an electrical lamp that will not light. It can only light if it contains certain characteristics such as: a source which generates the electricity, a wire which connects it to the source and a light bulb. If this light bulb is shattered, it emits light. Why? It releases light because you have destroyed something that is essential to the process of illumination. In the same manner, if someone uses a bullet to inflict a mortal wound to the heart of someone else, indeed, he dies and his soul is released from the body. This is because you have destroyed an essential element of the human constitution, without which, the human soul is no longer able to inhabit the body. For this reason, the Divine law does not prescribe any punishment for dying, i.e., a natural death which begins with the departure of the soul from the body. There is, however, a prescribed punishment for murder. Additionally, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has said: ‘Accursed is the one who destroys the physical form that Allah created.’

Indeed, the life that a body encloses is a structure that has been moulded by the Creator *Glorified is He*. As such, it is the property of its Creator, and it is not allowable for anyone to destroy it; even its temporary owner. If this was not the case, how would you explain the Islamic prohibition of suicide and treatment of it as a mark of gross infidelity and disbelief in Allah?! At a fundamental level, killing is being explicitly prohibited in the verse because it is ending a life caused by humans’ work not by death. This is different from death which is not intended in the verse. The Quran clarifies this issue with Allah’s words: ‘Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144)

Clearly, we can see that murder is not death. Murder is an act of transgression on the physical constitution of another person and the subsequent destruction of that constitution. Allah says: ‘…your children….’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) Although the term *al-awlad* (children) encompasses males as well as females, the well-known findings of historical research reveal them to have practiced only female infanticide, not male. The Quran records: ‘When the baby girl buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed’ (*at-Takwir:* 8-9).

If truth be told, during those times, they would consider male children sources of aid and support in facing life’s difficulties as well as in their wars against each other. Moreover, they viewed males as sources of good ancestry and the elongation of lineage. Conversely, they viewed females as unmixed sources of shame, especially in the shadow of poverty, neediness, and destitution, for perhaps a wealthy person might attempt to lure her into something which could compromise her honour. With this understanding, the matter was still interpreted to be a matter of provision. Allah's saying: '…for fear of poverty…' (*al-Isra':* 31) should be taken to mean: out of fear of poverty. The word *imlaq* (poverty) is derived from the words *malaq* (to adulate) and *tamallaq* (flattering), both of which connote neediness. Indeed, a person does not voluntarily flatter another; quite the opposite, the flatterer is usually in need of something that the second party has. Thus, he flatters him with the aim of acquiring his need.(1)

Turning our attention to Allah's statement: '…We shall provide for them and for you…' (*al-Isra':* 31), we find that it has a point that we should consider attentively, in order to effectively respond to the enemies of the Quran—those who accuse the Quran of containing contradictions.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions here: '…for fear of poverty…' (*al-Isra':* 31). This is stated to the effect of 'fearing poverty'. This means that poverty has not set in yet. It is a looming possibility in the unfolding days ahead. Currently, the provision is present and gaining access to it has been facilitated. Hence, the one who takes the life of his children, in such a situation, is not preoccupied with his own provision. Rather, he is concerned with the future provision of his children. This explains why the arrangement of the verse occurs as follows: 'We shall provide for them' (*al-Isra':* 31).

First of all, when the infant is born, his apportioned provision comes into existence with him. As such, do not be preoccupied with this issue: It is completely removed from your sphere of influence. Only after making the previous assertion does Allah say: ‘and for you’ (*al-Isra’:* 31). This implies that the provision of the children is given precedence over your own provision. Perhaps this can be understood as such: ‘Do not kill your children out of fear of impoverishment. Indeed, We are providing for you through them and on their account.’ It is incumbent upon us that we direct additional attention to this issue because the enemies of the faith—those who plough through the Quran seeking a fault—have imagined contradiction or redundancy between the verse we are discussing: ‘Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you…’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) and another verse which reads: ‘…do not kill your children from poverty. We will provide for you and for them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) We respond to these by stating: you have approached the Quran without the level of mastery of the Arabic language that is necessary to understand it properly. The Quranic style is not marked by rigidness. On the contrary, its most salient feature is its eloquence. Understanding this feature and reflecting upon it requires a depth of linguistic feeling and perception.

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(1) *From among the meanings that have been mentioned for malaq is an increase in affection, invitation, and humility above and beyond the proper expression of those characteristics. The sycophant rajul malaq gives with his tongue that which is not in his heart. The Prophetic Hadith expresses this in the words, 'Cajoling is not from the characteristics of a believer.' (The Quran, Lissan Al-'Urab) under the heading* م ل ق*) Muttaqi Al-Hindi has recorded it in a work entitled Kinz al - 'umal 28937 from the Hadith narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, which he ascribed to ibn 'Adi in Al-Kamil and Bayhaqi in ash-Shu'ab on the authority of Mu'adh. See Al-Firdaws in Ma'thur Al–Khattab 5158.*

If you approach the words of Allah in the correct manner, you will not find it to contain any discrepancy or redundancy. The first manner in which the verse is worded is not more highly articulated than the second is, nor is the second more eloquent than the first is. Absolutely not, rather, each verse is well expressed. For indeed, even if the two verses appear identical at first glance, there is a great difference between the meanings of each.

The verse of the chapter of *al-Isra’* reads: ‘We shall provide for them and for you’ (*al-Isra’:* 31). We have already clarified the wisdom underlying this arrangement: provide sustenance for them as well as you. As for the verse in the chapter of *al-An‘am*, it reads: ‘...do not kill your children from poverty. We will provide for you and for them.’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) Certainly, we must recognize that the verse contains an outset and a rearmost. To understand one without understanding the other, will lead to an unsound conclusion. Even more, it is absolutely essential that any real attempt to understand the verse join between its outset and a rearmost. If this is achieved, the true import of the verse will become apparent, and you will be removed from any further reservations about the meaning of this verse. In reference to this group of critics, they probed the rearmost of the two verses without looking at the outsets. If the verses contained the same outset, there might be some validity to their conclusions. However, there is a marked contrast between the outsets of the two verses: ‘…for fear of poverty…’ (*al-Isra’:* 31), while the second ‘…from poverty…’ (*al-An‘am:* 151).

The difference contained within the two expressions is obvious. In the first case, the poverty is not present yet. In actual fact, fear of something is evidence that its object has yet to materialize; its occurrence, however, is anticipated in the future. Furthermore, the one who holds this fear is not preoccupied with his own provision. Rather, he is preoccupied with the provision—or feared lack thereof—that will be available for his children. As for the second expression: ‘…from poverty…’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) the impoverishment is present and has actually become visible. In this situation, a person is preoccupied with his own lack of resources not an expected shortage of resources in the future. In such a situation, it is fitting that the fathers be accorded the first mention when discussing provision, i.e. before that of the children. As long as the outset of each verse differs, the rearmost must follow suit. So where is the contradiction?

There is another suggestion in the verse. The address contained within the prohibition is directed toward a group: ‘do not kill your children.’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) The active participle is plural and the object of the verbal clause within the statement is plural as well. Earlier, we mentioned that if a plural active participle is addressed to a plural object, the meaning becomes individualized. This would make the meaning: Not any single one from among you should kill his children. This is no different from how a teacher would tell the students: ‘Take out your books.’ He intends that each individual student should remove his book.

If someone avers that the verse is only prohibiting each individual father from killing his son out of fear of poverty, yet, it does not prohibit a father from killing someone else’s child, as a favour, and that someone killing a third one’s child, we respond by stating: This is incorrect. The meaning of the verse is that all parents should not kill any children. This implies that the meaning encompasses my children as well as the children of others. This is the intended meaning when a plural active participle is addressed to a plural object. If we were, for instance, to say: it is permissible for you to make me a favour and kill my child, and for me to kill your child as a favour for you; this could not stand to reason because it neglects the grammatical principle that states: if a plural active participle is addressed to a plural object, the meaning becomes individualized.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse by saying: '…killing them is a great sin.' (*al-Isra':* 31) *Khit'a* is like *khata'a* refers to a sin or great misdeed. It appears with two vowel markings both *kasra* and *fat'ha* in the same manner as when the verse reads '*khudhu hidhrrakum'* 'take your precaution' (*an-Nisa':* 71) or '*khudhu hadharakum'*; can appear with alternate vowel markings. As for the term *Khit'a* (sin), the letters *kh, t* and *a* (hamzah) indicate a lack of conformity with that which is correct. Nonetheless, on the first occasion, your lack of conformity with the correct course of action might be attributed to the fact that you do not know what is correct. However, on the second occasion, if you are out of step with the correct course of action it is because you transgressed its limits after knowing them.

The teacher, when he corrects the mistakes of the students during the school year, he first clarifies where they have erred. Afterward, he proceeds to correct these mistakes. However, he does not do this until he has apprised his student of the principle that he is proceeding upon; the principle that the student overlooked and consequently fell into error. During this time, there is nothing objectionable about our correcting and instructing him. Indeed, he is still within the period of being educated; the phase of his being cultivated and trained.

Conversely, if these questions occur on the final exams, the matter changes altogether. The teacher will point out the mistakes of the student but he will not correct them. Rather, he will configure the grades of the student in accordance with what he deserves. In the end, the matter will ultimately be one of success—for those who arrived at the correct response—or failure—for those who answered erroneously. This is because by the end of the year the student has become aware of all the rules which he should abide by. This is a result of the fact that at the year's end the teacher has assumed binding regulations that he must adhere to. *Khit'a,* or *khata'a* are derived from *khata*, out of which we get the verb (to take a stride) and the word *khatwah* (footstep)(1). Both of these meanings connote repositioning through movement. It is as though the correct course of action is established, well rooted and has become well known among people; but you, after this, transgress it and reposition yourself elsewhere. This repositioning is representative of the *Khit'a* (mistake); a footstep, which leads you into transgression.

Likewise, Allah *the Most High* says: 'Follow not the footsteps of Satan' (*al-Baqara:* 168). Such steps gradually divert you from the fundamental principles of the *Shari'a*. The clear and unchanging fact is that Allah is the Creator of humankind, and He has honoured them by making them vicegerents over the earth, succeeding each other in constructing and improving life in the world and establishing the Way of the Creator *the Most High* on earth. So how can the ones who have been honoured by being made the Creator's successive vicegerents cut off this succession by murdering their children, who are the seeds of the future generations? Even if we take the opinion of those who hold that the word '*awladukum*' strictly refers to daughters—that is, slaying the daughters and sparing sons—what will be the case when the young men grow up and want to marry? How can the succession of the human race continue with only males? But this understanding does not conform to the verse because the verse strictly prohibits infanticide, males, and females alike. The Lord *the Most High* describes the offense as being 'grave': 'a grave offense' (*al-Isra':* 31). Actually, it is a gross sin with many bad consequences.

First: This crime destroys something which Allah created. No one can destroy something which Allah created but Allah Himself.

Second: It severs the continuity of human life and undermines the successive vicegerency, which Allah planned, over the earth.

Third: It is a flagrant violation of a person's natural feelings of kindness and affection. Indeed, a child is a part of his father. Killing his child deprives a person of all the feelings of fatherhood and love and mercy, and even the quality of being humane itself. As such, the Lord *the Most High* has given us guidelines to preserve the human lineage and the continuous succession of human vicegerency, as divinely planned, over the earth, as Allah prohibits fathers from murdering their children. The Lord *the Most High* then says:

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(1) The verbs *khata'* and *akhta'* are verbs with sound ending as opposed to weak endings which end in the Arabic character Hamza As for the verb *Khata* it is a verb with a weak ending which ends in the Arabic character Alif—which in this case has been transformed from the Arabic character Waw. This explains why the present tense form of the first occurs as *yukhti'*, while the present tense of the latter occurs as *yakhtu*

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا۟ ٱلزِّنَىٰٓ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فَٰحِشَةً وَسَآءَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٣٢﴾

And do not go anywhere near adultery: it is an outrage,
and an evil path [32] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 32)

After concluding the discussion of how to preserve human lineage and maintain successive human vicegerency over the earth, the Lord *the Most High* wants to protect humankind from loss and provide him with guidelines to live a life of decency. When we have a new baby, son, or daughter, we are very happy and so pleased with the newborn child that we prefer them to ourselves with regards to food and other needs. We strive to carve out a life of ease and a delightful and promising future for them. The poet coined this meaning when he said,

Like our own livers, our children move about the earth

If winds blow furiously on them, not a wink of rest can we maintain

Nonetheless, this familial support system that the Lord *the Most High* has made the bedrock of family life is completely razed when any amount of doubt creeps into the hearts of the fathers about the paternity of their children. In such a case their life turns into an overwhelming inferno boiling with unrelenting internal conflict, about which no one can endure or speak. It is a stab at the deepest part of one's own psyche. This explains why the Lord *the Most High* strongly prohibits us from this vile crime. He aims to preserve the pure lineages of men and women. In such a case, every father can attain a peace of mind about the pure linage of his children. As such, one will express affection and provide parental care for his children bearing the burdens and agonies of life for their sake.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'And do not approach fornication' (*al-Isra':* 32). The one who attentively surveys the Quranic verses finds that the Lord *the Most High* concludes His Commandments saying: 'These are the bounds set by

Allah; do not, then, transgress them' (*al-Baqara:* 229). This verse comes in the context of the legal rulings on divorce. The Lord *the Most High* has laid down rules for divorce and orders us to abide by these rules without transgressing them. Allah *the Most High* tells us the rules and forbids us from overstepping them. As for prohibitions, Allah *the Most High* concludes them by saying: 'These are bounds set by Allah: do not, then, approach them' (*al-Baqara:* 187). The prohibition in question is related to the ruling of approaching women during the devotional retreat. The Lord *the Most High* wants us to restrain from approaching this limit, to keep a protective distance from it. This precaution is mandatory to keep at a distance from evils. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Whoever approaches the border of a sanctuary is in danger of encroaching its boundary'.(1)

As the Creator of human beings, He is most knowledgeable about those things that they should not approach. To put it simply, some forbidden matters may be so tempting and attractive that they seduce man to fall into sins, and this is why man should not even approach such evils. Evidently, there is a difference between committing an offense and approaching it. What is forbidden is to actually commit it, why did Allah then prohibit approaching it? In reply to this I say, 'Allah intends to protect your emotions concerning this particular issue—sexual instinct, which is the strongest of human instincts. In other words, if you come close to its allowable limits, you may very well fall inside its prohibited boundaries. Keeping a distance from illicit sex is safer for a person'. The scholars have classified 'the aspects of feeling and knowledge' into three stages: Perception, sentiment and drive. If you are, for instance, strolling in a garden and you spot a beautiful rose, the moment you fix your gaze upon it is called 'perception'; it is when your sense of sight perceives its presence. Fittingly, nothing prevents you from looking upon it and enjoying its beauty. Having become impressed and pleased by it, the love of this flower roots itself in your heart, which is called ‘sentiment’. This describes the inner sensation aroused by your observation. As you extend your hand to pluck it, this represents the ‘drive’ stage, when action takes place. Here, the Divine Law endeavours to prevent you from false actions. It prohibits neither perception nor sentiment in normal circumstances.

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(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He who falls into doubtful things falls into that which is unlawful, just as a shepherd who grazes his cattle in the vicinity of a pasture declared prohibited (by the king); he is likely to stray into the pasture. [Oh people] Beware, every king has a protected pasture or limits, and Allah's limits are that which He has declared unlawful'. Al-Bukhari, (2051); Muslim, (1599) on the authority of An-Nu'man ibn Bashir.*

However, this issue of sexual instinct is exceptional; it is difficult to separate drive from sentiment and sentiment from perception with regards to the sexual instinct. It is an amalgam of interconnected phases in a way that humanity is not able to separate them. When a man sees a beautiful woman, a strong impression and inclination towards her are aroused in him. Next, he loves her, which urges him to approach her. This is the point when he both obeys the drive of his instincts and falls into what is unlawful, or suppresses it and suffers the bitterness of abstention. The Lord *the Most High* is most knowledgeable about human nature. He knows what revolves around and pervades people’s inner thoughts: their deepest feelings and emotions. This is why He not only prohibits illicit sex, but He also forbids all means that lead to it, even the glance. Allah says: ‘Tell the believing men to lower their gaze’ (*an-Nur:* 30).

Put it simply: if your perceptive faculties are allowed to work loosely, the emotions will be excited. Once they are excited, drive will take over. If you allow your response—after the sight of attractive beauties—to be determined by your ‘drive’, much corruption will take place. Nevertheless, if you suppress your emotions after the entire process of perception, being emotionally excited and sensing the drive, you will suffer from the heartbreak of feeling, an intense passion you cannot satisfy. No patience will help you bear it. Therefore, it is safer for you and for the entire community, and it also preserves your honour and protects you from sinning, to lower your gaze and stop looking at others. If you follow this order, you will then honour people and bring comfort to your soul as well. But unfortunately many people overlook this fact. Men and women are doing nothing short of deceiving themselves by being in private settings with foreign members of the opposite sex. If questioned, each claims innocence and good intentions. They view relationships fostered by work, school, family relationships, or the neighbourhood a pretext for mixture and intimacy. Actually, it is nothing but delusion. Undoubtedly, the Creator is more aware of people and their weaknesses. Allah only commands us to lower our gaze to escape tremendous dangers and evils to the gazers and also the entire community. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The glance is a drawn arrow from the quiver of Satan. Whoever leaves it out of fear of Allah will instead taste the sweetness of faith in his heart'.(1) Considering the above, we can understand Allah's objective when He says: 'And do not approach fornication' (*al-Isra':* 32).

He did not say, 'Do not commit illicit sexual intercourse', for this crime is the last stage that follows a number of steps that lead up to it. Hence, beware of allowing yourself to approach it. Indeed, one who comes near to the borders of a prohibited territory will most likely fall into it. Keep away from those who call for liberal sexual behaviour and the free mixing of sexes. Falsehood remains false regardless of the prevalence and the multitude of its followers; it will never become the truth. Be wary of the widespread justifications that people offer, e.g., 'she is his paternal cousin', 'he is her maternal cousin,' or 'they were raised in the same house'. Beware of all hapless justifications that do not change anything which is unlawful to be lawful. The bottom line is as long as the lady is lawful for you to marry; it is not lawful for you to be in seclusion with her. Prophet Muhammad's statement clearly states, 'No man is alone with a woman but Satan is their third'. (2) Gazing at women and being alone with them are not evils in themselves, but they are wrong because of the bad consequences to which they lead. As such, Allah's saying: 'Do not approach fornication' (*al-Isra':* 32) is a more compelling way to pronounce its unlawfulness and also safer and more protective for individuals and the community than simply saying, 'Do not commit illicit sexual intercourse'.

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(1) *Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 4: 314; on the authority of Hudhayfa may Allah be pleased with him. Al-Hakim said about it, 'Its chain of transmission is authentic but both Al-Bukhari and Muslim have not narrated it'. Ad-Dhahabi, in At-Talkhees, remarked that 'Ishaq is very weak and 'Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Wasiti (from Wasit) has been deemed as weak by critics of Hadith.'*

(2) *Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 1: 113; on the authority of Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him. Al-Hakim said about the Hadith, 'It fulfills the criteria of Al-Bukhari and Muslim. At-Tirmidhi narrated it (Hadith, 1171) in the form of a marfu' Hadith, which was attributed to Prophet Muhammad himself (Hadith, 2165). He graded it as good and authentic, yet scarce, i.e. having only one narrator in one of its stages, when related in this way'.*

The same style is used in Allah's Command outlawing the consumption and distribution of intoxicants: ‘O you who have believed! Intoxicants, games of chance, idolatrous practices and [divination by] arrows are [nothing] but a loathsome evil of Satan's handiwork: avoid it, then, so that you may prosper!’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 90) However, some people say that there is not a single verse in the Quran prohibiting intoxicants. Glory be unto Allah. Which is more strict and compelling—to say, ‘Do not consume intoxicants’ or ‘Avoid intoxicants altogether’? Evidently, the former just prohibits intoxicants. In other words, one may distribute, purchase, manufacture, and transport intoxicants. On the other hand, the latter’s use of the word ‘avoid’ necessitates one keeps away from it completely and does not deal with it in any conceivable place or manner. Clearly, the word ‘avoid’ expresses a much stronger prohibition than a straightforward declaration. How can we assert that the word ‘avoid’ is less commanding than a straightforward declaration when Allah *the Most High* addresses a very important issue of belief in the following terms: ‘…those who avoid evil forces lest they [be tempted to] worship them’ (*az-Zumar:* 17). Do you say that the avoidance expressed here is less commanding than a straightforward proclamation, is the worship of evils not unlawful? Allah *the Most High* then says: ‘indeed, it is an abomination’ (*al-Isra’:* 32). The word ‘abomination’ designates what is exceedingly vile. Indeed, the Lord *the Most High* has made illicit sex an abomination. When He *the Most High* created males and females, He decreed their union and procreation, That is, He defined the standard way for their union in marriage and did not leave the issue undecided for others to deal with as they wish. This Divine Plan aims to preserve human lineage and maintain the purity of progeny. Consequently, a man attains peace of mind about his own family and children. Indeed, the marriage contract unites a man with a woman and blesses them with the Divine Word and the prophetic way of life. How will you react if you have a marriageable daughter and you know that a young man keeps staring at her with longing attempts to approach her? Undoubtedly, a sense of protectiveness will rage in your heart. You might confront that man and turn the world upside down if necessary in expression of your dislike for his misbehaviour. On the other hand, if this young man proposes to your daughter, you welcome him warmly and are pleased that he has approached you. Afterwards, you call the family and a beautiful celebration is organized. What happened? What made you welcome the one who proposed? What is the difference between the first approach and the second one? The difference is that one is lawful and the other is unlawful. That is why it is said, 'The lawful way removes any jealousy'. Therefore, the one who feels jealous for his daughter from the least lustful touch is now helping her in her marriage and giving her to her newly wedded husband in good conscience. Put simply, they are being united by the blessed Word of Allah, which has untold effects on human souls. Once the guardian of the prospective wife says, 'I agree to marry her to you' and the prospective husband responds, 'I accept', coolness and tranquillity descend on the hearts. These feelings give rise to joy and exuberance, for this sacred word affects the inner make-up of human beings and has a profound effect on creating harmony in every particle of the body and in every drop of blood.

The profound effects of the Word of Allah upon spouses are many; it particularly creates spiritual unity between them which results in them admiring and respecting one another and never feeling annoyed or irritated, or tending to be cruel. Likewise, the father does not feel jealous about his daughter. As such, when the Lord *the Most High* legislates *'idda* (the period of mandatory waiting following divorce or the husband's death before remarriage), we find that the *'idda* of the divorced women differs from that of widows. There is wisdom in that difference. The Lord *the Most High* knows the nature of the human soul and what affects it. If the wisdom behind the *'idda* is limited to assuring that the divorced woman or widow is not pregnant, one month or one menstrual cycle will be sufficient.

Obviously, the matter is more far-reaching than that. The woman is experiencing particular feelings; she is still labouring under the effect of the previous marriage because untying the bond of marriage results in negative as well as positive effects on both males and females. The woman grew accustomed to the ebb and flow of the lawful and legitimate union. For this reason, the divorced woman is not allowed to remarry before the conclusion of her *'idda*—the passage of three menstrual cycles.(1) This is enough time for the effect of a lawful and legitimate relationship she had to peter away and eventually disappear, so she will be ready to meet with another prospective husband. For the widow's *'idda,* her waiting period is four months and ten days.(1) A question may be raised, 'Why is the widow's waiting period longer?' In reply, divorce often takes place following a sense of dislike between the marital partners, which actually aids in reducing the effect of their marital experience. She is naturally reluctant or even dislikes continuing with him. Unlike the divorced woman, the widow lost her husband and their separation has nothing to do with any dislike. For this reason, her longing to be with him is more intense. This explains why she needs longer time to get over the lingering effects of her previous union. In this circumstance, the Lord *the Most High* takes woman's feelings into account concerning her wishes and desire to be with her deceased husband. Allah *the Most High* knows that her wishes and feelings need time to abate. During the time of the *'idda*, she can become psychologically ready to meet with another prospective husband. Indeed, harmony within the union of husband and wife does not rely on the intellect; rather, it is directly related to the natural emotional state of the spouses, which, in the first place, depends on compatibility between the male and the female. This compatibility gives rise to the harmonious co-mingling of the positive and negative elements that shape the man-woman relationship. Consequently, love and passion occur; binding and attaching them together in the process. Eventually, it is all—as mentioned earlier—a result of the profound effects of the oath taken in the Name of Allah. The shade that lies underneath that oath is where the husband and wife have united. This is the way the two spouses meet in comfort and serenity and find tranquillity in each other because their actual physical make-ups are now in accord and harmony. Consequently, the family is pleased and everyone is happy. Prophet

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(1) Allah says concerning the mandatory waiting period for divorced women, in which it is lawful for the husband who pronounced the divorce once or twice to return the divorced =

= woman into marriage and is also the period whose conclusion marks the time at which it is permissible for the divorced woman to remarry someone else if she chooses to do this: 'The divorced women shall undergo, with-out remarrying, a waiting-period of three monthly courses…' (*al-Baqara:* 228), i.e. three monthly menstrual cycles.

(1) Concerning the *`idda* of widows, Allah says: 'If any of you die and leave wives behind, they shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting period of four months and ten days; whereupon, when they have reached the end of their waiting-term, there shall be no sin in whatever they may do with their persons in a lawful manner' (*al-Baqara:* 234).

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was correct when he advised his community about the relationships with women, saying, ‘And intercourse with them has been made lawful to you by the Words of Allah’.(1)

This word is from Allah *the Most High* and Allah is the Creator of human beings; He knows what sets them right. Now, imagine that this union takes place in an illicit manner without the blessed Word of Allah. Only consistency, incompatibility, absence of harmony, bitterness, and rancour will occur, incessantly, as long as they are involved in such a relationship. That is why the Quran terms it ‘an abomination’. The evidence of its abomination is found in the fact that the doers of this evil never like to be known and they keep their sins hidden from the community. Furthermore, those who commit this heinous misdeed hate to see the same act carried out with members of their own family. However, the most sufficient measure of its abhorrence is that Allah refers to it as such and enacts punishments for those guilty of this crime. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* addressed this illness when a young man approached him complaining of his weakness to control this natural sexual instinct. The man said, ‘O Messenger of Allah! Permit me to have illicit sex’. Indeed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* introduced general religious principles, but he also addressed the maladies of individuals appropriately to overcome any type of weakness experienced and help individuals control such weaknesses. This approach is clear to us in the varied responses of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was asked about the best of deeds. To one person, he said, ‘Prayer in its appointed time’.(2) To another, he said, ‘Meeting your brother with a smiling face’.(3) To a third, he said, ‘Be kind to your brother’.

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(1) *Muslim, sahih, (Hadith, 1218) on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah in a lengthy transmission; some of its content includes, ‘Fear Allah in how you deal with women. You have taken them into the marriage bond as a trust from Allah and intercourse with them has been made lawful unto you by the Words of Allah’.*

(2) *Muslim, sahih, (Hadith, 85) in Kitab Al-Iman, on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud may Allah be pleased with him ‘I asked the Messenger [Muhammad] peace and blessings be upon him ‘Which deed is the best?’ He responded, ‘The prayer in its appointed time’.*

(3) *Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith, 2626); Ahmad, Musnad, (Hadith, 5: 173) on the authority of Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him who said, ‘The Messenger [Muhammad] peace and blessings be upon him said to me, “Do not look down at any good deed, even meeting your brother with a smiling face”.’”*

In this way, he gave various responses because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not describing a general rule for the entire community. On the contrary, he gave each questioner what he needed to remedy his particular weakness. Like a doctor who concerns himself with curing a patient, he diagnosed and tested patients to determine the disease and prescribe the appropriate medication. For example, how did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reply to the young man who told him about his observance of religious duties, such as Prayers and Fasting, but him not being able to overcome his sexual instinct. Did he slam the door in his face and label him as a pervert? No! Instead, Prophet Muhammad saw his spiritual suffering and realised that the man came looking for a cure after recognizing that he had a disease. Admitting one has a disease is the first step towards a cure and recovery. The young man approached Prophet Muhammad for no other reason than he hated that illness. The recognition of the disease is the earliest sign of recovery. Do not be too arrogant to admit your problem. Being too arrogant to admit your problem will, in turn, only aggravate the disease and complicate matters. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* considered the complaint of this young man as a healthy sign of faith. He only came to voice his complaint, for he felt it was an unbearable sin, but he yearned for it. Observe very closely how Prophet Muhammad treated this illness. He sat him down and then said, ‘My brother Arab, will you be happy if this happened to your mother?’ The young man’s facial expression changed and he retorted, ‘No! O Messenger of Allah; may I be your ransom’. The Prophet continued, ‘Will you be happy if this happened to your sister? Will you be happy if this happened to your wife? Will you be happy if this happened to your daughters?’ After each question, the young man responded, ‘No! O Messenger of Allah; may I be your ransom’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, ‘Similarly, other people will not be happy if that happened to their mothers, to their sisters, to their wives or daughters’. Prophet Muhammad then placed his noble hand on the chest of that young man and prayed, ‘O Allah, purify his heart and protect his chastity!’(1) The young man then departed. Later he expressed what he felt by saying, ‘When I left the Messenger [Prophet Muhammad], there was nothing more detestable to me than illicit sexual intercourse. I swear by Allah, I was not enticed by anything like that but I remembered my mother, sisters, wife, and daughters’. The way Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* treated that young man is strikingly similar to how pharmacists treat people.

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(1) *Ahmad, Musnad, (5/256-257); Al-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, 8: 190-215 from Abu Umamah may Allah be pleased with him in which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be=*

There is a technical term called ‘encapsulating bitter drugs’. If the medication is so bitter that the sick person is reluctant to take it, they sweeten it for the drug to pass his taste buds without any bitterness being noticed. The Creator *the Most High* has only placed taste buds in the tongue, to the exclusion of all other parts of the body where the food passes. The tongue is a sign of Allah's miraculous creation of human beings. It is one of the manifestations of Allah's Creative Power in the sense that He created it with small well-defined glands, each gland recognising a particular type of taste; one for sweet food, another for bitter food and so on. Each performs its own function, although all the glands are closely compacted and pressed together.

Like the process of encapsulating the bitter drug to sweeten the bitter medicine, the ‘moral medicine’ encases the advice in a way that makes the advisee accept it. It is said, ‘Advice is a weighty issue; you should give it gently’. It is also said, ‘Facts are bitter, therefore express them elegantly, and avoid harsh words and debates’. The adviser should consider the condition of the advisee and be gentle with him. He should not make the advisee experience the difficulty of being deprived of something he wants to do and also the difficulty of receiving unnecessarily coarse advice. The Lord *the Most High* has laid out the method of calling others to His Path for us to follow. Allah says: ‘Call [all mankind] to the Path of Your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation’ (*an-Nahl:* 125). Privacy is one of the etiquettes of giving advice which we learned from the Prophet. No advice is useful if we disclose private and sensitive information about people. Such disclosure negatively affects the advisee and the entire community. If you maintain the desired level of privacy, you will find it more likely that the advisee will accept your advice.

= *upon him said, ‘O Allah! Forgive his sin, purify his heart and protect his chastity’. After that, the young man never even slightly inclined towards any indecent behaviour.*

An old saying states, ‘Secret words of advice to your brothers save their face and affect their behaviour beautifully, whereas words of advice given publicly shame and defame them’.

Continuing with the verse under discussion, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘an evil way’ (*al-Isra’:* 32). The word ‘*sabeel’* refers to a path that leads to a goal. As for the path of life, we are Allah's vicegerents on this earth; Allah has created us to cultivate and develop the world and strive to secure the means that lead to human happiness, welfare, and prosperity. If a human being chooses misguidance and deviates from the path that the Creator laid down for him, he violates the divinely given vicegerency. Instead of filling the world with happiness, he fills it with sorrow. I think the moral dissolution and wantonness we witness these days and their dreadful effects that have reached Muslim lands give us reason to believe that illicit sex is an evil way and a despicable path. It undermines the integrity, felicity, and security of the community. It is enough that whenever you leave your home for any overnight trip, you take all your personal belongings with you. The perpetual fear of the possibility of infection pursues you everywhere; in the apartment you enter, in the bed you sleep and even in the washroom you use. Everyone is frightened and anxious, and AIDS has spread like wildfire. The situation has grown so alarming that not even the safety of the cautious and hygienic travellers can be assured.

The fright we experience is just a result of humans abandoning the way of Allah; such abandonment has turned our life into an endless chaos. Allah allowed new diseases and maladies to breakout in proportion to human shamelessness and disobedience. Since man is too stubborn to turn in repentance to Allah, let him forcibly come in overwhelming fear. The entire world is developing educational programs that promote chastity and purity; however, they are not motivated by faith in the Divine Law, but such pure stances are imposed by anxious fear of many merciless diseases that affect people without discrimination. In essence, illicit sexual intercourse is an abomination and an evil way. The recent occurrences support the truth of this verse. They prove that any deviation from the Way of the Creator will only lead to distress for the creation in the life of this world as a prelude to the distress of the

Hereafter. But preserving people’s honour and guaranteeing the purity of lineage will create a wholesome and sound community where man is secure about this matter. However, we also have to endeavour to preserve human life. Allah *the Most High* says:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا۟ ٱلنَّفْسَ ٱلَّتِى حَرَّمَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ ۗ وَمَن قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا
لِوَلِيِّهِۦ سُلْطَـٰنًا فَلَا يُسْرِف فِّى ٱلْقَتْلِ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ مَنصُورًا ﴿٣٣﴾

Do not take life, which God has made sacred, except by right: if anyone is killed wrongfully, We have given authority to the defender of his rights, but he should not be excessive in taking life, for he is already aided [by God] [33]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 33)

“And [oh people] do not take any human being's life” (*al-Isra’:* 33). In conformity with the plural verb (oh people, do not take) which is used in the verse, we expect the sentence to use a plural subject (lives); that is, we expect the following, ‘[Oh people] do not take the human lives that Allah has willed to be sacred’. However, the Lord *the Most High* wants to declare that the responsibility for the life of any one person is collective and universal. It is not simply the killer who is questioned about the murder, but the entire community. ‘Which Allah has willed to be sacred’ (*al-Isra’:* 33) Allah has made this life itself sacred; that is, it is not permissible to harm it in any way. It is a structure that was fashioned and created by Allah. The structure of Allah should not be damaged by anyone besides Him. Or it can be read: ‘…human being’s life which Allah has willed to be sacred” (*al-Isra’:* 33) which means that Allah has made it prohibited to kill this life. As for His saying, ‘other than in [the pursuit of] justice’ (*al-Isra’:* 33), it is an exception from the preceding rule: ‘Do not take any human being's life, which Allah has willed to be sacred’. This condition implies: However, you may need to take life in pursuit of justice. Justice, with regards to taking life is enacted in three situations:

- Retribution for murder.
- Execution for apostasy from Islam.
- Execution for adultery.

These are three legal causes for taking human life. Under these circumstances, the killing takes place in pursuit of justice. The enemies of Islam have caused much clamour over these laws as well as others, and have accused Islam of being harsh and barbaric. To support their claims, they mention that these punishments are inconsistent with human rights and dignity. Furthermore, they claim that this contravenes the principle of religious freedom as envisaged by Islam and expressed in the Word of Allah *the Most High*: ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith’ (*al-Baqara:* 256). As for the capital punishment for murder cases, they say, ‘If the community suffers loss due to the untimely demise of one of its members, how can we increase the loss by killing another person?’ In response I say, ‘It is absolutely necessary that we understand and realise the purpose of the Divine Rulings. The objective that underlies the Divine Law of Retaliation in murder offenses is not to bring about a situation in which there is widespread killing; its only goal is to prevent murder and to endeavour to put an end to this crime from the onset. When the Lord informs you, “If you kill, you will be killed,” He is protecting your life and the lives of others. Undeniably, the human being possesses nothing more valuable than his life. As such, even the cold-blooded killer is prevented from killing another for no other reason than he desires to stay alive. There are reasons that drive a murderer to commit the crime; perhaps the victim disgraced the killer, violated his honour or regarded him as an enemy. But without doubt, the murderer’s life is more valuable than that. When we say, “If you kill, you will be killed,” we prevent him from committing this crime. We are threatening him with the harshest punishment possible. This is why it is said, “Killing is the best means to prevent killing”’.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘In [the law of] just retribution, O you who are endowed with insight, there is life for you’ (*al-Baqara:* 179). This assertion targets those who possess a sound understanding and perceptive minds. The law of retribution is not as some may imagine it. Quite the reverse, it provides security for life, defends the integrity of the community and prevents bloodshed. We must have a properly adjusted sense of right and wrong when approaching Allah's Rulings. The killer only kills when he is unmindful of the ruling. Additionally, we must survey the law of retribution objectively; it is essential for us to consider the following:

- Just as the law of retribution protects others from murder, it protects me from being murdered by others.
- The duties you owe others are the same as the duties they owe you. The benefit you experience from this law is the same as the benefit all others experience from it.

Hence, why are there any objections? The same applies for theft. When Allah commands you, 'Do not steal', you view it an order that restricts your personal conduct. In truth, it actually restricts the conduct of others from stealing from you. Whoever reflects deeply upon the rationale underlying these punishments finds them to be in the interest of all individuals. They restrict the potential harmful behaviours of the individual as well as of the entire community. For example, when the Wise Lawgiver makes *zakat* (obligatory charity) an obligation upon you to pay a specified portion of your wealth to the poor, do not say, 'It is my money; I have earned it through sweat and hard work'. We say to you, 'Yes, it is your money; nonetheless, do not forget that the days are made up of a shifting of fortunes and changes of fate. Today's wealthy might be tomorrow's poor; when the days bite you, you will find someone who will provide a helping hand for you and give your needs the consideration that you once gave to the needs of others'. Put simply, we must be judicious when approaching the Rulings of Allah *the Most High* and view matters from all directions. In such a case, we can see how they protect us and at the same time restrict our actions. Since these enactments protect us to the same degree they restrict our actions, they qualify as just laws. The law of retribution protects and secures human life, and subdues any individual's intention to commit murder. If a person becomes heedless of this ruling and commits this crime, he must receive reprisal. If we want to object to these punishments by referring to humanity, human dignity and mercy, as some claim, let it also be known that the one who objects to the execution of murderers willingly contributes to the death of millions. He opens the door of anarchy, disputes, and differences. Everyone who differs with another will hasten to kill him because there is no means in place to check and deter him from committing murder. That is, in order to prevent murder we must implement the Ruling of Allah and establish His Law, even against those closest to us. These rulings are not revealed to be merely recited. Absolutely not! They were revealed as practical methods for organizing our lives and protecting the community. This explains why the Lord *the Most High* made the ‘carrying out’ of these punitive measures a public event witnessed by the community. Witnessing and hearing are for the entire community to be assured that Allah's Rulings are not considered to be empty threats. In reality, they are quite the opposite; they are being implemented before their very eyes. Allah *the Most High* declared: ‘Let a group of the believers witness their punishment’ (*an-Nur:* 2). The opponents of the law of retribution for murder crimes also criticize the punishment of apostasy. For them, it is a barbaric and repressive measure that violates religious freedom; a right that is upheld by Islam. Allah says: ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith’ (*al-Baqara:* 256).

In fact, when Islam enacted the punishment of apostasy and ruled that the apostate shall be killed, it aimed to make the issue of accepting Islam graver for non-Muslims. Consequently, only the sincere and those whose hearts found contentment in Islam accepted it, as they were fully aware that recanting their commitment to Islam after taking the testimony of faith results in death. It should be a merit rather than a demerit. It entails laying out the conditions of accepting Islam from the onset and clarifying the end of the path you are thinking of embarking on. As for freedom of religion and belief, it is your right before accepting Islam. No one will compel you at all; if you choose to continue your present lifestyle, it is your right. However, if you choose Islam, think carefully, reflect deeply, and survey the issue as much as you can. There is no room for trial runs in the religion of Allah. If you are moved towards Islam, remain within its sphere, but if you are not pleased with it, refrain from it. If you understand these conditions at first, you have no legitimate reason to criticize the punishment of apostasy. Know that the religion of Allah *the Most High* is far too distinguished and majestic to beg someone to enter it.

‘If anyone has been slain wrongfully’ (*al-Isra’:* 33). The verse refers to a negative behaviour that should not have taken place. The word ‘wrongfully’ means anyone killed unjustly for a reason other than the three reasons mentioned above. However, if this wrongful murder occurs, what is the Divine Judgment? Allah *the Most High* answers: ‘We have given authority to his next of kin [to exact a just retribution]; but let him (the next of kin) not commit excesses in [exacting retribution, that is] killing’ (*al-Isra’:* 33). The next of kin here is the individual responsible for defending the rights of the victim. He is one of the family members of the deceased, e.g., father, brother, son or paternal uncle, chosen to seek justice on his behalf. This is the party responsible for demanding requite for his slaying. The term: ‘…have given authority…’ (*al-Isra’:* 33) means We made it his right and gave him the legal jurisdiction to take the life of the murderer. Authority should be used to carry out orders and enable one to implement Allah's command. Likewise, the community of believers should also stand beside him and aid the execution of this judgment. This is because any individual should follow Allah’s Laws himself, but if he becomes weak and tends to violate these laws (by wrongfully murdering another, for example, he must be deterred by an outside force, e.g., the authorities and the believing community, who must assist in establishing justice. The Lord *the Most High* empowers the appointed relative of the deceased to pursue justice through the law of retaliation. If the deceased has no one to take up his cause, this right moves to the relevant authorities, who take up the responsibility of carrying out this judgment. However, when the whole process of retaliation goes to the authorities and becomes drawn out and cumbersome, the technical procedure undermines the objectives of the original ruling. In turn, the flames of resentment, rancour, and animosity burn in the heart of the guardian of the victim and leave him in rage. The guardian suffers through these extended legal proceedings whereas the other parties involved are unaffected by their extension. In fact, lengthening the period of legal proceedings only benefits the murderer. Actually, the passage of days or possibly years lets the horribleness of the crime lose its effects in the minds of the people as it begins to find its way into oblivion. At such a time, the crime becomes insignificant and its contemptibility is forgotten. As such, instead of facing the murderer and wanting to requite him for the crime he committed, sentiments and emotions begin to change and people begin to only think of the soul that is about to be put to death. As a result, they sympathize with the killer instead of thinking that he needs to be punished for the crime. However, the law of retaliation should be executed before the awfulness of the crime abates in the minds of the people and loses its impact. Nonetheless, although the Lord *the Most High* has legislated retaliation and made it the responsibility of the guardian of the victim, He does not want to prevent the community from seeking forgiveness that can conclusively end the differences. Allah *the Most High* says: 'Whoever is forgiven anything by his brother, then it is to be followed with kindness and goodness towards him' (*al-Baqara:* 178). Against a backdrop of murder and bloodshed which teams with vengeance, the Lord *the Most High* talks about forgiveness, brotherhood and a lofty conduct. Despite all pains, the believers constitute one brotherhood; the doors of forgiveness and magnanimity are often open. As such, the guardian of the victim who has the right to demand retaliation is also encouraged to forgive; he may choose to accept blood money and forgive the killer. This would effectively settle the case. Additionally, he may waive the payment of the blood money, either partly or entirely. In other words, the payment of the blood money by the guilty (to spare his life) grants the guardian a measure of control and dominance over him. Allah *the Most High* has given the guardian the right to demand that the killer be brought to justice and suffer retaliation. But if he decides to forgive the killer, the killer will understand that his life is a gift from the guardian of the victim. This describes the exchange that takes place, turning hatred and animosity into harmony, peace, and friendship. In this way, any chain of vengeance, that is often never-ending, can be eliminated. It is well known that in Upper Egypt any killer tries to prompt the guardians of the victim to forgive him: The killer gathers his funeral shroud around him and goes to the guardians of the victim and submits himself to them in acknowledgment of the crime he committed. He is giving the guardians all their rights to deal with him in any way they choose. However, what can the guardians do when facing such a complete surrender except forgive and pardon the killer! In this way, animosity and hatred are completely uprooted.

The Lord *the Most High* then says: 'Let him not commit excesses in [exacting retribution that is] killing' (*al-Isra':* 33). In other words, since Allah has given you the right to execute equal retaliation, do it without transgression and excessiveness. Forms of transgression are many. The following are just examples of transgression and excessiveness:

- The convicted murderer may not be a highly regarded member of his family. The guardian may not, in such a case, be satisfied with killing him for his crime and may ask for another person with a high status and position to kill instead. Here, he seeks to kill an innocent person which is a form of transgression.
- Transgression may also be in quantity. For instance, if someone is killed and the guardian is not content by simply bringing the killer to justice; instead, hatred, animosity and blood feuding lead him to commit multiple murders.
- It may also be displayed by him mutilating the body of the executed killer; he is not satisfied with simply executing the killer. Hatred and rage are not supposed to drive you to transgress the legitimate boundaries. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to mutilate the killer of *Hamzah may Allah be pleased with him* but Allah forbade him from doing this (1).

Allah *the Most High* then says: 'Truly, he is indeed helped [by Allah]!' (*al-Isra':* 33) In other words, it is not for the guardian to exceed the proper bounds of equal retaliation, for the Lawgiver has not left him without support; the Lord has given him the complete right to demand and exact retribution. As such, it is a Divine Obligation to proceed in the process of seeking justice following the limits of Allah without overstepping the boundaries. Indeed, if he transgresses the limit and kills other than the convicted murderer, he himself will be killed in requital for the unjust murder he committed. After that, the Lord *the Most High* says:

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(1) *When Hamzah may Allah be pleased with him was killed and mutilated at Uhud, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'If Allah supports me against them, I will mutilate thirty of their men'. When the Muslims heard of this, they said, 'By Allah, if we are given power over them, we will mutilate them as no Arabs before them have ever been mutilated'. Then Allah revealed: 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack, respond only to the extent of the attack leveled against you; but to keep patient is far better for [you, since Allah is with] those who are patient in adversity' (an-Nahl: 126).*

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا۟ مَالَ ٱلْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ أَشُدَّهُۥ ۚ
وَأَوْفُوا۟ بِٱلْعَهْدِ ۖ إِنَّ ٱلْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْـُٔولًا ﴿٣٤﴾

Do not go near the orphan's property, except with the best [intentions], until he reaches the age of maturity. Honour your pledges: you will be questioned about your pledges [34]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 34)

Again, the Lord uses the expression: 'And do not approach' (*al-Isra':* 34). He did not say, 'Do not consume the property of orphans!' But He prohibits us from approaching or even thinking of violating the property of an orphan, for an orphan is weak. As such, it is inappropriate to take advantage of him. *Al-Yateem* (i.e. the orphan) is a child whose father passed away before he reached the age of puberty and maturity. He has lost his father and has no one else to look after him; he is overcome with grief and pain when he sees other children with their loving fathers. He will become distressed about his fate which prevented him from having a father in his life.

The Lord *the Most High* first consoles the heart of the bereaved orphans and quells their emotions. He then advises the community to take on the responsibility of caring for them. As such, the orphans feel that, though they suffered the loss of their biological father, the Muslim community are all fathers for them. Their care for the orphans coupled with their tenderness is a compensation for their lost fathers.

Furthermore, a person's heart feels content when he sees that the orphan is honoured within the faith-centred community; the community looks after him and offers him support insomuch that each member of the community considers him as his son. As such, an individual is not vexed by life's trials nor is he fearful lest his children become orphans, for they will find the same form of consideration, help, and care in the community. To summarize, if the orphan finds such fatherly care and compassion from the community, he will be content with his decree and accept the Divine Predestination. Moreover, human souls feel assured about the future of their children if they become orphans.

Allah *the Most High* then says: 'except in the best way (to improve it)' (*al-Isra':* 34). Namely, do not take advantage of an orphan's vulnerable situation; he is still young and dependent upon others —you must not greedily consume his property or misappropriate it unjustly. His saying: ‘except in the best way (to improve it)’ (*al-Isra’:* 34) is an exception from the previous statement: ‘and do not approach’; it is permissible to approach the wealth of an orphan if our intent is to enhance it.

The word ‘*ahsan’* (the best way) is a superlative, which indicates an amplified presence of good. It is as though we have two descriptions: one is good and the other is the best. In other words, it is not enough to approach the wealth of the orphan in a way that is good; you should rather approach it in the way that is best. This gives rise to the question, ‘What is the good way to approach the wealth of an orphan? And what is the best way?’ The good way of approaching the wealth is to refrain from arbitrarily squandering the wealth of the orphan and violating the property rights as you approach his wealth. However, the best way of approaching the wealth of an orphan is to increase it for them through wise investment and to preserve the principal until the orphans become capable of dealing with their money themselves.

That is why the Lord *the Most High* says: ‘But let them have their sustenance therefrom’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5). He did not say, ‘Let them take from it as their sustenance. To put it simply, letting them take from it for their sustenance will cause the money to decrease. However, the statement: ‘But let them have their sustenance therefrom…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5) implies that the portion allotted to them from the money is taken from the profits, not from the principal. If this is not the case, imagine the case of one of the caretakers of an orphan who owns some property. He takes from the money of the orphan, pays the *zakat* and other financial obligations, and eventually spends all the money. Consequently, once the orphan reaches the age of majority when he can handle his own responsibilities, he will find nothing much of that money left.

The Lord *the Most High* commands the preservation of the orphan's wealth; that is, we should invest it to create profits and make it increase for these profits to cover the expenses of the orphan's life. The other possible scenario is that the child will not find any money left for him when he becomes a young man. The Lord *the Most High* wills the orphan to have access to the expertise and experience of those adults with backgrounds in making and managing wealth.

Perhaps there is a skilful expert who does not have liquid cash. He may invest the money of the orphan and take his share from the resulting profits in a fair manner. But if he is wealthy, he should completely abstain, because taking anything from it is impermissible for him. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Let him who is rich abstain entirely [from his ward's property]; and let him who is poor partake thereof in a fair manner’ (*an-Nisa’:* 6). Indeed, if someone has experience in money management and is suitable for the task, we should not allow that experience to go to waste, nor do we deny the orphan's access to it. In this way, we extend benefits for the experienced entrepreneur who has no wealth and for the orphan who cannot manage his money. In this way, the members of the community of believers help and complement each other.

Allah *the Most High* then says: ‘before he comes of age’ (*al-Isra’:* 34), i.e. until he grows, matures and reaches the age of maturity. Is the ‘age of maturity’ enough to give the orphan control over his property? In fact, it is not sufficient. He may be—despite his age—a dull-witted individual, who acts irresponsibly with money. In such a circumstance, it is not permissible for us to leave him unattended or free to squander the wealth as he chooses. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘If you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions’ (*an-Nisa’’:* 6). In a separate verse, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Do not entrust to those who are weak of judgment the possessions which Allah has placed in your charge’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5). He did not say, ‘their wealth’ due to the fact that those of weak judgments do not own or retain property rights. The money belongs to their guardians, who are charged with the responsibility of preserving and investing the wealth on their behalf.

The age of maturity designates the existence of sufficient mental capacity and the ability to comport oneself with decency. It is a vital condition for the orphan to take his wealth and manage it. The phrase: ‘of age’ (*al-Isra’:* 34) means to reach the point of physical maturity, i.e. have balanced and even behaviours; he is no longer a gangly child. The organs of the human being grow and mature through the passage of days until he reaches maturity and mental discernment. It is the time when he enters puberty and becomes well balanced. Allah then determines that puberty is the time at which the human being assumes moral responsibility. If Allah charges man with moral responsibility before the age of puberty, when the onset of puberty takes plac, man may object to being held responsible before he had undergone the changes in his physical make-up at puberty.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘And be true to every promise—for, verily, [on the Judgment Day] you will be called to account for every promise which you have made!’ (*al-Isra’:* 34) The ‘promise’ refers to one's contracts or agreements with others; a voluntary agreement which a person undertakes and for whose results and terms he is responsible. The first ever contract which was endorsed was the contract of faith taken from all human beings to worship Allah alone; nevertheless, you are free to accept faith in good conscience or to live outside its boundary. Allah does not desire that our bodies feign humility before Him; rather, He desires that our hearts consciously submit to Him in reverence. If He willed that everybody be forced to submit to Him, not one of us could deviate from the path of faith in Allah. Thus, the Lord *the Most High* spoke to His Messenger [Mohammad] saying: ‘You will perhaps kill yourself with anguish because they do not accept the faith! If We had so willed, We could have sent down to them a sign from the heavens so that their necks will be bowed down before it in utter humility’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 3-4). Allah did not will for their necks to come by force, but He willed that their hearts come in obedience and submission. However, many people confuse this issue; when commanding one of them to perform a religious requirement, he may reply: ‘There shall be no coercion in matters of faith’ (*al-Baqara:* 256). In response I say, ‘You have not interpreted the verse accurately. The verse means that there is no coercion to enter the faith. However, after you accept the faith, you have to fulfil its duties. Accepting this contract of faith means that you are willing to fulfil all the requisites, with regards to worship and your manners, which result from this acceptance. This explains why contracts are binding on believers and fulfilling them is a sign of faith. You are free to meet with so-and-so or free to decline to meet with him. Only if you make an appointment, does it become your duty to actually see him. In such a situation, the party that is preparing to meet with you has arranged their schedule and all subsequent activities to accommodate this meeting. If you call off your meeting and break the agreement you have made, you have given yourself the right to cancel this appointment, but placed the other party in an awkward situation.

This characteristic can never be present in a believer. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has included it among the characteristics of a hypocrite.(1) Furthermore, Allah's saying: '…and be true to every promise—for, verily, the covenant is a great responsibility' (*al-Isra':* 34) could either mean: You will be held responsible for your pledges. Every person will be asked about his pledges, whether he has fulfilled them or not? Or the phrase: '…is a great responsibility…' could signify that the contract will not be the responsibility of the contracting parties, but the contract itself is the one that carries the responsibility of fulfilling what is stipulated in it. It is as though Allah has linked the responsibility to the contract or agreement itself. So you and I are free of any responsibility, it is the (obligation prescribed by) the contract itself that shall be held responsible.

In some instances, the Lord *the Exalted* uses the passive participle in places that at first glance appear inappropriate. Nonetheless, after investigating and looking intently, you find that its usage reflects the height of eloquence, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when you (Muhammad) recite the Quran, We put between you and those who believe not in the Hereafter, a veil which is concealed' (*al-Isra':* 45). You will notice that the passive participle '*mastura*' (which is concealed) is used here. In a literal sense, a veil (*hijab*) is an object which is used to cover, but it is not itself '*covered'*. But in this verse, the Lord wants to represent the veil as being dense and impenetrable; as though it, itself, is covered with a separate veil. This is similar to how some well-to-do people arrange the curtains in their homes in two layers. In this way, the curtain itself becomes covered with another curtain. The same idea is clear in Allah's Statement: '…a shelter of a shade which is shaded' (*an-Nisa':* 57); that is the shade is very deep as it itself is shaded.

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of 'Amr ibn Al-`As may Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Four qualities which, if found in a person, make him a pure hypocrite, and whoever has one of them has a trait of hypocrisy until he gives it up: when he speaks, he lies; when he is entrusted, he betrays; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he disputes, he becomes obscene'. Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (book of authentic Hadiths) (58) and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2459).*

We should ponder on the state of a community in which pledges are not honoured and agreements are breached. A community whose members give little or no regard to the values of fulfilling commitments and having honest intentions is found to be a broken community, a community in which people do not trust each other. Once confidence, commitment, and honest pledges—which are the axes upon which the community turns—have been lost; you can be assured that such a community is bound to fail. It becomes no longer amenable to growth or development.

Due to the importance of pledges and covenants in Islam, you will find that an agreement becomes binding merely by a verbal promise. It does not require official registration because the believer can be counted on to stand by his word, even if it is not written down and notarized. From this comes what people refer to as ‘Legal Rights’ and ‘Religious Rights’. For instance, people say, ‘this is legal and that is religious’.

The difference between them is obvious, but perhaps an example will help to further illustrate this. Assume you have taken a loan from your friend, and you gave your friend a loan receipt for the amount for him to feel reassured; later, you met him at a time when you agreed to repay him and you settle the debt. However, he asked you to forgive him for not having the loan receipt at that moment, and you assured him saying, ‘It is really no problem, just send the receipt to me whenever you can’. But if we pause for a moment and imagine that this individual is going to act fraudulently and deny that you had ever paid the debt, in such a situation, according to the law, he has the right to be paid the debt he is owed; on the other hand, according to religion, he is not entitled to anything. In a word, the pledges and agreements that we conclude with people should be regarded as a religious rather than a legal obligation. Then Allah says:

وَأَوۡفُواْ ٱلۡكَيۡلَ إِذَا كِلۡتُمۡ وَزِنُواْ بِٱلۡقِسۡطَاسِ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمِۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞ وَأَحۡسَنُ تَأۡوِيلٗا ٣٥

And Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with accurate scales: that is better and fairer in the end [35]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 35)

The noble verse moves us to one of the gravest issues that face any community. It is the issue that guarantees to every human being the fruit and outcome of his labours and hard work in this life. It ensures him that his efforts will serve his own best interests and not the interests of the domineering classes who are like parasites which feed off the hard work of others and nourish themselves by sucking the blood of the masses. If a person's efforts serve his own best interests, the lazy and indolent are thrown into despair. They know that they have no place within a productive and active community. They will soon realize that if they continue to remain indolent, they will not find their daily bread. This gives them an impetus to work. This also helps enhance the workforce, uplift the community, and bring prosperity to its members.

It is true that any faith-based community is expected to be altruistic. However, this is the case for positive altruism that arises voluntarily from within the individual. In a faith-based community, there is no place for kidnapping, stealing, embezzlement, and forcible seizure. Such a community aims to organize life in a way that helps all people and stops anyone from being a leech on someone else's earnings.

Moreover, if we try to combat diseases caused by parasitic blood-sucking insects that nourish themselves on human blood, we must recognize that to try to combat 'human parasites' is a more worthy fight. As long as you are able to work, it is your responsibility to do so. As for those who are unable, they have legitimate excuses and should be treated with respect and deference. They have rights that should be fulfilled by the state and each individual Muslim. This is the security that Islam extends to all who are in need.

This is an opportunity to advise the wealthy people who contribute to meeting the needs of the poor, 'Do not moan and groan when we take this amount from you today; be sure that the ability and power that you exert to earn that money are not inherent in you—rather, they are gifts from Allah. As such, they can be taken away from you at any moment. Your strength can be exchanged for weakness, and your self-sufficiency for neediness. If this happens to you, we will provide for you (as you used to provide for others) and assure your future'. For this reason, it is essential that the human being contributes positively to life; everyone works and labours to contribute to the enhancement and enrichment of life. A human should not be content with inactivity and listlessness as his lot because the faith-based community cannot equate the one who works with the one who idly sits doing nothing, or the active contributor with the indolent loafer.

Imagine two brothers who divided their inheritance equally among themselves. The first lived moderately with his money and strove in earnest to increase it. The second, on the other hand, lived extravagantly and wastefully, spending everything that he owned until finally he ended up destitute and regretful over what he had lost. It is not right to equate this with that, nor is it reasonable to take from one (the responsible and earning brother) and give to the other (the lazy and wasteful brother). You should absolutely not do this because when human beings—and nations as well—take that which is not rightfully theirs, Allah burdens them with extra problems.

Consequently, it is unlawful to begrudge wealthy people their wealth when it is the product of their own labour and the outcome of their personal striving, as long as they practice moderation in spending their wealth and discharge all their financial obligations towards the community. We should leave them to work assiduously using all the abilities, talents and aspirations they have because the poor will eventually benefit from them and their aspirations, whether they like it or not. Therefore, we should let them work for indeed, even if it appears that they are simply working for themselves, in actual fact, the benefit of their hard work will reach you as well. Prosperity in the community extends to all its members.

Let us suppose that one of these wealthy persons wanted to establish a factory, a building, or a huge project. How many workers and craftsmen will be needed to complete the task? How many managers and engineers will benefit from this project? Any wealthy person who aspires to undertake a project on such a scale will not make any achievements until the work that is needed to fulfil them has turned into food and clothing for the poor.

To put it succinctly, we must leave the wealthy individual to strive and work diligently because the community will reap benefit from his diligence and hard work. Your only duty is to watch over him. If his pursuits proceed in legitimate and productive directions, then all is well and good. But if his pursuits proceed in wrongful directions, he must be deterred.

Allah *the Exalted* shows you the best way to ensure your happiness in life and how to act properly; He says: ‘And give full measure when you measure’ (*al-Isra’:* 35). The discussion that is being laid out here is not simply about weights. On the contrary, it is applicable to all kinds of weights and measures that are used to quantify things in the transactions of life; for example the units of measure used for length. These are units of measurement which are calculated in millimetres, centimetres, metres, or kilometres. Each object is measured in accordance with the unit of measurement that corresponds to its size; a book is measured in centimetres, a room in metres, and a road in kilometres. Clearly, the units of measure used to quantify length must correspond to the object that we are measuring; this is the case for the units used for measuring length. To know the area of objects, length and width are employed. As for the volume of a solid, it is calculated in terms of length, width, and height; and a balance is used to measure mass.

In fact, life can be precisely measured in units that quantify volume, and scales are used to determine the weight of a mass. We have the units of measure (cubic content) which help us determine sizes, and weights which help us assess masses. Masses are not measured in cubic content; rather, the amount of a mass is only known through weight. This is evidenced by the fact that a kilogram of cotton consists of much more (material) than a kilogram of iron. This means that the standards of measurement must be correct. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And give full measure when you measure…’ (*al-Isra’:* 35); this means: Give full and accurate measure without any depreciation in the value by either side.

In another noble verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Woe to those who give short measure (*al-Mutaffifin*), who demand of other people full measure for themselves but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1-3)

‘Those who give short measure’ refers to those who increase their portion (by decreasing or lessening other people’s portions). These people make sure that when they receive a measure from other people, they take the full exact amount. This is not in itself censurable; rather, what is censurable is: ‘…but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!’

(*al-Mutaffifin:* 3) That is, when it is they who are measuring or weighing for people, they give less than what is due. That is to say: they cheat by giving an inaccurate measure. This is the behaviour for which they have been censured and blamed within the noble verse. A human being is not held blameworthy for demanding the full amount of his due in any transaction. On the contrary, he is blameworthy because he is not fair; he fails to treat others as he will like to be treated.

We observe that many people consider the ‘*tatfif*’ (reduction of the quality and/or quantity of a product without changing the price) that is referred to by the word ‘*al-mutaffifin*’ (those who give short measure) in the verse only refers to weights and measures. *Tatfif*, in fact, also refers to the price. The salesman who, for instance, fraudulently takes twenty grams from your one kilogram of goods has cheated you in both the weight and the price.

Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, then says: ‘…and weigh with a balance that is straight *(al-qistas al-mustaqim)…*’ (*al-Isra’:* 35) that is: Make the scales precise, even, and free of any crooked dishonesty or intent to deceive.

The attentive reader will recognize that when emphasizing the accuracy of measurements during transactions, the Lord *Glorified is He* orders the people to measure goods properly and in full. He expressed it in this manner: ‘And give full measure when you measure…’ (*al-Isra’:* 35). But when He discusses the weights, the overriding focus is on precision. He has mentioned that it should be: ‘…a balance that is straight...’ that is, not simply any balance, but one that gives a precise, equitable measure. The question that arises here is, ‘Why is there a focus on flawless precision of weights, in particular?’ If you scrutinize the process of measuring an object, you find that it is carried out in clear open view. The chances for a person to defraud are significantly low when measuring. In fact, cheating when measuring, in many cases, is detected and foiled. This is because measuring takes place in full view (of the customer), and any possible fraud attempts can be easily uncovered.

As for weighing, it is different. Weighing is more open to fraud, and the sellers have a thousand and one ways to tamper with the scales without anyone perceiving what they are doing. Scales, as we know, are simple balancing apparatuses that can carry and hold things. It consists of a pivot that is at the centre. On one side of this pivot, we have the pan in which the unknown weight is placed, and on the other side, we have the pan in which the counterweight is placed. Any discrepancy in the weight that rests on the two pans will tip the scale off balance. If either pan is tampered with in any way, it will unsettle the scale.

If we wish to discuss at length the techniques of cheating used by sellers in the marketplaces, we will fill many pages. This explains why the Lord *the Exalted* was particular in stressing the duty of being precise when weighing. Certainly, it is a vast arena for fraudulent practices and consuming people's property unjustly.

We previously mentioned that the measurement of each object is taken in the unit of measurement that is suitable for it. The value and worth of an item are also factors that affect how it is measured; measuring limes is not like measuring almonds, gold, or diamonds. Therefore, part of the meaning of 'a balance that is straight' *(al-qistas al-mustaqim)* is that the scale should be properly calibrated to accurately measure the object being weighed. The one measuring gold, for instance, is weighing something valuable. Even if the amount being weighed is comparatively small, it will still equal a substantial amount of money. For this reason, experts in such matters caution the sellers from bringing their head near the scale, as they might be blowing into the pan of the scale. Surely, you can suffer loss on account of that simple blow!

But we should tell those whose hands have grown accustomed to fraudulent and deceptive practices while buying and selling, 'You only sell one product to the people and you cheat in it. However, at the same time you purchase many daily necessitates of life. You should be well aware that when you cheat against the people who are buying your one product, you will be cheated against when buying hundreds of items. You will inevitably be the loser. Give no consideration to the assumptions and illusions that this will somehow work in your favour'.

Keep in your mind that above you is the Sustainer of existence; neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. Nothing about you is hidden from Allah. He will put in your path someone who will make you 'drink from your own cup' until you recognize the reality of such unprofitable and unbeneficial transactions. Even if you can escape the earthly legal authorities, you will not be able to escape heavenly retribution. The money that you fraudulently took from people's provisions will go to waste without use, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained, 'Whoever acquires money by ill-gotten means, Allah will cause it to be dissipated in calamities'.(1) The inverse is also true. Anyone who deals honestly with the people when buying, selling, and carrying out transactions, Allah will surround him with those who will deal with him fairly and honestly.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…That is good (advantageous) and better in the end' (*al-Isra':* 35). The word 'that' refers to 'a balance that is straight' *(al-qistas al-mustaqim),* which always achieves the best of consequences. This implies that the opposite of 'a balance that is straight' *(al-qistas al-mustaqim)* results in bad and undesirable ends. The one who cheats and defrauds people thinks that these fraudulent practices will increase his wealth and bring him prosperity. We say to him, 'You are deluded. No good can come out of deception and minimizing the rights of others. In fact, profit through deception is loss itself because the Lord *the Exalted* will, in return, send to you those who will cheat you. This is the first point. As for the second point, it will not be long before the people discover your dishonesty in weighing and measuring, and cease to do business with you'. In short, measuring with anything besides 'a balance that is straight' *(al-qistas al-mustaqim)* does not contain any good and will not result in a favourable end.

On the other hand, Allah *the Exalted* will send the truthful seller who weighs with justice and gives full measures those who will give him just weights and full measures. In addition to this, he will become notable among the people for his honesty and trustworthiness, and people will jump at the chance to do business with him. This is what is intended by Allah's statement: '…That is good (advantageous) and better in the end' (*al-Isra':* 35). This is the blessed end.

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(1) *Narrated by `Ajiluni in Kashf Al-Khafa' (vol. 2, p. 313). He traced it back to Al-Quda`i who related it on the authority of Abu Salmah Al-Himsi with a chain of narrators which lead back to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. However, Abu Salmah Al-Himsi was classified as weak and his being a Companion is not verifiable. Subki said that he (Abu Salmah) did in fact meet Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him but this information is incorrect.*

The Lord then says:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِۦ عِلْمٌ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلسَّمْعَ وَٱلْبَصَرَ وَٱلْفُؤَادَ
كُلُّ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْـُٔولًا ﴿٣٦﴾

Do not follow blindly what you do not know to be true: ears, eyes, and heart, you will be questioned about all these [36] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* moves to another issue which involves the proper organization of life and the overall way of life of the human beings whom Allah has appointed as His vicegerents on the earth, and to whom He has granted life and provided with abilities and life's necessities.

After Allah has secured life's essentials for the human beings, He guided them as to how they should improve themselves in life through investigation and reflection. They should make the best of the intellectual capacities that Allah has endowed them with, employing the materials and energies that Allah created to enhance and enrich their lives and communities.

The process of advancement and enhancement of life cannot achieve meaningful outcomes unless the basis for it is sufficiently clear. If you strive to develop life upon the basis of a clear unambiguous principle, you will arrive at the desired results. For instance, the student who desires to enter Law School has a clear and well-determined objective. He joins the Law School, works assiduously, and realizes his goals and aspirations. This only happened because he had a clear reason to work about which he was convinced.

Accordingly, life's development must be based on well-established objectives. It is these firm objectives that make the individual engage in any meaningful pursuit, being confident that his work will lead to the desired results. Someone who wants to travel to Alexandria or Aswan, for instance, does not embark on the journey until he has clear directions about the route he is taking. This mirrors the process through which the development of life is pursued; it cannot be completed unless it is based on clear and well-defined 'directions' which exist in creation. When we say '*`ilm*' (knowledge), we are referring to those directions.

We previously clarified the meaning of *'qadiyya'* (a fact, matter, or important question). It signifies a definite statement that will prove either the dishonesty or truthfulness of the one who is stating it. It is like saying, 'The earth is spherical', or 'the sun emits light', or 'the moon reflects light'. These pronouncements represent definitive scientific realities about which there is no argument. They are absolutely provable, demonstrable facts. This is the reality of knowledge.

As for ignorance, it is when you positively assert a *'qadiyya'* that is not in conformity with reality. In other words, it is false. Ignorance is not, as some believe, lack of knowledge. Being illiterate or uninformed is what constitutes lack of knowledge; the uninformed person has neither a true assertion nor a false one concerning a certain matter. This explains why we see the illiterate or uninformed more positively predisposed and amenable to education than the ignorant. The only thing you need to do with an uninformed person is educate him about a topic and he will quickly learn and adapt. Conversely, the ignorant must first have the erroneous notions that he believes to be true removed from his mind; then—and only then—can you teach him.

In terms of the major questions in life, we can separate them into two categories: The questions upon which the inclinations of people are in conflict, and the questions upon which the inclinations of people are in conformity. The questions upon which the inclinations of people are in conflict are the cases in which every person puts forward his own self-serving personal judgment, even if it is damaging to others. As long as the basis of an opinion concerning a certain question is whimsical, people will differ in their conclusions about it. Every individual has his own preferences. If each of us had to decide individually the outcome of every major matter, we will have never agreed on anything.

Indeed, the Lord *Glorified is He* has spoken the truth when He says: 'And if the truth had been in accordance with their desires, verily, the heavens and the earth, and whosoever is therein, will have been corrupted!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71) If this is the case, what can be the way out of this disagreement and conflict? The way out entails that each of us frees himself from his capricious views, and then we should submit all matters over which we disagree to the One Who has no inclinations or prejudices.

Your Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* is the Only One Who has no inclinations or prejudices. We are all His creation. We are all equal in His Eyes. There is none among us who has a lineage with Allah. Allah's Law is one and impartial towards all, so no one can object to any of His rules; everyone is submissive to this law and bound to follow it. This is because it is Allah's Law, not a law made and enforced by humans.

Therefore, a popular saying goes, 'A finger cut by the Law does not bleed'. That is, I am not subservient to you nor are you subservient to me; rather, all of us are subservient to Allah *the Exalted* and His Command. In view of that, leave to Allah all the issues that are subject to conflicting desires and caprices. He will decide all these matters in order to release all of you from foreign, external imposition of values.

The questions upon which individual desires and opinions agree are the matters that are material or empirical. They are based on the fixed, incontrovertible characteristics of matter itself. They do not attempt to favour someone's viewpoint over that of another. Consequently, there is nothing wrong with following the opinions of others regarding them. Because of the empirical accuracy of these issues, you will have no choice but to accept them. The laboratory that you enter to carry out experiments in search for empirical data about a specific issue that relates to the material world or (more specifically) chemistry, for example, is a neutral lab; it does not seek to placate anybody.

We already said that there is no such thing as Russian or American electricity or chemistry. These constitute material facts on which there is no dIsagreement. Arbitrary and capricious inclinations are what create conflict between the East and West; the East is based on communism and the West on capitalism.

For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself laid down this demarcation (between faith-related questions and experiment-related questions), when he saw people cross-pollinating palm trees. He advised them to discontinue the practice of cross-pollination. They obeyed him and discontinued the practice of cross-pollinating their palm trees that year. The outcome was that the palm trees did not fructify. On the basis of practical experience, it was observed that the suggestion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been incorrect. From whom did these instructions come? From Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah, the Prophet of Allah and His Messenger, who was keen that each opinion he gave was correct and truthful. However, he plainly said, ‘You are more knowledgeable about your worldly affairs’. (1) In this way he set an example for over-zealous religious scholars who keep poking their noses into empirical, material facts. The Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* states: ‘… each group knew its drinking place…’ (*al-Baqara:* 60), and of course Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has said, ‘None of you truly believes until his inclinations are in accordance with what I have brought’.(2)

If you want your progress within life to take a wholesome and fruitful direction; one in which there is harmony and cooperation with others rather than one in which there is opposition and conflict, the Lord clearly states: ‘And follow not (O human) that of which you have no knowledge…’ (*al-Isra’:* 36) The essential point of this command is for you to progress in life relying on guidance and insight.

Allah’s Injunction: ‘And follow not (O human) …’ means not to pursue or interfere in matters of which you have no knowledge. Consider a person who, for example, claims to be capable of repairing televisions, while, in fact, he does not know anything about these devices. He will probably cause more damage to the television than repair.

In light of this, the juristic scholars have said, ‘He who says, “I do not know” has given the (right) scholarly opinion’ because by announcing his lack of knowledge about a particular issue, he is effectively referring the questioner to someone who is truly knowledgeable. If, on the other hand, he answers incorrectly, his answer will lead to undesirable consequences. Whoever takes this course of action when approaching his worldly affairs, will have a life defined by failure.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2362) on the authority of Rafi` ibn Khadij in which he said that when the date palms did not bear fruit, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘I am only a human being. So, when I command you about a thing pertaining to religion, act upon it; and when I suggest to you something out of my personal opinion, keep it in mind that I am only a human being’. Also, according to the Hadith narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2363) on the authority of Anas, he said, ‘You have better knowledge (of technical skills) in the affairs of the world’.*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Abu `Asim in the book of As-Sunna (vol. 1, p. 12) on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Umar. Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali also mentioned it in Jami` Al-`Ulum wal-Hikam (p. 460), but he classed it as weak.*

The verb '*yaqfu'* (translated as 'follow' in the verse under study) is derived from the word *'qafa',* which refers to the back of something. In another noble verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Then We sent, following in their footsteps (*qaffayna*), Our Messengers…' (*al-Hadid:* 27). This means, 'We sent successive Messengers who followed in one another's footsteps'. The expression '*yaqfu atharah*' means to walk behind someone.

A man once said, advising his son when he desired to marry(1), 'O son, do not choose her to be your wife if she has a child from a previous union (*hannana*), or if she will constantly remind you of what she gives you (*mannana*), or if she is a fair woman of bad origin (*`ushbat ad-dar*) or a two-faced woman (*kabbat al-qafa*).

The *'hannana'* is a woman who has a child from a previous marriage who may remind her of her love for his father. The *'mannana'* is a woman who has wealth or stature that she uses to lord over you. The '*`ushbat ad-dar*' is a fair woman who has been raised in a bad environment. The *'kabbat al-qafa'* is a woman who mentions a person's faults to others behind his back.

In the context of the verse under discussion, knowledge refers to all types of knowledge. This must be pointed out because many people believe that the word knowledge (*`ilm*) strictly refers to religious knowledge. However, knowledge (*`ilm*) is every type of information that enhances life. Knowledge can be categorized as being of two types:

- Religious knowledge: It is that which conclusively eliminates all conflicting desires and inclinations, so that all desires and inclinations are actuated by only one motive, faith. This type of knowledge is the preserve of only the Lord. We have no share in it. The Creator knows best about His creation. He has laid down the laws which regulate and maintain the universe because He knows best what improves and what worsens its condition.

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(1) *Ibn Manzur*, *Lisan Al -`Arab* under the root [*ha-nun-nun*; *ain-shin-baa'*]. It was stated as an advice of a father to his son who wanted to marry.

In the same manner that you do not consult a butcher to learn how to service a television, for example, do not take the instructions for maintaining and servicing human beings from anyone other than their Creator. As the Quran says: 'How could He Who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk:* 14) Regarding this type of knowledge, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…so accept whatever the Messenger (Muhammad) gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

We should not interfere in these issues or attempt to add to them because they represent Allah's Way that has come with definitive commandments (Do this and do not do that). As a way, it is not amenable to augmentations or modification. Any prohibition or command that exists within it must be observed and honoured. If not, your choosing to abandon the way designed for you by your Lord and Creator will cause corruption in the world through your violation of His Prohibitions or Commandments. In terms of those affairs which the Creator *the Exalted* has left (to the discretion of the human beings), and issued neither a commandment nor a prohibition in respect to them, you are free to do or avoid them.

The attentive observer of the Law of the Creator *Glorified is He* finds that the matters of religious and moral obligation, contained in 'Do this' and 'Do not do that', are only few compared to matters about which you have a free choice. Therefore, reserve for your Lord and Creator—who possesses ultimate knowledge about you—a platform that grants Him the sole right to decide how you should live your life and how it should be organized. After all, are we not obligated, as Allah's creation and slaves, to accept His Judgment as the final word in all matters of faith, and keep our noses out of His Business?

As for the second type of knowledge, it is material and empirical knowledge which is not subject to caprice or prejudice. Rather, the Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* has made it an area of research, competition and a domain of active participation and contribution by all. And because of this, people inevitably receive and share information and data. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* has given us an example of this type of knowledge in His Words: 'See you not that Allah sends down water (rain) from the sky, and We produce therewith fruits of varying colours. And among the mountains are streaks white and red, of varying colours, and (others) very black. And of people, and moving living creatures, and cattle, in like manner of various colours…' (*Fatir:* 27-28).

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentions in the previous verse all classes of beings: humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects; and He concludes this with His Words: '…it is only those who have knowledge among His servants that fear Allah…' (*Fatir:* 28).

These are natural phenomena within the universe. Immerse yourself in them as you want; studying and researching them. If you devote yourself to their study with enough assiduity, they will help you arrive at other phenomena which will improve and uplift your life. The discoverer of the steam engine, the wheel, electricity, gravity or other scientific breakthroughs did not create something new (non-existent) in Allah's Universe. Their achievement lay in thoroughly examining and reflecting upon the phenomena of nature, which ultimately allowed the scientists to arrive at breakthroughs that brought ease and felicity to their respective communities as well as all the other communities in the world. For this reason, the Lord *the Exalted* warns us against letting the phenomena in the Universe pass us by without taking due notice or reflecting on them: '…and there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to…' (*Yusuf:* 105).

Designating scientific achievements with the word 'discoveries' is a truthful description that corresponds with the true state of matters; scientists have not brought something new into being—all these things already existed. They just earned the merit of finding and discovering them. In the light of this, the word 'invention' proves to be an imprecise term when used to describe such discoveries. Since Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* has forbidden us to involve ourselves in matters we are ignorant of, what, then, are the types of matters we are allowed to engage in and pursue? We should concern ourselves with matters that are within the scope of our knowledge and about which we are absolutely certain from among the various physical sciences.

To summarize, if the matter is religious, it is for the Creator to hand down laws to us regarding it. But if it is a material or empirical matter related to worldly affairs, we must use our minds to find the most beneficial, life-enhancing solutions. This explains why, after this, the Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the faculties that are needed for the acquisition of knowledge. He says: 'Verily! The hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)' (*al-Isra':* 36).

At this point, a question arises about the faculties used to attain knowledge when we consider the Command of the Lord *the Exalted* which states that we are forbidden to delve into matters of which we have no knowledge, but we should proceed in the light of the knowledge of matters about which we are certain. In fact, if it were not for these faculties, the human being will know nothing at all. This is made clear in the Statement of the Lord *the Exalted*: 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing, sights and minds, so that you might be thankful' (*an-Nahl:* 78). Do human beings give thanks for anything other than the outcomes they receive? This outcome is knowledge.

Once they emerge from their mother's wombs, the senses start to function in the human body, right after birth. Some people believe that an infant cannot understand anything until he grows up and becomes able to talk and communicate with others. Actually, a baby is aware and perceives things from the first days after birth.

For this reason, physiologists say that a baby is born with natural abilities of perception, which the specialists cautiously refer to as 'the five apparent senses'. Their cautious approach was appropriate because afterwards they discovered other senses such as the sense of muscle force which we use to distinguish heavy matter from that which is light.

Out of the various human senses, hearing and seeing are the most important. They are mentioned in the Quran in the following order: First is hearing, and next is sight because hearing precedes sight. The sense of hearing is fully operative at birth, but it is followed by sight within a few days after birth. This means that hearing develops and functions more rapidly than other senses. This is one reason. Another reason is that hearing is unique in that it is the only sense that performs its function even during sleep. This points us to the great Wisdom of the Creator *the Most High*; it is through the function of hearing that you are summoned from sleep.

Allah *the Most High* has given us a vivid depiction of this faculty in the story of the seven sleepers in the Cave. When Allah *the Exalted* willed that they should sleep for many years, He covered their ears with deafness and disabled their hearing. Without doing this, they will not have been able to sleep undisturbed for such a long period because of the noises outside the cave. Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘We sealed their ears (with sleep), for a number of years, in the cave’ (*al-Kahf:* 11).

Throughout Allah’s Book, the sense of sight is mentioned before the sense of hearing in only one verse; that is: ‘Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard, send us back and we shall do good…’ (*as-Sajda:* 12). The discourse here is not about the life of this world; rather, it is about the Hereafter. This will be the time when people shall be terrified by the horrors they see on the Day of Judgement. In the Hereafter, people will see before they hear.

But in this life, hearing is the first of the senses to develop, and it the most important for the acquisition of knowledge. Even the one who learns by reading hears before he reads. The alphabet is learned first through hearing. Hence, hearing is used first in the process of education, and after that the role of sight comes into play.

A closer examiner of the noble verses in which hearing and sight have been mentioned will find that hearing is stated in the singular while sight is stated in the plural, such as Allah’s saying: ‘…He gave you hearing, sights and minds…’ (*as-Sajda:* 9). The only exception to this occurs in the verse at hand, which states: ‘Verily! The hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)’ (*al-Isra’:* 36). We may ask why? What is the wisdom behind mentioning it in the singular form here?

Before we explain the wisdom behind this, we must be aware that the Speaker is Allah, the Most Exalted. As long as the Speaker is Allah, then every word must be meticulously positioned and very eloquently expressed for the context of the verse.

Hearing occurs in the singular form because the thing being heard does not vary in respect to those who hear it; if a sound rings out at this very moment, all of us will hear it. It is same in the ears of all those near it.

On the other hand, sight proves to be qualitatively different. In fact, we are, at this very moment, faced with various visible objects and different scenes. You are looking at something, but I am looking at something else. All of us in the same area hear the same sound, but this is not the case for what we see. This explains why hearing has been expressed in the singular form, whereas sight in the plural.

Allah's statement: 'Verily! The hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)' (*al-Isra':* 36) means that sight is expressed in the singular. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* is discussing in this passage the individual responsibility of every human being towards his hearing and sight. In front of the Lord *the Most High* accountability is individual; no one will be asked about anybody else. Every person will be questioned only regarding his own actions. Therefore, it is appropriate in this context to talk about hearing and sight in the singular form because each person will be asked solely about his own sight.

Each human being is responsible for their own hearing, sight, and mind in terms of the acquisition of knowledge of the principles upon which their lives are lived. The same criteria apply to what people give using these faculties. It is as though the Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* is saying to the ears, 'Do not hear anything except that which is good and do not learn anything except that which is beneficial'. The message is the same to educators and teachers, they should allow their children to hear only things which encourage them to be virtuous and help improve and enrich their lives.

To the eye, Allah seems to say, 'Look only at lawful and permissible things which do not excite your lusts'. Again, the same advice goes to those responsible for raising up youth and children, 'Shield their eyes from that which arouses lusts and ruins the life'. This is how we should instil in our community the concept of 'correct knowledge' that serves as a basis for the progress of life.

Since you are responsible for your limbs and will be accountable for them, you should never claim to have seen what you have not seen or heard what you have not heard. You should absolutely avoid exposing yourself to the responsibility of giving testimony on matters about which you are unsure.

You must also avoid adopting false causes and building your life based on them. If something is built on corrupt foundations, it follows, naturally, that the outcome will also be corrupt. Conversely, anything built on proper foundations shall yield proper results.

The summation of all this is Allah’s statement: ‘And follow not (O human) that of which you have no knowledge’ (*al-Isra’:* 36). What is the reason for this injunction? Because you will be held accountable for this knowledge as well as the faculties used to acquire it: ‘Verily, the hearing, the sight and the heart, [regarding] each of these [you] will be questioned (by Allah)’ (*al-Isra’:* 36). Allah then says:

وَلَا تَمۡشِ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مَرَحًاۖ إِنَّكَ لَن تَخۡرِقَ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ وَلَن تَبۡلُغَ ٱلۡجِبَالَ طُولٗا ﴿٣٧﴾

Do not strut arrogantly about the earth: you cannot break it open, nor match the mountains in height [37]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 37)

The noble verses are still maintaining one steady theme by illustrating the path of balanced interactions within the Muslim community. A balanced community is the one centred upon One God; He is the Absolute Authoritative Master and the Wise Lawmaker.

The one who ponders on all these verses will find that they contain an upright course of life for establishing a balanced, coherent society. This upright course begins with Allah’s Words: ‘Set not up with Allah any other god…’ (*al-Isra’:* 22).

This issue (the oneness of Allah) is the most fundamental and vital aspect of life; all other issues of life cannot be arranged unless they fall under it. Next, Allah divides the community into different groups. Concerning the first group, He enjoins showing kindness to the elders—those who have fulfilled their task in life—as it is time for them to be honoured and to have their favours repaid; so He commanded that parents be treated respectfully and kindly.

Afterwards, Allah turns to the young group—who need protection and care—and gives instructions relating to children. He prohibits killing them out of fear of poverty or need. He also gives special consideration to the orphans because the orphan is vulnerable and in need of additional support, care, tenderness and compassion.

Then Allah speaks about wealth, life's maintainer. Concerning it, He prescribes moderation and temperance—for the middle group—and prohibits straying away to either of the two extremes, namely extravagance and niggardliness. Next Allah forbids obscenity, particularly sexual intercourse outside marriage (i.e. adultery and fornication), which soils reputations and corrupts lineages. Then, He declares murder and bloodshed as forbidden.

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* moves the discussion to how to preserve people's wealth, effort, and hard work. He orders that goods be weighed and measured honestly and accurately, and He prohibits fraud and cheating. Next, He instructs the human being to be intellectually honesty; this means that he should refrain from claiming to be knowledgeable about that which he is ignorant so as not to base his life on fallacious grounds.

Can you not see that this delineates the way of life that can ensure the well-being and integrity of the community? The well-being and integrity of the community is consequent upon the well-being and integrity of its members. Basically, the human being is the single most determinant factor in the way life proceeds and progresses, and this is his responsibility as he has been appointed the vicegerent of Allah on earth. For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to establish a balanced society, where there are balanced interactions between its members.

The basic element of this balance is equality of all mankind before Allah. We are all His slaves. None among us is related to Allah by birth or lineage. All humans, in Allah's Sight, are equal, like the teeth of a comb(1). The only superiority anyone has over anyone else is attained through Allah-fearing piety and good deeds.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn `Adi in Al-Kamil (vol. 3, p. 248) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him who narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'People are as equal as the teeth of a comb; one is not superior over another except in how he avoids evil deeds. Man progresses when supported by his brother as a good brother helps and encourages the person to do good. No goodness is expected in the companionship of those who do not like for their companions whatever they like for themselves'. Its chain of transmitters includes Abu Dawud Nakh`i, concerning whom Ibn `Adi said, 'It was agreed that he fabricated hadiths'. However, `Ajiluni attributed it in Kashf Al-Khafa' (vol. 2, p. 401) to Ad-Daylami on the authority of Anas and then Sahl ibn Sa`d.*

If we do in fact have different statuses within the life of this world, it is only an external superficial difference. When you look into these differences, do not look at it from only one particular direction and say, for instance, ‘This man is rich and that man is poor, end of story’.

Most people strictly concern themselves with only this perspective when looking at such differences, and neglect all others perspectives. This is incorrect. You must look at other aspects which also play a part in defining a person’s life, and observe different elements (that shape a person’s well-being in a holistic sense) of the human being’s psychology and views. If you look at matters in this way, you will find that the cumulative assets of all human beings are the same. As for the only distinguishing factor, Allah *the Most High* has spoken the truth concerning it, saying: ‘…in Allah’s Eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones who are most mindful of Him …’ (*al-Hujurat:* 13). As long as a faith-based society thoroughly upholds this value, it will be considered socially deviant for any of its members to raise himself to a rank of holiness or status above others. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do not strut arrogantly about the earth…’ (*al-Isra’:* 37). That is to say do not strut boastfully and proudly, and it could also mean vainly and snobbishly. This is because when someone behaves arrogantly and proudly and, for some reason, thinks of himself as being better than others are, he must be able to assure the continuity of that characteristic which he believes justifies his attitude. This means that the thing that causes him to be arrogant must inherently be a part of him; it never leaves him. However, it is due to Allah’s Wisdom that He made everything which might be used as a justification for arrogance an additional gift to humans; and hence, not inherent in their beings.

Human existence—with its various dimensions—from their creation out of nothing to being provided out of nothing, is a gift from Allah that could be taken away any day. So how will it seem if you, after having behaved arrogantly on account of your wealth, are seen by the people as a poverty-stricken person? And likewise, how will it seem if you, after having bragged about your power, are seen by the people as a weak and needy person?

As such, humility and good manners are more befitting for humans. As for pride and superiority, they are strictly reserved for the Creator *the Most High*. How can you attempt to compete with Allah in His Attributes (Pride, Majesty, Supremacy etc.)? The Lord *Glorified is He* has forbidden us to do this. There is none that deserves to be described by the divine attributes of perfection besides Allah *the Exalted*. In fact, acknowledging that true pride and majesty belong to Allah alone stops anyone from being proud with others.

Whoever wishes to see how all creation are equal before the Creator *the Most High*, he should observe the acts of worship. Through them, the inherent humility of all people is manifested. When the call to prayer is given, for instance, you see all people as equals, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, rulers or those who are ruled. The security patrolman standing side by side with the cabinet minister, you see all of them bowing or prostrating; all of them are in a state of humbleness, neediness, and submission before Allah. All of them are the slaves of Allah. Their statuses 'come off' with their shoes as they prepare to pray! In the courtyard of the All-Merciful all stand on equal footing. This equality is witnessed even more clearly during the rites of *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

A most outstanding aspect of prayer is that the president or another important figure does not disdain or feel any shame in being seen in such a humble and unassuming position by his subordinates. Why is that the case? The answer is that the humbleness and humility that are shown here are for Allah. And to be sure, such humility to Allah is in fact the very essence of honour, dignity, and stateliness.

Then Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: '…you cannot break it (the earth) open, nor match the mountains in height' (*al-Isra':* 37). We notice in this expression a tone of reproach and reprimand. It is as if the Lord *the Most High* is saying to these arrogant people and those who possess a false sense of superiority, 'How can you go about puffed up with arrogance and conceit concerning that which has been given to you as a gift, although this gift is not inherent in your being? Even with this pompous pretension and self-aggrandisement attitude, none of you can penetrate the earth; on the contrary, it will remain solid and able to withstand your challenges. Keep in mind, that the earth is the lowest part of the world and is trampled upon by feet daily. Likewise, the mountains, they are a solid inanimate body which will remain above you, and you will never be able to outstrip them in height'. However, we should remember that the Lord *the Exalted* admonishes His honourable believing servants only to protect their honourable status, and so He says: 'Do not strut arrogantly about the earth…' (*al-Isra': 37*).

At the same time, when Allah *the Exalted* wants to reprimand the people who live with false puffed up pride, He mentions the lowest order of beings: inanimate objects—namely, the earth and mountains. Despite being inferior beings, they may tower above and surpass the human.

A careful observer of the various types of beings in existence: inanimate objects, plants, animals, humans, etc. finds that the human being benefits from all these groups. The inanimate objects benefit the plants. Both the animals and the plants benefit other animals and the human being. Additionally, human beings derive exclusive benefit from the animals. Thus, all types of creatures have been placed to serve the human being. What, then, is your role in this enterprise, O human being? Who is it that you yourself serve? You must have a specific role in the created order and a function in life. If you do not, then the stones and earth have a more purposeful existence than you. It is obligatory on you to search for a mission and specific role within this existence.

Within the philosophy of *Hajj*, there is something that arouses wonder. Inanimate objects, which occupy the lowest order of being, find a lofty place and status. The *Ka`ba* is in itself a stone structure circumambulated by people. In one of its corners, we find the Blessed Blackstone; and, although being a stone, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed us to kiss it. Consequently, people crowd around the Blackstone trying to gain the honour of kissing it or even simply touching it. Undeniably, this is one of the clearest manifestations of slave hood to Allah that exist in creation. The human being sits atop the food chain, he is literally served by the rest of creation; nonetheless, he sees dignity and honour in kissing a stone.

Equally, the uprooting or cutting of plants is forbidden in the Sanctuary in Mecca. By no means do you have the right to extend your hand towards them (with the intention of uprooting or cutting them). Furthermore, hunting animals is not allowed. These things which serve me most of the time are appointed a time in which I am to serve them and recognize their sanctity. Allah *the Exalted* has planned this to be experienced once in our lifetime to help us remember our natural state and origins. This is designed to prevent the human being from becoming self-deluded concerning the superiority he has inherited within the hierarchy of creatures on the earth. Moreover, this is intended to help him learn that slavery to Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* resonates throughout the universe.

Not in the slightest should the human being violate this open manifestation of worship and slavery that exists within the created order by displaying pride, arrogance, or vainglory. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

كُلُّ ذَٰلِكَ كَانَ سَيِّئُهُۥ عِندَ رَبِّكَ مَكْرُوهًا ﴿٣٨﴾

The evil of all these actions is hateful to your Lord [38]
(The Quran, *al-Isra': 38*)

This is referring to all of the previously mentioned instructions and directions which began from Allah's statement: 'Set not up with Allah any other god…' (*al-Isra':* 22) and the stated issues that we were cautioned against, which aim to preserve integrity and balance within the community, ward off evil and bring about goodness. The evil (*as-sayyi`*) is that which is hateful to Allah *the Exalted*. Allah only hates those matters that go against the principles of obedient servitude to Him. The human being, on the other hand, dislikes anything that goes against his desires or conflicts with his inclinations.

It was said that the previously stated duties and prohibitions were the Ten Commandments revealed to Musa (Moses *peace be upon him*). They are referred to in Allah's statement: 'We inscribed everything for him on the Tablets which taught and explained everything, saying, "Hold on to them firmly and urge your people to hold fast to their excellent teachings…"' (*al-A'raf:* 145).

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

ذَٰلِكَ مِمَّآ أَوۡحَىٰٓ إِلَيۡكَ رَبُّكَ مِنَ ٱلۡحِكۡمَةِۗ وَلَا تَجۡعَلۡ
مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ فَتُلۡقَىٰ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَلُومٗا مَّدۡحُورًا ﴿٣٩﴾

[Prophet], this is some of the wisdom your Lord has revealed to you: do not set up another god beside God, or you will be thrown into Hell, blamed and rejected [39]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 39)

The word ‘this’ in the previous verse refers to the aforementioned injunctions.

As for ‘*al-hikmah*’ (wisdom), it signifies placing something in its proper position to effectuate its proper purpose. This is to keep wisdom prevailing in the community; for wisdom protects it from disorder, foolishness, stupidity, and corruption.

Concerning Allah’s statement: ‘do not set up another god beside Allah’ (*al-Isra’:* 39), one may be led to ask, ‘Why is this prohibition being repeated? Did the beginning of this entire section of instructions not start with this same prohibition?’

The Lord *Glorified is He* laid down a flawless way for us; one which will order and arrange our lives. Before beginning to explicate its details, He started with: Allah is one God, without partners or associates. After this, He organized all the different levels and groups in the community. He established the foundations of purity, chastity, and order to preserve the inviolability of lineage. Then He called us to show mutual humility. The basic aim of these instructions is to establish an upright community whose members attain happiness by following the Divine Path.

As such, you should never acknowledge the existence of a god besides Allah. The Lord *Glorified is He* repeated this prohibition: ‘do not set up another god beside Allah’ (*al-Isra’:* 39) because there will come a time when people will give high regard to the philosophy of some thinkers; consequently, they will adhere to their viewpoints and proceed according to their methodologies. Some will even give preference to these methodologies over the Path of the Lord *the Most High*. They will create confusion in the minds of the people and tempt them away from the true teachings of their religion. In the process, they will convince them that these ideas are superior to the teachings that Islam preaches. This implies that it is not sufficient to merely believe; you must remain continually on guard against those who might attempt to shake your faith. Hence, do not consider anyone (or anything) other than Allah as your lord; the person you worship besides Allah will work to lure you away from your religion. And the result shall be: 'You will be thrown into Hell, blamed, and rejected' (*al-Isra':* 39). You will be 'Blamed' because you have committed a blameworthy action, and 'Rejected' means removed and cast far away from Allah's Mercy. This is the recompense in the Hereafter.

As for the one who does not believe in the Hereafter, in order for the people to be able to withstand him in this life, Allah *Glorified is He* allows him to taste some of his punishment in the life of this world. In this sense, Allah *Glorified is He* expedites the punishment of this individual; He punishes him in the life of this world before the Hereafter. This is reflected in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '…and he who follows My guidance will not go astray, and neither will he be unhappy. But as for him who turns away from remembering me — verily, he shall have a straightened life…' (*Ta Ha:* 123-124). Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned the following in the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn (the one with two horns): 'Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it [as if it were] setting in a spring of murky water, and he found a people near it. Allah said, "O Dhu Al-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or treat them with kindness'. He [Dhu Al-Qarnayn] said, "Whoever does wrong, we will punish. Then he will be returned to his Lord, and He will punish him with a terrible punishment"' (*al-Kahf:* 86-87). Allah *Glorified is He* states Dhu Al-Qarnayn as saying: '…we will punish him…' (*al-Kahf:* 87) as Dhu Al-Qarnayn had been given authority in the land and entrusted with the responsibility of preserving social equity; His responsibility even extended to people who did not believe in the Hereafter. If this was not the case, and we postponed the punishment of such people until the Hereafter, they will ruin the lives of countless numbers of men and women; they will be given free-reign to cause much corruption.

For this reason, an oppressive tyrant does not die until Allah *Glorified is He* has requited him for his misdeeds and allowed him to taste the punishment of the life of this world before that of the Hereafter. The oppressed must see and notice that the end result of oppression is disastrous. At the same time, the oppressed are under Allah’s protection and are given support and aid by Him in whatever way He chooses. This holds true to such an extent that if an oppressor knew what Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for the oppressed, he will withhold his oppression.

Allah says:

أَفَأَصۡفَىٰكُمۡ رَبُّكُم بِٱلۡبَنِينَ وَٱتَّخَذَ مِنَ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنَٰثًاۚ إِنَّكُمۡ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوۡلًا عَظِيمٗا ﴿٤٠﴾

What? Has your Lord favoured you people with sons and
taken daughters for Himself from the angels? What a
monstrous thing for you to say! [40] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 40)

Some of the polytheists claim that Allah *Glorified is He* has a son. Some from among them assert that ‘Isa (–Jesus, the Messiah) is Allah’s Son, while others from among them claim that Uzair (Ezra) is Allah’s Son. Then there are those of them who say that the angels are Allah’s daughters. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* is rebuking all of them: How can you attribute daughters to the Creator *Glorified is He* and you deem it an honour to have sons? This is an inequitable distribution. As Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned elsewhere: ‘What — for yourselves [you choose only] male offspring, whereas to him [you assign] the female: lo that is an unfair distribution!’ (*an-Najm:* 21-22) That is a dishonest and wrongheaded distribution.

The statement of Allah: ‘Has, then, your Lord distinguished you…’ (*al-Isra’:* 40) is saying, ‘Has He honoured you by choosing and designating sons for you but taken daughters for himself?’

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And yet, they attribute to Him offspring from among some of the beings created by Him…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 15). This explains why, after mentioning their claim, Allah follows with: ‘…Verily, you are uttering a dreadful saying’ [*al-Isra’:* 40]. Essentially, He described their assertion as being extremely ugly and a great slander against Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* similarly says in another verse: ‘They say, “The All-Merciful has taken unto Himself a son!” Indeed, [by this assertion] you have put forth something monstrous’ (*Maryam:* 88-89). Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

وَلَقَدۡ صَرَّفۡنَا فِي هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ لِيَذَّكَّرُواْ وَمَا يَزِيدُهُمۡ إِلَّا نُفُورٗا ٤١

We have explained things in various ways in this Quran, so that such people might take notice, but it has only turned them further away [41] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 41)

The word ‘*sarrafna*’ (explained in various, diverse ways) means that Allah *Glorified is He* changes something from one form to another. Allah’s statement: ‘…the change (*tasreef*) of the winds…’ (*al-Baqara:* 146) indicates the same meaning of changing from one state to another. This verse uses the word *‘tasreef’* (change), which is derived from the word ‘*sarrafna*’. This means that at times you will see it (the wind) blowing lightly, tranquilly and serenely, and at other times you will see it blowing furiously. The same wind that blows softly can become a destructive cyclone. Winds can come as heralds of good and growth, or they can come as fruitless occurrences which yield no good at all. This idea is indicated in the word ‘*tasreef*’ (change).

The meaning of the statement: ‘And, indeed, We have explained [Our message] in various, diverse ways in this Quran’ (*al-Isra’:* 41) is specifically directed at effectively dealing with the claims of those who assert that Allah *Glorified is He* has taken children for Himself—as referred to the Quran. He has dedicated a significant number of places (in His book) to treat this topic. Due to its gravity, the Quran posits various treatments for this issue in different places throughout its text. As a result, the mention of this issue occurs again and again in the Quran. At times repetition is in the topic itself, and at other times it occurs in a fashion that resembles a chorus line. The latter can be observed in Allah’s statement: ‘Then, which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 13)

Allah’s statement: ‘but all this only increases their aversion’ (*al-Isra’:* 41) means, ‘Instead of returning to the correct path by once again accepting (how great Allah is), they increased their aversion, running away (from Allah’s Path). We must ask, ‘Why is this case?’ The answer is that they desired to retain the ‘temporal authority’ that had been theirs before the dawn of Islam. We will explain what we are referring to as ‘temporal authority’.

If we study the history of legal systems throughout the world, we find that the so-called positive law—secular law that was contrived by human beings—did not appear until sometime later (in the history of legal development). In fact, it developed as the result of the hegemonic influence of the priestly classes. The lawmakers of the period created laws, endorsed them in the name of faith, and subsequently compelled the people to comply with them. Nonetheless, it was observed that sometime after they had given a particular ruling concerning a matter, they used to issue a second ruling for the same matter that contradicted the first one. This resulted in the people turning aside from ecclesiastical law. In its stead they produced the so-called positive law, and this explains how they came to wield what is termed as ‘temporal authority’.

To be sure, this temporal authority is what prevented the Jews of Medina from believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, they were fully aware of his description as well as the contents of his message and the time he was coming. When they saw the idolaters of Mecca, they used to say, ‘There will come a time when a prophet will come from this land. (And when he will come) We will follow him and subsequently destroy you as the people of ʿAd and Iram were destroyed’. But when they were in fact confronted with this prophet–whom they clearly recognized–they disbelieved in him; this, despite the fact that they were earnestly praying for victory over the disbelievers by his advent.

These are the details concerning Allah‘s statement in respect to the Jews of Medina: ‘And whenever there came unto them a [new] revelation from Allah, confirming the Truth already in their possession–and [bear in mind that] aforetime they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the Truth–whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the Truth], they refuse to believe it. But the curse of Allah is on all those who deny the Truth’ (*al-Baqara:* 89). In actual fact, the Jews proved to be those who were the most hostile to the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* despite the fact they were absolutely certain about his truthfulness. Their reason was that accepting this message meant they will be prevented from exercising the temporal authority that they enjoyed. It will signify the effective end of their domination in the fields of science, economics, and war. All of these things had been firmly in their grasp before Islam.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُل لَّوۡ كَانَ مَعَهُۥٓ ءَالِهَةٞ كَمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذٗا لَّٱبۡتَغَوۡاْ إِلَىٰ ذِي ٱلۡعَرۡشِ سَبِيلٗا ﴿٤٢﴾

Say, 'If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne' [42] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 42)

That is to say: If there were other deities besides almighty Allah, these deities will seek a means of access to the Owner of the Throne of Power. Allah *Glorified is He* has already treated this issue elsewhere when He said: 'Allah [Himself] bears witness that there is no god but Him' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). This is an unambiguous issue: It is either true or it is something other than true. If it is true then the matter is conclusive. On the other hand, if it is something other than true, there is another god. But if this is the case, where is he? Why do we not hear from him? Perhaps he exists but is unaware of his existence. Or perhaps he is aware of his existence and of this issue, but is reluctant to confront it and articulate his disagreement with the claims of the opposition. Whatever the case may be, if any of the above mentioned scenarios are true, such a 'being' certainly does not deserve to be considered a god. Therefore, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* testifies to His Own Oneness and no one has risen to contest this claim, this matter must be judged as being decisively in His Favour.

The term: 'the owner of the throne' is, in general, not used for anyone besides the one for whom the decisive command is uncontestedly in his hands, after all the fighting and conflict have ceased. Accordingly, the chair or seat of authority is given to him so that he can assume his role upon it.

Seeking a means of access to the Owner of the Throne of Power, as mentioned in this verse under discussion, means that they contest Allah's claim (to the Throne) and want to resist and oppose His Authority. If these 'contenders' to Allah's Throne are victorious, then the matter will be settled.

If, on the other hand, they are defeated, the least that these deities will do is that they will part with that which they have created. This is expressed in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Never did Allah take to Himself any offspring, nor has there ever been any deity side by side with Him: [for, had there been any] lo! Each deity will surely have taken what he had created, and they will surely [have tried] to overcome one another’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 91). An alternative meaning of this verse is that: they will strive to find a way to the Throne in order to request Allah’s permission to be counted among His creation and slaves. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place: ‘Never does the Messiah feel too proud(1) to be Allah’s slave, nor do the angels who are near unto Him…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 172). He also mentions: ‘Those [saintly beings] whom they invoke are themselves striving to obtain their Lord’s Favour–[even] those among them who are closest [to Him]–hoping for His Grace and dreading His punishment’ (*al-Isra’:* 57). In essence, those whom you have associated with Allah—as exemplified in your statements: Jesus (The Messiah) *peace be upon him* is Allah’s son; Ezra *peace be upon him* is Allah’s son; the angels are Allah’s daughters, etc.—depend on Allah *Glorified is He* for sustenance and seek a means through which to submit to Him. Even the closest of them to Allah—the angels—seek a means through which to demonstrate their submission to Him. This implies that those who do not enjoy the closeness to Allah *Glorified is He* that they do should be even more willing to submit to Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* exalts Himself when He says:

سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥ وَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ عُلُوّٗا كَبِيرٗا ٤٣

Glory be to Him! He is far above what they say! [43]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 43)

His saying: ‘Glorified is He’ is an absolute renunciation of all that men might say in an attempt to confine Allah’s Essence, Attributes, or Actions. To be sure, His Essence is nothing like yours essence; nor are His Attributes anything like your attributes. And for that matter, your actions, as well, bear no resemblance to His Actions. This is because all these vary according to the one who has them or carries them out.

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(1) This is saying, ‘He does not disdain, look down upon, dislike or feel too proud to be Allah’s slave’. Implied within this statement is that he is more than willing to fulfill all of the rights that a master has over a slave (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 2/287).

For example, every structure includes pillars, a central foundation, and something to protect them. Although all structures are composed of these elements, one will differ from the other based on the sturdiness and strength of the materials. In the same manner, there must be this range of difference between Allah *Glorified is He* and the creation; between The Lord and the one ruled by Him; between the worshipper and who he worships.

In fact, all things that are thought to be equally distributed among people differ according to the unique qualities that people possess. His saying: 'Sublimely and immeasurably' (*al-Isra':* 43) indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* is exalted and immeasurably far from what these people are saying. Hence, He said: 'Sublimely and Immeasurably Exalted' because people differ in (their understandings of) exaltedness.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* chose to use the expression *'kabir'* (translated 'Sublimely and immeasurably' in the verse, lit. 'big' or 'great') as opposed to *'akbar'* (lit. 'bigger' or 'greater') here. This word choice is most precise. In point of fact, the word *'kabir'* means that everything besides Him is comparatively small, whereas the word *'akbar'* suggests that aside from Him being *'akbar'* (greater) there is someone or something else that might comparatively be described as *'kabir'* (big). The latter suggests that someone or something owns a measure of the greatness—albeit in a comparatively small amount—that He owns. This explains why we say *'Allah Akbar'* when announcing the prayer. The word *'akbar'* (lit. 'Greater') is a valid description of Allah *Glorified is He*, but it is not considered as one of His Attributes. The reason that the call to prayer is issued in this manner is because there are things among the day's activities that can be legitimately described as *'kabir'*—which in this context would mean of great importance or significance—such as performing good deeds and exerting effort to earn one's livelihood. These things are of great importance (*kabir*) but Allah *Glorified is He* is more important (*akbar*). Allah *the Exalted* then says:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ ٱلسَّبۡعُ وَٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَمَن فِيهِنَّۚ وَإِن مِّن شَيۡءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ
بِحَمۡدِهِۦ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تَفۡقَهُونَ تَسۡبِيحَهُمۡۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورٗا ﴿٤٤﴾

The seven heavens and the earth and everyone in them glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise: He is most forbearing, most forgiving [44]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 44)

'Glorifying' Allah means that you believe that Allah, alone, is the Supreme Deity. Indeed, you do not truly believe in something, i.e. believe that it is awe-inspiring, until you are sure that that which you believe in excels and surpasses you in the characteristic which inspires you with awe. What is more, you will not entrust or commission someone to perform a task (for you) until you are absolutely certain that he is more capable and qualified than you at performing that task.

And if you believe in only One Deity, this means you believe that this One Deity, Allah *Glorified is He* is superior to all others. There is no one who resembles Him; despite the fact that they might be described with the same name that belongs to Him. (We say), 'Allah is rich', (and we also say), 'You are rich'—with the same words. Nonetheless, Allah's richness is intrinsic and your being rich is acquired—which means that you can be divested of it at any time.

The same could be said in relation to the characteristic of existence. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* exists and you exist. However, the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* has never been preceded by non-existence; not in the slightest, His existence is intrinsic, while your existence can only be described as being contingent—it can terminate at any time.

Fundamentally, this verse is asserting that 'Glorifying' Allah *Glorified is He* means you believe that He, alone, is the Supreme Deity. If this was not the case and we likened Him to something else, we will be likening Him to something unworthy of being a deity. 'Glorifying' Allah means you say He is exalted, i.e. He has no deficiencies. This is a characteristic that is firmly established as having belonged to Allah *Glorified is He* before there was anybody present among His creation to exalt Him. Allah *Glorified is He* is glorified and exalted by virtue of His Being and this description was established as His before He brought creation into existence. In the same sense, He was the Creator before He created anything: Just as you say so-and-so is a poet–is he a poet because he composed some verse? Or is he naturally and instinctually a poet, even before he composed any piece?

In reality, the poetic gift is a given talent and a special ability that he possesses. If he did not have this ability, he will not have been able to compose (poetry). Therefore, he is a poet before he composed any poetry. In an identical fashion, all Attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* were present before the advent of creation.

The word ‘glorify’—and all of its derivatives—is recurrent in the Quran; for example, in the opening of the chapter of *al-Isra*, Allah says: ‘Glorified is He’ (*al-Isra’:* 1). The meaning of this statement is that the glorification of Allah *the Most High* was established before He created anybody to glorify Him. The expression is also used in the following verse: ‘All that is in the heavens and on earth has glorified Allah…’ (*al-Hadid:* 1).

The word *‘*glorified*’* expressed in this verse is in the past tense. This is because glorification is not restricted to the human being; absolutely not, it involves the heavens and the earth as well–and they were created before human beings.

There is also the expression: ‘All that is in heaven and all that is on earth glorify Allah’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 1). In this instance, the word ‘glorify’ is expressed in the present tense to indicate that the glorification of Allah *the Most High* is not something that has passed and is finished; rather, it is perpetual–it will continue into the future without cessation. As such, as long as the glorification and exaltedness of Allah *Glorified is He* were established before He created anybody to glorify Him, and are also carried out by all creatures in the heavens and the earth, it is not legitimate for any person to rebel against Him and upset this order that exists within the creation; that is, none of us should not take part in this chorus of glorification that is recited by all of creation: ‘Glorify your Lord’s Name the Most High’ (*al-A‘la:* 1).

As for the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘there is not a single thing’ (*al-Isra’:* 44), this means: Everything that can be considered a thing (praises and glorifies Allah). Of course, the word ‘thing’ could refer to any number of items. In fact, this means that everything that exists glorifies Allah *Glorified is He* and sings His Praises.

Indeed, the scholars have paused at the mention of this verse and commented, ‘The glorification is an indication of how great the creation is, how precisely it is arranged, and the great wisdom behind the creation itself. This should turn our attention to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* is Exalted (above everything), Supreme and Powerful’. However, they thought this glorification was strictly figurative and not actual set words because they were not able to hear or comprehend it.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* has left us no room to argue about this issue because He says: ‘But you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorification’ (*al-Isra’:* 44). Clearly, there is a glorification that could be described as being imperceptible; however, this is not the intended meaning of the verse. The glorification being referred to in the verse refers to everything glorifying Allah *Glorified is He* in its own ‘language’.(1)

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘But you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorification’ (*al-Isra’:* 44) indicates that there are different types of glorification. There is the basic, general state of glorifying Allah, which could be described as being figurative, that is carried out by the whole of creation—but there is also the praise, directed to Allah in whom the believers have faith, which is given by all objects in a 'language' that is accessible to them and which we are unable to comprehend. Concerning this second type of glorification, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned: 'Each [of them] knows indeed how to pray to Him and to glorify Him' (*an-Nur:* 41). That is, everything that exists knows how to pray to Allah *Glorified is He* and how to glorify Him. The Quran contains verses whose text indicates that each species in existence has a language that can be understood by those of the same species. At times, those who belong to a superior genus (i.e. human beings) vie with each other in order to understand the language of a genus that is inferior to them. But how can we deem it to be farfetched that these languages can exist independent of us simply because we are not able to understand them?

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(1) *In his Tafsir (5/3996), Al-Qurtubi wrote, ‘The correct approach on this issue dictates that you believe that everything sings Allah’s Praises; additionally, there are a number of narrations that point to this. If this were a figurative glorification, what could the special favour given to Dawud (David) amount to? By this special favour, he is referring to the statement of Allah Glorified and Exalted is He concerning Dawud: “And we caused the mountains to join Dawud (David) in glorifying the Lord, and likewise the birds: for we are able to do [all things]” (al-Anbiya’: 79). This can only refer to actual praise and glorification as articulated by creation. The Hadith of the Prophet contains additional support for that which is expressed in the apparent meaning of the Quran: That everything literally praises Allah Glorified and Exalted is He. This makes the verse more worthy of being explained in this manner. And Allah Glorified and Exalted is He knows best’. This is consistent with what the honourable Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi has mentioned about this issue.*

And now, let us look at people themselves. In order to achieve mutual understanding among themselves they will employ the use of a common language. However, they still have different languages. Some among them are unable to understand others. If an English person attempts to use Arabic characters and expressions, no one will be able to understand him. This is because he has not learnt that language.

Language is a social phenomenon. This statement means that the human being is in need of language. To be sure, man lives within a community and needs to reach mutual understanding with its other members to be able to convey his thoughts. Furthermore, he needs to listen to the thoughts of the other members of his community. In order for the successful engagement of this process of thought conveyance, humans must have a language. If the human being lived in solitude, he will have no need for a language; for he will only need to access that which passed through his own thoughts–end of story.

In a real sense, language is not connected with blood, nationality, or place of origin; if you, for example, bring an English child and place him in an Arabic speaking environment, he will speak Arabic. Indeed, language is a social phenomenon that is dependent on hearing and imitation (for its proper acquisition). This explains why if your ear is unable to hear, you will be unable to clearly annunciate your words. The following statement of Allah *Glorified is He* is based on this understanding: 'deaf, dumb and blind' (*al-Baqara:* 18).

So they are dumb and unable to speak because they are deaf, unable to hear. If the human being is not able to hear the expression, he will find it overwhelmingly cumbersome to speak it: What the ear hears, the tongue can articulate.

Therefore, it is through hearing that language is acquired. Everyone hears from his father and from the environment in which he lives. If you follow this issue—as if it were a chain—to its logical conclusion, you will end with Adam *peace be upon him*. This makes us ask an interesting question, 'From whom did Adam hear the language that he spoke?' Indeed, the Quran has solved this quandary for us in Allah's words: 'And He imparted to Adam the names of all things' (*al-Baqara:* 31).

Moreover, even with someone speaking Arabic—which is the same language you speak—there is a chance that you might not understand him. A language is a language, but it can do nothing to remedy the misunderstandings that occur due to the different levels of comprehension that exist among its people. One such example of this is seen in the story of the grammarian Abu ʿAlqama. He wanted to indicate how downhearted he was using some unusual, abstruse phrases. Those with him at the time were completely exhausted by his choice of words, but none of them more than his servant, who was unable to stand his incessant lamenting.

It is narrated that on that night, Abu ʿAlqama(1) told his servant, 'Has the yowl of the fowl preceded us?' His servant replied, *'Zaqfaylim'*. This was the first time Abu ʿAlqama needed to enquire about the meaning of a word. He asked, 'My boy, what is the meaning of *zaqfaylim*?' The servant asked, 'What is the meaning of yowl of the fowl?' He responded, 'I was asking if the hens had crowed'. The servant replied, 'I was saying, "No, they had not crowed!"'

How, then, can we regard as implausible the idea that we are unable to understand the language of other created forms: such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Is what Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us of concerning the existence of a language for all created forms not enough to assuage this misgiving? There are languages for other created forms even if we do not understand them. Our doubt is based on our belief that language is restricted to that which is articulated with the tongue; but language comprises much more than that.

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(1) *The story of Abu 'Aqlama, the grammarian, with his servant*

For instance, there is a sign language, a body language and a Morse code. As such, language is not limited to the tongue. In fact, it comprises all forms of conventional signs that are understood by a set group of people. For example, when the servant is looked at by his employer, that glance is enough for the servant to know what his employer needs. In this case, the glance is a means of conveying information.

Now we are even beginning to hear about dictionaries which record the languages of some animals in order to try to know what their expressions mean. Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with some signs which indicate that each species within the animal kingdom has a language that is understood by those of the same species. This is understood from His statement: 'And we caused the mountains to join Dawud (David) in glorifying the Lord' (*al-Anbiya':* 79). The mountains joined Dawud in glorifying Allah *Glorified is He* and singing His Praises just as they have joined others in praising Allah *Glorified is He*. Nonetheless, the objective here is to indicate that they not only joined him in the act of praising Allah *Glorified is He* but also that the mode of their praising was in conformity with his. It was as though they were engaged in a ballad being sung in two-part harmony. Of course, this (duet of sorts) implies that Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was able to understand them just as they were able to understand him.

In the same manner, (we have) the ant which spoke in front of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*; Sulaiman understood its speech and at one point even beamed laughingly at something it said. In addition to that, Allah *Glorified is He* taught him the verbal communication of the birds. In brief, every species has a language that it uses to praise Allah *Glorified is He* but we are unable to understand how they praise Allah. Our inability to understand their praise can be traced back to the way it is carried out; it is a way of glorifying Allah that is conveyed and expressed in a style that restricts its understanding to those who—on account of their humility—are granted the ability to comprehend it.

Concerning Allah's Exaltedness, He *Glorified is He* has made His Exaltedness unrestricted: all must submit to it. Even the disbeliever is inescapably driven to recognize Allah's Exaltedness. This however, does not strip him of the ability to choose between disbelief and faith. In all, Allah *Glorified is He* desires that His Exaltedness be recognized by everything: The inanimate objects, the plants, the animals, the believers from among the human beings as well as the disbelievers among them. How does this occur?

Allah *Glorified is He* has named Himself by the word Allah. It is a name of the One that has to exist; that is, it is impossible for Him not to exist. Afterwards, He challenged the disbelievers to apply His Name to anything or anybody else when He said: '…Do you know any whose name is worthy to be mentioned side by side with His' (*Maryam:* 65). Despite their tendency to be (uncritically) contrary and stubborn (in refusing the message of Islam) none of them will dare name his child by the name 'Allah'. Obviously, the process of identifying objects by naming them is a matter in which each individual is given a free choice.

This represents Allah's Exaltedness. Even the disbeliever—although in spite of himself—recognizes this quality of Allah *Glorified is He*. As such, it stands as a proof of Allah's Might and Grandeur. Might and Grandeur which are so dissimilar to anything identified with human beings that not even a disbeliever will be bold enough to attempt to assume any of Allah's Qualities. Indeed, although they are decidedly in a state of disbelief, they themselves are not satisfied with disbelief. They are (subconsciously) fearful of Allah's Wrath and Vengeance that might await them if they engage in such a practice. This explains why none of them have been so bold as to (sacrilegiously) name himself by the Name of Allah.

With regards to devotional acts, Allah *Glorified is He* has decided that they be exclusively dedicated to Him; no one is allowed to share this right with Him. This of course implies that no one can (legitimately) dedicate an act of worship to anyone besides Him *Glorified is He*. Nonetheless, for all intents and purposes, people do venerate their fellow human beings at levels that near the worship of Allah *Glorified is He*. Some of them (obsequiously) bend their backs out of submission to others as though they are literally bowing or prostrating.

Some of them praise a dictator; proclaiming that he is unequalled (in his greatness). At times, this exaggeration is allowed to progress until the dictator is regarded as some type of god on earth. Still worse, some of them prostrate (in adoration) to the sun, as the people of Sheba were accustomed to doing. It was the Hoopoe who gave the report on them when he said: 'And I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah' (*an-Naml:* 24). Have we not seen some people who draw near a government official; do they not begin to act deceitfully in order to appease him? He may even spend a lot of money to please this official. Do we not see one of them going to his master's palace every day in order to sign his name in the visitors' book as a way of indicating that he is loyal and obedient to him?

Accordingly, some people believe that certain people have characteristics which are not present in any other person. Likewise, some people are too humble to others as they bow and prostrate to them or flatter them.

But Allah *Glorified is He* has reserved the obligation of Fasting entirely for Himself; it cannot be done for the sake of any one but Him. No one is able to use Fasting as a means of drawing near to someone else. Have you ever seen anyone try to get close to somebody else by Fasting (for their sake)? Moreover, notice how Glorious and Exalted Allah, Himself, is; no one dares to attempt to name himself by Allah's Name.

Returning to the devotional acts (in the same manner), people do not fast for the sake of anyone beside Him. Imagine if you said to someone, 'In order to be closer to you, I will fast this specific day or this specific month'. Naturally, you will expect the person for whose sake you are fasting to sit by your side and guard you; monitoring and inspecting your Fast. It is as though you want him to experience difficulty and hardship in order for you to get closer to him.

This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned in one of the Qudsi Hadiths, 'Every act of the child of Adam is for him besides Fasting; it is for Me and I will grant the reward for it'.(1) That is to say, 'You can attempt to draw closer to someone other than Me by any means from among the principal acts of Islam, but not by Fasting’. Consequently, no one will ever attempt to get closer to someone else by way of voluntarily fasting for his or her sake.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih book of authentic Hadiths (1903) and Muslim in his Sahih (2/806) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra, This is a Qudsi Hadith whose source is the Lord Himself.*

To conclude, this glorification of Allah is overarching and comprehensive proof for all the creation; it unambiguously affirms how great Allah is. This is why we say to the disbeliever, ‘You have scornfully rejected faith in Allah’. Unto the disobedient we say, ‘You have scornfully rejected (obeying) Allah’s commands’. Unto both we say, ‘As long as you all are engaged in this scornful rejection of Allah *Glorified is He* at times even proudly displaying the ease with which you are able to out rightly reject and rebel against Him *Glorified is He* why do you not disdainfully reject a disease that you might be afflicted with or death as it “knocks at your door”?’

Why do you not display this disdain in front of the Angel of Death: Tell him, ‘I am not going to die today?’ These realities indicate that none can stop what Allah has willed for anyone from happening—even the one who does not believe in Him. In actual fact, no one is able to rise up or rebel against what Allah has willed for him.

The same can be said of the disobedient (servant of Allah) when he deviates from the straight path and begins to extend his hand toward others’ property–by way of theft, embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds. Allah *Glorified is He* creates ways to make him lose all that he had gained by his unlawful, fraudulent practices. Or he may also lose the money he obtained from lawful means as well. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘Whoever makes his money through dishonest means, Allah will take it from him through calamities’.(1)

To recap, glorification of Allah is the ‘language’ of the entire Universe. Some of it we are able to understand, and some of it we are not—this is the case for all of us except those whom Allah *Glorified is He* allows to understand what is usually hidden. If Allah *Glorified is He* grants His Special Favour to someone and thereby teaches him the language of the birds and other animals, as well as plants and inanimate objects, that individual will be able to understand and comprehend them. This is the blessing that He bestowed upon Dawud *peace be upon him* and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. As an expression of gratitude for this blessing, Sulaiman *peace be upon him* said: 'My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your Favour which you have bestowed on me and on my parents' (*an-Naml:* 19).

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(1) *Cited by Al-'Ajiluni in Kashf Al-Khafa' (2/313); Qada'i vouched for its authenticity and mentioned that its chain extended to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when narrated on the authority of Abu Salma Al-Himsi. However, Abu Salma Al-Himsi is classified as a weak narrator and his being a Companion has not been confirmed. He said that he met Subki, but this is incorrect.*

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And there is not a single thing that does not glorify Him by praising Him' (*al-Isra':* 44). It is incumbent upon those given knowledge (of the various forms of glorification) to tell us how other beings glorify Allah. To be sure, they are clearly articulated expressions (of glorification), but they are expressed in a language that only those especially chosen by Allah *Glorified is He* can understand.

Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes this verse by mentioning: 'Verily, He is Oft Forbearing, Most Forgiving!' (*al-Isra':* 44) Indeed, in many instances the human being is completely oblivious of the different phenomena in the universe and its signs which indicate the true nature (of existence). He is in a position to be able to clearly observe the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* and the wonder of His 'Handiwork'—and despite this he is still heedless. In the same manner, he is neglectful of the glorification of Allah that is articulated throughout the Universe. This is why Allah mentioned that He is forbearing; He does not hasten the punishment of the negligent. He also mentioned that He is Oft Forgiving to those who repent and turn back to Him.

This is due to the mercy He shows His slaves. If Allah *Glorified is He* were to cease to show mercy to His slaves, the human being—who is the master of creation—will have a more unfortunate lot than the animals. This is clear if we reflect upon the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* concerning how all the creation glorifies Him: 'Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many the punishment has been justified....' (*al-Hajj:* 18) Here, before us, are all of the various types of created forms: Inanimate objects, plants, and animals. All of them—without exception—prostrate themselves to Allah

Glorified is He. They prostrate themselves and they glorify Allah *Glorified is He* in unison. The only discrepancy we see in this matter occurs in relation to the human being, the 'ennobled master' of all created forms. But, why do we see this discrepancy within the human being, this willingness to 'break rank' with the rest of creation in its glorification of Allah *Glorified is He*? We respond by stating, 'It is because he is the only creature of Allah *Glorified is He* that has been distinguished with free-will. Allah *Glorified is He* has given him choice and freedom to do or not to do any given act. As for the rest of creation, they are all subjected to instinct and do not exercise any volition'. At this point, someone might say, 'Why did Allah *Glorified is He* not make the human being not have free-will, like the rest of creation?'

To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* gave the human being volition and free will for a noble reason. The quality of being overpowering invests Allah with the Authority to do what He wants with His creatures. If He *Glorified is He* determines something for one of them, this creature is inexorably bound to that which has been determined for him; he cannot deviate, nor can he differ from it. However, His quality of being overpowering does not stipulate that He should be loved.

As for giving free will, this characteristics demands that He should be loved. Indeed He created you with a choice: You can believe or disbelieve. And despite this, you have still chosen to believe in Him—out of love for Him. You have freely chosen obedience and submission. This is proof that Allah is One Who people love.

By no means should you submit to the idea that the one who disobeys Allah *Glorified is He* does so because Allah *Glorified is He* has pre-ordained for this person to disobey Him. Quite the reverse, the person has chosen disobedience on the basis of the free will that Allah *Glorified is He* has given him. Some have even dared to say, 'Why should the human being be charged as guilty? What is the sin man committed to be the only creature that has been given free will to the exclusion of the rest of the creation?'

If you view this point logically as well as philosophically, you will find that all of creation has free will, not simply human beings. However, the rest of creation chose to submit to Allah's orders. They preferred to allow Allah to completely determine their paths and arrange their existence from the very beginning. It was the human being who, on the other hand, preferred to be allowed to exercise free will during his life. He said, 'I will be careful; I will sincerely fulfil this responsibility'. This fact is very clear in Allah's statement: 'Verily, We did offer the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man undertook it–for, verily, he has always been prone to do great wrong and misjudge [matters] out of ignorance' (*al-Ahzab:* 72). The reticence of these created forms to bear the responsibility of free will is evidence of the great knowledge they owned. They refused to bear the Trust because there is a great difference between agreeing to accept a responsibility and actually fulfilling it when it has to be discharged; there is a huge difference in accepting responsibility at a time when your ability to bear it is completely uncertain and a time when you have reason to believe you can discharge it. Indeed, you might assume a responsibility because you are confident in your ability to carry it out but later encounter unplanned circumstances which prevent you from discharging the responsibility.

In many instances, the trust taken on good faith is not notarised or written down—this is well known. As a result, this trust often becomes the domain of trickery and fraud. The one assuming the trust is the sole guarantor of the legal rights of the one granting the trust. At times, the former is unable to fulfil the terms of the trust and ends up succumbing to the moral temptations of fraud and deception–life's problems sometimes overpower men.

A person can guarantee his ability of fulfilling a trust when he agrees to accept it, but he cannot guarantee he will be *'capable'* of fulfilling the trust when it has to be discharged (he may or may not be able to discharge the responsibility). This explains why the other created forms opted to allow Allah to completely determine their paths and arrange their existence. As for the human being, he said, 'I have a mind; I can use discretion in order to measure the desirability of certain actions over others'. In this manner, the human being wronged himself. He cannot guarantee he will still have these abilities when it is time to fulfil the responsibility that he so willingly assumed. He made this assertion without giving due consideration to the possibility of a change occurring in his circumstances.

In essence, the rest of the created order is not grudgingly subjected to what Allah has determined for them; absolutely not, they preferred this situation (allowing Allah to completely determine their paths) as their lot and chose it. Likewise, the human being does not have free will in spite of himself; rather, it is the outcome of his choice and preference.

Allah says:

وَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ حِجَابًا مَّسْتُورًا ﴿٤٥﴾

[Prophet], when you recite the Quran, We put an invisible barrier between you and those who do not believe in the life to come [45] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 45)

Allah *Glorified is He* arranges certain things in preparation for something else, and creates circumstances whose purpose is to serve as a catalyst or to be something like an introduction for future events of greater importance. The idolaters of Mecca did not leave any stone unturned, nor were they aware of any stratagem that could be used to harm or punish Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* except that they pursued it to its full extent. Nonetheless, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not surprised by this and it did absolutely nothing to decrease his resolve. Why? Because he was expecting all of this abuse and he had already undergone experiences that granted him sufficient strength to combat these calamities.

In essence, nothing startled Prophet Muhammad because he knew how the situation will develop even before he was sent as a Prophet. When he was visited by Angel Gabriel *peace be upon him* for the first time in the cave, he returned to *Khadija may Allah be pleased with her* frightened. She went with him to her cousin, Waraqa ibn Nufal, who consoled him by informing him that he had been contacted by the bearer of Heavenly Revelation. He also told Prophet Muhammad that he *peace and blessings be upon him* will be the heavens' emissary to the earth, and that he was the prophet of the nation. During the course of his conversation, Waraqa ibn Nufal said, 'I wish [I was young enough] to be alive when your people forcibly expel you'. Prophet Muhammad responded, 'Will they forcibly expel me?'(1) His response was foreboding, 'No man has ever come with that which you are bringing without becoming the object of (his people’s) animosity. If I see that day, I will aid you with all that I have’.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/139-140) from a tradition that was narrated on the authority of Mohammad ibn Nu'man ibn Bashir. It was cited by Ibn Hisham in the Biography of Prophet Muhammad that he compiled (1/238). Its text=*

At heart, Allah *Glorified is He* fortified Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* against the unfolding events of the future for the Prophet to be prepared for what will happen. There was nothing that could surprise him and potentially lead to a break down. Allah allowed Prophet Muhammad to taste the proper amount of the disease (to protect him from future adversities) before the difficulties actually came. Again, this was only done for Prophet Muhammad to have a sufficient amount of resistance to the adversities and be certain of the impending Help of Allah *Glorified is He* no matter how grim or constricting the circumstances he *peace and blessing be upon him* and his companions were confronting may have been.

But with regards to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, as long as this is their view, the life of this world is the only thing they have. It represents their only chance. This is why they are very obsessive in their quest to fulfil all of their desires in it; they spare nothing. If the believer postpones satisfying some of his passions and desires in the life of this world because he is awaiting satisfaction in the Hereafter, for what are the disbelievers postponing the fulfilment of their desires?

This means that the point that has made them very desirous of this world and its fleeting pleasures is the fact that they do not believe in the Hereafter.

Consequently, if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* comes with a way that brings the movement and progress of humanity into conformity with the rest of the Universe, it must inevitably agitate these disbelievers who are desirous over the fleeting pleasures of this world and their worldly positions. They will oppose this message by resisting Prophet Muhammad himself and the Way that he promotes. They will resist the Messenger himself by attempting to cause him harm, and they will resist the Way and Message

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= *includes Waraqa saying, ‘I swear by the One in whose hands my soul lies, you are the prophet of this nation. The great conveyer of Divine Revelation that visited Moses peace be upon him has come to you. They will declare you to be a liar; they will do you great harm; they will drive you out and ultimately take up arms against you. If I live to see that day, I will strive to benefit the cause of Allah to the utmost’.*

that he promotes by attempting to discourage people from it. Did Allah not relate what the disbelievers used to say when they saw anyone who was positively predisposed to Islam: ‘Do not listen to this Quran, but make a noise [when it is recited], so that you might gain the upper hand!’(*Fussilat:* 26). Their saying: ‘Do not listen to this Quran’ (*Fussilat:* 26) is a testimony to the fact that they recognized the Truth of the Quran and that it had a great capacity to reach the heart and to affect it. If this wasn not the case, why will they say something like this regarding it? Their saying: ‘…make a noise [when it is recited]…’ (*Fussilat:* 26) means: make a clamour and create any distraction for the Quran not to reach the ears of the people. Their actions establish that they were confident in Prophet Muhammad’s trustworthiness and in the truthfulness of his message. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to go to the *Ka’ba* and sit beside it, quietly reciting the verses of the Quran, the notables among the disbelievers of Mecca used to purposely listen to the Quran and relish its beauty and eloquence.(1)

Allah’s statement tells us: ‘And when you recite the Quran, We put between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter a veil which is concealed’ (*al-Isra’:* 45). It is related(2) that Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, Abu Lahab and Um Jamil used to follow Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and secretly listen to his recitation with the purpose of seeing what it said and harming Him *peace and blessings be upon him*. As a result, Allah *Glorified is He* used to deafen their ears for them not to be able to hear the Quran. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* used to recite, but they were not able to hear anything, and consequently they were forced to turn away seething with hatred.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham cites this story in his compilation of the Biography of Prophet Muhammad (1/315). Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, and Akhnas ibn Shariq left (their houses) one night to listen to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while he prayed in his home at night. None of them knew where the other two were until the break of dawn, at which time they left. They met up on the main road and followed one another. They repeated this three nights in a row.*

(2) *According to what Al-Qurtubi narrated in his Tafsir (5/3997), Az-Zujaj said, ‘This was revealed in reference to a people who used to cause Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him harm when he used to recite the Quran. These were: Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, Nadr ibn Harith, Um Jamil the wife of Abu Lahab and Huwaytib. Allah Glorified and Exalted is He used to cover Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him from their sight when he was reciting the Quran. They used to pass by the Prophet without seeing him.*

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wants this experience to prepare Prophet Muhammad for something more important. That (more important) event is represented in what happened to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the night of the Migration; the night that they (the disbelievers) hatched a plot to assassinate him by striking him with one collective blow. Allah's Care protected Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it is as though it said to him, 'Go out and walk in front of them, and do not be scared. Indeed, the One Who made you able to recite (the Quran) and Who placed a barrier between you and them for them not to be able to hear you is the One Who will cause blindness to descend upon their eyes for them to not be able to see you'.

Despite the fact that they had meticulously planned this conspiracy, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not depart into their midst holding his breath out of fear. Quite the reverse, He *peace and blessings be upon him* departed saying, 'May your countenances be disfigured'.(1) He did not fear being discovered by them, but even more than this, he took a handful of dirt and threw it in their faces. This clearly indicates how certain he was that he was being aided and supported.

With regards to Allah's statement: 'a veil which is concealed' (*al-Isra':* 45), a veil is something that blocks one from perceiving something. If it is for the eye, it prevents vision. If it is for the ear, it prevents hearing. The word '*mastura*' (which is concealed) is a passive particle which refers to the veil, which prevents them from hearing or seeing, itself being covered. If the veil itself is covered, what do you think about what is behind it? Without doubt, the mind will immediately think of a physical veil when this verse is read.

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(1) *This statement of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him has come down to us through the Hadith about the Migration on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas which was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/368). Similarly, it has been narrated in connection with the Expedition of Hunayn in Sahih Muslim (1777) in a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Iyas ibn Salma from his father. It was also narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/286) and Ad-Darimi in his Sunnan (2/219) from the Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu 'Abd Ar- Rahman Fahri.*

However, the veil that Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioning is symbolic; no one is able to see it. This is the same as what is referred to in Allah's words: '…raised the heavens without any supports that you can see…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2). If He had just said, 'without any supports', without any more information, He will have negated the presence of supports in the sky–and this will be the end of the story. In that case, we will have simply classified it under Allah's statement: 'Verily, it is Allah [alone] who upholds the celestial bodies…' (*Fatir:* 41). We will have concluded that the matter depended on Allah's Power and hence without the presence of any supports to uphold the sky.

Nevertheless, His mentioning '…that you can see…' allows us to correctly say, 'without supports'; and this is what you all see in the sky. Indeed, we may look here and there, but we will not find the canopy of the sky being upheld by any supports. Or we can also conclude, 'There are supports in the sky, but we are unable to see them'. They are allegorical supports. Your mind does not start thinking of the pillars we humans erect which are made of reinforced steel, marble or iron.

In this respect, the delusion of the human being is effectively crushed. He must realise that he is only capable of perceiving that which Allah *Glorified is He* allows him to perceive. Additionally, he must realise that the senses that he utilizes for perception might cease to perform their proper functions any time. This does not imply that your senses are functioning and will always continue to function but without the ability to do as you choose. On the contrary, Allah *Glorified is He* grants the senses the ability to function in the first place, and He is likewise able to strip them of that ability.

It is the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* which makes this Universe 'tick'. It commands each object to perform its specific function in life and if Allah wills, it can disable any object for it to be unable to perform this function. This is the reason why we reject the philosophy of deism: Namely, that Allah *Glorified is He* exercised His authority in creation only on one occasion: when He created the laws and principles of nature. (According to this philosophy) It is these (immutable) laws and principles which govern the outcome of affairs in life and make it 'tick'.

In the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* we find that he was travelling with his army while being pursued by Pharaoh and his forces. This went on until he reached the seashore. At that time he had the sea before him and Pharaoh behind him, this prompted his companions to proclaim: ‘Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). ‘Where can we find refuge’, they said, ‘The sea is in front of us and the enemy is at our backs?’ This is a logical concern when surveying the issue from the vantage point of the human being. However, Musa *peace be upon him* was operating on quite a different level. Allah recounts what he said: ‘He replied, “Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!”’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) Did Musa *peace be upon him* say this because he had a hidden store of human knowledge? Of course not; it was the confidence that he had in his Lord which spurred him to say this. In that manner, he placed the matter in the Hands of the Creator. Allah said to Prophet Musa *peace be upon him*: ‘Thereupon we inspired Musa (Moses) thus, “Strike the sea with your staff!”–whereupon it parted, and each part became like a huge, firm mountain’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63) Allah *Glorified is He* defied the laws of nature which govern the liquidity and volume of water for Musa. The water solidified and became like mountains, while the path of the sea became dry land. This enabled Musa *peace be upon him* and his people to cross the sea and pass safely to the other side. The constriction of their souls was relieved by being delivered safely. After this occurred, Musa *peace be upon him* prepared to strike the sea with his staff for it to return to its normal state. This was to prevent Pharaoh from crossing and reaching him; however, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded him to leave it as it was: ‘and leave the sea undisturbed(1): for verily, they [Pharaoh and his men] are a host destined to be drowned!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 24) As soon as Pharaoh and his men had descended into the sea and all of them were on the seabed, Allah *Glorified is He* released the water and let it return it its normal state following the laws of nature which govern its liquidity. It completely covered Pharaoh and his men. This was a sign from among the signs of Allah *Glorified is He*; it was clear evidence of His Awesome Power. If Allah *Glorified is He* so chooses, He

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(1) That is to say, ‘Leave the sea calm for them to descend into it, confident that they too could cross’ *[Al-Qamus Al-qawim 1/279].*

Glorified is He can rescue you or destroy you with the same object. It was also clear evidence that He has control of His creation. It is not as some say, ‘The laws and the principles of nature affect and regulate creation’. Every miraculous happening that has occurred throughout the history of mankind were examples of the laws and principles of nature which govern existence being defied.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَجَعَلۡنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمۡ أَكِنَّةً أَن يَفۡقَهُوهُ وَفِيٓ ءَاذَانِهِمۡ وَقۡرٗاۚ وَإِذَا ذَكَرۡتَ
رَبَّكَ فِي ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ وَحۡدَهُۥ وَلَّوۡاْ عَلَىٰٓ أَدۡبَٰرِهِمۡ نُفُورٗا ﴿٤٦﴾

We have put covers on their hearts that prevent them from under- standing it, and heaviness in their ears. When you mention your Lord in the Quran, and Him alone, they turn their backs and run away [46] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 46)

The word ‘*akinnah*’ in the verse refers to a covering. The Quran tells us they admitted that they had a covering or veil that covered their hearts and which made their hearts unaware and heedless; Allah says: ‘And they say, “[It is as if] Our hearts are under coverings [concealed] from that to which you invite us, and in our ears is a deafness, and between us and you is a partition, so do [what you will]; indeed, we are doing [what we will]”’ (*Fussilat:* 5). All that exists is part of Allah’s creation, and the human being is the master among creation; he is the vicegerent of Allah and he is cherished and nurtured by the Creator. This is part of man’s very nature; everyone is cared for by the Lord and no one can avoid His Care. It makes no difference, even if he is a disbeliever, he will remain basking in the gifts and bounties that are a result of Allah’s Care and Lordship. The disbeliever is not prevented from this gift on account of his disbelief, just as the disobedient are not prevented from this gift on account of their disobedience. Rather, it is as Allah *Glorified is He* described: ‘To each We give freely on all–to these and to those–from the bounties of your Lord. And never have the bounties of your Lord been restricted’ (*al-Isra’:* 20). Previously, we mentioned the difference between the bounties Allah gives due to Him being Our Lord and which are represented in life’s enumerable blessings, and the bounties Allah gives due to Him being the One

Who is worshipped and which consist of Allah giving responsibility to the human being. The latter implies the existence of a worshipper and an object that is worshipped, and the orders, ’Do’ and ‘Do not do’.

Therefore, the bounties Allah gives as He is Our Lord are general and applicable to everyone, at all times. The duty of the human being is to stop, reflect, and ponder over these blessings that come to him without the need to expend any effort or exertion. This sun, that earth, and the atmosphere, does he have any power over them? Do they perform their respective functions because man has ordered them to do this? Indeed, they are the first of the blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* has granted the human being and subjected to his usage by His Power. Do not these blessings call for faith in the One Who gives them?

Earlier we cited a parable that proved the Creator’s Existence by taking into account what He has placed in the Universe of natural phenomena and signs; it is the parable of a man stranded in the desert. He is stranded for such a long time that he begins to approach his demise. Surprisingly, in these seemingly bleak moments, he finds a table outspread with the choicest and most select food and drink. Will this miraculous occurrence not cause him to think about where this food and drink came from before he extends his hand toward the table to start eating? This is like the disbeliever who is basking in the Favour and Blessings of Allah *Glorified is He*. He has arrived in this Universe and (miraculously) found it amenable to his wishes and suitable for him to live on; it is like a hospitable host that gives everything he needs for his livelihood. This should have made him think: He must take the blessings not on their own merit, but as evidence that there is One Who gives and arranges them.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not prohibit his Divine Blessings from the one who disbelieves. Quite the reverse, indeed, as soon as the disbeliever becomes resolute and firm in his disbelief, Allah closes his heart and aids him in acquiring what he desires. In fact, He gives him more of what the disbeliever loves, as He has mentioned: ‘In their hearts is a disease and so Allah lets their disease increase…’ (*al-Baqara:* 10). In essence, Allah’s saying: ‘for, over their hearts, We have laid veils’ (*al-Isra’:* 46) is not how Allah *Glorified is He* acts at first. Absolutely not, it is a result of the disbelief that the disbelievers, themselves, love, and that they say concerning themselves, ‘Our hearts are veiled’. Allah is simply responding to them by granting them what they want and sealing their hearts for their disbelief to become stronger. As long as they love this for themselves, We will give them more of it. Allah *Glorified is He* then moves on to say: ‘lest they understand it (the Quran)’ (*al-Isra’:* 46). That is: so they do not understand the Quran. Indeed, Allah does not want them to understand the Quran in spite of themselves, but rather, He wants them to willingly understand it while their hearts are content, submitting to the evidence because they are truly convinced. Allah does not desire that our outward forms feign submission to him; He desires that our hearts be imbued with sincere reverence for Him. If this was not the case, and He did, in fact, simply desire a hollow submission that we could perform with our bodies, none of us will have ever been able to deviate from His Path or will be able to prevent himself from complying with the Orders of Allah *Glorified is He*. In such a case, all will submit to His Orders and be completely subjected to His Will.

In the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara’*, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Perhaps [O Muhammad] you will kill yourself with grief because they do not become believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign to which their necks will bend in humility’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 3-4). In this case, the necks are bowed down in humility, not the hearts. To be sure, you can subdue the body of your enemy and compel him to say specific words and do particular actions; however, you will never be able to conquer his heart and make him love you. Basically, Allah wants the hearts; He wants them to be in a state of obedience, but an obedience born out of love and free choice. In terms of the disbelievers we have been discussing, they chose for their hearts to be veiled. This is what they love and their hearts were satisfied with disbelief; consequently, Allah increased their disbelief.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and in their ears deafness’ (*al-Isra’:* 46). The intended meaning here is that they are unable to hear anything beneficial. But what is the benefit that can be gained from hearing? Language is a means (of communication) shared by the speaker and the listener. By way of language, thoughts and concepts are exchanged with the goal of effectuating a purpose. If someone listens (to something) but gains no benefit, his hearing does not avail him at all; he might as well be deaf.

Concerning the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And when you mention your Lord alone in the Quran, they turn back in aversion’ (*al-Isra’:* 46), we may ask, ‘Why do they turn their backs in apparent aversion?’ They only do this because you came to them with something which frightens and disturbs them. By Allah (the case is), if faith in Allah was not something that is in harmony with the innate predisposition of man, even down to his very physical makeup, will these people be afraid to remember Him? What is it that they fear when they claim not to believe in Allah and do not even accept He exists? In other words, how can this fear of theirs be explained as anything but the fear of being overtaken be their own innate feelings; that instinctual sense that they have attempted to obscure through heedlessness? Indeed, if Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned in their presence, they flee in fear and trepidation.

The Lord then continues by saying:

نَّحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَسْتَمِعُونَ بِهِۦٓ إِذْ يَسْتَمِعُونَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِذْ هُمْ نَجْوَىٰٓ
إِذْ يَقُولُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ إِن تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَّسْحُورًا ﴿٤٧﴾

We know best the way they listen, when they listen to you
and when they confer in secret, and these wrongdoers say,
‘You are only following a man who is bewitched’ [47]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 47)

Nothing on earth or in heaven eludes Allah. This is a reality that should be taken to heart and into consideration by the disbelievers. Actually, they should thoroughly reflect on this fact as it will guide them to having faith in Allah. To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about them by saying: ‘And [they] say to themselves, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?" Sufficient for them is Hell, which they will [enter to] burn, and wretched is the destination.’ (*al-Mujadala:* 8) They must reflect deeply upon this statement. Bear in mind, they said these words to themselves, and not to anyone else. If that was the case, who informed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of these words of theirs, words that were never mentioned aloud? Who told him what they had said? Does this revelation of their inner thoughts not summon them to believe in Allah?

Returning to the verse in the chapter of *al-Isra'*, we say: since the Lord *Glorified is He* knows every minute detail of everything, nothing is able to evade or escape Him; He is fully aware of the following: First, He is aware that they listen to you (Muhammad). Second, He is aware that they gather in secret groups. Third, He is aware that they say these words to the evildoers; in other words, they first listen (to what is said) then converse secretly among each other in their secret groups, and finally tell other evildoers.

They say that this verse was revealed to match the deep and abiding love the Arabs had for language in general coupled with a particular obsession for different well-organized figures of speech. This explains why the nature of the miracle given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the same type as the specific talent his people had, for it to be a more suitable challenge (to produce a verse like it) for their expertise. This is the manner in which Allah *Glorified is He* chooses appropriate miracles for every Messenger.

At that time, the Arabs had elaborate forums dedicated to oratory and eloquence. People that were noted for their skill at composing poetry, for their eloquence and for their ability to express themselves adeptly used to gather at these forums. During the seasons of the Great Pilgrimage (*Hajj*), all of the linguistic enthusiasts used to pour into Mecca. All of them were familiar with the purity of the language of the Arabian Peninsula and its various literary styles. This was the background that encouraged them to listen to the Quran; given the finely tuned ear and the natural linguistic dexterity they possessed, they ardently loved its clear mode of exposition. The only problem (for them) was that the Quran contained demands and responsibilities that they will not be able to fulfil. Furthermore, it will decisively end the existing political status quo that they were accustomed to live with.

For these reasons they behaved arrogantly and stubbornly; their stance could be personified as a quizzical glance at the invitation to believe. This was the stance they adopted despite the fact that they were naturally impressed by the clear detailed exposition of the Quran and its eloquence.

It is related that some of the prominent figures, such as Nadr ibn Harith, Abu Sufyan and Abu Lahab*,* crept away after the people who had said, ‘Do not listen to the Quran!’ had slept. Each one of them went secretly to Prophet Muhammad’s house to listen to the recitation of the Quran. How could they prevent themselves from listening to a form of oratorical address so magnificent in its style? Indeed, it was enough that they had already restrained their feelings and their hearts from being moved by this Quran. On their way back from these nightly walks, they used to meet one another by chance; and of course they used to ask each other what they were doing. On one occasion, they lied to each other (concerning the reasons they did not accept the Quran), mentioning baseless reasons. But on another occasion, they acknowledged the deep love of listening to the Quran that had been planted in their hearts.(1)

Allah’s saying: ‘We are fully aware of how they listen to it’ (*al-Isra’:* 47) refers to their state of mind when listening to the Quran; namely, that they were in a state of amazement when they listened to it. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘when they listen to you and when they are [being] secretive, conversing privately’ (*al-Isra’:* 47). The word ‘*najwa*’ (being secretive, conversing privately) used to describe these disbelievers is related to the word ‘*al-tanaji*’ which refers to secret conversations. This phrase therefore means, ‘We are well aware of how they listen to you’; and describing the disbelievers are ‘*najwa*’ implies that they conversed secretly all the time.

Next, we are presented with the third description of these disbelievers: ‘when the wrongdoers say, "You follow nothing but a man who is bewitched"’ (*al-Isra’:* 47). This is how they used to describe Prophet Muhammad to others. Audaciously, they accused Prophet Muhammad of practicing witchcraft. They also accused him of being insane, of being a poet and another time they accused him of being a fortune-teller. These are all truly invalid accusations that have no proof to back them up. If anything at all, it is proof of how stupid their views were.

The word ‘*mashuran*’ (bewitched) comes from the word ‘*magic*’ which refers to creating the impression that something is happening when, in fact, it is not, or that something is being said when, in fact, it is not being uttered. In other words, it is the ability to divert people's attention away from the real state of affairs. As for the true state of matters, they are permanent and unchanging.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham cited this story in his account of the Biography of Prophet Muhammad (1/315).*

This explains why we say, 'The miracle of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* resembled magic, but it was not magic'. To be sure, that which took place during that miraculous event was real, and not a form of highly deceptive magic. With regards to the staff being transformed into a snake and thereupon beginning to devour the ropes and sticks of the magicians, this actually took place; it was not simply an illusion. Nonetheless, as long as the miracle resembled magic, the people thought it was magic, especially in light of the fact that the Quran proclaimed concerning Pharaoh's magicians: 'They cast a spell upon the people's eyes' (*al-A'raf:* 116). In a separate verse, the Quran declares: 'By virtue of their sorcery, their [magic] ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly' (*Ta Ha:* 66). Essentially, reality is a constant and does not change. This implies that the magician saw their staffs as just that: staffs. The captivated on-looker, on the other hand, saw a serpent. But concerning Musa *peace be upon him* there is no semblance between his actions and those of the magicians. The Lord *Glorified is He* affirms this for us; He makes it clear that what happened to Musa was nothing like the magic and sorcery the magicians were practicing, as can be seen in Allah's conversation with Musa. Allah said: 'Now, what is this in your right hand, O Musa (Moses)?' (*Ta Ha:* 17) In reply to this, Musa *peace be upon him* spoke at length (concerning his mission) because from all the people, no one loved to talk to his Lord more than Musa. He answered Allah, saying: 'It is my staff; I lean on it and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep' (*Ta Ha:* 18). At this point, Musa *peace be upon him* started to feel as though he is being a little long-winded, and therefore in an effort to be concise, he said: 'and I have many other uses for it' (*Ta Ha:* 18). This was the extent of his knowledge about the staff he was carrying. However, Allah *Glorified is He* then told us He was going to give it other properties: 'He (Allah) said, "Throw it down, O Musa!" So he threw it–and lo, it was a snake, moving rapidly!' (*Ta Ha:* 19-20) Was it an optical illusion? Did Musa *peace be upon him* see it as a serpent while it was actually a staff? Or did it actually become a serpent? In actual fact, it became a real serpent. This is evidenced by the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘and in his heart Musa became apprehensive’ (*Ta Ha:* 67). Indeed, Musa *peace be upon him* will not have been apprehensive unless his staff had become an actual serpent. Then His Lord reassured him: ‘[But] We said, "Fear not! Verily, it is you who shall prevail!”’ (*Ta Ha:* 68) This explains why the magicians, upon seeing what the staff of Musa *peace be upon him* performed, were certain that it was not magic. On the contrary, (they knew that) it was something clearly outside the realm of magic and magicians. And they knew that what happened was beyond Musa’s individual capabilities. As a result, they professed their belief in the Lord of Musa *peace be upon him* the only One Who will have been capable of performing that kind of miracle.

To continue with the verse under discussion we say Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘when the wrongdoers say, "You follow nothing but a man who is bewitched"’ (*al-Isra’:* 47) that means: someone who has been bewitched by another person. This is the speech of the evildoers; those who desperately attempted to make up any accusation, from here and there, against Prophet Muhammad. On a different occasion, they mentioned that he himself was a magician. Allah *Glorified is He* stated: ‘[But] the disbelievers say, "Indeed, he is clearly [nothing but] a magician"’ (*Yunus:* 2).

One time, you said Prophet Muhammad was a magician. And yet another time, you said he himself was bewitched. This illustrates how confused and obstinate you were. If he is a magician, you know many magicians, so why do you not confront Prophet Muhammad using magic that is similar to his, as you claim? Or, why did he not cast a spell on you, just as you allege he cast a spell on the others, bringing this struggle to a decisive end? Moreover, is it possible for a magician to be bewitched?

On the other hand, if he was, in fact, bewitched as you claim, that is to say: someone had cast a spell on him, did you ever hear anything he said which was out of step with reality and therefore indicated that he was bewitched? Have you heard him say the senseless drivel that bewitched persons are known to say? Fundamentally, these accusations are lies, all of which are demonstrably false; they contain no shred of truth. This is proven by the fact that you rejected his call, but he (Prophet Muhammad) did not harm you.

When they were not able to substantiate this allegation, they went to another extreme. They said that he was a poet. O Arabs! O possessors of linguistic brilliance and unmatched eloquence! We do not expect this from the likes of you. Is someone of your linguistic stature not able to distinguish between poetry and prose? The Quran possesses a self-contained style unique to itself: It is not poetry; it is not prose; it is not rhyme; it is not composition. It is unique and has its own style.

For this reason, we find that linguists divide speech into two categories: Divine Speech and human speech. Human speech can be further divided into poetry and prose. As for Divine Speech, the Speech of Allah *Glorified is He* it is completely exempted from any form of classification because it belongs to a class of its own; it is distinct from all other forms of speech.

If you were, for instance, to read any literature, you will, undeniably, recognize the poetry from the prose. Your ear will notice the difference between the two distinctive styles. However, this is not the case in terms of the Quranic style. You read its verses, and you are struck by its harmony. You do not even notice that within the text you sometimes move from prose to poetry or from poetry to prose.

To put it succinctly, the Quran contains an original and self-contained style; it should not be referred to as poetry or prose. This issue is not at all confusing for an Arab who is well trained in his language, in both poetry and prose—especially someone capable of distinguishing superb literature from mediocre scripts.

Allah then says:

ٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ ضَرَبُواْ لَكَ ٱلۡأَمۡثَالَ فَضَلُّواْ فَلَا يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ سَبِيلٗا ﴿٤٨﴾

See what they think you are like! But they are lost and cannot find the right way [48] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 48)

At the mention of this verse, you should really be astounded by the level of the disbelievers' stubbornness. First they said concerning the Quran, 'It is a work of sorcery'. Then they said, 'It is a work of poetry'. At different times they described Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a poet, a soothsayer and finally a magician.

It is known that the Divine Message contains three elements: the One Who sends the Message, Who is Allah *Glorified is He*; the Messenger, who is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and that which is sent, which is the Quran. The disbelievers stubbornly refused to accept these three. Worse than that, however, is that their refusal gave them the impetus to tell lies and circulate falsities about Allah, His Messenger, and His Book. Previously, we discussed the violations they made against Allah's Divinity and their stance in relation to Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

One example is mentioned in Allah's saying: 'And they say, too, "Why was this Quran not bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) In terms of the issue of faith in general, their position was explained in the following verse: 'And they say, "O Allah! If this indeed be the Truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!"' (*al-Anfal:* 32) Is this a supplication that a rational person will ever say? Instead of saying, 'Guide us to the Truth', they prefer death to attentively listening to the Quran. This clearly indicates how arrogant and stupid they were when dealing with the Book of Allah.

That is why the Lord *Glorified is He* out of His love for His Messenger Muhammad and His desire to raise his status, even among the disbelievers, responded to their hollow claims and consoled the heart of His Messenger. He relieved Prophet Muhammad of his suffering when He said: 'We indeed know the grief which their words cause you' (*al-An'am:* 33). This is referring to their intermittent accusations that he was a magician, a soothsayer, a poet and was insane: 'It is not you that they say are untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject' (*al-An'am:* 33). That is, the problem does not concern you, Muhammad. Even in their disbelief, they do not really believe you are a liar—they do not have the audacity to believe that; the truth is they do not really believe the accusations they have made against you. The real problem is that they reject My [Allah's] verses. Moreover, all of their reactions in relation to Allah's Divinity, the issue of prophethood and revelation can be seen as evolving from their initial predisposition towards evil.

Their statement concerning the insanity of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* amounts to nothing but a falsehood that is far removed from the truth. Indeed, what is insanity? Insanity is when the capacity to think and choose between alternatives is inexistent in the human being. The underlying reason for insanity can be innate in a person's creation. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* made the person that way. Or it can be the result of some type of misfortune which befell a person. For instance, a person who sustains a massive head trauma may permanently lose his ability to think properly.

Continuing our discussion of the verse in hand, Allah is merciful to His slave as He does not hold him to account until he reaches puberty and his mind has fully developed, when he is able to reproduce another like him. This is because if Allah had held a person to account before puberty, when the person undergoes the normal basic changes at the age of puberty he will realise he did not have the suitable abilities to act properly when he was younger.

Even though a child is not held to account before he reaches puberty, his father is asked to order his son to pray before the age of maturity to make him used to praying when he is young so that he will find it easy when he reaches the age of maturity and he will be used to following orders. The human being does not question his father's natural love and his eagerness to see good come to him. It is, no doubt, his father who rears him and ensures that he has everything that he needs. He has a real and tangible trust and confidence in his father. The Lord *Glorified is He* wants to nurture a sense of 'having to obey the one whose favour upon us is clear' within us. If this method is followed, when we reach the age of maturity, we will not experience any difficulty in assuming our responsibilities; these things will have already become a habit for us.

The One Who is responsible for granting the father the right to issue any command has also given him the right to implement a punishment if his command is not obeyed. This means that the orders that the child has to follow are given by his minor-lord, as it were, in the same way that the punishment (in the case of non-compliance) is meted out by this same minor-lord. This is all done in order to prepare him—through the clear paternal care and mercy he received from his parents—to obey the Lord of all that exists Who has generously bestowed blessings on the parent as well as the child.

This implies that a sound and mature mind is a mandatory pre-condition for assuming responsibility. Here, we are referring to the mind that is developed and free; not the mind that is labouring under some type of external compulsion. If there is compulsion, there cannot be any real sense of responsibility.

Allah then says: ‘See what similitudes they coin for you’ (*al-A‘raf:* 48). In fact, they attempted to declare him as being insane. A person suffering from insanity is unable to effectively weigh between different potential choices. In light of this, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them by saying: ‘Nun. By the pen and what they inscribe, You are not [O Muhammad], by the favor of your Lord, a madman. And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted. And indeed, you have a great moral character’ (*al-Qalam:* 1-4). The Lord *Glorified is He* decisively negated that Muhammad, His Messenger, could ever be described in this way. Conversely, He established the fact that he (Prophet Muhammad) had a very noble character. The person suffering from insanity cannot be described as having a good character; he is not held accountable for his actions. He might curse this person, attack that person, or even spit in someone’s face. In such situations, the only things we can do are smile and have mercy on him.

It will be reasonable for someone to ask, ‘How does the Creator *Glorified is He* divest someone of the blessing of being able to effectively use his intellect; is the person in such a situation not a human being that has been elevated and honoured by Allah? How can he live like this; (without the intellect) he is just a shadow of a human being?’

If we want to understand the wisdom which underlies this reality, we must compare the conditions of those whose minds are sound and those who suffer from insanity. This will enable us to understand how just the One above the heavens is and to appreciate the Wisdom of the Creator. As for someone whose mind is sound, we hold you accountable for everything that you do; big and small. This is appropriate for the great status you seek to assume among creation; you desire position and authority, you do not want anybody to criticize you or what you say. In short, you want to do as you like.

But do you not notice that the person suffering from insanity does the same; he says and does whatever he likes. Furthermore, he is honoured (if you will) more than you in that he is not questioned about his actions in this life or the Hereafter. Is this not sufficient compensation for the loss of his intellect?

Do not look just at what has been taken from him; rather, look at what he has been given in terms of honours in this life and the Hereafter.

Allah then said: ‘They have strayed, so they cannot [find] a way’ (*al-Isra’:* 48). This means: They are unable to say anything that will deter or discourage any of the people who believe in you. They said, ‘he is insane’; but this was nothing but a lie. They said, ‘he is a magician’; again, they lied. They called him a poet, and they were also telling a lie. Lastly, they called him a soothsayer; and this amounted to nothing besides another lie. At this point, they had come to the end of the road; they were not going to be able to find any means of dissuading the people from following Prophet Muhammad.

When they realised that they were unable to invent any (despicable) character trait that could repel any people who wanted to believe in Prophet Muhammad, they proclaimed: ‘O Allah! If this indeed is the Truth from you, then rain down on us stones from the sky’ (*al-Anfal:* 32). Some of them even questioned: ‘And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) They cannot come up with anything to impede the progress of your (Prophet Muhammad’s) mission. This is proven by the fact that they were unable to quash the Prophet’s mission although it was weak at the beginning of the call and despite the recurring persecution that was inflicted upon the early Muslims. In fact, in the face of all of this, you saw it grow day after another. The expanse of the faith grew steadily. As for their plots and conspiracies, they were completely stifled or forced into decline, as Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: ‘Have they not seen that We gradually reduce the land from its outlying borders? (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41) The lands that accepted Islam were on a steady incline while the lands that chose to remain in disbelief were decreasing.

By referring to their hearing the Quran and their subsequent proclamation, ‘Our hearts are shrouded in veils; our hearts are heedless (of what you are calling to Muhammad)’, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to direct our attention to a very important principle, one that is applicable to all things. Namely, that every process requires someone who carries out the process and also requires someone upon who the process is carried out. For example, a farmer who uses a hoe to plough the soil; the soil allows him to do this. It reacts with the farmer as he ploughs. In the end, the soil gives him the harvest that he was waiting to reap. On the other hand, if he performs the exact same process with a solid bed of rock, it will never allow him to do this. From this, we learn that the fruitful outcome of a process depends on two sides: the one who carries out the process and the one upon whom the process is carried out.

In light of this, I am completely astonished by these people who say, 'It is the West that is creating trials for the Muslims in their ability to practice their religion. They come to us advancing all types of (ill-fated) reforms and other deviant practices. They are trying to push various principles on us which result in nothing but our destruction. These people are trying to make us doubt our religion, etc.' We respond to these people by saying, 'How can any of you be harmed at all if (the West) did that and you refused to accept it from them. Leave them to do whatever they want. The important thing is that we refuse to accept these principles and values. The reason for our loss is not located in what the West is doing with us; rather, it is in our compliance with it. We eagerly and uncritically run behind everything that comes from their direction. This will not be the case if we had true faith in our hearts. The West wants to solidify its influence and inculcate its values (among our population). The only thing you have to do is refuse these misguided ways'.

It is upon the basis of this theory—the one who carries out the act and the one upon whom it is carried out—that all of the world's civilizations are constructed. This is a result of the fact that when the Lord *Glorified is He* summoned us forth into existence, He placed the essential elements of our lives at our disposal. These include the sun, moon, stars, earth, heavens, water, atmosphere, etc. Among these essentials of nature, some of them provide for you and serve you without forcing you to interact with them or to request anything from them. This is like the sun, water, and atmosphere. Other elements of nature do not provide for you until after you have interacted with them. This describes the earth; it does not provide for you until after you have cared for it by ploughing, watering, and seeding the soil.

The one who reflects deeply upon creation finds that all human achievements were based on the second process outlined above; the process which is described as that which does not provide for you until after you have interacted with it. Human ambition has risen to the point where they have taken the first type of essential elements of nature—the type which provides for you unmediated and without you needing to have any control over them—and used them to obtain new benefits from them. An example being what is happening now with the use of solar power in new and unprecedented ways. Clearly, the one who takes the means, working with these base elements, and strives to advance and develop is not denied the progress that results from his efforts.

Therefore, if they come to make you doubt your religion, the blame is not on them but on you because you accepted what they said. This explains why it is our obligation and the obligation of everyone who is concerned with the rearing of our children to strengthen them to be able to withstand the current global invasion of atheism as well as Christian and Western ideals. We must teach them the basic principles of faith. This will enable them to defend themselves against this invasion and respond with evidence and convincing arguments in order not to fall prey to these people.

This and similar efforts represent the power of resistance that we use when inoculating against physical illness. To be sure, when it (a virus) tries to attack the body, it is unable to adversely affect it. Do you not see how Allah—in His Quran—presents the doubts the disbelievers spread? He mentions their whimsical arguments, discussing such doubts with them, and finally reveals the error of their views. He says: ‘Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths; what they say is nothing but a lie’ (*al-Kahf:* 5).

Why does the Quran display these arguments? Is it for us to adopt them and learn from them? No, it is so that when these arguments are presented, we will not be taken by surprise. When they rear their ugly heads, we will be sufficiently ready to protect ourselves from them; this method (of displaying their arguments) helps us to remain firm, as opposed to being shaken in our faith when we encounter arguments such as these.

As pointed out earlier, all of life’s transactions entail the one who carries out the act and the one upon whom the act is carried out. Previously, we cited an example; we said, ‘During the winter a person might blow on his hands in order to warm them, but he does the same thing to a cup of tea to cool it’. In both cases, the process is the same; the variable, however, is the object upon which the act is carried out. This is exactly how different types of people hear the Quran and receive the Word of Allah. A person may hear the Quran when he is calm and receptive to his innate love of language; a natural passion for all beautiful linguistic expressions. This is something altogether different from if he heard it when he was overpowered by any stubborn, arrogant, or conceited inclinations.

This was the case with ʿUmar *may Allah be pleased with him*. He heard the Quran on two separate instances. One can be described as when he was in a state of disbelief, having extreme zeal (for disbelief) and harshly refusing to take heed of the Quran when it was recited. The second state was when he was in a state of faith and was softhearted, after he had heard the news of his sister's conversion to Islam. He hurried to her as she was reading the Quran. Upon reaching her, he struck her forcefully until she began to bleed from her face. When seeing this, he was taken by the natural compassion one has for his siblings; this compassion prevailed over the violent feelings that disbelief had produced in him. Once he heard the Quran while in this state of compassion, it had a profound impact on him. He believed immediately. It just so happened that the Quran had touched him, while his heart was pure. In such a circumstance, it inevitably had an impact on him.

The crux of the matter is that the person (to whom the Quran is recited) should be ready to accept to listen to the Quran and react to it in order for its impact to take place and produce a fruitful result. In fact, the Lord *Glorified is He* summarizes this issue for us in His words: 'And among them [O Muhammad] are those who listen to you, until when they depart from you, they say to those who were given knowledge, "What did he say just now?"' (*Muhammad:* 16) Then the response comes: 'Those are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed and who follow their [own base] desires' (*Muhammad:* 16). In a separate verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if We had made the Quran other than Arabic, they will have said, "Why are its verses not explained in detail [in our language]? Is it a foreign [recitation] and an Arab [Messenger]?" Say, "It is, for those who believe, a guide and a cure". And for those who do not believe—in their ears is a deafness, and it is blindness in their [eyes]' (*Fussilat:* 44). In essence, the Quran is one but how it is received (by different people) varies. As a result, you should absolutely not blame the one who wants to call people to the path of misguidance. On the contrary, leave him in his misguidance but strengthen the others for them to become strong enough to withstand his call and be prevented from being affected by or responding to it.

After we have discussed the position of the disbelievers in relation to Allah’s Divinity and their position in relation to the Prophethood (of Muhammad), we will discuss their position in relation to the Way that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was advancing. This Path touches upon many issues and includes several topics. However, the essence of this Path as well as its basic structure entails that we believe in the Hereafter. As long as we believe in the Hereafter, our growth and development in life will be harmonious. Of course, belief in the Hereafter implies belief in all of its delights and punishments. This belief gives us the impetus to perform good deeds and remain vigilant concerning our religious responsibilities in this life. This is strikingly similar to a student who works seriously and with assiduity throughout the year because he knows that the final exam will be held at the end of the year. He knows that his success or failure depends on his study habits.

The imbecile is the one who thinks this life is the last stop; the final destination. Indeed, all of Allah’s slaves stand on an equal footing; yet, we notice that some die in the wombs of their mothers, and some die after only a few months or a few years. If this life was the final destination and the ultimate end, the duration of their stay in it should be the same for all people. Consequently, the difference in life spans in this life is a proof that it is not the ultimate end.

It is strange that in the spectacle of death we see people lamenting heavily over those who die young; they say, ‘He was taken during his childhood’. This is the source of much wailing and crying, but why? They say, ‘He never got the chance to enjoy the delights of this world’. Glory be to Allah! What is the world that you are referring to! In fact, Allah chose him before he was polluted by his sins and soiled by his misdeeds. Why, then, are you lamenting like this? If you were able to see what he was enjoying, you will be envious of him.

People make many mistakes when attempting to judge and asses the ultimate end and purpose of things. Certainly, every act the human being performs is in service of an end, but this is a temporal end, not an ultimate end. The ultimate end is that which is not followed by anything else. The pupil studies at the elementary level in order to progress to the preparatory level. He then studies at that level to progress to the secondary level. This is the same way that worldly goals or 'ends' follow each other in succession until you arrive at the last stage in this life. The last stage is for a person to build a house, get married, and lead a happy life in which he enjoys the services and privileges he has been able to accumulate; these make him comfortable in this life. But this (short timeline) takes for granted that he will live until he completes all the various stages; nonetheless, it is possible that he will die before he reaches this goal.

Consequently, the human being must work; he must exert effort in order to become someone who is served. This service is directly related to the effort that you initially expended. Clearly, someone who felt it sufficient to discontinue his education after the elementary school level is not the same as someone who graduated from university; each one has his place and his rank. Without a doubt, there are different levels in life, as you have to make use of the means in this life and you only reap what you have sown. Therefore, your goal in this life is to become 'served' (as it were). The only thing is that the things that serve you can rebel against you or abandon you. On the other hand, in the Hereafter you will be spared all of this. No one besides you will have an effect on your happiness and contentment. By merely thinking of something, you will find it right before you. Indeed, you live in this life in accordance with the means; whereas in the Hereafter, you live in accordance to the One *Glorified is He* Who creates and controls all the means.

In this fashion, if you weigh the delights of this life and the delights of the Hereafter, the scale will tip in the direction of the delights of the Hereafter. In relation to this life, the extent of your relationship with it only consists of the number of years you spend in it; not the total amount of time that the world has existed or will exist. This should remind us of these people who are very pleased to announce that the world is several million years old. That is fine; but the more important question is, 'What do you have to do with all of these millions?'

Consequently, this life—as it relates to the person—is only the number of years one has in it, not the whole life span of this world. Even if we were to suppose that a person's life span could be known with certainty, it will still be a moderate number of years, and will definitely be terminated by death. Add to this the fact that in this life your good fortune has a direct proportional relationship with your striving and taking the means of success in life.

The Hereafter, however, is ever lasting. It neither ends nor dies. Of course, this means that we can speak about the duration of our abiding in it with certainty as opposed to an approximation. Additionally, the extent of your enjoyment in it is not related to your capabilities; rather, it is related to the capability of your Creator *Glorified is He*.

So in essence, which is preferable? Which is a more suitable object (of someone's) striving and effort? It is sufficient for you to consider the following; whatever measure of good fortune you enjoy in this life even if you are at the peak of ease and luxury among the upper crust of the people, this state of affairs will be ruined by one of two things: You fear that this good fortune might decline with the onset of death or your fear that it might decline with the onset of poverty. Indeed, this means that it is a mixed blessing. In the Hereafter, you will not be apprehensive about the good fortune you experience passing you by nor about you passing it by (not being able to enjoy it). Which 'transaction' then is more profitable?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* addresses their denial of the resurrection after death:

وَقَالُوٓاْ أَءِذَا كُنَّا عِظَٰمًا وَرُفَٰتًا أَءِنَّا لَمَبۡعُوثُونَ خَلۡقًا جَدِيدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

They also say, 'What? When we are turned to bones and dust, shall we really be raised up in a new act of creation?' [49] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 49)

The interrogative form that appears in the verse is intended to convey astonishment and their rejection of the idea that human beings will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment after they have become bones and dust.

The remnants and residue of something are thought of as being dust or particles from something that has decomposed. To be sure, these people considered the possibility of resurrection after death far-fetched and implausible. This is only because they were completely oblivious of the origins of existence and the origins of the human being's creation. If we make use of the field of statistics—which was formulated by the scientists of our time—we will come to find that it serves this matter of faith; if we took a census of the world's population today, we will find that it is currently increasing. Nonetheless, if we backtracked, we will notice the number becoming regressively smaller as we go back in the past until we arrive at the original inhabitants of earth: Adam and Eve. The question then becomes, 'From where did they emerge into existence?' This is a matter of the unseen and it must be given due reflection.

Because of the very fact that it is a matter of the unseen, the Lord *Glorified is He* has taken the responsibility upon Himself of clarifying it to us. Indeed, if He declined to do this, people will continually err in their attempts to clarify this issue. When Allah *Glorified is He* elucidated this issue in His book, He did this in a way that increased the faith of the believers for them to be steadfast in front of any confusing statements that are said to cast doubts in their beliefs. This was for us not to follow those who say anything without thinking or contemplating about it while being showered with praise for saying things of which they are not certain. These people maintain that human beings descended from apes. This is a fallacious notion that is very easy to rebut. We simply ask, 'Why have not the remaining apes evolved into human beings?' Nonetheless, even if we suppose that the human being was originally an ape, where did it come from? It is a redundant topic; we just end up where we started. This is nothing beside unjustified clamour and a distraction from reality.

This is no different than the false notions which the geologists have stated; they now say that the sky, sun and earth were all one solitary mass before they separated from each another. But these are theories which are not supported by any conclusive evidence.

For this reason, the Creator *Glorified is He* desires to give us a glimpse of this matter for us not to fall victim to the misleading theories by following those who plunge into (explaining) these affairs without guidance. This means that we will have been reinforced against such blunders. To be sure, these are not the type of issues that can be figured out by way of empirical research. On the contrary, they can only be taken from the Creator; He has the most comprehensive knowledge about what He has created.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves’ (*al-Kahf:* 51). It is as though Allah is saying, ‘There was no one with Me when I created the heavens and the earth, nor when I created the human being. No one witnessed Me (in the act of creation) for them to be able to describe what took place’. Allah continued: ‘And I did not take the deviants as assistants’ (*al-Kahf:* 51). This is saying: I have not taken any of these deceitful, misleading persons as an assistant or an aide. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to us, ‘You should deem all of these people who advance premature arguments concerning the process of creation as “those who lead people astray.” Hence, do not listen to them’.

This is for you to relieve yourself (of the responsibility) of investigating matters like these and to abstain from burdening the intellect with more than it is equipped to accommodate; the mind should not be made to exceed its proper function. The primary use of the mind is to discover empirical truths that are discovered by interacting with the material world. If this begins to veer in the direction of metaphysics, we do not follow this course. Indeed, there is nothing at the end of this process besides foolishness and conjecture; neither of which are of any benefit.

The intellect is one of the ‘means of perception’. In this sense, it is like the eye, which is the ‘means of visual imagery’, or like the ear, which is the ‘means through which sound is grasped’. As long as the intellect is a ‘means’ of perception, it must be bound by limits. Indeed, the eye has limits in what it is able to perceive and the ear is also bound by limits in what it is able to hear. In the same fashion, the intellect has limits in what it is able to conceive and grasp; (if you understand this) it will not be able to wander aimlessly into unknown territories with you. Your responsibility is to discipline the mind and to make use of it in the fields in which it is best suited to work; do not give it free rein in every issue.

For this very reason the philosophers wore themselves out; and they wore the world out with them! To be sure, they leapt head first into issues that were beyond the scope of the intellect. I challenge any school of philosophy that has ever existed—from the time of Greek Philosophy—to be in agreement concerning any issue besides this one issue: Recognizing the necessity of exploring that which is beyond material existence. However, who informed you that there was a metaphysical realm that needed to be explored?

Undeniably, you were guided to the fact that there is a Creator for this existence by your innate sense of faith. Existence is not an outcome of chance as some say. Absolutely not; it has a Creator; He is the Creator of the matters of the unseen which you are seeking. These are the matters which you are exerting your minds to their outmost in order to merely speculate concerning their true nature. All the while, your only obligation was to say, ‘That which is beyond the realm of the physical must explain itself to us’.

Without a doubt, if the philosophers agreed on the basic premise (that there is something beyond material realm) and leave it to the One Who is beyond the physical to reveal it to them, they will be spared a lot of fruitless exertion and exhaustion.

The Quran responded to their rejection of the resurrection and their saying: ‘And they say, "When we are bones and crumbled particles, will we [truly] be resurrected as a new creation?”’ Allah responded in His statement: ‘Say, "Are there of your 'partners' any who begins creation and then repeats it?" Say, “Allah begins creation and then repeats it, so how are you deluded?”’ (*Yunus:* 34), and His statement: ‘On that Day we shall roll up the skies as written scrolls are rolled up; as we brought into being the first creation, so we shall bring it forth anew—a promise which We have willed upon Ourselves: for, behold, We are able to do [all things]’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104), as well as the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And it is He [Allah] who creates [all life] in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew: and most easy is this for Him’ (*ar-Rum:* 27). Indeed, reviving something is easier than creating it *(ex nihilo)* in the first instance.

The philosophers thought for a long time about this issue of resurrection after death. It is the issue they highlighted in their attempt to create doubts among the people about Allah’s religion. Among the doubts they spread in respect to this issue was their saying, ‘How can this be a sound conclusion? If someone dies and his corpse subsequently decomposes and becomes dust and dirt, and then there is a tree planted over where he is buried, the tree will be nourished by the soil that used to be his body. If another human being eats from the fruit of the tree, he will then have taken in some of the constituents of the dead person. Some of the molecules of the original deceased will have transferred to the eater. This means that the added molecules that the eater has consumed have been taken away from the deceased. Per the dictates of logic, how can there be (bodily) resurrection after death?'

This is what they say, but in fact, they have not taken into account that in an issue like this, the person of the human being and his physical constituents are two entirely different things. But we may ask: how is this so?

Consider the following: Someone becomes overweight and is advised by his physician to lose weight. As a result, he works to lose weight by using all of the known weight-loss methods. This process, whether weight gain or weight loss, is governed by two factors—namely, nourishment and expenditure of energy. The human being increases in size when the nourishment that he takes in exceeds the energy that he expends. When the opposite occurs, he becomes weak. The growing and developing child increases in size because he takes in more nourishment than he expends in energy. The man of mature age, on the other hand, expends more energy than the nourishment he takes in; this is why he is weak.

If someone who suffers from an illness that causes him to lose weight and become emaciated, he goes to the doctor and the doctor will treat him until he returns to his natural weight. Now, are the molecules of his body (that made up his weight) that he lost when he became thin the same exact molecules that go back into his body once he completes his treatment? In reality, the molecules of fat that he has shed are still present on the earth; no new organism has been formed out of them. (All we know about them is that) they are a set amount of fatty tissues (molecules) which used to strengthen him and make up his person.

Our Lord *Glorified is He* out of His Mercy has said: 'We know what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a retaining record' (*Qaf:* 4). The Lord *Glorified is He* will then reassemble the parts of each individual that are essential to the individual and make up their persons.

Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to say:

قُلْ كُونُوا۟ حِجَارَةً أَوْ حَدِيدًا ﴿٥٠﴾

Say, ‘[Yes] even if you were [as hard as] stone,
or iron [50] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 50)

This is as though Allah is saying, ‘Say to them, while rebutting them, “You regard the resurrection as far-fetched and find it difficult to accept because it refers to resurrecting bones and dust that once upon a time were animate life. In fact, the ‘familiarity’ of these bones and dust with animate life will make it easier for them to be returned to their former state. Nonetheless, greater than this is the power of the Creator *Glorified is He* to return you to your former living states even if you had become stone or iron after your deaths. These are two material substances that they never used to think of as being living animate objects”’. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* is challenging them with an example of something as far removed from life as can be imagined. First, He says ‘stone’ and then progresses to ‘iron’ while addressing them. This is because iron is more resolute and unbending than stone; moreover, iron is capable of cutting stone. Allah is saying, ‘If you were a stone in this life, I (Allah) will resurrect you as stone and if you were iron, I will resurrect you as iron’. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* takes the dialogue a step further; He *Glorified is He* says:

أَوْ خَلْقًا مِّمَّا يَكْبُرُ فِى صُدُورِكُمْ ۚ فَسَيَقُولُونَ مَن يُعِيدُنَا ۖ قُلِ ٱلَّذِى فَطَرَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ۚ
فَسَيُنْغِضُونَ إِلَيْكَ رُءُوسَهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هُوَ ۖ قُلْ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَكُونَ قَرِيبًا ﴿٥١﴾

Or any other substance you think hard to bring to life.’
Then they will say, ‘Who will bring us back?’ Say, ‘The One
who created you the first time.’ Then they will shake their
heads at you and say, ‘When will that be?’ Say, ‘It may well
be very soon [51] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 51)

Allah’s statement: ‘Or [any] other substance you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]’ (*al-Isra’:* 51). This is as though Allah is saying, ‘Bring anything you want, no matter how unlikely it is (that it can be resurrected).

Dig deep, search well in your attempt to meet this challenge by bringing something far removed from life. To be sure, I am able to resurrect it no matter how far removed from life it might be’.

Concerning Allah’s statement: ‘you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]’ (*al-Isra’:* 51), the intended meaning of this is, ‘Choose something that is great and is known for being without life. You cannot find anything that has these characteristics besides stone and iron. These things are the elements that are most deprived of life’. This was something they unanimously agreed upon; there was nothing in their direct surroundings more unbending and inflexible than stone and iron. Nevertheless, the Lord *Glorified is He* allowed the disbelievers, themselves, to choose an appropriate substance; He is challenging them to choose and settle on one thing. This thing should be more distant from the possibility of being given life than stone or iron.

When we ponder over Allah's saying: 'or any other substance you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]' (*al-Isra’:* 51), we notice that the thing being referred to here is left completely unspecified. This is because although they agree on the impossibility of bringing beings made of iron and stone to life again, they differ with regards to the beings made of elements harder and stronger than iron and stone. Therefore, this verse states an unspecified object so that it may refer to anything anyone may think of.

Because Imam ʿAli ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was known for his quick intellect and intuition and for being very experienced in issuing legal verdicts, some people wanted to test him by asking him a question that required a protracted enquiry into the various substances and their respective properties. They asked him about the strongest substance in the world. They disagreed about this issue. Some of them said, 'Iron is the strongest'. Others said, 'No, stone is the strongest'. Some even said, 'Water is the strongest’. In this regard, ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said to them an answer which reflects his extensive experience and profound knowledge. He did not say, 'The most durable items out of Allah's creation are such and such' by mentioning whatever came to his mind. On the contrary, he at first specified the number of strong substances by saying,: 'The most durable elements of all Allah's creation are ten [in number]’. Indeed, this was not an impromptu reply.

Rather, it was something that he duly studied and investigated. He extended his fingers and began to count the ten substances. It was as though he was a teacher who had duly prepared the lessons he was going to deliver. He said, ‘The ten strongest things Allah created are: The deeply embedded mountains; but iron can cut through mountains. However, the iron can be melted by fire; but fire can be extinguished by water. On the other hand, the water is carried by the rainclouds floating between the heavens and the earth; but the clouds can be dissipated by strong winds. Nevertheless, the human being can shield himself against strong winds using his clothes or any other material. Despite this, the human being can be overcome by drunkenness; but drunkenness is overcome by sleep. And finally sleep is overcome by anxiety. Therefore, it is anxiety which is the strongest of Allah's creation'.

These are the things referred to in Allah’s saying: 'or any other substance you think is greater [or harder to reproduce]' (*al-Isra’:* 51). Accordingly, although they are the strongest things, Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of bringing them back to life and resurrecting them just as sure as you are all now alive on this earth.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then they will say, “Who will restore us?” Say, “He Who created you the first time”' (*al-Isra’:* 51). This means that the One Who created you *(ex nihilo)* for the first time is surely capable of returning you to life again. In fact, the process of returning people back to life is easier than the first creation. However, the answer will not be convincing unless it entails a conclusion that the other party agrees on. Are they convinced that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created them? Yes, they accept this fact in spite of their disbelief. The proof for this is clearly stated in the Glorious Quran: ‘And if thou ask them who created them, they will surely say, “Allah”' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). They are convinced of this, but they state another argument, asking, ‘Who will restore us and bring us back to life?’ If you say to them, ‘The One who created you the first time’: 'They will then shake their heads towards you and say, “When will that be?” (*al-Isra’:* 51). Shaking heads in this situation is a sign of mockery and ridicule. When we ponder over this Quranic phrase: ‘They will then shake their heads towards you’ (*al-Isra’:* 51), we recognize that it is describing an action that will occur in the future due to the free choice of the one performing it. The context refers to a debate between the disbelievers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who recited this verse before them.

In this very situation, they had the opportunity to practically belie Prophet Muhammad by not shaking their heads towards him *peace and blessings be upon him*. By not shaking their heads, and thereby acting differently to what is mentioned in the Quran, they could have objected to this saying in the Quran and accused it of being fabricated. However, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who is the Master of all affairs and therefore He made them hear this verse repeatedly without acting differently to what it states. This proves the stupidity of the disbelievers and the absurdity of their ideas.

Their situation in this respect closely resembles their reaction against the incident of the changing of the *Qibla* (the direction towards which Muslims direct themselves in Prayer). Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have seen the turning of your face [Prophet Muhammad] to heaven [hoping that the *Qibla* will be changed]. And now verily We shall make you turn [in Prayer] toward a *Qibla* which is dear to you’ (*al-Baqara:* 144). Allah *Glorified is He* responded to Prophet Muhammad's supplications and changed the *Qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca. After that, Allah informed His Prophet, Muhammad, that the disbelievers will mock at this change of the *Qibla* and say, as is related in the Quran: 'What has turned them away from the direction of Prayer they have hitherto observed' (*al-Baqara:* 142). This was a statement that they will issue due to their own free will in the future. Therefore, they could have, upon hearing this verse, refrained themselves from saying this for them to be able to challenge the truthfulness of the Quran. Yet, they said exactly what the Quran said they will say. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* knew what they will surely say. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and [they] say, “When will that be?”' (*al-Isra’:* 51)

The question being posed here is like the previous question; it is a form of denial and also an exclamation. This indicates that they think that the resurrection after death is implausible. You may notice here that the question pertains to time. They have shifted the debate from the plausibility of resurrection to specifying its actual time. This represents their withdrawal from the earlier issue. They earlier said, 'Who will bring us back (to life)?' But now they are saying, 'When will this take place?' The answer is addressed to them thus: '…Say, "Perhaps it is near"' (*al-Isra':* 51). The word *'asa*' (perhaps) connotes substantiated hope. Substantiated hope relates to those things that are expected; of course, this will vary according to the one who is hoping and that for which he is hoping. If you say, for instance, 'Perhaps (*'asa*) so-and-so will give you this or that thing'; this is a more distant hope because it is a hope that someone else will give you something. On the other hand, when you say, 'Perhaps I will give you such-and-such a thing'; this is a hope that is closer to being realized because the person is talking about himself. Indeed, a person has more confidence in himself than he has in others. Yet, even in spite of this, my opinion might change and I may decide not to give it to you. Or, the time of granting you (what I said I will perhaps grant you) might come and I might not be able to deliver. Conversely, if you said, 'Perhaps Allah will give you such and such'. Without a doubt it is a hope that it is closer to being realized because you have placed hope in Allah *Glorified is He*; the One Who is not overcome or burdened by anything in the heavens or on earth. If the One issuing the statement is Allah Himself *Glorified is He* not only is the hope that he is expressing substantiated, but also the circumstances concerned with what is hoped for, will inevitably occur. In essence, there are three levels of hope; someone having hope in another person is one level and a person having hope in himself concerning an issue affecting another person—that he will be able to perform a given action for him—is another level. And the hope that someone has in Allah is an entirely different level.

Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained for us the issue of 'something being near' when He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I and the Final Hour were sent forward like these two'(1). He then indicated how close with his index and middle fingers. This nearness to the Final Hour is due to there being no Messenger after him. This means that he and the Day of Judgment are next to each other, there is nothing (eventful) that separates the two. This resembles one saying, 'Everything that is sure to arrive is (in reality) right around the corner' because any event that will inevitably occur in the future is near; that is, it will surely come.

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(1) *An agreed upon Hadith of Prophet Muhammad. It has been narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (book of authentic Hadiths) (2951). It was also narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (11/347 Fath Al-Bari) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

Allah says:

يَوۡمَ يَدۡعُوكُمۡ فَتَسۡتَجِيبُونَ بِحَمۡدِهِۦ وَتَظُنُّونَ إِن لَّبِثۡتُمۡ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا (٥٢)

It will be the Day when He calls you, and you answer by praising Him, and you think you have stayed [on earth] only a little while [52] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 52)

This day refers to the Day of Judgment. It is the day in which none will be able to escape or flee from what Allah wills for him. This is unlike the case in the worldly life when one may think that he is able to flee from Allah's Decrees. When creating human beings, Allah *Glorified is He* placed human will power in authority over human limbs in respect to those matters where they are able to exercise a choice. Therefore, man is an independent agent; he does whatever he chooses, says whatever he wishes, and refrains from whatever he wants. In this regard, his will possesses the power to control his limbs. As for those matters with which he is naturally compelled to comply, his will has no effect whatsoever.

On the Day of Judgment, man's will and limbs will be separated. The authority that he once wielded over his limbs will cease to exist. This is proven by the fact that on the Day of Judgment one's limbs will offer testimony to the person's choices and deeds in this worldly life. Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And they shall say to their skins, "Why have you borne witness against us?" They shall say, "Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak…"' (*Fussilat:* 21). This means that limbs, addressing man on the Day of Judgement, will say, 'We surely were made subservient to you in the worldly life—the time when means were employed. As for now, we are all connected to the One *Glorified is He* Who causes all things to act. You no longer have power over us'. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment will say: 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all)' (*Ghafir:* 16). In the worldly life, people are empowered and vested with the rights of ownership; the benefits of some have been placed in the hands of others. However, in the Hereafter, the affair and the dominion are entirely in Allah's Hands alone; concerning which He has no partner: 'It will be on the Day when He calls you' (*al-Isra': 52*) (saying to you all: rise from your graves and come forward when the Trumpet is blown for the second time to have your bodies revived): '…And you answer by praising Him…' (*al-Isra':* 52). This is as though Allah says, 'You will rise imbued with a sense of obedience and surrender. You will not come forth in a spirit of disdain, disregard, or arrogance. The worldly life in which you had such attributes is over and now is the time for the eternal life in the Hereafter'.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and you will answer (*tastajiboon*)…' (*al-Isra':* 52) instead of saying, 'and you will respond (*tujibun*)'. This is because answering (denoted in the word '*tastajiboon'*) denotes absolute obedience and submission. The same is the case with the words '*fahim*' (to understand) and '*istafhama*' ('to seek clarity' or 'to inquire'). The latter implies that one is actively seeking an understanding. In the same sense, the word '*tastajiboon*' (you will answer)—which conforms to the same linguistic pattern—implies that you are actively seeking a way to answer. You are insistent and diligent about responding, rather than refusing and being slow to answer. In brief, you are rushing to comply with the order which was given to you.

However, not only will you answer the order, but Allah explains: '…you will answer by praising Him…' (*al-Isra':* 52). This gives us an even more detailed picture of the Resurrection: It implies that you will rise and rush to stand before Allah, praising and thanking Him. But, how is it that you praise Him when this is only done if someone is granted what he desires? Yes, they will certainly praise Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because they will be witnessing first-hand the day which Allah *Glorified is He* kept reminding them of and incessantly called upon them to have faith in and to do good deeds in preparation for, despite their rejection and denial. Now they are here and witnessing that which they used to reject; the reality that they had once deemed a falsehood is now unfolding before their very eyes. It is true, then: They will rise—from their graves—praising Allah *Glorified is He*; Who had made them aware of what lay ahead of them and was never negligent in advising them to follow the right path. This is no different from how you advise your child to study hard. If he neglects to take your advice and subsequently fails on his examination, he will come to you remorsefully, ‘You gave me the right advice, but I failed to take heed’.

Therefore, the portrait of the Hereafter, which Allah *Glorified is He* details for us, is a blessing rejected by the disbelievers in this world but they will recognize and believe in it in the next life. They will come to the realization that it was in fact one of the greatest of Allah’s Favours upon them. In spite of the suddenness of this realization, it will be too late for them to gain any benefit from it.

In this connection, scholars of the orientalist tradition object to the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 34). This verse comes after the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘The flames of fire and smoke will be sent on you two, then you will not be able to defend yourselves’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35). In their view, the verse discusses punishment and retribution, so it is not in harmony with the following verse: ‘Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 34)

The attentive observer of the verse, however, recognizes that the two verses are in complete harmony. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* admonishing people and warning them of the impending punishment awaiting them if they continue upon the path of misguidance is a favour. You are being warned in order for you not to commit the acts that lead to such a punishment. To be sure, the one who is aware of the punishment for a certain crime refrains from committing it.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘and you will think you have stayed only a little while’ (*al-Isra’:* 52). The word ‘*tathunnoon*’ (you will think) comes from the word ‘*thann*’ (speculation) which refers to the most likely of all available opinions. This is because they were hesitant to believe in and were not certain about the resurrection.

The Quranic phrase: ‘you have stayed’ refers to one’s life span in the worldly life or the time spent in the grave. Undeniably, the worldly life is a short period of amusement. But on top of that, when your time in it draws to a close, nothing from it remains with you. The same can be said of the grave. The deceased in his grave is like the one who is asleep; he does not know how long he has slept. The only thing he is able to imagine is the customary stint of rest that most people are familiar with when they sleep. This explains why, when each individual is asked, 'How long did you remain asleep?' the answer is always, 'A day or the better part of a day'. This is the period of time that is most well known to people. A sense of time is gained by noticing different events. However, during sleep, and to a greater extent death, we do not move at all. Furthermore, how can we notice anything we do when we are not even conscience?

In fact, in another verse Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'On the day that they see it, it will be as though they had not tarried but the latter part of a day or the early part of it' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46). He *Glorified is He* also states: 'He will say, "How many years did you tarry in the earth?" They will say, "We tarried a day or part of a day, but ask those who keep account"' (*al-Mu'minun:* 112-113). This is to say, 'We were not aware enough to count the passing days. Ask those who are able to count'.

There is also the story of 'Uzair (Ezra) whom Allah *Glorified is He* caused to die for a period of a hundred years, after which He *Glorified is He* resurrected him and asked him: '…He [Allah] said, "How long have you tarried?" He said, "I have tarried a day, or a part of a day"…' (*al-Baqara:* 259). This was the normal amount of time that he used to rest. However, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified for him what had actually occurred: '…He [Allah] said, "Nay! you have tarried a hundred years; then look at your food and drink—years have not passed over it; and look at your ass…"'(1) (*al-Baqara:* 259). This means that, as much as 'Uzair could perceive, the amount of time (he had spent dead) amounted to a day or part of a day. Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently explained that it had been a hundred years. Clearly, the difference between the two amounts is staggering. Nonetheless, even with that staggering difference, both statements are truthful. Allah *Glorified is He* has given us proof of that. Indeed, when He resurrected 'Uzair from the dead, he found that his donkey had become decrepit bones; this made the figure of a hundred years credible. But when he turned and looked at his food and drink, he found that they had not been changed at all; it was as though he had only been resting a day or part of a day. If a hundred years had passed over the food and drink, it will have completely decomposed, not just changed. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* constricted the flow of time and extended it at one and the same time. Indeed, He is *Al-Basit* (The Expander) and *Al-Qabid* (The Constrictor). In essence, the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* (one hundred years) is true. Likewise, the statement of 'Uzair (a day or part of a day) is also true. There is none capable of joining polar opposites besides the Creator *Glorified is He* of all things and their opposites.

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(1) *In terms of his food, it has been mentioned that he had with him: grapes, figs, and juice. He found that they had not changed at all. The juice had not fermented (and become alcohol). The figs had not become sour. And the grapes had not rotted. This is an excerpt from the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir (1/314).*

After the Quran discusses the position of the disbelievers in reference to Allah's Divinity, their stance in relation to prophethood, their rejection of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* their view of Allah's Way and their disbelief in the resurrection and the Day of Judgment, He *Glorified is He* wants to begin giving us lessons which will help us to implement His Way. He *Glorified is He* states(1):

وَقُل لِّعِبَادِى يَقُولُوا۟ ٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنَ يَنزَغُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ
إِنَّ ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنَ كَانَ لِلْإِنسَـٰنِ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا ﴿٥٣﴾

[Prophet], tell My servants to say what is best. Satan sows discord among them: Satan is a sworn enemy of man [53]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 53)

Previously, we clarified the difference between slaves when the word *'abid'* is used and slaves when the word *'ibad'* is used; both of them are the plural of the word slave (*abd*). However, the word *'abid'* is used in reference to one who has submitted to the will of his master in those things that are compulsory for him but who acts rebelliously in relation to those things in which he has a choice. As for the term *'ibad'*, it is used to indicate one who submits to the will of his master in all of his affairs: Those which are compulsory for him as well as those in which he has a choice. To phrase it another way, he gives what Allah *Glorified is He* wants priority over that which he wants. Concerning these persons, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And the slaves (*ibad*) of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace, And those who spend [part of] the night before their Lord, prostrating and standing [in Prayer]' (*al-Furqan:* 63-64). The difference between them exists in relation to the life of this world and not the Hereafter. The ability to choose upon which the differences between the two types of people are based will be removed in the Hereafter. In the light of this, all will be equal in the Hereafter. All of them are *(abid)* and *(ibad)*. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* will say to Satan (Iblis) in the Hereafter: 'Was it you who led these My slaves (*ibad*) astray, or did they by themselves stray from the Right Path?' (*al-Furqan:* 17) He referred to them as *'ibad'* in spite of their disbelief and misguidance.

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(1) *In Asbab An-Nuzul (p.166), in relation to the occasion surrounding the revelation of this verse, Wahidi mentioned, 'This was revealed in regard to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. One of the men from among the Arabs had cursed him and Allah Glorified is He ordered him to forgive the man'. Al-Qurtubi said in his Tafsir (5/4004), 'This has been mentioned by Thalabi, Mawardi, Ibn Atiyya and Wahidi'.*

The Quranic verse: '…and say that which is best…' (*al-Isra':* 53) means: with an expression or statement that is best. Or, in the same manner we can say: the action that is best. The meaning becomes, 'Say (Oh Muhammad) to My slaves that they should say that which is best and speak kindly. This is because they are ready to implement your command and they believe you are truthful'.

The phrase: 'That which is best' (*al-Isra':* 53) means that which embodies the greatest form of kindness—that from which all things in life which maintain a standard of excellence emanate. Faith in Allah *Glorified is He*—that is, to bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah—is that which is best. This is the best and first thing that should be said. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say, 'The best thing that I have said, and the best thing the prophets who preceded me have said is, "There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah"'.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (3585) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Al-Aas Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi said, 'This Hadith, as Narrated with this narration, is classified as gharib (that is, it has only one narrator in one of the stages in the chain of narrators)'.*

This is the case since from it all good springs. It is the pinnacle of excellence in the true sense of the word. In fact, as long as you have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* the only lessons you receive (in life) will be from Him and the only thing you fear will be Him. Furthermore, you will only be desirous (of pleasing) Him. In this manner, the whole of your affairs, in the life of this world and the Hereafter, will be made excellent.

You only say, ‘There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah’, after you are convinced of its truth. You want to spread this declaration to all of those within reach of your voice. It is not enough that you believe in it yourself; by no means, you want others to join and participate with you in performing this good act. This is the reason why, when we pronounce it, one says, ‘I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah’. The phrase ‘I bear witness’ implies that you testify and make it clear for those who do not bear witness to it. It is as though your faith in this declaration calls upon you to proclaim it among the people and propagate it in their midst.

We can also say that the meaning of: ‘That which is best’ (*al-Isra’:* 53) refers to any good word. By the same token: ‘That which is best’ may allude to an effective but mannerly style of debate, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘…and reason with them in the best manner’ (*an-Nahl:* 125). We could also say that: ‘That which is best’ refers to distinguishing between mutually exclusive propositions and examining them using our intellect. Afterwards, we chose the proposition ‘which is best’ and address our audience with it.

Essentially: ‘that which is best’—as an expression—can be used in many ways to encompass all good things in any of life’s activities that involve speech or action. For example, we can observe the activity of debating—especially if it is being done with the intention of making the Word of Allah *Glorified is He* the uppermost. Undoubtedly, your rival dislikes the general position that you are advocating. If you then deal harshly with him and choose your words roughly and maliciously, what began as a simple disagreement will end in personal animosity.

Once this becomes a personal issue, you have lit the fire of his rage. In reality, he needs you to be gentle with him. You are not trying to provoke him to angrily move from being your acquaintance to hating you. On the contrary, try to make him move from merely being your acquaintance to actually loving you. This process will extinguish the flames of his hostility—which are directed at your argument—increase the feelings of friendship between you all and increase the likelihood of his accepting what you are saying. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The good and the evil deed are not alike. Repel (evil) with what is best, then lo! He between whom and you there was enmity [will become] as if he were a warm friend’ (*Fussilat:* 34). It may be said, ‘I have repelled evil with that which is better; but in spite of this, my enemy persists in his aggression against me. I have yet to gain his respect’. We respond to this enquirer by saying, ‘You think that you have repelled evil with that which is better, but reality belies this claim. In fact, what you have done is that you have attempted to test the reliability of Allah’s Word. This ‘test’ that you have administered is paramount to doubting Allah. What you must do now is repel evil with good but without attempting to test Allah’s Word. If you do this in earnest, you will find your enemy will become your friend right before your eyes’. The poet has expressed this magnificently:

‘O you who are weary from (attempting) to interact with the one who is responsible for this and the one who is accountable for that

Resist and endure their (bad conduct) until you see the verse of Allah’s Book (1) made manifest!

However, why do we say (with what is best)? The reason for this is that Satan (Iblis) strives to create strife between you: ‘Indeed, Satan sows discord between them’ (*al-Isra’:* 53). The discord (*nazgh*) being referred to here are the impulses and insinuations that are produced by Satan (Iblis). In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if a prompting from Satan should harm you, seek refuge in Allah; surely, He is the Hearing, the Knowing’ (*al-A‘raf:* 200). If you are on guard against Satan and weary of his deceptive stratagems, remember Allah when he goads and incites you towards evil. If you do this, he will depart from you straight away and take up his cause with someone else. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us concerning Satan and his promptings to seek refuge in Him: ‘From the mischief of the whisper [of evil], who withdraws’ (*an-Nas:* 4). This verse states that the Satan withdraws and slinks away when the name of Allah is mentioned. Conversely, if Satan recognizes a weakness or heedlessness in anyone, he keeps whispering to him until the person surrenders to such whispers and so becomes an easy prey to Satan’s schemes.

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(1) As for the saying of the poet, 'until you see the verse of Allah’s Book manifest', it refers to seeing the manifestation of what is contained in the verse: ‘He between whom and you was enmity will be as if he were a warm friend’ (*Fussilat*: 34). Persistently responding with that which is best makes the animosity that exists between you and someone else turn into friendship.

In many instances, the insinuations of Satan (Iblis) come as if they are probes and tests for the believer to warn him of this enemy. Satan (Iblis) entices man time and time again in order to test whether he will respond to his insinuations. As this is the way of Satan, then when you dispute with that which is better, you do not give Satan (Iblis) an opportunity to light the flame of personal animosity between you and anyone else; animosity which leads you to curse and swear at one another. This is how simple differences of opinions and viewpoints may change into fully-fledged personal hatred.

In the light of this, when you see two people, with whom you share no relationship, engaged in an argument and you feel unhappy when you see them attack each other like this, you only need to say, ‘I seek refuge with Allah from Satan (Iblis), the Accursed’ three times. I assure you that the dispute will come to an end. This is analogous to cold water that extinguishes the fire of anger, drives Satan (Iblis) away, and reassures people. Your role here is strikingly similar to a fire fighter who rushes in to put out a blaze, especially if this action is coupled with a sincere intention for the welfare of the disputing parties; that is, you have nothing to gain by your involvement.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Satan sows discord between them’ (*al-Isra’:* 53). You may notice that the enticement of Satan (Iblis) is not limited to affecting opposing parties engaged in a contentious argument about a religious issue or matter of faith. On the contrary, his insinuations enter between brothers, relatives and loved ones. Allah relates to us in the Quran that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* said: ‘…after Satan had sowed discord between me and my brothers’ (*Yusuf:* 100), although they were ancestors of prophets. But this prophetic ancestry was what kept iniquity from growing into uncontrollable proportions among them. This is a proof of their goodness. There is a way you can distinguish between the good and the evil. You find that the good people may threaten to do the harshest actions, but they eventually adopt an easy course. The evil people, on the other hand, are exactly the opposite; they may seem as though they do not intend to harm anyone, but they eventually do the harshest thing possible. Consider what the brothers of Yusuf said, as related in the Quran: ‘Kill Yusuf (Joseph) or drive him away to a faraway land’ (*al-Isra’:* 9). However, one of them proposed to cast him into the dark depths of a well. He posed this suggestion out of a desire to see his brother survive, as is established by his statement which Allah relates: '…so that he will be picked up by some caravan' (*Yusuf:* 10). As such, you can observe that the evil (manifested in their suggestion to murder Yusuf *peace be upon with him* that initially had taken root in their souls eventually gave way to a less severe alternative.

Next in the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, Satan is a sworn enemy of man’ (*al-Isra’:* 53). This verse clearly states that Satan’s (Iblis) enmity towards people is as old as our forefather Adam *peace be upon him*. This means that it is a deeply rooted and well-established enmity. Allah says about him: ‘Adam, this is an enemy for you and your wife, so do not let him expel you from the Garden and thus make you miserable’ (*Ta Ha:* 117). Taking this into account, it is a father’s responsibility to teach his children the story of the first enmity that came between Satan (Iblis) and Adam *peace be upon him* just as he teaches him the ways of life and the ins and outs of survival. Furthermore, he must teach him that the urges to do good that cross his mind are from Allah, but the impulses to do evil actions that cross his mind are from Satan (Iblis). As such, the young people should be fully aware of Satan (Iblis), his impulses and his insinuations towards evil. This is the way to instil a protective barrier of faith in his son. As a result, the son becomes prepared for the plots and evil schemes of Satan (Iblis) and the impulses that he will send his way. Children should be taught that every affair that contravenes the Divine law is from Satan (Iblis). Parents should exert their utmost to instil these meanings and concepts in the minds of their children.

The Quran clearly states: ‘Indeed, Satan is a sworn enemy of man’ (*al-Isra’:* 53), that is, Satan's sworn enmity is everlasting until the Day of Judgment. This is proven by the pledge taken by Satan that he will keep insinuating the children of Adam till the end of time. Allah states what Satan said: ‘If you give me respite until the Resurrection Day, I will surely bring his descendants under my sway and mislead them, all but a few’ (*al-Isra’:* 62). Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رَّبُّكُمۡ أَعۡلَمُ بِكُمۡۖ إِن يَشَأۡ يَرۡحَمۡكُمۡ أَوۡ إِن يَشَأۡ يُعَذِّبۡكُمۡۚ وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَكِيلٗا ﴿٥٤﴾

Your Lord has the most knowledge about all of you: if He pleases He will have mercy on you, and if He pleases He will punish you. [Prophet], We did not send you to take charge of them [54] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 54)

This verse indicates that Allah's Will is unlimited; if He chooses to be merciful towards us, then this is out of His Grace, and if He chooses to punish us, then this is what justice dictates as a recompense for our evil deeds. In fact, if Allah *Glorified is He* judges us according to the dictates of justice, not a single one of us will survive. This is because when anyone of us counts the good and bad deeds he does, he will certainly find himself deserving punishment. For this reason, it is advisable to supplicate Allah saying, 'O Allah, treat us with favour and not with justice, with benevolence not fairness, and after compensating for our deficiencies not with a reckoning’. Allah *Glorified is He* does not prevent His Mercy from disobedient people, nor does He give them respite just to punish them later—according to what they justly deserve. Rather, He keeps them always in a state between fearing His Punishment and hoping for His Forgiveness.

When the early Muslims were exposed to various types of persecution and torture, and had none to protect them or deliver them from this torture, they went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them* and complained to him about their sufferings. Prophet Muhammad studied the circumstances of all the lands in search of an appropriate place that could serve as a refuge for these people who had suffered persecution. He ordered them to migrate to Abyssinia (now known as Ethiopia). Concerning this land, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Indeed, the king who assumes power there is a just ruler under whom no one is oppressed'.(1)

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(1) *Um Salama Allah be pleased with her said, ‘Mecca was a difficult place for us [Muslims] and the Companions of Prophet Muhammad had been inflicted with unspeakable oppression. Prophet Muhammad was under the protection of his uncle and his people; this meant that* =

It was a time in which they could not defend themselves. The weak among them were incapable of confronting the oppression and the strong among them were incapable of protecting the weak. The strong people from among the Muslims used to go to Prophet Muhammad and suggest that they respond to the aggression of the disbelievers by doing this and that, but Prophet Muhammad used to say, 'I have not received any order (to respond to their aggression), I have not received any order…'.

Allah decreed that every believer should undergo sufferings and different kinds of persecution in order to be capable to endure trials and hardships. Indeed, these were the people who later carried the Message that flowed throughout the earth, proclaiming the Message of Allah. Delivering Allah's Message requires resoluteness and strength. As such, the believers had to be tested. This explains why the early period of Islam, during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, was marked by calamities and adversities. It was a period that witnessed, on the one hand, the regular torture and persecution of the believers, and, on the other hand, the incident of *Al-'Isra' wa Al-Mi'raj* (the Night Journey). The underlying wisdom behind all of these occurrences was to test the Muslims and make clear who truly believed in Islam. Having endured all these afflictions and hardships, only the strong believers were the ones who were able to hold on firmly to the Divine Message and convey it to the four corners of the world. This is so that there will be no one among the Muslims who were only interested in seeking some worldly gains. In Islam, the gains are not in this world, but the real gain is Paradise whose width is equivalent to that of the heavens and the earth.

For this reason, in the Second Pledge of Allegiance at *'Aqaba*, they said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Muhammad! Ask for whatever you want on behalf of your Lord and on behalf of yourself. Then, inform us of our reward from Allah and from you if we comply with your

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= *he was not forced to endure any of the attacks that befell his Companions. At that time, Prophet Muhammad said to his Companions, “Indeed, in the land of Ethiopia there is a king under whom no one is oppressed, so travel to his land and reside there until Allah alleviates your burden and grants you a way out from what you are experiencing here”. This is part of a longer Hadith narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/301) and Ibn Hisham in his As-Sirah (Biography of Prophet Muhammad) (1/321).*

orders’. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, 'For my Lord, I ask that you worship Him and associate no partner with him. For my Companions and me, I ask that you host us, support us and ward off from us those things that you have warded off from yourselves’. They said, ‘What do we get if we comply with your orders?’ What did Prophet Muhammad say to them? Did he tell them, ‘You will lead a prosperous and affluent life?’ No, he did not. Rather, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Your reward is Paradise'.(1) They said, ‘Then we shall comply with your request’.

This is the real reward a believer should attempt to attain. Indeed, it is conceivable that one of them might die after making this pledge and before enjoying any welfare due to Islam prevailing and gaining dominance. Clearly, Prophet Muhammad is truthful in what he has promised. As long as the reward is Paradise, there should be strong believers who are firm and steadfast in order to be able to confront hardships, trials, and tribulations.

Accordingly, the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘You Lord is the most knowledgeable about you [and what you deserve]: if He pleases He will have mercy on you’ (*al-Isra’:* 54) is that Allah is the most knowledgeable of you; He may show His Mercy towards you, granting you an avenue to get out of Mecca by giving you a refuge in Abyssinia, or: ‘…if He please He will punish you’ (*al-Isra’:* 54), that is put you into hardships in order to test your faith and make known which believers are worthy of carrying Allah’s Message.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'We did not send you to be a guardian (*Wakil*) over them' (*al-Isra’:* 54). A w*akil* is the person who is entrusted by somebody to perform a specific task. The intended meaning here is: We did not send you for any other purpose besides conveying the Message. After the successful performance of this task, you are not responsible for their faith. Furthermore, you have no power to determine their fate. Definitely, guidance and Divine Facilitation in order to attain faith is in the Hands of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* says this to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘[O Prophet Muhammad], We did not send you to be a guardian over them' (*al-Isra':* 54). This statement is not intended to subjugate or underestimate Prophet Muhammad. On the contrary, this is intended as a mercy to him and a means of comforting him. It is as though Allah is saying to His Prophet, 'O Muhammad, do not burden yourself above your capability'. Allah addresses His Prophet in the same manner in another verse: 'It may be that you torment yourself [O Muhammad] because they will not [accept belief and] become believers' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3). Allah *Glorified is He* does not blame His Messenger, Muhammad. Absolutely not, He is actually consoling him. In fact, anyone who attentively studies the occasions in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was admonished finds that they were, in truth, admonishments that were intended to benefit him *peace and blessings be upon him* out of mercy towards him and compassion with him. However, some people mistakenly argue that Allah *Glorified is He* blamed Prophet Muhammad because he had committed an error.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, (2/450) on the authority of 'Amir Ash-Sh'abi, and it was also narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/120). As-Suyuti stated it in his Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (4/294) quoting it from Ibn Sa'd in At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra.*

A case in point in this regard is mentioned in Allah's saying: 'He [Prophet Muhammad] frowned and turned away because the blind man came to him. But how do you know? Perhaps he will be purified' (*'Abasa:* 1-3). Allah *Glorified is He* criticizes His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* because he neglected the man who came to him to inquire about Islam and burdened himself with arguing with the notables. It was as though Allah *Glorified is He* was compassionately admonishing Prophet Muhammad not to burden himself with such a difficult mission. The admonishment here is a way of protecting Prophet Muhammad and a way of making matters easy for him.

Another example is also stated in Allah's saying: 'O Prophet! Why do you prohibit [for yourself] that which Allah has made lawful for you, seeking to please your wives? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful' (*at-Tahrim:* 1) when Prophet Muhammad prohibited himself from doing allowable things. Prohibition entails that one is denied things. Allah *Glorified is He* is criticizing His Messenger, Muhammad, because he had placed an undue constraint upon himself; he had forbidden for himself what Allah has made lawful for him. This resembles exactly the case when a father scolds his son who stays awake late at night studying until he exhausts himself. In essence, these admonishments are for the benefit of Prophet Muhammad and not to dishonour him. Allah says:

وَرَبُّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِۗ وَلَقَدْ فَضَّلْنَا
بَعْضَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍۖ وَءَاتَيْنَا دَاوُۥدَ زَبُورًا ﴿٥٥﴾

Your Lord knows best about everyone in the heavens and the earth. We gave some prophets more than others: We gave David a book [of Psalms] [55] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 55)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: *'A'alam* (knows best)' which is an intensified verb. This indicates profound knowledge. When it is said that Allah *Glorified is He* 'knows best', then those of lesser stature than Him can legitimately be described as just possessing awareness. As such, we say, 'So-and-so is "knowledgeable", but Allah has full knowledge of everything'. Allah *Glorified is He* does not prevent people from employing their intellects in order to discover any of creation's hidden wonders or secrets. Accordingly, this verse means that Allah's Knowledge is not limited to you Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or even to the affairs of all the Muslims; His Knowledge fully encompasses all that exists in the heavens and on earth. His Knowledge is perfect and absolute; not a single atom eludes Him. It is upon the basis of this knowledge that He has decreed the provisions for His creatures and distributed talents among them; each one is given in accordance with what secures his interests.

Accordingly, when you see someone whom Allah has given in scant measure, know that this person does not deserve anything besides what he has. Moreover, you must realize that the only thing that will make him good is that which Allah has allotted for him. In fact, all people are slaves to Allah and completely dependent upon Him. Allah does not take any one of them as an enemy nor is he related to any of them through lineage. Consequently, all people are perfectly equal in relation to Allah. He gives each one in accordance with his readiness to receive the Divine Grant. This even applies to the disbeliever whose heart flagrantly rejects faith. His heart has become engulfed in his hypocrisy to such an extent that he passionately loves it as his lot. Allah *Glorified is He* does not prevent him from that which he loves for himself; in fact, He increases him in it.

It is on account of Allah's Knowledge of what is in the heavens and the earth that He gives His slaves in accordance with what they deserve—in terms of the affairs in which they have no freewill. Indeed, in relation to these things they are all equal. As for the matters in which they are allowed to exercise a degree of choice, the Creator *Glorified is He* offers people means, materials, faculties, intellects, and power. Accordingly, it is incumbent on every person to make use of these things that have been placed at their disposal in order to elevate their standard of living as much as they are able.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We made some prophets excel others' (*al-Isra':* 55). Who is the One Who made some prophets excel others in this case? Allah *Glorified is He* is the One who endowed some prophets with a higher status than others. We are not allowed to state that any are better except the ones Allah has stated are better. This is because it is Allah who possesses the ability to reward someone according to the higher status he has. On the other hand, we do not have the ability to reward any one according to the high status they have. This explains why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None should say that I am better than Yunus (Jonah), the son of *Mata*'.(1) It is Allah Who grants preference for some over others. It is clearly stated in the Quran that Allah has endowed some prophets with a higher station than others: 'Those messengers—some of them We caused to exceed others. Among them were those to whom Allah spoke, and He raised some of them in degree. And We gave 'Isa (Jesus), the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and We supported him with the Pure Spirit' (*al-Baqara:* 253). This preference is according to Allah's Knowledge. Allah has given *Ulu Al-'Azm* (those of determination from among Allah's Messengers) higher status above others as a result of the hardships and difficulties they underwent in their attempts to call their respective communities to worship the One True God, Allah. Furthermore, they have been elevated on account of the diligence with which they carried Allah's Message and the effort they expended to propagate it. Or perhaps their elevated status is attributed to the long lengths of time they spent among their respective peoples. These are only some of the possible explanations of their elevated status, and Allah alone knows the basis upon which He has favoured them.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2376) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. In his commentary on Sahih Muslim, An-Nawawi said, 'The scholars said that this Hadith of Prophet Muhammad could be interpreted in one of two ways: First, that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him made this statement before he knew that he was better than Yunus (Jonah) peace be upon him. When he learned that, he said, "I am the master of all of the children of Adam". Second, he said this as a warning to the ignorant; dissuading them from imagining an inherent deficiency in the rank of Yunus (Jonah) peace be upon him (15/141).*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We gave Dawud (David) a book [of Psalms]' (*al-Isra':* 55). Why is Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* the only one for whom Allah mentions the book that was revealed to him along with his name? It is thought that Dawud *peace be upon him* was given dominion in addition to the Scripture; this made him not only a prophet but also a king. However, it seems as though Allah *Glorified is He* is indicating that the preference of Dawud *peace be upon him* is not rooted in his having been a king, but rather in his having been a prophet who received scripture.

In the noble Hadith of Prophet Muhammad it is recorded, ‘Indeed, I was given the choice of being a prophet-slave or a prophet-king: I chose to be a prophet-slave’.(1)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلِ ٱدْعُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُم مِّن دُونِهِۦ فَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ
كَشْفَ ٱلضُّرِّ عَنكُمْ وَلَا تَحْوِيلًا ٥٦

Say, ‘Call upon those you claim to be deities beside God:
they have no power to remove or avert any harm
from you’ [56] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 56)

Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Say to those who oppose you regarding the Oneness of Allah, “If you are seized by some type of calamity do not seek refuge in the One in Whom you

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/231) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, who said, ‘The Angel Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him was sitting with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when he looked to the sky and saw an angel descending. To this, Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him said, “Verily, this angel, since he was created, has never descended from heaven before this hour”. When he descended he said, “O Muhammad, Allah Glorified is He has dispatched me to you. Will you like to be a prophet-king or a messenger-slave?” At this point, Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him said, “O Muhammad show humility before your Lord!” Consequently, he responded, “Of course, a messenger-slave”’.*

'disbelieve'; on the contrary, seek refuge in those you claimed were 'sharers' in Allah's Divinity". In reality, they will never listen to you'. This is because the human being, by his very nature, does not deceive himself. If they had believed that those whom they were calling as gods besides Allah could benefit them at all, they will not have called upon Allah in whom they 'disbelieved' and abandoned those in whom they believed. Why is that?

Indeed, the human being does not rebel or transgress until all of his resources are in order. That is to say: all of his resources have been arranged and organized. However, if one of his resources fails, his ability to foment a rebellion is weakened. Inevitably, he will attempt to compensate for that loss. In the meantime, he will not deceive himself by asking for it from him who does not possess it. On the contrary, he will seek the aid of someone he believes to possess that which he needs. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when distress afflicts you in the sea, those whom you call on besides Him [Allah] leave you in the lurch!' (*al-Isra':* 67) He *Glorified is He* also says: 'And when distress afflicts a man he calls upon his Lord, turning to Him frequently…' (*az-Zumar:* 8). Why is this? Without doubt, it is because that which has afflicted him has enfeebled him and broken his arrogance and pride. Before, when the Divine Obligations were made clear to him, he disbelieved, but now—beset with a calamity and constrained by misfortune—he must be frank with himself: self-deception will not avail him.

In this regard, we gave the analogy of the character that rural dwellers of the past used to refer to as a 'barber surgeon'. He was responsible for maintaining public health within a given community. At this time, his role was similar to the role now assumed by the physician. If an actual doctor was appointed to a given community, the 'barber surgeon' used to strive hard to turn the people against him by broadcasting his (the doctor's) lack of knowledge and limited background. His objective was to keep the attention of the people focused squarely on himself; in this way, no one will share his earnings with him. In the passing days, however, the 'barber surgeon' was confronted with a tribulation: indeed, his son had fallen sick. He had no recourse but to carry his son in the secrecy of the night to the doctor. Nonetheless, when his situation became known to the people, he was ashamed before them.

As such, a person does not deceive himself during a time of calamity nor does he tell lies to himself. Say to them, ‘If you are seized by hardships and adversities, seek the aid of those whom you claim exist as gods’. They will never respond to this invitation and they will never call on them from their hearts. Although, if they did call on those deities who they claim are gods, they (those false deities) could never relieve them of their hardship or suffering: ‘…they do not have the power to remove any distress from you’ (*al-Isra’:* 56). The Quranic statement: ‘…nor to transfer it [elsewhere]’ (*al-Isra’:* 56) means that they (those false deities) are incapable of changing your situation from one of hardship to one of benefit, blessing or mercy. The meaning could also be: they are incapable of moving this state of hardship away from you to your enemies. This means that they do not possess the ability to do this or that.

Allah *Glorified is He* instructs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on how to establish proof against them in order to clarify that they are severely mistaken and only deceiving themselves. They oppose their innate senses and instincts. If they are afflicted with a disaster—one that shakes them to their very cores—they do not seek refuge with their ‘gods’. Indeed, they know that those ‘gods’ do not possess the ability to benefit or harm them. They know that those ‘gods’ cannot hear them. And if they were—for the sake of argument—able to hear them, they still will never be able to respond to them. On the Day of Judgment they will disavow their association of other partners along with Allah (*shirk*). In fact, they will seek refuge in Allah; it is He alone who possesses the ability to remove sufferings and adversities from them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says(1):

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(1) *As for the occasion of the revelation of this verse, it is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (3030) in the Book of Quranic Exegesis that Abdullah ibn Masud Allah be pleased with him said, ‘There was a group of human beings who used to worship a group of jinn. However, when the group of the jinn converted to Islam, those jinn worshippers persisted in worshipping them. Hence, the verse was revealed’.*

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَدۡعُونَ يَبۡتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمُ ٱلۡوَسِيلَةَ أَيُّهُمۡ أَقۡرَبُ
وَيَرۡجُونَ رَحۡمَتَهُۥ وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُۥٓۚ إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ كَانَ مَحۡذُورٗا ٥٧

Those [angels] they pray to are themselves seeking a way to their Lord, even those who are closest to Him. They hope for His mercy and fear His punishment. The punishment of your Lord is much to be feared [57] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 57)

These are the ones whom you consider ‘gods’ whom you take as associates in Allah’s Divinity and who you worship with Allah. However, you should know that these (beings) are also Allah’s slaves. They strive to be close to Him and they seek the means by which they might approach Him. This description includes the Messiah (Christ) *peace be upon him* who you take as a partner with Allah—and in exactly the same way, the angels are also Allah’s slaves. The Quran clearly states: ‘Never did the Christ feel too proud to be Allah's slave, nor the angels who are near unto Him’ (*an-Nisa’:* 172). These illustrious personages do not disdain or reject the fact that they are Allah’s slaves. To be sure, they only desire to become close to Him *Glorified is He*. How then can you direct your worship and your devotion towards them and they are themselves slaves?

Allah’s saying: '…seeking the means by which they might approach their Lord' (*al-Isra’:* 57) means that their ardent goal is to foster a close relationship with Allah *Glorified is He* His saying: '…even those who are the closest to Him' indicates that each time one of them becomes closer to Allah he only becomes more desirous of being closer to Allah than any of his counterparts, and therefore he continues to approach Him. Indeed, if those who are closest to Allah desire to be nearer to Him, what is to be said of those who are distant from Allah?

As for Allah’s saying: 'The Punishment of your Lord is truly something to be feared' (*al-Isra’:* 57), it means that it is absolutely necessary that Allah’s punishment be regarded seriously and that one should abstain from all things that lead to it. When punishment is from Allah, no one can dodge it nor is there any place to flee from it. Furthermore, the severity or weakness of a given punishment is directly related to the one who is inflicting it. This means that if the punishment is attributed to Allah, it will undoubtedly entail severe pain. There is no one who can stand it. Allah *Glorified is He* clearly mentions in the Quran: ‘His seizing is most painful, most severe’ (*Hud:* 102).

Allah *Glorified is He* has already clarified the issue of Divine Unity in many verses in the Quran. What is more, He did not request that we attest to the truth of the Divine Unity until after He had attested to it Himself *Glorified is He* and until after the angels and those in possession of sure knowledge had attested to it. Allah says: ‘Allah (Himself) bears witness that there is no god save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (also bear witness)’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). This is a testimony from Allah *Glorified is He* Himself concerning His Own Essence. The testimony of the angels is the testimony due to experiencing and seeing this reality. As for the testimony of those who have sure knowledge, it is a testimony based on deduction. In all, these three very compelling forms of testimonies were stated before we were requested to bear witness and testify to the Divine Unity ourselves.

It is upon the basis of this testimony that Allah *Glorified is He* exercises His Authority and Power in creation. As long as there is no deity besides Him, it is for Him to command anything: ‘Be!’ And (without delay) it is! He says this because he knows that there is no deity besides Him. On the basis of this principle, He issues the decisive judgment concerning all affairs, and He changes things from one state to another. In fact, if these three testimonies are valid and true, the matter is closed. On the other hand, if these testimonies are not true and there is, in fact, another god, where is he? If he is unaware of things, then he is an inactive god. Needless to say, this characteristic is not appropriate for the rank of Godhood. But if he is aware of the situation on earth, why has he not made his right (to be worshipped as a god) known?

As such, this claim of Divine Unity has been preserved for the Lord *Glorified is He* and no one else has ventured to call it his. It must be considered as belonging solely to Allah until someone dares to challenge His position.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “If there were—as some people assert—[other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they will have to strive to find a way to the Owner of the Throne”’ (*al-Isra’:* 42).

That is to say: if there were other gods within the creation, they [these gods] will have sought that god through whom everything was organized well and orderly, talking to him about this ‘divinity’ or trying to get closer to him.

The Lord then goes on to say:

وَإِن مِّن قَرۡيَةٍ إِلَّا نَحۡنُ مُهۡلِكُوهَا قَبۡلَ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ
أَوۡ مُعَذِّبُوهَا عَذَابٗا شَدِيدٗاۚ كَانَ ذَٰلِكَ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ مَسۡطُورٗا ﴿٥٨﴾

There is no community We shall not destroy, or punish severely, before the Day of Resurrection – this is written in the Book [58] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 58)

As soon as you hear ‘…there is not a town but…’ (*al-Isra’:* 58), you can be assured that the style of address being employed here is one that contains a negation and an affirmation. The meaning is: There is no community but Allah *Glorified is He* will destroy or inflict with a dreadful punishment before the Day of Judgment. However, does this judgment apply to all towns? We respond by stating, ‘No, indeed not; for this is an absolute judgment’. In the Quran, absolute judgments are qualified by other Quranic statements. Concerning this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘This is because your Lord will not destroy towns unjustly, while their people were unaware [of the Truth]’ (*al-An‘am:* 131). Allah *Glorified is He* also states: ‘Your Lord will not destroy any town without cause if its people were acting righteously...’ (*Hud:* 117).

These verses intend to clarify the exception to the general principle that was previously mentioned. Moreover, they restrict it to certain limits. In this sense, the meaning becomes: There is no town whose people are not unaware of Allah’s Way and do not advocate good that will be spared from destruction or Allah’s Wrath.

Concerning Allah’s saying: ‘And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement…’ (*al-Isra’:* 58), the words: ‘…We will destroy it…’ (*al-Isra’:* 58) refer to the kind of torture that will exterminate them, leaving none of them alive. The words: ‘…or chastise it…’ (*al-Isra’:* 58) refer to torture without extermination.

Chastisement is the first stage. If it achieves the desired result, namely, that it makes people return to the correct course of action, then all is well and this ends the matter. On the other hand, if, after chastisement, they are not convinced or deterred and they stubbornly persist in their wrong actions, they will meet their doom. This is spelled out clearly within the Statement of the Lord: ‘Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places. Then it became ungrateful for Allah's Blessings, so Allah afflicted it with the garment of famine and fear for what its people had done’ (*an-Nahl:* 112).

In reality, the present contains various illustrations of this issue. It is inevitable that every township that engages in corruption and vice will garner some punishment. The illustrative examples before us are sufficiently clear; there is no need to elaborate—we do not want to ‘scrape the scab off our wounds’.

It is natural that punishment will precede complete destruction. To be sure, punishment represents real sufferings. Moreover, a person is able to feel and sense punishment. As for destruction, it represents the complete annihilation of life. As such, it precludes the possibility of sensing the punishment.

By studying the respective histories of past nations we begin to recognize that there is a long-standing tradition of the unrighteous being destroyed. The respective communities of Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them*, as well as ‘Ad and Thamud were all consumed by the Wrath of Allah, which cannot be averted from the people who disbelieve. However, in each of the aforementioned cases, the wrath that descended upon those peoples was one of total devastation. As a matter of fact, the prophets *peace be upon them*—at that time—were not requested to carry weapons in order to propagate their Messages. Their only responsibility was to convey the Message; the Lord assumed the responsibility of chastising the non-compliant. This has one exception: if the believing followers of a prophet asked for permission from Allah to fight to spread the Word of Allah. This was asked by the followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘[O Prophet Muhammad], consider the leaders of the children of Israel who came after Musa (Moses), when they said to one of their prophets, “Set up a king for us and we shall fight in Allah’s Cause” He said, “Is it not possible, if you were commanded to fight, that you will refuse to fight?" They said, "How could we refuse to fight in Allah's Cause when we and our children have been driven out of our homeland?" Yet when they were commanded to fight, all but a few of them turned away...' (*al-Baqara:* 246). This is how the children of Israel requested to fight and demanded permission to engage in an armed struggle. Nonetheless, their prophet warned them; he was fearful of making them responsible for what they had earnestly requested and then watching them fail to comply with the orders they had been given. As fate had it, this is what actually took place, and there only remained with him a meagre fighting force. What is more is that after only a short while, even that meagre fighting force began to slowly diminish, one after the other. As a matter of fact, their determination, at that moment, was not yet enough to push them to engage in armed struggle for the Cause of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Clearly, the responsibility of the Messenger was to convey the Message. It was the One in the heavens that assumed the responsibility of punishing those who disregarded the Message or disobeyed it with severity that devastated them to such an extent that not a single soul among them was spared.

As for the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* our Lord has mercifully spared us of such a punishment. Allah says: 'But Allah will not send them a punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor will He punish them if they sought forgiveness …' (*al-Anfal:* 33).

This is an example of how Allah *Glorified is He* distinguishably honoured and was especially generous with His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, Allah did not seize his people with a demolishing punishment. But why did He not? If the truth be told, it was because their prophet was the Final Messenger and the Seal of the Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* was about to make them instrumental in the process of carrying the Message of Prophet Muhammad and assisting him in his mission. These people were destined to become key figures in the effort to propagate the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* throughout the vast regions of the earth. This is because the Lord, when He sent His Way to earth, had already foreshadowed the negligence that will characterize the people's treatment of it, as well as their habit of following in the steps of the previous nations. These are two points that hinder people from proceeding in the Path of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[O Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness to this", lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were not aware of this", or lest you say, "It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to Allah, and we are only the descendants who came after them…"' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173).

Clearly, the Lord has outlined for us how the human being will wander blindly and eventually deviate from the way. The underlying cause for this will be either heedlessness or the habit of blindly following evil and unworthy models. The first person to learn from Allah *Glorified is He* was Adam *peace be upon him* and he faithfully discharged his responsibility of conveying the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* to his offspring. Nevertheless, with the passage of time negligence towards some of this Way began to creep in as the result of the love of vain desires and passions that had been made an aspect of the human being's nature. It is in fact these desires that removed the human beings from the Way of their Lord. Given the nature of deviance, if it takes place in one generation, it will only worsen in the following generation. Certainly, the current generation has two factors that make it unable to be upright: its own negligence and the habit of following the example of the previous generation. As such, with the passing of successive generations and the increased heedlessness of the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* that accompanied each generation, it was necessary for the Lord to send someone from among the supporters of the prophets to make people aware of their transgression.

Hence, the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been chosen to be the best of nations that were raised up for the benefit of humanity (as exemplars for people): '[Believers], you are the best community brought forth for people…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110). Why is this the case? Allah says: '…you order what is right, forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110).

The favoured position of this community emanates from the responsibility they bear in terms of carrying the Message. Allah *Glorified is He* has conferred a unique honour upon the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him*: He has given the responsibility of spreading this Message to each individual who believes in the Message, until the Day of Judgment. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed the message among his contemporaries within his community. After that, it was upon the community to convey the Message among the following generations. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stands as a witness over us; and we stand as witnesses over mankind.

Within the noble Hadith of Prophet Muhammad we find, 'May Allah make his face shine the person who hears what I say and conveys it to others exactly as he has heard it (i.e., both the meaning and the words), for perhaps the one to whom the knowledge is conveyed understands it better than the one who heard it in the first place'. (1)

This is how the favour of this community is retained; it is inextricably linked to the faithfulness with which it carries the Message of its prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In the light of the fact that there will be no prophet after him, this is a responsibility they must bear. Highlighting the importance of the role that the Muslim community must play in the conveyance and spread of the Message at every time and place, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned to us, 'Each of you is posted as a guard on the gates of this religion. Beware lest the religion is attacked through the gate where you are posted'. This is the general meaning of what Prophet Muhammad said.

Consequently, every Muslim either represents the religion successfully or misrepresents it. His conduct and behaviour in the community are watched and observed. He is a representative of Islam and one of its ambassadors. His task is to comply with this responsibility and take it into consideration before doing anything. He should fulfil this responsibility in the best way possible in order to become an attractive example of what it means to lead an Islamic way of life and for his face to shine, as the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad mentioned above states, due to teaching this faith to others.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/437), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2657, 2658), Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (232) and Humaydi (1/47) from a Hadith that was narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ad.*

You are guarding one of the gates, and you must assume this responsibility by creating a good impression of the faith and submitting wholeheartedly to the rules of Islam. If you achieve this, you will have become a means of attracting those who are considering the idea of embracing the faith and are viewing the brilliance of Allah’s Way from afar.

Some people find it agreeable to judge Islam on the basis of the misdeeds of its adherents; they give a verdict on Islam that is founded upon the conduct of those who are affiliated with it. This is a mistake. Anyone who wants to get an accurate impression of Islam must take it from the sources of the faith: The Quran and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you, for instance, see someone who is affiliated with Islam who is a thief, do not say, ‘This is Islam!’ This will not be correct at all because Islam has proscribed theft. In fact, it has specified a punishment to be carried out on those who steal. In essence, it is not appropriate for anyone to be regarded as an absolute standard upon which Islam is judged.

This explains why scholars of the highest stature and thinkers who engage in an investigative study of the Islamic faith do not focus their attention on the actions of the Muslims and their present condition. Rather, they derive their conception of Islam from its original sources. Some of them, including the Frenchman René Guenon, have said, ‘All praise be to Allah *Glorified is He* Who guided me to Islam before I came in contact with any Muslim’. In reality, it is lamentable that if he were to consider our current condition, he will have come to a different conclusion.

As such, most of those who look upon Islam with a balanced outlook, while being fair-minded, will be guided to it. Nonetheless, there are those who look upon Islam with a fair and balanced outlook but the intent of believing and finding faith has been removed from their hearts. Even if their intellects are convinced with Islam, the difference that exists between the matters of the intellect and the matters of the heart is enormous.

There is one writer among these non-Muslim researchers of Islam who is responsible for authoring a book about history’s great personages entitled ‘The One Hundred Most Influential Personalities, the Greatest of Them Being Muhammad Ibn 'Abdullah’. In truth, it is not a book that is concerned with faith. It is merely a cursory reading of history, making stops at intermittent points to highlight the people who have made significant impacts on the history of mankind. He found that they were one hundred personalities and concluded that when all things are taken into consideration, the greatest of these personalities was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is even though Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not receive any education at school, nor did he graduate from a notable university or undergo private instruction from a teacher.

Did this author not ask himself, 'How did Muhammad gain this pre-eminence among history's notable figures? Why does he, in fact, deserve to be afforded this pre-eminence?' Certainly, you have mentioned the outstanding talents of each of the personalities along with the sources of these talents; whether a specific method of education, term of study in a certain university, or a period of research, study and learning from knowledgeable instructors. Why, then, did you neglect to mention the sources of Prophet Muhammad's talents? You know that he was an illiterate man that was reared in a community in which illiteracy was widespread; is that not correct? This is an indication that this researcher undertook this study with his head but not with his heart.

Let us return to the issue of chastisement and destruction. Indeed, it has caused disagreements between lawmakers with regards to establishing stoning as the legally required punishment for adultery (sexual intercourse) committed by one who is or has been married and lashing as the punishment for fornication committed by one who has never been married. One group in the debate opined that lashing is established by the Quran. As for stoning, they view it as being established by the habit of Prophet Muhammad. This is why they say, 'Stoning the adulterer is a habit of Prophet Muhammad'. This is a mistaken view; it is far from the truth. To be sure, there is a marked difference between a ruling whose evidence is contained in a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad and a ruling that is itself a habit of Prophet Muhammad. The ruling whose evidence is contained in a Hadith actually carries the status of a legal obligation; however, the source of its being an obligation is taken from a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad. This is the case with the issue we are currently discussing. For an additional example, consider the Sunset Prayer which contains three units of

Prayer; its performance is a legal obligation, but its evidence comes from a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad. As for the ruling that is a *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad, its legal status is fixed because it was a habit of the Prophet which means that the one who performs it will be rewarded, but the one who does not perform it is not punished. This is like the three glorifications of Allah *Glorified is He* that we recite during the bowing posture of the Prayer. This means that stoning the adulterer is a legal obligation, but its evidence is contained in a Hadith. The role of the Hadith, in this case, is to give evidence that something is an obligation, not to lay down something as a non-obligatory habit or *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad.

Consequently, whoever says that stoning as a punitive measure for adulterers is not dealt with explicitly in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* we say to him, ‘Correct, its evidence is in a Hadith, which is—lest we forget—the second most authoritative source within Islamic legislation’. This also needs to be said to those who claim that the Quran is the only source of Islamic legislation. The Quran itself has spoken on this issue: ‘…so accept whatever the Messenger [Muhammad] gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you…’ (*al-Hashr:* 7).

From this, we are able to conclude that the actions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are as authoritative as the Quranic text. The question then becomes, ‘Did they implement the punishment of stoning during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or not?’ In point of fact, they did implement the punishment of stoning during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*(1) If someone wants to claim that this is not a direct textual reference to stoning, we say, 'An action is even more compelling as evidence than a direct textual reference. A text could be interpreted in more than one way, but an action is clear and not amenable to various interpretations'.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (16/1691) from a Hadith that was narrated by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said, ‘A member of the Muslim community approached the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while he was in the mosque. He called out to him and said, “O Messenger of Allah! Verily, I have committed illicit sex”. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him turned aside from him, but he faced him again and said, “O Messenger of Allah! Verily, I have committed illicit sex”. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him disregarded him again and again until this had continued for four times. Once he had confessed four times, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him summoned him and asked, “Are you mentally ill?” He responded, “No”. He then asked, “Are you married?” “Yes”, the man responded. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him finally said, “Take him and stone him”‘.*

Additional evidence of the obligation of stoning is found in Allah's Statement concerning implementing punishments on slave-women: '…then if they are guilty of indecency, they shall suffer half the punishment which is (inflicted) upon free women…' (*an-Nisa':* 25). On the basis of this, they say, 'Stoning—if it were the prescribed punishment for a free married woman—cannot be divided in half. Thus, the prescribed punishment that is being referred to, here, cannot be stoning'. We say to them, 'You did not make any distinction between stoning and other customary types of corporeal punishment. Stoning is a death penalty, whereas a corporeal punishment is the infliction of pain to a living person that is able to sense and feel that pain. The specific type of corporeal punishment being referred to here in this verse is lashing.

Consequently, the Lord's statement: '…then if they are guilty of indecency, they shall suffer half the punishment which is (inflicted) upon free women…' (*an-Nisa':* 25) is, in fact, a reference to lashing, which can be divided in half. Moreover, if this were intended to be a general ruling the verse will have read, 'They shall suffer half which is upon free women'. That is, Allah mentioning: '…the punishment…' (*an-Nisa':* 25) is evidence of the obligatory status of stoning; a death penalty which free and bondwomen are equal in its regard.

In the same manner, we can see how Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* made a distinction between different types of threats, threatening to punish and then threatening to destroy, when he checked the ranks of the birds and noticed that the Hoopoe was absent: '…I will punish him severely, or kill him…' (*an-Naml:* 21).

One might ask, 'Is it inescapable that every township given to wrong-doing and aggression will be punished or destroyed before the Day of Judgment?' Yes, it is inevitable that they will be visited by some measure of punishment or destruction. In fact, if Allah *Glorified is He* delayed all of the punishment that they deserve until the Day of Judgment, oppression will become unmanageably widespread and will nearly consume the whole of creation.

When people notice an oppressor carousing through life and enjoying its pleasures in spite of his wrongdoings, it becomes an enticement for them towards doing wrong. On the other hand, if they see that the oppressor has been completely consumed by the evil outcome of his actions: He has been overcome with calamities; this will restrain them from committing wrongdoings. They will be able to easily conclude that the end result of oppression and wrongdoing is ruinous. The oppressor will not slink away from retribution on earth before being punished in the Hereafter. Nevertheless, if the punishment of an oppressor is delayed until the Hereafter, despair is the only lot of the one who does not believe in the Next Life.

For this reason, when one of the oppressive heads of state in Eastern *Sham* (Mediterranean region) passed away, for whom—despite his oppressive tenure —the people had never witnessed him experience any significant measure of hardship or calamity during the life of this world, one of those present said, ‘There is a realm that transcends this realm. It is a realm in which the performer of righteous deeds is rewarded and in which the wrongdoer is requited. It is impossible for an oppressive wrongdoer to completely escape punishment’.

During the course of my debates with the Communists in Brussels, I said to them, ‘Indeed, you adopted a hard-line stance in dealing with dissenting Capitalists and those who supported feudalism, in 1917 and afterwards’. They responded, ‘Indeed, they deserve even more punishment than that; they were guilty of this and that’. I said, ‘When did they start doing these things?’ ‘They did this for as long as they were alive’, they answered. I re-joined, ‘And if you punish your contemporaries from among them for their wrong actions which they copied from their predecessors, how did you punish their predecessors? What punishment did you give them?’ They replied, ‘Well, we did not see them (we were not alive at their time and so we were not able to punish them)’. At this, I said to them, ‘Then you must believe in the Day of Judgment. It is the time when the previous generation you speak of will be punished. Even if they have escaped punishment in the life of this world, the Hereafter will come and “set the record straight”’. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Another punishment awaits the evildoers, though most of them do not realize it…’ (*at-Tur:* 47).

At this point, I ask that you re-focus your attention on the verse that we are currently interpreting: 'And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement; this is written in the Divine Ordinance' (*al-Isra':* 58).

In seeking its explanation, consult the exegetical work of Nasafi(1). In it you will find many illustrative examples that elucidate the meaning of this verse. He says, 'Such-and-such a town will be beset with such-and-such. Or this or that village will be plagued by one thing or another'. Astonishingly, the reality came to pass in accordance with what he said. Within these discourses he discusses the future of Egypt—to which he dedicated quite a lengthy passage. Actually, I think he predicted what has been taking place in Egypt since the year 1952. An expressive part of what he said reads as such, 'A man from Juhayna will enter Egypt. Woe unto its people, woe unto the people of As-Sham (Eastern Mediterranean region), woe unto the inhabitants of Africa, and woe unto the Saharan desert dwellers. However, he—the man from Juhayna—will not enter *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem)'(2). I strongly recommend that you read this passage of *Nasafi*.

Afterwards, the Lord says: '…this is written in the Divine Ordinance' (*al-Isra':* 58). This expression means: Recorded and transcribed in the Preserved Tablet. The Lord does not say: '…this is written in the Divine Ordinance' (*al-Isra':* 58), but the events unfold and entail something different from what has been written. On the contrary, it is inevitable that the Lord will substantiate these Quranic declarations of truth with realities and events that actually unfold and happen.

Then Allah says(3):

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(1) *Nasafi* was *Aba Barakat 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad An-Nasafi Allah be pleased with them* (d.701 A.H.). His work if Quranic exegesis is entitled: *Madarak At-Tanzil fi Haqa'iq At-Ta'wil.*

(2) This is a direct quote from the exegetical work of *Nasafi* (2/318) in the edition that was published by *Dar Al-Fikr*. This particular passage was narrated by *Muqatil* and is mentioned in the books of *Ad-Dahhak*. Here, *Sheikh Ash-Sh'arawi* has quoted the text verbatim.

(3) *The occasion surrounding the revelation of this verse is related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, who said, 'The people of Mecca asked Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to transform the hill of Safa into gold. They also asked him to shift the mountains and make them verdant and arable. Allah said to him, 'If you like, you may=*

وَمَا مَنَعَنَآ أَن نُّرۡسِلَ بِٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ إِلَّآ أَن كَذَّبَ بِهَا ٱلۡأَوَّلُونَۚ وَءَاتَيۡنَا ثَمُودَ
ٱلنَّاقَةَ مُبۡصِرَةٗ فَظَلَمُواْ بِهَاۚ وَمَا نُرۡسِلُ بِٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ إِلَّا تَخۡوِيفٗا ﴿٥٩﴾

Nothing prevents Us from sending miraculous signs, except the fact that previous peoples denied them. We gave the people of Thamud the she-camel as a clear sign, yet they maltreated it. We send signs only to give warning [59]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 59)

The word '*ayat'* (miraculous signs) is the plural of '*ayah'* ('sign' in this verse); it refers to an amazing occurrence which commands attention and captures one's attention. In terms of these '*ayat'*, they are either manifest in the wonders of creation which make us realise how great the Power of the Great Orchestrator is, some examples of such wonders being mentioned in Allah's saying: 'The night and the day, and the sun and the moon are only a few of His signs…' (*Fussilat:* 37); or the word '*ayat'* can refer to the miraculous signs which indicate the truthfulness of a Messenger in what he conveys from his Lord. Additionally, the word '*aya'* can be used to refer to individual parts (verses) of the Quranic revelation—which have been termed as the Bearer of Heavenly Injunctions.

Essentially, this leaves us with three designations for the word '*ayat'*: The wonders of creation, miraculous signs, and the verses of the Quran. We may ask, which of them is indicated in the verse: 'Nothing has prevented Us from sending miraculous signs (*ayat*) except [Our Knowledge] that previous peoples denied them…' (*al-Isra':* 59)?

The wonders of creation are omnipresent and do not need to be sent. The same can be said of the Quranic revelation. The only remaining possibility is the miraculous signs. However, they too are present; every prophet was given a miracle that coincided with the specific genius of his people. The miracle of

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= *take your time with them and perhaps We will choose certain individuals among them (to have faith), or you may give them what they want. However, if they disbelieve after receiving what they want, they will be destroyed in the same manner that those before them were destroyed'. He replied, 'No, I will choose to take my time with them'. At this, Allah revealed: 'And nothing has prevented us from sending miraculous signs except [Our knowledge] that previous peoples denied them…' (al-Isra': 59).*

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* resembled but was superior to magic, which was a field at which the children of Israel excelled. In the same manner, the miracles of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* were medical in nature; this was something which his people practiced extremely well.

The miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entailed linguistic excellence, eloquence and clarity in verbal expression. Indeed, the Arabs did not have any talent beside this one. The Quran challenged them with something they knew well and in which they excelled. This was because it will be more compelling and commanding evidence for them.

Returning to our initial question, ‘What is the intended meaning of the *ayat* that Allah *Glorified is He* has prevented from them?’ These *ayat* (signs) refer to the other miracles that they were requesting. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They say, “We will not believe you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers gush forth through them; or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face; or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky—even then, we will not believe in your ascent until you send a real book down for us to read…”’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-93).

Anyone who attentively surveys these suggestions put forward by the people of Mecca will find that they are extremely remote from the type of miracles that are primarily required to keep Prophet Muhammad firm, to establish his trustworthiness or to clarify the truthfulness of his Message and his reliability in conveying the Message from Allah *Glorified is He*. These types of miracles have to be ones his nation is able to perform and in which his people shine and have experience. His was a community of the spoken word, eloquence, and communication; did they have experience in causing springs to gush from the earth? Will the sky falling upon them in pieces be suitable evidence for them of the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad being a Messenger? Or is it simply a stubborn argument and a sign of their proud reluctance to accept the Truth? In essence, the people of Mecca sat idly requesting signs and demanding miracles, while in reality the Lord sends down miracles as He chooses. It is not for anyone to suggest to Allah *Glorified is He* what miracle He should send down or to compel Him to do anything. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “If Allah had so willed, I will not have recited it to you, nor will He have made it known to you. I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me. Will you not then understand?”’ (*Yunus:* 16).

The Lord is capable of sending down that which they requested of miraculous signs. To be sure, He is not overcome by anything. Nor is there anything which is too cumbersome or burdensome for Him. The truth is that humankind has a past history of rejecting miraculous signs.

Allah then says: ‘…We gave the people of Thamud the she-camel as a clear, visible sign, yet they maltreated it…’ (*al-Isra’:* 59). The word ‘*mubseratan’* in the phrase: ‘…as a clear, visible sign…’ (*al-Isra’:* 59) implies that the sign of the she-camel was obvious and clear. The people of Thamud requested a specific miracle.(1) Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them and sent down a miracle unto them. They did not just haughtily deny the faith and disbelieve in the miracle they had requested, they did in fact do worse than that: They sinned against the very miracle they had been sent. They gathered around the she-camel, treated it roughly and harshly, and finally hamstrung it. It is as though Allah says, ‘This is the past account of Thamud which prevented Us from responding to the people of Mecca in their request for the miracle they suggested not because We were unable to give them what they had asked for’.

Concerning the she-camel, the Lord says that it was ‘*mubsirah’*: ‘…a clear, visible sign…’ (*al-Isra’:* 59) in order to give some indication as to how clear and convincing it was. This is identical to Allah’s statement: ‘…We have made the sign of the day visible, [a time for] seeing…’ (*al-Isra’:* 12). He uses the word *‘mubsirah’* (lit. ‘seeing’) Is the *aya* (sign) of the day *mubsirah* (‘visible’, lit. ‘seeing’), or does it give one the ability to see during it? In ancient times, people used to think that human being's ability to see was based on rays which emanated from his eyes onto the visible object that he was viewing. This, they believed, was what produced vision. It was thus believed until Ibn Al-Haytham came and established its flaws. He clarified that human beings are able to capture a visual image of something when rays which emanate from the visible object meet the eyes. This is evidenced by the fact that you can see something when it is clearly exposed to light but not when it is shrouded in darkness. This understanding is what enables us to say that it is the sign of the day which is *mubsirah* (visible, [a time for] seeing): in fact, it is its rays that enable vision.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir within his work of Quranic exegesis (2/228) wrote, ‘They asked Saleh (Shelah) to bring them a sign. The suggestion that they posited was that a fattened she-camel be made to emerge from a solid rock. What is more, they even designated a specific rock—which they referred to as ‘Al-Katiba’—in one of the quarters of the desert mounts (as the place where they wanted to see this happen). Furthermore, they wanted the she-camel to emerge unto them bearing a young camel. That is to say: pregnant with her child and exhausted from the pains of pregnancy. In actual fact, what they requested came to them as they had requested it: The rock began to stir and out of the middle of the rock came a she-camel, without blemish and with her young one moving by her side.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…We send signs only to frighten and deter' (*al-Isra':* 59).

This is saying: We send signs (*ayat*) other than miracles for the purpose of frightening and detering the disbelievers and the obstinately rebellious. For example, the people of Mecca persecuted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and openly—even brazenly—planned to carry out his assassination. Allah *Glorified is He* made their efforts of no benefit and they began to realise that if they killed him, his family will rise to avenge his death. It was at this point that they hatched another plot to murder him at night. They decided to take one hardy youth from each tribe and command them all to strike Prophet Muhammad, all at once.

Nevertheless, the Lord made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* aware of their plot and rescued him from their treachery. They also prepared some paranormal measures to get rid of him, but Allah *Glorified is He* was overlooking their scheme. Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of what they had planned for him. In this manner, their brazen attempts at harming him were rendered unsuccessful and their covert schemes at harming him were made useless. In the same way, means of harming him using magic were completely fruitless. Every attempt that they concocted was met with failure. With this, they realised that there was no way they could impede the progress of this mission in any way. They began to realise that the only way to have peace was by having faith, and following the caravan of faith was the most expedient route to peace.

In essence, the Lord has many signs (*ayat*). They come with the purpose of reprimanding those who claim that the faith is not true and of frightening them with what became of their predecessors who also ‘gave the lie’ to the Messengers. These are people whom Allah *Glorified is He* seized with a mighty force. From among the signs (*ayat)* that have come with the expressed purpose of frightening and deterring, we have what has been mentioned in this Statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them, but they wronged themselves’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40).

All of these signs (*ayat)* were sent by Allah *Glorified is He* to the people who rejected faith. Each one was according to what was suitable for them.

Addressing Prophet Muhammad, Allah then says:

وَإِذۡ قُلۡنَا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحَاطَ بِٱلنَّاسِۚ وَمَا جَعَلۡنَا ٱلرُّءۡيَا ٱلَّتِيٓ أَرَيۡنَٰكَ إِلَّا فِتۡنَةٗ لِّلنَّاسِ
وَٱلشَّجَرَةَ ٱلۡمَلۡعُونَةَ فِي ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِۚ وَنُخَوِّفُهُمۡ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمۡ إِلَّا طُغۡيَٰنٗا كَبِيرٗا ﴿٦٠﴾

[Prophet], We have told you that your Lord knows all about human beings. The vision We showed you was only a test for people, as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran. We warn them, but this only increases their insolence [60]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 60)

This is saying, ‘Remember! O Muhammad—so that your Companions can remember with you—when we said to you, “Indeed, your Lord completely encompasses men and women”. Therefore, it is not possible for them to undertake any action or say anything of which Allah *Glorified is He* has no knowledge. To be sure, encompassing something implies a thorough knowledge of all of its various aspects. As long as the affair is characterized as such, your heart, O Muhammad, should be at rest. Be assured that the extent of their harm towards you will be limited to reckless threats and fruitless plans, even if they make use of the paranormal jinn. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses them, and He will render their efforts completely futile and suffocate them within their own plot. For this reason, when the Lord issues the challenge to the disbelievers to bring a verse like the Quran, He challenged the jinn as well. He says: 'Say, "Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other"' (*al-Isra': 88*).

During that time, there was a widely held superstition, among the Arabs, that maintained that everyone who possessed some extraordinary talent was receiving inspiration from a devil. What is more, they even claimed that these devils all resided in a valley called Wadi Abqar (the Valley of Ingenuity) that was located in the Arabian Peninsula. This is the background in which the Quran challenged them to come forward and contest the inimitability of the Quran with the help of the devils inspiring them.

This is the manner in which the Lord consoled His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He completely encompasses all people; He knows their outward actions as well as their inward intentions, what they reveal and what they conceal. Thus, with the consolation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the souls of all the believers also became calm.

This is a manifestation of how Allah takes care of and sustains the entire Universe. It is this sustainability that we refer to when refuting the philosophers; those who aver that the Creator only manifested His Power and Authority in creation on one occasion: when He created the laws that govern creation. 'It is these natural laws that truly govern affairs on earth', this group of philosophers maintain, 'It is they that control the outcome of events'.

Refuting this position is really a simple matter. If it is really the natural laws that control the universe, we should not see any divergence from the course of those laws within creation. This implies that all of creation is run mechanically; hence, there should be absolutely no departure from the established norms. As such, the occurrence of divergences is an indication of the existence of a force that is in control and capable of defying these laws. An example of this is the fire that was ignited to burn the Prophet and friend of Allah *Glorified is He* Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Was rescuing Ibrahim from the fire the main point in the story, the point that aimed to increase Islam (submission to Allah) and make it stronger? No, the goal was not simply to rescue Ibrahim *peace be upon him*. If this was the goal, then Allah *Glorified is He* will not have allowed them to apprehend him in the first place.

Or Allah *Glorified is He* could have sent a rain cloud to douse the flames of the fire—and thus rescue Ibrahim *peace be upon him*. However, the Lord wanted to display an *Aya* (sign) for them which could serve as an indication that the laws that they assumed natural and inalterable can be defied. For this reason, He allowed them to set the fire alight, physically arrest Ibrahim *peace be upon him* and cast him in the fire. They then saw him as he stood in the middle of the fire. Thus, they had no pretext to disclaim the truth of the sign sent by Allah. It was precisely at this point that the Divine Power intervened and divested the fire of its capacity to burn: 'But We said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham)"' (*al-Anbiya': 69*).

This means that the natural laws were not created to function absolutely—without being checked. What happened here did not indicate the unrestricted consistency of the natural laws; quite the reverse, this was an indication of the unrestricted Power of the Creator.

It is as if Allah desires to console His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and raise his spirits by consistently providing him with His Succour and Support; he should not be shaken by the fact that his people have resolved to oppose and persecute him. Allah *Glorified is He* also wants to console the believers and reassure them that they are on the Truth.

As for the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'encompasses all mankind' (*al-Isra': 60*), encompassing necessitates not only knowledge of them, but also power over them. Accordingly, they cannot remove themselves from Allah's Knowledge or His Power. It is important to have knowledge and power. Indeed, you might know something is harmful but be unable to deter it. In essence, knowledge alone is not sufficient. To be sure, it must be accompanied by the power to act and implement any course of action. This means that Allah encompassing all mankind indicates that He possesses knowledge of them and He is capable of implementing anything He wants with regards to them.

The word '*an-nas'* ('all mankind', lit. 'people') is used in many different ways. At times it refers to creation in its entirety; from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the establishment of the Final Hour. This is exemplified in the Statement of Allah: 'Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind, from the harm of the slinking whisperer (of evil), who whispers into the hearts of mankind (*an-nas*), whether they be jinn or people"' (*an-Nas:* 1-6).

At other times, the word '*an-nas'* means some of the creation to the exclusion of others, This is illustrated by the Statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Do they envy [other] people (*an-nas*) for the bounty Allah has granted them?' (*an-Nisa':* 54)

In the verse under discussion, the Arabic word '*an-nas'* refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is a response to what the disbelievers of Mecca were saying: 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man from either of the two cities?'' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He*, says: 'Those who have been warned by other people (*an-nas*), "A host has gathered against you; so beware of them..."' (*Al-'Imran:* 173). Here, we can see again that the word '*an-nas'* refers to some people to the exclusion of others.

In fact, the scholars took time to study the use of the word '*an-nas'* in the verse: 'And [O Prophet] when We said to you that your Lord encompasses all mankind (*an-nas*)' (*al-Isra':* 60) and decided that it really refers to only the disbelievers who had taken a hostile stance in relation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Nevertheless, there is nothing objectionable about interpreting this statement according to the general meaning which is implied from its literal meaning. If interpreted in this way, the verse refers to how Allah encompasses the believers—the foremost of them being Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*—and also how Allah encompasses the disbelievers—the foremost among them being the notables among the disbelievers of Mecca.

For this reason, the all-encompassing knowledge and control being mentioned here is not a single phenomenon: Allah encompasses each of them in a way that is compatible with their standing with Him. If you want to analyse how Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses the believers, and first and foremost Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you will find that it refers to an all-encompassing concern and protection. The objective is to ward off harm from them. On the other hand, if you want to observe how Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses the disbelievers, it refers to an all-encompassing control that restricts them and which they will not be able to circumvent or elude. Each manifestation of Allah's all-encompassing knowledge and control has an appropriate manner in which it is implemented.

The manner Allah *Glorified is He* encompasses the disbelievers is expressed in Allah's statement: 'When you are sailing on ships and rejoicing in the favouring wind, a storm arrives: waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape' (*Yunus:* 22). The connotation here is that they are being closed in, constrained and left unable to find anything to relieve them.

As for the manner Allah encompasses the believers, the foremost among them being Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself, it is typified by Allah's Statement: 'Our word has already been given to Our slaves, the Messengers. It is they who will be helped' (*as-Saffat:* 171-172). Thus, the Lord encompasses the believers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; but this is an all-encompassing care. It is as though He is saying, 'Hasten to your task and carry out your responsibilities. Those plans they have concocted will never harm you'. This explains why, when the believers were experiencing the greatest form of persecution and oppression at the hands of the disbelievers—a time in which the believers were not able to do anything, even defend themselves—the statement of Allah was revealed: 'The hosts will be routed and they will turn and flee' (*al-Qamar:* 45).

'Umar *Allah be pleased with him*—whose opinions were often later supported by the Quran—remarked, 'What hosts are these?' He was truly amazed, 'How can we rout this group of hosts when we can barely defend ourselves(1)?' This was a relief for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a reassurance for the believers. It is as though the verse reads, 'O Muhammad! No matter how much persecution and oppression you experience, Allah will be your aid and support against them'.

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(1) *'Ikrima Allah be pleased with him said, 'When the verse: "The hosts will be routed and they will turn and flee" (al-Qamar: 45), 'Umar Allah be pleased with him remarked, 'What group of hosts are these? What group of hosts will be routed?' Recollecting, 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'On the day of Badr I saw Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him putting on his armour. He was reciting Quran: "The hosts will be routed and they will turn and flee". That day I understood its meaning'. This was cited by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (4/266). Later, its authenticity was attested to by Ibn Abu Hatim.*

This is also the meaning of what Allah says in another verse: 'And the ones who support Our Cause will be the winners' (*as-Saffat:* 173). 'O Muhammad! You should call all of this to mind when you are forced to deal with adversity and tribulation. Your adversaries think that they have surrounded you and that they have power over you. Always bear in mind that Allah encompasses all people; you are in Allah's Favour. No external threat will harm you. At this very moment—although unbeknown to them—they are under a siege that they will never be able to escape'.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'We made the vision (*ru'ya*). We showed you nothing but a test for the people' (*al-Isra':* 60). The word *ru'ya* (vision) is the verbal noun of the verb '*ra'a'* (to see). The word '*ru'yah'* is also a verbal noun for the verb '*ra'a'*. If you intend to refer to a vision that is witnessed during sleep, you say, 'I witnessed a *ru'ya* (vision)'. On the other hand, if you intend to refer to a vision that is witnessed with the physical eye, you say, 'I saw a *ru'yah* ("sight" or "scene")'. The former is exemplified by a statement Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* made in reference to a dream that he witnessed: '…he said, "Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream (*ru'ya*) I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true…"' (*Yusuf:* 100). Notice that in this verse he did not say '*ru'yati'* which implies that it was a sight witnessed with the physical eye. To sum up, the verb is the same, but the verbal nouns used in the varying context differ. As such, the scholars disagree about this '*ru'ya'* that Allah *Glorified is He* has made a trial for men and women.

The majority of the scholars(1) are of the opinion that the mention here refers to the vision that was established at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra':* 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the remote mosque…' (*al-Isra':* 1). This is, of course, a reference to the Night Journey and the Ascension.

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(1) *This was the opinion of Ibn 'Abbas, Abu Malik, Um Hani, Hasan Al-Basri, and Qatada as narrated by As-Suyati; who collected the narrations of their opinion on the matter in Ad-Durr Al-Manthar (5/308-309). Additionally, in his Tafsir (3/49), Ibn Kathir has transmitted the opinion that was favoured by Ibn Jarir about this matter. He said, 'On the strength of the consensus that exists among the people recognized as authorities in the field of Quranic exegesis concerning this issue (the abovementioned conclusion must be regarded as being conclusive)'. That is to say: In relation to the vision and the tree.*

Other scholars(1) view that the *ru'ya* (vision) being mentioned here is a reference to Allah's statement: 'Allah has truly fulfilled His Messenger Muhammad's vision, "Allah willing, you will most certainly enter the Sacred Mosque in safety, heads shaved, hair cut short and without fear! For Allah knew what you did not, and He has granted you a speedy victory"' (*al-Fath:* 27).

This is the occasion on which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was promised—as was conveyed to him in the verse—that they will enter the Inviolable Mosque that year. However, they were prevented from entry at Hudaybiyya. Consequently, a trial of faith ensued among the Muslim community. They were absolutely downhearted; how could Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* make them a promise which failed to come to fruition?

Afterwards, Allah clarified the wisdom of their failure to enter Mecca that year. As he was on his way back to Medina, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'They were the ones who disbelieved and barred you from the Sacred Mosque and prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been, unknown to you, among them believing men and women whom you will have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account—Allah brings whoever He wills into His Mercy. If the [believers] had been clearly separated [from the disbelievers], We will surely have punished those who disbelieved from among them with a painful punishment' (*al-Fath:* 25).

Thus, the Lord prevented them from realizing this vision at the time of Hudaybiyya, for if they had entered Mecca making war and bearing weapons at a time in which there were believing men and women—who were unknown to them—present, they will have caused those men and women harm and will have attacked them during the conflict. To be sure, at that time there was no way of differentiating between a believer and a disbeliever. They could have killed a believer and been forced to live with the resultant shame. If it was possible to distinguish the believer from the disbeliever, they will have entered Mecca regardless of the wishes of its inhabitants.

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(1) *In a separate narration attributed to him concerning the vision, Ibn 'Abbas said, 'The vision being referred to in this verse is the vision Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him witnessed in which he entered Mecca during the year of Hudaybiyya. Eventually, they were turned away (at Mecca) and that created a severe trial for the Muslim faithful. At this point, the verse was revealed. Once they were able to enter Mecca the following year, Allah revealed: "Indeed, Allah has shown the truth in His Messenger's [Muhammad] true vision…" (al-Fath: 27)'. In his Tafsir (5/4011), Al-Qurtubi mentioned that this interpretation is weak. 'Indeed, the chapter was revealed during the Meccan phase (of Prophet Muhammad's mission) and the vision (they are attempting to correlate with it) occurred in the Medinese phase', he commented.*

In the light of what happened, it was natural that people will begin to harbour some doubts concerning what happened at Hudaybiyya. In fact, the trial could be described as a great tremor for the Muslim community. This tremor was felt so deeply that Al-Faruq (‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab) *Allah be pleased with him* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Are we not upon the Truth? Are they not the partisans of falsehood? Are you not the Messenger of Allah?’ Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* responded, ‘Adhere to him [Prophet Muhammad] as, by Allah, he is the Messenger of Allah (1)’.

Um Salamah, the Mother of the Believers *Allah be pleased with her* played a critical role in solving the utter confusion that had ensued in the wake of that fateful event. When the people refused to comply with the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* —they did not leave Hudaybiyya—Prophet Muhammad entered her tent and commented, ‘O Um Salamah, the Muslims have been destroyed. I gave them an order and they did not comply’. Um Salamah counselled him wisely, ‘O Prophet Muhammad, they have been hurt. Indeed they have come out of deep devotion to the Sacred House and have been prevented from entering its precincts after having come so close to it. No doubt, this has left them deeply wounded. Do what you have been commanded by Allah, O Prophet Muhammad! Once they see your steadfastness and determination they will comply with your orders’. The suggestion of Um Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* helped to resolve this issue. (2)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/325); it is from a long Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Al-Masar ibn Makhrama and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam that pertains to the occasion of Hudaybiyya.*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/325) in a very long and detailed Hadith that deals with the occasion of Hudaybiyya on the authority of Al-Masar ibn Makhrama and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam. In the Hadith we find, ‘Indeed, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, “O people, offer your sacrificial animals and shave your heads.” However,=*

Some said, ‘The vision that Allah *Glorified is He* has made a trial for the believers is that which was shown to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before the Campaign of Badr’. This was the occasion on which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘By Allah, it is as though I can see the places where the various persons from the disbelievers will meet their demises’. Prophet Muhammad then pointed to different areas, saying, ‘This is where so-and-so will meet his demise and this is where so-and-so will meet his demise; and as for so-and-so, he will meet his demise here’.(1) Actually, the deaths of the people mentioned by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* happened just as he said they will happen. So, tell me—by Allah—who is able to predict what will happen in battle with that degree of precision. Battles are always defined by constant shifts of attacking, retreating, and formational changes of direction. All of this happened, but Prophet Muhammad was still able to pinpoint where these people will meet their deaths. This is because he is truly the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*!

Nevertheless, the knowledgeable and well-qualified scholars, who are held in respect by the other every-day scholars(2), have said, ‘To be sure, these occurrences; whether referring to what happened in *Hudaybiyya* or what took place in relation to Prophet Muhammad’s vision at Badr,(3) all happened

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= *not one of them stood up to follow his orders. He repeated this command a second time, and again not one man among them stood up. This prompted him to repeat his command a third time, but again no one from among them stood up to comply with his orders. At this, Prophet Muhammad left and entered the tent of Um Salama Allah be pleased with him. Prophet Muhammad said, “Um Salama, what is the matter with these people?” She replied, “O Messenger of Allah, as you can see they have been deeply wounded. Do not talk to any of them; simply go to the place of offering and slaughter your sacrifice, and then shave your head. If you do this, they will copy you.” As a result, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him departed from her tent without speaking to anybody until he reached the place of animal sacrifice where he slaughtered and shaved his head; afterwards, the people stood up and sacrificed their animals and shaved their heads as well. When they were on the way back to Medina from Mecca, about half-way through the route, the chapter of Al-Fath was reavealed’.*

(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1779) and by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/219) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Among these scholars one finds the likes of Al-Qurtubi who mentioned this view in his Tafsir (5/4011) and Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (3/49).*

(3) *The action taken by Prophet Muhammad on the Day of Badr has not been mentioned in connection with the interpretation of this verse. However, some books do mention this=*

during the Medinan phase of Prophet Muhammad's Mission. Yet, the verse under consideration was revealed during the Meccan phase of the mission. In the light of this, we must view the last two positions as being incorrect and view the first as more likely: The vision—mentioned in the verse under discussion—refers to the Night Journey and the Ascension. This is the sounder opinion'.

This will naturally make one enquire, 'Was the Night Journey and the Ascension a dream?' Without doubt, it was a scene that was witnessed with the eyes. But why is the scene that was observed with the physical eye now referred to as a vision that was witnessed while sleeping? How could the Lord give the disbelievers and those of wavering faith an opportunity to say, 'Indeed, the Night Journey and Ascension were visions witnessed in a dream?' In reply, we pose the question, 'Who told you that the word '*ru'ya'* is used to exclusively refer to dreams? If the truth be told, within the language of the Arabs it is used to refer to the vision witnessed during sleep as well as a sight witnessed with the physical eye. This is evidenced by a poem of one of their most outstanding poets, who, upon capturing some valuable game, expressed his feelings in the following in words:

He praised Allah for the vision (al-ru'ya) he saw and, in his heart, joy was felt

And he reassured his soul that earlier he had blamed, charging with guilt

That is to say: He said, '*Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest)' when he saw a valuable game animal approaching him. It is noteworthy that he expressed the occasion of seeing something with the physical eye by using the word '*ru'ya'*.

= *separate opinion which has been refuted and deemed quite weak by the scholars in the field. On the authority of Sahl ibn S'ad, who said, 'This vision refers to the occasion on which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saw Bana Umayya jumping vigorously at his pulpit. Prophet Muhammad became very upset, and he did not laugh again until he died'. Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his Tafsir (5/4011) and also commented on its weakness. Ibn Kathir deemed the veracity of this Hadith to be weak in his Tafsir (3/49). He said, 'Mohammad ibn Al- Hasn ibn Zibala is a transmitter who is discarded due to unreliability, and if all things are taken into consideration, his instructor must also be deemed unreliable'.*

However, the Lord chose to employ the use of the word '*ru'ya'* in order to convey the meaning that this was something wondrous and exceptional. For instance, this is no different from when we say, 'That will only happen in dreams'. Stylistically, this is an example of how the Quran uses the exact and most appropriate forms of the words. The author of the speech before you is the Lord; He deliberately chose the word '*ru'ya'* because it implies that it was a miraculous sign: the Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca to Al-Quds (Jerusalem) in the span of one night. The miraculous aspect of this occasion is not travelling to Al-Quds. To be sure, many of the disbelieving Meccans had already undertaken business and other types of trips to Al-Quds beforehand. The miraculous aspect of this occasion is the amount of time in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* completed the journey; he went and returned in the span of one night. This is proven by the fact that they challenged Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* jeering, 'Describe Al-Quds (Jerusalem) for us!'(1)

If they were in doubt that something like that could ever occur, they will not have asked this question. Therefore, their objection concerned the time it took to complete this journey. A journey—we must keep in mind—that they were accustomed to complete in one month, even when travelling upon their sturdiest camels. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to them, informing them that he had completed the journey in one night. Basically, because the Night Journey is something that took place during a limited amount of time, it is appropriate to call it a '*ru'ya'*. Indeed, dreams are not subject to the constraints of time. Accordingly, things that will normally require large amounts of time can be completed within dreams in a span of hours.

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(1) *This is what actually occurred; in fact, one on them said, 'O Muhammad, no one knows Al-Quds (Jerusalem) better than I do. Therefore tell me, how are its buildings arranged, what is the general lay-out of the city, and how close is it to the mountains?' The narrator said, 'Al-Quds was raised before Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while he was in his seat and was looking upon it like one of us look at his home'. The narrator continued, 'He [Prophet Muhammad] said the buildings are arranged in such-and-such a manner, the general lay out of the city is like this and that, and its closeness to the mountains is approximately such-and-such'. Someone else from among them said, 'You have spoken the truth'. Afterwards, he went to the other disbelievers and said, 'Muhammad has spoken the truth in what he has narrated'. Ibn Kathir mentioned this in his Tafsir (3/13).*

What is more is that through the use of recent technology, scholars who study the issue of human consciousness during sleep have been able to conclude that the activity of the human mind while sleeping does not exceed seven seconds. This figure is being taken out of the total amount of hours that sleep normally lasts.

Yet, if you wanted to narrate what you witnessed during your sleep it takes a considerable amount of time. Where is 'time' within a dream? It does not exist. Indeed, the vehicles of perception that the human being uses to acquire a sense of time are not at work during sleep. Thus, the one who is asleep does not sense time, and when a dream starts, it flashes quickly before him because it, alone, occupies the mind. This explains why someone who walks hurriedly does not sense the passing of time. Just as we say in Egypt, 'So-and-so can understand the affair while it is flying by'. This is an indication of an action being completed rapidly because all of his energies and faculties are focused on the completion of just that one thing.

Another point can be considered: if the Night Journey and the Ascension were dreams, will this create a trial of faith for the people? Imagine if someone said to us, 'Last night, in my sleep, I travelled from Cairo to New York and from there to Hawaii, and finally from Hawaii to Japan'. Will we say that he was a liar?

Basically, Allah's statement that says this '*ru'ya'* (vision) was something that tested the people and tried them, implies that the context of this vision is not one that occurred in a dream, but one that was experienced with the physical eye. It is as though Allah selected this word in order to make the response of the disbelievers a proof of Prophet Muhammad's truthfulness. They said, 'Even travelling upon our best camels, that journey takes a month to complete; and here you are claiming to have completed the same trip in a single night!' If this occurrence had been a dream, they will not have responded in this fashion. But what is the wisdom that underlies testing people and trying them with something like this? The wisdom was to test the people in order to melt what was in their hearts in the crucible of faith. This purification process was done for the good to be separated from the bad; and the believer from the disbeliever. Within our ranks, none besides those whose commitment to the faith was true and whose belief was strong remain. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* does not want to entrust His Way—the Way that will lead to the progress and development of life until the establishment of the Final Hour—to anyone besides people whose commitment to the faith is reliable. This is what qualifies them to carry the Divine Message.

The Night Journey represents the crucible that made the genuineness of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* shine. He, when the disbelievers approached him saying, 'Indeed your companion is now telling us that he travelled to Al-Quds (Jerusalem), was raised up through the heavens and returned to Mecca, all in one night', confidently proclaimed, 'If he said it, it is true'.(1) This was his response; he answered in the most direct manner possible. The only criteria he used for judging the truth or falsity of the claim was assessing whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said it or not. This describes how the dross was cast aside by the incident of the Night Journey and the Ascension. The dross is removed by calamities and tribulations that shake it and cause it to become unsettled; the person that represents dross, within this analogy, is tested and his dishonesty becomes clear by denying and disbelieving.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran…' (*al-Isra':* 60). This means that the cursed tree that has been mentioned in the Quran has also been a means of testing people, although the test of (accepting the validity of) the Night Journey lies in accepting the unusual speed in which it took place. As for the cursed tree, the test of accepting its validity lies in accepting the fact that it grows from the bottom of the Hellfire.

It is well known that trees are plants that cannot survive without water and irrigation. Therefore, how can there be a tree in Hell? This tree represented a test for the faith of people. Thus, when Abu Jahl heard this verse, he attempted to make it a bone of contention; he said to the people(1), 'The Quran which Muhammad recites states that there is a tree in Hell called '*Shajarat Az-zaqqum*'. How can this saying be sensible when fire consumes everything, even stones?' Logically, this objection seems credible. However, a believer does not tackle Allah's verses in terms of logic, as he should take into consideration Allah's Omnipotence. Actually, things do not derive their functions and properties from the elements from which they are formed, but they derive them from the laws that have been established by the One Who has created them. The Creator *the Glorified and Exalted* commands the tree to grow from the bottom of Hell due to His Absolute Power. He also commanded fire to be cool and safe for Ibrahim (Abraham).

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his Tafsir (5/4012). The complete version contains the following: they said to him, 'Do you believe in what he said before hearing it from him yourself?' He responded, 'Where are your minds? I believe him in what he conveys of the Message from Heaven; how could I then disbelieve him in what he conveys concerning Al-Quds? The heavens are much further away than Al-Quds'.*

When Ibn Az-Zab'ari heard Allah's saying: 'Is Paradise a better accommodation or the tree of *Zaqqum*. Indeed, We have made it a torment for the wrongdoers. It is a tree that emerges from the bottom of the Hellfire.' (*as-Saffat:* 62-64) he commented, 'By Allah, the only '*Zaqqum'* we know is the combination of butter and dates, so have some with me.'(2) He ridicules Allah's saying and belies Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*.

On the other hand, the believers are urged by their faith and the truthfulness of the Messenger, who conveyed Allah's sayings, to accept and believe in

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Qatada that he said, 'When Allah mentioned the tree of Zaqqum, the wrongdoers were tried; Abu Jahl said, 'Your companion says that there is a tree in fire although it is well-known that fire consumes trees. The only Zaqqum we know is the combination of dates and butter, so have some 'Zaqqum' with me. Then, when people wondered that there is a tree growing in Hell, Allah sent down the following verse: 'It is a tree issuing from the bottom of the Hellfire.' (as-Saffat: 64) This verse means that the tree is actually nourished by fire because it is created from fire. 'Its emerging fruit as if it was heads of the devils.' (as-Saffat: 65) Its fruits are likened to the heads of devils.*

(2) *Al-Wahidi quoted in his book 'Asbab An-Nuzul' (p.166) that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'When Allah Glorified is He mentioned Az-Zaqqum (the tree of Hell), the members of Quraysh were frightened. Abu Jahl said, "Do you know the Zaqqum that Muhammad scares you with?" They said, "No." He said, "It is porridge mixed with butter. If possible, by Allah we would take of it as much as possible.' Then Allah Glorified is He revealed: '...as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran...' (al-Isra': 60) As-Suyuti stated in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (5/310) attributed this narrated to Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawih and Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Ba'th.*

Allah's sayings. They know that things do not take their only from the elements from which they are created. On the contrary, these attributes are given in by the Will of their Creator. Allah's Absolute Power arranges things and gives them their attributes.

A person may ask: Why does Allah describe this tree as cursed? Why is it cursed although it is one of Allah's miracles and a sign of His Omnipotence? It also indicates that natural laws do not govern the universe, but Allah controls the universe and has the ultimate ability to change the nature of objects. How can it be cursed while it contains the disbeliever's food by which he will be tormented? It is a means of punishment and torment for the enemies of Allah. The intended meaning here is that it is the tree whose eater is cursed, as only the sinners will eat from this tree, as Allah says: 'The tree of *zaqqum* will be the food of the sinner' (*ad-Dukhan:* 43-44). The sinner is undoubtedly cursed. Nevertheless, why does the verse state that the curse is cast on the tree and not the one who eats from it?

It was said that the Arabs understand that anything that involves harm is cursed and distant from Allah's Mercy. When the disbeliever sees this tree, he will curse it, so it is cursed by the one who is forced to eat from its fruits. In addition, the disbeliever will eat from it because he is cursed. Accordingly, it can be said that the tree and the people who will eat from it are cursed. (1)

Among the problematic issues that are raised concerning this verse in the modern era are the statements of the orientalists who want to find fault in the Quran and raise objections concerning its styles, such as Allah's saying about *Az-Zaqqum* tree (tree of hell): 'Its emerging fruit as if it was heads of the devils.' (*as-Saffat:* 65) The reason for their objection is that simile and metaphor are normally employed to express something which is unknown to the speaker by comparing it with something known. In this verse, the thing being likened (tree of *Az-Zaqqum*) is unknown to us, as it is considered unseen, about which we do not know anything. In addition, the thing that is likened to is also unknown to us (heads of devils). How an unknown object is likened to something unknown too? In fact, we have never seen the tree of *Az-Zaqqum* (tree of hell) and do not know its fruits, nor have we ever seen the devil in order to know how its head looks like.

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(1) *This was mentioned by Yahya Zakariyya Al-Ansari in his book entitled, 'Fath Ar-Rahman Bikashf ma Yaltabis fil Quran' p. 238, edition 1985, Al-Sabuny Publishing House.*

The orientalists say that the only reason that the Muslims do not criticise this verse is that they give the Quran a holy and sublime status, so this prevents them from criticising the Quran. If they start thinking of the styles used in the Quran, they will come up with new facts. We refute that opinion, saying that they have learned the Arabic language as a foreign language, so they are not proficient enough in the language to understand the literary style of the Book of Allah. There is great difference between being talented and proficient in the language and learning a language as a foreign language in order to earn one's living.

Talent for language means interaction between the language and one's emotions. Therefore, the person who has this talent understands the intended meaning of a certain expression immediately. As for language learnt as a foreign language -especially at an old age - it merely enables a person to speak proficiently. If they had this talent for Arabic, they would not have even raised this objection. Before the revelation of the Quran, a Bedouin said(1):

He was producing a loud noise like a camel that was strangled with a rope,
He wants to kill me but the man is not murderous,
Can he kill me and a mashrafi (2) sword is always beside me,
It is sharpened like the canines of a ghoul.

Have you ever seen a ghoul? Does it even exist? Nevertheless, the Arab poet likened his sharpened sword to the canines of a ghoul because people imagine a ghoul as having a frightening form. Due to the prevalence of the horrible image of a ghoul, this image makes it permissible to liken things to it.

The same case applies to the image of the devil; although no one has actually seen it, people imagine it a hideous, repulsive, and scary appearance.

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(1) The poet is Imru' Al-Qays ibn Hajar, a well-known poet from the pre-Islamic era.

(2) A Mashrafi sword: The sword is attributed to a town in Yemen named Al-Masharif. [Lisan Al-ʿArab under the (sharaf) entry]

If we assigned to all cartoonists and artists the task of drawing a picture of a devil, all of them will draw pictures that differ from each other, but undoubtedly each of them will have his own ugly and repulsive image of the devil.

If Allah *Glorified is He* likened the fruits of *Az-Zaqqum* tree (tree of Hell) to something known, people would have the same mental image for it. Nonetheless, Allah willed for people to have different horrible images for *Az-Zaqqum* tree (tree of Hell). Accordingly, this particular simile benefits the verse more effectively than any other expression. This ambiguity reveals the intended meaning.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…We warn them, but this only increases their insolence.' (*al-Isra':* 60) This means that Allah warns them that they will subject themselves to the punishment from which those who belied the Messengers suffered. Eventually, the Messengers gained advocacy and the disbelievers were forsaken. When you warn someone of an impending evil, you have done him a real favour. For example, when a father warns his son of negligence and laziness and reminds him that their consequence is potential failure and being scorned by people, he advises him to study his lessons hard.

Accordingly, Allah's saying: '…We warn them…' (*al-Isra':* 60) is considered a bounty from Allah because Allah gives them a horrible image of the consequences so that they do not commit the acts that entail this punishment. We mentioned previously that warnings can be a bounty, as mentioned in Allah's saying in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'A flame of fire and smoke will be sent to you, and you will not defend yourselves. So which of the favours of your Lord would you deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) Mentioning fire and flames in this verse is considered a bounty because it informs people about something that will take place in the future, as a result of the actions that they should be warned against doing. Allah's saying: '…We warn them, but this only increases their insolence' (*al-Isra':* 60) indicates that warning against punishment would increase them in oppression because they understood properly the requirements of faith. If they were unaware of these requirements, they would testify that there is no deity but Allah, and would become believers. However, they understood very well that this testimony of faith means that sovereignty lies in the Hands of Allah, and that Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, is the one that conveys Allah's Law. Therefore, they feared the potential negative consequences of embracing Islam, as they feared for their sovereignty and status in the Arabian Peninsula. They rejected the fact that Islam regards the maters equal to slaves.

The verse means that whenever they were reminded of Allah and warned of punishment, they increased in arrogance and aversion to Allah's religion, which destroyed the transient dominance they enjoyed. Therefore, the Messengers' enemies enjoyed transient dominance, but the Messengers destroyed their dominance and treated all people on equal footing.

This fact is manifested in Islam when Messenger Muhammad arrived in Medina, and its inhabitants were preparing to enthrone 'Abdullah ibn Ubay as their king,(1) but people dispersed and left him and gathered around Messenger Muhammad. Therefore, it is normal that Ibn Ubay felt angry, increasingly resented and antagonised Messenger Muhammad and envied him the love and support he received from people.

Then Allah has revealed that this is the attitude of stubborn people who oppose the Truth and scheme against goodness. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِءَادَمَ فَسَجَدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ
قَالَ ءَأَسْجُدُ لِمَنْ خَلَقْتَ طِينًا ﴿٦١﴾

When We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they all bowed down, but not Iblis. He retorted, 'Why should I bow down to someone You have created out of clay?' [61]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 61)

This means that envy is as old as the creation of man on earth. We should remember what occurred between Adam and Satan, who is cursed by Allah.

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(1) *Al-Bayhaqi stated in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/499) that when the Messenger Muhammad entered Medina, he passed by 'Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul at the end of a path where the latter's home was located. Prophet Muhammad waited for 'Abdullah - who was the master of Al-Khazraj - to invite him into the house. Instead, 'Abdullah said to him, 'Go to those who invited you and they will host you.' When Messenger Muhammad mentioned to a group of Al-Ansar (Medinan supporters) what happened with 'Abdullah ibn Ubay, Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah said, 'O Messenger of Allah, before Allah blessed us with your coming, we wanted to crown 'Abdullah ibn Ubay as our king.'*

Envy has started at the beginning of creation and will continue until the Day of Judgment.

Allah reminds Muhammad and his people of the time when He told the angels to prostrate before Adam. We tackled previously prostration which should only be dedicated to Allah *Glorified is He*. Nonetheless, if the order to prostrate before other than Allah comes from Allah, nobody should object to this order. Allah knows that the angels' prostration before Adam is not shame nor does it undermine their faith or worship of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* because obedience is the essence of worship.

Allah says about the angels who are responsible for arranging and organizing affairs on earth: 'For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11) Allah commanded them to prostrate before Adam because he was about to be Father of humanity. Allah was about to subject the entire creation for Adam, even the angels were about to be placed at his service. Therefore, Allah ordered them to prostrate before Adam out of obedience and submission to His command, not out of submission to Adam.

Allah says: '…but not Iblis...' (*al-Isra':* 61). Some people have concluded that Iblis (Satan) was an angel. We excuse the proponents of this opinion if we tackle this verse without considering the other verses that address this topic. However, if we discuss a general topic like this one, we must consider all the relevant verses so that we can make an accurate picture. The evidence of those who support this opinion is that Allah says: '…they all prostrated, but not Iblis…' (*al-Isra':* 62). The command was issued to the angels, which means he is one of them as they believe. Nonetheless, as Allah *Glorified is He* follows: '…and they prostrated, except for Iblis. He was of the jinn and departed from the command of his Lord.…' (*al-Kahf:* 50) If their evidence is based on the command Allah gives to the angels, we have strong evidence that states that Iblis was of the jinn. Nevertheless, a question may rise: If Iblis was of the jinn, why is he held to account because he did not prostrate?

There is a clear text in the Quran that establishes that Iblis was of the jinn. However, Allah *Glorified is He* held him to account because he did not prostrate to Adam and considered him one of the angels because he obeyed

Allah out of free will whereas the angels obey Allah innately. In this way, the rank of Iblis is more elevated than that of the angels because he has the choice to obey or disobey Allah. He chose to obey Allah although he was able to show disobedience, so he assumed the rank of the angels. Rather, he was actually the master of the angels(1) who boasted that he was chosen to be righteous though he had the ability to disobey Allah. Furthermore, he abided by Allah's instructions.

He had reached the rank and company of the angels. If an order is issued to those of a lower rank, it is expected that those of the higher rank should obey this order. If we consider him as occupying a lower rank than the angels occupy, the order to prostrate which was given to the angels applies to the one of the lower rank. Therefore, he had to prostrate in all cases.

For example - and to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection - if the President enters upon the ministers, they stand out of respect and reverence. If the deputy ministers are also present, they will also stand in order to honour him.

Among the problematic issues relevant to this topic, which have been raised by the orientalists, is the wording of the Quran about Iblis, as it uses 'refused' (*al-Kahf:* 31) 'was arrogant' (*Sad:* 74) 'refused and was arrogant' (*al-Baqara:* 34) 'what prevented you from prostrating to…' (*Sad:* 75) and '…what has kept you from prostrating…' (*al-A'raf:* 12).

We discussed the inability of these people to understand the Arabic styles and expressions because they do not have talent for Arabic. The one who reflects on the expressions used in the Quran will find that they are in harmony with one another.

The word '*aba* which is used in the Arabic text of the verse, implies only refusal, but it does not imply arrogance. However, Allah wants to convey that Iblis refused to prostrate out of arrogance. Thus, the use of different styles in this regard conveys this meaning.

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(1) *Sa'id ibn Al-Musayyib said, 'He was the leader of the angels that belonged to the lowest heaven.' Ibn 'Abbas mentioned, 'Iblis (Satan) was in the company of the noblest and most honourable angels. He was a treasurer of the Garden and he was in charge of the lowest heaven.' Ibn Kathir mentioned this in his Tafsir (3/89)*

Allah's saying: '…what prevented you from prostrating to…' (*Sad:* 75) and '…what has kept you from prostrating…' (*al-A'raf:* 12). The first wording of the Arabic text of the verse is in the affirmative case, while the second is in the negative case. At the first glance, this appears to be a contradiction between the two verses, as some scholars said that the Arabic negative particle 'la' in the second verse as being is not essential. The whole line of argument that maintains that the Quran contains a non-essential word is highly inappropriate. The One Who revealed this Quran is far from using non-essential words. Other people who show some politeness when speaking about the Quran say that the negative particle (*la*) here serves the purpose of connecting the clause, as they find it inappropriate to say that the Quran contains non-essential words. In reality, the negative particle here neither serves the purpose of connecting the clause nor is superfluous. Actually, it adds a new meaning.

Allah's saying: '…what prevented you from prostrating to…' (*Sad:* 75) implies that Iblis was about to prostrate, but something prevented him from doing so. The phrase 'what prevented you from so-and-so' is said when a person is about to do an action but stops.

On the other hand, the verse: '…what has kept you from prostrating…' (*al-A'raf:* 12) means that something convinced Iblis (Satan) to abstain from prostrating. Therefore, the two verses are different in meaning, and both of them are necessary.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Why should I bow down to someone You have created out of clay?' (*al-Isra':* 61) The question here implies objection and refusal. This verse is clarified by other verses, such as Allah's saying: '…He said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay."' (*al-A'raf:* 12) It is implied from the previous verse that Iblis agrees that Allah is the One Who created the whole of him and Adam. He only considers the elements from which each of them was created: Adam was created from clay and Iblis was created from fire. However, why does he consider fire better than clay? Both of these elements were created by Allah and play an important role in life. Could we - for example - say that the eye is better than the ear? This is not possible because each of them has a role that the other cannot do.

We mentioned previously that you sometimes prefer a straight piece of iron or a piece of iron with a hook. In case you need a piece of iron with a hook, warped iron will be more preferable than straight iron. Everything in the universe has been created to fulfil a certain purpose, and will not be good except when it performs its role. Therefore, how did Iblis come up with this idea that fire is superior to soil? The original fuel of fire is wood, which it uses to burn, and wood grows out of clay. Clay was created before fire and is superior to it. Therefore, Iblis's judgement of this situation was mistaken.

Allah's saying: 'You have created out of clay?' (*an-Nahl:* 61) means that Allah created him from clay. In actuality, creation from clay only represents one stage among the various stages of the creation process.

Allah's saying: 'When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul…' (*al-Hijr:* 29) implies that there are many stages of the creation, which contained creation from water, dust and clay. When water is mixed with dust, it forms clay which blackens by the passage of time and its scent changes and becomes dried mud. This dried mud is remarkably similar to the way the people of the rural areas make bricks. During this process, they mix dust with water and straw, and leave the mixture for a period of time until the odour changes. Then, they pour the final product into the mould. When clay is left to dry and harden, it will become argil such as pottery. In this stage, when you knock on it, it makes a remarkable sound.

After all these stages, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration.' (*al-Hijr:* 29) Therefore, there is no ground for raising an objection to the fact that on different occasions the Quran has mentioned the creation of the human being as coming out of various elements: water, dust, clay, and dried mud. All of these elements represent different stages of the creation of one creature.

Then, Allah says:

قَالَ أَرَءَيۡتَكَ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِي كَرَّمۡتَ عَلَيَّ لَئِنۡ أَخَّرۡتَنِ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ
ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ لَأَحۡتَنِكَنَّ ذُرِّيَّتَهُۥٓ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا ﴿٦٢﴾

And [then] said, ‘You see this being You have honoured above me? If You reprieve me until the Day of Resurrection, I will lead all but a few of his descendants by the nose’ [62]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 62)

Iblis (Satan) says: *ara’aytuka* in which the (*hamza*) is used for as an interrogative particle, the letter (*ta*) and (*kaf*) are used to indicate that someone is being addressed. Both of the two letters are used in order to place an emphasis. The word means: ‘You do this’ and also ‘inform me’. In the Quran, seeing something is equal to learning it because knowledge by the eye is certain. Therefore, the most certain knowledge is that which is gained by vision, while knowledge gained by the ears is less certain, as you may hear something which appear to be a lie. This meaning is mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘Have you not known, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) The verb *tara* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is used despite the fact that during the Year of the Elephant Messenger Muhammad was an infant. Therefore, the meaning is: ‘Have you not known?’ Allah did not use the word *ta’lam* and used the word *tara* instead. This part of the verse means that Allah tells Messenger Muhammad that when He informs Messenger Muhammad of something, he should regard this knowledge more affirmed than the knowledge gained by his eyes.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…You see this being You have honoured above me?...’ (*al-Isra’:* 62) This means that Iblis (Satan) asks Allah about the reason that He preferred Adam to him. It seems that giving preference to Adam over Iblis is something that needs to be justified and substantiated. Iblis waits for an answer from his Lord *Glorified is He*. Iblis’s rancour and envy caused him to say: ‘…If You reprieve me until the Day of Resurrection, I will lead all but a few of his descendants by the nose.’ (*al-Isra’:* 62) The animosity and jealousy he harboured for Adam happened in advance, and he did not wait for receiving an answer.

The word *akhkhartani* means reprieving me until the Day of Resurrection. This implies that he knows that any living being, either a human being or jinn, has an appointed term. He asked Allah to reprieve him, an act that implies exaggerated obstinacy. He does not threaten them throughout the span of his life, but he wants to do so until the Day of Judgment. This means that he not only threatens Adam, but also his descendants. Iblis directs his hostility towards Adam, so why does he extend this hostility towards Adam’s descendants? He should have limited his envy and anger to Adam only, and then advised his (Iblis) offspring to carry on the struggle after his demise. This is the rage that filled his heart and completely consumed him.

In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* reprieved him, saying: ‘…you are of those reprieved.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 15) and Satan said, ‘…I will lead all but a few of his descendants by the nose.’ (*al-Isra’:* 62) The Arabic character (*lam)* is used to indicate an oath, as it is used in another verse in which Allah says: ‘…and I will mislead them all.’ (*Sad:* 82) Iblis is bizarre; he swears by Allah while knowing that life span and the appointed time of death are in the Hand of Allah *Glorified is He*; then he asks Him to postpone his appointed time. However, he does not obey Allah’s order to prostrate before Adam.

The Arabic word *(iktinak)* has two meanings; the first connotes complete elimination or removal. For example, people say, ‘The locusts *iktanak* the plant’ which means that they devoured it entirety. The second meaning refers to overwhelming someone to do something. This meaning is derived from the reins that are placed upon a horse’s jaw that help steer the horse in different directions and control it by force.

Therefore, *iktinak* can be conceived of as elimination of or compulsory control over something. Allah’s saying: ‘…all but a few…’ (*al-Isra’:* 62) indicates Iblis’s acquaintance with Allah’s Power. He also knows how to swear an oath by Allah, as he said: ‘By Your Might, I will surely mislead them all.’ (*Sad:* 82) It means: By Might that you exercise over Your creation. Allah says: ‘…let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so…’ (*al-Kahf:* 29) As for the slaves whom Allah has guided, Iblis cannot approach them nor can he exert any influence on them. Iblis remembers Allah’s Power and knows that if Allah wills to keep for Himself a slave who dedicates his worship sincerely to Allah; Iblis will not be able to misguide. He said: ‘Except Your true servants.’ (*Sad:* 83)

Allah’s saying: ‘…all but a few…’ (*al-Isra’:* 62) refers to the believers who have been chosen and guided by Allah, so Iblis (Satan) cannot approach them by any means. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ٱذْهَبْ فَمَن تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزَآؤُكُمْ جَزَآءً مَّوْفُورًا ﴿٦٣﴾

Allah said, ‘Go away! Hell will be your reward, and the reward of any of them who follow you – an ample reward [63] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 63)

Allah’s saying: ‘go away’ indicates that Allah dismisses and banishes him. The second part of the verse reads: ‘…Hell will be your reward, and the reward of any of them who follow you…’ (*al-Isra’:* 63). It means that those who follow Iblis will be rewarded by Hell. We notice that the Allah says: ‘your reward’ and not ‘their reward’ because Iblis is considered one of them, so he will receive the same reward. He is also the one being addressed in this verse. This prevents him from thinking that the recompense that is mentioned in the verse is limited to the disobedient from among the human beings. It also prevents him from claiming that he is simply fulfilling the decree of Allah expressed in His saying: ‘And incite [to senselessness] whoever you can among them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their children and promise them. But Satan does not promise them except delusion.’ (*al-Isra’:* 64) These are not commands that are required to be obeyed, as there is a difference between a command that is required to be obeyed and a command that is not required to be obeyed. An order is given from one in authority to the subordinate, but if the command cannot logically be fulfilled, the intention differs.

For example, when you tell your son to study his lessons and work hard, but he does not show interest, you tell him to play as he wishes. Do you actually mean that you want him to fulfil your command to play? If your son fails testing his exam, will he say that you ordered him to play? This command cannot be taken from the outward appearance, as it is intended as a warning.

Allah’s saying: ‘… an ample reward.’ (*al-Isra’:* 63) means that the reward will be full without any shortage with regard to punishment and those being punished.

Allah *Glorified is He* says addressing Iblis:

وَٱسۡتَفۡزِزۡ مَنِ ٱسۡتَطَعۡتَ مِنۡهُم بِصَوۡتِكَ وَأَجۡلِبۡ عَلَيۡهِم بِخَيۡلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ وَشَارِكۡهُمۡ
فِي ٱلۡأَمۡوَٰلِ وَٱلۡأَوۡلَٰدِ وَعِدۡهُمۡۚ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا ٦٤

Rouse whichever of them you can with your voice, muster
your cavalry and infantry against them, share their wealth
and their children with them, and make promises to them –
Satan promises them nothing but delusion [64]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 64)

Allah says: ‘Rouse whichever of them you can with your voice…’ (*an-Nahl:* 64). Sometimes you tell your son who slackens to rise and to be active. Allah also says: ‘O you who have believed, what is [the matter] with you that, when you are told to go forth in the cause of Allah, you adhere heavily to the earth? …’ (*at-Tawba:* 38) You may tell the person who slackens to rise and move. Allah tells Iblis to rouse whichever of them he can with his voice, and to deceive them with his devilish insinuations, either from among devils or the devilish human beings who assist and support him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…muster your cavalry and infantry against them…’ (*al-Isra’:* 64) (*aglib ‘alayhim)* means mustering and making a loud voice, which is like the voices produced by the commandos during their attack or the karate champions.

These voices are specifically intended to frighten and distract the opponent. Additionally, these screams weaken the opponents’ attention, so he cannot react properly. Therefore, overcoming the opponent becomes easier for him. Allah’s saying: ‘…muster your cavalry and infantry…’ (*al-Isra’:* 64) means to shout a battle cry while riding horses in order to ‘muster’ these people. Sometimes, when the Arabs speak of horses, they mean the cavalry. This is similar to the Hadith: ‘O cavalry of Allah, Mount.’(1) This evokes an image of the knight's cavalry. The word (*rajalik),* which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, is derived from *rajilan* (coming on foot); this word implies continuation of abiding by a certain routine, and also refers to infantrymen.

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(1) *This mentioned by Al-‘Ajluni in Kashf Al-Khafa' (2/531). He said: ‘It was narrated by Abu As-Sheikh in An-Nasikh wal Mansukh on the authority of 'Abd Al-Karim who said:*=

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…share their wealth…' (*al-Isra':* 64). How can he share their wealth? He made the illegal wealth attractive to them by earning their money through illicit means and spending it on prohibited matters. It is supposed that the children have pure lineage. The task of Iblis is to corrupt lineage, make adultery attractive to people so that they beget illegal children. He may also urge them to raise their children as Jews or Christians, or to kill them out of fear of poverty or the like. These are examples of Iblis's sharing in people's children.

Allah's saying: '…and make promises to them…' (*al-Isra'*, 64) means give them false promises, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.' (*al-Isra':* 64)

Allah says: 'Satan promises them nothing but delusion.' (*al-Isra':* 64) Iblis can delude only the negligent and heedless people, and make falsehood attractive to those people. You can never delude a person, so that he regards falsehood as the Truth except when this person is heedless and inattentive. If this person uses his mind and becomes attentive, he will distinguish between the Truth and falsehood.

This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* often addresses us, saying: '…Then will you not reason?' (*al-Qasas:* 60) And: '…Then will you not give thought?' (*al-An'am:* 50) Allah also addresses people, saying: 'Then do they not reflect…' (*an-Nisa':* 82) and '…O you of understanding…' (*at-Talaq:* 10).

= *'Sa'id ibn Jubayr narrated the story of the soldiers to me. He said that some people came to the Messenger Muhammad and said, "We pledge our allegiance to you and the cause of Islam." He continued with the story, mentioning, 'The Prophet commanded to call the people, "O cavalry of Allah, Mount up." They took their mounts immediately, and none from among them tarried behind. Sa'id continued. In the Fath (7/413), Ibn Hajar said:"Ibn 'A'idh narrated from Mursil Qatada: "Messenger Muhammad dispatched someone to call the people, 'O cavalry of Allah, Mount up."*

All these are evidence that proves the importance of the intellect, as Allah encourages us to use it in all of our affairs. Whenever we hear anything, we should think about it. Why does Allah give us this command? Why does Allah consistently urge us to think and reflect on everything? Undoubtedly, the one who urges you to think and reflect on matters is sure that what he offers is good. For example, the honest fabric merchant who sells good fabrics displays his product with confidence, and invites you take a closer look in order to assess its quality. If Allah *Glorified is He* wants to call us to faith without pondering, He will not call us to think and contemplate.

Iblis' falsity promises and deceives you when he is heedless and inattentive. However, if you are attentive to his tricks, he will not approach you. One of the most captivating tricks used by Satan is to make the worldly life attractive to people who are given to heedlessness. He incites them to enjoy their life illegally, and not to pay heed to resurrection, reckoning, or recompense.

These insinuations can only be believed by the person who is inclined toward disobedience. He obeys Iblis and falls prey to his false promise. On the Day of Judgment, Iblis will acquit himself from these imbeciles and say: 'And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I deny your association of me [with Allah] before. Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment…' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

The previous two verses include five orders for Iblis: Go, rouse, muster, share, and make promises. These orders were not issued for Iblis to implement them, but to threaten him and manifest his inability to impede the progress of the call to faith or to prevent people from entering its fold. Allah *Glorified is He* tells Iblis that whatever he does, he will not obstruct the advancement of Allah's religion.

Therefore, Allah says:

إِنَّ عِبَادِى لَيۡسَ لَكَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ سُلۡطَٰنٞۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلٗا ﴿٦٥﴾

But you will have no authority over My [true] servants:
Your Lord can take care of them well enough [65]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 65)

We have already discussed the difference between the words ‘*ibad* and ’*abid* in meaning. The word ’*abid* refers to the slaves who are submissive to the will of the master in matters in which they do not have choice, but rebellious in the matters in which they are given the right to choose. As for the word ’*ibad*, it refers to people who are submissive to the will of their Lord in matters in which they do not have a choice, and in matters in which they do have a choice. They accept to be submissive to Allah in all situations.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about His slaves and those whom He has elected in His saying: ‘The servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace. Those who spend [part of] the night to their Lord prostrating and standing [in prayer]. Those who say, “Our Lord, avert from us the punishment of Hell. Indeed, its punishment is ever adhering.”’ (*an-Nahl:* 63-65) The servants of Allah are His elects and beloved people who prefer to submit to His Will even in matters in which they are allowed to choose. Therefore, they deserve this Divine protection against the plots, insinuations, and tricks of Iblis: ‘But you will have no authority over My [true] servants…’ (*al-Isra’:* 65). We previously discussed the plot of Iblis, which Allah describes in the following verse: ‘…the plot of Satan has ever been weak.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 76) As a matter of fact, Iblis will say on the Day of Judgment before his victims - those whom he misled and deceived - as a pretext: ‘…But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me…’ (*Ibrahim:* 22). This means that he does not have any authority over people by which he forces them to disobey Allah. In addition, he does not have any definitive proof in order to convince them to disobey Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Your Lord can take care of them well enough.’ (*al-Isra’:* 65)

The word *Al-wakil* means the patron and supporter. This word also entails trusting someone to perform all the tasks one needs. If you can trust some people and entrust your interests to them, what will be the case if your patron is Allah *Glorified is He*? Undoubtedly, if Allah is your patron, He will support and suffice you, so you will not need anyone else.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رَّبُّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى يُزۡجِى لَكُمُ ٱلۡفُلۡكَ فِى ٱلۡبَحۡرِ لِتَبۡتَغُواْ
مِن فَضۡلِهِۦٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ بِكُمۡ رَحِيمٗا ﴿٦٦﴾

[People], it is your Lord who makes ships go smoothly for you on the sea so that you can seek His bounty: He is most merciful towards you [66] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 66)

Allah is responsible for creating and sustaining people. He created you from nothing, and sustains the believer and disbeliever. The word *yuzji* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means sending gradually. The word *al-fulk* means ships; Allah says: ‘ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people’ (*al-Baqara:* 164). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind’ (*Yunus:* 22). Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘so that you can seek His bounty.’ (*al-Isra’:* 66) The word *ibtigha’* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means seeking good benefits from the sea, such as food or something else. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear…’ (*an-Nahl:* 14).

The sea is one of the sources of provision and sustenance, and is full of a great treasure of Allah’s bounties. Thus, Allah says: ‘…He is most merciful towards you.’ (*an-Nahl:* 66) Allah’s Mercy represents Allah’s innumerable favours. The One who gives you the land with all its bounties can give you bounties from the sea. The earth upon which we dwell contains dry land and sea. The percentage of the dry land is one fifth of the earth’s surface, and the rest of the area is covered by sea which is full of immense bounty from Allah.

There are many ways, in which a person can move on land from one place to another: he can walk or take any means of transport according to his abilities. Some people may ride mules and others ride. As for the sea, you can transverse it only on a vessel. It is out of Allah's Mercy that He has made ships one of His signs. These ships enable us to move smoothly on the sea, and Allah protects them with His Power from drowning.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) is the first person who built a ship with inspiration from Allah. Ships were unknown before him, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And he constructed the ship, and whenever an assembly of the eminent of his people passed by him, they ridiculed him. He said, "if you ridicule us, then we will ridicule you just as you ridicule."' (*Hud:* 38) People had not known ships before Nuh (Noah) made a primitive one from wooden planks and ropes. If Allah had not guided him to the manner of constructing the ship, he would not have known it. As Allah *Glorified is He* has guided us through one of His Messengers to the construction of the ships, which enable us to benefit from three quarters of the earth, this undoubtedly represents His Mercy and the enhancement of human capabilities.

In addition, Allah has enabled us to further develop and enhance the ship throughout time, a fact that manifests His Mercy. Ships would move along the surface of the water by the wind power using the sail which controls and directs the ship its captain wants Wind was the original way that moves the ships, but progress and scientific development led to the discovery of steam power and electricity. This has enabled the ships to move easily. Moreover, the construction of ships design has developed throughout the ages so that we see huge multi-level ocean liners which actually resemble mountains. This verifies Allah's saying: 'And of His signs are the ships in the sea, like mountains…' (*ash-Shura:* 32). Allah gives us a proof of His Knowledge of what the world will arrive at in terms of progress and development of shipbuilding, as ships now resemble mountains. At the time of the revelation of the Quran, there were not any multi-level ocean liners that fit this description. These ships only began to appear after the discovery of Archimedes' principle which enabled the construction of these ships.

In spite of the evolution of maritime navigation, we must never fail to recognize Allah's Power, which enables these ships to traverse the sea and move on the water's surface calmly and peacefully. The human being must guard himself against being deceived by his scientific and technological attainments. He should not regard himself as ruler of creation, as Allah says: 'If He willed, He could still the wind, and they would remain motionless on its surface....' (*ash-Shura:* 33) This is particularly relevant because wind is the original means of powering ships.

If someone were to state now, 'If the wind stops, we would just use some other form of power, such as steam or electricity.' We respond to them by stating: 'You have taken the word 'wind' as it appears in the verse quite literally—that it only applies to air. Yet, if we observe the word wind and how it is glossed, we find that the word 'wind' is a reference to all forms of power; its meaning is not limited to any one form. Considering this, the meaning of 'He stills the wind,' is understood as: He disables the locomotion of the ships. It makes no difference what type of power it is: wind, steam, electricity, or anything else for that matter. The bottom line is that if Allah wants to, He is capable of rendering any of these forms of locomotion inoperative.

After this the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ ٱلضُّرُّ فِي ٱلْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَن تَدْعُونَ إِلَّآ إِيَّاهُ ۖ فَلَمَّا
نَجَّىٰكُمْ إِلَى ٱلْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ كَفُورًا ﴿٦٧﴾

When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him desert you, but when He brings you back safe to land you turn away: man is ever ungrateful [67] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 67)

The sea, that intimidating expanse that surrounds man on all sides, if he encounters trouble while being at the sea, it is inescapable. In land, means of rescue from (potential harm) are many. On the other hand, in sea, there is no rescue save that which comes from Providence, i.e. from Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein, there comes a storm wind and the waves come upon them from everywhere and they assume that they are surrounded, supplicating Allah, sincere to Him in religion.' (*Yunus:* 22) This is a human description; it even applies to the disbeliever. If he is stranded and without a mean for his rescue, he will seek refuge with Allah, the True Saviour and Deliverer from harm. In many instances, the human being will not simply submit (to what appears to be an impending doom), he will remain clinging to the hope that he will be rescued.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And when adversity touches you at sea, lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him.' This is saying: They are completely imperilled, surrounded by violent winds and billowing waves. In such a circumstance, they are able to sense the imminent danger present in their situation. They realize that the only one who can save them is Allah. As we mentioned before, even ardent disbelievers—when faced with this type of situation—are truthful with themselves. They do not lie to themselves or engage in self-deception. Even if they (the disbelievers) believe in other deities and regularly engage in the worship of idols, when confronted with the like of their present situation they only seek refuge with Allah, and their pleas of desperation are directed solely to Him. They have full knowledge that their gods cannot hear them, and thus are unable to respond to them. In fact, their gods do not possess any power to benefit them or rescue them.

Allah's statement: 'lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him,' indicates that your consideration of those objects that you had erstwhile taken as gods have completely vanished. They have ceased to even enter your thoughts. There is no way that they are now going to say: O Hubal! They will never submit to deceiving themselves in this manner. More succinctly, they are completely unable to hold up the farce (of idolatry) during this frightening moment.

Staring down a tight and compressed situation like the one at hand, they fail to remember these gods; they never even cross their mind. To be sure, if they allowed these gods to so much as cross their mind, it would lessen their singular confidence in Allah—the Only One Who possesses any ability to rescue them. It is He Who can grant the aid and salvation they are seeking.

Previously, we elucidated some of the implications of this issue in the story we narrated about the barber in the countryside. Remember, he was the person responsible for providing cures for the down-to-earth people of the country. Although he claimed to possess considerable degrees of knowledge and experience, when his son became ill, he wasted no time in consulting a physician. To be frank, just because he can deceive the people about the extent of his expertise, it does not mean that he would attempt to deceive himself. In the same manner, a person does not sell himself short. If he is consumed and overwhelmed by danger, he only resorts to Allah; because He is the Only One Who can relieve that which causes anxiety and offer aid to the one who is weighed down by worry. As we mentioned, this is equally applicable to the disbeliever. In fact, it is Allah has ordered the disbelievers to turn to Him and call on Him: 'Then why, when Our punishment came to them, did they not humble themselves?' (*al-An'am:* 43) This means that if they humble themselves and call upon Him, He will hear their pleas and respond to them even though they are disbelievers who arrogantly reject His invitation to faith. No matter what, they are still His servants and the product of His creative act. This is the unlimited mercy of Allah; it even envelops those who do not believe in Him!

This explains why the Lord of Grandeur said in a Qudsi Hadith: 'The earth spoke and said, "Master, permit me to cave in around the progeny of Adam, they have consumed Your blessings but declined to offer You gratitude." Next, the sky spoke and said, "Permit me to fall above the progeny of Adam, they have enjoyed Your blessings but neglected to offer You thanks." After that, the mountains spoke and said, "O Lord! Give me permission to collapse upon the progeny of Adam, they have consumed your blessings but restrict your thanks." Then, the seas spoke. They offered, "O Lord! Will you not allow me to drown the progeny of Adam, they exult in taking from what you have given them, but fail to show gratefulness." Once everyone had finished, Allah *Glorified is He* answered: "Leave what I have created to Me. If you all were responsible for their creation, you would feel inclined toward being merciful with them. They are my servants. If they repent to Me, I will be beloved to them. However, if they fail to repent to Me, I will rectify them."'

The True Lord *Glorified is He* forgave their worship of other gods, their ill will toward prophethood, and their attempt to stand in the way of His Message. He allows them to do this because He is the [True] Lord. As long as

He is Lord, He is Merciful. Therefore they can still humble themselves and call on him. Nevertheless, after He delivers them safely to shore, they rebel against His worship. They denounce the realization they had arrived at and commit what essentially amounts to ingratitude for Allah's blessings. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes His statement by saying: 'and ever is man ungrateful.' The word 'ever' refers to someone who is constantly displaying ingratitude for favours. Ruinous, indeed, is the affair of the one who displays ingratitude for the blessings of the Creator; how can he bring himself to say something like, 'It was nature that dictated that this (good thing or in this case, his rescue) would happen as it did'. This constitutes a straightforward act of ungratefulness for something that was clear; something that he witnessed! He experienced the consternation; he sensed just how in jeopardy his predicament had become! Then, after Allah rescues him, he defies Allah and rebels against Him. Although it is sad, it is an accurate description of human nature.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then moves on to say:

أَفَأَمِنتُمْ أَن يَخْسِفَ بِكُمْ جَانِبَ ٱلْبَرِّ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ
عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا۟ لَكُمْ وَكِيلًا ﴿٦٨﴾

Can you be sure that God will not have you swallowed up into the earth when you are back on land, or that He will not send a sandstorm against you? Then you will find no one to protect you [68] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 68)

We are still discussing those who rebel against Allah after He has rescued them from turbulence on the sea; are they safe from Allah's designs while on land? Are all the things that threaten their existence limited to being at sea? Is Allah *Glorified is He* not capable of putting them in situations that terrify them and present threats to their existence, while they are on land, just as He did, while they were at sea?

Allah *Glorified is He* questions: 'Then do you feel secure that [instead] He will not cause a part of the land?' This is similar to what He said in another place when speaking about the fate that Qarun (Korah) met; He said: 'And thereupon we caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling.' (*al-Qasas:* 81)

You are not removed from this being your state, if Allah chooses it for you. Even though we have taken to the habit of saying ‘land is always safe’, we must recognize that this is only relevant when speaking about how we relate to each other and to existence as human beings. On the other hand, if the command of Allah is issued for a calamity of some sort, nothing can prevent its occurrence.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘or send against you a storm of stones?’ refers to a wind that carries pebbles and debris. The portion of the verse that reads ‘let loose upon you’ means that they are being pelted severely with the pebbles. Pebbles can be a form of punishment that cannot be withstood or endured. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* concluded His statement by saying: ‘Then you would not find for yourselves an advocate.’ This statement indicates that you will find none to help you (withstand the punishment), nor will you find any to defend you (against it). Accordingly, you should not be deceived into believing that dry land represents your guaranteed security and unthreatened safekeeping. By no means, the peril that I (Allah speaking) can bring upon you is present and you are never distanced from it. It makes no difference whatsoever whether you are on land or sea.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَمْ أَمِنتُمْ أَن يُعِيدَكُمْ فِيهِ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ فَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ قَاصِفًا مِّنَ
ٱلرِّيحِ فَيُغْرِقَكُم بِمَا كَفَرْتُمْ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا۟ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا بِهِۦ تَبِيعًا ﴿٦٩﴾

**Or can you be sure that He will not send you back out to sea,
and send a violent storm against you to drown you for being
so ungrateful? You will find no helper against Us there [69]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 69)**

This statement should be understood as such: Even if He has rescued you from the dangers of seafaring that does not necessarily imply that you are safe on land. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* can bring calamity to bear upon you while you are on land. Or for that matter, He can return you to the sea and thus causing you to revisit the fear and consternation that you were removed from the first time. To put it more directly, the verse suggests: Does your being rescued mean that you are now safe?

Turning to Allah’s saying: ‘and send upon you a hurricane of wind,’ we say that a hurricane is a storm which pelts with fury and rage. Additionally, it only occurs on dry land. ‘Drown you for what you denied?’ As for this part of the verse, it reveals: As a result of your ingratitude for the blessings of Allah and your flagrant denial of His (immense) favour, this can become your plight. This was your response, while the only thing required of you was recognition of Allah—as the source of the good fortune you experienced—and an acknowledgement of His favour.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then you would not find for yourselves against Us an avenger.’ The meaning is: If We (Allah) carried out all that we have spoken of in respect to chastising you, you would never find anyone to avenge what happened to you or to take revenge for you. In essence you have no hope; there is none who can help you, nor is there anyone who can defend or protect you. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: I fear not your response to my punishment (whatever that response might be). Indeed, in many instances, human beings refrain from committing certain actions out of fear of a reaction. He sits and thinks a good while; if I punch so and so, eventually, his family will get involved and they might do such and such to me. On the other hand, in respect to the True Lord *Glorified is He* there is no one who can attempt to avenge His punishment or reprisal.

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions:

وَلَقَدۡ كَرَّمۡنَا بَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ وَحَمَلۡنَٰهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡبَرِّ وَٱلۡبَحۡرِ وَرَزَقۡنَٰهُم مِّنَ
ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ وَفَضَّلۡنَٰهُمۡ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٖ مِّمَّنۡ خَلَقۡنَا تَفۡضِيلٗا ٧٠

We have honoured the children of Adam and
carried them by land and sea; We have provided
good sustenance for them and favoured them
specially above many of those We have created [70]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 70)

Is there any ennoblement the children of Adam have been given that is superior to the fact that the base elements that give their lives substance had been provided for them before they were created? To be sure, Allah arranged the created order and created many things especially for their (the children of Adam) use: 'It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth.' As such, all that is in creation was subjected for your use even before you came in to existence. In fact, all of Allah's creatures either serve or are served. As for you—a member of humanity—you are served by every other type of creatures in creation; this even includes the angels. Did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not mention: 'For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11) For the same intent and purpose, He has also mentioned elsewhere: 'And those who arrange [each] matter.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 5) This means that the entire creation revolves around you and is present to serve you. It (the creation) gives unto you unfailingly and without pause even though you are not required to expend any effort at all in many cases. This explains why we say that the only obligations for the thinking man or woman are simply reflection and contemplation; this is all that is needed to arrive at a solution to the impossible riddle that is creation. With this alone, you can discern that there is an Intelligent Creator. It is sufficient for you to observe the signs of Allah: Do they not serve me although I have no power or dominion over them? The sun, moon, stars, soil, air, water, rain, clouds, all of them give me and are extended unto me Yet, I have no power over them. Who has arranged all of this for me? I can see that no person is crazy enough to claim them for himself!

O human, when one of your own, cries out to you, 'I am a Messenger from the Lord; the One responsible for bringing all of this (the created order) into existence', it is your responsibility to lend him an attentive ear and hear him out. Indeed, he is the one capable of removing you from the confusing conundrum that (witnessing) creation has landed you in.

Fittingly, the only obligation of the human being is to use his ability to think and his mind to interact with the elements of creation that have been subjected to his use and placed at his fingertips. These elements do not act according to his order nor do they submit to his power.

The scholars have differed in their attempt to locate the precise areas of human ennoblement. Some of them have concluded that the human being was ennobled through the gift of intellect. Others have averred that human nobility can be traced to the ability to use discernment. ‘The gift of free will’ some have offered as the source of human ennoblement. Some have commented that walking upright as opposed to tilted toward the ground—like an animal—is the principle source of human nobility. Interestingly, some scholars have highlighted the shape of the human hand, in its possessing a shape that gives it the ability to handle things with ease, as a starting place for human ennoblement. Observantly, some have pointed out the fact that a human being eats with his hand as opposed to his mouth—like a beast—as the form of ennoblement. In this way, each has cited an aspect of the human ennoblement. (1)

Within this discourse about the source of human ennoblement, we also have a position we would like the scholars to survey. How can they neglect it when it is none other than: To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the entire creation by the word (Be!) which emanated from Him; the only exception to this was Adam *peace be upon him*. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam with His own hand and breathed His spirit into him. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘What prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My hands?’ (*Sad:* 75) He also said: ‘And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration.’’ (*al-Hijr:* 29) The absolute apex of the favour and nobility that Allah has given the human being rest in Allah’s creating our father Adam *peace be upon him* with His hand. This is proven by the fact that Allah has made it an element of his distinction.

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir (5/4022), Al-Qurtubi mentioned: The correct position—that which is relied upon—offers that the true source of human ennoblement is the intellect: It is the basis upon which all moral responsibility is predicated. With it, Allah is known, His Word comprehended, His Paradise arrived at, and His Messengers believed. In fact, only after it (the intellect) proved itself incapable of guiding the servant to the performance of all that was required of him, the Messengers were dispatched and the Scriptures were revealed.*

يَوۡمَ نَدۡعُواْ كُلَّ أُنَاسِۭ بِإِمَٰمِهِمۡۖ فَمَنۡ أُوتِيَ كِتَٰبَهُۥ بِيَمِينِهِۦ
فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يَقۡرَءُونَ كِتَٰبَهُمۡ وَلَا يُظۡلَمُونَ فَتِيلٗا ٧١

On the Day when We summon each community, along with its leader, those who are given their record in their right hand will read it [with pleasure]. But no one will be wronged in the least [71] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 71)

This is referring to the Day of Judgment. The one who summons someone is, of course, responsible for calling them. The people, in this situation, are being called forth. The call that is issued onto them on this Day will not be according to a given name and surname; rather, He will call each people by its leader, that is to say, their Messengers. So, it will be said, ‘O Nation of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*’, ‘O Nation of Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*’; ‘O Nation of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.’ O Nation of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.’ Afterward, He will separate this initial group of peoples. Each group of people will be called by the name of the person responsible for conveying the message unto them and guiding them. The purpose of this is to encourage people to convey knowledge among them.

Some of them have interpreted the piece of the verse that reads (*imam*) as: their mothers. Within this manner of summoning people by the names of their mothers we find that it is first and foremost an honour for Isa *peace be upon him*. Additionally, it is a means of covering the affair of children that were conceived illegitimately. Indeed, this prevents their affair from being exposed to onlookers during a moment as tense as that one.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then whoever is given his record in his right hand - those will read their records, and injustice will not be done to them, [even] as much as a thread [inside the date seed].’This indicates that the act of receiving the record with the right hand is a fortuitous sign and it establishes the commencement of everlasting peace. Of course, the one who receives the record in his right hand wastes no time at all in reading his record. In fact, after taking it, he proudly proclaims among the people: ‘“Come you all, Read my record!”’ (*al-Haqqa:* 19) Certainly, he is thrilled (with the outcome) of his righteous actions. As such, he loves for people to know what his records consisted of.

Taking a closer look at the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘and injustice will not be done to them, [even] as much as a thread [inside the date seed],’ we find that injustice consists of taking from the good fortune of others that which you do not possess. For example, you have a deficiency in a certain area; despite this, you still desire to be compensated (as though you were not deficient in that area). This is injustice. The question then becomes: In what way is the True Lord *Glorified is He* deficient that He would cause (even with a stretch of the imagination) injustice to the creation? As a description, injustice is only applicable to the actions of created things. If truth be told, in many instances, the human being is discontent with what Allah has apportioned for him. This is what gives rise to the feelings of inferiority and deficiency that cause him to oppress others. As for the True Lord, He is completely independent of His creation. Thus, how can He oppress them? To add to the implausibility of such a conclusion (that Allah could never oppress His creation), we only need to consider the fact that He *Glorified is He* has granted them everything they own.

As for the meaning of the phrase ‘as much as a thread,’ the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses parables within the Quran which reflect an inherent familiarity to the Arab and his environment. One of the things the Arabs are most familiar with is Dates. It is their favourite form of physical nourishment and fodder for their grazing animals. From the Date, the Quran has mentioned: *naqir*, *qatmir*, and *fatil*. These are three things which you find in the pit or kernel of a fruit and the Quran has used them to convey a sense of the minuscule and minute.

The *naqir*(1): The tiny cavernous spot on its pit.

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(1) *The utterance naqir has appeared in the Quran in two places: ‘Or have they a share of dominion? Then [if that were so], they would not give the people [even as much as] naqir [the speck on a date seed].’ (an-Nisa': 53) and ‘And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] naqir [the speck on a date seed].’ (an-Nisa': 124)*

The *qatmir*[1]: The thin transparent pellicle that appears between its pit and its flesh.

The *fatil*: The thin thread-like substance which lines the groove of its pit.

The meaning is that Allah *Glorified is He* would never oppress people. Without doubt, He *Glorified is He* is far removed from oppressing anyone, even in the smallest amount imaginable.

The fate which lies at the other end of the spectrum—the one that does not receive his record in the right hand; but instead receives it in the left hand—is not mentioned in this verse. Nevertheless, a description of this reality has occurred in Allah’s statement: ‘But as for him whose record shall be placed in his left hand, he will exclaim, “Oh, would that I had never been shown my record.”’ (*al-Haqqa:* 25) Within a separate verse, Allah said: ‘But as for him whose record shall be given to him behind his back.’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 10)

Turning to the verse currently under consideration, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said:

وَمَن كَانَ فِي هَٰذِهِۦٓ أَعۡمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ أَعۡمَىٰ وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلٗا ٧٢

Those who were blind in this life will be blind in the Hereafter, and even further off the path [72]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 72)

This is the unfortunate counterpart of the one who receives his record in his right hand. Indeed, he was devoid of all insight in this life; accordingly, he is now deprived of vision in the Hereafter. If this is an accurate description of his state, he can be assured that he belongs to the group of the Left. At times, the verses mention the causes that led to this being his situation and other times they mention the effects of this being his fortune. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: The one who will receive his record in his right hand, read it and proudly tout it among people was not without insight during this life. On the contrary, he was insightful and (spiritually) conscious; he was guided unto the way of Allah, and (upon reaching it) made the wise decision to tread its path. Subsequently, this is the outcome of his choice; this is his reward.

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[1] The utterance *qitmir* occurs in the Quran on one occasion: ‘And those whom you invoke other than Him do not possess [as much as] the membrane of a date seed.’ (*Fatir:* 13)

Conversely, the one who will receive his record in his left hand was completely devoid of insight during this life. There is a sharp contrast between spiritual blindness (being without spiritual insight) and physical blindness. Physical blindness refers to the inability to perceive visible phenomena due to a lack of vision. The disbelievers in this life can perceive the visible objects that exist around them. They can grasp the material realities of life. In terms of their spiritual insight, on the other hand, they have been divested of it; they cannot see good nor can they recognize the path of guidance.

Previously, we asserted that the human being, in order to proceed within life upon a straight course, is in absolute need of vision; this is what enables him to see the material objects that he encounters. Certainly, it is his vision which prevents him from colliding with something stationary—and thereby injuring himself—or running into something fragile—and thereby destroying that thing. As such, vision is a gift from Allah that has been given to the generality of human beings; believers and disbelievers alike. However, alongside the blessing of vision we find another immense blessing. It is the fruit of the Divine, and it is only given to believers. Can we be referring to anything besides spiritual insight; being able to 'see' the values that the human being acquires from the Way of Allah once he submits to it and walks upon the path of guidance it provides.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'will be blind in the Hereafter and more astray in way.' If his blindness in this life was spiritual blindness, his blindness in the Hereafter will be physical. To be sure, spiritual insight is only required in this life; it is with it that the good is distinguished from the bad. Furthermore, it is upon it (spiritual insight) that all righteous action is predicated. Yet, within the Hereafter there is no domain of righteous action. In view of that, we can conclude that the blindness of the Hereafter is physical blindness. Just as Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned in different verses: 'whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter]. And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of

Resurrection blind.' (*Ta Ha:* 123-124) In another place, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned about them: 'We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection, [they will lie] prone upon their faces, blind, dumb and deaf' (*al-Isra':* 97).

Despite this, someone might be led to comment: But there are other verses that seem to suggest that they will be able to use their vision in the Hereafter, such as: 'until the time when they behold that [doom] of which they were forewarned.' (*Maryam:* 75)

In this respect, you can also cite: 'And the criminals will see the Fire and will be certain that they are to fall therein.' (*al-Kahf:* 53) In order to join between these different sets of verses and observe the conformity that exists among them, we offer the following: In terms of physical vision on the Day of Judgment, the disbelievers will experience two distinct phases. The first is rising from the grave and being driven to the Place of Reckoning. During this phase they will be blind, deaf, and dumb. This will intensify their confusion and increase their fright. Indeed, they will be consumed in commotion of truly epic proportions, but they will not have a clue as to what is happening or where they are being carried. Imagine, all this will be taking place and they will not be able to hear a word from anyone. This is the extent to which they are in alarm and bewilderment; yet, they know nothing. This is the phase of their blindness, deafness, and dumbness.

As for the second phase, it finds them with vision. This phase will begin when the True Lord *Glorified is He* manifests Himself to the people of the Place of Reckoning and removes the veil of His Glory. At this point, the disbelievers will become as though their vision has not only returned, but is now much sharper than before. Ironically, the thing they will see will be their place in the fire.

Here, we should consider the relation between 'blind' and 'and more astray from the path.' The blindness in the Hereafter is worse than blindness in this life. As we mentioned, blindness in the Hereafter has a far more profound impact on leading one astray.

As for the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'and more astray from the path,' it can be taken for granted that he had gone astray in this life. However, how can he go farther astray in the Hereafter?

Some have mentioned in this regard: Indeed, during his misguidance in this life, the possibility that he would return to the Way—the Straight Path—and end his period of deviance was always present. On the other hand, in the Hereafter there is no possibility of self-correction; his state of being misguided is conclusive. The time of choice (the choice to follow the Path or go astray) has effectively come to a conclusion. Therefore, he is farther astray and more misguided in the Hereafter than he was during this life.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

وَإِن كَادُوا۟ لَيَفْتِنُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ لِتَفْتَرِىَ
عَلَيْنَا غَيْرَهُۥ ۖ وَإِذًا لَّٱتَّخَذُوكَ خَلِيلًا ﴿٧٣﴾

[Prophet], the disbelievers tried to tempt you away from what We revealed to you, so that you would invent some other revelation and attribute it to Us and then they would have taken you as a friend [73] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 73)

We are being introduced to yet another of the despicable characteristics the non-believers displayed when dealing with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They were serious in their attempts to dissuade him from proclaiming that with which Allah dispatched him. On occasion, they would say, 'Leave us to our gods, we will indulge them for a year and reap the material benefits their shrines bring us. We also desire that you (Muhammad) make our territory (*Thaqif*) a sacred precinct in the same way that you have declared Mecca a sacred precinct.' On a different occasion, they offered, 'You will not receive a stone and they will prevent its being given until their gods are appeased.'

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(1) *Addressing the cause of the following verse, Ibn 'Abbas mentioned: It was revealed concerning the Thaqif delegation. They approached the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'It would please us if you allowed us to pay homage to our gods for a year. And we would like you to make our valleys sacred precincts just as you have made Mecca a sacred precinct. This means that sacrosanct status should be extended to their trees, birds, and beast (like those of Mecca).' The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him rejected this offer; in fact, he did not even respond to them. At this, Allah revealed this verse. Sa'id ibn Jubayr said, 'The idolaters said to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him "We will not desist (from persecuting you) until you 'embrace' our gods, even if it is only with the tips of your fingers."' The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'There would be no transgression on my part if I did; certainly, Allah knows that I' am devoted to Him (alone).' This is the point at which Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse.*

The meaning of (*Kadu*, endeavour to) is that they came close to. This is not an indication that they almost succeeded at performing the action. By no means, this is simply an indication that they began to plan its execution. In the end, however, it did not happen. The meaning then becomes: Indeed, they were coming to the point where they would try to tempt you from what was revealed to you, but it did not happen. Their attempt (even as they understood it) was a long shot. It was based on an effort to create a trial for you in your faith. They made hapless propositions such as: 'We will worship your Allah for a year and in exchange, you will worship our gods for a year.'(1)

As for the meaning of 'tempt you away', it refers to their attempt to shift you (Muhammad) or turn you away from what Allah has revealed to you. Nonetheless, the question is: Why? It is 'in order to [make] you invent about Us something else.' This is the same reality the Quran recounts from them in a different verse: 'Bring us a Quran other than this or change it.' (*Yunus:* 15) The response of the True Lord *Glorified is He* was as follows: 'Say, [O Muhammad], "It is not for me to change it on my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. Indeed, I fear, if I should disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous Day."' (*Yunus:* 15) Allah *Glorified is He* also said: 'Say, "If Allah had willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you, for I had remained among you a lifetime before it. Then will you not reason?"' (*Yunus:* 16)

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(1) *Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim at-Tabarani narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with them who said: 'Indeed, Quraysh called upon the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him with the intention of giving him money. They offered him enough money to make him the wealthiest man in Mecca. They even offered to marry him off to whomever he wanted from among their women. They said to him, "This is for you Muhammad; just desist from cursing our gods and refrain from speaking ill of them. However, if you do not want to abide by those conditions, we have another offer for you; one we think you will find agreeable. The Prophet asked, "And what is that?" They responded, "Worship our gods for a year and in exchange, we will worship your Allah for a year." At this, the revelation descended; it contained Allah's words: "Say, "O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship." (al-Kafirun: 1-2)' This was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-manthur (8/654).*

Within the stance that is being articulated in this verse, we notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is removing burden from His Messenger. He shifts the affair from the domain of the Messenger to His domain. This is done so that animosity and tension do not arise between Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people. The source of this affair is not Muhammad; its source is none other than Allah Himself. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: ‘We know that you, [O Muhammad], are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33) ‘So, there is no reason to feel sad (O Muhammad)! You are regarded as a trustworthy person among them. Nevertheless, this affair is Mine; it is with Me!’ This is the manner in which the True Lord *Glorified is He* removed the burdens off His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. He left the people with no room to direct their hatred toward the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: ‘and then they would have taken you as a friend.’ The friend is a companion with whom you share great love and affection. This is so to such an extent that it is almost as if each one of you is completely absorbed and immersed in the other. This statement of Allah is an example of this: ‘And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 125)

The meaning of the verse under consideration then becomes: If you renounce the Way that has come to you from Allah, you will have become beloved to them, in the same way that you were beloved to them before. If truth be told, they used to feel great affection toward you. Indeed, they were fond of saying ‘The Truthful and Trustworthy’ when addressing you. As such, the only thing that has pushed them to assume this stance of hostility toward you is the Way of Allah that you advocate. If you denounce it or at least water it down, they will come to regard you as one of their beloved again. Despite this, do not set your sights on becoming beloved to them; on the contrary, set your sights on being loved by your Lord. Indeed, it is He that sent you—as a Messenger.

Addressing His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوۡلَآ أَن ثَبَّتۡنَٰكَ لَقَدۡ كِدتَّ تَرۡكَنُ إِلَيۡهِمۡ شَيۡـٔٗا قَلِيلًا ٧٤

If We had not made you stand firm, you would almost have
inclined a little towards them [74] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 74)

The one who intently ponders in this verse finds that it contains many safeguards for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Upon a closer look, we recognize that the verse did not say, ‘If it was not for Our support in establishing you (upon the truth), you would have inclined toward them.’ On the contrary; ‘you would have inched toward inclining to them.’ This means that even his (The Messenger of Allah) inching toward inclining to them was prevented from occurring. As for actual inclination, such a thing is unfathomable and unimaginable in respect to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. To put it more frankly, it could never happen. Yet, in spite of that, Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed understanding with His words: ‘a little.’ What is intended here is a ‘little inclination.’

In fact, this reveals that the nature of Allah’s Messenger—even without revelation from Allah—is well balanced and instinctive. If we were to imagine a scenario in which he was not supported by Allah (upon the truth), what would be able to expect from the Messenger of Allah? The only thing that would have happened is that he would come close to inclining to them slightly. Earlier, we said that coming close to something means that one begins to consider (the implications of a particular action). However, in the end, it does not take place. All of these occurrences paint a very distinct portrait of the Messenger of Allah. He has a personality and feelings but can act independent of them when the truth demands.

In terms of the meaning of ‘strengthened you,’ it means to make a person or thing unyielding and secure. The word ‘inclined’ as it is used here is derived from the inclination that a person displays toward something which might provide him with security and protection. Indeed, people construct walls in order to protect their valuables. Consider this: If a person wants to seek protection by means of a wall, he props his back up against it; in this he has succeeded in protecting his back. Now that his back is secure, nothing can approach him from behind; nonetheless, if he wants to protect all four sides, he needs to retreat to a corner—recline, in other words. Once inside the (tight space of a) corner, he can lean against it and feel secure concerning that which is in front of him; the wall to the right is protecting one of his flanks and the wall to the left is protecting the other.

Within the verse we are currently discussing, the True Lord *Glorified is He* desired to draw out the resentment the enemies of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* harboured for him in their hearts. To be sure, He *peace and blessings be upon him* was eager to see his people guided and united. As a result, he would bring a tremendous burden upon himself and assume more responsibility for the actualization of this goal than he could rightfully claim. This is what informed his incident of overlooking 'Abdullah ibn Um Maktum *may Allah be pleased with him* who had come to him enquiring about Islam: He only overlooked him because he was trying to communicate with the notables among the Quraysh. At this, his Lord *Glorified is He* informed him of the misstep he was making in assuming too much responsibility(1) (for the guidance of his people).

In the present verse, it is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying, ‘People! If, indeed, Muhammad fails to comply with what you want, in terms of abandoning the revelation that was sent to him by his Lord, pardon him. In truth, his firmness and unwillingness to yield are from Me. Muhammad is not displaying disregard for you when he refuses to comply with your wishes.’ For example, this would be very similar to if you had a servant who committed some type of error; you want to hold him responsible for his mistake but then you recall, ‘Wait a minute; I am the one who charged him with the responsibility and commanded him to do (whatever action). In essence, this is really my issue; the servant should accrue no blame at all for what he committed.’

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Allah Glorified is He said to him concerning this: ‘The Prophet frowned and turned away. Because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting]. But what would make you perceive, [O Muhammad], that perhaps he might be purified. Or be reminded and the remembrance would benefit him? As for he who thinks himself without need. To him you give attention. And not upon you [is any blame] if he will not be purified. But as for he who came to you striving [for knowledge], while he fears [Allah]; From him you are distracted.’ ('Abasa: 1-10)*

إِذًا لَّأَذَقْنَٰكَ ضِعْفَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ وَضِعْفَ ٱلْمَمَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا نَصِيرًا (٧٥)

In that case, We would have made you taste a double punishment in this life, and a double punishment after death and then you would have found no one to help you against Us [75] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 75)

If you would have inched toward inclining to them even slightly, Allah would have doubled your punishment in this life as well as in that after death.’ With this warning, the True Lord *Glorified is He* effectively removed the resentment for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that had taken root in the hearts of his people. Instead, He directed it to Himself *Glorified is He*.

As for the meaning of ‘double [punishment in] life and double [after] death,’ it is issuing an amount that would normally be equivalent to that spread over two occasions on a single occasion. Returning to the specific context of the verse, this (doubling) would have to be taken to imply that He (The Prophet) would be made to experience nothing but punishment in this life. In actual effect, this is asserting: ‘I would have punished you twice the usual amount within this life and twice the usual amount after death.’ Nevertheless, this begs the question: Why would the punishment have been doubled in respect to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? It is said that the underlying reason for this (warning of additional punishment) is the Prophet’s being the greatest example (of proper conduct) and the model of moral excellence for humanity. In light of this elevated position, it is totally impossible that the like of this action could have been committed by him. In a few words, we can confidently say that it is inconceivable (that anything like that could have been done by Allah’s Messenger). However, if something like this was even fathomable, it would have led to a double punishment on his part.

This verse is similar to that which Allah *Glorified is He* directed to the Prophet’s wives when He said: ‘O wives of the Prophet, whoever of you should commit a clear immorality - for her the punishment would be doubled two fold, and ever is that, for Allah, easy.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 30) This warning was issued on account of their being members of the Household of Prophethood and the Mothers of the Believers. Indeed, they too are an example for Muslim women. We notice that every promotion in rank or position within the domain of calling to Allah is accompanied by a greater responsibility to keep oneself clear of indiscretions. To be sure, in this position his behaviour will be taken as an example; should he display misguidance, there is no way that the effect of that misguidance will be limited to himself. Quite the reverse, others will follow his lead and therefore and become misguided. This is what accounts for Allah’s mentioning more rigid (albeit hypothetical) compounded punishments for the Prophet and his wives.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then you would not find for yourself against Us a helper.’ That is to say, ‘You would not have found anyone to defend you. Nor would you have found anyone to aid you. Indeed, your security and welfare can only be assured by Me. As such, how could anyone besides Me help you?’

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

وَإِن كَادُوا۟ لَيَسْتَفِزُّونَكَ مِنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ لِيُخْرِجُوكَ مِنْهَا ۖ
وَإِذًا لَّا يَلْبَثُونَ خِلَـٰفَكَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٧٦﴾

They planned to scare you off the land, but they would not have lasted for more than a little while after you [76]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 76)

Again, using ‘about to’ means that they came close to performing the action. It is understood that they were not bold enough to go through with it or they were not able to. So, this is simply expressing the idea of coming close to performing a given action. They will try to exile you; yet, you will not leave except when My will dictates.’

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(1) *As for the occurrences that led to the revelation of this verse, Mujahid and Qatada mentioned, ‘This was revealed in respect to the people of Mecca who had begun considering exiling the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. If they had exiled him, they would have only been allowed to stay comfortably upon the land for a short amount of time. However, in the end, Allah ordered him to migrate, and he left voluntarily.’ In his Tafsir (5/4030) Al-Qurtubi mentioned: ‘This is the most correct position because this chapter was revealed in the Meccan phase of the Prophetic Mission. That which precedes it addresses the people of Mecca and there is not a single mention of the Jewish community.’*

Allah’s statement: ‘drive you from the land to evict you therefrom,’ means that they will attempt to drive you to leave Mecca by displaying ill will toward you and abusing you. The disbelievers of Mecca knew that the Prophet’s departure would mean that they could rest. At the very least, his absence would mean that he could not continue to be an inspiration to the slaves and downtrodden among their people. Indeed, it was they who loved him and were positively predisposed to accepting the religion he was promoting.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions: ‘And then [when they do], they will not remain [there] after you, except for a little.” This is saying: If they exile you from Mecca, they will only remain in it after your departure for a short period of time. In fact, this is what happened when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* finally did leave Mecca. In the year that the campaign of *Badr* (which occurred just two years after the Prophet’s departure) was waged, seventy of the notables of the Quraysh were killed and seventy others were taken captive. This means that after the departure of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Mecca, they were not allowed to live comfortably within its confines nor enjoy the unhindered dominance that they were seeking through driving him out.

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* continues:

سُنَّةَ مَن قَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا قَبۡلَكَ مِن رُّسُلِنَاۖ وَلَا تَجِدُ لِسُنَّتِنَا تَحۡوِيلًا ٧٧

Such was Our way with the messengers We sent before you, and you will find no change in Our ways [77]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 77)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is making it clear that which took place was one of His many Ways that He ordains in dealing with the Messengers. This is similar to His statement: ‘And Our word has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers. [That] indeed, they would be those given victory, And [that] indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) It was their (the disbelievers of Mecca) duty to find some sense of moral admonition in what occurred with the Messengers of the past. In this, we are referring to how their enemies and detractors were confounded by the wrath of Allah.

Indeed, Allah sent the Messengers, and although they were declared liars, aggressed against, and persecuted, they were, nonetheless, granted victory by Allah and made triumphant in the end.

As for the ‘established way’, it refers to a habitual practice which is not abandoned nor altered. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* follows the mention of His Way by stating: ‘and you will not find in Our way any alteration.’ Undeniably, the only way that a particular way (of doing something) is changed or altered is by someone powerful enough to challenge the established way by initiating his new way of doing things. If a way is attributed to Allah, it goes without saying that it is rooted in sufficient power. In fact, it is rooted in the strongest power; indeed, it is only Allah *Glorified is He* who is capable of this alteration. There is absolutely no one who can change the Ways of Allah. When Allah *Glorified is He* speaks, He only issues the truth, for which there is no substitute or challenge to His authority.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has just rounded out a discussion of belief in the attributes of divinity, conviction in prophethood, and the Day of Judgment along with the necessity of certainty in it. Also, within His discussion concerning the Day of Judgment, He directed focus to the act of receiving the record of one’s deeds. Now, the True Lord *Glorified is He* desires to give us the fruit of this Way and (make clear) its ultimate effect: Establishing an (equitable and decent) way of life for us and organizing our progression and development. This Divine Way has come to us in the form that primarily consists of rulings. Yet, those rulings also contain a distinctive set of fundamental practices, it was these that were summed up in the Prophet’s statement, ‘Islam is built upon five pillars: the testimony of faith—There is nothing worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*—the establishment of the daily-prayer, the annual giving of *zakat,* fasting the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to the House, for who can afford it [physically and financially].’(1) From this, it should be sufficiently clear that these represent the pillars upon which Islam is built. However, the only thing that seems to be in question is: What do these pillars mean to the individual Muslim? If you think deeply upon this question, you will find that we all have a share in the testimony of faith: There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. As for the prayer, none are exempt from it for any reason. It is a perpetual obligation, recurring five times throughout the day.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (16), Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (8) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with them.*

In terms of the rest of the pillars, which are: *zakat,* fasting, and pilgrimage to the House, the conditions that make them a requirement do not apply to everyone. As such, the indigent person is not required to pay *zakat* or make the pilgrimage to the House, and the infirm is not required to fast (the month of Ramadan). Therefore, we observe the presence of two categories: Pillars of Islam and Pillars of the Muslim. Simply put, the pillars of the individual Muslim are the testimony of faith and the establishment of the daily-prayer. Paying *zakat,* fasting, or making pilgrimage to the House might also be included (if the conditions of their being an obligation are met). When a Muslim performs all the 'pillars', he has brought his pillars into conformity with the pillars of Islam

Furthermore, the testimony of faith—which is from among the pillars of Islam, —we find that it suffices one if he simply says it (with sincerity and without ever recanting) one time. Again, as we mentioned, there is a possibility that the conditions that make paying *zakat,* fasting, or making pilgrimage to the House an obligation might not be fulfilled in respect to a particular individual. So, in fact, there is really nothing that remains beside the prayer. This explains why it has been made the foundation of the faith(1).

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned:

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(1) *This is articulated in the Hadith that reads: 'The prayer is the foundation of the faith. The one who establishes it establishes the faith. Conversely, the one who destroys it destroys his faith.' Within his sourcing of the Hadith (1/147) included in the Ihya, Al-Hafiz Al-'Iraqi said, 'It was narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Shu`ab with a weak chain of transmission from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of 'Umar.' In the work entitled Al-Asrar Al-Marfu'a (n. 578), Mulla 'Ali Al-Qari said, 'Ibn As-Salah mentioned in Mushkil Al-wasit that this Hadith was not well-known. In At-Tanqih, Nawawi mentioned: Indeed, this Hadith is false and baseless. Nonetheless, Daylimi narrated it on the authority of `Ali, this is what was narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durur Al-Muntathira (p.279)*

أَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ لِدُلُوكِ ٱلشَّمۡسِ إِلَىٰ غَسَقِ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَقُرۡءَانَ
ٱلۡفَجۡرِۖ إِنَّ قُرۡءَانَ ٱلۡفَجۡرِ كَانَ مَشۡهُودٗا ٧٨

So perform the regular prayers in the period from the time the sun is past its zenith till the darkness of the night, and [recite] the Quran at dawn – dawn recitation is always witnessed [78] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 78)

As we mentioned, the prayer is established and a recurring obligation in the religious life of the Muslim. The Muslim is never exempted from the prayer under any circumstances. In essence, it is a clear articulation of faith and loyal submission to Allah every day, five times a day. Additionally, it contains elements from all of the other pillars of Islam. For example, during the prayer, you mention the testimony of faith, you bear witness: There is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. So instead of merely mentioning it one time to satisfy the obligation of faith, you mention it many times each day within each prayer. That would make one pillar.

Furthermore, prayer encompasses fasting in its broader sense. Certainly, the person should refrain from eating during prayer as he is abstained from indulging into both the gluttony and sexual desires. Obviously, one is prohibited from engaging in any action that is not related to the prayer while he is performing it, such as being engaged in external conversation.

Moreover, prayer formulates the concept of *zakat* (the alms-giving to the poor). In fact, the money that you earn is consequently *zakat*-able (due to be paid as *zakat*) and is only gained through exerting effort, which in turn consumes time. When someone prays, he is literally sacrificing his time during the prayer which is even more expressive kind of *zakat* than that of giving alms. In the same manner, prayer also develops the concept of pilgrimage because it requires that the person should direct towards the *qibla* (direction that should be faced by the Muslim during prayer), where he conceptually beholds the image of the Holy *Ka'ba* and maintains the impression of pilgrimage.

Thus, prayer is worthy to be described as the fundamental pillar of faith; whoever establishes it establishes faith, otherwise faith is destroyed. Therefore, prayer has been accorded high priority in terms of Islamic rulings. As Allah *the Exalted* says: 'So perform the regular prayers…' (*al-Isra':* 78), i.e. establish the prayer with excellence at due times.

The prayer is distinct from other pillars of Islam; all religious obligations were revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through Divine inspiration except prayer. It has exclusively become a religious duty commanded directly by Allah; the matter which indicates its overwhelming importance. This is as previously illustrated resembles the employer who regularly telephones the employee to give him orders. However, the former only summons the latter to highlight crucial issues and to be sure that he fully understands the directives to be done; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection.

Similarly, the prayer has become an obligation imposed directly by Allah on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and on his Ummah due to its importance and predominance among other religious obligations. Afterwards, Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* took up the task of teaching Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the way to perform the prayer, who in return taught it to the people. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* told them, 'Offer your prayers in the way you saw me offering my prayers'.(1)

Allah mentions that He *the Almighty* sets the appointed times of prayer: '… In the period from *duluk* (the time the sun is past its zenith)…' (*al-Isra':* 78). The word *duluk* (the time when the sun is past its zenith) has a core meaning of moving from one position to another. Therefore, the Arabic word *mudallakati* (masseur: the professional massage therapist) is a derivative from *duluk* because the masseur moves his hands from a position to another.

The intended meaning of *duluk* is that the sun passes its zenith and tilts from the middle of the sky towards the direction of its eventual setting. When the human being looks to the horizon, he sees it widely broaden if he has strong eyesight, but he sees it narrow if he has weak one. Thus, it is said 'a man of narrow horizons' to describe the fatuous person.

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(1) *It was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (631), in Musnad Ahmad (5/53), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by Malik ibn Hurayth Allah be pleased with him.*

When the person gazes upon the sky, he sees it like a hemisphere and he is in the centre of the circle. The time when the sun is perpendicular to him, this is the time that the sun has passed its zenith. As the sun begins to tilt westwards, it is said that it has broken the zenith. This indicates that the time of *azh-Zhuhr* (the Noon Prayer) has begun. On investigating the matter, it is found that after the obligation of prayer on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* the noon was the first prayer time prayed by the Messenger. Indeed, this is because the prayer was made an obligation upon him in the heavens during the Night Ascension. Thus, the first prayer time that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* encountered after his return was that of the Noon. Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* says: '… Till the darkness of the night…' (*al-Isra':* 78). This means that establishing prayer extends from the time when the sun passes its zenith until the darkness of the night. During this time span, the prayers of *azh-Zhuhr* (the Noon), *al-'Asr* (Late Afternoon), *al-Maghrib* (Sunset), and *al-'Isha* (Night) are established. The only prayer that remains is that of *al-Fajr* (Dawn). Mentioning it, Allah *the Exalted* says: '… And [recite] the Quran at dawn— dawn recitation is always witnessed' (*al-Isra':* 78). Concerning this particular reference, there is a question raised about the reason of mentioning the Quran recitation at dawn without specifically referring to the Dawn prayer. In response to this, some have assumed that because the recitation of Quran has immense value at the dawn, especially in the light of tranquillity and serenity experienced at that time. The person really receives the message of the Quran with full awareness before being involved into life's activity because: '… Dawn recitation is always witnessed' (*al-Isra':* 78). This means that dawn recitation is witnessed by angels. Thus, witnessing Quran recitation is an act of worship for those creatures (the angels) who have not been charged with the responsibility of performing the congregational prayer but is valuably considered by Allah. However, the presence of the people charged with the responsibility of praying is incomparably appreciated.

Allah *Glorified is He* has imbued the congregational prayer with the real meaning of worship. In the congregational prayer, all people are equal; regardless of their social standing or status. As soon as they enter the mosque and take off their shoes, the superior stands shoulder to shoulder with the subordinate.

Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prohibited people from reserving special places for themselves in the mosque.(1) Basically, the Muslim is supposed to take his seat in the nearest available space in the mosque; he is seated according to the order of his arrival. The earlier he arrives at the mosque, the more favourable his position (in the mosque) will be. Absolutely, there is no reason to step over others(2) or to squeeze in between two people (3) to get a more preferable place.

For example, many people attending the prayer are observed rushing and unfolding their personal prayer mat in the first row to reserve a place and then go off on their errand. Once they find themselves late for the prayer, they push and shove others in order to get to their reserved place. Indeed, this behaviour is fundamentally rejected in mosques as they are the Houses of Allah where all people are treated on equal footing and where worship and devotion to Allah should be realised in their deepest and truest sense. Conceivably, the person prays next to someone and on another day, he will pray next to someone else, where each one, bowing and prostrating, is expressing his submission to Allah. Thus, it is inappropriate for anyone to show an attitude of superiority over the other.

In the same manner, this essential meaning of worship is observed within the rites of *Al-Hajj* (the pilgrimage). Notable figures and highly esteemed persons make their way and keep with the rites of the pilgrimage, in full submission, humbleness, weeping and sincerely imploring Allah. However, they are still the ranked persons in the eyes of the people.

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(1) *It was narrated in Musnad Ahmad (3/428), in Sunnan Ibn Majah (1429), and in Sunnan Abu Dawud (862), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by 'Ab Ar-Rahman ibn Shibl who said: ‘The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him prohibited to peck like a crow, to spread (the forearms) like a wild beast, and to fix a place in the mosque like a camel which gets used to a certain place’*

(2) *It was narrated in Sunnan Ibn Majah (1116), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by Ma'adh ibn Anas who recalled that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘Whoever steps over the necks of the people on Friday, he has taken a bridge to Hell’.*

(3) *It was narrated on the authority of Salman Al-Farisi Allah be pleased with him who mentioned that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘Whoever takes a bath on Friday and does it well, purifies himself and does it well, puts on his best clothes, and puts on whatever Allah decrees for him of the perfume of his family, then comes to the mosque and does not engage in idle talk or separate (pushing between) two people; he will be forgiven for (his sins) between that day and the next’. It was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (910).*

Returning back to the blessed dawn time and the prayer witnessed by the angels who serve Allah during the night, though they are not charged with the responsibility of performing prayer, actually, the presence of the human beings who have been charged with the responsibility of praying is better than that of the angels because human beings get benefit from the prayer.

Therefore, as per the Noble Hadith: ‘Prayer in congregation is twenty-seven times more meritorious than a prayer performed individually’, (1) it should be noticed that Allah *Glorified is He* has linked each of the five daily prayers to a particular time. Furthermore, He has made the movement of the sun as the indicator of prayer time. Nonetheless, this arouses the question about what is supposed to be done if the sun is hidden by cloud cover or other phenomenon and seemed to be absent. This question leads the person to the natural conclusion that it is the responsibility of the believer to create something that enables him to take exact measure of time. Certainly, the devices currently used for the measurement of time, display overwhelming ingenuity and represent a great source of ease and facilitation for people. Therefore, it is an obligation upon Muslim scholars to always aspire to introduce innovative concepts to serve faith issues because the invention of these advanced means used to serve the obligatory pillars of Islam represent a duly commitment.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلَّيۡلِ فَتَهَجَّدۡ بِهِۦ نَافِلَةٗ لَّكَ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَبۡعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامٗا مَّحۡمُودٗا ﴿٧٩﴾

And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra offering of your own, so that your Lord may raise you to a [highly] praised status [79] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 79)

In this verse, Allah commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight sleep and rise for prayer. This order is especially given to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* beyond the obligation imposed on Muslims in general. Allah’s special Command to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to rise and pray at night is also reflected in His saying:

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(1) *It was related on the authority of Abdullah ibn ‘Umar and narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (645) and in Sahih Muslim (650).*

‘You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak [1] Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, [2] half, or a little less, [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly [4]’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-4). Despite the fact that it is a special obligation imposed upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; yet, it is not issued in a way that denies him some flexibility in the performance of this act of worship. The important thing is to stay up for Allah *the Exalted* for even a small part of the night. The cause of this additional worship is expressed in Allah’s saying: ‘We shall send a momentous message down to you’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 5). This suggests that night prayer and standing before Allah at that (special) time is going to grant Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the required strength and fortitude to be able to shoulder the responsibility of carrying and conveying the Divine Message to people.

In the Noble Hadith: ‘Whenever anything distressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he prayed’.(1) This means that when the Prophet faced an insoluble issue without having any one to alleviate his difficulties (in the worldly sense), he only resorted to Allah, the Master of the whole world to help him. As Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Night prayer makes a deeper impression and sharpens words’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 6). Certainly, due to Prophet Muhammad’s humble standing, imploring and engaging in intimate dialogue with Allah, when most people are deeply asleep not considering worship, he experienced Allah’s mercy abundantly. Whoever imitates him and rises for prayer during this time, will also have a share in this abundant and overflowing mercy. On the other hand, those who do not rise for night prayer will have no share in such overwhelming mercy.

Thus, standing in prayer during the night grants a Muslim strength that is born out of faith and spiritual fortitude. In as much as the role of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is greater than those of other Muslims, his share of standing in night prayer also exceeds theirs. Indeed, he had to confront many difficulties that required his persistent connection with Allah, the One, the All-Sustaining to seek His help.

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(1) *It was narrated in Musnad Imam Ahmad (5/388) and in Sunnan Abu Dawud (1319) excerpted from the Hadith narrated by Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him.*

It is amazing and lamentable that Muslims have abandoned and completely disregarded this Prophetic Hadith. If they are distressed, they do not rush to prayer; nevertheless, they seek to offer justifications for failing to pray. There is someone who justifies that he is busy, yet being busy with some worldly affair, does not exempt him from liability for disregarding this religious obligation. He never knows that the prayer is the source of open-door blessings; it may achieve normal two-day objectives in a couple of hours. There is a marked reluctance by those people to perform the prayer; they hardly establish make-up prayers if they pray. If they are asked about their laxity on performing prayer, they justify that they do not have enough time to pray; nonetheless, if they need to use the bathroom, they would surely be able to make time for that. Even if all the world's preoccupations and concerns were bearing down on them, they should make time to pray.

As per Allah's saying: 'As an extra offering of your own…' (*al-Isra': 79*), the phrase implies that this night prayer is an additional offering imposed especially on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is the spiritual excellence of the good doers mentioned by Allah in his saying: 'The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs [15] they will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before [16]' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16).

The person who spiritually excels good deeds is the one who performs additional deeds over his religious obligations. Hence, those who assume this status of spiritual excellence have been described by Allah *the Almighty* as: 'Sleeping only little at night [17] praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness [18]' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-18). Standing in prayer during this time is not an obligation; the person may pray *Al-'Isha* and sleep until *Al-Fajr* prayer. However, if he wants to emulate and follow the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* he should spiritually excel in good deeds as much as he can.

Next, Allah *the Exalted* says: '… So that your Lord *'asa* (may) raise you to a [highly] praised status.' (*al-Isra':* 79) The beginning of this verse focused on the topic of obligation; accordingly, the conclusion provides the reward of the doer of such additional obligation. In the Arabic Quranic transcript, the word *'asa* (may) indicate either 'hopefulness' (expected action that can take place) or ‘wishful thinking’ (aspired wish for an impossible event). The following poetic verses illustrate the meaning of ‘wishful thinking’:

I wish the planets could come near
So that I would arrange them here

The poet is expressing his desire that the planets could be within his grasp so that he can arrange them in the form of poems dedicated to the encomium of his muse. It goes without saying that this is a request for the impossible.

Again, ‘wishful thinking’ is observed in the following poetic verses:

I wish the flush of youth could return for a single day
I would inform it of what old-age brought along its way

As for ‘hopefulness’, it is an aspired request for a certain action whose occurrence is possible, to take place. Under the umbrella of requests, there are many forms that can be listed. When the speaker requests something whose occurrence is impossible from another, it is considered ‘wishful thinking’. Whereas, when the speaker requests something whose occurrence is possible, this is regarded as ‘hopefulness’. However, when the speaker requests from someone to supply him with information to form a sensory image without demanding any action to be done, this expresses a question, such as, ‘Where’s Zaid?’ There is a marked difference between making an actual request for something and requesting information to enable someone to form a sensory image of it.

When the speaker makes an actual request for something, he has two possibilities; whether he intends to order someone to do something or to prohibit him from performing an action. The former represents an order such as saying, ‘Sit!’ Conversely, the latter represents a prohibition such as saying, ‘Do not sit!’

Returning to the verse under discussion, the word *'asa* (may) indicate ‘hopefulness’. However, the achievement of the request only depends on the person in whom hope is placed; some people may help, whereas others may be reckless. Even though, the person could be hopeful of others’ support and they are thought to be credible to achieve his requests, yet the circumstances may not allow them to fulfil their promises because man by nature is subject to the vicissitudes of life.

On the other hand, placing hopefulness in Allah is the most assured outcome for your request. Thus, you have undoubtedly placed your hope in Allah, the Lord of Majesty, the Ever providing, the Magnificent and the Dependable, Who is never subject to the circumstances that we as Humans are. As such, the hope that is placed in Him is, undoubtedly, the request that will be realised.

Turning now to the phrase '[highly] praised status', it refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is widely praised by everyone and everything from the moment of Adam's creation until the Day of Judgment. The intended meaning of '[highly] praised status' is the rank of intercession specifically granted to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. On the Day of Judgment, the creation takes their positions within the Place of Reckoning full of fear and fright of the events of that fateful day. The terror will be so overwhelming that the ardent wish of the people will simply be to leave the Place; even if they are going to the inferno of hell! Then, all nations will seek intercession of their prophets dispatched to them. Each prophet will turn them down, until they arrive at Prophet Muhammad, the Seal of the Messengers and the Master of the Prophets, who will then say, 'It is for me (intercession for all people is my granted mission), I will take it upon'.(1) This explains the cause that made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded us to supplicate: '*wab'athu maqaman mahmudan*

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(1) *In his Tafsir (5/4038), Al-Qurtubi mentioned: There are four different interpretations of the 'Praised Status'; the first, and most likely, conceives that it refers to the right of intercession granted to Prophet Muhammad on behalf of the people on the Day of Judgment. This opinion was conceived by Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman. The second considers that the 'It' refers to the banner of praise granted to Prophet Muhammad on the Day of Judgment. The second opinion does not contradict with the first, as the Prophet could be granted both the right of intercession and the banner of praise as well. The third opinion perceives that this is reference to the fact that Allah will seat Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him on the Throne beside Himself. The fourth thesis proposes that this refers to the intercession for those in the hellfire destined to come out. This was proposed by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah.*

alladhi wa'adtahu (O Allah, resurrect him to the Praised Status that you have promised)'.(1) There is no doubt that this prayer is for our benefit.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقُل رَّبِّ أَدۡخِلۡنِي مُدۡخَلَ صِدۡقٖ وَأَخۡرِجۡنِي مُخۡرَجَ
صِدۡقٖ وَٱجۡعَل لِّي مِن لَّدُنكَ سُلۡطَٰنٗا نَّصِيرٗا ٨٠

Say, 'My Lord, make me go in truthfully, and come out truthfully, and grant me supporting authority from You'[80]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 80)

Allah's saying: '… Make me go in truthfully…' (*al-Isra':* 80) should be viewed as a general reflection because the person, before entering truthfully, should first request permission to leave; he never enters before he exits. As such, the natural sequence of events should be: 'First, cause me to exit in a truthful and sincere manner and then cause me to enter in the same way.' This thesis is easily refuted and negated because, indeed, the purpose of leaving is to abandon something and to go into another, while the purpose of entering is to be received. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* begins with entering because it is more important. As it is said: 'Any matter, by no means, should not be left until you know how to enter into another'.

Entering into and exiting from any matter in a truthful manner should not be without a purpose. Therefore, entering somewhere truthfully means that your manner of entering is in conformity with your purpose; i.e. to enter a place, it should be done to realise a specific goal. For example, if you enter a store for a purpose, such as making a purchase, this entering is truthful. On the other hand, if you enter without a purpose or even to cause people detriment, your entrance cannot be considered truthful. In an ultimate sense, this means that your entrance and your exiting should be for the sake of Allah. This is the manner in which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exited from Mecca and subsequently entered into Medina. His departure and entrance were for Allah's sake; thus, they were truthful. Indeed, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not leave Mecca until his people had persecuted him and made every attempt to combat his mission so that Mecca could no longer be deemed suitable for carrying on the Prophetic Mission. Consistent with his purposeful manner of departing, he only went into Medina on account of its people's aid and support of his mission. Hence, truthfulness should comply with actual ability and objectives; it is untruthful to sell oneself short by not doing what his goal demands.

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(1) *On the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah: Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever says, when he hears the call to prayer: "Allahumma rabba hadhihid-da'wat it-tammah was-salat il-qaimah, ati Muahmmadan Al-wasilah wal-fadilah, wab'athu maqaman mahmudan alladhi wa'adtahu (O Allah, Lord of this perfect call and the prayer to be offered, grant Muhammad the privilege of intercession and also the eminence, and resurrect him to the Praised Status that you have promised)," will be granted my intercession on the Day of Resurrection'. It was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (211) and in Musnad Ahmad (3/354)*

Afterwards, Allah says: '… And grant me supporting *sultan* (authority) from You' (*al-Isra':* 80). This shows offering the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* the means of seeking Allah's aid. Indeed, Allah has dispatched His Messenger with the Message of Truth, which was in fact about to encounter heavy opposition from the people deeply involved with falsehood and moral corruption. Those people would aggressively attempt to disrupt the mission by attacking it incessantly. For this reason, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* earnestly turned to his Lord and sought his aid and support in confronting the enemies.

As previously pointed out, the word *sultan* (authority) in Allah's saying: '… Supporting *sultan* (authority)' (*al-Isra':* 80) either designates a compelling proof or a subduing authority. This can be seen clearly within Allah's saying: 'We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance, so that people could uphold justice…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says that He sent clear signs to be the instruments of compelling evidence. Then, Allah *the Exalted* says: '… We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). This represents tools and instruments used for strength and deterrence of evil.

The upright person is he who restrains himself from transgressing the boundaries set by Allah and who responds to the call of the Messenger. Whereas, the wicked person is not convinced by the compelling proof and evidence, but rather, his malicious conduct should be restrained by force. If the former is required to swear an oath by Allah, he does so faithfully; whereas, if the latter is required to give testimony, he commits perjury, conceiving that his testimony is a means of avoiding punishment. Indeed, his attitude voiced: ‘Yes! I got away with this’. Similarly, old sayings conceive: ‘In combating evil, punishment deters more than prohibitions revealed in the Quran.’

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقُلْ جَآءَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ ٱلْبَٰطِلُۚ إِنَّ ٱلْبَٰطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا ﴿٨١﴾

And say, ‘The truth has come, and falsehood has passed
away: falsehood is bound to pass away’ [81]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 81)

Allah *the Almighty* within this declaration has raised one of the banners of the faith that continues to fly up until the present day: ‘The truth has come!’ As long as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is being commanded to announce the arrival of the truth, it can be undoubtedly assured that it is coming. Hence, Allah’s order has been issued candidly. The next time that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made this declaration was in the Year of Conquest, when he entered Mecca victoriously. At the time of his triumphant arrival, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* smashed all three-hundred and sixty idols around the *Ka’ba*, while proclaiming, ‘The truth has now come [to light], and falsehood has withered away; it will not be renewed nor will it return.’(1) This means that the truth has arrived and falsehood has faded away. Moreover, falsehood will never regain the strength needed for renewal or revivification; it no longer even possesses the ability to relaunch an attack.

Allah’s saying: ‘... The truth has come, and falsehood has passed away’ (*al-Isra’:* 81) seems to connote that the truth arrived on its own merits. Unmistakably, Allah has attributed the act of coming to the truth itself, as though it possesses the ability to act according to its own will. The verse ostensibly suggests that no one brought the truth. The same can be said of the ‘passing away’ of falsehood, which is, by its very nature, ill-fated, decadent, waning, weak, degenerate, and short-lived.

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(1) *It is recorded in Sahih Muslim (1781), excerpted from the Hadith narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him; and cited by Al-Qurtubi (5/4042) on the authority of Al-Bukhari and At-Tirmidhi.*

It is remarkable that the truth, when arrived, ushered in by Messenger Muhammad on the Conquest of Mecca, benefited everyone; even the disbelievers. On that day, an incident showing the loftiness of the Islamic faith took place. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called upon the people of Mecca, who had erstwhile displayed rank stubbornness and arrogance and who had driven him away from the most beloved place to him; Mecca. However, on that day, the tables had turned and the Prophet then had the upper hand. They came before him and he said: ‘What do you think I am going to do with you?’ ‘Good! You are a noble fellow and you are the son of one of our noblest fellows’ they hopefully responded. He told them: ‘Go! All of you are free to go!’(1)

Therefore, it is obvious that the truth has nothing to do with suppressing people; contrariwise, its arrival represents their relief and elevation. Among the manifestations of truth that casts its shadow over the Meccan populace at the Conquest, there is another incident that took place: One of the enemies of Islam entered the sanctuary of the *Ka’ba* and headed towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the intention of harming him.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra, ‘Indeed, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him prevailed upon Mecca with the intention of conquering it and Allah made his intention realised—for your good. Then, he entered upon the leaders of Quraysh, the idolaters who were in control of the Ka’ba at that time. They were assured that they would be executed. Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him then circumambulated the Ka’ba and performed two units of prayer and went to the Holy House itself. Once there, he grabbed the handle of the door and asked, “well, what have you to say for yourselves now, what do you think?” They said, “you are regarded as a man of magnanimity among us and you are the son of a gentle, forbearing man”. They repeated this three times. Then, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him responded to them: “I say to you as Yusuf (Joseph) peace be upon him said: ‘But he said, “You will hear no reproaches today. May Allah forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful”’ (Yusuf: 92). Abu Hurayra continued, ‘they rose from that sitting as though were rising from the graves. In time, they entered Islam.’ It was narrated in Dala’il An-Nubuwwa of Al-Bayhaqi (5/58).*

However, once he placed his hand on the Messenger, he completely changed. He said, 'I swear by Allah, when I prevailed upon him (with the intention of harming him), there was nothing more disliked to me in the world than him. Yet, as I placed my hand on him, I swear by Allah, there became nothing in the world more beloved to me than him.'(1) This illustrates the arrival of the truth and the passing away of falsehood.

In Allah's saying: '… Falsehood is bound to pass away' (*al-Isra': *81), the phrase 'bound to pass away' has the pattern of intensification. The meaning indicates that falsehood is intrinsically fading away and dissipating. Strangely enough, falsehood itself is used as one of the Divine forces. But for the bitterness of the falsehood, the people would not have been desirous of the truth. Thus, with the sting of falsehood's bite, they do recognize the sweetness of the truth.

Allah *the Almighty* has illustrated an example for truth and falsehood, as He says: 'He sends water from the sky those fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools: in this way Allah illustrates truth and falsehood— the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to man stays behind— this is how Allah makes illustrations' (*ar-Ra'd: *17). Allah *Glorified is He* makes use of a very effective analogy to explain the nature of truth and falsehood. He resembles them to the natural phenomenon accompanying the rainwater on the mountaintops. As the rainwater descends onto the mountaintops and subsequently flows into the valleys between the mountains, as it carries sediments of mixed stones, sand, and straw. This results in the formation of the top layer of froth that floats over the water's surface. Needless to say, this froth is not beneficial to the people. As soon as the wind blows, this froth is taken aside to leave water pure, useful, and untainted. Within the analogy, this water represents the truth as it benefits people; whereas, the froth is representative of falsehood as it is useless.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham narrated in his Sira of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him (4/37): Faddala ibn 'Umayr ibn Al-Maluh Al-Laythi wanted to assassinate the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him while he was circumambulating the House in the year of the Conquest of Mecca. So when he drew near to him, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Is that Faddala?' He responded, 'Yes, I am, O Messenger of Allah.' The Prophet then asked, 'What are you talking to yourself about?' 'Uh, nothing at all, I was just remembering Allah', he forced out. At this, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him laughed and then said 'seek the forgiveness of Allah!' He then placed his hand on Faddala's chest and he experienced an unusual sense of calmness. Faddala went on recount: 'I swear by Allah, by the time he had lifted his hand from my chest, there was nothing in Allah's creation more beloved to me than him*

Additionally, there are other examples that Allah *the Almighty* illustrates to enable people to recognise this analogy; such as those jobs of the blacksmith or the goldsmith. Indeed, the latter heats gold under fire in order to remove whatever dross is attached to the pure precious metal.

Next, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ ٱلْقُرْءَانِ مَا هُوَ شِفَآءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٨٢﴾

We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe; as for those who disbelieve, it only increases their loss [82] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 82)

The verse cites two models of people receiving the Quran: the first, when the believer deals with the Quran; it represents a healing and a mercy. However, when the wrongdoer receives the Quran, it represents a source of loss. The Quran clarifies that the wrongdoing is the cause of failure to benefit from it. Undoubtedly, the Quran is essentially the source of goodness; rather than the source of loss.

Previously, we clarified that two distinguishable persons may be subjected to the same action, but their subsequent reaction varies from one to another. In other words, when pure cold water is drunk by someone in good health, he finds its taste agreeable and sweet; however, the same water can be drunk by an ill person, who finds its taste bitter and stale. In both cases, the water is the same, but the one with whom the water is 'interacting' is different. In this vein, if someone in good health eats butterfat, it benefits him; for it increases his activeness and strength. On the other hand, if another sick person eats butterfat, it increases the severity of his sickness and aggravates his illness.

Some of these meanings were, beforehand, elucidated in the story of the conversion of Al-Faruq Umar *Allah be pleased with him* to the Islam. Inflexibly, when he received the Quran in a spirit of disbelief and stubbornness, he felt aversion and abhorrence towards it. Yet, when he received the Quran in a spirit of tenderness, gentleness, and mercy towards his sister whose tooth had been fractured by him, he was impressed and believed in it.

Fundamentally, being good-natured or ill natured has an impact on the person receiving and interacting with the Quran. This issue is remarkably similar to optimism and pessimism; for example, if there is a half-filled cup of water, the optimist directs his attention to the half-filled part of the cup while the pessimist will see the other empty half. The former is positively optimistic with the half-filled cup; whereas, the latter is negatively pessimistic that the other half is empty! Both of them are considered correct; it is only their dispositions that differ.

The issue of receiving the Quran has been tackled in Allah’s saying: ‘When a chapter is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, “Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?” It certainly does strengthen the faith of those who believe and they rejoice [124] but, as for the perverse at heart, each new chapter adds further to their perversity. They die disbelieving [125]’ (*at-Tawba:* 124-125). These verses discuss that the Quran revealed is unchangeably the same; yet, it is only the disposition of the person receiving the Quran which varies. The believer receives it with his sound faculties, so it increases his belief; however, the disbeliever receives it with corrupted faculties, so it increases his disbelief. In conclusion, the process of receiving facts is only distorted by corrupted faculties.

As the following saying goes, ‘In searching for the truth, do not promote any falsehood within yourself. You should first disestablish the harboured falsehood, so that you can soundly compare different matters to reach the best’.

Furthermore, there is another example that tackle the same issue in Allah’s saying: ‘Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, “What was that he just said?” These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed, those who follow their own desires [16] Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path, and given them their awareness [of Him] [17]’ (*Muhammad:* 16-17). The saying, ‘… What was that he just said?' (*Muhammad:* 16) is evidence that they did not really pay attention or actually care about the Quran.

Moreover, there is a third example tackling the same matter in Allah's saying: 'If We had made it a foreign Quran, they would have said, "If only its verses were clear! What? Is it foreign speech to an Arab?" Say, "It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it…"' (*Fussilat:* 44).

For more clarification, another compelling example from everyday life is the television transmission. Some people watch and enjoy a television program in their home because they are able to pick up a clear signal; whereas, their friend might complain of the bad connection and the fuzziness of the picture. They advise him to solve the problem in his receiver. Similarly, the key factor to properly receive the verses of Allah is to adjust the 'receiver' correctly (to have sound faculties).

Therefore, Allah's saying: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe…' (*al-Isra':* 82) depends upon the person's good-natured, good receipt of the Quran and sound understanding of Allah's Messages.

Turning to the word 'healing', it means treating a present illness to bring about recovery. As for the word 'mercy', it refers to taking the precautionary measures necessary to prevent the reoccurrence of an illness of which once you have been cured. Thus, 'mercy' is used for protection and 'healing' for treatment.

However, is the Quran limited to be a cure (in a metaphorical sense) for the spiritual diseases of the heart and the harmful effects of the psyche? Does it free the Muslim heart from vexation, confusion, worry, envy, rage and other spiritual maladies? Is it a treatment for physical illnesses as well? It is established that the meaning of 'the Quran is a cure', is as broad as the meaning of the word treatment can sustain. This means that it is used for the treatment of both physical and spiritual diseases. This is ascertained by the Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri *Allah be pleased with him* that he set out at the head of a caravan who eventually passed by a people and asked them for food but were refused hospitality. As fate would have it, the leader of those people was bitten by a poisonous animal and his people asked for anyone to treat him.

When they requested from the people of the caravan to treat him, they responded, 'We can only treat him in exchange for some sheep as compensation.' They bargained them because of their stinginess and failure to honour them as visitors. Their deed came in accordance with Allah's saying: '… But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that' (*al-Kahf:* 77).

Once they had agreed upon food compensation in reward for treating the leader, they recited the chapter *al-Fatiha* over him, and he was cured. Taking their reward, they ate some of the food but waited for eating the compensated sheep until they returned to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As they returned, they asked the Messenger concerning the permissibility of taking their reward. He said: 'Who informed you of the healing properties of the Quran? What you have experienced is named *Ruqyah* (reading the Quran over a sick person to treat him so that he may be healed, by the permission of Allah). Divide the sheep up and give me a share as well'.(1)

Accordingly, treating physical illness with the Quran is not something weird, but rather, it has precedence in the Prophetic Hadith. Indeed, The Quran is the saying of Allah, the Master of all things, who subdues His creation, simply, by saying the word 'Be' to do whatever He wills. The possibility of the curative effect of Allah's Words on the ill person is not at all farfetched.

On one occasion, a challenger to the concept that the Quran can be a physical cure, engaged in a debate with a scholar upholding the view the opponent questioned the scholar, 'How can a sick person be cured by the use of mere words? This is implausible!' The scholar responded, 'Shut up, you idiot!' The man flushed with anger and was about to leave the place. The scholar said, 'Look! What a simple word that has affected you! What about the effect of sacred Words uttered by Allah *the Almighty*?' Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…As for those who disbelieve, it only increases their loss' (*al-Isra':* 82). Due to their wrong-deeds as well as corrupt and contradicting predisposition in receiving the heavenly graces; they did not benefit from the Quran and, thus, failed to avail themselves of Allah's Mercy.

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(1) *It is narrated in Musnad Ahmad (3/44) and in Sahih Al-Bukhari (5736), excerpted from the Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَآ أَنۡعَمۡنَا عَلَى ٱلۡإِنسَٰنِ أَعۡرَضَ وَنَـَٔا بِجَانِبِهِۦۖ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ كَانَ يَـُٔوسٗا ﴿٨٣﴾

When We favour man he turns arrogantly to one side,
but when harm touches him, he falls into despair [83]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 83)

Allah *the Exalted* gives the human being an accurate depiction of his own essence so that he can be enough fortified by faith if inflicted with an illness. This is similar to how the physician prescribes a vaccination or immunization shots to prevent the occurrence of a virus. Even though, this reflects the human nature and the overwhelming traits which dictate his conduct; yet, he should lessen the adverse effects of this nature. Spelled out plainly, the verse indicates the human being's tendency to turn away arrogantly from Allah's Path as he receives Allah's bounty.

To further elucidate this issue, there is the example of the father who gives his son a monthly allowance; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection. In this case, the son only pays attention to the father on the beginning of every month; no doubt, his goal is simply to get the allowance that he is accustomed to, while he disregards him throughout the whole month. The scenario would not be the same if the son received his allowance daily; he would pay attention to the father each day to remind him of his allowance. In all cases, why does the son disregard and turn away from his father after having his allowance? Undoubtedly, the father gives his son the freedom to deem himself independent throughout the month. If the son were good and devoted, he would never overlook the favour of his father, but he would cherish him. The case of the father and the son is a small-scale simulation to the utmost example of Allah *the Almighty*.

This verse means that the wrongdoer turns away from remembering Allah and abandons His Way. There are some people who turn away from the remembrance of Allah but continue to follow His Way. If they would only follow the Way of Allah and also keep on remembering Him, there would be no way to ever neglect the Divine Giver of blessing.

If the person is preoccupied by the gifted blessing and turns away from Allah, Who endows this blessing, it is almost as if he considers Allah—the Divine Giver of blessing—as dispensable. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'But man exceeds all bounds [6] when he thinks he is self-sufficient [7]' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7). This self-sufficiency is not an innate feature of the human being; contrariwise, it is acquired. This means that he could cease this transgression of self-sufficiency one day and turn again to beseech Allah, the Endower of the blessing, for a Divine grant. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Prophet], all will return to your Lord' (*al-'Alaq:* 8).

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions another disgraceful human defect: '… But when harm touches him, he falls into despair' (*al-Isra':* 83). When the human being is faced by unfavourable circumstances or is even slightly harmed, he falls into despair in Allah's Mercy. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is directly advising His creature who falls into despair that even if he felt tightly constrained by the distresses of life, there is no cause to give in to hopelessness and desolation. Indeed, he, as a believer, does not live with a myopic focus on the means, but rather, he should be broad-minded to pay attention to satisfy Allah *the Almighty* Who controls the means. As long as he is able to enjoy the 'good graces' of Allah, Who is in control of the means, so he should not fall into despair or hopelessness

This explains the saying, 'As long as Allah is the Lord, do not be stressed'. It might be acceptable for a person to soak in despair if he does not have a Lord overseeing his affair; otherwise, there is no reason to be hopeless. The son relying on his father does not worry about worldly concerns; but rather, he feels stress-free as his father takes care of his needs. In the light of that example, what about people who rely on their Lord to look after their interests and to take care of their needs? As long as they have a Lord to turn to and to call on him at any time, they should not be desperate or over-stressed.

As Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to this matter, He teaches us not to feel sorrow if we perform a good deed or a favour to someone who rejects or refuses to admit it. He teaches us not to be dismayed, as long as they do the same in respect to Allah, the Lord of all creation. Indeed, Allah incessantly bestows favours upon them; whereas, they, in return, disregard Him and deny His favours.

When Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* requested from Allah to prevent people from casting aspersion on him, Allah told him that He does not do this even in respect to Himself. As they fabricate many unbefitting concepts on Allah, openly profess their disbelief in Him and denounce His Power in originating creation or granting blessings. So no one should be angered by slanders or abuses casted on him by the disbelievers.

Nonetheless, the human being can be easily given to despair and melancholy because, while experiencing blessing, he disregards and turns away from Allah. Consequently, he denies his need to the Lord to resort to in the time of distresses. Therefore, he who turns away from Allah in the beginning will be driven to despair in the end. Yet, Allah *the Exalted* responds to those who call on Him and seek refuge in Him at times of adversity, even the disbelievers: 'When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him desert you…' (*al-Isra':* 67).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ كُلٌّ يَعْمَلُ عَلَىٰ شَاكِلَتِهِۦ فَرَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ هُوَ أَهْدَىٰ سَبِيلًا ﴿٨٤﴾

Say, 'Everyone does things their own way, but your Lord is
fully aware of who follows the best-guided path' [84]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 84)

Each individual in this life goes on his particular path with his own disposition. Additionally, people are at variance concerning their behavioural tendencies: the first type is positively predisposed to faith, the second is in a continuous conflict sometimes predisposed towards faith while other times towards disobedience, whereas the third is negatively susceptible to disbelief. As such, people are not the same; thus, they cannot be forced to be of the same disposition.

As long as the situation conforms to the description above, everyone should act according to his unique and particular disposition. Thus, if an ill-natured person treats others rudely, they should not treat him the same in return. Their responsibility is to act in accordance with their own disposition and standard of behaviour; they should respond in a way that expresses their good standard.

As the saying goes: ‘There is no better way to respond to he who disobeys Allah through misbehaving yourself than to obey Allah through gracefully behaving in regard to him’ in this manner, the social balance within the community is established and the causes of inconsistencies are resolved.

In this verse, ‘*Rabb* (Lord)’ refers to Allah, Who is responsible for edification and who undoubtedly knows the idiosyncrasies, secrets and other traits of His follower. As Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘How could He Who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?’ (*al-Mulk:* 14)

Subsequently, Allah *the Exalted* says:(1)

وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلرُّوحِۖ قُلِ ٱلرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّى وَمَآ أُوتِيتُم مِّنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾

[Prophet], they ask you about the Spirit. Say, ‘The Spirit is part of my Lord’s domain. You have only been given a little knowledge’ [85] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 85)

The phrase ‘they ask you’ has been used throughout the Quran conveying several meanings. If the phrase inquires about something beneficial, which if it remained unknown would expose the person to harm, the Quran provides the listeners with answers to their queries. This is illustrated in Allah’s saying: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about menstruation. Say, “Menstruation is a painful condition, so keep away from women during it…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 222). Moreover, it is also illustrated in Allah’s verse: ‘They ask you [Prophet] what they should give. Say, “Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy and travellers. Allah is well aware of whatever good you do”.’ (*al-Baqara:* 215) On the other hand, if there is an enquiry about something un-influential, which if it remained unknown would not expose the person to harm; the Quran redirects their attention to other beneficial matters. A compelling example of this type is illustrated as they asked about the phases of the moon; how does the new moon appear small at first, and then incrementally grow in size until it becomes a full-moon, after which, it decreases again until it returns to its original state?

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(1) *The reason of the revelation of this verse: It was narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas’ud: {While I was walking in the company of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him in one of the fields of Medina, the Prophet was leaning on a date palm leaf-stalk. We passed by a group of Jews. Some of them said to the others, ‘Ask him about the spirit.’ The others said, ‘Do not ask him, lest he would say something that you hate.’ Some of them said, ‘We will ask him.’ So a man from among them stood up and said, 'O Abul Qasim! What is the spirit?’ The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him kept quiet and I knew that he was being Divinely inspired. Allah revealed to him: ‘[Prophet], they ask you about the Spirit. Say, “The Spirit is part of my Lord’s domain. You have only been given a little knowledge”.’ (al-Isra’: 85)}*
This was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (4721) and also in Sahih Muslim (2794). It is mentioned in Tafsir Ibn Kathir (60/3): This context, apparently, gives clear indication that this verse was revealed during the Medinan phase of the prophetic mission. Indeed, it was revealed after the Jews questioned him about that in Medina. In spite of this, the chapter is entirely deemed Meccan (revealed during the Meccan phase of the Prophetic mission). This aroused a conclusion that this chapter was revealed to him at Medina a second time just as it had been revealed at Mecca beforehand. Or perhaps he was given revelation (while in Mecca) that he would respond to their queries with this verse that would be revealed to him later on.

Engaging the Arabs, at the time of the revelation of the Quran, in these natural phenomena which have not been discovered yet, is a useless matter. Furthermore, a full explanation of this exhaustive scientific reasoning of the various lunar phases would surpass their level of perception at that time. Additionally, this knowledge was then inadequate to help in grasping the Divine Law. As well as, its inexplicable mysteriousness would not expose the person to any harm. However, if the Quran had explained in details that there are various phases of the moon and that its rotation in a specific orbit between the earth and the sun causes the alteration of day and night, to people unaware of scientific changes, they would have accused the Quran with spreading baseless superstitions and they would have perhaps abandoned this religion at all.

However, Allah turned their attention to an aspect concerning crescent moons that had to do with the benefit they got from those crescents: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons. Say, “They show the times appointed for people, and for the pilgrimage”’ (*al-Baqara:* 189).

Sometimes, Prophet Muhammad was given questions for the sole purpose of testing his truthfulness. An instance of this took place when the Jews of Mecca incited the polytheists to ask Prophet Muhammad about the spirit. The Jews were well aware that no mortal possessed knowledge about it, but they only meant to plot against the Prophet. They thought that maybe he would be tempted to say anything about the spirit by way of reply, which they knew beforehand would be wrong as no one could tell the truth about the nature of the spirit. They wanted him to fall in that trap to use his necessarily false answer to the question against him and dissuade people from accepting the religion he called for.(1) It was a malicious scheme they plotted to prove he was a liar and not a Messenger of Allah. Indeed, in most cases, people are tempted to appear knowledgeable, especially before adversaries. No one would like to admit that he has no answer to a question given by his enemy. It was this instinct that the Jews depended on. They thought the Messenger would never allow himself to be demeaned before his opponents and would attempt to furnish an answer- a wrong one- to their question.

Nevertheless, Allah rendered their attempt futile. He revealed to His Messenger an answer they had never expected: '[Prophet], they ask you about the spirit. Say, "The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge."' (*al-Isra':* 85). Hearing this truthful answer, many of the people of the Scripture embraced Islam, for this answer was consistent with what they had learned from their Scriptures about the nature of the spirit and that it is from Allah and none but Him knows its secret.

It is worthy of notice that the word *ruh* (spirit) has been used in several contexts with different meanings. One of them is: the force that breathes life into the body so long as it inhabits it, as in the following verse: 'When I have fashioned him and breathed My *ruh* (spirit) into him, bow down before him' (*al-Hijr:* 29). If this spirit is taken out of the body, it becomes a lifeless corpse. This is death that Allah describes in His words: 'When the soul of a dying man comes up to his throat' (*al-Waqi'a:* 83).

In other verses of the Quran, the word *ruh* is used to refer to the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) entrusted with delivering the Divine Revelation, as Allah says: 'The Trustworthy *ruh* brought it down' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193). In other contexts, the word *ruh* is used to refer to Divine Revelation, as Allah says: ‘So We have revealed a *ruh* to you [Prophet] by Our command…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52).

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(1) *Imam Ahmad Narrated in his Musnad (4/60) on the authority of Ibn Abbas, 'The polytheists of Quraysh said to the Jews, "Tell us something to ask that man [Prophet Muhammad] about." The Jews told them, "Ask him about the spirit.' They did, and on that occasion, Allah revealed this verse: '[Prophet], they ask you about the spirit. Say, "The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge."' (al-Isra': 85).*

The word *ruh* is sometimes also used to convey ‘empowerment’, as in this verse: ‘…These are the people in whose hearts Allah has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His *Ruh*…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22). The word *ruh* is also used to refer to ‘Isa (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*: ‘…The Messiah, ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was nothing more than a Messenger of Allah, His word, directed to Mary, a *ruh* from Him…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 171).

Now the question is: what is the common thread that ties these several meanings together? Some have put it that the spirit is the secret that gives life to the body and that Divine Revelation is the secret that gives life to the heart and soul by ingraining faith in them, hence the similarity and the use of *ruh* to describe both. The spirit gives one the temporary life of this world whereas faith is the way to the eternal life of the Hereafter. The former is a *ruh* in the sense that it gives force to the mortal body to perform its mission in this life, and the latter is also a *ruh*- and is even more deserving of this name- for it is the force that causes one’s life to extend without end and enjoy eternal bliss as promised by our Lord.

Allah means to alert us to the truth. This life is but a journey, no matter how long it lasts. We exist in this world, demonstrate power and ability through our actions and achievements so long as the spirit that inhabits our bodies. However, all this is temporary. The real life is yet to come. It is the life when our deeds culminate in the final station each will be deservedly placed in, there to remain forever: ‘… The true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64). The *ruh* (spirit) that animates your body in the life of this world is inevitably exposed to the possibility of being taken from you at any moment, ever since you are a foetus in the womb of your mother until you grow old. On the other hand, the *ruh* that leads you to blissful eternity in the Hereafter is eternal too. It is the guidance sent down to us from our Lord to lead us along His Straight Path. This *ruh* is stronger and more permanent, never to be visited by death.

Now it may be easy to perceive why the word *ruh* is used to refer to the Quran and the angel who was commissioned with the responsibility of delivering it. They both have contributed to guiding the *ruh*, which is the spirit, to eternity in Paradise, to the life attained by committing oneself to the Ordinance of the Creator.

So Allah says: '… Say, "The Spirit is part of my Lord's domain..."' (*al-Isra':* 85). It is a matter that none but Allah possesses knowledge of. No one can explore its nature or know its secrets. Is it an essence which enters the body and causes it to have life and the absence of which causes death. Perhaps it is only the effect of the Creator's command to life 'Be': when He says to it 'Be', it exists, and when He commands it to die, it dies. After answering the question about *ruh* (the spirit), Allah concludes the verse by saying: '… You have only been given a little knowledge."' (*al-Isra':* 85) No one can ever grasp the reality of the spirit. Has the human mind not already encompassed knowledge of everything so it only remains for it to mingle with the secrets of the spirit? At one time, a man criticized one of the adherents of Sufism. The latter asked him, 'Have you attained a comprehensive understanding of everything in creation?' 'No,' the man replied. The Sufi then said, 'Well, I am one of those things that you do not understand!'

As we pointed out before, when Allah presents to us a certain fact, He does so from an angle that our limited minds can grasp. Were He to unveil to us the secrets of everything, they would sure be above our ability to comprehend. We have already seen an example of this wisdom in His answer to the question about crescent moons. He says: '… They show the times appointed for people, and for the pilgrimage.' (*al-Baqara:* 189) This is the benefit of crescent moons and this is what matters to us. As for the development of the moon's phases, this is a matter that ignorance of would cause no harm. Benefitting from something is not dependent on complete understanding of its reality or possessing thorough knowledge of it. An illiterate villager can use a television and a VCR even though he does not know how these machines work or the process by which they function. Allah draws our attention to this issue when He says: 'Do not follow blindly what you do not know to be true…' (*al-Isra':* 36). We should not interfere with things we have no knowledge of. The mental powers Allah has endowed us with are too precious to be wasted on things that knowledge of would do no real good just as ignorance of would do no harm. What benefit do we gain from knowing the secrets of the *ruh* (spirit)? What harm can be done if we remain ignorant of it? Knowledge is worth it when it helps us gain benefits and avoid harms.

When Allah says: '…You have only been given a little knowledge.' (*al-Isra':* 85), this was not meant to just address Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries who asked about the *ruh* (spirit). This verse was revealed over fourteen-hundred years ago. However, it is meant to address all people until the advent of Judgment Day. It encompasses all human endeavours to attain knowledge until the end of time. It is a timeless message to all humankind not to overstep their limits, for if they discover a secret of Allah's creation, there remains countless secrets undiscovered and undiscoverable.

Allah has already foretold that He would guide us to find out some of the wonders of His creation: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth…' (*Fussilat:* 53). Indeed, breakthroughs about the vast universe and the human being are made every day. In astronomy, physics, and all sciences, countless discoveries have been made, all equally amazing and equally expressive of the Majesty of Him Who has created everything. Nevertheless, does this mean that we know everything? The aforementioned verse implies that the process of discovering the vast creation of Allah will be ongoing by His will until the Final Hour, and really much will still remain unknown to us!

Aspirations of the human mind throughout history have proved to be so high. The products of these aspirations show that scientific advancement proceeds in large leaps. In the past, progress was measured by centuries. Now, hardly a single day passes without a new, unprecedented invention coming to light. A machine would be manufactured only to remain on the shelves because newer models have been released before the older ones could be sold! It is worthy of underlining, however, that human discoveries and inventions only contribute to increasing welfare. Products of this creative human effort all pertain to life's luxuries, for the basic needs of life have already been there without any interference on the part of humankind. Allah has already provided the world with all the essential requirements of life even before man was brought to existence. People have always lived before they knew electricity. Invention of the latter only added to their welfare. People used to drink in earthen jugs and now they use crystal glasses. Human inventions have been an increase in luxury, but the basic needs of life have always been there. Allah has secured them even before humankind were brought to the earth.

Human intellectual prowess has wonderfully blossomed. Scientific advancement has reached such unsurpassed levels that people almost deem themselves as sovereigns over the entire creation, as if nothing in existence can overcome their irresistible control. However, all this will come to an end: '… But when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, and adorns itself, and its people think they have power over it, then the fate We commanded comes to it, by night or by day, and We reduce it to stubble, as if it had not flourished just the day before…' (*Yunus:* 24). Allah calls His servants to obey Him so when they return to Him, after they have explored some of the secrets of His creation and enjoyed some of His bounties, they will enjoy ultimate bounty and eternal joy in the Hereafter. All the dazzling luxury of this life is only what man has made for himself. Now then about what that which Allah has prepared for man in the Hereafter? If life's finery can be so wonderful, how marvellous can Allah's reward be?

Whatever we see of the enjoyments of this life in the hands of some should not be a cause for envying them or bearing them any grudge. Rather, they are manifestations of our Lord's Majesty and Bounty that should make us long for what He has prepared for the righteous in the Hereafter. If what He gives to His servants- believers or not- in this life is so beautiful, we should long then to have what He has prepared for His believing servants to enjoy eternally.

Whatever developments and advancements humankind has been able to produce are originally based on the elements and resources Allah has created. Even the mind that thinks, the will, and the hands that work are all creations of Allah *Glorified is He*. The role of the human being then is confined to using his mind and creativity to employ the resources Allah has created. No matter what height these developments reach, they are no competition to what waits in Paradise, where the believers will have their wishes come true just as these wishes cross their minds!

Allah says in the following verse:

وَلَئِن شِئۡنَا لَنَذۡهَبَنَّ بِٱلَّذِيٓ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ بِهِۦ عَلَيۡنَا وَكِيلًا ٨٦

If We pleased, We could take away what We have revealed to you – then you would find no one to plead for you against Us [86] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 86)

By this verse, Allah means to discipline the disbelievers. Meanwhile, He means to protect His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* from their blame and alleviate some of his burden. The verse declares he was only delivering the Message of Allah and was never a fabricator who contrived that message and claimed it was revealed to him by Allah. Had Allah so willed, He could have taken back what He had revealed to him. He could have blotted out what His Messenger received and what the Companions learnt and recorded.

Some may ask: would Allah have rescinded the Truth He had revealed, after He had made it known to people through His Messenger? The verses use the second conditional, which indicates impossibility, for Allah would not hide the Truth or rescind His revelations. The verse is meant to emphasize that Allah is Capable of doing that if He wanted it. The purpose of this declaration is to clear Prophet Muhammad from any accusation against his truthfulness. He did not invent that Message, but Allah chose him to be His Messenger to humankind.

Some misunderstand the meaning and purpose of this verse: 'whether Allah relents towards them or punishes them is not for you [Prophet] to decide…' (*Al-'Imran:* 128). They wrongly believe it implies reproach or censure of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, the meaning of the verse has nothing to do with anything even remotely similar to that. By this verse, Allah only means to tell the people of Prophet Muhammad and everyone addressed by this Message that the Prophet was only a servant of Allah in Whose Hand is everything. Prophet Muhammad did not do or say anything, pertaining to his mission, of his own accord, but was only implementing the commands of Allah Who is the One Who decrees everything. It was also to protect Prophet Muhammad from the anger of his disbelieving people. It is like a master who says in defence of his servant, 'Do not blame or harm him;

I am the one who commanded him to do whatever he has done.' This is only an illustrating example, for Allah is far elevated above all comparison.

Now, why must we regard it as farfetched that the Creator- with all His Power- could blot out that which He revealed to His Messenger after it had been memorized? Have we not seen that a person can lose his memory and hardly remember anything about his life? Just as Allah may cause someone to lose his memory, He could well rescind that which He had revealed to His Messenger.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '… then you would find no one to plead for you against Us' (*al-Isra':* 86). If Allah were to take back what He had revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* no one could plead with Allah for the revelation to be returned to the Prophet again.

This would have been the case:

إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِّن رَّبِّكَ ۚ إِنَّ فَضْلَهُۥ كَانَ عَلَيْكَ كَبِيرًا ﴿٨٧﴾

If it were not for your Lord's mercy: His favour to you has been truly great [87] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 87)

This is a message to reassure Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah is his only Protector, so let him never grieve, for Allah's favour upon him is abundant. In the next verse, Allah poses a challenge to everyone addressed by the Message:

قُل لَّئِنِ ٱجْتَمَعَتِ ٱلْإِنسُ وَٱلْجِنُّ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يَأْتُوا۟ بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا
ٱلْقُرْءَانِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِۦ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

Say, 'Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other' [88] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 88)

As for the command 'Say', it does not mean this is a dialogue between Allah and His Messenger. Quite the reverse, it is a command to Prophet Muhammad to announce this challenge to all mortals, all humankind and jinn. These two distinct kinds are those Allah has chosen from among His creatures to assume the onus of moral responsibility on account of the freewill He has given them. Allah has sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to mankind and jinn alike. The latter, too, are addressed by the Glorious Quran, as Allah says: ‘Say [Prophet], “It has been revealed to me that a group of jinn once listened in and said, “We have heard a wondrous Quran, that gives guidance to the right path, and we have come to believe it”’ (*al-Jinn:* 1-2). A challenge is something you ask of a protester that you know he would be unable of. However, the challenge has to be of the field that the protester excels in. Otherwise, the challenge would be devoid of any logic. It would be implausible to challenge someone about a thing of which they have no knowledge. It would not make any sense to challenge a normal person with no prior weightlifting experience to a contest. A real challenge would be posed to a well-known weightlifting champion. This explains why all of the miracles that were given to the Messengers of Allah were related to fields in which their respective peoples displayed particular excellence. This was the case so that each miracle could serve as a challenge to those addressed by the message. None of the previous nations would have room to complain that the challenge was in a field they knew nothing about. None could have claimed that, had the challenge been in a field of which they had knowledge, they would have defeated the Messenger. The miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses)- the staff that turned into a snake and his hand that shone when he brought it out of his pocket- were related to a field in which his contemporaries excelled: magic and sorcery. Had that been mere magic, they would have defeated it, but it was not any sort of magic, rather, it was a miracle from Allah. The miracles of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) were reviving the dead, restoring hearing to the deaf, and curing the leprous. It was so because his people excelled at medicine. The miracle of Prophet Muhammad was the unique, unmatchable eloquence he was given- manifested in the Glorious Quran- since Arabs were truly masterful in the language of Arabic.

The disbelievers of Mecca requested particular signs to be sent down to them so they would believe in the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad. However, it was for Allah only to decide which miracles and signs to send to His servants. He knew *the Exalted* what was most appropriate in each context to serve as a miracle to prove the truthfulness of His Messenger. Had the adversaries of Prophet Muhammad asked him to bring them signs and miracles that were related to fields they knew next to nothing of. Allah would not have challenged them- by sending down the miracles they wanted- in fields in which they possess no particular genius. Rather, He revealed the Quran and made it the principle miracle that affirms the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for it challenged them in their field of excellence. What really distinguishes the Quran from all the previous miracles of the Prophets is that it will last to impress every generation of humankind until the end of time. Other miracles- that were relevant to physical phenomena- were also given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for his contemporaries to see. These were miracles directly addressed to his contemporaries to further support him before his opponents. We believe in them for news of them were narrated to us by the trustworthy transmitters of the Message- who received it directly from the Prophet and delivered it to us generation after another. The purpose of those various miracles was to establish faith in the hearts of those who witnessed them. Among them was the water that gushed forth under the hands of Prophet Muhammad, the tree branch that leaned towards his direction, and the animal that spoke to him. Unlike the Quran, the objective of these miracles was to give assurance of the Prophet's truthfulness to those who witnessed them. The Glorious Quran, however, is addressed to everyone who has lived on earth, ever since the time of Prophet Muhammad until the Day of Judgement.

What really distinguishes the Quran from the previous Books and miracles is that it is both the Book and the miracle. It is the divine revelation that offers guidance and the perfect way of life and is meanwhile a miracle that stuns with its magnificence whoever ponders it. The Prophets' miracles all died with their deaths, but the Quran is an everlasting miracle that will continue to impress with its uniqueness whoever recites it until the end of time. The previous Books were confined to delivering the guidance of Allah, but the miracles associated with them were separate. The miracles of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were the staff that turned into a snake and his hand that shone when he brought it out of his pocket, but his book was the Torah. The miracles of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* were reviving the dead, restoring hearing to the deaf, and curing the leprous, but his book was the Bible. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* had his Book that delivered divine guidance and his principal miracle that proved his truthfulness both represented by the Glorious Quran.

For this reason, when the disbelievers of Mecca asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to level the mountains of Mecca, rend the land beneath them apart, and give life to their dead to affirm his truthfulness, Allah revealed to him: 'If there were ever to be a Quran with which mountains could be moved, the earth shattered, or the dead made to speak [it would have been this one], but everything is truly in Allah's hands…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 31). Allah is *the Almighty* Creator Who has absolute Power to do all that. Still, had they pondered the Quran, it would have sufficed for them. It would have been enough as evidence for the Prophet's truthfulness.

Some orientalists have posed this question: If the aspect of miraculousness of the Quran is represented in its unique eloquence, then it is only a challenge to Arabs. How then do you claim that Islam is addressed to all people, and in what way can the Quran be miraculous to non-Arabs? First, if Arabs who enjoy a particularly masterful command of the Arabic language and natural fluency in it have paled before this challenge, others who are less versed in the Arabic language must be even more awed before its miraculousness.

Second, who says that the only aspect of miraculousness in the Quran is its unique eloquence? This One aspect- even though addressed to all people- was specifically intended for the first community who received the Message- those who would carry the burden of delivering faith to the world. When the Message of Islam began to spread throughout various regions of the world and come in to contact with non-Arabs, the most auspicious aspect of Quranic miraculousness has been quite another thing, besides its linguistic uniqueness.

The Quran reveals to people various things, stories, and phenomena totally unknown to us. Science comes every day with a new discovery that pertains to something foretold in the Quran centuries before science knew it. The Quran was revealed to an unlettered Prophet and was first addressed to an unlettered community; however science is yet to come with new discoveries that remove the veil from other scientific allusions the Quran has made. Is not this sufficient to render the Quran miraculous even to non-Arabs? Secrets of the Quran are unending that we are still pondering over certain verses of it and waiting for science to explore their meanings.

Not so long ago, the atom was found out to be the smallest material unit in existence, to which the Quran has already alluded, as in the following verse: ‘Whoever has done an atom’s-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom’s-weight of evil will see that’ (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8). However, with the advancement of tools and research methods, scientists have managed to split the atom. Seeing that there was something in creation smaller than the atom some thought this could be a fine opportunity to attack the Quran and cast doubts over its truthfulness and precision. However, whoever investigates the Book of Allah will find a reference to this recent scientific development in His words: ‘… there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor anything less than that nor greater, but it is in a clear book’ (*Yunus:* 61). Even a split atom has been afforded a mention in the Book of Allah. Does all that not make the Quran miraculous?

So Allah posed a challenge to all His servants when He said: ‘… Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it…’ (*al-Isra’:* 88). Arabs used to believe that every talented poet or eloquent wordsmith was inspired by a demon. They believed those artful demons all resided in a valley referred to as the ‘Valley of Ingenuity.’ This explains why Allah does not limit the challenge to people only, but whoever they believed was the source of their inspiration. They attributed their exceptional competence in language to jinn, fine, they too may be included in the challenge!

Another point is also worth highlighting respecting the words of Allah: ‘… to produce something like this Quran…’ (*al-Isra’:* 88). The challenge is to produce ‘…something like…’ the Quran, something only near it in magnificence and miraculousness. As for producing an identical version of the Quran, as for producing a book exactly equal to it is too much for all humankind and jinn that Allah would not pose it as a challenge to them. The Quran is the word of Allah, enough said. It is impossible to produce its equal. Therefore, the challenge is just to try to even imitate the Quran in the aspects of its uniqueness. As such, the only thing imaginable within the realm of a potential challenge is to produce something like the Quran. A copy cannot match the excellence of the origin. An imitated version of a thing is, needless to say, less in every respect than the original composition. If an even less marvellous copy is so hard to produce, an equal to the original would be impossible. Allah then says: '… they could not produce anything like it…' (*al-Isra':* 88). If they cannot produce even a replica, can they ever manage to produce the original?

Allah concludes the verse by these words that add even more power to the challenge: '… however much they helped each other' (*al-Isra':* 88). The word used in the original text of the verse is *zhahir* which is the Arabic for 'helper' or 'supporter'. This challenge is indeed too momentous to be undertaken by a single person, so Allah poses it to all His servants collectively. Let all humankind and jinn to come forward with all that they possess in terms of creativity and genius. Let people seek assistance from the jinn they claim to awaken their muses. Let all efforts and talents collaborate in this attempt and let the able assist the feeble to meet this challenge, yet they would not meet it!

Has the challenge remained confined to producing something like the Quran? No, for Allah has reduced this challenge to producing even only ten chapters like the Quran (1) or even a single chapter like it.(2) With the challenge thus reduced, their failure and incapacity are shown even more strikingly, for though Allah has made the challenge easier, those addressed by it- all humankind and jinn- are still, and would forever be, very far from meeting it. Each time the challenge is thus made easier, its loftiness shows more impressively. Certainly, challenging them to produce only a single chapter like the Quran heightens the challenge and is more expressive of the Quran's inimitability. No one has been in any way capable of producing even one verse that is even remotely similar to anything in the Book of Allah.

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(1) Allah poses this challenge in His words: 'If they say, "He has invented it himself," say, "Then produce ten invented *suras* (chapters) like it, and call in whoever you can beside Allah, if you are truthful."' (*Hud:* 13)

(2) Allah says: 'If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single *sura* (chapter) like it– enlist whatever supporters you have other than Allah– if you truly [think you can]. (*al-Baqara*: 23)

Now, let us look at that challenge from another perspective. It is also meant to stress the principle that all people are equal at the sight of Allah. As a matter of fact, this principle of equality among all people is one of the main reasons that incited enmity towards Islam in the hearts of the disbelievers. Acknowledging that the Quran is the word of Allah necessarily entails acknowledging Prophethood of Muhammad and elevating him highly to a status that none of them- including the nobility-ever attained. That acknowledgement meant he would be far above those who opposed him, rejected his call, oppressed his followers, and plotted his assassination. Allah describes this attitude of the disbelievers in His words: 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) This implies that perhaps they might have accepted the Quran had it been revealed to someone other than Prophet Muhammad. They were driven by envy over the high-status Allah has granted him through this revelation, as Allah says in this verse: 'Do they envy [other] people for the bounty(1) Allah has granted them?…' (*an-Nisa':* 54) Glory is to Him Who distributes worldly provisions according to His Wisdom and Mercy. Even though Allah has granted people powers and means through which to seek His bounties that pertain to the life of this world, He has not granted them the keys of provision, for He grants whatever He wills to whomever He wills. If people have no power over worldly provisions, how is it that they want to interfere with the issue of revelation? How is it that they want to withhold the Mercy of Allah He has decreed for His servants? 'Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace? We are the ones who give them their share of livelihood in this world and We have raised some of them above others in rank…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

In the next verse, Allah speaks about the nature of the Quranic discourse:

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(1) i.e. the Prophethood given to Muhammad. *[The Quran, A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem]*

وَلَقَدۡ صَرَّفۡنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٖ
فَأَبَىٰٓ أَكۡثَرُ ٱلنَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُورٗا ٨٩

In this Quran, We have set out all kinds of examples for
people, yet most of them persist in disbelieving [89]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 89)

This verse refers to the variation of the Quranic style. This is not meant only to impress the mind through the rhetorical effect, but also to address the different minds with different kind of arguments that suit each. Allah has sent down the Glorious Quran to address all the different types of human dispositions. The Quran deals with a wide range of topics and offers insights on a similarly vast range of meanings. In light of this, it necessarily displays various styles of address that deal with the same issue from various perspectives. Every issue is explicated in several ways for all different minds to comprehend.

Let us examine, for example, how Allah deals with the essence of the Islamic creed: the divinity and oneness of Him *the Exalted and Almighty*. In one verse, He says: 'If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods *illa* (but; except; other than) Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins…' (*al-Anbiya':* 22). Some have raised a misconception concerning this verse. Since the Arabic word *illa* also denotes 'without', some have alleged that the verse appears to mean: If there were other deities of whom Allah were not one, only then would the heavens and earth fall to ruin! In other words, the existence of Allah is what matters. Therefore, so long as He exists, it would do no harm if other deities shared in His dominion! The heavens and earth would only fall to ruin if Allah were not among those other deities! the Exalted above what they ascribe to Him!

This faulty understanding stems from misunderstanding the meaning of *illa.* In this verse, it means 'other than'. Therefore, the verse means if there were deities other than Allah presiding over the heavens and earth, if any other deities shared in His dominion, they would inevitably fall to ruin.

In another verse, Allah deals with the same issue of Islamic monotheism, but in a different style: 'Allah has never had a child. Nor is there any god beside Him– if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91). Allah is Exalted above having a son or a partner. Furthermore, if there were other deities with Him, each of them would have claimed independence with that which he has created. Each would have selected a specific part of existence to be his dominion. Each would have attempted to lord over the others Whose will would be executed if those deities disagreed on something? If one of them gained victory, how would the rest- the defeated ones- be ever called deities despite their inability and defeat?! He is only One God: Allah *Glorified is He*!

Here is a third verse of the Quran that deals with the matter of Islamic monotheism in a different way: 'Say, "If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne"' (*al-Isra':* 42). Were there other deities, they would have punished the Lord of the Throne for assuming His role as Possessor of the dominion of the heavens and earth and excluding them all!

In another verse, Allah displays another different proof that He is the One God; He says: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). There has never been anyone who has come forward to object to Allah's being the One God by claiming to be a god himself. Logically, since no contender has even objected to this declaration or made a statement that contradicts it, this means that divinity rests securely with Him Who has ascribed it to Himself. In principle: what is declared as truth should be held as truth unless another party declares or proves otherwise. We have previously used an analogy to clarify this meaning- and as we always say, this is only for illustration, for Allah is far elevated above all comparison. We said before: suppose a host found a wallet full of cash in the place where his guests had been seated. He announced that to the group and displayed the wallet to them. One of them said the wallet belonged to him and no one contradicted his claim. That being the case, would the host have any grounds to doubt his claim?

That was one example, and there are many others. We have seen how Allah has dealt in the Quran with the issue of monotheism. Now let us see how He refutes the claim that He has begot a son. Some of the people of the Scripture have made the following allegation, as Allah quotes them in the

Quran: ‘The Jews said, “’Uzayr (Ezra) is the son of Allah,” and the Christians said, “The Messiah is the son of Allah”…’ (*at-Tawba:* 30). Allah refutes this allegation in His words: ‘The Creator of the heavens and earth! How could He have children when He has no spouse…’ (*al-An‘am:* 101). Another verse also deals with the same issue, yet in a different manner: ‘They assign daughters to Allah(1)—may He be exalted! —and the [sons] they desire to themselves’ (*an-Nahl:* 57). They not only alleged that Allah has children, but also assigned to him daughters in particular, for they used to despise them, and claimed sons for themselves since they were the favoured offspring. ‘Are you to have the male and He the female? That would be a most unjust distribution!’ (*an-Najm:* 21-22)

Thus, the Quran varies its styles and methods of discourse. The purpose of this variation is to offer several kinds of logical arguments to address the different types of minds that receive the message. The turn of mind and the disposition inevitably differ from one person to another. Among the various mechanisms through which Allah presents truths in the Quran is the use of parables. It is quite common in the Arabic language to use parables, adages, and aphorisms, being precise and concise meanwhile delivering the intended meaning. An adage represents an unchanging impression, which makes it fit to be used whenever an appropriate occasion presents itself.

For example, there is a common Arabic proverb that says, ‘What news have you brought, O Esam?’ The occasion of this proverb was that a man sent a woman called ‘Esam’ to ask on his behalf the hand of a woman he wanted to marry, so when she returned, he asked her that question. Since then, it has grown a common question to be asked to anyone who has been sent on any errand.(2) People commonly say to someone who has an air of importance, ‘If you are a gust of wind, then prepare to meet a tornado!’ A proverb is an expressive sentence. Once said and adopted by people, it continues to be used with the same wording whenever an occasion arises. As for an aphorism, it is a witty sentence that expresses a general truth. It is usually concise but conveys pithy meanings. A famous one also translates: ‘A true brother is not always born by your mother.’ Another says: ‘A woman does not need to be taught how to veil.’(1) ‘He who exhausts his riding animal can never reach his destination’ is another traditional aphorism. Poetry also sometimes gets so widely known that some verses become almost a maxim, like the following:

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(1) “Some of the pagan Arabs called angels the daughters of Allah. This is doubly blasphemous because of the contempt in which daughters were held in a warrior community, to the extent of female infanticide…” *[The Quran, A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem]*

(2) Ibn Mandhur says in *Lisan Al-Arab* lexicon that *Esam* is a man’s name and that it refers to Isam ibn Shahir Al-Jarmi, the usher of An-Nu’man ibn Al-Mundhir. The same is narrated by Az-Zirikli in Al-A’lam (4/233).

A sick mouth infected with bitterness

Finds all tastes bitter even pure water!

There is also the following famous couplet:

Miserable is him who has a king’s aspiration,

But his means are straightened by destitution!

A student who only bothers to study right before the exams, when it is quite too late, should know that ‘A quiver has to be filled with arrows a good time before going hunting’, not right when the prey is seen!

Adages and aphorisms are thus so common in languages, and this is why the Quran has adopted them as one of the means of presenting truths. For example, Allah says: ‘Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or of something [even] less than that…’ (*al-Baqara:* 26). Allah is never ashamed to draw parables even with the meanest of creatures in order to engage every type of mind and drive the point home. Allah would draw a parable using a gnat or even a smaller creature, and in every form of Allah’s creation is a manifestation of His Majesty. Every bit of His creation, no matter how small or seemingly simple, is miraculous.

A similar parable is presented here: 'O people! a parable is set forth, therefore listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it; weak are the invoker and the invoked' (*al-Hajj:* 73). Allah also says in another verse: 'The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house; and most surely the frailest of the houses is the spider's house did they but know' (*al-'Ankabut:* 41). The use of parables serves a good purpose conveying the meanings intended to different kinds of people. The Quran does not stick to one monotonous tone or style. On the contrary, it addresses every category of human intellect based on their different backgrounds and capacities to understand, hence the variation.

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(1) According to Ibn Barri, this saying means that someone who is experienced in something does not need preaching or instructing. A woman does not need advice about how to veil herself with a head covering. *[Lisan Al-Arab]*

This is so clear also in the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He would receive the same question from several of his companions, yet give a different answer to each, depending on the condition of him who was asking the question. For example, Prophet Muhammad was more than once asked, 'What is the most meritorious of all deeds, O Messenger of Allah?' To one of those who asked that, he replied, 'Observance of *salat* (the Prayer) within its appointed time.'(1) To another, he said, 'Filial piety, (duty to one's children)'(2) and on a third occasion, he gave this answer, 'To greet your brother with a smiling face'.(3) By those various answers, perhaps Prophet Muhammad was addressing a weakness- respecting religious practice- in each of his Companions. It was not a one-size-fits-all approach that was applied for everybody, but quite the reverse. The way he dealt with every issue showed an obvious sense of considering each person's condition, needs, and unique nature.

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(1) *'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud said, 'I asked the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him "Which deed is the most meritorious?" he replied, "Observance of salat (the prayer) within its appointed time."' [Cited by Muslim in his Sahih, Hadith no. 85 in "The Book of Faith"]*

(2) *Abu 'Amr Ash-Shaybani narrated, 'The owner of this house- pointing at the house of Abdullah- told us: 'I asked the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him "Which deed is most beloved to Allah the Exalted and Almighty?" He replied, 'Observance of salat (the prayer) within its appointed time." I then asked, "Then what?" He replied, "Then filial piety."' [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5970) and Muslim in his Sahih (85) in "The Book of Faith"]*

(3) *Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him said, "The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him told me, 'Do not underestimate the value of any good deed (no matter how seemingly insignificant), even if it is just meeting your brother with a smiling face."' [Cited by Muslim in his Sahih (2626) and Ahmad in his Musnad (5/173)]*

Back to the verse we are considering; Allah concludes it by saying: '… yet most of them persist in disbelieving' (*al-Isra':* 89). The original Arabic text of the verse uses the word *aba* which denotes 'rejection'. Furthermore, the entire structure of the verse also conveys the fact that they reject faith and are pleased with anything apart from it, hence their persistence in disbelief.

Allah says in the following verse:(1)

وَقَالُواْ لَن نُّؤۡمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ تَفۡجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ يَنۢبُوعًا ﴿٩٠﴾

They say, 'We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until
you make a spring gush out of the ground for us [90]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 90)

It is a truth basically acknowledged that every human being is subject to vicissitudes. No one perpetually remains in the same condition forever. No one knows what will happen to him tomorrow. Allah is the only unchanging truth. As long as this is the case, it is implausible for anyone to judge anything conclusively concerning the future. No one owns the future. It is totally in the Hand of Allah Whose Knowledge always encompasses all things and Who is not subject to changes.

Allah has made it the nature of everything in this temporary life that decline must follow prosperity. When one reaches the peak, it means he will inevitably start his journey downwards. A poet has expressed this meaning so well when he said:

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(1) *This is the occasion on which this verse was revealed, as narrated by Wahidi in his 'Asbab An-Nuzul (pp.168-170) on the authority of Ibn Abbas: 'Utba, Shayba, Abu Sufyan, An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and Abu Jahl, among other notables from Quraysh, all gathered on top of the Ka'ba and agreed, "Let us send for Muhammad, argue with him and oppose him until it becomes impossible for his followers to continue to follow him." They sent him this message, "The noblest of your people have gathered on your account; they would like to speak with you." The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him went to them without delay, for he thought that perhaps he was beginning to get through to them— he was always worried on their account and wanted wholeheartedly to see their hearts open for right guidance. Besides, their animosity was becoming hard to bear, so he eagerly responded to their summons.' Once in their company, a long conversation ensued between the two parties, which Wahidi details in his volume, and it was on that occasion that the verse was revealed.'*

When a thing grows perfect, watch for its decline!
Once a peak is reached, a fall is sure to come next!

This makes it quite unwise to wish to have perfect lives and perfect blessings. How often people lament that something is missing and wish it were perfect. They do not realize that it is in fact the deficiency within every blessing that causes it to last. If the blessing is allowed to come full circle, what then is to be expected, after perfection but that the perfect thing must start its journey to diminishing? Stay contented with that which is missing, for perhaps it is what keeps envy and grudge at bay. A father would lament that one of his children has not been up to his expectations. He would wish that child was as good as his siblings. He has not come to the realization that Allah has decreed this out of His Wisdom. This one aspect of imperfection is perhaps your safeguard against the animosity of those who bear you ill will. Mutanabbi(1) alluded to this meaning in his praise of Sayf Ad-Dawla(2):

All eyes are envious of your perfection!
Ward off their envy by displaying a fault!

They look at your perfection with envy, so display any aspect of imperfection to avert the wickedness of their envious eyes!

In the verse we are reflecting on, the disbelievers said they would never embrace faith unless what they asked came true. They made an assertion that they would still be disbelievers in the future, but is it in any mortal's scope to determine what will happen in the future? It is only for Allah to decide what will happen tomorrow. It is worthy of mention that one of the disbelievers who made this assertion later converted to Islam. They vowed to remain disbelievers until Prophet Muhammad made a spring gush out of the ground for them. However, they turned believers and it did not take a spring gushing forth from the earth to substantiate their faith.

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(1) He is Ahmad ibn Husayn Abu At-Tayyib Al-Kindi. He was born in 303 AH in the city of Kufa in an area called Kinda. He was raised in an Eastern Mediterranean province, but shortly after that he moved to the rural areas where his command of Arabic was sharpened and his appetite for literature was whetted. He produced his first lines of poetry when he was a child. He withdrew to the remote area of Samawa until the Sovereign of the city of Homs took him as a captive and eventually imprisoned him until he repented and repudiated some of his earlier claims. He died in 354 AH at the age of fifty-two. *[Az-Zirikli in Al-A'alam 1/115]*

(2) He is Ali ibn Abdullah ibn Hamdan At-Taghlubi, Abu Al-Hasan Sayf Ad-Dawla. He was born in present-day Silvan in the Diyarbakir Province in 303AH. He is narrated to have had extensive confrontations with the Romans. He ruled Wasiṭ, Damascus, and Aleppo which is where he died. He was buried in Silvan in 356 AH at the age of fifty-three. *[Az-Zirikli in Al-A'alam 4/303]*

During the Conquest of Mecca, ʿIkrima ibn Abu Jahl said what he said at Al-Khandama(1), but later went to Prophet Muhammad and declared faith.(2) He fought side by side with Khalid ibn Al-Walid at the Battle of Yarmuk where he was dealt a mortal wound. As Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* carried 'Ikrima, he said, 'Is this a death that would make the Messenger of Allah pleased with me?'

No one is, therefore, capable of determining the future unless the outcomes of present events are in his hands. He must be capable of preventing any change in circumstance so he may control the future. Does any mortal possess this ability? No, Allah is the One Who is in control of the present and future. Allah says in the chapter of *al-Kafirun*: 'Say [Prophet], "Disbelievers: I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-4). The chapter negates that the Prophet does not and will not worship the false gods of the disbelievers, nor will they (if they persist in disbelief) worship his Lord *Glorified is He*. One may ask: how does the Quran negate the possibility of something occurring in the future? The Quran is the word of Him Whose Omnipotent Knowledge encompasses all things. He is the One Who is never affected by change. He is the One Who decrees what will happen and what will not.

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(1) Al-Khandama is a well-known mountain in Mecca. Ibn Barri narrated that during the Conquest of Mecca, Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him confronted some of the idolaters at Al-Khandama and successfully routed them. That was called The Day of Al-Khandama. [Lisan Al-'Arab]

On the day of the Conquest of Mecca, Companion Bilal ibn Rabah stood on top of the Ka'ba and proclaimed the call to the Noon Prayer. Seeing that, 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl said, 'Indeed Allah has blessed Abu Al-Hakam (his father who had died as a disbeliever) for sparing him the scene of this slave ascending Ka'ba to say what he just said!' [Cited by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 4/328]

(2) *'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl fled after the Conquest of Mecca. He took to the sea among other and they encountered a storm. Some called out, 'Now is the time for turning to Allah with sincere devotion, for indeed, in this situation, the other gods you serve cannot help you in the least. 'Ikrima said, 'If Allah only can help me while at sea, then none but Him can help me on land!' Then, he prayed, 'O Allah, if you save me from the perilous circumstance in which I know find myself, I vow to go to Muhammad and place my hand inside his (as an expression of submission to the truth) and hopefully I will find him forgiving and generous.' When he returned from the sea unharmed, he went to the Prophet and declared faith. [Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba, 4/258, Bio. 5632]*

So the verse we are considering states that the disbelievers vowed to persist in disbelief '… until you make a *yanbu'* (spring; springhead) gush out of the ground for us' (*al-Isra':* 90). In another verse, Allah says about the Great Flood that took place at the time of Prophet Nuh (Noah): '[We] burst the earth with gushing springs…' (*al-Qamar:* 12). The gushing forth is the process by which the water hidden in the earth is allowed to come to the surface. A spring is water that emerges from the earth; it is very plentiful, so no matter how much water is taken from it, it would not dry. However, its waters may decrease slightly at times when rains are scarce, for example. A springhead, on the other hand, is the never-ending source, and this is to which the verse refers. It consistently overflows without any decrease in water levels. An example of this is the *Zamzam* Well in Mecca. Perhaps the disbelievers made that request out of intense need of water at that time.

So the disbelievers asked Prophet Muhammad to cause a spring to gush out of the ground, and:

أَوْ تَكُونَ لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِّن نَّخِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجِّرَ ٱلْأَنْهَٰرَ خِلَٰلَهَا تَفْجِيرًا ﴿٩١﴾

Or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them [91] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 91)

They have previously asked water for themselves, and now they are asking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a garden. By garden we mean an orchard or a plot of date-palm trees and grapevines. These were specifically the two most well known types of produce at this time and in this place. As for the portion of the verse which reads: '…and make rivers pour through them.' (*al-Isra':* 91), it implies that they would like to see the rivers gush forth and continue running beside the gardens, so as to secure a perpetual water source for the gardens.

The next ‘challenge’ they requested from Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* was:

أَوْ تُسْقِطَ ٱلسَّمَآءَ كَمَا زَعَمْتَ عَلَيْنَا كِسَفًا أَوْ تَأْتِىَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ قَبِيلًا ﴿٩٢﴾

Or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring God and the angels before us face to face[92]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 92)

The word *(za'am)* means an alleged claim that has no bearing in reality. They say that, ‘The allegation is the horse which can carry a lie on its back’. To this end, Allah tells that those who deny the truth ‘claim’ that they will never be raised from the dead. (*at-Taghabun:* 7). So, if they are accusing Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* of making alleged claims, then they should beware that he is only conveying the message of Allah, that he is faithfully transmitting the message of his Lord to them. Thus, if they wish to issue an accusation that anyone is making alleged claims, let them direct that accusation to the True Lord *Glorified is He* since no blame should accrue to His Messenger.

The only reason they recalled this issue of the sky falling upon them is because prior to this the True Lord *Glorified is He* had asked them if they do not think about what is in front of them and behind them in the heavens and earth! And that if He wished, He could make the earth swallow them, or make fragments from the heavens fall down upon them. (*Saba’:* 9) This explains why they asked Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* to put this warning in action! The word (*kisafa*), in this verse, means fragments.

Allah says: ‘…or bring Allah and the angels before us face to face.’ (*al-Isra’:* 92), this is like saying, ‘Until we are able to see them before us face-to-face.’ A meaning identical to this one can be located in verse 21 of the chapter of *al-Furqan* where Allah says that those who do not believe that they are destined to meet him are wont to wonder about why no angels have been sent down to them, or why they cannot see their Lord!

Anyone who reflects deeply on the requests the disbelievers made of Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* will find that they were nothing short of deliberate attempts to conjure up the most unimaginably far-removed scenarios from reality. This offers us strong indication that they did not really desire faith and guidance in the first place. Quite the reverse, they wanted to argue and to invoke an opportunity to express their stubbornness. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* rebuffs their obstinacy and stubbornness and tells them that even if He were to send down angels upon them, or even if He made the dead speak to them, or even if He were to assemble before them, face to face, all the things that can prove the truth, they would still not believe. (*al-An'am:* 111) Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says relaying their requests:

أَوۡ يَكُونَ لَكَ بَيۡتٞ مِّن زُخۡرُفٍ أَوۡ تَرۡقَىٰ فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَلَن نُّؤۡمِنَ لِرُقِيِّكَ حَتَّىٰ تُنَزِّلَ
عَلَيۡنَا كِتَٰبٗا نَّقۡرَؤُهُۥۗ قُلۡ سُبۡحَانَ رَبِّي هَلۡ كُنتُ إِلَّا بَشَرٗا رَّسُولٗا ﴿٩٣﴾

Or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky – even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read.' Say, 'Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?' [93]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 93)

A house (*al-bayt*): is a place where one regularly spends the night, and (*zukhruf*) is something used as an ornament (expressed here as gold). At the time, gold was the most precious thing that could be used for decoration. Indeed, almost every type of adornment will fade as time goes by and lose its lustre, and this will make it lose the very attribute that made it beautiful in the first place. Gold is a noted exception to this general rule; only if it is pure (24k) gold that is unmixed with any other metal. Pure gold does not rust, nor does it interact with other elements. For this reason, it retains its lustre and sheen. So, if we imagine a house made of gold, what would it look like?

Those who insist on advocating empty pretences that civilization is all about luxury and superfluous extravagances, have taken to the practice of covering less expensive material (like wood) with coats of gold; like we see in various imported items. They do this with the purpose of preserving the lustre and superficial beauty of things.

Then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: '…or ascend into the sky…' (*al-Isra':* 93). That is to say: that you have a set of stairs upon which you can ascend into the sky. Obviously, they rushed to issue this statement but then opted to tone it down a bit because they must have realized how farfetched it is, so they just bluntly blurted out the true essence of their ingrained obstinacy, saying: '…even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read…' (*al-Isra':* 93).

It is as though they are insisting on showing their stubbornness to Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him*. In the first request, they are liars (when they said it is enough to convince them of his truthfulness) and in the following request they are also liars. The truth is that even if Allah revealed unto them the book they requested (in the third request), this still would not cause them to believe in the message. The True Lord *Glorified is He* rebuts them, saying that even if He had sent down to Muhammad, a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say that it is nothing but blatant sorcery (*al-An'am:* 7).

Pay close attention to the way that the Quran refutes the previously mentioned obstinacy. Allay says: '…Say, 'Glory be to my Lord!…' (*al-Isra':* 93); it is a phrase which indicates the magnificence and utter transcendence of the True Lord *Glorified is He*; a flagrant challenge to the whole universe and the entire created order. It is a phrase that is only mentioned in reference to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. There never will occur a time when people say this phrase in reference to each other despite the presence of tyrants and despots—whom the world never seems to be short of—whom people desire to flatter and cajole. It is a phrase issued based on free will; it is possible for anybody to say it; nonetheless, no one would dare say it in reference to anyone besides Allah.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* challenges mankind within things that are within their power and free will. But, at other times, He challenges them in matters which are intended to demonstrate that He knows that the limited ability of all mankind could never stand a chance at the challenge in hand. An example of this is when Allah *Glorified is He* damned the hands of Abu Lahab to be ruined and that he too will be ruined! That neither his wealth nor his gains will help him, and that he will burn in the flaming Fire. (*al-Masad:* 1-3) Of course, these verses were revealed in respect to Abu Lahab. At the time of their revelation he was a disbeliever, but there was a likely chance he could have accepted faith as others from among the disbelievers had accepted it. People like ʿUmar and Al-ʿAbbas *Allah be pleased with them* and others became committed believers and at the time these verses were revealed, they had not come to Islam yet. So, what was it that gave Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* the assurance that Abu Lahab would never believe? Indeed, he had conveyed the message of his Lord—the Quran—which had been recited, memorized, and recorded; with this clear statement that Abu Lahab would die as a disbeliever and that his ultimate destination would be the inferno of hell. Here, we must point out: Was it not within the power and will of Abu Lahab to make this statement a mere falsity? Could he not have stood and uttered among his people the testimony of faith, 'There is no deity to be worshiped but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah'; even if it was just sheer hypocrisy? After doing so, would he not have been able to accuse the Quran and Muhammad of lying? Nevertheless, none of this happened because the Speaker of these words is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.

Within the scope of this challenge, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has attributes and names. All His names are derived from His attributes except in one case: The eminent utterance that is derived from His pure essence (*Allah*). It is the name given to the Divine Essence and it is not derived from any attribute from among the attributes of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. The fully Capable, the Much-Forgiving, the Ever-Living, and the All-Sustaining and other names of Allah are all derived from attributes. The name (*Allah*) on the other hand, is a designation given to the Divine Essence under which all of the other attributes are subsumed.

In this manner, the Creator left a door open for a challenge to all mankind, they were free to choose the name (*Allah*) for themselves or their children. This challenge was even declared within the Book of Allah when Allah asked if we knew of anyone worthy of the same name as He? (*Maryam:* 65) Yet, no disbeliever has ever been so bold as to call himself by this name; thus, this challenge remains standing until the establishment of the Final Hour. Indeed, this is because Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is true and the belief in Him is so entrenched within the human psyche, even the disbelievers. If they knew that this word (*Allah*) was nothing more than an utterance designating a lie or that it was a word that did not coincide with any reality, undoubtedly, they would have been emboldened to call others (*Allah*) without the slightest bit of constraint. But, as long as they know that the name (*Allah*) is true and refers to a reality, they would not dare be so bold as to use the name inappropriately or use it in reference to themselves, for fear of an unforeseeable backlash or yet an unimaginable punishment.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* responded to the obstinacy the disbelievers were displaying through their requests from Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* by saying: '…Say, 'Glory be to my Lord!…' (*al-Isra':* 93) Indeed, their requests have reached the absolute limit where one can only express his utter astonishment by saying, 'Glory be to my Lord!' This is an exclamatory phrase that is relevant to no one but Allah. By mentioning this phrase, it is almost as if we consign the entire affair to Allah. For surely, the Quran contained enough miracles and wonders to obviate all of the things that they requested!

Allah asks them, in another verse if it is not enough for them that He has sent down to them the Scripture that is recited, and contains a mercy and a lesson for the believing people!? (*al-'Ankabut:* 51)

The Arabic character *hamza* used in the beginning is an interrogative particle intended as an expression of amazement, so the verse says, 'Have they not had enough wonders, while I have revealed this scripture to them? Indeed, this scripture—with all its marvels—makes the need for anything else unnecessary.'

The verse goes on: '…Am I anything but a mortal, a messenger?'' (*al-Isra':* 93) It means: 'Did I ever make the claim that I was a Deity? I am only a human being; I am merely conveying the message of my Lord, and I only do what He commands me to do'. In another verse Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says to His prophet to tell them that it is not for him to change this Book of his own accord; he only follows what is revealed to him since he fears the torment of Judgement Day, if he disobeyed his Lord. (*Yunus:* 15)

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا مَنَعَ ٱلنَّاسَ أَن يُؤۡمِنُوٓاْ إِذۡ جَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡهُدَىٰٓ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوٓاْ أَبَعَثَ ٱللَّهُ بَشَرٗا رَّسُولٗا ٩٤

The only thing that kept these people from believing, when guidance came to them, was that they said, ‘How could God have sent a human being as a messenger?’ [94] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 94)

This means that the only issue that stood between them and believing was this: How can a human being become a messenger? This was the only thing they could not push down their throats or digest: ‘…How could Allah have sent a human being as a messenger?’ (*al-Isra’:* 94) Pondering on the issue of how a messenger could possibly convey any message from Allah, will always reach a single rational deduction; the conveyance could only be done by a human being. How could a different species or order of being be expected to communicate with human beings? There must be some sort of medium receiving the conveyance from Allah and delivering it to mankind. As a matter of fact, human beings are incapable of receiving any form of direct interaction from such a high and intense Entity. So, there are stages needed to incorporate this task, since it is not granted to any mortal that Allah should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He will. (*ash-Shura:* 51)

In this case we dare to ask, ‘But we have a human messenger, so how does Allah address him?’ For this, an emissary is selected from among those belonging to a higher order (the angels); Allah chooses message-bearers from among His angels (*al-Hajj:* 75). Next, Allah chooses a messenger from among the human beings, who will faithfully receive the conveyance from the angel who was chosen, to convey its contents to us (human beings). This is because we are incapable of withstanding a direct encounter with the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

To make it clearer, let me offer this analogy—and as always, even the loftiest similitude pales in comparison to Allah’s Glory: If you want to light a small lamp but the electrical current available has a high-voltage, would you be able to use that current to light the small lamp? Of course We would not, since it would burn the lamp instantly. So, what are you to do when faced with such a situation? The only thing that you can do is using a transformer—a medium. This device will reduce the high voltage of the current and dispense what is only needed to light the lamp (and what it can handle): Only then, can that lamp emit light. In the same manner, the True Lord *Glorified is He* chooses angels as emissaries—angels that can receive direct conveyance from Allah. He then chooses human beings—who can receive the Divine inspiration directly from the angels—to serve as messengers. Finally, the chosen messenger from among the human beings conveys and circulates the message among the members of his people from the human family. With this in mind, what is so strange about a human being serving as Allah's messengers? Why do you disprove of it when it is the most natural thing to do? That is why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wonders why it is so surprising to people that He has revealed His message to a man from among them so he could warn them! (*Yunus:* 2)

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the example of the town to whose people Allah sent two messengers but they rejected both, so He reinforced them with a third and they said to them, 'Truly, we are messengers to you.' (*Ya Sin:* 13-15). Still they rejected them and this means that their objection to the Messenger being human is anything but new. In fact, it has always been this way, that the disbelievers have been passing down since the time of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* relays to us in the Quran the different things these people said like: we see nothing in you but a human like us, (*Hud:* 27), don not follow a mortal like yourselves or you will be losers, (*al-Mu'minun:* 34), and we will surely be sinking to error and folly if we followed any mortal from among us. (*al-Qamar:* 24) Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* urges us to realize the solid tradition established with all the Messengers and He tells us that He has never sent any messenger to mankind except a mortal human being whom He inspired. (*an-Nahl:* 43)

That is to say: Messengers to mankind cannot be angels; it is imperative that they be human beings in order to complete the process of revelation. If this was not the case, and the Messengers came as angels, how would all the people be able to see angels? They might say, 'Even though an angel will be concealed from us—and we cannot see it—but it can see us.' The only problem here is that conveyance of the Divine Message is not just about seeing or being seen; it is about interaction and exchange of discourse. For this reason, (even if an angel were dispatched as a messenger) it would be necessary for him to present himself as a human being to effectively convey Allah's message. So, in the end we are right back where we started: The process of using a human being as a messenger is a natural progression and an inescapable fact.

Allah declares it so clearly that even if He had sent an angel as messenger, He would still have sent him in the form of a man, which would increase their confusion. (*al-An'am:* 9) Hence, there is no cause for stubbornness, obstinacy, or opposing the natural course that Allah has created and deemed suitable for His creatures.

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُل لَّوْ كَانَ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ مَلَٰٓئِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ
لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَلَكًا رَّسُولًا ﴿٩٥﴾

Say, 'If there were angels walking about on earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from Heaven as a messenger' [95] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 95)

The word 'Say' here introduces debunk aimed at the disbelievers. If there were angels walking on earth—feeling at home—We (Allah) would have sent an angel messenger, to be from their very type. The one conveying the message must be of the same type of the one to whom the message is being conveyed. This is expressed clearly within the lengthy Prophetic Hadith of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*; the Hadith in which Jibril *peace be upon him* came to Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, to ask him about some religious matters to teach the Companions. So, he asked him to define spiritual excellence (*ihsan*), faith (*iman*), and Islam? Jibril *peace be upon him* came to the gathering in the form of a man from the desert dwellers. After he completed his task, he set off without anyone being able to identify him. When those in attendance finally asked Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, about him, he said: 'Indeed, this is Jibril; he came to teach you about your religion.'(1)

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(1) *An agreed upon Hadith of the Prophet. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (50) and likewise by Muslim in his Sahih (8); the narrator of this Hadith was 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him.*

One more thing which establishes the necessity of the Messengers being human is that the Messenger is assigned the task of being a moral example for his people, and Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* tells us that the Messenger of Allah is the optimum model for those of you who put their hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Him often. (*al-Ahzab:* 21) So, how else can this good example be manifested? How would the people be guided to follow the model of an angel? The Messenger, when he conveys and clarifies the Way of Allah, must first embody the message he is presenting. So, he cannot issue them a command that he himself cannot apply; quite the reverse, he is foremost among the people in words as much as in actions.

In this way, you will always find that the true ruler or advisor is the one who applies the advice to himself first. Our leader ʿUmar, whenever he wanted to legislate a law but recognized that this legislation would present a challenge for some wrongdoers, he would gather all the people, tell them of his proposal, and then warn them of the consequences of non-compliance saying something to this effect, 'I swear by the One in Whose Hands is my soul, whoever from among you disobeys my order, I shall punish him and make an example of him for all the Muslims. And this applies to me before it applies to anyone else.' This is the reason why ʿUmar *Allah be pleased with him* ruled large swaths of the world during his term. A man saw him once resting peacefully beneath a tree and said what would become later a famous adage: 'You ruled, you were just, you felt safe and so you slept!' In case of ʿUmar *Allah be pleased with him* it was never about ruling more territories or peoples, it was about ruling himself and so the whole earth made itself ruled by him. If truth be told, the ruler is but the centre of a sphere, and around him are other smaller spheres which see him and just follow his lead. Consequently, when they see him behaving righteously, they will also behave righteously, and no one will dare to defy him. But if they see him corrupting, they will exceed his actions and dwarf his corruption by manifolds.

Accordingly, we can say: There is no way anybody can rule someone else until he first rules himself. After this, the public will follow his lead and become compliant with his orders, without him needing to exert any extra effort.(1)

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(1) *'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab wrote to Musa Al-Ash'ari Allah be pleased with them: As for what follows: Indeed, the happiest shepherds is he whose flock is happiest with him and the=*

Nowadays, we see rulers who have understood this principle of being a role model and a good example as it should be understood. We see them driving the best cars and living in the most luxurious mansions, and using even expensive devices, yet still they lead very simple life-styles. Some of them even live in mansions inherited from their fathers or grandfathers but they voluntarily renounce the pampered life styles and the ultra-luxurious living for the sake of being close to their own people.

Same with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who advanced the Islamic method and way of living, while at the same he made himself the quintessential example of its moral and spiritual implications? We find Him urging the wealthy to give charity to those in need but subsequently prohibiting his household from accepting any charity. Similarly, while it is allowed for the Muslims to inherit assets from each other, whatever Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, leaves behind cannot be inherited by his family; since his wealth and assets are charity to be given to impoverished members of the Muslim community.(1)

So, Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, prohibited the members of his household from things that he allowed (and even encouraged) to be given to others. The goal was to set an example of how not to misuse one's power. This also safeguarded him from any intentional slandering the weak-minded might have tried to cast on to him or His character.

Accordingly, we can conclude that ruling is not about discriminating between the ruled and the ruler. Nor is it about giving some of the people privilege over others; only when the people sense equality will they submit to

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= *most wretched of shepherds—in the consideration of Allah—is he whose flock is most wretched with him (as their leader). By no means should you indulge yourself, for indeed those under your lead will do the same. (Hilyat Al-Awaliya' 1/50)*

(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1758) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said: {Once the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him had passed away, the wives of the Prophet wanted to dispatch 'Uthman ibn 'Affan to Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with them in order to ask him about their inheritance from the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her said to them, 'Did the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him not say: 'We (the Prophets) do not leave behind inheritance, that which we leave is charity.'} Al-Bukhari also narrated this Hadith in his Sahih (3711, 3712)*

their ruler, render him their obedience and compliance, since he is not serving his own benefits but rather striving for the betterment of the entire society. This should be established by the fact that such a ruler enjoys a standard of living superior to their own in many respects.

Had the messenger come as an angel, he would not have been able to complete this role of providing a comprehensive example of how to lead an Islamic way of living. Had an ‘angel’ prophet ordered us to follow his example in performing some tasks, we would of course object, saying: ‘How can we be expected to follow you? You are an angel; you do not have any base desires like us. You do not eat, drink, marry, or procreate. Indeed, what you have commanded us to do may be proper for someone like you, as for us we can never live up to that standard.’ This is one of the reasons why it is imperative for a messenger to be human, so that we will not have any excuse for not complying with his orders, since he will be the first to implement what he teaches and all we need to do is follow his lead.

As I said earlier, imagine if you were in the jungle and you saw a lion manoeuvring gracefully and chasing its prey to prance on it, do you yearn to be a lion? Yet, when you see a mounted cavalryman sizing up his enemies and preparing to tackle them, you do yearn to be like him! Wisdom is: The human being will always be the example you will yearn to follow. Therefore, the process of the role model can never be established effectively unless this model was a human being. By now, we hope it is clear enough and that there is no reason to reject the natural process that Allah destined for conveying His message.

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيدًۢا بَيْنِى وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِۦ خَبِيرًۢا بَصِيرًا ٩٦

Say, ‘God is witness enough between me and you. He knows and observes His servants well’ [96] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 96)

(Say): This is a final response to the requests that they made for having miraculous wonders and to their objection to the Messengers being human: ‘…Allah is witness enough between me and you…’ (*al-Isra’:* 96). The help of a witness is usually sought to help determine the outcome of some case, so what case is at hand here? The case at hand here is the vexation that the disbelievers were causing Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, they had requested from him that which wasn not in his power to deliver. But, those who tried to annoy Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not concern him at all; his entire focus was on his Lord. This is why he said: '…Allah is witness enough between me and you…' (*al-Isra':* 96).

If the testimonies in worldly affairs require a witness who saw what happened—upon which an appropriate verdict will be determined—the testimony of the True Lord *Glorified is He* implies that He is the Witness who sees, the Judge who issues verdicts, and the One capable of executing the verdict He will issue.

This is the true meaning of the statement: '…Allah is witness enough between me and you…' (*al-Isra':* 96). Indeed, Allah is enough for you within this matter because He is fully aware concerning His slaves. This means that He knows even the minutest details about them. In fact, He is even aware of the implications beyond their stubbornness and abstinence. Additionally, Allah is all seeing, so nothing that they do escapes him.

Afterward, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says:

وَمَن يَهۡدِ ٱللَّهُ فَهُوَ ٱلۡمُهۡتَدِۖ وَمَن يُضۡلِلۡ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُمۡ أَوۡلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِهِۦۖ
وَنَحۡشُرُهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ عَلَىٰ وُجُوهِهِمۡ عُمۡيٗا وَبُكۡمٗا وَصُمّٗاۖ مَّأۡوَىٰهُمۡ جَهَنَّمُۖ
كُلَّمَا خَبَتۡ زِدۡنَٰهُمۡ سَعِيرٗا (٩٧)

[Prophet], anyone God guides is truly guided, and you will find no protector other than Him for anyone He leaves astray. On the Day of Resurrection We shall gather them, lying on their faces, blind, dumb, and deaf. Hell will be their Home. Whenever the Fire goes down, We shall make it blaze more fiercely for them [97] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 97)

Previously, we said guidance is of two types: The first is the 'clarification' guidance that is given to all of creation—believers and disbelievers—without restriction. Indeed, Allah makes the straight path clear for all people—believers and disbelievers alike—He guides them to it and clarifies its contents.

As for the other type of guidance, it is the aid and facilitation towards the process of carrying on the obligations contingent to the method the people believed in. It is this type of guidance that is specifically for the believer. After Allah gives him clear indication of what the truth is, the believer accepts faith, affirms its truth, and acknowledges the favours and blessings of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. Foremost among these favours and blessings is the fact that Allah has given him a Divine Method in running the affairs of his life. Essentially, divine aid and facilitation are gifts from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*.

About guidance, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that He offered the tribe of Thamud His guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance. (*Fussilat:* 17) This means that He gave them clear indication as to what the straight path is, but they, preferred to be kept blind and misguided rather than to accept guidance. As a result, Allah withheld His aid and facilitation from them.

Allah addresses His Messenger, *peace and blessings upon him*, using two patterns to highlight each form of guidance. In one instance, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* tells him that he (Muhammad) cannot guide the ones whom he loves, but it is Allah who guides whom He wills. (*al-Qasas:* 56) So, Allah negates the ability of Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, to provide the guidance of aid and facilitation, because this guidance is not in his possession to give.

In another verse Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* tells him that he (Muhammad) gives guidance to the straight path. (*ash-Shura:* 52) This last verse establishes that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can give the guidance of clarification since this is the core of his role as a conveyor of Allah's message. In this manner, Allah establishes one form of guidance for His messenger and negates the other since both forms are different and separate. Like when Allah says that most people do not know, but they know the outer crust of this life. (*ar-Rum:* 6-7) So, Allah negates their knowledge and in the following sentence He affirms it. What Allah is saying here is that they have no knowledge of the essence life, but that their knowledge is only about the ostensible crust of life. We must keep repeating these meanings so as to instil them in the hearts and souls of those with a religious turn of mind, so they can benefit from them.

Yet, in another instance the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells prophet Muhammad that it was not him who killed them (when he threw sand at them), but it was Allah who did. (*al-Anfal:* 17) In this verse, Allah is establishing one type of ‘throwing’ and negating another!

Nevertheless, when the source of the speech is infinitely wise and profoundly adept at conveying His message, you should immediately conclude that what is being established is different from that which is being negated. The fact is that Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, during the Battle of Badr, took a handful of dust and flung it at his adversaries. This is the ‘throwing’ that is established by the verse. Then again, it was Allah’s divine power that enabled the molecules of that dust to reach the eyes of the His adversaries; affecting their vision and impacting their ability to fight. This is then the ‘throwing’ that the True Lord *Glorified is He* negates as being the action of Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*.(1)

To be able to comprehend this issue more profoundly, consider the following analogy: Imagine that you are pushing your son to study hard and diligently, so he gets his books, sets them in front of him and skims through them to create the impression that he is reading hard. However, when you review the content with him you find that he has not retained anything that he read. You might say to him, ‘You studied, but you really did not study.’ In saying this, you have established and negated that he studied. Why? Because technically he did study—if what is meant by that is that he opened the books and skimmed through them—but he did not study in the sense of actively retaining any of what he read.

As such, the True Lord *Glorified is He* guides all people in the sense that He directs them to the straight path and clarifies its contents. On the other hand,

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(1) *Concerning the events that surrounded the occasion of this verse being revealed, Wahidi An-Nisaburi mentioned (p. 133): ‘Most of the people who specialize in Quranic exegesis maintain that the verse was revealed in reference to the occasion upon which prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him took some of the dirt and pebbles from the valley (of Badr) on the day of the battle and said to the idolaters: ‘You will meet dishonor’. He then hurled the handful of dirt he had taken at them. There was not a single disbeliever whose eye was not affected by at least a particle of the dust. See also the different narrations of this account in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur by As-Suyuti (4/40-41).*

He specifically guides the believers with the guidance of aid and facilitation to successfully assume the responsibilities that come along with the straight path. Therefore, Allah tells us in various instances in the Quran that He increases the guidance of those who follow the right path, and gives them awareness of Him. (*Muhammad:* 17) He also tells us that He does not bestow His guidance upon the evildoers. (*as-Saff:* 7) He rather guides those who are committed to righteousness.

He also states that He does not bestow His guidance on the iniquitous. (*as-Saff:* 5) Again, the opposite is true, He guides the obedient. Nor does He guide the people who refuse to acknowledge the truth. (*al-Baqara:* 264) Once more, the opposite is true, He guide the believers.

So, throughout the text of the Quran, Allah reveals, in a number of styles, those whom He guides. Conversely, he who chooses disbelief and does not make belief his long-term goal shall reap what he has sown, not just that, but Allah will increase him in his disbelief and set a seal upon his heart. This is the reality that is being established when Allah tells us that He shall leave them to flounder in their obstinacy. (*al-An'am:* 110)

Now, let us return to the verse we're currently reviewing: 'anyone Allah guides is truly guided…' (*al-Isra':* 97). The word 'anyone' also meaning 'he whom', or the Arabic term (*man*)—is a relative pronoun which means: he who (does such and such action). Nevertheless, the word *man* is not limited to being a relative pronoun denoting only the masculine/singular form. On the contrary, it can equally be employed to denote any number of people regardless of gender; some of whom would more precisely be expressed in their own individual pronoun forms as: 'she who', 'those two men who', 'those two women who', 'all of them who', and 'all of those women who.' Thus, you would say: 'Whoever man comes to you, be hospitable.' The usage of *man* here has the broad applicability we just mentioned. So, even though the pronoun *man* is used, it can still encompass one man, two men, more than two men, or one woman, two women or more than two women... etc.

So, *man* here can have six implications; singular for both genders, two for both genders, and plural for both genders; in relation to the verse, 'anyone Allah guides is truly guided…' (*al-Isra':* 97). That is why we say: 'And she whom Allah guides, she alone has found the right way' and 'And they whom Allah guides, they alone have found the right way' and so forth.

This leads us to ask: If this is so, why does the word *man* denote the masculine/singular form particularly, especially when addressing a matter as critical as guidance? In fact, when addressing the issue of misguidance, the word *man* is also used, but it denotes the masculine/plural. The answer is this: True, this does highlight that the word *man* was used in the first instance to denote the singular form, and in the second the plural, like in the verse where Allah tells us that we will find no protector other than Him for anyone He leads astray. (*al-Isra':* 97) This is a fine point of interpretation and it requires reflecting profoundly. When discussing guidance, the singular form is used because the path of guidance is only one: it has no alternatives. It is the Way of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and His straight path. It was actually this that prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, was referring to when he said: {None of you truly believes until even his whims are in accordance with what I've conveyed.}(1)

On the other hand, when addressing misguidance, the plural form is used because the paths of misguidance are numerous and the ways to misguidance are numerous. In other words, there are innumerable ways to be misguided! This is clearly what is being indicated in the statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He tells us that this is His Path leading straight, so we must follow it, and not follow the other ways which will lead us away from it. He further tells us that this is what He commands us to do, so we may refrain from wrongdoing. (*al-An'am:* 153)

Indeed, on one occasion prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, read this verse and drew a visual diagram to illustrate its meaning. He drew a line on the sand for his Companions to see it. After this, he drew many other lines right and left (from the straight line); once done, he pointed at the straight line and said, {This represents what I and my companions are upon.}(2)

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Abu 'Asim in a book titled 'As-Sunna' (1/12) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr Ibn Al-'As Allah be pleased with him and cited by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in Jami' Al-'ulum Wal-Hikam (p.460): The latter did mention that the Hadith contained some weakness.*

(2) *Narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him who said: {he Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him drew a line in the sand with his hand=*

In short, guidance is represented by one path, while misguidance is not limited to a specific number of paths. For this reason, when you analyse the people of misguidance, you find them so disparate because the paths of misguidance that they have chosen differed. What’s more is that each path of misguidance among them has its own unique characteristics. It is important that you read this verse very carefully and thoughtfully so that you can recognize the intent of its Author *Glorified is He*. If someone reads this verse without reflecting profoundly, he might conclude that the guided people will not find anyone to protect them but Allah, as well as the misguided people too, i.e. leading himself to believe that Allah’s guidance includes both.

But the Quran is very meticulous in each ‘stop’ it makes and in each letter it ‘mentions’. And since the message is delivered by the Divine, then every single character is strategically placed. The word ‘protector’ refers to anyone who can assist them or aid them, and ‘other than Him’ should be taken to mean; no one can protect them from Allah after it has been determined that He is not their helper or protector.

Next, we come to, ‘…On the Day of Resurrection We shall gather them, lying on their faces…’ (*al-Isra’:* 97). The Arabic word *hashr* refers here to the event of rising from the graves and being brought together for reckoning. Interestingly, the phrase ‘lying on their faces’ has perplexed many of prophet Muhammad’s Companions. They asked him: How can a human being walk on his face? He answered: {Indeed, the One who has given them the ability to walk on two legs is capable of giving them the ability to walk on their faces.}(1)

= *and then said, ‘This is the straight path of Allah.’ Then, he drew some lines to the right and left and said, ‘these are paths that are worth nothing. In fact, there is not a path among these except that there is a devil sitting upon it and inviting to it.’ Afterward, he recited: ‘This is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it…’ (al- An‘am: 153)} This was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/465) and Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (2/318). The latter said: ‘It had a sound chain of transmission but Imams Al-Bukhari and Muslim declined to rnarrate it.’ Ibn Hibban also narrated it (1741—Mawarid Az-zam’an)*

(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra: {Indeed, the Messenger of Allah said peace and blessings be upon him* ***‘****When people are brought forth from the graves, they will be of three types: Some walking, some riding, and some on their faces.’ The Companions responded, ‘O Messenger of Allah, how can they come on their faces?’ At this, the Messenger of=*

In so much sense, there is nothing really amazing about this: We do see many examples of this among Allah's creatures, and He tells us the in the Quran that among his creatures are those which crawl on their bellies, others walk on two legs and others walk on four… (*an-Nur:* 45). You must have surely seen a snake? How does it slither so quickly and smoothly? Certainly, Allah (who created such a creature) is capable of making those who choose misguidance walk on their stomach on the Day of Judgment. After all this is an uncontested will of a Creator who desires to lower them to the absolute depths of debasement and lowliness. However, they would be better off if this was the extent of their debasement and lowliness because indeed Allah says that He shall gather them on that day lying on their faces; blind, dumb and deaf. (*al-Isra':* 97)

This reveals the forms Allah will employ to debase them: So, in addition to walking on their faces, they will be blind, which means that they will be unable to see anything or find their way. Combine their blindness with deafness—which means that they will be unable to hear the call that will be issued on that day—and dumb so they will not be able speak while going through this harrowing experience. Now, I want you to imagine a human being with these various handicaps combined. Once you have completed the mental picture of that individual, consider the fact that he is not simply experiencing these states on a normal day, but he is experiencing them on the Day of Resurrection. How would you assess the amount of terror that he will inevitably be filled with when the Resurrection commences suddenly? In the scenario that we have been elaborating, nearly all his senses have been reduced to nothing. This means that he is amidst pandemonium, without being able to have access to the assuring power of his senses which could have helped him acquire some equilibrium.

Here, we would like to mention an interesting insight concerning this verse. In many places throughout the Quran, we see 'deaf and dumb' occurring in this very order when being used as adjectives. Nonetheless, we observe an

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= *Allah responded: 'Indeed, the One who has given them the ability to walk on their feet is capable of giving them the ability to walk on their faces.'} This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Ahmad in His Musnad (2/254, 363) and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3142). The latter deemed the Hadith 'good.'*

exception to this general rule within this verse which mentions 'dumb' before 'deaf'. Logically, deafness precedes dumbness because the human being can only repeat what he hears, so if he hears nothing he will naturally utter nothing. Hence, we say that speech is the outcome of hearing; it is a social feature rather than being contingent to genre or race.

Previously, we mentioned that an English child who is raised in an Arabic speaking environment will inevitably grow-up speaking Arabic and vice-versa. This is because language essentially, has very little to do with race. It is a social feature established within individuals based on what they hear as they grow up. The equation can be summarized as such: The tongue simply utters what the ears hear. Even the Arab, who is raised in an Arabic speaking environment without being exposed to the peculiar pronunciations and meanings of some Arabic dialects, will not be able to imitate those sounds or understand their meanings.

Yet, within the verse that we are currently reviewing, dumbness precedes deafness; why? Indeed, when this person is taken unaware by the terror of resurrection, the first thing he would be expected to do is ask about what is taking place, after which he would want to listen intently to find out what is going on. But in his case he will be taken by surprise and gripped with terror and he will not even be able to enquire about what is taking place around him. Thus, dumbness precedes deafness in this situation.

Some orientalists and those who hew closely to them (i.e. those who have ostensibly accepted Islam, and Allah knows what is in their hearts) have raised an objection here. They say: The Quran says in this verse that they will be resurrected on their faces and blind which means they will not be able to see. However, in another verse Allah says that when they 'behold' the torment they were warned of, (*Maryam:* 75), and in yet another place, He says the sinful people will behold the fire and will know that they are bound to fall in it (*al-Kahf:* 53). So, these two verses suggest that they will be given sight, so how do we reconcile these two verses with the one we are discussing now?

Anyone who carefully examines the state of those being punished—on the day of Resurrection will realize that the blindness (along with the other loss of senses mentioned in this verse) is specifically associated with the moment of their actual rising. That is to say: they will rise from the graves in a state of blindness so confused and bewildered, hence intensifying their humiliation and disgrace. Afterward, they will be ushered to the place of their reckoning and their sight will be restored so they can see the various punishments that have been designated especially for them. In this way, Allah has given them utter humiliation in both states: sight and blindness.

This explains why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says in another verse that He will lift from the unmindful their veil (on Judgment Day) and their sight will be so sharp. (*Qaf:* 22) He also says that Hell will be their home, whenever the fire goes down, He shall make it blaze more fiercely. (*al-Isra':* 97) Their home (as it appears in the verse) is their ultimate abode and destination. As for the word (goes down), it refers to the weakening of the fire. However, this begs the question: If the purpose of the fire is to punish, why does it weaken at all? Would this not constitute their being given a reprieve from punishment? One who carefully ponders this verse finds that the weakening of the fire is a type of punishment. For indeed, something which remains constant allows the one engaged with it to grow accustomed to it. Thus, constancy and perpetuity within punishment gives way to familiarity. On the other hand, if the fire dies down a bit, they will get their hopes high thinking their punishment is near the end, but once the fire roars to life again their hopes will be smashed and they will start yet another round of punishment. If truth be told, this mode of punishment is more agonizing and painful for them.

In terms of Arabic rhetoric this process is referred to as: Despair after fulfilment. An example of this is seen in the poet's words:

Dealing with Layla, the following day,

I had become like someone trying to grasp water,

Only to find that he had been betrayed,

By the very spaces between his fingers.

Despair after fulfilment can also be seen in prisons and detention cells. You will see a prisoner being pushed to unbearable levels of thirstiness till he will scream out to the guard and start beseeching him for a glass of water. The guard would then bring him a glass of water and virtually place it upon his lips. The prisoner's desire for the water is so heightened at this point, he just wants to wet his palate and quench the burning sensation in his throat. Then the guard spills the water on the floor, and this will be a most antagonizing and irritating form of punishment (for prisoners). A poet(1) has expressed this meaning beautifully in the following words:

It is similar to how a cloud taunts a thirsty person with lightning
As he begins to ask for rain, it dissipates and the sun breaks through (2)

As soon as he saw it, his hopes got high that the cloud would be a source of water. Consequently, when the cloud dissipated his hopes dissipated along with it.

Another example of a punishment that some think is a type of mercy for Hell dwellers, may Allah protect us from it, is the fact that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* will renew their skins for new skins (after they have been charred). This is not an act of mercy, but indeed an intensification of their punishment. Allah says that every time their skins are burnt off, He shall provide them with new skin so they might taste the suffering in full. (*an-Nisa':* 56) In fact, when the skin and the underlying nerves get burnt out completely they will stop feeling anything—as a result—so they will be spared from tasting their punishment. Hence, their skins are renewed to reinitiate their sense of pain and thus, experience perpetual punishment. Not long ago, people used to think that sensation stemmed exclusively from the brain; only they noticed later that human beings could sense things even before any signals reached the brain.

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(1) The unidentified poet is Kathir ibn ʿAbd Ar-Rahman Al-Khazaʿi Abu Sakhr. He is a famous poet of Tamimi extraction. He was originally from the people of Medina but spent most of his life in Egypt. His correspondences with ʿIzza bint Hamil Ad-Damariyya were abundant; indeed, she was very dear to him. He died in 105 A.H. (Al-Aʿalam 5/219, Az-Zirikli)

(2) This verse was composed by Kathir ʿIzza. See also his Diwan (p.107) published by Dar At-Thaqafa, Beirut 1971, edited by Ihsan ʿAbbas. Shihab Ad-Din Mahmud Al-Halabi (d. 725 A.H.) in his book entitled *'Husn At-Tawassul ila Sana'at At-Tarassul'* which was edited by Akram ʿUthman Yusuf (P. 121). The latter said: his mention of 'how a cloud taunts a thirsty people with lightning' is not simply a parable. If truth be told, the poet's objective is to describe how the start of yearning leads to the end of despair.

For example, if you pointed your finger near someone else's eye, you would see him blink before you even touch him. They call this action 'cranial reflex'. In subsequent years, researches were directed toward gaining more knowledge about the place where sensation starts in the human being. In the end, these studies reached what the Quran had informed us about more than fourteen hundred years ago. Namely, that the epidermis is the main hub of sensation within the human being. For instance, when you go to take an injection, the minute the needle penetrates the top layer of your skin you will not feel it as it pricks through the lower layers.

How could the Arabs have known about these intricate scientific theories? Who could have informed Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, about them? Indeed, this is one of the many (universally recognized) miraculous aspects of the Quran; its inimitability can be recognized by Arabs as well as non-Arabs.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَآؤُهُم بِأَنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَقَالُوٓا۟ أَءِذَا كُنَّا
عِظَٰمًا وَرُفَٰتًا أَءِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا ﴿٩٨﴾

This is what they will get for rejecting Our signs and saying,
'What? When we are turned to bones and dust, how can we be
raised in a new act of creation?' [98] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 98)

The demonstrative pronoun (this) which appears in the verse refers to the punishment of whose repulsiveness you have just learned. The phrase '…what they will get for…' refers to the chastisement that will consume them deservingly, not unjustly. Upon hearing the verses that deal with punishment—like these—by no means should you be moved with compassion or sympathy towards the wrongdoers. To be sure, they are only being requited for their deeds, stubbornness, and ultimately disobedience. The postponement of penalties is indeed the very thing that makes people sympathize with the wrongdoers.

There is a difference—in terms of public response—when justice is meted out shortly after the commission of a crime because the vileness of the crime committed is still fresh in the minds of the public and its fire is still blazing in their hearts. If you punish a criminal within this timeframe, the punishment will serve some end and the desired result can accrue from it. Most importantly, the public will sympathize with the victim more than the criminal. But when we delay meting out justice, and get entangled in a medley of legal proceedings that may extend for years, undoubtedly, the crime will be forgotten and the initial alarm that it set off within the public will subside. Indeed, the very vileness of the crime, that at first outraged them, will become as if it never happened. In short, the entire occurrence of the crime will have become obscured. In this case, when you punish a criminal, after a long time has elapsed, all that the public will remember is the affliction of the punishment (with the crime totally forgotten) and hence they will sympathize with the criminal.

So, before you think of their skins which will be charred and renewed, (*an-Nisa':* 56), and before you think of how they will be resurrected blind, dumb and deaf on Judgment Day (*al-Isra':* 97), you must remember and consider what they have done. Then learn that the punishment they are receiving is of Allah's justice. Hence, do not feel sorry for them, and this is what Allah tells us in the chapter of *an-Nur* about the punishment He prescribed for adultery. Allah tells us outright not to have any compassion standing between us and carrying out the law of Allah, if we truly believe in Him, and that a group of the believers must witness their chastisement. (*an-Nur:* 2)

Allah *Glorified is He* shows us the pretext for this punishment: 'This is what they will get for rejecting Our signs…' (*al-Isra':* 98). Again, the word 'signs' encompasses all the wonders within creation, all the miracles that are manifest on the hands of prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, and which serve as proof of his truthfulness, and it also includes the Quranic verses which contain rulings. Hence, the disbelievers have disbelieved in all these aforementioned categories. This means that they disbelieved in the wonders of creation, and did not allow these wonders to let them contemplate about the Creator, nor did they reflect upon the wisdom underlying all His wonders. In the same way, they rejected the verses of the Quran, and they did not believe in what they came with.

All of this indicates their disbelief and the faults that exist in their natural dispositions and inclinations. In a similar fashion, they also rejected the miracles of the Messengers *peace be upon them*. This indicates that these disbelievers were unable to recognize the truth when presented to them.

One of their expressions of disbelief was their saying: 'If we become bones and dust, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead in a new act of creation?' (*al-Isra': 98*). This statement is a flagrant rejection of the verses of the Quran. The Quran was conveyed by Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* to inform them that they would be raised and held accountable for their actions on the Day of Judgment. With this statement they shifted the debate in a new direction, discussing the issue of resurrection after death.

They used the words: '…bones (*'izham*) and dust (*rufat*),' (*al-Isra': 98*). The Arabic word *rufat* mentioned in this verse corresponds to the Arabic word *futat* (crumbs or fragments) both in its meaning and linguistic pattern. This explains why the word, 'bones,' was mentioned before the word, 'dust,' as the word 'dust' here refers to 'decrepit bone fragments'. Indeed, when a human corpse decomposes and the soil eats away at the skin, the only thing that remains is the bones. However, with the passage of time, these bones also begin to break down, crumble, and turn into dust. This is precisely why the disbelievers regarded the concept of resurrection after death as farfetched, because it would occur after their corpses had transformed into bones and then dust.

They also said: '…shall we (*a'ena*), forsooth, be raised from the dead,' (*al-Isra': 98*). The Arabic word *a'ena* ('shall we') starts with a *hamza* (*a')*. Conventionally, the Arabic *hamza* is used to convey an interrogative meaning, but here, it additionally indicates contempt and doubt. Why have the disbelievers treated the matter of resurrection after death with doubt and uncertainty?

Our answer is that the disbelievers certainly suffer from imbalances which affect their natural inclination towards faith (that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed inside all human beings). It serves their lies and false hopes, towards the Hereafter, to reject the issue of resurrection. Even when they suppose that this resurrection will take place, they assume that their position as leaders in this worldly life will secure their status in the Hereafter. These people's understanding of the world is limited to the outer appearances of creation. As far as they are concerned, life is essentially made up of the perceptible phenomena and the other transactions in which they engage. Thus, they live their lives according to this shallow understanding, without realizing that everything in life has uniquely suited and changing phases.

For example, geologists and palaeontologists say, ‘The constituents that are concealed within the earth change with the passage of time. They transform into other forms of matter’. This means that these constituents experience phases for which they are uniquely suited. Life is broader than the outward transactions that we engage in during our existence in this world. In fact, life has a wider encompassing reality than anyone can apprehend.

An example of these varying phases, which created beings are subjected to, can be seen in the states of human consciousness. These are the states of sleep and wakefulness. The portion of life that the brain spends in sleep is governed by certain natural laws, while the existence of the brain in a wakeful state is governed by different natural laws. Despite these different phases of the brain, the body remains alive in both states. In light of this, when we inform you that your death is governed by laws that you are not aware of, and for that matter, your resurrection after death also has distinct laws, this is indeed a plausible statement.

A sleeping person witnesses dreams and altered perceptions despite his senses being concealed from the outside world. He may even precisely narrate certain events, occurrences, and spectacles that he saw in his dreams and state that he assumed he was awake during these occurrences. A person who has lost their sense of sight can also witness dreams and can narrate them with high precision and clarity. People can experience such lucid dreams because sleep is governed by its distinct laws. Dreams are perceived through other sense neurons than those organs that customarily perceive the external life’s events. Your life asleep is independent and different from your life when you are awake. In fact, two people may be sleeping in one place. One of them might be witnessing a joyful dream, while the other person is experiencing a horrific and saddening nightmare. Neither of them is able to perceive or feel the presence of their mate’s dream. Indeed, each one of them is experiencing an independent and specific realm of existence which is not shared with anyone else.

You might witness a dream in a few seconds that would take you thirty minutes to narrate to one of your friends. Scientists who specialize in sleep medicine have concluded that the mind can make up a dream in a few seconds, as if the time spent in sleeping is 'suspended' and the traditional media that are normally used to perceive the world are stopped. Therefore, when you fall asleep, your life is different from the time you spend when you are awake. The same can be said about resurrection after death, which is another phase of your life, after the life of this world. Each of these stages of existence is governed by laws that are particularly suited for it.

Some minds may consider dreams to be simple figments of the imagination that do not correspond to any reality. However, we may observe that some people do have dreams that cast doubt on to this notion. For instance, a person may have a dream in which they had some food. After they wake up, they report having the taste of the food in their mouths. Another person sees a dream where he has been beaten. Then, after waking up, proceeds to show you the marks on his back where the wounds should be. Others rise from sleep drenched in sweat as though they were in actual fights and not merely dreaming of a quarrel or a struggle. This does not prove that all dreams are real, but rather shows that some dreams, by the will of Allah, can prove to be very tangible upon waking. And that dreams are meant to be a sign for the believers.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to clarify a concept to us through the phenomenon of sleep. During sleep, each one of us has a special life that is governed by its own set of laws. These laws are distinct from the natural laws of this world. Our minds should find this as an indication and a sign that another life after death is a plausible phenomenon.

Many scholars have concluded that this phenomenon is part of an uninterrupted and regressive series. The wakeful state consists of strict physical laws. Existence in a state of sleep is made up of laws that are more subtle and delicate than those that govern our existence in the wakeful state. Therefore, it is natural for us to conclude that death is governed by laws that are subtler than those that govern sleep. Following the same pattern, resurrection may be governed by laws that are simpler than those that govern death.

The Quran has conclusively decided upon this matter, as Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Everything is bound to perish, except His (Allah’s) (eternal) Self,’ (*al-Qasas:* 88). Every item or entity in existence that could legitimately be referred to as a thing is bound to perish, except Allah *Glorified is He* as indeed, Allah is the Everlasting Power. Perishing is the opposite of being alive. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘…that those who perished (through disbelief) would perish upon evidence and those who lived (in faith) would live upon evidence; and indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing,’ (*al-Anfal:* 42). Therefore, everything has a specially suited modality of living. Before those things perish, they must live in accordance with that modality.

For this reason, we are genuinely amazed when scientists teach us that a simple box of matches contains sufficient forces in its atoms that can power a train’s journey for a long time. Glory be to Allah *Glorified is He*. This energy is stored in atoms, but we are simply unable to detect its presence. Only astute researchers of science can be able to observe and record these phenomena. Another example of this concept is the phenomenon of magnetism which can lead iron filings to move when a magnetic rod is passed over them. There is a form of existence, present among the atoms of the iron filings, that has reached a precision undetectable by human beings.

Therefore, we can say that the bones and their remaining fragments have an existence of their own. Thus, sceptics should realize that they will continue to have an existence even when they become dust. Even in that state, you will be a part of their physical existence, from which they can reconstitute another existence. There is another question that confronts the logic of these people, who are sceptical of resurrection. ‘Which is a more plausible concept: resurrecting the remnants of a former creation or creating these bodies from nothingness to start with?’

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them in His statement: ‘We know how the earth consumes their bodies, for with us is a record unfailing,’ (*Qaf:* 4). Allah *Glorified is He* knows, without fail, the precise number of atoms that constitute our bodies and can re-configure these atoms once more after our bones crumble. He knows the detailed record of everything in existence and none of these details escape His knowledge or Power.

Allah *Glorified is He* also said, rebuking the claims of the sceptics: ‘Could we, then, be (thought of as being) worn out by the first creation? Nay – but some people are (still) lost in doubt about (the possibility of) a new creation,’ (*Qaf:* 15). These people are truly lost in bewilderment, doubt, and hesitation.

Indeed, we have debated some communist atheists who denied the concept of resurrection. These were communists who had killed their enemies and usurped their money as a revengeful punishment for the wrong and transgression that their enemies had committed towards them. I kept asking them, ‘What about your enemies who died before you could punish them for their wrong-doing?’ Surely, these people did not receive their proper share of punishment in this world. How can they escape from this punishment if they are guilty of so much wrongdoing? The Hereafter is the place where those who were able to escape worldly requital will be punished for their misdeeds. This must take place in order for the balance of justice to be established.

They said: ‘…shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead,’ (*al-Isra’:* 98). They disregarded being resurrected after death as a far-fetched theory. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* said, in tolerant response to them: ‘And it is He who creates (all life) in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew, and most easy is this for Him,' (*ar-Rum:* 27). Restoring the life of something that once existed is an easier and more simplistic task than creating something into existence from nothing.

The discussion here pertains to the bodily resurrection of the human being. This is a creature that has been brought into existence by Allah *Glorified is He* who made him a master in this earth and has made his years limited. Why are some people adamant about rejecting the resurrection of human beings, neglecting Allah’s Power over all the other created things?

Many of these created forms are older and greater in their material magnitudes than human beings are (i.e. the Mountains and Stars). Before they deny the resurrection of human beings after they have become dust, they should look at the more momentous and stunning objects within creation. Despite their immensity, these entities are submissive and obedient to Allah *Glorified is He* without any resistance or objection. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth,’ (*Ghafir:* 57).

Thus, those who reject the resurrection of human beings (after they become dust and bones) should consider the magnitude of the sun. It was created by Allah *Glorified is He* before the creation of human beings and it will remain until Allah *Glorified is He* wills otherwise. The sun consistently emits light and warmth without interruption, impairment, or failure. It does not need to be serviced nor have its parts replaced. This force of nature moving about in its orbit has been subjected by the Power of the Creator to your service. What does recreating human beings amount to when compared to the Power of the Creator *Glorified is He*?

Allah said:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ قَادِرٌ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يَخْلُقَ
مِثْلَهُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَهُمْ أَجَلًا لَّا رَيْبَ فِيهِ فَأَبَى ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ إِلَّا كُفُورًا (٩٩)

Do they not see that God, who created the heavens and earth, can create the likes of them [anew]? He has ordained a time for them – there is no doubt about that – but the evildoers refuse every- thing except disbelief [99]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 99)

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: ‘Did they not see (‘*awalam yaraw)* that Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth, has the power to create them anew in their own (original) likeness,’ (*al-Isra’:* 99). When we encounter the Arabic *hamza (‘a),* which is used as an interrogative particle, followed by the Arabic character *wa,* which is used for attaching independent clauses and items within a sentence, we can be assured that the sentence contains a word or phrase that has been omitted. In this case, the words, ‘Did they not see,’ in the verse can be translated as, ‘Did they (deny resurrection and) not see?’ Thus, the verse is asking the question, ‘Can they not see that Allah *Glorified is He* who is responsible for the creation of the heavens and the earth, is capable of creating their likes?’

Allah’s words, ‘…in their own likeness,’ indicate that He will recreate them, once more, in their former states. Indeed, the act of creation entails a new construction. Some scholars interpreted the verse that they will be created in their old forms. Another interpretation is that they will be given a different form that only has the same likeness. The second interpretation may have more weight because their new forms will have no free will in the Hereafter compared to the life of this world where they had free will. In the Hereafter, they will only be compelled to obey Allah’s Commands. This is because the Creator will announce on the Day of Judgment: ‘With whom will sovereignty rest on this Day? With Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists,’ (*Ghafir:* 16).

Allah *Glorified is He* said in this verse: ‘…having beyond any doubt, set a term for their resurrection? However, all (such) evildoers are unwilling to accept anything but disbelief!’ (*al-Isra’:* 99) They flagrantly rejected standing before Allah in this world. In the Hereafter, it will be an indisputable reality. However, these individuals are stubborn disbelievers, no matter the form of evidence or parables you present to them. They have turned a deaf ear to guidance, as accepting faith will decrease their worldly power and their self-proclaimed majesty. Indeed, (accepting faith) would make them equal to their slaves and restrict their free enjoyment of moral corruption and misguidance.

Those leaders and notables rejected faith and scoffed at the idea of resurrection after death, out of fear for their rank, position, and temporal authority. We can pose the following question to them, ‘Have you not experienced oppression at someone’s hand? Has anyone not ever transgressed against you or stolen wealth from you without being apprehended or punished?’ Indeed, it is more fitting to believe in the Hereafter which is the place where punishment and recompense are realized. There, you will receive indemnity from all of those who have wronged you

In the following verse, the Quranic context shifted our attentions to a new issue. Allah *Glorified is He* said:

قُل لَّوۡ أَنتُمۡ تَمۡلِكُونَ خَزَآئِنَ رَحۡمَةِ رَبِّيٓ إِذٗا
لَّأَمۡسَكۡتُمۡ خَشۡيَةَ ٱلۡإِنفَاقِۚ وَكَانَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ قَتُورٗا ١٠٠

Say, ‘If you possessed the very stores of my Lord’s bounty, you would hold them back in your fear of spending: man is ever grudging’ [100] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 100)

This is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* to convey this proclamation to his community. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* demonstrated his faithfulness in conveying the message of the Quran, as he conveyed every word in the message, including the word, ‘Say,’ and did not omit any part of the text he received from Allah *Glorified is He*. This displays the depth of Prophet Muhammad’s commitment to convey the message of his Lord.

Treasuries are places where precious worthy riches are stored for a specific period of time. The phrase, ‘…treasuries of my Lord’s Mercy,’ is a reference to the benevolent divine bounties in the world, from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the establishment of the Final Hour. These bounties exist in Allah’s treasuries, whether they are already manifested in this world or will still be manifested. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘…and We only bestow (bounties) in accordance with a measure well-defined,’ (*al-Hijr:* 21) Therefore, these bounties are present within the knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* until there is need for them. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about the created signs in the heavens and the earth in the following terms: ‘Say, “Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two days and claim that there are powers that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?” For it is He who (after creating the Earth) placed firm mountains on it, (towering) above its surface, bestowed blessings on it and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it: (and all this He created) in four aeons,’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10). Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘…bestowed blessings on it…’ after mentioning the firmly established mountains. Then He said, ‘…and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence…,’ (*Fussilat:* 10). It is as if the mountains are the storehouses of sustenance and divine mercy to the people of the earth. Sustenance is the livelihood that grows out of the earth’s vegetation upon which individuals seek to maintain their lives. Thus, the Quran informed us that the elements that make up the human being are the very same elements that make up the farmable soil from which we eat.

However, how can mountains be considered treasure houses of sustenance that were placed by Allah *Glorified is He* on this earth before the creation of human beings? Our answer is that the mountains are a primary source of the soil that we use in farming. Mountains may appear as solid inflexible masses of rock, but the reality of their composition is somewhat different. The alternating forces of climate change, such as the sunlight and the cold breezes, break down the hard mountainous rocks into sediments and soil deposits. These deposits are carried by the falling rainwater to form silt in the nearby valleys. Therefore, mountains and valleys have complementary shapes, with the mountainous tops extending toward the sky and the valleys possessing a cavernous topography. The mountains lose their composition and this matter is added to the rich soils of the valleys. Ultimately, this forms the farmable topsoil which we refer to as *ghareen* (alluvion) and *tami* (silt).

We were informed that the city of Damietta, in Egypt, was much nearer to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. However, with the passage of time, vast fields of fertile topsoil were allowed to form due to the Nile River carrying sediments from its sources. As a result, many years ago, the city of Damietta was separated from the sea. Nowadays, owing to the construction of the Aswan High Dam, this build-up of topsoil decreased and the waters of the sea have started eroding the nearby land of Damietta.

Thus, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* said concerning the inception of the earth's creation: 'For it is He who (after creating the earth) placed firm mountains on it, (towering) above its surface, bestowed blessings on it and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it,' (*Fussilat:* 10). This is the chain of events that lead to the creation of sustenance within the earth. Additionally, the verse indicates that the storehouses of Allah *Glorified is He* are unlimited and that they render us bounties without cessation.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying: 'If you were to own all the treasuries of my Lord's Mercy, you would still try to hold on (to them) tightly for fear of spending (too much): for man has always been greedy,' (*al-Isra':* 100). If Allah *Glorified is He* granted human beings ownership of the treasuries which contain His endless bounties and mercy, human beings would still display stinginess, niggardliness, and avarice. The natural disposition of human beings is continuous fear of poverty. They hold their hands from spending generously because they are afraid of their incapacity to replace these expenditures and their inability to exert their future desires.

The Arabic word *bukhl* (stinginess) is used when the person withholds spending their money on other people. On the other hand, if people withhold spending money on themselves, the Arabic word is *taqteer* (miserliness) which is a particularly disgraceful and despicable trait. It is conceivable that a person might withhold his resources from someone else, but the idea that a person would withhold his resources from himself is the most extreme form of avarice.

For this reason, an Arabic poet(1) said the following verses, in ridicule of one such miserable person:

‘’Isa is stingy upon himself, despite the fact that he is a mortal,
If he could avoid such a spending, he would just breathe out of one nostril.’

The same poet also said the following verses about another miser:

‘Indeed, O son of Yusuf, if your entire house was full of needles,
And your father wanted a needle to mend his garment, you would not lend it.’

Many human beings display vicious love of wealth by withholding their resources from others and themselves. The principal reason for this avarice is the fear of poverty, even if they were granted the endless treasures of the heavens and the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* said in the next verse:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ تِسْعَ ءَايَٰتٍۭ بَيِّنَٰتٍ ۖ فَسْـَٔلْ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ إِذْ جَآءَهُمْ
فَقَالَ لَهُۥ فِرْعَوْنُ إِنِّى لَأَظُنُّكَ يَٰمُوسَىٰ مَسْحُورًا ﴿١٠١﴾

**In the past, We gave Moses nine clear signs – ask the
Children of Israel. When Moses came to [the Egyptians],
Pharaoh said to him, ‘Moses, I think you are bewitched’ [101]
(The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 101)**

Earlier in this chapter, we saw that the disbelievers of Mecca requested several miracles to believe in Prophet Muhammad’s message. These suggestions were mentioned by Allah *Glorified is He* in the following verses: ‘And so they say,

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(1) The poet mentioned above is ibn Ar-Rumi. His proper name is ʿAli ibn Al-ʿAbbas ibn Jurayj Abu Al-Hassan. He was a great poet and a contemporary of Bashar and Al-Mutanabbi. His grandfather was a client of Banu Al-ʿAbbas. He was born in Baghdad in the year 221 A.H., in the same city that he was bred. He died there, by poison, during the year 283 A.H. and was 63 years old when he passed away. (The book of ‘Al-ʿAalam’ (4/297) by az-Zirikli).

“(O Muhammad,) we shall not believe you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or you (should) have a garden of date-palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush, or you (should) cause the skies to fall down upon us in fragments, as you have threatened, or (until) you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us, or (until) you have a house (made) of gold, or (until) you ascend to the heavens, but nay, we would not (even) believe in your ascension unless you bring down to us (from the heavens) a written book which we (ourselves) could read”’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-93).

Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to turn the Arabs’ attention to the fact that the Jews were given nine signs before them. These signs descended upon them without their request, but they, nonetheless, rejected these messages. Thus, the point that is being emphasized in this verse is the obstinacy and stubbornness displayed by the people of disbelief in every age and place. Allah *Glorified is He* described these signs and messages that were revealed to the people as clear messages (*bayinnat*). This means that these messages were unmistakable, bright as the light of day and plainly visible to everyone present. These nine signs were intended for Pharaoh because many people mistake the miracles that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* showed to Pharaoh with the miracles that were shown to the children of Israel. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And indeed, We gave to Musa nine clear messages’ (*al-Isra’:* 101). These nine signs sent to Pharaoh and his people included the staff which transformed into a snake, the hand which was withdrawn from the pocket (of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him*) white and illumined, the years of famine, as well as the epidemics and shortages that beset the people of Pharaoh. After they persistently denied Allah’s signs, Allah *Glorified is He* unleashed a flood upon them followed by locusts, lice, frogs, and blood. These nine signs were made manifest as a result of the exchange that ensued between Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh.

There were other miracles revealed to the children of Israel. These included the staff which Prophet Musa used to strike a stone, releasing twelve gushing springs of water, the mountain being raised above the children of Israel as though it were a cloud, as well as the manna and the quails which were provided for them to eat. All of these miracles were directed solely to the children of Israel.

Allah *Glorified is He* said, 'Ask then the children of Israel…,' (*al-Isra':* 101). We find that this command is specifically directed to Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*. How can Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*, direct a question to the children of Israel, to whom Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* was sent, when their generations had passed away a long time ago? Are the Jews not present at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* their distant descendants? The answer is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can still ask their descendants this question because the descendants had orally conveyed the accounts of these occurrences, generation after generation. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* addressed the descendants of the children of Israel who were contemporaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the following verse: 'And, indeed, Musa spoke (thus) to his people, "Remember the blessings which Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon you when He saved you from Pharaoh's people who afflicted you with cruel suffering. They slaughtered your sons and spared only your women. This was an overwhelming trial from your Lord"' (*Ibrahim:* 6).

It was the forefathers living in the time of Pharaoh who were saved, but Allah *Glorified is He* still addressed their descendants with the words, '...when He saved you,' for indeed, if Allah *Glorified is He* had destroyed the forefathers, the descendants would not have existed. Therefore, in essence, the rescue of their forefathers can also be considered their own rescue.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* is directing these questions to the children of Israel because they were extensively exposed to Allah's revelations, being inextricably linked to the Messengers and the Revealed Scriptures, such as the Torah and the Gospel. On the other hand, the idolaters of Quraysh had no past attachment to heavenly scriptures. This explains why they denied the message of Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to address the idolaters in the following manner: 'None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does, and (none can bear witness as does the scholar) who has true knowledge of the Divine Book,' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43). Indeed, the Jews and Christians who have knowledge of the Scripture will have clear signs of the truth of Prophet Muhammad's Message. They will know specific characteristics about him and the precise time of his revelation. One of them even said that they know about his prophecy as much as they know about their own sons.(1)

These questions that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directed to the children of Israel were meant as a verifying testimony to his prophecy. His people had requested various signs to indicate the truth of his message and Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make them aware of the history of their brothers and predecessors throughout the ages. Allah *Glorified is He* had given these former communities clear signs and eye-opening miracles, but they, nonetheless, persisted in their disbelief.

The people of Pharaoh were shown nine clear signs from Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* but they disbelieved them. Likewise, the people of Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* were also provided a clear sign. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…thus, We provided the she-camel as a manifest sign for (the tribe of) Thamud, but they treated it with injustice' (*al-Isra':* 59). The people of Thamud did not just deny this sign of the she-camel that was miraculously brought forth from a mountain, but they committed a graver sin by murdering it.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And We only refrain from sending the signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false' (*al-Isra':* 59). Just as the people of previous times had disbelieved in the manifest signs, these people would disbelieve in a similar manner, for indeed, disbelief follows one path throughout the ages.

In addition, most of them are not demanding these signs and miracles with a sincere desire to believe the truth. On the contrary, in many instances their demands are being motivated by stubbornness and obstinacy. These are only attempts to fuel controversy and dissension with the aim of debunking the message and passing an enjoyable time.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said, 'It is narrated on the authority of `Umar that he himself asked 'Abdullah ibn Salam: "Did you really know Muhammad as you know your own son?" He answered, "Yes, and in fact, I was even surer about Prophet Muhammad than my own son!" He continued, "The most trustworthy of heaven's inhabitants was sent to the most trustworthy of earth's inhabitants. I knew Prophet Muhammad from his description (in previous divine revelation). As for my son, I do not know exactly what his mother was up to!"' (This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir, 1/194).*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Pharaoh said unto him, “Verily, O Musa, I think that you are under the effect of sorcery (*musshoor*),”’ (*al-Isra’:* 101). This happened after Pharaoh had witnessed all the signs, proofs and miracles of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him*. He accused Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of being a sorcerer!

The word *musshoor* that is used in this verse can be translated as ‘bewitched’. In this instance, Pharaoh is accusing Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of being a sorcerer and a magician (*sahir*). Why was the word used in this verse *musshoor* (under the effect of sorcery) instead of the word *sahir* (sorcerer or magician)? The reason is that this form of the word (*musshoor*) is used in the Arabic language to place stronger emphasis on the meaning intended.

Another example of this is using the word *mastoor* (veiled or covered) instead of the word *satir* (veiling or covering), to describe Allah’s protecting barrier in the verse: ‘And when you recite the Quran, We place between you and those who do not believe in the hereafter a hidden (*mastoor*) barrier (*hijab*),’ (*al-Isra’:* 45). If the barrier is itself a *satir* (cover), why did Allah *Glorified is He* use the word *mastoor* (covered) to describe it? Again, the reason is that this lexical form of the word expresses the meaning and emphasizes it more effectively. The protective cover is in full thickness, as if its own layers provide cover for each other.

We find another example of this lexical usage in the following verse that described the gardens prepared for the believers as having: ‘…a dense shade (*zhilan zhaleela*),’ (*an-Nisa’:* 57). Indeed, the shade itself will be shaded, with the air being divinely conditioned by Allah to provide a canopy of absolute protection and comfort. We can see a slight glimpse of such shade in this worldly life, when we seek the cover of a leafy tree during intense heat. The air underneath the tree is soothing because the leaves form a lattice that provides a multi-layered cover.

Therefore, we can now understand why the word *musshoor* was used in the verse, ‘“…Verily, O Moses, I think that you are under the effect of sorcery (*musshoor*)"' (*al-Isra':* 101). Pharaoh claimed that Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* was bewitched by someone else (*musshoor*), instead of claiming that he was an established sorcerer (*sahir*). This lexical form is a greater emphasis of the meaning that Pharaoh intended in his disbelief, 'Musa's signs are not divine, but are only the work of strong magic. Even Musa himself is bewitched!'

As a matter of fact, the idolaters of Mecca used the expression *musshoor* to refer to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They said: '…if you were to follow him (Muhammad), you would only be following a man (who is) bewitched (*musshoor*)!' (*al-Isra':* 47) In order to support their refutable falsehood, they claimed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had lost the ability to use the faculties of discernment. Therefore, they used the description *musshoor* to claim that he has gone insane or he was under the influence of sorcery. To answer them, if he were a magician, he would not fall as a victim to someone else's sorcery. In addition, why was he unable to cast the same spells on them as he appeared to have cast on those who believed in him? How did the disbelievers resist his sorcery and remain steady in their disbelief?

It is also safe to say that if he was mentally ill, he would conform to behaviour commonly expected of people suffering from mental illness. He did not perform any abnormal actions or make involuntary statements and was in complete control of the critical and discerning features of his mind. They had never witnessed any abnormal characteristics in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In light of this, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to their untruths in His words: 'Nuun (Allah begins this verse with the Arabic letter Nuun). Consider the pen, and all that they write (therewith)! By the grace of your Lord (O Muhammad), you are not insane! And, most surely, you shall have a reward never to be cut off. And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality and exalted character,' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4). Indeed, he had an exalted standard of character.

We now return to the verse we are studying. In the end, Pharaoh contradicted himself. After he accused Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of practicing simple magic, Prophet Musa's signs triumphed against the acts of Pharaoh's magicians!

Therefore, these magicians fell in prostration at the truth of the signs of Prophet Musa. At that point, Pharaoh accused his own magicians by claiming, 'Verily, he must be your master who has taught you magic' (*Ta Ha:* 71). This demonstrates the feelings of frustration and loss that Pharaoh must have experienced at that moment, Allah said:

قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَآ أَنزَلَ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ
بَصَآئِرَ وَإِنِّى لَأَظُنُّكَ يَٰفِرْعَوْنُ مَثْبُورًا ﴿١٠٢﴾

He said, 'You know very well that only the Lord of the
heavens and earth could have sent these signs as clear proof.
I think that you, Pharaoh, are doomed' [102]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 102)

In this verse, Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* addressed Pharaoh directly, rejecting the claims of sorcery or insanity. Moreover, Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* pointed out how Pharaoh clearly knew that these signs he had witnessed were from Allah *Glorified is He* the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Pharaoh was only bent on denying the divine origin of these miracles.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* described how such thoughts run in disbelievers' minds: 'And in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected the (signs), although their minds were convinced of their truth,' (*an-Naml:* 14). Therefore, these disbelievers had absolute certainty in the truth of the miracles they had witnessed, but in spite of this, insisted on rejecting them. The only plausible reason for this rejection is their fear that the truth would shake the foundations of their worldly power and strike the bases of their thrones.

Allah *Glorified is He* described these signs as: '…manifest,' (*al-Isra':* 102). They were eye-opening signs to convince those who witness their occurrence and open their hearts to faith. On considering these signs, they would be capable of paying attention to their Messenger, who had come with miraculous signs of a similar nature to what his people thought they had excelled at.

Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* did not show any signs of weakness at Pharaoh's disbelief. In fact, his feet became firmer and the roots of his message deepened. In front of all the people, he addressed Pharaoh and challenged him by saying: ‘I think that you (O Pharaoh) are utterly lost (*mathboor*)’ (*al-Isra’:* 102). This was in response to Pharaoh’s comment: ‘…O Musa, I think that you are under the effect of sorcery (*musshoor*)’ (*al-Isra’:* 101). Thus, the truth of the statement of Musa dealt with Pharaoh’s empty words and, Pharaoh, the one who initiated the exchange, was the wrong-doer. The term *mathboor,* which is translated here as ‘utterly lost’, refers to a person who is miserably ruined that they are prevented from attaining any good. It is possible that Allah *Glorified is He* could have informed Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of Pharaoh’s imminent destruction.

If we compare both exchanges between Pharaoh and Prophet Musa, we will find that being under the effect of insanity or sorcery (*musshoor*) is a milder condition than being utterly lost in misery and estrangement (*mathboor*). A person who is suffering from mental ailment may lose the blessing of sound reasoning, but with proper care, can lead a life fairly similar to those in possession of healthy minds. In appropriate circumstances, this individual might even lead a life that is superior in certain respects. People are generally more forgiving to his sayings and actions. He may even go to great lengths of wrongdoing without the slightest objection or reprimand from others. Indeed, this range of autonomy is always direly desired by the dictators and autocrats of the world, to effectuate their pronouncements without blame or feedback.

Thus, it is true that Allah *Glorified is He* has deprived some people of a completely healthy mind through which they can perceive reality as clearly as others. Some people may wonder why Allah *Glorified is He* would impose such afflictions on some people. Here, we need to view the issue of mental disease from all of its relevant angles.

When Allah *Glorified is He* deprived some people from the ability to interact soundly, he may have given them other blessings that many sane people are wishing and desiring. In the events of their insanity, these people are allowed a life of decreased responsibility, where Allah *Glorified is He* forbade sane people from objecting to their behaviour. No one in society is allowed to scold or berate them. With Allah’s Commands, everyone should be gentle and caring towards people with such special needs. On top of that, they are not subjected to any reckoning in the Hereafter. Is there any respect which excels this? Therefore, even if someone is being deprived of a particular blessing that seems standard among most people, they may have received other blessings that can only be recognized by our insight and consideration.

If you see someone who is blind, for example, you should never consider yourself better than him in Allah's sight. No one among us is favoured due to a lineage or family roots, and indeed, we are all equal. Therefore, an individual who was deprived of the blessing of sight could have been compensated, for instance, by having heightened abilities to use their other senses. This means that Allah's scales are always balanced.

Read this couplet of poetry composed by a poet who, himself, had been deprived of the blessing of sight. He said:

'My blindness was decreed before the time I was born,
but from blindness flows an intelligent mind.
Thus, I arrived in this world, amazing others,
with a clear memory prepared for learning.
With the absence of the eye as a support for the mind,
I grasped the knowledge that eluded most people.'(1)

The poet narrated the qualities of people afflicted with blindness. This includes their intelligence, innate depth of perception and extraordinary inclination towards attaining knowledge. Indeed, the qualities that he highlighted are readily observable by anyone who has lived with a blind person. Moreover, this is what we generally observe concerning those who have disabilities.

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(1) These two lines of poetry were composed by Bashar ibn Burd. He actually composed these verses after people commented about one of his earlier verses, in which he said, *"The dust which floated above our heads were shining, with the glimmer of our swords, as a night's sky shining with its falling stars."*
People said, "No one has ever offered a metaphor or simile more descriptive than this. How can you do so when you have never seen anything in this world?"
Bashar responded, "Indeed, the absence of sight strengthens the intellect and the heart. They are not occupied with the things that the eyes customarily gaze upon. This grants the mind a heightened sensitivity to touch as well as an inherent intellectual and artistic depth."
Then, he recited the two verses mentioned about the qualities of blindness. This is an excerpt from Al-Aghani which was written by Abu Al-Faraj Al-Asfahani (1/376).

Allah *Glorified is He* has tested them by depriving them of something in their physical constitution, but then, Allah also counteracted that by granting them a different blessing. He does this as a consolation for them and to help them deal with their losses. However, sometimes, this compensation is very subtle. It requires people with sound perception to recognize these blessings.

In the same fashion, we saw how many people, in life, who were tested by the absence of some blessings, persevered to lead lives of excellence in other areas. They affirmed their values in society and developed the necessary balance to lead productive and dignified lives within their communities. An example of this phenomenon can be observed in the German economist Schacht who had a deformity in his legs that relieved him of compulsory military duty. This actually strengthened his resolve to make a significant contribution to his country. He chose economics as his endeavour and excelled in drafting the plans which aided his nation in achieving economic stability. Schacht went on to become the leading economist in Germany.(1)

We must realize that the process of creation of human beings does not yield the same predictable results that we may find in rigid mathematical methods. A machine may produce large numbers of units of the same appearance and function, giving us the same result every time, but the creative act of the Creator is not mechanistic. Biological diversity and disparity from solid patterns and norms is an essential character of Allah’s creative act. This diversity entails an absolute wisdom, as it demonstrates the Omnipotent Will of the Creator. You will easily notice this phenomenon in siblings, born to the same parents, differing in their complexions, heights, and aptitudes.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And among His wonders are the creation of the heavens and the Earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours’ (*ar-Rum:* 22). Allah’s Power to create beings from nothing is an ability that cannot be duplicated by humans. Furthermore, the Creator *Glorified is He* willed the existence of handicapped people and those who endure deficiencies in their physical constitution. This is a pertinent reminder to mankind when they become forgetful of Allah's immense favour upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly transgressing, whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

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(1) Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht (22 January 1877 – 3 June 1970) was a German economist, banker, liberal politician, and co-founder in 1918 of the German Democratic Party. He served as the Currency Commissioner and President of the Reich bank under the Weimar Republic. He was a fierce critic of his country's post-World War I reparation obligations.

In many instances, people are led astray as a result of the blessings they enjoy because they are heedless that Allah *Glorified is He* is the source of these blessings. Thus, when they encounter those who have been afflicted with difficulties, they may start to take notice and call to mind the favours of Allah *Glorified is He* upon them. You will find that many people who enjoy the blessing of sight take it for granted until they encounter a blind person having difficulties crossing a street. At that moment, they may recall the blessing of vision while uttering, 'Allah *Glorified is He* is worthy of all praise.' Thus, people who endure handicaps are not insignificant in Allah's sight. On the contrary, in addition to these handicaps being tests of honour for those who endure them, they also turn the attention of other people to the favours of Allah *Glorified is He* upon them.

However, it is disheartening to see a person who is being tried with an affliction failing to cope with the test of their Lord. Some of them may complain to other people about Allah's will, saying 'Look at what Allah has done to me!' In this way, they may be using their affliction as a means to earn a living which they do not deserve, by asking money from other people under false pretences. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us, 'If you are tested with an affliction, conceal it (as much as you can).'(1) A person who exposes his afflictions to other people is complaining to the creation about the Creator! On the other hand, if such a person righteously conceals the hardships they are enduring, the Lord *Glorified is He* will provide their livelihood to their doors without difficulty or complaint.

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(1) *Cited by Al-'Ajiluni in his work Kashf Al-khafa' (211) with the wording* ***'****If you are tested with disobedience (to Allah Glorified is He), conceal it.****'*** *Also, Hakim recorded in his Mustadrak (4/244), from a Hadith that was narrated by 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him, that Prophet Muhammad stood after the Aslami was stoned for adultery and said, 'Avoid the impure things that Allah Glorified is He has forbidden. Whoever succumbs (to temptation), let him conceal his actions within the cover that Allah Glorified is He has provided and repent to Allah Glorified is He for indeed, whoever divulges unto us the wrongs that he has committed can only expect that we will carry out the punishments the Book of Allah Glorified is He has prescribed for his action.' Al-Hakim said, 'This Hadith is authentic when graded in light of the conditions set by Al-Bukhari and Muslim. However, they did not narrate it.'*

Worse than that is the way some healthy people call for undue attention by feigning handicaps or illness. Their aim is to earn the sentiments of other people in order to garner their financial support. These are acts of robbery using the illusion of weakness and need.

Now, let us refocus our attention on the story of Prophet Musa and Pharaoh to summarize its thought-provoking lessons. The first point is that Pharaoh was primarily responsible for the upbringing and rearing of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* since he was a newly born child. That was after Pharaoh had ordered the systematic extermination of the male children among the people of Prophet Musa. We are highlighting these elements of the story to point out that Allah *Glorified is He* can place a barrier between a man and his inherent desires. Indeed, the will of Allah *Glorified is He* is always successful.

Allah *Glorified is He* placed the parental love of Musa in the hearts of Pharaoh and his wife. Pharaoh's wife expressed this love by telling Pharaoh: 'A joy to the eye (could this child be) for me and for you! Slay him not, as he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son.' (*al-Qasas:* 9) The inherent hatred and hostility that Pharaoh had for Israelite children disappeared. Why did he love this child in particular? It must have passed his mind that this child was cast into the open water by his family in order to avoid his murder! Why did this conclusion evade his thinking? The reason can be found in Allah's saying: 'Allah intervenes between man and (the desires of) his heart' (*al-Anfal:* 24). Indeed, Pharaoh did not respond in the way that was typical of him because Allah *Glorified is He* had disarmed the insight of his heart. Thus, the ignorance and stupidity of this corrupt ruler was made apparent for all the people to see.

Additionally, the story also points to the fact that the attention and nurturing of Allah the Greatest Lord, is always above the most direct and intimate parental attention. A poet once said, as an expression of this point:

'If you do not find care from your children when you are elderly, with the one you expected to support you letting you down and the one you hoped for was not around, bear in mind that the boy who was raised by Angel Gabriel became a disbeliever, and Moses who was raised by Pharaoh became a messenger!' Then Allah Glorified is He said:

فَأَرَادَ أَن يَسْتَفِزَّهُم مِّنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ فَأَغْرَقْنَٰهُ وَمَن مَّعَهُۥ جَمِيعًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

So he wanted to wipe them off the [face of the] earth,
but We drowned him and those with him [103]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 103)

Previously, we discussed the meaning of the term *istaffaza* during our observation of Allah's statement: 'And incite (O Satan) (*istafziz*) whoever you can among them with your voice,' (*al-Isra':* 64). Within our current verse, the term *istifzaz* takes on the meaning of a disturbance created by loud screaming. A person who is startled by a loud voice will be stirred to rapid action. These are the types of sounds that were formerly used by cavalrymen, and are still used by martial artists, to frighten or disrupt the composure of their opponents' concentration. Consequently, the opponent may be overcome or driven away in moments of combat or confrontation. The everyday usage of the Arabic term *istifzaz* appears when a parent orders a lazy child: *Fiz*! This means, 'Get up to do your work!'

Pharaoh wanted to deceive the people of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* in a way that drives them out of the land. He thought that once Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* and his followers are gone, he would have sole control of the whole territory. This is an indication of Pharaoh's idiocy, heedlessness, and foolishness! Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* was sent by Allah *Glorified is He* to free the children of Israel in the first place! This was clearly pointed out in Allah's words: 'And go, both of you (Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)), unto Pharaoh and say, "Behold, we bear a message from the Lord of all the worlds: Let the children of Israel leave with us!"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 16-17) Pharaoh, in his idiocy, aided Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* in the completion of his mission. Indeed, the will of Allah *Glorified is He* was operating above and beyond the will of Pharaoh. Pharaoh wanted to expel the children of Israel so that he can wield sole control over the land, and the will of Allah

Glorified is He dictated that Pharaoh himself would be driven from his worldly life! In the end, he was seized by Allah's might and drowned before he could carry out his plots against the children of Israel.

In one of the rural farm areas, a farmer quarrelled with his neighbour and threatened to burn his neighbour's crops the following year. That man died before the following crop season! This lead the people to say, 'He died before the crops even ripened!' In the same manner, Allah *Glorified is He* drowned Pharaoh and his entire entourage before they had the chance to apply their plots, Allah said:

وَقُلْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ لِبَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱسْكُنُوا۟ ٱلْأَرْضَ فَإِذَا
جَآءَ وَعْدُ ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ جِئْنَا بِكُمْ لَفِيفًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

After his death, We told the Children of Israel, 'Live in the land, and when the promise of the Hereafter is fulfilled, We shall bring you to the assembly of all people' [104]
(The Quran, *al-Isra':* 104)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* is referring to the time that followed the death of Prophet Musa. The verse said: 'Dwell securely on earth,' and many scholars (1) claimed that this expression referred to the Holy Land, specifically Jerusalem. We need to analyze this opinion closely. This is the same land that Allah *Glorified is He* had mentioned in the following verse, in which Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* ordered his people: 'O my people! Enter the Holy Land(2) which Allah has promised you' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21). However, their response to Prophet Musa's order was as follows: 'O Musa! Ferocious people(1) dwell in that land, and we surely are not entering it unless they depart from it,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 22). They also said: 'O Musa! Never shall we enter that (land) so long as those others are in it. Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight, both of you! We, shall remain here, sitting!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24)

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(1) *This includes the statements of Al-Qurtubi, who, in his Tafsir (5/4067), said: "The places they were made to dwell were the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt."*

(2) *In his Tafsir (2/37), Ibn Kathir wrote, "Ibn 'Abbas said, 'It (the Holy Land) refers to At-Tur and its direct vicinity." The same was said by Mujahid and others. A separate narration from Ibn 'Abbas contains the following, "It is Jericho." This position has also garnered some support among Quranic exegetes. However, this may not be right because Jericho is certainly not the city they were intended to enter victoriously, nor was it one of the townships they would have passed through on their way to Jerusalem. It would only be plausible if 'Jericho' is the name of another piece of land that is directly surrounding Jerusalem. This is the position that is narrated on behalf of Suddi, as narrated by ibn Jarir. It might not be the same city known as Jericho that is a well-known township bordering tur to the east of Jerusalem.*

The word earth (as it appears in the verse under examination) does not have any additional adjectives. The verse simply stated: 'Dwell securely on earth.' As we can see clearly, the meaning of the word is vaguely assigned. This is different from the specific saying, 'Dwell in the sacred land of Mecca or the land of Medina.' If you want to give someone permission to settle down and take up residence in a place, like Alexandria, for example, you would order them, 'Take a residence in Alexandria.'

How can I make sense of this command when I am technically already residing in the 'land'? Obviously, you would need to be a bit more specific. Commenting upon this portion of the verse, we offer: The statement of Allah *the Exalted* '…Dwell now securely on earth…' was issued in this way; without specifying a particular place in order to accommodate the verses of the Quran that make it clear that they (the Children of Israel) would be dispersed widely throughout the earth. This of course implies that during the time they would not have a single homeland in which they—as a collective body—could settle. Indeed, this is affirmed by the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth…' (*al-A'raf:* 168). In actual fact, the reality that we observe taking shape after the revelation of this verse supports its assertion: We see that they (the Jewish Diaspora) were spread throughout the nations of the world. Peculiarly, when they would take up residence in these various places throughout the world, they would always create separate little enclaves in which they would form their communities. That is to say, they never mixed with the peoples of the host countries in which they were residing. You would find every group living as though it was an independent nation (inside a nation)—they never mixed with others.

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(1) *Many Quranic exegetes have mentioned that the attempt to identify these ferocious people mentioned in the verse has yielded conflicting narrations. The reason is that the Children of Israel have fabricated a number of Hadiths concerning the bodily prowess of the people who were referred to as ferocious. Some of them have included a man named 'Awaj ibn 'Unuq bint Adam. He has been described (in these false Israelite Hadiths) as being three-thousand, three-hundred and thirty-three (3,333) cubits tall! This is a narration that we should be embarrassed to even mention. Additionally, it clearly contradicts what has been narrated in the two Sahih books: "Prophet Muhammad is narrated to have said, 'Indeed, Allah Glorified is He created Adam. His height was 60 cubits. From the time of Adam's creation down to the present day, the average height of people has been decreasing.' This is an excerpt from the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir (2/38).*

As for the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: '…when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!' (*al-Isra':* 104) In terms of what is intended by (the promise of the Last Day), it represents the second disgrace of the children of Israel. To be sure, Allah had already addressed the first disgrace of the children of Israel—it occurred in the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And we made [this] known to the children of Israel through revelation, "Twice, indeed, will you spread corruption on earth and will indeed become grossly overbearing!" Hence, when the prediction of the first of those two [periods of iniquity] came true, We sent against you some of Our bondmen of terrible prowess in war, and they wrought havoc throughout the land: and so the prediction was fulfilled.' (*al-Isra':* 4-5)

Indeed, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had kept them under surveillance from outside their dwellings in Medina. But it was not simply the Medinas' Jews; this also included the Bani-Qurayzha as well as the Bani-Qaynuqa and the Bani-Nadir tribes. In the end, the Messenger wound up expelling them from Medina and banishing them to scattered areas throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. After this occurrence, the relationship between Muslims and Jews remained disconnected for quite some time.

Afterward, addressing this second disgrace of the children of Israel, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…And so, when the prediction of the second [period of your iniquity] came true, [We raised new enemies against you, and allowed them] to disgrace you utterly, and to enter the temple as [their forerunners] had entered it once before, and to destroy with utter destruction all that they had conquered' (*al-Isra':* 7).

In speaking of this second disgrace, we are living in the time of its occurrence. By that, we mean that the Jews will begin taking up residence in one nation so that the promise of Allah—to requite them for their actions—can be effectuated. Would the Muslims be able to combat the Jews if they were spread throughout the earth? No doubt, it was the True Lord *Glorified is He* who inspired them with the idea of establishing a 'national Jewish homeland', as they call it. This makes it very easy to combat them all at once; once Allah requites them, they will not be able to slip away. Assuredly, Allah will seize them within His mighty and powerful grip.

This is what is being referred to within the portion of the verse which reads: '…We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!' (*al-Isra':* 104) That is to say: A mixed crowd brought together from countries all over the world. Indeed, this is a proper description of what is now taking place in Palestine.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَبِٱلْحَقِّ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ وَبِٱلْحَقِّ نَزَلَ ۗ وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَٰكَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا ﴿١٠٥﴾

We sent down the Quran with the truth, and with the truth it has come down – [Prophet], We sent you only to give good news and warning [105] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 105)

The statement of Allah: 'And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high…' (*al-Isra':* 105). The word *al-haqq* (or the truth) comes from this idea of effectuating or carrying something out, as in the Arabic expression *haqqa ash-shay'*. In a sense, this can be taken to mean establishing something. The truth then, is something which is established and does not undergo change. On the other hand, falsehood is constantly changing; it will always take on the colour of the context in which it is situated. This is the nature of falsity; it is bound to perish. Nevertheless, the variation that exists within falsehood implies that it will take on many different forms; while the truth, conversely, only has one form.

For this reason, when Allah *Glorified is He* gives us parables for truth and falsehood He says: '[Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does Allah set forth the parables' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17).

Therefore, if you witness a historical period in which the people of truth have been afflicted with weakness and feebleness, while the people of falsehood have gained the upper hand, do not be deceived. The people of falsehood have merely risen to the surface like foam rising to the water's surface. It is there, but its being there does not contain benefit for anyone. Moreover, as soon as a strong wind from any direction comes upon the river, the water—which is pure and beneficial for people—will become distinct, whereas the foam will dissipate without having benefitted anyone. In the end, the pure water—which offers innumerable benefits to human beings in terms of consumption, farming, etc.—will remain in the earth.

This parable demonstrates the way falsehood is constantly changing and being altered. However, in spite all its changes it is still unable to truly benefit anyone. Again, the truth is established and impervious to frivolous change. This is primarily due to its being a manifestation of the Allah, the Ultimate Truth *Glorified is He*. He is the True Lord *Glorified is He* and it goes without saying that He is well above any change.

As for the portion of the verse which reads '…We bestowed this [revelation] from on high…' (*al-Isra':* 105), we notice that the attached personal pronoun (translated here as *(this)*) is not preceded by anything that explains what it refers to. While it is true that an attached personal pronoun often represents something that is well known to all of those being addressed, it should still be mentioned alongside the object or person to which it refers, out of grammatical etiquette. Nevertheless, here the attached personal pronoun has not been preceded by anything. There are other instances within the Book of Allah where the attached personal pronoun has been preceded by that to which it refers, such as the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: 'Say: If all mankind and all invisible beings would come together with a view to producing the like of this Quran, they could not produce its like…' (*al-Isra':* 88). Within this verse, the attached personal pronoun that appears in the Arabic *bi mithlihi* translated here as 'its like' of course refers to the Quran whose explicit mention precedes it within the verse.

We would also like to add that if an attached personal pronoun appears without being preceded by the thing to which it refers, it must be something highly specific, i.e., something in which no two people can find room to differ concerning. We see an example of this in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Say: "He is Allah the One"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). Here we see the use of a personal pronoun (though in this case it is a detached personal pronoun) which has not been preceded by the thing to which it refers because it could only refer to Allah *the Exalted*. There is no disagreement concerning this matter.

The same can be said of the verse we are currently exploring: '…We bestowed this [revelation] from on high…' (*al-Isra':* 105). There can be absolutely no doubt: This refers to the Quran. Indeed, the Quran is something established, precise, and uncontested. The verb 'bestowed' has been selected to convey transitiveness. As though the speech of the True Lord *Glorified is He* the Quran had been safeguarded in the 'Preserved Tablet' (*al-Lawh al-Mahfuz*) until the time for the Quran to effectuate its purpose arrived.

Once that time had arrived, Allah sent down the entirety of the Quran from the 'Preserved Tablet' to the lowest heaven. This is what we understand from the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Behold, from on high have We bestowed this [Book] on the Night of Destiny.' (*al-Qadr:* 1) Comparing this (the point just discussed concerning chapter of *al-Qadr*) to the verse we have been exploring; the bestowal 'We bestowed this' being discussed in this verse is the same as that of the chapter of *al-Qadr*. Afterward, over a period of twenty-three years, Allah incrementally revealed the Quran as the circumstances surrounding the Prophet's mission dictated. That is to say, every time something would happen, a Quranic instalment would be revealed to specifically treat the matter at hand.

Turning to yet another aspect of the verse: '…We bestowed this…' (*al-Isra':* 105): We find the use of the word 'We'. This refers to the True Lord *Glorified is He*: it is He who safeguarded the Quran in the 'Preserved Tablet', and it is He who bestowed it: He bestowed upon the trustworthy angel that he had selected—for the task of conveying revelation. 'Trustworthy divine inspiration has alighted with it from on high' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193): Although not specifically named, this is a reference to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. Jibril is the Angel who has been especially honoured by Allah and (in one place) even equated with the Spirit (The Souls of man created by Allah). The Quran has also been equated with the Spirit, Allah says: ‘And thus, too, [O Muhammad] have We revealed unto you a life-giving Message…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52)

Furthermore, He has mentioned concerning the Quran: ‘behold, this [Book] is indeed the [inspired] word of a noble Apostle’ (*at-Takwir:* 19). The noble (angel) did not conceal or omit any of what was revealed to him: ‘with strength endowed, secure with Him Who in almightiness is enthroned [20] [the word] of one to be heeded, and worthy of trust! [21]’ (*at-Takwir:* 20-21); these verses contain descriptions of Jibril *peace be upon him*: The angel who descended with the revelation from the True Lord *Glorified is He*. After this however, to whom did he convey the heavenly messages? Of course, he conveyed them to none other than ‘The Chosen One’, the one known for his trustworthiness among human beings: ‘For this fellow-man of yours is not a madman: he truly beheld [the angel – beheld] him on the clear horizon; and he is not one to begrudge others the knowledge [of whatever has been revealed to him] out of that which is beyond the reach of human perception. Nor is this [message] the word of any satanic force accursed.’ (*at-Takwir:* 22-25) Accordingly, we can conclude that the Quran that we have in our hands is the exact same Quran that descended from the ‘Preserved Tablet.’ This Quran represents the established truth concerning which there is no doubt; it is true, and not a single character within its text has been changed. From now until the coming of the Final Hour, none will be able to locate discrepancies or other inconsistencies that would suggest that the Quran is false.

Following this, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘…with this [very] truth it has come down…’ (*al-Isra’:* 105). First we find the statement: ‘And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high…’ (*al-Isra’:* 105). This implies that all of the means through which this revelation materialised are sound and firm: All of them are rooted in truth and cannot be approached by doubt or suspicion. As for the statement ‘…with this [very] truth it has come down…’ (*al-Isra’:* 105) itself, it refers to the content of the Quran. The content of the Quran is true just as its sources and means of conveyance are. In fact, the Quran came down as a miracle; it is a book of spiritual reflection, but it also gives practical guidelines concerning how one should live. In addressing just how miraculous it is we need look no further than the fact that it challenged those renowned for their eloquence, linguistic purity and stylistic depth—and at every level of the challenge proved their inability to match the Quran. The practical instructions for our lives in the Quran are rooted in truth.

The first thing we encounter within the guidance of the Quran is a focused conversation about the fundamental beliefs that serve as the foundations for every religious and philosophical tradition. This means that before the Quran instructs you: 'Allah said….' or 'Allah has commanded…' it views teaching about Who Allah is and who the Messenger conveying Allah's message is as first priorities. Belief is the fountainhead from which behaviour and disposition flows.

Accordingly, the Quran lays out the basics of divinity and clarifies that Allah *the Exalted* is One, and that He possesses characteristics and attributes of total perfection. Not stopping there, the Quran also lays down the basics concerning the angels, prophecy, miracles, the place of return and the Last Day. These matters would be considered matters of belief. Indeed, the priority shown these matters (in the Quran) is reflective of how Islam views itself and its first responsibility: To provide a fortress inside which (correct) belief can be taught. While in the Meccan phase, the Prophetic Mission was nearly entirely concentrated on this aspect of the faith as opposed to other legitimate aspects of the faith. This was done so that the Muslims could give this issue—which is the foundation of the faith—its due consideration. Properly attaining this matter is tantamount to properly attaining submission to Allah and resignation to His will.

The human being neither resigns to the will nor consigns his affair besides to one he trusts. In that case, gaining first-hand knowledge concerning Allah is a must. After knowledge, faith in Him *the Exalted* and affirming the truth of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* are simply natural outcomes.

The Quran also contains laws and rulings which are established and do not change; that is, they cannot be abrogated by any other scripture due to finality of the Quran. This is expressed in the Quran with the following wording: '…Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of my blessings, and willed that Islam be your religion…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3).

In summary, we may conclude that the Quran has been revealed with the truth as it relates to: Divinity, angels, prophecy, miracles, laws, and rulings. These things are true and cannot be doubted in the least. Again, the established truth descended from Allah through the medium He has chosen from among the angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* unto whom He has chosen from among men and women Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. All of this points to the fact that the truth—which is established and does not change—was sent with protection and fortification.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* spoke truthfully when He said: 'Behold, it is We Ourselves who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this reminder: and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it [from all corruption].' (*al-Hijr:* 9) Here, we would like to cite some contemporary evidence that also points to the fact that the Quran contains unwavering truth; truth that will only become more manifest with the passage of time. In Germany, one of the lawmakers formulated a new law that made provision for the discretionary use of law (perhaps when systematic application would result in an unfavourable outcome). In doing this, they were under the impression that they had developed something unprecedented; they really believed that they had uncovered some new legal implement that would permit them to punish those who try to usurp others' rights.

Sometime down the line, a lawyer from Bani Sweif travelled there to study. While there, he stumbled upon some readings about this new law that they were claiming to have pioneered. Later on, he informed them, 'this law that you are enthusiastically claiming for yourselves is an Islamic Law, in fact, it can be found in the Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.' Upon receiving the news, they eagerly headed for some of the Prophetic biographies and located the story of a man who had complained to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that someone owned a palm tree that was either growing on his property or leaning onto his property. The owner of the tree would make use of it in different ways: tacking things to it, hanging things on it, etc., thus when he wanted to make use of the tree, he would burst into the home of his neighbour. So, what was the judgment of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in this case? One of the men has the right to make use of his tree, but he is being prevented from it by something beyond his control and as a result he is engaging in distasteful conduct (by breaking into the home of his neighbour). The supposed outcome would have the owner of the tree only entering the home of his neighbour as necessity dictated, for example, to prune the tree, graft it, or gather its fruit. {The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought the man forth and said to him: 'You can either grant him the palm tree as a gift, sell it to him, or you can cut it down.'}

Is this not from the truth (in terms of civil law) that Islam brought and introduced? Is this not a proof of the amazing breadth of the divine law? Allah's law contains guidance for how all matters should be handled, big and small.

To this, you can add what some Illuminist scholars have said concerning the meaning of: '…with this [very] truth it has come down…' (*al-Isra':* 105), they have opined that the (very) truth that it has come down with is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Just as one might say I visited Cairo and alighted *(nazala)* with so and so. That is to say: I alighted (*nazala*) with him or in his living space.

Next, the True Lord *the Exalted* says: '…For we have sent you but as a herald of glad tidings and a warner' (*al-Isra':* 105) For a tiding to be considered glad it must contain good news. Conversely, a warning normally contains bad news. However, in both the scenarios of issuing a glad tiding or a warning, there is a condition that must be fulfilled: Namely, that the one being informed of the good news or being warned be given an opportunity to confer with himself and alter his conduct (if the situation calls for that) appropriately. If this condition is not fulfilled, the idea of issuing a warning or a glad tiding is completely futile and void of benefit. Therefore, you must convey the glad tidings of Paradise or the warning of the doom of Hell, while there is sufficient time (for the one being informed) to assume the actions that will lead him to paradise or to refrain from the behaviour that is leading him up the road to perdition.

For example, say you gave your child good news of success and a bright future if he works hard and warned him of failure if he is negligent. It goes without saying that you could not tell him this the night before the final exams; on the contrary, you would have to tell him while he still had sufficient time to choose what he wanted.

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is informing His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* of the nature of his duty as Messenger in its truest sense. He is the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* which means that it is his duty to simply convey both the glad tidings and the warning; by no means is he to assume a level of responsibility (for their guidance or misguidance) above his calling. Making his people believers has not been made incumbent upon him. It is Just as Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned: ‘But would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?’ (*al-Kahf:* 6)

That is: Perhaps you might destroy yourself or be driven to intense sadness over their failure to believe. In another verse He said: ‘Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death [with grief] because they [who live around you] refuse to believe [in it]?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3). It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* has lessened the burden of His Messenger and is calling him to refrain from wearing himself out in his attempt to call them to the faith: Conveying the message is his only responsibility. Guiding unto the faith is the prerogative of none other than Allah *the Exalted*.

Nevertheless, the anxiety that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced over the guidance of his people was a consequence of the comprehensiveness with which he embraced and fully embodied the state that he himself had summed up in the statement, ‘By Allah, none of you truly believes until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself.’(1)

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had attained a perfect state of faith and he would have loved for his people to experience it as he had. This also went for his enemies; even those who had boldly and impudently attempted to impede the progress of his mission right down until their final moments of struggle. He was hoping that they too would be given faith and salvation. In fact, even after he had been given the upper hand and could requite them for bad actions he did not do so; instead He said to them: ‘No;

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(1) *The authenticity this Prophetic Hadith has been agreed upon. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (13) and by Muslim in his Sahih (45) in Kitab Al-Iman. The narrator of the Hadith is Anas ibn-Malik and the wording is as follows: {I swear by He in whose hands is my soul, no servant of Allah has attained perfect belief until he loves for his neighbor (or perhaps he said brother) that which he loves for himself.}*

(I don not desire their punishment) rather, it is my ardent hope that Allah will bring from their seed a people who will worship Him alone and will ascribe divinity to nothing else.’(1)

Undoubtedly, Allah and His Messenger have spoken the truth, to be sure, the ascendants of those people went on to carry the standard of the faith. In actual fact, many of them wound up being some of the fiercest warriors in service of the faith. We are speaking of men the likes of ʿIkrima ibn-Abu Jahl, ʿAmr ibn Al-ʿAs, and Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with them* when they were disbelievers there were a great many Muslims who would have jumped at the chance to kill them in the early battles of Islam. They had no clue that Allah had not allowed them to take the lives of these men for a wise purpose: They would after a time be with you as warriors and battle commanders for the faith!

After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said:

وَقُرۡءَانٗا فَرَقۡنَٰهُ لِتَقۡرَأَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ عَلَىٰ مُكۡثٖ وَنَزَّلۡنَٰهُ تَنزِيلٗا ﴿١٠٦﴾

It is a recitation that We have revealed in parts, so that you can recite it to people at intervals; We have sent it down little by little [106] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 106)

The meaning of *faraqnah* (gradually unfolded) is to spread out or to send down gradually, i.e., in separate instalments, each in accordance with what the circumstances demanded. As for the meaning of *ala makath* (by stages), it carries a connotation of gradualness, deliberation and steadiness.

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(1) *This was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3231, 7389). It is based upon a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of ʿA’isha may Allah be pleased with her in which she said: Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him said to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him ‘Indeed, Allah has heard what your people have been saying about you and how they have denounced you. Now, Allah is sending unto you the angel who has been placed in charge of the mountains in order that you might command him as you wish—in terms of what you want to say done about your people. Then the angel of the mountains called me and greeted me. After this, he said: ‘O Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him if you choose, I can smash them in between the two crags.’ The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him responded by saying: ‘No; (I do not desire their punishment) rather, it is my ardent hope that Allah will bring from their seed a people who will worship Him alone and will ascribe divinity to nothing else.’*

In fact, this verse was revealed in response to the disbelievers who claimed that the Quran should have been revealed all at once. Allah *Glorified is He* faithfully transmits their (weak) position when He says: ‘Now they who are bent on denying the truth are wont to ask, “Why has the Quran not been bestowed on him from on high in one single revelation?’ (*al-Furqan:* 32)

The first thing that jumps out to us about the style in which they posed their question is that it exposes them. The contradiction in which they are, by now, wallowing is unmistakable. In previous verses did not we observe them claiming the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* had fabricated the Quran? Now they are apparently acknowledging that it did in fact descend upon him from on high. This would imply that he has nothing to do with how it descends, correct? Earlier, we clarified that they were not, in fact, attacking the Quran, but it was the person of the Messenger to whom the Quran was revealed.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes up the task of rebutting what they had proposed. He demonstrates how their suggestion is baseless: It is out of step with the very nature of the Quran. It would not befit the Quran to descend all at once as they suggested. Within the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses them in the following ways: ‘…[It has been revealed] in this manner so that We might strengthen your heart thereby…’ (*al-Furqan:* 32).

In this manner, Allah has revealed (the Quran) in this way—the way that you have attempted to criticize—by design. The Quran descends in segments that address particular circumstances, for a reason: ‘…so that We might strengthen your heart thereby…’ (*al-Furqan:* 32). For indeed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would be subjected to a great deal of insolence from the disbelievers, not to mention the mockery, ridicule, oppression, castigation and subjugation that he would be forced to withstand. It goes without saying that he needed to be consoled and reinforced (by Allah).

Accordingly, revelation descending day after day and treating the circumstances he had to confront was a major source of relief for him: It reduced his burden and the other ill effects of what he had to suffer of the hardships and difficulties inherent within inviting to Islam. The constant descending of revelation represented an on-going direct connection between him and the One by whom he was sent. On the other hand, if the Quran would have been revealed all at once, the Prophet's reinforcement from Allah (which occurred through the act of revelation) would have also only occurred once, and the direct line of communication between the Prophet and his Lord would have been lost. This is the aspect of the verse which relates to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* '…for We have so arranged its component parts that they form one consistent whole' (*al-Furqan:* 32). That is: We have sent it (the Quran) down in stages, piece by piece. As for the term *ratl*, it refers to the individual parts of that make up a consistent whole. For example, we would say the *ratl* (parts) of an automobile. This is the way the Quran was revealed: one section of verses after another. This method of revelation made it very easy for the Companions of the Prophet to commit the Quran to memory, understand its import and act according to it proscriptions. They *may Allah be pleased with them* would commit a group of verses to memory and act according to them; like this, the matter of memorizing the Quran and acting according to the lessons it imparts was simplified for them. This was a special distinction granted to the Companions, those whose responsibility it was to preserve the Quran. Ironically, even up until the present day, we still separate the Quran into sections and parts to facilitate memorization: We divide the verses over a group of tablets and memorize the contents of each tablet, one after another.

'and [that] they [who deny the truth] might never taunt you with any deceptive half-truth without Our conveying to you the [full] truth and [providing you] with the best explanation.' (*al-Furqan:* 33) This refers to the opponents of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* those who stubbornly resisted the Way of Allah, that is who would confront him and attempt to discredit him by pulling the wool over his eyes in relation to some matters. It was inevitable that a response which exposed the falsity of their (would be) proofs would need to be furnished at an appropriate time. If the Quran was revealed all at once this process would have been frustrated.

As for the portion of the verse which reads: 'and [that] they [who deny the truth] might never taunt you with any deceptive half-truth…' (*al-Furqan:* 33). That is to say: never will they taunt you with something strange by which they intend to discredit you, without Our conveying to you the [full] truth. This is clarifying that Allah's response to them will consist of the established and indisputable truth.

If we could turn our attention for a moment to some of the examples of how the Quran responded to them within a number of affairs, we would locate the following, each characterized by preciseness and dynamism.

So, when they attempted to cast aspersion on to the character of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: '…If you were to follow [Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you would follow] only a man bewitched!' (*al-Isra':* 47). The response of the Quran, the Word of Allah *the Exalted* came as follows: 'Nuun. (Allah swears by the Arabic letter Nuun) Consider the pen, and all that they write [therewith]! You are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman! and, verily, yours shall be a reward never-ending for, behold, you keep indeed to a sublime way of life' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4). To be sure, someone bewitched would never be described as 'keeping a sublime way of life.'

When they said: '…"what sort of apostle is this [man] who eats food [like all other mortals] and goes about in the market-places…?"' (*al-Furqan:* 7) The Quran rebuffed them by pointing out: '…We never sent as Our Message-bearers any but [mortal men,] who indeed ate food [like other human beings] and went about in the market-places…' (*al-Furqan:* 20). This means that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not doing something without precedent as far as this issue goes. Indeed, he is like others among the Messengers; messengers for whom these characteristics (eating food and going about in the market places) are something generally known of them. If truth be told, it is these humanizing characteristics that make the example of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such a complete model; precisely because he is a human being just like the other human beings Allah sent before him. If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had represented some special case that did not apply to others, it might have been possible for them to raise a reasonable objection (against his legitimately being considered the Prophet) and advance an argument on its basis.

In light of this, the statement the Prophet used to make must be considered a display of courtesy toward his Lord first and then toward his companions. He would say: 'Indeed, I am nothing beside a person who is sometimes admonished (That is: by way of revelation). So, if I were to say, "I exist in a class that leaves no room for comparison between you and I, I would be called to account for it." Instead, I prefer to say, "I am nothing besides a human being like you."'

Can you see the extent to which He embodied true humility? When they attempted to launch an accusation against The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* they said: 'Does he [knowingly] attribute his own lying inventions to Allah—or is he a madman…?' (*Saba':* 8) The response of the Quran was contained in Allah's word: 'and so they assert, "[Muhammad, himself] has invented this [Quran]!' Say [unto them]: "Produce, then, ten chapters of similar merit, invented [by yourselves], and [to this end] call to your aid whomever you can, other than Allah, if what you say is true!" (*Hud:* 13)

Afterward, the requirements of the challenge that Allah had issued them were relaxed and the challenge became easier: 'And if you doubt any part of what We have bestowed from on high, step by step, upon our servant [Muhammad], then produce a chapter of similar merit…' (*al-Baqara:* 23).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* begins to engage them around this issue using the same lenient tone and elevated conduct throughout the exchange, He says: 'Do some, perchance, assert, "[Muhammad] has invented this [story]?" Say [O Prophet]: "If I have invented it, upon me be this sin; but far be it from me to commit the sin of which you are guilty"' (*Hud:* 35).

In a separate verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: "Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty of, nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing."' (*Saba':* 25) Observe the manners being employed here: When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* speaks of his own actions he says 'whatever we may become guilty of' but when he speaks of his enemies he does not attribute any wrong-doing to them; on the contrary, he says for 'what you are doing'.

These examples of the truth that the Quran provided were intended to clear the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* of the attempts his people had made to discredit him. Imagine the Quran had been revealed all at once, would it have been possible to respond to these accusations, and to engage the Messenger's people around the issues that they, themselves, had selected to harm the reputation of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*?

All of the previous examples were strictly related to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* consoling him as he worked to propagate the message of Islam. Nonetheless, there are also examples which relate to the issues of rulings (within the divine law) and legislation. Lest we forget that the Quran not only descended with guidance concerning belief, but that it also contains legal and legislative guidance. In addition to that, the Quran came down to stand as the lasting and permanent testament of Allah: it will remain unchanged until the Day of Judgment, that is to say, not a single character of its text will be abrogated in the way that previous scriptures were abrogated by the scriptures that were revealed after them.

If you analyse this issue of belief, you will find the statements about it definitive: they do not leave any room for ambiguity. The quintessential expression of this is contained in one statement: Allah is One and absolutely indivisible; He has no partners in His divinity. He possesses attributes of total perfection. This concise method of discussing creed is used again and again; it makes no difference what the topic is: the angels, resurrection after death, or judgment and accountability before Allah.

However, when the discussion shifts toward the day-to-day activities that men and women have become accustomed to, the method changes. Treating these matters requires gradualness and gentleness. Conciseness and brevity are not appropriate in dealing with them. One only needs to look at the method of the Divine Legislator *Glorified is He* when He willed to prohibit the consumption of wine; one immediately notices how He did it gradually—in a number of successive stages—until He finally extricated this deeply entrenched habit which had completely taken hold of that community. If the Quran had been revealed all at once would it have been possible to treat the matter this way?

Look at how it (the Quran) acknowledged—in the interest of gentleness—the fact that within wine there was something worth noting. Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* said: ‘And [We grant you nourishment] from the fruit of date-palms and vines: from it you derive intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance…’ (*an-Nahl:* 67). As soon as some of the Companions heard this verse one of them said, ‘By Allah, it is as if Allah is covertly censuring wine.’ To be sure, he had understood it with the inherent depth he possessed in his comprehension of the Arabic language; he recognized that Allah had described the word sustenance by referring to it as wholesome. On the other hand, He had opted to refrain from describing intoxicants at all: this implies that He did not refer to them as wholesome. Behind this mention we can detect something about intoxicants: They destroy the wholesome blessings of Allah and ruin them for those who have been granted them.

Next, the issue is handled in the manner of moral admonition and guidance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They will ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: "In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man; but the evil which they cause is greater than the benefit they bring…"' (*al-Baqara:* 219). In this manner, it revealed the truth of the matter after it had questioned them about it and gave them the freedom to choose. This verse should be understood as moral admonition and advice; not binding law and legislation. However, this paved the way for the unequivocal proscription of intoxicants shortly after that.

During the same time period, some of them would pray under the influence of intoxicants and hardly understand what they were saying. On one such occasion they heard an intoxicated person attempting to pray recite from the chapter of *al-Kafirun:* 'Say: "O you who deny the truth! I worship that which you worship."' The person standing next to him attempted to point out his mistake by signalling to him but realized that he was drunk. Shortly after, his story reached the Messenger of Allah, at which point the statement of Allah *the Exalted*(1) was revealed: 'O you who have attained unto faith! Do not attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness, [but wait] until you know what you are saying… (*an-Nisa':* 43).

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(1) *On the authority of 'Ali ibn-Abutalb, may Allah honour him, who said, 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn-'Awf prepared some food and called us to dine with him. While there, he served us some wine, and we began to feel its effects. Shortly after, the time for the prayer came upon us, and one from among our party stepped forwarded to lead us in prayer, he recited: Say: "O you who deny the truth! I worship that which you worship. And we worship that which you worship." Subsequently, Allah Glorified is He revealed: 'O you who have attained unto faith! Do not attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness, [but wait] until you know what you are saying…' [an-Nisa': 43] this story was cited by Ibn-Kathir in his (Tafsir) (1/500); concerning it he said, 'this was the way it was related by Ibn-Abu Hatim. While At-Tirmidhi related it on the authority of 'Abd ibn Hamid who related it from 'Abd Ar-Rahman Ad-Dashtaki; grading its authenticity, he said: (hasan sahih).*

With that, the period in which one could not consume wine became longer. Throughout the day obligatory prayer must be performed five times. As such, one would have to abstain from drinking before the prayer and leave enough time for the effects of the alcohol to wear off. This made them accustomed to abstaining from alcohol and trained them to be patient in dealing with this ill that had so thoroughly engulfed their community. Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* waited to seize an opportunity to deal with the issue once and for all. The time came when all the people had to gather to drink some wine. The wine did its work and they began to quarrel among themselves until the conflict eventually grew bloody. Afterward, they, themselves, went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and questioned him (1):

'O Messenger of Allah! Would you grant us clear guidelines about the consumption of wine?' It was at this time that the revelation which contained the definitive ruling concerning intoxicants was revealed: 'O you who attained to faith! Intoxicants, and games of chance, and idolatrous practices, and divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing: shun it, then…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90).

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(1) *On the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him who said, 'O Allah please give us clear-cut directives about wine consumption.' After this, the verse that appears in chapter of Al-Baqara was revealed: 'They will ask you about intoxicants and games of chance…' (al-Baqara: 219] Upon the revelation of this verse, `Umar was summoned and it was read aloud to him. When he finished listening to the verse, again he said: 'O Allah please give us clear-cut directives about wine consumption.' Subsequently, the verse which appears in an-Nisa" was revealed: 'O you who have attained unto faith! Do not attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness…' [4: 43] During this time whoever the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him made responsible for issuing the call to prayer would call out: 'Do not approach the prayer while you are intoxicated!' After these new developments, again 'Umar was called and the latest verses were read aloud to him, and for a third time he commented: 'O Allah please give us clear-cut directives about wine consumption.' Following this, the subsequent verse was revealed: 'O you who attained to faith! Intoxicants, and games of chance, and idolatrous practices, and divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing…' (al-Ma'ida: 90] Again, 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him was called and the verse was read to him until it reached the part which asks: '…Will you not, then, desist." (al-Ma'ida: 91] 'Umar responded: 'We have finished.' Cited by Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi in Asbab An-Nuzul (p.118)*

The question is: How would this social ill—in which the community was fully engrossed—have been removed and treated if the Quran had been revealed all at once? Indeed, by revealing the Quran in segments, at different times, in accordance with the dictates of context, it is as though the True Lord *the Exalted* was orchestrating a running dialogue between the verses that were being revealed and those who were being affected by them. That is, those who were consistently carrying out the directives mentioned in the verses. At times, this dialogue would become so intense that they (the Companions) would prevail upon the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and question him despite the fact that He had prevented them from meddlesome questioning, as Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not ask about matters which, if they were to be made manifest to you [in terms of law] might cause you hardship…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 101).

Nonetheless, in spite of this, if they were ‘pinched’ by a question, they would immediately ask the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. The Quran spells this out clearly when it says: ‘They will ask you about intoxicants and games of chance…’ (*al-Baqara:* 219). ‘…And they will ask you as to what they should spend [in Allah’s cause]…’ (*al-Baqara:* 219), ‘They will ask you about the new moons…’ (*al-Baqara:* 189), ‘And they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains…’ (*Ta Ha:* 105). As such, underlying the revelation of the Quran in segments there is deep and profound wisdom that must be reflected upon. If the Quran had been revealed all at once this wisdom would have been misplaced.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ ءَامِنُوا۟ بِهِۦٓ أَوْ لَا تُؤْمِنُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمَ مِن قَبْلِهِۦٓ
إِذَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ يَخِرُّونَ لِلْأَذْقَانِ سُجَّدًا ﴿١٠٧﴾

Say, ‘Whether you believe it or not, those who were given
knowledge earlier fall down on their faces when it is recited
to them [107] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 107)

As for the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: ‘Say, “Believe in it or do not believe…”’ (*al-Isra’:* 107), the first clause which begins with the word ‘believe’ is a command and the second clause ‘do not believe’ is a prohibition. Within Arabic grammar, both the command and the prohibition are considered types of commission (within speech). Linguistically, a command is a particular type of commission that occurs when you request that someone who is your subordinate do something. Prohibition is a specific type of commission that occurs when you command someone who is your subordinate to refrain or desist from doing something. If this linguistic commission occurs but is issued toward someone who is considered your equal or peer, it becomes solicitation. If one commissions someone who is superior or above him in rank the speech-act becomes supplication. For this reason, when we order a student to offer a grammatical analysis of the statement: (Lord forgive me and have mercy upon me!) he will say that ‘forgive’ is a command verb. To him, we would respond, ‘Your understanding of the expression is shallow.’ For indeed, although forgive is a command verb, it is being issued by a subordinate to a superior: from the servant to his Lord *the Exalted*. In light of this, we do not refer to it as a command; it is more appropriate that we refer to it as a supplication.

In the strictest linguistic sense, the appropriate response to a command or a prohibition is obedience. However, does this mean that we would be forced to acknowledge that in reference to the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Say, “Believe in it or do not believe…”’ (*al-Isra’:* 107) the matter is being put forth as an elective. That is to say, that if people believe they have obeyed Allah’s Command and if they do not believe, they have also abided by Allah’s Prohibition?

We would respond to that by stating: In this case neither the command nor the prohibition should be taken at face value. On the contrary, what is being intended here is warning, and belief and disbelief have only been equated to make the warning stronger. For instance, this is the same way you would tell your child who you notice has become negligent: Study or choose not to, you are a free man! Of course, it goes without saying that you do not intend to prohibit him from studying. Quite the reverse, what you intend is to threaten him and motivate him to study.

Accordingly, Allah’s statement: ‘Say: “Believe in it or do not believe…”’ (*al-Isra’:* 107) should be understood as equating between believing and disbelieving. Just as He said: '…let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.' (*al-Kahf:* 29)

Of course, this is not to be taken as a command which would make believing or disbelieving acts of obedience. Quite the reverse, what is being intended here is to issue a warning which is being done by equating between the two possibilities. So in essence it is really the same whether you believe in it or disbelieve (it stands as the truth all the same). To reinforce this point, the True Lord made this a source of consolation for His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* after he was disheartened by the failure of the people of the Book to attain to faith.

As for the portion of the verse which reads: '…Behold, those who are already endowed with [innate] knowledge…' (*al-Isra':* 107), it refers to the Jewish and Christian religious communities. These are the two communities which had the benefit of receiving heavenly revelation; indeed, they had listened to the Torah and the Gospel and had conveyed those two scriptures to their contemporaries living at the time of the revelation of the Quran. If anyone could attest to the truth of The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* it would be these people. To be sure, their scriptures—the Torah and the Gospel—contained glad tidings of the advent of his prophecy. On account of this, many of them abandoned their former religions and embraced Islam: this was only because they were certain that Islam was the true faith.

One such person was 'Abdullah ibn-Salam(1). He was one of the scholars of the Jewish community in Medina; he was aware of the characteristics of the coming messenger as well as the time of his advent. This explains why he said, 'In truth, I knew him (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) the first time I spotted him. I knew him as well as I knew my own son; in fact, my knowledge of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is more certain than my knowledge of my son(2)!'

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(1) *He is: 'Abdullah ibn-Salam ibn Al-Harith Al-Isra'ili, Abu Yusuf, a Companion of the Prophet. He embraced Islam at the time of the Prophet's arrival to Medina. His former name was Al-Husain, but the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him named him 'Abdullah. He witnessed the conquer of Jerusalem with 'Umar, but remained settled in Medina until he died in year 43 A.H. (al-A`lam, Az-Zirikli 4/90)*

(2) *Allah Glorified is He says: 'They unto whom we have vouchsafed revelation aforetime know it as they know their own children: but behold, some of them knowingly suppress=*

Once Islam had really taken root within his heart, he decided to go to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and declare publicly what he had been feeling—the desire to embrace Islam. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, the Jewish community is a community given to lying and falsehood. If I announce my Islam now, they will accuse me of things for which I am not responsible. Ask them about be me while they still consider me a member of their religious community and observe their responses.’ So, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them: ‘What do you say about Ibn Salam?’ They answered, ‘He is one of our rabbis and the son of one of our rabbis, and they proceeded to describe him with the most praiseworthy attributes and commendable characteristics.’ Afterward, ‘Abdullah said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they have said what they said about me, and now I want to declare the testimony of faith: I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and I bear witness that you are Allah’s Messenger.’ As he had predicted, after they learned of his conversion to Islam, they denounced him and described him the worst characteristics. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, did I tell not you that they were a people given to lying and falsehood.’(1)

In the faith of ʿAbdullah ibn-Salam and others from among the Jewish and Christian communities—those who knew the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by his characteristics which had been mentioned in their scriptures, and knew the time that his advent would occur, and that his call to prophecy was true—there was consolation for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. In a sense, this helped to offset the negative consequences of his people rejecting him and declaring him a liar. This explains the statement of Allah *the Exalted*:

= *the truth’ (al-Baqara: 146) Al-Qurtubi narrates that: it is related on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him, that he said to ‘Abdullah ibn-Salam, ‘Did you know Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him like you know your own child?’ ‘Yes, in fact, I knew him better’, he continued ‘the trustworthy (the Angel Gabriel peace be upon him) in the heavens descended upon the trustworthy (Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him) on earth; and due to his description I recognized him. As for my son, I cannot be one hundred percent sure of what his mother was doing.’ This is what Ibn-Kathir mentioned in his (Tafsir) (1/194).*

(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3938) and Ahmad in his Musnad (3/108, 271, 272) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Anas ibn-Malik may Allah be pleased with him.*

'And [if] they who are bent on denying the truth say [to you, O Prophet], "You have not been sent [by Allah]," say, "None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does; and [none can bear witness as does] he who truly understands this Book."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43) The acceptance of faith of these former Christians and Jews—who were contemporaries of the Prophet—is enough for us. Indeed, these were people who were true to themselves, their prophets, and the books from which they derived guidance. When their books described Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave glad tidings of his advent, they did not deny the characteristics or distort them. Quite the opposite, they hurried to Medina in hope of encountering the new prophet that was supposed to emerge there. They would say to the idolaters of Mecca, 'For sure, we are awaiting the dawn of a day when a new prophet will arrive and we will follow him in your midst. With him as our leader we will vanquish you as the peoples of ʿAd and Iram were vanquished (cursed people who disobeyed the Messengers sent to them).' '…whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it. And Allah's rejection is due to all who deny the truth.' (*al-Baqara:* 89) In spite of this, Allah did not allow the truth to completely wither away; He maintained its nucleus and made it the catalyst that propelled them to respond to the Messenger of Allah's invitation to explore the new faith.

The statement of Allah *the Exalted*: '…as soon as this [Book] is conveyed unto them.' (*al-Isra':* 107) is a reference to the Quran. The phrase '…fall upon their faces in prostration…' indicates that they rush to prostrate (after hearing the Quran): their prostration is motivated by the sheer emotional force of the scripture, not because they have consciously decided to do so. Simply by hearing the Quran, they fall to the ground in prostration. Can this be for any reason beside the fact that they have been emotionally affected by it and that faith has begun to take root in their souls? What is more is that they do not simply fall in prostration; they fall upon their chins *(adhqan)* in prostration. The chin is the lowest point on the face, but it is well known that prostration is customarily performed on the forehead. As for those being mentioned in the verse, they prostrate upon their faces—the entire face! This is a sign of how thoroughly they have submitted and humbled themselves before Allah.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ سُبۡحَٰنَ رَبِّنَآ إِن كَانَ وَعۡدُ رَبِّنَا لَمَفۡعُولٗا ١٠٨

And say, "Glory to our Lord! Our Lord's promise has been fulfilled" [108] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 108)

This is what they say while prostrating: Limitless in His glory is our Lord who has fulfilled what He promised in the Torah and the Gospel. Indeed, He has sent The Final Messenger and has given him the Quran. He is limitless in His glory! He has brought the promise that He made to us to fruition, we recognize him, and we believe in him. It is as though they are praising Allah for this blessing.

After this, the True Lord says concerning them:

وَيَخِرُّونَ لِلۡأَذۡقَانِ يَبۡكُونَ وَيَزِيدُهُمۡ خُشُوعٗا ١٠٩

They fall down on their faces, weeping, and [the Quran] increases their humility [109] (The Quran, *al-Isra':* 109)

They had fallen upon their faces in prostration to Allah because they had come to terms with the Quran which was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In him, they realized that the promise of Allah had been fulfilled so they aided him and believed in him. This time however, they are falling upon their faces in prostration as a result of what they heard of the Quran—once they heard some of the details of its contents—and the way they were affected by it. The second instance of prostrating contains a heightened sense of emotion—because it was after hearing the Quran. This is why the additional descriptions of their weeping and increased humility are mentioned here. Allah *Glorified is He* says: "And so they fall down upon their faces, weeping…" (*al-Isra':* 109) that is to say: Every time they read a verse their devotion and humility before Allah increases.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلِ ٱدْعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ أَوِ ٱدْعُوا۟ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنَ ۖ أَيًّا مَّا تَدْعُوا۟ فَلَهُ ٱلْأَسْمَآءُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ
وَلَا تَجْهَرْ بِصَلَاتِكَ وَلَا تُخَافِتْ بِهَا وَٱبْتَغِ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١١٠﴾

Say [to them], ‘Call on God, or on the Lord of Mercy – whatever names you call Him, the best names belong to Him.’ [Prophet], do not be too loud in your prayer, or too quiet, but seek a middle way [110] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 110)

‘Say, invoke Allah…’ Mention Allah, call on Him, or request Him. The word Allah is the proper name of the Deity: He *Glorified is He* whose Existence is absolutely necessary. When the Word God or Allah is used, each can only refer to that Entity whose Existence is absolutely necessary, The True Lord. In the same way, we name people if a name is used; it refers to the individual that is called by that name.

Within our nomenclature there are many types of names: Common names, surnames, nicknames, etc. As for common names, they are the most familiar; each time a child is born he/she is given a common name and is henceforth referred to by that name. In terms of surnames, they are also given to a person, but they usually begin with *Abu*, *Um*, *Ibn*, or *Bint*; for example, the names Abu-Bakr and Umm Al-Mu’minin. A nickname, on the other hand, represents a description of the person to whom it is assigned; whether a praiseworthy trait is being described or one worthy of blame. For example, we use the names: as-Siddiq, ash-Shaʿir, al-Faruq.

If a person shares a name with someone else, one must add an additional description to his name when referring to him, i.e., the way a person might be accustomed to referring to all his children as Muhammad. In such a situation, a name ceases to perform its intended function of singling out a particular person. As a result, we must describe each of them with a description that makes him distinct from all the others. So we would say for example, Big Muhammad, Little Muhammad, or even Muhammad the Engineer. In this way, whenever the name is used (with its additional description) it will be taken as a reference to a particular person.

So, as opposed to our practice which is to name our children, the True Lord *Glorified is He* assigns names to Himself. These are the names which are referred to as the Most Beautiful Names (*al-Asma' al-Husna*) the word *husna* is a noun on the linguistic pattern of '*af' al* which expresses superlative meaning in feminine nouns. A commonly used word of the same type is the adjective *kubra*. If one wanted to express an identically superlative meaning but did so within a masculine noun, the word *Ahsan* would be used instead of *husna*. The question, however, is: Why did Allah describe His names with the word *husna*?

In the Arabic language, the purpose of a noun is to shed light upon the thing to which it refers. The only thing is that within human beings a name might not be an accurate description of the one to which it refers. We might name someone *sa`id* (happy) but he might be unhappy or we may call a person *dhaki* (smart) while he, in fact, is dim-witted. This variance between the names and the things to which they refer reflects a lack of beauty (*husn*) in the naming of these objects. Beauty in naming occurs when the name is in complete accord with the reality of the thing to which it refers. In fact, the more the person being referred to with the name reflects, and embodies the quality the name denotes, the more beautiful the name becomes. In other words, the person we name *sa'id* should actually be *sa'id* (happy)!

With suitability, a name becomes beautiful (*hasan*). Nonetheless, it still does not arrive at the highest level of beauty; indeed, the highest level of beauty (within the act of naming) is reserved for the names of Allah, those with which He has named Himself. The names of Allah are of unlimited perfection. As such, these names do not contain the inconsistency that the names of human beings contain. As we mentioned, in many instances a person might be named '*adil* (just), yet he might be oppressive or someone might be called *sharif* (noble) while he is ignoble. This explains why we say: After associating partners with Allah, the worst act of wrongdoing is for something to betray its name.

So the street ʿImad Ad-Din (pillar of the faith) is so named, but the stubborn rejection of the faith has been its claim to fame.

At times, a name can oppress the one to which it refers. The lines above attempt to capture one such instance: There was once a street named ʿImad Ad-Din that had been known as headquarters for debauchery and dissolution. In the past, there was no place less deserving of the name ʿImad Ad-Din!

In terms of the noblest utterance, the Name of Allah, as we mentioned, it is a name that denotes an entity whose existence is absolutely necessary. After this is established, the names and attributes that refer to this Entity are reserved for Him and cannot be used in reference to anyone or anything else. So, for example, when we say the Almighty (*al-'Aziz*) this can only be taken to refer to Allah. Yet, it remains allowable to say: So and so is *al-'Aziz* among his people; so and so is *ar-Rahim* (The Dispenser of Mercy) to whoever is in his company; so and so is *an-Nafi'* (The Bestower of Benefit) to anyone who contacts him. Nonetheless, if we simply mention the ‘Bestower of Benefit’ without qualifying the statement beyond that, it could only refer to the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

In light of this, the attributes of Allah have the same status as the proper name of the Divine Essence (Allah). Indeed, if the proper name either of the Divine Essence or any of Allah’s attributes is mentioned, in isolation without further qualification, they will be taken as referring exclusively to Allah *the Exalted*. The Most Beautiful Names of Allah then, are, in the deepest sense, His attributes.

If we think deeply about these attributes we find them of two types: Names that describe some essential aspects of the Lord and names which describe one of His acts. Any name that describes an essential aspect of Allah negates the possibility of Him being described with its opposite. So, the attribute and name The Almighty (*al-'Aziz*) describes an essential aspect of Allah, this means that He could never be described by its opposite: powerlessness (*adh-dhalil).* Likewise, the attribute and name the Living *al-hayy* describes an essential aspect of Allah, so we could not describe Him with its opposite: death. On the other hand, the names which describe Allah’s acts do have opposites. For instance, Allah is the Exalter (*al-Mu'izz*) which means that He raises or exalts people and things as He chooses. The Name the Humilator (*al-Mudhill*)—also one of Allah’s names—is its opposite. The same can be said of *ad-darr* (The Inflictor of Harm), it is the opposite of *an-Nafi‘*. Likewise, Allah is *al-Muhyi* (The One Who Grants Life), but He is also *al-Mumit* (The one who causes death) and so on. In the final analysis, know that if you find that one of the names of Allah is accompanied by a name which describes it opposite, it is a name denoting one of His actions. Conversely, if you find that the name does not have an opposite know that it refers to some aspect of Allah.

Yet, consider a Divine Name describing an action such as The One Characterized by Concealment (as-Sattar or as-Sittir). Why is there no opposite Divine Name for this attribute? We do not say The One Who Exposes *(al-Faddah)* because Allah wants His creation to demonstrate this positive character trait and to foster the attribute of concealing the faults of people. For if people discover one shameful fact about an individual, they tend to reject everything from that individual, even anything good. This deprives the community from a lot of benefit. Alternatively, when you conceal someone's shortcomings, you give the entire community the opportunity to benefit from the good in them. When Allah is disobeyed, He loves for the disobedience of His servant to remain concealed, so that everyone can continue to benefit from others in life. After all, nobody is perfect in his traits except for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, the following was spoken truthfully:

Who is it? Who never wronged?

Who is it? Who only has goodness in scroll?

Thus out of His eternal wisdom, Allah orders us to conceal the faults of others: this facilitates unhindered development within life. Also, hearts change quickly, if I learn something about you that you regard as private and would rather keep concealed, it would probably affect the way I interact with you and you would subsequently change the way you interacted with me and we would run the risk of having the ties of friendship severed. On the other hand, by concealment and respecting privacy, we continue to benefit from each other.

This explains why they say: *If your faults were to be uncovered, you would not dig the graves of one another*. If everyone's secrets become exposed and everyone knows the other's 'dirty laundry', then who will bury the deceased; this represents absolute estrangement between community members.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say [to them], 'Call upon Allah' (*al-Isra':* 110). Note that the name Allah has been chosen as the proper name for the Absolute Cause. Although this name does not denote a particular attribute, it embodies all most perfect attributes. Other names have specific domains: The Omnipotent *(al-Qadir)* expresses capability, The All-Wise *(al-Hakim)* expresses wisdom, The One Who Seizes *(al-Qabid)* relates to the ability to take away souls and possessions, the Almighty *(al-'Aziz)* relates to strength or might, etc. While every name has a certain context, the name Allah encompasses all attributes.

This is highlighted in the following prophetic Hadith, 'Everything that does not begin with the Name of Allah is maimed.'(1) Why? Because when you undertake an action, you need to start with the wisdom behind this task. Then, you need the capability to perform it. And you need knowledge of the expected outcomes. So, you need many attributes. Nonetheless, when you begin an action you do not need to individually seek the help of the All-Wise, and the Omnipotent, and the Omniscient. Allah *the Exalted* makes it easy on you by making it sufficient to simply say 'In the Name of Allah' before engaging in any action. By that you have mentioned the name that encompasses all faultless attributes.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…or call upon the Most Merciful…' (*al-Isra':* 110). Here He mentions the Most Merciful (*ar-Rahman)* as opposed to mentioning the Compeller (*al-jabbar*) or the Irresistible (*al-qahhar*) because mercy (*rahma*) is the attribute of gentleness to creation. Allah *the Exalted* highlights this attribute and makes it the focal point for His servants' relationship with Him even in His names the Compeller or the Irresistible. In fact, these qualities also serve as a warning. Knowing that Allah has attributes like compulsion, total strength, and retribution, a servant will always be cautious not to fall under the wrath of such attributes (by being disobedient). Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding, so that you may guard yourselves against what is wrong.' (*al-Baqara:* 179)

Then, a potential killer will refrain from killing knowing that it would cost him his own life, as in the Arabic saying, 'Killing is the best prevention of killing.’ As such, the legislation of the law of retribution and the establishment of the divinely sanctioned punishments are not abuse. They are merciful in that they deter men and women from committing crimes that would necessitate such retributive capital punishment or any other divinely sanctioned punishment. Mercy is given even to someone vanquished by Allah, since Allah has been warning: I am the Compeller, fear me. In that He is merciful because He is warning His servants from committing what would lead to His displeasure and retribution.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2: 359) on the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah said, 'Every important speech or matter that does not begin with the remembrance of Allah is maimed.' Or He said: '...is severed.'*

Another reason for choosing the name the Most Merciful (*ar-Rahman)* is because mercy underlies all commandments. The Way of Allah has been sent down to arrange people’s affairs and secure their happiness as they move through life. This enables different elements of creation to compliment, cooperate with, and assist one another as opposed to combat one another. The goal of the Divine Way is to unite the Muslim community and ensure its peaceful living.

The sacred law is overwhelmingly characterised by ‘divine mercy’, it is the general trend. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Most Merciful. Taught the Quran.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 1-2) The Quran was revealed to arrange worldly affairs and provide a criterion to gauge them. It creates peace between you and your Creator, yourself and your fellow humans. Thus the Quran is a manifestation of ‘divine mercy’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings would you both (jinn and mankind) deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 13) Some oriental scholars have criticized that this verse which appears repeatedly in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* (The Most Merciful) is also appending the following verse, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid!’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35). How can a verse about fire and smoke be preceded and concluded by a verse about blessings? Had those scholars given it more thought, they would not have objected because warning from the flash of fire and smoke is a blessing. The Quran is basically saying: Beware of what would lead to suffering from fire and smoke, deterring you immediately from such action. Is that not one of Allah’s blessings bestowed upon His slaves and mercy towards them? What would you say if Allah *Glorified is He* had surprised you with torment without having warned you of it?

There is another subtle meaning to the use of Allah’s name the Most Merciful (*ar-Rahman*). Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and then established Himself above the Throne– He is the Most Merciful! Ask, then about Him, [the] One who is [truly] informed.’ (*al-Furqan:* 59) After having created the entire creation—the heavens, the earth and all that is in them, He established Himself on the throne (1), which indicates that all creation has been perfected. A king does not sit on his throne until he gains complete power and command free from opposition. ‘…and then established Himself above the Throne– He is the Most Merciful!’ (*al-Furqan:* 59).

Allah chose the attribute of mercy to reassure us that His mounting the throne does not entail oppression or merciless dominance. It is a mercy He mounts the throne to organize our lives and to bless us by making us show mercy to one another. So, it is a mounting for the best interest of creation that implies mercy and grace.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Most Merciful, established on the throne.’ (*Ta Ha:* 5) Establishing Himself on the throne *the Exalted* has been mentioned seven times throughout the Quran. They have been listed in a short poem:

Allah’s ascending of the throne has been mentioned in seven locations of His Speech, let’s count:

In the Chapter of *al-A'araf,* then in *Yunus* and *ar-R'ad* followed by *Ta Ha*: make sure to count

In the Chapter of *al-Furqan*, then *as-Sajda*, and lastly *al-Hadid*: now get the total amount.

Every attribute describing His Majesty serves ‘divine mercy.’ He frightens His servants with His majestic attributes so they would not succumb to disobedience and may enjoy Allah’s blessings in this life and in the Hereafter. In conclusion, mercy supersedes all other attributes of Allah and represents the fundamental characteristic of His Way in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'On the last night of *Ramadan* the Compeller grants forgiveness…'(1) Notice that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say the All-Forgiving grants forgiveness; why did he prefer the attribute of compelling when forgiveness is the topic? It is said that forgiveness is only necessary when an act of disobedience has been committed. Disobedience warrants punishment which conforms to the Compeller. But did the attribute of forgiveness overcome that of compelling and take over its speciality? No, the Forgiver intercedes with the Compeller. Allah's character Name the Compeller is thus in control; however, we ask of You (Compeller) to allow your attribute of forgiveness to intercede for them. It is as though the attributes of beauty intercede with the attributes of majesty.

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(1) Translator’s comment: Allah establishes Himself on the throne or sits firmly on it in a manner that suits His Majesty. It is beyond human understanding and far from resembling any of His creation *Glorified and Exalted is He*.

Therefore, scholars of the Prophetic saying (Hadith) explain: believers will intercede, then Prophets will intercede, then Angels will intercede, and then the intercession of the Most Merciful of all merciful (2) begins. But with whom will the Most Merciful among the merciful intercede? They explain that He will intercede with Himself that Allah's attribute of beauty (The All-Forgiving) will intercede with His attribute of majesty (The Compeller) *the Glorified and Exalted*.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings upon him, said: 'My nation has been given five things in the month of Ramadan, which no previous prophet had: First, on the first night of Ramadan Allah the Exalted and High looks at them. And Allah will never punish whoever He looks upon…; fifth, when it is the last night, Allah forgives them all.' a man from among the people then asked: 'Are you referring to the Night of Power?' The Messenger, peace and blessings upon him, responded: 'No! Have you not seen how workers collect their wages when they finish work.' In his book At-Targhib wa at-Tarhib (2/65) Al-Munthiri says: "Al-Bayhaqi cited a similar chain of narrators".*

(2) *A long Hadith (Prophetic saying) on the authority of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq states that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings upon him, said: 'Everything happening in this life and in the Here-after has been displayed upon me. Everything that ever lived in the world since its beginning to its end will be summoned…' Until he finally said' 'Then it will be said: 'Call the truthful and the righteous forward for intercession. Then it will be said' 'Now call the Prophets forward; and a Prophet would come forth with a band (of followers); another would only be followed by five or six people, and a Prophet will come forth alone. Then, it will be said: call forth the martyrs to intercede for whomever they want. After the martyrs finish their intercession, Allah will say: 'I am the Most Merciful among the merciful; let anyone who did not associate partners with me enter my Paradise.' So, they enter paradise. Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/4). It was also recorded by Haythamy in Al-Majma' (10/374) as well as by As-Suyuty in Al-Budur As-Safira fi umur Al-Akhirah (pg.119).*

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Say [to them], 'Call upon Allah, or call upon the Most Merciful– whichever [name] you call-to Him belong the best names...' (*al-Isra':* 110). Therefore, it really does not matter which name you invoke Him by because all His names are perfect. Nonetheless, you should invoke Allah with the attribute that best fulfils your need. So, for instance, if it is knowledge that you pursue, you should say: O All Knowing, grant me knowledge! When you are weak say: O Strong One, strengthen me! If you desire honour and might, you should call out: O Almighty, grant me might and honour! Yet, you can simply say in short: O Allah! In any situation it will suffice.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…And do not be too loud in your prayer nor hushed therein, and seek a way in-between that.' (*al-Isra':* 110) Here the word prayer encompasses every action within the prayer. In terms of 'do not be too loud', it indicates that raising your voice unnecessarily in prayer is prohibited. However, by the same token, Allah says: 'nor hushed therein', i.e. do not pray in such a low voice that those praying behind you are incapable of hearing you. Praying in this manner is also prohibited. Thus the two extremes are disliked, and moderation is always desirable (the Golden Mean). I believe that since it is prohibited to raise one's voice too loudly in prayer, then it goes without saying that shouting out one's prayer in a microphone and the like is equally inappropriate. These devices distract people.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So, when the Quran is recited, then listen to it and pay attention, that you may receive mercy.' (*al-A'raf:* 204) So, by raising your voice with the Quran, even more so by using a microphone, you make everyone responsible for listening. By that, you either have them fall into sin or prevent them from taking care of their personal business. Perhaps someone else is attempting to recite the Quran too, or to ask Allah forgiveness, or to praise Him or pray during that time. How could you turn your recommended action into a compulsion for others? This is not permissible! Leave others alone, free to do as they choose. You certainly do not want to be among those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has described: ‘Say: “Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in (their) deeds?” Those whose efforts have been wasted in this worldly life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-104). This is like those who go around using a microphone before the dawn prayer and start singing random songs that are not part of any verses, just disturbing the ill and being inconsiderate to others. When will Muslims wake up, and look critically at such heterodoxy that disturbs people and spoils their worship?

Even worse, if raising the voice while reciting the Quran is done for a living or to attain some worldly aim, and recitation turns into a display of vocal styling and a field in which to compete, such people have entered a totally different category of sin by using religion for worldly gains, and we ask Allah’s protection for ourselves and for you from such sinful behaviour.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and seek a way in-between that.’ (*al-Isra’:* 110) Seek a way between the two extremes of a voice too loud or too low; follow the way of moderation: the way which characterises the divine law. The Messenger of Allah, *peace and blessings upon him*, demonstrates the practical application of this principle. When checking on the Companions one night, he found Abu Bakr reciting in a voice barely heard. When he asked him why, Abu Bakr responded, ‘I am engaged in an intimate dialogue with my Lord, and He knows everything about me.’ Then when the Messenger of Allah, *peace and blessings upon him*, went to 'Umar, he found him reciting in a very loud voice, so he asked him why, and 'Umar responded, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I am repelling Satan with my recitation.’ The Messenger of Allah, *peace and blessings upon him*, ordered Abu Bakr to slightly raise his voice and 'Umar to slightly lower it(1).

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(1) *Mohamad ibn Sirin said: It has been narrated that Abu Bakr used to pray in a very low voice and that ‘Umar used to raise his voice in prayer. Abu Bakr was asked, ‘Why do you do so?’ He responded, ‘I am engaged in intimate dialogue with my Lord, and He knows what I need.’ He was told, ‘Well done’. When the same question was posed to ‘Umar, he responded, ‘I ward off Satan and call the drowsy to attention.’ He was also praised, ‘Well done’. After the verse was revealed: “...And do not be too loud in your prayer nor hushed therein, and seek a way between that.” (al-Isra’: 110) Abu Bakr was told to slightly raise his voice and ‘Umar was told to slightly lower it. (This is an excerpt from Tafsir ibn Kathir 3/69).*

This moderation and balance are characteristics that we are commanded to observe even in supplication, as Allah says: ‘And remember your Lord inwardly, in all humility and awe without raising your voice’ (*al-A‘raf:* 205).

Moderation, expressed by ‘…in-between that’ (*al-Isra’:* 110) describes every ruling upon which our religious lives are based. In fact, the Quran itself has been revealed upon a nation which adopts the path of moderation in its affairs: religious as well as worldly. Within matters of belief, for example, Islam adopts a middle course; it rejects the claims that there is no God and the claim of the existence of many gods. Islam rejects both extremes as misguidance and establishes the presence of one unique and indivisible God who is without partners.

When discussing spending, Islam again chooses the way of moderation and balance; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just mean between those [two extremes]’ (*al-Furqan:* 67). This moderate economy succeeds in enriching one’s own life as an individual, as well as community life. The whole of this approach to spending is summed up where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost limit (like a spendthrift), lest you become blameworthy and insolvent.’ (*al-Isra’:* 29) The close-fisted miser who refuses to spend money causes economic stagnation and hinders community endeavours, which is a threat to the entire community. On the other hand, extravagant spending represents a threat to the individual. If someone spends all their possessions, they do not spare anything to elevate their living standard. Thus, this wise choice of moderate spending saves the individual from ending up blameworthy for not spending or insolvent and incapable of raising living standards like responsible people.

Finally, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقُلِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ شَرِيكٌ فِى
ٱلْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ وَلِىٌّ مِّنَ ٱلذُّلِّ ۖ وَكَبِّرْهُ تَكْبِيرًا ﴿١١١﴾

And say, ‘Praise belongs to God, who has no child nor partner in His rule. He is not so weak as to need a protector. Proclaim His limitless greatness!’ [111] (The Quran, *al-Isra’:* 111)

Who is being praised in this verse? Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…who has not taken a son…’ (*al-Isra’:* 111). The fact that Allah has not taken a son is a great blessing for His creation, for which they should praise Him. Had He taken a son, His son would receive all or more of His care. Allah, however, is simply above having a son, and all His creation are His dependents. Thus, we are all equal in receiving care from our Lord, none being His son or having any close kinship ties to Him. But the most beloved among Allah’s creations is the most pious of them.

Then again, what is the underlying reason that people want to have a child? There are two main reasons why people want children: The first is the continuity of the father’s lineage after his death. A poet gives reference to this: My son; you are myself after I have expired

Allah Who is immortal and everlasting does not need anyone to carry on His legacy or to continue His lineage *the Glorified and Exalted*. All praise to Him Who has not taken a son. The second reason for which people want to have a child is to increase their strength by having a group around them and to compensate for personal weakness. Allah, however, is the Almighty, the Irresistible and so He does not need a group or anyone to increase His strength. Therefore, Allah commands us to glorify Him: He has not taken unto Himself a son or a partner. Note that either the sons or the partners of most kings and rulers are behind their corruption and injustice.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and has no partner in [His] dominion…’ (*al-Isra’:* 111). This is also a blessing for which we should thank and praise Allah. Imagine what it would be like if Allah had a partner in His dominion. We would have been continuously confused not knowing which partner to obey and who to please.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? …' (*az-Zumar:* 29).

There is a known quote that 'A ship with two captains sinks'. The fact that Allah is One and has no partners alleviates all worries, since His commands are effectuated with no objection. There is no other god to give you contradicting orders. Is that not a blessing that necessitates praising Allah?

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '…and has no need of a protector (*wali*) out of weakness…' (*al-Isra':* 111). The word *(wali)* -translated here as 'protector' refers to someone who handles affairs on your behalf. Surely you would only entrust your affairs to someone who you believe can secure a particular benefit or warding off harm, assisting you when confronting an adversary or strengthening one of your weaknesses. If you do not possess the ability to actualize your goals, you enlist the service of someone who does. A Protector (*wali*) has the same root as loyalty (*walaa'*) because when you seek protection from someone, you naturally develop a sense of loyalty toward them. Allah *Glorified is He* does not have a *(wali)* to whom He resorts because He is the Almighty and the Exalter; He is not in need of anyone.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* concludes by saying: '…and glorify Him (*say Allahu akbar*) with [great] glorification.' (*al-Isra':* 111)

In the heart of a believer nothing is more treasured or honoured than Allah. That is why 'Allah is the Greatest' *(Allahu akbar)* is the phrase for the call to and the commencing of prayer. One must truly glorify Allah more than anything in life, so when He summons you at any time, your response should be: Allah is greater than what I am currently doing. Even if He summons you while you are in the presence of a great person, you must know and remember in your heart: Allah is greater than any great person. Also, glorify Him with great glorification (say *Allahu akbaru kabeera*) by giving His commandments and prohibitions precedence over any other rules set by anyone else in life.

Now do not forget that by glorifying Allah you gain from His glory yourself, and that is granted only to those who have purified their worship to Allah. So, unlike the humiliating slavery to man, being a slave to Allah is a great honour, since the slave of Allah benefits from His master's bounties, unlike a slave to a human being where the master reaps the benefits off the slave's hard work. As the poet says:

There is great honour for me in being a slave, for without appointment, I enjoy my Lord's reception.

In His holiness, He is the greater one, yet I get to choose the time and place of our meeting.

How difficult it is and sometimes impossible to get to meet a prominent person in life, whereas with Allah, the Lord of Honour, all you need is to have faith in Him and you get to meet Him anytime and anywhere you like and complain or ask whatever you need. What greater honour is there?

Therefore, what dignifies the Messenger of Allah the most during the Night Journey and Ascension (*al-Isra' wa al-M'iraj*) is his description as a slave to Allah, who *Glorified is He*, says 'Exalted is He who took His slave for a journey by night from the Sacred place of worship (*Al-Masjid Al-Alaqsa)* [at Mecca] to the Remote place of worship (*Al-Masjid Al-Haram)* [at Jerusalem]…' (*al-Isra':* 1).

All honour is in being a slave to Allah and in prostrating to Him. In fact, slavery to Allah and prostration to Him prevent one from being enslaved by anyone else. A poet says: The prostration you loath is your salvation from thousands other prostrations.

Therefore, glorify Allah and proclaim His majesty and know that He is the only true refuge. Whoever seeks refuge with Allah is in His Company and greatly benefits from His attributes. Moreover, Allah protects His Company from the evil plots of their enemies and from their oppression. Previously, we gave the example of a child who might be bullied by his peers when alone; whereas, if he is accompanied by his father, no one would dare to bully him.

Thus, we must remain in the presence of Our Lord if we wish to experience lasting, unlimited safety. Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that Allah may test those in His Company, but only to draw them even closer to Him, as though He is saying: I am testing you by depriving you of one of my blessings so you may focus on Me—and nothing else, not even My blessing. While a healthy person is accompanied by Allah's blessings, an agonised person is in the company of Allah Himself.

Did Allah not say in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Son of Adam, I was sick but you failed to visit Me.' The person replies, 'How can I visit you when you are the Lord of the worlds?' Allah responds, 'Did you not know that my slave so and so was sick and you failed to visit him. Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me with him?'(1)

A sick person is always delighted to receive visitors who alleviate some of the pain and suffering he or she endures. Well, if a diseased were to really enjoy the company of Allah and feel His benevolence, I swear by the One God other than whom there is nothing worthy of worship he or she would never feel the pangs of illness. Therefore, such believers are too humble to complain about their pain and never despair no matter how severe the affliction gets. How could they be tormented by the pains of illness and how could they ever despair when they are experiencing the company of Allah?

So, glorify Him with great glorification: Place His Commandments and Prohibitions above all else. Know that: Allah is greater than anything great, even Paradise. Repeat it to yourself: Allah is greater than Paradise. Remember the famous quote by Rabiʿa Al-ʿAdawiyya(2):

Everyone worships You out of fear of the Fire and views salvation as the best prize.

Or they desire to eternally dwell in gardens, live in castles and drink from Salsabil.

As for me, I do not care about gardens or fire; for my Love cannot be substituted.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2569); it is from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

(2) She is: Rabiʿa bint Isma'il Al-ʿAdawiyya, Um Al-Khair, The client of the Basrian ʿAtik clan. She was famous for her piety among the people of Basra, where she was born. Much has been said about her dedication in worship and asceticism. She died in Jerusalem 135 A.H. (Al-Aʿalam 3/10, Az-Zirikli).

In a Qudsi Hadith, Allah says: ‘If I had not created Paradise and Fire, would I not still be worthy of worship?’ No doubt that Allah, the Great is greater than everything, including Paradise. At the end of chapter 18, i.e. the chapter of *al-Kahf*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Therefore, whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and not join anyone in the worship of his Lord!’ (*al-Kahf:* 110)

Notice that Allah did not say: whoever hopes to receive the ‘reward of his Lord’, or ‘the Paradise of his Lord’, or ‘the bliss from his Lord’. That is because the goal of a true believer is not comfort and luxury, but the goal is to meet the Dispenser of comfort and luxury. In another Qudsi Hadith, Allah *Glorified is He* says to the angels: ‘Have you seen My servants? I bestow this and that blessing upon them and when I take away a blessing from them, they love Me all the same’.

And that concludes the chapter of *al-Isra’*. Allah *Glorified is He* ends this chapter with a reminder of three important blessings among His countless blessings. These three blessings are on top of the list of things for which we need to praise Him.

1. All praise is to Allah who has not taken unto Himself a son. He does not beget children nor was He begotten and He is One and Unique.
2. All praise is to Allah who has no partner in His dominion because He is One.
3. And all praise is to Allah who is not in need of any form of aid from anyone because He is the All-Dominant, the Almighty, the Exalter.

Therefore, we must glorify Allah (*Allahu akbar*) with every blessing that He bestows upon us.

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In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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الشعراوي

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المجلد (14)

the chapter of

al-Kahf

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَل لَّهُۥ عِوَجَا ۜ ﴿١﴾

Praise be to God, who sent down the Scripture to
His servant and made it unerringly straight [1]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 1)

Allah concludes chapter 17 (*the chapter of al-Isra'*) with praise, and starts chapter 18 (*the chapter of al-Kahf*)(1) again with praise. The phrase 'all praise is due to Allah' (*al-hamdu-lillah*) has always been the motto which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would utter among the best of utterances: Exalted is Allah *(subhan Allah)* and all praise is due to Allah *(al-hamdu-lillah).* Also, chapter 17 commences with 'Exalted is Allah' (*subhan Allah*), while Chapter 18 commences with 'all praise is due to Allah'. Exalted is Allah *(subhan Allah*) is an expression exalting Him above anything that does not suit His Majesty including having a partner that shares Himself or His actions or His attributes. It is also an expression of glorifying the Divine Essence which later bestowed many blessings; so we say: all praise is due to Allah *(alhamdu-lillah)*. Thus, 'Exalted is Allah' *(subhan Allah)* is an expression for exaltation and 'all praise is due to Allah' (*alhamdu-lillah)* is an expression of gratitude for blessings.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Kahf* is chapter 18 in the arrangement of the Noble Quran. It contains 110 verses, and falls in part 15 and 16 of the Book. According to all commentators it was revealed in Mecca. Al-Qurtubi, however, says that a group has said that the beginning of the chapter was revealed in Medina until the word 'barren' (*guruza*), but the former opinion is the correct one. The merits of the chapter of Al-Kahf have been mentioned in numerous prophetic sayings (*Hadiths*) including one narrated by Muslim (809) on the authority of Abu Ad-Dardaa' in the book 'Salat *Al-Musafireen*': *Whoever memorizes ten verses from the beginning of the chapter of Al-Kahf is safeguarded from the Anti-Christ. An-Nawawy* comments in his exegesis of Muslim, "and in another narration, '*from the end of the chapter of Al-Kahf*' it has been said that the reason for that is the wonders mentioned in its beginning and end which anyone who meditates upon would be safeguarded from the trial of the Anti-Christ.

The Arabic word *al-hamd* in its general meaning comprises the notions of lauding (*thanaa'*), gratitude (*shukr*) and commendation (*madh*). Although these words are similar in meaning, each of them has its own connotation. While they are all expressions of lauding, gratitude (*shukr*) is shown by someone who has received a personal favour or gift like when someone does you a favour and you show them gratitude and thank them for it.

The word praise *(al-hamd)*, however, is not just a personal gratitude, but also a more general gratitude for blessings given to you as well as to others. Hence, the domain of praise *(al-hamd)* is wider than that of gratitude (*shukr*). As for commendation (*al-madh*), you could commend a beautiful design just because you like it without previously having received anything from it or its designer.

Now when Allah says *(al-hamdu-lillah)* with the definite article (*al*) which indicates exclusiveness, it means absolute, total praise (*al-hamd*) is due only to Allah. This praise incorporates all praises, even the praise you give to a person who benefits or helps you out –originally it is praise to Allah who enabled this person to be good to you. In this manner, if you trace back the praise given to any person anytime, you will find that it goes back to the Original Benefactor *Glorified and Exalted is He*.

The phrase *(al-hamdu-lillah)* is the expression by which Allah taught us to praise Him. Otherwise, if He had left us to individually choose how to praise and thank Him, without determining the expression, then people would have differed greatly in their praise, each according to their abilities of expression. We would then find the eloquent person more elegant in expression than the one who stammers, and the illiterate. Allah simplified it and made us all equal in how we thank Him. Everyone says *(al-hamdu- lillah)*, the eloquent, the person who stammers and the illiterate.

Therefore, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said as he praised and lauded Allah: Exalted are you, we are incapable of enumerating the laud you are due, You are as You have lauded Yourself. For if we tried to enumerate the laud You are due, we would not be able to, because no one knows the extent of lauding due unto You except You, and no one else could enumerate it. All we can do is to say what You have taught us in praising you: *(al-hamdu-lillah)*.

Thus, making all people equal in praising Allah is a blessing in itself, and deserves praise. So, we say: All praise be to Allah for teaching us to say (*al-hamdu-lillah*). And knowing to praise Him for teaching us how to praise Him is also a blessing! All praise be to Allah for teaching us to praise Him with (*al-hamdu-lillah*). And so, if you tried to trace the praise due to Allah, you would find it to be an endless chain of praise, upon praise, upon praise, upon praise etc. Thus, Allah remains forever the One Being praised (*Mahmoud*), and the slave remains in infinite praise.

Allah *Glorified is He* commences five chapters (*suras*) of the Quran with ‘All praise is due to Allah’ *(al-hamdu-lillah)*: ‘All praise is due to Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds’ (*al-Fatiha:* 2), ‘All praise is due to Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth, and made the darkness and the light; yet those who disbelieve set up equals with their Lord’ (*al-An‘am:* 1), ‘All praise is due to Allah who has revealed the Book to His slave and has not placed therein any crookedness’ (*al-Kahf:* 1) ‘All praise is due to Allah, to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and to Him is due (all) praise in the Hereafter …’ (*Saba’:* 1), ‘All praise is due to Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who made the angels messengers with wings …’ (*Fatir:* 1).

However, both praises in each chapter have their own aspect. The first praise is due because Allah is the Lord of all the worlds (*rabb al-‘alamin*) with the Arabic word *(rabb)* Lord meaning the Creator and the One in charge of sustainment and upbringing (*at-tarbiya*). He created from nothingness, and provided from nothingness and assumed responsibility for bringing up his slaves. He is a Lord to all the worlds and we are obliged to praise Him for being the Lord (*ar-rabb)* of the worlds and for providing for them with His grace.

The second praise is due to Him who created the heavens and the earth, and established darkness and light. These are signs and blessings that are accurately created to sustain life and preserve all species by enabling reproduction.

Darkness and light are also among the great blessings of Allah, and they are not opposites, but complement one another. There is a function for darkness, just as light has its function. Darkness is for tranquillity and resting, and light is for effort and activity. It is not possible to endeavour in effort and to be diligent in work unless there is time to rest and calm down, thereby renewing one's energy. Hence the pairing of darkness and light is for harmonious balance, since life is not sustainable in continual darkness, just as it is not sustainable in continual light.

The third chapter (*sura*) commencing with *(al-hamdu-lillah)* is the one we are currently examining. Allah makes it clear that He does not only sustain and bring up human beings materially, but that there is a superior kind of upbringing and sustainment, that of the spirit and of values. He mentions here a true aspect of the creation of mankind, that man was not created for a material reason, but for a loftier mission: to know moral values, the Lord and religion, and to strive for another life other than this material one. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All praise is due to Allah who has revealed the Book to His slave…' (*al-Kahf:* 1). The praise here is for the revelation of the Holy Book which comprises all moral values. We have previously said that Allah, *Exalted is He*, gracefully set the models of a correct and righteous life even before He created it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Most Merciful; Taught the Quran; Created humanity; [And] taught them to communicate.' (*ar-Rahman*: 1-4) So, the teaching of the Quran came before the creation of mankind; Allah established a well-ordered pattern for life before He created His slaves based on His comprehensive knowledge of their nature and what is suitable for them. This is like an inventor of a device or instrument who fully knows its function and can determine the ways of its maintenance. The Book revealed unto Mohammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the primary directive. Therefore, you must adjust yourself onto it and know that it is the regulator of your life, and that it contains the fundamental rules of your safe-keeping.

Allah *Glorified is He* says '…to His slave …' (*al-Kahf:* 1) as in chapter of *al-Isra'*: worshipful slavery is the aspect of dignity (for Mohammad) during the Night Journey and Heavenly Ascent. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Exalted is He who took His slave for a journey by night …' (*al-Isra'*: 1).

Worshipful slavery is why he was raised unto Allah's presence, and why he had been chosen to receive the Book for he was a true slave before he was transported by night [on that miraculous journey]. First, he assumed the responsibility of abiding by Allah's orders and calling others to it. So, he was a sincere slave and endured what he endured for Allah's sake. And it was his reward to be raised to the rank of divine presence where he was granted the ordained prayers in order to descend back and raise his voice with it and call his people to it.

Thus, the Prophet received to deliver, and he received because he had achieved a pure state of slavery. He was ascended unto the presence of his Lord and accepted the prescribed rite of prayer to deliver it to his people; as if he were saying to them: Whoever wishes to meet Allah let him perform the prayer.

The reference to '…the Book…' (*al-Kahf:* 1) is to the Noble Quran. But the chapter of *al-Kahf* is the eighteenth chapter out of the one hundred and fourteen chapters of the Quran. In other words, the Quran is not yet complete, so why did He call it 'the Book' (*al-kitab)* before the last chapter? In my opinion, the word book *(al-kitab)* can be used to mean part of it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When We have recited it, repeat the recitation (*Quran*)' (*al-Qiyama:* 18). The word 'Quran' was used here to mean a recitation. So, it may refer to a single verse or a chapter or the whole Quran.

Alternatively, the intended meaning of 'the Book' could be the Quran as it was descended in its entirety from the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfuzh*) to the lowest heaven and then revealed in instalments according to circumstances. Hence the intended meaning here could be the complete descent (*al-inzal*) of the Book and not the revelation (*at-tanzil*) thereof.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and has not placed therein any crookedness' (*al-Kahf:* 1) meaning He established it soundly in straight-forward rectitude, with no deviation or crookedness (*'iwaj*). As He said in another verse: 'An Arabic Quran without any crookedness …' (*al-'Ankabut:* 28). Crookedness (*i'wijaj*) is when something takes on a bent, a contorted extension, whereas straightness, used to mean uprightness (*al-istiqamah*) means a uniform extension, twisted neither to the right nor to the left. It is known that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. People's lives in this world cannot be upright unless they pursue a straight path which protects them from colliding with one another.

Allah *Glorified is He* has created mankind to complement one another, for each one of them has a talent which the others need. We have the doctor, the engineer, the carpenter, the tailor, and no one can stand alone without the talents of others. Therefore, it is imperative that different people interact with one another in life and that they complement one another in harmony. And their interaction must be regulated like traffic laws to avoid colliding with one another. On a twisting road with many curves someone approaching from here cannot see the other approaching from there, and they crash. Therefore, it is necessary for the road to be straight, so that every one of us sees the other, and avoids colliding with them. The divinely ordered path is the straight, even path which insures the safety of people in life; everyone knows their limits.

Crookedness was also mentioned in the following; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they ask you about the mountains. Say, “[On that Day] my Lord will blast them into dust, and leave a flat plain; you will not see therein any crookedness or unevenness’ (*Ta Ha:* 105-107). A flat plain void of anything ‘…you will not see therein any crookedness…’ (*Ta Ha:* 107): in other words it is straight; ‘…or unevenness’ (*Ta Ha:* 107). So, it is evened out, containing no depression or elevation to obscure the view and cause collision like a steep incline (*al-’aqabah*) in traffic.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the Noble Quran saying:

قَيِّمًا لِّيُنذِرَ بَأۡسًا شَدِيدًا مِّن لَّدُنۡهُ وَيُبَشِّرَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ٱلَّذِينَ
يَعۡمَلُونَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ أَنَّ لَهُمۡ أَجۡرًا حَسَنًا ﴿٢﴾

**Warning of severe punishment from Him, and [giving]
glad news to the believers who do good deeds — an
excellent reward [2] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 2)**

The first Arabic word in this verse is *(qayyim)* meaning straight like the word (*mustaqim*). It refers to the Quran confirming what was said in the previous verse: ‘…and has not placed therein any crookedness’ (*al-Kahf:* 1). This is because straightness and crookedness are not always spotted with the naked eye and you may need a precise instrument to accurately reveal their extent. You notice this phenomenon on a flat paved road which appears to be perfectly straight and even, but as soon as it rains, this seemingly evenness is exposed, and its flaws become evident. Therefore, the confirmation: '[He made it] straight (*qayyim*)…' (*al-Kahf:* 2).

The word *(qayyim)* also means supremacy and guardianship over others (*muhaymin*). You say: the guardian (*qayyim*) to mean the one legally entrusted of managing a minor's affairs. Thus, the Quran has no crookedness in it, and is also the supreme guardian over the previous [divinely revealed] scriptures.

As Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian (*muhaymin*) over it' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Also, relevant in this context is where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then turn your face straight to the right (*qayyim*) Religion…' (*ar-Rum:* 43). The right *(qayyim)* religion also means the entrusted guardian (*muhaymin*) of previous religions. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…to warn of a severe punishment from Him…' (*al-Kahf:* 2).

And that is the reason for the revelation [of the Quran]. The Arabic word for warning (*indhar)* is to scare from an approaching calamity. Those warned here are the disbelievers since none other is warned of severe punishment. They are not explicitly mentioned here, however, to allow analysis, since the Quran must be received with open, perceptive thought, and an active mind.

Then He intensifies the punishment, referring to it as 'severe', plus [it is] '…from Him…' (*al-Kahf:* 2). The severity of any punishment corresponds to the strength of the punisher, so when a punishment is from Allah, then no one has the power to withstand it, nor can anyone escape from it.

Following this, He says: '…and to give good tidings (*yubashshir*) to the believers …' (*al-Kahf:* 2). The Arabic verb used is *(yubashshir)* to give good tidings from *(bishara)* good tiding, the foretelling of something good to occur in future. Note that here, for the good tiding He explicitly mentions to whom it is --namely, the believers—unlike with the warning of severe punishment, where the disbelievers were not mentioned. This is from the mercy of Allah even in sentence structure. The glad tiding here is about a good reward because it is from the All-Generous, the Infinitely Gracious (*al-mutafaddil*). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّٰكِثِينَ فِيهِ أَبَدًا ﴿٣﴾

That they will always enjoy [3]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 3)

In other words, they shall stay in it for eternity. Unlike people's reward in this life for one another, Allah's reward in the Hereafter is not limited to how much you deserve. When the Supreme Benefactor (*al-mun'im*) rewards, His reward is abundant. So, when people wrong you in the assessment of your reward in this world, know that Allah is just, and will give you with extreme generosity. He is the Supremely Equitable (*al-munsif*), the Infinitely Gracious (*al-mutafaddil*). And while any reward in this world is deemed to incomplete or cut off, it is permanent in the hereafter since any blessing in this world is transient: either you leave it or it leaves you.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيُنذِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُواْ ٱتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَدًا ﴿٤﴾

It warns those people who assert, 'God has
offspring' [4] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 4)

Unlike the first warning, this repeated warning is specific to the peak of disbelief: a warning to those who say that Allah has taken unto Himself a son. As for the first warning, it applies to the general disbelief, while the second is for reiteration of the specific alongside the general. The punishment reserved for those who attribute a son to Allah will be commensurate with their audacity.

The Quran has definitively explained the abomination of this act of disobedience. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And they say, "The Most Merciful has taken [to Himself] a son!"; You have done an atrocious thing, the heavens almost rupture therefrom, and the earth splits open and the mountains collapse in devastation! That they attribute a son to the Most Merciful and it does not befit the Most Merciful that He should take [to Himself] a son!' (*Maryam:* 88-92) It is surely the gravest act of disobedience to delve into the person of Allah with words that would cause the sky to be torn to shreds, and at which the earth would crack apart, and at the horror of which the mountains would collapse.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّا لَهُم بِهِۦ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلَا لِـَٔابَآئِهِمْ ۚ كَبُرَتْ كَلِمَةً
تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَٰهِهِمْ ۚ إِن يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا ﴿٥﴾

They have no knowledge about this, nor did their forefathers
— it is a monstrous assertion that comes out of their mouths:
what they say is nothing but lies [5] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 5)

This proposition which they allege and this utterance which they falsely say about Allah, from where did they get it? The truth is that they claim it while having no knowledge of it. Knowledge is either personal, or inherited from fathers and grandfathers. But they possess nothing of that and attest to something that has no reality. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They have no knowledge of it’ (*al-Kahf:* 5). The absence of knowledge arises from one of two factors. Either a thing exists or you are not aware of it because it is concealed from you. Or because a thing has no existence in the first place, and you do not know that it has no existence because the non-existent cannot be the basis of any knowledge.

As regards His utterance: ‘dreadful is this saying that comes out of their mouths’ [*al-Kahf:* 5], the Arabic word *kaburat* (rendered as dreadful here) means to be oppressively immense and sinful to the utmost degree because they have spoken of an abominable issue; it is intolerably atrocious that this statement should come out of their mouths.

The Arabic word *kalima* (assertion) refers to a singular word that has no additional attribution. It is like the word Mohammad, the verb ‘go’, or the preposition ‘in’. They are independent words. Sometimes, this word, i.e. *kalima* is used to refer to a phrase or a speech. Similarly, the verse refers to their (false) assertion that Allah has taken a son as a word. Exactly as we say that, so and so has delivered a word (*kalima*), when in reality he has delivered a speech.

Another example of this is found in the verse wherein Allah says: 'until when death overtakes one of them, he says: Send me back, my Lord, send me back; Haply I may do the good in that which I have left. By no means! It is a [mere] word that he speaks' (*al-Mu'minun:* 99-100). Thus, Allah refers to the statement of theirs as a *kalima*. Another example of this is yet the words Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him*: 'Say, O followers of the Book! come to an equitable proposition (*kalima*) between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and [that] we shall not associate aught with Him and [that] some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah; but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.' (*Al-'Imran:* 64) Allah calls all of this discourse a *kalima*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that this word comes out of their mouths, which means that this statement is intolerably atrocious because it has already come forth from them and they actually said it. If only they had kept it to themselves, had not publicised it and regarded it too monstrous to utter, they would have been counted among the believers. A delegation from the Yemen came to the Prophet *peace be upon him* and said, 'O Prophet of Allah, we have thoughts about Allah which we cannot dare talk about. In other words, we are unable to utter them. The Prophet said, 'That is clear faith.'(1) Thus, what is blameworthy is that they have expressed this notion with their mouths. This is the ultimate ignominy. It is no matter how evil thoughts and ideas are when the one in whose mind they occur suppresses them. He suffers no consequences, as if they had never occurred.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said that what they say is nothing but lies. What is not in line with reality is a lie. A wise man circulates the words in his mind and inspects them with his thought before he speaks. A proper conception of the words arises in his mind and his tongue gives voice to it. Before thinking of this conception and before uttering it, it either corresponds with reality or it does not.

Before saying, 'Mohammad is diligent,' For example, the conception of his diligence arises in your mind. That is what is called mental conception that you give utterance to when you say, 'Mohammad is diligent.' If there exists a person who is called Mohammad and is actually diligent, this mental conception and utterance corresponds with reality and thus, its communication is true. However, if there existed no person called Mohammad or he existed but was not diligent, then the verbal utterance does not correspond with reality and thus, the communication is fallacious. Therefore, this is an informative method of discourse that could be true or false.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim*

In addition, there is also a generative method which could be neither true nor false because its correspondence to the reality happens after the verbal utterance. It is as saying to someone, 'Study your lessons.' In this case, the reality of this utterance will occur in the future. Therefore, such a generative method of discourse is not described as either truth or false.

The actual truth, from the scientific approach, is that the verbal utterance corresponds with reality and belief. Thus, if you believe in something, but it is not real, then it is fallacious in terms of reality, however you are not a liar because there is a difference between the report and the one who communicates it. This phenomenon is clear in the verse where Allah says: 'When the hypocrites come to you, they say: We bear witness that you are most surely Allah's Prophet, and Allah knows that you are most surely His Prophet, and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1)

Thus, their statement that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is true because it corresponds with reality. However, does it concur with their conviction? No, it does not correspond to their belief. Therefore, Allah testifies that they are liars because their speech does not concur with the reality of their convictions. Allah calling them liars does not pertain to their statement that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah, but rather to their saying, 'we bear witness.' Thus, calling them liars is due to their statement of bearing witness. To bear witness means that the heart is in agreement with the tongue. They bore witness with their tongues apart from their hearts.

In the verse we are studying, their utterance that 'Allah has taken a son,' had no basis in reality, so it is a fallacious ascription. Therefore, Allah said that they say nothing but lies. (*al-Kahf:* 5)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* consoles His Prophet Muhammad in order to alleviate him of what he encounters of hardships, resistance and impudence on the path of calling people to Islam. Thus, He *the Almighty* says:

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَٰخِعٞ نَّفۡسَكَ عَلَىٰٓ ءَاثَٰرِهِمۡ إِن لَّمۡ يُؤۡمِنُواْ بِهَٰذَا ٱلۡحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا (٦)

But [Prophet] are you going to worry yourself to death
over them if they do not believe in this message? [6]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 6)

The meaning of the Arabic phrase *bakhi' nafsak* (worry yourself to death) is to exert yourself in calling your people greatly and excruciatingly. The verse shows compassion for the Prophet Muhammad, because he overburdened himself in order to guide his people with that which Allah has not charged him with and made incumbent upon himself what Allah did not make incumbent upon him. The Prophet *peace be upon him* used to call his people to Islam and they would renounce and turn away from him. He would follow in their footsteps with regret and sorrow the way you follow a beloved one or dear companion who leaves you behind on a journey while you are filled with the bitterness of distress and separation. Therefore, it was as if the Prophet, out of his love for his people and his earnest desire to guide them, was nearly killing himself with grief.

The Arabic word *al-asaf* means profound sorrow as the Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* said, 'O my sorrow for Yusuf!' (*Yusuf:* 84) and as in the verse where Allah speaks about Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he returned to his people in anger over their worship of the calf. Allah says: 'So Musa returned to his people wrathful, sorrowing.' (*Ta Ha:* 86)

However, Allah *Glorified is He* had defined the mission of the Prophet Muhammad as conveying the Message. He made him a bearer of glad tidings and a Warner. He did not charge him regarding calling people to Islam except with that which was within His capacity. Thus, the verse is a manifestation of Allah's Mercy to His Prophet. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا جَعَلۡنَا مَا عَلَى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ زِينَةٗ لَّهَا لِنَبۡلُوَهُمۡ أَيُّهُمۡ أَحۡسَنُ عَمَلٗا (٧)

We have adorned the earth with attractive things so that
We may test people to find out which of them do best [7]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 7)

It is as if this verse is a commentary on the previous one. It is a reminder to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the life of this world is short and the end of this world is imminent. Therefore, there is no need for the Prophet to destroy himself out of grief over the stubborn resistance of his people. The life of every person in this world is his time in it and the actual length of existence of this world is not his business. The life of someone else will avail nothing to anyone. Thus, indeed this world is so short and quickly it reaches its end! Then they all return to Us (Allah) and We recompense them in accordance with what they did. So do not be sad, do not despair and do not trouble your soul because of their disbelief.

Allah said that He has adorned the earth with attractive things. This means that everything that is on the earth is an enchanting adornment. This adornment is the ornamentation, which glitters before the eyes and attracts it. It then, obliterates and disappears. The Quran has clarified this phenomenon for us in the verse that says: 'And set forth to them parable of the life of this world: like water which We send down from the cloud so the herbage of the earth becomes tangled on account of it, then it becomes dry broken into pieces which the winds scatter, and Allah is the holder of power over all things' (*al-Kahf:* 45). So, beware not to be deceived by this ornamentation because it is splendid beauty which dries up quickly and becomes some debris.

Allah has made that which is on earth adornment in order to test us. The Arabic noun *al-bala',* which is derived from the same root as the verb used in the verse means a trial and examination. It does not mean a misfortune as some people think because the real calamity befalls upon the one who fails in the examination. This testing of theirs is from Allah even though He knows their state and how their response will be in advance. Yet, Allah tests us in order to make it actual knowledge and actual evidence.

The closest approximation to this issue is of a pupil whose failure is foreseen by his teacher based upon what he has seen of preliminary indications including his mentality, his diligence, and attention. The teacher builds his judgement on them. Once the pupil takes the exam, he actually fails and comes to nothing. However, does this mean that we should abolish examinations in our schools and rely on the experience of the teacher with his pupils? No, we should not. Examinations are imperative as actual evidence against the one who fails. Thus, the meaning of the phrase 'so that We may test people.' (*al-Kahf:* 7), is that a trial that serves as evidence against themselves.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِنَّا لَجَٰعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيۡهَا صَعِيدٗا جُرُزًا ﴿٨﴾

But We shall reduce all this to barren dust [8]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 8)

The Arabic word *as-sa'id*, (dust) is a layer of soil that appears on the surface of the earth and has no plant on it, while the word *juzuran* is a land that is devoid of vegetation or that had some plants on it but the locusts have eaten it or some plant epidemic has ruined it, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not see that We drive the water to a land having no herbage, then We bring forth thereby seed-produce of which their cattle and they themselves eat; will they not then see?' (*as-Sajda:* 27). In as much as the situation is like this and this world is ornamentation, which is quickly removed, then the end is near. Thus, leave them to Me to test and requite them for their deeds.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَمۡ حَسِبۡتَ أَنَّ أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلۡكَهۡفِ وَٱلرَّقِيمِ كَانُواْ مِنۡ ءَايَٰتِنَا عَجَبًا ﴿٩﴾

[Prophet], do you find the Companions in the
Cave and al-Raqim so wondrous, among all Our
other signs? [9] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 9)

The reason behind revealing the story of the people of the cave was a question posed by the disbelievers of Mecca who wished to put the Prophet Muhammad in an embarrassing situation. It is narrated that they sent two men, namely: An-Nudr ibn Al-Harith and 'Uqba ibn Abu Mu'it, to the People of the Scripture in Medina to ask them about the veracity of the Prophet Muhammad, the news they had about him and what was related about him in their scriptures.

Before the beginning of the Prophet's mission, the Jews of Medina used to threaten the Arab tribes of *al-Aws* and *al-Khazraj*, worshippers of idols, with the arising of a new prophet. They used to say that the time of a prophet, whom we will follow and we kill you with him like the slaughter of *'Ad* and

Iram (cursed people who Allah destroyed), has surely come. Subsequently, the people of Mecca were keen to ask the Jews of Medina about the truth of Prophet Muhammad. When the two men went to the Jews of Medina, the latter said, 'If you desire to know the veracity of Prophet Muhammad, ask him about three things. If he gives you answers, then he is truthful. Ask him, ‘What is the story of the group of men who passed through time in a marvellous manner? And what is the story of the wandering man who roamed the earth to the east and to the west? And what is the spirit?’

The two men then went to the Prophet and asked him these questions. Whereupon He said, 'I will answer you tomorrow.' The next day came and the day after it. Fifteen days passed without the Prophet being granted any revelation concerning these questions. This grieved the Prophet Muhammad and he was sad that he had given a promise and did not fulfil it. It is said that the reason behind the revelation delay was that he said, 'I will answer you tomorrow,' without saying, 'If Allah wills.' Therefore, Allah addressed him saying: 'do not say of anything, I will do that tomorrow,' without adding, “God willing”' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

The above verse in itself is a proof of the truthfulness of the Prophet. It is a proof of His etiquette and fidelity in conveying from his Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to give this lesson in the person of the Prophet to be a model for others. It also meant to show that how no one should disdain when someone corrects him. For here is the Prophet being corrected and set straight by his Lord. It is as if the above statement of Allah is edification for the *Ummah* in the person of its Prophet so that no student might feel disdainful of the directives of his teacher so long as the goal is reaching the truth. Therefore, do not reject the rectification of an opinion over another, even if it comes from a human being. What would you think if the rectification, the correction and edification was from the Creator and His side?

Consider the following model of the etiquette of rectification and the legitimacy of appealing a legal judgment. This lesson is mentioned in the verse, 'And Dawud and Sulaiman when they gave judgment concerning the field when the people's sheep pastured therein by night, and We were bearers of witness to their judgment.' (*al-Anbiya’:* 78) The judgment of Dawud

(David) *peace be upon him* in this case was that the owner of the grain-field should take possession of the sheep which had eaten his crop of grain. However, when Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* learned of this judgment, he sought to rectify it. He said, 'Nay, the owner of the grain-field should assume control of the sheep and derive benefit from them, while the owner of the sheep should be charged of cultivating the grain-field until it returns to its former state. Then, the sheep should be returned to their owner and the grain-field to its owner.' That is why Allah says afterwards: 'So We made Sulaiman to understand it.' (*al-Anbiya':* 79) However, Allah did not accuse David *peace be upon him* of error, rather, He said: 'and to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge.' (*al-Anbiya':* 79)

Let us note here that the rectification did not come from the father to the son which would have been a natural occurrence. It came from the son to the father instead. This is in order to confirm that there is no offense or shame for the young to correct the old or for the son to the father. The goal is to reach the truth and the correct thing. In this case, Prophet Sulaiman *peace be upon him* did not turn a blind eye to the defectiveness of the judgment of his father. Rather, He gave voice to the truth and articulated it because the truth is more precious than any relationship even if it be the relationship of paternity. From this case, we understand that the rectification of one human being of another human being is a normal and acceptable affair which no one should disdainfully reject. The idea of appeal in courts is derived from here, for it is possible that a judge in a court of appeals can rectify his colleague in the court of the first instance. He might come across something or perceive an aspect of the case, which he did not.

Let us pause here to examine the fidelity of the Prophet to conveying the message from Allah. He certainly did not hold anything back of the divine revelation, even that which came as a reprimand and a rectification for him. It is as if he were reliably honest even against himself. It is the Prophet himself, who conveyed to us the verse: 'And do not say of anything: Surely I will do it tomorrow.' (*al-Kahf:* 23), and it is he who conveyed to us: 'O Prophet! why do you forbid [yourself] that which Allah has made lawful for you' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). Furthermore, he is the one who conveyed to us concerning the battle of *Badr*: 'Allah pardon you! Why did you give them leave?' (*at-Tawba:* 43) There are many more examples alike from the verses of the Quran. Thus, His Lord praises him with saying: 'Nor of the unseen is he a tenacious concealer.' (*at-Takwir*: 24)

Even in the domain of intimidation and threatening, Prophet Muhammad did not hold back of the divine revelation a single letter. Consider the verse where Allah says: 'And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings, We would certainly have seized him by the right hand, Then We would certainly have cut his aorta.' (*al-Haqqa:* 44-46) Indeed, this is the absolute fidelity and truthfulness which hides nothing.

Was it not worthy for the people of Mecca to comprehend this aspect of the Prophet and consider His truthfulness when he told them about himself things they did not know and which it might be expected that he conceal from them? Is this not irrefutable evidence of his veracity in what he says?

When Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us to say 'Allah wills', as we set about to do something in the future, He is evidently bestowing a grace upon His servants. He is protecting them from having a lie attributed to themselves if they are unable to realize what he promised. Yet there is neither restriction upon anyone nor any limitation to the aspirations of human beings when we say ‘Allah wills.' Some people allege and claim that saying this expression abolishes planning for the future. We tell them lay your plans as you wish, organise your affairs as you want and take the preliminary steps you feel appropriate for the success of your efforts. What harm would afflict you when you attach all of this to the will of Allah, which is in itself an aid to you in accomplishing what you desire. Hence, if you fail, you have given yourself protection presented in the will of Allah. You are not a liar, but it is Allah Who has not willed yet that you accomplish what you were aiming to do.

The truth is that no one possesses an event in the future and no one can guarantee it except Allah. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to link deeds to the will of Allah. For example, if you said, 'I will meet so and so tomorrow to talk to him about such and such a thing,' do you have control over any of the elements of this occurrence? Do you guarantee that you will live until tomorrow? Do you guarantee that this other person will live until tomorrow? Do you have assurance that the subject of the meeting will stay the same and that no unexpected factor will befall it? Thus, why are you certain that you will do such and such tomorrow? Say 'Allah wills' and get out of this embarrassing situation.

Let us return to the verse, which we are studying. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Prophet], do you find the Companions in the Cave and Al-Raqim so wondrous, among all our other signs?' (*al-Kahf:* 9) The verse starts with an Arabic initial word *am* which is one of the conjunctive particles It signifies a contrast to what comes before it and directs careful consideration to what follows. It similarly occurs in the verse where Allah tells the Prophet to say: 'Say, Are the blind and the seeing alike? Or (am) can the darkness and the light be equal?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16)

Hence, Allah wants to tell the Prophet Muhammad if the disbelievers ask you about the Companion of the Cave assuming that it is an enigmatic puzzle which will put you in an embarrassing situation, do not trouble yourself with their discourse nor with their ill intention. Moreover, do not imagine that the Companions of the Cave are the only wondrous marvel We have, for our wondrous signs are numerous and this is but one of them.

The Arabic word *al-kahf* is a fissure in a mountain and the word conjoined to it *ar-raqim* is something which is imprinted with something, i.e. a thing that could be written upon such as a stone or similar object. Perhaps it refers to a stone that was at the door of the cave upon which the names of these youths were incised. Relevant to this is the verse where Allah says about the Quran: 'It is a written book (*marqum*)' (*al-Mutaffifin*: 9). Allah asks whether the Prophet has thought that these were, among His signs, a wonder. These were not the only marvels, as all of His signs are wonders and deserving of careful meditation.

Thereafter, the following verses proceed to provide details of this marvel. Allah says:

إِذۡ أَوَى ٱلۡفِتۡيَةُ إِلَى ٱلۡكَهۡفِ فَقَالُواْ رَبَّنَآ ءَاتِنَا
مِن لَّدُنكَ رَحۡمَةٗ وَهَيِّئۡ لَنَا مِنۡ أَمۡرِنَا رَشَدٗا ١٠

When the young men sought refuge in the cave and said, 'Our Lord, grant us Your mercy, and find us a good way out of our ordeal' [10] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 10)

The Arabic verb *awa* which is at the beginning of the verse is related to the word *al-ma'wa* which is a shelter where people seek refuge and shelter. The subject of the verb *al-fitya* is the plural of *fata* which is a young man who is in the prime of life. Young men are those upon whom all the hopes of bearing the burdens and advancement of every difficult enterprise are pinned.

These subject-believing young men stood fast holding the banner of their conviction and their faith before the oppressive power of disbelief and the tyranny of polytheism. They were full of the youthfulness of faith and conviction. Consequently, they sought refuge in the cave, leaving their wealth, their families and all that they possessed behind them. They fled with their religion into this constrained space, which was devoid of any sustaining element of the necessities of life. Their souls were not pre-occupied with these necessities; rather they knew that they had a Lord who would take care of them. Therefore, they implored Him in humility saying: 'Our Lord, grant us Your Mercy.' (*al-Kahf:* 10) They asked for mercy from Allah to help them in their current state of being cut off from all the necessities of life. For gracious mercy in a fissure of a mountain will not come from any human being, but rather from Allah only. They also beseeched Allah to prepare for them a right guidance. In other words, they ask Allah to facilitate for them the right path to the good and to truth.

Surely, when disbelief forced these believing youths to take refuge in the constriction of the cave, they humbly pleaded and turned towards their Lord, for He alone was capable of expanding this constriction, as He said: 'Yet why did they not, when Our misfortune came to them, humble themselves?' (*al-An'am:* 43)

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَضَرَبۡنَا عَلَىٰٓ ءَاذَانِهِمۡ فِي ٱلۡكَهۡفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدٗا ١١

We sealed their ears [with sleep] in the cave for years [11] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 11)

It is said that the tent was struck (*durib*) upon the earth, i.e. the earth was covered with it after being vacant. To strike means to cause one thing to hit another with force on condition that the thing that one uses to strike is stronger that the thing which is struck or otherwise the one who strikes will be striking himself. Therefore, a poet in speaking of opponents of the notion of divine predestination said: O ye scorner of the varieties of divine decree. With yourself, you deal harshly, not with destiny. And O hitter of a rock with a staff, Did you strike the staff or did you strike the rock?

Thence, the meaning of the phrase, 'We sealed their ears,' is that we covered them with a good covering which veils them from the external world. This act of sealing their ears is the mercy for which they plead and asked Allah. When a man who works with an axe, for example, gets tired and exhausted of labour, he stands still for a while to rest. When he gets tired of standing, he sits down and when he gets tired of sitting, he lies down. If he still finds no rest, there remains nothing for him to do but to sleep. During sleep, the nerves are calmed and a person finds rest, even with the pains of the most severe illness. When a sick person sleeps, he feels no pain. That is why Allah chose for them this condition to provide rest for them during their time in the cave.

Thus, it is Allah *Glorified is He* who sealed their ears as a mercy and not a punishment because Allah desired for them the utmost degree of repose and calm sleep that is not disturbed by anything. Sleep is the ultimate repose which overcomes bodily pains in human beings.

Allah *Glorified is He* opted to seal their ears because the sense of hearing is the first operational senses in a human being and it is the first instrument of perception which functions in a child. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* mentions it first when He says: 'and Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers-- you did not know anything -- and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

These senses are the windows of knowledge and perception for a human. When you put your finger in front of the eye of a newborn child, you find that he does not blink because he does not see until after three to ten days. Nevertheless, when you whisper into his ear, he pays attention. Thus, the sense of hearing performs its function from the time of the birth. Furthermore, the ear is also distinguished by being the only faculty of perception which does not cease during sleep since it is through hearing that one is roused from sleep

These young men went into in the cave and took shelter in it. It was a fissure in a mountain within a desert which is exposed to storms, winds and the sounds of animals and many other things liable to disturb the sleeping person. Therefore, if the Creator had left them sleeping there normally, these sounds would have disturbed them and upset their repose. Thus, He rendered their faculty of hearing inoperative and thereby, they were able to sleep for all of this period. Then Allah said that He caused this seal to be within the cave for a number of years. The Arabic word *'adada* means many years. A limited number is known and thereby, not counted, unlike large numbers. Similarly, we say that so and so a person possess a million enumerated and in cash.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ بَعَثۡنَٰهُمۡ لِنَعۡلَمَ أَيُّ ٱلۡحِزۡبَيۡنِ أَحۡصَىٰ لِمَا لَبِثُوٓاْ أَمَدٗا ١٢

Then We woke them so that We could make clear which of the two parties was better able to work out how long they had been there [12] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 12)

The Arabic verbal phrase at the beginning of the verse, *ba'athnahum* means we roused them from their long sleep. Since they had been sleeping, it is not then a question of their death. However, when the period of their sleep was prolonged, it appeared like death. The two parties whom Allah talks about are the two groups among the young men themselves as they asked one another about the length of their stay. They said it was a day or part of a day. Another interpretation refers to the two groups who differed in their determination of the length of time of their sleep.

Allah *Glorified is He* raised them in order that He might perceive which of the two parties would assess the length of their stay in the cave accurately.

The Arabic word *al-amad* which is used at the end of the verse means a period of time and a number of years.

He who examines the preceding verse finds a summary of the story and an abridged version of it included, as if it was a telegraphic report of what happened. The Companions of the Cave were believing-young men who had escaped with their religion into one of the caves. Allah sealed up their ears and thereby, they slept for a long time. He awakened them in order that He might know who could calculate the length of their sleep. Of course, this telegraph does not provide us with the details of all phases of the story. Therefore, the verses detailing the story now commence. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

نَّحۡنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيۡكَ نَبَأَهُم بِٱلۡحَقِّۚ إِنَّهُمۡ فِتۡيَةٌ ءَامَنُواْ بِرَبِّهِمۡ وَزِدۡنَٰهُمۡ هُدٗى ١٣

[Prophet], We shall tell you their story as it really was. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more and more guidance [13] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 13)

The pronoun ‘We’ here refers to Allah *Glorified is He*. It is He, who relates what happened in truth. If the storyteller was other than Allah, one would anticipate some error, forgetfulness or omission of some of the events of the story out of some his caprice. However, if the narrative comes to you from Allah, then it is the truth. As He said in another verse: 'We narrate to you the best of narratives.' (*Yusuf:* 3).

Thus, there can be a narrative or tale which is not excellent. That is the narrative which is not precise or accurate. However, the Quranic narratives assure you the utmost precision in portraying the events and allow you to envisage all the details. The Arabic word for narrative or tale is *qissa* or *qasas*. It signifies the precision of succession. It is derived from the verb *qassa* which is to trace the succession. This function used to be carried out by men known as narrators of the Noble Hadiths. They were rigorously tracing the succession of the real facts of events. As for the Arabic word *an-naba*', it means a prodigious report.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more and more guidance.' (*al-Kahf:* 13) Here comes the detail of the story after being summarized by the Quran in the preceding memorandum and telegraph. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to His Prophet that this story has been told before, but it was narrated without veracity and it was altered. Nevertheless, our narrating of it is a true narrative which is free of falsehood.

Hence, the reality of these Men is that they were youths who believed in Allah and sacrificed for the sake of this cause. When they believed in Allah, He looked after them, illuminated their vision, fortified their hearts with patience, and increased them in faith. As He says in another verse: 'And [as for] those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding.' (*Muhammad:* 17) How similar this phenomenon is to a teacher who notices the signs of intelligence in one of his pupils. He sees him responsive and avid for knowledge, so he gives him his attention and bestows upon him much information.

Let us take note here that these believers who sacrificed everything and fled with their religion were still at the stage of youth. At this stage of life one gets preoccupied with this world and pays attention to its pleasures. Yet these young men were truly pre-occupied with their religion since their childhood in order to set a model and an example to the believing youth of every time and place. Their vigorous youth was that of faith and creed.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَرَبَطۡنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمۡ إِذۡ قَامُواْ فَقَالُواْ رَبُّنَا رَبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ لَن نَّدۡعُوَاْ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ إِلَٰهٗاۖ لَّقَدۡ قُلۡنَآ إِذٗا شَطَطًا ﴿١٤﴾

We gave strength to their hearts when they stood up and said, ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth. We shall never call upon any god other than Him, for that would be an outrageous thing to do [14] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 14)

The Arabic word *ar-rabt* which occurs as a verb at the beginning of the verse means that you bind something up and strengthen it in order to preserve what is in it the way you tie up a water skin so that water will not leak from it or a riding animal so that it will not run away. The derivations of its Arabic root occur frequently in the Quran. For example, Allah says in the story of the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'And the heart of Musa's mother was free [from anxiety] she would have almost disclosed it had We not strengthened her heart.' (*al-Qasas:* 10)

Allah fastened that which was in her heart of faith. He inspired her to cast her son into the water and had Allah not strengthened her heart and made her steadfast, she would have gone after her son crying and wailing, thereby attracting attention to him as Allah says: 'she would have almost disclosed it' (*al-Qasas:* 10). That means she would have revealed the plan which Allah had ordered her to follow in order to save Musa. Thus, the heart of Musa's mother was reassured and her breast became free of detrimental agitations. Of course, the heart is the domain of agitated reactions, as evinced by the turbulence, which occurs in it, the increase in pulse-rate and the rush of blood in anger, for example.

The heart is not called breast (*fu'ad*) unless it is inflamed and agitated with emotion. When Allah strengthened the heart of Musa's mother, He made her take control over her emotions in a way that governed her actions to move along with the intended plan. Consequently, we bid the angry person whose blood boils in his veins to be calm and to control himself because calmness will assist him in attaining the truth and to reign in the unruliness of his anger. The outcome of such anger is never worthy of praise. Are you not aware of the Prophetic directive concerning the state of anger? Allah's advice is to change your current situation because this procedure provokes in you a pacific inclination and drives anger away from you. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and their hearts vacant.' (*Ibrahim:* 43) This means that they are empty and with nothing in them. When you empty something of its contents, it fills with air.

Here, Allah says about the Companions of the Cave that He strengthened their hearts so that the creed and faith in Allah would remain in them and that their hearts are not shaken or removed by events or misfortune. This derives from the act of increasing them in guidance as mentioned in the previous verse. As regards their standing up and saying that their Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth, it is indicative of their opposition to falsehood and their firm stance in its face. Falsehood terrified them, so they rushed to counteract it with their utterance 'Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth.' (*al-Kahf:* 14)

There is no doubt that they heard discourse contradicting their statement as well as their doctrinal proclamation exposed them to war and oppression. Thus, the verse gives a picture of two groups that are the group of disbelief which denies the existence of Allah or attributes associates unto Him, and the group of faith which resoundingly proclaims 'Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and earth.' (*al-Kahf:* 14) If the group of disbelief called to worship other than Allah, then the group of faith said, 'We shall never call upon any god other than Him.' (*al-Kahf:* 14) They observed that if they alleged the existence of a god besides Allah '…that would be an outrageous thing to do. That is to say, we would then have transgressed the bounds and distanced ourselves far from that which is correct.

Subsequently Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ قَوۡمُنَا ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ ءَالِهَةٗۖ لَّوۡلَا يَأۡتُونَ عَلَيۡهِم
بِسُلۡطَٰنِۢ بَيِّنٖۖ فَمَنۡ أَظۡلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفۡتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبٗا ﴿١٥﴾

These people of ours have taken gods other than Him. Why do they not produce clear evidence about them? Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God? [15]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 15)

In this verse, the Companions of the cave, the believing youth, report that their people had adopted other gods than Allah without giving any proof or clear evidence that these views they held concerning the worship of these gods were true. Thus, 'Who could be more unjust than someone who makes up lies about God?' (*al-Kahf:* 15) The most abominable wrong and most vile is that we contrive a falsehood against Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.' (*Luqman:* 13)

Subsequently Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذِ ٱعْتَزَلْتُمُوهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ فَأْوُۥٓا۟ إِلَى ٱلْكَهْفِ يَنشُرْ
لَكُمْ رَبُّكُم مِّن رَّحْمَتِهِۦ وَيُهَيِّئْ لَكُم مِّنْ أَمْرِكُم مِّرْفَقًا ﴿١٦﴾

Now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God, take refuge in the cave. God will shower His mercy on you and make you an easy way out of your ordeal [16] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 16)

This is the conversation of the young men between each other. They observed that they have withdrawn themselves from the people of disbelief, departed from their ways, and followed the path of faith in Allah, which had been made easy for them by Allah. Consequently, they added that they should go to the cave, take refuge, and shield themselves in it to flee with their religion and not to fear their people seducing or coercing them away from their religion.

Here, we note the fact that the flight of these young men was not to another country, wherein there was a way to live. Instead, they fled to a constricted cave within a mountain in the desert that contained nothing of the necessities of life. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* alerts and warns us not to say that the cave was constricted and ask how they lived in it. They were emigrants to Allah, refugees in Him and relying on Him.

Therefore, Allah says that they said that their Lord would spread out His mercy upon them. Now, constriction is the opposite of expansiveness and amplitude. Yet they uttered this statement with full trust in the mercy of Allah. They were firmly convinced that He would not abandon or forsake those who emigrate to Him and that He would expand that constriction for them through His mercy. Indeed, Allah did spread it out for them when he caused them to sleep. Do you not see that the sleeper resides freely in this world, here and there, with no limits or borders restraining him?

What happened in the story of the prophet Musa (Moses) represents example of this bountiful expansiveness. The Pharaoh and his army were pursuing him until his followers cried, 'Most surely we are being overtaken out.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) They were stranded as the sea was in front of them and the enemy behind them. There was no means of escape in terms of what they could see of the reality of the situation. However, what did Musa *peace be upon him* say to his people in this situation? He uttered with a ring of deep conviction the statement of one who has complete trust in Allah's help. He said, 'By no means, surely my Lord is with me: He will show me a way out.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62)

Then, assistance from his Lord came at that very moment and they were relieved from what they faced in terms of restricted escape. Allah inspired him: 'Strike the sea with your staff.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63) Likewise, the notion of expansiveness is expressed in the verse we are studying: 'God will shower His mercy on you.' (*al-Kahf:* 16) Then, Allah said that they also observed that Allah would prepare for them from their affair facility. The plural of the Arabic word *al-mirfaq* which occurs as the object of the verb at the end of the verse is *marafiq*. It refers to the facilities of life, which a human being cannot give up on. Allah *Glorified is He* caused them to sleep and made them in no need to the facilities of life. If they had remained awake, they would inevitably had need of these necessities.

Subsequently, Allah says:

وَتَرَى ٱلشَّمْسَ إِذَا طَلَعَت تَّزَٰوَرُ عَن كَهْفِهِمْ ذَاتَ ٱلْيَمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَت
تَّقْرِضُهُمْ ذَاتَ ٱلشِّمَالِ وَهُمْ فِى فَجْوَةٍ مِّنْهُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ مَن يَهْدِ
ٱللَّهُ فَهُوَ ٱلْمُهْتَدِ ۖ وَمَن يُضْلِلْ فَلَن تَجِدَ لَهُۥ وَلِيًّا مُّرْشِدًا ﴿١٧﴾

You could have seen the [light of the] sun as it rose, moving away to the right of their cave, and when it set, moving away to the left of them, while they lay in the wide space inside the cave. (This is one of God's signs: those people God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray) [17] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 17)

After Allah had sealed their ears and protected them from noises that would have disturbed and troubled their sleep, he also protected them from the light of the sun. Recent studies have proven the danger of sunrays especially for a sleeping person and the importance of darkness as nerves are calmed and the limbs and organs find rest in it. The sun is a one of the creations of Allah. It has a fixed orbit and a regulated law, as Allah says: 'all [orbs] travel along swiftly in their celestial spheres.' (*al-Anbiya':* 33)

However, the Creator made the sun go beyond its regulation for them so that its light would not disturb them. He caused it to turn and incline away from the cave while it was rising and hence, the word *az-zur* means inclining away from the truth. Similarly, we say *izwarra 'an ash-shay'* to mean to turn away from something. Thus, when the sun rose, it inclined away from the cave to the right side. However, when it set, it moved away to the left of them. This way of turning aside is expressed with the verb *taqr'd*, which has an interesting semantic association with the well-known word *al-qard*, which means to give someone something they need. It is as if the sun were loaning and lending them something, as it did not let its ray in their place of slumber when it set. This is something they had no right to, so it is as if the sun were lending it to them.

Undoubtedly, this is a manifestation of the power of Allah which can create something and its opposite. We should note that Allah *Glorified is He* attributed the action of the act of turning aside to the sun. It is as if the sun were doing this of its own after Allah had regulated its movement of these actions, as you regulate a device in our day.

Allah said that they were laying within an open space thereof, i.e. the cave. He added that, 'This is one of God's signs.' So, in as much as these actions of the sun are among the signs and miracles of Allah then do not object and do not wonder how the sun tilted and changed its course. The Creator created the creation and gave each created thing its regulatory law according to which it behaves. However, He did not let each created thing act on its own merely based on its specific regulatory law; rather, He has controlling power over the regulatory law and can render it operative and inoperative if He wills. Then Allah says: 'those people God guides are rightly guided, but you will find no protector to lead to the right path those He leaves to stray.' (*al-Kahf:* 17)

Now, the controversy over divine guidance and leading astray has been around for a long time and the consequences of this polemical battle continue to exist to the present. There are always those who say, 'If Allah is the one Who guides and the One Who leads astray then why does He punish me if I go astray? This is a widespread question and it has been taken up by orientalists and philosophers with the intention of providing a justification for the rebellious disobedient soul. In response to this, we ask every disputant: why do you restrict your objection to the issue of harm and punishment when you go astray? Why do you not mention the reward you subsequently get when you behave correctly and have faith? The limitation of your objection to the former without concerning the latter is proof that guidance, which has come to you is a benefit you have abandoned and you clung to the case in which there is harm. No one says this except those who sin against their own souls.

Guidance is of two types: The first is indicative guidance which is for everyone including the believer and the non-believer. For Allah does not indicate the way to the believer alone; rather, He shows the way of faith to the believer and the non-believer. Then whoever advances towards faith in Him, Allah will certainly consider him qualified for the second type of guidance namely, assistance. Hence, He will take him by the hand, help him, and make faith easy to his heart. Moreover, He would give him the capacity to do good, infuse his inner being with joy and facilitate his life for him.

Whomever Allah *Glorified is He* wills guidance for, He grants him guidance and whomever He wills misguidance for, He increases him in deviant straying. Yet, He has made it clear that whoever wants to be guided, he is guided aright with assistance from Allah. Thus, the non-believers are not guided aright, nor the transgressor nor the wanton sinners. This is because Allah has left each one to choose and in this manner; Allah withholds from them the guidance of assistance. Subsequently, Allah says:

وَتَحۡسَبُهُمۡ أَيۡقَاظٗا وَهُمۡ رُقُودٞۚ وَنُقَلِّبُهُمۡ ذَاتَ ٱلۡيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ ٱلشِّمَالِۖ وَكَلۡبُهُم بَٰسِطٞ
ذِرَاعَيۡهِ بِٱلۡوَصِيدِۚ لَوِ ٱطَّلَعۡتَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ لَوَلَّيۡتَ مِنۡهُمۡ فِرَارٗا وَلَمُلِئۡتَ مِنۡهُمۡ رُعۡبٗا ١٨

You would have thought they were awake, though they lay asleep. We turned them over, to the right and the left, with their dog stretching out its forelegs at the entrance. If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away, filled with fear of them [18] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 18)

In other words, if you had a chance to look at them, you would have imagined them awake and not sleeping. This is because their Lord preserved them in a state of alertness and maintained their physical condition. Moreover, He manifested in them another miraculous sign as He turned them over in their sleep to the right sometimes and to the left at others in order to keep their bodies stay in their original state, not being corroded by the earth. It is well known that if a person is ordained to sleep for a long time on a patient's bed, he will be afflicted by other ills, namely bedsores that result from his continuous sleeping on one side, may Allah protect our health and yours. Thus, Allah has developed the procedure of turning them over to the right and to the left as if they were awake.

Allah says that their dog was stretching his forelegs at the entrance. Thus, it seems that they were shepherds and that their dog followed them, sat down stretching out its forelegs at the entrance of the cave. The verse continues: 'If you had seen them, you would have turned and run away, filled with fear of them.' (*al-Kahf:* 18) Allah had cast awe and fear of them into the souls of people so that if a person came across them, he would be frightened and turn away filled with horror. Their physical appearance would inspire this as they are turning over to the right and to the left, yet not one of them awoke or got up for this entire duration.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ بَعَثۡنَٰهُمۡ لِيَتَسَآءَلُواْ بَيۡنَهُمۡۚ قَالَ قَآئِلٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ كَمۡ لَبِثۡتُمۡۖ قَالُواْ لَبِثۡنَا يَوۡمًا أَوۡ بَعۡضَ
يَوۡمٖۚ قَالُواْ رَبُّكُمۡ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثۡتُمۡ فَٱبۡعَثُوٓاْ أَحَدَكُم بِوَرِقِكُمۡ هَٰذِهِۦٓ إِلَى ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ فَلۡيَنظُرۡ
أَيُّهَآ أَزۡكَىٰ طَعَامٗا فَلۡيَأۡتِكُم بِرِزۡقٖ مِّنۡهُ وَلۡيَتَلَطَّفۡ وَلَا يُشۡعِرَنَّ بِكُمۡ أَحَدًا ١٩

In time We woke them, and they began to question one another. One of them asked, ‘How long have you been here?’ and [some] answered, ‘A day or part of a day,’ but then [others] said, ‘Your Lord knows best how long you have been here. One of you go to the city with your silver coins, find out where the best food is there, and bring some back. But be careful not to let anyone know about you [19] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 19)

Allah says that He woke them which means He roused them from their sleep. Since their long sleep that lasted three hundred and nine years was like death, He uses the Arabic phrase *ba'athnahum*, (We resurrected them.) The awakening/resurrecting here is due to a specific matter. It was in order that they ask one another about the length of time they spent in the cave. They divided into two groups. The first group inquired about the length of time they had spent. In response to this question, the other group responded in a manner compliant with human nature concerning normal sleep. They said that they have remained thus a day, or part of a day. For a human being is not capable of assessing the length of his sleep with accuracy, but the norm in sleep is that it be as such, a day or part of a day.

On pondering over this verse, scholars have deduced that when they asked each other this question, they could find nothing about themselves that would have suggested the passage of a long period. They found themselves in the same state in which they went to sleep. Their condition had not changed, for example, from youth to old age, nor had their hair turn grey. Therefore, they answered that they had been sleeping for a day or part of a day. Had they found themselves grey-haired and aged, they might have estimated the time corresponding to this state of old age.

This is the case of a perplexed person when asked about time without having any idea of its duration. For indeed it is lengthy in Allah's view but short in the person's view. This is like the statement of Allah in the chapter of *al-Baqara* where Allah says: 'He said, How long have you tarried? He said, I have tarried a day, or a part of a day. Said He, Nay! you have tarried a hundred years; then look at your food and drink years have not passed over it; and look at your Donkey; and that We may make you a sign to men.' (*al-Baqara:* 259)

In the passage above, the man judged the length of his staying to be a day or part of a day, because he found himself in the same state with nothing having changed in him. Then, how can the truth be derived in light of the two divergent utterances? Allah *Glorified is He* stated that the period was a hundred years, while ‘Uzair (Ezra) stated that it was a day or part of a day. Undoubtedly, we are before a sign of the Creator and a miracle of His miracles, which none could be capable of except the Lord of time and space, the One Who contract time into a day or part of a day and the One Who spread time to a hundred years.

Thus, the Creator has manifested evidence of the truth of both utterances regarding this miracle. The food of ‘Uzair, which remained in its state of freshness and did not change is evidence for it being a day or part of a day, while his donkey, which he saw to be dry bones, signifies evidence for it being a hundred years. Glorified and Exalted is Allah Who brings together a thing and its opposite simultaneously.

Then Allah narrates their discourse, 'Your Lord knows best how long you have been here' (*al-Kahf:* 19). These were the words of the group who wanted to close the dispute on this issue. Thus, they told their brothers that they had to put aside this matter, which is of no benefit, and leave it to Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* constantly bids us to skip an endless debate to some other topic and shift it to a fruitful, useful issue. Thus, they said, 'One of you go to the city with your silver coins, find out where the best food is there, and bring some back. But be careful not to let anyone know about you.' (*al-Kahf:* 19)

The Arabic word *Al-wariq* as used in the verse means money consisting of silver coinage. They sent one of them with what they had of coins to purchase food for them from the town; as soon as they awoke, their exceptional state ended and they reverted to their natural condition, and thus sought nourishment. However, we should take into account that hunger did not impel them to the unrestricted seeking of food. Rather, you see them earnestly concerned about the purity of their food, along with selecting the best of it, the cleanest of it and the most free from that which is forbidden.

In addition, they were not lax in being wary of their people, for the one amongst them to go on this mission was to enter the town surreptitiously and to be subtle in the matter so that no one of the populace would be aware of him because the reason for this is that they awoke in the same state they slept in and were therefore still on their guard with regard to their people, thinking that they were pursing them and searching for and seeking to kill them.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّهُمۡ إِن يَظۡهَرُواْ عَلَيۡكُمۡ يَرۡجُمُوكُمۡ أَوۡ يُعِيدُوكُمۡ
فِي مِلَّتِهِمۡ وَلَن تُفۡلِحُوٓاْ إِذًا أَبَدٗا ٢٠

If they found you out, they would stone you or force you to return to their religion, where you would never come to any good [20] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 20)

This was a precaution on their part for the sake of religion so as to protect their doctrinal creed which they fled with, for they thought that if the people of the men of the cave were to stone them, then the men of the cave will be still be prosperous in the Hereafter, which will not be the case if they were to turn to disbelief. So, if the people of the men of the cave were to manage to bring them back to their religion, the men of the cave will not achieve success neither in this world nor in the Hereafter.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَعۡثَرۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ لِيَعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقّٞ وَأَنَّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ لَا رَيۡبَ
فِيهَآ إِذۡ يَتَنَٰزَعُونَ بَيۡنَهُمۡ أَمۡرَهُمۡۖ فَقَالُواْ ٱبۡنُواْ عَلَيۡهِم بُنۡيَٰنٗاۖ رَّبُّهُمۡ أَعۡلَمُ
بِهِمۡۚ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ غَلَبُواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَمۡرِهِمۡ لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيۡهِم مَّسۡجِدٗا ٢١

In this way We brought them to people's attention so that they might know that God's promise [of resurrection] is true and that there is no doubt about the Last Hour, [though] people argue among themselves. [Some] said, 'Construct a building over them: their Lord knows best about them.' Those who prevailed said, 'We shall build a place of worship over them' [21] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 21)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty,* 'In this way We brought them to people's attention so that they might know that Allah's Promise [of resurrection] is true and that there is no doubt about the Last Hour' (*al-Kahf:* 21) indicates clearly that the [story of the] Men of the Cave serves as a basis of proof of the coming of the Last Hour and of resurrection after death. It was as if it was said unto them, 'So here you are, still alive in this world, although Allah *the Almighty* caused you to sleep this long period of time and then awakened you.’ They had been discovered, and they were still alive.

Then He *the Almighty* says; '[though] people argue amongst themselves. [Some] said, "Construct a building over them. Their Lord knows best about them."’ (*al-Kahf:* 21) This dispute occurred amongst the group that came across the Men of the Cave. It appears that they were religious people, so they wanted to preserve this Divine sign. It is certain that the moment they discovered the Men of the Cave, the latter reached their predestined end and died.

This incident needs to be recorded in history and memorialised. For this reason, it became a widely circulated parable for the whole world so that the story be known of these youths who made such a sacrifice for the sake of their doctrinal conviction and fled with their religion from the abundance and spaciousness of life to the constriction of the cave. In this way, they became an example to every group devoted to their belief, and a proof that Allah *the Exalted* comes to the aid of those who are attached to Him, and furthermore, He defends them and immortalises their memory until the coming of the Final Hour.

Therefore, some of those who discovered them said to each other, '...Construct a building over them …' (*al-Kahf:* 21) which simply implies a structure. However, the others opposed them insisting that the building should be a *masjid* (place of worship); Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Those who prevailed said, "We shall build a place of worship over them."’ (*al-Kahf:* 21) They decided to build upon them a *masjid* so that it would be a place for prostrating to Allah *the Almighty* and for worship in order that it be a building commensurate with this tremendous, eternal wondrous sign.

Then Allah *the Most High* speaks about the disputations arising from the curiosity of people regarding knowledge of the number of the Men of the Cave and other details concerning them, all of which is in truth, knowledge of no benefit, along with which the ignorance of it causes no harm.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَٰثَةٞ رَّابِعُهُمۡ كَلۡبُهُمۡ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمۡسَةٞ سَادِسُهُمۡ كَلۡبُهُمۡ رَجۡمَۢا
بِٱلۡغَيۡبِۖ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبۡعَةٞ وَثَامِنُهُمۡ كَلۡبُهُمۡۚ قُل رَّبِّيٓ أَعۡلَمُ بِعِدَّتِهِم مَّا يَعۡلَمُهُمۡ
إِلَّا قَلِيلٞۗ فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمۡ إِلَّا مِرَآءٗ ظَٰهِرٗا وَلَا تَسۡتَفۡتِ فِيهِم مِّنۡهُمۡ أَحَدٗا ﴿٢٢﴾

[Some] say(1), 'The sleepers were three, and their dog made four,' others say, 'They were five, and the dog made six' – guessing in the dark – and some say, 'They were seven, and their dog made eight.' Say [Prophet], 'My Lord knows best how many they were.' Only a few have real knowledge about them, so do not argue, but stick to what is clear, and do not ask any of these people about them [22] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 22)

There was a disagreement amongst people concerning the number of the Men of the Cave. Some of them said, 'They were three, with their dog being the fourth', while others said, 'They were five, with their dog being the sixth.' Yet, Allah *the Almighty* commented on these statements, saying that *rajman bi al-ghaib* (they were vainly guessing about the unseen) since this was merely talk without true knowledge. This indicates to us its erroneousness and being at variance with reality. Furthermore, there are those amongst them, i.e. scholars who were those who said, 'They were seven, with their dog being the eighth.' The Quran makes no comment on this last statement which indicates that it was the closest to the correct number.

Then comes the decisive saying on this issue: '... say: "My Lord knows best how many they were." Only a few have real knowledge about them...' (*al-Kahf*: 22). So, Allah *the Exalted* has not clarified for us their actual number, but ordered us to leave this to His Knowledge and not to investigate a question which is futile and without benefit. Hence, the important thing is that the basic outline of the story is confirmed which is the following: There were some young people, vigorously unyielding in their religion, who fled with their faith and made every sacrifice for its sake so that they would not be seduced away from it by the people of disbelief and oppression, and thus, they took refuge in the cave; then Allah *the Almighty* did with them what he did and made them an *aya* (sign), an *'ibra* (moral lesson), a *mathal* (parable) and a *qudwa* (model to be followed).

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(1) *It has been said that those referred to here are Christians, for a group of them came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him from Najran [of southern Arabia] and when there was mention of the Men of the Cave, the adherents of the Jacobite sect said: 'They were three, with their dog being the fourth'; while the adherents of the Nestorian sect said: 'They were five, with their dog being the sixth'; and the Muslims said, 'They were seven, with their dog being the eighth'. It has also been said that this was a narration from the Jews who urged the polytheists [of Mecca] to ask the Prophet about the Men of the Cave. Cited by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir), 5/4112*

As for the fine details of the story, these are secondary matters which neither cause one to advance or to fall back. Therefore, after this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... So do not argue, but stick to what is clear, and do not ask any of these people about them' (*al-Kahf:* 22); that is to say, do not dispute over them.

Then, came the curiosity of people who inquired about the length of the story, its locality, along with the identity, number and names of the personages involved, even as far as discussing the name of their dog. All of these are secondary matters, which do not benefit the tale nor harm it. Here, we must be aware that when Quranic narratives are vague about their characters, this ambiguity is rooted in wisdom, for if you were to investigate the vagueness of the protagonists in the narrative of the Men of the Cave, you would find it to be the very source of elucidation of the fundamental outline of the story. However, if the Quran informed us, for example, of the location of these young people, some would have said, 'This incident of the youthful group is peculiar to this place since there was a limitation of freedom of thought there.'

Also, if the Quran had specified their era, some would have surely said, 'There occurred what happened to them because in their era it was possible to achieve such deeds.' Furthermore, if it had specified the persons and identified them, they would have said, 'The like of these persons will not come again.'

For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* rendered them obscure in order to realise the desired benefit of the narrative. He rendered them obscure in terms of time, in terms of place, in terms of number, along with rendering them obscure in terms of personal identity. Allah *the Almighty* did so in order that the narration of them would become known throughout this entire world in this form without being linked to time or place or specific personages. Thus, it bore the banner of truth, and the following of its example is obligatory and applicable in all times and places and for all people. This, then, is the very essence of the message of the narrative, and this is clearly the moral of the tale.

Consider His saying: 'a believing man of Pharaoh’s family exclaimed' (*Ghafir:* 28). In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* sufficed stating ever so clearly that he was ‘a believing man’ without mentioning anything else about him. What is important in this regard is the steadfastness in faith, no matter who this believer is, whatever era he lives in, whatever place he dwells in and whatever name or description he is called under.

Likewise, in the saying of Allah *the Exalted* 'For those who are bent on denying the truth Allah *the Almighty* has propounded a parable in [the stories of] Nuh's (Noah’s) wife and Lut's (Lot’s) wife …' (*at-Tahrim:* 10), He did not mention anything about the two of them, nor did he identify the two of them with further specifics. This is due to there being no benefit in exact designation here, as the import and intention of the verse is the clarification that guidance is solely in the Hands of Allah, that even a Prophet sent by Allah *the Almighty* is not able to guide his own wife or those closest to him and that a woman has absolute freedom of belief.

Similarly, His saying, 'And for those who have attained to faith Allah has propounded a parable in [the story of] Pharaoh’s wife …' (*at-Tahrim:* 11), Allah *Glorified is He* did not inform us who she was, nor did He identify her with further detail since to pinpoint her with precision neither helps nor hinders. What is important is that we know that Pharaoh, who alleged his own divinity, with all of his tyrannical power and authority, was unable to induce his wife to believe in him.

Hence, doctrinal belief and faith are personal matters of the heart which cannot be forced upon a person. In the following verse, we have the wife of Pharaoh believing in Allah *the Most High* saying: '… Lord, build me a house near You in the Garden. Save me from Pharaoh and his actions. Save me from the evildoers.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 11)

Regarding the story of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [We have propounded yet another parable of Allah and consciousness in the story of] Maryam (Mary), the daughter of *’Imran …*' (*at-Tahrim:* 12).

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* has specifically identified her by name, even the name of her father. Why is this? It is said that this is due to the event which she will be exposed to is a unique occurrence and something special to her, which will not be repeated with anyone else. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* identifies her clearly and specifies her unmistakably. However, for the general situation which repeats itself, there is wisdom in that it should remain ambiguous, unrelated to a particular person, time, or place. This is the case with the story of the Men of the Cave, which Allah *the Almighty* made vague so that it would be *a qudwa* (parable and an exemplary model) for every believer, of all times and in every place.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَاْيۡءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٞ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾

Do not say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow' [23]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 23)

In this verse under study, the Mercy of Allah for His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reveals itself, for He did not wish to offensively shock him *peace and blessings be upon him* with the issue of this infringement. Instead, He gave him what he desired, granting him what he asked for in the matter of the Men of the Cave. Then, at the end, He reminded him of this contravention in the manner of a gentle admonition by saying: 'And never say about anything, "Surely, I shall do this tomorrow," without [adding], "If Allah so wills"…' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

We have previously mentioned that when the people asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about this story, he told them, 'I will give you an answer tomorrow.' He did not say, 'If Allah so wills.' Yet Allah *the Almighty* did not censure him, rather, He fulfilled his need and then drew his attention to the matter of this infringement. This was of the Mercy of Allah for His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In a similar fashion, Allah *Glorified is He* addressed His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* with His saying: 'May Allah, pardon you [O, Prophet]! Why did you grant them permission…?' (*at-Tawba:* 30). Here, Allah *the Exalted* precedes with pardon and confirms it since this particular affair is of the past, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was known to have a tendency for clemency and magnanimity. Then, following this, He blames him. It is as if someone asked you for help or assistance, but had previously misbehaved towards you, so it is more in keeping with good manners not to bluntly offend him concerning his misbehaviour by bringing it up first thing, rather, it is better to take care of his need, and then remind him of what he did wrong.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَٱذۡكُر رَّبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلۡ
عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَهۡدِيَنِ رَبِّي لِأَقۡرَبَ مِنۡ هَٰذَا رَشَدٗا ٢٤

Without adding, 'God willing,' and, whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say, 'May my Lord guide me closer to what is right' [24] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 24)

In other words, on the assumption that you forgot to say, 'If Allah so wills' at the moment of commencing some task, it is incumbent upon you to repeat it again in order to make up for having forgotten it at the outset.

Concerning His saying, '… and say, "May my Lord guide me closer to what is right"' (*al-Kahf:* 24), this supplication means that He *the Most High* guides me and aids me so that I will never forget again and that He establishes His Remembrance as *lazima* (fixed attribute) to my inherent commitments in every act of my actions so that I do not launch any activity except by saying: 'If Allah so wills'. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَبِثُواْ فِي كَهۡفِهِمۡ ثَلَٰثَ مِاْئَةٖ سِنِينَ وَٱزۡدَادُواْ تِسۡعٗا ٢٥

[Some say], 'The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years,' some added nine more [25] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 25)

This verse provides us with a snippet from the detailed communication which Allah *the Exalted* granted to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him* concerning the Men of the Cave. It tells us about the number of years which the youths spent in their cave as being three hundred years. This is the actual number of years according to the calculation of the sun. For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* did not say three hundred and nine years; instead He said '… some added nine more.' (*al-Kahf:* 25) However, when the Men of the Cave heard this saying, they objected and exclaimed, ‘We recognise three hundred years, but are not cognisant of the additional nine years. This is because their calculation of this period was based on solar years.’

It is well known that when the Creator created the heavens and the earth, He divided up time in an astronomical manner. Thus, He established the sun as the token of the day, which we recognise by its rising and setting. Since the sun does not indicate to us the beginning of the month, the Creator made the month tied to the moon which appears as a crescent at the beginning of every month. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, the number of months, in the sight of Allah, is twelve months, [laid down] in Allah’s decree on the day when He created the heavens and the earth …' (*at-Tawba:* 36).

Hence, if you calculated these three hundred years according to the lunar calendar, you would find them to be three hundred and nine years. Thus, according to your solar calculation they are three hundred years, and according to our lunar calculation, they are three hundred and nine. We know that the Christian era year exceeds the *Hijri* [lunar year] by about eleven days in every year.

It is from the Wisdom of the Creator that dating in Islam is linked to the phases of the moon. Just imagine if the pilgrimage, for example, were tied to a single month according to the solar calendar in a single climatic condition which did not change. Then, if pilgrimage were in winter, it would remain thus every year. How much hardship would this present to those for whom pilgrimage in winter was not agreeable? The situation is similar to fasting.

However, according to the lunar calendar, these rites of worship move throughout the year; hence, they come in summer at times, in autumn at times, in winter at times and in spring at times. Thus, every person can accomplish this ritual worship at a time of year that suits him. Therefore, it is said, 'O, time, you comprise all time.'

The one who meditates deeply on the relationship of the rites of Islam with the revolving of astronomical bodies will find many wondrous signs and marvels. For example, if you examined the call to prayer in light of this revolving, you would discover that the phrase *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) is a continuous call, ceasing neither during the day nor during the night in the dominion of Allah *the Almighty*. At the time at which you call out *Allah Akbar,* someone else is calling out *ashhad an la ilah illa Allah* (I bear witness that there is no deity except Allah), while someone else is calling out *ashhad an Muhammad Rasul Allah* (I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger, of Allah). In this way, the call to prayer is a *dawalayk* (ever-repeated summons in a systematic pattern that never ceases).

The same holds true for prayer; for at the time you are engaged in *Azh-Zhuhur* (mid-day prayer), there are others engaged in *Al-a'sr* (mid-afternoon prayer), others in *Al-maghrib* (sunset prayer) and yet others in *Al-isha'* (the evening prayer). The universe of Allah *the Almighty* is thus never for one instant devoid of someone standing, bowing or prostrating [in worship]. Hence, the words of the call to prayer and the actions of prayer pervade all moments of time, and in every manner of worship.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلِ ٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثُوا۟ ۖ لَهُۥ غَيْبُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ أَبْصِرْ بِهِۦ
وَأَسْمِعْ ۚ مَا لَهُم مِّن دُونِهِۦ مِن وَلِىٍّ وَلَا يُشْرِكُ فِى حُكْمِهِۦٓ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٦﴾

Say [Prophet], 'God knows best how long they stayed.' His is the knowledge of all that is hidden in the heavens and earth – How well He sees! How well He hears! – and they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule [26] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 26)

In His saying 'How well He sees! How well He hears!' (*al-Kahf:* 26), the Arabic form of this expression *absir bi-hi wa asmi'* is one of amazement *ta'ajjub*; in other words, it connotes how powerful is His sight and how intense is His hearing. This is because it is the sight and hearing which take in everything without limitation.

Regarding His saying: '... they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule' (*al-Kahf:* 26), it is as if Allah *the Exalted* is reassuring His slaves that His speech is true, and neither varies nor changes since He is One, Unique without any associate who might alter His speech.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Prophet:

وَٱتۡلُ مَآ أُوحِيَ إِلَيۡكَ مِن كِتَابِ رَبِّكَۖ لَا مُبَدِّلَ
لِكَلِمَٰتِهِۦ وَلَن تَجِدَ مِن دُونِهِۦ مُلۡتَحَدٗا ﴿٢٧﴾

[Prophet], follow what has been revealed to you of your
Lord’s Scripture: there is no changing His words, nor can
you find any refuge except with Him [27]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 27)

What this means is that after the questions which the disbelievers of Mecca asked Prophet Muhammad concerning that which his Lord informed him and enabled him to respond to them, then they must know that he has a Lord who is intimately compassionate unto him; He will not leave him, nor will He abandon him to their deceitful plotting. For if they desired to create a constricting dilemma for the Prophet, Allah *the Almighty* has removed him from it. Thus, he should not imagine that the obstacles which his opponents erect shall have any effect on the topic of his mission of calling people unto Islam.

If Allah’s backing for him should be slow in coming, then Prophet Muhammad should know that Allah *the Most High* wishes to put to the test the soldiers of truth who will carry the message until the Final Hour arises. For none survive in the realm of faith except the strong and those matured [by trial]. The misfortunes and hardships which occur in the path of calling others to Islam are meant to sift the people of faith such that none can remain steadfast through them except the one who is sufficiently trustworthy to bear this religious creed.

As for His saying: '…There is nothing that could alter His Words…' (*al-Kahf:* 27), this is because no one has the capability of changing the Words of Allah *the Almighty* unless there were alongside Him another god. Just as it is known that He is the sole deity and has no associates, then know that His Saying is the truth, which neither changes nor varies. What follows, '...there is no changing His Words…' (*al-Kahf:* 27) means that there is no place of shelter to go to, for Allah *the Exalted* is sufficient for you and He is the most excellent Guardian. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

'Why – is it not enough for them that We have bestowed this revelation on you from on high, to be conveyed [by you] to them? For, verily, in it is [manifested Our] grace, and a reminder to people who will believe.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 51)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِٱلْغَدَوٰةِ وَٱلْعَشِىِّ يُرِيدُونَ
وَجْهَهُۥ ۖ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَا تُطِعْ مَنْ
أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُۥ عَن ذِكْرِنَا وَٱتَّبَعَ هَوَىٰهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُۥ فُرُطًا ﴿٢٨﴾

Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval, and do not let your eyes turn away from them out of desire for the attractions of this worldly life: do not yield to those whose hearts We have made heedless of Our Quran, those who follow their own low desires, those whose ways are unbridled [28]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 28)

This verse was revealed in regard to *Ahl as-suffa* (the People of the Portico)(1) who were a group of the sincere devotees of Allah and who had also withdrawn themselves from normal activity to devote themselves to worship. Thus, people spoke ill of them and raised objections about them: 'Why do they not work? Why are they not preoccupied like all other people?' Indeed, they even went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him, 'We want you to pay attention to us and to leave those *Al-majadhib* (idiots).' At this, Allah *the Almighty* revealed: 'Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval...' (*al-Kahf:* 28). Therefore, when we see the like of these (those whom we call the possessed ones *Al-majadhib* and who have withdrawn themselves from normal activity to devote themselves to the worship of Allah *the Almighty*), it is incumbent upon us not to disdain them, nor to underestimate them nor to have doubts about them. Allah *the Almighty* has created mankind in such a way that makes them complement one another. For example, a rich man, who might be indulged in all acts of pleasure and thereby lost his hereafter for this worldly life, might hurry to this religiously committed person (dervish), who does not concern himself with the delights of this life and who pays no attention at all to its pleasure, asking him to make supplication to him so that Allah *the Almighty* will remove his affliction. Thus, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* uses these dervishes to drive the attention of those people to the ultimate fact that the pleasure of this life is finite.

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(1) *The context for the revelation of this verse is narrated by Salman Al-Farisi Allah be pleased with him who said: There came to the Messenger peace and blessings be upon him [a group] of those whose hearts were being reconciled [to Islam after the conquest of Mecca, including,] 'Uyyina ibn Hisn, Al-Aqra' ibn Habis and others of their social rank, and they said: 'O Messenger peace and blessings be upon him of Allah the Almighty, if only you would sit at the front of the seated council and remove away from us those [people] and the bad smell of their garments ---by which they meant Salman, Abu Dharr and the indigent Muslims who wore woolen garments and nothing else-- then we would sit with you and converse with you and learn from you.' Whereupon Allah the Almighty revealed: "And Convey [to the world] whatever has been revealed to thee of thy Sustainer's writ. There is nothing that could alter His words; and thou canst find no refuge other than with Him. [27] And contain yourself in patience by the side of all*=

It is truly astonishing that when some adversity or misfortune befalls this worldly person, so great and of such high rank, you will see him rushing to this pious old man, kissing his hand and asking him for his prayers. It is as if the Creator had furnished these men possessed by the love of Allah *the Most High* *Al-majadhib* in order to restrain through them the recalcitrance, or *jimah*, of

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= *who at morn and at evening invoke their Sustainer, seeking His countenance… [28]" (al-Kahf: 27-28) until he reached "…Verily, We have readied a fire is countenance…" (al-Kahf: 28) in which He threatened [the arrogant and hard-hearted] with Hellfire. So, Prophet Muhammad got up to search for [these pious but poverty stricken Muslims] until he located them at the back of the mosque where they were invoking Allah the Almighty [he peace and blessings be upon him then] said: 'Thankful praise be to Allah the Almighty who has not caused me to die before commanding me contain myself in patience by the side of men of my community; with you in life and with you in death.' This is narrated by Al-Wahidi in (Asbab An-Nuzul), page 171, and also by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5/4121).*

worldly people, those overly engrossed in the whirlpool of this world and deeply deceived by its alluring splendour.

In addition, you will frequently see worldly people striving to be of service to these pious slaves. One day(1) we prayed the sunset prayer in the mosque of Sayyiduna Al-Husayn *Allah be pleased with him* in Cairo, and amongst us was an important businessman who suddenly took out a sum of money and asked a worker to change it into lower denominations of Egyptian pounds. The worker then returned with the sum in the form of Egyptian pounds in small denominations, whereupon the important businessman said to him, ‘No, no. I must have Egyptian pounds of larger denominations because so-and so, the one possessed by the love of Allah *the Most High, Al-majdhub* at the door of the mosque only accepts large denominations of Egyptian pounds!’ At this, I said to myself, *subhan Allah*! (May Allah be praised!) There is a *majdhub* at the door of the mosque who has engrossed in the solicitude of the most important businessman in Egypt, who is avid to please him and to give him what he wants.’

Then He *the Almighty* says: 'And do not let your eyes turn away from them...' (*al-Kahf:* 28); in other words, keep your eyes upon them, and do not turn your gaze away from them to others from among worldly people. This is due to the *madad* (the moral assistance) of being looked at by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which comprises spiritual sustenance for the believers. The verse continues: '… out of desire for the attractions of this worldly life...' (*al-Kahf:* 28). What this means is that if you were to have done this and turned away from it then, it would be as if you coveted the *Dhina* (beguiling beauty) of the life of this world and its *zakharif* (vain embellishments).

In the command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remain in close contact with the People of the Portico and not to turn away from them in preference for worldly people, there was that which fortified these individuals of deep faith who made their worship of Allah *the Almighty* and coming closer to Him their *daydanhum* (regular practice) and their primary preoccupation.

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(1) The story of the man bewitched with Al-Hassan and the great economist.

However, is it required that all people be like the People of the Portico, withdrawn from the normal activities of life for the sake of worship? The answer is of course not, for Allah *the Most High* rendered them a small minority amongst people, establishing in every local one or two of them in order that they might be an example, reminding people and curbing the unruly capriciousness of their strivings towards this lowly, worldly life.

It is astonishing to see someone claim to himself without justification the state of these pious ascetics, making people believe that he is *majdhub* (possessed by the love of Allah) and *wali* (that he is a saint), while swindling and deceiving. One does not falsely lay claim to something unless there is some benefit behind it such as the one who lays false claim to medicine or lays false claim to knowledge for what he perceives to be the advantages of a doctor or a scholar. Amazingly enough, we might find someone falsely claiming to be a ‘dervish’ to the extent that he tries his utmost to convince others with this allegation, or that he is a *wali* (a Patron of Allah). Here, we should take into account that one will not claim something unless he will get a benefit or an advantage from it. For example, someone may claim to be a doctor or a scholar due to the advantages of these two positions. Accordingly, when he sees how people respect and dignify those dervishes in spite of the fact that the latter had not indulged in the pleasures of this worldly life, he claims to be so. Hence, why should these pretenders not lay claim to this state of pious asceticism? Why should they not enjoy all of these bounties without the slightest effort? Alas, the status of these truly pious slaves would not have been distorted, nor would people have spoken ill of their behaviour, except on account of this spurious, pretentious caste which relished a life of laziness and abasement.

Returning to the verse under study, then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not yield to those whose hearts We have made heedless of Our Quran…' (*al-Kahf:* 28).

This is because He did not command you to turn away from these aforementioned pious men and to give your attention to worldly people, those who neglect the remembrance of Allah *the Exalted*. However, regarding the one whose heart finds secure repose in Allah's Remembrance and has tasted the sweetness of faith, He does not issue such an order. Indeed, such a person is *Al-majadhib Al-awliya'* (as close one can be to the saintly ones possessed by love of Allah and of the People of the Portico). Moreover, perhaps his soul might entice him to be like them. So, how could He give the order to turn away from them?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has propounded the correct stance to take with regard to this world by saying, 'Allah *the Almighty* revealed to this world that whoever serves me, then serve him, and whoever serves you, then avail yourself of him…'(1) Hence, this world and its inhabitants are in the service of the believer whose heart is filled with faith, and whose attention is focused exclusively on Allah *the Most High* in all circumstances.

As for His saying, 'those who follow their own low desires...' (*al-Kahf:* 28), this means that this one who incites you against the People of the Portico with his heart being heedless of Allah's Remembrance only because he pursues his passionate cravings. Thus, his desires and vain pleasures have cut him off from the remembrance of Allah *the Exalted*. So, as long as he is preoccupied with things that correspond to his passionate cravings, he will not be concerned with what Allah *the Most High* demands. Indeed, he is too busy with what his soul demands. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'None of you truly believes until his desires are in accord with what I brought'.(2) Thus, a true Muslim, possessed of sound faith, is he whose desires and longings are in conformity to the well-ordered Path of Allah, not deviating from it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin …' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

Concerning His saying, '… those whose ways are unbridled' (*al-Kahf:* 28), this means that his situation is one of loss and ruin, as if he had uselessly squandered his own soul.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *This Hadith is not viewed as having a sound chain of transmission, though it is supported by similar Hadith.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Abu 'Asim in the book (As-Sunna) (1/12) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr.*

وَقُلِ ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ ۖ فَمَن شَآءَ فَلْيُؤْمِن وَمَن شَآءَ فَلْيَكْفُرْ ۚ إِنَّآ أَعْتَدْنَا
لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ نَارًا أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ سُرَادِقُهَا ۚ وَإِن يَسْتَغِيثُوا۟ يُغَاثُوا۟ بِمَآءٍ كَٱلْمُهْلِ
يَشْوِى ٱلْوُجُوهَ ۚ بِئْسَ ٱلشَّرَابُ وَسَآءَتْ مُرْتَفَقًا ﴿٢٩﴾

Say, ‘Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so.’ We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides. If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink! What a painful resting place! [29]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 29)

Regarding His saying, 'Say, "Now the truth has come from your Lord…"' (*al-Kahf:* 29), in essence, it is also saying, 'Say, "The truth has come from your Lord"’. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* chose the Arabic word *Ar-rabb* (Lord) and did not say ‘from Allah *the Almighty*', this is due to all believing that it is *Ar-rabb* is the One Who creates, as indicated by His saying: 'Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah." How perverted, then, are their minds!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87).

Another relevant verse in this respect is His saying: 'And thus it is [with most people] that if you ask them, "Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?" They will surely answer, Allah …' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87).

The meaning of '… from your Lord …' (*al-Kahf:* 29) is that by your own proper admission, the One Who created you, *rabbakum* (provided for your upbringing) and took responsibility for your maintenance, is the One Who revealed to you this truth. As for '… your Lord …' (*al-Kahf:* 29), that is to say not solely my Lord, rather your Lord and the Lord of all people.

The truth is that which is fixed and immutable, and inasmuch as it is from Allah *the Exalted* no one will alter it. Thus, the one who changes his words is the one who pronounces on something and is ignorant of something contrary to it, and afterwards he corrects it. However, the Truth is from Allah *the Almighty* since nothing is beyond His Awareness, and nothing escapes His Knowledge.

For this reason, there is no rectification of any ruling of His rulings on the part of anyone of His creation.

Now, *Ar-rububiya* (sustaining Lordship) is a blessing, and your Lord Who created you and bestowed bountiful blessings upon you is the One Who raises you like a father who brings up his son. Therefore, no one is opposed to sustaining Lordship. However, as for *Al-uluhiya* (Supreme Divinity), its requirement is to obligate: Do such-and-such, and do not do such-and-such. Hence, He addresses you in the capacity of sustaining Lordship with regard to matters which are for your welfare and does not address you in the capacity of Supreme Divinity which circumscribes your choices. By nature, man does not incline to that which circumscribes his choices. For this reason, he has recourse to the worship of other deities since they do not make demands.

Therefore, we find those who falsely ascribe divinity to themselves, or claim prophethood, always tend towards lightening of the requirements of the prescribed way. This is due to their knowing that heaven-sent religious paths are difficult for people since they impose restrictions upon their activity and upon their freedom of choice. Thus, when Musaylama laid false claim to prophethood, he noticed that people were discontent with having to pay obligatory alms tax, so he eliminated it from them. Likewise, when Sijah, a woman who laid false claim to prophethood, she lightened the prayer. They made these concessions, and if they had not done so, how else would they have united people behind them?

How similar are the false pretenders of former times with the false pretenders of today who sell the religion for some contingent benefit of this world, for example, those who give people formal legal opinions making permissible what Allah *the Exalted* has forbidden, such as *Al-ikhtilat* (unrestricted mingling of the sexes) and other issues in order to render the matter of religion easy for people. Now, although religion is innate to the human soul, a person will incline to one who relieves him of some of its perceived burdensome requirements. You would be astonished to see certain well-educated people and holders of advanced degrees going to *Ad-dajjalin* (deceiving charlatans) and taking them at their word. Amongst them are those who delude themselves that they are following a religion which makes them feel at ease, and in the shadow of which they do whatever they want.

Therefore, inasmuch as you are believers in *Ar-rububiya* (Sustaining Lordship) of creation, and *Ar-rububiya* (Sustaining Lordship) of providing maintenance and bestowing benefits, then it is imperative that you believe in that which has come from your Lord, as we say in the adage: ‘The one who eats my food listens to my word.' Yet, in addition to all of that, and in spite of the grace of Allah *the Almighty* and His blessings upon them, they tell them, 'There is no compulsion in faith': '… let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so...' (*al-Kahf:* 29). What this means is that the benefit of faith accrues to you yourselves.

According to one of the Qudsi Hadiths, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* narrated that Allah *the Almighty* says(1): 'Verily you will never possess an advantage for Me that you could benefit Me, and you will never possess a disadvantage for Me that you could do harm to Me. And even if the first of you and the last of you, and the living amongst you and the dead amongst you, and the present amongst you and the absent from amongst you were to come together in the state of the heart of the most God-fearing single man amongst you, this would not increase My Dominion in the least. And even if the first of you and the last of you, and the living amongst you and the dead amongst you, and the present amongst you and the absent from amongst you were to come together in the state of the heart of the most depraved single man amongst you, this would not decrease My Dominion in the least.'

The Hadith continues: 'And even if the first of you and the last of you were to gather *‘ala sa‘idin wahid* (together as one) and each of you were to petition me with his request, and I were to grant it to him, this would not diminish from that which I have except as the inserting of a needle when one of you plunges it into the sea. Verily, I am *jawwad* (magnanimous), *wajid* (omnipresent) and *majid* (glorious). My boon is speech, and My punishment is speech, for verily My Decree regarding anything is if I will it, I say to it "Be!" and thus it is.'

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(1) *A nearly identical Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (2495), and by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/154, 177) on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him.*

Thus, the benefit of faith reverts to a believer, as He says: 'Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good; and whoever does evil, does so to his own hurt…' (*Fussilat:* 46), but I want for human beings to always be in a state of blessing from me, for I myself bestow upon them the blessings of this world, and I also want to bestow upon them the blessings of the Hereafter.

This verse under study follows His saying: 'Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval…' (*al-Kahf:* 28). When the adversaries of Islam saw the Message gradually spreading, they attempted to stop it, not by aggression on their part against those who believed, rather regarding Prophet Muhammad. They did so by sending a delegation to him and said to him, ‘O, Muhammad, we have been sent to you in order to plead with you. You have introduced in your people something which no one has introduced before you. You have insulted our gods, disgraced our discernment, and reviled our religion. So, if you desire wealth, we will gather together wealth until you become the richest amongst us, and if you desire glorious rank, we will make you lord over us and establish you as our chief. Also, if you desire kingship, we will make you king.’

Thereupon, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By Allah, I have no desire for what you are speaking of; rather, my Lord has sent me to you with the truth. Thus, if you take heed and obey, then so be it. However, if you do not, then verily Allah is my ally against you.'(1)

This was their attempt to influence him in the expectation that if the affairs were secret, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might be more obliging. However, when they did not attain the object of their desire, they said to themselves, ‘We shall solicit (The Prophet’s) favour through one whom he loves, for perhaps he was embarrassed to accept the proposal from us as we are his antagonists. So let us send to him one whom he loves.' Thus, they went to his paternal uncle Abu Taleb, but when his paternal uncle spoke to him, he *peace and blessings be upon him* made his famous statement, 'By Allah, O, my paternal uncle, if they were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand in order for me to give up this mission, I would not abandon it until Allah causes it to be triumphant or I perish for its sake.'(1)

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(1) *Ibn Hisham narrated this incident in (As-Sira An-Nabawiya) (1/295-297), with slightly different wording, summarised as follows: Fifteen of the notables of [the tribe of] Quraysh gathered at the Ka‘ba and sent for Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in order to speak to him. They offered him wealth, kingship, nobility and glorious rank or providing him with the treatment of a shaman (At-tibb) if he were afflicted by Jinn. Thereupon, [The Prophet] replied: 'Nothing of which you speak concerns me. I did not come with what I came with seeking your wealth, nor superior standing among you, not kingship over you. But rather, Allah the Almighty has sent me to you as a Messenger peace and blessings be upon him and has revealed a scripture unto me... Hence, if you accept what I have brought you, then that is your good fortune in this world and the Hereafter. And if you reject it from me, then I will show steadfast patience [in waiting] for the decree of Allah the Almighty until Allah the Almighty decides between me and you.'*

Then, when this attempt also failed, they came at him from a third vantage point by saying, ‘Let us reach a compromise between us: you should stay away from those impoverished persons and turn your attention away from them and not attach yourself to them. Instead, turn your attention towards us.’ At this point Allah *the Almighty* revealed: 'Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval' (*al-Kahf:* 28). Then Allah *the Exalted* made it clear that Islam or the religion which he had revealed does not take its commands from the people unto whom it was revealed; on the contrary, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to establish for them the criteria of the truth, and he summons his people to them. Hence, how could they themselves establish these criteria and thus bid the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to turn away from the poor and give his attention to them? Therefore, the Prophet said: 'Say, "Now truth has come from your Lord …"'(*al-Kahf:* 29) because He sent him with the Truth as a messenger unto them, and he has not come except for others' guidance. So, if they wish to direct him according to their desires, then he has reversed the matter. Their summoning him to turn away from those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening and to turn his attention to them is proof of the falseness of their faith. They are not serious about following him, and therefore, he has no need of them.

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(1) Ibn Hisham narrated this incident in *(As-Sirah An-Nabawiya)* (1/266), as attributed to Ibn Ishaq, that when [the leading unbelievers of the tribe of] Quraysh asked Abu Taleb to restrain Muhammad from them, the latter said to his brother’s son: ‘O son of my brother, your people have just come to me, telling me such-and-such... So, spare me and spare yourself, and do not burden me with a matter that I cannot bear.’ At this, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* made this statement above. Then Abu Taleb said, ‘Keep to your path, O son of my brother, and say whatever you like, for, I swear by Allah *the Almighty* I will never forsake you for anything.’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… Let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so …' (*al-Kahf:* 29). This means let them enter Islam on this basis: that every truth comes down from Allah *the Almighty* not that the truth be obtained from them and that he returns it thus back to them. Nay, rather, the truth is that which Allah *the Exalted* sent with him for them. So, on this basis whoever wills, then let him believe, and whoever wills, then let him disbelieve.

We have previously clarified the issue of this verse by saying that if we find a command without the demanded action actually being desired, then we should be aware that the command is being used for another purpose. This is like when a father says to his negligent child, 'Play as you wish!' However, of course, he does not mean to order his child to play; rather, he wishes to intimidate him and to censure him.

The same holds true for the following verse: '…Let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so …' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Otherwise, if you took the verse at its face meaning, then the one who believes would be obedient to the command, '… Let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so…' (*al-Kahf:* 29), and also the insubordinate one would be obedient to the command, '… and let those who wish to reject it do so …' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Thus, both of them would then be obedient, so on what grounds would one be punished but not the other? Thus, the command here is not actually meant to be such; instead it is for equalisation and intimidation. That is to say, it is all the same for you whether you believe or do not believe, for you are free in this matter. Since the proceeds of faith revert unto you, Allah *the Most High* can dispense with you and with your faith. Likewise, *khalq Allah* (the human creations of Allah) who believe in Muhammad, they, too, are in no need of you, for Allah's *istighna'* (state of being able to dispense with you) extends to the Messenger's independence of needing you, and Muhammad shall triumph and the religion of Allah *the Exalted* shall spread without you.

Allah *the Almighty* desired that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* call out the summons of Islam in Mecca and to proclaim it publicly in the ears of leaders of disbelief and the fiercely arrogant of the Arabian Peninsula against whose opinion and directive no one resisted, as they had a special status and supremacy amongst the Arab tribes.

Through the wisdom of Allah, He willed that *An-nasr* (the victorious support) for Islam did not come at the hands of these, for if triumph had come due to their assistance, it would have been said that they were the ones who coordinated the victorious backing and dominance over the Arabs. They would have united in solidarity around one of their own in order to rule the entire world through him. However, tribal solidarity for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not produce faith in him; rather, faith in Muhammad is what gave rise to zealousness for the Prophet and his message.

Then the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides. If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink! What a painful resting place!' (*al-Kahf:* 29) Punishment mentioned in this verse is for those who choose disbelief. However, why does the verse terrify and amplify the issue of punishment? This is due to the enunciation of terrible consequences, terrifying by it, shocking by it and warning of it, so that people do not fall into the deeds which inevitably bring about chastisement. Nay; rather, it is in order that they desist from sin and stay far removed from causing its effects. Hence, scaring people from the punishment and terrifying them by it is a Mercy from Allah *the Almighty* unto His slaves, because fear of punishment will hinder them from committing offenses, which merit it.

The meaning of the Arabic word *a'tadna* in the verse (translated as 'We have readied') means in essence 'We have prepared.' So, the matter of punishment is accomplished in advance. Paradise and Hellfire have been created in reality, and they are prepared and set up; in other words, they will not be prepared in the future, for the effective and wise preparations have already been done. Allah *the Exalted* has prepared Paradise to accommodate all of mankind if they believe, just as He has prepared Hellfire for all of mankind if they disbelieve. Thus, if a portion of mankind believes and a portion disbelieves, then the place in

Hellfire of the one who believes remains vacant, and the place in Paradise of the one who disbelieves remains vacant. For this reason, He *the Most High* said with regard to this issue: 'For such will be the paradise which you shall have inherited by virtue of your past deeds' (*az-Zukhruf:* 72).

Thus, Allah's creation of Paradise and Hellfire is a fully regulated matter, and there shall never occur any shortage or overcrowding. Indeed, all of us have his prepared place set aside specially.

Regarding His saying: '… for the wrongdoers …' (*al-Kahf:* 29), the Arabic word employed in this prepositional phrase, *Az-zhalimin*, is derived from the same root as *Azh-zhulm* (with the basic meaning of injustice), which is to take a right [from someone] and give it to someone else. *Azh-zhulm* has many forms, with the most heinous and gruesome of which is *Al-ishrak* (associating other powers or presumed deities with Allah *the Almighty*) because you are taking the supreme right of Allah in worship and giving it to other than Him. This is the summit of *Azh-zhulm*. Then come lesser forms of inequity and injustice. Each one who thus sins against himself will receive punishment to the extent of his injustice except if he is *mushrik* (one who associates other powers or deities with Allah *the Most High*), for the punishment of such a one is permanent and continuous; it does not end nor does ever let up on him. However, if a believer commits an act of injustice less grave than that of *Ash-shirk* (associating other powers of deities with Allah), he will be chastised for it–if he has not repented or been forgiven by Allah *the Exalted* for it–then He will cause him to enter paradise.

In His saying: '… will envelop them from all sides …' (*al-Kahf:* 29), the Arabic word *As-suradiq*, a kind of tent, is used with the meaning of something which surrounds them. Thus, it is as if Allah *the Exalted* has set up a tent over Hellfire, encircling them and confining them, in such a manner that their eyes can see no place devoid of fire. Thus, a condemned person's vision of a place free of fire might inspire him with the hope of escaping. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to cause them to despair of escaping. Then He *the Almighty* says: 'If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink! What a painful resting place!' (*al-Kahf:* 29)

The Arabic word *Al-istighatha*, used as a verb and translated as 'beg for' in this verse, is a cry of pain from the one who is in pain to someone who could relieve him of that pain. Allah *Glorified is He* says another verse: '… It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine…' (*Ibrahim:* 22); what this means is that when they cry out due to the punishment, I am unable to calm down your screaming, and you, likewise, will not calm down my screaming.

Hence, when the people of hellfire cry out for relief from the pain of punishment, they *yughathu* (receive a downpour) which is an expression that strongly suggests that they will receive a shower of something of the Mercy of Allah; that some gift of clemency will come to them or that the punishment might be decreased in intensity. However, that will not happen as Allah says: 'They will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces. What a terrible drink! What a painful resting place!' (*al-Kahf:* 29) This means that if they ask for aid in the form of cold water to ease them of the pain of hellfire, they will then suddenly find themselves beneath a shower of water like molten lead.

The Arabic word *Al-muhl*, translated here as molten lead means the dregs of boiling oil which is also called *Ad-durii*, or it means some sort of molten metal such as lead, and this requires more intense heat, that needed for boiling water. In this manner, they are given an increase of heat above and beyond the heat of the fire and are tormented from whence they anticipated mercy.

His saying, '… they will be relieved water …' (*al-Kahf:* 29), expressed by the passive voice verb *yughathu*, is derisive and sarcastic in style, for the norm in linguistic style is that you address the one you are speaking to be based on the exigencies of his condition. Hence, you felicitate him when he is in a condition of gladness, and you console him when he is in a condition of sadness with words corresponding to his state, but if you diverge in your words from what the circumstances require, then this runs counter to *Al-balagha* (rhetoric) unless you intend *At-tahakkum* (derision) or *Al-istihza'* (scorn).

Thus, His saying concerning disbelievers, 'If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal …' (*al-Kahf:* 29), is derision towards them because its expression diverges from what normal circumstances would require. This is similar to when the father says to his child who failed an exam, ‘Congratulations on your failure.’

Likewise, the meaning of the following, '… scalding their faces …' (*al-Kahf:* 29), is that the water is so intensely hot that it broils their faces before it enters their mouths: '…What a terrible drink!' (*al-Kahf:* 29) means the water that is poured upon them. Regarding the following, '…What a painful resting place!' (*al-Kahf:* 29); the Arabic word employed in this verse, *Al-murtafaq*, is something upon which a person rests his elbow in order to sit in a relaxed manner. However, by Allah *the Almighty* is there repose in hell? Thus, this again is a form of derision towards them and a means of causing them to lament all the more. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the tyrants of this world and especially its mighty and powerful ones who defy Him: 'Taste it – you who [on earth] has considered yourself so mighty, so noble!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 49)

In this matter the True Lord *the Most High* speaks in a variety of styles. Amongst these is the utilisation of the word *An-nuzul* which is what is prepared to honour guests. This expression is found in His saying: '[But,] verily, as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds – the gardens of Paradise will be there to welcome them (*nudhulan*)' (*al-Kahf:* 107).

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[But,] behold, as for those who say, ‘Our Lord is Allah’ and then steadfastly pursue the right way – upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not and grieve not, but receive the glad tiding of that Paradise which has been promised to you! We are close unto you in the life of this world and [will be so] in the life to come; and in that [life to come] you shall have all that your souls may desire, and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for, as a ready welcome from Him who is Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy!"' (*Fussilat:* 30-33) The One Who has prepared this welcome and this hospitality is the Much-Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy, and the One Who prepares a welcome for His guests, does so to the extent of His infinite bounty and the breadth of His magnanimity. So what do you imagine will be the welcome Allah *the Exalted* has readied for His *awliya’* (beloved ones and the saintly ones close to Him)?

The verse concludes with His saying, '… Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy!' (*Fussilat:* 32) since there is no believer except that he had committed some misdeed, or he had thought about doing so, It is as if Allah *the Most High* is saying, 'Beware of mentioning what you may have done wrong while you are in this beneficent place of welcome, for Allah *the Almighty* is Much-Forgiving of your misdeeds, a Dispenser of Mercy unto you. He accepts your repentance and erases the effect of your misdeed.'

The discussion is of *An-nuzul* (the welcome reception) in Paradise, for it is a place of deferential honour and hospitality. However, if this term is used in reference to Hellfire, then it is meant as *At-tahakkum* (derision) and *As-sukhrirya* (mockery) for those condemned to it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if one happens to be of those who are wont to call the truth a lie, and [thus] go astray, a welcome (*nuzulan*) of burning despair [awaits him in the life to come.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 92-93), in which He *the Almighty* employs the word *An-nudhul* in circumstances not in conformity with it.

After the Divine Command in His saying: '…Let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so…' (*al-Kahf:* 29), He wishes to elucidate the ruling for each of the two choices of faith and disbelief. This He does in the rhetorical manner of *Al-laff wa An-nashr* (involution and evolution) which is a well-known manner of expression in Arabic in which several things are mentioned and subsequently their *ahkam* (rulings or judicious consequences) are set forth according to their initial sequential order, or these rulings are mentioned randomly in no specific order.

An example of the first type of involution and evolution which is based upon logical ordering is found in His saying: 'For it is out of His grace that He has made for you the night and the day, so that you might rest therein as well as seek to obtain [what you need] of His bounty…' (*al-Qasas:* 73); what this means is so that you might rest at night and seek of Allah's bounty during the day.

The sequential order here is evident in that the first ruling applies to the first item ruled upon, and the second ruling applies to the second item ruled upon, and so forth. This pattern is reflected in the following line of a poet:

My heart, my eyelid, my tongue, and my Creator

These four elements are to be provided with explanatory predicates, so what is their story, and how will they be described? The poet says:

My heart, my eyelid, my tongue, and my Creator

Content is, weeping is, grateful is, and Much-Forgiving is.

Thus, they are to be understood according to the following order: My heart is content, my eyelid is weeping, my tongue is expressing gratitude, and my Creator is Much Forgiving.

At other times involution and evolution are expressed in a random fashion without sequential order, trusting that the intelligence of the listener will trace back everything to its proper origin. This is the case of the verse which we are presently examining. You will thus note that Allah *Glorified is He* says, '… Let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so…' (*al-Kahf:* 29) in which He begins with the choice of faith and then mentions disbelief. However, in the consequential ruling on each of these two, He mentions the ruling on disbelief first: '…We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers …' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

Subsequently, after this, He mentions the ruling on the believers by saying: 'As for those who believe and do good deeds– We do not let the reward of anyone who does a good deed to go to waste–' (*al-Kahf:* 30). In consideration of the fact that the speaker is a Judicious Lord, there is not a letter of his speech except that it has significance, and that behind it lies wisdom. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks of belief, He made it a choice subject to the will of the slave, but He preferred that faith be first and that it come before disbelief. However, when He speaks of the ruling upon each of these two, he began with the sentence for disbelief. This is derived from the principle that *' Dar* (the warding off) of a *mafsada* (cause of evil or corruption) takes precedence over *jalb* (the attainment) of *manfa'a* (a benefit).' Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجۡرَ مَنۡ أَحۡسَنَ عَمَلًا ٣٠

As for those who believe and do good deeds – We do not let
the reward of anyone who does a good deed go to waste [30]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 30)

Commenting on the verse in question, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* attaches good deeds to faith since the latter is the source of any behaviour, and therefore no benefits are derived, i.e. if one believes but does not work in accordance with that faith, as we know that the advantage of faith is that a believer must abide by the proscriptions and the commandments ordained by Allah *the Exalted* which is why the combination of faith and good deeds are repeatedly mentioned in the Quran; Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, encourage one another to the truth, and encourage one another to steadfastness.’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3)

The reason for this is that once faith affects believers to do good deeds, they therefore will inevitably be exposed to hardship and difficulty which requires urging one another to be steadfast to the truth. In connection with this point, we have an exemplary model of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who bore the burden of *da‘wa* (calling others to Islam) and patiently endured injury and insult for the sake of Allah *the Almighty*.

Back to the verse being examined, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We do not let the reward of anyone who does a good deed go to waste.' (*al-Kahf:* 30) The Arabic relative pronoun *man* (anyone who) is generally applied for a believer and a disbeliever alike. Hence, He *Glorified is He* did not say: ‘Verily, We do not neglect the reward of any who is perfectly correct in faith.’ This is because a disbeliever may do good things, and thus Allah *the Almighty* will not waste his deeds; rather, he will be only rewarded in this worldly life, yet he will receive nothing in the Hereafter.

If a disbeliever makes innovative efforts and does well in a branch of knowledge or agriculture or commerce, he will not be deprived of the outcome of his diligent work. However, his recompense will be hastened for him in this world, and he will have no portion of reward in the Hereafter.

In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and We shall turn to the deeds they have done and scatter them like dust.’ (*al-Furqan:* 23)

Likewise, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘If anyone desires [only] the fleeting life, We speed up whatever We will in it, for whoever We wish; in the end We have prepared Hell for him in which to burn, disgraced and rejected.’ (*al-Isra’:* 18) Furthermore, He *the Almighty* says: ‘But the deeds of those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a desert; the thirsty person thinks there will be water, but when he gets there, he finds only Allah Who pays him his account in full– Allah is swift in reckoning.' (*an-Nur:* 39)

The verse indicates to disbelievers who are content with their worldly life and whatever good they did was only for the sake of pleasing people not Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, when such a person reaches the Hereafter, he will find nothing but distress and regret, as he will be taken by surprise with the Existence of Allah *the Exalted* in Whom he did not believe. It is logically known that a human being seeks his reward from the one for whose sake he undertook his deeds; however, these people did not perform their deeds for Allah *the Most High*; rather, they did so for humanity, society and fame. So, they gained the reward in this worldly life and there remains nothing left for them in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ جَنَّٰتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهِمُ ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ
أَسَاوِرَ مِن ذَهَبٍ وَيَلْبَسُونَ ثِيَابًا خُضْرًا مِّن سُندُسٍ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٍ مُّتَّكِـِٔينَ
فِيهَا عَلَى ٱلْأَرَآئِكِ نِعْمَ ٱلثَّوَابُ وَحَسُنَتْ مُرْتَفَقًا ﴿٣١﴾

They will have Gardens of lasting bliss graced with flowing streams. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold. There they will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade. There they will be comfortably seated on soft chairs. What a blessed reward! What a pleasant resting place! [31]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 31)

The word 'they' refers to those who believed and performed good deeds, so their reward will be in accordance with what Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will have Gardens of lasting bliss' (*al-Kahf:* 31). We have already seen images of gardens in this world, and the word (gardens) can be correctly understood through both legal and lexical definition; legally, it is known as being the abode which Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared as a reward for believers in the Hereafter. Lexically, it is a place in which there is cultivation, fruit and trees, and which keeps whoever goes through it hidden. The Arabic derivations of the etymological root of the word for garden based on the letters ‘j’ and ‘n’ all revolve around hiding and concealment. Thus, insanity (*junun*) is concealment of the rational mind and the jinns are invisible created beings, and *Al-junna* is a shield which veils the body from an attacker, etc.

We have previously said that when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to us about something regarding the Unseen world, He does so with words that already exist in our language, so we have the meaning at first, and its own word will then come later in order to be easily understood. In case of this point, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the Unseen world, as what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I have prepared for My pious worshipers such things as no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of and nobody has ever thought of.’(1)

Thus, from where can we come up with words or expressions which identify such ideas of which we have no knowledge? For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* expresses them in terms that bear the same resemblance with our language. However, He gives them a description which distinguishes them from a garden of this world, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious; rivers of water forever pure …’ (*Muhammad:* 15).

We are familiar with what river is and we know what water is, but then comes His saying, 'water forever pure …’ (*Muhammad:* 15) in order to distinguish water of the Hereafter from that of this world. Likewise, the same holds true for the second part; He *Glorified is He* says: 'rivers of milk forever fresh …’ (*Muhammad:* 15).

Wine in this world is quite well known, but it is not delicious for the one who drinks it. Thus, the one who drinks gulps it quickly. This is due to it not being pleasant to the taste or smell, and is not the same for, a glass of juice, for example which you drink sip by sip in order to relish its taste and enjoy it. Likewise, the wine of this world ruins minds in contrast to the wine of the Hereafter. Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* gave it the name ‘wine’ so that we might have some idea of it, He distinguished it to be delicious, unlike the wine of this world, for our language does not contain words for the things which Allah *Glorified is He* will create for us in paradise, as it comprises that which no eye has seen, nor ear has heard. The perceptions of the eye are fewer than the perceptions of the ear, since the eye provides you only with the scene which you can see, whereas the ear provides you with that which is said by you and by others. Then, the saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘…and nobody has ever thought of it …’ increased the scope of that which paradise comprises to that which we are unable to perceive. In the same verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… rivers of honey clarified and pure …’ (*Muhammad:* 15). Allah *the Exalted* uses the Arabic word *Musaffa* (clarified and pure) in order to distinguish it from the honey that we already familiar with. It is known that people in the past used to get honey from the mountains, to which pebbles and sand stuck. Therefore, He distinguished the honey of paradise by describing it as being filtered of all extraneous matter.

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(1) Narrated by *Muslim* (2824), *Ahmad* in his *Musnad* (2/466), and by *Abu Na’ym* in his book *Al-Hilyah* (2/262) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, the full version is ‘The Prophet, said, "Allah said, 'I have prepared for My pious worshipers such things as no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of, and nobody has ever thought of. All that is reserved, besides which, all that you have seen, is nothing." Then he recited: – 'No soul knows what is kept hidden (in reserve) for them of joy as a reward for what they used to do.' And it was explained by Sheikh *Ash- Sha’rawy* in his book “‘*Ahadith Qudsiah*”, 1/69:85.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They will dwell amid thornless lote trees’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 28); we are aware of lote-trees of this world, and they are thorny trees. However, those of the Paradise will not be like this, as they will be thorn-less lote-trees (*sidr makhdud*) not causing a hand to bleed like the lote-trees of this world.

Back to the verse being examined, Allah *Glorified is He* distinguishes *Al-Janna* (the garden) of the Hereafter from the gardens of this world; He *the Almighty* says: ‘They will have Gardens of lasting bliss …’ (*al-Kahf:* 31). In other words, they will live in a perpetual residence which does not come to an end. This is of course unlike the gardens of this world. Suppose that someone in this world enjoys houses and palaces in luxuriant grounds and gardens, which comprise the blissful garden of this world; will it last for him? Verily, the gardens of this world, however great their pleasures and enjoyment may be will escape you, or you will leave them behind.

The Arabic word *'adan* refers to the name of paradise. Yet, there is a difference between one place of residence and another in Paradise, just as you see public gardens and private gardens. In paradise, a believer has a private residence in the Garden of Eden.

Concerning the rivers of paradise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… Gardens graced with flowing streams …' (*Muhammad:* 12); in another verse, He *the Almighty* says: '… Gardens graced with flowing streams …' (*at-Tawba:* 100). Thereby, He gives us two images of the flowing of water in order to indicate that water originates from far away and flows in rivers under paradise. You, in this worldly life, might be concerned, lest someone might hinder the water from reaching you, that he might restrain it by a dam. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says to you: 'Rest assured, for the water flows from below the gardens. In other words, water flows from Paradise itself, and thus no one can hold it back from you.'

In this verse, it is as if the Allah *Glorified is He* is giving us a subtle indication that we will be able to establish residences for ourselves on the surface of the water, along with being able to utilise the watery surfaces upon which to erect buildings. The watery surfaces of the Nile or the irrigation embankments of the barrages all the way to Damietta are a case in point. Here, you would find large, expansive areas where you could erect pillars in the water. Then, you could employ architectural engineering permitting us to construct enough houses for the residents of this region while leaving the agricultural land as it is for vegetables and grains and for people's nourishment.

Perhaps we could also apply this procedure to the general countryside whereby the farmers could erect their houses and livestock in the same manner over canals and drainage ditches widely distributed over our country without decreasing the agricultural areas. Giza, Dokki, and Mohandeseen regions were at one time lands producing an abundance of crop fields, serving to supply the food needs of Cairo before urban expansion. When foreign experts were brought in to expand Cairo, they focused on the desert and established Misr Al-Jadida (New Egypt), and not one of them transgressed a single hand-span of agricultural terrain. Instead, they incorporated into their plans green-spaces for every house. Hence, this verse offers a suggestive idea which might solve our housing crisis and preserve the narrow agricultural area.

Another point is raised in the same verse when Allah *the Almighty* says: '…There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold …' (*al-Kahf:* 31). One might say, 'Why will men be adorned with bracelets of gold?' All of this is superficial ornamentation and vain beautification which we see today in the aspirations of people to wrongly beautify their life with adornments; nowadays we see youth wearing bracelets, likewise, and bracelets of gold in the Hereafter are vain beautification and superficial ornamentation. In another verse Allah *the Exalted* says: '… they will be adorned with silver bracelets ….' (*al-Insan:* 21) And in another illustrative verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, where they will wear silk garments.' (*Fatir:* 33)

In this respect, bracelets are defined as of gold, silver, or pearls. Hence, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said of this embellishment in the Hereafter that it will amount to what the ritual ablution amounted with a believer. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, where they will wear silk garments.' (*Fatir:* 33)

In this verse, we have noticed that the adornment is for beauty, and not amongst the necessities; thus, the Arabic verb *yuhallawna* (they will be adorned) is in the passive voice. In other words, they were adorned by others, and He *Glorified is He* did not say, 'They will adorn themselves.'

Afterwards Allah *the Almighty* spoke about clothing which is amongst the necessities; He says: '… There they will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade …' (*al-Kahf:* 31). The verb in this verse is in active voice, as the action was undertaken by them. As for the previous mention of bracelets, this was a favour from Allah *Glorified is He* and the favour was given precedence over the action undertaken by themselves, as what is mentioned in another verse; He *the Almighty* says: 'Say [O, Prophet], "In Allah's Grace and Mercy, let them rejoice …"' (*Yunus:* 58). Raher, it means that one should not say, 'I did such-and-such on my own accord.' It is due to the Favour and Mercy of Allah; in other words, we find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* confirmsing this truth by saying: 'The good deeds of any person will not make him enter Paradise.' (i.e., none can enter Paradise through his good deeds). They (the Prophet's Companions) said, 'Not even you, O, Allah's Messenger?' He said, 'not even myself, unless Allah bestows His Favour and Mercy upon me.'[1]

Thus, you should not consider your deeds as great because they are little comparing to Allah's Grace and Mercy since your very beginning with no charging until the age of puberty. Therefore, whatever good deeds you have, they are still little.

Likewise, whatever you accomplish of pious and obedient act, it is merely nothing to compensate the due Right of Allah over you. Thus, if we grant you with entry into Paradise, this is due to the Favour that comes only from Ours because you have already taken your due right previously and in advance in this world. However, He makes a distinction, with the point of the active voice for He *Glorified is He* says: '… they will wear …' (*al-Kahf:* 31) which is to say that, as a result of good deeds they performed; however, as for beautification and adornment with the point of the passive voice, He *Glorified is He* says: '… they will be adorned …' (*al-Kahf:* 31) which can be a man who outfits his daughter for marriage providing her with the necessities of life and then supplements of luxuries and the adornments of life such as chandeliers or carpets, etc.

In this respect, clothing is amongst the necessities of life which Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon his slaves, as He says: 'Children of Adam, We have given you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you…' (*al-A'raf:* 26). The final Arabic word of this passage *Ar-reesh* (ornament) is finery which people use for ostentation and pleasure.

Returning to the verse under study; concerning the clothing worn in paradise, they are two kinds of clothes mentioned in the verse; the first Arabic word *As-sundus*, translated as 'fine silk', while the second Arabic word *Al-istabraq* translated as 'brocade' is heavy, thick silk material.

Consequently scholars have pondered over the non-Arabic words, such as *Al-istabraq* and *Al-qistas* which mean balancing scales, both of which are of

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(1) *Narrated by both Al-Bukhari (6463) and Muslim (2816) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah*

Persian origin, and the word *Amen*, which we use as a feature of prayer, has an origin being Yemeni or Abyssinian. They asked how the Quran can employ these terms, while it is originally an Arabic Quran. In response, we can ask, 'did the Quran introduce these terms into the Arabic language at the moment of revelation, or did they already exist and were widely used?' The Arabs surely knew these words and employed them, and they became Arabic terms circulating in speech and became current with taking the pattern of Arabic words.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point among the words which have been in common use in Arabic which is the English word bank (*bank*). Perhaps it was easier to use than the classical Arabic term *masrif*, and for this reason the Arabic Language Academy acknowledged it and introduced it officially into Arabic. Therefore, the question that has been previously raised of such scholars as to whether it might have been acceptable if the Quran had initially introduced them and gave them leave for daily usage, but the case is different because those terms had been used and widely understood by all, that is to say, they became a part of Arabic language.

Returning to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: '… There they will be comfortably seated on soft chairs…' (*al-Kahf:* 31). The Arabic word *Al-ittika'* is used as a verb in this passage meaning that a person sits in a reclining position on his side which relaxes him. The Arabic word *Al-a'ra'ik*, translated here as couches are elevated seats or beds which are decorated like a sofa for example. The verse is being completed and Allah *the Almighty* says: '…What a blessed reward….' (*al-Kahf:* 31) Then the verse ended logically consistent when He *Glorified is He* says: 'what a pleasant resting place!' (*al-Kahf:* 31) What this means is that this is certainly in accordance with the circumstances in Paradise as opposed to what has been told concerning the people of Hellfire, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…What a painful resting place!' (*al-Kahf:* 29)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱضۡرِبۡ لَهُم مَّثَلٗا رَّجُلَيۡنِ جَعَلۡنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيۡنِ
مِنۡ أَعۡنَٰبٖ وَحَفَفۡنَٰهُمَا بِنَخۡلٖ وَجَعَلۡنَا بَيۡنَهُمَا زَرۡعٗا ﴿٣٢﴾

Tell them the parable of two men: for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between [32] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 32)

This verse in question is still related with those who urged Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to divert attention away from those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval. Herewith, people are divided into two sections: one group being arrogant and greedy for glorious rank of reputation and power while another group being weak and submissive, not having a glorious reputation. However, Allah *the Exalted* establishes His signs to include everyone with equalisation set in between. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* sets a living parable, amongst people you can notice, a wealthy disbeliever and a poor believer, and you should carefully contemplate the situation of both of them.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Tell them the parable of two men…’ (*al-Kahf:* 32) in which the imperative form of the Arabic verb *daraba* is translated to one of its different meanings that is to propound, and its noun is *Ad-darb* which means that you cause something or someone to feel pain so the one beating should be stronger than the one beaten. Otherwise if you struck that which is stronger than you are, it would be as if you had struck yourself. For instance, a poet says:

O you who strike a rock with a staff
Did you strike the staff or did you strike the rock?

The striking or setting a parable *(darb al-mathal*) is for attracting attention and sentiments so that it takes you out of one state and puts you in another, as for the case if something is obscure, and you do not understand. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* gives an example, thereby clarifying and drawing your attention to it. For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Tell them the parable of …’ (*al-Kahf:* 32). We have previously explained that proverbs and parables are part of the speech of the Arabs, echoing back to some idea or meaning, and then it becomes widely understood by all then combined until it becomes a proverb or metaphor. For example, we used to say the generosity of Hatim (*karam* Hatim), so you call out to a generous person as ‘Hatim’. The reason for this is due to Hatim becoming famous for generosity; this quality was attributed to him in speech. Other examples of people whose names became metaphors for the qualities they embodied include the following: `Amr Ibn Ma`idd famed for his courage and boldness, Iyas famed for his intelligence and Ahnaf Ibn Qays famed for his forbearance (*Al-hilm*). Therefore, the poet Abu Tamam said, lauding the caliph:

(He is like) The courage of `Amr, the generosity of Hatim
With the forbearance of Ahnaf, and the intelligence of Iyas

Then certain rivals of Abu Tamam sought to disparage his poem and to belittle him in the sight of the caliph, saying to the poet, ‘Verily, the caliph is above and beyond the one you have described. How can you make a comparison with those you mention? In his army are a thousand like `Amr, and among his treasurers are a thousand like Hatim. So how can you compare him to the uncouth ones of the Arabs?' As one of them said:

And the eulogizer compared him in daring and wealth
To one, if you saw him, was the most insignificant servant
For in his army are fifty thousand like `Antar
And among his treasurers are a thousand Hatims

Then Allah *Glorified is He* inspired Abu Tammam with a rebuttal, in the same metre and rhyme:

Do not disavow my coining a parable for him with one who is beneath him
In extraordinary generosity and courage
For Allah Glorified is He has coined a parable with the inferior
For his light with the niche and the lantern

Thus, a parable is propounded to draw the attention of people, and to elucidate an ambiguous case. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat or larger…’ (*al-Baqara:* 26).

Subsequently, the Quran provides us with many parables to clarify specific issues. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who take protectors other than Allah can be compared to spiders building themselves houses– the spider’s is the frailest of all houses– if only they could understand.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41)

Another parable concerning the breaking of promises and the lack of fidelity, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Do not use your oaths to deceive each other– like a woman who unravels the thread she has firmly spun…’ (*an-Nahl:* 92). Another relevant example Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘they are like people who [labour to] kindle a fire; when it lights up everything around them, Allah takes away all their light, leaving them in utter darkness, unable to see.’ (*al-Baqara:* 17)

Yet another example portraying the transient state of this world, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Tell them, too, what the life of this world is like; We send water down from the skies and the earth’s vegetation absorbs it, but soon the plants turn to dry stubble scattered about by the wind. Allah has power over everything.’ (*al-Kahf:* 45)

A parable clarifies obscure things with something evident and clear, known to everyone who hears it. In this respect, for example, a poet wishes to describe a hunchback, portraying him in a depiction so detailed and precise that it is as if you were looking at him:

Shortened are his neck veins, sunken is the back of his head

As if he were waiting to be slapped

And if his neck were slapped once

And he sensed the second follow-up slap, his head and neck conjoine*d.*

Back to the verse under study; Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Messenger: ‘Propound, O, Muhammad, for them a parable for a wealthy, self-sufficient disbeliever, and for a poor person when he is content with faith.'

Furthemore, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And propound to them the parable of two men: for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between.’ (*al-Kahf:* 32) However, the question is was this parable or proverb really extant? And did the two men really exist in history? Yes, they were actually of the Jewish people(1), and their names were Barakus and Yahudha. Yahudha was a content believer, but Barakus was wealthy and self-sufficient. Each of them had inherited eighty thousand *dinars* from their father. Barakus received his share and bought a piece of land which he cultivated and a castle in which he lived, and he got married and eventually had many children and an entourage. As for Yahudha, he saw fit to give his share away in charity, thereby purchasing himself a land and a castle in paradise, preferring the lovely-eyed virgins (*Al-hur Al-'ayn*) and children in perpetual paradise to a wife of this world and its progeny and delights.

Consequently, Barakus felt that he was self-sufficient with what he owned and was deceived by it. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7)

The first failure is to be preoccupied by the enjoyment of blessings and to neglect the Bestower of Blessings (*Al-Mun`im*) and to believe that what surrounds you of blessings is the fruit of your efforts and your work, along with being the result of your striving and skills. Such was the case concerning what Qarun (Korah) said, for Allah *the Almighty* says: '…but he answered, "This wealth was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess."' (*al-Qasas:* 78) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* abandoned him to his knowledge and his skill, so that he might remain greedily intent upon his possessions, relying on what he possessed of knowledge and strength until Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We caused the earth to swallow him and his home…' (*al-Qasas:* 81), and neither his possessions nor his knowledge were of any use to him.

Hence, these two images are actually real in society: the arrogant disbeliever who regards himself as self-sufficient and superior with his wealth, and the believer who is content with the frugal lot that which Allah *Glorified is He* has assigned to him.

Just ponder over the agronomy apparent in the verse Allah *the Almighty* says: '… for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, surrounded them with date palms, and put corn fields in between.' (*al-Kahf:* 32)

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(1) The story is of Barakus and Yahudha

Allah *Glorified is He* has taught us to establish walls of date palms around gardens and orchards to form an enclosure which blocks winds and storms. In this verse, He mentions date palms and grapes, which are types of fruit, before mentioning grain which aids basic living; similarly, He previously mentioned bracelets of gold, which are superfluous ornamentation, before mentioning clothing, which is amongst a primary necessity.

Concerning the linguistic meaning of the word Janna (garden) which indicates hiding and concealing, it is applicable in our daily life, for people today create gardens around their houses so as to hide them from the sights of others. A person has a private residence and also general facilities for his close friends; therefore, he establishes for them another residence so that no one will gaze at the female members of his family. For this reason these two divisions are called reception area and inviolable area.

Likewise, we find mention of two gardens in another verse Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘There was a sign for the people of Sheba, too, in their dwelling place: two gardens, one on the right, one on the left. "Eat from what your Lord has provided for you and give Him thanks, for your land is good, and your Lord most forgiving"’ (*Saba’:* 15). Allah says:

كِلْتَا ٱلْجَنَّتَيْنِ ءَاتَتْ أُكُلَهَا وَلَمْ تَظْلِم مِّنْهُ شَيْـًٔا ۚ وَفَجَّرْنَا خِلَـٰلَهُمَا نَهَرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

Both gardens yielded fruit and did not fail in any way; We made a stream flow through them [33] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 33)

That is to say, the gardens provide the fruits required from them. The Arabic word *Al-ukul*, translated as ‘yield’ means that which is eaten. We know that the crops of agricultural fields follow each other in close succession; thus, they supply you something today, something tomorrow, something the day after tomorrow and so forth.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… and did not fail in any way …’ (*al-Kahf:* 33). The Arabic word *tazhlim* means to wrong or treat unjustly but it is translated in this verse as ‘fail’, mainly suggesting to us charitable deeds in this world. In essence, the earth is inanimate and does not do wrong nor withhold what is due to you nor squander your toil. So, if you exert your effort and labour, it bestows generously; when you sow a modest measure of seeds in it, thus, it provides you with more than ten times that measure. Likewise, when you put a single seed in it, it yields for you thousands.

Hence, the earth is magnanimous, exceedingly generous on the condition that you do what is required of you in terms of ploughing, sowing, maintenance, and irrigation. Furthermore, the sky might relieve you of the latter obligation and irrigate for you.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wished to propound a parable for the compounding of heavenly recompense, He says: ‘Those who spend their wealth in Allah's Cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains…’ (*al-Baqara:* 261). Thus, if the earth gives you seven hundred grains for each grain you plant, then how do you imagine the magnanimity of the Creator of the earth is? There is no doubt that His gift will be tremendous. After this He says: ‘… Allah gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes: He is limitless and all knowing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 261)

Thus, then, the earth does not commit injustice. Indicative of the earth’s fairness is that it gives to you according to the extent of your effort and hard work therein. Allah *Glorified is He* also fully appreciates the value of this toil of yours and thanks you for this effort. Once Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw a companion's palm was cracked due to hard labour, and he commented, ‘Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger love this hand.’

Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger love it because it has worked, not to the extent of its own need; rather, it has worked for itself and for others. Otherwise, if every worker only worked to meet his own need, then how would those who cannot work survive? Therefore, it is must upon those with ability and strength to work for what suffices them, and also suffices those who are incapable of working. Furthermore, supposing you will not give something in charity to the needy, yet you will sell the surplus you do not require, so this is considered a kind of facilitation for people and cooperation with them.

How similar is the earth in its giving and generosity to a mother who is open-handed to you in giving if you had been dutiful to her, and likewise the same could be said about the earth. Indeed, a mother by her nature may give unto you without anything expected in return, treating you with compassion even if you are ungrateful. Likewise for the earth, for do not you see that it yields various plants for you which you have not sown or toiled for? So how would it be if you treated it with hard labour and good fertilisers? No doubt, it would give even more to you. The truth is that the earth is not our mother in merely an allegorical sense; rather, it is our mother in a very real sense, for we are made of its soil and are a part of it. When a person becomes sick, for example, and becomes burdensome to all people who cannot look after him, only his mother inclines compassionately and keeps him out of harmfulness. Similarly, if he dies and becomes a corpse, every beloved brother and relative disdains him, while the earth takes him in its embrace, absorbing every bit of him, and concealing him at a time when he is in dire need of being concealed.

Returning to the verse under study; He *Glorified is He* then says: '…We made a stream flow through them.' (*al-Kahf:* 33) This is due to water being the origin of agriculture. So, Allah *the Almighty* provided both gardens with water exclusive to each, emerging from within each of them and flowing forth abundantly through them; this water does not come from outside, hence it cannot be held back by anyone.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَانَ لَهُۥ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَٰحِبِهِۦ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُۥٓ أَنَا۠ أَكۡثَرُ مِنكَ مَالٗا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرٗا ﴿٣٤﴾

And so he had abundant fruit. One day, while talking to his friend, he said, 'I have more wealth and a larger following than you' [34] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 34)

In other words, the man's situation was not limited to having two gardens in which there were date palms, grapes and a grain-field that provided him with his food. Indeed, on top of this fruit he possessed other resources of gold and silver and children, since a child is the fruit of his father. He will soon say to his brother: 'I am greater than you in wealth and mightier in terms of numbers of dependents.'

Then a dialogue takes place between both of them: '…One day, while talking to his friend, he said, "I have more wealth and a larger following than you."' (*al-Kahf:* 34) This is quite clear proof that what was previously mentioned concerning the two gardens and what they encompassed of blessings led him haughty arrogance and that this is the cause of his statement to his friend. The Arabic word *As-sahib*, translated as ‘friend’ in this verse, is the person who accompanies you, even if you do not have affection for him. The Arabic expression *yuhawiru-hu*, rendered above as ‘while talking to him’ means he argued with him such that one of them says something and the other responds to it, until they reach a conclusion. So what did he say to his companion? Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… he said, "I have more wealth."’ (*al-Kahf:* 34)

Referring to his two gardens and what they comprise of blessings. He then continued: ‘… and a larger following than you.’ (*al-Kahf:* 34) This is implied previously as a part of his abundant fruit this one viewed himself pretentiously as self-sufficient on the basis of his possessions and children.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَدَخَلَ جَنَّتَهُۥ وَهُوَ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِۦ قَالَ مَآ أَظُنُّ أَن تَبِيدَ هَٰذِهِۦٓ أَبَدًا ﴿٣٥﴾

He went into his garden and wronged himself by saying, ‘I do not think this will ever perish [35] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 35)

We previously knew that there were two gardens, so why did He *the Almighty* say: ‘He went into his garden …’ (*al-Kahf:* 35)? We reply that if a person had two gardens, he would not be able to enter both of them at the same time; instead, the moment he enters it, he will go to a single garden, then afterwards he can enter the other one.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and wronged himself…’ (*al-Kahf:* 35); a person may do wrong to someone else, but how can he do wrong to his own self? A person wrongs his own soul when he gives free rein to his delights and desires since he thereby deprives it of other objects of true desire and causes it to fail to attain what is last and greater. A person’s wrongdoing and sin fall back upon himself because the self has two sides: greedy self and emotional self which restrains through human pure character *Al-fitra*. Thus, the issue here is therefore one of dispute between these elements. Hence, one says, ‘The fiercest enemy of a person is his own self.’ However, if you were to say, ‘How is this possible, when we both are considered one thing?’ Yet, if you thought about it deeply, you would find that when your self speaks to you of something, you then rebuke it. This is because within you are two personalities: a personality that is innately upright and another personality which is avidly possessive and lustful. Hence, if the lustful-self inclines towards some forbidden desire or becomes perverted, the innately upright self will set it straight and rectify its behaviour. Therefore, we have said that the Divine approach in all religions has been that, when refractory disobedience becomes generalised amongst people, and there is no longer anyone to admonish or to guide aright, Allah *the Exalted* sends for them a messenger to guide and to remind them of higher realities. The exception applied only to faithful community of followers (*ummah*) of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is because He shouldered them with the message of their prophet and placed their guidance in their own hands, not only but also brought forth from them those who carry the banner of the call unto Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, they will not have need for another messenger, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the final seal of the prophets and messengers.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is reassuring us that corruption and immorality will never be generalised. For if there exist amongst this community of followers (*Al-ummah*) those who are sinful, on the other hand there also exist those who bear the banner of commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong. This issue is essentially required and is the foundation upon which Islamic society stands.

Returning to the verse under study; Allah *the Exalted* then says: '… I do not think this will ever perish.' (*al-Kahf:* 35) So, does this mean that he is wronging against his own self by merely entering the garden? No, he does not because it is his garden which he is free to enter as he pleases. Rather, what is meant by the wrong or injustice in this verse is what went through his mind and what he said to himself as he entered. Thus, he certainly wronged his own self when he had the idea that superiority is based on wealth and by being deceived by bounteous blessing. Hence, he said, 'I do not think this blessing will ever perish or that this luxuriant garden will ever come to an end or be annihilated.' The tangible reality before his eyes had indeed deluded him, causing him to think it unlikely that all this blessing could be extorted. Moreover, his delusion tempted him even further than Allah says:

وَمَآ أَظُنُّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ قَآئِمَةً وَلَئِن رُّدِدتُّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّى لَأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهَا مُنقَلَبًا ﴿٣٦﴾

Or that the Last Hour will ever come – even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there [36] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 36)

Therefore, he gives his delusion a full free. Furthermore, if it were acceptable for him to say: '…I do not think this will ever perish!' (*al-Kahf:* 35), it would be inadmissible for him to say: 'or that the Last Hour will ever come…' (*al-Kahf:* 35). Afterwards when he denied the coming of the Last Hour, he was reminded by innate concerns and then rectified himself by saying: 'even if I were to be taken back to my Lord' (*al-Kahf:* 36). What this means is that in any case, if I am brought back to my Lord on the Day Resurrection, then there, I will have even more than this and greater. It is as if he was assured that Allah *the Almighty* had prepared for him that which is better than this.

Let us examine the utterance of this arrogant one, ungrateful concerning the blessings and favours of Allah upon him; thus he was completely deluded by it. He says: '…even if I were to be taken back to my Lord…' (*al-Kahf:* 35). Therefore, he acknowledges that he has a Lord unto whom he will return, but if he is a liar, then at least he should be mindful and not be self-contradicted! Since what he exhibited was haughty arrogance, delusion and doubt about the arising of the Last Hour, and this is incompatible with his utterance 'my Lord' and is not consistent with it.

As for the Arabic word *munqaaiban*, translated as 'my last resort' in the verse being examined, means a place of return or refuge; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ لَهُۥ صَاحِبُهُۥ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُۥٓ أَكَفَرْتَ بِٱلَّذِى
خَلَقَكَ مِن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ سَوَّىٰكَ رَجُلًا ﴿٣٧﴾

His companion retorted, 'Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust, from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man? [37] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 37)

Commenting on this verse being examined, then his believing companion responds to him debating and arguing in order to reveal that which is right:

'Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust …' (*al-Kahf:* 35). In other words, his previous speech was all focused on himself, and all his marks of superiority, along with his denial of higher realities. Does he speak of all of this and does not remember his beginning and being moulded out of dust which is the origin of your creation: 'from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man?' (*al-Kahf:* 35) At this point the small drop of fluid refers to the basis of procreation which is to refer to the process of shaping so that he is well finished and perfectly completed.

The Arabic phrase *sawwa-ka*, translated in this verse as 'shaped you' means to make something in a way which corresponds to its function in life. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; the iron rod is straight and sound, but the iron hook at the end is curved. Thus, the curvature of the iron hook is the essence of its soundness and conforms to its function, for its function is for us to catch or seize something, and if this iron hook were straight, it would not perform its intended function.

The initial particle in the verse, consisting of the vocalised glottal stop '*a*' and followed by the verb *kafarta* is translated as 'have you no faith' and is not interrogative in meaning as it might be. Rather, it is an interjection of disapproval and censure for what his companion said, and for what he said out of denial (*kufr*) and forgetfulness concerning the reality of his situation and the beginning of his creation.

Dust or earth is defined as the origin of mankind, and it is also a phase amongst the complete process of his creation. With regard to the creation of the human being, Allah *Glorified is He* has variously mentioned it as being 'out of water', 'out of dust', 'out of dark slime transmuted' and 'out of sounding clay, like pottery'.

As a result of man's stages of creation, some people raise objections to these different things cited in the creation of the human being. In reality, they are only one process which has multiple transitional phases. If you add water to dust or earth, it becomes mud. Then, if you mix the components of the mud together, it becomes transmuted dark slime; then if you left it to dry out a bit and become cohesive, it becomes argil clay. Hence, they are sequential steps for a single issue.

Allah *Glorified is He* says concerning the response of the believing man:

لَّٰكِنَّا۠ هُوَ ٱللَّهُ رَبِّي وَلَآ أُشۡرِكُ بِرَبِّيٓ أَحَدٗا ﴿٣٨﴾

But, for me, He is God, my Lord, and I will never set up any partner with Him [38] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 38)

Regarding the original Arabic word of His speech at the beginning of the verse *lakinna*, translated as ‘But, for me…’ (*al-Kahf:* 35), it means ‘but I’ with the deletion of the initial vocalised glottal stop of the word *ana* and the assimilation of the phoneme ‘n’ of *lakin* into the following ‘n’ of *ana*. The word 'but' (*lakin*) is used here in the sense of rectification, as the believer is correcting what his companion said. Paraphrased, the believer said, 'I am not like you in the opinion you have expressed. If you have reneged in the One Who created you from dust, then out of a drop of sperm, and then fashioned you into a well-formed man, I, therefore, have not denied my faith in the One Who created me. Therefore, my conviction is only to believe in Allah *the Almighty*': '… He is Allah, my Lord …’ (*al-Kahf:* 35).

You should note that the disbeliever did not say ‘Allah *Glorified is He* is my Lord’, rather, the phrase ‘my Lord’ occurred in the casual context of his speech. There is a significant difference between the two statements. Since the Lord (*Ar-rabb*) is the Creator Who assumes responsibility for up bringing and this fact is not doubted by anyone; there is no possible objection. However, the doubt concerns Allah *Glorified is He* Who is worshipped and obeyed. The meaning is the Lord deals with sustenance, whereas Divinity demands duties and obligations. Thus, the disbeliever acknowledged Lordship, but denied Divinity and commandments.

Then the believer reaffirms his faith by saying: ‘… and I will never set up any partner with Him.’ (*al-Kahf:* 35) The believer was not content with merely clarifying to his companion the state of disbelief in which he was. Rather, he desired to transmit his faith to others; this is the nature of a believer to be keen about the guidance of others. After having made his faith clear in Allah *the Almighty* he wished to teach his companion how a believer should be. In other words, faith of a believer is not complete until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself. In addition, a believer should be mentally grounded to attempt to guide a disbeliever, for a believer's behaviour has been made correct regarding others, and the good of a believer comprises the inclination to correct the behaviour of a disbeliever through faith. Therefore, instead of cursing your enemy, it is better to pray to him for guidance, since your invocation against him will only increase your distress on his account. Thus, in this verse he is calling his companion to follow the way of guidance; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوۡلَآ إِذۡ دَخَلۡتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلۡتَ مَا شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِٱللَّهِۚ
إِن تَرَنِ أَنَا۠ أَقَلَّ مِنكَ مَالٗا وَوَلَدٗا ﴿٣٩﴾

If only, when you entered your garden, you had said,
"This is God's will. There is no power not [given] by God."
Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than
you [39] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 39)

In contemplation of this verse, the believer wants to teach him the acceptable reaction of faith in receiving a blessing by referring everything to Allah *the Almighty* because man has nothing to do with its reception, for it all came by His Mercy. The question here is from where did the nourishment from these gardens and orchards come? They came from the earth which Allah *the Exalted* created for you, without your efforts or having played any role. Likewise, the strength which enabled you to work is gifted to you, and it may also be taken from you at any time, rendering you feeble and incapable of doing anything. Hence, when you examine all of these issues you find them referring back to the supreme gift from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Another example for more illustrations is to look at the chair on which you are comfortably sitting, it being of exceptional elegance and amazing craftsmanship; from where did the craftsman get its material? If you track it back, you will find it as a piece of wood from some forest. If you were to ask the forest: 'Where did you get this wood?' it would answer you, 'From Allah *Glorified is He*.'

Therefore Allah *the Exalted* teaches us the proper mental attitude with regard to His favours upon us. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Consider the seeds you sow in the ground. Is it you who make them grow or is it We?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64) This seed which you have sown in your field, did you sit next to it in order to make it flourish and draw it from the earth so that it is developed by your interference day after day? Rather, all you did for it was to plough the earth and sow the seeds. Even regarding the procedure of ploughing, Allah *the Almighty* made beasts of burden subservient for you so that you could undertake this activity, and you would not have had the capacity to subjugate them for this work; it is only Allah *Glorified is He* Who made them subservient and submissive to serve you. With support to this idea, Allah *the Most High* says: '… and made them obedient, so that some can be used for riding, some for food' (*Ya Sin:* 72). You would not have been capable of subjugating them by yourself.

Thus, if you analysed any blessing of the blessings which requires your work, you would find that your portion therein also is gifted by Allah *Glorified is He* and is granted from Him. Even after the crop matures with flowers and bears fruit, it is not safeguarded from being ruined by some diseases, or some disaster that befalls it. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If We wished, We could turn your harvest into chaff and leave you to wail, "We are burdened with debt; we are bereft."' (*al-Waqi'a:* 65-67)

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning and made no allowance [for the Will of Allah]. A disaster from your Lord struck the garden as they slept, and by morning it was stripped bare, a desolate land.' (*al-Qalam:* 17-20)

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Consider the water you drink. Was it you who brought it down from the rain cloud or was it We?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 68-69) This water of which you drink, sweet and cool, are you aware of how it descends? Have you seen the steam of water rising into the atmosphere? Have you seen how clouds gather driven by the wind? Do you have any consciousness of this process? Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If We wanted, We could make it bitter…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 70). What this means is that it could have been made so intensely salty, of which you could derive no benefit.

Thus, whenever Allah *the Almighty* bestows any blessing upon his slaves, he reminds them of its opposite, for it is not due to their endeavours, and it is incumbent upon them to extend thanks to Him in order that it remains forever. Otherwise, if it is out of their handiwork, let them safeguard it themselves!

Similarly, with regards to the question of the human being creation, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that He grants life and abolishes it with death. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Consider [the semen] you eject. Do you create it yourselves or are We the Creator? We ordained death to be amongst you. Nothing could stop Us.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 58-60)

At this point Allah *the Most High* tells His created beings that if you yourselves are the creators, then you sustain and keep death away from you, i.e. you cannot. In this verse, He recalls the blessing in creating, and He is the only One Who can abolish this blessing of the origin of mankind.

With regard to the creation of fire, it is a different matter, since Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Consider the fire you kindle. Is it you who make the wood for it grow or is it We? (*al-Waqi‘a:* 71-72) However, in this case, Allah *the Exalted* only mentions His Power in the creation of fire and its igniting, but He does not mention what its opposite is. He did not say, 'We are capable of extinguishing it.' Yet He mentioned the creation of the human being and his capability of negating it with death, and the creation of crops and His capability to turn them into broken stubble and the creation of water and His capability to make it salty. Fire is the exception since it is He Who wills it to be lit and blazing continuously, in order that it remains a reminder to all people. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We made it a reminder and useful to those who kindle it.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 73)

Let us also give attention in the foregoing verses to one of the features of inimitability and precision of Quran’s expression. The speaker is the Lord Who speaks of everything in a manner which suits Him. So, in the case of agricultural process with the interference of the human being such as ploughing, sowing, irrigation, and so forth, we notice that He affirms the action of destructing these crops in order for man not to be deceived by his actions.

As for the statement regarding water — and the human being has no part in its formation — there is no need for use of the intensification particle as in the previous example. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘If We wanted, We could make it bitter…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 70) without emphasis since the human being makes no claim of having any merit in this process of descending water from the sky.

Let us return to the verse under study with the believer who admonishes his disbeliever companion and instructs him on how to receive Allah's favour upon him. Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'If only, when you entered your garden, you had said, "This is Allah's Will. There is no power not [given] by Allah."' (*al-Kahf:* 39) The Arabic phrase at the beginning of the verse means 'why not' and is for urging and incitement. Hence, whenever a person sees something which pleases him among his possessions or children, even if he finds his own face attractive in the mirror, he is obligated to say, 'This is Allah's will. There is no power not [given] by Allah *Glorified is He*.'

In a relevant Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'If it is not said in the presence of a blessing, this is Allah's Will. There is no power not [given] by Allah.'

Therefore, whenever a moment a blessing of Allah be attractive, you must not be distracted thereby and caused you to forget the very One Who blessed you; rather, you should say, 'This is Allah's Will. There is no power not [given] by Allah.' That is to say that none of this is due to my power or my action; rather, it is a favour of Allah, and therefore, you ascribe the blessing to its Creator and its Benefactor. Furthermore, inasmuch as you have ascribed the blessing to its Creator, then you have sought His protection and requested His preservation for it, and have thereby guaranteed its continuance.

We have noted that Ja'far As-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* had great knowledge of the treasures and secrets of the Quran. He was aware of the human self and what afflicts it of vicissitudes, disturbing the happiness of life, in terms of fear, anguish, anxiety, deception, or even the splendour of life aspirated by humans.

So, Ja'far As-Sadiq used to find out for these ailments that which corresponded to them from the remedies of the Quran. Thus, he used to say regarding fear: 'I am amazed at those who fear but do not seek refuge in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* who says, 'Allah is enough for us. He is the best protector.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 173), for I have heard Allah *Glorified is He* say after this: ‘They returned with grace and bounty from Allah. No harm befell them…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 174).

‘And I am amazed at those who are overcome by anxiety since anxiety is obstruction of the heart and confusion of the mind due to something whose cause is unknown, and I am amazed at those who are overcome by anxiety and do not take refuge in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '… There is no God but You. Glory be to You; I was wrong.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 87), for I have heard Allah *Glorified is He* say after this: 'We answered him and saved him from distress …' (*al-Anbiya’:* 88), not only this, but moreover: '… this is how We save the faithful…' (*al-Anbiya’:* 88). This is like a general description for every believer, and not particular to Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* to whom these latter verses refer.

For the saying of the believer who is affected by anxiety, '… There is no God but You. Glory be to You; I was wrong (*al-Anbiya’:* 87), signifies 'I have no safe sanctuary nor place of refuge but You': '… I was wrong' (*al-Anbiya’:* 87). Or in other words, 'I admit sin and laxity, so perchance what I have committed of sin and what I have done to wrong my soul is the cause of this anxiety which troubles me.'

Continuing with the words of Ja‘far As-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* ‘I am amazed at those who are the object of deception. How they do not take refuge in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…But [as for me,] I commit myself unto Allah …' (*Ghafir:* 44), for I have heard Allah *the Exalted* saying after this: 'And Allah preserved him from the evil of their scheming …' (*Ghafir:* 45).

Since Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who assumes the obligations of responding to them and confronting their cunning with His cunning, as He *the Most High* says: 'And the disbelievers schemed [against ‘Isa (Jesus)]; but Allah brought their scheming to nought, for Allah is above all schemers.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 54)

‘I am also amazed at those who seek this world and its [transient] charms--that is, the one possessed of avid cravings in this world, eager for its ornaments--how they do not take refuge in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '… Whatever Allah wills [shall come to pass, for] there is no power save with

Allah!' (*al-Kahf:* 39), for I have heard Allah *the Exalted* say after this: '… If only, when you entered your garden, you had said, "This is Allah’s Will. There is no power not [given] by Allah." …' (*al-Kahf:* 39) For if you said this regarding your blessing, it will be preserved and grow, and if you said it regarding the blessing of someone else, Allah *the Almighty* will bestow upon you something superior to it.

It is an amazing thing that an impoverished believer, who possesses nothing of the goods of this world, guides his disbelieving companion to the keys of blessing which cause him to get more of the benefits of this world, in spite of what he already has at his disposal of its favours. The key, then, to augmentation of blessing in this world and to the continuance of favour in it is that we say: '…This is Allah's Will. There is no power not [given] by Allah…' (*al-Kahf:* 39).

The believer continues his speech, expounding to his companion that which he reproached him for in terms of his being destitute and his companion being wealthy, was along with his companion being superior to him in his possessions and his progeny: '… Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than you …' (*al-Kahf:* 39).

Then, he reminds him that Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of altering this state of affairs by saying:

فَعَسَىٰ رَبِّيٓ أَن يُؤۡتِيَنِ خَيۡرٗا مِّن جَنَّتِكَ وَيُرۡسِلَ عَلَيۡهَا
حُسۡبَانٗا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَتُصۡبِحَ صَعِيدٗا زَلَقًا ٤٠

My Lord may well give me something better than your garden, and send thunderbolts on your garden from the sky, so that it becomes a heap of barren dust [40]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 40)

The Arabic word *‘asa*, (it may well be) implies *Ar-Raja’* (expectant hope). If this expectant hope is from Allah *the Almighty,* then it will come to pass without a doubt. Hence, whenever you say in the presence of someone else’s state of blessing, ‘Whatever Allah wills [shall come to pass, for]. There is no power save with Allah!', Allah *the Exalted* gives you that which is superior to that regarding which you said, ‘Whatever Allah wills [shall come to pass, for]. There is no power save with Allah!' Also, if you acknowledge the blessing of Allah upon you and traced its merit back to Him, He gives you increase [of blessings], a point which is proved by His saying, '… If you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly give you more and more…' (*Ibrahim:* 7). With regard to His saying, 'My Lord may well give me something better than your garden …' (*al-Kahf:* 40), it means that Allah *the Most High* is able to change one's condition from wealth to poverty and vice versa. So, you have no power to preserve this blessing, just as you certainly had no power to bring it about originally. Therefore, it is possible that my Lord will bestow upon me a blessing like unto yours, while leaving your blessing intact. However, the Will of Allah *the Exalted* could transform your blessing and eliminate it; Allah says: '… and send thunderbolts on your garden from the sky…' (*al-Kahf:* 40) which means that this blessing--in which you exult and the flourishing of which you are so proud and which makes you feel so superior to Allah's created beings--maybe Allah *the Almighty* will send down a calamity upon it.

The Arabic word *Al-husban* (calamity) in the verse, signifies a thing which is *mahsub* (calculated) and determined with *hisab* (precision and reckoning) as is the case in His saying: '[At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses (*bi-husban*)' (*ar-Rahman:* 5). The Creator established the sun and the moon for the cognisance of time: '… so that you might know how to compute the years and to measure [time] …' (*Yunus:* 5). We would not be cognisant of the calculation of years and the measurement [of time] unless they themselves were regulated according to a precise system which never becomes unbalanced, exactly like a watch which you would not be able to know and regulate the time unless it is itself correctly regulated.

The etymological pattern *hasib husbana* (which means he calculated with precise reckoning) is similar to *ghafar ghufrana* (which means he forgave with full remission). Allah *the Exalted* did indeed send down upon this garden─ in which its owner exulted─a bolt of lightning, calculated and carefully calibrated with the extent of this garden such that it did not affect anything beyond it. This was in order that [the owner] would not say, 'It is a general cosmic sign which has afflicted me just as it has afflicted others.' Nay, indeed it is a specific thunderbolt, calculated for this garden to the exclusion of others. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…so that it becomes a heap of barren dust.' (*al-Kahf:* 40) In other words, this garden-so luxuriantly cultivated with grain-crops and fruit, brimming with date-palms and grape-vines-after being struck by a lightning bolt, has become a *sa'id* (sterile plateau), that is to say, barren and covered in dust. A relevant usage of the same word occurs in His saying regarding the performance of ritual *At-tayyamum* (ablution with fine soil when no water is available); Allah says: '…then take resort to pure dust…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). However, this is not all what happened to the garden, rather, it became '… a heap of barren dust' (*al-Kahf:* 40). The final Arabic descriptor *zalaqa* in the verse signifies dampened dust upon which the feet slide, and thus it is not suitable for anything, even walking upon.

أَوۡ يُصۡبِحَ مَآؤُهَا غَوۡرٗا فَلَن تَسۡتَطِيعَ لَهُۥ طَلَبٗا ﴿٤١﴾

Or its water may sink so deep into the ground
that you will never be able to reach it again [41]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 41)

The Arabic word *ghawra* in the verse (sinks deep into the ground) means 'sunken profoundly into the earth'. At this point, you might object by saying, 'Water could be sunken into the earth, but we could still extract it with machines.' For this reason, He *the Almighty* causes [the owner of the garden] to despair of any stratagem he might think of by stating plainly, 'that you will never be able to reach it again.' (*al-Kahf:* 40) In other words, you will not reach it by any means at your disposal. In the same respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place in the Quran: 'Say [unto those who deny the truth]: "What do you think? If of a sudden all your water were to vanish underground, who [but Allah] could provide you with water from [new] unsullied springs?"' (*al-Mulk:* 30) Take note that this speech of the believer to his disbelieving companion is merely an expectation he is addressing to him, as expressed by 'My Lord may…' (*al-Kahf:* 40). It is an expectation which has not yet occurred and which has not attained the *iqa'ayat* (intervention phases) of *Al-qadar* (Divine foreordainment).

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَأُحِيطَ بِثَمَرِهِۦ فَأَصْبَحَ يُقَلِّبُ كَفَّيْهِ عَلَىٰ مَآ أَنفَقَ فِيهَا وَهِىَ خَاوِيَةٌ
عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا وَيَقُولُ يَٰلَيْتَنِى لَمْ أُشْرِكْ بِرَبِّىٓ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٢﴾

And so it was: his fruit was completely destroyed, and there he was, wringing his hands over what he had invested in it, as it drooped on its trellises, and saying, 'I wish I had not set up any partner to my Lord' [42] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 42)

In this manner, *At-tanfidh* (anticipation preceded by effectuation), as if Allah *the Exalted* were responding positively to the believing man, and not refuting his expectation. 'And so it was: his fruit was completely destroyed …' (*al-Kahf:* 42). The Arabic verb *uhita* (were encompassed) in the verse suggests that He made an encompassing wall around the fertile garden. Thus, it had no outlet, as He *the Almighty* said in another verse: '…so that they believe themselves to be encompassed …' (*Yunus:* 22). Note in the verse under study that Allah *Glorified is He* said, literally: *uhita bi thamarih* (his fruit was encompassed). He did not say, for example that his grain-field or his date palms were encompassed. This is because the walling-in might be around something which later bears fruit. However, the walling-in here occurred around the fruit itself, while it was close to being harvested and close to being consumed. In this manner, the disaster inflicted is more intense. Fruit is the goal and the final product of grain-fields.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* depicts the regret of the owner of the garden and his grief over it, by saying: '…and there he was, wringing his hands over what he had invested in it…' (*al-Kahf:* 42); in other words, striking one hand against the other means a person does so when he is taken by surprise by an event he did not anticipate. Thus, he stood there dumbfounded, not knowing what to say, smacking his hands against one another, not speaking until he had recovered from the horror of this surprise and the consternation it caused him. However, what was he wringing his hands over? He was wringing his hands over what he had spent on it '… as it drooped on its trellises …' (*al-Kahf:* 42).

In this passage, the Arabic word *khawiya* means ruined, barren of vegetation, completely barren. Likewise, He says in another verse says: 'Or [are you, O man, of the same mind] as he who passed by a town deserted by its people, with its roofs caved in …' (*al-Baqara:* 259).

The Arabic word *'urush* (trellises or roofs above) of course implies something raised, but when the thunderbolt came down upon them from the sky, it demolished the structural frames [of the fruit], and turned its high points to its low points. So, the trellis fell first, and then the walls collapsed on top of it.

Regarding His Words, '… and saying, "I wish I had not set up any partner with my Lord."' (*al-Kahf:* 42), the disbeliever said this after being restrained from speaking by the terrible surprise and beating his hands against one another, and then he snapped out of his consternation and blurted out this instantaneous verbal inclination: 'I wish I had not set up any partner with my Lord.' (*al-Kahf:* 42) Desiring that he had not associated anyone with Allah *the Almighty* because *Ash-shuraka' (*the associates besides Allah) which he had assumed were of no benefit to him.

Allah says:

وَلَمْ تَكُن لَّهُۥ فِئَةٌ يَنصُرُونَهُۥ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مُنتَصِرًا ﴿٤٣﴾

He had no forces to help him other than God – he could not even help himself [43] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 43)

What this means is that he had no helpers or supporters to protect him from this which had befallen him or to shield him from the devastation which enclosed his garden. Concerning His saying, '… than Allah nor could he even help himself' (*al-Kahf:* 43), this is because it would not have been appropriate for him to triumph, and victory for him is inadmissible. Why is this?

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

هُنَالِكَ ٱلْوَلَٰيَةُ لِلَّهِ ٱلْحَقِّ ۚ هُوَ خَيْرٌ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ عُقْبًا ﴿٤٤﴾

In that situation, the only protection is that of God, the True God: He gives the best rewards and the best outcome [44] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 44)

The verse opens with the Arabic word *hunalika*, (for this it is) which means at the time of this situation, the time at which the thunderbolt descended from the sky and struck the garden, rendering it utterly devastated. At such a moment, you remember *Al-mun'im* (the giver of Blessings) and wish that you had not associated anything with Him *the Almighty*. Hence, His saying *hunalik* signifies a precise time, the time of climax, climax of misfortune and of distress.

The Arabic word *hunalik* occurs in the Quran for wondrous phenomena, and summons to phenomena even more wondrous. An example of this is found in the story of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he goes into the chamber of our lady Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* and finds her with *rizq* (nourishment); Allah says: 'He would ask, "O, Maryam (Mary), from whence came this unto you?" She would answer, "It is from Allah. Behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning."' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

Now, it was Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* who was her guardian, charged with providing her with food and drink, so when he saw her with various types of food which he did not bring to her, he asked her from where it had come. Whereupon, she responded, 'It is from Allah *the Almighty*. Verily, He grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.' This statement gave hope to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* for the benevolent Favour of Allah *the Exalted* and he desired to seize upon this opportunity. So, he petitioned Allah in prayer to grant him a son, though his wife had been barren until then. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*Hunalika* (In that self-same place), Zakaryya (Zechariah) prayed unto his Lord …' (*Al-'Imran:* 38).

The Arabic word *Al-walaya*, (all protective power) in the verse under examination means that you have a *waliy* (patron) who supports and protects you. The *waliy* is the one who has power over you and who defends you in the time of adversity. According to another reading, the word *Al-wilaya* is pronounced with an '*i*' after the '*w*', with the meaning of dominion or *Al-mulk* (sovereignty). This is what we find in His saying: 'With whom will *Al-mulk* (sovereignty) rest on that Day? With Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16)

Concerning His saying: 'the only protection is that of Allah, the True God.' (*al-Kahf:* 44), this is due to He being the One to reward good deeds with recompense better than this world and all that is in it; He *the Almighty* says: 'He gives the best rewards and the best outcome' (*al-Kahf:* 44); that is to say, *Al-‘aqiba* (the best outcome) with pure sustenance in the garden of Eternity.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has coined for us a similitude, and has elucidated for us the final end of the wealthy disbeliever and the impoverished believer. Moreover, He has made clear to us that a person should not be deceived by blessing nor deluded by felicity and *An-na‘im* (ease) because these are gifted by Allah *the Most High*. Therefore, always keep *Al-Wahib* (the Giver) and *Al-Mun‘im* (the Bestower of Blessings) in your mind, so that He might preserve for you your blessings. Otherwise, you would be like this ungrateful man who deemed himself so superior and exulted in the favour of Allah *the Almighty* whose final end was as you have seen.

This is a parable concerning *Al-amr Al-juz’i* (a particular incident) which is linked to a broader, single precept. If you examined it with insight, you would find that it applies to this entire world, for it is a small-scale model of the state of the life of this world. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* proceeds from the particular parable to the general parable by saying:

وَٱضۡرِبۡ لَهُم مَّثَلَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا كَمَآءٍ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَٱخۡتَلَطَ بِهِۦ
نَبَاتُ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَأَصۡبَحَ هَشِيمٗا تَذۡرُوهُ ٱلرِّيَٰحُۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ مُّقۡتَدِرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

Tell them, too, what the life of this world is like: We send water down from the skies and the earth’s vegetation absorbs it, but soon the plants turn to dry stubble scattered about by the wind: God has power over everything [45]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 45)

In this verse, the True Lord makes the unknown clear to us by what is known of this world. Scholars of Arabic language say that this verse comprises *tashbih tamthil* (allegorical representation). Since, in this verse, He likens the state of this world in terms of its brevity and its ephemerality to water which descends from the sky, and then the earth is irrigated with it and produces varieties of crops and fruit. However, quickly these plants dry up and turn into *hashim* (fragmented chaff) dispersed by the wind. This image, as one says, is drawn from the manifold; in other words, the aspect of resemblance in it is not one thing, rather, it is several things. So, if *At-tashbih* (a simile) is composed of multiple things, then it is a *mathal* (parable). On the other hand, if a comparison is between a single thing and another single thing, it is called a similitude or *mithl* (likeness), as when we say, 'This is *mithl* (like that).' Therefore, He says: 'Hence, do not coin any similitudes for Allah!' (*an-Nahl:* 74) because Allah *the Exalted* is beyond all comparison

In such a manner, this world appears beautiful, flourishing, bounteous, sweet, and verdant, and then suddenly you find nothing of it in your hands. For this reason, the Quran calls this *dunya* (world), a word related to the Arabic verb *dana* meaning to be low or vile, which suggests the disdainful insignificance. Otherwise, then, what more base description than this with which could it be described? This is so that we might be cognisant that what stands opposed to it is *'ulya* (a higher) life.

It is as if Allah were saying to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Just as I propound for them the parable of the two men and what happened to them, I now propound for them a parable of the life of this world and that it fluctuates dramatically with its inhabitants. Also, it changes with them, so I propound a parable of this world for them drawn from the reality of this world itself.'

The meaning of '… and the earth's vegetation absorbs it …' (*al-Kahf:* 45) is that the rain causes the plants of the earth *ikhtalata* (to mingle) and to mesh with each other, along with the twigs and branches intertwining. This is an image of plants in fertile soil, but if the earth were salty, and not fecund, it would produce plants in single units, a stick here, and a stick there.

However, do the plants remain in their state of greenness and freshness? No, rather, indeed, how rapidly they desiccate, fragment, and become dry stubble, which the wind rips away and scatters. This is a metaphor for this world when it takes on its embellishment itself and is beautifully adorned, as He says: '…until – when the earth has assumed its artful adornment and has been embellished, and they who dwell on it believe that they have gained mastery over it – there comes down upon it Our Judgment, by night or by day…' (*Yunus:* 24).

Then, in the verse under study, He says: 'Allah has power over everything.' (*al-Kahf:* 45); He is always fully capable of eliminating something and bringing forth its opposite, as He *the Most High* says: '… but, behold, We are most certainly able to withdraw this [blessing]!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 18)

Likewise, He has the power and ability of creation, and He has the power and ability of annihilation; hence the quality of power and ability is never separated from Him, which is why He gives life and decrees death, He raises in power and dignity and He debases and humbles, He contracts and He expands, He harms and He benefits.

In view of the previous debate of the owner of the garden who exulted in his possessions and his progeny, there comes corresponding mention of wealth and offspring. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلْمَالُ وَٱلْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَٱلْبَـٰقِيَـٰتُ
ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتُ خَيْرٌ عِندَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life, but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope[46] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 46)

These are the basic elements of people's distraction and *fitna* (strife) in this world: wealth and children; however, why did He *the Almighty* put wealth first? Is it more precious to people than children are? We say, 'The True Lord gave precedence to wealth over children not because it is dearer or more valued, but due to wealth being more general amongst those being addressed, contrary to children. For every person has material possessions, even if they be few, but as for children, this is a particularity, since there are people who are deprived of them.'

Moreover, children are not possible without wealth since procreation and bearing offspring require marriage and expenditure. Thus, everyone has some wealth, but not everyone has children. The wise pronouncement in this verse is a general matter, which is the following: 'Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life…' (*al-Kahf:* 46). The Arabic word *zina* (adornment) in the aforementioned statement means that which is not of the necessities of life; hence it is merely outward form and ornamentation, for a believer is content with what has been decreed to him and lives his life without wealth and without children. Indeed a person may be made unhappy by his wealth or made miserable by his child to the degree that he wishes he had died before he was provided with this wealth or this child.

The issue of bearing children has become a mental complex and difficulty amongst many people. Hence, you see a man distressed and preoccupied with worry because he wants a son in order to gain *‘izwa* (a line of descent) and *‘izza* (social standing), and yet perhaps he will be granted a son and face humiliation on his account. Likewise, how many problems are caused in homes because the wife does not bear children? If only people were convinced that childbearing is a blessing from Allah *the Almighty* and that *As-salb* (deprivation) is also a blessing from Him, then everyone would find relief. Have we not read the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Allah’s alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills. He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills, or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills] and causes to be barren whomever He wills, for, verily, He is All-Knowing, infinite in His Power.' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

Thus, sterility in itself is a blessing and gift from Allah *the Exalted* which if a person accepted from his Lord, He would compensate him for his sterility by making all children his children. They would look to him and treat him as if he were their father, and he would thereby taste the delight of children without having to trouble himself in the raising of anyone, to shoulder the anxiety of anyone.

Likewise, the one who is distressed because Allah *the Most High* bestows daughters upon him, but no sons, and is exactly like the one about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'for whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger.' (*an-Nahl:* 58)

Indeed, he desires a son in order that he might have *‘izwa* (a line of descent) and *‘izza* (honourable status), but he has forgotten that the honourable status of a believer is through Allah *the Almighty* not through other than Him. We say, ‘By Allah, if you received a daughter with joy and contentment on the basis that she is a gift from Him, it would be a causal factor in her finding a husband who is more benevolent to you than your own son, then she in turn might bring forth a son for you who would be dearer to you than your own son.’

Hence, wealth and children are of the adornment of life and its outward embellishment, but not an imperative necessity. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has demarcated this world for us by saying: 'Whoever finds himself sound in body, with peace of mind--that is to say, no one threatens his security--and in possession of his day’s nourishment, then it is as if this world has given him possession of all it has to offer.'(1)

Thus, whatever exceeds this is *zina* (adornment), and hence a person is able to live without wealth or children, to live according to values which bestow blessings upon him, and with satisfaction rendering him content with his Creator.

Returning to the verse under study; Allah then says: '… but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope.' (*al-Kahf:* 46) This means that neither wealth nor children will go with you into the grave and will not protect you from punishment. Only enduring *Al-baqiyat As-salihat* (good deeds) will be of benefit to you. [This is illustrated in an anecdote wherein] Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was once given an ewe as a present, and Lady ‘A’isha *Allah be pleased with her* knew that the Messenger of Allah most liked the shoulder of the ewe as its meat is tender and light. Therefore, she saved the shoulder for him *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave the rest away in charity. Then, when he came, he asked, 'What have you done with the ewe?' Whereupon she replied, ‘All of it is gone except for its shoulder.’ At this he laughed and said, 'Nay, rather, all of it *baqiyat* (has remained) except its shoulder.'(2)

In another Hadith, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O, son of Adam, have you anything of your possessions except what you have eaten and thus used up, or what you have worn and thus worn out, or what you have given away in charity and thus preserved?'(3) This is the meaning of '… but lasting good works have a better reward …' (*al-Kahf:* 46).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi (2346) and Ibn Majah (4141).*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (6/50) and At-Tirmidhi (2470).*

(3) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (4/24, 26), Muslim (2958) and At-Tirmidhi (2342).*

The question which now comes to mind is the following: ‘If neither wealth nor children represent a necessity of the necessities of life, then what are the necessities of life?’ The necessities of life is everything which makes this world *mazra‘a* (a place to sow crops) for the Hereafter, and a means of attaining perpetual, ever-lasting, pleasurable, happy life. It is a place where you do not finish with *An-na‘im* (a source of felicity) and then leave it, nor does any source of felicity finish with you and leave you, for it is the bliss of paradise.

The necessities, hence, are religion and the well-ordered Path of Allah, along with the values which regulate the activities of life in accordance with that which Allah *the Almighty* intended in the creation of life.

As for the Arabic phrase *wa Al-baqiyat* in this passage, meaning roughly ‘and/but enduring things/deeds’, since He begins it with the conjunction (*wa*); it signifies that what comes before it is not to be considered among enduring things or deeds. Rather, the preceding is ephemeral along with the ephemerality of this world. Then, He describes these enduring deeds or things as *As-salihat* (being good and righteous) to distinguish between them and *Al-baqiyat As-sayyi’at* (enduring bad or evil deeds) by which one earns everlasting existence in Hellfire.

Concerning the saying of Allah, '… but lasting good works have a better reward …' (*al-Kahf:* 46), one might ask *khayr* (better) in whose view? Since every addition to a compound phrase adds to the power of the phrase compounded, *khayru-ka* (your better issue) is not the same as *khayr man huw aghna min-ka* (better is one who is wealthier than you), and this is not the same as *khayr al-hakim* (the better ruler/judge). So, what would you think of *Al-Khayr* in the view of Allah? The full conclusion of this passage answers the question: '… but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope.' (*al-Kahf:* 46).

The Arabic word *Al-amal*, occurring at the end of the verse and translated as ‘hope’ is what a person aspires to from that which is not available to him in his current state. Thus, if he is in possession of *khayr* (some benefit or blessing), he aspires to that which is superior to it. Here, we stress that the highest hope lies with Allah *the Exalted*. All of this makes it clear for us that this world is ephemeral and that we are journeying to an eternal time. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* adds as a complement after *Al-baqiyat As-salihat* (enduring good deeds) that which corresponds to this, so He *the Almighty* says:

وَيَوْمَ نُسَيِّرُ ٱلْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى ٱلْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً وَحَشَرْنَٰهُمْ فَلَمْ نُغَادِرْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٧﴾

One day We shall make the mountains move, and
you will see the earth as an open plain. We shall
gather all people together, leaving no one [47]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 47)

In other words, keep in the forefront of your mind the day that We will make the mountains go away, and this world will come to an end; perform enduring good deeds since, verily, We will send into oblivion the mountains which you perceive to be so firmly established and stable, whose size, mass, strength and solidity have survived countless generations without changing. The Arabic expression *tasyir al-jibal* (causing the mountains to disappear) in the verse means their removal from where they stand. Similarly, He said in another verse: 'and when the mountains are made to vanish as if they had been a mirage.' (*an-Naba':* 20) In another verse, He says: 'and when the mountains are made to vanish.' (*al-Kahf:* 3) Likewise, He *Glorified is He* says: 'and when the mountains are scattered like dust.' (*al-Mursalat:* 10) He further says: '[It will take place] on a Day when the sky will be like molten lead and the mountains will be like tufts of wool.' (*al-Ma'arij:* 9-8)

Let us take note that the True Lord mentions the strongest immovable manifestation in the life of this world. Yet, there are other things on the earth which are strong and well grounded, such as skyscraper buildings and massive age-old trees, as well as many others. However, if He *the Almighty* is going to pulverise these mountains and remove them from their locations, then everything else on the face of the earth is all the more evanescent. Then He says: '…and you will see the earth as an open plain.' (*al-Kahf:* 47)

The earth is everything which supports and carries you of this world on which we live and everything that rises above you and shades you, namely the sky. As for the Arabic word *bariza* (void and bare) in the verse above, it is related to

Al-baraz which is empty space. In other words, you will see the earth as an empty space, void of all that was upon it of various mountains, buildings, and trees, even of the ocean which covers a large portion of the earth.

All of these perceived forms will have vanished without a trace, as if *barazat* (the earth came into view after having been hidden): some of it beneath mountains, some of it beneath trees, some of it beneath buildings and some of it beneath water. Thus, it becomes a vast empty expanse, without a single landmark for anything.

In a similar sense, there is what we call *Al-mubaraza* (single combat duel) whereby you witness one strong youth saying to another, ‘Step outside!’; what this means is into an open space so that the latter will not find anything to defend himself with, or a wall, for example, against which he could brace himself. We say, ‘so-and-so *baraza* (came out) to so-and-so and *baraza-hu* (meet him in combat)’, and this means that the former fought with the latter.

Regarding '...We shall gather all people together, leaving no one…' (*al-Kahf:* 47), it means that Allah *the Almighty* assembled them for the Day of Judgment, for they departed this world in stages from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* as death harvests souls, and now the day has come on which all of them are gathered together. Concerning the phrase '… leaving no one …' (*al-Kahf:* 47), it means that He *the Most High* shall not omit a single one of them. All will be subject to His Examination. The Arabic word *nughadir* (leaving out) is derived from the root (*gh-d-r*) all of which derivations lead to the connotation of *At-tark* (leaving or neglecting). Thus, the Arabic word for *Al-ghadr* means neglecting loyalty and breaching of faith.

Even the Arabic word *ghadir* which is a word for a small stream or creek is called *ghadir* because when rain falls on the earth, it goes away and leaves only a little bit in footprints.

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَعُرِضُوا۟ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ صَفًّا لَّقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا كَمَا خَلَقْنَـٰكُمْ أَوَّلَ
مَرَّةٍۭ ۚ بَلْ زَعَمْتُمْ أَلَّن نَّجْعَلَ لَكُم مَّوْعِدًا ﴿٤٨﴾

They will be lined up before your Lord: ‘Now you have come to Us as We first created you, although you claimed We had not made any such appointment for you’ [48]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 48)

Concerning His saying, 'They will be lined up before your Lord …' (*al-Kahf:* 48), the Arabic word *Al-’ard* used as a passive voice verb in the verse *‘uridu*, signifies that *Al-’arid* (the examiner or reviewer) receives that *Al-ma’rud* (which is being examined or reviewed) in an ordered manner such that all aspects of the latter are shown. This is similar to when a commander inspects troops at a military review, for example, hence he sees every one of his soldiers. The Arabic word *saffan* used as an adverb in the verse, means *sufufan* (in well-ordered rows). Even the angels will come in well-ordered rows, as He says: 'and [the majesty of] your Lord stands revealed, as well as [the true nature of] the angels, rank upon rank.' (*al-Fajr:* 22)

In other words, it is an organised process in which no one can disguise himself, and there will be no escape from it for anyone. They will be rows interposed in a way that no row will be concealed from the one near next to it; hence, everyone will be clear in all their states.

In a Hadith related by Mu’adh ibn Jabal *Allah be pleased with him* Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us, 'Allah *the Almighty* will assemble humanity and then cry out, "O, My slaves! Procure your arguments and prepare your responses, for verily you are gathered, held accountable and answerable. O, angels! Stand my slaves up in rows on the tips of their toes for *Al-hisab*' (the Reckoning)."’(1)

You should just try to imagine the strenuous effort and pain which the one who stands on his toe-tips experiences. Normally, the weight of the body is distributed onto both feet in a standing position and onto a chair in a sitting position and onto the entire body in the state of sleep, and in this way, the weight of the body is alleviated according to the position that it is in. However, if all of the weight is concentrated onto the tips of the toes of both feet, there is no doubt that it is a painful and onerous posture. It is so difficult for people that they wish only to abandon it, even if for hellfire.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5/4148), attributing it to Abu Al-Qasim ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Mundah; it is also related by As-Suyuti in (ad-Durr Al-manthur) (5/400).*

Then, He says: ‘Now you have come to Us as We first created you…' (*al-Kahf:* 48); that is to say, that you will return to the state in which you descended from your mother’s womb, naked, possessing nothing not even that which might cover your private parts. This significance is portrayed in detail in His saying: '[And Allah shall say:] "And now, indeed, you have come unto Us in a lonely state, even as We created you in the first instance, and you have left behind you all that We bestowed on you [in your lifetime]. And We do not see with you those intercessors of yours whom you supposed to have a share in Allah’s Divinity with regard to yourselves! Indeed, all the bonds between you [and your earthly life] are now severed, and all your former fancies have forsaken you!' (*al-An‘am:* 94)

Concerning His saying: 'although you claimed We had not made any such appointment for you' (*al-Kahf:* 48), the statement in this verse is addressed to disbelievers who denied the Resurrection and the Final Reckoning. The Arabic word *za‘amtum*, translated as ‘you were wont to assert’, is derived from the same root as the Arabic word *Az-za‘m,* which is the wrapping of a lie.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَوُضِعَ ٱلْكِتَٰبُ فَتَرَى ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَٰوَيْلَتَنَا
مَالِ هَٰذَا ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّآ أَحْصَىٰهَاۚ
وَوَجَدُواْ مَا عَمِلُواْ حَاضِرًاۗ وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

The record of their deeds will be laid open and you will see the guilty,
dismayed at what they contain, saying, ‘Woe to us! What a record
this is! It does not leave any deed, small or large, unaccounted for!’
They will find everything they ever did laid in front of them: your
Lord will not be unjust to anyone [49] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 49)

Regarding His saying, 'The record of their deeds will be laid open …' (*al-Kahf:* 49), this means that the angels will lay it open at the command of

Allah *the Almighty* and each one will be given his *kitab* (record). Hence, it will be a scene composed of multiple images, for the one who obtains his record in his right hand will be joyous and say: '…Come, you all! Read this, my record!' (*al-Haqqa:* 19), proudly displaying it to people, to show what is in it, for it is an honourable record with nothing in it to be embarrassed about; therefore he is proud concerning it and summons people to read it. Thus, he is like a pupil who obtained high marks and then rushes jubilantly to show them and proclaim them publicly. This is in contradistinction to the one who is given his record in his left hand, since he says: '… Oh, would that I had never been shown this my record, and neither known this my account! Oh, would that this [death of mine] had been the end of me! Of no avail to me is all that I have [ever] possessed, [and] all my power of argument has died away from me!' (*al-Haqqa:* 25-29). Surely, this is disgrace, contrition, and regret over an embarrassing document.

Returning to the verse under examination: '… and you will see the guilty, dismayed at what they contain …' (*al-Kahf:* 49) is referring to the fearful and trembling. In this verse, the True Lord depicts for us the state of fright of these in order to scare His slaves, to warn them and to magnify the punishment in their minds, while they are still in a period to make amends and to rectify their comportment. This is part of the Mercy of Allah *the Exalted* unto His slaves.

Their first condition is *Al-ishfaq* (one of apprehension), which is a process of a heart slumping and beating loudly. Then comes the inclination to speak: '…saying, "Woe to us!'…"' (*al-Kahf:* 49) The Arabic word *ya* in this passage, (translated as 'Oh'), is an exclamatory particle, as if they were saying: 'Oh, our misfortune! Oh, our perdition!' This is your time [it has come], so get ready. Relevant to this is His saying in the narrative of the two sons of Adam *peace be upon him* when Qabil (Cain) killed Habil (Abel) which was the first instance of murder and the first death among the offspring of Adam *peace be upon him*. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* sent a raven to him to teach him how to bury his brother. Whence, he said: '… Oh, woe is me! Am I then too weak to do what this raven did, and to conceal the nakedness of my brother's body?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31) The expression in the verse above: '… Oh, woe is me!'

(*al-Ma'ida:* 31) means ‘Oh, my perdition', as if he is grieving over the situation he finds himself in and that the raven is cleverer and more experienced than him. This is so that we might not be unjust to these creatures and say, ‘They are beasts that do not understand.’

Regarding the saying of Allah, '… What a record this is! It does not leave any deed, small or large, unaccounted for!' (*al-Kahf:* 49), it means that it, i.e. the record, omits neither small nor large [deeds], but it has reckoned them and calculated them; '… They will find everything they ever did, laid in front of them...' (*al-Kahf:* 49) which means that everything they have ever done is noted down and drawn up in their records. He says: '… your Lord will not be unjust to anyone …' (*al-Kahf:* 49) because Allah *the Exalted* is Ever Equitable and All Just holding against them only what they have done.

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِـَٔادَمَ فَسَجَدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِۦٓ ۗ
أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُۥ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُۥٓ أَوْلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِى وَهُمْ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّۢ ۚ بِئْسَ لِلظَّـٰلِمِينَ بَدَلًا ﴿٥٠﴾

We said to the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ and they all bowed down, but not *Iblis:* he was one of the jinn and he disobeyed his Lord’s command. Are you [people] going to take him and his offspring as your masters instead of Me, even though they are your enemies? What a bad bargain for the evildoers! [50] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 50)

The story of the Angels prostrating to Adam *peace be upon him* is frequently repeated in the Noble Quran, and each time the verses provide us with a specific, subtle observation. In this verse, the True Lord is telling us: ‘It is incumbent upon you to keep well in mind the enmity of Satan towards your father Adam and to keep well in mind that he took an oath upon himself in the presence of Allah *the Almighty* that he would lead all of you astray. Hence, it is imperative for you to be mindful of this enmity, so that if he talks to you about something, then remember his animosity towards you.’

Whenever Allah warns us of the devil, He is surely cultivating in us *Al-mana'a* (the immunity) with which we can resist him, along with the immunity from committing something which does harm in the future when he takes you by surprise. You place [this immunity] in the body in the form of *hamid* (a benign) microbe, and this is [like] an inoculation which accustoms the body to fighting a disease and to overcome it if it afflicts him.

Likewise, the True Lord provides us with immunity against the devil, and He reminds us of how he was in relation to our father Adam *peace be upon him* and of his haughty refusal to prostrate to him. We must always bear in mind [Satan's] utterance: '… Tell me, is this [foolish being] the one whom you have exalted above me? Indeed, if you wilt but allow me a respite till the Day of Resurrection, I shall most certainly cause his descendants – all but a few – to obey me blindly!' (*al-Isra':* 62)

So, be on your guard, given that We will cause mountains to vanish, and will level the earth, and will compile for everyone their own record of you. So, beware of standing in a distressing situation on the Day of Resurrection, and then be taken by surprise at *kitab* (a record) which does not omit small or large [deeds]. Therefore, endeavour to repent unto Allah *the Exalted* and to set right that which is between you and your Lord.

The command in the verse under examination is meant for the angels: 'We said to the angels …' (*al-Kahf:* 50), for they are the most noble of created beings since they do not disobey Allah *the Most High* in what He commands them, and they carry out what they have been ordered to do. When Allah *the Almighty* orders the angels, who possess these qualities, to prostrate to Adam, this means *Al-khudu'(*humble submission). It also means that this is *Al-khalifah* (the vicegerent) whom I command you [angels] to be in his service.

It is for this reason that He called [the angels]: *mudabbirat amran* (the executors of command). In addition, He says about them: '[thinking that] he has unrelenting hosts of loyal helpers, in front of [man] and behind him, guarding him at Allah's command…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). Thus, it is as if *muhimma* (the assigned mission) of these angels is to be with *Al-bashar* (mankind) and in their service. Therefore, if the True Lord *the Most High* has mobilised these angels, and they are the most noble of created beings, for serving mankind, and if He commanded them to prostrate to him as a demonstration of their submissiveness to man, then it is even more evident that He has made the entire creation, with its earth and sky, submissive to him and that He has placed it in his service. For in this verse, He has mentioned the most noble of created beings in order that the rule apply to all that are beneath [the angels].

We have previously said that scholars have differed greatly concerning the nature of Iblis (Satan): Is he one of the jinns or one of the angels? However, this verse has definitely cut short this controversy and settled it, for He says: '…and they prostrated, except for Iblis (Satan). He was of the jinns…' (*al-Kahf:* 50). So, inasmuch as the Quran provides an unequivocal text which clarifies the species [of Satan], then no one has the right to say that he was one of the angels.

Now, given that [Satan] was one of the jinns, which is a species with freedom of choice to do or not to do, he clearly chose not to do as indicated in the passage: '… and departed from the command of his Lord.' (*al-Kahf:* 50) which means he returned to his original state and defied the command.

As for His saying, 'Then will you take him and his descendants as allies other than Me while they are enemies to you?' (*al-Kahf:* 50), this is a baffling phenomenon, for, in light of what [Satan] did, how can you make him your *waliy* (protecting patron), apart from Allah *the Almighty* Who created you and provided you with sustenance? Hence, He *the Most High* is more entitled to this *walaya* (sovereign guardianship).

The Arabic phrase *wa dhurriyatu-hu*, (translated as 'and his descendants' in the passage above), suggests that Iblis (Satan) procreates, that he has offspring and that they engage in marriage. However, we might also say that *dhurriyatu-hu* means all those who follow in his path of deviance and temptation, even if they are human beings as He says: 'And thus it is that against every prophet, We have set up as enemies *Ash-shayatin* (the evil forces) from among humans as well as from amongst Al-jinns (invisible beings) that whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind …' (*al-An'am:* 112).

Concerning the final phrase in the verse under study, Allah says: 'Wretched it is for the wrongdoers as an exchange.' (*al-Kahf:* 50), and this indicates that taking Satan, who arrogantly refused to prostrate to your forefather, as a master and to abandon the sovereign power of Allah *the Almighty* Who ordered the angels to prostrate to your forefather, is an act of wretchedness.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّآ أَشۡهَدتُّهُمۡ خَلۡقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا خَلۡقَ
أَنفُسِهِمۡ وَمَا كُنتُ مُتَّخِذَ ٱلۡمُضِلِّينَ عَضُدٗا ٥١

I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray [51]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 51)

Surely, this Iblis (Satan) whom you have taken as patron and master aside from Allah *the Exalted* and to whom you have given *Al-miza* (distinctive preference) and to whom you have lent your ears, I (Allah *the Almighty*) have not granted (such devils) to witness by mere sight the creation of the heavens and the earth. Moreover, they were not even present at this since the creation of the heavens and the earth came before their own creation. Likewise, they were not witness to their own creation since at the moment I (Allah *the Exalted*) created them, they were non-existent. Indeed, they did not witness anything of this so that they might inform you.

Concerning the saying of Allah, 'I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51), it refers to assistants, helpers and supporters. Hence, you [the devils] did not witness the creation, nor did you help Me in it.

The Arabic word *Al-'adud*, (translated as 'helpers' in the verse), is power that comes to your aid and supports you. The word derives from *'adud Al-insan* (the upper arm of a man) since he applies the use of his hands to the majority of his tasks. When he applies himself to his tasks with his hands, a whole group of his limbs is set into motion, contracting and expanding, to the right and to the left, the upper body, as well as the lower body. All of these movements require an organisational force or a motor which is *Al-'adud*. In the movements of the hand, along with the precision with which it performs its function, are wondrously great signs which evince the precision *As-san'a* (of its own making).

When human beings fabricated modern machines which resemble the human arm and hand, you will note that the driver of a bulldozer, for example, undertakes multiple movements in order to make this machine move. However, as for you, you make your hand move as you please without being aware of what is occurring. How are these movements accomplished for you simply by thinking about them, without effort from you or *At-tadbir* (conscious planning and direction)?

All of your parts are subservient to your will. So if you want to stand up, for example, you stand up instantaneously. Therefore, beware of believing that you are a mechanical creation. Rather, you are *san'a rabbaniya* (of divine fabrication) far-removed from mechanical devices. As proof of this, if the Creator willed to bring some part of you to a standstill, He would command the brain to break off its connection with it, resulting in complete paralysation whereby you would be incapable yourself of dispelling it or repairing it.

A relevant usage of the same word is also His saying in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '… We shall strengthen your *'adud* (arm) through your brother …' (*al-Qasas:* 35), which means that We will fortify you and provide you with support and help.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ نَادُوا۟ شُرَكَآءِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ فَدَعَوْهُمْ
فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لَهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُم مَّوْبِقًا ﴿٥٢﴾

On the Day God will say, 'Call on those you claimed were
My partners,' they will call them but they will not answer;
We shall set a deadly gulf between them [52]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 52)

In other words, Allah is saying, 'Recall, O, Muhammad, that your community of faithful might recall with you this Day: "On the Day Allah will say, 'Call on those you claimed were My partners …'" (*al-Kahf:* 52). 'In this verse, the True Lord tells the disbelievers to call out to their *shuraka'* (associates) whom they have adopted aside from Allah. The Arabic word *za'amtum*, (translated as 'you imagined') means that they have lied in their claim that they are Allah's: '… They will call them, but they will not answer; We shall set a deadly gulf between them.' (*al-Kahf:* 52) This is a mark of their odiousness, along with their flaunting and ill manners with Allah, for they should have been ashamed to face Him and returned to the truth, admitting to what they lied about. However, instead, they persisted: '… They will call them…' (*al-Kahf:* 52). It is conceivable that amongst those they associated with Allah *the Almighty* are *dun At-taklif* (people beneath any responsibility) and *fawq At-taklif* (people above any responsibility). Hence, for example, amongst disbelievers are those who say ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is an associate of Allah, and amongst them are those who say ‘Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him* is an associate of Allah. This is all groundless falsehood, for will they respond to them?

Amongst *mushrik* in are those who have adopted other deities, such as the sun, the moon, idols, and other things. Amongst them are also those who worship people like them and are, likewise, subservient to them. These (latter false deities) will be there with them on that day, and their worshippers will surely invoke them and call out to them by saying, ‘Come over here and argue on our behalf and get us out of the situation we are in. We have indeed worshipped you and have obeyed your every command.’ Allah *the Almighty* says of them: '…We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah …' (*al-’Ankabut:* 3) yet, from whence will they attain to what they desire? Indeed, the ties between them have been severed, and their pretence has expired: '… but they will not answer …' (*al-Kahf:* 52). Then Allah *the Exalted* will place between the caller and the called *wadi sahiq* (a bottomless valley): '… but they will not answer; We shall set a deadly gulf between them.' (*al-Kahf:* 52)

The Arabic word *Al-mawbiq* at the end of the verse (translated as ‘a deadly gulf') is a place in which perdition or annihilation occurs; it is a valley which is one of the ones from *Juhannam* (hellfire) in which all perish. Or the word refers to a mortally perilous place, separating the caller and the called, such that no caller can have recourse to the called, nor can the called come to caller’s aid and help him since between them lies a source of annihilation.

A relevant usage of another form of this word in found is His saying: 'If He willed, He could still the wind, and they would remain motionless on its surface. Indeed in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful, Or He could destroy them for what they earned, but He pardons much' (*ash-Shura:* 33-34). What this means is to be destroyed.

It is truly amazing that this is the first act of obedience on their part to Allah *the Almighty* for when He tells them, 'Call on those you claimed were My partners' (*al-Kahf:* 52), they respond positively to this command, while they certainly did not obey other commandments.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَرَءَا ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ٱلنَّارَ فَظَنُّوٓا۟ أَنَّهُم مُّوَاقِعُوهَا وَلَمْ يَجِدُوا۟ عَنْهَا مَصْرِفًا ﴿٥٣﴾

The evildoers will see the Fire and they will realize that they are about to fall into it: they will find no escape from it [53]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 53)

The Arabic word *ra'a*, (translated as 'will behold' in this verse), is related to *Ar-ru'ya*, seeing or looking which is when the eyesight falls upon a visible object. Also, the looking is on the part of those who will be punished in Hellfire. However, *Ar-ru'ya* (the looking) could also be on the part of hellfire which is going to punish them since it beholds them, awaits them and summons them. Furthermore, He says: 'On that Day We will ask Hell, "Are you filled?" It will answer, "[Nay,] is there yet more [for me]?"' (*Qaf:* 30) In other words, it is like Hellfire is saying, 'Here I am, gazing in anticipation at them, and ready to receive them.'

The Arabic word *Al-mujrimun*, (translated as 'those who were lost in sin' in the verse under examination) are those who commit sins, at the front of which is *Al-kufr* (disbelief) in Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, *Ar-ru'ya* (the looking) in this verse is mutual. The punisher and the punished, each of them looks at the other, recognising each other.

Concerning His saying, '… and they will realise that they are about to fall into it …' (*al-Kahf:* 53), the Arabic word *Azh-zhann* (know) is intended to mean certainty. That is to say, they are certain that they will fall into it. This is like the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'who know with certainty that they shall meet their Lord …' (*al-Baqara:* 46). This means that they are convinced.

With regard to the final statement in the verse: '… They will find no escape from it.' (*al-Kahf:* 53), it means that as there is an unbridgeable gulf between the two of them; they can also find no escape route to flee through or refuge to seek shelter in or any place to which they might go far from the fire, hence the chasm is there and all means of departure is lost.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ صَرَّفۡنَا فِي هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ لِلنَّاسِ مِن كُلِّ
مَثَلٖۚ وَكَانَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ أَكۡثَرَ شَيۡءٖ جَدَلٗا ﴿٥٤﴾

In this Quran We have presented every kind of description
for people but man is more contentious than any other
creature [54] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 54)

We have previously spoken about the distribution or dispersal of miracles. I said that *At-tasrif* means the transmutation or conversion of something to multiple things. An example is when Allah shifts the course of winds so that they do not come from a single direction, rather from here at times and from there at others. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* transmutes parables and moral lessons, which means that He brings them forth in multiple situations and in various depictions.

He *the Most High* sets forth parables concerning a phenomenon which might be invisible so as to strike the ears of people with them. Hence, He provides a similitude for it and employs an evident, tangible phenomenon for them so that they precisely comprehend it.

Now, inasmuch as Allah *the Almighty* has provided diverse forms of every kind of moral lesson in this Quran, then the one who does not understand has no excuse, for the Quran has brought forth multiple facets to teach people with all their variations of modes of understanding and talents. Hence, one finds the illiterate listening to it and taking from it according to the ability of his understanding. The half-educated also listens to it and understands according to his level of education. While the great scholar takes from it according to his vast knowledge and finds in it the object of his desire. Nay, even more than this, the specialist in any branch of knowledge and science finds in the Quran the most precise details since Allah *the Almighty* has expounded everything in it.

Then, He says, '…man is more contentious than any other created being.' (*al-Kahf:* 54) which means that man is much given to quarrelling and disputation of opinion. The Arabic word *Al-jadal* (contention) is defined as an argument that includes an attempt of each side to establish the veracity of his ideology or his discourse. Now, argumentation can be rooted in falsehood, with a view to verifying proof of heretic tendencies, and one may engage in fraudulent manoeuvring in order to justify his ideology even if it is mistaken. This is faulty argumentation based on passionate inclinations. However, argumentation can also be rooted in truth, and it is thus viewed as constructive disputation which strives to arrive at the truth. Under this case, it is very far from partiality, passionate inclination, or ulterior motives.

When the Noble Quran speaks of contention or argumentation, it says: 'And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner …' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46). Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: '…and argue with them in the most kindly manner…' (*an-Nahl:* 125).

Once Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed by the dwelling of 'Ali and Fatima *Allah be pleased with them* to awaken them for the pre-dawn prayer; he knocked on their door again and again. However, it seems that they were immersed in deep sleep, then he cried out to them, 'Are you not going to pray?'(1) Then 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* responded, by saying, 'O, Prophet Muhammad, verily our souls are in Allah's hands. If He wills, He will release them [from the death-like state of sleep], and if He wills, He will hold onto them.' Prophet Muhammad laughed and said, 'Man is more contentious than any other created being.'

This is because man has multiple whims and contrasting inclinations, which is why he attempts to prove the correctness of his fancies and desires with argument, contending with the truth, beguiling and dodging cunningly.

If you scrutinise his opinion, you will find that he has some capricious desire that he is striving for and bent on realising. You notice this matter clearly when you chose one of several roads to follow with your companion, for example, because it is the easiest and most direct of them. Then, all of a sudden, he proposes another road to you and tries to convince you of it by every means, but the truth is that he has a hidden motive and a whimsical desire which he wishes to attain.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Imam Ahmad (1/77), Muslim (206) and Al-Bukhari (7348).*

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا مَنَعَ ٱلنَّاسَ أَن يُؤْمِنُوٓا۟ إِذْ جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْهُدَىٰ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُوا۟ رَبَّهُمْ
إِلَّآ أَن تَأْتِيَهُمْ سُنَّةُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ قُبُلًا ﴿٥٥﴾

Now that guidance has come to them, what stops these people believing and asking forgiveness from their Lord before the fate of earlier peoples annihilates them or their torment confronts them? [55] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 55)

What is it that which prevents them from believing after the Quran was revealed to them although We provided it with varied miracles and parables?

In another verse, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies the reason behind their opposition to faith; thus He says: 'for, indeed, many facets have We given in this Quran to every kind of lesson [designed] for [the benefit of] mankind! However, most men are unwilling to accept anything but blasphemy, and so they say, "[O, Muhammad,] We shall not believe you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or you have a garden of date-palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush, or you cause the skies to fall down upon us in smithereens, as you have threatened, or [till] you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us, or you have a house [made] of gold, or you ascend to heaven – but nay, we would not [even] believe in you ascension unless you bring down to us [from heaven] a writing which we [ourselves] could read!" Say you, [O, Prophet], "Limitless in His Glory is my Lord! Am I, then, aught but a mortal man, an apostle?"' (*al-Isra':* 89-93)

All of these harassing questions and this stubbornness on their part is what stands between them and faith in Allah *the Almighty*. However, whenever He produces a miracle which a people requests, then they do not believe in it, thus, He annihilates them. Therefore, He says after this: '… before the fate of earlier people annihilates them …' (*al-Kahf:* 55). Hence, this is the miracle that awaits them, so there should come upon them the customary action of Allah *the Exalted* in annihilating those who disbelieve in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Before the advent of Islam, it was Heaven which would intervene to support correct belief, as it would demolish their towns and houses upon them. Prophet Muhammad, at that time, was responsible only for inviting people to have faith and delivering of his Message, and it was not part of his mission to summon people unto war or rigorous effort while spreading his Message. The religious community of Prophet Muhammad is the exception, for it has been entrusted to bear the sword in order to chastise those who secede from obedience to Allah *the Almighty*.

As for His saying, '…and asking forgiveness from their Lord…' (*al-Kahf:* 55), it refers to what has passed in terms of abusive bickering, harassing questions and haughty arrogance over accepting the truth. This is followed by the passage, '… the fate of earlier people annihilates them …' (*al-Kahf:* 55) which indicates the annihilation of disbelievers. Then comes the final phrase of the verse, which is '… or their torment confronts them?' (*al-Kahf:* 55) The Arabic word *qubulan* is rendered above by a reference to the Hereafter and manifestly evident before them, or it may be understood as the plural of *qabil* and thus signifies numerous kinds or sorts of chastisement in accordance with His saying: 'But verily, for those who do evil, there is a punishment aside from that…' (*at-Tur:* 47). That is to say, they will have punishment other than the fire, as the types of chastisement for them are numerous.

Subsequently, Allah consoles His Prophet Muhammad in order that he pays no attention to the doings of the disbelievers and does not allow himself to be consumed with regretful grief at their opposition, by saying:

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ ۚ وَيُجَٰدِلُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟
بِٱلْبَٰطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا۟ بِهِ ٱلْحَقَّ ۖ وَٱتَّخَذُوٓا۟ ءَايَٰتِى وَمَآ أُنذِرُوا۟ هُزُوًا ﴿٥٦﴾

We only send messengers to bring good news and to deliver warning, yet the disbelievers seek to refute the truth with false arguments and make fun of My messages and warnings [56] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 56)

We have already stated that argumentation may be based on truth, or it may be based on falsehood, just as those who disbelieve are doing in this verse. They are arguing on the basis of falsehood and making use of every stratagem to refute the truth, which is to say, to obstruct, and eliminate it. Regarding the passage, '… and make fun of My Messages and warnings' (*al-Kahf:* 56), the Arabic term *ayat* (Messages) refers to the cosmic signs of creation which are there to confirm the veracity of Prophet Muhammad; it also refers to the signs of the Quran and the signs of rulings and commands which they have taken derisively and mockingly and which they have not given any importance to what they contain of stern warning.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن ذُكِّرَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِۦ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا وَنَسِىَ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ ۚ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ
أَكِنَّةً أَن يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِىٓ ءَاذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا ۖ وَإِن تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى ٱلْهُدَىٰ فَلَن يَهْتَدُوٓا۟ إِذًا أَبَدًا ﴿٥٧﴾

Who could be more wrong than the person who is reminded of his Lord's messages and turns his back on them, ignoring what his hands are storing up for him [in the Hereafter]? We have put covers over their hearts, so they cannot understand the Quran, and We put heaviness in their ears: although you call them to guidance [Prophet] they will never accept it [57] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 57)

In the opening of the verse, 'Who could be more wrong …' (*al-Kahf:* 57), is expressed in the form of a question in order to emphasise the statement. This is as if your companion alleges that you have not cultivated your relation with him and have not been kind to him. So, you might tell him by means of notification, ‘I did such-and-such for you.' However, the notification or information may be true, or it may be false.

For example, if you presented the issue by means of a question, you would tell him, ‘Did I not do such-and-such for you?’ Hence, you would get a confirmation from him, and evidence against him would come from his own words, while you seem not to comprehend anything about a conflict except that you are sure that his answer will only be what you desire. In this manner, Allah transforms it into a rhetorical question, 'Who could be more wrong than the person who is reminded of his Lord’s Messages …' (*al-Kahf:* 57), thereby leaving it up to us to respond, so that we ourselves say, ‘No one is more wicked than someone who does that.’ Thus, confirmation is the lord of proofs.

Regarding His saying: '… and turns his back on them …' (*al-Kahf:* 57) means that the disbeliever has rejected the Messages of Allah. Concerning His saying: '… ignoring what his hands are storing up for him [in the Hereafter]?' (*al-Kahf:* 57), this means that he forgot his misdeeds. It was his obligation to pay heed to these signs and thus to believe in them, for perhaps Allah *the Almighty* might have forgiven him due to his faith, and hence exchanged his misdeeds for good deeds.

Then He says: '… We have put covers over their hearts, so they cannot understand the Quran …' (*al-Kahf:* 57). The Arabic word *akinna* (veils) is the plural of *kin,* and it means coverings. Allah *the Exalted* has placed covers over their hearts, so faith does not enter into them, and disbelief does not exit from them, but this is not oppression on His part towards His slaves; Allah *the Almighty* is utterly exalted from that. Rather, it is a response to what they have requested and compliance with what they desired. Thus when they showed their love of disbelief and their chests were expanded with it, He *the Most High* increased it in them since He is a Lord Who gives His slave what he wants.

Allah says in another verse: 'In their hearts is disease, so Allah lets their disease increase, and grievous suffering awaits them because of their persistent lying.' (*al-Baqara:* 10) Along the same lines, He says: 'Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil …' (*al-Baqara:* 7).

The saying of Allah '… so they cannot understand the Quran…' (*al-Kahf:* 57) encourages them to understand it along with the Miracles of Allah *the Almighty* for they were previously reminded of them, and they turned away. So Allah *the Exalted* has deprived them of comprehending and understanding them.

As for His saying, '… and We put heaviness in their ears' (*al-Kahf:* 57), it refers to deafness, hence they do not hear. Concerning the saying of Allah, '…Although you [Prophet] call them to guidance, they will never accept it.' (*al-Kahf:* 57), it is only expected after Allah has sealed their hearts and their ears and has closed off any access they might have had to knowledge and guidance; guidance comes originally from hearing the saying of truth, whereupon your heart receives it with contentment and your limbs react to it with steadfast adherence. Therefore, you hear with your ear and accept with your heart, while the limbs are affected by it, responding obediently with strict observance to what has been commanded. As long as the ear is overcome by hollowness and deafness, you will not hear. If you did hear something, your heart would reject it, and the limbs would not react except to what the heart has been filled with in terms of convictions.

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَرَبُّكَ ٱلۡغَفُورُ ذُو ٱلرَّحۡمَةِۖ لَوۡ يُؤَاخِذُهُم بِمَا كَسَبُواْ لَعَجَّلَ
لَهُمُ ٱلۡعَذَابَۚ بَل لَّهُم مَّوۡعِدٞ لَّن يَجِدُواْ مِن دُونِهِۦ مَوۡئِلٗا ٥٨

Your Lord is the Most Forgiving, and full of mercy: if He took them to task for the wrongs they have done, He would hasten their punishment on. They have an appointed time from which they will have no escape [58] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 58)

Part of Allah's Mercy unto the disbelievers is that He does not treat them with punishment or annihilate them. Instead, He gives them a respite and turns away from them because they have an appointed time from which they will not escape, nor will they slip away, nor will they have any shelter that might protect them from Him. There is no doubt that Allah *the Almighty* has far-reaching Wisdom in giving them a respite in this world, for perchance He will bring forth from amongst these one who believes in Him and one who will bear the banner of religion and defend it. Indeed, this has occurred frequently in the history of Islam. From the loins of Abu Jahl came 'Ikrima

Allah be pleased with him and Allah *the Almighty* gave respite to Khalid Ibn al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* and thus he became the greatest military commander of Islam.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَتِلْكَ ٱلْقُرَىٰٓ أَهْلَكْنَٰهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا۟ وَجَعَلْنَا لِمَهْلِكِهِم مَّوْعِدًا ﴿٥٩﴾

[Just like] the former communities We destroyed for doing wrong: We set an appointed time for their destruction [59]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 59)

In this verse, the Arabic word *tilka* (those) is a demonstrative pronoun for a feminine word which in this case is *Al-qura*, or communities. The letter '*k*' in this word is an addressing form, and so the Message here is addressed to Prophet Muhammad, while his community of followers is implicitly included in the message to him. For Allah's Speech to him *peace and blessings be upon him* is speech to his community of followers. However, the demonstrative pronoun does not occur except for something definitive, existent, and tangible. An example of this occurs in His saying: 'Now, what is this in your right hand, O, Musa (Moses)?' (*Ta Ha:* 17)

So, where are these communities or towns? Did they exist in the era of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Yes, there were vestiges and ruins of these settlements which indicated them. Prophet Muhammad and people could see them during their journeys to the Levant and other places. Among the examples of these are the settlements of Thamud- people of Saleh (Shelah), as well as the settlements of the people of Lut (Lot) about them. Allah *the Almighty* says: '… and, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138)

Tilka is thus a demonstrative pronoun to what is existent and tangible, indicating that which remains of these settlements after they were engulfed in the punishment of Allah *the Almighty* and that which overwhelmed them of His punishment that cannot be held back from a people who are given to sin and inequity.

As for the Arabic word *Al-qura* (communities) in the verse under study, it is the plural of *qariya* which applies to a place where the staples of life and its necessities are available. They comprise even more than the necessities and staples of normal life, for the word *Al-qariya* is only applied to a place in which the staples of life are bountiful, with abundance sufficient for one who comes upon it as a guest to find in it a hospitable meal. If it is a large settlement, abundant sustenance comes to it from everywhere, as if it is a mother, hence we call it *umm Al-qura,* 'the mother of settlements'.(1)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذۡ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِفَتَىٰهُ لَآ أَبۡرَحُ حَتَّىٰٓ أَبۡلُغَ مَجۡمَعَ ٱلۡبَحۡرَيۡنِ أَوۡ أَمۡضِيَ حُقُبٗا ﴿٦٠﴾

Moses said to his servant, 'I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years!' [60]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 60)

Regarding His saying: 'Musa (Moses) said to his servant…' (*al-Kahf:* 60), it reminds Prophet Muhammad of the time when Musa (Moses) said to his servant boy so-and-so, or Joshua ibn Nun, a descendant of Yusuf (Joseph), who was a boy that followed and served [Moses] in order to learn from him. Then this passage comes: 'I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet …' (*al-Kahf:* 60). However, what is the story of Musa (Moses) and his servant? Is there any relation between it and our context here?

The pertinence of the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* here is that the disbelievers of Mecca had sent [a group] to the Jews to ask them concerning information on Prophet Muhammad since they were people of the Scripture and more knowledgeable about heavenly topics. The disbelievers of Mecca wanted to know their opinion about Prophet Muhammad and if he were telling the truth or not. The Jews said to the delegation from Mecca, 'Ask him about three things, if he responds to you [correctly], then he is a true prophet. Ask him about the youths who disappeared in the old ages, about the wandering man who roamed the earth and about the Spirit.’ So, they immediately returned and asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* these questions, whereupon he told them: 'I will answer you tomorrow'.(1)

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(1) This description for Mecca occurs in His *the Almighty* saying: 'And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Quran, that you may warn the mother city and those around it, and that you may give warning of the day of gathering together wherein is no doubt; a party shall be in the garden and (another) party in the burning fire.' (*Ash-Shura:* 7)

This indicates that the response to these questions was not in his possession, which is a proof for him and not against him, for the Prophet*peace and blessings be upon him* never blurt out words just like that without knowledge in order to answer them. Instead, he remained silent until the response would come from Allah *the Almighty*. This stems from his gracious manners with his Lord who educated him in the most refined way.

Fifteen days passed without receiving any Divine revelation by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning this issue, until the situation became distressing for him. However, the disbelievers and hypocrites were delighted since they had found a shortcoming concerning him. Hence, they took advantage of this chance to find fault with him. However, Allah *the Almighty* had disciplined His Prophet Muhammad above all else to show them that he would not say anything about these issues except on the basis of revelation from Him, for he neither speaks on the basis of caprice nor does make pronouncements based on his opinion.

Had these people been discerning, they would have understood that the slowness in this matter was proof of the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, the story of Musa (Moses) is narrated in this passage in order to rebut people’s abuse and to make it clear to them that a prophet does not know everything. Is it an incumbent upon him to answer you about everything? Is he to be chided on the spot for not being aware of a particular matter?

These miracles occur in order to say to the Jews and those who were entangled in their subterfuge from amongst the disbelievers of Mecca, ‘You are so zealous for Musa (Moses), the Torah and Judaism. Yet here is Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* himself learning not from Allah *the Almighty* but from a slave like him, and he travels in pursuit of him seeking knowledge.’

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(1) *This is narrated by Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (3/71) who attributes it to Ibn Ishaq.*

These miracles occur in order to say to them, ‘O, you who dictated these questions to the disbelievers of Mecca and manifested malicious joy over when revelation was delayed for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*! Understand that the delay in revelation is for you to be aware that the Prophet does not utter anything from his own caprice. So, this issue should have drawn your attention to the truthfulness of him and his integrity; for he is not stingy regarding the unseen.’

It is said that the motive behind the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who had a very close relationship with his Lord, is that he asked Him: '… O, my Lord! Show [Yourself] unto me, so that I might behold You…' (*al-A‘raf:* 143). Musa (Moses) was emboldened to make such a request by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* had spoken to him: 'Now, what is this in your right hand, O, Musa (Moses)?' (*Ta Ha:* 17) Musa had a prolonged conversation with his Lord. Who is it that Allah *the Almighty* speaks to does not seek to draw out the period of intimacy in discourse with Him? Hence, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: '…It is my staff. I lean on it, and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep. [Many] Other uses have I for it.' (*Ta Ha:* 18) In this way, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* extended the time of intimacy and talk with Allah *the Exalted*. Therefore, he asked Him, ‘O, Lord, does there exist anyone on the earth more knowledgeable than me?’ His Lord then replied to him, ‘Yes, there is someone more knowledgeable than you on the earth. So, go to the place at the junction of the two seas and there you will find one of my slaves who is more knowledgeable than you.’ Hence, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* took his servant and went off to the junction of the two seas.

It is related in a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that once Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was preaching and he was asked, ‘Who is the most knowledgeable?’ He said, ‘I am.’ That is to say amongst mankind. However, then Allah *the Almighty* informed him, ‘No, there is on the earth someone who is more knowledgeable than you amongst mankind.’(1) This was in order that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* not become conceited over what Allah *the Exalted* has taught him. Subsequently, He says: ‘I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes me years!’ (*al-Kahf:* 60)

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari (4725-4727) in the context of the verse in question. Ahmad also narrated it (5/117).*

The Arabic expression *la abrahu,* i.e. 'I shall not give up' really means 'I shall not abandon'. Some believe that *la abrahu* means 'I shall not leave the place where I am', but it really means 'I shall not abandon that which I am in the course of doing'. So, if I am sitting, I will not leave off sitting, and if I am walking, I will not leave off walking. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had made this statement while he was seeking the junction of the two seas and travelling towards it. Thus, the meaning is 'I shall not abandon my journey to that place until I reach the junction of the two seas.'

The same form of the Arabic root *baraha* occurs in His saying concerning the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: 'Therefore, I will by no means depart from this land until my father permits me or Allah decides for me, and He is the best of the judges.' (*Yusuf:* 80) This was said by Yusuf's (Joseph's) oldest brothers after he took his brother Benjamin and prevented him from departing with them. Hence, here the oldest brother was ashamed to meet his father who had made them take a solemn oath of responsibility to bring Benjamin back and to return him to him.

The Arabic phrase *majma' al-bahrayn*, or the junction of the two seas, means the place where they meet, thus become one sea, such as the Tigris and Euphrates, for example, at *Shatt-al-'Arab*. Finally, regarding His saying, '…even if it takes me years!' (*al-Kahf:* 60), the Arabic word *Al-huqub* means untold years, which is a long period of time estimated to be about seventy or eighty years. So, if the minimum number assigned to the plural form is three, then this means that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would travel for two hundred and twenty years, assuming that the period is seventy years long. Thus, the meaning is 'I shall not abandon my voyage to that place, even if I have to travel for two hundred and ten years.' This is due to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* being filled with a yearning desire to see this man who was more knowledgeable than him, for how was this possible when he was a prophet and a divinely knowledgeable man. For this reason, his Lord informed him that the knowledge given to this man was imparted directly by Allah *the Almighty* not from any of mankind.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجۡمَعَ بَيۡنِهِمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا فَٱتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُۥ فِي ٱلۡبَحۡرِ سَرَبٗا ﴿٦١﴾

But when they reached the place where the two seas meet, they had forgotten all about their fish, which made its way into the sea and swam away [61] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 61)

The Arabic verb *balagha* in the dual form, rendered as 'they reached' refers to Musa (Moses) and his servant. The Arabic phrase *majma' bayna-hima* literally means the junction between the two seas. They forgot all about their fish. It is an indication that both of them were affected by forgetfulness. Although carrying the fish was entrusted to the servant of Musa (Moses), and he forgot about it, yet it was up to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to remind him about it. The leader of a group must pay attention to every minor detail of the travelling party, normally he would be the last to leave a site in order to inspect it and see if perhaps someone had forgotten something. Hence, the moment they got up to continue their travelling, Musa (Moses) should have rectified the situation and reminded his servant about what they had with them as provisions for the journey.

The Arabic word *Al-hut*, or fish, is a well-known kind of fish. In some countries, they use the word *hut* to refer to all kinds of fish. They had prepared it to eat if they became hungry during the journey; it was roasted, and the youth was carrying it in a basket. Regarding His saying, '… which made its way into the sea and swam away' (*al-Kahf:* 61), it means that the roasted fish got out of the basket and flowed off towards the sea. The Arabic word *As-sarab* means an underground passage; it is an adverb, which is translated here as disappeared from sight. It is similar to a tunnel or subterranean vault. It may also mean declivity or descent, as we say, 'The water leaked down, or *tassarraba*, from the water-skin.' This is because the level of water in the skin is so high that it leaks down from it. This is amongst wondrous marvels that a roasted fish should jump, that life should return to it, that it should head towards the sea as it knows that water is its home and its proper place.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ لِفَتَىٰهُ ءَاتِنَا غَدَآءَنَا لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِن سَفَرِنَا هَٰذَا نَصَبًا ﴿٦٢﴾

They journeyed on, and then Moses said to his servant,
'Give us our lunch! This journey of ours is very tiring' [62]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 62)

That is to say that in their travelling they went beyond the junction of the two seas and the meeting point. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* told his servant, 'Get our lunch ready for we have become exhausted from travelling.' The Arabic word *An-nasab*, used adverbially means fatigue. So, this means that the two of them travelled all the way to the junction of the two seas and then rested. When they had gone beyond this place, they were exhausted; therefore Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked for food. At this instant, the servant remembers that he had forgotten the fish.

قَالَ أَرَءَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَآ إِلَى ٱلصَّخْرَةِ فَإِنِّى نَسِيتُ ٱلْحُوتَ وَمَآ أَنسَىٰنِيهُ
إِلَّا ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُۥ ۚ وَٱتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُۥ فِى ٱلْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ﴿٦٣﴾

And [the servant] said, 'Remember when we were resting by
the rock? I forgot the fish – Satan made me forget to pay
attention to it – and it [must have] made its way into the
sea.' 'How strange!' [63] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 63)

This is the speech of the servant of Musa (Moses). The verse begins with the Arabic expression *a-ra'ayta,* which means 'Would not you believe it?' What this means is that all I can relate of the situation is that when we took shelter beneath the rock at the junction of the two seas in order to rest, 'I forgot the fish …' (*al-Kahf:* 63). Let us note here that he said, 'I forgot', while in the previous verse he said 'ready to forget'; this is because the latter is notification from Allah *the Almighty* whilst the former is that of the servant of Musa (Moses).

The verse indicates that a leader is followed and does not leave it up to his followers to act independently in all things since a follower might neglect some aspect of the travel and might be preoccupied with other things, causing him to forget what he is charged with concerning a matter of the journey.

Then the servant excuses himself for having forgotten the fish by saying: '… Satan made me forget to pay attention to it …' (*al-Kahf:* 63); it is Satan who played with his thoughts and inclinations such that he made him forget his duty and made him forget to remember the fish. Regarding His saying '…and it [must have] made its way into the sea. How strange!' (*al-Kahf:* 63) It means that the fish made its way to the sea in an amazing way. In the aforementioned verse, He *the Almighty* says [about the fish]: 'which made its way into the sea and swam away.' (*al-Kahf:* 61); this was the state of the fish, but in the verse, He says 'in an amazing way', since the servant is relating what happened and finds it amazing, for how could a roasted fish move with life and jump from a basket, along with making its way straight to the water?! Now this is truly one of the marvels, as it violated the customary norm.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ذَٰلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغِ ۚ فَارْتَدَّا عَلَىٰٓ ءَاثَارِهِمَا قَصَصًا ﴿٦٤﴾

Moses said, 'Then that was the place we were looking for.'
So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps [64]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 64)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, 'Then that was the place we were looking for.' (*al-Kahf:* 64) using the Arabic verb *nabghi* with the meaning of searching for. Hence, this place at which they lost the fish is the intended destination, as if the fish was more aware of the meeting place than Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. In this way, the location of the place was made known, for it is the junction of the two seas where they meet and become one sea. This image exists only on the geographic arena of the tribe of Israel in Sinai. There is located the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez where they conjoin into a single sea at the Egyptian Ra's Mohamed Region.

Then He says: '… So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps' (*al-Kahf:* 64); this means that they returned upon the imprints of their feet as tracers do. They retraced their footsteps with precision until they arrived at the place where the fish slipped away. It was the appointed meeting place which Allah *the Exalted* had fixed for Musa (Moses), in order that he would find there the upright slave.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَوَجَدَا عَبۡدٗا مِّنۡ عِبَادِنَآ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُ رَحۡمَةٗ مِّنۡ عِندِنَا وَعَلَّمۡنَٰهُ مِن لَّدُنَّا عِلۡمٗا ﴿٦٥﴾

And found one of Our servants – a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own [65] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 65)

We have previously discussed worship based slavery or servitude, which, if it is to Allah *the Almighty* then it represents honour and highly dignified status; however, if it is for other than Allah *the Exalted* then it represents debased servility and shameful abasement. We have said, ‘Verily, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not undertake the Night Journey and Ascension except because he was a slave of Allah *the Almighty* as He said: 'Limitless in His Glory is He Who transported His servant by night …' (*al-Isra’:* 1). It is as though in servitude to Allah *the Most High* the slave takes the best of his master, whereas in servitude to men the master takes the best of his slave.

Then the True Lord describes this upright slave by saying '… a man to whom We had granted Our Mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own’ (*al-Kahf:* 65). Scholars have discussed the meaning of the Arabic word *Ar-rahma,* translated in this verse as grace, saying that it occurs in the Quran with the meaning of prophethood. This is illustrated in His saying: 'And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31), Allah’s response to them was the following: 'But is it they who distribute your Lord’s Grace (*rahma*)?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

The ultimate grace comes at the hand of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* and at the hands of the Divinely-sent messengers. However, this grace in the verse comes from His Presence directly, without the mediation of an angel. Therefore, He says: 'whom We had granted …' (*al-Kahf:* 65). Then, He says, '…of Our own…’ (*al-Kahf:* 65), in which the Arabic phrase *min I‘ndi-na* conveys the meaning of from Our Presence and Possession meaning that it refers to the bestowal and the source of this knowledge given to the righteous man.

After this, He says: '…whom We had given knowledge of Our own' (*al-Kahf:* 65), that is to say, from Our Presence and Possession without the mediation of Divinely-sent messengers. This is why it is called mystic knowledge, as if there is no impediment to Allah *the Almighty* to select one of His slaves and to confer upon him special knowledge which is even unknown by messengers.

Hence, we must differentiate between knowledge and emanations coming by way of a Divinely sent messenger and his directives, and knowledge and emanations coming directly from Allah *the Exalted* to whomever He selects from amongst His slaves. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brings exoteric rulings related to prescriptions and proscriptions: 'Do this' and 'do not do that'. However, there are other rulings which are not exoteric, having inward justifications above outward ones. It was these latter rulings which Allah *the Almighty* accorded to the upright slave 'Al-Khidr' *peace be upon him*.

This is proved by the fact that a prophet brings rulings which forbid killing and destroying other people's possessions, yet along comes Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* and destroys a ship and kills a youth. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* objects to these acts because he has no knowledge of their justification. If Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had cognisance of the justification for making a hole in the ship, he himself would have immediately set about making one in it.

Thus, the knowledge of Musa (Moses) is not the same as the knowledge of Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* which is why Al-Khidr said to him, '… Behold, you will never be able to have patience with me for how could you be patient about something that you cannot not comprehend within the compass of your experience?' (*al-Kahf:* 67-68)

To paraphrase Al-Khidr's words to Musa (Moses), 'So this knowledge is not in your possession, for my knowledge is of the elite amongst saints, and your knowledge is of the intelligence of Divinely-sent messengers.' The two types of knowledge, in reality, are not opposed to each other, though the knowledge of sainthood has esoteric or inward justifications and the knowledge of Divine Message has exoteric or outward justifications.

Subsequently, He *the Almighty* says:

قَالَ لَهُۥ مُوسَىٰ هَلۡ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰٓ أَن تُعَلِّمَنِ مِمَّا عُلِّمۡتَ رُشۡدٗا ﴿٦٦﴾

Moses said to him, 'May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?' [66] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 66)

It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is teaching us the etiquette of the acquisition of knowledge and the proper conduct of a pupil with his teacher. Although Allah commanded him to follow Al-Khidr, he did not say, for example, 'Verily Allah *the Almighty* has commanded me to follow you.' Nay, rather he was polite with him and sought his permission in this manner: 'May I follow you …' (*al-Kahf:* 66).

The Arabic word *Ar-rushd* (consciousness of what is right) means a good comportment in things and the appropriate course of action in the cause of that which you are concerned with. I have previously said that *Ar-rushd* comes at the age of adulthood, though this does not mean that everyone who has reached adulthood is rightly guided, for a person can be mature but not rightly guided and may even be foolish. For this reason, when the True Lord *the Most High* spoke of orphans by saying: 'And test the orphans [in your charge]…' (*an-Nisa':* 6) which means to examine them. Now, the examination of an orphan occurs when he is still under your guardianship. So, you should entrust him with work that will enhance his condition and give him a portion of his bequeathed wealth, allowing him to handle it under your gaze and under your care in order to see how his conduct will be.

You must aspire to train him to face life, not to isolate him from it until he attains unto consciousness of what is right, *Ar-rushd*, and then give him his bequeathed wealth, for then he will not be capable of disposing of it because of his lack of experience. If he fails, the experiment will have been a loss for him. Hence, then, the examination of an orphan is done while he is still under your guardianship and within your hearing, sight and supervision, a matter which is appropriate for him.

The same passage concerning orphans continues: '… until they reach a marriageable age …' (*an-Nisa':* 6) which is the age of legal maturity, but after this, He does not say, 'Then give them their [bequeathed] wealth' because after reaching adulthood there is another condition: '… then, if you find them to be mature of mind …' (*an-Nisa':* 6). Thus, the legal guardian is obligated to follow this sequential order: to watch over the orphan while he is under his guardianship and to push him into the struggle of life and its experiences until he becomes capable of confronting life so that he does not fumble about ruinously with his wealth due to his lack of experience and expertise. Then, if you become aware of his being correctly guided after attaining adulthood, you shall give him his bequeathed wealth that he might dispose of it. However, if you do not sense mature discernment in him or correct conduct, then do not give over to him the wealth to squander it with his misconduct.

Therefore, in this same sense, He says: 'And do not give over to those who are weak of judgement your wealth ….' (*an-Nisa':* 5) In this verse, He does not say 'their wealth' because the weak-minded possesses no wealth as long as he is weak-minded or foolish. Rather, it is your wealth that you might dispose of in a generous and correct fashion and preserve it for its owner until the time that you are certain of his mature and correct discernment.

Thus, the *rushd* which Musa (Moses) was seeking from the upright slave was primarily concerned with the appropriate conduct and wisdom in comprehending things. However, does this mean that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not rightly guided? No, rather, he was rightly guided in his proper path as Divinely sent prophet, that is, in the conveyance of exoteric rulings.

As for the *rushd* which he was seeking, it was the *rushd* of the path of the upright slave. The latter indicated to him that he sought something that was not known to him, but this does not disparage the high station of prophethood since Allah *the Almighty* says: '… and you have been granted very little of [real] knowledge' (*al-Isra':* 85). He said to the Prophet: '… but [always] say, "O, my Lord, cause me to grow in knowledge!"' (*Ta Ha:* 114)

Thus a poet said:

'The more I increase in branches of knowledge,
I grow in the certainty of my ignorance.'

Increasing one's knowledge today means that he lacked this part of knowledge yesterday, and likewise, he is deficient today in terms of what he will learn tomorrow. Whenever a person is of broad horizons and a lover of knowledge, you will notice that every time he becomes acquainted with a particular matter, he longs to learn about something else, for always he has a voracious appetite for knowledge, never having enough in accordance with the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There are two who are insatiable, never getting their fill: the seeker of knowledge and the seeker of wealth.'(1)

There is also the example of the poet who turned his attention to his soul whenever it invites him to delusion, presumptive pride, and vanity at what he possesses of inconsiderable knowledge, yet he is vigilant of its deception, so he said:

The soul said: I have learned a great deal
    I replied: this great deal is an insignificant acquisition.

He then produces a clarifying simile:

A ladle from the ocean fills the jug
    Thus it believes itself to be the great ocean.

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَن تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٦٧﴾

The man said, 'You will not be able to bear with me patiently [67] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 67)

In this verse, the upright slave dictates the conditions of this companionship and elucidates for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the nature of his knowledge and his path by informing him, 'Your path is not the same as my path, and my knowledge is from a source of intelligence that is more subtle than yours. You will notice ways of conduct on my part that you will not be able to endure because you possess no knowledge of their hidden secrets.' It is as if he is searching for excuses for Musa's (Moses's) inability to endure with him. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by At-Tabarani in (Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir) (10/223, Hadith 10388).*

وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِۦ خُبْرًا ﴿٦٨﴾

How could you be patient in matters beyond your know- ledge? [68] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 68)

What this means is that: do not be aggrieved that I said, ‘You will never be able to have patience with me since you have no experience of the manners of action that you will be exposed to. Likewise, how can you patiently endure something of which you have no knowledge of?'

Let us take into account that this conversation between Musa (Moses) and Al-Khidr(1) was characterised by the etiquette of discussion. Also, the difference of opinion between the two paths: the path of exoteric rulings and the path of that which is at variance with exoteric rulings. Yet, each of them accepts the opinion of the other and respects it, while not opposing it or disapproving of it. This is in contrast to the adherents of various schools of Islamic jurisprudence who rebuke one another, and even go so far as to declare each other disbelievers. Therefore, if they find, for example, a devoted slave of Allah’s slaves whom Allah *the Almighty* has selected for something of His Emanations, he leads a mystical order and has followers, we see those who censure him. The situation may reach the stage of vilification and defamation and even pronouncing the charge of infidelity.

The saying of Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* 'How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?’ (*al-Kahf:* 68) reveals one of the aspects of etiquette between teacher and student, inasmuch as he accords respect to his opinion and searches for an excuse for him if he opposes him. Thus, both of them have their own particular path and neither remonstrates on the basis of his path against the path of the other.

So, what did the student say after listening to these conditions?

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(1) *According to Mujahid [a great early scholar of the Quran], he was called Al-Khidr peace be upon him because when he prayed, everything around him became green (ikhdarra). Similarly At-Tirmidhi narrates a Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayra who says that the Prophet Muhammad of Allah the Almighty said: {He was called Al-Khidr peace be upon him because he sat on a white fur which suddenly quaked beneath him [becoming] green (khadra’)}. This was cited by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (5/4169).*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِيٓ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَآ أَعۡصِي لَكَ أَمۡرًا ﴿٦٩﴾

Moses said, ‘God willing, you will find me patient.
I will not disobey you in any way’ [69]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 69)

The meaning is the following, ‘I accept your conditions, O, teacher, so rest assured, for I will not argue with you and will not oppose you in anything.' He prefaces his statement with reference to the Divine Will by saying: ‘Allah willing,…' (*al-Kahf:* 69), in order to gain his favour and fill his heart with compassion towards him, Regarding, 'you will find me patient…’ (*al-Kahf:* 69); this means that whatever you do '… I will not disobey you in any way.’ (*al-Kahf:* 69)

In this manner, he establishes himself as the one to submit to orders and the teacher as the one to issue orders, for the learner is submissive to commands.

Allah says:

قَالَ فَإِنِ ٱتَّبَعۡتَنِي فَلَا تَسۡـَٔلۡنِي عَن شَيۡءٍ حَتَّىٰٓ أُحۡدِثَ لَكَ مِنۡهُ ذِكۡرًا ﴿٧٠﴾

The man said, ‘If you follow me then, do not
query anything I do before I mention it to you
myself’ [70] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 70)

This is a confirmation from Al-Khidr to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* and an enunciation of the protocol that he must adhere to in accompanying him, ‘If you follow me, then do not question me until I inform you.’ It is as if he is teaching him the etiquette of acquiring knowledge and being patient in receiving it, avoiding hastiness in wishing to understand every issue in and of itself.

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي ٱلسَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَاۖ قَالَ
أَخَرَقۡتَهَا لِتُغۡرِقَ أَهۡلَهَا لَقَدۡ جِئۡتَ شَيۡـًٔا إِمۡرٗا ﴿٧١﴾

They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, Moses said, 'How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!' [71] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 71)

The verse's opening verbal phrase in Arabic *fa-ntalqa* (the two went on their way) means they travelled together. This is what they did until they boarded a ship which was set up to transport passengers. The first thing Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* did was to set about making a hole in it and destroying it. At this point, Musa (Moses) could not bear this deed, and this matter grew intolerable in his soul. Thus, he could not endure it and said, 'How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!' (*al-Kahf:* 71)

It is an astonishingly strange or shockingly horrible thing. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* forgot what he had pledged himself to do in terms of obedience to the upright slave and not defying him, but he could not patiently endure what he saw of his actions.

It is as if the True Lord desires to teach us that hypothetical statements are one thing and actual deeds are another. Thus, you might hear beautiful speech from someone which appeals to you, but as soon as the time for work and implementation comes, you witness nothing. Generally, words are said in a manner of liberality, such as the person who tells you, 'You can depend on me in this matter. You have my full support.' However, as soon as you are in genuine need of him, you are like the one grasping water and find nothing forthcoming from him.

Let us take note here that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not content with questioning: '... How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!' (*al-Kahf:* 71) Rather, indeed, he transgressed to accusing him of committing a detestable and shockingly horrible deed, for the hypothetical saying of Musa (Moses) is one thing, and his witnessing the piercing of the ship and its destruction without apparent cause is quite another; Moses evoked a legal ruling concerning the destruction of someone else's property, not to mention the possible drowning of the ship's passengers. Thus, he saw the matter as grave and the harm done very great. This is because Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* takes from one store of intelligence and Al-Khidr takes from another store of intelligence.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

قَالَ أَلَمۡ أَقُلۡ إِنَّكَ لَن تَسۡتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبۡرٗا ﴿٧٢﴾

He replied, 'Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?' [72] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 72)

This is another lesson from Al-Khidr to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*, whereby he said, 'Surely, my statement to you was truthful. I warned you that you would not be able to endure what you witness of my actions. Yet, here you are raising objections against me, while we had agreed and made a pact that you would not question me about anything until I myself inform you of it.'

Subsequently, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

قَالَ لَا تُؤَاخِذۡنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تُرۡهِقۡنِي مِنۡ أَمۡرِي عُسۡرٗا ﴿٧٣﴾

Moses said, 'Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you' [73] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 73)

Musa (Moses) apologises to his teacher for what words escaped him and requests his indulgence and not to blame him. The statement: '…Do not make it too hard for me to follow you.' (*al-Kahf:* 73) means: 'Do not impose upon me in the matter of following you distress and hardship.' So, Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* pardoned him and the journey resumed.

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَٰمٗا فَقَتَلَهُۥ قَالَ أَقَتَلۡتَ نَفۡسٗا
زَكِيَّةَۢ بِغَيۡرِ نَفۡسٖ لَّقَدۡ جِئۡتَ شَيۡـٔٗا نُّكۡرٗا ﴿٧٤﴾

And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Moses said, 'How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!' [74] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 74)

You will notice that the first transgression on the part of Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* was against property which he destroyed, but in this instance the case increases to the gravity of killing a blameless person without just cause. Now for what offense was this youth killed who had not even reached the age of maturity? For this reason, Musa (Moses) said concerning the first act: '…What a strange thing to do!' (*al-Kahf:* 71), that is in order to say astonishingly strange. However, here he says: '… What a terrible thing to do!' (*al-Kahf:* 74), that is to say what was done was atrocious; this is because the crime is very grave.

The Arabic phrase *An-nafs Az-zakiya* 'innocent human being' means a person who is clean and pure, being untarnished by any sins or offenses against Divine commandments.

Similarly, the response of Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* contrasts with his first response. In the first instance he said, 'did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?' (*al-Kahf:* 72) which generally means, 'I spoke in general terms.' However, He *the Almighty* says:

قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُل لَّكَ إِنَّكَ لَن تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٧٥﴾

He replied, 'Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?' [75] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 75)

In this statement he emphasises what he said and stresses that it was to Musa (Moses) that he spoke, employing the Arabic prepositional phrase *la-ka*, meaning 'to you', or in other word, 'I told you in person.'

Subsequently, after the second time in which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* disagreed openly with his teacher Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* he makes another pledge for himself.

Allah says:

قَالَ إِن سَأَلْتُكَ عَن شَيْءٍ بَعْدَهَا فَلَا تُصَاحِبْنِي قَدْ بَلَغْتَ مِن لَّدُنِّي عُذْرًا ﴿٧٦﴾

Moses said, 'From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company – you have put up with enough from me' [76] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 76)

In this manner, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* barred the route for himself and gave himself a single chance after which separation between them would occur. Hence, it was said in a Hadith, 'May Allah have mercy on us, and on my brother Musa (Moses) whom if he had persevered patiently, we would have come to know a great deal.'[1] Now, here comes the third incident, and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* has no excuse after that.

Regarding the meaning of 'You have put up enough from me' (*al-Kahf:* 76) is ‘You have done everything one could possibly do for me, and henceforth I will have no excuse.’

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱنطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَتَيَآ أَهۡلَ قَرۡيَةٍ ٱسۡتَطۡعَمَآ أَهۡلَهَا فَأَبَوۡاْ أَن يُضَيِّفُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا
فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ أَن يَنقَضَّ فَأَقَامَهُۥۖ قَالَ لَوۡ شِئۡتَ لَتَّخَذۡتَ عَلَيۡهِ أَجۡرًا ﴿٧٧﴾

And so they travelled on. Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down and the man repaired it. Moses said, ‘But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that’ [77]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 77)

The Arabic word *istat’am* (asked for food) means to request nourishment. Asking for food is the truest kind of question since only a hungry and needy person asks for food. On the other hand, if one were to ask you for money, we could say that he is hoarding it. However, no one stands in the way of food, and withholding food from one who asks for it is a proof of stinginess and deeply rooted meanness in one’s character. This is what the inhabitants of this village did when the two of them passed through it and requested food, but they refused to feed them.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2380)* with the following wording: ‘May Allah’s mercy be upon us and upon Moses, if only he had not rushed to the opinion of astonishment, but [instead] he was overcome by censuring his companion.} Another differently worded Hadith, also found in Muslim, and in Ahmad (5/121) reads: ‘May Allah *the Almighty* have mercy on Moses, how I wish that he had been steadfast in patience so that he might have related to us [more] of the narrates of the two of them.'

The one who scrutinises this verse will notice the manner by which the Quran depicts the extent of these people's miserliness and stinginess, along with the depravity of their nature. For example, He does not say: 'but they refused to feed the two of them', instead He says: '…but were refused hospitality …' (*al-Kahf:* 77). There is a difference between providing food and providing hospitality. Refusing to feed means that they withheld food from them, but refusing to provide the two of them with any hospitality means everything that it is possible to offer a guest, even simply a shelter and a warm welcome. This is the ultimate thing that can be envisaged regarding the meanness of these people.

You will also note the repetition of the Arabic word *ahl*, rendered 'people' in the verse. Hence, when He says: '…when they came to a town…' (*al-Kahf:* 77), this would normally lead to the use of a personal pronoun referring to these people in the next phrase; thus one would say, 'They asked for food.' However, He says: '… and asked the inhabitants for food …' (*al-Kahf:* 77). Is this because when they entered the village, they encountered all of its inhabitants, or did they encounter only some of them who meet them as they entered?

Naturally, they encountered only some of them upon entering the village. However, the request for food was to all the people of the village, as if the two of them passed by every house in the village and asked all of its residents, one after the other without exception. Hence, it is as if they were all united in stinginess and meanness of character.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says: '… they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down, and the man repaired it.' (*al-Kahf:* 77) As soon as the two of them arrived, they found a wall that wanted to collapse. One knows that free will is only a characteristic of someone who thinks and has consciousness. So, if the verb occurs in relation to an unconscious or inanimate object, then it means to be 'on the brink of'. In other words, a wall that was about to collapse based on what we perceive in it of relevant signs, such as cracking and fissures, for example.

This understanding of the issue of the wall's wanting or willing accords with those of superficial thinking and narrow-mindedness. However, as for those of broad minds who use the intelligence to think and investigate, who are meticulous in their examination of issues, they have no objection to the notion that a wall could have a will. This is based on the concept that everything in the universe has a life which corresponds to it. It is the prerogative of Allah *the Exalted* to speak to it and for there to be a verbal exchange between the two of them. Did Allah *the Almighty* not say: 'and neither sky nor earth shed tears over them …' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29)?

So, if the sky can weep, then it has gone beyond mere discourse, and it has acquired perceptions and feelings. It possesses feelings and sentiments which may be far beyond the sentiments of men. Thus, His saying, '…and neither sky nor earth shed tears over them…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29), is evidence that it weeps over the loss of upright, pious persons.

Companion ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was once asked about this issue. He responded, ‘Yes, when a believer dies, two places weep over him: a place in the sky and a place on the earth. As for the place of weeping on the earth, it is the place where he prayed. As for the place of weeping in the sky, it is the place where his good deeds would ascend to.’(1) This is a proof of the harmonious relationship of a believer with the universe around him which prostrates to Allah *the Almighty* actively glorifies Him and is obedient to Him. Furthermore, it loves those who are piously obedient and finds the disobedient repulsive and detests and curses them. For this reason, the Arabs say, ‘The place found him repugnant, which means that it disliked him because he was not in harmony with it since the place was obedient and he was disobedient; likewise, the place exalted Allah *the Almighty* while he was heedless. Consequently, His saying concerning the wall in, '…was on the point of falling down...' (*al-Kahf:* 77), is a statement to be taken literally.

Henceforth, these created things have feelings, and they possess the ability to weep and to feel grief over the loss of those they love. In a relevant

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(1) *This was narrated by Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (4/142) and he attributes it to Ibn Abu Hatim from ‘Ali Allah be pleased with him with the following wording: ‘There is not a devoted slave except that he has his place of prayer (Musalla) on earth and a place to which his good deeds ascend in heaven. And surely the partisans of the Pharaoh did not have righteous deeds on earth, and no deeds ascending towards heaven ’ Then ‘Ali Allah be pleased with him recited: '... and neither sky nor earth shed tears over them ...' (ad-Dukhan: 29).*

Hadith, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Indeed, I am cognisant of a rock in Mecca that used to greet me before I was given my prophetic mission.’(1)

It is narrated in Prophet Muhammad’s biography that a stump of a palm tree against which he would lean during the Friday sermon yearned for him along with pebbles glorifying Allah actively in his hand. I do clarify it again that we should not say that the pebbles glorify Allah *the Exalted* in the hand of Prophet Muhammad because pebbles also glorified Allah in the hand of the leading disbeliever Abu Jahl; rather, we should say that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the praising glorification of the pebbles in his two hands.

There is nothing strange that the Quran should provide us with examples of the speaking on the part of such things, for scientists in our modern age are conducting research into the language of fish, birds and bats, from which they took the idea of radar. They have concluded that animals have presentiments of the occurrence of earthquakes, especially the donkey, which immediately flees the place before the earthquake occurs. Thus, they have means of perception and a language by which they comprehend one another and a means of articulation by which they express themselves.

Returning to the verse under study; Allah *the Almighty* says regarding what Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* did with the wall that was on the verge of collapsing: '…and the man repaired it ….' (*al-Kahf:* 77) He fixed and restored it. Then there comes the statement: 'Musa (Moses) said, ‘If you had wished, you could have taken payment for doing that.’ (*al-Kahf:* 77) This is the statement of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* influenced by what he perceived of the meanness of the village people and their miserliness. It was as if Musa (Moses) was saying, ‘We asked them for food, but they did not feed us. They did not even offer us a shelter. So, why should we undertake a job like this for them without compensation?’

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/89, 95) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (2277).*

This statement was made by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* because he was unaware of the wisdom behind this deed.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ هَٰذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنِكَ ۚ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَأْوِيلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِع عَّلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ٧٨

He said, 'This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently[78] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 78)

The verb 'replied' in this verse refers to Al-Khidr. The word 'this' signifies what you just did in saying, 'If you had wished, you could have taken payment for doing that.' (*al-Kahf:* 77) Now, it had previously happened that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had placed a condition upon himself that if he raised any objection against his teacher, this time it would be the end of journey for the two of them. It is as if Al-Khidr had not done anything on his part since it was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who had said: '… if I query anything you do, banish me from your company. …' (*al-Kahf:* 76); however, in this verse he is questioning him. Hence, there remains nothing but the parting of ways: 'He replied, "This is where you and I part company."' (*al-Kahf:* 78)

His saying, 'This is where you and I part company' (*al-Kahf:* 78) is to be considered a fundamental regulation from the True Lord *the Most High* and a proof that these two paths of knowledge and action do not meet which means that each one of them continues to have its own way: the seeker has his path and the non-seeker has his path, and neither of them should raise objections against the other. Rather, each should adhere to the well-bred approach within the bounds of what Allah *the Almighty* had taught him.

Then He *the Most High* says: 'I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently' (*al-Kahf:* 78). This means 'I will not leave you while these questions remain in your soul, so that you will have no ill-thoughts about me. I will inform you of the true reality of these acts to which you objected in order for you to know that Allah *the Almighty* did not deceive you, rather, indeed, He sent you to someone who could teach you something which you did not know.'

Then Al-Khidr began to reveal to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the wisdom of these actions, respectively. It is as if a companion of yours censured you for something, and you are keen to maintain his affection, so you tell him, ‘Give me a moment so that I might clarify for you what happened. I did such-and-such for such-and-such a reason.’ You do this to assuage his heart and to dispel any misgivings he may have about the matter.

It is said that this is part of the proper etiquette of comradeship, for it is not permissible that we part ways in disagreement. We should part ways in harmony and good will since separating in disagreement causes the breach to grow and invites the cutting of relations. Hence, before we go our separate ways, we should tell each other that the issue is such-and-such, and thus things are cleared up and souls become serene.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَمَّا ٱلسَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتۡ لِمَسَٰكِينَ يَعۡمَلُونَ فِي ٱلۡبَحۡرِ فَأَرَدتُّ أَنۡ أَعِيبَهَا
وَكَانَ وَرَآءَهُم مَّلِكٞ يَأۡخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصۡبٗا ﴿٧٩﴾

The boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force [79] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 79)

In the Arabic expression *li-masakin* (to some needy people), the initial preposition indicates possession, which is that the boat was owned by them. This verse has settled the dispute between scholars regarding the meaning of the Arabic word *Al-faqir* (impoverished person) and *Al-miskin* (a needy person); which of them is in greater want from the other? Based on this verse, *Al-miskin* (the needy one) is he who owns something which does not suffice him such as those who owned the boat in the story in hand; the Quran refers to them as *masakin*. As for *Al-faqir* (the poor), this is he who does not own anything.

Regarding the meaning of '…made their living from the sea…' (*al-Kahf:* 78), it signifies that the domain of their work was the sea. They laboured in it by transporting passengers or goods, or by fishing and the like.

Concerning His saying: '…and I damaged it…' (*al-Kahf:* 78), the speaker here is Al-Khidr *peace be upon him*. He attributes to himself the desire to render it defective and does not attribute it to Allah *the Almighty* deeming Him above that which is improper. However, regarding favourable things, he attributes the matter to Allah *the Exalted* and thus he said, '… and so your Lord willed it that when they come of age they should bring forth their treasure …' (*al-Kahf:* 82). For this reason, at the end of the narrative he ascribes everything he did to Allah *the Almighty* by saying: '… And I did not do [any of] this of my own accord …' (*al-Kahf:* 82).

Then He *the Almighty* says: '… because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force.' (*al-Kahf:* 78) In this statement, the Arabic word *kull* (every) traces an absolute enclosure, leaving nothing outside of it. It says that the king seizes every boat, whether it is damaged or undamaged. However, the true reality is that he only seizes sound boats to make use of them and has no need for a damaged, unsound one. It is as if the thread of the verse contains an assumed description, that is to say, he seizes every sound boat by force from its owner. The Arabic word *Al-ghasb*, used adverbially and translated here as 'by brute force', is that which is taken without right, with compulsion, force and confiscation. This takes on multiple forms, such as theft which is taking money or possessions from its guarded place, covertly, by breaking drawers or a cabinet. Seizure is taking someone else's money or property by force with the person witnessing it, in this situation resistance and conflict exist between the usurper and the one being usurped.

Another form of it is snatching which is taking another person's money or property just like that in public view, but in a wily manner. Someone snatches something and flees with it without you being able to catch him. Hence, snatching is done openly but without resistance. Another form is embezzlement whereby you take someone else's money or property, while you have his trust and confidence. It occurs clandestinely and is replete with a stratagem that conceals it.

Inasmuch as the issue here is one of forcible seizure, then the proprietor of the thing will inevitably resist, even if only partially, seeking to defend his right. It might thus turn out that the usurper leaves him his money or property. Hence the matter, then, involves dispute and confrontation.

Therefore, making a hole in the boat outwardly appears to be a criminal attack on valuable property, and this is legally forbidden, but if this violation were the cause of saving the entire boat from seizure, then this is all right. A damaged boat is better than no boat. If Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had been cognisant of this wisdom, he himself would have hastened to make a hole in it.

As long as the circumstances are like this, then we are obligated to transform the boat into a defective one and to ruin it by making a hole in it or by removing a board from it in order to cause the usurping king to avoid seizing it.

The Arabic adverbial phrase *wara'a-hum* (behind them) imparts the meaning of in front of them because this tyrant was lying in wait for boats which passed by him. So, whatever sound boat he found, he would seize it. Thus, in reality, he was in front of them. Within the scope of His saying, 'with hell awaiting him (*min wara'i-hi*), and he shall be made to drink of the water of most bitter distress' (*Ibrahim:* 16), is hell behind him or in front of him?

The Arabic word *wara'a* is also employed with the meaning of *ba'd* (after), as is the case in His saying: '… whereupon We gave her the glad tiding of [the birth of] Ishaq (Isaac) and after Ishaq (Isaac), of [his son] Yaqub (Jacob).' (*Hud:* 71)

The Arabic word *wara'* also occurs with connotation of 'other than', as in Allah's saying about the qualities of believers: 'and who are mindful of their chastity, [not giving way to their desires] with any but their spouses – that is, those whom they rightfully possess [through wedlock], for then, behold, they are free of all blame, whereas such as seek to go beyond that [limit] are truly transgressors.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 5-7)

Similarly, in His saying, 'Forbidden to you are your mothers… But lawful to you are all [women] beyond these…' (*an-Nisa':* 23-24), this word in question, *wara'*, may be employed to give the meaning of behind; Allah says: 'And Lo, Allah accepted a solemn pledge from those who were granted earlier revelation [when He bade them]: 'Make it known to mankind, and do not conceal it!' But they cast this [pledge] behind their backs…' (*Al-'Imran:* 187). Thus, the Arabic word *wara'* occurs in the Quran with four meanings, namely in front of, behind, after and other than (or beyond). This is amongst the qualities which distinguish Arabic from other languages and which also distinct the Arab aptitude, which is capable of discerning the appropriate meaning for the context, from all other languages. In the same connection, the word *Al-a'yn*, for example, may give the following meanings: the seeing eye, a wellspring of water, gold and silver, spy, etc. It is the context which determines the intended meaning.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلْغُلَٰمُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَآ أَن يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَٰنًا وَكُفْرًا ﴿٨٠﴾

The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief [80] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 80)

In this verse, the Arabic word *Al-ghulam* (young man) refers to the boy who has not yet attained puberty or the age of legal obligation. Inasmuch as he is too young to be bound by the rulings of religion, he is still in the age of purity and innocence from sinful offenses. For this reason, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* opposed his killing and said: '… How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! …' (*al-Kahf:* 74) which means the lad was pure and blameless. These is no doubt that the death of a youth at this age is better for him and in his interest than waiting till he is polluted with sinful offenses, for he at this particular age will not be held accountable for his deeds. Therefore, his purity and blamelessness is that which summoned us to hasten taking his life. This all concerns the boy, but what about his father and mother?

In this regard, He *the Most High* says: 'The young boy had parents who were people of faith…' (*al-Kahf:* 80). How often are children a source of tribulation for parents, especially in the light of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'O, you who have attained to faith! Behold, some of your spouses and your children are enemies unto you, so beware of them …' (*at-Taghabun:* 14)?(1)

The tribulation through offspring stems from the aspirations of the parents for them and their endeavour to improve their situation. It might be that the material means are insufficient, thereby pushing the father to the unlawful for the sake of his children. In the case of the boy in question, Allah *the Exalted* was fully aware that he would be source of tribulation and temptation for his parents. As they were true believers, He *the Almighty* did not want tribulation to afflict them, which is why He determined that He would bring them back to Him in a state of faith.

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(1) Regarding wives and children being enemies, Ibn Kathir says in his *(Tafsir)* (4/376): 'This means that that they distract one from pious deeds.'

It is as though the decision of Allah *the Almighty* was for the good of the boy and the good of the parents, as a boom granted to both parties. A profound wisdom lies concealed behind the outwardly apparent event against which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was so opposed.

Therefore, when a child or small boy close to us dies, it is viewed as ignorance that we should be excessively grief-stricken over him, lamenting his childhood which has been lost and his youth which he never enjoyed. We are not aware of the pleasure that has been prepared for him. We are unaware that whichever of our children are taken before maturity, his residence in paradise is not circumscribed because all of it belongs to him: he can run in it as he desires, sit in it wherever he likes, sit in the company of the Prophets and in the company of the companions, with no one barring him. Therefore, they are called ‘the free-roaming entrants of paradise'.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief,' (*al-Kahf:* 80). The Arabic word *khashayna* means (we were afraid). When a son is born, he is considered the apple of our eye since he will support his parents. However, this son may also be the reason for the ruin of his father’s religion, pushing him to telling lying, accepting bribery and stealing. Hence, this son leads his father to hellfire, and it is better that Allah *the Almighty* removes him from the path of the father, so that the latter will not be oppressed; Allah then says:

فَأَرَدْنَآ أَن يُبْدِلَهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُ زَكَوٰةً وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا ٨١

We wished that their Lord should give them another child
– purer and more com- passionate – in his place [81]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 81)

Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* does not miss the opportunity of ascribing good to Allah *the Almighty* thus, he says, 'I love this deed and desire it, yet the One

Who replaces the bad son with the good son, in reality, is Allah *the Almighty*: 'We wished that their Lord should give them another child, purer… in his place.' (*al-Kahf:* 81) Hence, this good is from Allah *the Almighty* and I am but an agent for realising it.'

Regarding His saying: '… another child, purer and more compassionate, in his place' (*al-Kahf:* 81), the Arabic word *dhakatan* is used adverbially; it gives the meaning of greater purity and chastity. There follows the saying of Allah: 'purer and more compassionate …' (*al-Kahf:* 81); that is, they desired a son to be of benefit for the two of them in this world and to be a delight for them. However, inasmuch as this world is transient, without eternal existence and out of the fact that He *the Almighty* was fully Aware of the point that this first son would be a source of tribulation and temptation for his parents, draw them into acts of sinful disobedience and misdeeds, and would cause them to be afflicted with punishment, it was the Divine Mercy that decreed to take him from this life rather than letting them enjoy him in this transient world, and then suffer with him in the eternal Hereafter.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلۡجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَٰمَيۡنِ يَتِيمَيۡنِ فِي ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحۡتَهُۥ كَنزٞ لَّهُمَا وَكَانَ
أَبُوهُمَا صَٰلِحٗا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَن يَبۡلُغَآ أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسۡتَخۡرِجَا كَنزَهُمَا رَحۡمَةٗ مِّن
رَّبِّكَۚ وَمَا فَعَلۡتُهُۥ عَنۡ أَمۡرِيۚ ذَٰلِكَ تَأۡوِيلُ مَا لَمۡ تَسۡطِع عَّلَيۡهِ صَبۡرٗا ﴿٨٢﴾

The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience' [82]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 82)

Regarding the wall belonging to two boys, it signifies that they had not yet reached the age of maturity, and moreover, they were two orphans. Beneath this tottering wall was a treasure for these two boys who were then not capable of managing it. Now, just imagine what would happen if the wall collapsed and this treasure was discovered, with its gold glittering before the eyes of this people whose qualities we know. Having just refused to give food or merely a place to shelter for Musa (Moses) and Al-Khidr, the least they could be described as is that they were vile and not to be entrusted with anything. As we have become accustomed to saying about extreme loss: ‘The loss of orphans is on the table of the depraved.’

Thus, there is no doubt that what Al-Khidr did, regarding building the wall and erecting it or restoring it is to be viewed as a kind of slap in the face to these vile ones, corresponding to the ungracious way they dealt with them. They were repaid two-fold when Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* deprived them of this treasure.

So, the motive for repairing the wall stems from what was beneath it of wealth, which had to be preserved until these two boys grew older. It is as if the True Lord *the Most High* had sent him to these two boys at this precise time when the wall was beginning to decay (the signs of its collapse were evident) in order to set about repairing it before it fell and the matter of the treasure was revealed while its two owners were still in a state of weakness and inability to protect it.

Then Al-Khidr repaired the wall and restored it to its previous state, a restoration of one whom Allah *the Almighty* had given instruction from above. It is said that he built it in a temporary fashion corresponding to the age of the two boys; in other words, he built it for a prescribed period which would end with the two boys reaching maturity and having the capacity to protect it, and then it would collapse. Now, this is quite a precise procedure which no one could gauge except one who had been given special knowledge from Allah *the Almighty*.

Based on this verse under study, it appears that the two boys were twins of the same age, a point which is proved by the saying of Allah: '… so your Lord intended them to reach maturity …' (*al-Kahf:* 82). The Arabic word *Al-ashudd* (of age) means attaining strength or power by which the bodily organs and limbs become fully developed and mature. Now, the apparatus of the body become fully developed when a person becomes capable of siring offspring.

You will note here that the True Lord *the Almighty* says, '…reach maturity…' (*al-Kahf:* 82), or more literally 'attain to full strength', rather than saying they attain to mature discernment and conduct. This is because there is a difference between *Ar-rushd* and *Al-ashudd*. The former means correct conduct in affairs, whereas the latter means strength or power. Here, the two boys are in need of strength, which will protect their treasure from these depraved ones, and hence, the expression '*ashudda-huma'* is appropriate in this context.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… and then dig up their treasure as a Mercy from your Lord …' (*al-Kahf:* 82); they should recover it with what they possess of strength and virility. Regarding the Arabic word *Ar-rahma* (grace), it is a quality granted to one in order to protect him from malady. In this sense, it is clear in His saying:

'Thus, step-by-step, We bestow from above through this Quran all that gives health [to the spirit] and is a grace to those who believe [in Us]…' (*al-Isra':* 82). In the same verse, the Arabic word *shifa* (health to the spirit) means to treat a disease that is present and to cure it; the word *rahma* refers to that which prevents the return of the malady another time.

Likewise, as concerns what happened to the two boys, it was a Grace from Allah *the Exalted* to protect their wealth and to preserve their due rights. Then, Al-Khidr does not neglect to ascribe the favour to its proper owner, to abolish from his own soul delusion arising from knowledge and assuming superiority over his companion; he says: '…I did not do [these things] of my own accord.…' (*al-Kahf:* 82) That is to say, he admitted that what has been occurred was by order of Allah *the Almighty* and what I taught you was from revealed to me from on high since I have no superiority over you. This is a lesson in the good manners of humility and acknowledging the source of favour.

Then, Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* says: '… These are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.' (*al-Kahf:* 82). In this passage, the Arabic word *ta'wil* (real meaning) means to trace back a matter to its true significance and explaining whatever was obscure in it.

Following this, the verses move to another question from amongst the three questions which the disbelievers of Mecca, at the advice of the Jews, asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about. It is the question about the wandering man who roamed the lands; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَن ذِى ٱلْقَرْنَيْنِ ۖ قُلْ سَأَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْكُم مِّنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٨٣﴾

[Prophet], they ask you about Dhu Al-Qarnayn. Say, 'I will tell you something about him [83] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 83)

This verse contains reference to Dhu Al-Qarnayn (the two-horned man); this was actually his nickname. This is perhaps because he was two-horned in his physical make up, or he wore a crown which had two orientations, or because he reached the two rising and setting places of the sun in the east and the west.

Scholars have different views concerning Dhu Al-Qarnayn; amongst them are those who say: 'He is Alexander, the Great of Macedonia, who roamed the lands.' However, Alexander, the Great, was in Macedonia in the west, whilst Dhu Al-Qarnayn means that the man penetrated the east and the west. This is what prompted a meticulous scholar of India, Abu Al-Kalam Azad, the Indian Minister of Education, to say that he is not Alexander the Great, rather, he is Cyrus the Great, and that this was his voyage into the east and the west and between the two dams. Moreover, Alexander was a pagan idol worshipper, and a student of Aristotle, whereas Dhu Al-Qarnayn was a believing man as we shall come to know from his story.

In general, the interest of a story does not consist in identifying the personage himself because the personification of the events of the story weaken its impact, constraining it with the precision of a personal identification which does not go beyond anyone else, which is why some claim that a specific personal issue does not repeat itself.

Therefore, even if scholarship came up with his positive identification, we would say, 'This occurrence or this deed is particular to this person.' However, the True Lord *the Most High* desires to propound for us a parable, applicable to any person, and what would be his conduct and his action if Allah *the Almighty* enabled him and granted him power and authority.

If the Quran had defined this personage as Alexander or Cyrus or even someone else, it is an individual occurrence which does not go beyond this person, thereby deflecting the soul from taking him as a model. The story then loses its moral significance and its effective impact. If there were a benefit in identifying him, Allah *the Exalted* would have identified him for us.

We have previously made it clear that when the True Lord propounded a parable of those who disbelieved, He says, '… Nuh's (Noah's) wife and Lut's (Lot's) wife …' (*at-Tahrim:* 10), which means that He did not identify them with their given names. This is because the objective in propounding the parable here is to tell Prophet Muhammad that even prophets may be unable to guide people who are closest to them. This is due to faith being a personal affair, and no one has authority in it over anyone else.

Similarly, when Allah *the Almighty* propounds a parable for those who believed, He says: '…Pharaoh's wife…' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). This is Pharaoh who misguided people and claimed divinity, yet his wife was a believer. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is telling all people that embracing a particular religion is a personal viewpoint which is not influenced by anyone, whoever it might be, neither by the guidance of a prophet nor the sinful seduction of the most misguided of those gone astray who also claim divinity.

In this manner, Islam preserves for woman her role and her power, along with respecting her opinion.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* relates this story without specific personification in order that it might serve as a pattern and a model which can be followed by everyone. Otherwise, if the story had been made to revolve around a specific person, it would have been bound to this personage alone. However, when Allah *the Exalted* speaks of Maryam (Mary), we find Him specifying her by name, even the name of her father. This is because the circumstances that surrounded Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* was a matter which was particular to her, it will never occur again amongst the daughters of Adam; therefore, He specifies and designates her identity since personification is necessary in such instances.

However, when He leaves a parable or story without specification, then it is suitable for repeating itself in any time and at any place, as we have seen with the story of the People of the Cave. Why else would Allah *the Almighty* make vague the names, the place, the time and the number of people involved except in order that they might serve as an example and a model to believing youths in any time, at any place or for any given number.

Concerning His saying, '[O, Prophet], they ask you about Dhu Al-Qarnayn…' (*al-Kahf:* 83), we should note that the topic of questions asked for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Quran comprises a significant extent in it. People asked him sixteen times, as recorded in the Quran. One of these questions is in the past tense; Allah says: 'And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near …' (*al-Baqara:* 166). They occur fifteen times in the imperfect tense as in His saying: 'They will ask you about the new moons …' (*al-Baqara:* 215).

Also in His following sayings: 'They will ask you as to what they should spend on others. Say: "Whatever of your wealth you spend shall [first] be for your parents…."' (*al-Baqara:* 215) 'They will ask you about fighting in the sacred month.…' (*al-Baqara:* 217) 'They will ask you about intoxicants and games of chance …' (*al-Baqara:* 219), '… And they will ask you as to what they should spend [in Allah's cause]. Say: "Whatever you can spare…"' (*al-Baqara:* 219), '… And they will ask you about [how to deal with] orphans. Say: "To improve their condition is best."…' (*al-Baqara:* 220), 'And they will ask you about [woman's] monthly courses …' (*al-Baqara:* 222) 'They will ask you as to what is lawful to them ….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 4) 'They will ask you [O, Prophet] about the Last Hour ….' (*al-A'raf:* 187) In this chapter, it occurs three times and also in 'they will ask you [O, Prophet] about the Last Hours: "When will it come to pass?"' (*an-Nazi'at:* 42) 'They will ask you about the spoils of war …' (*al-Anfal:* 1), 'And they will ask you about [the nature of] Divine inspiration …' (*al-Isra':* 85), 'And they will ask you about the Two-Horned One. …' (*al-Kahf:* 83) 'And they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains [when this world comes to an end]. Say, then: "My Lord will scatter them far and wide."' (*Ta Ha:* 105)

These are fifteen questions in the imperfect tense, though responses to them are varied and all of them issue forth from Allah, the All-Wise. Therefore, it is necessary that the variance of response to each question has something to which to pay attention. Amongst these questions are those which were asked by adversaries and believers. Concerning the questions asked by the believers, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade them to ask until they were calm, even if their questions were regarding the pre-Islamic age and they wish to become aware of the opinion of Islam with regard to them. Thus, it is as if they forgot the customs and norms of the pre-Islamic period and were desirous that all of their affairs be legally regulated in accordance with Islam.

In scrutinising responses to these questions, you will find one which comes as a direct answer without the imperative verb ‘say’ (addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*); this is clear in His saying: 'And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near …' (*al-Baqara:* 186). You will also find one in which the imperative verb ‘say’ is conjoined to the conjunctive particle *fa* such as His saying: 'And they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains [when this world comes to an end]. Say, then: "My Lord will scatter them far and wide."’ (*Ta Ha:* 105)

The rest of the questions all occur with the response beginning with the imperative verb ‘say’. So, what is the wisdom in conjoining the verb with the conjunctive particle *fa* in this verse as contrasted with all the others? It has been said that when Allah *the Almighty* uses ‘say’ in a response, then this tells that this is an answer to a question that Prophet Muhammad was actually asked; the meaning is they really asked it. As for the conjunctive particle *fa*, it occurs in response to a question that he has not been asked, but that he will be asked in the future. Hence, regarding His saying 'And they will ask you about [what will happen to] the mountains [when this world comes to an end] …’ (*Ta Ha:* 105), the question has not yet been posed. So, the meaning is the following: ‘If they ask you, then say’, as if it were a provisional measure for a response to a question which will be asked in the future.

Now, if you asked, ‘Then what is the wisdom in the manner of response to His saying, 'And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near …' (*al-Baqara:* 186), which is void of both ‘say’ and ‘then, say’, in spite of the conjunctive particle ‘if’, which requires the *fa* in its response clause?’

We would respond, ‘Because the question here is about Allah *the Almighty* and He wishes to respond to them concerning it by eliminating the mediation of anyone. Therefore, the response comes directly without any mediator:

"And if My servants ask you about Me – behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls …" (*al-Baqara:* 186).'

Returning to the verse under study, Allah says: '[O, Prophet], they ask you about Dhu Al-Qarnayn...' (*al-Kahf:* 83); the verse refers to his history and reports concerning him and the mission that he undertook. Allah *Glorified is He* also says '…Say, "I will tell you something about him."' (*al-Kahf:* 83) What honour could be greater than this honour?! Behold, the True Lord *the Most High* takes upon Himself the history of this man and narrates it in His Noble Quran which will be recited and used in worship until the Day of Resurrection. What this means is that the example of this man will remain as long as the Quran remains, eternal along with its eternity. His influence in what he did will remain a model, and he is an example to those who do what he did. If this signifies anything, it signifies that good deeds are remembered with Allah *the Almighty* before they are mentioned amongst mankind.

Hence, what remembrance is more lasting than mentioning the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn by Allah *the Exalted*? The Arabic prepositional word *min-hu* (something by which) means some of his account and history, not all of it.

The Arabic word *dhikr* (remembrance) occurs with multiple meanings in the Noble Quran, all of which meet in honour and high standing, remembrance and esteem. As soon as the word is uttered, the immediate impulse is to think of the Quran, as we find in His saying: 'Behold, it is We Ourselves Who have bestowed from above, step-by-step, this reminder, and, behold, it is We Who shall truly guard it [from all corruption].' (*al-Hijr:* 9) After this, it is used to refer to any scripture which Allah *the Almighty* has previously revealed; Allah says: 'And [even] before your time, [O, Muhammad,] We never sent [as Our prophets] any but [mortal] men, whom We inspired, and if you have not [yet] realised this, ask the followers of [earlier] revelation.' (*an-Nahl:* 43)

The word *Adh-dhikr* may also be used to express what pertains to this of renown, honour, high-standing and immortalisation of a name, as is clear in His saying: '[O, men!] We have now bestowed upon you from above a Divine revelation in which is your eternal honour…' (*al-Anbiya':* 10). Likewise is His saying: 'and verily, this [revelation] shall indeed become [a source of] eminence for you and your people …' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44).

That is to say, good reputation, honour, and high standing are fulfilled inasmuch as the Quran mentions this name. Since when a name is mentioned in the Quran, its renown is disseminated and reverberates unto the horizons.

We have said in regard to the story(1) of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* that he became a slave after he was kidnapped from his people and sold in Mecca to Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* then, she gave him as a gift to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* for this reason they called him Zayd, son of Muhammad. Then when his family learned of his existence in Mecca, his father and paternal uncle came, and they spoke to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning returning him to his family. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Give him the choice.' When they gave Zayd the choice, he said, ‘I would never choose anyone over the Messenger of Allah.' Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* honoured him and called him Zayd*,* son of Muhammad. When Allah *the Almighty* wished to abolish formal adoption, He *the Almighty* said: '[And know, O, believers, that] Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is Allah’s prophet and the Seal of all prophets …' [*al-Ahzab:* 40], and He said: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers’ names. This is more equitable in the sight of Allah …' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). So, do not say, ‘Zayd*,* son of Muhammad’, rather, say, ‘Zayd ibn Haritha’. It was then that Zayd was saddened at this change, feeling that he had thereby lost the great honour of being ascribed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, the True Lord *the Most High* mends the sentiment of Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* renders his name a distinguishing mark which rings out in the Quran, being recited and used in worship until the Day of Resurrection. Zayd is the sole companion who is mentioned by name in the Book of Allah *the Almighty* in His saying: ‘[But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union with her, We gave her to you in marriage …' (*al-Ahzab:* 37).

Thus, what is higher and greater than this honour?! Let us carefully examine this verse: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers’ names. This is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5).

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(1) The story of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him*

Allah *the Almighty* did not accuse His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of lying as He says: '…This is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). Thus, what Prophet Muhammad did was also equitable and just, but that which Allah commanded was more equitable and more just.

Hence, then, the mention of Dhu Al-Qarnayn in the Book of Allah is a great honour and in it is an indication that the one who does good has his place of distinction and station with Him, along with being rewarded in that his memory is immortalised and his reputation will endure amongst people in this world.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا مَكَّنَّا لَهُۥ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ مِن كُلِّ شَىْءٍ سَبَبًا ﴿٨٤﴾

We established his power in the land, and gave him the means to achieve everything [84] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 84)

The Arabic word *At-tamkin* (established him securely), used as a verb, means that he is given the means by which he would be able to undertake all of the affairs he desires. This is because he is trustworthy in unhindered management of affairs based on the well-ordered Path of Allah *the Almighty*. Similarly, in another verse concerning Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And thus We established Yusuf (Joseph) securely in the land [of Egypt]. He had full mastery over it, [doing] whatever he willed …' (*Yusuf:* 56). Thus, it means granting him the means to achieve any objective he wishes, and thereby, he manages affairs. However, why did We establish him with such security? We established him securely because he is trustworthy in freehanded management of affairs in accord with the well-ordered Path of Allah *the Almighty*.

Regarding His saying, '… and gave him the means to achieve everything' (*al-Kahf:* 84), it means that Allah granted him the causal forces by which he could attain to what he wanted. There is nothing that he wants except that Allah *the Exalted* provided him with the means of attaining it.

So, what did he do?

فَأَتۡبَعَ سَبَبًا ﴿٨٥﴾

He travelled on a certain road [85]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 85)

The Arabic phrase *atba'a sababa* (he chose the right means) signifies that he did not set out for an end except by the means which Allah had granted him. The True Lord had certainly established Dhu Al-Qarnayn with full mastery on the earth and gave him the means for accomplishing anything. Yet, he did not rely on that which he was given, but he did not desist from action and was not indolent. Instead he took from Allah's Gifts to him something of every means.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَغۡرِبَ ٱلشَّمۡسِ وَجَدَهَا تَغۡرُبُ فِي عَيۡنٍ حَمِئَةٖ وَوَجَدَ عِندَهَا
قَوۡمٗاۗ قُلۡنَا يَٰذَا ٱلۡقَرۡنَيۡنِ إِمَّآ أَن تُعَذِّبَ وَإِمَّآ أَن تَتَّخِذَ فِيهِمۡ حُسۡنٗا ﴿٨٦﴾

Then, when he came to the setting of the sun, he found it [seemed to be] setting into a muddy spring. Nearby he found some people and We said, 'Dhu Al-Qarnayn, you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to' [86]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 86)

His reaching to the setting place of the sun is proof that he was not initially in this place; rather, he came to it from the east. As regards the Arabic expression *maghrib ash-shams* (the setting of the sun), does the sun actually set and go away *taghrub*? It sets and goes away in the eye of the beholder in one place, for if you watch the sun at the moment of setting, you will find that it sets, for example, into an island. However, if you go to the island, you will find it setting in another place and so forth. Hence, its setting has the meaning of its vanishing from your own sight. Since the sun never disappears, it is ceaselessly rising and setting; the meaning thus is when it sets on a people, it rises on others. For this reason, there are multiple easts and wests.

It is this which has given us the perpetuity of the Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* and its endless cycle on tongues at all times, for when we are praying the *Adh-dhuhr* (midday prayer), for example, others are praying

Al-‘asr (the mid-afternoon prayer), yet others are praying *Al-maghrib* (the sundown prayer) and *Al-fajr*. In this manner, Allah *the Exalted* is mentioned at all times by means of every prayer time. Hence, the followers of mystical knowledge say, ‘O duration! In you is all of time.’

Then He *the Almighty* says: '…he found it [seemed to be] setting into a muddy spring…’ (*al-Kahf:* 86); this refers to a wellspring in which there was water. We have previously said that the Arabic expression *Al-hama’ Al-masnun*, the first term of which is used in a slightly different form in the statement, is mud which has turned black from prolonged existence in water. In investigating this matter, the great scholar of India Abd Kalam Azad(1), in agreement with the honourable late Sheikh ‘Abd Al-Jalil I‘sa, said that it was a place called Azmir.

Regarding His saying, '… and nearby he found a people…' (*al-Kahf:* 86), this means that it was close to this wellspring. The verse continues: '… and We said, "Dhu Al-Qarnayn, you may choose [which of them] to punish or show kindness to."’ (*al-Kahf:* 86) Hence, this is delegation of full authority to him for Allah *the Almighty* and none are delegated with full authority except the one who is trustworthy in managing affairs. With reference to '… you may choose [which of them] to punish them …' (*al-Kahf:* 86), it is evident that they were disbelievers or idolaters, not believing in Allah *the Exalted*. So, you can either punish them for their disbelief or deal with them in a kind manner.

However, what aspect of kindness or goodness did Allah *the Almighty* intend him to apply? In this verse, He means that they might be amongst the people of heedlessness whom the Message of faith had not reached, so show them the right way and direct them to the Religion of Allah *the Almighty*. Then, whoever of them believes treat him with kindness, and whoever insists on clinging to his disbelief punish him. Thus, you must first engage them with a gracious admonition and a clear enunciation, and then afterwards you can judge them based upon their conduct.

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(1) Abu Kalam Azad: He is Ahmad ibn Khayr Ad-Din, of Indian fatherhood and Arab motherhood and culture, who was born in Mecca (1302 AH); his ancestors come from Delhi. He studied under the scholars of Al-Azhar and became a commentator of the Quran and one of the great orators of the Muslims of India and one of their leaders during their independence movement. He served Minister of Education in India until he died of a stroke in 1377 AH (from Al-*A‘lam* of az-Zirikli).

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

قَالَ أَمَّا مَن ظَلَمَ فَسَوْفَ نُعَذِّبُهُۥ ثُمَّ يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِۦ فَيُعَذِّبُهُۥ عَذَابًا نُّكْرًا ﴿٨٧﴾

He answered, 'We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their Lord He will punish them [even more] severely[87] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 87)

His statement, '…We shall punish …' (*al-Kahf:* 87) gives us an indication of the respite these people will be granted, a grace period which will permit him to admonish them, remind them and teach them the requirements of the religion of Allah *the Almighty*.

We have previously said that there are different kinds of iniquity, the most horrendous and highest form of which is ascribing partners or associates to Allah *the Almighty*. He says: '… for, behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong.' (*Luqman:* 13) Then He *the Almighty* says: '… and when they return to their Lord, He will punish them [even more] severely.' (*al-Kahf:* 87) Hence, we will not punish him to the extent of what he did; rather, we shall only chastise him with temporal punishment. This is because temporal punishments were legislated to preserve the balance of society and to restrain those who will not be restrained by admonishment. Otherwise, what is the benefit of admonishing non-Muslims? This is why we see people who believe neither in Allah *the Almighty* nor in the Resurrection and the Hereafter legislate these temporal punishments in order to maintain the probity of their condition.

After the chastisement of this world and its punishment, there is a more severe punishment in the Hereafter: '…punish them [even more] severely,' (*al-Kahf:* 87). The severe punishment refers to something we are not cognisant of, something we have no experience of or familiarity with. When we are caused suffering in this world, we are chastised according to our primal nature and according to our strength. However, Allah's punishment in the Hereafter is something which we do not know, and it is beyond our powers of perception and capacities.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلَهُۥ جَزَآءً ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ۖ وَسَنَقُولُ لَهُۥ مِنْ أَمْرِنَا يُسْرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

While those who believed and did good deeds will have
the best of rewards: we shall command them to do what
is easy for them [88] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 88)

Concerning His saying, '… will have the best of rewards…' (*al-Kahf:* 88), it means we will grant him excellent recompense. This is followed by: '… We shall command them to do what is easy for them.' (*al-Kahf:* 88) which means that we will speak pleasant words to him, which will encourage and incite him, and if we charge him with obligations, we will charge him with easy things that are not burdensome.

This verse establishes for us the basis for the procedure of compensation which itself is the source of equity of society and the cause of its advancement. For the society without means of requital which rewards the diligent and punishes the slacker is a society which ends up in chaos and a state of negligence. Since if people feel safe from reaping the consequences of their actions, they become lazy, and it is possible that what Egypt suffers from today is a result of poor management traced back to those people in society who are above the law, whom we cannot punish, and thus the others become negligent.

Likewise one notices that those who gain good salaries and receive bonuses do not work and that he who gains them is the one who curries favour, ingratiates himself, flatters others and dissimulates his motives. These have their crooked ways in which they excel, but as for the one who is diligent and works with sincerity, his strength is consumed and he is preoccupied with performing his job well and with mastery. He has not time for such devious courses, for he seeks to please with his work and his excellent performance. Now this is the one who deserves honour and deserves bonus pay. You should imagine the extent of corruption and negligence which is caused by this inverted and crooked state of affairs.

Hence, then, the equity of society and the basis for its advancement is the following: '… He answered, "We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they return to their Lord, He will punish them [even more] severely. While those who believed and did good deeds will have the best of rewards.

We shall command them to do what is easy for them."' (*al-Kahf:* 87-88). So, how beautiful it would be if we earmarked encouragement bonuses and prizes, along with holding ceremonies of honour for the distinguished and exemplary on the condition that the criteria of selection are based on due right and equity.

The Arabic word *Al-husna* (goodly) signifies the superlative degree of *Al-hasan* (perfection), and it is feminine. Thus, if we grant him such good reaction, then it is good and excellent with all the more reason. Relevant to this is His saying: 'For those who persevere in doing good there is the ultimate good in store, and more [than that] …' (*Yunus:* 26).

Allah says:

ثُمَّ أَتْبَعَ سَبَبًا ٨٩

He travelled on [89]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 89)

That is to say, he went on to another place.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَطْلِعَ ٱلشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَطْلُعُ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ لَّمْ نَجْعَل لَّهُم مِّن دُونِهَا سِتْرًا ٩٠

Then, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found
it rising on a people for whom We had provided no
shelter from it [90] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 90)

Concerning His saying, '… to the rising of the sun …' (*al-Kahf:* 90), the same applies to what we said about its setting. This is due to its ceaselessly rising as it does not rise from a single place. Rather, each of us has a place at which it rises, and each of us has a place where it sets according to the expanse of the horizon.

Then He *the Almighty* says: '… he found that it was rising on a people for whom We had provided no coverings against it' (*al-Kahf:* 90). The Arabic word *As-satr*, translated as coverings in this verse, is a barrier between two things; it is either to mollify heat or to mollify cold. Thus, Dhu Al-Qarnayn had gone to a nomadic people who live as wanderers like some tribes in the middle of Africa, for example, or else they have nothing to shield them from the sun such as dwellings in which they live, or trees beneath which they might seek shade. We call people such as these ‘sun-struck ones’ since they do not possess that which shelters them from the heat of summer or the cold of winter, and they are a backward people, primitive and uncivilised. Allah *the Exalted* provides such people something in their skin which compensates them for these things which they lack. Hence you observe in their skin that which furnishes them with warmth in winter and coolness in summer. This we find even in normal environments, regarding a human being’s face which is exposed to heat and cold along with alterations of weather. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* fashioned it with a particular nature that can withstand these variations in contrast to the rest of the body covered with clothing, for if a part of it is uncovered, it will be intensely sensitive to heat or cold. Likewise, amongst animals are those which Allah *the Almighty* has granted special traits in their skin, allowing them to live at the frozen arctic pole without being affected by its cold.

Now, these primitive peoples live like that, adapting to their environment, the issue of clothing does not preoccupy them. They do not think of them, even when civilised people come to them and they see clothing and how it constitutes embellishment and covering for their private parts; therefore, make us of it.

Let us observe here that the Quran does not tell us anything about these people and what Dhu Al-Qarnayn did with them. If it had made an analogy of the situation with the previous people whom he encountered at the setting of the sun, we might have said that perhaps he civilised them and provided them with the means of progress.

Some commentators of the Quran believe that Dhu Al-Qarnayn went to a place where the day was three months long, or six months long. His arrival coincided with the presence of the sun, so he did not witness its setting in that location during the duration of his stay there, and did not see any cover against it which might shield them from it. Hence, it seems that he might have gone to the extreme north.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَذَٰلِكَ وَقَدۡ أَحَطۡنَا بِمَا لَدَيۡهِ خُبۡرٗا ﴿٩١﴾

And so it was: We knew all about him [91]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 91)

The Arabic word *kadhalik* (thus) means in this way did he travel, just as he went to the west, he went to the east. He *the Almighty* then says:

ثُمَّ أَتۡبَعَ سَبَبًا ﴿٩٢﴾

He travelled on [92] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 92)

That is, he went to another place. Allah then says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيۡنَ ٱلسَّدَّيۡنِ وَجَدَ مِن دُونِهِمَا قَوۡمٗا لَّا يَكَادُونَ يَفۡقَهُونَ قَوۡلٗا ﴿٩٣﴾

Then, when he reached a place between two mountain barriers, he found beside them a people who could barely understand him [93] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 93)

A barrier is a structure between two things. It might be something immaterial and tangible, such as a mountain. It refers here to two mountains between which there is a gap. Inasmuch as Allah *Glorified is He* says 'between two mountain barriers', the word 'between' in this verse necessitates the existence of a gap between the two mountain barriers from which comes the enemy. Allah says that Dhu Al-Qarnayn found beside the two barriers a people who could barely understand him. They did not know how to speak, and likewise, they could not understand speech. He who can comprehend can also communicate. Thus, these people neither understood what was said to them nor spoke. They could hardly understand, or in other words, they did not even come close to understanding. Thus, Allah has not just negated the process of understanding from them but its proximity as well. It is as if there was no hope that Dhu Al-Qarnayn would be able to make them comprehend.

How does He Allah *the Exalted* tell that they could not speak and then directly after this say, 'They said, "O, Dhu Al-Qarnayn."' (*al-Kahf:* 94) where He affirmed their ability to speak? It appears that Dhu Al-Qarnayn addressed them in sign language and found a way to communicate with them based on their movements of speaking in order to execute what they wanted. Undoubtedly, this process required much effort and patience on his part to communicate with them. Otherwise, he could have left them on the excuse that they did not speak nor understand.

Hence, he is a model example of a believing man who is keen to do good and who spares no effort in helping and guiding. Hand gestures have now become a renowned and well-known language. It has its rules and students who communicate with it exactly as we communicate today with a dumb person. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوا۟ يَٰذَا ٱلْقَرْنَيْنِ إِنَّ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَأْجُوجَ مُفْسِدُونَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَهَلْ
نَجْعَلُ لَكَ خَرْجًا عَلَىٰٓ أَن تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا ﴿٩٤﴾

They said, 'Dhu Al-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are ruining this land. Will you build a barrier between them and us if we pay you a tribute?' [94] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 94)

Allah says that they communicated with Dhu Al-Qarnayn, which means they used signs that transmitted the meaning like verbal expression. They inevitably made use of something like gestures, for example, to learn about each other. Gog and Magog are people behind the two mountains barriers. They reached these people through this gap in between. They harmed and attacked them. Thus, they offered to pay him a tribute, i.e. a compensation and tax to close this gap for them and prevent their enemies from passing through it to them, Thereupon, Allah *Glorified is He* says about Dhu Al-Qarnayn :

قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّى فِيهِ رَبِّى خَيْرٌ فَأَعِينُونِى بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا ﴿٩٥﴾

He answered, 'The power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute, but if you lend me your strength, I will put up a fortification between you and them [95] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 95)

Similarly, the communication was through means of signs and gestures. He wanted to make them understand that he was in no need of compensation as Allah conferred upon him many blessings. However, he is in need of workforce to assist and support him in the execution of this work.

We understand from this verse that he who has been given a firm position on the earth has to assist for the sake of Allah. Furthermore, the assistance has to be sufficient so as not to render the one being assisted continually to need your help all the time. Assistance needs to be given in a way that renders him independent of requiring help in the future. You might teach how to do something instead of giving money that will be spent immediately and would once again become needy. Hence, it is said, do not give me a fish but teach me how to catch fish. Such is a consistent and continuous assistance that has its own soul and life.

Since Dhu Al-Qarnayn was well established upon the earth and endowed with many blessings and wealth, he had no need for money but for human labour power. Thus, he said, 'lend me your strength,' (*al-Kahf:* 95). He wanted a powerful and sincere human strength and energy in order to 'put up a fortification between you and them.' (*al-Kahf:* 95)

He did not say he would erect a dam or barrier because a solid dam is deficient. If it was shacked, for example, in one side of it, the other side will be shacked as well. Therefore, he put up for them a rampart. He built a wall in the front and another in the back and made filled in between them with earth. In this manner, the rampart would be flexible and would not be affected if it were hit by an earthquake, for example. The earth it contained would act like springs, which absorbs shocks. To fill up something with rubbles is to pile up layers of soil, one on top of the other, so that a hole is filled up and levelled out with the surface of earth. Hence the expression we hear when someone reproaches his companion who does not want to listen, 'Fill this subject up.'

ءَاتُونِى زُبَرَ ٱلْحَدِيدِ ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا سَاوَىٰ بَيْنَ ٱلصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ ٱنفُخُوا۟ ۖ
حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَعَلَهُۥ نَارًا قَالَ ءَاتُونِىٓ أُفْرِغْ عَلَيْهِ قِطْرًا ﴿٩٦﴾

Bring me lumps of iron!' and then, when he had filled the gap between the two mountainsides [he said], 'Work your bellows!' and then, when he had made it glow like fire, he said, 'Bring me molten metal to pour over it!' [96] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 96)

Dhu Al-Qarnayn was not wandering and roaming by himself. Allah had given him a way. This means that he was not alone; rather, he had an army, power, soldiers, and equipment with him. He was accompanied by men and labourers and had food supplies and necessary provisions of a long voyage. He could have ordered his men to work on this fortification; however, he ordered the people there and engaged their services in order to train and teach them since they were capable and had the necessary human strength for this work.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah does not lay on any soul a burden except to the extent to which He has granted it.' (*at-Talaq:* 7) So inasmuch as Allah has given you the power, then work and do not depend on others. Thus, you find Dhu Al-Qarnayn ordered them three commands: lend me your strength, bring me lumps of iron, and bring me molten metal that I may pour upon it.

Dhu Al-Qarnayn used lumps of iron and molten copper. However, how did he construct a fortification with iron and copper? This structure resembles what engineers do today in architecture with steel reinforced concrete. He used iron and filled its gaps with molten copper to be more solid so that the enemy would not only be able to pierce it, but it was exceptionally smooth and slippery so that they would not be able to climb and get over it. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'when he had levelled [them] between the two mountain walls.' (*al-Kahf:* 96) This means that he had levelled between the two walls with the two mountains. A relevant usage of this is found in the verse, 'Who then is more unjust than he who rejects Allah's communications and turns away from them?' (*al-An'am:* 157) This means to turn away from it to the side. Dhu Al-Qarnayn then said, 'Blow [with bellows]' He ordered them to blow in the iron which he had set alight. When the iron had flared up, he called for molten copper. In this manner, the red-hot iron smelted with the molten copper and constituted a solid, high, and slippery wall.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَمَا ٱسْطَٰعُوٓا۟ أَن يَظْهَرُوهُ وَمَا ٱسْتَطَٰعُوا۟ لَهُۥ نَقْبًا ﴿٩٧﴾

Their enemies could not scale the barrier, nor could they pierce it [97] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 97)

Gog and Magog were incapable of pass over the fortification `or climbing and penetrating it.' This is because it was smooth and slippery wall that have nothing to cling on. Moreover, they could not pierce it because it was solid. Then Allah says on the tongue of Dhu Al-Qarnayn:

قَالَ هَٰذَا رَحۡمَةٞ مِّن رَّبِّيۖ فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعۡدُ رَبِّي جَعَلَهُۥ دَكَّآءَۖ وَكَانَ وَعۡدُ رَبِّي حَقّٗا ﴿٩٨﴾

[And he said, 'This is a mercy from my Lord. But when my Lord's promise is fulfilled, He will raze this barrier to the ground: my Lord's promise always comes true' [98]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 98)

Dhu Al-Qarnayn, as a righteous man who did not neglect to ascribe the blessing to the prime Bestower of Blessings. He acknowledged that he was merely an intermediary and an instrument for carrying out the command of Allah. He said that was a Mercy from his Lord because he took the empowering constituents which Allah granted him and utilised them in the service of His slaves. Everything is a creation of Allah, including thought, power, and strength, the resources, and elements of nature. Thus, I do not have the right to say that I did such-and-such.

Dhu Al-Qarnayn proclaimed that when his Lord's promise is fulfilled, the barrier would be razed to the ground. The promise of Allah referred to in this context signifies the Hereafter. Therefore, he tells them not to think that the solidity of this barrier and its strength are lasting and eternal. This is a worldly accomplishment that Allah will raze and level it to the ground when His promise of the Hereafter and the Day of Resurrection come. He warns them against being vainglorious and arrogant against others after having been humbled and humiliated by Gog and Magog. It is as if he gives them more notice and immunisation to protect them from becoming tyrannical after becoming independent. Moreover, he says that his Lord's Promise always comes true (i.e. inevitably occurs without a doubt).

The latest investigation into the issue of Dhu Al-Qarnayn and the building of the barrier concludes that it happened at a place now known as Balkh, while the two mountains are of the Caucasus Mountains; they really exist and have a gap in between of them, where there is a built structure. It is also said that the one who built this was Cyrus the Great and that this place is between today's Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَتَرَكۡنَا بَعۡضَهُمۡ يَوۡمَئِذٖ يَمُوجُ فِي بَعۡضٖۖ وَنُفِخَ فِي ٱلصُّورِ فَجَمَعۡنَٰهُمۡ جَمۡعٗا ﴿٩٩﴾

On that Day, We shall let them surge against each other like waves and then the Trumpet will be blown and We shall gather them all together [99] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 99)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that He shall leave them, on the Day of Resurrection, to surge over each other like the waves of water. One will not be able to differentiate between them just as he cannot separate particles of water of waves. All people will become mixed up; the strong with the weak and the frightened with the frightening. They are now at the Day of Resurrection where the enmities of this world have terminated and every person is preoccupied with his own matter.

Allah refers to the blow of the Trumpet. This is the second blow since the first is that which will cause everyone to fall dead, as He says, ‘And the trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are in the earth shall swoon except such as Allah pleases; then it shall be blown again, then lo! They shall stand up waiting.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 68)

Thus, the first blow is the one that will cause people to fall dead, while the second is the one which will cause the Awakening and Resurrection. Now, being struck by a blow can cause death or make someone lose consciousness for a period and then regains consciousness. The kind of blow that causes death occurs in the verse wherein Allah says, ‘And to Thamud when it was said to them, “Enjoy yourselves for a while.” But they revolted against the commandment of their Lord, so the rumbling overtook them while they saw.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 43-44)

Regarding the second blow that causes loss of consciousness, it is like that which happened to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* ‘And when Musa (Moses) came at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, “My Lord! Show me [Yourself], so that I may look upon You.” He said, “You cannot [bear to] see Me but look at the mountain, if it remains firm in its place, then will you see Me”; but when his Lord manifested His Glory to the mountain He made it crumble and Musa (Moses) fell down in a swoon; then when he recovered, he said, “Glory be to You, I turn to You, and I am the first of the believers.”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 143) The high unshakeable solid mountain was rendered level when Allah disclosed Himself to it and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was struck and fell to the ground unconscious. Now if Musa (Moses) was rendered senseless due to sighting that which had been exposed to the divine manifestation, what would the direct sight of Allah Himself have been like? It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* had taught Musa (Moses) a lesson. He told him that He was not unwilling to disclose Himself to Musa (Moses); however, He wanted him *peace be upon him* to look at the mountain before seeing Him *Glorified is He* so that it might be a lesson for him. Thus, seeing Allah is not forbidden according to the Quran, however can we bear the manifestation of Allah?

Thus, it is a mercy from Allah to us that we do not see Him in our worldly state. However, in the Hereafter, the Creator shall fashion us in another manner and shall create us in a way that is compatible with the Self-Disclosure of Himself to the believers. He says, '[Some] faces on that day shall be bright, Looking to their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23) We notice that this new preparation occurs in all the matters of the Hereafter wherein one is nourished, but does not excrete. This is because your nature in the Hereafter will not be the same as yours in this world.

Thus, the question posed by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a precise and scientific inquiry. He said, 'My Lord! Show me [Yourself].' (*al-A'raf:* 143) This is like asking for the procedure of beholding Him, since Musa (Moses) cannot see Allah with his nature and constitutional make-up.

Considering this incident, we can understand the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wherein he said, 'Do not give a prophet superiority over another, for on the day of Resurrection all the people will fall unconscious and I will be the first to emerge from the earth. I will see Musa (Moses) standing and holding one of the legs of the Throne. I will not know whether Musa (Moses) has fallen unconscious or the first unconsciousness was sufficient for Him.'(1) It is said that the reason is that he has fallen unconscious once in this world and Allah does not make His slave fall unconscious twice.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْكَـٰفِرِينَ عَرْضًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

We shall show Hell to the disbelievers [100]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 100)

This verse tells that Hell shall be presented to the disbelievers to see and witness it. This presentation is also for the believers as Allah says, ‘And there is not one of you but shall come to it.’ (*Maryam:* 71) Some believe that this means that everyone shall enter it. In fact, it means that everyone shall see it and pass by it. Similarly, one might come to water and reach it without drinking from it. This is because the route along which everyone must pass is laid on top of the Hellfire so that both the believer and disbeliever shall see it.

Observing Hell before entering paradise on the part of a believer will show him the extent of the Favour and Mercy of Allah on him as He *the Almighty* has saved him from that punishment. He will realise the grace of faith granted to him and the way Allah guided him to, so that he could pass by this place safe and unharmed. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us of this case, saying, ‘whoever is removed far away from the fire and is made to enter paradise, he indeed has attained success.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185)

However, the disbeliever will be presented to the hellfire and thereby will see it first thing. This sight will be the sight of distress, regret, and terror before entering it, as he knows that he is going into it and that he will not evade it. This case is mentioned in the chapter of *at-Takathur* wherein Allah says, ‘Abundance diverts you, until you come to the graves. Nay! You shall soon know, Nay! Nay! You shall soon know. Nay! if you had known with a certain knowledge, you should most certainly have seen hell; Then you shall most certainly see it with the eye of certainty; Then on that day you shall most certainly be questioned about the blessings.’ (*at-Takathur:* 1-8)

Allah wants to say that if only we would take that certain knowledge concerning what the hellfire and its punishment from Him, we would be like the one who has seen it. That is because He conveys to us a scientific, truthful image of it. This is what we call the knowledge of certainty. However, in the Hereafter, we shall see the hellfire itself. This is the eye of certainty, that is, it is a visual view that will be realised on the Day of Resurrection when we pass along the bridge that is laid over hell.

Allah, out of His Mercy, Grace and Magnanimity, will make this point the last association of the believers with hellfire and will save them from it. Thus, Allah says at the end of this chapter, 'Then on that day you shall most certainly be questioned about the blessings.' (*at-Takathur:* 8) However, the disbelievers have a third phase with hellfire, which is the truth of certainty that occurs when they enter hell and become in direct contact with its heat. Allah says, 'And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones, He shall have an entertainment of boiling water, And burning in hell. Most surely this is a certain truth. Therefore, glorify the name of your Lord, the Great.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 92-96)

Thus, we have the knowledge of certainty, which is the theoretical image of hellfire that Allah declared. He *the Almighty* told us that among the descriptions of hellfire are such-and-such, and warned us against it while living in this ease and comfort of this world. In addition, we have the eye of certainty which happens in the Hereafter when we pass along the bridge and see hellfire with our own eyes. Finally, there is the truth of certainty which is for the disbelievers when they are cast into it and come into direct contact with it in reality.

I once told you about New York and described it to you. Then I would be giving you a truthful theoretical picture of it. If you believed me, then that would be the knowledge of certainty. If you were to pass by it and see it with your own eyes from abroad of an aeroplane, this would be the eye of certainty. If you stayed and wandered around it, this would be the truth of certainty.

Therefore, the representation of hell to the disbelievers is not the same as that to the believers as it is certainty that will be realised by entering it and coming into direct contact with it.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ كَانَتۡ أَعۡيُنُهُمۡ فِي غِطَآءٍ عَن ذِكۡرِي وَكَانُواْ لَا يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ سَمۡعًا ﴿١٠١﴾

Those whose eyes were blind to My signs, those who were unable to hear [101] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 101)

This verse refers to those disbelievers whose sight is veiled in such a way that prevents them from perceiving the vision of guidance. In addition, they were unable to hear that which benefits the listener such as the warnings and admonition. Their ears were there and capable of hearing and they listened with them. However, they did not derive benefit from it because they fled from listening to the truth and admonition and closed their ears not to hear it. Thus, they have paid no attention to any good. As for the believers, Allah says, 'And when they hear what has been revealed to the messenger you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognise.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 83)

Thus, the aversion of those disbelievers to what they heard rendered them as if they had no sense of hearing. Similarly, we say in our colloquial dialect that someone is deaf towards me. In other words, he does not want to listen to me. Thus, the Quran recounts what the disbelievers of Mecca said, stating, 'And those who disbelieve say, "Do not listen to this Quran and make noise therein, perhaps you may overcome."' (*Fussilat:* 26) The polytheists of Mecca meant to jumble the Quran and not give men a chance to listen to it. They knew that the Quran has influence on people, and thus they acted like this. Their ears and their inclination for eloquence let them know very well that the Quran has a great impact on its listener to the degree of taking over his soul. It is inevitable that the eloquent Arabs will be touched by the Quran. It is inescapable that they will admit that it is a miracle that it is not a speech of man. This will definitely call them to believe that these words are the words of Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. For this reason, they warned one another not to listen to this Quran and talk frivolously about it.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Woe to every sinful liar who hears the communications of Allah recited to him, then persists proudly as though he had not heard them; so announce to him a painful punishment.' (*al-Jathiya:* 7-8) The situation might go beyond the question of avoiding listening to hindering speech, as Allah says, 'Has not the account reached you of those before you, of the people of Nuh (Noah) and `Ad and Thamud, and those after them? None knows them but Allah. Their messengers come to them with clear arguments, but they thrust their hands into their mouths and said, "We do surely reject the message you have brought and we are in disquieting about what you are summoning us to."' (*Ibrahim:* 9) Thus, the issue is not about avoiding listening only, but hindering speech as well, for perhaps a word might reach their ears while they are attentive and thereby, will be influenced. Thus, they stopped themselves from speaking, as it is said be quiet and zip your mouth.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَحَسِبَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَن يَتَّخِذُواْ عِبَادِى مِن دُونِىٓ أَوۡلِيَآءَۚ
إِنَّآ أَعۡتَدۡنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ نُزُلٗا ١٠٢

Did they think that they could take My servants as masters instead of Me? We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers' resting place [102] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 102)

Allah wonders whether they were blind to the truth and believed they could adopt His slaves as masters other than Him. We have previously discussed that the devoted slaves are the believers in Allah who are enraptured in love for Him and who have given preference to the desired intentions of Allah over the preferences of their own souls. We have also made clear the distinction between the slaves and servants of Allah.

The verse here talks about the disbelievers, who have adopted the devoted servants of Allah who are close to Him as allies instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah says about those beloved servants, 'The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of Allah, nor do the angels who are near to Him.' (*an-Nisa':* 172) How can you take them as masters instead of Me and resist Me while they are My beloved ones?! Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah."' (*at-Tawba:* 30)

Others say that the angels are the daughters of Allah. How can you take them as masters aside from Allah while they do not disdain from being servants to Him? They see their eminence and dignity in worshipping Him; however, you take them as masters instead of Him! It is as if Allah reprimands them and says if only you had not taken My enemies as masters; this is a form of heedlessness on their part. Therefore, their requital shall be a hell prepared for them.

Thus, the rest of the verse proclaimed that hell shall be their resting place. A resting place is like what is prepared to honour a guest, such as hotels for example. Thus, this is meant as derision and ridicule of them.

Allah says:

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُم بِٱلْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَٰلًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Shall we tell you who has the most to lose by their actions [103] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 103)

The imperative verb ‘say’ addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The hyperbole form of the word loser ‘the greatest losers’ is used in this context. Their loss is due to their deeds. These greatest losers are described in the following verse wherein Allah says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

Whose efforts in this world are misguided, even when they think they are doing good work? [104] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 104)

The efforts of those people (the deniers of the Truth) have gone astray because they committed evil and believed it was good. Thus, misguidance comes to them from where they expected guidance. They build hospitals, schools, and charitable associations; they cry out for equality and other good values and account themselves as having done good works and having advanced good. However, were those deeds for the sake of Allah? The reality is that they performed them for the sake of people, fame, and history. Therefore, they receive their rewards from people and history in the form of aggrandisement, honour and the immortalisation of their memories.

Thus, their efforts are worthless. It has vanished as if it were nothing. It was like a mirage that Allah *Glorified is He* depicts in the verse, ‘whose efforts in this world are misguided, even when they think they are doing good work.’ (*an-Nur:* 39) Allah does not neglect the due rights of those people nor does He withhold reward from them as they have done well in pursuing causal factors. However, this compensation will be in this world since their work and excellent pursuance of causal factors was for this world. Thus, they shall have no portion in the reward of the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* has made this issue clear when He says, ‘Whoever desires the gain of the hereafter, We will give him more of that gain; and whoever desires the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the hereafter he has no portion.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

Nevertheless, the due rights of the disbelievers are maintained. It is not permissible for any one of the believers to wrong or attack them. Jabir ibn `Abdullah said: 'I heard that a narrator of Hadith narrated a Hadith from Messenger Muhammad. So, I asked about him and was told that he had gone to Syria. I purchased a camel, saddled it, and set out for a month until I reached Syria. When I asked about him, I was told that he was 'Abdullah ibn Unays. When I went to see him, his servant told him, "Jabir ibn 'Abdullah is at the door!" Ibn Unays came out, stepping on his own robes in his haste. We embraced. Jabir said, 'I have been informed that you related the following Hadith from Prophet Muhammad: "Verily, Allah will call out on the Day of Resurrection: 'O My angels, I am the Sovereign; I am the Judge. No one of the people of Hellfire should enter Hellfire while anyone destined for paradise has wronged him until I retaliate him. And no one of the people of paradise should enter paradise while anyone destined for Hellfire has wronged him until I retaliate him even if it were but a slap.'"'(1) Thus, take note of the precision of the Scales of Judgement and the equity of Allah. It watches over the due right of a disbeliever and takes his revenge, before admitting him to Hell, on any person even if the person who wronged him was a believer.

The word 'misguidance' occurs in the Noble Quran with numerous usages determined by the context in which it is found. It may occur with the meaning of disbelief, which is the apex of going astray and the summit of disobedience. Regarding this meaning, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Rather you wish to put questions to your Messenger, as Musa (Moses) was questioned before; and whoever adopts disbelief instead of faith, he indeed has lost the right direction of the way.' (*al-Baqara:* 108).

It may occur with the meaning of an act of disobedience even on the part of a believer, as the verse wherein Allah says, 'And it behoves not a believing man and a believing woman that they should have any choice in their matter when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter; and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he surely strays off a manifest straying.' (*al-Ahzab:* 36)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad*

In addition, it may further indicate the meaning of being lost in the earth as is the case in the verse wherein Allah says, “When we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation?’ (*as-Sajda:* 10), that is, after being vanished and concealed in it. Moreover, it also expresses the meaning of forgetting as Allah says, ‘so that if one of the two errs, the second of the two may remind the other.’ (*al-Baqara:* 282)

The word ‘misguidance’ also occurs with the meaning of negligence, which assails a person and causes them to slip into a sin unintentionally. This usage is found in the story of Musa (Moses) and the Pharaoh when Musa (Moses) struck a man and killed him. When Pharaoh reminded him of this, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, ‘He said, “I did it then while I was of those unable to see the right course.”’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 20) Musa (Moses) wanted to say that he killed him in a state of negligence and without intention. Who could know that a strike could kill? The truth is that the end of the man came along with the strike but not due to it. It often happens that someone is run over by a car and then the autopsy reveals that he died due to a heart attack occurring at the same time as the automobile accident.

Finally, this word can also be used to give the meaning of having no knowledge of the full details of something, as in the verse where Allah says, ‘And found you lost and guide you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 7) This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not aware of what his people were doing of disbelief.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

أُولَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَآئِهِۦ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَٰلُهُمْ
فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ وَزْنًا ﴿١٠٥﴾

It is those who disbelieve in their Lord’s messages and deny that they will meet Him.’ Their deeds come to nothing: on the Day of Resurrection We shall give them no weight [105]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 105)

The messages that come from Allah are of three kinds. They have chosen to deny and refute all of them. First, they denied the signs of the universe, which prove the power of Allah. They did not meditate upon them or give them consideration. Second, they denied the verses of the Quran and the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Third, they denied the miraculous signs which Allah sent down to support His messengers, and did not believe in them. Thus, it is general and applies to all these cases.

They also denied that they would meet Allah on the Day of Resurrection and rejected it. Some of them even refuted it entirely and said, ‘What! When we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we then be raised?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 82) There are those who acknowledge resurrection according to their whim. They said, ‘and even if I am returned to my Lord I will most certainly find a returning place better than this.’ (*al-Kahf:* 36) There are also those who claimed that the resurrection is for the spirit without the body, and argued about this greatly. Thus, they either disavow the resurrection or else they envisage it in a false manner. Therefore, Allah said that their deeds are in vain and its benefit has disappeared. Furthermore, on the Resurrection Day they shall get no weight.

Orientalists have raised objections to this verse and wondered how to reconcile between it and the verses that confirm the Scales of Judgment. Allah says, ‘And We will set up a just balance on the day of resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least; and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, [yet] will We bring it, and sufficient are We to take account.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 47) Allah says in another verse, ‘He shall live a pleasant life. And as for him whose measure of good deeds is light, His abode shall be the abyss. And what will make you know what it is? A burning fire.’ (*al-Qari`a:* 7-11) In response to this, scholars reconciled between the verses of the Quran and said about the verse wherein Allah says, ‘on the Day of Resurrection We shall give them no weight.’ (*al-Kahf:* 105), that it is intended to signify contempt and insignificance. Thus, the meaning is that they have no esteem. We use this meaning now when we say that so and so has no weight with me. This means that it has no value. When you examine and reflect upon this verse, you will find that the verse says, ‘We shall give them no weight’. It did not say give against them. Therefore, the Scales of Judgement are there, but not in their favour. Thus, the meaning is that We shall not assess the scales to their advantage, but rather, We shall assess the scales to their detriment.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَآؤُهُمۡ جَهَنَّمُ بِمَا كَفَرُواْ وَٱتَّخَذُوٓاْ ءَايَٰتِي وَرُسُلِي هُزُوًا ﴿١٠٦﴾

Their recompense for having disbelieved and made fun
of My messages and My messengers will be Hell [106]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 106)

That which is happening to them, including the nullification of their works and giving them no weight is not due to injustice or iniquity on our part against them, rather, it is their recompense for their disbelief. In addition, they mocked the messages of Allah. Each time they heard a verse, they said that it was the legends of the former peoples. Allah says, ‘When Our communications are recited to him, he says: Stories of those of yore.’ (*al-Qalam:* 15)

Moreover, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not even free from their scorn and mockery. The Quran narrates their saying to him in the following verse: ‘And they say, “O you to whom the Reminder has been revealed! you are most surely insane.”’ (*al-Hijr:* 6) They refer to the reminder, which is the Quran, while they still did not believe in it as a kind of derision and mockery.

The Quran mentions what the hypocrites said in the chapter of *al-Munafiqun*: ‘They are the ones who say, “Do not spend upon those who are with the Messenger of Allah until they break up….”’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) When they say the Messenger of Allah, they do not mean that they believe in him; however, it is either out of their negligence of the falsehood they practice, or even out of derision and mockery. It is as if you were in a gathering and you saw someone claiming to have knowledge and showing off, so you would say ask this scholar!

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says about their derisive mocking of Prophet Muhammad, ‘And those who disbelieve would almost smite you with their eyes when they hear the reminder, and they say, “Most surely he is mad.”’ (*al-Qalam:* 51)

Then Allah speaks of the opposite of those disbelievers and says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ كَانَتۡ لَهُمۡ جَنَّٰتُ ٱلۡفِرۡدَوۡسِ نُزُلًا ﴿١٠٧﴾

But those who believe and do good deeds will be given the Gardens of paradise [107] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 107)

In this verse, Allah refers to those who believe; we have previously said that ‘to believe’ means to rectify the emotional and doctrinal spirit for your deeds to be in conformity to your faith in the One who laid down the sacred laws. From this point, faith became to be a primary condition for the acceptance of deeds. Otherwise, there are those who do the good but their motif is not faith, but rather, other considerations. For this reason, intention is a necessary condition in the acceptability of deeds.

Allah *Glorified is He* punishes the one who performs deeds for the sake of others than Him. He punishes him on the basis that the one for whom he performs denies, forswears, and harbours a grudge against Him instead of acknowledging Him for His favour unto him. In this, why it is said, ‘Beware of the evil of the one who owes you favour’. That is a true proverb because when you show kindness to a person, you embarrass his pride and have the upper hand over him. Thus, as soon as this inferior acquires fortune and attains a position of prestige among people, he will, if his character is not good, hate anyone who coffered favour on him at some time and damaged his pride. Thus, he will loathe the existence of such a person and dislike seeing him. He might devise plots against him to clear the way and have the area for him alone because this person is the only one whose presence vexes him.

Therefore, he who undertakes a deed for the sake of other than Allah, he will be left to obtain recompense from that other one. Frequently, you find the recompense contradicts what you anticipated. You did it for him so that honour you, yet he now holds you in low esteem. You did it for him so that he would respect you, yet now he looks down at you. You did it so that he would support and protect you, yet now he is your enemy. That is why it is said, ‘the rewards of the deeds performed for the sake of Allah are guaranteed, whereas the recompense of the deeds performed for other than Allah is not assured’ since the person you do things for may or may not compensate you.

Subsequently, Allah follows up faith with good deeds because good works must necessarily be initiated and result from faith and it. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘But those who believe and do good deeds.’ (*al-Kahf:* 107): To do good deeds means to observe what is good. In addition, when something is good in itself, leave it in its state of goodness and do not spoil it or else increase its usefulness. Suppose that there is a well which people drink from its water. You either leave it in its state of purity or abstain from throwing anything that could spoil it and remove its good and usefulness or else you augment its good and usability by adding to it what improves its utility and increases its capacity. You could construct a wall around it to protect it or use a cover to preserve it or a device for drawing up its water and making it easier for people to make use of it.

When an individual accomplishes good deeds, the benefits, which he reaps of the good deeds of others, are greater than that of his own good deeds. This is because he is a single individual, who derives benefit from the good of the entire community. On this basis, we should not find the commands of the Lawgiver and His requirements burdensome because He takes from you to give to you and to safeguard your life in the time of need or exigency. When this joint communal responsibility is fulfilled for you, you will face life with gratification in times of ease and with reassurance in times of hardship.

When religious law commands you to assume guardianship over an orphan and treat him generously, it reassures you with regard to your children after you are gone. So, do not be aggrieved if you should be afflicted with an adversity, for you are in a society of mutual assistance where your children shall be taken care of. Yet, in the shade of Islam and its teachings, an orphan might be happier in fortune than in his life under the care of his father. Perhaps, when his father dies, he finds that all the believers are fathers to him as his father was pre-occupied with other things in his life and did not benefit him at all; rather, he may have barred good from him, since people say: his father exists and he is liable for him.

Thus, Ahmad Shawqi says, ‘The orphan is not the one whose parents have concluded with the concern of life and have left him in an abject state. Indeed, the orphan is rather he who is faced with a neglecting mother or a pre-occupied father.’

In the final part of the verse we are studying, Allah says that they will be given Gardens of paradise. They will be given the highest degree in paradise named *al-firdaws*. It is prepared as a person prepares to receive his guest generously in terms of place of residence, the basic requirements of life and its luxuries. When a person prepares a welcoming reception and residence for his guest, he arranges it with things according to his abilities, means, and knowledge, so how would you envisage this if the preparer of the welcoming residence were Allah?

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ عَنْهَا حِوَلًا ﴿١٠٨﴾

There they will remain, never wishing to leave [108]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 108)

The eternality of the pleasurable amenities in the Hereafter is distinguished from that of this world no matter how superior the latter may be. The delights of this world are confined to our vision and capacities. Even if we reach the summit of enjoying delightful blessings in this world, we will always be fearful of losing them. For either bounties leave you or you leave them. However, in paradise the blessing is eternal and is neither limited nor forbidden. You are immortal amidst it such that the blessing will not leave you nor will you leave it. Therefore, Allah said that they will not desire to leave it. They will not seek to be transferred from it to anywhere else since no higher state of bliss can be imagined than that.

Naturally, a person has cravings for comfort and luxury. Whenever he attains some favour or benefit, he aspires to that which is better and whenever he obtains some pleasure, he desires more. This is the situation in this world. However, the situation is different in the Hereafter. How could one possibly seek anything higher than the state of bliss of paradise about which Allah says, ‘whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say, “This is what was given to us before; and they shall be given the like of it.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 25)

The above verse tells that every time Allah bestows a fruit upon them, another one comes to them whereupon they would say, ‘we have already been granted the like of it previously’. They believed it to be like that which preceded it, but it is not. Rather, it has a new, different flavour, even if it is the same fruit.

This is because the capacity of causal possibilities is limited, but as for the capacity of the One Who brings possibilities into existence, it is unlimited.

Allah is capable of providing you with a single fruit in a thousand colours and a thousand flavours. This is because the capacity of His Perfection never comes to an end. Thus, they will be given the like of it, i.e. the fruit is one, and similar to others of its kind, but the taste is different.

A man of our time in order to traverses his path in life, learns continually in order to earn a degree or a profession. He does this ceaselessly with toil and hardship for nearly twenty-five years of his life in the hope that he will live the rest of his imagined life in ease and enjoyment. Now, imagine that you will live the rest of your life in comfort, how long will the rest of it be? As for ever-lasting ease and comfort in the Hereafter, it is of a limitless duration and eternal bliss. What should a person desire and aspire afterwards?

Allah then says:

قُل لَّوْ كَانَ ٱلْبَحْرُ مِدَادًا لِّكَلِمَٰتِ رَبِّى لَنَفِدَ ٱلْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَن
تَنفَدَ كَلِمَٰتُ رَبِّى وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِۦ مَدَدًا ١٠٩

Say [Prophet], 'If the whole ocean were ink for writing the words of my Lord, it would run dry before those words were exhausted'– even if We were to add another ocean to it [109]
(The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 109)

The capacity and power of Allah has no limits. Since his capacity and power have no limits, then potentialities also have no limits. Thus, if the ocean were ink used to write the words of Allah that comprise the Divine command 'Be!', which brings forth potentialities, then it would not suffice for the words of Allah even if another ocean is added.

For example, we say about good merchandise that the manufacturer cannot produce better than this. However, the work of Allah knows no bounds. This is because the manufacturer processes things, whereas Allah fashions them with the command 'Be!'. Thus, we find in the finest hotels in this world the ultimate of that which science has attained in terms of serving human beings as you simply push on a button and what you desire of food or drink comes out. Undoubtedly, these things are prepared and readied in advance and one summons simply all varieties of them with a mere push of a special button. However, does there exist in this world a pleasure or benefit, which appears for you once it passes through your mind? Thus, the enjoyments of this world have limits at which they end.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'until when the earth puts on its golden raiment and it becomes garnished, and its people think that they have power over it, Our command comes to it, by night or by day, so We render it as reaped seed; produce, as though it had not been in existence yesterday; thus do We make clear the communications for a people who reflect.' (*Yunus:* 24) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is telling us, 'You have used up your means in this world to the full and have attained the maximum possible of its pleasures and beauty. So, now, come to that which I Myself have prepared for you. Leave these means of subsistence of Allah and come live directly through Allah. You were in the world of causative factors, so now come to the Originator of Causes'.

While Allah *Glorified is He* speaks in this verse of the ink which is used to write the words of Allah, He has discussed with more detail the pens by which they are written in another verse. Allah says, 'And were every tree that is in the earth [made into] pens and the sea [to supply it with ink], with seven more seas to increase it, the words of Allah would not come to an end.' (*Luqman:* 27)

The precision of the Quranic expression is realised when we imagine all the trees of the earth to be pens. The trees are distinguished in terms of continuous regeneration and ceaseless multiplication, which make them an unlimited and endless resource. In addition, we notice the precision of the Quranic expression when we imagine the water of the ocean to be ink used for writing, yet the water of the ocean, since Allah created it, is limited and constant, neither increasing nor decreasing. Therefore, since trees regenerate and multiply and the water of the ocean is constant and does not increase, Allah says, 'with seven more seas to increase it.' (*Luqman:* 27) That is to make the augmentation of water corresponds to the augmentation of trees. The intended meaning is seven like the first one and the choice of this exact number is because it was the ultimate number among the Arabs.

Science has clarified the cycle of water in nature for us. We learned that the quantity of water on the earth is constant and does not increase. This is because whatever is consumed of water evaporates and returns to the earth. For example, say a person drank a thousand tons of water during his life. On calculating what comes out of him as urine, sweat and the surplus of excretions, you will find it the same quantity, which he drank. It has evaporated and entered its cycle anew. Thus, it is said that a sip of water has been drunk by millions of men.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَىَّ أَنَّمَآ إِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَٰحِدٌ ۖ فَمَن كَانَ
يَرْجُوا۟ لِقَآءَ رَبِّهِۦ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَٰلِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِۦٓ أَحَدًۢا ﴿١١٠﴾

Say, 'I am only a human being, like you, to whom it has been revealed that your God is One. Anyone who fears to meet his Lord should do good deeds and give no one a share in the worship due to his Lord [110] (The Quran, *al-Kahf:* 110)

Allah orders the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say new words stating that he is but a human. This means that take me as a model, for I am not an angel, but rather, I am a human being like you. I have committed myself to the path that I am exhorting you to follow. I am not commanding you to do anything from which I am spared. Indeed, on the contrary, He was among the people least endowed with the pleasures of life and its embellishments.

For among those who believed in him were the wealthy who enjoyed the finest food and wore the most expensive clothes. On the other hand, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would go for a month or two without a fire being lit in his house to prepare food and used to wear patched clothing. Moreover, his children did not inherit from him, as other people inherit; nor were charitable alms lawful for them, as they were permitted to others, thus they were deprived of a right which others enjoyed.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the lowest in terms of material comforts. He was the least of those existing concerning the enjoyments of life and its finery. This draws our attention to the fact that the message did not bring Him any worldly benefit and did not set him apart from others in terms of the opulence of this transient world. Instead, it set him apart in terms of values and virtues.

On this basis, He used to say when revelation comes to him from above that he is not like us. However, when taken from me, he would say I am not but a human being like you. In addition, the verse here does not distinguish him from humankind except in terms of revelation. Thus, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not superior to men except that he was inspired.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says that our God is One. This phrase is prefaced by an Arabic particle of restriction to mean that there is no God other than Him. This is the summit of issues, so do not turn towards any God besides Him. One of the greatest blessings of Allah to man is that he has a sole God. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has given an example for us to make this matter. He says, ‘Allah sets forth an example; there is a slave in who are [several] partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 29)

Thus, such a slave who is owned by several masters who contend with each other, disagree with each other, and are mutually quarrelsome as if he gratifies this one, that one will be angry is not to be compared with a slave owned by a single master. Thus, among the things for which Allah is gratefully praised is that He is a single God.

The rest of the verse tells us that people carry out good deeds for some objectives, which Allah has drawn out for them in reward including paradise and its blissful pleasures. However, this verse clarifies an objective which is loftier than paradise and its joys; this is meeting Allah and the sight of His Magnanimous Countenance. Thus, the verse shifts attention from the blessing to the Bestower of Blessings.

Therefore, whoever fears meeting Allah and yet desires the meeting with his Lord not merely His reward in the Hereafter, let him do righteous deeds. That is the means required to the meeting with Allah. This is because righteous deeds are proof that you respected the command of the One Who Commands and trusted in His wisdom and His love for you. Thereby, your soul was set at ease in the shadow of obedience to Him. When you retire to your bed, review the record of your deeds and find only good, you will thereby make your soul happy and your breast will expand in joyous ease. You have no apprehensions of ill will from anyone and you do not fear the outcome of a matter whose results are not to be gratefully praised. So, who is it that favoured you with all these blessings and granted you such good fortune?

The verse continues and mentions other means to obtain the reward. Allah says, ‘and give no one a share in the worship due to his Lord.’ We have previously said that paradise is a one, in the sense of being something; therefore do not associate anything with the worship of Allah, even if this thing is paradise. You must hold your objective high and make it not to paradise, but rather to the meeting with its Lord, Creator and with the Bestower of Blessings in it upon you.

We have given an example for this in a man who prepares a great banquet consisting of the finest food and drink. He invites the dearest to him. When they enter, they all are pre-occupied with the food except for only one of them who is not interested in the food and drink. He rather asks after the host of the feast in order to greet him and socialize with him intimately.

How true(1) is that which Rabi`a Al-`Adawiyya said regarding this: All of them worship out of fear of hellfire and view salvation as a bountiful fortune or in order to reside in the gardens and thereby attain palaces and drink from paradise. I view no fortune in gardens or hellfire. I do not desire any replacement for the object of my love.

This explains the Qudsi Hadith in which Allah says in the first person, ‘If I had not created paradise and Hellfire, would I not still be worthy of being worshipped?’ Therefore, a servant should not be utilitarian even in worship, as Allah is worthy in and of Himself of being worshipped, not out of fear of His fire nor out of ambitious desire for His paradise. O Allah, grant us this station and render us by Your Mercy of those qualified for it.

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha`rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

the chapter of

Maryam

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

كٓهيعٓصٓ ﴿١﴾

Kaf Ha Ya 'Ayn Sad **[1]**
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 1)

These are five disjoined letters that are pronounced by saying the name of each letter rather than the sound that the letter indicates. Each letter has a name as well as a corresponding sound. Thus, for example, the group of letters *ka-ta-ba* constitute the word *kataba* (write), whereas their pronunciation based on the names of the letters would be *kaf – ta`- ba`*. Thus, the name of a group of letters combined is a proper noun that was established to indicate them.

In the Noble Quran, there are many chapters beginning with such disjoined letters. These are pronounced according to the name of the letter, not according to their phonemic value. These freestanding letters occur in several numerical combinations. They may be found as single letters, such as *Nun, Sad* or *Qaf.* They occur in pairs, as well, such as *Ta Ha* or *Ya Sin*. They may also occur in groups of three letters, such as *Alif Lam Mim* and *Ta Sin Mim* as well as groups of four letters, such as *Alif Lam Mim Ra`*. Moreover, they occur in groups of five letters, such as *Kaf Ha Ya `Ayn Sad* and *Ha Mim `Ayn Sin Qaf.*

It is for this reason we believe that the Quran must be learned by hearing it. Otherwise, how could you differentiate between articulating the freestanding letters *Alif Lam Mim* at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* and the same group of letters constituting a question word *alam* (have We not) as in the verse, ‘Have We not expanded for you your breast’? The latter has pronounced them as conjoined letters. Thus, Allah spoke the truth when he says, ‘Therefore when We have recited it, follow its recitation.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 18) Regarding this, we observe that both the educated and the uneducated can articulate the letters according to their phonetic sound. However, the name of each letter is not pronounced or known except by the educated person who knows the letters of the alphabet. Since the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was unlettered and had not learned from any teacher as being attested to by his enemies, who then taught him these letters? Thus, when you come across such freestanding letters, be aware that Allah articulated them utilizing the names of the letters. We speak using the phonetic sound of the letters not their names.

Subsequently, Allah says:

ذِكْرُ رَحْمَتِ رَبِّكَ عَبْدَهُۥ زَكَرِيَّآ ﴿٢﴾

This is an account of your Lord's grace towards
His servant, Zakaryya [2] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 2)

The Arabic word *adh-dhikr* has numerous meanings. *Dhikr* is the preliminary report of something and discussion of something about which you had no previous knowledge and related to this the Arabic word *at-tadhkir* which is a reminder of something which you were already aware of, but which We wanted to cause you to remember. This sense occurs in the verse where Allah says, 'And continue to remind, for surely the reminder profits the believers.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 55)

The word *dhikr* also refers to the Quran itself. Allah says, 'Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9) The Quran comprises the most superior accounts, the most reliable of reports and narrations. Likewise, the word *adh-dhikr* applies to every previous scripture from Allah, as expressed in the verse: 'so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43)

The word *adh-dhikr* also signifies glorious renown and nobility. This meaning is clear in Allah's saying, 'And most surely it is a reminder (*dhikr*) for you and your people...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44); as well as in His saying: 'Certainly We have revealed to you a Book in which is your good remembrance (*dhikr*)…' (*al-Anbiya':* 10). In the last verse, the word *dhikr* denotes good reputation and a dignified station. Likewise, this particular meaning appears when we say, 'So-and-so has dignity among his people.'

In addition, *adh-Dhikr* refers to one's remembrance of his Lord through obedience and worship. On the other hand, Allah's remembrance of His servant denotes the act of recompensing, rewarding, and showering mercy upon him. In this regard, He says, 'Therefore remember Me, I will remember you…' (*al-Baqara:* 152). Thus, in the verse under discussion, Allah's saying: 'This is an account of your Lord's Grace…' (*Maryam:* 2), means that what follows is an account of Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) story and of Allah's Grace upon him.

The Arabic word *ar-rahma* (grace) refers to the divine bestowals of mercy upon its recipient so that his capacity to fulfil his functions is maintained. The merciful person gives to the recipient of mercy a piece of sincere advice which helps them to perform their function in the most perfect possible way. So, if this is the case of mercy in the human context, then what are we to say of the Mercy of the Creator Who created mankind? Moreover, can you envisage His Mercy upon the best of His creatures, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Surely, it is complete and all-inclusive mercy, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the noblest and most honoured of the prophets. He is also the final prophet, so there will be no revelation or Divine Messages after him, nor does his Message require any modification to be made. Hence, he is the noblest of all messengers who are themselves the noblest of mankind. Allah's Mercy towards each prophet obtains its measure according to the extent of his mission, and Prophet Muhammad's mission is the most honoured of all prophetic missions.

The word *rahma* (mercy) is a verbal noun which carries the meaning of its verb. In Arabic, the verbal noun, like the verb, needs a subject and an object. An example of this is when we say, 'The man's beating of his child pained me'. Thus, Allah's saying, 'This is an account of your Lord's Grace towards His servant, Zakaryya (Zechariah)' (*Maryam:* 2), means that He has bestowed mercy on His servant Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'your Lord's Grace' (*Maryam:* 2) since this is the highest type of mercy and grace. As He *the Almighty* mentions here His Mercy towards His servant Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* He addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse with His saying, ‘And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 107). Thus, His Mercy towards Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not confined to him; rather, it is a universal one towards all of the worlds. This is indicative of his great, sublime station. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘This is an account of your Lord’s Grace towards His servant Zakaryya (Zechariah)…’ (*Maryam:* 2), this means that what is being recited to you, Messenger Muhammad, is a remembrance and an account of Allah’s Mercy, the most sublime kind of it, upon His servant Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*.

We have previously explained that servitude to mankind is contemptible and degrading; it is odious and unacceptable term. By contrast, servitude to Allah *the Almighty* comprises dignity and honour. This is because, on one hand, a human’s servitude to a human causes harm and grief to the former; it is the servitude of a slave to a master who takes his good. On the other hand, in the case of servitude to Allah *the Almighty* it is the servant who obtains the good of His Master.

Here arises a question, which is ‘What kind of Mercy has Allah *the Almighty* shown towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when He related the story of His servant Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* to him’? It is said that such kind of mercy is linked to Allah’s Absolute Power over the universe. His Omnipotence manifests itself in that He created causal factors for effects and then said to the causal factors, ‘You are not actors in and of yourself, but rather, you are only effective through My Will and My Power; so if I desire for you not to act, I nullify your action; and if you do not promote the good on your own, then I will oblige you to promote it’.

A relevant example of this is evident in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* whom the disbelievers threw into the fire. Allah’s foremost aim of extinguishing the fire for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* or to make it cold and tranquil was not merely to save him. After all, it would have been possible for Him to prevent the adversaries of Ibrahim (Abraham) from seizing him in the first place, or to send down rain to extinguish the fire which they had set alight. Had this happened, the defiance of his people would not have been effected. That is to say that if Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had managed to evade being seized by them, or if rain had fallen and put out the fire, they would have said, ‘If we had only been able to overpower him, we would have done such-and-such to him’, or ‘If the rain had not fallen, we would have done such-and-such to him’.

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* desired to scheme against these people and to manifest for them the absolute nature of His Divine Power. In order to do so, He enabled them to have control over Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* until they actually cast him in the fire. Only then did the Creator’s Supreme Command come to the fire, ordering it to suspend its power to burn: ‘We said, “O fire! Be a comfort and peace to Ibrahim.”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69)

Likewise, the story of Allah’s Mercy towards His servant Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* provides us with evidence of the Absoluteness of Allah’s Divine Power in the matter of creation. This story draws our attention to the fact that the Creator established causal factors for the universe, and that whoever pursues these factors attains to the desired effect. But beware of being distracted or seduced by them; for as the Creator may grant you blessings based upon causal factors, He may also abolish these factors definitively and bring forth effects apart from their causal factors.

Allah’s Unlimited Power was made manifest in the story of the beginning of creation. We are cognisant that the mass of human beings and their reproduction are accomplished by means of marriage between man and woman. However, the unlimited nature of the Divine Power is not restricted to these causal factors. The Creator manages the creation of His human beings by means of every manner of creation. Hence, He brought forth Adam *peace be upon him* without male or female, and He created Eve from a male without a female; also He created `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from a female without a male. Thus, Allah’s Divine Power is not bound by causal factors, and His Omnipotence to create in any manner will continue until the Day of Judgment. Consequently, we find a man and woman who are married yet no offspring is produced by them, for the causal factors are inoperative as to both. This fact is intended to prevent us from relying upon causal factors and from forgetting the Prime Causer of effects. In this connection, He says, ‘Allah’s is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons. Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren; surely He is the Knowing, the Powerful.' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

Back to the verse in question; Allah's Omnipotence manifests itself in the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* in that He answered his supplication by bestowing a son upon him. He *the Almighty* says, 'This is an account of your Lord's Grace towards His servant, Zakaryya (Zechariah).' (*Maryam:* 2) So, when was Allah's Grace bestowed on Zakaryya (Zechariah)? The answer is provided in the following verse in which Allah says:

إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥ نِدَآءً خَفِيًّا ﴿٣﴾

When he called to his Lord secretly,
saying [3] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 3)

This verse shows that Allah *the Almighty* answered Zakaryya's invocation when the latter called to Him secretly. In Arabic, *an-nida`* (calling) is one of the various styles of speech. Rhetoricians divide speech into the following two categories: *khabar* (informative discourse) which denotes providing information about a thing that may be truthfulness or falsehood; and *insha`* (creative discourse) which implies asking for something by employing an utterance which conveys neither truthfulness nor falsehood. Calling someone belongs to the latter category, *insha`* because when you call someone, you want to cause something to arise from yourself. Thus, if you say, 'O Mohammad', then you want him to come to you. Hence, calling out is to ask someone to come closer to you. But would it be correct for calling out to Allah *the Almighty* to have this meaning? After all, you do not call out except to someone who is far away from you and whom you wish to bring closer to yourself.

So, how could you call out to your Lord, while He is closer to you, through His Knowledge than your jugular vein? Furthermore, how could you call out to Him even though He hears you even before you speak? Hence, if He is always close to you, what then is the purpose of calling Him out? We say that the purpose of calling Allah *the Almighty* is to invoke Him.

In the verse under discussion, the supplication is described as made '…secretly' (*Maryam:* 3) because it is not like the calling out of one man to another, requiring raising the voice in order to be heard. Rather, it is a calling out to Allah *the Almighty* before Whom the concealed and revealed statements are the same. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says, 'And conceal your word or manifest it; surely He is Cognisant of what is in the hearts.' (*al-Mulk:* 13) One of the etiquettes of supplication is that we invoke Allah *the Almighty* as He commands us, saying, 'Call on your Lord humbly and secretly…' (*al-A'raf:* 55) Allah *the Almighty* '…knows the secret, and what is yet more hidden.' (*Ta Ha:* 7). This verse tells us that He is fully Aware of what is more hidden than the secret, namely; the secret before its coming into being.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* made supplication in the secrecy the best kind of supplication, for a person might invoke his Lord about something which, if it were heard by someone else, might cause that person to despise him. Thus, the best kind of supplication is that which is concealed between the servant and his Lord. In this way, the supplicant's affairs are not exposed among people.

As for Allah *the Almighty* He is *As-Sittir* (The Veiler) Who loves covering up of faults and defects even for those who are disobedient to Him. In the same vein, the concealed supplication allows the servant to ask his Lord for what would be embarrassing to publicly mention before other people. Moreover, it enables the servant to be unrestrained in invoking his Lord for whatever he wishes. After all, he is invoking his Lord and Protector in Whom he can take refuge. While people will be aggrieved and vexed if you ask them for the slightest thing, Allah *the Almighty* is pleased with you when you invoke Him.

Here arises the following question, which is: 'Why did Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* keep his supplication a secret? He invoked his Lord to bless him with a son, but how could this request be realised as he had already reached old age and his wife was barren? It was as if all the causal means available to him were inoperative. For this reason, he turned to Allah *the Almighty* in supplication, 'O Lord, I have no refuge but You. You alone are Fully Able to rupture the laws of nature'. This request from Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* came at the wrong time because he had aged and his wife was barren. That is one of the reasons why he called his Lord secretly. He also kept his supplication secret because he sought a son despite the existence of his paternal cousins who would shoulder the responsibility of conveying his message after his death. However, he did not entrust them with Allah’s way of guidance because their outward actions in life were not in conformity with it. So, how could he entrust them with Allah’s way of guidance while they could not even be entrusted with their own souls? So, if he *peace be upon him* publicly prayed to his Lord to give him a son who would inherit prophethood after him, his cousins would be angered and they would turn against him. Therefore, he made his prayer secretly between him and his Lord.

There is another question requiring an answer here, which is: ‘Why is Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* asking for a son at this late age and after having become very old and his wife had become barren? Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* clarifies his justification for this in a subsequent verse, saying, ‘To be my heir and the heir of the family of Ya`qub (Jacob).’ (*Maryam:* 6) Hence, the motive for his asking for a son was purely religious; he did not make this request for any worldly gain. He yearned for a son because he could not entrust the people who would remain after his death with Allah’s way of guidance and its protection from corruption.

Therefore, his saying, ‘To be my heir...’ (*Maryam:* 6) should not be understood in terms of an inheritance of wealth as many may mistakenly think, for the prophets do not have any heirs. In this connection, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘We (prophets) do not have any heirs. What we leave behind is to be given in charity.’(1) In this manner, a prophet departs from this world and his relatives do not derive benefit from his wealth, not even the poor among them.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim. Al-Bukhari narrated a Hadith to that effect on the authority of A`isha Allah be pleased with her. Muslim’s narration is as follows, ‘When the Messenger of Allah passed away, his wives made up their minds to send `Uthman ibn 'Affan (as their spokesman) to Abu Bakr to demand from him their share from the legacy of the Prophet. At this, A`isha said to them, ‘Has the Messenger of Allah not said, “We (prophets) do not have any heirs; what we leave behind is (to be given in) charity?”’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3092; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1758.*

In fact, the prophets' requests are entirely devoted to the Cause of Allah *the Almighty*. It is for this reason that Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said, '…and the heir of the family of Ya`qub (Jacob).' (*Maryam:* 6) The inheritance of the family of Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* refers to the prophethood which they passed on to next generations. Thus, we should not understand 'the inheritance' here in the sense of inheriting wealth or objects of this transient world.

In the same connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And Sulaiman (Solomon) was (Dawud's) David's heir….' (*an-Naml:* 16) What was it that Sulaiman (Solomon) inherited from (Dawud) David *peace be upon them*? Was he heir to his estate? If so, why did his other siblings not have a share? Obviously, he inherited prophethood and kingship from (Dawud) David. Hence, the issue here is far removed from materialistic inheritance.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says that Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* invoked Him, saying:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ ٱلۡعَظۡمُ مِنِّي وَٱشۡتَعَلَ ٱلرَّأۡسُ شَيۡبٗا
وَلَمۡ أَكُنۢ بِدُعَآئِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيّٗا ﴿٤﴾

Lord, my bones have weakened and my hair is
ashen grey, but never, Lord, have I ever prayed
to You in vain [4] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 4)

This is the call or invocation that Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* made, saying, 'Lord, my bones have weakened…' (*Maryam:* 4). Regarding the manner of invocation, we can either say 'O Lord', or 'O Allah'. Here, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said 'O Lord!' because he was praying for something related to the Allah's Bestowal of Lordship which is conferred on the believer and the disbeliever alike. Zakaryya (Zechariah) is asking for a son, and this matter is related to the physical constitution and its aptness for procreation, which are among the gifts pertinent to Allah's Bestowals of Lordship. This is the case even if the motive behind asking for a son is related to Allah's Divinity, given the fact that the son would be responsible for the divine way of guidance after the death of his father.

It is as if Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* had invoked his Lord saying, ‘O Lord, O You Who gives to the one who believes in You and to the one who disbelieves in You! O You Who gives to the one who is obedient and to the one who is disobedient! Far be it from You that You should ever hold back your gifts from one who obeys You and invites other people to obey You’.

As for the invocatory phrase ‘O Allah’, it is reserved for matters relating to worship and religious obligations.

Afterwards, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* presents the circumstances of this request: ‘Lord, my bones have weakened…’ (*Maryam:* 4). The Arabic word *al-wahan* denotes weakness. He said, ‘my bones have weakened’ (*Maryam:* 4) because everything has a basis in terms of firmness and strength. Water, for example, has a well-known basis, as do fat, flesh, nerves, bones, and all other parts of man’s physical formation. Among all these things, bones are the strongest. In the structure of the human body, bones—to use an analogy in the language of the modern age—are like the frame of a vehicle. Upon bones the human body is constructed of flesh, blood, and nerves. Hence, if the bones—which are the strongest of the body’s constituent elements—are afflicted by weakness and feebleness, then the other parts are even more likely to be similarly affected.

Hence, when an Arab man complains of drought and famine, what does he say? He says, ‘We have undergone difficult years. One year dissolved the fat—that is, from hunger and lack of food—and one year dissolved the flesh—that is, after the fat had been consumed—and one year wiped out the bones’. It is as if bones were the final store of nutrients in the body of a man when he is deprived of food and drink. In this condition, bones direct their nutritional properties to the brain specifically. This is because as long as the brain contains a spark of life, then whatever happens to the body in terms of degradation is capable of being repaired and restored to its natural state. Thus, the well-being of man is connected to the well-being of the brain.

For this reason, we find that doctors faced with critical cases concentrate their concern on the well-being of the brain to determine a person’s life or death. Even if the heart stops, doctors can return it to its naturally functioning state, whereas if the brain stops, this entails death.

So, it is as Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* is saying, ‘O Lord, my bones have become weak, and I have nothing left in me except the final source for sustaining life’.

Since bones are something inward, buried beneath the skin, then it is a hidden condition; hence, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* wanted to draw attention to another outward and clearly manifested condition, so he mentioned an evident matter, ‘and my hair is ashen grey, but never, Lord, have I ever prayed to You in vain.’ (*Maryam:* 4) In this phrase, he employs the Arabic verb *ishta`la,* whereby the spreading of grey hair on his head is likened to the breaking out of fire, for the white hair which surmounts him is clearly visible like fire.

The one who looks deeply into this analogy will find that fire, too, must feed on firewood and that it remains lit with ascending flames as long as the wood contains vegetal vitality which nourishes the fire. But as soon as this vegetal vitality runs out in the firewood, it, i.e. the fire begins to wane until it becomes embers without flames, and then it goes out.

Whitening of the hair on the head is also evidence of the weakness of the body and the feebleness of its vigour. This is because the hair derives its colour from the coloured substance—be it black, red, or blond—found in the bulb of the hair-root and which supplies the hair follicle with this colour. The weakness of the body gradually weakens this substance, until it disappears all together and, as a result, the hair emerges white. Thus, this whiteness of the hair is resulted from the absence of coloured substance due to the weakening of the body and a weakening of the glands that produce this colour.

Therefore, we find that the well-to-do who are much concerned with their hair put various substances on it as soon as the first signs of greying hair appear on them. This is because after the barber dresses them, the whiskers normally receive the greatest quantity of the caustic substances which affect the bulbs of the hair-roots and the coloured substance within the bulb. The hair is like a pipeline that facilitates the conduction of these substances through it, especially right after shaving when hair is still open after having it cut.

Afterwards, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* says, ‘Lord, have I ever prayed to You in vain.’ (*Maryam:* 4) This part of Zakaryya’s (Zechariah’s) invocation denotes the following: ‘Never in the past have I been disappointed on account of my prayer to You because You had answered all my prayers. So, just as You have been Benevolent to me previously by answering all my prayers so that I have never been discontented in my supplication to You, but rather, I have always been made happy by Your Answer—may You therefore not refrain from Your customary response to me on this occasion. Make me delightful in answering my prayer, particularly since my request to You is in obedience to You, for I do not want to depart from this world except in a state of reassurance concerning the one who will be entrusted with Your Way of Guidance and undertake this prophetic mission after I am gone’.

In the same connection, you may invoke Allah *the Almighty* for a matter which you desire, and if that which you desire did not come into being and your prayer were not answered, you should not be aggrieved. This sadness or disappointment might be false because you are unaware of the wisdom behind the deprivation and lack of positive response to your prayer. You are not cognisant that Allah *the Almighty* controls your actions. You may pray for something which you viewed as good from your perspective, but according to Allah’s Knowledge, it did not comprise any good for you. Hence, He withheld it from you and rectified your mistake with regard to the assessment of good. In this way, your Lord granted you a favour while you believe that He withheld His Blessings from you; He was kind and generous to you while you believe He deprived you. This is because you requested something good based on your own knowledge, but Allah *the Almighty* refrained from bestowing it on you based on His Knowledge which is most encompassing.

Afterwards, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* mentions another motive, which is the underlying reason and the essence of the matter; Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَإِنِّى خِفْتُ ٱلْمَوَٰلِىَ مِن وَرَآءِى وَكَانَتِ
ٱمْرَأَتِى عَاقِرًا فَهَبْ لِى مِن لَّدُنكَ وَلِيًّا ٥

I fear [what] my kinsmen [will do] when I am gone,
for my wife is barren, so grant me a successor — a gift
from You [5] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 5)

The Arabic word *al-mawali* (kinsmen) is a reference to Zakaryya's kin from among the sons of his paternal uncles. They thus belong to the second generation which will come after him. He feared that they would not be up to the task of being entrusted with Allah's Religion and way of guidance after he passes away. After all, he has noticed from their conduct and comportment in life that they were not qualified to carry out this mission.

The Arabic phrase '*min wara`i* (when I am gone) comprises the Arabic preposition *wara`* which, as we have previously explained in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, can carry the meaning of 'behind', 'in front of', 'after' or 'beside'. In the passage here, it signifies 'after me'.

Following this, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* says, 'for my wife is barren' (*Maryam:* 5). A barren woman is one who is not capable of giving birth from the very beginning due to her physical condition. A woman may also become barren because of her reaching the age of menopause, for example. We know that reproduction and begetting offspring in the human species arise from a man and a woman. In this regard, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* has already described his condition of weakness and old age, and then he related that his wife was barren and could not give birth to children. Hence, all the causal factors of begetting children were inoperative in their case.

Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) saying, 'for my wife is barren' (*Maryam:* 5) implies that she is naturally barren. It is an innate condition attached to her, rather than one which suddenly came upon her, so she has never borne children.

Subsequently, he *peace be upon him* says, 'so grant me a successor…' (*Maryam:* 5). The Arabic word *hiba* signifies a gift granted without anything given or done in exchange. In the case of Zakaryya (Zechariah), the means of attaining his desire are here inoperative, and all signs pointed to the impossibility of procreation. Therefore, he did not say, for example, 'give me' since giving (*al-`ata`*) may be a compensation for something else. However, in this instance, Allah's gift is granted freely and without pre-conditions. It is as if he had said, 'O Lord, if You were to grant me a son, then it would be an unconditional gift from You for which I do not possess the causal means'. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* states that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, 'Praise be to Allah, Who has granted me in my old age(1) Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac)…' (*Ibrahim:* 39).

Here, we should ponder and comment upon *Ibrabim*'s (Abraham's) saying, '*a`la al-kibar* (in my old age). Concerning this, commentators opined that the preposition *a`la* (in) has the meaning of the preposition *m`a,* which has the general signification of 'with'. They point out that the word *a`la* is made up of three letters, while the word *m`a,* consists of only two. This leads to the question of why Allah *the Almighty* does not use the simpler term instead of the longer one. Behind the word employed here, *a`la,* there must be some novel additional meaning. This lies in the fact that the word *m`a* denotes only the idea of accompaniment or simultaneity, whereas the word *`ala* conveys this meaning as well as the notion of 'rising above' or 'mastering'. It is as if Ibrahim (Abraham) said, 'Surely, old age, O Lord, precludes begetting children; but Your Unrestrained Omnipotence overpowers old age'.

Another relevant example of this is clear in Allah's saying, '…and most surely your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness to people, notwithstanding their injustice…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6). Here, it is as if injustice necessitates that they be punished; however, Allah's Mercy towards them and His Forgiveness took precedence over the deserved punishment.

Back to the verse in question; '…a gift from You' (*Maryam:* 5) means a gift directly from Allah, not based upon normal causal factors.

As for His saying, '…a successor' (*Maryam:* 5), it signifies that Zakaryya (Zechariah) asked for a righteous son who would follow him in bearing the trusteeship of conveying Allah's way of guidance to people in order that their proceeding in life will be sound and well-founded.

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(1) *When Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him was given glad tidings of the coming birth of Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), he was 117 years old. This opinion is stated by Sa`id ibn Jubayr. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/49.*

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* states that Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said:

يَرِثُنِي وَيَرِثُ مِنْ ءَالِ يَعْقُوبَ ۖ وَٱجْعَلْهُ رَبِّ رَضِيًّا ﴿٦﴾

To be my heir and the heir of the family of Ya`qub. Lord, make him well pleasing [to You] [6] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 6)

We have previously made it clear that inheritance here does not mean the inheritance of wealth because prophets do not leave heirs of their estates and whatever they leave behind of wealth is to be given as charity for the common good. Instead, the intended meaning here is the inheritance of knowledge, prophethood, kingship, and the conveyance of Allah's way of guidance to people. It is noteworthy here that Zakaryya (Zechariah) did not only say, 'To be my heir....' (*Maryam:* 6), but rather said in addition: '…and the heir of the family of Ya`qub (Jacob).' (*Maryam:* 6) It is as if he states, 'I do not represent the climax of righteous obedience within the lineage of Jacob, since there is also Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac) and Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them*'. This is a display of humility on his part and respect for the high-station of these prophets by assigning them their proper status.

Regarding, 'Lord, make him well pleasing [to You]' (*Maryam:* 6), it is a prayer on his part in which he asks Allah *the Almighty* to make the son he is praying for deserving of His Pleasure.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

يَٰزَكَرِيَّآ إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِغُلَٰمٍ ٱسْمُهُۥ يَحْيَىٰ لَمْ نَجْعَل لَّهُۥ مِن قَبْلُ سَمِيًّا ﴿٧﴾

Zakaryya , We bring you good news of a son whose name will be Yahya — We have chosen this name for no one before him [7] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 7)

The one who carefully examines this story will find that this verse has condensed a part of the narrative which can be understood from its context. This is done with full confidence in the intelligence of the listener and his ability to ponder over and properly understand the meaning. Thus, it is as if the meaning of the verse is as follows: Allah *the Almighty* heard the invocation of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and the circumstances surrounding his request, and He responded to him saying, 'Zakaryya (Zechariah)...' (*Maryam:* 7). The speech, addressed to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* in this direct manner is an indication of the speed with which Allah *the Almighty* answered his prayer; hence the response came directly and immediately without preliminary words of introduction.

Let us offer a similar Quranic example to fully illustrate this point; in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and Balqis. Sulaiman (Solomon) said, 'O chiefs! Which of you can bring to me her throne before they come to me in submission? One audacious among the jinn said, "I will bring it to you before you rise up from your place; and most surely I am strong (and) trusty for it." One who had the knowledge of the Book said, "I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye." Then when he saw it settled beside him, he said, "This is of the grace of my Lord that He may try me whether I am grateful or ungrateful…' (*an-Naml:* 38-40).

We should note that between Allah's saying, '…in the twinkling of an eye.' (*an-Naml:* 40), and His saying, 'Then when he saw it settled beside him…' (*an-Naml:* 40), there are omitted accounts which are required by the narrative sequence of the story. For example, the story may go as follows: 'Then Solomon gave him permission and so he departed and brought the throne'. However, the literary style here moves rapidly to concur with the speed of the event in terms of fetching the throne of Queen of Sheba from its distant location.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah says, 'We bring you good news...' (*Maryam:* 7); the Arabic verb employed here is derived from the root *al-bishara.* This word denotes the good news which makes you joyful before it occurs and thus prolongs the extent of happiness regarding a delightful thing. When one of your peers brings you glad tidings, he might be lying about it; or the circumstances and events may arise contrary to what he thought. But, how would it be with you if it is Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gave you the glad tidings Himself? When good news comes from Allah *the Almighty* you can be sure that it is true and will actually happen without any shed of doubt.

As for Allah's saying, 'We bring you good news of a son whose name will be Yahya (John)...' (*Maryam:* 7), it signifies that He also gave the promised son a name. In this regard, we know that human beings have choices in giving names for their newborn babies, and that they have full freedom in doing so. Thus, one woman may name her son Harankash, a name of a bitter orange, and she is free to do so. Another one may name her black-skinned daughter Qamar (Moon), which implies brilliant whiteness, and she, too, is free to do so.

However, when people give names to their offspring, they typically hope that the one named will possess qualities that gladden the soul and are a source of delight. Thus, when we name someone *Sai`d*, meaning happy, this is done with optimism that he will truly be happy, as this name is given with reference to what it connotes. But does this optimist person who gave this name to his son really exercise the power to assure that the named person will actually develop according to what he wants and for what and hopes? Of course, he does not have this power, nor can he guarantee the results. This is because there is a power higher than he is which governs, and the named person may become something quite different from that which his name signifies. However, if the One Who gave the name is Allah *the Almighty,* then the qualities that the name connotes will surely be realised in the character of the named person and will be applicable to him. Inevitably, the qualities imbedded in the name given by Him will be fully realised in the named person. He *the Almighty* named Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) son Yahya (John), which means 'he lives'; so this attribute necessarily applies to him.

The word Yahya (to live) is a verb, the opposite of which is to die. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* is fully Capable of causing Yahya (John) to live. But to what extent will He prolong his life and for how many years? Here, the quality embedded in the name Yahya*,* that is, to live, is realised even if he only lived until middle age, for example. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* brought Yahya (John) to life and achieved the attribute of life connoted by his name. Therefore, the people of knowledge concluded from his name, Yahya, which he would die a martyr to remain alive just as Allah *the Almighty* named him; this is indeed what occurred.

There follows Allah's saying, 'We have chosen this name for no one before him.' (*Maryam:* 7) This verse contains the Arabic word *samiyya* concerning whose meaning scholars have differing opinions. According to their opinions, it can signify: equal, comparable or similar; alternatively, it denotes that a person's name is like someone else's name.

A relevant example of the word *samiyya* (having the same name or equal to someone else) is found in Allah's saying, 'The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, so serve Him and be patient in His service. Do you know any one equal (*samiyya*) to Him?' (*Maryam:* 65) In this regard, scholars said that *samiyya* here carries both meanings. According to the first of these two meanings, namely equal, we can interpret the above verse as follows: 'There is nothing equal or comparable to Allah *the Almighty*'. This is because He says, '…there is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11), and He also says, 'No one is comparable to Him.' (*al-Ikhlas:* 4)

We might partly agree with this meaning in the case of Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*, but there is something that renders this meaning unfitting; when we apply the meaning of equal or comparable to the word *samiyya* as used in Allah's saying with regard to Yahya (John); this leads to the notion that never before was there anyone at the same level of righteousness and piety as him. Hence, if this is so, then what about the high religious rank of the father of the prophets, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*? Further, what about Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*? Therefore, this meaning which could be valid within the narrative context in another passage, is not correct here since, prior to Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* established certain men who were better than him, i.e. Yahya (John), or at least comparable to him.

As for the second possible meaning of Allah's saying, 'Do you know any one equal (*samiyya*) to Him?' (*Maryam:* 65), it implies that no one is called by the same Name of Allah. This is the meaning which corresponds correctly to the story of Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* since it is the novel name which Allah *the Almighty* gave to the son of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and no one had ever been called by it before. However, after him this name became so widespread that a poet could say:

I named him Yahya so that he would live, but it was not
Of any avail in warding off Allah’s decree of death.

In passing, we should contemplate on Allah’s signs regarding the matter of giving His Divine Name to anyone. It is noteworthy that no one has ever dared to name his son ‘Allah’, not even from among the disbelievers and the atheists who publicly proclaim their atheism and denial of the Creator. Such is the case, despite the guaranteed freedom to choose names for their children. This proves that their disbelief is just stubbornness and disputatiousness and that they are not even sincere in their disbelief. Furthermore, it shows that they know that Allah *the Almighty* exists, and therefore they are too afraid to give His Name to their offspring.

Hence, the word *samiyya* with respect to divinity takes on both meanings, namely; there is no equal to Allah *the Almighty,* and His Name is not given to anyone. With respect to Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*, it carries only the second meaning, namely; his name was not given to anyone before him.

Suppose that Allah *the Almighty* reviewed all names used previously and did not find anyone in the past who was called Allah, so He announced it as a challenge: ‘Do you know any one equal (*samiyya*) to Him?’ What has prevented the disbelievers and the atheist from meeting this challenge by calling any of their offspring ‘Allah’?! They failed to meet this challenge as no one has ever called his child by this name. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِى غُلَٰمٌ وَكَانَتِ ٱمْرَأَتِى
عَاقِرًا وَقَدْ بَلَغْتُ مِنَ ٱلْكِبَرِ عِتِيًّا ﴿٨﴾

He said, ‘Lord, how can I have a son when my wife is barren, and I am old and frail?’ [8] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 8)

When Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* heard the good news from his Lord and was reassured of attaining his request, this enticed him into seeking to penetrate deeply into an understanding of the means. How will this be effected and the glad tidings realised, given that he had reached the infirmity of old age and his wife was barren?

But, what did Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* mean by the above question, since he knew with certainty that Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of his condition and that of his wife? As a matter of fact, he did not deny the fulfilment of this glad tiding, nor was he seeking to emend Allah *the Almighty*—far be it from him to have this in mind.

Rather, the glad tiding emboldened him to seek cognisance of the manner in which it would be realised. This is akin to what occurred in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when his Lord spoke to him and chose him, singling him out with this distinction. This discourse with Allah *the Almighty* subsequently enticed him into asking to see Him, 'My Lord! Show me (Yourself), so that I may look upon You.' (*al-A'raf:* 143)

A similar event occurred in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he said to his Lord, 'My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead…' (*al-Baqara:* 260). In the above verse, the father of the prophets, Ibrahim (Abraham), did not doubt Allah's Capability to revive the dead, but he wanted to find out about the wondrous way of doing so. Thus, his request was not intended to doubt the truth in question, but rather to know the specific manner in which this truth manifests itself. Such discourse concerning the particular circumstances of Allah's Capability to raise the dead has nothing to do with its actuality.

Allah *the Almighty* thereupon informed Ibrahim (Abraham) that this matter was not something which could be formulated in words, but instead had to be experienced in practice. So, He commanded him according to what we know of this story, that is, to bring four birds on his own and then to clasp them close to himself in order to assure himself of their reality. Then He ordered him to cut them up into pieces and to subsequently scatter these pieces on the summits of mountains. After this, the Creator left it to Ibrahim (Abraham) to call the birds himself. With his command, the pieces would immediately come together and life would pervade them anew. This is among the manifestations of Allah's Sublime Majesty that He did not undertake this act, but instead caused someone who is not capable of doing this to actually do it.(1)

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(1) Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Ibrabim (Abraham), '… take four of the birds, then train them to follow you, then place on every mountain a part of them, then call them, they will come to you flying; and know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.' (*al-Baqara*: 260)

In fact, powerful human beings may extend the effect of their power to the weak ones in a way that whoever is not able of carrying something will call for someone who can carry it for him. Likewise, whoever is incapable of undertaking some task which will be brought to be carried out by someone? However, the weak remains in the same state, unable to do anything. That is to say that, the powerful human being does not give some of his power to a weak person. By contrast, Allah *the Almighty* transfers some of His Own Power to the weak person who then becomes strong and able to act.

Back to the verse under discussion; Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) saying, 'Lord, how can I have a son…' (*Maryam:* 8) is thus a question about the particular means of having a son. This is similar to the situation of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when his Lord asked him, 'What! And do you not believe?' (*al-Baqara:* 260), that is, He asked him whether or not he believes in Allah's Power and Ability to revive the dead. Ibrahim (Abraham) replied, 'Yes, but that my heart may be at ease.' (*al-Baqara:* 260) This verse shows that he was asking about the manner in which Allah *the Almighty* revives the dead.

Another possible interpretation of Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) question, 'Lord, how can I have a son…' (*Maryam:* 8) is that he wants to confirm and be ascertain of this glad tiding. This is like when you make a promise to your son to buy him a present and he importunes you regarding this matter to be certain of your promise to him. He takes pleasure in ascertaining that this promise will be fulfilled without a doubt.

Thereafter, Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* mentions the specific circumstances of this affair that bewilder him, saying, '…my wife is barren, and I am old and frail?' (*Maryam:* 8) In this statement, the Arabic word *`itiya* (frail) is derived from the verb *`ata*, meaning to be implacably insolent and overpoweringly destructive. The related word *al-`utuw*, connoting haughty and aggressive insolence, is tantamount to disbelief, while the person characterised by these traits, *al-`atiy,* is the strong one who cannot be defeated. It is for this reason that Zakaryya (Zechariah) describes old age—which is a symbol of weakness—as being implacably insolent and overpoweringly destructive. This is because no one is ever able to fight against or to repel the weakness of old age, regardless of the attempts to counter it through medicines, drugs, and vitamins.

It seems that this issue of longing to having a son used to preoccupy Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) mind and to weigh heavily upon him since he frequently invoked Allah *the Almighty* to bestow a son upon him. In another verse of the Quran, Zakaryya (Zechariah) says, '…O my Lord! Leave me not alone; and You are the best of inheritors.' (*al-Anbiya':* 89). Thus, he wanted a son who would be his heir as he was granted this heir, as Allah *the Almighty* is the best of inheritors.

Therefore, Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) prayer was answered: 'So We responded to him and gave him Yahya (John) and made his wife fit for him….' (*al-Anbiya':* 90) We should consider that before Allah *the Almighty* says, 'and made his wife fit for him…' (*al-Anbiya':* 90), He says, '…We gave him Yahya (John)…' (*al-Anbiya':* 90). Hence, the remedying of the wife was not a condition for the fulfilment of this glad tiding and the occurrence of this gift.

Here, we have a manifestation of the unlimited nature of the divine power that can never ever be resisted, that is, He is fully Capable of making this barren wife fertile since the divine action is not bound by any limit. By contrast, in our daily life, if one of your appliances, for example, becomes dysfunctional, you take it to an electrician to have it repaired. But he may find that it is seriously damaged and advises you to throw it away and to purchase another new one, as there is no way of fixing it.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* remedies Zakaryya's (Zechariah's) spouse for him so that we do not think that Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* came forth in some other way, while the wife remained in her state of barrenness.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

قَالَ كَذَٰلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّنٌ وَقَدْ خَلَقْتُكَ
مِن قَبْلُ وَلَمْ تَكُ شَيْـًٔا ﴿٩﴾

He said, 'This is what your Lord has said: "It is easy for Me:
I created you, though you were nothing before"' [9]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 9)

It is Allah *the Almighty* Who answered the question of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* saying, 'This is what your Lord has said….' (*Maryam:* 9)

This verse shows that He *the Almighty* announced and decreed that the matter would be in the way He willed. Therefore, Zakaryya (Zechariah) should not have discussed this question further, for Allah *the Almighty* knows best that his wife was barren. Despite that, Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon him the gift of a child.

This is followed by His saying, 'it is easy (*hayyin*) for Me' (*Maryam:* 9) which is similar to another verse concerning the Resurrection in which Allah says, '...and most easy (*ahwan*) is this for Him….' (*ar-Rum:* 27) However, you should not imagine that there are some things which are easy (*hayyin*), some others which are easier (*ahwan*) and some which are difficult for Him *the Almighty*. The intention behind these expressions is to bring the approximate meaning closer to our minds' grasp.

Allah *the Almighty* addresses us according to our speech and our logic. Thus, creation from what is existent is easier from our perspective than creation from nothingness. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says, 'Were We then fatigued with the first creation? Yet are they in doubt with regard to a new creation.' (*Qaf:* 15)

Hence, the issue of creation with respect to Him does not comprise easy and easier, or hard and harder. Such descriptions apply to someone who undertakes tasks in a manual step-by-step manner, which is the case with our tasks as human beings. On the contrary, Allah *the Almighty* does not concern Himself with such acts, but rather, He says to something, 'Be', and it is; He *the Almighty* says, 'His Command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82)

Then Allah *the Almighty* provides stronger proof for the easiness of this matter of granting Zakaryya (Zechariah) a son, affirming: 'I created you, though you were nothing before.' (*Maryam:* 9) After all, for Him to bring Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* into being out of something is less amazing than to create out of nothing.

Subsequently, He *the Almighty* says:

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱجۡعَل لِّيٓ ءَايَةٗۚ قَالَ ءَايَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ ٱلنَّاسَ ثَلَٰثَ لَيَالٖ سَوِيّٗا ﴿١٠﴾

He said, ‘Give me a sign, Lord.’ He said, ‘Your sign is that you will not [be able to] speak to anyone for three full [days and] nights’ [10] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 10)

The Arabic word *aya* (sign) signifies an indication that his wife had indeed become pregnant with Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*. It is as if Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* wanted to rush the matter and did not have the patience to wait for nine months. Instead, he wanted to live under the auspices of this blessing, as if it was an actuality for which his tongue would not cease to give praise and thanks. This blessing would abide in his mind despite the fact that his son was still a foetus in the womb of his mother.

Thereupon, His Lord responds to him, saying, ‘… “Your sign is that you will not [be able to] speak to anyone for three full [days and] nights.”’ (*Maryam:* 9) This verse shows that his sign is that he will not talk to people for a period of three nights. In this statement, the Arabic phrase *`alla* (that not) is not meant to be a prohibition of speaking; instead it is a notification of a condition which will come over him without his volition. This is because he will not speak to people although his faculties are in good order and free of any defect, such as muteness or other defect which would prevent him from speaking. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* adds the Arabic adverb *sawiya* which may be interpreted to mean that Zakaryya (Zechariah) will be unable to speak while he is sound and free of illness without any physical malfunction. In this manner, speechlessness is not a flaw, but rather, a sign from Allah *the Almighty*.

There is a difference between a cosmic decree and a religious one. The cosmic decree is that which comes to pass and you have no choice in evading its existence. The religious decree, on the other hand is that in which you do have a choice, for it is possible for you to obey and thus be obedient, or to disobey and thus be sinfully disobedient. What occurred to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was a cosmic decree and a sign from Allah *the Almighty* in which he had no choice.

In this way, Allah *the Almighty* gives us proof that He brings things into being without the presence of expected causal factors. The causal factors may remain sound and in suitable condition, yet their effect does not manifest itself. Thus, the tongue is present here, and the organs of articulation are in good working order, but nonetheless Zakaryya (Zechariah) is not able to speak. So, we should reflect on this unlimited divine power; Allah *the Almighty* willed a son for Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* in the absence of causal conditions, and here he is unable to speak although the causal conditions exist. Hence, both signs are equivalent with respect to Allah's Omnipotence and Will.

Subsequently, He *the Almighty* says:

فَخَرَجَ عَلَىٰ قَوْمِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلْمِحْرَابِ فَأَوْحَىٰٓ إِلَيْهِمْ أَن سَبِّحُوا۟ بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا ﴿١١﴾

He went out of the sanctuary to his people and signalled to them to praise God morning and evening [11]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 11)

Hence, this incident took place for Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him,* while he was in *al-mihrab* (the place of worship and prayer). This is normally situated on an elevated spot raised above that which surrounds it, and constitutes the place of prayer of the prophets and the righteous. It was called a *mihrab* because in it Satan wages war with his schemes and whispers. In the story of Dawud (David) *peace be upon him al-mihrab* is also mentioned, 'And has there come to you the story of the litigants, when they made an entry into the private chamber (*al-Mihrab*) by ascending over the walls?' (*Sad:* 21)

The same event of the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* is related in another verse which also indicates that he received the joyous news of the coming of Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*, while he was in his sanctuary; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Then the angels called to him as he stood praying in the sanctuary: That Allah gives you the good news of Yahya (John) verifying a word from Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 39)

In the verse in question, Allah's saying, 'signalled to them' (*Maryam:* 11), comprises the Arabic verb *awha* (to signal). As we have said, the word *wahy* (inspiration) has a general linguistic meaning as well as a specifically religious one. The general linguistic meaning of *al-wahy* is the communication of a message by hidden means. Based upon this meaning, *al-wahy* (inspiration) occurs in numerous ways. For instance, Allah *the Almighty* conveys revelation to the messengers and prophets, and inspires those who are of the elect but not messengers. An example of the latter is clear in His saying, ‘And We revealed to Musa’s (Moses’s) mother saying, “suckle him”’ (*al-Qasas:* 7) which is to say that He *the Almighty* inspired Musa’s (Moses’s) mother through hidden means.

Likewise, He inspires the angels, ‘when your Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe…’ (*al-Anfal:* 12); the righteous from among the followers of the messengers: ‘And when I revealed to the disciples, saying, Believe in Me and My apostle…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 111); and the insects which receive messages from Him in a covert manner: ‘And your Lord revealed to the bee saying, “Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build.”’ (*an-Nahl:* 68)

Moreover, such inspiration is even conveyed to inanimate things, as indicated in Allah’s saying, ‘When the earth is shaken with her (violent) shaking, and the earth brings forth her burdens, and man says, “What has befallen her?” On that day, she shall tell her news, because your Lord had inspired her.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 1-5)

In a slightly different vein, the devils may inspire one another; Allah says, ‘…the devils from among men and jinn, some of them suggesting to others varnished falsehood to deceive.’ (*al-An‘am:* 112) The devils also communicate surreptitiously to human beings who have taken them as intimate associates: ‘…the devils suggest to their friends that they should contend with you.’ (*al-An‘am:* 121) This is because Satan does not approach man except by stealthy means and by whispering in his thoughts.

On the other hand, inspiration in its authoritative religious connotation is communication from Allah Alone to a prophet who makes a claim of prophethood and is accompanied by a miracle. Thus, in this sense, *al-wahy* is the hidden communication from Allah *the Almighty* to a messenger.

Returning to the verse in question; Allah’s saying, ‘and signalled to them’ (*Maryam:* 11) means that Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* expressed himself to the people by means of indicative gesturing since he could not speak. The instruction he communicated to them was, '…to praise Allah morning and evening.' (*Maryam:* 11) In this passage, the Arabic adverb *bukratan* (by morning) denotes at the beginning of the day; whereas *`ashiyan* (by evening) means at the end of the day. So, he instructed them to enclose the day with glorification from beginning to end. It is as if he had begun to manifest the signs of joy and delight at the glad tidings, and that he felt that his own expressions of gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* and his glorification of Him were inadequate for this blessing. Therefore, he commanded his people to join him in glorifying and giving thanks to Him for this blessing since it was not restricted to him, but rather was shared collectively.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰيَحۡيَىٰ خُذِ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِقُوَّةٖۖ وَءَاتَيۡنَٰهُ ٱلۡحُكۡمَ صَبِيّٗا ١٢

[We said], 'Yahya, hold on to the Scripture firmly.'
While he was still a boy, We granted him wisdom [12]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 12)

Let us take note that this noble verse directs our attention to a later period of Yahya's (John's) life which took place many years later. The previous narrative context was speaking about him while he was just a glad tiding to his father and still a foetus in his mother's womb. Now, suddenly, Allah *the Almighty* addresses him as if he had become an actual person, saying, 'We said, "Yahya (John), hold on to the Scripture firmly." (*Maryam:* 12) Hence, he had attained the age of maturity, and was now qualified to assume the function of calling others to faith. The issue was thus one to be taken in all seriousness, as it was real and actual.

As for Allah's saying, '…hold on to the Scripture' (*Maryam:* 12), the Scripture refers to the Torah. It used to be their divine way of guidance which regulated their lives. There follows Allah's saying, 'firmly' (*Maryam:* 12) which means that Yahya (John) should hold the Scripture with faithful dedication to its preservation and earnest endeavour to act in accord with it. This is because heavenly knowledge and the divinely ordered path which have come to the Israelites in the Torah are not intended to be merely understood, but rather to be acted upon.

If it were otherwise, then one should bear in mind that Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Children of Israel, 'The likeness of those who were charged with the Torah, then they did not observe it, is as the likeness of the mule bearing books….' (*al-Jumu'a:* 5) Allah *the Almighty* had charged them with the Torah, but the Children of Israel had not properly carried out this task and failed to act accordingly.

In the verse in question, the Arabic word *al-quwwa* refers to the active power which controls the motion of life, both its movement and its stillness. For example, consider a spaceship which is launched into outer space and remains moving therein for several years; where does it get the fuel which propels it throughout this period? The reality is that it only requires fuel in a quantity sufficient to allow it to escape from the force of the earth's gravitational attraction. Then, once it gets out of the range of this gravitational force while it is moving, it remains in motion and does not stop except by employing some power. Similarly, that which is motionless remains so until some power comes along to cause it to move.

Hence, power either causes something motionless to move, or causes something moving to stop and become motionless. The braking mechanism of the train tracks which brings trains to a standstill is a case in point. This is because if you want to stop a train, you deprive it of fuel, but its forward momentum causes it to continue moving it forward, and so you need a counter power to stop it. This is what they call the law of inertia. In other words, if something is moving, it requires power to stop it, and if it is motionless, it needs power so that it can move.

You will notice this law of inertia, which we learned in school, when a car moves with you inside it and you find that your body is pushed backwards, as it has moved forward while you are motionless. Likewise, if the movement of the car stops, your body lunges forward because it has halted and you are still moving. Therefore, these things that are in a state of movement or inertia in the universe are the result of power.

In this way, we can understand Allah's saying, 'Yahya (John), hold on to the Scripture firmly' (*Maryam:* 12) because the Scripture contains commands and prohibitions, enjoining good and forbidding evil. So, if it orders you to do good deeds while you are not doing them, you will need a motivating power to push you to the good. It is as if you had been inert and required power to move you. Likewise, if the Scripture forbids you from evil deeds which you are doing, then you will need a power to hinder you and halt your movement towards evil. The divine way of guidance comprises this power which pushes you towards good if you are motionless, and prevent you from evil if you are moving in its direction.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'While he was still a boy, We granted him wisdom' (*Maryam:* 12). The Arabic word *al-hukm* (wisdom) in this passage signifies knowledge and understanding of the Torah; or, alternatively, obedience and worship. As for the Arabic word *sabiya* (child), it means that Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* was granted *al-hukm* at an early age. This was a gift from Allah *the Almighty* which is not dependent upon causal factors. Hence, maturity and intelligence appeared in Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* at an early age, surpassing his peers and his time. It is narrated that when he was quite young, his peers invited him to play, but he said to them, 'Not for play were we created.'(1)

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَحَنَانًا مِّن لَّدُنَّا وَزَكَوٰةً وَكَانَ تَقِيًّا ﴿١٣﴾

Tenderness from Us, and purity.
He was devout [13] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 13)

Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* had come into the world, while his parents were elderly and weak, so, as a child, he needed someone to encompass him with affection and compassion and compensate him for the tender compassion of his parents. He was also in need of someone who would teach him and bring him up. So, Allah *the Almighty* assumed this function, for He is his Creator and the One Who named him. Additionally, He is his Guardian. Hence, Allah gave him tender compassion from Himself, as indicated by His saying, 'from Us' (*Maryam:* 13). Allah *the Almighty* granted him tenderness from Himself because his parent's energy for compassion had already been depleted.

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(1) *This was narrated by Al-Hakim on the authority of Ibn `Abbas who narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace be upon him said, 'Two boys said to Yahya (John), son of Zakaryya (Zechariah), 'Come with us to play.' But Yahya (John) replied, 'Not to play were we created. Let us go to pray.' See Al-Hakim, Tarikh; As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/485.*

Concerning Allah's saying, 'and purity' (*Maryam:* 13), it denotes Yahya's (John's) purity of sins, clarity of soul and spiritual grace. All of this was the result of bringing him up according to Allah's way of guidance which regulated his proceeding in life: do this; do not do that.

This is followed by Allah's saying, 'He was devout.' (*Maryam:* 13). This part of the verse shows clearly that Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* responded well to the divine compassion and this upbringing influenced him deeply; and hence he was mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* that is, he faithfully executed His commands and refrained from that which He had prohibited. In this way, he protected himself from Allah's majestic attributes of awe-inspiring.

We have previously said that *at-taqwa* (piety) implies that you establish between yourself and that which you fear a defensive hindrance which protects you from its harm. So, we say, 'Be fearfully mindful of Allah', also, 'Be fearfully mindful of Hellfire'. Yet, how could we be mindful of Allah *the Almighty* Whose Protection we are striving after?

When we say, 'Be fearfully mindful of Allah', this means to establish preventive measures between you and His Attributes of Awe-inspiring and Irresistible Might. This will protect you from His Irresistible Might, Implacable Omnipotence, and Overwhelming Power; for you are incapable of bearing the slightest amount of His Chastisement. Hellfire is among Allah's forces and a manifestation of His Overwhelming Control. Hence, being fearfully mindful of Hellfire is a part of being fearfully mindful of Him. Moreover, the protective defence which safeguards you from His Divine Attributes of Irresistible Might and Sublime Rigour is none other than obedience through compliance with His commands and prohibitions.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَبَرًّۢا بِوَٰلِدَيۡهِ وَلَمۡ يَكُن جَبَّارًا عَصِيّٗا ﴿١٤﴾

kind to his parents, not domineering or
rebellious [14] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 14)

Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* was born when his parents were in a state of old age and weakness, so he did not receive adequate compassion or appropriate upbringing from both. He did not feel complete parenthood in their presence, since their role in his life was secondary and their guardianship over him was feeble and modest. Yet, despite all this, he showed them the full kindness and compassion of filial piety, which is why Allah *the Almighty* says of him: '…he was not domineering or rebellious.' (*Maryam:* 14)

Regarding the traits of haughtiness and rebelliousness, it is unimaginable that they would manifest themselves from a child towards his parents. An exception to this would be when the child felt that his father was neglecting him and turning away from guarding over him, and when he felt that his mother was too preoccupied to concern herself with his upbringing, abandoning him instead of taking care of him as he merits. It is for this reason that we find forms of this haughtiness and rebelliousness, and hear about those who treat their parents with cruelty and harshness. Since they did not receive affection, compassion, and watchful care from them, the bonds between parents and their offspring are severed. It seems that Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* related what happened to his son, and narrated his story to him. The son then came to understand the role of his parents and he disavowed any shortcoming on their part. Hence, he was full of gracious reverence and mercy towards them, conducting himself obediently and humbly in their regard.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَسَلَٰمٌ عَلَيۡهِ يَوۡمَ وُلِدَ وَيَوۡمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوۡمَ يُبۡعَثُ حَيّٗا ﴿١٥﴾

Peace was on him the day he was born, the day he died,
and it will be on him the day he is raised to life again [15]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 15)

This verse mentions three matters which are to be counted as the major landmarks in the life of a man: birth, death, and Resurrection. Allah *the Almighty* favoured Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* with peace on the day of his birth since he was born contrary to the usual manner of childbirth, given the fact that his mother was barren and old. Despite this, she was not the object of people's malicious talk, and no one raised objections to her giving birth to a child. Even though she was in this state, no one dared to be insolent towards her. This is because what happened to her was a sign of Allah *the Almighty* Who had given glad tidings of it to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* in order for the glad tiding to be a preparation for and a prelude to this wondrous event.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* favoured him with peace on the day of his death, since he would die a martyr. Martyrdom is not comparable to death, for it gives him life extending to eternal, immortal life. Likewise, He favoured him with peace on the Day of Resurrection when he would be raised up alive.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱذْكُرْ فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مَرْيَمَ إِذِ ٱنتَبَذَتْ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا مَكَانًا شَرْقِيًّا ﴿١٦﴾

Mention in the Quran the story of Maryam. She withdrew from her family to a place to the east [16] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 16)

In fact, the story of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* occurred before the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) and Yahya (John) *peace be upon them*. This is because the prayer of Zakaryya (Zechariah) for a son came as a result of what he heard from Maryam (Mary) when he asked her about the food with her and which he had not brought to her. As her guardian and trustee of her affairs, he was astonished to find that she was possessing sustenance that he had not brought to her, while she was devoting herself to worship in her prayer sanctuary. Consequently, he said to her, 'O Maryam (Mary)! Whence comes this to you? She said, "It is from Allah. Surely Allah gives to whom He pleases without measure."' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

It is as if this question was the initial starting point of a fundamental principle: from where did you get this? However, Allah's bestowals are not dependent upon causal factors, for He grants sustenance to whom He wills, when He wills, without measure.

The Will of Allah *the Almighty* decreed that Maryam (Mary) should utter this statement: ‘Surely Allah gives to whom He pleases without measure.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37). She meant to make Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* aware of something that she herself would later need when she realised she had become pregnant without a husband. Consequently, Maryam (Mary) will not object to this situation, and she will recognise that it is a gift from Allah *the Almighty*.

Likewise, this miracle of the gift of food reminds Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* about Allah’s Grace and vast Mercy; this matter is never absent from the mind of a prophet of Allah. Nevertheless, the human soul sometimes suffers from problematic issues which cause the awareness of this truth to drift far from the focus of one’s consciousness and from one’s concerns. But, as soon as it is recalled, he turns his attention towards it. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘There did Zakaryya (Zechariah) pray to his Lord…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 38). This verse shows that Zakaryya (Zechariah) thought that since Allah *the Almighty* grants His gifts to whomever He wills without reckoning, why should he not pray to Him for a righteous son, to be in charge of the mission of calling people to faith after him. As long as this provision is beyond all causal factors, then old age or barrenness will not prevent him from receiving this gift.

Hence, it was Maryam (Mary) who inspired Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* to make this supplication, and Allah *the Almighty* responded favourably to him by granting him Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*. This, in turn, was a preamble, paving of the way for Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* so that she would not be vexed by her pregnancy, and would attribute the phenomenon to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* bestows favours upon whom He wills without measure. This was also intended to be a source of comfort and assurance for her soul since otherwise it is possible that she would be plagued by strange thoughts and assailed by doubts, imagining that this pregnancy was a result of an event she was not aware of, or that it occurred, while she was asleep, for example.

So, Allah *the Almighty* prevented all of these doubts from affecting her by providing her with an introductory foretaste to witness and experience through the food which no one had brought to her, as well as in the pregnancy of the wife of Zakaryya (Zechariah) though she was barren and could not bear children.

As for Allah's saying, 'Mention in the Quran (*kitab*) the story of Maryam (Mary)' (*Maryam:* 16), the Arabic word *kitab* refers to the Noble Quran. This verse is addressed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanding him to relate the story of Maryam (Mary) which was revealed to him in the Quran. Discussion of this story had previously occurred in the chapter of *al-`Imran* in which Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the vow of Maryam's (Mary's) mother that the child in her womb would be dedicated to service in the Holy Temple at Jerusalem. However, only males were considered suitable for service in the Holy Temple as they were able to bear the great hardship of this task. So, when she gave birth to a female, the Will of Allah *the Almighty* was not in accordance with her doubtful supposition on the matter. While Maryam (Mary) was not able to serve the actual site of the temple, she devoted herself to serving it in a moral and religious manner with great intensity. Ultimately, she left her family behind and went to this spot which she adopted as a place of spiritual retreat for herself to worship Allah *the Almighty* far from the prying eyes of people.

Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was the daughter of 'Imran, and the Quran relates that she was addressed as: 'O sister of Harun (Aaron)!' (*Maryam:* 28) For this reason, confusion overcame many people, as they believed her to be the sister of Prophet Musa (Moses) ibn 'Imran and the sister of Harun (Aaron), the brother of Musa (Moses). In reality, this issue came about by happenstance whereby the names coincided. Consequently, when some of the companions went to Yemen, its inhabitants said to them, 'You say that Maryam (Mary) is the sister of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron), despite there being eleven generations between Maryam (Mary) and 'Imran, the father of Musa (Moses)!'

Thereupon, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Why did you not tell them that they were named after their Prophets and righteous people before them.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Al-Mughira ibn Shu`ba. At-Tirmidhi graded it as authentic, but strange Hadith, for it is only narrated through ibn Idris's chain of narrators. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2135; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3155.*

It is even mentioned that at the funeral of one of their scholars there were in attendance four thousand men with the name of Harun (Aaron). Therefore, the names here just happen to coincide. Maryam (Mary) is indeed the daughter of ‘Imran who is not the father of Musa (Moses); and she is indeed the sister of Harun (Aaron), but he is not the brother of Musa (Moses).

The Quran sets apart an entire chapter with the name of Maryam (Mary), and singles her out by identifying her by her name and the name of her father. We have previously explained that the individualised identification in the story of *Maryam* occurred because she was unique among women and stood apart from them by virtue of something that had never happened before and which happened only to her. This is a phenomenon pertaining to a specific person; it would never occur again to any other of the daughters of Eve.

On the other hand, when the Quran mentions an event that can conceivably be repeated, the story is related without specific identification of the personages involved. It is in this way that the narrative of the Quran treats the unnamed wives of Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) as examples of disbelief, though they were the wives of two noble prophets. The same is true for the story of Pharaoh’s unnamed wife who was an example of faith that arose in a house of disbelief, indeed within the very house of Pharaoh. The focus of their stories is not on specific personages. Instead, the purpose is to highlight freedom of belief, and to demonstrate that a woman, from the Islamic perspective, has independent personal freedom with regard to matters of belief. Moreover, she is not obliged to follow anyone in matters of religious belief or doctrine, regardless of whether she is the wife of a prophet or the wife of one of the leaders of disbelief.

Back to the verse in question; there follows Allah’s saying, ‘She withdrew from her family to a place to the east.’ (*Maryam:* 16) The initial part of this passage: ‘She withdrew from her family...’ (*Maryam:* 16) means that Maryam (Mary) distanced herself from them. The verb employed here *nabadha* denotes abandoning and forsaking. It is as if she were on intimate terms not with her family, but rather with the Lord of her family. We should consider that the Quran says, ‘…from her family…’ (*Maryam:* 16); it does not say, ‘from her people’. Thus, Maryam (Mary) left behind the people closest to her and those dearest to her heart, and went to this place to offer acts of worship to Allah *the Almighty*. The verse continues: '…to a place to the east.' (*Maryam:* 16) But the east of what?! Every place may be correctly described as being to the east of one place just as it can be correctly described as being to the west of another. Hence, this word is applicable to every place. However, there is a prominent landmark in her place, namely the Holy Temple. Therefore, the intended meaning is that she withdrew from her family to the eastern side of the Holy Temple to fully devote herself to worship and service this place.

Here, we can pose a question which is: 'Why did she choose the eastern side of the Holy Temple specifically over any other side'? It is said that this is because they used to find the rising of the sun propitious.(1) After all, the sun is the zenith of physical light in whose guidance people move about without stumbling. During his proceeding, man has two kinds of light: physical light which comes from the sun, the moon, the stars, or from lamps etc. This is the light which causes things around one to be visible to him, enabling him to avoid bumping into things stronger than him and which could smash him, or into things weaker than him and which he might smash.

Moreover, man has also the light of Allah's way of guidance which guides him as to issues of morality and values, preventing him from stumbling in the tortuous trails. Relevant to this is Allah's saying, 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth…' (*an-Nur:* 35); after which He says, '…light upon light....' (*an-Nur:* 35) Thus, Allah's way of guidance is the light of Allah which descends by means of revelation to guide humankind to the right path.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'The place is surely specified as being towards the east because they accorded great significance to the easterly direction and from whence celestial lights arise. Moreover, the eastern sides of everything were regarded as being superior to the other sides. This opinion is stated by At-Tabari. It was also related that Ibn `Abbas had said, "I am the most knowledgeable of people with respect to the fact that why the Christians took the east for their direction of prayer. My knowledge is based upon Allah's saying, 'She withdrew from her family to a place to the east.' (Maryam: 16) They took the birth place of `Isa (Jesus) as their direction of prayer."' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/4261.*

فَٱتَّخَذَتۡ مِن دُونِهِمۡ حِجَابٗا فَأَرۡسَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرٗا سَوِيّٗا ﴿١٧﴾

And secluded herself away; We sent Our Spirit to
appear before her in the form of a perfected man [17]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 17)

The Arabic word *al-hijab* is the veil or curtain which conceals a person from other people, and conceals other people from that person. So, what is the benefit of Maryam's (Mary's) setting up a veil between herself and her family after she had already withdrawn away from them? In our opinion, she withdrew from her family to a far-away place, and this is a veil with respect to the place. However, this does not stand in the way of there being another well-protected site which shields her so that no one can look upon her. Hence, there exist both place (*makan*) and well-sheltered site (*makin*). This concealing cover might consist of a single veil, being only a curtain. It might also be a veil covered by another veil, this being the compound veil. This latter is similar to the double-layered curtain employed by well-to-do people today, with one of them covering the other whereby the curtain itself is covered. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And when you recite the Quran, We place between you and those who do not believe in the hereafter a hidden barrier.' (*al-Isra':* 45) Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We sent Our Spirit to appear before her...' (*Maryam:* 17).

The Arabic word *ar-rooh* (Spirit) has numerous connotations in the Noble Quran. The first of these is the spirit upon which our physical life is dependent. When Allah *the Almighty* breathes the spirit into physical matter, life, perception and movement pervade it and circulate throughout all the faculties of the body. This is the meaning of spirit in His saying, 'So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down making obeisance to him.' (*al-Hijr:* 29)

But, is the life of the body, which is sustained by means of the Spirit of Allah *the Almighty* the true meaning of life which is intended by Allah's creation of humankind?! It has been said that if this is the life which is meant, then how insignificant it is, since a person may pass through it and die after an hour, a day, a year or even several years.

Hence, this is a short, low and negligible life. It is closer to the life of worms and vermin. But, as for man whom Allah *the Almighty* has honoured and for whose sake He created the universe, there must necessarily be another form of life which corresponds to Allah's honouring of him. This is the eternal and ever-lasting life of the Hereafter regarding which the Quran says, 'And this life of the world is nothing but a sport and a play; and as for the next abode, that most surely is the life— did they but know!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64)

In the latter verse, Allah's saying, '…the next abode, that most surely is the life…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) means that the Hereafter is the true life. On the other hand, your life in this world is threatened by death; even if you reach a very old age, you will ultimately and eventually die. So, if you desire the true life which is not threatened by death, you should strive after the life of the Hereafter.

Thus, as the Creator *Glorified is He* has provided you with a spirit in this world- the spirit by which you are animated and which corresponds with your life span in this world, Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to provide the spirit for you in the Hereafter in such a way which corresponds its enduring existence and its eternal nature.

When the Quran speaks of this Spirit, it says to people, 'O you who believe! Answer (the call of) Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). How is it that Prophet Muhammad calls them to that which will give them life, addressing them while they are already alive?! In fact, they are alive in the life of this world; however, Allah *the Almighty* is inviting them to another life that is unending and permanent. As for those who do not respond to this call and strive for this worldly life, they will not attain to anything except this short, fleeting life which has no permanence.

Just as Allah *the Almighty* uses the word 'spirit' to refer to the secret that He breathed into matter thereby infusing it with movement and life, He, likewise, terms as 'spirit' the values and precepts of conduct by which souls are enlivened with blissful life; He says, 'And thus did We reveal to you an inspired book (*rooh*) by Our command.' (*ash-Shura:* 52) The inspired book here refers to the Quran. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who brings down the revelation, as the Spirit: ‘The Faithful Spirit has descended with it.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193)

Consequently, in the verse in question, Allah’s saying: ‘We sent Our Spirit to appear before her...’ (*Maryam:* 17) refers to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him peace be upon him*. This is followed by His saying, ‘…to appear before her in the form of a perfected man.’ (*Maryam:* 17) In this phrase, the Arabic word *tamaththala* means that he did not appear in his actual form, but rather that he assumed this appearance. As for his true form, it is luminous with other attributes, having two, three, or four wings.

Here rises a question, which is, ‘Why did the angel come to Maryam (Mary) in human form’? This is because the two of them were going to encounter one another, and this meeting cannot take place in the realm of the invisible. In addition, it is impossible for an angel in his angelic state to meet with a human in his human state since each one of them is governed by specific regulatory principles which are incompatible with those of the other. In their meeting, it is necessary for the angel to appear in human form, or else for the human being to be raised to the state of possessing the attributes of the angels. The latter is exemplified in the case of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* being elevated to the state of having angelic properties in the incident of the Night Journey and Ascension. The meeting between these two creatures with different natures does not occur without this approximation.

Therefore, when the disbelievers asked for an angel to be sent by Allah *the Almighty* as a messenger, Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them saying, ‘Say, “Had there been on the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as an apostle.”’ (*al-Isra':* 95) Likewise, Allah says, ‘And if We had made him an angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and We would certainly have made confused to them what they make confused.’ (*al-An‘am:* 9) Hence, it is not possible for an angel to meet with human beings except through this approximation.

Thus, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* in human form so that she would feel at ease with him and not be frightened if she saw him in his angelic form. Allah’s saying, ‘…to appear before her in the form of a perfected man.’ (*Maryam:* 17), signifies that he manifested himself as one of mankind.

As for the final Arabic word *sawiyya (*a perfected man), it means that he appeared in a perfect physical form, constitution and features. His component parts were in harmony and well ordered in the most beautiful manner that a man could be, not disfigured by an over-sized forehead, nose, or mouth as we find in some people.

All of this was meant for Maryam (Mary) to feel at ease and be reassured, as well as to reaffirm that she was a virtuously modest virgin. For when she saw this handsome, well-proportioned young man, she did not show any admiration for him nor did she display any undue friendliness towards him in speaking. She did not utter a single word that might be construed as attraction towards him, but rather, as the Quran relates, she said:

قَالَتۡ إِنِّيٓ أَعُوذُ بِٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ مِنكَ إِن كُنتَ تَقِيّٗا (١٨)

She said, ‘I seek the Lord of Mercy’s protection against you: if you have any fear of Him [do not approach]!’ [18] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 18)

Hence, she did not give any indication of admiration towards him, nor did she incline desirously towards him with a single word. This is evidence of her chaste virtue, purity, uprightness and her pious steadfastness.

Her saying, ‘I seek the Lord of Mercy’s Protection…’ (*Maryam:* 18) means that she sought recourse and preservation in Allah *the Almighty* from him because she feared that he may assault or violate her while she is weak and has neither power nor strength save with Allah *the Almighty* and so she sought refuge in Allah *Glorified is He*. In fact, it is the believer who honours someone’s seeking refuge in Allah *the Almighty* and fully appreciates its value, for if you seek refuge in Him, He will help you, and if you seek His Protection, He will protect you.

In the same connection, there is a relevant story when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proposed marriage to a woman whose beauty aroused the jealousy of his wives. They feared that she would gain ascendancy over them in the heart of Messenger Muhammad, so they devised a scheme to rid themselves of her. They told her – and she was gullible and naïve – that the Messenger of Allah liked it when a person came near him to say, ‘I take refuge in Allah from you.’ Subsequently, as soon as he entered her dwelling, she immediately said this to him. Thereupon, he *peace and blessings be upon him* responded to her, ‘You have just sought protection in the ultimate Refuge. Return to your family.’(1)

Back to the verse in question; Maryam (Mary) made the following statement, ‘She said, “I seek the Lord of Mercy’s protection against you: if you have any fear of Him [do not approach]!”’ (*Maryam:* 18) because the righteous, heedful believer is the one who fears Allah *the Almighty* and shows due respect for expressions of seeking protection in Him. It is as if she had said, ‘If you are mindful of Allah, then distance yourself from me’. She chose to seek refuge in Allah by using His Name ‘the Lord of Mercy’ due to the hope that if the angel in the form of a man were not a pious believer, he would nonetheless distance himself from her out of mercy for her and her weakness. Thus, she resorted to the Lord of Mercy; the Giver of Mercy Who would protect her and safeguard her from him.

Allah then says:

قَالَ إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ رَسُولُ رَبِّكِ لِأَهَبَ لَكِ غُلَٰمًا زَكِيًّا ١٩

But he said, ‘I am but a Messenger from your Lord,
[come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son’ [19]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 19)

Here, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* said, ‘I am but a messenger from your Lord...’ (*Maryam:* 19), rather than saying ‘a messenger of Allah’. This is because the Lord is the One in charge of the integral upbringing; He is the One Who reforms and preserves it from moral corruption. The bestowals of Lordship are of a material nature, whereas the bestowals of divinity are of an immaterial, spiritual nature, being related to worship. Consequently, the above-cited passage implies: ‘I am a messenger of your Lord, Who assumes responsibility for you, watches over you and safeguards you, so do not fear’.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Usayd Allah be pleased with him in the Book of Divorce. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5255.*

Regarding his statement, ‘[come] to announce to you the gift’ (*Maryam:* 19), it is to be understood in the sense that what is going to happen to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* is a gift from Allah *the Almighty* that is not subject to the laws of nature. The gift in this instance is a veritable, outright gift. We have mentioned before in the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) and Yahya (John) *peace be upon them* that Allah *the Almighty* bestowed Yahya (John) upon Zakaryya (Zechariah) while he was in a state of old age and his wife was barren, but nevertheless the male and female sexual organs were present. However, in the case of Maryam (Mary), she was a female without a male. Hence, here is a manifestly pure gift and a true miracle.

Finally, Allah’s saying, ‘…a pure son’ (*Maryam:* 19) signifies that the boy will be purified, cleansed and of an unadulterated nature.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says of Maryam (Mary):

قَالَتْ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي غُلَٰمٌ وَلَمْ يَمْسَسْنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكُ بَغِيًّا ﴿٢٠﴾

She said, ‘How can I have a son when no man
has touched me? I have not been unchaste’ [20]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 20)

The saying of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* begins with the Arabic interrogative particle *anna* (how), aiming to discover the means through which this phenomenon would be effected and implying amazement at how such a thing could possibly occur.

The initial part of the statement includes the Arabic verbal phrase *yamsasni* (touched me) in which the notion of contact (*al-mass*) is an allusion and courteous expression for sexual relations. Maryam (Mary) disavowed any type of intimate encounter between her and any man when she said, ‘no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste.’ (*Maryam:* 20) Now, conjugal contact of a man with a woman has two basic means. The first means is that of legal marriage which Allah *the Almighty* ordained for His servants for procreative multiplication and the safeguarding of progeny. It is based upon consent, acceptance, and legal contract and witnessing. This represents sexual contact of a lawful nature. The second way is that when these intimate physical relations come about in an unlawful, forbidden form, either with the woman's consent or against her will. Maryam (Mary) refuted all these means when she said, 'I have not been unchaste.' (*Maryam:* 20) Hence, it is understandable that she asked about how she would have a son.

The Arabic verb *massa* (to touch) occurs in the Quran as a reference to sexual intercourse. An example of this is Allah's saying, 'There is no blame on you if you divorce women when you have not touched them…' (*al-Baqara:* 236) wherein the intended meaning of *al-mass* is sexual intercourse. For this reason, Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah rest his soul* interpreted the verb *lamas* (to touch) in Allah's saying: '…you have touched the women…' (*an-Nisa':* 43) as to have sexual intercourse since the Quran employs the word *al-mass* to signify the consummation of marriage. Moreover, *al-mass* is an act done by one party, whereas the verb *lamasa* conveys the meaning of mutual touching between two parties and, thus, for even more reason connotes copulation.

With respect to her statement, 'I have not been unchaste.' (*Maryam:* 20), the Arabic word *al-baghiy* (unchaste woman) means a woman who desires men. The related word *al-bigha`* implies prostitution, and thus *al-baghiy* is she who offers herself to men and seduces them, perhaps even coercing them into this sinful act.

Maryam's (Mary's) use of the word *baghiy* is a hyperbola form of the word *baghy* meaning transgression or injustice. She chose the intense or exaggerated form *baghiy* instead of saying *baghiya because* the latter –meaning fornicator—is associated to the due rights surrounding honour, whereas the aggressive transgression against honour itself corresponds to excess regarding this deed.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

قَالَ كَذَٰلِكِ قَالَ رَبُّكِ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّنٌ ۖ وَلِنَجْعَلَهُۥٓ
ءَايَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَرَحْمَةً مِّنَّا ۚ وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مَّقْضِيًّا ﴿٢١﴾

And he said, 'This is what your Lord said: "It is easy for Me – We shall make him a sign to all people, a blessing from Us"' [21] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 21)

This is just like what Allah *the Almighty* said to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he was amazed that he would have a son: 'He said, "This is what your Lord has said."' (*Maryam:* 9) It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was telling him that He was full aware of his condition of old age and that his wife was barren and could not bear children, but the command has come from Him and His decree has been issued. It is He Alone Who has control over the execution of things. So, why, then, should Zakaryya (Zechariah) be surprised?!

Here, we find that some people try to criticise the Quran by arguing that the final vowel in His saying '*kadhalika'* in the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) is different from *kadhaliki* in the story of Maryam (Mary), although the narrative context and meaning—translated as 'this is' in both cases—are one and the same. They ask which of these two usages is more eloquently superior to the other. And if one of them is such, then does the other lack some rhetorical features? This questioning on their part arises from inability to improperly understand the words of Allah *the Almighty* since the expressions *kadhalika* and *kadhaliki* comprise the demonstrative pronoun *dha*, and the particle *kaf* of address for the second person singular which is pronounced as '*ka*' for the masculine and '*ki*' for the feminine.

In the verses in question, Allah's saying, '…Your Lord…' (*Maryam:* 21) implies the One Who takes charge of your upbringing and your safeguarding. Now, whoever is brought up by his Lord is reared and provided for in a complete manner, enabling him to carry out the mission desired by the One Who instructs and brings him up.

Concerning Allah's saying, '…This is easy for Me…' (*Maryam:* 21), and what He says regarding the issue of resurrection after death: '…and most easy is this for Him…' (*ar-Rum:* 27), the words *hayyin* (easy) and *ahwan* (easier) are not to be taken in their literal sense regarding Allah *the Almighty*. This is because the notions of 'easy' and 'easier' call for the notions of 'difficult' and 'the most difficult', which are pertinent to the action a human being as to his processing of things according to his power and means. However, regarding the Creator, the notions of 'easy' and 'easier' do not exist, since He does not undertake actions by processing, nor does He need to apply effort; rather, He does so by His command 'Be'.

Allah *the Almighty* speaks to us according to the capacities of our intellects. Hence, His saying, '…This is easy for Me…' (*Maryam:* 21) shows that, based on human logic, if He has created us from nothing, then fashioning us again from something which exists is an easy matter for Him.

Then He says, 'We shall make him a sign to all people, a blessing from Us.' (*Maryam:* 21) Here, we may pose the following question, 'Was the purpose of creating `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* in this manner merely for Allah *the Almighty* to manifest His Power over creation and the unrestricted nature of His Omnipotence'? No, rather, there is another objective, which is clearly mentioned in Allah's saying, 'We shall make him a sign to all people...' (*Maryam:* 21). In this passage, the Arabic word *aya* (sign) means a wondrous phenomenon which runs counter to the familiarity of customary precedent, and from standard causal means. In a similar sense, we say, 'This person is a prodigy (*aya*) of beauty, a prodigy of intelligence'. Thus, the word *aya* is only said about something which goes far beyond ordinary comprehension.

Just as the Creator created Adam *peace be upon him* without a father or a mother, and just as He created Eve without a mother, the wondrous phenomenon here is that Allah *Glorified is He* created `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from a mother who did not have recourse to a father. Meanwhile, He creates all human beings from both a father and a mother. Yet, it may be that the father and mother exist, but He does not intend for the two of them to have children, so He renders whomever He wills to be sterile.

Hence, this matter is governed exclusively by the Will of the Creator of the universe *Glorified is He*. The sign here is intended that people recognise the absolutely unrestrained nature of His Power with respect to creation, and that it is not dependent upon causal factors, nor is it a mechanical process. Rather, it is up to the Will of the Creator to do whatever He wants.

But does the sign lie in the creation of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* or in his mother? It was possible to bring forth `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from a father and a mother, which is why the miracle is proved in his mother. Yet, he *peace be upon him* is the main reason for this miraculous event. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, ‘And We made the son of Maryam (Mary) and his mother a sign.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 50) Thus, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and Maryam (Mary) are one sign, not two, since they both cannot be separated.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘A blessing from Us’ (*Maryam:* 21). The creation of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* in such a manner manifests a particular facet of divine mercy. Hereby, Allah *the Almighty* mercifully spares people from having suspicions that His Power is conditional upon causal factors and dependent upon them. Even if this suspicion is merely a passing thought, it is not permissible and is not fitting with respect to the Creator. It is as if He is graciously sparing us from such very notions by means of an actual event confirming that absolute divine power arises regarding creation from extant factors, from partial factors and even from nothing.

There follows Allah’s saying, ‘And so it was ordained’ (*Maryam:* 21) means that it is a settled issue which allows for no disputation; therefore, you should not argue about its particular circumstances. This is because any speech about something in the future from someone who does not possess the means of carrying out what he says may not lead to the desired outcome on account of any of the various reasons. For example, you may say, ‘Tomorrow, I will do such-and-such’. But then tomorrow arrives, and many things—possibly outside of your control—come between you and what you desired. Hence, you do not have mastery over all the elements of the act.

By contrast, if the speech is from Allah *the Almighty* Who has mastery over all of the elements of the act, then be certain that His saying is the truth and reality. Thus, He says, ‘And so it was ordained.’ (*Maryam:* 21)

When we classified the actions as taking place in the past, or that which occurred before the uttering of the speech; the present, which is occurring at that moment; or the future, we stated that the actions regarding Allah *the Almighty* are not described as being in the past, present or future.

Hence, if He says, '…Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-Fath:* 14), a verse in which the Arabic verb *kana* (be) is in the form of the past tense, does this mean that He *was* Forgiving and Merciful only in the past, and He is not so in the present or will not be in the future? No, because Allah *Glorified is He* was and remains Forgiving and Merciful, for His Mercy and His Forgiveness are timelessly eternal, having been present even before anyone existed to be forgiven or bestowed mercy upon.

It is for this reason that the verb occurs in the form of the past tense since the attribute is present in Allah *the Almighty* since before the beginning of time. Hence, He is the Creator before He even created the creation, and it was based on the attribute of origination that He created all creatures. This can be likened to the parable we have propounded, as follows: 'We say that so and so is a poet, but is he a poet because he composed a versified poem? Or did he compose a versified poem because he is a poet? Consequently, then, he is a poet before he composed a poem since he would not have composed it if this trait were not already present in him'.

Therefore, Allah's attributes are timelessly eternal. So, when you say, '…Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-Fath:* 14); though the verb literally denotes 'was' (*kana*), this attribute has been unshakeably established for Him for all time. Moreover, since He does not change and no one opposes Him, then this attribute abides in Him. This means that He was and will never cease to be characterised by it.

This issue is clearly evident in the opening verse of the chapter of *an-nahl* in which Allah says, 'Allah's commandment has come, therefore do not desire to hasten it; Glory be to Him….' (*an-Nahl:* 1) Because the initial Arabic verb in this passage is expressed in the form of the past tense, certain orientalists have raised objections to this verse, arguing, 'How is it that He says, 'has come' (*ata*) in the past tense, and then He says, 'therefore do not desire to hasten it…' (*an-Nahl:* 1), employing an expression referring to the future'? To this, we reply, 'Since it is Allah Who says that His command has come, then this matter is concluded without doubt and without dispute, for there exists no other power to resist it or to prevent its occurrence. Therefore, it occurs in the form of the past tense, though, in reality, it refers to a future event'.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَحَمَلَتۡهُ فَٱنتَبَذَتۡ بِهِۦ مَكَانٗا قَصِيّٗا ٢٢

And so it was ordained: she conceived him. She withdrew to a distant place [22] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 22)

Here, the opening phrase in Arabic, *fa-hamalat-hu* (she conceived him) literally means that she then grew pregnant with him. This expression comprises temporal ellipsis and sequential continuity, with pregnancy necessarily implying one who carries and one who is carried. Regarding the next statement: ‘She withdrew to a distant place’ (*Maryam:* 22), you should not think that this narrative event of withdrawing is a repeated scene from the story, for the earlier withdrawal was for spiritual retreat and worship of Allah *the Almighty*. Here, His saying, ‘She withdrew...’ (*Maryam:* 22) implies that when she became aware of her pregnancy, she moved away from her people. She feared their prying eyes and curiosity, and therefore departed to a distant place.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَأَجَآءَهَا ٱلۡمَخَاضُ إِلَىٰ جِذۡعِ ٱلنَّخۡلَةِ قَالَتۡ يَٰلَيۡتَنِي مِتُّ قَبۡلَ هَٰذَا
وَكُنتُ نَسۡيٗا مَّنسِيّٗا ٢٣

And, when the pains of childbirth drove her to [cling to] the trunk of a palm tree, she exclaimed, ‘I wish I had been dead and forgotten long before all this!’ [23] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 23)

The opening phrase in Arabic comprises the verb *aja`ha* (to resort to her) which should be distinguished from the basic form of the same verb *ja`a*. The latter means for one ‘to come’ out of choice and pleasure, whereas the former means to ‘bring someone’ by coercion and against his will. Thus, it is as if it was the pains of birthing which caused Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* to seek recourse to the trunk of a palm tree and compelled her to go to that place. In other words, the throes of childbirth brought her as if there was an external force which forcefully pulled her to that place.

The throes of childbirth are the pains which afflict a woman before giving birth, and not the actual labour pains which precede the descent of the foetus. Allah's saying, '…the pains of childbirth drove her to [cling to] the trunk of a palm tree…' (*Maryam:* 23) makes clear for us the motive behind her going to the trunk of the palm tree. As a matter of fact, when the time of giving birth comes, a woman needs something to support herself against and to cling to in order to lighten the pain of birthing for her. Alternatively, she may resort to one of her friends with whom she can share this suffering. Hence, the throes of childbirth compelled her to have recourse to the trunk of the palm tree, which here occurs with the definite article since it is a well-known palm tree.

As for the Arabic expression *jidh` an-nakhla* (the trunk of the palm tree), the first element means the trunk of the tree which extends from the roots to the beginning of the branches. So, will Maryam (Mary), during her birthing, cling to this entire trunk? Of course not, she will only take hold of the part near to her. The word *jidh`* (trunk) is used here for exaggerated emphasis.

A similar example of this usage occurs in Allah's saying, '…they put their fingers into their ears because of the thunder peal, for fear of death…' (*al-Baqara:* 19). It is common knowledge that a person plugs his ear with the tip of the finger, not with the entire finger. Thus, the meaning is expressed using the word 'fingers' by means of exaggerated emphasis about preventing the upsetting noise and the thunderbolts which befall them from reaching their ears.

Hence, Maryam (Mary) found herself faced with a real situation and a visible pregnancy which she could not hide, and had no ability to conceal. She had previously acquiesced when the angel gave her glad tiding of a son endowed with purity, and she consented to become pregnant with him. But, what is her state now after the matter has evolved from words to actual reality, and here is the baby boy inside of her belly, and the time of giving birth to him has arrived? Inevitably, she has been afflicted by turbulent emotions since the situation has gone beyond the bounds of concealment and secrecy; that is why she says, 'I wish I had been dead and forgotten long before all this!' (*Maryam:* 23) She wished she had died before finding herself in these extremely difficult circumstances. Yet, when the angel had earlier informed her that Allah *the Almighty* would bestow upon her a pure son, she was incredulous, saying, ‘How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste.’ (*Maryam:* 20) Here, she only expressed wonderment and calm emotion. However, once the matter of giving birth becomes a reality, this must give rise to a powerfully emotional reaction expressing what she feels in terms of helpless bewilderment. It is for this reason that she wished for death, although Allah *the Almighty* forbids us from wishing for death. This prohibition is found in the Noble Hadith that instructs us not to desire death when life becomes straiten to us, but rather to say, ‘O Allah! Give me life so long as the life is good for me, and take away my life if death is good for me.’(1)

We have said that it is forbidden for you to wish for death as long as it comprises opposition to the Decree of Allah *the Almighty* and rebelliousness against His Will. This would be tantamount to your hating life when it becomes difficult for you, and therefore you yearn for death. On the other hand, if you should yearn for death based on your knowledge that you will be moving on to something better than that which you leave behind, then this is a different matter.

This issue of wishing for death has been related in the Quran when Allah speaks about the Children of Israel who said, ‘We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones’.(2) They also said, ‘Fire shall not touch us but for a few days’. Moreover, they proclaimed, ‘The future abode with Allah is specially for us.’ So, how did the Noble Quran answer them in this respect?

If the situation is as you say, and the Hereafter belongs to you: ‘… then invoke death if you are truthful.’ (*al-Baqara:* 94) Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* states what their reaction will actually be, saying, ‘And they will never invoke it on account of what their hands have sent before...' (*al-Baqara:* 95). In addition, He says about them, 'And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life.' (*al-Baqara:* 96). As long as they will not yearn for death and as long as they are the most covetous of people for life, then it must be that their worldly life is superior in their eyes than the life of the Hereafter.

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased him related that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Let none of you wish for death on account of an affliction that befalls him. if he cannot, but long for death, let him pray: “O Allah! Give me life so long as the life is good for me, and take away my life if death is good for me.”’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6351; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith, no. 2680.*

(2) In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And the Jews and the Christians say, “We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones.” Say, “Why does He then chastise you for your faults? Nay, you are mortals from among those whom He has created…”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 18).

Hence, it is not permissible for the believer to wish for death as an escape from some tribulation which has afflicted him, or as opposition to the decree of Allah *the Almighty*. However, this is permissible for him if he knows that he is proceeding to a place which is better than thatin which he currently is.

Back to the verse under discussion; regarding Maryam's (Mary's) saying, '…and forgotten long before all this!' (*Maryam:* 23), the initial Arabic word *an-nasy* (a forgotten thing) refers to something trivial to which no attention is paid. This is typically something which is forgotten due to its insignificance such as a box of matches with only two match sticks which someone forgets, and en route he remembers it and returns to his friend's house to bring it. In this sense, Maryam (Mary) longed to be an insignificant thing which is forgotten so that no one would remember her. She was not satisfied with merely wishing to be a negligible thing (*nasy*) which is easily forgotten in and of itself, since despite its insignificance, there might be someone who remembers and recognises it. For this reason, she emphatically stresses her wish of being totally forgotten by adding the word *mansiyan* (utterly forgotten). Thus, she wishes to be something forgotten which no one will remember or even think about.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَنَادَىٰهَا مِن تَحۡتِهَآ أَلَّا تَحۡزَنِي قَدۡ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحۡتَكِ سَرِيّٗا ﴿٢٤﴾

But a voice cried to her from below, 'Do not worry:
your Lord has provided a stream at your feet [24]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 24)

Here, the first word of the Arabic phrases *min tahti-ha* (from below), i.e. *min* is recited according to an alternative recitation as *(man)* with the meaning of ‘who’. It is correct that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* was still there with her, but he was not beneath her. So, this suggests that the one who called out to her was the newborn infant, saying, ‘Do not worry…’ (*Maryam:* 24). Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was aggrieved that her place of birth was cut off from people and that she was in the state of giving birth, with no one with her to support her. Moreover, there is no one with her to bring her the supplies required for this situation, such as food, drink etc. Therefore, her Lord took care of her and provided her with that which would sustain her including food and drink; thus Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…your Lord has provided a stream at your feet.’ (*Maryam:* 24) In this passage, the Arabic word *sariya* is a stream which runs with sweet, cool water. After this, Allah *the Almighty* gives her food which suits her condition, as He says:

وَهُزِّيٓ إِلَيۡكِ بِجِذۡعِ ٱلنَّخۡلَةِ تُسَٰقِطۡ عَلَيۡكِ رُطَبٗا جَنِيّٗا ﴿٢٥﴾

And, if you shake the trunk of the palm tree towards
you, it will deliver fresh ripe dates for you [25]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 25)

In this manner, Allah *the Almighty* provided Maryam (Mary) with the essential ingredients of life and the elements for its preservation. Based on their relative importance for a human being, these elements fall into the following order: air, drink and food. In fact, a person can do without food for a month, it being possible for him to subsist on the nourishment that his body has stored up. However, he is unable to do without water for more than three to ten days, depending on what his body contains of water, whereas he cannot survive without air for a single moment to the extent that he can die from the suppression of a single breath.

Therefore, it is part of the Wisdom of the Creator *Glorified is He* that He frequently grants ownership over food, and seldom grants ownership over water, but never grants ownership over air to anyone. This is because if you got angry with someone and consequently denied him air, he would die before you once again became pleased with him. Thus, the elements of the preservation of life are allotted according to their importance in the life of man. Allah *the Almighty* had assured provision of them for Maryam (Mary) and made them easily accessible to her, thereby relieving her of needing someone to serve her. Thus, air is present as she is outside in the open; then as for water, He caused a sweet, cool stream to flow beneath her; then with respect to food, He says, 'And, if you shake the trunk of the palm tree towards you, it will deliver fresh ripe dates for you.' (*Maryam:* 25) It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants to manifest another one of His Miraculous signs to Maryam (Mary). Thus, He commanded her to shake the desiccated trunk of the palm tree which even a strong man could not shake, let alone Maryam (Mary) who was in a weakened state and suffering the pain and hardship of childbirth.

Although Allah *the Almighty* is fully Capable of sending down food to her without any effort on her part or need for her to shake the tree, He wished to bring two matters together for her: the pursuit of causal factors as well as reliance on the Supreme Causer. The former, taking causative action to attain a desired result is embodied in the shaking of the palm tree, despite her being exhausted and enfeebled by pregnancy and childbirth. He brought her to the palm tree so she could lean against it in her solitude in order that we might know that a human being in his striving is required to take the causal factors into consideration, regardless of how weak he may be. Therefore, it was left up to Maryam (Mary) to take the initiative despite lack of strength. Thereafter she depended upon the Supreme Causer Who sent down to her fresh, ripe dates.

So, was Maryam (Mary) able to shake this large, desiccated trunk? Unquestionably, her action was merely a token gesture towards it, indicating compliance to Allah's Command. It was He Who took charge of causing the food to descend for her. A poet has depicted this situation in the following words:

Are you not aware that Allah said to Maryam (Mary)
Shake the trunk towards you, it will let fresh dates fall
If He had willed, He would have given [them to] her without shaking
But everything has an instigating cause.

Concerning Allah's saying, '…it will deliver...' (*Maryam:* 25), this signifies that upon her will fall '…fresh, ripe dates….' (*Maryam:* 25) This latter phrase means that the dates were ripen and merited being harvested, not being unripe and prematurely picked. Among the varieties of fresh dates known are some which fall before having reached maturity, and thus are not fit for eating. Moreover, His saying, '…it will deliver...' (*Maryam:* 25) comprises proof of the responsiveness of inanimate things and their ability to react. If this were not so, then a date would not depart from obedience to its mother tree; hence the tree willingly and responsively casts the dates down when they attain to a state of ripeness.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says,

فَكُلِي وَٱشۡرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيۡنٗاۖ فَإِمَّا تَرَيِنَّ مِنَ ٱلۡبَشَرِ أَحَدٗا فَقُولِيٓ
إِنِّي نَذَرۡتُ لِلرَّحۡمَٰنِ صَوۡمٗا فَلَنۡ أُكَلِّمَ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ إِنسِيّٗا ٢٦

So eat, drink, be glad, and say to anyone you may see:
"I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from
conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today"' [26]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 26)

With respect to providing sustenance to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* we notice that Allah *the Almighty* first provides water, saying, '…your Lord has provided a stream at your feet.' (*Maryam:* 24) Then Allah *the Almighty* provides food, saying, 'And, if you shake the trunk of the palm tree towards you, it will deliver fresh ripe dates for you.' (*Maryam:* 25) This is because water is more essential than food in terms of human needs. However, in the context of Allah's command for her to enjoy the benefit of these gifts, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So eat, drink...' (*Maryam:* 26), that is, He started with mentioning the act of eating and followed it by the act of drinking. Here arises the following question which is, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* mention the act of eating before that of drinking'? This is because a human being usually eats first, then drinks. Thus, despite its importance, water normally comes after food, so Glorified is Allah, the One Whose speech is ultimately true.

Allah's saying, 'be glad' (*Maryam:* 26), comes after Allah *the Almighty* has abundantly provisioned Maryam (Mary) with food and drink which are the mainstay of all material existence and by which life is sustained. However, after providing her with food and drink, she was still feeling a deep sadness, pain, and anguished bewilderment due to the situation she underwent. For this reason, after providing her with what sustained her physical body, Her Lord bestows upon her tranquillity and peace of mind, relieving her of pain of the soul and the anguish of her inner heart. In this verse, the first part of the Arabic expression *qarri `ayna* (be glad) implies being still and calm. In the Arabic language, this expression in question is tantamount to happiness. This is crystal clear in the saying of the wife of Pharaoh related in the following verse in which Allah says, '…and Pharaoh's wife said, "Here is a joy to behold for me and for you!"' (*al-Qasas:* 9) The Arabs employ the phrase *qurrat al-`ayn* (a joy to the eye) to refer to joy or delight. This is because the resting of the eye upon perceiving an object shows plainly that the eye has come across a beautiful sight, from which it derives gladness and becomes happy. Hence, the eye is not distracted from it by any other sight, and does not move away from it.

This expression may also be used in a contradictory sense, that is, in the sense of malevolence and imprecation against a person, wishing him ill. An example of this usage is found in the story of the woman who entered the presence of one of the caliphs, but who rebuffed her and so she said to him, 'May Allah completely fulfil His blessings upon you, and bring joy to your eye (*aqarra `ayna-ka*).' Those present in the court of the Caliph understood that she was supplicating to his benefit, but the caliph realised her real intention. He then said to those sitting with him, 'You have not grasped what she was saying. Most surely, she meant by 'May Allah completely fulfil His blessings upon you' that He should take them away. Have you not heard the poet's say:

When a thing is fully achieved, its shortcoming appears
Watch out for extinction when fulfilment is said.

This is because man is susceptible to variability, unable to remain constant in any state. As soon as he attains to the ultimate peak with regard to actualIsation of a blessing upon him, it is inevitable that he will be separated from it, given the fact that he is prone to change in this life.

Furthermore, the caliph interpreted the woman's saying, 'May Allah bring joy to your eye' to signify her wish that Allah *the Almighty* gives rest to the movement of the eye through blindness.

Back to the verse in question, Allah's saying, '…be glad...' (*Maryam:* 26) is a command to Maryam (Mary) to be happy because Allah *the Almighty* has chosen her; and to be joyful because what Allah *the Almighty* has given her. So, she should not be anxious about her son or be aggrieved, for he is the very essence of a blessing which was not conferred on anyone else from among the women of all the worlds.

There follows His saying, '…and say to anyone you may see, "I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today."' (*Maryam:* 26) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* takes charge of defending Maryam (Mary) and justifying her situation, which she herself would be unable to justify based on the cultural norms of her people. After all, who would be able to come up with an excuse for a woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth without having a husband? Regardless of what she says, she will not be believed and will not be safe from the tongues of her people and their defamation. Hence, the best response to what one dislikes is silence; and so Allah *the Almighty* commands her to keep silent and not to argue with anyone concerning her situation; Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today."' (*Maryam:* 26) Abstinence here is with regard to speaking. This is akin to what occurred in the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* for the two miracles are very similar to one another, given the fact that Allah *the Almighty* had granted a child to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* though the requisite organs were defective, and He also granted a child to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* though the means required for procreation were not found. No one can justify these miracles nor defend them except the One Who produced them *Glorified is He*.

Some people who indulge in attempting to find faults in the Quran have raised objections regarding the verse in question, asking, 'How can He command her to refrain from speaking and simultaneously order her to say, 'I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation?'(1)

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(1) *In his book, Abu Yahya Zakaryya Al-Ansari says, 'Allah's saying, "Say, 'I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today'" (Maryam: 26), is subordinate to an implicit factor between this statement and*=

It is possible that she made this statement initially to the first human being she saw to declare her abstinence, and that she afterwards abstained from speaking. Another possible interpretation is that what is meant by speech here is gesturing since communicating by gestures is the most effective form of communication and the most widely understood. This point is proved by the fact that although peoples' languages are different from one another since every group shares a common language specific to its members, nevertheless, body language continues to be the universal language upon which all agree. For example, when you nod with your head, it means 'yes' in all languages; and when you gesture with your finger in a certain way, it means 'no'. Hence, body language is a global and commonly shared language.

In another verse, the Noble Quran makes mention of the point in question, saying, 'Until when he reached (a place) between the two mountains, he found on that side of them a people who could hardly understand a word.' (*al-Kahf:* 93) This verse shows that the people referred to here could not come close to understanding, yet they had every possible reason to understand. Despite this, they communicated with Dhu Al-Qarnayn through speech, gesturing, and sign language, and thus they understood each other; Allah says, 'They said, "O Dhu Al-Qarnayn! Surely Gog and Magog make mischief in the land…"' (*al-Kahf:* 94).

Let us take note that Maryam's (Mary's) statement, '…and I will not talk to anyone today' (*Maryam:* 26) indicates that the prohibition from speaking specifically refers to human beings since she did not say generally, 'I will not speak'. It could not be otherwise since Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* was with her speaking to her, and there was mutual understanding between them; for he might find a way out of this difficult situation for her. Maryam (Mary) herself was fully confident and assured that such a way out existed, for though her Lord *Glorified is He* had commanded her to

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= *its preceding condition which may be assessed as follows: "And if you should see any human being who then asks you to speak, then say to him 'Behold, abstinence I have vowed.' This explanation nullifies what is said regarding her statement, "Hence, I may not speak today to any mortal" as being contrary to the vow of silence. According to this assessment, her saying is an integral part of the vow, not after it.' See, Al-Ansari, Fath Ar-Rahman Kashf Ma Yaltabis Fi Al-Quran, 255.*

abstain from speaking, He would surely render the baby boy capable of speech, so that he himself would speak and defend his mother from the accusations of her people.

When we previously discussed Allah’s saying, ‘…but a voice cried to her from below, “Do not worry.”’ (*Maryam:* 24), we eliminated the possibility that this call might have come from Jibril (Gabriel). We said that it was the call of the newborn infant. It is for this reason that Maryam (Mary) became reassured and she fully recognised that she was in the presence of a tremendous miracle. Moreover, she had the utmost confidence that when she gestured towards the child, he himself would speak and refute any accusation of her people. This is because the words spoken by someone who can speak do not provide justifying evidence which convinces people about a case contrary to normative customs. However, when he speaks while he is still in the cradle, this signifies that he is but a miracle that transcends ordinary phenomena. Moreover, if the infant boy is a miracle, then the miracle reasonably involves his mother as well.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

فَأَتَتْ بِهِۦ قَوْمَهَا تَحْمِلُهُۥ ۖ قَالُوا۟ يَٰمَرْيَمُ لَقَدْ جِئْتِ شَيْـًٔا فَرِيًّا ﴿٢٧﴾

She went back to her people carrying the child, and they said, ‘Maryam! You have done something terrible! [27]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 27)

We are full of wondrous admiration for the act of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* for instead of being embarrassed by what had happened and seeking to hide with her new-born child from the eyes of people, or even bearing him away to another place in the desolate regions of the earth, she carries him and hastens to her people. She would never have done this, nor even dared to do it, except on account of her confidence in the evidence which was on her side and which would be provided at the hands of her infant son.

This brings to mind an incident involving *Mohammad `Abduh* when some Orientalists in Paris asked him about how 'A`isha *Allah be pleased with her* faced her people after the slanderous lie against her honour began to circulate.

Those people knew it was a lie and falsehood, yet they repeated it as if they were unable to understand. Thereupon, Mohammad 'Abduh replied with concise simplicity that A`isha *Allah be pleased with her* faced them in the same way that Maryam (Mary) faced her people while she was holding her infant boy. That is, with the countenance of the one who is confident of being proven innocent, of the one who is certain of Allah's support and that He would never forsake her. Thus, when the innocence of 'A'isha *Allah be pleased with her* was revealed in the Book of Allah, people told her: 'Give thanks to Prophet Muhammad', whereupon she replied, 'I give thanks to Allah Who exonerated me from above seven heavens.'(1)

Back to the verse under discussion; when the people saw Maryam (Mary) in this state, they said harsh words about her, 'O Maryam (Mary)! You have done something terrible!' (*Maryam:* 27) In this statement, the Arabic word *fariyan* (something terrible) refers to unprecedented matter that sunders a customary norm in the eyes of people. Another possible meaning is that this word refers to the intentional lying.

Thereafter, they said to Maryam (Mary) as mentioned in the Quran:

يَٰٓأُخۡتَ هَٰرُونَ مَا كَانَ أَبُوكِ ٱمۡرَأَ سَوۡءٖ وَمَا كَانَتۡ أُمُّكِ بَغِيّٗا ٢٨

Sister of Aaron! Your father was not an evil man; your mother was not unchaste!' [28] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 28)

Regarding their saying to Maryam (Mary), 'O sister of Harun (Aaron)!' (*Maryam:* 28), this constitutes a scolding and an excessively severe reproach of her on their part. By this statement, they attribute her kinship to Harun

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(1) In his *Tafsir*, Ibn Kathir records that 'A'isha said, 'Divine revelation descended upon the Messenger of Allah, so we became silent in his presence. I could perceive joy in his face as he wiped the sweat from his brow, saying, "Be of good cheer, O ʿA`isha, for Allah has just revealed your innocence." But I was angrier than ever. Then my parents said to me, 'Get up and go to him.' To which I replied, 'No, by Allah, I will not betake myself to him, nor will I laud him in gratitude or either one of you two. Instead I praise Allah Who revealed my innocence. For all of you heard the slander against me, but you did not deny it or do anything about it.' This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari. See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Adhim*, 3/271.

(Aaron) who was named after Prophet Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him*. It is as if they reproached her, saying, ‘You are descended from a righteous house, and you were raised to be obedient to Allah. So, how could you commit such an act’? This is like the case when you observe a woman wearing hijab yet committing a misdeed in public that does not correspond to her appearance, and therefore you blame her for this behaviour which one could not imagine coming from someone like her.

With respect to Allah’s saying, ‘Your father was not an evil man’ (*Maryam:* 28), an evil person is the one in whose company you are bound to be afflicted by his evil, and who will cause you harm. There follows Allah’s saying, ‘your mother was not unchaste!’ (*Maryam:* 28) We have said before that the unchaste woman (*al-baghiy*) is the one who covets men and seduces them. It is as if they reproached her saying, ‘Where did you acquire this disgraceful trait, although you are from a good and upright family’?

Here, there is a proof that the position of the family has an impact on children. So, when we establish a believing family and a household adhering to Allah’s law, and when we embrace the children and encompass them with attentive care and safeguarding, then we will produce a generation that is faithful, conscientious, and beneficial to itself and its community.

Consequently, their statement: ‘Your father was not an evil man; your mother was not unchaste!’ (*Maryam:* 28) is a blatant accusation against Maryam (Mary) and an affirmation that she fell into the forbidden act, as if they insisted to accuse her of adultery.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَأَشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُوا۟ كَيْفَ نُكَلِّمُ مَن كَانَ فِى ٱلْمَهْدِ صَبِيًّا ٢٩

She pointed at him. They said, ‘How can we converse with an infant?’ [29] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 29)

This verse tells that when the people made their statement, Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* gestured towards the infant, being fully confident that he would speak, and calmly certain that she was not carrying a proof of a crime, but rather, a proof of innocence. Thus, when she pointed to him, she was telling her people, ‘Ask him’. Thereupon, they were filled with great astonishment; they said, ‘How can we converse with an infant?’ (*Maryam:* 29)

We should note that their question does not rule out the possibility that the infant could speak, since they did not say, ‘How could one who is an infant boy in the cradle speak’? Rather, they said, ‘How can we converse…?’ (*Maryam:* 29) Thus, they viewed it as improbable that they could converse with him. It is as if they are discrediting themselves and belittling their own capability of understanding the infant if he spoke to them.

As for the Arabic word *al-mahd* (cradle), it is the place prepared for the sleep of a baby because he is unable to remove harmful or uncomfortable things from himself. On the other hand, an adult is able to prepare a place in which to sleep and to remove from it anything that may disturb him while sleeping and reposing. That is because he has sufficient awareness such that if something were to cause him discomfort during sleep, he would be able to extricate himself from the condition he was in and discover what was causing him discomfort.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

قَالَ إِنِّي عَبْدُ ٱللَّهِ ءَاتَىٰنِيَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا ﴿٣٠﴾

[But] he said: ‘I am a servant of God.
He has granted me the Scripture; made me
a prophet [30] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 30)

It is as if `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* told his people ‘Do not speak. I am the one who will speak’. Then he proceeds to assail them with speech saying, ‘I am a servant of Allah.’ (*Maryam:* 30) In this manner, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* commences his discourse by proclaiming his servitude to Allah *Glorified is He*. This is an indication that people would later claim that he is not a servant, but a god or a partner with Allah. For this reason, the first statement he *peace be upon him* uttered was, ‘I am a servant of Allah’ (*Maryam:* 30) which definitively proves that the miracle that produced him does not prevent him from being a servant of Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, if you asked those who believe that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is a god or even a partner with Allah, ‘You believe, surely, that he spoke in the cradle so what did he say'? They will never recognise his statement because his saying, 'I am a servant of Allah' (*Maryam:* 30) refutes the very foundation of their belief.

But this is not all, for he *peace be upon him* then says, 'He has granted me the Scripture….' (*Maryam:* 30) So, how did Allah *the Almighty* vouchsafe revelation to `Isa (Jesus) while he was still a little boy in his cradle? It is said that this implies that the matter had been already settled and decreed; it is an event about which there is no doubt. It is as if he was saying, 'I am qualified to bear the trust of Allah to the people of the earth'. Although the revealed Scripture had not yet come, his Lord had actually instilled the Scripture in his heart, even if the time in which he would convey this revelation had not yet arrived.

Then `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said, '…and made me a prophet' (*Maryam:* 30) which means that his behaviour is upright, and it is not possible that there should be any blasphemous offense against him. Thus, if there arise some blasphemous transgression, then it is far from him, and he shares no part of the sin that it comprises.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* continues to state what `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said, affirming:

وَجَعَلَنِى مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُ وَأَوْصَٰنِى بِٱلصَّلَوٰةِ
وَٱلزَّكَوٰةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا ﴿٣١﴾

He made me blessed wherever I may be.
He commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as
I live [31] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 31)

This verse shows that Allah *the Almighty* has prescribed the performance of prayer and the giving of alms on `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as long as he lives. `Isa (Jesus) said these words in the cradle to prove the innocence of his very sincere and righteous mother, as her people made accusations against her with respect to the most cherished thing she possessed. In fact, nothing she might have said would have availed her; so in order to rescue her, Allah *the Almighty* instructed her by means of Jibril (Gabriel) or `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* to say, ‘I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today.’ (*Maryam:* 26)

Then the Quran mentions that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said:

وَبَرًّۢا بِوَٰلِدَتِى وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِى جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا ﴿٣٢﴾

To cherish my mother. He did not make
me domineering or graceless [32]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 32)

So, why did he mention his mother here and was so keen to affirm his piety towards her? This is because some might imagine that when `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* grows up and comes to know the story of his birth, and that his mother conceived him without a father and without any man touching her, that this issue might raise questions in his soul, leading to the possibility that doubts about his mother might assail him. Hence, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* wanted to eliminate such ideas; as he himself is the proof and the witness of his mother’s innocence. After all, the source of definitive evidence does not promote any misgivings about what it proves. It is as if he was saying to the people, ‘You should all beware of thinking that I would ever dare to be insolent against my mother, or that any bad thought about her would ever cross my mind’.

Thereafter, he says, ‘He did not make me domineering or graceless.’ (*Maryam:* 32) In this way, he excludes from himself all trace of ostentatious pride, harshness and arrogance. This is because a messenger must be gentle and friendly with his people since he comes to bring them out of what they are accustomed to in terms of immorality towards what will be onerous for them in the way of pious obedience.

By his very nature, man dislikes anyone who seeks to take him from the moral corruption he is familiar and comfortable with. Thus, it is natural for a prophet to encounter the provocation of his people, their stubborn resistance, and insolent haughtiness. If he were not compassionate and gentle in his speech, causing ears to incline to listen, and hearts to pay heed, then he would not be fit for this mission. This is the reason why Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with His saying, '…and had you been rough, hard hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 159).

In the final passage of the verse in question, the Arabic word *shaqiya* means defiantly disobedient. Indeed, anyone who embodies the traits enumerated by `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* will find that he is far removed from disobedience to Allah, which is the ultimate cause of a man's being wretched and unhappy.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* states that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said:

وَٱلسَّلَٰمُ عَلَيَّ يَوۡمَ وُلِدتُّ وَيَوۡمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوۡمَ أُبۡعَثُ حَيّٗا ﴿٣٣﴾

Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again' [33] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 33)

Regarding the story of Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* we have previously said that there are three major milestones in the life of man: the day of his birth, the day of his death and the day that he will be raised again, that is, the Day of Resurrection. So, what is the aspect of peace on these occasions with regard to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*?

Concerning his statement: 'Peace was on me the day I was born…' (*Maryam:* 33), this refers to the fact that the day of his birth passed peacefully in spite of what it contained of unprecedented wonders. No one acted towards him with malicious intent although he was a newborn infant who came forth without a father. It would have been possible for some zealous fanatics to have harmed him and his mother; however, nothing of the sort occurred, and the birth went peacefully for him and for his mother.

As for His saying, '…and will be on me the day I die...' (*Maryam:* 33), it means that the day of his death will comprise peace because the Jews seized him in order to crucify him, but Allah *the Almighty* saved him from their hands by casting his likeness upon another man. Then Allah *Glorified is He* raised `Isa (Jesus) up to heaven.

With regard to His saying, '…and the day I am raised to life again' (*Maryam:* 33), it is noteworthy that there is no other messenger who will be asked the following questions or who will be cross-examined in this world like `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And when Allah will say, "O `Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary)! did you say to men, take me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?" He will say, "Glory be to You, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); if I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it; You know what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Your mind, surely You are the great Knower of the unseen things. I did not say to them aught save what You enjoined me with…."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116-117) We should note here that there is no dispraise of the high station of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* for his Lord *Glorified is He* knows fully well that he only said to his people what he was commanded to say. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* intended this as a reprimand of those people who made of him and his mother two gods besides Him. Thus, with respect to the day when he would be resurrected to life, the aspect of peace lies in the fact that `Isa (Jesus) was already questioned in this world and was found to be completely faultless.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

ذَٰلِكَ عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ ۚ قَوْلَ ٱلْحَقِّ ٱلَّذِى فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Such was `Isa, son of Maryam. [This is] a statement
of the Truth about which they are in doubt [34]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 34)

Here, the opening Arabic word *dhalik (*such) refers to what has preceded of the story of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Concerning the passage: '…a statement of the Truth…' it means that what Allah *Glorified is He* states regarding the story of `Isa (Jesus) is the ultimate truth, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the True Lord (*Al-Haqq*). So, the One Who related this narrative to you is Allah, and His Statement is the absolute truth which contains no falsehood. It follows that the word *al-haqq* (Truth) here also signifies pure veracity which is the opposite of baseless falsehood. Thus, the two meanings of *al-haqq* overlap in this verse.

Another possible interpretation is that the intended meaning of the phrase *qawl al-haqq* is the command ‘Be’, by which the creation of `Isa (Jesus) and the entire universe is accomplished.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…about which they so deeply disagree.’ (*Maryam:* 34). In this statement, the Arabic verb *yamtarun* (to doubt) is derived from the same semantic root as the word *al-mira`* meaning baseless dispute and argument. Allah *the Almighty* knows that they will have dubious opinions about `Isa (Jesus), vainly engaging in groundless disputes, and that they will make various declarations about him. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was telling them, ‘Renounce these vain and worthless declarations concerning the status of `Isa (Jesus), and adhere to what I have informed you regarding him, for this is the pure truth which is not tainted by falsehood in any manner’.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

مَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ أَن يَتَّخِذَ مِن وَلَدٍ سُبْحَٰنَهُۥٓ إِذَا قَضَىٰٓ
أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ (٣٥)

It would not befit God to have a child. He is far
above that: when He decrees something, He says
only, ‘Be,’ and it is [35] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 35)

Here, we should pose the following question, ‘Why exactly does Allah *the Almighty* speak here about refutation of His having a son’? It has been said that this is because the issue of Allah having a partner or an associate is nullified by the fundamental rationality, for if every god were capable of action and non-action, then this frequently reiterated form would not befit divinity. Moreover, if one of them were a god for one thing, while the other a god for something else, then whatever one of these two gods possessed would represent a deficiency on part of the other god, a matter which is inconceivable with regard to divinity. If there were another god, then each one of them would assume control over a portion of creation, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 91). It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* refutes the notion of having a son, since it has particular relevance in regard to the story of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. This is because the question of having a son can be set apart from any evidence. Why? Because its evidence lies in taking a son to oneself or in desiring a son and a human being desires to have a son and endeavours to have one.

Why is this so? This is because man is the son of this world, and he knows that he will certainly die. Thus, he desires to be remembered when he has passed away. Alas, he is unaware that his repute does not come after him but rather goes ahead of him in the form of good deeds. Thus, the desire for a son here is to assure the prolongation and survival of life, and this is inconceivable in respect to Allah, for He is the Ever-Lasting Who does not cease to exist.

A son may also be sought to be a consolation, support, and helper to his father, a matter which clearly shows weakness on the part of the father while Allah *the Almighty* is the All Powerful Who does not require the assistance of anyone. Therefore, having a son is a notion negated from Him *the Almighty* since it is something incompatible with Divinity.

It is necessary that Allah *Glorified is He* be exalted far above having a son. For this reason, He says after this: '…He is far above that...' (*Maryam:* 35). In this statement of glorification, the Arabic word *subhan* signifies absolute exaltation of Allah *Glorified is He* beyond any comparison with respect to His being, His attributes and His actions, for there is nothing like Him. Should you find a common attribute between you and Allah, such as the fact that He has a Face and Hand, and that you also have a face and hands, then beware of comparing His sublime attributes to yours, thus saying, 'His Face is like my face' or 'His Hand is like my hand'; for you have existence and Allah *Glorified is He* has a different existence. So, is there any similarity between these two cases? Your existence is preceded by non-existence and is overtaken by non-existence, while His Existence was not preceded by non-existence and will not be overtaken by non-existence. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to say in matters such as these: 'There is nothing like Him: He is the All Hearing, the All Seeing.' (*ash-Shura:* 11)

The one who carefully studies the occurrences of the word *sabbaha* (to glorify) in the Noble Quran will find that it appears in all forms. It is found in the past tense: ‘Whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of Allah…’ (*al-Hadid:* 1); in the present tense: ‘Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth declares the glory of Allah…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 1); and in the imperative: ‘Glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*’ (*al-A‘la:* 1). Inasmuch as the entire universe extolled the Glory of Allah *the Almighty* has never ceased to glorify Him—and, indeed continues to glorify Him, then when He created mankind, He commanded them to glorify Him. This is because they are a part of the glorifying cosmic order, and they are obliged to be in conformity with it, and not to be discordant exceptions in Allah’s universe.

As for the verbal noun *subhan* (Glory be), it indicates that the absolute exaltation of Allah *Glorified is He* is affirmed even before He created the creation, as indicated by His saying, ‘Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts….’ (*al-Isra’:* 1) Because this issue is so wondrous and beyond the ken of your mind, it is introduced by the verbal noun *subhan* (Glory be), signifying the absolute incomparability of Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if He was warning those who assign authority of passing judgment to their own minds rather than the Omnipotence of Allah Who created them out of nothing. In fact, every act is commensurate in strength and capability with the one who does it.

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…when He decrees something, He says only, Be, and it is.’ (*Maryam:* 35) This is because the miracle of creating `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was contrary to all the laws of nature, and a violation of the norms to which people are accustomed. Therefore, beware of being incredulous at the act of Allah *Glorified is He* with respect to Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* whereby He brought him into being despite his parents’ dysfunctional reproductive organs. Similarly, you should not be incredulous at the creation of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* whom Allah *the Almighty* brought into being even though his mother had no intercourse with a man. Likewise, you should take care not to be incredulous at the speaking of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*, while he was but an infant boy in the cradle. These, indeed, are extraordinary phenomena which breach the laws of nature. Therefore, you must accept them in the context of ‘Glory be to

Him', as a confirmation of His incomparability. This is because, when Allah *the Almighty* wants something, He does not process it through work and effort, but rather brings it about by the command 'Be!' and thus it is.

In this connection, you should not think that the creation of things is dependent on pronouncing the command '*kun*' (Be!); for though this imperative verb is made up of the letter *kaf* and *nun*, even before you could articulate the second letter *nun*, the thing would already exist. However, the utterance *kun* ('Be!') is the briefest thing which can be envisaged by us, as Allah *the Almighty* addresses us by means of what brings this phenomenon closest to our understanding; otherwise accomplishing His Will is not dependent on Saying 'Be!' since whatever Allah *the Almighty* wills is brought about once He wants it to come into existence.

Moreover, if you deeply examine His saying, '…when He decrees something, He says only to it, Be, and it is' (*Maryam:* 35), you will find out that it comprises His saying, '…He says only to it...' (*Maryam:* 35) which denotes that the thing which Allah *the Almighty* wills to bring about is actually present and extant since before time. Thus, the command 'Be!' is not in order to bring it into existence from non-existence, but instead to make it manifest in the domain of actuality.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمۡ فَٱعۡبُدُوهُۚ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطٞ مُّسۡتَقِيمٞ ﴿٣٦﴾

God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him:
that is a straight path [36] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 36)

Linguistically, *ar-rabb* refers to the One Who takes charge of upbringing and safeguarding. This upbringing means that the educator instructs the educated person about what will make him qualified to perform his function. In a similar manner, if we want to have good engineers or doctors, we should give them the necessary training so as to be fully qualified to these jobs. In the same vein, we are confronted with people who have assigned partners to Allah, which is why we need good Muslim callers to direct them away from polytheism to true faith, and away from sinful disobedience to pious obedience.

Thus, the verse in question shows that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said to his people, ‘As long as Allah is my Lord and your Lord, and the One Who oversees the upbringing of all of us, then Allah *the Almighty* will inevitably give instruction to someone who will reform you. This is because Allah *the Almighty* does not speak to you directly, but rather will send me as a prophet to convey His message to you. Hence, I call you to worship Him Alone without any partner. Furthermore, inasmuch as Allah *the Almighty* is my Lord and your Lord, then it is imperative that you obey Him’. Allah’s saying, ‘…so serve Him…’ (*Maryam:* 36) refers to *al-`ibada* (acts of worship) which means that the worshipper obeys the One worshipped by following His commands and refraining from His prohibitions, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And they were not enjoined anything except that they should serve Allah…’ (*al-Bayyina:* 5).

There follows His saying, ‘…that is the straight path’ (*Maryam:* 36). This part of the verse shows that the straight path contains neither crookedness nor deviation. It is the path that takes you to your destination through the shortest route, and with the smallest effort. It is well known that a straight line is the shortest path between two points.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَٱخۡتَلَفَ ٱلۡأَحۡزَابُ مِنۢ بَيۡنِهِمۡۖ فَوَيۡلٞ لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن مَّشۡهَدِ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٍ ٣٧

But factions have differed among themselves. What suffering will come to those who obscure the truth when a dreadful Day arrives! [37] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 37)

Here, the word ‘factions’ refer to those who had diverging opinions concerning the nature of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Among them are those who believed that he was a god, and those who believed that he was the son of a god. Others believed that he was the third of a trinity. Among them are also those who accused him of sorcery and those who claimed that he was an illegitimate son, born of fornication—we seek forgiveness from Allah for what the wrongdoers and disbelievers said.

The word ‘faction’ refers to the people who agree upon a particular ideology and a specific idea, which they defend and upon which they make the tenet of their faith, leading their lives in accordance with it and subjugating the proceeding of their lives to its service.

As for Allah's saying, '…among themselves…' (*Maryam:* 37), it refers to some sects within those who believe in `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and follow him. Hence, those who made these baseless false statements about him are not from among his adversaries, but rather from among those who believed in him.

Thus, the people differed about `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* with each faction of them holding one of the above-mentioned opinions which are incorrect and far from the truth. Therefore, the Creator threatens them with His saying, 'What suffering will come to those who obscure the truth when a dreadful Day arrives!' (*Maryam:* 37). These factions maintained different opinions about `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* in this world, plunging into discussions about him with whatever notions they fancied. In fact, they could do so because Allah *Glorified is He* made them have control over their faculties and granted them freedom of action and choice. However, they freely directed their faculties towards what invokes Allah's Anger. It is as if chastisement in this world is not commensurate with what they did, and they must necessarily receive a delayed punishment in the Hereafter, corresponding to what issued forth from them in terms of violations against the due right of their Prophet, i.e. `Isa (Jesus) and against the due right of their Lord *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, Allah's saying, 'What suffering will come to those who obscure the truth when a dreadful Day arrives?' (*Maryam:* 37) refers to the Day of Resurrection, the Day when all secrets will be laid bare, and mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds. On this Day, no soul shall be of any avail to another and supreme authority will belong to Allah *the Almighty* Alone.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the Day of Resurrection as 'a dreadful Day', for it is a universally attended day which everyone will witness. By contrast, the punishment in this world is only witnessed by those present and contemporaneous to it; it is not witnessed by those who came before it or those who will come after it. However, the punishment of the Hereafter is the terrible spectacle which all of mankind will see.

It may be that a portion of the punishment is easier to bear for a person than to have someone else see him while he is being punished. He might be capable of enduring the punishment on his own; however, the fact of being punished in plain view of all people, seeing him in this state of humiliation and abasement—though in this world he had been mighty, haughty, wildly insolent or oppressively unjust—will undoubtedly be more injurious and of greater impact. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says about such people in another verse, ‘And could you see when they are made to stand before the fire, then they shall say, “Would that we were sent back, and we would not reject the communications of our Lord and we would be of the believers.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 27) Yet, this is a mere talk from them: ‘Nay, what they concealed before shall become manifest to them...’ (*al-An‘am:* 28). This last verse shows that the truth that they used to conceal will be made apparent to them, as if they had some cognition of it, but they concealed it. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says about them, ‘And could you but see when the guilty shall hang down their heads before their Lord: “Our Lord! we have seen and we have heard, therefore send us back, we will do good; surely (now) we are certain.”’ (*as-Sajda:* 12) Why have they suddenly seen and heard now? Because they used to hear in this world without heeding, and they saw the wondrous signs of Allah in the universe, but they did not believe in Him. However, in the Hereafter the realities which they continuously denied will be disclosed to them, and there will no longer be room for haughtiness and denial. That is why Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَسۡمِعۡ بِهِمۡ وَأَبۡصِرۡ يَوۡمَ يَأۡتُونَنَاۖ لَٰكِنِ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ فِي ضَلَٰلٖ مُّبِينٖ ٣٨

How sharp of hearing, how sharp of sight they will be when they come to Us, although now they are clearly off course! [38] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 38)

Regarding Allah’s saying, ‘How sharp of hearing, how sharp of sight they will be…’ (*Maryam:* 38), it is a rhetorical expression of astonishment; so this part of the verse means: how keen is their hearing and how keen is their sight. On the Day of Resurrection, the deniers of the Truth will have such finely-tuned hearing and such sharpened sight that a person would be amazed at their delicate hearing and comprehensive sight, even though they used to put their fingers in their ears so that they would not listen to the truth, and used to wrap themselves up so that they would not see it. In fact, they were blind to the self-evident miracles of Allah *the Almighty* which confirm the veracity of the messengers, as well as to the verses of revelation which bear decisive commandments, and to the cosmic signs which illustrate the Omnipotence of the Wise Creator of the universe.

As for Allah's saying, '…when they come to Us…' (*Maryam:* 38), it refers to the Day of Resurrection when they will have attentive hearing and sharp sight.

In fact, man, by virtue of being Allah's creation and being appointed vicegerent on the earth, was given control over his faculties; when he commands them, they obey. Hence, man's power and faculties are submissive to his will. For example, you can use your tongue to utter: 'There is no god but Allah', just as you can say: 'There is no god'; or say, 'Allah is the third person of the trinity'. The tongue is subordinate to you; it does not disobey you in this or that. Allah *the Almighty* gives you this freedom and provides you with this choice only because He will call you to account on the Day of Resurrection: Did you strive after the good which I directed you towards, or did you strive after the evil from which I forbade you?

However, on the Day of Resurrection this human will shall be dissolved and its power over the limbs will be abolished when Allah *the Almighty* will proclaim: 'To whom belongs the kingdom this Day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16) It is on that day that limbs will bear witness against their owner, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them as to what they did.' (*an-Nur:* 24) Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And they shall say to their skins, "Why have you borne witness against us?" They shall say, "Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak…."' (*Fussilat:* 21) Why should this not happen? After all, the limbs have been freed from the bondage of the human will, and the time has come to lodge their complaints with Allah *the Almighty* and to utter words of truth which they had suppressed beneath the coercion of the will and its subjugation. Earlier, we have drawn a similitude for this by a group of soldiers who march under the command of their immediate commanding officer. They carry out his orders with blind obedience. But, as soon as they have returned to the highest commander, their tongues let loose with complaints about the overbearing nature of their commanding officer and his arrogance.

Back to the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…although now these evildoers are clearly off course!' (*Maryam:* 38) Alas, if only they had understood this matter, they would not do wrong. Ultimately, they only did wrong to themselves, for Allah *the Almighty* is not harmed by the disbelief of disbelievers, nor does this diminish His Sovereignty and Supreme Authority. But how is it that a man wrongs himself? In actuality, this is because man possesses a heedful conscience which perceives things and discerns them. Additionally, man's soul desires clash with the heedful conscience and the divine way of guidance which commands it to do good and forbids it from doing evil. This soul, with its lustful passions, incites man to satisfy its own desires and causes him to fall into temporal enjoyment and transient pleasure which eventually bring forth punishment, and makes him miss lasting goodness and eternal bliss. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…but men are unjust to themselves.' (*Yunus:* 44) Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَأَنذِرۡهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡحَسۡرَةِ إِذۡ قُضِيَ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ وَهُمۡ فِي غَفۡلَةٖ وَهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ٣٩

Warn them [Muhammad] of the Day of Remorse when the matter will be decided, for they are heedless and do not believe [39] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 39)

As for Allah's saying, 'Warn them [Muhammad] of the Day of Remorse...' (*Maryam:* 39), it comprises the imperative form of the Arabic word *al-`indhar* (warning) which means to caution someone about an impending evil.

As for the Arabic word *al-hasra* (remorse), it signifies the intense grieve which afflicts the human soul when some benefits or goodness escape it with no possibility of regaining it, or when it meets with suffering which it cannot ward off. On the other hand, *an-nadam* (regret) is sorrow at a boon or benefit which has passed you over, but which is possible to regain. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; the pupil may fail a monthly exam and then feels regretful, but he still has the possibility of compensating for this failure in the following month. However, if he fails on the end of year exam, then he feels severe remorse, grieving over the past year whose loss cannot be compensated. It is for this reason that on the Day of Resurrection, the disbelievers will exclaim: ‘O our grief for our neglecting it!’ (*al-An‘am:* 31) In this statement the exclamation is an expression of woeful regret at their situation. It is as if each of them were saying to themselves: ‘Advance, for your time has come, and present yourself, for all opportunities for redress has been missed with no chance of return’. Hence, ‘the Day of Remorse’ is the Day of Resurrection when no one will be able to go back to compensate for what he neglected in terms of doing good in this world.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘…when the matter will be decided….’ (*Maryam:* 39), it means that the matter has come to pass; that is, it has happened and could not be reversed, there is no longer any room for compensating for what has passed. This is because the one who has decreed and imposed this matter is Allah *the Almighty* Whose command cannot be resisted. Thus, all affairs are subject to Allah’s command, the ultimate judgment belongs to Him and there is no god save Him.

In this regard, it is narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘At the time when Allah let the people of Paradise into Paradise and let the people of Hellfire into Hellfire, He will bring forth death in the form of a ram. Then He will ask the believers: “Do you recognise this?” They will respond: “Yes, this is death which has come to us, and we recognise it.” Then He will ask the disbelievers: “Do you recognise this?” They will reply: “We recognise it.” Then Allah will slay death and say to the people of paradise: “Eternity for you and no death”; and to the people of Hellfire: “Eternity for you and no death.”(1)

In such a manner, Allah *the Almighty* decrees the matter in order to cut off all hope for the disbelievers who may have thought that death would come to relieve them of their torment in the Hereafter. Thus, by bringing forth death in a personified form and slaughtering it in front of them, Allah *the Almighty* eliminates this hope from them and causes them to despair. From now on, there is no death, for death has died. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says about them, ‘And they shall call out, “O Malik! Let your Lord make an end of us.” He shall say, “Surely you shall remain.”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 77)

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(1) *This Hadith is related by both Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudari, Allah be pleased with him. In this Hadith, the ram is described as being white with black spots. In his commentary, Ibn Hajar narrated that Al-Qurtubi said, ‘The underlying reason for having a black and white ram is to combine the traits of the people of Paradise and Hellfire, which is whiteness and blackness.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4730; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2849; and Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 8/428.*

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…for they are heedless and do not believe.’ (*Maryam:* 39) Here, the Arabic word *al-ghafla* (heedlessness) means that a person’s mind is distracted from thinking about something which is clearly proven to be sound and true. This is because Allah *the Almighty* would never punish His human creatures without having provided them with evident proofs which the normative reason can receive and believe in. Consequently, the one who does not believe is either heedlessly negligent of these proofs or is intentionally indifferent to them, or else wilfully rejects them. Concerning the last category, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them…’ (*an-Naml:* 14). Another aspect of their negligence is their heedlessness of death. It has been said, ‘Whoever dies then his Day of Resurrection has arisen’.(1)

It is a manifestation of Allah’s Wisdom that He has made death obscure; having rendered it obscure with respect to its timing, cause and place of occurrence. Hence, it is as if the ambiguous nature of death serves as its most evident distinguishing characteristic. This is because its obscurity requires man to be ready to encounter it at any time, by any means, and in any place; for it comes unexpectedly, and it is not dependent on time, cause, or place. For example, a child may die while he is still in his mother’s belly, or after one day or several days of his birth, or after a hundred years. Further, he may die due to a specific cause, and without cause. We may be astonished when one of us dies without an apparent cause, without any car having hit him, or without a wall or rock having fallen on him or without any sickness having come over him. What then is the cause? The cause is death itself, for man will surely die. In other words, someone died because he is predestined to die. As one says, 'In the case of death without causes, death itself is the cause'.

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(1) *In his book, Al-`Ajluni narrated this Hadith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. The complete wording of the Hadith begins as follows: ‘Be frequent in the remembrance of death! For surely, if you remember it in a state of abundance, this will hinder any false peace of mind; and if you remember it in straitened circumstances, this will ease them for you…’ See Al-`Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa`, Hadith no. 2618.*

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَرِثُ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَنْ عَلَيْهَا وَإِلَيْنَا يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

It is We who will inherit the earth and all who are
on it: they will all be returned to Us [40]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 40)

Here, we may pose the following question, which is: 'How does Allah *the Almighty* say, 'It is We who will inherit the earth…' (*Maryam:* 40), while the earth and the entire universe belong to Him'? It has been said that this is because Allah, the Supreme Possessor, granted ownership and control to certain human creatures of His in this world; however, no one in the Hereafter will have possession over anything. It is on the Day of Judgment that man will not even have control over his own faculties and limbs, and all power and authority will belong to Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, authoritative control shall revert to its Supreme Owner, and none shall inherit this dominion except Him *the Almighty*.

For this reason, one finds that those who let themselves be deceived by Allah's blessings in this world may think that they shall enjoy the likes of them in the Hereafter, as one of them expressed it in the Quran saying, 'And I do not think the hour will come, and even if I am returned to my Lord I will most certainly find a returning place better than this.' (*al-Kahf:* 36) To this we respond, 'No, while it is true that you will be brought back to your Lord, but there shall be nothing for you in His Presence. This is because the One Who gave you mastery and possession in this world, granted you this controlling power out of His Supreme Dominion. Hence, as soon as the Hereafter arises, He shall be the sole Inheritor'.

Regarding Allah's saying, '…they will all be returned to Us' (*Maryam:* 40), it shows that the issue is not limited to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* will inherit all that they possessed, and that they will be free to go their way. No, indeed, Allah *the Almighty* will inherit all that they possessed and, then, they will be returned to Him to be held accountable for their deeds. Hence, they will also not elude the grip of divine sovereignty.

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱذۡكُرۡ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ صِدِّيقٗا نَّبِيًّا ﴿٤١﴾

Mention too, in the Quran, the story of Abraham.
He was a man of truth, a prophet [41]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 41)

After having spoken, at the beginning of the chapter of *Maryam* about the birth of Yahya (John) to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon them* and then the birth of the Messiah to Maryam (Mary), Allah *the Almighty* then turns our attention to review a retinue from among the processions of messages which Allah *the Almighty* sent as a light for the guidance of those on earth. Thus, He says, ‘Mention too, in the Quran, the story of Ibrahim (Abraham).’ (*Maryam:* 41) Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is considered the forefather of all prophets and their apex since Allah *Glorified is He* praises him with His saying, ‘surely Ibrahim (Abraham) was an exemplar…’ (*al-An‘am:* 120).

There is not one individual who encompasses all the traits of human perfection and gifts of excellence. However, a collective grouping of human beings comprises them: this person is brave and of strong build, that one is intelligent, this one has acute vision, that one is brilliant in medicine and this one in farming. In this manner are talents differentiated among mankind, with none among them combining all such gifts? No one’s capacity, life, or effort would suffice to make him gifted in all things since the total perfection is distributed in mankind as a whole. The exception to this is Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* for in the completeness of his gifts was equivalent to an entire community (*ummah*).

There follows Allah’s saying, ‘He was a man of truth, a prophet.’ (*Maryam:* 41) This passage contains the Arabic word *siddiq* (a man of truth) which derives from the morphological root *sadaqa* and means to speak on the basis of reality. Lying, on the other hand, is to speak on the basis of unreality. The person who speaks truthfully is called *sadiq,* that is, honest and sincere in his own character. As for our usage of the word *siddiq*, it connotes a superlative degree of truthfulness and sincerity.

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had attained the utmost degree of confident belief in what comes from Allah *the Almighty*; hence he obeys and submits voluntarily without questioning.

Such was the faith we witnessed on the part of the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* said to her: ‘when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve…’ (*al-Qasas:* 7). By Allah, how could a mother believe this speech and obey this command? For how would she rescue her son from evil or from presumed death by certain death? Thus, this speech is not credible and beyond the purview of the mind for the generality of people. However, in the procession of divine messages, the situation is different. The moment the mother of Musa (Moses) heard this call, no thought assailed her which was in opposition to the command of Allah, and no doubt about it came to her. This is because that which comes to such people from Allah *the Almighty* never meets resistance from Satan’s whispers. This is the uncontested rule among the messengers.

Hence, *as-siddiq* is the one who reaches the ultimate level of sincere belief in the truth. Allah *the Almighty* imbues him with transparency and illumination to attain truth and be able to distinguish it from falsehood at first glance, without further investigation and close examination of the issue. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* bestows light upon you which saves you from the clouds of doubt, and provides you with the delicate scale by which you weigh things. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘O you who believe! If you are careful of (your duty to) Allah, He will grant you a distinction…’ (*al-Anfal:* 29).

On this basis, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was called *as-siddiq* not only because he was truthful in and of himself, but also because he had absolutely certain belief in everything that came to him from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* For this reason, when he was informed of the narration of the Night Journey and Ascension, what did Abu

Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* say? He said, ‘If Prophet Muhammad actually said this, then he has spoken the truth.’(1)

As far as Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* is concerned, the truth of the matter simply rests upon the statement of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This was his fundamental criterion of assessing the truth: if Prophet Muhammad says something, then he is absolutely truthful. In such a manner, Abu Bakr undoubtedly and unquestionably believed him, even without considering the immediate circumstances of the matter. Therefore, from that day forward he was justly known as *as-siddiq*.

Concerning Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* Allah says, ‘…and his mother was a truthful woman…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 75). Here, Allah *the Almighty* describes her as ‘truthful’ because she unquestioningly believed in the glad tiding of having a son once the angel told her: ‘I am but a messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son.’ (*Maryam:* 19) She had complete trust in this glad tiding and took it to be an actual truth. Hence, when the child came, she gestured towards him with full confidence and complete certainty that he would speak.

Thus, *as-siddiq* (a firm believer) is not the one who speaks the truth, but rather, the one who believes steadfastly in the truth. In this sense, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a *siddiq* as well as a prophet. This is because a human being might be a firm believer whom Allah *the Almighty* grants a special transparency, but it is not necessary that he be a prophet. In this way, Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* was a *siddiqa* and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was a *siddiq*. Hence, having firm belief is an intrinsic matter, luminous quality comes from Allah *the Almighty,* whereas prophecy is a gift and a legislation coming from on high. It is a heavenly guidance whose conveyance is assigned to a prophet.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

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(1) *This narration is narrated by Al-Qurtubi. The full narration reads ‘Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him was asked: “Do you believe him before hearing it from him?” To this he replied, “Where are your minds? I believe him about narrations from heaven, so how could I not believe him about narrations from Jerusalem while heaven is much farther away.”’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/4012.*

إِذۡ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ يَٰٓأَبَتِ لِمَ تَعۡبُدُ مَا لَا يَسۡمَعُ وَلَا يُبۡصِرُ وَلَا يُغۡنِى عَنكَ شَيۡـٔٗا ﴿٤٢﴾

He said to his father, ‘Father, why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way? [42] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 42)

This verse relates what Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to his father on the basis of his being a prophet who had come to reform the behaviour of people in accordance with Allah’s way of guidance. The first of these to be set right was his father whom the Quran mentioned in this manner, referring to his paternity of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* without mentioning his name except in one verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And when *Ibrahim* said to his sire, Azar…’ (*al-An‘am:* 74).

This latter verse has given rise to controversy as some believed that Azar himself was Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) actual, biological father. However, this opinion stands in opposition to the Hadith which elucidates the purity of Prophet Muhammad’s lineage in which he said, ‘I am the choicest of the chosen, having continuously moved from the loins of pure men to the wombs of pure women.’(1) Hence, the origins of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* go back to Adam, ‘the pure man wedded to the pure woman’. So, if we concluded that Azar, about whom Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…but when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he declared himself to be clear of him…’ (*at-Tawba:* 114) is the father of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him,* this would be in contradiction to the above-mentioned Prophetic Hadith. After all, how could the forefathers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* include the likes of this disbeliever?

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Wa`ila ibn Al-Asqa` who said, ‘I heard Messenger Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him *say, “Surely, Allah chose the kinana tribe from the descendants of Ismail (Ismail (Ishmael)), and from the kinana He chose the tribe of Quraysh, and from the tribe of Quraysh He chose Banu Hashim, and from Banu Hashim He chose me.”’ Ibn `Asakir related that Anas said: ‘The Messenger of Allah* peace and blessings be upon him *recited: “Certainly an Apostle has come to you from among yourselves…” (al-An’am: 128), and said: “I am the best of you by way of ancestral line, by marriage and by glorious accomplishments. None of my forefathers since the time of Adam has been the product of fornication; all of us are the result of marriage.”’ See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala il An-Nubuwwa, 1/66; Ibn `Asakir, Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq Al-Kabir, 1/278.*

Yet, if we carefully examined the expressions related to fatherhood in the Noble Quran, we could extricate ourselves from this dilemma. The Quran speaks of direct, biological paternity; it also speaks of indirect paternity with respect to a grandfather or a paternal uncle. So, both the grandfather and the paternal uncle are referred to as fathers, for one’s father and paternal uncle share the same father. Hence, my paternal uncle represents a bond by which he is entitled to be called a father. There are two relevant verses in the Quran, one of which calls the grandfather a father, while the second calls the paternal uncle a father.

The first occurs in Allah’s saying in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘And two youths entered the prison with him. One of them said, ‘I saw myself pressing wine.’ And the other said, ‘I saw myself carrying bread on my head, of which birds ate.’ Inform us of its interpretation; surely we see you to be of the doers of good.’ (*Yusuf:* 36) They chose Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to interpret their dreams because they saw that he was one of the virtuous people. It is as if excellence of character had criteria which were recognisable even by those devoid of it. Thus, when the two youths were confronted with a matter which concerned them, they sought recourse only in this good man. In fact, the criteria for assessing the perfection of character are respected and considered even by those who have fallen away from it. When they said to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* ‘…surely we see you to be of the doers of good.’ (*Yusuf:* 36), he knew that they had been following his movements, his conduct and the way he behaved with them. He wanted to augment them from the illuminations he possessed, for his state did not comprise merely good behaviour and good reputation. No, indeed he embodied something else: ‘He said: There shall not come to you the food with which you are fed, but I will inform you both of its interpretation before it comes to you…’ (*Yusuf:* 37).

Then he leaves off responding to their question and commences to speak of that which is particular to him as a prophet and a caller to Allah *the Almighty*. He informs them that the talents he has are a gift bestowed by Allah *the Almighty*; it is not that he is more intelligent than they are. Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* said, as mentioned in the Quran: ‘…this is of what my Lord has taught me; surely I have forsaken the religion of a people who do not believe in Allah, and they are deniers of the hereafter. And I follow the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Issac) and Ya'qub (Jacob)…' (*Yusuf:* 37-38). Afterwards, he turns the attention of those with him to two falsehoods involved in worshipping multiple deities which do not benefit them in any way. Upon hearing that, they abandoned those deities and put their trust in Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* who has one Lord; Allah says, 'O my two mates of the prison! Are sundry lords better or Allah the One, the Supreme?' (*Yusuf:* 39) In this way, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was eager to spread his call and guidance to all those around him. Even when he was in prison, he did not forget his mission, nor did he desist calling to his message. When he had finished giving his spiritual counsel, he could then listen to them as much as he wanted. If he had responded to their question from the very beginning, they would have turned away from this spiritual counsel and would not have grasped it with the same interest and engagement.

Only now does he return to their question and the interpretation of their dreams: '…as for one of you, he shall give his lord to drink wine; and as for the other, he shall be crucified, so that the birds shall eat from his head, the matter is decreed concerning which you inquired.' (*Yusuf:* 41) Our key evidence of the issue in question in this story is clear in Allah's saying, 'And I follow the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Issac) and Ya'qub (Jacob)…' (*Yusuf:* 38). Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* is the son of Ya'qub (Jacob) who is the son of Ishaq (Issac) who is the son of Ibrahim (Abraham), hence the forefathers are referred to as 'father'.

A paternal uncle may similarly be referred to as 'father', as occurs in Allah's saying, 'Nay! Were you witnesses when death visited Ya'qub (Jacob), when he said to his sons, 'What will you serve after me?' They said, 'We will serve your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Issac), one God only, and to Him do we submit.'' (*al-Baqara:* 133) Here, Allah *the Almighty* enumerated Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* among the fathers of Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* although he was his paternal uncle.

Therefore, had the Noble Quran referred to Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) father as ‘his father’ in all its verses, the meaning would have referred to actual, biological fatherhood. However, when it says, even only a single time: ‘…to his father Azar …’ (*al-An‘am:* 74), then this signifies that his paternal uncle is the intended one. This is because a proper name is not brought forth after the mention of fatherhood except when we mean to indicate the paternal uncle. This is just as we say nowadays when we want to refer to the real father, ‘Your father came’, in this vague way without giving any name. However, in case of fatherhood which is not the biological one, we say, ‘Your father, so-and-so, came’, in which we mention a specific name.

Based upon the foregoing, it is to be noted that Allah’s saying, ‘…to his father Azar…’ (*al-An‘am:* 74), occurs just once in the Quran in order to firmly establish for us that Azar is not Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) biological father, but rather, he is his paternal uncle. In this manner, the integrity of Prophet Muhammad’s lineage and the purity of his ancestral line to Adam *peace be upon him* are preserved.

Back to the verse in question; Ibrahim (Abraham) said, ‘O father!’ (*Maryam:* 42), is expressed with the phrase ‘*ya abati*’, although the standard Arabic usage would call for him to say ‘*ya abi*’. The first person possessive pronoun ‘*i*’ of the latter formulation is omitted and replaced by the letter‘t’ in the phrase in question. Why is this so? It is said that *abati* entails a precise significance by which one aims to confirm that the person so addressed, despite being a father, embodies the tender compassion of both parents, that is, father and mother. Thus, it occurs with the letter‘t’ which is indicative of the other feminine aspect. For this reason, we find that *ya abati* is only said in the case of utmost compassion and affection. It is as if the mother had died, for example, and the father assumed the functions of both parents together, seeking to compensate the children for the lost tender compassion of the mother.

There follows Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) saying, ‘…why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way?’ (*Maryam:* 42) Here, the manner of expression employed by Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* towards his father manifests the proper etiquette of calling others to religion. This is evident because he presents the admonition in the form of a question so as not to make his father feel inferior or to make it too obvious that he is more knowledgeable than him.

We should note that in his question: '…why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way?' (*Maryam:* 42), Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* does not say from the beginning, 'Why do you worship Satan?' Instead, he delays stating this truth until the end of the discussion. So, rather than saying that his father was worshipping Satan, he analytically breaks down his personality, thereby revealing his constituent elements and unveiling the truth about him: he neither hears nor sees and can be of no avail whatsoever to him, i.e. Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father. These characteristics, then, should not be found in that which one worships. That is why worshipping anything besides Allah *the Almighty* like trees, rocks and Satan must be avoided. This is especially the case with the environment of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* which was full of graven images and idols.

In the final analysis, what does worship mean? It connotes the obedience of the worshipper to the object of worship in terms of its commandments and prohibitions. So, with respect to those who worship other than Allah *the Almighty* such as idols, or graven images, or the sun or the moon, what have these objects of worship commanded their worshippers to do? And what things have they made forbidden for them? In addition, what have they made ready for those who worship them? Furthermore, what have they prepared for those who disobey them? What is the way of guidance which they have brought forth in order to merit being worshipped? As a matter of fact, they bring about nothing at all. Hence, their worship is baseless and void. Subsequently, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* says:

يَٰٓأَبَتِ إِنِّي قَدۡ جَآءَنِي مِنَ ٱلۡعِلۡمِ مَا لَمۡ يَأۡتِكَ فَٱتَّبِعۡنِيٓ أَهۡدِكَ صِرَٰطٗا سَوِيّٗا ﴿٤٣﴾

Father, knowledge that has not reached you has come to me,
so follow me: I will guide you to an even path [43]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 43)

Here, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* repeats the affectionate vocative address of *'ya abati'* once again. It is as if he wants to stimulate the natural impulse of compassionate tenderness in his father and arouse in him the ties of kinship. It is as if he were saying to him, ‘My discourse with you is that of a son to his father’. This is just as we ourselves do nowadays when one of us wishes to cause his father’s heart to incline towards him in affection; he says: ‘O daddy, such-and-such’, or ‘O father, listen to me’. Likewise, this is the situation of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he addressed his father with this formula four consecutive times in these verses. He only did so because his eager desire for his father to be guided and to lead him by the hand to the straight path.

As for Ibrahim (Abraham) saying, ‘…knowledge that has not reached you has come to me, so follow me: I will guide you to an even path.’ (*Maryam:* 43), it implies the following, ‘Do not think, O my father, that I am trying to show myself to be more erudite than you, or that I am superior to you or more intelligent than you. This discourse does not originate from me, but rather from One higher than me and higher than you. Thus, there is no disgrace in listening and submitting to it. It is a message that I was charged with conveying to you. That which has come to me of knowledge has not come to you yourself’. This is a sensitive plea on the part of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* for the issue is not a personal one between a youth and his paternal uncle, or a youth and his father. It is surely a universal issue which goes beyond the boundaries of paternity and uncle-hood.

Hence, when we discussed the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Al-Khidr in the chapter of *al-Kahf,* we said that the righteous servant Al-Khidr sought to excuse Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* because he was acting on the basis of the knowledge he possessed, the likes of which Musa *peace be upon him* did not have. Thus, Al-Khidr told him: ‘And how can you have patience in that of which you have not got a comprehensive knowledge?’ (*al-Kahf:* 68) Likewise, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said something similar to his father so that he would not be overcome with pride and haughtily distain listening to his son.

Then Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, ‘…so follow me: I will guide you to an even path.’ (*Maryam:* 43) This verse shows that Ibrahim (Abraham) is calling his father to the straight path which is not of his making, but rather comes from the One Who is higher than him and higher than his father. The Arabic expression '*as-sirat as-sawiy*' refers to the straight path which delivers you to the desired destination with the least effort and hardship, and in the shortest period of time.

Afterwards, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* says:

يَٰٓأَبَتِ لَا تَعۡبُدِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنَۖ إِنَّ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنَ كَانَ لِلرَّحۡمَٰنِ عَصِيّٗا ٤٤

Father, do not worship Satan – Satan has rebelled
against the Lord of Mercy [44] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 44)

Let us note that at the beginning of his conversation with his father, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, '…why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way?' (Maryam: 42) whereas here he says, '…do not worship Satan…' (Maryam: 44) even though Satan can hear and see, so how can we understand this point?

It is said that Satan is the one who entices people to worship idols, trees, the sun, or the moon; and that is why this phenomenon can be traced back to him as he is its ultimate cause. Nonetheless, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* resolves the matter immediately, since his father worships an idol which neither hears nor sees and is not of any utility to him. This is by their own admittance which is clear in Allah's saying, 'Do they hear you when you call? Or do they benefit you or cause you harm?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 72-73) In posing such rhetorical questions, Ibrahim (Abraham) is not really seeking any explanatory response from the one he is debating with, since he already knows that the response will necessarily be in his favour and thus has the confidence to ask. Therefore, the worship of anything other than Allah *the Almighty* can always be attributed to the seduction of Satan.

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* then goes on to say, 'Satan has rebelled against the Lord of Mercy.' (*Maryam:* 44) In this statement, the Arabic word *`aseya* means excessive rebelliousness and disobedience. Thus, Satan is not merely sinfully rebellious, but rather, vehemently recalcitrant, disobeying the commands of Allah *the Almighty* in a hostile and defiantly stubborn manner.

Thereafter, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* says:

يَٰٓأَبَتِ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ أَن يَمَسَّكَ عَذَابٌ مِّنَ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ فَتَكُونَ لِلشَّيۡطَٰنِ وَلِيّٗا ﴿٤٥﴾

Father, I fear that a punishment from the Lord of Mercy may afflict you and that you may become Satan's companion [in Hell] [45] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 45)

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* continues to be gentle in calling his father to religion, for he said, '…a punishment from the Lord of Mercy may touch you....' (*Maryam:* 45) He does not say, for example, 'that a punishment will afflict you' since he does not wish to shock him with this truth. The Arabic word al-mass (touching) connotes light contact. It is as if he was telling his father, 'Your fate concerns me, and I am anxious about you, not wanting even so much as dust to reach you'. Indeed, this is the highest degree of compassion for him and an ardent desire for his salvation. Afterwards, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, '…and that you may become Satan's companion [in Hell].' (*Maryam:* 45) This verse shows us how he fears that his father would be afflicted with punishment similar to that of Satan due to his closeness to him and being one of his followers.

In this way, the conversation comes to an end. It included four compassionate pleas and provides a unique model for calling to Allah *the Almighty* with wisdom and gentle admonition. The discourse respected the sentiments of the father whose son was inviting him to faith, and giving him sincere counsel. It arranged matters in a natural order and linked them together in a gentle, refined sequence which did not provoke a negative reaction from the listener or shock him.

Allah *Glorified is He* has taken the various sides of the human soul into account, and has commanded that the inviting of others to Him should be done with wisdom and good exhortation so that the recipient of the message is not be exposed to the harshness of calling combined with the harshness of leaving behind what he is accustomed for what he is not accustomed to.

In fact, when you call a person to Allah *the Almighty* then you are surely extracting him from the depravity to which he has become accustomed. He did not become accustomed to it except after first having desired it. Then, he became habituated to it through actions and practice. These two misfortunes of desire and habit have taken control over him, and therefore he stands in greatest need of a gentle manner to incline his sentiments and cause him to be attracted towards you and, thus, respond positively to you.

The one who calls to religion in such a situation most closely resembles someone who strives to extricate a silk garment from thorns. Thus, if you reproached and treated him harshly, he would then turn away from you and avoid your call, thereby persisting in the depravity and inequity in which he was already immersed. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner…’ (*an-Nahl:* 125). As they say, ‘Counsel is burdensome, so do not send it like a mountain, and do not make it into an argument’. Similarly, it is said, ‘Truths are bitter, so mask them with the lightness of eloquence’.

After Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* concludes his speech, the father replies:

قَالَ أَرَاغِبٌ أَنتَ عَنْ ءَالِهَتِى يَٰٓإِبْرَٰهِيمُ ۖ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنتَهِ لَأَرْجُمَنَّكَ ۖ وَٱهْجُرْنِى مَلِيًّا ﴿٤٦﴾

His father answered, ‘Abraham, do you reject my gods?
I will stone you if you do not stop this. Keep out
of my way!’ [46] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 46)

The Arabic verb *raghiba* bears a particular meaning and its opposite depends upon the preposition which follows it. On the one hand, when it is followed by the preposition *fi,* it means to love desire and seek something. On the other hand, when it is followed by the preposition *`an*, it means to dislike, detest and stay away from something. Hence, the question: ‘Ibrahim (Abraham), do you reject (*raghib `an*) my gods?’ (*Maryam:* 46) implies abandoning these gods for the sake of something else. The same usage occurs in Allah’s saying, ‘and who forsakes (*yarghib `an*) the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) but he who makes himself a fool…’ (*al-Baqara:* 13). Here, *raghib `an* means to leave the creed of Ibrahim (Abraham) for another one.

In this connection, we should note that the verb *raghiba* followed by the preposition *fi* occurs only once in the Quran— even though the preposition is merely implicit after the verb—and this is found in Allah's saying concerning the marriage to female orphans: '...while you desire (*targhabuna*) to marry them…' (*an-Nisa':* 127). The desire for something means loving and yearning for it as well as for the way which leads to it. However, it may happen that you are not truly following its way nor pursue the causal factors which lead you to what you desire. This connotation is evident in the story of the proprietors of the garden in the chapter of *al-Qalam* in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Surely We will try them as We tried the owners of the garden, when they swore that they would certainly cut off the produce in the morning. And were not willing to set aside a portion (for the poor), Then there encompassed it a visitation from your Lord while they were sleeping.] So it became as black, barren land.' (*al-Qalam:* 17-20)

The owners of the garden had agreed to harvest the fruits of their garden in the morning, but they did not say 'If Allah wills'. So, Allah *the Almighty* demolished and destroyed it while they were sleeping. In the morning, they rushed to their garden and said to each other: 'No poor man shall enter it today upon you.' (*al-Qalam:* 24)

Thus, they cut off the path from themselves when they deprived the poor: 'But when they saw it, they said: Most surely we have gone astray. Nay! We are made to suffer privation.' (*al-Qalam:* 26-27) Then they realised their error, and returned to the right path, saying, 'Maybe, our Lord will give us instead one better than it; surely to our Lord do we make our humble petition.' (*al-Qalam:* 32) Thus, the owners of the garden were yearning for the path which leads to Allah *the Almighty*. So, before saying, 'I love Allah *the Almighty*', you must say, 'I am earnestly turning towards Allah *the Almighty*'. This is because it is not simply a question of loving and desiring, but rather, love and desire at the price of striving and undertaking deeds which lead you to that which you love and desire. Hence, before claiming to love your Lord, first strive for His pleasure earnestly.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And of them there are those who blame you with respect to the alms; so if they are given from it they are pleased, and if they are not given from it, lo! They are full of rage.' (*at-Tawba:* 58) This verse shows that the hypocrites are critical of the manner of distribution the alms. They, therefore, do not love Allah *the Almighty* but rather they love receiving gifts and fleeting abundance as evinced by the fact that they become angry if such things are withheld from them. It is then that they turn away from Allah's religion, as is the case of those about whom Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And among men is he who serves Allah (standing) on the verge, so that if good befalls him he is satisfied therewith, but if a trial afflict him he turns back headlong...' (*al-Hajj:* 11).

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* rectifies their conduct for them and guides them to the straight path: 'And if they were content with what Allah and His Apostle gave them, and had said: Allah is sufficient for us; Allah will soon give us (more) out of His grace and His Apostle too; surely to Allah do we make our petition.' (*at-Tawba:* 59) So, they should have pursued the means which lead to Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, the one who yearns for Allah's love is required to ardently seek the path which leads to Him.

Back to the verse in question; Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father then said, '…I will stone you if you do not stop this…' (*Maryam:* 46). This verse shows that he threatened Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that if he does not stop calling to Allah, he will stone him. The Arabic word *ar-rajm* denotes the act of throwing rocks. It is apparent that the procedure of stoning was a means of severe punishment, as in Allah's saying, 'For surely if they prevail against you they would stone you to death or force you back to their religion…' (*al-Kahf:* 20).

There follows the father's statement: 'Keep out of my way!' (*Maryam:* 46) This passage signifies that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father ordered him to go away and to leave him. This statement ends with the Arabic word *maliyya* which refers to a long period of time, and the word *al-malawa*, which also means a long period of time, as well as the word *al-malwan* which refers to the two periods of night and day, are derived from it. So, what did Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* say to his uncle after this harshness? He did not depart from his courteous manner, nor did transgress against the etiquette of calling to faith with wisdom and good exhortation, as he said:

قَالَ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَيۡكَۖ سَأَسۡتَغۡفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّيٓۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ بِي حَفِيّٗا ﴿٤٧﴾

Abraham said,… 'Peace be with you: I will beg my Lord to forgive you – He is always gracious to me [47]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 47)

It is as if Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* wants to attract the attention of his paternal uncle, which is referred to as father, and to emphatically confirm to him that he is in grave danger, meriting punishment from Allah *the Almighty*. This situation grieves Ibrahim (Abraham) and does not please him, for how can he abandon his uncle without taking him by the hand? The first thing he said to him was: '…Peace be with you!' (*Maryam:* 47) It is as if he was telling him, 'Greetings of peace from me personally. With greetings of peace do I confront what was issued from you, for my state with regard to you is only peace. I will not counter you with the likes of what you said, and I will not be rude to you, and you will not suffer any offense from me, nor will I say 'ugh' to you in exasperation or contempt. However, peace from me is not sufficient. You must also have peace from Allah *the Almighty*; for you have fallen into a perilous state which is not to be forgiven and which calls for punishment. Alas, I fear that you shall have no peace from Allah *the Almighty*'.

Therefore, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, '…I will beg my Lord to forgive you…' (*Maryam:* 47). It is as if he was excusing himself for saying: '…Peace be with you...' (*Maryam:* 47); for he did not say that except with the intention of asking his Lord to forgive his uncle, so that peace might be fulfilled for him if he renounces his beliefs in the worship of idols. In this manner, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* wished to show him compassion and win over his heart.

Only then did Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* speak of asking for forgiveness in the future. He did not say, 'I have asked for you to be forgiven', but rather: '…I will beg my Lord to forgive you…' (*Maryam:* 47). He desires that his asking for his uncle's forgiveness be freed from all flattering courtesy, hypocrisy, and imposture. So, if he invoked Allah *the Almighty* to forgive his uncle, then he might have felt that he was merely exhibiting amicability towards his uncle. So, he said: '…I will beg my Lord to forgive you…' (*Maryam:* 47) which means that he will do so far away from him so that it would be a secret supplication which holds out more hope of being accepted by Allah *the Almighty*.

Then Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, ‘He is always gracious to me.’ (*Maryam:* 47), wishing thereby to reassure his paternal uncle that he himself has rank with Allah *the Almighty* such that if he asked his Lord to forgive him, then Allah *the Almighty* would accept his petition. In this statement, the meaning of the Arabic adverb *hafiyya* (gracious) is determined by the preposition which follows it. When you say *hafiyyun bi-hi*, with the preposition *ba`*, it signifies treating someone with great honour and generosity encompassing the exigencies of his happiness. Similarly, one says, ‘*qabalahu bil-hafawa*’ meaning to receive someone with a warm welcome, with the honour and generosity corresponding to that which achieves happiness for him.

The way of treating guests generously is a relative matter, differing according to the differences among people. There are some for whom a benevolent reception would consist merely of receiving him —even if only on a piece of matting—and serving him something—even if only a cup of tea. There are others who need adornments, luxurious couches, and great feast tables for them to feel being warmly welcomed.

We also use the same word with a different preposition, *hafiyyun `an-hu*, which signifies going to great lengths in investigating someone to discover their news to such an excessive degree that one undergoes hardship and exhausts oneself in doing this. In the Egyptian dialect one says, ‘I finally reached him after having worn myself out (*hafitu*)’. A relevant example of this occurs in Allah’s saying regarding the Final Hour: ‘…They ask you as if you were solicitous about it (*hafiyun `an-hu*). Say, ‘Its knowledge is only with Allah, but most people do not know.’’ (*al-A‘raf:* 187) This verse tells us that they were asking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Hour as if he was painstakingly interested in it, obsessed with investigating it, and ceaselessly speaking of its circumstances.

Consequently, the meaning of: ‘…He is always gracious to me.’ (*Maryam:* 47), is that His Lord excessively honours Ibrahim (Abraham) with utmost benevolence which brings about his happiness. So, part of his happiness lies in that Allah *the Almighty* forgives his uncle for the major sin on which he is so insistent. It is as if Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is highlighting two issues: he inflates the sin into which his paternal uncle has fallen—which is disbelief in Allah *the Almighty*—and magnifies the Lord from whom he will seek forgiveness for his paternal uncle, in the light of: '…He is always Gracious to me.' (*Maryam:* 47)

Ibrahim's (Abraham's) thoughts in this regard may be paraphrased as follows: 'Now, since my Lord has always been gracious to me and has never forsaken me—and how could it be otherwise since He has made me a prophet and has always been generous to me. Therefore, rest assured that if you repent and renounce that which you currently adhere to of false beliefs, Allah *the Almighty* will surely forgive you'. It is as if he *peace be upon him* is emphatically confirming to his paternal uncle the station he himself holds with his Lord, and all that his uncle needs to do is to listen to his words and respond affirmatively to his call.

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* continued to seek forgiveness for his paternal uncle as he had promised him until it was made clear to him that the uncle was an enemy to Allah *the Almighty*. At that point, he ceased doing this and disavowed him, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And Ibrahim (Abraham) asking forgiveness for his sire was only owing to a promise which he had made to him; but when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he declared himself to be clear of him; most surely Ibrahim (Abraham) was very tender-hearted forbearing.' (*at-Tawba:* 114)

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* states that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* told his people:

وَأَعْتَزِلُكُمْ وَمَا تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَأَدْعُوا۟ رَبِّى عَسَىٰٓ
أَلَّآ أَكُونَ بِدُعَآءِ رَبِّى شَقِيًّا ﴿٤٨﴾

But for now I will leave you, and the idols you all pray to,
and I will pray to my Lord and trust that my prayer will
not be in vain[48] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 48)

The Arabic verb *`itazala* (to leave) means to abandon specific companionship for what is more preferable to it, even if this is done based on one's beliefs.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the fact that when a person debates about an issue and finds his opponent to be vehemently argumentative and obstinate in clinging to falsehood, he should not prolong dialogue with him. In this way, one prevents stubbornness from becoming more deeply embedded in his opponent, which incites the latter towards the arrogance of gaining the upper hand even on the basis of falsehood.

In the same vein, this is the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* instructed the contemporaries of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that if they wanted to investigate whether he is truthful or liar, they should do this in pairs or individually. They were not to delve into it as a communal discussion with rabble-rousing tumult. This is because the clamorous activity of a gathering is far removed from objectivity, and in such circumstances an individual becomes hidden in the crowd. Moreover, things whose consequences are not praiseworthy and cannot be predicted by anyone may occur.

The vociferous gathering is not governed by reason or logic, and the masses, as one says, have their minds in their ears. We have previously said that when Cleopatra and her allies were defeated, they portrayed this defeat as a victory, as has often happened over the course of history. Concerning this, a poet said:

The most eager listeners of the people are the lowliest
With what thoughts are they inspired
They filled the air with cries and shouts
By my life, they are murderers
False accusation influenced them
And falsehood fooled them
What parrots they are
Their intelligence is in their ears.

Thus, public discussion of a matter does not arrive at a sound opinion, nor does it attain to what is right.

Allah *the Almighty* says to the contemporaries of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Say, ‘I exhort you only to one thing, that rise up for Allah’s sake in twos and singly, then ponder: there is no madness in you fellow-citizen…’ (*Saba’:* 46). Critical investigation of a matter such as this requires two individuals who exchange views, thoughts, and evidence, arriving at a conclusion after in-depth study of the question. Consequently, if one of them should get the better of the other, then the affair was between the two of them without a third person to take malicious pleasure at the misfortune of the one defeated. Alternatively, a single person could investigate the issue, debating inwardly with himself. He would then study the personage of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the noble manners and character he embodies. He would ask himself, ‘How, despite these traits, can he still be regarded as mad? Have we noticed any symptoms of insanity in him? As for those who called him a sorcerer, why did he not cast magic spells over them as he did with his followers’?

Hence, if a single person ponders over these truths in his mind and carefully weighs the various opinions, he will be guided on his own to the right course. Thus, withdrawal is a requirement if a man finds the ambience unsuited to debating against vain falsehood with the truth. In this way, we can avoid giving firmer roots to disputatiousness and obstinacy in the soul of the opponent.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Surely (as for) those whom the angels cause to die while they are unjust to their souls, they shall say, ‘In what state were you?’ They shall say, ‘We were weak in the earth.’ They shall say, ‘Was not Allah’s Earth spacious, so that you should have migrated therein?’’ (*an-Nisa’:* 97) Thus, they had the opportunity to depart from this spot for somewhere else in Allah’s vast Earth. So, Allah *Glorified is He* is drawing our attention to the fact that the entire earth is on His Possession. His Earth is of great expanse, not being limited to Egypt or Syria or Germany; rather, the entire earth without barriers is indeed Allah’s Earth. So, whoever feels oppressed in a place can go to another with no hindrance preventing him from doing so.

But is this still the case in our day and age? Are you able to penetrate these barriers while they are based upon regulations and laws for which Allah *the Almighty* has revealed no authority? It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And the earth, He has set it for living creatures.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 10) This verse shows that the earth—all of the earth—is for living creatures—all living creatures. This is among the fundamental principles which the Creator established for mankind. Consequently, when man invented barriers and borders, and set up walls and wires, preventing living creatures from movement throughout Allah’s Earth, this resulted in the growth of great corruption in the universe. Thus, if you find a particular place unbearable, you cannot find any alternative place. If you reside in an environment which is not morally corrupt in its formation, you are destined to be unhappy therein for the rest of your life.

In our opinion, these barriers and boundaries have given rise to an ‘earth’ without men and men; without an earth. If only these potentials complemented one another, this world would be set right. In this connection, this issue of withdrawal or of emigration from the land of falsehood or from an environment in which truth is not triumphant is referred to in many verses of the Quran in relation to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Among these references is Allah’s saying, ‘They said, ‘Burn him and help your gods, if you are going to do (anything). We said, ‘O fire! Be a comfort and peace to Ibrahim (Abraham)’; And they desired a war on him, but We made them the greatest losers. And We delivered him as well as Lut (Lot) (removing them) to the land which We had blessed for all people.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 68-71) Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* left a land which defied the divine way of guidance for another land, and emigrated with his message to *Ash-Sham* which was a well-suited environment for the message.

Back to the verse in question; the withdrawal of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from his people was not done in quest of material gain and bounteous livelihood, but rather, for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* and in pursuit of a principle rooted in faith which he was calling for: ‘I will leave you, and the idols you all pray to....’ (*Maryam:* 48)

Here, the first thing that we observe is that the act of praying is used instead of worshipping, for the discourse, at the beginning, was about worship, as in Allah’s saying, ‘Why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see…’ (*Maryam:* 42); and in His saying, ‘Father, do not worship Satan…' (*Maryam:* 44). Here, the context entails that Ibrahim (Abraham) says, 'I shall leave you, and the idols you all worship ... and I will call upon my Lord'; that is, 'I will worship Him'. However, he refrains from speaking of worship here and said, 'I will leave you, and the idols you all pray to....' (*Maryam:* 48) What is the reason for this? It is said that this is because man does not turn away from his Lord and away from His Oneness except when he considers himself self-sufficient. But, if events force him to seek shelter and circumstances press down on him, he will not find any refuge except with Allah *the Almighty* whence he invokes Him. Thus, worship will definitely lead you to prayer. So, as long as you will be compelled to call out in supplication, then you should act from the very beginning on the following verse: 'I will leave you, and the idols you all pray to....' (*Maryam:* 48). Hence, Allah *the Almighty* employs prayer, instead of worship, as one may worship Allah *the Almighty* in a state of ease, but if a calamity or situation of great calamity should befall him, he has no refuge except in Him. He will return to Him with praying and supplication.

There follows Ibrahim's (Abraham's) statement: 'I will pray to my Lord and trust that my prayer will not be in vain.' (*Maryam:* 48) This verse tells us that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) prayer to his Lord will not be in vain because Allah *the Almighty* does not cause those who worship Him and invoke Him to be unhappy or distressed. If you wish to indicate the opposite of this, and then say, 'The wretched and unhappy are those who do not worship Allah *the Almighty* and do not call out to Him in prayer' Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَلَمَّا ٱعْتَزَلَهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَهَبْنَا لَهُۥٓ إِسْحَٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ۖ وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا نَبِيًّا ﴿٤٩﴾

When he left his people and those they served beside God,
We granted him Isaac and Ya'qub and made them both
prophets [49] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 49)

We should notice that in Allah's saying, 'We granted him Ishaq (Issac) and Ya'qub (Jacob) and made them both prophets' (*Maryam:* 49), He does not mention Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* because it was Ishaq (Issac) *peace be upon him* who came as a reward from Allah *the Almighty* to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* for his patience in the trial of the sacrifice of

Ismail (Ishmael), and for the way the two of them entrusted the entire matter to Allah *the Almighty* with submission to His decree and predestination. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'So when they both submitted and he threw him down upon his forehead; And We called out to him saying, 'O *Ibrahim*! You have indeed shown the truth of the vision; surely thus do We reward the doers of good. Most surely this is a manifest trial.' And We ransomed him with a Feat sacrifice.' (*as-Saffat:* 103-107) But the reward was not limited to providing a ransom sacrifice, but rather: 'And We gave him the good news of Ishaq (Issac)…' (*as-Saffat*: 112).

So, when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* submitted to Allah's command regarding the first son, Ismail (Ishmael), He bestowed upon him a second son. In another verse Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And We gave him Ishaq (Issac) and Ya'qub (Jacob), a son's son, and We made (them) all good.' (*al-Anbiya':* 72) It is as if the grandson were a supplementary augmentation to the gift of offspring, and an exceptionally magnanimous mark of distinction.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* shows them all favour by making them prophets: '…and made them both prophets' (*Maryam:* 49). The favour did not consist of Allah's granting of Ishaq (Issac) to Ibrahim (Abraham) and after him Ya'qub (Jacob), but rather that He made them all prophets. These glad tidings came to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* while he was promoting the message of Allah, and he hoped ardently that this mission would remain in his progeny after him. This was the same idea which Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* had. All of them keenly desired offspring, not for the sake of prolonging an ancestral lineage, or for multiplication of offspring or out of concern for having heirs for the properties of this world. Rather, this desire was for the descendants to bear the responsibility of conveying Allah's way of guidance and for the extension of this mission among them, and fulfilling its requirements.

In this regard, you should take a careful look at Allah's saying about Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'And when his Lord tried Ibrahim (Abraham) with certain words(1), he fulfilled them…' (*al-Baqara:* 124).

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir states, 'Scholars have differed in the identification of the commandments by which Allah put Ibrahim (Abraham) to the test. Ibn `Abbas said,*=

This verse shows that Allah *the Almighty* charged him with certain laws and he upheld them in the most excellent manner and performed them in their correct way. Due to his yearning for religious obligations, Allah *the Almighty* fulfilled them for him: ‘Surely I will make you an Imam of men.’ (*al-Baqara:* 124) The matter of religious leadership stirred up the soul of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and he avidly desired that this mission would continue in his progeny after him, so he asked: ‘And of my offspring?’ (*al-Baqara:* 124) For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* rectified Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) idea of religious leadership, and laid down a general principle for it. It is not something to be inherited, but rather is a religious assignment with certain conditions: ‘‘My covenant does not include the unjust’, said He.’ (*al-Baqara:* 126)

Hence, evildoers are not fit for this mission. Upon grasping this lesson, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* upheld this principle and sought to take it into account in his subsequent invocation to his Lord. Consequently, when he prayed to his Lord, saying, ‘My Lord, make it a secure town and provide its people with fruits…’ (*al-Baqara:* 126), he took precautions, lest there be evildoers in his land, and therefore added: ‘… such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day…’ (*al-Baqara:* 126).

However, Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) analogy occurs out of place here, so Allah *the Almighty* sets the issue straight for him. This is because he is speaking of a matter pertinent to Allah’s bestowals of Lordship which

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= *“Allah tried him with the rites of pilgrimage.” Also according to Ibn `Abbas: “He tried him with the rulings of purification. Five of these pertained to the head and five pertained to the body. Those concerning the head were: trimming the moustache, rinsing the mouth, rinsing the nasal cavity, brushing of the teeth and combing the hair. Those concerning the body were: clipping of the fingernails, shaving of the pubic hair, circumcision, plucking the hairs of the armpits and washing off any remaining feces and urine with water.” Ibn `Abbas also stated a third opinion: “The commandments with which Allah tried Ibrahim (Abraham) and which he fulfilled were as follows: leaving his people for Allah’s sake when he was ordered to do so; his arguing with Nimrod about Allah when he seized him for disagreeing with him which was a gravely dangerous stance, his patience for Allah’s sake at Nimrod’s throwing him into the fire in order to burn him alive despite the terrifying nature of this matter, and after that the emigration for Allah’s sake from his homeland and his country when Allah commanded him to depart from them...”’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 1/165.*

include the believer as well as the disbeliever, the obedient as well as the disobedient. As Allah *the Almighty* has already guaranteed the provision of sustenance to everyone, there is thus no cause for taking precautions regarding His bestowals of Lordship. Therefore, his Lord answers him: ‘And whoever disbelieves, I will grant him enjoyment for a short while, then I will drive him to the chastisement of the fire; and it is an evil destination.’ (*al-Baqara:* 126)

Hence, there is a distinction between bestowal of Lordship, and that of divinity, with the latter embracing religious leadership regarding Allah’s way of guidance. On the one hand, the bestowal of Lordship comprises sustenance which is provided to everyone and subject to causal factors. Thus, whoever pursues these causal factors obtains what he desires of this sustenance. On the other hand, the bestowals of divinity are gained by carrying out the prescribed duties, obedience, and worship. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Whoever desires the gain of the hereafter, We will give him more of that again; and whoever desires — the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the hereafter he has no portion.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20)

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُم مِّن رَّحْمَتِنَا وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ عَلِيًّا ﴿٥٠﴾

We granted Our grace to all of them, and gave them a noble reputation [50] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 50)

In Allah’s saying, ‘…Our Grace…’ (*Maryam:* 50), the Arabic word *ar-rahma* (grace) has the intended meaning of ‘prophethood’. It is for this reason that when the grandees and dignitaries who were contemporaries of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘and they say: Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) as if they deemed Prophet Muhammad too insignificant to have such a distinguished station; the Quran refuted their claim, stating: ‘Will they distribute the grace of your Lord…’? (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) Hence, the gift of prophethood is a grace which Allah *the Almighty* dispersed among the progeny of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

There follows Allah’s saying, ‘…and gave them a noble reputation.’ (*Maryam:* 50) These aforementioned prophets, i.e. Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Issac) and Ya’qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them* only uttered the speech of veracity and indisputable truth corresponding to reality. Here, the Arabic expression *lisan as-sidq* (noble reputation) signifies praise in the right place and veracious eulogy without false flattery. Praising is expressed by the tongue, and here we find ourselves recalling this procession of prophets– Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Issac) and Ya’qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them*–with excellent praise and good comportment, taking them as examples to emulate. All of this is part of their noble reputation. It seems that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* prayed for such reputation when he said: ‘My Lord: Grant me wisdom, and join me with the good. And ordain for me a goodly mention among posterity.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 83-84)

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱذۡكُرۡ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ مُوسَىٰٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ مُخۡلَصٗا وَكَانَ رَسُولٗا نَّبِيّٗا ﴿٥١﴾

Mention too, in the Quran, the story of Moses.
He was specially chosen, a messenger and a prophet [51]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 51)

This is also a figure from among the procession of prophets. In fact, the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* takes up a large portion of the Book of Allah, even larger than that taken up by the story of any other prophet. As a consequence, people have been lead to wonder about the reason behind this. Even the children of Israel view themselves as superior to other people based on their being the nation with the greatest number of prophets. But this is due to their folly, since this fact counts against them and not for them, for the multiplicity of prophets among them is proof of their obstinacy and their haughty arrogance towards their Prophets. As a matter of fact, there is no nation which confounded the prophets and caused them harm as did the children of Israel. Was it why their Prophets were so numerous? Prophets are the healers of moral values who cure those who lack them. Hence, the great number of prophets is evidence of the spread of spiritual disease and its chronicity which need a group of healers, rather than one healer, to cure them.

Some people think that the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in the Quran is merely a historical narrative such as when we relate a tale, saying: 'Once upon a time such-and-such...'. However, if the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in the Quran were merely the narration of historical events, it would have occurred only once. However, this is not the case because the wisdom behind relating it to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith…' (*Hud:* 120). Hence, the objective of this narrative is to strengthen Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying the message to his people. This is because he will face many situations and hardships in which he will need support, comforting and consolation. Thus, every time a grave situation arose between him and his people, his Lord would tell him: 'Remember Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he did such and such. You are the seal of the messengers and the crown of them all; hence it is imperative for you to endure and to persevere patiently'. However, had the story been revealed only once, the reinforcement through it would have occurred only once, even though there are numerous occasions which require strengthening during the prophetic mission.

In this regard, we find that the adversaries of Islam level charges of repetition against the Quran with respect to the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. This is simply a proof of their deficiency in understanding the Quran, since these passages in which they perceive redundant repetition are actually nothing but variegated events of a single theme. Yet behind each event lies a specific situational context and occasion to come forth, so that when its context arises and its appropriate time comes, it is revealed from on high.

Let us offer an example to clarify this point; the adversaries of the Quran thought that the following verse about Musa's (Moses's) childhood comprises redundant repetition, though this is not the case: '…an enemy to me and enemy to him…' (*Ta Ha:* 39). We should ask here, 'When the enmity did break out between the two opponents, namely; Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh? If the enmity had been from one side only, then the other side would encounter it with objectivity and without any vehement hostility until the enmity of the other side calmed down. He would then be an opponent without enmity. Then, when the one filled with fierce enmity saw him in such a state of virtuous comportment, the enmity in his soul towards the other would be dispelled, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! He between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend.’(*Fussilat:* 34)

However, when enmity is between two real antagonists, both being equally hostile, it is here that enmity rages, and its fire grows and conflict flares up between them, leading inevitably to one of them attacking the other. When Allah *Glorified is He* discussed the story Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh, He portrays the enmity of Musa (Moses) in His saying, ‘And Pharaoh’s family took him up that he might be an enemy and a grief for them…’ (*al-Qasas:* 8). Here, the enmity by which Allah *the Almighty* brought the state of Pharaoh into disgrace is on the part of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Nevertheless, at this point we find that Pharaoh took Musa (Moses) in and raised him, not knowing that he is an enemy to him, and that by his hands would come his own end by drowning. So, Pharaoh’s criteria of assessment are quite mistaken, though he makes claim to divinity.

In another instance, Allah *the Almighty* confirms enmity on the part of the Pharaoh in His saying, ‘…there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him…’ (*Ta Ha:* 39). Here the enmity arises from Pharaoh. Thus, the enmity was mutual, and therefore the conflict between them was fierce.

Similarly, among the Quranic verses which certain people viewed as repetitiveness are Allah’s saying, ‘And We revealed to Musa’s (Moses’s) mothers, saying, ‘Suckle him, then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve; surely We will bring him back to you and make him one of the apostles.’’ (*al-Qasas:* 7) In another verse Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘When we revealed to your mother what was revealed; saying, ‘Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore; there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him…’’ (*Ta Ha:* 38-39). Orientalists have raised a great clamour about these verses because they do not understand the Quranic style of expression, and they lack the innate disposition for the Arabic language necessary for grasping Allah’s Book. In fact, there is a difference between the two narrative contexts in the above verses. Concerning the first statement: '…when you fear for him, cast him into the river…' (*al-Qasas:* 7), it must be observed that these events had not yet occurred, but that they would take place in the future. These words are simply to prepare Musa's (Moses's) mother for events before they occurred.

As for the explanation of the second narrative, it depends upon the events at the time of their occurrence. For this reason, it is expressed in abbreviated formulations, as if they were discontinuous telegraphic messages, corresponding to the occurrence of the events: '…Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river…' (*Ta Ha:* 39).

The absence of repetition is evident in that the verse of the chapter of *al-Qasas* only mentions: '…cast him into the river…' (*al-Qasas:* 7), but it does not speak of the chest as does the verse of the chapter of *Ta Ha:* '…Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river….' (*Ta Ha:* 39) Hence, there is no redundant repetitiveness in this case as those who are biased against Islam mistakenly claim, for each verse speaks of a specific condition and phase of the story.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Mention too, in the Quran, the story of Musa (Moses). He was specially chosen….' (*Maryam:* 51) Here, the Arabic word *mukhlasan* (specially chosen) is derived from the same semantic root as the verb *khallasa* meaning to purify or refine something by separating it from other things. In other words, it means to extract something from other things with which it was mixed, as we distil perfumes, for example, from flower blossoms. In this way, you take what is good and leave what is base or bad. With regard to man, we say, 'So-and-so is pure and refined (*mukhlas*)'. This is because man is made up of numerous dispositions and aptitudes which serve every activity of life, with each of his aptitudes and abilities carrying out a certain function; however, certain things may penetrate one of these aptitudes which are not part of its function or which go beyond its intended purposes. It is then that certain flaws can affect it, leading to man's need to purify himself of these blemishes and defects.

Let us give an example to illustrate this point; Allah *Glorified is He* allows sexual intercourse between the husband and wife for a specific purpose, namely, the continuance of the species. On the other hand, after the animals, which are driven by instinct and not by reason or free will, perform this function, the female never allows the male to mate with it. Likewise, the male does not come to the female if it realises from its smell that it is pregnant. Hence, this instinct causes animals to be restrained by its function which is the preservation of the species. Man, however, is not restrained by the limits of this instinct, but rather makes it into a personal pleasure first and foremost, which is then followed by the purpose of preserving the species.

The same holds true regarding the instinct of self-nourishment. If man becomes hungry, he is driven by his instinct to eat. The underlying reason for this stems from the sustaining of life, not from filling up on meat and fat. This instinct causes animals to respect their natural limit; thus, if a beast is satiated, you cannot force it to eat a single twig of clover beyond its capacity. On the other hand, in the case of human beings, the matter is entirely different, for man eats until he is fully satiated, to the extent that he might suffer indigestion from over-eating. Even after this, there is nothing to stop him from having sweets, drinks etc. Therefore, the Creator *Glorified is He* establishes for us a way of guidance which regulates the human instinct; Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and eat and drink and be not extravagant…' (*al-A'raf:* 31). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A few morsels that keep his back upright are sufficient for him. If he has to, then he should keep one-third for food, one-third for drink and one-third for his breathing.'(1)

Moreover, curiosity is a human instinct; for man desires to be aware of the knowledge that other people have for the necessary advancement to occur in the proceeding of life. Man also desires to understand Allah's secrets in the universe; this is the acceptable facet in this regard. However, should this curiosity turn into spying and chasing after the shameful aspects of other people, then it is unacceptable and counted among the defects from which we must purify our souls.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn Ma`adi Yakrib. It is related in the following wording, 'No man fills a container worse than his stomach...' At-Tirmidhi graded this Hadith as good, authentic one. See Ahmad, Musnad, 4/132; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2380.*

Hence, every instinct has an underlying reason and a function beyond which we should not go. In this connection, the pure and refined one (*al-mukhlas*) is he who restrains his instincts at their proper bounds, not transgressing them. He purifies his instinct of the defects which surround them. This quality is either bestowed by Allah *the Almighty* upon a devoted servant, thus purifying himself from the beginning of these blemishes; or else he exerts himself to purify his own soul of its defects by adhering to the divine way of guidance. This, then, is what is meant by the pure or the chosen one (*al-mukhlas*); that is to say that he is the one who has purified his soul.

In this connection, it is said, 'Among people are those who attain to Allah's Grace by means of obedience to Him, and among people are those who attain to obedience to Allah by means of the His Grace'. Allah *the Almighty* made prophets purified from their very origin in order that they would be prepared and ready for guiding people and not waste their time in ridding themselves of the impurities of life and its experiences. Did Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not persist for twenty-three years teaching people how to purify their souls? So, how would it have been if the he himself had been in need of purifying his soul?

On account of the high status of these pure, chosen ones, Satan displayed proper etiquette and showed respect for this high status when he said, 'Then by Your Might I will surely make them live an evil life, all, except Your servants from among them, the purified ones.' (*Sad:* 82-83) Satan said these words because he is not capable of beguiling such pure, chosen people.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and was a messenger and a prophet.' (*Maryam:* 51) Among Allah's servants are those who are chosen and pure without being prophets or messengers, as is the case with a pious devoted servant. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* announces here that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was granted all these qualities, namely; being chosen, a messenger and a prophet. A messenger is one to whom divine legislation is revealed, he acts in accord with it and is commanded to communicate it to his people. On the other hand, a prophet is one to whom divine legislation is revealed, and he acts in accord with it, but is not commanded to convey it to others. Hence, every messenger is a prophet, but not vice versa, as a prophet lives according to the divine way of guidance revealed to a messenger who is contemporary with him or who has preceded him.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَنَٰدَيۡنَٰهُ مِن جَانِبِ ٱلطُّورِ ٱلۡأَيۡمَنِ وَقَرَّبۡنَٰهُ نَجِيّٗا ﴿٥٢﴾

We called to him from the right-hand side of the mountain and brought him close to Us in secret communion [52]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 52)

Regarding Allah's saying, 'We called to him from the right-hand side of the mountain...' (*Maryam:* 52), does this refer to the right side of the mountain, or to the right side of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*? It is not possible to say of a place that it is right or left, but rather to say this in relation to you or someone else. Hence, that which you consider to be to the right, someone else considers it to be to the left. One does not say about a place that it is to the right or to the left unless this is in relation to something fixed such as the direction of the *qibla* (prayer), for example. In this case, you would say, 'To the right of the *qibla*, to the left of the *qibla*, behind it or in front of it.'

Thus, Allah's saying, 'We called to him from the right-hand side of the mountain...' (*Maryam:* 52) signifies that the mountain was on the right of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* while he was heading towards it. This is a condensed account from the story which occurs in a detailed manner in Allah's saying, 'So when Musa (Moses) had fulfilled the term, and he journeyed with his family, he perceived on this side of the mountain a fire…' (*al-Qasas:* 29).

There follows His saying, '…and brought him close to Us in secret communion' (*Maryam:* 52) which means that Allah *the Almighty* drew Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* near to converse secretly with him. The Arabic word *an-najyy* refers to an intimate confidant who confers something in private with his bosom friend. This meaning occurs in the following Hadith: 'When three of you are together, two of you must not converse privately ignoring the third till the number increases, lest the third should be grieved.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim and Ibn Majah on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no/ 2184; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2775.*

Allah *the Almighty* draws Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* close to Him in order to speak in confidence with him, and this was a special privilege for Musa (Moses). Hence, Allah's words are meant for him alone and no one else can hear them. At this point, someone might ask, 'But, how is it that Allah speaks to him with words, and yet it is called a secret conversation?' In response to this, it is said that Allah *the Almighty* caused Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to hear it, but kept it concealed from others. Thus, it became a secret conversation just as two people might whisper to one another in secret. Such is a manifestation of Allah's Absolute Omnipotence that Allah *the Almighty* can enable someone to hear while preventing others.

Some Quranic exegetes opined that the word *al-ayman* (the right-hand) is not related to the Arabic word referring to the right (*al-yamin*), but instead it is derived from the Arabic word *al-yumn* (good fortune) and is thus associated with Allah's Grace and Blessing.

Concerning Allah's saying, '…and brought him close to Us in secret communion.' (*Maryam:* 52), it signifies being close to the presence of Allah *Glorified is He*. Here, we may pose a question, which is, 'Was Allah *the Almighty* the One Who drew closer to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*? Or was it Musa (Moses) who drew closer to the presence of Allah *Glorified is He*? But how can we say that Allah *the Almighty* drew closer to him when He is already closer to him with His Knowledge than his own jugular vein'? The answer is that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is the one who got close to the presence of Allah *the Almighty*. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* combines several traits in Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* inasmuch as Allah *the Almighty* makes him a chosen one, a messenger and a prophet, and further singles him out for conversation in confidence.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* adds another gift to him; Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُۥ مِن رَّحْمَتِنَآ أَخَاهُ هَٰرُونَ نَبِيًّا ﴿٥٣﴾

Out of Our grace We granted him his brother
Aaron as a prophet [53] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 53)

Allah *the Almighty* grants Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* as a special grace for him since Harun

(Aaron) was a helper for his brother and a support for him with regard to the conveyance of the message. Never has it happened with any other prophet that Allah *the Almighty* gives him an assistant to help him carrying out his prophetic mission. In this vein, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, ‘And my brother, Harun (Aaron), he is more eloquent of tongue than I, therefore send him with me as an aider, verifying me: surely I fear that they would reject me.’ (*al-Qasas:* 34) In this verse, the Arabic word *ar-rid`* refers to the helper. In this manner, Allah *the Almighty* has provided us with a brief account of the procession of prophethood in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The detailed account of this condensed overview here occurs in other Quranic verses.

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* says,

وَٱذۡكُرۡ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِسۡمَٰعِيلَۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ صَادِقَ ٱلۡوَعۡدِ وَكَانَ رَسُولٗا نَّبِيّٗا ﴿٥٤﴾

Mention too, in the Quran, the story of Ismail.
He was true to his promise, a messenger and a
prophet [54] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 54)

Here, Allah’s saying, ‘He was true to his promise…’ (*Maryam:* 53) may give rise to the following question, ‘What is so special here for Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him,* since all messengers were true to their promise’? It is said that there is a characteristic which stands out prominently in a person and by which he is distinguished, even if it may exist in someone else. This applies to the one who fulfils his promise which he made regarding a matter over which he has control and to which it is related.

As for Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* he was true to his promise with regard to the matter of life or death, a matter which involved his own soul, when he said to his father: ‘He said, “O my father! Do what you are commanded; if Allah pleases, you will find me of the patient ones.”’ (*as-Saffat:* 102) If only the command had been revealed directly to Ismail (Ishmael), the matter would have been easier to him, but instead it was his father Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Once again, the trial would have been easier if the boy himself was the one who had seen the dream in this regard, but the matter did not go like this, for it was the father who saw the dream.

At this point, we should note that the legal ruling is not proven by a dream except in the case of prophets. Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was accurate in his response when his father informed him of the matter; it seems as if Ibrahim (Abraham) was seeking his opinion in this matter: 'O my son! Surely I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; consider then what you see.' (*as-Saffat:* 102) Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was afraid to proceed with the sacrifice of his son without informing him, so that when the moment of sacrifice comes, the boy would not be filled with anger at his father, since he would not know the motive behind his father's act. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* wanted the surrender of his son who would be sacrificed to be an offering from Ismail (Ishmael) to Allah *the Almighty* for which he would have the reward and recompense. Thereupon, Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* said to his father, 'O my father! Do what you are commanded…' (*as-Saffat:* 102).

The promise to which Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* remained true is expressed in his statement: '…if Allah pleases, you will find me of the patient ones.' (*as-Saffat:* 102) He remained true to his promise, and surrendered to the sacrifice. He did not hesitate, nor did he renege on his promise. For this reason, he justly merited to be distinguished by his Lord with these virtues: 'He was true to his promise…' (*Maryam:* 53). When Allah *the Almighty* saw the surrender of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them* to His decree, He lifted it and called out to him: 'And We called out to him saying, "O Ibrahim (Abraham)! You have indeed shown the truth of the vision; surely thus do We reward the doers of good: Most surely this is a manifest trial. And We ransomed him with a Feat sacrifice."' (*as-Saffat:* 104-107) As a result of the patience shown in facing this trial, Allah *the Almighty* redeemed the sacrifice and saved Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* from being slaughtered. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* benevolently granted Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* another son: 'And we gave to him Ishaq (Isaac)…' (*al-An'am:* 84).

This Quranic lesson teaches us that if a Muslim submits to Allah's decree and is content with His predestination, then he will reap the fruits of this surrender. That which prolongs the duration of the divine decree upon people is their discontentment with it. No one can coerce Allah *the Almighty* to do anything, and His decree is surely executed, whether you are content with it or not. When you surrender to Him and are satisfied with His decree, Allah *the Almighty* relieves you of it or makes its beneficial aspect clear to you. For this reason, it is imperative that you respect predestination and be content with it because it is from your Lord, the Creator, the All-Wise; for His decree is not lifted until mankind are content with it.

How frequently do we see people objecting to Allah's decree, especially in the case of the death of a young child?! We see them weeping and lamenting excessively over him, with one of them saying, 'He, alas, did not have a chance to enjoy his youth'. We are astonished at such displays of ignorance: What youth? What sort of enjoyment might this be? How can they view things in this way while in his infancy he has departed from this vain, fleeting world and from temporary enjoyment to the everlasting abode and permanent bliss? How can this be the case since he has left life among the created things and gone to bounteous vastness of the Creator?

Surely, he is in blissful pleasure which, if you are cognisant of, you would yearn to be in his place. It is sufficient that these children are not questioned about their past deeds and are not taken to account. They have no specific residence in paradise because they wander freely and joyously in it as they please. For this reason, they are called the 'roamers of Paradise.'(1)

Another person may object to Allah's decree because his colleague at work has been promoted and becomes his boss; so he resents and despises him, and his soul burns with anger towards him. He should have asked himself before all of this, 'Did his colleague receive anything from Allah's dominion aside from His decree and predestination?' Hence, if you do not respect this colleague, it is obligatory for you to respect Allah's Will with regard to him, for he did not forcefully take anything from Allah *the Almighty*. In a similar vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Hear and obey, even if you are made subject to the authority of an Ethiopian slave whose head looks like a raisin.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmed and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra who narrated that Abu Hassan said to him, 'My two children had died. Would you narrate to me anything from Allah's Messenger's Hadiths which would soothe our hearts in our bereavements?' He said, 'Yes. Small children are the fowls of paradise. If one of them meets his father (or he said his parents), he would take hold of his cloth, or he said with his hand as I take hold of the hem of your cloth (with my hand). And he (the child) would not take off (his hand) from it until Allah causes his father to enter Paradise.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/477, 510; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2635.*

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says,

وَكَانَ يَأْمُرُ أَهْلَهُۥ بِٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَٱلزَّكَوٰةِ وَكَانَ عِندَ رَبِّهِۦ مَرْضِيًّا ﴿٥٥﴾

He commanded his household to pray and give
alms, and his Lord was well pleased with him [55]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 55)

This verse shows that among the great qualities of Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* which Allah *the Almighty* attributes to him are: 'He commanded his household to pray and give alms.' (*Maryam:* 55) The Arabic word *ahl* (household) refers to his wife and immediate kin. Allah *the Almighty* is not concerned with a trait, nor does He mention it, except if it is of great significance in His view. In this sense, Ismail's (Ishmael's) commanding of his household to pray and give alms is equal to his being true to his promise and his being a messenger and a prophet. So, whoever desires to be characterised by one of the qualities of prophethood must order his household to pray and give alms.

Here, we may pose a question, which is, 'Why does Ismail (Ishmael) give such precedence to his household specifically?' He focuses his attention on his own family because they comprise the most immediate environment. If someone can reform the latter, then his house and offspring will likewise be reformed. Furthermore, if a person can draw his family's attention to the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* and the performance of the five daily prayers, then, in this way, he blocks the path against Satan. In fact, Satan has no space in a house whose inhabitants pray the five prayers. Therefore,

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, Al-Bukhari and Ibn Majah on the authority of `Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. Ahmad's narration is as follows, 'Prophet Muhammad said to Abu Dharr, 'Listen and obey (your chief) even if he is an Ethiopian with a head like a raisin.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/171; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7142; and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2860.*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘May Allah have mercy on a man who gets up at night and prays, and wakes his wife, and she prays; and if she refuses he sprinkles water in her face. May Allah have mercy on a woman who gets up at night and prays, and wakes her husband and he prays; and if he refuses, she sprinkles water in his face.’(1)

Thus, everyone is able each night to be a messenger to his family and to his environments by carrying out the function of the messenger. This is because Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the last of the prophets and the messengers, for there will be no divine legislation after that revealed to him, and no Scripture will come down after what is sent down to him. Therefore, his community will bear his message after him and every believer among them knows some rulings of Islam is the delegated successor to him *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying them.

In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* say, ‘…that you may be the bearers of witness to the people and (that) the Apostle may be a bearer of witness to you…’ (*al-Baqara:* 143). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness that he conveyed the Message to us, and it is incumbent upon us to bear witness that we have conveyed it to mankind. So, if you have conveyed it to people in language and words, then it is also necessary to convey it in practice, for you have an excellent example in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *the Almighty* always mentions prayer and alms together. Prayer consumes some time, and almsgiving consumes some wealth which is a by-product of someone’s work. So, while almsgiving takes the product of time, prayer takes time. Thus, the charity in prayer is greater than the actual alms giving. Even though the giving of charity represents the augmentation of wealth and its blessings—though it appears to be a decrease—prayer represents the increase of time and its blessings. Therefore, beware of saying, ‘I am too busy and do not have time to pray’. In fact, the minutes during which you pray the obligatory prayers to your Lord infuse blessings into the entirety of your time.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, An-Nisa`i and Abu Dawud on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/250, 436; An-Nasa`i, Sunnan, 2/205; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1308.*

Likewise, when you stand before your Lord in prayer, you receive a charge of faith and light which helps you to perform your function in life. In doing this, you present your soul for review to your Lord, your Creator and your Maker; and you shall never be deprived of any blessing on account of this encounter with Him. Just imagine a manufactured object being placed five times every day before its maker for review, could any stoppage or malfunction ever affect it? Now, while the industrial engineer deals with material things, since they are sensory and perceptible, the Creator is invisible and reforms you in ways that you could never know.

Obviously, Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* would not command his household to pray and give alms unless he himself was keen on doing so. As for Allah's saying, '…and his Lord was well pleased with him.' (*Maryam:* 55), this means that Allah *the Almighty* was well pleased with him not on account of the traits of goodness which Allah *the Almighty* attributes to him, but rather, from his very origins, for Allah *Glorified is He* was well pleased with him and so chose him as a messenger and a prophet.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

وَٱذۡكُرۡ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِدۡرِيسَۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ صِدِّيقٗا نَّبِيّٗا ٥٦

Mention too, in the Quran, the story of Idris. He was a man of truth, a prophet [56] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 56)

The Quran continues to provide us with narratives from the procession of messages and prophets. Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon him* was the first prophet after Adam *peace be upon him*. He is Idris (Enoch), son of Seth, son of Adam. After him came Nuh (Noah), and then Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them* from whom came a lineage of various prophets.

In Allah's saying, 'He was a man of truth, a prophet' (*Maryam:* 55), we find the Arabic word *siddiq* (a man of truth) which we have already explained while speaking on Ibrahim (Abraham). We have noted that the *siddiq* is the one who attains to the utmost steadfastness of faith in what has come to him of truth. By virtue of this, Allah *the Almighty* gives him discernment and luminosity by which he distinguishes the truth. Consequently, Satan does not clash with him, although Satan may get through to my mind and your mind.

However, with respect to that which comes from Allah *the Almighty* Satan can neither oppose nor penetrate it. Therefore, the one who steadfastly believes—even if he is not a prophet—is adjoined to the prophets and the martyrs, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And whoever obeys Allah and His Prophet, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favours from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the good, and a goodly company are they.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 69)

In addition, Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon him* was ‘a prophet’, but Allah *the Almighty* does not also say that he was a messenger, for between him and Adam *peace be upon him* there were only two generations, and the message of Adam was still in place and operative.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

وَرَفَعْنَٰهُ مَكَانًا عَلِيًّا ﴿٥٧﴾

We raised him to a high position [57]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 57)

Here a high position in heaven may refer to spiritual or physical elevation. You may understand it in whatever way you wish, but beware of contesting it by asking, ‘How did He raise him to a high position’? This is due to the fact that exaltation is from Allah *the Almighty* and the One Who created him is He Who elevated him. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says,

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ مِن ذُرِّيَّةِ ءَادَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّةِ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ
وَإِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَٱجْتَبَيْنَآۚ إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ خَرُّواْ سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا ﴿٥٨﴾

These were the prophets God blessed – from the seed of Adam, of those We carried in the Ark with Nuh, from the seed of Abraham and Israel – and those We guided and chose. When the revelations of the Lord of Mercy were recited to them, they fell to their knees and wept [58] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 58)

Allah’s saying, ‘These…’ (*Maryam:* 58) refers to the aforementioned prophets and messengers. As for the phrase: ‘of the seed of Adam’ (*Maryam:* 58), it refers to Adam’s direct lineage such as Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon him;*

whereas the phrase: ‘of those We carried in the Ark with Nuh (Noah)’ (*Maryam:* 58) signifies those who came directly after Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon him*; yet the phrase ‘from the seed of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Israel’ (*Maryam:* 58), denotes those who came after Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. The progeny of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* are divided into two branches. The first is the branch of Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* from which comes the bulk of the prophets beginning with Ya`qub (Jacob), then Yusuf (Joseph), then Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron), then Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon), then Zechariah and Yahya (John), then Dhu Al-Kifl, then Ayyub (Job) and then Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon them*. The other branch is that of Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* from which came the summation of the jewels of prophethood, namely; Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then comes reference to: ‘and Israel’ (*Maryam:* 58), who is Ya`qub (Jacob), the Prophet of Allah. This is followed by: ‘and those We guided and chose’ (*Maryam:* 58) which is a reference to those whom Allah *the Almighty* has guided and chosen for prophethood. The verse then ends with, ‘When the revelations of the Lord of Mercy were recited to them, they fell to their knees and wept.’ (*Maryam:* 58)

Here, we may ask the following question, which is, ‘Why does Allah *the Almighty* say, ‘…the revelations of the Lord of Mercy…’ (*Maryam:* 58) instead of saying, ‘The revelations of Allah’? The answer is that Allah’s revelations carry a way of guidance and obligations, and this is burdensome for people. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was telling us: ‘Beware of concluding that Allah *the Almighty* makes hardship obligatory upon you. Rather, He assigns you to do that which brings happiness to the proceeding of your life and upon which you can rely for support. Consequently, He causes you to be joyful in the Hereafter’. It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* here gives preference to the Attribute of Mercifulness and Graciousness.

There follows Allah’s saying, ‘When the revelations of the Lord of Mercy were recited to them, they fell to their knees and wept.’ (*Maryam:* 58)

Allah *the Almighty* does not say that they prostrated, but rather, they immediately fell facedown upon the ground. This is a compulsive, natural reaction in which neither reason nor reflection has any role. The one who prostrates can prostrate calmly and in an orderly manner; however, the one who fells to his knees does so without thinking about it. This is similar to Allah's saying, 'The roof fell down on them' (*an-Nahl:* 26), which signifies that it collapsed upon them suddenly. This reaction is called an impulsive reaction which is the result of emotions which are the result of perception. These are the three manifestations of sentiment: perception, emotion, and impulsive reaction. Man has senses by which he perceives: the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue etc. These are means for gaining cognisance of perceptible things. When you become aware of something with your sensory organs, you will find that it affects you. This effect on your soul is but the emotions (love or hate, etc.), or attraction or revulsion. Subsequently, this emotion gives rise to an action which is the impulsive reaction.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; if you saw a beautiful rose, this sight would be 'perception'; and if you found it to be attractive and took delight in it, this would be 'emotion'; finally, if you reached out your hand to pick it, then this would be 'impulsive reaction'. Islamic law does not call you to account for perception, nor for emotion; however, when you extend your hand to pick this rose, we would say to you, 'Stop, for this does not belong to you'. The Lawgiver does not forbid you something and then He leaves you to your own desires. Instead, He forbids you and then inspires you with a suitable solution to your impulsive inclination. Hence, you should plant the like of that flower so that it will belong to you, or at the very least you should ask permission of its owner to pick it.

The same situation applies to someone who listens to Allah's words in the Quran; he perceives the Quran with his sense of hearing, and this gives rise to sweetness and strong feelings in him. This is the emotion from which arises the impulsive reaction. Such a person can do nothing but to fall to his knees in prostration to Allah *the Almighty*. The impulsive reaction here is not only an outward inclination, but also an inward one. Thus, their eyes overflowed with tears: '…they fell to their knees and wept.' (*Maryam:* 58)

The same concept has been addressed in several other verses, such as Allah's saying, 'Say, "Whether you believe it or not, those who were given knowledge earlier fall on their faces when it is recited to them."' (*al-Isra':* 107)

The phrase: ‘on their faces’ (*al-Isra’:* 107) is an indicative of utter submission and humility, as well as of full execution of prostration. Prostration begins with the forehead, and then the nose. We should be careful not to make our prostration ‘like the peck of a rooster’, as they say.

The previous verse is talking about the people of the Book who were aware of the prophetic mission of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that he would come with the Quran after a break in the sequence of messengers. When such people hear the Quran, they exclaim: ‘Glory be to our Lord! Most surely the promise of our Lord was to be fulfilled.’ (*al-Isra’:* 108)

Another example of this impulsive reaction regarding the Quran is clear in Allah’s saying concerning the people of the Book: ‘And when they listen to what has been sent down to the messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognise the Truth [in it].’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 83)

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Allah has revealed the best announcement, a book conformable in its various parts, repeating, whereat do shudder the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and their hearts become pliant to the remembrance of Allah...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 23), Here, a question may arise, which is, ‘Why does the Quran affect these senses and organs of the human body’? It is said that this is due to the fact that the One Who fashioned humans is the One Who composed the Quran. When the Creator *Glorified is He* speaks and when you understand Him and pay heed, He is not addressing your mind only, but rather, Allah *the Almighty* is addressing every atom of your constitution as well. It is for this reason that limbs fall in prostration, eyes shed tears, skins shiver, and hearts soften. How could it be otherwise when the speaker is Allah *the Almighty* Himself?

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* says,

فَخَلَفَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ خَلۡفٌ أَضَاعُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَٱتَّبَعُواْ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِۖ فَسَوۡفَ يَلۡقَوۡنَ غَيًّا ﴿٥٩﴾

But there came after them generations who neglected prayer and were driven by their own desires. These will come face to face with their evil [59] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 59)

As for Allah’s saying, ‘But there came after them generations...’ (*Maryam:* 59), it means that the circumstances did not remain intact about

Allah's aforementioned statement. Rather, those righteous people were succeeded by following generations. The Arabic word *al-khalf* (generation) which is used here, signifies the people who come after a person or following him.

In this connection, there is a difference between *khalf* and *khalaf*: the first, with no vowel after the 'l' is intended to mean the bad ones from among the offspring of a person and his children; the second, with an 'a' vowel following the consonant 'l', refers to the good ones. Therefore, when a poet(1), wished to express woeful distress over the people of goodness who have passed on, he said:

Gone are those under whose protective wing one lived

And I remained among the debased like unto skin of the scabby one.

What do you expect from these evildoers? After these people are mentioned, their characteristics of wickedness must follow; Allah *the Almighty* says, '…who neglected prayer and were driven by their own desires…' (*Maryam:* 59). Hence, they are a corrupt generation, since the first thing that they neglected was prayer, which is the central support of religion and the most important of its pillars in terms of observance.

While it is true that Islam is built on several pillars, yet some of these pillars may be waived for a Muslim and is thus not required to observe them, such as the prescribed alms, pilgrimage and fasting. There remain two fundamental pillars which are never waived under any circumstances which is the testimony of faith, that is, there is no deity worthy of worship, but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and keeping up prayer.

I was once asked by one of our brothers in Algeria, 'Why do we refer to someone who has performed the obligation of pilgrimage as '*Al-Hajj* so-and-so', yet we do not refer to someone who prays as 'the worshipper so-and-so', nor do we say, 'the alms-giver so-and-so' or 'the Observer of the fast so-and-so'?

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(1) Labid ibn Rabi`a ibn Malik Abu `Aqil Al-`Amiri, one of the poets of pre-Islamic times; he is from among the people inhabiting the high plateau of Nejd. He lived to witness Islam and is counted among the Prophet's Companions; later he took up residence in Kufa, lived a long life and passed away in the year 41 A.H. *See Az-Zirikli, Al-A`lam,* 5/240.

I responded to the questioner, ‘This is because by means of the pilgrimage, Allah *the Almighty* completes His favour upon the servant. When we say ‘*Al-Hajj* so-and-so’, this is an indication and a sign that Allah *the Almighty* has actualised this blessing for him. In other words, he has fulfilled all the pillars of Islam. The fact that he has performed the obligation of pilgrimage signifies that he had this capacity in terms of sufficient wealth and health. As long as he still has wealth, then he gives the obligatory alms; and as long as he is still in good health, then he fasts. Obviously, he does not do so unless he testifies that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and meanwhile observes the daily prayers. In this manner, all the pillars of Islam are fulfilled and perfected for him.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘These will come face to face with their evil.’ (*Maryam:* 59) This expression is seized upon by the adversaries of Islam who seek to find fault in the Quran. Hence, with reference to the Arabic word *al-ghayy* (evil), they say, ‘The word *al-ghayy* refers to wickedness, misguidance and corrupt beliefs; this is what they were actually guilty of in this world, and that is why they neglected prayer and followed their lusts. So, how is it that He says that they will encounter it in the future’? We content, ‘The intended meaning of *al-ghayy* here is the recompense for such evildoings and its consequences. It is as if you were to say: ‘The sky rained plants’. Now, the sky does not rain plants, but rather, it is water which causes plants to come forth. Likewise, their self-deception and depravity in this world were the reason why the punishment will befall them in the Hereafter. Thus, the meaning of this passage is that they will be confronted with punishment and ruin in the Hereafter.

Nevertheless, Allah *the Almighty* out of His Mercy for His human creatures has prescribed repentance for them. He has opened its door for them and rejoices if they repent. Therefore, those who are characterised by these bad qualities, having neglected prayer and followed their lusts, should not despair of Allah’s Mercy as long as the door of repentance is still open. The opening of the door of repentance before the disobedient is a grace by which Allah *the Almighty* shows mercy to the entire community of those who pursue vile passions and deviations. If it were not so and the door was shut in their faces, society would be made miserable by them because they would persist in their rebellious falsehood and delusions since they would have nothing in front of them for the sake of which they might rectify themselves.

Repentance comes from the servant and is accepted by the Lord *Glorified is He*. That is to say that the prescription of repentance and its acceptance are from Allah *the Almighty,* yet its effectuation is from the servant. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return [to Him].’ (*at-Tawba:* 118) This verse shows that Allah *the Almighty* prescribed repentance for them so that they might repent and so that He might thereby accept their repentance. Hence, repentance begins and ends with Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, the following exception was revealed:

إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ شَيْـًٔا ﴿٦٠﴾

But those who repent, who believe, who do righteous deeds,
will enter Paradise. They will not be wronged in the least[60]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 60)

There are conditions for repentance which must be considered. They are as follows: you should leave off engaging in the sin you have fallen into; you should regret what you have done; and you should make the determined intention not to return to it again. This does not mean that if you do it again, your repentance will not be accepted, for you may be exposed to circumstances that cause you to fall into sin once again. Rather, the intended meaning is that you make a sincere resolution when you repent not to do it again. Then, if you were to fall into it another time, this would be unintentional and without wilful insistence. Otherwise, if you planned this matter, and said to yourself: ‘I will commit a sin and then I will repent’, then how can you possibly know that Allah *the Almighty* will grant you enough time to allow you to repent? Therefore, take initiative to repent sincerely before it is too late.

These, then, are the conditions of repentance if it concerns an issue between the servant and his Lord. However, if it is an issue pertaining to other people, then there is inevitably another condition which should be met, that is, returning what you have wrongfully taken from the people if this is possible; otherwise, you should donate the equivalent to charitable causes with the intention of giving the reward for such an act to the ones you have wronged.

Following this, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…who believe, who do righteous deeds...' (*Maryam:* 60). The belief which is mentioned here is that which follows repentance since what he committed of wrongdoing has stained his faith which is why he needs to renew it. This is evident in the following Hadith: 'The fornicator who fornicates is not a believer so long as he commits it and no thief who steals is a believer as long as he commits theft, and no drunkard who drinks wine is a believer as long as he drinks it.'(1)

During these acts of disobedience, the disobedient person's attribute of faith is rendered null and void because his faith is absent at that time. This is because if he attained faith and was aware of the punishments of this world and the Hereafter which his misdeed incurs, he would not have fallen into these sinful acts of disobedience. It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says, 'who believe' (*Maryam:* 60) which means to renew one's faith and to restore it after making repentance. Then follows the saying of Allah: 'who do righteous deeds.' (*Maryam:* 60) It is through such righteous deeds that one amends what he corrupted through committing acts of disobedience.

The result of all this is clear in the saying of Allah: 'They will enter Paradise. They will not be wronged in the least.' (*Maryam:* 60) In another verse, the reward for those who repent believe and do righteous deeds is the following: '…except him who repents and believes and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones….' (*al-Furqan:* 70) Why does Allah *the Almighty* bestow all these blessings upon the wrongdoers who repent? It is said that this is because whoever has grown familiar with the objects of lustful desire and has become habituated to sinful disobedience, having tasted their pleasure, needs great effort in the struggle against his lower self and its subdual. This is contrary to the person who has never grown accustomed to such things. Therefore, disobedient sinners need an incentive to motivate them to return to showing obedience to their Lord *Glorified is He*. It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘They will enter Paradise.’ (*Maryam:* 60) without being rebuked for what they have done, for they have been sincere in their repentance to Him *the Almighty*. Furthermore, ‘They will not be wronged in the least.’ (*Maryam:* 60) As a matter of fact, the more your repentance is sincere and your remorse is profound, the more you will be rewarded by Allah *the Almighty* to the extent that your sins, out of the Mercy of Allah, will be transformed into good deeds. All of this is due to Allah’s Grace and Mercy.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in the book of Iman on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2475; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 57.*

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

جَنَّٰتِ عَدۡنٍ ٱلَّتِي وَعَدَ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ عِبَادَهُۥ بِٱلۡغَيۡبِۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ وَعۡدُهُۥ مَأۡتِيّٗا ﴿٦١﴾

They will enter the Gardens of Lasting Bliss, promised by the Lord of Mercy to His servants – it is not yet seen but truly His promise will be fulfilled [61] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 61)

With respect to Allah’s saying, ‘gardens of lasting bliss’ (*Maryam:* 61), this means that they will have everlasting gardens. This is contrary to the gardens of this world where you may find causal factors of pleasure and enjoyment, yet they are transient, for either you will leave them behind or they will leave you behind. Hence, every blessing in this world is without guarantee of perpetuity.

The gardens of perpetual bliss are not the residences of the inhabitants of paradise, but rather, they are the public gardens which all can enjoy. This is proved by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* conjoins the ‘gardens of lasting bliss’ in another verse with the mention of ‘good dwellings’; He says, ‘Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women gardens, beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and good dwellings in gardens of lasting bliss …’ (*at-Tawba:* 72).

In the verse in question, there follows Allah’s saying, ‘…promised by the Lord of Mercy to His servants — it is not yet seen...’ (*Maryam:* 61). The promise is the announcement of something good before its time has come so as to encourage the one who is promised to undertake deeds in order to attain to this good. Its opposite is a warning which is the announcement of something bad before its time so as to make a person cautious and avoid falling into that which brings it about.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* has opted for the name 'the Lord of Mercy' to reassure those who have wronged their own souls through acts of disobedience that their Lord is indeed Compassionate and Merciful. If they turn to Him in repentance, He will accept it from them; and if He makes a promise to them, He fulfils it. Now, Allah *the Almighty* has made a promise to us in the Quran, and we believe in His promise even though it is pertinent to the unseen realm: '…promised by the Lord of Mercy to His servants — it is not yet seen...' (*Maryam:* 61). Today's world offers a conclusive proof for the existence of the unseen. Our universe has been created in such a highly accurate way which can never be imitated. Hence if the One Who created this amazing, harmonious cosmos for us informs us of another perpetual blessing in the Hereafter, then we must have full faith in that; we, must rely on our own experience to attain faith to that which is invisible to us. Thus, having full confidence in Allah's Omnipotence of which we behold only a small portion in this world, we firmly believe in the existence of the Hereafter.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '…truly His promise will be fulfilled.' (*Maryam:* 61) Because the Lord of Mercy is the One Who has made the promise, then His promise must be invariably fulfilled. The Arabic word employed for this latter phrase is *ma`tiya*, which means that Allah's promise will be actualised and realised without any doubt, for Allah *the Almighty* never breaks His promise. The word *ma`tiya* (to be fulfilled) means that Allah *the Almighty* will bring His promise about, for it is the passive participle denoting the object of the implied verb. In the opinion of certain scholars, the word *ma`tiya* connotes *atiya* (coming), and thus occurs in the form of the passive participle with the intended meaning of the active participle. However, in our view, the meaning here is clear and does not require such an interpretation. This is because the promise of Allah *the Almighty* will be inevitably fulfilled, and that which has been promised is already firmly established in its place. Therefore, the intelligent one is the one who strives towards it, and pursues its path by means of good deeds to attain to it.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says regarding the people who will reside in Paradise:

لَّا يَسۡمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغۡوًا إِلَّا سَلَٰمٗاۖ وَلَهُمۡ رِزۡقُهُمۡ فِيهَا بُكۡرَةٗ وَعَشِيّٗا ﴿٦٢﴾

There they will hear only peaceful talk, nothing bad;
there they will be given provision morning and evening [62]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 62)

The Arabic word *al-laghw* (bad talk) signifies superfluous speech in which there is no benefit, as it squanders time and uselessly dissipates the energy of the speaker and that of the listener. Moreover, there is no benefit behind it and it is meaningless. The discourse here refers to the Hereafter: ‘There they will hear only peaceful talk, nothing bad...’ (*Maryam:* 62); for although the dwellers of paradise have heard a great deal of empty talk in this world, there will be no place for it in the Hereafter. Allah *the Almighty* makes an exception to that which will not be heard: ‘…only peaceful talk…’ (*Maryam:* 62). Obviously, the peaceful talk is not a kind of the empty talk, for it is the greeting of the people of paradise and the salutation of the angels: ‘…and their greeting in it shall be: Peace…’ (*Yunus:* 10).

Another possible interpretation for the word *salama* (peace) here is that it implies the soundness and immunity from all forms of defects which affected them in this world, for in the Hereafter they are free of them. There will suffer no physical dIsability, illness, fatigue, or hardship. However, we give preference here to the first meaning of salutation or greeting because peaceful talk in this verse is among things that are heard.(1)

Here, you might well ask, ‘But how is the word *as-salam* (peaceful talk) is considered an exception from the empty talk’? To this we would reply, ‘Among the stylistic expressions of language is the affirmation of praise by means of something which resembles disparagement’. An example of this is when we say, ‘There is no flaw in so-and-so except that he is brave’. Here, you were expecting us to single out some flaw as an exception to his lack of flaws; however, the meaning here is that if you consider bravery as a flaw, then there is a flaw in this person; for we have examined this person, and could not find flaw in him, unless we committed the unthinkable and counted bravery as a flaw. In this way, we affirm our praise of him with what appears to be criticism. An example of this is found in the following lines of the poet:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, ‘Peace is an all-inclusive name for goodness and well-being. The meaning is that they will hear nothing in [paradise] except that which they desire and love.’ On the other hand, Muqatil and others said, ‘This means greetings of peace between each other, and the greeting of peace of the angel upon them.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4297.*

And there is no flaw in them except that their swords
Have dents in them from engaging armies in combat.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…there they will be given provision morning and evening.’ (*Maryam:* 62) Here, Allah *the Almighty* does not say: ‘And it is incumbent upon us to give them their sustenance’, but rather: ‘…they will be given provision’ (*Maryam:* 62) which implies that this is an issue which has been determined and designated for them. It is a matter which has already been settled. As for the Arabic word *ar-rizq* (provision), it refers to everything from which benefit is derived. In the Hereafter, the extent of such provision is proportional to what a person did of good deeds in this world.

One of the manifestations of Allah’s Mercy towards His devoted servants of the People of Paradise is that He removes from their breasts whatever they contain of rancour, envy, and contempt. Hence, no one will envy anyone else who has a superior rank than him. Moreover, a person does not crave the pleasures of paradise except according to the extent of his good deeds and degree of merit; thus, if he finds someone higher than him in degree of merit, he feels no rancour or resentment in his soul towards him. The cause of rancour in this world results from seeing someone who is superior to you; however, in the Hereafter you will view this issue from another perspective, from the perspective of the purified soul which knows no rancour or ill will. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And We will root out whatever of rancour is in their breasts— (they shall be) as brethren, on raised couches, face to face.’ (*al-Hijr:* 47) Thus, if you saw someone who was of higher rank than you, you would say that he deserves whatever he has attained of goodness and enjoyment, for he used to struggle against his lower self and his deviant desires in this world.

In terms of description of what paradise comprises of provision and pleasure, it suffices to cite Allah's saying, '…therein shall be what their souls yearn after and (wherein) the eyes shall delight....' (*az-Zukhruf:* 71) In addition, we should recall Prophet Muhammad's statement: 'There will be bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.'(1) Hence, there are things in paradise which do not fall into the realm of our comprehension. Consequently, our language does not comprise words capable of expressing this bliss. This is because, in language, you utilise words whose meaning you can comprehend, but in paradise there are things beyond the scope of your comprehension and experience, and of which you have no knowledge. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* wants to describe the blessings of Paradise to us, He does so in terms of what we know of the blessings of this world: date palms, fruit, pomegranates, the meat of fowl and sweet-smelling herbs. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'A parable of the garden which those guarding (against evil) are promised: Therein are rivers of water that does not alter, and rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change, and rivers of drink delicious to those who drink, and rivers of honey clarified…' (*Muhammad:* 15). Yet, there is a difference between the nature of these things in this world and their nature in the Hereafter. It suffices here that you recognise the difference between wine in this world—and all that it contains of bad qualities in terms of its taste, its smell, and its power to seize the mind—and the wine in the Hereafter from which Allah *the Almighty* has removed all bad traits. Concerning this heavenly wine, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'There shall be no trouble in it, nor shall they be exhausted therewith.' (*as-Saffat:* 47)

Back to the verse under discussion; there follows Allah's saying, '…there they will be given provision morning and evening.' (*Maryam:* 62)

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(1) This Hadith is narrated by Muslim, Ahmad and Abu Nu`aym on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The full text of this Hadith reads: 'I have made ready for my upright, devoted servants that which no eye has ever seen, or ear has ever heard and which never has been imagined by the human heart.' *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2824; Ahmad, Musnad, 2/466; Abu Nu`aym, Hilyat Al-Awliya', 2/262.*

Here arises the following question, which is, ‘How is it that their provision will come to them in the morning and in the evening, although there is no time in paradise - no morning and no evening time, no night and no day’? To this we reply that Allah *Glorified is He* is speaking to us according to the capacity of our minds, that is, according to that which we ourselves are cognisant of in terms of the measures of the world. But actually the bliss of Paradise is continuous and not bound to time, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…its food and shades are perpetual…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 35); and ‘These are they who are the heirs, Who shall inherit the Paradise; they shall abide therein.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 10-11)

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

تِلۡكَ ٱلۡجَنَّةُ ٱلَّتِي نُورِثُ مِنۡ عِبَادِنَا مَن كَانَ تَقِيّٗا ﴿٦٣﴾

That is the Garden We shall give as their own to
those of Our servants who were devout [63]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 63)

Here Allah’s saying, ‘That is the Garden...’ (*Maryam:* 63) signifies that which He is providing us with an image of the garden. This depiction is: ‘We shall give as their own to those of Our servants who were devout.’ (*Maryam:* 63) In other words, they will inherit it. Now, this prompts the question, ‘Was there someone in Paradise before these people that they will inherit’? To answer this, we must understand that Allah *Glorified is He* before creating mankind knew who among them would believe by his own free choice, and who would reject faith by his own free choice; He knew who would obey and who would disobey. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* does not compel His servants to do anything, but rather He knows what they would do through the boundless nature of His Knowledge. Yet Allah *the Almighty* readied paradise so that it would be capacious enough for all of humanity if they were heedfully obedient; likewise He prepared Hellfire to accommodate all of humanity if they were wilfully disobedient. In this way, there would be no overcrowding and no housing shortage if all people entered Paradise, or if everyone entered Hellfire. Hence, when the people of Hellfire enter it, what happens to their spaces which were prepared for them in Paradise? They go to the People of Paradise, and thus they inherit them after the others have been deprived of them.

Subsequently, Allah, the Lord of Might, says:(1)

وَمَا نَتَنَزَّلُ إِلَّا بِأَمْرِ رَبِّكَ لَهُۥ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِينَا وَمَا
خَلْفَنَا وَمَا بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ ۚ وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا ﴿٦٤﴾

[Jibril said], 'We only descend [with revelation] at your Lord's command — everything before us, everything behind us, everything in between, all belongs to Him — your Lord is never forgetful [64] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 64)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* turns our attention to another topic. After speaking of paradise and its inhabitants, He relates an incident that happened to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when revelation descended upon him. We have said that the revelation comes down through the mediation of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who is an angel, upon Prophet Muhammad, who is a man.

The meeting between Jibril (Gabriel), governed by his angelic nature, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* governed by his human nature, cannot take place except through a rapprochement of these two species and a process of transformation which must occur in one of them. Either the angel must descend in human form, or else human nature of the messenger must ascend to the level of proximity with the angel to receive revelation from him. This is what used to occur to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when revelation would come to him.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* has described this transformation, saying: '… Jibril (Gabriel) squeezed me vehemently until I reached the limit of my endurance…'(1). His forehead would drip(2) with perspiration because the physical reactions and chemical processes which took place in his body. Then when revelation receded from him, these symptoms would go away. One of the companions, who used to sit close to Messenger Muhammad, related that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would place his knee on his knee, and that when revelation descended upon him, the companion said, 'I felt the knee of the Messenger of Allah, and it was as if it was as heavy as a mountain.'

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(1) *The cause of revelation for this verse is narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him as follows: 'The Messenger said to Jibril (Gabriel), "What prevents you from visiting us more frequently?" Thereupon was revealed the verse: '[Jibril Gabriel said], "We only descend [with revelation] at your Lord's command."' (Maryam: 64). This Hadith is also narrated by At-Tirmidhi who graded it as good, gharib Hadith. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3218, 4731, 7455; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3158.*

Moreover, when revelation came to him while he was on a riding beast, it would kneel down from the weight of revelation.(3) In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Behold, We shall bestow upon you a weighty Message.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 5) Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would become fatigued after this encounter and it would be so hard on him that he would go to Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* and say, 'Wrap me up! Wrap me up!' or 'Cover me! Cover me!'(4), as if he had a fever due to what he encountered in meeting an angel and his first exposure to revelation.

Later, Allah *the Almighty* wished to intermit the revelation for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order that he might repose from its fatigue and hardship. So, as soon as he had rested and the exhaustion had left him, he retained the sweetness of the revelation and consequently yearned for it anew. This is similar to the case when a person longs for a place he loves in spite of the thorns surrounding it and the difficulties of the route to reach it. In fact, love of something provokes a process like anesthetisation whereby you feel neither discomfort nor weariness in your pursuit of attaining it.

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(1) *This is narrated by Al-Bukhari in the context of a longer Hadith on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3.*

(2) *In his collection, Al-Bukhari narrated that `Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, 'I saw him when the revelation came to him on a very cold day, and his forehead was dripping with sweat.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2.*

(3) *In his collection, Imam Ahmad relates that Asma` bint Yazid said, 'I was holding the halter of al-`Adba, the she-camel of the Messenger, when the chapter of al-Ma`ida was revealed to him in its entirety and the neck of the camel was nearly broken by its weight.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 6/455.*

(4) *This is narrated by Al-Bukhari in the book of revelation on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3.*

We have said that when the revelation intermitted for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the disbelievers gloated over his misfortune, saying, ‘Surely, the Lord of Muhammad is displeased with him’; i.e. He has detested and abandoned him. This statement is a proof of their absurdity and foolishness. How could they say this when only yesterday they were calling him a sorcerer and a liar? Then, out of hatred, they recalled that he has a Lord Who has withheld revelation from him; and yet when he called them to believe in this Lord, they said, ‘From where did he come up with this speech’? Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘Have We not expanded for you your breast, And taken off from you your burden, Which pressed heavily upon your back, And exalted for you your esteem?’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1-4) Hence, the phenomenon of revelation was arduous for Messenger Muhammad.

Allah *the Almighty* wished to give those disbelievers a lesson by means of a perceptible cosmic fact witnessed by the believer and the disbeliever alike. This cosmic phenomenon is ‘time’, which is divided into night and day. Each of these two has a function for which Allah *the Almighty* brought it into being. In this regard, Allah says, ‘I swear by the night when it draws a veil, And the day when it shines in brightness.’ (*al-Layl:* 1-2) Therefore, beware of changing the function of the night to that of the day, or the function of the day to that of the night.

Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* refutes the false claim of the disbelievers, saying, ‘I swear by the early hours of the day, And the night when it covers with darkness. Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased, And surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-4)

This signifies that daytime, which is dedicated for the proceedings of life and sustaining it, and the night, which is dedicated for repose, tranquillity and rest, are two of Allah’s signs that are complementary to each other. The coming of the night with its stillness does not imply that the day will not follow it. No, indeed, another day will come and the proceedings of life will continue.

Similarly, this is the situation if revelation intermitted for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, do not think, O disbelievers, that it has been ceased, never to return. Rather, this is an intermission in order that Messenger Muhammad reposes, like the night in which you yourselves find rest from the toil of work during the day. Herein lies the reason why Allah *the Almighty* commences the chapter of *ad-Duha* with swearing by the morning brightness and the night when it grows still, since this serves as an analogy to His subsequent saying, 'Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased.' (*ad-Duha:* 3) In this manner of expression, we notice the inimitable precision of the Quran. When Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Your Lord has not forsaken you (*ma wadda`ka)*' (*ad-Duha:* 3), the particle of addressing the second person singular (*kaf*) is used to refer to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because *`at-tawdi`* (forsaking) applies to someone you love as well as someone you dislike. However, in the following verbal phrase: '…nor has He become displeased *(wa ma qala)*' (*ad-Duha:* 3), Allah *the Almighty* does not say '*qala-ka*' with the particle (*kaf*) which refers to the second person singular, since *al-qala* (displeasure) only applies to someone you detest. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* does not refer directly to Prophet Muhammad with a verb denoting displeasure with the addressee even though the verb is used in the negative form to refute the disbelievers' claims that Prophet Muhammad's Lord has forsaken or is displeased with him.

With respect to Allah's saying, 'And surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before' (*ad-Duha:* 4), the Arabic word *al-akhira* (what comes after) here signifies the final period of descending of revelation which will be better for Prophet Muhammad than its initial period. This is because it will be more expansive and will come to him without strenuous effort and without hardship. In fact, after the intermission, the bulk of the Quran was revealed to him in an easy manner.(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'It was related by Salama on the authority of Ibn Ishaq that this part of the verse means: 'What I have prepared for you, O Muhammad, is better for you than what I have hastened for you of favours in this world.' On the other hand, Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, 'Prophet Muhammad was shown success and victory which Allah would grant to his ummah after his passing away, and he was gladdened by this. Thereupon, Jibril (Gabriel) brought down Allah's saying, 'And surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before.' (ad-Duha: 4) See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 10/7433.*

Such is the case in the verse in question: '[Jibril (Gabriel) said], "We only descend [with revelation] at your Lord's command...."' (*Maryam:* 64). It is said that this verse was revealed when the disbelievers said, 'Surely the Lord of Muhammad is displeased with him'. Another view is that it was revealed after the disbelievers of Mecca asked the three questions which we discussed in the chapter of *al-Kahf.*(1) At that point, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'I will inform you tomorrow'. But the revelation did not come down to him for fifteen days, which distressed and saddened him. Subsequently, the verse in question came down: '[Jibril (Gabriel) said], "We only descend [with revelation] at your Lord's command..."' (*Maryam:* 64). This verse shows that the angels neither descend nor absent themselves except when they are commanded to do so.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '…everything before us, everything behind us, everything in between, all belongs to Him….' (*Maryam:* 64) Concerning His saying, '…everything before us…' (*Maryam:* 64), it refers to that which is in front of us. The following phrase: '…everything behind us…' (*Maryam:* 64) means what is in the back of us. As for the final phrase: '…everything in between. …' (*Maryam:* 64), it signifies that which lies between the front and the back. So, what is it that which lies between them? There is nothing in between the front and the back except for you. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Supreme Sovereign Who possesses dominion and what is dominated; to Him belongs time, place, and what exists in them.

There follows His saying, '…your Lord is never forgetful.' (*Maryam:* 64) Obviously, Allah *Glorified is He* does not send a messenger and then simply forget about him, leaving him without support or assistance. After all, He is Exalted far above any negligence or forgetfulness.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi relates that this is the opinion of Mujahid, Qatada, `Ikrima, Ad-Dahhak, Muqatil and Al-Kalbi. He reports that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to Jibril (Gabriel): 'You delayed in coming to me until my mind was filled with doubts and I yearned for you.' Thereupon, Jibril (Gabriel) replied: 'Surely, I longed [to come], but I am a servant under divine command: if I am sent forth, I descend; and if I am held back, I stay back.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4300.*

رَّبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا بَيۡنَهُمَا فَٱعۡبُدۡهُ وَٱصۡطَبِرۡ لِعِبَٰدَتِهِۦۚ هَلۡ تَعۡلَمُ لَهُۥ سَمِيّٗا ﴿٦٥﴾

He is Lord of the heavens and earth and everything in between so worship Him: be steadfast in worshipping Him. Do you know of anyone equal to Him?' [65]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 65)

Here we must first ask, 'what is the correlation between Allah's saying, '…your Lord is never forgetful.' (*Maryam:* 64) and His saying in this verse: 'He is Lord of the heavens and earth…' (*Maryam:* 65)?' It is said that this awesome cosmos—with its heaven, earth and all that it comprises of well-designed formulation and marvellous creation—is maintained on account of Allah's watchfulness over it. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Surely, Allah upholds the heavens and the earth lest they come to naught….' (*Fatir:* 41) Therefore, do not think that the cosmos is maintained on the basis of some laws which govern it. No, it is maintained on the basis of Allah's watchfulness over every phenomenon in the universe. Allah *the Almighty* is not overcome by drowsiness or sleep, and He knows everything before us, behind us and in between that. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* is ever watchful, neither forgetful not negligent, and He maintains the universe. Accordingly, He merits being worshipped and being obeyed in that which He has commanded. This is further supported by the fact that even before making anything incumbent upon you, Allah *the Almighty* has conferred many blessings on you which you could never bring forth yourself. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* has left you to enjoy these blessings for about fifteen years without charging you with any acts of worship.

It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* says here: 'He is Lord of the heavens and earth and everything in between so worship Him: be steadfast in worshipping Him.' (*Maryam:* 65) In many verses, the Noble Quran stresses the topic of Allah's Oneness, and that He is the only Lord. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'He is Lord of the heavens and earth and everything in between....' (*Maryam:* 65) Likewise, He says, 'All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.' (*al-Fatiha:* 2) And He also says, 'Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 26) This is because that the people of old, such as the ancient Egyptians, for example, used to set up a god for the sky, and a god for the earth, and a god for the weather, and a god for the dead, and a god for cereal crops etc. Yet Allah *the Almighty* made worshipful servitude the consequence of His Lordship for everything. Worshipful servitude means obedience for the one worshiped in terms of what He has commanded and what He has prohibited. So, how do we not obey Allah *the Almighty*, while we are His creation, and we eat the sustenance provided by Him and lead our lives amidst His blessings? In the countryside of Egypt, a man says to his son who rebels against him, ‘Whoever eats of the food I provide shall heed my word’. It is necessary that we know that the attributes of absolute perfection belongs to Allah *the Almighty* even before He created mankind. Actually, by virtue of these attributes of perfection, Allah *the Almighty* created the universe. Hence, neither does obedience benefit Him nor does it harm Him. So, if you asked, ‘Why, then, does He charge humanity with commands and prohibitions’? We would reply, ‘Allah *the Almighty* made humanity answerable in this way in order that the proceedings of life be maintained, and that endeavours support one another and do not clash. In such a way, progress and advancement will occur in their lives and they will live happily. However, were Allah *the Almighty* to leave them to their vain desires, life would be corrupted, for while you build, someone else would destroy’.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘None of you [truly] believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought.’(1) Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And should the truth follow their low desires, surely the heavens and the earth and all those who are therein would have perished.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 71) Hence, the Divine Laws were established for our own benefit and interest.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* commands us, saying, ‘…so worship Him: be steadfast in worshipping Him.’ (*Maryam:* 65) This is because worship entails difficulty and must be accompanied with perseverant patience in doing it. Worshipful servitude requires you to do things which are burdensome for you to accomplish. Likewise, it requires that you refrain from doing certain things which are difficult for you to give up since you have grown accustomed to them.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Abi `Asim on the authority on `Abdullah ibn `Amr Allah be pleased with him. In his book, Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali cites this Hadith and grades it as weak. See Ibn Abu `Asim, As-Sunna, 1/12; Ibn Rajab, Jame` Al-`Ulum Wa Al-Hikam, 460.*

In the same connection, patience is expected of all of us. Each one of us must show patience towards others because we are all surely prone to changeability. Hence, if you patiently endure offenses committed against you, then other people will show patient forbearance towards you if you do something to offend them. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 3) In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that if someone commits a sin against you or treats you badly, then forgive him just as you would like Allah *the Almighty* to forgive your sins and to pardon you for your own misdeeds.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And let not those of you who possess grace and abundance swear against giving to the near of kin and the poor and those who have fled in Allah's way, and they should pardon and turn away. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you?(1) And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*an-Nur:* 22)

You should not think that your forbearance of the offenses of others or your forgiveness of them is an unrewarded voluntary act on your part. This is because you will not be deprived of its recompense by Allah *the Almighty* and you will be repaid by having one of your own misdeeds forgiven. Even the one who forebears being shamed, for example, or being falsely accused,

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(1) *This verse was revealed concerning the story of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him and Mistah ibn Athatha. Mistah was the son of Abu Bakr's maternal aunt; he was a poor emigrant. He fought in the Battle of Badr. Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him used to support him on account of his poverty and his kinship. But, when the event of calumny occurred and Mistah said what he did about `Aisha, daughter of Abu Bakr and wife of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him swore that he would no longer provide Mistah with financial support and not to grant him the slightest benefit. Mistah came to him and apologised, saying, 'I used to visit the gatherings at the house of Hassan, and thus I heard [what was said], but I did not say anything.' Abu Bakr said to him, 'You laughed and thus shared in that which was said.' So, he upheld his oath. Then this verse was revealed and so he restored to Mistah the regular financial support he used to provide him with and said, 'I will never withdraw it from him again.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4301.*

Allah *the Almighty* will never fail to recompense him by concealing a disgraceful act which he has already committed. Thus, whoever is disgraced by what he had not done, he will be safeguarded from what he had actually done.

There follows Allah's saying, 'Do you know of anyone equal to Him?' (*Maryam:* 65) We have previously discussed the meaning of the Arabic word *as-samiy*. Scholars have disagreed over its meaning; some opined that it refers to the one who vies for superiority or glory over you. In other words, you try to excel him and he tries to do the same. Another interpretation is that *as-samiy* means someone who is on par with you and your equal.

Allah *the Almighty* has no rival to contend with Him in respect to His attributes of perfection, nor does Allah *the Almighty* have any peer, match, or likeness. This is manifestly evident in Allah's saying, '…there is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11); as well as His saying, 'Say, "He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him."' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4)

The Arabic word *as-samiy* has another meaning which we explained in the story of Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'We have chosen this name for no one before him.' (*Maryam:* 7) This verse means that Prophet Yahya's (John's) name was not given to anyone before him. The same holds true for Allah *the Almighty* for no one has ever called himself by His Name, neither before the revelation of this verse, nor after Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* challenged the disbelievers and the atheists, who were so recklessly insolent towards Allah *the Almighty* to name themselves 'Allah'. So, why was one of them not daring enough to give their son the name 'Allah'? As a matter of fact, these people, though disbelievers and atheists, believed in Allah *the Almighty* in the depths of their souls. They acknowledge His Existence and fear the consequences of naming themselves or someone else 'Allah'. In fact, they do not feel safe from being afflicted by some evil on account of doing that. Hence, this has never happened and no one has ever been so impertinently bold as to attempt it. This is because Allah *the Almighty* proclaims it as a challenge and as He holds sway over the will of mankind; Allah *the Almighty* knows that they will not dare to undertake such an action.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَيَقُولُ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ أَءِذَا مَا مِتُّ لَسَوْفَ أُخْرَجُ حَيًّا (٦٦)

Man says, ‘What? Once I am dead,
will I be brought back to life?’ [66]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 66)

Here, we should ask, ‘What is the intended meaning of the Arabic word *al-insan* (man)’? The word ‘man’ applies to and is used to signify any human being in the general sense. An example of this is found in the following verse: ‘Surely man is created of a hasty temperament.’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 19) In its collective form, *al-insan* may be used to refer to a specific category of people, a meaning which is clear in Allah’s saying, ‘Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 54) Here, the intended meaning of *an-nas* is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.(1) A similar example is found in His saying, ‘Those to whom the people (*an-nas*) said, “Surely men (*an-nas*) have gathered against you, therefore fear them”, but this increased their faith, and they said, “Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 173) Here, both usages of *an-nas* designate specific groups of people. The word *al-insan* in the verse in question: ‘Man says…’ (*Maryam:* 66), refers to the disbeliever who does not believe in the Hereafter and views the notion of life after death unlikely, exclaiming: ‘What? Once I am dead, will I be brought back to life?’ (*Maryam:* 66) The interrogative formulation here is employed to express denial, yet the response to this question is easily made, as Allah says,

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says, ‘This means that the disbelievers envied Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him on account of how Allah favoured him with the greatest prophet hood; it was their envy for him which prevented them from having faith in him since he was an Arab and not of the children of Israel.’ In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti relates that `Ikrima said, ‘People (An-nas) in this statement refers to Prophet Muhammad specifically.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 1/513; As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 2/566.*

أَوَلَا يَذْكُرُ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَٰهُ مِن قَبْلُ وَلَمْ يَكُ شَيْـًٔا ﴿٦٧﴾

But does man not remember that We created him when he was nothing before? [67] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 67)

Logically, it is easier that man be restored to life from something than to bring him into being out of nothing. Allah *the Almighty* makes this issue clear, saying, 'And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is easy to Him….' (*ar-Rum:* 27) Here, we should note that the actions undertaken by the Creator are not to be described as 'easy' and 'easier' or 'difficult' and 'more difficult' for Him; nevertheless, Allah *the Almighty* speaks to us according to what we can grasp and according to what we know from our conventions. Hence, based on our own customary experience, we are aware that to compose something from that which exists is easier than to bring it forth from naught. Moreover, while the action of the servant is based upon processing and application of causal factors, the Action of the Creator, on the other hand, is affected by His saying to anything, 'Be!' and it is.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Neither your creation nor your raising is anything but as a single soul….' (*ar-Rum:* 27) When `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'How does Allah take all people to account at the same time?', he answered, 'In the same way He provides all of them with sustenance at the same time.'

Concerning Allah's saying, 'But does man not remember…?' (*Maryam:* 67) This means that if man recalled this truth, he would not deny the Resurrection. This issue is also discussed in Allah's saying, 'And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. He says, "Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten?"' (*Ya Sin:* 78) If man called to mind their initial creation, they would not propound such a similitude for Allah *the Almighty*. Then comes the response in logical formulation; Allah says, 'Say, "He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognisant of all creation."' (*Ya Sin:* 79)

In the verse in question, we also have proof: '…We created him when he was nothing before' (*Maryam:* 67).

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَوَرَبِّكَ لَنَحۡشُرَنَّهُمۡ وَٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ ثُمَّ لَنُحۡضِرَنَّهُمۡ حَوۡلَ جَهَنَّمَ جِثِيّٗا ٦٨

By your Lord [Prophet] We shall gather them and the devils together and set them on their knees around Hell [68]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 68)

Regarding Allah's saying, 'By your Lord [Prophet] We shall gather them and the devils...' (*Maryam:* 68), the Arabic word *al-hashar* (to gather) signifies that Allah *the Almighty* will resurrect them from their graves. Then Allah *Glorified is He* will drive them altogether into the fire along with the devils who used to tempt them into disobedience and make it seem favourable to them. There follows His saying, '…and set them on their knees around Hell.' (*Maryam:* 68) Here, their being set on their knees is an indication of submissiveness, dejection, and humiliation which made them unable to stand upright.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ثُمَّ لَنَنزِعَنَّ مِن كُلِّ شِيعَةٍ أَيُّهُمۡ أَشَدُّ عَلَى ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ عِتِيّٗا ٦٩

We shall seize out of each group those who were most disobedient towards the Lord of Mercy [69]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 69)

The Arabic verb *naza`a* (to seize) means to powerfully pull something out of its established root. One does employ this verb except in cases wherein the thing extracted or yanked out is firmly attached to what it was taken from. A relevant example of this is found in Allah's saying, 'Say, "O Allah, Master of the Kingdom! You give the kingdom to whomsoever You pleases and takes away the kingdom from whomsoever You pleases…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). That is to say that the kings from whom the kingdom was taken away were firmly attached to it and covetous of it.

As for Allah's saying, 'out of each group' (*Maryam:* 69), it comprises the Arabic word *shi`a* (group) which means a faction that agrees upon some false opinion, being convinced by it and keeping company with its leaders. There follows the saying of Allah: '…those who were most disobedient towards the Lord of Mercy.' (*Maryam:* 69) In this passage, the Arabic word *al-`iti* (disobedient) refers to the person who has reached the ultimate degree of oppression and tyrannical transgression such that no one can stand up against him. We have previously discussed this meaning with respect to the attributes of growing old: '… and I am old and frail?' (*Maryam:* 8) This is because when old age comes, there is no stratagem against it, and no one has thus the power to overcome it.

It is known that when the heavenly messages descended upon the inhabitants of the earth, there were some people who were negatively affected by them. They viewed them as detrimental regarding themselves, their wealth, their social standing and their authority and leadership. Allah's messages came to confirm the truth, to prove His Oneness and the equality of human beings with respect to the divine way of guidance.

There are tyrants, oppressors, and masters who have slaves. In this world exists the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor and the healthy and the sick. The heavenly messages came to affect unrestricted, free access to worshipful servitude. So, who can negatively impact these messages? In addition, who can become angry and display enmity towards them? Indeed, they are those tyrants and oppressors; those who possess power, wealth and influence. As a matter of fact, those tyrants and oppressors necessarily have subordinates who follow them and support them in their falsehood.

So, when it is the Day of Judgment, whom will firstly be held accountable? They are the tyrants and haughty oppressors. They will be present before their followers so that the latter see them subjugated and humiliated, while in this world they were arrogant tyrants. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* also deprives their followers of any hope of salvation. Perhaps they thought that these oppressive tyrants would intervene and defend them since they were their servants in this world, and were their followers and supportive allies. But, as soon as Allah *the Almighty* seizes them firstly, He consequently cut off all hope of salvation for their followers.

This same idea is also conveyed in Allah's saying, 'And on the day when We will gather from every nation a party from among those who rejected Our communications, then they shall be formed into groups.' (*an-Naml:* 83) This verse tells us that the grandees and tyrants from among them will be gathered together, so that the followers see the downfall of those they followed, and so that the weak might witness the downfall of the strong. Therefore, they lose all their hope of salvation.

In the Quranic discourse about Pharaoh—who had reached the utmost degree of tyranny and self-aggrandisement when he falsely laid claim to divinity—it says about him: ‘He shall lead his people on the resurrection day, and bring them down to the fire; and evil the place to which they are brought.’ (*Hud:* 98) Pharaoh is their leader and thus will be at their head in the march into Hell, just as he was their leader towards errant deviancy in this world; he was their master and they imitated him. Therefore, he bears two grave burdens: the burden of his own errant deviancy regarding his own soul, and the burden of having misguided his own people. In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands and then say: This is from Allah, so that they may take for it a small price....’ (*al-Baqara:* 79). Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

ثُمَّ لَنَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِالَّذِينَ هُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِهَا صِلِيًّا ﴿٧٠﴾

We know best who most deserves to burn in Hell [70]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 70)

In this verse, the Arabic word *siliya* means to be heated and burned in the Fire. It is derived from the verb *saliya/yasla* signifying to enter the fire and feel its heat. On the other hand, the related verb *istala* refers to the case when someone seeks to warm himself by the fire, as in Allah’s saying, ‘…so that you may warm yourselves (*tastalun*).’ (*an-Naml:* 7) The general meaning of the verse is that Allah *the Almighty* knows who most merits entering the fire first. They have the priority concerning the order of their entry into the fire. This is because they will argue with one another in the Hereafter. They will squabble and cast blame upon each other. An awful and terrifying scene will arise between them, shamelessly exposing all the sins which they had committed. The follower and the one followed, the worshipper and the one worshipped, each one will cast blame upon the other. Just read what they will say, ‘And they shall say, “O our Lord! Surely we obeyed our leaders and our great men, so they led us astray from the path; O our Lord! Give them a double punishment and curse them with a great curse.'" (*al-Ahzab:* 67-68) And in another verse Allah *the Almighty* says, 'When those who were followed shall renounce those who followed (them), and they see the chastisement and their ties are cut asunder.' (*al-Baqara:* 166) Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* manifests the truth when He says, 'The friends shall on that day be enemies one to another, except those who guard (against evil).' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن مِّنكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا ۚ كَانَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَّقْضِيًّا ﴿٧١﴾

But every single one of you will approach it, a
decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled [71]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 71)

This is a general address to all mankind without exception, as evinced by Allah's saying which comes after it: 'We shall save the devout….' (*Maryam:* 72) Hence, those who will approach the hellfire here include those who are righteous and devout, and those who are not.

But what is the meaning here of the Arabic word *al-wurud*? It basically means to go to a source of water for drinking; that is to say: reaching water without drinking from it. This is reflected in Allah's saying, 'And when he came to the water of Madyan, he found on it a group of men watering…' (*al-Qasas:* 23); that is, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* reached the watering place. Hence, the meaning of: 'But every single one of you will approach it...' (*Maryam:* 71), is that all people including the devout and sinners will reach the fire and see it. This is because the path along which all must pass is laid over the centre of Hell.

In this regard, Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The *sirat* will be placed across hell on thorns like the thorns of *sa`dan* plant. Then the people will cross it. Some will pass over safe and sound, some will be detained, and some will fall in headfirst.'(1) Thus, as soon as the believer sees the fire from which Allah *the Almighty* has saved him, he praises Him and becomes fully cognisant of His blessing and Mercy upon him.

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(1) See Ibn Maja, *Sunnan*, Hadith no. 4280; *Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, 4/585; Ad-Daylami*, *Firdaws,* Hadith no. 8836.

There are some scholars who are of the opinion that *warada* means someone came to the water and drank from it, citing as evidence Allah's saying, 'He shall lead his people on the Day of Resurrection, and bring them down (*awrada*) to the fire...' (*Hud:* 98) meaning that Pharaoh caused them to enter it. However, this violates the pattern of Arabic in which the Quran was revealed, as the poet(1) says:

When they reached the waterhole, its pools so blue

We set up poles like sedentary campers.

That is, when they arrived at the watering place, they pitched their tents beside it. Hence, at the time they reached it and erected their tents beside it, they had not yet drunk from it, nor had they drawn any of its water. Therefore, the meaning of *al-wurud* is arriving at a water source without drinking of its water.

Those who hold the opinion that *warid* means to enter the fire rather than simply to approach it also cite the following saying of Allah in support of their opinion: 'We shall save the devout and leave the evildoers there on their knees.' (*Maryam:* 72) They argue that if *al-wurud* merely signified arrival at the watering place, without drinking from it or entering into it, then Allah *the Almighty* would not have said: '…and leave the evildoers there on their knees.' (*Maryam:* 72) Instead, He would have said: 'Then Allah shall save the devout and cause the evildoers to enter it'. But Allah *the Almighty* actually says, '…and leave the evildoers there....' (*Maryam:* 72) This is a proof that all people, the devout and the evildoers, will enter the fire.

Based on the first opinion, *al-wurud* comprises the meaning of seeing the fire without entering it. The motive behind this is that Allah *the Almighty* is Benevolent to His believing servants for He shows them the fire and its blazing flames in order that they may be cognisant of His favour upon them. They would be fully aware of the reward of their faith in Allah *the Almighty* that is, it saved them from this fire. In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…then whoever is removed far away from the fire and is made to enter the garden he indeed has attained the object.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185)

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(1) Zuhayr ibn Abu Sulma of the tribe of Mudar, a master poet of the pre-Islamic era. His father, his maternal uncle and his sons, Ka`b and Bujayr, were poets, as well as his sisters Salma and Al-Khansa`. He was born in the territory of the Muzayna tribe, close to Medina. See Az-Zirikli*, Al-A`lam,* 3/52.

But it is also possible to understand the verse according to the second meaning, that is, with *al-wurud* denoting entry into the fire. This is because the Creator *Glorified is He* created all things in light of laws and natures that govern them. Allah *the Almighty* alone has the Power and Ability to render this nature inoperative and to strip it of its particular characteristics. Just as we saw in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham), the entering of the believers into the fire could be like what happened in the case of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* made the fire cool and safe for him. Allah *the Almighty* enabled the enemies of Ibrahim (Abraham) to seize him, and then they cast him into the fire, while it was in its natural state of burning. Now, nothing fell upon the fire, such as rain, to extinguish it, in order that they be furnished with all the causal factors of burning. Yet, nevertheless, Allah *the Almighty* saved him from it so that the miracle would be manifest before their eyes.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* nullified the nature of water in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* solidifying it and halting its flow until each part became like a mighty mountain. Hence, He is the All-Powerful and All Capable of altering the nature of things. Therefore, it is possible that the believers enter the fire in the manner which occurred with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*; Allah says, 'We said, "O fire! Be a comfort and peace to Ibrahim."' (*al-Anbiya':* 69) Then Allah *the Almighty* saves the believers and leaves the disbelievers in the fire, and this is more odious and infuriating for the latter.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…a decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled.' (*Maryam:* 71) In this passage, the Arabic word *al-hatm* is something that inevitably occurs. The servant is not able to control anything regarding Pre-ordainment, for he does not have power over that which is definitively determined or over that which is subject to this inevitable determination. For example, you may say to your friend, ‘You must visit me tomorrow’. Nevertheless, you do not have control over any of the causal factors for making this visit happen. What makes you so sure that you will live until tomorrow? Furthermore, what makes you so sure that the circumstances will not change and prevent the visit of this friend? Therefore, you do not have the decisive determination over anything; instead the One Who prescribes decrees is the All-Powerful Who has dominating control over things inasmuch as nothing escapes from what Allah *the Almighty* wills. Now, if you asked, ‘Who prescribes what is necessary for Allah’? The response is that Allah *the Almighty* prescribes what is necessary on Himself. There is no other power that imposes decrees upon Him, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying, ‘…your Lord has ordained mercy on Himself….’ (*al-An‘am:* 54)

Then Allah *the Almighty* confirms this inevitability by His saying, ‘…which must be fulfilled.’ (*Maryam:* 71) This signifies that His decree is an irreversible ruling; it cannot be corrected or amended by anyone, it is an absoLute ruling. Thus, for example, when the disbelievers of Mecca desired that belief and disbelief coexist, they proposed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘We will worship your God for one year and you worship our god for one year.’

However, Allah *Glorified is He* desired the severance of ties with them in a final, definitive manner which did not give credence to such compromise. Thus, He says, (1) ‘Say, “O disbelievers! I do not serve that which you serve, nor do you serve Him Whom I serve: Nor am I going to serve that which you serve, nor are you going to serve Him Whom I serve. You shall have your religion and I shall have my religion.”’ (*al-Kafirun:* 1-6)

The severance of ties here is not the same as what we may see, for example, between two states. In such a case, each of them cuts its political relations with the other, but conditions may subsequently call for reconciliation between them and the return to normalised relations. Contrary to this, the cutting of ties with the disbelievers is a decisive and irreversible severance. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was saying to the disbelievers: ‘Beware of imagining that we might re-establish relations with you once again'. It is for this reason that the negation is repeated in this chapter, to the degree that some think that it is redundant repetition. However, this is because they approach the Quran without careful reflection.

The actual meaning of this chapter is that at the present moment, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and also his followers do not worship that which the disbelievers worship, and they are not worshippers of that which the believers worship. This also applies to the future, for the believers will not be worshippers of that which the disbelievers worship, and they will not be worshippers of that which the believers worship. Hence, no one will oblige the believers against their will to modify this resolution or to return to a state of reconciliation.

Consequently, following the chapter of *al-Kafirun* came the chapter of the *al-Hukm* (1): 'Say, "He, Allah, is One."' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1) Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* has no other partner to rectify Him. His Speech and His Decree are ultimate and definitively imposed, without revocation or amendment.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says,

ثُمَّ نُنَجِّي ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَواْ وَّنَذَرُ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ فِيهَا جِثِيّٗا ﴿٧٢﴾

We shall save the devout and leave the
evildoers there on their knees [72]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 72)

The Arabic word *jithiya* (on their knees) is derived from the verb *jatha/ yajthu*, meaning to kneel. It is an indication of shameful humiliation and punishment.

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* turns our attention to another narrative scene, saying:

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(1) *This is the chapter of al-Ikhlas, concerning which As-Suyuti says: 'It is called al-Asas (The Foundation) because of its comprehensive treatment of the Oneness of Allah which is the foundation of the religion.' See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan Fi `Ulum Al-Quran, 1/159.*

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟
أَىُّ ٱلْفَرِيقَيْنِ خَيْرٌ مَّقَامًا وَأَحْسَنُ نَدِيًّا ﴿٧٣﴾

When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, [all that] the disbelievers say to the believers [is], 'Which side is better situated? Which side has the better following?' [73]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 73)

This is a dialogue that took place between the believers and the disbelievers. The believers at the early time of Prophet Muhammad's mission were usually the weak ones who could not even protect themselves. They had neither high social rank nor supremacy to safeguard themselves. Then Allah's way of guidance manifested itself in their favour, rendering all people equal: chieftains and slaves, the strong and the weak. So, it was natural that the religion of Islam was met with rejection on the part of the disbelievers of Mecca- the holders of glorious standing, authority, and power who took possession of the good things of the people around them. As for the weak, they believed in Allah's message at a time when they did not have enough strength to protect themselves.

Hence, when Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying, 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs' (*al-Qamar:* 45), `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* asked 'What host is this? What sort of rout could this be? We are not even capable of protecting ourselves?'(1) During this period, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was instructing the oppressed believers to emigrate to Abyssinia and to Medina. But later when Allah *the Almighty* granted victory to the believers, along with His support for them at the Battle of Badr, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'Allah, has manifested the truth: 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir cites the following Hadith, attributing it to Ibn Abu Hatim who narrated it on the authority of `Ikrima who said, 'When the statement "Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs" (al-Qamar: 45) was revealed, `Umar Allah be pleased with him said, "Which hosts shall be routed? Which hosts shall be defeated?" Later, he said: "On the Battle of Badr I saw Messenger Muhammad leap in his armour while he was saying: 'The hosts shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs in flight!' On that day, I realised its interpretation."' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 4/266.*

Back to the verse in question; in this aforementioned dialogue, the disbelievers revile the believers in Allah, saying: ‘What has your belief in Allah availed you, for here you are in a state of weakness, lowliness, humiliation and constricted means of sustenance? Would a god be content that those who believe in him be in such a state, while his adversaries and those who disbelieve in him are those possessing glorious rank, authority, and ample means of subsistence’?

In this way Allah *the Almighty* subjected some of them to trials at the hands of others, as He says, ‘And thus do We try some of them by others….’ (*al-An‘am:* 53) The believer and the disbeliever, the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, all of them are a source of trial to one another. This is in order that Allah *the Almighty* scrutinises the faith and tests the certainty in the hearts of the believers. Allah *the Almighty* thereby prepares them to carry His message to the entire world in all times and places. It follows that He must select for this mission those with strong faith from among Muslims, not for any worldly gain but to bear His message and to assume its burdens. This, then, is the believer who is entrusted to bear the responsibility of conveying Allah’s way of guidance. In the same vein, we find those who call to the false paths in this world by bribing those who are called to them. On the contrary, Allah’s way of guidance takes from them to test them and purify them.

So, how could the wealthy man be a source of trial for the poor man and vice versa? The wealthy man is put to the test by the poor man since he enjoys ample means of life while the poor one is in straitened circumstances. The wealthy man eats until he gets indigestion from overeating, while the poor is famished. The wealthy person dresses in fine clothes, while the poor one is almost naked. So, will the rich recognise Allah’s blessings upon him and give out the due obligation of such blessings?

On the other hand, the poor man is put to the test by the wealthy when he sees him in this state of ease. Will the poor person be able to patiently bear such hardship? Or will he remonstrate against that which Allah has predestined for him and harbour feelings of resentment and malice against the wealthy one? If the poor knew that poverty was a training lesson which is given to the soldiers of the truth who carry forth Allah's way of guidance to human beings in all time and place, he would not rise up in opposition to this apportioning, and would not resent the wealthy people.

Similarly, the healthy are put to the test by the sick and the sick by the healthy. The healthy live with Allah's blessings in a state of well-being. But as for the ill and infirm, they live with the Bestower of Blessings (*Al-Mun`im*) as evinced in the Qudsi Hadith in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O son of Adam, I fell ill and you visited Me not. He will say, "O Lord, and how should I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?" He will say, "Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had fallen ill and you visited him not? Did you not know that had you visited him you would have found Me with him?"'(1)

That is why you find that the visitors of the sick believers feel pained on account of their ailments, while the sick believers themselves are in a state of intimate affection with Allah *the Almighty* distracting them from their illnesses and pains. Who would avoid sharing the company of Allah *the Almighty*? Thus, if a sick person harbours rancour towards the person of sound body, then he fails the test. He should have realised that while the healthy person is in the company of blessing, yet he is in the company of the Bestower of blessings.

The people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* after having continued to preach them for 950 years, responded to his message, saying, '…and we do not see any have followed you but those who are the meanest of us at first thought…' (*Hud:* 27). In their view, the followers of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were the scum of the people. Then they tried to incite him to reject them as they were weak and of no rank or authority. But, he said, '…and I am not going to drive away those who believe; surely they shall meet their Lord…' (*Hud:* 29).

In another verse, he said, 'And I do not say to you that I have the treasures of Allah and I do not know the unseen, nor do I say that I am an angel, nor do I say about those whom your eyes hold in mean estimation (that) Allah will never grant them (any) good–Allah knows best what is in their souls– for then most surely I should be of the unjust.’ (*Hud:* 31)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim and Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, 4/1990; Al-Bukhari, Al-`Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 517.*

Over the course of time and the various prophetic messages, the disbelievers looked upon the poor and the weak believers with contempt and distain, seeking to drive them away and evict them from their houses. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad, ‘And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His favour; neither are you answerable for any reckoning of theirs, nor are they answerable for any reckoning of yours, so that you should drive them away and thus be of the unjust.’ (*al-An‘am:* 52)

In this manner arose the narrative scene which we have in the verse in question: ‘When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, [all that] the disbelievers say to the believers [is], “Which side is better situated? Which side has the better following?”’ (*Maryam:* 73) As for Allah’s saying, ‘Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity…’ (*Maryam:* 73), the word *al-ayat* (revelations) is the plural of *aya* which is something wondrous and amazing. As we have previously said, this word is used to refer to cosmic signs which serve as proof of the Allah’s Omnipotence and Power and draw our attention to the marvellous nature of His creation, such as the signs of the day, the night, the sun and the moon. The same word *al-ayat*, is also used to designate the miracles that serve to confirm the truthfulness of the messengers. Examples of these are enumerated in Allah’s saying, ‘And they say, “We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us). Or you should have a house of gold, or you should ascend into heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending until you bring down to us a book which we may read.” Say, “Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal apostle?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-93)

Likewise, *Ayat* refers to the verses of the Quran which bear rulings and prescribed laws which is the intended meaning in the verse under discussion because the verses of the Quran include all other *Ayat* (signs).

As for Allah's saying, 'the disbelievers say to the believers [is], "Which side is better situated?"' (*Maryam:* 73) this means that the disbelievers said to the believers, 'We would be pleased [to know] your judgement in the following matter: we, the disbelievers, are in a state of abundance, while you, O people of faith, are in an adverse state of penury, so which of these two groups is superior to other'? By Allah, according to the disbelievers' standards of measure, they are better; however, according to the higher and everlasting standards of measure, the believers are better.

The Arabic word *al-maqam* (position) is a noun signifying the place of your standing; it is derived from the verb *qama*. On the other hand, the word *muqam* with the basic meaning of place of residence is derived from the verb *aqama*. Regarding Allah's saying, 'Which side is better situated?' (*Maryam:* 73) this refers to a place or location in which one is positioned in rivalry over someone else such as a big house with furniture and a sitting room for which one prides oneself over others.

There follows the final phrase of the verse: '…the better following?' (*Maryam:* 73) A person normally has a house which provides shelter for him, and it comprises a sitting room to which he retires, sitting in it with their friends and loved ones. They call this the 'sitting room' or 'parlour' where the chief or grandee of their people sits, surrounded by their family and followers. In colloquial Egyptian Arabic, we say that such a personage: 'Governor of the floor of the seated assembly'. Thus, when he gets up, the entire assembly disburses, since they are their subordinates. As the poet said:

The seated assembly, O Kulayb, broke up after you.

In addition, there is something known as *an-nadi* which is a place where the dignitaries and notables of a community gather in council, instead of each one of them having his own private gathering. Today, we find the word *nadi* applies to clubs, such as the club for athletes, the club for judges and so forth. Hence, the word *an-nadi* (followers) is evidence that the disbelievers were in agreement, united in solidarity, and forming a unified bloc against Islam and against the Truth.

Another example of the connotation of the word *an-nadi* occurs at the end of Allah's saying, 'Then let him summon his council' (*al-'Alaq:* 17). Also, derived from the same semantic root, this word might refer to what was known even in the pre-Islamic times as *dar an-nadwa* (the abode of convening). It was in this place where the disbelievers used to assemble to devise plots against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Besides, the word *an-nadi* refers to a place that was utilised for engaging in reprehensible and lewd things—Allah forbid—in which they would gather for everything that was vile, including wine drinking, dancing and prostitution. This is clearly expressed in Allah's saying, '…and you commit evil deeds in your assemblies?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 29) This offers a proof of the widespread nature of fornication and shamelessness among the wealthy people and the open manner of its practice. They did not commit these sinful acts secretly, but rather in a gathering of the patrons of these places.

The word *an-nadi* and *al-muntada,* both signifying a meeting place or clubhouse, are derived from the Arabic word *an-nada* which signifies generosity. Hence, when an Arab woman praised her husband, she would say, 'Lofty in authority, generous for guests and his house near the place of assembly'. This means that his house was the nearest to the council hall, and hence he is the destination for people aiming to fulfil their everyday needs.

Thus, the disbelievers' statements to the believers: 'Which side is better situated? Which side has the better following?' (*Maryam:* 73) were a trial for both groups. The believers said, 'If it had been good, they would not have gone ahead of us therein.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 11) On the other hand, the disbelievers said, 'Inasmuch as Allah has favoured us with gifts in this world, since He is the Provider of Sustenance, He will inevitably favour us with blessings in the Hereafter'. But the verses do not delve into the counter argument on the part of the believers. Instead, the rebuttal against the disbelievers came from another aspect, whence Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَكَمۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا قَبۡلَهُم مِّن قَرۡنٍ هُمۡ أَحۡسَنُ أَثَٰثٗا وَرِءۡيٗا ﴿٧٤﴾

We have destroyed many a generation before them who
surpassed them in riches and outward glitter! [74]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 74)

The Arabic word *kam* (many) in this context expresses great quantity or frequency which cannot be enumerated. The phrase which follows it is something which has occurred many times. This usage is employed, for example, when your friend says to you: ‘You have never shown me a kind favour’, whereupon you enumerate all the acts of kindness which you have conferred upon him, saying: ‘How many times (*kam*) have I done such-and-such for you’?

As for the Arabic word *al-qarn* (generation), it refers to a community of people who live together in a specific time in such a manner that it is comprised of overlapping generations, including grandfathers, fathers, sons and grandsons all together. In this sense, the term *al-qarn* is regarded as the equivalent of one hundred years. In addition, it is used in reference to a community whose members are united together under a single kingdom or divine message, regardless of how long their era extends. The people of Nuh (Noah) are a case in point.

Concerning the Arabic word *al-athath* (riches), it literally means the furnishings of a house, with such things corresponding to the financial means of its proprietor.

Finally, the Arabic term *ar-ri`ya* (outward glitter) is intended to denote the passive participle. The same usage occurs in Allah’s saying, ‘And We ransomed him with a Feat sacrifice.’ (*as-Saffat:* 107) in which the word *dhibh* (sacrifice) carries the meaning of *madhbuh* (object of sacrifice).

In another recitation (1) of this verse, the word *ar-ri`ya* is replaced by the word *az-ziyy*. This latter is not far from the meaning of the former, for *az-ziyy* also refers to that which is displayed or seen except that it consists of the apparel which is worn as clothing. According to this recitation, the intended meaning is the beauty of appearance, the gracefulness of the person and the neatness of their attire. The disbelievers certainly took vain pride in such things, whereas the believers were dishevelled and dusty, wearing clothing that was patched and worn out.

The standard recitations of the Quran differ from each other in some of the Quranic words. This is because when the Noble Quran was first recorded in writing, this was without diacritical dots to distinguish different letters, and without vowel markings. Instead, this initial written version relied on the

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(1) *This is the recitation of Ibn `Abbas, Ubayy ibn Ka`, Sa`id ibn Jubayr and Al-A`sam Al-Makki.*

Arab's natural aptitude and their eloquent mastery of the language which enabled them to read the letters correctly based on the meaning appropriate to the context. This situation continued until the Umayyad era when scholars established a system of dots for differentiating between letters. For a word without such dots, the protuberance representing certain letters, for example, might be read in the case of dots missing above it as *nun, ta` or tha`* . In the case of dots missing beneath it, it might be read as *ba`* or *ya`*. But, the Arabs, due to their knowledge of the contextual arrangement of words are able to determine the intended letter. It is thus that the word *ri`ya* can be read as *ziyya,* as the principal difference between the two being a dot above the first letter of this latter word, yet the meanings of the two words is not far apart.

Other examples of variations based on differences in the placement of diacritical dots include the phrase '*fatabayyanu*' (*an-Nisa':* 94) which is translated as 'use your discernment'. It is also read as '*fatathabatu*' with the meaning of 'ascertain'. Similarly, the word '*sibgha*' (*al-Baqara:* 138) with the connotation of characteristic or nature, is recited as '*san`a*' with the meaning of workmanship or design. The correctness of usage on the part of such variant readings is proven by the fact that the differences in the articulation of these letters does not result in differences of meaning.

It is for this reason that Arabs in the past used to get angry if they were sent a letter that was provided with vowel diacritics, for this would serve as an accusation of stupidity and lack of knowledge of the Arabic language. It is understandable, therefore, that those scholars who established the rules of language were not Arabs. This is due to the fact that Arabs at that time used to have an aversion to formally laying down rules for language, for their language was based upon an innate aptitude that did not require study or instruction. However, when the non-Arabs embraced Islam, they had no way of learning its primary language except by this study of rules.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We have destroyed many a generation before them who surpassed them in riches and outward glitter!' (*Maryam:* 74) because the disbelievers said, 'Which side is better situated? Which side has the better following?' (*Maryam:* 73) In this way, Allah *the Almighty* demonstrates their foolishness as they do not reflect on the reality of life and thus are unaware of the end of those who were mightier than them in terms of importance and rank.

Allah *Glorified is He* refutes the claim of the disbelievers' superiority over the believers, for this superiority in terms of worldly blessings does not arise from themselves. No, rather, it is a gift from Allah *the Almighty* and a source of trial and seduction, so that when Allah *the Almighty* seizes them, He will strip them of power and glory. This will be more odious, distressing, and infuriating for them because if Allah *the Almighty* seized them in a state of subjugation and lowliness, His seizure would not have this effect upon them.

Allah *Glorified is He* causes them to be opulent through His blessings in order that they expect even more benefits and advantages, then Allah *the Almighty* seizes them. This is precisely expressed in the poet's words:(1)

As a cloud emits flashes of lightning upon a thirsty people
When they see it, it disperses and vanishes.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* filled them with ambitious desires at the beginning, and then He seized them and dashed their hopes in the end. We have propounded a simile for this in the prisoner of war who is very thirsty and asks for water. The guard brings the water to him until it is at his lips, while he is yearning for having his thirst quenched. Then the guard withholds it from him and deprives him so that his distress will be even more severe and his pain will grow greater. If the guard had not brought the water to the prisoner from the very beginning, his pain would have been easier to endure.

Therefore, O you disbelievers, when you make comparisons between yourselves and the believers and belittle them on account of the luxuries of this world that you possess, then you have compared between the means and paid no attention to the ends. It is foolish for you to be overly concerned with the means and to forget the ends. In order for the comparison to be sound, you must compare your condition with that of the believers at the beginning and at the end.

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(1) Kuthir ibn `Abd Ar-Rahman Abu Sakhr Al-Khuza`i, a well-known poet, a native of Medina, who resided mostly in Egypt. He was excessively short and ugly. He was also haughty and self-praising. He was known as 'Kuthir `Azza', the latter being `Azza bint Jamil Ad-Dumriya, as he was consumed by his love for her. He died in 105 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, *Al-A`lam,* 219/5.

Let us offer an example for this by a hard-working farmer in his grain fields which he tends with care, soiling it himself every day with the dust of his land. By contrast, there is another man who takes delight in clean clothes, in sitting in the café and in loafing around here and there. The latter looks at his friend who is worn out by work and believes himself to be better than him. But, as soon as harvest time comes around, the first one reaps the fruits of his toil and the result of his efforts, while the second sits there grieved and deprived. Thus, it is necessary when making comparisons to take into consideration the means along with the ends.

A poet hits the mark when he said:

> Oh, for the one who shows me my objective before my setting out
> For by what route do I come if objectives follow departures?

Thus, the disbelievers have separated the means in this world from the end in the Hereafter, so they revel in vainglorious pride and look down upon the believers, saying, ‘Which side is better situated? Which side has the better following?’ (*Maryam:* 73)

We also have an example in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘So naught was the answer of his people except that they said: Slay him or burn him….’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 24) In this way, they agreed on burning Ibrahim (Abraham), but Allah *the Almighty* saved His prophet and nullified their endeavour. Ultimately, they met their end in the Hereafter: ‘And he said: You have only taken for yourselves idols besides Allah by way of friendship between you in this world’s life, then on the resurrection day some of you shall deny others, and some of you shall curse others, and your abode is the fire, and you shall not have any helpers.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 25) They should not have focused on the means away from their ends.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* responds to those deluded by His blessings saying, ‘We have destroyed many a generation before them who surpassed them in riches and outward glitter!’ (*Maryam:* 74) Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says in other verses: ‘Have you not considered how your

Lord dealt with `Ad, (The people of) Aram, possessors of lofty buildings, the like of which were not created in the (other) cities; and (with) Thamud, who hewed out the rocks in the valley, and (with) Pharaoh, the lord of hosts.' (*al-Fajr:* 6-10) The annihilation of those peoples and their likes is easy, demanding nothing of Allah *Glorified is He* sending upon them sandstorms, thereby burying their civilisation and turning them into remnants after they had once been flourishing.

So, Allah *the Almighty* calls upon the disbelievers to reflect on history and to contemplate the consequences that befell the disbelievers and the deniers of the Truth, like themselves. Were the same punishment to befall them, their position and rank, in which they take pride, would be of no avail for them. These worldly means will not protect them from the punishment awaiting them in the Hereafter. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* does not refute their claim with hypothetical words, saying, 'Surely, your recompense will be such-and-such of chastisement'. Instead, Allah *the Almighty* provides them with a tangible example from what has previously occurred to the disbelieving peoples.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with His saying, 'So whether should We make you see part of what We threaten them with….' (*Ghafir:* 77) This verse refers to the subjugation, defeat, and destruction they will be afflicted with in the Hereafter; '…or should We cause you to die, to Us shall they be returned.' (*Ghafir:* 77) So, whoever escapes from the punishment of this world, he will not escape from that of the Hereafter.

When the Quran invites the disbelievers to reflect on the ultimate end of those who came before them, saying, 'We have destroyed many a generation before them…' (*Maryam:* 74), it does so by encouraging them to grasp the moral lesson and admonition from those who preceded them. It cites the occurrence of something tangible as evidence of the truthfulness of something unseen that is yet to come, namely, the punishment in the Hereafter. Thus, the Quran calls them to ponder over what happened to the civilisations that came before them and which had never been equalled on earth. Are you, disbelievers, more powerful than they are? Will you be able to protect yourselves from what befell the deniers of the truth before you?

This is with regard to the present circumstances, but as for unseen reality, the Quran presents it in another verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Surely they who are guilty used to laugh at those who believe. And when they passed by them, they winked at one another. And when they returned to their own followers they returned exulting. And when they saw them, they said, “Most surely these are in error” and they were not sent to be keepers over them.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-33) The foregoing is the state in this world, but what will be the state in the Hereafter? The verses continue: ‘So on the Day of Judgment those who believe shall laugh at the disbelievers; On thrones, they will look.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-35) Then Allah *the Almighty* addresses the believers, saying, ‘Surely the disbelievers are rewarded as they did.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36)

It is as if He will address the believers saying, ‘After what you have suffered at the hands of the disbelievers, We are fully able to pay them back for what they did to you in terms of derisive mockery in this world. In any case, their mockery of you in the worldly life was limited in time, whereas your laughing at them now is an everlasting situation without end. So, ultimately, which of the two parties is in a better state’?

Therefore, beware of being deceived by the outward appearances of things, or to be duped by the sparkling of pleasures and bounties, rather, you should look towards the ultimate objectives and final ends. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world; and the ever-abiding, the good works, are better with your Lord in reward, and better in expectation.’ (*al-Kahf:* 46)

In the chapter of *al-A`raf*, there is another narrative depiction of the circumstances of the Day of Resurrection. The people on the heights say to the people of the fire: ‘Of no avail were to you your great number and your behaving haughtily.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 48) Then they turn their gaze towards the believers in Paradise and ask the people of the fire: ‘Are these they about whom you swore that Allah will not bestow mercy on them?’ (*al-A‘raf:* 49) How low is the rank of the people of the fire when compared with that of the people of the paradise?

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ مَن كَانَ فِى ٱلضَّلَٰلَةِ فَلْيَمْدُدْ لَهُ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ مَدًّا ۚ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا رَأَوْا۟ مَا يُوعَدُونَ إِمَّا ٱلْعَذَابَ
وَإِمَّا ٱلسَّاعَةَ فَسَيَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ هُوَ شَرٌّ مَّكَانًا وَأَضْعَفُ جُندًا ﴿٧٥﴾

Say [Prophet], 'The Lord of Mercy lengthens [the lives] of the misguided, until, when they are confronted with what they have been warned about – either the punishment [in this life] or the Hour [of Judgement] – they realize who is worse situated and who has the weakest forces' [75]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 75)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say, 'The Lord of Mercy lengthens [the lives] of the misguided' (*Maryam:* 75). This means that Allah *the Almighty* grants the misguided people respite and draws them near to destruction. This is because He is the Lord of all, and by virtue of His Lordship, He gives provision to both the believer and the disbeliever alike. Just as Allah *the Almighty* supports the believer with triumph, He helps the disbeliever to attain what he intends. The latter point is clear in Allah's saying, 'There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease….' (*al-Baqara:* 10) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* adds to their disease because they are content and satisfied with it and asked for more of it.

With regard to Allah's saying, 'The Lord of Mercy lengthens [their lives]...' (*Maryam:* 75), this means that Allah *the Almighty* gives the misguided person increase in this world and its adornments, a fact which is clear in His saying, 'Whoever desires the gain of the hereafter, We will give him more of that again; and whoever desires — the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the Hereafter he has no portion.' (*ash-Shura:* 20) In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us: 'Beware of being filled with admiration for their possessions and their children. This is because this serves as a source of divisive seduction and distraction for them. It is by such things that Allah *the Almighty* torments them in this world, through endeavouring to amass wealth and seeking to educate their children, and, ultimately, through the distress of losing both. Finally, in the Hereafter, He punishes them on account of their wealth and children. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Let not then their property and their children excite your admiration; Allah only wishes to chastise them with these in this world's life and (that) their souls may depart while they are unbelievers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 55)

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…When they are confronted with what they have been warned about – either the punishment [in this life] or the Hour [of Judgement] ...’ (*Maryam:* 75). Here, the Arabic word *al-`adhab* refers to the punishment that will afflict the disbelievers in this world by being defeated by the believers. In addition, they will suffer humiliation and debasement at the hands of the believers. Concerning Allah’s saying, ‘…or the Hour [of Judgement] ...’ (*Maryam:* 75), it signifies the punishment which awaits them in the Hereafter. At that moment, ‘…they will realise who is worse situated and who has the weakest forces.’ (*Maryam:* 75) However, this knowledge will be of no avail, for its time has already passed, as they are in the Hereafter and so they cannot return to the worldly life to believe. Hence, in this manner, the grief is greater and the distress is more severe.

Here, we may pose the following question, which is, ‘What is the reason for mentioning the “forces” in this context which speaks of the Hereafter; after all, the disbelievers’ forces will be of no avail on that Day’? In fact, this is an expression of derision against them, as in Allah’s saying, ‘Gather together those who were unjust and their associates, and what they used to worship besides Allah, then lead them to the way to Hell.’ (*as-Saffat:* 22-23) The verb ‘lead’ also has the meaning of ‘guide’ in Arabic, and thus one might ask, ‘Is leading them to the fire an act of guidance’?

The narrative continues, as Allah *the Almighty* turns to them, saying, ‘What is the matter with you that you do not help each other? Nay! On that day, they shall be submissive. And some of them shall advance towards others, questioning each other. They shall say, “Surely you used to come to us from the right side.” They shall say, “Nay, you (yourselves) were not believers; and we had no authority over you, but you were an inordinate people.”’ (*as-Saffat:* 25-30) This verse shows that the leaders of the disbelievers will say that they did not force their followers to do anything. They merely made suggestions to them and thereupon the latter obeyed them. For this reason, the disbelievers, as quoted in another verse, will say, ‘Our Lord! Show us those who led us astray from among the jinn and the men that we may trample them under our feet so that they may be of the lowest.’ (*Fussilat:* 29)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَيَزِيدُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱهْتَدَوْا۟ هُدًى ۗ وَٱلْبَٰقِيَٰتُ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتُ خَيْرٌ عِندَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ مَّرَدًّا ﴿٧٦﴾

But God gives more guidance to those who are guided, and good deeds of lasting merit are best and most rewarding in your Lord’s sight [76] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 76)

The Arabic word *hidaya* (guidance) in the Islamic context has two meanings. On the one hand, it has the meaning of leading to good and the elucidation of its path. On the other hand, it refers to Allah’s support to the guided one to attain to faith. Whoever manifests a firm belief in the former, Allah *the Almighty* will help him with the second. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil).’ (*Muhammad:* 17)

Regarding His saying, ‘…and good deeds of lasting merit are best and most rewarding in your Lord’s sight.’ (*Maryam:* 76) the Arabic phrase *al-baqiyat as-salihat* (the good deeds of lasting merit) signifies the good actions which you undertook solely for Allah’s sake. These good deeds are: ‘…best and most rewarding in your Lord’s sight.’ (*Maryam:* 76) Such are the ultimate ends that we, Muslims, await and for which we strive. Whenever you draw parallels in respect to the hard paths, you should think of them in terms of their felicitous ends, for this will make the burden of worship and the difficulty of observing obligatory acts seem easier for you. Allah’s saying, ‘…and most rewarding in your Lord’s sight.’ (*Maryam:* 76) comprises the Arabic word *marada* which refers to what you will be returned to.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:(1)

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(1) *As for the cause of the revelation of this verse, it is related that Khabab ibn Al-Arat said, ‘I was owed a debt on the part of Al-`As ibn Wa`il, and I went to see him to settle its repayment. But, he said, “No, by Allah, I will not repay you until you disown your*=

أَفَرَءَيْتَ ٱلَّذِى كَفَرَ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَقَالَ لَأُوتَيَنَّ مَالًا وَوَلَدًا ﴿٧٧﴾

Have you considered the man who rejects Our revelation,
who says, ‘I will certainly be given wealth and children’? [77]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 77)

Let us take note here that the Quran does not mention or identify the person who made this statement, even if this person was known to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is addressed in this verse. This is because this statement might be uttered in our day and age, or at any point of time. Hence, what is important here is not the person him, but rather, the statement itself? It has been related that this person was Umaya ibn Khalaf or Al-‘A`s ibn Wa`il As-Sahmi.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘Have you considered…?’ (*Maryam:* 77), it means ‘have you not seen this’? It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is alluding to what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed with respect to this case. The verse goes on to mention, ‘…the man who rejects Our Revelation, who says, “I will certainly be given wealth and children”’ (*Maryam:* 77) stating that this disbeliever said, ‘If there is indeed a resurrection then in the Hereafter, I will be just as I was in this world, the possessor of wealth and children’. This parallels what the owner of the garden said to his brother: ‘And I do not think the hour will come, and even if I am returned to my Lord I will most certainly find a returning place better than this.’ (*al-Kahf:* 36)

As a matter of fact, the human being should not take pride in any blessing unless it is self-produced and he is able to maintain it. Yet, he possesses nothing that arises from his own self, nor is he incapable of maintaining any blessing, as no one can sustain them except the Bestower and the Giver of blessings. So, why is there such self-delusion about these blessings?

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Say, “Have you considered if your water should go down, who is it then that will bring you flowing

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= *belief in Muhammad.” To this, I replied, “No, by Allah, I will not disbelieve in Muhammad until you die and are resurrected.” Then, he said, “In that case, when I die and am resurrected, then come to me for I will have children and wealth in that place, and will repay you at that time.” Thereupon Allah the Almighty revealed this verse.’ See Al-Wahidi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p.173; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2795.*

water?”’ (*al-Mulk:* 30). Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Say, “Have you considered if Allah should destroy me and those with me— rather He will have mercy on us”; yet who will protect the disbelievers from a painful punishment?’ (*al-Mulk:* 28)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* responds to this groundless claim and says:

أَطَّلَعَ ٱلْغَيْبَ أَمِ ٱتَّخَذَ عِندَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ عَهْدًا (٧٨)

Has he penetrated the unknown or received a
pledge to that effect from the Lord of Mercy? [78]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 78)

It is as if Allah is addressing this disbeliever saying, ‘Have you made this statement according to your own knowledge? Or have you penetrated the unseen thereby gaining knowledge of what you will obtain in the Hereafter’?’ The verse goes on to ask ‘…or have he received a pledge to that effect from the Lord of Mercy?’ (*Maryam:* 78) Did Allah *the Almighty* give him a pledge that he will have in the Hereafter the same as that which he had in this world? Thus, to make such a statement, he should have either penetrated the unseen or received a pledge from Allah *the Almighty*. So, which of these two was available for him such that he might make this statement with such certainty?

This meaning is evident in Allah’s saying, ‘What! Shall We then make (i.e. treat) those who submit as the guilty? What has happened to you? How do you judge? Or have you a book wherein you read, that you have surely therein what you choose? Or have you received from Us an agreement confirmed by an oath extending to the Day of Resurrection that you shall surely have what you demand?’ (*al-Qalam:* 35-39) Here, the intended meaning is that: who guarantees for them what they lay claim to?! Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has informed us, ‘Whoever brings happiness to a believer, he has then received a pledge from Allah.’(1) Furthermore, he said, ‘Whoever prays the obligatory prayers in their appointed time, he has received a pledge from Allah.’(1) So, who are those who have received a pledge from Allah *the Almighty* that He will not cause them to enter the fire?

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(1) *In his book, Ibn Al-Jawzi narrated the Hadith of Ibn `Abbas in which he relates that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Whoever brings happiness to a believer, he makes me happy, and whoever makes me happy receives a pledge with Allah, and whoever has received a pledge from Allah, the fire will not touch him.’ Ibn Al-Jawzi then says, ‘It is narrated through Ad-Daraqutni’s chain of narrators. In* =

The Arabic word *al-`ahd* (pledge) refers to something agreed upon between two parties. If a pledge is between people, then it is an unreliable one. It can be honoured or not, for man is prone to changeability, and the circumstances may prevent him from fulfilling his pledge. However, if the pledge is from Allah *the Almighty* the Master of all things, there is no power that can nullify His Will. His pledge, therefore, is a true and a reliable one, which will never fail to be honoured.

When you make a solemn promise to your Lord with respect to faith, you are not in a position to be sure of what changes you might undergo. However, when your Lord pledges to reward you, then you can be certain that He will fulfil His pledge and will not renege on His promise.

Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to give counsel to `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* he said, ‘Supplicate to Allah that he establishes for you a covenant in the hearts of the believers,’ (2) this is to say, love and affection in their hearts, and as long as Allah *the Almighty* grants him this covenant, Allah *the Almighty* fulfils it and it would come to pass.

= *Mizan Al-I`tidal, Adh-Dhahabi grades this narration as false in meaning.' See Ibn Al-Jawzi, Al-`Ilal Al-Mutanahiya, 2/514; Adh-Dhahabi, Mizan Al-I`tidal. 2/293.*

(1) *In his book, Imam Ahmad narrates on the authority of Ka`b ibn A`jra that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Surely, your Lord says: “Whoever prays the prayers at their appropriate times and preserves them and does not let them go by through neglecting their due right, he has My Pledge that I will cause him to enter Paradise. In addition, whoever does not pray them at their appropriate times and does not preserve them and lets them go by through negligence of their due right, he has no pledge; if I will, I will punish him, and if I will, I will forgive him.”' See Ahmad, Musnad, 4/244.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates that Al-Bara` ibn `Azib related that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to `Ali Allah be pleased with him ‘Say, “O Allah, establish a covenant for me with you, and make me beloved in Your Sight, and instill affection for me in the hearts of the believers.”' Thereupon, Allah revealed His saying, ‘But the Lord of Mercy will give love to those who believe and do righteous deeds.' (Maryam: 96) Al-Bara` said, ‘It was revealed in reference to `Ali.' In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, ‘According to Ibn `Abbas this verse was revealed in reference to `Abd Ar-Rahman Ibn `Awf. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/544; Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4333.*

The Name ‘the Lord of Mercy’ is chosen here for the characteristic of all-encompassing Mercy that lies in it and it also corresponds to His help with fulfilling one’s pledge.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَلَّا ۚ سَنَكْتُبُ مَا يَقُولُ وَنَمُدُّ لَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلْعَذَابِ مَدًّا ﴿٧٩﴾

No! We shall certainly record what he says and
prolong his punishment [79] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 79)

Here, the Arabic word *kalla* (no) is a particle for negating and nullifying that which was said before it. In this case, it negates the disbeliever’s statement in the previous two verses: ‘I will certainly be given wealth and children’? Has he penetrated the unknown or received a pledge to that effect from the Lord of Mercy?’ (*Maryam:* 77-78) Then, the word *kalla* is followed by an explanation and reasoning for this negation.

This particle also occurs in Allah’s saying, ‘And as for man, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honour and makes him lead an easy life, he says, “My Lord honours me”. But when He tries him (differently), then straitens to him his means of subsistence, he says, “My Lord has disgraced me”. No! …’ (*al-Fajr:* 15-17)

In the last verse, Allah *the Almighty* refutes the statement which comes before *kalla* (no) because pleasurable things and plentiful means of sustenance are not a proof of being honoured by Allah *the Almighty*. Similarly, poverty and lack of sustenance are not a proof of being disgraced by Him. On the contrary, both states constitute tribulations and trials, as the verse makes clear. The presence of blessings does not mean that you are blessed, but rather the real blessing is succeeding in the test of both conditions.

Allah *the Almighty* may bestow wealth upon you, but then you do not spend it on what Allah *the Almighty* has permitted. Thus, it comprises a temptation for you whereby you fail the examination. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* did not honour you by means of wealth, but rather, Allah *the Almighty* made it a means of seduction and deception. Thus, it is by your hand that wealth is transformed into either a blessing or a curse, or a mark of honour or a disgraceful abuse.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *Glorified is He* then says,(1) 'We shall certainly record what he says and prolong his punishment.' (*Maryam:* 79) Allah's saying, 'We shall certainly record…' (*Maryam:* 79) clarifies that Allah *the Almighty* will not hold this disbeliever accountable on the Day of Judgment for what he says that he has done. Rather, he will be held accountable for what was recorded against him and he will read it. It is as if the recording is not restricted to what we imagine it to be, but rather, it is a recording of the voice and the breaths. When the Day of Judgment comes, every human being will find the record of what he has done.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day.' (*al-Isra':* 14) This saying indicates that when the person sees what was written in the book, he will know that it consists of what he has done. Nowadays the human beings can record the breaths and words of their adversaries. So, how can you consider it unlikely that Allah *the Almighty* records the breaths, voices, and movements in such a manner that when a person reads them and sees them recorded in his book, he would not be able to deny them?

As for Allah's saying, '…and prolong his punishment' (*Maryam:* 79), it means that this disbeliever's punishment will be increased. The Arabic word *al-madd* (to prolong) signifies that you increase something. However, at times you increase something from its own substance, while other times you increase it by adding something else to it. For example, you might bring a string and extend it to its limit, or you might attach another string to it, and thereby you have lengthened it with another thing. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* increases the punishment of the disbelievers.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'Allah's saying, "We shall certainly record what he says and prolong his punishment." (Maryam: 79), signifies that He will record this disbeliever's statement as counting against him, and He will recompense him for it in the Hereafter. Furthermore, He will "...prolong his punishment" (Maryam: 79), that is, Allah the Almighty will grant him increased punishment above and beyond standard punishment.' Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4319.*

He says:

وَنَرِثُهُۥ مَا يَقُولُ وَيَأۡتِينَا فَرۡدٗا ﴿٨٠﴾

We shall inherit from him all that he speaks of and he will come to Us all alone [80] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 80)

This verse tells us that while this disbeliever is expecting Allah *the Almighty* to bestow upon him more blessings, Allah *the Almighty* will take all the blessings from him. So, His saying, 'We shall inherit from him...' (*Maryam:* 80) means that Allah *the Almighty* will take from him what he possesses. This meaning is clear in His saying, 'It is We who will inherit the earth and all who are on it: they will all be returned to Us.' (*Maryam:* 40) Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and We are the inheritors.' (*al-Qasas:* 58)

Thus, the fact that Allah *the Almighty* 'shall inherit from him' (*Maryam:* 80), is contrary to the disbeliever's expectation to 'be given wealth' (*Maryam:* 77). Likewise, His saying, 'and he will come to Us all alone' (*Maryam:* 80) is a rebuttal of his expectation to be given: '…children' (*Maryam:* 77) since he will appear before Allah *the Almighty* on the Day of Judgment alone with none of his children alongside him to defend him.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ءَالِهَةٗ لِّيَكُونُواْ لَهُمۡ عِزّٗا ﴿٨١﴾

They have taken other gods beside God to give them strength [81] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 81)

The Arabic word *aliha* (gods) is the plural of *ilah* which refers to the one who is worshipped, that is, the Lord Who brought you out of nothing and assumes the responsibility of raising you. Allah's bestowal of divinity comprises prescribed obligations and worship, while the bestowal of lordship consists of blessings and gifts. Therefore, who is worthier of your worshipful servitude and obedience?

Some people have taken other gods beside Allah, such as the sun, the moon, a stone, or a tree. We ask such people, 'Why do you think that these gods are worthy of your worship? What have they commanded you to do? What things have they forbidden you? What favours have they bestowed upon you? Where were they when you were a foetus in your mothers' wombs'?

Let us compare this topic with obedience to one's parents. Surely, your father who provided for you when you were young and took care of all your needs, also your mother who carried you in her womb and vigilantly looked after your comfort are more deserving of your obedience than anyone else. You should not give preference to a command other than theirs. Allowing others to gain mastery over you and giving them your obedience and loyalty apart from your parents are not permissible while you are in the prime of your youth and the peak of your strength.

For this reason, among the basic principles of upbringing is that parents should instruct their children to heed and obey them. We should warn these children against obeying others, especially those who are not to be trusted with upbringing, including the laymen and the depraved friends who attract children towards the blameworthy acts.

Nowadays we warn our children against going around with strangers or accepting food or drink from them. We witness this in our daily life and that is why it is unnecessary to elaborate at length on this issue. Hence, this is a kind of immunity which you must give to children, precisely like immunity against illnesses.

Such is the condition of those who had taken gods beside Allah *Glorified is He*. They find ease in a god which lays down no obligations upon them nor demands any difficult acts worship from them. That is to say that each of these gods lets its worshippers worship it according to the worshippers' caprice and whim.

Clearly, these polytheists have accepted the bestowals of lordship and enjoyed the blessings of Allah *the Almighty*, but they rejected the bestowals of divinity by abstaining from worshipping Him.

As the human being is religious by his very nature, these people have chosen a religion in accordance with their deviant inclinations and passionate desires. They have taken gods that neither command nor impose obligations.

This also applies to many educated people who follow Allah’s religion according to their whims. They obey His enemies in matters which are far away from His religion. Although they are people of culture and mature minds, they convince themselves that they adhere to the religion and the truth.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…to give them strength.’ (*Maryam:* 81) The Arabic word *al-`izz* (strength) means dominance and ability to hold back others, whereby no one can cause you any harm. One says, ‘So-and-son is strong (*`aziz*)’; this is to say that he is undefeatable.

We have the right to ask here, ‘Wherein lies the strength in worshipping these gods? In addition, what is the benefit that will come to you from worshipping them’? For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* refutes their claim saying:

كَلَّاۚ سَيَكۡفُرُونَ بِعِبَادَتِهِمۡ وَيَكُونُونَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ضِدًّا ﴿٨٢﴾

But these gods will reject their worship and will even turn against them [82] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 82)

Here, the Arabic word *kalla* (no) rules out that there is any strength in worshipping anything besides Allah *the Almighty*. Rather, on the Day of Judgment, ‘… these gods will reject their worship....’ (*Maryam:* 82) This verse shows that these gods will dIsavow having been worshipped by them, and they will deny that they themselves are gods alongside Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, these gods ‘…will even turn against them.’ (*Maryam:* 82) Thus, while the disbelievers adopted them as gods other than Allah *the Almighty* and sought to have strength through worshipping them, these gods will turn against them and become their adversaries and opponents.

The Arabic word *ad-didd* means your antagonistic enemy and the one who tries to maltreat you. In the Noble Quran, there are many discussions between these gods and those who worshipped them. An example of this is found in the case of those who worshipped the angels and adopted them as gods beside Allah *the Almighty*. When Allah *the Almighty* asks the angels: ‘Did these worship you?’ (*Saba’:* 40), they reply: ‘Glory be to You! You are our Guardian, not they; nay! They worshipped the jinn; most of them were believers in them.’ (*Saba’:* 41) Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘When those who were followed shall renounce those who followed (them)….' (*al-Baqara:* 166) Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says about the worshippers of false gods: 'And who is in greater error than he who calls besides Allah upon those that will not answer him till the day of resurrection and they are heedless of their call?' (*al-Ahqaf:* 5)

Hence, the disbelievers imagined that their gods are a source of strength and protection, but they turned out against them and became their enemies. This is similar to the case of the young woman who said to her father: 'O father, what made you consent to my marriage to the son of so-and-so'? That is, what is it that pleased you with him? He said, 'O my dear daughter, they are a family of strength, rank, nobility, power and protection'. She said, 'O father, you assumed that there would be love between me and him, but you did not predict that there would be enmity between us. Therefore, if enmity arises, what you have said will turn against you, and you will be miserable by their strength and rank'.

Some people have set up wealth as a god, as a poet said:

To wealth belongs a folk, when it appeared saying
I am wealth, the folk said, you alone do we worship.

Those who worship wealth, seeing strength in it and being arrogantly boastful about it, are unaware that it will be a curse and torture for them on the Day of Resurrection; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'On the Day when it shall be heated in the fire of hell, then their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it; this is what you hoarded up for yourselves, therefore taste what you hoarded.' (*at-Tawba:* 35)

In such a manner, the more their greed for wealth increases, the more its fiery branding intensifies. You will note in the last verse that the natural sequential order akin to the request when a poor beggar stands before an ignoble wealthy man. As soon as the beggar appears, the features of the man's face change, and then he turns his face away from him. Afterwards he turns his side towards the beggar and gives his back to him. In this same order does punishment take place and branding occur—may Allah *the Almighty* protect us from such punishment. Thus, wealth which was believed to comprise strength changes into torture and calamity.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And when men are gathered together they shall be their enemies, and shall be deniers of their worshipping (them).’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 6) Even the limbs and organs by which you enjoyed your disobedience in this world will testify against you; Allah says, ‘On the Day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them as to what they did.’ (*an-Nur:* 24) That is because you were heedless of Him Whom you should have been heedful of, and you kept in mind what you were not supposed to have called to it. So, on the Day of Judgment, the true Lord Whom you were heedless of will call you out and take you to account. On the other hand, the false gods to whom you devoted yourself will abandon you and deliver you to perilous ruin.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّآ أَرْسَلْنَا ٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ تَؤُزُّهُمْ أَزًّا ﴿٨٣﴾

Have you [Prophet] not seen how We send devils to incite the disbelievers to sin? [83] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 83)

The Arabic word *al-azz* literally means the powerful convulsion or agitation marked by force. In other words, the devils stir them up and inflame them. The word *al-azz* is similar in meaning to the word *an-nazgh* which occurs in Allah’s saying, ‘If Satan should prompt you to do something, seek refuge with Allah – He is all hearing, all knowing.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 200)

Satanic incitement takes place by means of evil whisperings and enticements in order to provoke the person into disobedience and wickedness. The same meaning is also expressed by the word *at-ta`if,* as in Allah’s saying, ‘Those who are aware of Allah think of Him when Satan prompts them to do something and immediately they can see [straight].’ (*al-A‘raf:* 201)

The verse under discussion ‘Have you [Prophet] not seen how We send devils …’ (*Maryam:* 83) prompts a question which is, ‘If Allah *the Almighty* hates that which the devils do to man, whether a believer or a disbeliever, why, then, does He send them to the disbelievers’? Allah *the Almighty* sends the devils to human beings for a certain mission, that is, to serve as tribulation and trial for them. In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, “We believe”, and not be tried?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 2) Hence, they perform the function for which they were created, namely, standing in the way of the believer in order to divert him away from faith. Allah *the Almighty* thereby purifies the believers and brings out the firm belief of those who stand firm in the face of the satanic wiles.

We have said, ‘Satan has a long history with man, starting with Adam *peace be upon him* when he refused to obey Allah’s command to prostrate before Adam. Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* cast him out and banished him from His Mercy. Consequently, Satan wanted to get revenge on Adam’s progeny due to what had befallen him because of Adam. In this regard, ‘He said: Then by Your Might I will surely make them live an evil life, all.’ (*Sad:* 82); and He also said, ‘As You has caused me to remain disappointed I will certainly lie in wait for them in Your Straight Path.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 16) In such a manner, he announced his method and his way, affirming that he will lie in wait for those who are upright, whereas those on the crooked path have no need of his misguidance and seductive deceptions. For this reason, we find him threatening the believers, saying, ‘Then I will certainly come to them from before them and from behind them, and from their right-hand side and from their left-hand side….’ (*al-A‘raf:* 17) It is well known that there are six directions, and Satan comes from all of them except for two, that is, the above and the below direction. This is because these two directions are respectively linked to divine mightiness from above and the humility of worshipful servitude from below, as embodied in the act of the servant when he raises his hands to Allah *the Almighty* in supplication and when he falls down before Him in prostration. Consequently, these two directions are closed to Satan since they are the two sides of obedience and devout servitude, and he is not active except in a state of a heedless negligence of which he takes advantage in man.

If we reflect upon the matter of Satan, we will find that his conflict is not with his Lord *Glorified is He* but rather with man. This is because when Satan says to his Lord *Glorified is He* ‘He said, “Then by Your Might I will surely make them live an evil life, all.”’ (*Sad:* 82) He observes respectful etiquette with Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if he was saying, ‘Temptation is not skilfulness on my part, but instead I deceive them into sin by means of Your

Might which is Exalted above your human creations, and by means of giving them free choice, allowing (by means of which) the believer to believe and the disbeliever to disbelieve. This is the means of access by which I get through to them. This is proven by the fact that I have no authoritative power over Your faithful adherents or Your devout servants whom you chose and purified'. For this reason, Satan said, 'Except Your servants from among them, the purified ones.' (*Sad:* 83)

Here, another question also arises, which is, 'If Satan only lies in wait along the straight path of the righteous in order to cause its followers to wander astray, then why does he lie in wait for the disbelievers'? We reply, 'This is because the disbeliever by his nature and innate disposition is inclined towards faith and towards the straight path, for he may ponder over the cosmos with all its marvellous signs before him. So, perhaps reflecting upon Allah's universe will lead him to believe in Him. That is why Satan lies in ambush for him in the path of reflection and contemplation in order to prevent him from believing in the Creator *Glorified is He*.'

Satan stirs you up either to arouse carnal appetites or to make you forget about obedience, as the Quran relates: '…and nothing made me forget to speak of it but the Satan.' (*al-Kahf:* 63) Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and if the Satan causes you to forget, then do not sit after recollection with the unjust people.' (*al-An'am:* 68)

Many of our Muslim brethren ask, 'Why is it that during the daily prayer precisely we are assailed by thoughts about the problems of life and concerns of this world'? To this, we reply that this is a healthy symptom of faith. This is because if Satan were not aware of the importance of the daily prayer—that when it is accepted from you, your sins are forgiven—he would not attempt to ruin it for you. But, our real problem is that if we give Satan the full rein, we will end up following him and become forgetful of the saying of our Lord: 'And if an interference of Satan should cause you mischief, seek refuge in Allah; surely, He is the Hearing, the Knowing.' (*Fussilat:* 36)

Hence, as soon as you sense that you are straying from prayer and the attitude of standing before Allah *the Almighty* all you have to do is say, 'I take refuge in Allah from Satan, the accursed'. Even if you were in the middle of reciting the Quran, you have the right to interrupt the recitation in order to seek refuge in Allah from Satan. The moment he realises your recurrent awareness of his stratagems, he will leave you and despair of influencing you.

Previously, we drew an analogy for this with a thief who does not hover around a house which is abandoned and ruined, but rather hovers around a house which is flourishing and populated. Then as soon as he approaches it, the proprietor of the house notices and drives him away by shouting, and so the thief takes recourse in escaping. Now, perhaps the thief says to himself, ‘Maybe the owner of the house merely shouted by coincidence’ and then he goes back again. But, the owner of the house remains vigilant and so the thief flees and never comes back.

We must be cognisant that among the stratagems and sly tricks of Satan is that when he finds difficulty in seducing you from one way, he will then approach you from another one. This is because he is well aware that people have multiple means of penetration, and that each of us has a weak point by which access is gained. There are among men, for example, those whom you cannot win over with mounds of gold, yet you can incline them favourably with words of praise and flattery. Now, this cursed one, Satan, has varied ruses corresponding to the varieties of personalities.

Therefore, it is easy for you to distinguish between an act of sinful disobedience which arises from the soul and that which comes from Satan. The soul entices you to do a single object of carnal passion which it desires and it will accept nothing other than it. If you tried to budge it to some other object of lustful desire, it refuses everything except what it wants. On the other hand, if Satan has a hard time urging you to undertake one such act of disobedience, he then invites you to indulge in another one. The important thing for him is to make you fall into a sin.

Allah *the Almighty* warns us against Satan because he fights against human’s innate disposition towards faith- this disposition which urges him to believe that the universe has an All-Powerful Creator. The proof of the Existence of Allah *the Almighty* is an innate natural one which is no need of philosophical explanations. As the Arabs of old said, ‘Camel droppings provide clear evidence of a camel and a footprint offers a proof of someone walking. The heaven with its constellations, the earth with its natural pathways, the sea with its waves; does this all not prove the Existence of the Subtle, the Aware'?

Similarly, every craftsman is well versed in his craft and expert in its fine details. So then, what do you think of the Creator: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.' (*al-Mulk:* 14) Hence, the proofs of faith are inborn, natural ones which the philosopher shares in common with the shepherd; no, indeed it might be that philosophy came and complicated the proofs.

Back to the verse in question; let us ponder over Allah's saying, 'Have you [Prophet] not seen how We send devils…' (*Maryam:* 83). Now, it is well known that the proceedings of Satan are concealed, as Allah *the Almighty* says, '…he surely sees you, he as well as his host, from whence you cannot see them…' (*al-A'raf:* 27). Here, we should ask, 'How is it that Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in regard to this issue with His saying, 'Have you [Prophet] not seen' (*Maryam:* 83), although it is a phenomenon which is not visible to man'?

In our opinion, Allah's saying, 'Have you [Prophet] not seen…' (*Maryam:* 83) carries the meaning of 'do you not know?', whereby 'knowing' is tantamount to 'seeing'. The same usage occurs in His saying, 'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) Obviously, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see this event, so how can his Lord address him by asking 'have you not seen'? This is in order to indicate to you, O Messenger Muhammad, that Allah's conveyance of information to you is more reliable than the information that your eyes convey to you. This is because the vision of the eye might deceive you, whereas the communication of Allah *the Almighty* is truthful and will never deceive you. Hence, the knowledge conveyed to you by Allah *the Almighty* has greater priority and is more trustworthy than the knowledge you gain through your own senses.

The Arabic word *ash-shayatin* (devils) is the plural of *shaytan* which refers to Satan who was the rebellious one from among the jinn. The jinn are creatures similar to mankind, and Allah *the Almighty* says about them: 'And that some of us are good and others of us are below that: we are sects following different ways.'[1] (*al-Jinn:* 11) Hence, there are among the jinn those who are far below righteousness and these are the devils or demons.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَا تَعۡجَلۡ عَلَيۡهِمۡۖ إِنَّمَا نَعُدُّ لَهُمۡ عَدّٗا ﴿٨٤﴾

There is no need for you to be impatient concerning them:
We are counting down their [allotted] time [84]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 84)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hoped that Allah *the Almighty* would relieve him from the leading figures among the disbelievers and the enemies of the Islamic call, so Allah *the Almighty* says to him: 'There is no need for you to be impatient concerning them; we are counting down their [allotted] time.' (*Maryam:* 84) This is because Allah *the Almighty* wants their lives to be prolonged, and their deeds to become even worse, and their sins to multiply, for the angelic scribes maintain a close watch over them and keep a careful record of their sins.

As for His saying, 'We are counting down their [allotted] time' (*Maryam:* 84), it means that the matter is settled since everything that can be counted comes to an end. On the other hand, the thing which cannot be reckoned and cannot be counted does not come to an end, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying, '…and if you count Allah's favours, you will not be able to number them….' (*Ibrahim:* 34) This is because Allah's blessings cannot be computed, nor counted, nor come to an end. For this reason, the passage above begins with the Arabic particle *in* (if) which suggests doubt, as this is a matter which no one dares to undertake; a fact which is supported by Allah's saying, '…What is with you passes away and what is with Allah is enduring….' (*an-Nahl:* 96)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says, 'The phrase "different ways" here refers to the paths, which are multiple and varied, and refers also to the opinions which are divergent. In the view of Ibn `Abbas, Mujahid and others, the verse signifies that among them are those who believe and those who do not believe.' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 4/430.*

Nowadays we are witnessing the science of statistics and all the advancements that it has achieved to the point that there are now universities dedicated to it, with specialised scientists introducing statistics into everything. Yet, not one of them has ever thought of quantitatively enumerating Allah's blessings in His universe. What is the reason for that? This is because applying oneself to count something means believing that you will be able to complete the process, and all of these scientists know perfectly well that however much they counted, they would never be able to count Allah's blessings. Hence, the phrase: 'We are counting down their [allotted] time.' (*Maryam:* 84), signifies that Allah *the Almighty* reckons their misdeeds and counts their sins before the end of their lives. The more their lives are prolonged, the greater the number of their sins will be. All that ends in numerical quantity likewise ends in duration.

Then Allah says:

يَوۡمَ نَحۡشُرُ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ إِلَى ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ وَفۡدٗا ﴿٨٥﴾

On the Day We gather the righteous as an
honoured company before the Lord of Mercy [85]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 85)

Allah *the Almighty* has provided us with multiple images and diverse scenes of the Day of Resurrection. He has depicted for us the image of false gods and their worshippers as well as what occurs between the two parties in terms of argument and disputation. He has given us an image of those who collaborated in evil, and of those who collaborated in goodness. This verse is part of another image which portrays the righteous believers on one side and the evildoers on the other one. So, what is the image of the righteous people?

Here, the Arabic word *nahshur* (to gather) means that Allah *the Almighty* will assemble the righteous people. As for the Arabic word *al-wafd,* it literally refers to a delegation which goes to a king to receive his gifts. This is the condition of the righteous people when Allah *the Almighty* brings them together on the Day of Resurrection as an honoured delegation in order to receive His favours and blessings. But you should not imagine that they are assembled walking, for example. No, rather, every righteous believer will be riding a she-camel the likes of its beauty has never been seen. Its saddle is made of gold, and its bridle is made of green chrysotile gems.[1]

This is the condition of the righteous believers. By contrast, the condition of the evildoers will be the opposite, as Allah says:

وَنَسُوقُ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ وِرْدًا ﴿٨٦﴾

And drive the sinful like a thirsty herd into Hell [86]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 86)

As-sa`iq (the one who drives) is positioned at the rear, chasing them, (the disbelievers) with angry words and driving them with reprimands. Such is the depiction in His saying, 'The Day on which they shall be driven away to the fire of Hell with violence.' (*at-Tur:* 13) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* does not say, for example, 'We will lead them', for the one who leads is situated in the front, and it is possible that one of those led might elude the leader's attention and escape from him.

Regarding the Arabic word *al-wird*, rendered here as 'a thirsty herd into Hell', it literally means to go to a watering place to seek the quenching of thirst. However, the fire is the place of blazing, intense heat, flames and boiling water. So, we should ask here, 'Why is coming to the fire with its heat called going to a watering-place'? This is said in scornful mockery of them, as is the case with the saying of Allah: '…and if they cry for water, they shall be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces.' (*al-Kahf:* 29) Now, when you hear the Arabic word *yughathu* (they will be given help), you anticipate some benefit and expect mercy. But, they will be given water like molten brass, which will scald their faces.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi narrates that Ibn `Abbas said, 'The believers will be provided with she-camels from paradise. These will have saddles of gold upon them, and their bridles and reins will be of green chrysotile gems. The believers will be assembled while mounted on them.' In another narration, `Ali said, 'Allah does not gather them together on foot, but [mounted] upon she-camels whose saddles are made of gold, pure-bred camels whose bridles are adorned with sapphires. If they merely give thought to them, they march ahead, and if they spur them, they fly.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4324.*

Another example of this derisive mockery is clear in His saying, ‘Taste; for sure you are the mighty, the honourable’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49), which serves as a reproach to the arrogantly oppressive disbelievers and wrongdoers. A further example yet occurs in His saying, ‘…Therefore announce (*bashshir)* to him a painful chastisement’ (*Luqman:* 7), in which the Arabic verb *bashshir* normally means to give glad tidings, while here Allah *the Almighty* is given the glad tiding of a painful chastisement.

Hence, Allah’s saying, ‘On the Day We gather the righteous as an honoured company before the Lord of Mercy.’ (*Maryam:* 85) is scathing sarcasm such as when you say to the negligent boy who flunks an exam, ‘Congratulations on your failure’.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّا يَمْلِكُونَ ٱلشَّفَٰعَةَ إِلَّا مَنِ ٱتَّخَذَ عِندَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ عَهْدًا ﴿٨٧﴾

No one will have power to intercede except for those
who have permission from the Lord of Mercy[87]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 87)

When the disbeliever comes into direct contact with the punishment, the first thing he hopes is that the object of his worship intercedes on his behalf and saves him from the situation in which he is. But this is very far-reaching, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And who is in greater error than he who calls besides Allah upon those that will not answer him till the day of resurrection and they are heedless of their call? And when men are gathered together they shall be their enemies, and shall be deniers of their worshipping (them).’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 5-6)

For this reason, these people will have no power to intercede on the Day of Judgment, as the intercession is only given by Allah’s permission, a fact which is clear in His saying, ‘No one will have the power to intercede except for those who have Permission from the Lord of Mercy.’ (*Maryam:* 87)

In order to have Allah’s permission to intercede on behalf of someone, you should do enough good deeds to fulfil your obligations. Then you should increase these good deeds to meet the qualification of intercession for other people. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* never renders your good deeds in vain. So, whatever good deeds you do beyond the prescribed obligations will be in your account balance in a record book which does not overlook small or large things, and does not leave out so much as an atom's weight.

Whenever a believer—regardless of how immoderate he is—notices a person devoting himself to Allah *the Almighty* and striving to increase his acts of obedience, he should ask Allah *the Almighty* to make this person more obedient, and he should be happy for him. This is because the superabundance of good deeds done by this devout believer may be of benefit to you, for one day you may need his intercession. But as for those who take pleasure in ridiculing and scorning people for pious devotion, they fall under the category of those oppressors about whom Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Surely they who are guilty used to laugh at those who believe. And when they passed by them, they winked at one another. And when they returned to their own followers they returned exulting. And when they saw them, they said: Most surely these are in error.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-32)

How will you face the devout people and hope for their intercession after all that you have done? If you are not faithfully observant yourself, then at the very least you should love those who are filled with pious devotion. You should also consider that this love constitutes a good deed whose fruit you hope to reap on the Day of Resurrection.

There is a similarity between intercession in the Hereafter and that which takes place between us in this world. For example, if you want to have a difficult issue settled for you, people may tell you, 'Go to so-and-so and he will get it done for you'! Then this person goes with you and fulfils your need. So, why was it achieved by the hands of this person? He must have done some favours to the person who had the ability to satisfy this need and so the latter was not able to refuse a request coming from him.

Therefore, it is necessary for the one who intercedes to have a balance of devotional acts which permitted him to do that. If you reflected carefully on this matter, you would find that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the first to have a balance of faith which encompassed his prescribed obligations and also that of his *ummah*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says about him: '…he believes in Allah, trusts[1] the believers….' (*at-Tawba:* 61) Therefore, he was granted the right to intercede as a privilege for him.

Allah *the Almighty* is never unmindful of the balance of His human creatures. Thus, all man's recommended acts of worship will be stored up for him. Even if a man is wrongly accused and punished for a deed he did not commit, Allah *the Almighty* will preserve this for him and conceal that which he has actually committed without punishing him for it.

Thus, the permission to intercession which is referred to in Allah's saying, '…except for those who have permission from the Lord of Mercy.' (*Maryam:* 87) entails that you attain to the lofty rank of *ihsan* which can only be attained by dedicating yourself to doing the prescribed obligations. If you did not do so, then how could you attain to this rank, while you fall short in the rank of faith, which is lower than that of *ihsan*?

In this connection, you should heed Allah's saying, 'Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and fountains taking what their Lord gives them….' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16) So, what is the reason for getting these blessings? The answer is provided in the following verses: '…surely they were before that, the doers of good. They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning they asked forgiveness. And in their property was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied (good).' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16-19)

Al-muhsin is the one who engages in acts of worship more than what Allah *the Almighty* has made obligatory for him. Such acts should be of the same type as those which are prescribed. Let us offer an example of this point; Allah *the Almighty* did not oblige us to offer *qiyam al-layl* (the night prayer) or to ask for forgiveness at dawn. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* did not oblige us to give voluntary charity to the beggar and the destitute. It is imperative here that we differentiate in terms of giving charity between what is a 'duty' and what is a 'fixed duty'. In the final verse above, there is

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti relates that Ibn `Abbas said, 'This means that he believes firmly in Allah and is truthful to the believers.' Ad-Dahhak said, 'He believes firmly in Allah regarding what He revealed to him, and he trusts the believers, including their testimonies and solemn oaths concerning their due rights, their sexual organs and their possessions.' See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 4/227.*

a reference to the ‘duty’ because the verse refers to the voluntary charity. On the other hand, the ‘fixed duty’ refers to *zakat* (obligatory charity).

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوا۟ ٱتَّخَذَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ وَلَدًا ﴿٨٨﴾

The disbelievers say, ‘The Lord of Mercy has offspring’ [88] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 88)

This statement they utter is nonsense and falsehood, for when did Allah *the Almighty* take a ‘son’?! In which century after the birth of the Messiah *peace be upon him*, did this occur? This Christian article of faith did not arise except after three hundred years of the birth of the Messiah. So, what was the situation before this? Moreover, how did Allah’s dominion increase after this alleged ‘son’ came? Nothing increased in His dominion, for the sun, the stars and air, for example, remained the same.

Hence, objectively speaking, this notion of Allah taking a son is outrageous and groundless foolishness, because nothing was added to His dominion on account of this alleged ‘son’. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* possesses no defective attribute which was perfected by the coming of the alleged ‘son’, since His attributes of perfection were extant before He created anything. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator before He creates; He is the Provider before He provides; He is the One Who Grants life before He gives life; and He is the One Who Causes death before He causes anything to die. Moreover, it was by means of these attributes that Allah *the Almighty* brought the creation into existence. Thus, His attributes of perfection were present in Him before the existence came into being.

We have propounded a parable for this in a poet who utters a poem of his own composition. We said that he composed the poem because he is a poet from the very beginning, and that he would not have composed it if he had not been a poet.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* refutes this falsehood with His saying, ‘… a grievous word it is that comes out of their mouths; they speak nothing but a lie.’ (*al-Kahf:* 5)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* responds to them with His saying,

لَقَدۡ جِئۡتُمۡ شَيۡـًٔا إِدّٗا ﴿٨٩﴾

How terrible is this thing you assert [89]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 89)

The Arabic word *al-`idd* (terrible) signifies the extreme limit of abomination and odiousness; it is an offensively repugnant phenomenon. It is used as a verb as in the following expression ‘a terrible matter befell him’, which is to say that it was oppressively burdensome for him and he could not cope with it. An example of this meaning is clear in Allah’s saying in the verse of Al-Kursi: ‘…and the preservation of them both tires Him not….’ (*al-Baqara:* 255) This means that the preservation of the heavens and the earth does not weigh heavily upon Him.

Here, we may ask, ‘Why does Allah *the Almighty* deem this phenomenon so offensively repugnant and abominable’? It is said that this is because taking a son is bound to certain aims. A son is sired to provide you with a kindred ally and strength, or for you to have a lineage extending after your death. But Allah is *the Almighty* Who is in no need of anyone, and He is the Ever-Abiding, the Everlasting, Who does not stand in need of prolongation in duration. Therefore, taking a son with respect to Allah *the Almighty* has no purpose. Moreover, His taking a son controverts the exclusive worshipful servitude due to Him. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

تَكَادُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ يَتَفَطَّرۡنَ مِنۡهُ وَتَنشَقُّ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَتَخِرُّ ٱلۡجِبَالُ هَدًّا ﴿٩٠﴾

It almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, the mountains to crumble to pieces [90]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 90)

This verse shows that not only Allah *the Almighty* finds this issue objectionable but also the inanimate things with no prescribed obligations find it utterly abominable. Thus, the heavens with all their power and mightiness are nearly ripped asunder at the horror of what was said. The heavens come close to being torn apart, but why does this not actually happen? This is because Allah *the Almighty* upholds them, a fact which is clear in His saying, ‘Surely, Allah upholds the heavens and the earth lest they come to naught…’ (*Fatir:* 41).

In a Qudsi Hadith, we read: ‘The sky said, “O Lord, give me permission to fall to pieces upon the sons of Adam for they have eaten Your favours and have abstained from expressing gratitude to You.” The earth said, “O Lord, give me permission to swallow up the sons of Adam, for they have eaten Your favours and have abstained from expressing gratitude to You.” Moreover, the mountains said, “O Lord, give us permission to fall down upon the sons of Adam, for they have eaten Your favours and have abstained from expressing gratitude to You.” The seas also said, “O Lord, give us permission to drown the sons of Adam, for they have eaten Your favours and have abstained from expressing gratitude to You.” But Allah *the Almighty* replied to them, “Leave Me and My human creations, for if you had created them, you would have shown mercy to them. Hence, if they turn to me in repentance, then I am their beloved; and if they do not repent, then I am their Healer.”’

So, what is the cause behind the sky coming close to being rent into fragments, and for the earth to nearly split open, and for the mountains to come close to falling down? The answer is given in the following verse in which Allah says:

أَن دَعَوۡاْ لِلرَّحۡمَٰنِ وَلَدٗا ﴿٩١﴾

That they attribute offspring to the Lord of Mercy [91]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 91)

This is the main cause why the entire universe verges on quaking and raging in anger; it is due to this abominable statement.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* continues, saying:

وَمَا يَنۢبَغِي لِلرَّحۡمَٰنِ أَن يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا ﴿٩٢﴾

It does not befit the Lord of Mercy [to have offspring] [92]
(The Quran, *Maryam:* 92)

Here, we must distinguish between the refutation of a phenomenon and the refutation of its suitability; the latter is what is referred to in this verse under discussion. An example of this is found in Allah’s saying about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘And We have not taught him poetry, nor is it meet for him…’ (*Ya Sin:* 69). In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* disavows that Prophet Muhammad recites poetry and rejects the suitability of his doing this. Now, a person might think that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was incapable of composing poetry, or that he did not have at his disposal the linguistic means or refinement of sentiment to make poetry. However, he was perfectly capable of versifying if he wanted; hence, he had the ability to do it, but it was not an activity that was appropriate for him.

The same holds true for Allah’s saying, ‘Not befit the Lord of Mercy [to have offspring]’ (*Maryam:* 92), for if Allah *the Almighty* had willed that He should have a son, it would have been so. This concurs with His saying, ‘Say, “If the Beneficent has a son, I am the foremost of those who serve.”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 81)

It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying, ‘If Allah *the Almighty* had actually had a son, then I would have submitted to this most gladly. However, this phenomenon was not willed by Allah *Glorified is He* and it would not behove Him. So, how can I claim that Allah *the Almighty* has a son based on my own opinion’?

Allah *the Almighty* does not need a son. He says:

إِن كُلُّ مَن فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَّآ ءَاتِى ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ عَبْدًا ﴿٩٣﴾

There is no one in the heavens or earth who will not come to the Lord of Mercy as a servant [93] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 93)

This is because the Creator *Glorified is He* created the human beings and provided them with free choice, to believe or not to believe. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* forcefully imposed some things upon them in which their will has nothing at all to do with. Hence, the disbeliever who accustoms himself comfortably to disbelief and habituates himself to it, rebelling against obedience and faith, is not able to rebel against illness, death, or poverty, for example.

Therefore, you are free to choose in some aspects, but an obedient slave in others. While the sphere of choice is yours in this world, it will not be yours in the Hereafter. Previously, we drew a distinction between *al-`ibad* (servants) and *al-`abeed* (slaves). While both the believers and the disbelievers are the slaves of Allah *the Almighty,* the servants are those who submit their freedom of choice and their own will to the Will of their Lord. Thus, all their actions arise in accord with what Allah *the Almighty* wants. These are the ones about whom Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk on the earth in humbleness…' (*al-Furqan:* 63).

As for Allah's saying, 'There is no one…who will not come to the Lord of Mercy as a servant' (*Maryam:* 93), it means that when it is the Hereafter, the sphere of choice is eliminated and no one will be able to deviate from Allah's Will, and thus Allah *the Almighty* will say, 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16) Allah *the Almighty* is the fully Capable of bestowing and taking away, this is proven by His saying, '…You give the kingdom to whomsoever You please and take away the kingdom from whomsoever You please, and You exalt whom You please and abase whom You please…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26).

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّقَدۡ أَحۡصَىٰهُمۡ وَعَدَّهُمۡ عَدّٗا ﴿٩٤﴾

He has counted them all: He has numbered them exactly [94] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 94)

The Arabic word *al-`ihsa`* signifies counting. In times of old, they used to use pebbles or date stones to count things. But date stones are linked to the ownership of date palms and may not be abundantly available to everyone. For this reason, they would make use of pebbles (*hasa*), giving rise to the word for numerical reckoning *al-`ihas`*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَكُلُّهُمۡ ءَاتِيهِ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ فَرۡدًا ﴿٩٥﴾

And they will each return to Him on the Day of Resurrection all alone [95] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 95)

This means that everyone will return to Allah *the Almighty* alone —without family or children or kindred allies—as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'The Day on which a man shall flee from his brother, And his mother and his father, and his spouse and his son— Every man of them shall on that day have an affair which will occupy him.' (*'Abasa:* 34-37) This is because each one will be preoccupied with his own state, thus oblivious of those who are closest to him: 'On the day when you shall see it, every woman suckling her infant shall quit in confusion what she suckled….' (*al-Hajj:* 2)

If you reflect upon His saying, 'will return to Him' (*Maryam:* 95), you will find that it is the slave who returns to Him with his free will, without being forced to return. It is as if everyone's return was regulated according to a determined time; and when this time arrives, everyone rushes willingly to Him *the Almighty*.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ سَيَجۡعَلُ لَهُمُ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ وُدّٗا ﴿٩٦﴾

But the Lord of Mercy will give love to those who believe and do righteous deeds [96] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 96)

The Arabic word *wuddan* signifies affection and love rooted in faith and leading to strong attachment. Allah *the Almighty* has established causal factors in His universe for the love and warm friendship. For example, when you are aware of a person who loves you and shows affection for you, as soon as you see him coming towards you, you stand up to receive him with a friendly smile, and you make room for him at the seated gathering. Furthermore, you ask about him when he is absent, and visit him when he is sick. You share joyous occasions with him, you comfort him in times of grief and lend him support in times of hardship. These ties of affection arise from love and pre-existing friendship.

Ties of affection may arise because kinship or mutual interests or friendship. These are the causal factors for the ties of affection in this world between all mankind, those who believe and those who disbelieve. However, Allah *the Almighty* says here, 'The Lord of Mercy will give love to those who believe and do righteous deeds.' (*Maryam:* 96) The bond of love in this verse is achieved without any reference to any motive or cause from among these causal factors. These ties of affection between those who believe exist, for example, when you see a person for the first time and you feel at ease with him as if you know him, and you say to him: ‘I love you for Allah’s sake’. This is the love which Allah *the Almighty* has established between believers, as a gracious favour from Him, not on account of the causal factors of affection as we commonly know it.

Therefore, Hirm Ibn Hayyan(1) *Allah rest his soul* said, ‘Surely, when Allah *the Almighty* sees His believing servant devoting himself to Him and loving Him wholeheartedly and expelling doubt from his heart; Allah *the Almighty* will surely open the hearts of all of the believers to him when such person’s heart— which is the most elevated source of beliefs and the well-spring of good deeds— is sound and presents it to Him.’(2)

This is similar to the Qudsi Hadith wherein Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘No servant devotes himself to coming close to Me except that I instil the love of him in the hearts of all of the believers.’(3) This means that the believers show love and mercy towards him for no worldly cause. In another Qudsi Hadith, we read: ‘When Allah loves a slave, He calls out Jibril (Gabriel) and says, “I love so-and-so; so love him.” Then Jibril (Gabriel) loves him. After that Jibril (Gabriel) announces to the inhabitants of heavens that Allah loves so- and-so; so love him; and the inhabitants of the heavens (the angels) also love him and then make people on Earth love him.'(1) Hence, it is a gift and a bounty from Allah *the Almighty* that the believer is loved by anyone who sees him, without any causal factors of affection. If you have donated to Him *the Almighty* what you hold sway over, this for sure benefits your heart—which is the storage space of beliefs and the well-spring of all pious deeds—then, Allah *the Almighty* will grant you what He holds sway over in terms of the hearts of all people, as Allah *the Almighty* controls their hearts and directs them however He wills.

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(1) *Hirm ibn Hayyan A-`Abdi was a worker for `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. He died on a very hot day, and when they had dusted off their hands from burying him, a cloud came and rained on his grave, with herbs having spouted and grown there since that day.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi said, ‘Hirm ibn Hayyan used to say, ‘No one devotes himself to drawing near to Allah the Almighty with his heart, except that He devotes Himself to drawing near to him by means of the hearts of the people of faith until he is sustained by their affection and their mercy.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran 6/4333.*

(3) *This Hadith is related by Al-Haythami on the authority of Abu Ad-Darda` who said that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Empty yourselves of worldly concerns as much as you are able; for, surely, the one for whom this world is his greatest concern, Allah will enlarge his means of subsistence and establish his poverty between His two eyes... and no servant devotes himself with his heart to Allah except that He causes the hearts of the believers to come to him with affection and mercy, and Allah hastens towards him with every benefit and favour.’ This Hadith is also narrated by At-Tabarani. One of its narrators is Mohammed ibn Sa`id Al-Maslub who was a liar. See Al-Haythami, Majma` Az-Zawa`id, 10/247; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir and Al-Awsat.*

In His saying, 'And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it...' (*an-Nisa':* 86), our Lord *Glorified is He* instructs us to respond to an act of courteous favour with something more excellent than it, and if we are not able to respond with something better, then at the very least the response should be equivalent. So, if this applies to the bestowal of the servant, then what are we to say of the bestowal of the Lord?

Also, relevant to this issue is what we find in the following Hadith: 'If anyone makes it easy for the one who is indebted to him (while finding it difficult to repay), Allah will make it easy for him in this worldly life and in the Hereafter, and if anyone conceals the faults of a Muslim, Allah will conceal his faults in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah helps His slave as long as he helps his brother.'(2)

In the above Hadith, the Arabic word *al-`awn* (help) entails the presence of someone who helps and someone who is helped. It is necessary that the one who helps be stronger than the one who is helped, for he gives to other people from the superabundant attribute which he possesses, such as health, ability, wealth, or knowledge. Now, one's help offered to his brother is limited by his own capacities and means; however, Allah's help to His servant is unlimited because it corresponds to His Absolute Capable Power.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra peace be upon him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2637; Ahmad, Musnad, 2/413.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra peace be upon him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2699; Ahmad, Musnad, 2/252, 296.*

In this manner, Allah *the Almighty* grants us assurance that when we sacrifice a little, He gives us in abundance without limits, as a manifestation of His favour and generosity. Are you not aware that a good deed in His view is rewarded tenfold, and is even augmented up to 700 times its worth?! Is not this trade with Allah *the Almighty* a profitable one? In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O you who believe! Shall I lead you to merchandise which may deliver you from a painful chastisement?' (*as-Saff:* 10) Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says about this trade: '…a gain which will not perish.' (*Fatir:* 29)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants the believers to have reciprocal love in a manner that would bind their hearts together and bring about amicable relations between them. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* will grant us the reward for this. Therefore, you should not think that the matter of faith is selfless altruism; rather, faith is tantamount to coveting self-interest. This is because when you give something in charity, you are actually aspiring to Allah's augmented compensation.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to give others the surplus of what we have at our disposal, a fact which is expressed in the following Hadith: 'Whoever possesses a superabundance of wealth, let him return it upon those who have no wealth…'(1) You should know that Allah *the Almighty* will compensate you with what is better than what you have given.

Let us offer a similitude for this fact; imagine that you have two sons, and you give each of them his pocket money. The first buys sweets with it, by which he eats and gives to his companions. The second wastes his pocket money on useless things, such as games and so on. So, to which of the two would you give after that? Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* treats us in this way.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *It was related that Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri said, 'Once we were on a journey with Messenger of Allah when a rider came and began looking right and left. The Messenger of Allah said, "Whoever has an extra mount should offer it to him who is without it, and whoever has surplus food should give it to him who has nothing;" and he continued mentioning other properties until we thought that none of us had any right to surplus of his own property. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1663; Ahmad, Musnad, 3/34.*

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرۡنَٰهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لِتُبَشِّرَ بِهِ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ وَتُنذِرَ بِهِۦ قَوۡمٗا لُّدّٗا ٩٧

We have made it easy, in your own language [Prophet], so that you may bring glad news to the righteous and warnings to a stubborn people[97] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 97)

The initial Arabic particle *fa* here indicates the arrangement of one thing upon another, so you must carefully examine the following sentence to know about this arrangement. So, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to give glad tidings to the righteous believers and to warn those who are stubborn because Allah *the Almighty* has made the Quran easy for Prophet Muhammad. Allah's saying, 'We have made it easy…' (*Maryam:* 97) means that Allah *the Almighty* has facilitated it for him *peace and blessings be upon him* in terms of memorisation, recitation and elucidation of its meanings such that he can employ it in the mission for the sake of which it was revealed.

The fact of facilitating the Quran for people to read is proved by many verses, such as Allah's saying in the chapter of *al-Qamar*: 'And certainly We have made the Quran easy for remembrance, but is there anyone who will mind?' (*al-Qamar:* 17) The one who investigates the phenomenon of facilitating the Quran will discover amazing wonders. For example, you find that a verse occurs in a particular chapter with a certain manner of expression, and then appears within the same thematic context in another chapter with a different expression. Hence, the Quranic manner of expression is not one of rigid clichés or even the product of some mechanical process, but it is surely the Speech of the Lord.

Let us offer an example to clarify this point; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Nay! It is surely an admonition. So whoever pleases may mind it.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 54-55) If you compare this with the manner of expression found in the following saying of Allah: 'Surely this is a reminder, so whoever pleases takes to his Lord a way' (*al-Insan:* 29), you will easily notice the different styles. The same applies to the following sayings of Allah *the Almighty* 'Surely, this is a reminder (*tadhkira*) ...' (*al-Insan:* 29), and 'Nay! Surely it is an admonishment (*tadhkira*).' (*'Abasa:* 11)

At this point, let us examine a subtle observation in the chapter of *Ar-Rahman* in which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two gardens.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 46) Subsequently, there follows a discussion about these two gardens and what they contain until one reaches the mention of: ‘In them shall be those who restrained their eyes….’ (*ar-Rahman:* 56) Even the latter verse refers to the two gardens in the feminine sense; the verse before it refers to them in the masculine sense.

The same applies to His saying, ‘And besides these two are two (other) gardens. (*ar-Rahman:* 62) which is followed by descriptions of what these two additional Gardens contain until one reaches mention of the beautiful maidens: ‘In them are goodly things, beautiful ones.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 56) In this latter verse, the relative pronoun refers to the feminine sense which is contrary to the verses before it.

Now, you are justified in asking yourself, ‘The discussion here concerns the two gardens, so why does the manner of expression change from *fi-him,* which refers to the garden in the masculine sense, to *fi-hinna*, which refers to them in the feminine sense when it comes to this particular blessing specifically’? It is said that the bliss of paradise is shared in common, and thus all believers should share it. As for the blessing of the beautiful maidens of paradise, not all people will enjoy the same maidens, for each will have his own. Allah *the Almighty* is considerate of the feelings of jealousy in men, and, consequently, each one of us will have his special beautiful maidens that no one else shares in common with him.

It is for this reason that when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw paradise, he saw a palace therein and stayed away from it. When he was asked about the reason for staying away, he said, ‘It belonged to `Umar, and I am well-aware of the jealousy of `Umar.’(1)

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(1) This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ibn Majah one the authority of Abu Hurayra who related, ‘When we were sitting with Allah's Messenger he said, “While I was sleeping, I saw myself in Paradise, and behold, a woman was performing ablution by the side of a palace. I asked, ‘For whom is this palace?’ They replied, ‘For ‘`Umar’. Then I remembered the jealousy of `Umar and returned immediately.’ `Umar wept (on hearing that) and said, ‘Let my father and mother be sacrificed for you, O Allah's Messenger! How dare I think of my jealousy being offended by you.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3242; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 107.

Now, had Allah *the Almighty* not revealed the Quran and made it easy, no one would have memorised it. The verses of the Quran used to descent upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and when the revelation receded from him, he would dictate them to the companions, continuing to recite them as they originally had come to him. So, if Allah *the Almighty* had not said to him: 'We will make you recite so you shall not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6), this would not have been easy for him.

When it comes to our memorisation of the Book of Allah, we also encounter wondrous marvels. Hence, a seven-year-old child, for example, is able to memorise the Quran according to its rules of proper recitation. But if he neglects its memorisation until later in life, the Quran escapes away from his memory. In contrast to this, if he had memorised any other passage at this young age, it remains imprinted in his mind.

Hence, the question of memorising the Quran is not merely a matter of having retentive memory, but rather a matter of Allah's succour granted to the memoriser. Thus, if you are in a state of endearment and harmony with the Book of Allah, it remains with you. On the other hand, if you leave it aside and shun it disrespectfully, it will slip away from you. This fact is expressed in the following Hadith: 'Read the Quran regularly. By the One in Whose Hand Muhammad's soul is, it escapes from memory faster than a camel does from its tying ropes.' (1)

This is because the letters of the Quran are of different nature; they are like arrayed angels which make up a word and a verse. Thus, if you pay attention to the letter, the word and the verse, then the angels will pay attention to you and will be well pleased with your recitation. **(2)**

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Musa Al-`Ash`ari. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5033; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 791.*

(2) It is related that Usayd ibn Hudayr said: 'One night while he was reciting the chapter of *al-Baqara*, with his horse tied up close by to him, the horse suddenly began bolting around. So, he fell silent, and the horse calmed down. Then he began to recite again, and the horse started bolting around. So, again he fell silent and the horse again calmed down. Then I raised my head to the heavens and there was something like a shadow in which there were the likes of lanterns. Thereupon, I went away so that I would not see them. Prophet Muhammad asked, "Do you have any notion of what that was?" He replied: "No." Prophet Muhammad then said, "Those were angels who had come close [to listen] to =

Among the wondrous aspects in the facilitation of the memorisation of the Quran is that if you engage your mind in recitation, you will stumble about and make mistakes; however, if you undertake the recitation instinctively just as you memorised it, the verses follow one another in uninterrupted succession.

As for His saying, '…in your own language [Prophet....' (*Maryam:* 97), it means that Allah *the Almighty* has revealed the Quran in Arabic to an Arabic-speaking people in order that they understand His Message regarding the glad tiding of paradise and the warning of eternal punishment. If it had come to them in another language, they would have said, as the Quran relates about them, 'And if We had made it a Quran in a foreign tongue, they would certainly have said, "Why have not its communications been made clear? What! A foreign (tongue) and an Arabian! …."' (*Fussilat:* 44)

There follows Allah's saying, '…so that you may bring…warnings to a stubborn people.' (*Maryam:* 97) The Arabic word *al-indhar* (warning) denotes cautioning against a calamitous evil that will occur in the future. In the same passage, the Arabic word *al-ladad* (stubbornness) means vehement antagonism and fierce enmity. We say: 'So-and-so is full of recalcitrant contentiousness' meaning he is excessive in his animosity and does not yield to proof or persuasion, and however much you try to convince him, he is adamant in his antagonistic opposition.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *Maryam* with His saying:

وَكَمۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا قَبۡلَهُم مِّن قَرۡنٍ هَلۡ تُحِسُّ مِنۡهُم مِّنۡ أَحَدٍ أَوۡ تَسۡمَعُ لَهُمۡ رِكۡزَۢا ﴿٩٨﴾

How many generations We have destroyed before them!
Do you perceive a single one of them now, or hear as much
as a whisper? [98] (The Quran, *Maryam:* 98)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* relieves Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of the distress and vexation he encounters in the path of calling others to Islam. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was telling him, 'Beware of being afflicted by the aversion of your people to you and their hatred

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= your voice. Had you continued reciting until the morning, people would have been able to gaze at them, as they would not have concealed themselves from them."'

of Allah’s way of guidance. Beware of shrinking before their stubborn oppressiveness to you, for these people are not mightier than the deniers of the truth who came before them and whom Allah *the Almighty* brought to perdition. Surely, I am sparing them only because they have a mission to fulfil with you’.

We have previously explained that the disbelievers who escaped being killed in certain battles — causing the Muslims to grieve over their survival—later included ‘The Unsheathed Sword of Allah’, Khalid ibn Al-Walid.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘How many generations We have destroyed before them! Do you perceive a single one of them now, or hear as much as a whisper?’ (*Maryam:* 98) Here, the Arabic word *kam* (many) indicates great quantity. As for the Arabic word *qarn* (a generation), it signifies a people or a nation. This is followed by Allah’s saying, ‘Do you perceive a single one of them now, or hear as much as a whisper?’ (*Maryam:* 98), which means that Allah *the Almighty* seized them and left no perceptible trace of them. The means of sensory perception, as we know, consist of the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, the nose for smelling, the tongue for tasting, and the hand for feeling. Hence, whatever faculty of perception we employ, we cannot detect any trace of them.

Regarding His saying, ‘…or hear as much as a whisper?’ (*Maryam:* 98), this contains the Arabic word *ar-rikz* (whisper), which is a low voice that can be barely heard.

Such, then, is the practice of Allah *the Almighty* with respect to the deniers of truth from among earlier peoples as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Are they better or the people of Tubba(1) and those before them? We destroyed them, for surely they were guilty.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 37) Where are the people of `Ad, Thamud and Iram, the possessors of lofty buildings, the likes of which has not been created in all the earth? Where is Pharaoh, lord of the hosts? Thus, every tyrant, no matter how advanced his civilisation was, was not able to make it endure because Allah *the Almighty* wanted to efface it. Were the disbelievers of Mecca more powerful than all of them? For this reason, when you hear this question: ‘Do you perceive a single one of them now, or hear as much as a whisper?’ (*Maryam:* 98) You can only reply, ‘No, I do not perceive any one of them now, nor do I hear any whisper of them’.

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(1) The word Tubba is an honorific title of the kings of ancient Yemen, who were the people of Sheba. Each time a man became king over them, they called him Tubba. Similarly, the word Khosrau was applied to the king of Persia, Caesar for the king of Byzantium, Pharaoh for the king of Egypt and the Negus for the king of Abyssinia. *See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran, Al-`Azhim, 4/143.*

the chapter of

Ta Ha

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

A the beginning of the chapter of *Ta Ha*(1), Allah *Glorified is He* says:

طه ﴿١﴾

Ta Ha **[1] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 1)**

We have discussed the discrete letters at the beginning of Quranic chapters, but there is no hindrance here for us to point out the explanation of the word *Ta Ha.* Some scholars view this word as being conjoined, thus being written and read '*taha*'. According to this opinion, it is one of the names of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, there are others who regard them as independent letters, *Ta Ha*, such as *Alif Lam Mim* and *Ya Sin,* which are discrete letters at the opening of other chapters. Yet, it happens that these letters coincide with one of the names as occurs in *Nun*, which is a letter and also a name of the whale: '…the man with the whale (*Nun*)….' (*al-Anbiya':* 87) Likewise, *Qaf* is a letter and at the same time the name of a mountain called Mount *Qaf.*

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(1) *Ta Ha is the 20th chapter in the arrangement of the Noble Quran. It contains 135 verses. Scholars unanimously agree that it was revealed in Mecca before `Umar's embracing of Islam. In the chronological order of revelation, it is the forty-fourth chapter having been revealed after chapter Maryam and prior to that of the chapter of al-Waqi`a. According to As-Suyuti, the only two verses which have not been revealed in Mecca are Allah's saying, 'O [Prophet] be patient with what they say–celebrate the praise of your Lord, before the rising and setting of the sun, celebrate His praise during the night, and at the beginning and end of the day, so that you may find contentment and do not gaze longingly at what We have given some of them to enjoy, the finery of this present life: We test them through this, but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.' (Ta Ha: 131-132), which were revealed in Medina. See As-Suyuti, Al-`Itqan Fi `Ulum Al-Quran, 1/42.*

Hence, there is nothing to prevent these letters from signifying a proper noun called, *Taha* so that it could be one of Messenger Muhammad's names(1). This is especially likely since it is followed by: 'It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent down the Quran to you.' (*Ta Ha:* 2) However, you will note a difference here, since the letters *ta* and *ha* are pronounced without the final glottal stop, *al-hamza*. So, although they are discrete letters like *Alif Lam Mim*, the two letters are not fully articulated. This is because the Arabs found the glottal stops burdensome and awkward and therefore lightened the pronunciation of the letters without them. Similarly, instead of saying *dhi`b* (wolf), one says *dhib*, and in the place of *bi`r* (well), one says *bir*. It is this pronunciation which makes it more likely that the letters in question are one of Prophet Muhammad's names.

We have previously explained that the chapter openings comprising such discrete letters differ from other verses of the Quran. For all the verses of the Quran, from beginning to end, are founded upon continuation even if you have the right to pause. For this reason, all copies of the Quran are based upon connectivity with respect to verses as well as to chapters. Thus, you articulate the end of a chapter in linkage with the opening verse of the succeeding chapter: 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, and the Giver of Mercy'.

For example, the final question of the chapter of *Maryam:* 'Do you perceive a single one of them now, or hear as much as a whisper?' (*Maryam:* 98) is linked to the verse: 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' at the beginning of the next chapter. Even with the final word of the last chapters of the Quran, you would recite the verse: 'From among the jinn and the men' (*an-Nas:* 6) and link it to 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' of the next chapter. This is the case even in the final word of the Quran. The last word of the Quran, *an-nasi,* also occurs in a state of connectivity with the final vowel being indicated in the text. This is an indication that the beginning of the Quran is linked to its ending; no part of it is detached from any other part. So, beware of closing it after reaching the last verse, believing that you have finished it, as its ending is connected to its beginning. Thus, when you to read the last verse of the Quran: ‘From among the jinn and the men’ (*an-Nas:* 6), you can continue by reading: ‘In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*al-Fatiha:* 1) of the chapter of *al-Fatiha.*

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'Ibn `Abbas said that the meaning of Taha is 'O you man'; this opinion is cited by Al-Bayhaqi. Al-Mahdi mentioned that Al-Hasan and `Ikrima had the opinion that the Syriac language had this meaning. According to At-Tabari, it means 'O you man', and this is also the opinion of As-Sudi and Sa`id ibn Jubayr. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4337.*

Hence, the entire Quran, every sentence, verse and chapter of it, is based on linkage except for the openings of chapters with discrete letters which are founded upon pause or stopping, such as *Alif Lam Mim*. This is one aspect of inimitability, for the Quran is not a mechanical speech; rather; it is the inimitable Speech of the Lord of the worlds.

For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* precisely clarified the independence of these letters, saying, ‘Learn this Quran, for surely you are rewarded for reciting it; each letter recited is worth ten good deeds. I do not say that *Alif Lam Mim* is a letter, but *Alif* is a letter, *Lam* is a letter and *Mim* is a letter. Each letter recited is worth ten good deeds.’(1)

Allah then Allah says:

مَآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ لِتَشۡقَىٰٓ ٢

**‘It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent
down the Quran to you’ [2] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 2)**

The Arabic word *ash-shaqa`* (distress) means hardship, strain and toil. So, Allah *Glorified is He* excludes hardship from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on account of the revelation of the Quran to him. Then, what is the contrary of this? The contrary is that Allah *the Almighty* bestowed the Quran on him to make him happy. He is happy first of all, that

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ad-Darimi in the Book of the Virtues of the Quran on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him. See Ad-Darimi, Sunnan, 2/429.*

Allah *the Almighty* selected him to be qualified for receiving the Quran, and that he applied the divine way of guidance and carried out all the good deeds. Then why does the expression: '…to distress you [Prophet]...' (*Ta Ha:* 1) occur in this verse? This part of the verse refers to the claim of the disbelievers such as Abu Jahl, Mut`im ibn `Adi, An-Nadru ibn Al-Harith and Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira who went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'You have given yourself much trouble with this Message.' Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Surely, Allah has sent me as a mercy to the worlds.'(1) He was indeed sent in order that he be happy, and that his people and all people would be happy, not in order to distress himself or other people. But from where did the disbelievers come up with this question of hardship and distress? If the believer examines Allah's way of guidance which is revealed in the Quran, he will find that it intervenes in his desires and choices, and bars his lustful passions from exceeding their limits. It commands him to do what he dislikes and what is burdensome for himself, and forbids him from what he habitually enjoys and desires. Hence, Allah's way of guidance apparently runs contrary to the desires of free choice, which vexes and distresses the soul. But you should take into account that you would only deduce this result if you set apart the means from the end and viewed this world and religious obligations as detached from the Hereafter and the recompense.

The believer connects the means with the end, and exerts himself strenuously in this world in the hope of the reward in the Hereafter. Thus, he is happy with Allah's way of guidance and never felt distressed by it. He is like a pupil who endures the strain of study and learning because he is readying himself for the joy of success at the end of the year. On this basis, those disbelievers see distress and vexation in Allah's way of guidance since they set the means apart from the end. For this reason, they felt hardship and distress, while the believers felt the bliss of worship and the enjoyment of undertaking the obligations. This is the issue which caused the disbelievers to worship some gods that do not put any demands upon them, nor laid down any prescribed path or obligations upon them, gods which they could worship as they pleased, proceeding under their auspices on the basis of their unbound sentiments and moods. Therefore, the Quran makes it clear that they are heedless in this domain, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent down the Quran to you.’ (*Ta Ha:* 2)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad on the authority of Abu Umamas Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/257.*

Another way of understanding the implications of ‘distress’ is that the revelation of the Quran exposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the mockery and the offenses of the chiefs and the leaders of Quraysh. In fact, they set their fools and young boys upon him in order to revile him and throw rocks at him.

Allah *the Almighty* also excludes unhappiness and distress in this sense: ‘It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent down the Quran to you.’ (*Ta Ha:* 2) This signifies that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should not trouble himself with them, for indeed Allah *the Almighty* revealed the Quran in order that he only would convey it to them.(1) This meaning is repeated frequently in the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) And elsewhere He says, ‘If We please, We should send down upon them a sign from the heaven so that their necks should stoop to it.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4)

We have previously coined a similitude for this with a man who has two slaves, one of whom has been fastened with a rope, while the other has been left unfettered. So, when he summons them and they respond to his command, which one of them will be more subservient to him and more respectful of his command? Without a doubt, it will be the one who is free and unfettered because he comes of his own choice, while he would have been capable of disobedience. Similarly, your Lord *Glorified is He* desires that you come to

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(1) *A relevant Hadith is related by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Ibn `Abbas in the context of a lengthy Hadith in which Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Indeed, Allah sent me but as a conveyor of His Message, and did not send me as a harassing enforcer.’ At-Tirmidhi grades this Hadith as good, authentic one. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3318.*

Him freely believing in Him out of your own volition, while you have the ability to disbelief.

There are some who take pleasure in criticising Islam and accusing Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘The Messenger of Allah commits mistakes and Allah corrects him’. Taken by surprise, we say, ‘In what way does this harm you? After all, it is his Lord Who corrected him. Are you the ones who corrected the Messenger of Allah?! Furthermore, who informed you of his mistakes? Is he *peace and blessings be upon him* not the one who informed you? Is this not an indication of his trustworthiness in conveying the Message, and something for which he should be praised’?

Hence, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has no disdain for being educated by his Lord. It is for this reason that he said, ‘Indeed, I am but a human being and divine inspiration comes to me—that is from Allah—so I say, ‘I am not like anyone of you. Then shortcomings are found in me, so I say, ‘I am naught but a human being like you.’

Those critics of Islam contentiously cited the story of 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was too pre-occupied with the grandees of Quraysh trying to make them pay attention to him. The one who contemplates this story finds that ibn Umm Maktum was a believer who came to ask Messenger Muhammad about something, that is, he could ask him *peace and blessings be upon him* at any other time. On the other hand, the grandees of Quraysh were the leaders of disbelief and the notables of the people. Moreover, they were possessed of vehement recalcitrance in their animosity to Islam. Yet, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was ardently desirous of guiding them and exhausted himself in arguing with them in the hope that Allah *the Almighty* would guide through them those beneath them in social status. Thus, in this situation, he *peace and blessings be upon him* chose for himself that which was more difficult, and his Lord admonished him for this. But it was admonishment in his interest, for him and not against him.(1)

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(1) *Concerning this incident Allah the Almighty says, ‘He frowned and turned (his) back because there came to him the blind man. And what would make you know that he would purify himself, Or become reminded so that the reminder should profit him? As=*

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَّا تَذْكِرَةً لِّمَن يَخْشَىٰ ﴿٣﴾

'But as a reminder for those who hold God in awe' [3] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 3)

This verse shows that Allah *the Almighty* did not reveal the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to distress him, but rather, He revealed it as 'an exhortation', that is, as a reminder for those who hold Allah *Glorified is He* in awe. As for the Arabic word *al-khashya,* it denotes fear and awe, for fear may not be accompanied with awe, whereas fear of Allah *the Almighty* must gather together both fear and awe at the same time.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

تَنزِيلًا مِّمَّنْ خَلَقَ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ ٱلْعُلَى ﴿٤﴾

A revelation from the One who created the earth and the high heaven [4] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 4)

Here, the opening Arabic word *tanzil* is a verbal noun derived from the verb *nazzala* which means that Allah *the Almighty* caused the Quran to descend in revelation. Several forms of the root *n-z-l* are used to refer to the revelation of the Quran, including: *anzalna* (to reveal), *nazzalna* (we sent it down) and *nazala* (to descend). For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely We revealed it on the grand night. And what will make you comprehend what the grand night? The grand night is better than a thousand months. The angels and Jibril (Gabriel) descend in it...' (*al-Qadr:* 1-4). This is because the Quran was revealed in multiple phases. Initially, it had been kept on the Preserved Tablet. When Allah *the Almighty* willed that the Quran carry out its mission in existence, He revealed it all at once to the lower heaven of this world. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* caused it to descend. It then came down from the lower

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= *for him who considers himself free from need (of you). To him do you address yourself. And no blame is on you if he would not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard. And he fears, from him will you divert yourself. Nay! Surely, it is an admonishment. So, let him who pleases mind it.' ('Abasa: 1-2)* heaven in portions upon the heart of Messenger Muhammad according to the circumstances and events. The one who came down with it was Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* a fact which is clear in Allah's saying, 'The Trustworthy Spirit brought it down' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193).

Then, the verse in question continues with Allah's saying, '…from the One who created the earth and the high heavens.' (*Ta Ha:* 4) Here, Allah *the Almighty* singles out the heavens and the earth because they are among the mightiest of His creation. He has prepared the two of them to serve man. Therefore, the moment he viewed this universe arranged to serve him with its earth and its heaven—without having any power to control anything of it—he should have used his intelligence to lead him to believe in the One Who brought this universe into existence. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to you, 'If the Creator has prepared the universe for you with all that is needed to sustain your physical life, would He then leave your spiritual life without His gift'?

The Creator *Glorified is He* created this universe on the basis of a regulated, self-sustaining, equitable, and wise plan. It provides His vicegerent on the earth with the means to survive in his life, and gives him all that he requires in precise measure. The continuity of life calls for food, drink and air, and Allah *the Almighty* has certainly bestowed these upon man with great wisdom. Man needs food, but he can survive without it for a month. He also requires water, but he cannot survive without it for more than ten days. In addition, he needs air, but he cannot do without it for a period longer than several breaths.

It is a manifestation of Allah's Wisdom that Allah *the Almighty* created your body to take in the elements for the sustenance of life for a period of time sufficient for coming up with a stratagem or attracting the sympathy of someone else. When you eat, the body takes what it needs according to the exerted energy, and whatever is in excess of this it stored in your body in the form of fat which nourishes the body when food is not available. Among the marvels of Allah's Omnipotence is that this fatty matter automatically transforms itself into any other substance needed by the body. Thus, if you need iron, it transforms itself chemically into iron; and if you need arsenic, it transforms itself chemically into arsenic. Yet in reality, it is a single substance. So, who would have the ability to undertake this process aside from Him? After having provided you with what sustains your life in terms of food, drink and air, Allah *the Almighty* provides you with that which sustains your species through marriage and procreation.

As for His saying, '…the high heavens' (*Ta Ha:* 4), the Arabic word *al-`ula* (high) is the plural of *`ulya*. This is similar to *kubar*, the plural of *kubr,* meaning 'mighty, grave, great' as found in Allah's saying, 'Surely it (Hell) is one of the gravest (misfortunes).' (*al-Muddaththir:* 35)

In this manner are the sublime constituent elements of the constitution of Allah's vicegerent on the earth perfected. For just as Allah *the Almighty* has given him that which sustains his life and his species in the creation of the heavens and the earth, Allah *the Almighty* has, also provided him with what sustains his immaterial, spiritual aspects with the revelation of the Quran which guards our actions from the wickedness of carnal desires. This is because the One Who revealed the Quran is The One Who created the earth and the high heavens.

The outstanding quality in this sublime constitution of man is the quality of mercifulness. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ عَلَى ٱلۡعَرۡشِ ٱسۡتَوَىٰ ﴿٥﴾

'The Lord of Mercy, established on the throne' [5]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 5)

The previous verse provided us with a manifestation of compassion and mercy and this verse provides us with a manifestation overpowering compulsion and vanquishing force. Here, the establishment of the All Merciful on the throne is to be understood in the context of: '…there is nothing like Him….' (*ash-Shura:* 11)

We have previously discussed the attributes shared in common between Allah *Glorified is He* and His human creatures, for you have hearing and sight, and Allah *the Almighty* has Hearing and Sight. But beware of thinking that Allah's Hearing or Sight is like your hearing or your sight. Similarly, in the matter of being established on the Throne, since Allah *Glorified is He* has a manner of settling Himself on His Throne, but it is not like your own settling yourself on a chair for example.(1)

The Arabic word *al-`arsh* (throne) in the customary usage of Arabs is the elevated seat of a king. Now, does a king sit upon his dais to deal with the matters of his kingdom and direct its affairs except after he is well established in his command?

Likewise, the Creator *Glorified is He* created the universe with its earth and heaven, and created mankind, and caused the Quran to descend to set their lives in order. So, after His command was well established, He did not leave the universe to function mechanistically, for Allah *the Almighty* did not withdraw from His universe and His human creatures because they were in need of His preserving watchfulness over His creation.

Did Allah *Glorified is He* not say in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘O My slaves, sleep to your eyelids content, for I am the ever Watchful, and I do not sleep’?

Thus, Allah’s universe is not an automatic machine, rather it is maintained by virtue of Allah’s Watchfulness over it. That is why the miracles which violated the natural laws are considered a proof of His Watchfulness.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَهُۥ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا بَيۡنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحۡتَ ٱلثَّرَىٰ ۝٦

Everything in the heavens and on earth, everything between them, everything beneath the soil, belongs to Him [6]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 6)

In this verse, Allah Glorified is He shows that He holds sovereignty over what is in the heavens and the earth and that which is under the soil. Allah the

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, ‘That which Sheikh Abu Al-Hasan and others believed was that Allah is established on His Throne without bounds nor specific form, as is the establishment of created being.’ Ibn `Abbas said, ‘He purposely directs the creation in what has been and what will be until the Day of Resurrection and after the Resurrection.’ In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says, ‘The soundest way of understanding this is the way of the righteous predecessors: to adhere to what is found concerning this in the Quran and the Sunnan of Prophet Muhammad without descriptive designation, distortion of meaning, anthropomorphism, negation or comparison.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4341’ Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 3/142*

Almighty only shows His Ownership of valuable things which are of benefit. It is as if He is drawing the attention of His human creatures to what the universe comprises of elements of sustenance for their physical life so that they might seek them out, and to extract what He has stored for them of secrets and treasures in the heavens and the earth. The one who examines the civilisations of peoples will find that they result either from excavations into the earth or from the secrets of outer space in the space age.

If Muslims had understood this verse since it has been revealed, they would have been aware that in the earth and beneath the soil, there are treasures and resources which they did not know about until the modern age, following explorations and excavations. In fact, we have found petroleum and minerals and precious stones, all of them beneath the surface of the soil, just waiting for someone to search for them and derive benefit from them.

Scientists have explained that these resources are distributed in Allah's Earth in equal measures. So, one part of the earth might have water while another might have crops; a third might yet have minerals, whilst a fourth might have petroleum and so forth. It is like a watermelon when you divide it up into equal pieces from the outer surface to the centre. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure.' (*al-Hijr:* 21) Hence, the blessings are already found, yet just waiting for Allah's divine decree to manifest themselves to us and allow us to utilise them to our advantage.

Allah then says:

وَإِن تَجۡهَرۡ بِٱلۡقَوۡلِ فَإِنَّهُۥ يَعۡلَمُ ٱلسِّرَّ وَأَخۡفَى ٧

Whatever you may say aloud, He knows what you
keep secret and what is even more hidden [7]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 7)

Hence, Allah the Almighty tells Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him that Allah Glorified is He watches over his innermost secret just as He watches over what he says aloud; and what is stated aloud is the same for Him as that which is kept secret. Indeed, Allah the Almighty knows what is even more hidden than a secret.

Allah *the Almighty* tells him so even Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is entrusted with the Message. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* says to his *ummah*, ‘Beware of uttering speech which apparently comprises mercy, while it is not actually insincere because just as Allah *the Almighty* knows what is spoken aloud, He also knows the secret and that which is even more concealed than a secret’.

Previously, we have discussed the Arabic word *al-jahr* (aloud) saying that it denotes making yourself audible to the person who wishes to listen. As for the Arabic word *as-sirr* (secret), it means to confide to someone what you would not like to be circulated among other people. So, you tell him that this speech is confidential while you are psychologically at ease that you share your secret with someone you trust not to reveal the secret. Our life is mostly full of matters which distress the heart, and it is necessary that you allow your heart to have a sense of relief. At this point, we can quote the following poet:

Of necessity is a complaint to one of manly virtue
He will console you or cheer you or feel compassion.

Thus, you need someone who listens to you in order to give you relief, and cheer you up, but he should not expose that which you have told him in confidence.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘what is even more hidden’ (*Ta Ha:* 7), it signifies that which is more concealed than a secret. Hence, even if your secret has come out of your mouth into the ear of your listener, there is what is more hidden than this secret, that is, what you have kept to yourself and did not share with anyone.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And conceal your word or manifest it; surely He is Cognisant of what is in the hearts.’ (*al-Mulk:* 13) This verse shows that, Allah *the Almighty* knows their most hidden contents before they become speech.

In addition, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and We know what his mind suggests to him….’ (*Qaf:* 16) The innermost whispering of the soul and what is buried deep in hearts are what is more hidden than a secret. Hence, there are the public statement, the secret statement, and that which is more concealed than a secret. But some knowledgeable people say, ‘There is in Allah’s Knowledge, that which is even more hidden than the more hidden’. So, what is it? They say, ‘Surely, He knows what will be in the soul before it exists’.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* clearly states the statement which all the messengers were sent to communicate:

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَۖ لَهُ ٱلۡأَسۡمَآءُ ٱلۡحُسۡنَىٰ ٨

God—— there is no god but Him — the most excellent names belong to Him [8] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 8)

The statement ‘There is no god but Allah’ is the apex of the doctrine of faith about which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The best of what I and the prophets before me have said is: None has the right to be worshipped but Allah.’(1)

So, as long as there is no god except Allah *the Almighty* He is entrusted with you, for there is no other god to challenge Him. Therefore, perform good deeds for His sake and Allah *the Almighty* will suffice you in all respects, and you will thereby relieve your soul from the contending and divergent powers, and He will make you independent of every need.

In the same vein, once an Arab Bedouin entered upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was speaking with Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and the Arab Bedouin could not comprehend anything of what the two of them were saying. So, he said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I do not understand your sound and the sound of Abu Bakr. The only thing I know is that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’ Whereupon, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘It is that about which we are murmuring O brother of the Arabs.’(2) It is the foundation and the pivotal axis around which Islam revolves.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As Allah be pleased with him. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3585.*

(2) *It is narrated that some companions of the Prophet said, ‘The Prophet said to a person, “What do you say in prayer?” He replied, “I first recite tashahhud (supplication recited in sitting position in prayer), and then I say, ‘O Allah, I ask You for paradise, and I=*

The Arabic word ‘Allah’ is the name of the necessarily Existent Creator with all the Attributes of perfection He possesses. So, Allah *the Almighty* is Allah, the Existent, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Ever-Living, the One Who Grants Life, and the Inflictor of Harm. All these attributes belong to Him. But inasmuch as these attributes attain the degree of perfection in Him, they become names for Him such that if the name ‘Creator’ or the ‘All-Provider’ is uttered, it applies only to Him.

Mankind may share some of these attributes with the Creator, as indicated in His saying, ‘And when there are present at the division the relatives and the orphans and the needy, give them (*yarzuq*)….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 8) For a human being also provides sustenance (*yarzuq*); however, his provision is derived of Allah’s Provision, for Allah *the Almighty* is the sublime All-Provider, and from the ocean of His bounties everyone takes a handful.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 14); and He also says, ‘…and you create to a lie!…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 17) This means that there are creators other than Him. Now, the meaning of creation is bringing forth something out of nothing. Thus, the one who brings sand and manufactures a drinking glass is the creator of the glass. So, you brought something into being from non-existence, and Allah *the Almighty* brought something into being from non-existence. However, you created something out of something else whose existence preceded yours. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* is the best of creators. Yet, your Lord does not begrudge being just to you and calling you a creator. This makes it obligatory upon you that you be just to Him by saying that He is: ‘…the best of creators.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 14)

Moreover, if Allah *the Almighty* respects your creating and thus calls you a creator on this basis, and does not begrudge granting you one of His attributes, yet He has informed you that He is the best of creators. This is because you create a non-existent thing which remains in a fixed state; however, the Creator *Glorified is He* creates a non-existent thing and grants it life, and causes

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= *seek refuge in You from Hell-Fire’, but I do not understand your sound and the sound of Mu`adh (what you say or he says in prayer).” The Prophet said, “We too go around it (Paradise and Hell-fire).” See Ahmad, Musnad, 3/474; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3847; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 792.*

it to conjoin with its like and produce offspring. So, is the person who creates a drinking glass able to make of it male and female so as to produce drinking glasses?! Or can a small drinking glass become large, or feel pain if it is broken, for example?! Thus, Allah *the Almighty* is the best of creators, and likewise He is the best of providers, inheritors and schemers.

As for Allah's saying, 'the most excellent names belong to Him' (*Ta Ha:* 8), the Arabic word *al-husna* (excellent) is the feminine superlative—like *al-kubra* (the greatest, the largest)—as opposed to *ahsan* which is used for the masculine superlative. Hence, there are good names (*hasana*) which are names pertaining to creation, but as for Allah's names they are the excellent (*al-husna*) because they have attained the highest level of perfection. This is also because the names and the qualities to which they refer exist in the Exalted Creator. So, when in reference to Allah's names you say, 'The Provider', then it is the best quality of providing, not a good quality.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'For those who do good is good (*husna*) reward (*al-husna*) and more (than this) …' (*Yunus:* 26); He does not say *hasana* because they did exceptional good and thus they deserve *al-husna* and what is more than that.

In reality, Allah's names are attributes, but when they are used to refer to Him, they become names. You have the right to name a black youth '*Qamar*' (radiant like the moon), and a dwarf '*At-Tawil*' (the tall one) since when a name is applied in the sense of a proper name to something else, its link to its original meaning is dissolved, and only its function as a proper name remains in force. However, Allah's names maintain their original, excellent meaning even after they become His names. Hence, they are the excellent names.

After Allah *the Almighty* speaks about Prophet Muhammad who is the final messenger and the bearer of the divine way of guidance—for there is no prophet after him, and after his way of guidance there is no other way—Allah *the Almighty* wishes to comfort him with consolation and to illustrate his station in the procession of the messages. In doing so, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to provide him with a model example of the messengers before him, and to portray how every messenger endured hardship commensurate with his Message. While previous messages were limited in time and place, those charged with conveying them wore themselves out in their cause. So just imagine a messenger who comes with a message for all time and all places. It is inevitable that he will encounter difficulties equivalent to all other messengers combined. Hence, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* was saying to him, ‘Prepare yourself mentally, O Muhammad, that you will encounter strain and difficulty corresponding to the greatness of your Message; you are the final Prophet; and the expanse of your Message in time, which extends to the Final Hour, and in space to all the earth’.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* selected for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the story of a prophet who possessed a steadfast determination, for he came as a messenger to the Children of Israel and to Pharaoh. As for the Children of Israel, they were a materialistic people, and as for Pharaoh, he had claimed divinity. Allah *the Almighty* chose to narrate the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to Messenger Muhammad and to thereby console him in all that he faced of hardship in conveying the Message. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith; and in this has come to you the truth and an admonition, and a reminder to the believers.’ (*Hud:* 120) Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘Say, “I am not the first of the apostles….”’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 9)

So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is like other messengers who certainly encountered trouble and hardship commensurate with the scope of their messages. He will also find trouble and hardship in proportion to the scope of his Message. This is analogous to the case of the student who is satisfied with completing middle school, while another is not satisfied but with getting his secondary or university certificate; a third person might yet strive for a doctorate. There is no doubt that each of them expends effort corresponding to his mission.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَهَلْ أَتَىٰكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰٓ ﴿٩﴾

Has the story of Moses come to you [Prophet]? [9] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 9)

When a question comes from Allah *the Almighty* you can be sure that it is not a real question. It is not intended to be an inquiry here because Prophet

Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* information comes to him from his Lord *Glorified is He* so how could Allah *the Almighty* ask him about anything? The intention of the interrogative here is to make one eager for what follows. It is like when you say to your companion, 'Have you heard what happened yesterday'? In this way, you rouse his longing to hear what happened.

The Arabic word *al-hadith* (story) in the verse in question means an informative narration about Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* whether it comes to Prophet Muhammad through Divine inspiration or in another way, that is, someone may have related it to him. So, has this story reached you? Listen to it now from me:

إِذْ رَءَا نَارًا فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ ٱمْكُثُوٓا۟ إِنِّىٓ ءَانَسْتُ نَارًا لَّعَلِّىٓ
ءَاتِيكُم مِّنْهَا بِقَبَسٍ أَوْ أَجِدُ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ هُدًى ﴿١٠﴾

He saw a fire and said to his people, 'Stay here —
I can see a fire. Maybe I can bring you a flaming
brand from it or find some guidance there' [10]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 10)

Let us note here that the context does not mention the story of Musa (Moses) from its beginning which starts by the event mentioned in Allah's saying, 'And We inspired to Musa's (Moses's) mothers, saying, suckle him…' (*al-Qasas:* 7). Then follows his departure from the city in fear and his journeying to Shu`aib (Jethro), etc. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* goes directly to the core of the matter, namely; the prophetic mission.

Concerning His saying, '…I can see a fire. Maybe I can bring you a flaming brand from it or find some guidance there.' (*Ta Ha:* 10), the Arabic word *anast* (I can see) means that he saw and sensed something which invites intimate acquaintance, something to be glad about and to find appeasement in. Its opposite, the *tawjast*, means to have premonition, apprehensions about something bad or evil which one should be afraid of, as found in His saying, 'Musa (Moses) was inwardly alarmed.' (*Ta Ha:* 67)

As for the Arabic expression *la`alli* (maybe I can), it signifies that hopefully he will find in the fire a *qabas* (flaming brand), which is taken from the fire. You then take from it a piece of burning wood like a candle. In another context, Allah *the Almighty* utilised the word *jadhwa* which refers to the fire when its flames had gone out but there remain its embers from which you can ignite a fire. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…Surely, I see fire; I will bring to you from it some news, or I will bring to you there from a burning firebrand....' (*an-Naml:* 7)

These are all multiple forms and states of fire, but there is no contradiction in them as some take pleasure in saying. This is because when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, 'Maybe I can' (*Ta Ha:* 10), he was hoping to find a burning brand, but he did not know what state the fire would be when he reached it; would it be a burning brand (*qabas*) or an ember (*jadhwa*)? Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had sought a burning brand for his family because they found themselves in a rainy and very cold night. In addition, they were foreigners, not knowing anything about the place, for they had not travelled previously through this way and thus they were travelling without knowing which direction to take. So, what should Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* do being accompanied by his wife, young son and his servant? They were in dire need of fire for warmth in this bitterly cold climate, or to seek direction in the route. For this reason, he said, '…or find some guidance there' (*Ta Ha:* 10), that is to say, a guide who can indicate the way to us, in another verse, he said, '…Wait, I have seen a fire, maybe I will bring to you from it some news.…' (*al-Qasas:* 29) Therefore, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* caught sight of fire, he hastened to it after reassuring his family: 'Stay here—I can see a fire.' (*Ta Ha:* 10)

This issue of the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was subjected to doubt on the part of the adversaries of Islam since they found different contexts in a single story. This is because at one time he said, 'Stay here—I can see a fire. Maybe I can bring you...' (*Ta Ha:* 10); and in another verse, he said, '…maybe I will bring to you from it some news.…' (*al-Qasas:* 29) Moreover, on one occasion he said 'a brand' (*qabas*), and on another 'a burning brand' (*shihab qabas*), and elsewhere 'an ember' (*jadhwa*). In addition, in one place, he said, '…or find some guidance there' (*Ta Ha:* 10); and in another he says, '…maybe I will bring to you from it some news.…' (*al-Qasas:* 29)

The one who carefully examines the situation which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* his young son and his servant found themselves in at that isolated place, with the weather being gloomy and overcast, will find that the differences of the story details is normal. This is because each of them received the report from Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in a particular way. So, when he saw the fire and informed them about it, he wished to reassure them, hence he said, '…I will bring to you from it….' (*an-Naml:* 7) Then, when he saw them clinging to him and saying, 'Do not leave us in this place', he said, 'Stay here....' (*Ta Ha:* 10) Perhaps he said one of these statements to his wife and son, and said the other to his servant. They must have necessarily questioned him, and thus the statements differed concerning a single situation. This also is true regarding his saying 'brand' (*qabas*) or 'ember' (*jadhwa*), for when he said, '…maybe I will bring to you from it' (*al-Qasas:* 29), he hoped to find a brand there because he may go and find the fire in a state of glowing embers. On another occasion, he firmly said, '…I will bring to you from it….' (*an-Naml:* 7) Hence, they are differing scenes constituting the fabric of the complete story. The expressions are multiple because the situation in that event is susceptible to revision, and it does not terminate with a single expression.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّآ أَتَىٰهَا نُودِىَ يَـٰمُوسَىٰٓ ﴿١١﴾

When he came to the fire, he was summoned,
"Moses!" [11] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 11)

It is said that when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had reached the fire, he found light glittering in a tree, yet neither did the greenery of the tree affect the glittering light, nor did the light cover the tree hindering its greenery. Hence, it was a marvellous phenomenon, which none would be capable of producing except Allah *the Almighty*. This fire was the first welcoming, appeasing thing that manifested itself for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in this wild, desolate place. As if this amazing sight which he saw was a divine preparation for him so that he might receive the message from His Lord. So, the issue is not merely one of normal sight.

While he was in this state of amazement, '…he was summoned, "Musa (Moses)!"' (*Ta Ha:* 10) Allah's saying, '…he was summoned…' (*Ta Ha:* 10), indicates that the One Who called out to him knew exactly who he was and for this reason he was called by his name: 'Musa (Moses)!' (*Ta Ha:* 10) Inasmuch as this was the case, the expectation of good was present in him and he began to feel assured with regard to the source of calling, and to desire intimate association with it. So, he searched for the origin of the voice, not knowing from whence it came. He therefore considered it a wondrous phenomenon like the sight of the tree from which light shone forth.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنِّيٓ أَنَا۠ رَبُّكَ فَٱخۡلَعۡ نَعۡلَيۡكَۖ إِنَّكَ بِٱلۡوَادِ ٱلۡمُقَدَّسِ طُوٗى ١٢

I am your Lord. Take off your shoes: you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa [12] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 12)

As soon as his Lord said to him 'I am your Lord.' (*Ta Ha:* 12), whatever was in Musa's (Moses's) heart of wonderment and astonishment for what he saw and heard was removed. After all, he knew that it all this is from Allah *the Almighty* and he was therefore relieved and gladdened in the hope of seeing other marvels. In Allah's saying, 'I am your Lord' (*Ta Ha:* 12), we should consider that when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about Himself, He uses the first person singular: 'I am your Lord.' (*Ta Ha:* 12) But when Allah *the Almighty* speaks of His actions, He employs the plural form, as in His saying, 'Surely We revealed it on the grand night' (*al-Qadr:* 1), in His saying, 'Surely We have revealed the Reminder...' (*al-Hijr:* 9), and also in His saying, 'Surely We inherit the earth and all those who are on it….' (*Maryam:* 40)

Here, we may pose a question which is, 'Why does Allah speak about His actions in the plural form, while He calls us to affirm His Oneness and not to ascribe partners to Him'? It is said that when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about Himself, He must necessarily reflect His Divine Oneness, a fact which is clear in His saying, 'I am Allah; there is no god but Me, so worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me.' (*Ta Ha:* 14)

As for His action, Allah *the Almighty* speaks in the plural form since His actions need a multiple of His attributes and diverse capacities. It requires His Divine Will, Power, Knowledge, and Wisdom. Hence, Allah's attributes support one another in undertaking an action. For this reason, expressions about this occur in the plural form. The Arabic letter *nun* referring to the first person plural subject, is used to manifest Allah's Greatness in His saying, 'We have revealed the Reminder...' (*al-Hijr:* 9) and in His saying, 'We inherit the earth….' (*Maryam:* 40)

The address to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came in the expression of Lordship: 'I am your Lord' (*Ta Ha:* 12) in order to show intimacy with him. This is because the attribute 'Lordship' denotes the One Who assumes responsibility for your protection and your education. Allah *the Almighty* created and provided you out of nothing. Here, Allah *the Almighty* does not say 'Surely, I am Allah' because Divinity gives rise to the requirements of prescribed duties, worship and regulating the actions by do this and don't do this.

Regarding His saying, 'I am your Lord' (*Ta Ha:* 12), it means that Allah *the Almighty* conferred a special Grace on him, because the messengers are different from the rest of mankind, for they get a special education. This fact is clear in Allah's saying, '…that you should be reared under My watchful eye' (*Ta Ha:* 39) and similarly He says, 'I have chosen you for Myself.' (*Ta Ha:* 41) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* brings up and instructs the messengers with an upbringing that conforms to the mission they will undertake.

As for His saying, '…Take off your shoes...' (*Ta Ha:* 12), this is the first command for Musa (Moses). The removal of shoes is meant to be a mark of humility and a demonstration of awe. In addition, the place is sacred and this is also a reason for such reverent behaviour: '…you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa.' (*Ta Ha:* 12) It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was commanding him, saying, 'So, remove your shoes so that your body is not separated from the soil of this sacrosanct, pure place, and do not allow your shoes to come between you and having direct skin-contact with the grains of this soil'. This makes one think of some people's opinion of walking with bare feet in Medina. Someone who followed this practice said, 'Perchance my foot step might coincide with a spot where Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stepped'.

About the Arabic name *Tuwa*, it refers to the valley where Allah's encounter with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* took place(1). This is a general description of the location, the identification of which occurs in another verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And when he came to it, a voice was uttered from the right side of the valley in the blessed spot of the tree….' (*al-Qasas:* 30)

There are some who think that there is a repetition in the verse above, but this is not the case. Rather, it is the foundation of new speech, clarifying and localising where the sacred valley of Tuwa is. Thus, if you asked, 'Where is *Tuwa*? You would be told, 'On the right-side of the valley'. But you may then say, 'The right-hand side of the valley itself is lengthy, so where is this place precisely'? You would be told, 'At the blessed spot of the tree'.

Hence, the latter verse specifies the place for you with greater precision. It is as when you say, 'I live in such-and-such a quarter, on such-and-such a street, at such-and-such a number'.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

وَأَنَا ٱخۡتَرۡتُكَ فَٱسۡتَمِعۡ لِمَا يُوحَىٰٓ ١٣

I have chosen you, so listen to what is being revealed [13] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 13)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was saying to Musa (Moses), 'Though I have been your Lord and Lord of the disbelievers, I shall augment you with a privilege for you only'. This privilege is that: 'I have chosen you…' (*Ta Ha:* 13), that is, for bearing the Message, and Allah *the Almighty* is most Cognisant of to whom he entrusts His Message.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says that these opinions concur with the statements of Ibn `Abbas, Mujahid and others. On the other hand, Ad-Dahhak said, 'It is a deep circular valley similar to a long rolled up thing (At-Tuwa)'; while Al-Hasan said, 'The valley was doubly blessed and sanctified on two occasions. Al-Mahdawi related from Ibn `Abbas that it was called Tuwa because Musa (Moses) traversed it at night, as he went along it and ascended to the highest part of the valley. So it is as if He said: 'Behold you are in the hallowed valley', which you crossed and enwrapping it, that is to say, you passed by it and hence enfolded it with your walking. In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says, 'The first interpretation is the soundest as it concurs with Allah's saying, 'When his Lord called upon him in the holy valley, twice.' (an-Nazi'at: 16) See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4347; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 3/144.*

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the disbelievers of Mecca did not find objection in the Quran. They did not find in it any flaw regarding what it calls for in terms of virtuous traits of character and ideals. Furthermore, they did not find any shortcomings in its literary style, given the fact that they were well versed in excellent style with ears that passionately loved eloquence of speech. Thus, they directed their criticism of Messenger Muhammad, saying: 'Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?'(1) (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Hence, their entire opposition was against the fact that the Quran was revealed to 'Muhammad' specifically. For this reason, the Quran rebukes them and exposes their foolishness in this matter, saying, 'Will they distribute the mercy of your Lord?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) How could this be possible while Allah *the Almighty* has distributed between them their means of temporal livelihood? This fact is provided in His saying, 'We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world….' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) Despite that, they wish to distribute Allah's Mercy, saying, 'This should have been bestowed upon this one, and that should have been bestowed upon that one'.'

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…so listen to what is being revealed….' (*Ta Ha:* 13) The Arabic root comprising *s-m-`a* gives rise to the following derivations: s*ami`a* (to hear), *`istama`a* (to listen) and *tasamma`a* (to give ear intently). When we say *sami`a*, it means to hear something coincidentally, such as when you are walking along the road, you hear a lot of speech, some of which concerns you and some of which does not concern you. This is due to the fact that the ears do not have coverings which prevent hearing, like the lids of eyes, for example; when you see a sight which is disagreeable to you, you can close your eyes. Thus, you hear everything that reaches your ear, and you have no choice in the matter.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says that the two cities here refer to Mecca and Ta`if, but the scholars have disagreed as to the identification of the man intended from each city unto whom the Quran should have been revealed. Several scholars like Qatada who says that they meant by this was Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and `Urwa ibn Mas`ud Ath-Thaqafi. Mujahid, on the other hand, said that they specifically meant `Utba ibn Rabi`a. Ibn Kathir adds, 'It seems evident that they meant a man of great standing of wither of the two cities.' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 4/128.*

However, the Arabic word *`istama`a* implies that you consciously take it upon yourself to hear, and the speaker is free either to speak or not to speak. As for the Arabic word *tasamma`a*, it is to make the utmost effort to hear.

Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was informed that the tribulation of song would become common and that the devices for broadcasting this affliction would become wide-spread, pouring into every ear in spite of itself, he said, ‘Whoever listens intently to the songstress slave-girl, molten copper will be poured into his two ears.’ This Hadith refers to the one who takes it upon himself to hear, and intentionally turns the radio or television to this singing. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say *sami`a* (to hear) because everyone would be the recipient of this evil in spite of himself.

Here, in the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…so listen (*`istami`*) to’ (*Ta Ha:* 13); He does not say, ‘*tasamma`*’ since one cannot demand Allah *the Almighty* to speak. Commanding Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to listen means that he should summon all his faculties, and prepare all his senses in order to hear; for if the ear is for hearing, there are nevertheless other senses which you can employ in giving attention, as the eye sees, the nose smells and the tongue speaks. Thus, he is obliged to summon all his senses to hear, and to ready his heart to heed that which he hears, and to carry out that which is demanded of him. It is for this reason that when you are speaking to your companion and you find him distracted apart from you, you say, ‘It is as if you were not with me’. What is the reason for this? It is because one of his faculties has wandered and distracted him from listening.(1)

Regarding His saying, ‘what is being revealed…’ (*Ta Ha:* 13), the Arabic word *al-wahy* (inspiration) generally means information about the unseen from any source to any person regarding anything, whether good or bad. But as for revelation from legal perspective, it is a communication from Allah *the Almighty* to a messenger who has been sent with a way of guidance for the benefit of His slaves. Thus, if the Revelation of Allah *the Almighty* to the mother of Musa (Moses), or to the disciples of `Isa (Jesus) does not constitute revelation in the strict theological and juridical sense in such a manner, revelation has been defined in terms of from whom it comes, to whom it is conveyed and about what it is.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi relates, ‘Sufyan ibn `Uyayna said, “The beginning of knowledge is listening, then understanding, then memorisation, then acting upon what you have learned, then propagation through teaching or writing. This is because when the slave listens to the Book of Allah and to the Sunnan of His Prophet with a sincere intention according to that which Allah wants, He will cause him to understand what He wants, and He will place light in his heart.”’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4348.*

It is good to ask here, ‘How does revelation descend from Allah *the Almighty* to the Messenger?’ How does divinity in its sublime lofty meet with mankind in its nether depth? Hence, there is an imperative need for an intermediary. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Allah chooses messengers from among the angels and from among the men….’ (*al-Hajj:* 75)

Thence, the chosen one of the angels receives from Allah *the Almighty* and gives to the chosen one of mankind, for the highest cannot meet with the lowest directly: ‘It is not granted to any mortal that Allah should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He wills: He is Exalted and Wise.’ (*ash-Shura:* 51) Thus, the disposition of man and his nature do not qualify him for this encounter with Allah *the Almighty*. How could this be possible since when Allah *Glorified is He* revealed Himself to the mountain, he demolished it? It is a manifestation of His Exaltedness that we do not see Him or speak with Him directly, nor do we sense Him with any of our senses. Moreover, if Allah *the Almighty* could be sensed with any faculty of perception, He would not merit being the true God.

Now, how could Allah *the Almighty* be perceived, while there are things in His creation which cannot be perceived such as the spirit, for example? After all, we have no awareness of its true nature, nor where it is, and we cannot sense it with any of our faculties of perception. So, if the spirit is created yet we are incapable of perceiving it, then how could we possibly perceive its Creator?

In the same vein, can you perceive the ‘truth’ which people ascribe to themselves and claim to uphold, with each of them priding himself that he speaks the word of truth—and, likewise justice and other immaterial qualities? Are you aware of their form? So, how can you aspire to perceive the Creator *Glorified is He*?

Hence, an aspect of Allah's Majesty is that faculties of perception do not discern Him, and Allah *the Almighty* does not meet with men in a direct encounter. Thus, the chosen one of the angels receives from Him and conveys to the chosen one of mankind. Then the chosen one of mankind conveys this revelation to mankind. Notwithstanding, concerning the matter of receiving the revelation, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to strain himself to the limit, and his forehead would pour forth sweat at the commencement of revelation to him. This is the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* willed to withhold revelation from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for some period so that he might take rest from the encounter with the angel sent to him. So, when the periodic interruption of divine inspiration took place, this preserved for him the sweetness of what had been revealed to him and caused him to yearn for divine inspiration anew. Hence, all that he encountered of hardship and duress while receiving the revelation seemed insignificant to him, due to the pre-occupation of his heart with something that caused him to forget his difficulties.

It has been narrated that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in a state of receiving the revelation, he would hear around him reverberations like the buzzing of bees. Moreover, if it happened that he placed his foot on one of his companions when revelation was descending upon him, and the companion felt as if it was a mountain. If revelation came upon him while he was mounted upon a riding beast, it would kneel down and groan from his weight.

We have drawn a comparison for the intermediary between the divine nature and human nature with an electric current. When we connect it to a small lamp, it cannot support the power of the current, so we install a device which regulates the current for it, and provides the lamp with the power corresponding to its requirements, otherwise it will burn out.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

إِنَّنِيٓ أَنَا ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنَا۠ فَٱعۡبُدۡنِي وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ لِذِكۡرِيٓ ﴿١٤﴾

I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me [14]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 14)

In the verse before previous one, Allah *the Almighty* says to Musa (Moses), 'I am your Lord' (*Ta* Ha: 12), in order to reassure him and to put him at ease that He is the Compassionate Provider, providing even for the disbeliever who disobeys Him. But here, He addresses him with His saying, 'I am Allah...' (*Ta Ha:* 14), which means that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who lays down obligations and the One to be worshipped and obeyed in His commands or prohibitions. Now, the first of these obligations, and their summit and the wellspring from which all pious behaviour issues is: 'I am Allah; there is no god but Me.' (*Ta Ha:* 14) For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said concerning this: 'The best which I and the prophets before me have said is: There is no god but Allah.'(1)

Hence, as long as there is no god save Him, it is not acceptable to take commands or prohibitions except from Him. We should put our trust in Him and our hearts should not be pre-occupied with anyone else, since He wants us to put our trust in Him, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying, 'And rely on the Ever-living Who dies not….' (*al-Furqan:* 58)

The sincere and sagacious one does not place his trust in anyone but Allah *the Almighty*. So, perhaps you place your trust and reliance on someone besides Him, and then a day comes and you do not find him. How true are the words of the poet who said?

Place all of your might and glory in your Lord
Thus, it will be durable and well established

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As Allah be pleased with him. In its complete form, it reads: 'The best of supplication is the supplication of the day of `Arafah, and the best of what I and the Prophets before me have said is, "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, Alone, without partner, to Him belongs all that exists, and to Him belongs the Praise, and He is powerful over all things."' See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3585.*

But if you derive your strength and honour from one who dies
Then, surely, your might and glory are dead.

Hence, when Allah *Glorified is He* states, '…there is no god but Me' (*Ta Ha:* 14), He reassures Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to have no fear, for he will receive no orders from other than Him. In a similar sense, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of power."' (*al-Isra':* 42) This verse shows that if there were any gods with Him, those who lay claim to divinity would go to Him, disputing with Him, or trying to gain favour with Him. However, this will not happen because there are no other gods besides Him.

It is a prerequisite for the true God that He derives no benefit from issuing commands and laying down regulations and laws, and that His Commands and Interdictions be for the welfare of those commanded. On this basis arises a differentiation between the law of Allah, and the law of men. The latter is infused with desires and mixed with interests and selfish motivations. Thus, for example, if the one laying down regulations and making laws is of the working class, he will be partial to them and raise them above capitalists, but if he was of the latter, he would place the capitalists above the workers.

Likewise, another prerequisite for laying down regulations is that there be nothing he is unaware of which might necessitate correction at some later time. Now, these prerequisite conditions exist only in divine legislation, for Allah *the Almighty* possesses the attributes of perfection before He created the creation.

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says after this: 'So worship Me...' (*Ta Ha:* 14). This is to be done by obedience to His commands and avoidance of His prohibitions, for He has no affective inclination in that which He commands you to do, rather, it is in your interest and for your good.

Some people believe that worship refers only to prayer, prescribed alms, fasting, and pilgrimage. However, it has a much broader meaning than this, for every action in life amounts to worship according to the following maxim: everything which the fulfilment of an obligation necessitates is obligatory.

Thus, for example, prayer is not fulfilled except by the covering of what is indecent to expose (*al-`awra*). You should think about this piece of cloth by which you cover your private parts: how many hands have contributed to it from the time it was a seed in the earth until it became fine cloth veiling your nakedness. Each one of these was engaged in worship while they were executing their task is this matter.

Similarly, with the loaf of bread which you eat and the water taps from which you perform your ritual ablution: how many hands, workers, factories, scientists and resources were mustered to serve you in order that you might be able to perform your actions in life?

Hence, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks to us about the Friday congregational prayer, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘O you who believe! when the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know. But when the prayer has ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah’s Grace, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9-10) In this manner, He takes us from work to prayer, and after prayer He commands us to work and endeavour, to disperse in the earth and seek His Bounty. Thus, disobeying His command to: ‘…hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9) is similar to disobeying His command to: ‘…disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah’s Grace, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10) Here, Allah *the Almighty* specifies worldly commerce because the merchant is more covetous about his selling than the buyer is about his purchasing, and it might be that it was in the best interest of the buyer not to make the purchase.

Hence, Islam does not tolerate laziness, nor does it sanction lethargy or sitting around idly. He, who desires laziness, let him not derive benefit from the activity of those who are active. In this regard, there is an incident in which `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* saw a man staying in the mosque and not leaving it. Thereupon he asked, ‘Who provides for his sustenance?’ They said, ‘His brother’ to which he responded, ‘His brother is superior in worship than he is.’ This is because his brother participates in the activity of life and expands the benefit to people.

Thus, all useful work is an act of worship on the condition that it is accompanied by the correct intention. The believer or the disbeliever each works with the intention of providing oneself for a living; but what is the difference between the two of them? The believer works, it is true, to sustain himself, but also to facilitate for other people their own subsistence and the activities of their lives. Thus, if a taxi driver, for example, works to earn an amount that suffices him and then repairs to his home and parks his car, then who will be there for the sick person who needs someone to take him to the doctor? Likewise, if a merchant earns his provision and then shuts his shop, who will sell to the people?

Therefore, you should work for your sake, but also keep in mind the interests of others and their needs. If you do this, then you are in a state of worship. Hence, you should work to the extent of your energy and strength, not to the extent of your needs. Then take what you need from the product of your energy, and what remains is to be returned to the people, either in the form of voluntary alms giving, or at a price. After all, it is enough for you that you facilitated other people's affairs. Hence, we say, 'Worship denotes every activity which performs a service provided that your do you for Allah's sake'.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me.' (*Ta Ha:* 14) Now, why did He single out prayer from among all other acts of worship? This is because prayer is abiding worship which cannot be separated from the believer as long as there is breath in him. On the other hand, obligatory alms-giving, *zakat,* for example, is waived for one who is impoverished, and fasting is waived for the sick and pilgrimage is not obligatory for those who are unable to undertake it. However, as for prayer, there is never any excuse that justifies abandoning it. You can pray standing or sitting or even lying down, and if you cannot pray in this manner, then pray with movements of the head or the eyelids. If you are even incapable of this, then it is sufficient that you envisage it in your heart as long as you are conscious, for the obligation of prayer is not waived for you under any circumstances. In addition, prayer is repetitive worship: five times during a twenty-four-hour period. This is to keep you continuously mindful of the Lord of life if the pre-occupations of life cause you to forget Him. You present yourself for review to your Lord and your Creator five times every day. Just imagine a mechanical device that was presented for review to its maker in such a manner, would it be possible that some defect or malfunction occur in it?

As for obligatory alms giving, this occurs annually, or at every harvest. Fasting is for one month of the year and pilgrimage is required once in a lifetime. For this reason, when some matter distressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he used to get up and pray(1) in order to present himself for review to his Lord and His Creator, We do this in physical manufacturing when we present a machine for review to its maker and engineer who knows the rules of its maintenance. In a Hadith, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My comfort has been provided in prayer.'(2)

We have previously mentioned that prayer has its importance because it reminds you about your Lord five times every day. It also reminds you about yourself and about Allah's Power over others when you see the president and those presided over side by side in the lines of prayer. If you should happen to arrive before your president, you would seat yourself in the first row, and he would seat himself behind you. Then you would see him humbled before Allah *the Almighty* and he would know that you see him in this state. This is then a stimulus for his humility towards you and not presuming superiority over you in the future.

How many a man of high rank and leadership have we seen weeping at the Great Sanctuary in Mecca clinging to the curtains of the *Ka`ba*, and at *Al-Multazam* while he is the great one who people hold in awe. Hence in prayer, there is unrestricted access to worshipful servitude to Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *A Hadith to this effect was narrated by Imam Ahmad in and by Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him, 'When anything distressed the Prophet he prayed.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/388; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, 1319.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, An-Nasa'i and by Al-Hakim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik. In his book, Al-Hakim says, 'This Hadith is authentic according to the conditions stipulated by Muslim, but neither Al-Bukhari nor Muslim narrated it.' Adh-Dhahabi agreed with Al-Hakim on that issue. The complete form of this Hadith is as follows: 'Women and perfume have been made dear to me, but my comfort has been provided in prayer.' See Ahmad, Musnad*, 3/127, 199, *285; An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 7/61; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, 2/160.*

For this reason, among the most dangerous things to affect Muslims is the provision of special places in the mosque for specific kinds of people for whom space is set aside, and they are accompanied by bodyguards even in Allah's house of worship. Then they come at the last minute and sit in the first row. Moreover, among other people is one who spreads out his prayer carpet to reserve a place so that when he arrives, he finds the place empty.

All the Muslims must reject this behaviour. You must push his prayer carpet to the side, and sit there yourself because priority of seating corresponds to priority of being present; and Allah *the Almighty* has indeed arranged this in the mosque in terms of arrival in it. This bad customary practice brings upon its doer many forbidden things, since he makes his way over the necks of people, and unrightfully distinguishes himself from them, and causes a lessening of the spirit of pious servitude in Allah's house of worship.

Due to the importance of prayer and its status among acts of worship, it is distinguished in the manner of its prescription in accordance with its importance. This is because all acts of worship were made obligatory by means of divine inspiration except prayer. Allah *Glorified is He* summoned His truthful Messenger unto Him to convey it to him directly in the light of its importance.

We have propounded a simile for this in the president who, if he wishes to communicate some matter to one of his subordinates, he writes to him. But if the matter is important, he contacts him by phone. However, if it is even more important, he summons him to convey it to him in person. Now, just as Allah *the Almighty* brought Prophet Muhammad close to Him to prescribe prayer, He made prayer a means of proximity for His slaves to Him. Concerning His saying, '…and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me' (*Ta Ha:* 14), the Arabic verb *aqama* means to make something established on firm foundations. Hence, the establishment of prayer is to observe it meticulously and completely in terms of its basic pillars without any shortcoming.

As for Allah's saying, '…so that you remember Me' (*Ta Ha:* 14), it means that prayer reminds us about Allah *the Almighty* for the passage of time and the monotony of blessing may make you forget the Bestower of blessings. So, when you hear the call 'Allah is the Greatest' (*Allahu Akbar*) and you see people hastening to Allah's house of worship, not being distracted by anything, you will remember if you have forgotten, and your heart will pay heed if you have been negligent.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ ءَاتِيَةٌ أَكَادُ أُخْفِيهَا لِتُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍۭ بِمَا تَسْعَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾

The Hour is coming — though I choose to keep it hidden —
for each soul to be rewarded for its labour [15]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 15)

Thus, along with what has preceded, you should take heed of to the fact that the Hour is inevitably coming. Here, the Hour is the life span of the entire universe. As for the life spans of those living in it, they are variable; each according to his predetermined time of death. Thus, whoever dies, his last hour has arisen, and the issue is settled regarding him. Hence, we say that there are two kinds of 'hours': the last Hour of each one of us, and this is his life span and his predestined fate which he is not aware of when it will be; and, then there is the Last Hour of the entire universe, and this is the 'Great Hour'. Thus, 'The Hour is coming...' (*Ta Ha:* 15) signifies that you should keep this in mind at all times. Inasmuch as death will transport you to it quickly, beware of saying, 'I will die soon, but I will only be resurrected after thousands or millions of years' because time is suspended after death. How is this?

Time is not regulated by anything aside from events, thus if events cease to occur, then time also ceases. This is like what happens in sleep; are you able to determine the time that you have slept? Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'On the day that they see it, it will be as though they had not tarried but the latter part of a day or the early part of it.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46)

Similarly, relevant in this context is the slave(1) whom Allah *the Almighty* caused to die for a hundred years, and when He revived him, he said concerning the length of his sleep, 'I have slept a day or part of a day.' The People of the Cave said the same after three hundred and nine years of sleep(1) because a day or part of a day is the maximum period of time that a sleeping person can imagine that he slept. It is for this reason that we say. 'Whoever dies, his final hour of resurrection has arisen'.(2)

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(1) *This is a reference to Uzayr about whom Allah the Almighty says, 'Or the like of him ('Uzayr) who passed by a town, and it had fallen down upon its roofs; he said, "When will Allah give it life after its death?" So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him to life. He said, "How long have you tarried?" He said, "I have tarried a day, or a part of a day..."' (al-Baqara: 259).*

It is a part of Allah's Wisdom to conceal the Last Hour. He has hidden it from everyone. Perhaps if a person knew when his last hour was, he would say, 'I will do what I please, then repent before death'. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* has concealed it so that we might be on our guard to avoid encountering Allah *the Almighty* in a state of rebellious disobedience.

Likewise, He has hidden the Great Hour so that you do appropriate other people's properties, making use of it unjustly and in hostile transgression. This is because you know that if you steal, you will return to Allah *the Almighty* and He will hold you accountable and that is why you should be upright and correct your behaviour.

Regarding Allah's saying, 'The Hour is coming...' (*Ta Ha:* 15), it indicates that it will not be brought, rather, it is coming. Though it is Allah *the Almighty* Who will bring it about, it is as if it was scheduled to occur automatically, so when its time comes, it takes place.

As for His saying, '…though I choose to keep it hidden…' (*Ta Ha:* 15), it contains the Arabic verb *kada* which is not translated explicitly here, signifying to 'come near'. An example of its usage is when you say, 'Zayd is about (*kada*) to come'; in other words, he has approached, but has not yet come. Hence, the intended meaning in the verse is that Allah *the Almighty* has come close to conceal it, so no one is aware of its appointed time. But when it occurs, they we will surely recognise it. As Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "The knowledge of it is only with my Lord; none but He shall manifest it at its time…."' (*al-A'raf:* 187)

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(1) *In this is regard, Allah the Almighty says, 'And thus did We rouse them that they might question each other. A speaker among them said, "How long have you tarried?" They said, "We have tarried for a day or a part of a day…"' (al-Kahf: 19).*

(2) *A Hadith to this effect was realated by Al-`Ajluni on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him with its complete version as follows: 'Be frequent in the remembrance of death. For, surely, if you remember it in a time of abundance, it will disturb your [false] peace of mind; and if you remember it in a time of penury and constriction, it will make it [seem] bountiful. Death is tantamount to the arising of one's Final Hour.' See Al-`Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa`, Hadith no. 2618.*

But there may be another interpretation as His saying, '…to keep it hidden (*ukhfiha*)….' (*Ta Ha:* 15) There are some tri-literal verbs which signify the opposite meanings when the middle letter is doubled. An example of this is in the Arabic verb *marada* meaning to be stricken with illness as opposed to: the doctor treated (*marrada*) him, i.e. he cured him and removed the malady. Similarly, we say, 'I encased (*qashartu*) something, i.e. I provided it with an outer peel or shell; but then we say, 'I peeled (*qashshartu*) the orange' meaning I removed its outer layer.

An example of this is found in Allah's saying, 'By Allah! you will not cease to remember Yusuf (Joseph) until you are a prey to constant disease (*harrad*)….' (*Yusuf:* 85) *Al-harrad* refers to mortal exhaustion, and the verb *harida* means to become fatigued by great strain and hardship. This is to be compared with His saying, 'O Prophet! Urge (*harrid*) the believers to war…' (*al-Anfal:* 65), in which the initial imperative Arabic verb is *(harrid)*. The meaning of *harrid* in the verse is to urge and incite them to fight. It is this which removes mortal exhaustion from them in the face of the disbelievers because if they do not wage war, they will perish. Thus, *harida* means to perish, and *harrada* is the elimination of imperilling fatigue and certain death.

The opposite meaning of a verb may also come by pre-fixing it with the glottal stop *hamza*. A sample of the resulting opposite meanings is found in the following two verses. In the first: 'And as to the deviators (*al-qasitun*), they are fuel of hell' (*al-Jinn:* 15), we find the plural form of the active participle *al-qasit* is derived from the verb *qasata*, and thus means the one who is unjust and deviant through disbelief.

But in the second example, in His saying, '…surely Allah loves those who judge equitably (*al-muqsitin*)' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42), we find the plural form of active participle *al-muqsit* which is derived from the verb *aqsata* and signifies the one who is equitable and does away with injustice. So, while basic tri-literal verb is one and the same, *qasata,* yet the verbal nouns associated with it differ. When we say *qasata qistan*, it means to be just; whereas, *qasata*, *qastan* or *qusutan* means to be unfair. This glottal stop *hamza* in the verb *aqsata* is called the glottal stop of removal or elimination.

Among the expressions deriving from the tri-literal verb *qasata* is: justice and impartiality. Now, the difference between *qasata* and *aqsata* is that *qasata*, in its positive sense, means to be equitable from the very beginning, whereas *aqsata* means that, if someone encounters inequity and wrongdoing, he abolishes it, and removes it. Thus, it adds to justice the elimination of injustice.

Likewise, the verb *`ajama* as in the expression he made the matter unintelligible *`ajama* which means he obscured it; whereas *a`jama*, with a prefixed *hamza* means to rid something of its obscurity or unintelligibility. We have the word *al-mu`jam* (dictionary) which removes the obscurity of words and explains them.

Similarly, in Allah's saying, '…though I choose to keep it hidden…' (*Ta Ha:* 15), the Arabic word *khafiya* means to veil or conceal, whereas *akhfa* as used in the verse means to remove its obscurity or concealed nature. The hidden aspect of a thing will endure except by its enunciation.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'for each soul to be rewarded for its labour.' (*Ta Ha:* 15) In fact, if there were no reckoning and recompense in the Hereafter, then those who wronged their own souls and cause mischief in this world would be more fortunate than the believers who adhered to Allah's Way of Guidance. Hence, in our discussions with communists, we told them, 'You have killed whomever you have caught of your enemies, the capitalists, but what about those who die before you catch them? How would you punish those who managed to elude you? It would have been more suitable for you to believe in a place from which they could not escape, and where they would receive their requital. Indeed, this place is the Hereafter in which every soul is rewarded for its labour.'

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَا يَصُدَّنَّكَ عَنْهَا مَن لَّا يُؤْمِنُ بِهَا وَٱتَّبَعَ هَوَىٰهُ فَتَرْدَىٰ ﴿١٦﴾

Do not let anyone who does not believe in it and follows his own desires distract you from it, and so bring you to ruin[16] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 16)

In this verse, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was granting Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* immunity from what the disbelievers – who cast doubts about the Hereafter and fear that it is true – will say to him. They wish that the Hereafter would be a lie, since it is not in their interest; in other words, it is to their advantage to deny it. So, you should beware of listening to these disbelievers when they seek to divert you from the Hereafter by saying: ‘What! When we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we then certainly be raised, or our fathers of yore?’ (*as-Saffat:* 16-17)

We should ask here, ‘Why do they believe that the Hereafter is so far-fetched? Is not Allah *the Almighty* not He Who created them out of nothing, capable of refashioning them after they have turned to bones?’ In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is most easy to Him.’ (*ar-Rum:* 27)

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* uses the adjective ‘easier’/'most easy' in the comparative form in order to show us how it is easy for Him to bring the creation back to life. This analogy is in accordance with our understanding, as we know for sure that there is something easy and something easier. However, regarding Allah *the Almighty* there is neither easy nor easier in this sense because His Command is fulfilled even before saying the imperative command ‘Be’.

Here arises a question, which is, ‘Why do the disbelievers reject the Hereafter and refuse to believe in it?’ In fact, they know that if there is a life to come, they will be requited for what they have done. Since this issue is difficult for them, they thought that it is in their interest to believe that the Hereafter is a falsehood.

How truthful was Abu Al-‘Ala’ Al-Ma’arri when he said:

The astrologer and the shaman both claim
    Bodies are not resurrected, [so] I told them

If your words are correct, then I am no loser

Or [if] my words are correct, then the loss is upon the two of you

In other words, if a believer in the Resurrection did not gain by this belief, then he would not lose. However, as for those who deny it, they are truly the losers.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘… and so bring you to ruin’ (*Ta Ha:* 16), it means that if you followed those who do not believe in the Hereafter, you would be inflicted with eternal damnation.

In this manner, Allah’s Discourse comes to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; firstly, He *the Most High* mentions the foremost of the Pillars of Faith, that is, to believe in Him Alone without any partners ascribed to Him. Then He *the Almighty* mentions the last of these Pillars which is to believe in the Resurrection. Hence, the matter comes from Him in the beginning and returns to Him in the end, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘I am Allah; there is no god but Me’ (*Ta Ha:* 14), until He says: ‘The Hour is coming—though I choose to keep it hidden….’ (*Ta Ha:* 15)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* depicts for us the beginning of His Revelation to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*:

وَمَا تِلْكَ بِيَمِينِكَ يَٰمُوسَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾

Moses, what is that in your right hand? [17]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 17)

In this verse, the word ‘what’ is an interrogative particle, and the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ refers to something grammatically feminine, namely that which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is grasping in his hand. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* asks him, ‘What is this thing with you?’ In fact, the response to this question could be delivered by a single word: a staff. As for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* he surely knows that Allah, Who is asking this question, is fully aware of what is in his hand, but this is a kind of reassuring talk since the situation is difficult for him, and his Lord wants to make him feel at ease and to establish familiarity with him. Now, if the friendliness comes from Allah *the Almighty*, then the slave should make full use of the opportunity and prolong the period of sociability with Him, not cutting short the domain of conversation by responding with a single word. Therefore, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* replies:

قَالَ هِىَ عَصَاىَ أَتَوَكَّؤُاْ عَلَيْهَا وَأَهُشُّ بِهَا عَلَىٰ غَنَمِى وَلِىَ فِيهَا مَـَٔارِبُ أُخْرَىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

‘It is my staff,’ he said, ‘I lean on it; restrain my sheep with it; I also have other uses for it’ [18] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 18)

After Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, ‘It is my staff …’ (*Ta Ha:* 18), He opened up for himself another area for further discourse by adding: ‘I lean on it and restrain my sheep with it. I also have other uses.’ (*Ta Ha:* 18) At this point, he felt that he expatiated on this matter, so he tried to be brief by saying: ‘I also have other uses.’ (*Ta Ha:* 18)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was expecting another question to be asked such as ‘What are these other uses?’ He expected such a question to prolong his friendliness with his Lord. After all, no one ends a conversation with Allah *the Almighty* except he who is indifferent to Him.

The staff has a long history with mankind, for it is one of the necessities of training, exercise and travelling. In addition, it has great importance in shepherding, etc. In this verse, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* mentions some of its uses by saying: ‘… I lean on it…’ (*Ta Ha:* 18) which signifies that he supports himself with it while walking. A person needs to support himself with a staff in marching and in fatigue because he is in need of two kinds of strength: strength for movement and walking and another to support the body. A staff helps the person to support the weight of his body, especially if he is tired and his two feet are not strong enough to carry him.

Thus, his statement, ‘… I lean on it…’ (*Ta Ha:* 18) means that he relies on it while walking, and when he stops to pasture sheep, he props himself on it. Supporting oneself by leaning in this manner allows a person to alternate between his two feet, resting the foot that is tired, and shifting from one side to the other.

If a person remains in one posture resting up one part of his body for a long time, the pores of the body become blocked in that area, not allowing for the secretion of sweat. This causes severe damage, which we observe in patients who are confined to their beds for a long time, damages which appear in the form of sores known as ‘bed sores’. It is for this reason that doctors recommend these patients to alter their position, by not sleeping on one side.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* willed to turn the People of the Cave over in their sleep from one side to another, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘We turned them about to the right and to the left ….’ (*al-Kahf:* 18)

Therefore, if a person stands or sits for a long time without anything to lean upon, he will be agitated and unsettled. Based on this, the restful couch is one of the manifestations of blessing and luxury in this world and in the Hereafter. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says about the governor’s wife, i.e. Zulaykha: ‘… and prepared for them a restful couch ….’ (*Yusuf:* 31)

Concerning the blessings of the Hereafter, He *the Most High* says: ‘Reclining on thrones set in lines, and We will unite them to large-eyed beautiful ones.’ (*at-Tur:* 20) He also says: ‘Reclining on beds, the inner coverings of which are of silk brocade …’ (*ar-Rahman:* 54). Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Reclining on green cushions and beautiful carpets.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 76) Hence, reclining is a means of rest, but a person should alter his position of recline from one side to the other so that he is not exposed to what is called ‘bed sores’.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then mentions another use of his staff, namely ‘… restrain my sheep with it...’ (*Ta Ha:* 18) and strike the leaves of trees so that they fall down so that sheep and other livestock can eat them. This is because the herder moves with the livestock in the desert, and they eat of the naturally growing plant which is not cultivated by anyone, only being watered by rain. When this herb is no longer available, the herder needs a staff to strike the leaves of the tall trees so that the sheep can eat them. Hence, his statement, ‘… I lean on it…’ (*Ta Ha:* 18), implies that the staff is for his own repose; on the other hand, his statement, ‘… restrain my sheep with it...’ (*Ta Ha:* 18), indicates that he *peace be upon him* uses it in serving the needs of his flock. This is a kind of training for him how to manage the provisions of both livestock and men, for the herding of sheep trains the person (the shepherd) how to run the affairs of the entire Ummah, followers of the religion.

It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* sent no prophet except that he herded sheep, so that they would be patient while calling people to the Divine Way of Guidance. This fact is proven by the following Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Every prophet has tended sheep.' He was asked, 'And did you?' He replied, 'Yes, I tended them for a few carats for the people of Mecca.'(1)

Back to the verse in question: when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sensed that he had spoken too long to his Lord, he summarised his statement and said, '… I also have other uses' (*Ta Ha:* 18) which denotes that he derives other benefits from the staff.

Scholars may Allah reward them have made attempts to look into the other uses which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not mention about the staff. So, they examined the condition of the herder and the function of the staff in their lives, and they found other uses besides those mentioned.

Amongst these benefits are the following: the primitive herder puts his staff on his shoulder and hangs his provisions of food and water on it. In addition, some herders make use of their time in hunting, a process which requires certain equipment such as a bow, an arrow, and a woven bag in which they gather what they catch. Hence, you see one of them placing the staff on his shoulders lengthwise and he hangs these pieces of equipment from both ends upon it.

Furthermore, if the intense heat of the sun harms him, and he does not find any shelter of shade, he can plant his staff in the earth and throw his robes over it, making it into a kind of tent or umbrella by means of which he protects himself from the heat of the weather. When he needs water and finds that the water of the well is at a very deep level which the bucket cannot reach, he can use the staff to prolong the rope in order to reach the water. These are among the multiple uses of the staff.

Some scholars say that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was surely anticipating that his Lord would ask him about these uses, in order to prolong the conversation with Him. However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not ask him about this since He was going to move on to something more important than the subject of the staff. It is as if He *the Almighty* was saying, ‘What you have mentioned, O, Musa (Moses), concerns the function of the staff with regard to you, but I wish to inform you of its function with regard to Me.’

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ibn Majah on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2262; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2149.*

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَلْقِهَا يَـٰمُوسَىٰ ﴿١٩﴾

God said, Throw it down, Moses [19]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 19)

This command to throw the staff to the ground is a form of training and practice for Musa (Moses) in order to prepare him for his encounter with Pharaoh. At this point, the staff deviates from its regular state which he is familiar with; that is to say, it becomes no longer eligible for leaning upon or restraining sheep. Instead, it transformed from the species of wood to the species of animal and became a snake. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَلْقَىٰهَا فَإِذَا هِىَ حَيَّةٌ تَسْعَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾

He threw it down and – lo and behold! – it became
a fast-moving snake [20] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 20)

This is a drastic transformation in the matter of the staff. It would certainly have been possible to demonstrate a miracle by transmuting the staff, a dry stick, from wood into a green tree, but Allah *the Almighty* performs this miracle for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* because he will need it later. Moreover, if the staff had been transformed into a living tree, it would have established itself in its place. Hence, it changes into a snake, an animal object slithering here and there; this is what he will need in his coming battle.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threw down his staff, ‘… and–lo and behold!–it became …’ (*Ta Ha:* 20); this expression denotes suddenness and surprise. It is like when you say, ‘I went out, and all of a sudden there was a lion at the door.’ When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* cast his staff, which was dry, it instantly turned into a snake which moved at great speed, and it was no longer stiff and dead. Is this not a sudden surprise? It was only natural for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to be frightened at what he saw; so his Lord reassures him by saying:

قَالَ خُذۡهَا وَلَا تَخَفۡۖ سَنُعِيدُهَا سِيرَتَهَا ٱلۡأُولَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾

He said, 'Pick it up without fear: We shall turn it back into its former state [21] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 21)

So, Allah *the Almighty* commands him to pick it up, as He *the Almighty* shall turn it back immediately: '… into its former state' (*Ta Ha:* 21), that is, a dry staff. In view of the symptoms of fright which appeared on Musa (Moses), He *the Almighty* tells him: 'Pick it up without fear ….' (*Ta Ha:* 21) In another verse, He *the Most High* relates Musa's (Moses') fear by saying: 'Musa (Moses) was inwardly alarmed.' (*Ta Ha:* 67)

This phenomenon was a form of training and a means of trial for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* since the staff has a vital function in his Message. It will itself be his miracle in his confrontation with Pharaoh when he strikes the sea with it(1) and in his Call to the children of Israel when he strikes the rock with it whereupon water gushes forth therefrom.(2)

The Quran discusses this part of Musa's (Moses') story in different manners: it sometimes speaks of the staff as if it was a 'serpent'; other times it mentions that it turned into a 'snake'; on a third occasion, it refers to it as a *jan* which is a kind of snake that moves rapidly. Due to this, some raise objections about these differences by saying, 'Then which of these forms did the staff take?' The reality is that the staff had these diverse forms when it was transformed. In terms of its deadliness and ability to kill, it was a snake; in terms of its massive size, it was a serpent, while in terms of the rapidity and subtlety of its movement, it was like a *jan*. All of these traits were in the staff.

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(1) This is in reference to the following verse: 'Then We revealed to Musa: Strike the sea with your staff. So it had cloven asunder, and each part was like a huge mound.' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 63)

(2) This is in reference to Allah's saying: 'And when Musa prayed for drink for his people, We said: Strike the rock with your staff So there gushed from it twelve springs…' (*al-Baqara*: 60).

When you bring together all of these scenes, they provide you with a complete picture of the staff after it had become a snake. Hence, the verses of the Quran complete one another in order to depict the image intended by Allah *the Almighty*.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱضۡمُمۡ يَدَكَ إِلَىٰ جَنَاحِكَ تَخۡرُجۡ بَيۡضَآءَ مِنۡ غَيۡرِ سُوٓءٍ ءَايَةً أُخۡرَىٰ ﴿٢٢﴾

Now place your hand under your armpit and it will come out white, though unharmed: that is another sign [22]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 22)

The word 'hand' is well understood. The Arabic word *Al-Janah*, translated as 'armpit' here, literally refers to the wing of a bird, which corresponds to the arm of the human, starting from the upper arm. The same word is used by Allah *Glorified is He* when He commands us to treat our parents well by saying: 'And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion …' (*al-Isra':* 24). In this verse, He *the Almighty* commands us to be humble with our parents and not to look down upon them superciliously.

In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'Put your hand inside your shirt, and it will come out white but …' (*al-Qasas:* 32). In this verse, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is commanded to put his hand in the pocket of his shirt. This is because people in the past used to position the pocket inside the garment in order to place money and other things into it so that it would be far from the hand of the thief. Then, when a person needed something from his pocket, he would insert his hand into the collar of his shirt in order to reach it. This is among the manifestations of the complementarity nature of the Quranic verses.

In the verse under study, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to contract his right hand and to put it from the collar of his shirt under his upper left arm. The verse continues: '… it will come out white, though unharmed …' (*Ta Ha:* 22); this means that the moment he *peace be upon him* removes his hand, he will find it white, possessing light, brilliance and radiance.

Now, it is well known that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was of brownish colour, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described him when he was asked to depict the messengers whom he met during his Night Journey and Ascension. He said, ‘Musa (Moses) was a man of high stature as if he was of the people of the *Shanu’a* (tribe) …’(1) That is to say, he was brown-skinned and exceptionally tall.

Based on this, the whiteness of the hand and its luminous quality was among Allah’s miraculous signs. If Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had been fair-skinned, the whiteness of his hand would not have been evident.

As for His saying, ‘… though unharmed...’ (*Ta Ha:* 22), it means that the whiteness of Musa's (Moses') hand was not due to any kind of illness, for the whiteness in contrast to the brownness might have been a disease—from which we seek Allah’s protection—such as leprosy, for example, and Allah *the Almighty* excluded this possibility from him.

In Allah’s saying, ‘…That is another sign’ (*Ta Ha:* 22), the word ‘sign’ means a miracle. Yet He *the Almighty* does not say anything about the first miraculous sign here, i.e. the transformation of the staff.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِنُرِيَكَ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِنَا ٱلْكُبْرَى ﴿٢٣﴾

We do this to show you some of Our greatest signs [23]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 23)

In so doing, Allah *the Exalted* discloses to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* some of the wondrous sings to serve as miracles for him. Thus, when He *the Almighty* commands him to do something of this nature in the future, he will be certain that his Lord will neither deceive nor abandon him. Rather, He will support him and grant him victory. This is why he should not be alarmed or afraid nor should he retreat. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was preparing His

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. In his the commentary on Al-Bukhari, Ibn Hajar states, ‘The word Shanu’a refers to a tribal grouping from the Yemen.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no.3394; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.165; and Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 6/429.*

Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for the impending encounter with his enemy, Pharaoh, who pretentiously ascribes divinity to himself.

Then, after this fortifying charge and practical experiment, He *the Almighty* says to Prophet Musa (Moses):

ٱذْهَبْ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُۥ طَغَىٰ ﴿٢٤﴾

Go to Pharaoh, for he has truly become a tyrant [24]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 24)

In this verse, we may ask, 'Why did He send him to Pharaoh initially and did not send him to his people?' This is because Pharaoh had done an abominable action when he falsely claimed to be divine, and this is the summit of transgression. Moreover, he had enslaved the children of Israel; hence, it was imperative to settle affairs with Pharaoh in the beginning.

This is why the miracle of the staff occurred in three situations: The first was to provide Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with experience and training. This actually happened between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his Lord by means of practice so that when the time came to unveil it before Pharaoh, Musa (Moses) would not be over-awed by it or withdraw in hesitation; rather, he would perform this miracle with a steadfast, confident heart. The second occasion was with Pharaoh alone as a means of frightening him. As for the third, it was with all the sorcerers.

Hence, each of these situations comprised its own underlying wisdom and role. Thus, we strongly stress that there is no repetition in the events of the story as some falsely claim.

As for His saying in reference to Pharaoh, '… he has truly become a tyrant' (*Ta Ha:* 24), it means that he went beyond the limits of equity. This happens when someone excessively appropriate what is not his. If only Pharaoh had claimed one of the human attributes, he would not have been blamed, but instead he attributed to himself one of Allah's Attributes.

When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* heard the name of Pharaoh, he recalled what had happened in Egypt and that he had been brought up in the house of this Pharaoh who pretentiously ascribed divinity to himself. So, how would he face him? He also called to mind the incident of the man he had killed,[1] after which he departed from Egypt in fear and apprehension of being caught. So, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* realised that the burden of his mission was weighty, he said:

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱشۡرَحۡ لِي صَدۡرِي ٢٥

Moses said, Lord, lift up my heart [25]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 25)

It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, ‘O Lord, I shall execute Your Commands, but I do not wish to face this mission while my heart is constricted in regard to it. This is due to the constriction of the heart undermining strength and dissipating it. This also helps to defeat a man.’ Therefore, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* supplicated with this prayer: ‘Lord, lift up my heart’ (*Ta Ha:* 25); he did this in order that his strength would be adequate to the undertaking of this difficult mission which requires great effort corresponding to its difficulty. This signifies that his heart was constricted by the prospect of meeting Pharaoh for the above-mentioned reasons.

Then Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said:

وَيَسِّرۡ لِيٓ أَمۡرِي ٢٦

And ease my task for me [26]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 26)

Musa (Moses*) peace be upon him* made this supplication because lifting up the heart in this matter was not sufficient, as it concerns the doer, but he might find in his opponent vehement recalcitrance and obstinacy. Therefore, he invoked Allah *the Almighty* by saying: ‘And ease my task for me’ (*Ta Ha:* 26), so that he would not face violent dispute and transgression from Pharaoh,

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(1) This is in reference to Allah’s saying: ‘He entered the city, unnoticed by its people, and found two men fighting: one from his own people, the other an enemy. The one from his own people cried out to him for help against the enemy. Moses struck him with his fist and killed him.’ (*al-Qasas*: 15)

Hereby, the matter would be facilitated on the part of the opponent with regard to receiving the Message, after lifting up the heart of the caller. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then said:

وَٱحۡلُلۡ عُقۡدَةٗ مِّن لِّسَانِي ٢٧

And loosen the knot from my tongue [27]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 27)

This is because speech and conveying the Message need clear articulation and a flowing tongue which is unhindered with words. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had a speech impediment in his tongue, so he was not fluent in speech.

The same speech defect also affected the tongue of Al-Hussayn ibn ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with them* so that when Prophet Muhammad would hear him, he would laugh and say, ‘He inherited it from his paternal uncle Musa (Moses).’

The precision of expression is to be noted in Allah’s saying: ‘… from my tongue’ (*Ta Ha:* 27); He does not say. ‘Untie my tongue’. This is because if he had said the latter, it might have been understood as a rebellion against Allah’s Decree concerning the speech defect in his tongue. However, he is not raising objections, but merely asking for a part of his tongue to be untied in order to enable him to undertake his mission of conveying a verbal Message.

Afterwards, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said:

يَفۡقَهُواْ قَوۡلِي ٢٨

So that they may understand my words [28]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 28)

This is the motive behind his request, that is, he wants the people to understand his words; were it not for this motive, he would not have requested for removing his tongue’s impediment. Therefore, the real purpose of his request is to allow the people to comprehend his speech and discourse. Then, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* continues in requesting that which he believes will assist him in executing his mission; Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱجۡعَل لِّي وَزِيرٗا مِّنۡ أَهۡلِي ٢٩

And give me a helper from my family [29]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 29)

The helper here refers to the one who assists and supports. The same root of the original Arabic word is used when Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to frighten people about the Hereafter; He says: 'Truly, there is no refuge. They will all return to your Lord on that Day.' (*al-Qiyama:* 11-12) This means that on the Day of Judgment there is no shelter or helper to turn towards except Allah *the Almighty*. So, the helper is the one who takes burdens and responsibilities upon himself. When someone is charged with a great task and he is unable to do it alone, he asks for such a helper, for he needs someone to assist him in this task. Someone is to be considered a true helper if he is a good counsellor, trustworthy and aids his companion with sincere honesty. However, if he is cheating and blameworthy, working only for his own interest, then he is not a true helper; no indeed he is a burden. Deriving from the same semantic root, we have Allah's saying: 'And a burdened soul cannot bear the burden of another....' (*Fatir:* 18) In the same connection, we read in a Noble Hadith, 'The best of kings is a king whom Allah has provided with a minister. If he forgets, he will remind him, and if he has the intention—merely the intention— of going good, he assists him. Likewise, if he intends evil, he hinders him....'(1)

These are the signs of a helper who gives good counsel in the interests of the subjects as elucidated by the Divine Way; for every ruler has two entourages: one of them commanding the good and another commanding that which is reprehensible and vile, as is clear in a Noble Hadith.(2) So, if this is the Divine Way, what is wrong with the policy of man?

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(1) *'Aisha Allah be pleased with her narrated that Messenger Muhammad Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him said: 'Whoever among you is appointed to a position of authority; if Allah wills good for him, He will give him a righteous minister who will remind him if he forgets and help him if he remembers.' See An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 7/159.*

(2) *The wording of this Hadith is as follows: 'Allah neither raised up any Prophet nor did He authorize any person with ruling power but for whom there were two types of entourage: one enjoins upon him to do good and incites him to carry it out, and the other enjoins evil and goads him; and the protected (from the bad entourage) is the one whom Allah protects.' This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7198; Ahmad, Musnad, 3/39.*

The ancient Persian monarch Anoushirwan once said, ‘Beware of thinking that anyone of us can dispense with anyone else, for each of us has a function to do. Hence, if you are superior in something, then you are deficient in other things which Allah has placed in people other than you so as to make up for your deficiency. Co-existence is shared, but this sharing is imposed by necessity and is not a question of condescending courtesy. Otherwise, if others were disposed to favour you with grace, what then would you do?’

We have previously propounded a parable for people’s need of one another by saying, ‘What would happen if sewer workers or street-sweepers were to stop working for several days? Yet if the ministers were absent for several days, nothing would happen.’ Hence, do not think you are superior to others because each one of them has a function which they fulfil. So, if you are better than someone in a particular thing, then he is better than you in another, as the totality of somebody’s talents is equal to that of another. However, if you were to ask, ‘Then why such disparities exist between people’ you would be answered that this is in order that we are in need of one another. After all, if all people had the same talents, and we said to a group of us, ‘Please be so kind and sweep the streets on such-and-such a day’, they would not condescend to do it. However, if need compelled them to do such work, they would rush to it. Just as we see nowadays concerning the most strenuous professions and the most arduous of tasks—which people flee from, and even look down upon with contempt—you find their practitioners accepting them willingly and even zealous in accomplishing them, despite the hardship they entail. Indeed, they get angry if they find no opportunity to do that work because it is the source of their subsistence and that of their dependents. With this perspective, no one should deem himself superior to others so that balance would be achieved in the society.

Back to the verse in question; Musa's (Moses') saying, ‘…from my family’ (*Ta Ha:* 29), means that he would be trustworthy for him *peace be upon him*. This request on the part of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* indicates the elevated manners of the comportment of prophethood. Allah *the Almighty* had chosen him to convey the Divine Message, so why does he partner his brother with him in this mission? That is because Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* does not wish to take pride in the Message, to deem himself above others because of it or even to transgress any limits. Rather, he desires to accomplish it in the most perfect way. Therefore, he seeks to compensate for his deficiency through seeking the help of his brother in communicating the Message. If Prophet Musa (Moses) had desired to have exclusive monopoly on the Message, he would not have made this request.

This is a model which should be imitated. Hence, if you are charged with a matter beyond your strength and capability, there is no shame on you to seek someone else's assistance in it. This is evidence of your sincere devotion to the duty with which you have been entrusted.

Afterwards, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* specifies which one of his family he needs by saying:

هَٰرُونَ أَخِي ٣٠

My brother Aaron [30]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 30)

He has selected his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* to help him in the mission of conveying the Message. He clarifies the reason for this request in another verse by saying: 'And my brother, Harun (Aaron), he is more eloquent of tongue than I ….' (*al-Qasas:* 34) In this manner, Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* complete each other, and each of them makes up for the deficiency in his brother. It is said that Harun (Aaron) excelled over him in other aspects. He possessed the attributes of gentleness and forbearance while Musa (Moses) was harsh and of quick anger. So, the former was suitable for clemency, and the latter was suitable for severity. This is evident in the case when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* returned to his people, having left them in the company of his brother, and they had meanwhile begun to worship the golden calf. His anger became vehement as stated in Allah's saying: 'And when Musa (Moses) returned to his people, wrathful (and) in violent grief …' (*al-A'raf:* 150). He then became furious with his brother and dragged him by his beard, manifesting his toughness and harshness. Thereupon, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* said, 'Son of my mother!' (*al-A'raf:* 150) in order to stimulate Musa's (Moses') compassion by reminding him about the kindliness of the mother and her tenderness; in another verse, Harun (Aaron) pleads, '… let go of my beard and my hair!' (*Ta Ha:* 94) It is as if he is saying to his brother, 'Strike me as you wish, but do not attack me unfairly by my beard and my head.'

Hence, the eloquence of Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* balances out the knot in the tongue of Musa (Moses), and his clemency relieves the severity and vehemence of the latter. In addition, Musa (Moses) was brown-skinned, with curly hair and of hooked nose, while Harun (Aaron) was fair-skinned with straight hair. In addition, he was graceful in his proportions and features, comforting to behold. So, whoever was not comfortable with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him,* would be comfortable with Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him*.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to like it when Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* descended upon him in the image of Dihya Al-Kalbi(1) who was very good-looking. So, Jibril (Gabriel) used to sometimes descend in this image in order to make Prophet Muhammad feel at ease.

Despite being excelled by his brother in certain attributes, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not harbour feeling of resentment against his brother and did not consider that he was better than he was. Rather, he rendered the qualities of his brother complementary to his own, and all of them were for the sake of carrying out the mission and conveying the Message in its most perfect way. Thus, he did not look towards himself and his own success, but rather towards the success of the mission with which Allah *the Almighty* had charged him.

It is imperative to make this virtuous comportment common amongst people. Hence, if you notice a good trait or one aspect of perfection in someone else, then you should give thankful praise to Allah *the Exalted* for that. You should also be aware that the benefit of this good trait will return to you, and it you will make up for what is lacking in you. So, do not resent the one who possesses it, for he will compensate for your shortcomings, and you yourself will derive benefit from his blessing.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* stated:

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(1) *In his book, Ibn Hajar states, '[Dihya Al-Kalbi] was a famous Companion; his first military engagement was the battle of the Trench; his handsome appearance was proverbial and Gabriel used to descend in his image. He settled in Damascus and lived in Al-Mizza. He lived until the Caliphate of Mu'awiya.' See Ibn Hajr, Al-Isaba Fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba, 2/162.*

ٱشۡدُدۡ بِهِۦٓ أَزۡرِي ٣١

Augment my strength through him [31]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 31)

It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* recognises that carrying the Message to Pharaoh and to his people later is going to be a strenuous undertaking, so he invokes Allah *the Almighty* to provide him with his brother to help him with this difficult mission. Afterwards, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* continues to pray to His Lord by saying:

وَأَشۡرِكۡهُ فِيٓ أَمۡرِي ٣٢

Let him share my task [32]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 32)

In this verse, his supplication 'Let him share my task' (*Ta Ha:* 32) signifies that he asks Allah *the Exalted* to allow Harun (Aaron) to participate with him in the Message as a Favour from Him, not from Musa (Moses). Hence, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* desired that both the favour and the charging with obligation be from Allah *the Almighty* so that Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* would not rise in opposition nor become annoyed by the mission he is assigned to undertake.

Therefore, when they went to Pharaoh, the two of them said: 'We are your Lord's messengers …' (*Ta Ha:* 47). Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not say that Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was a servile follower of his; rather, he is just like him, sent by Allah *the Almighty*. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* spoke, he spoke on behalf of himself and on behalf of Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him*. This is why when Musa (Moses) imprecated against Pharaoh and his people saying: '… Our Lord, destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they believe not until they see the painful punishment' (*Yunus:* 88), Allah *the Almighty* answered his prayer by saying: 'The prayer of you both has indeed been accepted….' (*Yunus:* 89) Thus, while the supplication was made by Musa (Moses) alone, Harun (Aaron) confirmed it by saying Amen, and the one who says Amen is included among those who have supplicated to Allah *the Almighty*.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* stated:

كَيْ نُسَبِّحَكَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٣٣﴾ وَنَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

So that we can glorify You much [33]
and remember You often [34]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 33 - 34)

This is the reason why Musa (Moses) wanted to share the undertaking of the mission with his brother, not in quest of his own ease; but rather to combine their efforts in pious obedience to Allah *the Almighty* along with glorification and remembrance of Him. The glorification of Allah means to celebrate His Praise and extol His Holiness with regard to His Essence, Attributes and Actions. Evidently, there is no essence comparable to His Essence, as He Himself says: '… there is nothing like Him …' (*ash-Shura:* 11). Therefore, there is nothing similar to Him in His Essence, Attributes, and Actions. So, you should beware of saying that Allah's Hearing is like your hearing, that His Sight is like your sight, or that His Action is like your action. The meaning of extolling Allah's limitless glory and glorifying His Holiness is that He is exalted to the level of His proven Divinity, and thus we add nothing to His Glory from ourselves.

Regarding His saying, 'So that we can glorify You much' (*Ta Ha:* 33), it means to do that continuously, as if the glorification brings joy down upon the soul of the extoller. Likewise, obedience on the part of the obedient brings bliss to his soul. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My comfort has been provided in prayer.'(1) Moreover, it is narrated, 'When anything distressed the Prophet, he prayed.'(2)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad, An-Nasa'i and Al-Hakim on the authority of Anas Ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. In his book, Al-Hakim says, 'This Hadith is authentic according to the conditions stipulated by Muslim, but neither Al-Bukhari nor Muslim narrated it.' Adh-Dhahabi agreed with Al-Hakim in this regard. The complete form of this Hadith is as follows: 'Women* and *perfume have been made dear to me, but my comfort has been provided in prayer.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 3/127, 199, 285; An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 7/61; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, 2/160.*

(2) *A Hadith to this effect was narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad and by Abu Dawud on the authority of Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him who said: 'When anything distressed the Prophet, he prayed.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/388; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, 1319.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّكَ كُنتَ بِنَا بَصِيرًا ﴿٣٥﴾

You are always watching over us [35]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 35)

This verse shows that Allah *the Exalted* is always watchful over Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) observing their actions to ascertain whether or not they performed them in the most perfect way.

For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ قَدۡ أُوتِيتَ سُؤۡلَكَ يَٰمُوسَىٰ ﴿٣٦﴾

God said, Moses, your request is granted [36]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 36)

The verse tells us that Allah *the Almighty* has given Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* what he asked for. Indeed, He has bestowed His Favour on him before he asked, rather even before he knew how to ask.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَلَقَدۡ مَنَنَّا عَلَيۡكَ مَرَّةً أُخۡرَىٰٓ ﴿٣٧﴾

Indeed We showed you favour before [37]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 37)

To show someone a favour means to grant him something without anything in exchange, as opposed to recompense, which is a reward provided in exchange for deeds. As for Allah's saying: '…before' (*Ta Ha:* 37), it indicates that there was a first instance of such free favour. However, here the intended meaning of the freely bestowed favour is the inspiration which came upon the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he was very young. In reality, this is the first gift; nevertheless, He *the Almighty* says in this verse, '…before' (*Ta Ha:* 37), literaly translated as 'at another time' to take the sequence of relating the events into consideration.

So, when was this first gift bestowed? The answer is provided in Allah's saying:

إِذۡ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أُمِّكَ مَا يُوحَىٰٓ ٣٨

We inspired your mother, saying [38]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 38)

This verse means that Allah *the Exalted* had conferred His Favour on Musa (Moses) when He inspired his mother to do some actions. Thus, this was the first gift to Musa (Moses) when he was born in the year in which Pharaoh was killing all males. At that time, Allah *the Almighty* inspired Musa's (Moses') mother by saying: '… when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve. Surely We will bring him back to you and make him one of the prophets.' (*al-Qasas:* 7)

In the verse under study, Allah's saying, '…what was inspired' (*Ta Ha:* 38) implies that this inspiration is a tremendous phenomenon which you, Musa (Moses), should give due assessment to and exert yourself based on it to the utmost. The structure of this verse is similar in its emphatic repetition to the verb as occurs in His saying: '… so there came upon them of the sea that which came upon them.' (*Ta Ha:* 78)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* provides details of this inspiration to the mother of Musa (Moses) by saying:

أَنِ ٱقۡذِفِيهِ فِي ٱلتَّابُوتِ فَٱقۡذِفِيهِ فِي ٱلۡيَمِّ فَلۡيُلۡقِهِ ٱلۡيَمُّ بِٱلسَّاحِلِ يَأۡخُذۡهُ
عَدُوّٞ لِّي وَعَدُوّٞ لَّهُۥۚ وَأَلۡقَيۡتُ عَلَيۡكَ مَحَبَّةٗ مِّنِّي وَلِتُصۡنَعَ عَلَىٰ عَيۡنِيٓ ٣٩

"Put your child into the chest, then place him in the river.
Let the river wash him on to its bank, and he will be taken
in by an enemy of Mine and his." I showered you with My
love and planned that you should be reared under My
watchful eye [39] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 39)

This is what Allah *the Almighty*, inspired to the mother of Musa (Moses). The Arabic word *Al-Yamm* (river) refers to a large body of water, whether it is salty or fresh. In this regard, when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of Pharaoh's drowning, He says: '…and drowned them in the sea (*Al-Yamm*)…' (*al-A'raf:* 136). In this verse, the intended meaning is the Red Sea. However, with respect to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* he was born in Egypt and his chest was cast into the Nile, as the palace of Pharaoh was on the Nile.

By Allah! What sort of mother is this who would believe such words, 'If you are afraid for your son, then throw him into the river?!' How could she possibly save him from presumed death at the hands of Pharaoh and cast him into certain death by throwing him into the river?! Yet, in spite of this, the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not hesitate for a moment in executing Allah's Command, nor did she hold back. This is the difference between that which comes from the All-Merciful and that which comes from Satan. The soul puts up no resistance to that which comes from the All-Merciful; rather; it receives it as an incontestable issue. As for what comes from Satan, it does not dare to vie with that which comes from the All-Merciful. Hence, the mother of Musa (Moses) took her baby and threw him into the river as her Lord inspired her to do.

It is noteworthy that a similar verse in the chapter of *al-Qasas* does not mention anything about the chest; it only mentions throwing him directly into the river: 'Then when you fear for him, cast him into the river ….' (*al-Qasas:* 7) So, what is the reason for this? It is said that Allah *Glorified is He* speaks in the above verse about the ultimate reason of fear which is throwing her baby into the river. It is natural for a mother to strive to ensure the safety of her baby. This is why she fashioned a chest for him and prepared it in a way which allows it to float on the surface of the water.

The discourse here is meant to prepare the mother before the event. Before the execution of the Divine Order, the mother will have arrangements and means which help her child to survive. Thus, she fashioned a chest for him, putting a sort cradle in it and took the necessary precautions for the event. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* reassured her about her son by saying: '…and do not fear nor grieve.' (*al-Qasas:* 7) This is because He *the Almighty* will save him, as he has a mission to undertake: '… surely, We will bring him back to you and make him one of the prophets.' (*al-Qasas:* 7)

Then, as soon as the time of implementation arrived, the command came in rapid successive expression: ‘Put your child into the chest, then place him in the river. Let the river wash him on to its bank...’ (*Ta Ha:* 39). It is for this reason that you find the context of the first verse calm and slow, corresponding to the phase of preparation. However, when it is the stage of execution, the context is quick and successive, corresponding to the rapidity of implementation. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was inspiring her, ‘Hurry up with the command which I previously inspired to you.’ These words are in the final phase of this matter.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘Let the river wash him on to its bank...’ (*Ta Ha:* 39), it means the waves will carry him and transport him, as they had orders to take him to the palace of Pharaoh.

Hence, we have here three throws for the benefit of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: the casting of mercy and compassion into the chest, the throwing of the chest into the river in execution of Allah’s Command and the river’s casting the chest to the palace of Pharaoh.

Allah’s saying, ‘… and he will be taken in by an enemy of Mine and his.’ (*Ta Ha:* 39) shows that Pharaoh is an enemy of Allah because he falsely ascribed divinity to himself, and he is also an enemy of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* because the latter will stand in his way and obstruct him at his limits.

The verse comprises an indication of the inevitable fulfilment of Allah’s Will, for when He decrees a thing, He accomplishes it, even at the hands of His enemies while they are unaware. After all, who could imagine or believe that Pharaoh- in his tyranny and unruly rage, killing the newborn males of the Children of Israel —would be the one to embrace Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and bring him up in his household? Who could imagine that he would love Musa (Moses) and find a place of warm acceptance for him in his heart?

Did Pharaoh find and take Musa (Moses) at the beginning so that he would be an enemy to him? Or did he find and take him in so that he would be like a son? The response is clear in the statement of Asiya, Pharaoh’s wife: ‘…"Refreshment of the eye to me and to you, Do not slay him. Maybe he will be useful to us, or we may take him for a son." They did not perceive.’ (*al-Qasas:* 9)

Thus, there was love on the part of Pharaoh, although it later turned to enmity. It is for this reason that Pharaoh will say, 'Did we not bring you up as a child among us, and you tarried among us for (many) years of your life?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18)

Those who cast doubts about the Quran levelled charges of repetitiveness against the issue of enmity in His saying, '…and he will be taken in by an enemy of Mine and his' (*Ta Ha:* 39), and in His saying in another verse, 'Pharaoh's family took him up that he might be an enemy and a grief for them…' (*al-Qasas:* 8).

However, the one who carefully examines the two verses will find that the enmity in the first verse is on the part of Pharaoh towards Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his Lord, whereas the enmity in the second verse is on the part of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* towards Pharaoh. In this way, the enmity is mutual, and this insures its ferocity and continuity. This is the intended meaning in this story.

However, if the enmity had been one-sided, then perhaps the other party might have forgiven his enemy, and so his enemy might have felt ashamed and inclined to reconciliation. However, the enmity between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh had to be implacable since it was over the supreme issue of Allah's Oneness.

Here, we should ask, 'Why did the arrival of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in this condition not arouse the alarm of Pharaoh so that he would ask about his story and look into his case?' Indeed, this was Allah's Will nothing can evade, and thus the wife of Pharaoh loved Musa (Moses) and so she said: '…Refreshment of the eye to me and to you....' (*al-Qasas:* 9) Hence, following this, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I showered you with My love and planned that you should be reared under My watchful Eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 39)

So, both of Asiya and Pharaoh loved Musa (Moses) when they saw him, and this love is from Allah *the Almighty* without any reason for it. In fact, love between people is based upon reasons; hence you love a person because you are fond of him because he is a relative or a friend of yours or he has done you a favour. However, you may love someone while there is no reason for this except that it is Allah's Will.

Thus, Allah's saying, 'I showered you with My love...' (*Ta Ha:* 39), means that even though Musa (Moses) does not has anything to necessitate or cause love, Allah *the Almighty* showered him with His love. This is especially true as Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was brown-skinned, frizzy-haired, hook-nosed and possessed of ungainly contracted shoulders. It is as if this physical form occurred to pave the way for this love, and as a confirmation of Allah's Will which compelled Pharaoh to love Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

In this manner, Allah *the Almighty* changed the heart of Pharaoh and caused love of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to enter into it. This is meant to let this matter pass by this hugely inattentive one and cause him to adopt his enemy and to raise him in his household, despite the fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did not have grace and beauty which would attract hearts to him.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '… that you should be reared under My watchful Eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 39) This shows that Musa (Moses) would be brought up and educated under Allah's Watchful Eye and Protective Care. Despite the fact that Musa (Moses) was actually brought up in Pharaoh's house, Allah *the Most High* guarded over him. Thus, if he were exposed to something objectionable in his upbringing, his Lord would intervene in order to teach him and raise him correctly.

Among these situations is that Pharaoh and his wife Asiya would sit with the little Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as he played, when suddenly he grabbed Pharaoh's beard and jerked it with such force that he became angry and ordered that he be killed. However, his wife intervened by saying, 'He is still young and does not understand anything. He cannot distinguish a date from a hot ember.' So, they brought him a date and a hot ember in order to test him, then Allah *the Almighty* drew his hand away from the date and directed it towards the hot ember in order to let the issue pass for this hugely inattentive one. Moreover, indeed, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* took the ember in spite of its heat and put it into his mouth, burning his tongue. This is what caused him this speech impediment which afflicted him later.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is reassuring His Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* by saying: ‘Do not be afraid, for you are under My Watchful Eye and under My Protective Care. If they do something to you, I shall intervene.’ In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘I have chosen you for Myself.’ (*Ta Ha:* 41) This verse shows that Allah *the Almighty* watches over and protects him since he has a mission to fulfil for Him.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذْ تَمْشِىٓ أُخْتُكَ فَتَقُولُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ مَن يَكْفُلُهُۥ ۖ فَرَجَعْنَـٰكَ إِلَىٰٓ أُمِّكَ
كَىْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ ۚ وَقَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنَـٰكَ مِنَ ٱلْغَمِّ وَفَتَنَّـٰكَ فُتُونًا ۚ
فَلَبِثْتَ سِنِينَ فِىٓ أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ ثُمَّ جِئْتَ عَلَىٰ قَدَرٍ يَـٰمُوسَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

Your sister went out, saying, “I will tell you someone who will nurse him,” then We returned you to your mother so that she could rejoice and not grieve. Later you killed a man, but We saved you from distress and tried you with other tests. You stayed among the people of Midian for years, then you came here as I ordained [40] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 40)

Thus, the sister of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had a role to play in his story. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘And she said to his sister, "Follow him." So she watched him from a distance while they did not perceive.’ (*al-Qasas:* 11)

In this verse in question, Musa's (Moses') mother tells his sister to follow him once she knows of his rescue from the river. So, she followed him and became aware that he was in Pharaoh’s house. Then Allah *the Almighty* caused him to refuse and reject all the wet-nurses. At this point, his sister intervened by saying: ‘I will tell you someone who will nurse him.’ (*Ta Ha:* 40) Indeed, only Allah *the Almighty* is Capable of bringing about this sequence of events.

Then He *the Most High* says: ‘…We returned you to your mother…’ (*Ta Ha:* 40). When we examine the semantic root of *Raja‘* (to return) in the Quran, we find that it sometimes occurs as an intransitive verb as in Allah’s saying: ‘And when Musa returned to his people …’ (*al-A‘raf:* 150). It also occurs as a transitive verb, as is clear in His saying: '…We returned you to your mother…' (*Ta Ha:* 40) and 'Therefore if Allah brings you back to a party of them…' (*at-Tawba:* 83).

The difference between an intransitive and transitive verb has to do with the act of returning itself; as for the transitive verb, it means he returned with himself, but as for the intransitive, it means that he caused someone else to return. Thus, returning is to revert to the state in which you were after having left it, and if you return on your own without any external forces, then the verb is intransitive. However, if there were factors which compelled you to return, then the verb is transitive.

As for Allah's saying, 'So that her eye might be cooled …' (*Ta Ha:* 40), it means that Musa (Moses) was returned to his mother in order that she rejoices at this matter.

Aspirations can be either abstract or tangible to the senses. Thus, if a person has hopes whose realisation he aspires to, as soon as they are realised, we say, 'He no longer aspires to anything.' The same is true with regard to a perceptible physical thing. The Arabs say that a beautiful thing captivates the gaze of beholders; that is to say, it binds the eye so that it does not look away from it. In fact, the person will not turn away from that which is beautiful unless he sees something more beautiful which cools the eye. In other words, it is an attractive thing at which the eye fixes itself and does not seek over it any augmentation of beauty.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Later you killed a man, but We saved you from distress and tried you with other tests...' (*Ta Ha:* 40). This is another Gift of Allah *the Almighty* bestowed upon Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. In fact, Allah's Gifts upon him were many, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Indeed We showed you favour before.' (*Ta Ha:* 37) So, this refers to one particular time, but there were multiple times.

The issue of Musa's (Moses') killing was narrated in Allah's saying: 'He entered the city, unnoticed by its people, and found two men fighting: one from his own people, the other an enemy. The one from his own people cried out to him for help against the enemy. Musa (Moses) struck him with his fist and killed him…' (*al-Qasas:* 15). Musa (Moses) departed from the city,(1) frightened and watching out cautiously for people lest they catch him and kill him. This is the meaning of His saying, '…but We saved you from distress….' (*Ta Ha:* 40) It means Allah saved him from being killed or being captured.

Regarding Allah's saying, '…and tried you with other tests...' (*Ta Ha:* 40), it signifies that He *the Almighty* exposed him to many tribulations, but He then rescued him. The first of these trials is that you were born in the year that newborn children were being slain. This is followed by the trial of being cast into the river, and then what occurred to him with Pharaoh when he pulled his beard.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'You stayed among the people of Midyan for years, then you came here as I ordained.' (*Ta Ha:* 40) In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the period of his stay amongst the people of *Midyan* as being one of His Favours on Musa (Moses), although he was a wage-earning labourer there. In this respect, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, 'My Lord! Surely I stand in need of whatever good you may send down to me.' (*al-Qasas:* 24)

In *Midyan* Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* became acquainted with Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* and married his daughter and fathered a son through her. Throughout this period, he was far from his homeland and his mother. So, when Allah *the Almighty* willed to charge him with the Message, He made him yearn for his country and for the sight of his mother. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* ordained his return, a point which is quite clear in His saying: 'then you came here as I ordained.' (*Ta Ha:* 40) Thus, this verse shows that Musa's (Moses') return was by a Divine Decree from Allah *the Exalted* Who chose him to deliver the Message. He stirred his heart with the longing to return to his homeland and to see his mother, thus caused him to walk on an unknown route, enduring the hardships of cold and the duress of travel. Now, on the return route and in the valley of Tuwa, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had an appointment to be chosen to bear the Message.

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(1) This is the city of Memphis which today lies 28 kilometres south of Cairo.

In this respect, a poet who eulogised the caliph said to him:

The caliphate has appeared and it was preordained
Just as Musa (Moses) came unto his Lord as preordained

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱصۡطَنَعۡتُكَ لِنَفۡسِي ﴿٤١﴾

I have chosen you for Myself [41]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 41)

This verse signifies that Allah *the Almighty* had rescued and protected Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* because He has prepared him for a mission, that is, to be sent as a messenger with the Divine Way of Guidance to Pharaoh and to his people.

Scholars have endeavoured to enumerate the requests which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and asked of his Lord, which they found to be eight in number: ‘Moses said, "Lord, lift up my heart. And ease my task for me. And loosen the knot from my tongue, so that they may understand my words, and give me a helper from my family, my brother Harun (Aaron). Augment my strength through him. Let him share my task so that we can glorify You much and remember You often."’ (*Ta Ha:* 25-34)

Then, they found that Allah *the Exalted* bestowed upon him eight others without a request from him, a point which is clear in the saying of Allah: ‘When We inspired your mother what was inspired. "Put your child into the chest, then place him in the river. Let the river wash him on to its bank, and he will be taken in by an enemy of Mine and his. I showered you with My love and planned that you should be reared under My watchful Eye." Your sister went out, saying, "I will tell you someone who will nurse him." Then We returned you to your mother so that she could rejoice and not grieve. Later you killed a man, but We saved you from distress and tried you with other tests. You stayed among the people of *Midyan* for years, then you came here as I ordained.’ (*Ta Ha:* 38-40)

Thus, if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked his Lord for eight requests, he had been granted eight others, without even asking for them. This is due to the fact that if Allah *the Almighty* gives you your request, this indicates His Ability to respond to it. However, if He gives you without request, this indicates His Love for you.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱذۡهَبۡ أَنتَ وَأَخُوكَ بِـَٔايَٰتِي وَلَا تَنِيَا فِي ذِكۡرِي ﴿٤٢﴾

Go, you and your brother, with My signs,
and make sure that you remember Me [42]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 42)

In this verse, the word 'signs' signifies the dazzling miracles which will overwhelm Pharaoh, So, Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* will not go empty-handed; rather, they have the proof of the veracity of the Message which they carry to Pharaoh.

The verse then continues: '… and make sure that you remember Me.' (*Ta Ha:* 42) In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* commands them not to fall short or be lax in remembering Him. This is because He had prepared both of them in a manner corresponding to the difficulty of their mission. So, He warned them against being lax in undertaking it, for if they manifested any shortcoming, then this would be viewed as a shortcoming in their execution of the mission, not in Allah's Preparation for them.

Regarding His saying, '… that you remember Me' (*Ta Ha:* 42), it is a command for Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) that they should always remember Allah *the Almighty* for He is the One Who sent them and supported them with miracles. Moreover, it is He Who guards and watches over them all the time. In addition, He is the One Who will recompense them, and thereby they should not be heedless of this fact.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱذۡهَبَآ إِلَىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنَ إِنَّهُۥ طَغَىٰ ﴿٤٣﴾

Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds [43] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 43)

In fact, there is no transgression which is worse than Pharaoh's false claim to be a divine lord. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Pharaoh was lofty in the land, and most surely he was of the extravagant.' (*Yunus:* 83) In this verse, 'the extravagant' is the one who oversteps the limits, and Pharaoh had indeed exceeded the bounds by his transgression and ascription of divinity to himself. He had dominated the earth with the supremacy of a tyrant over other weaker people.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَقُولَا لَهُۥ قَوۡلٗا لَّيِّنٗا لَّعَلَّهُۥ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوۡ يَخۡشَىٰ ﴿٤٤﴾

Speak to him gently so that he may take heed, or show respect [44] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 44)

This is a command to Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* to speak to Pharaoh gently even after he became a tyrannical transgressor. In this verse, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who judges that Pharaoh is a tyrannical transgressor. When you pronounce against him this charge, this judgment corresponds to your power and means as a human being. However, when Allah *the Exalted* says that he '... exceeded all bounds …' (*Ta Ha:* 43), this signifies that he has overstepped all limits and reached the apex of tyrannical transgression, for it is our Lord Who makes this judgment.

As for His saying, 'Speak to him gently...' (*Ta Ha:* 44), it stresses that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* must give Pharaoh the space he needs to witness their proof and miracles, not to treat him with aggressiveness or harshness. It is said that the admonition is weighty, so you should not deliver it as weighty as a mountain. In this respect, it is important for the caller not turn the admonition into an argument. Furthermore, you should not combine two hardships against the admonished person by taking him from what he is used to, which is the first hardship, through a way which he dislikes, which is the second one. Rather, you should take him from what he is used to by means of what he likes.

This is a clear and a well-founded way of calling to faith which is established in Allah's saying: 'Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation …' (*an-Nahl:* 125). This is the approach to be followed in calling to Islam since you are extracting the admonished one from what he is used to and familiar with; in other words, you are taking him out of what he enjoys of freedom and licentiousness in passionate desires and pleasures. By so doing, you can bind him with the Divine Way of Guidance, and this should also be done gently and benevolently.

It is this manner which man uses today in the domain of medication; even though the medicine used to be bitter, they have nowadays managed to coat it with a layer of sweet taste so that the procedure of swallowing it can be accomplished. Likewise, the same holds true for the bitterness of accepting truth and admonition, which is why you should coat it with mild and friendly words.

Now, employing the model verb 'may' in Allah's saying, '… so that he may take heed or show respect' (*Ta Ha:* 44) signifies the hope that Pharaoh may respond positively to the Message. This raises a question, which is, 'How could Allah *the Almighty* say, "…so that he may take heed or show respect" (*Ta Ha:* 44), while His Knowledge encompasses the fact that Pharaoh will not take heed nor show respect and that he will die as a disbeliever by drowning?' The answer is that Allah *the Exalted* wants Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to approach Pharaoh with confidence that he would be guided, not despairing of his guidance. This would give Musa (Moses) sufficient power to discuss the matter with him and to display proof to him. On the other hand, if Musa (Moses) went to Pharaoh while knowing the ultimate result, he would be frustrated, not seeing any value to his words.

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* knows for certain what will happen regarding Pharaoh, yet He wishes to establish the evidence against him, a fact which is clear in His saying: '… so that people should not have a plea against Allah after the (coming of) prophets …' (*an-Nisa':* 165).

As for His saying, '… he may take heed or show respect' (*Ta Ha:* 44), it indicates that if any person puts aside his wicked thoughts and carnal desires, he will inevitably be guided by his primordial nature to believe in Allah's Existence. Moreover, he will recall the covenant taken by Allah from all souls in pre-eternity, when He says: '… "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes! We bear witness.... "' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

Also, relevant to this context is what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Every child is born with a true faith of Islam (i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone), and it is his parents who convert him to Judaism, Christianity or Magianism.'(1)

In fact, if a person were to remember and refrain from his capricious inclination, he would inevitably be guided to believe in Allah's Existence. However, Allah *the Almighty* has provided space for forgetfulness, which is why He has sent messengers to remind people. For this reason, He says: '…(We sent) messengers as the givers of good news and as warners…' (*an-Nisa':* 165), but He does not say that they were sent to initiate something new; rather, they were sent to give good news and to warn the people against what they should not have been forgetful of.

As far as the issue of belief in Allah is concerned, it should have been clear and familiar to people that there is an Omnipotent Creator. Afterwards, they should have only waited for messengers to inform them about His Commands and the way they should worship Him, or in other words, what they should do and from what they should abstain.

In the same respect, we have previously propounded a parable of a man who was lost in the vast desert and who could find neither water nor food until he was on the point of perishing. He was then overcome with sleep and when he awaked, there was suddenly a table spread with various types of food and drink. By Allah, before he reached his hand out to the food, would he not wonder about the one who brought this to him? This also applies to the human being who had come into an already-fashioned universe to receive him: the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, crops, water and air, etc. So, would it not be fitting for him to ask, 'Who created this marvellous creation?' Thus, if you recollected all blessings you come upon in this world, you would end up with faith.

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(1) Magianism is a sect which believes in the eternal nature of light and darkness, claiming that good is the act of light and evil is the act of darkness. *See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab, the root Majasa.*

Back to the verse being examined; the meaning of Allah’s saying, ‘… so that he may take heed…’ (*Ta Ha:* 44) is that by taking gently to Pharaoh, he might recall the aforementioned blessings and thus have faith in their Bestower. As for His saying, ‘…or show respect’ (*Ta Ha:* 44), it means that if he did not take heed, he at least should be afraid of the coming punishment and thus believe in Allah *the Almighty* to whom all things shall return in the Hereafter.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the two of them:

قَالَا رَبَّنَآ إِنَّنَا نَخَافُ أَن يَفْرُطَ عَلَيْنَآ أَوْ أَن يَطْغَىٰ ٤٥

They said, ‘Lord, we fear he will do us great harm
or exceed all bounds’ [45] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 45)

Fear is a sentiment in the soul which arouses awe and dread of something. Now, what do Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) fear? They are afraid that ‘… he (i.e. Pharaoh) will do us great harm...’ (*Ta Ha:* 45) which means that they feared he would overstep the bounds against them. The opposite of overstepping the limits in a matter is to fall short in it. This is why one says, ‘The middle way is that of virtue between excess and lax negligence.’ Concerning the use of this term in question, i.e.: ‘overstepping the limits’, one says that a horse exceeds the limits when it outstrips in a race course. The horse also exceeds the limits when it does not only outdistance other horses but also goes beyond that. For this reason, when the Quran tells us about the Limits of Allah, it says on one occasion. ‘These are the Limits of Allah, so do not exceed them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 229) which signifies that we should beware of going beyond those limits established for us by Allah *the Almighty*. On another occasion, it says: ‘… These are the Limits of Allah, so do not go near them …’ (*al-Baqara:* 187).

Thus, as for legally permissible things, it says: ‘…so do not exceed them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 229) which means to stop at the limit and to not go beyond it. However, as for the legally forbidden things, it says: ‘… so do not go near them …’ (*al-Baqara:* 187). This is because if you approach them, you will fall into them.

Back to the verse under study; the meaning, then, of '…he will do us great harm...' (*Ta Ha:* 45) is that Pharaoh may go beyond the bounds and rush to kill the messengers before they say anything. Regarding Allah's saying, '…or exceed all bounds' (*Ta Ha:* 45), it suggests that he will not be satisfied with killing the messengers, but he will also plunge into abusing the due Right of Allah or say something blasphemous about Him as he previously ascribed divinity to himself.

Now, the callers to Islam must not reach the stage in which those who are called might abuse the due Right of Allah *the Almighty*. In this respect, He educates those who believe in Him about the proper etiquette of calling such people by saying: 'And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest exceeding the limits they should abuse Allah out of ignorance...' (*al-An'am:* 108).

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ لَا تَخَافَآۖ إِنَّنِي مَعَكُمَآ أَسۡمَعُ وَأَرَىٰ ﴿٤٦﴾

He said, 'Do not be afraid, I am with you both, hearing and seeing everything [46] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 46)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* reassures Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* that He will not forsake or abandon them, for He is with them both all the time, hearing and seeing. As the action is an utterance which is heard or a deed which is seen, then they should rest assured, for Allah *the Exalted* shall protect them. Elsewhere, He says: 'And certainly Our Word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the prophets. Most surely they shall be the assisted ones, and most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones.' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

This is one of the established Laws of Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, if you see the so-called soldiers of Allah defeated, then you can be certain that they are not His true soldiers. Otherwise, Allah's Promise of victory to His Armies can never be broken.

We can offer evidence to substantiate this fact by what happened to the Muslims at the battle of Uhud. It is correct that the Muslims were routed in this military campaign because they diverged from Prophet Muhammad’s directives and disobeyed him when he told the archers, ‘Do not leave your positions under any given circumstance.’(1) However, as soon as they noticed the first signs of victory, they abandoned their positions and descended to gather booty. Then Khalid ibn Al-Walid circled behind them, and they suffered a defeat. Even if the Muslims were defeated, Islam, nevertheless, was victorious, for when they went against Prophet Muhammad’s orders, they were routed. By Allah, had they been victorious despite this contravention, would the position of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have been set firmly aright amongst them after this?

Thus, in the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures them that His Omnipotence shall protect the two of them, and it will intervene if the situation requires it, just as what happened in the incident of the date and the ember, while Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was a young child in Pharaoh’s house.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says to the two of them:

فَأْتِيَاهُ فَقُولَآ إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ وَلَا تُعَذِّبْهُمْ ۖ
قَدْ جِئْنَٰكَ بِـَٔايَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكَ ۖ وَٱلسَّلَٰمُ عَلَىٰ مَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ ٱلْهُدَىٰٓ ﴿٤٧﴾

Go and tell him, “We are your Lord’s messengers, so send the Children of Israel with us and do not oppress them. We have brought you a sign from your Lord. Peace be upon whoever follows the right guidance [47] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 47)

Let us note here that the two of them did not directly confront Pharaoh with what he falsely claimed of divinity. Rather, they referred to Allah’s Lordship by saying, ‘We are your Lord’s messengers...’ (*Ta Ha:* 47) which constitutes a great shock for Pharaoh. Thereafter, they moved on to another issue, namely the case of the children of Israel whom Pharaoh had made subservient in his service, punishing and oppressing them. Hence, they said, '… so send the Children of Israel with us and do not oppress them...' (*Ta Ha:* 47). It is as if they were sent to take the children of Israel with them to rescue them from Pharaoh's oppression. The verse then continues: '... We have brought you a sign...' (*Ta Ha:* 47). This means that they have brought him a miracle which was '… from your Lord.' (*Ta Ha:* 47) In this verse, we notice that they repeated the word 'Lord' for the second time.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Musa ibn ‘Uqba. In this Hadith we find: ‘Messenger Muhammad positioned fifty men from among the archers near the cavalry of the enemy. He gave command over them to ‘Abdullah Ibn Jubayr, the brother of Khawwat ibn Jubayr, and he told them, ‘O you archers, once we have assumed our positions for the battle, do not abandon your positions even if you see that we are granted victory. I command that no man among you leave his place, and keep the cavalry away from us!’ So he enjoined them to do this, and it came to pass. As a result of the archers’ disobedience to the orders of Prophet Muhammad, he was badly hurt during this battle.’ See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala’il An-Nubuwa, 3/209.*

Allah *the Exalted* had taught them how to enter into the presence of Pharaoh and how to converse with him in a matter which has nothing to do with his arrogant pride and purported divinity, namely the case of the children of Israel.

As for the children of Israel, they are the remaining descendants of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his brothers who came to Egypt in the era of Al-'Aziz(1) who brought Yusuf (Joseph) into his inner circle and placed him in charge over the grain stores of the land. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says about the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: 'The king said, "Bring him to me. I will have him serve me personally." Then, once he had spoken with him, "From now on, you will have our trust and favour." Yusuf (Joseph) said, "Put me in charge of the nation's storehouses. I shall manage them prudently and carefully."' (*Yusuf:* 54-55)

Concerning Allah's saying: '… Peace be upon whoever follows the right guidance' (*Ta Ha:* 47), this is not meant to be a greeting to Pharaoh, as this greeting is only offered to a follower of guidance, but if the addressee does not fit this description, then this greeting indicates the end of the discussion.

For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to write this same expression in his missives to Al-Muqawqis, the great one of the Copts, and to Heraclius, the Emperor of Byzantium, by saying: 'I call you to Islam. If you become Muslim, you will be safe, and Allah will double your reward. If you turn away, then you incur the wrong action of your subjects. Peace be upon the one who follows guidance.'(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says that Al-'Aziz is the title of the governor of Egypt in the time of Joseph, and he was the chief minister. Mohamed ibn Ishaq said that his name was Itfir ibn Ruhayb who was in charge of the Egyptian treasury. At that time, the king was Ar-Rayan ibn Al-Walid, a man form Al-'Amaliq. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 2/473.*

Thereafter, Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* said to Pharaoh:

إِنَّا قَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْنَآ أَنَّ ٱلْعَذَابَ عَلَىٰ مَن كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿٤٨﴾

It has been revealed to us that punishment falls on whoever rejects the truth and turns his back on it [48] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 48)

Hence, they provided him here with the ultimate issue: it has come to us by Divine revelation that whoever denies and turns his back on the truth shall be inflicted with chastisement. Their saying, '…it has been revealed to us…' (*Ta Ha:* 48) means that it is their Lord Who has revealed the Message to them. Now, when Pharaoh heard this discourse, he desired to enter into specific details in order to preoccupy and prolong the argument with them. By so doing, Pharaoh would compose his thoughts and think about what to say. Afterwards,

قَالَ فَمَن رَّبُّكُمَا يَٰمُوسَىٰ ﴿٤٩﴾

[Pharaoh] said, 'Moses, who is this Lord of yours?' [49] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 49)

In this verse, Pharaoh directs his speech to the main leader of this mission, namely Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Consequently:

قَالَ رَبُّنَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ خَلْقَهُۥ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ ﴿٥٠﴾

Moses said, 'Our Lord is He who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance' [50] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 50)

In this verse, the meaning of Allah's saying, '… He Who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance' (*Ta Ha:* 48) is that He created everything in the existence for a specific purpose. Thus, His creation is fashioned in accord with the purpose for which it was created. The verse continues: '… then gave it guidance.' (*Ta Ha:* 50) This means that He directed everything to fulfil its function and made it easy for it to do so.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in the context of a long Hadith on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1773.*

Allah *the Almighty* granted everything its form. Now, a created being is something which must have materiality, a form, and shape; it has a colour, a smell, and component elements to perform its function. As a matter of fact, when Allah *the Most High* creates something, He ordains for it all the aforementioned things by means of which this created being shall properly do its due role. Thus, He provides it with an eye to see, with a nose to smell and with a tongue to taste. Then He guides all things to what He wills in order to accomplish their function. All of this is done without any intervention on the part of anyone.

A man, being preordained by the Exalted, fully Capable One is able to make, for example, a time bomb and to regulate the time of its explosion so that it performs its function automatically afterwards without its maker's communication with it. If this is so, then it is understandable that Allah *the Almighty* created everything and provided it with the capability of performing its function in the most perfect way, with a spontaneous instinctual execution. Thus, the animals which we accuse of stupidity, calling them unintelligible beasts, are not, in reality, as such. Allah *Glorified is He* has given us a depiction of them in the story of the raven which He sent to teach the son of Adam how to bury the corpse of his brother. This story is related in His saying: 'Then Allah sent a raven digging up the earth so that it might show him how he should cover the dead body of his brother. He said, "Woe me! Do I lack the strength that I should be like this raven and cover the dead body of my brother?" So he became of those who regret.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31) How did the raven undertake this deed? It did this by means of the instinct which Allah *the Exalted* placed in it.

Let us take another example to illustrate this point. When you want a donkey —which some people see as a symbol of stupidity— to go over a ditch, you will notice that it looks at it and estimates its width, and if it is able to get across it, it jumps without hesitation. However, if it is beyond its capacity, it hesitates, draws back, and refuses to advance, no matter how severe you beat it or compel it to do this. This is actually done by the innate instinct placed in it by Allah *the Almighty*.

For this reason, you find that created beings are not endowed with free will, and so they do not err because they are governed by instinct. Additionally, they do not have a mind to incite them to follow whims, nor do they have a choice between options. They are similar to the artificial intelligence which provides you with that which you have programmed into it, no more or less. The human being, on the other hand, is able to alter reality and to hide that which he wants from it. This is because he has intellectual capacities by which he can compare between things, thus determines preferences—say this, but do not say that. This is the blessing by which Allah *the Almighty* distinguished them from other created beings.

Likewise, you find that when an animal has eaten its fill, it refrains from food, and it is not possible to force it to eat a single sprig of clover however much you may try. The human being who possesses a mind and passionate inclinations, on the other hand, will say to you, 'Provide me with varieties of food. You will be shown where they can be accommodated.' Hence, there is nothing to hinder him after having eaten like a horse, from tasting numerous kinds of sweets, fruit, etc.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He: '… gave everything its form, then gave it guidance.' (*Ta Ha:* 50) Let us offer an example of the ears which are judiciously put together, perfectly suited to receive sounds. On the outside, an ear has wrinkles and curves which capture sounds of high frequency, mollifying their intensity. Hence, they reach the delicate eardrum in an abated form; otherwise these sounds would rupture it and render it deaf. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* provided the external form of the ear to block winds such that, if they blow strongly, they will not harm it.

Likewise, how many are the Signs of Allah in the eye! Allah *the Exalted* had created it with precise measure. Let us offer an example of its signs; if its temperature exceeds 12 degrees, it is ruined. On the other hand, if the tip of the temperature of the nose exceeds 9 degrees, it cannot carry out its function. Yet there is an organ within the body the temperature of which is 40 degrees, namely the liver. The overall temperature of a person is 37 degrees, remaining constant in cold regions where it is freezing, just as it remains constant in hot regions. It neither increases nor decreases except in the case of illness or defect in the body.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* created everything in the existence with precise measure, wisdom and capacity to carry out its function, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘Who creates, then makes complete and Who makes (things) according to a measure, then guides (them to their goal).’ (*al-A‘la:* 2-3)

Let us give another example namely, the tongue; Allah *the Exalted* provided it with protuberances each one of which tastes a specific flavour. One is for sweetness, one is for bitterness, one is for acridity and so on. All of them are placed in this narrow area, next to one another, with an apportionment that is precise and inimitable.(1)

You should reflect also on the nose and the mucus it contains and which does not drip from you. It also has delicate little hairs which enable the inhaled air to go through a process of filtration and conditioning before it reaches your lungs. For this reason, we should not cut the small hairs which are inside the nose, as they have a function.

Furthermore, the muscle of the heart—and all that which it comprises of the atrium, ventricles and entry and exit points for the blood—is finely regulated and mechanically functioning. It does not stop or malfunction for a period of 120 or 140 years. It works spontaneously even when you are asleep. So, what machine could possibly perform this function?

Back to the verse under discussion; when Allah *the Exalted* sent Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* to Pharaoh with miracles proving their veracity, their primary mission was to rescue the Children of Israel from his tyrannical transgression. Thus, the question of faith was incidental, whereas the fundamental mission of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was to ‘… send the Children of Israel with us and do not oppress them.’ (*Ta Ha:* 47)

When Allah *the Almighty* presents the issue of faith, He substantiates it by the proof of the beginning of creation, a point which is clear in His saying: ‘Our Lord is He Who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance.’ (*Ta Ha:* 50) So, it was suitable to present such proof to Pharaoh because he claimed divinity, and some people must have deified him, even though they were mankind like him. Moreover, he boasted proudly of his dominion and his wealth of the land of Egypt, its Nile and bountiful blessings by saying, '…My people! Is the kingdom of Egypt not mine? And these rivers flow beneath me…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51). This is why Allah *the Exalted* wished to refute his claim of divinity by saying, 'Have you created any of your subjects who deify you?'

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(1) From Linguist: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha’rawi *may Allah rest his soul* it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

The proof offered in the case of Pharaoh is similar to that offered to Nimrod when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to him: '"My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die." He said, "I give life and cause death."' (*al-Baqara:* 258) Hence, Nimrod came up with nothing but argumentation and sophistry, taking refuge in the stratagem of those who have no sound argument. So, he brought two men and said, 'I sentence this one to death and grant pardon to this one.' In this way, he claimed to be a Lord like Allah *the Almighty* Who gives life and causes death. Therefore, when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* sensed that he was resorting to tricky manoeuvring and disputation, he moved him to an issue that he could not argue about. Ibrahim's (Abraham's) argument is presented in Allah's saying: '… Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "So, surely, Allah causes the sun to rise from the east, then make it rise from the west." Thus, he who disbelieved was confounded, and Allah does not guide aright the unjust people.' (*al-Baqara:* 258)

Thus, returning to the case of original creation is a proof which no one can refute; even Pharaoh himself did not claim that he created anything. Instead, he haughtily demonstrated his power, was pretentiously arrogant, and claimed divinity only over those who deified him, but whom he did not create. Moreover, he created neither himself nor the dominion in which he was taking pride.

Inasmuch as the proof of the original creation was a convincing one, Pharaoh had no rebuttal against it. For this reason, when he heard Musa's (Moses') statement: 'Our Lord is He Who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance' (*Ta Ha:* 50), he was unable to refute this evidence. Consequently, he sought to shift the dialogue from discussing this irrefutable proof to a secondary, valueless issue to which he fled. He said to Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron):

قَالَ فَمَا بَالُ ٱلْقُرُونِ ٱلْأُولَىٰ ﴿٥١﴾

He said, 'What about former generations?' [51]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 51)

Thus, Pharaoh asked about the bygone peoples. However, what is the relevance of the former generations about which they were talking? As a matter of fact, the moment Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sensed the tricky manoeuvring of Pharaoh and the attempt to escape from the fundamental topic, he closed the door upon him by saying:

قَالَ عِلْمُهَا عِندَ رَبِّي فِي كِتَٰبٍۖ لَّا يَضِلُّ رَبِّي وَلَا يَنسَى ﴿٥٢﴾

Moses said, 'My Lord alone has knowledge of
them, all in a record; my Lord does not err or
forget' [52] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 52)

Hence, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* answered Pharaoh by saying, 'I have nothing to do with this issue since the One to be asked about the past generations is the One Who will recompense them. It is Allah Who certainly knows their condition, especially in terms of their belief and disbelief because He will hold them accountable for that.' Thus, this question is out of place; it is merely a kind of light talk and abusive drivel. This is because no one knows the state of the past generations except Allah *the Almighty* as it is He Who will reward or punish them.

Regarding Allah's saying, '… all in a record...' (*Ta Ha:* 52), it means that He recorded all what concerns the former generations in a Book. The angels who regulate affairs according to the Divine Decree review this Book in order to carry out their mission with which He entrusted them. The word 'Book' does not mean that Allah *the Almighty* reviews it to know what is in it, a point which is ever so clear in the Saying of Allah: '… My Lord does not err or forget.' (*Ta Ha:* 52) Then Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* brings Pharaoh back to the primary issue which is the subject of creation, but with a detailed depiction by saying:

ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَسَلَكَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا وَأَنزَلَ مِنَ
ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِۦٓ أَزْوَٰجًا مِّن نَّبَاتٍ شَتَّىٰ ﴿٥٣﴾

It was He who spread out the earth for you and traced routes in it. He sent down water from the sky. With that water We bring forth every kind of plant[53]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 53)

To spread out something is to prepare it in a way suitable for its function. This is like what you do with your bed before you go to sleep. It also looks like what you do when you prepare the bed for the baby and smooth it out, removing what might upset or disturb him from it so that he can settle in it and rest. You will necessarily undertake this task for him because he lives by your own natural instinct until his own natural instinct impels him to such matters and so he does it by himself. This is why it is imperative for you during this period to watch over him to provide for his needs and to take good care of him. Thus, the meaning of Allah's saying, 'It was He Who spread out the earth for you...' (*Ta Ha:* 53), is that He has smoothed it out and prepared it for human beings so that it would be fitting for their lives and livelihood on it.

Now preparing the earth does not mean making it flat; rather, arranging it for its function, since the earth has mountains, elevations and valleys, without which life would not be possible on it. Hence, arranging it implies making it suitable for living on it, whether it be on land that is level, curved, elevated or sunken. As for the land which is level, we find roads which are flat and straight. However, as for mountainous regions, they are curved and twisted since they can only be in this form. These roads have an advantage in their curves, as you do not have to face the sun for a long period; rather, you alter between facing the sun at times and the shade at other.

We have previously drawn analogy with the hook which we make of iron; if we made it straight, it would not serve its purpose. Hence, its correctness lies in its being crooked. So, you prepare it in this way to fulfil its function, and if it were straight, it would not pull the intended thing. Therefore; we say that the orderly correct arrangement is to make something suitable for its function, regardless of whether it is with straightness or crookedness, or whether it is with an uneven surface or with even regularity.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '… and traced routes in it.' (*Ta Ha:* 53) This means that He traced routes for the people to help them reach their destinations with ease. The Arabic word for the verb 'to trace' has many connotations. This verb can be transitive, thus meaning entering or penetrating. It also occurs as a transitive verb as when you say, 'So-and-so travelled the road.' Also relevant here is Allah's saying: 'What has brought you into Hell?' The addressees in this verse are casted into hellfire which means that they entered it. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Enter your hand into the opening of your shirt …' (*al-Qasas:* 32), or in other words, place it into it.

When you travel along desert routes, you will find that they vary from one to another. Amongst them are those which are so narrow that one can barely put his single foot, and amongst them are the broad routes upon which a loaded camel or a car can travel. This is due to the fact that Allah *the Exalted* has traced out for us different, varied ways according to the task which we are undertaking.

Then He says: 'He sent down water from the sky. With that water We bring forth species of various herbs.' (*Ta Ha:* 53) This is also relevant to the issue of creation, which no one claims a role in since it would be an easily refuted claim. So, it is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was saying to Pharaoh, 'O, you who ascribe divinity to yourself, show us a manifestation of your Divine Power. Show us, for example, the plants that you have created.' However, he was unable to do so, and thereby he was obligated to accept the validity of the argument.

In a similar manner, no one has any active role in causing water to descend from the sky. However, once plants emerge, we may have some work to do such as ploughing, sowing, irrigating and so on. Yet this work is based on the causal factors which Allah *the Almighty* created for you. Therefore, when He speaks of water, He says '… He sent down ….' (*Ta Ha:* 53) This clearly means that no one has any part in it. However, when He speaks of plants, He says, '…We brought them forth…' (*Ta Ha:* 53), since this process entails the cooperation of many efforts which assists in the process of bringing them forth. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* respects and values your work.

In the same connection, let us read His saying: ‘Have you considered what you sow? Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the causers of growth?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 63-64) In these verses, He says that He respects the efforts made by people in sowing the land. However, when you plough, from where did you get the seeds? Then as soon as you trace back the chain of the original seeds, it leads you to plants which have no precedent. Likewise, if you traced back the chain of humanity, you will find that it ends up at a father who has no father, as he was created by Allah *the Almighty*.

Now after you have sowed the ground and watered it, do you have a stratagem for making them spout and grow daily? Did you grab hold of it and pull it so that it might grow? It is indeed the Power of the All-Capable, ‘Who creates, then makes complete and Who makes (things) according to a measure, then guides (them to their goal).’ (*al-A‘la:* 2-3) For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* emphatically says, following the verses cited in the previous paragraph: ‘If We pleased, We should have certainly made it broken down into pieces …’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65). So, if this is your handiwork, O, mankind, then preserve it and protect it yourselves.

This is similar to what occurred in the case of Qarun when he said regarding Allah’s Blessings conferred on him: ‘… I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 49) If this had been true, he should have sustained and protected these blessings with what he possessed of knowledge. So, when Allah *the Most High* caused the earth to swallow him and his house, this illustrated the falsehood of his statement.

Let us take into account that Allah *the Almighty* stresses the fact: ‘If We pleased, We should have certainly made it broken down into pieces….’ So, what is the reason for this emphasis? It is because you have an active participation in the issue of cultivation, a point which might deceive you and make you hesitant in accepting this possibility. By contrast, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about water, He says: ‘Have you considered the water which you drink? Is it you who sends it down from the clouds, or are We the senders? If We pleased, We would have made it salty …’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 68-70). The latter verse is expressed without any emphasis because it is a matter which no one makes claim to.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘We bring forth species of various herbs.’ (*Ta Ha:* 53) In this verse, the plants are referred to as being in pairs. This is because Allah *the Exalted* wants all the species to multiply and proliferate, which necessarily requires pairs of opposite genders: male and female. Just like mankind, all other creatures proliferate. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* created the earth and measured its sustenance in a way which must be sufficient for everything that lives on it.

However, when the land is constrained and no longer produces sustenance enough for us, and people starve, then we certainly should know that we have failed to reclaim and cultivate it. Therefore, when shortages of food are inflicted us, we went out to the desert to make it arable. Now we know that we were undoubtedly negligent for a long period in the past. We proliferated in population, but we did not augment what was around us of cultivable land.

In the same respect, we should note that male and female do not exist only in plants, but rather, they exist in all that which Allah *the Almighty* created, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘Glory be to Him Who created pairs of all things, of what the earth grows, and of their kind and of what they do not know.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36) Hence, the phenomenon of complementary pairs exists in everything, whether or not you are aware of it, even in inanimate things. There are positive and negative charges, electrons, and ions in the atom. In this manner, the more mankind proliferates, the more Allah’s Bestowal increases.

As for His saying, ‘… species of various herbs’ (*Ta Ha:* 53), it means that Allah *the Almighty* brought forth many different and diverse plants by the water; this difference might yet be found amongst plants of the same species.

So, if you were to go, for example, to the date market in Medina, the city of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, you would find many types of dates, differing in their shape, taste, and size. All of them fall under the single category of what is termed ‘dates’. This is also the case if you examined all the other species of cultivated crops.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the reason for bringing forth plants by saying:

كُلُوا۟ وَٱرْعَوْا۟ أَنْعَـٰمَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَـَٔايَـٰتٍ لِّأُو۟لِى ٱلنُّهَىٰ ﴿٥٤﴾

So eat, and graze your cattle. There are truly signs in all this for people of understanding [54] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 54)

The imperative verb ‘eat’ shows that the Creator *Glorified is He* created life and created the constituent elements for sustaining it; the first of these is nourishment including food and drink. As for these elements of subsistence, there is a correspondence between ownership and importance, as shown in the following order: food, water, and air.

You require food but can go without it for a month until the amount of fat you store in your body is over. The body will nourish itself from this when food is absent because when you eat, you burn up some of this food in your movement and then store the rest in the form of fat which is the storehouse of nourishment in the body. Then, as soon as the fatty substance is used up, the body derives its nourishment from flesh, and then from bone which is the last of the storage places of nourishment in a person’s body.

Thus, when Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* wanted to describe his weakness, he said, ‘…My Lord! Surely, my bones are weakened….’ (*Maryam:* 4)

Hence, you find that nourishment is possessed by many. Since you are able to survive a long time without it, this enables you to devise ways of acquiring it or enables others to provided assistance to you when they realise that you are of limited means and hungry.

As for water, you cannot go without it for three to ten days. Therefore, it is rare for water to be possessed by someone. However, as regards air, you are incapable of surviving without it for more than a single breath. Hence, it is a manifestation of Allah’s Mercy towards His slaves that air is owned by no one. Otherwise, if the proprietor of air became angry at you and withheld it from you, you would die before he is pleased with you. There is not time for you to devise a stratagem for getting it.

Afterwards Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and let your cattle graze’ (*Ta Ha:* 54); this is due to them also having a need of nourishment. In another verse, He *the Most High* says: ‘A provision for you and for your cattle.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 33)

Subsequently, everything is ultimately beneficial to mankind for whom Allah *the Almighty* made this entire universe subservient.

There follows His saying: ‘There are truly signs in all this for people of understanding.’ (*Ta Ha:* 54) The word ‘signs’ in this verse refers to the wonderful phenomena. As for the expression ‘people of understanding’, it refers to those who employ their intellect in the process of reflecting and deciding upon various choices. In Arabic, the root of the word ‘mind’ refers to the cord used for restraining and controlling a riding beast so that it does not run away from you. Likewise, the mind was not created for you so that you might roam astray however you like. Rather, it was created to restrain your natural impulses and to govern them in accordance with their function in your life. The natural impulse to eat, for example, is to sustain life in accordance with the energy of the body. Hence, when you exceed this limit, this amounts to corrupting gluttony.

In the same respect, curiosity was provided for studying the universe and uncovering its secrets and Allah’s wondrous signs inherent in it. However, you should not go beyond this by spying on other human beings.

The discerning minds also forbid the like of these deviant escapades. Therefore, human beings must necessarily possess a discerning mind which restrains their natural impulses in order that they do not transgress against the function ordained for them. A person must stop such impulses at their limits, otherwise they break free and run riot in the universe. Hence a human being must have a mind which restrains him and says to him, ‘Do not follow the carnal inclinations of the soul and its whimsical tendencies.’ If this is not done, then how can you give free rein to your lustful desires while you are not alone in the universe? What would the situation be like if others gave free rein to their lustful desires as well?

In Arabic, the discerning mind is also termed *Lubb* (kernel or innermost core) which calls your attention to the deep truths of things, not to their outer shape, and that you would be of greater foresight and deeper thinking in matters. Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* commands you to give something of the surplus of your wealth to the poor, people with superficial thinking say, ‘No, how could it be that I weary myself and toil at accumulating it, and then give it to a poor man while he has not done anything?’ However, when you deepen your comprehension of the wisdom of this command, you find that Allah *Glorified is He* says to you, ‘Give to the needy now while you are able so that if at some time you are in need, you will find someone who gives you.’ As a matter of fact, life is ever changing; the rich may become impoverished; the healthy may become sick; the strong may become weak. This is an established law among mankind, prevailing over them.

When you examine how the Divine Law sets bounds on your lustful passions, you should not forget that it imposes the same bounds on others as well. Therefore, as Allah *the Most High* commands you as an individual by saying, ‘Do not look at the inviolable things of other people’, He also commands all people not to look at your inviolable things.

In this way, the Creator *Glorified is He* has not provided us with the intellectual capacities in order to run riot in the universe; rather, they are used to regulate our natural instinct and behaviour, along with guarding them from the baseness of our passionate desires. Consequently, this will set the society aright and protect its members. Otherwise, if you permit yourself to steal, this means that you permit others to steal from you! Hence, it is in your own interest to find legislation that hinders you and a procedural method to regulate your life and the life of others.

Allah says:

مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَٰكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ ﴿٥٥﴾

From the earth We created you, into it We shall return you, and from it We shall raise you a second time [55]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 55)

Let us take into account here that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is presenting issues to Pharaoh which do not concern him alone, issues which help prevent giving rise to another Pharaoh.

The verse begins with a prepositional phrase which signifies that Allah *the Almighty* created mankind out of the earth, about which He previously says: ‘It was He Who spread out the earth for you…’ (*Ta Ha:* 53). Allah *the Almighty* mentions in the verse that we have three phases in relation to the earth: 'From the earth We created you, into it We shall return you, and from it We shall raise you a second time.' (*Ta Ha:* 55) In another verse, He *the Most High* mentions a fourth phase by saying: 'Therein shall you live, and therein shall you die and from it shall you be raised.' (*al-A'raf:* 25) So, there are four phases: being created out of the earth, living upon it, returning to it by death and being brought forth by means of resurrection.

Concerning Allah's saying, 'From the earth We created you...' (*Ta Ha:* 55), one should note that the creation is of two parts: the primary creation and the secondary creation. The primary creation was with Adam, and he was created out of clay, or in other words, out of the earth. Then there is the second creation, which occurred through procreation. Now if the primary creation was out of clay, then all that descend from it are considered likewise since he was the first origin.

We might express the fact that mankind came from earth in a different way and say, 'Procreation is generated by male sperm and female eggs; these are two elements which are originally brought forth by food and drink and originally come forth from the earth. Hence, you, mankind, are created from the earth, with an intermediary or without an intermediary.' If this issue of creation is relating to the unseen world, nevertheless, the Creator has left in His universe discerning minds which research and examine the universe. They have provided us with evidence of the veracity of this issue. When scientists analysed the soil of the earth, they found it to consist of sixteen elements beginning with oxygen and ending with magnesium. So, when they analysed the elements of man, they found them to be the same sixteen elements. By this analytical research, they confirmed the veracity of the issue of the creation about which the Creator had informed us.

Concerning His saying, '… into it We shall return you...' (*Ta Ha:* 55), this is a visible phase, for we bury our dead in the earth. Hence, a poet said:

If you have become fed up with life, then return to
The earth and sleep peacefully from the torments
She is a mother more compassionate than the mother
Who left you behind to be troubled?

So after the structure of a human being is razed by death, only his relatives hasten to bury him. You should reflect on the case of a woman whose only child has died, and he was the dearest of all people for her and whom she would not bear being parted from for a single night. Now she cannot bear his presence. Instead, she rushes to send him to his original mother, the earth.

This is because after the soul leaves the body, it rapidly turns into putrid corpse which cannot be endured even on the part of his mother and those closest to him. However, the earth embraces him and absorbs everything that is noxious in him.

Amongst the amazing marvels in the destruction of the physique of the human being by death is that it happens contrary to his construction. Thus, when the Creator speaks of the original creation of man, He says that he was created out of dust, out of clay, out of dark slime transmuted and out of sounding clay, like pottery. We have said that all of these are stages of a single substance. Then the Creator breathes the spirit into him, and life streams into him.

However, when we examine death, we find it to be the opposite of this sequence. It is as if you constructed a building consisting of numerous floors, then the last floor to be built is the first to be demolished. Similarly, death as it occurs to a person begins with taking away the spirit which was blown in him at the very end. Then, the body stiffens with rigor mortis like pottery makers sounding clay. Then, it decays and becomes putrid like dark slime transmuted. Then, the water in it evaporates, and the remaining elements dissolve; thus, it ultimately turns into earth.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '… and from it We shall raise you a second time.' (*Ta Ha:* 55) This means that human beings will be raised anew by means of revivification on the Day of Resurrection. This revivification has a particular order which differs from the initial creation; Allah *the Exalted* will begin by restoring the spirit, and then He consummates the body for it.

All of these are cosmological matters laid before Pharaoh, so they might turn him away from his condition of claiming divinity. Now, divinity requires the existence of those who deify, for a god must have those who worship him. So, how can Pharaoh ascribe divinity to himself, while he possesses nothing of the attributes of Lordship? In fact, none merit divinity and worship except He Who possess the attribute of Lordship to begin with. One proverb goes: ‘He who eats my food must heed my words.’

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرَيْنَٰهُ ءَايَٰتِنَا كُلَّهَا فَكَذَّبَ وَأَبَىٰ ﴿٥٦﴾

We showed Pharaoh all Our signs, but he denied them and refused [to change] [56] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 56)

The word ‘signs’ in this verse means stupendously amazing phenomena, as we say, ‘So-and-so is a prodigy or paragon of intelligence, a prodigy of beauty and a prodigy of generosity.’ We have previously categorised Allah’s Signs as follows: firstly, the cosmic signs, like the sun and the moon; secondly, the signs which confirm the veracity of messengers which are the miracles; and thirdly, the verses of the Noble Quran which are called the bearers of rulings.

However, Allah’s signs are numerous and cannot be enumerated. So, does the verse in question mean that Pharaoh saw all of these signs? The answer is ‘No’, since the intended meaning refers to some specific signs, namely, the nine miraculous signs which Allah *the Almighty* provided as a proof to the veracity and truthfulness of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. This fact is ever so clear in Allah’s saying: ‘and certainly We gave Musa (Moses) nine clear signs …’ (*al-Isra’:* 101). These clear signs were the following: the staff, the hand, the flood, the locusts, the lice, the frogs, the blood, the drought, and the shortage of crops. Therefore, these are the miraculous signs with which Allah *the Exalted* supported Musa (Moses).

It is important to note here that the totality expressed in Allah’s saying, ‘… all Our Signs …’ (*Ta Ha:* 56) is a relative one; in other words, He showed Pharaoh all the signs that were meant specifically to him. It is like when you say to your son, ‘I have provided you with everything.’ Here, you do not mean that you brought him everything that exists; rather, your speech indicates a relative totality which signifies that you have brought this son everything he needs.

Yet, in spite of this, the result was that '… he denied them and refused [to change].' (*Ta Ha:* 56) Hence, Pharaoh attributed falsehood to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and dismissed the signs as having no basis in reality. Accusing Musa (Moses) of lying was Pharaoh's pretext for his rejection of the signs, and so he '… refused [to change].' (*Ta Ha:* 56) Thus, he refused to believe in the Message that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had brought to him.

If we were to argue with Pharaoh regarding his ascription of falsehood to Musa (Moses) when the latter said to him: 'Our Lord is He Who gave everything its form, then gave it guidance' (*Ta Ha:* 50), we would say, 'Why do you lie, Pharaoh? Allah *the Almighty* said, "I created this universe and all that is in it." No one has ever opposed this statement or ascribed it to himself, even you, Pharaoh. Although you have ascribed divinity to yourself, you have never claimed any role in creation. Hence, the matter of creation indisputably belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*. No one has ever contested Him over it. Thus you, Pharaoh, are the liar in your ascription of falsehood to Musa (Moses) and in your refusal to believe in him.'

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَجِئۡتَنَا لِتُخۡرِجَنَا مِنۡ أَرۡضِنَا بِسِحۡرِكَ يَٰمُوسَىٰ ﴿٥٧﴾

He said, 'Have you come to drive us from our land with your sorcery, Moses? [57] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 57)

The Egyptians of earlier days lived along the banks of the Nile, which is why a historian called Herodotus once said, 'Egypt is the gift of the Nile.' As soon as the water receded, they would plant seeds and wait throughout the year for them to grow and bear crops. They had no other work with which they were busied, and this monotonous life accustomed them to being somewhat lazy. Nevertheless, they loved this place, and if you were to have said to one of them, 'Leave this land for a day or two', he would rage against you and become angry. For this reason, Pharaoh exploited the attachment of his people to the land of Egypt and tried to rouse the animosity of these Egyptians, who believed in him as a god, against Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron). In seeking to provoke his people's enmity against them, he made the following statement which the Quran relates: ‘He said, ‘Have you come to drive us from our land with your sorcery, Musa (Moses)?’ (*Ta Ha:* 57)

At this point, the people were stirred up, but not for the threatened divinity of Pharaoh. Rather, this was in defence of their economic interests and all the benefits they derived from living along this blessed Nile, which was never stingy towards them in its flooding or it in receding. The people used to call it ‘Auspicious in Coming and Going’; it flowed when there is much water in it and even when its water is little—like the moving of the sun and the moon—on a predictable seasonal basis.’

In this manner, Pharaoh shifted the domain of dispute with Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* to his subjects, for he was frightened by the consequences of Musa's (Moses’s) words. Pharaoh feared that if his people understood the matters presented by Musa (Moses), they would discover his falseness. Moreover, they would become furious with him, revolt against his rule and reject his claimed divine status.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَنَأْتِيَنَّكَ بِسِحْرٍ مِّثْلِهِۦ فَٱجْعَلْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكَ
مَوْعِدًا لَّا نُخْلِفُهُۥ نَحْنُ وَلَآ أَنتَ مَكَانًا سُوًى ﴿٥٨﴾

We will confront you with sorcery to match your own: make an appointment between us which neither of us will fail to keep, in a mutually agreeable place [58] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 58)

Thus, Pharaoh called the miracles brought by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sorcery, which is why he said, ‘We will confront you with sorcery to match your own….’ (*Ta Ha:* 58) However, this label is erroneous regarding the due right of Musa (Moses), even though it was correct in context of Pharaoh’s people. So, what is the difference then between what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* produced and the sorcery that the people of Pharaoh produced?

As a matter of fact, sorcery does not alter the reality of the thing; rather, the thing remains as it was in reality, in other words, in its original case. Sorcery only affects the beholder such that he sees things not as they really are, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying: '… they deceived the people's eyes ….' (*al-A'raf:* 116) So, when the sorcerers threw down their ropes, even though these ropes did not change from their original, natural state, a given spectator saw them as snakes and serpents moving rapidly. On the other hand, as for the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* it, upon being thrown down by Musa (Moses), changed into a real snake. This is proven by the fact that when Musa (Moses) himself saw it in this form for the first time, he was afraid of it.

Concerning Allah's saying, '…Make an appointment between us which neither of us will fail to keep...' (*Ta Ha:* 58), it means that Pharaoh and Musa (Moses) agreed upon an appointed time and place which not one of them would miss. Thereupon follows the phrase: '…in a mutually agreeable place.' (*Ta Ha:* 58)

In Arabic, the word translated in this verse as 'mutually agreeable' could refer to a place which is smooth and level. This is because the meeting will be a spectacle for all the people, thus the field of vision must be evened out such that no one's view is blocked. Another possible interpretation is that the place where they would meet should be mutually agreeable by both of the two parties. This is like when we say, 'Let us meet in the middle of the route so that neither I become weary nor you.'

Allah says:

قَالَ مَوْعِدُكُمْ يَوْمُ ٱلزِّينَةِ وَأَن يُحْشَرَ ٱلنَّاسُ ضُحًى ﴿٥٩﴾

He said, 'Your meeting will be on the day of the feast, so let
the people be assembled when the sun has risen high' [59]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 59)

Naturally, there should be a reason behind holding any event. Furthermore, the place and the time at which it shall occur should be defined. Now, we are fully aware of the cause of this encounter and that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* would challenge Pharaoh and his sorcerers.

Pharaoh has specified the place by saying, '… in a mutually agreeable place' (*Ta Ha:* 58), so there remains only the appointed time to accomplish the event. Therefore, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* specified it by saying, 'Your meeting will be on the day of the feast...' (*Ta Ha:* 59). It is as we have said: Every event must take place at a certain time and place. This is why we must not ask, 'When did Allah come into existence? Or where is He?' This is due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* is not created; rather, He is the Creator of everything, including the time and place. So, how can He *the Almighty* be restricted by them?

Back to the verse in question; Musa (Moses) did not say that the meeting would be on Monday or Tuesday, for example. Rather, he said, 'Your meeting will be on the day of the feast...' (*Ta Ha:* 59). It is the day on which all the inhabitants of Egypt gather, and it seems that this was the Day of the Nile Inundation. On this day, they used to go out in their finery, joyous about the flood of the Nile and the abundance of its benefit and blessings. In passing, we should note that Egypt still continues to celebrate this day.

The chief judge used to delay pronouncing the order for the prescribed land tax until after he had viewed the Nilometer; then, if he deemed it sufficient to irrigate the land, he would determine the amount of the land tax, otherwise he would not. This raises a good question which is, 'Why did Musa (Moses) specifically choose this day? Why did he not specify any other day?' This is because he was absolutely confident of Allah's Support for him, thus he desired that the disgrace of Pharaoh would be brought before this great throng and in the middle of this massed assembly. Furthermore, the like of this gathering was an opportunity which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would not miss, for the Egyptians on this Day are joyous and cheerful. In this state of happiness, the people are closer to accepting the truth than at any other time or condition.

Concerning Allah's saying, '… so let the people be assembled when the sun has risen high.' (*Ta Ha:* 59) It means that the people should be there in broad daylight. The day of the feast might have been in the early morning or at the end of the day, but Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for being well prepared and confident of victory, wanted this encounter to occur in the full clarity of day so that everyone would witness it.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَتَوَلَّىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنُ فَجَمَعَ كَيۡدَهُۥ ثُمَّ أَتَىٰ ٦٠

Pharaoh withdrew and gathered his resources,
then he returned [60] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 60)

So, Pharaoh left Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in order to arrange his affairs. This is followed by Allah's saying: '…and settled his plan...' (*Ta Ha:* 60). This means that he schemed against his enemy, Musa (Moses). Clandestine planning or plotting, however, is not a sign of strength; rather, it is an indication of weakness, for it clearly indicates that one has no strength for open confrontation. This is similar to the one who surreptitiously administers poison to his opponent due to his lack of capacity to confront him head on.

Hence, clandestine planning is evidence of weakness. In the light of this fact, we understand that Allah's saying regarding women, '…surely your guile is great' (*Yusuf:* 28) is not an indication of their strength; rather, it is evidence of their weakness. So, just as their guile is great, likewise is their weakness.

Regarding Allah's saying, '…and settled his plan...' (*Ta Ha:* 60), it means that Pharaoh started thinking about different kinds of cunning schemes in order to select from among them the most harmful to his opponent. This is similar to the case of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* when he said to his people: '… resolve upon your affair and (gather) your associates ….' (*Yunus:* 71)

Pharaoh's problematic situation requires multiple points of view. This is why he is pondering over what he should do and what he should not do. Then he finishes with this consultation, resulting in an opinion which takes all possibilities into account, so that nothing will catch him by surprise after having taken precautions for all eventualities. So, it is as if he had said, 'Agree upon a clear plan which unifies your suggestions in the light of realising the objective.'

A similar instance is found in Allah's saying in the context of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* when He *the Most High* says: '…and agreed that they should put him down at the bottom of the pit.…' (*Yusuf:* 15) This means that Yusuf's (Joseph's) brothers agreed upon this proposal and unanimously accepted it. However, this was only after one of them had said, 'Slay Yusuf (Joseph) or cast him (forth) into some land…' (*Yusuf:* 9). However, the final proposal was that they would put him in the dark depths of a well.

In any case, the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) were of the lineage of prophethood, and evil was not deeply rooted in their natures. For this reason, their scheme against Yusuf (Joseph) diminished from murder to abandoning him in some distant land, and then to the least odious of these ideas, which is to cast him into a well. This is the attribute of good people. As for the bad people in whose hearts evil has become deeply rooted, their evil increases and grows. Hence, one of them may say, ‘I want to meet so-and-so and spit in his face hit him or cut him. No, I would rather fire a bullet to kill him.’ Thus, his evil mounts ever higher.

Afterwards, the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) even hoped for Yusuf's (Joseph’s) rescue by saying: ‘…so that some of the travellers may pick him up.’ (*Yusuf:* 10)

Back to the verse under study; Allah *the Almighty* then says concerning Pharaoh: ‘… then he returned.’ (*Ta Ha:* 60) This signifies that he came to the appointed meeting place, which had been previously set, with respect to place and time.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to us of the realities of that day by saying:

قَالَ لَهُم مُّوسَىٰ وَيْلَكُمْ لَا تَفْتَرُوا۟ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا
فَيُسْحِتَكُم بِعَذَابٍ ۖ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ ﴿٦١﴾

Moses said to them, ‘Beware, do not invent lies against God or He will destroy you with His punishment. Whoever invents lies will fail’ [61] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 61)

When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saw the sorcerers, he wanted to warn them about what they were about to do and to give them some warnings to deter them. So, he reminded them that they had a Lord Who would hold them accountable. It is like when you say to a person whom you see intending to commit a crime, ‘If you do such-and-such, I will call the police, and you will be punished with such-and-such.’ In this way, you remind him of the consequences of his transgression.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…do not invent lies against Allah...’ (*Ta Ha:* 61). In this verse, to invent a lie means to produce a falsehood which stands for an intentional lie. The verse then continues: ‘… or He will destroy you with His punishment.' (*Ta Ha:* 61) Likewise, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* warns the sorcerers that if they invent lies against Allah *the Almighty* He shall exterminate them by means of chastisement in this world, leaving aside the punishment they would be afflicted with in the Hereafter. Thereupon follows His saying: 'Whoever invents lies will fail.' (*Ta Ha:* 61)

This verse shows that the one who invents lies against Allah *the Exalted* is the true loser.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَتَنَٰزَعُوٓاْ أَمۡرَهُم بَيۡنَهُمۡ وَأَسَرُّواْ ٱلنَّجۡوَىٰ ٦٢

So, they discussed their plan among themselves,
talking secretly [62] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 62)

It appears that the warning given by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to the sorcerers when he said to them, 'Beware, do not invent lies against Allah, or He will destroy you with His punishment' (*Ta Ha:* 61), had affected them, causing them to be afraid. Hence, they '…discussed their plan among themselves...' (*Ta Ha:* 62), which implies that they started to argue about what had been said to them and to exchange views in this regard. Then, follows Allah's saying, '…talking secretly' (*Ta Ha:* 62), which signifies that they conversed in secret. This is evidence of their being scared of Musa's (Moses') warnings. It also serves as a proof of their readiness to act upon what is right and proper. Ultimately, however, they were determined to continue with the contest to its end.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوٓاْ إِنۡ هَٰذَٰنِ لَسَٰحِرَٰنِ يُرِيدَانِ أَن يُخۡرِجَاكُم مِّنۡ أَرۡضِكُم
بِسِحۡرِهِمَا وَيَذۡهَبَا بِطَرِيقَتِكُمُ ٱلۡمُثۡلَىٰ ٦٣

Saying, 'These two men are sorcerers. Their purpose is to drive
you out of your land with their sorcery and put an end to your
time-honoured way of life [63] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 63)

Scholars have wavered over this verse since it has two alternative recitations, as it can be recited as *In Hadhani* or *Inna Hadhani.*

In the recitation of *Hafs* adopted by the Egyptians, it is recited as *In Hadhani La-Sahirani*, translated as ‘these two men are (two) sorcerers.’ When the Arabic word ‘*In’* precedes a clause beginning with a verb, it is then used as a conditional conjunction, meaning ‘if’, such as when we say, ‘If Zayd comes, I will treat him with generosity.’ On the other hand, the same word is used as a negating particle when it precedes a noun followed by the particle of exception, such as Allah’s saying: ‘(As for) those of you who put away their wives by likening their backs to the backs of their mothers, they are not their mothers; their mothers are no others than those who gave birth to them ….’ (*al-Mujadala:* 2)

In this verse, the meaning is that none are their mothers except those who have given birth to them or bore them. The same is true for the phrase in the verse under study whose meaning, therefore, is that these two men are nothing but sorcerers.

By contrast, in the second alternative recitation, namely ‘*Inna Hadhan La-Sahiran’,* the first element has a doubled final letter. This word, *Inna,* is a particle which comes before a nominal clause wherein the subject is in the accusative case, marked normally by the ‘*a*’ or ‘*an*’ ending. The predicate which follows this subject should be in the nominative case, normally signalled by the ‘*u*’ or ‘*un*’ ending. Hence, according to the grammatical rules, one should say, *‘Inna Zaydan Mujtahidun* (Indeed, Zayd is industrious)’. However, in this recitation, we have the subject noun of the clause in the nominative case, whereas the grammatical rule would require it to be the accusative case. So, how can we address this issue?

It is said that this usage is a dialect of *Kinana*, one of the Arab tribes. In fact, each tribe has its specific dialect and colloquial usages for which it was well known. The Quran was revealed in the tongue of the tribe of the Quraysh since all of the dialectical variants of the Arabs flowed into the dialect of the Quraysh at the seasonal gatherings for pilgrimage, poetry contests, trade fairs and similar events.

The dialect of the Quraysh was dominant among the dialects of all these tribes, and this is why the Quran was revealed in it. However, Allah *the Exalted* wanted other tribes to have some share in that. Thus, a certain number of

Quranic words and expressions were revealed according to various dialects of the Arabs to prove that it was not revealed specifically for the tribe of Quraysh. Rather, it was revealed for all people.

Amongst the dialects of the tribes which the revelation of the Quran incorporates is that of *Kinana,* which requires that the dual take the long ‘a’ sound in all its cases, be it nominative, accusative or genitive. In support of this opinion, we can quote the following verses of poetry(1):

How exquisite Salma is, again how fine, how fine

If only her two eyes belonged to us and her two orifices

She is a lucky find if only we gained her

And the place of anklets on her two feet

Indeed, her two parents and the two parents of her two parents

Have attained in glory by her two utmost limits

Here, at the beginning of the penultimate stanza, the poet says *Inna Abaha* in the nominative case although he was supposed to say ‘*Inna Abiha’* in the genitive case, because this dialect maintains the nominative case, marked by long (a) in the dual, regardless of its grammatical case.

Hence, the Quran was not revealed in the tongue of the Quraysh on the basis of it being the language of dominance; rather, it was so because it encompasses the cream of eloquent expression of all the dialects of the Arabian Peninsula. This language of the Quraysh was refined at the seasonal gatherings of poetry and literature at *‘Ukazh*, *Dhu Al-Majanna,* etc.

Let us return back to Allah’s saying: ‘They said, "These two men are sorcerers. Their purpose is to drive you out of your land with their sorcery..."’ (*Ta Ha:* 63). This verse shows that Pharaoh’s attempt to rouse his people’s enmity against Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* has seemingly produced results, and his scheme has affected the sorcerers. For this reason, they repeated the same words of the great teacher, Pharaoh, accusing Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* of sorcery. In their statement, '… and put an end to your time-honoured way of life' (*Ta Ha:* 63), the 'time-honoured way of life' refers to that which the people were content to live by, along with the beliefs and path which they followed. As far as the sorcerers were concerned, the 'time-honoured way of life' refers to the fact that they took Pharaoh as a god, worshiping and obeying him. This is what they call the exemplary way of life!

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(1) *This quotation serves as linguistic evidence is attributed to Ru’ba Ibn Al-‘Ujaj, while some have attributed it to Abu An-Najm Al-Fadl ibn Qudama Al-‘Ajali; it has also been said to be ascribed to some people of Yemen.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* relates what the sorcerers said:

فَأَجْمِعُوا۟ كَيْدَكُمْ ثُمَّ ٱئْتُوا۟ صَفًّا ۚ وَقَدْ أَفْلَحَ ٱلْيَوْمَ مَنِ ٱسْتَعْلَىٰ ﴿٦٤﴾

So, gather your resources and line up for the contest.
Whoever wins today is sure to prosper [64]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 64)

It is as if the sorcerers said to themeslves, 'Pay attention and focus all your minds, all your arts and movements in sorcery in order that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) do not succeed in expelling you from your land and destroying your exemplary way of life.'

They said to one another: 'So, gather your resources...' (*Ta Ha:* 64). It means that they advised one another not to keep hidden any art of sorcery and to exhibit what they could do. This is because there is normally mutual envy between the practitioners of a craft or profession, so one of them may refrain from displaying all that he is capable of at a given time. Or he will try to conceal what he can do so that other sorcerers would not observe that. However, in such a situation, they were obligated to make maximum efforts, for the situation is critical and the dire consequences will affect them all if they fail in this appointed task.

As for their saying, '…and line up for the contest' (*Ta Ha:* 64), it means that they united as if they were one person, for this would make them more awesomely frightening; thus, they would be more likely to cause terror to enter the hearts of their adversary. Moreover, if they advanced together, no one would be able to hold back, as they would keep an eye on each other.

There follows their statement: ‘Whoever wins today is sure to prosper.’ (*Ta Ha:* 64) In this verse, the verb ‘to prosper’ means to be successful, as in Allah’s saying: ‘Successful indeed are the believers.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 1) In Arabic, this verb is etymologically derived from ploughing the earth, which gives rise to agriculture, because when the farmer cleaves or tills the earth and tends to it, it provides him with its bounty. So, his activity in it is auspicious and blessed.

This is why when Allah *the Almighty* wishes to make clear for us the augmentation of recompense and reward for voluntary alms-giving and for performing good deeds, He draws an analogy for us with cereal crops by saying; ‘The parable of those who spend their property in the Way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears (with) a hundred grains in every ear; and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases; and Allah is Ample-giving, All Knowing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 261)

So, if the earth, which is merely one of Allah’s creations, bestows all of these gifts, then just imagine the gifts of the Creator of this earth. For this reason, the parable is followed by His saying: ‘…and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases...’ (*al-Baqara:* 261). Ultimately, the Arabic word used to refer to being successful in agriculture was taken to signify every success, even if it has nothing to do with cultivating the land. This is due to the ultimate objective of all activities of life to be assuring human’s survival through food, and the earth is the origin of all of this, and so it is the origin of success.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘Whoever wins today is sure to prosper’ (*Ta Ha:* 64), it means that the sorcerers said to each other, ‘The one who seeks to overwhelm his opponent is sure to prosper. Success, however, does not belong to the one who seeks to overwhelm, for it belongs to the one who actually overwhelms. Hence, the one who actually overwhelms must concentrate on overcoming his rival so that however much his rival seeks to overwhelm him, he maintains the upper hand over him. Therefore, overwhelming only comes after seeking to overwhelm.'

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says about the sorcerers:

قَالُوا۟ يَـٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِمَّآ أَن تُلْقِىَ وَإِمَّآ أَن نَّكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَلْقَىٰ ﴿٦٥﴾

They said, ‘Moses, will you throw first or
shall we?’[65] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 65)

Thus, they asked Musa (Moses) whether to throw first or should they be the first to cast what they have prepared of sorcery. Then, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* opted that they be the first to cast.

Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ بَلْ أَلْقُوا۟ ۖ فَإِذَا حِبَالُهُمْ وَعِصِيُّهُمْ يُخَيَّلُ إِلَيْهِ مِن سِحْرِهِمْ أَنَّهَا تَسْعَىٰ ﴿٦٦﴾

‘You throw,’ said Moses, and — lo and behold! — through
their sorcery, their ropes and staffs seemed to him to be
moving [66] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 66)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* told them to throw first because if they cast their magic spells, the staff would consequently have its due mission when he threw it. So, he wanted the staff to have an effect after changing into a serpent, snake or *jan,* a fast-moving snake. Otherwise, if he threw first, what would its task be?

Allah *the Almighty* surely inspired the sorcerers of Pharaoh to adopt this courtesy in their contest with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* so they gave him a choice between making the first throw himself or having them make the first one. Surely, He intervenes between a person and his heart, so He inspired them to do this although they were His opponents. He caused them to give voice to what would assist the one entrusted with the glorious miracle, thus they said: ‘Musa (Moses), will you throw first or shall we?’ (*Ta Ha:* 65) Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* based on the experience he underwent at Tuwa with his Lord *Glorified is He* when He told him: ‘Throw it down, Musa (Moses)’, chose to throw last. Then, when he threw his staff, it changed into a fast-moving snake, and he saw its movement. However, in this trial experiment, there was nothing for the staff to seize up. So, if he were to throw first and the staff turned into a snake or serpent, what would be the difference between it and the ropes of the sorcerers which changed before them into snakes and serpents? Hence, it was imperative that there be something to distinguish Musa's (Moses') staff as a miracle from the magic of the sorcerers and their charlatanism. For this reason, he chose to be the last to throw according to a revelation from Allah *the Exalted* so that his staff would swallow up that which the sorcerers falsely contrived. Evidently, what is swallowed up must necessarily come before that which swallows up.

Now, in terms of the action in front of the onlookers, there was no difference between the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the ropes of the sorcerers and their staffs, for all of them moved. However, Musa's (Moses') staff manifested its superiority by seizing up that which they performed of magic, chasing after their ropes and staffs, jumping here and there. Thus, the snake of Musa (Moses) had an eye by which it perceived, thus swallowed up their sorcery into its belly. Yet it remained as it was, without its belly becoming puffed up, for example. Thus, this is the miraculous aspect in Musa's (Moses') staff.(1)

Allah's saying, '…and—lo and behold!—through their sorcery, their ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving' (*Ta Ha:* 66), indicates, therefore, that the movement of their ropes and staffs was not a real one; rather, it was the result of delusion. This is evident in the expression: '…seemed to him…' (*Ta Ha:* 66), for Musa (Moses) saw them moving rapidly, yet they were not really doing so.

Concerning the sorcerers, Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: '… they deceived the people's eyes …' (*al-A'raf:* 116). Hence, the sorcerers produced imaginary deceptive acts through any possible means. Some say, for example, that they put quicksilver into their staffs and ropes, and when it was heated by the sun, it extended, and so their staffs and ropes began to twist and move. However, whatever means employed, it was merely delusion. As for the sorcerers themselves, they saw them as ropes, i.e. in their original state, which is the difference between the magic of the sorcerers and the miracle of Musa's (Moses') staff.

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(1) In his *Tafsir, Ibn Kathir* says, '*Mohamed ibn Ishaq* said, 'The staff set about pursuing those ropes and staffs one by one, until one could see neither a little or a lot of what they had thrown. Then Moses picked it up and it turned again into staff in his hand as it was before.' See *Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim*, 2/237.

Now, sorcery differs from cunning tricks which rely on sleight of hand, artifices, and deception. In this regard, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And they followed what the devils chanted of sorcery in the reign of Sulaiman (Solomon), and Sulaiman (Solomon) was not a disbeliever, but the devils disbelieved, they taught men sorcery …’ (*al-Baqara:* 102). Hence, sorcery is an art which is learnt, and it deludes by means of utilising jinns, so it is they who undertake all of these movements. Therefore, it is not cunning tricks of sleight of hand, but rather a procedure that has its principles and rules which are taught and learnt.

When Allah *Glorified is He* presents us with the issue of sorcery, we are to understand that it is tantamount to making the devils submissive to the service of the sorcerer. He *the Almighty* provides each of them with the capability to harm others; the sorcerer harms with his sorcery, and the devils harm with their abilities of assuming various forms and penetrating the barriers. This is because jinns were created of fire which is characterised with transparency; thus, they are capable of piercing walls, for example.

On the other hand, the human being was created of clay that is characterised with denseness. We have made analogy in order to make this phenomenon more intelligible by saying, ‘Imagine you are sitting behind a wall built of solid earthly substance and on the other side of which is an apple, for example. Will anything of the apple become accessible to you? On the other hand, if there was a fire on the other side of the wall, you would feel its heat through the wall. This unique trait, namely penetrating the barriers, is one of the traits which Allah *the Exalted* granted devils, not to mention that they see the people from whence they do not see them.’

Nevertheless, the Mercy of Allah, the All-Capable towards us is manifested in providing us with that which protects us from the devils. So, He has made jinns governed by the form they assumed. This is to say that if the Satan were to appear to you in the form of a man, then this form would truly govern him, and if you were to shoot a bullet at him at that moment, you would actually kill him.

Therefore, Satan is more frightened of you than you are of him. He does not appear to us in flesh except for a fleeting moment out of fear that the one perceiving him will grab hold of him, and so he will not be able to escape.

In the same respect, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* once caught hold of a devil and said,(1) ‘I intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque so that the boys of Medina could play by him, but I remembered the invocation of my brother Sulaiman (Solomon): ‘And grant me a kingdom such as shall not belong to any other after me.’ (*Sad:* 35)

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* bestowed upon the devils the unique ability to take on forms as they desire, but He bound them by the forms they assume. It is as if He said to Satan, ‘If you leave your innate nature and assume another form, then accept the fact that this form governs you and that those who are weaker than you shall have power over you.’ If this were not the case, they would strike fear into people and terrify them, and no one would be safe from their evil. The case is similar with the sorcerer himself, for he, by virtue of sorcery and talismans, possesses the ability to make jinns subservient to him, doing for him whatever he desires. This peculiarity makes his power superior to others. So, due to this sorcery, he has an advantage which is not available to the generality of people. Hence, there are no equal opportunities between him and other people.

Allah *the Exalted* wants these opportunities in the activity of life to be based on equality. Thus, it is as if He *the Almighty* says to the sorcerer, ‘Beware of thinking that what I made easy for you, that is, using what is more powerful than you to accomplish what is beyond other people’s ability, will benefit you in any way. You should not also believe that you have gained through sorcery an advantage over others. No, rather the opposite is true, for you will not gain anything from your sorcery except harm and unhappiness, as sorcery is a trial for people, just as it is a trial for jinns.’ Therefore, He *the Almighty* says: ‘… yet these two taught no man until they had said, "Surely we are only a trial, therefore do not be a disbeliever..."’ (*al-Baqara:* 102).

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(1) This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra *Peace be upon him.* The complete version reads: ‘A strong demon from the Jinn came to me yesterday suddenly so as to spoil my prayer, but Allah enabled me to overpower him, and so I caught him and intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque so that all of you might see him, but I remembered the invocation of my brother Sulaiman (Solomon): ‘And grant me a kingdom such as shall not belong to any other after me.’ (*Sad:* 35) See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3423; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 541.

The word 'trial' in this verse signifies that Allah *the Almighty* puts someone who learnt sorcery to the test, for as long as He provides it to them, this means that He examines whether he will employ it for good or for evil purposes. Then, if you were to say, ‘I am learning sorcery in order to utilise it for good’, we would say to you, ‘This is your discourse at the moment of receiving this knowledge, but you should not be so certain of yourself at the moment of enactment.’ This is similar to the case of taking on the burden of trust. You may take it with good intention, firmly believing that you are confident of your ability to deliver it to its owner at its proper time. However, at the time of implementation, you may undergo a situation which alters your intention, and thus you dishonour the trust. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely, We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and man has turned unfaithful to it; surely he is unjust, ignorant.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72) Thus, the heavens, the earth and the mountains chose submission over free choice and over bearing the burden of trust since they could not guarantee their upholding of it.

Allah *the Almighty* warns the sorcerers when He says: ‘…yet these two taught no man until they had said, "Surely, we are only a trial, therefore do not be a disbeliever..."’ (*al-Baqara:* 102). It is as if a sorcerer’s will ultimately incline to disbelief because he is innately prone to follow his whims. He is incapable of keeping his soul in check in order to dominate the power of sorcery for good. When Allah *the Almighty* wills to make strength subservient to the good, He employs the services of obedient ones. Now obedient *jinn* would never accept to be used in undertaking evil actions. Therefore, the sorcerer will only be able to make use of disobedient jinn, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘…and most surely the devils suggest to their friends…’ (*al-An‘am:* 121).

For this reason, you notice that all those who are involved in sorcery are characterised by anger and that their features bear the traces of sins and evil omen. Whoever sees them flees from them, and they live in the most constrained images of life. You find the sorcerer taking from this one and that, pilfering people and deceiving them. In spite of this, you find him begging, living in destitution. Moreover, he dies as a disbeliever, banished from Allah’s Mercy; even his children are not free from his evil omen. Allah *the Almighty* clearly manifests the truth when He says: ‘And those persons from among men used to seek refuge[1] with persons from among jinn, so they increased them in wrongdoing.' (*al-Jinn:* 6)

There is another noteworthy aspect of the life of sorcerers to which we should turn our attention. From where do sorcerers earn their livelihood? They earn it from the normal masses of people who understand nothing of sorcery. If one were truly successful by sorcery, he would spare himself from asking people for remuneration. He may also ask someone to bring strange things, deluding him into thinking that his problem will not be solved except in such a manner.

So, we should ask here, 'Why does the sorcerer not utilise his sorcery to rob a safe, for example, thereby relieving himself of this wearisome effort?' Were he to argue, 'How could I do that when it is other people's property and appropriating it is thievery?' Then, let him seek out the precious minerals and treasures of the earth, for these belong to no one.

Let us return to the sorcerers of Pharaoh. What sort of sorcery did they practise? Was it a type of cunning tricks, sleight of hand, and deceiving onlookers? Or was it sorcery which the devils taught in the time of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*? All of these will not stand up against the dazzling miracle which was produced at the hands of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in order to prove his veracity.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَوْجَسَ فِي نَفْسِهِۦ خِيفَةً مُّوسَىٰ ﴿٦٧﴾

Moses was inwardly alarmed [67]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 67)

In this verse, to be 'alarmed' denotes frightening in the heart, which does not go beyond it to the limbs. However, if it extends to the limbs, it changes

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(1) As-Suddi said, 'A man used to depart with his family and when he came to a certain terrain, he would settle there and say, 'I seek refuge with the master of this valley from among the jinn, lest I come to be harmed in it or my possessions, or my offspring or my livestock.' In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says, 'So when the jinn saw that man took refuge in them out of fear of them, they increased them in fear, terror and fright until the people became even more intensely scared of them, and even more frequent in seeking refuge in them'. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 4/428.

into an impulsive act such as fleeing or running. Hence, the impulsive act comes after an emotional sensation. This is why Allah *the Almighty* adds: '…inwardly …' (*Ta Ha:* 67).

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* felt fear when he saw the ropes and staffs of the sorcerers change in front of the beholders into snakes and serpents. This is because the onlookers may be satisfied with what they saw, and the situation would end at this point before Musa (Moses) would be enabled to do anything. Now, if you asked, 'Why did he not just throw his staff and be done with the issue?' We would say, 'Because his orders comes from Allah *the Exalted* step by step, and He watches over him with His Hearing and Sight, such that the new revelation comes to him immediately.'

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْنَا لَا تَخَفْ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْأَعْلَىٰ ﴿٦٨﴾

But we said, 'Do not be afraid, you have the upper hand [68] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 68)

This is Allah's Decree, coming to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*, in a form like that of a condensed telegraph, '…you have the upper hand' (*Ta Ha:* 68) which means that he should rest assured because he would be the victor and the winner. However, the humanity of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* stimulated him to ask, 'How would I be victorious?'

At that moment, the practical executive command comes to him, following Allah's theoretical promise that he would be victorious. It is as if He is following up every movement of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* not leaving him to confront this matter alone; rather, He was with him all the time, hearing and seeing. Then He responds to what is heard of words and what is seen of actions with what corresponds to them. Prophet Musa's (Moses') hearing and heart were always sharply focused on that which was sent to him of Divine revelation, as his Lord addressed him by saying: 'I am with you both, hearing and seeing everything.' (*Ta Ha:* 46)

So, the suitable reaction will come to Musa (Moses) at its proper time. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* did not inform Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* of his mission with Pharaoh, nor did He *the Almighty* abandon him *peace be upon him* to undertake it by himself. Instead, this matter was accomplished by means of Allah's Direct Instructions.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَلۡقِ مَا فِي يَمِينِكَ تَلۡقَفۡ مَا صَنَعُوٓاْۖ إِنَّمَا صَنَعُواْ كَيۡدُ سَٰحِرٖۖ وَلَا يُفۡلِحُ ٱلسَّاحِرُ حَيۡثُ أَتَىٰ ﴿٦٩﴾

Throw down what is in your right hand: it will swallow up what they have produced. They have only produced the tricks of a sorcerer, and a sorcerer will not prosper, wherever he goes [69] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 69)

This was the core of the miracle of Musa's (Moses') staff which was to seize and swallow up that which the sorcerers falsely conjured by sorcery. The expression 'to seize' used in this verse provides you with the rapidly animated image which looks like a quick glance of the eye. When you say, 'I seized it', this means that you took it rapidly and with force. Therefore, the purpose of the staff was to seize up what was produced by sorcery.

There follows Allah's saying: '… They have only produced the scheme of a sorcerer' (*Ta Ha:* 69). In this verse, the 'scheme' refers to the secretive planning devised in order to defeat an adversary. However, what can the plotting stratagem, tricks and fabrications of a sorcerer do in the face of Allah's Power and Omnipotence? Then He *the Almighty* says: '… and a sorcerer will not prosper, wherever he goes.' (*Ta Ha:* 69) We have previously spoken about the matter of a sorcerer's success, noting that regardless of what he has been granted of power through the use of jinns, this will never give him distinction over other, and he will not have the ability to harm anyone.

Therefore, beware of thinking that Allah *the Almighty* has given charge of your interests to such people. While it is true that the sorcerer has some special abilities, yet he does not harm anyone except by Allah's Permission, a fact which is stated clearly in His saying: 'And they cannot hurt with it anyone except with Allah's permission …' (*al-Baqara:* 102). Moreover, this matter does not apply to the sorcerer only; rather, it applies to the entirety of existence until the Last Hour.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأُلْقِيَ ٱلسَّحَرَةُ سُجَّدًا قَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِرَبِّ هَٰرُونَ وَمُوسَىٰ ﴿٧٠﴾

[So it was, and] the sorcerers threw themselves down in submission. ‘We believe,’ they said, ‘in the Lord of Aaron and Moses [70] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 70)

Regarding this situation, Az-Zajaj(1) said, ‘The case of these sorcerers is amazingly wondrous. They had cast their ropes and staffs for the sake of disbelief and rejection of the truth. Yet, then suddenly they threw themselves down for the sake of gratitude and worshipful prostration to Allah.’

It is true that they did indeed enter this contest as disbelieving transgressors, but they departed as truly reverent believers(2); they came with all that they had of deceitful plots, assembling the most refined sorcery and its teachers who knew it well. That is to say that they would not be fooled by tricks of sorcerers or their ruses, so when they saw the staff and what it did to their sorcery, they had not the slightest doubt that it was a miracle far beyond what they could contrive of sorcery. Therefore, they rushed without hesitation to publicly announce their faith in Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. This demonstrates to us that the innate faith in the soul may be blotted out by one’s whims, but as soon as it awakens and the veil is removed from it, the soul hastens to believe and is affected by it.

Thus, the sorcerers hastened to believe in Allah. This is proved by the fact that they will later say to Pharaoh: ‘…and the sorcery that you forced us to practise…’ (*Ta Ha:* 73). Hence, they were coerced to practise it. They were also in Pharaoh’s service as evinced by their statement: ‘We must surely have a reward if we are the prevailing ones.' (*al-A'raf:* 113) It is as if they did not earn wages for sorcery, so when this difficult mission arose, they requested compensation for it since it was a struggle upon which rested the status of Pharaoh amongst his people. On the other hand, their practice of sorcery to terrorise people and to frighten those who might be seduced to revolt against Pharaoh was a forced labour for which they were not paid.

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(1) He is Ibrahim ibn As-Surri ibn Sahl Abu Ishaq Al-Zajjaj, a scholar of grammar and linguistics. He was born in 241 A.H. and died in Baghdad in 311 A.H. In his youth, he used to be a glass maker, and then inclined towards the science of syntax. He was the teacher of Al-Qasim, the son of ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Sulayman, the vizier of the ‘Abbasid caliph *Al-Mu’tadid*. See *Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam*, 1/40.

(2) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir relates that ibn ‘Abbas and ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr said, ‘At the beginning of the day, they were sorcerers, yet pious martyrs at its end.' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim,* 3/158.

For this reason, Pharaoh did not oppose his sorcerers regarding their request. Instead, he even promised to bestow on them an additional favour by saying: '… and you shall certainly be of those who are near (to me).' (*al-A'raf:* 114) It means that they will join his retinue; He wanted to boost their zeal and to strengthen their determination so that they would spare no effort in the art of sorcery in this decisive contest.

Hence, their inclinations and innate dispositions rejected this activity, for they knew for certain that it was falsehood and fabrication. However, what could they do when their chief was ordering them to do it, even forcing them to do it, and obliging them to teach others?(1) What is the reason for this? It is because sorcery, magic arts, and falsification constituted Pharaoh's capital and his goods, which he was striving to distribute. Upon these, his dominion was based and his deification was built.

We should take into account that the verb 'to throw' in Allah's saying: '… the sorcerers threw themselves down in submission' (*Ta Ha:* 70) has a different meaning from that in Allah's saying: 'Thereupon they threw their [magic] ropes and their staffs …' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 44). In the latter case, the verb is in the active voice, signifying a voluntary act on their part. However, as for the saying of Allah, '… the sorcerers threw themselves down in submission' (*Ta Ha:* 70), the verb is in the passive voice, denoting that it was not a voluntary act on their part; it was against their own volition. It is as if the forceful power of the truth unexpectedly roused their innate nature, and they were unable to do anything but to fall down in prostration to Allah *the Almighty*. In this verse, the act of throwing on the part of the sorcerers was spontaneous, which means it was without any premeditation or awareness on their part. Thus, the evident truth and the dazzling miracle in the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* took them by surprise because they knew for certain that it was not an act of sorcery, given the fact that they were the most knowledgeable people in matters of sorcery.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates that Ibn Abu Hatim narrated regarding Allah's saying: '...and the sorcery that you forced us to practise…' (Ta Ha: 73) that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'Pharaoh took forty young men of the children of Israel and commanded that they learn sorcery with annual wages. He then added, 'They perfectly taught them such that no one on the earth could defeat them.' See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/587.*

Let us take notice in this verse that it occurs in the plural form: ‘the sorcerers threw themselves down in submission’, ‘they exclaimed’, ‘they said’ and ‘we believed’, so why does Allah use this style? This is in order to show that they were unanimous, and there was no dispute amongst them, which indicates that they were coerced to practise sorcery.

It is also noteworthy that the enunciation of their faith manifested itself in a visible act which is witnessed by everyone; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… the sorcerers threw themselves down in submission’ (*Ta Ha:* 70), and then with an audible statement, ‘We believe,’ they said, ‘in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses).’ (*Ta Ha:* 70) Similarly, in another verse, they said: ‘We believe in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 47-48)

Now, we know that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the main messenger, and his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* was sent with him. So, when the Quran depicts the situation of the sorcerers with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* it relates their saying: ‘We believe,’ they said, ‘in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses).’ (*Ta Ha:* 70) and their saying: ‘We believe in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 47-48)

For this reason, this issue has provoked contention on the part of the enemies of Islam who say, ‘What did the sorcerers exactly say? Did they say the first one or the second one?’

We contend, ‘You should try to imagine the mass of sorcerers who participated in this decisive contest. Their leaders and elite alone numbered seventy sorcerers, so what about all the subordinate ones? Hence, they were very numerous. Thus, in view of this multitude and this mass, is it reasonable to imagine that they all united in action and speech or that each one of them had his own particular reaction based on his own discerning faculties of faith?'

There is no doubt that they did not come to an accord about one utterance. Amongst them were those who said, 'We believe in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses).' (*Ta Ha:* 70) There were also others amongst them who said, 'We believe in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 47-48) Likewise, there were amongst them those who were superficial in their manner of expression and said: 'We believe in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 47-48) These were not discerning enough to realise that due to Pharaoh's having laid claim to divinity and having stated, 'I am your exalted lord' might cause their own saying: 'the Lord of Musa and Harun!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 48) to be understood as referring to Pharaoh himself since he was the one who brought up Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he was young.

Another one amongst them became aware of this issue, and being more precise in expression, he distanced Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* from this specious reasoning by saying, 'We believe in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses).' (*Ta Ha:* 70) In this verse, Harun (Aaron) occurs first, as his upbringing had nothing to do with Pharaoh, and was not beholden to him for any favour, and then after him Musa (Moses) was mentioned.

Hence, these multiple utterances and differing scenes belong to a multitudinous group whose actions were unorganised and whose manners of expression were not in agreement. The Quran relates it as it was, so no one has the right to say, 'If the first utterance is correct, then the other utterance is erroneous or vice versa.'

How similar is this situation to a sports match about which thousands of people watch and make comments. Do you imagine that their expressions describing this match would be in agreement? We say, therefore, that the Quran related many scenes and utterances for a single story to communicate to us everything that happened.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* relates the reaction of Pharaoh to what occurred by saying:

قَالَ ءَامَنتُمْ لَهُۥ قَبْلَ أَنْ ءَاذَنَ لَكُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ لَكَبِيرُكُمُ ٱلَّذِى عَلَّمَكُمُ ٱلسِّحْرَ ۖ فَلَأُقَطِّعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ
وَأَرْجُلَكُم مِّنْ خِلَٰفٍ وَلَأُصَلِّبَنَّكُمْ فِى جُذُوعِ ٱلنَّخْلِ وَلَتَعْلَمُنَّ أَيُّنَآ أَشَدُّ عَذَابًا وَأَبْقَىٰ ﴿٧١﴾

Pharaoh said, ‘How dare you believe in him before I have given you permission? This must be your master, the man who taught you witchcraft. I shall certainly cut off your alternate hands and feet, then crucify you on the trunks of palm trees. You will know for certain which of us has the fiercer and more lasting punishment’[71] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 71)

It is natural that Pharaoh should fly into a rage after what he heard from his sorcerers, for he had assembled them in order to support him and then suddenly they forsook him. No, indeed, they tore down the foundations of his throne and believed in a god other than him. Alas, if only they had remained silent when they abandoned him, but instead they proclaimed it publicly and loudly: ‘We believe in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses).’ (*Ta Ha:* 71)

In the opening part of the verse under study, we notice in Allah’s saying, ‘Pharaoh said, "How dare you believe in him before I have given you permission!"’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) Pharaoh, despite the disappointment he was smitten with, still clings tightly to his tyrannical state and to his divinity. Thus, he wanted to make the abasement and humiliation which had overcome him to disappear, for he had wished to give the people the impression of a tenacious person on whom these events had no effect. Thus, he said: ‘Pharaoh said, "How dare you believe in him before I have given you permission!"’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) It is as if he was saying to the sorcerers, ‘I am your chief who taught you sorcery, and you should have shown due respect for my station as your educator as I was going to give you permission.’

The verb ‘to believe’ is mentioned many times in the Noble Quran. In Arabic, its original connotation refers to being safe and secure and to be assured that there is nothing that can frighten you. This verb can be transitive, thus takes a direct object, as in Allah’s saying: ‘So let them serve the Lord of this House Who feeds them against hunger and gives them security against fear.’ This last verse means that Allah *the Almighty* safeguarded the populace of Mecca from fear.

The same verb can also be transitive when it is followed by the preposition fi (in); Arabs say, *'Amantu bi Allah'* ('I believe in Allah'). It can also be transitive when it is followed by the preposition lam (for), a meaning which is clear in the saying of Allah: ‘But none believed in Musa (Moses) except the offspring of his people …’ (*Yunus:* 83). In this case, the verb means to have actively trusting belief in what he brought. Hence, in Arabic, the connotations of the verb to believe include to grant some protective security, to believe firmly in something and to have sincere trust in someone’s truthfulness.

Moreover, so many forms of the Arabic root of this verb can occur as synonyms such as in Prophet Ya’qub’s (Jacob’s) saying: ‘I cannot trust in you with respect to him, except as I trusted in you with respect to his brother before?’ (*Yusuf*: 64) This is because his, ‘… as I trusted in you with respect to his brother before?’ (*Yusuf*: 64) refers to the first experience of entrusting Yusuf (Joseph) with them; so the verb appears in its basic form, as opposed to the circumstances of the second time. It was then that he required a kind of precaution for the matter; so he said, ‘I cannot trust in you with respect to him…’ (*Yusuf*: 64).

Back to the verse under discussion; in Pharaoh’s statement: ‘How dare you believe in him …’ (*Ta Ha:* 71), the verb ‘to believe’, therefore, means to have sincere trust in Musa's (Moses’) truthfulness.

Let us reflect on the eloquence of the Quran in the following expression: ‘… before I have given you permission!’ (*Ta Ha:* 70) Who uttered these words? It is Pharaoh, the dispenser of commands and prohibitions amongst his people, now speaking of permission! There is a significant difference between issuing orders and granting permission. To command something to be done means that Pharaoh favourably inclines to it, and the commanded one is obligated to execute it. On the other hand, granting permission may be regarding a matter which he does not like and does not desire. Yet, here he is giving permission since he does not have the capacity to issue orders.

To paraphrase Pharaoh’s words here, we put it like, ‘Inasmuch as you have believed in him before I gave you permission, then he must be your eminent leader who taught you sorcery. Thus, your loyalty was to him, and you showed reverence for this eminence and helped him to triumph.’

This is a poor explanation on the part of Pharaoh for the reality of faith. In his view, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was superior to them not because he excels at the art of sorcery more than them. Rather, he overcame them because they were courteous to him and acted in collusion with him since he was their eminent leader and their teacher. For this reason, Pharaoh threatens them by saying: ‘I shall certainly cut off your alternate hands and feet, then crucify you on the trunks of palm trees.’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) This threat and menacing promise is made because—in his view—they caused his defeat and forsook him in his decisive battle with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Thus, the discussion is about hands and feet, so the intended connotation is that Pharaoh threatens the sorcerers with severing their right hand along with the left foot, or the left hand along with the right foot.

In Pharaoh’s saying, ‘…then crucify you in the trunks of palm trees’ (*Ta Ha:* 71), we should pay attention to the fact that the normal crucifixion is undertaken on tree trunks, whereas the verse employs the literal expression ‘in the trunks of palm trees’. For this reason, some commentators have attempted to get out of this ambiguity, saying that here the proposition ‘in’ has the meaning of ‘on’. However, this interpretation does not do justice to the elevated style of Quranic expression. We must first agree upon the meaning of crucifying. It is to provide the object upon which the crucifying takes place, which is made of wood or iron, for example; then, you bring the person who is meant to be crucified, and you bind him onto this upright object in a firm manner, and then you tighten the binds upon him with intense force.

You can try out this matter by fastening a matchstick, for example, to your finger and then tightening the bind with great force. You will find that the matchstick penetrates into the flesh, and at that moment you would say that the matchstick is ‘in’ your finger, not ‘on’ it.

Hence, in Allah’s saying, ‘…then crucify you in the trunks of palm trees…’ (*Ta Ha:* 71), the action of ‘crucifying them in the trunks’ is to be understood literally, that is, the preposition ‘in’ retains its basic meaning. This is meant to indicate the excessively rigorous manner of crucifixion such that the object upon which the act of crucifying takes place penetrates the one crucified upon it. It is as if he is not crucified ‘on’ the trunk, rather, he is crucified ‘in’ it.

Then Pharaoh said, ‘You will know for certain which of us...’ (*Ta Ha:* 71). In this part of the verse, the phrase ‘which of us’ refers to Pharaoh and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or to Pharaoh and the Lord of Musa (Moses) Who sent him. There follows His saying: ‘…has the fiercer and more lasting punishment.’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) In this verse, Pharaoh indicates the severity of the punishment in terms of manner, continuation, and duration. It is worth noting that the Quran does not mention anything further about Pharaoh’s threat, whether he carried it out or not. However, it is more likely that he implemented that with which he threatened them.

The threat of Pharaoh should have filled the hearts of the sorcerers with awe and terrorised them so that, at the very least, they would have tried to make excuses for what happened, but nothing like this occurred. Indeed, they instead gave voice to what would infuriate Pharaoh even more, affirming as mentioned in the following verse:

قَالُوا۟ لَن نُّؤْثِرَكَ عَلَىٰ مَا جَآءَنَا مِنَ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَٱلَّذِى فَطَرَنَا ۖ
فَٱقْضِ مَآ أَنتَ قَاضٍ ۖ إِنَّمَا تَقْضِى هَٰذِهِ ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَآ ﴿٧٢﴾

They said, ‘We shall never prefer you to the clear sign that has come to us, nor to Him who created us. So decide whatever you will: you can only decide matters of this present life [72] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 72)

To prefer someone to someone else means to give the former the precedence over the latter while they are equal in the aspect of preference. So, you say, ‘I prefer so-and-so over so-and-so’, while the two of them are of the same status. However, the same verb can also be used in situations where you have something and give it to a poor person. By so doing, you have given him preference over yourself. A relevant example occurs in Allah’s saying: ‘…and prefer (them) before themselves though poverty may afflict them…’ (*al-Hashr:* 9).

Thus, their statement, ‘We shall never prefer you to the clear sign that has come to us, nor to Him Who created us...’ (*Ta Ha:* 72), serves as a response to Pharaoh’s saying: ‘… You will know for certain which of us has the fiercer and more lasting punishment.’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) From the perspective of Pharaoh, the battle is with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Hence, the sorcerers wanted to confront Pharaoh with the truth which has become evident to all of them. In reality, the conflict is not with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him,* but rather, it is with the manifest signs of Allah *the Almighty* with which Musa (Moses) was sent. They are declaring to Pharaoh, 'We shall not prefer you over the signs of Allah which have come to us clearly and indisputably.'

When the sorcerers witnessed the miracle of the staff, it was they who had the deepest belief in Allah *the Almighty* a point which is clearly evident when they said, 'We believe in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses).' (*Ta Ha:* 70) Here, they did not say, 'We believe in Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron).' This indicates plainly that their faith is sound and truthful from the first instant.

We have previously come across this issue in the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) with the Queen of Sheba, *Balqis*, when she said, '… and I submit with Sulaiman (Solomon) to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.' (*an-Naml:* 44) Thus, she declared her submission solely to Allah *the Exalted*; she did not say, 'I have surrendered myself to Sulaiman (Solomon)' because there is a supreme Lord to Whom all submit.

Therefore, the sorcerers' statement, 'We shall never prefer you to the clear sign that has come to us, nor to Him Who created us...' (*Ta Ha:* 72) is a precise expression full of awareness and wisdom. You will not find in it the persona of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him;* instead, you find evidence of the truth which he brought from Allah *the Almighty*. In this respect, He *the Most High* says: 'those who disbelieved from amongst the followers of the Book and the polytheists could not have separated (from the faithful) until there had come to them the clear evidence.' (*al-Bayyina:* 1) Then He *Glorified is He* makes it clear to whom the evidence of the truth came: 'A messenger from Allah, reading out pages [blessed with] purity.' (*al-Bayyina:* 2)

So, there are three stages of attaining to faith which start with believing in the messenger and then believing in the evidence of truth and lastly believing in Allah *the Almighty*.

In the verse under study, the ‘clear signs’ refer to the manifestly clear matters which settle all contention surrounding them. They do not allow for argument or a disputation as their proof is obvious and manifestly apparent.

As for the sorcerers’ saying, ‘to Him Who created us’ (*Ta Ha:* 72), it means that they will not also give preference to Pharaoh over Allah *Glorified is He* Who created us. There is another possible interpretation for this part of the verse; it can serve as an oath attesting to what they just stated; you say, ‘I will not do such-and-such, I swear by Him Who created you.’ Hereby you take an oath that you will not do this thing. In this sense, the sorcerers’ statement expresses the standpoint of not going back on what they said; in other words, their belief in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* is steadfast and unshakable.

Subsequently, they do not miss the opportunity of referring to the threats of the Pharaoh which is the following: ‘…I shall certainly cut off your alternate hands and feet, then crucify you on the trunks of palm trees.’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) Therefore, they say: ‘So decide whatever you will…’ (*Ta Ha:* 72). It is as if they were saying to him, ‘Execute the sentence you pronounced concerning the severing of hands and feet or carry out that which you have decided concerning other matters. Do whatever you want, for these threats no longer frighten us.’ There follows their saying: 'You can only decide matters of this present life.’ (*Ta Ha:* 72)

So, they continue to say to him, ‘You are a man, and you might die at any time, and so you will pronounce rulings only for the period of your life. Perhaps there will come after you he who is better than you are, not falsely claiming what you have ascribed to yourself of divinity. Now, should it happen that the one who comes after you will follow in your footsteps, and then his life also will come to an end. Even if the customary practice you established for your people in terms of presuming deification remains until the Day of Resurrection, the issue will be settled, even if it is delayed until the arising of the Last Hour.’

As we have previously said, the pleasures and delights of this world, regardless of the level they reach, are threatened by two factors: either you lose them or they leave you. However, the pleasures and delights of the Hereafter are enduring and continuous. You never lose them, and they never leave you.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* relates that the sorcerers said:

إِنَّآ ءَامَنَّا بِرَبِّنَا لِيَغۡفِرَ لَنَا خَطَٰيَٰنَا وَمَآ أَكۡرَهۡتَنَا عَلَيۡهِ مِنَ ٱلسِّحۡرِۗ وَٱللَّهُ خَيۡرٞ وَأَبۡقَىٰٓ ٧٣

We believe in our Lord, [hoping] He may forgive us our sins and the sorcery that you forced us to practise – God is better and more lasting [73] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 73)

Inasmuch as the sorcerers have reverted from faith in a human being to faith in the Creator of all the human beings, this is a wise thinking for which they should not be blamed. Hence, they explain the motive behind their faith by saying, '[hoping] He may forgive us our sins and the sorcery that you forced us to practise...' (*Ta Ha:* 73).

Thus, the motive behind their belief in Allah *the Exalted* is that it will be beneficial for them, for He will forgive their numerous sins, including what Pharaoh obligated them to do regarding the matter of sorcery for them. After all, they performed sorcery under coercion, and they practised it under compulsion. Thus, it was an activity which did not follow in accordance with their natural inclination nor with their fundamental constitution and innate disposition.

How often are people forced to do things which they are not content with, executing orders which they are not convinced of, especially during the eras of haughty transgressors and tyrants. For example, we have frequently heard of prison wardens in detention centres; one of them would receive orders to torture one of the prisoners. So, what would he do while he knows that the person is innocent? He would not be able to make his heart submit to torturing him, so he would enter the prisoner's cell and tell him, 'scream out as loudly as you can.' Then, he would pretend that he was beating him.

Then the sorcerers say: 'Allah is better and more lasting.' (*Ta Ha:* 73) In fact, Allah *the Almighty* is the Ever-Lasting, while Pharaoh and other cruel tyrants, who would come after him and even the whole world, will come to an end. He *the Most High* provided the human beings with causal means in this world, but in the Hereafter they will not live by these causal means; rather, they will live by the Causer Himself. For this reason, if something crosses your mind, you find it in front of you; this is the bliss of the Hereafter. As for the civilisations of this world, they will never attain to it regardless of the level of development they reach.

Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…until when the earth puts on its golden raiment and it becomes garnished, and its people think that they have power over it, Our command comes to it, by night or by day…' (*Yunus:* 24). Therefore, however strongly human beings believe that they are capable of doing everything in their world, in reality they are weak, unable to preserve even what they have attained.

Hence, you should always keep Allah *Glorified is He* in your mind, and this will be compensation for every good thing that you pass by. You should be ashamed lest He observe you while you are disobeying Him. It was related in a Qudsi Hadith, 'If you believe that I do not see you, then there is a deficiency in your faith, and if you believe that I see you, then why have you ranked Me as the most insignificant of those who behold you?!'(1)

In this respect, once a pious sage was asked, 'What have you wholeheartedly dedicated your life to?' He replied, 'To four things: I know I am never free from the gaze of Allah for even the blink of an eye, so I have been ashamed of disobeying Him. I know that I have apportioned sustenance which will not pass me by, for Allah has guaranteed it for me, so I am content with it. I know that there is a debt I owe which no one else can repay for me, so I preoccupied myself with it. Finally, I know that I have an ordained time of death which is advancing towards me, so I am consciously advancing towards it.'

Another one of the upright wise men commented on these four principles by saying: 'Be heedful of the One from Whose gaze you are never freed and render your thanks to the One Whose Favour never ceases to come to you, render your obedience to the One Whom you cannot dispense with and render your submissiveness to the One from Whose Dominion and Authority you cannot escape.'

In this manner, these eight sayings encompass all the religion.

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(1) Research in the books of Hadith has revealed the absence of authoritative support for a Hadith with this wording.

Subsequently, the sorcerers who proclaimed their faith put forward the reasons for this faith by saying:

إِنَّهُۥ مَن يَأۡتِ رَبَّهُۥ مُجۡرِمٗا فَإِنَّ لَهُۥ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحۡيَىٰ ﴿٧٤﴾

Hell will be the reward of those who return to their Lord as evildoers: there they will stay, neither living nor dying [74]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 74)

In Allah’s saying, ‘Hell will be the reward of those who return to their Lord as evildoers...’ (*Ta Ha:* 74), the evildoer basically means the one who committed a crime. In this verse, the crime is to break one of Allah’s Laws, just as human beings do regarding their own laws. They impose a punishment on whoever goes against these laws. However, it is necessary that the crime be specified and known to people; so, as soon as someone falls into it, he deserves the punishment. Hence, no one should be punishing except on the basis of a crime, and there is no crime except on the basis of a written text.

Allah’s saying, ‘… those who return to their Lord as evildoers...’ (*Ta Ha:* 74) signifies that it is the evildoer who shall return to Allah *the Almighty* in spite of his culpability and the punishment he anticipates. However, why did the sorcerers address Pharaoh using the term ‘evildoing’? This is because he said, ‘… I shall certainly cut off your alternate hands and feet, then crucify you on the trunks of palm trees.’ (*Ta Ha:* 71) He said so while they did nothing more than uttering the word of truth, so which one, then, is the evildoer?

Allah *the Exalted* then says: ‘… there they will stay [in Hell], neither living nor dying.’ (*Ta Ha:* 74) The evildoers will not die in the Hell because death would relieve them of chastisement. Therefore, they shall wish for death while they are punished in the hell, a fact which is ever so clear in Allah’s saying: ‘O, Malik, let your Lord make an end of us.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 77) Then comes his reply: ‘Surely, you shall tarry.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 77)

Evidently, there is a difference between punishment and death, for death is the termination of life which is not followed by any pain. As for punishment, it only arises with life, as it means to hurt a living being. For this reason, in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) and the Hoopoe bird, Sulaiman

(Solomon) *peace be upon him* said: ‘I will most certainly punish it with a severe punishment or kill it...’ (*an-Naml:* 21). Hence, punishing is different from killing, as the latter entails the termination of life.

Now, the meaning of ‘… neither living nor dying’ (*Ta Ha:* 74) is that there is a stage between death and life, whereby a person does not die and thus finds relief, nor does he live a life free of suffering.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَن يَأْتِهِۦ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمُ ٱلدَّرَجَٰتُ ٱلْعُلَىٰ ﴿٧٥﴾

But those who return to their Lord as believers with righteous deeds will be rewarded with the highest of ranks [75] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 75)

It is as if the sorcerers were referring in their earlier statement, ‘Hell will be the reward of those who return to their Lord as evildoers...’ (*Ta Ha:* 74), to Pharaoh. In the verse in question, however, they are referring to themselves and to the path of faith which they followed: ‘But those who return to their Lord as believers with righteous deeds...’ (*Ta Ha:* 75).

Here, they combine faith and good deeds since faith is the spiritual source from which the impulsive actions are issued forth in accordance with the Divine Way of Guidance that they believe in. Otherwise, what is the benefit of you believing in something without acting upon it? Concerning this connection, we should note that the Quran frequently combines between belief and righteous deeds.

Regarding Allah’s saying, ‘… will be rewarded with the highest of ranks’ (*Ta Ha:* 75), the word ‘ranks’ refers to the degrees of eminence in Paradise, for it comprises ascending degrees, one of them above the other. On the other hand, Hellfire comprises descending levels, one of them below the other.

Allah *the Most High* provided paradise with ascending degrees because those who dwell in it vary between each other in their good deeds,(1) just as they varied from one another in a single good deed due to their different levels of sincerity. Hence, we find in a Hadith, ‘People are in danger save those who are cognisant of the truth, and those who are cognisant of the truth are in danger save those who perform good deeds, and those who perform good deeds are in danger save those who are sincere, and those who are sincere are in tremendous danger.’

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(1) *`Ibn Al-Mubarak and Abu Nu‘aym narrated that ‘Awn Ibn ‘Abdullah said, ‘Surely, Allah grants a people entry into paradise and gives them until they have had enough. Above them are people in higher ranks, and when they look at them, they recognise them, so they say, ‘O our Lord, those are our brothers and we were with them, so on=*

So, what are the highest ranks referred to in this verse? The answer is provided in the following saying of Allah *Glorified is He*:

جَنَّٰتُ عَدۡنٖ تَجۡرِى مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ وَذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ مَن تَزَكَّىٰ ﴿٧٦﴾

Gardens of lasting bliss graced with flowing streams, and there they will stay. Such is the reward of those who purify themselves [76] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 76)

The intended meaning in this verse is that the Gardens of lasting bliss have been prepared for the residence of those who believe and do righteous deeds. Now, there is a difference between a place prepared for residence and a place prepared for transitory use. Likewise, a place differs in its luxury according to the one who prepares it. Therefore, how would you envisage a place prepared for you by Allah *the Almighty* with His Divine Power and Ability?

There follows Allah’s saying: ‘…beneath which rivers flow, and there they will stay.’ (*Ta Ha:* 76) We know that water is amongst the most important constituent elements of life in this world, for it is integral to growing crops and the nutritive elements are dissolved in it. Without water, life would be impossible on the face of the earth. In passing, we should note that when Allah *the Almighty* sends rain from the sky, the one upon whom rain falls may not derive benefit from it, as it might fall on a mountain, for example. Let us consider the Nile, for instance, upon whose water the Egyptian people live; it comes from Abyssinia and other places.

= *what basis have you given them preference over us?’ Then it will be said, ‘How far you are from them, surely they used to go hungry while you were satiated, they would go thirsty while your thirst was well-quenched, they would be standing in worship while you were sleeping, and they would ascend higher while you sank down.’ See Ibn Al-Mubarak, Az-Zuhd, p. 23, Hadith no. 99; Abu Nu‘aym, Hilyat Al-Awliya’, 4/247.*

Therefore, the Creator *Glorified is He* has rendered the expression, '…beneath which rivers flow...' (*Ta Ha:* 76), a symbol for greenery, freshness, abundance and blissful life, In fact, every human being—though he may not be in need of food, for example, since he is satiated—finds delight in the sight of the green nature with its crops and flowers. After all, a person does not only delight in eating the fruits of the crops, but he also delights in viewing them. So, if you eat three meals per day, you still can take pleasure in a beautiful view, for lovely scenery constitutes a delight to the spirit and happiness for the soul.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* commands us not to confine our deriving of benefit to the blessings that we possess. So, even if you are forbidden to eat the fruits that do not belong to you, you can take delight in viewing them as this is also a pleasure and continuous nourishment. This point is quite clear in Allah's saying: '… behold the fruit of it when it yields the fruit and the ripening of it.' (*al-An'am:* 99)

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Most High* says: '… beneath which rivers flow...' (*Ta Ha:* 76). This is because the flowing of rivers in this world is a means to verdure and fertility. Concerning His saying: '… beneath which…' (*Ta Ha:* 76), it indicates that the water is an integral part of the Gardens. It is not flowing towards you from some other place, so it will not be withheld from you, nor will you be deprived of it.

Thus, in another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '… beneath which rivers flow...' (*at-Tawba:* 100). That is to say that below the Gardens there are flowing rivers, but their origin is from another place. He ascribes flowing to the river, not to the water. This serves as an emphasis, since the river is the conduit in which the water flows.

Allah *the Exalted* then says: '…and there they will stay.' (*Ta Ha:* 76) In this verse, He guarantees the eternality of the blessings in the Hereafter. In fact, the defect of any worldly blessing stems from the fact that it ends, either by you losing it yourself when you die or else it goes away itself. By contrast, Allah *the Almighty* has rendered the blessing of paradise free of this defect, for it is everlasting and enduring. It does not disappear, nor are you removed from it.

Afterwards Allah *the Almighty* concludes this verse with His saying: ‘Such is the reward of those who purify themselves.’ (*Ta Ha:* 76) In Arabic, purity refers to something intrinsically pure and growing; it augments beyond the state in which you see it.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; you may go to a garden and view artificial roses and natural roses. In the latter, there is moisture, freshness, pleasant fragrance, and growth; all of these are inherent qualities of a rose. This is in contrast to an artificial rose which remains in a single state.

This is the difference between what the human creates and the creation of his Creator. Therefore, that which Allah *the Almighty* fashions is more abiding and more enduring, a fact which is clearly manifested in His saying: ‘… So, blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 14)

It should be noted here that He does not begrudge you the attribute of creation since you utilised causal factors and employed your intellectual ability, so you have some aspects of the creative power. However, your Lord is the best of creators since when you create something; you do it out of the already existed beings which are originally created by Allah *the Exalted*. On the contrary, He creates out of nothing. Moreover, while you create something inanimate, He creates alive and growing beings, multiplying by themselves.

Back to the verse in question; the word *az-zakat* (the prescribed alms) which you give to the poor comes from the same root of purity because it purifies the remainder of the property and causes it to increase. It is worth noting that Allah *the Almighty* describes that which you give of wealth in charity as augmentation while He describes the increase earned through usury as obliteration.

Hence, the meaning of His saying, ‘Such is the reward of those who purify themselves’ (*Ta Ha:* 76) is that the Gardens of lasting bliss are prepared as a reward for believers who have purified themselves of sins and then ascended progressively in attaining to the truth. Although they have already believed, their faith increases and grows daily. The more their faith increases, the greater their nearness to their Lord; as a matter of fact, the purity of things comes before their growth as the warding off of a cause of evil takes precedence over the attainment of benefit.

Therefore, a believer should first purify his belief and then work on increasing it. This is similar to someone who wishes to engage in commerce; he must first provide pure, lawful capital, and then he shall work on growing it. So, beware of using impure, unlawful capital which you then try to increase. Therefore, the more a believer causes his faith to grow, the higher he ascends in his rank. That is why he shall have a lofty rank in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَلَقَدۡ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰٓ أَنۡ أَسۡرِ بِعِبَادِى فَٱضۡرِبۡ لَهُمۡ
طَرِيقٗا فِى ٱلۡبَحۡرِ يَبَسٗا لَّا تَخَٰفُ دَرَكٗا وَلَا تَخۡشَىٰ ٧٧

We revealed to Moses, ‘Go out at night with My servants and strike a dry path for them across the sea. Have no fear of being overtaken and do not be dismayed’ [77]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 77)

This revelation to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* occurred after the end of the contest in which the forces of faith had triumphed. As for Pharaoh, he had lost one of his most important weapons and a large part of his authority and tyrannical power.

In this verse, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* has assembled the Children of Israel of the remaining descendants of the family of Jacob in order to take them to the Promised Land. However, Pharaoh rapidly readied his army and gathered together his forces and marched in pursuit of them to the coast of the sea. Thereupon Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people were besieged, with the sea in front of them and Pharaoh and his army behind them. They had no way of escape from this dilemma.

This is the judgment of the human mind, but from the perspective of true believers, there is a solution. This is because a believer’s affairs are not isolated from his Lord and Creator. So, when a calamity or a tribulation befalls him, he considers the fact that his Lord is safeguarding him. Then he takes refuge in Him and finds comfort in His Protection. Thus, it is said, ‘There is no disaster while You are Lord.’ So as long as I have a Lord in whom I can find refuge, then there is no calamity, for it only befalls the one who has no Lord in Whom to seek refuge.

We have coined a simile for this point; if someone had only a single Egyptian pound in his pocket, and it drops from him on the road, he will be aggrieved. However if he possesses other money, it will compensate him for his lost. Likewise, your belief in Allah *the Almighty* compensates you for any calamity that befalls you.

In order to save Musa (Moses) and his people from this dilemmatic situation, Allah *the Almighty* commanded him by saying: 'Go out at night with My servants and strike a dry path for them across the sea.' (*Ta Ha:* 77) Thus, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was ordered to go out by night because the night is best for concealing a traveller.

In Allah's saying, '…with My servants...' (*Ta Ha:* 77), the word 'servants' basically has a general and a specific connotation. Generally, it refers to all created beings in the universe since they are Allah's subservient slaves. Even if the human beings have free choice in some matters, they are under compulsion in other things. Thus, even the one who is accustomed to using his freedom of choice to act in contravention of Allah's Way of Guidance faces compelling forces such as illness and death.

On the other hand, the term 'Allah's servants' specifically refers to the elite which have preferred what He wills over what they desire, and they willingly opted for this. So, when Allah *Glorified is He* gave them the choice by saying, '… let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve' (*al-Kahf:* 29), they chose what pleases Him.

It is for this reason that Allah *the Almighty* ascribes them to Himself by saying: 'As regards My servants, you have no authority over them...' (*al-Hijr:* 42). He also describes them in His saying, '… honoured servants' (*al-Anbiya':* 26), and in His saying: 'And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk on the earth in humbleness.' (*al-Furqan:* 63)

Back to the verse under study; Allah *the Almighty* commands Musa (Moses), by saying: '… and strike a dry path for them across the sea.' (*Ta Ha:* 77) By so doing, they will have a dry path in the middle of the water.

In Arabic, the verb ‘to strike’ means to hit something by an instrument. A related usage of this is to strike coinage, or in other words, to mint it and mark it with a seal. Thus, after being a piece of metal, it becomes circulating money. So, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff, and the sea split apart, and the water pulled away into a dry path suitable for passing over with feet. This phenomenon cannot be envisaged by the human mind. Therefore, his Lord reassures Musa (Moses) by saying: ‘Have no fear of being overtaken and do not be dismayed.’ (*Ta Ha:* 77) This means that he should have no fear of being caught up by Pharaoh or being drowned in the sea, for the path is prepared, levelled, and suitable for this function.

This is another miracle of Musa's (Moses') staff which he previously cast and it became a fast-moving snake. Here, he also struck the sea with it, and so what was beneath it became a dry path surrounded by mountains, a point which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘… and each part was like a huge mound.’ (*al-An‘am:* 63) These staffs are also the one with which he struck the stone, thus causing water to gush forth from it.

The narrative in these verses did not mention anything about the exchange of words between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people when they found themselves in this predicament. This conversation, however, is related in other verses of Quran. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘so when the two hosts saw each other, the companions of Musa (Moses) cried out, "Most surely we are being overtaken." He said, "By no means, surely, my Lord is with me. He will show me a way out."’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 61-62)

Through the multiplicity of narrative segments in the Quran, the wider and comprehensive picture of the story is rendered complete, and thus there is no redundant repetition as some are deluded into thinking.

Hence, before the following saying of Allah, ‘… and strike a dry path for them across the sea...’ (*Ta Ha:* 77), was revealed to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the children of Israel said, ‘Most surely we are being overtaken.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 61) Thereupon, he said, ‘By no means, …’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62). But how could he say this with such confidence, while what they feared was likely to happen within a moment?

To this, we reply, ‘This is due to the fact that he did not say this based upon his own opinion or the laws of men; rather, he said as such based on the laws of the Creator of men.’ Thus, he said, "By no means, surely my Lord is with me. He will show me a way out."’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62) Therefore, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not deceiving his people as he was not cut off from heaven and the Commands of His Lord.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَتۡبَعَهُمۡ فِرۡعَوۡنُ بِجُنُودِهِۦ فَغَشِيَهُم مِّنَ ٱلۡيَمِّ مَا غَشِيَهُمۡ ﴿٧٨﴾

Pharaoh pursued them with his armies and was overwhelmed by the sea [78] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 78)

With respect to Allah’s saying, ‘… and was overwhelmed by the sea’ (*Ta Ha:* 78), it means that the water covered them. This incident is left vague to indicate its terrifying nature and horror as it is beyond description.

In another narrative segment of this event, Allah *the Almighty* explains that, after crossing over with his people safely, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* on the basis of his own judgment and faith-based deductions, wanted to strike the sea a second time. By so doing, it would return to its unbroken flow and thus prevent Pharaoh from overtaking him. However, Allah *the Almighty* commanded him by saying: ‘and leave the sea intervening; surely they are a host who shall be drowned.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 24) Thus, He ordered him to leave the sea as it is and not to revert it to its unrestricted flow, for just as He rescued him by means of water, He will annihilate his enemy by means of water as well. Hence, Exalted is the One Who saves and destroys with the same thing.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَضَلَّ فِرۡعَوۡنُ قَوۡمَهُۥ وَمَا هَدَىٰ ﴿٧٩﴾

Pharaoh truly led his people astray; he did not guide them [79] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 79)

Pharaoh had previously said to his people: ‘… and I do not make you follow any but the right way.’ (*Ghafir:* 29) So, where is the right way about which he spoke after Allah *the Almighty* covered them up with the sea? Indeed, he led his people to annihilation, not providing them with salvation and upright guidance. Hence, he was a liar in laying claim to the right way of guidance since he led them astray instead of guiding them and destroyed them instead of saving them.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ قَدۡ أَنجَيۡنَٰكُم مِّنۡ عَدُوِّكُمۡ وَوَٰعَدۡنَٰكُمۡ جَانِبَ
ٱلطُّورِ ٱلۡأَيۡمَنَ وَنَزَّلۡنَا عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡمَنَّ وَٱلسَّلۡوَىٰ ٨٠

O, Children of Israel, We rescued you from your enemies.
We made a pledge with you on the right-hand side of the
mountain. We sent down manna and quails for you [80]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 80)

Allah *the Exalted* has bestowed countless gifts and blessings on the children of Israel. The pious servitude, which He ascribed to them in saying, '… Go out at night with My servants…' (*Ta Ha:* 77), required that they implement His Way of Guidance. Moreover it required that they always remember His blessings such that every time their souls veered towards a forbidden act, they would recall one of these blessings. This would remind them that they are not free volunteers in their faith in Allah; rather, they are just repaying the blessings and favours of Allah.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* reminds them about some of His blessings and addresses them with the fondest of terms, 'O, children of Israel' (*Ta Ha:* 80); the name 'Israel' means the sincerely devoted servant of Allah. This is similar to when to say to your companion, 'O, son of the good man or pious man.' Hence, Allah *the Most High* is reminding them about their noble origins, attributing them one of His prophets, Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him*. It is as if He is drawing their attention to the fact that committing acts of transgression is not appropriate for them, nor is deviating from Allah's Way of Guidance since they are the descendants of this righteous man.

The word 'enemy' in Allah's saying, 'We rescued you from your enemies…' (*Ta Ha:* 80) refers to Pharaoh who held them in contempt, killed their sons, spared their womenfolk, exploited their labour without recompense and committed despicable deeds against them.

There follows Allah's saying: 'We made a pledge with you on the right-hand side of the mountain.' (*Ta Ha:* 80) This pledge was in order that they adhere to the sound path in the activities of life. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* freed them from harm and bestowed His blessings on them. The word 'pledge' necessarily implies a mutual act between two parties. So, was the pledge taken by both Allah and the children of Israel? No, the promise was only from Allah *the Almighty*; however, the Quranic expression includes the Children of Israel in the promise. This draws our attention to the fact that if a person promises you something and you agree, then it is as if you have entered into a promise.

As for Allah's saying, '…on the right-hand side of the mountain' (*Ta Ha:* 80), it refers to the place where they received the Divine Way of Guidance. It is a place far away in the desert, bereft of crops and water. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* assures them of what will nourish them by saying: 'We sent down manna and quails for you.' (*Ta Ha:* 80)

The 'manna' is a white liquid similar to honey. It dribbles like crystallised drops resembling dew on the leaves of trees. In the morning, the children of Israel used to gather this sweet food. This blessed phenomenon still exists; in Iraq, for example, a significant industry is based upon the manufacture of honeydew. The 'quail' which was bestowed on them is a kind of birds. In this manner, Allah *the Almighty* provided them plentifully with the basic necessities of life: this sugary substance whose delicious flavour was a blend of cream and bee honey, as well as appetising birds without any tiresome effort on their part to the extent that they would find it in front of them prepared and ready to eat. Thus, they should have been expected to be grateful for Allah's blessings upon them, but they objected to that, saying: '…"We cannot bear with one food. Therefore, pray our Lord on our behalf to bring forth for us out of what the earth grows, of its herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions." He said, "Will you exchange that which is better for that which is worse?"' (*al-Baqara*: 61)

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, alongside this Blessing which accompanied them in the aridity of the desert, Allah *the Almighty* mentions another blessing by saying: ‘And We made the clouds to give shade over you, and We sent to you manna and quails.’ (*al-Baqara:* 57) Thus, He protected the children of Israel from the heat of the sun while they were travelling in the desert.

We should take note of the difference of wording between the two verses concerning manna and quails. In the verse under study, the Arabic verb used to refer to sending down of manna and a quail is transitive indicating that the action may happen only once. On the other hand, the verb used in the chapter of *al-Baqara* signifies the continuous nature of sending down. This is because Allah *the Almighty* addresses the topic from all aspects through different narrative segments.

Country folk in Egypt employ the word 'manna' to refer to a dark reddish substance which then turns black and drips onto plants, but it is not a blessing; instead, it is considered a harmful disease to plants.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كُلُواْ مِن طَيِّبَٰتِ مَا رَزَقۡنَٰكُمۡ وَلَا تَطۡغَوۡاْ فِيهِ فَيَحِلَّ
عَلَيۡكُمۡ غَضَبِيۖ وَمَن يَحۡلِلۡ عَلَيۡهِ غَضَبِي فَقَدۡ هَوَىٰ ﴿٨١﴾

Eat from the good things We have provided for you, but do
not overstep the bounds, or My wrath will descend on you.
Anyone on whom My wrath descends has truly fallen [81]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 81)

Food, drink, and air are basic constituents of life, which Allah *the Almighty* has guaranteed for us. In this verse, the command to eat signifies permissibility. It is not obligatory for you to eat unless you intended to refrain from food in the manner of a hunger strike which endangers your life. In this case, you are obligated to eat.

In Allah’s saying, ‘Eat from the good things We have provided for you...’ (*Ta Ha:* 81), the ‘good things’ are specified because the provision includes both good and bad. The provision connotes everything that you derive benefit from, even if it is unlawful. This is to say that whatever you obtain of the unlawful is also part of your provision, but you expedited it by unlawful means. Now if you desist from it and restrained your soul from it, you would obtain multiples of it from what is lawful.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…but do not overstep the bounds...' (*Ta Ha:* 81). In a similar verse of the chapter of *an-Nahl,* He *the Most High* says: '… and We did them no injustice, but they were unjust to themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 118) Hence, it is as if the reason for doing injustice to the soul lies in their having transgressed the proper bounds in eating of sustenance. Overstepping the bounds of something means to exceed its normal limit within which it is beneficial. A related usage is flooding of water when it goes beyond the bound of alleviating the dryness of the land and thirst and reaches the bounds of inundation. In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely, We bore you up in the ship when the water rose high.' (*al-Haqqa:* 11) This verse refers to the case when the water surpassed the limit within which it is beneficial and became ruinous and destructive.

The same is true with regard to any limit, but how do you overstep the limit regarding food and means of subsistence? When Allah *the Almighty* created the earth, He apportioned its ordained nourishment until the Day of Resurrection, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'He … blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them—all in four Days.' (*Fussilat:* 10) So rest assured, mankind, in regard to this matter. So, if you should see that the earth does not produce, then do not blame it. Rather, blame yourselves for your falling short and indolence with respect to cultivating and farming it, as Allah *the Almighty* commanded us by saying: '… He brought you into being from the earth, and made you dwell in it.' (*Hud:* 61)

Thus, we should not overstep the bounds after the Creator brought forth our sustenance and the constituent elements of our life and rendered them suitable for human beings upon whom He bestowed honour, making them His Vicegerent on the earth. He established clearly defined limits for the lawful things from amongst this sustenance and these constituent elements. Therefore, you must not overstep these bounds by being excessive in your consumption of your food and drink.

We even see that amongst man-made machines each has its own special fuel and that if you give it something else, it will not perform its function. For example, if you fuelled an aeroplane with diesel fuel, it will not move because such fuel does not accord with its nature.

Hence, you should not go beyond the sustenance which is lawful. In fact, if we analyse what Allah *the Almighty* has permitted and what He has made forbidden, we would find that permissibility is the basis of things. The great majority of things are lawfully permitted for you. As for that which is legally forbidden, they are few and limited, and you could even delineate them.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Say: "Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you …"’ (*al-An‘am:* 105); however, He does not say in another verse, for example: ‘Say: Come I will recite what your Lord has made lawful for you.’ This is because the lawful matters are so extensive and cannot be enumerated.

Hence, when Allah *the Almighty* bestows substance on you, He tells you, ‘This is your lawful and personal provision. It includes your nutrition and the essential elements of your life. They are integral to your survival and to the vivacity of your movements. So, do not transgress beyond what is lawful, in all its abundance, to what is forbidden, in all its scarceness and limitation to a number of categories which have been made clear to you and against which you have been warned.’

In the body, nourishment allows it to maintain metabolism which is the process of destruction and construction. This is a continuous process that occurs at every moment. So, beware of building an atom of your atoms with what is unlawful, for this atom will persevere in inciting you to fall into what is unlawful.

In the same respect, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah *the Almighty* is Good and accepts only that which is good. Indeed, Allah has commanded the believers to do that which He has commanded the messengers. So *the Almighty* has said, "O, (you) messengers! Eat of the good things and perform righteous deeds.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 51) and *the Almighty* has said: ‘O you who believe! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 172) Then he mentioned [the case] of a man who, having journeyed far, is dishevelled and dusty, and who spreads out his hands to the sky and says, ‘O, Lord! O, Lord!’ while his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, his clothing is unlawful, and he has been nourished with unlawful, so how can [his supplication] be answered?(1) This is because the atoms of his physical frame are not in harmony since they grew on nourishment which Allah did not make lawful for him.

Hence, you hear certain disputatious people say, ‘In the light of the fact that Allah created swine, then why did He make it unlawful?’ To this, we reply, ‘You have understood that every created thing was created to be eaten, and this is not correct. Now, Allah *the Exalted* created petroleum by which machines run on, but can you consume it like a car? Thus, there are certain created beings which were created for a specific function, but human beings directed them to a different function. This is a transfer of a thing to other than what it was made for, which constitutes, in the case of swine, a transgression in foodstuff, for you have shifted the unlawful to the lawful.’

However, transgression may appear in another form, such as when you eat what Allah *the Almighty* has made lawful of good things, but you obtained it in an unlawful way. You accustom yourself to laziness as regards lawful earning and take possession of the efforts of someone else, living dependently on him. Besides the fact that you nourish yourself on what is unlawful, you are also depriving someone else of activity, productivity, and ownership. So, what, then, is the benefit that the one who is wearing himself out derives when someone else takes the fruit of his toil?

Transgression in this sense takes multiple forms in our society, amongst which we could enumerate: extortion or robbery, snatching, theft, embezzlement, bribery, breach of trust and duping someone who hires you. There are many other examples of taking the possessions of people by deception and without any right. Every act amongst these transgressions has its special form. Thus, amongst the forms of appropriating people’s wealth is snatching. It is the crime committed when you grab someone else’s money without the person being able to stop you, and then you run away with it. However, if he is able to catch you, but you take it by force, then this is violent robbery. By contrast, if the act of appropriating the wealth is done surreptitiously, while it is in a secured place, then this is theft. On the other hand, if you are entrusted with money under your control and then you take from it covertly, then this is embezzlement, and so on and so forth.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/328, Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1015; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2989.*

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* has made certain things lawful for you, and other things forbidden for you. So, if the thing is lawful, then do not take it except with due right so that each of us respects the work of others and their activities in life as well as their rightful ownership. In this way, the proceedings of life will be rectified, and everyone will be happy. We will thereby help the one who is charitable and assist the forlorn beggar.

Islam has a sound method for doing away with the problem of unemployment, which some modern systems of government are adopting today. The law of Islam encourages the eradication of unemployment is similar to the case when you have a well dug and then have it filled in, after which you give the worker his wages for this work. How is this possible? What is the benefit of this? Why should we not just give the worker his wages without digging and without filling in?

This is in order that a person does not become habituated to lassitude and laziness, and so that he does not eat except by the sweat of his brow and effort, otherwise the society would become corrupt.

Furthermore, transgression regarding sustenance has another form. It is to use what Allah *the Almighty* has provided you to be energy in the endeavours of a useful life in an unlawful way by expending this energy in disobeying Him.

In this sense, the transgression of the children of Israel was the causal factor for Allah's punishment, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…and We did them no injustice...' (*an-Nahl:* 118); what this means is that by punishing them '…they were unjust to themselves' (*an-Nahl:* 118), or in other words, transgressing.

Returning to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* then says: '… or My Wrath will descend on you...' (*Ta Ha:* 81). In Arabic, the verb translated as 'to descend' has two possible meanings. It can signify that something becomes permissible or lawful. It is in this sense that one says that imprisonment is legitimate for a thief. The same verb occurs with the meaning of descending or settling down in a place. Hence, the meaning of '…or My Wrath will descend on you...' (*Ta Ha:* 81) is either that it 'became legitimate and prescribed for you', or else it means that it 'descended upon you'. However, it is possible that the meaning is more general than anyone of the above.

The word 'wrath' refers to emotional excitation of anger which causes changes in the chemistry of the body. Hence, you notice in an angry person that his jugular veins swell up, his face reddens, and his facial features become altered. These are the modifications which accompany this emotional disturbance. So, is the Wrath of Allah of this type? Of course, it is not, for He *Glorified is He* is not subject to changeability. Now if an angry person's punishment corresponds to the degree of his anger, then what would you think if the anger were from Allah *the Almighty*? In Allah's words: 'Anyone on whom My Wrath descends has truly fallen' (*Ta Ha:* 81) the verb 'to fall' has two meanings. It can signify one's falling from a high place without having any will or power to prevent that as if he falls suddenly from a rooftop, for example. In this sense, we have the poetic hemistich:

* Into the abyss fell the well bucket as it was betrayed by the rope?

That is to say the rope for drawing up the bucket is cut off.

The other usage of this verb connotes to love something.

Hence, the meaning of Allah's saying, '… has truly fallen' (*Ta Ha:* 81) is that the one upon whom Allah's Wrath descend has fallen into the depths that retain none of his value in life. It may also mean that he has fallen down in this world and will fall down in the Hereafter as occurs in Allah's saying: 'His abode shall be the abyss.' (*al-Qari`a:* 9) Thus, his abode will be such a chasm. So, what will he do if he falls into such an abyss?

All of this comprises moral lessons and admonitions for a believer which Allah *the Almighty* makes clear for him in order that he construct the enterprise of his life based on their light and guidance.

Man is susceptible to variability; he does not remain constant in any state, fluctuating between health and sickness and between wealth and poverty. Everything he enjoys is granted to him, it is not self-produced. Therefore, you should beware of grieving when a blessing passes you by because no blessing will be abiding. Suppose that you have attained the peak of blessings, then what would you possibly anticipate except that they will vanish? As a poet once said:

When a thing is fully achieved, its shortcoming appears
Watch out for extinction when fulfilment is said.

Hence, if something is fulfilled for you and you have a fickle nature with no condition enduring for you, you will inevitably sink to the other side. It is as if the shortcoming of a human being regarding his hopes in life is like an amulet of protection for blessings, that is, his defect or fault will protect him from envy. As a poet once said in a eulogy:

Mankind stares are your perfection
So seek refuge from the evil of their eyes in a single defect.

In other words, envious eyes are gazing towards you, so divert them from you even if it be with but one flaw which people will speak of and with which they become preoccupied.

In the same respect, a woman once entered the presence of the caliph and said to him, ‘May Allah completely fulfil His blessings upon you and bring joy to your eye.' Those present understood that she was supplicating to his benefit. When she left the caliph asked, ‘Are you aware of what the woman said?’ They replied, ‘She was praying for you.’ Whereupon, he said, ‘No; rather, she was uttering an imprecation against me, for when she said, "May Allah completely fulfil His blessings upon you", she certainly intended to mean that they should be taken away. After all, when a blessing is completely fulfilled, nothing remains except its removal. As for her utterance, "May Allah bring joy to your eye,” she meant to still it from movement.’

Therefore, do not become angry if people say that you are flawed in such-and-such, for this flaw is the amulet of perfection. Allah *the Almighty* wishes this for your own interest.

Now, inasmuch as a human being is susceptible to variability, he inescapably neglects Allah’s Way of Guidance by committing mistakes and lapses which call for forgiveness. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِنِّي لَغَفَّارٌ لِّمَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا ثُمَّ ٱهْتَدَىٰ ﴿٨٢﴾

Yet, I am most forgiving towards those who repent,
believe, do righteous deeds, and stay on the right path [82]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 82)

In this verse, the attribute 'most Forgiving' is meant to express hyperbola. Hence, if the intensified or exaggerated ascription is affirmed, then by the logic of language the lesser or non-intensified ascription, forgiving, is likewise affirmed. This is regarding the affirmation case. The same hold true in negation as in Allah's saying: '… and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants.' (*Fussilat:* 46) In this verse, the intensification or exaggeration in being unjust is negated. However, does this imply that He might be unjust? Of course, it does not.

A thing can be exaggerated or done to excess in two ways. The first of these is that you are excessive in the same act, such as when you eat one or two flat loaves of bread at a meal, and someone else eats five loaves. This would be exaggeration or excess on his part in the same activity, which in this case is eating. The second way is that exaggeration or excess may be in the repetitive nature of the act. For example, it is normal for us to eat three times a day, but there are those who eat six meals. Such a person we call a glutton; that is to say, he is eating like a horse and having excessive number of meals per day.

The meaning of Allah's Name 'the Most Forgiving' is that He is Forgiving towards me, Forgiving towards you and Forgiving towards everyone; that is, He repetitively forgives all mankind.

In passing, we should note that Allah *the Almighty* has prescribed forgiveness and repentance to protect societies from their evil members. In fact, if a bad person commits a crime but finds no chance of forgiveness and repentance, then he will relish crime, and even exaggerate in committing it. However, if the door of repentance and forgiveness is opened for wrongdoers, this shields society from their ferocity.

Allah *the Exalted* does not only forgive sins, but He also pardons sinners repetitively for these sins. So, every time you transgress against Him, He forgives you. You should, nevertheless, reconcile yourself to the principle that if you commit a sin and repent of it, you will not do it again. Furthermore, you should not regulate and map out your disobedience based on the hope that you will be able to repent, for what makes you think that you will live long enough to repent!

The verse in question shows us that Allah *the Almighty* forgives those: '…who repent, believe...' (*Ta Ha:* 82). Hence, inasmuch as He *the Almighty* says: '…repent, believe...' (*Ta Ha:* 82), then it is imperative that repentance in this verse comprises turning away from disbelief and then having faith in Allah *the Exalted* and His Messenger. In fact, faith is the fountainhead from which human conduct issues forth. This requires that you heed Allah's Orders by carrying out His Commands and avoiding His Prohibitions. This is what is meant by His saying: '… do righteous deeds...' (*Ta Ha:* 82).

However, is doing righteous deeds not already the sign of being rightly guided? So, why does Allah *the Almighty* then say: '… and stay on the right path'? (*Ta Ha:* 82) It is said(1) that right guidance signifies your perseverance in doing the righteous deeds and your seeking to augment them. In this respect, He *the Most High* says: 'and (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance …' (*Muhammad:* 17).

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ أَعۡجَلَكَ عَن قَوۡمِكَ يَٰمُوسَىٰ ﴿٨٣﴾

[God said], Moses, what has made you come ahead of your people in such haste? [83] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 83)

Here, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is asked, 'What prompted you to be in such a hurry? Why did you come before your appointed time?' He had a designated meeting with his Lord in order to receive His Divine Way of Guidance. In this meeting, it was expected that he be accompanied by a group of the select elite of his people and their leaders, but he rushed ahead to the appointed meeting without them. Hence, He *the Almighty* says to him: ‘Musa (Moses), what has made you come ahead of your people in such haste?’ (*Ta Ha:* 83)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi attributes this opinion to Sufyan Ath-Thawri, Qatada and other scholars. In addition, he says that, according to Ibn 'Abbas, this part of the verse means that the person has no doubts about his faith. This opinion is mentioned also by Al-Mawardi and Al-Mahdawi. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4404.*

Whereupon Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ هُمْ أُوْلَآءِ عَلَىٰٓ أَثَرِى وَعَجِلْتُ إِلَيْكَ رَبِّ لِتَرْضَىٰ ﴿٨٤﴾

And he said, ‘They are following in my footsteps. I rushed to You, Lord, to please You’ [84] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 84)

It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was saying, ‘As for my people, they are coming behind me, but I have ‘…rushed to You, Lord, to please You.’ (*Ta Ha:* 84) This means that he has hastily come to the meeting with his Lord in order to please Him.

He had hurried to the meeting place of His Lord and had gone ahead of his people based on wisdom. When a human being commands others to do something which entails hardship for their soul and the restraining of their sensual inclinations, he must take the initiative by saying, ‘I am not free of this command, and I will be the first to carry out what I am ordering you. Therefore, I will apply it before the rest of you.’

This is why the victorious general Tariq ibn Ziyad(1) said to his troops, ‘Know that when the two forces join battle, surely I will face the trespassing tyrant of the people, Luzriq, myself, and if I kill him, you will have been spared the threat he represents.’ In this way, leadership sets the example and becomes a model. This is expressed in a proverbial saying, ‘Do such-and-such and my hand is in your hand’, but on this occasion Tariq ibn Ziyad states, ‘My hand will act before your hand.’

Thus, Musa's (Moses') saying, ‘… rushed to You, Lord, to please You’ (*Ta Ha:* 84) means that he rushed to his Lord so that he accepted that His Way of Guidance be applied on Musa's (Moses') part, as a prophet entrusted with it and on the part of his people. This is due to that if they see him hastening to that meeting at the appointed place, they will be convinced that applying Allah's Way of Guidance is good for them. Otherwise, he would not have reached the appointed place before them. In this manner, the Divine Way of Guidance dominates and becomes well established in the earth which would make Allah *the Almighty* pleased with His vicegerent on the earth.

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(1) Tariq ibn Ziyad, Al-Laythi by tribal allegiance, the conqueror of Andalusia, was Berber by origin. He embraced Islam at the hand of Musa ibn Nusayr, and was among his most vigorous and powerful men. He was born around 50 AH, penetrated the territory of Andalusia, and died in 102 AH. See *Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam*, 3/217.

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* informs Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* about what his people did after he left them, namely worshipping the golden calf.

قَالَ فَإِنَّا قَدْ فَتَنَّا قَوْمَكَ مِنۢ بَعْدِكَ وَأَضَلَّهُمُ ٱلسَّامِرِيُّ ﴿٨٥﴾

But God said, 'We have tested your people in your absence: As-Samiri has led them astray'[85] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 85)

As a matter of fact, being put to a test is not something inherently objectionable or reprehensible. This is because the result of this test could be either praiseworthy or blameworthy. This is similar to the case of a pupil who sat for an examination; if he succeeds, then this is good for him, but if he fails, then this is good for other people. How is this beneficial to them? This is due to there being matters in which an individual's interests may be realised while the interests of the community are destroyed. Hence, if a negligent, lazy pupil manages to succeed without studying orexeting an effort, he has attained a personal benefit—even if it be a fatuous benefit. At the same time, however, he sends a message to others, inspiring them to neglect their responsibilities. In this manner, frustration and apathy prevails in society, and this is enough to entail its destruction.

The word 'trial' occurs with this meaning in Allah's saying: 'Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, We believe, and not be tried?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 2) Hence, it is necessary that there be examination so that every person receives his recompense according to his results. Now, if someone were to ask, 'Does Allah *the Almighty* test His servants in order to become aware of their condition?' We would say, 'No; rather, in order for people to be aware of their condition and for their true natures to be revealed. Consequently, they will be dealt with accordingly: this one is a hypocrite, this one is sincere, and this one is a liar.

Then, you will be enabled to take precautions in your dealing with them. Thus, testing the people is not meant to enable Allah *the Exalted* to know about their conditions, but instead to enable other people to become aware of them.'

Another explanation is that Allah's test is meant to deprive the one being tested of any pretext. For example, someone may say, 'If Allah *the Almighty* were to bestow wealth upon me, I would do such-and-such in the manner of charitable deeds.' However, as soon as he is put to a real test and is granted wealth, he withholds it and becomes stingy. Now, if Allah *the Most High* had left him without wealth, he would have said, 'If I had had some, I would have done such-and-such.'

Thus, the test reveals to the people the true nature of the one being tested. Then, if he is good and charitable, they will follow his example and admire him. Moreover, they will love him and heed what he says. However, if he is not good, then they will avoid him. Hence, the purpose of testing is to achieve the interest of society and its well-being.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* terms the children of Israel's worship of the golden calf in the absence of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* a 'test'. Then He *the Almighty* ascribes it to Himself by saying: 'We have tested your people...' (*Ta Ha:* 85).

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: '...As-Samiri has led them astray.' (*Ta Ha:* 85) This means that As-Samiri caused the children of Israel to follow other than the path of truth. As a matter of fact, deviation from the path of truth can be merely on a personal, individual level whereby a person bears the burden solely by himself. It can also go beyond this by leading others astray, whereby the person shoulders his burden and the burden of others whom he has led astray.

In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'That they may bear their burdens entirely on the Day of Resurrection and also of the burdens of those whom they lead …' (*an-Nahl:* 25). Yet, in another verse, He *the Most High* says: 'And a burdened soul cannot bear the burden of another …' (*Fatir:* 18).

These are amongst the issues which some orientalists discussed, attempting to accuse the Quran and its style of contradiction. This arises from them only because of their lack of comprehension of the language of the Quran, as they did not naturally grasp it. If they comprehended the Quran, they would recognise the difference between a person going astray by himself and being the cause of leading others astray.

The name 'As-Samiri'(1) mentioned in the verse under study refers to Musa As-Samiri. It is related that his mother gave birth to him in the lifeless desert, and then died where she bore him. The boy remained without a mother to look after him, so Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* took charge of him and brought him up until he grew up to be a young man.(2)

A poet has given expression to this segment of the narrative and that which it comprises of differentiation between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Musa As-Samiri by saying:

If you do not encounter your sons with careful attention,
The hopeful one may be false and the promising one may disappoint,
For Musa who was raised by Jibril (Gabriel) became a disbeliever,
And Musa (Moses) who was raised by the Pharaoh became a Messenger.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi relates that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'As-Samiri was from a people who worshipped cows. He then ended up in Egypt where he outwardly adopted the religion of the children of Israel, while in his heart he was still attached to the worship of cows. It is also said that he was a man of the Copts and was a neighbour of Moses, believed in him and departed with him. It is also said that he was one of the great men of the children of Israel from a tribe known as the Samaritans, who are known in the Levant.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4408.*

(2) *With regard to Allah's saying about As-Samiri: 'I saw something they did not; I took in some of the teachings of the Messenger...' (Ta Ha:96), Ibn 'Abbas said: 'As-Samiri recognised Gabriel because when his mother feared he would be slaughtered, she left him in a cave and piled up its entrance with rocks, so Jibril (Gabriel) used to come to him and feed him with his fingers. On one of them was milk, on another was honey and on another was butter fat. He continued to nourish him until he grew up. Thus, when he sighted Jibril (Gabriel) in the sea, he recognised him.'*

فَرَجَعَ مُوسَىٰٓ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِۦ غَضْبَٰنَ أَسِفًاۚ قَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ أَلَمْ يَعِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ وَعْدًا حَسَنًاۚ أَفَطَالَ
عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْعَهْدُ أَمْ أَرَدتُّمْ أَن يَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُم مَّوْعِدِى (٨٦)

Moses returned to his people, angry and aggrieved. He said, ‘My people, did your Lord not make you a gracious promise? Was my absence too long for you? Did you want anger to fall on you from your Lord and so broke your word to me?’ [86] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 86)

In this verse, the Arabic verb translated as ‘to return’ can be used intransitively as when you say, ‘So-and-so returned to the truth.’ It can also be used transitively, taking a direct object as in Allah’s saying: ‘Therefore if Allah brings you back to a party of them and then they ask your permission to go forth …’ (*at-Tawba:* 83). However, the meaning differs between the two.

Here, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* returned to his people when he heard what happened to them due to the temptation of As-Samiri. He was ‘…angry and aggrieved...’ (*Ta Ha:* 86) because of their worship of the golden calf. He then said, ‘My people, did your Lord not make you a gracious promise?’ (*Ta Ha:* 86) The ‘gracious promise’ in this verse refers to Allah’s bestowal of the Torah upon them. It included the principles regulating their activities of life, and by means of it, their life in this world would be good as well as their reward in the Hereafter.

Then follows Allah’s saying: ‘Was my absence too long for you?’ (*Ta Ha:* 86) It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was saying to them, ‘Was my promise delayed in coming and became so distant that you forgot it even though I was not absent from you for a long period?’ Actually, this period was not too long, a fact which is quite clear in Allah’s saying: ‘And We appointed with Musa (Moses) a time of thirty nights and completed them with ten (more) …’ (*al-A‘raf:* 142).

Then Allah *the Almighty* relates that Musa (Moses) said, ‘Did you want anger to fall on you from your Lord and so broke your word to me?’ (*Ta Ha:* 86) Now, inasmuch as Musa's (Moses') promise to them was near in time, their forgetfulness should not have occurred. Therefore, it must be that they were wilfully inclined to disobedience and that they wanted the wrath of Allah *the Almighty* to fall on them. Otherwise, they would not have fallen victim to such a relapse during the absence of their messenger. So, if this was the condition of the children of Israel while their messenger was still alive, then what would their state be after his death?

In the same respect, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say, 'Is this what occurs while I am still alive among you?'(1) It is as if he was saying to the companions, 'How could you do this while I am still present amongst you?'

As for Allah's saying, '…and so broke your word to me?' (*Ta Ha:* 86) it is akin to another verse in which He *the Almighty* says '…Evil is it that you have done after me …' (*al-A'raf:* 150). These verses show that there had been a promise and discussion between Musa (Moses) and his people. Before he departed from them, he had enjoined them to follow Harun's (Aaron's) path, and to obey his commands until he came back to them. So, it was Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* that was to take his place in directing the affairs of his people while he was absent. He was Musa's (Moses') partner in conveying the Message, and he possessed the dignified status of a messenger and so obedience to him was mandatory. This is the promise which they broke with Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* relates the response of the children of Israel:

قَالُوا۟ مَآ أَخْلَفْنَا مَوْعِدَكَ بِمَلْكِنَا وَلَٰكِنَّا حُمِّلْنَآ أَوْزَارًا مِّن
زِينَةِ ٱلْقَوْمِ فَقَذَفْنَٰهَا فَكَذَٰلِكَ أَلْقَى ٱلسَّامِرِىُّ ﴿٨٧﴾

**They said, 'We did not break our word to you deliberately.
We were burdened with the weight of people's jewellery, so
we threw it [into the fire], and As-Samiri did the same' [87]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 87)**

In Arabic, the tri-literal semantic root *(m-l-k)* has three forms, each of which has its own meaning contrary to the claim of some that they have a single meaning. The three forms revolve around the idea of possession or dominating control, but with the following differences: The word *Malk* means a person’s control over himself and his volition without his possessing anything else of that which surrounds him. The word *Milk* refers to that which is possessed aside from your own self. Finally, the word *Mulk* means that you dominate and control something as well as the person who owns it. Hence, these three words are not synonyms with a single meaning.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by An-Nasa'i on the authority of Mahmoud ibn Labid Allah be Pleased with him who said, 'The Messenger of Allah was told about a man who had divorced his wife with three simultaneous divorces. He stood up angrily and said: Is the Book of Allah being toyed with while I am still among you? Then a man stood up and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, shall I kill him?' See An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 6/142.*

Thus, Allah’s saying, ‘They said, "We did not break our word to you deliberately"’ (*Ta Ha:* 87) means that they did not break their word out of their volition; rather, other factors outside their free will induced them to go against the promise.

So, what were these other factors apart from their own volition? They said, ‘We were burdened with the weight of people’s jewellery...’ (*Ta Ha:* 87). The word ‘burden’ means something which is burdensomely heavy on the soul. It is used to refer to the sin because it is heavy on the soul, and its heaviness will also extend to the Hereafter, since the pain of bearing it will not end there. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…What a terrible burden to carry on that Day.’ (*Ta Ha:* 101) These burdens here consisted of the jewellery of the people of Pharaoh. It is said that the children of Israel used to borrow jewellery from their neighbours and acquaintances from amongst Pharaoh’s people for their feast-days in order to embellish themselves with it. Thus, we may ask here, ‘Why did they not return these entrusted items to their owners before the time that Musa (Moses) appointed for departure?’ It is said that they did so because they wanted to keep their departure a secret so that their enemies would not be able to prepare themselves and prevent them from departing, so there was not enough time to return them.

Other people say that these ornaments and pieces of jewellery were amongst the things expelled by the sea after Pharaoh and his people were drowned. However, this opinion is to be rejected since if they took them after the sea spewed them out, then they would have been items of booty, not burdens.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘… so we threw it [into the fire], and *As-Samiri* did the same.’ (*Ta Ha:* 87) The expression jewellery normally refers to gold. As for the verb to throw, it means to cast something with force, as if the one throwing is fed up with carrying it. In this there is evidence that the children of Israel still bore the basics of faith, as they were pained and saddened because they had not returned the entrusted items to their rightful owners.

Therefore, As-Samiri gained access to them by this angle, explaining to them, ‘Surely, you will not be absolved of this transgression unless you cast these ornaments into the fire.’(1) However, he had something else in mind, which was to melt down the gold and remove what it contained of impurities. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘… As-Samiri did the same.’ (*Ta Ha:* 87) This means that he also cast what he had of jewellery. However, there is a difference between their action of forceful throwing and his action of casting, as the latter denoting subtlety and unhurried deliberation, for he was their chief and their teacher.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَّهُۥ خُوَارٌ فَقَالُوا۟ هَٰذَآ إِلَٰهُكُمْ وَإِلَٰهُ مُوسَىٰ فَنَسِىَ ﴿٨٨﴾

But he [used the molten jewellery to] produce an image of a calf which made a lowing sound, and they said, ‘This is your god and Moses’ god, but he has forgotten’ [88]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 88)

This verse signifies that As-Samiri fashioned for them from this melted gold: ‘…an image of a calf, a (mere) body...’ (*Ta Ha:* 88). In this verse, the word translated as ‘a mere body’ also occurs in the Quran in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* in which Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And certainly We tried Sulaiman (Solomon), and We put on his throne a (mere) body, so he turned (to Allah).’ (*Sad:* 34) Allah *the Almighty* had bestowed upon Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* a mighty dominion which no one after him should have in which He rendered birds, jinns, men and the wind all subservient to his command. It seems he was possessed by something of vanity or self-deception, so Allah *the Most High* wished to draw his attention to the One Who granted him this dominion and to remind him that this dominion does not exist on its own. Rather, it exists by the command of Allah Who has the Power to settle him on his throne in the form of a motionless body, without any control even over his own limbs and soul.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi, relates a similar narration from Qatada, which is as follows: ‘When the people of Moses had fallen behind, As-Samiri told them, ‘The only reason that you have been slowed down is because of what you have of jewelry.’ So they gathered it and presented it to As-Samiri, and then he cast it into the fire and crafted a calf out of it for them. Then he threw upon it a handful of the trail-dust of the horse of the Messenger, that is, Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4408.*

This is similar to the case of someone who is stricken with total paralysis and sits on a chair as a motionless body, with no control over his limbs. So, if Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* lacks wilful power over a single one of his limbs, would he then possess the volitional control over that which is external to him of birds or man or jinns? It is if Allah *the Almighty* was saying to him, ‘So do not let yourself be deceived that Allah granted you authority over all species because He has the Power to take all of this away from you.’

In the same respect, it is related that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* rode a flying carpet which carried him wherever he desired. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and (We made) the wind (subservient) to Sulaiman (Solomon) who made a month’s journey in the morning and a month’s journey in the evening…’ (*Saba’:* 12). Thus, a bit of pride and vanity penetrated him, then he heard from beneath himself someone saying, ‘O, Sulaiman (Solomon)—just like this, without distinguishing titles—we have been commanded to obey you as long as you have obeyed Allah.’ Then the flying carpet returned him to the place where he was. This is why Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* asked for forgiveness and repented.

Similarly, we see that when someone dies, the first thing that is forgotten about him is his name, since people refer to him as a body, saying, for example, ‘The body is here. What you have done with the body?’ Then, this is also forgotten as soon as he is put on the bier, at which point people speak of him as the wooden plank by saying, ‘Where is the wooden plank now. Just look at the wooden plank.’ Hence, the moment that the Creator *Glorified is He* takes His spirit from the servant, he becomes a corpse, and then a wooden plank. Thus, what is the value of this world that has an end that comes in this manner?

Back to the verse in question; Allah's saying, '… an image of a calf, a (mere) body which made a lowing sound…' (*Ta Ha:* 88), signifies that there was no movement in that calf as it was merely a statue. It was made in a particular form such that when wind blew on it, it emitted a whistling sound similar to the lowing of a cow. What arises is a question which is, 'Why did *As-Samiri* dream up this idea and choose this image of a calf?'

It is said that this is because he exploited the yearning of the children of Israel and their inclination towards idolatry and paganism which was deeply rooted in them. This is evident in what they said to their prophet, Musa (Moses), while their feet were still wet from the sea after Allah *the Exalted* had saved them from Pharaoh. They should have been grateful to Allah *the Almighty*. However, once they encountered a people who were bowing in worship to idols, they said, 'O, Musa (Moses), make for us a god as they have (their) gods.' (*al-A'raf:* 138) Hence, As-Samiri produced this calf for them, but he had advanced beyond worshipping graven images in fashioning it, rendering it an effigy with a lowing sound that could be heard.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* relates that the children of Israel said, '… This is your god and Musa's (Moses') god, but he has forgotten.' (*Ta Ha:* 88) This verse shows that As-Samiri forgot the basis of faith in his own soul; he forgot that this deed entails leaving the fold of faith to disbelief. If only he had just merely disbelieved, but instead he disbelieved and caused the people to fall into disbelief as well. He certainly must have forgotten that, for if he had the slightest recollection of faith and the dire consequences of his deed, he would not have done this.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَلَّا يَرْجِعُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَوْلًا وَلَا يَمْلِكُ لَهُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا ﴿٨٩﴾

Did they not see that [the calf] gave them no answer, that it had no power to harm or benefit them? [89] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 89)

So, how could they worship this calf while it does not respond to them nor have power over them? In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And recite to them the story of Ibrahim (Abraham). When he said to his father and his people, "What do you worship?" They said, "We worship idols, so we shall be their votaries." He said, "Do they hear you when you call? Or do they profit you or cause you harm?"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 69-73)

Thus, even the person of low intelligence will not venture upon this act. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* questions such people by saying: 'How do you deny Allah?…' (*al-Baqara:* 28) In this verse, He *the Most High* asks them about the cause of their disbelief as if it were an astonishing phenomenon which the mind cannot accept or confirm. Did it ever cross the minds of these who worshipped the calf that it did not answer them if they prayed to it and that it possessed no power to harm them if they disbelieved in it or to benefit them if they believed in it?

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ قَالَ لَهُمْ هَٰرُونُ مِن قَبْلُ يَٰقَوْمِ إِنَّمَا فُتِنتُم بِهِۦ ۖ
وَإِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ فَٱتَّبِعُونِى وَأَطِيعُوٓا۟ أَمْرِى ﴿٩٠﴾

Aaron did say to them, 'My people, this calf is a test for you. Your true Lord is the Lord of Mercy, so follow me and obey my orders' [90] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 90)

Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* took the place of his brother when he was absent, a point which is ever so apparent in Allah's saying: '… and Musa (Moses) said to his brother Harun (Aaron), "Take my place among my people, act well and do not follow the way of the mischief-makers.' (*al-A'raf:* 142) Thus Musa (Moses) asked his brother to replace him and to act righteously. This was an authorisation from him to his brother to govern the people as he saw fit and to determine the interests of the community as he perceived. This authorisation was mentioned in Harun's (Aaron's) favour before his brother after this.

So, Allah's saying, 'Harun (Aaron) did say to them, "My people, this calf is a test for you"' (*Ta Ha:* 90) shows how Harun (Aaron) admonished them to the best of his ability, clarifying for them that the matter of the calf was a test from Allah *the Almighty*. According to his assessment of this situation, he did not want to enter into an armed conflict with these people. This is because altogether they numbered three hundred thousand, of whom only twelve thousand worshipped the calf. If Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* had engaged them in battle, he would have wiped out this entire number. For this reason, he was content with admonishment by saying: ‘My people, this calf is a test for you. Your true lord is the Lord of Mercy, so follow me and obey my orders.’ (*Ta Ha:* 90) Here, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* reminded them about being obedient to him because this is the promise they made to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

قَالُواْ لَن نَّبْرَحَ عَلَيْهِ عَـٰكِفِينَ حَتَّىٰ يَرْجِعَ إِلَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ ﴿٩١﴾

But they replied, ‘We shall not give up our devotion to it until Moses returns to us’[91] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 91)

So, those who worshipped the calf from amongst the children of Israel said, ‘We shall remain in this state.’ There are some who think that the Arabic verb used in this verse to indicate their continuation in worshipping the calf refers only to remaining in place; however, its meaning depends upon the context. Thus, you say, ‘I will not stop travelling until I reach my destination.’ However, it may also refer to a place as when you say, ‘I will not leave this place.’ It can also refer to a specific condition. Both of these possible usages occur in the Quran. With respect to a place and residence, we have Allah’s saying, ‘…Therefore, I will by no means depart from this land until my father permits me…’ (*Yusuf:* 80), and with respect to a condition or state, He *the Almighty* says: ‘and when Musa (Moses) said to his servant, "I will not cease until I reach the junction of the two rivers …"’ (*al-Kahf:* 60). The last verse means that he will not give up walking until he reaches his destination.

Hence, in the verse under study, Allah’s saying, ‘We shall not give up our devotion to it until Musa (Moses) returns to us’ (*Ta Ha:* 91) means that they shall continue to worship it until Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* returns, for they will not remain without a god during this period.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ يَٰهَٰرُونُ مَا مَنَعَكَ إِذۡ رَأَيۡتَهُمۡ ضَلُّوٓاْ ﴿٩٢﴾ أَلَّا تَتَّبِعَنِۖ أَفَعَصَيۡتَ أَمۡرِي ﴿٩٣﴾

Moses said, 'When you realized they had gone astray,
what prevented you, Aaron [92] from coming after me?
How could you disobey my orders? [93]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 92-93)

This conversation was between Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him*. The phrase, '…what prevented you…' (*Ta Ha:* 92), occurs in the Quran in two modes of expression. The first is found in Allah's saying: '…what prevented you that you should do…' (*Sad:* 75). This is a question about what has hindered Satan from prostration.

The second formula is found in Allah's saying '… What hindered you so that you did not make obeisance …' (*al-A'raf:* 12). This is a question about what has held Satan back that he does not prostrate. This is because a hindrance might be a coercive impulse on your part since you do not want to do it. Then someone else may come along and convince you to do it. So, at times you are forced against your will; in other words, you do not want to prostrate, but you are ordered to do so. Hence, the first formula indicates that the preventive force comes from you, but should someone convince you to prostrate yourself by your own choice, then you have been hindered from prostrating. Thus, sometimes the hindrance comes from oneself and sometimes from someone or something else. In this manner, the two formulations can occur together.

Thus Allah's saying, 'Musa (Moses) said, "When you realised they had gone astray, what prevented you, Harun (Aaron), from coming after me? How could you disobey my orders?"' (*Ta Ha:* 92-93) This signifies that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked his brother about the one who prevented him from coming after him. However, is he really asking a question in this instance? In reality, he is not asking a question, for you might speak to a person about a sin, while you do not know what his transgression is; however, you speak in this way in order to hear his response. The response will then be against the one who opposed him.

A relevant instance of this is what 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said when he kissed the Black Stone, 'I know that you are just a stone and that you can neither do any harm nor give benefit. Had I not seen the Messenger of Allah kissing you, I would not have kissed you.'(1) Hence, 'Umar kissed it because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* kissed it, but he made this remark to provide us with an abiding response through history to everyone who might ask about kissing the stone.

Similarly, in the verse in question, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* brought up a misconception so that we would hear the reply. In this way, we would take heed of the abiding and resounding response of the concerned person, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him*.

قَالَ يَبْنَؤُمَّ لَا تَأْخُذْ بِلِحْيَتِى وَلَا بِرَأْسِىٓ إِنِّى خَشِيتُ أَن
تَقُولَ فَرَّقْتَ بَيْنَ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ وَلَمْ تَرْقُبْ قَوْلِى ﴿٩٤﴾

He said, 'Son of my mother – let go of my beard and my hair! – I was afraid you would say, "You have caused division among the children of Israel and have not heeded what I said"' [94] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 94)

Here, the statement of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to his brother was accompanied by an impulsive act and movement which we understand from Harun's (Aaron)'s saying: '…let go of my beard and my hair!…' (*Ta Ha:* 94). Then, he mentions his excuse, saying: '… I was afraid you would say, "You have caused division among the children of Israel and have not heeded what I said."' (*Ta Ha:* 94) In this verse, he is referring to Musa's (Moses') saying: 'Take my place among my people and act well and do not follow the way of the mischief-makers.' (*al-A'raf:* 142)

So, Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* reminded him about the authorisation which he had given him. He, i.e. Harun (Aaron), had made the judgment on the basis of his view of the situation and had kept his people from armed conflict with one another which might have resulted in the annihilation of the believing people of the children of Israel. His judgement was made in line with Musa's (Moses') order: '… and act well...' (*al-A'raf:* 142).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim. In his commentary on this Hadith, An-Nawawi says: ''Umar only said, 'You can neither do any harm nor give benefit', in order to forestall any delusion on the part of some of the recent converts to Islam who had been accustomed to the worship of stones, and to attaching great importance to them and hoping for benefit from them.' See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1270.*

Hence, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* raised this issue with his brother, not in order that he himself hear the response, rather so that it would be heard by the entire world throughout history.

Then Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* shifts the conversation to the leading source of this trying discordance, namely As-Samiri:

قَالَ فَمَا خَطۡبُكَ يَٰسَٰمِرِيُّ ﴿٩٥﴾

Moses said, 'And what was the matter with you,
Samiri?' [95] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 95)

Thus, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* asked him, 'What do you have to say about your involvement in this affair? What is your story?' The question 'what is/was the matter' refers to a significant incident which people call a momentous event; it is not a fleeting event to which no one pays attention.

A relevant example of this is found in Allah's saying: 'How was your affair when you sought Yusuf (Joesph) to yield himself (to you)?' (*Yusuf:* 51) It is also found when the Quran relates of Musa's (Moses') saying to the two daughters of Shu'aib (Jethro): 'What is the matter with you?' (*al-Qasas:* 23)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* relates that As-Samiri said:

قَالَ بَصُرۡتُ بِمَا لَمۡ يَبۡصُرُواْ بِهِۦ فَقَبَضۡتُ قَبۡضَةٗ مِّنۡ أَثَرِ
ٱلرَّسُولِ فَنَبَذۡتُهَا وَكَذَٰلِكَ سَوَّلَتۡ لِي نَفۡسِي ﴿٩٦﴾

He replied, 'I saw something they did not; I took in some of the
teachings of the Messenger but tossed them aside: my soul
prompted me to do what I did' [96] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 96)

The verb to see refers to what is perceived sensuously by the sight and abstractly by the mind, with the latter means to know something. Hence, As-Samiri's saying, 'I saw something they did not...' (*Ta Ha:* 96) signifies that he was convinced of a matter that they were not convinced of; then, he proceeded to act and they imitated him in what he did regarding the calf. His judgment led him to the making of the calf since he noticed that his people were fond of idols as they had previously asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to provide them with a god when they saw another people worshipping idols. So, As-Samiri took advantage of the absence of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and told them, ‘I will make for you that which Musa (Moses) was not able to make. No; rather, I will do more for you, for you merely requested an idol of stone, whereas I will provide you with the effigy of a calf made of gold which makes an audible lowing sound.’

There follows Allah’s saying: ‘…so I took a handful (of the dust) from the footsteps of the Messenger, and then I threw it in the casting...’ (*Ta Ha:* 96). Concerning Allah’s saying, ‘…from the footsteps of the Messenger…’ (*Ta Ha:* 96), scholars have related numerous accounts dealing with it. Amongst them is that when Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* used to look after As-Samiri during his childhood, he used to come on a horse. Hence, As-Samiri noticed that when the horse passed by a place, everything touched by its hooves would turn green and life would pervade it. For this reason, those who adhered to this point of view were of the opinion that the calf was real and that it had a natural sound which was not merely due to wind passing through it.

According to another opinion, the word 'Messenger' in Allah’s saying, ‘…from the footsteps of the Messenger…’ (*Ta Ha:* 96), generally refers to the direct conveyor of Allah’s Legislations to those meant to receive them. On the other hand, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* is the messenger sent by Allah *the Almighty* to the direct messenger, and no one could see him. Hence, the word ‘messenger’ was applied to the bearer of the Divine Way of Guidance to those addressed by it. However, the word may be uttered with intentional mockery as occurs in Allah’s saying: ‘They it is who say, "Do not spend upon those who are with the Messenger of Allah until they break up…"’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). Here, the hypocrites said, ‘The Messenger of Allah’, out of sarcasm, not out of belief. Similarly, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And they say, "What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food and goes about in the markets…"’ (*al-Furqan:* 7). Thus, this word may be used in a derisive sense.

The Messenger came to convey the rulings of Allah *the Almighty* and this is his teachings which remain after him. Thus, the verse connotes that thought about one of the rulings conveyed by the Messenger, namely Allah’s Oneness, Uniqueness and Divinity and that He is not an idol. Regarding Allah’s saying, ‘… and then I threw it in the casting...’ (*Ta Ha:* 96), it means that As-Samiri did away with it and expelled it from his thoughts; then he gave free rein to think beyond that. This is proven by the fact that he then said, ‘… My soul prompted me to do what I did.’ (*Ta Ha:* 96) This means that his soul incited him to disbelieve and compelled him towards sinful disobedience. The incitement of the soul is not used with regard to obedience: rather, it is used in the context of disobedience. Hence, the broader meaning is that he took something of the traditions of the Messenger and of the revelation which he brought from Allah *the Almighty* and then removed it from his course of action and banished it from his thought. After this he proceeded merely on the basis of his own free choice.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ فَٱذْهَبْ فَإِنَّ لَكَ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ أَن تَقُولَ لَا مِسَاسَ ۖ وَإِنَّ لَكَ
مَوْعِدًا لَّن تُخْلَفَهُۥ ۖ وَٱنظُرْ إِلَىٰٓ إِلَٰهِكَ ٱلَّذِى ظَلْتَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفًا ۖ
لَّنُحَرِّقَنَّهُۥ ثُمَّ لَنَنسِفَنَّهُۥ فِى ٱلْيَمِّ نَسْفًا ﴿٩٧﴾

Moses said, ‘Get away from here! Your lot in this life is to say, “Do not touch me,” but you have an appointment from which there is no escape. Look at your god which you have kept on worshipping – we shall grind it down and scatter it into the sea [97] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 97)

The reaction of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to this act of As-Samiri was to command him to depart as a punishment for him, and the utterance which would bound to him shall be, ‘Do not touch me.’ (*Ta Ha:* 97) This implies that no one shall have contact with him, nor shall he have contact with anyone.

This is due to the fact that those who fabricate falsehood and claim that they have a message and the function of prophets will only have temporal and spatial power in the heart of the people. They will have an ideology with followers and supporters. Hence, in the path to their objective, you will always find them trying to deviate from Allah's Way of Guidance, aiming to replace it with methods and procedures according to their capricious inclinations. They wrongfully tend towards making the path facile and simple, granting their followers freedom for which Allah *the Exalted* has revealed no authority, like the one who permitted the mingling between men and women.

Surprisingly, you find that those who believe in such ideas and apply them are not from the common masses of people: rather, they are from the educated classes and people of high rank. They argue, 'How can a woman cover herself from us while women represent half of society?'

Thus, how attractive their religion is and how easy it is for people, for it has manifested itself in accord with their desires and lustful appetites and has lifted the restrictions for them. As a matter of fact, the soul inclines by it natural disposition to religiosity because it is innately constituted for it, but it desires that this religion be easy without any hardship in it, even if this contravenes Allah's Way of Guidance.

For this reason, Musaylama, Sajah and other false prophets lifted the obligations of prayer and fasting for their followers. Moreover, in their opinion, the obligatory alms giving is burdensome on the soul, so there is no need for it. If they did not do this, then what would be the appealing distinction which they brought in order for people to follow them? What would be the means of encouragement for followers of a new religion?

In this way, these false prophets gain temporal and geographic sway, as well as followers and adherents. Hence, one who corrupts his life by seeking power and status through people's submission to him and their subordination to his ideas will be punished by Allah *the Almighty* by them. He will suffer his humiliation at their hands, for it is they who have assisted him in his wrongdoing. As for As-Samiri, he despised and disavowed his followers to the degree that he said, 'Do not touch me.' (*Ta Ha:* 97) It is as if As-Samiri was fleeing from them by saying, 'Do not you dare come near me or have contact with me.' Thus, intimacy and love turn into remoteness and enmity. He now runs away from the people who were around him and upon whom his dignity and power was based. It was they who caused his downfall and supported him in rebellious disobedience to Allah *the Most High*.

In such a manner, was the end of As-Samiri; he was detached from his community to wander about aimlessly in the land, fleeing from people. No one would have contact with him after the truth confronted and overwhelmed him.

What a resemblance this situation bears to what happens to an upright young man when the followers of falsehood tempt him and attract him to their ways. After he has integrated himself into their path and has tasted the pleasure of their falsehood and their misguided ideas and conduct, he suddenly regains clarity of mind through the jolt of the truth which brings him to his senses. However, this is only after he has lost a great deal. Thereafter, you find him fleeing this companionship, keeping himself far away from merely coming near them.

Therefore, amongst those who choose their religion in accord with their whimsical inclinations are idolaters. Inasmuch as worship implies the worshippers' obedience to the object of worship, then how easy the worship of idols is since they are gods without prescribed obligations. It is worship without hardship that does not constrain your actions, nor does it restrain you from satisfying your sensual desires. If this were not the case, then what have idols prepared as reward to one who worships them? What have they prepared of punishment to one who rejects them?

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* had said to As-Samiri, 'You shall be punished by the same society from which you sought dignity, authority, and control and long-lasting fame. Now, you will disassociate yourself from them and flee from their proximity, and you will not endure that any one of them touches you, for they are the cause of your tribulation and the source of your seditious temptation.' Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Friends shall on that day be enemies one to another, except those who guard (against evil).' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67) Thus, let the bosom friends of vain delusion and the companions of evil who come together on the basis of disobedience during forbidden nightly gatherings be warned against such meetings. On the Day of Judgment, honest friendship is for pious believers who convene together on the basis of the truth and encourage one another to obedience to Allah *the Exalted*.

There is a difference between someone who shares a glass of wine with you and one who breaks it and spills it before you taste it. There is a difference between someone who distracts you from prayer and one who encourages you to observe it. In addition, there is a difference between someone who makes you happy at this moment with disobedience and one who compels you to bear the difficulty of obedience. So, observe and think deeply.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…but you have an appointment from which there is no escape…' (*Ta Ha:* 97). The appointment in this verse refers to what awaits *As-Samiri* of punishment in the Hereafter.

There follows this final passage: '…Look at your god which you have kept on worshipping—we shall grind it down and scatter it into the sea.' (*Ta Ha:* 97) In this verse, the Arabic word *I'tikaf,* describing As-Samiri's devoted worship of idols, is used in the Islamic context to signify residing in the mosque and separation from the outside community.

As for Allah's saying, '…we shall grind it down...' (*Ta Ha:* 97), it means that the calf will be like a burned object by filing it down with a file until it becomes pieces and scattered particles to be thrown into the air. Regarding Allah's saying, '…and scatter it into the sea' (*Ta Ha:* 97), this means that Musa (Moses) will scatter it in the way that farmers do when they winnow grain in order to separate the chaff from it with an instrument like a sieve. These simple instruments have now been replaced by modern mechanical ones which serve the same purpose.

This is because As-Samiri's god was this calf which was made of gold, for which burning in a fire is not suitable. Instead, it requires of different process which will get rid of it for good such that not a trace remains. This here is your god, O, Samiri, which you worshipped, for if it were a true god, it would have defended itself.

After Allah *the Most High* demonstrated the vain falseness of the deed committed by As-Samiri and those who followed him, He once again reminds them about the true guidance and the correct path. Furthermore, He informs them that everything they did was nonsense; hence, He says:

إِنَّمَآ إِلَٰهُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ وَسِعَ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ عِلْمًا ﴿٩٨﴾

[People], your true god is the One God – there is no god but Him – whose knowledge embraces everything [98]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 98)

When Allah *the Almighty* says, '… there is no god but He...' (*Ta Ha:* 98), we testify to this statement, for we learnt it from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who heard it from his Lord and conveyed it to us. It is the testimony of the absolutely true Divine Unity. Above all, it is the testimony from Allah *the Almighty* to Himself, as He says: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He and (so do) the angels and those who possess knowledge …' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

Hence, this is a testimony of Allah *Glorified is He* to Himself even before He created a testifier to attest to it. Then, the angels testified to this; it is the testimony of the witness that there is no god besides Him. Then, those who possess knowledge testified to this with a testimony based on a proof substantiated by reflecting on the creation which they perceive to be based upon the most marvellous and amazing order. All these created beings can only be fashioned by an All-Powerful God. Allah's Oneness has been unquestionably proven because it is a veracious proposition which He acknowledged about Himself, and to which the angels and those endowed with knowledge bore witness. Furthermore, no opponent has ever risen to claim it for himself.

Otherwise, where is the god from whom Allah *the Almighty* took divinity? Either this alleged god is not aware, or he is aware but did not object. In either of these two cases, he does not merit being a god. Now, if a claim is not met with an objection, it is conceded to its claimant until a contradicter comes forward. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* said, 'There is no god but I, and I am the Creator of the entire universe and the manager of its affairs.' No one has come and claimed anything like this, not even from disbelievers. We have coined a similitude for this phenomenon as follows: Imagine that a group of guests and visitors stays with you, and after their departure, you find a wallet and so you ask about its owner. However, no one claims it until one of them says, 'It is mine.' Hence, then he is its owner and is entitled to it since no contradicter has arisen.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Say: If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of power.’ (*al-Isra’:* 42) This verse shows that if there were other gods, they would necessarily have to go to the Lord of the Throne. They would need to do this either in order to submit to Him and try to obtain from Him the power to do things, or else to call Him to account for His claim of Divinity while they are also gods. However, nothing like this has ever occurred, and no one has provided proof that he is a god. So, if a claim is not supported by proof, then it is null and void.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* refutes the existence of other gods by saying: ‘Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with him any (other) god— in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 91). If we imagined that there is a god for the sky, a god for the earth, a god for jinns, a god for mankind and so forth, then the advantage of one of them would be a disadvantage for the other, and the power of one of them would be a weakness in the other. None of this is in accordance with the Attributes of Divinity.

What we observe in Allah’s saying, ‘…your true god is Allah...’ (*Ta Ha:* 98) is that the word ‘god’ is not synonymous with the Name ‘Allah’. Were this to be the case, the meaning of the phrase would be ‘Your only Allah is Allah.’ Thus, there is a difference between the two words. The Divine Name Allah is the proper Name for the necessarily Existent Supreme Being. On the other hand, the word ‘god’ refers to the one who is worshipped and obeyed in what he commands. Therefore, the general meaning of the passage in question is that the one who is worshipped and obeyed in what He commands is Allah *the Almighty* the Creator of this universe and the Lord of Supreme Existence.

Allah *the Almighty* is the truly worshipped and Obeyed One since there are other falsely worshipped ones. For example, there are those who worship the sun, the moon, trees and rocks, and they call them gods. So, if worship denotes obeying the commands and proscriptions of the one worshipped, then what have these gods ordered them to do? What things have they forbidden them to do? What have they prepared for the one who worships them or for the one who rejects them? Hence, they are worshipped, but in vain because they are gods without a prescribed way of guidance.

Thus, this verse aims at refuting the claim that there are other gods beside Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore Allah's saying, '… your true god is Allah—there is no god but He—whose knowledge embraces everything' (*Ta Ha:* 98) must be a rebuttal to a claim that there is another god. The formula of this verse refutes this claim and then affirms the truth of the matter.

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* says: '… your true god is Allah...' (*Ta Ha:* 98) because when As-Samiri fashioned the calf for them, he said, 'This is your god and Musa's (Moses') god, but he has forgotten.' (*Ta Ha:* 88) Hence, Allah *the Almighty* refutes his claim and corrects the false with the truth by saying: '…your true god is Allah—there is no god but Him—whose knowledge embraces everything.' (*Ta Ha:* 98)

Then Allah *the Almighty* adds that which differentiates between the true God and the false ones, saying, '…whose knowledge embraces everything' (*Ta Ha:* 98), for He is the True God, and thus, His Knowledge encompasses everything. This is also a rebuttal against As-Samiri and what he adopted as a god besides Allah *the Almighty* since the calf which he deified possessed no knowledge. Likewise, if As-Samiri who instructed them to worship the calf, possessed such knowledge, he would have known that his calf would be destroyed and scattered by the winds. He would have also known the consequences which he would arrive to with his saying to the people 'touch me not' and that chastisement in this world would descend upon him before the punishment of the Hereafter. Now, had he been aware of these realities, he would not have had the audacity to undertake this act.

Allah's All-Encompassing Knowledge includes all what concerns the obedient and the disobedient servant, but out of His Mercy towards us, He does not take us to task for what He knows about us. Rather, He teaches us to say when we supplicate to Him: 'Our Lord! You embraced all things in mercy and knowledge…' (*Ghafir:* 7). Thus, His Mercy comes before our misdeeds and sins and precedes His punishment and vengeance. In another verse, He *the Most High* says: '…and My mercy encompasses all things…' (*al-A'raf:* 156).

If we stopped at the following phrase, '…whose knowledge embraces everything' (*Ta Ha:* 98), this matter would be burdensome for us, for then He would requite us for our misdeeds and our good deeds, and surely, no one can endure that.

Then Allah *the Almighty* elucidates the wisdom of the Quranic stories. In fact, stories are a kind of historical accounts, but they are not history in a narrow sense, for they are the history of something witnessed, the knowledge of which concerns and benefits a person. Otherwise, history entails our relating: in such-and-such a place, a man sold such-and-such, and he did such-and-such or this and that. Hence, the story narrative is about a prominent event which has an impact on the one who hears it. From these stories, the admonitions are deduced and the moral lessons are derived.

History, on the other hand, is the linking of events to their time of occurrence, and so when you link any event to its time, you have established its history. If it was a distinctive event, we call it a tale, but if it was a famous tale which rises above all other tales, we call it biography. This is why the historical accounts of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were set apart as a biography. While the narrative tale is special, the biography is even more special. As the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the seal of prophets, we term his history 'biography', and we do not say 'story'. This is because he led his life in accordance with Allah's Way of Guidance and shaped his character in line with the Quran which was revealed to him.

The story narrative occurs, at times, with a focus on the event, and then come the personages which revolve around it. At other times, it occurs with a focus on a single personage around which events mainly revolve. So, if you wanted to establish a history of 'Urabi Revolution, for example, you would first concentrate on the event, and then you would mention the personages who were involved in it. However, if you intended to tell the history of the personage of 'Urabi, you would focus on his personage first and then depict the events which occurred around him.

The narrative story of the Quran differs from other man-made stories which we hear and relate. The latter are invented stories built upon a plot and resolution. Hence, a storyteller takes an event and weaves incidents from his own imagination around it.

In this manner, storytellers have just taken the term ‘story narrative’ and have diverged from its exigencies, calling this fabricated set of events a ‘story’, whereas it is not so. This is due to the fact that the word ‘story’ is derived from the notion of following the track of something without straying from it or deviating here or there. That is to say that one should narrate the event as it is, without adding or omitting anything.

Hence, narrating a story entails a strict adherence to events, which does not allow for creative composition or falsification. This is the difference between the narratives of the Quran which Allah *the Almighty* calls, ‘…the truth of the matter…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 62) and ‘…the best of narratives…’ (*Yusuf:* 3) on one hand, and the narratives and compositions made by the human beings on the other.

Thus, the Quranic narrative is termed ‘the true narrative’ and ‘the best narrative’ because it sticks to the truth and does not go beyond it. Moreover, it has an elevated objective which is more sublime than normal stories. The objective and the purpose of storytelling of this world—if it is successful—is to shield you from the events of this worldly life, whereas the Quranic narrative offers a broader protection as it shields you in the world and in the Hereafter.

If you notice repetition in the stories of the Quran, then be aware that it has an objective and purpose and that they are segmented narratives for the various aspects of a single event. Thus, if you were to assemble all the segmented narratives, they would provide you with a complete picture of the event.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَذَٰلِكَ نَقُصُّ عَلَيۡكَ مِنۡ أَنۢبَآءِ مَا قَدۡ سَبَقَۚ وَقَدۡ ءَاتَيۡنَٰكَ مِن لَّدُنَّا ذِكۡرٗا ﴿٩٩﴾

In this way We relate to you [Prophet] stories of what happened before. We have given you a Quran from Us[99]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 99)

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And all We relate to you of the accounts of the Messengers is to strengthen your heart therewith.’ (*Hud:* 120) It is as if Prophet Muhammad’s heart was in need of being strengthened since it would take in all the occurrences of life and would encounter many calamities whose terror would turn the hair of heads white. In this regard, Allah *the Exalted* says about the Messengers before him: '… they were shaken violently, so that the Prophet and those who believed with him said, "When will the help of Allah come?"' (*al-Baqara:* 214)

In the same way, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers were oppressed, boycotted and besieged in the ravine without shelter or food, until they ate leather and the leaves of trees.(1)

These calamities and stressful hardships distress the human soul when it encounters them, so it needs Allah's support to remain steadfast in faith. For this reason, He *the Almighty* relates to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the narratives of those who preceded him in the procession of Messages to show him that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is not novel amongst Messengers, for they also endured severe trials. So, as their leader, he should bear the tribulations and hardships corresponding to his status and accustom himself accordingly.

Hence, in Allah's saying, 'In this way We relate to you [Prophet] stories of what happened before...' (*Ta Ha:* 99), the expression 'in this way' signifies that just as He *the Most High* has related to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the story of Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Pharaoh and As-Samiri, He will relate to him other stories about previous messengers.

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(1) *In his book, Al-Bayhaqi relates this report. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him took up residence in the ravine of Banu 'Abd Al-Muttalib due to the fear of his paternal uncle Abu Taleb for him that the polytheists would kill him openly. Then the polytheists met and agreed not to associate with them, or engage in commerce with them, or enter their dwellings until they had handed over the Messenger of Allah to be killed. They wrote a pact and swore oaths to this effect. So the clan of Banu Hashim remained there for three years, and the tribulation and hardship became very intense until Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him informed his paternal uncle that Allah had told him that the binding document has been decomposed by the moisture of the earth. All that which was written in it has been eaten away with the exception of the Name of Allah the Almighty. When Allah had spoiled the document upon which their evil scheme was recorded, Prophet Muhammad and his Companions and kinfolk came out and co-existed and mixed with other people. See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, 2/311-314.*

The Arabic word for the word ‘story’ refers to a report of great importance; it does not apply to the matters of trivial importance. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says concerning the Day of Resurrection: ‘Of what do they ask one another? About the great event’ (*an-Naba’:* 1-2). On the other hand, the word ‘news’ or ‘report’ is used to refer to normal events.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘We have given you a Quran from Us.’ (*Ta Ha:* 99) In this verse, He confirms that the bestowal of the Quran is from Him, affirming this meaning by His saying: ‘… from Us.’ (*Ta Ha:* 99) He *the Most High* does not say, for example, ‘We have given you a reminder.’ This has a significant meaning since all the Scriptures of the previous messengers were revealed and conveyed only in meaning. Afterwards, their followers formulated them with their own expressions. By contrast, the Quran is the only Scripture which was revealed whose wording and meaning were both revealed by Allah. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… from Us.’ (*Ta Ha:* 99) This means that He revealed the Quran directly to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Whoever carefully examines Prophet Muhammad’s transmission of the Quran and how he received it from his Lord will find that he safeguards the words of the Quran verbatim; not a single letter is missing from it. Let us offer an example to illustrate this fact; He *the Almighty* says: ‘Say: "He, Allah, is One."’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1) It would have been sufficient for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to communicate this message by saying, ‘He, Allah, is One’; however, he *peace and blessings be upon him* has said literally what came to him directly from his Lord. In your view, if you said to your son, ‘Go to your paternal uncle and tell him, ‘My father will visit you tomorrow’, would it not be adequate that the boy should say, ‘My father will visit you tomorrow"?

Hence, the Quran, which we have before us, is itself the very Words of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Not a single letter has been altered in it, by either additions or omissions as it is the text of miraculous inimitability, which is why it must remain as Allah *the Almighty* revealed it.

In His saying, ‘…a reminder…’ (*Ta Ha:* 99), the word ‘reminder’ has multiple meanings. In this verse, it refers to the Quran as in His saying: ‘Surely, We have revealed the Reminder, and We will most surely be its guardian.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9)

It is also used with the meaning of repute, dignity, and glory in this world as in His saying: ‘Certainly, We have revealed to you a Book in which is your good remembrance…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 10). In essence, the word 'reminder' refers to noble status and high rank amongst people. Likewise, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 44).

Now, someone may ask, ‘How can the Quran be a source of eminence and dignity for the Arabs, while it has made evident their weakness and exposed their impotence to imitate it? Does the defeated one possess renown and dignity?’ To this question, we answer, ‘The fact that they have been vanquished by the truth is evidence that they are strong. After all, it was the Quran that made evident the incapacity of the Arabs while they were the people of eloquence, rhetoric, and articulate communication.' When Allah *the Almighty* challenges, He does not challenge the weak; instead, He challenges the strong. It is a cause of pride for you to say, ‘I defeated the champion so-and-so, but where is the pride in your saying, ‘I defeated a normal person'?

The word ‘reminder’ is also used in reference to every Scripture which Allah *the Almighty* revealed. In this regard, He commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘…so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know…’ (*an-Nahl:* 43). Here, the term ‘followers of the Reminder’ refers to followers of the Torah and the followers of the Gospel.

In addition, the word ‘reminder’ is expressed as a verb with the intended meaning of doing good deeds and the reward prepared for them by Allah, as He says: ‘So remember Me, and I will remember you…’ (*al-Baqara:* 152). This means that if we remember Him *Glorified is He* with obedience; He will remember us by bestowing His Favour on us.

Moreover, the word ‘reminder’ occurs with the meaning of exalting and praising Allah *the Almighty* and with the meaning of recollection and reflection. Hence, it has numerous meanings which are determined by context.

Now, we may ask, ‘Why does Allah *the Almighty* choose the word "reminder", instead of the word "book", for example?’ It is said that the word ‘reminder’ connotes that you keep in mind or recall something from the very beginning since it is an important matter not to be forgotten. Moreover, the Quran is a reminder because one turns to it for inspiration or advice. The word 'reminder' also comprises the ideas of reflection and remembrance as one does not recollect something unless it is important. This importance corresponds to the duration of the matter and the level of its significance. In fact, the outcome of recollecting something in this world is limited to providing you with the benefits of this worldly life. However, the Quran is the reminder which furnishes you with the best of this world and the Hereafter. Therefore, it is the most important recollection to keep in your mind; it should not be forgotten. Hence, a Muslim must firmly adhere to the teachings of the Quran at all times, for it achieves happiness in both this world and the Hereafter.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* portrays this Reminder, by saying:

مَّنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهُ فَإِنَّهُۥ يَحْمِلُ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ وِزْرًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

Whoever turns away from it will bear on the Day of Resurrection a heavy burden [100] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 100)

Regarding the verb 'turns away', we know that the length of something is the furthest measureable distance while the width is its shortest measureable distance. Therefore, when the Allah *Glorified is He* wants to depict for us the extent of His Dominion, He says: '…a Garden, the extensiveness of which is (as) the heavens and the earth.' (*Al-'Imran:* 133) He thereby expresses the greater with the lesser; in other words, if the width of paradise is like that of the heavens and the earth, what would you imagine its length to be like? It must absolutely be infinite.

Every one of us has a length and a width, and the width is only demarcated by the two shoulders which are always best viewed from behind rather than from the front. Thus, we find that when a tailor wants to take measurements of you for a garment, he takes them from behind. Hence, the width of a person is the upper part of his back.

On this basis, the verbal phrase 'to turn away from something' means to leave it and go far away from it or to give your back to it and depart from it.

Another example of a similar usage is to say to someone, 'Give me the breadth of your shoulders', which is a colloquial saying which means to turn your face and depart from me. If this person is sitting, you say, ‘Get up and show me your full height’, which is a colloquial saying which means that you ask him to show you the breadth of his shoulders and depart from you.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us an image of the consequences of the ‘turning away’ of those who hoard gold and silver and do not spend it in His Way by saying: ‘On the day when it shall be heated in the fire of hell, then their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it; this is what you hoarded up for yourselves. Therefore, taste what you hoarded.’ (*at-Tawba:* 35) Hence, you find that punishment is in accordance with the manner of turning away in rejection. The first thing that happens when a beggar asks the one who hoards wealth is that the latter knits his brows together in a scowl and the features of anger and anguish appear on him. Then he turns his side to the beggar, and then gives his back to him and turns away.

The word ‘burden’ in the verse in question means a weighty load. If only a burden were in this world where one can get rid of it, either by having it unloaded, or by leaving it behind through death, however, it applies to the Hereafter. That is to say that it is a heavy burden which will not be removed from anyone who turns away in rejection, nor will he evade it by death. After all, it is a load which has no end, and there is no hope of getting rid of it. Indeed, it is a burdensome load that causes ceaseless pain. Now, a burden might be heavy, but it is at the same time desirable to the soul, as in the case of someone who carries something beneficial to himself. However, the burden in the Hereafter is heavy and detestable. After this, the burdened one is given over to chastisement; thus, it is said about the one who commits sins that he brought a burden upon himself.

Allah says:

خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهِۖ وَسَآءَ لَهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ حِمۡلٗا ١٠١

And will remain under it. What a terrible burden
to carry on that Day! [101] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 101)

In this verse, the word ‘terrible’ indicates that this burden will be vile on the Day of Resurrection because a carried load might not be foul or repugnant if it comprises good. If it is bad, its owner might bear it for a short period in this world and then throw it off. However, a burden in the Hereafter is a vile, foul load since it is in the domain of eternity which has no end.

So, when will this happen? The answer is provided in the following verse in which Allah says:

يَوۡمَ يُنفَخُ فِي ٱلصُّورِۚ وَنَحۡشُرُ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ يَوۡمَئِذٖ زُرۡقٗا ١٠٢

When the trumpet is sounded and We gather the sinful, sightless [102] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 102)

This will take place on the Day of Resurrection. The trumpet in this verse refers to the horn with which the first and the second blow are blown, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying: 'And the trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are in the earth shall swoon, except such as Allah pleases; then it shall be blown again. Then lo! They shall stand up awaiting.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 68)

There follows Allah's saying: '…and We gather the sinful, sightless.' (*Ta Ha:* 102) This means that He *the Most High* will gather them together and drive them in a blued state. The Arabic word translated as 'sightless' can signify the blueness of their colour as when you see a person whose face has become flushed and his hue turns blue due to something which has afflicted him. This blueness is the result of the lack of health and harmony in the chemistry of a body. This is an internal reaction whose effect manifests itself on his outward skin. It is as if the terror of the Resurrection and its events produce this blueness in them. Some scholars interpret this verse to mean that they will be gathered in a state of sightlessness, for certain kinds of blueness can cause blindness like blue waters which afflict the eye and may cause blindness.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

يَتَخَٰفَتُونَ بَيۡنَهُمۡ إِن لَّبِثۡتُمۡ إِلَّا عَشۡرٗا ١٠٣

They will murmur to one another, 'You stayed only ten days [on earth]' [103] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 103)

This means that while they were assembled in a state of blueness or blindness, 'They will murmur to one another…' (*Ta Ha:* 103), which means that they are talking in secret and speaking to one another in hushed voices, with none of them, out of terror of what he sees, daring to speak in a loud voice. When the terrified person encounters his enemy, he lowers his voice so that his hiding place will not be noticed. Another possible explanation is that the situation on the Day of Judgment will be terrifying to such a degree of horror that a person cannot speak, thus become incapable of anything more than whispering. Thus, what is the aspect of hushed conversation and about what will they be whispering to each other?

They secretly converse with one another by saying: ‘You stayed only ten days [on earth]’ (*Ta Ha:* 103). This means that they tell each other, ‘You have only spent ten days on the earth.’ Subsequently, the Quran makes it clear that they did not correctly estimate the real period of their staying in the earth, for it is not really a period of ten days as evinced by Allah’s saying in the following verse: ‘…but the more perceptive of them will say, "Your stay [on earth] was only a single day."’ (*Ta Ha:* 104)

So, the ‘ten days’ period ends up being one, and then the one day ends up being an hour, a fact which is clear in His saying concerning them: ‘And at the time when the hour shall come, the guilty shall swear (that) they did not tarry but an hour…’ (*ar-Rum:* 55). All what ultimately ends is considered short in terms of its period of time. Hence, we have contrasting statements which tend towards diminution. It is as if the life span of this world was but an hour, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘On the day that they shall see what they are promised. They shall be as if they had not tarried save an hour of the day.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 35) This decrease in their residing in this world is only to indicate their total failure and the insignificant quantity of good which they sent ahead of themselves for the Hereafter. They were heedless and negligent in this life and thus departed from it fruitlessly. This is why they make excuses for themselves by claiming the shortness of time as if they did not have enough time to perform good deeds!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

نَّحۡنُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذۡ يَقُولُ أَمۡثَلُهُمۡ طَرِيقَةً إِن لَّبِثۡتُمۡ إِلَّا يَوۡمٗا ١٠٤

We know best what they say – but the more perceptive of them will say, 'Your stay [on earth] was only a single day' [104]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 104)

Allah *the Almighty* is relating to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what the fate of these evildoers will be in the Hereafter. Thus, as soon as Day of the Resurrection comes, Allah's Description of them will occur just as it was foretold, for His Knowledge is All Encompassing. This discourse which the Quran relates about them is a matter within the domain of their choice, since they heard this from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It would have been within their capacity not to end up making these statements, but when the Day of Resurrection comes, they will utter them in just this manner, not changing anything of it. In Allah's saying, '…the most perceptive of them…' (*Ta Ha:* 104), the word 'perceptive' refers to the most superior of them in judgement.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَسۡـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلۡجِبَالِ فَقُلۡ يَنسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسۡفٗا ١٠٥

They ask you [Prophet] about the mountains: say, '[On that Day] my Lord will blast them into dust [105]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 105)

We have already discussed the phrase 'they ask you' in the context of Allah's saying: 'They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance…' (*al-Baqara:* 219). Now, a question is an inquiry which calls for a response. It can be posed by an ignorant to someone who knows, like the pupil who asks his teacher in order to know the answer. Otherwise, it can be posed by someone who knows to someone ignorant, like the teacher who asks his pupil in order to know his level of knowledge and the firmness of what he has understood.

This point serves as a rebuttal for one of the misconception which the orientalists have gone into intensively by saying, 'Allah says: "So, on that day neither man nor jinn shall be asked about his sin" (*ar-Rahman:* 39), while in another verse He says: "And stop them, for they shall be questioned" (*as-Saffat:* 24), so how is it possible that the first verse denies questioning while the second affirms it?' Therefore, they accuse the Quran of containing contradictory verses.

These orientalists do not possess a natural disposition for Arabic; thus, they are unable to comprehend the Quranic style. The explanation of this misconception is that a question is meant either for you to become cognisant of what you were ignorant about, or else to assess the responder in terms of what you know yourself and thereby using his response as evidence against him.

So, when the Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And stop them, for they shall be questioned.' (*as-Saffat:* 24) The question here is that of confirmation rather than a question of actually seeking to know. When the question is negated, then the seeking after knowledge on the part of the speaker is likewise negated; however, when the question is affirmed, then it is a question of confirmation.

In the same respect, an act can sometimes be denied or negated and sometimes affirmed, but the aspect of negation is clearly separated from the aspect of affirmation. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…and you did not smite when you smote (the enemy), but it was Allah Who smote…' (*al-Anfal:* 17). In this verse, the act of casting is at first negated and then affirmed although it was a single action and the one whose action is both affirmed and negated is a single person, namely Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, how can we get out of this ambiguity? Did he cast or did he not cast?

In order to explain this issue, we propose an analogy of a father who is seated near his son in order that the latter study his lessons. The boy then set about studying, turning the pages of a book. However, when the father wished to examine the extent of what his son has acquired of information, he found that he has not learnt anything. So, he said to the boy, 'You have studied, but you have not studied.' His statement 'you have studied' means that the son has performed the act of studying, whereas his statement, 'You have not studied' means that the son has not learnt anything.

Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* cast, would it have been possible that this casting would reach to all the eyes of the enemy's army? Thus, he only took a handful of earth and threw it towards the army, but it was the Power of Allah *the Almighty* which caused this scoop of earth and its fragments to reach all of the enemies' eyes.

Let us offer another example which is found in Allah's saying: '…but most people do not know.' (*al-Jathiya:* 26) In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* denies their having knowledge. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'They know the outward of this world's life ….' (*ar-Rum:* 7) This confirms that they have knowledge.

Let us return to Allah's saying in the verse in question: 'They ask you [Prophet] about the mountains…' (*Ta Ha:* 105); when we come across the phrase 'They ask you' in the Noble Quran, we find that the response to it is preceded by the imperative verb 'say', such as in His saying: 'They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: "In both of them there is a great sin and means of profit for men…"' (*al-Baqara:* 219). Similarly, He *the Almighty* says: 'They ask you concerning the new moon. Say: "They are times appointed for (the benefit of) men and (for) the pilgrimage."' (*al-Baqara:* 189)

Likewise in all such verses except for His saying here: 'They ask you [Prophet] about the mountains: say, "[On that Day] my Lord will blast them into dust."' (*Ta Ha:* 105) In this verse, the imperative verb 'say' is conjoined with the particle *Fa'* (then). So, what is the reason for this?

It is said that the question in all of these other verses is about something which has occurred or exists in reality, hence the response is prefaced by the word 'say'. Another example of this is Allah's saying: 'And they ask you about menstruation…' (*al-Baqara:* 222). However, in case of His saying, 'They ask you [Prophet] about the mountains...' (*Ta Ha:* 105), He *the Almighty* says in the response: '…say, "[On that Day] my Lord will blast them into dust"' (*Ta Ha:* 105) because this is an event which has not yet occurred.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* informs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will be asked this question. Hence, it is as if the particle *Fa'* (then) here indicates an anticipated conditional sentence, that is, 'If they actually ask you, then say such-and such.'

Thus, the question about the mountains was not posed at the time of the revelation of this verse, whereas the other questions were actually offered to him *peace and blessings be upon him* that is, before the revelation of the verses concerning them.

The response to a question may also occur without being preceded by the word ‘say’ such as in Allah’s saying: ‘And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near…’ (*al-Baqara:* 186). In this verse, He does not command Prophet Muhammad, to say, ‘Say’ or ‘then say’ because this would suggest an intermediary between Allah *the Almighty* and His servants. It is as if He is making it evident that He is near to His servants, a point which is clear by eliminating the word ‘say’ from the response.

Now, you might be amazed and say, ‘How can all of these questions to Prophet Muhammad occur in the Quran, while the Quran is the Book of Divine Guidance? It has already brought obligations that may already be burdensome for people since it compels them to observe things which run contrary to what they desire. Thus, it would have been expected that they would not ask about matters concerning which no rulings have been revealed.’ To this, we say, ‘These questions of the companions demonstrate their longing for the revelation of Allah’s Rulings and Prescriptions. Thus, regarding their customs in the pre-Islamic period, they, after becoming Muslims, wished to do them from an Islamic perspective based on the notion that they constitute part of worship and are not merely habitual pre-Islamic customs.'

This is in spite of the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade them from asking questions by saying: ‘Leave me as I leave you, for the people who were before you were ruined because of their questions and their differences over their prophets.’(1)

Nevertheless, they asked questions and wanted to construct their lives on the basis of the Divine Way of Guidance revealed in the Quran, rather than on the basis of the familiar customs which they had in pre-Islamic times. Hence, these questions were intended to allow their affairs to be governed in the light of the Divine Way of Guidance.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari, Ad-Daradqutni, Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra peace be upon him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7288; Ad-Daraqutni, Sunnan 2/281; Ahmad, Musnad 2/313, 482, 495; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1337.*

Concerning His saying, '…say, "[On that Day] my Lord will blast them into dust."' (*Ta Ha:* 105), we have already discussed this meaning of blasting something into dust in His saying: '…we shall grind it down and scatter it into the sea.' (*Ta Ha:* 97) The intended meaning is that Allah *the Almighty* will pulverise the mountains and scatter them in the air. In the verse, He emphasises the act of blasting by using the verb 'to blast' and repeating it again in the verbal noun formula at the end of the verse. In this manner, He *the Almighty* reaffirms that the mountains will be fragmented into tiny atoms scattered by the wind.

Now, some people might imagine that the mountains will be crushed into chunks of stone in the way we split rocks today into large pieces. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* reaffirms the act of wiping out the mountains and that they will be like particles in the air. Therefore, in another verse, He says: 'And the mountains shall be as loosened wool.' (*al-Qari`a:* 5) This means that the mountains will be like carded wool. Here, we may ask, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* specifically mention mountains?' This is because the human being views himself as eminently susceptible to variability, a thing which totally applies to the animals and plants; he sees that animals die and are slaughtered and that plants dry out and are broken into pieces. In fact, even the human being himself dies and comes to an end. Hence, everything he sees around him signifies change and extinction, except for the mountains which he views as firmly rooted and consistently stable. They are not apparently affected by change with the passing of ages.

This is why they are used as proverbial comparisons in terms of solidity and stability, a point which is quite clear in Allah's saying: 'And they have indeed planned their plan, but their plan is with Allah, though their plan was such that the mountains should pass away thereby.' (*Ibrahim:* 46) Mountains, then, are a manifestation of solidity. So, it is not surprising that people would ask about this solid, firmly grounded creation, saying, 'What will Allah do with them?'

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَيَذَرُهَا قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا ﴿١٠٦﴾

And leave it a flat plain [106]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 106)

As for Allah’s saying, ‘And leave it a flat plain’ (*Ta Ha:* 106), it means that He leaves the earth smooth, flat and void of any vegetation or structure. In this verse, the object pronoun ‘it’ refers to the earth, not to the mountains since these will not be a flat plain. However, it is the earth upon which the mountains are located which will become smooth and even, barren of any mountains or buildings. Hence, the earth is one thing, whereas mountains upon it are another.

Another relevant verse in this respect is His saying: ‘Say: "What! Do you indeed disbelieve in Him Who created the earth in two periods, and do you set up equals with Him? This is the Lord of the Worlds. And He made in it mountains above its surface, and He blessed therein and made therein its foods, in four periods, alike for seekers."’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10)

Concerning the second verse above, the object pronoun in the passage, ‘…and He blessed therein and made therein its foods, in four periods, alike for seekers’ (*Fussilat:* 10) does not refer to the earth; rather, it refers to the mountains. This is because the mountains are in reality the storehouses of sustenance and the sources of fertility for the earth. The human being is made of the earth, and so is his provision; we know for certain that plants are eaten by mankind and animals, while plants and animals are both nourishment for mankind.

Hence, the earth requires fertility to support it and provide it with nutritive elements. If the Creator had furnished it with a single layer of fertile soil, this layer would be used up after a few years, and the earth would have become sterile and barren after this. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wisely created the mountains and made them a source of fertility to provide the earth with enduring and continuous provision for as long as life remains on the earth. In this way, Allah’s Wisdom becomes clear in that the mountains are composed of solid stone, but when they are exposed to factors of erosion with the passing of the years, the outer layer is broken down due to climactic conditions of heat and cold. Then comes rain, acting upon the rock like a file, thus forming what is called topsoil. These particles are then borne to valleys and the courses of rivers and are distributed over the surface of the earth, gradually increasing its fertility every year. If this was not the case and the mountains were crumbly and not solid, they would collapse within years and no longer perform this function. Therefore, we say that mountains are the sources of subsistence, and not the earth.

In the same respect the fertility of the Nile Valley and the Delta comes from the alluvial mud of the Nile and the topsoil which the water carries from the heights of Africa. This topsoil which is brought down from the mountains is that which causes the increase in dry lands. You can notice this phenomenon in cities which face the sea, since after having been along the coast, they have now become deep within dry land.

We have previously depicted the mountain as being triangular with its base at the bottom and the river valley as being triangular with its base at the top. Every paring lost by a mountain represents an augmentation of the river valley. It is as if the Creator *Glorified is He* established this phenomenon in order to correspond to the increase of population on the earth.

Grammatically analysis of the verse under study indicates that the referent to the object of the verb in the phrase ‘and leave it’ has been omitted, relying on the intellect of the listener and his alert discernment that it could only be a reference to the earth. This is similar to His saying, ‘Say: "He, Allah, is One"’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), in which the referent of the subject pronoun ‘He’ is not mentioned. This is because it is understood that it could only refer back to Allah *Glorified is He* even if His Name ‘Allah’ did not come before it. Another instance of this is found in His saying: ‘…until it disappeared from sight.’ (*Sad:* 32) In this verse, the intended reference is to the sun which had set and so Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* missed the prayer. The verse, however, does not mention anything about the sun. A final example of this is in Allah’s saying: ‘He would not leave on the back of it any creature…’ (*Fatir:* 45); what He means by this is upon the surface of the earth, even if it is not mentioned in the verse. The same is true in the case of Allah’s saying in the verse being examined: ‘And leave it…’ (*Ta Ha:* 106). Thus, in this verse, the object pronoun ‘it’ refers to the earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّا تَرَىٰ فِيهَا عِوَجًا وَلَآ أَمۡتًا ١٠٧

With no peak or trough to be seen [107]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 107)

It is as if it was flattened and evened out with a ‘spirit level’ tool such that you do perceive in it any curvature or crookedness. In this verse, the word 'unevenness' denotes depression and elevation. Thus, the earth will be levelled with perfect evenness as we ourselves do with walls in order to ensure their levelness.

Hence, we find that when an engineer wishes to take over a building from a construction contractor, he relies on rays of light since they are straight and reveal to him the slightest defect in a wall. Alternatively, he relies on particles of soil since they fall in a straight line, and after several days, you can notice from the particles of soil what curvatures or protuberances the wall comprises.

Subsequently, the Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوۡمَئِذٖ يَتَّبِعُونَ ٱلدَّاعِيَ لَا عِوَجَ لَهُۥۖ وَخَشَعَتِ ٱلۡأَصۡوَاتُ لِلرَّحۡمَٰنِ فَلَا تَسۡمَعُ إِلَّا هَمۡسٗا ١٠٨

On that Day, people will follow the summoner from whom there is no escape; every voice will be hushed for the Lord of Mercy; only whispers will be heard [108] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 108)

The word ‘summoner’ means the crier, like the mueddhin who so frequently summons people to the Presence of Allah *Glorified is He* in prayer. Now, some people in this world answer the call of prayer, while others decline and reject it. However, as for the crier in the Hereafter, namely the angel who blows the Trumpet, no one will disobey him or refrain from responding to him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…there is no crookedness in him.…’ (*Ta Ha:* 108). This is because we see that when the crier in this world calls out to a mass of people, he turns right and left and goes in a circle so that he will be heard in all directions. However, if his voice does not reach all ears in an audible manner, he utilises a microphone, for example, but as for the crier in the Hereafter, he is not faced with any crookedness here and there, since he causes all to hear him, and his voice reaches all ears, without deviation or deflection.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Every voice will be hushed for the Lord of Mercy; only whispers will be heard.' (*Ta Ha:* 108) We have actually shed light on theses whispers when speaking about Allah's saying: 'They will murmur to one another…' (*Ta Ha:* 103).

Now, we know that any large gathering cannot be calmed down easily, so just imagine what it would be like on the Day of Resurrection when people from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the rising of the Last Hour will be gathered together in one arena; they all will be in total silence. Allah says: '…Every voice will be hushed for the Lord of Mercy; only whispers will be heard.' (*Ta Ha:* 108) So, why are all these voices —which have always been vociferous about what they want, and have always been characterised by noisy tumult and din —hushed? This is due to the situation on the Day of Judgment being different and the terror being tremendous. Out of terror and that fact that each and every human being will be preoccupied with his own state, thinking about what he is heading towards, no one dares to raise his voice. If one should talk, he would do so in secret and in whispers by asking, 'What has happened? What is going on?'

As a matter of fact, we, human beings, are unable to speak in an audible voice at times of hardships. For example, when Sa'd Zaghlul(1) died *may Allah have Mercy upon him*, Ahmad Shawqi(2) was in Lebanon at the time, and he heard people speaking in a hushed voice, whispering to one another that Sa'd had died. No one dared to speak of it aloud because of the horrifying nature of this event. Shawqi then said:

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(1) He is Sa'd Pasha Ibn Ibrahim Zaghlul, leader of the Egyptian political awakening movement. He was born in Ibyana of the villages of Gharbia governorate in 1857 CE, and entered Al-Azhar University in 1874 CE where he had contact with Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani. He assumed the office of the Minister of Education and then of Justice. In 1919 CE, he was elected president of the Egyptian delegation seeking independence, and was exiled by the British to Malta. He died in 1927 CE at the age of 70. See *Az-Zirikli*, *Al-A'lam,* 3/83.

(2) Ahmad Shawqi, known as 'the Prince of Poets', is the most famous Arab poet of the modern age, He was born in Cairo in 1868 CE and grew up in the royal house in Egypt. He later studied Law in France. He cultivated most of the genres of poetry, including panegyric poetry, love poetry, elegiac poetry and descriptive poetry. Later he became involved in political events. He died in 1932 CE. See *Az-Zirikli*, *Al-A'lam*, 1/137.

Ears were trampled by whispers and lip movements
I said: O people marshal together your discernment
In its two veins every soul contains its ultimate decline.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوۡمَئِذٖ لَّا تَنفَعُ ٱلشَّفَٰعَةُ إِلَّا مَنۡ أَذِنَ لَهُ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ وَرَضِيَ لَهُۥ قَوۡلٗا ١٠٩

On that Day, intercession will be useless except from those to whom the Lord of Mercy has granted permission and whose words He approves [109] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 109)

Intercession requires three elements: someone who is interceded for, and in this case it is man; an intercessor who has a higher station; and the one before whom intercession is sought. Now, the one before whom intercession is sought does not randomly allow for the intercession improvised on your part. Instead, you must be granted formal permission for it, and you must be placed in the station and rank of intercession. This is a basic requirement of being an intercessor.

Regarding Allah's saying, '…and whose words He approves' (*Ta Ha:* 109), this concerns the one for whom intercession is sought; he must utter words which Allah *the Almighty* accepts and is well-pleased with—even if he falls short in other domains. In fact, the best thing a slave can utter to please Allah *the Almighty* is to say, 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' This statement pleases Allah *the Almighty* and constitutes the hope to which the slave clings. Furthermore, it is glad tidings for those who are guilty of disobedience because it ensures their inclusion in the intercession of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Thus, if you suffer a bad trait of character or a moral defect which you view as an impassable obstacle, you should not despair. Instead, you should focus on another side of your soul which is stronger. On its basis, you should increase your good deeds, for they wipe out misdeeds.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

يَعۡلَمُ مَا بَيۡنَ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَمَا خَلۡفَهُمۡ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِهِۦ عِلۡمٗا ﴿١١٠﴾

He knows what is before and behind them, though they do not comprehend Him [110] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 110)

Concerning Allah's saying, '…what is before and behind them…' (*Ta Ha:* 110), it means that He knows what is in front of them and what is behind them. On the other hand, a human being's knowledge does not encompass Him. In fact, a human being is cognisant only of that which he has been informed of, unless there are certain premises from which he makes deductions. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* has hidden many things in existence, including what He had provided with preliminary indications. The one who is fully aware of these preliminary signs attains to the knowledge they veil.

Despite that, we do not say that the one who reached these conclusions has knowledge of the unseen; rather, we say that he has discovered the unseen by preliminary signs which Allah *Glorified is He* has given him. This is similar to the case of the student who is given geometry exercises. We remind him of the given premises, and then he is led by the provided elements to arrive at the conclusion.

The universe is full of phenomena in which we can find many secrets if we examine and study them profoundly. After all, it was by studying the phenomena of the universe that people discovered the age of steam, which thus facilitated certain activities for people. By so doing, the scientists discovered the law of floating objects, penicillin, and so forth.

All of these phenomena are existent in the universe of Allah *Glorified is He* and they were simply waiting to be explored and discovered. Therefore, He reproaches us by saying: 'and how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it.' (*Yusuf:* 105) Indeed, if human beings only took notice of these phenomena with full attention, they would derive benefit from them.

However, there are certain matters which Allah *the Almighty* has claimed of which He has exclusive knowledge. While He may give the knowledge of these matters to His beloved servants, they may also remain exclusively in Allah's Knowledge, with no one else to be cognisant of them.

Subsequently, the Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَعَنَتِ ٱلْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ ٱلْقَيُّومِ ۖ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ حَمَلَ ظُلْمًا ﴿١١١﴾

And [all] faces will be humbled before the Living, Ever Watchful One. Those burdened with evil deeds will despair [111]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 111)

As a matter of fact, the face is the most eminent and noble organ in the body of a man. It is what gives a person his distinguishing outward characteristic. This is why a person protects and preserves it. This is clear in the fact that if dust or soil, for example, hits your face, you wipe it with your hand. You have done nothing more than putting what was on your face onto your hand. Why is this? This is so due to the face being the most eminent thing you possess.

Therefore, prostration to Allah *the Almighty* in prayer is a sign of submission, humility, and servitude to Him. By so doing it, you accept to put the noblest part of your body on the ground, putting it into direct contact with the soil. A person does not prostrate except to the One Whom he absolutely believes that He merits this prostration. He is totally convinced that prostrating to Him Alone preserves him from having to prostrate to anyone else. As a poet once said:

And the prostration which you so dislike
In becoming devoted to prostration there is salvation

Thus, you must solely prostrate to Allah *the Almighty* as this will save you from prostrating to anything besides Him, and you must carry out good deeds only for His Sake so that He will satisfy all your needs.

Then, follows Allah's saying: 'Those burdened with evil deeds will despair.' (*Ta Ha:* 111) The verb 'to bear' means to take up a load which is very heavy. As for the word 'evildoing', it originally means that you take a good thing that does not belong to you in order to make use of it and increase what you possess. Apparently, you enjoy augmentation, but in reality, you are loading yourself with a vile burden and a heavy encumbrance. Thus, you will not be able to bear it as you have increased in sin, not in good.

Inequity has levels and degrees. The lowest of these is to take what is not yours even if it is contemptible and valueless. The same goes true for wronging someone else by defaming him. Then inequity moves higher until it reaches its peak with the act of associating others in worship with Allah *the Exalted*. This fact is clear in His saying: '…most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.' (*Luqman:* 13) It is a horrible inequity because you have taken a due right of Allah *Glorified is He* and given it to someone or something else. Therefore, make every effort to be free of this major sin, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely, Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and He forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases' (*an-Nisa':* 48).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن يَعۡمَلۡ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَهُوَ مُؤۡمِنٞ فَلَا يَخَافُ ظُلۡمٗا وَلَا هَضۡمٗا ﴿١١٢﴾

But whoever has done righteous deeds and believed
need have no fear of injustice or deprivation [112]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 112)

The 'righteous deeds' refer to actions whose result is good for you and for others. The minimum expression of faith with regard to righteous action is to leave that which is good and beneficial in its state of goodness or usefulness and not to corrupt or ruin it. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; if you find a well from which people drink, you should not plug it up or pollute it. Then you can advance in righteous action and augment its usefulness by building a wall around it so as to protect it or furnishing it with a cover, etc.

One of the manifestations of Allah's Mercy towards us is that when He recommends us to engage in righteous action, He says: '…righteous deeds…' (*Ta Ha:* 112). So, it is sufficient that you do some righteous deeds since a human being's energy does not allow for undertaking all righteous deeds, nor does he have the strength for this. Thus, it is adequate to take a portion of them upon yourself, and some else take a portion. Then, when all of these portions of good deeds done by mankind are gathered together, they constitute complete righteousness and goodness.

As we have previously mentioned, a single one of us does not have the capacity or means to have the perfection of Prophet Muhammad's moral conduct. He said: 'Beneficence is in me—in truth—and in my Ummah (followers of

Islam) until the Day of Resurrection.'(1) Hence, in every individual of the members of the Islamic Ummah (followers of Islam) there is a trait of goodness in such a manner that if you brought together their traits of perfection, this would provide us with the perfection of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Concerning Allah's saying, '…and believed...' (*Ta Ha:* 112), this is stipulated because faith is a condition of the acceptance of good deeds. However, if a good deed is carried out by a disbeliever, he obtains his compensation in this world through renown and fame as well as the perpetuation of his memory. This is due to the fact that he has acted in this manner in order that good things be said about him, a point which has actually been done by people who praised their acts.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…need have no fear of injustice or deprivation.' (*Ta Ha:* 112) In this verse, the word 'injustice' is different from the word 'evildoing' which is found in His saying: 'Those burdened with evil deeds will despair.' (*Ta Ha:* 111) In this latter passage, 'evildoing' is on the part of a man towards himself or to others. However, in the verse under study, '…need have no fear of injustice or deprivation' (*Ta Ha:* 112), the reference is to injustice falling upon him by not being recompensed for his good deed. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* shall not punish him for a misdeed he did not commit, nor shall He fail to reward him for a good deed he has done because He does not wrong people by so much as the weight of an atom.

As for Allah's saying at the end of the verse, '…or deprivation' (*Ta Ha:* 112), it means diminution. This means that He *the Almighty* will not diminish his recompense and his reward. In passing, we should note that the same word is found in the expression of 'digestion of food' whereby a quantity of food is digested and then absorbed, changing into a liquid in the blood, and thus decreases in extent. Yet another usage of this word is when we say, 'So-and-so has been denied his due right'; what this means is that he had a proper right but did not obtain it.

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(1) *In his book, Al-'Ajluni says, 'It was said in Al-Maqasid that our sheikh said, 'I am not aware of [any such Hadith], but its meaning is sound, that is to say: 'There will never cease to be a group from my Ummah manifest upon the truth…' See Al-'Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa', 1/476.*

Here arises a question, which is, ‘What is the point of conjoining the word "deprivation" to the word "injustice", for the negation of injustice entails the negation of derivation?’ To this, we respond, ‘This is because at times the reward is nullified totally while at others the compensation of reward is diminished.’

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا وَصَرَّفْنَا فِيهِ مِنَ ٱلْوَعِيدِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ أَوْ يُحْدِثُ لَهُمْ ذِكْرًا ﴿١١٣﴾

We have sent the Quran down in the Arabic tongue and given all kinds of warnings in it, so that they may beware or take heed [113] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 113)

This verse opens with the Arabic phrase ‘and thus’ which here signifies that just as Allah *the Almighty* revealed Books to previous peoples, He also revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, just as He sent messengers to the previous peoples, He has also sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to contemporary people. However, the previous Divine Messages differ in that they were sent for a limited period of time and for a particular people, whereas Prophet Muhammad was sent to all people and for all times until the Last Hour.

We grasp from Allah’s saying, ‘And thus We have sent the Quran down…’ (*Ta Ha:* 113), that the one sending down is higher than the one to whom something is sent down. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were drawing our attention and uplifting our fervent aspirations by saying: ‘Do not descend to the level of earthly legislation because it takes into account the present moment and disregards the future. It is also governed by vain inclinations, and this is why there are certain matters which are missing from it and thus in need of rectification.’

Therefore, when He *the Almighty* summons us to His Sublime Way of Guidance, He says: ‘Say: "Come…"’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). Here, the second imperative verb means to ascend—as well as merely ‘come’—and obtain the Divine Way of Guidance from above, not from the earth.

There follows, in the verse under study, the word ‘Quran’ which refers to something read or recited. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* refers to the Quran as:

'…a Scripture…' (*al-Anbiya':* 10). This means that the Quran is also written and recorded so as to be preserved in hearts by memorisation and in transcribed lines. He *the Almighty* then says: '…in the Arabic tongue…' (*Ta Ha:* 113) although Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all people across the expanses of time and place, thus, the Quran was revealed as a miracle to everyone. This is because he *peace and blessings be upon him* was the direct caller for the Arab people who were the first to receive his Message, so it was necessary that the miracle appears in his language. Furthermore, the miracle of the Quran was not meant only for Arabs: rather, it is a challenge for all mankind and jinns across the extent of time and space. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say: "If men and jinns should combine together to bring the like of this Quran, they could not bring the like of it …"' (*al-Isra':* 88). Hence, the Quran is a challenge for all nationalities: Russian, American, Japanese, and the entire world, including jinns. However, why are jinns also included in the domain of this challenge? It is said that the ancient Arabs used to believe that every poet or great orator was made eloquent by a devil that provided him with inspiration. This is why jinns are also included in this domain.

Thus, one might say, 'How can the Quran challenge other than the Arabs to produce something like it while it is in Arabic? Thus, it only serves as evidence against Arabs.' To this, we reply, 'Is the inimitability of the Quran found only in its Arabic style and manner of expression? No, since the aspects of inimitability of the Quran are numerous, including some aspects shared by all languages. For example, do languages differ in laying down legislation for the good of the society? Did the Quran not bring a Divine Way of Guidance to an illiterate nomadic people by means of which they conquered the two greatest civilisations which were contemporaneous to them, namely the civilisation of Persia in the east and Byzantium in the west? Was this phenomenon not worthy of investigation and research? Moreover, you have the universal principles which the Quran speaks of more than fourteen centuries ago, while modern science is still discovering them today.'

Hence, it is only natural that the Quran should have appeared in Arabic because it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was an Arab and lived in the midst of a community made up of Arabs. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We did not send any messenger but with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them clearly…’ (*Ibrahim:* 4). This is due to the fact that a messenger’s people are the ones who receive the Message, react to it and are convinced by it. Subsequently, they spread it throughout diverse regions of the earth. It is amazing that, with the Message of the Quran, they won over this world which does not have knowledge of Arabic. They convinced it with principles and methods which the Quran brought because languages do not differ over such principles and methods.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and given all kinds of warnings in it…’ (*Ta Ha:* 113). This shows that when the Quran warns about something, it issues this warning in differing modes, repeating it in a different manner in order to remind those who are heedless.

In other words, Allah *the Almighty* has varied the warning with every expression of promise and threat. Each formulation counters a sensual or deviant impulse of the soul of an individual; thus, He has addressed all of these capricious inclinations at every level. Hence the scholar, the ignorant, and the person of average intellect all find in the Quran what corresponds to them since it establishes ruling for everyone, including the philosopher and the layman. It is therefore inescapable that the Quran comprises diverse formulations for all types of natural disposition in order to convince everyone.

In fact, the Quran employs both promises and threats, for each of them addresses those who specifically need them. The one who is not attracted by the promise of good responds to being uprooted strongly and powerfully. As a poet once said:

Great patience and if it avails naught he follows it with threat
If it is of no use his decisive decisions suffice

In a traditional saying we find: ‘Indeed, some people may be deterred by someone’s worldly authority while they are not influenced or deterred by the Quran.’

Warnings and frightening are blessings from Allah, as related in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He has made the two seas to flow freely (so that) they meet together. Between them is a barrier which they cannot pass. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 19-21) These are blessings from Allah *the Almighty*. However, in His saying: 'The flames of fire and smoke will be sent on you two, and then you will not be able to defend yourselves. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) However, what is the blessing in the fire and fiery flashes?

Here, the aspect of blessing stems from the fact that Allah *the Almighty* warns you against what makes you fall into them. He admonishes you while you still have time to make amends. Hence, He does not seize you while you are inattentive, nor does He abandon you in your state of heedless negligence. This is similar to when a father forewarns his son by saying, 'If you neglect your studies, you will fail in the examination. Your classmates will disdain you, and this and that will happen to you.' Thus, he does not abandon his son to his heedlessness so that the examination does not take him unawares, and failure does not overcome him by surprise. Is this not a favour and useful advice?

Thus, the Quran employs diverse manners of expression in order to correspond to the receptivity of different temperaments and frames of mind. In this way, the people might receive the Quran with awareness and due consideration, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…so that they may beware or take heed.' (*Ta Ha:* 113)

Concerning His saying, 'so that they may beware...' (*Ta Ha:* 113), the word 'beware' normally refers to protecting yourself from evil, disobedience and destruction. As for His saying, '…take heed' (*Ta Ha:* 113), it could mean that if the people heed the warnings of the Quran, they will have renown, dignity and high rank due to their good deeds. These are the elevated status which they attain by virtue of pious obedience.

This is because ordained obligations consist of two sections: one proscribes disobedience, and another prescribes obedience. For example, you are prohibited from drinking wine and are meanwhile commanded to pray. Hence, pious people guard themselves against the former, and they take heed of doing the latter. Now, inasmuch as the Quran descended from above, it must necessarily state after this:

فَتَعَٰلَى ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمَلِكُ ٱلْحَقُّۗ وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِٱلْقُرْءَانِ مِن قَبْلِ أَن
يُقْضَىٰٓ إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُۥۖ وَقُل رَّبِّ زِدْنِى عِلْمًا ﴿١١٤﴾

Exalted be God, the one who is truly in control. [Prophet],
do not rush to recite before the revelation is fully complete
but say, 'Lord, increase me in knowledge!' [114]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 114)

In this verse, the expression 'Exalted be Allah' means that He is far beyond all and elevated above all that might resemble any created being. He is sublimely exalted in Himself, for there is nothing like Him *Glorified is He*. He is sublimely exalted in terms of His Attributes, for there is no attribute similar to His. So, if you find an attribute in creation which bears a resemblance to an Attribute of the Creator, and then you should view it in the light of His saying: '…there is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Allah *Glorified is He* does not begrudge call His servant a creator if he produces something, but when He speaks of His Creation, He says: '…So blessed be Allah the best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) Hence, you are a creator, but your Lord is the best of creators. This is because you created out of what exists whereas your Lord *Glorified is He* creates out of nothing. In addition, you have created something solid in a single condition, while Allah *the Almighty* has created a living, growing creation which feels moves and multiplies. We have previously cited, as an analogy for this, the case of the one who makes glass vessels out of sand, and we have elucidated the difference between the two kinds of creation.

Allah's saying, 'Exalted be Allah, the One Who is truly in control' (*Ta Ha:* 114) draws our attention to the necessity of looking upwards in matters of legislation, for what compels you to adopt legislation from a servant who is the same as you? Why should he not adopt your legislation? Hence, it is necessary that the lawmaker be higher than the one for whom the laws are made or laid down.

Amongst the words of exaltation which are not uttered except for Allah *the Almighty* is the expression 'Exalted be Allah'. We have never heard a man say it to another man. Although there are disbelievers, atheists and deists, no one has ever said this expression in praise of anyone else. The same is true for the expression ‘sublimely exalted and blessed’. Thus, we praise Him, saying: ‘Blessed are You, O, Lord, and exalted’, which means that He is One God with no partner or associate.

So, Allah’s saying, ‘Exalted be Allah…’ (*Ta Ha:* 114) signifies that His Position is surpassingly high and that His Exaltation rises to a level that cannot be reached. As for presumptions of superiority between mankind, it is an odious, detested phenomenon. On the other hand, the sublime superiority of Allah *Glorified is He* is in the best interest of mankind. Regarding this observation, the people of the countryside give expression to it by saying, ‘He who does not have a chief let seek to have one.’ This is because the chief is the one who will assist the weak and demolish the tyrannical inequity of the strong; hence, if we had no chief, we would quarrel and be ruined.

Therefore, it is in the best interest of the entire universe that Allah *the Almighty* be sublimely exalted and infinitely superior, for He does not look down upon us; rather, He is sublimely exalted for our sake and in our interest. Thus, when an elevated person or tyrant becomes conscious that Allah *the Exalted* is higher than him, his tyranny and superciliousness will surely come to an end. Moreover, when the weak person knows that he has a higher supporter whom no one can defeat, he feels reassured and lives in security. In this manner, social harmony between people prevails.

In fact, we love our worshipful servitude to Allah *the Almighty* although the word ‘servitude’ itself is detestable and disliked when it is pertinent to the slavery of men to men, with the master taking the good of his slave. On the other hand, servitude to Allah *the Almighty* comprises nobility and dignity because it is the slave who takes the good of his Master. Hence, I am a slave of Allah *the Almighty* and my servitude to Him is for my own benefit as I will not augment His Dominion in any way, and He will not derive any benefit from me. This is due to the fact that He *Glorified is He* had Mastery over His Dominion and exercised His Supreme Authority in the universe even before He created both living and non-living beings. Before you, O, iniquitous and rebellious man, came into existence, He had brought forth for you the entire universe, and all that it contains.

Hence, your belief in Allah *the Almighty* will not add anything to His Dominion, a fact which is clear in the following Qudsi Hadith: 'O, My servants, you will not attain harming Me so as to harm Me, and you will not attain benefiting Me so as to benefit Me…'(1) So, when He *the Almighty* manages our affairs, this is for our benefit and nothing of this benefit returns to Him.

Concerning Allah's saying, '…the One Who is truly in control' (*Ta Ha:* 114), this is explained by the fact that there are numerous kings for whom Allah *the Almighty* has confirmed dominion and referred to them as kings. In this regard, He *the Most High* says: 'and the king said, "Bring him to me."' (*Yusuf:* 50) He also says: 'Have you not considered him who disputed with Ibrahim (Abraham) about his Lord because Allah had given him the kingdom?' (*al-Baqara:* 258)

Thus, there are kings in this world, but they are not true kings, for the True King is Allah *the Almighty*. After all, it is He Who conferred the dominion on the kings of this world. Thus, it is possible that any one of them will leave behind his dominion or that his dominion will be taken away from him. Now, what sort of sovereignty is this over which its possessor cannot reign? What kind of dominion is that which can be stripped from you through a military coup or the shot of a bullet? Hence, Allah *the Almighty* is the True King Who establishes some of mankind as kings over the affairs of others for their benefit. Furthermore, as He *the Almighty* grants sovereignty, He is Fully Able to remove it if He wishes, a fact which is ever so clear in His saying: '…You give the kingdom to whomsoever You please and take away the kingdom from whomsoever You please…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* possesses the Absolute Dominion and bestows therefrom on whom He wishes. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* dominates the kings and all what they have control over, as He is Ever Watchful over His creation; thus, no one can escape from His Dominion.

We hear of those who revile kings and presidents and those who speak ill of their due right, not realising that their dominion was granted by Allah *the Exalted*. It is He Who has established them as kings and delegated powers to them, for no one of them had seized his dominion against Allah's Will. So, you should not oppose Allah's Choice; rather, you should respect anyone to whom He *the Almighty* has delegated authority over your affairs. You should also know that this is in the interest of the country and its people. Ultimately, the iniquitous tyrant amongst them may become one of the subject populace.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and Ibn Majah on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased upon him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/154; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2577; and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4257.*

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* gives sovereignty to some people over the affairs of others—this one manages that, and this one owns that—in order for the proceeding of the universe to move. However, when the Day of Resurrection comes, He *the Almighty* will say: 'To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16) Indeed, this is the true Dominion. Allah's saying, '…Who is truly in control' (*Ta Ha:* 114) also means that His Dominion is constant and does not change. As a matter of fact, every manifestation of power in the universe changes except for Allah's Power. Therefore, He *the Most High* issues His Orders with full confidence that they will be executed because He is the True King Who controls all matters. If this were not the case, then how could He say to a thing 'Be!', and behold it is? Thus, nothing in His creation can resist or rebel against Him by disobeying His Command 'Be!'

Allah *the Almighty* revealed the Quran in Arabic and provided it with various warnings so that people might protect themselves and/or be heedful. He *the Almighty* has the full right to do so because He is the True King, and there is no capriciousness in what He legislates and that is why you are obligated to accept His Legislation. The defect of the human legislations is that they are affected by vain desires and deviant inclinations. So, if a capitalist establishes laws, he gives preference to capitalists, and if a poor man establishes laws, he gives preference to the poor. By contrast, Allah *the Almighty* is not partial to anyone at the expense of anyone else.

Moreover, the lawmaker must be knowledgeable about the new developments of the future, so that no one will seek to rectify a law and change it as is the case today with man-made laws. Events have compelled us to change the law because at the time of its establishment we were not aware of the future developments and made no precautions for them. Therefore, as Allah's Knowledge is All Encompassing, there is no rectification ever for His Law.

Now, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* is the True Sovereign, He must assure mankind that the Quran, the Divine Way of Guidance, reaches them in the form He uttered, without any alteration. For this reason, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely, We have revealed the Reminder, and We will most surely be its guardian.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9) He *the Almighty* has taken it upon Himself to preserve the Quran since mankind (the Jews and Christians) had already been put to the test by being entrusted with preserving the Divine Way of Guidance, but they dishonoured this trust. They distorted the Torah, the Gospel and other sacred Books by either concealing some of that which Allah *the Exalted* revealed or by forgetting part of it. Even those who remembered it did not leave it in its original state, but they distorted and falsified it. If all of this were accepted from them, it would be unacceptable that they ascribe falsehood to Allah *the Almighty* and compose a Scripture on their own by saying: ‘It is from Allah, while it is not from Allah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 78).

This is because the preservation of the Divine Way of Guidance was delegated to mankind as an ordained obligation which is susceptible to being obeyed or disobeyed. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘We revealed the Torah with guidance and light, and the prophets, who had submitted to Allah, judged according to it for the Jews. So, did the rabbis and the scholars in accordance with that part of Allah’s Scripture which they were entrusted to preserve...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 44). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* commanded them to preserve the Book as an obligation upon them, but they disobeyed it by forgetting, concealing, and falsifying their Books.

For this reason, He *the Almighty* assumed responsibility for preserving the Quran since it is the final Scripture which allows for no rectification or emendation. He *the Almighty* guaranteed that it would not be falsified or distorted in any way. Therefore, we must be confident that the Quran, the Book of Allah, is His Word which was revealed with His All-Encompassing Knowledge from the Guarded Tablet; He *the Almighty* says: ‘In a book that is protected. None shall touch it except the purified ones.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 78-79) Subsequently, it was brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit who was entrusted with it and did not make any change in it. Then it descended upon the heart of the best messenger, namely Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about whom Allah *the Almighty* says:

‘And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings, We would certainly have seized him by the right hand.’ (*al-Haqqa:* 44- 45)

Hence, the Quran was preserved as knowledge in the Guarded Tablet and was preserved by the secure trust of the one who brought it down from heaven, namely Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* and by the one who received it, namely Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, we have no excuse (to claim that the Quran has been distorted) after Allah *Glorified is He* brought together for it every type of preservation.

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* caused the Quran to descend upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it was necessary that He says to him: ‘Exalted be Allah, the One Who is truly in control…’ (*Ta Ha:* 114). Indeed, this is the absolute truth that will remain forever, for everything is prone to change except for Allah *the Most High*. Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…[Prophet], do not rush to recite before the revelation is fully complete…’ (*Ta Ha:* 114). These preliminary statements are to reassure Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with respect to the memorisation of the Quran. This is because when the revelation descended upon him, he used to attempt to repeat it word for word. For example, if the divine inspiration said, ‘Say: "It has been revealed to me …"’ (*al-Jinn:* 1), he would set about repeating it in his innermost being, reciting it after Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* in fear that he might forget. This indicates his great carefulness about the Quran.(1) So, Allah *the Almighty* forbade him *peace and blessings be upon him* this hastiness by affirming: ‘[Prophet], do not rush to recite before the revelation is fully complete…’ (*Ta Ha:* 114). Hence, He *the Almighty* ordered him not to be in a hurry or preoccupied with repeating the Quran, for it will be granted to him in its matured state when it is perfected.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* ordered him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to fear that anything of the Quran will escape him as long as it is He Who is entrusted with its preservation. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘We will make you recite so you shall not forget…’ (*al-A‘la:* 6). It is as if He *Glorified is He* was telling him, ‘So, rest assured, O, Prophet Muhammad, and do not be anxious about this matter because your preoccupation with memorising a word might cause another word to slip away from you.’

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(1) *This is narrated by Ibn Abu Hatim who heard it from As-Suddi, as stated by As-Suyuti. A narration to this effect is also cited by Al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/602; Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4425; and Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 3/167.*

Hastiness is that you produce an event before its maturity, such as when you pick a fruit before it is ripe and before its due time of harvest. When you eat it, you get surprised that it has not matured properly yet. Or else you prematurely pick it while it is small and is not sufficient for a single person, but if you had left it until its proper season, it would have been enough for several people.

The Quran is a speech ranked at a high level of rhetorical eloquence. It is not comprised of common speech which is easy for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to memorise. This is why he was so eager to memorise and verify it. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this issue by saying: ‘Do not move your tongue with it to make haste with it. Surely, on Us (devolves) the collecting of it and the reciting of it. Therefore, when We have recited it, follow its recitation.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 16-18) Thus, when the verses are completed, then Prophet Muhammad can recite them as he likes.

This phenomenon is among the miracles of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; when several sections of the Quran or an entire chapter would be revealed at one time, and the revelation departed from him, he would repeat them as they were revealed to him. Now, were you to bring the person with the greatest capacity of memorisation and read to him for ten minutes from any book or any discourse, he would not be able to repeat it for you.

As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he would order the scribes to record the Quran and dictate it to them as he heard it, without changing a single letter of it. Moreover, he would dictate the verses in their specific locations in different chapters of the Quran by saying: ‘Put this in chapter Such-and-Such, and that in such-and-such chapter.’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Al-Hakim and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan Allah be pleased with him* who said: ‘A long time might pass upon the Messenger of Allah without anything being revealed to him, and then sometimes a chapter with numerous verses might be revealed. So when something was revealed, he=

Had each chapter been revealed at one time, the matter of its memorisation would have been somewhat easier. However, the verses of a single chapter were revealed on diverse occasions. Hence, although he *peace and blessings be upon him* would recite a single chapter in prayer, for example, its verses would have been revealed on disparate occasions, this one having been revealed today, this one yesterday, and so forth. Despite this, he would recite the verses in their proper order.

Relevant to this is Allah's saying after the above-cited supporting verses: 'Again on Us (devolves) the explaining of it.' (*al-Qiyama:* 19) Similarly, He *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in another chapter by saying: '…and We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them…' (*an-Nahl:* 44). Thus, the explanation of the Quran is on the part of Allah *the Exalted* and its clarification is on the part of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Back to the verse in question; as for Allah's saying, '…before the revelation is fully complete…' (*Ta Ha:* 114), it means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should wait until the state of the Divine inspiration leaves him. However, how would he know that? The Companions described the Prophet Muhammad's state at the time when Divine Revelation would descend upon him by saying, 'We used to hear around his head something like the buzzing of bees, and his forehead would drip with perspiration,(1) and the duress of it would reach an intense degree.' Furthermore, if revelation descended upon him while he was mounted on a riding beast, it would kneel down with him, for Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely, We will make to light upon you a weighty Word.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 5)

Hence, there were physical signs which would manifest themselves on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the revelation descended upon him. This is because the Divine inspiration was from an angel

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= would call for someone who could write, and say: "Put these verses in the chapter which mentions this and that in it."' See *At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan*, 5/272; *Al-Hakim, Mustadrak*, 2/221, 330; and *Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa*, 7/153.

(1) 'A'isha *Allah be pleased with her* said: 'I saw it coming down on him on an intensely cold day, and when it had left him, his forehead was dripping with sweat.' See *Al-Bukhari, Sahih,* Hadith no. 2; and *Ahmad, Musnad*, 6/257.

who had a particular natural constitution which differed from the natural human constitution of Prophet Muhammad. So, in order to ensure the direct meeting between them, it was necessary that a sort of mutual approximation in natural constitution should occur between them. Thus, either the angel would transform from his angelic form into a human form, or even Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would transform from his human condition to an elevated angelic condition, so that he could receive messages from the angel.

For this reason, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would undergo chemical changes in his natural physical constitution; it was these transformations which would cause him to perspire so profusely that he would say, ‘Wrap me! Wrap me!’ or ‘Cover me! Cover me!’(1)

In fact, the descending of revelation upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a difficult process, especially at its commencement. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* wished to ease this hardship for him and to relieve him from the descent of revelation for a period of time. This was meant to grant him a respite, on the one hand, and to make him long for the Divine inspiration, on the other hand. Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have We not expanded for you your breast. And taken off from you your burden, which pressed heavily upon your back.’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1-3) In this verse, the word ‘burden’ is the heavy load which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would bear during the descent of revelation upon him.

However, when the revelation intermitted for him *peace and blessings be upon him* his enemies rejoiced at this, saying, ‘Indeed, the Lord of Muhammad has abandoned him.’(2) Exalted is Allah! Is it in dissention that you mention that Prophet Muhammad has a Lord? Were you not, O, disbelievers, who called him a liar and a sorcerer? Now he suddenly has a Lord because He has abandoned him! The disbelievers did not comprehend that the intermission of the revelation was based on sublime wisdom and ordained by the Lord of Muhammad. This was in order that he could rest psychologically from the duress of these chemical changes in his physical constitution and to restore his energy and increase his yearning to encounter Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* again. The yearning for something makes the difficulties in getting to it seem insignificant, just like the lover who travels to his beloved, not being hindered by the hardship of the road.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of ‘A’isha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir relates that Jundub Ibn ‘Abd Allah Al-Bajli Allah be pleased with him, said, ‘Jibril (Gabriel) was slow in coming to Prophet Muhammad so the polytheists said, ‘Muhammad has been abandoned by his Lord.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 4/522.*

Allah *the Almighty* then rebutted the disbelievers' claim by saying: 'I swear by the early hours of the day and the night when it covers with darkness. Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased. And surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before. And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased.' (*ad-Duha:* 1-5)

Thus, He *the Almighty* refuted the disbelievers' claim that Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him and rectified their statement by saying: 'Your Lord has not forsaken you…' (*ad-Duha:* 3). In this verse, the pronoun of direct address 'you' is employed since 'forsaking' may be used even with the person whom you may love. By contrast, Allah's saying, '…nor has He become displeased' (*ad-Duha:* 3), does not include the pronoun of direct address even in negation. This is because the negation here with the second person singular pronoun would impart the possibility of dislike towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Let us give an example to clarify the last point; when you say, 'I have not seen Sheikh of Al-Azhar drinking wine', have you lauded him with this statement, or have you criticised him? In reality, you have criticised him because you have placed him under the suspicion that he could commit such a misdeed.

Hence, this Quranic expression indicates clearly the high status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the sight of his Lord. Here, we may ask, 'What is the wisdom that Allah *the Almighty* swears to this issue by the bright morning hours and by the night when it grows still and dark? What is their relationship with the absence of revelation from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?' In Allah's saying, 'I swear by the early hours of the day and the night when it covers with darkness' (*ad-Duha:* 1-2), He *the Almighty* wishes to turn the attention of these disbelievers to a cosmic phenomenon witnessed and recognised by everyone. It is that He *the Most High* created the day and dedicated it to working, making efforts and pursuing the means of sustenance. He also created the night and rendered it a domain to rest and tranquillity, whereby the human being reposes at night and his energy is restored once again in the morning.

The same holds true for the Divine inspiration in the case of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for when he is exhausted by revelation, he needed some time to rest. Hence, the matter of the intermission did not entail terminating the revelation without resuming it again; rather, it was in order for Prophet Muhammad's vigour to be renewed and for his yearning for the divine inspiration to be roused. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* gave him glad tidings in His saying: 'And surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before.' (*ad-Duha:* 4) This means that much good would come to him, i.e. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* directs disbelievers' attention to the signs of the universe and the nature upon which their lives are dependent. Now, they take repose from the toils of the day during the still of night, so why do they criticise Prophet Muhammad for resting from the painstaking effort of the revelation and its hardship? Does their resting in the tranquillity of night signify the perpetuity of night and that the day will not return?

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah's saying, '…but say, "Lord, increase me in knowledge!"' (*Ta Ha:* 114) It is a directive to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for seeking augmentation in knowledge. So, as long as Allah *the Almighty* is the Guardian and the Preserver of the Book, Prophet Muhammad asks Him to bestow of its knowledge on him. This is due to the fact that he will have need of knowledge which embraces all times and places and upon which the proceedings of life will be based until the Last Hour. Hence, he *peace and blessings be upon him* definitely must make the necessary preparations for this mission.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ عَهِدۡنَآ إِلَىٰٓ ءَادَمَ مِن قَبۡلُ فَنَسِيَ وَلَمۡ نَجِدۡ لَهُۥ عَزۡمٗا ﴿١١٥﴾

We also commanded Adam before you, but he forgot
and We found him lacking in constancy [115]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 115)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is consoling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and relieving him of his grief for people's disbelief and obstinate resistance by saying, 'Accept them with all their shortcomings, for they are the descendants of Adam, thus rebellious disobedience is something innate in them. We had previously entrusted their forefather with a charge, but he forgot, so if they forget. Then, accept it from them with forbearance, as they are the offspring of 'a forgetful man'. Therefore, if you request someone to do something, but he fails to carry it out, you should not become angry, but rather, you should view the matter from the perspective of this principle and excuse him.'

With respect to Allah's saying, 'We also commanded Adam...' (*Ta Ha:* 115), it implies that He ordered, enjoined and admonished him *peace be upon him*. As for His saying, '…before you...' (*Ta Ha:* 115), it has a significant role in the Quran and has settled numerous situations for us, including this very situation of Adam *peace be upon him*. Hence, the intended meaning is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should consider the case of their forefather, Adam, whom Allah *the Almighty* charged with an obligation directly without the mediation of a messenger. He *the Most High* charged him with just a single Command and a single Prohibition; He commanded him to eat from all of the paradise except for a certain tree. This was the only prescribed obligation, but Adam *peace be upon him* forgot with what he had been commanded.

Hence, when the prescribed obligations of numerous matters come through the intermediary of a messenger, we should excuse and accept the excuses of the one who forgets from among the descendants of Adam. Due to the frequency of forgetfulness amongst them, He *the Almighty* says: 'I am most forgiving…' (*Ta Ha:* 82). As everyone is susceptible to forgetfulness and error, this, therefore, calls for much forgiveness.

Likewise, the word 'before' occurs in Allah's saying: 'Why then did you kill Allah's prophets before…?' (*al-Baqara:* 91) In this verse, it is of important significance, for if Allah *Glorified is He* had simply said, ‘Why, then, do you kill Allah’s prophets?’, then perhaps this might have incited the Jews to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Or else he might have understood that he was liable to be killed like his predecessors from amongst the prophets and messengers. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* restricts the phenomenon of killing prophets and renders it a historical incident which will not happen again. In other words, this is something which previously occurred, or in other words, it will not be repeated in the present time.

Concerning Allah’s saying, ‘…but he forgot and We found him lacking in constancy’ (*Ta Ha:* 115), it means that Adam *peace be upon him* forgot the decree and did not have a strong resolution to support him in fulfilling the command and remaining steadfast in it. In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* wishes to tell you that when He commands you to do something beneficial for yourself, you hasten to do it. However, if He issues a command which restricts your carnal desires, you tend to refuse and contravene it. On this basis, the prescribed obligation requires a strong determination to enable you to implement and persevere it. If you accept a command which goes against your lustful desires, this entails that you have pondered over it and examined it carefully. You may have found out that even though violating this command might provide you only with fleeting and transient carnal desire, it will lead to later perpetual humiliation. Hence, having strong determination here means that you are not seduced by carnal desire.

Surely, you are aware that Allah *the Almighty* describes the messengers, the bearers of the most important Divine Messages in the history of mankind, as: ‘…the Messengers endowed with constancy…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 35). This is because they endured hardships and difficult tasks requiring steadfastness and patience regarding prescribed obligations. Another relevant verse is Allah’s saying: ‘Take hold of the law We have given you with firmness…’ (*al-Baqara:* 63). This firm resolution impels you to do the acts of obedience yet meanwhile restrains you form committing the acts of disobedience.

The issue of the servant’s forgetfulness of prescribed obligations which leads to chastisement and punishment has provoked amongst people a problem with the Divine Predestination and Decree. Thus, we heard some people say, ‘Inasmuch as Allah has predestined me to do this thing, then why does He punish me for it?’ We are astonished by this statement. Why do such people not also say, ‘Why does He reward me for such an act inasmuch as He has predestined me to do it?’ Why do they raise an objection about the former and not the latter? This is simply because the former is not to their advantage. Therefore, you must deal with your Lord in a consistent manner and assess matters with a single measure.

The covenant which Allah *the Almighty* made with Adam *peace be upon him* was that he could eat opulently from all the blessings of paradise as he desired, with the exception of one tree which He cautioned him and his wife of even coming near to, saying: ‘…and do not approach this tree, for then you will be of the unjust.’ (*al-Baqara:* 35)

This issue draws our attention to the fact that permissible things are numerous and cannot be counted or circumscribed, whereas forbidden things are few in number, being limited and confined. Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to us about the obligations, He says: ‘Say: "Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you…"’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). So, only the proscribed things can be delimited, while permissible things are beyond the domain of delimitation.

We should take note that when Allah *the Almighty* warns us against forbidden things, He does not only warn us against committing them, but also against approaching them by saying: ‘…and do not approach this tree...’ (*al-Baqara:* 35). In this instance, He did not say, ‘Do not eat from it.’ By obeying this command, the human being stays far away from the danger zone and the possibility of committing misdeeds.

In the same respect, when our Lord speaks to us about the limits which He has determined for us, He says with regard to those limits of what is permissible: ‘These are the Limits of Allah, so do not exceed them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 229). On the other hand, with regard to those limits of that which is forbidden, He says: ‘These are the Limits of Allah, so do not go near them.’ (*Ta Ha:* 187) This is due to the possibility that the one who hovers around a restricted area is liable to fall into it.

Scholars have engaged in extensive debate regarding what it was that Adam *peace be upon him* forgot. Amongst them are those who believe that he forgot Allah's Command to 'eat of this but not to approach that.' Based on this opinion, Adam *peace be upon him* did not forget the command since he carried it out and ate of what Allah *the Almighty* made permissible for him. As for his having eaten of the tree which He forbade him, this is also not a question of forgetting since Satan reminded him about this proscription by saying: 'Your Lord has not forbidden you this tree except that you may not both become two angels or that you may (not) become of the immortals.' (*al-A'raf:* 20) Hence, when he *peace be upon him* ate of the forbidden tree, he was not forgetful of what Allah *the Almighty* had forbidden him from.

Thus, this raises a question which is, 'What is the intended meaning of forgetfulness here?' The intended meaning is that Adam *peace be upon him* forgot what Allah *the Almighty* had informed him regarding the enmity of Satan—may Allah curse him—which is clear in the saying of Allah: '…this is your enemy, yours and your wife's. Do not let him drive you out of the garden and make you miserable.' (*Ta Ha:* 117)

It is inevitable that certain issues will slip from human thought, and if man possessed alertness and caution, he would not have been fooled by the deceptions of Satan. Thus, you see the latter reminds Adam *peace be upon him* of the prohibition and does not leave him in his state of heedlessness, then he tries to convince him by saying, 'If the two of you eat of this tree, you will become angels, or you will be among the immortals.'

Now, as long as you, O, Satan, are so clever, then why do you not yourself eat of the tree and become an angel or one of the immortals? Why had you previously appeared so feeble by saying: 'Respite me until the day when they are raised up?' (*al-A'raf:* 14) Hence, this is an example of how Satan deceived Adam *peace be upon him* and his offspring. Allah *the Exalted* draws our attention to this point, saying, 'Remain vigilant and be cautious, for Satan's enmity towards you is pre-existing ever since all the angels prostrated in deference to Adam *peace be upon him* but he himself, namely Satan, refused to prostrate.' Thus, Adam *peace be upon him* should have been cautious about his enemy and fortified himself against him by having a negative opinion of him, carefully examining his discourse, thinking about his words and thoroughly inspecting his proposal.

There are some who say that the sin of Adam *peace be upon him* was the result of forgetfulness, and so it is an unintentional mistake for which there is no punishment, as indicated in the Noble Hadith: ‘Allah has pardoned for me my *Ummah* (followers of Islam) their mistakes, their forgetfulness and that which they have been forced to do under duress.’(1)

So, was forgetfulness not forgiven in the past but was made so for this *Ummah* (followers of Islam) as a favour to it? The adherents of this opinion seek an excuse for Adam *peace be upon him*, but how is this possible while His Lord had charged him with this single command directly? The matter, then, is unlikely to be that of forgetfulness, for if he forgot just a single command directly ordained by Allah *the Almighty* then this would, in any case, be a grave sin.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* narrates to us the story of Adam *peace be upon him* and Satan:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِءَادَمَ فَسَجَدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ ﴿١١٦﴾

When We said to the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ they did. But Iblis refused [116] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 116)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* relates to us the story of Adam *peace be upon him* but we notice that He provides us with a summary of the story and its condensed version by saying: ‘We also commanded Adam before you, but he forgot; We found him lacking in constancy.’ (*Ta Ha:* 115) The basis of the story and its natural sequence is that He *the Almighty* said, ‘I created Adam *peace be upon him* with My Hand and fashioned him, and so forth. Then I commanded the angels to prostrate to him. Therefore, I told him such-and-such…’.

Presenting the story in this way is a literary style which is meant to raise the reader’s excitement. Nowadays, authors and writers employ it in their

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Majah, Ad-Daraqutni and Al-Hakim on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him. Al-Hakim judges it to be sound according to the criteria of Al-Bukhari and Muslim. See Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2045; Ad-Daraqutni, Sunnan, 4/170; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 2/198.*

stories, giving us at the beginning of the story a segmented episode of its ending in order to provoke a desire to pursue its narrative events. Then, an author returns and presents you the story from the beginning in full detail. Thus, this is a way of raising excitement, yearning, and attentiveness.

An example of this is the style of the Quran in relating the story of the People of the Cave, whereby it mentions the story in abbreviated form, saying: ‘Or, do you think that the Fellows of the Cave and the Inscription were of Our wonderful signs? When the youths sought refuge in the cave, they said: "Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Your, and provide for us a right course in our affair." So, We prevented them from hearing in the cave for a number of years. Then, We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties was best able to compute the time for which they remained.’ (*al-Kahf:* 9-12) Thereafter, it set about telling the story in detail: ‘We relate to you their story with the truth…’ (*al-Kahf:* 13).

This style occurs frequently in the stories of the Quran as in the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* which begins with the conclusion of the story regarding punishment that afflicted the disbelievers from amongst his people: ‘The people of Lut (Lot) treated the warning as a lie. Surely, We sent upon them a stone storm, except Lut’s (Lot's) followers; We saved them a little before daybreak.’ (*al-Qamar:* 33-34) Then, the Quran mentions the details of the events as follows: ‘And certainly he warned them of Our violent seizure, but they obstinately disputed the warning. And certainly they endeavoured to turn him from his guests, but We blinded their eyes; so taste My Chastisement and My Warning.’ (*al-Qamar:* 36-37) Amongst the most prominent of these instances is Allah’s saying in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh: ‘Then we raised after them Musa (Moses) with Our communications to Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they disbelieved in them; consider then what was the end of the mischief makers.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 103) This verse shows that after a procession of Messages, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was sent to Pharaoh and his notables, but they disbelieved in the Messages; so, you should look at the ultimate consequence of these corrupting people. This is the summary of the story. Then He *the Almighty* commences narrating the events in detail: ‘and Musa (Moses) said, "O, Pharaoh! Surely, I am a prophet from the Lord of the worlds."' (*al-A'raf:* 104) Likewise, such is the narrative style of the Quran in the story of Adam *peace be upon him* as previously mentioned. It provides us with the summary of the story and then proceeds to supply a detailed account: 'When We said to the angels, "Bow down before Adam…' (*Ta Ha:* 116). This means 'Remember, O, Prophet Muhammad, when we said to the angels: "Bow down before Adam…" (*Ta Ha:* 116). Now, before we delve into the story of our forefather Adam *peace be upon him* we must indicate that it is frequently repeated in the Quran. However, this repetition is intentional for wisdom and does not imply mere retelling of the events. Instead, these are narrative segments of different sides of a single incident which come together in the end to provide you with a complete story from all its perspectives.

Moreover, the objective of the Quranic stories is to strengthen Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he will undergo many hard calamities and severe trials, which require strengthening his heart. This objective would not be realised if we cited a story for a single time as is the case with the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* for example.

Concerning Allah's saying, 'When We said to the angels, "Bow down before Adam." They did,…' (*Ta Ha:* 116), some people raise objections to this by saying, 'How could angels prostrate to a man?' Yes, they actually prostrated to Adam *peace be upon him,* but they did not prostrate of their own accord, but rather, at Allah's Command to them. Thus, it is not a question of prostrating to Adam *peace be upon him* as much as it is a question of obedience to Allah's Command. To the one who raised this objection, I say, 'Are you more royal than the king? That is to say, are you more careful about Allah's Rights more than Him?'

What does prostrating mean? Prostrating signifies submissive humility, a meaning which is clear in Allah's saying: 'And he raised his parents upon the throne and they fell down in prostration before him…' (*Yusuf:* 100). In this verse, the prostration before Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was that of reverence and submissiveness, not that of worship.

As for Adam *peace be upon him* he was the vicegerent of Allah *the Almighty* on the earth, but he was not the only created being living on it, for there are other created things, including perceptible things like the sun, the moon, the stars, the air, the water, the soil and the mountains—and all that it contained for the benefit of this vicegerent. These created beings also included imperceptible things, like the angels who covertly manage this universe. Amongst them are guardians and scribes, and others who are charged with the wind, rain and so on and so forth of the factors which serve humankind. Hence, it was imperative that all of these submit themselves to serve human beings.

There are those who find it agreeable to say that Adam *peace be upon him* wronged us when he disobeyed his Lord, for he caused us to descend from Paradise to the earth. To this, we respond, 'We must comprehend that Allah *the Almighty* did not create Adam *peace be upon him* for Paradise which is the abode of immortality; rather, He created him to be His vicegerent on the earth, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'And when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to place in the earth a vicegerent ..."' (*al-Baqara:* 30).

Thus, the first communication from Allah *the Exalted* about Adam *peace be upon him* is that He was creating him for the earth, not for paradise. Although the word paradise or garden is used in reference to the abode of immortality and otherworldly bliss, it is also employed in reference to gardens and orchards of this world. This latter usage occurs in Allah's saying: 'Surely, We will try them as We tried the owners of the garden when they swore that they would certainly cut off the produce in the morning.' (*al-Qalam:* 17) It occurs as well as in His saying: 'And set forth to them a parable of two men, for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines…' (*al-Kahf:* 32). Hence, the word 'garden' is expressed in reference to something in the earth which encompasses all that the soul desires because it suffices the person and relieves him of being in need of anything else.

So, do not wrong Adam by saying that he caused you to be expelled from paradise because he was not in the eternal Garden. Rather, he was in a place which Allah *the Almighty* had prepared to teach him a lesson and train him for carrying out his mission in life and his vicegerency on the earth.

Surely, you have seen what is done now in terms of setting up camps for training in a diverse range of domains of life. In these we assure the provision of the sustenance of the trainee and his lodging and oversight. These are places which are set up for training in various fields of endeavour, such as athletics, academia, or science, military and so forth.

Similarly, the Garden of Adam *peace be upon him* was a place for receiving training prior to undertaking his function as the vicegerent of Allah *the Almighty* on the earth. He *the Most High* put him through this practical test and gave him a sample of shouldering the responsibility of carrying out a command and refraining from a prohibition. Moreover, He warned him against his enemy, namely Satan, who would be lying in wait for him and for his offspring afterwards. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* disclosed to him some of his enemy's tactics of leading astray and deception.

This is the quintessence of the Divine Way of Guidance on the earth with which all the messengers came. It comprises commandment and prohibition, obligation and warning about Satan and his whisperings, which seek to incite us to violate Allah's Commandments and Proscriptions.

After this training course in the Garden, Adam *peace be upon him* knew by a practical application that Satan was his enemy and that he would seduce and deceive him. Following this trial, Allah *the Exalted* caused him to get down to the earth in order to undertake his function in a state of awareness and to exercise caution towards his enemy.

There are some who pause long in examining the question of the disobedience of Adam *peace be upon him* by asking, 'How could he disobey Allah *the Almighty*, while he was a prophet?' They cite Allah's saying: 'Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray.' (*Ta Ha:* 121) To this, we say, 'Inasmuch as Adam *peace be upon him* is the vicegerent on earth and from him issued forth the progeny of all people until the Last Hour—with his descendants comprising prophets and non-prophets, messengers and those to whom messengers were sent—he represents all of the coming mankind in all its types, the infallible and the fallible alike.'

Moreover, we point out that Adam *peace be upon him* passed through this trial before he was made a prophet and also after he was made a prophet. This is evinced by Allah's saying: 'Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray—later his Lord brought him close, accepted his repentance, and guided him.' (*Ta Ha:* 121-122)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* had brought Adam *peace be upon him* close to Him and made him infallible after putting him to a test. Then when he *peace be upon him* and his enemy were sent down upon the earth, his Lord addressed him as follows: '…so surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 38)

In this way, a new phase in the life of Adam *peace be upon him* began and he assumed two roles: the role of infallibility and prophethood after being chosen by his Lord and the role of a normal man, fallible and susceptible to forgetfulness and contravention as any person from amongst human beings.

It is necessary, then, that we understand that Adam *peace be upon him* was created for peopling and cultivating the earth as Allah *the Almighty* prepared it for him along with his descendants after him. He *Glorified is He* furnished it with all the necessary elements of life and the necessary elements for the survival of the species. Thus, whoever desires the opulence of life then let him exercise his intelligence regarding these necessary elements and let him derive from them whatever he wishes.

We have mentioned that the universe comprises tangible dominion and the invisible realm. As for the tangible dominion, it is the outward manifestation which we perceive and witness, whilst the invisible one lies beyond that; it includes things which perform their function in our life without us perceiving them. For example, the phenomenon of gravity—which intervenes in many aspects of our life—was at one time veiled in the invisible realm. We did not see it or know anything about it. Then, the minds were led to discovering it, and we became aware that there was something called gravity.

The invisible realm includes angels who are charged with specific tasks, a point which is quite clear in Allah's saying: 'For his sake there are angels following one another, before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah's commandment…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). In addition, amongst these angels are the recording scribes: 'He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand.' (*Qaf:* 18)

Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* created Adam *peace be upon him* and the angels charged with overseeing his interests in the earth, He commanded them to prostrate to him, since they would be at his service. Hence, prostration here is an act of obedience to the Command of Allah *the Almighty* and submissiveness to the vicegerent who would populate the earth and make it prosper.

Returning to the verse under study there follows Allah's saying: 'but Iblis refused.' (*Ta Ha:* 116) In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'but not Iblis; he was proud…' (*Sad:* 74). He *Glorified is He* has clarified the reason for Satan's refusal to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* in His saying: '…Are you proud or are you of the exalted ones?' (*Sad:* 75) This means that there is no reason for Satan's refusal except being too arrogant to prostrate, or else he was amongst the exalted ones. This latter category is comprised of the angels who were not included in the command to prostrate. Hence, it is as if the command was for specific angels, those who were charged with serving Adam *peace be upon him*. As for the exalted ones, these are the angels who dedicated themselves to worshipping Allah *the Almighty* and have nothing to do with Adam *peace be upon him* and perhaps are not even aware of him.

One of the stylistic characteristics which has provoked argument surrounding the rhetoric of the Quran amongst orientalists is Allah's saying: '…What prevented you that you should submit to him…' (*Sad:* 75)? Also, it includes His saying in another verse: 'What hindered you so that you did not submit…?' (*al-A'raf:* 12) They asked, 'Which of these two expressions is most eloquent, for if it be one of them, then the other is not eloquent?' All of this is the result of shortcomings in understanding the language of the Quran and the lack of an innate sensitivity for Arabic amongst such people. In fact, there is a difference between the case when you want to prostrate and then someone orders you not to do so, on one hand, and the case when someone convinces you not to prostrate, on the other. Thus, in the case of Allah's saying, 'What hindered you so that you did not submit…' (*al-A'raf:* 12), you wanted to prostrate, but someone hindered you from doing so. On the other hand, His saying 'What prevented you that you should submit to him' (*Sad:* 75) means that someone commanded you not to prostrate, and he convinced you.

Amongst the questions which have arisen around this story is the following, 'Was Satan one of the angels, and thus included in the command to prostrate? How could he be one of the angels, while they do not disobey Allah *the Almighty* in what He commands them? If he was not an angel, then what brought him into the situation?'

In order to clarify this issue, we say, 'Allah *the Almighty* created the two classes of the jinns and the humans. He granted them free choice in many matters and rendered them to compel in certain matters in order to affirm His Absolute Power regarding His creation. Thus, while you have free choice in matters of religious obligations, being capable of obeying or disobeying, nevertheless it is not within your scope of choice that you are healthy or sick, tall or short, poor or rich, nor is it up to you that you live or die.

Allah *the Exalted* does not obligate you to do this or not do that unless your physical constitution is adequately sound to do or not do the divinely prescribed obligations. Besides, they are compulsory matters in which you have no choice, and these are preordained matters. Hence, we say to those who are accustomed to rebelliousness and have gotten used to contravening the Rulings of Allah *the Almighty* in matters of religious obligations, 'Why do you not also rebel against the preordained matters as long as you have grown accustomed to contravention?' Thus, you are compelled to be a slave despite yourself.

Therefore, if the one with free will is obedient, he forces his soul to adhere to Allah's Way of Guidance. Indeed, he gives preference to Allah's Choice over his, and thus, he holds a great position with Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, his obedient servant is better than an angel because an angel obeys while he is compelled. On this basis, there arises the difference between servants and slaves. All the people under compulsion are slaves, but servants are those who have left their free choice to the choice of Allah *the Most High*.

On this basis, we say that Satan was one of the jinns and does not belong to the angels, for he was commanded but refused and was punished, even if the command was originally for the angels. The Quran settles this issue when it says: '…but Iblis (did it not). He was of the jinns, so he transgressed the commandment of his Lord.' (*al-Kahf:* 50) This is an unambiguous text about which there can be no disputation.(1)

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(1) In his *Tafsir, Ibn Kathir* narrates that Al-Hassan Al-Basri said: 'Satan was not one of the angels for even the blinking of an eye. He is the origin of the jinns, just as Adam is the origin of mankind.' See *Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim*, 1/77.

However, if you said, ‘Then why was Satan included in the command of prostrating as he was not an angel?’ We would reply, ‘The reason for this is that before this situation Satan was obedient, and he had witnessed the process of the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. He used to be called ‘the peacock of the angels’ because he compelled himself to obedience in matters of free choice, and so he excelled the angels and used to sit in their gatherings. So, when the command came to the angels to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* he was included in it and obligated to do it for two reasons: Firstly, if he was superior to the angels in station, being their peacock who had obligated himself to obedience in spite of his free will, then it behoves him to be more obedient to the command more than them. So, why did he disobey this specific command? Secondly, if he was inferior to them, then the command to the superior must necessarily encompass the inferior. This is similar to the case when you order the ministers, for example, to rise for the president of the republic. If there are delegates and directors amongst them, they would naturally be included in the order.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَقُلْنَا يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ إِنَّ هَٰذَا عَدُوٌّ لَّكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكُمَا مِنَ ٱلْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَىٰٓ ﴿١١٧﴾

So, We said, ‘Adam, this is your enemy, yours and your wife’s: do not let him drive you out of the garden and make you miserable [117] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 117)

In Allah’s saying, ‘…and your wife's…’ (*Ta Ha:* 117), the Arabic word translated as ‘wife’ does not originally mean a pair as some people believe. Rather, it linguistically means a single individual in the company of his counterpart. Similarly, it is not correct that we speak of two individuals as a twin; instead, we should say ‘two twins’, for each of them is the twin of the other. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And of everything We have created pairs…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49).

It is also noteworthy in Allah’s saying, ‘…Do not let him drive you out of the garden...’ (*Ta Ha:* 117) that the discourse is addressed to both Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife, warning the two of them against the deception of Satan and his sly scheming. However, when He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and make you miserable' (*Ta Ha:* 117), He only addresses Adam; in other words, He did not say, 'and make the two of you miserable.' So, what is the reason for this? This is because the responsibility of striving and toiling pertains to the man, whereas the woman is a source of calm and tranquillity, encouraging the man to strive and work. This is contrary to what we see in our society of keenness for the employment of women on the pretext of assisting in the responsibilities of life. Allah says:

إِنَّ لَكَ أَلَّا تَجُوعَ فِيهَا وَلَا تَعْرَىٰ ﴿١١٨﴾

In the garden you will never go hungry, feel naked [118] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 118)

Allah *the Almighty* has prepared the garden for Adam and furnished for him everything that he needed. He *the Most High* has made all its delights permissible for him except for one thing.(1) In this verse, Adam has Allah's assurance: '…you will never go hungry or feel naked.' (*Ta Ha:* 118) This means that he *peace be upon him* would not go hungry in it because it contains every kind of fruit, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying: '…and eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish…' (*al-Baqara:* 35). We observe here that He has provided the two of them with what satisfies the outward natural disposition, namely clothing and covering, as well as what satisfies the inward natural impulse, namely food.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنَّكَ لَا تَظْمَؤُا۟ فِيهَا وَلَا تَضْحَىٰ ﴿١١٩﴾

Be thirsty, or suffer the heat of the sun [119] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 119)

In the garden, Adam and Hawwa (Eve) would not be thirsty or be exposed to the scorching heat of the sun. Hence, their Lord has also assumed liability to spare the two of them the inward natural impulse of thirst and the outward natural impulse of not letting the sun scorch them.

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(1) *This is the tree about which Allah the Almighty says: '... and do not approach this tree, for then you will be of the unjust.' (al-Baqara: 35) In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir cites several opinions regarding this tree and its identification: it is the grape vine, it is wheat, it is the ear of grain, it is the date palm, it is the fig tree. See, Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/79.*

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ قَالَ يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ هَلْ
أَدُلُّكَ عَلَىٰ شَجَرَةِ ٱلْخُلْدِ وَمُلْكٍ لَّا يَبْلَىٰ ﴿١٢٠﴾

But Satan whispered to Adam, saying, 'Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that never decays?' [120] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 120)

We note that Allah *Glorified is He* chooses 'whispering' as a term for the act of Satan, which corresponds to the temptation to do something. Originally, this word in question refers to the sound of jewellery, like gold with which women adorn themselves. Now, sounds are known by names of created beings emitting them. As we say, 'The croaking of frogs, the neighing of horses, the lowing of cows, the braying of donkeys, the bleating of sheep, the gurgling of water and the rustling of trees.' Likewise, whispering is the term for the sound of precious adornment which attracts listeners and seduces them to look towards it. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is warning us that Satan will seek access to us by way of seduction and beautification.

So, with what did he whispered to Adam *peace be upon him*? He whispered to him by saying: 'Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that never decays?' (*Ta Ha:* 120) We are astonished by Satan; given that he is aware of the tree of immortality and power that never decays, why does he not eat from it himself to obtain this advantage?

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَكَلَا مِنْهَا فَبَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْءَٰتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ
عَلَيْهِمَا مِن وَرَقِ ٱلْجَنَّةِ ۚ وَعَصَىٰٓ ءَادَمُ رَبَّهُۥ فَغَوَىٰ ﴿١٢١﴾

And they both ate from it. They became conscious of their nakedness and began to cover themselves with leaves from the garden. Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray [121] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 121)

So, after the two of them had eaten of this tree, their private parts became exposed to them. The private parts are the area of a person's body that he is ashamed to reveal. This includes the backside and the front side of men and women, both of which have their function. It is by means of these parts that the body rids itself of waste. From the front issues forth water through the two kidneys, the ureter and the bladder, and from the rear are expelled the remnants and excrement of food resulting from the process of digestion and metabolism.

However, when did Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife become conscious of their private parts? Was it after eating in general from the trees of the garden or after eating from the forbidden tree specifically? Allah *the Exalted* arranged the timing for the appearance of their private parts to coincide with eating from the tree which He had forbidden to the two of them, a point which is clear in His saying: ‘And they both ate from it. They became conscious of their private parts…’ (*Ta Ha:* 121). Hence, before eating from this tree, they were not aware of their private parts, and they had no cognisance of this process of excretion. This is because the nourishment was divinely prepared, and thus it provided strength and life without leaving any waste in the body.

However, once they had transgressed and eaten from the tree, food began to ferment, and thus, they experienced the process of digestion as we know it. So, this was the first time that Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife noticed the issue of bodily waste, their private parts and what comes out of them.

Therefore, there is a symbolic matter which requires paying attention to; when you see nakedness in society, then know that its members had broken the Divine Way of Guidance.

Hence, Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife had no knowledge of the excreted waste of food and all that results from it in terms of odour and disgusting, foul things, except after their transgression. At this moment, they were bewildered, not knowing what they should do. There was nothing in front of them except the leaves of trees, so they ‘…began to cover themselves with leaves from the garden.’ (*Ta Ha:* 121) This means that they instinctively set about sticking the leaves upon their private parts in order to cover them. Otherwise, what is it that makes these two orifices shameful as distinguished from the other orifices of the body like the nose and mouth, for example?

It is said that this is due to the fact that the orifices of the front and the rear discharge something foul and disagreeable, which a person is keen on concealing. Amazingly, when a human being—the speaking animal which Allah *the Almighty* has favoured—eats, he does so out of choice, whereas an animal eats due to its natural impulse and instinct. Despite that, a human being goes beyond the limit in eating and drinking, consuming an extensive variety of food, and eating more than what he needs. He eats even after he is satiated. All this is contrary to the animal which is governed by instinct.

Hence, you find human waste disgusting and repulsive, without any use to be made of it. On the other hand, the waste of animals barely has any smell and can be utilised as fuel and natural fertiliser. We, nevertheless, disregard animals and call them beasts, and so on and so forth.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray.’ (*Ta Ha:* 121) In fact, Adam’s disobedience was confined to the period before the beginning of his prophethood; to be specific; it was during the phase of training. A person in this latter phase is prone to do right or wrong, and if he makes a mistake during this period, a trainer should not punish him; rather, he should correct his mistake. As in the case of a pupil during his school years, if he errs, the teacher corrects him. In an examination, however, the teacher holds him accountable. The meaning of Allah’s saying, ‘…and was led astray’ (*Ta Ha:* 121) is that Adam did not attain to the truth. Similarly, one says about the one who becomes lost in the desert that he has strayed from the right path. As for Adam *peace be upon him* there followed the next phase of infallibility after being fallible.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ ٱجْتَبَٰهُ رَبُّهُۥ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَىٰ ١٢٢

Later his Lord brought him close, accepted his repentance, and guided him [122] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 122)

Thus, Adam *peace be upon him* acted the role of a normal man who obeys and disobeys and who is prone to listen to the words of Satan. However, his Lord ordained repentance for him, a fact which is ever so clear in His saying: ‘Then Adam received (some) words from his Lord, so He turned to him mercifully…’ (*al-Baqara:* 37). Hence, Adam *peace be upon him* was disobedient, while he was a normal man and not when he was a prophet as some people mistakenly believe.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘Later, his Lord brought him close...’ (*Ta Ha:* 122), this took place at the beginning of the phase of prophethood in the life of Adam *peace be upon him*. Thus, after the phase in which he disobeyed his Lord, the latter brought him close and selected him as a prophet. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘Then Allah brought him close’, rather, he says that his ‘Lord’ did so. This is because the Lord is the One Who assumes responsibility for educating and care. Now, the perfect education entails preparation for one’s function, and part of the preparation of Adam *peace be upon him* for his function was that he should pass through both this test and training in the garden. Finally, Allah’s saying, ‘…and guided him’ (*Ta Ha:* 122) points to this guidance in His saying:

قَالَ ٱهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًۢا ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ ۖ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُم
مِّنِّى هُدًى فَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ هُدَاىَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَىٰ ﴿١٢٣﴾

God said, ‘Get out of the garden as each other’s enemy.’
Whoever follows My guidance, when it comes to you
[people], will not go astray nor fall into misery [123]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 123)

It is as if Allah the Almighty said to them, ‘Descend the two of you to the earth and proceed in it in the light of the past trial and be aware that there are commands and prohibitions and that there is an enemy who whispers, embellishes and leads astray to the point that your private parts appear.’ In this way, He is providing Adam with sufficient immunity for him and his descendants in order that the proceedings of life are rendered sound and upright in the light of the prescribed obligations. These obligations comprise the commandments and prohibitions which the Satan incites us to violate.

Nevertheless, we must not forget another factor which is the soul that incites to evil, impelling you towards disobedience and transgression. Hence, Satan is not your sole enemy that you might use as a scapegoat to which you attribute all of your disobedient acts. This is because there are disobedient acts which Satan does not cause you to fall into except by means of the soul. Otherwise, why did Satan go astray? Who caused him to go astray and whispered to him?

In Allah's saying, 'Get out of the garden...' (*Ta Ha:* 123), the verb to 'get down' is expressed in Arabic in the dual form. The two persons thereby commanded here are Adam *peace be upon him* in whom his descendants are embodied, and Satan, in whom his descendants are also embodied. Hence, the dual imperative verb pertains to the origin of both species. On the other hand, Allah's saying in another verse, 'Get out of this (state) all…' (*al-Baqara:* 38) is expressed in the plural form of the verb. In this case, this is a reference to all the resulting offspring of Adam and Satan.

As for Allah's saying, '…as each other's enemy' (*Ta Ha:* 123), it signifies that one is the foe of the other. The Arabic word translated in this verse as 'each' has a significant role in the Quran. The intended meaning of this verse is that there is a mutual enmity between the obedient human being and Satan, but if the former is disobedient, then there is no enmity since Satan wants you to be disobedient. When the enmity is affirmed without clarifying whether it is mutual or one-sided, then it is mutual.

An example of this use of the word translated here as 'each', but it originally means 'some' as found in Allah's saying: 'Will they distribute the Mercy of your Lord? We distribute amongst them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We have exalted some of them above others in degrees...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). So who are those who are raised above others and who are those above whom others are raised? The followers of a superficial perspective comprehend from this verse that the rich are raised above the poor. However, the actual meaning is much broader than this, for all human beings are equal before Allah *the Almighty*.

As a matter of fact, the functions of life require many diverse abilities and numerous talents. This is why one does not find all talents combined in a single person, entailing the deprivation of others. Instead, the Creator *Glorified is He* distributes talents amongst His human creation. Thus, one finds a person skilful in a particular field, while another is skilful in another and so on. In this manner, people have need of one another, the ties between individuals of society are thereby established, and there occurs between them the necessary harmony for the proceeding of life.

Hence, every individual in existence is raised above others in something and has others raised above him in something else. Therefore, a human being should be courteous in the activities of his life and should not deem himself above another on account of his extraordinary qualities in something. Let him look to that in which others excel and are distinguished, so that no one looks down upon another, for the latter may be better than him. It may even be that he possesses certain talents which are not fulfilled in the one who ridiculed him.

Returning to the subject of verse under study; inasmuch as Adam and his offspring will be the enemy of Satan and his offspring, then what will judge between them? It is Allah's Way of Guidance, a point which is clear in His saying: 'Whoever follows My Guidance, when it comes to you…' (*Ta Ha:* 123). Hence, you should beware of furnishing the guidance from yourselves, for this will not be beneficial to you and will not lead you to success.

There follows Allah's saying: 'Whoever follows My guidance, when it comes to you [people], will not go astray nor fall into misery.' (*Ta Ha:* 123) Allah's Guidance and Prescribed Path could be considered a manual for the soundness and well-being of a human being. Surely, we notice that a manufacturer provides his manufactured device with a manual which includes instructions on how to operate and maintain it. If you follow these instructions, this device will be at your service and perform its function for you without breaking down.

Now, just as this manual is not prepared except by the manufacturer of the device, likewise, none lays down laws for human beings or establishes guidance for them except their Creator *Glorified is He*. However, if someone else does this, it would be an offensive usurpation of Allah's Right. It would be as if you went to the butcher and asked him to lay down the necessary instructions for the maintenance of a microphone!

Thus, corruption in the universe occurs whenever we depart from Allah's Prescribed Path and transgress against His Law and Legislation, being satisfied with guidance aside from His Guidance. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says: 'Whoever follows My Guidance, when it comes to you [people], will not go astray nor fall into misery.’ (*Ta Ha:* 123) So, if this is the result for the one who follows Allah’s Guidance and the ultimate consequence of proceeding on the basis of His Prescribed Path, then what are the consequences for the one who rejects it?

Allah says:

وَمَنۡ أَعۡرَضَ عَن ذِكۡرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُۥ مَعِيشَةٗ ضَنكٗا وَنَحۡشُرُهُۥ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ أَعۡمَىٰ ﴿١٢٤﴾

But whoever turns away from it will have a life of great hardship. We shall bring him blind to the Assembly on the Day of Resurrection [124] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 124)

In this verse, the Saying of Allah, ‘turn away from’ signifies going away from in aversion and turning the breadth of your shoulders towards someone as we mentioned above. Regarding Allah’s saying, ‘…a life of great hardship…’ (*Ta Ha:* 124), the word ‘hardship’ means a severe constriction which you try to escape from here and there but cannot. This life of hardship befalls the one who wilfully turns away from Allah the Almighty. This is because the life of the one who believes in Him is never constrained even when his means of sustenance are limited, for he believes that his Lord will find a way out for him from this situation.

However, when the means of subsistence of a disbeliever are constrained and render him helpless, he finds no one to seek refuge in and therefore commits suicide. By contrast, a believer has a Lord Who provides for him and Who relieves his distress, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who believe and whose hearts are set at rest by the remembrance of Allah; now surely by Allah’s remembrance are the hearts set at rest.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 28) This is why it is said, ‘There is no worry while You are (My) Lord.’ Let us give an example to illustrate this point. A child bears no worries due to the existence of his father who spares him the toils of life and its hardships. So, he is not aware of the shortages or the increases in prices and thus endures nothing of anxiety. If this is the case with a child who has a father, then how would you envisage the one who has a Lord?

We have previously coined a relevant simile by saying, ‘Imagine that you have an Egyptian pound which falls from your pocket, or which you lose, you would grieve over it if you did not have other money. However, if you have another sum of money, you will not be aggrieved about losing the pound. Likewise, if you have a bank account, it would be as if nothing happened. Likewise, by having faith in his Lord, a believer possesses a higher reserve which compensates him for everything.'

Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with a parable for this reserve of faith in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh when Musa (Moses) and his people were trapped between the sea before them and Pharaoh and his army behind them. While the people were certain of being overcome, what did Prophet Musa (Moses) say? He said, 'By no means, surely, my Lord is with me. He will show me a way out.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) In such a way, he *peace be upon him* uttered this statement with deep conviction and full confidence, despite the fact that the statement might be shown to be false in a moment. However, it arises from the faith by which hearts are reassured and from the account reserve which every believer places his trust.

Hence, whoever believes in Allah *the Almighty* and follows His Guidance will never find himself in constrained circumstances or unbearable hardships. If some tribulation should befall him, it will not cause him to lose contentment, nor hinder him from seeking refuge in his Lord.

Amongst the miraculous verses of the Quran concerning the issue of *Diq As-Sadr* (constriction of the chest) is Allah's saying: 'Therefore (for) whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam, and (for) whomsoever He intends that He should cause him to err, He makes his breast straight and narrow as though he were ascending upwards…' (*al-An'am:* 125).

Now, from where did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* know that someone who ascends into the sky will be afflicted by a constricted chest? Did anyone go up into the sky at that time and experience this phenomenon? The meaning of constricted chest is that the capacity of the lung—which is the organ of breathing—becomes constricted by illness or excessive effort, etc. Surely, you notice that when you go up a tall ladder, for you become out of breath. This signifies that the lung—which is the storage container for air—does not get sufficient air corresponding to the activity undertaken, and it is then that the action of breathing increases in order to make up for the shortage of air.

Now, after the conquest of space, we are aware of the phenomenon of constricted breathing in the higher layers of the atmosphere which compel us to take oxygen tanks and other equipment for artificial breathing.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِيٓ أَعْمَىٰ وَقَدْ كُنتُ بَصِيرًا ١٢٥

And he will say, ‘Lord, why did You bring me here blind? I was sighted before!’ [125] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 125)

The word ‘blind’ also occurs in Allah’s saying: ‘And whoever is blind in this, he shall (also) be blind in the Hereafter and more erring from the way.’ (*al-Isra’:* 72) The word ‘blindness’ signifies that you do not perceive visible things. However, there may also be visible things which you do not pay attention to with your sight as if you were blind and did not see. Similarly, the one who turns away from the signs and does not meditate upon them is blind, for he does not see them.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says regarding the Hereafter: ‘…and We will gather them together on the Day of Resurrection on their faces, blind and dumb and deaf…’ (*al-Isra’:* 97). Now, when disbelievers are resurrected, they will be terrified by the Resurrection which they used to deny, and they will be deeply troubled and anxious. Each one of them will try to find an exit and a means of escape. Alas, Allah *the Exalted* has stripped them of all the means of perception and has closed in their faces all routes to salvation. A person can be guided to his path by himself when he has a sight. However, if he is blind, he can call for someone to take him by the hand. Even if he is blind and dumb, then perhaps he hears someone calling, warning, and guiding him. However, if he is blind, dumb, and deaf, can he be guided? All means of salvation are closed before him, for he is blind and cannot perceive the path on his own; he is dumb and thus unable to seek help from anyone who might save him, and he is also deaf and unable to hear anyone who volunteers to guide or warn him.

Many of those who cast doubts about the Quran found something superficial in this verse with which they assail the style of the Quran, inasmuch as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And he will say, "Lord, why did You bring me here blind? I had sight before!"’ (*Ta Ha:* 125) However, in another verse He says: ‘And the guilty shall see the fire, then they shall know that they are going to fall into it…’ (*al-Kahf:* 53). Thus, in one verse, He *the Almighty* negates their sight, whilst in another He affirms it. It escapes these disputatious ones that a person, after the Resurrection, passes through several stages. At the moment they are gathered together from their graves, they are blind so that they do not guide themselves to the path of escape, but after this, Allah *the Almighty* restores their sight to show them another painful punishment, which is the Hellfire in which they will be chastised.

Thus, what befalls them in the Hereafter is just recompense for what they did, for they had presented themselves as being blind, deaf, and dumb in this world since when the messenger summoned upon them to Allah *the Almighty* they deafened their ears and covered themselves with their clothing.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ كَذَٰلِكَ أَتَتْكَ ءَايَٰتُنَا فَنَسِيتَهَا ۖ وَكَذَٰلِكَ ٱلْيَوْمَ تُنسَىٰ ﴿١٢٦﴾

God will say, ‘This is how it is: You ignored Our revelations when they came to you, so today you will be ignored’ [126] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 126)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* will treat them as they treated Him; He will ignore them as they had ignored His Revelations. The word ‘signs’, translated in this verse as 'revelations', has many meanings. Basically, it refers to a marvellous or amazing phenomenon. It also applies to cosmic signs which draw attention to the Creator of the cosmos, and it is further used to refer to the miracles which support the messengers and confirm the veracity of their communication on behalf of Allah *the Almighty.* While cosmic signs attract attention to the Creator’s Omnipotence and Wisdom, the messenger is the one who guides the people to the Master of this Omnipotence and Wisdom for which they are searching. It is as if the messenger is saying, ‘O, you believer! The Master of the Power that you are looking for is Allah. He wants such-and-such from you. If you obey Him, then your reward will be such-and-such, but if you disobey Him, then your punishment will be such-and-such.’ Then Allah *the Exalted* backs up the messenger with miracles which provide evidence of his truthfulness in conveying Message coming from his Lord.

The word ‘signs’ also applies to the verses of the Scripture which bear legal rulings and the Divine Way of Guidance. The one referred to in the verse under discussion denied all these signs and did not turn his attention to them. So, inasmuch as he ignored the Revelations of Allah *the Almighty* then his just recompense is to be ignored and abandoned. This punishment is for those who ignore the revelations, not for those who unintentionally forget them, the case under which they will be forgiven and excused.

Regarding Allah’s saying, ‘…so today you will be ignored’ (*Ta Ha:* 126), it connotes that this guilty person will not be included in those who will enjoy the eternal delight of the paradise, but he will not be forgotten or neglected in terms of requital and punishment.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِى مَنۡ أَسۡرَفَ وَلَمۡ يُؤۡمِنۢ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِۦۚ وَلَعَذَابُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ أَشَدُّ وَأَبۡقَىٰٓ ١٢٧

This is how We reward those who go too far, and who do not believe in their Lord’s revelations. The greatest and most enduring punishment is in the Hereafter [127]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 127)

Concerning Allah’s saying, ‘This is how...’ (*Ta Ha:* 127), it means that We punish whosoever goes astray in accordance with His saying: ‘We reward those who go too far....’ (*Ta Ha:* 127) In this verse, ‘to go too far’ means to exceed the reasonable limit of something. Thus, eating, for example, was established by Allah *the Almighty* for the preservation of life, but if you go beyond this limit, then it is wasteful excess.

Also, your income provided for you by Allah must be spent within certain bounds, which is why you should save the some of it in order to advance in life. However if you disburse it all, then you are guilty of excess and will not be able to live a decent life. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Surely, the squanderers are the fellows of the devils…’ (*al-Isra’:* 27).

Islam possesses a wise vision as regards economics, for Allah *Glorified is He* wants you to spend, but does not want you to squander; between these two limits the rudder of society navigates, and the gears of life turn. Thus, if you go beyond the boundary of each of them, the proceeding of life is impaired, society becomes confused, and merchandise becomes unsalable. Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified this vision in His saying: ‘and they who when they spend are neither extravagant nor parsimonious and (keep) between these the just mean.’ (*al-Furqan:* 67) Hence, your Lord wants you to conduct your affairs between these two limits because miserliness and avarice obstruct the movement of life and squandering stiffens life and deprives you of advancement and pursuing the causal factors of opulence. For this reason, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…lest you should (afterwards) sit down blamed, stripped off.’ (*al-Isra’:* 29)

Now, immoderation may also arise from another side. In fact, your Lord has created you and has created for you the means of subsistence for your life. In addition, He *the Most High* had determined for you the permissible and the forbidden. So, if you tried yourself to augment that which is lawful with that which Allah *the Almighty* had made forbidden for you, then this is transgression on your part of the limit which your Lord set for you. You have thereby gone beyond the limit of what He made lawful for you and from which He prohibited you.

Immoderation may also take another form when the thing may be lawful in itself, but you take it in an unlawful manner. Now, if we shift the issue to prescribed obligations, we find that Allah *the Almighty* has made some things lawful and others unlawful. Therefore, you should not make what is prohibited lawful, nor should you prohibit what is lawful, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Say: "Who has prohibited the embellishment of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants and the good provisions?"’ (*al-A‘raf:* 32)

In a similar respect, Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘O, Prophet! Why do you forbid (yourself) that which Allah has made lawful for you…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1)? Hence, your Lord does not place undue restrictions upon you, and He also forbids you from placing undue restrictions upon your own soul by depriving it of what He made lawful. Similarly, He censures you for making what He prohibited for you lawful because this is all in your interest.

As immoderation can be in food, and drink which are the means of subsistence for the continuation of life, it can also occur in other domains such as the preservation of the species through marriage and procreation. With respect to sexual activity, Allah *Glorified is He* has established bounds to assure the bringing forth of offspring in the light of lawful pleasure, but whoever transgresses these bounds is immoderate.

It is a manifestation of Allah's Mercy that He forgives a believer who transgresses against his own soul, a fact which is clearly manifested in His saying: 'Say: "O, My servants, who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the Mercy of Allah …"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 53).

Back to the verse in question; Allah's saying, 'This is how We reward those who go too far...' (*Ta Ha:* 127), places immoderation as a degree next to disbelief, for He says afterwards: '…and who do not believe in their Lord's revelations...' (*Ta Ha:* 127). This is due to that when such a person prohibits what is lawful or makes lawful what is prohibited, he suspends Allah's Revelations.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The greatest and most enduring punishment is in the Hereafter.' (*Ta Ha:* 127) Hence, the aforementioned punishment will afflict them in this worldly life, not in the Hereafter. So, you should not think that Allah *the Almighty* delays every punishment for a disbeliever, for there are punishments which are hastened for him in this worldly life, not put off until the Hereafter.

The first kind of punishment which the Almighty Allah does not delay and which He hastens in this worldly life is the punishment for iniquity. The iniquitous person cannot die before the one he treated unjustly sees what He has done to this wrongdoer. Otherwise, those who do not believe in the Resurrection or in otherworldly recompense would transgress against mankind and cause mischief on earth. Thus, it is out of Allah's Wisdom that we see the ruin of unjust tyrants so that the proceeding of life sets itself aright, even if a person who has been wronged is not a believer.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to punish, His Chastisement corresponds to His Power as is the case with the blow of a child; it is certainly not the same as the blow of a strong young man. Thus, whatever comes to an unjust person of punishment in this worldly life is trifling since it comes from people; however, the punishment of the Hereafter is an entirely different thing because it is Allah's Punishment which corresponds to His Omnipotence.

Allah’s saying, ‘The greatest and most enduring punishment is in the Hereafter’ (*Ta Ha:* 127) affirms that the punishment of the Hereafter is everlasting. By contrast, the punishment of this worldly life ends with death, or when your punisher becomes content with you and is merciful to you. It might also happen that someone intercedes for you and has the punishment removed from you. However, in the Hereafter, there will be nothing of this kind, for there will be no escape from the punishment nor any refuge to which to resort.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَلَمۡ يَهۡدِ لَهُمۡ كَمۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا قَبۡلَهُم مِّنَ ٱلۡقُرُونِ يَمۡشُونَ فِي مَسَٰكِنِهِمۡۚ
إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّأُوْلِي ٱلنُّهَىٰ ﴿١٢٨﴾

Do they not draw a lesson from the many generations We destroyed before them, through whose dwelling places they now walk? There truly are signs in this for anyone with understanding! [128] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 128)

In the opening phrase of this verse, the verb translated as ‘draw a lesson’ means having guidance and illustrative explanation. Thus when you guide a person, it means that you show him the way of righteousness. Allah’s saying, ‘Do they not draw a lesson from…?’ (*Ta Ha:* 128) is a question which is generally put either in order to find out what you are ignorant about or to confirm what you have done. It thus gives the meaning of the following question, ‘have they not seen the previous people and what befell them when they rejected the messengers of Allah?!’ In this regard, He says: ‘And most surely you pass by them in the morning.’ (*as-Saffat:* 137)

In a similar respect, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘I swear by the daybreak, and the ten nights, and the even and the odd, and the night when it departs. Truly, in that there is an oath for those who possess understanding. Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with Ad, (the people of) Aram, possessors of lofty buildings, the like of which were not created in the (other) cities, and (with) Thamud, who hewed out the rocks in the valley, and (with) Pharaoh, the lord of hosts,’ (*al-Fajr:* 1-10). So, do you not see all of these lessons and admonitions with regard to those who rejected the Divine Way of Guidance? Do you not see that Allah *the Almighty* grants triumph to His messengers? He never abandoned and forsook them as He says: ‘And most surely Our Host alone shall be the victorious ones.’ (*as-Saffat:* 173) In addition, He says: ‘…and surely Allah will help him who helps His cause…’ (*al-Hajj:* 40). After all of this, the deniers of the Truth still turn away in rejection as if they have not seen anything of these signs.

When you come across the Arabic word translated in this verse as ‘many’, then you should be aware that it is used in reference to something very numerous which is beyond delimitation. It is like when you tell your companion, ‘How much have I given you!’, or ‘How much have I helped you!’ These two expressions mean that you have given him so many times and that you have helped him so many times. It is as if you are urging him to respond by himself, and you do not ask such a question unless you are sure the answer is in your absolute favour.

Hence, Allah’s saying, ‘Do they not draw a lesson from…’ (*Ta Ha:* 128) means that He elucidated for them and directed them to consider the numerous peoples who rejected their messengers and to think of the punishment that happened that afflicted them. Those being addressed here should have been called to their senses and taken a moral lesson from these incidents, instead of turning away from them.

Allah’s saying, ‘…through whose dwelling places they now walk?…’ (*Ta Ha:* 128) It is similar to His saying: ‘And most surely you pass by them in the morning.’ (*as-Saffat:* 137) Thus, this is not history being related, but rather, it is an exemplary reality which they see with their own eyes and travel through its ruins. There follows Allah’s saying: ‘There truly are signs in this for anyone with understanding!’ (*Ta Ha:* 128) This means that there are wondrous signs in what happened to the previous generations for anyone who possesses intelligence and sound intellect.

The Arabic expression translated in this verse as ‘anyone with understanding’ comprises the word *Nuha* which means ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’. The mind solves many problematic aspects of thought; for there are those who believe that Allah *the Almighty* created the mind for us so that we might employ it in the realms of thought as we please and run free of all restrictions. However, the Arabic word for mind is derived from the same semantic root as ‘hobble cord’ by which one hobbles a camel so that it does not run away. In a similar way, your mind restrains you and organises your actions, so that you do not conduct yourself in the universe based on your capricious desires and inclinations. It restrains you in order for you to employ it in grasping matters by saying, ‘This is right, and this is wrong’ before you venture towards them.

Hence, if the thief truly grasped what he was doing, he would not dare to engage in stealing from people, for how would he feel if we permitted all people to steal from him, given the fact that he is a single individual while they are a massive group?

When Allah *Glorified is He* restricts your gaze from extending to that which He has forbidden you from, you should not say, ‘He has unduly constrained me’, for He has commanded others to lower their gaze from things which are private to you, and these others are more numerous than you are. Hence, the Divine Law is in your interest in the first place. However, if you want to transgress against the honour of people, then permit them to do the same to you!

In the same connection, once a young man came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and complained of his inability to endure his sexual impulse and wanted permission for himself to fornicate—in Allah do we seek refuge from such an act. Prophet Muhammad wished to teach him a lesson that would turn him away from this offense. So what did he tell him? He said: ‘O brother of the Arabs! Would you wish this for your mother? Would you wish this for your sister? Would you wish this for your wife?’ Each time the young man responded, ‘No, O, Messenger of Allah, may I be sacrificed for you.’ Now, you can imagine what would afflict any one of us if he heard a mention of his mother, his sister, or his wife in such a context. Then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to the young man after shaking him up with this rigorous jolt, ‘Likewise, people would not wish this for their mothers, wives, sisters or daughters.’ Thereupon the young man said, ‘By Allah, my soul has never thought of doing anything of this sort except that I called to mind my mother, my wife, my sister and my daughter.’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad and At-Tabarani on the authority of Abu Umama Allah be pleased with him. The same Hadith mentions that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him made a supplication for him, saying, ‘O Allah, forgive for him his sin and purify his heart and safeguard his sexual organ. Thereafter, the youth never again glanced at anything.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/256. 257; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, 8/190, 215.*

Hence, the mind or intellect is the measuring scale, and it is that which affects equilibrium and makes judgemental comparisons between things. The same is true when it occurs in the usage of the Arabic word *An-Nuha* and *Al-Lub,* which also refer to the mind. The first word relates to the act of forbidding from doing something, whereas the second signifies the inner truth of something and its core. All of these connote not being superficial in thought, letting it run away from you hither and thither.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوۡلَا كَلِمَةٞ سَبَقَتۡ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَكَانَ لِزَامٗا وَأَجَلٞ مُّسَمّٗى ١٢٩

If it were not for a preordained Word from your Lord [Prophet], they would already have been destroyed. Their time has been set [129] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 129)

In spite of all this discourse about the signs of Allah *the Almighty* regarding those who rejected messengers and the harsh punishment that befell them, the disbelievers of Mecca passed by them without taking an example from them, being deterred or even fearing that their end might be like that of those who came before them. Perhaps they said, 'Here we are. We see no chastisement befalling upon us: no thunderbolt, no metamorphosis, and no raging wind. So, what are you, Muhammad, threatening us with?'

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies this issue for them, saying, 'Nothing prevents Us from doing to you what We did to the rejecters of the messengers before you and nothing hinders Us from subduing you and destroying you, except for one thing, which is the preordained Word issued by Allah.' In this regard, He *the Most High* says: 'If it were not for a preordained Word from your Lord [O, Prophet], they would already have been destroyed. Their time has been set,' (*Ta Ha:* 129).

Thus, what is this Decree or the Word that has already gone forth from Allah and which has held punishment back from them? The intended meaning of this Word is quite clear in Allah's saying to Prophet Muhammad: 'But Allah was not going to chastise them while you were amongst them, nor is Allah going to chastise them while yet they ask for forgiveness.' (*al-Anfal:* 33) Hence, this Ordinance which has been previously decreed by Allah *the Almighty* is what withheld His punishment from disbelievers. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* elucidates this issue further by saying: ‘No, but I hope that Allah will let them beget children who will solely worship Him *the Almighty* and will worship none besides Him.’(1)

Now, someone may say, ‘Allah threatens those who reject Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with sending down upon them what befell the deniers from among the earlier peoples, and yet, the disbelievers of Mecca rejected Prophet Muhammad without anything happening to them.’ To this, we reply: ‘This is because they have two guarantees of safety from punishment: the Decree which went forth and the preordained term for death set by Allah *the Almighty*. Every one of us has his stated term for death.’

As for Allah’s saying, ‘…they would already have been destroyed…’ (*Ta Ha:* 129), it means that if it were not for Allah’s preordained Word, it would have been necessarily incumbent that they be overcome with what overcame the previous peoples.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱصۡبِرۡ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحۡ بِحَمۡدِ رَبِّكَ قَبۡلَ طُلُوعِ ٱلشَّمۡسِ وَقَبۡلَ
غُرُوبِهَاۖ وَمِنۡ ءَانَآيِٕ ٱلَّيۡلِ فَسَبِّحۡ وَأَطۡرَافَ ٱلنَّهَارِ لَعَلَّكَ تَرۡضَىٰ ١٣٠

So [Prophet] be patient with what they say – celebrate the praise of your Lord, before the rising and setting of the sun, celebrate His praise during the night, and at the beginning and end of the day, so that you may find contentment [130]
(The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 130)

As long as the people of Mecca are rejecting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them* while they are secure from the Divine punishment in this world, then they will necessarily intensify their denial and persist in their contentious obstinacy towards him. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* turns to another aspect and grants Prophet Muhammad the required immunity to confront this situation by saying: ‘So, [O, Prophet] be patient with what they say…' (*Ta Ha:* 130). This is because he will receive a reward corresponding to what he endures with patience.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of 'A’isha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith No. 3231, 7389; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1795.*

Patience may be easy and facile in some situations, and it may be oppressive and difficult, necessitating strenuous effort in others. Thus, at times Allah *the Almighty* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Bear with patience', and at other times, He says, 'Persevere in patience.'

Thus, what are the statements which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* must bear with patience? They are their calling him a sorcerer, a poet, possessed by the jinns or by madness and a soothsayer. Likewise, he must bear their calling the Quran 'confused dreams' and the 'fables of earlier peoples'. So, bear all of this with patience, O, Prophet Muhammad, for every statement they utter is self-refuted.

As regards their calling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a sorcerer, who are the ones upon whom he works his sorcery? Did he enchant the believers with it? If this were the case, then why did he not also enchant the disbelievers and thereby conclude the matter? Hence, their abiding in headstrong obstinacy and disbelief in him is a proof of his innocence of this charge.

As for their calling him a poet, how is this possible while they are a people whose main productive activity lies in words, the arts of oratory, poetry, and prose? How, then, could they be unaware of the style of the Quran? Is the Quran like poetry which is metred and rhymed? If this accusation had been made by another people, it would have been acceptable. However, that it should come from you, O, people who establish marketplaces and exhibitions for speech—like exhibitions for industries today—this is not acceptable.

We have previously said that when you read an article, for example, and you come across a verse of poetry; you feel it, and your ears sense that you have shifted from prose to poetry, or from poetry to prose. Take, for example, the words of Ibn Zaydun(1): 'This is reproach whose consequences are praiseworthy, and this repugnant offense is an adverse inundation which then clears up. It shall not cause me to have doubts about my liege lord if his flow is delayed. So, although the overflowing of the well buckets is slowed, I will fill them, and although the clouds be lumbering in their movement, I will cause them to gather. With today there is a tomorrow, and for every period of postponement, there is a preordained decree. There is blame in seeking to ensnare it, but no blame in being heedless of it.

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(1) This is Ahmad Ibn 'Abdullah ibn Ghalib ibn Zaydun Al-Makhzumi Al-Andalusi, Abu Al-Walid. He was a minister, writer, and poet of the inhabitants of Cordoba. He was born in 394 AH. He devoted himself to the service of Ibn Jahwar (one of the kings in Andalusia) and became an ambassador between him and Andalusia kingdoms, and all were much impressed with him. He has recorded correspondence and a collection of poetry. He died in 463 AH at the age of 69. See *Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam*, 1/158.

For if the deed which caused offense was only one
Then his deeds which brought delight numbered in the thousands.'

Your ears immediately sense that you have shifted from prose to poetry.

However, this is not the case with the Quran. Let us offer an example of Allah’s saying: ‘And women in the city said, "The chief's wife seeks her slave to yield himself (to her). Surely, he has affected her deeply with (his) love. Most certainly, we see her in manifest error." So, when she heard of their sly talk she sent for them and prepared for them a repast gave each of them a knife and said [to Yusuf (Joesph)], "Come forth to them." So, when they saw him, they deemed him great cut their hands (in amazement) and said, "Remote is Allah (from imperfection). This is not a mortal. This is but a noble angel." She said, "This is he with respect to whom you blamed me, and certainly, I sought his yielding himself (to me), but he abstained’ (*Yusuf:* 30-32).

Did you sense a shift in style from prose to poetry, or from poetry to prose? Yet, if you analysed the metre of the Arabic origin translated in this verse as ‘This is he with respect to whom you blamed me…’ (*Yusuf:* 32), you would discover that it comprises poetic metre.

Similar is the case in Allah’s saying: ‘Inform My servants that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful.’ (*al-Hijr:* 49) If you wanted to turn it into a poetic couplet, it would say:

Tell My servants that I — I alone
Am truly forgiving and a true dispenser of mercy

Nevertheless, you read this verse in its context and do not feel that it is poetry because the style is in a category of its own. This is a manifestation of the magnificence of the Quran; it is a unique speech not produced by human beings.

As for accusing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being ‘possesses by madness’, a mad person does not know what he is doing and is not held accountable for his actions. We cannot accuse him of anything, nor call him ‘liar’ or ‘shameless’, for example, because his means of discernment is out of order. There is no order or harmony in his comportment, for he might laugh in your face and then strike you at the same time, and he may give you something and then spit in your face.

The mad person has no moral character. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as follows: ‘Noon. I swear by the pen and what the angels write. By the grace of your Lord, you are not mad. And most certainly, you shall have a reward never to be cut off. And most certainly, you conform (yourself) to sublime morality.’ (*al-Qalam:* 1-4)

The moral character is the deeply ingrained, natural disposition to righteousness. So, how could Prophet Muhammad be insane when he possesses a sublime moral character? Moreover, have you witnessed on his part anything which madmen are prone to do? With respect to their statement that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* fabricated this Quran, how is this conceivable when before the beginning of his prophetic mission you never heard poetry or oration from him, nor did he previously utter anything similar to the Quran? How could he invent the like of this inimitable style when he does not possess the craft of artful speech? Furthermore, if Prophet Muhammad had indeed fabricated the Quran, then why do you not fabricate the like of it in order to refute his claim? In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* challenges them by saying: ‘…Say: "Then, bring a chapter like this…"’ (*Yunus:* 38). In such a manner, their very own statements stand as evidence of their lying and their pretentious accusations with regarding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…Celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising and setting of the sun.’ (*Ta Ha:* 130) Glorification of Allah *the Almighty* signifies exalting Him. This is an Attribute of Allah that existed even before He created anyone to glorify and exalt Him. Hence, He says at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra’*: ‘Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night…’ (*al-Isra’:* 1). This is due to the Night Journey going against physical laws. Thus, it is as if said, ‘Allah’s

Actions are infinitely exalted above your actions.’ Therefore, glorifying Allah *the Almighty* means that exaltation is firmly and permanently established for Him, even if there is no one who exalts Him. Then, when Allah *the Almighty* created the universe, the heavens, the earth and all that they contain glorified Him. So, if glorification was firmly established for Allah *the Almighty* even before there existed any one to glorify Him, and then His initial creation glorified Him—and continue to glorify Him—then, you, too, should glorify the Name of your Supreme Lord. That is to say, Exalt Him in His Essence, His Attributes, His Actions, and His Words far above anything you perceive in the created beings.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…the praise of your Lord…’ (*Ta Ha:* 130). Amongst the inevitable aspects of mankind is that they are different in inclinations, objectives and interests. They dispute with one another and wage war on one another over fleeting things. Amongst them are the wrongdoer and the wronged person, the strong and the weak. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that there is One in Whom nothing of these attributes is present in order to establish the law and the perfectly straight measuring standard which regulate the life of mankind. This exalted Attribute of bearing no resemblance to created beings and not having any defects is a blessing which we should thank and praise Allah *the Almighty* for its existence in Him. We should praise Him that there is nothing like Him, for this is what renders the entire universe willingly obedient. However, if there were anything like Him, then perhaps it would refuse to obey the command ‘Be!’ Thus, it is.

Moreover, glorification and exaltation mean that the criteria which regulate the world are not the criteria of the world itself; rather, they are more suitable and stronger, and this is your own advantage. Thus, when you glorify Allah *the Exalted* you should remember that glorification is a blessing. So, you should praise Allah *the Almighty* that there is nothing like Him and glorify Him with a glorification accompanied by praise to Him because His Exaltation only results in blessed favour upon those He created. Therefore, this blessing merits that you praise Allah *the Most High* for it.

An example for this is lord of a family, the wise elder man who is true to his word, and equitable in his dealings with its members, along with being held in high esteem by all of them. You find that they all praise Allah *the Exalted* for his existence amongst them since he preserves the equilibrium of the family and maintains order between its members. Do we not say from proverbs, ‘The one who has no chief let him purchase one’? This is true even if this dominant chief is haughty because his superciliousness is in the interest of the members of his family inasmuch as each one of them will restrict himself to his bounds.

For this reason, we find among Allah’s Names the Most High and the Sublime. This Attribute—while it is detested between men because it is unjustifiable—is desirable for Allah *the Almighty* because it renders everyone as an inferior slave to Him. Thus, Allah’s Sublimeness and Highness are based on reality, for He says: ‘His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: "Be", so it is.’ (*Ya Sin:* 82) In summary, nothing can maintain harmony in the universe except a Power different from that of mankind.

There follows Allah’s saying: ‘…before the rising and setting of the sun. Celebrate His praise during the night and at the beginning and end of the day, so that you may find contentment.’ (*Ta Ha:* 130) This means that you, O, Prophet Muhammad, should glorify Allah *the Almighty* continuously and incessantly, just as His Blessings upon you are incessant and do not come to an end. In fact, every movement you make is a blessing; so sleeping, awakening, eating, drinking, seeing, hearing and all your motions are blessings meriting grateful praise. Each of these blessings embodies additional blessings.

Take for example the movement of the hand that you strike with and examine just how lithely compliant and responsive it is, doing as you wish without any thinking on your part. Your fingers contract and grasp things without your sensing of the movement of the muscles and their harmony. A person may not take notice of Allah’s Power in the movement of his hand until when it is stricken with paralysis—may Allah preserve us from this. At such a moment, he realises that its movements are based on complex procedures which no one has the power to facilitate except the Creator *Glorified is He*. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* informs us about the time of glorification, rendering it at all times: ‘…before the rising and setting of the sun. Celebrate His praise during the night and at the beginning and end of the day...’ (*Ta Ha:* 130). One should celebrate Allah’s Praise to the best of his ability.

Glorifying Allah *the Almighty* during the night means continuing to do so throughout the parts of the entire night. However, does this mean that a person should persist in doing nothing but glorifying Allah?

Regarding a period of time, dialecticians say that is not positively defined. Thus, you can divide the night into hours and glorify Allah *the Exalted* every hour, or you can ascend higher and glorify Him every minute, or you can ascend even higher and glorify Him every second. This depends on the stations of the one who is glorifying and praising as well as his spiritual state. Amongst the servants of Allah are those who never stop glorifying Him for a single moment. You will find such a worshipper glorifying Allah *the Almighty* in all his movements because he knows that he is not carrying out this act of worship by his own self as proven by the fact that the ability to undertake it can be taken away from him at any time.

Hence, the periods of time vary with the differences of spiritual stations and states. Surely, you can see that in the framework of a single system of measurement people measure in metres, then by centimetres and then by millimetres. In the measurement of time, the Japanese have developed instruments which can determine a fraction of seven thousandth parts of a second.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and at the beginning and end of the day’ (*Ta Ha:* 130). This is in order to encompass all of time, its night and its day, and all spiritual stations and states. For this reason, some masters of spiritual knowledge say in their words of counsel, in order to safeguard the well-being of the proceeding of life, ‘Render your mindfulness to One Who never ceases to see you’, for this is the One Who merits your mindfulness. A person should pay heed to this matter and not allow his mindfulness to be rendered to someone who neglects and abandons him or becomes heedless of him during sleep.

The words of counsel continue, ‘Likewise, render your thanks to One Whose blessings are unceasingly bestowed upon you.’ So, when you drink a glass of water, then you should say, ‘Praise be to Allah that He quenched my thirst.’ Then, as soon as you feel its invigorating effect in yourself, you should say, ‘Praise be to Allah.’ Then, when you discharge it as sweat or urine, you should say, ‘Praise be to Allah.’ This is how you ceaselessly praise Allah *the Exalted* and express your gratitude to Him.

The words of counsel continue as follows, ‘Plus, render your obedience to the One Whom you cannot do without’, for as long as you cannot dispense with Him, then He is most worthy of your obedience. Finally, ‘And render your humble submissiveness to One from Whose dominion and authority you cannot escape’, for otherwise, where could you go?

Back to the verse in question; we may ask here, ‘Why does Allah *the Almighty* render the time of glorification at night unrestricted, whereas He defines it during the day, saying: "and at the beginning and end of the day"? (*Ta Ha:* 130) It is said that the day is normally the domain of work and endeavour; thus, your glorification may preoccupy you to the detriment of your work. Moreover, our Lord commanded us to seek the means of sustenance in the earth and to participate in the activities of life. In fact, work assists you in glorification and obedience and helps you to respond to the call to prayer.

Surely, you can find this evident by reading Allah’s saying in the chapter of *al-Jumu‘a*: ‘O, you who believe, when the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you if you only knew. But when the prayer has ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah’s grace and remember Allah much, so that you may be successful.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9-10)

The reason for this is that activities of life help you in accomplishing the obligations that Allah *the Exalted* has prescribed for you. Let us offer an example to clarify this point. In order to pray, you need something to cover your nakedness. So, consider the cloth with which you veil your private parts; how many hands have contributed to its making? How many activities of life have combined together to produce it in this form?

However, at night, when you are at rest, it is possible for you to devote yourself wholly to the glorification of Allah *the Almighty* to the extent of any time. Allah’s saying, ‘…before the rising and setting of the sun. Celebrate His praise during the night and at the beginning and end of the day…’ (*Ta Ha:* 130) calls for our attention, for which rising and which setting is meant? Which day and to which night is being referred? Is it for Egypt, Algeria, India, or Japan? In fact, it constitutes phenomena which are multiple and extensive across the extent of time and space with no end. This is because the sun is at all times both rising and setting. Now, this is an indication of the fact that the invocation and the glorification of Allah *the Almighty* are continual and never cease.

Afterwards, Allah *the Most High* mentions the objective of glorification by saying: '…so that you may find contentment.' (*Ta Ha:* 130) We should take note that Allah *Glorified is He* encourages us to do devotional deeds by stressing their beneficial nature for us. Hence, He does not say, 'So that I might be content.' Instead, He says: '…so that you may find contentment.' (*Ta Ha:* 130) Thus, it is as if the matter is beneficial to you and in your interest.

To find contentment means that you attain to what you hope for from amongst what you love or desire. Now, a person is not happy or content except if he reaches that which he desires and realises that for which he hopes.

Let us give an example to further illustrate this point. When you ask your companion if he is happy now and he responds in an ambiguous way, this implies that he has not yet reached the stage of contentment. However, if what he desires is realised, then he will respond to the same question by saying, 'Yes, I am happy. Praise be to Allah.' Furthermore, if you granted him a favour which exceeds what he expected of you, he embraces you and says, 'May our Lord prolong your life. May Allah reward you benevolently?'

Hence, achieving happiness and contentment of a human being has stages. It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'Allah will say to the people of paradise, "O, Dwellers of Paradise," and they would say in response, "At thy service and pleasure, our Lord. Goodness is in Your Hand." He (the Lord) would say, "Are you well pleased now?" They would say, "Why should we not be pleased, O, Lord, when you have given us what You has not given to any of Your created beings?" He would, however, say, "May I not give you (something) even more excellent than that?" Then, they would say, "O, Lord, what thing can be more excellent than this?" Thus, He would say, "I shall cause My pleasure to alight upon you, and I shall never be displeased with you afterwards."'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Sa'd Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7518; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 302.*

Thus, this is contentment at its highest levels. The goal of glorification which your Lord charged you with is, hence, that you find contentment yourself and that it results to be beneficial for you. Yet, in any case, Allah *Glorified is He* is glorified before He created anything of the entire universe. Therefore, our glorification does not augment His Dominion in the slightest way. However, Allah *the Almighty* causes you to find the perfect contentment when you please Him.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says(1):

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيۡنَيۡكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعۡنَا بِهِۦٓ أَزۡوَٰجٗا مِّنۡهُمۡ زَهۡرَةَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ
ٱلدُّنۡيَا لِنَفۡتِنَهُمۡ فِيهِۚ وَرِزۡقُ رَبِّكَ خَيۡرٞ وَأَبۡقَىٰ ١٣١

And do not gaze longingly at what We have given some of them to enjoy, the finery of this present life: We test them through this, but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting [131] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 131)

After Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, ‘So, [O, Prophet] be patient with what they say…’ (*Ta Ha:* 130), He puts him on his guard against seeing what the haughty oppressors and obstinate opponents have as blessings towards which he may turn his eyes. Gazing longingly implies that you do not restrict yourself to merely looking with the extent of the eye's normal capacity; rather, you direct it in an expanded way in order for you to see more than what is appropriate. In this sense, gazing longingly always follows the preoccupation of the soul with a blessing leading to the eye's yearning to stare at it. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to Prophet Muhammad, 'Do not let your soul be engrossed with that which they enjoy of blessings because these are part of the splendour of this world which rapidly perishes.'

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(1) *In His book, Al-Wahidi narrates a Hadith on the authority of Abu Rafi‘, the bondsman Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him that a guest took up residence with Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him so he summoned me and sent me to a man of the Jews who sold foodstuffs. I told him, ‘Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him says to you: A guest has settled with us, but we lack some of what is suitable for him, so sell me such-and such an amount of flour, or lend it to me until the new moon of the month of Rajab.’ To which the Jew responded, ‘I will not sell or lend to him except on the basis of a collateral deposit.’ Abu Rafi‘ continued, ‘So I returned to [The Prophet] and informed him, whereupon he said: ‘By Allah, I am trustworthy with regard to heaven and trustworthy with regard to the earth, and if he agreed to sell to me or lend to me, I would fulfill my obligation to him. Take this armour to him [as a collateral deposit].’ This verse was then revealed consoling him for [what he was lacking in] this world. As-Suyuti also cites this narration attributing it to Ibn Abu Shayba, Al-Bazar, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn Jarir. However, in his book, Al-Qurtubi says, ‘Ibn ‘Atiya said: This is objectionable as a causal context for the revelation of the verse in question because the chapter itself was revealed in Mecca, and the story mentioned occurred in Medina towards the very end of the life of Prophet Muhammad since he died while his armour was still being held as a collateral deposit with the Jew in this story which was mentioned.’ See Al-Wahidi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p. 174; As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/612; and Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4438.*

Concerning Allah's saying: '…what We have given some of them to enjoy…' (*Ta Ha:* 131), it contains an Arabic word that literally means pairs or couples, but in this verse, it does not refer to a man and a woman. Instead, it refers to the categories of things that are paired together. Relevant to this is Allah's saying: '…And We have appointed for them comrades so they have made fair-seeming to them what is before them and what is behind them…' (*Fussilat:* 25).

Thus, everyone has a devil that accompanies him constantly and does not part from him, and this is the intended comradeship which is meant in the verse in question. Similarly, pertinent to this issue is Allah's saying: 'a speaker from amongst them shall say, "Surely, I had a comrade of mine."' (*as-Saffat:* 51)

The word 'finery' is an indication of its rapid ending and a short life. Here, it refers to the blooming radiance of this worldly life which is called the 'lowest life'. What description could reflect its insignificance better than the latter term? Allah *the Almighty* has given them of the enjoyments of this transient worldly life, but they set about being boastful about it. Yet it is only a temptation and a test, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'We test them through this...' (*Ta Ha:* 131).

Thus, we must take into account that testing can be by means of good just as it can be by means of bad, a point which is clearly manifested in Allah's saying: '…and We try you by evil and good by way of probation…' (*al-Anbiya':* 35). This is also evident in the following two verses in which He *the Almighty* says: 'And as for man, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honour and makes him lead an easy life; he says, "My Lord honours me."' (*al-Fajr:* 15) Hence, the person expresses thanks for this grace as coming from Allah *the Exalted*. Then, there follows: 'But when He tries him (differently), then straitens for him his means of subsistence, he says, "My Lord has disgraced me."' (*al-Fajr:* 16) At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* corrects this idea for them by saying, ‘Both of you are liars in this manner of discourse, for being the beneficiary of His Favour is not evidence of His honouring, nor is its removal evidence of His disgracing. Hence, afterwards, He says: ‘Nay, but you do not honour the orphan, nor do you urge one another to feed the poor. And you eat away the heritage, devouring (everything).’ (*al-Fajr:* 17-19) So imagine that Allah *the Almighty* has given you blessing, and you do not give thanks for it or observe its due right in terms of charity, then where is the honouring aspect of it?

Back to the verse under study; Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.’ (*Ta Ha:* 131) This means that you, O, Prophet Muhammad, should not preoccupy your mind with what Allah *the Almighty* has granted them since He will grant you something greater than that. The blessing of your Lord is superior to this fleeting favour and is more enduring and eternal. This is because it is continual and ceaseless where you do not lose it, nor does it leave you. However, as for these people, the favour they enjoy is temporary and will pass them by through poverty, or they will pass it by themselves through death.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأۡمُرۡ أَهۡلَكَ بِٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَٱصۡطَبِرۡ عَلَيۡهَاۖ لَا نَسۡـَٔلُكَ رِزۡقٗاۖ
نَّحۡنُ نَرۡزُقُكَۗ وَٱلۡعَٰقِبَةُ لِلتَّقۡوَىٰ ١٣٢

Order your people to pray, and pray steadfastly yourself. We are not asking you to give Us provision; We provide for you, and the rewards of the Hereafter belong to the devout [132] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 132)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* provides us with the Way of Guidance for reforming society and assuring its harmony. It begins with the first unit of the society, which is the head of the family. It is incumbent upon him to rectify himself first and before anything or anyone else. Then he should pay attention to the second unit which is the group immediately around him and the closest people to him, namely his kinfolk and family. He is the pivotal axis of the family, so when he rectifies himself, then he is obligated to rectify the people who have intimate contact with him.

As for Allah's saying, 'Order your people to pray...' (*Ta Ha:* 132), it is meant to set upright the foremost unit in the structure of the universe, namely the head of the family. Thus, if he is firmly established in righteous piety and orders his immediate kin to observe prayer, the entire universe becomes upright, and the well-being of all people is achieved.

The issue here is not limited to simply issuing an order, for the responsibility does not end there. Rather, he should '…pray steadfastly…' (*Ta Ha:* 132) because prayer comprises strenuous effort requiring patient perseverance. This is due to the fact that prayer takes time from the proceeding of life which is the cause of achieving good and being beneficial for you. Hence, it is necessary to persevere in observing it.

There is a difference between the imperative verbs 'be patient' and 'be steadfast' which is employed in the verse in question. The former is a normal action, whereas the second implies exaggeration or intensity; in other words, you should deliberately exaggerate in being patient.

One of the manifestations of this perseverance is that you strive to observe prayer in front of your children in order to imbue their minds with the importance of prayer. For instance, you might enter your house and find food has been prepared, so you tell your children, 'Wait for me for a few minutes so that I can pray.' Thus, your children's attention will be drawn to the fact that prayer is even more important than eating, thereby implanting in their souls the reverential awe for the prescribed religious duties and respect for the obligatory nature of prayer. Furthermore, you should also strive to give preference to prayer over any other activity, no matter what it may be.

In the same respect, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* used to pray at night what He willed for him to pray until the call for the dawn prayer was cried out. Then, he would wake up his family, and if they refused, he would sprinkle water on their faces(1) since prayer is better than sleep. While sleep at such a time comprises rest for the body, yet prayer is superior and greater, for it suffices that you become in the presence of Allah *the Almighty* when you offer it.

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(1) *Ibn Majah narrates on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him, that Prophet Muhammad said:, 'May Allah show mercy to a man who gets up during the night and offers prayer, awakens his wife to pray, and if she refuses, he sprinkles water on her face (to make her get up). May Allah show mercy to a woman who gets up during the night and offers prayer, awakens her husband for the same purpose, and if he refuses, she sprinkles water on his face.' See Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1336.*

Imagine that the head of a household is absent from it for a month or a year, and then suddenly they cry out, ‘Your father has come!’ At that time, you would see everyone rushing towards him. Likewise, when Allah *the Most High* summons you, then you should not fail to accept His Invitation. Rather, you should rush towards Him and hasten to respond to His Call. Imagine that your companion is calling you, but you do not respond to him. I believe this would be something unacceptable and would not be met with your companion’s contentment.

Hence, it is imperative that you accustom your children to respect the call to prayer. As soon as they hear its first phrase, they should respond to the summons, not giving preference to anything over it. After all Allah *the Almighty* does not bless the activity which diverts you from the call ‘Allah is the Greatest’, for in this case, you have been distracted by blessings from the Bestower of Blessings.

Therefore, if you wish to become aware of the best elements of society, then watch for their precedence in responding to the call of prayer. Further, if you wish to know who is the highest in society in terms of the spiritual station, then you should observe who is the last to exit the mosque, Contrary to this is the one who arrives at the end of prayer and as soon as the formal prayer has ended, he rushes to leave.

It is related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* criticised one of his companions for his haste in leaving the mosque after the final greeting of the prayer. He, therefore, made a point of calling him on one of these occasions, saying to him, ‘Are you aiming to abstain from our company?’ Now, is there anyone who would intentionally abstain from seeing Prophet Muhammad and sitting with him? Whereupon the man said, ‘No, Messenger of Allah, I have a wife at home who is waiting for this robe of mine in order to pray in it.’ So, Prophet Muhammad prayed for him, and the man left to go to his wife. When he got to her, she said to him, ‘You have delayed by such-and-such a number of glorifications.’ Thereupon, he told her, ‘I was stopped by the Messenger of Allah and such-and-such happened.’ Whereupon she told him, ‘Are you complaining about your Lord to Muhammad?’

Returning to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘We are not asking you to give Us provision; We provide for you...’ (*Ta Ha:* 132). Hence, is it the provision that is distracting you from the presence of your Lord? If this were the case, then He *the Almighty* says: ‘We are not asking you to give Us provision…’ (*Ta Ha:* 132). Regarding the one who is not able to work, it is Allah Who directs towards him a wealthy person to knock on his door and give to him. This is because a rich person’s faith stipulates his charity to the poor, but the faith of a poor person stipulates no condition regarding the wealthy.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is giving us an indication of the necessity of looking for poor people and knocking on their doors in order to give them their due right from the wealth of the rich. Hence, you should not wait until the poor humbly asks for his due right in the society of faith.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘We provide for you...’ (*Ta Ha:* 132), it means that He does not ask you to furnish Him with sustenance and then abandon you; rather, He does not ask anything of you and then provides for you. So, you should rest assured regarding this issue.

The verse concludes with Allah’s saying: ‘…and the rewards of the Hereafter belong to the devout.’ (*Ta Ha:* 132) This is because if the circumstances of life become straitened for you, you can take refuge in Allah *the Almighty*. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to do get up and pray when something distressed him. The critical development of matters comes when we ourselves are bereft of the causal factors bestowed by Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, when you are deprived of means and the situation gets straitened, there remains nothing for you to do but to have recourse to the Prime Causer *Glorified is He* a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘…and whoever is careful of (his duty to) Allah, He will make for him an outlet, and give him sustenance from whence he thinks not…’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3).

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوا۟ لَوْلَا يَأْتِينَا بِـَٔايَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦٓ ۚ أَوَلَمْ تَأْتِهِم بَيِّنَةُ مَا فِى ٱلصُّحُفِ ٱلْأُولَىٰ ﴿١٣٣﴾

The disbelievers say, ‘Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?’ Have they not been given clear proof confirming what was in the earlier scriptures? [133] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 133)

We have previously discussed the meaning of the Arabic word translated as ‘it were not for’ in Allah’s saying, ‘If it were not for a preordained Word…’ (*Yunus:* 19), which signifies the restraining of punishment due to the existence of the preordained Word. However, in Allah’s saying here, ‘Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?’ (*Ta Ha:* 133) The same Arabic word bears the implication of urging or requesting. The same usage is found in His saying: ‘And wherefore did you not say when you entered your garden, "It is as Allah has pleased …"’ (*al-Kahf:* 39).

It is as if the Quran does not impress or appeal to the disbelievers of Mecca, although they are a people of refined rhetoric, eloquence, and purity of speech. Indeed, the Quran puts them to shame with its eloquence and clarity of expression. So what miraculous sign do they want above and beyond this Quran? Yet, they say, ‘Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?’ (*Ta Ha:* 133) asking for a tangible miracle, like that of previous messengers, to serve as proof of Prophet Muhammad’s truthfulness in conveying the Message given to him from Allah *the Almighty*. In this same sense, He says: ‘and they say, "We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us). Or you should have a house of gold, or you should ascend into heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending until you bring down to us a book which we may read." Say: "Glory be to my Lord. Am I aught but a mortal apostle?"’ (*al-Isra’:* 90-93) Thus, it is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying, ‘I have no role in the miraculous signs of Allah *the Almighty* nor do I choose them, but here is the Quran in front of you providing you with reports of what happened with regard to previous people. Therefore, "… ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know." (*an-Nahl:* 43)

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself, and magnifies the name of his Lord and prays. Nay! You prefer the life of this world, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting. Most surely, this is in the earlier scriptures, the scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses).’ (*al-A‘la:* 14-19) In addition, He says: ‘Surely, We have revealed to you as We revealed to Nuh (Noah)…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163). For this reason, in the verse under study, He *the Almighty* then says: ‘Have they not been given clear proof confirming what was in the earlier scriptures?’ (*Ta Ha:* 133) Thus, the Quran came as a comprehensive and a guardian over previous Scriptures. It mentioned all the tangible miracles cited in these Books. However, did these disbelievers witness the miracle of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* curing the blind and lepers? Did they witness the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or the she-camel of Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*? They only came to realise these miracles when the Quran related them. Afterwards, these miracles became narrative reports of significant events, not witnessed by the eyes. This is because the tangible miracles happen at one time. If someone sees them, then he believes in them, but as for the one who does not see them, they are narrative reports. If the Quran had not narrated them, no one would have believed in them.

However, these people want a tangible miracle to accompany the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which is a universal Message for all time and every place. On the other hand, if his miracle had been of a sensory nature, then it would have been for those who witnessed it only. However, Allah *Glorified is He* willed that his miracle be a permanent one for the extent of time and space. Hence, to the one who believes in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* we say, ‘This is his permanent and everlasting miracle until the Last Hour.’

Therefore, the Quran is a miracle for all generations, and if the miraculous aspects of the Quran had run out during the first generation that witnessed its revelation, then the succeeding generations would have received it without its miraculous inimitability. However, Allah *the Exalted* willed that the miraculous inimitability of the Quran be a secret embodied in it. Every generation discovers its secrets to the extent of their careful reflection and study of it. In this way, the Message remains safeguarded through the miracle.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ أَنَّآ أَهْلَكْنَٰهُم بِعَذَابٍ مِّن قَبْلِهِۦ لَقَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَا لَوْلَآ أَرْسَلْتَ
إِلَيْنَا رَسُولًا فَنَتَّبِعَ ءَايَٰتِكَ مِن قَبْلِ أَن نَّذِلَّ وَنَخْزَىٰ ﴿١٣٤﴾

If We had destroyed them through punishment before this Messenger came, they would have said, 'Lord, if only You had sent us a messenger, we could have followed Your revelations before we suffered humiliation and disgrace!' [134] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 134)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying, 'I have refuted any excuse you might make. Certainly, if I had annihilated you during a break in the sequence of the prophets, you would have said, "Why did you not keep us alive until a messenger came to us? If a messenger had come to us, we would have believed in him before falling into ignominy and disgrace."' Thus, the meaning of the verse is that if Allah *the Almighty* had destroyed them by punishment before the revelation of the Quran, they would have said, 'Our Lord, if only you had sent a messenger to us, we would have believed in him and would have been rightly guided.' This is merely an empty statement which they might utter, for as Allah *Glorified is He* says about them: '…And if they were sent back, they would certainly go back to that which they are forbidden, and most surely, they are liars.' (*al-An'am:* 28) Indeed, it is merely a statement meant to save them from their dubious state.

In Allah's saying, '…before we suffered humiliation and disgrace!' (*Ta Ha:* 134) Humiliation refers to what befalls a living person due to what he has done, rendering him humble and submissive after having been high and haughty. Humiliation occurs above all through defeat, but being taken captive is even more humiliating than defeat since it is possible to be defeated and then you escape. More humiliating than either of these is being killed. Hence, humiliation occurs in this worldly life before those who witnessed it and who were contemporaneous to their being submissive after being proud and exalted. As for 'disgrace', it means to be afflicted by shame. This signifies the disappointed waning of the soul after its having been elevated. Related to this is the expression, 'You are disappointed' which means you were anticipating something, but you found its opposite.

Relevant to this usage is Allah's saying: 'Our Lord! And grant us what You have promised us by Your messengers and disgrace us not on the Day of Resurrection…' (*Al-'Imran:* 194). So, while humiliation is hastened for them in this world, disgrace is delayed until the Hereafter. In this way, it will be their degrading shame for all to see—as one says, 'A humiliating disgrace with sounding bells'—since their disgrace will be witnesses by everyone attendant at the Day of Judgment.

This word translated in this verse as 'disgrace' carries with it memories of an amusing situation during the days when we were young, memorising the Quran under the tutelage of his eminence Sheikh Hasan Zaghlul *upon whom be Allah's Mercy*. He was a blind man, and we used to take advantage of his debilitated condition, eluding him and escaping from correcting our recitation of the part of the Quran which we were memorising. Now, the one who attempts to memorise it on his own just from the printed copy of the Quran is susceptible to error. This is what actually happened in the case of a colleague of ours whose name was Sheikh Mohammed Hasan 'Abd Al-Bari. It happened that the principal of the school appeared unexpectedly, and he wanted to hear us recite. Sheikh 'Abd Al-Bari had not corrected his recitation of the part from which he was going to recite, and so he recited: 'Our Lord. surely whomsoever You make enter the fire, him You has indeed brought to disgrace…' (*Al-'Imran:* 192). However, instead of pronouncing the verb of the final phrase as *Akhzata,* he recited it as *Akhrayta*. At this the Sheikh *may Allah be Merciful to him* laughed for a long time, and then said, 'O, my son, the meaning is correct, but the authoritative narration is not like that.'

Afterwards, we used to make use of it as a way of embarrassing Sheikh 'Abd Al-Bari, so whoever wanted to make him angry would say. 'Surely, whomsoever You make enter the fire…', and then be silent! However, Allah *the Most High* decreed that each one of us would face a similar situation which could be held against him. In my case, I made a mistake when I recited, before correcting my recitation, from the beginning of chapter *ash-Shu'ara'* which is made up of the five free-standing letters written in two blocks: *Ha–Him* followed by *'Ayn – Sin - Qaf*. I had previously come to know how to pronounce *Ha - Mim*, but I had never come across *'Ayn - Sin - Qaf*, and so I recited, '*Ha - Mim- 'Asaqa'* pronouncing the second block of the discrete letters as a conjoined word. Thereafter, whenever I said, 'Surely whomsoever You make enter the fire…' to Sheikh 'Abd Al-Bari, he would reply, '*Ha – Mim*'.

Hence, we said, 'Exalted be Allah';

Whoever finds fault one day in something
He will not die until he finds it [in himself].

In summary, the disbelievers' statement, 'Lord, if only You had sent us a messenger, we could have followed Your revelations before we suffered humiliation and disgrace!' (*Ta Ha:* 134) It is a disputation on their part. It is as if they said, 'If You had sent a messenger to us, we would have followed him before being humiliated in this worldly life by defeat, capture or death, and being disgraced in the Hereafter openly for all to see.'

قُلۡ كُلّٞ مُّتَرَبِّصٞ فَتَرَبَّصُواْۖ فَسَتَعۡلَمُونَ مَنۡ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلصِّرَٰطِ ٱلسَّوِيِّ وَمَنِ ٱهۡتَدَىٰ ١٣٥

Say [O, Prophet]: 'We are all waiting, so you carry on waiting: you will come to learn who has followed the even path, and been rightly guided' [135] (The Quran, *Ta Ha:* 135)

In the first section of this verse, the word 'waiting', which occurred two times, means to be readied and poised for something to happen to someone else. You say, 'So-and-so is lying in wait for me.' In other words, he is carefully observing me and trailing me, anticipating some lapse or error on my part. Hence, Allah's saying, 'Say '[O, Prophet]: "We are all waiting, so you carry on waiting..."' (*Ta Ha:* 135) signifies that each one of the believers and the disbelievers is expectantly watching the other since they are adversaries; each one is anticipating a slip on the part of the other and intently observing to see what will happen to him.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* illustrates the orientations of this expectant waiting on the part of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and on the part of his enemies: 'Say: Do you await for us but one of two most excellent things?' (*at-Tawba:* 52)

It is as if the believers were saying to the disbelievers, 'What are you waiting for us except due to one of two most excellent things: either that we die as martyrs fighting you or that we are victorious over you, causing you to be subjected? Then, whichever anticipated thing happens will be honour for us, either victory or martyrdom, for both of them are most excellent. We also observe you in anticipation that Allah *the Exalted* will afflict you with punishment from Himself or at our hands, for both of them are vile. Now, as long as the situation is as such, then wait in anticipation as you please, and we will observe you expectantly as we wish, for our watching in anticipation over you brings us joy, while your expectant observing of us causes you pain and grieves you.'

Allah's saying 'Say:…' (*Ta Ha:* 135) in this verse means that the following statement, 'We are all waiting,' (*Ta Ha:* 135) is not on the part of Prophet Muhammad, for he does not hold sway over the universe and is not aware of the unseen. It is therefore the Statement of Allah *the Almighty* Who told him, 'Say, O, Muhammad: 'We are all waiting, so you carry on waiting...' (*Ta Ha:* 135).

Hence, it was said on the part of the One Who has control over everything, for nothing evades His Will. However, perhaps if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said it on his part to them, they would say, 'These are but the words of a man who controls nothing of events.' Therefore, you should comprehend it not according to the criteria of human speech but according to the criteria of the One Who holds sway over all human affairs.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…you will come to learn who has followed the even path and been rightly guided.' (*Ta Ha:* 135) When will this occur? At the time the Last Hour arises when the parting of ways takes place, either to Paradise or to Hellfire. At that moment, disbelievers will know who has followed the straight Path: we, the believers, or they. However, that knowledge will not benefit or be of any avail for disbelievers, for it has come too late. The time of reckoning has come, so the time of doing good deeds and redressing mistakes is up. Surely, it is knowledge which cannot lead to good deeds to save you, for the time of deeds has come to an end. In such a way, it will be knowledge which increases their distress, hurting rather than benefitting.

Thus, the word 'path' refers to is the straight, even road, while the word 'even' refers to something straight and level, with neither curvature nor protuberance.

The verse ends with Allah's saying: 'and been rightly guided.' (*Ta Ha:* 135) This is because the even path might exist, but there exists no one to follow it. Hence, the intended meaning is that they will come to know the even path and the one who is guided to it and follows it.

Now, perhaps someone might think that this question of waiting in expectant anticipation may take too long, so Allah *Glorified is He* puts an end to this thought with His saying at the beginning of the next chapter of *al-Anbiya'* as follows: 'There has drawn near to the people their reckoning…' (*al-Anbiya':* 1).

In this manner, the two chapters blend in harmony, and the meaning between the verses forms a continuous chain.

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EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد [15]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (15)

the chapter of

al-Anbiya'

In the Name of God(1), the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Anbiya*(2)*,* Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱقۡتَرَبَ لِلنَّاسِ حِسَابُهُمۡ وَهُمۡ فِي غَفۡلَةٖ مُّعۡرِضُونَ ١

Ever closer to people draws their reckoning, while they turn away, heedless [1] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 1)

'Drawing near' refers to either time or place. If it is a matter of distances, we say, 'There has drawn near to the people their reckoning,' that is, its place. If it is a matter of duration, we say, 'There has drawn near to the people their reckoning', that is, its time. Thus, 'near' means the ever close impending occurrence of an event in the manner of time or of place.

When Allah *Glorified is He* declares in the past tense, 'There has drawn near to the people...' (*al-Anbiya':* 1), it indicates that that thing is necessary and is inevitably going to happen. When human beings speak about an approaching thing, they say 'it draws near,' not 'it drew nearer' because no one says 'it drew' in this manner of affirmation, except Allah *the Almighty* Who controls all events and has Power over them. Human beings, on the other hand, do not control events and are not able to command something over which they do not have control after making this statement.

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) The chapter of *al-Anbiya'* is number 21 in the order of the Quranic chapters. It was revealed in Mecca according to all of the scholars, and it contains 112 verses. It was revealed after the chapter of *Ibrahim* and before the chapter of *al-Mu'minun*. The chapter of *al-Anbiya'* is number 72 in the order of the revelation of the Quran. See *As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan Fi 'Ulum Al-Quran,* 27/1.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah's commandment has come; therefore do not desire to hasten it….' (*an-Nahl:* 1) The verb 'has come' indicates that the action has come to pass before He makes this statement. However, it will happen in the future, as He says: '…therefore do not desire to hasten it…' (*an-Nahl:* 1). Actually, you are only told, 'Do not hasten the advent of something' if the event will happen afterwards. How, then, does Allah *the Most High* combine the past, '…has come…' (*an-Nahl:* 1), and the future, '…therefore do not desire to hasten it…'? (*an-Nahl:* 1) Scholars said, 'You are forbidden to command the proceeding of a future thing because you do not even have control over your own self, nor do you control the circumstances of the future, a point which is clear in His saying: 'And do not say of anything, "Surely, I will do it tomorrow" without saying, "if Allah wills"...' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

Thus, you must complement your statement with saying, 'If Allah wills', since your saying, 'I will do that tomorrow' is a matter having different components: the subject of the action, which is you; the object of the action, the time, which is tomorrow; the cause which calls you to do this act; and the power which enables you to do it.

Now, you do not have control over any aspect of these components. Perhaps tomorrow will come, and one of these components will have changed and will have intervened between you and what you want. Therefore, it is necessary to free yourself from the probability of lying by saying 'If Allah wills'. In this way, you return the affair to the All-Powerful Who controls all of these components. It is as though your Lord instructs you: 'Do not be a liar.'

Therefore, we find that language accords with the power of the speaker and fixes for him suitable tenses to use. So, if you knew about the occurrence of an action, you would say in the past tense, 'So-and-so came', as the matter finished. However, if you knew that he was betaking himself to come or getting ready to do so, you would say, ‘So-and-so is coming’, or in other words, soon; or ‘He is going to come’, or in other words, after that.

This is what is in conformity with the power of human beings. On the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* controls the time of the events and their orientations. Everything is subject to His cosmic Command, so when He says for a future thing, ‘[it] has come...’ (*an-Nahl:* 1) or ‘There has drawn near to the people...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1), believe it to be the truth because nothing deviates from His Command. It is He Alone Who has His Commands obeyed with the word ‘Be.’ If He says it, then the matter is finished.

Therefore, He says in the verse under study, ‘There has drawn near to the people their reckoning...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1) in the form of the past tense, and not ‘draws near’ or ‘will draw nearer’ because the speaker is Allah *the Almighty.*

The past tense of the verb ‘to draw closer’ also occurs in His saying, ‘The hour drew nigh and the moon did rend asunder.’ (*al-Qamar:* 1) And in His saying: ‘Nay! Obey him not and fall in prostration and draw nigh (to Allah).’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 19)

As for Allah’s saying, ‘... reckoning...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1), it is a word to which many meanings are applied, for it means that you count something by numbers, adding, subtracting, or multiplying, and then you direct the result for or against you. If it is for you, you are a creditor, and if it is against you, you are a debtor. Or you connect the causative factors with their causes.

There are things which come without reckoning, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely, Allah gives to whom He pleases without measure.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 37) However, you are not able to control this case, and Allah *the Exalted* is not asked, ‘Give me excess or deficiency.’

As for the reckoning in Allah’s saying: ‘There has drawn near to the people their reckoning...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1), it demands the existence of a someone to reckon, namely Allah *the Almighty,* the ones who experience reckoning namely mankind and that by which they are reckoned are the acts and the events which they brought forth in their world. The latter is divided into two categories: the deeds before they were charged with observing the prescribed obligations and deeds they undertook after they were charged with that. Allah *the Most High* does not hold us responsible for that which was before the age of maturity, which marks the beginning of bearing obligations. Rather, He leaves us being merry, revelling in His Blessings, without being asked about anything. However, after maturity, He obligated us to observe things which bring about good for us and enjoined us to follow the Way of Guidance which ensures our happiness by obeying injunctions and refraining from prohibitions. This entails that we are held responsible for that which we did or did not do.

Therefore, the affair of reckoning is not haphazard as if one group is consigned to the paradise and another group to the Fire. As for His saying in the Qudsi Hadith, ‘These are in paradise and I do not care, and these are in the Fire and I do not care’,(1) it only refers to His Knowledge of what will happen to them at the time of reckoning, for He knows what they accomplished and what they neglected.

You should not forget that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who judges on the Day of Judgment. If the reckoning is for good, He will multiply the good deeds and repay you for that with favour and excess of such as He wills. If the reckoning is for bad, it will be recompensed with a punishment equal to it, without excess of such, as He says: ‘Requital corresponding.’ (*an-Naba’:* 26)

Thus, the Reckoner is Allah *the Almighty* Who does not profit from what He imposes upon His creation. It is a manifestation of His Mercy and Blessings towards us that He warned us against the causes of perdition; He did not seize us unaware, nor did He come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly with the reckoning. Rather, He elucidated for us the obligations, made clearto us that which is allowed and that which is forbidden and informed us about the Day of Reckoning so that we prepare ourselves for it and not follow our desires in the proceedings of life. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So, he who has done an atom’s weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom’s weight of evil shall see it.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8)

It is out of His Mercy towards His servants that He made them this promise and taught them this measure while they are still in this worldly life, capable of correcting mistakes and renewing repentance and righteous conduct. It is out of His Mercy towards us that He exhorts us with this exhortation and repeats it to us day and night.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad and 'Abdullah Ibn Ahmad in his additions to the Musnad of his father on the authority of Abu Ad-Darda’ Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 441/6.*

Therefore, our Lord did not take us by surprise, and the Resurrection did not come upon us suddenly with its terror. Thus, you should know that ‘There has drawn near to the people their reckoning...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1). As long as the affair is thus, it is up to the human being to assess the extent of the drawing close and when he is going to be taken to the Day of Reckoning. Evidently, you should not think that your life span is like that of the worldly life since Allah *the Almighty* has created it. Rather, your life span and your worldly life correspond to your stay within it, and it is a hypothetical, uncertain stay. This is due to the fact that there exists in creation ones who were allowed to live for a long time and ones who died in their mothers’ wombs. Therefore, do not delay you repentance, for you do not know whether the appointed time grants you respite until you repent or descends swiftly upon you so that you are seized in your sin.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘There has drawn near to the people their reckoning...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1) although the Hour is still far away, and between us and the Resurrection is that which no one knows except Allah *the Almighty*. How is that the case? Scholars said that this is because the Reckoning is according to the deeds which have a fixed time during one’s life; after one’s death, his deeds stop. At that point, the time of his reckoning draws near because he is not aware of the period he spends in the grave. For him, it is as if it was a single hour in a day.

If you say, ‘Amongst mankind is he who lives for one hundred years or one hundred and fifty years’, we reply, ‘This thing is hypothetical. We are not sure about it. Man is liable to die at any moment, whether for one reason or another or without any reason at all.’

We notice in His saying, ‘There has drawn near to the people their reckoning...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1) that He says ‘to the people’ although the reckoning could be for them or against them. Does the phrase ‘to the people’ imply that the Reckoning is for their benefit? This is unlikely since He says afterwards: ‘…while they turn away, heedless.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1) Thus, the Reckoning is not for their benefit; rather, it is against them. Then, how is it possible in a context such as this that He says, ‘There has drawn near to the people their reckoning...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1) while the affair is against disbelievers?! One would suppose that He would say, ‘Closer drew over the people their reckoning.’

We say, ‘That is the case if you take the particle "to" as referring to the Reckoning, but here it is referring to the drawing near, not for the Reckoning.’ In other words, it drew near to people. As for the Reckoning, it is either for them or against them, but this is a different matter.’

In His saying, ‘…while they turn away, heedless…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1), the meaning of heedlessness is the disregarding of something which should not be disregarded; rather, it should be remembered and taken into account. Heedlessness is not similar to forgetfulness since heedlessness disregards a matter which one must not disregard and which cannot be ignored, whereas forgetfulness is unintentional.

The heedlessness of the people in this case is about the core of the religion and its summit which is faith in Divinity. If you believe in Allah’s Divinity, then heedlessness is pertinent to the rulings of the religion, whose violation entails committing sins. The discourse in this respect is about disbelievers as indicated by His saying afterwards: ‘Whenever any fresh revelation comes to them from their Lord…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 2). Similar to heedlessness of the Supreme Lord is heedlessness of His Rulings, though there is a distinction between the former heedlessness and the latter.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his companions about this heedlessness as narrated by Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman *Allah be pleased with him* who said, ‘The Messenger of Allah related to us two Hadiths, one of which I have seen (happening) while I am waiting for the other. He narrated that honesty was preserved in the roots of the hearts of men (in the beginning) (Honesty in this Hadith refers to true faith in Allah. This means that faith descends and comes to dwell in the heart and we utter the testimony of faith), and then they learnt it (honesty) from the Quran, and then they learnt it from the (Prophet's) *Sunna*. He also told us about its disappearance by saying, "A man will go to sleep whereupon honesty will be taken away from his heart" which means that he becomes heedless and only its trace will remain, resembling the traces of fire (like a cigarette, for example, when it falls on the skin, burns it and alters its colour). He then will sleep whereupon the remainder of the honesty will also be taken away (from his heart), and its trace will resemble a blister. (Which means from an ember of fire that is raised over the surface of skin, and in fact this blister does not contain anything or it becomes swollen). So there will come a day when people will deal in business with each other, but there will hardly be any trustworthy persons amongst them. Then it will be said that in such-and-such a tribe there is so-and-so who is honest.’ This is due to the rarity of honesty. Then the narrator added, ‘ There came upon me a time when I did not mind dealing with anyone of you, for if he were a Muslim, his religion would prevent him from cheating, [In other words, if he acted dishonestly toward me in anything or an error happened (in) what concerns the sale] and if he were a Christian, his Muslim ruler would prevent him from cheating [In other words, the men charged with supervision of the markets (and they are the people of reckoning), for if they see deception, they stop it and return the property to its rightful owner.], but today I cannot deal except with so-and-so and so-and-so.’(1) Now, if this was the case in their time, what about our time?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he said, ‘People are like a hundred camels. You can hardly find one worth riding amongst them.’(2) What this means is that despite their great number, you do not find amongst them a camel that will bear you and your luggage.

In another Hadith, he said, ‘Temptations will be presented to men's hearts as a reed mat is woven stick by stick’,(3) that is, as the mat is woven, reed after reed, until it is complete, and then comes to take possession of the heart.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7086; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 143.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him. In his commentary, Ibn Hajr says, ‘The meaning is: you do not find among a hundred camels one riding camel suitable for riding because the one which is suitable for riding should be smooth and readily obedient. Likewise, you do not find one among a hundred men who is suitable for companionship, who supports his friend and is easy-going at his side.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6498; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2547; Ibn Hajr, Fath Al-Bari, 335/11*

(3) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. Its conclusion is as follows: ‘Whatsoever a heart becomes* =

So, these people are heedless of both the summit of religion and Divinity, not of the religious obligations because they are not believers in the Lawgiver *Glorified is He*.

Allah’s saying, ‘…while they turn away...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1) indicates that they are pursuing this act with stubbornness.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَا يَأۡتِيهِم مِّن ذِكۡرٖ مِّن رَّبِّهِم مُّحۡدَثٍ إِلَّا ٱسۡتَمَعُوهُ وَهُمۡ يَلۡعَبُونَ ٢

Whenever any fresh revelation comes to them
from their Lord, they listen to it playfully [2]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 2)

This means that when they hear any new reminder from the Quran for the first time, ‘…they listen to it playfully’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 2) not paying any attention or giving any concern to it. In fact, they do this intentionally, urging and prodding one another to do so, a point which is clear in Allah’s saying about them: ‘And those who disbelieve say, "Do not listen to this Quran and make noise therein, perhaps you may overcome."’ (*Fussilat:* 26)

They are afraid that if they listen to the Quran they will be influenced by it and start to believe in it. Therefore, they do not listen to it but make noise, in order that no one may hear it in calm and repose and thus believe in it. This means that this activity is to their advantage because they are not able to reply to the arguments of the Quran, nor to stand firm in the face of its inimitability, eloquence and influence upon souls. In fact, they can do nothing except to divert mankind from listening to it and jumble it to the point that no one is able to hear it. By so doing, it does not penetrate their hearts in order that faith may enter therein.

Playing means that you occupy yourself with a purposeless activity, just as a young child takes his brother’s notebook and scribbles in it with a pen, without any method or goal.

= *filled with makes a black mark on it, and whatsoever a heart renounces makes a white mark on it.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/368, 405; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 144.*

There is also diversion, which is an action intended toward a goal, but a goal which you have set for yourself or which someone else who wants to corrupt you by means of it has set for you. Therefore, it is an intentional activity, and it has a goal; it is not disinterested scribbling as one who occupies himself, for example, with sketching some pictures for amusement or with solving a crossword puzzle, for these are activities from which one derives no benefit.

As for the useful activity with which a person should occupy himself, it is that which is set for you by someone superior to you and who is wise and loving towards you. You do not find these specifications except in the Allah *the Almighty*; therefore, everything which diverts you from that which He sets for you is diversion because it distracts you from that which is more important.

Therefore He says: 'The life of this world is only idle sport and play…' (*Muhammad:* 36). So, playful amusement is for the phase of childhood when we tell our children to play, whereas diversion is nothing other than occupying yourself with an intentional activity that has a goal, but it diverts you from a higher goal set for you by the Wise, the All-Powerful and *the Most High* Who loves you.

Therefore, the ultimate conclusion of diversion and playful amusement is that they play with the hearing of the Quran. They even did not hear the Quran as a diversion which has a goal; rather, they heard is as playful amusement having no goal and without any benefit since its goal is detrimental to them.

Even if playful amusement is permitted in the period before maturity, it is, nonetheless, necessary that people's hearts are brought up in a way, ensuring that they turn towards Allah *the Almighty* the Creator, the Sustainer in this early period of their life. Hence, this is a father's duty, for when he brings food or drinks for his younger child; he should say in front of him, 'Our Lord provides us with this.' This is to be done in all the affairs of life; he returns the affairs to Allah *the Exalted* and instructs the young child to say, 'In the Name of Allah' and to say, 'All praise belongs to Allah.'

In this manner, a child's emotions are cultivated according to the certainty of Allah *the Almighty* the All-Powerful. If a child does not see Him, he nonetheless sees His Signs and Blessings, and he sees his father who supports him and brings everything for him. A father does not claim the glory for himself; rather, he ascribes everything to Allah *the Almighty*.

His father, who is the greatest example for him, removes these matters from him and ascribes them to Allah *the Exalted* so that the consciousness of the child is brought up in line with faith. However, if a child is not brought up in this way, diversion and playful amusement will seep stealthily into his soul.

We have already said, ‘It is inevitable that every action arises from some emotion, and no action arises without an emotion except the action of a madman. People’s hearts are those which direct their limbs, and if their hearts were not heedless, their limbs would not play.’

For that reason, when ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* saw a man playing with his beard while praying—as many do—he said, ‘If the heart of this one were humble in his prayer, his limbs would be humble as well.'(1) This is because the movement of the limbs indicates preoccupation of the heart. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

لَاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْۗ وَأَسَرُّواْ ٱلنَّجۡوَى ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ هَلۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا بَشَرٞ
مِّثۡلُكُمۡۖ أَفَتَأۡتُونَ ٱلسِّحۡرَ وَأَنتُمۡ تُبۡصِرُونَ ٣

With frivolous hearts. The evildoers conferred in secret: ‘Is this man anything but a mortal like your- selves? Are you going to fall under his spell with your eyes wide open?’ [3]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 3)

If it were only the case that each of them did that action by himself, but instead they deliberated together against Allah *Glorified is He* to distort His Message by means of play and diversion. He *the Most High* says: ‘The evildoers conferred in secret' (*al-Anbiya’:* 3), that is, they whisper to each other concerning sinful doings and keep that a secret. Secret conversation is to lower the voice as is mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘nowhere is there a secret counsel between three persons, but He is the fourth of them, nor (between) five, but He is the sixth of them…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 7).

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(1) In his book, Imam *Al-Ghazali* mentions this as a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Al-‘Iraqi says, ‘At-Tirmidhi Al-Hakim narrated it in *An-Nawadir* on the authority of Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him*. It has a weak chain of narrators because it is from the saying of Sa‘id ibn Al-Musayyib narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba in *Al-Musannaf* and there is a man whom he did not name. See *Al-Ghazali*, *Ihya’ ‘Ulum Ad-Din*, 151/1.

So, do not think that you are hidden from the sight of Allah, or that you can hide anything from Him *Glorified is He*. If we carefully reflect upon this aforementioned verse of the chapter *of al-Mujadala,* we will notice that it did not mention the conversation that takes place between two persons; rather, it began with highlighting that conversation that takes place among three persons. Why is this? This is because ‘secret conversation’ usually takes place amongst three persons when two of them secretly converse with each other to the exclusion of the third.

Also, we should take into account that this verse in question does not highlight the sequential order of numbers respectively; in other words, it does not say, for example, ‘and not four except that He is the fifth of them’ because this order of numbers is not the prime concern of this verse.

The same prohibition of ‘secret conversation’ is also mentioned in the following saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Have you not seen those who are forbidden secret counsels, then they return to what they are forbidden, and they hold secret counsels for sin and revolt and disobedience to the Messenger…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 8). This verse clearly indicates that as long as they secretly converse with each other, it goes without saying that their speech is against sound human nature, for if what they said were truthful, they would speak it openly. We can thus conclude that their ‘secret conversation’ is a conclusive proof that they suffer (spiritual) defects in their minds, hearts, etc.

As for His saying concerning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O you who have attained to faith! Whenever you [intend to] consult the Messenger, offer up something in charity on the occasion of your consultation...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 12), this raises a good question, which is ‘Did the companions use to converse with Prophet Muhammad secretly?’ The answer is ‘No’, yet He instructed the companions how to politely speak with him *peace and blessings be upon him*; this fact is clear in His saying: ‘Do not hold the Prophet's calling (you) amongst you to be like your calling one to the other…' (*an-Nur:* 63). So, if this is the case, what is the true meaning to be deduced from the aforementioned verse of *al-Mujadala*? We understand from this verse that we are not allowed to raise our voices, as we do with one another, in the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; that is, we must revere and venerate him *peace and blessings be upon him* while in conversation with him.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: '…The evildoers conferred in secret…' (*al-Anbiya':* 3). Thus, arises the following grammatical question, which is 'Is the relative pronoun *Al-Ladhin* (who) in the original Arabic verse the subject of the verb *Asarru* (conferred in secret)? Before answering this question, we should consult the Arabic grammar, which clearly states that if a verb comes before a subject, the latter must be in the singular form. Arabs say, '*Akala Al-Qawmu*' ('The people ate …') with a singular subject to come after the verb. If we apply this grammatical maxim on the verse in question, we will fully realise that the Arabic particle known as *Waw Al-Jama'a* (a letter that is attached to the end of verbs to indicate that the subject is plural) is the subject of this verb in question and not the relative pronoun. It is as though a questioner asked, 'Who are those who conferred secretly?' So, the answer will be as follows: 'The evildoers are the ones who do so.' As for the Arabic word *Zhalamu* (they committed evildoing), it includes all kinds of injustice. First of all, people commit injustice against themselves by committing injustice against Allah *the Almighty* Himself. This actually takes place when they ascribe partners to Him in worship, a point which is proven by His saying: '…most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.' (*Luqman:* 13)

Second, people may commit injustice and in equity against one another, so why does Allah *the Exalted* mention the word *Zhulm* in its general sense? The answer is that as long as man has committed injustice and equity against Allah *the Almighty* he will not hesitate to commit wrong against other people. Back to the verse being examined, we have the following questions, which are 'What is the secret conversation which those people concealed? Who informed Prophet Muhammad about it?'

As for the first part of the question, the answer is stated clearly in the following verse: '…And they say to themselves, "Why does Allah not chastise us for what we are saying?"...' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

Let us now move to the second part of the question which is ‘Who informed Prophet Muhammad about it?’ It goes without saying that Allah *the Almighty* the Lord of Prophet Muhammad, is the One Who informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* of it, which is why these deniers of the Truth should have taken into account that there is nothing in the universe that could be concealed from Him. In other words, they should have occupied their minds with the undeniable fact that Allah *the Most High* knows fully all the secrets of the universe. As a matter of fact, if they had done so, they might have been turned into believers instead of being polytheists.

In this verse under study, Allah *the Almighty* informs us of some of their secret conversation, affirming that they wondered about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘Is this man anything but a mortal like yourselves?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 3) This clearly indicates that they rejected him *peace and blessings be upon him* on the grounds that he was a mere mortal and not an angel. Allah *Glorified is He* then concludes the verse with their question: ‘Are you going to fall under his spell with your eyes wide open?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 3) This question on their part clearly tells that they have viewed the Quran as a kind of spell, for they claimed that it, i.e. the Quran, sparked off disputes between fathers and their sons and between brothers one another, which is the result of nothing but sorcery.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

قَالَ رَبِّى يَعۡلَمُ ٱلۡقَوۡلَ فِى ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٤

He said, ‘My Lord knows everything that is said in the heavens and the earth: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing’[4] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 4)

It is as though a questioner said, ‘from where did you get all of this information, O, Prophet Muhammad, given that your people had concealed it?’ So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* answered, ‘My Lord knows everything that is said in the heavens and the earth…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 4). This means that there is nothing in the universe that could be concealed from His Sight, a fact which is conclusively proven by His saying at the end of the verse, '…He is All Hearing, All Knowing' (*al-Anbiya': 4*) meaning that He *the Almighty* hears all what is said, openly or secretly, and that He knows fully well all that is done in the universe.

Allah *Glorified is He* then sheds light on another part of their secret conversation by saying:

بَلْ قَالُوٓا۟ أَضْغَٰثُ أَحْلَٰمٍۭ بَلِ ٱفْتَرَىٰهُ بَلْ هُوَ شَاعِرٌ
فَلْيَأْتِنَا بِـَٔايَةٍ كَمَآ أُرْسِلَ ٱلْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

Some say, 'Muddled dreams'; others, 'He made it up';
yet others, 'He is just a poet, let him show us a sign as
previous messengers did' [5] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 5)

The use of the Arabic particle *Bal* (Nay) in this verse plainly indicates that the deniers of the Truth persisted on their rejection; thus, they added to their speech about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what Allah mentions in His saying: 'Muddled dreams'. As for the Arabic word *Adghath* it is the plural of *dhigth* which refers to a bunch of grass of different forms, a meaning which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* about Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him*: 'And take in your hand a bunch [of grass] and strike with it and do not break your oath.' (*Sad:* 44)

This word in question, i.e. *Adghath,* has also been mentioned in the chapter *of Yusuf* when Allah *the Almighty* talks about the vision of the ruler of Egypt, 'They said, "Confused dreams, and we do not know the interpretation of dreams."' (*Yusuf:* 44)

As for His saying, 'Others say, "He made it up" (*al-Anbiya':* 5), it clearly points out that these deniers of the Truth had persisted in their rejection; thus, they accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of telling a lie. They yet did not stop at this limit, but they accused him, of composing poetry, a point which is deduced from His saying" '…Yet others say, "He is just a poet…."' (*al-Anbiya':* 5). It is thus clear that they did not reach a consensus on one accusation against him *peace and blessings be upon him* a point which clearly indicates their utter confusion, for they, first of all, denied that he was not a human being, then they accused him of practising sorcery; afterwards, they accused him of being an inventor and finally of being a poet.

We have previously refuted all of these accusations, concluding that they were big liars who told lies about him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *the Exalted* then concludes the verse with His saying: ‘…let him show us a sign as previous messengers did.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 5) This part of the verse indicates that they were not convinced with the Quran as a Divinely revealed sign, which is why they asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring them another sign as previous messengers and prophets did. Yet, the Quran itself refutes their allegation, affirming that if they were to believe when the sign they asked for came to them, Allah would have made it for them, but all the previous experiences of prophets and messengers with their people clearly indicate that they would never believe, no matter how many signs were shown to them, which is why they must be chastised in the Hereafter for their rejection and stubbornness.

Concerning the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has promised that He would not chastise the disbelievers in this worldly life as long as Prophet Muhammad is still alive amongst them, He did not make for them the signs they wanted. This is due to the fact that Allah *the Exalted* never breaks His Promise; in other words, if He had allowed His Messenger to perform them a miracle, and they did not believe after that, punishment would have certainly afflicted them. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

مَآ ءَامَنَتۡ قَبۡلَهُم مِّن قَرۡيَةٍ أَهۡلَكۡنَٰهَآۖ أَفَهُمۡ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

But of the communities We destroyed before them not
a single one believed. Will these now believe? [6]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 6)

This verse refers to how the previous nations acted with their messengers and prophets and how they opposed and rejected the Divine Messages sent down to them. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the disbelievers from amongst his people or nation would follow in the footsteps of previous disbelievers as to stubbornness and rejection and that had He shown them a sign, they would not have believed, a point which is supported by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-An'am:* '... And if they were brought back [to life], they would return to the very thing which was forbidden to them, for, behold, they are indeed liars!' (*al-An'am:* 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُّوحِىٓ إِلَيْهِمْ ۖ فَسْـَٔلُوٓا۟
أَهْلَ ٱلذِّكْرِ إِن كُنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧﴾

And even before your time [Prophet], all the messengers We sent were only men We inspired — if you [disbelievers] do not know, ask people who know the Scripture [7]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 7)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* replies to their objection to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* being a human being and their demand that he should be an angel, a demand which they frequently asked for as shown in the Quran; for example, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they say: '... Shall mere mortal men be our guides?...' (*at-Taghabun:* 6)

This aforementioned verse of the chapter of *at-Taghabun* tells us about what these disbelievers said; they wondered how they could be guided by these mortal messengers and prophets who were, as they thought, like them and are not better than they are! Thus, we should ask them the following: 'Does a messenger guide you by means of his humanity, or, instead, by something given to him from above? Is he the one who invented the Divine Way of Guidance for you?!'

As a matter of fact, Prophet Muhammad is not a social reformer, but a bearer and a conveyer of the Divine Message of Allah Lord of all the worlds. In this regard, it is of great importance, O, disbelievers, to know that all the messengers and prophets we sent before Prophet Muhammad were mortal; this is the meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And even before your time [O, Prophet], all the messengers We sent were only men We inspired…' (*al-Anbiya':* 7). In addition, If We had sent an angel to them; We would have sent you an angel as a messenger. Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…if you [O, disbelievers] do not know, ask people who know the Scripture.' (*al-Anbiya':* 7) In this part of the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* directs the disbelievers to ask the Jews and the Christians about the nature of the messengers and prophets sent to them; that is, were they men or angels?

The impossibility of sending an angel as a messenger is viewed in the light of the fact that a messenger or prophet serves as a model example for his people and a conveyer of the Divine Way of Guidance which he must first abide by before asking others to apply it. In other words, he should not ask people to do something he himself does not do. Therefore, we should take into account that a fundamental condition of people to follow a 'model example' is that the latter must be a human being like themselves.

Let us illustrate this point by giving the following example; if you saw a lion in the jungle, leaping, roaming and killing, would you think, 'Someday I will be a lion'? Will you take the lion as a model example for you? The answer is an emphatic 'No' because your model example must be a human being like yourself. Yet, the case is totally different if you take a courageous horseman as your model example, for he, like yourself, belongs to the human race.

As such, it is clear that if Allah *the Almighty* had sent an angel as a prophet or a messenger, He would have made him a man. Thus, we should take into consideration the fact that angels do not disobey Allah in what He commands them to do; rather, they do as they are commanded. As for us, the human being, we err and commit sins.

Referring to the disbelievers' objection to the humanity of messengers and prophets, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Yet, whenever [Allah's] Guidance came to them [through a prophet,] nothing has ever kept people from believing [in him] save this their objection: "Would Allah have sent a [mere] mortal man as His Messenger?" Say: "If angels were walking about on earth as their natural abode, We would indeed have sent down unto them an angel out of heaven as Our Messenger."' (*al-Isra':* 94-95)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* refutes their claim by saying: 'And [even] if We had appointed an angel as Our Message-bearer, We would certainly have made him [appear as] a man ....' (*al-An'am:* 9)

Therefore, it is not possible that there be a messenger for human beings who is not himself a human being. If we examine the case of Prophet Muhammad in the light of this plain fact, we will reach the conclusion that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is a human being who is inspired by Allah *the Almighty*.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…if you [O, disbelievers] do not know, ask people who know the Scripture' (*al-Anbiya':* 7), it means that if you, O, disbelievers, are in doubt as to this statement, then ask the people of the Book from amongst the Jews and Christians to whom messengers and prophets were sent before you.(1)

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…if you do not know…' (*al-Anbiya':* 7) to indicate that the disbelievers have superficial knowledge concerning this topic.

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَٰهُمْ جَسَدًا لَّا يَأْكُلُونَ ٱلطَّعَامَ وَمَا كَانُوا۟ خَٰلِدِينَ ﴿٨﴾

We did not give them bodies that ate no food, nor were they immortal [8] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 8)

The pronoun 'them' in the saying of Allah, 'We did not give them…' (*al-Anbiya':* 8) refers to the messengers. As for the Arabic word *Jasadan* (body), it literally refers to something which is moulded and solid, and which does not eat, drink, or move. On the contrary, messengers and prophets are human beings, who, like all other humans, eat, drink and walk in the market streets; in other words, they normally act as mere humans, which is why He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying: '…nor were they immortal.' (*al-Anbiya':* 8) This is because immortality is not of the characteristics of mankind, a point which is fully realised by disbelievers. As a matter of fact, this point of the immortality of mankind is also stressed in the following saying of Allah: 'Surely, you shall die and they (too) shall surely die.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 30)

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(1) *This is the opinion of Sufyan. As for Ibn Zayd, he holds the position that this verse refers to the Quran; the meaning thus is 'Ask those believers who are well versed in the Quran.' Jabir Al-Ja'fi is related to have said, 'When this verse was revealed, 'Ali Allah be pleased with him said, "We are the people who know the Scripture."' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4447.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ صَدَقْنَٰهُمُ ٱلْوَعْدَ فَأَنجَيْنَٰهُمْ وَمَن نَّشَآءُ وَأَهْلَكْنَا ٱلْمُسْرِفِينَ ٩

We fulfilled Our promise to them in the end: We saved them and those We wished to save, and We destroyed those who exceeded all bounds [9] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 9)

This verse under discussion refers to one of Allah's Laws in the Universe, which is that He *Glorified is He* always fulfilled His Promise to His messengers in the end, a point which is evidenced by the fact that we have never heard about any group of disbelievers and rejectionists who were given victory over their messengers and prophets, a point which is definitively proven by the following saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'For, long ago has Our Word gone forth unto Our servants, the Message-bearers, that, verily, they would be succoured and that, verily, Our hosts would [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

As for the fulfilment of the Divine Promise, it is achieved by saving prophets, messengers and whomsoever Allah *the Exalted* wishes from their opposing people. It is also fulfilled by destroying *Al-Musrifin* (those who exceeded the bounds). In other words, in the very of end of the prophets' struggles with their people, Allah *the Almighty* grants them over the disbelievers, thus fulfils His Promise to them.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

لَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَٰبًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ ۖ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ١٠

And now We have sent down to you [people] a Scripture to remind you. Will you not use your reason? [10] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 10)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* addresses those who rejected the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying to them, 'I did not send down to you a sign which is difficult for you to understand; rather, I sent you a messenger with a miracle from the same kind of that field in which you were very proficient. Then, when the Quran was revealed, you understood its meanings and fully recognised its objectives, a point which is proven by the fact that you did not object to the strange vocabulary used in it, nor did you accuse Prophet Muhammad of inventing them of his own, although you tried your utmost to discover one mistake on his part, if any.

For instance, when the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘*Alif Lam Mim’* was revealed, we did not know of any of them who said, ‘O, you who believe in Muhammad! Your prophet claims that he has been given a miraculous Book, so ask him, "What is the meaning of *Alif Lam Mim*?"' This actually proves that they had properly and correctly understood the meanings of these discrete letters and that they did not find any mistake in them for which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might be blamed. This is based on the fact that Arabs themselves used these letters in their speeches to alert the attention of the listener.

We know very well that speech is the way of communication between a speaker and a listener. As a matter of fact, a speaker carefully prepares his speech before articulating it, which is why he cannot be surprised by it; as for the hearer, he might become surprised, thus needs to be alerted so that no part of the speech would escape him. In this manner, Arabs use a number of particular particles known as *Adawat At-Tanbih* to call the attention of the listener to the importance of speech so that he would miss nothing of it. An example of the use of these particles is ever so clear in the following verse of poetry by ‘Amr ibn Khulthum(1):

Ha, girl! Up with the bowl! Give us our dawn draught ...(2)

Another example may also be found in the following verse:

Oh! Grant one more morning, decayed ruins!

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(1) ‘Amr ibn Kulthum ibn Malik, Abu Al-Aswad is a poet lived in the pre-Islamic period and belonged to the tribe of Taghlib. He was born in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula in the region of Rabi‘a. He was very proud of himself. He became the master of his tribe while still a youth. He lived long, and died 40 years before the advent of Islam in the island known as Al-Furatiyyah. See *Az-Zirikli, Al-‘Alam,* 5/84.

(2) The first hemistich of this poetic verse under discussion is quoted from the Hanged Poem of ‘Amr ibn Kulthum. The word ‘bowl’ is used to refer to the large drinking-cup. The meaning thus is ‘Oh, wake from your sleep, O female cupbearer! Give me a morning draught in your great drinking-cup’. See *Az-Zawzani, Sharh Al-Mu‘laqqat As-Sab,* p. 165.

But can one in an empty time grant favours?(1)

It is thus clear that the particles ‘Ha!’ and ‘Oh!’ are used to call the attention of the listener to the importance of the speech. The same particles are also used by the Quran. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Oh, verily, they who are close to Allah—no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.’ (*Yunus:* 62) He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘…verily, they [who are bent on denying the truth of this Divine Book] are enshrouding their hearts...’ (*Hud:* 5).

It is therefore clear that they properly understood the meanings of these verses and letters of the Quran, and perhaps they understood even more than this from them, yet they did raise any objections to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this regard despite their burning desire to criticise him.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…to remind you…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 10), the Arabic word *Adh-Dhikr* (reminder/remembrance) may be used, as we explained earlier, to refer to the Quran or the heavenly revealed Scriptures. It might also be used to convey the meaning of honour and dignity. It may further be used to give the meaning of praise, remembrance, and glorification.

However, what is the intended meaning of this verse? A possible explanation of this verse is that it reminds them of Allah the Creator and of His Divine Way of Guidance. O, disbelievers, if you had paid attention to the laws mentioned in the Quran, you would have fully realised that it is in total agreement with your innate disposition and that it was not revealed to oppose all of your laws, a point which is proven by the fact that the laws of the Quran accepted some of your, O, disbelievers, laws to which you were guided by your human instinct.

The following are examples which prove the aforementioned point; the Quran agreed on their law as to the blood money prescribed in the case of killing. It does not change it. In the same connection, the Quran accepted the topics of engagement, marriage and the giving of dowry all of which were prevailing amongst them during that time. We know for certain that so many of the Arabs during that period of time, based on their innate disposition, viewed the drinking of wine as forbidden; others never prostrated to idols. It is thus clear that the sound innate disposition never contradicts the Divine Way of Guidance.

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(1) The verse is composed by *Imru’ Al-Qays*. See *Az-Zawzani, Shah Al-Mu‘llaqat As-Sab‘,* p. 12.

Another possible explanation for this part of the verse is that it refers to their nobility, good repute, position and high rank amongst nations and peoples, for the Quran has been revealed in your Arabic language. Thus, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* wanted to turn the hearts and minds of all mankind to your language, encouraging them thereby to study it, to use it in their conversations and to disseminate it amongst mankind. For those who are not able to speak it, they are allowed and encouraged to translate it; how great an honour it is!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…Will you not use your reason' (*al-Anbiya':* 10), it encourages them to use their minds to reach the sound conclusion that their good exists in the Quran. In other words, if you, O, disbelievers, want the sound religion along with good moral character, you will find them in the Quran; likewise, if you want to attain a high position, this will also be achieved by the Quran. As a matter of fact, there is no honour greater than your prophet being an Arab and your Quran being revealed in the tongue of Arabs.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَمْ قَصَمْنَا مِن قَرْيَةٍ كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً وَأَنشَأْنَا بَعْدَهَا قَوْمًا ءَاخَرِينَ ﴿١١﴾

How many communities of evildoers We have destroyed!
How many others We have raised up in their places! [11]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 11)

The Arabic word *Qasamna* (destroyed) refers to the act of breaking into fragments after which there is no mending. Therefore, Allah *the Most High* tells them with the news of the punishment that afflicted those opposing and disbelieving nations before them, so that they would take admonition. Allah *the Almighty* also warn them that destroying the evildoers is not something new for Him; rather, it had so many precedents in history.(1)

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(1) *In his Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, Al-Qurtubi says, 'In this verse, He the Almighty refers to those cities that were in Yemen. Other scholars yet are of the opinion that it refers to a=*

For this reason, He *the Almighty* says: ‘How many communities of evildoers We have destroyed!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 11) The Arabic word *Kam* (how many) in this context indicates that the number of the destroyed communities was so huge that it could not be counted. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* warned disbelievers that they might be afflicted with the same punishment in case they persisted in their rejection and stubbornness. As for the saying of Allah, ‘How many others We have raised up in their places’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 11), it means that many nations and communities had taken the places of their evildoers who were destroyed.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّآ أَحَسُّواْ بَأۡسَنَآ إِذَا هُم مِّنۡهَا يَرۡكُضُونَ ١٢

When they felt Our might coming upon them, see how they tried to escape it! [12] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 12)

This verse tells that when the disbelievers felt the Might of Allah *the Almighty* coming upon them, ‘…they tried to escape it’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 12) so that the punishment would not overtake them. As for the Arabic word *Ar-Rakdu* (running), it means to run fast, or hurriedly. This word of *Ar-Rakdu* is also used to refer to the galloping of a riding animal, an act which is done by striking the animal with one’s legs in order to make it run quickly. The same word in question has been mentioned elsewhere in the Quran; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Strike [the ground] with your foot...’ (*Sad:* 42), giving thereby an order to Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* to strike the ground with his foot in order to extract water from therein; He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...Here is cool water to wash with and to drink!’ (*Sad:* 42)

As a matter of fact, this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Sad* clearly indicates on the miraculous aspects of the Quran. We know that Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* suffered from a skin disease, which is why Allah *the Almighty* ordered him to strike the ground with his leg; when he *peace be upon him* did so, cold water gushed from the ground. It is from this water

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= *people of a place called Hadur to whom a Prophet under the name of Shu‘yab ibn Dhi Mahdam was sent.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4449.*

that Ayyub (Job) drank and by which he washed his body; in other words, Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* was treated internally and externally.

If we reflect on this point in the light of today's medicine, we will find that doctors pay attention to treating pimples and sores on the skin with creams which heal the lesions but are yet unable to put an end to the causes which give rise to the disease. As for the Divine Treatment, it healed Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* internally and externally.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

لَا تَرْكُضُواْ وَٱرْجِعُوٓاْ إِلَىٰ مَآ أُتْرِفْتُمْ فِيهِ وَمَسَٰكِنِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُسْـَٔلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

Do not try to escape. Go back to your homes and the pleasure you revelled in: you may be questioned [13]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 13)

Relating the events of the story of these deniers of the Truth, Allah *the Almighty* told us about the main reason why He afflicted those people with punishment by saying: '…How many communities of evildoers We have destroyed!' (*al-Anbiya':* 11) He *the Most High* then detailed how He destroyed them, affirming meanwhile that when these deniers of the Truth felt that they were about to be afflicted with the Divine Punishment, they left their towns in a hurry, lest the punishment would overtake them, which is why He, in this verse in question, orders them not to run and to go back to their homes and the pleasure they revelled in.

As for the Arabic word *At-Taraf* (pleasure), it means to live a luxury life. Arabs say, '*Taraf Ar-Rajulu Yatrafau'* to convey the meaning that one lived and still lives in luxury. Yet, when we add Hamaza at the beginning of the verb, it becomes *Atrafa,* which means that a man enjoyed a luxury life, but he was now deprived of it because of his arrogance. Also, when we say, '*Atrafahu Allah',* it means that even though Allah *the Almighty* had caused him to live a luxury life, he did not thank Allah for it; thus, he deserved to be afflicted and overtaken with Divine Punishment.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…and the pleasure you revelled in…' (*al-Anbiya':* 13) means that He has given them great pleasure, yet they did not thank Him for it, thus deserving to be overtaken with Divine Punishment. Here arises a question which is 'As long as Allah *the Almighty* wants to chastise them, why does He give them pleasure?' The answer is quite clear in the fact that He wanted to double the punishment for them, as follows: when you punish someone for something he does, it is true that the punishment will cause him pain; yet if you provide him with pleasure, then take this pleasure out and replace it with punishment, this will be viewed as adding chastisement to their chastisement. We previously gave an example to illustrate this point, saying that if you want to make your enemy suffer quite a bit, you should drop him from the top of something which is high so that the punishment will be more painful and difficult.

This aforementioned point of doubling their punishment is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things...' (*al-An'am:* 44). This means that when the deniers of the Truth forgot all that they had been told to take to heart, Allah *the Almighty* gave them health, wealth, power, land, mansions and palaces '…until—even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted—We suddenly took them to task, and lo, they were broken in spirit.' (*al-An'am:* 44) Thus, to afflict them with punishment after they had been provided with considerable pleasure is awful pain.

In the same respect, there is another subtle observation in the aforementioned verse of *al-An'am;* Allah *the Almighty* says: '…We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things…' (*al-An'am:* 44). As a matter of fact, there is a big difference between this verse and that of the chapter of *al-Fath* in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely, We have given to you a clear victory.' (*al-Fath:* 1) As for the first verse, it indicates that the act of opening was not in their interest, whereas the latter indicates that it was for the interest of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In other words, Allah *the Exalted* tells believers that these blessings given to disbelievers will be the cause of their destruction and punishment, so, you, O, Muslims, should not be deceived by the pleasure they revel in.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…you may be questioned' (*al-Anbiya':* 13), it is an order from Him to them to return to their homes and palaces and the comforts in which they revelled, for perhaps someone might pass by and ask them about the previous pleasure they used to enjoy. As a matter of fact, the humiliation they now suffer from after being punished will make them unable to speak or to narrate what happened to them; rather, all what they will say is what Allah *the Almighty* mentions and records in the following verse:

قَالُوا۟ يَٰوَيْلَنَآ إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

They said, 'Woe to us! We were wrong!' [14]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 14)

This verse tells plainly that when the deniers of the Truth felt the coming of Divine Punishment, they tried to run away, lest it might overtake them. Yet Allah *Glorified is He* ordered them to go back to the pleasure they revelled in, confirming that none would now save them from His punishment since no one could challenge His Will. So, when they found themselves in this position, they did not find anything to do except to grieve, and so they turned to their souls to rebuke them and to pass judgment on them that they deserve the punishment that overtook them.

Concerning the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…Woe to us...' (*al-Anbiya':* 14), it indicates that they themselves called upon their punishment, just as people say: 'Oh! My misery' or 'Oh, My misfortune'! This raises the following question which is 'Is it conceivable that someone might call upon misery or misfortune to afflict him?!' The answer is 'No', for man only seeks and calls upon what is good and pleasant.

Back to this part of the verse in question; it means that the deniers of the Truth will call upon the punishment to afflict them. It is at that particular time that they will have nothing to be happy with; they will regret for all what they did; they now blame themselves when they were completely certain with the utmost assurance that they will be overtaken by the punishment.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…We were wrong!' (*al-Anbiya':* 14) This part of the verse plainly indicates the regret of the deniers of the Truth who committed injustice against themselves by disbelieving in Allah *Glorified is He* a point which is ever so clear in Allah’s saying: ‘Lest any human being should say [on Judgment Day], “Alas for me for having been remiss in what is due to Allah ...”’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 56).

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَمَا زَالَت تِّلْكَ دَعْوَىٰهُمْ حَتَّىٰ جَعَلْنَٰهُمْ حَصِيدًا خَٰمِدِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

And that cry of theirs did not cease until We made them burnt-off stubble [15] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 15)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘And that cry of theirs did not cease…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 15), it means that they continuously used to say, ‘Woe to us! We were wrong!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 14) In other words, they did not say this statement of regret just one time; rather, they used to continuously repeat it. As a matter of fact, they thought that it was only this statement that would remove the rage of their hearts exactly as a criminal does; he used to blame himself for the commitment of the crime confessing that he deserves to be sent to jail.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…until We made them burnt-off stubble’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 15), the Arabic word *Hasid* (stubble) refers to a plant after being harvested and reaped, while the word *Khamidin* (burnt off) refers to one of the traits of fire; we know fully well that fire, when started, is blazing and aflame, then it becomes silent and calm after which it turns into dust. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* refers to their stubbornness and persistence in rejecting the Message of Prophet of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* confirming that all of this had now come to an end.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَآءَ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَٰعِبِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

We did not create the heavens and the earth and everything between them playfully [16] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 16)

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* tells about His Ultimate Power by offering us an example for the miraculous creation of the heavens and the earth about which He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *Ghafir*: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth...’ (*Ghafir:* 57). However, why is the creation of the heavens and the earth greater than that of man? It is because man is subject to change; he dies after his life span comes to its end. As for the creation of the heavens and the earth and what is between from the stars and planets, it is indeed greater than the creation of man, for the heavens and the earth are predestined by Allah *the Exalted* not to suffer from any defects.

At this point, it is of great importance to know that Allah *the Almighty* does mention this blessing of the creation of the heavens and the earth in this regard because they are subdued to serve mankind, and not because they are wondrous creation. We know for certain that entire universe including the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the air, the rain, the clouds and the earth and even what is beneath it is subdued to you, O, mankind; even the created beings from which you get not direct benefit are also created for the sake of serving you.

In the light of this undeniable fact of subduing all the created beings to man, the question to be asked here is ‘What is the role of man in the universe? In other words, as long as all other created beings have a specific role to do in the universe, what is the role entitled to man?' It is thus clear that if man has no role to perform in this life, he will be less significant than animals, plants and even innate things, which is why you, O, man, must have a role fitting your supremacy over all other created beings to perform. Regarding this, we should also take into account that these created beings did not subdue themselves to you by their own will, but they did by the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. So, you should become conscious of the One Who subdued all of these created beings which are stronger than you are, to you; likewise, you should be fully aware of the fact that you have no authority over the heavens, nor will you be able to reach the sun or the moon in height. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘…for you cannot cut through the earth nor reach the mountains in height.’ (*al-Isra’:* 37)

Therefore, you, O, man, should have made use of your mind to reach the sound conclusion on Who subdued the entire universe to you; you should have recognised that Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and what is between. You should have known that He did not create them in vain or for play; rather, He created them for your sake. This point is definitively proved by the following Qudsi Hadith in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O son of Adam, I created the things (i.e. the other created beings of the universe) for your sake, and I created you for My Sake. So, do not occupy yourself with that which is for your sake over and above Him for Whose Sake you are (created).' In this way, we can say that the entire universe is owned by man who himself is owned by Allah *the Almighty* which is why He orders man not to be fully occupied with what is subservient to him in such a way that makes him forget about Him.

At this point, we should ask the following question which is 'What is the profound wisdom behind the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them?' The answer to this question is quite clear in the fact that these created beings lead us to realise this Ultimate Power that created the entire universe: Power of Allah *the Almighty*. In other words, they serve as means to prove the Attributes of Majesty and Beauty of Allah *the Exalted*. For example, if someone claims that he is a poet, we are going to ask him about a poem he composed. If he brings it, he will be already a poet; otherwise, he will be claiming something without a proof.

Once again, Allah *the Most High* created the entire universe for you, O, man, and allowed you to make use of it in all possible ways. He *the Almighty* also subdued all of other created beings to you. The sun, for example, never objects to rising, nor do the moon, the stars, the rain, the air, the earth, and the plants object to being subdued to man. As a matter of fact, these created beings all bring benefit to people, believers, and disbelievers alike. This is because all of them are subdued to man; in other words, they do not have free will to choose what to do. Man, on the other hand, has free will to choose what to do and what not to do.

When you contemplate the entire universe, you will find that it is divided into two parts: one part with which man has nothing to do at all; that is, he has no authority over it. As a matter of fact, the created beings of this part run smoothly and efficiently in a harmonious manner; none of them suffers any defects at any time. As for the second part, it is subject to man’s interference; in other words, he has power and authority over it and it is amongst the created beings of this part that corruption takes place.

Referring to the created beings of the first part, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And [they have a sign in] the sun. It runs in an orbit of its own, which means it is laid down by the Will of the Almighty, the All Knowing, and [in] the moon, for which We have determined phases [which it must traverse] till it becomes like an old date-stalk, dried-up and curved; [and] neither may the sun overtake the moon, nor can the night usurp the time of day since all of them float through space [in accordance with Our laws].’ (*Ya Sin:* 38-40)

It is thus clear that the entire universe is efficiently run and kept in perfect order by the command of Allah *the Almighty* the Creator, with no created being ever falling behind. If you were to examine, for example, a complete year of 365 days and tried to turn it back to another year, you would find that the sun would rise from the same place it rose from in the previous year and that it rose form the same place it rose from in the second day, and so on and so forth. Glory be to its Creator!

Therefore, those who establish the calendar in order to know the periods of time first establish it of thirty-three years, taking note of the revolution of celestial bodies. Amazingly enough, the information they recorded for one year recurs in the following year, and so on. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; when the specialists determine the appointed time of a solar or lunar eclipse, or of a partial or annular eclipse of either kind, you find that the time is perfectly regulated, happening at exactly the same appointed time. This is evidence of the regularity of the movement of this part of the universe over which man has no authority at all.

In contradistinction to that part of the universe, if you reflect over anything which man has authority or power, you will find that it is almost corrupt. We, human beings, involve in a number of daily dealings with each other, including buying, selling, measuring, weighing, etc. In actuality, most of these dealings, out of man’s fraudulence and deceive, is corrupt, which is why Allah *the Almighty* sent His Divine Way of Guidance to root out this corruption on the human part.

It is thus clear that all the corruption on the surface of the earth is the result of man’s interference. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* says to man, ‘O, man! You get yourself into troubles. I have created the entire universe to serve you, with no created being in it falling behind. Yet, even though I granted you the free will to choose what to do and what not to do, you have transgressed against yourself. O, man! My Divine Way of Guidance is better for you than all your plans, so if you abide by it and them come to Me in the Hereafter wherein there will be no room for causes, I assure you that you will be in everlasting blessings and that you will find no pain nor misery.’

Therefore, if one occupies himself by firmly adhering to the Divine Way of Guidance, everything he has will suffer no corruption at all. If we contemplate the main reason why Allah *the Almighty* had subdued the entire universe to the service of mankind, we will reach the conclusion that He wants nothing from His creation but to willingly bear witness that there is no god but He and that Prophet Muhammad is His Messenger. Here, we should cast light on the difference between the legally responsible created beings in this universe, namely man, jinns and the rest of the created beings; as for the latter, they have no free will to choose, thus bearing witness to the Oneness of Allah *the Almighty* from the very beginning of their creation, whilst the former have free will, thus He will provide them with great reward if they willingly bear witness to His Oneness; yet if they reject, they will be severely punished in the Hereafter.

In the same respect, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to tell man about the favours He conferred upon him by saying, ‘O, man, in addition to all these blessings I gave you, I sent you a Divine Way of Guidance imparting you the knowledge of what you must do and what you must not do. So, if you carry out My Commands, I will reward you; but if you disobey, I will punish you. This is actually the ultimate goal behind the creation of the heavens and the earth which are not created for mere play. O, man, as for this Divine Way of Guidance, you should know it from the messengers sent to you; so, if you reject and deny them, you will know nothing about these rulings included in this Way of Guidance, thus you will be punished.’

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَوۡ أَرَدۡنَآ أَن نَّتَّخِذَ لَهۡوٗا لَّٱتَّخَذۡنَٰهُ مِن لَّدُنَّآ إِن كُنَّا فَٰعِلِينَ ١٧

If We had wished for a pastime, We could have found it within Us – if We had wished for any such thing [17]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 17)

This verse clearly means that If Allah *the Exalted* had wanted a pastime, He would have had it, for His Power is Ultimate and His Will cannot be challenged. As for His saying, '…thus had We wished for any such thing' (*al-Anbiya':* 17), it clearly indicates that this will never happen.

As for the Arabic word *Al-Lahw* (pastime), it means to turn one's attention to an activity which has no goal and from which one derives no benefit. In actuality, heedless man leaves behind something important in order to turn himself towards something unimportant. Therefore, we should take into account that pastime and play actually involve movement of the bodily limbs but without deriving any benefit at all, which is why these two are described as being futile.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

بَلۡ نَقۡذِفُ بِٱلۡحَقِّ عَلَى ٱلۡبَٰطِلِ فَيَدۡمَغُهُۥ فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٞۚ وَلَكُمُ ٱلۡوَيۡلُ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ ١٨

No! We hurl the truth against falsehood, and truth obliterates it – see how falsehood vanishes away! Woe to you [people] for the way you describe God! [18]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 18)

This verse tells that as long as deniers of the Truth indulged in their pastime and play and so long as they did not thank Allah for the blessings He gave them, they will no longer enjoy this. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* gives respite to the oppressor, but when He seizes him, He does not let him escape.

As for the Arabic word *Al-Qadhf* (to hurl) in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'No! We hurl the truth against falsehood…' (*al-Anbiya':* 18), it means to throw with extreme forcefulness. As for the word *Yadmaghuhu* (obliterate), it means to hit one in his head. Due to the fact that it contains the brain, the head is the most important organ in the human body. It the bodily organ responsible for running the affairs of the human body, so if it acts properly, the entire body will work efficiently; otherwise, life will come to an end. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* made the bones of the skull the strongest within the entire body, so as to protect this important organ, namely the brain. At this point, we affirm that doctors do not declare the death of a person unless the brain stops functioning; they do not do so if the heart, for example, stops working because by particular methods, the heart may be brought back to operate efficiently, which is not the case with the brain.

After the digestion of food within the body, the brain, being the most important organ in the human body, gets the most important elements of this digested food. Regarding the rest of the body organs, they get what enables them to perform and act. As for the surplus, it is to be stored in the form of fats from which the body will get energy in case there is no food, but when these fats are over, the body will take its energy from the meat and them from the bones. Everything in the body therefore serves the brain because it is the highest of the organs. This is not the case with plants, for the most important of them, unlike man, is the lower part, which is why if there is no water in the soil, they take nourishment from the leaves until they die, and then from small branches, the stem and the root, respectively.

Referring to this scientific fact, Allah *the Almighty* says about Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*: 'He prayed: "O, my Lord! Feeble have become my bones, and my head glistens with grey hair ...."' (*Maryam:* 4) This aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Maryam* clearly indicates that bones are the last storehouse of food in man's body, so when Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) says that his bones became feeble, this means that he is about to die. It is thus clear that the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…obliterates it…' (*al-Anbiya':* 18) means to hit in the most important organ in the human body, and not in another organ that may be brought back to function if damaged. It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards, '…See how falsehood vanished away!' (*al-Anbiya':* 18) It means to 'violently pass away'.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Woe to you [people] for the way you describe Allah' (*al-Anbiya':* 18), it means that whosoever rejects the Divine Way of Guidance and denies messengers will be eventually in loss, for

Allah *the Almighty* will hurl the Truth against falsehood and thus obliterate it. It is at that time that when evildoers feel the coming of punishment that they will say, as mentioned in the Quran, '…Woe to us! We are wrong!' (*al-Anbiya':* 14)

The Arabic word *Tasifun* (describe) in this verse being examined means that the deniers of the Truth used to tell lies against Allah and His Messengers. Upon seeing a beautiful man, Arabs say that his face tells that he is beautiful. In the same respect, Allah *the Almighty* says: '... and [all the while] their tongues utter the lie...' (*an-Nahl:* 62); what this means is that if you, O, Prophet Muhammad, want to know their falsehood, listen to their speech and what their tongues say.

In actuality, Arabs have a particular statement which carries this meaning; they used to say, '*Hadith Khurafa'* (or fabulous speech). This statement is in essence attributed to a man whose name was *Khurafa* and who once said, 'I have an arrow which, when fired at a gazelle, follows behind it. When the gazelle turns to the right, it follows behind it. When it goes to the left, it follows behind it. When it climbs a mountain, it follows behind it, and when it descends, it follows behind it.' It is as if this arrow of *Khurafa* looks like today's modern guided missile. From this point onward, this statement has been used be people in reference to anyone who tells lie. (1)

Therefore, a poet says:

That speech is fabulous, O, mother of 'Amr

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, 'O, Messenger of Allah, if you want a definition for falsehood, I am not telling you that it as speech which does not agree with reality, but instead I will direct you to listen to their speech because it is the truest depiction of falsehood, for it is fully exposed to everyone.’ This meaning is also clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...Limitless is He in His Glory, and sublimely Exalted above anything that men may devise by way of definition’ (*al-An‘am:* 100) which means that the deniers of the Truth tell lies and fabrications about Allah *the Almighty*. At this point, someone might ask, ‘Why does Allah give respite to falsehood and does not obliterate it until it grows stronger?’ We say in reply, ‘The wisdom of this is to try people’s faith. We know for certain that man does not truly love truth until he has seen the ugliness of falsehood, and he does not fully realise the dignity of justice until he has seen the ugliness of wrongdoing, for nothing is good or ill but by comparison. At this point, we can quote the following verses of poetry:

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(1) *In his Musnad, Imam Ahmad narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said: 'Prophet Muhammad told his women a story one night and one of the women among them said, "O, Messenger of Allah, that story seems to be fabulous," to which he peace and blessings be upon him replied, "Do you know who is Khurafa?" He was a man from the tribe of 'Udhra and he was captured by the jinns wherein he lived with them for a long period of time, then they returned him to mankind. He used to tell men of the wondrous things he saw amongst the jinns, until men came to use the phrase 'speech of Khurafa.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 6/157.*

The face like the daybreak is whitened;
The hair like the night, blackened.
Contraries when combined are beautiful,
The beauty of one displaying the other

So, we do not fully realise the beauty of the truth except by identifying the ugliness of falsehood, nor are we able to realise the sweetness of faith except after experiencing the bitterness of disbelief.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَلَهُۥ مَن فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَمَنْ عِندَهُۥ لَا
يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِۦ وَلَا يَسْتَحْسِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Everyone in the heavens and earth belongs to Him, and those that are with Him are never too proud to worship Him, nor do they grow weary [19]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 19)

Allah *the Most High* previously informed us that He created the heaven, the earth, and all that is between them. He *Glorified is He* created other created beings and allowed them to dwell therein. Therefore, we should take into account that from amongst the creation of Allah *the Almighty* are those who are given free will to choose what to do and what not to do, yet this free will has only to do with the matters of legal obligation; as for those matters pertaining to cosmic affairs, these created beings have nothing to do at all. This is why we clearly state that man has nothing to do with defining the date of his birth or death, nor does he have the ability to determine whether or not he will be healthy, intelligence, tall, short, etc. That is to say that he is totally subdued to the Will of Allah *the Almighty* with the exception of the matters of legal obligation over which He gave him free will to decide on. Heaven and earth, on the other hand, are wholly subjugated and subdued to the Will of Allah *the Almighty*; He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it ....’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72) This verse clearly tells that both the heavens and the earth chose subjugation to the Will of Allah over free choice for which they have no ability.

As for man his intellect prompted him to bear it, thus he preferred to have free choice, thinking that he would direct this trust [of reason and volition] safely and soundly; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘... Yet man took it up, for verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

As a matter of fact, Allah *the Exalted* describes man, upon choosing to bear the trust, as being most wicked and most foolish since he did not realise the consequence of assuming this burden. Take into consideration if one were to say the following, ‘Then what is so special about the obedience of the heavens and the earth, given that they are compelled to obey?’ We would say in reply, ‘they are compelled by their own free choice, for Allah *Glorified is He* let them choose, and they chose compulsion.’

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…and those who are with Him are never too proud to worship Him…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 19), it means that angels continuously offer their acts of worship to Him and that they, unlike human beings, never tell lie or disbelieve in Him because they ‘... do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6)

Concerning the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…nor do they grow weary’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 19), the word *Yastahsirun* (grow weary) means to become weak, fatigued, weary and afflicted by listlessness and exhaustion. This meaning is also clear in the saying of Allah *the Exalted*: 'Yea, turn your vision [upon it] again and yet again, [and every time] your vision will fall back upon you, dazzled and truly defeated...' (*al-Mulk:* 4), which means that his vision will turn to him weak, exhausted and unable to face intense light, just like when your eyes are brought in direct contact with the light of the sun or the light of a car; it goes without saying that such light hinders you from seeing since the nature and essence of light is that it enables us to see what we are unable to see.

Referring to the total obedience of angels to the commands of Allah *the Almighty* he *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran: 'Never did the Messiah feel too proud to be Allah's servant, nor do the angels who are near unto Him ....' (*an-Nisa':* 172) As a matter of fact, angels get their dignity from being totally obedient to Allah *the Exalted*.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

يُسَبِّحُونَ ٱلَّيۡلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ لَا يَفۡتُرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

They glorify Him tirelessly night and day [20]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 20)

This verse plainly indicates that angels worship Allah *the Almighty* and extol His Limitless Glory. It also tells that neither weakness nor lassitude afflicts them, nor do they feel any tiredness from their worship of Him; in other words, they are not too proud to worship and to submit to Him. This meaning is also deduced from the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Behold, those who are near unto your Lord are never too proud to worship Him, and they extol His Limitless Glory and prostrate themselves before Him [alone].' (*al-A'raf:* 206)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَمِ ٱتَّخَذُوٓاْ ءَالِهَةٗ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ هُمۡ يُنشِرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Have they chosen any gods from the earth who can
give life to the dead? [21] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 21)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* asks the deniers of the Truth about the reason why they are heedless of all of these facts mentioned up till now; He also asks them whether they have any gods other than Him *the Almighty* the One Who created the heaven, the earth and what it is between and the One to Whom belongs all the creation including man, jinns and angels. It is as if He asks about the reason why they turn away from Me to these false gods. Are they better than Me?! Are they closer to them than Me?! It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* denies their turning away from Him, even though He is the One Who grants them all of the blessings and to Whom belongs all what in the heavens and the earth and what is between.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…who can give life to the dead?' (*al-Anbiya':* 21), the Arabic word *Yunshirun* means having the ability to give life to the dead. It goes without saying that none but Allah *the Almighty* has the ability to resurrect the dead.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

لَوۡ كَانَ فِيهِمَآ ءَالِهَةٌ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَاۚ فَسُبۡحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَرۡشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ٢٢

If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but
Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins: God,
Lord of the Throne, is far above the things they say [22]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 22)

This verse clearly tells that despite the deniers of the Truth turning away from believing in Allah *the Almighty* to Whom belongs dominion over the heavens and earth and with His Limitless Glory all creatures extol, there is in fact no other god in existence; this is a point which is derived from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but He, both the heavens and the earth would be in ruins….' (*al-Anbiya':* 22) As a matter of fact, the speech is still relating to the heavens and the earth.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…any gods but He…' (*al-Anbiya':* 22), the particle *Illa* (but) indicates exception; in other words, it is used to exclude what follows it from the activity of what precedes it. For example, if you were to say, 'All the people came except Mohamed', this means that Mohamed is the only one who did not come. So, if we understand this verse in question in the light of this rule, the meaning will be that had there been any gods other than Allah *the Exalted* the heavens and the earth would have been in ruins. It is thus clear that *illa* here gives the meaning of *Ghayr*. This meaning is also clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* about Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: 'And this was revealed unto Nuh (Noah): "Never will any of your people believe [other than] those who have already attained to faith ...."' (*Hud:* 36) The meaning of this part of the verse being examined will thus be: 'If there were in the heavens and earth things described as being gods other than Allah, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin. It is thus impossible for there to be a partner beside Allah *the Almighty*.'

Similar to this verse is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Say: "If there were, as some people assert, [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him Who is enthroned on His Almightiness"' (*al-Isra':* 42).

By these verses of the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* wants us to use our minds to reach the correct conclusion, asking us to suppose that there are gods other than Him, 'Say: "If there were, as some people assert, [other] deities side by side with Him ..."' (*al-Isra':* 42), yet if this was supposed, then '... surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him Who is enthroned on His Almightiness.' (*al-Isra':* 42) The word 'a way' in this verse means 'a path' which means that they sought a path unto Him Who is enthroned on His Almightiness, that is, unto Allah *the Almighty* but why? It is because the deniers of the Truth want to argue and compete with Allah *the Almighty* as to how He seized Divinity and Dominion over the heavens and the earth or because they want to come near to Him and seize divinity from Him, exactly as He gave effective power to fire, for example, from within His Power, for fire does not act by itself; rather, it acts by the Will of Allah *the Almighty* the One Who created fire, which is proven by the fact that He is the One Who caused fire to lose its power in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*; Allah says: '[But] We said: "O, fire! Be you cool and [a source of] inner peace for Ibrahim (Abraham)!"' (*al-Anbiya':* 69)

Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with Him any (other) god— in that case would each god have certainly taken away what He created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91). This noble verse, among many others, confirms that Allah *Glorified is He* exists and that He *the Almighty* is One, with no partner with Him *Glorified is He*.

But on the assumption that the Arabic word for 'but' is a particle of exception, it confirms that He *the Almighty* exists, but does not preclude His having a partner nor affirm His Oneness. Therefore, this particle is actually a noun meaning 'other than'. Since this word ends indeclinably, its grammatical inflection appears according to what follows it. So, the grammatical status of the Arabic word for 'but' which appears in the verse in question before the Word of Majesty, 'Allah', is actually the grammatical status of the Arabic word for 'other than'. But we may ask here, 'Why would the heavens and the earth fall into ruin if there had been therein any gods other than Allah *the Almighty*?' This is due to the fact that in this case there are only two possibilities: either these gods are equal as to the attributes of perfection, or else one of them possesses the attributes of perfection while the others possess the attributes of imperfection. On the assumption that they all possess the attributes of perfection, do they hold the same position in the creation of the things, or do they differ from one another? If they held the same position in the creation of something, this would constitute an unnecessary repetition; for one of them will create and thereby leave nothing for the other to do, given the fact that there is only one agent for each effect. Whereas if they differ in the creation of things, one of them will say: 'This is for me', while the other will say: 'This is for me;' they thus will surely try to overcome one another.

On the other hand, if only one of them possesses the attributes of perfection, while the other possesses the attribute of imperfection, then it is not appropriate for the latter one to be a god. In this manner, Allah *Glorified is He* illustrates the examples in various ways in order to prove, by the means of the revelation and logic, that there is no god but Him and that it is false to associate gods with Him *Glorified is He*.

Likewise, He *the Almighty* refutes the claims of those who call on other gods besides Him such as those who say, 'Ezra is the son of Allah', or 'The Messiah is the son of Allah', and those who take the angels as gods apart from Him. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Those whom they call upon, themselves seek the means of access to their Lord—whoever of them is nearest…’ (*al-Isra’:* 57). So, if these gods whom they call upon beside Allah *the Almighty* are themselves seeking a means of access to Him, in order to come nearer to Him, how can they be true gods?

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘Allah, Lord of the Throne, is far above the things they say.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 22) Here, He *the Almighty* declares Himself to be far above what they utter of blasphemies, lies, and calumnies.

As for the word ‘throne’, it is used to refer to the elevated seat on which a king sits, and it is a sign of supreme authority and domination, a meaning which is clear in Allah’s saying about the Queen of Sheba: ‘Surely I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given abundance and she has a mighty throne.’ (*an-Naml:* 23) So when He *the Almighty* says: ‘…Lord of the Throne...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 22), He turns one’s attention to His Throne which nothing surpasses and with which no other throne contends.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about Himself:

لَا يُسْـَٔلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْـَٔلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

He cannot be called to account for anything He
does, whereas they will be called to account [23]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 23)

Allah *the Almighty* will not be questioned about what He does because both the questioner and the one questioned possess ranks, with the latter usually being of a lower rank than the former. Therefore, there is no one who can question Allah *the Almighty* about what He does, whereas He *Glorified is He* questions mankind and calls them to account. For this reason, some wise people say, ‘The proof that Allah has no partner is His creation of so-and-so because if He had a partner, His partner would oppose Him in this matter.’ Thus, there is no one superior to Him *the Almighty* so that s/he could ask Him, ‘Why did you do such and such?’

Afterwards, He *Glorified is He* says:

أَمِ ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ ءَالِهَةًۖ قُلۡ هَاتُواْ بُرۡهَٰنَكُمۡۖ هَٰذَا ذِكۡرُ مَن مَّعِيَ وَذِكۡرُ
مَن قَبۡلِيۗ بَلۡ أَكۡثَرُهُمۡ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ٱلۡحَقَّۖ فَهُم مُّعۡرِضُونَ ٢٤

Have they chosen to worship other gods instead of Him? Say, 'Bring your proof. This is the Scripture for those who are with me and the Scripture for those who went before me.' But most of them do not recognize the truth, so they pay no heed [24]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 24)

As long as they took gods apart from Allah *the Almighty* then they should produce the proof that their objects of worship are true gods. Just as Allah *the Almighty* — Who is the True God — brought irrefutable proofs of His Existence, Power, Oneness and Uniqueness, they, likewise, should produce their proofs. As a matter of fact, being unable to offer proofs or evidence on their existence clearly indicates that these are false gods, especially if we take into account the fact that they neither revealed a Book, nor sent a Messenger, nor sent down a Divine Way of Guidance.

Where are these gods, then? If they have no knowledge of what happens, then they are heedless gods, not suited to occupy this exalted rank. If, on the other hand, they are knowledgeable of what happens, why did they not oppose the realities and defend themselves? Clearly, they are not capable of such opposition.

So, Allah's saying: 'Bring your proof' (*al-Anbiya':* 24) is a challenge for them to produce a proof of the existence of any god other than Him *the Almighty*. The word 'proof' here refers to the existence of the universe in this wondrous order; for have you ever heard that another alleged god said, 'I am the one who brought this all into being'? Furthermore, has this alleged god ever sent a Messenger with a miracle?

Thus, their claim of the existence of others gods besides Allah *the Almighty* is a lie, a fabrication and an invention sprung from their own selves because they are not knowledgeable people. However, this does not mean that they were not given knowledge; no, they were given it, but they turned away from hearing it, a point which is clear in Allah's saying: 'But most of them do not recognise the truth, so they pay no heed.' (*al-Anbiya':* 24) It is as though the truth has features by means of which it is known so that s/he who proceeds to know it will surely find it. By contrast, how could those who turn away from knowledge come to know about the Truth? It is thus clear that the Truth does exist, and those who seek it will surely find it through proof and evidence.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِيٓ إِلَيۡهِ
أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنَا۠ فَٱعۡبُدُونِ ﴿٢٥﴾

We never sent any messenger before you
[Muhammad] without revealing to him:
‘There is no god but Me, so serve Me’ [25]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 25)

This verse clearly indicates that Allah’s Oneness is the most essential topic in all the Divine Messages, starting from the first Message of Adam *peace be upon him* to the last Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. All the Messengers and Prophets were sent with the Message that ‘there is no god but Allah’. This is the most important topic in all the Divine Messages.

In Allah’s saying: ‘…any messenger...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 25), the word ‘any’ is used in the sense of inclusion and generalisation, that is, every single Messenger of Allah. If a person says to you, ‘I have some money,’ this statement may mean that s/he has a little bit of money, some coins, for example, which are too few to be called money. But if s/he says to you, ‘I do not have any money,’ then s/he categorically negates the idea of having money, that is, s/he does not have even a single penny.

Therefore, the issue of association of partners with Allah *the Almighty* or the denial of His Existence is but a new false issue that those deniers of the Truth made up.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالُواْ ٱتَّخَذَ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ وَلَدٗاۗ سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥۚ بَلۡ عِبَادٞ مُّكۡرَمُونَ ٢٦

And they say(1): 'The Lord of Mercy has taken offspring for Himself.' May He be exalted! No! They are only His honoured servants [26] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 26)

When Allah says 'May He be exalted' (*al-Anbiya':* 26), He declares Himself to be far above having a son. He *Glorified is He* has honoured servants who are the angels.

Allah *the Almighty* then mentions some of the qualities of these honoured angels, saying:

لَا يَسۡبِقُونَهُۥ بِٱلۡقَوۡلِ وَهُم بِأَمۡرِهِۦ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٢٧

They do not speak before He speaks and they act by His command [27] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 27)

Although the angels are honoured servants, they do not speak before Allah *the Almighty* speaks, that is, they do not say what He has not said, nor do they speak before Him *the Almighty* even if what they would say is in accordance with His Will. Furthermore, they do not do what He does not command them to do.

In this regard, it is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is giving us an indication of some of the evil aspects of the society, which is to see the great, honoured ones fashioning for themselves temporal power, saying what their Lord did not say, doing what He did not order them to do and giving precedence to their orders over His.

As for His saying: '…and they act by His command' (*al-Anbiya':* 27), it means that they carry out His Commands; when He bids, they act, and when He forbids, they refrain.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'This verse is revealed concerning the tribe of Khuza'a since they said, "The angels are Allah's daughters", thus used to worship them, seeking their intercession for them.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4457.*

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ
إِلَّا لِمَنِ ٱرْتَضَىٰ وَهُم مِّنْ خَشْيَتِهِۦ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede without His permission — indeed they themselves stand in awe of Him [28] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 28)

The discourse here is about the honoured servants among the angels. Although Allah *the Almighty* honoured them and favoured them, He nonetheless did not leave them alone, free from monitoring and observation; rather, He knows what is before them and what is behind them. He also did not leave the matter of intercession to them, so that they may intercede for whomever they like. On the contrary: ‘…they cannot intercede without His Permission.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 28)

This means that they do not intercede except for those whom Allah *the Almighty* loves and with whom He is pleased. So, beware of thinking that when you say ‘the angels are Allah’s daughters’, or when you worship them apart from Allah that they will intercede for you before Him. This is due to the fact that the honoured angels do not intercede for any but those whom Allah *the Almighty* loves and is pleased with from among the believers.

You should not, then, think that they are: ‘...honoured servants’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 26) in the sense of being spoiled, able to do whatever pleases them. On the contrary, in spite of being honoured, they observe their bounds and do not transgress them, for they are given all of this honour only because they are obedient and adherent to Allah’s Commands. Along with this obedience, they: ‘…themselves stand in awe of Him.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 28) Thus, despite this honour, they do not rest at ease and security, but rather tremble fearfully and apprehensively in awe of Allah *the Almighty*.

For that reason, He *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَن يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَٰهٌ مِّن دُونِهِۦ فَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِيهِ
جَهَنَّمَ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

If any of them were to claim, ‘I am a god beside Him,’
We would reward them with Hell: this is how We
reward evildoers [29] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 29)

So, supposing that one of them made such a statement – for this did not actually take place, nor is it possible for them to say it – then: ‘We would reward them with Hell: this is how We reward evildoers.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 29) What is the reason for that? It is because they would have committed the highest level of wrongdoing, which is associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He* in worship, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘…most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity.’ (*Luqman:* 13)

Therefore, despite being angels and being honoured, Allah *the Almighty* threatens them: ‘if one of them should make that claim, he would be requited with Hell.’ This fact serves as reassurance for all the creation.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to offer proof for His Uniqueness which He strongly emphasised in the preceding verse. In fact, even though Allah’s Uniqueness embodies His Unity, there is a distinction between them; they are not synonyms as some people mistakenly think. This is because ‘the One’ and ‘the Unique’ are two distinct attributes of Allah *the Almighty* as He says: ‘Say: “He, Allah, is One”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1); and elsewhere He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘...and He is the Unique, the Supreme.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 16)

‘The Unique’ means the One for Whom there is no equivalent. Allah *the Unique* is One in His Essence, that is, He does not have parts. So, His Uniqueness precludes that there exists a single one like Him, and His Oneness precludes that He is, in His Essence, comprised of parts. This is so because if He *Glorified is He* were comprised of parts, every part would come to be in need of another part to form His entirety. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* is neither holistic nor partial.

Allah *the Almighty* chose for the purpose of offering proof of His Uniqueness the universally witnessed signs of the cosmos which no one can deny, as they are regulated, clear and beneficial, all at the same time. Here, we should take into account that the sign could be clear, but for which one has no pressing need. But the human being would be acutely aware of the benefit of the sun if it were absent from him, and, likewise, s/he would be acutely aware of the benefit of the rain when the sky ceases raining, and so on. Thus, witnessing these signs and benefiting from them calls for paying attention to them, so that when they are absent from you, you wait and watch attentively for their returning anew.

Allah says:

أَوَلَمۡ يَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ كَانَتَا رَتۡقٗا
فَفَتَقۡنَٰهُمَاۖ وَجَعَلۡنَا مِنَ ٱلۡمَآءِ كُلَّ شَيۡءٍ حَيٍّۚ أَفَلَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Are the disbelievers not aware that the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart, that We made every living thing from water? Will they not believe? [30] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 30)

Allah’s saying: ‘Are the disbelievers not aware…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 30) means: ‘have they, i.e. the disbelievers become blind that they do not perceive this amazingly crafted and masterfully engineered and ordered creation? So, they disbelieve because they are blind and unable to see Allah’s signs in the universe’.

Here arises a question, which is, ‘How can Allah *Glorified is He* say: ‘Are the disbelievers not aware…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 30), while the discussion here is about the heavens and the earth, and He has said: ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls; nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders’ (*al-Kahf:* 51)? The creation of the heavens and the earth was not witnessed by anyone, nor did anyone inform them about it, so how would they have seen it?

We spoke previously about the Quranic usage of the verb ‘to see’ and said that it is used in different senses: sometimes it is used in the sense of visual sight; and sometimes it is used in the sense of knowledge, as in Allah’s saying: ‘Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see or witness this event – since he was born in the same year – the meaning thus is: ‘Do you, O Prophet Muhammad, not know?’ So, why does the meaning of the verb ‘to see’ turn from the optic perception to the intellectual one despite the fact that the sight of the eye is the most certain source of knowledge to the point that people say, ‘With the eye there is no “where”,’ that is, there is nothing which the eye does not see?

Scholars replied that Allah *the Almighty* wants to inform Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the following, ‘Even though you did not see it with your own eyes, your Lord informed you about it; and being informed by Allah *the Almighty* is more reliable than seeing it with your own eyes because it is possible for your eyes to deceive you, or for you to see things without paying attention, whereas information received from Allah *the Almighty* is absolutely reliable, free from all deception.’ A relevant example of this is Allah’s saying: ‘Do you not see that We have sent the devils against the unbelievers, inciting them by incitement?’ (*Maryam:* 83)

But, how would they come to have an intellectual view with regard to the creation of the heavens and the earth? Scholars replied, ‘This is because when the human being sees this amazing creation, s/he must ask him/herself – even out of his/her curiosity– ‘From where did this amazing creation come?’ Naturally, the human being turns toward things that are amazing and asks about them, even if s/he has no interest in them and derives no benefit from them. So, what do you think would be the case regarding something which benefits him/her?

Thus, they should have considered the following question: ‘Who is it that informed Messenger Muhammad of this matter?’ Moreover, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* produced a miracle confirming his truthfulness in his transmission from Allah *the Almighty* and informing them of that about which they were inquiring. Since the Speech is from Allah, then it is absolutely truthful, for: ‘...who is truer of word than Allah?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 122)

The Quran was revealed in the Arabian Peninsula which was populated by the disbelievers who worshipped idols, and by the Jews, as well as some Christians, both known as the people of the Book. These Jews and Christians, who believed in Allah, His Messengers, and His Books, used to argue with the disbelieving idolaters, saying, ‘When Prophet Muhammad appears, we will follow him, and with him we will kill you, like the peoples of ‘Ad and Iram.'(1) Despite that, when there came to them that which they knew from Allah *the Almighty* they disbelieved in it and made an alliance with the disbelievers, forming with them a single front and a single party united only by their aversion towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and towards what was set forth to them of the true religion. This is similar to what is happening right now, with all of the eastern and western camps uniting together against Islam.

Thus, after the advent of Islam, the people of the Book and the disbelievers united in a single camp against Islam. The disbelievers used to listen to the people of the Book, and in the Torah there is a discourse on the creation of the heavens and earth, which says: ‘The first thing which Allah created in creation was a jewel. Then He looked upon it with awe so that a reaction took place within it giving rise to vapour and smoke. The smoke rose above and formed the sky, and the residue remained and formed the earth.’

In this manner, a bit of knowledge came to them concerning the creation, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘Are the disbelievers not aware that the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart….’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 30)

The orientalists casted doubts on Allah’s saying that the earth and heavens, ‘…used to be joined together…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 30). They said, ‘As “the heavens” is plural and ‘the earth’ likewise has a plural form, the grammatical rule requires that we use the plural pronoun instead of the dual.’ But the one who raised this objection does not realise that Allah *the Almighty* considers the heaven here as a type and the earth as a type. So, the intended meaning here is ‘heavenly substance and earthly substance’, which are dual.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir cites that Mohamed ibn Ishaq narrated on the authority of ‘Asim ibn ‘Amr that Qatada Al-Ansari said on the authority of some sheikhs, ‘Concerning us, by Allah, and concerning them—that is, concerning the Helpers and the Jews who were their neighbours—this story was revealed, that is, Allah’s saying: ‘And when there came to them a Book from Allah verifying that which they have, and aforetime they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieve, but when there came to them (the Prophet) that which they did not recognize, they disbelieved in Him ….’ (al-Baqara:89) They said, ‘We had overwhelmed them by force for a time in the period before Islam when we were the polytheists and they were the people of the Book, and thus they would say, ‘A Prophet will be sent soon whom we will follow. His time has approached, and with him we will kill you like those of the tribe of ‘Ad and Iram’ then, when Allah sent His Messenger from Quraysh and we followed him, they disbelieved in him.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 124/1.*

The Quran, being set forth in the Arab manner of speaking which is based on perspicacity, intelligence and a nimbleness of understanding, contains many instances similar to this. Consider, for example, Allah’s saying: ‘...And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9). Here, Allah *the Almighty* does not use the verb ‘to quarrel’ in the dual form because a party, even if singular, comprises a group. So, fighting does not take place between one faction and another, but rather, between the individuals belonging to each faction. Therefore, we note that when the Quran speaks about fighting, the plural is employed. On the other hand, when we come to make peace, we see that peace is not made between these individuals; but rather, between a representative of each faction. As peace is made through two individuals representing each party, the statement reverts to the dual; Allah says: ‘…make peace between them; but if one of them acts wrongfully towards the other, fight that which acts wrongfully until it returns to Allah’s command; then if it returns, make peace between them with justice.…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9)

Here, to ‘be joined together’ means something cohering together and contiguous. As for Allah’s saying: ‘…We ripped them apart…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 30), it means that He *the Almighty* separated them and took away that coherence. We should note that what is mentioned in the Torah to the effect that Allah *the Almighty* created a jewel and then looked upon it with awe so that such and such happened to it is confirmed by Allah’s saying in the Quran: ‘Then He directed Himself to the heaven and it is a vapour, so He said to it and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly....’ (*Fussilat:* 11)

When the scholars apply themselves to the verses concerning the cosmos, they do so according to the different schools of interpretation and their ability to make personal reasoning. As a matter of fact, every scholar arrives at his/her own understanding in accordance with his/her level of education and knowledge.

The ancient Arabs did not have much knowledge about cosmic phenomena. For example, the Arabs did not know about the laws of gravity or the sphericity and movements of the earth. So, had the Quran mentioned the likes of these phenomena which his/her intellectual faculties did not perceive and which his/her education did not include at that time, s/he would have turned away from this discourse which s/he would mot understand. You can imagine what it would be like if it were said to him/her, for example, ‘The earth is a sphere which rotates along with us and everything else, including oceans and mountains, etc.’

As the Quran is first and foremost a Book containing a Divine Way of Guidance on what one should and should not do, everything connected with it is presented clearly, without any obscurity. As for the affairs of the cosmos which are subject to human education and civilisation developments, only a general concept is given about them. These general concepts await the reflective minds to bring their relevant phenomena to light one after another. Allah *the Almighty* gives us a mere intimation and leaves it to contemplative minds to complete the picture.

The scholars of Islam have held two positions on this matter, both of which emanate from love for Allah’s religion, ardent devotion to His Book and a genuine desire to confirm the veracity of the cosmic facts which the Quran mentioned more than 14 centuries ago and which modern science has just known about nowadays.

The first position is held by those scholars who used to say that there is evidence in the Quran for every new discovery, thus they say, ‘The Quran arrived at this fact before modern science did, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truthful in his transmission from Allah.’

Those who maintained the second position feared yet to interpret the Quran according to the theories which had not been proven yet; otherwise, they would have connected Allah’s Book with something which could be proven false afterwards.

The true position yet is to make a distinction between scientific theory and scientific fact, for the theory is a matter which is still subject to research and study, thus has not been confirmed yet. Therefore, people say, ‘That statement is theoretical', meaning that it requires something to corroborate it in reality. On the other hand, the scientific fact is something which undergoes the process of experimentation, and then its correctness is confirmed in practice. We thus become sure that it is a fact that will not change.

We must not, therefore, connect the Quran with a their, which permits either truth or falsehood. By so doing, mankind will not waver in understanding the Quran, nor will s/he accuse us of interpreting it according to our own caprices. As for the confirmed scientific fact, however, once established in an irrefutable way, there is nothing to prevent us from connecting it with the Quran.

Let us give an example of the sphericity of the earth to fully illustrate this point. When the scientists first asserted it, many people objected, provoked an outcry over it and even wrote books about their opposition to it. What is more, among these objectors were people declaring those who upheld this view to be disbelievers on the grounds that the Quran did not clearly mention this matter. Then, when knowledge progressed and sufficient proofs confirming this theory abounded, they saw that other planets such as the sun and the moon, were spherical, so why would the earth not likewise be so?

Likewise, if you stand, for example, on the shore of the ocean and look at a ship coming from afar, you will not see anything of it except the edge of its sail, and will not see the rest of the ship until it comes near to you. This indicates that the surface of the earth is not flat, but that there is a bending in it, which in turn indicates its sphericity.

Afterwards, when the age of space exploration began and the scientists went into outer space and returned to earth with photographs, its sphericity became a fact. In this way, a theory evolved into an irrefutable, undisputed scientific fact. Even those who opposed it when it was but a theory cannot do anything except to accept and believe in it.

The same applies to the rotation of the earth, for who in ancient times would believe that it is the earth – along with everything on it, including waters, buildings and so on – which revolves around the sun? In order to understand this phenomenon, you should take a small jug of water and tie it with a string from above, then swing it rapidly in a circle, from down below to up above.

You will notice that when the opening of the jug points downward, it does not spill any water. So, what is the reason for this? It is because the speed of the rotation surpasses the gravitation of the earth which pulls the water towards it. This is proven by the fact that if you become lax in your rotation of the jug, the water will spill from the opening, as gravitation will inevitably have an effect. As a matter of fact, it is the gravitation of the earth that holds the water upon it throughout its rotation.

But we must not adopt a new theory produced in the phase of research and study and then happily connect it with the Quran. This happened in the beginnings of the modern period and scientific revolution when the scientists discovered the solar system, which at first comprised only seven planets ordered according to their nearness in position to the sun, as follows: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus.

Here some of the famous scholars—including Sheikh Al-Maraghi—hurried to assert that these planets were the seven heavens, and wrote treatises asserting that the Quran was the first to say this. Then, as the days passed, scientists discovered an eighth planet (Neptune), and then a ninth.(1)

Therefore, to connect a theory before it is scientifically confirmed with the Quran is a big mistake. It is possible that when newer instruments and bigger microscopes become available to them—as some astronomers say—they will discover many other planets. This is because our solar system is but 1 among 100 million systems in the galaxy which we, following the Greeks, call the Milky Way.(2) In fact, these planets which we see are vast and immense to an extent surpassing the human imagination. For example, the sun which we see is 125 million times bigger than the earth,(3) and there are planets big enough to encompass 1 million suns within them. The distance between us and the sun is estimated by 8 light minutes, and a light minute is calculated by what is travelled in 60 seconds, with 1 second of speed including 186,000 miles, that is, 800,000 kilometres.(1)

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(1) The discovery of this ninth planet (Pluto) did not take place until the year 1930. See *Mawsu'at Al-Ma'rifa*, p. 37.

(2) The first person to describe the broad light beam known as the Milky Way was Democritus, who thought that the Milky Way was simply composed of an abundant number of stars so as to be impossible for anyone to distinguish between them. Modern astronomical telescopes have confirmed the correctness of this view. See *Mawsu'at Al-Ma'rifa*, p. 5.

(3) If the sun were an empty sphere, it could encompass 1,300,000 spheres the size of the earth before it would be filled.' See *Mawsu'at Al-Ma'rifa*, p. 22.

As for the distance between the earth and the Andromeda Galaxy, it is calculated by light years, not seconds, and is estimated to be 100 light years away. The brightest star, Sirius, on the other hand, which Allah *the Almighty* mentions as one of His Favours, saying: ‘And that He is the Lord of the Sirius’ (*an-Najm:* 49) is farther away than that. Now, all of these planets and stars are in the lower heaven alone, so what connection does this have with the seven heavens about which they spoke?

For this reason, many fans of these scholars tried to erase this matter from their books in order that it is not taken as a flaw and as a mistake against their intellectual methods.

Also, among the incorrect theories which they maintained is the following: the solar system, including the earth, came into being because of the rotation of the blazing mass of the sun, from which some fragments broke off, issued forth, and then cooled with the passage of time. In this way, the earth was created, and when the earth cooled, it became suitable for plant life, then animals, and then man. They substantiated this theory by the point that the interior of the earth remains blazing to this day, erupting forth in volcanoes such as Mount Vesuvius,(2) for example.

Now, the logic would require us to say, ‘If the earth is a fragment of the sun which has separated off from it, then it would be natural for the sun to cool with the passage of time and for its heat to lessen. But the facts, to the contrary, prove that this theory is unsound. Furthermore, their stance requires that they actually know something about the creation of the heavens and the earth which Allah *the Almighty* did not reveal. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

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(1) That is, the sun is distant from the earth by approximately 94 million miles, and its light, which travels at a speed of 186,000 miles per second, reaches us in just more than eight seconds. See *Mawsu‘at Al-Ma‘rifa*, p. 36.

(2) Mount Vesuvius is situated at a distance of 11 kilometers from the city of Naples in Italy, and it is tantamount to a volcano within a volcano because it is situated in the basin crater of the inactive volcano of Mount Zuma. See *Mawsu‘at Al-Ma‘rifa*, p. 1012.

Then, He *the Almighty* states a general principle: '…nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) Therefore, those who lead mankind astray are those who take them from the truth to error. Here, it is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is giving us an indication of the misguiding statements that will come into being, with some people saying, 'Such and such happened in creation.'

These details may only be known from the Creator *Glorified is He* and so stop at this boundary because our knowledge of how something was created is not a condition for benefitting from it. In fact, we benefit from Allah's creatures whether or not we understand how they were created, or how they were previously. We had benefitted from the sphericity of the earth, from the sun and from the moon, without even knowing anything about them. Moreover, scholars determined the timetables for the solar and lunar eclipses and the periods of time for calendars before the sphericity of the earth was discovered.

Let us offer an example to further illustrate this point; the illiterate man who knows nothing buys a television, for example, and learns how to turn it on and how to use it, without knowing anything about its formation, its mode of operation, or its transmission of images and sounds, and so on. So, you should take what is beautiful in creation and benefit from it, just as Allah *the Almighty* created it for you, without delving into the source of its creation or the manner of its formation, just as if an appetising dish were placed before you, would you search to know who cooked it?

The opinions of the scholars concerning the verse in question and the meaning of the heavens and the earth being 'joined together' and then being 'ripped apart' have varied greatly. Among them are those who held the view stated by the Torah that there was a jewel which Allah *the Almighty* looked upon with awe, to which such and such happened and then it formed the heavens and the earth.

In addition, some of them held that the meaning is specific to each, the earth and the heavens, individually, and that they were never conjoined, using some verses as a proof; Allah says: 'Then let man look to his food, [24] That

We pour down the water, pouring (it) down in abundance, [25] Then We cleave the earth, cleaving (it) asunder, [26] Then We cause to grow therein the grain, [27] And grapes and clover, [28]' (*'Abasa:* 24-28).

Elsewhere, He *the Almighty* says: 'So We opened the gates of the cloud with water pouring [11] And We made water to flow forth in the land in springs, so the water gathered together according to a measure already ordained. [12]' (*al-Qamar:* 11-12)

The intended meaning, then, is that the earth was 'one single entity' by itself and burst forth with plants, and the heaven was 'one single entity' and burst forth with rain.(1) So, Allah *the Almighty* split the heaven with the rain, and split the earth with the plants which burst forth from it, a point which is clear in His saying: 'I swear by the rain giving heavens, [11] And the earth splitting (with plants); [12]' (*at-Tariq:* 11-12).

Furthermore, He *the Almighty* says about the heaven: 'And on the day when the heaven shall burst asunder with the clouds....' (*al-Furqan:* 25) On the assumption that the word 'heaven' means everything above you and which overshadows you, the clouds may also be said to be part from the heaven.

According to this view, we understand that the 'ripping apart' is not the parting asunder of heaven and earth, but the parting of each of them individually. In any case, this understanding does not yield a new judgment, but is an interpretation in accord with reason. The passage of time may confirm it, or may instead bring something else. What is important is that neither of the two interpretations prohibits the other.

In regard to Allah's saying: '...We made every living thing from water...' (*al-Anbiya':* 30), the representatives of the second interpretation say, 'Since it is mentioned here, water must definitely have a connection with the heavens and the earth's being 'joined together' and being 'ripped apart.'

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(1) *This opinion was held by 'Ikrima, 'Atiyya, Ibn Zayd, and Ibn 'Abbas as well, according to what Al-Mahdawi mentioned: 'The heavens were one single entity and did not rain, and the earth was one single entity and did not sprout. Then heaven was split open by the rain, and the earth by plants.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4460.*

We notice that the verse does not say 'everything living' but rather: '…We made every living thing from water.…' (*al-Anbiya':* 30) They, i.e. the followers of the second interpretation inferred from this that what is intended by 'life' here is the human life which we live, yet they did not realise that water is included in the formation of everything. This is because the animals and plants live on water, and if they fail to find it, they die and come to an end. Likewise, within the lowest animals and plants there is also a watery element. In fact, everything possessing radiance, or moistness or softness has water within it. So Allah's saying: '...every living thing...' (*al-Anbiya':* 30) refers to everything of this kind in existence.

It is a matter of scientific fact that everything has a life, and that everything has water within it, as is proved by Allah's saying: 'O you who believe! Answer (the call of) Allah and His Apostle when he calls you to that which gives you life....' (*al-Anfal:* 24) Yet Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the believers in this manner even though they are already living! So, the intended meaning is that He *the Almighty* will give them another valuable life. This is because their life in this world is limited, and that is why they are called to another, eternal life, which is the life of the Hereafter.

That entity which is joined to the physical body so that life enters into it is called a spirit, for Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My Spirit….' (*al-Hijr:* 29)

Likewise, the Way of Guidance which descends from the heaven to guide the people is called a *ruh* (spirit), and so is called the angel who brings it down. This is based on the fact that the Divine Way of Guidance gives us an eternal, everlasting life which never ceases.

If we descend lower than this, we would find that animals also possess life, for they perish and die, and so do the plants, for if you deprive them of water, they dry up, wilt and come to an end. Finally, the inanimate objects possess life as well, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying: '...everything is perishable but He....' (*al-Qasas:* 88)

Here, He *the Almighty* describes everything which can be called a 'thing' as being 'perishable'; and, as perishing is the opposite of life, everything which perishes must necessarily first possess life. Have you not read His saying:

‘...that he who would perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof...’? (*al-Anfal:* 42) The opposite of life, therefore, is perishing.

Then, every one of the created things, all the way down to inanimate objects, possesses life, and water plays a role in its formation, as Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: ‘…We made every living thing from water…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 30).

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* concludes this verse by saying: ‘...Will they not believe?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 30) So, how can they be blind to these signs which have been pointed out to them, and refuse to believe in the Oneness of Allah *the Almighty*? They should have turned their attention to these amazing signs from which they could derive benefit. How can they not do so, while human beings today, upon seeing amazing modern inventions, devices and even toys, wonder about their inventors and their lives, education, etc.?

It is more appropriate that we turn our attention to the Most Great Creator, Who amazingly created for us this cosmos, for being heedless of Allah’s Signs and turning away from them is an unnatural state which does not suit the people of understanding.

Allah says:

وَجَعَلْنَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ رَوَٰسِيَ أَن تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ وَجَعَلْنَا
فِيهَا فِجَاجًا سُبُلًا لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

And We put firm mountains on the earth, lest it
should sway under them, and set broad paths on
it, so that they might follow the right direction [31]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 31)

The words ‘firm mountains’ means fixed, immovable mountains. Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* also describes the mountains as ‘pegs’, for He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And the mountains [its] pegs?’ (*an-Naba’:* 7) In this verse, He *the Almighty* compares the mountains in relation to the earth with pegs in relation to a tent.

Then He *the Almighty* mentions the reason for this setting up of firm mountains, saying: ‘...lest it sway under them...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 31), that is, for fear that the earth tilts, shakes and be set in motion with mankind. If the earth had been created in the state of fixity, it would not sway or be set in motion, and would not require being stabilised by the mountains. But this is not the case, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And you see the mountains, you think them to be solid, and they shall pass away as the passing away of the cloud….' (*an-Naml:* 88)

So, it is not strange that we know today that the mountains move—though you do not see their movement because they are fixed in respect of your position in relation to them. This is because you have the same movement, just as if you and your companion were on a boat and the boat moved along with you both; you would not be aware of the movement of your companion because you have the same movement.

Allah *the Almighty* compared the movement of the mountains with the passing of the clouds, for the clouds do not pass by means of a self-produced movement, but rather by the propulsion of the winds. Likewise, the mountains do not move by means of a self-produced movement, but rather by the movement of the earth as a whole, which is a clear proof of the movement of the earth.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and set broad paths on it….' (*al-Anbiya':* 31) This means that one of the manifestations of Allah's Wisdom is that He set up for us on the earth paths on which we may travel. This is due to the fact that if the mountains were a single mass filling the surface of the earth, it would not be suitable for the human beings' life and movement. As for His saying: '...broad paths...' (*al-Anbiya':* 31), it means wide paths in the valleys and places of level, soft ground. In another passage, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'That you may go along therein in wide paths.' (*al-Anbiya':* 31) The object pronoun in Allah's saying: '…and set broad paths on it…' (*al-Anbiya':* 31) may refer to either 'the mountains' or 'the earth', for on both there are paths on which the people travel—on the mountains in the form of trails and valleys.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the reason for this appointing of paths, saying: '…so that they might follow the right direction.' (*al-Anbiya':* 31) 'Following the right direction' here bears two meanings, as follows: either to find their way to the Creator of these paths and thereby be guided by them to the marvellous Maker of all things, or to find their way to different countries and places of different directions. In former times, they used to make of the mountains as indications and signs and make them signposts, to the extent that they used to describe things by means of their positions in relation to the mountains. So, they would say, ‘Such-and-such a place is near to such-and-such a mountain, and to the right of such-and-such a mountain.’ One of their poets said:

Take the inner track of Hirshay(1) or its backside, for
on both sides of Hirshay there is a path.(2)

So, His saying, ‘Follow the right direction’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 31) here can carry both of these two meanings, just as in Allah’s saying: ‘and landmarks; and by the stars they find the right way.’ (*an-Nahl:* 16) This indicates that they find their way to the paths and the directions by the means of the stars. An Arab used to say, for example, ‘Travel with the Pleiades to your right—or the Pole Star, Canopus, or another star’, for they were acquainted with the locations of these stars and travelled by their guidance.

Another possible interpretation is that they find their way to the knowledge that the stars have a connection with the life of man. In the past, they used to say ‘So-and-so’s star fell’, as though every star in the sky had a connection with something else. This is something which some specially qualified people know about, and they may be guided by means of the stars to something, but only on condition that they be truthful and honest, not misleading the people.

This is confirmed by Allah’s saying: ‘But nay! I swear by the falling of stars; [75] And most surely it is a very great oath if you only knew [76]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 75-76), which signifies that if you had knowledge of that, you would know that the stars play a major, profound role in the universe.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Hirshay* is a mountain trail on the way to Mecca near to Al-Juhfa, from which one can see the sea. It includes two paths, both of which lead in the right direction. See *Ibn Mandhur*, *Lisan Al-‘Arab*, *h-r-sh.*

(2) *In his book. Ibn Mandhur cites this verse, but did not ascribe it to anyone. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-‘Arab, h-r-sh.*

وَجَعَلْنَا ٱلسَّمَآءَ سَقْفًا مَّحْفُوظًا ۖ وَهُمْ عَنْ ءَايَٰتِهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

And We made the sky a well-secured canopy – yet from its wonders they turn away [32] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 32)

The sky is called a canopy because it refers to everything which overshadows you. But there is a difference between a man-made canopy, which depends on supports and props and a canopy made by the Most Great Creator, which covers the entire earth and is well secured without any supports. It is an even canopy neither swelling nor cracks.

The sky was wonderfully created by Allah *the Almighty*. He *Glorified is He* miraculously created it, as He miraculously created Adam *peace be upon him*. So, whereas every human is brought into existence as a result of the sexual relationship between man and woman, Adam was created directly by Allah *the Almighty*. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘He said: O Iblis! What prevented you that you should do obeisance to him whom I created with My Two Hands?’ (*Sad:* 75) Indeed, this is an extraordinary honour for Adam.

Likewise, He *the Almighty* says concerning the creation of the sky: ‘And the heaven, We raised it high with power....’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47) In another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘I swear by the heaven full of ways.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 7) That is, the sky which is tightly woven and firm. The meaning of its ‘weave’ is that its tiny particles, which are not individually perceivable due to being closely united with one another, are not completely united, but closely united as tiny particles. For that reason, you see the sky as being smooth, and so the Creator *Glorified is He* says about it: ‘He raised high its height, then put it into a right good state.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 28)

Consider the workmanship of human beings when one of us wants to build a wall, for example. Despite the act of building being carried out with extreme precision, some bricks inevitably protrude out from others. Then the trowel-man comes, tries to level the wall, and measures it with a level, but still some curves or bends remain in the wall. Then the painter comes and, trying to remedy these and similar faults, prepares a cosmetic paste, which becomes an essential element in the completion of the wall.

After the person exhausts all of his/her means to prepare his/her house as s/he likes, a number of days pass and then Allah *Glorified is He* exposes the faults of all these workers; for as a result of the falling of the smallest particles of dust, some faults of the workmanship appear, and all of the faults of the wall stand clearly revealed to all.

If the workmanship of human beings differs according to the difference in the skilfulness of each one of them and his/her proficiency in his/her work, then what do you think if the One Who created, built, evened and adorned is Allah *the Almighty*? In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Who created the seven heavens one above another; you see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent....’ (*al-Mulk:* 3)

Consider the most skilful of makers who levels a roof for a number of rooms; s/he employs one material with the same colour; inevitably, you will find a difference in the degree of the colours, even if the worker mixes the colour one time for every room. This is because when s/he takes from this mixture, you will find that which is left over to be stronger in concentration than what was taken. Also, if s/he does not complete the work on the same day, you will find that the paint which remains until the next day loses an amount of water, which also affects the degree of the colour.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘...Well-secured’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 32), it means that the structure of the sky is well secured, for it is perfect, without any disparity in it. In fact, one only secures something which is precious and noble. So, from what thing does Allah *the Almighty* secure it, i.e. the heaven? In fact, He *the Almighty* secures it from moving to and fro and from falling upon the earth except by His Leave, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission….’ (*al-Hajj:* 65) He *the Almighty* also says: ‘And one of His Signs is that the heaven and the earth subsist by His Command….’ (*ar-Rum:* 25)

Thus, the heaven has been created miraculously. As well, it is protected by means of Allah’s Power, and no one except Him *Glorified is He* is able to do so. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who protects it; He does not leave its protection to the human beings, even if, strictly speaking, it does not require protection because it is His creation.

Among those matters which Allah *Glorified is He* clarified for us with regard to the sky is 'eavesdropping'. Before the advent of Islam, the devils used to eavesdrop,(1) but after the revelation of the Message to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, Allah *the Almighty* willed that His Message not be falsified by Satan's hearing it and then revealing it to Prophet Muhammad's enemies. So He *the Almighty* prevented the Jinn from eavesdropping by means of flames. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly We have made strongholds in the heaven and We have made it fair seeming to the beholders. [16] And We guard it against every accursed devil, [17] But he who steals a hearing, so there follows him a visible flame. [18]' (*al-Hijr:* 16-18)

Then He *Glorified is He* says in the verse in question: '…yet from its wonders they turn away.' (*al-Anbiya':* 32) In this way, He *the Almighty* declares that there are signs which are specific to the sky, for there are innumerable signs in the cosmos, thus the sky has its own signs, including the sun, the moon, the stars, and the other celestial bodies. In the same vein, we hear from the scientists at observatories that there are stars in the sky whose light has not yet reached us, from the time of Allah's creation of the earth until now, despite the fact that the speed of light is 300,000 kilometres per second. It is possible for us to understand this in the light of His saying: 'And the heaven, We raised it high with power, and most surely We are the makers of things ample.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti says, 'Allah relates that the jinn said: 'And that we sought to reach heaven, but we found it filled with strong guards and flaming stars. [8] And that we used to sit in some of the sitting-places thereof to steal a hearing, but he who would (try to) listen now would find a flame lying in wait for him: [9]' (al-Jinn: 8-9) Ibn 'Abbas said, 'The devils had positions in the sky from which they would eavesdrop on the revelation. When they heard a word, they would add to it nine words—the word which they heard being truthful, and the words they added being false. When Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him was sent, access to their positions was blocked. They narrated this to Satan—as the stars did not used to emit flames before that—and Satan said to them, 'This happening is only because of something which happened on earth.' Then he sent his army, and they found Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him standing, praying between two mountains. They came to Satan and informed him, whereupon he said, 'This is the event which happened on earth.' This narration was cited by At-Tirmidhi, who authenticated it, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Jarir, Abu Nu'aym and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 302/8.*

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us an approximate picture of this matter so that we do not overstrain ourselves with reflection about it, saying, ‘In relation to the Dominion of Allah, the heavens and the earth and all that is between them are nothing but as a ring cast in a vast desert.’(1)

Despite that, when the astronauts went to the moon, some of our scholars, out of their love to Islam and sincere belief in the Quran, hastened to state that these astronauts travelled to the heaven, this being the intended meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘Assembly of the jinn and the men! If you are able to pass through the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass through; you cannot pass through but with authority.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33) They said that the authority in the verse refers to that of knowledge, which enabled the astronauts to travel into outer space.

However, if they passed beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth by the authority of knowledge, why does Allah *the Almighty* say after this: ‘The flames of fire and smoke will be sent on you two, then you will not be able to defend yourselves.’? (*ar-Rahman:* 35) Thus, the intended ‘authority’ is not that of knowledge as they think, but rather, it is that of Allah’s Permission and Will.

If the matter were as they say, the disbelievers of Mecca would have said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he informed them about his Ascension to the seven heavens, ‘How can you say that, O Muhammad, while your Lord says: “Assembly of the jinn and the men! If you are able to pass through the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass through; you cannot pass through but with authority.”’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33) Therefore, the intended meaning of ‘authority’ here is Allah’s Permission; when granted, the doors of the sky were opened for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Moreover, what is the connection of the moon with the sky, given the fact that the Divine Speech is about passing beyond the regions of the heavens? How can the moon be compared with the heaven? As the distance between the earth and the moon is two light-years, the moon is, therefore, but an outskirt among the outskirts of the earth, like Al-Ma'adi, for example, in relation to Cairo. So about which heaven are they speaking?

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(1) *Ibn Ḥibban narrated this Hadith on the authority of Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari which includes the following: ‘O Abu Dharr, the seven heavens along with the Throne are nothing but as a ring cast in a vast desert, and the Throne surpasses the Footstool as the vast desert surpasses the ring.’ See Mawarid Adh-Dham’an, Hadith no. 94.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…they turn away.' (*al-Anbiya':* 33) We have already spoken about 'turning away,' which is to avert oneself from something, that is, to turn one's back to it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلَّيْلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ وَٱلشَّمْسَ وَٱلْقَمَرَ ۖ كُلٌّ فِى فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

It is He who created night and day, the sun
and the moon, each floating in its orbit [33]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 33)

Allah *the Almighty* graciously bestowed blessings upon some of His creation, and He only mentions, from among what He has bestowed, that which is considered a great blessing and favour. These blessings include the night and the day, by which He *Glorified is He* swore an oath in His saying: 'I swear by the night when it draws a veil, [1] And the day when it shines in brightness [2]' (*al-Layl:* 1-2). He *the Almighty* also says: 'I swear by the early hours of the day, [1] And the night when it covers with darkness. [2]' (*ad-Duha:* 1-2) So, the night and the day are two complementary signs. They are not contraries, for Allah *the Almighty* created the earth for His vicegerent to inhabit and cultivate, a point which is clear in His saying: '...He brought you into being from the earth, and made you dwell in it….' (*Hud:* 61)

This verse means that Allah *the Almighty* commands us to inhabit and cultivate the earth through the means of subsistence He gave to us, including an intelligent intellect, effective bodily limbs, and power. In fact, all the material things are created by Allah *the Almighty* and it is not incumbent upon you to do anything except to employ His blessings in the habitation and cultivation of His earth. When the person exerts his/her effort during the day, the body afterwards needs rest in the night. Sleep is, therefore, one of the greatest signs of Allah for the human being which indicates that the Creator *Glorified is He* is a reliable guardian of the self even more than is the self's possessor, that is, man.

Thus, we see some overburdening themselves with work, not giving their bodies their natural rest until they become unable to work. This is where sleep comes in, as though it were an innate control within you, forcing you to rest, and sounding the alarm: You are not fit right now for work; be merciful to yourself and give it its rightful rest. Now, when you try to sleep before the proper time of sleep, the body refuses and it does not comply. However, when it overtakes you, it seizes you from all the surrounding factors to the extent that you may sleep on small stones.

As in the Arab proverb, 'The tired one's bed is soft, and the hungry one's food is pleasant.' That is, when the tired, overworked person sleeps, s/he sleeps even on small stones, without any means of comfort. Despite all this, s/he sleeps restfully. In another proverb, it is said: 'Sleep is a guest: if you search for it, it will afflict you; if it searches for you, it will relieve you.' Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to us about the sign of sleep in another statement: 'And one of His signs is your sleeping by night and (by) day….' (*ar-Rum:* 23)

Here, we should add a precautionary remark: although sleeping takes place at night as the proper time for rest and repose, there are people who work at night and sleep during the day—like watchmen, policemen, bakers, and others—and these people are not forbidden from sleeping in the daytime to maintain the proceeding of life.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…the sun and the moon….' (*al-Anbiya':* 33). Of course, there are many other signs in Allah's universe, but the most apparent among them all are the sun and the moon, for they are witnessed by all. He *the Almighty* then says: '…each floating in its orbit.' (*al-Anbiya':* 33) This is because the night, the day, the sun and the moon revolve one after another, succeeding one another, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And He it is who made the night and the day to follow each other….' (*al-Furqan:* 62)

The word '...floating...' (*al-Anbiya':* 33) is a subtle Quranic expression for the rendering of movement. It is taken from the swimming of fish in water wherein they float by means of a streamlined, easy movement.

These two kinds of movements are actually observed in the clock wherein the minute hand moves with a leap, that is, it proceeds from stillness to movement and then to stillness once again. In other words, there is a point of time in which the minute hand makes a motion while another in which it is idle. As for the second hand, it makes a steady motion. The swimming of fish proceeds in the same manner, a meaning which is also clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘and float [through space] with floating serene.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 3)

It is in this same manner that the movement of the shadow takes place; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Are you not aware of your Lord [through His Works]?—how He causes the shadow to lengthen....’ (*al-Furqan:* 45) This is also how the child grows. As a matter of fact, if you carefully and continually watch your young child over a period of time, you will be barely able to notice how it grows to the extent that you might believe that it does not grow. Yet, if you were absent for a couple of months, for example, and then go back, you can then easily and fully realise how it grew bigger. That is because the matter of growth takes place every single second, not because growth suddenly appears.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا لِبَشَرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ ٱلْخُلْدَ أَفَإِيْن مِّتَّ فَهُمُ ٱلْخَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

We have not granted everlasting life to any other human being before you either [Muhammad] – if you die, will [the disbelievers] live for ever? [34] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 34)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this matter on the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the disbelievers tried to kill him *peace and blessings be upon him* by throwing a stone upon him from a high place.(1) By so doing, those deniers of the Truth, really wishing Prophet Muhammad’s death, thought that they could get rid of him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Here,

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(1) *It is narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him had gone to the Jews of Banu An-Nadir, seeking their help in paying the blood-money for the people of two persons who were killed by a Muslim. The Jews then replied in the affirmative, confirming that they would help him peace and blessings be upon him in this regard. Yet, when they were alone, they said to one another, ‘This is the best opportunity to get rid of Muhammad.’ They agreed on assigning one of them, known as ‘Amr ibn Jihash, to climb to the top of a house and to let a stone fall down upon his head. However, when the man took his place to carry out the mission, Gabriel came down and told Prophet Muhammad of their scheme, which is why he stood up suddenly and went back to Medina. When he got home, he ordered Muslims to be ready to go to fight against them. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 3/190.*

Allah *the Almighty* stresses that Prophet Muhammad, like all the Messengers and Prophets before him, will for sure die, a meaning which is crystal clear in the following verse of the chapter of *az-Zumar*: ‘...Verily, you are bound to die [O Muhammad,] and, verily, they, too, are bound to die.’ (*az-Zumar:* 30)

Undoubtedly, death is one of Allah’s Established Laws in the universe. It is though He *Glorified is He* was saying to Prophet Muhammad not to grieve, for he will be rewarded greatly in the Hereafter for all the hardships and difficulties he endured in the cause of delivering the Divine Message to mankind. It is for this reason that when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked to choose whether to live until the Day of Resurrection, or to die right now, he said, ‘I choose the Company of my Lord *the Most High*.’(1) It is thus clear that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘We have not granted everlasting life to any other human being before you either [Muhammad]….’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 34) indicates that Prophet Muhammad, like the Prophets and Messengers before him, will for sure die, confirming meanwhile that those who will come after him *peace and blessings be upon him* will not be granted eternity in this life, a point which is clear in His saying: ‘…if you die, will [the disbelievers] live forever?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 34) This part of the verse tells that the disbelievers shall not be happy with your death, O Prophet Muhammad, for they will not live forever.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَآئِقَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِ ۗ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِٱلشَّرِّ وَٱلْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً ۖ وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Every soul is certain to taste death: We test you all through the bad and the good, and to Us you will all return [35]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 35)

This verse clearly indicates that death is one of Allah’s Established Laws in the universe; none will be safe from it. Here, we strongly stress that death, in essence, entails good, so why? The answer is as follows: in case the dead is a good person who acted righteously in this worldly life, death then serves as a means of hastening the reward to him/her; yet in case s/he was a wrongdoer, people will be relieved from him/her.

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(1) *This is part of the Hadith narrated by ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said, ‘I often used to hear Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saying, “Allah the Almighty does not cause any Prophet to die until He asks him to choose (between life and death).”’ ‘Aisha then continued, ‘When Prophet Muhammad was in the agony of death, I heard him peace and blessings be upon him saying, ‘Nay, rather, the highest companions of Paradise’. See Ahmad, Musnad, 6/274.*

Here arises the following question, which is 'How is death tasted?' The answer to this question is crystal clear in the fact that the act of tasting means 'man's experience of the pain of death.' For once one has really died, it is impossible for him/her to taste anything, but before s/he dies, s/he will for sure taste the agonies of death, a meaning which is clear in the following poetic verse:

Grief after the separation of the spirit is impossible,

and grief does not exist before the separation

It is thus clear that the meaning of the verse in question refers to the agonies of death which afflict man at the time of his/her death, for no matter how healthy a man may be, a moment will inevitably come in which s/he perceives that s/he is most certainly dying—that is when the spirit comes up to the throat, a meaning which is deduced from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Nay, but when [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dying man], [26] and people ask, "Is there any wizard [that could save him]?" [27] The while he [himself] knows that this is the parting. [28]' (*al-Qiyama:* 26-28) meaning plainly that death, under this case, will inevitably take place.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…We test you all through the bad and the good…' (*al-Anbiya':* 35), it means that Allah *the Almighty* will for sure try and test mankind in this worldly life. In this regard, we strongly stress that the act of trying and testing itself is not bad, but rather, it is the result obtained from it that might be praised or blamed. This point may be further explained in the light of the final exam which students have to sit; can we consider this exam to be bad? Here arises a very good question which is 'Does Allah *the Almighty* need to try His slaves to know about their affairs?!' The answer is 'No,' for He *Glorified is He* tries them to make them a witness against themselves. With His *Glorified is He* saying: '…We test you…' (*al-Anbiya':* 35), He addresses all people: the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the ruler and the subject, and so forth.

Therefore, all of us are a trial for one another: the rich is a trial for the poor, and vice versa, but how could we understand this? As for the poor person, Allah *the Almighty* tests him/her to see whether or not s/he will be content with what He *Glorified is He* had predestined for him/her, and whether s/he will envy the rich, or say, ‘It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power save in Allah! O Allah, bless him and give me from Your Provision.’ As for the rich, He *the Almighty* tests him/her to see whether or not s/he will spend his/her money for the Pleasure of Allah.

In this way, you can draw comparisons like these to reach the conclusion that ‘evil’ and ‘good’ are both but a mere test and trial which ends either in success or failure. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying, ‘...band to Us you will all return.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 35) This means that people will be returned to Allah *the Almighty* to be requited for their deeds; if they do good, they will be greatly rewarded; otherwise, they will be afflicted with severe punishments.

Allah says:(1)

وَإِذَا رَءَاكَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ إِن يَتَّخِذُونَكَ إِلَّا هُزُوًا أَهَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى
يَذْكُرُ ءَالِهَتَكُمْ وَهُم بِذِكْرِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ هُمْ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

When the disbelievers see you, they laugh at you: ‘Is this the one who talks about your gods?’ They reject any talk of the Lord of Mercy [36] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 36)

This verse in question sheds light on a particular incident that took place between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the disbelievers.

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(1) *Ibn Abi Hatim narrated that As-Suddi had said: ‘Prophet Muhammad, Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him once passed by Abu Sufyan and Abu Jahl who were speaking to each other. When Abu Jahl saw him Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him he laughed and mockingly said to Abu Sufyan: “This is the Prophet of Bani ‘Abd Manaf”, whereupon the latter angrily said: ‘why do you deny the prophethood of this man from Bani ‘Abd Manaf?!” When Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him heard this conversation, he returned to Abu Jahl and said: ‘I believe that you will not stop what you are doing (i.e. denying the Message of Islam) until you are afflicted with that which afflicted your uncle.” Then, he turned to Abu Sufyan and said: “You only said this out of zeal.” Then Allah the Almighty revealed His saying: “When the disbelievers see you, they laugh at you ...” (al-Anbiya’: 36)’ See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/630.*

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'When the disbelievers see you, they laugh at you…' (*al-Anbiya':* 36), the Arabic particle *I'n* (when) does not indicate 'conditionality,' but rather, 'negation', a meaning which is also clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'As for those of you who [henceforth] separate themselves from their wives by saying, "You are as unlawful to me as my mother," [let them bear in mind that] they can never be [as] their mothers: none are their mothers save those who gave them birth....' (*al-Mujadala:* 2)

The meaning of this aforementioned part of the verse thus is: 'When the disbelievers see you, O Prophet Muhammad, they do not take you except in mockery, that is, they mock at you.' But, what is the sense of mockery referred to in this verse? The answer is clear in the saying of Allah in the same verse in question, '…Is this the one who talks about your gods?' (*al-Anbiya':* 36) In other words, 'Is this the person who insults your gods? The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Is this…' (*al-Anbiya':* 36) indicates that those deniers of the Truth belittled Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In this regard, it is important to know that *Adh-Dhikr* (talk) may be good or evil; you expect your friend to say good about you; as for your enemy, you expect him/her to speak badly of you. Accordingly, as along as Prophet Muhammad is taking about their so-called gods, it is inevitable that he is going to speak badly of them. For example, he will say that they are made of stones and that they can cause man neither harm nor benefit, a meaning which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'If you invoke them, they do not hear your call; and even if they could hear, they would not [be able to] respond to you. And [besides,] on the Day of Resurrection they will utterly disown your having associated them with Allah....' (*Fatir:* 14)

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…They reject any talk of the Lord of Mercy.' (*al-Anbiya':* 36) In this part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* wonders why those disbelievers are angry with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he speaks bad of their gods, while they themselves deny the Existence of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. We notice that Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned the Arabic particle *Hum* (they) twice in order to lay emphasis on the fact that those deniers of the Truth have indeed disbelieved in Allah, the Lord of Mercy.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

خُلِقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ مِنْ عَجَلٍۚ سَأُوْرِيكُمْ ءَايَٰتِى فَلَا تَسْتَعْجِلُونِ ﴿٣٧﴾

Man was created hasty: I will show you My signs soon, so do not ask Me to hasten them [37] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 37)

The meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…hasty…' (*al-Anbiya':* 36) is that man was created hasty. As for the Arabic word *Al-'Ajala* (hastiness), it means that a person hurries to obtain the results of something before its due time. As a matter of fact, man may be in a hurry to obtain the good, which is permissible; yet to hurry to be afflicted with evil is utter stupidity. The Quran has many examples which indicate this foolishness on the part of the disbelievers; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When is that promise [of Allah's Judgment] to be fulfilled? [Answer this, O you who believe in it,] if you are men of truth!' (*al-Anbiya':* 38)

Telling about them, Allah *the Almighty* also says: O Allah! If this be indeed the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!' (*al-Anfal:* 32) This clearly indicates that those disbelievers had hastened punishment because they did not believe in it; they did not believe it to be true that something such as this would happen to them, which is why Allah *the Almighty* replied to them, saying: '…I will show you My signs soon, so do not ask Me to hasten them.' (*al-Anbiya':* 37) In another position in the Quran, He *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the Truth], or whether We cause you to die [before that retribution takes place—know that, in the end], it is unto Us that they will be brought back.' (*Ghafir:* 77) This means that He *the Almighty* will show you, O Prophet Muhammad, how We would severely punish them, and even if We were to cause them to die, you would for sure watch their punishment in the Hereafter.

Allah says:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا ٱلْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

They say, 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say is true?' (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 38) [38]

This verse clearly indicates that the disbelievers mistakenly thought that Allah *the Almighty* would not punish them in the Hereafter, and that they would not be held accountable for their deeds before Him *Glorified is He*; they did not even think that He *the Almighty* would punish them severely in the Hell-Fire to the extent that when their skins thoroughly burned, Allah would change them for other skins, so that they may taste the chastisement. In the Quran, Allah tells us that the disbelievers did not believe that they would be punished after death; He *the Almighty* says: 'Or you cause the skies to fall down upon us in smithereens, as you have threatened, or [till] thou bring Allah and the angels face to face before us.' (*al-Isra':* 92)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَوْ يَعْلَمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ حِينَ لَا يَكُفُّونَ عَن وُجُوهِهِمُ
ٱلنَّارَ وَلَا عَن ظُهُورِهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

If the disbelievers only knew, the time will arrive when they will not be able to ward off the Fire from their faces or their backs, and they will get no help[39] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 39)

This verse in question means that the disbelievers knew nothing about what would happen to them at this time when they would not be able to repel the Fire from their faces in the Hereafter. Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned the 'face' in particular because it is the most honoured of man's body parts, which is why if any dirt falls upon your face, you strive to remove it with your hand, even if you can do no more than shifting the dirt from your face to your hand! Why do you do this? It is because the face is precious to you, thus cannot accept it to be insulted in any way.

It is thus clear that the saying of Allah: '…they will not be able to ward off the Fire from their faces…' (*al-Anbiya':* 39) plainly indicates that the disbelievers will face great humiliation, whilst His *saying*: '…or their backs…' (*al-Anbiya':* 39) indicates that they will be covered with the fire from all directions. As for the saying of Allah: '…and they will not get help.' (*al-Anbiya':* 39), it means that they will find none to save them from this punishment or to defend them, even the Satan that used to entice them in this worldly life will renounce them on the Day of resurrection. Allah *the Almighty* says about this: '...It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine...' (*Ibrahim:* 22). The Arabic verb *Asrakha* (to respond to one's cries) means to eliminate the cause of his/her crying, which is why the *Hamza* in this verb is known as the *Hamza* of removal and elimination. You say: 'So and so cries', when s/he is afflicted with something beyond his/her capacity of endurance, thus cries out calling for help and assistance. So, in case s/he was given help and assistance and his/her suffering was removed, this means that this person had removed the cause of suffering. As such, the meaning of this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Ibrahim* is that the Satan tells his followers that he will be unable to defend them, nor will they be able to defend him, and that he will be unable to save them from the chastisement, nor will they be able to save him from the punishment.

This undeniable fact of the Satan renouncing his followers in the Hereafter is also mentioned in the following verse of the chapter of *al-Hashr* in which Allah says: 'The like of [what happens] when Satan says unto man, "Deny the Truth!"—but as soon as [man] has denied the Truth, [Satan] says, "Behold, I am not responsible for you: behold, I fear Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!"' (*al-Hashr:* 16) This clearly means that Satan can do nothing to the children of Adam but to cause them to fall into sin after which he disclaims all association with them.

But, this is the clause of condition, so where is the clause of result? It is implicitly understood from the context of the verse, that is, if the disbelievers who are bent on denying the Truth knew that there would come a time when they would not be able to ward off the Fire from their faces, nor from their backs, and would not find any succour, then they would stop their wrongdoing and get rid of all the means leading to it.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

بَلْ تَأْتِيهِم بَغْتَةً فَتَبْهَتُهُمْ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ رَدَّهَا وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

It will come upon them suddenly and stupefy them;
they will be powerless to push it away; they will not
be reprieved [40] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 40)

This verse refers to the Day of Resurrection. As for the Arabic word *Baghta* (suddenly), it refers to an event which takes place while people are heedless of it, whilst the word *Baht* (stupefying) means surprise and confusion. As such, Allah *the Almighty* says that the Day of Resurrection will come down upon the disbelievers all of a sudden, thus they will be so surprised and confused that they would be unable to decide what to do or where to go. In actuality, when someone is stupefied with something, s/he will be unable to prepare for it or even protect themselves from it. In our contemporary world and particularly at times of war, warning sirens would be activated to alarm people about an eminent attack or raid, thus people take their precautions and go into shelters and refuges. Yet, in case they were attacked suddenly by the enemy, they would have no opportunity to be safe from this danger.

Another example of stupefaction is found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* about that person who argued with Prophet *Ibrahim peace be upon him* concerning his Lord; Allah says: ‘Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; causes it, then, to rise in the west!’ Thereupon he who was bent on denying the Truth remained dumbfounded....’ (*al-Baqara:* 258)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…they will not be reprieved’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 40), it means that Allah will not allow them any respite, nor will He *Glorified is He* delay their punishment. This is because when it is the Hereafter, the matter has no longer fallen under the category of threatening, but rather exceeds it to afflicting them with the punishment in reality.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدِ ٱسْتُهْزِئَ بِرُسُلٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَحَاقَ بِٱلَّذِينَ سَخِرُوا۟
مِنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

Messengers before you [Muhammad] were also ridiculed, but those who mocked them were overwhelmed in the end by the very thing they had mocked [41] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 41)

Taking into account that Allah *the Almighty* had previously addressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with His saying: 'When the disbelievers see you, they laugh at you…' (*al-Anbiya':* 36), He *Glorified is He* in this verse in question comforts and consoles him *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him that all the Messengers and Prophets before him had been ridiculed, which is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* should not grieve, for those deniers of the Truth will surely be afflicted with the Divine Punishment as a result of their mockery and evildoing.

Let us offer an example to further clarify this point. Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran about the story of Prophet Noah *peace be upon him* with his people, saying: 'And [so Noah] set himself to building the ark; and every time the great ones of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him...' (*Hud:* 38). So Noah *peace be upon him* answered in reply: '...If you are scoffing at us—behold, we are scoffing at you [and your ignorance], just as you are scoffing at us.' (*Hud:* 38) meaning that you, O deniers of the Truth, shall wait until the end, and you will see!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…overwhelmed…' (*al-Anbiya':* 41), it means that those who mocked the Messengers and Prophets were overcome and befallen with severe punishment, a meaning which is also clear in the saying of Allah: 'Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin are wont to laugh at such as have attained to faith; and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another [derisively]; and whenever they return to people of their own kind, they return full of jests.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29–31), meaning that those evildoers used to happily go back to people of their kind, which is an indication of their ignobility and baseness of character, for they do not only suffice with their derision, but also report and boast about it. Allah *Glorified is He* then continues: ‘And whenever they see those [who believe,] they say, “Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!” And, withal, they have no call to watch over [the beliefs of] others; But on the Day [of Judgment], they who had attained to faith will [be able to] laugh at the [erstwhile] deniers of the truth: [for, resting in paradise] on couches, they will look on [and say to themselves]: “Are these deniers of the truth being [thus] requited for [aught but] what they were wont to do?”’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 32–36) Here arises the question, which is ‘Could we now requite them for their deeds?’ Yes, O Lord!

At this point, we should stress that the disbelievers’ derision and mockery of the People of Truth will not last forever, for it will for sure end in the life of this world, yet Allah *Glorified is He* will not cease mocking at them, i.e. the deniers of the Truth in the Hereafter. It is yet of great importance to take into consideration the following subtle observation, which is that even though the believers are frequently ridiculed and mocked at by the disbelievers, Allah *Glorified is He* protects the lives of those disbelievers as a result of the existence of the believers among them, a reason which is clearly mentioned in the following Qudsi Hadith in which Allah says: ‘Were the children not suckled, the elderly not bent over in body, and the livestock not put to pasture, I would surely impose punishment upon you.’(1)

So, when you see a pious man, express gratitude for him or even follow his example, or the least you can do is leave him alone without any derision or annoyance. That is because by the very existence of this pious man, your life, O mocker, is protected and safeguarded.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Haythami in his Majma‘ Az-Zawa’id from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra; Al-Haythami yet attributed it to Al-Bazzar and At-Tabarani in his Al-Awsat. The chain of transmission of the Hadith includes Ibrahim ibn Khaytham, who is weak.*

قُلْ مَن يَكْلَؤُكُم بِٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ مِنَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِۗ بَلْ هُمْ
عَن ذِكْرِ رَبِّهِم مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Say, 'Who could protect you night and day from the Lord of Mercy?' Yet they turn away when their Lord is mentioned [42]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 42)

The Arabic word *Yakl'u* means 'protect' and 'safeguard'. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says how those deniers of the Truth deny Me in spite of the fact that I have showered countless blessings upon them. In other words, you, O disbelievers, hurt and mock the pious from among His *Glorified is He* slaves even though He *the Almighty* is the One Who '…protects you night and day…' (*al-Anbiya':* 42). This very fact of Allah's Protection of mankind is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran; He *the Almighty* says: '...that could preserve him from whatever Allah may have willed...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). It is yet very important to know that the meaning of this aforementioned verse of *ar-Ra'd* is that those angelic keepers are not to protect man from what Allah had predestined for him/her because the command of protection originates from Allah *the Almighty*. Here, we stress that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who commissioned these angels to protect you, that is, they do not do this act of protection voluntarily. It is thus clear that one of Allah's Blessings upon man is that He *the Almighty* protects you day and night through His angels who ward off harm from you.

We often hear about some person who got up from sleeping and found a snake in his/her bed. Amazingly enough, the snake neither bit nor hurt him/her in any way. Yet, upon seeing the snake, s/he might feel badly frightened because s/he does not know that the snake will not hurt him/her so long as s/he does not harm it which is one of the wonders of these creatures, that is, they do not hurt you so long as you do not hurt them. It is thus clear that Allah *the Almighty* is the Only One Who protects you from all that which causes you harm while sleeping.

At this point, we should strongly stress that Allah's Protection of man is not limited to the act of protecting him/her from dangers, but rather extends to providing him/her with means of subsistence, including the sun, the moon, the earth, the sky, the water, etc. Yet despite all these blessings, those deniers of the Truth stubbornly refuse to believe in Him *Glorified is He* and mock at His

Messengers and pious slaves, which is why He *the Almighty* concludes the verse with His saying: ‘…Yet they turn away when their Lord is mentioned.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 42) It means that they should not have been heedless of the Remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

أَمۡ لَهُمۡ ءَالِهَةٞ تَمۡنَعُهُم مِّن دُونِنَاۚ لَا يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ
نَصۡرَ أَنفُسِهِمۡ وَلَا هُم مِّنَّا يُصۡحَبُونَ ٤٣

Do they have gods who can defend them against Us? Their gods have no power to help themselves, nor can they be protected from Us[43] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 43)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* asks: ‘Do those deniers of the Truth have other gods that prevent them from believing in Me?’ He *the Almighty* then gives the answer to this question, affirming that these so-called gods are not capable of helping themselves, let alone help others! How could they help themselves when they are mere idols made of stone, and sculpted by their servants in various forms?! How could they help themselves when if the wind carried away one of them, it would require someone to pick it up and put it in its place?!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…nor can they be protected from Us’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 43), it is to be explained in the light of the fact that a Bedouin used to seek the help of a strong person to protect him from a particular tribe against whom this person has previously committed wrong, especially as he was about to pass by the houses of this tribe. In actuality, this meaning is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* about Moses *peace be upon him* when he asked Allah to support him with his brother Aaron. Allah says: ‘...They keep a grave charge [pending] against me, and I fear that they will slay me’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 14) meaning that Aaron would accompany him *peace be upon him* and protect him from the wrongdoing of the people of Pharaoh, thus being safe from them.

Back to the verse in question; this particular part of the verse clearly indicates that Allah will not accompany those deniers of the Truth, nor will they be saved from His Punishment. In addition, none can accompany them, nor can anyone save them from the Divine Punishment.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

بَلْ مَتَّعْنَا هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ وَءَابَآءَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ طَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْعُمُرُ ۗ أَفَلَا يَرَوْنَ
أَنَّا نَأْتِى ٱلْأَرْضَ نَنقُصُهَا مِنْ أَطْرَافِهَآ ۚ أَفَهُمُ ٱلْغَٰلِبُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

We have allowed these sinners and their forefathers to enjoy life for a long time. But do they not see how We are shrinking their borders? Is it they who will prevail? [44] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 44)

This verse clearly tells that those deniers of the Truth have enjoyed the Blessings of Allah *the Almighty* for a long time, yet what was the end of those sinners? Allah *the Almighty* gives an answer to this question, so that we might take admonition; He *Glorified is He* says: 'Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth and beheld what happened in the end to those [deniers of the Truth] who lived before their time? Greater were they in power than they are; and they left a stronger impact on the earth, and built it up even better than these [are doing]....' (*ar-Rum:* 9)

Elsewhere in the Quran, He *the Almighty* clearly states that the sinners were seized by a mighty, powerful seizure. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not see how many a generation We have destroyed before their time—[people] whom We had given a [bountiful] place on earth, the like of which We never gave unto you, and upon whom We showered heavenly blessings abundant, and at whose feet We made running waters flow? And yet We destroyed them for their sins, and gave rise to other people in their stead.' (*al-An'am:* 6)

Back to the verse in question; He *the Almighty* says: '…But do they not see how We are shrinking the borders of the earth?' (*al-Anbiya':* 44) In the chapter of *ar-Ra'd,* He *Glorified is He* mentions a similar verse, saying: 'Have, then, they [who deny the Truth] never yet seen how We come to the land, diminishing it in its extremities. For, [when] Allah judges, there is no power that could repel His Judgment: and swift in reckoning is He!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41)

As a matter of fact, some Muslim scholars attempted to understand these two aforementioned verses of *ar-Ra'd* and *al-Anbiya'* in the light of the recent modern scientific discoveries. Upon discovering that the earth is oval and not perfectly circular, they, trying to prove the veracity of the Quran and that it mentioned this scientific fact even before modern science, held the view that these two verses cannot be explained except in the light of this particular scientific discovery. They thus believe that this act of shrinking of the borders of the earth takes place at the Equator, not the two poles.

Yet these scholars did not take into consideration the point that these two verses clearly mention that the act of shrinking takes place from all the borders and sides of the earth and not just from one side or border. For this reason, it is very important to know that such opinions may lead people to have doubts about the Quran. With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…But do they not see…?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 44), we have a question: ‘Is the act of seeing in this verse relating to real vision or to science?’ In case we said that it is relating to real vision, this opinion would be rejected by the fact that this phenomenon was not discovered until the 20th century, that is, none knew anything about it before that time, thus it is not relating to real vision. Also, it has nothing to do with science because this piece of information discovered recently was not known by anyone. In addition, the Arabs were not people of knowledge or culture, so how can we then understand this part of the verse?

The answer is that those deniers of the Truth had actually known about the previous nations and how they opposed and rejected the Divine Way of Guidance for nothing but that it came to eliminate their power and to achieve equality among mankind. In spite of all their stubbornness, the number of the followers of Islam increased day by day, whilst their numbers dramatically decreased.

In other words, Allah *the Almighty* diminishes the land of disbelief by either causing people to die, or by demolishing their houses and buildings by way of earthquakes; this is on the part of the disbelievers. As for the believers, Allah *Glorified is He* causes them to increase in number, and thus increases the area of the land of faith.(1) Here, we strongly stress that all the previous nations had actually experienced this matter.

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(1) *Commenting on this verse, Ibn ‘Abbas says, ‘Have these disbelievers not seen that We are opening the lands for Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him one after one.’ Al-Hassan and Ad-Dahhak, on their part, say, ‘(This verse) refers to Muslims’ victory over the polytheists.’ As for ‘Ikrima, he says, ‘Had the earth actually diminished in*=

If someone yet asks: ‘How can we assent to this interpretation of this Meccan verse when the increasing of the land of faith did not happen until after the Hijra? We say: ‘The fact of the verse being Meccan does not in any way affect the meaning, for it is not necessary that they themselves should experience this established law of diminishing the land of disbelief, but it is rather sufficient to take admonition from the previous nations, a point which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time.’ (*as-Saffat:* 137)

He *the Almighty* also says: ‘…and with [the tribe of] Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein.’ (*al-Fajr:* 9–12) Yet another possible interpretation of this verse is that those deniers of the Truth had actually known about this fact of diminishing the land of disbelief from their allies of the people of the Book. The meaning thus is: you, O disbelievers, will be afflicted with the same punishment that afflicted the previous nations. Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: ‘…Is it they who will prevail?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 44), meaning ‘Have those disbelievers not witnessed that We diminished the land in its extremities? Or this did not happen, thus leaving them thereby the victors?!’ In other words, ‘which of the two parties are victorious: Allah’s Messengers or the disbelievers?’ The answer is for sure that it is the disbelievers who were defeated and humiliated; this is an undeniable fact which is crystal clear in the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...Verily, Our Hosts—they indeed—would [in the end] be victorious!’ (*as-Saffat:* 173) He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Behold, We shall indeed succour Our Apostles and those who have attained to faith in this world’s life....’ (*Ghafir:* 51)

Allah *the Almighty* then addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying:

= *size, people would not have found any place to reside in, thus they will for sure die.’ Commenting on all these opinions, Ibn Kathir holds the position that he supports the first opinion, which is also the opinion held by Ibn Jarir. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Adhim, 2/520.*

قُلْ إِنَّمَآ أُنذِرُكُم بِٱلْوَحْيِ ۚ وَلَا يَسْمَعُ ٱلصُّمُّ ٱلدُّعَآءَ إِذَا مَا يُنذَرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Say, 'I warn you only through the Revelation.'
The deaf will not hear the warning call [45]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 45)

This verse tells clearly that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not tell the disbelievers anything from his own accord; rather, all the revelations including the giving of glad tidings and warnings, were from Allah, Most High. You, yourselves, O disbelievers, know for certain that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mere human that only received the Divine Message from Allah to deliver it to you.

As a matter of fact, had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to you, 'I am the one who warns you…', then you would have a right to doubt. But, on the contrary, the One Who gives this command is Allah *the Almighty* and Prophet Muhammad has nothing to do with it at all but to convey to you this Message from Allah Who Alone has the Omnipotence to do what He wills.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…The deaf will not hear the warning call.' (*al-Anbiya':* 45) In this regard, we should know that 'hearing' is the first sense through which man gets information. In addition, it is the first sense that functions in the human body. That is why before a child speaks, it must necessarily hear something first, in order to pronounce that which it heard because 'hearing', as we previously said, is the first sense that functions in the human body, thus followed by all other senses. In the same vein, we should know that the ear starts working before the eye, which is why Allah *the Almighty* mentions the sense of hearing before that of seeing. He *the Almighty* says: '...Verily, [your] hearing and sight and heart—all of them—will be called to account for it [on Judgment Day]!' (*al-Isra':* 36)

It is of great importance to be fully aware of the fact that 'ears' are the only body organs that do not stop functioning, even if a person is asleep. That is because 'hearing' is the sense which responds to people's calling. For this reason, when Allah *the Almighty* wanted to put the People of the Cave to sleep for that long period of time, He smote their ears, thus their sense of hearing became inactive, in order that the sounds of nature outside the cave would not disturb them. He *the Almighty* says: '...We veiled their ears in the cave for many a year.' (*al-Kahf:* 11)

The meaning of the saying of Allah: '…The deaf will not hear the warning call' (*al-Anbiya':* 45) is thus that those deniers of the Truth did really hear, but yet did not respond positively to the Divine Way of Guidance. In other words, they did not get any benefit from their hearing because the benefit of hearing is that you listen and respond to someone who speaks to you, so if you do not respond, then it is as if you did not hear. If, for example, you ordered an employee to do something, and he paid no attention to it, you would say to him, 'Are you deaf?' For this reason, the Quran refers to them as being 'deaf'.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the warning call' (*al-Anbiya':* 45), it means that, if only it were an ordinary summons to which they paid no attention, but no, they pay no attention and turn away from Our Warning, that is, when they are warned against Our Punishment. As a matter of fact, one should pay great attention to the 'warning' because it causes him/her to get benefit through keeping away from harm which is why it is foolish not to take care of it. For instance, if you warned man against a particular road which is full of lions, or wolves, or snakes or robbers and he did not pay attention to your warning, this would be viewed as foolishness, for he did not take the necessary precautions to save himself.

We previously said that 'to warn someone' is to inform him/her of an approaching evil before its time in order that s/he may prepare him/herself for it and, if possible, eliminate it before it arrives. So, to tell someone about an evil at the time of its happening is not 'warning' in any way because you do not give him/her the opportunity to take the necessary precautions to save him/herself.

It is thus clear that the problem with those deniers of the Truth has nothing to do with their body organs, but rather with their ability to properly and correctly understand the Divine Way of Guidance. For the disbeliever, when you talk about faith, s/he does not pay you any attention because the matter does not appeal to him/her.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَئِن مَّسَّتۡهُمۡ نَفۡحَةٞ مِّنۡ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ يَٰوَيۡلَنَآ إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Yet if a mere breath of your Lord’s punishment
touches them, they will be sure to cry, ‘Woe to us!
We were wrong!’ [46] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 46)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells that those deniers of the Truth will not take heed of the Truth until the punishment touched them.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Yet if a mere breath of your Lord’s Punishment touches them…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 46), it means that the punishment that will touch them in this stage is not severe. As for the Arabic word *An-Nafha,* it refers to a gentle breeze which carries the traces of things but not their reality, such as that which comes up with the scent of roses; as a matter of fact, this breeze in question does not carry the roses themselves, but only their scent.

Likewise is this touch of the Divine Punishment: it is nothing but a mere touch, exactly as we say of the slightest heat of the fire that touches us even though we are far away from it.

As for the Arabic word *Nafha* (breath), it, linguistically, indicates that those deniers of the Truth will be touched with the Divine punishment for only one time in this stage. It is of great importance to know that they, in this stage, will be afflicted with just one touch and one breath of punishment, yet they are unable to endure any. So, how will they act in case they are to be afflicted with the everlasting Divine punishment?!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…they will be sure to cry, ‘Woe to us! We were wrong’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 46), it indicates that those deniers of the Truth will, upon being afflicted with this touch of the Divine punishment, admit the absolute truth which they concealed for a very long period of time. It is now that you, O disbelievers, are going to speak! It is now that you become able to fully realise the essence of things! You now do all of this as a result of being afflicted with just one touch of breath from the Divine punishment! So, where were your feelings and senses before that?! It is thus clear that the matter has to do with the ability to understand things properly and correctly, not with the nature of man.

The saying of Allah: ‘Woe to us’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 46) plainly tells that they, upon being touched with this one breath of the Divine punishment, become fully aware of the severe punishment they are going to meet in the Hereafter. Having sensed this punishment, they will openly admit ‘…We were wrong!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 46)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَنَضَعُ ٱلْمَوَٰزِينَ ٱلْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْـًٔا ۖ وَإِن كَانَ
مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا ۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِنَا حَٰسِبِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

We will set up scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection so that no one can be wronged in the least, and if there should be even the weight of a mustard seed, We shall bring it out – We take excellent account [47] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 47)

In this verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* sheds light on another topic. He *Glorified is He* shifts from speaking of the disbelievers’ denial and rejection to the Message of Prophet Muhammad, their disbelief in the Divine Revelation and their stubbornness on not to pay attention to the good brought to them to another topic which is that of accountability and the scale of justice. So why does He *the Almighty* do so? As a matter of fact, He *the Almighty* does this in order to call their attention to the fact that this Divine Way of Guidance which they have received with denial and doubt is for their own benefit. In addition, He *Glorified is He* wants to tell them that they will for sure be held accountable for all their deeds, and that all of their actions are recorded and written down. That is to say that He *the Almighty* out of His Infinite Mercy, still gives them advice to be safe from the chastisement.

The Arabic word *Mawazin* (scales) is the plural of the word *Mizan* (scale) which is an instrument by means of which we determine things with regard to their weight. In actuality, such determination is possible for a number of things, including measuring weight by means of a scale, determining distance by means of a measure, and so forth. It is important in this regard to know that people have established fixed and strict criteria according to which the weight, the length, the height, etc. of something is exactly and precisely determined.

People formerly used to weigh a piece of stone equivalent to a kilo, for example, and use it on the balance-scale because it served as a fixed reference. But this piece would wear down as a result of the frequent use and so inevitably undergo change.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* speaks about something which is weighed, but He does not mention other measures, so why? Scholars believe that this is because those things which are applicable to be weighed are larger in number than anything else. For this reason, they used to test the children, saying to them, ‘Is a kilo of iron heavier, or a kilo of cotton?’ Then the child would look at the cotton, see that it is soft and fluffy, thus say, ‘Cotton!’ As a matter of fact, cotton is of bigger size than iron, but the area it occupies may yet be diminished by pressing, which is why it is commonly believed that ‘weight’ is the most important criteria according to which the essence of a thing might be determined.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And the skies has He raised high, and has devised(1) [for all things] a measure.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 7) Here arises a question, which is: ‘Is Allah *the Almighty* going to set up just one scale or more than one?’

We strongly stress that the entire creation will be held accountable for their deeds at one time. They will not stand in a long procession, each one waiting for his/her turn, but everything will happen at one time. For this reason, when Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was once asked, ‘How will Allah reckon the entire creation at one time?’ He said, ‘As He provides them all with means of subsistence at one time.’ Even though you, O man, believe that this matter is of enormous difficulty, it is extremely easy for Allah *Glorified is He*.

The Arabic word *Al-Qist* (justice) is an adjective for the scale; it is a verbal noun meaning ‘justice,’ as you say in praise of a judge: ‘That is a just judge,’ that is, one characterised by justice. Yet if you wanted to intensify the expression, you would say: 'That judge is justice,' as though he himself personified justice. Therefore, *Al-'Adl* (the All Justice), not *Al-'Adel* (the Just)*,* is one of the Names of Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *In his Fath Ar-Rahman bi Kashf Ma Yaltabis Fi Al-Quran, Imam Abu Yahya Zakarriya Al-Ansari says, ‘Allah the Almighty joined between the raising of the skies and the scale because the scale is one of the most important blessings of Allah the Almighty for it is by means of which that the system of the entire universe is established.’ See Abu Yahya Zakarriya Al-Ansari, Fath Ar-Rahman bi Kashf Ma Yaltabis fi Al-Quran, p. 405.*

Here, we should take into account that this word in question, i.e. *Qist* carries a number of meanings in the Arabic language; it even gives a meaning and its opposite; exactly like the word *Zawj* (spouse) which applies to both the man and the woman alike; the word *'ayn* (eye), which is used to refer to the following: the body part by means of which one is able to see, to a spring of water, to a spy, as well as to gold and silver.

Likewise is the Arabic word *Al-Qist;* it gives the meaning of justice; this meaning is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...Verily, Allah loves those who act equitably.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 42) As for the word *Al-Qast,* it gives the meaning of 'injustice'; Allah says: '...As for those who abandon themselves to wrongdoing—they are indeed but fuel for [the fires of] hell!' (*al-Jinn:* 15) The Arabic word *Al-Qasitun* in this regard gives the meaning of tyrants and wrongdoers.

In this regard, it is of great importance to know that the word *Al-Qist* gives the meaning of *Al-'Adl* in case 'justice' is applied from the very beginning as to a particular matter, which is why the word *Aqsat* clearly indicates that there was an unjust ruling which was nullified and altered to be 'just'. This meaning is perfectly clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...Call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). The Arabic word *Aqsat* in this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Ahzab* indicates that even though the ruling of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was just and equitable, the ruling of Allah *the Almighty* is even more just and equitable.

We know that Zayd ibn Haritha preferred Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to his family; he chose not to go back home with them, which is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to reward him for this act, thus called him Zayd ibn Muhammad.

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* altered this just ruling of Prophet Muhammad to a more equitable one of His, that is, even though he *peace and blessings be* *upon him* has acted justly and equitably in this regard, the Ruling of Allah is even more just and equitable.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...Call them by their [real] fathers' names...' (*al-Ahzab:* 5), it came to nullify the practice of adoption. By abolishing this act, Allah *the Almighty* wants to lay down a new legislation concerning the family affairs. In addition, He *Glorified is He* wanted to modify a lot of rulings which cannot take place in the light of this act of adoption. For instance, how will the members of the family act and behave when the adopted son reached puberty? Would it be allowed for this boy to look at the women of this family even though he is a foreigner to them?

In this regard, the orientalist aroused doubts on the topic of the Hereafter's scales, to the extent that they claimed that these following two verses: 'We will set up scales of justice for the Day of Resurrections…' (*al-Anbiya':* 47) and '...No weight (*wazn*) shall We assign to them on Resurrection Day' (*al-Kahf:* 105) are contradictory with one another; they claimed that the first verse affirmed the existence of the balance while the second negated it.

We said: 'Being unable to correctly understand the rulings of the Arabic language, those people are unable to understand the Quran. As a matter of fact, if we reflect upon the Arabic particle *Lam* (to) in the second verse, we will be able to properly understand the meaning; this *Lam* indicates possession and benefit exactly as they say in the language of accounting 'for him' and 'against him,' that is, to his credit or to his deficit, a meaning which is also clear in the Quran; Allah says: '...In his favour shall be whatever good he does, and against him whatever evil he does….' (*al-Baqara:* 286)

The meaning of this verse of the chapter of *al-Kahf* thus is Allah *Glorified is He* will not assign to them a weight in their favour on the Day of Resurrection. On the contrary, He *the Almighty* shall judge them guilty. In the same connection, the word *Al-Wazn* is used to refer to a material weight, or an incorporeal weight. An example of the latter is the saying of Arabs, '*La Wazna Lahu Bayn Ar-Rijal'* meaning 'So-and-so holds no weight (i.e. value) among men.'

Based on this, this verse of the chapter of *al-Kahf* can be understood as referring to both the disbelievers' material and incorporeal weight. This meaning is yet crystal clear in the story of the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* about whom Allah says: '[Allah] answered: "O Noah, behold, he was not of your family, for, verily, he was unrighteous in his conduct..."' (*Hud:* 46) which clearly means that even though this boy was sired by Noah *peace be upon him* he is not his son as to the matters of faith and belief, for he did not believe in the Message of his father.

In fact, the disbelievers and the sinners thought that they would be honoured by Allah *the Almighty* in the Hereafter just as they were in this worldly life, a point which is crystal clear in the story of the man of the Two Gardens about whom Allah tells that he said to his friend: '(I have) more wealth have I than you, and mightier am I as regards [the number and power of my] followers!' And having [thus] sinned against himself, he entered his garden, saying, 'I do not think that this will ever perish!' And neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!' (*al-Kahf:* 34–36) But it is absolutely out of the question that those deniers of the Truth will possess weight in the Hereafter, for weight on that particular Day is given to works alone, not to people of distinction. The meaning, then, is that Allah *the Almighty* will not assign weight to people of distinction from among the disbelievers, but rather will weigh their works and deeds. For that reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have addressed his relatives, saying, 'Let no people bring me their works on the Day of Resurrection, yet you bring me your (familial) relations.'(1)

In the same connection, he *peace and blessings be upon him* also says, 'O *Fatima,* daughter of Prophet Muhammad, do good deeds, for I cannot avail you anything with Allah.'(2) This clearly indicates that people's lineages and families will avail them nothing in that situation.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'My close friends on the Day of Resurrection are the most pious. People's lineage will avail them naught in the Hereafter. So, O family of Muhammad, let not people come with their good deeds while you come with the sins of this world on your backs, for then you will call upon me, saying, "O Prophet Muhammad! but I will turn away from you."' See Ibn Abi 'Asim, As-Sunna, 1/94.*

(2) *Hudhayfa said, 'I once came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while Al-'Abbas was sitting on his right and Fatima on his left. Then he peace and blessings*=

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…so that no one can be wronged in the least…' (*al-Anbiya':* 47), it means that those deniers of the Truth had wronged Allah *the Almighty* by associating partners with Him in worship, and that they had wronged Messenger Muhammad by accusing him of practising sorcery, telling lies and being crazy. Even though one of the established rules of the Sharia that whoever is wronged has the right to requite, a meaning which is crystal clear in His saying: '...if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you...' (*al-Baqara:* 194), He *Glorified is He* clearly states in this verse in question that no injustice will be committed on that Day of Resurrection.

As for the Arabic word *Al-Khardal* (seed of mustard) in the verse in question, it indicates exactness and precision in investigating everything. Today the mustard-seed is also the international standard measurement unit.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...We shall bring it out...' (*al-Anbiya':* 47), it means that all of their deeds, whether for or against them, will be brought on the Day of Resurrection. So, in case the balance of deeds is in their favour, they become fully certain that Allah never wrongs them, for He *Glorified is He* carefully investigates all of their deeds, even the smallest of small acts of goodness, and if it is against them, they know that He *the Almighty* will thoroughly examine everything in the Reckoning. By mentioning the grain of mustard-seed, which is of small size, and the word *Mithqal,* which indicates weight, Allah *the Almighty* gathers together between the size and the weight of man's deed.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying: '…We take excellent account.' (*al-Anbiya':* 47) This part of the verse clearly indicates that none can do this matter as precisely as Allah *the Almighty* does, for He *Glorified is He* is never heedless of anything.

As a human being, do not think that this matter of the Reckoning and the Balance-Scale is an easy one in which you could arrive at perfect exactitude,

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= *be upon him said, "O Fatima, daughter of Prophet Muhammad, do good deeds, for I cannot avail you anything with Allah.' See Al-Haythami, Majma' Az-Zawa'id, 1/49; he attributed it to Al-Bazzar.*

no matter how many precautionary measures you took to do so, for you are a mere human being who is incapable of weighing things exactly because the iron measure by means of which you weigh things is liable to increase and decrease.

For example, dust may accumulate upon the measure you use in weighing things, or a drop of oil may even fall upon it; with the passage of time, the process of weighing things may be affected either for the interest of the buyer or for that of the seller. In the same connection, if we carefully consider the doorknob, we will find that it, unlike the rest of the door, is shining, which is to conclude that everything in the universe is decreased by virtue of touching or being in direct contact with it.

This point is also applicable to even the modern balance-scales which ensure a high level of precision and accuracy. These balances are still unable to give you the most absolute accuracy, a thing which is entitled only to Allah *the Almighty* as He says: '...None can take count [of man's doings] as Allah does!' (*al-Ahzab:* 39) and '...None can take count as We do!' (*al-Anbiya':* 47) because He *Glorified is He* neither forgets, nor is heedless of anything.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ وَهَٰرُونَ ٱلْفُرْقَانَ وَضِيَآءً وَذِكْرًا لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

We gave Moses and Aaron [the Scripture] that distinguishes right from wrong, a light and a reminder for those who are mindful of God [48] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 48)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to console His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and relieve the burdens of the hardships which he suffered at the hands of his people. Therefore, He *the Almighty* tells him here of these examples from those previous Messengers who were endowed with firmness of heart(1) and who were persecuted and hurt by their people. In actuality, by so doing, He *the Almighty* wants to make Messenger Muhammad’s task of conveying the Message easier, thus his peoples’ offense would not divert him from his very purpose of conveying the Divine Message to mankind.

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(1) *Allah the Almighty says: 'Remain, then, patient in adversity, just as all of the apostles, endowed with firmness of heart, bore themselves with patience...' (al-Ahqaf: 35) Commenting on this verse, Ibn Kathir said: 'Scholars differed over the number of those Messengers who were endowed with firmness of heart, yet the most common opinion is that they are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, the seal of all of them.=*

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* starts with Prophet Moses *peace be upon him* because he is one of the Messengers who suffered greatly in conveying the Message to his people. It is enough to know that he *peace be upon him* had suffered from the believing men of his people, so what about the disbelieving ones?! Here, in this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says that He has given *Al-Furqan* to both Moses and Aaron because they both were sent to deliver the same Message, a meaning which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And my brother Aaron—he is far better in speech than I am...’ (*al-Qasas:* 34) and ‘Add You through him to my strength, and let him share my task.’ (*Ta Ha:* 31–32)

The Arabic word *Al-Furqan* is used to refer to something by means of which two things are distinguished from one another. It is one of the names of the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Hallowed is He who from on high, step by step, has bestowed upon His servant *Al-Furqan* by which to discern the true from the false, so that to all the world it might be a warning.’ (*al-Furqan:* 1)

The word *Al-Furqan* thus is a verbal noun indicating intensification. Arabs say: ‘*Farraq Tafriqan wa Furqanan’* to indicate the intensification of the act. That is because adding the two letters *Alif* and *Nun* at the end of the word strengthens the meaning and makes it clearer. This is because when you distinguish between two things the difference between which is insignificant, you call this simply a ‘distinction’ (*farq*). So, when you distinguish between two things, the difference between which results in something momentous for the formation of society and the proceeding of life; this is a ‘conclusive distinction’. It is for this reason that the Quran is called *Al-Furqan* because it distinguished the Truth from falsehood.

This meaning of this word is also clear in His saying: ‘O you who have attained to faith! If you remain conscious of Allah, He will endow you with a standard [or

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= *Other scholars believe that this description applies to all the previous Messengers and Prophets.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 4/172.*

distinction] by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal:* 29). There is no consciousness of Allah except by means of carrying out His Commands and Instructions which are mentioned in the Quran which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for the word *Al-Furqan* in this aforementioned verse of *al-Anfal,* it means a light by which you separate between things and distinguish between obscurities.

As a matter of fact, the more you are conscious of Allah, which is the first *Furqan,* He *Glorified is He* will provide you with the second *Furqan* by means of which you could distinguish among things and have the perspicacity by which you could get out of any troubles.

Do not you see them saying, 'So-and-so is clever' and 'So-and-so is quick-witted,' that is, able to summon remote or improbable things and turn them to advantage in the present moment? This actually results from the good fortune and success granted to him/her by Allah *the Almighty*. In this regard, Arabs used to be proud of the intelligence and sharp-wittedness of Iyas ibn Mu'awya, a point which is clear in the following poetic verse:(1)

The boldness of ʿAmr with the magnanimity of Hatim,

The forbearance of Ahnaf, and the sharpness of Iyas

Let us offer this striking example to see how Allah supports His pious slaves by *Al-Furqan.* It is narrated that when the Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja'far Al-Mansur wanted to make pilgrimage to Mecca for the last time in his life, he was told that Sufyan Ath-Thawri(2) was speaking of him, criticising him and accusing him of injustice. So the Caliph said, 'I am going to make the pilgrimage this year, and I want to see him crucified in Mecca.' This news reached the people of Mecca where Sufyan Ath-Thawri was residing in the company of his companions from the Sufis, including Sufyan ibn ‘Uyyana and Al-Fudayl ibn ‘Iyad who both deeply loved Ath-Thawri.

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(1) He is Abu Tammam, Habib ibn Aws At-Ta'i. He was born in one of the villages of Syria in 180 A.H. He experienced a poor life and used to work for a weaver while he was a boy. He died in the year 231 A.H. at the age of 51.

(2) He is Sufyan ibn Sa'id ibn Masruq Ath-Thawri Al-Mudari. His nickname is Abu Abdullah. He is the most knowledgeable person of the Hadith and the other sciences of religion at his time. He was born in Kufa in 97 A.H. The Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur asked him frequently to be appointed as a ruler, but he refused. He died in Basra in 161 A.H. while hiding from the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mahdi. See *Az-Zirikli, Al-'Alam,* 3/104.

One day the three of them were at the Mosque and Ath-Thawri was lying down between his two companions, with his head on one’s lap and his feet on the other’s, when the news of Al-Mansur and his proclamation reached them. So Ibn ‘Uyyana and Al-Fudayl pleaded to Ath-Thawri, ‘O Sufy*an*, do not disgrace us and disappear so that Al-Mansur could not see you, for if he seizes you and carries out his threat against you, he will weaken men’s firm belief in those who are mindful of Allah.’

It is at this point that Ath-Thawri said, ‘By Him in whose Hand is my soul, he will not enter the city,’ And this is what actually took place, for Al-Mansur entered Mecca from the direction of Al-Hajun where he fell from his riding animal and died at once. As such, he entered Mecca as a dead body and Ath-Thawri himself was the one who led his funeral prayer. This is the distinction, light, insight and perspicacity of the believer who sees by Allah’s Light and does not set about any affair except according to His Guidance.

It is also narrated that Al-Mahdi, the Abbasid caliph, entered the *Ka‘ba* and found there a young boy of the age of 16 or 17. Around him, 400 eminent, bearded sheikhs of awe-inspiring appearance and dignified status were gathered, and the boy was giving them a lesson. Astonished, Al-Mahdi said, ‘Ugh, should not head one of these bearded people not head the gathering?!’ Then he approached the boy, wanting to scold and upbraid him, and said to him, ‘How old are you, boy?’ Thereupon the boy said, ‘My age equates that of Usama ibn Zayd when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed him as a commander of an army which included within its ranks Abu Bakr and ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with them*.’ Then, acknowledging the boy’s sharpness of wit and his rightful assumption of that position, Al-Mahdi replied, ‘May Allah bless you.’

The appellation of the ‘criterion’, then, is not applied to anything except momentous, mighty affairs, equivalent to that which descended upon Moses *peace be upon him* or that which descended upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It also came to be a proper noun for the Quran, for there is a distinction between the name and the description. You describe everything which distinguishes between truth and falsehood as a ‘criterion’, but when this word is used as a proper noun, it applies to the Quran.

The one who contemplates this matter of the division that distinguishes between truth and falsehood in the Quran finds that it plays a role in the story of Moses, for its very first verse reads: ‘And when We parted the sea for you....’ (*al-Baqara:* 50)

The division is to separate between something which is simultaneously contiguous and different. In arithmetic they say ‘mixing’ and ‘mingling’, for there is a difference between separating between mixed things such as an orange, an apple, and a grape, and separating them while they are mixed together as juice, intermingled to the point of becoming a single thing.

Therefore, the division of the sea for Moses *peace be upon him* is not simply a ‘division’, but a ‘conclusive division,’ because the greatest kind of division is to divide the water into two parts, each of which is like an immense, towering mountain—and who has the power to do such a thing except for Allah *the Almighty*?

Then He *the Almighty* says: ‘...a light and a reminder for those who are mindful of Allah.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 48) This means that what was revealed to Moses *peace be upon him* was a light which guides the people throughout the paths of their life free from any harm. Otherwise, how would they pass through the narrow passes of life? If the human being journeyed without guidance, s/he would either collide with what is stronger than him/her and be smashed, or else s/he would collide with what is weaker than him/her and smash it. The Light, therefore, is important and necessary in the human being’s life, for by virtue of this Light s/he is rightly guided in the proceedings of a peaceful life. Leading it according to clear evidence, s/he neither wears himself/herself out nor troubles others.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘...and a reminder...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 48), it means that the scripture reminds those who are heedless and calls them to attention. This is because when layers of heedlessness accumulate, they form a covering which veils one’s ability to see and blinds one’s insight. Therefore, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave a likeness for man’s heedlessness, he said, 'Temptations will be presented to men's hearts as a reed mat is woven stick by stick.'

According to another narration, he said, 'seeking protection again and again', that is, seeking Allah's Protection from these temptations afflicting a believer. Have you seen the maker of the reed mat when s/he subjoins one reed to another until s/he has formed a complete mat? Likewise, when the temptations are presented to us, the reminder eliminates our heedlessness so that the layers of heedlessness do not pile-up upon us, one over another.

The Hadith then continues, 'Any heart which is impregnated by them—that is, accepted them—will have a black mark put into it, but any heart which rejects them will have a white mark put in it. The result is that there will become two types of hearts (Allah's Messenger spoke truly): either white like a stone which will not be harmed by any turmoil or temptation, so long as the heavens and the earth endure; and the other black and dust-coloured like a vessel which is upset, not recognising what is good or rejecting what is abominable.'(1)

The scholars said that this is the rust about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Nay! Rather, what they used to do has become like rust upon their hearts.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 14) Thus, the reminder is that which removes this rust.

Some of the qualities of those: '…who are mindful of Allah.' (*al-Anbiya':* 48) are mentioned in the following verse:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَخۡشَوۡنَ رَبَّهُم بِٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَهُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّاعَةِ مُشۡفِقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

Those who stand in awe of their Lord, though
He is unseen, and who fear the Hour[49]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 49)

To 'stand in awe' is to fear something due to its exaltedness and awesomeness. You might fear something which you detest and despise, but to 'stand in awe' is to fear that your father or your teacher, for example, sees you being negligent. You will feel ashamed that he sees you in this state of negligence.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim in the Book of Iman and by Ahmad on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 144; Ahmad, Musnad, 5/386, 405.*

Thus, the meaning of ‘standing in awe’ of Allah *the Almighty* is that you fear being negligent in what He commanded and with which He entrusted you. This is due to the fact that Allah’s standards are high, and perhaps you failed to do that with which you are entrusted.

Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* explains this matter, saying: ‘...those of His servants only who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah...’ (*Fatir:* 28). What is the reason for this? It is because the scholars are the most knowledgeable of Allah *the Almighty* and of His Wisdom in His creation; whenever the truths of the creation and its secrets are disclosed to them, their fear of Allah *the Almighty* and their awe and reverence of Him increases. For that reason, He *the Almighty* says about them: ‘They fear their Lord above them...’ (*an-Nahl:* 50). This verse shows that they fear their Lord, Who is superior to them, but they do so with love and awe of Him.

The meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘…though He is unseen…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 49) is that they fear Allah *the Almighty* despite the fact that they do not see Him with their eyes, but rather see Him in the traces of His creative Power. Another possible interpretation is that the ‘unseen’ here refers to the affairs which they do not witness, but which Allah *the Almighty* informs them about, and thereby these affairs become as if they were seen with their own eyes.

The meaning could also be that they fear their Lord in their periods of seclusion from the world, for the awe of Allah *the Almighty* and proper comportment toward Him accompanies them even in their seclusion and solitude, unlike those who hypocritically demonstrate this comportment in front of people, and then become rebellious against Allah *the Almighty* in their solitude.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and who fear the Hour.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 49) They also fear the Hour, but their fear is accompanied by wariness, unlike their fear of Allah *the Almighty* which is accompanied by awe. This is because they fear that the Hour will come upon them before being completely prepared in a way that makes them happy with Allah’s Requital when they receive it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَهَٰذَا ذِكْرٌ مُّبَارَكٌ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ أَفَأَنتُمْ لَهُۥ مُنكِرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

This [Quran] too is a blessed message We have sent
down – are you [people] going to deny it? [50]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 50)

That verse means that just as the Torah is: ‘... a reminder...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 48), the Quran which Allah *the Almighty* revealed to Prophet Muhammad is a reminder, but it is: ‘…a blessed reminder…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 50).

They say, ‘this thing is blessed,’ which signifies that it gives to you goodness on top of what one expects from it. An example of this is when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to give his companions milk to drink from a single deep, wooden drinking cup,(1) and to feed the entire army from a small, scanty amount of food.(2)

Let us offer an example from our daily life; we hear the people say, ‘So-and-so’s salary is small, but despite that, he and his children live a good life.’ This is because Allah *the Almighty* blesses this small amount of money for him.

Thus, the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘…a blessed reminder…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 50) is that its goodness is beyond what you think. So, you should beware of saying, ‘It is merely a Book of statutes and commandments’, for the Quran possesses the quality of eternity, and contains endless secrets. Its blessing includes all the spheres and all the domains up to the Hour of Resurrection, for regardless of the times we repeat its verses, we find it beautiful and eloquent. In every age, it reveals new secrets, and it never wears out from repeating its recitation, nor do its wonders come to an end. So the Quran is blessed because the goodness it comprises transcends the period of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and, indeed, every period, age and century. Every day it bestows a new secret from among what Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned in it.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Allah be pleased with him that on the Day of the Tree in Hudaybiyya, Allah’s Messenger peace and blessings be upon him brought water in a small drinking vessel, put his hand in it, and made the water flow out between his fingers as though they were springs. Jabir said, ‘We drank and it sufficed us.’ Then he was asked, ‘How many were you?’ and he said, ‘If we had been 100,000 it would have sufficed us. We were 1,500.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4152; and Al-Bayhaqi, Dala‘il An-Nubuwwa, 4/115.*

(2) *‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, ‘When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him reached the valley of Murr Azh-Zhuhran during the days of the Peace Treaty with Quraysh, his companions said to him, ‘O Messenger of Allah, if we slaughtered some of our camels and ate from their meats and fats and sipped from the broth, we would wake up in the morning—if we hastened to do it—and we would be rested.’ He said, ‘No, but bring me what remains of your provisions.’ So they spread out their leather mats and cast forth upon them the remainder of their provisions. Allah’s Messenger peace and blessings be upon him invoked a blessing upon them, and they ate until they were completely filled. Then they wrapped up what remained of the provisions in their sacks.’ See Muslim, Sahih, Book of Al-Luqta; Al-Bayhaqi, Dala‘il An-Nubuwwa, 4/120.*

The Quran, then, is: '…a blessed reminder…' (*al-Anbiya':* 50) because its aspects of goodness transcend the period in which it was revealed, and go beyond every age and century, for every day it bestows a new secret from what Allah *the Almighty* reveals in it. Thereby, He *the Almighty* mentions how astonishing their rejection is: '…are you [people] going to deny it?' (*al-Anbiya':* 50) How can the like of this Speech be denied?

We have already clarified their statements about the Quran. Among them are those who said, 'It is sorcery'; others who said, 'It is poetry'; and still others who said, 'It is lies and the fairy-tales of the ancients.' All of this reflects their bankruptcy in argument which is meant simply to ensnare people. It merely reveals the inconsistency of their thinking.

Did they themselves not say: 'Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Thus, they acknowledged the veracity and the standing of the Quran and that it is from Allah *the Almighty*. They do not object to it in anything, but they object to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to whom the Quran was revealed, which indicates that they have not yet awakened from their heedlessness.

We should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* says: 'This is a blessed reminder…' (*al-Anbiya':* 50), and does not say, 'This is the Quran,' as though 'the reminder' does not point to anything except the Quran.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَآ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ رُشْدَهُۥ مِن قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهِۦ عَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

**Long ago(1) We bestowed right judgment
on Abraham and We knew him well [51]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 51)**

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* began His consolation of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by mentioning a part of the story of Moses *peace be upon him*, and then turned immediately to the story of Abraham *peace be upon him*, despite the fact that Abraham came before Moses. So, what is the reason for this? This is because Moses *peace be upon him* had a direct connection with the Jews who lived near to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina and were a people of argument and opposition.

Here, Allah's saying: '...right judgment...' (*al-Anbiya':* 51) refers to the right guidance of Abraham's intellect to the perfection of righteousness and the greatest extent of goodness such that depravity never returns after righteousness, nor evil after goodness, nor does he forsake nobility for baseness—this is the meaning of 'right judgment.' Superficial righteousness, on the other hand, drags you into depravity, or causes you to forsake goodness for evil, for there is no 'right judgment' in that.

Now, we hear them talking about beautiful arts, and winning over people with glittering catch phrases which they admire until boldness brings them to call dancing a refined and beautiful art. How far is Allah from every imperfection! Dancing would be as they say if it were truly refined and beautiful and remained that way always, and did not devolve into something ugly and base. But what happens when a man sits in front of a female dancer while she displays her charms and movements in such a way that his wife at home is not able to do? How many homes are ruined and families destroyed due to a female dancer? What, then, is the refinement and the beauty in this art?

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'This means before the Prophethood, that is, Allah gave him rectitude in vision and reasoning when the night covered him and he saw the star, the sun, and the moon. However, it is said that 'long before,' means before Moses and Aaron peace be upon them. According to this opinion, 'the right judgment' refers to the Prophethood. The first interpretation is held by most of the Quranic exegetes.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4473.*

Imam *'Ali Allah be pleased with him* summed up this matter by saying, 'There is no evil in an evil after which comes paradise, and there is no goodness in a goodness after which comes the Hellfire.'

Therefore, the human being must pay attention to that rectitude which is the right guidance of the intellect in the direction of the greatest propriety, perfection, and goodness. This rectitude has two dimensions: rectitude of the physical constitution and rectitude of thought.

Rectitude of the physical constitution is the completion of the human being's formation so that every organ within him/her performs its function properly, and this does not come about until the age of maturity. The Creator *Glorified is He* made the maturity of the procreative organs an indication of the completion of this rectitude, when the human being becomes able to beget the like of him/herself.

This is clear in fruits; their taste does not become sweet until after their ripening and the maturation of their seed to germinate when it is sown. Out of the Wisdom of the Creator, we eat the fruit and save its species through its sound seed. But if the fruits ripened and we ate them before the maturation of their seeds, we would have eaten the existing fruits but not saved their species, and they would then die out.

Another manifestation of Allah's Wisdom is that when the fruit ripens, and there is no one to harvest it, it falls to the ground of its own accord, and then its life cycle begins anew.

For a good reason, Allah *the Almighty* appointed religious obligation to begin after maturity. If He *the Almighty* had obligated you before maturity, you would have found in the obligations a prohibition of some things which you did not know about and were not aware of, and you would have objected to your Lord, saying, 'How can I adhere to this obligation, O Lord, when my natural impulse drives me to do such-and-such?'

In the same vein, there is rectitude in every part and apparatus in the human body which corresponds to it, and its growth corresponds to one's formation. Take, for instance, a child's eyes, mouth, and fingers; all of them grow and develop in a way corresponding to the child's formation.

The teeth in particular comprise a profound Wisdom from the Creator *Glorified is He*. During the stage in which the child is not able to clean his/her teeth by himself/herself, nor is someone else able to do so, Allah *the Almighty* gives him/her a temporary set of teeth called ‘milk teeth’, which stay with him/her during his/her earliest years. Then, when s/he grows to become able to clean his/her teeth by himself/herself, Allah *the Almighty* replaces the first set of teeth with another one which remains with him/her throughout his/her life.

Moreover, there is a higher rectitude; it is a mental, intellectual rectitude in which the intellect and reflection become sound, and the mind which selects and compares alternatives to determine which is preferable matures. The physical, bodily rectitude may mature for a person without his/her intellectual maturity. In this case, we do not allow him/her to freely administer anything until we test him/her, in order to know the extent of his/her proficiency in administering that which s/he possesses. Then, if s/he passes the test, we give him/her the property which belongs to him/her to freely administer it. This ruling is mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘And test the orphans until they attain puberty; then if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 6) That is, the guardian should not wait until the child becomes older and then give him/her the property to do with it as s/he wants without having any experience. Rather, the guardian should test him/her and make him/her engage in the daily life’s activities. In this way, s/he becomes an experienced young person, able to soundly administer his/her affairs.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And do not give away your property to the weak of understanding…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5). This is because his/her bodily rectitude has matured unlike his/her intellectual rectitude. So, be careful not to say, ‘It is his/her property which s/he is entitled to administer as s/he wills’, for property is not to be given to those who are weak of judgment, as indicated by His saying: ‘And do not give away your property to the weak of understanding…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 5). Here, Allah *the Almighty* does not say ‘their property,’ because these guardians should take care of the property of the people of weak understanding as though it were really theirs, for they are responsible for it before Allah *the Almighty*. The property of one who is weak of judgment is not given to him/her unless s/he shows a sound administration of it.

Another example of rectitude is that which the Quran calls ‘full maturity’: ‘...until when he attains his maturity and reaches forty years, he says: My Lord! Grant me that I may give thanks for Your Favour which You has bestowed on me and on my parents...’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15).

‘Full maturity’ is to become established in rectitude. Allah *the Almighty* says here ‘forty years,’ despite the fact that the human being normally attains bodily and intellectual rectitude after the age of maturity, at about 15 years old. Therefore, there is no hope for one who does not attain rectitude until the age of forty, and, in fact, the fire is the most appropriate place for him/her. This is because when s/he disbelieves or deviates from the path in the prime of his/her youth and vigour, we may excuse him/her, saying, ‘The petulance of youth, passion, adolescence and etc.’ but when s/he reaches forty years old, what excuse does s/he have?

If s/he does not learn the principles of rectitude in his/her childhood or adolescence, s/he will undoubtedly find in the occurrences of life throughout forty years events which forcibly guide him/her. Throughout this time, s/he sees his/her works and their consequences, his/her errors and mistakes, and should take from them a practical and theoretical lesson in rectitude.

Related to this are some contemporary technical terms we hear, such as when people speak about ‘political rationality’ and ‘rationing’ of food consumption. So, what do these terms indicate? They indicate that the events and experiences of life, and the lack of rectitude in man’s journey through it tormented mankind and forced them to reflect on some ‘rationalisation’ by which this corruption may be eliminated.

An example of practicing rectitude for oneself and ‘rationalisation’ for others is as we do when we rationalise our use of wheat. We used to feed the livestock with wheat, until things came to a point where we could not find it around anymore. As a result we started rationing loaves of bread, and we eventually came to a point where we divided a single loaf into four parts, which we ate in limited quantities, never wasting anything. Moreover, if any amount left over from one meal which remained clean, we would serve it again in another meal.

If the baker did not possess such ‘rationalisation,’ s/he may remove the loaf from the oven before it is ready and so find it to be still in a doughy state, pulpy throughout. Then the attentive lady of the house would come, open the loaf before placing it on the table, take from it this pulp, combine it all together, and finally toast it in the oven and make from it some other meal.

What we said about rationing of bread also applies to rationing of water. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded us to ration water, even to the point of doing so in the ritual ablution which is something which connects us to Allah *the Almighty*.

This rectitude which we described applies to everyone who possesses an intellect and is not a Messenger. By this rectitude, one finds the way to deal with the affairs of his/her life in a proper manner, but the result of this rectitude is witnessed in this world only. On the other hand, the rectitude of the Messengers is higher and is pertinent not only to this worldly life, but also to the Hereafter, for is it a gift from Allah *the Almighty* to the Messengers.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says concerning Abraham *peace be upon him*: ‘Long ago We bestowed right judgement on Abraham...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 51). It is as though Abraham’s rectitude is not subject to these principles and depends on neither maturation nor prophethood. Rather, his rectitude is precocious, from the time when he was young and used to contemplate the stars and search for his Lord: ‘…then when he saw the moon rising, he said: Is this my Lord? So when it set, he said: If my Lord had not guided me I should certainly be of the erring people. Then when he saw the sun rising, he said: Is this my Lord? Is this the greatest? So when it set, he said: O my people! Surely I am clear of what you set up (with Allah).’ (*al-An‘am:* 77–78) So, Abraham was qualified for the Message from the time of his youth. When he was sent as a Prophet, the manifestation of his rectitude appeared upon his being thrown into the fire: Gabriel *peace be upon him* came to him and offered him assistance. Thereupon, Abraham said, ‘I need nothing from you’. This was the first of the propitious signs of Abraham’s rectitude in thought and doctrine.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says about him: ‘And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words, he fulfilled them...’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). This verse means that He *the Almighty* tested him in some obligations, and he fulfilled them, performing them in the most perfect manner. Among these obligations is that He asked him to erect the foundations of The House. It would have sufficed that Abraham *peace be upon him* raised the foundations of The House just as far as his arms could reach, but he was eager to fulfil the commandment as perfectly as possible. So he reflected upon it and exercised skill and ingenuity in bringing a stone and standing upon it in order to raise the edifice to the further extent of the stone. His young son Ishmael *peace be upon him* helped him in this, handing him the stones, but the young child's feet would slip whenever he lifted up the stones to his father. So he exercised skill and ingenuity in this matter and carved the shapes of his feet into the stone so that he could stand upon it firmly. These two footprints are still witnessed by us to this very day on the stone of Ishmael.

Thus, Abraham *peace be upon him* possessed an ardent love for religious obligations and an eagerness to fulfil them. The fact expressed in Allah's saying: '…We knew him well' (*al-Anbiya':* 51) is also attested to clearly in His saying: '...Allah best knows where He places His Message...' (*al-An'am:* 124).

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِۦ مَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلتَّمَاثِيلُ ٱلَّتِىٓ أَنتُمْ لَهَا عَٰكِفُونَ ۝٥٢

He said to his father and his people, 'What are
these images to which you are so devoted?' [52]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 52)

This means, O Muhammad, when Abraham *peace be upon him* said to his father and his people: 'What are these images …?' (*al-Anbiya':* 52) 'Images' here is the plural of 'image,' which is taken from the word for a similitude or a likeness, and the similitude of something is what is similar or equivalent to it. They used to apply themselves to things with a certain mass and to shape them according to the form of things created by Allah *the Almighty* such as the form of man or of animals. These images were made out of stone, iron, wood, etc. Then they would set it up in order to worship it.

They used to exaggerate in this by making an image out of stone and another one of marble: this one is small, that one is big. Furthermore, they would put in its eyes two beads in order to appear to people that it possessed the power of sight, which was one of the various kinds of activities in this craft. Therefore, Abraham *peace be upon him* says disparagingly to his father and his people: 'What are these images to which you are so devoted?' (*al-Anbiya':* 52) But the question here is not a real one, but a negative question bearing a tone of mockery, scorn, and rebuke. Inevitably, he would pose this question to them in an expressive way infused with rebuke.

We already spoke previously about the meaning of 'his father' here, when we said that the intended meaning is actually his uncle, as evinced by Allah's saying in another place: '...to his father, Azar....' (*al-An'am:* 74) He raised the issue first with his father or his uncle, who was the closest to him among men, wanting people to be reassured concerning that to which he was calling them, and that it was good; otherwise he would not have begun with his father. This is also because he might not have held any influence with the people, or they might not have held him in esteem or affection, while they did have affection and respect for his father or for his uncle. In spite of that, this esteem did not prohibit him from despising their vain speech and actions, as is mentioned in Allah's saying: 'Say: If your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your mates and your kinsfolk and property which you have acquired, and the slackness of trade which you fear and dwellings which you like, are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His command: and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.' (*at-Tawba:* 24)

The commentators carefully examined the preposition '*Lam'* translated as 'to' in Allah's saying: '…to which you are so devoted?' (*al-Anbiya':* 52) The meaning is that they are intensely devoted to the worship of these images, as is stated in another verse: '…they came upon a people who kept to the worship of their idols.' (*al-A'raf:* 138) However, in the first verse the preposition *Lam* is used instead of *'Ala,* which collocates in Arabic with the verb to devote. To this some scholars said that the preposition *Lam* here means *'Ala*. So, why does Allah *the Almighty* use the preposition *Lam* instead of the preposition *'Ala* which is more usually used with the verb devote?

If we reflected on the connotations of the word: '... so devoted…' (*al-Anbiya':* 52), we say that being 'so devoted' linguistically means staying at the mosque. Thus, these people were intensely devoted to the service of these gods. The preposition *Lam* translated as ‘to,’ however, bears another connotation, for it indicates possession and benefit. Another example for this is Allah’s saying: ‘On the day when We will roll up heaven like the rolling up of the scroll for writings….’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104)

‘Scrolls’ here mean sheets or leaves of paper on which we write, as for instance when people say, ‘We record such-and-such,’ that is, they write it on the scroll or on paper in order to preserve it. The meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘…for writings…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104) is something written down, so the meaning becomes as though, ‘We shall roll up the paper with what is written upon it.’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوا۟ وَجَدْنَآ ءَابَآءَنَا لَهَا عَٰبِدِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

They replied, ‘We found our fathers
worshipping them’[53]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 53)

Therefore, they have no argument for their worshipping of these images which they themselves fashioned and set up except that they saw their fathers worshipping them. Their argument, then, is blind imitation, and if they had an argument for the fact that they themselves worship them, they would have stated it.

In another place, they also said: ‘...Surely we found our fathers on a course, and surely we are followers of their footsteps.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) Therefore, we blame them for this blind imitation, and we blame their fathers as well. So, what was Abraham’s reply?

The word ‘...worshipping...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 53) indicates the fact that their worship of the idols was derived from a lack of understanding because worship means the compliance of the worshipper with the commands of the one s/he worships. So, what did their idols command them to do?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* relates that Abraham *peace be upon him* said to his people:

قَالَ لَقَدْ كُنتُمْ أَنتُمْ وَءَابَآؤُكُمْ فِي ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ٥٤

He said, ‘You and your fathers have clearly gone astray’[54] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 54)

He wanted to set this foolishness aright so he said, ‘You have strayed from the right path because you blindly imitated your forefathers who contrived this affair and established it as a custom for you. Faith, however, cannot be realised by blind imitation.’

It is astonishing that they blindly imitate in this case exactly, for who persists in doing exactly what his/her father did? Do we not instead see each new generation producing something which was unknown to the previous generation? Therefore, they say, ‘Men resemble the time in which they live more than they resemble their fathers.’ This is due to the fact that every time has its conventions and its progressive developments. You have control over your child so long as s/he is young, so that s/he eats drinks and dresses as you like. But when s/he grows and becomes an adult, s/he comes to have his/her own particular personality and thinks independently, choosing his/her food and clothes and the college where s/he will study, and s/he may even find fault with you in some things.

Thus, the people of Abraham blindly imitated their fathers only in this matter of worship. But why did they hold fast to blind imitation in the matter of faith, apart from all other matters? If it were the case that every generation arrived as an exact replica of its predecessor, the course of life would never change, but it does, which proves that every generation possesses its own distinct identity and way of thinking.

These people blindly imitate their fathers in this worship and in no other matters precisely because it is a worship and a piety without any obligation; that is, their gods provide no Way of Guidance to mankind, and neither constrain them concerning anything nor prohibit them any of the desires which they are accustomed to. In short, it is a religiosity without any consequence or responsibility.

For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* replies to them in two different ways. In one place He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and when it is said to them, follow what Allah has revealed, they say: Nay! We follow what we found our fathers upon. What! And though their fathers had no sense at all, nor did they follow the right way.’ (*al-Baqara:* 170) Elsewhere, He says: ‘And when it is said to them, Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger, they say: That on which we found our fathers is sufficient for us. What! Even though their fathers knew nothing and did not follow the right way.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104)

We notice that the second half of each verse is different, for in one place He says: ‘…had no sense at all...’ (*al-Baqara:* 170), and in the other, ‘...knew nothing….’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104) Why does this difference exist? This is because the second half of each verse corresponds to its first half, and the first part of each verse is different. In the first verse they say: ‘Nay! we follow what we found our fathers upon….’ (*al-Baqara:* 170) So, they may follow either this or that without limiting themselves to one thing. On the other hand, they said in the second verse: ‘That on which we found our fathers is sufficient for us.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104) This means that they rendered that on which they found their fathers sufficient for them, and they did not want anything additional added to it. So in this case they limit themselves to that which they found their fathers believing in and doing.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says in the second half of the first verse: ‘…had no sense at all...’ (*al-Baqara:* 170), and in the second half of the second verse He says: ‘...knew nothing...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104) because only s/he who uses his/her reason is rightly guided to the Truth.

As for the one who knows, s/he can derive his/her knowledge from what s/he reflected on and also from what others attain to by using their reason. Therefore, the circle of knowledge is wider than the circle of reason because reason guides to one particular thing, whereas knowledge includes what others were guided to. Then Allah *the Almighty* relates their reply:

قَالُوٓاْ أَجِئۡتَنَا بِٱلۡحَقِّ أَمۡ أَنتَ مِنَ ٱللَّٰعِبِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

They asked, ‘Have you brought us the truth or are you just playing about?’ [55] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 55)

That is they said, ‘O Abraham is this speech of yours serious? Or are you joking with us?’ It is as though they find it farfetched that Abraham’s speech would be serious because it is difficult for them to understand.

Abraham *peace be upon him* then replies to them:

قَالَ بَل رَّبُّكُمْ رَبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ٱلَّذِى فَطَرَهُنَّ وَأَنَا۠ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكُم مِّنَ ٱلشَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

He said, Listen! Your true Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them, and I am a witness to this [56] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 56)

Abraham *peace be upon him* replies, ‘I brought you the Truth, which declares that these idols are not to be worshipped; rather, the one who deserves worship is Allah, the Lord of the heavens and the earth: ‘He said, ‘Listen! Your true Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them....’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 56) So, he negated that their idols are true gods and then affirmed that Allah *the Almighty* is the true God. Allah’s saying: ‘He who created them...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 56) means that He is the Creator of the heavens, the earth, the idols themselves and indeed everything in existence. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and I am a witness to this.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 56) A witness is someone who attained to the truth through its evidence, as though it is seen by his/her very eyes. So Abraham *peace be upon him* said, ‘I am one who bears witness to the fact that your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and with me is the evidence of this truth.’

Allah *the Almighty* then relates that Abraham *peace be upon him* said:

وَتَٱللَّهِ لَأَكِيدَنَّ أَصْنَٰمَكُم بَعْدَ أَن تُوَلُّوا۟ مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

By God I shall certainly plot against your idols as soon as you have turned your backs! [57] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 57)

After all that transpired of their being stubborn and quarrelling in vain, Abraham *peace be upon him* swore, ‘By Allah I shall certainly plot against your idols...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 57) with the particle ‘by’ here indicating the swearing of an oath. But is it possible for someone to plot against idols? So, the intended meaning is that he would plot against his people by the means of the idols. This is because the idols are Allah’s creation which extol His praises and are thankful to Abraham *peace be upon him* for this action.

How beautiful is that which the poet[1] said with this meaning, when he spoke on the tongue of the stones in the cave of Hira’ and Thawr, where the stones used to be jealous and envious o*f Hira’ because Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him* used to devote himself to the worship of Allah *the Almighty* in it, before the time of his mission. It witnessed and was pleased with Prophet Muhammad’s worship and companionship. So when he came to the cave of Thawr during the Hijra, Thawr became overjoyed because it had attained the same rank as Hira’:

How much we envied Hira’ when we saw
the faithful spirit flooding you with lights.
Then Hira’ and Thawr became equal—
He pleaded at both for stones’ alternation.
They worshipped us, while we were the greatest of the worshippers
of Allah who stand in prayer in the early mornings.
They took our silence as a proof against us,
And so we became for them fuel for the Fire

This is because Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...the fire of which men and stones are the fuel....’ (*al-Baqara:* 24)

They accused us of ignorance, just as
they accused of it Mary’s son and the Apostles.
To the exceeder of bounds, his requital; but that by which he exceeded,
The All-Forgiving’s mercy delivers

The smashing of the idols, then, does not constitute plotting against them, but rather against their worshippers who believe the idols to be capable of harming or benefiting. By means of his action, it is as though Abraham *peace be upon him* establishes for them proof of the futility of worshipping stones, a tangible proof which cannot be refuted. It is as if he says to himself, ‘If I am in the wrong when I smash the idols, they will prevent me and repel the axe

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(1) One of the poems of Sheikh Al-Sha‘rawi on the *Hijra* incident.

from my hand, but if I am in the right, they will allow me to proceed with what I am doing.'

As for Allah's saying: '…as soon as you have turned your backs!' (*al-Anbiya':* 57) This means he will do it after they have turned away from the idols and are unaware of them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَجَعَلَهُمْ جُذَٰذًا إِلَّا كَبِيرًا لَّهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

He broke them all into pieces, but left the biggest one for them to return to [58] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 58)

We notice here that the Quranic style omits that which is understood from the context, just as in the story of Solomon and the hoopoe: 'Take this my letter and hand it over to them, then turn away from them and see what (answer) they return.' (*an-Naml:* 28) It omits the part of the story when the hoopoe travelled to the Queen of Sheba, cast the letter before her, and she took it and presented it to her Council: 'She said: O chief! Surely an honourable letter has been delivered to me.' (*an-Naml:* 29)

The meaning of '...into pieces...' (*al-Anbiya':* 58) is into scattered shards and fragments after they had been assembled bodies: '…but left the biggest one for them to return to.' (*al-Anbiya':* 58) This means that he left it and did not shatter it. They used to place the idols in a special formation and décor, in such a manner that the large one would be in the middle, surrounded by all of the small idols, as though it possessed dominion over them and a high-standing among them. They also used to place in its eyes green jewels cut from peridot in order to give the impression to one viewing it that it was looking at him/her.

Allah's saying: '...for them to return to' (*al-Anbiya':* 58) means that Abraham *peace be upon him* left the biggest one so that they could ask it about what happened to the smaller gods, and why it did not defend them, especially since they found the axe on its shoulder?

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* relates their statement:

قَالُوا۟ مَن فَعَلَ هَٰذَا بِـَٔالِهَتِنَآ إِنَّهُۥ لَمِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

They said, ‘Who has done this to our gods? How wicked he must be!’ [59] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 59)

So, when they went to their house of worship in which they worshipped their idols and found them shattered, they said: ‘Who has done this to our gods? How wicked he must be!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 59) He must be wicked, in their opinion because he attacked the undamaged gods and broke them.

Therefore, these gods are not able to defend themselves from harm, and these people who worshipped them should have paid attention to this event. How could they accept to worship them when, if the mere wind caused one of the idols to fall, it would break it? Thereby the idol would require someone to repair it and set it back in its place—so what kind of divinity is this which they uphold, contrary to the idols’ realities?

Allah *the Almighty* narrates what happened after this:

قَالُوا۟ سَمِعْنَا فَتًى يَذْكُرُهُمْ يُقَالُ لَهُۥٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمُ ﴿٦٠﴾

Some said, ‘We heard a youth called Abraham talking about them’[60] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 60)

This means that some of them voluntarily spoke without being asked, and said this. These people had a fixed day on which they would go to their place of worship where the idols were, bringing with them their food and drink, which appears to have been a feast for them. Azar prepared himself for this day and wanted to take Abraham *peace be upon them* with him, hoping that the gods might guide him and turn him away from that in which he was involved.

But Abraham *peace be upon him* claimed that he was sick, unable to go with them, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘He said: Surely, I am sick!’(1)

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(1) *Allah the Almighty says: ‘Then he looked at the stars, looking up once, Then he said: Surely I am sick (of your worshipping these).’ (as-Saffat: 88–89) In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir relates that Qatada said, ‘The Arabs say of him who reflects, “He gazes at the stars.”’ Qatada means that Abraham gazed at the sky reflecting on what he could say to distract them, and then he said: ‘Surely I am sick’ (as-Saffat: 89), that is, ill. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 4/13.*

(*as-Saffat:* 89) When he had resolved to smash their idols and said: ‘By Allah I shall certainly plot against your idols as soon as you have turned your backs!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 57) Some of the people heard him and informed the rest of them of his resolution.

Here, Allah’s saying: ‘…talking about them.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 60) means speaking with evil about them. As for His saying: ‘...called Abraham…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 60), it means that his name is Abraham, or, when they call him, they say, ‘O Abraham.’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوا۟ فَأْتُوا۟ بِهِۦ عَلَىٰٓ أَعْيُنِ ٱلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

They said, ‘Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they may witness [his trial]’ [61] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 61)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...Before the people’s eyes...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 61) means within their field of vision so that they may see him with their own eyes. Allah’s saying: ‘…so that they may witness [his trial]...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 61) means that they did so in order that the people might witness the punishment which they will bring down upon him. This is meant to be a warning to others so that no one else would dare to commit such an act.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُوٓا۟ ءَأَنتَ فَعَلْتَ هَٰذَا بِـَٔالِهَتِنَا يَٰٓإِبْرَٰهِيمُ ﴿٦٢﴾

They asked, ‘Was it you, Abraham, who did this to our gods?’ [62] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 62)

Here, a part of the discourse is also omitted, for first they brought him, and then they asked him this question. The question: ‘Was it you, Abraham, who did this to our gods?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 62) It is a question about the agent of the action because the act is apparent, not requiring any questioning. Thus they did not say, ‘Did you do this, Abraham?’ Instead, they were concerned with the agent of the action, saying: ‘Was it you, Abraham, who did this to our gods?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 62) As you say, ‘Did you build that house which you were intending to build?', which is a question about the act, but when you say, 'Is it you who built the house?', the intended focus is on the agent.

Allah *the Almighty* then relates Abraham's reply:

قَالَ بَلۡ فَعَلَهُۥ كَبِيرُهُمۡ هَٰذَا فَسۡـَٔلُوهُمۡ إِن كَانُواْ يَنطِقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

He said, 'No, it was done by the biggest of them – this one. Ask them, if they can talk' [63] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 63)

It is as though he wants to elicit from them the acknowledgement that their biggest god does not do anything so that they will find themselves facing the question: Why, then, do you worship them? Abraham's saying: 'No, it was done by the biggest of them...' (*al-Anbiya':* 63) contains a certain reproach and rebuke for them, in so far as he ascribed the action of smashing the idols to the one who is not capable of doing it. Az-Zamakhshari *may Allah be merciful to him* gave as an example of this a man with beautiful handwriting and another who does not know how to write well. The second one sees a beautiful sample of writing and says to the first: 'Are you the one who wrote this?' Thereupon the second one says: 'No, you are the one who wrote it!' reproaching and rebuking him.

Then Abraham *peace be upon him* declares openly to them what he wants: 'Ask them, if they can talk.' (*al-Anbiya':* 63) But they will not ask them because they know the idols' true state.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَرَجَعُوٓاْ إِلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ فَقَالُوٓاْ إِنَّكُمۡ أَنتُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

They turned to one another, saying, 'It is you who are in the wrong' [64] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 64)

So, they paid attention, returned to their senses, and spoke the truth: 'It is you who are in the wrong.' (*al-Anbiya':* 64) This means that it is they who are wrong because they worship the idols, while they know that they neither benefit nor harm anyone; they neither see nor speak.

Thus, they themselves faced this reality and exposed the futility of this worship. But this sobriety will be at their expense, and their loss from it will be great. It will cause them to lose the temporal power in the shade of which they live, and by means of which they benefit from that which is offered to the idols. Therefore, in no time at all they retrace their steps and turn back upon their heels, once the harsh reality overwhelms them and they think about what this sobriety entails.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ثُمَّ نُكِسُوا۟ عَلَىٰ رُءُوسِهِمْ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ يَنطِقُونَ ٦٥

But then they lapsed again and said, ‘You know very well these gods cannot speak’ [65] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 65)

After they faced the truth, ‘they lapsed again...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 65). A ‘relapse’ is when one who is high comes to be low—of course, you know what it is! So they threw back upon him the very argument he placed against them: ‘You know very well these gods cannot speak.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 65) This is the very essence of foolishness.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَفَتَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنفَعُكُمْ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ ٦٦

Abraham said, ‘How can you worship what can neither benefit nor harm you, instead of God? [66] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 66)

That is, an idol will neither benefit them if they worship it, nor will it harm them in any way if they renounce its worship. Then, Abraham’s response continues:

أُفٍّ لَّكُمْ وَلِمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ٦٧

Shame on you and on the things you worship instead of God. Have you no sense? [67] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 67)

The Arabic word translated here as ‘shame on you’ is a verbal noun with the meaning of being angry. It is neither a noun, nor a verb, nor a preposition, but a noun possessing the meaning of a verb because it possesses a dimension both of being nominal and of being verbal. Therefore, Arabs' speech revolves around nouns, verbs and prepositions alone. Another word of this kind is the word translatable as 'far from the mark,' which is a verbal noun with the meaning of being far off. Thus, by this expression 'shame on you,' Abraham *peace be upon him* expresses his anger and exasperation at his peoples' actions with regard to worshipping idols instead of Allah *the Almighty*.

Thereafter, Allah *the Almighty* states their reaction, saying:

قَالُوا۟ حَرِّقُوهُ وَٱنصُرُوٓا۟ ءَالِهَتَكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ فَٰعِلِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

They said, 'Burn him and avenge your gods,
if you are going to do the right thing' [68]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 68)

We notice that their saying: '...burn him...' (*al-Anbiya':* 68) is an intensified form of the verb 'to burn,' which is employed to express hyperbola. So, they agreed upon that course of action and then erected a structure and placed a fire in the middle of it. They continued to heat it up for 40 days, adding to it everything capable of catching fire. By so doing, the heat of the fire became extremely intense, to the point that any bird which flew above the fire would immediately be roasted and fall from the sky, due to the intensity of its heat. The proof of this is that when they wanted to cast Abraham *peace be upon him* into the fire, they were not able to approach it on account of its intensely scorching heat, and therefore had to construct a catapult in order to cast him into the fire from a far distance.

Their saying: 'Burn him and avenge your gods…' (*al-Anbiya':* 68) is in accordance with their belief that there is as though a battle between Abraham *peace be upon him* and their false gods. But the reality is that false gods which they worship are on Abraham's side, not against him, and therefore the real battle is between Abraham and the idol worshippers.

They then said: '…if you are going to do the right thing.' (*al-Anbiya':* 68), that is, they said, 'If you are going to do anything with Abraham *peace be upon him*, then burn him.

Thereafter Allah *Glorified is He* says concerning His deliverance of Abraham *peace be upon him* from the burning fire:

قُلْنَا يَٰنَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَٰمًا عَلَىٰٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ ﴿٦٩﴾

But We said, ‘Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham’ [69] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 69)

This command came from the Supreme Lord to transcend the prevailing laws of the cosmos by this miracle. In fact, no one can transcend these laws except the One Who established them, just as we said concerning the story of Moses *peace be upon him*, ‘The norm of water is liquidity and free passage, and no one can deprive it of this essential property except its Creator. Therefore, He parted it for Moses by means of a ‘conclusive partition’—as we said—with each part being like an immense, towering mountain.’ Thus, no one can suspend the norm of things except their Creator because these things were not created with a kind of power over their own self-existence; rather, they were created in order to fulfil a function, and only He Who created them for that function has the Power to deprive them of their essential properties.

In the same vein, there is a distinction between the action of the servant and the action of Allah *Glorified is He*. Let us give an example to illustrate this fact; imagine that you are highly skilled at aiming and shooting a gun and are standing in front of a target with a revolver in your hand. You fire a bullet facing the target—but do you have control over it after that? Is it possible for you to command it to incline toward the right or the left? On the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* has control over it, and can cause it to travel however He wills. He *the Almighty* created the fire and created within it the essential property of burning and He Alone has the Power of depriving it of this essential property, rendering it unable to burn, as it does not possess self-existence by itself.

Therefore, some people say, ‘As soon as the first part of the command: ‘Fire, be cool and safe...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69) was uttered, all fires in existence went out. Then when He said ‘...for Abraham…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69), the command became specific to Abraham’s fire only, and all other fires began burning again. We notice here that Allah *Glorified is He* qualified coldness with peace because coldness in general causes pain.(1)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَرَادُوا۟ بِهِۦ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَٰهُمُ ٱلْأَخْسَرِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

They planned to harm him, but We made them suffer the greatest loss[70] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 70)

The intended meaning of 'planning to harm him' here is their plan to burn him. The meaning of plotting is secret planning made with regard to the enemy in order that s/he not perceive what is being planned for him/her and therefore not be on guard against it. It can be in the interest of someone or against him/her, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Thus did We plan for the sake of Joseph...' (*Yusuf:* 76). Here, planning was for his benefit, for Allah *the Almighty* does not say, 'We planned against Joseph,' rather, He says: '...Thus did We plan for the sake of Joseph...' (*Yusuf:* 76). They say that contrivance indicates a weakness and an inability to confront the other, for one who plans concerning someone else and conspires against him/her secretly only does so because s/he is not capable of confronting him/her face to face.

Therefore they say, 'I take refuge in Allah from the grip of the weak, for I am superior to the grip of the strong.' For whenever a weak person has an opportunity to do something, s/he never misses it because s/he cannot be sure whether or not s/he will have another one. By contrast, the strong person who is confident of his/her ability is able to take hold of his/her adversary at any time. Hence one poet said:

She is weak but if an opportunity comes,

she kills; likewise is the ability of the weak

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti relates that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'If the command: "Be cool" was not followed by: "and safe,", Abraham would have died from its coldness; and if this were not followed by "for Abraham," no fire would have remained on earth that day which did not go out, thinking itself to be intended by the command.' This is narrated by Al-Faryabi, 'Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/640/5.*

Thus the scholars’ judge the weakness of women by Allah’s saying: ‘...surely your guile is great.’ (*Yusuf:* 28) Inasmuch as their guile is indeed great, their weaknesses are also great, or even the greatest.

Then He says: ‘…but We made them suffer the greatest loss.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 70)

‘The greatest losers’ is the plural of ‘the greatest loser,’ in the form of the superlative, indicating an intensification of loss. Their loss may be seen to be connected with the burning of Abraham *peace be upon him* from a number of perspectives: firstly, Abraham *peace be upon him* was not afflicted by any evil, despite his being thrown into the fire; then, they did not avert his enmity towards them; and, after that, they will be punished for their action in the Hereafter. Is there a greater loss than that?

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَنَجَّيْنَٰهُ وَلُوطًا إِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ ٱلَّتِي بَٰرَكْنَا فِيهَا لِلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

We saved him and Lot [and sent them] to the land We
blessed for all people [71] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 71)

Allah’s saying: ‘...We saved him...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 71) means that there was an imminent evil and harm which was about to afflict Abraham, but Allah *the Almighty* delivered him from it. This deliverance was continuous because after Allah *the Almighty* delivered him from the fire, He delivered him also from the harm to which he was exposed.

Allah *the Almighty* saved both of him: ‘...and Lot...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 71), who was Abraham’s nephew: ‘[and sent them] to the land We blessed for all people.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 71) That is, Allah *the Almighty* said to Abraham, ‘Leave this land—the land of Babylon in Iraq—go to a hallowed land in Ash-Sham, and bring your brother’s son with you.’ Thus, once He *the Almighty* had delivered them, He did not leave them in that place, but chose for them this blessed place.

When a land is described, it refers to a specific area; but if it is not described, it refers to the land in general, unless the context specifies it. For example, when Joseph’s brother said: ‘Therefore I will by no means depart from this land until my father permits me…' (*Yusuf:* 80), the context clarifies for us that the land intended here is Egypt.

But in Allah's saying: 'And We said to the Israelites after him: Dwell in the land…' (*al-Isra':* 104), He does not specify a certain land which suggests that the intended meaning is the land in general. The meaning is: 'Dwell on the earth as a whole, that is, scatter about upon it; you do not have an independent homeland'—as He says in another verse: 'And We cut them up on the earth into parties...' (*al-A'raf:* 168).

When Allah *the Almighty* wants to gather the children of Israel who are dispersed— '...when the promise of the next life shall come to pass...' (*al-Isra':* 104), that is, the time when they will be victorious — '...We will bring you both together in judgment.' (*al-Isra':* 104) In this manner, they will assemble in one place to facilitate their being judged all at once.

In Allah's saying: '…We blessed...' (*al-Anbiya':* 71), the 'blessing' could be material or spiritual. In the first case, the meaning would be that this land is endowed with green crops, fruits, rivers and treasures of the earth; in the second case, the meaning would refer to the values of this hallowed land, which is the land of Prophets and of places of Prophethood and Divine Messages.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُۥٓ إِسْحَٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ نَافِلَةً ۖ وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا صَٰلِحِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

And We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift, and made each of them righteous [72]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 72)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* relates to us a part of the story of Abraham, but one far from what we were just discussing about him. He *the Almighty* bestowed Isaac upon Abraham *peace be upon them* when he prayed to Him, saying: 'My Lord! Grant me of the doers of good deeds.' (*as-Saffat:* 100) This is despite the fact that he had already been given Ishmael *Allah's peace be upon him* who was born of Hagar, which aroused the feelings of jealousy within Sarah. She found within herself the strong urge to have a child, a feeling which women often experience concerning childbirth. Sarah was upset that, while Abraham *peace be upon him* could have a son from his wife Hagar, she was not able to give him a son as well.

Therefore, Sarah implored to Abraham *peace be upon him* to pray to Allah *the Almighty* to provide her with a son, whereupon he *peace be upon him* did. So, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to answer His Prophet Abraham's call and to fulfil his *peace be upon him* wife's desire of having a son, yet His *Glorified is He* Will decreed that He would eternalise the mentioning of this son through making the connection between him and one of the articles of faith, so that none would forget his story.

This is proved by the fact that the story of Isaac *peace be upon him* in the Quran begins with Allah *the Almighty* commanding His Prophet Abraham in a dream-vision to sacrifice his son Ishmael *peace be upon him*. Abraham thus told Ishmael what he saw. Allah *the Almighty* tells us about this in the chapter of *as-Saffat, saying*: '...O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you: consider, then, what would be thy view!' (*as-Saffat:* 102)

By telling Ishmael about this vision, Abraham *peace be upon him* seemed that he wanted to have the consultation of his son in this difficult matter. He also wanted not to take him by surprise, so that the boy would not unknowingly change his thoughts and feelings of love towards his father. He *peace be upon him* further wanted that his son not be deprived of the great reward for this act of obedience and for patience with this trial.

As for Ishmael *peace be upon him* he did not object to what his father told him about. He did not say, for example, 'O my father! This is just a dream, not a Divine Revelation. How can we take such a crucial decision on grounds of it?' Rather, we find him *peace be upon him* saying: '...O my father! Do as you are ordered...' (*as-Saffat:* 102). Here, we notice that he *peace be upon him* did not say to his father, 'Do as you say,' but he, firmly believing that this was the Command of Allah, clearly said: '…He said: O my father! Do what you are commanded; if Allah please, you will find me of the patient ones.' (*as-Saffat:* 102)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'But as soon as the two had surrendered themselves to [what they thought to be] the Will of Allah...' (*as-Saffat:* 103), it clearly indicates that both Abraham and Ishmael had together submitted to the Command of Allah *the Almighty*. As for His *Glorified is He* saying: '...And [Abraham] had laid him down on his face' (*as-Saffat:* 103), it means that Abraham *peace be upon him* had laid the head of his son Ishmael upon the hill, which is an area of land that is higher than the surrounding land. As for His saying: '...on his face' (*as-Saffat:* 103), it means that he *peace be upon him* had placed his forehead on the ground, so that he could slaughter him by the neck, which is viewed as the most rapid way to slaughter someone or something.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and We called out to him saying: O Abraham! [104] You have fulfilled the dream…' (*as-Saffat:* 104–105) So, Abraham *peace be upon him* was benevolently rewarded because he fulfilled the dream-vision and hastened to apply the command, even though it came in a form of a dream-vision. He could have slacked off on the fulfilment of this command, but, on the contrary, as soon as it was decreed, he and his son carried it out.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* does not want anything from his servant regarding the Divine Decree except that s/he submits to it. One poet(1) spoke truthfully when he said:

Surrender to your Lord's judgment, for wisdom determines it,
in order to find rest and lead a life of ease.
And remember Allah's friend in the sacrifice of his son:
His Creator spoke, and he surrendered.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* does not relieve the human beings from a Divine Decree unless they become satisfied with it, for no one can compel Him *the Almighty* to do anything. Let us offer an example to clarify this point: when a father enters the house and finds his son doing something he detests, he may scold him or beat him lightly in an expression of his anger. If the boy submits to and obeys his father, the father turns toward him affectionately and compassionately, and may even hug and make up with him. But if the boy resists and becomes rude, his father treats him with more toughness, compounds his punishment, and increases his severity toward him.

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(1) Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *may Allah be Merciful to him*.

In the case of Abraham, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice.’ (*as-Saffat:* 107) Not only did Allah *the Almighty* ransom Ishmael for Abraham *peace be upon him* but He *the Almighty* also: ‘…gave Abraham the good news of Isaac…’ (*as-Saffat:* 112). Thus He *the Almighty* increased His Favour on Abraham *peace be upon him* so far as Isaac *peace be upon him* was also made a Prophet, like Ishmael *peace be upon him*. This is the relevancy of the discourse about Isaac and Jacob, *peace be upon them*.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift…’ (*al-Anbiya':* 72). The additional gift of Abraham *peace be upon him* is that when he asked his Lord for a righteous son, Allah *the Almighty* announced to him the good news of Isaac, and after him of Jacob, both of whom were Prophets. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…an additional gift…’ (*al-Anbiya':* 72) because this was an addition to what he, i.e. Abraham asked for. That is to say that Isaac *peace be upon him* was the answer to Abraham’s prayer, and Jacob *peace be upon him* was an addition to this.

In fact, while the happiness that man experiences for having a son is great, the happiness he experiences from having a grandson is even greater. As they say, ‘The grandson is dearer than the son.’ The man ensures his continued remembrance after his death through his son, so when a grandson arrives, he ensures that his grandfather will continue to be remembered for yet another generation.

This gift came from Allah *the Almighty* because Sarah was a barren woman, as indicated by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Then his wife came up in great grief, and she struck her face and said: An old barren woman!’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 29) Thereupon the Messengers replied to her: ‘They said, ‘Are you astonished at what Allah ordains?’ (*Hud:* 73) This means that Allah *the Almighty* is Powerful over everything.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘…and made each of them righteous.’ (*al-Anbiya':* 72) So Abraham’s grandson, that is, Jacob was an additional gift, an increase in the gift of progeny and honour on the part of Allah *the Almighty* for Abraham *peace be upon him*. Then He *the Almighty* bestows His Favour on all of them by causing them to be among the righteous and the Prophets, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying in another verse: ‘…and each one of them We made a Prophet.’ (*Maryam:* 49)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَجَعَلْنَٰهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ
وَإِقَامَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَإِيتَآءَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةِ ۖ وَكَانُوا۟ لَنَا عَٰبِدِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

We made all of them leaders, guiding others by Our command, and We inspired them to do good works, to keep up the prayer, and to give alms: they were Our true worshippers[73] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 73)

‘Leadership’ here does not mean their possession of temporal power; rather, their being models for people: ‘…guiding others by Our command….’ (*al-Hajj:* 73) So, they do not proceed in anything except upon guidance from Allah *the Almighty*.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘...We inspired them to do good works...’ (*al-Hajj:* 73), it means that He *the Almighty* opened for them the doors of goodness and made it easily attainable. This is because He *the Almighty* opens the ways of goodness and helps the one who possesses the inclination to goodness to attain it. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...to keep up the prayer, and to give alms...’ (*al-Hajj:* 73). As a matter of fact, keeping up prayer is the essence of all good deeds, for while doing good deeds is a blessing, keeping up prayer entails being present before the Bestower of Blessings. Thus, prayer is the essence of goodness.

Despite this fact, we find some people neglecting prayer, trying to excuse themselves on account of work, lack of time, etc. However, all of these are weak excuses. So, I used to say to such people, ‘By Allah, when you need to use the bathroom you must find time to do so—or do you not?’ Thereupon, they would say, ‘We find the time.’ To this I reply, ‘Why, then, do you allocate some time for that, but do not make efforts to arrange a time for prayer?’ When your Lord *Glorified is He* knows that you are responding to His call, He *the Almighty* makes the response easy for you. We have seen that He *Glorified is He* makes even the disbeliever subservient to you to help you keep up the prayer.

On one of our trips to Belgium, we saw that Muslim children there do not study anything about the Islamic religion in the schools, but are taught about the Christian religion. So we requested an interview with their minister of education, and we spoke with him about this matter. Our argument was as follows, ‘You, Belgians, accepted the presence of these Muslims in your country and their participation in the proceedings of your life because of your need for them. Now, it is to your advantage that these Muslims possess a religion which will supervise them prior to your own supervision of them. Indeed, you are the first of those who would derive benefit from teaching the Islamic religion to the Muslim children. Then, in the very next day, they did pass a resolution concerning the teaching of the Islamic religion in the schools to the Muslim children. This was because Islam is a fruitful and positive religion whose teachings are guaranteed and trusted.

Thus, due to the importance of prayer Allah *Glorified is He* mentions it at the beginning of the acts of goodness, and at their forefront. This is due to the fact that the summit of good deeds is to be present with Allah *the Almighty* Who confers these good deeds on you.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and to give alms...’ (*al-Hajj:* 73). In fact, *zakat,* which is to give out a portion of your property for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* is a practical application of the response to Allah *the Almighty*. The mention of prayer is always combined with *zakat,* for the connection between the two is strong. While *zakat* is the sacrifice of a portion of your property, which is actually the result of work during a period of time, prayer is the sacrifice of time itself.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…they were Our true worshippers.’ (*al-Hajj:* 73), it means that they obeyed His commands and avoided that which He *the Almighty* prohibited as worship entails that the worshipper obeys that which s/he worships.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلُوطًا ءَاتَيْنَٰهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا وَنَجَّيْنَٰهُ مِنَ ٱلْقَرْيَةِ ٱلَّتِى كَانَت
تَّعْمَلُ ٱلْخَبَٰٓئِثَ ۗ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ قَوْمَ سَوْءٍ فَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

We gave Lot sound judgement and knowledge and saved him from the community (1) who practised(2) obscenities — they were shameless people who broke God's law! [74]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 74)

The word 'Lut' appears in the accusative because it is connected to Allah's saying: '...Long ago We bestowed right judgement on Abraham...' (*al-Anbiya':* 51). Likewise, Prophet Lut *peace be upon him* was given sound judgment, that is, wisdom. Etymologically, the two Arabic words for 'sound judgment' and 'wisdom' are originally derived from the word for the curb which is placed under the chin and lower jaw of a horse. This is because a horse might bolt from its owner or turn in a direction unwanted by its rider. Therefore, a bridle, which is a piece of iron with two outermost parts, is placed under the horse's chin and lower jaw in order to direct it to go to the right or to the left.

Wisdom means to put something in its proper place, and sound judgment means to put the truth in its place in relation to the complainant or the defendant, that is, in relation to the two opposing parties.

In Allah's saying: 'We gave Lut sound judgement and knowledge…' (*al-Hajj:* 74), there is a distinction between 'sound judgment' and 'knowledge'. The latter signifies that you realise and know, whereas the former means to apply what you knew. Thus, knowledge is the realisation while sound judgment is the application.

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(1) *The village of Sodom… In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi relates that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'There were seven villages. Gabriel peace be upon him overturned six of them, and left one of them untouched for Lut and his dependents. This was Zaghar, in which is located Ath-Thamar, from the district of Palestine to the border of As-Sara. It includes many villages extending up to the Red Sea. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4484.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'Concerning the deeds of obscenities which they used to commit, there are two opinions. The first of them is sodomy. The second is to break wind, that is, they used to break wind in the company of one another and in their gatherings.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4485.*

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and saved him from the community who practised obscenities…’ (*al-Hajj:* 74). Just as Allah *the Almighty* saved Abraham *peace be upon him* from the fire, He *the Almighty* also saved Lut *peace be upon him* from the community which practised obscenities. These abominable deeds of Lot’s people are well-known.(1)

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards: ‘…they were an evil people, transgressors.’ (*al-Hajj:* 74) The evil person is s/he who harms anyone that interacts with him/her. He does not harm only some people, but everyone who interacts or comes into contact with him/her.

Transgression is to disobey the religious commands. This expression, like all of the Quranic expressions, is taken from the realities of the Arabian life. The original meaning of the Arabic word for transgression refers to the coming forth of the fresh, ripe date from its skin; when the small, green dates have ripened and their skin separates from them so that the fresh, ripe dates come forth from them. Now, this skin was created in order to perform a function, namely, to protect the fruit. Similarly, we use this word to express deviating from Allah’s Way of Guidance which, likewise, performs a vital function in our life. Therefore, whoever violates it is a transgressor.

Allah says:

وَأَدۡخَلۡنَٰهُ فِي رَحۡمَتِنَآۖ إِنَّهُۥ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ٧٥

We admitted him to Our mercy; he was a
righteous man[75] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 75)

Here, a question arises, which is, ‘How did Allah *the Almighty* admit Prophet Lut to His Mercy while all of us are within the compass of His Mercy?’ The scholars answered that this is because there is general Mercy for all the human beings, including even the disbeliever, and there is special Mercy that exceeds the general one. This special Mercy is Prophethood, as evinced by Allah’s saying: ‘And they say: Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) To this Allah *the Almighty* replies: ‘Will they distribute the mercy of your Lord?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) — That is, Prophethood—‘We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

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(1) *Ibn ‘Asakir narrated that Abu Umama Al-Bahili said, ‘Lut’s people were known for possessing ten negative traits: sporting with pigeons; throwing hazelnuts; whistling by the lips; throwing pebbles or stones; uttering poetry before its completion; cracking and popping chewing gum; letting the loin cloth hang down (extending beyond the heels); putting outer garments with full sleeves aside; sodomy; and having drinking companionships. The negative traits of this community will outnumber these. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/644.*

So how do they distribute Allah’s Mercy, that is, Prophethood, which is the greatest form of Mercy, while He *the Almighty* distributes for them what is even lower than it that is, their livelihoods, and subsistence in this world? Thus, the meaning of Allah’s saying, ‘We admitted him to Our mercy...’ (*al-Hajj:* 74) is that Lut *peace be upon him* was chosen as one of the Prophets. As for Allah’s saying: ‘…he was a righteous man’ (*al-Hajj:* 74), it implies that he *peace be upon him* was suitable for Prophethood and Allah *the Almighty* knows best to whom He entrusts His Message. However, the summit of this Mercy was embodied in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the last Prophet and Messenger; he is not emended or supplemented by any Messenger after him. For that reason, his Lord addressed him, saying: ‘It was only as a mercy that We sent you [Prophet] to all people.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 107) Therefore, while the Messengers before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were a mercy to their peoples, he is a mercy to all the worlds.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions to us another Messenger who is endowed with firmness of heart, saying:

وَنُوحًا إِذْ نَادَىٰ مِن قَبْلُ فَٱسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُۥ فَنَجَّيْنَٰهُ
وَأَهْلَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلْكَرْبِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ٧٦

Long before that, We answered Noah when he cried out to
Us: We saved him and his family from the great calamity [76]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 76)

As in the case of Prophet Lut, Allah *the Almighty* endowed Noah *peace be upon him* with sound judgment. In Allah’s saying: ‘Long before that, We answered Noah when he called out to Us.’ (*al-Hajj:* 76) To ‘cry out’ linguistically means to ask someone to come. If one in a higher position asks someone of a lower position, it is a 'calling out.' If they are of equal standing, then it is a 'request,' and if the lower in position asks the one of the higher position, it is a 'supplication'. So, when you say 'O Lord,' the 'O' here is not for calling out, but for supplication.

When you test a pupil, you may say to him, 'What is the grammatical function of the word 'Lord' when one says, 'Lord, forgive me.' If s/he is perspicacious, s/he will say, 'The Lord is the object of supplication, as "O Lord" is implied.' As for the pupil who says, 'The Lord is the object of calling out,' we treat him/her with indulgence because s/he is somewhat correct. This is because the 'O', in its original sense, is for calling out, but this answer is not accurate. Likewise, with regard to 'forgive me,' if one says the verb is imperative, we give him/her half a mark, but if s/he says it is a supplication, we give him/her the full mark.

Back to the verse in question; what did Noah *peace be upon him* say in his supplication? Allah *Glorified is He* informs us about that elsewhere, relating that Noah implored: 'My Lord! Leave not upon the land any dweller from among the unbelievers.' (*Nuh:* 26) Then, He *the Almighty* answered the supplication of Prophet Noah *peace be upon him*: 'We saved him and his family from the great calamity' (*al-Hajj:* 76). The 'calamity' meant here is Noah's persisting in calling his people to Allah *the Almighty* for a thousand years save fifty, and the toil and hardship he suffered due to his mission, concerning which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And whenever I have called them that You may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, cover themselves with their garments, and persist and are puffed up with pride: Then surely I called to them aloud: Then surely I spoke to them in public and I spoke to them in secret.' (*Nuh:* 7–9) Afterwards, when Allah *the Almighty* commanded him to build the ark, they began to scoff at him. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And he began to make the ark; and whenever the chiefs from among his people passed by him they laughed at him…' (*Hud:* 38).

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* accepted his supplication: 'We answered Noah when he called out to Us.' (*al-Hajj:* 76) This fact is also mentioned in Allah's saying: 'And Noah did certainly call upon Us, and most excellent answerer of prayer are We.' (*as-Saffat:* 75) Here, He *Glorified is He* describes His response by the indeclinable word meaning 'how excellent,' signifying praise.

Does this mean that there is evil responder? The scholars said, 'Yes, this is true when you ask for something which is evil for you, and the one asked complies with your request. On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* is the best of responders because He does not answer your request unless it be something wholesome and beneficial to you. When there is something evil in your supplication, He refuses to answer it in light of His Knowledge that it will not benefit you.'

It is as though the Supreme Lord says to you, 'I am not your employee who answers all your requests; rather, I am Ever-Watching over you. It may be that you ask for something which you think is good for you, whereas I know by the eternality of My Knowledge that it comprises evil, not goodness. So the true goodness for you is that I do not answer this request, as I am the best of responders.'

Suppose that Allah *the Almighty* responded to every one of us as we desired; how would the situation of a mother, for example, be if she became angry with her only son, and in a moment of anger supplicated against him, saying, 'My Lord, make him taste Your fire'? So, Allah *the Almighty* is the best of responders because He refuses the like of this supplication and prevents its realisation. For that reason, He *the Almighty* says: 'And man prays for evil as he ought to pray for good, and man is ever hasty.' (*al-Isra':* 11) This means that the human being prays and implores in his prayer for that which s/he thinks is good while in reality it is not.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَنَصَرْنَٰهُ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ
كَانُوا۟ قَوْمَ سَوْءٍ فَأَغْرَقْنَٰهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

And We helped him against the people who rejected Our signs – they were evil people, so We drowned them all [77] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 77)

The verses continue to narrate to us a brief account of some of the Prophets, as we are in the chapter of *al-Anbiya'*, that is, the Prophets. When we reflect on this verse, we find that Allah *the Almighty* punishes by means of water, just as He punishes by means of fire, despite the fact that they are two opposites which never meet. Indeed, no one has the power to do so except the Creator *Glorified is He*.

The story of the drowning of the people of Noah and the people of Sheba after the collapse of the dam of Ma'rib comprises strong, impeding events for the people of the Arabian Peninsula. This is because as soon as they see water, they fear it and move away from it, even to the point that when they need water, they will go to a distant place to fill up their water skins—all due to their knowledge of the danger of the flood, and that it could neither be turned away nor held back from them by anything.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about some Prophets of the children of Israel who came after Moses *peace be upon him*:

وَدَاوُۥدَ وَسُلَيْمَٰنَ إِذْ يَحْكُمَانِ فِى ٱلْحَرْثِ إِذْ نَفَشَتْ
فِيهِ غَنَمُ ٱلْقَوْمِ وَكُنَّا لِحُكْمِهِمْ شَٰهِدِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

And remember David and Solomon, when they gave judgement regarding the field into which sheep strayed by night and grazed. We witnessed their judgement [78]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 78)

The judgment here refers to the decree of David and Solomon regarding a quarrel between two parties. A 'field' is a piece of land where the soil has been turned over to be suitable for agriculture. The same word translated here as 'field' is also mentioned, translated as 'tilth,' in Allah's saying: '...and destroy the tilth and the stock...' (*al-Baqara:* 205).

Evidently, the field itself is not destroyed; rather, the crops and fruit that spring from it are destroyed. So, the crop is called tilth because it springs up from it, as is also found in Allah's saying: 'as the likeness of wind in which is intense cold (that) smites the tilth of a people who have done injustice to their souls and destroys it...' (*Al-'Imran:* 117).

Now, why is tilth called crop, when tilth is simply the preparation of the earth for cultivation? They said, 'This is in order to make clear that it is not possible to have crops without tilth, as it means the stirring up of the earth’s soil. This activity helps with the incorporation of air into the soil and the dehydration of its extra water, for after the process of repeated irrigation, a layer of dross forms upon the earth which clogs the pores of the soil and prohibits the evaporation of ground water, which in turn brings about the ruin of the roots of the plants.

Therefore, the best quality soil is not that which is purely clayey, nor that which is purely sandy; while the clayey earth holds back the water, the sandy soil allows the water to seep through. Thus, neither of these two kinds of soil are suitable for plants. On the other hand, the good soil is that which combines these two qualities, for such soil provides the plants with the necessary ventilation and gives them water according to their need for it.

Therefore, a young crop is called tilth because it is the cause of its growth, its increase, and its good quality. Moreover, this turns our attention to the fact that there is no crop without tilth, a point which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘Have you considered what you sow? Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the causers of growth?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 63–64)

In this matter, there is an allusion to one of Allah’s universal laws, which is that you must necessarily work in order to attain to your purpose. Your Lord and Creator has conferred His Blessings on you even before He brings you into existence and charges you with anything. You kept enjoying His Bestowals before reaching the age of maturity without being held responsible for any of your actions.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* will give you endless Bestowals in the Hereafter, without making any effort to get them. All of this is in return for your obeying Him in matters of free choice during the time of being entrusted with the religious obligations.

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a noble Hadith: ‘Give the labourer his wage before his sweat dries,’(1) because he laboured and therefore deserves the wage; and the matter is the same in the case of the tilth.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Abu Nu‘aym on the authority of Abu Hurayra; At-Tabarani on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah; and by Ibn Majah on the authority of ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar, though, according to Al-Busiri, there are two weak links in Ibn* =

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…into which sheep strayed by night and grazed...' (*al-Anbiya':* 78). This verse refers to a quarrel between two parties who asked David *peace be upon him* to pass judgment on it: one man had a crop, while the other had sheep, and the sheep strayed due to the heedlessness of their owner and ate the crop. So, the owner of the crop complained about the owner of the sheep to Prophet David *peace be upon him* who, perhaps finding that the crop which the sheep destroyed was equal to them in value, decreed that the owner of the crop should take the sheep.

When the opposing parties left, Solomon *peace be upon him* who was 11 years old at the time, met them, and came to know from them his father's ruling in this case, whereupon he said: 'The most gracious ruling for both parties is other than this.'(1) Thus, he called his father's judgment gracious, and did not accuse him of injustice, for example, but he was aware of a judgment which would be still more gracious.

Then, when his remark reached his father, he asked him, 'What is the most gracious settlement between the two parties?' Solomon *peace be upon him* replied, 'We give the sheep to the owner of the crop to make use of their milk and wool, and we give the land to the owner of the sheep to cultivate it until it is returned to its previous state, at that time the owner of the sheep will take the sheep and the owner of the crop will take the crop.'

The Arabic verb for: '…strayed by night and grazed...' (*al-Anbiya':* 78) has another meaning as well, which is to take on a size greater than one's

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= *Majah's chain of transmission. See Abu Nu'aym, Hilyat Al-Awliya', 7/142; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam As-Saghir, 1/20; and Ibn Majah, Sunan, Hadith no.2443.*

(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi mentions that Solomon asked the two parties after they had left the presence of his father David how Allah's Prophet David had settled things between them. They said, 'He judged that the sheep should go to the owner of the tilth.' Then he said, 'Perhaps the judgment will be different than this—proceed with me.' He approached his father and said, 'O Prophet of Allah, you determined such-and-such, whereas I see that which will be even more gracious for everyone.' Then he stated his judgment between the two parties, whereupon David said: I agree, my son, may Allah never diminish your understanding. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4487.*

normal size—just as when you take, for example, a piece of bread or rusk and put it in milk or water and then notice that it swells up and increases in size. We say, using the same verb, ‘It swelled up,’ just as we say to someone who assumes a stature greater than his/her, ‘You are ruffling your feathers.’

As for Allah’s saying: ‘...We witnessed their judgement.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 78), it means that He *the Almighty* oversaw their judgment.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَفَهَّمۡنَٰهَا سُلَيۡمَٰنَۚ وَكُلًّا ءَاتَيۡنَا حُكۡمٗا وَعِلۡمٗاۚ وَسَخَّرۡنَا مَعَ دَاوُۥدَ
ٱلۡجِبَالَ يُسَبِّحۡنَ وَٱلطَّيۡرَۚ وَكُنَّا فَٰعِلِينَ ٧٩

And made Solomon understand the case [better], though We gave sound judgement and knowledge to both of them. We made the mountains and the birds celebrate Our praises with David – We did all these things [79]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 79)

David and Solomon *peace be upon them* are both Prophets, but each of them has his distinct position. Allah *the Almighty* gave them both sound judgment and knowledge, yet their statement in this case differed. However, the understanding which Solomon *peace be upon him* arrived at neither belittles David’s knowledge nor contests his judgment.

The judgment of both David and Solomon *peace be upon them* is similar to the verdict of the court of first instance and the court of appeal. You must be careful not to think that when a court of appeal overturns a ruling of the first instance, this means that it necessarily contests or challenges it.

This is the case in Allah’s saying: ‘And made Solomon understand the case [better]…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79) He *peace be upon him* set forth a judgment different from that of his father. Therefore, the judge of first instance might rule concerning a case, and it may be adjourned so that it proceeds to an appeals judge, who reads the same case but with another view, so that his judgment comes to be different from the first.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘We made the mountains and the birds celebrate Our praises with David...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79). When Allah *the Almighty* mentions both David and Solomon, He *the Almighty* intends to demonstrate to us some of what He *the Almighty* has conferred on them. Consequently, His saying: 'And made Solomon understand the case [better]…' (*al-Anbiya':* 79) is an expression of Solomon's distinction. Then, He *the Almighty* demonstrates a distinctive mark of David *peace be upon him* as well, saying: 'We made the mountains and the birds celebrate Our praises with David...' (*al-Anbiya':* 79).

When Allah *the Almighty* subjects something to do a certain action, it means that He *the Almighty* compels the subjected thing to ceaselessly do something about which it has no choice or option. We notice here a progressive development from the lower to the higher; first, He *the Almighty* subjected the mountains, which are inanimate objects and then the birds, which are more elevated than the inanimate objects. But even if we conceived that the birds can celebrate Allah's praises because they are alive and possess a spirit, a movement, and an expressive sound, how is it possible for the hard and solid mountains to do so?

When they turn to consider this verse, some of the scholars take it by the external indications of interpretation, not by in-depth insight into the meaning. They see the mountains as solid bodies, without any expressive sound such as birds possess, and therefore they are astonished by the statement that the mountains glorify Allah *the Almighty*. They wonder, 'How is it possible for them to do so while they are solid, inanimate bodies?'

However, there is nothing to be astonished about, for if you undertook a comprehensive survey of the races of men on earth, with their languages, tongues, appearances and colours differing according to the environment in which they live, you would find that men differ in the likes of these matters and agree only in their natural dispositions. All the races share the instincts of hunger, thirst, fear, laughter, and affections; they have no choice or option regarding them.

Have you not considered Allah's saying: 'And that He it is Who makes (men) laugh and makes (them) weep...' (*an-Najm:* 43)? Since He *the Almighty* is the One Who causes to laugh and to weep, we will not differ in these respects.

Speech is, then, one of the things in regard to which the human beings differ. But this difference has nothing to do with the sound of the letters, for the letters are the same. For example, when we pronounce *Shrshl*, the speakers of other languages also pronounce it in the same way: with (sh), (r), (sh) and (l). We are united with regard to the letters, but different with regard to the meanings of things.

It may be difficult for some throats to pronounce certain letters according to their natural formation. Non-Arabs, for example, do not pronounce the letter (ḍ), but have only the letter (d), whereas in Arabic we make a distinction between the soft (d) and the emphatic (ḍ), between (S) and (th), between (z) and (dh), and between *Hamza* and *'Ayn*. Therefore, we find that a non-Arab does not say 'Ali, but 'Ali, for s/he is not able to pronounce the *'Ayn*, despite the fact that s/he is a human being who possesses a language and speaks.

The human beings do not understand one another's languages—for there is Arabic, there is English, there is French, and so on—and unless they study these languages, they will not understand them.

It is well known that language is born of hearing and imitation, for the tongue speaks that which the ears hear. So, the dumb one who does not speak was first of all deaf, not hearing anything. The child speaks that which s/he hears, for if you placed an English child in an Arab milieu, s/he would speak Arabic.

Why, then, are we astonished when we do not understand the language of the birds or the language of inanimate bodies, which are completely different from us? Being unable to understand them does not mean that they do not possess a language among themselves which they all share and by which they express themselves.

Do not consider it far-fetched, then, that the lower species possess languages by which they understand one another, but you do not understand them. This is proven by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* gave us an illustration of the language of birds, and showed that He *the Almighty* teaches it to whom He wills, as in the case of Solomon *peace be upon him* who was able to understand and speak the language of the birds.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* relates Solomon's saying: '...men! we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given all things...’ (*an-Naml:* 16). If Allah *the Almighty* had not taught him the language of the birds, he would not have known it.

Solomon *peace be upon him* inspected the birds and, not finding the hoopoe, he threatened it, but the latter said afterwards: ‘...I comprehend that which you do not comprehend and I have brought to you a sure information from Sheba.’ (*an-Naml:* 22)

We notice here the exactness of Solomon *peace be upon him* in inspecting his kingdom, for he did not neglect anything, even the hoopoe. We also notice his good manners in his saying: ‘How is it I see not the hoopoe or is it that he is of the absentees?’ (*an-Naml:* 20) Here, he doubted his vision first, for perhaps the hoopoe was present, but he did not see it.

We should take account of the hoopoe’s speech to the king: ‘...I comprehend that which you do not comprehend...’ (*an-Naml:* 22), and also his precise knowledge of Allah’s Oneness and other articles of faith: ‘I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah…’ (*an-Naml:* 24).The hoopoe objects to this polytheism and replies to it by something specific to it, a phenomenon which concerns it: ‘That they do not make obeisance to Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth…’ (*an-Naml:* 25).

The hoopoe chose to talk about the phenomenon of bringing forth what is hidden, because it is in this manner that it gets its food, for it does not eat things on the surface of the earth, but must necessarily dig up its food out of the ground, bringing forth what is hidden within it to be its food.

This is also the case with the ant, which is smaller than the hoopoe; it spoke to Solomon *peace be upon him* and he understood its speech. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when they came to the Valley of the Ants, one ant said, ‘Ants! Go into your homes, in case Solomon and his hosts unwittingly crush you.’ Solomon smiled broadly at her words...’ (*an-Naml:* 18–19). This ant was talking to the other ants, but Solomon *peace be upon him* understood it, and so he said: ‘Lord, inspire me to be thankful for the blessings You have granted me…’ (*an-Naml:* 19). Thus, we do not understand these languages unless Allah *the Almighty* teaches them to us.

In spite of this, when the scholars encounter this verse: ‘We made the mountains and the birds celebrate Our praises with David...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79), they say, ‘The celebration of Allah’s praises here is not meant literally; rather, it is an indicative glorification, for by their state the mountains are indicative of the Creator *Glorified is He*. However, the soundest interpretation is to concede that the mountains extol praise, but we ourselves do not understand them, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah’s saying: ‘...but you do not understand their glorification...’ (*al-Isra’:* 44).

Given that we witness scholars today working to produce a dictionary for the language of fish and other animals, we do not think it far-fetched that sometime in the future a dictionary of the language of stones or other inanimate bodies will be produced. Otherwise, what will be the progressive developments in knowledge destined to take place in the future? The Quran already established this truth, and we simply await its discovery by modern science.

The privilege which Allah *the Almighty* bestowed upon Prophet David *peace be upon him* is not all about the mountains’ extolling of praise, as the mountains extol Allah’s praise in David’s presence and in the presence of anyone else. Rather, David’s privilege is that they intone with him and concur with him in extolling praise, and echo him. So, when he says ‘Glory be to Allah,’ the mountains intone beside him ‘Glory be to Allah,’ as though they were together a single chorus, intoning the same hymn.

Referring to the mountains as ‘inanimate,’ does not mean that they are devoid of life, for it is with respect to the form of their constitution that they are described as such. If you reflected on the stone quarries within the layers of the earth, you would realise that they have lives, reactions, and movements throughout millions of years. It is the result of this movement that the colour and constitution of stones change, which is a clear indication that there is life, present within them. For example, if you paint a stone with a certain colour, it will inevitably change with the passage of time. There is, therefore, life in these solid bodies, but we do not perceive it.

We should note that it is inaccurate to consider the glorification of the pebbles in the hand of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a miracle. This is because the stone glorifies Allah while being in Prophet

Muhammad's hand or in that of Abu Jahl. One should say, 'The miracle is that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the glorification of the pebbles in his hand.'

There is nothing in Allah's cosmos which does not possess a life appropriate to it and a language by which it glorifies Him *the Almighty* whether or not it is perceived by us. This is due to the fact that speech is derived from the presence of life, and everything in existence possesses life. For example, the scientists say that a single box of matches, which we use all the time, comprises between its atoms interactions which would suffice to drive a train around the world. These interactions indicate movement and life.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...everything is perishable but He...' (*al-Qasas:* 88). So, everything which can be called a 'thing'— except for Allah *Glorified is He* — is bound to perish. However, nothing can perish without having a previous life, for perishing is the opposite of living, a point which is evidenced by Allah's saying: '…that he who would perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof...' (*al-Anfal:* 42).

As a matter of fact, everything in existence possesses life according to its own laws. It is not necessary that you hear the speech of something in order to acknowledge that it has a life. Sign language, for example, is a meaningful language which we can understand. A servant, for instance, understands with a single glance what his master wants him to offer the guest.

Moreover, sailors have certain signs which they all understand and by which they communicate with one another. The telegraph system is also another way of effectuating communication and another means of understanding. It is not necessary, therefore, that communication be brought about by means of speech. Rather, each of the species understands and speaks with one another in its own language. If Allah *the Almighty* wants to endow you with His illuminations, He *the Almighty* gives you the intuitive insight and knowledge by which you would understand the languages of different species.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification...' (*an-Nur:* 41). The indefiniteness of 'each' in this verse signifies universality. Everything possesses its suitable kind of prayer and has its glorification which accords with its nature.

When Allah *the Almighty* demonstrates the issue of glorification, submission, and compulsion of all created beings to Him, He *the Almighty* makes the statement universal, concerning all species—with the single exception of man because glorification and submission is specific to only some people. This fact is clear in His saying: ‘Do you not see that Allah is He, Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18), meaning that there will be no exception. As for the human beings, He *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and many of the people; and many there are against whom chastisement has become necessary; and whomsoever Allah abases, there is none who can make him honourable; surely Allah does what He pleases.’ (*al-Hajj:* 18)

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...We did all these things.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79) Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of everything and the Doer of everything, but nevertheless He *the Almighty* emphasises this truth in order that we not be astonished by the glorification of the birds and mountains. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* is the Doer, the Giver and the Mover.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says about David *peace be upon him*:

وَعَلَّمْنَٰهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَّكُمْ لِتُحْصِنَكُم مِّنۢ بَأْسِكُمْ ۖ فَهَلْ أَنتُمْ شَٰكِرُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

We taught him how to make(1)coats of mail for the benefit of you [people], to protect you in your wars, but are you grateful for this? [80] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 80)

Allah *the Almighty* begins this verse with His saying: ‘We taught him...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 80). Knowledge is the communication of beneficial information from someone who knows it to someone who does not. The human being is always in need of knowledge and learning because s/he is Allah’s Vicegerent on earth. S/he will not fulfil this task except by moving extensively among the people which requires understanding, knowledge, interaction, and mutual exchange of knowledge and cultures. Such beneficial information includes, for example, the fact that in order to mould iron, it must first be heated until it becomes pliable and mouldable; likewise, water must first be brought to a boil for such-and-such time, etc.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi, says, ‘Making here refers to the sort of activity which enables man to abstain from depending on other men, and by which he defends himself from harm and injury. In a Hadith it is said, ‘Allah loves the modest, weak, gainfully employed believer and loathes the importunate beggar.’ David’s craftsmanship was making armors.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4500.*

The matters of knowledge required for the human being's movement upon the earth are of two kinds. The first of these is that which Allah *the Almighty* does not entrust to the created beings themselves, so it came from Him by means of revelation and that is why the intellect has nothing to do with it. This was meant to prevent people's desires from causing any disagreement about the Way of Guidance which He *the Almighty* revealed, saying to you 'Do this,' and 'Do not do that.'

As for the matters concerning which the human beings' desires do not differ—but rather, they strive to share them, to compete for them, and perhaps to steal them—Allah *Glorified is He* left them to the activity of people's minds and their strivings. He *the Almighty* may inspire someone with these matters or facilitates a process of learning for him/her, even if it be by means of one lower than oneself, as He *the Almighty* taught Adam's son, Cain, by means of the raven how to conceal his brother's vile body. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Then Allah sent a crow digging up the earth so that he might show him how he should cover the dead body of his brother...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31)

A scientific theorem may have its premises in the cosmos, so if we apply our minds to study it, we may arrive at scientific truths. Moreover, a scientific theorem may come from experience or from an idea which Allah *the Almighty* casts into a man's heart.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We taught him how to make coats of mail for the benefit of you [people]...' (*al-Anbiya':* 80). It is possible for us to say that this was instruction by revelation, by experience, or by casting into the heart. This craftsmanship was not known before David *peace be upon him*.

The 'coats of mail' mentioned in the verse are stronger and more judicious than 'clothing.' 'Clothing,' from the same Arabic root as 'coats of mail,' refers to that which covers the human’s private parts and that which protects him/her from the heat and the cold, as is mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘…and He has given you garments to preserve you from the heat...’ (*an-Nahl:* 81).

But in war, we require greater protection and increased defences than what we usually find in clothing. We need something which safeguards us from being injured and protect us from the enemies’ deadly strikes. Therefore, the human beings were guided to fashion helmets and armour to protect the vital parts of the human body. They made them fit the head and the chest, for in the head is the brain, and in the chest is the heart, and if these organs are safe and sound, then broken bones can be set and everything else can be treated in some way.

The ‘coats of mail’ here, then, are stronger and greater in protection than mere clothing because their function is more serious than the function of clothing. Before David’s time, there were thin outer garments on the surface of which a sword would slide. Then, when David *peace be upon him* fashioned armour, he made it consist of rings in order that a sword would break upon it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards: ‘…to protect you in your wars…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 80). This means that the armours might protect, guard, and defend you in your war against your enemies.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* inspired David *peace be upon him* so that he began to think and to create. In fact, all the reflections on how to progressively develop and improve a production begin simply by observing the faults of previous productions. Subsequently, the maker attempts to correct the previous mistakes until we arrive at something without fault, or at least something avoiding the faults of earlier productions—which is why the final product is called the ‘latest model.’

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…but are you grateful for this?’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 80) This means that the people should be grateful for the blessings of Allah *the Almighty* who guards and protects them in dilemmas and difficult situations. He *the Almighty* commands us to treat our enemies harshly in order to show that the believer must be prepared to confront the disbeliever and to seize hold of the causes of survival if a war broke out.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...We also sent iron, wherein is great violence and advantages to men, and that Allah may know who helps Him and His Messengers in the secret; surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.' (*al-Hadid:* 25)

Thus, the function of iron in life is not solely to benefit the human beings; it has also a function in battle. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '...We also sent iron….' (*al-Hadid:* 25), just as He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely We Ourselves have revealed the Quran to you.' (*al-Insan:* 23) As the Quran is revealed to guide the human beings, iron supports this guidance inasmuch as we use it to strike the disobedient disbelievers and to protect the breasts of the truthful believers. This is why He *the Almighty* says: '...We also sent iron...' (*al-Hadid:* 25), that is, from above, although it comes out of the earth.

That there is iron upon the earth, then, is one of the greatest blessings that Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed upon us, for we use it to protect ourselves from the enemy. Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* fashioned the creation and did not simply leave it to manage its affairs; rather, He *the Almighty* created it and established for it the laws of its protection and preservation. This merits our eternal and unfailing gratitude.

Thereafter, the Quran directs our attention to Solomon, the son of David. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلِسُلَيۡمَٰنَ ٱلرِّيحَ عَاصِفَةٗ تَجۡرِي بِأَمۡرِهِۦٓ إِلَى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ ٱلَّتِي
بَٰرَكۡنَا فِيهَاۚ وَكُنَّا بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَٰلِمِينَ ٨١

We harnessed the stormy wind for Solomon, so that it sped by his command to the land We had blessed – We have knowledge of all things [81]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 81)

There is no doubt that Solomon *peace be upon him* benefitted from that which Allah *the Almighty* taught his father, David *peace be upon him* and received a portion of Allah's Blessing toward his father. Here, his Lord *Glorified is He* distinguished him by some privileges, including his dominion over the stormy wind, that is, the wind which is intensely forceful and which:

'…sped by his command to the land We had blessed...' (*al-Anbiya': 81*). It is as though the winds served as interior transportation means within his kingdom from Iraq to Palestine.(1)

Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and grant me a kingdom which is not fit for (being inherited by) anyone after me; Then We made the wind subservient to him; it made his command to run gently wherever he desired.' (*Sad:* 35–36)

That the wind was 'gentle' signifies that it was light, soft and smooth, while here it is described as: '...stormy...' (*al-Anbiya':* 81). So it is as though, within this one wind, Allah *the Almighty* united the quality of speed, by using the adjective 'stormy,' with the quality of ease, by using the adjective 'gentle.' No one has the power to unite these two qualities except for Allah *the Almighty*. For example, when a car in which we are riding accelerates, it is not possible for us to be at ease and reassured; rather, people become alarmed and demand that the speed be slowed down.

As for the wind which was subservient to Solomon *peace be upon him* it used to hasten with him to his destination, and yet it was restful, smooth and calm, without having any affect upon his bodily condition. Furthermore, he did not experience any shock or feel the force of the wind's rushing which would require him to use a safety belt, for example. No one except Allah, the Contractor and the Outspreader, has the Power to unite these qualities. He contracts time with respect to some people and outspreads it with respect to others.

The blessing in Allah's saying: '...We had blessed…' (*al-Anbiya':* 81) includes both a sensible blessing by way of its crops, fruits, fertility and treasures of the earth, and a spiritual blessing in so far as He placed therein places where divine revelation and prophethood descend, as well as signs and traces of the Prophets.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir relates that Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, 'He used to depart in the morning upon his carpet from Damascus and descend in Persepolis, where he would have breakfast, go back from Persepolis to Kabul and spend his night there. For one who goes quickly it would normally take one full month to travel between Damascus and Persepolis, and another full month to travel between Persepolis and Kabul.' Kabul is the present capital of Afghanistan. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 3/528/3.*

The subjection of the winds to Solomon *peace be upon him* did not consist in their carrying him, for example, as we see in movies, on a flying carpet which carries something and travels with it through the air, nor did it consist in their propelling his ships upon the seas. Rather, their being subjected to him means that they moved according to his will and carried out his orders, travelling wherever he wanted, whether to the right or to the left. They did not blow according to the natural law according to which Allah *the Almighty* created them, but instead according to Solomon’s will.

While this gentle wind carried him on internal trips within his kingdom, there were also winds which carried him on external trips and journeys, about which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And (We made) the wind (subservient) to Solomon, which made a month’s journey in the morning and a month’s journey in the evening…’ (*Saba’:* 12). So he travels by them throughout the world: ‘...wherever he desired.’ (*Sad:* 36)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…We have knowledge of all things.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 81) This means that Allah *the Almighty* possesses the Knowledge by which He regulates the affairs according to His Will, and He *the Almighty* willingly breaks the natural law originally established by Him, and thus causes the wind to travel as He likes, even to the contrary of the natural law.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينِ مَن يَغُوصُونَ لَهُۥ وَيَعۡمَلُونَ
عَمَلٗا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَۖ وَكُنَّا لَهُمۡ حَٰفِظِينَ ﴿٨٢﴾

And We made some of the jinn subservient to him,
to dive for him and do other works besides. We were
watching over them [82] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 82)

After Allah *the Almighty* subjected to him the wind, He subjected to him the jinn: ‘…to dive for him...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 82). ‘Diving’ means to delve into the depths of the sea in order to bring for Solomon its treasures, gems and wondrous things which Allah *the Almighty* stored within it. The jinn also: ‘…do other works besides...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 82), that is, Solomon *peace be upon him* charged them with toilsome works which men are not capable of performing.

This is explained in another place where Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They made for him what he pleased of Sanctuaries and images, and bowls (large) as watering-troughs and fixed cauldrons…’ (*Saba’:* 13). Thus, the designs of the work were included in his will.

‘Sanctuaries’ is the plural of ‘sanctuary,’ which is a place of worship such as the *Qibla*, for example. ‘Bowls’ is the plural of ‘bowl,’ which is a very large, wide basin, big enough for a large number of people. As for the ‘fixed cauldrons,’ they are the ones which have been constructed and are firmly established so that it is not possible to move them from one place to another.

We saw something similar to these fixed cauldrons in Riyadh during the time of King ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz *may Allah be Merciful to him*. It was so wide and high that if a man stood before it stretching his arms upwards as far as possible, he would not reach its height. In pre-Islamic times, Ibn Jad‘an and Mut‘im Ibn ‘Adi were well known for possessing the like of these fixed cauldrons.

As for ‘images,’ they are well known, and the position concerning them has been clear ever since the time of Abraham *peace be upon him* when he broke them and forbade their being worshipped. This view opposes that of those who say that the statues and images were originally permitted, until men became infatuated with them and worshipped them apart from Allah *the Almighty* and at which time they became forbidden. So, how do we explain the fact that Allah *the Almighty* mentioned the subjection of those who make statues for Solomon as one of His Blessings bestowed on him while they are forbidden? To this we reply that they used to make statues for him, not for the purpose of glorification and worship, but in insulting and contemptuous forms by making them in the shape of a giant man or a larger lion which supports part of the palace or one of its balconies; or they formed them to support a dining table, and so forth. That is, they were not for worship or glorification.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...We were watching over them.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 82) This means that He *the Almighty* kept watch over the people of that time who witnessed these works in order that the jinn neither harmed nor frightened them—as it is well known that jinn see human beings, while human beings do not see them, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah’s saying: ‘...he surely sees you, he as well as his host, from whence you cannot see them….’ (*al-A‘raf:* 27)

Solomon *peace be upon him* however, used to see the Jinn and to supervise them, while they worked for him, and his story includes the following episode: 'But when We decreed death for him, naught showed them his death but a creature of the earth that ate away his staff....' (*Saba':* 14) Here, there is an indication that the Jinn do not know the unseen. That is why Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'and when it fell down, the jinn came to know plainly that if they had known the unseen, they would not have tarried in abasing torment.' (*Saba':* 14)

It is said that, after Allah *the Almighty* bestowed His Favour upon Solomon *peace be upon him* and gave him dominion which is not fit for being inherited by anyone after him, he took these jinn and confined them in bulgy, long-necked bottles so that they would not work for anyone other than him.

This is merely a snapshot from the story of Solomon *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* then directs our attention to the story of Job *peace be upon him* saying:

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذۡ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ ٱلضُّرُّ وَأَنتَ أَرۡحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

Remember Job, when he cried to his Lord, 'Suffering has truly afflicted me, but you are the Most Merciful of the merciful' [83] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 83)

We said that crying out to someone equal to you is means to seek a response, but with respect to Allah *the Almighty* it has the meaning of a prayer or a supplication. Therefore, the meaning of Allah's saying: '…when he cried to his Lord...' (*al-Anbiya':* 83) is that Job *Allah's peace be upon him* prayed to Allah *the Almighty* and invoked Him for a request which is expressed in Allah's saying: 'Suffering has truly afflicted me, but you are the Most Merciful of the merciful.' (*al-Anbiya':* 83)

A 'suffering' is a trial from Allah *the Almighty* which concerns the body such as an illness. However, the same Arabic word for suffering, with a difference in the vowels, signifies harm and a trial which concerns anything other than the body. In fact, there is nothing prohibiting Prophets from falling ill, but only with non-repulsive, non-repellent illnesses.

Now, how is it possible that Job *peace be upon him* invokes his Lord and voices his pain, saying: 'Suffering has truly afflicted me...'? (*al-Anbiya':* 83)

Does Allah *the Almighty* not know that a suffering has befallen him? Moreover, is it fitting for a Prophet to lament his being tried by Allah *the Almighty*? Yes, lamenting is permissible for Job *peace be upon him* because the servant is not supposed to be courageous toward his Lord. In this connection, when a man paying a visit to Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* found him suffering from an illness and expressing his pain, he said to him, ‘Are you lamenting—you, the father of Hasan?’ Thereupon, Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* replied, ‘I am not supposed to show courage before Allah.’ That is to say, he is not valorous before Allah *the Almighty*.

Surely, the polite behaviour towards one who wants to prove his/her strength to you, and seizes hold and squeezes your hand, for example, in order that you shout and feel pain is that you comply with him/her and say, ‘Ouch,’ showing him/her, even if in a friendly way, that s/he is stronger than you.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…but you are the Most Merciful of the merciful.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 83) When Allah *the Almighty* states that His creatures possess the like of one of His Attributes, as in His saying: ‘...the most merciful of the merciful’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 83), His saying: ‘...the best of the creators’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 14), and His saying: ‘...the best of schemers’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 54), you should know that He *the Almighty* does not disregard their rightful possession of it.

Mercy, for example, is one of the human beings’ qualities, as indicated in the noble Hadith: ‘The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful,’ (1) and also in Messenger Muhammad’s saying, ‘Be merciful on the earth, and you will be shown mercy from Who is above the heavens.’(2) To be merciful signifies being characterised by the Character Traits of Allah *the Almighty* as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Be characterised by the Character Traits of Allah.’

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, and Abu Dawud on the authority of ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As. At-Tirmidhi said, ‘This Hadith is good, authentic.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/160; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1924; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4941.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Abu Nu‘aym, At-Tabarani on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud, expressed in the following form: ‘If you (singular) are merciful toward those on earth, the One above the heavens will be merciful toward you (singular).’ See Abu Nu‘aym, Hilyat Al-Awliya’, 4/210; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 10277, and Al-Mu‘jam As-Saghir, 1/101.*

Thus, the creation possesses the quality of mercy, but Allah *the Almighty* is the Most Merciful of all the merciful, as His Mercy encompasses all things. As we said with regard to the quality of being a creator, it is possible for you, for example, to make a drinking glass from sand and thus bring it into existence and make use of it, but is your creation of the drinking glass similar to Allah's creation?

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَٱسۡتَجَبۡنَا لَهُۥ فَكَشَفۡنَا مَا بِهِۦ مِن ضُرࣲّۖ وَءَاتَيۡنَٰهُ أَهۡلَهُۥ
وَمِثۡلَهُم مَّعَهُمۡ رَحۡمَةࣰ مِّنۡ عِندِنَا وَذِكۡرَىٰ لِلۡعَٰبِدِينَ ٨٤

We answered him, removed his suffering,(1) and restored his family to him, along with more like them, as an act of grace from Us and a reminder for all who serve Us [84]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 84)

Allah *the Almighty* responded to Job's supplication by removing the affliction which had befallen him and giving him, on top of this, a gift fot which he did not even pray. This gift was the restoration of his family along with more like them since his family was small in number. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…as an act of grace from Us and a reminder for all who serve Us.' (*al-Anbiya':* 84) This is meant to teach every worshipper that if s/he devotes his worship to Allah *the Almighty* then when an affliction or concern befalls him/her and s/he takes refuge in Allah *the Almighty*, He will respond to his/her request and will give him/her, in addition to that, another gift. Therefore, that which happened with Prophet Job *peace be upon him* is an example which one must follow.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'Opinions differ over how long he suffered the trial. Ibn 'Abbas said, 'The period of his trial was seven years, seven months, seven days, and seven nights.' Wahb said, 'Thirty years,' and Al-Hasan said, 'Seven years and six months.' I said, 'A more correct opinion than these—and Allah knows best—is eighteen years, as narrated by Ibn Shihab from Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him as mentioned by Ibn Al-Mubarak.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4507.*

وَإِسۡمَٰعِيلَ وَإِدۡرِيسَ وَذَا ٱلۡكِفۡلِۖ كُلّٞ مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ٨٥

And remember Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu Al-Kifl(1): they were all steadfast [85] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 85)

We said that the chapter of *al-Anbiya'* does not tell a complete story of the Prophets, but gives us only a part of it. Here, it mentions by name only Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu Al-Kifl *peace be upon them*. Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they were all steadfast.' (*al-Anbiya':* 85) It is as though patience in itself was a consideration on account of which Allah *the Almighty* sends a given Messenger. Let us reflect on the patience of Ishmael *peace be upon him* and how he bore patiently his father's sacrificing of him because of a dream-vision he had seen — what patience can be greater than this? Then, during his youth and until he becomes older, he lives in a valley bereft of plants and bears the hardships of this dry, barren environment, obeying Allah's saying: '...our Lord! That they may keep up prayer....' (*Ibrahim:* 37) It is as though leaving this land and requesting one which provided comfort, sown fields, and fruits would be tantamount to refusing to perform the prayer. Therefore, we see that he prefers to remain in that place and to abstain from the comfort of this world, which others enjoy, as an act of obedience to Allah's Command.

The result of this is that Allah *the Almighty* gave him something better than sown fields and fruits. He *the Almighty* gave him a gift in which he can take pride among all of the Prophets: He *the Almighty* made the Last Prophet, Muhammad Ibn 'Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him* to be from his progeny. What outcome can be more excellent than this?

As for Idris *peace be upon him* he belongs to the fifth generation of the descendants of Adam *peace be upon him*. Some of the scholars say that he is 'Osiris,' but we say only what the Quran says: he is Idris. The prophetic biographers say, 'Prophet Idris was the first to whom Allah taught the spinning of wool and the sewing of clothes; before that, people used to cover their nakedness with pieces of leather.’ He was also the first to use the stars in order to know the directions and the years, as well as the first to write by the pen. These are called the ‘firsts of Idris.’

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir says, 'The apparent meaning from the context is that Dhu Al-Kifl would not be connected with the Prophets unless he were himself a Prophet. Others said, 'He was a righteous man, a just king, and a fair judge,' but Ibn Jarir hesitated with regard to this issue. Allah knows best.' Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 3/190.*

As for Dhu Al-Kifl *peace be upon him* the Arabic word *Dhu* means ‘the possessor of,’ and *Kifl* means a ‘fortune’ or ‘portion.’ So why is he called ‘Dhu Al-Kifl’? Dhu Al-Kifl is the son of Job *peace be upon him* and it is clear that Job’s children were many in number. However, Allah *the Almighty* favoured Dhu Al-Kifl with a Message, and this was his fortune, apart from Job’s other sons. For that reason, he is called ‘Dhu Al-Kifl.’(1)

This same root (*k-f-l*) also appears in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and believe in His Messenger: He will give you two portions of His mercy….’ (*al-Hadid:* 28) This verse came after a discourse about Jesus *peace be upon him* and those who believed in him and followed him. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘O you who believed in previous Messengers, the last of whom is Jesus, believe in the Seal of the Messengers so that you will come to have two portions, that is, two shares and two allotments of Allah’s Mercy: one share for your faith in Jesus and the Messengers who preceded him, and another share for your faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.’

Then, Allah *the Almighty* describes these three Prophets as: ‘…they were all steadfast.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 85) He *the Almighty* describes all Prophets as being patient because they stand up against all kinds of persecution, offences, and calamities for the sake of their mission, and bear that all with patience.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir mentions that Mujahid said, ‘Dhu Al-Kifl was a righteous man, but not a Prophet. He guaranteed the Prophet of his people that he would spare him from the affairs of his people and would straighten them out for him and judge among them with justice. He did this and so was called Dhu Al-Kifl.’ In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi mentions other opinions including the following: [1] He was a virtuous man who would take upon himself the affairs of every man who was suffering from a trial, accusation, or demand, and Allah would save the man by means of him. [2] He was called Dhu Al-Kifl because Allah the Almighty guaranteed to him the double reward of his effort and work in comparison other Prophets of his time. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Adhim, 3/190; and Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4508.*

وَأَدۡخَلۡنَٰهُمۡ فِي رَحۡمَتِنَآۖ إِنَّهُم مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

We admitted them to Our mercy; they were truly righteous [86] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 86)

'Mercy' here refers to Prophethood which is a tremendous affair and an enormous gift. Therefore, if, for its sake, they have to undergo a number of hardships, this is justifiable.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَذَا ٱلنُّونِ إِذ ذَّهَبَ مُغَٰضِبٗا فَظَنَّ أَن لَّن نَّقۡدِرَ عَلَيۡهِ فَنَادَىٰ فِي ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ
أَن لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنتَ سُبۡحَٰنَكَ إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

And remember the man with the whale, when he went off angrily, thinking We could not restrict him, but then he cried out in the deep darkness, 'There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong' [87] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 87)

'Dhu'n-Nun', that is, 'the man of the whale' is Prophet Jonah, son of Amittai. In Arabic, the word *Nun* is one of the names of the whale; its plural being *Ninan*, and for that reason Jonah *peace be upon him* was called '*Dhu'n-Nun.*' He was sent to the people of Ninawa in the land of Al-Mawsil in Iraq. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to 'Addas, 'you are from the land of a righteous Prophet: Jonah, son of Amittai.'(1)

Nun is also the name of one of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, but the name of a letter may concur with a name for something else, as in the case of *Qaf* which is the name of a mountain, and *Sin*, for there is a river called the Sin River. Thus, the names of letters may coincide with the names of things.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…when he went off angrily...' (*al-Anbiya':* 87) Someone may be described as angry at something; however, the anger described in the verse is mutual, as it indicates an action done between two agents. That is, there is another person in front of you: you are angry and s/he also is angry.

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(1) *In his biography, Ibn Hisham narrates this Hadith which also includes the following: 'Addas said, 'How could you know who Jonah, son of Amittai, is?' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He is my brother; he was a Prophet, and I am a Prophet.' Then 'Addas, proceeded to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him kissing his head, his hands and his feet. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 2/421.*

However, in the basics of the language, we incline the side of activity to one of them and the side of passivity to the other, as we say, 'Zayd participated with 'Amr.' That is, the participation is mutual between the two of them, but the side of activity is greater with regard to Zayd. Each of them is the agent at one time and the object at another. Sometimes, language considers this participation, and so the expression bears both meanings, being the agent and being the object, at the same time. An example of this is found in the saying of the Arab poet describing one's movement on land abounding with snakes that, if you move without resisting them, they will make their peace with you and not harm you. He says:

His step made its peace with the snakes,

the viper and the large serpent

This means that he made his peace with the snakes, so the snakes made their peace with him. Thus, the making of peace takes place between both of them, together. But it is the side of the snakes that triumphed, and therefore appears grammatically as the agent because their harm is greater than his harm. So when he substitutes for the snakes the viper and the large serpent, which are names of snakes, he should produce a substitute in the nominative case, in accordance with the word for which they are substitutes. Yet he produces a substitute in the accusative case because he perceives that the snakes are not just the agents, but also the object.

Back to the verse in question; Why did Jonah *peace be upon him* become angry? This is because his people denied his Message. So, he threatened them that, if they did not repent, a punishment would fall upon them. Then the appointed time came and that with which he threatened them did not befall upon them. Subsequently, he feared that they would consider him a false Prophet and would harm him. So, he abandoned them angrily and went off to another place, not knowing that they repented and that, as a result, Allah *the Almighty* waived their punishment.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* makes this situation clear, saying: ‘And wherefore was there not a town which should believe so that their belief should have profited them but the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the chastisement of disgrace in this world’s life and We gave them provision till a time.’ (*Yunus:* 98) This verse means that it did not happen before that time that a community attained to faith before the punishment befalls it and thereupon benefited by its faith, except for one community, which were the people of Jonah. When they believed and repented, Allah *the Almighty* waived their punishment.

Thus, Jonah *peace be upon him* left while there was mutual anger between him and his people and they were the cause of his wrath. This is similar to what happened in the emigration of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He emigrated from Mecca, but he did not abandon this love for it. Therefore, it is called an emigration. This is because the people of Mecca abandoned Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first of all, and abandoned his mission and also compelled him to emigrate and leave Mecca; thus they played a role in the emigration and were its cause.

For that reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, addressing Mecca, ‘By Allah, you are the best land of Allah, and the dearest of the land of Allah to me. By Allah, had I not been expelled from you I would never have left.’(1)

The poet Al-Mutanabbi(2) takes this meaning and gives expression to it in his saying:

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(1) This Hadith is narrated by *Ibn Majah* and *Ad-Darimi* on the authority of *Ibn ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Adi ibn Hamra’ Al-Zahri*, who said, ‘I saw the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* while *he was atop his riding camel, stopping at Al-Hazura, saying…’ See Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3108; and Ad-Darimi, Sunnan 2/239.*

(2) He is Ahmad ibn Al-Husayn Al-Kindi Abu At-Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi, the wise poet, and one of the objects of pride of Arab literature. He was born in Kufa in 303 AH in the ‘Kinda’ quarter, and raised in Ash-Sham. Then he moved to the desert, where he studied literature, the Arabic language, and the people’s history. He came to Sayf Ad-Dawla Al-Hamdani, the commander of Aleppo, and praised him. He departed to Egypt, where he praised Kafur Al-Ikhshidi, then satirised him. He, his son and his servant were killed on camel-back in the year 354 AH. *See Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam, 1/115.*

If you abandoned a people while they
Could have prevented you, it is they who are the abandoners

With regard to Allah's saying: '…thinking We could not restrict him...' (*al-Anbiya':* 87), some people look at it with a superficial glance and say, 'How can Jonah think that Allah *the Almighty* could not restrict him?' This understanding springs from ignorance of the language, for the word that they think it means having power over something, possesses another meaning, as in Allah's saying: 'Let him who has abundance spend out of his abundance and whoever has his means of subsistence straitened to him, let him spend out of that which Allah has given him….' (*at-Talaq:* 7) Here, the one 'whose means of subsistence straitened to him' is s/he whose means of subsistence constrained him/her.

Another example is Allah's saying: 'Surely your Lord makes plentiful the means of subsistence for whom He pleases and He straitens (them)…' (*al-Isra':* 30). A third example is Allah's saying: '…and as for man, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honour and makes him lead an easy life, he says: My Lord honours me. But when He tries him (differently), then straitens to him his means of subsistence, he says: My Lord has disgraced me.' (*al-Fajr:* 15–16)

Thus, Allah's saying: '…thinking We could not restrict him…' (*al-Anbiya':* 87) means that when Jonah *peace be upon him* departed from his land in wrath toward his people, he thought that Allah *the Almighty* would not constrain him, but would enrich him and give him a better place than the one he left, as indicated by the fact that he said afterwards: '…but then he cried out in the deep darkness, "There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong."' (*al-Anbiya':* 87) So, how would he doubt Allah's Power while he invokes Him to relieve him from his distress which depends on Allah's Power? How, then, would the meaning be proper if we said that the verse means that Allah *the Almighty* will not have power over Jonah?(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'This saying is rejected because it entails disbelief.' Ath-Tha'lab, 'Ata', Sa'id Ibn Jubayr, and many scholars say that the meaning is, 'Thinking that We will not constrain him.' Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4511*

The proper meaning is attained by saying that the verse means that Jonah *peace be upon him* thought that Allah would not constrain him. After all, Jonah *peace be upon him* knows that he is Allah's Messenger and that his Lord will not forsake him or abandon him in that distress.

An obscurity in the story of Jonah is found in Allah's saying: 'But had it not been that he was of those who glorify (Us), He would certainly have tarried in its belly to the day when they are raised.' (*as-Saffat:* 143–44) How is it possible that Jonah *peace be upon him* would have remained in the belly of the whale until the Day when all shall be raised from the dead, despite the fact that he as well as the whale would die? Or would the whale remain until the Day of Resurrection, carrying Jonah in its belly? The sense of the verse would be upheld if we considered the potential death of both Jonah *peace be upon him* and the whale in the light of the containment theory concerning mixtures. Consider, for example, what happens when you dissolve sugar in a glass of water: the water particles encompass the sugar particles. As the greater encompasses the less, the sugar does not encompass the water; rather, the water encompasses the sugar.

Then, if the whale died and Jonah *peace be upon him* also died in its belly, and their atoms combined and blended with one another, the whale would encompass Jonah *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Hour. In this manner, the meaning would remain sound, for he would be in the whale's belly, despite their atoms being dispersed.(1)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَٱسۡتَجَبۡنَا لَهُۥ وَنَجَّيۡنَٰهُ مِنَ ٱلۡغَمِّۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُـۨجِي ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

We answered him and saved him from distress: this is how We save the faithful [88] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 88)

Allah *the Almighty* responds to the crying out of Jonah *peace be upon him* and delivers him from his distress: '…this is how We save the faithful.'

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti says, 'Concerning Allah's saying "He would certainly have tarried in its belly to the day when they are raised."' (as-Saffat: 44) Qatada said, 'The belly of the whale would become a tomb for him until the Day of Resurrection.' As-Suyuti ascribes it to 'Abd Ibn Hamid, ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 7/127.*

(*al-Anbiya':* 88) This verse shows that this matter is not specific to Jonah *peace be upon him* but rather applies to every believer who invokes Allah *the Almighty* with this supplication. So Allah's saying: '…this is how We save the faithful' (*al-Anbiya':* 88) means that just He *the Almighty* saved Jonah. He *the Almighty* saves the believers who take refuge in Him by these words: 'There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong,' (*al-Anbiya':* 87) for Allah *the Almighty* eliminates his grief and dispels his anxiety.

For that reason, Ibn Mas'ud *Allah be pleased with him* says, 'Inquire into the Quran,' that is, delve and penetrate into its verses in order to discover its treasures and secrets.(1) Ja'far As-Sadiq was one of those who inquired into the Quran and meditated upon it. He used to extract from its verses a cure for every disease and a 'prescription', as we say, for all the conditions of the believer.

The believer fluctuates among different states, including fear, be it fear that the comfort of this worldly life will escape him/her, or fear that a tyrant will threaten him/her. S/He may feel an anxiety and constriction in his/her breast without any causes, which is grief. Moreover, s/he may face the scheming of the schemers, the guile of the beguilers, and the plotting of evil people.

All of these states befall the human being, and in the midst of them s/he needs someone who would support him/her and pull him/her out of that which s/he is undergoing. This is because, in this state, s/he has neither power nor strength and is incapable of taking precautionary measures with regard to all of these affairs.

The splendour and vanities of this life may try to entice him/her so that s/he looks forward to having what is greater than what s/he already has, and seeks for the maximum in everything. In fact, there is no end to the human being's ambition in this regard, as the poet said:

His needs die with the man,

but his needs continue as long as he lives

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(1) Concerning the tradition of 'Abdullah, 'Draw forth [the meanings of] the Quran, for it contains news of the early and late generations.' Shamir said, 'The "drawing forth" of the Quran is the reading of it and the scholars' diligent inquiry into its explanation and meanings. See *Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab*, *th-w-r*.

People constantly strive to grasp all the comforts and luxuries of this worldly life, but they are mistaken, for the completeness of something entails the beginning of its end, as the poet said:

When something becomes complete its diminution begins;
When ‘complete’ is uttered, expect a coming to an end

This is because the human being is prone to changeability; no state persists for him/her, whether it be one of health or illness, wealth or poverty, or sadness or happiness, for changeability is one of the qualities of the human beings—and glory be to Him who does not change. So, what would happen after you reach the highest point, given the fact that you are prone to change? We see people becoming angry and complaining when one of this world’s amenities or comforts escapes them, or when life diminishes something of theirs. But these people do not see that this diminution is the very thing which preserves their blessings, for it protects them from the eyes of the envious, whereby what they have remains intact.

You see, for example, a good family which has gained the interest and respect of the people, despite the existence of a bad, evil person who shames the family. Now, it is this very person who protects the family from the envious eyes of the people. Al-Mutanabbi grasped this meaning and expressed it in his praise of Sayf Ad-Dawla,(1) saying:

Mankind gazes at your perfection, so seek health
From the evil of their eyes in but one fault

We return to the prescription of Ja‘far As-Sadiq who extracted it for us from the Book of Allah, just as the doctors extract the medications and cure from the physicians’ books. He says, ‘I am amazed by the one who fears and does not take refuge in Allah’s saying: ‘... Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 173) for Allah *the Almighty* says immediately afterwards: ‘So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace, no evil touched them...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 174).

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(1) He is *‘Ali ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Hamdan Abu Al-Hasan Sayf Ad-Dawla Al-Hamdani*, patron of *Al-Mutanabbi* and object of his praise. He was born in *Mayyafariqin* in *Diyar Bakr*, in the year 303 Ah, and grew up to be brave and well-mannered, possessed of determination. He ruled *Wasit*, Damascus, and Aleppo, where he died in the year 356 Ah, at the age of 53. See *Az-Zirikli*, *Al-A‘lam,* 4/303.

As-Sadiq then said, ‘I am amazed by the one who is distressed and does not take refuge in Allah’s saying: ‘There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 87) for Allah *the Almighty* says immediately afterwards: ‘We answered him and saved him from distress: this is how We save the faithful.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 88) As-Sadiq continued, ‘I am amazed by the one who against whom a plot is contrived and does not take refuge in Allah’s saying: ‘...and I entrust my affair to Allah...’ (*Ghafir:* 44), for Allah *the Almighty* says immediately afterwards: ‘So Allah protected him from the evil (consequences) of what they planned…’ (*Ghafir:* 45). Finally, As-Sadiq said, ‘I am amazed by the one who seeks this world and its embellishment and does not take refuge in Allah’s saying: ‘...It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power save in Allah...’ (*al-Kahf:* 39), for Allah *the Almighty* says immediately afterwards: ‘Then maybe my Lord will give me what is better than your garden....’ (*al-Kahf:* 40)

In this way, the believer can be at peace putting his/her trust in Allah’s Care because s/he takes refuge in her/his Lord by means of an appropriate supplication in each of these states. When your Lord sees that you invoke and take refuge in Him, and that you attribute to Him every blessing concerning yourself, your people, or your property, and that you recognise Him as the Benefactor, He gives you that which is even better.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about another one of the Prophets, saying:

وَزَكَرِيَّآ إِذۡ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرۡنِي فَرۡدٗا وَأَنتَ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡوَٰرِثِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

Remember Zechariah, when he cried to his
Lord, ‘My Lord, do not leave me childless,
though You are the best of heirs’ [89]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 89)

Zechariah *peace be upon him* aged and Allah *the Almighty* had not bestowed upon him a son, so he turned toward Allah *the Almighty* saying: ‘He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened and my head flares with hoariness, and, my Lord! I have never been unsuccessful in my prayer to You: And surely I fear my cousins after me, and my wife is barren, therefore grant me from You an heir…' (*Maryam:* 4–5).

When Allah *the Almighty* gave him the good tidings of a son, he was astonished, because he looked at the given facts: how could Allah *the Almighty* bestow a son upon him, when he had become far advanced in years and his wife was barren? So, he wanted to confirm these tidings, saying: '…O my Lord! when shall I have a son, and my wife is barren, and I myself have reached indeed the extreme degree of old age? He said: So shall it be, your Lord says: It is easy to Me, and indeed I created you before, when you were nothing.' (*Maryam:* 8–9) So, Allah *the Almighty* put Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon him* at peace, saying, 'Discard the natural causes of the created order, because the One Who brings you these good tidings is the Creator.'

Zechariah *peace be upon him* had already learned from his guardianship of Mary that Allah *the Almighty* gives in accord with causes, and He also gives without cause. Mary's people competed for her guardianship and sought to outdo one another in the performance of this service because they knew her nobility and her rank. Therefore, they rewarded her guardianship by the casting of lots. When they threw them into the sea,(1) Zechariah's lot emerged, and he won the guardianship of Mary. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'This is an account of things beyond your knowledge that We reveal to you [Muhammad]: you were not present among them when they cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Mary, you were not present with them when they argued [about her].' (*Al-'Imran:* 44) The lot casting is implemented in the light of the importance of this affair and its profound significance, as lot casting is a measure for deciding affairs according to the Divine Decree, in order that no caprice or arbitrariness may enter therein.

When Zechariah *peace be upon him* became in charge of Mary, he used to provide her with whatever she needed and to take care of all of her affairs.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir mentions that 'Ikrima, As-Suddi, Qatada, Rabi' ibn Anas, and several people relate that they went to the River Jordan, where they took a vote that they would throw their quills and whoever's quill stood firm in the flow of the water would be her guardian. So they threw their quills, and the water carried away all of them except for Zechariah's, which stood firm. It is said that the quill went upward, cutting through the flow of water. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/363.*

One day, he entered upon her and found with her some food which he had not brought.(1) In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He said, "Mary, how is it you have these provisions?" and she said, "'They are from Allah: Allah provides limitlessly for whoever He will."' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Here is a point and an indication of the necessity for the head of a family to follow and pursue everything concerning his family. When he sees something inside the house which he himself did not bring there, he should ask about its source, for it is possible, for example, that one of the children took something which did not belong to them. Asking 'Whence came this to you?' is a basic rule and practice which we need to apply whenever we have a doubt.

Zechariah *peace be upon him* grasped Mary's answer which came quickly and confidently, pointing to the clear truth that does not change: '…and she said, "They are from Allah: Allah provides limitlessly for whoever He will.' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) Yes, this is something which Zechariah *peace be upon him* knew, but it had not come to reside in the seat of his consciousness until Mary reminded him about it. Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'There and then Zechariah prayed to his Lord, saying, "Lord, from Your grace grant me virtuous offspring: You hear every prayer."' (*Al-'Imran:* 38) It is as if Zechariah *peace be upon him* said, 'If that is the reality of the matter, then give me a son who will inherit Prophethood after me.' Then, he mentioned the reasons of childlessness like weakness, old age and his wife's barrenness; yet he asked for a child, given the fact that Allah *the Almighty* grants sustenance to whom He wills, beyond all reckoning and beyond all causes.

Thus, Zechariah *peace be upon him* benefited from these words, and Mary likewise benefited from them in what followed — when the pregnancy with the Messiah *peace be upon him* came upon her without any natural cause.

In the verse in question, Zechariah *peace be upon him* prays to his Lord, saying: 'My Lord, do not leave me childless, though You are the best of heirs.' (*al-Anbiya':* 89) It is as if he said, 'I do not seek a son in order to inherit my possessions after me, for You, Allah, are the best of inheritors, Who inherits the heaven and the earth, and everything belongs to You.’

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(1) *That is, he found her in possession of summer fruits during the winter, and winter fruits during the summer. In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir, says, 'This is the opinion of Mujahid, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Qatada, As-Suddi, and Al-'Awfi. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/360.*

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَٱسۡتَجَبۡنَا لَهُۥ وَوَهَبۡنَا لَهُۥ يَحۡيَىٰ وَأَصۡلَحۡنَا لَهُۥ زَوۡجَهُۥٓۚ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ
يُسَٰرِعُونَ فِي ٱلۡخَيۡرَٰتِ وَيَدۡعُونَنَا رَغَبٗا وَرَهَبٗاۖ وَكَانُواْ لَنَا خَٰشِعِينَ ٩٠

We answered him — We gave him John, and cured his wife of barrenness – they were always keen to do good deeds. They called upon Us out of longing and awe, and humbled themselves before Us [90] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 90)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* responded to Zechariah *peace be upon him* not only by bestowing upon him a son despite his being advanced in years and his wife’s barrenness, but also by naming that son. Allah *the Almighty* gave him this name, that is, Yahya (John) for a certain purpose. This is because the people are free with regard to giving names to named things, as we said; nothing prevents us from naming a black girl ‘Moon,’ because the name can depart from its original meaning and become a signifier for this named person. There is, then, a difference between the name and the named thing. We may choose the names optimistically, hoping that the named person will become like the name, as in the case of the man who named his son Yahya (John), which means ‘to live’, apparently because he was concerned about the potential death of his children. Therefore, he said:

I named him John that he might live but there is
no way for Allah’s decree (of death) to be stopped

That is, he named him John hoping that he will live, but this did not prevent Allah’s Decree from coming to pass. Likewise, when ‘Abd Al-Muttalib named Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, ‘I named him Muhammad in order that he might be praised on earth and in heaven.’(1)

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(1) *Abu Al-Hakam At-Tanukhi said, ‘When it became the seventh day (after the birth of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him ‘Abd Al-Muttalib sacrificed an animal and invited the tribe of Quraysh. When they had eaten they said, ‘O ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, did you see this son of yours on account of whom you have honored us—What did you* =

But, when the One Who names John is Allah *the Almighty* who holds sway over life and death, then the named one will necessarily accord with the name, that is to say, the one named John—'the living'—will necessarily live—to the extent that if he dies, he will die a martyr in order that life may be realised on his part, even after death.

The meaning of Allah's saying: 'We gave him...' (*al-Anbiya':* 90) is that He *the Almighty* granted John to Zechariah *peace be upon them* without being bound by natural human laws or causes. Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and cured his wife of barrenness….' (*al-Anbiya':* 90) So, after she was barren, unable to give birth, Allah *the Almighty* carried out a 'divine operation' for her to restore her ability to give birth. In fact, a woman may give birth as long as she possesses the ovules involved in the formation of an embryo. When these ovules cease being produced, a woman becomes barren. These ovules are found in a bunch, and have a fixed number, resembling in this a bunch of hen's eggs. Therefore, some people call the last of the children the 'last of the bunch.' Thus, John's coming into being runs counter to the natural causes for birth because the One Who put all the creation into being so willed.

Now, why does not Allah *the Almighty* say to Zechariah *peace be upon him* 'We cured you'? The scholars said, 'This is due to the fact that the man is fit for begetting offspring for so long as he is able to perform the sexual act, no matter how advanced in years he may become. This is contrary to the receiving woman, for the cessation of the ability to beget children takes place on account of her.'

In those who are barren and unable to beget children, we witness some of Allah's signs. We see that the spouses are both healthy and that their bodily organs are fit for begetting children, and yet they do not beget children. But, when each of them marries another person, they beget children. This is because the matter is not merely mechanical; rather, above and beyond the apparent causes, there Allah's Will and Intention. For that reason, Allah *the Almighty* says:

= *name him?' He said, 'I named him Muhammad.' They said, 'Why did you choose for him a name other than one of his family's?' He said, 'I wanted that Allah in heaven and His creation on earth should praise him.' See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 1/112/; Ibn 'Asakir, Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq Al-Kabir, 1/282; and Ibn Kathir Al-Bidaya Wa An-Nihaya, 2/264.*

‘Allah’s is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons. Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren.’ (*ash-Shura:* 49–50)

Then, the verse clarifies the causes of honour for Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and why Allah *the Almighty* answered his supplication: ‘…they were always keen to do good deeds. They called upon Us out of longing and awe, and humbled themselves before Us.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 90)

These three qualities highly qualified Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and his wife for that divine gift. We should take account of what happened with Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* for it is not specific to him; rather, it applies to every believer who possesses these qualities.

Therefore, I advise the one who is inflicted with sterility and childlessness and who is depressed by the causes of this world and the methods of modern medicine to take refuge in Allah *the Almighty* like Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and his family: ‘…they were always keen to do good deeds. They called upon Us out of longing and awe, and humbled themselves before Us.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 90) You should take it as a divine ‘prescription’, and the answer will not be long in coming, if Allah *the Almighty* so wills.

Now, why has the following quality ‘…they were always keen to do good deeds…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 90), been mentioned specifically? The scholars say, ‘this is because those who are barren or sterile and unable to beget children are in most cases greedy, not possessing that quality which would encourage spending. They consider it too much to take out and give something to a poor person because he is not their son.’

But when one vies with another in spending and doing good deeds of all different kinds, it challenges his natural disposition so that he becomes contrary to his original state in this regard. Those whom Allah *the Almighty* tests with sterility or barrenness may be prone to envy other people, or may harbour resentment for those who are able to beget children. However, if they get rid of this envy and look upon others’ children as if they were their own, they will come to harbour affection for them and vie with one another in good deeds, and then they will invoke Allah *the Almighty* out of longing and awe.

Allah *the Almighty* Who is the Supreme Creator, may thus transcend for them the natural laws and bestow upon them a child through a way that they did not consider.

As for Allah's saying, '…and humbled themselves before Us' (*al-Anbiya':* 90), it means that they were content with Allah's Will concerning them; they accepted their being childless in so far as it was a trial and a divine decree. In fact, a divine decree is not lifted from the servant until he becomes fully content with it, for it is not fitting that a believer should rebel against Allah's decree. Actually, being humble to Allah *the Almighty* entails being content with the divine decree prescribed by Allah for the people.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says,

وَٱلَّتِىٓ أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهَا مِن رُّوحِنَا
وَجَعَلْنَٰهَا وَٱبْنَهَآ ءَايَةً لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

Remember the one who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her from Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all people [91] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 91)

You may ask, 'Why is Maryam (Mary) mentioned after the previous prophets'? We say, 'This is because prophethood signifies Allah's preference of the prophet to the rest of His creation. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* preferred Maryam (Mary) to all the women of creation; Allah *the Almighty* did so allowing her to miraculously beget a child without being touched by a man. This is a special privilege to Maryam (Mary) alone, apart from all other women. As a matter of fact, while the act of selecting prophets recurs, the selection of Maryam (Mary) for this particular affair will never recur for anyone else ever'. Allah's saying, '…the one who guarded her chastity…' (*al-Anbiya':* 91), means that she was modest and preserved her chastity, for she did not succumb to any man.(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'Ihsan (chastity) means the opening of her shirt, that is, no suspicion attached to her garment, i.e. she is a chaste woman. There are four openings of the shirt: the two sleeves, above, and below. As-Suhayli said, 'So your imagination should not wander to anything other than this. It is an example of the subtlety of indirect expression because the Quran is the purest in meaning, the most* =

As for Allah's saying, 'We breathed into her[1] from Our Spirit…' (*al-Anbiya':* 91), it signifies that this matter is special to her and that it transcends the laws of nature, for she did not have sexual intercourse with any male. Rather, the Spirit, which Allah *the Almighty* had previously breathed into Adam and from which there then came the subsequent spirits, is the same Spirit which Allah *the Almighty* breathed into Maryam (Mary), and from which there came a single Spirit. So, it is the same Spirit about which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My Spirit…' (*al-Hijr:* 29).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and made her and her son a sign for all people.' (*al-Anbiya':* 91) Here, a 'sign' means something wondrous in the cosmos. There is wondrousness with regard to both of Maryam (Mary) and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*; she gave birth to a baby without a male, and he was begotten without a father. Both are signs of Allah *the Almighty* and a divine miracle.

Having presented a brief account about the prophets, Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

إِنَّ هَٰذِهِۦٓ أُمَّتُكُمۡ أُمَّةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ وَأَنَا۠ رَبُّكُمۡ فَٱعۡبُدُونِ ﴿٩٢﴾

[Messengers], this community of yours is one single
community and I am your Lord, so serve Me [92]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 92)

An *ummah* (community) is a group of people united by a single bond, be it belonging to the same land, being ruled by the same king or even having the same religion, as mentioned in Allah's saying, '…We found our fathers on a course…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 22), that is, following a religion.

= *judicious in formulation, the subtlest in allusion and the most perfect in expression, preventing the imagination from going in any undesired direction.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4518.*

(1) *In his book, Abu Yahya Zakaryya Al-Ansari says, 'This means that the angel had breathed into the pocket of her chemise.' In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti mentions that Qatada said, 'He breathed into her bosom,' but Muqatil said, 'He breathed into her vulva.' A chemise is a women's garment. See Al-Ansari, Fath Ar-Rahman, p. 271; see also As-Suyuti, Ad-Dur Al-Manthur, 5/671.*

So, the intended meaning is that the *ummah* of the messengers is a single *Ummah* by nature, without any difference within it.(1) All the messengers come only to complete a single building, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The similitude of mine and that of the prophets before me is that of a person who built a house quite imposing and beautiful, but for one brick in one of its corners. People would go around it, appreciating the building, but saying, "Why has the brick not been fixed here?" he said, "I am that brick and I am the last of the Prophets."'(2) This clearly means that with the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prophethood is completed and sealed.

The word '*ummah*' also refers to the person who combines all the qualities of goodness. We know for certain that Allah *the Almighty* has scattered the qualities of goodness throughout creation, for there is not a single person who combines within himself all talents and virtues; rather, each one of us has a distinctive feature and a virtue as to a specific aspect or field. Therefore, people need one another, and they attain to perfection through cooperation, by which the different elements of society come to be closely connected with one another. This integration is either brought about by voluntary needs or else by compulsory ones.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; if all the people studied together and graduated from the university and all became professors and teachers, who would occupy other crafts and jobs?! Who would sweep the streets and perform other such tasks?! What if the sewer drainage pipelines became obstructed? Would these professors and teachers unite with one another to clear and repair them? Even if they did so one time, that would be on a voluntary, unpaid basis.

The public welfare, however, is not based on voluntariness, but on need and necessity. If this need did not existed, the drainage worker, for example, would not leave in the morning to do his exhausting, repellent work—but how can he not, when he is shouldering the responsibility of a family, children and expenses?

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'When Allah the Almighty mentioned the prophets, He said, "All these prophets agree upon the Oneness of Allah, therefore the word 'ummah' means the religion, which is Islam." This is the opinion of Ibn `Abbas, Mujahid and others.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4519.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in the Book of Virtues, Hadith no. 22, on the authority of Abu Huraira Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3535; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2286.*

We have said previously that the human being should not let himself be deceived by whatever talents or virtues he possesses, and deem himself to be above other people because of them. Rather, he should seriously consider other people's talents without which he ca not do.

Need, then, is the connecting link within society. If the link were instead based on voluntariness and courteousness, we would never accomplish anything, for if we said to the worker, for example, 'Can you sweep the streets please', you would find him giving a thousand excuses for not doing that. However, if his children would starve if he did not go to work, then, for sure, he would hurry and hasten to work.

The truth is that each individual in society serves no one except himself, for just as you are useful to others, you also make use of them. Therefore, take care not to envy someone's talent in a particular thing because his talent ultimately benefits you.

This matter should be taken into consideration with regard to the worldly life as well as the Hereafter. So, when you see a pious person who is endowed with noble character, you should neither scoff at him nor mock him, as some people like to do. This is because his righteousness will be in your interest, and you will benefit from his piety and rectitude; and perhaps Allah *the Almighty* bestows abundant provision on us because of these individuals.

There may be in one and the same house young, intelligent, educated people, but amongst them there is a handicapped or insane person. They may look down upon and disregard him, taking no pride in knowing him. Yet, it may be that they live together under his protection and are sustained in his honour.

Often, we see people becoming angry and resentful about Allah's decree when Allah *the Almighty* bestows upon them a child with a defect or a disability. But, by Allah, if you would be content with that child and accept Allah's decree concerning him, he would be a source of constant protection for you. In fact, such individuals are created thus for wisdom in order that we do not rebel against Allah's creation in His universe. Furthermore, this is meant in order that the people of blessing, well-being, and health fully realise the favour bestowed upon them; and in order that we perfectly know that Allah *the Almighty* does not withhold anything from His servants except that Allah *the Almighty* gives them something else in compensation for it.

You should notice, for example, the conditions of the insane people whom other people neglect, despise, and turn away from their ragged appearance. Despite that, you see that when a dilemmatic situation befalls people of rank and authority, they take refuge in the likes of these insane people, seeking blessings and prayers from them. This, in itself is, the highest thing that the people of rank, authority, and influence could aspire to—that their word is regarded, their command is obeyed, and that men take refuge in them just as they take refuge in these poor, insane ones.

Whenever Allah *the Almighty* bestows goodness upon this sheikh, the insane, you see the person of high rank try to get closer to him, inviting him to partake of his food, defending him from people's offences and even embracing him in his arms. This is because the person of high rank tested the matter and came to know that this sheikh possesses a portion of Allah's abundance and a mark of honour with which Allah *the Almighty* favours whosoever He wills from among His servants. All of us are Allah's servants; none of us is Allah's son or shares any sort of kinship with Him *Glorified is He*.

Even though intellect is the most exalted thing which the human being takes pride in, for it is what gives man preference to other creatures, you should consider the crazy person who has lost his mind and become deprived of this invaluable faculty. You see people pointing at him, saying 'This one is crazy'. Yes, he is indeed crazy, but when you consider the comportments of these people, do you see crazy people stealing? Do you see them committing adultery? Do you see them committing suicide? Thus, even though he is crazy, he is fully aware of himself. Even if he is deprived of the intellectual faculties, his Creator *Glorified is He* gave him, instinct which governs him, just as the instincts of animals govern them. Do you ever see a donkey, for example, throw itself in front of a train?

We should not, then, disparage these people or deem them to be insignificant, for Allah *the Almighty* has compensated them for that of which Allah *Glorified is He* deprived them. Even among us, there are those who strive to reach that which these people have already reached, but they are unable. Who among us does not hope to be like this crazy person whom the people praise, and from whom they seek blessings and prayers? What greatness does the human being seek higher than this? It suffices such a person that he is not held accountable for what he does in this worldly life, nor will he be questioned for them in the Hereafter.

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *the Almighty* says, '[Messengers], this community of yours is one single community…' (*al-Anbiya':* 92). Among the various meanings of the word '*ummah*' is the person who gathers all of the qualities of goodness. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* described Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as an 'exemplar', saying: 'Surely, Ibrahim (Abraham) was an exemplar(1)…' (*an-Nahl:* 120). This verse means that he combined within himself all the qualities of goodness, which are only found together in a complete *ummah* as a whole.

An *ummah* will not be united except when its formation is built on the basis of belief in one God, for if its formation were based on belief in many gods, each god would lead what he created; some would overcome others, and life would fall to ruin. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And should the truth follow their low desires, surely the heavens and the earth and all those who are therein would have perished…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

Therefore, the *ummah* will not be one unless it receives its commands from one God, and submits to a single object of worship. If it neglects this one God, it becomes divided and dispersed.

It is as though Allah *the Almighty* was saying to the believers, 'You all will try being a single *ummah*, by means of which you will rule over this world. Your call will start from an illiterate *ummah* bereft of knowledge and culture and unpractised in the government of nations. This is because your *ummah* was a tribal one in which each tribe had its own laws, its own dominion, and its own leadership’.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti says that 'Ibn Mas`ud was asked, "What is the exemplar?" He said, "The one who teaches goodness to the people."' Qatada said, 'He is an Imam who guides and is emulated, and whose way is followed.' See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/176.*

Then, the divine way of guidance, which encompasses all the affairs of this world, was revealed to the early Muslims. It was a system which overwhelmed the civilisation of both Persia and Byzantine and subdued them both. If the Muslim *ummah*, in its early time, were an educated one, other people would call this shift a civilizational leap, but, on the contrary, it was an unlettered *ummah*, and so was its Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the way of guidance which stripped these civilisations of their might and glory must be greater than all other ways and civilisations.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and I am your Lord, so serve Me.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 92) Here, Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to firmly adhere to His divine way of guidance, in order to remain one *ummah*. Allah *Glorified is He* chooses the quality of being a Lord, for He did not say, ‘I am your God’. This is because the Lord is the One Who creates, sustains, and brings up, whereas the God is the One Who prescribes religious obligations.

It is as Allah *the Almighty* was saying, ‘As long as I am your Lord Who created you out of nothing, provided for your needs, look after your interests and welfare, watches over you by night and day and sustains even the disobedient and the disbeliever—given all of this, I am more deserving of worship. It does not behove you, after all of this, to worship any god other than Me’. This is the reasoning of sound intellect, as they say, ‘He who eats my morsel listens to my word’.

Obedience to Allah’s Commands and prohibitions is part of worship. In fact, the fruit of this obedience returns to you, for Allah *the Almighty* possesses the attribute of Eternal Perfection before He even created the one who obeys Him. Thus, your obedience will not add anything to Allah’s Dominion, nor will your disobedience diminish Him in any way whatsoever. Therefore, the matter is up to you, and your Lord rewards you for an action which, in reality is for your own good.

But, have the people heard this call for one *ummah* and work in accordance with it? Are we really one *ummah* like that one which made Islam triumphant within half a century? This *ummah* whose impacts we still continue to see in these countries which revolted against Arabism and the language of the Quran! As a matter of fact, a religion and an *ummah* of this nature should not have been abdicated.

To the question: ‘Did the one *ummah* remain?’ the following verse responds:

وَتَقَطَّعُوٓاْ أَمۡرَهُم بَيۡنَهُمۡۖ كُلٌّ إِلَيۡنَا رَٰجِعُونَ ٩٣

They have torn their unity apart, but they will all return to Us [93] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 93)

This verse shows that the people became sects, parties, groups and factions, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘surely, they who divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them…’ (*al-An‘am:* 159).

Why does Allah *the Almighty* tell Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he has nothing to do with those people? This is because they destroy the unity of the *ummah,* which only takes place when its members differ. The *ummah* does not differ except when its paths become multiple, but if all the people follow one path, they will not differ. In so far as they have torn their unity apart and have become different divisions, each with its own path and law, religious obligations and banner, will they be left in this state, or will they be returned to Allah *the Almighty* in the end?

Allah *the Almighty* provides the answer saying, ‘…but they will all return to Us.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 93) As long as the people were a single *ummah* in creation from the beginning, in the return and in the end, then why do they differ in the middle of the path? Difference, then, originated when the people followed different paths, while they should have followed only one path. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came as a Seal of the Messengers, and Islamic law came as a universal law comprehending the excellences of the previously revealed laws, and even adding to them the excellences necessitated by the ages which were to come after him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, the believing *ummah* should have come together in agreement upon that comprehensive, universal way of guidance, which cannot be supplemented. In this way, the unity of the *ummah* will be forged, and its religious obligations will come from a single God. Consequently, these obligations will not be subjected to arbitrary views based on whim and personal opinion, temporal powers or base intentions.

Therefore, when the groups which profess Islam become numerous and divided, we say to them, ‘Be a single group, and if you do not, then with which one of you is the truth? This is because Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with His saying, ‘Surely they who divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them…’ (*al-An‘am:* 159).

The callers to a single call do not become divided except by following arbitrary views and selfish interests. True religion, on the other hand, is that which comes in accordance with that which pleases Allah *the Almighty* regarding mankind.

The believers have dispersed from that which has united them about Allah’s Command. Subsequently, their unity has been torn apart and they followed different directions to the point that no statement unites them except for ‘There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. As for their paths and their laws, however, they take them from here or there. Ultimately, these laws will torment them, and these civilisations will abandon them, and they will see their evil effect. Then, they will return in the end to Islam, for it is the only place of refuge—as we hear today the call that ‘There is no solution except Islam’.

Yes, Islam is the solution to problems, crises, conflicts and weapons; the solution to the multiplicity which has weakened the Muslims and undermined their brotherhood, concerning which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited, and remember the Favour of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His Favour you became brethren….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 103)

By Allah, were we to return to the covenant of Allah *the Almighty* and hold fast to it so that arbitrary views did not toy with us, we would return to be a single *ummah* which rules over the whole world?

So, Allah’s saying, ‘…but they will all return to Us’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 93) means that they will eventually return to Him in the Hereafter for the reckoning. I say, ‘O Lord, if only this return could take place in this worldly life so that when man-made laws torment us, we take refuge with You and return to You anew’. Then, our glory would return to us, and the saying of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would prove true for us: ‘Islam initiated as something strange, and it would revert to its (old position) of being strange, so good tidings (are) for the strangers.’(1)

This understanding is corroborated and this hope is strengthened by Allah’s saying afterwards:

فَمَن يَعۡمَلۡ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَهُوَ مُؤۡمِنٞ فَلَا
كُفۡرَانَ لِسَعۡيِهِۦ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ كَٰتِبُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

If anyone does good deeds and is a believer,
his efforts will not be ignored: We record
them for him [94] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 94)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* admonishes us to do righteous deeds in order to give us hope if we return to Him. This world as a whole bears witness that every ideology is futile, and that every slogan is but a false and transitory thing by which particular people embellish their arbitrary views; thus it will not be long before every ideology comes to an end. At that time, it will become clear to its adherents that it is wrong, and so they will abandon it.

An example of this is the Communist ideology which ruled over Russia in 1917 and, for the sake of which, holy things were violated; blood was shed; houses were razed; and riches were confiscated. While Russia was previously a nation which exported food to the countries of the world, it has now become one which begs for food from other countries, which were the first to be harmed by this ideology and suffer from its laws.

Back to the verse in question; Allah’s saying, ‘If anyone does good deeds and is a believer…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 94) connects the doing of righteous deeds with faith because faith is the starting point of the believer in everything he does; it is also the point from which he abstains in order to attain by means of his righteous doings, the good fortune of both this worldly life and the Hereafter.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim in the Book of Faith, and by Ibn Majah on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3986; and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3986.*

As for the one who does righteous deeds, just because they are righteous, viewing the mattes of humaneness and nobility as the main basis for his actions yet void of sincerity, he will be rewarded for this in the worldly life; they may acquire honour, authority and good reputation, but he will, for sure, have no share in the reward of the Hereafter because he performed these good deeds without being heedful of Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of this in His saying, ‘And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert which the thirsty man deems to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full…’ (*an-Nur:* 39).

This verse means that the disbeliever will be seized suddenly by Allah, Who recompenses and repays him. This possibility never crossed his mind, so it will be said to him, ‘You have done such-and-such to be mentioned by people, and this has happened…and the matter is finished’. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Whoever desires the gain of the Hereafter, We will give him more of that…’ (*ash-Shura:* 20). This verse means that Allah *the Almighty* shall grant him an endless reward in the Hereafter. Then, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof—but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20) This is because he worked for the sake of the people, and therefore took his wage from them by perpetuating his memory, making exhibitions and statues for him, etc.

Allah’s saying, ‘…his efforts will not be ignored…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 94) means that He, Almighty, will never neglect this man his rightful due nor will Allah *Glorified is He* deny his endeavour. Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…We record them for him’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 94) which means that Allah *Glorified is He* records for their deeds for them. Amazingly, man was supposed to be the one who records for himself, but when the One Who records your deeds for you is your Lord Himself and Who rewards you for them, there is no doubt that it is a precise recording which does not neglect even the weight of an atom of your deeds.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَحَرَٰمٌ عَلَىٰ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَٰهَآ أَنَّهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ٩٥

No community destroyed by Us can escape its return [95] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 95)

Allah’s saying, ‘…It is unfailingly true…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 95) means that it is impossible that a community can escape its return to Him *the Almighty*. A ‘community’ here means every community whom Allah *the Almighty* has destroyed for their disbelief in the messengers and for their standing against them in resistance and opposition. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* destroyed them for their sins in this worldly life. Is it reasonable, then, that Allah *the Almighty* will leave them in the Hereafter without holding them accountable for their sins? Undoubtedly, these disbelieving peoples and communities will return to Allah *the Almighty* in the Hereafter to be recompensed by means of a permanent, eternal punishment.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا فُتِحَتْ يَأْجُوجُ وَمَأْجُوجُ وَهُم مِّن كُلِّ حَدَبٍ يَنسِلُونَ ٩٦

And when the peoples of Gog and Magog are let loose and swarm swiftly from every highland [96] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 96)

The story of Gog and Magog is told at the end of the chapter of *al-Kahf*, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the wandering man who walked about the earth, whereby it was revealed: ‘And they ask you about Dhu Al-Qarnayn. Say, “I will recite to you an account of him.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 83)

The scholars speak about Dhu Al-Qarnayn; they hold different opinions concerning him, as follows: some say that he is Cyrus, while others believe that he is Alexander, the Great. But the Quran is not concerned about the person himself, or else it would mention him by name. It does not give a history of a man or erect, as it were, a statue of him, but rather, it wants to emphasise the qualities which concern Allah *the Almighty* and His creation.

It suffices that we know that he was a man whom Allah *the Almighty* gave power over the earth. That is, Allah *the Almighty* granted him the means for obtaining power, dignity, and authority. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* gave to him from all the means of power, including property, knowledge, and armies. However, he did not confine himself to that; rather, '…he followed a course.' (*al-Kahf:* 85) This means that he pursued the means that were conducive to goodness.

We spoke previously about the issue of the personification or exact designation of the heroes in the stories of the Quran. The Quran does not give a special history of the individuality or the personality; rather, it wants the character to be universal in order for it to be an example to be imitated. By so doing, it provokes reflection and brings about the intended effect of the story.

That which concerns us in the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn is that he was a man who was given power over the earth, and that he possessed certain qualities. Likewise, that which concerns us about the People of the Cave, is that they were young men who believed in their Lord, clung to their religion and creed, and made sacrifices for their sake; in other words, neither the personalities, time, place nor the number concern us in this regard.

Therefore, the Quran makes all these matters obscure, for any young man, at any time, in any place and by any names can reach this position of faith. However, if Allah *the Almighty* had specified them, some people would have said, 'It is an event specific to these people, or they are examples which are not repeated'. Therefore, the Quran makes them obscure in order that they may be an example and a model until the end of time.

Likewise, when the Quran wants to give an example of those who disbelieve; it mentions both of Nuh's (Noah's) wife and Lut's (Lot's) wife but does not describe either of them in detail. Similarly, it gives Pharaoh's wife as an example of those who believe but does not mention exactly who she is.(1) This is because the purpose of citing these examples is not to know the personalities, but rather to know that women have the freedom of belief and an independence of view. She is not subordinate to anyone, which is clearly indicated by the fact that both Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) were unable to guide their wives. Similarly, Pharaoh, the disbeliever who falsely claimed to be divine, was unable to prevent his wife from having faith in Allah *the Almighty*. In this connection, she said, '…My Lord! Build for me a house with You in the garden and deliver me from Pharaoh and his doing, and deliver me from the unjust people.' (*at-Tahrim:* 11)

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(1) In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Allah sets forth an example to those who disbelieve the wife of Nuh (Noah) and the wife of Lut (Lot): they were both under two of Our righteous servants, but they acted treacherously towards them so they availed them naught against Allah…' (*at-Tahrim*: 10).

Thus, that which concerns us in the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn is that Allah *the Almighty* established authority for him on the earth and gave him every means for obtaining power and dominion. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* trusted that he would be a balance for goodness and truth, and He entrusted him to judge between the people according to his vision of truth and justice.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Until when he reached the place where the sun set, he found it going down into a black sea, and found by it a people. We said, "O Dhu Al-Qarnayn! Either give them a chastisement or do them a benefit."' (*al-Kahf:* 86)

Allah *the Almighty* had strengthened and entrusted him, so he used this strengthening at the right time and place and took up the trust in accordance with its rights, for he said, '…As to him who is unjust, we will chastise him, then shall he be returned to his Lord, and He will chastise him with an exemplary chastisement…' (*al-Kahf:* 87). This means that Dhu Al-Qarnayn punishes the unjust people in proportion to his power; then they shall be returned to their Lord Who will punish them according to His Power.

On the other hand, Dhu Al-Qarnayn said, 'And as for him who believes and does the good, he shall have goodly reward, and We will speak to him an easy word of Our command.' (*al-Kahf:* 88)

This should be the constitution of the ruler who was given power over the people; the constitution of reward and punishment by which the affairs of countries and mankind are put in order. When he sees a shortcoming, he punishes the one responsible for it, no matter what his rank may be. This ruler is not to be afraid of the wrongdoer, nor should he dissimulate before him.

Furthermore, he should fear none but Allah *the Almighty*. By contrast, when he sees one who is virtuous and diligent, he repays and rewards him.

We see in our society that this basic rule has become inoperative among workers, for everything has become confused; affairs have been overturned; and other criteria for reward and punishment, for which Allah *the Almighty* has not sent down any authorisation, have been set, that is, the criterion has been turned upside down, so that the indolent boast and the assiduous and virtuous are disappointed.

Regarding the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn, Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'Until when he reached the land of the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people to whom We had given no shelter from it.' (*al-Kahf:* 90)

This is the totality of that of which Allah *the Almighty* informed us about Dhu Al-Qarnayn. It appears that he, in his wandering across the globe, arrived at a land over which the sun remained rising for three or six months without setting. Therefore, he found them to be without any covering, that is, any shade, which would veil them from the sun. Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'until when he reached (a place) between the two mountains, he found on that side of them a people who could hardly understand a word.' (*al-Kahf:* 93)

Despite that, he strove to make them understand and to communicate with them; he did so out of his desire for their welfare and for that which would be advantageous for them. This is the quality of the believing ruler when he is given power over the earth, when the means for obtaining leadership are given to him and when he is entrusted with the human beings. If he had not been desirous for their welfare, he would have excused himself on grounds that he did not understand them and they also did not understand him.

Then, when they arrived at a common language, which may have been sign language by which we communicate with those who are unable to speak, for example, they said, 'O Dhu Al-Qarnayn! Surely, Gog and Magog make mischief in the land. Shall we then pay you a tribute on condition that you should raise a barrier between us and them?' (*al-Kahf:* 94).

Afterwards, Dhu Al-Qarnayn commanded them to bring pieces of iron, and he set a fire ablaze upon them until they became red. Then, he said,

'…Bring me molten brass which I may pour over it.' (*al-Kahf:* 96) In this manner, he fashioned for them a barrier which protected them from Gog and Magog. But his benefit to them was not limited to this affair in itself; rather, he benefitted them in a way which bestowed upon them goodness and power in order that they would not be subjected to the like of this situation. This act is in accordance with the wisdom of the saying: 'Do not give me a fish, but teach me how to fish'. That is to say, he made them take part in the work so that they would perceive the importance of the barrier and be keen on observing and protecting it. Then, if they ever found themselves in a similar situation again, they would not need to wait for someone to come and fashion a barrier for them, but rather, they would fashion it by themselves.

This example, which the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn presents, is applicable to all times and places, and for every ruler whom Allah *the Almighty* gives power over the earth and makes him hold sway to worldly affairs. In a Hadith about the best act, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Help a worker, or work for one who is unskilful.'(1)

Opinions differ about the identities of Gog and Magog; some say they are the Tartars. Others say they are the Mongols. Still others say they are the Hittites, the Sirdiyal, or the tribes of the Huns.

However, if there had been a benefit in their being specified, the Quran would have done so. Rather, the important point to take from their story is that they were a people who corrupted in the land and refused to leave what is good and healthy in its state of goodness. Then, when one who has been given power over the earth confronts them, it is his duty to bar them from causing corruption. It is our duty not to corrupt, as these people have done, that which is good. Indeed, we should not only leave what is good and healthy to its goodness, but we should also increase its goodness.

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(1) *Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him narrated, 'I said, "Messenger of Allah, which of the deeds is the best?" He replied, "Belief in Allah and to strive in His cause." I again asked, "Who is the slave whose emancipation is the best?" He replied, "One who is valuable for his master and whose price is high." I said, "If I can not afford to do it?" He replied, "Help an artisan or make anything for the unskilled (labourer)." See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2518; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 84.*

There are a number of lessons which we can deduct from Dhu Al-Qarnayn's building of the barrier; thus, it is incumbent upon those in power and those who are entrusted with the welfare of mankind to pay attention to. Among these lessons is that he did not limit himself to their request to build a barrier which would prevent the harm of their enemies; rather, he strove and advanced in that matter in order to accomplish what was better for them. A massive, continuous barrier of a single piece is easier to be destroyed or penetrated, and that is why he said, '…therefore you only help me with workers, I will make a fortified barrier between you and them.' (*al-Kahf:* 95)

They requested a barrier but he said, 'a fortified barrier'. Thus, he advanced the idea for them, and wanted to make for them a barrier in a special form which would absorb the blows, without affecting its structure. This is because he made between the two sides a coil-like rampart which gave the barrier a sort of elasticity. This clearly tells us how the true believer must act when he bears the responsibility of the people.

When they offered money to him in compensation for his work, he refused it and said, '…That in which my Lord has established me is better, therefore you only help me with workers…' (*al-Kahf:* 95). It is as if he said to them, 'Out of Allah's bounties, I have much money, but just help me with whatever strength you possess'. Thus, the prescribed charity for having strength and power is to hold back corruption from other people.

Back to the verse in question; Allah's saying, 'And when the peoples of Gog and Magog are let loose…' (*al-Anbiya':* 96) is pertinent to His saying, 'They have torn their unity apart…' (*al-Anbiya':* 93), for when the people of goodness tear asunder and separate, the people of corruption are encouraged to assail them. The least of what they say concerning them is that if they had been upon goodness, they would have benefitted themselves. In this way, the people of falsity incite other people not to listen to the reformers, whereby they weaken the strength of the people of truth, and turn people away from them.

Allah's saying, 'And when the peoples of Gog and Magog are let loose…' (*al-Anbiya':* 96) means that the sources of corruption and tribulation came into the world. These sources of corruption and tribulation do not gain ground and do not find any opportunity or temporal power except when the people of truth become heedless and disunited and therefore fail to repel them and to bar their way by force.

Gog and Magog are the people of corruption in every time and place, such as Genghis Khan who destroyed the first Islamic province in Khwarizm, which was ruled by King Qutb Arslan. Then, from the third generation of his descendants came Hulagu who entered Baghdad, the capital of the Islamic caliphate at that time, destroyed it, killed its people until blood flowed in the streets, and threw Islamic books into the river until they formed an arched bridge by which one could cross over. These are the people referred to as the Tartars.

Thus, the Quran relates to us a story from the ancient history of Gog and Magog, a story which happened in the days of Dhu Al-Qarnayn; then we, Muslims, ourselves had experienced the brutality of the Tartars during the Islamic era. Allah *the Almighty* willed the Muslims to benefit from the attacks of these barbarians, thus He caused the Muslim states to unite and repel the Tartars' attacks on the land of Egypt under the leadership of Qutuz and Zahir Baybars, both of whom were examples of those given power over the earth, although they were both Mamelukes.

These attacks of those tartars who corrupted the earth were barbaric and savage. Nowadays, the descendants of Gog and Magog(1) have gathered together in the modern period to launch their so-called 'civilised' attacks against the Muslim World. These include the crusaders who were defeated by the union of the Muslims under the leadership of Saladin *may Allah rest his soul*.

Thus, in the course of history we, Muslims, are victorious when we are one *ummah*; and we are defeated when we become separated and split up into nations and groups. These truths prove the veracity of the Quranic teachings concerning unity and non-dispersion, which we have emphasised here.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and swarm swiftly from every highland.' (*al-Anbiya':* 96) The 'highland' here refers to a raised place on a mountain north of China from which these corrupt people come. As for Allah’s saying, ‘…and swarm swiftly…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 96), it means to ‘rush’.

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(1) This is a simile made by late Sheikh Sha`rawi *may Allah have mercy upon him;* he wanted to make simile between the wrongdoers including the crusaders and the people of Gog and Magog.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱقۡتَرَبَ ٱلۡوَعۡدُ ٱلۡحَقُّ فَإِذَا هِيَ شَٰخِصَةٌ أَبۡصَٰرُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ
يَٰوَيۡلَنَا قَدۡ كُنَّا فِي غَفۡلَةٖ مِّنۡ هَٰذَا بَلۡ كُنَّا ظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

**When the True Promise draws near, the disbelievers’
eyes will stare in terror, and they will say, ‘Woe to us!
We were not aware of this at all. We were wrong’ [97]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 97)**

Thus, the people of corruption will come rushing from every corner and direction, but their corruption will not last long, for the Day of Judgment has drawn near. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘The hour drew nigh and the moon did rend asunder.’ (*al-Qamar:* 1); Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘Allah’s commandment has come; therefore do not desire to hasten it…’ (*an-Nahl:* 1).

This is an awakening for the heedless and a warning for the oppressors from among the people of corruption, and an appeasement and a hope for the wronged and oppressed people. They should rest at peace, for the time of recompense draws near.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘The true promise shall draw near…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 97). A ‘true promise’ means that which will be fulfilled by the one who makes it, for you might make a promise which you are incapable of fulfilling. In this case, it is a promise, but a false one. In fact, promises differ according to the virtue of the one who makes them and his capabilities and power to fulfil that which he promised.

But, no matter what capabilities you may have, and no matter what means of effectuation you may possess, can you guarantee that the conditions and the circumstances will put you in a position to fulfil a given promise. No one possesses power over all this except for Allah *the Almighty*. This is because when Allah *the Almighty* makes a promise that which He has promised with is carried out. The true promise, then, is the promise of Allah *the Almighty*.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘The True Promise shall draw near…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 97), you should be careful not to weigh this worldly life by its elemental life span; rather, you should weigh it by your life span within it. This is the real weight of the worldly life with regard to you, for you have nothing to do with the worldly life of others. So, if you do not know when you will be separated from the worldly life, then there is no doubt that the end of your life is near, and that the true promise has drawn near with regard to you.

Likewise, the period of your stay in your grave until the coming of the Hour will pass by you as but a single hour of a day, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying, ‘…as though they had not stayed but an hour of the day…’ (*Yunus:* 45).

If each one of us perceived Allah’s concealment of his time of death, he would know that this concealment indicates the greatest clarity, for when Allah *the Almighty* conceals it, we expect it in every moment and in every breath. That is why it is said, ‘When one dies, his Day of Resurrection comes’.(1) This is because the resurrection means the reckoning and requital for one’s deeds, and when one dies his deeds come to an end and his scroll is rolled up.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…then, lo! The disbelievers’ eyes will stare in terror…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 97). Allah’s promise here refers to the resurrection, which will come upon us suddenly and take us by surprise. That is why we say that the Arabic particle translated as ‘then, lo!’ signifies suddenness or unexpectedness, as if you said, ‘I went out, but then, lo! There was a lion before the door’, that is, you were taken by surprise by it. In the same manner, the hour in which the Hour comes will take everyone by surprise; no one will know what to do.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…then, lo! The disbelievers’ eyes will stare in terror…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 97). One ‘stares in horror’ when he sees something which he did not anticipate or take into consideration. One stares in astonishment, with the upper eyelid, which usually opens and closes over the eye, be immobile and unable even to blink. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…He only gives them respite until a Day when their eyes will stare in terror…' (*Ibrahim:* 42).

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(1) *In his book, Al-`Ajluni narrates this Hadith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. In its full version, it reads: ‘Increase the remembrance of death, for if you remember it in the midst of wealth, it will trouble you, and if you remember it in the midst of poverty it will enrich you. Death is the Resurrection.’ See Al-`Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa`, Hadith no. 2618.*

If you want to see eyes staring in horror, just watch someone taken by surprise by something which he did not have in mind, for you will see him—without his being aware of it and by his natural instinct—staring fixedly, with unmoving eyelids.

Then, the disbelievers will say, 'Woe to us! We were not aware of this at all.' (*al-Anbiya':* 97) This is because the situation is not confined to staring in horror, but other means of perception are also roused, thus the tongue says, 'Woe to us!', which is an outcry of distress. That is, their time has come and therefore they have no other option but to say, 'O punishment, this is your time, so present yourself'.

Distress is the swift destruction for which they are calling. But, does the human being seek destruction and call for it against himself? We say, 'Yes', this is when he does something and sees its evil consequences, and the bitter truth faces him, he inclines towards punishing himself. Have you not heard the likes of those who say, 'I deserve it', 'I merit the beating' and so on? This is the blaming of the soul and its rebuke for that which came forth from it, for it is the soul which caused itself to fall into this plight.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'the friends shall on that day be enemies one to another, except those who guard (against evil).' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67) Why, then, does he not blame his soul and seek the punishment for it when it is the one which brought about his fall into this peril? In that situation, the measures to which they were accustomed to in this world are overturned, and their friends involved with them in doing evil and disobedience are now their enemies.

Thus, the disbelievers will say, 'Woe to us! We were not aware of this at all.' (*al-Anbiya':* 97) This situation never crossed their minds, and thus they never accounted for it. 'Unawareness' is to avert from your mind that which should be in your mind at all times. But, how could this heedlessness happen, given that Allah *the Almighty* reminds us about this situation at every moment of night and day? Do you not see that Allah *the Almighty* named the Quran a reminder in order to drive this heedlessness away from us? Whenever you become heedless, the Quran reminds you, raises your emotions, and stirs up your sentiments.

The matter, then, is not one of heedlessness, and that is why we see that they correct their own speech, saying, ‘We were wrong.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 97) This is because they remembered that Allah *the Almighty* frequently roused their sentiments and propelled their emotions in the direction of faith, but they did not respond. Therefore, they will acknowledge their wrongdoing and will not be capable of denying it in the like of this situation, for lying would be of no use. Perhaps they seek a kind of mercy by means of being truthful, thinking that the truth will benefit them, but this is impossible.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was relating this encounter when the resurrection with its terrors takes them by surprise, and when their eyes stare in horror; it is at that point that some of them say, ‘Woe to us! We were not aware of this at all.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 97) Then, their companions reply to them, ‘What is this unawareness? Allah reminded us about the resurrection and about this situation in every moment, but “We were wrong.” (*al-Anbiya’:* 97) By so doing, their companions negated the first statement and affirmed that all of them were wrongdoers. Thus, they acknowledged their wrongdoing and confront one another, but only after it is too late.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ حَصَبُ
جَهَنَّمَ أَنتُمْ لَهَا وَٰرِدُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾

You [disbelievers] and what you worship instead
of God will be fuel for Hell: that is where you
will go [98] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 98)

The idols, the graven images, the sun, the moon and the stars which they took as gods apart from Allah *the Almighty* will precede them to hell, in order that Allah *the Almighty* cut off from them any hope of salvation. This is because when they see the punishment, they will perhaps remember these idols and think about seeking refuge with them, thus appealing to them for help, hoping that these false gods might deliver them from this dire strait. They said previously about these gods: ‘…These are our intercessors with Allah…’ (*Yunus:* 18); they also said, ‘…We do not serve them save that they may make us nearer to Allah…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 3).

Therefore, in order to cut off all hopes and expectations, Allah *the Almighty* gathers them all together in Hell, where both the disgrace of the object of worship and the failure of the worshipper become apparent, as the worshipper comes to the fire and finds that his object of worship has already arrived there before him. However, will all the objects of worship be fuel to the Hell without any exception? After all, the disbelievers worshipped idols, and among them were those who worshipped `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* those who worshipped Ezra, and those who worshipped the angels. So, will they also be gathered together with their worshippers in the fire?

If we were to hold this view, then their entrance into the fire would be like the one into which Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* entered, for Allah *the Almighty* joined for him fire and safety at the same time. Their presence there would be solely for the purpose of having their worshippers see them in the fire and know that they are, therefore, unable to benefit them in any way.(1)

In Allah’s saying, ‘…fuel for Hell…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 98), ‘fuel’ means everything by which fire burns, be it wood, straw, petrol or electricity. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…a fire whose fuel is men and stones…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6).

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti relates that Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, ‘When the following verse “You [disbelievers] and what you worship instead of Allah will be fuel for Hell: that is where you will go.” (al-Anbiya’: 98), was revealed, Ibn Ziba`ri said, “Do you not maintain, O Muhammad, that `Isa (Jesus) was a righteous servant, that Ezra was a righteous servant and that the angels are righteous?” He said: “Yes, absolutely.” He said: “But these Christians worship `Isa (Jesus), these Jews worship Ezra, and these people of the tribe of Malih worship the angels.” The people of Mecca immediately became noisy, raising a cry, and started to make merry. But then the following verse was revealed: “But those for whom We have decreed Paradise will be kept far from Hell” (al-Anbiya’: 101), that is, Ezra, `Isa (Jesus) and the angels.’ This was narrated by Abu Dawud in his Nasikh, as well as by Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh and At-Tabarani. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Dur Al-Manthur, 5/679.*

Therefore, the fire itself longs for the disbelievers, waits expectantly for them, and is eager to receive them, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying, ‘On the Day that We will say to Hell, “Are you filled up?” And it will say, “Are there any more” (*Qaf:* 30)?

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘When they shall be cast therein, they shall hear a loud moaning of it as it heaves, Almost bursting for fury…’ (*al-Mulk:* 7–8).

As for Allah’s saying, ‘…that is where you will go.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 98), the verb ‘go’ means entering immediately, but it has a different meaning in other verses like Allah’s saying, ‘And there is not one of you but shall come to it…’ (*Maryam:* 71).

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

لَوۡ كَانَ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ءَالِهَةٗ مَّا وَرَدُوهَاۖ وَكُلّٞ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

If these [idols] had been real gods they would not
have gone there – you will all stay there [99]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 99)

When the disbelievers enter the hell and immediately see their gods in front of them, their hope in their gods’ intercession will be cut off, as Allah *the Almighty* says in the case of Pharaoh: ‘He shall lead his people on the Resurrection Day, and bring them down to the Fire…’ (*Hud:* 98). Their leader will go ahead of them and precede them to the fire, for if Pharaoh were not in front of them, the people would think that he would deliver them from this dire strait. If these idols were indeed gods as they claim, they would not enter the fire.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…you will all stay there.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 99) It is well known of fire that it eats that which is inside it and then dies down. This fire, however, has no end, for whenever their skins become well cooked, Allah *the Almighty* replaces them with new skins, and in this manner the fire remains blazing and never becomes extinguished. The word: ‘…all…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 99) includes both the worshipper and the object of worship.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

لَهُمْ فِيهَا زَفِيرٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

There the disbelievers will be groaning piteously, but the [idols] will hear nothing [100] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 100)

It is well known that exhalation is the exteriorising movement of the respiratory process, for in inhalation the human being takes in oxygen, and in exhalation he sends forth carbon dioxide. We notice that the expression here is limited to exhalation without inhalation because exhalation is the hot, outer air, and in the fire there is not any air for inhalation. Thus, it is as though they are without any inhalation—may Allah protect us from punishment.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…but the [idols] will hear nothing.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 100) This is among the verses to which the Orientalists paid attention because there are other verses confirming the opposite, that is, those in the fire will be able to hear and to speak, as in Allah’s saying, ‘And the dwellers of the garden will call out to the inmates of the fire: “Surely we have found what our Lord promised us to be true; have you too found what your Lord promised to be true?” They will say, “Yes.” Then a crier will cry out among them that the curse of Allah is on the unjust.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 44)

Yes, they will hear, but they will not hear anything which will gladden their hearts. Rather, they will hear blame and rebuke, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying, ‘And the inmates of the fire shall call out to the dwellers of the garden, saying, “Pour on us some water, or of that which Allah has given you.” They shall say, “Surely Allah has prohibited them both to the unbelievers.”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 50)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ سَبَقَتْ لَهُم مِّنَّا ٱلْحُسْنَىٰٓ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ عَنْهَا مُبْعَدُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

But those for whom We have decreed paradise will be kept far from Hell [101] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 101)

After Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned the recompense of the disbelievers in the fire, He mentions the opposite, for a meaning is clarified through contrast with an opposite. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Most surely the righteous are in bliss, and most surely the wicked are in burning fire.’

(*al-Infitar:* 13–14) Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Therefore they shall laugh little and weep much…’ (*at-Tawba:* 82). In this way, the comparison remains vivid in one’s mind.

Allah’s saying, ‘But those for whom We have decreed paradise…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 101) means that Allah *the Almighty* decreed ultimate bliss for the people of obedience and the people of paradise. Allah *the Almighty* took a portion of His creation and said, ‘These ones are for paradise, and I do not care; and these ones are for the fire, and I do not care.’(1) In this vein, you should not say, ‘What is the wrong which these people have committed?’ because Allah *the Almighty* decrees matters in accordance with His prior, Eternal Knowledge about the obedience of some people and the disobedience of others.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘…Those(2)…will be kept far from Hell’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 101), it means that they will be far away from the fire.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

لَا يَسۡمَعُونَ حَسِيسَهَاۖ وَهُمۡ فِي مَا ٱشۡتَهَتۡ أَنفُسُهُمۡ خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

They will not hear a murmur from it – and endlessly
they will enjoy everything their souls desire[102]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 102)

The ‘murmur’ of the fire means its hissing and the sounds which issue from it when it first flares up. In Allah’s saying, ‘…and endlessly they will enjoy everything their soul’s desire’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 102), Allah *the Almighty* does not say, for example, ‘They will abide with all that their souls have ever desired’, but rather: ‘…and endlessly they will enjoy everything their souls desire’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 102), as though they are immersed in the blessing of that which their souls desired, and as though their souls’ desires were a covering which enclosed and contained them. This fills the people of goodness and righteousness with longing for paradise and its blessing, in order that they strive for it and prepare themselves for this blessing.

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(1) *Imam Ahmad narrates on the authority of Abu Ad-Darda` that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Allah created Adam at the time of his creation, struck his right shoulder, then extracted white offspring as if they were atoms. Then He struck his left shoulder and extracted black offspring as if they were embers. He said to those in his right [shoulder], “To Paradise, and I do not care”, and He said to those in his left shoulder, “To the fire, and I do not care”. See Ahmad, Musnad, 6/441.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir relates that Ibn `Abbas said, ‘These’ here means the friends of Allah, who will pass by the Fire, along the path, faster than a flash of lightning, while the disbelievers remain kneeling within it.’ Others—such as Hajjaj ibn Mohammed Al-A`war on the authority of Ibn Jurayj and `Uthman ibn `Ata` on the authority of `Ata` on the authority of Ibn `Abbas—said, ‘But it was revealed that, among the objects of worship, there is an exception, for Ezra and the Messiah will be removed from them. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al- ‘Azhim, 3/198.*

Previously, we said that the human being toils at the start of his life and learns a craft, or takes an academic degree in order to benefit from it and find rest in his future. His rest is commensurate with his labour and exertion of efforts, for every fruit necessarily requires cultivation and exertion, and Allah *the Almighty* does not let the reward of anyone who does a good deed, go to waste.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; we used to see a farmer with worn-out clothes and a ragged appearance spending his day in his field, nothing occupying him except his work there. Then, you see another well-dressed, clean person sitting happily in the coffee shop, and perhaps even making fun of his companion who distresses himself with work. Ultimately, when the time for harvest comes, the worker finds the fruit of his labour, while the idler finds only grief and remorse.

So, your Lord has given you energy and body organs, wanting you to be active; for activity incurs blessings. If the farmer kept overturning his land and stirring up its soil without even sowing it, Allah *the Almighty* would still compensate him and his labour would bear fruit, even if by allowing him to find something valuable in the soil, such as a gold ring.

As a matter of fact, the human being obtains luxury and relaxation in accordance with his labour at the beginning of his life. Therefore, the one who labours for ten years, for example, will get rest throughout his life; if he labours for twenty years, he as well as his children, after his death, will get rest; and if he labours for thirty years, his descendants will also rest, and so forth.

The educated person also acquires luxury in accordance with his academic degree. So, the one who acquired a middle-level degree, a higher degree or a doctorate obtains position and standing in his society according to these degrees.

Despite that, whatever worldly comforts and luxuries the human being prepares for himself, this comfort will be viewed in accordance with his capabilities and possibilities. When we travelled to San Francisco, we saw one of the grand hotels and people said to us, ‘King Faisal *Allah be merciful to him* used to stay herein’, and so we wanted to wander about and look around inside it. Truly we were captivated by the manifestations of luxury and splendour and the magnificence of the architecture within it. There were people from the high class with me, and I said to them, ‘This is what the servant prepares for the servant, so can you imagine what the servant’s Lord prepares for him’?

So, whenever you see people of comfort and luxury in this world, you should not envy them because their comfort should remind you about and fill you with longing for the eternal comfort of the Hereafter.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

لَا يَحْزُنُهُمُ ٱلْفَزَعُ ٱلْأَكْبَرُ وَتَتَلَقَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ
هَٰذَا يَوْمُكُمُ ٱلَّذِى كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

They will have no fear of the great Terror: the angels(1)
will receive them with the words, ‘This is the Day you
were promised!’ [103] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 103)

The people of the paradise will enjoy endless bliss and unceasing bestowals, which will never pass away from them due to deficiency or death. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says regarding them, ‘They will have no fear of the great Terror…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 103).

How can the people of paradise undergo any terror while they are in this eternal blessing?! Another possible interpretation for this verse in question is that before entering paradise, the calamities and the terror of the Day of Resurrection will cause them no grief.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti mentions that Ibn Abu Hatim narrated that Mujahid said, ‘Those angels who were connected with them in this world will receive them on the Day of Resurrection and say, “We are your protectors in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. We will not separate ourselves from you until you have entered Paradise.”’ See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/683.*

As for Allah’s saying, ‘…the angels will receive them with the words, “This is the Day you were promised”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 103), it means that Allah *the Almighty* fulfilled His promise to them and bestowed upon them the bliss of the Hereafter.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says,

يَوۡمَ نَطۡوِي ٱلسَّمَآءَ كَطَيِّ ٱلسِّجِلِّ لِلۡكُتُبِۚ كَمَا بَدَأۡنَآ
أَوَّلَ خَلۡقٖ نُّعِيدُهُۥۚ وَعۡدًا عَلَيۡنَآۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا فَٰعِلِينَ ١٠٤

On that Day, We shall roll up the skies as a writer rolls up
[his] scrolls. We shall reproduce creation just as we
produced it the first time: this is Our binding promise.
We shall certainly do all these things [104]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 104)

Thus, the punishment of the disbelievers and the bliss of the believers will be on that Day of Resurrection when Allah *the Almighty* shall roll up the skies as a writer rolls up his scrolls. The ‘Day’ here refers to the time when the disbelievers are severely punished and when the believers dwell eternally in the paradise.

As for the word ‘scrolls’, it refers to the sheets of paper on which we write down something in order to record it.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and the heavens rolled up in His Right Hand…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 67). This verse shows that Allah *the Almighty* rolls the heavens up by His Power because our right hand is the active one by which we do things. But we should not understand the act of ‘rolling’ here to be like what we experience in our life; rather, we should understand it in the light of Allah’s saying, ‘…There is nothing like Him…’ (*ash-Shura:* 11).

As for Allah’s saying, ‘We shall reproduce creation just as We produced it the first time…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104), it demonstrates to us that Allah *the Almighty* is speaking about the first creation, and His saying, ‘We shall reproduce creation…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104) demonstrates the existence of a second creation.

Thus, Allah’s saying in another verse: ‘On the Day when the earth shall be changed into(1) a different earth and the heavens (as well), and they shall come forth before Allah, the One, the Supreme’ (*Ibrahim:* 48) makes it clear that the first creation depends on causes and effects. This is because Allah *the Almighty* gave the human being in this worldly life the means of subsistence, such as the sun, the moon, the rain, the soil, the water and so forth. He has nothing to do with these affairs, and his duty is confined to just employing the intellectual faculties to develop these affairs and to attain luxury through them.

In the second creation, on the other hand, you receive the bliss from Allah *the Almighty* without seeking its worldly causes. This is because the Hereafter is not based on causes; rather, it is based on the Causer *Glorified is He*. When you see the bounties which no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no human heart has ever perceived in the paradise, you will know for certain that what your Lord has prepared for you is greater than your deeds.

However much the means of luxury in this worldly life are progressively developed, and whatever means of relaxation and high-class service the people have, the utmost limit of what they possess is that you press a button and the door opens for you, or a meal or a cup of coffee is brought to you. But I challenge the whole world to use all the advancement and technology it possesses to present me with whatever food or drink occurs to my mind, so that I see it in front of me without even speaking, for no one has the power to do so except for Allah *the Almighty*.

Regarding Allah’s saying, ‘We shall reproduce creation just as We produced it the first time…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104), the resurrection does not merely signify bringing the creation back to their original state. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* brings it back in a state superior and preferable to its previously state, inasmuch as the blessing is bestowed upon you once it crosses your mind. In paradise, the believer will reach for a kind of fruit and say, ‘I ate the like of this before.’(1) Then, it will be said to him, ‘It is not thus; rather, this one is better than what you ate and more pleasant than what you tasted.’ This is because if you take, for example, an apple of this worldly life, you will find it subject to the peculiar quality of the soil, the water, the surrounding environment, the means of extermination such as insecticides which agriculture cannot do without these days and so forth. The apple of the Hereafter, on the other hand, is something completely different; it is a Lordly work and a divine preparation.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, ‘It is narrated from a Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayra, and traceable in an ascending order of transmitters to the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him that he said, “The earth shall be changed, and He will spread it out and extend it as a skin, on which you will see neither crookedness nor unevenness. Then Allah the Almighty will drive away the creation with a cry, and suddenly everyone will be in the second creation in the like of their position in the first creation: those who were in its interior will be in its interior and those who were on its surface will be on its surface.”’ This was mentioned by Al-Ghaznawi. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 5/3721.*

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* turns His servants’ attention towards the fact that His care for them is better than their care for their own selves because Allah *the Almighty* is more protective towards us than we are towards ourselves. In this way, we come to know the distinction between something in our hands and something with Allah *the Almighty*.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…this is Our Binding Promise. We shall certainly do all these things.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 104) This means that nothing is exempted from that which Allah *the Almighty* promised, and that no one can contradict Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدۡ كَتَبۡنَا فِي ٱلزَّبُورِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ٱلذِّكۡرِ أَنَّ
ٱلۡأَرۡضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ ٱلصَّٰلِحُونَ ١٠٥

We wrote in the Psalms, as We did in [earlier] Scripture:
‘My righteous servants will inherit the earth’ [105]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 105)

‘To write’ here means to record. As Allah’s Knowledge is eternal, not requiring any recording, this recording is for our sake, in order that we become reassured. This is similar to the case when you take a loan from your companion and you record it; you do so in order to be reassured, despite the fact that both of you trust each other.

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(1) In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘...whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: This is what was given to us before; and they shall be given the like of it...’ (*al-Baqara:* 25).

In Allah's saying, 'We wrote in *Az-Zabur…*' (*al-Anbiya':* 105), '*Az-Zabur*' refers to the Psalms which was revealed to Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*; it may also refer to something which is written down. So, in its generality, this word applies to every Book revealed by Allah *the Almighty*. As for His saying, '…after the Reminder…' (*al-Anbiya':* 105), the word 'Reminder' applies sometimes to the Quran and others to the previously revealed Books. As long as *Az-Zabur* applies to every Book revealed by Allah the Reminder necessarily possesses a more comprehensive meaning. Therefore, it refers to the Preserved Tablet because it is the Reminder which includes everything. So, the meaning of Allah's saying, 'We wrote in *Az-Zabur…*' (*al-Anbiya':* 105), is that Allah *the Almighty* wrote in the Books which was revealed to the prophets what Allah *the Almighty* had already written in the Preserved Tablet, or what He wrote in the Psalms; it does not mean that Allah *the Almighty* gave to Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* more than what He gave to the other prophets and messengers. Allah's saying, '…after the Reminder…' (*al-Anbiya':* 105) indicates that one of the two Books was earlier than the other, yet we say, 'The Quran is the eternal Speech of Allah *the Almighty* and there is nothing in the Divine Books more ancient than it. So, that which is intended by Allah's saying, '…after the Reminder…' (*al-Anbiya':* 105) is not the temporal order but rather, the order of mentioning the Quran after the *Az-Zabur* in this sequence mentioned in the verse.

What, then, is it which Allah *the Almighty* wrote for Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* in the Psalms? Allah *the Almighty* laid down for him: 'My righteous servants will inherit the earth.' (*al-Anbiya':* 105).

As for the word 'Earth', it, if applied generally, refers to the terrestrial globe as a whole. It could also be qualified by a specific description, as in Allah's saying, '…the holy land…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21), and in His saying, '…I will not depart from this land…' (*Yusuf:* 80), that is, the land in which he dwelled. On the other hand, Allah's saying '…the earth…' (*al-Anbiya':* 105) refers to the earth in general. As for His saying, '…will inherit…' (*al-Anbiya':* 105), it means that the earth will truly and officially belong to Allah's righteous servants.

Which Earth, then, is this? Is it the earth on which we are living right now, or is it another changed Earth?

Since we are talking about the beginning of creation and its resurrection, the intended meaning is the changed earth to come in the Hereafter,(1) which Allah's righteous servants shall inherit. Inheritance here is similar to Allah's saying, '…that this is the garden of which you are made heirs for what you did.' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

Here, we may ask, 'From whom did they inherit this earth?'

When Allah *the Almighty* created the creation, He has prepared paradise to be large enough for all of humanity if they all believed, and He prepared the fire to be large enough for all of the humanity if they all disbelieved. So, there is no question of over crowdedness in any case, for when the people of paradise enter the paradise and the people of the fire enter the fire, the places originally established in paradise for the people of the fire will become empty, thus, Allah *the Almighty* will grant them to the people of paradise and divide them up among them so that these places will enlarge the portion of the people of the paradise.

Another possible interpretation is that the 'earth' here means the earth of this worldly life,(2) whereby the meaning would be that Allah *the Almighty* gives to the right person who reforms the earth power over it, even if he is a disbeliever. This is because Allah *the Almighty* does not deprive the human being of the fruits of his labour even if he is a disbeliever. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Whoever desires the gain of the hereafter, We will give him more of that again; and whoever desires— the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the Hereafter he has no portion.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'The best interpretation among those given here is that the intended meaning is the land of paradise, as Sa`id ibn Jubayr said because the land of this world is inherited by both the righteous and the non-righteous. This is the opinion of Ibn `Abbas, Mujahid and others.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame'Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4530.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, 'According to Ibn `Abbas, it is the land of the disbelieving communities. The ummah of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him will inherit them by means of conquest.' See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4530.*

But, concerning the disbelievers' reformation of the earth and the empowerment of their civilisations, how quickly will calamities befall them and their civilisations turn against them! Look, we already see the calamities of the advanced, developed nations and the difficult social diseases from which they suffer. This is because the reformation of the earth is not confined to the economy, food, drink, and luxury. Sweden, for example, is one of the foremost countries in the world in terms of income, but despite this, it also has the highest suicide rate and the highest degree of perversion, which constitutes the hard, wretched way of life about which the Noble Quran says: 'And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life, and We will raise him on the day of resurrection, blind.' (*Ta Ha:* 124) Wretchedness does not only stem from poverty and need; no, indeed, it has many other forms. Thus, you should not measure the level of civilisation only on material grounds. Rather, you should consider in your consideration all other aspects, for the one who perfects the material, worldly aspects enjoys them only in this worldly life. By contrast, having righteousness, good character, and values is the means to attain the luxury of this worldly life as well as the blessing of the Hereafter.

Thus, Allah's saying, 'My righteous servants will inherit the earth' (*al-Anbiya':* 105) comprises the material prosperity of this worldly life and the spiritual prosperity of the Hereafter. So, if you seize prosperity under any circumstances without having faith, you will find its fruit for some time, and then it will turn against you, for where are the people of the ancient civilisations like `Ad, Thamud, and the Pharaohs?

Regardless of whatever success these civilisations attained, it was not possible for any of them to maintain itself in perpetuity, for each of them perished and disappeared.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with `Ad, (the people of) Aram, possessors of lofty buildings, the like of which were not created in the (other) cities; and (with) Thamud, who hewed out the rocks in the valley, and (with) Pharaoh, the lord of hosts.' (*al-Fajr:* 6–10) These advanced civilisations were buried beneath the layers of the earth so that we do not know even where their places are. But if you take hold of spiritual prosperity prescribed by Allah *the Almighty* you will gain both the blessings of this worldly life and the Hereafter. This is because the activity of life requires a way and a method in order for it to proceed harmoniously; this main way is clear in the tow orders: 'Do this and 'Do not do that'. The human beings cannot establish this way of guidance. Therefore, it is established by the Lord of mankind who fully knows what puts them in order, and who prescribes for them what makes them happy.

Allah's way of guidance alone is what commands and prohibits us, and informs us of what is allowed and what is forbidden. It is incumbent upon us to carry it out, and the rulers and the people in charge, who are holding firm to the balance of justice, must keep an eye on its implementation, and put in charge those who are fit for this task in order to undertake it in the perfect way possible, or else the society will become corrupt. The ruler must oversee people, encourage the worker and punish the sluggish and place the appropriate person in his appropriate place.

The components of a prosperous society include scholars who delimit right from wrong, and rulers who implement this and manage the affairs accordingly. The Arabic word for 'ruler' is taken from the word for a bridle bit, that is, the bridle which allows one to control a horse and direct it.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'One who puts someone in charge over the community, while there is someone still better than him among the people will not smell the scent of paradise.'(1)

What is the reason for this? This is because such conduct spreads corruption in the earth, and hinders lofty resolutions and strong ambitions—that is, when you see one who is less qualified than you put in charge of affairs, while you are cast aside. But when you consider the balance of justice, each one of us will strive diligently to attain his appropriate position.

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(1) *Imam Ahmad narrates that Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him related that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The one who rules over the Muslims in some respect and invests someone with authority over them out of favouritism or partiality will have Allah's curse upon him, and Allah will not yield to him purely or equitably until He has thrown him in Hell.' See Ahmad Musnad, 1/6.*

Therefore, the duty of the rulers and the people in power is to advance society. We do not say to the ruler, for example, ‘Prepare food for us’, or ‘Make for us an appliance’, for this is not his function. It is narrated that one of the emirs possessed some land which he cultivated. One of the employees whom we call ‘plantation overseers’ assumed responsibility for it; his duty was to oversee the land.

One day the emir went to attend to his land and examine its various conditions in the company of the plantation overseer. On their second round about the land, the plantation overseer saw a stream from which water was overflowing and flooding the field, and he went down and closed it up by himself. At that moment, the emir became angry and discharged him from his work. This was because the overseer worked with his hands, whereas his function was to oversee the plantation, and he had at his disposal workers who could undertake the like of this work. But why this way is followed in the management of works? This is because when you work with your hands, you are but one person; but when you oversee, it is possible for you to oversee thousands of workers. It is for this reason that the specialisation of works and activities came into being.

Thus, the ruler and the person in power must preserve Allah’s way of guidance and must oversee people’s implementation of it. The ruler must resist every instance of corruption, bar the transgression of the perpetrators, and reward the diligent worker, a point which is clear in Allah’s saying in the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn: ‘He said, “As to him who is unjust, we will chastise him, then shall he be returned to his Lord, and He will chastise him with an exemplary chastisement. And as for him who believes and does good, he shall have goodly reward, and We will speak to him an easy word of Our command.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 87–88)

This is the case because Allah *the Almighty* restrains by force that which is not restrained by the Quran. Were we to leave the people of corruption and the deviants until the Day of Resurrection, society would become corrupt. There is no way to avoid using force to uphold the soundness of society and to punish the corruptors; there is no way to avoid using force to stop those who attack us and demand the alteration of our Islamic system. That is why

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And prepare against them what force you can and horses tied at the frontier, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allah and your enemy…’ (*al-Anfal:* 60). The enemy must know that you possess a deterrent which will repel him if he commits excesses against you or attempts to corrupt the uprightness of the society.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says in a Hadith(1) that with regard to an arrow which is shot for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* a portion of the reward will go to everyone who had a hand in its being shot, starting from the one who cut it from a tree to the one who trimmed and sharpened it and ending up with the one who set it in the bow and shot it at the enemy. This is because in that act lies the preservation of Truth and righteousness, whereby righteousness endures and no one becomes able to corrupt it.

The responsibility here is not restricted to the rulers and the people in power; rather, it is the responsibility of every individual in charge of any affair of the Muslims, as is stated in the following Hadith: ‘Every one of you is a guardian and every one of you is responsible (for his wards). A ruler is a guardian and is responsible (for his subjects); a man is a guardian of his family and responsible (for them); a wife is a guardian of her husband’s house and she is responsible (for it), a slave is a guardian of his master’s property and is responsible (for that). Beware! All of you are guardians and are responsible (for your wards).’(2)

It is incumbent on the worker to supervise himself even before paying attention to the employer’s supervision. After all, Allah *the Almighty* watches all people. It is stated in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘If you believe that I do not see you, then there is a defect in your faith, and if you believe that I see you, then why do you make Me the least significant of those who observe you?’

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(1) *`Uqba ibn `Amir narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Allah the Almighty admits three people into Paradise by means of one arrow: the maker who has a good motive in making it, the one who hands it up for shooting and the one who shoots it.’ See Ad-Darimi, Sunnan, 2/204; see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1637; and Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2811.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Bukhari on the authority of Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/54, 111; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2409; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1829.*

Anyone who reflects upon the proceedings of life will see that it is comprised of an intricate intertwining of different factors. For example, if you wanted to build a house, the architecture constitutes one activity, the building is another activity, the electricity is still another activity, the carpentry is also a different activity, and so forth. If, then, we said, 'This work is comprised of one hundred activities, for example, then you do not in fact have power except over one activity in which you are proficient; the rest of the activities is performed by others. If you are faithful in your activity, Allah *the Almighty* will inspire other people to be faithful to you, even inadvertently. Therefore, you will be faithful in one activity and perform it skilfully, and the people will be faithful in ninety-nine activities'.

You should consider that the thoughts and ideas are controlled by Allah *the Almighty* for if, out of fear of Him, you perform well your work for others, Allah *the Almighty* will oversee them in their work for you, and His Oversight will suffice you. For example, a craftsman may make something for you and desire to cheat you, but Allah *the Almighty* prevents him from carrying out his intention. Perhaps an acquaintance will sit with him and he will be ashamed to act dishonestly in front of him, or he will not find anything by which he can cheat you. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* causes the craftsman to perform his craft skilfully for you, despite this being contrary to his intention. Thus, if you want your affairs to thrive, promote the affairs of others.

Among the principles by which we promote and inherit the earth is that we look upon all people as being equal. No one is superior over another except by means of piety and righteous action, for there is none among us who is the son of Allah *the Almighty* nor is there anyone among us who can claim kinship with Allah *Glorified is He*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…In Allah's Eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him…' (*al-Hujurat:* 13).

Within Islam, there is no discrimination between classes except with regard to perfection of work, for the value of each person is that which he does well. We previously gave an example of this, and we still mention it, even though it is an example of a non-Muslim. There is a Frenchman who was a leader of the Labour Union, and he used to defend the rights of the workers and demand for them an increase in pay from the Ministry budget. Then, when he assumed the position of the Minister and shouldered this responsibility, he desisted from that which he used to demand. So, the workers raised an uproar, and one of them, wanting to make him angry, said to him, 'Remember, Your Excellency the Minister, that you were, a long time ago, a shoe-shiner.' The man did nothing but say, 'Yes, but I used to do it well.'

Previously we mentioned that Allah *the Almighty* distributes talents and abilities amidst His creation. So, when you see yourself distinguished over someone else in something, you should not be deluded by it, but search for that by which someone else is distinguished over you. After all, we are all equal before Allah *the Almighty*; He does not favour one over another. As you are distinguished by your knowledge or your power, someone else may be distinguished by his happiness with his family, or his trustworthiness and people's confidence in him. Another one may be distinguished by his contentment with what was apportioned to him, his self-sufficiency, and contentment with little, or having a righteous son who is obedient to him and who is the delight of his eye. This matter, then, is decreed and determined because the Lord *Glorified is He* is Ever-Watching over you; no secret of yours is hidden from Him. When Allah *the Almighty* distinguishes some of us over others, it is in order to destroy the conceit and pride within us and to strip away the jealousy and rancour from our hearts. In this manner, society becomes balanced, and distinction does not become a cause of envy since the distinction over you can be for your own benefit, and will redound upon you.

Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the Day of Resurrection and about how the sun will move near to peoples' heads, affirming that people's grief and distress will become severe on that Day, except for those whom Allah *the Almighty* gives shade when there is no shade except for His shade. This is because those righteous people served as a shelter of peace in this world; therefore, Allah *the Almighty* will give them shade in the Hereafter. This is clearly indicated in the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says, 'Seven people Allah will give them His shade on the Day when there would be no shade but the shade of His Throne (i.e. on the Day of Resurrection): And they are: a just ruler; a youth who grew up with the worship of Allah; a person whose heart is attached to the mosques, two men who love and meet each other and depart from each other for the sake of Allah; a man whom an extremely beautiful woman seduces (for illicit relation), but he (rejects this offer and) says, “I fear Allah”; a man who gives in charity and conceals it (to such an extent) that the left hand does not know what the right has given; and a man who remembers Allah in solitude and his eyes become tearful.’(1)

Indeed, by their upright conduct these people created a shelter of peace in the world, and thus they deserve Allah’s shelter in the Hereafter. By the likes of these people, Muslim society attains equilibrium and rises to the highest point possible. This society which we want is that in which the rich are humble, the poor are noble and generous, and the youth are obedient.

The Lord of Mighty *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘I love three kinds of people, and My Love for three others is even greater [thus we divide these six people into two groups]: I love the poor person who is humble, but My Love for the rich man who is humble is even greater [because even though he actually possesses the causes for pride, he remains humble]; I love the rich person who is generous, but My Love for the poor person who is generous is even greater; and I love the old person who is obedient, and My Love for the youth who is obedient is even greater.’ The Qudsi Hadith continues, ‘Likewise, I detest three people, and My Detestation of three others is even greater: I detest the rich person who is arrogant, and My Detestation of the poor one who is arrogant is even greater; I detest the poor one who is greedy, and My Detestation of the rich one who is greedy is even greater; and I detest the youth who is disobedient, and My Detestation of the old one who is disobedient is even greater.’

These are twelve types: six in Love and six in Detestation. That is to say, the more we adhere to this criterion, and the more our society will be advanced and progressed.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 660; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1031.*

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّ فِي هَٰذَا لَبَلَٰغًا لِّقَوْمٍ عَٰبِدِينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

There truly is a message in this for the servants of God! [106] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 106)

A ‘message’ is something important which the people must know about. Therefore, when the people are preoccupied with war and await its news, it comes to them in the form of communiqués; they say, ‘Communiqué number one’ because it is an important matter.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘There truly is a message in this…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 106). This means that what the Quran states is the true and the supreme message which leaves no excuse for the people, no possibility of being heedless, and no possibility for one to emend or supplement it in any way. This is because the message of the Quran is the highest degree of what it is possible for you about which to be informed.

Here arises a good question, which is, ‘For whom does the Quran constitute a message’? Undoubtedly, the Quran is a message ‘…for the servants of Allah!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 106), those who firmly believe in the Will of Allah *the Almighty* and carry it out, be it a command or a prohibition

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَٰكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

It was only as a mercy that We sent you [Prophet] to all people [107] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 107)

As long as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Seal of the Messengers and Prophets, then his mission to mankind must have been final and complete; it must have been eligible for all times and places until the advent of the Hour. Previous messengers’ messages were dedicated only to a specific period of time and to a specific group of people, yet his *peace and blessings be upon him* Message came as a grace and mercy to all the worlds. Therefore, it must necessarily be fully able to address the incidents and occurrences of life which may face and challenge people, today and in the future.

The word *al-`alamin* (The worlds) here refers to all what Allah *the Almighty* has created, like the world of the angels, the world of jinn, the world of mankind, the world of inanimate objects, the world of animals, and the world of plants, etc. So, how can Prophet Muhammad's Message be a mercy to all of them? Scholars replied that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is a mercy to the angels, for Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* used to fear the final outcome until the following saying of Allah *the Almighty* was revealed to Messenger Muhammad: 'The processor of strength, having an honourable place with the Lord of the Dominion' (*at-Takwir:* 20); whereupon Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* rested at peace and felt safe.

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a mercy to the inanimate objects because he commanded us to remove any harm from the path. He is also a mercy to the animals, as it is stated in a Hadith: 'Never does a Muslim plant trees or cultivate land and birds or a man or a beast eats out of them but that is a charity on his behalf.'(1)

Moreover, there is a Hadith concerning a woman who entered the fire for detaining a cat; she neither fed it, nor allowed it to drink, nor left it to eat of the vermin of the ground.(2)

There is also a Hadith concerning a man who entered paradise because he gave water to a dog which was panting and eating the moist soil from the severity of thirst. The man descended into a well, filled his shoes with water, and gave the dog to drink. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* thanked him and forgave his sins for him because he descended into the well without any vessel to fill with water but strove with his own resources, employing artful means in the situation and worked hard to bring water to the dog to drink.(1)

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2320; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1553.*

(2) *Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'A woman entered the (Hell) fire because of a cat which she had tied, neither giving it food nor setting it free to eat from the vermin of the earth.' Ibn Hajar says, 'The intended meaning of 'vermin of the earth' is the pests of the land and its insects, such as mice and other such things.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, 8/33; Ibn Hajr, Fath Al-Bari, 6/357.*

Thus, Islam shows mercy to animals, birds, mankind etc. As a matter of fact, the religion of Islam sets everything in life in order, leaving out nothing from the people’s affairs, whether big or small, for the mere chance. It is for this reason that it is a mercy to all the Worlds. Therefore, Allah’s saying, ‘It was only as a mercy that We sent you [Prophet] to all the worlds’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 108) clearly means that all things brought by Islam are included within the elements of mercy.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَآ إِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَٰحِدٌ فَهَلْ أَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ١٠٨

Say, ‘What is revealed to me is that your God is one God – will you submit to Him?’[108] (The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 108)

The Oneness of Allah *the Almighty* is the first mercy bestowed upon us which entails that all of us are equal. That we worship only one God, without any partners, is one of the greatest Graces of Allah *the Almighty* upon us, for worshiping Him Alone frees us from the worship of anyone else. If there were numerous gods, we would be afflicted by the confusion arising from a god who commands us to do something and another who prohibits us from doing it. For that reason, Allah *the Almighty* wants us to take pride in His Oneness and Divinity. Expressing this meaning, the Islamic poet Mohammed Iqbal says:

Within this prostration in which you dislike residing

is deliverance from one thousand other prostrations

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(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘While a man was walking on his way he became extremely thirsty. He found a well; he went down into it to drink water. Upon leaving it, he saw a dog which was panting out of thirst. His tongue was lolling out and he was eating moist earth from extreme thirst. The man thought to himself: ‘This dog is extremely thirsty as I was.’ So, he descended into the well, filled up his leather sock with water, and holding it in his teeth, climbed up and quenched the thirst of the dog. Allah appreciated his action and forgave his sins.’ The Companions asked, ‘Shall we be rewarded for showing kindness to the animals also?’ He said, ‘A reward is given in connection with every living creature.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6009.*

Your prostration to Allah *the Almighty* protects you from prostrating to anyone other than Him, for if you did not prostrate yourself to Him, you would have to prostrate yourself to everyone who is stronger than you are. You should, therefore, be proud of offering your acts of worship to Allah *the Almighty* Alone because this protects you from worshipping human beings whom might call you 'a servant' of one of them. It goes without saying that you are truly a servant to Allah *the Almighty* and not to a mere human being like you.

Allah *the Almighty* gave us an example of this matter in His saying, 'Allah sets forth an example: There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 29) Is a servant of a number of masters who order him at the same time and, on top of this, disagree with one another, equal to a servant who is owned by only a single master? Thus, we are all servants of Allah *the Almighty*; when we submit, we do not submit to any other than Him; I do not submit to you, and you do not submit to me. Therefore, they say: 'No blood will spill from the finger of someone, whom the Sharia orders it to be cut' because it is a command from on high, from the heaven which no one has anything to do with.

Therefore, worship is forbidden when it is offered to human beings like you because the master, in this case, takes the benefit of his servant without giving him anything in recompense, whereas in the case of worshipping Allah *the Almighty* the servant himself is the one who takes the benefit of his Master *Glorified is He*. The poet(1) says:

My soul is sufficed by the glory of being a servant;

The Lord receives me kindly without any appointment

He in His Holiness is the most glorious,

But I meet with Him whenever and wherever I like

Take it upon yourself to compare between a meeting with one of the people of authority of this worldly life and a meeting with your Lord *Glorified is He*, for if you want to see one of these people, you must necessarily request an appointment, and then wonder whether your request will be accepted or rejected. If it is accepted, you will have no power over any element of the meeting; the time, the place and the subject of conversation will be decided by someone other than you.

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(1) This poetry is composed by Sheikh As-Sha`rawi *may Allah have mercy upon him*.

By contrast, if you want to have a meeting with your Lord *Glorified is He* you need to do nothing but make an ablution and raise your hands, saying 'Allah is the Greatest'. After that you will be in Allah's company; that is, you yourself are the one who has decided the time, the place, the subject of conversation, and the end of the meeting with Him *the Almighty*.

Do you not see how Allah *the Almighty* showed favour to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the 'Night Journey' and the 'Ascension,' in so far as He described him as a servant to Him, saying, 'Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night…' (*al-Isra':* 1). Thus the wisdom of revealing the saying of Allah, 'Say, "What is revealed to me is that your God is one God…' (*al-Anbiya':* 108) after His saying, 'It was only as a mercy that We sent you [Prophet] to all the worlds.' (*al-Anbiya':* 107) is to clearly indicate that His Order to us to worship Him Alone undoubtedly saves us from being servants to human beings like us.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* makes us desirous of this worship with His saying, '…will you submit to Him?' (*al-Anbiya':* 109) In such a manner, you urge your lazy son to be like his companion who does excellent work and takes first place; for you say to him: 'Will you not study and work hard in order to become like him'?

This is similar to the saying of Allah here, '…will you submit to Him?' (*al-Anbiya':* 109) It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to the people, 'Will you surrender yourselves to Me? Indeed, your welfare lies in being Muslims and your glory lies in offering your acts of worship to Me'.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَإِن تَوَلَّوْاْ فَقُلْ ءَاذَنتُكُمْ عَلَىٰ سَوَآءٍۖ وَإِنْ أَدْرِىٓ
أَقَرِيبٌ أَم بَعِيدٌ مَّا تُوعَدُونَ ١٠٩

But if they turn away, say, 'I have proclaimed the message fairly to you all. I do not know whether the judgement you are promised is near or far [109]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 109)

As for Allah's saying, 'But if they turn away…' (*al-Anbiya':* 109), it means that if they rejected the Message and turned their back on it, '…say, "I have proclaimed the message fairly to you all."' (*al-Anbiya':* 109) From the same root as the word for 'proclaim' comes the word for the call to prayer meaning to notify about something. To 'notify' someone originally means to do so by means of listening and speaking, given that people originally did not possess the practice of reading and writing, and therefore notification depended upon speech and hearing. Thus, the meaning of Allah's saying, 'I have proclaimed the message fairly to you all…' (*al-Anbiya':* 109) is that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has actually informed them about the Message.

As for Allah's saying, '…fairly to you all…' (*al-Anbiya':* 109), it means that the Message was conveyed to them all; Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* be upon him did not distinguish someone over another. Regarding being notified, they were all equal; none of them is distinguished over anyone else. Therefore, he *peace and blessings be upon him* used to strive for the Message to be conveyed to everyone, a point which is crystal clear in his Hadith: 'May Allah gladden a man who hears something from us, so he conveys it as he heard it. Perhaps the one it is conveyed to has more understanding than the one who heard it.'(1) In this manner, goodness spreads and circulates among all people.

Thus, Allah's saying, '…say, 'I have proclaimed the message fairly to you all…' (*al-Anbiya':* 109) means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings*

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja and Al-Hamidi on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 1/437, At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2657, 2658; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 232; and Al-Hamidi, Musnad, 1/47.*

be upon him did not inform one community apart from another, nor did some ears hear but not others. One of the tokens of the perfection of faith is that the hearer should inform those who did not hear because no one of you becomes a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* attracts their attention to the matter of the Hour, saying, ‘…I do not know whether the judgement you are promised is near or far.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 109) It is as though Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying to them, ‘You should pay attention, take heed, and be careful, for I do not know, perhaps the Hour is near; perhaps it will take you by surprise before I finish my speech with you’.

Therefore, when they asked one of the righteous people, ‘To what did you give your entire life’? He said, ‘I gave my entire life to four things: I knew that I am not free from Allah’s Sight for a single instant, so I was ashamed that I disobeyed Him. I knew that I possessed a livelihood which would not pass me by, for Allah *the Almighty* ensured it for me, so I contented myself with it. I knew that I have a debt which no one else would repay it for me, so I devoted myself to paying it off. I knew that there was an appointed time of death for me which would strike me suddenly, so I took advantage of it unhesitatingly’. The intended meaning, then, is: prepare yourself for the Day of Judgment before it takes you by surprise.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says,

إِنَّهُۥ يَعۡلَمُ ٱلۡجَهۡرَ مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡلِ وَيَعۡلَمُ مَا تَكۡتُمُونَ ١١٠

But He knows what you reveal and conceal [110]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 110)

Given that your Lord fully knows that which is spoken in public, that which is spoken in secret and that which is yet more hidden, you should beware of dissimulation because Allah *the Almighty* forbids you from doing so with human beings, so it is with all the more reason that Allah *the Almighty* forbids you from doing it with Him, for Allah *Glorified is He* knows what you conceal just as He knows what you reveal. In this regard, human beings know nothing about you except that which you make public. Therefore, the most important thing for all criminals is to do their crimes in secret, so that people will know nothing about them, thus be able to escape punishment. But how can anything be disguised from the Sight of Allah *the Almighty* and His All-Comprehensive Knowledge?

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘But He knows what you reveal and conceal.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 111) Here, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us the proper conduct extending even to that which we hide. Therefore, there is all the more reason to observe proper conduct in that which we make public. We believe in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is unseen, not witnessed by the eyes. Supposing that you are in your house, you know everything within it because it is something seen with your own eyes. That which is outside of your house, however, is unseen by you, so you do not know it. But as for Allah *the Almighty* He is unseen and knows everything which is seen as well as everything which is unseen.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِنْ أَدْرِي لَعَلَّهُۥ فِتْنَةٌ لَّكُمْ وَمَتَٰعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١١١﴾

I do not know: this [time] may well be a test for
you, and enjoyment for a while [111]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya’:* 111)

It is as if Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saying to them, ‘Perhaps the grant of respite, your remaining without punishment (in the worldly life), and the slowness of the Hour in reaching you are none but a trial and a test to you. I wonder if you will be successful and triumph in this test; commenting on this point, Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, ‘Let not then their property and their children excite your admiration; Allah only wishes to chastise them with these in this world’s life, and (that) their souls may depart while they are unbelievers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 55) Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘And let not those who disbelieve think that Our Granting them respite is better for their souls; We grant them respite only that they may add to their sins; and they shall have a disgraceful chastisement.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 178)

As for Allah's saying, '…and enjoyment for a while' (*al-Anbiya':* 111), it means that this enjoyment of this worldly life will not last long because it has a limited period.

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the chapter of *Al-Anbiya`* with His saying:

قَٰلَ رَبِّ ٱحۡكُم بِٱلۡحَقِّۗ وَرَبُّنَا ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ ٱلۡمُسۡتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ ١١٢

He said,(1) 'My Lord, pass the true judgement.'
And, 'Our Lord is the Lord of Mercy. We seek His
assistance against what you [disbelievers] say' [112]
(The Quran, *al-Anbiya':* 112)

Allah's saying, 'He said, "My Lord, pass the true judgement"' (*al-Anbiya':* 112), is similar to the prayer of the preceding prophets: '…Our Lord! Decide between us and our people with truth; and You are the best of deciders.' (*al-A'raf:* 89)

But what is the importance of describing Allah's Judgment as 'true', given that He only judges with the truth? The scholars said: 'Allah *the Almighty* wants to clarify this fact for us because we live in this worldly life where falsehood is common. So, it is as though we are hearing a judgment by the truth for the first time'.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'Our Lord is the Lord of Mercy. We seek His assistance against what you [disbelievers] say.' (*al-Anbiya':* 112) This means that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Whose Aid is ever to be sought against those who accuse Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of madness, sorcery, etc.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi, relates that Qatada said, 'The Prophets used to say: "...Our Lord! Decide between us and our people with truth..." (al-A'raf: 89). Therefore, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was commanded to say, "My Lord, pass the true judgement." (al-Anbiya': 112). So, whenever he encountered an enemy—and he knew that he was in the right and his enemy was in the wrong—he used to say: "...Our Lord! Decide between us and our people with truth..." (al-A'raf: 89), that is, settle by means of it.' This is also mentioned by As-Suyuti who attributed it to Ibn Abu Hatim. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 6/4532; As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/689.*

We notice in the verses of the chapter of *al-Anbiya`* that Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the rolling up of heaven as a scroll is rolled for the writings; then He says, '…this [time] may well be a test for you, and enjoyment for a while' (*al-Anbiya':* 111), and afterwards Allah *the Almighty* says, 'My Lord, pass the true judgement.' (*al-Anbiya':* 112) All of this is in order to bring the matter of the Hour and its rising near to us, to make us be able to understand it easily, and to prepare us to turn towards the chapter of *al-Hajj*.

the chapter of

al-Hajj

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Hajj*(1).

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمۡۚ إِنَّ زَلۡزَلَةَ ٱلسَّاعَةِ شَيۡءٌ عَظِيمٞ ١

People, be mindful of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing [1] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 1)

This address is given to all people in general. Addresses which encourage faith are usually issued to all mankind with no exception, yet when Allah *the Almighty* orders carrying out a legal ruling, He uses the expression: ‘O you who believe’.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says here, ‘People, be mindful of your Lord….’ (*al-Hajj:* 1) Allah *the Almighty* wants to draw people’s attentions to the power of faith. In His saying, ‘…be mindful of your Lord…’ (*al-Hajj:* 1), ‘mindfulness of Allah’ means to place a barrier between yourself and what displeases Him, that is, something to protect you from torment which you do not have the power to endure.

We can observe here that sometimes Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Be conscious of Allah…’ (*al-Baqara:* 194), whilst other times Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Be conscious of the fire…’ (*al-Baqara:* 24); this is because the meaning is ultimately the same. The meaning of ‘Be conscious of the fire’ is to place a protective barrier between yourself and the fire, and this is done by obeying Allah's Commandments and keeping away from His prohibitions.

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(1) The chapter of *al-Hajj* is the 22nd chapter in the written order of the Quran, and contains 78 verses. It was revealed in Mecca and Medina according to most scholars, as narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir*.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Be conscious of Allah' because Allah *the Almighty* has attributes of Beauty and attributes of Majesty; as for the Attributes of Beauty, they are such as the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy, the Out spreader, the Coverer of faults etc. As for the attributes of Majesty, they are the All-Compeller, the All-Dominant, and other awe-inspiring Attributes.

So, you should place a barrier between yourself and the attributes of Majesty, for you do not have the power to endure His Dominance and His Mightiness. Now, the Hellfire is one of Allah's hosts and one of the manifestations of His Dominance; so just as we say, 'Be conscious of Allah', we say, 'Be conscious of the Hellfire'.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* chooses to speak about His attribute of Lordship, saying, '…Be Mindful of your Lord' (*al-Hajj:* 1), that is, Allah *the Almighty* did not say, 'Be mindful of Allah' because the Lord is the One Who sustains and looks after His creatures. So, the One Who warns you here is the One Who loves you and gives you, and He is the One Who created, sustained, and provided you.

So, the attribute of Lordship entails giving, that is, creating and providing out of nothing; and therefore, it is all the more fitting that you be conscious of Allah *the Almighty* for He has done great favours for you.

As for the Attribute of Divinity, it entails the religious responsibilities and worshipful obedience of 'Do' and 'Do not'. In other words, it indicates that Allah *the Almighty* is worshipped and obeyed in all what He commands and all what He prohibits.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '…for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing.' (*al-Hajj:* 1) An earthquake is a sudden violent movement of the earth's surface, sometimes causing great damage. For example, if you want to take a peg out of the ground, you must first shake it and rock it back and forth so that the hole in the earth around it gets wider, and then it can come out. If you just try to pull it right out, you will find it very difficult and strenuous. The dentist does the same thing when he pulls a tooth.

So, the meaning of 'earthquake' is a violent motion which removes things from their places; Allah *the Almighty* speaks many times about this movement, saying, 'When the earth shall be shaken with a (severe) shaking. And the mountains shall be made to crumble with (an awful) crumbling. So that they shall be as scattered dust.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 4-6) In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'When the earth is shaken with her (violent) shaking. And the earth brings forth her burdens. And man says, "What has befallen her?" On that day, she shall tell her news. Because your Lord had inspired her.' (*az-Zalzala:* 1-5)

So, this 'earthquake' will not be like the earthquakes we see, which destroy some houses, or even bury entire villages, for these are only cosmological signs which prove the truth of Allah's Message, and remind you about the most enormous earthquake which will herald the coming of the Hereafter so that we are not deluded by our mastery of the world which is only Allah's gift to us.

When the earthquake hit Agadir, they noticed that the animals sensed something and began to panic minutes before the earthquake struck, and some of them went running into the open. So how did they know this? What awareness do they possess, although we consider these creatures to be dumb animals without reason or sense? This is a sign to the human being who deems himself the master of this universe: beware, for had Allah *the Almighty* not given you this mastery, these animals would revolt against you and overthrow you.

As for the earthquake referred to in the verse in question, it will not be an ordinary one, but will be a special earthquake which will strike the earth by Allah's inspiration, when He commands it to quake. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* describes this earthquake as being something mighty: '…for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing.' (*al-Hajj:* 1) When you, as a human being, say that something is mighty, it is so based on your own standards; as for the mighty thing here, it is so according to the standards of Allah *the Almighty*. So, you can imagine the terror of an earthquake which Allah *the Almighty* Himself calls a 'mighty thing'.

This chapter begins with the mention of the earthquake and the resurrection because Allah *the Almighty* says before that: 'The true promise draws near….' (*al-Anbiya':* 97) So, it was certain that Allah *the Almighty* would give us a picture of this 'promise', and a glimpse of what will occur thereupon to indicate His Power through which He will undoubtedly bring forth the earthquake of the Hereafter, and to show that the earth is not intrinsically steady, but rather, its stability is sustained by His Command and Power; that is to say, if He wants this stability to end, it will come to an end.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere, ‘And the earth brings forth her burdens.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 2) Thus, the volcanoes and disturbances within the earth, and all the other wonders we see, are all included in this verse, and therefore Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and what is between them two and what is beneath the ground.’ (*Ta Ha:* 6)

As long as Allah *the Almighty* tells us of His Dominion over what lies beneath the ground, this means that there must be treasures and precious things under the surface of the earth. As a matter of fact, we get most of our precious substances from beneath the surface of the earth, and most of the wealthy nations rely on underground riches, such as oil, metals, minerals, gold etc.

We mentioned before how Allah *the Almighty* spread His bounties throughout His universe, and how Allah *the Almighty* gave each of them an appropriate time to be discovered. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and We do not send it down but in a determined measure.’ (*al-Hijr:* 21)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَوۡمَ تَرَوۡنَهَا تَذۡهَلُ كُلُّ مُرۡضِعَةٍ عَمَّآ أَرۡضَعَتۡ وَتَضَعُ كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَمۡلٍ
حَمۡلَهَا وَتَرَى ٱلنَّاسَ سُكَٰرَىٰ وَمَا هُم بِسُكَٰرَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّ عَذَابَ ٱللَّهِ شَدِيدٞ ٢

On the Day you see it, every nursing mother will think no more of her baby, every pregnant female will miscarry, you will think people are drunk when they are not, so severe will be God’s torment [2] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 2)

We know that ‘to see’ can refer to the perception of knowledge or the beholding of the vision. The things we know are either ‘certain knowledge’, or a ‘certain vision’, or ‘true certainty’. Certain knowledge means that someone you trust tells you something, just as the explorers gave many reports about the existence of a continent which they later called ‘America’, and said that it contained such-and-such; this is what we call ‘certain knowledge’. If you get on a plane and go to America and see what is there from the plane window, this is called ‘certain vision’. Moreover, when you disembark from the plane and walk in the streets and see the buildings, this is what we call ‘true certainty’.

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* tells us that there is a punishment for the disbelievers in the Hellfire which is undoubtedly a true report, our knowledge of that is ‘certain knowledge’. When we actually see it, this will be a ‘certain vision’, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Then you shall most certainly see it with the eye of certainty.’ (*at-Takathur:* 7)

When dwellers of the Hellfire enter therein, and experience its heat and its flames – and only its dwellers will experience this – they will know it with true certainty. Therefore Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And if he is one of those on the right hand. Then peace be to you from those on the right hand. And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones; he shall have an entertainment of boiling water and burning in Hell. Most surely this is a certain truth. Therefore, glorify the name of your Lord, the Great.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 90-96)

The meaning of Allah’s saying, ‘…every nursing mother will think no more of her baby…’ (*al-Hajj:* 2) is that every nursing mother will be distracted from what she is doing because of the terror she sees, such as if a servant is frightened when he sees an imposing or powerful man and so drops what he is carrying, for example. This is something involuntarily stemming from something which distracts one from another action which might be emotional or instinctive.

An example of the emotional side is that a mother will be distracted from her baby. In fact, the motherly emotion is commensurate with the needs of the child. During pregnancy, for example, the mother walks and moves carefully in fear for the safety of the foetus in her womb. Allah *the Almighty* placed this emotion in the mother’s heart to protect the child; otherwise, it would easily be exposed to harm or life-threatening things.

Therefore, when they asked the Arab woman which of her children she loved most, she said, ‘The youngest until he grows; the absent until he returns; the sick until he recovers’. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* gives emotion according to need, and so the pregnant women’s emotion, during the period of breastfeeding, towards her baby is the strongest at all.

So consider the breastfeeding woman, and how she will utterly forget her nursling and leave him; what terror must it be to distract and overcome the woman's motherly emotion and affection, and even her instinct?

In the same connection, the Quran gives us another image of this terror when Allah *the Almighty* says, 'The Day on which a man shall fly from his brother, and his mother and his father, and his spouse and his son.' (*'Abasa:* 34-36)

An aspect of the greatness of the Quran's rhetorical style is that it mentions the brother here before the mother and father; they say that this is because the parents might exist at a time when he thinks that they do not need him and he does not need them because he is grown-up, but he might hope for aid and assistance from his brother.

When Allah *the Almighty* says, 'every nursing mother will think no more of her baby…' (*al-Hajj:* 2), the word used is *murdi`a*. Now there are two words in Arabic, *murdi`a* and *murda`a*; the latter means a woman who is able to nurse babies, whilst the former means a woman who is actually doing so, and whose breast is now at her baby's mouth. So, what a great deal of terror that could distract her at such a time and cause her to utterly forget what she is doing.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'every pregnant female will miscarry….' (*al-Hajj:* 2) After speaking about nursing, He now goes even further and speaks about the pregnant woman; it is clear that to hold onto one's pregnancy until the proper time comes is which is deep in the very fibre of her body, for as soon as the fertilised egg reaches the womb, it grasps onto it and closes around it, as Allah *the Almighty*, says, '…And whatever We will [to be born] We cause to rest in the [mothers'] wombs for a term set…' (*al-Hajj:* 5).

When the time for birth comes, Allah opens the womb for the child. So, this is a matter of instinct beyond the power and the will of the mother; thus, the bringing forth of this burden before its time is an indication of the great terror and horrible event which will occur.

There are two kinds of burdens: a burden which you carry and is separate from you, and a burden you carry and which is a part of you. Concerning this, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and grievous for them will be the weight [of that burden] on the Day of Resurrection.' (*Ta Ha:* 101) A 'weight' is something heavy which you cannot manage, whilst a 'burden' is something easy to carry which you can bear. In this regard, a poet said:

A weight is not what the back carries,
    It is what the heart contains.

That is, the thing which you can carry and which your back can manage is not a true weight, but a true weight is the grief which your heart bears.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, 'you will think people are drunk when they are not, so severe will be Allah's torment.' (*al-Hajj:* 2) That is to say, they will sway to and fro in confusion, just as drunk people do when alcohol affects them, and so they stagger left and right, and fall to the ground; the drunker they get and the further they stray from their natures, the worse it gets.

This is what it will be like on the Day of Resurrection; not because people will be drunk, but because they will be so frightened and panicked: 'you will think people are drunk when they are not, so severe will be Allah's torment.' (*al-Hajj:* 2)

But the question is, wherefrom will this confused movement come? They say that it is because Allah *the Almighty* created the body parts in such a way which is balanced and stable; the anatomists specify the different parts of the body and the specific areas which are responsible for preserving the body's balance, and if these body parts and glands are disturbed, the person feels dizzy and loses his balance. This happens when you look from a high place, or when you travel at sea, for example.

So, this confusion is not caused by intoxication, but by the terror of what they see, which will cause a change in the glands and cells responsible for balance, so they will stagger like drunkards.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'so severe will be Allah's torment.' (*al-Hajj:* 2) Now they will not have seen this chastisement yet, but simply the coming of the Last Hour and its terrors will cause them to lose their balance because the one who believes that the resurrection is happening in this way, will also believe that after it there will be chastisement in hell: 'It is all over, and the thing we used to deny is happening before our eyes'!

The True Lord then says:

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يُجَٰدِلُ فِي ٱللَّهِ بِغَيۡرِ عِلۡمٖ وَيَتَّبِعُ كُلَّ شَيۡطَٰنٖ مَّرِيدٖ ③

Yet still there are some who, with no knowledge, argue about God, who follow every devilish rebel [3] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 3)

An ‘argument’ is a dialogue between two people who each seek to support their opinion and refute the opinion of the other; it is related to the word *jadl*, which means ‘to twist’ a rope or cord, winding one strand over another.

If you reflect on how wool or cotton is spun, you will find that it is composed of small strands no more than a few centimetres long, yet they make from it long ropes by twining these threads together so that the end of one strand is joined to the middle of another, and this is how it is spun and wound. If you want to make this thread stronger, you twist it with another thread. The same is true with argumentation, wherein each interlocutor seeks to strengthen his position and his view, and refute the arguments of the others.

When He says, ‘Yet still there are some who, with no knowledge, argue about Allah’ (*al-Hajj:* 2), how can someone argue about Allah *the Almighty*? To argue about Allah *the Almighty* means to argue about His Existence, like the atheist who denies His Existence; or to argue about His Oneness, such as those who associate other deities with Allah *the Almighty*; or to argue about the unseen things of which Allah *the Almighty* has spoken, such as the Last Hour which some people deny and do not believe in. All these are types of arguments about Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘with no knowledge’ (*al-Hajj:* 2); so to argue about Allah *the Almighty* is permissible and allowed, as long as it is based on knowledge and sound understanding, as He says elsewhere: ‘…and argue with them in the most kindly manner…’ (*an-Nahl:* 125).The True Lord does not forbid argument, but He wants it to be conducted in the best way and with gentle means, as they say: ‘Advice is heavy, so do not make it even heavier by turning it into an argument, and do not try to take a person away from his habit by using methods he does not like; read Allah’s words: “Call them [all mankind] unto your Lord's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation…" (*an-Nahl:* 125), and 'And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner….' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46) Therefore, the Noble Quran taught Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* how to argue, saying: 'Say, "Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty of, nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing."' (*Saba':* 25) Look at this elevated eloquent style: when addressing them, He says, '…Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty of…' (*Saba':* 25), ascribing guilt to his own self, and yet when He speaks about them, He says, '…nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing' (*Saba':* 25), and does not say here, 'for whatever you may be guilty of', which would have been the equivalent expression. This way of speaking attracts hearts and opens them up to embracing the truth.

When they accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being insane, the Quran replied to them with reason and logic, asking them: What is madness? Madness means that a person's actions are not based on any sound decision from the brain, asking them if they have ever experienced anything like this from Muhammad! What is virtue? Virtue is upright and sound action, which is noble and good, questioning them whether they have ever seen anything but this from Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him!* Therefore, He replies to them, 'Say, "I counsel you one thing only: Be [ever-conscious of] standing before Allah whether you are in the company of others or alone; and then bethink yourselves [that] there is no madness in [this prophet,] your fellow-man…."' (*Saba':* 46) How could the man who possesses this virtuous and upright conduct possibly be mad?

As well, when they called him a liar, the Quran responded to them: '…Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you ere this [revelation came unto me]: will you not, then, use your reason?' (*Yunus:* 16) The Message came to him after he reached the age of forty, and before then had you ever heard him give a speech or recite poetry? Did he ever deliver a speech, or read a poem which you preserved as you preserved the works of your other poets?

In addition, they said that he *peace and blessings be upon him* possessed a kind of genius – but what kind of genius is this which bursts forth after the age of forty? If you look at instances of genius, you will find that they occur in the second or third decade of a person's life; so how could Prophet Muhammad have delayed his genius until the age of forty? Who guaranteed for him that he would live that long, when he saw people falling all around him: his father died before he was born, and his mother died when he was an infant, and his grandfather died when he was still young.

In this way, the Quran gives us an example of argument based on wisdom and goodly counsel, and argument based on knowledge of what one says, and of a perception of the true nature of things.

Therefore, when Ash-Sha`bi(1) went to the Byzantine Emperor(2), the Emperor said to him, 'You have things in Islam which the rational mind cannot accept.' Ash-Sha`bi asked him which things he meant, and he said: 'You say that in paradise there is food which never runs out, but we know that if we take from something again and again, it will eventually run out.' Look at the line of argumentation which ensued.

Ash-Sha`bi said, 'Tell me, if you had a lamp, and everyone in the world came along and lit their own lamps from its flame, would this decrease anything from the flame?' This was a refined and high level of argumentation. The Emperor continued: 'And how can we all eat in paradise without ever needing to answer the call of nature?' Ash-Sha`bi replied: 'Does the foetus in its mother's womb grow, or not? It grows more and more every day, and this shows that it must be consuming nourishment – but does it produce waste? If the foetus produced waste and relieved itself in its placenta, it would die. So, the foetus consumes as much nourishment as it requires growing, so that none of its nourishment is left over.'

He then said, 'Where do spirits go when they leave bodies?' Ash-Sha`bi answered comprehensively: 'They go to where they were before they entered the bodies. You have a lamp before you, and it is lit' – and he blew it out – 'now where has the light gone?'

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(1) A man from the second generation of Muslims (*tabi`un*)

(2) The story of Ash-Sha`bi with the Roman king

Another example(1) of argumentation based on knowledge and perception was given by `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* when Mu`awiya's soldiers killed `Ammar ibn Yasir *Allah be pleased with him* and the companions in the ranks of Mu`awiya *Allah be pleased with him* became angry and remembered what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said to `Ammar *Allah be pleased with him*: 'The unjust faction will slay you'(2), and they began to leave Mu`awiya's army one by one. So `Amr ibn Al-`As *Allah be pleased with him* went to Mu`awiya, Allah be pleased upon him, and said, 'Dissent has formed amidst the army, and if it continues not one of them will remain with us. Mu`awiya *Allah be pleased with him* asked 'What is it?' He replied, 'They say that we have killed `Ammar, whom Prophet Muhammad said that he would be killed by the unjust faction.'

Mu`awiya wavered for a moment, and then said, 'Tell them that the one who brought him out to fight killed him'(3) meaning by this `Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him*. When `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* heard about this, he said, 'Ask them then who killed Hamza ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib?' That is, if what you are saying is true, then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* killed Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* because he brought him out to fight.

This is argumentation based on knowledge, and knowledge might be intuitive, meaning that you believe in something, but you cannot prove it, or it might be rational and based on evidence. Knowledge might even come by revelation from Allah *the Almighty* without involving anyone else. We gave the example of intuitive knowledge before by saying, 'Suppose a small child sees his brother sitting next to his father on a chair, and he wants to sit next to his father, so he first tries to move his brother out of the way, taking hold of him and pulling him aside'.

Here, we ask 'How did the small child know that there was not enough room for them both to sit there, and that you cannot occupy a space unless you first remove what is already occupying it'?

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(1) The story of the group of Mu`awiya Abu Sufyan *Allah be pleased with him* killing `Ammar ibn Yasir *Allah be pleased with them all* and the response of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (447) and Muslim (2916)*

(3) *This story was narrated by Ahmad (iv. 199)*

These are principles which we only learn at secondary school, when we learn the meaning of volume and displacement; and this is something which the child knows intuitively.

In fact, if you reflect on geometric theorem, you will find that every theorem is based on a previous theorem; if you want to prove the hundredth theorem, you use the ninetieth, for example, and so on, until you get back to an intuitive theorem which requires no proof. Thus, we can say that everything scientific in the universe is based on intuitive principles which require no proof, and which cannot be defined. Take the sky, for example: they say that it is everything above you and shades you. So, the ceiling is a sky, and mist is a sky, and clouds are a sky and the sky is a sky; but the sky does not actually need this definition, since when you hear the word ‘sky’, you know what it means intuitively without any definition.

These intuitive principles cannot be argued over because they are obvious; and if you say to this child, ‘Sit on top of your brother’, this is not a real argument because it is not correct.

As for rational, experimental knowledge, it is that you use one thing to prove another such as if you enter your house and find a cigarette but in an ashtray, so you ask, ‘Who came to see you today’? It is just as the Arab man who would travel in the desert and find the tracks of a camel and a driver on the ground, and say: ‘These tracks show that a camel and a man have passed this way’.

As for knowledge of Revelation, it comes from Allah, and He sends it to whichever of His servants He wills.

So, the one who argues should use one of these three when he argues; for if he argues without knowledge, it is pure sophistry of no use.

This verse ‘‘Yet still there are some who, with no knowledge, argue about Allah…’ (*al-Hajj:* 3) was revealed about An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, who would argue without any knowledge about the Existence of Allah *the Almighty,* His Oneness, the Resurrection and so on. But the verse does not indicate An-Nadr alone but it indicates everyone who does what he did, and utilises his kind of argumentation.

Then, Allah says, '…who follow every devilish rebel.'(*al-Hajj:* 3) That is, this argumentation might either be of his own devising, or it might be inspired by Satan's whisperings to him, encouraging him to contravene Allah's way of guidance, whether this satanic force be of man or jinn.

Evil deeds and deviations against Allah's way come from either the whispered insinuations of the soul, which refuses to renounce sin, or else from Satan who is always trying to recruit you to his side. But we must not make Satan a scapegoat to blame for all our sins and evil deeds, for not all sins come from Satan, and some sins come from the soul itself. And we said before that if Satan is the one who incites to evil then who incited him to evil in the first place? It is as the poet said,

When Satan went astray, who was his Satan?

The difference between a soul-inspired sin and a Satan-inspired sin is that Satan wants you to sin in any way at all, whereas the soul wants you to commit a specific sin and no other so that if you move onto anything else, it will not accept it and will insist on this one sin in particular.

This is different from Satan, for if you refuse to obey him in one sin, he will try to tempt you into another sin, whatever it may be; what is important to him is that you disobey Allah *the Almighty*. In this way, you can determine whether a sin is inspired by your own soul, or by Satan.

When one of the scholars (1) was asked, 'How can I know if I am a man of this world or a man of the Hereafter?' he said, 'No scholar can tell you this, but you must find out the answer from your own self. Look at yourself, and if the one who takes charity from you is more beloved to you than the one who gives you a gift, then know that you are a man of the Hereafter. If the gift is more beloved to you than the charity, then know that you are a man of this world.'

This is because a man always loves the one who gives him the longer-lasting joy; the one who gives you a gift gives you joy in this worldly life, so you love him; and the one who takes charity from you gives you joy in the Hereafter, so you love him. And this is something in which Satan plays no part.

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(1) The story of the question of a man to one of the pious people 'Am I among the dwellers of heaven or hell?'

In another verse, the True Lord says, '…And yet, among men there is many a one that argues about Allah without having any knowledge [of Him], without any guidance, and without any light-giving revelation.' (*Luqman:* 20)

This verse contains mention of all the kinds of knowledge of which we have just spoken; for 'knowledge' means intuitive knowledge, whilst 'guidance' means proof-based knowledge; as for 'light-giving revelation', it means the Revelation which comes from Allah *the Almighty*. All argumentation must be based on these three things, and it must be done in the kindliest manner.

The word *marid* (rebellious) is related to *murud* which means insolence and extreme corruption; the word *marid* is also derived from it meaning the one who haughtily seeks to put himself above you.

Allah then says:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِ أَنَّهُۥ مَن تَوَلَّاهُ فَأَنَّهُۥ يُضِلُّهُۥ وَيَهْدِيهِ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ ٱلسَّعِيرِ ﴿٤﴾

Fated to lead astray those who take his side, and
guide them to the suffering of the blazing flame [4]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 4)

That is, Allah *the Almighty* has decreed this about this rebellious satanic force, and has made a plain judgement about 'those who take his side' (*al-Hajj:* 3), i.e. follows it and goes behind it, 'and guide them to the suffering of the blazing flame' (*al-Hajj:* 4) 'To lead astray' and 'to guide' are opposites, so how can we combine them?

The meaning is that it will lead him away from the way of truth and goodness, and guide him towards evil; for the meaning of 'guidance' is to give directions, whatever they may be. If you direct towards goodness, this is guidance; and if you direct towards evil, this is also guidance.

Read what Allah says, 'And Allah *the Almighty* will thus command, "Assemble all those who were bent on evildoing, together with others of their ilk and [with] all that they were wont to worship instead of Allah, and lead them all onto the way to the blazing fire."' (*as-Saffat:* 22-23) That is, direct them and guide them into hell. Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, ‘Behold, those who are bent on denying the truth and on evildoing – Allah will indeed not forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, but the road that leads to hell…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 168-169). A ‘blazing flame’ is a raging fire which neither dies down nor goes out.

The True Lord then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِن كُنتُمۡ فِي رَيۡبٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡبَعۡثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقۡنَٰكُم مِّن تُرَابٖ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطۡفَةٖ ثُمَّ مِنۡ
عَلَقَةٖ ثُمَّ مِن مُّضۡغَةٖ مُّخَلَّقَةٖ وَغَيۡرِ مُخَلَّقَةٖ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمۡۚ وَنُقِرُّ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡحَامِ مَا نَشَآءُ إِلَىٰٓ
أَجَلٖ مُّسَمّٗى ثُمَّ نُخۡرِجُكُمۡ طِفۡلٗا ثُمَّ لِتَبۡلُغُوٓاْ أَشُدَّكُمۡۖ وَمِنكُم مَّن يُتَوَفَّىٰ
وَمِنكُم مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰٓ أَرۡذَلِ ٱلۡعُمُرِ لِكَيۡلَا يَعۡلَمَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ عِلۡمٖ شَيۡـٔٗاۚ وَتَرَى ٱلۡأَرۡضَ
هَامِدَةٗ فَإِذَآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡهَا ٱلۡمَآءَ ٱهۡتَزَّتۡ وَرَبَتۡ وَأَنۢبَتَتۡ مِن كُلِّ زَوۡجِۭ بَهِيجٖ ٥

People, [remember,] if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped: We mean to make Our power clear to you. Whatever We choose We cause to remain in the womb for an appointed time, then We bring you forth as infants and then you grow and reach maturity. Some die young and some are left to live on to such an age that they forget all they once knew. You sometimes see the earth lifeless, yet when We send down water it stirs and swells and produces every kind of joyous growth [5]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 5)

Allah says ‘People, [remember,] if you doubt the resurrection’ (*al-Hajj:* 5), that is, if you doubt that the resurrection will occur, then here is evidence that it will: ‘that We created you from dust’ (*al-Hajj:* 5). This means the first creation, that of Adam; as for all people after Adam, they were created from a living man, ‘then a drop of fluid’. (*al-Hajj:* 5)

So he who follows the verses of the Quran will find that the True Lord says that man was created ‘from dust’ (*al-Hajj:* 5), and elsewhere ‘out of a drop of fluid’ (*at-Tariq:* 6), ‘out of clay’ (*al-An‘am:* 2), ‘then a clinging form shaped’ (*al-Hajj:* 5) and ‘out of sounding clay, like pottery’ (*ar-Rahman:* 14)

This has led the orientalists to object to the rhetoric of the Quran, and they say, ‘From which of these things were you created’?

This objection is the result of their limited understanding of the language of the Quran; for dust, fluid, mud, slime and sounding clay are all different stages of the same thing. When you put water on dust, it becomes mud; and when you leave this mud to ferment and thoroughly mix so that you cannot tell its constituents apart, and its odour changes, it becomes dark slime; and when it dries, it becomes sounding clay like pottery, from which Allah *the Almighty* created and formed man, and then blew something of His Spirit into him. So, these are all different stages of the same process; and if a process moves through several different stages, this does not change the process itself.

The True Lord then speaks about the second creation after Adam, namely that of his progeny, saying, ‘then a drop of fluid’. (*al-Hajj:* 5) The word *nutfa* literally means a drop of fresh water, as when the poet said:

The cloud gave the remnant of a few drops its clarity,

Thick at the edges, blue at the sides

Water does not appear blue unless it is pure and unadulterated.

The drop of sperm is also a most essential element because within the human body there are processes of metabolism and processes of production; that is, there is always destruction and rebuilding going on which cause various waste products to be expelled by the body: urine, stools, sweat, tears and earwax are all products of the body’s metabolising of food inside the body so that it can extract the essence of the nutrition and transfer it to the blood.

From this essence is derived human semen, from which the sperm-drop is taken. So, it is the essence of the essence of man, and it causes pregnancy and the formation of the embryo. It is as though the Creator purified it and cleansed it in this way because it would be the source of His noblest creature, man.

This drop only comes out of man during sexual intercourse, which is the most pleasurable experience of the living human being. Why? If you reflect on the other pleasures which man enjoys, such as taste, smell, or touch, these are well-known pleasures which are limited to particular human senses. As for the pleasure which accompanies the ejaculation of semen during sexual intercourse, it is a complete pleasure for which the entire body convulses, so that the exact area of feeling cannot be defined, but rather, every cell of the body experiences it.

Therefore, our Lord commanded us to take purity baths after this action because it involves every cell of the human makeup; and perhaps those who have innate knowledge of Allah *the Almighty* are never heedless of Allah *the Almighty* except in this moment. That is why we are commanded to take purity baths afterwards, as the scholars have said.

As for those people who have profound knowledge of Allah *the Almighty* and His Grace, they say: ‘Allah *the Almighty* created Adam from clay, and made his progeny from this living sperm drop which he placed in Eve, and then from this He brought forth all the rest of mankind; so it is as though in every one of us there is an atom from our forefather Adam, because if this atom had died there would not have been any procreation after Adam. This atom exists within you, exists in the sperm drop which comes from you and makes your own son, it is the purest thing within you because it is the atom which witnessed the first creation, the creation of Adam, your forefather’.

We make this easier to understand by saying, ‘If you take a centilitre of dye and place it in a bottle of water and then stir it until the water is mixed with the dye, then every drop of water will contain an atom of this dye; and the same will happen if you then pour the water from the bottle into a barrel of water, and so on’.

So, every one of us has within him an atom from his forefather Adam, an atom which witnessed the first creation, and witnessed the first covenant which Allah *the Almighty* took from mankind, of which He says, ‘And when your Lord took the seeds of the children of Adam from their loins, He made them bear witness against themselves, “Am I not your Lord?’’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172)

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* speaks about ‘sending’ His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘…the one whom Allah has sent as an apostle’ (*al-Furqan:* 41); the word ‘sent’ implies that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* already existed, and that he had roots in a Message sent directly from Allah *the Almighty* when He took the covenant from

His servants, whilst they were in the loins of Adam. Likewise, He addressed him *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, 'And so, [O Prophet,] exhort them; your task is only to exhort' (*al-Ghashiya:* 121), that is, to remind them of the ancient covenant which we all took, and to which we all bound ourselves.

Therefore, let us read the following verse: 'And when your Lord took the seeds of the children of Adam from their loins, He made them bear witness against themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" to which they answered, "Yes, indeed, we do bear witness thereto…"' (*al-A'raf:* 172). This was before the creation of mankind, before capricious desire had yet entered men's souls: '…[Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this." Or lest you say, "Verily, it was but our forefathers who, in times gone by, began to ascribe divinity to other beings beside Allah; and we were but their late offspring: wilt Thou, then, destroy us for the doings of those inventors of falsehoods?"' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173)

So, Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remind people of the first covenant, so that they would not forget it, and so it would remain a proof against them.

Then He says, 'then a clinging form' (*al-Hajj:* 5). The clinging form is called in Arabic *`alaqa* because it *ta`liqu* (clings) to the womb. Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, 'Was he not once a [mere] drop of sperm that had been spilt, and thereafter became a germ-cell — whereupon He created and formed [it] in accordance with what [it] was meant to be?' (*al-Qiyama:* 37-38)

The sperm is carried in a drop of liquid semen, and it is the essence from which the embryo is created; and the 'germ-cell' here means the fertilised egg. After the egg had been bonded to the mother, and the sperm had been bonded to the father, they were united in a new bond, coming together within the womb, as though something in their intrinsic nature makes them cling together; and they call this the 'zygote'.

In Arabic, if someone always stays close to you, you say that he is 'like a germ-cell'.

After this, the germ-cell turns into 'then a lump of flesh' (*al-Hajj:* 5), i.e. *mudgha* which literally means a morsel of meat the size of a single bite, and is a mixture of several things, such as if you eat a piece of meat with vegetables and rice, and chewing turns them into a mixture. This is because the human body is not made of a single constituent, but of several constituents.

This lump of flesh is ‘shaped or unshaped’ (*al-Hajj:* 5); it is complete in the sense that it is in the shape and form of a human body: there is the head, there is the arm, there is the foot and so on; it means that it is created in the form of a human being.

As for ‘unshaped’, we have discovered recently that this refers to the cells which restore the body and mend it if it is damaged. They are akin to ‘spare parts’ to rebuild and restore the damaged tissues of the body, as happens with wounds, which if left to the natural processes of the body to heal bit by bit without leaving a trace.

We see this with the children of farmers, when one of them is injured or develops sores, and they leave it to the body’s natural resistance; and after a while these sores disappear without leaving any mark at all because they leave the body to receive divine treatment. If we interfere in the wound by applying chemicals or stitching it, it will leave a mark behind, and the area will be scarred. This is because these chemicals disturb the pores of the skin; and therefore, we find that these parts of the body have changed, and the person has the urge to scratch them and rub them, because these pores used to expel the body’s waste in the form of sweat, and when these pores were blocked these effects were caused. And all of this is because we interfered with the nature which Allah *the Almighty* created. So, the meaning of ‘unshaped’ is the process which replaces and rebuilds what is damaged on the human body.

He then says, ‘We mean to make Our power clear to you. Whatever We choose We cause to remain in the womb for an appointed time….’ (*al-Hajj:* 5) That is, that we might clarify to you everything about this matter. ‘Whatever We choose We cause to remain in the womb for an appointed time…’ (*al-Hajj:* 5) meaning the embryonic lump which is destined to be a foetus, and continue to develop until it is born, which is why He then says, ‘for an appointed time’; or He might cause it to be miscarried.

If you say, ‘What is the wisdom behind creating and forming it, if it has been destined to die, whilst still in the womb?’ we say, ‘so that we may know that death can come at any time, and is not governed by cause or age. Death might come to an old man, just as it might come to a foetus in its mother’s womb, and life can end at any time’.

He then says, ‘and then We bring you forth as infants’ (*al-Hajj:* 5), saying ‘We’ in the plural, yet then using the word *tiflan* which means, not ‘infants’, but literally ‘infant’ in the singular. Why? They say it is because there are words in Arabic which can be used for both the singular and the plural so that the word *tiflan* here means ‘as infants’. The plural word *atfal* is used elsewhere in the Quran, when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Yet when the children among you attain to puberty….’ (*an-Nur:* 59)

Similarly, the word *`adl* (justice), can also be used as an adjective meaning ‘just’, in which case it is used for both singular and plural nouns without any change in its form. And in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* he said about the idols: ‘Now [as for me, I know that,] verily, these [false deities] are my enemies…’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77). The word *`adu*, (enemy), is used in the singular form. When Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* spoke about his guests, he said, ‘Behold, these are my guests’ (*al-Hijr:* 68), using the word *dayf*, which literally means ‘guest’ in the singular. So, in these instances, the singular word has a plural meaning.

He then says, ‘then you grow and reach maturity’ (*al-Hajj:* 5). In this way, the context shifts us away from infancy to the final stage of human life; we spoke before about the stages of human life, and how he passes to the stage of maturity: physical maturity, wherein he is able to procreate, and mental maturity, wherein he is able to control his action properly, and make intelligent choices between alternatives.

Then comes the stage of full adult maturity: ‘…then you grow and reach maturity…’ (*al-Hajj:* 5) meaning that he has a mature experience of the events of life, too.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘Some die young and some are left to live on to such an age’. (*al-Hajj:* 5) The abject state of old age means its humiliation, when a person begins to show signs of decline and weakness, 'That they forget all they once knew.' (*al-Hajj:* 5) This is because he forgets. He realises that his health, strength, and power are not intrinsically his, but rather were only given to him by Allah *the Almighty*.

When a man reaches abject old age, he gradually goes back to the state of infancy needing someone to take his hand so he can stand or walk, just as you take a child's hand; and when he speaks, he babbles and stutters like a child who is learning to speak; and so on, for the other aspects of his life.

Therefore, they say that early marriage is the best way to sire a 'father' who will help you in the 'childhood' of your old age; a 'father', not a 'son' because in later life he will perform the role of father for you. They say, 'He has caught up with his father' meaning that their ages appear to be the same.

But why do only some of us reach abject old age, and others do not? The True Lord has made this an example for us so we do not say, 'If only our lives were longer' because if everyone reached abject old age, it would be very difficult for us; so Allah *the Almighty* is merciful to us by creating death.

He then says, 'You sometimes see the earth lifeless, yet when We send down water it stirs and swells and produces every kind of joyous growth' (*al-Hajj:* 5). Just as man was created from dust, then a sperm drop, then a germ-cell, then an embryonic lump complete and yet incomplete, then came forth as an infant, then reached maturity then either died or passed on to abject old age; the same is true of the earth: 'You sometimes see the earth lifeless' (*al-Hajj:* 5).

The word *hamida* (dry and lifeless) literally means 'still', which is why we say to a restless child, *ihmid,* (be still!); 'yet when We send down water it stirs and swells' (*al-Hajj:* 5), that is, its atoms spring into motion and give forth plants, after they had been still and motionless.

To 'stir' means for something to move which you thought was fixed but was actually not. This is because everything has some kind of motion, and even the lifeless piece of iron has motion in its atoms, but you do not have the means to perceive this motion. If you reflect on magnetism, you will become aware of this movement in its atoms, for when you rub a magnetised rod over another rod which is not magnetised in a single direction, it takes its magnetism; and this means that the atoms of the rod have been changed so that they bear a single charge, either positive or negative; and if the rod is rubbed in the other direction, the atoms will change again.

So even iron – the symbol of firmness and immobility – also has motion and life of its own kind, even if it seems to you to be the most lifeless of objects on the surface. Therefore, we say that 'lifeless' means motionless to the eye, since it contains no plants; and then 'it stirs', increasing and swelling and moving to give forth plants. In reality, it was not motionless at all because its atoms were moving in their own way.

And the meaning of 'swells' is that it becomes larger, just as a broad bean becomes larger when you put it in water, taking on extra moisture, as do all pulses. This increase in size of the grain is what splits it into two halves when it germinates, shoots comes out of it, one of which grows upwards as a stalk which seeks out air, and one of which grows downwards as a root which seeks out water. These two halves remain the source or nourishment for the plant until it becomes strong and can take its nourishment from the soil. Once these two halves of the bean fulfil their function in nourishing the plant, they turn into leaves, and are the first leaves the plant grows.

Moreover, we can observe that the plant does not take all of its nourishment from the soil, but rather takes as much as 90% of its nourishment from the air, and you can see this if you look at a flowerpot with a plant in it, for you will find that the volume of soil in the pot does not decrease in any noticeable way as the plant grows in it.

When you reflect on the roots of plants, you find that this is one of the signs of Allah *the Almighty*; for the root reaches out until it finds moisture or water, and when it reaches its source of nourishment it stops. Look at the fenugreek, for example, and you will find that its roots are not equally long, but vary according to how far the seed is from the source of moisture.

'And [it] swells', that is, it increases and enlarges, just as dough does when we leave it to rise, 'and produces every kind of joyous growth'. (*al-Hajj:* 5)

This is a living image which we can all see with our own eyes. The earth is dry and stable, bereft of motion, yet when water falls upon it, it changes and its atoms move, and it splits open and gives forth plants. This even happens with artificial rain, for we saw at *`Arafa*, for example, how artificial rain was poured onto it, and the valley became green. But when the water stops, it goes back to how it was before because the water does not continue to come. If you were to continue to pour water on it, it would become a place of forests and gardens, as we see in Europe.

Rain does not need the earth to be flattened for it because it waters the highlands and the lowlands equally; the land which you water, on the other hand, must first be levelled so that the water reaches it all equally.

When Allah *the Almighty* sends water to the dry earth, whereupon you see it burst forth with vegetation, then, from where did the seeds come? Why were they not damaged after remaining in the ground for all this time? The earth is what protected them from damage until the right conditions came for them to germinate. The word for this kind of natural germination, when plants grow from the earth without any human involvement is called 'natural growth'.

When these seeds are transferred to the desert or the valleys, this takes place by means of wind or the dung of animals. The literal meaning of the word *zawj* in: '…every kind (*zawj*) of lovely plant' (*al-Hajj:* 5), is 'one of a pair'; some people think that it means 'a pair', but actually it means 'one of a pair', i.e. one thing which is accompanied by another of its kind; for He says, 'And that it is He who creates the two kinds – the male and the female' (*an-Najm:* 45), and so each one of them is a *zawj*. Likewise, when you say 'a pair of shoes', you mean one individual shoe and another individual shoe alongside it. Likewise, the word 'twin' means a child born alongside another child, so that each one of them is a 'twin'; we say, 'they are twins', we do not say 'they are twin.'

There is a manifestation of the precision of Quranic rhetoric in the words: 'every kind joyous growth', for all creatures, whether they be minerals, plants or animals, must have the pair of male and female, this paring of which Allah *the Almighty* has said: 'And in everything have We created opposites…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49). Even those minerals which we think of as being lifeless and motionless are made of pairs: positive and negative in electricity, in atoms, and in magnetism. Everything which replicates itself must contain these two opposites.

Therefore, when the True Lord dealt with this matter in the Quran, He dealt with it in a way which allowed for further human possibilities, saying, ‘Limitless in His Glory is He who has created opposites in whatever the earth produces, and in men’s own selves, and in that of which [as yet] they have no knowledge.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36)

His saying, ‘that they forget all they once knew’ is encompassed all the discoveries that science would make in the future, which would affirm the truth of the Quran as time passed. In the past, we learned of electricity and that it contains positive and negative, and we said, ‘This is something of which we had no knowledge’; and this is one of the miraculous qualities of the Quran.

So, take this as a general rule: everything which reproduces more of itself must contain two opposites.

So, when He says, ‘…every kind of joyful earth’ (*al-Hajj:* 5), every kind of plant exists individually and has its pair with it, and this is clear when we see how pollination takes place between the male and female parts of a plant; a plant might either be male or female, as is the case of date-palms, or it might contain both the male and female elements, as is the case of wheat and corn.

And if you look at a corn plant, you will see that at the top of it is a crest containing fine grains bearing the male pollen, and in the middle of the stalk there is a cob containing fibres which each attach to the corn seeds on the cob, which bear the female pollen. And when the wind blows, the top of the sheaf shakes and the male pollen falls onto these fibres and pollinates them. And therefore, we see that those seeds which do not have fibres protruding from them outside the cover of the cob shrivel up and die because they are not pollinated.

The meaning of ‘joyful’ is attractive, beautiful, and eye-catching; and the beauty of a plant’s appearance is common, and not only experienced by the one who owns it, unlike the enjoyment of eating it. When you pass by an orchard or a garden, you can enjoy its appearance and its beautiful colours and fine scents.

Within the human soul there are elements which take nourishment from this verdure and these colours, which enjoy this beauty, even if one does not own them.

Therefore, the True Lord draws out attention to this fact when He says: '…Behold their fruit when it comes to fruition and ripens'. (*al-An'am:* 99) That is, everyone is able to behold this, after which we must leave the more specific enjoyments to those who own them. Enjoy Allah's creation, for the soul can be nourished by more than just food.

Read what He says about horses: 'And you find beauty in them when you ride them home in the evenings and when you take them out to pasture in the mornings.' (*an-Nahl:* 6) So horses are not only meant for carrying burdens, but they are also a source of beauty, splendour, please and satisfy your souls.

The True Lord then says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَأَنَّهُۥ يُحْىِ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ وَأَنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٦﴾

This is because God is the Truth; He brings the
dead back to life; He has power over everything [6]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 6)

That is, that happens when man is created and formed, when plants germinate and grow, all comes back to the fact that 'this is because Allah is the Truth; He brings the dead back to life' (*al-Hajj:* 6), so why did He say, 'The Truth' and not 'The Creator'? They say it is because a creator might create something and then leave it, but Allah *the Almighty* is the True Creator; and the meaning of 'the truth' is that which is firm and never changes, and likewise His bestowal never changes, and He will continue to be a Creator who gives to you every day because His bestowal is constant and never runs out.

If you look at the whole universe, you will find that it has a repeating cycle. Allah *the Almighty* created the earth and measured out its constituents; for example, the amount of water which Allah *the Almighty* created in the universe is constant and does not increase or decrease, because water has a cycle, and the water you drink during your whole life does not decrease the total amount of water which exists because it comes from you as waste and returns once again by means of the water cycle.

The same is true of the food we eat, and the pretty flower we pick. Everything in existence has a cycle through which it turns; and this is the meaning of: '…and [He] equitably apportioned its means of subsistence….' (*Fussilat:* 10) So, the meaning of the 'The Truth' is The Constant One who never changes in His creation or His bestowal. So, do not think that Allah's gifts to you are something new; rather, they are ancient gifts which are repeated for you and for others.

Then He says, 'and because He alone brings the dead to life' (*al-Hajj:* 6), as we said about the previous verse: 'you can see the earth dry and lifeless' (*al-Hajj:* 5), i.e. still and bereft of life, and only Allah *the Almighty* is able to revive it. Therefore, we find that the scholars of jurisprudence call the land which we make suitable for farming 'dead land revived'.(1) It is only Allah *the Almighty* that can bring all that is dead back to life, and therefore He then says, 'He has power over everything.' (*al-Hajj:* 6) As long as this is the case, and as long as you all witness the sign of the revival of the dead earth, then why do you deny the resurrection and that you shall be brought back to life?

Allah then says:

وَأَنَّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ ءَاتِيَةٌ لَّا رَيۡبَ فِيهَا وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَبۡعَثُ مَن فِي ٱلۡقُبُورِ ٧

There is no doubt that the Last Hour is bound to come,
nor that God will raise the dead from their graves [7]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 7)

They denied that the dead will be resurrected when they said, 'Why – after we have died and become mere dust and bones, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead? – And perhaps also our forebears of old?' (*as-Saffat:* 16-17) The True Lord replies to them: 'Indeed, We shall raise you to life after death; and the One who created you from nothing is the more able to bring you back'. Therefore He said, 'And it is He who creates [all life] in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew; and most easy is this for Him…' (*ar-Rum:* 27). The True Lord is speaking to us here according to the scope of our minds because we understand that to create something from existing parts is easier than to create it out of nothing; but for the Creator Himself , there is no question of 'easy' or 'easier'.

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(1) This means to take land which was not previously used for anything and to make is suitable for settlement or farming or the like; this land should be far from any settlement, and not adjoining it. The jurists say that this land belongs to the one who revives it, for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever revives a dead land, it is his.' There is a difference of opinion among the jurists as to whether the permission of the ruler must be obtained before doing this. (Sayed Sabiq, *Fiqh As-Sunna*).

So, when He says, 'And [know, O man] that the Last Hour is bound to come…' (*al-Hajj:* 7), it is as though the action of raising the dead to life is not the utmost end of Allah's power, but rather, His power encompasses many signs and wonders. The 'Last Hour' means the time of the resurrection and its coming; but the resurrection will be a time of reckoning and judging for mankind, and therefore they must be brought forth from their graves, which is why He says after this, '…nor that Allah will raise the dead from their graves'. (*al-Hajj:* 7) So, everything that has gone before is the fruit of the fact that He is the Ultimate Truth; and because He is the Ultimate Truth, He raises the dead, and has the power to do anything, the Last Hour is coming beyond all doubt and He will resurrect all who are in their graves.

The True Lord then says:

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يُجَٰدِلُ فِى ٱللَّهِ بِغَيۡرِ عِلۡمٖ وَلَا هُدٗى وَلَا كِتَٰبٖ مُّنِيرٖ ﴿٨﴾

Yet still there are some who, with no knowledge or guidance
or any book of enlightenment, argue about God [8]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 8)

We spoke at the beginning of the chapter about argument based on knowledge and sound counsel. I said that knowledge is intuitive, empirical, and rational, or inspired by Allah *the Almighty*. As for those people who argue about Allah *the Almighty* they do so without intuitive knowledge, 'guidance' (*al-Hajj:* 9), i.e. empirical and rational knowledge '…or guidance or any book of enlightenment, argue about Allah' (*al-Hajj:* 9), i.e. inspiration from Allah *the Almighty*. So, they are people of sophistry and fruitless debate which have no benefit; and when the intelligent person encounters this kind of debater, he should not humour them in their sophistry because no benefit can come of it. Rather he should direct the argument to a position where no sophistry can be used.

We have a fine example of this in Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he debated Nimrod. Read Allah's words: 'Are you not aware of that [king] who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) about his Lord, [simply] because Allah had granted him kingship? Lo! Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord is He who grants life and deals death." [The king] replied, "I [too] grant life and deal death!" Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west!" Thereupon he who was bent on denying the truth remained dumbfounded….' (*al-Baqara:* 258)

Nimrod used sophistry when he said 'I grant life and deal death' (*al-Baqara:* 258) because he did not really grant life or deal death;(1) Ibrahim (Abraham) wanted to move him to an area where no sophistry was possible, to bring an end to the affair and prevent his rival from engaging in any further nonsense, so he said, '…Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west!' (*al-Baqara:* 258) The result was that Allah's enemy was unable to give any answer: 'Thereupon he who was bent on denying the truth remained dumbfounded' (*al-Baqara:* 258) That is, he was astonished and confused.

Allah says:

ثَانِيَ عِطْفِهِۦ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِۖ لَهُۥ فِي ٱلدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌۖ وَنُذِيقُهُۥ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ عَذَابَ ٱلْحَرِيقِ ٩

Turning scornfully aside to lead others away from God's path. Disgrace in this world awaits such a person and, on the Day of Resurrection, We shall make him taste the suffering of the fire[9] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 9)

Man, in his general physical form has a head, neck and shoulders, and he has two sides and a back, and all of these body parts play roles in his life and his motions, and participate in his actions. And the one who argues about Allah *the Almighty* without having any knowledge, guidance or light-giving revelation turns aside from you, and turns his head away because the conversation does not please him – not because what you say is false, but rather because he has run out of arguments and does not know what to say, and so all he can do is turn aside.

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(1) Nimrod based his claim on the fact that he called forth two men who deserved to die, pardoning one and killing the other.

Therefore, they call this kind of argument *mira`* in Arabic, as in ‘Will you, then, contend (*tumarun*) with him as to what he saw?’ (*an-Najm:* 12) That is, will you argue with him about what he saw? *Mira`* means ‘violent arguing’, and is derived from the word *mara* which means ‘to milk an udder until it is completely emptied to the last drop’.

The same is true of the one who makes false arguments, or who argues without possessing any knowledge or proof; you see him stubbornly persisting, trying to take all that his opponent has; and if he had any real knowledge or arguments, he would end the matter without stubbornness and obstinacy.

The Noble Quran gives us an image of this arguing and this rejection of the truth when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘For, when they are told, “Come, the Apostle of Allah will pray [unto Allah] that you be forgiven,” they turn their heads away, and thou canst see how they draw back in their false pride.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 5)

The Quran shows us here the gradual way in which a person turns away from the truth, starting by turning his head, and then his side, and then turning his back and showing his shoulders. These are all ways of fleeing from argument when one is not strong enough to convince the other.

He says, ‘Turning scornfully aside to lead others away from Allah’s path….’ (*al-Hajj:* 9) This is the reason he turns his back because he wants to lead astray those who are guided; if he were to stay listen to his rival and the arguments and proofs which he gives, he would be defeated and would not be able to lead the people astray. Therefore, he scornfully turns aside and flees this situation which he cannot face or challenge.

How is such a person requited? Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Disgrace in this world awaits such a person’. (*al-Hajj:* 9) *Khizy* (Disgrace) means ignominy and humiliation, and this is the requital of this worldly life before the Hereafter. Did the disbelievers not experience this disgrace on the day of Badr? Did the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not take a staff in his hand before the battle and point with it, ‘Here is where so-and-so will die, and here is where so-and-so will die’ naming the chieftains of disbelief and misguidance from Quraysh?(1) After the battle was over, it turned out just as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said it would, and each of these chieftains died at the very places where the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said they would.

And when Abu Jahl was killed at this battle, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* stood over him – Glory be to Allah! The shepherd, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* stood over the leader of Quraysh. When Abu Jahl said, as he lay dying, 'You have indeed climbed high, little shepherd.'(2) That is, 'You have climbed above me, though a lowly man you are!' So, what disgrace could be greater than this?

And after Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* interceded for Abu Sufyan with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the day of the Conquest of Mecca, and Abu Sufyan saw the procession of the Prophet as he entered Mecca, surrounded by the banners of the Helpers in a huge and awesome procession, he could not control himself or conceal what his heart contained, and he said to Al-`Abbas: 'The dominion of your nephew has become great indeed.' Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* replied: 'It is prophet hood, Abu Sufyan.'(3) That is, it is not a question of dominion, but rather, prophet hood aided by Allah *the Almighty*.

When the people asked Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* for permission to enter, he allowed those who had embraced Islam the earliest, the slaves and freedmen, to enter, and left the chieftains of Quraysh at the door. They became angry and enraged at this; and among them was the father of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* who said to him, 'Will you give them leave to enter, and leave us?' He replied, 'It is Islam which has placed them ahead of you.' `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* witnessed this, and said to them: 'What angers you so? What business is it of yours if their Lord gives them leave, whilst you must wait?' The true anger will be in the Hereafter when those people are called into paradise, whilst you all tarry in that terrible place.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (1779) and Ahmad (iii. 219) on the authority of Anas*

(2) *Ibn Hisham, (Sira)*

(3) Ibid

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘But the foremost shall be [you who in life were] the foremost [in faith and good works], they who were drawn close unto Allah.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 10-11)

He then says here, ‘…and on the Day of Resurrection We shall make him taste suffering through fire.’ (*al-Hajj:* 9) This disgrace which they endure in this worldly life will not spare them from the disgrace and suffering of the Hereafter. In addition, when He says, ‘suffering through fire (*hariq*)’, the word *hariq* means the fire which burns things in its intensity, such as the fire into which they cast Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and which was so hot that it roasted the birds which flew over it.

The True Lord then says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمَتۡ يَدَاكَ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَيۡسَ بِظَلَّٰمٖ لِّلۡعَبِيدِ ١٠

[It will be said], ‘This is for what you have stored
up with your own hands: God is never unjust to
His creatures’ [10] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 10)

The word ‘this’ refers to the disgrace of this worldly life and the suffering through fire in the Hereafter which have just been spoken of. This will be a consequence of what their own hands have wrought, it will not be from any wrongdoing on Allah’s part, but rather, they will have wronged their own selves, as He says: ‘…and no wrong did We do to them, but it was they who persistently wronged themselves.’ (*an-Nahl:* 118) Did He take them to task without any warning, or without making it clear that these actions are sinful? You cannot punish someone for a sin unless you first inform them of it, and let them know what penalty is; and if you punish him without letting him know that, this is a sin and a crime, and then you wrong him. Therefore, the lawmakers say, ‘There can be no punishment without a crime, and no crime without a law.’

The declaration has thus come to you and informed you that these actions are crimes, and Allah *the Almighty* has sent the Messengers to you, and you have been forewarned, as He says elsewhere: ‘…Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] ere We have sent an apostle [to them]'. (*al-Isra':* 15) Also He says, '[It will be said], 'This is for what you have stored up with your own hands: Allah is never unjust to His creatures.' (*al-Hajj:* 10) But are all sins wrought by the hands alone? Sins can be words, deeds, or actions of the heart such as envy or hypocrisy. But, most sins are wrought by the hands.(1)

He then says: 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures.' (*al-Hajj:* 10), literally 'Allah *the Almighty* is not *zhallam* to any of His creatures'. The word *dhallam* is an intensive form of the word *zhalim* which means 'wrongdoer', just as *akul* is the intensive form of *akil,* 'one who eats', and therefore means 'one who eats a lot.' So, the action is one, but the results of the action differ. When a verb is intensified, this means either that the action itself is intensified, or that it is repeated. For example, you might eat only a single piece of bread for a meal, or you might eat five pieces, which intensifies the action for a single meal. You eat three meals a day, but you exaggerate the amount you eat in a single meal. But, the nature of the intensity could also be in the number of meals, such as if you eat a single piece of bread in a meal, but you eat five meals a day instead of three; this is an intensity of repetition of the action.

The intensive Arabic form has one meaning when it is affirmed and another when it is negated. If you say that so-and-so is *akul*, 'one who eats much', affirming the intensive adjective for him, you thereby also affirm the basic sense of the verb a fortiori, so he is certainly *akil* 'one who eats.' If you negate the intensive form, then you do not thereby also negate the basic form: if you say that so-and-so is not *akul*, this does not mean that he is not *akil* – he might not eat a lot, but he does eat something.

If we apply this rule to Allah's Words 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures' (*al-Hajj:* 10), the literal meaning will be 'Allah is not *zhallam* (unjust) to any of His creatures'; this would mean that He was still *zhalim* – and far be it for Allah *the Almighty* that this be true! One explains this by saying that there are other verses which negate the basic action itself, such as when He says, '…and your Lord does not wrong anyone' (*al-Kahf:* 49), 'And it is not We who will be doing wrong unto them, but it is they who will have wronged themselves.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 76) Moreover, the intensive adjective form here is linked to the word 'creatures', so if we assume that the intensiveness here is that of repetition, 'Allah is never unjust to His creatures' (*al-Hajj:* 10), then it would mean that He does not wrong this person, or that person, or the other person; the objects of the wronging here are creatures, not one single creature.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi says in his exegesis that the hands here are used to symbolize all actions.*

The essence of wrongdoing is that the strong takes what rightfully belongs to the weak, and the strength of the wrongdoing is commensurate with the power of the wrongdoer. Given this, if wrongdoing were to come from Allah *the Almighty* in accordance with His Strength and Power, it would be severe indeed and no one would be able to bear it. Therefore, the word *zhalim* is not enough to portray this, but *zhallam* is needed, thus the full meaning is only given by the intensive form.

The True Lord then never does the least wrong to His creatures, for He made it clear to them what He permits and what He forbids; He made clear what the crime is and what its punishment will be, and the messengers conveyed this from the very beginning, so no one has any excuse.

Then the True Lord says:(1)

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(1) Several explanations for the causes of revelation of this verse have been narrated, among them was that certain Bedouins accepted Islam and then went home, and when they found good fortune there in the form of rain and fertile land, they praised Islam, whereas if there was a year of drought, they said, 'This religion had done us no good'; so, the verse was revealed. This was related by Ibn `Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* according to Ibn Kathir in his exegesis. Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri said that it was revealed about a Jewish man who embraced Islam and then lost his sight, his wealth and his son, and blamed Islam for this and complained of it to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said, 'O Jew, Islam cleanses a man just as fire cleanses iron, silver and gold of their impurities'; and then this verse was revealed.

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَعۡبُدُ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ حَرۡفٖۖ فَإِنۡ أَصَابَهُۥ خَيۡرٌ ٱطۡمَأَنَّ بِهِۦۖ وَإِنۡ أَصَابَتۡهُ فِتۡنَةٌ
ٱنقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجۡهِهِۦ خَسِرَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةَۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡخُسۡرَانُ ٱلۡمُبِينُ ﴿١١﴾

There are also some who serve God with unsteady faith: if something good comes their way, they are satisfied, but if they are tested, they revert to their old ways, losing both this world and the next – that is the clearest loss [11]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 11)

‘There are also some who serve Allah with unsteady faith….’ (*al-Hajj:* 11) ‘Worship’ means to obey Allah’s Commandments by fulfilling them, to keep away from His prohibitions by staying clear of what He prohibits. Some people offer worship to Allah *the Almighty* as long as things are going well for them, but as soon as evil befalls them, or they experienced misfortune, they turn away utterly: ‘if something good comes their way, they are satisfied’. (*al-Hajj:* 11)

The True Lord wants His servant to worship Him on a basis of firm faith, which is not shaken or disturbed by events and caused to waver. Your Lord wants you to be His servant in good times and bad times, in ease and in difficulty, for they are both a trial and a test. You only believe in Allah *the Almighty* because you know that He is an All Wise, All Just, and All-Powerful God; you must accept the events which He sends upon you in your life considering these attributes.

So, if life is difficult for you, know that there is a wise reason for this which may not be for you but for your children who will live on after you; for perhaps if they saw you living in ease and goodness, they would fall into greed, corruption and transgression; and perhaps a life of straitened means and scant provision, and your hard toil to give them their life’s needs, will be a motivation for them to do good.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘…and We test you [all] through the bad and the good [things of life] by way of trial: and unto Us you all must return.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 35)

You should be aware of this fact: have faith in the wisdom of your Lord in all that He makes happen to you, whether it is a boon or a misfortune. If you fall ill and are confined to your home, then say, ‘What would have happened outside, from which Allah *the Almighty* has saved me and protected me?’, for goodness may lie in that which you deem evil, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…but it may well be that you hate a thing the while it is good for you.…’ (*al-Baqara:* 216)

The statisticians, who have examined some of our households, found that although brothers live in the same house, with the same environment, the same parents, and the same level of schooling, one brother may be upright and virtuous, whilst another is the opposite. Additionally, when they looked into the cause of this phenomenon, they found that the upright and virtuous son was raised during a time when his father was ill and confined to the home for several years, so that this boy had to take a larger share of the responsibilities of looking after the family and helping to raise his siblings and so did not have the opportunity to go out or mix with bad company.

In another study of a deviant youth, they found the cause of deviancy was that the father was a businessman, whilst he was growing up, and was frequently away travelling, yet he spent a lot of money on his family, so that his son grew up in luxury but away from his father.

In another study, they found two brothers, one of whom was successful and the other was the opposite, and when they looked into why this could have occurred, even though they both lived in the same environs, they found that the successful brother suffered from poor health and so he preferred to stay at home and read and study, whilst the other enjoyed good health and so preferred a life of luxury and spent most of his time outside the house. There are many similar examples of this.

So, trials can bring great fortune; there is wisdom behind them because they are sent upon you by the wisdom of your Lord and Creator; they are not the result of your own work. As long as this is true, then be content with them, and worship Allah *the Almighty* with sincerity and firm faith, in good times and in bad ones.

Concerning His words, ‘…serve Allah with unsteady faith’ (*al-Hajj:* 11); ‘unsteady’ means the edge of something, such as if you arrive at a gathering and find the room full, so you sit at the edge by the end most side of the others; usually this is not a comfortable or stable position. The same is true of those who worship Allah *the Almighty* on the borderline, meaning that faith has not settled comfortably into their hearts and is quickly unseated by trials, because he worships Allah *the Almighty* in a way which is not stabilised with certitude, which the true believer feels in Allah *the Almighty* Who is All Wise in all that He sends upon His servants.

This verse does not leave out any attitude of the human soul, whether in times of good or times of evil.

Reflecting on His words: ‘if something good comes their way, they are satisfied, but if they are tested…’ (*al-Hajj:* 11), you do not say, ‘I have attained to good’, but rather good is what has befallen you and come to your door. You do not seek out your provision as much as your provision seeks you out; and therefore Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…And unto everyone who is conscious of Allah *the Almighty* He [always] grants a way out [of unhappiness], and provides for him in a manner beyond all expectation…’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3).

The people of sincerity say: ‘Your provision knows where you are better than you know where it is’. This means that it knows your address, whilst you do not know its address. This is borne out by the fact that you might seek out provision in a certain place and not find anything at all. You might see crops bloom forth splendidly in the fields, and hope that it will give a plentiful harvest, and build your hopes upon it, but then a storm or blight befalls it, and you do not harvest even enough to meet your barest needs.

We may take admonition from Ibn Udhayna (`Urwa)(1)(2) When things became difficult for him in Medina, they said to him, ‘You are friends with Hisham ibn ʿAbd Al-Malik, the Umayyad Caliph, so go to him, and he will be good to you.’ So, Ibn Udhayna indeed went to visit his friend, spurring his camel fiercely all the way to the Levant, and asked for an audience with him and was granted it. The Caliph welcomed him and asked how he was, and he replied, ‘I am in dire straits indeed.’ There were scholars in the court of the Caliph, and so he said to Ibn Udhayna: ‘Did you not say’ – for he was a poet:

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(1) The story of Ibn Udhayna with Hisham ibn ‘Abd Al-Malik, the Umayyad Caliph

(2) A poet and jurist who died in 130 A.H.

‘I know – and profligacy is not my nature –

That the provision which is mine will surely come to me’?

Ibn Udhayna then felt that the Caliph had dashed his hopes and thus said to him: ‘May Allah *the Almighty* reward you well, Commander of the Faithful, you have reminded me of what I had forgotten, and alerted me to that of which I had become heedless’, and he left. When he left the Caliph’s court, the Caliph thought about the matter and upbraided himself for treating his friend in this way when he had come to ask his favour, and for responding to him in such a way. He wanted to make amends for this error, so he sent an envoy to him bearing many gifts. But, whenever the Caliph’s representative reached the place where Ibn Udhayna had gone, he found that he had moved on to another place, until he arrived all the way to his house and knocked upon the door, and informed him that the Commander of the Faithful regretted what he had done, and sent him gifts and presents. Upon this, Ibn Udhayna added another line to his aforementioned poem, saying,

‘I seek it out, and such seeking wearies me,

And had I simply sat and waited for it, I would not be so weary!’

We also notice that this verse says: ‘…If something good comes their way, they are satisfied, but if they are tested…’ (*al-Hajj:* 11) that is, Allah *the Almighty* did not contrast ‘good’ with ‘bad’, but rather said ‘tested’ meaning a test because he might succeed in this trial so that it is not bad for him.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘they revert to their old’ (*al-Hajj:* 11), it completely turns things around so that after being an obedient servant he becomes disobedient, thereby ‘losing both this world and the next’ (*al-Hajj:* 11), for a man to lose his worship is a great loss which nothing can replace or supplant, and therefore He then says, ‘that is the clearest loss.’ (*al-Hajj:* 11) So, are there clear losses and unclear ones?! Indeed, some losses can be compensated, but the loss which cannot be compensated is the clear loss which remains with a man and never leaves him. This loss does not apply only to this world such that it could be replaced or borne, but it extends to the Hereafter as well, where loss cannot be replaced and torment cannot be borne. And hence comes the saying of Allah: ‘the clearest loss’ is the loss which entirely encompasses and overwhelms the one who experiences it. Therefore, we say to those who lose someone dear to them as the mother who loses her only child: 'If those you lost were beloved and dear to you, then sell them for a dear price and enter paradise on their account by bearing the loss patiently and hoping for compensation for it from Allah *the Almighty*'. Also, if you lost out on their account in this world, then do not lose out in the Hereafter; for if we slap our faces, tear out clothes, and object to what Allah *the Almighty* decreed for them, we will then lose out both in this world and in the Hereafter.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he, said: 'How wonderful the Muslim's affair is! His affair is all good: If good fortune befalls him, he gives thanks and it is good for him; and if bad fortune befalls him, he is patient and it is good for him. This is only true of the believer.'(1)

To be patient in trial and grateful in ease is one of the levels of faith and the stages of certainty in the believer's soul; it is a beginning step which is followed by other steps and ascending stages, according to the strength of one's faith.

Listen to the dialogue which took place between some ascetic scholars competing with one another to reach these higher stages of faith; they competed not for the sake of glory or fame, but for the sincere intention to reach higher levels of faith.

One of these men of sound faith asked another, 'What are the ascetics in your land like?' He replied, 'If good comes to us, we give thanks; and if evil comes to us, we have patience.' The old man laughed and said: 'And what of this? This is what dogs do! As for us, if good comes to us, we share it with others; and if evil comes to us, we give thanks.'

This is not bragging, it is competition, for both men were ascetics who followed the path to Allah *the Almighty* and knew that they would be accounted according to how they followed this path, so they tried to rise to the highest level of it. So, do not think that the final goal is to have patience in times of trial and to give thanks for graces, for this is only the beginning, and beyond it there are higher ranks and grades for those who seek to go higher, and to do their utmost to worship their Lord. Look at how one of these ascetics said to his companion, ‘Do you not yearn for Allah *the Almighty*?’, whereupon he said, ‘No;’ he said in astonishment, ‘And why is that?’ He replied, ‘only the one who is absent is yearned for – when did He become absent from me that I should yearn for Him?’ This shows us the levels of faith and the pure relationship between the servant and his Lord *the Almighty*.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (2299), Ahmad (v.24) and Ad-Darimi (ii. 318) on the authority of Suhayb Ar-Rumi Allah be pleased with him*

The True Lord then says, about the one who worships Allah *the Almighty* on the borderline of faith:

يَدْعُوا۟ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُۥ وَمَا لَا يَنفَعُهُۥ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلضَّلَٰلُ ٱلْبَعِيدُ ﴿١٢﴾

Instead of God, they call upon what can neither harm nor help them – that is straying far away [12]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 12)

The meaning of ‘neither harm’ (*al-Hajj:* 12) is: Can the idol which the disbeliever worships possibly harm him? No, the idol cannot harm him; he can only truly be harmed by the One whom he refuses to worship; he is harmed by the Lord which he denies, and the requital which he will be given for his actions. So, what does ‘neither harm’ mean here? It means that it will not harm him if he rejects it and refuses to worship it, and it will not benefit him if he worships it; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘that is straying faraway’. (*al-Hajj:* 12) Indeed, he is astray because a man should only worship and obey someone he hopes will benefit him in some way, or who he fears will harm him in some way.

I mentioned before what one of those endowed with deep knowledge said affirming: ‘Give your obedience to one whom you cannot do without.’ If we said this to our boys at school, and the educators recognised the importance of it, boys would not tempt one another to engage in bad behaviour; the boy would stop and think a thousand times about his Lord’s Directions, the advice of his mother and father, and how if he succumbed to temptation; he would abandon the directions of those who love him, fear for him and hope for the best for him, all for the sake of the temptation of a friend, though he knows nothing about him and about his character.

We must teach our children the principles of Islam so that the boy knows from his earliest age who loves him and who hates him, and who he is best off obeying.

We can observe in the verse that harm is mentioned before benefit: '…something that can neither harm nor benefit him'. (*al-Hajj:* 12) This is because preventing evil comes before seeking good because evil means the disruption of the natural balance of something. Benefit increases you and gives you something extra, whilst harm takes something away from you, and therefore it is better for you to remain as you are without either losing or gaining anything. So, if you stand before two things, one which brings benefit, and another which wards off harm, you must doubtlessly choose to ward off harm first, preventing evil before you seek good.

We gave an example before to illustrate this: Suppose that one man wants to throw an apple at you, whilst another wants to throw a stone at you at the same time; what do you do? Catch the apple, or protect yourself from the stone?! This is what it means when we say that preventing evil comes before seeking good.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَدۡعُواْ لَمَن ضَرُّهُۥٓ أَقۡرَبُ مِن نَّفۡعِهِۦۚ لَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡمَوۡلَىٰ وَلَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡعَشِيرُ ١٣

Or invoke one whose harm is closer than his help:
an evil master and an evil companion [13]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 13)

The previous verse affirmed that he calls upon what cannot harm him nor benefit him, and this verse affirms that what he calls upon is closer to harming him than benefiting him.

The word *aqrab* (closer) is a comparative form meaning that two things share an attribute but one of them has more of it than the other. If you say, 'So-and-so is handsomer than so-and-so', this means that they are both handsome, but one more than the other.

So, His words, 'Or invoke one whose harm is closer than his help…' (*al-Hajj:* 13) mean that there is some benefit which is likely, but the harm is more likely. This verse therefore seems on the surface to contradict the previous verse, but in reality there is no contradiction whatsoever, and we must understand this in the light of His words: '…Had it issued from any but Allah they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction!' (*an-Nisa': 82*)

There were priests for the idols which they used to worship who would rule over them and over those who worshipped them, and if the idolaters wanted anything they would say to the priests, 'Call upon Allah for us for such-and-such.' So, they possessed influence and temporal power, and they were the intermediaries between the idols and those who worshipped them, and as such they were given many good and beneficial things, and they would take everything which was offered to the idols.

Idols were a cause of benefit for their priests, but this benefit only applied to this worldly life, they would leave it when they died. So, the duration of the benefit was short, death might have come to one of them before he had a chance to benefit from what he had taken. Once death came, they had no faith, nor good deeds, nor repentance. This is the meaning of '…whose harm is closer than his help….' (*al-Hajj:* 13)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '…an evil master and an evil companion.' (*al-Hajj:* 13) The word *bi`s* is used to express blame, and means 'evil' and 'ugly'. A master is the one who is near to you, and one from whom you seek benefit because you only draw close to what benefits you. You might do this because he helps you in hard times and in straitened circumstances, succours you when you need succour; this is meaning of a true master. Or otherwise, you keep him near to you because he consoles you and gives you good company, although he is too weak to succour you; this is the 'companion'. The idols which they worshipped were vile patrons because they did not succour them in times of dire need; and they were vile companions because they did not console them or give them cheer in times of ease.

The True Lord then says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُدۡخِلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي
مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَفۡعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٤﴾

But God will admit those who believe and do good deeds to Gardens graced with flowing streams. God does whatever He wishes [14] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 14)

After speaking about the disbelievers, denizens of hell and those who worship Allah *the Almighty* on the margins of faith, it was inevitable that the True Lord would then give the contrast because the soul is then able to make a comparison and reflect on the matters which send a man to hell, and those matters which cause him to enter paradise; and this serves to make the point even clearer.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous: will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire.’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14) Then He says, ‘Let them, then, laugh a little – for they will weep a lot….’ (*at-Tawba:* 82)

Mentioning the blessing alone without its contrasting calamity does not give the desired effect, but when you contrast the blessing with the calamity, contrast the prevention of harm with the gaining of benefit, it serves to highlight the other. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185) If you have faith, then you shall not only be drawn away from the fire – although this is a blessing in itself – but you shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise.

Faith is an action of the heart and feelings which satisfy the soul; but it has requirements. If you attain to faith in Allah *the Almighty* your heart is satisfied that Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator, the Provider and the Necessary Being, then what does this faith require of you? Faith requires that you obey Allah’s commandments, for He is All Wise; that you trust His Power, for He is All-Capable; that you fear His Wrath, for He is All-Compelling; that you do not despair of His Grace, for He is the Giver of Grace; and that you do not feel safe from His Grasp, for His Grasp encompasses all.

You believe in all these things, so when He issues a commandment to you, you must call to mind the reasons for obeying this commandment, and trust that your Lord does not command you and forbid you for no reason but rather does so by the attributes of perfection which He possesses, or by virtue of His attributes of Majesty and Power. So, in all that you do, and in all that you take or you leave, you should take these attributes into mind.

Therefore, the verse combines mention of faith and righteous deeds: ‘Verily, Allah will admit those who have attained to faith and have done righteous deeds into gardens.…’ (*al-Hajj:* 14)

In the chapter of *al-`Asr*, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Consider the flight of time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself, unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works…’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-2); not only this, but He also says, ‘…and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity.’ (*al-’Asr:* 3) The enjoining of truth and patience in times of trial is part of the proper response to the call of faith, and one of its fruits because the believer will encounter, in the journey of life, many trails which might shake him, and he will encounter scorn and derision, and perhaps he will even undergo torture. So, he must grasp firmly to the truth, and share with his fellow believers in enjoining truth, and he must be patient, and share with his fellow believers in enjoining patience. This is because every man may have periods of weakness and laxity, so in times of trial the strong must counsel the weak.

Perhaps this situation might change at another time when a different trial emerges, and the one upon whom you enjoined patience today might enjoin it upon you tomorrow; and in this way, a faithful society becomes filled with mutual enjoining of truth and patience. So, counsel one another, for you shall encounter difficulties which will not affect everybody equally, but will affect some and not others; and if you are weak, then you will find that one of your brethren will counsel you: ‘Be patient, be strong, be cautious, and do not let this trial take you away from the truth or from patience’. These are the constituents of salvation to which the believers must cling: faith, righteous deeds, and the mutual enjoining of truth and patience.

He says, ‘Gardens graced with flowing streams…’ (*al-Hajj:* 14); the word gardens means crops, trees, plants, flowers and sweet fragrances. And all these things live on water, which is why He says, ‘with flowing streams…’ (*al-Hajj:* 14); the meaning of ‘…with flowing streams…’ (*al-Hajj:* 14) is that the water which belongs there does not come there from somewhere else such that it might be cut off; in another verse, He says, ‘through’, literally ‘under’, ‘which running waters flow’ (*at-Tawba:* 100). Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah does whatever He wishes.’ (*al-Hajj:* 14)

For nothing is beyond His Power; He does not require effort to perform His actions, as human beings do; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, “Be” – and it is.’ (*Ya Sin:* 82) If you carefully reflect on this verse, you will find that the thing which Allah *the Almighty* wants and commands to exist already exist, since He speaks to it, saying: ‘“Be” – and it is.’ (*Ya Sin:* 82) Therefore, it must already exist in reality, and the commandment here is only for it to manifest itself in the visible world.

The True Lord then says:

مَن كَانَ يَظُنُّ أَن لَّن يَنصُرَهُ ٱللَّهُ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ فَلۡيَمۡدُدۡ بِسَبَبٍ
إِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ ثُمَّ لۡيَقۡطَعۡ فَلۡيَنظُرۡ هَلۡ يُذۡهِبَنَّ كَيۡدُهُۥ مَا يَغِيظُ ١٥

Anyone who thinks that God will not support him in this world and the next should stretch a rope up to the sky, climb all the way up it, and see whether this strategy removes the cause of his anger [15] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 15)

The word ‘think’ means knowledge which is uncertain and unconfirmed. I spoke before about the ascription of things: there is a verdict given, and the thing for which it is given. If you say, ‘Zayd is hard-working’, you believe that the attribute of hard work befits Zayd; if your belief is correct, you will be able to offer evidence for it, saying, ‘The proof of this is that he is at the top of his class every year’.

But, if someone believes something without being able to give any proof for it, such as if he hears people saying that Zayd is hardworking and so he says the same thing, but has no proof that it is true, or such as the child who recites, 'Say, "He is the One Allah"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), this is something true which the boy believes, but he cannot offer any proof for it until he grows up and his intelligence matures.

From where did the child take this matter and believe in it? He took it from his guardians, whether his father or his teacher, and then imitated them. So, if this matter is factually true but you cannot prove it, then this is imitation; if you believe in something factual and you can prove it, then this is the highest level of knowledge; if you believe in something which is not factually true, then this is ignorance.

The ignorant person is the one who believes something which is not true; this is the one who causes problems for the whole world, who makes all those around him suffer; for if a person is uneducated and does not know anything at all and has a clean page unmarked by any notion, you can convince him of the truth and he will accept it from you, because his mind is empty and he will not oppose you.

As for the ignorant person who holds false beliefs, you must first convince him that his beliefs are mistaken so that he renounces them, and only then can you teach him what is correct.

If you have doubts about an ascription so that it seems to you likely to be true or false, this is called 'doubt'; so, you cannot be sure that Zayd is hardworking, nor that he is not. If it seems more likely to you that he is hard working, then this is 'supposition'. If it seems more likely to you that he is not hard working, then this is called 'fancy'.

So, the ascription of something is either knowledge, which is true and which you believe and can prove; or it is imitated knowledge, which is true and which you believe but you cannot prove; or it is ignorance, wherein you believe something which is not true; or else it is doubt; z*hann* (supposition), wherein you find it more likely to be true; or it is *wahm* (fancy), wherein you find it more likely to be false. And the word z*hann* (to suppose or to think) occurs when He says, 'Anyone who thinks that Allah will not support him….' (*al-Hajj:* 15)

That is, it occurs to his mind in passing that Allah *the Almighty* will not succour Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or indulges in this fancy – and no one would think this apart from the disbelievers because they hope for this in the battle between good and evil – whoever thinks such a thing should stop thinking it because it is impossible, and it will never happen.

And the disbelievers might have entertained this thought when they saw the beginnings of the victory of the faith and the signs that it would triumph, and this made them feel anguish, and nothing would give their minds peace except to entertain this thought.

Therefore Allah *the Almighty* casts their anguish back upon them, and says to them: 'Your anguish will continue because faith and its hosts will continue to be succoured, the only option you have left is to cast a rope up towards the sky, tie about your necks and hang yourselves; if you think that this plan will save you from your anguish, then go ahead and do it: '…should stretch a rope up to the sky, climb all the way up it and see whether this strategy removes the cause of his anger.' (*al-Hajj:* 15) But, what is anger? It is a kind of anger accompanied by grief and despair which you feel when you see something happening before your eyes which does not please you, yet at the same time you can do nothing to stop it.

The Arabic word for angry is *ghayzh*, a word based on the same lexical root which appears elsewhere in the Book of Allah *the Almighty;* it is used even for inanimate objects which have no sensation. Allah *the Almighty* says that the fire of hell is 'well-nigh bursting with fury…' (*al-Mulk:* 8), and 'When it shall face them from afar, they will hear its angry roar (*taghayyu*) and its hiss.' (*al-Furqan:* 12) It is as though the fire of hell feels furious rage at them, and is waiting to receive them.

And both the believer and the disbeliever can feel anguish, for when we see the disbelievers stubbornly oppose faith, scorn and mock it, we feel anguish, but Allah *the Almighty* relieves the anguish of our hearts, as He says, 'removes the cause of his anger' (*Yusuf:* 15). As for the anguish the disbelievers feel when they see the faith being succoured, it will remain in their hearts, for our Lord says to them: 'Be assured that Allah *the Almighty* did not send any messenger without undertaking to succour him; if any of you think otherwise, then nothing will relieve and abate your anguish except that you hang yourselves'. Therefore, the True Lord says to them in another verse: 'Say, "Perish in your rage!"' (*Al-'Imran:* 119) As for His words: 'should stretch a rope up to the sky' (*al-Hajj:* 15), they are to reach out means to unfurl something which was furled such as when He says, 'And the earth – We have spread it out wide…' (*al-Hijr:* 19), so that however far you travel the earth is always spread out, and it never ends, that is, it has no edge.

The word *sabab* is used in this context to refer to the rope such as the rope you use to draw water from a well. But can anyone stretch out a rope to the heavens? So, He connects this matter to something impossible as though He is saying to them: 'Even if you want to hang yourselves, you will be unable, and this anguish of yours will continue'. Or, the meaning of 'to the sky' is 'to the ceiling of the house', such as is the case with one who hangs himself from the ceiling.

I could also understand the word *sabab* to mean 'anything which gets you to the heavens', and any means by which you could ascend. In this case, the meaning would be: 'Use any means you like to reach the heavens and prevent the means of victory from reaching Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; for his succour comes from Allah, so prevent it if you can'. They are also unable to do this, so the anguish will remain in their hearts.

We may observe that we are speaking about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* although the verse does not mention him specifically but rather only has a third person singular pronoun 'him' when He says, 'Anyone who thinks that Allah will not support him…' (*al-Hajj:* 15). These words address those disbelievers who anguish over the successes of the faith; so when Allah *the Almighty* says 'succour him', who does this refer to? It refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Why? They say it is because when words are used in a general way, they refer to certain meanings: when you say 'sky', we know what it means; we know what 'heart' means; and we know what 'light' means. The names of things are either explicit, like 'Muhammad', '`Ali', '`Umar', 'earth' and 'sky', or they are pronouns which refer to these explicit nouns, such as: 'I', 'you', 'he' and 'they'. Pronouns are vague, and only the speaker designates their meaning: you say 'I', and other people also say 'I' and 'we'. So, the one who designates the meaning of the pronoun is the person who speaks it, and the easiest pronouns to understand are those which refer to the speaker himself, or the one to whom he speaks. And if the person in question is neither the speaker nor the listener, but is absent (the 'third person), then how is he to be identified? When you say 'he', 'she' or 'they', who is meant by these pronouns? How do you designate them? They say that something must come before it to indicate who it is such as if you say, 'A man came to see me and I received him well'; who did you receive? You received the man of whom you are speaking. 'A woman came to see me, and I received her well'. 'Such-and-such people came to see me, and I received them well'. So the pronoun is identified by the earlier mention of its subject.

But Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has not been mentioned here before the pronoun such as would assign it to him. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has not been mentioned, but reflect on the meaning: the discourse here is about succour in the battle between the side of faith, led by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the side of disbelief, led by these stubborn opponents; so the position here is clearly assigned, and the pronoun could not refer to anyone but to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.(1)

Another example of this is found Allah's words: 'Behold, from on high have We bestowed this….' (*al-Qadr:* 1) The pronoun here is clearly assigned to nothing other than the Quran; a pronoun is not clearly assigned unless the mind does not think of anything else except that one particular thing, in the context of the discourse.

Read the saying of Allah: 'Say, "He is the One Allah"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), and you will observe that the pronoun comes before the explicit noun, so that the reference is deferred; yet the mind does not think of anything other than Allah *the Almighty* so that if 'He' is said alone in this way, it could not mean anything other than Allah *the Almighty*.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Now if Allah were to take men [immediately] to task for all the evil that they do, He would not leave a single living creature upon its face…' (*an-Nahl:* 16) – upon what face? The mind does not think of anything else here other than the earth.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi affirms this opinion in his exegesis of this verse.*

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And see whether this strategy removes the cause of his anger…' (*al-Hajj:* 15), the question here is being asked by the One Who fully knows, and it is therefore a rhetorical question meant to make them acknowledge themselves that their anguish will remain as it is, and nothing will heal it, and that they will die whilst still in anguish, as He says elsewhere: 'Say, "Perish in your rage!"' (*Al-'Imran:* 119)

The True Lord then says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ ءَايَٰتٍۭ بَيِّنَٰتٍ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَهْدِى مَن يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾

In this way, We send the Quran down as clear
messages, and God guides whoever He will [16]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 16)

The saying of Allah, 'We send' (*al-Hajj:* 16) refers to the Quran because, as we have just said, the reference of this pronoun is obvious, and as long as this is the case it does not need to have been mentioned before. The notion 'bestowal from on high' implies the concept of height; so, if you see that this law which the Quran has brought is difficult for you, or comes between you and your desires, know that it has come down from One Who is higher than you, from Allah *the Almighty* not from an equal of yours whom you could correct or debate, asking the reasons for this commandment and that prohibition. As long as the commandment comes to you from Allah *the Almighty* then you must hear and obey, and not debate.

And we have a fine example of this resignation in Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*. When they said to him, 'Your companion claims that he was taken in one night from Mecca to Jerusalem and then up into the heavens', this man of great sincerity said nothing more than: 'If he said it, he spoke the truth.'(1) He did not debate since the matter had come from on high, from Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham, (Sira)*

We said before that if you visit a sick person and find all kinds of medicines at his side, and you ask him what they are all for, he will say, ‘The doctor prescribed them for me’. And if you then begin to criticise these medicines, listing their side effects, dangers and ingredients, you thereby involve yourself into something which is none of your business. Of course, the difference with this example is that doctors are capable of making mistakes when prescribing medicines, but nevertheless it serves to explain the situation – and Allah *the Almighty* is beyond compare. And the poet spoke the truth when he said:

Glory be to Him who inherits the doctor and his medicine,
And shows the patient how even doctors die!

So, the proof of every command is not that we know its wisdom; it is that we know the one who commands it.

The meaning of *ayat* (messages) is ‘wondrous signs’, the meaning of ‘clear’ is ‘plain to see’. I explained before that the word *ayat* can mean three things: the cosmological signs which prove Allah’s Omnipotence and strengthen faith in the soul, such as the night, the day, the sun and the moon; *ayat* also mean the miracles vouchsafed to the messengers to prove that they are really sent by Allah *the Almighty*; and finally, the word *ayat* means the verses of the Quran, bearing Allah’s laws.

Here, the word *ayat* in the verse ‘In this way, We send the Quran down as clear messages’ (*al-Hajj:* 16) could be applied to all of these meanings for the verses of the Quran contain cosmological wonders, and miracles, and lawgiving messages. He then says, ‘and Allah guides whoever He wills.’ (*al-Hajj:* 16) This is one of those things which confuse some people much such as: ‘…He lets go astray him that wills [to go astray] and guides aright him that wills…’ (*an-Nahl:* 93); other similar expressions are clung onto by those who are themselves not guided, who say, ‘Allah did not will to guide us, so what can we do? What have we done wrong’? This is not a rational objection because a rational objection requires that you mention one thing and its contrast, whilst these people only draw attention to one side of this matter and not the other which means that their objection is nothing but a vain excuse. When the misguided person says, ‘Allah destined that I be misguided, so what wrong have I done?' Why does he not also say, 'Allah willed for the obedient person to be guided, so why does He reward him'? So why did you leave aside the good, and discuss only the bad?

The one who reflects deeply on those messages which speak of Allah's will with regard to misguidance and guidance will find that He has made clear which people He wills to send astray and which people He wills to guide. Read His saying, '…behold, Allah does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the truth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) So, their denial of the truth came before their lack of guidance. He says, '…behold, Allah does not bestow His guidance upon such iniquitous folk' (*al-Munafiqun:* 6), and '…Verily, Allah does not grace with His guidance people who are given to evildoing!' (*al-Qasas:* 50)

He only guides those who believe in Him; as for those who choose disbelief and are pleased with it, Allah *the Almighty* sets a seal on their hearts so that faith does not enter it and disbelief does not leave it; they love this disbelief, so He gives them more of it, just as he increases the faith of the faithful: 'Just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance….' (*Muhammad:* 17)

Guidance here is direction towards what is good. I gave an example of this before – though Allah *the Almighty* is beyond compare. Suppose that you are following a road which is unknown to you, and you stop at a highway patrolman and ask him for directions, so he shows you which way to go and describes which route you should follow. But do his directions oblige you to follow the route he has described? Of course, you are free to follow it or go a different way. If you show appreciation for the patrolman's favour to you, and thank him for it, he might sense that you are a good person, and help you out himself with the obstacles on the road, and he might get in the car with you to accompany you through a dangerous area where he fears you might run into trouble. This is the meaning of 'Just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in Allah- consciousness.' (*Muhammad:* 17) But if you treat this man disrespectfully, or accuse him of not knowing the road properly, he will leave you to your own devices, not even give you any advice.

In the same way, the True Lord directed both the believer and the disbeliever towards goodness, and the believer was content with Allah *the Almighty* and accepted His commandments and prohibitions, and praised Allah *the Almighty* for this blessing, so He increased his faith and helped him with the difficulties of worship, and gave him a guiding light to follow. As for the disbeliever, He leaves him to sink into the darkness of his disbelief and to stumble through the mazes of blindness and misguidance.

The True Lord then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُواْ وَٱلصَّٰبِـِٔينَ وَٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ وَٱلۡمَجُوسَ وَٱلَّذِينَ أَشۡرَكُوٓاْ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَفۡصِلُ بَيۡنَهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ شَهِيدٌ ﴿١٧﴾

As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith,
the *Sabi'ans*, the Christians, the *Magians*, and the idolaters,
God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection;
God witnesses all things [17] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 17)

Allah *the Almighty* speaks of six factions saying of them: '…Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection; Allah witnesses all things.' (*al-Hajj:* 17), the fact that He will decide between them implies that there is a difference and battle raging between them. And if you seek out the other verses which mention these factions, you will find that there are two verses, one in the chapter of *al-Baqara* and the other in the chapter of *al-Ma`ida*.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians and the *Sabi'ans* – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Lord; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 62) In *al-Ma`ida*, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the *Sabi'ans* before the Christians, and puts the word in the nominative case (*sabi`un*) instead of the accusative (*sabi`un*), saying, 'For, verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the *Sabi'ans*, and the Christians – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 69)

He says, ‘As for the believers’ (*al-Hajj:* 17), (i.e. in Prophet Muhammad), ‘those who follow the Jewish…’ (*al-Hajj:* 17) means that Jews and Christians that both of whom came before Islam. As for the *Sabi'ans*, they were a group who used to follow the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* then turned to star-worship, so were called *sabi`a* ‘those who change their religion’ because of how they left the true religion. As for the ‘*Magians*’, they were fire-worshippers, ‘…and the idolaters…’ (*al-Hajj:* 17) are the idolaters who worship idols and false gods.

As for the difference in whether the *Sabi'ans* or Christians are mentioned first, they say that it is because the Christians are a large and well-known faction with a prophet, whilst the *Sabi'ans* were a faction who abandoned their prophet and disobeyed him and invented a different doctrine from his; so, they were a minority, but they came before the Christians chronologically. So, when He acknowledges the chronological order, He says, ‘and the *Sabi'ans*, and the Christians’ (*al-Hajj:* 17), whilst when He acknowledges the large number of adherents and the renown, He says, ‘and the Christians, and the *Sabi'ans*’. (*al-Baqara:* 62) So, the word order in both cases exists for a specific reason.

As for His saying ‘the *Sabi'ans*’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 69) in the nominative case, when it would usually be in the accusative case because it is in a list of nouns which follow the word *inna* (verily), which makes the nouns it precedes accusative – so why is this word made nominative in the midst of a list of accusative nouns?

They say that a nominative can only intrude on a list of accusative nouns if it marks the end of one sentence and the beginning of another; so, it is as though He is saying: ‘Verily, those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians – and the *Sabi'ans*, too’. So, a whole new sentence is being added here so that it is deferred in the meaning and brought forward in the actual wording; therefore, it combines the two different orders in one single verse.

But how do differences between religions originate? The difference originates by there being people who believe in Allah *the Almighty* and believe in the prophet who delivers the message of Allah *the Almighty,* but they then differ amongst themselves about certain things, just like the difference we see between the Mu`tazilite sect and the Sunnis, or between the Jabri sect and the

Qadari sect: one group affirms the divine attributes and another group denies them; and one group says that man has no free will and is destined to do all he does, whilst another group says that he has free will.

And differences might arise between religions concerning prophet hood, for religious people might believe in the All-Powerful Allah but differ about prophets such as Musa (Moses), `Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them* even though they are all true prophets. Or the difference might arise because of claims such as those who claim to be prophets, like those who worship fire or Buddha, for example.

So, this verse mentions these six factions; and what is the judgement of them all, now that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been sent? We say, 'As for the idolaters who worship idols and those who worship false prophets, they are disbelievers and lost; as for the Jews and Christians who believe in an All-Powerful Allah and in true prophet hood, their position after the appearance of Islam is that Allah made a final clean slate for all these religions: in the case of those who were Jews or Christians before Islam appeared, Allah offered them a clean slate in the form of Islam, and if they truly adhered to the primordial faith in Allah *the Almighty,* they had to start anew as believers and Muslims. That is why He then says, '…all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Lord; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 62)

After Islam appeared, all of these groups – the Jews, Christians, Magians and idolaters – were given a new life and a chance to turn over a new leaf and be born again, for they were all obliged to embrace faith in Allah *the Almighty* and His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as though Islam is a spiritual occasion which effaces all that has gone before it, Allah *the Almighty* forgives all that was in the past.

When the True Lord speaks about the generation before the prophet hood of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He says, 'And Lo, Allah accepted, through the prophets, this solemn pledge (from the followers of earlier revelation), "If, after all the revelation and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession, you must believe in him and succour him." "Do you – said He – "acknowledge and accept My bond on this condition?" They answered, "We do acknowledge it." He said, "Then bear witness [thereto], and I shall be your witness."' (*Al-'Imran:* 81)

Therefore both Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* told their followers about Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave glad tidings of him, which is proved by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* says, '…whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it…' (*al-Baqara:* 89); this refers to the Jews and Christians.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came as a mercy to the worlds to gather all the religions in Islam, which added to them those things which would be required by the affairs of life and the developments of time until the Last Hour.

Islam came as a clean slate for those people, giving them the opportunity to renew their lives with faith and righteous deeds after which they would receive their reward in full, from their Lord and their previous religions, would not tarnish them, nor would their false and corrupt beliefs.

As for if differences that arose concerning matters of prophet hood, as is the case in the verse we are currently examining: 'Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed, Allah is over all things a Witness.' (*al-Hajj:* 17) The meaning of this 'decision' is that we will be shown who is right and who is wrong. Thus, these verses combine the different situations of agreement and disagreement, and show what the requital of each shall be.

And when decisions are made between things, this refers either to their placement or their requital; and they say that of course the judgement passed over them, stating who is right and who is wrong, will lead to their being placed in different places, as well as being given different requitals.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Allah witnesses all things' (*al-Hajj:* 17) because He is the Judge who makes the final decision between His servants. A judge requires either proofs or witnesses; these witnesses must be just; justice of testimony can only be assured by means of religion which prevents man from straying from the truth. If the One to judge here is Allah *the Almighty,* no proofs or witnesses are required, for His Knowledge encompasses all things and not a single atom in the heavens or the earth escapes Him.

It is amazing that Allah’s judgement and decision encompass all forms of authority: legislative, judicial and executive; for His decree cannot be delayed or outsmarted by any stratagems; no rights are ever violated by His judgements, as is the case in the courts of this world.

As for human judgements, there is a separation therein of legislative, judicial, and executive bodies, and therefore a verdict might be given, but its execution might be delayed. As for Allah’s judgement, it is executed immediately and nothing can delay it.

So, the matter does not proceed in that way, but rather, it is instantly reckoned, either for you or against you.

The True Lord then says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَسۡجُدُۤ لَهُۥ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَن فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱلشَّمۡسُ وَٱلۡقَمَرُ
وَٱلنُّجُومُ وَٱلۡجِبَالُ وَٱلشَّجَرُ وَٱلدَّوَآبُّ وَكَثِيرٞ مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِۖ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيۡهِ
ٱلۡعَذَابُۗ وَمَن يُهِنِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِن مُّكۡرِمٍۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَفۡعَلُ مَا يَشَآءُ ۩ ﴿١٨﴾

Do you not realize [Prophet] that everything in the heavens and earth submits to God: the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the animals? So do many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved. Anyone disgraced by God will have no one to honour him: God does whatever He will [18] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 18)

Allah *the Almighty* says ‘*alam tara*’ (do you not see), but meaningfully means ‘Do you not realise…’ because the prostration of these things is not the same as the prostration which we ourselves do, but rather, every kind of being in the universe has its own way of prostrating.

We spoke before about the genera of being in the universe saying that they are four in number: the lowest is minerals; then comes plants, which are higher in that they have growth and motion; then comes animals which are higher in that they have sensation; and then comes human beings who are higher in that they have the capacity to think and choose between alternatives.

Each one of these genera serves those which are higher than them; this circle ends in the fact that everything in the universe has been subdued by Allah *the Almighty* to serve man. A Qudsi Hadith says, ‘O Son of Adam! I created all things for you, and I created you for Me; so, do not let what was made for you distract you from what you were made for.’ So, man should have thought about this distinction which his Lord gave to him, realised that everything in the world, however small, has a purpose to fulfil and a role to play. O man, since you are the master of this universe, you must also have a purpose and a role to play in life. You are not a lesser being than these things which Allah *the Almighty* has subdued for you; otherwise, you would become lower than they are.

If the purpose of all other beings is to serve you because you are higher than they are, then seek your purpose from one who is higher than you are. If a messenger comes to you from One Who is higher than you to tell you what this purpose is, you should thank him because he has alerted you to what you should be doing and to whom you should always be connected. Therefore, you should never turn away from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he explains many things to you which are subjects of rational enquiry.

Man should have thought about these beings which serve him: Do you have any power over them? They have served you since you were a child, before you ever issued a command to them and before you had the power to command or utilise these things. You should have been aware of the presence of a power which is higher than you and these things, the power which subdued the entire universe for your service; this is a natural enquiry which must surely take place.

These things which are in your service have never rebelled against you and never refused to serve you. Look at the sun, the moon, and so on: has the sun ever said that these people do not deserve my favour, so I shall not rise upon them today? Has the earth ever rebelled against those who farm it? Has the wind ever refused to blow? These beings are all stronger than you are, and you have no power over them and you could never subdue them; they are in Allah’s grasp, subdued for you by His command because they are subdued; they never refuse to perform their function.

As for man, he causes corruption, and refuses to obey by means of the free will which Allah has given him.

Some people say that the prostration of these beings is only a symbol of how they indicate Allah's Existence, not really a prostration, but this is contradicted by Allah's words, '…Each [of them] knows indeed how to pray unto Him and to glorify Him…' (*an-Nur:* 41). Every being, no matter how small, has its own way of praying, glorifying and prostrating, which suits its nature. If you reflect on how man prostrates by placing his forehead on the ground, you will find that people do it differently according to circumstance, yet they are all the same species. The prostration of the healthy person is not the same as that of the sick person, who might prostrate in his bed, or sitting on a chair, or even only with a movement of his eyes or his fingers to indicate his prostration; and if he cannot even do this, he prostrates by imagining that with his mind. If prostration differs in this way even among the members of a single species, according to his strength and his ability, then why do you find it far-fetched that every kind of being might have its own special way of prostrating which suits its nature?

If this is how prostration is acted by man, then are we waiting to see the sun or the moon prostrate? As long as the True Lord said that they prostrate, then we must believe that they prostrate in a way known only to their Creator.

By Allah, if a sick man prayed on a chair or in his bed before your eyes, would you know that he is prostrating? So how can we hope to know how these beings prostrate?

One of the meanings of prostration is submission and obedience, so if some people find it far-fetched that these beings could truly prostrate, let them consider this prostration to mean submission and obedience, as we say about a proud man: He came forth in prostration meaning that he was humble and submissive. This is reflected by Allah's words: 'And He [it is who] applied His design to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke; and He [it is who] said to them and to the earth, "Come [into being], both of you, willingly or unwillingly!" – to which both responded, "We do come in obedience."' (*Fussilat:* 11)

So, you can understand this prostration in any way you like; you will not go beyond His Intention. Out of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* made these creatures obedient to His Will; they never contradict it or contravene it as He says, 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

I shall move on now and relate some of the dialogues of those spiritual wayfarers who have attained knowledge of Allah *the Almighty* by His Grace, who have experienced the sweetness of getting close to Him, who would engage in dialogue and competition, not for the sake of pride, but with the intention of moving ever closer to Allah *the Almighty*.

Two were sitting together; one of them had phlegm in his mouth which he wanted to spit out; he showed signs of confusion, looking here and there, so his companion said to him, 'Spit it out, and relax.' He said, 'How can I, when every time I want to spit it out I hear the earth glorifying Allah *the Almighty*; I am ashamed to spit it upon one who glorifies.' So the other man – it seems that he had attained a higher rank than him – affected to spit on the floor and said: 'One glorifier atop another.'

Hence, the people with deep knowledge of Allah *the Almighty* perceive this glorification and acknowledge it; according to the Knowledge of Allah *the Almighty* perception and understanding which you possess, you may become cognisant of these spiritual matters.

When the True Lord says, 'Do you not realise [Prophet] that everything in the heavens and Earth submits to Allah…' (*al-Hajj:* 18), it is clear that those in the heavens are the angels, and we are not of them, but we are the people of the earth, therefore we are included in this prostration and part of it, so why does Allah *the Almighty* then say, 'So do many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved' (*al-Hajj:* 18)?

The statement 'So do many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved' indicates that we are subdued, compelled and prostrate like the other beings in the universe, but that we also have free will in some things. The disbeliever becomes accustomed to rebelling against his Lord: He commands him to believe, but he disbelieves; He commands him to obey, but he disobeys; but why does he not rebel in all things? Why does he not refuse to become ill when Allah *the Almighty* makes him ill? Why does he not refuse to die when death comes to him? So, man acquiesces to Allah's commands just like the trees, stones and animals do; it is the sphere of free will which causes this division to exist: many men believe, and many others will inevitably have to suffer.

But why did Allah *the Almighty* not make all His creatures subdue to His will? Scholars say it is because the attribute of subdual, the impossibility of defying Allah's Will affirms His Omnipotent Power over all things, but it does not affirm His Ability to be loved, for love requires free will, that is, feeling freedom to choose whether to believe or disbelieve and then to choose belief, that they be free and able to disobey but then choose to obey.

Suppose you have two slaves, you chain one of them to you whilst leaving the other one free. If you call them both and they answer you, then which one of them is more obedient to you: the one who is forced and compelled, or the one who is free? So, subdual and compulsion affirm His Omnipotent Power, and free will affirms His love.

The difference which occurred between people is that many of them attained to faith, while many others earned suffering for themselves. Why did this difference occur?! It comes from the free will which Allah created in you; so those who wish may believe, or disbelieve. It is therefore as though the disbelief of the disbeliever and his free will only exist because Allah *the Almighty* has subdued him to have free will; so even in his free will, he is subdued.

His statement 'So do many human beings' means by their own free will; it might have been expected that in contrast He would say, 'Whereas a few of them; but those who believe are many, and those who disbelieve are also many'.

The meaning of 'though for many others punishment is well deserved' (*al-Hajj:* 18) is that this is something unavoidable so that the believer and disbeliever are not treated alike: 'Or should We, perchance, treat those who surrender themselves unto Us as [We would treat] those who remain lost in sin?' (*al-Qalam:* 35) These people must be punished, for the truth requires this.

Then He says, ‘Anyone disgraced by Allah will have no one to honour him: Allah does whatever He wills.’ (*al-Hajj:* 18) This is because if you deserve punishment from someone who is equal to you, then someone else who is stronger than him might come and prevent him, or an intercessor might come and intercede for you. It is as though the True Lord is telling them to despair of any salvation from His punishment, for no one could prevent him.

If Allah *the Almighty* wants to disgrace someone, then no one can honour him, neither by succouring him nor by interceding for him. It means then: ‘Anyone disgraced by Allah’ (*al-Hajj:* 18) (disgraces him by the suffering which he will inevitably have to endure after earning it for himself) ‘…will have no one to honour him…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18). Likewise he will have none to restore his pride because the only way to do this would be to overcome Allah *the Almighty* Himself, and this is impossible, or to intercede for him before Allah *the Almighty* no one can intercede before Allah *the Almighty* save with His leave.

Therefore, we say that the True Lord has absolute power over His creatures, no one has any power over Him; that is, no one can say to Allah *the Almighty:* This is mine, not Yours. Therefore, He ends the verse by saying, ‘…Allah does whatever He wills.’ Then, the True Lord then says:

هَٰذَانِ خَصْمَانِ ٱخْتَصَمُوا۟ فِى رَبِّهِمْ ۖ فَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ قُطِّعَتْ لَهُمْ
ثِيَابٌ مِّن نَّارٍ يُصَبُّ مِن فَوْقِ رُءُوسِهِمُ ٱلْحَمِيمُ ﴿١٩﴾

These two kinds of people disagree about their Lord.
Garments of fire will be tailored for those who disbelieve;
scalding water will be poured over their heads [19]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 19)

The word *khasm* (contender or rival) is one of those Arabic words which can be used for the singular, dual and plural, and for the masculine and feminine, such as when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And yet, has the story of the litigants (*khasm*) come within your ken – [the story of the two] who surmounted the walls of the sanctuary [in which Dawud (David) prayed]?’ (*Sad:* 21) And He says, ‘[We are but] two litigants. One of us has wronged the other…’ (*Sad:* 22).

The meaning of His words: ‘These two kinds of people disagree…’ (*al-Hajj:* 19) refers to His words: ‘many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18).

Contention requires that a decision be made concerning those who contend and a decision requires witnesses; but if the decision comes from Allah *the Almighty* then no witnesses are required, for ‘…none can bear witness as Allah does.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 79)

If He brings forth witnesses from their own selves, it is only to present them with proof against them so that they will acknowledge the justice of their fate, ‘And they will ask their skins, “Why did you bear witness against us?” – [and] they will reply “Allah who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]…”’ (*Fussilat:* 21). If you say, ‘How can the body parts testify against their owners on the Day of Resurrection when they were the ones who did the deeds’? We say, ‘There is a difference between an act which I intend and an act which I do whilst disliking it’. For example – and Allah *the Almighty* is beyond compare – the military general issues orders to his troops, they must obey him even if his orders are mistakes; once they return to the commander-in-chief, they tell him what their general did; for the commander-in-chief gave the general authority over them, obliged them to obey him and follow his orders.

The Creator *Glorified is He* has given man authority over his body parts, therefore the action is ordained by man’s will, whilst the body parts merely carry the action out. When you want to stand up, for example, by simply willing to do this you find yourself standing without thinking about the motion of standing or the muscles which move to cause this action to occur, although it is a complex action carried out by a combination of will, the mind, the nerves and the muscles; you are not consciously aware of any of this – when you stood, did you not command the body parts to move, then, they moved? If your limbs obey you and respond to your mere will, then is it not all the more likely that, as creations of Allah *the Almighty* they will respond to Allah’s will?

So, the basis of action is not the limbs, but the will, which is proved by the fact that if Allah *the Almighty* wants to disable a body part, he disables the commanding will and cuts it off from the body part so that it is paralysed and does not move, if the person wants to move it thereafter he cannot; Why?! It is because he does not know the specific parts which come together to move this body part. If you asked the most knowledgeable of kinaesthetic scientists, or those who manufacture robots, what the exact motions are which take place in the human body when it stands from a reclining or seated position, no one will be able to describe for you exactly what goes on inside the body during this action.

If you look at a mechanical digger, for example, which performs an action very similar to humans, you will find that even a boy can control it by pushing a few buttons; he can describe for you every action which it performs and which devices are involved in each action. So, tell me, by Allah: which button do you press to move your hand or your arm? And which button moves your eyes, your tongue, or your foot? It is nothing but your will, and your body responds however you like; for Allah *the Almighty* created you and gave your will complete control over your body. So do not find it far-fetched that these creations of Allah *the Almighty* will respond when He wills them to do something.

Even the suffering of the Hereafter will not be for these body parts, but will be for the conscious soul. This is proved by the fact that when a man experiences severe pain, he can only find relief from it in sleep, when he wakes up the pain returns. So, it is the soul that feels pain and suffering, not the body.

The True Lord is the One Who will decide between these two contrary kinds of men, as He says in another verse, '…verily, Allah will decide between them on Resurrection Day…' (*al-Hajj:* 17).

`Ali(1) *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I shall be the first to kneel before Allah on the Day of Resurrection to receive His decision; with me shall be `Ubayda ibn Al-Harith and Hamza ibn `Abd al-Muttalib, all of us on one side, and on the other side shall be `Utba ibn Rabi`a, Shayba ibn Rabi`a and Al-Walid ibn `Utba.(2) Why? Because the first battle of Islam took place between these people, and the first contention which occurred in its history. At the Battle of *Badr*, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent certain people out to engage in single combat, for the Arab custom at battles was to send out champions from each side to engage in single combat, rather than making everyone suffer by fighting all at once, thereby exposing the lives of all to peril.

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(1) `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* calling for fencing in order to stop the bloodshed and the emergence of `Amr ibn Al-`As *Allah be pleased with him* to fight him instead.

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (4744); Qays ibn `Abbad said that the verse (al-Hajj: 19) was revealed in regard to this; and these men were the champions who fought in single combat at the Battle of Badr.*

Another example of this is what occurred between `Ali and Mua`wiya at the Battle of Siffin, when `Ali said to Mua`wiya: Come out and fight me, Mua`wiya; if you defeat me, you shall be Caliph, if I defeat you, then acknowledge that I am the rightful Caliph. `Amr ibn al-`As, who was on the side of Mu`awiya, said, ‘O Mu’awiya, by Allah `Ali has been fair to you and this will spare the blood of the Muslims on both sides. So, Mu`awiya looked at `Amr and said, ‘By Allah, `Amr, all you want is that I will go to fight him and he will slay me, so that you can take command after I am gone! As long as you have said what you have said, no one shall go to fight him save you – so go to him!’ So `Amr *Allah be pleased with him* went out to fight `Ali, but was `Amr *Allah be pleased with him* anything like as valiant or strong as `Ali? `Ali fought `Amr fiercely, when `Amr felt that `Ali was about to strike him a killing blow, he resorted to a trick, and used his cunning to get `Ali off him; he exposed his private parts, knowing fully that `Ali would be too pious to look at his revealed nakedness; and indeed `Ali did leave him alone and spare him, and `Amr survived because of this trick.(1)

A poet spoke of this event by saying:

There is no good in warding off ruin with a lowly act,
As `Amr warded it off one day, with his nakedness

Also, Abu Firas Al-Hamadani, composed a poem which begins:

I see you unable to weep and always patient;
Does passion not hold any sway over you?
‘Indeed, I am filled with longing and grief,
But a man like me never reveals a secret.’

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(1) *Ibn Kathir, (Al-Bidaya Wa-An-Nihaya)*

And in this poem, he also says:

We are people who have no middle position:
We shall command the world, or else go to our graves.

Let us return to the Battle of Badr where the disbelievers objected when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent out some men of the Helpers saying, ‘These men are unknown to us; we want to be challenged by our own equal, men of Quraysh.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent out to them `Ali, Hamza and `Ubayda ibn al-Harith ibn `Abd al-Muttalib. The idolaters sent out `Utba, Shayba and al-Walid to face them; the believers triumphed, while the idolaters were vanquished.(1) This was the day about which Allah *the Almighty* said, ‘For, indeed, Allah did succour you at Badr, when you were utterly weak. Remain, then, conscious of Allah, so that you might have cause to be grateful.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 123) So Badr represented a spiritual judgement between these two contenders, and there will be another judgement in the Hereafter, of which `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘I shall be the first to kneel before Allah *the Almighty* on the Day of Resurrection to receive His decision.’

The meaning of ‘These two kinds of people disagree about their Lord.’ (*al-Hajj:* 18) appears in their difference concerning their Lord: some of them believe in the existence of Allah *the Almighty* and others deny it; one group affirm that He has attributes, where another group deny these attributes. That is, they are divided by faith and unbelief. Then the decision will be proclaimed ‘Garments of fire will be tailored for those who disbelieve; scalding water will be poured over their heads’ (*al-Hajj:* 19).

His saying, ‘Garments of fire shall be cut out for them’ (*al-Hajj:* 19) is as though the fire will be apportioned to them according to their bodily forms, in terms of its torment and its fierceness; so there will be no space therein to decrease its severity, nor will it be loose upon them.

And then ‘scalding water will be poured over their heads’ (*al-Hajj:* 19), the Arabic word *hamim* means water which is as hot as it can be, so hot that it actually burns; and you can imagine how hot water boiled by our Lord would be.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham, (Sira)*

So Allah *the Almighty* combines all manner of torment for them because man wears clothes to conceal his nakedness and protect him from heat and cold, so they cover the whole body with their benefit; and He says, ‘And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah’s blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought.’ (*an-Nahl:* 112)

They will not be made to taste the clothing, but something else; the purpose of the clothing is to make this misery all encompassing and comprehensive so that the entire body will taste it, and the suffering will be especially severe.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يُصۡهَرُ بِهِۦ مَا فِي بُطُونِهِمۡ وَٱلۡجُلُودُ ﴿٢٠﴾

Melting their insides as well as their skins [20]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 20)

We said that water will be as hot as it can be; it does not burn at the temperature known to us, but rather, its Lord boils it to a temperature which no one could endure. If you pour boiling water on a human body, it scolds the skin on the outside but it does not reach the inside; as for this water, when it is poured on them it will cause all that is in their bodies to melt away first, then their skin afterwards. Lord, save us from Your punishment on the Day when you resurrect your servants!

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَهُم مَّقَٰمِعُ مِنۡ حَدِيدٖ ﴿٢١﴾

There will be iron crooks to restrain them [21]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 21)

The word for ‘crooks’ here is *maqami`*; now a crook is the whip you use to spur on a horse and make it obey you, or the person you punish; but these ones will be made of iron. This indicates that they will be humiliated and broken in spirit, as well as tormented. The True Lord then tells us the purpose of these crooks:

كُلَّمَآ أَرَادُوٓاْ أَن يَخۡرُجُواْ مِنۡهَا مِنۡ غَمٍّ أُعِيدُواْ فِيهَا وَذُوقُواْ عَذَابَ ٱلۡحَرِيقِ ٢٢

Whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape, they will be pushed back in and told, 'Taste the suffering of the Fire' [22]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 22)

The True Lord depicts the condition of the denizens of hell and their suffering and despair that it will never be lessened for them. If they try to get out of the anguish of this suffering, these grips will come and return them to it once more. A man might get used to a certain kind of suffering so that it becomes trifling for him, such as a prisoner who is whipped on the back, and after a few whippings he finds that he no longer feels it any more. The Arabian poet Al-Mutanabbi(1) described this well when he said:

Time flung woe after woe at me, until
It was as though I dwelt in a nest of arrows;
And every time an arrow hit me,
One arrowhead would break on another.

But how the denizens of hell suffering could be lightened, when the True Lord has said, 'every time their skins are burnt off We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering' (*an-Nisa': 56*)?

So, when they are returned, they will be made to despair after having imagined that they might find salvation; despair after hope, is severely hard on the soul. Therefore, they say, there is nothing worse than bridling despair after unbridled hope.' Another example of this is when He says, 'and if they beg for water, they will be given water' (*al-Kahf:* 29). When they hear that they will be given water, they will feel hope and joy; then despair will come to them when they hear: '…water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces' (*al-Kahf:* 29), and He says, 'Taste suffering through fire [to the full' (*al-Hajj:* 22). The word *hariq* means the doer of burning act.

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(1) A famous Arabic poet of the third century A. H

After such a number of verses speaking about the disbelievers and the suffering which awaits them, it was inevitable that He would speak about the contrary state, about the believers, so that the mind would make a comparison between this and that, the believer would thus increase his hold upon faith and his hatred of unbelief, likewise the disbeliever would be reminded of what the outcome of his disbelief will be, hence renounce it and embrace faith. In this way, everybody benefits from this contrast. It is as though by giving us these contrasts in the verses of the Quran, Allah has given us the means of salvation and mercy.

The True Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُدۡخِلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ
يُحَلَّوۡنَ فِيهَا مِنۡ أَسَاوِرَ مِن ذَهَبٖ وَلُؤۡلُؤٗاۖ وَلِبَاسُهُمۡ فِيهَا حَرِيرٞ ٢٣

But God will admit those who believe and do good deeds to Gardens graced with flowing streams; there they will be adorned with golden bracelets and pearls; there they will have silken garments [23] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 23)

The True Lord makes clear here what He has readied for His believing servants. Dwellings: ‘Gardens graced with flowing streams…’ (*al-Hajj:* 23), ornaments: ‘there they will be adorned with golden bracelets and pearls’ (*al-Hajj:* 23) and clothing: ‘there they will have silken garments.’ (*al-Hajj:* 23) So He will combine for them the blessings of dwellings, ornaments, and clothing. In the Hereafter, men will enjoy silk and gold, which are forbidden for them in this world. Women might object here, saying: what bliss is there for us in things which we enjoy even in this worldly life, namely gold and silk? Indeed, you enjoy gold and silk in this worldly life, but in the Hereafter it will be a different kind, a complete pleasure which is not disturbed by anything. A woman’s clothes there will be pure and unruffled, and it will remain with her and no one will take it, she will not need to alter it or sell it, because it will be renewed in her hand every day, and will have a different form and style from what it had before.(1) We said this before when we looked at what Allah *the Almighty* says about the denizens of paradise: ‘They will say, “It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance”…’ (*al-Baqara:* 23).

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(1) *Ka`b Al-Ahbar said, ‘Allah has an angel which, from the day it was created, makes clothes for the denizens of paradise, and will continue to do so until the Last Hour. If a single=*

They will think that the foods and fruits of paradise are the same as what they ate before, so their Lord will make it clear to them that they are not like the fruits of this world: ‘…for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]…’ (*al-Baqara:* 23). That is, they will be different kinds of the same sort.

The True Lord then says:

وَهُدُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱلطَّيِّبِ مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡلِ وَهُدُوٓاْ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطِ ٱلۡحَمِيدِ ﴿٢٤﴾

They were guided to good speech and to the path of the One Worthy of all Praise [24] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 24)

As for the saying of Allah, ‘They were guided’ (*al-Hajj:* 24), it means that Allah *the Almighty* guided them; so the One Who guided them to the means of entering paradise to enjoy its dwellings, ornaments and clothing, also guides them now in paradise and shows them how to give thanks to Allah *the Almighty* for His blessings; this is the meaning of ‘They were guided to good speech…’ (*al-Hajj:* 24); this best of tenets is summarised in other verses, such as His words: ‘…All praise is due to Allah who has made His promise to us come true…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 74), and: ‘All praise is due to Allah who has caused all sorrow to leave us: for, verily, our Lord is indeed much forgiving, ever responsive to gratitude. He Who, out of His bounty, has made us alight in this abode of life enduring.’ (*Fatir:* 34-35)

When the denizens of paradise enter therein and encounter its enduring bliss, they will find nothing to say but, ‘All praise is due to Allah’, as the True Lord says of them, ‘…And their call will close with [the words] “All praise is due to Allah the Lord of all the worlds!”’ (*Yunus:* 10) Also, some scholars say(1) that ‘the best of all tenets’ means the tenet of monotheism, ‘There is no

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= *garment of paradise came to earth, its light would outshine the sun; so, do not ask anything else about the clothing of the denizens of paradise.’ Ibn Al-Qayyim, (Hadi Al-Arwah)*

(1) This was the opinion of Ibn `Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* according to Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis.

deity but Allah', for the love they had for this tenet is what brought them into paradise. The meaning of 'the best of all tenets', literally 'the best of all words' can encompass all goodly words, as He says elsewhere: 'Are you not aware how Allah sets forth the parable of a good word? [It is] like a good tree, firmly rooted, [reaching out] with its branches towards the sky.' (*Ibrahim:* 24)

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…and to the path of the One Worthy of all Praise.' (*al-Hajj:* 24) That is, Allah *the Almighty* guided them to the road which leads to paradise, or He guided them to paradise itself, as He says in another verse: '…Allah will indeed not forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road, but the road that leads to hell…' (*an-Nisa':* 168-169).

The True Lord then says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡمَسۡجِدِ ٱلۡحَرَامِ ٱلَّذِي جَعَلۡنَٰهُ لِلنَّاسِ
سَوَآءً ٱلۡعَٰكِفُ فِيهِ وَٱلۡبَادِۚ وَمَن يُرِدۡ فِيهِ بِإِلۡحَادِۭ بِظُلۡمٖ نُّذِقۡهُ مِنۡ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٖ ﴿٢٥﴾

As for the disbelievers, who bar others from God's path and from the Sacred Mosque – which We made for all people, residents and visitors alike – and who try to violate it with wrongdoing, We shall make them taste a painful punishment [25] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 25)

The verses have now moved to another subject. 'As for the disbelievers, who bar…' (*al-Hajj:* 25); the saying of Allah '*alladhina kafaru*' (those who have disbelieved) is used in the perfect tense because they have indeed committed disbelief, and then 'bar' is in the imperfect tense; it might have been thought that He would say 'and barred' in the perfect tense just as He said 'disbelieved' in the perfect tense, but this is not a matter of rules or automatic actions; for their barring of others from the way of Allah *the Almighty* is a result of their disbelief, and this barring is still going on.

The meaning of 'from the path of Allah' is 'from the struggle in Allah's cause' and His saying, 'and from the Sacred Mosque' (*al-Hajj:* 25) because they prevented Muslims from entering it since it was still under their control and their authority. This indeed is what happened at Hudaybiya when the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* yearned to perform the minor pilgrimage and circumambulation in the Sacred Mosque, which had long been denied to them; yet when they went, the disbelievers of Mecca forbade them and barred them from entering.

As for His statement: "and from the Sacred Mosque' (*al-Hajj:* 25), the word *haram* (sacred) implies that it is forbidden to commit any sin therein, or to be disrespectful to it, or to aggress against anyone therein. The word *haram* is used to describe certain places and certain times specifically five things: the *Ka`ba,* the Inviolable Mosque, the Sacred City and Region, which means the areas around the *Ka`ba* – and these first four are all places and then the fifth is the Inviolable Month (or Sacred Month), of which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'They will ask you about fighting in the sacred month…' (*al-Baqara:* 217), the reason for the inviolability of these places and times is a wisdom intended by the Creator because He is a Merciful Lord with His creatures and wants to give them an opportunity to shield their pride and check their conceit. Wars and struggles used to rage between the people who were inflamed by tribal customs and cycles of violence such that each side would desire to utterly annihilate the other, and they might continue with the war even though they did not really want to do so, but their pride prevented them from turning back and withdrawing.

Therefore Allah *the Almighty* gave inviolability to these places and times, to provide a cover for this false pride and hateful conceit. Every action requires a time and a place, so Allah *the Almighty* forbade fighting in the sacred months, so that if war was raging between them and then a sacred month came along, the weak would be saved from the grasp of the strong without damaging their pride; perhaps he might shake his head and say, 'Were it not for the sacred month, I would have done such-and-such to them'. So, this is a mercy from Allah *the Almighty* to His servants, a shield to protect them from the evil of their own selves their impulses and to spare their lives.

The pride of the Arabs in such a situation is akin to the pride of a husband and wife who are unwillingly at odds, each of them wanting to go to the other, but being prevented by their pride from yielding; so the man sits in his room and closes the door behind him, the wife looks and sees him raising his hands and praying to Allah *the Almighty* to help him be reconciled with his wife. So, she goes and adorns herself, and then comes and opens the door to his room and, as though someone is making her enter, tells him she wants to be reconciled.

Likewise, He has made certain places inviolable, for the times in which He has forbidden fighting are four months, three which are connected and one which stands alone, namely *Rajab*; and the months which are continued are *Dhul Qa`da*, *Dhul Hijja and Muharram.*

Allah *the Almighty* also forbade fighting in these places, to prevent the blood of men from being spilled because of the tribes' fighting for the sake of envy, conceit and pride. He says about the prohibition of fighting in the Inviolable House: '…And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship unless they fight against you there first; but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth.' (*al-Baqara:* 191)

So perhaps when they encounter the months or places of inviolability, they will find relief from fighting and realise the pleasure of peace and the importance of reconciliation, settle their differences by other means than warfare. For war only begets war, whilst the pleasure of peace, the repose of security and the experience of calm life beget the urge to reconcile and to settle these disputes by peaceful means

The one who reflects on these places which Allah *the Almighty* has made inviolable will find that they are arranged in different levels, as though they are concentric circles whose focal point is Allah's Inviolable House, the *Ka`ba;* then comes the Inviolable Mosque around it, then the Inviolable City of Mecca, so the Inviolable Region, which is also determined by a specific time, namely the days of the pilgrimage only.

As for the *Ka`ba,* it is not, as some people think, the building which we see today. The *Ka`ba* is the space itself, whilst this building is the content of the space. If you were to remove the building which is there now, the space where the building stands is the Temple; this place extends down into the earth and up into the heavens.

So, Allah's Inviolable Temple is this space of land extending right up into the heavens. Do you not see that people pray on the higher levels, in places much higher than this building? They face the air above the *Ka`ba,* not the *Ka`ba* it self. Why? Because the *Ka`ba* extends into the air, as far as Allah wills.

After the Temple comes the Mosque which is a space of land which has been dedicated as a mosque, But there is a mosque in the place where you build it and give it an architectural form like that of which we speak now when we say ‘mosque’, meaning the place itself; there is also a place which is a ‘mosque’ because of what goes on within its space, such as when the mosque is full so, we go into the streets and pray so that in this circumstance, the street itself is a mosque; they say that even if this went on all the way to Sana`a, row after row, it would all be one mosque.

Let us return to what went on between the Muslims and the idolaters on the Day of Hudaybiya. The disbelievers barred the Muslims from the *Ka`ba* when they were so close they could see it with their eyes, and this enraged the Muslims, and some of them wanted to enter Mecca by force despite what he disbelievers said.

But Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew a secret which his Lord had divulged to him, so he acceded to their conditions and made a treaty with them known as ‘The Treaty of Hudaybiya’. Some of the companions resented this, namely, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab who said to Prophet Muhammad, ‘O Messenger of Allah, are we not on the side of truth?’ He said, ‘We are.’ `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘And are they not on the side of falsehood?’ Prophet Muhammad, said, ‘They are.’ He said, then, why do we yield so humbly against the honour of our religion?’(1)

One of the stipulations of this treaty was that if a disbeliever embraced Islam and joined the ranks of the Muslims, Muhammad would send him back, whilst if a Muslim went over to their side they would not have to return him.(2)

And the mother of the believers Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her* took a great stance in the midst of this hardship, a sound opinion which rebutted the opinions of the men and guided them back to the truth; this is something which makes us all proud of the Muslim woman and by which we can reply to those who bleat about ‘women’s rights’.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

(2) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him explained his acceptance of this by saying, ‘If one of us joins them, then may Allah keep him far from us! And if one of them joins us and we send him back to them, Allah will give him relief and a way out.’ Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Muslim.*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to his tent in an angry state, and said to Umm Salama, ‘The Muslims have come to ruin, O Umm Salama, for I commanded them but they did not obey.’ That is, I commanded them to go home without performing the minor pilgrimage this year. So, Umm Salama said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they are disappointed, for they have been barred from entering Allah’s House when they are close enough to see it. But go and do whatever your Lord commands you, O Messenger of Allah if they see you do it they will know that the matter is irrevocable.’ Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* followed this advice, and shaved his head and slaughtered his offering, and the people did the same; that was that.(1)

Before they returned to Medina, Allah *the Almighty* willed to tell them the wise reason why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accepted the conditions of the idolaters, even though they were unjust and harsh: Firstly, this truce and pact meant that they acknowledged Muhammad, his rank, status and acknowledged him as their equal; this in itself was a gain. Secondly, both parties agreed to halt their fighting for several years, this gave the Muslims the opportunity to devote their time to meeting delegations and spreading Allah’s religion. Thirdly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could have entered Mecca against the wishes of its inhabitants, he could have killed them all, but what would have happened to the dwellers of Mecca who were secret believers, whose identity no one knew? They lived amid these disbelievers, they would therefore have come to the same end as the disbelievers; had the believers in Mecca made themselves known, the disbelievers would have taken them prisoners.

Read what Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘It was not for your enemies’ sake that He stayed your hands from them: for it was they who were bent on denying the truth, and who debarred you from the Inviolable House of Worship and prevented your offering from reaching its destination. And had it not been for the believing men and believing women [in Mecca], whom you might have unwittingly trampled underfoot, and on whose account you might have become guilty, without knowing it, of a grievous wrong – (had it not been for this, you would have been allowed to fight your way into the city: but you were forbidden to fight) so that (in time) might admit to His Grace whomever He wills. Had they (who deserve Our Mercy and they whom We have condemned) been clearly discernible (to you), We would indeed have imposed grievous suffering (at your hands) on such of them as were bent on denying the truth.' (*al-Fath:* 25)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Al-Bayhaqi*

Then He says of the Inviolable Mosque: 'We shall make them taste a painful punishment.' (*al-Hajj:* 25) That is, for all mankind, '…residents and visitors alike' (*al-Hajj:* 25), i.e. from outside of Mecca. The meaning of 'alike' is that these two kinds of people are completely equal in this regard.

Therefore, we say to those who reserve places for themselves in Allah's Inviolable Mosque in particular or in any mosque in general: Save yourself the trouble, for Allah *the Almighty* reserves these places for those who come first, not those who set down a prayer-mat to save the place, disturbing others thereby.

Because this verse says, 'Which We made for all people, residents and visitors alike– and who try to violate it with wrongdoing, We shall make them taste a painful punishment.' (*al-Hajj:* 25) Some say that it is not permitted to rent out houses in Mecca, that whoever wants to stay in a house there may stay without paying, so that the local and the stranger are equal.(1)

This opinion is rebutted by the fact that the houses are now built and established. The land of Mecca belonged to everyone when it was open and all were free to build there if they liked; but once the houses were built and settled, it was no longer permitted for anyone to enter them without the resident's permission.

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(1) *They even used to have no doors on their houses, until theft became prevalent, so the people began to put doors on their houses after `Umar Allah be pleased with him gave them leave to do so. Imam Malik Allah rest his soul said that the houses of Mecca are not the same as the mosque, and that the people have a right to close their houses and forbid people from entering them; and this is what people do these days. Al-Qurtubi, (At-Tafsir)*

A discussion about this took place in Mecca between the two scholars Al-Handhali and Imam Ash-Shafi`i *Allah rest his soul* for Al-Hanzhali deemed it impermissible to rent houses in Mecca because this verse says that they are for everyone; and Ash-Shafi`i *Allah rest his soul* replied to him by saying, ‘If this were the case, then Allah *the Almighty* would not have called the Emigrants ‘…those who have been driven from their homes…’ (*al-Hashr:* 8), for He attributed the homes to them, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have asked, when he arrived in Mecca, ‘Did `Aqil leave for us a single house or a home?’(1) The fact that `Aqil *Allah be pleased with him* had sold their houses after they emigrated proves that they had owned them. With this, Al-Hanzhali went over to the opinion of Ash-Shafi`i.

In any case, this verse is speaking about the Mosque, not all of Mecca, so the difference of opinion should never have gone as far as to include the whole of Mecca.

He then says, ‘And who try to violate it with wrongdoing, We shall make them taste a painful punishment’ (*al-Hajj:* 25). *Ilhad* (Profanation) might concern the ultimate truth, namely the profaning of faith in Allah *the Almighty* or *ilhad* (atheism); as for here, what is meant by ‘to violate’ is to incline away from the truth. And when He says, ‘by wrongdoing’, evildoing of whatever kind does not go as far as the level of disbelief; yet when evil profanation occurs in Allah’s house, this is an enormity, because you are in your Lord’s house, the *Ka`ba.*

You should have been ashamed even to think of sinning, for even to think of sinning in this place is itself a sin, because you are in a place wherein you must always have sensations of awe and dread. Just as Allah *the Almighty* has distinguished His house by multiplying the good deeds performed therein, He has also magnified the enormity of the sins you commit whilst in the confines of His house – so be aware of this.(2)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1588) and Muslim (1351)*

(2) *Ibn Mas`ud said, ‘If a man intends to sin but does not – anywhere but the Inviolable Mosque – then it is not recorded against him until he does it; but if a man intends a sin in the Inviolable Mosque, Allah will not take him from this world without first subjecting him to painful suffering.’ Narrated by Sa`id ibn Mansur and At-Tabarani*

One of the sayings of the countryside here is, ‘You are so impudent you would get drunk in a scholar’s house’. The meaning of this is that it is easy to imagine someone getting drunk in a sinful man’s house or in a bar, but to do so in a scholar’s house would be a real enormity and an act of sheer impudence. Why? Because a place is as inviolable as the one who owns it; if this is the case, and this house belongs to Allah *the Almighty* you disobey your Lord in His own house, then what could be more impudent than this?

This is a special attribute of the Inviolable Mosque; for all mosques are houses of Allah *the Almighty* but there is a difference between a house which Allah *the Almighty* chooses for Himself and a house which Allah’s servants choose for Him. That is why the house which Allah *the Almighty* chose for Himself, the Inviolable House, is the focal point towards which all the other houses of Allah *the Almighty* in the world face.

The consequence of profaning Allah’s House: ‘We shall make them taste a painful punishment…’ (*al-Hajj:* 25), they shall taste suffering by a constant and unchanging decree of Allah *the Almighty*; and taste is the most effective form of perception, and therefore this suffering is truly humiliating. To taste is to perceive the flavour of food and drink, but it can apply to everything that is perceived, not only food and drink. Elsewhere, our Lord says, ‘Taste it –you who [on Earth] has considered thyself so mighty, so noble!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49)

That is, taste humiliation and abasement, not in the form of that which is eaten and drunk, but with total perception, perception which involves the entire body: the fingernails taste it, the feet taste it, the chest tastes it and the neck tastes it. This tasting of humiliation and abasement in this worldly life for these people is only a simple example of the severity of Allah’s punishment.

The suffering of the Hereafter will be terrible; and suffering means physical pain, if you want the pain to endure you must continue to apply the tool which imparts the pain.

Allah then says:

وَإِذۡ بَوَّأۡنَا لِإِبۡرَٰهِيمَ مَكَانَ ٱلۡبَيۡتِ أَن لَّا تُشۡرِكۡ بِي شَيۡـٔٗا
وَطَهِّرۡ بَيۡتِيَ لِلطَّآئِفِينَ وَٱلۡقَآئِمِينَ وَٱلرُّكَّعِ ٱلسُّجُودِ ﴿٢٦﴾

We showed Abraham the site of the House, saying, ‘Do not assign partners to Me. Purify My House for those who circle around it, those who stand to pray, and those who bow and prostrate themselves [26] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 26)

Since the previous verses spoke about the *Ka`ba*, it was appropriate here to speak about its history and how it was built. Allah says, ‘We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of the House, saying, “Do not assign partners to Me. Purify My house for those who circle around it, those who stand to pray, and those who bow and prostrate themselves.”’ (*al-Hajj:* 26) The meaning of *bawwa`a* (show) is ‘to make a dwelling place; that is, one goes about one’s work and business, then returns and goes back to this place, such as the house to which one returns. Another use of this root word is found when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…they earned (*ba`u*) the burden of Allah’s condemnation…’ (*al-Baqara:* 16).

The particle *idh* (when) is an adverb of time which is used to evoke an event, and then followed by a report of this event, Here it is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and means: ‘Remember, Muhammad, the time when Ibrahim (Abraham) was told such-and-such’. In every verse in the Quran which contains the particle *idh*, it is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him of an event which occurred at that particular time.

But what does the concept of a dwelling-place, or a placed assigned for dwelling, have to do with the *Ka’ba*? They say it is because a dwelling-place is a patch of ground which a person chooses and makes into the place to which he returns after engaging in the labours of his life; and a man does not choose such a place unless it furnishes him with all the basic needs of life.

Therefore, Allah says in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘and thus We established Yusuf (Joseph) securely in the land [of Egypt]. He had full mastery (*yatabawwa`*) over it, [doing] whatever he willed…’

(*Yusuf:* 56). And He says about the children of Israel, ‘And [thereafter], indeed, We assigned (*bawwa`*) unto the children of Israel a most goodly abode (*mubawwa`*) …’ (*Yunus:* 93).

So, the meaning of ‘We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of the House…’ (*al-Hajj:* 26) is ‘We made it an abode for him, where he could return from the toils of his life, once We had told him and showed him the place it should be’.(1)

We said that a place is not the same as the contents of a place: the place is the patch of land upon which and in which the contents reside. So, the land of this mosque is the ‘place’, and the building which is built on this land is called ‘the contents of this place’. With this in mind, we can see that Allah *the Almighty* showed Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the place where He would command him to build the *Ka`ba*.

The scholars discussed this matter to a great length, some of them saying that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was the first person to build the *Ka`ba*. One says to those who hold this view: The True Lord assigned for Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of the *Ka`ba*, meaning that He showed it to him, as though the *Ka`ba* already existed. This is proved by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* tells us that Ibrahim (Abraham) said, ‘O our Lord! Behold, I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Your sanctified *Ka`ba…*’ (*as-Saffat:* 14). Allah says elsewhere, ‘And when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the *Ka`ba…*’ (*al-Baqara:* 127)

It is clear that Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* assisted his father in the building of the *Ka`ba* once he was a grown man and had the power to help his father; but when they first settled there, Ismail (Ishmael) was still a baby. His words: ‘close to Your sanctified *Ka`ba*’ indicate that they were already close to the *Ka`ba* before Ismail (Ishmael) grew old enough to help his father build the *Ka`ba*. This is therefore proof that the *Ka`ba* already existed before

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(1) *That is, we showed him its location so he could rebuild it. The Flood washed it away, and when Ibrahim (Abraham) came he could find no trace of it, so Allah the Almighty sent a wind which blew away the sand and revealed the foundations which Adam had built, and Ibrahim (Abraham) built on top of them. (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi)*

Ibrahim (Abraham) came to it. And the True Lord made this matter clear in His saying, ‘Behold, the first house ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakkah: rich in blessing, and [source of] guidance unto all the worlds.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96)

In order for us to agree on how to understand this verse, we must first ask: who are ‘mankind’? They are Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny until the end of time. Adam *peace be upon him* is a member of mankind, so why would the verse not include him, too? The *Ka`ba* was set up for mankind, and Adam *peace be upon him* is part of mankind, so it must have been set up for Adam, too.

So, it may be said that the *Ka`ba* was set up even before Adam *peace be upon him* therefore we believe the opinion which states that the angels were the ones who first set up the *Ka`ba*, after which the Flood washed away all visible signs of the *Ka`ba*, and then Allah *the Almighty* showed Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* by means of divine inspiration where the location of the *Ka`ba* was, commanded him to rebuild it in this same valley.

It is said that Allah *the Almighty* sent a cloud to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to show him where the site was, and it spoke to him: ‘O Ibrahim (Abraham), build the *Ka`ba* the same size as me!’(1)

If you reflect on the meaning of ‘And when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the *Ka`ba*’ (*al-Baqara:* 127), the word ‘raising’ implies the notion of height which is the third dimension; it is as though the foundations already had length and width, and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* added height to them. But why did Allah *the Almighty* assign to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the site of the *Ka`ba*?

When Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* settled his family close to the *Ka`ba*, he said ‘…so that, O our Lord, they might devote themselves to prayer…’ (*Ibrahim:* 37). It is as though from the very onset it was a matter of worship and prayer, prayer devoted to the True Lord, Allah *the Almighty*; and therefore, He commanded him first of all: ‘Do not assign partners to Me. Purify My house for those who circle around it, those who stand to pray, and those who bow and prostrate themselves.’ (*al-Hajj:* 26)

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Daylimi as a saying of the Prophet Muhammad*

The meaning of this is: purify this *Ka`ba* from everything which signifies idolatry, for this is the proper way to begin the establishment of Allah’s House. Was there ever any suspicion that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* would ascribe divinity to aught but Allah *the Almighty*? Of course not, for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was as far from idolatry as could be. But when Allah *the Almighty* sends forth a messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the first one to receive the commandments from Allah *the Almighty* which he must deliver to his community. So, he is the first one to receive and the first one to obey so that he can be a role model for his people and so that they believe in him and trust him, for he commands them things which he himself obeys.

For example, Allah *the Almighty* says to Prophet Muhammad, ‘O Prophet! Remain conscious of Allah…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 1). Did Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ever cease to be conscious of Allah *the Almighty*? This command is really being given to the whole Islamic community via the person of their Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that it is easier for us when our Lord commands us to be conscious of him, and we do not object to this commandment since it has also been given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For you can observe that some people do not like it when you say to them, ‘Be conscious of Allah’, and they might consider this as an insult and an accusation, imagining that it can only be said to someone who has done something which is contrary to consciousness.

But this is a misunderstanding of the commandment of fearing Allah. When I say to you, ‘Be conscious of Allah’, this does not mean that you are not afraid of Allah; rather, I am reminding you to begin every action of your life with consciousness of Allah *the Almighty*.

So, when Allah *the Almighty* said to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘…Do not assign partners to Me…’ (*al-Hajj:* 26), this does not mean that Ibrahim (Abraham) was guilty of doing this. The statement: ‘do not assign partners’ means that the prohibition is applied to all the different forms of false gods whatever they might be: trees, stones, idols, stars or planets. This is emphasised by His saying, ‘Purify My house for those who circle around it’. (*al-Hajj:* 26) ‘Purification’ is to attain spiritual purity by removing all the means of idolatry and sincerely worshipping Allah Alone without any partners. It is also to attain material purity by cleaning His house of the accretions which had accumulated upon it over time, as well as the effects of the flood that had deposited dirt upon the site.

The meaning of ‘those who will walk around it’ (*al-Hajj:* 26) refers to those who would perform circumambulation around the Sacred House; regarding His saying, ‘and those who will stand before it’ (*al-Hajj:* 26), it refers to those who would keep spiritual vigil therein. His statement: ‘those who will bow down and prostrate themselves’ (*al-Hajj:* 26) talks about those who would go there at the fixed times of prayer to offer their prayer. He signifies prayer with the actions of bowing and prostration because they are the most distinctive actions of it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَذِّن فِي ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلۡحَجِّ يَأۡتُوكَ رِجَالٗا وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ
ضَامِرٖ يَأۡتِينَ مِن كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٖ ٢٧

Proclaim the Pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you on foot and on every kind of swift mount, emerging from every deep mountain pass [27] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 27)

After raising the house’s foundations, Allah *the Almighty* commanded Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to proclaim unto all people the duty of pilgrimage, why? Because such a house belongs to Allah, as mankind are Allah’s creatures; so why should the vision of the house be restricted to those who live near it?

The True Lord wanted this distinction to be enjoyed by all His creatures so that they would all go to see their Lord’s Sacred House. Although all mosques are dedicated to Allah *the Almighty* this mosque was chosen by Allah Himself to be His house. Therefore, He made it the focal point for all the houses of worship.

One of the signs of fealty which people show is that they go to visit the palaces of the mighty and the noble wherein the visitor records his name in the visitors' record-book, and he sees this as an honour and a distinction. So, what about the House of Allah *the Almighty*? How could its visitation and its vision be restricted only to its tenants and those who live near it or those who are destined to pass it by?

As for the verb 'proclaim', it means to 'inform'; the ear is one of the primary means of receiving information, thus the word *adhan* (proclamation) is derived from the word *udhn* (ear) Another word derived from this root is found in His saying, 'and [remember the time] when your Lord made [this promise] known (*ta`adhdhana*) proclaimed…' (*Ibrahim:* 7). The ear is the primary means of hearing and learning things, therefore, before we learn speaking, we must be able to hear basically.

When Allah *the Almighty* commanded Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to make this proclamation, no one was anywhere near the house except Ibrahim (Abraham), his son and his wife; so to whom was he supposed to proclaim? Who in this wide and barren desert and this uninhabited valley would listen? Therefore, his Lord called to him: 'O Ibrahim (Abraham), it is for you to proclaim and for Us to pass this proclamation on.'(1) That is, your mission is to raise you voice and make the proclamation; We shall cause this call to reach all the people throughout all times and places. In fact, Allah enabled all mankind to hear it whilst they were still in their forefathers' loins.(2) Regarding Allah's Power, He says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…and it was not you who cast, when you didst cast, but it was Allah who cast….' (*al-Anfal:* 17) That is, O Ibrahim (Abraham), do what you are charged to do, and leave what is beyond your power to the power of your Lord! So, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* proclaimed the duty of pilgrimage to the people, the call reached all mankind, and will continue to reach them until the end of time; those who respond and say, 'At Your service', shall have an act of pilgrimage recorded in their books of deeds. Some of the scholars even say that those who respond a single time will have an act of pilgrimage recorded for them, while those who respond twice will have two, and so on, because each time they say, ‘At Your service’, they are responding again and again.(1)

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(1) *The like of this was narrated by As-Suyuti on the authority of Ibn `Abbas (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, vol. 32).*

(2) *As-Suyuti narrates the like of this on the authority of Ibn `Abbas (ibid).*

If you say, ‘Allah *the Almighty* has given us commandments and prohibitions, so why does the pilgrimage in particular have this great status?’, we say, ‘The pillars of Islam begin with the two testimonies of faith (There is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah); then comes prayer and it is followed by the order of giving the poor-due which is, in turn, followed by the duty of fasting *Ramadan* and they all are perfected by the duty of performing pilgrimage. Looking at all these pillars, you will find that pilgrimage is the only pillar which the Muslim strives to fulfil. If one cannot afford to do it, he scrimps and saves, even sacrifices his basic provisions, denies himself many things so that he can fulfil this obligation of pilgrimage; people do not do this for any obligation other than the pilgrimage. Why is this? They say it is because Allah *the Almighty* has decreed this matter, saying: ‘Proclaim the pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you.’ (*al-Hajj:* 27) So, they will come, even without consciously choosing to do so. Do you not see how people are drawn to perform this obligation, as though there is an external force drawing them to do so? This is the meaning of Allah’s words: ‘make people’s hearts to incline towards them’. (*Ibrahim:* 37) *Tahwi* (incline) means that they will come without consciously choosing to do so; it is derived from the verb *hawiya* (to fall), which is something outside a man’s control, such as when someone falls from a height, not having the ability to choose not to fall.

In this way, hearts will yearn and burn with desire for Allah’s house, as though there is something drawing them to perform this obligation. Allah decreed this by saying, ‘They will come to you’. (*al-Hajj:* 7) With other commandments, He issues the commandment and then leaves it up to the free will of those He commands as to whether they will obey or disobey. So, this is something which would surely come to pass, by the testimony of the Quran itself.

Some people of deep understanding opine that the commandment ‘Proclaim the pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you.’ (*al-Hajj:* 27) was not given to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* but rather to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to whom the whole Quran was revealed, affirming that this verse is addressed to him. In this case, the meaning of ‘For when We assigned unto Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of this *Ka`ba…*’ (*al-Hajj:* 26) is: ‘Remember, O you to whom I have revealed My Book, when We assigned unto Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of this Mosque; remember this, and “Proclaim the pilgrimage to all people, They will come to you” (*al-Hajj:* 27)’. So, it is as though this commandment is meant for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.(1)

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(1) *This is narrated by Ad-Daylimi on the authority of `Alu ibn Abi Taleb, but it is likely a forgery according to As-Suyuti and Al-Fatani.*

That is why one does not see this inclination in the other communities such as the Jews and Christians, for they do not make pilgrimage or visit Allah’s House at all. It is known that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* made pilgrimage to Allah’s House,(2) but it is not known that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* ever did since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The time is nigh when the Son of Maryam (Mary) shall come down, and come forth as a pilgrim, and visit my grave and be buried there.’(3)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said ‘and come forth as a pilgrim’ because `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* has not died yet. He will become a follower of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When he descends from Heaven, he will pray behind an imam from the *ummah* of Muhammad may *Allah send blessings upon all His prophets and messengers*!

The People of the Book controversially claimed that the son whom Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* almost sacrificed was Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him*. Had it really been Ishaq (Isaac), then the rites of sacrifice, ransom, and stoning of the pillars would be performed by them in the Levant. Yet all these rites are performed in Mecca because the near-sacrificed son was Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*.

Moreover, remember well what your Sacred Scripture says in Genesis 22, wherein the True Lord inspired Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to climb the mountain of Faran and take his only son to slaughter him. At that time, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) only son was Ismail (Ishmael), not Ishaq (Isaac), because Allah first spared Ismail (Ishmael) and then gave Ibrahim (Abraham) glad tidings of Ishaq (Isaac).(1)

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentions this interpretation in his exegesis.*

(2) *This was narrated by Muslim (166) and Ahmad (i.315) on the authority of Ibn `Abbas.*

(3) *Al-Qurtubi narrated the like of it in his exegesis.*

Allah's Wisdom placed clues which unveil lies of liars and by means of which we can ascertain the Truth. Henceforth, judges say that there is no such thing as a perfect crime; the criminal will always leave some evidence behind which points to him, no matter how carefully he plans his crime. For example, something might fall from him, even if only a button from his clothes or a small piece of paper bearing a telephone number, and so on. That is why they say, 'Crime does not pay'; for the criminal will surely be caught by the one who investigates him. Judges have a real talent how to extract the real story from the criminals themselves. A judge continues to question the criminal until he finds a flaw or contradiction in his story by means of which he can reach the truth. This is because the truth only has one face, and the one who tells the truth does not stammer or waver. As for falsehood, it has more than one face, if you ask the liar to tell his story more than once; you will find alterations or contradictions in his words. Therefore, the Arab proverb says, 'If you want to be a liar, you must have a good memory'. In other words, 'Remember what you said first, so that you do not change it afterwards'.

An example of a lie which exposes the one who says it is that one person says to another, 'Do you remember the day when we were in such-and-such place in the night before the end-of-Ramadan festival, and the moon was full'? So the other one says, 'How could the moon be full at the end of the lunar month'?

The judge might utilise certain tricks; he must use his cleverness to bring the truth to light, such as the example of the judge(2) who must decide between two men, one of whom accuses the other of taking money from him as a trust and then claiming it for himself and burying it in such-and-such a place. When the judge questions the accused, he denies the charge, so the judge leaves him and turns to the owner of the trust and says to him: ‘Go to that place and search, for perhaps you forgot it somewhere, or perhaps someone else took it from you’. So, the owner of the money goes off, then suddenly the judge asks the defendant, ‘Why is he taking such a long time?’, and the defendant answers, ‘Because the place where the money is buried is far away, your honour’. So his memory betrays him and he speaks the truth without meaning to do so.

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(1) It is clear from reading the Book of Genesis that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was 86 when Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was born (Gen 16:16), whilst he was one hundred years old when Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* was born (Gen 21:5), which means that Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was 14 years older than Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him*. Ishaq's (Isaac's) mother Hagar *peace be upon her* was a wife to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* (Gen 16:3) So how could they say that Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* was Ibrahim's (Abraham's) only son at the time of the sacrifice?

(2) This is the story of the holder of a trust with the judge.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘They will come to you on foot’ (*al-Hajj:* 27); as for the word *rijal,* it is the plural of *rajil* which means someone who goes on foot; regarding the word *damir* (and on every kind of swift), it means a horse or camel which is thin because of the long journey it has travelled.

The way in which those who come on foot are mentioned before those who come mounted emphasises the divine wisdom of ‘They will come to you’; for they will all be eager to fulfil the obligation of the pilgrimage, even if they must go on foot. Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…emerging from every deep mountain pass’ (*al-Hajj:* 27), meaning that they will traverse every wide road, coming from afar.

The True Lord then says:

لِّيَشۡهَدُواْ مَنَٰفِعَ لَهُمۡ وَيَذۡكُرُواْ ٱسۡمَ ٱللَّهِ فِيٓ أَيَّامٖ مَّعۡلُومَٰتٍ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُم
مِّنۢ بَهِيمَةِ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِۖ فَكُلُواْ مِنۡهَا وَأَطۡعِمُواْ ٱلۡبَآئِسَ ٱلۡفَقِيرَ ﴿٢٨﴾

To attain benefits and celebrate God’s name, on specified days, over the livestock He has provided for them – feed yourselves and the poor and unfortunate [28]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 28)

Manafi’ (to attain benefits) is a general and comprehensive word which encompasses all manner of benefits: material and worldly, spiritual and otherworldly. One should not restrict what Allah has broadened, because every motion of life connected to pilgrimage can be considered as a benefit.

Your preparations and the arrangement of its expenses, equipment, and transport are all beneficial for you and for others, when you give enough to your family to suffice them until you return.

The buying and selling which go on in the pilgrimage centres include benefits which the people exchange: the merchant sells to you; the owner of the house you rent gets benefit and so does the owner of the car which transports you. So, the material benefits of pilgrimage are numerous, interlinked and connected to the spiritual benefits. The one who buys the sacrificial animal, for example, performs a rite and aids the merchant who sells it to him, the farmer who raised the animal, the butcher who slaughters it and the poor person who eats it.

Therefore, pilgrimage involves a great deal of the motions of life, gives benefit to you and to others without your being aware of it. You can observe the gifts which the pilgrims take back to their families and friends, especially the Egyptians; some of them buy all these presents before they even perform their rites, spending most of their time in the markets, as though they would not be real pilgrims if they did not bring all these gifts back with them. Therefore, people like this used to ask me, ‘I have to make a sacrifice,(1) but I have no money left for the sacrificial offering. What should I do’? He wanted to fast to expiate the offering, for indeed, how could he fulfil his obligation when he had spent all the money he had? I would say to those who asked me this, ‘Give me your suitcase and I will sell all the gifts in it and leave you with enough money to meet all your expenses until you go home’. Are all these things not benefits?

Another benefit of pilgrimage is that as soon as the pilgrim makes an intention to perform this obligation, prepares himself for it materially and spiritually, he tries to turn over a new leaf, correcting his faults and repenting from his sins and mending all his relationships with others. So, he undergoes a personal refinement which makes a new man out of him as this auspicious occasion merits and makes him worthy to see Allah’s House and circumambulate therein.

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(1) This means that he performed *`umra* (minor pilgrimage) before *hajj* (the major pilgrimage), coming out of his consecrated state in between the two; and this requires that a sacrificial offering be made.

Part of preparing for the pilgrimage is that the pilgrim must learn his rights and duties. In addition, he must have the proper etiquette of a pilgrim knowing what he must avoid and what is forbidden for him. He must cast off the usual clothing and attire with which he adorns himself and the position amongst the people of which he is proud. He must also be aware that being in the consecrated state makes all equal.

He must learn how to have good etiquette with his own self and with all the different forms of being around him.(1) This is done by not thinking about sin, not even pulling a single one of his hairs, or cutting one of his nails and not using perfume or even scented soap.

The amazing thing about pilgrimage is that as soon as the pilgrim enters the consecrated state, he is as eager as can be to observe these rulings. I am certain that any man who intends to perform pilgrimage and enters the consecrated state will not then commit any sin because he has been preparing himself for a new journey in which he will be purified of all his sins; so how could he commit any more sins when he has come to a distant land to be purified of them?

During pilgrimage, the pilgrim has also etiquette with animals, neither hunting them nor killing them; also with plants, not cutting down any trees. He has etiquette even with inanimate objects which he considers to be the lowest form of existence, for he is eager to kiss the Black Stone and does his best to get to it, for if he cannot reach it, he salutes it with his hand.

Pilgrimage is a period of order and discipline. In pilgrimage, you see the human being's humiliation; this being which is higher than all other creatures is now in a state of extreme humility and modesty, no matter how high his rank usually is. The human soul experiences such great tranquillity and contentment when it kisses the Black Stone; a man is saddened if he is unable to kiss it.

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(1) He means that the pilgrim must not hunt whilst in a consecrated state. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Kill no game while you are in the state of pilgrimage. And whoever of you kills it intentionally, [shall make] amends in cattle equivalent to what he has killed – with two persons of probity giving their judgment thereon – to be brought as an offering to the *Ka`ba;* or else he may atone for his sin by feeding the needy, or by the equivalent thereof in fasting: [this,] in order that he taste the full gravity of his deed, [while] Allah *the Almighty* shall have effaced the past. But whoever does it again, Allah *the Almighty* will inflict His retribution on him: for Allah is an avenger of evil. Lawful to you is all water-game, and what the sea brings forth, as a provision for you [who are settled] as well as for travellers, although you are *forbidden to hunt* on land while you are in the state of pilgrimage.…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 95-96)

The True Lord then says, ‘and celebrate Allah’s Name, on specified days’. (*al-Hajj:* 28) They extol the name of Allah *the Almighty* because the pilgrimage actions are accompanied by the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* and declarations of fealty to Him. The pilgrim does not do anything without saying, ‘At Your service, Allah at Your service’! This declaration of fealty continues to be uttered until he stones the pillars at *`Aqaba*. The meaning of ‘At Your service, Allah at Your service’ is ‘The concerns of this worldly life call to me, and You have called me to fulfil the obligation with which You have charged me, and I choose to answer You first, because You are my Creator, and the Creator of all the things which concern me and distract me from You’.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘on specified days’ (*al-Hajj:* 28), it refers to those days of sacrifice on the 10th plus the three days of the festival of sacrifice on the 11th, 12th and 13th of the month of *Dhul Hijja*.(1)

The statement ‘over the livestock He has provided for them’ (*al-Hajj:* 28) instructs Muslims that they give thanks to Allah *the Almighty* for the provision of food and drink which they enjoy at this time, and for the buying and selling in which they engage during the pilgrimage. Or they give thanks to Him *the Almighty* for creating these cattle for them, even if they do not perform the pilgrimage; for the creation of cattle – meaning camels, cows, sheep and goats – and their subdual to man’s will were founded on great wisdom. In addition to the benefit of their meat, milk, wool, and hides, give thanks to Allah *the Almighty* for the fact that He subdued them to your will. Had Allah *the Almighty* not subdued them for you; you would never have been able to benefit from them. The camel, for example, is a huge animal which can be led by a small child, it can make it kneel and even load it with goods, whilst man cannot tame snakes or wolves, for example. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Are they, then, not aware that it is for them that We have created, among all the things which Our hands have wrought, the domestic animals of which they are [now] masters? And that We have subjected them to men's will….' (*Ya Sin:* 71-72) We extol Allah *the Almighty* and give thanks to Him for the cattle which He has provided and allowed us to benefit from by eating, selling and enjoying their beauty, as He says, 'And you find beauty in them when you ride them home in the evenings and when you take them out to pasture in the mornings.' (*an-Nahl:* 6)

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(1) Others say it is the first ten days of the month, or the day of sacrifice and the three days after it (the 10th to the 13th), or the day of sacrifice and the two days after it, or the day of *`Arafa,* the day of sacrifice and the following three days (i.e. the 9th to the 13th) (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*).

Had Allah *the Almighty* not subjected them to your service, you would never have been able to subject them or benefit from them. Therefore, in His Wisdom, Allah *the Almighty* left some creatures untameable so that you cannot tame them or subdue them by any means in order that we would continue to remember this blessing and give thanks to Him *the Almighty* for it.

Before, I gave the example of the flea which is the lowliest of creatures and so small you can barely see it, yet you have no power over it. It might rob you of your sleep and keep you awake all night. You can see this blessing when you see the small boy leading the camel and if it were to refuse to move, you would not be able to force it to move. If it were to attack you, you would not be able to overpower it, it might kill its owner and wreak havoc on all those around it. You have no intrinsic power over it, but you can only benefit from it because Allah *the Almighty* has subdued it for you; you can lead it to its own slaughter where it will stand and calmly yield to you.

The one who reflects on those animals which Allah *the Almighty* has permitted us to eat will be caught by surprise, for the animals which Allah *the Almighty* has allowed you to eat give you benefit for their whole lives; even when they are afflicted by fatal disease, what do they do? They move their head and show you the place where you will cut, as though they are saying to you: 'I am in my final moments of life, and so I am trying hard to let you benefit from my meat'. When people in the countryside see this, they say: 'It wants what is lawful', that is, it wants to be slaughtered lawfully. As for the animals which are not slaughtered and which Allah *the Almighty* has not made lawful, they die with their heads bowed because there is no benefit in them.

We call these animals stupid, dumb, and so on, but if you reflect on them you will change your view. Take the donkey, which some nations use as a symbol for stupidity and moroseness, as an example: you drive it ahead of you, load it with garbage, and beat it, yet it does not object to you or disobey you. If you clean, adorn it with a silver bridle, a velvet saddle, take it as a mount and an adornment, it will carry you on its back and go where you direct it. If you treat it angrily and use it to bear loads and carry garbage, it will carry it contentedly and obediently. Also, if you want it to jump over a ditch which is wider than what it can manage, it will come to a halt, no matter how much you beat it and how harsh you are with it; it will never go any further ahead because it knows how far it can jump, and it knows its own ability and thus never tries to do more than it is able to – yet we call it a donkey!

The True Lord then says, '…feed yourselves and the poor and unfortunate' (*al-Hajj:* 28). The 'unfortunate' man is the one whose appearance and clothing clearly show him to be poor; as for the 'poor' man, he is the one who appears to be well-off but is actually poor. People do not take any notice of these poor people; they might not even know that they are poor and needy. Allah *the Almighty* says of them: '…He who is unaware [of their condition] might think that they are wealthy because they abstain [from begging]; [but] you cannot recognise them by their special mark: they do not beg of men with importunity…' (*al-Baqara:* 273).

So the meaning is: 'Eat that which you are allowed to eat, namely that which is purely charitable or an unconditional offering to the Sacred Mosque, i.e. that which is not an obligatory offering like those offering made in the *qiran* or *tamatu`* pilgrimages [which combine *`umra* and *hajj* (the minor and major pilgrimages), either both within the same *qiran* (state of consecration), or *tamatu`* i.e. with a gap in between where the pilgrim comes out of consecration, or an expiation for violating the rules of the consecration, or a vow – for in all of these cases, the person must not eat any of the sacrificed meat.(1)

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(1) *Some say that the qiran and tamatu` sacrifices may be eaten from, whilst others say they may not. Ash-Shafi`i's opinion was that obligatory sacrifices may not be eaten from by the one who offers them, whilst for voluntary sacrifices it is best for the one who offers them to eat a third of the meat, give a third away as a gift, and give a third away as charity. (Al-Jasas, Ahkam Al-Quran)*

So, eat some of the voluntary sacrifice you make, and give some to the unfortunate and the poor. In His Mercy with the poor, Allah *the Almighty* made this duty so that the wealthy and well-off go searching for animals to sacrifice, buy them, and then go to the place where the sacrifice is made, undertaking all this toil; then they go searching for poor people to give it to them, while the latter may be relaxing. Their provision comes to them from Allah's Grace, as easily as can be. Therefore, they say Allah *the Almighty* honoured the poor man by making him one of the pillars of the rich's Islam, meaning the obligation of the poor-due and not making the rich man one of the pillars of the poor's Islam.

The True Lord then says:

ثُمَّ لْيَقْضُوا۟ تَفَثَهُمْ وَلْيُوفُوا۟ نُذُورَهُمْ وَلْيَطَّوَّفُوا۟ بِٱلْبَيْتِ ٱلْعَتِيقِ ﴿٢٩﴾

So let the pilgrims perform their acts of
cleansing, fulfil their vows, and circle around
the Ancient House [29] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 29)

As for the word *qada*, either it means Allah's decree which is for a man to inevitably undergo, or it means the judgement which a man passes between two contenders. The first reaction that one must do when judging between contenders is to bring an end to the contention; so the meaning of *liyaqdu* here is to 'perform' (*al-Hajj:* 29).

The words 'acts of cleansing' (*al-Hajj:* 29) here are the English translation for *tnafath*; when the Quran was revealed, the people of Quraysh did not use this word, so they asked the Bedouin what it meant, whereupon they told them that '*tnafath'* means the dust and dirt which builds up on the body. 'By Allah *the Almighty*', they said, 'we did not know this word until the Quran used it'.

So, the meaning is: 'Let them rid themselves of the dirt which has accumulated upon them in the course of their adhering to the rules of ritual consecration since the pilgrim spends the days of pilgrimage without using perfume, or trimming his hair or nails. Once he finishes the rites of pilgrimage and makes his sacrificial offering, he is allowed to rid himself of this accumulated dirt and grime once he comes out of his consecrated state. He is once again permitted to do things he had been obliged to avoid.

As for His saying, ‘fulfil their vows’ (*al-Hajj:* 29), it means that if the pilgrim vowed anything to Allah *the Almighty*, he must fulfil it.

Regarding the saying of Allah, ‘and circle around the Ancient House.’ (*al-Hajj:* 29), the act of circumambulation meant here is *tawaf al-ifada*. ‘Circumambulation’ means to go around something so that you begin and end at the same point, and then begin again, and so on. Allah *the Almighty* describes the house as being *`atiq* (ancient); the Arabic word *`atiq* has many meanings, one of which is ‘old’ or ‘ancient’. As long as it is the first house ever to have been set up for mankind, it must be ancient. The attribute of ancientness is a praiseworthy quality here because it means something precious which is preserved and looked after.

We see that some people own precious and rare things which they preserve and pass on to their heirs; they call them ‘antiques’ such as works of art and the like; the more time passes, the more valuable they become.

The word *`atiq* also means ‘beautiful’. If a person is *`atiq*, this means he has been freed from slavery and the control of others. So, what does it mean that the house is called *`atiq*? When the House is called ‘ancient’, this incorporates all these meaning. It is old; and being the first house ever set up for mankind, it is precious, valuable, and rare, for we can behold signs within it which we cannot see anywhere else. It is enough to mention that to see it and go around it serve as a means for one’s sins to be forgiven.

It is also *`atiq* in the sense of being ‘freed from the control of others’ because Allah *the Almighty* protected it from the aggression of tyrants. Have you not heard the story(1) of the Elephant and What Allah *the Almighty* did to Abraha (the attacker of Mecca) when he wanted to destroy it? Even the elephant which led this army became conscious that this was an act of aggression against Allah’s House, so it turned back from it and went in any direction they wanted except for the direction of the *Ka`ba*.

It is said that a man(2) went to the elephant and said in its ear, ‘Kneel, O Mahmud (the elephant’s name), come to your senses, for you are in Allah’s Inviolable City’.

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(1) *This is the story of the elephant and its people.*

(2) *Ibn Hisham says in his Sira that the man was named Nufayl ibn Habib Al-Khath`ami.*

A poet(1) spoke of this by saying:

The elephant stopped still, and remained thus,
Yelping as though it had been wounded

Then Allah *the Almighty* sent a swarm of birds upon them and it pelted them with stones, until they all died. It is narrated that when `Abdul Muttalib, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to speak to Abraha about the hundred she-camels he took from him, the latter said, ‘I used to respect you when I saw you, but you have fallen in my estimation, speaking to me about the hundred camels I took from you, and saying nothing of the house wherein lies all your glory and pride.’ How did `Abd Al-Muttalib reply? He said, ‘As for the camels, they are mine; as for the house, it has a Lord who protects it.’

Some might accuse `Abdul Muttalib of being negative by saying this; but the great man of Quraysh was not negative, but rather, he had complete trust that Allah *the Almighty* would protect His House; therefore he left it in the care of the One Who was more powerful than him. It was as though he was saying: ‘If I were to protect it myself, I could only do so with my power, my strength, and my guile, but I want to leave it to Allah’s Power and Strength. I only left the house to Allah’s Protection because I am completely certain that its Lord will protect it; and this will unsettle the enemy and confuse him’.

The position of `Abd Al-Muttalib was very similar to the position of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when his people said to him, ‘Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61); he replied with complete confidence and certainty: ‘Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62)

`Abdul Muttalib was not negative as some people might think. He was positive in an elevated way; for had he been ‘positive’ in the way you mean (i.e. fighting against Abraha), this would only have given him confidence in his own power, whilst the way he actually acted, which you deem to be negative, gave him confidence is Allah’s Power and Strength; and therefore, the hosts of Heaven intervened directly.

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(1) *It was Ummay ibn Abi As-Sult Ath-Thaqafi.*

But, why do Muslims go around the *Ka`ba*? Scholars say it is because when the Muslim is away from the *Ka`ba*, he prays towards it according to what direction it lies in relation to his location. So, all over the world, the Muslims face the *Ka`ba*, one from the north, another from the south, a third from the east and a fourth from the west, that is, people face it from every other possible direction.

If you go to the *Ka`ba* itself and have the honour of seeing it, do you face it from the same direction you did when you prayed at home, and do others do likewise? So, all the directions of the *Ka`ba* are equal for you and for everyone else, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘and wherever you turn, there is Allah’s countenance…’ (*al-Baqara:* 15). So no place is more appropriate than any other, and therefore we walk in circles around it.

The True Lord then says:

ذَٰلِكَ وَمَن يُعَظِّمْ حُرُمَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّهُۥ عِندَ رَبِّهِۦ ۗ وَأُحِلَّتْ
لَكُمُ ٱلْأَنْعَٰمُ إِلَّا مَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَٱجْتَنِبُوا۟ ٱلرِّجْسَ
مِنَ ٱلْأَوْثَٰنِ وَٱجْتَنِبُوا۟ قَوْلَ ٱلزُّورِ ٣٠

All this [is ordained by God]: anyone who honours the sacred ordinances of God will have good rewards from his Lord. Livestock have been made lawful to you, except for what has been explicitly forbidden. Shun the filth of idolatrous beliefs and practices and shun false utterances[30]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 30)

The saying of Allah, ‘All this’ refers to the previous discourse which was a clear proclamation. It calls you to another commandment which shall now be given. This shows that what will be said now is a continuation of what was said before; after speaking about the house and the rites of the pilgrimage connected to it, He continues by saying, ‘All this [is ordained by Allah]: anyone who honours the sacred ordinances of Allah will have good rewards from his Lord…’ (*al-Hajj:* 30). The True Lord wants His servants to adhere to His commandments by doing what He commands and abstain from what He prohibits. You are forbidden from leaving all that Allah *the Almighty* commands. You are forbidden from doing all that He prohibits; and these are the sacred commandments of Allah *the Almighty* which you must honour by obeying the commandment and abstaining from the prohibited.

When you honour these sacred commandments, do not honour them for their own nature, nor nothing is inherently sacred, but rather you honour them because they are Allah’s sacred commandments and injunctions. Therefore, He might make the conditions of their adherence subject to change and He might send circumstances upon you which appear on the surface to be contradictory.

Take the minor ablution, for example. Some people think that it is meant to clean the body; but if there is no water available, it is replaced by the dry ablution, wherein we put dust on certain limbs. So, it is not a matter of cleanliness, but rather of adherence, obedience and of remembering that you are doing something extraordinary for which you must purify yourself by making ablutions. If He commands you to make the dry ablution, then you must obey without looking for the reasons and causes of the commandment. This is how to respect and honour Allah’s Commandments, basically because they are from Allah *the Almighty*. When we see this kind of obedience and respect even in the interactions of our ordinary daily lives and when the soldier is trained, for example, he is taught discipline before taking up a weapon or trains with it. He learns the word ‘attention’ meaning not to move no matter what the circumstance may be so that even if a scorpion stings him, he does not move.

The drill sergeant goes to the soldiers in the mess hall and says, ‘Attention!’, so everyone obeys, the spoon which was on the plate remains on the plate, the spoon which was in the soldier’s mouth remains in his mouth, to the extent that you do not see any movement. This behavioural discipline comes before the other important and vital areas of military discipline which only come after it has been learned.

So, your Lord is worthier of this discipline because worship is nothing other than the worshipper’s disciplined obedience to the commandments of the one he worships, a complete obedience with no discussion. You are not doing it for its own sake, but in obedience to Allah’s Command. When you circumambulate, you kiss the Black Stone, then when you stone the small rocks, you pelt another stone. This is a stone and that is a stone, yet we kiss one and treat the other with disdain; one stone is kissed and the other is bombarded because this is a matter of obedience and adherence; this is all part of honouring Allah's sacred commandments.

`Ali *Allah be pleased with him* alerted us to this truth when he said about wiping over socks in the ablution: 'if religion had followed our human logic, it would have made more sense to wipe the bottom of the foot than the top'(1); this is because the bottom of the foot gets dirty first.

We mentioned when discussing the previous verses that five things are inviolable or sacred, that is, the Inviolable House, the Inviolable Mosque, the Inviolable City, the Inviolable Regions and the Inviolable Month. Allah's sacred commandments are those things which He has made forbidden, so we must not do them.

The True Lord then states what the result of this obedience will be, saying, 'will have good rewards from his Lord' (*al-Hajj:* 30). The goodness here is not based on outward appearances, people's opinions or the intrinsic nature of the thing; rather, it means what is good for the servant in his Lord's Sight.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'Livestock have been made lawful to you, except for what has been explicitly forbidden.' (*al-Hajj:* 30) You might say, 'How is this, when they were lawful from the beginning since the basis of all things is that they are lawful'?

Scholars say Allah *the Almighty* forbade hunting on pilgrimage and in the sanctuary. Some people might have thought that it was henceforth permanently banned so that they would no longer benefit from it. Therefore, He made it clear that it is all permitted except for those things He explicitly forbade, which the Quran makes clear when it says, 'Forbidden to you is carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than Allah's has been invoked, and the animal that has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beast of prey, save that which you [yourselves] may have slaughtered while it was still alive; and [forbidden to you is] all that has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3), and 'Hence, eat not of that over which Allah's name has not been pronounced: for this would be sinful conduct indeed…' (*al-An'am:* 121).

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud (162)*

As for the saying of Allah ‘Shun the filth (*rijs*) of idolatrous beliefs and practices and shun false utterances’ (*al-Hajj:* 30), the Arabic word *rijs* literally means the thick accumulation of filth which builds up inside something, not only on the surface; it can be easily removed.

The word ‘shun’ does not only mean neither to abstain, nor to approach the things which lead to this sin; for when you approach the things which lead to and cause sin, they will tempt you and occupy your mind. The person who strays near something is likely to fall into it, which is why the True Lord did not say, ‘abstain’, but said ‘shun’. I am astonished by some of those people who sin against themselves and say, ‘The command to shun intoxicants does not mean they are forbidden, since He did not say, ‘intoxicants are forbidden to you’. We say that ‘shun’ is even more of a clear prohibition than saying ‘they are forbidden to you’; for had the True Lord said, ‘Intoxicants are forbidden to you’, this would have meant that you could not drink them, but you could attend places where they are drunk and you could brew them, carry them and sell them. But, when He tells you to shun them, then it means that you cannot even go anywhere near them.

Therefore, I find that the rhetorical style of the Quran in imparting Allah’s commandments and prohibitions clearly distinguishes the bounds of what Allah. Where commandments are concerned, He says, ‘These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, transgress them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 229).

Where prohibitions are concerned, He says, ‘These are the bounds set by Allah do not, then, offend against them (literally ‘do not approach them’)…’ (*al-Baqara:* 187). So, when Allah commands and permits something, stay within the bounds of what He permits; do not transgress them by doing anything else. Yet, when He forbids something, do not even approach them. When Allah *the Almighty* wanted to forbid Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* from eating from the tree, He said to them: ‘but do not approach this one tree’ (*al-Baqara:* 35).

After commanding us to shun the loathsome evil of false gods, the True Lord says, ‘…and practices and shun false utterances.’ (*al-Hajj:* 30) So He links idol-worship to bearing false witness, as though they are equal sins. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* finished his dawn prayer one day and then stood up and said, ‘Indeed, Allah has placed the bearing of false witness right after idol-worship!'(1) Why? Because bearing false witness combines all different forms of evildoing; for when someone says, 'There is no Allah', this is false and then he is a bearer of false witness. When he says, 'Allah has partners', this is false, and the one who says it is a bearer of false witness. Likewise, when he does evil or distorts the truth or insults others, this is all part of bearing false witness.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* therefore listed the enormities, and said, 'Shall I not tell you of the gravest of all enormities?' They said, 'Tell us, O Prophet Muhammad.' He said, 'To associate partners with Allah and to dishonour one's parents.' He was reclining, and then he stood up and said, 'And indeed, bearing false witness! And indeed, bearing false witness!' The narrator said, 'He kept on repeating it until we thought he would never stop.'(2)

Scholars say about the bearer of false witness: 'O bearer of false witness, you are of blatant evil! You mislead judges and swear false oaths by Allah *the Almighty*!'

It is notable that the bearer of false testimony falls in the estimation of the people; he also falls in the estimation of the one on whose behalf he testifies, even though he testifies on your behalf and gives you an advantage over your rival, he sullies his own dignity, and so you despise him. If he is called to testify regarding someone else, you will be the first one to reveal that he gave false testimony on your behalf.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

حُنَفَآءَ لِلَّهِ غَيۡرَ مُشۡرِكِينَ بِهِۦۚ وَمَن يُشۡرِكۡ بِٱللَّهِ فَكَأَنَّمَا خَرَّ مِنَ
ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَتَخۡطَفُهُ ٱلطَّيۡرُ أَوۡ تَهۡوِي بِهِ ٱلرِّيحُ فِي مَكَانٖ سَحِيقٖ ﴿٣١﴾

Devote yourselves to God and assign Him no partners, for the person who does so is like someone who has been hurled down from the skies and snatched up by the birds or flung to a distant place by the wind [31] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 31)

The verse under discussion suffices with mentioning two attributes which serve as a summation, namely inclining towards Allah *the Almighty* and turning away from all that is false. That is to say, they do not ascribe divine qualities to aught beside Him. The word *hunafa* is the plural of *hanif* which is derived from the word *hanafa* which describes a leg which is bent and not straight. Now this attribute here does not mean that these people are crooked, but rather, the meaning is that when you deviate away from deviance, you are thereby upright.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (iv. 321), At-Tirmidhi (2300) and Abu Dawud (3599)*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (5976) and Muslim (87)*

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* described Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as 'one who turned away from all that is false (*hanif*)…' (*Al-'Imran:* 67) meaning that he turned away from idol-worship.

I said that Allah does not intervene with a new religion until people become completely steeped in corruption and misguidance, and the means of guidance are all exhausted. Consequently, there is no one to give counsel to a man, not his own soul and conscience, nor his religion, nor his community and environment. The human soul has a certain natural immunity against all that which contradicts the truth, but this immunity can be covered over by passions. Once this immunity no longer exists in the entire community, Allah sends a new prophet, a new message, and a new warning.

This is what Allah *the Almighty* means when He says, 'they would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did: vile indeed was what they were wont to do!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 79) That is why Allah *the Almighty* testified that the *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the best *ummah* ever brought out for the good of mankind. The immunity of truth exists within it; it will always advise itself and enjoin what is good and guide the deviant person back to righteousness; and therefore Prophet Muhammad said about it: 'Goodness will remain in me and in my *ummah*, until the Day of Resurrection.'(1)

The meaning of this is, 'Goodness is encompassed in me, and spread throughout my *ummah*'. He *peace and blessings be upon him* embodied all the attributes of goodness and Allah *the Almighty* gave perfection to him alone, but who of his *ummah* could be as perfect as him? Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* spread out the attributes of goodness throughout the Muslim *ummah* so that each of them took one of his attributes; one is generous, another is courageous, a third is forbearing and so on.

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(1) *Narrated by As-Suyuti although there is some doubt about its authenticity*

Since the *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has this role, this means that he was the Seal of the Prophets, because his *ummah* would continue to convey his Message after him and therefore Allah would not have to intervene by sending another Messenger until the Last Hour.

So, I say that messengers do not come unless there is deviation and they come to straighten this deviation and to incline towards uprightness. This is the meaning of ‘Devote yourselves to Allah and assign Him no partners…’ (*al-Hajj:* 31). This attribute is defined by upright adherence to Allah’s commands, and not the commands of human beings, we cannot choose for ourselves the means of attaining perfection, and say, ‘Things must be like this and that’. No, only the Creator can define the means for His creatures to attain perfection.

The True Lord does not want us to do something merely for the sake of the thing itself, but rather because it is His command. I explained this notion before by giving the example of a disbeliever who does good deeds and benefits to other people and society, but not for the sake of religion or Allah’s Commandments, but the humanity, social position, renown and esteem. Allah *the Almighty* does not deny such a person what he rightly deserves, or the reward for his actions; yet He gives it to him, but only in this worldly life, as He says, ‘[But,] behold, as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds – verily, We do not fail to requite any who persevere in doing good.’ (*al-Kahf:* 30)

These people, however, have no share of the reward of the Hereafter because they worked for the sake of society, people and esteem. They were rewarded in this worldly life with fame, esteem, being renowned. In a Qudsi Hadith, the True Lord says to them, ‘…You only did it so that (such-and-such) would be said – and indeed it was said.’(1)

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘The first of people to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who was martyred. He will be brought forward, and shown his blessings, and he will acknowledge them. (Allah) will say, ‘What did you do with them?’ He will say: ‘I fought in Your cause until I was martyred.’ He will say: ‘You have lied; you fought so*=

Allah *the Almighty* gave us numerous parables to describe these people, such as when He says, 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that]He will pay him his account in full – for Allah *the Almighty* is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39)

So, the deeds of the disbeliever are like a mirage which can be seen from a distance, so that he who sees it thinks there is water there, but in fact there is not. Eventually he comes to realise that there is nothing there, and is surprised to find that a Just Allah exists, he had not had this on his mind when he did any of his deeds.

In another verse, He says, '[This, then, is] the parable of those who are bent on denying their Lord: all their works are as ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day: [in the life to come,] they cannot achieve any benefit whatever from all [the good] that they may have wrought…' (*Ibrahim:* 18). He also says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Do not deprive your charitable deeds of all worth by stressing your own benevolence and hurting [the feelings of the needy], as does he who spends his wealth only to be seen and praised by men, and believes not in Allah and the Last Day: for his parable is that of a smooth rock with [a little] earth upon it – and then a rainstorm smites it and leaves it hard and bare. Such as these shall have no gain whatever from all their [good] works: for Allah does not guide people who refuse to acknowledge the truth.' (*al-Baqara:* 264)

As rain causes anything to grow when it falls upon a smooth, hard rock, the deeds of the unbeliever are like this. As for those who wish to attain the reward of the Hereafter, they must achieve the true meaning of 'Devote…to Allah and assign Him no partners' (*al-Hajj:* 31), and base their deeds on Allah's Commandments. So, a deed should not be done because it is good in itself, but rather, because Allah *the Almighty* has commanded you to do it. This will be proved by the fact that the Lawgiver will command you some things

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= *it would be said that you were brave; and it was said.' Then He will order for him to be dragged away on his face, and thrown in the fire.' Narrated by Muslim (1905), Ahmad (ii. 322), and An-Nasa'i (vi. 23)* which you will not see to be good, yet nevertheless you are obliged to obey them in order to attain the discipline which the Wise Lawgiver wants from you; and then after this, the goodness of this deed will be revealed to you and you will learn the wisdom behind it.

Take the Islamic position concerning the orphan, for example. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* encouraged us to take care of orphans and provide for them generously, even saying, ‘I and the one who provides for the orphan shall be like these two in paradise’, placing his first and middle fingers together.(1) So the one who provides for the orphan will be a companion of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in paradise.

There are many hidden wisdoms to be found in this position, of which many people might be unaware. The orphan has lost his father whilst still young, so that he has no father whilst his friends enjoy the protection of their fathers. So, if this young child is not shown affection by all people, as though they are his fathers, he will develop feelings of bitterness and resentment towards Allah *the Almighty* and the fate which denied him the affection and care of a father, but did not deny this to others. Therefore, Islam wants the orphan to have an equal upbringing in society so that he does not feel bitterness towards Allah *the Almighty* or towards the people, as they all treat him as though he were their son.

There is another point worth making here: When you see the position of the orphan, and how society looks after him and raises him, your heart will feel assured if you should die suddenly whilst your children are still young. These are immunities which Islam places in society: immunity for the orphan himself, and immunity for those who look after him and provide for him.

Looking after the orphan and providing for him must be done in light of the words ‘Devote yourselves to Allah and assign Him no partners…’ (*al-Hajj:* 31) so that your action is devoted solely to Allah *the Almighty* without any regard for worldly pleasures, such as the one who is eager to become an orphan’s guardian so that he can utilise the orphan’s wealth or because he desires the orphan’s mother and so on; for as we said, such deeds are ‘like a mirage in the desert' (*an-Nur:* 39), or like 'ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day' (*Ibrahim:* 18) or like 'a smooth rock' (*al-Baqara:* 264) from which nothing can grow.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (5304) and Abu Dawud (5150) on the authority of Sahl ibn As-Sa`idi*

If one tries to devote his intention solely to Allah in deeds such as this, he cannot be certain that this intention will not be mixed with other goals, which is why the Hadith says, 'O Allah, I ask Your forgiveness for every deed I intended for You Alone, but for which my intention was then mixed with something which was not for You.'(1)

The second attribute with which Allah describes His faithful servants is: 'assign Him no partners'. (*al-Hajj:* 31) Idolatry is a grave matter indeed because the True Lord, as the Qudsi Hadith says, has no need whatsoever of any associate; so why would you seek refuge in any but Allah *the Almighty* when Allah exists?

Therefore, He says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'Of all [supposed] associates, I have the least need for any association; thus, if anyone does an action for someone else's sake as well as Mine, I will leave it to the one whom he associated with Me.'(2) And the True Lord then gives us a clear image of the consequence of idolatry: '…for the person who does so is like someone who has been hurled down *(kharra*) from the skies and snatched up by the birds or flung to a distant place by the wind.' (*al-Hajj:* 31)

The Arabic word *kharra* (hurled down) means falling from the sky without holding onto anything, as He says elsewhere: '…so that the roof fell (kharra) in upon them from above…' (*an-Nahl:* 26).

Man has within him an aspect of mineral nature in that the law of gravity applies to him. If he goes up, he must come down because of this gravity and cannot hold himself suspended in the air, since this is beyond his power. Man, also has an aspect of vegetal nature in that he grows and an aspect of animal nature in that he has instincts; and his human nature is found in his mind, his intelligence and his ability to choose between alternatives – by this, he was honoured above all the other kinds of being.

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(1) *Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali mentions this in his (Jami` Al-`Ulum Wal-Hikam) as a supplication of Mutraf ibn `Abdullah.*

(2) *It' is narrated by Muslim (2985) and Ibn Majah (4202) on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

We can observe here that ‘hurled down’ is linked to a great height: ‘hurled down from the skies’. (*al-Hajj:* 31) Therefore, no power can protect him or prevent him from falling, neither from him nor from anything else. Before he reaches the ground, the birds carry him off; and if they do not carry him off, then the wind blows him away to a far-off place and plays with him. So, he is bound to perish a way or another and any one of these three would be enough to finish him.

The intelligent person should reflect on the meaning of this Quranic image and beware of this fate, for this is the state of those who associate partners with Allah *the Almighty*. If you take this image to be a comparison of one state with another, then the image is plainly there before you; and if you want another interpretation which explains its individual parts, then the ‘skies’ signify Islam, the ‘birds’ are passions, and the ‘wind’ is the exhortation of Satan, which plays around with him, carrying him here and there. So, what loss could be worse than this? And who could save a man from this fate?

The True Lord then says:

ذَٰلِكَ وَمَن يُعَظِّمْ شَعَٰٓئِرَ ٱللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِن تَقْوَى ٱلْقُلُوبِ ﴿٣٢﴾

All this [is ordained by God]: those who honour
God’s rites show the piety of their hearts [32]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 32)

As for the saying of Allah, ‘this is [ordained by Allah]…’ (*al-Hajj:* 32), it refers to what has just been said which has become clear and plain. We now wish to say something else, and draw the hearer’s attention to it. Concerning the saying of Allah, ‘those who honour Allah’s rites’ (*al-Hajj:* 32), the word *sha`a`ir* is the plural of *sha`ira* (symbol) which means the rituals which Allah *the Almighty* sets up for His servants that they might attain His reward by honouring them. The consecrated state of the pilgrim is a symbol, the *takbir* (saying *Allahu Akbar*, Allah is the Greater) is a symbol, the circumambulation is a symbol, the rushing between *Safa* and *Marwa* is a symbol, stoning the pillars is a symbol and so on. These are all things which Allah *the Almighty* has honoured, and commanded us to honour. To honour something means more than just to do it or to perform it; to honour the symbols means to perform them with love, devotion and sincerity, to do them as perfectly as possible and even to do more than is required of one.

A fine example is the devout friend of Allah; Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* commanded him to raise the foundations of the House. It would have been enough for him to build it as high as his hand could reach and he would therefore have done what he was commanded to do. He felt love and devotion for this responsibility, so he employed strategy and placed one boulder atop another so that he could stand on them and make the building even higher.

To love the commandments of Allah is a stage of faith that we must reach, even in our worldly labours. Suppose that you are relocated to a new office and you learned that the director of this office is a hard and serious man, who does not neglect any mistake and does not tolerate any lateness or negligence during working hours. You will adhere to these new directions to the letter and might even go beyond them, not because you love your work, but because you do not want to be censured by this director one day.

Thus, the point is that fulfilling our obligations with love and devotion will lead us to Allah's love. Therefore, we find that those endowed with deep knowledge say, 'A sin which causes humility and profound regret might be better than a good deed which causes pride and arrogance'. What is important is that we reach the stage of surrendering and humbling ourselves to Allah *the Almighty*. A sin that leads you to this goal is better than a good deed that leads you to delusion and pride.

This is what it means to love the religious responsibilities and the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* expressed this devotion when He said, 'And the coolness of my eyes has been placed in prayer.'(1) Therefore, the Quran reproached those who: 'when they stand up to prayer they stand up sluggishly; they do it only to be seen of men and do not remember Allah save a little.' (*an-Nisa':* 142)

Fatima, daughter of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was cleaning and polishing a dirham. When Prophet Muhammad asked her what she was doing, she said that she wished to give it as charity and that she knew that it was going to Allah before the pauper. This is what it means to honour the rites of Allah and to perform them with desire and love.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, An-Nasa'i and Al-Hakim*

In the early period of Islamic history, people used to contend for being the first to get to the mosque when they heard the call to prayer and for being the last to leave the mosque after the prayer is finished. You might like to compare their state to our state today. Those people honoured the indications of Allah and placed them second to nothing. One of those endowed with deep knowledge reached such a level of love of Allah's commandments and rites that made him proclaim that he has become worried that Allah will not reward him for obeying Him. When he was asked why, he replied that he desired it and how could Allah reward him for fulfilling his desire.

Therefore, when a commandment from Allah reaches the people to whom He has given resolve and deep knowledge, they welcome it without any discussion or debate. How could they debate the commandment of Allah, while they honour it? Therefore, we wonder about those who debate and object to those things that the Prophet Muhammad did, such as polygamy. In addition, how could he *peace and blessings be upon him* be accused of committing inappropriate things?! As a matter of fact, as long as you believe that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah, how can you blame him *peace and blessings be upon him* for doing a particular act while neglecting another. Do you yourselves possess enough perfection to judge the actions of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? In fact, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is an absolutely perfect person.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says that honouring His rites show the piety of the hearts and not of the limbs. That is because the heart is where Allah looks and where the measurement of honouring of His rites take place. Moreover, we said before that Allah does not want us to yield our bodies up to Him, rather, He wants our hearts to yield to Him. If He wanted our bodies to yield, they would yield to Him unwillingly, as He says: 'Perhaps you will kill yourself with grief because they do not believe. If We please, We should send down upon them a sign from the heavens so that their necks should stoop to it.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4)

You can force someone who is weaker than you to do something he hates and you can even make him prostrate before you if you want. However, you cannot make him love or respect you. Why is that? That is because you can force the body, but you have no power over the heart. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَٰفِعُ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ مُّسَمّٗى ثُمَّ مَحِلُّهَآ إِلَى ٱلۡبَيۡتِ ٱلۡعَتِيقِ ﴿٣٣﴾

Livestock are useful to you until the set time.
Then their place of sacrifice is near the Ancient
House[33] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 33)

As long as these things are the rites of Allah and shows the piety of the heart, you should do and honour them because they shall give you benefits that you could recognise or not. You might recognise some of them but not others because they are veiled from you. The true unknown value of the reward for these rites is commensurate with the level of sincerity with which it is done.

The verse talks about the sacrificial animals since Allah ended the verse by saying 'Then their place of sacrifice is near the Ancient House.' (*al-Hajj:* 33) Thus, the rite meant here is that of sacrificing animals whose benefits are obvious. We benefit from their wool, fur, milk, and meat. In addition, we take them as mounts and decorations.

Utilising all these benefits are until the set time which is that time when you say and intend that such and such an animal is for the sanctuary. When you make this intention, you can no longer benefit from any part of it, nor can anyone else do so. Therefore, they label these animals so that if it is lost, the people will recognise that it is an offering for the house of Allah and no one will take it. Inasmuch as these benefits last until a set time, they must be worldly benefits, as you will find the otherworldly benefits later in the Hereafter.

Allah says, 'Then their place of sacrifice is near the Ancient House.' (*al-Hajj:* 33) This means that when this set time comes, the pilgrim will take the offering to the sanctuary to be sacrificed. The scholars discussed this verse much. They said that the act of sacrificing is made at Mina, not in Mecca. However, the verse says that it is near the Ancient House. We say that the sacrifice was originally made in Mecca at the sanctuary, as the verse says, however they later found it inappropriate to perform the sacrifices in the sanctuary because of the mess and the blood it left there. Thus, it was deemed better to make the sacrifice away from the sanctuary so that it would remain clean. However, this does not prevent the original method from being done, which is to perform the sacrifice at the sanctuary, as Allah says in another verse, ‘as an offering to be brought to the *Ka`ba*.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 95) In the same vein, a Hadith says, ‘Mecca is all a place of sacrifice.’(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٖ جَعَلۡنَا مَنسَكٗا لِّيَذۡكُرُواْ ٱسۡمَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُم مِّنۢ
بَهِيمَةِ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِۗ فَإِلَٰهُكُمۡ إِلَٰهٞ وَٰحِدٞ فَلَهُۥٓ أَسۡلِمُواْۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلۡمُخۡبِتِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

We appointed acts of devotion for every community, for
them to celebrate God’s name over the livestock He
provided for them: your God is One, so devote yourselves
to Him. [Prophet], give good news to the humble [34]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 34)

The acts of devotion are the sacrifices of worship as Allah tells us that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, ‘Say, “Surely my prayer, and my sacrifice, and my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 162)

Allah appointed acts of devotion for every community because the rites, indications, and acts of worship do not have to be the same for all communities. Every community is given what is appropriate for it and appropriate for its temporal and environmental situation. Thus, the messengers did not come to change the fundamental truths upon which religion stands. These fundamentals and foundations are constant from one message to another and they are not changed or replaced when different messengers are sent.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) that keep to obedience and be not divided therein.' (*ash-Shura:* 13) This applies to the fundamental roots of doctrine; yet as for the branches, Allah sees what is best for a society and the acts of obedience and worship which are appropriate for it.

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(1) *The like of this was narrated by Ahmad and Ad-Darimi.*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* makes clear what the wisdom behind these acts of worship is. He says, 'to celebrate Allah's name over the livestock He provided for them'. (*al-Hajj:* 34) This means that these rites were laid down so that they remember Allah in all things and give thanks to Him for all the blessings they derive from the livestock. That is why we invoke Allah when we sacrifice, saying, 'In the name of Allah, Allah is The Greatest.' We invoke Him because slaughtering means releasing the spirit that Allah created and that you could never release it by your own will alone. Thus, saying the phrase 'In the name of Allah, Allah is The Greatest' means that I am not releasing this animal's spirit of my own accord, but rather because Allah commanded and permitted me to do so. Allah is greater than your will and greater than your emotions.

We see that some people do not like slaughtering and wonder why we slaughter this animal or this chicken. They claim to have mercy and pity for these animals. However, they do not have more mercy for them than their Creator does. We only slaughter them because Allah has permitted this and we only eat them in the name of Allah. This is clearly proved by how we never approach those things which Allah has forbidden us. Do we honour cats more than rabbits since we slaughter the rabbits and leave cats alone? Do we respect the dog more than the sheep? We do not definitely. It is a matter of law and a commandment from Allah which we must honour and obey. Allah provided those livestock for us. This means that he has created them for us, given them to us and tamed them to our will so that we benefit from it. Had He not subjected them to our will, they would never have yielded to our power and strength.

Allah then proclaims His Oneness. This tells that although the laws of one community differ to those of another, do not think that this one is from one God and the other law is from another God. There is only One God, Who gives each community the laws which are most appropriate and best for them, because divine legislations come to treat specific social ailments.

The pure root of all religions is the belief in One All-Powerful God, who sends messengers with miracles to prove their honesty and convey His message. This is the basis of all revealed religions. Likewise, the fundamental rules and foundations of religion are commonly agreed upon. Stealing, adultery, false testimony and so on, are forbidden in all religions. Nevertheless, there are certain matters which are appropriate for one community but not another and the Lawgiver for all of them is One God. All people, from the very beginning of creation to the Last Hour, are equal before Him and therefore, He chooses what is best for each of them.

Do you not see how the head of a family arranges the affairs of his children, and Allah is beyond compare? For example, the head of the family tells each of them what to do when the food is served. He says that one of them must eat something different because he is ill, for example, and cannot eat the same food the others eat. So, he tells the mother to make something different for the ill child. This is because he is the guardian and the one responsible for all of them. He must consider what is best for each of them individually.

Therefore, differences between the laws of different communities do not mean that there are several gods. Nay, Glory be to Allah! There is only One God, Who gives to each of His servants according to their needs, in order to balance and upright society. In the past, doctors used to have two kinds of medicine which they used to give every patient no matter what their condition was. Therefore, this treatment was useless. Nowadays, a skilled doctor performs the necessary tests and analyses the patient to diagnose his condition. He prescribes the appropriate medicine for this condition with precise measures to cure the illness without harming the patient in another way. The same is true of the diverse sacred laws which were given to different communities.

Inasmuch as God is One and we are all equal in His sight and none of us is His son, then let us devote ourselves to Him. Surrender all our affairs to Him *the Almighty*. Honour and accept gladly His commandment, but if He leaves something up to our free choice, do what we like. In addition, do not forget that Allah has given us the chance to ascend the levels of faith. In addition, He shows us how to reach spiritual excellence, if you want to.

Subsequently, He tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to give good news to the humble. Generally speaking, a humble man is a person who submits humbly to all the commandments of Allah. The more precise meaning of humble is the one who does not seek revenge for himself when he is wronged, as Allah says, ‘And indeed, whoever is patient and forgiving, these most surely are actions due to courage’. (*ash-Shura:* 43) The word ‘indeed’ here adds extra emphasis. But why did Luqman not add the word indeed when he advised his son: ‘and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these acts require courage’ (*Luqman:* 17)?

Scholars say that misfortunes are of two kinds. The first is caused by an adversary and is accompanied by rage and lust for revenge. The second is a misfortune which befalls a man without there being any adversary involved, such as illness. That kind which has an adversary involved needs more patience therefore it requires emphasis, unlike the misfortune which befalls you without there being any adversary involved. It comes from Allah and therefore easier to bear patiently than the other kind. Luqman was advising his son to bear patiently that kind of misfortune that has no adversary.

Despite this, Allah *Glorified is He* has given the human soul ways of venting itself to preclude anger from building up inside and turning into hatred and malice, which could cause worse things to happen to you in the first place. Therefore, He has permitted you to respond but has yet encouraged you to do something higher than this and better for you. He says, ‘and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men; and Allah loves the doers of good (to others)’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 134). The verse above includes three stages from which you can choose according to how well and correctly you understand the words of Allah and how close you are to Him.

The first stage is to restrain anger, that is, to curb your anger within yourself without translating it into revenge. Anger, then, is an emotion of the heart and a feeling of the soul. The second stage is to pardon men, i.e. to forgive taking revenge and to give anger no place in your soul and willingly cleansing it of all feelings of ire and anger. The third stage which is doing good is the highest rank of all. It is not to pardon only, but to do good to the one who wrongs you.

Some people say that this is contrary to human nature. Indeed, it is contrary to the nature of ordinary people. However, those who recognise its reward and fully well know that by doing it they will be close to their Lord, find it easy to do and indeed love doing good to those who wrong them. Therefore, when Al-Hasan Al-Basri *Allah rest his soul* heard that someone had backbitten him, he sent him a gift of a plate of fresh dates and said to him, ‘I heard that you gave me some of your good deeds yesterday.’ It is clear that good deeds are more precious and valuable than a plate of fresh dates. Hence, they say, ‘what a strange man who wrongs those who wrong him’. They have given him their good deeds which is the best things that they have done, so why would he wrong them in return?

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make a balance in society and put an end to the causes of hatred and malice in the human soul. When you do good to the one who wrongs you, you uproot the hatred and malice from his soul, as Allah says, ‘Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! He between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend.’ (*Fussilat:* 34) By doing so, you take your adversary from a position of adversity to a position of friendship and love.

So, a humble person submits humbly to Allah, while a person, who is not humble, is full of arrogance and tyranny towards those around him and holds himself to be better than everyone else. If he invokes the majesty of his Lord, he would humble himself before Him and behave with His creatures as well. Arrogance, on the other hand, is a sign that someone is heedless of Allah’s Majesty as though he is unaware of his Creator. Thus, you could say that humility is of two kinds. The first is to be humble before Allah through submitting oneself to him and honouring His commandments, while the second is to be humble before the creatures of Allah through doing justice, forgiving, and pardoning them because of the belief that Allah will be on the side of the wronged person.

Consider your children when one of them wrongs the other. Whom would you support and sympathise with? Undoubtedly, you would be on the side of the one who was wronged. You would feel for him and want to compensate him for being wronged. Yet, the one who wronged would regret it because of the distinction his brother gained after being wronged. He might even wish that he had been the one who was wronged instead.

Likewise, the humble person sees that all mankind are Allah's dependents and that the most beloved one to Him is the kindest to His dependents. Therefore, he forgives those who wrong him and leaves their affair up to Allah, the Lord of all. In addition, if the wronged person responds to the one who wrongs him, he would only do so according to his limited power and strength, whilst if he leaves the response to Allah, it would be commensurate with His Power.

In addition, it is worth noting that before thinking of revenge, the wronged person should be aware that he might have wronged others without realising and taking note of it as well. Thus, this is something which is for you as well as against you. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'O son of Adam, you have prayed against the one who wronged you', which is permitted as He says, 'Allah does not love the public utterance of hurtful speech unless (it be) by one to whom injustice has been done.' (*an-Nisa':* 148) This means that the one who is wronged has been given the opportunity of praying against those who wrong him. Allah continues saying, 'And the one you have wronged has prayed against you. Thus, if you will, I shall answer your prayers and the prayers made against you or if you will, I shall leave you both until the Hereafter, where My pardon shall extend to both of you.'(1)

The humble man bears all of this in mind and exercises tolerance and forgiveness, so that his Lord will be on his side. Therefore, they say that if a wrongdoer knew what grace Allah had in store for the one he wronged, he would withhold this wrongdoing from him. When you see the one you wrong forgiving and pardoning you, do not think that you have humbled him, for he has only humbled himself, for it is Allah Who will raise him and lift his head above you one day. That is why it is considered an upright conduct when two people quarrel to ask whether they have a father or a boss who shall be called to arbitrate between them and seek his judgement to end this dispute. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) Al-Ghazali relates this as a saying of Yazid ibn Maysara.

ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ ٱللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ عَلَىٰ مَآ أَصَابَهُمْ
وَٱلْمُقِيمِي ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَٰهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Whose hearts fill with awe whenever God is mentioned, who endure whatever happens to them with patience, who keep up the prayer, who give to others out of Our provision to them [35] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 35)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* lists some of the attributes of humble people. Their hearts tremble with awe whenever Allah is mentioned. They quake in fear, shake, and quiver in awe of Allah.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘now surely by Allah’s remembrance are the hearts set at rest.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 28) Thus, Allah in one verse says that their hearts fill with awe, and in another verse, He says that their hearts set at rest. Why is that? That is because when the remembrance of Allah comes after a sin, the soul will surely feel fear and quake in dread of Allah, while when His remembrance comes after a misfortune or difficulty, the soul will find rest and comfort. Consequently, when you are best with difficulty and you do not have the means to get out of it, you say, ‘I have a Lord’ and seek refuge with Him, just as Musa (Moses) did when he said, ‘By no means; surely my Lord is with me: He will show me a way out.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62)

The second attribute is that they patiently bear whatever ill befalls them which they believe to be bad and consider a misfortune. We judge misfortunes according to the superficial harm they do. But, if you were to bear in mind the reward for the misfortune when you judge it, it would be easy for you and you would not consider it bad. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The truly unfortunate man is the one who loses out on the reward.’ This is the true misfortune that cannot be mended; whilst a misfortune that befalls you and you bear it patiently to earn reward is not really a misfortune.

Allah mentions their third attribute which is that they establish prayer. Prayer shows the faithfulness of a Muslim. It is the obligation that is never waived under any circumstance. The two testimonies of faith are enough to be said once in your lifetime and alms giving is paid only once a year when you have its fixed amount. Likewise, fasting is only required one month out of the year and the pilgrimage is performed once in your lifetime when you can afford it and there is no blame on you if you cannot afford it.

Thus, prayer is a constant allegiance to Allah throughout the whole day. It is your Lord who calls you to it and you can set the time and place for this meeting with Him because He is ready to meet you at any time. You can imagine a president or a king, for example, calling you and insisting that you come and see him five times every day to be in his presence. Allah *Glorified is He* calls His servants to meet with Him and does not call them only once, but five times throughout the day and night. However, it is not burdensome for Him to repeat these meetings as He can meet them all at the same time. `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked how Allah will reckon all people at the same time, he replied, ‘He does so in the same way He provides them all at the same time.’

The fourth attribute is that they spend out of that with which they are provided. They do not spend out of their pockets, but they spend from what Allah has provided for them. Amazingly, Allah gives you provision from His bounty, yet when He wants you to help a needy person, He says to you, ‘Who is there that will offer to Allah a good gift.’ (*al-Hadid:* 11) It is as though Allah is saying that He does not ask for His gifts back and meanwhile does not say give what he has given to you to so and so a person. However, if you give a poor man a portion of your money, it will be stored up for you and not wasted. The provision which Allah has bestowed upon you belongs to you and He will never cheat you out of any of it. Allah respects your possessions and appreciates your actions, your hard work, and your effort with good rewards.

It is like the example of a man who needs a large amount of money for one of his sons, which is why he takes from his other sons what they have saved up from their allowance and promises to give it back to them later. Therefore, Allah says that He will double it for him. He gives you even more in return. This made some people say that Allah has forbidden dealing in usury, yet He gives usury to us. Indeed He *the Almighty* gives you double and orders you to leave Him deal in this way. That is because when He gives you more, He does not take anything away from anyone else, nor does He lose anything which He has. He does not cause misery for any weak or needy person, or take advantage of their need.

In Islam, charity is a form of insurance against poverty if you ever become needy. The thing that a man fears most in old age is poverty. When he is unable to earn and no longer able to work, he fears that his money might run out and might need other people to help him in his old age. Here, Allah reassures him to rest easy, for just as he gives to others in his times of ease, others will reach out to him when he is old and infirm. Thus, Allah takes from you in order to give you and insure your future that you fear.

Charity in Islam is a fund to show solidarity with all society. It is like the funds of an insurance company. Thus, when your means are straitened and you grow old and infirm, we say to you: ‘Do not grieve, for you are part of a cooperative believing society and just as you were required to give to others when you were well-off, others are required to give to you when you have nothing’.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلْبُدْنَ جَعَلْنَٰهَا لَكُم مِّن شَعَٰٓئِرِ ٱللَّهِ لَكُمْ فِيهَا خَيْرٌ ۖ فَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱسْمَ
ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا صَوَآفَّ ۖ فَإِذَا وَجَبَتْ جُنُوبُهَا فَكُلُوا۟ مِنْهَا وَأَطْعِمُوا۟ ٱلْقَانِعَ
وَٱلْمُعْتَرَّ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ سَخَّرْنَٰهَا لَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

We have made camels part of God’s sacred rites for you.
There is much good in them for you, so invoke God’s name
over them as they are lined up for sacrifice, then, when they
have fallen down dead, feed yourselves and those who do not
ask, as well as those who do. We have subjected them to you
in this way so that you may be thankful [36]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 36)

After speaking about spending out of what Allah has provided for us, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the spending of camels, male or female, or the equivalent in cattle. Its Arabic name indicates that it is fat and plump. You must look for this attribute when you choose one to offer as a sacrifice to Allah and beware of being one of those people who offer that which they do not want for themselves. Be one of those people of whom Allah says, 'O you who believe! Spend (benevolently) of the good things that you earn.' (*al-Baqara:* 267)

Allah asks us to invoke His name over them and mention Him with thanks for giving and subduing them to us. Invoke Allah's name upon them when you slaughter them as they are lined up and standing on their feet with no weak or lameness. They are lined up before you as though they are in a show. These are the attributes of good cattle which befit this ritual and which are worthy of being offered to the house of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* shows the way of their falling dead. It is well known that camels are not slain on the ground as other cattle are, but rather, they are slaughtered whilst standing and once a camel has been slaughtered, it falls to the ground heavily because of its bulk.

Then Allah orders us to feed ourselves of it. However, we said that only the offering which is completely voluntary and not linked to any of the affairs of the pilgrimage can be eaten. Thus, the offerings of the joint or separate minor and major pilgrimages or an offering given to make amends for a mistake and a vow and so on cannot be eaten from. The reason why we are commanded to eat some of the offering is that they used to disdain to eat of something which had been slaughtered for the poor. Therefore, it is as though commanding them to eat indicates that they must choose that which they would be happy to eat from. In addition, Allah orders us to feed the needy who do not beg, and the beggars.

Allah has subjugated them to us in this instance and in others in order to be thankful. He subdued them for us from the time man was first brought into being. Therefore, we must give thanks to Allah for creating them and making us own them. We must give Him thanks for subduing and subjecting them to our will as well as for guiding us to the performance of this rite and all this good which will bring you benefit in this world and in the Hereafter as well.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

لَن يَنَالَ ٱللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَآؤُهَا وَلَٰكِن يَنَالُهُ ٱلتَّقۡوَىٰ مِنكُمۡۚ كَذَٰلِكَ
سَخَّرَهَا لَكُمۡ لِتُكَبِّرُواْ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَىٰكُمۡۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ٣٧

It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God but your piety. He has subjected them to you in this way so that you may glorify God for having guided you. Give good news to those who do good [37] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 37)

Before Islam, people used to pour the blood on the idol when they made sacrifices for them as though they were telling them that they have sacrificed and here was the blood of the animal. This action showed their folly and foolish conduct as they thought that if they did not pour the blood on the idol, it would not know that they had sacrificed for it. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* draws attention to the fact that neither their meat nor their blood reaches Him. He does not take anything from them and He is fully able to give to the poor man that you are commanded to give and make him as well off as you.

Actually, what Allah wants from making people different in terms of richness and poverty is to make balance in society. Society is not a machine which moves in unison; rather, it is based on human life that is, in turn, based on need and integration. Thus, these differences must exist between people and the divine legislation intervenes to take from the strong and give the weak and to take from the rich and give the poor, in order to put an end to feelings of rancour, envy, hatred, and selfishness.

For when the strong man gives the weak some of his strength, he will not envy him and will hope it remains with him because its benefit is passed onto him. Similarly, when a rich man gives some of the wealth which Allah granted him to a poor one, he will win his heart and relinquish the feelings of envy and jealousy and make him pray for the rich man to be always well blessed. Thus, these social differences are inevitable to represent the statement of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'The relationship of the believer with another believer is like (the bricks of) a building, each strengthens the other.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Therefore, when a well-blessed person who shares his blessing with others is smite by a financial crisis, others grieve for him and feel his pain because his blessing is passed on to them and his wealth is shared with them. Recently, a man in the countryside might raise a cow or buffalo for its milk and would not neglect to share it with the neighbours and the needy people. They would pray for him that Allah bless his wealth; and when he suffered a financial loss, they would all grieve for him.

Therefore, when you share the blessings given to you with those who do not have them, you protect yourself from a lot of rancour and envy. However, if you do not, then at least conceal this wealth from the eyes of the needy so you do not arouse their resentment. Perhaps if an intelligent man sees you, his faith will keep him from extending his eyes to what you have; however, when little children see you carrying something which they do not have or see your son eating when they have nothing, this is where the problem will arise.

Allah said that it is our piety that reaches Him. Piety is realised after following the way of Allah, which is represented in obeying, remembering, and thanking Him. The way of obedience is to follow the do's and don'ts of the religion. In addition, the religion calls you to remember, with every blessing, the One Who gave these blessings to you and never let the blessing distract you from thanking the One who created it.

We observe at the end of the verse that the Noble Quran contains similar phrases. The end of the verse which reads, 'He has subjected them to you in this way so that you may glorify Allah for having guided you. Give good news to those who do good…' is similar to the end of the previous verse which reads, 'We have subjected them to you in this way so that you may be thankful.' (*al-Hajj:* 36)

Some of the scholars who study the Quran and search through its verses are interested in these similar phrases. They gather together these kinds of similar verses which speak about the same issues and arrange them in their minds. They, by doing so, are often faulty in their memorisation of the Quran. That is why the scholars advised one who memorises the Quran to leave scholarly matters aside, while he is memorising it, so that if he forgets a word he stops and does not continue until he remembers it. The scholar, on the other hand, might recite another similar verse mistakenly and make it seem to fit.

Allah says that He subjugated them to us so that we may glorify Him for having guided us. This is to remember Him and give thanks to Him for giving us the grace to partake in these righteous acts. Then He gives good news to those who do good. To give good news means to give news of something pleasing before the coming of its time so that the one you tell can prepare for it and rejoice in it. Likewise, to warn means to give news of something bad before it happens so that the one you warn can prepare for it and take the opportunity to correct his mistake, protect himself from the thing of which you warn and find a way to save himself.

The doers of good are those who engage in *ihsan* (spiritual excellence,) which is the highest level of faith. It is to resolve on doing more of those acts of worship which Allah has obliged you to do than what is obliged. For example, Allah *the Almighty* has obliged you to pray five times in the day and night, however you can add more of the same obliged prayers as you like. You cannot invent your own acts of worship. The same is true of fasting, the alms giving, the pilgrimage, and all the other acts of worship which Allah has commanded you to do. On doing this, you have arrived at the level of spiritual excellence. Spiritual excellence constitutes of two elements. There is the act of worship itself, of which you have resolved to do more than that which Allah has obliged you to do and then there is the inspiration behind it, which is that you perform the action as though Allah is watching over you. It is mentioned in the Hadith of Jibril (Gabriel), peace be up him: '*Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see him and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, (then take it for granted) that Allah sees you.'(1)

Your vigilant awareness of Allah and your recognition of how He is watching over you inspire you to this spiritual excellence. Do you not see how the worker whom you directly supervise and watch, unlike when you leave him by himself, always finishes his work on time and does it well? If you do not reach this level where it is as if you can see Allah, you can at least remember that He can see you and that He is always watching you.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Allah says, ‘Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and fountains. Taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that, the doers of good.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16)

He then explains the cause of their excellence: ‘They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning, they asked forgiveness. And in their property, was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied (good).’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19) Is it obligatory for you to do this? You have the right to pray the evening prayer and then sleep until the dawn prayer and likewise Allah did not oblige you to pray for forgiveness in the watches of the night, nor to give voluntary charity. So, these recommended righteous deeds because the one who does them to reach the level of *ihsan*, that is the highest level of faith. Thus, let you be prepared to seek it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُدَٰفِعُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ خَوَّانٍ كَفُورٍ ٣٨

God will defend the believers; God does not love the unfaithful or the ungrateful [38] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 38)

The opening words of this verse give us the sense that a battle is being waged. Such battle is between the truth which He has revealed, and the falsehood which opposes it. Allah says earlier: ‘These two kinds of people disagree about their Lord.’ (*al-Hajj:* 19) Inasmuch as there is a disagreement, it will lead to battles that might take the form of words and arguments or they might take the form of violence, fierceness, and direct military combat.

The battle which the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* fought against the idolaters of Mecca who opposed him, was not only a battle of words. They first called him a sorcerer, a madman, a poet, a liar and so on. The matters escalated after that and they harmed the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and tortured them. They would come back battered and bruised to the Prophet Muhammad, but he would say to them that he, ‘I have not been commanded to fight, be patient, and be patient.’ When the aggression of the disbelievers reached a peak, Allah gave Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* permission to fight and revealed this verse.

Allah says that He will defend the believers. The Arabic verb used places emphasis on that matter. To defend means to meet an action with its like, thereby Allah defend them and the disbelievers push back. Thus, pressure is applied by both sides and this only occurs in a battle. A battle means that there will be a victor and a loser. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures the believers that He will enter the battle on their side and will defend them.

The words of Allah express something natural. Allah *Glorified is He* would not send a messenger and let the people of falsehood triumph over him, for otherwise there would be no point in sending the messengers at all. Thus, Allah reassured Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave him glad tidings by saying, 'And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the messengers. Most surely they shall be the assisted ones. And most surely our host alone shall be the victorious ones.' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) In addition, Allah says, 'And surely Allah will help him who helps His cause.' (*al-Hajj:* 40) Moreover, He says, 'O you who believe! If you help (the cause of) Allah, He will help you and make firm your feet.' (*Muhammad:* 7)

All these verses reassure and give glad tidings to the believers and they came in stages for a wise reason intended by Allah. He forbade them from fighting at first for a wise reason and exposed them to fighting before giving them leave to fight their enemies for a wise reason, which was to test the believers and purify their ranks from cowards and those whose faith is weak who only half-worshipped Allah. Thus, those with a strong faith and firm belief remain to carry the banner of this religion and spread it throughout the earth, as it is a global message for all times and places until the Last Hour. Inasmuch as the message of Islam has this status, it needed strong men to bear it. If the enemies of Islam succeeded to put an end to it, that religion of Allah would be destroyed forever

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* had to purify the faithful just as a goldsmith purifies gold and removes its impurities by putting it in fire. Similarly, these trials and misfortunes purified the faithful and showed their ranks as they fought together in unity.

Then Allah proclaims his dislike to the unfaithful or the ungrateful. It is as though Allah has become a participant in the battle. The two Arabic words express hyperbole, i.e. someone who is constantly treacherous and someone who is always ungrateful. The notion of unfaithfulness implies that there was a trust which has been betrayed. Indeed, there was the primordial trust of moral responsibility, of which Allah says, ‘Surely, We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and man has turned unfaithful to it.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72) So he betrayed this trust, after having accepted to be worthy of it. In addition, there was another trust even before that, which was the covenant that Allah took from His servants when they were still in the loins of Adam. Allah says, ‘And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls: Am I not your Lord? They said, “Yes! We bear witness.” Lest you should say on the day of resurrection: “Surely we were heedless of this.” Or you should say: “Only our fathers associated others (with Allah) before, and we were an offspring after them”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172-173).

If they are going to say that indeed this was a trust, but it was so long ago and how any of them could remember it now. We ask them whether they acknowledged that Allah created and brought them into existence from nothing and sustained them from nothing as Allah says, ‘And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say, “Allah.”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) Similarly, as they acknowledged that Allah created the heavens and the earth and all the good things in between, they should have honoured this acknowledgment properly and have had faith. However, despite all this they still disbelieved. Is not this a betrayal of the trust that they all took up in their own lifetimes and in which they all shared?

Someone who is ungrateful is the one who shows ingratitude for the blessings of Allah and denies them. As long as they were unfaithful and ungrateful people, it was inevitable that Allah would succour Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and aid him in this battle. It was first permitted to fight and then commanded to make the necessary preparations and utilise the means which lead to victory. If all these means were exhausted, Allah would be with them to aid them with forces of His own.

This occurred at the beginning of the mission. Allah aided His Prophet with forces from Him and aided him even with a stubborn disbeliever like the one who led the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on his

Emigration. Has Allah not aided him with the pigeon and the spider when he was in the cave? Has Allah not made the ground sink beneath the feet of the horse ridden by Suraqa, who had set out after him?

These were forces which we could not see and with which Allah had aid Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after He exhausted all the means. Had Allah *Glorified is He* willed, He could have forced all these opponents to submit to Prophet Muhammad and none of them would have been able to raise their heads to oppose him. However, Allah *Glorified is He* had wanted to make the people obey Muhammad and submit to Allah. Allah says, ‘If We please, We should send down upon them a sign from the heaven so that their necks should stoop to it.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4)

We said before that Allah wants His servants to yield to Him their hearts, not only their bodies. Were He to force them to yield by means of a cosmological sign such as a great wind, a storm or a chasm in the earth or any other sign which destroyed those who came before them, they would have said, ‘These are merely natural disasters which have befallen us’. However, Allah allowed this confrontation to occur between the two sides and eased the means of victory to His partisans and forces. Allah, says, ‘Fight them, Allah will punish them by your hands and bring them to disgrace, and assist you against them and heal the hearts of a believing people.’ (*at-Tawba:* 14)

Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَـٰتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظُلِمُوا۟ ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged – God has the power to help them [39] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 39)

Allah *Glorified is He* defended the truth using many ways. The first was to give them permission to fight. The second was to command them to amass the strength needed to fight as He says, ‘And prepare against them what force you can and horses tied at the frontier.’ (*al-Anfal:* 60) This means that they must use all means and utilise all what they have at their disposal to gain victory over their enemies. In addition, if you utilise and exhaust all means, Allah shall intervene with forces of His own which you cannot see. The fact that Allah defends those who believe does not mean that He will intervene to protect them whilst they sit at home; rather, it means that they must first muster all the strength they can and seek all the necessary means to attain victory.

Giving them permission to fight means that they were waiting for this commandment and hoping to be allowed to gain victory over their enemies, They had not been allowed to do so first and then Allah willed to fight and gave them permission to do so and revealed the subject verse. Therefore, the reason for allowing them to fight was that they were wronged. Thus, their Lord commanded them to fight, but not to aggress. Allah says, ‘And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits. And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from whence they drove you out.’ (*al-Baqara:* 190-191)

Thus, Allah first commanded them to have patience. Thereafter, the first stage was to fight in order to repel the aggression of others and to defend themselves without aggressing. The second stage was: ‘O you who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you and let them find in you hardness; and know that Allah is with those who guard [against evil].’ (*at-Tawba:* 123) Allah says that He is well able to assist them by giving them the means to attain victory or by succouring them without any material means by sending them subtle power they cannot see. Examples alike have been experienced for real.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

ٱلَّذِينَ أُخۡرِجُواْ مِن دِيَٰرِهِم بِغَيۡرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّآ أَن يَقُولُواْ رَبُّنَا ٱللَّهُۗ وَلَوۡلَا دَفۡعُ ٱللَّهِ ٱلنَّاسَ
بَعۡضَهُم بِبَعۡضٖ لَّهُدِّمَتۡ صَوَٰمِعُ وَبِيَعٞ وَصَلَوَٰتٞ وَمَسَٰجِدُ يُذۡكَرُ فِيهَا ٱسۡمُ ٱللَّهِ
كَثِيرٗاۗ وَلَيَنصُرَنَّ ٱللَّهُ مَن يَنصُرُهُۥٓۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, ‘Our Lord is God.’ If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God’s name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. God is sure to help those who help His cause – God is strong and mighty [40]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 40)

Indeed, had they been driven out rightfully and deserved to be driven from their homes due to something such as committing indecency, disturbing the peace, committing crimes or violating tribal laws, their expulsion would have been rightful. Nevertheless, the reality is that they did nothing and they committed no wrong. They only said that Allah was their Lord.

Their people saw these words a sin and a crime, for which they deserved to be driven from their homes. Likewise, Allah says of the people who made the ditch, ‘And they did not take vengeance on them for aught except that they believed in Allah, the Mighty, the Praised.’ (*al-Buruj:* 8) Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘do you find fault with us [for aught] except that we believe in Allah?’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 59)

In addition, in the story of Lut (Lot), Allah says, ‘They said, “Turn out Lut’s (Lot’s) followers from your town; surely they are a people who would keep pure!’ (*an-Naml:* 56) Thus, they drove them out, not because they engaged in filth and sin, but because they were people who sought to purify themselves. Purity and chastity were the crimes for which they were driven away! It is as though you say, ‘so-and-so has no flaws, except that he is generous’, or ‘so-and-so has no virtues, except that he is a thief’. The latter is an attribute which cannot be praised and the former is an attribute which cannot be faulted.

Those people overturned the balance and violated sound nature with these corrupt judgements that show the corruption of their own natures. What could be more corrupt than to reverse natural standards? They hated what should be loved and loved what should be hated. There is nothing that showed their corrupt natures more clearly than their cult to a stone and their disdain to worship the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* shows what the result of the absence of checking people by means of others on the part of Allah is. In the verse we are currently studying, Allah, says, ‘If Allah did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques where Allah’s name is much invoked.’ In addition, He says in another verse, ‘And were it not for Allah’s repelling some men with others, the earth would certainly be in a state of disorder.’ (*al-Baqara:* 251)

If corruption and disorder should happen between people in the motions of life, it can be amended and corrected. However, when corruption infiltrates the very foundations of spiritual certainty on earth and people started hating what connects them to Heaven and destroying places of worship, this is a calamity and a corruption which cannot be repaired. It is as though these two verses depict an extremity of corruption and crime.

The earth is overwhelmed with corruption when this reciprocal check is absent. How is that? Suppose that an evil tyrant in a certain land enslaves the people and drains all their wealth and blood without anyone restraining him. This will certainly cause negligence and chaos in society and no one will try to work as hard as he can, for why should he work when someone else is taking all his income? This is how corruption begins to overwhelm the earth.

Since this is a corruption related to the motions of the lives of people, it can be put right. But what do you think will happen if this corruption spreads even to the places of righteousness and worship and severed the connection of the people to Heaven? If the first kind of corruption can be put right, the corruption of religion can never be put right because the balance which used to govern the motions of life is destroyed and society no longer has any balance or principles to which to refer.

One may observe that His saying, ‘If Allah did not repel some people by means of others…’ (*al-Hajj:* 40), refers to all people in general, not to any one sect in particular. He did not say, ‘If Allah had not enabled the believers to defend themselves against the disbelievers’, but rather than He spoke about all the people in general because this is a general principle which views all people equal.

The words ‘of other’ are also framed in this general way to show us that any side could be defended at one time and defended against at another. They are each lying in wait for the other: when one group falls into corruption, the other comes and stops it from going into it any further. It does not mean that one particular group is always defending itself against the other.

Another example of this way of speaking is His saying, ‘…and [We] raise some of them by degrees above others…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32); this part of the verse does not specify who is raised and who is not because each of them is raised in a certain aspect and not in another. This is because all mankind are Allah’s dependents; He does not show nepotism to any of them.

Consider the power of Russia in the East and that of America in the West: they are clear manifestations of Allah's saying, '…If Allah did not repel some people by means of others…' (*al-Hajj:* 40), each of them is prepared to face the other, watching each other's actions and military advances. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* has made them this way to safeguard other people, lest any of them threaten the rest of humanity. This fear, observation and constant state of preparation is what prevents war from breaking out between them. Imagine what would happen if they fought a war which resulted in a clear winner and loser. The winner would certainly unleash corruption upon the earth and wipe out all the others, going further and further in its evil without there being anyone to deter it.

Out of His Mercy to the believers, Allah *the Almighty* provokes the wrongdoers with all their methods and arts against one another. He chastises the evildoer with someone even more evil, so that the good people can remain far away from this battle and not be engaged in it. Good people cannot bear these kinds of actions because they are compassionate ones who are not suited to this violent and brutal revenge.

Read what Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And in this manner, do We cause evildoers to seduce one another by means of their [evil] doings.' (*al-An'am:* 129) In this way, Allah *the Almighty* graces good people, spares their lives and relieves His *`awlia`* (most righteous servants) of the need for entering these struggles between the forces of falsehood.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conquered Mecca after his people had driven him out of it and after committing all acts of wrong against him and his companions, in what manner did he enter the city, bearing in mind that he was the leader of a conquering army that could have done whatever it wanted to its enemies? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered Mecca with his head lowered so that his head almost touched the saddle of his mount in his humility.(1) Yet, despite this, when Abu Sufyan saw him *peace and blessings be upon him* at this moment, he said to Al-`Abbas, 'Your nephew's dominion has become great indeed.'(2)

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(1) *Ibn Hisham Sira*

(2) *Al-`Abbas replied: 'Nay, it is prophet hood'. Abu Sufyan said, 'Yes, thus does it seem.'*

When Prophet Muhammad had the disbelievers of Mecca at his mercy, and could have killed them all, he said, ‘O people of Quraysh! What do you think I should do with you?’ They said, ‘You are a noble brother, and the son of a noble brother’, whereupon he said to them, ‘Go, then, for you are free.’(1)

What is this mercy and what is this tenderness which Allah *the Almighty* has placed in the hearts of the believers? How could anyone oppose and turn away from such a religion?

The True Lord pits evil people against each other. We see this verse manifested in every time and every place in the conduct of the evildoers while good people watch these struggles in which Allah *the Almighty* destroys the evildoers at the hands of each other.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…many monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where Allah’s name is much invoked, would have been destroyed…’ (*al-Hajj:* 40).

A monastery is a special place of worship for the Christians. They also have public place of worships to which the people go; they are called churches. The monastery, on the other hand, is a special place of worship in which the inhabitant secludes himself and devotes himself solely to worship. Monasteries are not found in cities, but in the mountains and valleys of the countryside, far from the bustle of civilisation, so that the monk can cut himself off from the motions of life.

Islam forbids this kind of monasticism because it was not established by Allah *the Almighty* as He says, ‘…But as for monastic asceticism – We did not enjoin it upon them: they invented it themselves out of a desire for Allah’s goodly acceptance. But then, they did not [always] observe it as it ought to have been observed…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27).

So, the True Lord did not criticise them for devoting themselves to worship, but He criticised them for cutting themselves off from the motions of life and the means of livelihood; a fact which is recorded in His saying, ‘…But then, they did not [always] observe it as it ought to have been observed…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27).

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(1) *Ibn Hisham, Sira*

Islam permits one to devote oneself to worship, as long as he does not abstain from working to earn a living. Rather, a Muslim is supposed to worship Allah *the Almighty* during every action of his life and keep Allah *the Almighty* on his mind at all times, in all that he does and all that he does not do. Therefore, there is a difference between the one who only worships Allah *the Almighty* when he is in seclusion and the one who worships Him *Glorified is He* even in public.

`Umar *Allah be pleased with him* talked about a man who stayed in the mosque all the time to worship, leaving his brother to support him saying, ‘His brother is more devout than he is?’ But, how?! They say it is because you can make every motion of your life an act of worship by making your intention purely for Allah *the Almighty*. Let us draw a comparison between the believer and the disbeliever: they both work and strive to earn a living for themselves and their families, and to live a dignified life, for this is the goal of all our work – but if the believer had no goal for working other than this, he would be just the same as the disbeliever.

The believer, however, bears in mind other goals; he works as much as he can, not only as much as he needs to, then he takes what he needs and spends the rest and gives charity to those who are not able to work for their living.

Therefore, the True Lord says, ‘Truly, to a happy state shall attain the believers: those who humble themselves in their prayer, and who turn away from all that is frivolous and who are intent on [giving] the poor-due.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 1-4) Does this only mean that they pay the poor-due? No, it means that the believers work and toil with the intention of helping those who cannot earn their living, as though when they work and strive, they intend to utilise the extra earnings to gain the reward of Allah *the Almighty*. This is what distinguishes the believer from the disbeliever.

In the thirties, I remember once(1) we came from the countryside in winter to visit our teacher Sheikh Al-Hafizh At-Tijani, who was ill *may Allah rest his soul* and be well pleased with him. He lived in an unpaved outskirt of the town. I decided to take a taxi so we would not have to walk through the mud, but when I got to the neighbourhood, the taxi driver refused to go any further because he said the fare would not cover the cost of cleaning the mud off his car. After being stubborn for a while, he finally agreed to take us where we wanted to go and we paid him double the fare. But, before he went, I said to him, 'Why do you work as a taxi driver as it is a very hard job?' He said, '(I do so) for my benefit and my children's benefit.' I said to him, 'And would it hurt you to add something else to this and make your intention to do your job to make things easier for people?' These words had an effect on the man, and he said, 'By Allah *the Almighty* I will never refuse another passenger.'

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(1) The story of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi’s meeting with Sheikh Al-Hafizh At-Tijani and what happened between them

Thus, the meaning of '…and who are intent on [giving] the poor-due…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 4) is that the believers do not only give the poor-due, but rather than that their intention, when they work, is to spend the extra earnings in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* so that they would get reward.

So, Islam forbids monasticism insofar as it prevents the individual from participating in society, which is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There is no monasticism in Islam'(1) because Islam considers every action done with the intention of benefitting all society as a spiritual act of worship. In this way, work is viewed as worship.

In this respect, Muslim scholars have placed conditions on those who wish to withdraw themselves from the life of people with the aim of devoting themselves to worship, saying that first, he must not rely on someone else to support him financially, meaning that he should first work to save up money to meet his needs, whilst he is in his spiritual seclusion. At that point, we can quote the Pakistani poet Mohamed Iqbal:

It is not true asceticism to be a mystic
Who flees from the realities of life for the sake of religion;
Mysticism exists in the marketplaces,
In money, ambitions and trials.

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(1) *Al-Bayhaqi narrated something similar, with the wording: 'Allah has given us, in monasticism's stead, the primordial religion of truth and tolerance.'*

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘and synagogues’ which refers to the Jewish place of worship. But why does the Quran not list these buildings in chronological order, saying, ‘Synagogues, monasteries and churches’? It is because the Quran lists those things which are chronologically nearest to it, and then those which are further away.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘…And mosques’, it refers to Muslims’ places of worship. Since the True Lord linked mosques to the verb ‘…would have been destroyed.’ (*al-Hajj:* 40), this indicates that Muslims must have their own places of worship even though the entire earth has been made a purified place of prayer for them, meaning that you can pray on any patch of ground; and if you have no water, you can make ablution with the soil. This means that the earth is both a place of prayer and a place of work, as well as worldly activity. You can work in your factory, for example, and pray there as well. But the True Lord wants us to devote certain places on His earth to be houses for Him, wherein we separate ourselves from all the motions of life and devote ourselves solely to worship.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘If someone builds a mosque for Allah– even if it is only like a bird’s nest – Allah shall build him a house in paradise.’(1)

When He says, ‘…mosques…would have been destroyed’ (*al-Hajj:* 40), this indicates that there should be a special place for worship; for if not, and the whole world was considered to be a mosque, then what would be destroyed? With this in mind, every place where anything other than worship is regularly done is not considered to be a mosque, such as the prayer rooms which they install underneath apartment blocks. These are not mosques and praying in them is just like praying in the street or at home because the mosque is both a place and has a specific function.

Now it is clear that a mosque is to extend from the floor to the sky, a point which is proved by the fact that in Allah’s Sacred Mosque, we pray on the roof of the mosque and face the air above the *Ka`ba*, not the building of the *Ka`ba* itself. Why? Because the air above the *Ka`ba* all the way up to the sky is part of the *Ka`ba* itself. The same would be true if we were in a hole or a mine under the ground because all the ground under the *Ka`ba* is part of the *Ka`ba*. The same is applied to the rushing forth between Safa and Marwa: if the ground floor is full, people walk on the second floor or on the roof, because the air above it is included in it.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (i. 241) and Abu Na`im (iv. 217)*

A mosque is a place which has been especially devoted for worship and it extends from the ground to the sky. No worldly activities are conducted inside it, nor are any deals made and so on.

But if we put a mosque in the basement of an apartment building, wherein people normally practice their worldly activities with all the disorder and commotion they involve, whether lawful or unlawful, pure or impure, including marital relations and so on, this all invalidates the status of the place as a mosque which Allah *the Almighty* has made a place of worship from the floor to the sky. So, we should call these places 'prayer-rooms' not mosques.

The True Lord then describes these mosques by saying, '…where Allah's name is much invoked…' (*al-Hajj:* 40) because the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* in mosques is constant and uninterrupted – we are not speaking about one mosque, nor the mosques of one region, but we mean the mosques of the whole world from east to west, and from north to south.

If you consider the prayer times, you will see that they are connected to celestial movements and with the relative position of the sun in the forms of sunrise, midday, and sunset. Since these times are different for every place on earth, you find that the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* never ceases by night or by day. As you are making the call to prayer, other people are just about to pray while others are already praying. When you pray the midday prayer, others are praying the dawn or afternoon prayers. Indeed, when you are in the first unit of the dawn prayer, others are in the second unit; and when you bow, others are prostrating.

This a constant cycle of worship at all times passing through every place on earth, so that the world never stops invoking Allah *the Almighty*. Is this not abundant extolling? Are the words 'Allah is The Greatest' not always being spoken by mankind, without ceasing?

Moreover, since Allah’s enabling people to defend themselves against each other might result in a battle in which there is a loser and a winner, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…Allah is sure to help those who help His cause…’ (*al-Hajj:* 40). So, if the struggle is waged between the disbelievers, it will not end, whilst if it is between the Truth and a falsehood which Allah *the Almighty* has declared to be false, then it will inevitably end with the triumph of Truth. Such a battle will not usually last long because the Truth is always under Allah’s protection. The battles which last long are those which rage between two forces of falsehood; neither one of them deserves Allah’s succour more than the other; they will therefore continue to assault each other. If it is not a ‘hot’ war, it will at least be a ‘cold’ one. Why? Because there is no power without whims to decide between them, and as long as whims are involved, the battle will continue.

The final logical permutation is a battle between two forces of truth, yet this does not exist because there is only one truth and therefore no conflict can ever arise between two forces who are both on the side of truth.

The True Lord is well able to succour His `*awlia*` and destroy their enemies without there being any war, but Allah *Glorified is He* wants them to utilise the means of succour and therefore teaches them the foundations of this matter by saying to them, ‘Now when you meet [in war]those who are bent on denying the truth, smite their necks until you overcome them fully, and then tighten their bonds; but thereafter [set them free], either by an act of grace or against ransom, so that the burden of war may be lifted: thus [shall it be]. And [know that had Allah so willed, He could indeed punish them [Himself]; but [He wills you to struggle] so as to test you [all] by means of one another….’ (*Muhammad:* 4)

The saying of Allah, ‘you overcome them fully’ means that you make them unable to move, ‘and then tighten their bonds’; do not, O Muslims, finish them and do not kill them, but rather bind them well and take them as prisoners; this clearly shows the mercy and conduct of Islam in wars; the purpose is not to kill or take life; a point which is clear in the saying of Allah, ‘…thereafter [set them free,] either by an act of grace or against ransom’; an act of grace means to make a prisoner exchange so that you release theirs and they release yours. Ransom means that the enemy buys his freedom.

This matter provides an argument concerning slavery in Islam. It offers a response to those who enjoy accusing Islam, utilising sophistry and word games to convince people that Islam aided the spread of slavery.

When Islam was revealed, slavery had already been endorsed. Islam did neither begin it nor invent it. At that time, there were many ways in which a man could be enslaved. If someone incurred a debt and could not repay it, he would become the slave of the creditor. If a man committed a sin and feared its punishment, they would take him as a slave. Highwaymen would waylay people in the road and take them as slaves, and so on.

When Islam came, it set about blocking all these channels of enslavement and restricted it to lawful warfare. It then provided many ways for bringing an end to the act of slavery, which already existed. At that time, the only way a slave could be freed was if his master willed to free him. Yet, Islam added other ways to this, making the freeing of a slave an expiation for certain sins, an expiation for vows and a way to take back a certain unlawful form of divorce.(1) Islam even encouraged Muslims to free slaves as an act of charity, to help those slaves who wished to buy their freedom, and so on.

If you do not free your slave, then at least you should feed him the same food you eat, buy him the same quality clothes you wear and refrain from ordering him to do more than he can, or help him to do what he cannot do alone, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'They are not but your brothers.'(2)

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(1) *Specifically, the ancient Arab practice of saying to one's wife, 'You are to me as the back of my mother!', thereby making her forbidden to him without divorcing her; the Arabs would do this to harm and spite their wives. When a woman complained to the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him of this, verses concerning this matter were revealed: 'As for those of you who [henceforth]separate themselves from their wives by saying, "Thou art as unlawful to me as my mother," [let them bear in mind that] they can never be [as]their mothers: none are their mothers save those who gave them birth: and so, behold, they but utter a saying that runs counter to reason, and is [therefore]false. But, behold, Allah the Almighty is indeed an absolver of sins, much forgiving. As for those who would separate themselves from their wives by saying, "Thou art as unlawful to me as my mother", and thereafter would go back on what they have said, [their atonement] shall be the freeing of a human being from bondage before the couple may touch one another again: this you are [hereby] exhorted to do - for Allah the Almighty is fully aware of all that you do.' (al-Mujadala: 2-3)*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2545) and Muslim (1661) on the authority of Abu Dharr*

It is clear that those people who criticise Islam for allowing slavery used to draw a comparison between 'slavery' and 'freedom'. It is not a comparison; they should compare 'slavery' and 'death' because the only people taken as slaves are those who are overcome in battle when the one who overcomes them could easily kill them. But out of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* forbids killing them and allows enslaving them. So, the benefit which the victorious soldier attains for himself is taken in exchange for sparing the life of the one he vanquishes. Moreover, once the war is over, we encourage him to set him free and we give him many opportunities to gain freedom. So, do not compare a slave to a free man, but rather compare slavery to death – death is even worse than slavery.

Therefore Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will succour you against them; and He will soothe the bosoms of those who believe, and will remove the wrath that is in their hearts. And Allah will turn in His Mercy unto whom He wills: for, Allah is all knowing, wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 14-15) This command bears six results, which are as follows: 'fight against them': 'Allah will chastise them', 'and will bring disgrace upon them', that is, the disgrace is that they were deluded by their power and their fierce tyranny, believing that no one could defeat them, 'and will succour you', 'and He will soothe' 'and will remove' – so these six verbs are the results of the command 'fight against them'.

Then a new sentence begins, although it seems at first that another verb is added to this list, that is, however, a manifestation of the precision of the Quranic discourse. In this way, we see the mercy which Allah *the Almighty* shows even to the disbelievers. He says, 'And Allah will turn in His Mercy unto whom He wills', which is a new sentence with the verb in the Arabic indicative mood, whereas the six verbs in the foregoing list were in the jussive mood. This is because Allah *the Almighty* did not want to associate the believers and disbelievers together, even when listing the results which would come from the commandment He gave.

They were defeated and overpowered, that they had lost their power and dread; they might yet come back to their senses and return to the truth. This shows how Allah *the Almighty* was merciful to the disbelievers even as they battled against the faith.

But, why would Allah *the Almighty* turn in His Mercy to the disbelievers and have mercy on them, when they are enemies to His religion and His Prophet? They say it is because He is their Lord and Creator, they are His servants and dependents, and He is more merciful to them than anyone is.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'The sky said, 'O Lord, allow me to fall in pieces upon the son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.' The earth said, 'O Lord, allow me to swallow up the son of Adam, as he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.' The mountains said, 'O Lord, allow me to fall upon the son of Adam, he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.' The oceans said, 'O Lord, allow me to drown the son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You.' The entire universe hates the disbelievers and is set against the sinners and enraged with them – yet what did the True Lord say to them? He said, 'Leave Me with that which I created; for had you created them, you would have been merciful to them. If they repent to Me, I am their Beloved. If they do not repent, I am their Healer.'

Let us return to His words, '…Allah is sure to help those who help His cause…' (*al-Hajj:* 40). As long as succour comes from Allah *the Almighty* do not analyse your power or compare it to that of your enemy. Your Lord has forces which are known only to Him, the means of succour which may come to you when you are under Allah's protection are manifold. They can come to you from where you least expect and by the simplest of means. The least of these is that Allah *the Almighty* makes your enemy's numbers seem small to you and makes the believer's numbers seem large to the disbelievers which terrifies them and saps their spirits. Or the opposite might occur so that the disbelievers see the numbers of believers to be small so that they are emboldened and advanced – then suddenly they are faced with the truth.

'…And none can comprehend your Lords forces save Him alone…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). So, do not rely only on your own strength, or gauge how you match up to your enemy. Forget about these calculations; all you must do is to utilise the means at your disposal as best as you can, then after that you should consider the means of Allah.

The least of your Lord’s forces(1) is for Him to cast terror into the hearts of your enemies and this alone is enough. It is related that in one of the Muslims’ battles, the breaths of the Muslims changed and became bitter because of how long they had been fighting, so they took out their tooth-sticks and began to clean their teeth and freshen their breath; and when the disbelievers saw this, they said, ‘They are sharpening their teeth to eat us!’ Allah *the Almighty* thus cast terror into their hearts without their perceiving it.

Then He says, ‘…Allah is strong and mighty’ (*al-Hajj:* 40). *He is Almighty* in that He cannot be overcome. As long as Allah *the Almighty* succours those who succour His cause, then the battle will inevitably end with victory, however much their strength wanes and weakens. Were the Muslims not weak and oppressed in Mecca, unable even to raise their heads in the presence of the disbelievers?

When in the midst of this, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His words, ‘Yet the hosts of those who deny the truth shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs (in flight)’ (*al-Qamar:* 45) whereupon `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* the companion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was amazed, despite his prescience and his genius. He said, ‘Which hosts are these who shall be routed, when we are not even able to defend ourselves?’ Then when he saw what happened during the Battle of Badr, `Umar said, ‘Allah spoke the truth when He said, ‘Yet the hosts of those who deny the truth shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs (in flight)’(2) (*al-Qamar:* 45). Allah *the Almighty* is the Most Powerful and Almighty will surely succour you, and this is something which has been destined since pre-eternity: ‘Allah has thus ordained: ‘I shall most certainly prevail, I and My apostles! …’ (*al-Mujadala:* 21)

When you have attained to victory, remember that you have a role to play, which is clearly mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*:

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(1) *The story of the Muslim army using their teeth cleanse (as-siwak) in one of the battle and disbelievers thinking that they were going to devour them*

(2) *Ibn Kathir, Tafsir*

ٱلَّذِينَ إِن مَّكَّنَّٰهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ أَقَامُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَوُاْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ
وَأَمَرُواْ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَنَهَوۡاْ عَنِ ٱلۡمُنكَرِۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡأُمُورِ ٤١

Those who, when We establish them in the land, keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, command what is right, and forbid what is wrong: God controls the outcome of all events [41] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 41)

The meaning of '…We establish them in the land' (*al-Hajj:* 41), is that He gives them authority, power and victory, so that no one dares to challenge them or assault them. Yet, they have to know that Allah *the Almighty* did not establish them and succour them just for their own sakes, but to fulfil the mission of reforming and purifying man's duty on earth from everything which invalidates or corrupts it.

Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* could mount a flying carpet(1) and bid it to carry him wherever he pleased to go. One day as it was carrying him, he entertained a vain thought and the carpet bucked and almost threw him off. Then he heard a voice from the carpet saying to him, 'We were commanded to obey you as long as you obey Allah.'

The one whom Allah *the Almighty* establishes on earth and gives authority to can force anything he likes upon his society. Even if he is established on earth by means of falsehood, he can force his falsehood upon the people, if only for a while.

So, what should the believer do if he is established on earth? Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Those who, when We establish them in the land, keep up the prayer…' (*al-Hajj:* 41), so they are always invoking and swearing fealty to their Lord Who gave them this establishment. They present themselves to Him five times a day and night.

As for the saying of Allah, '…pay the prescribed alms, command what is right and forbid what is wrong…' (*al-Hajj:* 41), it refers to the foundations of righteousness in society, and the balance which brings happiness to all.

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(1) *The story of Sulaiman (Solomon) peace be upon him and the flying carpet when he felt proud of himself*

Regarding His saying, ‘Allah controls the outcome of all events’ (*al-Hajj:* 41) means that all things end up with Allah *the Almighty*. Those who adhere to these directions and fulfil their proper role in society will be all the better off for it. Those who reject this will come to a well-known fate.

Then the True Lord consoles His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he is not concerned by the unbelief, stubbornness and opposition to his call which he met from his people.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَإِن يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَعَادٌ وَثَمُودُ ﴿٤٢﴾

If they reject you [Prophet], so did the people of
Noah before them, and those of 'Ad, Thamud [42]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 42)

As for the saying of Allah, ’If they reject you [Prophet]…’ (*al-Hajj:* 42), it means that if they give the lie to your call, oppose you and stand in the way of your message in an attempt to nullify it, then know that you are not the first prophet to experience this, for many messengers before you had already suffered this. You must not consider this denial separately from its consequence; indeed, the people gave them the lie, but what was the consequence of this? Did we leave them, or did we take them to task as only *the Almighty* can? So, do not grieve, for the same thing (i.e. punishment) will afflict them just as it afflicted the deniers and stubborn unbelievers who came before them.

To reiterate, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* must bear difficulty and hardship in the way of his Message which is commensurate to its stature. Every messenger before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent only to his own people and for a limited amount of time, yet even they had to endure many difficulties for the cause of their messages. So, how do you think it would be for a prophet sent to all people in all times and places?! He would certainly have to endure hardships and struggle many times greater than that which his fellow messengers endured before him.

It is as though the True Lord was preparing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and qualifying him to bear hardships from the onset, so that his spirit would not crumble when encountering them as he began to convey his Message, saying to him: ‘Leadership is not an easy thing, it involves many hardships and perils, so prepare yourself’ exactly when you say to your son, ‘Be careful, the exams at the end of this year will be difficult, for the ministry wants to reduce the number of people admitted to university, so work hard so you can get a high mark’. When the son hears this warning, he buckles down and concentrates, so that he does not suffer an upset when the exams come.

Then the True Lord gives examples of those who gave the lie to His messengers, saying, ‘…so did the people of Nuh (Noah) before them, and those of `Ad and Thamud’ (*al-Hajj:* 42).

Then He says:

وَقَوۡمُ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَقَوۡمُ لُوطٖ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَأَصۡحَٰبُ مَدۡيَنَۖ وَكُذِّبَ مُوسَىٰ
فَأَمۡلَيۡتُ لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ثُمَّ أَخَذۡتُهُمۡۖ فَكَيۡفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٤٤﴾

Abraham, Lot [43] Midian. Moses too was called
a liar. I gave the disbelievers time, but in the end
I punished them. How I condemned them! [44]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 43-44)

We may observe here that the True Lord names those who gave the lie, except for the case of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* where He names the one who was given the lie. He does not say, ‘and the people Of Musa (Moses)’, but rather says, ‘…Musa (Moses) too was called a liar…’ (*al-Hajj:* 44). Why is this? They say it is because his mission was especially difficult because he encountered someone who went as far as claiming divinity for himself.

He says, ‘…but in the end, I punished them. How I condemned them!’ (*al-Hajj:* 44) That is, He left them alone for a while so that they thought He had forgotten them. He not only left them alone, but actually gave them more and more, not to honour them, but so that He could then take them to task as only the Almighty Determiner can. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* explains this brief mention to us in more detail, saying, ‘And they should not think – they who are bent on denying the truth – that Our giving them rein is good for them: We give them rein only to let them grow in sinfulness…' (*Al-'Imran:* 178). He also says, 'Let not, then, their worldly goods or (the happiness which they may derive from) their children excite your admiration: Allah but wants to chastise them by these means in this worldly life, and (to cause) their souls to depart while they are (still) denying the truth.' (*at-Tawba:* 55)

So, do not be deluded by what they possess, it is only a trial for them, so that on the day Allah *the Almighty* takes them to task, their loss will be greater. If they never had these blessings to begin with, their hearts would not have become attached to them, and they would not be pained to lose them.

Something like this happened during the time of Sa`d Zaghlul (Egyptian Prime Minister) One of his opponents was abusing and insolent towards him, but then he surprised everyone by giving this man an important position in Cairo; the people were confused by this and asked him about it; he said, 'Indeed, I have given him this position so he can become acquainted with eminence and status, thus feel the loss all the more painfully when it is taken from him.' That is, he raised him up high so that he would fall on his head because what would be the good of throwing him from a mat, for example?

Then Allah says: '…How I condemned them!' (*al-Hajj:* 44) The True Lord here poses a statement in the form of a question that urges you to ask: what happened? This verse asks, 'Did we not punish them as they deserved to be punished'?

The word 'condemned' means to rebuke someone by degrading him, such as the one who is generous and kind to you, smiles in your face, gives you many things and then one day brings an end to all this, so you say, 'Why has so-and-so denied me?', that is, why did he cut his blessings off from me?

It is as though the True Lord wants to draw from us an acknowledgement of His power to punish His enemies who lie to His messengers. This is also true of His words, 'Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin are wont to laugh at such as have attained to faith, and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another [derisively]; and whenever they return to people of their own kind, they return full of jests; and whenever they see those [who believe,] they say, "Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!” And, withal, they have no call to watch over [the beliefs of] others. But on the Day [of Judgment], they who had attained to faith will [be able to] laugh at the [erstwhile] deniers of the truth: [For, resting in paradise] on couches, they will look on [and say to themselves], “Are these deniers of the truth being [thus] requited for [aught but] what they were wont to do?”’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29 — 36) That is, have the disbelievers been requited for their deeds? Were ‘We able to meet out to them the punishment they deserved’? ‘…How I condemned them!’ (*al-Hajj:* 44) That is, Allah’s rebuke of their position of refusing to fulfil the rights of the blessings they received, which is the reason He turned their blessings into curses.

The True Lord then says:

فَكَأَيِّن مِّن قَرۡيَةٍ أَهۡلَكۡنَٰهَا وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٞ فَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ
عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا وَبِئۡرٖ مُّعَطَّلَةٖ وَقَصۡرٖ مَّشِيدٍ ٤٥

How many towns steeped in wrongdoing We have destroyed and left in total ruin; how many deserted wells; how many lofty palaces! [45] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 45)

There is an expression which indicates a large amount, that is, ‘How many’, such as when you say, ‘How many a favour have I done for you’! It means that you have done many great favours beyond counting. The phrase indicates a large number and amount. Another example of it is found when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And how many a prophet has had to fight [in Allah’s cause], followed by many devoted men…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 146).

A ‘township’ is a place that when Allah *the Almighty* destroys, He does not destroy the place itself, but rather, He destroys its dwellers and things. So, the meaning of ‘township’ is the town’s inhabitants, as is the case when He says, ‘And ask them in the town in which we were…’ (*Yusuf:* 82), that is, ask the people of the town. The meaning could also be, ‘Ask the town and it will answer you’. If you ask the people of the town, they might lie to you, but if you ask the town itself by consulting its records, it will tell you exactly what happened.

It might be that the town itself is also destroyed and its landmarks altered, as Allah says, ‘And [now] those dwellings of theirs are empty, [ruined] as an outcome of their evil deeds…’ (*an-Naml:* 52).

The meaning of ‘how many deserted wells; how many lofty palaces’ (*al-Hajj:* 45) is that it was destroyed because of its evildoing. Allah *the Almighty* does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves, and in another verse, Allah says, ‘And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah’s blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought.’ (*an-Nahl:* 112)

So, the destruction of townships must have a reason, and when the destruction is visited upon them they become ‘…how many deserted wells…’ (*al-Hajj:* 45).This means that is has fallen and collapsed onto something else. His words ‘…left in total ruin…’ (*al-Hajj:* 45), indicate the huge scale of the destruction, such that the roofs fell in first, and then the walls collapsed; or, it means that Allah *the Almighty* turned them right over so they were upside down.

He then says, ‘…how many deserted wells; how many lofty palaces!’ (*al-Hajj:* 45) A well is a deep hole in the ground which reaches subterranean water, from which they obtain water for drinking, farming and so on. He mentions this elsewhere when He says, ‘Now when he arrived at the wells of Midyan…’ (*al-Qasas:* 23), that is, the wells from which they drank.

When a well is in use, you see signs of life around it, people spread out around it, plants grow where water is spilled on the ground as it is drawn from it and birds flock around it to drink from it. As for the well which is not in use, you find that it is deserted; there are no signs of life around it. Moreover, the winds might blow dust onto it, so that it is covered up and abandoned. So, the meaning here is a well which no longer serves its purpose, namely to provide water.

To continue: ‘…how many lofty palaces!’ (*al-Hajj:* 45) Home could be a tent of leather or haircloth, a hut, a house or an apartment. When a man wishes to have a higher standard of home, he builds something especially for himself, but he must still go out to take care of his life’s essential needs such as food. Lofty palaces mean a dwelling which contains inside it everything that you need so that you do not need to leave it; so it contains all of life’s essential needs. The Arabic word for *qasr* (palace) and from this is derived the word *maqsurat* with which Allah *the Almighty* describes the pure companions of paradise, when He says, ‘There the blest will live with their companions pure and modest (*maqsurat*), in pavilions.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 72) That is, they never go outside them or leave them.

The word *mashid* ‘high’ is derived from the word *shayd* which means the plaster which is used as mortar in stone buildings, i.e. an adhesive to stick the stones together and make them level. In the past, they used to build with bricks and clay, but palaces and grad residences would be built with stone and high-quality mortar. From this, the verb *ashada* has been derived, meaning to raise and elevate something or someone. Height is another distinctive feature of castles and it is obvious that the size of rooms in apartments is not the same as that of castles because the former are small and low whilst the latter are large and high.

His statement, ‘how many lofty palaces’ (*al-Hajj:* 45) indicate that those who were destroyed were people of wealth and comfort, castle-dwellers and nobles.

The True Lord then says:

أَفَلَمۡ يَسِيرُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمۡ قُلُوبٞ يَعۡقِلُونَ بِهَآ أَوۡ ءَاذَانٞ يَسۡمَعُونَ بِهَاۖ
فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعۡمَى ٱلۡأَبۡصَٰرُ وَلَٰكِن تَعۡمَى ٱلۡقُلُوبُ ٱلَّتِي فِي ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٤٦﴾

Have these people [of Mecca] not travelled through the land
with hearts to understand and ears to hear? It is not people’s
eyes that are blind, but their hearts within their breasts [46]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 46)

To journey means to cover the distance from one place to another and they call this travelling; and the True Lord invites His servants to travel around the earth because travel has two benefits: Travel may be for the purpose of investment and to seek provision, if you are in a place where it is difficult for you to make a living such as those who travel to other lands to work and seek provisions.

Or otherwise, the purpose of travel is to take admonition and reflect on Allah’s creatures in His huge dominion and to find, in Allah’s creations and signs, evidence of His Omnipotent Power.

Travelling in different lands gives you the opportunity to observe the differences between different environments: this one is hot and that one is cold, this one is a barren desert and that one is verdant and free of sand. Therefore, our Lord says to us: ‘Say, “Go all over the earth, and then behold…”’ (*al-An‘am:* 11) The words ‘and then’ in the verse implies that travel has another purpose which is to invest and seek provision. This verse indicates that these two purposes can be combined. So, when traveling for work, do not be heedless of Allah’s signs in the place to which you travel and take from it cosmological lessons to benefit you spiritually.

In another verse, He says, ‘Say, “Go all over the earth and behold…”’ (*an-Naml:* 69). The use of the word ‘and’ here implies a direct relationship meaning that the purpose of the travel is to behold Allah’s signs. This refers specifically to that travel which is undertaken for the sake of reflection and contemplation, not for investment and the seeking of provisions. Therefore, the popular saying goes ‘The one who lives in one place sees some things, but the one who travels sees much more’. The more places you see, the more sings, and wonders you see which prove Allah’s Omnipotence. You might see one thing which does not move you, and then see another which touches you and stirs your emotions, and encourages you to reflect on the world. His words, ‘Have these people [of Mecca] not travelled…’ (*al-Hajj:* 46) are meant to emphasise and affirm that indeed they have journeyed. It is like if you say, ‘Have I not been kind to you’? This you only say if you have indeed been kind. Indeed, they did travel about the earth in their winter and summer journeys and they would pass by the ruined settlements of those who had been destroyed, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time.’ (*as-Saffat:* 137) That is, you are a people who make journeys and expeditions and you have the opportunity of seeing what happened to those who came before you, so how can it be acceptable for you to turn away from Allah’s signs? ‘Have these people [of Mecca] not travelled through the land with hearts to understand and ears to hear? It is not people’s eyes that are blind, but their hearts within their breasts.’

(*al-Hajj:* 46) Since they had travelled and journeyed in the land, how could they not perceive Allah's signs? How could their hearts not be moved?

We might take some time to consider His words, 'with hearts to understand' (*al-Hajj:* 46) – does a man understand things with his heart? It is clear that understanding takes place in the brain, whilst the heart is in the breast.

Indeed, man has means of perception, which are the senses which receive sensory phenomena. In deference to science, they call these the 'five external senses', the science of physiology has shown that man has other senses than the external ones. When you pick up two different things, you can tell which of them is heavier; so which of the five known senses allows you to do this?

If you say it is the eye, then leave the object on the ground and simply look at it. If you say it is touch, then try touching it without picking it up. So, you do not perceive weight by means of these senses, you do it with something else and another means of perception, the muscular sense which can tell what is light from what is heavy.

When you go to buy a piece of cloth from the draper, you stroke the cloth softly with your fingertips and you can tell which cloth is thicker, even if the difference between them is very slight. So, which sense do you use to determine this? It is the sense of discernment. There is also the sense of distance and other senses which modern science has discovered in man.

When man perceives these things with his means of perception, the mind intervenes to sift through these perceptions and to choose from all the alternatives the one which suits it best. If he wishes to choose an item of clothing, the mind says, 'This is softer and finer than that'; if he wishes to choose perfume, the mind says, 'This is nicer than that'. In summer it chooses thin clothing and in winter chooses thick clothing.

After intelligence chooses and weighs up the alternatives, it makes a judgment which settles in the mind and convinces it and there is no more need for perception or for choosing between alternatives. Then you do whatever your soul has settled on and with which your heart feels comfortable.

So, there is a perception with the senses, a distinction with the intelligence and then a settling of the principle of the heart. As long as the principle settles in your heart, it becomes a guide for your life, and all the rest of your body serves the principle which you have adopted and which has settled in your heart and your core.

But why is it the heart, exactly? They say it is because the heart is what performs the role of pumping the essential means of life, blood, to every part of the body, these body parts which implement the things which settle in the consciousness. That is why they say that the heart is the seat of faith. How? They say it is because you sift and conjugate things until belief and faith settle in your heart and faith or belief is what is tied to the heart and settled within it. Then from the heart this belief extends to the rest of the body parts and senses which act in accordance with this faith. As long as you have decided on a principle and a belief, then you must not contradict it with something else, otherwise your heart will have not understood or comprehended.

The words 'to understand' indicate that the intelligence has another role apart from choosing between alternatives, which is that it keeps one away from error and prevents him from wandering into labyrinths. Some people think that the meaning of *`aql* (intelligence) is 'freedom of thought' and that a man can delve into whatever thoughts he pleases. But no, the word *`aql* derived is from the word *`iqal* which means to tie a camel so that it cannot move and to confine it so that it cannot run away from you.

Then Allah says, '…and ears to hear?' (*al-Hajj:* 46) Why does He say this, when these people already have ears which can hear? Indeed, they have ears which can hear, but since their hearing does not benefit them, it is as though they have no hearing at all. Otherwise, what is the point of hearing something which does not benefit you or have any impact on your life? Hearing such a thing is no different from not hearing it – nay, it would be better not to hear it because if you hear it, it is an argument against you.

'It is not people's eyes that are blind, but their hearts within their breasts' (*al-Hajj:* 46). Blindness of the eyes is a trivial thing when compared with blindness of the heart because a man who loses his sight can still hear, use his intelligence, be guided etc. Others can tell him about what he cannot see for himself and describe it to him in detail as though he can see it. But what can be done is the heart is blind, even if the eyes can see?

If the sight of the eye can be replaced and compensated, then how can the blindness of the heart be compensated? A blind man can feel his way around and if he cannot he can still ask you to take his hand and guide him – but what can a man do if his heart is blind?

Therefore, we call the one who is heedless of an obvious matter or an established principle ‘blind-hearted’ meaning that his heart has been covered over so that it cannot perceive anything.

When Allah says, ‘…their hearts are within their breasts’ (*al-Hajj:* 46), it is obvious that the heart is in the breast, so why does He bother to say this? They say it is to emphasise to you that what is meant is the real heart, so you do not think it is only the notional and intellectual heart, just like when He says, ‘…uttering with their mouths….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 167)

It is obvious that utterances come from the mouth, but He wants to emphasise that he means real speech because otherwise it could mean a signal or a gesture, whilst real speech is the clearest and most emphatic form of communication. A poet said:

Wounds made by arrows cause pain,
    But not like pain of wounds caused by the tongue.

They say, ‘Mind the tongue between your cheeks’. Yet can the tongue be anywhere else but between the cheeks? The purpose of the expression is to emphasise that speech especially is meant, not any other means of communication.

Then the True Lord says:

وَيَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَكَ بِٱلۡعَذَابِ وَلَن يُخۡلِفَ ٱللَّهُ وَعۡدَهُۥۚ وَإِنَّ
يَوۡمًا عِندَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلۡفِ سَنَةٖ مِّمَّا تَعُدُّونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

They will challenge you [Prophet] to hasten the punishment.
God will not fail in His promise – a Day with your Lord is
like a thousand years by your reckoning [47]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 47)

They called for the hastening forth of the chastisement upon themselves when they said, ‘…O Allah! If this be indeed the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!' (*al-Anfal:* 32)

Also, they said, '…Bring about, then, that [punishment] with which thou hast threatened us, if thou art a man of truth!' (*al-A'raf:* 70)

No one calls for the hastening of chastisement unless he does not believe in it, whilst the one who truly believes in chastisement fears it and wants it to be delayed, or to be saved from it. The meaning of 'they will challenge you [Prophet] to hasten the punishment…' (*al-Hajj:* 47) is that they think that if Allah *the Almighty* warns them of chastisement, this means it must come to them immediately, and therefore the True Lord corrects this notion of theirs and says, '…Allah will not fail in His promise– a Day with your Lord is like a thousand years by your reckoning.' (*al-Hajj:* 47) So do not hasten forth that of which you have been warned. It will certainly come to you without doubt because it is a promise from Allah *the Almighty* and does not break His promises. But know that a day in Allah's reckoning is not like a day of yours. For you, a day is twenty-four hours, whilst for Allah *the Almighty* it is like a thousand years of your reckoning of days.

A day is a period of time wherein certain events may take place and is not expansive enough to contain any more events than might possibly take place in such a span of time. But a day in Allah's sight could contain enough events to fill a thousand years of your reckoning. This is because you need effort and exertion to do things, whilst the Creator does not do things with effort, but rather, when He wants something to be, He merely says, 'Be!', and it is. So, your actions require time, whilst your Lord's actions are done with the word 'Be!' The True Lord willed that these people live with the suffering of thinking about this warning for all their lives, suffering its torment even before it occurs.

So, do not think that this chastisement of which you have been warned will occur today or tomorrow; no, because measures of time are not all the same.

Have you not read what Allah *the Almighty* said to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* upon his supplicating against Pharaoh and his people, '…O our Lord! Wipe out their riches, and harden their hearts, so that they may not attain to faith ere they see the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!' (*Yunus:* 88)? His Lord replied to him, 'Accepted, is your prayer…' (*Yunus:* 89). The exegetes say that the answer to Musa's (Moses's) supplication did not come until forty years after he made it.(1)

Elsewhere, Allah says, 'He governs all that exists, from the celestial space to the earth; and in the end, all shall ascend unto Him [for judgment] on a Day the length whereof will be [like] a thousand years of your reckoning.' (*as-Sajda:* 5) This period is extended when Allah *the Exalted* says, 'All the angels and all the inspiration [ever granted to man] ascend unto Him [daily,] in a day the length whereof is [like] fifty thousand years.' (*al-Ma'arij:* 4) Why? Because when this event comes, time will not apply to you because of the terror you behold, you will find short periods to be long, the time will pass you by slowly, you will hope to be away from it even if this means going to hell.

On the other hand, the man who experiences bliss finds long periods to be short and time passes him like the blink of an eye. You can observe for yourself how fast the time seems to pass when you are with your loved ones and how slow it seems to pass when you are with your enemies or people you do not love. Our Arabic poetry has described this concept many times, such as:

Cheerful events are measured with scales,
    And trials are measured in furlongs.

Another example reads:

The night was not long for me, though I slept not,
    For what kept me awake was the sweetest of visions.

Ibn Zaydun said:

If the night is long for me after you are gone,
    Then how many a night was far too short in your company!

The True Lord then says:

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(1) *This was the opinion of Ibn `Abbas, as is narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur.*

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن قَرْيَةٍ أَمْلَيْتُ لَهَا وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُهَا وَإِلَيَّ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٨﴾

To many a town steeped in wrongdoing I gave more time and then struck them down: they all return to Me in the end [48] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 48)

The question by 'how many' indicates a large number. So, the meaning is 'how many a community'. The phrase 'I gave more time' (*al-Hajj:* 48) means that Allah gave them respite, but the length of this respite did not mean that He had neglected them. Allah *the Almighty* gives the disbeliever rein and leaves him be for a time and then when the right time comes He takes him to task and chastises him. The power with which someone is taken to task depends on the power of the one who takes him and the severity of the vengeance depends on the avenger. Henceforth, if Allah *the Almighty* Himself takes someone to task, then what will this taking to task be like? In another verse, He answers this question by saying, '…as only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can take to task.' (*ash-Shura:* 54) He cannot be overcome, nor can anyone restrain Him. The phrase 'take to task' implies severity, vigour, and overwhelming power.

Then Allah says, '…they all return to Me in the end.' (*al-Hajj:* 48) That is, the final end is with Allah *the Almighty* and you cannot avoid it.'To give rein' means to delay the chastisement until an appointed time, as Allah says, 'Let the deniers of the truth have their will; let them have their will for a little while!' (*at-Tariq:* 17) This set time might be deferred for a time, after which the chastisement befalls them, as was the case with the previous communities, which Allah *the Almighty* destroyed by causing the earth to swallow them up, or by drowning them, and so on. As for the *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this rein will be given in the form of superficial worldly events, such as what happened to the disbelievers and how they were humiliated, disgraced, defeated and broken. As for the real chastisement, it awaits them in the Hereafter.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Almighty* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Do not imagine that chastisement and vengeance is slow to come to them in this worldly life, for if you do not see them chastised in this world, you shall certainly see it in the Hereafter'. Allah says, '…And whether We show thee [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the truth], or whether We cause thee to die [ere that retribution takes place – know that, in the end], it is unto Us that they will be brought back.' (*Ghafir:* 77)

Then the True Lord says:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

Say [Prophet], 'People, I am sent only to give you clear warning' [49] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 49)

Warning is a kind of mercy because you give news of a bad thing before it happens, so that those you warn can be aware of it and try to save themselves from it and avoid the means which lead to it. When I remind you of Allah *the Almighty* and of how He takes His enemies to task as only the Almighty Determiner can, you must guard yourself against this end and save yourself from all that leads to ruin. The meaning of 'clear' is comprehensive, leaving nothing out, whether big or small.

Allah then says:

فَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

Those who believe and do good deeds will be forgiven and have a generous reward [50] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 50)

As long as they have faith and do righteous deeds, this means they have benefitted from the warning and that it has had a positive result on them. They attained to faith in Allah *the Almighty* as an All-Powerful Deity endowed with the attributes of absolute perfection and thus they acted in accordance with His commandments. Therefore, they were granted forgiveness for any sins they might have done and they were granted a most excellent sustenance, a bountiful one, which came to them generously and plentifully. 'Generous' is the one whose hand is always stretched forth to give, as the poet says:

I am a man whose golden coins settle not
On my palm, but pass by like wayfarers

So, the sustenance here seems to be provided by itself because it is extended and never cut off; it is like when you fill a cup of water from a running water source, so that its place is immediately filled.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ سَعَوۡاْ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا مُعَٰجِزِينَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ٥١

But those who strive to oppose Our messages
and try in vain to defeat Us are destined for
the Blaze [51] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 51)

To strive means to work towards a goal; it can mean to physically go somewhere, or it can apply to an intellectual endeavour. It's an action which is done from a certain beginning to a certain end.

Striving is not intrinsically praiseworthy, nor intrinsically blameworthy; if it is done for the sake of a good thing, then it is praiseworthy such as that kind of striving of which Allah *the Almighty* says, '…they are the ones whose striving finds favour with Allah!' (*al-Isra':* 19) If on the other hand, it is done for an evil thing, it is blameworthy and foul, such as the striving of which Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Now there is a kind of man whose views on the life of this world may please you greatly, and [the more so as] he cites Allah as witness to what is in his heart and is, moreover, exceedingly skilful in argument. But whenever he prevails, he goes about the earth spreading corruption and destroying [man's] tilth and progeny: and Allah does not love corruption.' (*al-Baqara:* 204-205) As for the related expression *sa`a* (goes around the earth), it is usually an evil thing, for it means to indulge slander and to strive to spread calumny amidst the people. A man who is *sa`a* is a slanderer who conveys evil to people with the intention of causing harm. If people do good, these people conceal it, whilst if they do evil they announce it; and if they do not know, they invent lies.

Therefore, I consider the results of this calumny spread between people 'the plague of talebearers' (those who hear evil and then strive to convey it to others), when they should have concealed it and kept it secret, so that this vice would not spread amongst the people. Once a talebearer told a story(1) about Humam ibn `Abdullah As-Saluli to the tyrant ruler, Ziyad ibn Abih. Ziyad said to the talebearer, ‘Shall I bring the two of you together?’ The talebearer could only say ‘yes’ because how could he have taken back what he said? Perhaps he said to himself, ‘Maybe Allah will cause something to happen which will get me out of this mess before the meeting takes place’. Then Ziyad arrested Humam and concealed the talebearer behind a curtain in his court and had Humam brought in. He said to him, ‘Humam, I hear that you have disparaged me.’ He said, ‘No, may Allah guide you, I have done no such thing, and you deserve no such thing.’ Ziyad then pulled back the curtain and said, ‘This man told me that you disparaged me’, whereupon Humam looked and found it to be a friend of his with whom he would sit, and said to him:

Either I trusted you as a friend or you betrayed me,
Or else you spoke words of which you had no knowledge;
Thus, in the way you have behaved,
You have proved either a traitor, or a sinner!(2)

That is, either way you are blameworthy because you either betrayed the trust of our companionship or failed to keep a secret I entrusted to you or you invented this tale deceitfully and untruthfully. Upon hearing this, Ziyad threw his robe over Humam’s shoulders, but he did not punish the talebearer. This shows that they were comfortable with those who told them tales, and that they were accustomed to hearing such tales.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…to oppose Our messages (*ayat*)…’ (*al-Hajj:* 51). Verses are cosmological signs such as the sun and moon, or the miracles of the prophets, or the verses of revelation. They strove against them meaning that they said false and untrue things about them, just as a talebearer strives to tell lies about people. When these people looked at the signs of the cosmos, they said, ‘It is but the work of nature’, and when they saw a prophet perform a miracle they said, ‘It is but sorcery and the fables of the ancients’, and when they heard the verses of revelation recited to them they said, ‘It is but poetry’. And by all this, they only wanted to ruin the faith of the faithful and bar them from Allah’s cause.

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(1) The story of Humam ibn `Abdullah As-Saluli with Ziyad ibn Abih when he was plotted against by an envier.

(2) Ghazali tells this story in his *`Ihya `Ulum Ad-Din*, but with different personnel.

The word *mu`ajizin* (try in vain to defeat Us) means warriors, it is derived from the verb *`ajaza* which in turn is derived from *`ajaza* meaning ‘to be unable’; so each side vies with the other to see which of them will be the first to be rendered incapable of continuing; each side challenges the other to see which of them is best. The verb *`ajaza* is akin to the verbs *sabaqa* and *nafasa*, which mean ‘to compete’. So, the act of ‘try in vain to defeat Us’ (*al-Hajj:* 51) is a reciprocal and two-way action. The verb *naafasa* (to compete) is derived from the word *nafas*, (breath), the action wherein you breathe in and out to give oxygen to the blood so that man’s physical life continues. If he stops breathing, he dies. A man can go without food or water for a while, but he cannot go without air even for a single breath. This competition took place between `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* and Al-`Abbas(1): `Umar said to Al-`Abbas, ‘Will you compete with me underwater?’ That is, we shall both go underwater and see which of us can hold our breaths the longest. A man can prepare for this competition by taking a deep breath before he goes under the water, but if he goes under it whilst his lungs are empty, how will he be able to endure it? Underwater, the competitors only have the air which they stored in their lungs, so this competition shows which of them has the most capacious chest, and which of them can last longer underwater. This is the essence of *mu`ajaza* ‘seeking to expose the other’s incapacity’.

So, the meaning of ‘strive against Our messages, try to defeat Us’ (*al-Hajj:* 51) is that they think they are able to defeat Us, for when We give them miraculous clear speech, they invent empty speech in an attempt to defeat Us – yet how could they possibly succeed? How could they hope to harm Allah’s speech with their own speech?

Allah *the Almighty* then states what the requital for this action and this arrogance will be: ‘are destined for the blaze.’ (*al-Hajj:* 51) This is Allah’s judgement on them, plain and clear, for who could ever defeat Allah’s Purpose?

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(1) The story of the diving race `Umar ibn Al-Khattab and Al-`Abbas

The True Lord then says:(1)

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ مِن رَّسُولٖ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ إِلَّآ إِذَا تَمَنَّىٰٓ أَلۡقَى ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ فِيٓ أُمۡنِيَّتِهِۦ
فَيَنسَخُ ٱللَّهُ مَا يُلۡقِي ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ ثُمَّ يُحۡكِمُ ٱللَّهُ ءَايَٰتِهِۦۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٞ ٥٢

We have never sent any messenger or prophet before you [Muhammad] into whose wishes Satan did not insinuate something, but God removes what Satan insinuates and then God affirms His message. God is All knowing and wise [52]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 52)

This verse has provoked a great deal of discussion on the part of the scholars, and many false reports and legends from other religions have become brought into these discussions, especially concerning the meaning of *tammanna* (wish), which has two meanings in Arabic. As long as a word has two meanings, then nothing makes one of these meanings more prominent than the other except its more prevalent usage by the Arabs. The word *tamanna* can mean ‘to read’, such as when Hassan ibn Thabit eulogised `Uthman ibn `Affan *Allah be pleased with him* by saying:

He *tamanna* (read) the Book of Allah the Almighty at the night’s start,
And at the night’s end he met with his fate.

That is, `Uthman was killed while he was reading the Quran. Yet, since this meaning of *tamann*a is very rare, it is not usually considered when the Quran is concerned. *Tamann*a also means ‘to hope’ which is its usual meaning in Arabic, whilst its meaning ‘to read’ is not generally used – and what makes it clear that the meaning ‘to read’ does not apply here on principle is that directly before it, Allah says, ‘We have never sent any messenger or prophet before you [Muhammad]’ (*al-Hajj:* 52).

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(1) *Al-Wahidi narrates in Asbab An-Nuzul that this verse was revealed about an event wherein Satan caused the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to recite something which was not actually part of the Quran in chapter of an-Najm (details are given in the main text), after which Allah the Almighty corrected it and then revealed this verse. It is important to note that this story does not have an authentic basis, as stated by Ibn Kathir and al-Qurtubi in their exegeses, and by Qadi `Iyad in Ash-Shifa.*

Now it is known that a Messenger is given Scripture which he can read, whilst a Prophet is not given any new Scripture, but rather, he follows the law of the messengers who came before him. So as long as Satan casts aspersions on both messengers and prophets, the word *tamanna* here must mean ‘hope’, not ‘read’, for what does the Prophet read when he does not receive Scripture?

Those who understand *tamann*a to mean ‘read’ when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘We have never sent any messenger or prophet before you [Muhammad] into whose wishes Satan did not insinuate something’ (*al-Hajj:* 52), whether they be scholars of deep or superficial understanding, say that it means that when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the Quran, Satan interfered with his recitation and placed therein that which was foreign to it. They say that after Allah’s words: ‘Have you, then, ever considered [what you are worshipping in] al-Lat and al-`Uzza, as well as [in] Manat, the third and last [of this triad]?’ (*an-Najm:* 19-20), have been revealed, Satan added ‘These are the exalted birds, and their intercession is most desired’, as though Satan placed these words in the Quran, after which Allah *the Almighty* expelled them again and established His true verses. But this theory casts doubts on the Quran itself and how can we believe in such a thing when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Trustworthy divine inspiration has alighted with it from on high. Upon your heart, [O Muhammad], so that you may be among those who preach.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193-194) Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘Now if he [whom We have entrusted with it] had dared to attribute some [of his own] sayings unto Us, We would indeed have seized him by his right hand, and would indeed have cut his life-vein, and none of you could have saved him!’ (*al-Haqqa:* 44-47)

So, the True Lord protected the Quran and His words from this kind of interference, so how could we accept that these statements of disbelief could be inserted into the Quran? How could their statement ‘These are the exalted birds, and their intercession is most desired’ make sense, especially if we consider the saying of Allah, ‘Have you, then, ever considered [what you are worshipping in] al-Lat and al-`Uzza, as well as [in] Manat, the third and last [of this triad]? Why – for yourselves [you would choose only] male offspring, whereas to Him [you assign] female: that, lo and behold, is an unfair division!’ (*an-Najm:* 19-22) How could the one go alongside the others?

So, this understanding of the verse does not make sense, and Satan does not have the power to place something in the Quran which is foreign to it. But, Satan might interfere in another way: when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recites the Quran, containing guidance, counsels, rulings and miracles for mankind, do you think that Allah's enemy would clear the air for the people so they can listen to this speech without distracting them, disturbing their thoughts, and trying to prevent them from listening to it? So, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited (*tamanna*) the Quran to them, Satan cast an aspersion on his recitation and sent his human followers to say that the Quran was mere sorcery, poetry, a lie and fable of the ancients.

The role of Satan, then, is not to place something in Allah's word which is foreign to it, for this is not within his power and Allah *the Almighty* would never let him touch His Book; rather, what he does is to cast obstacles on the path of the Quran and its understanding and influence, in order to bar the people from understanding it and being affected by it, and to spoil the Quran in the sight of those who are willing to believe in it.

But did this attempt to defame the Quran and bar the people from it have any result? Additionally, were the people really diverted away from the Book of Allah *the Almighty*? Allah *the Almighty* thwarted Satan's efforts, and his attempts did not place a single obstacle in the path of faith to the Quran and its effect. The Quran found hearts and ears which heard and reflected and embraced faith, yielding to its majesty and magnificence and submitting to its rhetoric and eloquence; they believed in it one after another. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…but Allah removes what Satan insinuates and then Allah affirms His message. Allah is All Knowing and Wise'. (*al-Hajj:* 52) That is, Allah *the Almighty* annulled and quashed the falsehoods and obstacles which Satan cast with the intention of barring people from the Quran; and Allah *the Almighty* enforced His verses and made them clear that they are truly from Him and that they serve as a miracle, the like of which man and jinn-kind could never produce, even if they all cooperated to do so. All of this applies if we consider *tamanna* to mean 'read' or 'recite'.

If, however, we consider it to mean 'hope', then we say that a messenger is someone whom Allah *the Almighty* sends with the religion of truth to mankind. If he is able to follow this religion himself, then his hope will be that what he has brought will be believed or obeyed; his hope will be that his religion gains authority and control over the motions of human life.

The prophet or messenger has more concern for his people than anyone else and is eager that they be benefitted and guided; the Quran is thus a good thing which he would love for the people to take, as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.’(1)

But would Satan simply sit and watch Messenger Muhammad’s hopes for his people be realised, or would he cast obstacles in the way of this hope and stir up souls against it, encouraging his people to rebel against him by reminding them of the power and dominance they would lose because of Islam? In this way, Satan cast aspersions on the hopes of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘wishes Satan did not insinuate something, but Allah remove what Satan insinuates’. (*al-Hajj:* 52)

Satan would not leave the Quran to penetrate people’s hearts, or even their ears. He was the author of the notion: ‘…Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it….’ (*Fussilat:* 26)

If Satan did not cast obstacles in hearing the Quran and raise doubts about it, everyone who heard it would believe in it. The Quran has a sweetness which cannot be resisted, and an effect which penetrates the heart directly.

Yet despite this, the aspersions Satan cast did not degrade the Quran, or the power of the call; it began to increase day after day and the number of those who believed in the Quran increased. What is important is for us to be aware of how to receive the Quran and how to listen to it: we must receive it without any prejudice, for Allah’s laws are only received poorly because of the prejudice of whim.

I said before that a container cannot contain two things at the same time and one of them must be taken out if the other is to enter. So, you must first completely empty your mind and your thoughts, and only then receive Allah’s word and study it however you like, and you will come to believe in it as long as you cleanse your heart for it so that nothing remains in your mind to cloud the natural disposition which Allah *the Almighty* created in you. When you do this, the Quran will find its way into your heart; and once your heart has experienced the love of the Quran, nothing will ever take it out again.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (13) and Muslim (45) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik*

In the conversion of `Umar(1) *Allah be pleased with him* we have a fine example and a lesson, for when he heard his sister recite the Quran for the first time, his heart was closed and contained only disbelief, so it did not move him, and thus he struck her a blow which made her face bleed. When he saw this, his heart softened and he felt compassion for his sister. It is as though the emotion of love cast out the emotion of enmity so that his pure nature was revealed; and when he heard the Quran after this, he believed in it right away.(2)

Likewise, if you want to discuss the matter of faith or disbelief and choose one of them – because they cannot be combined, and you must choose one or the other – then if, when you discuss this matter, you insist on disbelief from the onset, then you will never reach faith because Allah *the Almighty* seals the stubborn heart so that disbelief cannot leave it and faith cannot enter it. You must first take the disbelief out and be free of it, and then discuss the matter as you wish.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Say, “I counsel you one thing only: Be [ever-conscious of] standing before Allah, whether you are in the company of others or alone; and then bethink yourselves [that] there is no madness in [this prophet,] your fellow-man….”’ (*Saba’:* 46)

But, if you discuss the matter whilst having a prejudiced thought in your mind, you will be like those people of whom Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Now among those [hapless sinners] are such as [pretend to] listen to thee, [O Muhammad,] and then, as soon as they leave thy presence, speak [with scorn] unto those who have understood [your message]; “What is it that he has said just now?…”’ (*Muhammad:* 16). That is, what is the latest thing he has brought, and what is miraculous about it? The reply then comes: ‘…It is such as these whose hearts Allah has sealed because they [always] followed but their own lusts. Just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in Allah consciousness….' (*Muhammad:* 16-17) In another verse, the True Lord *the Almighty* says about the Quran: '…Say, "Unto all who have attained to faith, this [divine revelation] is a guidance and a source of health; but as for those who will not believe – in their ears is deafness, and so it remains obscure to them…' (*Fussilat:* 44).

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(1) *The story of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab`s conversion to Islam and his story with his sister*

(2) *Ibn Hisham, Sira*

So, the same Quran never changes, but those who listen to it are different. We said before that if you want to make a cup of hot tea cooler, you blow in it. If you want to warm up your hands in the cold winter, you blow on them. How could this be, when it is the very same action? Indeed, it is the same action, but the recipient of the action differs from one instance to the other.

Allah says: 'any messenger or prophet before you'. (*al-Hajj:* 52) The word 'any' indicates that these words are comprehensive, referring to all the previous prophets and messengers. Every prophet and messenger hoped that his religion would spread and his way of guidance would be followed, and that all his people would believe in him. But Satan would never sit idly and watch him get all that he hoped for, but inevitably would stand in the way of his call to bar the people from it and divert them away from his call and his message. But in the end, Allah *the Almighty* always succoured His messengers and prophets, and annulled the obstacles which Satan cast in the way of their call, and then made His messages firm and clear so that they were firmly established and no one could deny them.

When you hear the word 'cast', know that it implies obstacles and evils such as when Allah *the Almighty* says, '…And so We have cast enmity and hatred among the followers of the Bible, [to last] until Resurrection Day….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 64)

One of those who understand *tamanna* here to mean 'recite' says that Allah *the Almighty* sent certain things to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to prove his human nature, and then He wiped away the traces of this human nature to show that Allah *the Almighty* always kept Messenger Muhammad under His protection so that if his human nature ever inclined to something, Allah *the Almighty* would protect him from it. Because of this, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Things come to me so that I say, “I am not like one of you”; and then things are taken from me so that I say, “I am nothing but a human being like you.”’ So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a human being, but he is divinely inspired with that which protects him from human errors.

An aspect of his human nature was that he was a victim of an act of sorcery, and this is a fact which cannot be denied, and many authentic narrations were narrated about this. The disbelievers plotted all types of schemes against him *peace and blessings be upon him*; they mocked him, insulted him, persecuted him and vilified him; and then they planned one night to kill him, and waited for him, but they did not succeed. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And [remember, O Prophet,] how those who were bent on denying the truth were scheming against thee, in order to restrain thee [from preaching], or to slay thee or to drive thee away: thus, have they [always] schemed; but Allah brought their scheming to not – for Allah is above all schemers.’ (*al-Anfal:* 30)

Allah *the Almighty* planned for the sake of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and delivered him safely from their scheme, and thus Allah *the Almighty* exposed their plotting and thwarted their efforts and both their open and secret plans failed. So, they(1) resorted to the sorcerers, asking them to do to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what they had been unable to do. They worked a spell on a comb which had one of the Prophet’s hairs on it, adding some fibres of male date-palm pollen. Allah *the Almighty* exposed them and told Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this, so he sent `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* to bring the comb from out of the well of Dharwan.(2)

It is as though the True Lord *the Almighty* wanted to show us that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was human who is subject to the same things as are all human beings, but his Lord did not leave his human nature alone, but protected it with His All-Sustaining Power.

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(1) *They worked a spell on a comb which had one of the Prophet’s Muhammad hairs on it, adding some fiber of male date-palm pollen.*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (3268) and Muslim (2189) on the authority of `A`isha Allah be pleased with her*

This is what is meant by those people who prefer the first interpretation of *tamanna* as 'read' or 'recite', that is, messengers are subject to the same things as are other human beings, but then Allah intervenes to protect them from this. As for us, we prefer the other interpretation which says that *tamanna* means 'hope.'

The verse then ends with the words: 'for Allah is All Knowing and Wise.' (*al-Hajj:* 52) Allah *the Almighty* knows well the plots and plans of Satan, and has enough wisdom to deal with these plots.

Allah then says:

لِّيَجۡعَلَ مَا يُلۡقِي ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ فِتۡنَةٗ لِّلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٞ وَٱلۡقَاسِيَةِ
قُلُوبُهُمۡۗ وَإِنَّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ لَفِي شِقَاقِۭ بَعِيدٖ ﴿٥٣﴾

He makes Satan's insinuations a temptation only for the sick at heart and those whose hearts are hardened – the evildoers are profoundly opposed [to the Truth] [53] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 53)

Someone might ask: 'If Allah annuls the aspersion which Satan casts, then what is the point of allowing it to be cast in the first place'? Allah *the Almighty* allowed it to be cast as a trial to test the people, to make clear who was prepared to carry the burden of the message, this was a responsibility which could only be borne by those who could overcome such trials and escape from the temptations of Satan and avoid the obstacles he sets up. That is why He said of them: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind….' (*Al-'Imran:* 110)

You only attained this rank because you proved worthy of bearing this trust; trials come to you, but you scoff at them and do not let them turn you aside. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'He makes Satan's insinuations a temptation only for the sick at heart and those whose hearts are hardened…' (*al-Hajj:* 53), i.e. hypocrisy such that if they are exposed to trial they turn the other way, and say as others said, 'It is nothing but sorcery, lies and fables of the ancients'.

It was also a trial for 'all whose hearts are hardened', those who have lost the softness of their hearts, not looking at the beauty around them which

Allah *the Almighty* created and gave being and sustenance, nor acknowledging the bounties Allah *the Almighty* gave them, nor rejoicing in Him or coming to Him.

We can observe that the small child feels comfortable with his mother and father and relies on them because he has experienced their affection and grown up in their care; and if he is raised by a nanny, even if his mother is around, he will prefer the nanny and feel more comfortable in her care, and disregard his own mother. Why? Because he looks at the good which is done to him, from where it comes; he looks at those who do him favours and kindnesses and his heart is attached to them, no matter who they might be. These people came into Allah's universe having no power or strength, and He received them with all types of good things, yet despite this their hearts were hard and solid, and they did not acknowledge this kindness.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '…the evildoers are profoundly opposed [to the Truth].' (*al-Hajj:* 53) They sin against their own selves when they prefer a benefit which is instantaneous and small to a benefit which is eternal and great. The word *shiqaq* (opposed) literally means 'split', as is the case when two people disagree with each other; even if only it were a trivial split which could be healed and re-joined, or a split like those of this worldly life which occur between people because of worldly problems. But the verse states that their split is 'profoundly', meaning that its effect is permanent and terrible. So, the first reason why Satan is allowed to cast these dispersions is that it is a test; as for the second reason, Allah now tells us what it is:

وَلِيَعْلَمَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمَ أَنَّهُ ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ فَيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِهِۦ فَتُخْبِتَ
لَهُۥ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهَادِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ⁽٥٤⁾

And He causes those given knowledge to realize that this Revelation is your Lord's Truth, so that they may believe in it and humble their hearts to Him: God guides the faithful to the straight path [54] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 54)

His words 'and He causes those given knowledge to realize that this revelation is your Lord's truth…' (*al-Hajj:* 54) mean that they may be ever more certain and convinced that this is the truth, no matter what doubts other people try to cast on it and no matter how much they call it sorcery, lies or fables of the ancients. For Allah *the Almighty* will annul all of this and the people of sound knowledge and discernment will continue to believe in the Quran because of the facts, indications, and proofs they possess which tell them that it is the truth. As long as it is the truth which cannot be disturbed by these false accusations, they must therefore believe in it: ‘and that they may believe in it’ (*al-Hajj:* 54), then this faith must be followed by action and implementation: ‘and humble their hearts to Him’ (*al-Hajj:* 54), that is, surrender with humility, lowliness and resignation.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Allah guides the faithful to the straight path.’ (*al-Hajj:* 54) So, Satan’s plots and casting of aspersions did not end when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, but rather, Satan continues to lie in wait for his community after him. Satan lies in wait and plots against the whole community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and all those who bear his Message.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And thus it is that against every prophet We have set up as enemies the evil forces from among humans as well as from among invisible beings that whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind. But they could not do this unless your Lord had so willed: stand, therefore, aloof from them and from all their false imagery!’ (*al-An‘am:* 112) That is, leave them aside, for Allah, has plans for them. So, why do they do it? And what is the wisdom behind this? Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And that Allah might render pure of all dross those who have attained to faith….’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 141) He also says, ‘Yet, to the end that the hearts of those who do not believe in the life to come might incline towards Him….’ (*al-An‘am:* 113) So Satan’s mission is to take advantage of those whose faith is weak and who worship Allah *the Almighty* on the verge of disbelief; those people who invent arguments to justify how they are immersed in their passions and how they follow the path of Satan; those who enjoy attacking religion and who hope that religion, the Lord and the resurrection are only delusions with no basis in reality because they are afraid that these things could be real and that they might get in trouble due to their evil deeds, and that they might have a painful destiny ahead of them. Because of all this, they find the resurrection far-fetched and thus say, as recorded in the Quran: 'Why – after we have died and become mere dust and bones, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead?' (*as-Saffat:* 16) Why? Because they want to justify their behaviour and get themselves out of trouble which they, in reality cannot, get out of, such people will follow anyone, and eagerly embrace any doubt which is raised about Allah's religion and grasp hold of it; and their intention is to destroy religion at its foundations.

For example, we hear some of these wretched people objecting to how eating carrion is forbidden and eating slaughtered meat is permitted, a point which shows how the seeds of idolatry and disbelief have taken root in their souls; they even give wild arguments which only convince their fellow disbelievers and hypocrites – for this issue is clear, and death is not the same as killing or slaughtering. 'Death' means that the spirit leaves the body first before the body is damaged, and the form of the body only begins to break down after the soul leaves it. As for killing, it is when the body is broken first, and thus the spirit leaves, such as if a man or an animal is struck on the head and dies because his brain is damaged and smashed, so that the spirit can no longer remain in it. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And Muhammad is only a messenger; all the [other] messengers have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain…' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). So, dying is not the same as being slain.

We illustrated this before with the example of the electric light we use, which flows though wires and then manifests itself in electric lamps. We still do not know the nature of this electricity and this light, but we see it and enjoy it. Now if the lamp breaks, the light goes out because the lamp is no longer suitable for receiving this light, although it still exists in the wires. So, electricity's light only shows itself if this vacuum-sealed glass bulb remains sound. In the same way, the spirit cannot remain in the body unless the body has certain specific attributes, and if these attributes are disturbed, the spirit leaves the body.

As for slaughtering, it also means to expel the spirit from the body, but by the command of Allah *the Almighty* its Creator and by a dispensation from Him in which it resembles the lawful execution of a man for just retribution or another lawful reason. We slaughter the animal which Allah *the Almighty* has permitted us and commanded us to slaughter, and had Allah *the Almighty* not commanded us to slaughter it we would not do so, and had Allah *the Almighty* not permitted it, we would not eat it which is proved by the fact that we do not eat the animals which He has not permitted us to eat.

Those people who criticise the lawful way of slaughtering and prefer to kill the animals by strangulation, for example, have missed the point and the wisdom of slaughtering: Slaughtering allows all the blood out, and blood contains substances which are harmful to man which must be rid of by removing all the blood of the slaughtered animal, since it contains an amount of impure blood which has not passed through the kidneys to be cleaned.

The Muslim is eager to bear the teachings of Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and eager that these teachings should govern the motions of life; but Satan does not leave him alone to bring this hope to fruition, just as he did not leave the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* alone before him. His plots and casting of obstacles did not end when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, but they still continue, and will continue until the Last Hour.

Therefore Allah *the Almighty* says in the next verse:

وَلَا يَزَالُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فِي مِرۡيَةٖ مِّنۡهُ حَتَّىٰ تَأۡتِيَهُمُ
ٱلسَّاعَةُ بَغۡتَةً أَوۡ يَأۡتِيَهُمۡ عَذَابُ يَوۡمٍ عَقِيمٍ ٥٥

The disbelievers will remain in doubt about it until the Hour suddenly overpowers them or until torment descends on them on a Day devoid of all hope [55] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 55)

They will not cease to be in doubt and therefore we say that Allah *the Almighty* has given the followers of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the duty of continuing his Message; Allah *the Almighty* says, '…so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you…' (*al-Baqara:* 143). You must bear witness that you have conveyed the message, just as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a witness over you. It is as though every one of us has been sent by Allah *the Almighty* and just as Messenger

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bore witness that he conveyed the message unto him, he must bear witness that, he in turn, conveyed the Message after the death of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, this verse combines both these aspects so that he *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness before you, and you bear witness before all mankind.

When the True Lord *the Almighty* gives us this Message to convey, He says, ‘As long as you shall continue the Messenger’s Message, you shall inevitably encounter, just as the Messenger did, those who mock you, persecute you and cast obstacles in the way of your hopes. Yet, if you are steadfast, then Allah *the Almighty* will annul what Satan casts, will succour His *awliya`* in the end and Islam will remain until the Last Hour’. In addition, there will always be people who will oppose this religion and spread doubts about it, and the atheists who seek to make the people doubt Allah’s Existence will appear, from time to time, to confront us with notions which contradict Allah’s religion, such as saying that this universe was created by nature alone, and you will see and hear these claims in their writings and articles.

Empirical science was not spared from these perversions of theirs, for when they see an animal living in harmony with its environment, they say: ‘Nature has caused it to adapt the right colour and form for its environment’. When it comes to plants, as well, if they are confronted with a sign of Allah *the Almighty* such as that of which He says, ‘… all watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favoured above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast] …’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 4), they say, ‘Plants are nourished by the process of selection’, meaning that the plant itself chooses and selects its nourishment so that in the same soil with the same water, different plants grow which are sweet, bitter, acidic and spicy. Instead of acknowledging Allah’s grace and power, they speak of ‘nature’ and ‘natural selection’.

I spoke to some of these people in France, trying to answer them and refuting their claims. The simplest way to do this is to point out that the process of selection requires a conscious will to differentiate between the things which are selected: does a plant have a will which allows it to choose between sweetness and acidity? In addition, can it tell the difference between bitter and the spicy? They try to convince people of the role of nature in order to distance their minds from the concept of Allah's Power and they say that plants take nourishment by means of narrow capillaries which look like hairs. We know that these capillaries are tubular and hollow on the inside. Now when you place these tiny capillaries in water, the water in them rises to the top because the air pressure inside these tubes, due to their narrowness, is less than the pressure outside them. So, the water rises inside them. If these capillaries were broad, then the pressure inside them would be equal to the pressure outside them and the water inside them would not rise.

So, we said to them: 'If we brought a tank with different liquids inside it and all are mixed together, and then we put these capillaries in it, would you find in each capillary a particular liquid and no other, or would we find the water inside them to be a mixture of all the different ingredients present in the tank'? If you did this experiment, you would find that indeed the liquid would rise in the capillaries in this way, but the different ingredients of it would not be separated; the same liquid would be in each capillary – and how different this is from how plants grow and take nourishment. Allah *the Almighty* speaks the truth when He says, 'Who creates [everything], and thereupon forms it in accordance with what it is meant to be, and who determines the nature [of all that exists], and thereupon guides it [towards its fulfilment.' (*al-A'la:* 2-3)

So how far these explanations are from reality! How ignorant those who advance them and circulate them are! Especially in an age when science and research has advanced, its means have proliferated, an age when minds have become enlightened, and many secrets of the universe have been discovered which prove the awesome power of its Creator; yet there are still those who advance the cause of falsehood.

The True Lord says, 'The disbelievers will remain in doubt about it until the Hour suddenly overpowers them…' (*al-Hajj:* 55). So, they will be present in the *ummah* of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until the Last Hour rises, and we shall confront them just as he *peace and blessings be upon him* confronted them. Satan will continue to cast aspersions into these people's souls, whisper to them, inspire his allies from man and jinn-kind, and set up obstacles and barriers to bar people from Allah's religion. This is an example of how Satan casts obstacles in the way of the most important of all matters, namely; faith in Allah *the Almighty*.

Satan also casts aspersions concerning the matter of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we find that there are those who attack the personality of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'How could he lead a whole nation when he was an unlettered nomad?' They accuse him and criticise him over the matter of his multiple marriages, and so on. This represents an obstacle barring the way to attain faith in him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We are amazed at how these people attack him *peace and blessings be upon him* whilst disbelieving in him, for these attacks of theirs implicitly suggest that they believe that he really was the Messenger of Allah; otherwise, they would not spend so much effort on criticising him, since if he were only an ordinary person, he would not have been subjected to all this criticism.

Therefore, do not debate with these people about Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but only about the most important issue, that is, Allah's Existence, then the existence of messengers who convey Allah's Message. If you begin things with them by discussing the topic of faith in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you will never reach a resolution with them because they are setting their own standards of perfection and then measuring his *peace and blessings be upon him* conduct against these standards. This is the wrong way around because we take our definition of perfection from him *peace and blessings be upon him* and from his actions; we do not invent our own standards of perfection.

In this vein, they also raise doubts about Allah's laws. For example, they object to how Islam allows divorce, for how can we divide a married couple? Now it is strange that they take this stand, for how can we force an estranged married couple to stay together when they do not want to, as though they are chained together? How can we do this, when you cannot force a man to befriend someone he does not want to, even if he only sees him once a day, for example? How, then, could you force a couple to remain bonded together in one place, when they hate each other?

Allah *the Almighty* thwarts their efforts and shows the falsehood of these notions, the events of life and its problems have forced them to allow divorce, only it can solve these kinds of problems. These people have raised much debate about Allah's words, 'He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with the [task of spreading] guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religion…' (*at-Tawba:* 33). His words, 'They aim to extinguish Allah's light with their utterances: but Allah has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth' (*as-Saff:* 8) and '…however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught but Allah…' (*as-Saff:* 9).

They say: 'But despite this, the religion has not prevailed, and the majority of people in the world still do not believe in Islam'. They mean to raise doubts about Allah's Book, yet this statement of theirs arises from a lack of understanding of this verse, and the meaning of 'cause it to prevail'. This does not mean that Islam will prevail over everything which opposes it so that no one will be left to reject it.

Rather, 'cause it to prevail' means that He will destine victory for it by means of the truth of its arguments and teachings even though the disbelievers and idolaters hate this. So, they will continue to exist, but it will prevail over them, and Islam will become ascendant, and they will be forced to adopt its laws and rulings to solve their problems. The fact that they will adopt elements of Islam to solve their problems, although they do not believe in it, is more of a rebuttal of them than it would be for them actually to believe in it. If they believed in Islam, it would not prevail over them or become ascendant over them.

So, you raised doubts in this matter, and said it was not from any God or messenger, yet the days have forced you, with their events and experiences, to resort to these laws which you opposed. You are adopting the laws of Islam whilst still disbelieving in it, which is proof that it has prevailed over you.

We continueby examining: '…until the Hour suddenly overpowers them'. (*al-Hajj:* 55) The scholars have spoken much about the meaning of 'the Hour': does it mean the Day of Resurrection, or the day on which a man dies? The 'Last Hour' could mean both since when a man dies it is as though his resurrection has already begun, his deeds have come to an end; and man's death comes suddenly just as the resurrection will come suddenly. So, the two possible meanings are equally valid. But if the Last Hour will come suddenly and surprise them with all its horrors, then what are the minor heralds, and the major heralds? Are they not signs which will indicate that Hour is nigh, which would mean that it is no longer a sudden occurrence? They say that the heralds of something do not necessarily mean that it will definitely happen right away; rather, a herald signifies that something is near, so be ready for it and prepare for it; as for the exact time of its occurrence, no one knows it, and its coming will be sudden despite these forewarnings.

Allah then says, '…and [supreme] suffering befalls them on a day void of all hope.' (*al-Hajj:* 55) Some (1) consider this day to be the Day of Resurrection, and that the Last Hour means death; others (2) say that it means the Battle of *Badr*, on which Allah *the Almighty* separated the truth from falsehood. This is an effort for which they deserve our gratitude, but when we reflect on the verse: 'The disbelievers will remain in doubt about it…' (*al-Hajj:* 55), this means that the doubt will continue, and the Battle of *Badr* is over. The doubt will continue until the Day of Resurrection.(3)

There is nothing to prevent both the 'Last Hour' and the 'Day void of all hope' from both meaning the Day of Resurrection, meaning that they both refer to the same thing. There is a difference between the time of an event and the event itself: The Last Hour is the time wherein the event of suffering will occur, so the Hour will come first and then suffering will follow, although the coming of Last Hour is also in itself a form of suffering. When Allah says, '…The disbelievers will remain in doubt about it until the Hour suddenly overpowers them or until torment descends on them on a day devoid of all hope.' (*al-Hajj:* 55) The word *`aqim* literally means 'barren', that is, someone who cannot conceive children, whether male or female so that nothing will come after them. Allah *the Almighty* used this same word when speaking of Sara, the wife of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: '…A barren old woman [like me]' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 29). The Day of Resurrection is also a barren day; no day will follow it; it will be the end of the cycle, as someone said, 'The world always gave to them, but now it is barren'.

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(1) *Including Ad-Dahhak and Mujahid, according to Al-Qurtubi and As-Suyuti*

(2) *Ibn `Abbas, Qatada and Mujahid, according to Al-Qurtubi*

(3) *Ibn Kathir preferred this interpretation.*

Or *`aqim* here might mean that it brings no good but only evil such as when Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And [you have the same message] in [what happened to the tribe of] `Ad, when We let loose against them that life-destroying wind (*`aqim*) which spared nothing of what it came upon, but caused [all of] it to become like bones dead and decayed.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41-42) This is because when the wind blows, good things are expected from it: it may bring a cloud full of rain, or move the crops so that the male pollen falls onto the female: 'And We let loose the winds to fertilize [plants]…' (*al-Hijr:* 22). But this wind brought nothing good, and nothing beneficial. It would have been a mercy had it gone no further than being bereft of benefit, but no; it actually went as far as bringing harm: '[It] spared nothing of what it came upon, but caused [all of] it to become like bones dead and decayed.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 42) So it destroyed everything it touched.

Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere, 'And so, when they beheld it in the shape of a dense cloud approaching their valleys, they exclaimed, "This is but a heavy cloud which will bring us [welcome] rain!" [But Hud (Eber) said], "Nay, but it is the very thing which you [so contemptuously] sought to hasten – a wind bearing grievous suffering, bound to destroy everything at its Lord's behest!" And then they were so utterly wiped out that nothing could be seen save their [empty] dwellings….' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25)

So, the meaning of *`aqim* here is something which brings no goodness or benefit, but only evil and torment; or otherwise it means that no day will come after it because you will leave the world of vicissitudes where things are always changing from one state to another. The world switches from wealth to poverty, from health to sickness, from youth to old age, from security to fear, from summer to winter, from hot to cold, from day to night and so on. But in the Hereafter, you will move from a world of vicissitudes and means-based life, to another world where you will live with the Ultimate Cause, and to a final Day after which there will be no more days, as though it is barren and has no progeny or successor. It is like when you go to a party of great munificence and bounty, and you say, ‘That was the party to end all parties!’, meaning that the like of it will never be seen again.

If in this world you live by the means which Allah *the Almighty* has created for you, in the Hereafter you will sit in comfort enjoying the bounty of the Ultimate Cause. You will have to do no more than think of something and you will see it there in your hands. Because after the resurrection there will be no vicissitudes or changes, everyone will remain the same age, growing neither old nor decrepit, nor sickening or dying.

Consider what Allah says about the women of paradise, ‘For, behold, We shall have brought them into being in a life renewed having resurrected them as virgins, full of love, well-matched with those who have attained to righteousness.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 35-38) To the one who hates his wife in this world because she makes him weary, we say: Do not compare the spouse of this world to the spouse of the Hereafter because Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘there shall they have spouses pure’ (*an-Nisa’:* 57), that is, purified of everything you disliked about them in this world in their forms, their nature and their character. In the Hereafter, there is nothing to spoil bliss.

The True Lord then says:

ٱلْمُلْكُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلَّهِ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ فَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟
وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ فِى جَنَّٰتِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ﴿٥٦﴾

On that Day control will belong to God: He will judge between them. Those who believe and do good deeds will be admitted to Gardens of Delight [56] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 56)

Someone might ask, ‘Does all dominion not belong to Allah *the Almighty* on every day, as well as that day’? Indeed, all dominion belongs to Allah *the Almighty* in this world and in the Hereafter, but in this world Allah *the Almighty* created creatures and gave them dominion within His dominion; but this dominion does not last. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Say, “O Allah, Lord of all dominion! You grant dominion unto whom You will, and take away dominion from whom You will; and You exalt whom You will, and abase whom You will. In Thy hand is all good. Verily, You have the power to will anything.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26)

So, in this world there are people to whom Allah *the Almighty* has granted dominion over certain things, and in this respect the dominion belongs to others; but in the Hereafter all dominion will be Allah's alone: '…With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists' (*Ghafir:* 16). At the resurrection, 'while those who disbelieve and reject Our revelations will receive a humiliating torment.' (*Ghafir:* 16) So, all dominion will return to its rightful Owner, and all means will return to their Ultimate Cause.

The meaning of '…He shall judge [all men and make a distinction] between them…' (*al-Hajj:* 56) is that there is a dispute between two parties, one of which is in the right and the other of which is in the wrong. The judgement of disputes in this world requires witnesses, proofs, and oaths and they say in courts: 'The burden of proof lies with the plaintiff and an oath must be taken by the defendant'. This is true of the disputes of this worldly life. As for the disputes of the Hereafter, they are judged by the True Lord who knows all that is secret and concealed and who requires no proof or witnesses, or any other authority to execute His judgement.

The courtroom of the Hereafter does not require any lawyers; you cannot deceive the judge or bribe a witness to lie for you. In the courtroom of the Hereafter, you cannot use your temporal power to overturn the verdict or quash it. On that day, all dominion will belong to Allah *the Almighty* alone, the judgement on that day will be Allah's alone; Allah *the Almighty* will be judge, witness, and executor, and no one will be able to question His judgement.

As long as there will be a judgement, there will inevitably be a winner and a loser, and Allah *the Almighty* makes this clear by saying, '…Those who believe and do good deeds will be admitted to gardens of delight.' (*al-Hajj:* 56)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَكَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٞ مُّهِينٞ ﴿٥٧﴾

While those who disbelieve and reject Our revelations will receive a humiliating torment [57] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 57)

These are the tyrants, who had power in the world of disbelief and rebellion, whom Allah *the Almighty* has judged must be punished with shameful suffering after they had been so proud and haughty in this world. We may observe here that the suffering of hell is sometimes called ‘grievous’, sometimes ‘awesome’ and sometimes ‘shameful.’ The grievous suffering is the one which causes pain to him who experiences it; but this might last for a while and then end, whilst the awesome suffering is unending. The shameful suffering is the one which humiliates and besmirches his dignity, of which he was always proud.

You find that people differ as to how they deal with different kinds of suffering: some of them are unmoved by tough blows, but they be hurt by a word which injures their dignity and pride. Because of this, Allah *the Almighty* speaks of these different kinds of suffering, which encompass all the different psychological faculties, dealing out to each soul that which hurts it most.

The True Lord then speaks about something we needed to know, for the first Muslims in Mecca were driven away from their homes, children and possessions simply because they said, ‘Our Lord is Allah’ and there is no doubt that a man’s homeland, family and place of upbringing have an effect on the dispositions of his soul which cannot be easily erased, and when he is away from home, he misses it and longs to return. A poet said:

Even if my homeland wrongs me, it is dear to me;
Even if my family withhold from me, they are still generous.

Therefore, when the student leaves his local town and heads off for Cairo, people say, ‘He will definitely come home, no matter what hardships befall him’; he will come home to seek help and support from his family, or even at the end of his life, he will come home to be buried beneath the soil of his own homeland. People say that when Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *Allah be pleased with him* saw that one of the birds was missing, ‘…he said, “How is it that I do not see the hoopoe? Or could he be among the absent? If so, I will punish him most severely or will kill him unless he brings me a convincing excuse!’ (*an-Naml:* 20-21), for he was a Prophet and he would not deal out punishment without first hearing the excuse – they say that the birds asked Sulaiman (Solomon) how he would punish the hoopoe and he replied: ‘I shall place him among a species other than his own and in a place which is not familiar to him’, i.e. not his own home.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ قُتِلُوٓاْ أَوۡ مَاتُواْ لَيَرۡزُقَنَّهُمُ
ٱللَّهُ رِزۡقًا حَسَنٗاۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ٥٨

He will give a generous provision to those who migrated in God's way and were killed or died. He is the Best Provider [58] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 58)

Earlier, Allah says, 'Those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, "Our Lord is Allah…"' (*al-Hajj:* 40). These people endured many hardships and toiled in the cause of their beliefs, which is why Allah will certainly compensate them for these sacrifices; therefore, He says here, 'He will give a generous provision to those who migrated in Allah's way and were killed or died…' (*al-Hajj:* 58). I made it clear that being slain is not the same thing as dying, for death means that the spirit leaves the body without the body being broken, whilst to be slain or killed means that the body is broken and the spirit leaves it as a result.

As for the saying of Allah, 'He will give a generous provision…' (*al-Hajj:* 58), it means Allah *the Almighty* will give this as compensation for the family and wealth they have left behind at home, just as the fair ruler compensates the victim of wrongdoing by giving him more than what was taken from him. Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: 'And he who forsakes the domain of evil for the sake of Allah shall find on Earth many a lonely road, as well as life abundant. If anyone leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto Allah and His Messenger and then death overtakes him – his reward is ready with Allah….' (*an-Nisa':* 100)

Because the one who is killed thereby triumphs in martyrdom and attains to one of the two good things, whilst the one who dies loses out on this honour, and therefore the reward of the martyr is provided with Allah – and what do you think about a reward given by your Lord *the Almighty* Himself? It is like when a weary man walks and has nothing, not even anyone to lend him anything and suddenly his foot falls into a hole and he angrily says, 'This, too'? But then he sees that his foot has unearthed something shiny in the soil and he realises that he has found gold.

It is narrated(1) that the Companion Fudala *Allah be pleased with him* saw the people burying a martyr and another man who had died of natural causes and they saw that he ignored the martyr's grave and went directly to the grave of the one who was not martyred. When they asked him why he had chosen the non-martyr's grave over the martyr's, he said, 'By Allah, I care not from which kind of grave I am raised to life, as long as my reward is ready with Allah.' Then he recited this verse 'And he who forsakes the domain of evil for the sake of Allah shall find on earth many a lonely road, as well as life abundant. If anyone leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto Allah and His Apostle, and then death overtakes him – his reward is ready with Allah…' (*an-Nisa': *100).(2)

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'He is the Best Provider.' (*al-Hajj:* 58) When the True Lord *the Almighty* describes Himself with an attribute and then uses the plural, this means He is declaring that some of His creatures might share this attribute with Him, as we said before about '…hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of Artisans!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) *Al-Khaliqin* means creators. In doing this, Allah affirms that His creatures have this attribute and thus includes them with Himself *the Almighty* in it, i.e. this attribute, for He does not wrong His creatures in any way and He does not deny them the fruits of their labours. To make something means that you have created it to the extent that Allah *the Almighty* even says about lying: '…and [thus] you give visible shape to a lie…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 17). The words *takhluquna ifka* literally mean 'you create a lie'. 'Creation' means to bring something into existence considering that it did not exist before. When you make a tumbler out of glass, you bring something into existence, although it did not exist before; this happens despite the fact this process includes materials which Allah created. You used your mind to bring into existence something new. Here, we should take into consideration that the creation of your Lord is better still, for you create using materials which already exist, whilst your Lord creates out of nothing; additionally, the things you make stay as they are and remain in the same form you fashion them and they do not reproduce, or grow or have any life. As for your Lord's, creation, you know well enough how it is.

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(1) The story of Fudala Allah be pleased with him and the martyr's grave

(2) Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir

In the same way, Allah *the Almighty* says here, ‘He is the Best Provider’ (*al-Hajj:* 58), affirming that His creatures too are providers, in that they are a means of provision. Provision is everything which gives benefit, even if it is unlawful and therefore Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘O you who have attained to faith! Partake of the good things which We have provided for you as sustenance…’ (*al-Baqara:* 172). I say that the servant is a means of provision, Allah creates the provision in the first place and then gives it you so you can benefit from it and utilise it and give it to others. The provision you give was in turn received from the Original Provider *the Almighty* which is why you, in this sense, are a provider. Yet, they do not like to call a human being a ‘provider’, even though Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…He is the Best Provider.’ (*al-Hajj:* 58); why is this? They say this, so that people do not get the idea that provision comes from human beings.

Therefore, we hear many simple labourers or low-level employees, or doormen for example, say to their bosses when they fire them from their jobs: ‘Sir, all provision is in Allah’s Hand’. How could you say this when you took your pay from your boss’s hand and from his money? They say it is because they look at the Primary Giver of the provision and only then to the secondary giver.

As for the goodly provision which Allah has promised those who emigrate in His cause, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies it by saying:

لَيُدۡخِلَنَّهُم مُّدۡخَلٗا يَرۡضَوۡنَهُۥۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلِيمٌ حَلِيمٞ ﴿٥٩﴾

He will admit them to a place that will please them:
God is all knowing and most forbearing [59]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 59)

This is because provision might be good, but not please the one who owns it; but as for the provision which Allah will grant these people, it will be fully pleasing to them. ‘Pleasure’ means the soul’s acceptance of something it finds enjoyable so that it does not seek anything higher than it and want anything more.

Therefore, once the denizens of paradise have enjoyed its bliss, which contains that which no eye has seen, nor ear has heard nor human heart has imagined, the True Lord *the Almighty* will manifest Himself to their eyes and say to His faithful servants, ‘O My servants, are you well pleased?’ They will say, 'And how could we not be well pleased, when You have given us that which You gave no one in the worlds before?' He will say, 'Shall I not give you what is better than this?' They will say, 'And is there anything better than what we have now?' He will say, 'Indeed, I will give unto you My goodly pleasure, such that I shall never be angry with you again.'(1)

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'And, indeed, in time will your Lord grant you [what thy heart desires] and you shall be well-pleased.' (*ad-Duha:* 5) He also says, 'O you, human being that hast attained to inner peace! Return you unto your Lord, well-pleased [and] pleasing [Him].' (*al-Fajr:* 27-28) He will give you such pleasure that your life itself will be pleased as though life loves you and is pleased with you.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…Allah is All Knowing and most forbearing.' (*al-Hajj:* 59) He knows the bliss which every man deserves at the reckoning. He then gives them even more from His bounty as He wills. Your Lord's reckoning in the Hereafter is not like your reckoning in this world, for His is based on grace, not justice.

Allah *the Almighty* is Most Forbearing in that He shows forbearance to His servant when he sins and pardons the slip-ups of the righteous. So, if you mix your righteous deeds with evil ones and you contravene Allah's Guidance in heedlessness or error, do not let this spoil your relationship with your Lord, or disturb the tranquillity of your life, for your Lord is forbearing and will pardon you for these things, as they say: 'The one who loves you will swallow a pebble for you'.

Therefore, when one of the believers unveiled the plans for the conquest of Mecca to the disbelievers,(2) and `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* wanted to kill him, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade him and said, 'Perhaps Allah looked at the men of Badr and said, "Do as you will for I have forgiven you."'(3)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (7518) and Muslim (2829) on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri*

(2) *It was Hatib ibn Abi Balta`a, who feared for his family in Mecca and so warned Mecca dwellers about the impending conquest.*

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (4890) and Muslim (2494) on the authority of `Ali Allah be pleased with him*

It was sufficient that they went out and risked their lives to fight a battle in which they had far less numbers and equipment than their enemies. Do we not remember them for this event? And did the True Lord not say, '…for, verily, good deeds drive away evil deeds…' (*Hud:* 114)? When someone is tested by something he is too weak to face, let him at least be strong in those things he is able to face. If Satan defeats you in one aspect of evil, then defeat him in another aspect of good, for the one will make up for the other.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

ذَٰلِكَ وَمَنْ عَاقَبَ بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبَ بِهِۦ ثُمَّ بُغِيَ عَلَيْهِ
لَيَنصُرَنَّهُ ٱللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَعَفُوٌّ غَفُورٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

So it will be. God will help those who retaliate against an aggressive act merely with its like and are then wronged again: God is pardoning and most forgiving [60]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 60)

'So it will be…', that is, 'All that We have just said has been firmly set in place and We shall not speak about something else'. Allah says, '…Allah will help those who retaliate against an aggressive act merely with its like and are then wronged again…' (*al-Hajj:* 60).

The True Lord *the Almighty* created man and placed in him various faculties so that he could fulfil his role as vicegerent on earth with balanced actions. He created emotions in us and gave them a role to play and these emotions cannot be ruled by laws. He also created instincts in us- these instincts have a role to play, but the use of man's instincts is governed by laws, so you must not indulge your instincts outside the bounds of the role for which Allah created them.

For example, Allah has given you an instinctive love for food in order to preserve your life, so do not make it a goal for and of itself, eating just to enjoy the food. It is a temporary enjoyment followed by enduring pains and problems. Allah placed this instinct in the human soul and made it completely disciplined, just like an alarm clock: when you are hungry, you find yourself looking for food and seeking it out. If you are thirsty, your soul inclines to water. It is as though there is a bell inside you which alerts you to your body's need for the essential constituents which preserve it.

Curiosity is another instinct which Allah placed in you so that you would study and seek out the secrets of the universe which illustrate Allah's Power and Might; so do not go beyond this goal and indulge in this instinct by spying on people and seeking out their secrets.

Moreover, procreation is an instinct created by Allah to preserve man's existence, so you must not go beyond this purpose and stray into that which Allah has forbidden.

Anger is also an instinct and a necessary reaction: you do not rationally choose whether to be angry or not, but rather, if things happen to anger you, you cannot help but get angry. Yet, despite this, Allah *the Almighty* made boundaries and laws for it and commanded you to restrain yourself and refrain from reacting.

Love and hate are instincts and emotions which yield to no law and cannot be controlled by reason. You have the right to love or hate, but you must not translate this emotion into deliberate action and reaction which leads you to aggress or do wrong. 'Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice….' (*al-Ma'ida:* 8) This is something which cannot be governed by laws and you do not have the power to choose whether to love or hate. Therefore, when `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* met the man who killed his brother(1), he said to him, 'Turn your face away from me, for I love you not.' The man was intelligent, so he said to `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* 'Will your lack of love for me prevent me from getting any of my rights?' `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said 'no', whereupon the man said, 'Only women cry over love!' that is, 'Love me or hate me as you will, but do not wrong me or deny me any of my rights'.

So, do we always stay within the bounds and goals of our instincts? If you reflect on sexual instinct, for example, which some people boldly call a 'bestial instinct': Glory be to Allah, is that one not ashamed to wrong beasts in this way, simply because they do not talk? Indeed, they understand this instinct far better than you do, for if a female has been fertilised by a male, they do not go near it and it does not let them near it once it is pregnant. Yet, you go to excesses in this instinct, indulging in it to a point way beyond its proper goal and wisdom. This person should refrain from saying such things because he is unjust to beasts by saying this; there are people who are far lower than beasts. What we have said about animal's instinct for sex could also be said about their instincts for food and drink.

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(1) The story of 'Umar Allah be pleased with him with the killer of his brother who told him: 'only woman weep out of love'

So, the Creator *the Almighty* created instincts in you and did not restrain them and He gave them lawful outlets so that they could fulfil their roles in your life, surrounding them with a fence of moral responsibilities which direct them and govern them in order that they do not lead you astray. For example, He says about the instincts for food and drink, 'O children of Adam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship and eat and drink [freely], but do not waste…' (*al-A'raf:* 31).

About the instinct for curiosity, He says, '…do not spy upon one another…' (*al-Hujurat:* 12). In this way, all your instincts have boundaries which you must not cross.

Therefore, when we spoke about the attributes of faith and the attributes of disbelief, we said that Allah *the Almighty* describes the believers as '…firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another…' (*al-Fath:* 29) because they put every instinct in its proper place, showing firmness to their enemies and mercy to their fellow believers; and they stop at this boundary and do not overturn its standards, adhering to the True Lord's, words: '…humble towards the believers, proud towards all who deny the truth…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54).

It is as though the Creator wants us to be balanced with the norms of faith: the believer was not created to be humble all the time, nor to be proud all the time, but rather it is circumstance which puts him in the appropriate place. He is proud and haughty towards the disbelievers and humble and meek towards the believers.

A branch of this matter is the issue of responding to aggression if one is aggressed against; Allah says, '… Allah will help those who retaliate against an aggressive act merely with its like and are then wronged again….' (*al-Hajj:* 60) The True Lord created the human soul and knows its tendencies and emotions well and therefore He permits you to respond in kind if you are transgressed against so that anger does not fester in your soul, which might result in something even worse than a response in kind. He allows you to respond in kind so that the issue will end there and not escalate; so if someone hits you, you may vent yourself by hitting them back. You have this right, but remember that it must be equal and it must be complete, as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere, 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you…' (*an-Nahl:* 126).

Yet can you gauge this equivalence and return the blow with an exactly equal one? Is your strength the same as his and is the degree of your reaction the same as his? If it should happen that you hit him harder than he hit you because of your anger, what will you do? Will you allow him to deal this extra amount back to you? Or will you be an aggressor and a wrongdoer? Therefore, why would you want to enter such a labyrinth, when you could simply forgive? As a matter of fact, when Allah *the Almighty* says, '…but to bear yourselves with patience is indeed far better for [you, since Allah is with] those who are patient in adversity' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 126); this means that He gives you a way out of this awkward situation.

I previously told you the story of the Jewish usurer who said to someone who asked for a loan, 'I stipulate that if you are late in repaying the debt, I will take a pound of your flesh.' The time for repayment came and the debtor did not pay, so the creditor took him to court and told the judge what he had stipulated, so the judge said, 'Indeed you have the right to take a pound of his flesh, but with a single cut of the knife and if you take any more or less than a pound, we will take the difference from you.'

So, the issue of equivalence here is a way of putting an obstacle in the way of angry revenge and opening a door to the possibility of spiritual growth and advancement. Although the True Lord has permitted you to satisfy yourself by saying, 'But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil…' (*ash-Shura:* 40), He also tells you not to forget forgiveness and tolerance: '…and [those who] hold in check their anger and pardon their fellow-men because Allah loves the doers of good.' (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

Therefore, the verse in question reminds us of a spiritual principle which is: '…those who retaliate against an aggressive act merely with its like and are then wronged again…' (*al-Hajj:* 60), kind for kind, '…retaliate… aggressive act merely…' (*al-Hajj:* 60), this means that the other responds again after he has returned the enmity in kind and wrongs him and aggresses against him, '…Allah will most certainly succour him…' (*al-Hajj:* 60), succour him against the aggressor who did not accept Allah's law of equivalent retaliation.

Then Allah follows this herald of victory and succour by saying, '…Allah will help those who…' (*al-Hajj:* 60), although it might be thought that the best attributes to complement succour would be 'strong' and 'mighty', as succour requires strength and might. But Allah *the Almighty* chose the attributes of pardon and forgiveness to draw the attention of the one who seeks requital to this possibility of spiritual growth and advancement; forgive, have mercy and pardon because your Lord pardons and forgives. He chose attributes which inspire the believer to have compassion for his fellow believer.

Moreover, have you never sinned against Allah? '…Allah is Pardoning and Most Forgiving.' (*al-Hajj:* 60) As long as you desire that Allah should forgive you, then you should forgive His servants. When you forgive those who deserve to be punished, the result will be, as Allah *the Almighty* says, '…lo! He between whom and yourself was enmity [may then become] as though he had [always] been close [unto you], a true friend!' (*Fussilat:* 34) The True Lord wants to instil in us psychological purity and spiritual unity, so He gave you the chance to respond in kind to aggression to vent your anger and then, He called you instead to show pardon and forgiveness.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُولِجُ ٱلَّيْلَ فِي ٱلنَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ
ٱلنَّهَارَ فِي ٱلَّيْلِ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌۢ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٦١﴾

So it will be, because God makes night pass into day, and
day into night, and He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing [61]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 61)

The saying of Allah 'So it will be' means 'What I said to you before has a proof'. What is this proof? It is that Allah takes from the weak and gives to the strong and takes from the tall and gives to the short. It is not a predictable or mechanical matter, but rather, Allah created it with a certain measure. Night and day and the two containers in which all that you do is done; the True Lord says, 'So it will be because Allah makes night pass into day, and day into night…' (*al-Hajj:* 61). This makes the night grow longer, that is, He makes the night enter into the day, taking it away piece by piece so that the night becomes longer and the day shorter. Then He enters the day into the light, taking it away piece by piece so that the day becomes longer and the night shorter. Therefore, we see that they are not of the same length. For example, in winter the night is longer and the day shorter and in summer the day is longer and the night is shorter. One of them is always longer and the other is shorter and they are both constantly changing.

If even the containers of events are subject to vicissitudes, then the events themselves will also undergo change; when the container is large, the goodness it contains will be ample. We have our traditional measures and each of them takes as much contents as it has room for. In this way, as the containers of events get longer or shorter, the events they contain increase and decrease.

Allah *the Almighty* then ends the verse by saying, '… and He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing.' (*al-Hajj:* 61) Allah *the Almighty* hears all that is said and sees all that is done. Speech is contrasted by deeds and they are both forms of action. Some people think that action is one thing and speech is another, but this is not the case because action means the function of a part of the body and the action of every body part is its proper function: the action of the eye is to see, the action of the ear is to hear, the action of the hand is to touch, the action of the nose is to smell and likewise the action of the tongue is to speak. Speech is for the tongue alone, whilst action is for the other body parts, yet they are all forms of action. That is why we always contrast speech with action, as Allah *the Almighty* says, '…Why do you say one thing and do another?' (*al-Baqara:* 61)

Hearing and sight are the two most fundamental human faculties and the basis of all the other senses, for they are always working, unlike the senses of smell or taste, for example, which only work a few times a day.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلۡحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦ هُوَ
ٱلۡبَٰطِلُ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلۡعَلِيُّ ٱلۡكَبِيرُ ﴿٦٢﴾

So it will be, because it is God alone who is the Truth, and whatever else they invoke is sheer falsehood: it is God who is the Most High, the Most Great [62] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 62)

His saying ‘So it will be’ means ‘what was just said is something well-established, which We have done’ ‘because Allah alone who is the Truth’ (*al-Hajj:* 62). The truth is the firm thing which never changes; it goes without saying that everything besides Allah *the Almighty* changes. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* causes change, but does not undergo it Himself. Therefore, the people of deep knowledge say, ‘Allah does not change for you, but you must change for Him’.

As long as your Lord *the Almighty* is the Ultimate Truth which never changes and everything besides Him does change, then do not grieve; and if you are angry, then be content and if you are weeping, then smile and be at ease, for you are a subject of vicissitudes in a world of vicissitudes where nothing is constant. Therefore, if a man becomes angry when he suffers a reversal and says, ‘If only it had not happened!’, I say to him: ‘Do you want your life to be perfect? Things will inevitably befall you because you are subject to vicissitudes and even if you get to the top you will certainly have to come down again because you are constantly subject to vicissitudes and changing states – and only your Lord is eternally unchanging’.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…and whatever else they invoke is sheer falsehood…’ (*al-Hajj:* 62). Everything that you invoke or worship besides Allah is sheer falsehood meaning that it withers away, as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘…for, behold, all falsehood is bound to wither away!’ (*al-Isra’:* 81), i.e. it passes away and never remains. ‘…it is Allah who is *the Most High*, the Most Great.’ (*al-Hajj:* 62) Allah *the Almighty* is exalted in that all His creatures are beneath Him; and He is great in that all of His creatures are small.

One of His names is *Al-Kabir* (The Great) and we only say *Akbar* (Greatest) in the call to prayer and the opening of the prayer. Allah *the Almighty* is the Greatest because everything else but Him is small.

When He calls you and summons you to fulfil your obligation, He says, ‘Allah is the Greatest’ because the motions of your life and your daily needs are something which He considers great, important and worthy of attention, but although your livelihood is something great, Allah is even greater and your Lord takes you away from work to prayer and then calls you again back to work: ‘And when the prayer has ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah’s bounty…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10).

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءٗ فَتُصۡبِحُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ
مُخۡضَرَّةًۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٞ ﴿٦٣﴾

Have you [Prophet] not considered how God sends water down from the sky and the next morning the earth becomes green? God is truly most subtle, All-Aware [63]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 63)

The expression ‘Have you [Prophet] not considered how…’ literally means ‘Do you not see’; if it is used for a physical thing which the eye can see, then it means that you did not see the thing and we are alerting you to it; and if it is used for something which cannot be seen by the eye, then it means ‘Have you [Prophet] not considered how…’; the reason we refer literally to sight rather than knowledge is to convey unto you that when Allah tells you something, this is even more reliable than what your eye tells you.

The meaning of ‘Have you [Prophet] not considered how…’ are both: ‘do you not know?’ and ‘Did you not see’?

‘Have you [Prophet] not considered how Allah sends water down from the sky…’ (*al-Hajj:* 63). This is a sign which you can see, but you can only see the outward superficial side of it: you see the water come falling from the sky – but how does this water come together in the sky? Why does it fall in this particular place? These are processes which you do not see. Allah’s

Power is Absolute; and one may reflect on what effort you would have to exert and the time you would have to expend in the processes of heating and condensation, just to gather a single cup’s worth of evaporated water – and do you see all these processes going on when rain is formed?

So you have only seen the surface appearance of rain and therefore your Lord alerts your attention to all what goes on behind this appearance that you might reflect on it. Therefore, the Creator made water cover three-quarters of the earth’s surface, for the increased surface area of water increases the amount of evaporation that Allah spreads over dry land. If you were to put a cup of water in your room and leave it for a month or two, you would find that its level would have decreased by perhaps a centimetre; but if you were to pour the water on the floor of the room, it would dry within minutes. So, the thinness of the water level increases the rate of evaporation; and on dry land, we need a large amount of fresh water for farming, drinking and so on and this can only be provided by a large amount of rainfall.

Allah *the Almighty* then speaks of what happens after the water falls from the sky: ‘…and the next morning the earth becomes green’ (*al-Hajj:* 63). That is, after a short amount of time, it becomes green and verdant; He does not mention any human involvement in this process, for man does not plough, plant, or sow, but it is solely a matter of Allah’s Power. But where did the seeds from which these plants were formed come from? And who planted them and sowed them? The seeds were in the earth, alive and lying in wait, safe from any harm, even as time passed. Allah was preserving them until the water came and allowed them to germinate, which they did. Therefore, we call these kinds of plants ‘wild’ because they grew by the power of Allah, without any human involvement.

The winds transferred these seeds from place to place, as He says, ‘And We let loose the winds to fertilise [plants]…’ (*al-Hajj:* 15). If you follow these seeds back from tree to tree, you will arrive back to the mother tree which the Creator created, before which there was neither tree nor seed. Therefore, it is narrated that Yusuf al-Njjar who used to look after Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* and watch over her– when he saw that she was with child and had no husband, he asked her respectfully: ‘Maryam (Mary), has a tree ever grown from no seed?' She replied: 'Indeed, the very first tree, which produced the very first seed.'

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '…Allah is truly Most Subtle (*Latif*), All-Aware'. (*al-Hajj:* 63) Most Subtle means a precise handling of things. For example, when you want to thread a needle, you find that at first the thread will not pass through the needle's eye and you try to make the end of the thread thinner and you twist it so that it will be thin enough to pass through the eye. After having been thick, the thread becomes fine and thin, which in Arabic would be called *latif*.

It is said that the finer something becomes, the more dangerous it is. People may imagine that the stronger something is, the bigger it is, but this is not correct, for in fact a thing becomes more dangerous the finer and more subtle it is. Do you not see how a microbe can assail a man and how we cannot sense its presence or feel any pain because it? This is because it is subtle and fine and it has a subtle way of entry which you cannot feel because it is so small that it cannot be seen by the naked eye.

How small and puny is a gnat, yet it can hurt you with a bite of its tiny proboscis which you can barely seen. The smaller something is, the more caution you need to defend yourself from its danger. For example, if you want to build a house in a remote or empty place, you need to put iron bars on the windows to protect you from wild animals like wolves and then you need to install meshes to keep out the mice; and if you want to protect yourself from gnats and flies, you need an even finer mesh or screen. In this way, the smaller and subtler the thing is, the more caution it requires.

The thing which is *latif* (fine) enters other things subtly. In Arabic they call a person *latif al-madkhal* (a subtle manoeuvre) meaning that he behaves with each person in the way that suits them best and knows what everyone's weak points are, that he might assail them from there, as though he has a skeleton key for men, with which he can open up any personality.

But, what do His words '…Allah is truly Most Subtle (*Latif*), All-Aware' (*al-Hajj:* 63) have to do with what He said? Scholars say it is because the process of germination takes place by means of fine pores and capillaries which emerge from the seed when it germinates, absorbing nutrients from the soil and these root capillaries require unfathomable wisdom and their absorption of the nutrients that each of them need requires awareness, as He says, '…[all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favoured above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast]…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4).

So, the earth becomes green because of the True Lord's unfathomable Wisdom and because of His Awareness of how to deal with things; and therefore, He says after it: '…Most Subtle, All-Aware' (*al-Hajj:* 63) because of how delicate these root fibres are, we try to keep the level of water in the soil down because if it gets too high it will damage these capillaries and they will decay and die and the plants will become yellow and die.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

لَّهُۥ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِۗ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُوَ ٱلْغَنِيُّ ٱلْحَمِيدُ ﴿٦٤﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him;
God alone is Self-Sufficient, worthy of all praise [64]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 64)

So, all that is in the heavens and the earth are under Allah's dominion and yet the True Lord does not derive any benefit from them and He only created them to benefit His creatures and He has no need of any of them. With His attributes of perfection, Allah *the Almighty* created all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth and therefore He then says, '…Allah is Self-Sufficient, The Praiseworthy.' (*al-Hajj:* 64)

Allah's attributes of perfection already existed before He created the universe; He has possession of the heavens and the earth and of all they contain – He owns both the container and the contents. We do not own the heavens, or the earth, but we only own the good and beneficial things therein which Allah has given us. Allah *the Almighty* is Self-Sufficient and He has dominion over everything and He only gives unto us what He truly owns.

His statement, 'The Praiseworthy' (*al-Hajj:* 64) means that He is praised. So He is Self-Sufficient and praiseworthy because His Self-Sufficiency does not benefit Him *the Almighty,* but benefits His creatures, so they praise Him for His Self-Sufficiency and they do not resent Him for it. It is amazing that the True Lord *the Almighty* allows His creatures to possess that which belongs to Him. Then if someone uses this blessing for its proper purpose and if someone gives the needy person some of the blessing which Allah gave him, Allah thanks him for it even though the blessing came from Him in the first place. This is because you are His servant and He brought you into existence and therefore He has undertaken to take care of you.

If the incapacitated person needs something from you, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan…’ (*al-Baqara:* 24) He considers it a loan, although it belongs to Him, because He has given you possession of it and therefore would not take it from you, but rather takes it as a loan which He will repay with a goodly increase. He is Self-Sufficient and The Praiseworthy. The self-sufficient one is only praised if others can benefit from his self-sufficiency.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱلۡفُلۡكَ تَجۡرِي فِي ٱلۡبَحۡرِ بِأَمۡرِهِۦ وَيُمۡسِكُ
ٱلسَّمَآءَ أَن تَقَعَ عَلَى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ إِلَّا بِإِذۡنِهِۦٓۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِٱلنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿٦٥﴾

Have you not considered how God has made everything on the earth of service to you? That ships sail the sea at His command? That He keeps the heavens from falling down on the earth without His permission? God is most compassionate and most merciful to mankind [65]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 65)

This verse is a continuation of the previous one; everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him *the Almighty,* but He has subdued it for the benefit of His creatures. If someone asks, ‘Why did He not give it to us and place it in our ownership?’, we answer ‘Because your Lord wants to reassure you that He will never give it to anyone and it will remain in Allah’s ownership so that you can benefit from it – and can you be sure that if Allah gave it to someone else, that person would not withhold it from you’? Your best hope is that all dominion continues to belong to Allah exclusively because He is your Lord and your Lord and He will never change on you and never refuse to benefit you.

He says, ‘the ships sail the sea at His command.’ (*al-Hajj:* 65) This means that ships sail through the sea by His command, and the wind sends them, i.e. ships wherever Allah commands it, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and in the change of the winds…’ (*al-Baqara:* 164), no one but Allah *the Almighty* has the power to do this. In another verse, He says, ‘If He so wills, He stills the wind and then they lie motionless on the sea’s surface…’ (*ash-Shura:* 33).

Reflect on the precision of the Quranic discourse which comes from Allah, who knows everything, past, present and future. Someone might say today, ‘We no longer need the wind to move our ships or direct them because they now run on motors’. Indeed, ships today do run on motors, but the Arabic word *rih* means more than just ‘wind’. *Rih* does not only mean this particular natural force which propels ships on the surface of the water; rather, it means ‘power’ in itself, whether it be wind, steam, electric, nuclear or whatever.

This is borne out by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and do not [allow yourselves to] be at variance with one another, lest you lose heart and your moral strength (*rih*) desert you…’ (*al-Anfal:* 46). That is, lest your power desert you, whatever this power might be; even the fisherman who goes out to sea in a little boat which he propels by means of oars, using the strength and power of his hands and muscles, does not fall outside this concept. Thus, we see that the meaning of the verse will continue to apply to every time and place, until the Last Hour.

And when the word *rih* is used in the singular, meaning ‘wind’ (rather than *riyah*, [winds]), it usually implies the occurrence of something evil and harmful, such as when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And you have the same message in what happened to the tribe of `Ad, when We let loose against them that life-destroying wind’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41), ‘…and your moral strength (*rih*) desert you…’ (*al-Anfal:* 46) and when He says, ‘…Nay, but it is the very thing which you [so contemptuously] sought to hasten – a wind bearing grievous suffering.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24) When it is given as *riyah* in the plural, ‘winds’, it usually means something good, as when He says, ‘And We let loose the winds to fertilize [plants]…’ (*al-Hijr:* 22).

I spoke before about the role wind plays in the stability and self-sustenance of things: the huge mountain which we see to be stable and firm is only firm because of the wind's effect on it and how the wind surrounds it on all sides; and if the air were to be removed from one side of the mountain, it would collapse. This is the concept upon which the bomb was designed: the air is what keeps buildings and blocks steady and firm because it surrounds them from all sides and they are balanced; and when the air is removed from one side of the building, it collapses.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…that He keeps the heavens from falling down on the earth without His permission?' (*al-Hajj:* 65) So the sky is held above us without any supports and nothing holds it up but Allah, by His Power and Sustenance so that it cannot fall upon the earth save by His leave, as He says in another verse, 'Verily, it is Allah [alone] who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth lest they deviate [from their orbits] – for if they should ever deviate, there is none that could uphold them after He will have ceased to do so…' (*Fatir:* 41).

'…Allah is Most Compassionate and Most Merciful to mankind.' (*al-Hajj:* 65) His attributes include Compassion and Grace; and a superficial understanding of these two attributes sees them to be one and the same, but they are two distinct attributes. Compassion is to remove pain and Grace is to increase blessings and the rule is that preventing harm always comes before bringing benefit. Your Lord is Compassionate with you by removing those things which give you pain and after this He brings you benefit by His Grace.

We explained this matter before by saying: Imagine that one person is about to throw a stone at you and another is about to throw an apple at you – which of them will you deal with first? Undoubtedly you will deal with the stone first and worry about defending yourself from its harm before you try to get the apple.

Therefore, He says, 'Now if Allah were to take men [immediately] to task for all the evil that they do [on Earth], He would not leave a single living creature upon its face. However, He grants them respite until a term set [by Him] …' (*an-Nahl:* 61).

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحۡيَاكُمۡ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمۡ ثُمَّ يُحۡيِيكُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ لَكَفُورٞ ﴿٦٦﴾

It is He who gave you [people] life, will cause you to die, then will give you life again – but man is ungrateful [66] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 66)

The True Lord reminds us here of some of His blessings and some of the processes which, if we studied them, we would find within them many blessings which Allah has granted us and we would never forget them.The first of these is: ‘it is He who gave you the life…’ (*al-Hajj:* 66). To give something life means to give it the power to fulfil the function for which it was created. The first life was given to Adam *peace be upon him* when his Lord created and formed him and then blew something of His Spirit into him. Then He brought us into being as Adam’s progeny.

His statement ‘will cause you to die’ (*al-Hajj:* 66) refers to that just as creation is a sign of Allah, so death too is a sign of Allah, which we can see and experience. As long as you believe in the signs of creation and death and you can see them and you do not doubt them, and then when Allah tells you that there will be another life after this, then believe it. This is because the owner of all these signs is One and the precursors in which you believe should lead to a conclusion in which you also believe – and the precursors are right there before you, plainly true.

Therefore, He then says, ‘then will give you the life again’ (*al-Hajj:* 66). The concept of raising to life is used to mean several different things in the Quran including the material life which is manifested by motion, eating and drinking and also the life in the Hereafter of which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life: if they but knew this!’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64)

This is the true life because the life of this world is constantly in flux and man therein fluctuates between power and weakness, health and sickness, wealth and poverty youth and old age; and after this, it must end. As for the life of the Hereafter, which Allah *the Almighty* calls it ‘the only [true] life’, it is a life wherein there is neither fluctuation nor end. So you have two lives: a life of your physical form, which moves, senses and lives; and another eternal life which will never end.

Therefore, the True Lord says, ‘O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the call of Allah and the Apostle whenever he calls you unto that which will give you the life…’ (*al-Anfal:* 24). The question is: how is this when we are already alive? The answer is that this does not mean the life of this material world which is subject to vicissitudes, but rather, it will give you true life in the Hereafter, the eternal unending life of which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life: if they but knew this!’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) That is, if they possessed the real knowledge which guides the one who possesses it.

If the material worldly life was made by the blowing of the spirit into man, then what is the nature of the second life of which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…he calls you unto that which will give you the life….’ (*al-Anfal:* 24)

They say that this life will also involve *ruh* (a spirit), but not the same spirit as before, but the spirit of the Quran, of which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And thus, too, [O Muhammad,] have We revealed unto you a life-giving message (*ruh*), [coming] at Our behest…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52). He also called the angel that brought the Quran down *ruh* in His saying, ‘Trustworthy divine inspiration (*ar-ruh*) has alighted with it from on high.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 193)

So, the second spirit, which gives you true immortal life is the guidance Allah conveyed in His Noble Book: if you follow it, you will attain this eternal life and enjoy therein what no eye has seen, nor ear heard nor human heart imagined and it will never be interrupted or withheld.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘but man is ungrateful (*kafur*)’ (*al-Hajj:* 66). *Kafur* is an emphatic form of the word *kafir* which means ‘ingrate’. The *kafur* is the one who does not acknowledge the blessings he receives from Allah, even though if he truly knew their nature he would never cease to give thanks to Him *the Almighty* who gave them.

Man goes through different stages between life and death, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘[Whereupon] they will exclaim, “O our Lord! Twice hast Thou caused us to die, just as twice Thou hast brought us to life! But now that we have acknowledged our sins, is there any way out [of this second death]?'" (*Ghafir:* 11) When will they say these words?

The scholars say that it will be on the Day of Resurrection. Allah brought them no life from the death of nonbeing and gave them life in this world and then caused them to die and then raised them to life again in the Hereafter; so there was a death before creation, then a death after creation and then they were brought forth again at the resurrection.

The words 'He who gave you [people] life' (*al-Hajj:* 66) are a claim made by the Creator and no one else has made this claim for himself. Despite the large numbers of disbelievers, atheists, and deniers who have existed at all times and in all places, we have never heard anyone claim to have created and this is something we should take a moment to consider: Why has no one ever claimed this? And if no one has ever claimed to create or give life, then who is it who creates, gives life and deals death?

If the people are concerned to chronicle those who invent certain inventions, for example, saying, 'The inventor of electricity was so-and-so and he lived in such-and-such place and he did this and studied there and found that', and so on – so what about the One Who created you and gave you the life, out of nothing? Especially since no one has ever laid claim to it, it is clear that this claim belongs to Allah Alone *the Almighty*.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says

لِّكُلِّ أُمَّةٖ جَعَلۡنَا مَنسَكًا هُمۡ نَاسِكُوهُۖ فَلَا يُنَٰزِعُنَّكَ فِي
ٱلۡأَمۡرِۚ وَٱدۡعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَۖ إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدٗى مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ (٦٧)

We have appointed acts of devotion for every community to observe, so do not let them argue with you [Prophet] about this matter. Call them to your Lord – you are on the right path [67] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 67)

The True Lord created Adam *peace be upon him* as His vicegerent on earth and gave him a test of his mission which was to follow Allah's Commandments and Prohibitions. He informed him of the enmity Satan bore towards him and towards his progeny and warned him not to follow in Satan's footsteps. This test resulted in the descent of Adam *peace be upon him* from paradise to earth to go about his mission as Allah's vicegerent on earth, whilst always remembering his first experience with Satan. Allah subdued everything in existence to serve him and work for him.

Then Allah revealed unto him a way of guidance which he could follow to ensure the uprightness of his life and the lives of his progeny and He reminded him of the experience he had already undergone in paradise and what had happened when he disobeyed his Lord's guidance because of which his nakedness was revealed: '…and they began to cover themselves with pieced-together leaves from the garden…' (*al-A'raf:* 22).

Likewise, if you contravene this way of guidance in this world, your nakedness will be exposed. Therefore, whenever you see anything shameful exposed in society of any kind, whether societal, economic, or educational, know that one of Allah's laws has been ignored and so one of society's shameful matters has been exposed. This is because Allah's guidance provides the rules of maintenance which protect you and arrange your affairs so that you can fulfil your true purpose in life.

If you go home and find that one of your domestic appliances is not working properly, you know that it is broken, so you take it to the mechanic who specialises in the maintenance of this appliance. In the same way, if something in your life is not performing its function properly, then take it back to the One Who specialises in its maintenance: take it back to Allah and to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This judicious logic is acknowledged by all, believers and disbelievers alike: you return the product to its producer and to the one who knows the rules of its maintenance. No one has ever claimed to have created you, so when something within you malfunctions you must go to your Lord and Creator. Therefore, whenever something vexed the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he would go and stand in prayer(1) The statement 'Something vexed him' means that something was beyond his power and his mean. So, he would hasten to prayer to present himself to his Lord. So, if you find that something within you is not right, in any way, then all you have to do is perform ablution and stand before your Lord, so that He can fix whatever is broken within you.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (vol. 388) and Abu Dawud (1319) on the authority of Hudhayfa*

If the mechanic fixes the appliance for you by material means, even with nothing but a little piece of wire, then your Lord is unseen and His treatment is also unseen and will come to you without your perceiving it.

Within the way of guidance which Allah established for the maintenance of His creatures, there are roots and there are branches: the root is that you believe in the One All-Powerful Allah and this is something over which none of the divinely-revealed messages has ever differed, as He says, 'In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) – and into which We gave thee [O Muhammad] insight through revelation…' (*ash-Shura:* 13). So these roots are not differed upon by any religion. When people, however, were spread out all over the world, each community lived separately from the rest because of the large distances and the absence of the means of communication and connection which we have today. Mass communication applications have made the whole world like a single village: when something happens in the furthest east, you can see it and hear about it in the furthest west, at the very same time. As people lived in this isolation, people did not know about one another, to the extent that they were still discovering new continents only two hundred years ago.

The result of this isolation was that there were as many vices as there were communities and the messenger or prophet would come to deal with the vices of a particular community and would be sent to his own people alone: one would be sent to deal with the issue of dishonest weighing and measuring, another to deal with financial tyranny, another to deal with perversions of nature another to deal with tribal fanaticism etc.

As for the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it came at a time when these disparate communities were beginning to encounter one another and his Message was meant for all people in all places. You find that the different messages of Musa (Moses), `Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them all* share a common root, whilst their branches differ according to the different environments.

But since Allah knew that this isolation would come to an end and that these disparate environments would meet and come together so that their vices would be commonly shared, He sent the final Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to them all, for all times and places thenceforth.

And in this verse, He says, 'We have appointed acts of devotion (*mansak*) for every community to observe…' (*al-Hajj:* 67). That is, the True Lord *the Almighty* appointed ways of worship for all the communities to whom He sent messengers which were appropriate for their times because they were isolated from one another, as He says, '…Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48).

The laws differ in their branches in a way which is appropriate to their time, place, and environment; as for virtues and doctrines, they are universal. Allah *the Almighty* is one in every revealed religion and lying is forbidden in every revealed religion and no prophet ever came forth to permit his people to lie.

Mansak (way of worship) means a religious form. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "Behold, my prayer, and [all] my acts of worship (*nusuk*), and my living and my dying are for Allah [alone], the Lord of all the worlds."' (*al-An'am:* 162)

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…so do not let them argue with you [Prophet] about this matter…' (*al-Hajj:* 67) as if they say, 'You are a messenger and we also follow a messenger who has his own way of guidance and law'. Indeed this is true, but this way of guidance is the seal of all others and has come to encompass and summarise all the laws which came before it and is suitable for all the new issues which may arise.

Therefore, the True Lord reassures Messenger Muhammad after this commandment: 'call them to your Lord– you are on the right path' (*al-Hajj:* 67). That is, rest assured that you are in the right and call unto your Lord; you are following the right way which will surely reach them. Even if they do not have faith in it, they will be forced to adopt it as a temporal law because of the events and problems of life; they will find nothing better than Allah's law with which to govern, even if they do not believe in it.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon Him* 'Do not dispute with them and do not let them draw you into dispute, but rather do what Allah commands you in the verse: ‘Therefore declare openly what you are bidden and turn aside from the polytheists’ (*al-Hijr:* 94). Turn away from those who argue with you and dispute the Message, for things will happen to them as a result of the evil they do and they will be forced to adopt your word and *Shari’a* (Islamic Law) to solve their problems.’

Allah calls this path the Right Path because it is He who has made it for you. It is a Path made by the Creator Who knows fully well all the dispositions of the human soul. It is made by He who has legislated for each disposition that which suits it best. Thus, the affairs of life will for sure force them to adopt the Law enacted by Allah to His vicegerent on earth.

He *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِن جَٰدَلُوكَ فَقُلِ ٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

And if they argue with you, say, God is
well aware of what you are doing [68]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 68)

The Arabic word *jidal* (argue) is derived from the word *jadl* which means to twist the fibres of a rope together to make it stronger. When a thin thread is twisted, it gets thicker, stronger, and shorter because its parts have grouped together. Similarly, to argue means to bolster something and make it stronger and likewise, an argument is an attempt to strengthen one’s argument against one’s adversary.

In the verse we are studying, Allah orders His Messenger Muhammad to say that He *the Almighty* is aware of what they are doing; however, He says in another verse: ‘And have disputations with them in the best manner.’ (*an-Nahl:* 125) Thus, Allah is saying that if they persist in arguing with you after you have dealt with them in the most kindly way, then say that Allah is well aware of what you are doing. This means ‘refer them, O Prophet Muhammad back to Allah and seek His Judgement.

He says:

ٱللَّهُ يَحۡكُمُ بَيۡنَكُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا كُنتُمۡ فِيهِ تَخۡتَلِفُونَ ٦٩

On the Day of Resurrection, God will judge between you regarding your differences [69] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 69)

It is worth noting that Allah *Glorified is He* does not say ‘Allah will judge between you and us,’ as might have been expected since there are two parties involved in the argument. It is as though He *Glorified is He* is saying to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Leave them, for they will themselves continue to differ amongst themselves and will not remain disputing with you.’ That is because a dispute on a single topic is the result of the caprice of the soul, which, in turn, is the result of the desire for temporal power. Thus, rest yourself, for your Lord will judge between them regarding what they disputed.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمۡ تَعۡلَمۡ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعۡلَمُ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ إِنَّ
ذَٰلِكَ فِي كِتَٰبٍۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرٞ ٧٠

Are you [Prophet] not aware that God knows all that is in the heavens and earth? All this is written in a Record; this is easy for God [70] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 70)

Allah Himself has attributed the knowledge of everything to Himself and no one else has claimed it. No one knows all that is in the heavens and the earth except Allah. This verse comes after that one which spoke about judgement of dispute, so perhaps someone might object and say, ‘As long as Allah has decreed laws to govern all the motions of life and all the Messengers have already conveyed them, what was the need for sending a Messenger to all mankind?’

We said that religion is of two kinds. The first does not change according to the Messengers, communities, and ages. This one includes the fixed general matters, i.e. the doctrines, principles, and virtues. The second, on the other hand, differs among the ages and communities, wherein each rule is appropriate for the given age and the given community.

Inasmuch as Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who will judge between the two sides, He said that He knows all that which occurs in the heavens as well as on the earth. This is to say that He *the Almighty* knows the outer and innermost nature of everything that exists and thus His Judgement is based on knowledge and awareness. Allah says that all this is written in a Record. The Knowledge is one thing and the Record is another. Thus, someone might ask, 'what is the point of that Record since Allah knows everything and He never errs or forgets?'

The scholars said that what is meant by the Record is the Preserved Tablet, which contains a record of everything as Allah says in another verse: 'Nay! Surely it is an admonishment. So let him who pleases mind it. In honoured books, exalted, purified, in the hands of scribes' (*'Abasa:* 11-15). The Quran itself is included inside that record, as Allah says: 'Nay! It is a glorious Quran, in a guarded tablet.' (*al-Buruj:* 21-22)

In addition, He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah makes to pass away and establishes what He pleases, and with Him is the basis of the Book.' (*al-An'am:* 59) He also says: 'And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures—none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and the sea, and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but [it is all] in a clear book.' (*al-An'am:* 59)

Thus, the reason this record is needed is to show you and to show the observing angels that everything which will happen in the future has been recorded by Allah since before time began. The fact that it comes in the future just as Allah has recorded it is proof of His Ultimate Knowledge. Writing something before it happens and its exact occurrence in the way it has been written is the ultimate proof of the knowledge and encompassment of that thing on the part of the writer. Thus, writing this record is not to help Allah in any way, but to offer evidence against you and it will be said to you: 'Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day.' (*al-Isra':* 14) Here is your chronicle and here is your story. It is not an invention of us, but it is your own deeds; it is proof against you.

The Knowledge of Allah that encompasses that which is in the heaven and earth indicates a promise and a warning at the same time. This is one of the wonders of the Quranic discourse. The Quran gives something and its opposite at the same time. How is that? Suppose that you have two children and one of them wronged the other in your absence. They rush to you to complain one about the other, when you came home. You then say to them, ‘Be quiet, both of you. I know what happened and I will give each of you what he deserves based on what I know.’ Doubtless, the innocent one will rejoice and smile, while the guilty will be fearful and grow pale.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* knows everything in the heavens and the earth, and His Encompassing Knowledge is a promise to the righteous and a warning to the wicked.

He *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِۦ سُلْطَٰنًا وَمَا
لَيْسَ لَهُم بِهِۦ عِلْمٌ ۗ وَمَا لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ مِن نَّصِيرٍ ﴿٧١﴾

Yet beside God they serve that for which He has sent
no authority and of which they have no knowledge:
the evildoers will have no one to help them[71]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 71)

It is as though worship, i.e. obeying the commandments and refraining from prohibitions must be determined by a superior being. None of us have the right to make laws for another, commanding him to do something or even forbidding him from doing another. A commandment that comes from your equal counterpart does not outweigh another and thereby you can say, ‘Why should you command and I obey?’ However, if the command comes from a higher being than you, you obey without any objection and your rationale for doing so is that the command came from a higher being. You say, ‘My father told me to do such and such a thing or My Lord commanded me to do such and such a thing or forbade me from doing such and such a thing.’

Thus, the origin of every instruction to do or refrain from must be originated by Allah, for He is a higher being than you or me. If I acquiesce to His Commands and Prohibitions, this does not inconvenience or harm me because I have not yielded to an equal, but rather to Allah Who is our only Lord, and thus there is no shame in following His Judgements. Therefore, a parable of the country goes: ‘If the Sacred Law cuts off your finger, it does not bleed.’ Why not? Because it is not you who cut it off, but Allah. Thus, there is no tyranny or abuse of power on the part of anyone and there is no shame or humiliation for anyone.

Allah *Glorified is He* said that they serve beside Him that for which He has sent no authority. This means that they worship other beings instead of Allah. The authority is either an authority of force or that of a strong argument. To have an authority of force means to force and compel someone to do what he does not want to, while the authority of argument is to convince someone by means of argumentation to do something based on his own free will. On the other hand, these false Gods which they worship besides Allah do not have any authority of force nor of argument. Therefore, Satan argues on the Day of Resurrection with those who followed him saying: ‘And I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you obeyed Me.’ (*Ibrahim:* 22) Satan is proclaiming that they, i.e. the deniers of the Truth paid heed and responded to him while he had neither any authority or power to force them to commit sins, nor an argument to convince them to do so.

In addition, Allah said that they serve that of which they had no knowledge. This is the deduction (of the disbelievers) which deduces laws from the overall Revelation sent down by Allah *Glorified is He*. This is the knowledge about which Allah says: ‘If they had referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those among them who can search out the knowledge of it would have known it.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 83) This verse speaks about the people of knowledge. Thus, worship must be based on a clear and unambiguous authority from Allah, or otherwise from the reason-based deduction of the people of knowledge.

Moreover, He *Glorified is He* said that the evildoers will have no one to help them. Allah did not say that they shall not be helped nor did He affirm their defeat because this is something unquestionable; rather, He states that no one shall even attempt to help them. They will not triumph and will not be given succour. No one attempts to give succour to another unless the one he succours is weak.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا تُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ءَايَٰتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٖ تَعۡرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ٱلۡمُنكَرَۖ
يَكَادُونَ يَسۡطُونَ بِٱلَّذِينَ يَتۡلُونَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ءَايَٰتِنَاۗ قُلۡ أَفَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِشَرّٖ
مِّن ذَٰلِكُمُۗ ٱلنَّارُ وَعَدَهَا ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْۖ وَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡمَصِيرُ ﴿٧٢﴾

[Prophet], you can see the hostility on the faces of the disbelievers when Our messages are recited clearly to them: it is almost as if they are going to attack those who recite Our messages to them. Say, 'Shall I tell you what is far worse than what you feel now? The Fire that God has promised the disbelievers! What a dismal end!' [72] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 72)

This verse depicts the state of the disbelievers when they hear the Book of Allah from Prophet Muhammad or his Companions. When they hear it, you can see hostility on their faces. You can recognise the hatred on their faces in the form of frowns, scowls, anger, and emotional reaction. They hate what they hear and their emotion almost turns into an angry physical reaction against the one who recites the Quran. This is because of the evil and grudge they harbour against that to which they listen.

Therefore, Allah said that they were almost going to attack those who recite the Messages to them. They were about to assault and assail them because the emotions that their souls are filled with are first shown on their faces as a reaction to what they would like to do and are then translated into physical actions of assault and attack.

Allah tells Prophet Muhammad to ask them in response to that, 'What makes you so angry that you attack us and hate what we read to you from the Book of Allah?' The rage and hostility they showed when they heard the Quran demonstrated that they did not have the ability to answer with arguments, therefore they sank into rage and hatred.

Therefore, Allah directs a question to them saying: 'Say, 'Shall I tell you what is far worse than what you feel now?' (*al-Hajj:* 72) He tells Prophet Muhammad to ask them why they are so enraged by the verses of the Quran and filled with such hatred while things are still easy. Has merely hearing these verses done all this to you?! What would you do when you enter hell in the Hereafter? The thing that you thought to be evil and which enraged and caused you to attack us is a simple matter, for there is something far worse awaiting you in the Hereafter, which is the Fire.

In this vein, it is narrated that Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* left the chieftains of Quraysh standing at the door and pushed the weak believers inside first, whereupon those chieftains were angry at this and turned up their noses. Abu Bakr wondered if they got angry because He put the weak ahead of them. He said, ‘What would you do when Allah admits them into paradise ahead of you?’

Allah *Glorified is He* said that He has promised the disbelievers the fire. Although a promise usually refers to something good, it is used here ironically to scorn and belittle them, as He says elsewhere: ‘So give them news of a painful torment.’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 24) They expect to hear some good news; however, they are struck with the news of torment and thereby become worse for them. Another example of this irony is clear when Allah says that the disbelievers will be begging for water and they shall be answered but with a spoiling water; He *the Almighty* says: ‘And if they cry for water, they shall be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces’ (*al-Kahf:* 29). That is because the despair and disappointment of the soul after it had expected something pleasant cause it to suffer even more. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verse saying: ‘What a dismal end!’ (*al-Hajj:* 72) This means that their final end and destination shall be evil indeed. He *the Almighty* then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٞ فَٱسۡتَمِعُواْ لَهُۥٓۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ تَدۡعُونَ
مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ لَن يَخۡلُقُواْ ذُبَابٗا وَلَوِ ٱجۡتَمَعُواْ لَهُۥۖ وَإِن يَسۡلُبۡهُمُ ٱلذُّبَابُ
شَيۡـٔٗا لَّا يَسۡتَنقِذُوهُ مِنۡهُۚ ضَعُفَ ٱلطَّالِبُ وَٱلۡمَطۡلُوبُ ٧٣

People, here is an illustration, so listen carefully: those you call on beside God could not, even if they combined all their forces, create a fly, and if a fly took something away from them, they would not be able to retrieve it. How feeble are the petitioners and how feeble are those they petition! [73] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 73)

Allah *Glorified is He* gives a parable saying *duriba Mathal* which is the passive form of the verb *daraba* (strike), i.e. to hit one thing against another forcefully. It is also used with the meaning of minting a coin with a known value.

To give an example means to liken something unknown to another which is known, striking, and noticeable so that it attaches to the mind. For example, we might describe someone you have never seen by comparing him to someone you know, saying, ‘He is like so and so a person.’ That is to say that you do so in order to make your addressee recognise the attributes of that person in question.

There are many examples of this in the Quran. Allah says: ‘Their parable is like the parable of one who kindled a fire but when it had illumined all around him, Allah took away their light, and left them in utter darkness—they do not see’ (*al-Baqara:* 17). He also says: ‘so his parable is as the parable of the dog; if you attack him he lolls out his tongue; and if you leave him alone he lolls out his tongue; this is the parable of the people who reject Our Communications; therefore relate the narrative that they may reflect’ (*al-A‘raf:* 176). Moreover, He *the Almighty* says: ‘The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house; and most surely the frailest of the houses is the spider’s house did they but know’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41).

So, giving examples is a way to convey information about something unknown by using something known as a basis. In addition, an example is characterised by eloquence and conciseness, so that it can be passed around quickly because it contains only a few words. For example, you say to a pupil who is lazy and negligent all the year and does not study frantically except when exams approach, ‘Fill your quiver before you shoot.’ This means that you must first fill your quiver with your arrows before going hunting. This is a parable which is said to illustrate the importance of being well prepared for something before its time comes.

Another parable of the Egyptian country folk is ‘Get your bread from the baker, even if he eats half of it.’ This parable is told to those who get things from those who do not specialise in them. It is also said about the one who is negligent in that thing in which he is supposed to be skilled, ‘The carpenter’s door is out of joint!’ Moreover, when you send someone to do something for you and he does it successfully and brings you back the result you were hoping for, he says, ‘The churning has brought forth butter’; churning means to turn milk in a churn to separate the butter from the milk.

In this way, a parable is a concise and eloquent phrase which was said at a particular time, and thus people begin to use it in similar situations because of its beauty and eloquence. A parable keeps its original wording and never changes. It keeps its form of gender and number as well. Why is that? That is because the parable was said at a particular instance at the first place and thereby keeps the same form and the same name, to whomever it is addressed.

Allah *Glorified is He* sets forth a parable to you and orders you to bear it in mind, pay attention and listen well to it and strive to understand it because it will help you with your relations with Prophet Muhammad and the believers. It is addressed to all mankind and does not single out anyone in particular. Allah says: ‘People, here is an illustration, so listen carefully.’ (*al-Hajj:* 73) He does not call out for the believers, because this parable is addressed to the disbelievers since the believers do not need it. In addition, He orders us to listen carefully to it and understand its meaning and its implication so that we conduct ourselves according to its teachings and according to our understanding of its meaning.

So what is this parable? Allah says: ‘Those you call on beside Allah could not, even if they combined all their forces, create a fly.’ (*al-Hajj:* 73) This tells that those whom they worship and turn to instead of Allah cannot create the smallest of creatures, i.e. a fly even were they to join all their forces and work together, not individually to that end. This is a bolder challenge, for it increases the power of the opponent.

The Quran also increased the boldness of its challenge to the Arabs. First of all, it challenged them to produce the like of the Quran and it then challenged them to produce the like of ten chapters because the entire Quran was too much for them. However, they could not; so it challenged them to produce the like of a single chapter, but they could not. The Quran issued an even bolder challenge and told them to gather all of their most eloquent and articulate people and all the jinn as well to help them, yet stressing meanwhile that they will still not be able to do so. Allah says: ‘Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Quran, they could not bring the like of it.’ (*al-Isra’:* 88)

Allah says that they will not create a fly, using the future tense in Arabic. This means that this negation is perpetual for all time. They could not do it in the past and they will never be able to do it in the future. Thus, no one of them imagines that they will one day in the future be able to do this. Allah negates the act in perpetuity in this way because you might refrain from doing something even though you are able to do it, however if you are challenged to do it, you will do it to answer this challenge. So He *Glorified is He* made it clear to them that they could not do it before and will never be able to do it after He challenged them.

Someone might say that the matter of creating a fly is a big challenge that no one could meet. Thus, Allah challenged them to do something easier than actually creating it, namely; retrieving what a fly has took away from them. Can anyone take back the food which a fly takes from them on its wings, feet or snout?

The disbelievers used to make sacrifices before their idols and place the meat before them to bless it. The blood would flow and stain them. The flies would come buzzing around it and take from it on their slender wings, feet, and snouts. Thus, He *the Almighty* challenged them to get back from them what they had taken and this would be easier than creating a fly. One can try this himself. If a fly lands on some honey before you, it will inevitably take a little bit of it even if only an imperceptible amount. Can you take hold of the fly and retrieve what it took from you?

Therefore, Allah said that the petitioners and that they petition are feeble. The fly itself is weak and they are also weak as evident in the fact that they cannot even do this. However, it is notable that there are those who are weak but claim to be strong on one side and there are those who are weak but their strength lays in their acknowledge of their own weakness. Although the fly is weak, Allah says about it: ‘Surely Allah is not ashamed to set forth any parable—[that of] a gnat or anything above that.’ (*al-Baqara:* 26) That is, He *the Almighty* is not ashamed to set forth any parable for something of an even smaller size, not something bigger like a bird, for example.

Then He *Glorified is He* says:

مَا قَدَرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِۦٓ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَقَوِىٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٧٤﴾

They have no grasp of God's true measure: God is truly most strong and mighty [74] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 74)

This verse tells that those disbelievers who worship false deities besides Allah, cannot create a fly or even retrieve from it what it has taken from them, and thus they, i.e. those disbelievers have no true understanding of Allah. If they had had, they would not have worshipped anything else besides Him *the Almighty*.

We observed that the measures of things differ according to what you are measuring and what you want to know. Length, for example, has its own units of measurement, but these units differ according to the nature of the thing being measured. If you want to measure the distance between Cairo and Alexandria, for example, you do not use millimetres, centimetres or even metres, but you use kilometres. When you want to buy a piece of fabric, you measure it in metres but a photograph picture is measured in centimetres.

Thus, everything has its own measure and dimension. If you want to know the distance, you measure the length, and if you want to know the space of an area, you measure the length and the width, while if you want to know the volume, you measure the length, width, and height. Length is measured in metres, area in metres squared and volume in metres cubed. Likewise, weight is measured in kilos, pounds, grams and so on.

In addition, the same verb used to indicate the measure of something can also mean to straighten as Allah says: 'But when He tries him [differently], then straitens to him his means of subsistence.' (*al-Fajr:* 16) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And whoever has his means of subsistence straitened to him, let him spend out of that which Allah has given him.' (*at-Talaq:* 7)

Moreover, just as the material things are measured, so are immaterial things. For example, you speak about material increase by saying that so and so a person has grown up, meaning that he has become a mature man and grown taller. As for immaterial measure, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'a grievous word it is that comes out of their mouths' (*al-Kahf:* 5). This means that their word that 'Allah has taken a son' is grave.

Allah *Glorified is He* is not a material being, for He is beyond material. Thus, the meaning of measure in His regard is the magnificence of His Attributes of Perfection. They, i.e. the disbelievers have no grasp of His true measure and have not duly magnified Him. They do not know His true measure, for if they knew it, they would not worship anything else instead of Him and they would not worship alongside Him these false gods that cannot create a fly or even claim back what it takes from them. How could they think that these false gods are equal to Allah and compare them to Him? If they truly knew Allah's Worth, they would be ashamed to do any of this.

Then Allah ends the verse by saying that He is Most Strong and Mighty. What do these two attributes have to do with what have come before? Scholars observe that Allah *Glorified is He* said in the preceding parable about those who preferred to worship idols than Him that they are both feeble. Thus, in contrast with this weakness, He said that He is Most Powerful and thus More Powerful than the worshippers. Allah does not need their worship and He is More Powerful than the idols they worship, for He could destroy them if He willed. In as much as you have turned away from worshiping Allah and preferred to worship other than Him, this is a prejudice. Thus, it is as though there is a battle being waged and if this is the case, Allah is Almighty and cannot be defeated.

The same words indicating that they have no grasp of Allah's true measure occur in several places in the Book of Allah. Allah says: 'They have no grasp of Allah's true measure when they say, "Allah has sent nothing down to a mere mortal"' (*al-An'am:* 91). They had no true grasp of Allah because they accused Him of imperfection, yet He is Perfectly Just. How could He oblige His servants to worship Him without sending Messengers to them? He is the One Who says: 'Nor do We chastise until We raise a Messenger.' (*al-Isra':* 15) Thus, when they say that Allah has revealed nothing unto a mortal, it is as though they are asserting that Allah *Glorified is He* punishes people without conveying anything to them. In response to this, He *the Almighty* says: 'Say, "Who was it who sent down the Scripture, which Moses brought"' (*al-An'am:* 91).

In another verse, He says: ‘These people have no grasp of Allah’s true measure. On the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be in His grip. The heavens will be rolled up in His right hand’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 67).

One can either give something its true measure or simply estimate its measure, yet measurements differ as for both. For example, you might look at a room and say that it is around 4 by 5, which is an approximate measure. However, if you actually take measurements and measure the room accurately, it might be larger or smaller than this. In the first case, you estimated its measure, whilst in the second case you gave it its true measure. In this regard, when you want to grasp a true measure of Allah’s Power and Perfection, you understand them according to the full capacity of the human mind.

What we have already said about the knowledge of certainty, vision of certainty and truth of certainty is related to this. In addition, when Allah revealed the verse that reads: ‘You who believe, be mindful of Allah, as is His due’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102), some of the Companions said, ‘And who can do this?’ It is difficult to be as perfectly mindful of Allah as He truly deserves. Therefore, Allah revealed: ‘therefore be careful of [your duty to] Allah as much as you can’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16), and: ‘Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability…’ (*al-Baqara:* 286).

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad used to praise Allah and say, ‘Exalted are You. We cannot praise You enough. You are as You have praised Yourself.’(1) Why is that? That is because no one, no matter how much eloquence he has been given, has the ability to duly praise Allah. Allah, out of His Mercy to His servants, has excused them from having to do this, for He has praised Himself and taught us how to praise Him. When an eloquent person speaks and praises Allah, he does so using the rhetoric praises and phrases. The ineloquent person who does not speak well, on the other hand, can rest assured when he praises his Lord with words of praise which He taught to him, for the expressions said by a philosopher are not different from those made by a shepherd.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim*

Had Allah not taught us the phrase of praising Him in the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, i.e. ‘All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds’ (*al-Fatiha:* 2), we would not know how to say this. Thus, Allah’s teaching the words of praise to His servants is itself a blessing which merits praise. In addition, praise itself merits praise and so on in an unending chain. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* is constantly being praised and the servant is constantly praising.

He *Glorified is He* spoke about the matter of divinity and the Attributes of Absolute Perfection, which befit it and warned us not to add to them anything that is not appropriate, which is the pinnacle of all doctrine. Thus, since we must believe in the matter of divinity with such purity and cleanse our faith of all adulterants, we must be informed about this divine power in which we believe. The way we are informed about this is by the sending of Messengers.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱللَّهُ يَصۡطَفِي مِنَ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلٗا وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعُۢ بَصِيرٞ ﴿٧٥﴾

God chooses messengers from among the angels
and from among men. God is all hearing, all
seeing [75] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 75)

Therefore, the second stage of faith, after believing in the pinnacle of doctrine is to believe in the Messengers. To choose means to elect the best of a large group. Choosing few from many indicates that they are the elite and the best. In addition, the act of choosing differs according to the selector; if the selector is Allah, then He will certainly choose the best of the best.

The selection pervades the entire universe. Allah chooses Messengers from the angels, men at certain times and for certain places. He singled out the month of *Ramadan* from time and the *Ka’ba* from the places. However, He *Glorified is He* did not make this selection simply in order to single out the ones He chose above everyone else, but rather so that the beauty of this selection would spread to all the creatures. When He chose *Ramadan* out of all other time, He did not do this simply in order to single out *Ramadan*, but rather, He did it so that you could recharge your spirit’s strength and purify it for all the other days of the year, and so you could benefit from the righteous deeds you do therein.

Moreover, a single choice might be repeated with a different focus. Therefore, the orientalists have objected to Allah's Words 'And when the angels said, "O Maryam! Surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the world"'. (*Al-'Imran:* 42) They wondered why the act of choosing is repeated here. However, if we reflect on the verse, we will see that there is a difference between the first selection and the second. As for the first, it means that He chose her to be a pious worshipper and to seclude herself in her niche to invoke Allah, whilst the second one was an election above all the women of the world by conceiving a child without a father. So the focus of the election was different in each instance.

Concerning the matter of choosing the angels, it is divided into those who are chosen and those from whom they are chosen. In another verse, Allah says: 'The Maker of the angels [as] messengers.' (*Fatir:* 1) That is, they all have messages to bear to worlds other than ours. However, as for the verse we are examining now, it refers to the angels who have a connection to man such as Jibril (Gabriel), Mikael (Michael), Israfil (Uriel) and the recording and protecting angels. They are solely occupied with this and do not know anything about this creation. They are the exalted angels, of whom Allah spoke when He said to Satan: 'Are you proud or are you of the exalted ones?' (*Sad:* 75) That is, those who were not included in the command to prostrate because they had another purpose.

Allah ends the verse saying that He is all hearing and all seeing. Hearing is connected to sounds, while sight has to do with deeds. They are the basis of all other senses. When Allah *Glorified is He* says that He is all hearing and all seeing, He is telling us that His Messengers would encounter words that would hurt and mock them. Additionally, He knows for certain they would be barred from making their call. Thus, let this be known to them and not dishearten them, for He *the Almighty* is with them, hears all that is said, and sees all that is done as they are beneath His Hearing, His Sight and His Ken.

Then Allah says:

يَعۡلَمُ مَا بَيۡنَ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَمَا خَلۡفَهُمۡۗ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُرۡجَعُ ٱلۡأُمُورُ ﴿٧٦﴾

He knows what lies before and behind them.
All matters return to Him [76] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 76)

Allah knows that which lies before and behind them. Whatever a man does, Allah's Knowledge encompasses it. Therefore, all matters return to Him and all things will in the end go back to Him. He did not create His creatures just to leave them alone, but rather for a wise reason. He destined an end for them wherein each would be accountable for his deeds. Those who strive, work for the Sake of Allah's call and bear the hardships of aiding Prophet Muhammad will be rewarded for that. Those who oppose them and stand in their way, whether by insulting words and mocking taunts or by actions that obstruct their call will also get the punishment they deserve.

Allah *Glorified is He* after speaking to us about matters of divinity and the Messengers who conveyed His Message, told us about the way of guidance which they would convey and deliver to bring order to our life's motions. This way of guidance is outlined by Do's and Don'ts. Here, we stress that the commandments and prohibitions do not cover every aspect of life's motions. A limited number of things are governed either by commandments or by prohibitions, and everything else is simply allowed. Allah issued commandments and prohibitions for those basic things which protect the motions of life from passions and caprices and left everything else up to our own choice, and thus you may do with them whatever you wish.

Therefore, we see that the scholars speculate and differ over those things which Allah has left for us. If Allah had willed, He could have sent down clear rulings for each of them about which no one would differ. Thus, you might ask, 'Why did Allah *Glorified is He* leave these things up to conflicts, different views, and disputes that would erupt about them?' Scholars say that this was actually the Will of Allah. He created man to be subdued in some aspects and free in others. People can let a scholar strive to reach whatever opinion he feels best and then accept that what he says is true whilst rejecting the opinion of another as false. That is because if Allah wanted it to be only one-way, He would have said so but He left it to be subject to scholars personal reasoning.

Thus, He wanted these different opinions to exist because just as man is compelled in many natural matters and free in other matters, the same is true in the case of moral responsibility. Man is compelled in those matters wherein if he strayed away from, the entire world would corrupt, yet he has free choice in other matters, which are both correct to do or to leave.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about this way of guidance:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱرۡكَعُواْ وَٱسۡجُدُواْۤ وَٱعۡبُدُواْ رَبَّكُمۡ
وَٱفۡعَلُواْ ٱلۡخَيۡرَ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُفۡلِحُونَ ٧٧

Believers, bow down, prostrate yourselves, worship
your Lord, and do good so that you may succeed [77]
(The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 77)

The call previously given by Allah while speaking about the parable was meant to address all mankind because He *the Almighty* wanted to alert the idol-worshippers to this parable and make them hear it, However, here He is speaking about a way of guidance and a constitution given especially to those who have attained to faith. That is because He only issues rulings to those who believe in Him, and thus those who disbelieve are not worthy of bearing this trust. Thus, He leaves them and does not give order to their lives. As we said before, the traffic policeman helps those who seek his aid and trust him and he directs and guides them, but if someone doubts his words or demeans him, he leaves them to get lost.

Thus, when your Lord calls you to do something, know that the context differs from the one to the other, such as when He says: ‘O you who believe! Believe.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136) Some of those people who only understand the superficial outward meaning of the Words of Allah have objected to this verse and wondered how Allah addresses them as those who have faith and then command them to have faith. The scholars answer this by saying that the meaning is that ‘O you who have attained to faith before you hear this new ruling, hold fast to your faith once you hear the new ruling and continue to have faith.’ Thus, if you require something of someone who already does it, then the meaning is that you are asking him to keep doing it.

Moreover, there is a difference between believing in a ruling and actually implementing it. You might believe that the ruling is truly from Allah and do not doubt or dispute it, yet you might not apply it or you might disobey it. For example, Allah says about pilgrimage: ‘And pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men for the sake of Allah, [upon] everyone who is able to undertake the journey to it and whoever disbelieves,’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 97) All the servants of Allah have to undertake the pilgrimage to the Sacred House but after meeting the essential condition of being able to undertake it, for there can be no responsibility without ability. However, Allah, after mentioning the condition, speaks of those who disbelieve. Does this mean that those who do not make the pilgrimage are disbelievers? No, it does not. That is because the meaning is that all people must believe that they owe Allah a duty of believing that they must make the pilgrimage to the Sacred House. Whoever believes this to be true is a believer, but as for whether he will actually undertake it or not, this is another matter.

The first legal responsibility Allah speaks about in the verse under discussion is prayer. In spite of the fact that Messengers brought many responsibilities from Allah, He *the Almighty* singles out prayer because it is the responsibility which is repeated five times every day, whilst the other responsibilities are seasonal. Fasting is done for one month out of the year; pilgrimage is made once in a lifetime for those who are able to undertake it and alms giving is paid one time for those who have enough to pay it or once they have held the minimum amount for one full year.

Thus, the obligation of the prayer is not like any other obligation and therefore Prophet Muhammad singled it out by saying, ‘That which differentiates us from the disbelievers is our performance of *salat* (prayer) He who abandons it is a disbeliever.(1) And He also said, ‘Prayer is the buttress of the religion.’(2)

Allah *Glorified is He* ordained the obligation of the performance of the prayers in a unique way. It was the only obligation to be given directly, whilst the others were given by means of Revelation. We gave an example of this before, Allah is beyond compare, and said that your boss could send you a memo with instructions on it, but if it is more important, he calls you over the phone and tells you what he wants in person. If it is even more important than that and comes from a higher department, he asks you to come here and gives it to you directly. In this way, rules are laid down according to the degree of their importance.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasa'i*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Ad-Daylimi, some scholars say it is a weak narration*

Prayer was not given through Revelation as the other obligations were, but it came directly from Allah. That is because it would be a connection between the servant and his Lord, and therefore He wanted to free it of all intermediaries. Allah further singled it out from all other responsibilities by making it an obligation which has to be always observed no matter what. A believer might be poor and does not have to pay the *zakat* (obligatory alms) One might be unable to do the pilgrimage or unable to fast because of travel or sickness. Nevertheless, you are not exempted from performing the prayers for any reason. If you cannot stand up, you pray sitting, reclining, or lying down, making gestures to indicate your bows and prostrations, or even simply making the motions of prayer in your heart. The point is that you are always remembering your Lord, connected to Him and no time passes except He is always on your mind.

We said before mentioning the Name of Allah through calling for prayer and the announcement for its start is going on at all times, without ever stopping. When you pray the dawn prayer, for example, someone elsewhere is praying the midday prayer. When you bow, someone elsewhere is prostrating. When you say, ‘In the Name of Allah, the All Merciful, the Giver of Mercy’, someone else is saying ‘All praise is due to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.’ Thus, it is constant intertwined worship which is never interrupted. One of those people who was endowed with deep knowledge addressed the time saying that a bit of time is all time. He meant that in every piece of time, all time is contained. In this way, the entire world runs with the worship of Allah and never ceases.

Allah singled out from prayer the acts of bowing and prostrating because they are the two most prominent actions of it, since bowing and prostrating are specific actions which both a believer and a hypocrite perform. The hypocrites were even the first people to reach the front rows of the prayer, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to distinguish that one from the other. Thus, He ordered to worship Him afterwards.

What matters is not the actions of bowing and prostrating, but your dedication of these actions to your Lord and your sincere intention for Allah alone. Otherwise, the prayer becomes mere actions like a physical exercise as some like to put it. Some people say that the prayer contains physical exercises in which the whole body works; indeed it is but an act of worship. An act of worship means to do something because Allah commanded you to do it.

Next, Allah orders to do good so that we may succeed. The word good is a general word which encompasses all the commandments of the religion. It is mentioned alongside prayer to convey a general principle, for everything that is necessary to fulfil an obligation is itself obligatory. Thus, good refers to all the good things which the teachings of the way of guidance establish for society. The way of guidance is only meant to order the motions of life in a way which makes them cooperate and support each other, not oppose each other. If things are properly implemented, then society will live in happiness.

Moreover, do not forget that when the religion restrains your freedom of movement (restricts you from doing a certain act), it does this for your own good and you benefit from this restriction. Allah restricts your freedom of movement so that you do not do evil to others and at the same time He restricts the freedom of everyone else so that they do not do evil to you. You are one person and they are many, yet due to restraining your freedom, Allah has restrained the freedom of all people for your sake. Thus, who benefits most? To illustrate, the *Shari'a* of Islam orders you to refrain from stealing and you are just one person, however it orders everyone else not to steal from you. It orders you to lower your gaze from the womenfolk of others and you are one person, yet it tells everyone else to lower their gazes from your womenfolk. Thus, every commandment Allah issues to mankind gives benefit to you.

Thus, 'doing good' is doing that which never leads to corruption. As long as all motions are under the command of a single will, they will cooperate and support one another. If you have your caprice and the next man has his, then these caprices will conflict and oppose each other. Therefore, good means everything that the teachings and laws of Allah *Glorified is He* enjoin.

Allah says that ‘doing the good’ will lead to success. But where will this success be? Is it in this world or in the Hereafter? For those who uphold Allah’s Law and keep to His Way of Guidance and do good, this success will be in this worldly life. Success is a natural fruit of the Way of Guidance of Allah in any society whose members try to do good for themselves and for others. Such is a society that acts according to the words of Prophet Muhammad, ‘No one of you shall become a true believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself.’(1) On achieving this success, you will see that society free of rivalry, conflict, injustice, bribery and so on. This is the success in this world. Moreover, it will be followed by the success of the Hereafter.

Thus, do not think that your religious responsibilities are a burden for you, because they are for your own good in this life and your own happiness and success in the life to come. Subsequently, their reward in the Hereafter will be a pure grace from Allah. The Prophet Muhammad alerted us to this when he said, ‘There is none whose deeds alone would entitle him into paradise. It was said to Him, ‘And Allah’s Messenger, not even You? Thereupon He said, ‘Not even I, but that my Lord wraps me in mercy.’(2) This is because a man does good in this world for his own good and for the good of the world in which he lives. Thus, he attains reward for it in the Hereafter from Allah’s grace and bounty, as Allah says: ‘And give them more out of His grace’ (*an-Nisa’:* 173). Allah says that if we realise this, we may succeed. Using the model verb may is for hope or expectancy and it has different levels of likelihood. For example, if you say, ‘So and so a person may give you,’ you hope something from someone else and you cannot ensure that he will actually give. However, if you say, ‘I might give you,’ the hope is in your own hands and thereby this is more likely than the previous example. But you and I are still equals and I might give you first. However, when you say, ‘Allah may give you,’ you hope from Allah and this is more likely than the other examples. Nevertheless, when Allah Himself says, ‘I may give you’, this is the strongest and likeliest kind of hope there is. That is because the promises and hopes of Allah are never unfulfilled.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukahri (13) and Muslim (45), on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَٰهِدُواْ فِي ٱللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِۦۚ هُوَ ٱجۡتَبَىٰكُمۡ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فِي ٱلدِّينِ
مِنۡ حَرَجٖۚ مِّلَّةَ أَبِيكُمۡ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَۚ هُوَ سَمَّىٰكُمُ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ مِن قَبۡلُ وَفِي هَٰذَا
لِيَكُونَ ٱلرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَتَكُونُواْ شُهَدَآءَ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِۚ فَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ
وَءَاتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱعۡتَصِمُواْ بِٱللَّهِ هُوَ مَوۡلَىٰكُمۡۖ فَنِعۡمَ ٱلۡمَوۡلَىٰ وَنِعۡمَ ٱلنَّصِيرُ ٧٨

Strive hard for God as is His due: He has chosen you and placed no hardship in your religion, the faith of your forefather Abraham. God has called you Muslims — both in the past and in this [message] — so that the Messenger can bear witness about you and so that you can bear witness about other people. So keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms, and seek refuge in God: He is your protector — an excellent protector and an excellent helper[78] (The Quran, *al-Hajj:* 78)

Allah is speaking about duly and truly striving in His cause. It is like what we said before about having a grasp of the true measure of Allah. It is because striving also requires sincerity and that you keep Allah in your mind. You might go out to fight solely to avoid criticism. You might wield your weapon and enter the battle without having on your mind that you are doing it for the cause of Allah and without the intention of ascending the Word of Allah. This is like the one who fights so that people see his rank or because he desires battle-spoils or because he has a score to settle with the enemy and wants to get revenge. These are some of the things which corrupt the true purpose of fighting and render it of any value.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad was asked, ‘O Messenger of Allah! One man fights for booty, other fights to win fame and the third fights to show off.’ He was asked, ‘Which of them is fighting for the cause of Allah?’ The Prophet Muhammad said, ‘The one who fights so that the Word of Allah will be exalted, is the one who fights in the cause of Allah.’(1) That is what is meant by striving hard for Allah as is His due. You can judge yourself in this regard, for all the criteria are in your hands.

You might wonder why striving for Allah. The scholars say it is because if you benefit from the implementation of the way of guidance of Allah after the Messengers showed you how to do so, you benefit yourself. Allah, however, wants this benefit to spread to those who are with you too and this can only happen if you strive with your life, wealth or anything you love. For otherwise, how will you bring success to the pact you made with Allah, of which He says: ‘Surely, Allah has bought of the believers their persons and their property for this, that they shall have the garden.’ (*at-Tawba:* 111)

The troops on the battlefield have a mission just as those who stay home and do not go out to fight also have a mission. When the soldier endures perils and dangers and risks death, this means that what he would earn by being killed is better than being a coward. This emboldens the others and gives them courage to fight. Therefore, at the battle of Badr, when a Companion who was chewing on a date heard what the Prophet Muhammad said about the reward of the martyr, he said to Prophet Muhammad: ‘O Messenger of Allah is there nothing between me and paradise save that I am slain in Allah’s cause?’ Prophet Muhammad said yes, so he threw the date from his mouth and joined the battle.(2) He was completely confident that what he was going onto by being martyred was better than what he was leaving behind. As for those who remain behind and do not go out to fight, their mission is to convey the message and adhere to it fully. Otherwise, if everyone went out to fight and everyone was martyred, who would bear the Message of Allah and spread it?

The word strive here is used in a general sense to mean all forms of striving and struggle. When the military struggle is successful and we defeat the disbelievers so that they no longer stand in the way of our message and leave us alone and wish to live in our country under our protection, then there is no longer any need for fighting and striving in the Path of Allah comes to another arena, i.e. striving against the soul.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘it is He who has elected you’, that is, He has chosen you and selected you to be the best community ever brought out for the good of mankind; the price of this election is that we must be worthy of it, live up to its responsibility and do all that Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to do.

And we advise those groups who work to spread the message and carry its banner: Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen you, so be worthy of this choice, and put His words in their proper context.

He, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘…and [He] has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to] religion….’ (*al-Hajj:* 78) That is, He *Glorified is He* has not elected you just to burden you, restrain you and make things difficult for you, but rather, He *Glorified is He* has made everything easy, and His Law is based on human capability. He *Glorified is He* has made dispensations to make things easier for you and to remove hardship and discomfort from you. The one who cannot stand may pray in a seated position, the one who is ill does not have to fast and the one who is poor does not have to pay *zakat* (obligatory alms) or perform the pilgrimage.

And He, Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: ‘…And had Allah so willed, He would indeed have imposed on you hardships…’ (*al-Baqara:* 220). But He *Glorified is He* did not impose hardships upon you, nor did He cause you undue discomfort; for the things He *Glorified is He* commands you to do are well within your capabilities.

He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘…the creed of your forefather Ibrahim (Abraham)…’ (*al-Hajj:* 78). The word *milla* (“creed”) here is in the accusative case because it is the subject of an elided verb, which we may explain as: Adhere to the creed of your forefather Ibrahim *peace be upon him*, for he supplicated for you when he said: ‘O our Sustainer! Make us surrender ourselves unto You, and make out of our offspring a community that shall surrender itself unto You, and show us our ways of worship, and accept our repentance…’ (*al-Baqara:* 128).

And another of Abraham's, supplications was: 'O our Sustainer! Raise up from the midst of our offspring an apostle from among themselves....' (*al-Baqara:* 129) Therefore Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am the prayer of Ibrahim, and the glad tidings of 'Isa (Jesus)(1) That is, from his progeny and the progeny of his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*.

And Ibrahim *peace be upon him* supplicated before Allah and said: '...and show us our ways of worship...' (*al-Baqara:* 128), that is, give us religious responsibilities; it is as though he longed to receive Allah's commandments, and would anyone long for responsibility, if it entailed discomfort or hardship?

And likewise, the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* longed for the responsibilities of Islam, and they would ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about them, even though he said, 'Ask me not about things I have left for you.'(2) Yet they would ask about religious matters, so that they could build their new lives, not on the customs of the pre-Islamic pagan ignorance, but on the rulings of Islam.

We need to comment on His words '...the creed of your forefather Ibrahim...' (*al-Hajj:* 78) because these words are addressed to the community to whom the message was sent, as well as the community who responded to it, But are all the Islamic community, descendants of Ibrahim *peace be upon him* so that Allah *Glorified is He* could say '...the creed of your forefather Ibrahim...' (*al-Hajj:* 78)?

We say that Islam is based on faith and open to all, and not all of the Islamic community are descendants of Abraham *peace be upon him*. But Abraham is the forefather of Allah's Messenger Muhammad. And the Messenger is a father to all those who believe in him. As the fatherhood of the Messenger is a fatherhood of allegiance and deeds. We can see this in the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* when Allah *Glorified is He* said about his (Nuh's) son: '...he was not of your family...' (*Hud:* 46).

And because Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a father to all those who believe in him, Allah *Glorified is He* referred to his wives as the mothers of the believers, saying: ‘The Prophet has a higher claim on the believers than [they have on] their own selves, [seeing that he is as a father to them] and his wives are their mothers…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 6).

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (v. 262) on the authority of Abu Umama peace be upon him*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad (ii. 247) on the authority of Abu Hurayra peace be upon him*

As long as the wives are mothers, then the husband is a father, and because of this connection, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* is the forefather of the Islamic community, although they are not all descended from him.

And we find that some of those who love to raise objections to Allah’s Word say, about the matter of Prophet Muhammad’s fatherhood to all the believers: ‘But the Quran says otherwise, for it said as part of the story of Zayd ibn Haritha *peace be upon him*: ‘Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40), negating that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is anyone’s father, so this contradicts what you say.’ We answer: If you understood what Allah *Glorified is He* was saying, you would not object to His words. Allah *Glorified is He* is saying: Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not the father of any one of you, but rather, he is the father of all of you. What is negated is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the father of any one individual, not that he is the father of all his community. And He *Glorified is He* says after this: ‘…but is Allah’s Apostle…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40), so as long as he is the Messenger of Allah, he is father to all.

And Allah *Glorified is He* then says about Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: ‘…It is he who has named you – in bygone times as well as in this [divine writ]–those who have surrendered themselves to Allah…’ (*al-Hajj:* 78), that is, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* named you Muslims (those who surrender), as though it is clear and obvious that you have been Muslims since the days of Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: ‘…so that the Apostle might bear witness to the truth before you, and that you might bear witness to it before all mankind….’ (*al-Hajj:* 78)

And elsewhere in the Quran, a similar expression is given with the words in a different order, when He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you….’ (*al-Baqara:* 143) Why is this? They say that it is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed Allah’s message, and called upon Allah *Glorified is He* to bear witness to this, saying: ‘O Allah, I have conveyed it! O Allah, bear witness!’(1) That is, ‘Bear witness that I have conveyed Your message.’ And Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted each member of his community to bear this message and convey it, so that those who did not see Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could hear his words. In this way, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be a witness over all those who believe in him, and those who believe in him would be witnesses over those to whom they convey the message.

And therefore one of the principal honours of his community is that no other messenger will ever come after Him *peace and blessings be upon him* because they are trusted to take care of Allah’s way of guidance, as though they will never be bereft of goodness. We said before that messengers only come when corruption has spread everywhere, and people have lost their natural immunity to evil, and all society has lost it so that no one prevents anyone else from evil. At this point, Allah *Glorified is He* intervenes by sending a messenger and a new miracle to rectify what has become corrupted. And the sealing of all divine messages with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a testimony that goodness will never disappear from his community, and no matter how far the people stray there will always be some who resolutely bear the message of Allah’s guidance and cling to it, and serve as a role-model for others. Therefore Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described this by saying: ‘Goodness is folded up in me, and it will unfold in my community’. So all goodness and perfection is contained in the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and spread out amongst his community.

The discourse then returns to the commandment of prayer: ‘…Thus, be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues…’ (*al-Hajj:* 78) because it is the obligation which is always required of the believer, and it is a constant declaration of fealty repeated five times a day, and through it the remembrance of Allah continues throughout all time without ever ceasing for a moment, when you look at the whole world and add each part of it to the other.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1729) on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas peace and blessings be upon him*

And the one who reflects on how time is in the sight of Allah *Glorified is He* will find that it is eternal without cease; for a day for us is twenty-four hours, whilst a day for Allah *Glorified is He* is one thousand years of our reckoning, and the Day of Resurrection will last fifty thousand years. And there is a day called ‘today’, meaning the moment we are in right now, and this is the day of Allah *Glorified is He* of which He said: ‘…every day He manifests Himself in yet another [wondrous] way’ (*ar-Rahman:* 29). Therefore Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in answer to the question, ‘What is your Lord’s business now, when the Pen of Destiny has dried’, said: ‘He manifests things, but does not begin them: He raises some people, and lowers others’.(1) So ‘today’ is a general day, it is not the day of Egypt, or Syria, or Japan. At every moment, Allah *Glorified is He* begins a day and ends a day, and thus His day is constant and unending.

And we read in the Noble Hadith: ‘Allah *Glorified is He* stretches out His hand by night so day’s sinner can repent, and stretches out His hand by day so night’s sinner can repent.’(2) Whose day and whose night? Day and night are always present without ending and at every moment of time day ends somewhere and begins somewhere else, and night begins somewhere and ends somewhere else. So Allah’s hand is always outstretched, and He *Glorified is He* never withdraws it, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Nay, but wide are His hands stretched out: He dispenses [bounty] as He wills…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 64).

He *Glorified is He*, then says: ‘…and hold fast unto Allah…’ (*al-Hajj:* 78). Seek refuge with Him in times of hardship; this means that you will be opposed and persecuted, for everyone who ever bore Allah’s message was persecuted. But do not let this affect you or crush your spirits, and seek your refuge and protection with Allah *Glorified is He* whenever hardships befall you, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…There is no protection [for anyone] from Allah’s judgment, save [for] those who have earned [His] mercy...’ (*Hud:* 43)!

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Abu 'Asim, Ibn Majah (202), Abū Na'im (v. 252) and Abu Ash-Shaykh in (Al-'Azma).*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad (iv. 395) and Muslim (2759) on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari*

And when you hold fast to Allah *Glorified is He*, you do not have to go to Him, for '…He is your Lord Supreme…' (*al-Hajj:* 78) meaning that He *Glorified is He* looks after your affairs; and as long as He *Glorified is He* is your Lord Supreme, then 'how excellent is this Lord Supreme, and how excellent this Giver of Succour!' (*al-Hajj:* 78)

the chapter of

al-Mu'minun

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Mu'minun*(1).

قَدۡ أَفۡلَحَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ ١

[How] prosperous are the believers! [1]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 1)

In the penultimate verse of the chapter of *al-Hajj,* Allah *Glorified is He* said '…so that you might attain to a happy state!' (*al-Hajj:* 77) the word *la'alla* – translated in the verse as (might) conveys a meaning of hope and so He *Glorified is He* wanted to confirm the prosperity of the believers by saying: 'Truly, to a happy state shall attain the believers' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1). Since hope from Allah *Glorified is He* is realised, He used the word 'truly' which confirms the actualisation of the event. In this way the beginning of the chapter of *al-Mu'minun* is in accordance with the end of the chapter of *al-Hajj.* The meaning of 'to attain a happy state' *(aflaha)* is: attaining the optimal amount of good that the soul desires.

We previously spoke of the process of germination and how it works; plants feed on two halves of a seed until it has a strong root which is able to soak up [water] from the soil. Thus, if you were to throw seeds onto un-stimulated land, the root would find difficulty in penetrating and soaking up [water] from the soil.

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(1) Al-Qurtubi in his *(Tafsir)*: The chapter of *al-Mu'minun* is number 23 in the order of the Quran. It comprises 118 verses. It is a Meccan chapter (6/4635).

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a scenario from our sensual reality and uses the metaphor of cultivating the earth in order to express the prosperity of the believer and the attainment of permanent bounty in the Hereafter. The farmer tills his land, irrigates it and pastures it. In return, the land gives him seven hundred grains for every one grain he plants. Such shall be the recompense in the Hereafter: ‘The parable of those who spend their possessions for the sake of Allah is that of a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains: for Allah grants manifold increase unto whom He wills; and Allah is infinite, all-knowing’ (*al-Baqara:* 261).

If this earth, which is a creation of Allah *Glorified is He* can give all of this, then what is your opinion of a direct gift from your Creator, the Creator of the earth which gives you? Just as the farmer’s struggling and hard work increases his yield, the hard work and struggle of the believer will increase his reward and recompense in the Hereafter.

ٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ فِي صَلَاتِهِمۡ خَٰشِعُونَ ٢

Those who pray humbly [2]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 2)

It is as if the first outward manifestation of prosperity is in the prayer. The statement continues to be connected to what our Lord said in the previous verses ‘O you who have attained to faith! Bow down and prostrate yourselves, and worship Your Sustainer [alone]…’ (*al-Hajj:* 77) and after this He said ‘…Thus, be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues…’ (*al-Hajj:* 78).

The first attribute He used to describe the believers who shall attain prosperity was ‘those who humble themselves in their prayer’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 2). He *Glorified is He* did not say: ‘those who perform the prayer’ since performing the prayer is an established affair for all the believers. Consideration, here, is given to the form and method; consideration is given to humility, submission, contentment and tranquillity of the heart and the bringing of Allah to mind, the one whom you are standing in front of.

When you say to your child ‘sit in front of the teacher attentively and listen to him carefully’, you are not ordering him to go to school or to attend his lessons since this is an already established matter. You are in fact concerned with the core of the matter and the state in which it behoves the child to be.

Humility is for the heart to be still and tranquil during this important affair. It should not be preoccupied with anything other than the prayer because Allah *Glorified is He* did not give man two hearts and as long as he is in the presence of his Lord it does not behove him to be preoccupied with other than Him. So much so that some of the Gnostics have said with regards to humility that whoever deliberately seeks to know who is to his right or left in the rank, his prayer is nullified.

When ʿUmar(1) *may Allah be pleased with him* saw a man who was playing with his beard while praying, he struck him upon his arm and said: 'if you are humble, then your organs will be humble'. This is because the organs draw their energy from the heart and the blood which the heart pumps to them. So if the blood from the heart is diverted away from the limbs, they would not be able to move.

This is why when one of the jurists asked a Sufi(2): 'what is the ruling of the one who forgets [an element] during the prayer?' he asked: 'the ruling according to us or according to you [the jurists]?' [The jurist] said: 'is the [ruling] according to us different from the [ruling] according to you [the *ansar*]?' He said: 'Yes. According to the jurists, whoever forgets [an element] during the prayer, the prostration of forgetfulness makes up for it. As for [the ruling] according to us, whoever forgets [an element] during the prayer, we kill him.' That is, it is a grave matter.

Does your Lord and Creator not deserve from you, that you should be free for Him at least during the time of prayer? It is only five minutes from each of the five [daily prayer] times, while He has left the remaining time to do what you wish. Do you feel it is too much to free your heart for Him, to bring Him *Glorified and Exalted is He* to mind? This action is in your own interest before anything else; it is in your own interest that you may be in seclusion with your Lord and that you may seek energy and sustenance from Him *Glorified and Exalted is He* and that you expose yourself to [receiving] his gifts and illuminations and to seek his lights and secrets.

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(1) The story of 'Umar with the man who was playing with his beard while praying

(2) *The story of the Sufi who was asked about distraction in prayer and answered "In our case or in yours?"*

Out of the desire of the people of God-consciousness for the completeness and wholeness of the prayer, one of them said to his companion who was avid to lead people in prayer(1): ‘why are you so avid to be the leader of the prayer knowing that the one who seeks leadership is not given it?’ He replied: ‘I desire it so that I can be exempt from the [juridical] difference of opinion between ash-Shafiʿi *may Allah be pleased with him* who obligated the recital of al-Fatiha behind the Imam, and Abu Hanifa *may Allah be pleased with him* who said that the recital of the Imam is [sufficient for] the follower. Thus, I am avid to lead the prayer so that I can recite and not be preoccupied with this difference of opinion.’

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ عَنِ ٱللَّغۡوِ مُعۡرِضُونَ ٣

Who shun idle talk [3]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 3)

Frivolity (*laghw*) is speech which has no benefit. It also applies to any action which is of no benefit. In another place He *Glorified and Exalted is He* says: ‘…and [who], whenever they pass by [people engaged in] frivolity, pass on with dignity’ (*al-Furqan:* 72), they are not preoccupied with it nor do they pay attention to it. The Quran relates that when the disbelievers hear the Quran they say: ‘…Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it…’ (*Fussilat:* 26).

This is why Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* made it one of the bounties of paradise that: ‘No empty talk will they hear there, nor any call to sin. But only the tiding of inner soundness and peace’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 25-26). It is as if one of the defects and afflictions of this world is that we hear much empty talk which has no benefit. In another verse, He *Glorified and Exalted is He* says about the wine of The Hereafter, which neither intoxicates the mind nor makes the drinker delirious: 'and in that [paradise] they shall pass on to one another a cup which will not give rise to empty talk, and neither incite to sin' (*at-Tur:* 23).

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(1) *The story of the Imam who was keen on leading the prayer and when asked about the reason he related: " to get of the conflict between Ash-Shafi‘i and Abu Hanifa"*

In the phrase 'Who turn away' (*al-Mu'minun:* 3), turning away is to keep away from something. It is a depiction of the self's rejection of a particular thing. The people of gnosis give a standard of frivolity: 'every action that you do not earn a reward for from Allah is frivolous.'

Because of this, always be avid that all your movements are for Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* so that you may be rewarded for them. [Be] like our companion(1) who was sought by a man to decree for him in a matter in which he had no right. Wanting to take advantage of this opportunity to do good and [believing] that there would be a reward in it for him even in preventing him, he said: 'O Allah, indeed he is a slave who sought a slave and I take his hand and seek The Lord, make the rectification of his mistake by seeking me a rectification for seeking you', i.e. 'Even though I am not able to decree the matter, by it I enter into [the presence of] Allah.

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ لِلزَّكَوٰةِ فَٰعِلُونَ ٤

And they who are observant of *zakat* [4]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 4)

Firstly, *zakat* can mean cleansing, as in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Take, [O, Muhammad], from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them increase [In wealth]' (*at-Tawba:* 103). Heedlessness can afflict a person while gathering wealth causing his wealth to mix with that which is doubtful; thus it requires cleansing. Cleansing of wealth is attained by giving charity.

Zakat can also mean development. After having cleansed your wealth you [want to] expand and increase it as in His statement: 'To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this [self] to grow in purity' (*ash-Shams:* 9), i.e. whoever develops the capacity of good in the self, elevates it such that if you were to look at your [good] actions, which outwardly appear to be deficient, [in reality] they bring about good later on, elevating the aptitudes of good within yourself.

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(1) The story of the two men, one of whom asked the other for alms and the response of the other was to pull his hand, raise it to the sky and imploring Allah to respond to his pleas

This is why; when Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about usury – which means increase – He made [seemingly] contradictory notions in a single verse. Usury increases wealth, the usurer taking a hundred and ten for the hundred that he lends, while *zakat* outwardly decreases wealth, the hundred becoming ninety-seven and a half after alms. The verse gives the true standard: 'Allah deprives usurious gains of all blessing, whereas He blesses charitable deeds with manifold increase…' (*al-Baqara:* 276) the usury which you believe to be increase is in fact destruction, and that which you believe to be a deficiency is in fact a blessing, an increase and development.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [remember:] whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through [other] people's possessions will bring [you] no increase in the sight of Allah – whereas all that you give out in charity, seeking Allah's countenance, [will be blessed by Him:] for it is they, they [who thus seek His countenance] that shall have their recompense multiplied!' (*ar-Rum:* 39) They are those for whom Allah *Glorified is He* will increase and multiply.

As our Lord commanded us to be humble in the prayer, He commanded the same in *zakat*. He *Glorified is He* did not say: those who perform, But said: '…who are intent…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 4). This is to inculcate the states of worship within man. For when you pray you should humble yourself and submit to Allah *Glorified is He* in your prayer. Likewise when you give *zakat*, you are [in reality] elevating the capacities of good within yourself. Thus when you do [good] actions and strive, do not limit your actions according to your need, instead do according to your ability. So take what you need from the fruit of your striving and make the intention that you will take *zakat* and charity from your remaining wealth. Thus, in your mind and intention, giving *zakat* (obligatory alms) should be a beginning.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ لِفُرُوجِهِمۡ حَٰفِظُونَ ٥

And who guard their chastity [5]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* commanded us to guard the private parts for the function for they were created. The function of these bodily parts is: to remove waste through urine and faeces and to perform sexual relations with the goal to preserve lineage. A person must guard his/her private parts to that which Allah *Glorified is He* permitted in His statement:

إِلَّا عَلَىٰٓ أَزۡوَٰجِهِمۡ أَوۡ مَا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُهُمۡ فَإِنَّهُمۡ غَيۡرُ مَلُومِينَ ٦

Except with their spouses or their slaves — with these they
are not to blame [6] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 6)

The verse speaks of those who guard their private parts except with their spouses because Allah *Glorified is He* permitted '…those whom they rightfully possess…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 60) ownership of slaves is [also] permitted. However it does not have a standing or an existence today. Slaves do not exist as they did before Islam since human international law has outlawed slavery, thus rendering the ruling [of slavery in Islam] inoperative and disused. There is a difference between a ruling being inoperative due to the non-existence of its subject and being overturned. The ruling on the ownership of slaves has not been overturned; it is just that its subject matter, slaves, do not exist anymore.

To clarify this issue, suppose that you are in a society in which everyone is rich – there are no poor people who are legible for taking *zakat*: you say that the ruling of giving *zakat* is inoperative; it is like an existent obligation – it just does not have a subject.

Some literalists say that ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him* repealed the share of those whose hearts are to be reconciled(1). In reality he did not repeal the ruling, nor did he have the authority to repeal a ruling of Allah *Glorified is He;* it was that he did not find a single person from the category of those whose hearts are to be reconciled in order to give. Thus the ruling remains intact and is acted upon in Muslim countries even in present times.(1) We and others, who expend their utmost efforts, attempt to reconcile the hearts of some unbelievers and other groups in order to make them more receptive towards Islam. Thus, the share of those hearts which are to be reconciled still remains and is acted upon.

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(1) *'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Muhammad Al-Muharibi related on the authority of Hajjaj ibn Dinar on the authority of Ibn Sirin on the authority of 'Ubayda said: 'Uyayna ibn Hisn and Al-'Aqra' ibn Habis came to Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him and said: 'O Caliph of the Messenger of Allah (Prophet Muhammad), there is a salt marsh which=*

We also hear those who say: 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* nullified the capital punishment for theft during the year of famine. This claim is contrary to the truth because he did not nullify this capital punishment. He merely nullified it in certain circumstances because the legal principle says: ‘Avert the capital punishments by doubts’. As long as a thief has stolen to ward off his hunger then he has not reached the quorum of theft since it is only considered theft if it goes over the amount which is sufficient to fulfil one’s basic necessities.

One may say: if there is a war between the believers and the disbelievers, we capture slaves] from them and they from us, does slavery not exist in this instance? We say: yes, slavery exists, but you have legally bound yourself to abide by international laws which prohibit slavery and you must therefore comply with them. However, if slavery is found then slave ownership is established. This issue is taken up [by its opponents] as a

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= *has no grass nor benefit so please grant us it!’ So he split [the land] for them and witnessed [a contract] for them. Then they went to 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him so that he would witness it. When 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him heard of what was in the contract he took it from them, spat on it and effaced it. They complained and spoke ill. He then said: ‘Prophet Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him would reconcile the two of you in those days when Islam was young. Allah Glorified He has now enriched Islam. Go and exert all that you will’ (Related by Abu Bakr Al-Jassas in Ahkam Al-Quran 3/160).*

(1) *Those whose hearts are to be reconciled’ are those new to Islam. In order to make their hearts steadfast in Islam, Allah the Almighty makes them one of those people who deserve zakat. Sheikh Sha’arawi refutes the claim that ‘Umar abolished this right, confirming meanwhile that he Allah be pleased with him did not find any one of those people at his time to give them their due share of zakat.*

means of disgracing Islam; and how is it that a slave-master can do this and that to his slaves?

This approach is a result of misunderstanding the wisdom behind slave ownership and of the fact that the honour of the bondmaid is in fact elevated by this permissibility. The bondmaid is taken captive in a war. It is possible that he who took her captive could have killed her, but Allah *Glorified is He* protected her blood; developed within the soul the idea of profit and so authorized him who captured her to benefit from her and made conjugal relations with her permissible for him.

You can imagine that while this bondmaid is in her master's house she witnesses the marital relationship between the master and his wife and within the [wider] society around her. It is from the wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* that He *Glorified is He* permitted her master to have intimate relations with her since after this she will not see the mistress of the house as being superior to her. And if she becomes pregnant from her master, she becomes free due to delivery of a child. Allah *Glorified is He* encourages the emancipation and freedom of slaves. Do you not see that after this He *Glorified is He* opens the door of emancipation and enumerates its causes; thus He made it an option for paying *zakat*, a way of giving charity and expiation *(kaffara)* for certain crimes.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for then, behold, they are free of all blame' (*al-Mu'minun:* 6), i.e. we do not praise them nor do we blame them. It is as if this issue is of limited importance.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَمَنِ ٱبْتَغَىٰ وَرَآءَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْعَادُونَ ﴿٧﴾

But anyone who seeks more than this is exceeding the limits [7] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 7)

'…Seek…' means pursue, and '…go beyond that [limit]…' means other than what we mentioned i.e. wives and slaves.

We have mentioned previously that the word 'beyond' *(wara')* is used in the Quran for a number of meanings. Here it means 'other than' wives and slaves. From that [meaning] is Allah's statement: '…But lawful to you are all [women] beyond these…' (*an-Nisa':* 24), i.e. I have forbidden such and such for you, and have permitted for you other than what is mentioned.

'Beyond' *(wara')* is also used to mean 'after'. 'Otherness' between two events does not negate the possibility of these two events taking place at the same time. As for an event being 'after' another event then the time that these two events take place in is different as in, Allah's statement: 'And his wife, standing [nearby], laughed(1) [with happiness]; whereupon We gave her the glad tiding of [the birth of] Isaac and, after Isaac, of [his son] Jacob' (*Hud:* 71), i.e. after him because the time of Jacob's birth is different from Isaac's birth.

Beyond *(wara')* can also mean 'behind' as in His statement: 'and lo, Allah accepted a solemn pledge from those who were granted earlier revelation [when He bade them]: "Make it known unto mankind, and do not conceal it!" But they cast this [pledge] behind their backs, and bartered it away for a trifling gain: and how evil was their bargain!' (*Al-'Imran:* 187) that is, they put it behind their backs.

Beyond *(wara')* can also mean 'in front' as in His statement: '…in front of them was a king who is wont to seize every boat by brute force' (*al-Kahf:* 79). It is known that the king was in front of them waiting to seize every boat that passed by. And His *Glorified is He* statement: '…with hell awaiting him…' (*Ibrahim:* 16) i.e. Hell is in front of him, it will come later, if it had already passed then it would be behind him.

The phrase'…are truly transgressors' (*al-Mu'minun:* 7) means those who transgress and exceed the bounds that have been legislated for them. When Allah *Glorified is He* is warning us against transgression, He, Allah *Glorified is He* differentiates between transgressing the commands and approaching the prohibitions. If it is related to commands He says: '…do not, then, transgress them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229). If it is related to prohibitions He says: '…These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187).

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(1) *Al-Azhari narrated on the authority of Al-Farra' about this verse: 'She laughed out of happiness of security because she feared as Ibrahim did'. Al-Farra said: this is a possibility and Allah Glorified is He knows best. As for those who say that 'she laughed' means she menstruated, I have not heard this from a trustworthy [source]. (Narrated by Ibn Mundhir in Lissan Al-'Arab – root d-h-k.)*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ لِأَمَٰنَٰتِهِمۡ وَعَهۡدِهِمۡ رَٰعُونَ ﴿٨﴾

Who are faithful to their trusts and pledges [8]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 8)

'Faithful' i.e. they uphold them and carry them out. Trust is defined as: everything for which protection is sought. The first thing for which one should seek protection is the pledge of faith in Allah; *Glorified is He* that was taken by Him: as long as you have faith in Allah then you must carry out His commands.

Thus there is a trust of Allah *Glorified is He* and a trust of the creation. The trust Allah *Glorified is He* is the one about which Allah said: 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) Since you accepted to bear the trust you must honour it.

As for pledge , this is everything that a person promises – other than disobedience – and he must fulfil that which he has promised because when you make a promise to a person regarding something, you have tied his actions and bound his plans to the fulfilment of your promise such as when you say to me, 'I will meet you tomorrow in such a place at such a time to do such and such'. I will organize my routine according to this promise. If you were to break your promise, then you have allowed yourself to act according to your leisure all the while constraining my actions and neglecting my interests and ultimately ruining my day. This is why Islam is very strict about breaking promises.

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ عَلَىٰ صَلَوَٰتِهِمۡ يُحَافِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾

And who keep up their prayers [9]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 9)

The previous verses spoke about the prayer in terms of having humility and submission. Here, He mentions the prayer in terms of its performance and guarding it. Guarding the prayer is that you make every prayer at its allotted time, and the allotted time of prayer is the call to prayer (adhan). Some scholars say that the prayer time is extended; so *Zhuhr*, for example, extends from the call (adhan) for *Zhuhr* until just before the call for *'Asr* and like this in all the other prayers. We say: yes, this is correct and that the prayer time is extended. But who has guaranteed that you will live until the end of the prayer time? Who has guaranteed for you that you will pray *'Isha'* before the call for *Fajr*? Yes, you remain free of sin until the last moment if you are able to pray by then. But can you guarantee this? It is like the one who is able to perform the pilgrimage, but delays it until his last days. If he performs the pilgrimage then he is free of responsibility. But he cannot guarantee that he will remain alive long enough to perform the pilgrimage. This is why it is obligatory to perform the pilgrimage without delay as soon as you are able to, so that you are free of sin.

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْوَٰرِثُونَ ۝١٠

will rightly be given[10]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 10)

'…They…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 10), that is those who possess the aforementioned attributes: 'they' are of six types: those who humble themselves in prayer; those who turn away from all that is frivolous; those who are intent on paying *zakat*; those who are mindful of their chastity; those who are faithful to their trusts and to their pledges and; and those who guard their prayers.

These are the inheritors. Inheritance is taking one's own right without a contract or gift because taking wealth from others has to be by means of selling, a contract or a gift. This is why they asked the inheritor: 'Is this your right?' He said: 'Yes'. They said: 'What is your deed as proof?' That is where is the contract by which you took the wealth? He said: 'my contract and deed is: 'concerning [the inheritance of] your children, Allah enjoins [this] upon you: The male shall have the equal of two females' share…' (*an-Nisa':* 11) this is a contract which is superior to and firmer than the contract of humans. As long as my contract is from Allah *Glorified is He* do not say the inheritance is taken without a contract because it is established upon the firmest of contracts: that is the contract from Allah *Glorified is He.*

Many people leave what Allah *Glorified is He* has legislated in inheritance out of love and monopolization of wealth or out of miserliness from those who have been legislated a portion. So he, who has sons and daughters, gives the sons and prevents the daughters from taking. And he who has daughters bequeaths to them all that he owns, preventing his brothers and their uncles from their right in his wealth. This is very common in society.

It is obligatory upon you to take caution in the affair of inheritance and respect the law of Allah *Glorified is He* and His division of wealth. Allah *Glorified is He* has gifted you wealth and left you to act independently with it throughout your life. You cannot then act independently after your death as well. You must leave the possessor and benefactor of the wealth to deal with it. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…ordinance from Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 11), i.e. not from anyone else; as long as the ordinance is from Allah *Glorified is He,* then you must obey it and carry it out. As soon as you refuse it, you are in reality refusing Allah *Glorified is He* and rejecting His division.

The one who ponders upon the issue of inheritance will find virtue upon virtue in that which Allah *Glorified is He* has legislated. Whosoever loves their sons should also give to their daughters so that you do not corrupt the bonds of kinship between your children after your death. Some men, who had previously taken all of their father's wealth preventing it from the daughters, come to us saying: we want to rectify the mistake and repeat the division according to what Allah has legislated.

We find that some people have rays of faith such that if some of the brothers refuse to repeat the division according to what Allah *Glorified is He* has legislated they say: I will bear the inheritance of my sisters from my own personal wealth. It is the likes of these to whom Allah *Glorified is He* grants success and blesses them in that which remains from their wealth because they placed their reliance upon Allah *Glorified is He* and so He *Glorified is He* increases them from his bounty and multiplies their small wealth until it becomes great. As for the one who relies on that which he possesses, Allah *Glorified is He* assigns him to his wealth.

We are perplexed by the one who assigns his wealth to his daughters in order to prevent his brothers from inheriting. We say to him: you are not just in this dealing, you must deal with them equally, for if you leave your daughters poor with no wealth, who will provide for and look after them after you have gone? Their uncles will provide for them, thus, let your transaction be equitable. When Allah *Glorified is He* gives inheritance to these groups He, Allah *Glorified is He* does so out of his bounty and generosity. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this by his statement: ‘None of you shall enter Paradise by his good deeds’ they said: ‘Not even You O Messenger of Allah?’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Not even I except that Allah will encompass me by His grace.’(1)

As for Allah’s statement: ‘…Enter paradise by virtue of what you were doing [in life]!’ (*an-Nahl:* 32) this is specific to the mere entering of paradise. As for increase, this is from the bounty of Allah *Glorified is He,* ‘…and give them yet more out of His bounty…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 173). From among Allah’s names is ‘The Inheritor’ (Al-Warith). He said: ‘and [mention] Zechariah, when he called to his Lord, “My Lord, do not leave me alone [with no heir], while you are the best of inheritors.”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 89) what is it that Allah *Glorified is He* inherits from us?

Allah *Glorified is He* created humanity, gave mankind the means of obtaining ownership [over things] and from His bounty. He *Glorified and Exalted is He* distributed this ownership amongst his slaves: this person owns such and such and this one owns such and such. On the day of Resurrection all sovereignty will return to its rightful owner. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* will be the sole Inheritor on the day when He *Glorified is He* will say: ‘…With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir:* 16)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the best of inheritors. The inheritor takes his inheritance so that he [himself] may benefit from it. Allah *Glorified is He* however, inherits that which he had originally left for others so that its benefit would return to them and increase them in their blessings and thus He gives them manifold. Just as He *Glorified is He* used to give them in this world through intermediary means, He *Glorified is He* will inherit these means in the Hereafter and will give them, from His bounty, without intermediary means. You will live in paradise in harmony, free of tiredness and struggle and will obtain whatever you wish for without having to move.

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith, Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6463) and Muslim in his Sahih (2816) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him*

Thus, humans inherit in order to take, whereas Allah *Glorified is He* inherits in order to give. Because of this He *Glorified is He* is the best of inheritors.

What is it that the believers who are adorned with these attributes inherit? Allah *Glorified is He* answers [by saying]:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ ٱلۡفِرۡدَوۡسَ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ١١

That will inherit the paradise; [and] therein shall they abide[11] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 11)

Allah *Glorified is He* inherits the perishable from them in order to give them the eternal *al-Firdaus* – the highest garden in paradise – in the hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* inherited in order to bring benefit to his slaves and to increase the benefit for them. In this world we used to benefit through intermediary means whereas in the hereafter we will benefit without intermediary means. Allah *Glorified is He* inherited in order to give – not just to return something similar to what he took but He *Glorified is He* gives above and beyond that, because we take as inheritance that which perishes whereas Allah *Glorified is He* gives us from his inheritance that which remains eternally.

But who do they [the believers] inherit *al-Firdaus* from? They said: when Allah *Glorified is He* created mankind He gave them the ability to choose between faith and disbelief; obedience and disobedience and prepared consequences for these choices. Thus He *Glorified is He* made paradise on the presumption that all of mankind would be believers such that if all of them were to enter paradise there would be no resultant overcrowding. Likewise He *Glorified is He* made the fire on the presumption that all of mankind would be disbelievers such that if all of them were to disbelieve they would all have their place in the fire.

Thus when the companions of paradise enter paradise they will be abandoning their places in the fire just as the companions of the Fire will be abandoning their places in paradise when they enter the fire. The companions of the Fire will inherit the unoccupied places in the fire while the companions of paradise will inherit the unoccupied places within Paradise.

Al-Firdaus is the highest place in paradise. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say, ‘If you ask Allah, then ask Him for *al-Firdaus* because it is the highest part of paradise and the middle part of paradise’(1). *Al-Firdaus* is a garden on the highest hill in paradise i.e. in a distinguished place. Loftiness is sought after in housing and gardens in this world: people like houses in high places where the air and water are pure. Do you not see them farm on raised [platforms] and wherever the earth is flat they make low drainage canals in order to drain out excess water which damages the harvest. This is why He, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and the parable… is that of a garden on high, fertile ground: a rainstorm smites it, and thereupon it brings forth its fruit twofold…’ (*al-Baqara:* 265).

Likewise, high ground is not irrigated by flooding but is irrigated by rainwater which cleanses the leaves before irrigating the roots making the plant benefit [completely]. This is why The Lord of honour says: ‘…and thereupon it brings forth its fruit twofold…’ (*al-Baqara:* 265).

It is known that leaves are the lungs of plants and it is through them that photosynthesis occurs by which the plants are nourished. If the pores of the leaves are closed up and dust gathers over them this will reduce the ability of the plant to breathe. It is like the person whose lungs are afflicted with an illness which prevents him from breathing properly.

Al-Firdaus has another distinguishing feature in that Allah *Glorified is He* planted its trees with His own] hand just as He *Glorified is He* honoured Adam *may Allah be pleased with him* by creating him with His own hand: ‘…O Satan (Iblīs)! What has kept thee from prostrating thyself before that [being] which I have created with My hands?...’ (*Sad:* 75)

It is related that when Allah *Glorified is He* created *al-Firdaus* and planted its trees with His [own] hand He said to *al-Firdaus*: ‘Speak’.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/335.339), Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7423) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

When *al-Firdaus* spoke she said: 'Truly, to a happy state shall attain the believers' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…therein shall they abide' (*al-Mu'minun:* 11) because the pleasures of paradise are everlasting. We know that the pleasures of this world will come to an end. No matter how much a person is given of it, it will be severed and disappear; either it will leave you, leaving you in poverty and need or you will leave it by dying. This is why He, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the pleasures of the Hereafter: 'never-failing and never out of reach' (*al-Waqi'a:* 33).

In this way see that in the opening of this chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* began talking about success of the Hereafter. He mentioned the fruit[s] and reward of faith first as if to say: 'This is the reward of the one who has faith in Me and follows My methodology.' It is like the opening of the chapter of *ar-Rahman* when He, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'The Most Gracious. Has imparted this Quran [unto man] He has created man. He has imparted unto him articulate thought and speech' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-4). How is this since Allah *Glorified is He* created man before teaching him the Quran?

This is because the one who makes something is the one who sets its guidelines. They define its purpose before beginning its production. For example–and Allah *Glorified is He* is the greatest example–the one who manufactures a fridge defines its function, purpose and manufacturing guidelines before its production.

And so the Quran is the methodology of the human and is the guideline of human life. Because of this Allah *Glorified is He* created the methodology and put down the guidelines of creation before creating Man.

وَلَقَدۡ خَلَقۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مِن سُلَٰلَةٖ مِّن طِينٖ ١٢

We created man from an essence of clay [12]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 12)

We have previously spoken about the creation of Man. We know that the Creator created the first human, Adam, from soil and from him created his partner and then the rest of humanity through intermarriage as He, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women…' (*an-Nisa':* 1).

The issue of the creation of the sky and the earth is one which Allah *Glorified is He* kept to Himself – not revealing it to anyone as He, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves; and neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray' (*al-Kahf:* 51). So do not pay heed to those in every time and place that lead men astray, who claim [to have] knowledge and cognition and say: 'The universe was [all] a single mass which used to rotate at [great] speed after which it split into parts which formed the earth etc…' And about Man they say: 'he is from a monkey' and other such superstitions which have no authentic basis.

It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* gave us faith-based immunity which protects us from being carried away by these theories. He, Allah *Glorified is He* informed us about these people and warned us about them. Because they have not witnessed anything of creation nor did Allah *Glorified is He* take them as helper so they say such things. This is an affair that Allah *Glorified is He* has taken upon Himself so do not state knowledge about Him except through that about which God Himself has informed you. The word 'human' is a generic noun which can apply to the singular, dual or plural; masculine or feminine. Thus, every single one of us is a human by the proof that Allah *Glorified is He* excluded a plural form from a singular word when He *Glorified is He* said: 'Consider the flight of time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself. Unless he be of those who attain to faith…' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3). Thus He *Glorified is He* excluded a group from the singular, man.

'…We create…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 120) means: we brought into existence from nothingness. We said previously that Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed the attribute of creation for mankind with the crucial difference that Allah *Glorified is He* creates out of nothingness, whereas man creates from something already existent. In Allah's creation there is movement and life which grows and multiplies, whereas that which man creates is stagnant and does not change. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* when describing His essence said: '…hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14)

As for the statement in the Quran about 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: '…I shall create for you out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your] destiny…"

(*Al-'Imran:* 49) this is special for Him *peace be upon him* the bringing into existence is through a command from Allah which He displayed at the hand of His Prophet.

As for the meaning of: 'Now, indeed, We create man…' (*al-Mu'minum*: 12) that is the first man Adam '…out of the essence of clay' (*al-Mu'minum*: 12). The word used for 'essence' here, *sulala* means linguistically to extract the quintessence of something out of it just as a sword is drawn out of its sheath, that is the case in which it is stored. The sword is the effective and lethal instrument, while the sheath is merely the thing that protects and carries this important object.

The essence *(sulala)* is, therefore, the best part of an object. Allah *Glorified is He* created the first man from the best types and elements of soil. If you were to take a fistful of soil the prime of it will slip through your fingers while only the coarse, sandy material would remain in your hand.

When Hassan ibn Thabit *may Allah be pleased with him* wished to mock Quraysh because of their enmity towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he said: 'Permit me to mock them from the pulpit O Messenger of Allah'. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'will you mock them while I am from them?' So Hassan said: 'I will draw you out of them as a hair is drawn out of dough'.(1)

The word essence *(sulala)* is also used to mean a good thing so they say: So and so is from the essence *(sulala)* of such and such a thing and, so and so is of good nobility i.e. a station of praise. So much so that they preserve the known origins of horses by registering birth certificates for them. From this came the fame of the original Arab horse.

Modern science has affirmed the truth of this verse, by laboratory analysis they have affirmed that the elements that make up the human being are the same elements which soil is made up of; sixteen elements from oxygen to magnesium. What is meant here is the fertile soil which is suitable for farming because the earth, generally, is made up of many elements some say one hundred and thirteen.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3531) and Muslim in his Sahih (2480) on the authority of their Sheikh 'Uthman ibn Abu Shayba with his chain to 'A'isha may Allah be pleased with her*

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَٰهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ﴿١٣﴾

And then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a safe place [13] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 13)

That is after We made him a regular human being with a spirit, We made him grow. Just as We created the first human from the essence of soil, We will create his progeny from the essence of water [semen] and its purest constituent which is sperm. The human eats drinks and breathes; blood then absorbs the nutrition, the remaining substances leaving the human body by way of faeces. Then the blood is cleansed and filtered in the lungs and kidneys. From blood comes the human's energy and sperm, from which the human is created. Thus, even in sperm he is a purified quintessence.

Sperm, which is the basis of a human's creation, lives in semen. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Was he not once a [mere] drop of sperm that had been spilt.' (*al-Qiyama:* 37) Then We put this sperm '…in [the womb's] firm keeping' (*al-Mu'minun:* 13); 'firm keeping' is the womb which Allah *Glorified is He* created in this fashion. He *Glorified is He* protected it with the pelvic bones and made it suitable for receiving and preserving the sperm.

ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا ٱلنُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْمُضْغَةَ عِظَٰمًا
فَكَسَوْنَا ٱلْعِظَٰمَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَٰهُ خَلْقًا ءَاخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ ٱللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ ٱلْخَٰلِقِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

And then We made that drop into a clinging form, and We made that form into a lump of flesh, and We made that lump into bones, and We clothed those bones with flesh, and later We made him into other forms — glory be to God, the best of creators! [14] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 14)

The scholars say that after forty days the drop of sperm turns into a blood-clot [germ-cell]. It is named such because it clings onto the womb's membrane. Scientists have named this the zygote which is in reality a small fertilized egg which begins to take nutrients.

From amongst the wonders of Allah's creation of the human being is that if a woman is not pregnant, she menstruates and if she becomes pregnant she does not menstruate. Why is this? This is because the menstrual blood exits when it has no function and the mother does not benefit from it. As for when she becomes pregnant, by the power of Allah *Glorified is He* it turns into nutrition for the new foetus.

Then He, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and then We create out of the germ-cell an embryonic lump…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14). This is a small piece of flesh the size of a morsel of food. We have previously said that the embryonic lump is thereafter split into that which is complete in itself and that which is incomplete as He, Allah *Glorified is He* said in another verse: '…then out of an embryonic lump complete [in itself] and yet incomplete, so that We might make [your origin] clear unto you…' (*al-Hajj:* 5). This verse explains this stage in detail whereas in the verse we are currently studying He informs of the developmental stages of creation in general. This is so that we do not suspect that the Quran repeats itself as some people claim.

The complete embryonic lump is the one from which limbs and features are formed. As for the incomplete one it remains as a precaution in case of damage to the body, just as when injuries occur, the incomplete one will fulfil its precautionary role.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: '…We create within the embryonic lump bones, and then We clothe the bones with flesh – and then We bring [all] this into being as a new creation…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) because in all these stages he was: a drop of sperm, then a blood-clot, then an embryo, then flesh and bones which was still connected to its mother taking food from her. Then, when Allah *Glorified is He* wills that, it should be born, it separates from its mother in order to take on life by itself. This is why we find that the moment the foetus separates from its mother during labour it confronts a difficult problem: that it will face an independent existence in which it will have to use its bodily systems for the first time, the first of which is breathing.

It is from Allah's mercy that the first part of the foetus that comes out [of the womb] is the head: this is so that it is able to breathe. Thereafter the rest of the body comes out. If the opposite was to occur, the feet coming out first, then it is possible that the baby can die. This is because it separates from its mother while still being dependent on her and is thus unable to breathe to maintain its new independent life. This is why in such a case the doctor will resort to a caesarean section to save the foetus's life and prevent it from choking to death.

Since the story of the creation of the human contains many lessons and signs throughout the stages which the human goes through, it was appropriate that the verse should end with Allah's statement: '…hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of artisans!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) This is because when you stop and think about Allah's ability in creating the human you are not able to say anything except: Allah be praised and Praised is Allah *the Creator*.

Therefore, it is narrated that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* recited this verse, ʿUmar *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of artisans!' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said to the scribe: 'write it, for verily it has been revealed'.(1) This is because ʿUmar's statement was a natural reaction to Allah's ability, His wondrous design and His unique creation. This is a type of harmony between the Arabic instinct and language and between the methodology of the Quran which was revealed in the language of its people.

It is said that Muʿadh ibn Jabal *may Allah be pleased with him* also uttered it.(2) Similarly, another man ʿAbdullah ibn Saʿd ibn Abu As-Sarh(1), however with a different outcome since ʿUmar and Muʿadh said it out of a wonder that Allah *Glorified is He* approved by His power and unique design.

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(1) *{A Hadith from 'Umar may Allah be please with him: narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba and 'Abd ibn Humayd and Ibn Mundhir on the authority of Saleh Abu-Zayl that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him said: '[I swear] by the One in Whose hand my soul is in, It was completed by that which you said O 'Umar'} [As-Suyuti narrates it in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/92]*

(2) *{From Mu'adh ibn Jabal. Narrated by Ibn Rahawayh, Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, At-Tabarani in Al-Awsat and Ibn Mardawayh on the authority of Zayd ibn Thabit who said: 'The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him dictated the verse: 'Now, indeed, We create man out of the essence of clay,' (al-Mu'minum: 12) until: '...a new creation...' (al-Mu'minum: 14). Then Muadh ibn Jabal may Allah be pleased with him said: 'hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of artisans!' to which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him laughed. Mu'adh asked Him: 'What made you laugh O Messenger of Allah?'. He replied: It is completed as: '...hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of artisans!' (al-Mu'minum: 14)*

As for Ibn Abu As-Sarh, he also said it out of wonder; however when his statement coincided with the statement in the Quran, he became conceited and began to claim that he was receiving revelation just as Prophet Muhammad. And why would he not since he had said that which the Quran did. Despite this he remained well mannered only claiming to receive revelation. However, his haughtiness increased and his delusion eventually made him say: 'I will reveal that which Allah *Glorified is He* reveals, thus Allah's existence is not necessary in this matter'. As a result he apostatized, Allah *Glorified is He* protect us from that! It was about him that Allah's statement was revealed: 'And who could be [more] wicked than he who invents a lie about Allah, or says, "This has been revealed unto me," The while nothing has been revealed to him? – or he who says, "I, too, can bestow from on high the like of what Allah has bestowed"…' (*al-An'am:* 93).

Ibn Abi As-Sarh remained until the conquest of Mecca when ʿUthman *may Allah be pleased with him* interceded on his behalf to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When he saw ʿUthman's desire to release Ibn Abu As-Sarh, he remained silent. When ʿUthman *may Allah be pleased with him* took him and left, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his companions: 'Was there not amongst you who would finish him off?' They said: 'O Messenger of Allah, if [only] You had nodded (i.e. You had signalled us to do this)'. Look at the logic of prophecy: he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'It does not befit a Prophet to have treacherous eyes.'⁽²⁾ In other words, this kind of behaviour is not appropriate for

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(1) *He is 'Abdullah ibn Sa'd Abu Sarh Al-Qurashi Al-Amiri from the clan of Amir ibn Lu'ayy the conqueror of Al-Ifriqiya. He accepted Islam before the conquest of Mecca and was one of the scribes of the revelation. He was the right-hand man of 'Amr ibn Al-'As when Egypt was conquered and become its governor after him for a period of twelve years. All of Al-Ifriqiya was under his control. He defeated the Byzantines in the battles of Dhat As-Sawari in the year 34 (A.H.) Died in the year 37 (A.H.). [Al-I'lam by Az-Zawkali4/89]*

(2) *Related by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (2683) and An-Nasa'i (7/1060) from the narration of Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas may Allah be pleased with him. The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: "Was there not amongst you a guided man you would kill*=

Prophets. If you had done it on your own accord, then there would not have been a problem.

After that, ibn Abu As-Sarh believed and became a good Muslim. He later became the governor of Egypt, led the conquests in Africa, and ended the riot that was raised in Nubia. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* had kept him in store for this important affair.

After the wonder we felt in the [discussion of] stages of man's creation, his coming to life, and the affirmation that Allah *Glorified is He* is the best of creators, He *Glorified is He* reminds us that this life is not everlasting. He *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُم بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ لَمَيِّتُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

Then indeed, after that you are to die [15]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 15)

You may ask: how does the True Lord *Glorified is He* inform us about the stages of creation and follow it by the stages of death and resurrection? We say: Allah *Glorified is He* put them together so that you may confront life knowing and remembering the thing that will end it. This is so that you do not become haughty nor heedless of the ultimate end; planning your life on this foundation.

Similar to that is His statement: 'Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion, and He is over all things competent. [He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed – and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2) It is as if He *Glorified is He* announced our death before He gave us life. He mentioned death before life so that you may face life and death, not being deluded by the worldly life but working for that which comes after death.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* addressed His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: 'Indeed, you are to die, and indeed, they are to die' (*al-'Ankabut:* 30).

= *him as I had refrained from giving him the oath of allegiance?' They said: 'We do not know, O Messenger of Allah, what you hold inside. If only you had signaled with your eyes'. He said: 'It does not befit a Prophet to have treacherous eyes."*

'After that' means after all the stages of creation which have passed: starting with the creation of the first human from soil until He *Glorified is He* says: 'Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14)

The one who ponders upon this verse will notice that though it talks about death, an event that no one doubts, the True Lord *Glorified is He* begins it with the word 'indeed' 'Then indeed, after that you are to die'. It is known that emphasis is required when encountering a denial, but in the case of no denial, emphasis is not required. Despite this, when He spoke about the Resurrection, an object of doubt and denial, He *Glorified is He* said:

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ تُبْعَثُونَ ١٦

and then, on the Day of resurrection,
you will be raised up again [16]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 16)

He did not say: you are to be resurrected as He said: 'you are to die'. Why does He, then, emphasise the affair about which there is general agreement while not emphasising the affair about which there is denial?

This is because the speaker is Allah, the One Who sees that you are heedless of death despite its clarity. Thus, since you are heedless of it, it is as though you deny it. This is why He emphasised it. This is also why it is said: 'I have never seen a certainty more resembling of doubt than people's certainty of death'. Everybody knows and experiences death, yet they distance it from themselves and do not ever imagine it to befall them.

As for the Resurrection, its proofs are clear and undeniable. This is why the verse does not include an emphasis. The proofs of the Resurrection are too clear for the intellect to deny. This is why I will make a general statement regarding it without resorting to emphasis. As for the one who doubts or denies it, we will emphasise the speech.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعَ طَرَآئِقَ وَمَا كُنَّا عَنِ ٱلْخَلْقِ غَٰفِلِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

And We created seven levels above you: We are never unmindful of Our creation [17]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 17)

We observe in this chapter that the number seven holds secrets which we must ponder. In the introductory [passages] of this chapter He *Glorified is He* mentioned seven types [of people]: 'Truly, to a happy state shall attain the believers; those who' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1-2).

We find that the developmental stages through which the human passes are seven: essence of clay; then a drop of sperm; then a blood-clot (germ-cell); then an embryonic lump; then bones; then flesh and then bringing [all] this into being as a new creation.

Here, He says: 'And We have created above you seven layered heavens.' In another verse, He says: 'It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them.' (*at-Talaq:* 12)

These seven targets an upper limit, the other seven are for the developmental stages of the human, and last seven for the heavens and the earth that have been created for mankind. 'The layered heavens' refer to the paths that are frequently travelled by the angels. So, look at the sky and its breadth and say: glorified be the One who forged it.

You will notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not mention the earth here. Why? This is because we are firmly established upon the earth and so do not fear any harm from it. Rather, we fear that the sky may fall upon us. This is why He *Glorified is He* said, immediately after: 'and never have We been of [Our] creation unaware'. Thus, We will not be unmindful of the sky above you, rather, We will uphold it by Our hands as He *Glorified is He* said: 'Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving.' (*Fatir:* 41)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a sensory proof for [the truth of] this verse. How does Allah *Glorified is He* hold the sky above us without any pillars? It is similar to the bird which Allah *Glorified is He* upholds in the sky: 'Do they not see the birds above them with wings outspread and [sometimes] folded in? None holds them [aloft] except the Most Merciful' (*al-Mulk:* 19).

We know that the bird flies in the sky by using its wings to push against the air, thus defying gravity and not falling just as the swimmer whose arms push against water in order to swim. Still, when the bird contracts its wings it remains in the sky without falling, who is it then that upholds it in this instance? You always see this image never doubting it. Thus, when I tell you that I uphold the skies from falling upon the earth, believe it, and use that which you witness in the sensory realm as a proof for this matter of the unseen realm.

In His statement: 'and never have We been of [Our] creation unaware,' it is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: be at peace concerning the sky above you, as I have put in place binding safeguards which ensure your continued safe existence under its canopy. Be at peace because it is in Our hands and under our care.

But, what is the meaning of '[Our] creation'. Does it refer to mankind or the creation of the sky? It means: We are not heedless of the sky, thus We have put in place systems and an order which protects you and guarantees your safety.

Heedlessness is to abandon something because it has escaped one's mind. This can never be true in the case of Allah *Glorified is He* since He is overtaken neither by drowsiness nor by sleep.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنزَلْنَا مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءًۢ بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَّٰهُ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ ذَهَابٍۭ بِهِۦ لَقَٰدِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

And We sent water down from the sky in due measure and lodged it in the earth — We have the power to take it all away if We so wish [18] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 18)

Concerning water, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have sent down rain from the sky in a measured amount'. Are the skies the storage place of water? No, the storage of water is the earth, as is [mentioned] in Allah's saying: ‘Say, “Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds. And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its sustenance in four days without distinction – for [the information] of those who ask.’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10)

When the Creator *Glorified is He* summoned man to this existence, he places upon the earth the necessary elements for the preservation of life: air, food, and water. We said previously that man is able to withstand a lack of food, but less so a lack of water. As for air, he is not able to do without it. This is why the Power of Allah did not make anyone sovereign over it, being the most basic and necessary element of life. Thus, the atmosphere and the air which encompasses the earth are part of what is meant in His statement: ‘and determined therein its [creatures’] sustenance.’ The proof of this is that when one leaves the earth’s atmosphere, they are deprived of air.

It is from the Creator’s divine power and wisdom that He made the water on the earth salty. This is because salt is the base material used in the removal of putridity from things. Fresh water is exposed to change and putrid, it is only by salt that we can remove corruptive elements; we put it in our food to preserve it and use it in tanning of leather, etc.

This is why a poet said:

O men of religion, O salt of the land
    Who will rectify the salt if it is corrupted?

Thus, the original storage of water is earth. It falls upon the earth after a process of evaporation which cleanses the water, making it safe for drinking and irrigation. We said that the Creator *Glorified is He* made the portion of water on the earth greater than the portion of dry land, so that the process of evaporation could take place [successfully] allowing enough rainwater to form in order to meet the needs of the earth’s inhabitants.

It is from Allah’s mercy towards us that the rainwater falls ‘in measured amount’ in accordance to its need. If it were to fall all at once, it would be a devastating storm as experienced by the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and the people of Ma’rib. In another place He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And there is not a thing but that with Us are its depositories, and We do not send it down except according to a known measure' (*al-Hijr:* 21). Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'and settled it in the earth' so that we can meet our needs from the rainwater. The remaining rainwater seeps into the earth, as He *Glorified is He* said: 'and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs' (*al-'Ankabut:* 21). From amongst the wonders of Allah's power is that ground water takes different courses such that freshwater does not mix with saltwater despite the fact that water is distinguished by its malleability. Those that dig up wells also find many wondrous things including freshwater neighbouring saltwater, and even in the middle of the sea, this phenomenon is found. Each has its own current, separate from the other.

Underground water is a natural storage for water which we can extract when needed. It also comes to our aid when the water available on the surface of the earth is depleted: and settled it in the earth'. It is a reserve for when the need for it arises. If the rain dries up, you are able to extract it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of His ability to remove this blessing: 'And indeed, We are Able to take it away'. This means use this blessing in a way that will not expose it to being removed. In another place, He said: 'Say, "Have you considered: if your water was to become sunken [into the earth], then who could bring you flowing water?' (*al-Mulk:* 30)

When you count the blessings of Allah which He has bestowed upon us, beginning with water: 'And We have sent down rain from the sky in a measured amount' you will find that they are also seven. It is clear this number has many secrets in this chapter. Therefore, the scholars have deeply investigated this number.

While I was a professor of the *Shari'a* College in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I remember being with a number of professors including the leader of our delegation ash-Sheikh Zaki Ghayth *may Allah have mercy upon him and forgive him,* the leader of the delegation of educational affairs Professor Salah Bek Al-Baqir and the Kingdom's Sheikh of scholars during that time, As-Sayyid Ishaq 'Azuz, who would gather us every night in the hotel he was staying in, and we would study some issues of knowledge. In one such gathering Ash-Sheikh Ibrahim ʿAtiyya raised the question of this number in the Noble Quran. While reading the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi, he found the following: ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab said to Ibn ‘Abbas *may Allah be pleased with them* ‘O Ibn ‘Abbas, do you know when the Night of *Qadr* is?’ Ibn ʿAbbas *may Allah be pleased with him* replied: ‘It is most likely on the twenty-seventh night’. When we heard this, we said we were talking about the number seven whereas the story refers to the number twenty-seven. When we disagreed, Sheikh Muhammad Abu ʿAli *may Allah lengthen his life* suggested that we go and pray in the Noble Sanctuary instead of the hotel, acting by the way of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Anytime we came across a serious issue, he would get up for prayer and we would say: ‘perhaps Allah will disclose to us the truth of this matter.’

After finishing praying, we sat to debate the issue. All of a sudden there appeared a man unknown to us, who resembled the dervishes, unconcerned about himself, sat next to us listening to what we were saying. Then he participated in the conversation and said: ‘Did the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* not say: “Seek it out in the last ten of *Ramadan*”(1)? So: take the first twenty away and only consider the last ten.’ We then looked around but could not find him. It was as if he was trying to say that the Night of *Qadr* is only found in these ten and thus the twenty-seventh would in fact be the seventh night. This is also from amongst the secrets of this number. ‘But above everyone who is endowed with knowledge there is One who knows all’ (*Yusuf:* 76).

May Allah lengthen the lives of those mentioned who remain with us and forgive those who died?

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2021) from the Hadith of Ibn 'Abbas and by Muslim in his Sahih (1166) in the Book of Fasting: On the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him with the wording ‘I was shown the Night of Qadr, then one of My wives woke me and I forgot it. So seek it out in the last ten.”*

فَأَنشَأْنَا لَكُم بِهِۦ جَنَّٰتٍ مِّن نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَٰبٍ لَّكُمْ فِيهَا فَوَٰكِهُ كَثِيرَةٌ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

With it We produced for you gardens of date palms and vines, with many fruits there for you to eat [19] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 19)

A garden is a place concealed by lofty trees and plants which conceal whoever traverses within it. Thus, he does need other than it to fulfil the requirements of life. It is therefore perfect in that it suffices him. He chose these types of plants and trees 'palm trees and grapevines in which for you are abundant fruits' because of their importance to the Arabs. Thus, He also said 'abundant fruits' because they did not comprise all types.

وَشَجَرَةً تَخْرُجُ مِن طُورِ سَيْنَآءَ تَنۢبُتُ بِٱلدُّهْنِ وَصِبْغٍ لِّلْـَٔاكِلِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

And a tree, growing out of Mount Sinai, that produces oil and seasoning for your food [20] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 20)

Sinai is a beautiful place because Allah blessed it. It was upon the mountain At-Tur that Allah *Glorified is He* spoke to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. It is a blessed place, just as Allah blessed the land of Jerusalem. He said: 'Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs' (*al-Isra':* 1).

'Produces oil' refers to the olive tree from which olive oil is extracted. 'And food for those who eat'. It is taken as a condiment, eaten with bread. It is the most sought after and tasty food in Sinai and the Levant (Ash-Sham), where olives are cultivated. We tasted this famous delicacy in Lebanon when we went there during the olive harvest.

وَإِنَّ لَكُمْ فِى ٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ لَعِبْرَةً ۖ نُّسْقِيكُم مِّمَّا فِى بُطُونِهَا وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَٰفِعُ كَثِيرَةٌ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

There is a lesson for you in livestock: We produce milk for you to drink from their bellies. And they have many other benefits: you eat them [21] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 21)

Livestock such as buffaloes are appended to cattle since they did not exist amongst the Arabs. A lesson is something about which one ponders and draws evidence with regards to the power of Allah and His unique design in the creation of livestock.

But what is the lesson to be drawn from the creation of livestock? The True Lord *Glorified is He* spoke of the creation of man, who is created from the elect material of soil and from sperm and so on regarding all the developmental stages of his creation. In livestock, you can see something of this choosing. Livestock eat from here and there and gather different types of food; from this mixture comes dung, a substance which has a bad unbearable odour, and the blood of the animal is formed. From amongst the dung and blood, the Creator *Glorified is He* brings out pure milk. This is the process of extraction and purification.

We notice that the verse under discussion says: ‘We give you drink from that which is in their bellies’ because we take the milk from the female only. Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘and for you in them are numerous benefits’. We notice that the verse in the chapter of *an-Nahl* concentrated on the purification of the milk from amongst the dung and blood, whereas here, it concentrates on the other uses of livestock. Each verse takes an aspect of the subject and tackles it from a particular perspective. We clarify this point for those who claim there is repetition within the Noble Quran. Many verses address the same subject; this does not make it repetition. They are in fact different parts of a whole which form the foundation of a subject. Every part gives a particular lesson, such that if you were to put all these apparently repetitive parts together, they would give you a complete picture of the subject.

The uses of livestock are many. We take wool and fur from them. People used to make cloth, carpets, and tents, long before modern textiles were known.

Leather and bones are also some of the uses of livestock. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And Allah has made for you from your homes a place of rest and made for you from the hides of the animals tents which you find light on your day of travel and your day of encampment; and from their wool, fur and hair is furnishing and enjoyment for a time’ (*an-Nahl:* 80).

‘And from them you eat’, He mentioned the eating of flesh as the final use because it is the final part of the animal which can be benefited from. We have mentioned previously that the animal which Allah has made permissible for us to eat, if exposed to that which will remove its life, will raise its neck uncovering the place of its slaughtering as if it is saying: ‘quickly, benefit from me before I die’.

About other uses of the livestock, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they carry your loads to a land you could not have reached except with difficulty to yourselves. Indeed, your Lord is Kind and Merciful’ (*an-Nahl:* 7). Thus, each verse talks about livestock giving us a piece of information, as part of the cohesion of the entire Quran.

وَعَلَيۡهَا وَعَلَى ٱلۡفُلۡكِ تُحۡمَلُونَ (٢٢)

And you ride on them, as you do in ships [22]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 22)

We mount the animals and load our goods on them. But since three quarters of the earth’s surface is water, the True Lord *Glorified is He* also wanted to inform us that He also carries us upon the water ‘and on ships you are carried’. Just as I (Allah) prepared mounts for you on the narrow, dry land, I also prepared for you that which will carry you on the vast waters.

Since this speech was about ships, it was appropriate to mention the one who has a connection to the ark – Noah *peace be upon him*:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِۦ فَقَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنۡ إِلَٰهٍ غَيۡرُهُۥٓۚ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ (٢٣)

We sent Noah to his people. He said, ‘My people, serve God,
for He is your only god. Will you not heed Him?’ [23]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 23)

After having informed us of the creation of man and animals, of some of the blessings which He bestowed upon us, the Quran began to inform us of the making of the ark. This is because someone may ask: what is the nature of the ark? Was it created from raw materials just like man and animals or did it grow like plants? The Creator *Glorified is He* clarified that it came into existence through divine inspiration: ‘So We inspired to him, “Construct the ship under Our observation, and Our inspiration, and when Our command”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 27).

‘Under Our observation’, refers to the fact that it was a precise design. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not leave His prophet to do whatever he wanted to. He followed him up, observed him and instructed him on the method of its construction and what materials to use. He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And We carried him on a [construction of] planks and nails’ (*al-Qamar:* 13). This refers to ropes by which they would tie the planks of wood together, or nails attaching the planks together.

However firm the planks of wood are made by coming together, there is no escape from gaps through which water can seep. How, then, is it possible to avoid this in the initial stages of building a ship? They say that the designer of a ship must firstly dry the wood very well before using it for building. Thus, when water drops on the wood after it has been built, this will cause the wood to expand, closing of any gaps and in turn preventing water from seeping through.

From amongst the wonders and miracles of the Quran regarding the building of ships is His statement: ‘And to Him belong the ships [with sails] elevated in the sea like mountains’ (*ar-Rahman:* 24). This type of ships did not exist when the Quran was revealed. Allah informed us of them, indicating that it is He *Glorified is He* who bestowed us with this blessing. He knew the levels that man could reach in the building of ships and that they would be firm and lofty like mountains.

Since this speech of ours is concerning ships, it is natural and appropriate that we should mention Nuh because He was the first one to be guided, by way of divine inspiration, to building the ark. He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And We had certainly sent Noah to his people’. After having spoken about livestock and the ensuing benefits and blessings accruing from them–which like the earth will perish–the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to give us an insight into the eternal life and its everlasting bounties which will not perish, He mentioned His methodology by which Nuh was sent –one of the most determined from amongst the Messengers.

Allah missioned Nuh to the recipients who are His people. Allah only sends a Messenger to people about whom He is concerned. How come they do not pay Him any concern although being His servants whom He created and of them made His deputies on the earth?

The one who creates or designs something must place guidelines for its maintenance in order to give it its objective in life and fulfils its role in a complete manner. We previously gave the example – and Allah is the loftiest example – of the manufacturer of the fridge or television who prepares a catalogue containing information about installation, how to maintain it and how to repair it.

Thus, the One Who created man and made him His deputy on the earth has more reason to set these guidelines and safeguard His creation. This is why, in the Qudsi Hadith He *Glorified is He* says: 'O son of Adam, I created everything for you, and created you for Me, so do not preoccupy yourself with that which belongs to you, over that which you belong to', i.e. as long as everything belongs to you, works for you and fulfils its function then you must also fulfil the function for which I created you.

Therefore, your Lord set laws for your protection by saying do this and do not do that. You must comply by the commands and fulfil them because they are the secret of beauty in the universe, and the secret of felicity and harmony in life. You must also avoid the prohibitions because they will lead to ugliness and uncover the defects of the society. As for the affairs about which He provided no instructions, leaving you free to either do them or leave them because they do not lead to ugliness within the society. These affairs are called 'the permissible things'. Allah has left them to your discretion and choice.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* summoned man to this universe, He created for him the essentials of life–such as food, drink, and air, as well as a means for the survival of the human race such as reproduction. The safety guidelines address these essentials. He organised and defined that which is permissible to eat and that which is prohibited saying: eat this and do not eat that; drink this and do not drink that. When we observe inventions of material things, we find that the inventor always defines the components of his invention; for example, a machine works at 110 volts and another works at 220 volts; this instrument runs on gasoline and this one on solar power. If you were to misuse these components, they would become dysfunctional. Similarly

– and Allah is the loftiest example – you must adhere to the laws and methodology of your Creator *Glorified is He* and not turn away from it otherwise your state will become corrupt and you will be unable to fulfil your function in life. Hence, if we wish to tread upon a steadfast reforming deputyship for which Allah created us, then we must adhere to the laws of safeguarding which our Creator *Glorified is He* placed for us.

This is why if you see a blatant defect in any aspect of life within society, then know that it is a natural result of leaving the methodology of Allah and breaking His laws. For example, if you see the poor, hungry and needy, know that there is a deficiency in fulfilling one of Allah’s laws. Either they are lazy, not wanting to strive, or they are unable because of newcomers who have monopolized all wealth.

Some ask that since the True Lord *Glorified is He* prohibited certain things such as swine and wine, why did He create them? It is their fault for thinking that everything was created for consumption. This thinking is incorrect because Allah *Glorified is He* created these things in order to fulfil a function in life. It is not necessary that they be consumed. Allah created the swine in order to clean up the environment from filth; this is why you do not see it eat anything else. As for wine, it was not created as wine. It is sweet grapes which are eaten fresh, man interfered in its nature and spoiled it by making it into wine, turning that which was permissible into prohibited.

We return to Allah’s statement: ‘And We had certainly sent Nuh (Noah) to his people’. The word ‘people’ refers to men – a specific group within society – and not both men and women; the evidence for this is His statement: ‘O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them’ (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

But was Nuh only sent to men and not to women*?* Nuh was sent to all of them. Only men were mentioned because they are the ones who will partake in the propagation of the religion, travel for it and convey it to women over whom they have guardianship. The importance of establishing the affairs of the universe and its rectification is dependent upon men. The meaning here is: ‘His people’ because He is from among them, he is trusted by them and His earlier life is also known to them. If He was to say something to them, they would not accuse Him of lying. It is from Allah's mercy towards His creation that He sends one of them as a messenger to them. He *Glorified is He* said: 'Indeed, there has come unto you [O mankind] a messenger from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128). In this way, people are won over and familiarity is established as opposed to the scenario where the Messenger was a king, for example, then the people would feel estranged by Him.

Therefore, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was known as the Truthful, the trustworthy even before being sent with revelation. His past life was known to them, which was an incentive for them to believe in what He came with. How can it be that they believe Him in the affairs of this world, and not believe Him in what He conveyed regarding Allah?

'To his people' means: We did not bring to you a messenger from a different species nor from a different tribe; rather, we brought to you a messenger from amongst yourselves. You know his past, his life and as a result will be more receptive to that which He brings, not as enemies to Him. Or the meaning could be: to people from Him because they will not be responsible for the rectification of life's affairs until they listen to His methodology. They would be from Him because they take the methodology of Allah from Him.

Then He *Glorified is He* said: 'and he said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him"'. He used 'O my people' out of affection for them 'worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him'. Worship is to obey the command of He who is worshipped. Worship necessitates the legal responsibility of commands and prohibitions. Divinity necessitates legal responsibility and worship. As for Lordship, then this necessitates giving and teaching i.e. sustenance. This is why He *Glorified is He* said: 'He is your Lord, and unto Him you will return' (*Hud:* 34). The Lord of you all: the believer, the disbeliever, the obedient, and the disobedient.

As we said: the sun, the moon, the earth, the rain, etc. serve all of humanity. There is no difference between a believer and a disbeliever. This is because this is the giving of lordship. If you asked a disbeliever who created him or who sustained him, the only thing he would be able to say is: Allah.

They should be ashamed for their honour and know that it is He alone who deserves to be obeyed and worshipped. The requirements of lordship and the belief in it necessitate that we believe in divinity.

Similarly, the infant, who grows under the care of his parents and becomes a youth, does not find other than them to fulfil his needs, remove him from harm's way or to stay up all night for his comfort. They do all of this with a good spirit and a content soul. They may even remain hungry so that you can be satiated, remain unclothed so you can be clothed, and deny themselves life's pleasures in order to give you a noble life. But when a child grows and reaches the age of puberty, we find him being disrespectful and disobedient towards them. He is taken away by bad friends who beautify rebellion against his father and mother.

We say to this unruly child: be ashamed and be humble; this is no way to repay your parents. Where were those friends when you were a boy and needed someone to depend upon? It is more appropriate that you only listen to those who do well by you.

This is an example of the Monotheism of Divinity and Monotheism of lordship – and Allah is the loftiest example – so how is it that you take the blessings of lordship from your Lord, but then rebel against Him in His divinity, disobeying His command, and denying His blessings. It is incumbent upon you to faithfully repay Him for His blessing.

You must know that your Lord *Glorified is He* has given you a trust by making you legally responsible for commands and prohibitions because you are His servant and creation. When you fulfil that which is incumbent upon you with regards to [His] divinity, Allah *Glorified is He* does not benefit an iota from it. The benefit returns to you. Likewise, if you were to [follow up] the affairs of obedience, worship and legal responsibility, you will find that they eventually are the blessings of lordship because they return to you with benefit.

So, we take commands and prohibitions to be legal responsibilities and burdens which are necessitated by faith and divinity. We say: yes, they are responsibilities from Allah, but they are for your own good. If you were just, you would find that divinity is from lordship. Thus, when the consumption of wine is prohibited for you in order to protect the corruption of the intellect, does He *Glorified is He* benefit from that at all? This is why He *Glorified is He* says about them: 'And if you asked them, "Who created the heavens and earth?" They would surely say, "Allah"' (*Luqman:* 25). And He says: 'And if you asked them who created them, they would surely say, "Allah" (*az-Zukhruf:* 87).

As long as He *Glorified is He* is your Creator, your Lord, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, why do you disobey Him? Does your disobedience cause a decrease in His dominion? Does the obedience of anyone cause an increase in His dominion? Before creating you, the True Lord *Glorified is He* created all the necessities of life with perfection; He then summoned you to a universe which was suitable for your arrival and living. Thus, obedience and disobedience neither benefit nor harm your Lord *Glorified is He*. This is why He says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'O My servants, if the first of you and the last of you, the humans of you and the jinn of you were to have the heart of the most pious of you, it would not cause my dominion to increase a bit. And if the first of you, the last of you, the humans of you and the jinn were to have the heart of the most sinful of you, it would not cause my dominion to decrease a bit. And if the first of you, the last of you, the humans of you, the jinn of you, those of you who are present and those who are absent were to gather at a single plateau, and each one of you were to ask me his need and I were to fulfil it for you, it would not cause that which I possess to decrease except like the dipping of a needle by one of you into the seas. That is because I am The Generous, The Founder of existence and The Glorious. My giving is speech, My punishment is speech, and if I wish for a thing, I merely say "Be" and it is'.(1) Therefore, when you obey Me, good will return to you because by this obedience you have guaranteed another eternal life after this perishable one which will disappear regardless of how lavishly you live in it. Its pleasures will evade you, either by death or by poverty. The pleasures of the hereafter, on the other hand, are everlasting and eternal; they will not evade you, nor will you evade them because it is a bounty which is never-failing and never out of reach.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2577), and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2495) via a different chain on the authority of Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him. The wording is At-Tirmidhi's who said: 'this is a sound Hadith'.*

This is why He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And indeed, the home of the Hereafter – that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64). And His statement: ‘Then will you not fear Him?’ This is a question which carries a threat and rebuke. But how can He rebuke them while they have only been ordered to worship Allah without displaying either obedience or disobedience? He saw them turning away so He ordered them to be fearful of Allah, which is to establish a protection between yourself and your Lord that guards you from His attributes of power and omnipotence. It will protect you from the causes of His force and vengeance. The protection which you establish between yourself and these attributes is your implementation of the methodology of Allah by obeying the commands and steering clear of the prohibitions.

From amongst the wondrous compositions of consciousness *(taqwa)* in the Noble Quran is His saying: ‘and fear Allah’ (*al-Baqara:* 194) and His saying: ‘fear the fire’ (*al-Baqara:* 24). They say: Yes, fear Allah and fear the fire because you are conscious or afraid of Allah because of the attributes of force and wrath which are attributed to Him. From amongst these is the fire. Thus, when you fear Allah by implementing His methodology, you are also fearful of the fire.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَقَالَ ٱلۡمَلَؤُاْ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن قَوۡمِهِۦ مَا هَٰذَآ إِلَّا بَشَرٞ مِّثۡلُكُمۡ يُرِيدُ أَن يَتَفَضَّلَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ
وَلَوۡ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَأَنزَلَ مَلَٰٓئِكَةٗ مَّا سَمِعۡنَا بِهَٰذَا فِيٓ ءَابَآئِنَا ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

But the leading disbelievers among his people said, ‘He is merely a mortal like you, trying to gain some superiority over you. God would have sent down angels if He had wished; besides, we never heard of anything like this from our forefathers [24] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 24)

‘Eminent’ are the ones who fill the hearts of gatherings with awe, splendour, prestige and leadership. But why was it them who opposed Him with such vehemence? They say: because the methodology of Allah only came to rectify that which had become bad and deteriorated in the universe. The True Lord *Glorified is He* sends down a methodology upon the tongue of the first messenger and demands from His people to convey the methodology of their messenger after Him. However, heedlessness overtook them making them leave the methodology in a number of ways: Of them are those who leave the methodology of his Lord, however he reproaches and blames himself and quickly repents and regrets. He thus rebukes and scolds himself internally. These are those who mixed good actions with bad ones.

Of them, too, are those who leave the methodology of their Lord with neither rebuke nor return. In our language, we call this type of person deprived in the sense that he lacks the reservation neither from the law nor from within himself. There remains after that the reproach of society: when he sees those who have left the methodology of the True Lord, he must resist them, cut them off, not love, nor respect them. Or else, if the corrupt and those who have embarked upon doing vile actions remain respected by the people and continue to have their status within society, they will persist in their sin, wasting themselves and society, causing society to descend into sin that amounts to widespread corruption and anarchy.

Do you not see that the wise sacred law made the blood money of murder payable by the family of the killer not just the killer himself? Why? It is because they will take their son into account if he begins to deviate or show signs of transgression, otherwise they will have to carry the burden of his misdemeanours.

We say: the 'eminent' were singled out because they are the ones who benefit most from evil and corruption in society. It is in their interest that these circumstances persist so that their temporary rule and status will remain. Therefore, they are the first ones who challenge the divine Messages with rejection and enmity. Did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not say of them in another verse: 'So the eminent among those who disbelieved from his people said, "We do not see you but as a man like ourselves, and we do not see you followed except by those who are the lowest of us"' (*Hud:* 27)?

The ones whom they call 'the lowest' are the oppressed, the poor, those concerned with the affairs of mankind, religion and morals. They gaze upon the Message once they hear it because it came to deliver them from oppression; this is why they are the first to have faith. If the methodology came to deliver justice for these people, then it also came to sever the oppression, force and ascendancy of the people of power. It is now obvious why they challenge and reject it.

‘Those who disbelieved from his people said, “This is not but a man like yourselves’. The first thing that repelled them from the Messenger was the fact that He was a human. So, what is it that you were waiting for then? This meaning has been explained in His statement: ‘And what prevented the people from believing when guidance came to them except that they said, “Has Allah sent a human messenger?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 94)

It is necessary that the Messenger be from the species to which He is being sent, so that He can be a suitable model for them. They would thus imitate Him and be guided by Him. If the Messenger had come as an angel, how could He have been a suitable example? How could they obey Him, while, as you are well aware, as an angel he would not eat, drink, reproduce nor have carnal desires or the necessary components of disobedience?

Let us suppose that Allah sent to you an angel. How will you see Him and receive guidance from Him? He must, therefore, come in the form of a man so that you are able to see Him and properly receive guidance from Him. Thus, in the discussion of this issue, we come back to the fact that he must be a man. This is why He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And if We had made him an angel, We would have made him [appear as] a man, and We would have covered them with that in which they cover themselves’. (*al-An‘am:* 9) The contention would still remain. It is foolish to suggest that the Messenger should be an angel.

As for their statement: ‘is not but a man like yourselves’, we say: yes, he (the prophet of Allah) is a man, but not like yourselves. You are wrong in making this similitude because he is a man who has been chosen by Allah to receive revelation. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘When guidance is taken from me I say: I am merely a human like yourselves. When I am given guidance by Allah, I say: I am not like any of you’. He *Glorified is He* says to the Prophet Muhammad: ‘Say, O [Muhammad], “I am only a man like you to whom it has been revealed that your God is but one God’ (*Fussilat:* 6). In this way, His preference lies in that He is a human to whom [the message] is revealed. His humanity is only for the sake of familiarity.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* follows up the statement of the disbelievers from the people of Nuh (Noah): ‘who wishes to take precedence over you’. He wishes to attribute virtue, honour, and leadership to Himself so that they become His followers. ‘And if Allah had willed [to send a messenger], He would have sent down angels’, as messengers. Allah *Glorified is He* refuted this statement of theirs. He *Glorified is He* said: ‘Say, “If there were upon the earth angels walking securely, We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel [as a] messenger’ (*al-Isra’:* 95).

Then they say: ‘We have not heard of this among our forefathers’. They had never heard anyone saying: worship Allah, for you have no god besides Him, since our forefathers of old used to worship idols. No one prior to Nuh (Noah) came and said what he has said. This is proof that they are merely imitating their forefathers. They do not have independent thinking by which they look at things with a perception of truth and justice. In another place, He *Glorified is He* said about them: ‘Indeed, we found our fathers upon a religion, and we are, in their footsteps, following’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 23).

If we ponder upon the state of societies, including the one in which we live, it will become apparent that their claim of following their forefathers is a false one. How is this? Ponder upon different generations and you will find that every generation has its own opinions, ambitions, and aspirations by which a son will differ from his father. Youth today have their own independent opinion. A youth will choose a college that he desires, cloth that he likes even if this disagrees with his parents’ opinion. In fact, the matter may even reach a stage whereby the father is accused of being rigid and backward if he does not adhere to his son’s decision. This is found in all generations.

Why is it then, that in such affairs you do not say: we found our forefathers agreed on what to believe? Why do you possess an identity of your own and independent thinking in matters of this life but not in the affairs of religion? You have an identity in those affairs that comply with your wishes, desires, and deviations. And you choose imitation in that which minimises your legal (religious) responsibility because legal responsibility will restrict these wishes and desires. This is why they rebel against the methodology of Allah. Thus, we are surprised when we see and hear this from our sons today and how the reins of mothers and fathers have been set down. A youth will follow his desires in the deviated matters. If his father confronts him, he turns away from him and accuses him of being of an old generation whose time has passed. This affair is now also true of girls. They have also become rebellious against these values and no longer value them.

Thus, their saying: ‘We have not heard of this among our forefathers’. They are also false in this statement because had they been truthful, they would have imitated their forefathers in everything; those things in their favour and those not, those of the affairs of this life and those of the affairs of religion, in values and morals. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* remedies this issue in a number of places in His noble book using different methods. From amongst them is His statement: ‘And when it is said to them, “Follow what Allah has revealed”, they say, “Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing”’ (*al-Baqara:* 170). This absolves them from the pains of legal responsibility. If worship is the worshipper’s obedience of the commands and prohibitions of the one who is worshipped, then the worship of idols is very easy. This is because they are gods, as they claim, but they do not have a methodology nor do they ordain legal responsibilities. Then what is that an idol commands you to do? What has it prepared as reward for the one who has obeyed it? What has it prepared as punishment for the one who has disobeyed it? Thus, the one that is worshipped in this case is without methodology and legal responsibilities. This is proof of the falsehood of their worship of idols and of their other gods besides them.

Did they not say: ‘…We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allah…’? (*al-’Ankabut:* 3) This is foolishness, absurdity and ignorance since their argument is illogical and does not stand. How do you say that you worship them while they do not introduce a way or legal responsibilities, while worship is manifested in the worshipper’s obedience of the one who is worshipped? This is only emptiness and creedal bankruptcy. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* refutes them by His saying: ‘…Even though their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?’ (*al-Baqara:* 170) In another place He *Glorified is He* says of them: ‘…they say, “What we inherited from our forefathers is good enough for us”…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104). This verse is more expressive of their disbelief than the previous one because they increase the level of disbelief and persist upon it. In light of this, their statement: '…Nay, we follow the ways of our fathers…' (*al-Baqara:* 170) implies that they may recheck their stance and be guided to the truth and go against their fathers.

By contrast, here, they say: '…enough for us…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104), i.e. this is sufficient for us and we will not change it nor turn away from it. For this reason the end of each verse complies with its content. So, in the first verse Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them by saying: '…Even though their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?' (*al-Baqara:* 170) Whereas, in the other He responds to them by saying: '…even though their forefathers knew nothing and were not guided…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104).

The True Lord mentions reason in the former verse because the human deliberates about reason with his self. He mentions knowledge in the latter verse because the human deliberates about knowledge not only with his reason, but also with the intelligence inspired by this knowledge. Thus, knowledge is wider than reason. This is why He mentions knowledge with their saying: '…enough for us…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104) which indicates exaggeration and persistence upon disbelief.

In their statement: '…we never heard of anything like this from our forefathers…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 24), we observe that heedlessness has become deep-rooted within them. This is because Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is considered the fifth ancestor after Adam *peace be upon him*, so, there is a long period of time between them. How is it then that throughout this period they did not hear of a messenger or prophet who said: worship Allah, for you do not have any divinity besides Him?

إِنۡ هُوَ إِلَّا رَجُلُۢ بِهِۦ جِنَّةٞ فَتَرَبَّصُواْ بِهِۦ حَتَّىٰ حِينٖ (٢٥)

He is just a madman, so let's wait and see what happens to him [25] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 25)

'He is just…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 25) i.e. He is not but. '…a madman…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 25). *Jinnah* means madness which is the concealment of the intellect, which has control over the human's actions in life. Thus, He is directed by its laws: ‘do this’ and ‘do not do that’. As for a madman, he does whatever comes to his mind without first submitting his actions to the faculties of thinking or reasoning. For this reason, it is from Allah’s justice that we do not hold a madman accountable for his actions whenever he behaves badly toward someone by cursing or striking, for example. We are only able to smile back and pray to Allah that He protects us from the tribulation with which he has afflicted the madman. If this is the state of a madman concerning his actions, how can someone whose conduct is governed by and complies with the moral laws and values be considered mad? It is strange that the accusation of madness constantly circulates upon the tongues of those who deny the Messengers *peace be upon them* in every place and time. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was accused of it, so Allah refuted them and rejected it being an attribute of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in His statement: ‘Nun (the Arabic letter Nun) By the pen! By all they write! Your Lord’s grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman: you will have a never-ending reward—truly you have a great moral character’. (*al-Qalam:* 1-4) How can someone who has a great moral character, then, be mad? If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was, indeed, a madman why did they entrust Him with their savings and valuable items; why were they content with Him; and why did they name him ‘the truthful’ and the ‘trustworthy’? They only did this because they knew of His character and that He was governed by firm values—based on truth and goodness—that cannot be shaken.

Since it is just a man possessed by jinn, ‘…so let us bear with him for a time.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 25) That is wait and leave him alone, for maybe he will come to his senses and leave this matter (of being a Messenger) by himself when He sees that we have left Him and are no longer concerned about what he does. Alternatively, let him do whatever he wishes, for if he is on the truth and Allah gives Him victory and brings His affair forth then we will follow Him, and if it is otherwise then know that we have turned away from Him since the beginning of the affair.

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱنصُرۡنِي بِمَا كَذَّبُونِ ٢٦

Noah said, 'My Lord, help me! They call me a liar' [26]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 26)

After His people had accused Him of lying He prayed to Allah to give Him victory. The words '…their calling me a liar' (*al-Mu'minun:* 26) mean: 'give me succour over their accusation of lying, and make their accusation improvable' so that I may have victory over them despite their accusation; 'or O Lord, compensate me for their denial with victory'. This is just like when we say: I bought this for this; I took this in exchange with that.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡهِ أَنِ ٱصۡنَعِ ٱلۡفُلۡكَ بِأَعۡيُنِنَا وَوَحۡيِنَا فَإِذَا جَآءَ أَمۡرُنَا وَفَارَ ٱلتَّنُّورُ
فَٱسۡلُكۡ فِيهَا مِن كُلّٖ زَوۡجَيۡنِ ٱثۡنَيۡنِ وَأَهۡلَكَ إِلَّا مَن سَبَقَ عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡقَوۡلُ مِنۡهُمۡۖ
وَلَا تُخَٰطِبۡنِي فِي ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓاْ إِنَّهُم مُّغۡرَقُونَ ٢٧

And so We revealed to him: 'Build the Ark under Our watchful eye and according to Our revelation. When Our command comes and water gushes up out of the earth, take pairs of every species on board, and your family, except for those on whom the sentence has already been passed – do not plead with me for the evildoers: they will be drowned [27]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 27)

Allah *Glorified is He* answered the prayer of His prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* by giving him victory over His people and commanded him to build the *fulk* (ark). *Fulk* is a ship and in Arabic it refers to the singular and plural. He *Glorified is He* says: 'So We delivered him and those with him in the laden ark.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 119) Here He says: *fulk* (ark). Allah also says: '…you see the ships ploughing their course so that you may seek Allah's bounty and be grateful.' (*Fatir:* 12) Here He says: *fulk* (ships). Thus, once it refers to the singular, and in another time, refers to the plural.

Allah says: *be'a'yonina* (Our watchful eye). His statement: '…under Our watchful eye and according to Our inspiration…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27) is proof that Nuh *peace be upon him* was not, as some claim, a carpenter. If He was truly a carpenter, his own intellect would have directed him in designing the ark. However, he designed it through the inspiration of Allah, by his directions and under His care. Just as He *Glorified is He* says: '…and planned that you should be reared under My watchful eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 39) Here He says: *ala ayni* (My watchful eye).The meaning is: design the ark, I will give you success in its design and guide you towards how it should be, and will correct you if you err in any of its design. Thus, I have commanded you, aided you and followed you up. Inspiration is the secret address of Allah to His Messenger.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: '…When Our command comes and water gushes up out of the earth…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27). Here the wording did not include the indifference with which Nuh *peace be upon him* built the ark and which was mentioned in Allah's statement: 'So he began to build the Ark, and whenever leaders of his people passed by, they laughed at him. He said, "if you laugh at us, surely we too laugh at you as you laugh (at us)."' (*Hud:* 38) This is because they did not have an idea of the reason of building the ship.

In another place the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us of how it was designed. He says: 'We carried him along on a vessel of planks and caulked with palm-fibre' (*al-Qamar:* 13). He says: *alwah wa dusur* (planks and caulked with palm-fibre).

We said previously that the word *dusur* are ropes by which the planks of wood are drawn together when they are dry. They are brought together tightly in a special way, such that if water was to fall upon them it would cause the wood to expand in size filling the gaps between the planks. This is similar to what we see in the production of oil barrels which are built from pieces of wood. In this manner, someone built a boat out of papyrus using ropes instead of nails and travelled with it to America.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…When Our command comes…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27), i.e. by saving the believers and destroying the deniers '…and water gushes up out of the oven (the earth)…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27).

A *tannur* is, literally, an oven which is used to bake bread. It is said that it had been inherited by Nuh from the days of Adam *peace be upon them*.

Gushes up with water means that water comes out of it. Originally it is a place from which fire come forth. So, when water comes out of it, it is as though it is boiling. Will all the water, mentioned in the verse, come out of that *tannur* (oven)? Water, will gush up from all over the earth, and descend from the sky. The bubbling of the *tannur* is a signal declaring the start of this grave phenomenon. If this occurs: '…put into the ship from each [creature] two mates…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27). He says: *fasluk* (put into) meaning: bring aboard and carry upon (the ark) a pair, male and female, from every species of creation. Also, He says in His statement: 'What has brought you into hell-fire?' (*al-Muddaththir:* 42) Here, He says: *salakakum* (brought you into) meaning: brought you into it. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '…put your hand into the opening of your bosom…' (*al-Qasas:* 32). He says: *usluk* (put… into) meaning: put it in. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Thus, do We make it to enter into the hearts of the guilty…' (*al-Hijr:* 12) He says: *naslukuhu* (make it enter into).

The words *fasluk*, *salakakum*, *usluk* and *naslukuh'* are derived from the Arabic root *salaka* from which we have taken—according to our linguistic norms—different meanings. For example, we say: he (a plumber) *sallaka* (cleared) a pipeline or a spring, i.e. he slipped through it that which removes the blockage.

In '…from each [creature] two mates…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27), Al-tanween added to the word *koll* made is pronounced *kollen* (from each) in the verse makes the word means: of each thing we desire protection and continuity of. This is because the flood will drown everything. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to preserve the essentials of life for His believing servants— that which will serve them—from animals and all other types of life which give birth or ovulate.

Zawjayn '…two mates…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27) is not as some think that *zawj* refers to two. *Zawj* refers to the singular and with it comes the other half. An example of this is in His statement: '…eight animals, in [four] pairs: a pair of sheep and a pair of goats— ask them [Prophet], "Has He forbidden the two males, the two females, or the young in the wombs of the two females? Tell me based on knowledge if you are telling the truth." And a pair of camels and a pair of cattle…' (*al-An'am:* 143-144). He thus named every individual from amongst these eight *zawj* (partner) because it is paired with its counterpart.

This applies to all creatures. As for humanity He does not say 'a pair' but says: '…and your family…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27). However many or of which gender they may be. However, what about the kinship here, is it that of lineage or that of faith?

Here, the kinship referred to is the kinship of faith and adherence, the proof being that Allah *Glorified is He* explains this point in another verse. He says of Nuh *peace be upon him*: '…and said, "My Lord! Surely my son is of my family"…' (*Hud:* 45). So His Lord said to Him: '…O Nuh! Surely he is not of your family; what he did was not right…' (*Hud:* 46).

Thus, the sonship (being a son) to prophets is a sonship of conduct and adherence. If those sons happen to be of the Prophet's progeny it is good, and if he is not of the Prophet's own progeny it is just as good. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said of Salman al-Farsi *may Allah be pleased with him*: 'Salman is from amongst us, the people of the house'.(1) Thus, he went beyond being a Muslim to being one of the people of the Messenger Muhammad's house.

It is as though Allah says: Also bring aboard it your family. The proof of them being intended is that he made exceptions from them: '…excepting those on whom sentence has already been passed…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27). Nuh *peace be upon him* had two wives, one which disbelieved in him and betrayed him along with her son Kan'an. She is the one mentioned in Allah's statement in the chapter of *at-Tahrim* (the chapter of Prohibition): 'Allah has given examples of disbelievers: the wives of Noah and Lot who married two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them…' (*at-Tahrim:* 10).

Kan'an is the one who said: 'I will seek refuge upon a mountain which will protect me from the water.' This point is not mentioned here because the events of this story are sporadically mentioned in the Quran, such that if they were all gathered together they would give a general picture of the story. You could ask: why did it not come altogether as in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak 3/598 from the Hadith of Amr ibn 'Awf Al-Muzani. Adh-Dhahabi and Al-Ajluni in Kashf Al-Khafa 1/558 said: its sanad (authenticity) is weak.*

We say: the story of Yusuf *peace be upon him* is mentioned all in one place so that the True Lord *Glorified is He* could give us an example of a complete tightly woven story which indicates His ability of narrating a story in one go for whoever wishes that to be manifest. So, if you desire a complete story, know that We are capable of accomplishing this—here is the story of Yusuf *peace be upon him*. The purpose of narrating stories in the Quran is to make the heart of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* firm. The True Lord says: '…We sent it in this way to strengthen your heart [Prophet]; We gave it to you in gradual revelation…' (*al-Furqan:* 32).

This is because Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* faced accusations of lying, enmity, and rejection from his people. He was exposed to severe adversities and would thus need something to console him and strengthen him in the face of those events. This is why different parts of stories in the Quran are found dispersed in many positions. In this way, they could be a consolation for the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well as a relief for him every time he is exposed to one of those adversities. By bringing these sporadic parts together a whole story is formed.

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* brought his other believing wife and children, Sam, Ham, Yaphet (Japheth) and their wives, aboard with him on the ark. These six, besides Noah *peace be upon him* and his wife make eight. They were accompanied by seventy-two believers, and carriers of the foundations of the faith that was being preserved by Nuh *peace be upon him*.

As the judgment—of drowning those who disbelieved from amongst his family—could not be appealed against, the True Lord follow this by saying: '…Do not plead with Me for those who have wronged—they will be drowned.' (*Hud:* 37)

We may ask: whom did they wrong? They wronged themselves when they disbelieved in Allah. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong…' (*Luqman:* 13).

It is true that when someone disbelieves, they deny Allah’s right of being One, being the Only, being existent; there being no other than Him to be worshiped, and attribute all of that to other than Him. However, this wrongdoing does not harm Allah a bit. In fact, it harms the disbelievers since they have wronged themselves. The height of folly is for a human to wrong himself.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا ٱسْتَوَيْتَ أَنتَ وَمَن مَّعَكَ عَلَى ٱلْفُلْكِ فَقُلِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى نَجَّىٰنَا مِنَ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

And when you and your companions are settled on the Ark, say, “Praise be to God, who delivered us from the wicked people” [28] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 28)

The phrase ‘…are settled…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 28) once you and those who are with you have ascended and boarded the ark and once your heart is content with the salvation of the believers who are with you, ‘…say, Praise be to Allah…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 28). It is appropriate that the believer receive the blessings of Allah with praise such that the blessing does not make him forget the Majesty of the one who gave the blessing. The moment everything on the ark has settled and you feel assured, hasten to praise Allah.

In another verse He *Glorified is He* says: ‘When trouble befalls man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble. In this way the deeds of such heedless people are made attractive to them.’ (*Yunus:* 12)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is giving us a fortification by making Himself an example for us; such that if our good deeds are met by ungratefulness by someone, we would not become angry. This is because people are ungrateful even to Allah *Glorified is He*. This is why when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: ‘O Lord I ask You to forbid that I be accused of what that is not in me.’ i.e. that people do not accuse me unfairly. His Lord *Glorified is He* replied to him: ‘O Musa, How can I do that for you when I have not even done so for Myself’.

Thus, this cannot be sought by anyone. If every single person who does good were to hold a grudge against people for being ungrateful, it would lead to a corrupted state. Moreover, people's interests would not be taken care of and kind people would withhold their good. This is why Our Lord *Glorified is He* set a model of Himself.

If a person is sensitive, he does not only behave ungratefully; rather, he goes beyond that; he hates and maintains resentment against those who have been kind to him. This is because human beings have a natural propensity for self-love, haughtiness, and arrogance. Thus, if a person meets anyone who treats him with kindness, he dislikes the latter, because his kindness overwhelms his own arrogance and curbs his haughtiness.

Therefore, they say: 'Beware of the evil of the one to whom you have done good'. Why? Because though he wishes to exercise his haughtiness, your mere presence overcomes his conceitedness. Thus, customize yourself that favours can be denied even if the doer is The Lord of Glory *Glorified is He*. Consequently, do not be saddened when your kindness is met with ungratefulness.

One poet (1) said about this:

The needy people move behind you in humility
Yet, once their need is fulfilled, they leave you behind and take flight
The best of them, when you are mentioned in evil,
Would keep silent, without refuting, while he could have slandered
So, do not quit doing good regardless of their ungratefulness
For verily the reward of Allah is more Increasable and is abundant

Thus, the meaning of the verse is: once you and those who are with you have ascended, and things on the ark have settled, beware of becoming deluded, turning aside, withdrawing yourself and forgetting to praise Allah for this blessing. This is why when we board a vessel or vehicle we are ordered to say: 'In the Name of Allah be its run and its riding at anchor' because we will not run it due to our skill and power, rather, in the Name of

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(1) This is from the poetry of Ash-Sh'arawi.

Allah who has inspired, in the Name of Allah who has aided and in the Name of Allah who has watched over and taken care of us. As long as we remember the Giver of blessings when receiving them and recognise the Giver of bounty while enjoying them, He will keep it for us.

Beware of denying Allah His favours, and attributing them to yourself like the one who said: '…"This wealth was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess."…' (*al-Qasas:* 78) If you maintain this attitude, then protect and preserve these favours yourself.

Even when mounting an animal, He *Glorified is He* teaches us to say: 'Limitless in His glory is He who has made this subservient to our use, since—but for Him—we would not have been able to attain to it. Hence, verily, it is unto our Sustainer that we must always turn'.(1)

In His statement: '…who saved us form the wrongdoing people' (*al-Mu'minun:* 28) He mentions saving because the fear of harm precedes the acquisition of benefit.

After that, the Lord of Nuh (Noah) teaches him another supplication to pray with when the ark settles and he disembarks it in order to get on with his new life on earth:

وَقُل رَّبِّ أَنزِلۡنِي مُنزَلٗا مُّبَارَكٗا وَأَنتَ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡمُنزِلِينَ ٢٩

And say, "My Lord, let me land with Your blessing:
it is You who provide the best landings" [29]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 29)

In another place, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And it was said, "Noah, descend in peace from Us, with blessings on you and on some of the communities that will spring from those who are with you…”’ (*Hud:* 48)—this is because you will disembark it, as it is not your living abode.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih 1342 The Book of Hajj from the Hadith of Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with them that when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him climbed His camel to go on a journey He would magnify Allah three times and say: 'Limitless in His glory is He who has made (The Quran, all) this subservient to our use – since (The Quran, but for Him,) we would not have been able to attain to it. Hence, verily, it is unto our Sustainer that we must always turn'. Ahmad has also narrated this in his Musnad 2/144, 150.*

In the same vein, the Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* supplicated as the Quran relates: ‘Say, “My Lord, make me go in truthfully, and come out truthfully, and grant me supporting authority from you”’ (*al-Isra’:* 80). Thus, when mentioning a blessing you must also mention the one who gave it. When some are envied by others for the blessings that Allah has granted them, be sure that when they received the blessings, they did not remember and say the name of the One who has given them those blessings. If a person when receiving a blessing, in terms of his fortune or children, says: ‘That which Allah wills! There is no power but with Allah!’ he, thus, puts the blessing under the protection of the Giver he would guarantee the longevity of the blessing and protection of it from the evil eyes of enviers, for he has placed it under the law of divine protection.

So ‘…land with your blessing…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 29). If something is blessed—when bestowed upon you—it gives way more than its natural capacity. An example of this is when someone with a basic salary lives a good life and gives his children a good education. It causes people to ask: ‘how did he afford all this? Indeed, it is the blessings that reside in something small making it plentiful. It is true that the income is small, but the smallness of the expenditure makes it plentiful.

Also take the example of someone who seeks provision through *halal* (permissible) means. Allah makes his affairs easy and fulfils his needs with very little cost. If his child falls ill Allah cures him with a simple Aspirin tablet and a cup of tea. He is not alarmed by the illness because his heart is tranquil, his soul is content, and he is trustful of Allah’s assistance. As for the one who earns from *haram* (unlawful) means and takes bribes etc. if his child falls ill, he rushes to the doctors and fears the worse. If he takes ten in bribes he will end up spending a hundred (for the treatment). We have said previously that this blessing is an inverse sustenance—it doesn not increase your income, instead, it decreases your expenditure.

‘…You are the Best of all who bring to land”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 29). We may ask: is the True Lord the best to bring to land, or the only One Who does this? It is permitted to say about a servant of Allah that he is an accommodator or harbourer when he provides comfortable accommodation to someone, by housing him, for example, in a comfortable apartment or receiving him as a guest. If you, a human, are such a harbourer, then know that Allah *Glorified is He* is the best harbourer because He when he provides accommodation, He does so according to His *Glorified is He* ability, generosity and giving.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not withhold from describing His creation as He describes Himself. Consequently, He attributes the ability to create to them, saying: '…glory be to Allah, the best of creators.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) He affirmed for you (humans) the attribute of creation because you bring a non-existent thing into existence despite the fact that you do this only through something Allah had already brought into existence. For example, you can make a glass from sand and fire. However, that which you bring into existence is inanimate; it does not grow nor reproduce, and it does not have life. Despite this, your Lord calls you 'a creator'. He also says: '…though you are the best of inheritors' (*al-Anbiya':* 89). He also says: '…and Allah is the best of schemers' (*Al-'Imran:* 54). Just as Allah *Glorified is He* did not withhold these attributes from you, do not withhold from Him that He is the best harbourer, the best of inheritors, the best of schemers, and the best of creators.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَٰتٍ وَإِن كُنَّا لَمُبْتَلِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

There are signs in all this: We have always put [people] to the test [30] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 30)

'In all this…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 30), i.e. in what has preceded '…there are signs…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 30), i.e. lessons, exhortations and wonders. If a man was to ponder upon them with impartial reason he will end up with good. '…We have always put [people] to the test.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 30) So, do not think that the trials are exclusively for oppressors and disbelievers, those whom He seized with penalty and destroyed. Trials may befall someone who does not deserve it. When Allah tests the people of good and righteousness, He does so in order to increase their reward, to raise their station and to purify their faith through testing them.

Take, for example, the trials that befell the first Muslims. They were not ordained for them out of detestation or vengeance. Rather, they were intended for their purification; for the manifestation of their firm unshaken faith. This is because they would be the ones to carry the propagation of Allah until the Last Hour. Thus, their filtration and purification through trials were necessary. Just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Do people think they will be left alone after saying "We believe" without being put to the test?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 2)

No, trials are necessary to distinguish the truthful from those who worship Allah as it were, upon the very edge (irresolutely). These must fall off the realm of *da'wa* (propagation). Only the firm believers who are not shaken by challenging events should remain. Accordingly, the statement: '…We have always put [people] to the test.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 30) refers to the people of faith who do not deserve punishment, yet they are afflicted with trials because Allah likes to raise their stations and test their faith. Thus, they can become fit for the propagation to Allah. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'By My Honour and Majesty, I will not cause a servant of mine for whom I have desired good to leave the world until I expiate the bad deeds he has done, either by causing illness in his body, loss in his wealth or by taking a child of his. If a bad deed, yet, remains I make the pangs of death heavy upon him until he comes to Me as the day his mother gave birth to him—By My Honour and Majesty, I will not cause a servant of mine for whom I have desired bad to leave the world until I expiate the good deeds he has done, either by giving him physical health, or blessings in his wealth and children. If a good deed remains I will lighten for him the pangs of death until he comes to Me without any good deeds.' Thus, just as calamities can be a form of vengeance for the disbelievers and oppressors, they can also be a form of benefit, a test of faith and a means of reward.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِمْ قَرْنًا ءَاخَرِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

Then We raised another generation after them[31]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 31)

That means after the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. We said that a *qarn* (generation) is a period of time in which people are drawn together due to their similar life experiences and interests. The scholars have concluded that a *qarn* (generation) is either equivalent to a hundred years, or the length of a dynasty however long it lasts or the length of a prophetic message however long it lasts. All of these are defined as *qarn* (generation).

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ أَنِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُۥٓ ۖ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

And sent one of their own as a messenger: 'Serve God,
for He is your only God. Will you not heed Him?' [32]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 32)

After the people of Nuh *peace be upon him* came the people of *'Ad*. To them Allah *Glorified is He* sent our master Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* as mentioned in the statement: 'To the people of Ad We sent their brother, Hud…' (*al-A'raf:* 65). He called them with the same call as Nuh *peace be upon him*: '…serve Allah, for you have no deity other than Him…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 32). He also said to them: '…Will you not heed Him?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 32)

Thus, the message of all the Messengers *peace be upon them* is one and unified as He *Glorified is He* says: 'In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Nuh, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus): "Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it"…' (*ash-Shura:* 13).

The religion of Allah is one. All the Messengers and Prophets came with it. What then is the meaning of the Lord's statement: '…for every one of you did We appoint a law and a way' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48)? We say: this is true because doctrines and foundational principles are static, they do not change: 'Worship Allah alone: you have no deity other than Him.'

As for the way and the law which is concerned with jurisprudence, this is the realm of difference between the Messengers. This is because these are affairs which are concerned with daily life and the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives every society—through the messenger sent to them—that which is most appropriate for it and that which will remedy its weaknesses.

Ash-shari'a is the law that governs people's daily life. As for the *din* (faith), it is the unchanging affair of Allah *Glorified is He* which no one is able to alter in the slightest. This is why the scourge of the previous nations was that they divided themselves up into many different sects and parties. It is about these peoples that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions, have nothing to do with them [Prophet]'. (*al-An'am:* 159)

Ponder upon '…have divided their religion…' (*al-An'am:* 159). He did not say 'divided their way or laws of legislation'. That is because the faith of Allah is one. As for the way or laws of legislation, they are the realm of differences which change according to the ills of society. Some of these peoples worshiped idols, some cheated the scales (in trade), whilst some denied the favours of Allah…etc.

We have previously clarified that the difference in ills between these societies was a result of the isolation that distanced them from one another. Thus, although they lived at the same time they were ignorant of one another. As for the message of Islam, the final universal message, it came at a point of co-existence and interconnectedness between civilizations. Accordingly, whatever happened in the northernmost point will be known in the southernmost point. This is why the ills of societies became one and the same. Hence, one final messenger came with a legislation which is suitable for all times and places until the Last Hour.

The scourge of the Muslims has been in the blind fanaticism which causes them to raise interpretive issues—in which Allah has given His servants a degree of freedom and choice—to the level of foundational principles and doctrine in which no interpretative differences are admissible. By doing so they are quick to judge others and accuse them of disbelief at the mere difference of opinion in interpretative affairs.

We say: it is from Allah's mercy in this matter that He made the foundational principles one and the same. As for the branch issues and interpretive affairs which are derived from the understanding of *mujtahid* (qualified jurist) these have been left by Allah to the people of understanding. It behoves each and every one of us to respect the opinion of the other, the proof of this being the True Lord's statement: '…if they referred it to the Messenger and those in authority among them, those seeking its meaning would have found it out from them…' (*an-Nisa':* 83). Otherwise, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted, He would not have allowed for our interpretation in anything and all the affairs of the religion would have been mandatory leaving no room for anyone's opinion or interpretation. As for the True Lord *Glorified is He*, His wisdom willed that He should mandatorily unite us upon affairs, of a nature, that if we were not to agree upon them, they would become corrupted. As for the affairs that accept many perspectives, He left to the interpretation of His creation. We must therefore respect the opinions of others and not to respond shamelessly to them. Rather, we should respect what Allah has chosen for us in terms of freedom of thought and interpretation.

The example we look up to concerning such conduct is the biography of the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the predecessors of this *ummah* (nation) at the battle of Al-Ahzab. When the wind blew towards the camp of the disbelievers, uprooted their tents, dispersed their ranks and when they fled from the battlefield, the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left for Medina. It was not long before His Lord ordered Him to go to Banu Qurayzha to discipline them. He *Glorified is He* informed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the angels were still prepared and that they had not yet laid down the weapons of war. So, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gathered the companions and said to them: 'Whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not pray the *asr* (afternoon) prayer except in Banu Qurayzha'.(1)

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(1) Agreed upon Hadith. Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 4119 and by Muslim in his Sahih in the Book of Al-Jihad wa As-Sayr 69 from the Hadith of Ibn 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them* that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called amongst them on the day of Al-Ahzab: 'Nobody should pray the noon prayer Zhuhr except in Banu Qurayzha' and in another narration the afternoon prayer ʿasr'.

The Companions went towards Banu Qurayzha between *asr* (afternoon) and *maghrib* (sunset). Amongst the companions were those who feared that the sun would set before them having prayed the afternoon prayer and so they prayed on the way. Others adhered to the command of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by not praying except in Banu Qurayzha, even if the sun had set. This difference took place between the Companions of the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in His presence. However it was only a jurisprudential difference. Afterwards, when they raised the issue to the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He concurred the opinion of both sides and did not reject the interpretation of either side.

In essence, in interpretative issues we must respect the opinion of others. This is why the '*ulama'* (scholars) and the people of balanced thought say: 'my opinion is correct but could be wrong, while the opinion of the other is wrong but could be correct'. If only the Muslims would rid themselves of this grave error which has divided them and weakened their influence amongst other nations! If only they would always remember the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions, have nothing to do with them [Prophet].' (*al-An'am:* 159)

In the same vein, when speaking of ablution, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'You who believe, when you are about to pray, washing your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6), we notice that Allah says: 'wash your faces' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6) without setting the limits of the face. Why? This is because there is no difference in peoples' understanding of what constitutes the face. However, for the arms He says: '…and your hands up to the elbows…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). He defines the arm as 'up to the elbows' because it is debatable. Some people say the arm is up to the shoulder, some say it is up to the elbow, while some others say it is merely the hand. This is why our Lord *Glorified is He* defines it in order to take us out of the sphere of difference with regards to the washing of this limb. If He *Glorified is He* had left it without defining it in this way there would have been permissibility in the affair: everyone would wash their arm as they saw fit. Similarly about the head He says: '…wipe your heads…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). He left it open to all the possibilities of the suffix *bi* in the word *biru'usikum* (your heads) which some see to convey a meaning of tangency; some consider it excessiveness, while others see it to convey a meaning of partialness.

Thus, when you encounter someone holding an opposing opinion to you in these types of affairs do not accuse him, because the texts have allowed for this difference. Allah has given him the right of interpretation just as he has given it to you.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* said:

وَقَالَ ٱلۡمَلَأُ مِن قَوۡمِهِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَكَذَّبُواْ بِلِقَآءِ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ وَأَتۡرَفۡنَٰهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا
مَا هَٰذَآ إِلَّا بَشَرٞ مِّثۡلُكُمۡ يَأۡكُلُ مِمَّا تَأۡكُلُونَ مِنۡهُ وَيَشۡرَبُ مِمَّا تَشۡرَبُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

But the leading disbelievers among his people, who denied
the Meeting in the Hereafter, to whom We had granted ease
and plenty in this life, said, 'He is just a mortal like you – he
eats what you eat and drinks what you drink [33]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 33)

We have spoken about the meaning of *mala'a* (the great ones). They are the elite and people of authority within a nation. They are annoyed by the faith-based way which eliminates their status and stands in the face of their transgression, control, and oppression of people.

'But the leading disbelievers among his people, who denied' (*al-Mu'minun:* 33), had just like what had happened with their predecessors from the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* '… the Meeting in the Hereafter, to whom We had granted ease and plenty in this life…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 33). The root *taraf* (ease) is similar to *farah* (joy). We say a man has ease in life when he has a bountiful life. If you add the letter a (in Arabic) it becomes *atraf*, then, it indicates that the blessing granted him ease, Allah granted him ease, i.e the blessing was the cause behind his transgression. Allah expanded the blessings for him so he can expand his transgression.

In the same vein, the True Lord says: 'So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received…' (*al-An'am:* 44), i.e. from the way of truth

‘…We opened the gates to everything for them. Then, as they revelled in what they had been given, We struck them suddenly and they were dumbfounded.’ (*al-An‘am:* 44)

This is such, so that seizing them with punishment would be more powerful, severe, and effective in its pain and woe. We have mentioned previously as a metaphor—and Allah *Glorified is He* is the loftiest example—that if Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to debase a denier of the truth, he does not do so from above a mat, (figuratively speaking), but does so from above a high chair; a lofty status so that the fall will be greater and more severe. For, if Allah seizes an ordinary person with punishment, a person that has no wealth, status or position over which he may lament, the matter would be of no real consequence. Alternatively, if Allah raises and elevates his station and makes his life easy, and then seizes him, there is no doubt that this is a seizure of one Exalted in Might and Perfect in Ability. This is more severe and more harmful.

Hence, ‘We had granted ease and plenty’ means we gave them generously and showered them with different blessings so they would increase in their disbelief and transgression. It is just as what Allah says: ‘So [Muhammad] leave them for a while steeped [in their ignorance]. Do they reckon that, by giving them wealth and sons, We race to give them good things? They really have no idea!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 54-56) Allah *Glorified is He* extends the means of error and deviation to these people so that they increase in it and become deeply immersed in its sins, whilst We become deeply concerned with their punishment and revenge.

Then, the Quran relates to us the saying that is oft repeated on the tongues of all of these peoples with regards to the divine messages: ‘…He is just a mortal like you…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 33). It is as if this saying has become a standard for all those who belie the Messengers and reject the way of Allah. They reiterate the humanity of the Messenger by saying he: ‘…eats what you eat and drinks what you drink…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 33) Did the disbelievers of Mecca not say to the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘… “What sort of messenger is this? He eats food and walks about in the marketplaces…’ (*al-Furqan:* 7).

Glory be to Allah. Despite the fact that they are of different nations and lived many ages apart, it is as if they speak with one tongue. It is as they say: Disbelief is one cult. Then, the True Lord says:

وَلَئِنۡ أَطَعۡتُم بَشَرٗا مِّثۡلَكُمۡ إِنَّكُمۡ إِذٗا لَّخَٰسِرُونَ ٣٤

And you will really be losers if you obey a mortal like yourselves [34] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 34)

'You will really be losers if you follow a mortal like yourselves'. However, He is a mortal but unlike yourselves. He is a mortal who receives divine revelation. We do not follow his mortality; rather, we follow that which has been revealed to Him.

أَيَعِدُكُمۡ أَنَّكُمۡ إِذَا مِتُّمۡ وَكُنتُمۡ تُرَابٗا وَعِظَٰمًا أَنَّكُم مُّخۡرَجُونَ ٣٥

How can he promise you that after you die and become dust and bones you will be brought out alive? [35] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 35)

They disbelieve in resurrection after death of which their prophet has promised them. However, what is the problem with the issue of resurrection? Is repeating something not easier than beginning it? If the Creator *Glorified is He* created you out of nothing, it is easier for Him to bring you back from your remains; though the word 'easier' is not an appropriate term to be used in reference to Allah *Glorified is He*. For, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not carry out His actions through handling and practice; rather, He does so by the word *Kun* (Be). 'Easier' is just used to express the case in terms that people could comprehend.

هَيۡهَاتَ هَيۡهَاتَ لِمَا تُوعَدُونَ ٣٦

What you are promised is very far- fetched [36] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 36)

'Very far-fetched…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 36) meaning *hay-hata* is a verbal noun which indicates that an affair is far-fetched. They said this about our returning after death after our bodies turn into bones and dust.

In Arabic, a word can be either an *ism* (noun), a *fi'l* (verb) or a *harf* (particle). A noun is a word that gives a meaning independently of itself which is not connected to time. So, when you say 'sky' we understand it to be that which is above you and shades you. A verb is a word that also gives a meaning independently of itself, but it is connected to time. So, when you say 'He ate', we understand what has been intended and that it is in the past tense. As for a particle, it is a word which does not give a meaning independently of itself. The particle *ala* (over/upon) conveys a meaning of superiority; however, the superiority of what? The meaning is thus not independent of itself. It needs something else to clarify it. Such are the words *fi* (in), min (from) and *ila* (to). Nouns, verbs and particles all have distinct characteristics by which they are known.

There is a fourth category which goes against this principle. This is why they (grammarians) refer to the verbal noun as *al-khalifah* (the *ansari*). An example is *hay-hat* which means to be far since it is a noun which conveys the meaning of a verb without taking on any of the characteristics of a verb. Similar to it are the words *shattan* which means (to be different) and *uff* which indicates being annoyed…etc.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says of them that they said:

إِنۡ هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا ٱلدُّنۡيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحۡيَا وَمَا نَحۡنُ بِمَبۡعُوثِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

There is only the life of this world: we die, we live, but we
will never be resurrected [37] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 37)

They ruled out the possibility of being resurrected. This is because they only believe in the life of this world. For them, everything is limited to it. 'There is only the life of this world…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 37). The Arabic word *in* is a particle of negation which means (it is not) as in His statement: '…they are not their mothers; their only mothers are those who gave birth to them…' (*al-Mujadala:* 2). He says: *in ummahatuhum* (their only mothers), i.e. none are their mothers save those who gave them birth.

Some may think that the statement, '…we die, we live…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 37) means that they believe in the resurrection since they said: 'we die', then, followed it by 'we live'. So, how could it be that they deny it? What is intended here is: we die and the children we have left behind live on. The proof—that this is not their belief—is their statement thereafter: '…but we will never be resurrected.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 37)

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا وَمَا نَحْنُ لَهُۥ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

He is just a man making lies up about God. We will never believe in him [38] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 38)

That is the man, who informed you about resurrection is '…a man making lies up about Allah…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 38). This statement of theirs is strange for they are recognizing that Allah exists by acknowledging: '…making lies up about Allah…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 38). How, then, can He Allah exist without sending a message on the tongue of His messenger? How — without a messenger—would you come to know the way of Allah? They said: by reason. However, reason does not suffice in this affair.

We have previously given an example—and Allah is the loftiest example—suppose we are sitting in a closed chamber and the doorbell rang. We would all agree that there is someone ringing the bell at the door. This is what is called reasoning. However, we will disagree as to whether it is a man, woman, child or whether it is a bearer of good news or a warner. Accordingly, we agree when we do not go beyond the limits of reasoning, yet, how are we to know who is at the door? We allow the one at the door to reveal his or her identity when we ask: 'who is there?' He or she will reply 'I am so and so, and have come for such and such a purpose.' Who is it then who will inform of the outcome of the reasoning? It is the one who made the reasoning.

Likewise, your reason believes that the universe has a creator to whom the signs in the universe point. If you were to look at an electrical lamp which lights up a room and reflect on it, you would find that behind its making there are factories, tools, workers, engineers and designers. Despite all of this, it has a limited ability, has a contingent life span, and may even break or its light goes out for any reason.

Do you not look at the sun and reflect upon its signs and wonders, how it illuminates half the globe at the same time without breaking down and without needing any repairs or spare parts. Despite this, no one has claimed it for themselves. Does this not indicate that behind this great creation is a greater creator?

Since we write records of the discoverer of electricity and the inventor of the light bulb, mentioning what they invented and how they reached it, is it not then worth searching for the creator of this wonderful universe?

If you tried to look at the sun directly during the day, your eyesight would become weak and you would not be able to see. If its heat was to become severe, nobody would be able to bear it. This is despite the fact that it takes eight minutes for the sun's light to reach us, travelling at 300,000 kilometres per second. What is this energy that emanates from the sun?

Moreover, from amongst its wonders are that you are able to feel its heat while on the surface of the earth. Yet, if you were to go on top of a mountain or a high altitude the temperature will drop despite the fact that you are in fact drawing nearer to the sun. The opposite happens when you light a fire: the temperature drops, the further you go away from it. As for the sun, the nearer you draw to it, the temperature drops. Who, then, is able to do this? What if somebody informs me that he is the creator of this sun? I would say to him: 'it is yours', until an adversary comes to claim it for himself. However, until now, there has not been anyone who claimed it for themselves.

Their saying: '…making lies up…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 38) is an exaggeration with regards to their messenger because making up lies is to deliberately lie; and lying, as we said, is when one speaks contradictorily to the truth. However, a speech can sometimes be contradictory to the truth, yet, it is true according to the speaker's knowledge. Thus, it is truthful in his eyes.

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱنصُرۡنِي بِمَا كَذَّبُونِ ﴿٣٩﴾

The prophet said, 'My Lord, help me! They call me a liar'[39] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 39)

Glory be to Allah! It is as if the history of the divine messages repeats itself with the beliers. It is as if a cliché (stereotype expression) consistently repeated on the tongues of the Messengers: 'worship Allah for you have no deity besides Him', they accuse them of lying by saying: 'you are nothing but mortals like ourselves.’ The end is thus always the same: ‘O my Sustainer! Succour me against their accusation of lying.’ i.e. turn their accusation of lying into victory for me.

This was said by Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* when His people accused Him of lying. It was also said by Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* when His people accused Him of lying. This is because when a Messenger is accused of lying, He only turns to the one who sent Him, because the one who sent him promised Him victory and succour:

‘And the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.’ (*as-Saffat:* 173)

Allah also says: ‘…Allah is sure to help those who help His cause…’ (*al-Hajj:* 40)

Allah He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: it is they who will be helped’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-172)

The meaning is: ‘give me victory as You are the one who sent me. My people have accused me of lying after I exerted all that is in my power to call them to You. I have no power against them. I only have Your help.’ When a person expends all that Allah has granted them without reaching his goal, he becomes helpless. He falls under His statement: ‘…Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him?’ (*an-Naml:* 62)

Therefore, do not seek succour in Allah until you have fulfilled your own responsibilities and exerted all efforts to reach your goal. However, do not ignore the means and say: ‘O Lord, Fulfil my wishes!’ The world is subjugated to you; the axe (the means) is in your hand; you have health and power. So expend your resources’. Do not say this until you have become that desperate person whose prayer Allah answers.

This is why we hear many people say: I prayed to Allah, but He did not answer my prayer. We say to them: you did not pray the prayer of the desperate. You prayed the prayer of someone who has the means at hand but is lazy to use them. This is why your prayer is not answered.

We see this even amongst us humans—and Allah has the loftiest example. Suppose that you are a wealthy person and own a business and you have just received a delivery of imported goods. You closely observe the workers as they store away the goods. It is not your job to carry and store the goods. This is the job of the workers. However, suppose you see a worker who is finding his load heavy such that the weight of the box is almost causing him to fall. How will you react? You will, no doubt fear for him, take his hand and help him. This is because he has done all he could and has expended his means. You will not, therefore, hold back your assistance.

In this way your Lord *Glorified is He* wants you to fulfil your responsibilities and to expend all the means at your disposal. This is because the means are Allah's outstretched hand to His creation. So do not reject Allah's hand which provides you with the means in order to seek self-fulfilment without expending the means.

This is why the Messengers who were accused of lying said: '…The prophet said, 'My Lord, help me…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 39) not because I am just sitting, languid and careless but '…against their calling me a liar' (*al-Mu'minun:* 39), i.e. I have done everything in my capacity, but I have nothing more I can use against them.

The response comes immediately:

قَالَ عَمَّا قَلِيلٖ لَّيُصۡبِحُنَّ نَٰدِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

And so God said, 'Soon they will be filled with regret' [40] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 40)

A'mma qalil means after a while. The Arabic word *ann* used here has the meaning of (after) just as in His statement: 'you will progress from stage to stage' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 19). *Tabaqan 'ann tabaq* mean: stage after stage.

'…Soon they will, in the morning, be filled with regret.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 40): When their accusation of lying will fall upon them and the punishment will befall them they will regret it. This is because they will not be able to rectify for that which has passed them. They will not have anything except for regret. This issue exemplifies to us the human nature: if it is not mixed with whims, it ends up by being on the truth. If anger leads it to falsehood, it then balances out when the tumults of anger subside.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us proofs and indications of this concept in the story of the two sons of Adam *peace be upon him* by saying:

‘[Prophet], tell them the truth about the story of Adam’s two sons: each of them offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one and not the other. One said, “I will kill you”, but the other said, “Allah only accepts the sacrifice of those who are mindful of Him”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 27).

The story develops until He *Glorified is He* says: ‘But his soul prompted him to kill his brother…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 30). This murder was thus a consequence of anger. It should have been that this murder calmed him and made him happy since he had carried out that which he desired. However he ‘…became remorseful.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 31) meaning that: after the outburst of anger within him had subsided, he regretted what he had done. Why? This is the nature of the human soul which is not led into inordinacy or taken out of its balance except by whims. If whims leave it, it returns to steadfastness and the truth. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* created measurements within the human being which should not be corrupted by whims and which should not be taken out of moderation by anger. This is why they say: the scourge of opinion is the whims.

Qabil (Cain) awoke from his heedlessness, but only after seeing the consequence of the evil deed which he arrived at due to his rashness. Those who are intelligent, however, awake before reacting.

However, why did He choose the morning specifically: ‘…Soon they will, in the morning, be filled with regret’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 40). He says, *latusbehunna* (will, in the morning, be).

The one who traces what happened to the belying nations who denied their Prophets finds that the punishment and vengeance wrought upon them usually took place by morning. Allah *the Most High* says, ‘Do they, then, [really] wish that Our punishment be hastened on? But then, once it alights upon them, hapless will be the awakening of those who were warned [to no avail]!’ (*as-Saffat:* 176-177) Allah *the Most High* also says, ‘And early in the morning the decreed punishment came upon them’ (*al-Qamar:* 38). He *the Most High* says, ‘Then in the early morning they called out to one another’ (*al-Qalam:* 21).

Simply, the morning follows the time of sleep; they arise and the punishment catches them by surprise. It suddenly befalls them when they have no way to escape. Unlike the punishment of daytime when people are conscious, at this time, they regret their disbelief and denial of the Prophets, which brought calamities upon them. Human regret for loss of good things is natural; man is sometimes overcome by desire and deluded by absurdity to reject the truth. It is arrogance that prevents people from submitting to a prophet under pretexts that he is a human like them. They falsely think that he seeks for power or authority over them. However, when they face the consequences of their belying and absurdity, they become regretful. Alas, too late is that hour of remorse! Therefore, self-arrogance leads a human being to regret when overcome by painful punishment in return for his/her disobedience. In this situation, one regrets arrogance and self-conceited, which she/he had to give up. It is wisely said that 'ultimate bravery is to act prudently and cautiously at times of danger.' For example, when you face an enemy and cannot defeat him/her. We remember President Sadat's statement, 'I cannot fight America.' Some people understood it as a sign of weakness and cowardice. It is not. In fact, it is bravery; rather, a high form of bravery! Bravery shall first be against oneself to remove self-deception. This form of bravery is higher than showing bravery against enemies. Imagine, if Sadat had entered war and lost, how great would be his regret for having a whimsical bravery apart from considering the consequences. We have witnessed the consequences of reckless decisions concerning wars!

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

فَأَخَذَتۡهُمُ ٱلصَّيۡحَةُ بِٱلۡحَقِّ فَجَعَلۡنَٰهُمۡ غُثَآءٗۚ فَبُعۡدٗا لِّلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

And then the blast [of our punishment] overtook them,
justly and unavoidably, and We caused them to become as
the flotsam of dead leaves and the scum borne on the surface
of a torrent. Far distant from, and deprived [41]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 41)

When the Lord *the Most High* promised and sets an appointed time for His Promise, the Promise must come true at its fixed time. If the promise does not come true—no punishment afflicts them, they would escape remorse and the principle itself will fail. As long as Allah *the Most High* has said it and divinely declared it in the Quran, He will maintain it. 'After a little while they will surely be smitten with remorse!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 40) Thus, the punishment must befall them in the morning. Therefore, 'the blast [of Our punishment] overtook them, justly and unavoidably' (*al-Mu'minun:* 41); it is not transgression or injustice. In another context, He *the Most High* says, 'As for 'Ad, they were destroyed by a storm-wind furiously raging' (*al-Haqqa:* 6). The two meanings meet, since the storm-wind makes a scolding sound as if it is a blast and a scream. 'We caused them to become as the flotsam of dead leaves and the scum borne on the surface of a torrent' (*al-Mu'minun:* 41). The Arabic word *ghuthaa* refers to the floating rubbish, e.g. dead leaves, hay, remains of plants, etc. on the surface of a body of water. This light, yet valueless floating rubbish, on the surface of water is randomly carried away by winds. It is also identical with the valueless about which the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'As far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17). The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said to His Companions: 'The nations will call upon one another against you as food is caved in on its vessel', i.e. they will call on one another to fight you as if you are booty that they want to carve up. The Companions said, 'Is it because we will be small in number, O Messenger of Allah?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'In fact you will be great in numbers then, but you will be like the scum of the flood' i.e. inconsequential and valueless, so can easily be defeated."

The Lord's statement: 'Far distant from, and deprived (of, Our mercy) are the unjust and wrongdoing people' (*al-Mu'minun:* 41) means that they are away from the Divine mercy and blessings, which We would have granted and promised them, had they believed in Us. The distance is not from punishment indeed. Distance may be in time or space. We usually say, 'It is far i.e. in time or place'. The intention here is they are far from the blissful graces and bounties that they have won, if they had believed.

Injustice is, as previously said, to seize the rights of others. Polytheism is a grave form of injustice and wrongdoing. Some literalists says that polytheism is a grave wrongdoing because one rejects divinity and wrongs Allah by associating partners with Him, while He is alone with no partners. Yes, you have committed wrongdoing but against yourself; you did nothing to Allah. Simply, nobody can wrong Him, even if injustice is—as said—seizing the rights of others unjustly. Actually, the rights of Allah are inviolable and established for Him before the existence of all and they are in need of no recognition from anyone. They are established no matter how widespread is falsehood or how arrogant are the people of misguidance! This is why He *the Most High* says, '[He] brought utterly low the cause of the disbelievers' (*at-Tawba:* 40), whereas 'Allah's Cause is always supreme' (*at-Tawba:* 40). He did not say in accordance with the first statement: [and made] supreme Allah's Cause because it implies that it may have passed a time when it was not supreme. Instead, it is 'Allah's Cause' in the nominative case to indicate constancy 'Allah's Cause is always supreme' (*at-Tawba:* 40). It is always supreme even if the cause of disbelievers may be temporarily high. Why? Evidently, the supremacy of disbelievers is in reality inspiring and awakening people to the supremacy of Allah's cause. If disbelief attains high supremacy with widespread evils and corruptions, people then open their minds and retain consciousness. They are alerted to the lowliness of disbelief and wrongdoing. As such, they reject that all and return to the right path and the firm truth of Allah *the Most High*. Thus, Allah's Cause is supreme despite the malicious efforts of disbelieves. Simply, the real beauty is only manifested in the presence of its opposite. Allah *the Most High* does not forsake the truth, but He leaves it to test human solicitude for it. If they do not guard it, then He does Himself. Since they have not wronged Allah — they indeed cannot, they have only wronged themselves. Injustice against others is comprehensible, but self-injustice and self-oppression is most repulsive and extremely grave.

ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَا مِنۢ بَعْدِهِمْ قُرُونًا ءَاخَرِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

And after them We gave rise to new generations [42]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 42)

A few verses previously the Lord *the Most High* said, 'after those [people of old], We gave rise to new generations' (*al-Mu'minun:* 31). The word generation in Arabic was mentioned in the singular form, since the topic was concerned with the nation of *'Ad*—the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*. Now, He *the Most High* says, 'After them We gave rise to new generations' (*al-Mu'minun:* 42) because the forthcoming discussion will explore a number of different nations and divine messages. He mentions the word generation in its plural form i.e. contemporary generations just as Ibrahim (Abraham) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* were contemporaries, and Musa (Moses) and Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them* were contemporaries.

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

مَا تَسۡبِقُ مِنۡ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلَهَا وَمَا يَسۡتَـٔۡخِرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

[For] no community can ever forestall [the end of]
its term, neither can they delay [its coming] [43]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 43)

Reflect upon this verse well and give it your full attention. Every community has an appointed term at which it will come to an end. It is like the fixed term of individuals which does not forestall nor is it delayed. Generation passed after generation and community after another in different stages similar to human life. They end and others follow them. Every community has a messenger who brings them the Divine call and way of life. He strives to promote the call until Allah gives him victory when his mission is spread and people follow it. Then, people fall prey to spiritual decline and languor, which mislead them away from the way of Allah; they differ and split apart. This heralds the end of this community, only for another to take its place. The same goes true for civilisations, which grow weaker and finally are overcome by other stronger ones. We hear of the ancient civilizations of Egypt, China, Yemen, Rome, Phoenicia and many others. They come one after the other and take their share of ascendancy and luxury. Then, their status turned into weakness and decline. Their determination and strength turned into diffidence and idleness. They become unaware of the means of their ascendancy and progress, so their civilization is destroyed and another stronger one takes its place.

Here is an example of a great civilization that reached the pinnacle of majesty, 'Have you not seen what your Lord did with the [people of] 'Ad; the people Of *Iram* [City] with lofty pillars (erected as signposts in the desert). The like of which was not built in any land? And with [the people of] Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [10]' (*al-Fajr:* 6-10)

Until today we see the remains of the Pharaonic civilization. We see how people of modern civilizations are attracted to it and how it grabs modern attention. People from all corners of the world come to visit its monuments. However, the civilization of ʻAd was greater than it was; Allah *the Most High* says about ʿAd: 'The like of which was not built in any land' (*al-Fajr:* 6-8). Despite this, we find nothing of their remnants indicating that majesty. This civilisation did not have immunity by which it could protect itself or preserve anything. It suffered destruction and nothing survived to tell about it. The followers of messengers also go through the same cycle. After having strong faith, they would suffer weaker faith and deterioration until the Lord *the Most High* sends a new messenger. '[For] no community can ever forestall [the end of] its term, neither can they delay [its coming]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 43). Clearly, no community can forestall the term that Allah has appointed for it. It neither ends, nor suffers destructions until there comes its fixed time. However, Allah's statement 'Neither can they delay [its coming]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 43) means that no community can forestall its term, i.e. if its term is to be destroyed after twenty years, it cannot be destroyed in fifteen years. As for delaying it after reaching twenty years to further ten years, how can this be? In response, we say that they cannot delay, i.e. they cannot forestall their term, but it is already pre-judged that they could not be delayed; delaying the term beyond its fixed time is impossible. Just like when we say that someone who has reached the age of twenty is not able to die at the age of ten. It means that it cannot be delayed [once it has been reached]

ثُمَّ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا تَتْرَا ۖ كُلَّ مَا جَاءَ أُمَّةً رَّسُولُهَا كَذَّبُوهُ ۚ فَأَتْبَعْنَا بَعْضَهُم
بَعْضًا وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ ۚ فَبُعْدًا لِّقَوْمٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

And We sent Our messengers in succession: whenever a messenger came to a community they invariably called him a liar, so We destroyed them one after the other and made them into cautionary tales. Away with the disbelievers! [44]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 44)

The Messenger followed 'One after another' (*al-Mu'minun:* 44), so some have thought the word used here (*tatra*) is a verb, while in fact it is a noun, for it ends with *nunnation*, which never exists in Arabic verbs. In addition, the first‘’ [in *ṯatra*] may stand for ‘w’ as narrated in the Prophetic statement, ‘Safeguard Allah and He will safeguard you. Safeguard Allah and you will find Him *ṯujahaka* or *wajahaka,* i.e. in front of you.’(1) If you change the first ‘t’ in “*ṯatra*” into a ‘w’, it becomes *witra,* which means following each other individually; each person after the other. *Witr* means an individual.

He *the Most High* says, ‘Every time their Messenger came to a community, they gave him the lie’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 44). Unfortunately, such was the normal answer of nations to their messengers. No messenger was sent but his people belied him, so he turned to his Lord, ‘[Whereupon the Prophet] would say, “O my Lord! Succour me against their accusation of lying!”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 39) Accusing the Messenger is always indicative of the wickedness of his people and the necessity of his mission. Messengers only came after falsehood and transgression dominate. As such, Messengers had to endure the false accusations attributing them to lying at the hand of those who benefitted from evils and wickedness insomuch that they defend it with all their might. Their belying of Messengers is a proof of the necessity of Messengers. Otherwise, there would be no need for a new divine message.

Allah’s statement: ‘So We caused them to follow one another’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 44) implies that a messenger passed and another came in his stead or that we destroyed the beliers and then others came after them, who also belied the Messengers and suffered destruction.

‘Let them become [mere] tales’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 44): the Arabic word *ahadith* (tales/narrations/speeches) is either the plural of hadith, e.g., the narrations of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* or the plural of *uhdutha*, i.e. a story frequently repeated by people. It is said of someone who is constantly spoken of ‘they have made me a subject of rumour’, i.e. in a denigrating manner. As such, ‘let them become [mere] tales’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 44) as nothing remains except tales which remind of their historical events. In another place, He *the Most High* says, ‘We caused them to become [one of those] tales [of things long past] and scattered them in countless fragments…' (*Saba':* 19). The Lord *the Most High* says about them and their predecessors: 'So – away with the folk who would not believe!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 44); they are away from the Divine Mercy and Bounty which they would have enjoyed, had they but believed.

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(1) *Ahmad, Musnad, (1/293, 303, 307); At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, (Hadith Number: 2516). At-Tirmidhi said, “It is a good narration from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas.”*

ثُمَّ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ وَأَخَاهُ هَٰرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَسُلْطَٰنٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron,
with Our signs and clear authority [45]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 45)

The Quran repeatedly relates the story of Musa *peace be upon him* and His brother Harun *peace be upon him* for whom Musa said, 'Add You through him to my strength, and let him share my task' (*Ta Ha:* 31-32). Some people think that Musa *peace be upon him* came with only one message, but actually he delivered two messages; a special message for Pharaoh summarised in his saying, 'Let, then, the children of Israel go with us and cause them not to suffer [any longer]' (*Ta Ha:* 47). He came with miracles to confirm that His message was from Allah. The dispute Musa had with the Pharaoh about faith was not part of his message, but his debates necessitated it. The other message was for the Children of Israel, which is the Torah.

On Allah's statement 'with Our messages' (*al-Mu'minun:* 45), we said that the word *ayaat* (i.e. verses, messages, signs, etc.) is the plural of *aya* which designates a wondrous thing which turns onlookers towards it. It is a sign of honour and pride for its owner. Signs are either celestial indicating the Divine Power in His creation, such as the sun and the moon; He *the Most High* says, 'Now among His signs are the night and the day' (*Fussilat:* 37). The function of celestial signs is to turn the attention of the creation towards the unique design of the Creator and the necessary faith in Him. It is through them that we know that there is a Great Creator and Power behind the unique universe. This Creator sustains and manages it. Who does sustain the sun with this extraordinary power? If the electric current disconnects, the lamp will go out. Who has created the sun out of nothingness and sustained it with energy from nothingness? There lies a power behind this universe. What is it? What does it seek from us? The function of Messengers is to convey to us the answers to these questions. The word *ayah* also refers to the miracle, which confirms the truth of a messenger in his conveyance of the Divine Message. It also refers to the verses of the Quran, which reveal the divine laws and ways for the creation to follow.

Then Allah *the Most High* says, ‘and a manifest authority [from Us]’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 45). This sentence takes the same rule of ‘with Our messages…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 45). Allah sent the message as well as the manifest authority. Here, the miracles stand for the *sultan* (i.e. compelling authority or power) since authority is proof. The proof of the highest existence lies in the universal signs, whereas the proofs for the truth of messengers are the miracles. The proofs of laws are the verses that carry them.

He named the staff, which was the miracle of Musa *peace be upon him* a manifest authority that is comprehensive because it was a miracle that kept repeating itself as seen in many contexts:

- In a situation, it turns into a snake and swallows other snakes
- On another occasion, it is used to strike the sea and split it.
- It is also used to strike a stone from which waters gush through.
  He said of it: ‘Many other uses have I for it’ (*Ta Ha:* 18).

Sultan also designates the act of compelling someone to do something or convincing others with incontrovertible proofs to do that thing. As such, on the Day of Resurrection, Satan would say to his followers, ‘I had no ‘*Sultan*’ at all over you; I but called you and you responded unto me’ (*Ibrahim:* 22), i.e. followed my delusions, but I have no authority over you, neither one of compulsion nor one of proof.

Finally, he also says, ‘It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine’ (*Ibrahim:* 22). A person only cries when something frightens them and they have no way out of it. They cry for someone to come and help them. The one who hurries to his aid is someone who has responded to their cries, i.e. has removed the cause of their cries.

إِلَىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَمَلَإِيْهِۦ فَٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ وَكَانُواْ قَوۡمًا عَالِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

To Pharaoh and his prominent leaders, but they responded
with arrogance: they were a haughty people [46]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 46)

'Pharaoh' is a title given to anyone who ruled Egypt, just like the title of Khosrau in Persia and of Caesar in Rome. We explored the meaning of 'great ones,' which is derived from '*mala'* (i.e. to fill). It refers to the people who fill the eyes with awe and stature—the leading notables of a people. It is said, 'So and so is the attraction of sight', i.e. people always look at him.

Allah's statement: 'But these behaved with arrogance, for they were people wont to glorify [only] themselves' (*al-Mu'minun:* 46). *Istikbaar* (arrogance) is different from *ta'ali* i.e. self-pride. In case of *Istikbaar,* one knows and recognizes the laws, but she/he refuses to obey it and disdains the idea of doing obeying the commands. As for *ta'ali*, one does not believe that she/he is subject to the ruling in the first place. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* addressed Iblis (Satan), when refusing to prostrate himself to Adam, 'Are you too proud [to prostrate before another created being], or are you of those who think [only] of themselves as high?' (*Sad:* 75) In reality, the lofty ones are the angels who are fully obedient to Allah *the Most High*; they know nothing of Adam *peace be upon him* and his children.

فَقَالُوٓاْ أَنُؤۡمِنُ لِبَشَرَيۡنِ مِثۡلِنَا وَقَوۡمُهُمَا لَنَا عَٰبِدُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

They said, 'Are we to believe in two mortals like us?
And their people are our servants?' [47]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 47)

Here they questioned the mortality of Musa and Harun *peace be upon them* following the footsteps of past nations. They angels sent as Messengers 'Whenever [Allah's] guidance came to them [through a prophet,] nothing has ever kept people from believing [in him] save their objection: "Would Allah have sent a [mere] mortal man as His Messenger?"' (*al-Isra':* 94) It is absurd to ask for an angel-messenger; if the Messenger was an angel, how could he be a role model for humans? How would they see him and learn guidance from him? Even an angel would have to assume a human form. Allah says, ‘If We had appointed an angel as Our message-bearer, We would certainly have made him [appear as] a man – and thus We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves’ (*al-An‘am:* 9). The objection remains how to believe that he is an angel.

Allah’s statement ‘Although their people are our slaves’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 47) relates their arrogance; how to believe in Musa and Harun, while their people– the Children of Israel—are our servants, and they obey our commands and we dishonour them, slaughtering their boys, putting their women to shame and humiliating them with a terrible punishment? They call it slavery because submission and humiliation imply slavery.

فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَكَانُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلْمُهْلَكِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

And so they called them both liars: they became another ruined people[48] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 48)

They were drowned. This story is well known and famous since Allah made it a lesson and example for others.

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

For, indeed, We had vouchsafed revelation unto Moses in order that they might find the right way [49] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 49)

The ‘Revelation’ here refers to the Torah as a way of guidance ‘in order that they might find the right way’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 49), i.e. take the way to a noble and beneficial point.

وَجَعَلْنَا ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَأُمَّهُۥٓ ءَايَةً وَءَاوَيْنَـٰهُمَآ إِلَىٰ رَبْوَةٍ ذَاتِ قَرَارٍ وَمَعِينٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign; We gave them shelter on a peaceful hillside with flowing water [50] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 50)

After giving this short summary of the story of Musa and Harun, we move onto the Messiah—son of Maryam *peace be upon him*. When talking of

'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* the Quran sometimes call him 'son of Maryam' and at other times ''Isa, son of Maryam'. As such, Maryam, His mother— the best of all women, wondered about the glad tidings of giving her a son. She said, 'How can it be while no man has touched me?' It did cross her mind that she may marry and have a child. Allah named him 'son of Maryam' after his mother, so he has no father. Nothing is more difficult for a young woman than to find herself pregnant, even though no man has touched her. The honour of a woman is the most valuable thing she has. The Lord *the Most High* [previously] prepared Mary *Allah's peace be upon her* to face this awkward situation. He fortified her with necessary defence to face this affair, just as we currently use immunization to ward off disease.

When Zakaryya (Zechariah) *Allah's peace be upon her* who was responsible for her, entered into Mary's prayer niche, he found that she had fruits in her possession which he himself had not brought. He asked, 'Whence came this unto you?' She would answer: "It is from Allah"' (*Al-'Imran:* 37). Maryam's response reflects her sound understanding of the issue of sustenance. It was not a passing response, since she then said, 'Behold, Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills beyond all reckoning' (*Al-'Imran:* 37). Here, there is a lesson for every father, guardian, and family leader; he should ask members of his family about everything he sees with them which he himself did not bring. He shall not allow his children to pursue that which is not rightfully theirs.

Zakaryya *peace be upon him* benefited from Maryam's statement. He became assured that Allah grants sustenance unto whom He wills beyond all limits, but this knowledge was on the periphery of his consciousness. When he heard Maryam *peace be upon her* his consciousness led him to pray for Allah to grant him a child despite his old age and barren wife. Maryam *peace be upon her* also benefited from it, because when she became pregnant— despite no man touched her— she was calm; she knew that Allah granted sustenance beyond all reckoning.

As for Allah's statement, 'And [as We exalted Musa (Moses), so, too,] We made the son of Maryam and his mother' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50), it refers to both 'Isa (Jesus) and Maryam. It uses the singular form 'a sign [of Our grace]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50) because they share it. Maryam becomes a sign after she reproduced without a partner and ‘Isa is a sign for he was born without a father. It is not that only one of them is the sign, but they are equal in it. The Quranic text conveys this fact when referring to ‘Isa first ‘And [as We exalted Musa, so, too,] We made the son of Maryam and his mother a symbol [of Our grace]’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 50) and to Maryam first in another verse ‘[We] caused her, together with her son, to become a symbol [of Our grace]’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 91). The text speaks of their equal status making no discrimination between them.

The sign is an extraordinary event affirming the absolute power of the Creator. No one should think that the process of reproduction is automatic and contingent upon parents. The Miracle of the creation of ‘Isa *peace be upon him* was that he was an exception from that rule; Allah makes him a proof of His Omnipotence. Allah if He so wills can simply create from nothingness, or from a father only, or from a mother only. Sometimes both a mother and a father exist, but there is no reproduction. To sum up, the Divine Will and Ability know no bounds. He *the Most High* says, ‘Allah’s alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills. Or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills], and causes to be barren whomever He wills’ (*ash-Shura:* 49-50).

As currently seen, people try to avoid reproduction in many ways, but a child destined to come will come despite human wishes and different contraceptives. He *the Most High* says, ‘[We] provided for both an abode in a high place of lasting restfulness and unsullied springs’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 50). After being pregnant in this manner, Maryam normally suffered persecution and banishment from her people. In fact, she [herself] was embarrassed from facing people and was wary of meeting anyone. Have you not seen Allah’s description of the daughter of Shu’aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* ‘[Shortly] afterwards, one of the two [maidens] approached him, walking shyly’ (*al-Qasas:* 25). She walked shyly in her way to call a young foreign man. How was then the situation with Mary *peace be upon her* when her people saw her pregnant while she was unmarried? It is the most difficult thing for a woman. In Paris, Imam Muhammad ʿAbduh was asked, 'How had 'A'ishah *Allah be pleased with her* faced her people after being falsely accused of adultery?' Allah inspired and guided him to say, 'The same way in which Maryam *peace be upon her* faced her people when she became pregnant.' They sought to use this occurrence as a source of dishonour to Islam.

In that situation, Allah defended Maryam *peace be upon her* against all suspicion. When Yusuf (Joseph, not the prophet Joseph but a religious man among the Israelites)—the carpenter, Maryam's fiancé(1) and most jealous of people over her, discovered her pregnancy, his heart turned to her with compassion. He did not suspect her and accuse her of promiscuity. Allah *the Most High* says, 'Know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart' (*al-Anfal:* 24). He began to serve her and feel compassion for her. Allah graced him with contentment regarding the affair. In his first wonders of her situation, he said to Maryam *peace be upon her* 'O Mary! Do you know of a tree without a seed?' Mary gently smiled, as she perceived his intention and responded: 'Yes, the tree which sprouted the first seed.' Such is the speech of believers endowed with common sense and perception. As such, Allah gives refuge to her and her son '[We] provided for both an abode in a high place of lasting restfulness and unsullied springs.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50) The word 'refuge' implies that a person is in dire need of a place for protection. Mary *peace be upon her* was desperately in need of a place for residence and protection from her people. This refuge must contain the necessities of life: air, water, and food, especially for a pregnant one like Maryam who had to prepare for the coming child. Wonderfully, the Lord *the Most High* prepared the place for Maryam '[We] provided for both an abode in a high place' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50):

- *Rabwah* [lit. hill] is a place, which is higher than the earth's surface but lower than a mountain. It has a moderate climate since it is between the heat of the earth's surface and the coldness of the mountaintop.

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(1) *As for the claim that Maryam was engaged to Joseph, the carpenter, this information is mentioned only in the Bible, meaning that it was mentioned in neither the Quran nor the Sunnan of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. Information like this may be accepted from the Islamic point of view as long as it does not call for anything which may be against the sound Muslim creed.*

- ‘Of lasting restfulness’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 50), i.e. the means of restfulness, such as food and water were all there. She would get water from a spring, which flowed down from the mountaintop and she would get food from the fruits of the date palm, which took root by her side.
- It is well known that a hill is the most appropriate place since water flows down to it from above, but no water remains to damage crops, for the water flows down to lower land. The Lord *the Most High* gives the example of fertile land which has a vast yield saying: ‘The parable of those who spend their possessions out of a longing to please Allah, and out of their own inner certainty, is that of a garden on *rabwah* (high, fertile ground)’ (*al-Baqara:* 265).

Allah *the Most High* chose for Mary *peace be upon her* a place of lasting rest, rich with the necessities of life to the highest degree insomuch that she would not need to move to another place. After speaking about a place of stability and the necessities of life, the Lord *the Most High* speaks of the general issue of food, drink, and air. It was thus suitable that He *the Most High* should then talk about food:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلرُّسُلُ كُلُواْ مِنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ وَٱعۡمَلُواْ صَٰلِحًاۖ إِنِّي بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ عَلِيمٞ ٥١

Messengers, eat good things and do good deeds: I am well aware of what you do [51] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 51)

How does the Lord *the Most High* address all Messengers at once? We say that the Noble Quran is the Eternal Word of Allah. It is not restricted to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even if it was revealed to him; it reiterates the addresses to all past messengers as well. After commanding them to eat good things, the Lord *the Most High* commanded them to: ‘Do righteous deeds’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 51). He then says, ‘Verily, I have full knowledge of all that you do’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 51). Clearly, the Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Listen to my commands, for I have full knowledge of all that is good for you. I am the Creator who knows how your entity responds to doing good. Your entity will only be firm and righteous when you eat good and lawful food'. As we said that the designer of a machine decides the proper fuel for its work; otherwise it will break down. Keeping to righteous actions in your daily life is contingent on eating good food, which nurtures your body from lawful sources. Your bodily atoms will thus be in harmony, co-operating with one another rather than opposing one another. If they are in harmony, they will help you in righteousness. If the unlawful food enters your body, it pollutes your atoms. They will repel and reject one another, just as using the wrong fuel for a machine. Learn this affair; the Creator tells of it, so believe in Him just as you believe in the ability of manufacturers who manufactures something for you and sets out the operating system of his design. The Lord firstly commanded messengers to eat from the good because the righteous deed requires a sound system which is inherently in order. As such, the biography of the Prophet relates that Umm 'Abdullah, the sister of Shaddad ibn Aws who sent some milk to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to break His fast on a hot day. He sent a message to her knowing that she was poor and owned nothing, asking: 'Whence did you get this milk?' She sent back saying, 'From a sheep that I possess.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* sent for her again asking, 'How did you get this sheep?' She said, 'I bought it with some money that I had saved.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* then drank the milk.(1) Even though we do not investigate our food to this extent, but the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* as a model, carries out the Divine Law perfectly. He also said, 'O people! Allah is good and only accepts good. Allah commands the believers that which He commanded the Messengers. He said: 'O you Messengers! Partake of the good things of life, and do righteous deeds: verily, I have full knowledge of all that you do' (*al-Mu'minun:* 51). And He said: 'O you who believe! Partake of the good things which We have provided for you as sustenance' (*al-Baqara:* 172). He then mentioned a dishevelled and dusty man, on a long journey, outstretches his hands to the sky supplicating: ‘O Lord! O Lord! O Lord! While his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, his clothing is unlawful and has been nurtured with unlawful, how can his prayers be answered(1) while he prays to Allah with a corrupt body polluted with unlawful means? Likewise, Sa‘d *Allah be pleased with him* once said to the Prophet, ‘O Messenger of Allah, pray to Allah that he answers my prayers’. In response, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘O Sa‘d, make your food good and your prayers will be answered’.(2) Then the Lord *the Most High* concluded this verse saying, ‘I have full knowledge of all that you do’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 51); namely, Allah knows what is right and will bring about good for human being.

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(1) It is narrated that Umm 'Abdullah then said, 'O Messenger of Allah! I sent the milk to you seeing you [fasting] on a long hot day, but You sent my messenger back with it'. He said to her, 'The messengers have been commanded to eat only lawful things and do only righteous deeds'. See Al-HaythamI, Majma' Al-Zawa'id, 10/291. He said: 'It is related by At-Tabarani and its chain has Abu Bakr ibn Abu Maryam, who is weak.'

وَإِنَّ هَٰذِهِۦٓ أُمَّتُكُمۡ أُمَّةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ وَأَنَا۠ رَبُّكُمۡ فَٱتَّقُونِ ﴿٥٢﴾

The Lord, the Most High, then says, ‘And, verily, this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Lord of you all: remain, then, conscious of Me!’[52] (*al-Mu’minun:* 52)

After the Lord *the Most High* spoke of the battle between faith and disbelief, He moved on to another battle which is no less serious than the first. It is the battle of division and differences between believers. He wants to forewarn us of differences and dissension, which sap the strength of the community (*ansar*) and weaken it in face of enemies. As seen, we have become sects and parties; enemies mock at us saying, 'Let them agree amongst themselves before preaching Islam'. The *ummah* is a firmly-built community united by time or religion. It also refers to an individual, if she/he has all the characteristics of goodness, which are only found in an entire community. Allah *the Most High* described prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as an *ummah* in His statement: 'Verily, Abraham was an *ummah* (i.e. man combining within himself all virtues) devoutly obeying Allah's will, turning away from all that is false, and not being of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah' (*an-Nahl:* 120). As for Allah's statement, 'Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). How could it be one *ummah* with different laws? In response, the religion is made up of fundamental principles and beliefs, which are all the same in all prophets' messages. As for ethics and laws, they change from a divine message to another according to the environment and times. He the *Most High* says, 'In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and into which We gave you [O Muhammad] insight through revelation – as well as that which We had enjoined upon Ibrahim, and Musa (Moses), and 'Isa (Jesus): Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein' (*ash-Shura:* 13). The community is united in terms of beliefs, even though it differs in laws, approaches, and provisions. As such, Allah says, 'To make lawful unto you some of the things which [beforehand] were forbidden to you' (*Al-'Imran:* 50). In past communities, if impurity tainted clothing, it was necessary to cut the area tainted with impurity. When Islam came it, lightened this hardship and ordained that they should merely wash the area to make it pure. Since your *ummah* is one community, 'Since I am the Lord of you all: remain, then, conscious of Me!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 52), i.e. fear Allah regarding the *ummah* and keep its unity. Beware of means to disunity and differences, which may lead to false accusations of disbelief in pursuit of temporal pleasures at the expense of the religion. The Lord *the Most High* says, 'Verily, as for those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects, you have nothing to do with them' (*al-An'am:* 159). Allah clarified the foundational principles over which there can be no differences or misinterpretations. As for the things left open for interpretations, we should respect the interpretation of others. Had the Lord *the Most High* so willed, He would have made everything unambiguous leaving no room for opinions or interpretation.

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(1) *Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 1015); Ahmad, Musnad, 2/328; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith Number: (2989) from Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Ibn ‘Abbas said, “I recited the [following] verse to the Messenger, ‘O mankind! Partake of what is lawful and good on earth’ (al-Baqara: 168). Sa‘d ibn Abu Waqqas may Allah be pleased with him stood up and said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, pray to Allah that He makes me [one whom He] answers his prayers’. The Prophet Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said: “{O Sa‘d make your food good and your prayers will be answered. [I swear] by the one in whose power Muhammad's soul resides that the servant who places an unlawful morsel into his stomach will not have his deeds accepted for forty days. No matter what worship he does, if his flesh springs from the unlawful, then the fire is more deserving of it}. Al-Haythami, Majma‘ Al-Zawa’id, 10/2910. He said: It is narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Saghir and its chain has men whom I do not know.*

As for Allah's statement, 'I am the Lord of you all' (*al-Mu'minun:* 52), it is out of My Grace that I gave you clarified the articles of faith because difference in these affairs corrupts the society. I have left other affairs which you may do or leave according to each interpretation because differences in them do not lead to corruption in society. We have previously given examples of these affairs.

Allah's statement 'Remain, then, conscious of me!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 52): means obey commands and carry out my ordainment. For matters left open for interpretations, respect the interpretation of others. Have we listened to Allah's statement and obeyed Him?!

فَتَقَطَّعُوٓاْ أَمۡرَهُم بَيۡنَهُمۡ زُبُرٗاۖ كُلُّ حِزۡبِۭ بِمَا لَدَيۡهِمۡ فَرِحُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

But they have split their community into sects, each rejoicing in their own [53] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 53)

Zurabara i.e. dispersed pieces, which is similar to Allah's saying, 'Bring me *zabara al hadeed,* i.e. pieces of iron' (*al-Kahf:* 96). 'Each group delighting in [but] what they themselves possess [by way of tenets]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 53), i.e. every group is pleased with its opinion as if its opinion is the sheer truth, while all others are false. They seek to have temporal authority over people and deceive them to imagine that they brought that which no one else before perceived or had.

His statement 'What they themselves possess [by way of tenets]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 53) refers to the opinion that they wish to promote in isolation from the ruling of Allah *the Most High*. For example, their saying that prayers in a mosque wherein lies a grave or tomb are void and it is idolatry in worship. If the affair is as they say, then they should destroy the Prophet's grave in Medina. Those who provoke such differences should understand the reality of affairs in the correct way so that they are not from amongst those about whom Allah says, 'But they [who claim to follow you] have torn their unity wide asunder, piece by piece, each group delighting in

[but] what they themselves possess [by way of tenets]’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 53). These differences spoilt past religions before Islam. Indeed, every heavenly religion before Islam, especially the religion of Musa (Moses) and ‘Isa (Jesus) gave glad tidings of Muhammad. When they were the people of the Divine Book and Message, they would argue with the disbelievers and idolaters, saying ‘the time has come for a prophet to come amongst you whom we will follow and with whom we will kill you the way ‘Ad and Iram were killed.’(1) However, ‘Whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it’ (*al-Baqara:* 89). Why? Simply, they wanted to preserve their temporal authority. Why would they not deny the Messenger of Allah (Prophet Muhammad) *peace and blessings be upon him* while one of them(2) was making preparations to crown himself as king of Medina? But the Prophet’s arrival to Medina stopped his plan.

فَذَرْهُمْ فِي غَمْرَتِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

But leave them alone, lost in their ignorance until a [future] time [54] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 54)

Dharhum and *Da‘hum* are synonyms; it is to ‘leave them alone’. The Arabs do not use the past tense of these two verbs, so you only have the present tense *yada‘u* and *yadharu* [she/he leaves]. *Dharni* is mentioned in Allah’s statement, *‘Dharni* (Leave Me) alone [to deal] with those who give the lie to the truth – those who enjoy the blessings of life [without any thought of Allah]’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 11). Allah’s statement ‘Hence, leave Me alone with such as [those who] give the lie to this tiding’ (*al-Qalam:* 44) which means ‘leave them to Me, I will punish them and do with them as I will. Or, leave them to do whatever they wish so that they deserve the punishment when it befalls them’. *Ghamra* (ignorance) literally means the flood of water that covers a man and prevents him from breathing (*tanaffus)*; the only hope of life lies then with the proportion of air in lungs. As such, a person is avid in training lungs to carry the maximum amount of air. It is from this root *nafas* (breath) that the Arabic word *munafasa* (competition) was derived, since in competition two people submerge in order to test the one who can survive longer underwater without breathing.

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(1) *Some elders of the Ansar said, ‘We had power over them [the Jews] during the pre-Islamic days. We were idolaters whilst they were People of the Book, so they said: “Verily, a prophet is about to be sent whom we will follow and kill you with him the killing of ‘Ad and Iram. When Allah sent His Messenger from Quraysh, we followed Him, whilst they disbelieved in Him’. Ibn Katheer related it in his Tafsir (1/124) through the transmission of Ibn Ishaq.*

(2) *He is 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul (d. 9 A.H.), the leader of hypocrites in Madina, nicknamed Abu Al-Habbab from Khuza‘a. Salul was his paternal grandmother. He was the leader of Khazraj during the last pre-Islamic days. He used to enjoy any disaster that befell Muslims and to spread evil rumors. See, Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam, 4/65.*

He *the Most High* says, ‘Then, let all such aspire as [are willing to] aspire to things of high account’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26). You can test yourself by taking a deep breath and counting until you see how much air your lungs can carry. The meaning is “leave them in their folly and heedlessness, for they will not last for long. They are like the one who has been submerged under water, the quicker his breaths run out, the sooner he leaves life. Allah *the Most High* then says, ‘Until a [future] time’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 54). A future time refers to a period of time that could be long as in His statement ‘Yielding its fruit at all times by its Lord’s leave’ (*Ibrahim:* 25). It could also be short like His statement, ‘Extol, then, Allah’s limitless Glory when you enter upon the evening hours and when you rise at morn’ (*ar-Rum:* 17). Allah *the Most High* uses the word *ghamra* to indicate that their time will not be long. The Quran goes on to address a topic of high interest to many believers:

أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُم بِهِۦ مِن مَّالٍ وَبَنِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾ نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِي ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ ۚ بَل لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Do they think that by all the wealth and offspring with which we provide them [55] We [but want to] make them vie with one another in doing [what they consider] good works? Nay, but they do not perceive [their error]! [56] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 55 - 56)

This issue has taken hold many of the believers when they see, the disbelievers prosper and own wealth and power, while they are poor. For some, their faith has been shaken due to these contradictions. We say to the believers, such was not the state of believers in the past. They ruled the world with knowledge and culture. Their civilization dominated a thousand years, but when they abandoned their religion and morals, the current decline befell them. Others dominated us because they took the means of this world. As Muslims, we shall also take these means. These means are available for all, as a grace from the Lordship, which neither believer nor disbeliever is denied. Whoever excellently uses them will obtain their fruits and advantages. He says, ‘To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof, but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come’ (*ash-Shura:* 20). In other words, Allah extends graces to His creation; whoever rejects them must be wretched in the journey of life. The prosperity of these people may be a mere vanity leading to transgression; Allah says, ‘Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things, until, even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted, We suddenly took them to task. Lo! They were broken in spirit’ (*al-An‘am:* 44). The True Lord *Glorified is He* treats this issue here ‘Do they think that by all the wealth and offspring with which We provide them. We [but want to] make them vie with one another in doing [what they consider] good works’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 55-56). Do they think it good for them? No, it is a time of allowance and a gradual way for them to increase in transgression. In another place, Allah *the Most High* says, ‘Let not their worldly goods and [the happiness which they may derive from] their children excite your admiration: Allah but wants to chastise them by these means in this world’ (*at-Tawba:* 85).

As for Allah’s statement, ‘Nay, but they do not perceive [their error]!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 56) The word *bal* (nay) negates the preceding sentence and confirms the succeeding one. It negates the aforementioned opulence, as it is temporary and perishable. It is in reality a calamity for them but they do not perceive it. They do not perceive that prosperity does not mean that We love or are pleased with them. They do not perceive the plot in motion for them. We have previously clarified that when Allah *the Most High* wills to take vengeance against His enemy; He firstly expands prosperity for them, makes things easier, and even raises their worldly status such that when He takes them, the fall will be severe and painful.

As for Allah’s statement: ‘We [but want to] make them vie with one another in doing [what they consider] good works…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 56), the word *musara‘ah* (vying or competing) is used to convey the meaning of competition and hastening to do good deeds and achieve the successful ends in the Quranic contexts. When you are away from something good, it is said, ‘vie to such and such’ to realize this ultimate end and move towards it quickly. But if one is already doing good deeds and wishes to encourage endeavours, you say ‘vie in doing good works.’ The first addresses whoever has not yet entered the realm of good deeds, whereas the latter for the one who has but wishes to rise within.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ هُم مِّنۡ خَشۡيَةِ رَبِّهِم مُّشۡفِقُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

Those who stand in awe of their Lord [57]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 57)

Khashya (awe) is the severest form of fear. A person may fear something, yet still hoping that she/he will survive it and expecting the means to save him/her and allay his/her fears to come through. However, when man fears Allah, it is the right fear from which no one can escape. They ‘stand in reverent awe’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 57) out of fear. Fear is either praiseworthy or blameworthy. The praiseworthy fear exhorts its beholder to stay clear of the causes of fear by doing good deeds. It is the fear of sins, which lead to punishment. It is like a student who studies and works hard out of fear of failure; the believer has fruitful and praiseworthy fear which drives him/her to carry out the means of salvation. This is a sign of faith. As for fear after its right time, the Quran narrates the statement of the criminals ‘The record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid open; and you will behold the guilty filled with dread at what [they see] therein. They will exclaim, “Oh, woe unto us!”’ (*al-Kahf:* 49) Such fear is of no benefit as it comes after the opportunity is lost and the expiry of the time of action. By that time, the Resurrection has already occurred and the books have been distributed, leaving no hope for salvation.

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُم بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمۡ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾ وَٱلَّذِينَ هُم بِرَبِّهِمۡ لَا يُشۡرِكُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

Then the Lord the Most High says: and who believe in their Lord’s messages, [58] and who do not ascribe divinity to aught but their Lord [59] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 58 - 59)

We notice in this verse that the Lord *the Most High* spoke about reverence and awe, then about faith in the Divine signs and finally about polytheism. You may ask: why did He not begin with warning against polytheism? In response it is because polytheism referred to here is the hidden polytheism into which even a believer may fall. Allah said about it, ‘And most of them do not even believe in Allah without [also] ascribing divine powers to other beings beside Him’ (*Yusuf:* 106). Do not, then, think that polytheism is just to ascribe partners to Allah or to prostrate to an idol. The hidden polytheism penetrates hearts and spoils actions, even if a person is a believer. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us the correct manners in this issue. He says in His supplication: ‘O Allah, I seek forgiveness from you for every action which I did for you alone, but that which is other than you mixed with that which you know.’(1) A person begins an action and his intention is sincere to Allah. However, ostentation and Satan’s embellishment may creep into it. As such, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* described hidden polytheism as being more hidden than the crawling black ant walking in darkness on a massive rock.(2) Just as doctrinal polytheism is not imagined from a person with such attributes.

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(1) *Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali (Jami’ Al-‘Ulum wal-Hikam, p. 27) narrated this supplication from Mutarraf ibn ‘Abdullah, who used to say: ‘O Allah I seek forgiveness from you for that which I repented and then returned to. I ask forgiveness from you for that which I vowed to do, but did not fulfill. I seek forgiveness from you for that which I claimed to be devoted to You but was then mixed with that which You know.’*

(2) *Ahmad, Musnad, (4/403) from Abu Musa Al-Ash‘ari may Allah be pleased with him that the Prophet Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said, O people, fear this shirk for it is more hidden than the crawling of an ant. Then someone said: How can we fear it, if it is very hidden, O Messenger of Allah. He said: “Say, O Allah, We seek refuge in You from ascribing partners to you while we know and seek forgiveness in You from that which we do not know.”*

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ مَآ ءَاتَوا۟ وَّقُلُوبُهُمْ وَجِلَةٌ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ رَٰجِعُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

Who always give with hearts that tremble at the
thought that they must return to Him [60]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 60)

They give out of their wealth in charity 'whatever they [have to] give' without limits, neither a tenth nor a twentieth. Allah *the Most High* wants to expand the idea of giving and benevolence. He says, 'whatever they [have to] give' (*al-Mu'minun:* 60) leaving it open so no one may think that it refers to obligatory charity. We know that Allah *the Most High* opens the way for excellence and virtue. This is the state of doing good about which Allah *the Most High* says, '[But,] behold, the God-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs. Enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16). The doer of good (*muhsin*) is someone who obligates himself to do acts of obedience beyond the obligatory duties. He does the voluntary acts of obedience. So, if the obligatory fasting is to fast the month of *Ramadan,* the *muhsin* fasts *Ramadan* in addition to the recommended days. The Quran is very precise when saying, 'They would lie asleep during but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-18). These voluntary acts of worship are additional to the compulsory ones. Allah did not ask you to stand in prayers over the night without sleep; rather, you should pray the night prayer (*'isha'*) and sleep until the dawn prayer (*fajr*). Clearly, Allah also speaks of the voluntary charity saying, 'and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19). He did not say 'known share' because the verse does not speak of the prescribed and fixed charity. It speaks of the supererogatory charity beyond the obligatory prescribed one.

The ambiguity in 'whatever' is also mentioned in His statement: 'and they were overwhelmed by the sea which was destined to overwhelm them' (*Ta Ha:* 78). He did not delineate the amount of water that overwhelmed them. He left the issue ambiguous so that the meaning could be more eloquent and that minds could think of it however they wanted.

However, since they have given and extended their hands to others with giving, why does He *Glorified is He* say: 'their hearts are fearful'? We say: the important part is not the mere action, but rather the acceptance of that action. An action is only accepted if it is sincerely for the sake of Allah, done without ostentation or seeking fame. These people act, attempt to be entirely sincere and seek the means of acceptance. Each one of them will give charity with the left hand not knowing what the right hand has given. Even with this caution, they fear their action may not be accepted. This is also one of the signs of faith.

It is as if your Lord is jealous of you not to take reward when doing an action. This is because if you seek the praise of people in the action, Allah will abandon you to them to take your reward; this is an invalid effort which is of no benefit. Allah is not content for you to be like this. In a Qudsi Hadith: 'sincerity is one of my secrets which I have stored in the hearts of those I love from my servants. No angel can see it so to record it, nor can Satan see it so to corrupt it'.(1)

Fearful: is a forceful reaction and tumultuousness which occurs to a limb out of fear or awe. Some of the exegetes are of the opinion that the verse: 'And they who give what they give while their hearts are fearful' was revealed about a man who used to steal, fornicate and drink wine, but his heart used to tremble about the thought of meeting with Allah and out of His awe. He thus still had a remnant of faith and modesty of Allah *Glorified is He*. They said that this is what ʿA'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* understood from the verse.(2) However, this understanding is inconsistent with His statement: 'who give'. They give to other than themselves, so there is here a giver and a receiver. If he intended theft, fornication and drinking of wine, He would have said: they come. Thus, the meaning is: they give to others what is their due share, whether these rights are those of Allah *Glorified is He* such as the zakat, expiations, oaths and capital punishment, or if these rights are connected to the servants such as deposits, trusts, doing justice in rulings etc. The believer should hence fulfil these rights, while his heart is fearful of the lack of sincerity leading to invalidating his action.

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Ghazali in (Ihya 'Ulum Ad-Din) (4/376) with a week chain of transmission.*

(2) *The Hadith of ʿA'isha may Allah be pleased with her and her understanding of the verse have been mentioned on page 10065.*

Then He *Glorified is He* said: ‘because they will be returning to their Lord’. The believer fulfils that which is upon him although you see him fearful and trembling because He believes in the return to Allah, standing in front of Him and that He is his Lord who rewards him according to his sincerity. He also fears that his affair becomes exposed if his action is mixed with ostentation because His Lord is not pleased that He should have a partner in an action. He *Glorified is He* knows everything and will account for every atoms weight of good and every atoms weight of evil.

There are actions which seem to be from the religion, however hidden within them is ostentation, even without a person knowing about it. This is why some people say: I do this for Allah then for you, or I rely upon Allah then upon you etc. These statements and those like them carry within their depths the meaning of polytheism (*shirk*) which you should keep away from in our dealings with Allah. We should not attribute anyone to Allah in order to keep away from *shirk*, even if it is not intended. This is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And most of them believe not in Allah except while they associate others with Him’ (*Yusuf:* 106). On the day of Resurrection, the people of sincerity will be content with their reward, while the people of polytheism and ostentation will be shocked by the presence of Allah *Glorified is He* for they were not concerned with Him when they used to act: ‘But those who disbelieved – their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due’ (*an-Nur:* 39). Thus, so long as we will be shocked by the presence of the True Lord *Glorified is He* – and there is nothing besides the True Lord, then our actions should be for the True Lord *Glorified is He* and nothing for other than Him.

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يُسَٰرِعُونَ فِي ٱلۡخَيۡرَٰتِ وَهُمۡ لَهَا سَٰبِقُونَ ٦١

It is those who hasten to good deeds, and they outstrip
[others] therein [61] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 61)

‘Those’ refers to the people who have the aforementioned attributes. ‘Hasten to good deeds’ means they were already vying on one another in doing good actions, but they sought to increase them so they would reach a loftier station. In His statement: 'and they outstrip [others] therein' was their vying the reason for them outstripping in attaining good actions, or was their attaining good actions the reason for them vying?

Linguistically there is: cause and effect, condition and rewards. For example, when you say, if you study, you will be successful, that means studying is the cause of success. However, did studying precede success? No, in fact success was present in your mind first. You remembered its distinctions and what your status amongst people in society would be. Through this you could find a drive, acted on it, so you studied in order to arrive at this goal.

This is also in: 'It is those who hasten to good deeds, and they outstrip [others] therein'. The meaning is: the intention is to outrun in attaining hence comes the hastening because the mind is ready for it first and its realities are clear.

Thus conditions, results, causes, and effects revolve around a driving factor which is the result and an occurrence which is the condition.

The meaning of '…and they outstrip [others] therein' is that these people are qualified for this deed and are able to do it. It is just as if I were to ask something of you and were to say: 'this thing is difficult.' I would say to you: 'you are fit to do it'.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفۡسًا إِلَّا وُسۡعَهَاۖ وَلَدَيۡنَا كِتَٰبٞ يَنطِقُ بِٱلۡحَقِّۚ وَهُمۡ لَا يُظۡلَمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

And We charge no soul except [with that within] its capacity, and with Us is a record which speaks with truth; and they will not be wronged [62] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 62)

After having spoken about hastening and competition, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explained that this is according to one's ability and energy, and that He only charges you because of His knowledge of your ability. Thus, do not look at the ruling and say: I am able to do it or I am unable to do it. Instead look at the burden: as long as your Lord has charged you, know that it is within your capability. As soon as your Lord knows of your inability, He will lighten the burden and not demand it of you. Examples of the lightening of burdens are clear in the prayer, fasting, and the pilgrimage etc.

Nowadays we hear those who say: ‘[people] no longer have the energy in this time to carry out these burdens; times have changed, work and responsibilities have increased’. We hear such statements by which people seek to absolve themselves of Allah’s law. We say: as long as the burden remains, then the ability to carry it out remains. The True Lord *Glorified is He* knows best of the abilities of His creation. Thus, I will firstly look at the burden and then judge that I have the capability. I will now judge the burden according to my capability.

Then He says: ‘and with Us is a record which speaks with truth’ what is intended here is the record of our deeds(1). But what is the point of recording our deeds? Will the servants belie their Lord *Glorified is He* regarding what has been recorded against them? The wisdom behind the recording of deeds is that it will be a proof against the person and an assurance that Allah has not wronged him. This is why His Lord will say to him: ‘Read your record!’ (*al-Isra’:* 14) Read it yourself so that the evidence against you stands without any objection from you.

He said after that: ‘and they will not be wronged’. This is because wrongdoing cannot be imagined from the True Lord *Glorified is He* since wrongdoing is a result of need, you only wrong someone else when you desire to benefit by some good that he has so you can increase what you already have. Wrongdoing is thus a result of need. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the Giver and is the Rich Who has no need of anyone, so why would He wrong anyone?

The weak person may also take what belongs to someone else in order to fulfil his need or whim. If he was strong, his own hard work would have sufficed him.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (6/4667) has mentioned other opinions regarding the meaning of record in this verse. He said, ‘It is said that it is the Preserved Tablet with everything having been affirmed therein. Hence, servants will do exactly as it has been written. It is also said that the indication in His statement: “and with Us is a record” refers to the Quran. God knows best. All of these are possible but the first is most apparent’. It is the record in which the deeds of the servants are recorded.* This was the opinion of Sheikh Ash-Shaʿarawi **.**

بَلْ قُلُوبُهُمْ فِي غَمْرَةٍ مِّنْ هَٰذَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْمَٰلٌ مِّن دُونِ ذَٰلِكَ هُمْ لَهَا عَٰمِلُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

But their hearts are enveloped with confusion
over this, and they have [evil] deeds besides
disbelief which they are doing [63]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 63)

We notice here that the ‘confusion’ does not envelop them, but it envelopes their hearts instead. This is a greater calamity because the heart is the repository from where the intellect ascertains cognitions, distinguishes between them, and chooses. Then these cognitions turn into beliefs that guide the heart in its daily movements. If the heart itself is enveloped, then the calamity is greater because it is the store of beliefs and assumptions which illuminate the way for you. The heart is also the place within the servants which receives the divine gaze. This is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 179)

He *Glorified is He* said: ‘Allah has sealed their hearts’ (*al-Baqara:* 7) because they loved disbelief and were content with it, while Allah *Glorified is He* is a Lord who has taken responsibility for sustenance of the creation. He gives them what they want even if it is disbelief. He sealed their hearts so that faith could not enter them and disbelief could not leave because they loved and preferred disbelief.

We see those who have been afflicted with the loss of a loved one and grieve over them, exaggerating in their grief by commemorating them after their death although it is possible the son may have been disobedient to his parents while they were alive. We warn those people and advise every grieved one to close the door of grief with the nails of contentment and submission, for if grief sees its door ajar, it enters and remains with you.

We have previously clarified that the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not remove a calamity from upon His servant until the latter is content with it. We should follow the model in this issue of our forefather Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who was tried by His Lord to sacrifice in a dream. He considered it to be a [legal] burden; he was content with the decree of Allah and submitted to His command. He then informed His only son of the dream so that he would not prevent him from this reward or take him by surprise leading him to have a change of heart: ‘And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead. We called to him, “O Abraham, You have fulfilled the vision.” Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.”’ (*as-Saffat:* 103-107)

After Ibrahim and his son became content with the decree of Allah, the trial was removed from them. A sacrifice was sent to them in place of Ishmael. In fact, their blessings were increased as they were given glad tidings of another child, Ishaq (Isaac) and Ya’qub (Jacob) after him. Recurring generations were a favour and reward for the contentment in Allah’s decree. How beautiful is what one poet(1) has said regarding this event:

Submit to the decree of your Lord as it harbours a wisdom
pursuing which He decrees it, for your comfort and reward
And remember the friend of Allah in sacrificing his son
When His Creator told him He submitted

Accordingly, if the hearts themselves are enveloped in confusion then the process of beliefs and assumptions is spoilt. From its damage, the daily movements are spoilt and corrupted. It is as it has reached us in a Noble Hadith: ‘Verily, there is a morsel of flesh that if it is good, then the whole body is good, but if it is corrupt, then the whole body is corrupt. Verily it is the heart.’(2)

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘and they have [evil] deeds besides disbelief which they are doing’. This means it is not only limited to beliefs. They have many other deeds into which they fall. The True Lord *Glorified is He* only mentions the topmost of their disobediences and examples from them. It is in His knowledge and on the Protected Tablet that they have done such and such deeds. Even if they themselves do not know that it will happen, their

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(1) *This is from the poetry of Ash-Sha'arawi.*

(2) *Agreed upon. Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (52) and Muslim in his Sahih (1599) from the Hadith of Nu'man ibn Bashir may Allah be pleased with him.*

Lord *Glorified is He* through His immense power knows what has already happened and what is going to happen.

It is one of the wonders of Allah's power that He *Glorified is He* decrees that His disbelieving servant will do such and such a deed, yet none of the disbelievers attempts to contradict this by saying: 'Allah has decreed this for me, but I will not do it in order to prove Allah's decree to be wrong'. This is because the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not judge according to what He has put upon us, rather, He judges according to the choice and decision of the servant because the servant is free to do or not to do a thing.

This issue is clear in His statement regarding Abu Lahab: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he. His wealth will not avail him or that which he gained. He will [enter to] burn in a Fire of [blazing] flame' (*al-Masad:* 1-3). His statement: 'He will [enter to] burn in a Fire' is regarding the future, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* has decreed that he will be in the fire. Abu Lahab was from a community in which there were disbelievers and believers. Who could guarantee that Abu Lahab would not hear this decree, not attaining faith and dying a disbeliever?

Was it not possible for this heedless one to stop in front of a group and say: 'There is no god worthy of worship, but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', entering therein into Islam and proving the decree against him incorrect? This is the speech of Allah and his ancient decree which cannot be refuted nor rejected by anyone, no matter how powerful he may be. This is from the power of Allah in His actions and the actions of His creation.

Hence, the meaning of 'and they have [evil] deeds besides disbelief which they are doing' is that decree which cannot be repelled nor belied even if that person is informed of it because the knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* covers both the past and the future. It is if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: My power is not limited to what I do but also covers what others do; those whom I have given the freedom of choice.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَخَذۡنَا مُتۡرَفِيهِم بِٱلۡعَذَابِ إِذَا هُمۡ يَجۡـَٔرُونَ ٦٤

Until when We seize their affluent ones with punishment,
at once they are crying [to God] for help [64]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 64)

This means that after they ascribed partners to Allah and disbelieved in Him, and after their hearts become ignorant and blind, they cry out and scream when a part of the punishments afflicts them. Who is able to bear the heat or smell (i.e. the stench of hell) of Allah's punishment? 'We seize' reflects ascendancy over someone through force without their consent. It gives the impression of violence and force such that the one being taken cannot escape no matter how hard he tries. From this is His statement: 'so We seized them with a seizure of one Exalted in Might and Perfect in Ability' (*al-Qamar:* 42), i.e. a severe taking to task, being restless therein not able to break free, 'And the shriek seized those who had wronged' (*Hud:* 67). And He says: 'Indeed, His seizure is painful and severe' (*Hud:* 102). 'We seize their affluent ones' because life depends upon necessities which ensure its continuity, and luxuries which make it comfortable and enrich it. Thus, the one who enjoys pleasure has surplus bounties which are above the necessities of life. The greater the enrichment, the greater the seizure will be and the more severe the pain.

We have previously mentioned the statement of Allah: 'Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart' (*al-An'am:* 44). It refers to forgetting the methodology of Allah. We did not encroach upon them; rather: 'We opened to them the doors of every [good] thing until, when they rejoiced in that which they were given, We seized them suddenly, and they were [then] in despair. So the people that committed wrong were eliminated' (*al-An'am:* 44-45). Here the sense of loss will be more severe and the regret greater.

The addressed here is the disbelievers of Quraysh. How can we say that Allah seizes if they were living in affluence with all the niceties of the Arabian Peninsula coming to them? Allah seized them in their affluence through scarcity over the years. Therefore, when the Prophet *peace and* *blessings be upon him* saw them in their affluence and transgression, He said, 'O Allah intensify your vehemence upon *Mudar*, and make it last years like the years of Yusuf (Joseph)'.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* answered the supplication of His Prophet. Scarcity and drought struck them until they began to eat corpses and *'ilhaz* which is the hair or wool of a slaughtered animal which is mixed with its blood after having dried and solidified under the sun's heat. This is the meaning of His statement: 'Until when We seize their affluent ones with punishment'.

And His statement: 'at once they are crying [to Allah] for help'. After having eaten corpses and excrement, Abu Sufyan said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O Muhammad, are you not a mercy to mankind? If so, then pray to Allah that He alleviates [our peril]'. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for them until He alleviated their [peril].(2) Or the punishment that is intended here is what happened to them on the day of Badr when Allah humiliated them. Many of them were killed and taken prisoner. Their leadership was slaughtered and their awe was lost. They used to persecute the believers and kill them; they would make them stand in the heat of the sun with huge boulders on their stomachs. In such a difficult situation which the believers suffered from, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat]' (*al-Qamar:* 45). They received the verse with amazement: such that ʿUmar *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Which assembly is it that shall be routed?' For there was no hope for the victory of the believers, When the day of Badr came and the believers saw what became of the disbelievers, ʽUmar *may Allah be pleased with him* said to himself, ‘Allah has spoken the truth, the assembly shall be routed’. And indeed they have been routed.

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him would say when raising his head from the final rak'a, 'O Allah, intensify your vehemence upon Mudar, and make it last years like the years of Joseph'. Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1006) and Ahmad in his Musnad (2/470, 502, 521).*

(2) *On the authority of Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with them: Abu Sufyan came to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and said: 'O Muhammad, for the sake of Allah, I implore you to have mercy, for we have eaten 'ilhaz – i.e. fur and blood – then Allah revealed: 'And We had gripped them with suffering [as a warning], but they did not yield to their Lord, nor did they humbly supplicate, [and will continue thus]'. (al-Mu'minun: 76) Ibn Kathir mentioned this in his tafsir (3/251) and attributed it to Ibn Abu Hatim.*

His statement: ‘at once they are crying [to Allah] for help’. A person only cries out when he does not possess the means to ward off a problem; thus he cries out calling for someone to save him raising his voice so that all around him can hear him. They shriek like a calf after having been leaders and tyrants. Why did they not remain leaders? Why are they screaming now? It is expected from them that they would hold themselves and show robustness in times of severity, not allowing the slaves and the poor from the believers to gloat over them. It is as one poet says:(1)

I will show my forbearance to those who gloat
That I do not fall apart in the face of trials

However, how far [is this meaning from them] for the punishment has now enveloped them. They cannot cheat themselves any longer. They have only to scream for help of the Helper and Deliverer from destruction.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لَا تَجْـَٔرُوا۟ ٱلْيَوْمَ إِنَّكُم مِّنَّا لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

Do not cry out today: you will get no help from Us [65]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 65)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* replied to them: ‘Do not cry out today’ because the one who cries out calls the one who will help him and you will not be helped for: ‘by Us you will not be helped’. You will not receive help from Us because I only help My friends, My messengers and those who obey Me. Sever your hope in receiving help from Me because I (Allah) am the One Who has sent down that which makes you cry out. How then can I remove it from you?

In another place, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the people of disbelief who joined forces against Him and who encouraged one another to attack the Quran and the Prophet and applauding anyone who did so: '[The angels will be ordered], "Gather those who committed wrong, their kinds, and what they used to worship other than Allah, and guide them to the path of Hellfire. And stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned." [They will be asked], "What is [wrong] with you? Why do you not help each other? But they, that Day, are in surrender."' (*as-Saffat:* 22-26) So, do not cry out because you will not receive help from Us. How can We help you in this wailing of yours when you turned away from Our signs?

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(1) *The poet is Abu Dhu’ayb, Khuwaylid ibn Khalid Al-Hudhali (d. 27 AH).*

قَدْ كَانَتْ ءَايَٰتِى تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَكُنتُمْ عَلَىٰٓ أَعْقَٰبِكُمْ تَنكِصُونَ ٦٦

My verses had already been recited to you, but
you were turning back on your heels[66]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 66)

How can you seek Allah's help and cry out to Him when you were blind to the verses that were recited to you which confirmed the existence of Allah through celestial signs, confirmed the truth of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through miracles, yet you insisted to be blind to all of them? But 'you were turning back on your heels'. The heel is the end of the foot. Instead of walking ahead like Allah had created him to do and using torches to show the way, they walked behind on their heels. It is as if they were taken to task in a way that the normal way of walking was changed. Why? This is because they became blind to the causes of guidance and so they began to get lost in the mazes of life without guidance. It is like the one who stumbles on his back not knowing where his feet are. This is what they did to themselves. The meaning is thus: only blame yourself for refraining from the causes of guidance, as you shut your eyes when they came in front of you.

In another place, He *Glorified is He* said of Satan: 'but as soon as the two hosts came within sight of one another, he turned on his heels and said, "Behold, I am not responsible for you"' (*al-Anfal:* 48).

مُسْتَكْبِرِينَ بِهِۦ سَٰمِرًا تَهْجُرُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

And spent the evening making fun of [the Quran] [67] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 67)

The meaning of arrogance is to seek greatness when, in fact, such a person is not great himself since he is in need of other than himself. The one who is great in and of himself is the one who can provide himself and has at his disposal the essentials and surplus of life requirements; he does not ask anyone else for them.

However, the necessities and essentials of a human being are provided to him by someone else, so it is inappropriate for him to be arrogant. He who wishes to be arrogant should be so if he has attained health, wealth, power etc. by himself. In actuality, all these things have been gifted to you since the healthy person can become sick, while the rich person can become poor.

Thus, glory be to Allah alone because He alone is the All-Bestower, the Giver of bounties to His creation by which they may have arrogance. From amongst the attributes of His majesty and perfection is that He is the Great. This is because He is the Sustainer of all creation. It is in the creation's interest that only Allah is The Great, so that no one would oppress the people and act arrogantly over them. This is how the True Lord *Glorified is He* protects His creation from His creation.

We have given the example of this – and Allah is the loftiest example – that it is in the interest of a family that there is only one person who is turned to. The common people say, 'if you do not have a prestigious man, you ought to buy one' because it is the balance by which affairs are made proper and by which life can move on.

We have said that one of the names of Allah is the Great. We do not say the greatest even though it is a superlative form; why is this? The greatest is an exaggerated form with respect to us mortals, we say: this is great and that is greater, this is strong and that is stronger. This cannot be said of His attribute because if you were to say: Allah is the greatest, the meaning would imply that you have ascribed partners to him since it would mean that He *Glorified is He* is the greatest while others are still great. This is why it is not said: Allah is the greatest, except in the call to prayer. Thus, the arrogant one is someone who seeks the qualifications of greatness without really having any of these qualifications. A person should only be arrogant if he possesses the essentials of greatness. However, the creation does not possess any of these. The meaning of ‘In arrogance regarding it’, the referent in the pronoun ‘it’ is not clear. In the verse, there was no such reference to which the pronoun returned. However, the speech here concerns the Messenger who was sent to them, and the Quran which was revealed to them as a miracle and methodology. Thus, the pronoun can only refer to one of the two. Or the pronoun could refer to the Noble Sanctuary of Allah (the *Ka’ba* in Mecca) since it was the reason for the status enjoyed by Quraysh amongst the Arabs and gave them leadership and nobility. They would travel on business trips to Yemen and Levant without anyone causing them any harm; this was in a time in which animosity and highway robberies had become widespread amongst the Arabs.

They would not have enjoyed this status if it was not for the Noble sanctuary of Allah to which the Arabs made pilgrimage every year. Its service and maintenance was in the hands of Quraysh. By means of it, they were arrogant towards the entire nation. In fact, they dared by being arrogant towards the sanctuary itself.

He *Glorified is He* says thereafter: ‘conversing by night, speaking evil’. They would gather around the House of Allah at night talking about the Prophet, slandering Him and speaking ill of Him and the Quran which was revealed to Him.(1)

The affair of these people is strange: how could they do this while in the vicinity of the House of Allah that lent them leadership and status? How could they speak ill of the Messenger of Allah who came to purify this House of its idols and filth? It is ill manners with Allah, His Messenger, and the Quran. True is one poet’s saying:

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(1) *'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas said this according to what Al-Qurtubi transmitted in his Tafsir (6/4671).*

I taught him to shoot everyday
When he became strong, he shot me
How many did I teach to rhyme
Who when rhyming slandered me

These people were arrogant towards the whole nation because of the sanctuary. Despite this, they did not preserve its sanctity. Instead they made it a place of night entertainment, slander, folly, frivolity, and everything else that did not behove of the place. They considered the Quran to be fables of the ancients and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be a magician, soothsayer, poet and madman.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* warns you that the necessities of your life are a gift and generosity from Him. When Abraha came to destroy the Noble House seeking to transfer its greatness and sacredness to Abyssinia, they did not have any power to ward him off nor to protect the sanctuary. If he had destroyed it, their awe would have been lost along with leadership of the tribes. They would have ventured against them as they did to others. However, Allah protected His house and defended its sanctity such that even the elephant was conscious of the lesson, staying put in its place, not moving towards the house. It would move in any other direction though. It is narrated that one of them(1) said to the elephant: ‘kneel down and return, rightly guided’ In other words, save yourself for you are in Allah’s inviolable sanctuary. As one poet (2) said:

The elephant was captive in Mughammas(3) until
It began to crawl as if it was wounded

In this way, Allah repelled, overpowered, and banished them. He protected the House for you and kept your leadership intact.

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(1) *On the authority of 'A’isha may Allah be pleased with her ‘I saw the rider and driver of the elephant blind, seeking food in Mecca.’ Related by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala’il An-Nubuwwa (1/125). The editor said: “This narration is in the biography of Ibn Hisham (1/59).” Transmitted by Ibn Kathir in Al-Bidaya wa An-Nihaya (2/174).*

(2) Umayya ibn Abu As-Salt ibn Abu Rabiʿa

(3) Mughammas is a place near Mecca.

Notice the transition from the chapter of *al-Fil* to the chapter of Quraysh. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have you not considered, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did He not make their plan into misguidance? And He sent against them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of hard clay, and He made them like eaten straw’ (*al-Fil:* 1-5). Then He says in the beginning of the chapter of Quraysh: ‘For the accustomed security of the Quraysh’ (*Quraysh:* 1). Whatever happened to the people of the elephant happened so that the Quraysh could find familiarity in what they were used to in the caravans of the winter and summer. ‘Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer’ (*Quraysh:* 2). Since Allah *Glorified is He* has protected you and protected The House for you, and has preserved your leadership, you should worship Him alone ascribing no partners to Him. ‘Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear’ (*Quraysh:* 3-4).

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَلَمۡ يَدَّبَّرُواْ ٱلۡقَوۡلَ أَمۡ جَآءَهُم مَّا لَمۡ يَأۡتِ ءَابَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

Then have they not reflected over the Quran, or has there come to them that which had not come to their forefathers? [68] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 68)

In this verse and in the one after it, He *Glorified is He* rebukes them about a number of affairs, one after the other. The first is: ‘Then have they not reflected over the Quran’? The question here is reproach and censure, what happened to them? Did they not understand the word that came to them in the Quran? Were they not the community of eloquence and rhetoric so much that they established seasons and fairs for it and hung it on walls?

It is incomprehensible that they do not understand the Quran. It came to you in a manner which is more than eloquent and rhetorical. You must have understood and comprehended what was in it. This statement of yours is proved by their statement: ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 3)

This is how the liar's nature deceives him; his logic betraying his conscience, thus your objection is not with the Quran. It is in fact with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because He is poor, from a humble family. The issue is about the struggle for leadership and temporal authority. Did these people not know that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come to strip them of their authority or to have ascendancy over them? He came to show them the methodology of Allah, all the while bearing the harm of the people of Quraysh, toil and hardship in pursuit of their comfort and eternal felicity.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to take judgement and carry the methodology of Allah as a burden not prestige. The proof being that His standard of living is lower than yours is. You see that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had lesser food, drink, clothing and furniture than them. Even His relatives were poor. Despite this, he prohibited them from taking *zakat* which He permitted for the generality of the poor Muslims. Similarly, the people would inherit, whereas they (his family) cannot.

Despite all of this, you still say: 'Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?' It seems that you were accustomed to having servitude for the powerful and tyrannous. You were accustomed to servitude for other than Allah. It was too burdensome an affair that Allah should liberate you from this servitude at the hand of a poor, humble man from amongst yourselves who came to rectify you and take you out from the servitude of creation to the servitude of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

Thus: 'Then have they not reflected over the Quran?' is a reproach because they understood the Quran but were jealous of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because it was revealed to Him, not them. He *Glorified is He* said: 'Or do they envy people for what Allah has given them of His bounty?' (*an-Nisa':* 54) The second affair is: 'or has there come to them that which had not come to their forefathers?' A strange matter came to them of which they had no prior knowledge. It is that a messenger from Allah came to them. This affair was known to them. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was from them as was Ismail (Ishmael), both of whom they believed in. In fact, they know it well. The same thing that prevented them in the first affair prevents them in this one: jealousy of the Messenger of Allah. This is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'Now if thou ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they say, "Allah"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87).

The third affair is:

أَمۡ لَمۡ يَعۡرِفُواْ رَسُولَهُمۡ فَهُمۡ لَهُۥ مُنكِرُونَ ٦٩

Or did they not know their Messenger, so they are toward him denying? [69] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 69)

Did He send to them a Messenger from the sky of whom they do not know his biography, character, lineage, or lifestyle before being sent? They knew Him well. Before his being sent as a messenger, they named Him the Truthful, the Trustworthy. They were content with His judgment regarding the black stone. They would trust Him with their precious items and wealth. They did not experience lying, betrayal, or any other error of the period of ignorance from him.

I have explained this matter in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Indeed, there has come unto you [O mankind] a messenger from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128), from your species, your kind, your tribe. He is not a stranger to you. You know his lifestyle, his biography, and his character. If you have never experienced Him lying about the creation, can you imagine Him lying about the Creator?

When He informed the people in the beginning of His mission that He was the Messenger of Allah, Did the Quran come to carry people to bring faith in Him? No, it came to resist those who did not believe. As for those who believed from the beginning, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* merely saying: 'I am the Messenger of Allah', they would say: 'you have spoken truthfully'. They would believe Him based on what they had experienced of Him in the past, what was known of His truthfulness and that He had never lied. Therefore, the yardstick that the Companions had was that the Messenger of Allah would speak. If He would speak, then the issue would end there, as He is truthful; nobody doubting his truthfulness.

Regarding the Night Journey and Ascension Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* said: 'If He said it, then He has spoken truthfully'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said of Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him*: 'Abu Bakr and I were like two race horses', i.e. in good character and excellent manners. ‘I beat him to prophethood and he followed me. If he had beaten Me, I would have followed him’.

When Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came down to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* at the start of revelation, he (the Prophet) went to Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* and told her of what happened as if to enquire from her what had happened without telling her that He was a messenger from Allah. Despite this she took Him to Waraqa ibn Nawfal who had knowledge of the previous divine scriptures. When Waraqa ibn Nawfal heard what had happened, he said, ‘It is the same angel who came down to Moses *peace be upon him*. I wish I would be alive when your people cast You out’. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Will they cast Me out?’ He said: ‘No one you came with what you have come with except they were taken as enemies. If I see the day it happens, I will help You with vigour.’(1)

Despite this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was scared that this was something from Satan. Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* assured him that this would not make sense. Therefore, she said to him: ‘you keep your ties of kinship, help the poor and destitute, help against the vicissitudes of time. Allah will never humiliate you.’(2)

Some people consider Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* to be the first legal interpreter (*Mujtahid*) in Islam due to this incident because she interpreted and derived from the characteristics of the Messenger of Allah before His Prophethood as being a proof of His truthfulness after the onset of Prophethood. This is why she is the first to be called ‘Mother of the believers’. Some of the well-learned people said, ‘Khadija is the mother of the believers including the Messenger of Allah amongst them because at that time, the Prophet Muhammad was more in need of a mother than a young wife who would entertain Him. Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* fulfilled the role of a mother towards the Messenger of Allah and looked after Him, assured Him and stood by Him in the most turbulent and difficult of times’.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (160) in the Book of Faith (Kitab Al-Iman) and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3) from the Hadith of 'A’isha may Allah be pleased with her*.

(2) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (160) in the Book of Faith (Kitab Al-Iman) and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3) from the Hadith of 'A’ish may Allah be pleased with her.*

We notice in the verse: 'Or did they not know their Messenger'. He attributed the Messenger to them (i.e. their Messenger). As for the attribution to Allah (Messenger of Allah), this means a messenger from Him. Thus, the meaning differs depending on to what it is attributed.

أَمۡ يَقُولُونَ بِهِۦ جِنَّةُۢۚ بَلۡ جَآءَهُم بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَأَكۡثَرُهُمۡ لِلۡحَقِّ كَٰرِهُونَ ٧٠

Or do they say, 'In him is madness?' Rather, he brought them the truth, but most of them, to the truth, are averse[70]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 70)

The fourth issue in which Allah *Glorified is He* reproaches them is: 'Or do they say, "In him is madness?"' Madness is the dysfunction of reason which balances movements according to benefit and harm. We should see which characteristic of madness Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* suffered from?

Leave the issue of religion and consider his character! Character is something everyone agrees upon and praises, even if someone has the opposite characteristic. The liar loves the truthful one and recognizes that truthfulness is an honour. The miser loves the generous one, the angry loves the patient. Do you not see that the liar tries to present his lie to the people but dislikes it when someone lies to him? Do you not see the one who gives false testimony, though he saves someone by his false testimony, he belittles him. The people of wisdom say: you are able to raise your head above your opponent because of the false testimony of someone.

In short, the yardstick for all good character is the same; so measure Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by His character not by the religion or message with which He came. Look at His good character towards you, and none of you will be able to say anything bad about it. Since you have nothing bad to say of His character or about His intellect because the intellect is the measure and foundation of good character. This is why His Lord *Glorified is He* says of Him: 'Nun (The Arabic letter Nun). By the pen and what they inscribe, You are not, [O Muhammad], by the favor of your Lord, a madman. And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted. And indeed, you are of a great moral character' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4). Thus your sublime way of life is the greatest proof that you are not a madman.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is, then, innocent of this accusation. The whole issue is as Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Rather, he has brought them the truth’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 70). This is His defect in their eyes because the truth angers those who benefit from falsehood. Some people see the truth in any good that comes their way. If it is something through which no benefit comes to him, he sees it as evil. If you wish to judge something, then do so when it is against you, not when it is for you. For example, you dislike a liar whether he has lied for you or lied against you. Thus, take every issue as if it is both for you and against you. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* restricted you from looking at the women of others, do not feel annoyed, and say: He prevented me from the pleasure of sight etc. However, look at the fact that while He restricted your eyes – and you are alone–He restricted others from looking at your women; i.e. those with familial ties to you such as your mother, daughters, wives etc.

He *Glorified is He* says thereafter: ‘but most of them, to the truth, are averse’. It is only natural that the people of falsehood, whose wrongdoing and transgression is widespread, should detest the truth which balances the scales and straightens the tumultuous waves of daily life. The detestation of the people of falsehood towards the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should be a reason to believe in Him, not deny him since if the people of falsehood detest it, then it must mean that it is truth otherwise they would not have detested it

وَلَوِ ٱتَّبَعَ ٱلْحَقُّ أَهْوَآءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ وَمَن فِيهِنَّ ۚ
بَلْ أَتَيْنَٰهُم بِذِكْرِهِمْ فَهُمْ عَن ذِكْرِهِم مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined. Rather, We have brought them their reminder, but they turn away from their reminder [71]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 71)

Thus, the affairs do not move in accordance with the whims of the creation; they do so according to the will of the Creator. This is because the Creator *Glorified is He* is the maker of this universe and every maker is very protective of his creation. We see this even in the creation of man. You can imagine what would happen if you were to take away the right of the creation from its maker. It is from giving the due rights that things move according to the will of the maker and not according to the whims of the creation. If the human being leads his life according to his whims, he will take that which is not his, will accept bribes, and incline towards sin and deviation. This is because he thinks that he benefits from it and does not look towards the end result of his action. He looks to the short-term pleasure and forgets the burdensome consequence which he will be unable to bear later. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined'. You may say: yes, following one's whims will ruin the earth and the way of life on it, but how does it ruin the heavens? Does anyone have power over them? We say: was it not their wish: 'And they say, 'We will not believe you until you break open for us from the ground a spring. Or [until] you have a garden of palm trees and grapes and make rivers gush forth within them in force [and abundance] Or you make the heaven fall upon us in fragments as you have claimed' (*al-Isra':* 90-92).

It was their desire that the heavens should be destroyed even if it did so above their own heads. What ruin is left after this? Like this, if you were to follow their whims, the heavens and the earth would fall into ruin. Not just the heavens and the earth but also: '…and whoever is in them…'; their corruption would encompass everything in existence.

Therefore, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* constrains these whims in his statement: 'None of you truly believes until his desires are in accordance with what I have brought'.(1) He *peace and blessings be upon him* is described as: 'Nor does he speak from [his own] desire. It is not but a revelation revealed' (*an-Najm:* 3-4).

Some of the orientalists have objected to this verse: 'Nor does he speak from [his own] desire', saying that this means that all his (Prophet Muhammad's) speech is correct. Why then does His Lord correct Him regarding some rulings? This must mean that the ruling that he originally made was according to His desire.

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(1) *Related by Ibn Abu 'Asim in As-Sunna (1/12) from the Hadith of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr. It is also mentioned by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in Jami' Al-'Ulum wa Al-Hikam (page 460) who said it is weak.*

If these people had truly understood the meaning of desire, they would not have made this objection. Desire is what moves you away from the truth when you already know what the truth is. The Messenger *Glorified is He* did not know these rulings when He spoke of them. He only spoke and ruled according to what He understood in an affair in which revelation had come from Allah. The ruling was then revealed from Allah to correct the interpretation of His Messenger.

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not follow a desire by which He spoke. The correction by the True Lord *Glorified is He* to His Messenger — who himself conveyed this correction — is the greatest proof of his truth and trustworthiness in conveying on behalf of His Lord. Otherwise, no one would have known of the correction if the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had concealed it in order to defend himself.

Similar to this meaning is His statement: ‘O Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you seeking the approval of your wives?’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1) He *Glorified is He* says: ‘May Allah pardon you [O Prophet]! Why did you grant them permission [to stay at home]?’ (*at-Tawba:* 43)

It was within the capacity of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to conceal those verses which reproach Him and are taking Him to task. However, He was trustworthy; he would say that which was for him and that which was against him. This is why His Lord says of him: ‘And if Muhammad had made up about Us some [false] sayings, We would have seized him by the right hand; Then We would have cut from him the aorta (i.e. removed his heart)’ (*al-Haqqa:* 44-46).

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have brought them their reminder, but they turn away from their reminder.” The ‘reminder’ here is: nobility, reputation and a lofty status, just as in His statement regarding the Quran: ‘And indeed, it is a remembrance for you and your people” (*az-Zukhruf:* 44).

His statement: 'We have certainly sent down to you a Book in which is your mention. Then will you not reason?' (*al-Anbiya':* 10) means that they should have embraced this Quran and held it above their heads. In it is their glory, their nobility and their honour. Without the Quran, the Arabs have no mention, for they were an illiterate community who were nomadic only settling in areas where there was water and grazing. They were Bedouins amongst whom wars and highway robbery were widespread. They would steal in order to host their guests. This is one of the strange things from the customs of the Arabs in the days of ignorance. They did not have a methodology by which they could govern their lives. It is strange to see the love of enmity and generosity present in one nature. They would do whatever they felt like, whatever occurred to them. There was no law to govern them, such that one poet said of them:

Pay no praise to Ibn ʿAbbad(1), though he is extremely generous

His is neither miser nor having munificence

It is no more than fits of humour and moodiness

One of the most famous Arabic poems on generosity is the following one which is even ingrained within children, describing a father who considered sacrificing his child to provide food for his guest because he could not find anything else to slaughter.

The poet(2) says:

Three days of hunger and sand-ridden food, tying his belly to calm the pangs,

In a desert wasteland, without the traces of any previous settlement

A harsh man indeed, to whom companionship was a distant thing;

The wildness and desolation to him seemed a blessing sweet.

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(1) He is Ismail ibn ʿAbbad Abu Al-Qaasim At-Taliqani, who was a minister and man of letters. He was made a minister by Mu'ayyid Ad-Dawla and then by his brother Fakhr Ad-Dawla. He was given the title As-Sahib (companion) due to him having accompanied Mu'ayyid Ad-Dawla since childhood. He was born in At-Taliqan in the year 326 A.H. He died in Ar-Rayy (Tehran) in 385 A. H and was moved to Isfahan where he was buried. [Al-Aʿlam by Az-Zirikli 1/316]

(2) He is Al-Hatty'a

In a lonely mountain ravine he left behind his aging wife
And three children all bare-bones, who seemed like the ghosts of wild beast
Shoeless and naked, never having dined on fresh-baked bread,
Nor, since the day they were created, ever tasted wheat.
He saw a spectre in the dark and was terrified,
But when he saw it was a guest, he was eager to welcome him.
He said: ‘O Lord, a guest is forthcoming but there is no food
By your rank do not deprive him of meat tonight’
And when his son saw the worry he felt, he said to him:
‘Dear father, slaughter me and serve me to your guest;
‘And offer no excuses of poverty and straightened means,
Lest he suspect we are secretly wealthy and revile us much.’
Yet as they spoke, from the distance there appeared wild donkeys in a drove,
Walking in a row, as though driven by a skilled herdsman
And they were thirsty, and needed water, so he rushed to them,
As though he were thirsting eagerly for their very blood
And he let them drink, until their thirst, was well quenched,
Then took an arrow from his quiver, and loosed it at them.
And a well-fattened mare, ere-foaled, fell to the ground;
She was well stocked with meat, and blessed with fat.
And oh! What joy he felt as he dragged her to his people;
And oh! What joy they felt when they saw her wound pour forth.
And they spent the night feasting, and taking care of their guest,
And they made no loss at all, nay, they only gained.
And their father, in his joy, became a father to their guest,
And their mother, in her glee, became their mother.

The characteristic of generosity has taken root amongst the Arabs, even within small children. Even a poor person does not like his poverty to be known. He wishes to give the impression that he is a rich, generous person even if this contradicts other blameworthy traits that he may have.

They are a people having contradicting traits. They lived in complete illiteracy and thus did not make a civilization. However, this was a quite merit for them after the emergence of Islam and mission of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For, how does it come that such people reached such lofty meanings and ways that they eventually ruled over the entire world? If they had been people of knowledge and civilization it would have been said of them and of Islam: it is a leap of civilization.

If the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been able to read they would have said: He read such and such; the True Lord *Glorified is He* said of them: ‘And, indeed, full well do We know that they say, “It is but a human being that imparts [all] this to him!”…’ (*an-Nahl:* 103)

Thus, the good reputation, nobility, glory and honouring of the Arabs all are established in the Quran. However, they did not act in their own interest nor were they concerned for the Quran. They turned away from it: ‘…and from this their reminder they [heedlessly] turn away!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 71) That means away from the Quran; This is a proof that they were heedless, being unaware of that which was in their own interest. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَمۡ تَسۡـَٔلُهُمۡ خَرۡجٗا فَخَرَاجُ رَبِّكَ خَيۡرٞۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ٧٢

Or do you [O Muhammad] ask of them any worldly
recompense? But [they ought to know that] a recompense
from your Lord is best, since He is the best of providers! [72]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 72)

In the Arabic verse, there are two different forms for the word meaning ‘worldly recompense’; these two forms are *Kharj* and *kharaj. Kharj* is the expenditure one gives out voluntarily, while *kharaj* is the expenditure given out in voluntarily. In Arabic, the extra letter ‘a’ found in the second word *kharaj* indicates that there is extra meaning, that is, *kharaj* is a more eloquent than *kharj*. The meaning of His statement: ‘Or do you [O Muhammad] ask of them any worldly recompense? But [they ought to know that] recompense from your Lord is best…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 72) is that if you want worldly recompense *kharj* does not take it from them; take it from Your Lord. That which they have is not *kharj* instead it is *kharaj*; ‘…But [they ought to know that] recompense from your Lord is best…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 72).

Thus, do not take sustenance except from the hand of the Lord of goodness and blessings. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not hold back in giving His creation their sustenance. It is He who has given them life and He has taken responsibility of providing their livelihood. A relative example is when you invite a friend for food; you may serve them food sufficing ten people. What do you think, then, your Lord *Glorified is He* has prepared for you?

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* appends the verse with His statement: ‘…since He is the best of providers!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 72) This has caused a problem for some people because the True Lord has described some of His creation as being providers of livelihood. However, He is the best of providers since He provides the root causes of things by which others make their provision. If you were to provide someone with food, for example, then you should know that He *Glorified is He* is the origin and source of that food.

He *Glorified is He* is the creator of soil, water, air, seeds. All you have to do is to use your intellect, use the energy that Allah has granted you and you present this food. For example, when you bring home monthly foodstuff of flour, oil, rice, sugar etc., and then your wife would prepare the food, would you say: it is my wife who has provided this food? This is why the scholars (‘ulama’) say: refrain your tongue from saying: so and so is a provider raziq. Leave it only mentioned in the statement of Allah because He *Glorified is He* is the creator of sustenance and the one who brings its origin into existence. You are merely the one who feeds it to another.

You may notice that He *Glorified is He* attributed *kharaj* to His Lordship which conveys a meaning of rearing, care and providence. So long as the recompense (kharaj) is that of Your Lord, O Muhammad, it is a great recompense and a giving which will not be expended.

وَإِنَّكَ لَتَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٧٣﴾

You call them to a straight path [73]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 73)

The 'straight path' is the even path which is neither crooked nor bent. How is then that they challenge you and put obstacles in your path while you only invite them to the straightway? Even if one person was to benefit from a crooked way, millions would benefit from a straight way.

We have previously mentioned that you must look at what the divine law has given you before you look at what it has taken from you. If the divine law takes something from you when you are rich, it gives you what you need when you are poor. It commands you to look after the orphan so that your children will be looked if you die, while they are small.

Thus, the divine law insures your life and makes you receive the decrees of Allah with contentment because you are in faith-based society which will not abandon you if you become poor nor will it leave your children if they were to become orphans. In a faith-based society, if a father dies, then everyone becomes a father to the orphan. If however an orphan is abandoned in a faith-based society, this will open the door for anger towards the decree of Allah. Those weak in faith would say: what wisdom is it in taking their father while leaving them as dependents with no one to take charge of them?

وَإِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ عَنِ ٱلصِّرَٰطِ لَنَٰكِبُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

And those who do not believe in the Hereafter turn away
from that path [74] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 74)

That'…way' (*al-Mu'minun:* 74) is the straight path which leads to the destination with minimal effort. It leads you to the best destination in minimal time. How significant a path is and how highly it is regarded, depends on the significance and sublimity of its destination. Of course, the road from Cairo to Alexandria is not the same as the road between villages and hamlets.

The phrase '…is bound to deviate…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 74) means to deviate from the straight path and thus, take part in perversity and distortion. In our daily interaction, a person seeking truthful conduct will say to you: ‘be straight’ i.e. on the straight path which has no crookedness or deceit.

What is it that led them to deviate from the straight path which organizes their way of life for them, makes them support one another instead of opposing one another, and from which the effort of the individual benefits the entire society? Why do they prohibit themselves from the advantages of this path? They said that it is because they disbelieved in the hereafter. If they had not disbelieved in the hereafter, they would have attained faith and followed the methodology of Allah because they would know that they will return to Allah who will reward the righteous and punish the evildoer. Thus, the thing that corrupted them was that they followed their desires and thought that this world was the destination and the end of the cycle. They were heedless of the hereafter and that it is the abode of true bounties; it will not escape them, nor will they escape it. It is as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has said of it: ‘…whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life: if they but knew this!’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) That is the real life.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ رَحِمْنَٰهُمْ وَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِم مِّن ضُرٍّ لَّلَجُّواْ فِي طُغْيَٰنِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ٧٥

Even if We were to show them mercy and relieve them of distress, they would blindly persist in their transgression[75] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 75)

That is if this were to happen they would return to what they used to do. As He *Glorified is He* has said in another verse: ‘For [thus it is:] when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto Us, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing; but as soon as We have freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Us to save him from the affliction that befell him!...’ (*Yunus:* 12)

If only man had stopped at this point. Instead people went beyond this as stated in the verse: ‘…and claims that there are other powers that could rival Allah…’ (The Rival, 39: 8). They say as Qarun (Korah) had said: ‘…”This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!"…' (*al-Qasas:* 78), i.e. this is thanks to my effort, my discussion with so and so and doing such and such.

It is, therefore, natural that the True Lord has said to him: since you have gained it only on account of the knowledge you possess, then protect it with the knowledge that you have. He *Glorified is He* said: 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling…' (*al-Qasas:* 81).

Where is your knowledge now? What kind of knowledge is it that cannot protect the things it gained? It is known that the discovery of something is more difficult than its preservation and protection. The word '…persist…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 75) means go to extremes '…in their overweening arrogance…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 75). Transgression means exceeding limits because Allah *Glorified is He* has put fixed limits to everything in existence that do not decrease or increase. If you maintain the limits depicted by Allah for you, then your life will become stable without trouble. If a thing transgresses, it corrupts the way of life. Even water through which Allah gave life to everything, if it transgresses, it drowns other creatures and destroys them after having been the secret of life when in a state of moderation. In this respect, Allah says: '[And] behold: when the waters [of Noah's (Nuh) flood] burst beyond all limits, it was We who caused you to be borne [to safety] in that floating ark' (*al-Haqqa:* 11).

The one who oversteps the bounds is called a transgressor (taghiya) with the (ta) of femininity which expresses exaggeration. If a person further transgresses, they are called taghut which means an idol; as if they were wrongfully worshipped because of their transgression.

The consequence of going to extremes in persevering in transgression is '…blindly stumbling to and from' (*al-Mu'minun:* 75). That is they become confused and blind to guidance and the truth. They are unable to distinguish between good and evil. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

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(1) *The cause of revelation of this verse: Ibn 'Abbas said: it was revealed regarding the story of Thumama ibn Uthal after he was captured, then became Muslim and the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessing be upon Him, released him. He came between Mecca and Al-Mira and said: By Allah I will not allow a grain of wheat to pass until the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessing be upon Him, gives permission. Allah took* =

وَلَقَدۡ أَخَذۡنَٰهُم بِٱلۡعَذَابِ فَمَا ٱسۡتَكَانُواْ لِرَبِّهِمۡ وَمَا يَتَضَرَّعُونَ ٧٦

We have already afflicted them, yet they did not submit
to their Lord: they will not humble themselves [76]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 76)

To abase oneself *(istikana)* is only said of someone who used to do evil things then calmed down. We say: so and so abased himself or yielded. The Arabic origin word is *kawn,* (to be) in English. Thus, it means to seek a new existence unlike the one they had, or a state unlike the one they were on before. Thus, before they would abase themselves and submit, they must have been rebellious to their Lord.

Existence is of two types: the first is the absolute existence, whereas the second existence is resulting from or occurring after the first. For example, we say: Zayd is born, i.e. Zayd has the first existence. If we ask whether he is, beautiful or ugly, this requires another existence. You say: Zayd was born; this is a complete statement with the subject and the predicate. There is no need to any more information because it is the first existence. But when we say: Zayd was hard working; this is the second existence which is his hard working. It is an existence which is the result of the first existence.

In this regard, we have two meanings of the Arabic verb *Kana* (was); the first has the meaning of complete existence which is mentioned in His statement: 'If, however, [the debtor] is in straitened circumstances, [grant him] a delay until a time of ease…' (*al-Baqara:* 280). That is there is already a debtor with straitened circumstances, and, so, you do not need any more information in this case.

= *Quraysh to task with famine and drought until they began to eat carrion, dogs, and 'ilhiz. It was said: what is 'ilhiz? He said: they would take wool and fur, dip it in blood, then grill it and eat it. Abu Sufyan said: I implore you for the sake of God and kinship; do you not claim that God sent you as a mercy to the worlds? He said: Yes. He: then by God I only see that you have killed fathers by the sword and killed the sons with hunger. Then His statement was revealed: 'And even were We to show them mercy and remove whatever distress might befall them [in this life], they would still persist in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro.' {Description} (al-Mu'minun: 75) Narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his tafsir (6/4677) and Al-Wahidi in Asbab An-Nuzul (page 179)*

On the other hand, we say: so and so wished if Allah would give him a child, then, it was Mohammad, i.e. he existed. Then, this is the incomplete 'was' which requires more detailed predicate. This form of 'was' *(kana)* is indicative of the past tense; verbs must indicate tense as well as an action. This is why it needs a predicate in order to give us an action. We say: Zayd was hard working. The predicate comes to complete the deficient verb. It is as if you describe him saying: Zayd is a hard-working man.

The statement of: '…but they did not abase themselves before their Lord…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 76) is that their humility and abasement was neither for themselves nor for the people. Indeed, humility and abasement must be devoted to Allah by being utterly submitted to His commands. However, they neither did so nor abased themselves, neither in time of mercy and alleviation of suffering nor in times of punishment. They should have known that Allah changed His stance towards them, and, consequently, they should have changed their stance towards Allah, abasing themselves before Him and humbly obeying His commands.

The statement '…and they will never humble themselves' (*al-Mu'minun:* 76) means to humble yourself in imploring (*daraa,* in Arabic) is to supplicate with humility to the one who gave you a hand, as stated in the verse: 'yet when the misfortune decreed by Us befell them, they did not humble themselves…' (*al-An'am:* 43) to seek refuge in Allah by supplication and seeking aid

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا فَتَحۡنَا عَلَيۡهِم بَابٗا ذَا عَذَابٖ شَدِيدٍ إِذَا هُمۡ فِيهِ مُبۡلِسُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

Until We open a gate to severe torment for them –
then they will be plunged into utter despair [77]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 77)

Indeed, all efforts to divert them to the right path have failed. Mercy did no good to them for they continued in excess, and the punishment did not deter them for they did not abase themselves after being afflicted by it. Thus, there no longer remains any argument or hope for them in salvation. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* opened against them '…a gate of [truly] severe suffering…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 77), i.e. they were afflicted by a calamity as if they were behind a closed door and suddenly got stricken by it, '…and then, lo! They will be broken in spirit.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 77) despairing of salvation, remorseful of what has passed them by.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنشَأَ لَكُمُ ٱلسَّمْعَ وَٱلْأَبْصَٰرَ وَٱلْأَفْـِٔدَةَ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

It is God who endowed you with hearing, sight,
and hearts – how seldom you are grateful! [78]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 78)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: I created my servants from nothingness and provided them with the staple of life and its necessities from nothingness. Then, I gave them a methodology which organizes their interaction and protect their lives because a maker of an article knows best about it, how it is properly maintained and knows the purpose for which it was created. For example, did the inventor of the fridge, after inventing it, say: look how this tool can benefit you? No, rather, he defined its function before making it. The same applies to the relation between Allah and His creation, and to Allah applies the highest similitude. The one who creates something and sets the purpose for it, knows best the safety regulations which prevent it from ruin and make it fulfil its function with optimum performance. Thus, if you break the safety regulations that your Lord has set for you, your life will fall into ruin and you will be unable to carry out the purpose for which you are created which is the worship of Allah alone without partners. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [tell them that] I have not created the invisible beings and men to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56)

This is why, when disagreement arises between yourselves, He has commanded you to refer it to Allah and His Messenger; just as you return a machine to its manufacturer who knows its nature and defects. We can derive from this issue that if you see a defect or corruption in the universe, know then that a ruling of Allah has been violated. For example, if you see a hungry naked poor man, he is either able to work but has not strived and has opposed the Quranic verse saying: ‘…go about, then, in all its regions, and partake of the sustenance which He provides: but [always bear in mind that] unto Him you shall be resurrected.' (*al-Mulk:* 15) Or, the able have denied him the share Allah has given him in their wealth; they have opposed His statement: 'and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as [those who] might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* disposes actions and things for His creatures in such a manner that keeps the balance of life and fulfils the needs of the needy. For example, when a wealthy person moves into a country other than his, he brings about his wealth into the new place. There is no particular reason for this person to move except that Allah gave power to a thought that occurred to him in order to preserve the distribution of wealth in society. If you try to account for it, you may find that the amount of alms in his old country has exceeded that which is needed to cover the needs of the needy. Thus, he moved to a country where there are fewer resources to cover the needs of the poor and needy.

After that your Lord did not leave you; instead, He presented you with signs which turn you to Him and which ease you in knowing Him. They are either the wondrous universal signs which indicate the power of Allah *Glorified is He* or miracles which affirm the truthfulness of the Prophets in conveying the message of Allah. Allah does not address each and every one of His creatures individually. Rather, He sends a messenger in order to convey to them, and supports him with a miracle that indicates his truthfulness in conveyance.

When you look at the signs of the universes and derive from them the existence of a powerful creator, you do not know who that creator is. The Messenger comes to you to inform you that it is Allah. We have given the example, and to Allah applies the loftiest similitude, that someone has knocked on the door of a room in which we are sitting. We will all agree that there is someone knocking the door. However, no one knows who it is. Here, there is agreement on the reasoning that there is a force behind the door that is knocking it; but who is it? And what does it want? To know the answer to these questions, the force must inform us. You should not say that you think it is so and so, nor should I. We should wait for the knocker to inform us about itself. You can but ask who it is that at the door and wait until it introduces itself, tells you reason for coming and what is wanted. Then, the verses (*ayat*) which carry the methodology of Allah come to advise what He wants from you.

The purpose of mentioning this is that all these verses require means of perception. They require hearing and sight in order for us to see and hear them. Then, they require intellect in order for us to reflect and ponder upon them. This is why He *Glorified is He* says: '[O men! Pay heed to Allah's messages,] for it is He who has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 78).

Hearing and sight are from the senses which the scholars have, out of caution, named the five outer senses, i.e. there are other senses that have yet to be discovered. Science has discovered muscles which distinguish weight, and the sense of touch which is able to distinguish between thick and thin on clothes, for example. You are not able to know these things with the five senses.

The two primary senses are hearing and sight because if a messenger comes to deliver Allah's message, I must be able to hear him. If you had faith in a deity, then hearing suffices you. If you did not already have faith in a deity, then you would also need sight in order to see the signs that indicate His existence and power, concluding from a design the existence of the designer, and from the creation the existence of the Creator. You would become amazed by the preciseness, engineering, and innovation in Allah's universe.

It is the function of the intellect, after what you have seen and heard, to transform it into rational conclusions and assumptions, to govern your life. For example, if you see fire and touch it, and get burnt by it, you will form the conclusion that fire burns and that you should not touch it. When a child nibbles at a pepper corn, they realize it is hot and feels the pain. When they see it again after that, they will say 'ouch', which, according to a child, is an expression indicating the rational judgement formed as a result of their previous experience with pepper. They have adopted it as a principle to be followed for the rest of their life. Likewise, based on your physical perceptions and experiences, you form mental judgments from which you will benefit thereafter.

Then, through the senses, one forms conclusions and assumptions which the intellect compares until it reaches a judgement which will be fixed in heart. We call this a conviction, i.e. something which has been rooted and cannot be undone.

When you ponder upon the speech of the Quran concerning the senses, you will find that it gives this order: hearing, sight and mind because they are the key senses. For example, we only require smell, taste and touch for few things. As for hearing and sight, the issue of Mission *(daʿwa)* rests upon them: hearing is used to hear the conveyance and by sight you can see the signs of Allah which indicate His power.

Modern science has affirmed the order of hearing, sight, and mind. This indicates that it is an order set by the Creator Who has done so out of Wisdom, Knowledge and Power, such that none precedes the other. Physiologists have affirmed this order as well. The first organ which functions in the human being is the ear then the eye. It begins to work from between three to ten days after birth. Thus, hearing and sight feed the processes on which the intellect works.

Thus, this is a congenital and formative order. Just as hearing is the first sense to function, it is also the only sense to remain with the human in all scenarios. The ear hears even during sleep as opposed to the eye. This is because calling is only complete through hearing. This is why it continues to fulfil its function even during sleep.

The eye cannot see in darkness, and it has natural covers which prevent seeing. The ear is not the same, for, if there is a noise, all ears can hear it. But for the eye, a visible thing could exist with you in the same place, yet you cannot see it, while someone else can. Thus, audible things are one, while visual is multiplex. This is why He *Glorified is He* said: '…hearing, and sights…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 78). You have no choice in hearing, but you do in sight. Visual perceptions may vary from a person to another, whereas everyone will hear the same thing.

Thus, it is from the inimitability of the Quran that in the story of the people of the cave, Allah *Glorified is He* sealed up their hearing in the cave so that they could sleep without the sounds of the desert disturbing them. If their sense of hearing had remained with them like the rest of creation, they would not have remained for such a long period of time without the noises startling them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And thereupon We veiled their ears in the cave for many a year' (*al-Kahf:* 11).

Another sign of inimitability of the Holy Quran is that, in every verse in which hearing and sight are mentioned, they are mentioned in this order: hearing then sight, except in one verse which speaks of the resurrection: They will say: '…Our Lord! We have now seen and heard…' (*as-Sajda:* 12).

Here, sight is mentioned before hearing because on the Day of Resurrection, the visual sight will startle them before the sounds will. This is one of the aspects of preciseness in the inimitable language of the Quran.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: you have no excuse for I have given you hearing to hear My message from the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*; I have given you eyes so you can turn to the signs in the universe; I have given you a mind to think with and to lead you to a conclusion that indicates the presence of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

It is as if Allah says to you: I do not come unexpectedly upon you, nor have I deceived you about anything. I have created you, provided you with livelihood, and arranged for you to have the instruments of comprehension in a logical order. What is your plea then? You must beware not to be preoccupied and diverted by your whims away from the message which has come to you on the tongue of Our Messenger.

When reflecting on the structure of the ear and eye, you will find that they are signs and miracles of the Creator *Glorified is He*. Scientists are yet to reach an understanding of their secrets and true essence, despite the progress of the sciences.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says at the end of the verse: '…[yet] how seldom are you grateful!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 78) That is because you had better be so grateful for these blessings and signs of Allah.

Some scholars say regarding the meaning of '… [yet] how seldom are you grateful!' that He *Glorified is He* indicated the utter ingratitude of the human being by using the word 'seldom'. However, this understanding is not appropriate here because Allah affirmed some gratitude being devoted by them but it is few; your Lord *Glorified is He* wants constant gratitude which accompanies every bounty with which He blesses you. When you see a blind person who has been deprived of the blessing of sight, falling in the road, you say: All praise is for Allah (*al-hamdu li Allah*). You say this by instinct because you continuously live in the blessings of Allah, but do not realize it until you see someone who has been deprived of it.

Therefore, if you wish for your blessing to last, keep hold of it with the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah, the Benefactor. When you have been given a blessing or when you see something that pleases you in your family or wealth say: This is what Allah has wished and there is no power gained except from Allah *(ma sha'a Allah la quwwat illa bi Allah).* Do you not see that Allah has made jealousy in order to caution us? If you wish to protect your blessing then do not forget the Benefactor because He is the only one who is able to protect it. Just as if we were to buy a tool, and agree with the manufacturer on a warranty for a fixed price.

Similarly, if you say, when receiving a blessing: This is what Allah has wished and there is no power gained except from Allah *(ma sha'a Allah la quwwat illa bi Allah),* you will not see anything bad coming to it. Because by saying this statement of prayer (*dhikr*), you activate the law of protection and place its protection under control of its maker. A person will not be tried with their blessing unless they are heedless of the Benefactor and abandon gratitude towards Him.

I remember(1) that there was a man of understanding of Allah in our village who owned a third of a *Feddan* (acre) which he used to cultivate in the traditional style. One year, he cultivated cotton on his land and worms almost destroyed it. My father spoke to him regarding the worms but he said: 'O Uncle Mutawalli*,* do not worry for I have rendered its protection', i.e. he had given out the alms which would protect and bless his wealth.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *The story of the peasant and the cotton worm in the village of Sheikh ash-Sha'rawi.*

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى ذَرَأَكُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

It is He who made you multiply on earth. It is to Him that you will be gathered [79] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 79)

The phrase '…has caused you to multiply…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 79) means He has made you propagate and spread throughout the earth in order for you to inhabit it in its entirety. It is amazing when you see people who reside on mountains and the dry, desolate desert, not being content with an alternative. They bear hardship in order to remain in those places, such that you wonder: why do not they leave this place for a fertile area?

We have seen these types of people who are patient with what Allah has decreed in their lands. We have seen them in Yemen after the flood of *'Iram* (The city belonging to the people of Noah) before which it was known as The Felicitous Yemen (*al-Yaman as-sa'id*). We have seen them in Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait. The people of these countries have told us of the tough life they used to live. Then the result of their patience came to them and Allah *Glorified is He* made these mountains and deserts the richest countries in the world. This is because they were content in the first instance with the decree of Allah. And because of their patience, He transformed the troubles of the desert into blessings. If those, who have been granted with those blessings, have been deprived of them in this world, they would have died of the cold.

This is because the Creator *Glorified is He* has distributed wealth in all parts of the earth equally. Every longitudinal part of the earth has the same amount of wealth as in other parts. Once upon a time, landholders were the rich and people of leadership. Then, things changed and riches other than agriculture have emerged. Thus, fortune constantly develops in all parts of the earth. They just become apparent at certain times.

Thus, the scattering of the creation throughout earth has a wisdom which the Creator *Glorified is He* desired. Then, He says: '… and unto Him you shall be gathered.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 79). That is do not think that by scattering you across earth you will be able to flee from Us, or that We are unable to gather you at the same time. Just as We scattered you for a wisdom, We will gather you, for another wisdom, and not a single soul will escape.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُحۡىِۦ وَيُمِيتُ وَلَهُ ٱخۡتِلَٰفُ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

It is He who gives life and death; the alternation of night
and day depends on Him; will you not use your minds? [80]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 80)

In His saying '…grants life and deals death…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 80) these are two actions which must take place after existence of life and death. The Creator *Glorified is He* creates life first, then death and then induces whatever action He wants from them.

Life precedes death in all but one verse in the chapter of *al-Mulk*: 'He who has created death as well as life…' (*al-Mulk:* 2). The reason for this is that Allah *Glorified is He* gives the human being choice by which he carries out the movements in all his bodily systems. You may think: what is it that you do when you want to get up from your place? What do you do when you wish to move your hand or foot? It is by mere will that your limbs move without you having to exert yourself to carry out these movements. Thus, by your mere will, your limbs respond and take the action you want to do; you are a creation of the Lord. So, if a created being is able to do what it wants without treatment, how can we then consider it to be a difficult thing for Him *Glorified is He* and some of us disbelieve that when He wills creating a being, He says to it 'Be' despite the fact that we do what we want with our limbs being motivated and moved by mere will and inner decision, without having to command them with anything or saying anything to them. Allah *Glorified is He* says to a thing 'Be', and then it is created, while you do actions without saying anything.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned death first in this verse: 'He who has created death as well as life…' (*al-Mulk:* 2) because life will delude a person by the fact that they have power of their limbs that may lead them to transgression. Thus, the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to warn them: 'remember that I will deal death' in order that they may face life with its opposite in mind leading them to become upright in their way of life.

The attributes of creation and causing death are eternal attributes of Allah which existed before He created or causing death to anything. As we have said, these are affirmed attributes of Allah even before He carries out the actions connected to them. For example, when a poet composes a poem, he does so because he is a poet, we do not say that he is a poet because he composed the poem. If he did not have the attribute of composing poetry, he would not have recited it. To Allah, applies the highest similitude.

Just as life is created, death is also created. One might say: if you fired a bullet at someone with the intent of killing, then you have created death. We say: thank Allah you did not claim giving life and sufficed with death. But there is a difference between normal death and killing. Killing demolishes the body first and then is followed by the spirit departing body. As for death, the spirit departs the body first without the body being demolished.

This is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And Muhammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? ...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144)

Namrud (Nimrod), the king who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* regarding His Lord, ordered the killing of one subject of his, and left the other living. Namrud claimed that he had given life to one and given death to the other. These actions, in reality, were nonsense. If he had any truth to his claim he would have brought the one he had killed back to life. This is why Ibrahim *peace be upon him* did not respond to this and moved onto a different issue in which Nimrud could not resort to trickery.

Thus, demolishing of body leads to the removal of the spirit because the spirit has certain specifications such that it can only take place in a sound body. We have clarified this issue, and to Allah applies the loftiest similitude, with an electrical lamp. The electricity is hidden in the wires whereby we cannot see its light unless we connect the lamp to it. It has such specifications that it will only give out light if they are fulfilled. If it breaks, its light will go out.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and to Him is due the alternation of night and day…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 80); night takes place after the disappearance of the sun and the coming of darkness which prevents the vision of things. In the past, it was thought that vision is complete when light goes from the eye to the object. Then the Muslim scientist Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham came and proved the error of this theory and established that vision is complete when light reflects from the object to the eye causing you to see; the evidence is that you cannot see an object if it is in the dark.

The darkness of night alerts us of the importance of light which we need in order to direct us in life. A person will face danger if he travels in the dark because they may bump into something weaker than them and then break it, or they will bump into something stronger than them and then they are injured and feel pain or suffer harm.

Thus, there must be light in order for life to continue, and in order to move throughout the earth. Similarly, there must be darkness to prevent human body from absorbing too much of the Sun's radiation and to rest from the strain of work. Modern science has affirmed the danger of the Sun's rays for a person's health.

This is why He *Glorified is He* says: '…and to Him is due the alternation of night and day…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 80). He made them different and follows one another so that each one of them could fulfil its respective function in the universe. He *Glorified is He* says 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it rises bright!' (*al-Layl*: 1-2) As long as each of them has its function, then beware of turning night into day and day into night. By doing so you will be going against the nature upon which Allah has created you. Look at those who lead their life in this manner, keeping awake at night until dawn (*fajr*) and sleeping during the day until sunset (maghrib); indeed they spoil the way of life: a student will sleep during his lessons and a worker will sleep and fall short while on the job.

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* warns us of this issue in His statement: '…turn out the lights when you go to sleep'(1). This is because the body will only take rest and be calm in darkness. The person will arise in the morning strong and energetic. Read the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* saying: 'And made the night [its] cloak. And made the day [a symbol of] life' (*an-Naba':* 10-11).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5624) and Ahmad in his Musnad (3/388) from the Hadith of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah. The wording is attributed to Al-Bukhari.*

A mark of the preciseness of the Quranic language is that it takes into account those that work during the night because the nature of their work; for example policemen, bakers and the like. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And among His wonders is your sleep, at night or in daytime…’ (*ar-Rum:* 23). Night is the original time of sleep and daytime is like night for those who serve the society during the night. This is why they must make the day an artificial night by closing their windows and sleeping in a calm place so that the human body can take its share of rest and serenity.

Thus, night and day are not opposites. They are two complimentary creations, not conflicting. They are like the male and the female, one completes the other. They are not, as some claim, opposites. This is why, after taking an oath by the night as it veils in darkness and the day as it rises bright, the True Lord *Glorified is He* said: ‘Consider the creation of the male and the female! Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends!’ (*al-Layl:* 3-4) Night and day are like male and female; each one has a function in life.

The divergence of night and day is in terms of light and darkness, length and shortness and the difference in places. Night does not take up the entire universe, nor does the day. When you are in night, it is day elsewhere. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘He makes the night grow longer by shortening the day, and He makes the day grow longer by shortening the night…’ (*Fatir:* 13).

The result of this is numerous sunrises and a sunset according to the number of places such that every sunrise coincides with a sunset and every sunset coincides with a sunset. Therefore, they say: a new night and day comes to being in every one millionth of a second.

This way, and as we have said, the continuous remembrance of Allah throughout all times is maintained; the call to prayer (adhan) and the prayer occur in every moment. While you pray the sunset prayer (maghrib), someone else is praying the night prayer (ʿisha’). Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to be mentioned in the entire universe in all the prayer times at every moment.

One of the Sufis and people of gnosis said addressing time: ‘O time, in you, you contained all the times’; i.e. O noon, you are also afternoon, sunset, night and dawn; but elsewhere.

From the divergence of the night and day, the hot summer and the cold winter also arise. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has charged all His servants with one system of religious assignment such as the pilgrimage, and has tied all kinds of worship with the *Hijri* calendar. Summer and winter happen consecutively in the time. This becomes clear if you make a comparison between the *Hijri* and Gregorian calendars; the one who is not able to make the pilgrimage in the summer can do so in the winter because the divergence of the lunar calendar makes it take on all the seasons of the year.

This is why they said: the Night of Power occurs throughout the entire year because the twenty-seventh of *Ramadan* corresponds, in one year, to the first of January, and in another year, it will correspond to the second, another time the third etc.

Another meaning of the divergence of night and day is that they succeed one another; Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And He it is who causes the night and the day to succeed one another, [revealing Himself in His works] unto him who has the will to take thought – that is, has the will to be grateful.' (*al-Furqan:* 62)

We see that night follows day, and that day follows night; Allah has made this circulation fixed throughout all time phases relating to it. So long as the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made night and day succeed one another, this must have been so from the beginning of their creation. For if the night had existed before the day, we could not say that night succeeded it because it had not been preceded by anything, This must mean that they were both created together, and as time passed, each succeeded the other. This cannot happen unless the earth is circular such that night and day can occur at the same time; day occurs when the earth in the place which faces the sun and night occurs in the place where there is darkness.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says: '…Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 80) This is because in these issues, in particular, you should have used reason. The divergence of times used to be based upon reason. Nowadays, it is based upon transportation because distances have shortened and we know now the difference between time zones with precision.

Similarly, people in the past abandoned the theory that the earth was round such that even when they captured images which revealed that it is round some of our thinkers denied it. We say: why do we take such a stance towards theories which our Quran had already established? Why do we give others the impression that our religion is heedless of these issues despite the fact that it had already made these discoveries?

If you were to ponder the statement of Allah: ‘And it is He who has spread the earth…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 3) you would find in it the conclusive proof for this theory because the spread earth does not have an edged boundary. This does not make sense unless the earth is round such that if you were to travel in it you would not find an end; until you end up in the place that you started. If the earth was any other shape, such as a square or rectangle there would have been an edged end. However, in the past, we did not possess the tools that would clarify and bring forth this reality.

Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* puts the question: ‘…Will you not, then, use your reason?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 80) It alerts us of the need to use our reason in matters of existence because we will encounter many of them in our path to Allah *Glorified is He*. Why does a person use his reason in order to plan crimes? However, Allah *Glorified is He* watches over this person and makes them commit an error in order to prove the crime against themselves. Therefore, the judicial specialists say that there is no perfect crime. This is the function of the judge or detective who converse with a criminal in order to reach this clue.

It is as if the True Lord says: you have abused your mind to satisfy your whims, so I must put you down the perilous path in order for your affair to be revealed. If I conceal it for you once, beware of persisting or thinking that you escaped by your reason or your planning, or else I will catch you even if it was a crime that you have not committed because you are not able to use your reason to plan against Allah; His justice is above all planning.

If a person is accused of a crime of which they are innocent and if harm reaches him as a result of this false claim; the divine justice will come down and Allah will conceal another crime that he had committed as a recompense for what he faced in the first. This can only be done by the Lord.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* alerts the human reason and stimulates it by inviting it to ponder, reflect and use reason in order to perceive the universe around it, this is proof that He *Glorified is He* has trust in His creation, His design; this is why He stimulates the minds to search and reflect upon this creation. You can notice this issue when a human presents a product. The one who makes an excellent product exhibits it and calls you to test it and make sure of its quality, while a manufacturer of a bad product will beat around the bush and will distract you from examining it lest you discover its defect.

When your Lord alerts you to reflect upon His creation, you must ascertain the significance of this stimulation in order to reach what Allah has intended for you.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

بَلْ قَالُوا۟ مِثْلَ مَا قَالَ ٱلْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

But, like others before them [81]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 81)

That is they did not take these signs as lessons. Nay, they spoke as the people of olden time spoke:

قَالُوٓا۟ أَءِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَٰمًا أَءِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

They say, ‘What? When we die and turn to dust
and bones, shall we really be resurrected? [82]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 82)

Whether these were their words or their predecessors’ words, those who were contemporaneous with the prophet Muhammad were sceptical about resurrection after death. All their speech indicates this. They were amazed at this affair.

The Quran mentions the words of one of them in this verse: ‘and [now] he [argues about Us, and] thinks of Us in terms of comparison, and is oblivious of how he himself was created! [And so] he says, “Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?” Say: “He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life [once again], seeing that He has full knowledge of every act of creation’ (*Ya Sin:* 78-79).

لَقَدۡ وُعِدۡنَا نَحۡنُ وَءَابَآؤُنَا هَٰذَا مِن قَبۡلُ إِنۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّآ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

We have heard such promises before, and so did our
forefathers. These are just ancient fables’ [83]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 83)

Do you think that since Allah *Glorified is He* has promised you with death and resurrection that this will be in this world? This is why you say: we have been promised this but it did not happen, and many of us have died but they have not returned nor been resurrected. Who told you that you will die today and be resurrected tomorrow? The resurrection will not take place until all of humanity has died, then all of them will be resurrected at one time.

Thus, this statement of theirs is nonsense and false argumentation. The statement ‘…we have been promised…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 83) i.e. with the resurrection, a promise (waʿd) is usually of something good just as a threat (waʿid) is of something bad, like in the saying of the poet:

If I was to make a promise and a threat
I will conflict my threat and carry out my promise

That is he is a generous man who leaves the evil which he has threatened with and does the good that he has promised to do. However, the scholars say that both forms of the word can be used interchangeably.

However, can the promise, given to the disbelievers, of resurrection, and punishment that follows it be considered a promise? The scholars say: yes, this threat of punishment which awaits them can be considered a promise of a good thing because it warns them of its danger in order that they may not fall into it. Thus, it is good for them now since it warns them, just as you warn your child of failure in school if he or she neglects his or her lessons.

From this meaning, we have also explained the repetition of His statement: ‘which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 13) In the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, after bounties of Allah, this verse is mentioned as a reproach for those who deny or belie these blessings. It is repeated after each blessing as a confirmation of this reproach. It is strange that this verse is also mentioned after misfortunes as in His statement: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36)

Is there a blessing in fire and flames? We say: yes, there is blessing in it because it is warning for you before meeting this fate, and a warning for you so you can take yourself to account.

They say: ‘…This is nothing but fables of ancient times!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 83) That is the resurrection is mere fables for them. Fables (*asatir*) is the plural of fable (*astura*) like *a‘ajib* (miracles) which is the plural of *a‘juba* (miracle). Some scholars say that *asatir* is the plural of *astar* which is the plural of *satr* (line), like *shakl* and *ashkal*; thus it is a plural of a plural. Whether it is the plural of *astura* or the plural or *satr*, the meaning is not different because a written thing can be considered by people to be a superstition which has no reality.

Fables are fabricated statements which have no basis. A Statement is not called a fable until its time of occurrence comes and it does not happen. So you can say fables of something other than resurrection as the time of resurrection of which you say ‘…fables of ancient times’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 83) is yet to come; all of humanity has not died in order for them to be resurrected. Thus you have erred in your timing and for thinking that you will die and be resurrected in this world, while people are still in the vastness of this world.

Thus, the resurrection is not as you say; on the contrary it is true. You have not used the appropriate word for it. This is why these rhetorical questions which establish the case against them are put to them:

قُل لِّمَنِ ٱلْأَرْضُ وَمَن فِيهَآ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Who owns the earth and all who live in it, if you know [so much]?’ [84] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 84)

The conditional phrase ‘if’ indicates that there is doubt in their knowledge.

سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ ۚ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

And they will reply, ‘God.’ Say, ‘Will you not take heed?’ [85] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 85)

As long as you have established that the earth and all that lives thereon belong to Allah, then ‘…Will you not, then, bethink yourselves [of Him]?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 85) That is: why do you turn away from the Owner and Creator of the world?

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ مَن رَّبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ ٱلسَّبْعِ وَرَبُّ ٱلْعَرْشِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿٨٦﴾

Say: Who is it that sustains the seven heavens and is the Lord of the Sublime Throne? [86] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 86)

We notice that they did not argue this issue, nor did they say, for example, that there is only the sky that we see. This indicates that it is a matter that they do not reject. It must mean that the previous prophets informed them of the heavens and that there are seven. It became a rational principle that they knew of. Otherwise, they would have objected to it since they only see one heaven. Thus, they did not argue this subject.

In the question: ‘…and the Lord of the Sublime Throne?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 86) the Throne is an awesome creation the essence of which only Allah knows, and He also said about it: ‘…and is established on the throne of His almightiness…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 54) and said: ‘…the throne of His almightiness has rested upon water…’ (*Hud:* 7).

Nobody has seen the Throne, but the Lord who created it has informed us of it; He said: to Me belongs such and such, it is sufficient that Allah *Glorified is He* has described it as sublime. Regarding this issue also, they did not argue with the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* nor did they say that they have not seen the Throne. This would also indicate that they had attained some of the knowledge of the previous prophets which had been transmitted to them at a point in the development of human civilization by those who were present.

The throne belonging to human kings was also described as great as well. In the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the Queen of Sheba (Balqis), the hoopoe said: '…and hers is a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 23) because the throne is a symbol of the establishment of rule and of the stability of the command of a king, who nobody opposes, This is why the first thing that Sulaiman *peace be upon him* said regarding her was: '…Which of you can bring me her throne…' (*an-Naml:* 38). It was as if He wanted to firstly take from her the symbol of greatness, safety, security, and stability of her realm.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ ۚ قُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

And they will reply, 'God.' Say, 'Will you not be mindful?' [87] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 87)

Since it is the case and you do admit that the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah, and that to Him belongs the great throne, why do you not fear this Allah? Why do you rebel against His methodology? This universe and everything therein has been created for your service; does this not make you take heed of the beneficent maker?

This is why He *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith*:* 'O son of Adam, I have created everything for you, and I have created you for Me, so do not be preoccupied by that which belongs to you from the one whom you belong to.'(1) That is do not let the blessing distract you from the Benefactor. The human being must first look to his Creator and his Owner and fulfil His right, then look at what they possess.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned in his tafsir (4/2380): It has been mentioned in some of the divine books that God Glorified is He says: O son of Adam, I have created you for My worship, so do not fool around, I have taken charge of your sustenance so you will not be tired. Seek Me and you will find Me, and if you fine Me then you have found everything…*

The meaning of: '…Will you not, then, remain conscious of Him?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 87) is that you should create a protective barrier between you and the majestic attributes of Allah. We have previously said that an aspect of the miraculous nature of the verses in the Quran is that one time they will say: 'be conscious of Allah' and another time 'be conscious of the Fire'. The meaning is not contradictory as some may believe. The meaning is in fact the same because the fire is a soldier of Allah and one of the attributes of His majesty. Thus, the meaning is: be conscious of the punishment of Allah and be conscious of the attributes of His force and omnipotence by making a protective barrier between you and them.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ مَنۢ بِيَدِهِۦ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ وَهُوَ يُجِيرُ
وَلَا يُجَارُ عَلَيْهِ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

Say, in whose hand is the realm of all things – and He protects while none can protect against Him – if you should know? [88] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 88)

'…In whose hand…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88) indicates having control over a thing; when you say that this affair is in my hand, you mean that it is under my control and disposition. And in '…the mighty dominion over all things' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88), the Arabic word for property *malaka* has three forms for its noun: *milk* which means property and possession, *mulk* which means reign and dominion, and *malakut* which means dominion over the unseen worlds.

Property (*milk*) is what you own, even if you only have one item of clothing it is your property. As for *mulk* it is to have authority and power over the individuals who have ownership of seen things. As for *malakut*, it is both the possession and authority of the created things that your senses cannot discern, and which you can only be known by informing of their Creator. Human beings cannot see everything in the universe. Rather, there are things inside themselves which they do not know about. All of these are included in the unseen realm.

In fact, a human being cannot even see the whole of the physical world because they can only see within their eyesight limit; they cannot see whatever goes beyond this limit even if someone else can see it. Therefore, things which are unseen to you may be included in the wider meaning of unseen realm. Thus, the unseen realm or *malakut* refers to the hidden things which nobody can see or which only some can see.

If human beings go deep in the worship and obedience of Allah *Glorified is He*, they will be outpoured with divine inspirations, and Allah will generously give them directly from this dominion, as He says: '…and We would have given them a rich reward of Our own.' (*an-Nisa':* 67)

Do you not see what the Lord *Glorified is He* says of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'And of Ibrahim, who fulfilled his duty.' (*an-Najm:* 37) He also said of him: 'When Abraham's Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled…' (*al-Baqara:* 124) i.e. he fulfilled the rights of Allah *Glorified is He* with precision and in a perfect way.This is why His Lord *Glorified is He* is content that he will be a leader for the people: '…He said, "I will make you a leader of people."…' (*al-Baqara:* 124)

Thus, when Ibrahim *peace be upon him* excelled in what was due to His Lord *Glorified is He* and when He reached this station His Lord said of Him: 'In this way We showed Ibrahim [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth, so that he might be a firm believer…' (*al-An'am:* 75).

By pleasing His Lord to excellence in the first place, He progressed to a station higher than it. This is like when a man enters your house and witnesses the blessings that you have, he feels happy for you, saying: 'what Allah has willed, Glorified is Allah', and prays that you be given more. When you notice his cordial admiration, you say: 'come and I will show you that which is greater'.

Another example of this is that of the righteous servant who worshipped Allah *Glorified is He* and drew nearer to Him by following the Path conveyed by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. When he became steadfast on the Path and was deeply engrossed in the worship and obedience of Allah *Glorified is He*, Allah granted him knowledge, from His grace, without an intermediary or messenger until he became a teacher to Musa *peace be upon him*.

In the verse we are discussing, Allah, then, says: '…Who protects, while there is no protection against Him…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88). We use yujeer (protect) when someone sought the protection of so-and-so, and the latter protected him, or someone who sought the succour of so-and-so, and the latter gave the former succour. Also, *jar* (protector) is mentioned in Allah's statement: '…I shall be your protector…' (*al-Anfal:* 48). A human does not seek the protection of someone else unless he is unable to protect himself. That is why he seeks the help of someone who is known to be strong, in order to protect, and defend him.

Thus, this issue comprises three elements; the protector: this is the one who agrees to help you, take you in his custody and defend you; the one being protected: this is the weak one who seeks protection; the one being protected from: this is the strong one who wishes to overpower. It is known that after what happened during the travel to at-Ta'if, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sought the protection of a disbeliever and entered in his protection.

In essence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* protects those who seek His protection and gives succour to those who ask for it. However, '…there is no protection against Him.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88) This is because the one who protects you does so against someone who is equal to him in strength, thus being able to prevent him from getting to you and protecting you from him overpowering you. Who is it then that can protect you from Allah *Glorified is He*? Who is it that can protect you if Allah *Glorified is He* is the one seeking you out? This is why He says regarding the son of Nuh (Noah) Kanaan *peace be upon him*: '…Nuh said, "Today there is no refuge from Allah's command, except for those on whom He has mercy."…' (*Hud:* 43) In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* protects from everything, and whoever spends the morning and the evening under the protection of Allah *Glorified is He* has no fear. Here you can notice the connection between the beginning of this verse and its ending: everything is in the hand and grasp of Allah *Glorified is He*; everything goes to Him. So beware of thinking that you can escape from His grasp by the blessings that He has given you because He is able to take it from you. If this happens, no one can protect you from Allah, nor can anyone give you help from Him.

In addition, read His statement: ‘Say, “Allah, holder of all control, You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hand: You have power over everything.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26)

In the verse we are studying He says: ‘…if you know [so much]’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 88) meaning if you have knowledge of this issue.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says of them:

سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِۚ قُلۡ فَأَنَّىٰ تُسۡحَرُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

And they will reply, ‘God.’ Say, ‘Then how can you be so deluded?’ [89] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 89)

In this verse also they say ‘all belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*’. This is because it is a truth that cannot be denied. As such, ‘…‘how can you be so deluded?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 89) How can you be deluded; or how were you deluded from the truth and turned away from it to this false speech?

These three issues are mentioned in the form of a question in order to condemn them through the manifestation of the creed in the highest existence; the clarity of the proofs of the inimitability of Allah’s message; and the clarity of the signs in the verses that discuss Allah’s Path. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted such words to be spoken by them, condemning themselves as witnesses on their own conduct; so that it could be a proof and true testimony against them.

It is well known that confession is the master of proofs. This is why He asks them the following questions: ‘Say [Prophet], “Who owns the earth and all who live in it, if you know [so much]?”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 84) ‘Say, “Who is the Lord of the seven heavens? Who is the Lord of the Mighty Throne?”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 86) ‘Say, “Who holds control of everything in His hand? ...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 88)

In answer to all these questions they said ‘Allah’: what, then, remains for you? What is it that prevented you from being mindful of the One whom you believe to be the owner of the earth and heavens, and in whose hand everything is? It was merely arrogance and rebellion. Otherwise, what did you mean by the word ‘Allah’ which you uttered?

You know Allah, and know what this word means because the meaning of a word precedes its formation in the human language. For, a language is usually made up of words which are set down for specific meanings. Thus, meanings exist first, then, we set the word which indicates that meaning. Since the word ‘Allah’ exists upon your tongues you must know what this word indicates. It is a linguistic matter which you have solved. Otherwise, a non-existent thing does not have a name. For example, what was a television called before it was invented? It did not have a name because its meaning had not yet existed. When the television was invented, it was given a name.

Since the word ‘Allah’ circulated on the tongues, this indicates that the existence of Allah *the Almighty* preceded the existence of His name. So, knowing Him by His name is a proof against you. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* presented these issues in the form of a question in order to get the confession out of them. This is as if a person denies that you did him any good, if you inform him: ‘I did such and such for you,’ you give him information. Information can be true or false, and he may recognize it or deny it.

Alternatively, when you ask him: did I not do such and such for you? He can not but admit it and utter the truth of what happened. His confession enables you to reach that which witnessing or proof cannot do.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

بَلْ أَتَيْنَٰهُم بِٱلْحَقِّ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

The fact is, We brought them the truth and they are lying [90] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 90)

This means let me inform you of their affair and why they denied the truth and did not utter it. They deny the truth because they are liars and want to establish that what they are on is only natural. They do this because they benefit from deviance and falsehood. This is why they impede the message which came to correct the scales and fight deviance and falsehood. In other words, they resort to belying the message and turning people away from it in order to benefit from falsehood.

This is why you should reflect upon why people disbelieve. They disbelieve because they benefit from falsehood, the truth troubles them and tightens a grip around them.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

مَا ٱتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِن وَلَدٖ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُۥ مِنۡ إِلَٰهٍۚ إِذٗا لَّذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَٰهِۭ بِمَا
خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَا بَعۡضُهُمۡ عَلَىٰ بَعۡضٖۚ سُبۡحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ٩١

Never did God take unto Himself any son. Nor is there any god beside Him— if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overpower the others. May God be exalted above what they describe! [91] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 91)

If only their affair had ended at them not attaining to faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. However, they transgressed until they described Allah *Glorified is He* to have things that do not befit Him to have. Since Allah rejects the idea of Him taking any offspring, 'Never did Allah take unto Himself any son…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) then, saying that Allah had a child, indicates that their transgression and deviation intensified Moreover, their impudence reached the extent of speaking falsely about the Almighty's Divine Entity.

First, we ask: what is offspring? Offspring is what a person begets whether it is male or female. We read in the Quran that they said: Isa (Jesus) is the son of Allah and Uzayr (Ezra) is the son of Allah. They said that the angels are His daughters. By Contrast, Allah says: 'Never did Allah take unto Himself any son…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91). This statement includes both sons and daughters.

The meaning of their claim which Allah negates in the verse 'Never did Allah take unto Himself any son…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) is that Allah existed, and then took offspring unto Himself. So, the taking of offspring is an occurrence. This indicates that there was a time in which Allah did not have offspring.

Here, we ask: what increase has the (assumed) existence of offspring caused in the dominion of Allah? Have the heavens become eight? Has this added another sun or moon in the universe? The universe is as Allah created it. He provided it with its necessities, foundations, and branches. Nothing has increased. Thus, the taking of offspring is frivolous, and nothing results from it.

They say, ‘Allah took a son’, in order that the creation could find affinity in the existence of His son, and sense His essence among the creation. They said this at the Council of Nicaea, as if The Messiah (‘Isa) *peace be upon him* took the station of divinity. However, how long did he *peace be upon him* stay among them? The Messiah *peace be upon him* was on the earth for thirty-something years before being raised to the heavens. How then were the people who had lived before His birth prevented from this affinity? In addition, how were those who lived after Him prevented from this affinity? Does this not contradict with the justice of Allah *Glorified is He* since all of humanity are the creation of Allah *Glorified is He*, all being equal to him?

Some of them say: He came to remove sins, but sins remained on the earth even after what He did. Thus, these are all weak proofs.

If we were to discuss this issue in a logical and philosophical way, we ask: why does a human take offspring? A human being takes offspring because he loves life, death shortens this life. Thus, he wants offspring in order for it to be an extension to his life, guaranteeing that he will be remembered in the following generation. If his offspring has offspring, of his own, he guarantees that his name will be remembered in two generations. This is why people say (in Egypt): ‘Dearer than a child is a grandchild’. What is this remembrance that they hold onto? The real remembrance is the good deeds that you leave behind, and at the same time goes to Allah before you do.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not need remembrance after Him, simply because He remains and does not die. This issue is thus not possible in His case.

Offspring may be taken in order to be a reliance and assistance for its father when he grows and his strength weakens. This is why they say, ‘the best marriage is an early marriage because it will help you to beget a son who will be like a father to you and will look after you during the childhood of old age when you reach old age and become like a child'. This is the result when you beget a child while you are still young. Moreover, this will enable you both to contemporaneous with each other for the longest time possible. The time in which he will continue to be the light of your eyes will be longer, as opposed to someone who begets in old age. This is why it is said that 'a father who looks after you in the childhood of your old age', and did not say 'a son' because in this instance you are in need of the compassion of a father.

This is also impossible in respect with the True Lord because He is the Strong who is not in need of a helper.

On the other hand, man loves his offspring because it is a part of him, and he is the cause of its existence. Therefore, he wishes to have offspring of his own. This is one aspect of man's love of ownership because a person wishes firstly to have land, then, he wishes to cultivate it and eat from its fruits, then, he wishes to have animals from which he can benefit and drink milk, then, after all this has been fulfilled he extends his wishes to taking offspring. It is as if he progresses from the love of inanimate objects to the love of plants, to the love of animals; and from there to the love of humans.

This is also impossible in His case. If you love your offspring because they are part of you; your own offspring that you cherish, then all of humanity are the children and of Allah *Glorified is He*. How, then, would He need offspring?

Thus, these are all false proofs. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* refutes them: 'Never did Allah take unto Himself any son…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91). He uses the word *min* (any) which indicates generality i.e. Allah *Glorified is He* never took anything starting from that which may be called a son, even if it be adopted. It just as if you were to say: *laysa 'andi mal* (I do not have money with me) you negate the possibility of having in your possession that which is usually considered to be wealth, yet this does not negate the possibility of you having in your possession a few pounds or pennies. If you were to say *laysa 'andi min mal* (I have nothing that is money with me), then, you negate the possibility of even possessing the least thing that can be called money.

We reply to the one who says that the word *min*, here, is superfluous by saying that the speech of Allah *Glorified is He* is precise and does not present itself to superfluity. Superfluity is only in the speech of mortals. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is deemed above this.

Then, in His refutation of their claims the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes us to higher level and says: '…Nor is there any god beside Him…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91), i.e. a deity that is rightfully or wrongfully worshipped. This is why He called the idols deities. However, the word 'Allah' is exclusively dedicated to the one who is rightfully worshipped. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* negated having partners in worship, as it is mentioned in another verse: 'If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins…' (*al-Anbiya':* 22), that is if there were deities other than Allah *Glorified is He*, the heaven and the earth would have fallen into ruin. Moreover, even if there were deities in addition to Allah, they would have fallen into ruin. This is because *illa*, here, is not of exception; it is a noun which means 'beside'. Its grammatical function becomes clear when the word 'Allah' follows it in the sentence.

If you were to reflect upon the idea of multiple deities, its falsehood would become clear to you. If there were other deities with Allah, they would have divided the universe among themselves making it into sections, each one taking his section: one would take earth; another would take the sky; another would take that which is between them etc. However, would any section of the universe be self-sufficient? Could the earth be sufficient without the heaven? If this were the case, a clash would take place by which the state of the universe would not be consistent.

Moreover, we would ask: why did not the deity who took the earth, for example, take the heaven? He must have taken the earth by means of his power, yet, left the heaven out of incapacity. An entity of such a description cannot be a deity. If they were to say: they are all powerful, each one of them possessing the ability of creation by himself, we say: what, then, is the benefit of the others?

Then, He says: '…each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overpower the others…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91), i.e. if each one of them was independent of his own section of the universe, the affairs of the universe would have fallen into ruin. This would be just as we see in the world of humans, when a king attempts to become independent over a part of land to which he has no right. We have seen the ruin that this leads to on the earth. This is an example of His statement: '…each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to over- come the others…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91). This is one portrayal of corruption. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* deals with this issue and announces: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

This is not our speech nor is it our testimony. Rather, it is the speech and testimony of Allah of Himself. However, did those entities know of this testimony? If they knew of it then their silence regarding it and lack of opposition is inability. If they were unaware of it, then they are heedless or asleep. In both cases, they cannot rightfully be deities.

In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* replies to them: 'Say, 'If there were other gods along with Him…' (*al-Isra':* 42), then in this case '…they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne.' (*al-Isra':* 42) That is they would have gone out looking for the deity who took the universe from them and attacked their authority; either to confront Him or to draw near to Him.

Therefore, He says of those who claim to have deities besides Allah *Glorified is He*: '…are themselves striving to obtain their Lord's favour…' (*al-Isra':* 57), i.e. 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* Uzayr (Ezra) *peace be upon him* and the angels whom you said are the daughters of Allah *Glorified is He*; all of them turn to Allah and seek to draw near to Him even '…those among them who are closest (to Him) – hoping for His grace and dreading His chastisement…' (*al-Isra':* 57). In another place He says: 'The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of Allah, nor would the angels who are close to Him…' (*an-Nisa':* 172). They never disdain to have servitude to Allah. In fact, they feel honour through this servitude. They are angered and upset when people call them deities, or revere them more than they deserve. This is because their loyalty and allegiance to Allah is greater than their loyalty and allegiance to themselves.

In fact, these things which they take as deities other than Allah will be the first to curse them. The stones which they worshipped other than Allah—despite the fact that the word worship here is wrong, we only repeat it here out of disregard because worship is when the worshipped obeys the command of the one being worshipped and keeps away from what it has prohibited, whereas stones do not have commands nor prohibitions—these stones worship Allah more than they do. And know Allah more than they do. For this reason, the stones despise and curse them. They will turn to fire at the resurrection to burn them.

Read this conversation between the cave of Hira'a—which witnessed the beginning of the revelation and in which the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* found solace in the first verses of the Quran—and the cave of Thawr—in which the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sought protection during the Emigration. Both of them consist of stones. The poet(1) says:

How we envied Hira'a when it witnessed
The faithful Spirit nourishes you with lights
Hira'a and Thawr became equal
By both, I intercede for the community of stones
People worshipped us, yet we worship Allah more
Than those who stand for prayer before dawn
They took our silence as a proof against us
And so we became the fuel of Hell fire
In ignorance they ascribed falsely to us
What they had ascribed to the son of Mary and the disciples
Those who overrate will have retribution while what is overrated
Will be saved by the mercy of the Forgiving

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(1) From the poetry of Sheikh Ash-Shaʿarawi *may Allah have mercy upon him*

This is why Allah says to 'Isa *peace be upon him*: '…'Isa, son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside Allah?"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) 'Isa *peace be upon him* then replied: '…"May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say. If I had said such a thing You would have known it. You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) Yes, indeed Allah knows what His servant and prophet 'Isa *peace be upon him* said. The True Lord just wanted to affirm to them (those who claim that 'Isa is the son of Allah) that he *peace be upon him* dislikes what they have said of him.

When the Romans had been defeated by the Persians the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saddened. Why? Because they are the people of the book who know Allah *Glorified is He*, and who know of the conveyance from Allah, even though they disbelieved in him *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for the Persians, they were Zoroastrians who worshipped fire. Therefore, the True Lord reassures Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with His statement: *'Alif. Lam. Mim.* (These are three Arabic letters) The Byzantines have been defeated* in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory* in a few years' time. Allah is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice* at Allah's help. He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful.' (*ar-Rum:* 1-5)

Even though they did not believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they believed in the Lord *Glorified is He* of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, prejudice in favour of Allah *Glorified is He* is greater than the prejudice in favour of the Messenger who conveys on behalf of Him.

Then He says: '…May Allah be exalted above what they describe.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) The word 'describe', here indicates that they lie. However, this is expressed by the word 'describe' meaning: if you want to recognise falsity then consider their speech, for it is a precise description of it. He says in another verse: '…their own tongues utter the lie…' (*an-Nahl:* 62). Their speech is falsity itself. This is the most truthful description of them because falsity is that which contradicts reality, and they do not say but that which contradicts reality.

It is like when you ask: what is stupidity? I say: look at the conduct of so and so. His conduct is the true description and clear translation of stupidity. It is as if he has reached a point in this description whereby he embodies the meaning which you are looking for.

The statement: '…May Allah be exalted…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) refers to the verbal noun *tanazuh* (de-anthropomorphism) which existed before the existence of the Messiah *peace be upon him*. It is an eternal attribute of Allah *Glorified is He*, since His de-anthropomorphism was established before He created anything. When Allah created the heaven and the earth, they both glorified Him: 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah. *He is the Almighty,* the Wise.' (*al-Hadid:* 1) The glorification has never discontinued since then. The True Lord says: 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah. He is the Almighty, the Wise.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1)

Since they all glorify Allah, then, you, O Muhammad, also glorify Him: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*.' (*al-A'la:* 1)

How can it be that while the entire universe glorifies, you do not, when you (human being) are the master of the universe?

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says regarding His lofty essence:

عَٰلِمِ ٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ فَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشۡرِكُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

He knows what is not seen as well as what is seen;
He is far above any partner they claim for Him [92]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 92)

Knowledge is to perceive an issue or a relative event that is definitive and has an evidence of it. One does not reach knowledge except through these conditions. If some issue is definitive and has occurred but cannot be proved, such as when a child says: 'Allah is one', then this is considered blind following just as a child follows his father or teacher. For a child keeps following others in this issue until he becomes able to apply study and discretion to it, on his own, and can consequently, prove it.

If an issue is definitive but has not occurred, then this is ignorance. Ignorance is not as some people think to not know. Ignorance is: when you are definitive about an issue which contradicts reality. This is why you find the ignorant one more difficult and tiresome for the people of da'wah (calling) and teachers than the empty-minded who knows nothing; who does not have initial background, and so waits for you to teach him. As for the ignorant, he needs you to firstly remove the wrong perception from his mind, then, replace it with the truth.

The unseen here, means the unrestricted unseen, that which cannot be seen by you or by others, can be seen by those who attend this gathering, we are only absent to those who haven not attended. This is a limited unseen. Electricity, gravity, and things like them are of this kind because they were unseen to those who came before us although they were present. When we reached understanding of their backgrounds, they became perceivable to us. This is why Allah says: '…but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills…' (*al-Baqara:* 255). He affirms their ability to attain, but on the condition that He wills it. If He wills, He will show them the unseen and give them knowledge of it when its time comes.

Hence, what is known to someone else but absent to you is not from the unseen. Likewise, what is absent to you, yet has the background which leads you to it is not from the unseen, too. The unseen is the unrestricted unseen which is absent to you and to others. It is that of which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He is the One Who knows what is hidden.* He does not disclose it except to a messenger of His choosing…' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27).

Al-shahadah means (what is seen). If the True Lord *Glorified is He* has knowledge of the unseen, then he most definitely has knowledge of the seen realm. Why then does He mention it? They said this indicates that He knows the unseen which has been made unseen to me and knows what is seen to other than me.

On the other hand, since Allah is unseen and concealed from us, when the universe, which is unseen, exists, some might think that the concealed and unseen only has knowledge of the unseen. So the True Lord wants to confirm this issue. He is unseen, but He knows the unseen as well as the seen.

We see certain people who try to bring down the veil of the unseen and attempt to discover what has been concealed from them. They would go to fortune-tellers, augurs and the like not knowing that the unseen is one of Allah’s the greatest blessings. The unseen is the essence of building the earth and harnessing its resources. Through the unseen, human interaction takes place. This is because humans are susceptible to change. If each on of us was to know what his brother had and the secrets of his brother were revealed to him, people would sever their relations and nobody would benefit from the other.

Therefore, they say: if you were to reveal each other’s secrets you would refrain from burying one another. That is if that which is in your brother’s heart was revealed to you, you would hold back from him even in burying him after his death.

For this reason, the True Lord willed that these affairs be unseen to soften the hearts and to spread good amongst people causing them to benefit from one another. Otherwise, if you were to know the bad deeds of someone and knew his stance of enmity towards you, you would even dislike the good he does to you and turn your heart towards him in hatred. You would not benefit from his good actions.

Therefore, we say to those who search for the hidden affairs of others: if you want to know someone else’s hidden affairs, then, give him permission to know yours. However, you will never allow this. Thus, leave the affair as Allah *Glorified is He* has intended and do not search for the unseen of others such that your life becomes stable.

Your Lord *Glorified is He* continuously turns your attention to the opposite. In a Qudsi Hadith Allah says: ‘O son of Adam, you prayed against the one who wronged you, and the one whom you wronged prayed against you. If you wish we will answer the prayer for you and the prayer against you. If you wish I will leave you both until the hereafter wherein my pardon will encompass you both’.(1) The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to purify the souls of humanity and wants people to stop at the boundaries which Allah has determined for the knowledge He has revealed to them. Do not search for the concealed or else you will cause yourself trouble. Do this and you will face the challenges of life with a soul that is pure and content with you and people or else you will cause yourself trouble. Then He says: '…He is far above any partner they claim for Him.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 92) This is because all the ones whom you ascribe as partners to Allah *Glorified is He* do not have knowledge of anything of this; neither the seen nor the unseen: therefore, it will not benefit you if you were to worship them, nor will it harm you if you did not worship them.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali 3/183 from the statement of Yazid ibn Maysara: If you begin to pray against the one who has wronged you then (The Quran, know that) Allah Glorified is He says: someone else prays against you because you have wronged him. So if you wish, We will respond to your prayer and the prayer against you, or if you wish, we will leave you till the Day of Rising wherein my pardon will encompass you both.*

Then, the True Lord says to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

قُل رَّبِّ إِمَّا تُرِيَنِّى مَا يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾ رَبِّ فَلَا تَجۡعَلۡنِى فِى ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

Say, Lord, if You are going to show me the punishment
You have promised them [93] Then Lord, do not include me
among the evildoers! [94] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 94)

'Say…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 93) is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. *Rabbi* '…Lord…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 93) is a calling (originally: *ya rabbi*) from which the particle of calling *ya* is omitted. '…if You are going to show me the punishment You have promised…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 93), then 'Lord, do not include me among the evildoers!'' (*al-Mu'minun:* 94). That is if you have decreed to punish them in my lifetime, then do not punish them, whilst I am amongst them.

This is from the softness of Muhammad's heart. When the disbelievers' abuse and opposition became severe in the beginning of his mission, Allah *Glorified is He* sent angels to him who presented him the opportunity to punish the disbelievers of his people. However, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused this and said, 'O Allah, guide my people, for verily they do not know'(1) and He, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Perhaps Allah will let them beget children who will say: There is no deity but Allah.’ In addition, his stance on the day of the conquest of Mecca is also clear and well known. This is because He, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a mercy to the worlds.

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(1) Narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba, by Ahmad in Az-Zuhd, by Abu Nu'aym and Ibn Asakir through Mujahid on the authority of 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr who said: When Noah's people struck Him until He fainted. When he became conscious He said: Guide my=

Did the Messenger make this supplication because he believed that Allah would make him amongst them when the punishment comes down to them? We say: no, because he did not say this sentence from himself, it was Allah who commanded him to do so. The Prophet would not have held such a belief. Thus, the issue is of revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* which he must convey and say as Allah had said. This implies mercy towards him so he does not see those who are being punished. Alternatively, the meaning might be what this verse refers to: ‘Beware of discord that harms not only the wrongdoers among you…’ (*al-Anfal:* 25).

This supplication by which the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed averts any thought that may occur to him and reassures him that it will not happen. His statement: ‘…if You are going to show me…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 93) includes the word *ummah* which consists of *im* and *ma.* Together, they express the meaning of condition and time. It is as if He says: when the punishment descends upon them, say: do not, O my Sustainer, let me be one of those evil-doing folks.

وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰٓ أَن نُّرِيَكَ مَا نَعِدُهُمْ لَقَٰدِرُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

We certainly are able to show you the punishment We have promised them [95] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 95)

That is We are able to show You something of the punishment that We have promised them. However, punishment is not that of extermination

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= people for verily they do not know. Shaqiq said that ‘Abdullah said: I saw the Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wiping blood from His face while saying what one of the Prophets said: ‘O Allah *Glorified is He* guide My people for verily they do not know’. *(The Quran, Narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 3/481). Look to the Book of asceticism by Ahmad ibn Hanbal 278, 280* because Allah has honoured your nation—even the disbelievers amongst them—such that He has excused them from this type of punishment, since with such a punishment He would not leave a soul of them; and this would prevent any of their progeny becoming believers in Allah. Suppose, then, that an exterminating punishment was to befall them on Badr, could we see the believers amongst them as well as their progeny who would come after Badr?

Hence, Allah would only exterminate them if He knew that there was no benefit in them or in their progeny after them; just like what had happened with the nation of Nuh *peace be upon him*. Consider what Nuh *peace be upon him* said of them: 'if you leave them they will lead Your servants astray and beget only sinners and disbelievers.' (*Nuh:* 27) Nuh *peace be upon him* would have never been able to say such a thing nor make such a judgment of his people except by revelation from Allah because only the Maker is able to make a judgment of such an enormous issue. For, we see the arrogant disbelievers and leaders of misguidance who then become good believers and did well in Islam. Take 'Ikrima, Khalid and 'Amr ibn Al-'As *may Allah be pleased with them* for example, and how much the believers pained and were saddened when they did not attain martyrdom. However, Allah had other plans. In fact, He was saving them for serving Islam and protecting the *da'wa* (propagation).

'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl(1) *may Allah be pleased with him* showed a rare example of bravery at the battle of Yarmuk where he was given a strike of death. He leaned to 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* while giving His spirit in the cause of Allah saying: 'does this death make Allah and His Messenger pleased with me?' This took place on the day of Khandama(2) about which the poet(3) said:

If you were to have witnessed the day of Khandama

When Safwan and Ikrima both fled

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(1) The story of martyrdom of 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl *may Allah be pleased with him*.

(2) Ibn Al-Athir said: it is a known mountain in Makka. Ibn Barri said: there was a skirmish there on the day of the conquest of Mecca on the day of Khandama. Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with him* met the polytheists and defeated and killed them. (The Quran, Lissan Al-Arab: kh-n-d-m)

(3) It is mentioned in Lissan Al-'Arab that Ibn Sayyid Al-Batalbusi attributed this poetical meter to Ar-Raʿish Al-Hadhali. Ibn Barri mentioned that it is Hamas ibn Qays ibn Khalid Al-Kanani. It is also said that this poetical meter is by Harim ibn Al-Hatim.

And we were met with the swords of the Muslims
Tearing asunder every forearm and skull
With a strike such that nothing but battle cry could be heard
And their screams around the neighing of horses
Not the slightest word of blame was uttered(1)

As for 'Amr ibn Al-‘As and Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with them* we all know of their affair.

Then, the True Lord says:

ٱدۡفَعۡ بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحۡسَنُ ٱلسَّيِّئَةَۚ نَحۡنُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

Repel evil by what is best. We are well aware of what they attribute to Us [96] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 96)

‘Repel…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 96) indicates staving off, i.e. there is an opponent facing you and attacking you wishing to cause you harm and you ward him off to defend yourself. However, repel with what is best, i.e. in a way or state which is better. So if he deals with you with force, meet him with leniency. This is the way which makes the people unanimously agree on your call and brings them closer to you. As it is mentioned in His statement: ‘…had you been harsh, or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 159). If you wish to draw them closer to you, then repel them with what is best. In the same vein, Muhammad’s stance on the day of the Conquest of Mecca; the day on which Allah gave him power over the necks of His enemies. He, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stood facing them and said, ‘O Quraysh, what do you think I will do to you?’ They said: ‘good; for you are a noble brother and the son of a noble brother. He, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said 'Go, for you are all free' (1).'

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(1) Ibn Mandhur mentioned these lines in (The Quran, Lissan Al-Arab: kh-n-d-m) from the speech of Ar-Raʿish Al-Hadhali to his wife after she blamed him after his defeat. Before this he had said:
If they come forward today I have no excuse
This is a complete weapon and tool
With two cutting edges it is quickly drawn

We notice that they spoke to him in a way that would cause His heart to soften to them and be compassionate towards them. They reminded him of their relationship and kinship to him. They said what would soften his heart and informed him of that which they would benefit from him: you are a noble brother and the son of a noble brother. They did not say, for example, you are a victorious general and, thus, you are able to do whatever you wish with us.

Truly, there were amongst these people and their progeny those who gave victory to Islam and were helpers in spreading Muhammad's call.

There is also the story(2) of Fudala(3) who used to hate the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such that he said before the conquest: 'By Allah, there is no one more hated by me than Muhammad.' His rage towards the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* increased when he saw him entering Mecca and destroying the idols. He wanted to break through the lines of fighters in order to kill him. Afterwards he said: 'by Allah, the moment I placed my hand upon Him, He became the most beloved of Allah's creation to me'.(4)

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(1) *Ibn Ishaq said: some of the people of knowledge have narrated to me that the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him stood at the door of the Ka'ba during His address and said: 'There is no Allah Glorified is He but Allah Glorified is He, He is alone with no partners. He has fulfilled His promise, given victory to His servant, and has defeated the confederates by Himself...what do you think I will do to you?' they said: 'good, a noble brother the son of a noble brother'. He said: 'Go for you are (The Quran, all) free' (The Quran, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya by Ibn Hisham 4/412)*

(2) *The story of Fuḍala trying to assassinate the Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.*

(3) *Fuḍala ibn Umayr Al-Laythi Al-Isaba 6988*

(4) *Ibn Abd Al-Barr mentioned in ad-Durar: that the Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him passed by him (The Quran, Fudala) on the day of the conquest while he was on his way to assassinate Him. So He said to him: 'what were you speaking to yourself about?' He said: 'nothing, I was remembering Allah Glorified is He'. The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him laughed and said: 'I will seek your forgiveness from Allah Glorified is He' He then placed His hand on his chest. (The Quran, After this) Fudala would say: 'By Allah Glorified is He He did not raise His hand from my chest until there was nobody on the face of the earth more beloved to me than Him'. Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani mentioned it in Al-Isaba entry no. 6988.*

However, what do we repel? We repel evil. We notice here that our Lord *Glorified is He* calls us to repel evil with what is best, not with what is good. The opposite of evil is good, yet, the True Lord wants you to rise up in this field and says to you: repel evil with what is best.

In another verse, He gives us the fruit (good outcome) of this faith-based transaction: '…he between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend.' (*Fussilat:* 34) If you were to reflect upon the meaning of this verse, you would find that recompense is from Allah *Glorified is He* not from the one you dealt with in such a way because Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…as if he…' (*Fussilat:* 34) and did not say: he becomes a true friend to you.

This is because when you repel with what is best, it makes your companion shy of you; it makes him regret the evil he did to you, and he will try to repay you and not repeat the action ever again. Despite all of this, he is not called *waleyan hamiman* (a devoted friend). He is called *waleyy* (a friend) and *hamim* (a devotee). This is because he was the reason by which your Lord *Glorified is He* brought you closer to Him, took care of you His friend, and defended you.

Therefore, when someone cursed Al-Hasan Al-Basri(1) in a gathering during the season of dates, Al-Hasan sent a tray of dates and said to his servant: take this to so and so and say to him: 'my master did not find anything more valuable than this to present you as a gift, for it has reached him that you presented your good deeds as a gift to him yesterday, and they are without a doubt greater than this gift of mine.(2)'

In essence, it is a folly to be a slanderer and a backbiter to others. For, by doing so it is as if you present your enemy with your good deeds, and given the greatest thing that you possess to the most hated of people to you.

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(1) The story of Al-Hasan Al-Basri *may Allah be pleased with him* offering a plate of dates to the person who insulted him.

(2) Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali 3/154 mentioned that a man said to Al-Hasan: so and so has backbitten you. So he sent a tray of dates and said: 'it has reached me that you gifted me your good deeds, so I wanted to recompense you. Pardon me for I cannot recompense you fully.'

Do you not see the stance of a father when he gets angry at his son, and the latter submits and humbles himself to his father; or the stance of a person whose brother wrongs him yet he bears with and does not respond similarly. At this point, the father becomes more affectionate and compassionate towards his son and is avid to please him. Similarly, in this way does Allah treat His servants when they act like this to one another—and to Allah *Glorified is He* is the loftiest example. Therefore, we said: if a tyrant knew what Allah has prepared for the wronged one he would hold back his tyranny because he would be wronging him from one angle but Allah *Glorified is He* would be pleasing him from another.

It is said(1) that there was a man whom a king would use to relieve his worries. If he got angry, he would summon this man and curse and slander him in front of the people until he calmed down. When the man wanted to leave, he would take him to the side and give him a pouch of money. One day this man needed money for something and tried to get to the king and said: do not you need me today to curse me?

Likewise: all you have to do is repel by what is best. If you met purity from your companion then, this is fine; otherwise, the reward of Allah *Glorified is He* is vaster and His giving is greater. How beautiful is the statement of the poet(2) who expressed this meaning:

O you who are annoyed by the actions this or that

Repel—may I sacrifice myself to you—with 'what…' until you see 'he between whom and you was enmity...*',* i.e. if you want to make the one with whom you have enmity a true friend, then repel with what is best. Then, He says: '…We are well aware of what they attribute to Us.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 96)

The meaning is: O Muhammad! You would be able to punish them if We did not know what these people had done to you! But, in fact We do know all about it and keep account of it, and We prepared an appropriate recompense for them. So, leave this matter to Us and do not busy yourself with it. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to elevate His Messenger

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(1) *The story of the king with the man used to get in order to insult him*

(2) *The Sheikh may Allah have mercy upon him and pardon him*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* above feeling angry; and for him not to be preoccupied with reacting emotionally. When someone does evil to you, O Muhammad, and you wish to respond; especially if this response goes against your good nature and beautiful character, it would be as if He is burdening you with something of which you are not capable.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to have mercy upon His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and comfort him. It is as if He says to him: ‘leave them and their affair to Me, for We know better what they attribute, i.e. what lies they tell about you.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقُل رَّبِّ أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ هَمَزَٰتِ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينِ ﴿٩٧﴾

And say, Lord, I take refuge with You from the goading of the devils [97] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 97)

Why was refuge sought from the ‘goading’ of the devils in this issue? Some said: because the devil wishes to interfere and show you that he is with you; that he wants to provoke you and spur you on against them and drive you to taking revenge against them and having power over them. *Hamazat* (goadings) is the plural of *hamaza* which is the insinuation by which the devil incites the human. From this is His statement: ‘If Satan should prompt you to do something, seek refuge with Allah …’ (*al-A‘raf:* 200).

Then, He says:

وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ رَبِّ أَن يَحْضُرُونِ ﴿٩٨﴾

I seek refuge with you, Lord, so that they may not come near me [98] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 98)

This means: if Satan comes to you with a prompting or whispering say: ‘I seek refuge with Allah from the promptings of the devils’. More than this, be cautious with Satan and say: ‘I seek refuge with Allah that they should even be present with me; even if they do not prompt me, for I do not even want them in my presence nor do I wish to sit with them.’

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَ أَحَدَهُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ٱرْجِعُونِ ﴿٩٩﴾

Until when death comes to one of them, he cries, My Lord, let me return [99] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 99)

Then, when the pangs of death approach one of them and he is certain that he is dying, Allah’s truths become evident to him; and he sees what we are not capable of seeing, as in His statement: ‘…‘but today We have removed your veil and your sight is sharp.’’ (*Qaf:* 22)

At that time, a Human being will wish to return to this life while he is dying. Why? Because he has seen the truth which he used to deny and belie. Those that witness the state of the dead at the time of death see indications which show that they see things we cannot see; each according to his state and his ending.

I remember when my father was dying, while reclining on my chest (1), he said to me, ‘O Amin—(I am known by this name in my town)—how come that you build all these palaces without informing me of them?’

The soldiers who cry in the battle: ‘blow O winds of heaven’, it must be that they saw them and smelt their scent. Otherwise, what else would have made them yearn for death and martyrdom other than the fact that they saw the more virtuous state that awaited them?

From amongst these people is the great companion(2) to whom the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke of the reward of martyrdom with Allah. He had dates either in his hand or in his mouth which he was chewing and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, is the only thing between me and paradise not that I enter this battle and be killed in the cause of Allah?’ He said: ‘yes’. So he spat out the date that was in his mouth and proceeded towards the battlefield.(3)’ It is as if he considered it too long to sit and chew on that date from seeking paradise. The certitude of these men in Allah *Glorified is He* and in the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reached such a degree.

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(1) *The story of the death of the father of Sheikh ash-Sha‘rawi.*

(2) *The story of the Companions who throw away the dates to enter heaven speedily at his martyrdom.*

(3) *On the day of Uhud a man came to the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said: ‘if I am killed where will I be?’ He said: ‘In paradise’ So he threw the dates that were in his hand, and fought until he was killed. Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 4046 and Muslim 1899 in his Sahih from the Hadith of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah.*

We notice in this verse: '…until when death comes to one of them…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 99) *Ahadahum* (one of them) is in the singular. Then, the verse reads: '…he cries, 'My Lord, let me return…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 99) *Irji'un* (let me return): this is addressing Allah in the plural form, out of reverence. He did not say 'O My Lord, let me return in the singular form as in His statement.

He also says: 'We have sent down the Quran Ourself, and We Ourself will guard it.' (*al-Hijr:* 9) Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* reveres Himself. However, in the verse we are studying, the dying person reveres Allah. By contrast, he previously disbelieved in Him when he was enjoying the comfort and ease of life.

Alternatively, *irji'un* might mean that he repeated the request: let me return, let me return, let me return and Allah *Glorified is He* gathered them into the plural form. Another meaning can be that he sought Allah's help and said: *rabbi* (my Lord), and then addressed the angels: 'let me return to the world'.

However, why does he seek to return?

لَعَلِّىٓ أَعْمَلُ صَٰلِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ ۚ كَلَّآ ۚ إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ
قَآئِلُهَا ۖ وَمِن وَرَآئِهِم بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

So as to do the good in that which I have left behind' Never!
This will not go beyond his words: a barrier stands behind
such people until the very Day they are resurrected [100]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 100)

That is I failed in doing many acts of good. Perhaps if I was to return after having witnessed the truth, I would make up for what has passed me from righteous deeds. Or perhaps I will do good with what I have left behind, for I held back my wealth, efforts and excess from people, I horded much wealth. I left it behind and I am still held to account for it. If I was to return I would put it forward and spend it for that which is stored for me on the day of resurrection.

Then the response comes: '…Never! This will not go beyond his words…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 100), i.e. his statement: 'let me return, let me return (to life) so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed!' It is merely a word that has no reality to it. It is a word which he utters in a time of constraint and extremity. Allah *Glorified is He* will not let them return; if He was to let them return, they would not act. This is why he negated it with His saying: 'Never' which refutes those things of which you want affirmation. Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to refute these things as is mentioned in the chapter of *al-Fajr*: '[The nature of] man is that, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, 'My Lord has honoured me,'* but when He tries him through the restriction of his provision, he says, 'My Lord has humiliated me.'' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16) So, the True Lord responds with 'never'; none of you is truthful. Money and wealth are not a proof of nobility, nor is poverty a proof of dishonour. Both assumptions are wrong. The proof being that, if Allah gave you money and you did not fulfil the rights of Allah and His servants with it, nor did it help you to fulfil that which is incumbent upon you, then this wealth has become a dishonour for you, not an honour. What good is wealth to you if you are included in His statement: 'No indeed! You [people] do not honour orphans.' (*al-Fajr:* 17) At this moment your wealth will be a proof against you.

Such is also the state of the one who thinks that poverty is dishonour. If Allah takes away from you the wealth that has turned you into an aggressor, then He has honoured you even if you do not perceive this honouring.

Then He says: '…a barrier stands behind such people until the very Day they are resurrected.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 100) How can they hope for return when there is a barrier between them and the earth which prevents them from returning to it? This is why the period of time between the life of this world and the hereafter is referred to as the intermediary life. It is neither of this life nor of the hereafter.

In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* creates the imagery of this scenario in His statement: '…Even if they were brought back, they would only return to the very thing that was forbidden to them—they are such liars! ...’ (*al-An‘am:* 28) That is if we were to send them back from the hereafter they would return to the disobedience of Allah *Glorified is He*. This is not merely an intellectual argument, then, reality has confirmed the truth of this statement. Read the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* regarding them: ‘When We favour man he turns arrogantly to one side…’ (*al-Isra’:* 83).

Thus, he received the bounty of Allah *Glorified is He*, revelled in it and then shirked from the obedience of Allah *Glorified is He*. In this vein He also says: ‘When trouble befalls man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble.’ (*Yunus:* 12)

Thus, the issue is that of compulsion. Every time they became desperate they called upon Allah *Glorified is He* and turned to Him and invoked. ‘Take from an actual event in their lives that which indicates the truth of My judgment of them if they were to return from the hereafter.’

Barzakh is (a barrier between two things). A barrier between two things takes its strength from the one who built it. Since this barrier is of His work *Glorified is He* no one can penetrate it. From this is His statement: ‘He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet,* yet there is a barrier between them they do not cross.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 19-20) Since they meet, what is the purpose of the barrier? They said: yes, they meet. However, neither of them transgresses the other. It is neither an issue of a dam nor a feat of engineering. It is a special barrier which none other than the unrestraint of the divine power which created natural laws is able to do. It (the divine power of Allah) made liquid water like a mountain, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck it with his staff each side became like a great mountain. It is the unrestraint of the divine power which caused springs to gush out of stone.

Thus, it is not an issue of mechanics as some believe. The barrier between freshwater and salty water is one of the immense signs of Allah, for us to see. Each and every one of us can check the validity of this phenomenon. However, this barrier is in front of them. Why, then, did He say: ‘…a barrier stands behind such people until the very Day they are resurrected’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 100)?

They said: because one word can have several meanings. This kind of word is called a *mushtarak* (joint). For example, the Arabic word ‘*Ayn* refers to eye, spring, spy, gold and silver and a notable person amongst his people. It is the context which defines the exact meaning which is being intended. Therefore, the listener must be fully aware in order to refer the word back to its meaning according to the context.

Such is also the Arabic word *najm* which refers to stars as well as plants which have no stalk such as grass upon which animals graze. From this is the statement of the poet:

I follow the star on my way towards you

And my horse grazes upon it in a desert

(*Najm* is an Arabic word that has two meanings mentioned here: a star and a plant without a stalk.)

The word *wara’a* refers to many meanings. It is the context that determines its intended meaning. It is used to mean ‘after’ as in His statement: ‘…We gave her good news of Ishaq (Isaac) and, after him, of Ya’qub (Jacob) ...’ (*Hud:* 71). It is also used to mean ‘exceeding’ as in His statement: ‘but anyone who seeks more than this is exceeding the limits’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 7). It is also used to mean ‘in front’ as in His statement: ‘…coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force.’ (*al-Kahf:* 79) The king was ahead of them waiting for every oncoming ship. It is the same in His statement: ‘with hell awaiting him…’ (*Ibrahim:* 16).

So His statement: ‘… a barrier stands behind such people until the very Day they are resurrected.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 100) means: in front of them.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي ٱلصُّورِ فَلَآ أَنسَابَ بَيۡنَهُمۡ يَوۡمَئِذٖ وَلَا يَتَسَآءَلُونَ ١٠١

On that Day when the Trumpet is blown, the ties between them will be as nothing and they will not ask about each other [101] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 101)

As-sur (the trumpet) is the one which is blown by Israfil *peace be upon him*. What is intended here is the second blowing which is for the resurrection.

Ansab (the ties of kinship) means being connected by direct kinship such as the son with the father or the father with the son or an indirect kinship such as that with an uncle. Kinship is the first kind of relationship upon which shared interests connect people. It is a necessary convergence which everybody has. You may not have friends, or colleagues but you must have someone with whom you have kinship or relation. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* negates kinship He says: '…the ties between them will be as nothing…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 101). It is not the existence of ties of kinship that is being negated. When the trumpet is blown, effectiveness of the connection between fatherhood and son-hood will be eliminated. Yet, kinship will still exist. However, since kinship usually consists of mutual cooperation, whether to seek benefit or to ward off evil, the negation, here, serves the benefit since no one will be able to benefit anyone else. Kinship will be present but without its benefit. The benefit in worldly affairs is that the strong help the weak. As for this event, everyone will be weak.

As the True Lord says: 'The Day man will flee from his own brother,* his mother, his father,* his wife, his children* each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that Day.' (*'Abasa:* 34-37) And He says: 'Every soul is held in pledge for its deeds' (*al-Muddaththir:* 38). 'This is why when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related that we will be resurrected on the Day of Rising, bare-footed and naked, the Mother of the Believers A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her*, was surprised and felt embarrassed of such a state. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed her that the matter will not be such; that everyone will be busy with themselves and it will be beyond anyone looking at another.(1) 'Thus, the negation is for the benefit of kinship, not of kinship itself. Since the benefit of kinship is of no avail at the formidable event of the Hereafter, then a person can rise above, and refrain from seeking its benefit in this life, too. If, for example, he has relatives who are non-believers, Allah has struck a parable in the story of Nuh *peace be upon him* and his son. His Lord *Glorified is He* addressed him: ‘…he was not one of your family. What he did was not right…’ (*Hud:* 46). So kinship was prevented even in this life. Thus, sonship is not of flesh and blood, rather, it is—especially with regards to prophets—of faith-based action and following Allah’s way conveyed by His Messengers.

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(1) *On the authority of A'isha may Allah be pleased with him : The Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Allah Glorified is He will raise the people on the Day of Resurrection bare-footed and naked.' A'isha may Allah be pleased with her said: 'O Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, what about nakedness?' He said: 'On that day everyone will have an affair that will preoccupy him' Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 6/90, An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan 4/114 and Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak 4/564 who said: It is authentic according to the condition of Muslim although he did not narrate it.*

If you were to reflect upon the history of the first Muslims, you would find that they used to find honour in Islam not in their lineage. Religion and creed were their lineage. In essence, religion and creed are the strong bond which connects between someone and another, even if he may be lower than him by the standards of our worldly life.

We read in the story (1) of Badr regarding Mus’ab ibn 'Umayr(2) *may Allah be pleased with him* who was a youth from the richest amongst Quraysh; he used to wear the finest clothes and live the best life. When his heart was given faith, he became ascetic from all these bounties and was deprived of the fortune of his family. When he migrated to Medina, the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him wearing sheep leather and said: ‘Look at what faith has done to your brother’(3).

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(1) *The story of Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr's change of heart to asceticism after his conversion to Islam.*

(2) *Mus‘ab ibn Umayr ibn Hashim ibn Abd Manaf Abu Muhammad. He performed the first and second emigrations to Abyssinia. (The Quran, The Prophet), Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him sent him to Madina to teach the Muslims the law and the Quran. He then came to the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him with the seventy people who gave their allegiance at the second ‘Aqaba. Mu’sab was of a mild complexion, neither tall nor short. He died at the battle of Uhud. (The Quran, Sifat As-Safwa 1/205, 206).*

(3) *On the authority of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him who said: The Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him looked at Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr may Allah be pleased with him while he was oncoming wrapped in a goatskin hide. So the Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘Look at this man whose heart Allah Glorified is He has illuminated. I have seen him being nourished by his parents with the finest food and drink. The love of Allah Glorified is He and His Messenger has called him to what you see now’. Narrated by Ibn Al-Jawzi in Sifat As-Safwa 1/206. Referenced by Abu Nu’aym in Al-Hilya 1/108. Al-'Iraqi has said in his referencing of the Hadiths of the Ihya’ 4/295 that its chain is sound/ hasan.*

During the battle, Mus’ab *may Allah be pleased with him* saw his brother Abu Uzayz(1) taken prisoner by the *ansari* Companion Abu Al-Yasar(2) *may Allah be pleased with him* to whom Mus’ab *may Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘be firm with your prisoner (i.e. do not let him flee) for his mother is a rich woman and will give you much wealth in exchange for him.’ Abu Uzayz looked at Mus’ab and said: ‘Is this your counsel regarding your brother?’ Mus’ab *may Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘He is my brother over you.’ Thus, there are no ties of kinship between them. Even in this life before the Hereafter.

During the battle of Uhud, Mus`ab ibn `Umayr *Allah be pleased with him* was martyred and they could only find a short cloth with which to shroud him in. If it covered his head, his feet would show; and if it covered his feet, his head would show. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Cover his head and put *Izkhar* (a sweet-smelling grass) leaves to cover his feet’ (3)

Another instance is when Umm Habibah *Allah be pleased with her* the daughter of Abu Sufyan became a Muslim and emigrated to Abyssinia with her Husband. She was accused of making the emigration for the sake of her husband, rather than for the sake of the religion. Then Allah *the Exalted* willed to show her innocence, and so it happened that her husband `Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh became a Christian while she remained a believer. When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* learned about her situation, He wished to compensate her and so proposed to her for marriage. He did not wait for her to come in order to contract the marriage, rather, He commissioned the Negus, the king of Abyssinia, to conclude the marriage contract on his behalf.(1)

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(1) *He is Zurara ibn ‘Umayr, the brother of Mus’ab ibn ‘Umayr may Allah be pleased with him. He accompanied and listened to the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. The historians of battles have agreed that he was imprisoned on the day of Badr. See Al-Isaba by Ibn Hajar entry 753 Kunyas.*

(2) *His name is Ka'b ibn Amr Al-Ansari. He was present at Al-Aqaba and Badr of which there are many accounts regarding him. He was the one who imprisoned Al-Abbas ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib. He was short with a large stomach. He died in Madina in the year 55 AH. (The Quran, Al-Isaba entry 1243). Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar has specified the vowel of his kunya Abu Al-Yasar 5/307 and 7/218.*

(3) *Agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1276) and by Muslim in his Sahih (940) based on the Hadith of Khabbab ibn Al-Art Allah be pleased with him.*

After her marriage to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* her father Abu Sufyan came to visit her while she was arranging the mattress of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Abu Sufyan wished to sit on it; she put it aside and prevented him from sitting on the mattress of the Messenger of Allah while he was still a disbeliever. He said to her: 'Do you hold the mattress back from me?' She replied: 'Yes.'(2)

Thus, the benefits of kinship are denied in this life before it is denied in the Hereafter. But out of his grace and kindness, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has kept the obligations of blood relationships and enjoins us to maintain them even with disbelievers. This is because He *the Most High* has made Himself available even to the disbelievers; so, with greater reason, a believer should open up to them. If you know of a disbeliever in hardship and you can help him, you should do so. Regarding this, read Allah's Words: 'But if they (both parents) strive with you to make you join in worship with Me others that of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not, but behave with them in the world kindly…' (*Luqman:* 15). Not only are they disbelievers, but they also want you to be a disbeliever. Despite this, maintain their rights of kinship and do not sever your relationship with them.

It was narrated that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* whom Allah elected as his close servant and described him with the words: 'And of

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(1) *Ibn Al-Jawzi said in Sifat As-Safwa (vol. 2, p. 31): 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him sent 'Amr ibn Umayyah Ad-Damari to the Negus, the King of Abyssinia to propose to her (Umm Habibah) on his behalf. So the Negus married her to him and gave her a dowry of four hundred dinars and sent her (to the Prophet) in the company of Shurahbil ibn Hasanah. It was said that she commissioned Khalid ibn Sa`id ibn Al-`As who married her off. This occurred in the year 7 A.H.*

(2) *It was narrated by Ibn Al-Jawzi in Sifat As-Safwa (vol. 2, p. 33): 'Abu Sufyan said to his daughter Umm Habibah after she had folded up the mattress that belonged to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him 'O my daughter, are you trying to keep me away from the mattress or keep the mattress away from me?' She replied, 'It is the mattress of the Messenger of Allah; and you are an impure polytheist.' So he replied, 'O my daughter, evil have befallen you after leaving me.'' It is well known that Abu Sufyan became a Muslim after the Conquest of Mecca.*

Ibrahim, who fulfilled his duty' (*an-Najm:* 37) and tried with Commands, which he fulfilled; one night a traveller was passing by. Before letting him in and hosting him, he asked him of his religion. When he informed Ibrahim *peace be upon him* that he was a disbeliever, Ibrahim turned away from him; and so he let him depart. Then Allah revealed to him: 'O Ibrahim, I have put up with him although he is a disbeliever in Me, and you want him to change his religion for a night's hospitality?' So Ibrahim *peace be upon him* hastened after the man until he caught up with him. He informed him of the reproach that he received form his Lord because of him. The man said: 'What a Good Lord He must be Who reproaches His loved ones regarding His enemies,' and he testified that there is no god but Allah and that Ibrahim is the Messenger of Allah.

Knowledgeable people even elevate the concept of kinship and see that relationship ties goes beyond the biological cause of your existence, which is your father and mother. Although kinship is the birth or branching out of one from another, there is a higher kinship, not to the one who brought you into existence through a cause, but to the One Who gave you the initial existence without a cause. It is incumbent upon you to take care of this kinship that brought you into existence from nothing. Allah has affirmed the rights of the parents because they are a cause of your existence, so how about the Supreme Originator?

Regarding Allah's statement: 'On that Day when the Trumpet is blown, the ties between them will be as nothing and they will not ask about each other,' (*al-Mu'minun:* 101), the Arabic verb *tasa'la* (mutual asking) is of the form *mufa`ala*, which denotes an action involving two actors, as opposed to *sa'ala* which means to ask. Thus every single one of them will ask and be asked. Just as when you say: Mohamad (*sharaka*) mutually participated or (*qatala*) fought with ʿAmr etc.

However, some orientalists have objected to this verse claiming that Muslims treat the Book of Allah with excessive awe and reverence that hinders their minds from thinking over what it says. Although Allah says about the Quran: 'If it (the Quran) had been from anyone other than Allah, they would have found much inconsistency in it.' (*an-Nisa':* 82) These people say that although the Quran negates the occurrence of mutual asking in this verse, it affirms it in the following verse, in the dialogue between the people of paradise: 'And they will approach one another, inquiring of each other' (*at-Tur:* 25).

There is another mention of mutual asking between the believers and the disbelievers: 'Every soul is held in pledge for its deeds, but the Companions of the Right will stay in Gardens and ask about the guilty. "What drove you to the Scorching Fire?" (they will ask) and they will answer, "We did not pray; we did not feed the poor; we indulged with others (in mocking the believers); we denied the Day of Judgement until the Certain End (death) came upon us."' (*al-Muddaththir:* 38-47)

At another place there is mutual asking between the believers themselves: 'And they will approach one another, inquiring of each other. They will say, "Indeed, we were previously among our people fearful (of displeasing Allah). So Allah conferred favour upon us and protected us from the punishment of the Scorching Fire. Indeed, we used to supplicate Him before. Indeed, it is He who is the Beneficent, the Merciful."' (*at-Tur:* 25-28)

So how, after all this, can it negate mutual asking by saying: '…when the Trumpet is blown, the ties between them will be as nothing, and they will not ask about each other.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 101) The answer is that what they consider here a contradiction is only a seeming one. There is a difference between people hearing about something and actually being confronted with it while being essentially a non-believer. According to the Quran, they said: 'There is only the life of this world: we die, we live, but we will never be resurrected.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 37)

But when startled by the blowing of the Trumpet and overtaken by the Resurrection, which the disbelievers used to deny, they will be completely dumfounded and shocked. The severity of the event will render their tongues speechless. All of a sudden what they used to deny is occurring before their eyes. Then they will move on from this state to accepting it as an inescapable reality. They will then start talking and asking one another about it and what has befallen them.

Consequently, their asking has a specific time (in which it will occur) and their inability to ask has a specific time. It is the sort of issue described as having separate parts. So when you hear a statement attributed to a wise and consistent person, which affirms something one time and negates it another time, know that the issue concerned is multi-sided.

Similarly, the orientalists have also raised objection to the questioning of sinners, where Allah *the Exalted* says in affirmation of their questioning: ‘And stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned.’ (*as-Saffat:* 24) and says in negation of their questioning: ‘On that Day neither mankind nor jinn will be asked about their sins.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 39) How can He *the Most High* affirm and negate an action regarding the same persons?

Their objection stems from a lack of understanding of the language of the Quran and Arabic eloquence. Or it may be that they merely want to criticize the Book of Allah and provoke doubts about it. However, many a harmful thing turns out to be beneficial; their doubts have caused the Muslim scholars to rise and refute their false claims and expose their intentions. Our case is similar to the one who prepares against a disease by taking the appropriate vaccination which gives the body immunity against this disease.

ʿUmar *Allah be pleased with him* – who had the unique merit of having his views confirmed by the Quran – would see the people kissing the Black Stone and expected that some people might question this issue, since Islam forbade them from the worship of idols, which were stones, and then commanded them to kiss this stone. So when kissing the Black Stone, he would say: ‘By Allah, I know that you are only a stone that neither benefit nor harm. If it were not that I saw the Messenger of Allah kissing you, I would not have kissed you.’(1)

So he alerted people’s attention to the basic rule in the law of Islam: stones are not to be worshipped. However, we have Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is our legislator and we are obligated by

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(1) *It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1597) and Muslim in his Sahih (1270) from the Hadith on the authority of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. At-Tabari said: ‘`Umar said this because the people had very recently been worshipping idols, so he feared lest some ignorant people should think that touching the Black Stone was derived from a principle of revering some stones just as the Arabs used to do in the Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic time). 'Umar Allah be pleased with him wanted to inform the people that his touching it was out of following the action of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him not because this stone could bring benefit or harm in and of itself, as they used to believe regarding idols in the Jahiliyyah.’ It was transmitted by Ibn Hajar in Al-Fath (vol. 3, p. 462).*

Allah to follow him. This was 'Umar's response to those who tried to stir doubt about this matter.

Also, when `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* spoke of the high cost of dowries, a woman corrected him, saying: 'You have erred O 'Umar. How can you forbid the high cost of dowries when Allah *the Exalted* says: "If you wish to replace one wife with another, do not take any of her bride-gift back, even if you have given her a *Cantar* (a great amount of wealth)…" (*an-Nisa':* 20). `Umar thus permitted the dowry to be a great amount of gold (or wealth) and because of his great character, he said: 'A woman is correct and `Umar is wrong'(1) to clarify that no one is above Allah's Law.

These are well-delineated and firmly established issues which we need to know to respond to people who ask us about the affairs of our religion.

We return to the issue of questioning the sinners which the Quran negates in one place and affirms in another. Our answer to this is that the Quran came consistent with the style and way of the Arabs. A question in the Arabic method of language is either posed by an ignorant person seeking information, such as when a student asks his teacher; or is posed by a knowledgeable person who asks an ignorant person, not in order to learn something, but rather to make him admit something.

So when Allah *the Exalted* negates the questioning, do not think that He is asking you in order to learn something from you, rather, He is asking in order for you to affirm your guilt. Therefore, He *the Exalted* says: 'Read your book. You yourself are sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day.' (*al-Isra':* 14)

The affirmation of the questioning has a specific meaning, and its negation serves another meaning. When Allah uses negation, He negates questioning to obtain knowledge from them. And when He uses affirmation, He affirms questioning to obtain admittance on their part, so that the proof against them be more binding, since confession is the master of evidence.

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(1) *It was transmitted by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (vol. 1, p. 467) with the wording: 'A woman is correct and a man is wrong.' It was also narrated by Az-Zubayr ibn Bakkar but Ibn Kathir said: 'Its chain is disconnected.' He also transmitted a similar narration to this and sourced it to Abu Ya`la. Ibn Kathir said: 'Its chain of narrators is good and strong.'*

We have clarified this issue with the example of a neglectful student who pretends to study in front of his father, so he opens his book and lowers his head as if he is reading. But when his father asks him a question, he will find that he has learned nothing, so he tells him: ‘You have studied, but you have not really studied’.

This is similar to Allah’s saying to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘…and when you (Prophet) threw (sand at them) it was not your throw (that defeated them) but Allah’s…’ (*al-Anfal:* 17). This is how an action of the same subject is negated and affirmed in the same verse. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* took a handful of pebbles and cast them towards the enemies,(1) but was it within his power to make this handful reach the eyes of all the enemies? So, the effort and the action of casting are attributed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while the result and aim is attributed to Allah *the Glorious and Exalted*.

Then the True Lord says:

فَمَن ثَقُلَتْ مَوَٰزِينُهُۥ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ
مَوَٰزِينُهُۥ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ خَسِرُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ فِى جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

Those whose good deeds weigh heavy will be successful, [102] But those whose balance is light will have lost their souls for ever and will stay in Hell [103] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 102-103)

Heavy and light refer here to good deeds; they shall weigh heavy or light. It is possible for us to say: ‘His scales were heavy with bad deeds.’

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of `Ali ibn Abu Talhah from Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with them both who said: ‘The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him raised His hands, that is on the Day of Badr and said: ‘O my Lord, if this group (of believers) were to be destroyed, You would never be worshipped on the earth.’ So Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him said to him: ‘Take a fistful of dust and cast it in their faces.’ So he took a fistful of dust and cast it into their faces such that there was not a single man of the mushrikin (those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity or worship) except that the dust from that fistful hit his eyes, nostrils and mouth, and they fled away.’ It was transmitted by both Abu Nu`aym (p. 404) and Al-Bayhaqi (vol. 3, p. 79) in Dala’il An-Nubuwwah. It was also mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (vol. 2, p. 294).*

That is, his bad deeds were copious. However, the Quran spoke from the perspective that the basis is good actions.

Scales are made up of two sides one of which holds the weighed object, and the other holds the measured weights. There are three rationally possible outcomes of the balance: either the weighted object is light, or the measured weights are lighter or they weigh the same. The noble verse has mentioned two of these scenarios: the weight of deeds is light or heavy in the balance, as in Allah's statement: 'Then as for him whose balance (of good deeds) will be heavy, he will live a pleasant life (in paradise). But as for him whose balance (of good deeds) will be light, His refuge will be an abyss. And what will make you know what it is? (It is) a hot blazing Fire!' (*al-Qari`a:* 6-11)

As for the scenario in which the scales are equal, this is symbolically referred to in the chapter of *al-A`raf*: 'A barrier divides the two groups with men on its heights recognizing each group by their marks: they will call out to the people of the paradise, 'Peace be with you!' They will not have entered it (paradise), but they will be hoping, and when their glance falls upon the people of the Fire, they will say, 'Our Lord, do not let us join the evildoers!' (*al-A'raf:* 46-47)

So whoever's good deeds outweigh his bad ones shall go to paradise, and whoever's bad deeds outweigh his good ones shall go to hellfire. The people of *Al-`Araf* (the Heights) are those who shall wait between paradise and hellfire because their good deeds will be equal to their bad deeds. They are neither from the people of paradise nor from the people of hellfire. They shall be upon the heights which is a barrier between paradise and hellfire from which they will look at the two groups. Then Allah says regarding them: '…they will not have entered it (paradise), but they will be hoping' (*al-A'raf:* 46); (they keep hoping) because Allah's Mercy precedes His Wrath and His Pardon precedes His punishment.

The heaviness or lightness of actions indicates that actions will have weight and size, or that Allah *the Exalted* will assign a mass for every action; this kind of deed will be of such and such a weight and so on. Also, the word balance denotes the precision of counting.

You can notice in the noble verse: ‘Then, those whose scales (of good deeds) are heavy, - these and they are the successful,’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 102) that the scales are mentioned in the plural form and not in the singular. Why? Because it is possible that every type of action has its own balance such that the prayer has its own balance; money has its own balance; the pilgrimage has its own balance etc. Then all these balances are counted together to give the plural.

As for Allah’s statement: ‘And those whose scales (of good deeds) are light, they are those who lose their own selves…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 103); this is because they have taken the petty short-term gains and relinquished the greater long-term gains, and have hurried to the perishable pleasures and abandoned the everlasting ones. The term of this word is limited and finite, its life span is uncertain and the good, attainable things in it are restricted by the ability of its people.

As for the Hereafter, its term is certain, its life span is eternal, and the good things in it will be according to the Ability of the Benefactor *Glorified is He*. Thus if you were to compare between the two, the extent of their loss would become clear to you. This is why the outcome is that: ‘…in Hell will they abide.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 103)

Then the True Lord gives us a picture which shows the horrors and punishments of Hell. He does this out of mercy in order for us to fear it and work intensely to save ourselves from such an end and its abominable consequences. Just like when the law says from the outset: ‘We shall cut off the hand of the thief’; it does not desire to cut off people’s hands, rather, it works on preventing them from and warning them of the consequent penalty. Therefore, Allah says about the wisdom behind the law of just retribution (*qisas*): ‘Fair retribution saves life for you, O people of understanding…’ (*al-Baqara:* 179).

The law of just retribution has often been attacked by the enemies of Islam. They say: It is enough that someone from the society has been killed, how can we then kill another? In fact, the Noble Quran did not legislate the law of retribution in order to kill two persons instead of one, rather, it did so in order to prevent killing and to save the lives of any potential murderers and subsequent victims. For when a murderer knows that he will be killed through retribution, he will refrain out of fear. If he does stop himself from killing, then we have kept both the murderer and the victim alive. Some have expressed this meaning by saying: Killing (justly) puts an end to killing (unjustly).

Allah *the Most High* says in regards to the horribleness of Hell:

تَلْفَحُ وُجُوهَهُمُ ٱلنَّارُ وَهُمْ فِيهَا كَٰلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

The Fire will scorch their faces and their lips will be
twisted in pain [104] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 104)

The word *al-lafh* (scorching) is used to describe fire when it touches something and its heat burns it out. Similar to it is the Arabic word *an-nafh*. The word *kalih* (sullen, gloomy, dismal) in the part stating: ‘…and their lips will be twisted in pain *(kalih)…*’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 104) is even used in colloquial Arabic: so and so has a scowling (*kalih*) face; that is, his face distorts in a detestable, discomforting manner. A scowling face has been compared to a grilled goat’s head which the fire has deformed. It is thus grilled and scowling with its upper lip meeting its forehead and lower lip meeting its chest which gives its teeth a repulsive appearance.

The True Lord then addresses the disbelievers with blame and places upon them the responsibility for where they have ended up. He does not punish them from the outset; rather, He only punishes them after having warned them, and after having sent to them a messenger with a methodology that explains the reward of the obedient and the punishment of the disobedient. He has alerted them to everything. Despite this, they have disobeyed and disbelieved. They have not started to do new actions in accordance with what Allah has commanded. Thus they are the ones who fell short in their duties.

أَلَمْ تَكُنْ ءَايَٰتِى تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَكُنتُم بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

Were My *Ayat* not recited over and over to you and still
you rejected them? [105] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 105)

That is, you are the cause of this punishment. People will have no excuse before Allah after the coming of the Messengers. Nobody will have an excuse after the conveyance of the message. This is why when the people of the fire will enter the fire, their Lord will address them: ‘Those who rejected the Truth will be led to hell in their throngs. When they arrive, its gates will open and its keepers will say to them, “Were you not sent your own messengers to recite the revelations of your Lord to you and warn you that you would meet this Day?”…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 71)

The noble verse affirms that they are the ones who have wronged their own selves: ‘…We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves…’ (*an-Nahl:* 118). Allah has not brought upon them a sudden punishment without prior clarifications warnings. Indeed, Allah has sent to them a messenger who commanded them, forbade them, gave glad tidings to them, and warned them.

Giving warning of a bad thing before it occurs is a blessing in itself; just as we said in the chapter of *al-Rahman* regarding Allah’s statement: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid. Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) Are the fire and its smoke blessings? Yes. Here the blessing lies in being warned of them before they occur, while you still have a very ample chance on the earth to make things right again.

The word *ayat* (signs or Quranic verses), as we have previously mentioned, refers to the universal signs which turn the attention of people to the existence of the High Creator Who brought about this universe with exquisite architecture and design; or to the miraculous signs that affirm the truth of the Messengers with regards to conveying the Message from Allah. The term also refers to the Quranic verses which carry the laws and rulings.

Allah has brought you all these *ayat* which are recited to you and which you can hear and see. Despite this you have denied their truth. The meaning of ‘…recited over and over to you…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 105) is that Allah has alerted you of them in advance and turned your attention to contemplating them so that no people can say: ‘We have failed to notice them.’

قَالُواْ رَبَّنَا غَلَبَتۡ عَلَيۡنَا شِقۡوَتُنَا وَكُنَّا قَوۡمٗا ضَآلِّينَ ١٠٦

They will say, 'Lord, our waywardness overcame us and
we went astray [106] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 106)

The attitude '…our wretchedness (*shiqwatuna*)…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 106) derives from *shaqawah* which is misery that encompasses the entire soul, not leaving any part of it. When it is said: So and so is miserable, it implies that he is straitened and troubled in all the areas of his life, and cannot find comfort in anything. It is as though by them saying: '…our wretchedness overcame us…' (*al-Mu'minun*: 106); they want to distance themselves from blame and shift it to Allah *Glorified is He*. So they say: 'O Lord, You have destined us to be miserable from the beginning of time, so we are free of guilt. How can we make our fate a happy one?' They mean to say: 'If our Lord had so willed, we would not have done this.' Our answer to them is: 'Allah has destined this for you from the beginning of time because it is the outcome of your own choices.'

رَبَّنَآ أَخۡرِجۡنَا مِنۡهَا فَإِنۡ عُدۡنَا فَإِنَّا ظَٰلِمُونَ ١٠٧

Lord, take us away from this and if we go back to
our old ways, then we shall really be evildoers [107]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 107)

They attribute wrongdoing to themselves; just as Allah *the Exalted* says of them in another noble verse: '…even if they were brought back, they would only return to the very thing that was forbidden to them— they are such liars!' (*al-An'am:* 28)

Therefore, the True Lord says afterwards:

قَالَ ٱخۡسَـُٔواْ فِيهَا وَلَا تُكَلِّمُونِ ١٠٨

He will say, 'Away with you! In you go! Do not
speak to Me! [108] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 108)

The expression *ikhsa'u* or '…away with you…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 108) is an eloquent expression for rebuke; it means to put to silence disgracefully and ignominiously. This is why it is said to dogs. To a friend you would say: ‘Be quiet,’ out of honouring him if, for example, he wished to speak of your favours upon him. You would say this because you wanted to honour him and spare him from placing himself in a position of weakness before you.

Also, one of the meanings of *khusu’* is being too weak to bear up a thing, as in Allah statement: ‘Look again! And again! Your sight will turn back to you, weak (*khasi’an*) and defeated.’ (*al-Mulk:* 4) That is, it is too weak to bear the light. And in Allah’s statement: ‘You know about those of you who broke the Sabbath, and so We said to them, “Be like apes! Be outcasts (*khasi’ina*)!”’ (*al-Baqara*: 65); that is, go banished and distanced from the loftiness and honour of humanity; We see that apes are naked and swift-moving, which is unbecoming of the honourable status of humankind. Thus, it is not meant that they became apes, rather, they were downgraded to ape-like status. We see that even now they are not concerned with issues of honour or of uncovering nakedness.

Accordingly, the meaning of: ‘…away with you! In you go! Do not speak to Me! ...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 108) is: be silent in shame and disgrace. What you have done to the believers is a sufficient crime. The True Lord *the Exalted* then says:

إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِى يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ ءَامَنَّا
فَٱغْفِرْ لَنَا وَٱرْحَمْنَا وَأَنتَ خَيْرُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

Among My servants there were those who said, “Lord, We believe. Forgive us and have mercy on us: You are the most merciful of all” [109] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 109)

The people meant in the previous verse are the oppressed from among the believers the likes of ʿAmmar, Bilal and Khabbab ibn Al-Art(1) *Allah be pleased with them all.* They used to make this supplication. Such a good supplication should not have been rejected; rather, it should be heard, followed, and taken as an example.

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(1) *Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (vol. 6, p. 4688), on the authority of Mujahid*

فَٱتَّخَذۡتُمُوهُمۡ سِخۡرِيًّا حَتَّىٰٓ أَنسَوۡكُمۡ ذِكۡرِي وَكُنتُم مِّنۡهُمۡ تَضۡحَكُونَ ١١٠

But you kept on laughing at them: so intent were you on laughing at them that it made you forget My warning [110] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 110)

We have spoken of this issue in Allah’s statement: ‘The wicked used to laugh at the believers — they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own people, and say, when they saw them, “These people are misguided,” though they were not sent to be their keepers– so today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers (not) been repaid for their deeds?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36) The disbelievers treated the weak and oppressed believers as a source of mockery and ridicule. They took it to the extent of making it their only preoccupation. The mockery and ridicule preoccupied them even from reflection; it absolutely left no room in their minds for thinking about what these people believed in. This is the meaning of: ‘…so much so that they made you forget My Remembrance…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 110). Your mockery of the believers distracted you from having faith in the One Who created you and them.

If only the mockery had halted at this point. In fact, it went beyond just mockery to using the believers as a laughingstock to entertain themselves and their folks: ‘But you took them for a laughingstock, so much so that they made you forget My Remembrance…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 110) and also in another verse: ‘and when they returned to their own people, they would return jesting.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31) The people of falsehood hurling derision and mockery at the people of truth are found at every time in human history. Even today we see those who mock and make fun of religious, righteous, and devoted people.

Then the True Lord says:

إِنِّي جَزَيۡتُهُمُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ بِمَا صَبَرُوٓاْ أَنَّهُمۡ هُمُ ٱلۡفَآئِزُونَ ١١١

Today I have rewarded them for their patience: it is they who will succeed [111] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 111)

When the people of faith showed patience with their mockery and ridicule, Allah compensated them by conferring honours and bounties on them. This is an issue that no believer should be heedless of when being mocked by his enemies. A believer should always remember the Generosity of his Lord and the recompense promised as a reward to those who observe patience. The mocker is merely a slave of limited power, while the One Who is always Generous and Beneficent to you is your Lord Whose Power is Almighty. You can, then, weigh the hardship of patience with their harm against the pleasantness of the blessings that you will receive as recompense for your patience.

قَٰلَ كَمۡ لَبِثۡتُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ عَدَدَ سِنِينَ ﴿١١٢﴾

He will say, ‘How many years were you on earth?’ [112]
(The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 112)

They shall be asked about the number of years they remained on the earth? But why do they ask this question? Because, as some said, this worldly life, with its splendour, attractions, and desires is what distracted you from the religion that guarantees for you an eternal life and an everlasting bliss. And on the assumption that you have enjoyed this in this world, does it compare to the endless delights that shall never pass away nor will you go and leave them behind, which have been stored up for the believers in the Hereafter?

When the Resurrection shall take place, it will be at a near time to those who will have died shortly before its occurrence. Thus their stay in the grave will be short, whereas the stay of the people who have died since the time of Adam *peace be upon him* will be long. The stay in the graves is, as they say, speculative. But do the dead know how long they have remained in the earth? It is known that they cannot perceive time because time can be perceived only through witnessing events. A dead person does not perceive time because he does not live through any events, just as the one asleep does not know how long he has been sleeping. So, every human being who will be asked this question will say: ‘…a day, or part of a day…’ (*al-Baqara:* 259).

It was ʿUzayr (Ezra) who said this – the one whom Allah caused to die and then resurrected. The Sleepers of the Cave, whom Allah put to sleep for three hundred and nine years, also said the same. This is the longest period one can imagine to have slept for. The one who is asleep cannot be sure about this because time is perceived through the alteration of events; when events disappear, perception of time also disappears.

This is the reason why Allah *the Exalted* says of all those who die – even if they have been dead since the time of Adam *peace be upon him*: ‘On the Day they see it, it will seem they lingered (in this life) an evening (at most,) or its morning.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 46)

And, in answer to this question, these people will utter the same response:

قَالُواْ لَبِثۡنَا يَوۡمًا أَوۡ بَعۡضَ يَوۡمٖ فَسۡـَٔلِ ٱلۡعَآدِّينَ ١١٣

And they will reply, ‘We stayed a day or a part of a day, but ask those who keep count’ [113] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 113)

That is, those who are able to count because we have not been conscious to be able to keep count of the years we have stayed in our graves. What is intended by ‘those who keep count’ are the angels who count and calculate the days.(1)

قَٰلَ إِن لَّبِثۡتُمۡ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗاۖ لَّوۡ أَنَّكُمۡ كُنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ١١٤

He will say, ‘You stayed but a little, if you had only known[114] (The Quran, *al-Mu’minun:* 114)

However long you estimate the duration of your life on earth to have been – even for those who have died since the time of Adam *peace be upon him* – still it will be little compared to the time that lies ahead in the recompense of the Hereafter. That which you have lived in this world cannot be measured against the eternal, long-lasting punishment in the afterlife. ‘If you had only known…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 114), that is, known the length of the eternal punishment you are heading towards.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi stated in his Tafsir (vol. 6, p. 4690) two opinions regarding who those are who keep count:*

- *According to Qatada, they are the counters who know this.*
- *According to Mujahid, they are angels who are with us in this life.*

أَفَحَسِبۡتُمۡ أَنَّمَا خَلَقۡنَٰكُمۡ عَبَثٗا وَأَنَّكُمۡ إِلَيۡنَا لَا تُرۡجَعُونَ ﴿١١٥﴾

Did you think We had created you in vain, and that you would not be brought back to Us? [115] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 115)

That is, what have you thought the reason and purpose behind Our creating you? As Allah says in another place: 'Do people think they will be left alone after saying "We believe" without being put to the test'? (*al-'Ankabut:* 2) The Arabic word *`abath* (absurd, idle, or vain acts) refers to a purposeless action without benefit. It is as when you say to someone who is doing something useless: 'What are you wasting your time on?' The opposite of *`abath* is *jadd* (seriousness or earnestness). Playing and jesting are part of life's actions; however, *jadd* (seriousness) constitutes any act done with a planned objective. As for *la`ib* (play), it is when you do an action which has no immediate objective apart from training oneself and engaging one's faculties and abilities so as to divert attention from causing damage or harm to something. This is similar to someone buying their child a toy by which he will be distracted from valuable possessions in the house, which, if he were to play with, would break. So you turn his energy towards something that keeps him from causing harm or to teach him a sport that will benefit him later, such as swimming or riding a horse. The word *lahw* (diversion, entertainment, distraction) signifies the same as *la`ib* in the sense that it is engaged in for a prospective purpose or in order to avert harm. Except that when you pursue play, it does not distract you from some other important things to do. *Lahw*, on the other hand, involves distraction from important issues. For example, when a seven-year-old child engages in play during the prayer times, his action is called *la`ib* (play), but if he is ten years old, his action is called *lahw* since it distracts him from the prayer which is obligatory for him.

Play trains you to do things that you may need in times of seriousness, and in turn facilitates their performance. As for *`abath*, it has no benefit at all. This is the reason why Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Did you think We had created you in vain…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 115). Allah negated the possibility of creation being frivolous without any purpose. Allah *the Exalted* created the creation with a set purpose and placed for them a law and a way that specifies this purpose. It is only the Creator Who can lay down a law for the creation.

As we have said previously, the designer who designed this microphone did not make it and then leave it up to us to find its function. Rather, before designing it he defined its function and purpose, which is to transmit sound over long distances. The purpose is clearly set from the beginning and before the work.

The one who defines the purpose of a product is its designer and maker. He is also the one who defines its fitness to its purpose. He also lays down the safety criteria or essential requirements needed in order for it to function properly. You, O human being, are Allah's Design, so leave Him to define your purpose and to set the law of your living and the rules for your safety which are defined by the commands, 'Do this' and 'Do not do this.'

The corruption of the world comes when the designed thing itself wants to usurp the designer's right of defining its purpose, its law and safety regulations. This is not part of its role. When the Creator defines your purpose for you, He sets down for you a law which will assist you in fulfilling your purpose. A key question here is, when do you attain full perception and comprehension of things around you to set down your own purpose and safety laws? At the best estimate, you are unable to reach this stage before the age of twenty. Who then will assign for you your purpose and safety laws before this age? No one other than your Creator *the Most High.* The state of affairs will not be put right unless we leave the purpose, law and safety requirements of a design to its proper designer.

How can you believe that Allah *the Exalted* created you in vain without purpose, when it is He Who has summoned you to existence, and provided for you the necessities of life, and urged you to employ your intellect and abilities which He endowed you with to achieve well-being and enhance your life?

In the past, we would sit in the light of a lamp, but now we have neon and crystal lights. No matter how much your life becomes easy or the means of comfort become more available, do not forget that these are all from Allah. All materials, energies, and intellectual abilities are creations of Allah *the Most High*. You do not own any of them. The proof is that if Allah takes away your intellect, you become mad; and if He takes away your energy and strength, you become weak and can hardly breathe. These are all bounties that have been gifted to you – they are not inherent in you.

Therefore, you must reflect upon your Creator *Glorified is He*, and the necessities of life that He has bestowed upon you so that you may know that this universe cannot be aimless. It must have a purpose which the Creator has assigned. You try, regarding yourself, to set your own subsidiary purpose which stems from the greater purpose for which Allah has created you.

Do you not see how you care for your little child? You teach him, spend money on him in all stages of his life until he reaches university. You attach yourself to a great hope that this son of yours will attain a status in society and among the people. This project in and of itself is a purpose. However, after he has attained status and a notable profession, this quest will ultimately end in death.

There must be another higher purpose. An imperishable purpose unsurpassed by anything else. This high purpose is meeting Allah and getting recompensed, by either paradise or Hell. It is in the light of this reality that we should approach all the affairs and concerns of our lives, knowing for sure that we have not been created out of frivolity. Rather, we have been created for a purpose appointed by Allah, and furnished as well with the means of achieving it.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says: '…and that you would not be brought back to Us?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 115) in spite of you and against your will, as if driven by something, as in Allah's Statement: 'On that Day they will be thrust into the Fire of Hell.' (*at-Tur:* 13) That is, they will be driven to it like animals being struck on the back of their necks.

فَتَعَٰلَى ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمَلِكُ ٱلْحَقُّ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ ٱلْعَرْشِ ٱلْكَرِيمِ ﴿١١٦﴾

Exalted be God, the true King, there is no god
but Him, the Lord of the Glorious Throne! [116]
(The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 116)

'Exalted be Allah' is an expression of transcendence and sanctification. The Arabic word *`uluw* (highness) refers to lofty status. When talking about people, we may say: 'So and so is higher than so and so'; but when we say: 'Exalted is Allah,' we mean the highest and most exalted sublimity. The high or special status that Allah accords to some human is just an inferior form of elevation which is changeable. The proof is that Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* may elevate you to a high position, and then, if He so wills, He may take it away. Thus, this elevated status is not inherent in you.

We know that the word *milk* (property) is used, for example, in reference to a piece of real estate owned by a proprietor who runs its affairs and has a flock. From this root comes the word *mallik* (proprietor). It can refer to the owner of anything. Even if he owns nothing beyond the clothes he is wearing, he is still considered to be an owner. As for the word *mallik* (king), he is the one who exercises sovereignty over all owners; he holds authority over the owners. Such a king does not derive his dominion from his own self; rather, Allah has granted it to him. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honour whom You will and You humble whom You will…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26).

Were the sovereignty of those kings inherent in them, it would not be taken away from them. Do you not see how a king of this world enjoys extensive power and solid dominion, but despite this, he cannot maintain his sovereignty? In a moment, it can collapse at the hand of one of his soldiers. Or his own country may exile him and not even allow him to be buried therein, in which case another state may volunteer to inter his remains in its lands. What kind of dominion is this?

This is a verse that we see realized in every age, which stands as a proof of the truth of the verse stating: 'Say: O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom You will and You humble whom You will…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). Thus if Allah gives you dominion, know that it is a bestowed dominion. No matter how firmly established it may become, do not rest assured of its continuity because Allah *the Exalted* has given you sovereignty for a purpose, and no one owns this purpose except Allah *the Most High*.

Therefore, the True Lord is '…the True King…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 116). In other words, He permanently possesses sovereignty and cannot be displaced or dispossessed of it. He is the One Who does whatever He wills in His

Kingdom, without opposition or rivalry. If He gives of His hidden dominion to some person, the reins of it remain in His Hand *the Exalted*. If He wills, He will extend it; and if He wills, He will strip it away. He alone is the True Sovereign. The dominion of anyone other than Him is only a conferred dominion and can be taken away at any time. If He gives dominion to certain people over others in this world, on the Day of Resurrection He will say: '…To whom belongs all sovereignty this Day? ...' (*Ghafir*: 16)

You will notice that His saying: '…You give sovereignty…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) is easier and smoothers than '…You take sovereignty away…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). Taking something away involves hardship and suffering because a person having dominion will try his utmost to hold on to it and will struggle to keep it. But can he struggle against Allah?

Allah's statement: 'Exalted be Allah, the True King…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 116) means that He is far exalted above having created you aimlessly and vainly, and above you escaping His Grasp, or breaking away from His Dominion, or living independent of His Authority. He is far exalted above you fleeing or resisting His Punishment. This is because He alone is God: '…there is no god but Him, the Lord of the Glorious Throne!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 116) The True Lord exercises sovereignty through the framework of: 'Say: He is Allah, the One God, the Self-Sufficient Master. He does not beget nor is He begotten, and nothing is equal or comparable to Him.' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4) When He tells you something, know that there is no god besides Him who can contradict Him.

The word *`arsh* (throne) is a symbol of stabilized rule. This is because at the beginning a king is usually preoccupied with administering the affairs of his kingdom, fighting rebels, and disciplining his opponents. Once all these affairs have been settled, he sits on his throne. Thus, sitting on the throne indicates the stability and orderliness of the affairs of his kingdom. Hence, after having created the creation the True Lord established Himself on the throne.

The throne also betokens authority and sway. Unlike any other throne, the Throne of Allah is a Noble Throne. He has exalted Himself above you not to degrade or humiliate you, but rather to elevate you to Him and to give you of His Bounties. As we have previously said, it is for our good that Allah is *Al-Mutakabbir* (the Proud), and it is from the greatness of the True

Lord that all pride belongs to him alone. For as soon as everyone realizes that pride belongs to Allah alone, nobody will pride himself over others or be arrogant towards anyone else.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And to Him belongs all grandeur within the heavens and the earth, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.' (*al-Jathiya:* 37)

And so the proverb says: 'Anyone who does not have a chief should seek one,' that is to live under his protection. The True Lord elevates Himself in the interest of His creation.Relevant to this point is what we have previously said regarding *`Ubudiyyah* (worshipful servitude and obedience to Allah) that is reprehensible and burdensome to the soul if it is towards humans. This is because any master takes over the good of his slave. But it is beloved to the soul when it is for Allah because through servitude to Allah, the slave receives the good of his Lord.

The earthly thrones of the kings of this world are used for enforcing authority, manipulating destinies, and draining the blood and resources of the people, but the Throne of your Lord is a Noble Throne. Indeed, the Noble One is noble and lofty in all His Aims and Purposes. Read His statement: '(And so they perished: and) how many gardens did they leave behind, and water-runnels, and fields of grain, and noble dwellings.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-26)

Also when exhorting us regarding our parents, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…say not to them a word of disrespect, and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word.' (*al-Isra':* 23)

Thus the noble throne is one that achieves the noblest aims of sovereignty. Sovereignty is not about authority and subjugation; rather, it should be exercised for the good of the people. When the True Lord created life, He apportioned the means of favour. He has made those who are strong and able and those who are weak and helpless, and then He commanded the strong to hold the hand of the weak and take care of them. In this sense, nobility is when the strong diffuse their benefit to the weak. Every good and righteous quality can be described as noble.

So beware of thinking that the Throne of your Lord is for authority, high-handedness, or oppression because it is absolutely a Noble Throne.

Then the True Lord says:

وَمَن يَدۡعُ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ لَا بُرۡهَٰنَ لَهُۥ بِهِۦ فَإِنَّمَا
حِسَابُهُۥ عِندَ رَبِّهِۦٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفۡلِحُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ ١١٧

Whoever prays to another God alongside Him – a God for whose existence he has no evidence – will face his reckoning with his Lord. Those who reject the truth will not prosper [117] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 117)

'And whoever invokes (or worships) besides Allah…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 117) means along with or instead of Allah. Worship is to obey the worshipped Lord in whatever He commands or forbids. But how can a human call upon a god that can neither benefit nor harm him and for whose existence or divinity he has no evidence? Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* threatens to punish whoever does this saying: '…then his reckoning is only with his Lord…' (*al-Mu'minun*: 117); that is, his True Lord. Surely, '…the disbelievers will not be successful.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 117)

As a concluding aspect that inspires wonder is that the chapter begins with Allah's Words: 'Successful indeed are the believers' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1) and ends with His Words: '… surely, the disbelievers will not be successful.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 117) That is, it ends exactly opposite of how it begins. This should lead you to reflect on that which lies between these two brackets. Since the issue is all about faith, where believers shall attain success and disbelievers will suffer failures, you must hold on to your Lord and adhere to His Law of 'Do' and 'Do not do.'

And whenever you are overpowered by desires into sin, remember to say:

وَقُل رَّبِّ ٱغۡفِرۡ وَٱرۡحَمۡ وَأَنتَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ ١١٨

… Say [Prophet], 'Lord, forgive and have mercy: You are the most merciful of all'[118] (The Quran, *al-Mu'minun:* 118)

If you fall into some error, keep mindful of this reality. Turn to your Lord for He is Oft Forgiving. He has allowed repentance for you to repent, and allowed seeking forgiveness for you to ask for forgiveness. He *the Most High* is more Merciful to you than a mother is to her child. Indeed, He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.

The prayer 'My Lord, forgive…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 118) signifies past sins, whereas '…and have mercy…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 118) signifies asking mercy from falling into sin again, and protection from erring in our future lives. Thus, hold on to your Lord and His Law under all circumstances. Let nothing turn you away from it.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد [16]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (16)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (16)

the chapter of

an-Nur

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

سُورَةٌ أَنزَلۡنَٰهَا وَفَرَضۡنَٰهَا وَأَنزَلۡنَا فِيهَآ ءَايَٰتِۭ بَيِّنَٰتٖ لَّعَلَّكُمۡ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١﴾

This is a *Surah* We have sent down and made obligatory: We have sent down clear revelations in it, so that you may take heed [1] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 1)

The name of this chapter is *an-Nur*(1) (literally, light)(2) and on examining the subject named or addressed by the chapter of *an-Nur*, you will find light pervading it from every side. I am not saying its verses, nor am I saying its words, but rather light pervades its every letter. Why? They said because *an-Nur* (light) is among the [onomatopoeic] words whose pronunciation points to their meaning, and defines them more than any other definition. Consequently, people recognize *an-Nur* simply through the pronunciation of this word. Light is not defined except by the true nature of that which it performs, namely being that by which visible things become apparent, and by which creation is revealed. If not for this light, we would see nothing.

Therefore, light is known by its characteristic property which grants you the ability to see visible things, as proven by the fact that you would not be able to see them if they were in a dark place. Thus, light is not seen, but through it we see things. Likewise, Allah *the Exalted* is the Light of the heavens and earth, illuminating them for us, but we cannot see Him *the Exalted*.

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(1) *The chapter of An-Nur is number twenty-four in the order of the Noble Quran; in the eighteenth part. It was consensually agreed that it was revealed in Medina, as stated by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (vol. 6, p. 4693). It was revealed after the chapter of An-Nasr, and before the chapter of Al-Hajj. It is chapter number seventeen in the chronological order of the Medinan revelations. See: Al-Itqan fī `Ulum Al-Qur'an by As-Suyuti (vol. 1, p. 27). The number of the verse of this chapter is sixty-four.*

(2) *Al-Qurtubi said in his Tafsir (vol. 6, p. 4693): 'The main objective of this chapter is to mention the rules of chastity and moral safeguards for honor.' 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him also wrote to the people of Kufa, saying: 'Teach your women the chapter of An-Nur.'*

But are all things visible? Are there not among them things that can be heard, smelled, and tasted? Yes they say, but visible things constitute the first proof of all these experiences and the occurrence of events. Since all the proofs of existence are visible; we see them first; then when you hear, or smell, or feel, or distinguish heavy from light, or near from far, these are all derivative of what exists in you after embracing that belief that Allah is the One Who created you and created all things for you. So whenever you look at the light, you will find that light is a sensory perception, by which you see all things.

In the past, people used to believe that a human being sees things by means of rays emanating from the eye and then falling on the object and so you see it. This was what people believed until the Islamic scientist, Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham, came and disproved this theory. He said that the rays come out from the visible object to the eye, and then you see it, and not the other way around. As proof of this, he pointed out that if the object was in darkness and you in the light, you still would not see it. Thus if the rays truly emanated from you, you would have seen it.

In light of this theory, we can understand Allah's Words: '…and made the daylight for seeing…' (*al-Isra':* 12). It allows seeing because the rays come from there, so it is what makes things visible.

But what is the utility of this sensory light to the human being, the vicegerent (*khalifa*) of Allah on the earth? When you see things, you are able to interact with them in a useful manner that provides you with their benefits and protect you from the harm they contain. If you could not see things, you would not be able to interact with them; otherwise, how could you walk in a dark place filled with harmful things, such as snakes or broken glass?

Without physical light, you do not know where to place your feet, or to take the good aspects of a thing and avoid its bad aspects. Similarly, if you walk into a dark place, without guidance, you would inevitably collide with someone stronger than you, who would then knock you down, or someone weaker than you, whom you would knock down. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* called the law and way that guides you along the path of life a light.

In absence of the Allah-given natural light, people devise sources of light according to their varying capacities and environments, beginning with lamps and gas lanterns. People vary widely even in this area – up until the era of electricity, florescent and neon bulbs, and various other lighting sources. This is at night. But once the sun rises, everyone extinguishes his lights and lanterns. Why? This is because the Lamp of Allah has shined and thus everyone equally receives its light without distinction. Likewise with the spiritual light which is the light of the law that Allah provides regarding any issue that requires guidance; turn off any lamps of human guidance besides it. It is not fitting that you should seek the aid of any light when the light of your Lord is available. Rather, you ought to seize the initiative and take as much as you can from the light of your Lord. For just as you take the sensory light provided by Allah and with it dispense with all other lights, follow the Light of Allah in moral values, follow the Light of Allah in your traits of character and in your transactions and in your behaviour, and this will allow you to dispense with any man-made lights and laws.

Do you not see how Nimrod was left dumbstruck when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* cut short his dispute and confronted him with the irrefutable evidence when he told him: '"Allah brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west." The disbeliever was dumbfounded…' (*al-Baqara:* 258).

The True Lord *the Exalted* pours forth His Light and His Attributes of Perfection upon His creation whom He has appointed as His vicegerents on earth. So He says: '…I am putting a successor on earth…' (*al-Baqara:* 30). The vicegerency on earth (*khilafa*) is not intended to be a single generation which Allah has created and appointed as His representatives on earth until the occurrence of the Final Hour; rather, the vicegerent is generations and descendants following upon one another, one dies and another is born in continuous chains of offspring, not the self-same persons.

The vicegerent will not succeed in his vicegerency unless he proceeds in it in accordance with the intention of the One Who appointed him to this role. The main failing that people show in exercising their role of vicegerency on earth is that they consider themselves to be the original leaders rather than appointed vicegerents. For a true vicegerent of Allah should keep this post of vicegerency upmost in his mind and should always look back and refer to the original source, and learn exactly what the One who appointed him as vicegerent desires of him.

The True Lord *the Exalted* established for Himself a vicegerent on earth to manifest through him the signs of His Power and the attributes of His Perfection. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Powerful, Allah is the Knowledgeable, Allah is the Wise, Allah is the Self-Sufficient, Allah is the Merciful, Allah is the Forgiving, etc. Allah gives of His Attributes and freely bestows some of them upon His creation and His vicegerents on His earth. He gives you power of His Power, mercy from His Mercy, and sufficiency in all things from His Abundance. Yet, the quality itself remains in His Hand; if He wills, He can take it away. Do you not see how the strong can become weak and how the rich can become poor? This is so that we might know that we are not self-endowed with these qualities, and that these gifts are not innate in us; rather, they are bestowments from Allah *the Glorious and Exalted*. For this reason, we are obliged to use them in accordance with His Intention. So when your Lord has given you power, He has poured it forth on you so that you may pour it forth to others. He has given you knowledge so that you may disperse it among people. He has given you wealth so that you may look after the rights of the poor.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon you a portion of His Attributes of Perfection and has preserved for Himself the ownership of these attributes – and if He wills, He can strip them from you – it is incumbent upon you to seize the opportunity and make the most of the attribute which have been bestowed upon you, and to exploit it in the way that Allah desires from you before you are stripped of it. Then when it is stripped from you, it will be granted to you through someone else.

So give in charity while you are rich to receive the charity of others if you are afflicted by poverty. And be magnanimous toward the orphan to find someone who will be magnanimous toward your orphans after you. For if you approach the events of life with this perspective, your heart will be at peace, and you will be secure from the mishaps of time and will face the events of life with contentment. And how could you be distressed when you are in a society that takes care of you as you have taken care of it, and which assumes your burdens as you have assumed its burdens, and cooperates with you as you have cooperated with it?

Truly Allah speaks the truth when He says: ‘Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if they were to die, show the same concern (for orphans); let them be mindful of Allah and speak out for justice.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 9)

Hence, the True Lord *the Exalted* desires of His vicegerents on His earth that they embrace the Qualities of Divine Perfection which bring happiness to mankind through having within them the imprints of their Creator. This indeed is the true viceregency.

The chapter of *an-Nur* came to convey the light of moral ideals, the light of values, the light of dealings and transactions, the light of manners, the light of management and comportment. And as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has established this light for us, mankind must not establish other laws for themselves because as Allah says: ‘…the one to whom Allah gives no light has no light at all.’ (*an-Nur:* 40) And if the sun did not exist, no one would ever be able to produce light for himself.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wills from His vicegerent on His earth that he be pure, noble, generous, and honourable; it is for this reason that He established laws which support this objective. The first and most important of these laws is the law governing the union between man and women, that it be a sound union in broad daylight so that a pure offspring will result from this union, worthy of the vicegerency of Allah on His earth. Therefore, the first matter which the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about in this chapter is that of adultery.

It is amazing that this chapter comes after chapter *al-Mu’minun* at the beginning of which Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Successful indeed are the believers.” (*al-Mu’minun:* 1) Then He mentions who these successful believers are ‘And they who guard their private parts.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 5) And here in the present chapter, He said: ‘The adulteress and the adulterer’ hence, providing the opposite of those who are mindful of their chastity.

We understand from this that no man and woman have sexual intercourse except based on light from Allah and guidance from his wise system of legal rulings. This is because He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of man, and He knows best what is good for him. He is the Creator of His offspring, and He knows how to harmonize these offspring with each other. Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of the dispositions of the soul, and He knows how these dispositions can co-exist without clashing.

Naturally, if you wanted to install a vicegerent in the universe contrary to the intent of Allah and based on other than the qualities of the True Lord, the universe will be disturbed and the dispositions of the soul will be at odds with each other. Then, what do you expect from this vicegerent if he appears in darkness? At that moment, ailments of procreation will arise such as burying children alive and killing them even in the bellies of mothers. Similarly, a man may have doubts about the fathering of his child, and then come to detest, neglect, and abandon him to a life of homelessness.

Hence, this matter will never be set aright except when the vicegerent complies with the specifications of his Lord, and when a couple has sexual union on the basis of what Allah has ordained. But when each of them schemes against the other in the darkness of sin, then the forbidden occurs by which genealogies get all mixed up, and the bonds of society disintegrate.

Surely among the cruellest experiences in the life of a man is to doubt the relationship of his child to himself. This thought should oppress him, leading him to neglecting his child and his own blood, wasting his money on this and that, while depriving his child. As opposed to pure offspring where the father is full of concern for his child going hungry so that the child can eat, going naked so that the child can be clothed.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* desires that offspring should be lovingly cared for by two parents in a proper state of lawful fatherhood and lawful motherhood who have come together on the basis of Allah's ordainment.

Consequently, if you make a comparison between a woman who is pregnant by fornication and another who is pregnant with a lawful, pure pregnancy, you will find that the first woman carries her child unwillingly, under coercion, and wishes to get rid of it while it is an embryo in her belly. And if she braces herself until the time of its birth, she will get rid of it that same day, even by casting it into the middle of the road. As for the woman who is in a state of lawful pregnancy, she yearns for a child; and if the pregnancy should be late in coming, she becomes anxious and goes from one doctor to the other. Then, if Allah grants her a pregnancy, she bursts with happiness and pride, and she is mindful of the foetus until the time of giving birth; then she bears the pains happily, embraces the child and breastfeeds it, and lives her life in its service and protection.

Allah desires that His vicegerent on His earth comes from a pure fertilization under the spiritual light of Allah; He desires that the father takes the lawful means and avoid the unlawful ones.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives a stern warning of punishment to the one who violates this prescribed path and who wishes to pollute the nobility of the vicegerency which Allah desires to be pure, and who desecrates offspring and causes people to boil over with malice and enmity, and who plants doubts in souls of people. The damage of such crimes against honour is not limited to personal enmities, but rather go beyond these to damages to society as a whole.

Consider the current threat of AIDS to societies which is a result of this unlawful sexual union; the danger is not limited to the two parties involved, but rather, it extends to others. Hence, it is in the best interest of all of society to impose the legal punishment for fornication so that this disease will not spread.

We are astounded by those who attack the Islamic law in the matter of prescribed legal punishments when it ordains the stoning of the married adulterer to death. Do these people not know that we sacrifice one in order to protect the safety of millions in their health and well-being? Are they unaware of what happens, for example, in an epidemic of the plague over which scientists are powerless until today -and they have not discovered a cure for it- and how the Islamic law commands us not to travel to a land where the plague has broken out, and commands those who reside there not to leave? Why? To contain this epidemic so that it will not spread further among people.

Such is the same situation with regard to fornication because the harm of the adulterer is not limited to himself only, but rather, it extends to the entire society. It should be noted that the Islamic law differentiates between the married man who commits adultery and the unmarried man who engages in fornication. The same is true for the female fornicator. Thus, in the case of fornication of a married woman, sperm from multiple sources accumulate in a single place.

Thus, we were asked in San Francisco: ‘Why do you [Muslims] permit men multiple wives, but do not permit women multiple husbands?’ For those who asked the question, this was by way of comparing man and woman: Why can a woman not marry and have four men?

I said, ‘Ask them, do they not have places wherein the youth can placate themselves sexually, that is to say, brothels.’ They responded, ‘Yes, in some states.’ I said, ‘Then by what means do you protect the health of society and its welfare?’ They replied, ‘We conduct periodic inspections on them every few weeks.’ I commented, ‘And does this periodic inspection include everyone? Or is it merely random examinations?’

‘Hence,’ I continued, ‘it is possible for disease to spread among these youths. Imagine that you conducted your inspection on one of these ladies on Sunday, for example, and on Monday she was exposed to disease. So how many people will this disease infect until the following Sunday comes along? So this is an issue, for you are unable to control disease by such a method.’

‘Another thing, do you conduct these examinations on married men and married women? And have you discovered among them such diseases?’ They answered, ‘No, it has never happened that we have discovered this between married couples.’ I remarked, ‘Then you should have perceived the cause of these diseases being the result from multiple sources of men’s sperm in a single place; since every sperm has its own flow in which microbes combat each other; if they combine in a single place, then disease will be produced from it.’

‘However,’ I continued, ‘when a wife has a single husband, we do not witness such diseases in society. And this is where the role of religious restriction comes in. If the religious restriction is lost, then material restriction will be needed to restrain the like of such people, and to hold them to the limits of Allah in spite of themselves, even if they do not believe in such laws.

Thus, these issues, problems, and diseases increase proportionally with the increase of fornication, and violate the sacred proscriptions of Allah. Just look, for example, at the person who is obliged to travel to such countries, how precautious and frightened he is when he stays in a hotel, for example, he takes his own personal belongings, as he fears to make use of things belonging to others. He cares for the cleanliness of the place, and changes the bed sheets before he sleeps, etc. All of these are precautionary measures.

Now when the Islamic law orders the killing of the male or female adulterer, it does this only to keep society as a whole safe and sound. We frequently face such objections from those possessed of foolish mercy and futile sentiments. Are they more merciful with mankind than the Creator is? Are they not aware of earthquakes and automobile and aeroplane accidents which reap thousands of souls? So why all this fuss when we amputate the sick limb from society?

In His statement: '[This is] a sura/chapter which We have sent down and We made it compulsory' (*an-Nur:* 1) *Surah* is a group of the instalments of the Quran or its verses enclosed within a beginning and an end, which contain rulings. They may be long, like the chapter of *al-Baqara*, or short like that of *al-Ikhlas* and of *al-Kawthar* since a *surah* has no specific quantity because it is fixed by Divine command.

'Which We have sent down' is a phrase meaning it came down from above to one who is lower than him. This is comparable to an employee, who for example, writes a complaint to his superior: I raise such-and-such unto you; then the superior says: I have sent down such-and-such a decision. So, the lower sends up to the higher, and the higher sends down to the lower.

Therefore, He *Glorified is He* says, 'We sent down', even for a thing which is not sent down from heaven, as He *Glorified is He* said: 'And We sent down iron, wherein is great military might and benefits for the people.' (*al-Hadid:* 25) Thus, iron, even if its source is in the earth, would not exist except for the power of the Most Exalted.

And '…We made it compulsory.' Something which is compulsory means it is obligatory to do because the Law-Giver has said so, and has enjoined it. In the same vein is His saying: 'then [give] half of what you specified' (*al-Baqara:* 237). In other words, it is half of that which you have decreed. Thus, everything has a ruling in the Islamic law, for verily Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained it by a judicious determination based on His Divine Decree.

In this chapter, there are many rulings, such that the True Lord *Glorified is He* said in it 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.' (*an-Nur:* 35) And, 'light upon light!' (*an-Nur:* 35) So as long as you have taken the light of the lower world and have decided that it is the best, and that when it appears it extinguishes all of your lights, then likewise take the light of divine legislation and act in accordance with it. Hence, you have two lights from Allah: perceptible light and spiritual light.

As for the words, 'that you might remember': After He *Glorified is He* said, 'I have sent down such-and-such,' He wishes to incite your sentiments to receive His verses with a good reception, and to apply His rulings in an exemplary way, saying, 'I have sent down to you such-and-such, so that you might bear [them] in mind.' This carries provocation and incitement for us to benefit from the legislation of the True Lord.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the first matter which He has imposed upon His servants:

ٱلزَّانِيَةُ وَٱلزَّانِى فَٱجْلِدُوا۟ كُلَّ وَٰحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِا۟ئَةَ جَلْدَةٍ ۖ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُم بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِى دِينِ ٱللَّهِ
إِن كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ ۖ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا طَآئِفَةٌ مِّنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

Strike the adulteress and the adulterer one hundred times. Do not let compassion for them keep you from carrying out God's law — if you believe in God and the Last Day — and ensure that a group of believers witnesses the punishment[2]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 2)

We remark: Verily the True Lord *Glorified is He* treats this subject in the desire to preserve the new generation, and the purity of this human being which Allah has established as His Vicegerent on earth. When we meditate upon the Quranic context of this verse, we find that the word adulterer signifies both female and male. Yet, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions them both plainly in order to remove any possible difference of opinion which might arise among some people regarding which of the two of them is the cause of this crime. This is a controversy into which even great scholars and jurists have fallen. For there are those who say that the male adulterer is the initiator of sexual intercourse and the prime actor, and the woman is the one dominated upon, so the action is attributable to the man and not the woman, thus he alone is the one who assumes this responsibility.

For this reason, Al-Imam Ash-Shafi‘i narrates that a man went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I had sexual intercourse with my wife in Ramadan.’ Whereupon the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Make [the prescribed] expatiation.’(1) Ash-Shafi‘i deduced from this Hadith that the expatiation should fall upon the man rather than the woman, otherwise the Messenger would have said to the man: ‘Let the two of you make expatiation.’

However, we must differentiate between forcing oneself upon someone sexually, and between having consensual sexual intercourse; the former is the act of the man even if the wife is disinclined and rejecting. As for consensual sexual intercourse, it is done in a state of pleasure and acceptance of both parties, and in this case the obligation of expatiation falls on both of them together. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explicitly states both the adulteress and the adulterer in order to remove this uncertainty and this difference of opinion. In my view, in this case it was the man who sought the legal ruling from the Prophet Muhammad; had it been the woman, he would have similarly told her the same, hence the judgement is particular to the person who sought the legal ruling.

One who reflects upon the verses concerning legal punishments will find, for example, in the punishment for stealing His saying, ‘Now as for the man who steals and the woman who steals.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 38) Here He begins with the male, but regarding the punishment for adultery, He said, “the adulteress and the adulterer,” beginning with the female. Why this difference in the Quranic expression?

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(1) *Narrated by `A’isha may Allah be pleased with her that she said: “A man came to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and said, ‘I am bound for Hellfire.’ The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him asked, ‘Why?’ [The man] replied, ‘I have had sexual intercourse with my wife in Ramadan during the day.’ [The Prophet] said, ‘Give in charity, give in charity.’[The man] said, ‘I have nothing.’ So he ordered him to sit down, then two fleshy bones upon which there was nourishment were brought to him and the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him ordered him to give them away in charity.” Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (1112).*

They say: Because the role of the woman in the matter of adultery is greater, as she is the one that tempts the man and rouses his emotions. Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has commanded men to lower their gaze, and has commanded women to conceal their beauty; all of which in order to close the doors to this crime and to prevent its causes.

As for the case of stealing, the burden of maintenance and providing the necessities of life normally falls upon the man's shoulders, as he is the one who is charged with them. Therefore, the man steals. But as for the woman, she is normally on the receiving end in her house, and it is not her duty to provide for the costs of life. But nevertheless, there is nothing to stop the woman from stealing as well. For this reason, He begins the matter of stealing with the man.

By comparing verses of the Quran, you find the words carefully weighed and extremely precise. Every word and every letter has its evident meaning, for it is the speech of a judicious Lord. If the matter were simply one of normal legislation, you would not need to consider issues such as these.

Subsequently the deterrent punishment comes for this crime: 'lash each one of them with a hundred lashes.' Lash is an order, but to whom? He did not specify a governor or judge because the command here is for the entire ummah/nation. Now the command to impose punishments is entrusted to the ummah as a whole, but does the entire community in all its numerous members carry out a single act in every place?

They say: the ummah is like the general deputy of the governor whose duty is to choose whomever he feels is competent to exercise power in order to implement for him what he wants. Whoever appoints a judge, the same has made a judgement. And as long as this is the situation, then beware of appointing someone as a judge who is incompetent for the post because the responsibility will be upon you if he wrongs people or is unjust. Now the ummah is not able collectively to lash every adulterer and adulteress, but when its ruler assumes power with the oath of allegiance, and when he is chosen to impose the criminal punishments ordained by Allah, then it is as if the ummah itself is the one that imposes the punishments, and is the one that enforces them. Hence, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Whoever delegates someone authority, and among the people there is someone who is better than him, he will not smell the scent of Paradise.'(1) Why? Because when you delegate responsibility over the affairs of people to one who is not fit for it, while there is someone who is fit for it, you are thereby spreading corruption in society. Do not think that you can conceal something from the eyes of people, as they have sufficient awareness and attentiveness with which to differentiate between competence and its opposite. If they keep silent and are heedless, they will nevertheless ask themselves behind your back: why did he delegate authority to that person, and leave aside someone who is more competent than he is? He must have other qualifications thanks to which he entered through the back door, and why should we not do like him? At this point, chaos reigns and rights are lost, and frustration, laziness, and apathy spread, disorders occur in society, and the public welfare breaks down.

Yet, in spite of all this, we cannot blame the ruler when he selects someone who is not suited for his appointed duty; rather, we must blame ourselves first since we are the ones who chose him and were false in our oaths of allegiance to him. Hence, Allah placed him in a position of dominance over us so that he also might be false is his choice. However, if each of us performed his duty in the choice of a suitable person, he who deceives people would not reach the ranks of leadership. In this way, matters are set aright and only through hard work, sincerity, reliability, truthfulness, and self-sacrifice in serving society would be the proper qualifications for choosing someone in leadership.

It is through the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* to mankind that He casts sincerity and love of work, and plants mercy towards people into certain hearts. Thus, you find in every government bureau or in every office a humble employee who loves people, and who is intent upon serving their interests. As for lashing, it is beating in a particular manner, such that skin is not cut, nor bones broken. Since a blow is effected based upon its force and upon the instrument used in beating. There is a blow which breaks bones but does not cut the skin, just as there is a blow that cuts the skin, but does not break bones, and there is also that which causes pain without causing either of the above. Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘and do not be taken by pity for them in the religion of Allah.’ This is a warning against foolish mercy, misplaced mercy. According to one poet:

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(1) *Related by Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: "Whoever assumes any power over the affairs of the Muslims and then appoints over them through favouritism, upon him will be the curse of Allah, and Allah will accept neither obligatory nor supererogatory prayers from him until he causes him to enter Hellfire." Related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1:6).*

He was harsh in order to restrain and he who is judicious,
Will be harsh at times to those he is merciful towards.

Hence, compassion has no place in the prescribed punishments of Allah. Show mercy towards them in your personal affairs between you and them. It is astonishing that you cry for mercy in matters of divinely prescribed punishments. Yet, on the other hand, some people beat and steal people’s money, violate that which is sacred and stir up civil strife and wars between them, so where is compassion then? Therefore, there is no room for mercy or compassion regarding the prescribed punishments of Allah, for we are not more merciful unto human beings than the Creator is. The prescribed punishments were not laid down out of love for hurting people; rather, they were laid down and made stern in order to prevent falling into the crime which merits a punishment. Thus, severing a single hand prevents the severing of thousands of hands.

We ask those who accuse Islam of cruelty and offensiveness in the application of prescribed punishments if they have forgotten what they did at Hiroshima, the after-effects of which are still in evidence today. Have they forgotten the wars which they incited in various parts of the world, and which took thousands of lives? Is it a question of this foolish mercy which has no meaning? Or is it a hatred for the prescribed punishments of Allah?

We recall that in the past, a protective and guarding force of the army used to be sent out with the party of pilgrims, protecting them from highway robbers. This pilgrimage escort used to be called *al-mahmal*. Then when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established the law of Allah, and applied the prescribed punishments, the routes became safe, and people could dispense with these guards. This was in spite of the vastness of the land, and the diverging nature of its routes and the difficulty of its terrain between mountains, valleys, and huge deserts which cannot be governed or guarded by the eye of man. It required legislation of the Creator.

And yet, when the number of hands that were severed is counted, you find that they are very few, and most of them are of people from outside the Kingdom. I recall that once I said in the sermon of '*Arafa*: return to your leaders and tell them to sever the hand of the thief since he who does not sever the hand of the thief has the intention of stealing himself; therefore, he fears for his own hand, and when you mention to him the issue of severing the hand of the thief, his own hand begins to tremble. Those who oppose the application of the prescribed punishments of Allah proceed on the principle 'cut off the hand to save the body.' But yet, the prescribed punishments of Allah sticks like a lump in their throats.

Lashing with a hundred lashes is specific to the fornicator who is not married. But as for the fornicator, who is married, he is under a different ruling which is not mentioned in the Book of Allah, rather, it is mentioned in the S*unna* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is because the Noble Quran is not only a book of procedure, rather, it is a book of procedure and miracle, and with it come principles. Among these principles is that He said in a verse: Verily we authorize the Messenger of Allah to establish legislation for people.

The law that is derived from oral utterance is liable to be disputed, opposed, and manipulated in terms of interpretation. However, if the law is derived from the action of the legislator, there is no doubt or possible dispute about it. It does not allow for interpretation because it is an act. And the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* indeed acted and stoned the married adulterer and adulteress in the account of Ma'iz and Al-Ghamidiya because he was authorized by Allah. It is necessary for us to differentiate between the two prescribed punishments in question. In the case of the prescribed punishment of the slave girl who fornicates, He *Glorified is He* says: 'then for them is half the punishment for free [unmarried] women.' (*an-Nisa': 25*) Some have understood from the verse that it applies to both the prescribed punishment of stoning and of lashing. They said: 'in the case of lashing, you can be lashed with fifty stripes, but how can we divide up stoning? And as long as stoning cannot be divided up, she is not liable to stoning. But if those who say this would carefully examine the text of the verse, they would get out of this contradiction. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say only 'then for them is half the punishment for free [unmarried] women,' He specified, 'the punishment.' In this manner, He is specifically referring to the prescribed punishment of lashing since punishment as used here is living pain, whereas stoning is the annihilation of life, hence the two are opposite to each other.

Indeed, consider the statement of the Quran in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the hoopoe: '[If so,] I will punish him most severely or will kill him.' (*an-Naml:* 21) This proves that punishment is not the same as killing.

Therefore, it is only possible to divide up the prescribed punishment of lashing only, whereas it cannot be the same with stoning. So, if the married slave girl commits adultery, she is to be stoned.

Regarding His saying: 'if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day' this is a grievous statement, and a provocation to the ummah. It is as if Allah is saying: this then is the law, and this is the prescribed punishment ordained by Allah, so if you are believers in Allah, the final and eternal punishment, then implement the law of Allah --and if you do not, then re-examine your belief in Allah and in the Last Day because verily We doubt the sincerity of this faith.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is provoking us and stirring us up against those who are prone to commit this crime, so that we might withhold them and frighten them with what Allah has ordained of prescribed punishments.

Hence, the meaning is: If you believe Allah to be wise and law giving, that He created man, that He desires to protect man, and to purify him in order that he might be qualified for true vicegerency on earth, then let the Creator act in His universe and with man according to His Will. Know that the creation is not your creation in which to interfere. Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'And let a group of the believers witness their punishment.' (*an-Nur:* 2) It is not limited to the prescribed punishment of punishment and lashing; rather, it is necessary that a group of believers witness this punishment, at least four people. Why? They say: because a soul might bear a humiliation if it is carried out in secret, but it is totally different when it is done in public. Hence, other people's witnessing of the execution of a prescribed punishment is a humiliation for the person concerned, and it is also a vehicle of deterrence for the one who witnesses, a pragmatic preventive example. For this reason, they say: the prescribed punishments are means of deterrence and means of restoration means of deterrence for he who witnesses them, that is to say, they restrain him from committing that which merits this prescribed punishment. And a means of restoration for the one punished, whereby his sin is amended and the punishment of the Hereafter is waived for him. Now, it is not possible to equate the person who confesses and upon whom the prescribed punishment is carried out with the person who does not confess. Since fornication is never proven by witnesses but rather by confession, this proves the law is correct by the confessor, and that he views disgrace in this world and its chastisement to be less grave than that in the Hereafter. Otherwise, he would not have confessed against himself.

If fornication could be proven by witnesses, then perhaps they might lie. Thus, we find that when a man came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* confessing to fornication, he said to him 'Perhaps you kissed, perhaps you fondled, perhaps you touched.'(1) In other words: you did not reach the stage which is called fornication; the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* wishing to avert the prescribed punishment based on doubt.(2)

Based on upon this tolerant Islamic principle, if you seized the adulterer and began stoning him, but he then attempted to flee due to the increasing pain, the Islamic law orders us not to pursue or catch him. Why? Because his fleeing from the prescribed punishment is viewed as if it were a recantation of his confession(3).

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (6824) and Ahmad in his (Musnad) (1/238, 255, 270, 289, 325) on the authority of Ibn `Abbas who said: When Ma`iz ibn Malik came to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him he said to him: "Perhaps you kissed or fondled or stared?" [Ma`iz] said, 'No, O Messenger of Allah.' He asked, "Did you marry her?" - he did no marry her - [Ibn `Abbas] said, 'Thereupon he ordered him to be stoned.'*

(2) *On the authority of 'A'isha may Allah be pleased with her she said, the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said "Avert the prescribed punishments from the Muslims to the degree that you can, and if there exists a way out for him, then let him be, for it is better that the community leader (imam) err on the side of pardon than to err on the side of punishment." Related by At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (1424)*

(3) *Related by Imam Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2:450), and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (1428) that when Ma`iz felt the stones, he raced to escape until he passed by a man with the jawbone of a camel (a bone of its palate), then he struck him with it, and other people beat him until he died. Then this was mentioned to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him who said: "If only you had let him go." At-Tirmidhi pronounced this Hadith to be "sound".*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

ٱلزَّانِي لَا يَنكِحُ إِلَّا زَانِيَةً أَوۡ مُشۡرِكَةٗ وَٱلزَّانِيَةُ لَا يَنكِحُهَآ
إِلَّا زَانٍ أَوۡ مُشۡرِكٞۚ وَحُرِّمَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ٣

The adulterer is only [fit] to marry an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress is only [fit] to marry an adulterer or an idolater: such behaviour is forbidden to believers[3] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 3)

‘The fornicator does not marry except a [female] fornicator or polytheist,’ because marriage can only be based on equality of status so that neither one of the pair is superior to the other. The adulterer/fornicator is possessed of vileness so the only fitting partner for him is a vile woman like him. In other words, an adulteress, or even more vile, a polytheist, this is because polytheism is viler than fornication since the latter is a violation of a guiding command from Allah, while polytheism is disbelief in Allah. Therefore, the polytheist is more impure than a fornicator is. And that which we say in regard to the marriage of a male fornicator (or adulterer), we also say in regard to the marriage of a female fornicator: ‘and none marries her except a fornicator or a polytheist.’

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(1) *The occasion of the revelation of the verse: Several narrations were narrated concerning the reasons for the revelation of the verse; among them:*

- Ahmad related in his (Musnad) (2:109, 222) on the authority of `Abdullah ibn ’Umar may Allah be pleased with them that a man of the believers sought permission of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him regarding [possible marriage to] a woman called Umm Mahzul who was a whore and who imposed as a condition [of marriage] that she provide for him, so he sought the permission of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him or mentioned to him the issue of this woman. The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him then recited this verse to him. This narraton was also related by Wahidi in his (Asbab An-Nuzul) (page 180).

- Related by At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (3177) and Abu Dawud in his (Sunnan) (2051); both related it on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-'As may Allah be pleased with him who said: ‘There was a man called Marthad Ibn Abu Marthad who was one who transported captives of war from Mecca to Medina, and there was a female prostitute in Mecca called `Inaq. She was an intimate friend of his. He said to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him ‘Should I marry `Inaq, should I marry `Inaq? But the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him held back and did not respond to [him] at all until this verse was revealed, whereupon, the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, “O Marthad, the fornicator marries none but a fornicator or an idolater, so not marry her!”

Some people object: What if the female fornicator is a Muslim? Shall a polytheist marry her? They say: the objective of the opposition here is to intimidate and repel only, not granting of permission because a Muslim woman is never allowed to marry a polytheist. Hence the verse serves as a rebuke to her.

In my opinion, the text of this phrase of the verse may be viewed from different angles since the woman who has committed fornication (or adultery) veers between two possibilities. On the one hand, if she has willingly engaged in fornication, knowing that it is forbidden, then she is disobedient, but remains a Muslim. On the other hand, if she has rejected the law against fornication/ adultery and actively opposed it, then she is a polytheist. In this case, our understanding of the verse becomes correct.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And that has been made unlawful to the believers.’ When Allah forbids fornication, this is the cause of the purity of progeny. Then the vicegerent will be pure of birth and breed, embraced by father and mother, embraced by the warmth of the family, not allowing him to be exposed to any harsh elements because he has issued forth from a healthy, pure, and clean receptacle.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَرۡمُونَ ٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتِ ثُمَّ لَمۡ يَأۡتُواْ بِأَرۡبَعَةِ شُهَدَآءَ فَٱجۡلِدُوهُمۡ ثَمَٰنِينَ
جَلۡدَةٗ وَلَا تَقۡبَلُواْ لَهُمۡ شَهَٰدَةً أَبَدٗاۚ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡفَٰسِقُونَ ٤

**As for those who accuse chaste women of fornication, and
then fail to provide four witnesses, strike them eighty times,
and reject their testimony ever afterwards: they are the
lawbreakers [4] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 4)**

Chaste women apply to a married woman because she has fortified herself by marriage from inclining towards fornication. It also applies to a free, noblewoman, since in the past there used to be slave-girls who were employed as prostitutes; something that free, noblewomen would never engage in.

Hence, the case of Hind(1), whom we address with respect now after her embracing of Islam, and she is the one who chewed the liver of Hamza *may Allah be pleased with her* at the battle of Uhud, but we have no cause against her now because Islam erases what came before it. When Hind heard the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* forbid women from fornication, she said, 'Now really! Does a free noblewoman engage in fornication?'(2) She said this because fornication was prevalent before Islam among prostitutes from among slave-girls; to such an extent that they even had banners which they would raise up on their houses to make themselves known.

The meaning is: they falsely accuse chaste women of what negates chastity, obviously implying fornication; '…and then do not produce four witnesses - lash them with eighty lashes.' This is what is called the prescribed punishment for defaming a free noblewoman of committing fornication, and accuse her of it. Now, in this case, you are obliged to bring four witnesses, testifying to what you accused her of. But if you fail, then the prescribed punishment for defamation of eighty lashes will be executed. But the issue does not end with lashing; rather, your testimony will henceforth never again be accepted: 'And do not accept from them testimony ever after.' Why? He is not deemed worthy of it because he becomes a disobedient. 'And those are the defiantly disobedient.' A disobedient person has no valid testimony. Thus, the Wise Law-Giver combines against the slanderer the prescribed punishment of lashing, followed by the abrogation of his status in society through the loss of his right of testimony. Finally, after this, He ascribes disobedience unto him, and he is thus fallen in social status and becomes undignified.

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(1) She is: Hind bint `Utbah ibn Rabi`a, the mother of Mu`awiyah ibn Abu Sufyan, and the wife of Abu Sufyan Ibn Harb *may Allah be pleased with him*. She is the one who chewed the liver of Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him the paternal uncle of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him at the campaign of Uhud after Wahshi killed him under her direction.*

(2) *Ibn Kathir related this in his (Tafsir) (4/353) in a commentary on the verse: "O Prophet, when the believing women come to you pledging to you that they will not associate anything with Allah, nor will they steal, nor will they commit unlawful sexual intercourse." (al-Mumtahana: 12) In his commentary, she is narrated to have said: O Messenger of Allah, and would a free noblewoman commit fornication? To this He replied: "No, by Allah, a free noblewoman does not commit fornication."*

All of this is designed to restrain anyone whose soul might entice to question the honour of free noblewomen and make accusations against pure women. Hence, defamation is most commonly done hurriedly without evidence. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to protect the *ummah* based on faith from the diffusion of sexual lewdness or merely the mention of it and conversation about it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُواْ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصۡلَحُواْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٥

Except for those who repent later and make amends — God is most forgiving and merciful [5] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 5)

Scholars have differing opinions about the meaning of exception here: is it exception from the ascription of disobedience? Or is it exception from not accepting their testimony?

We have already mentioned that the legitimacy of repentance is a gift from the True Lord *Glorified is He*. This is because, if repentance had not been made legally acceptable, whoever fell into disobedience once without his repentance, he would once again take the risk of disobedience and be frequent in it, And why not? For there is no motivation for him to refrain

Thus, when Allah gives legal sanction to repentance, he thereby protects society from the deprived who have sold their own souls, and have lost all hope of salvation. So, the legitimacy of repentance is a magnanimous favour and its acceptance is another magnanimous favour. Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then He turned to them so they could repent.’ (*at-Tawba:* 118) That is to say, He legitimized repentance for them so that they would repent and so that he could accept it from them.

As for His saying, ‘and reform,’ it signifies that he who sins is required to follow it with a good deed. It was narrated in a Noble Hadith: ‘And follow up a bad deed with a good deed, [the latter] will wipe out the [former].’(1)

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(1) *This was related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (5/153, 158) and by At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (1987), and by Darimi in his (Sunnan) (2/323) from the Hadith of Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him who said, He peace and blessings be upon him said: “Be fearful of Allah wherever you are, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed, [the latter] will wipe out [the former], and treat people with kindness.” This is At-Tirmidhi’s wording.*

Therefore, you will find that those who have wronged themselves in whatever aspect, when they grow older and ardently desire repentance, you see them passionately obsessed with the love of doing good and observing acts of obedience, desiring to make amends through this for past misdeeds. On the other hand, he who restrains himself from acts of disobedience; you find that he has a cold attitude towards such acts of piety, doing the good to the extent of his capacity. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were warning his servants: 'O my servants! Whoever takes from me stealthily or sets aside one of my laws, or wagers the risk [of my punishment] with an act of disobedience, will exhaust himself later. He will suffer through this sin because the bad deed will chase and strain him. I might, however, forgive him for it; and he will have need of many meritorious acts and good deeds with which to make amends for his negligence towards his Lord.'

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

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(1) *The occasion for the revelation of the verse: On the authority of Ibn `Abbas may Allah be pleased with them who said: "When the revelation descended: "And those who accuse chaste women and then do not produce four witnesses - lash them with eighty lashes," Sa`d ibn `Ubadah, the chief of the Ansar, asked: 'Is this the way it was revealed, O Messenger of Allah?' Upon which He peace and blessings be upon him said: "O Assembly of Ansar, have you not heard what your chief says?" They responded: 'O Messenger of Allah, he is a very jealous man. By Allah, he has never once married a woman who was not a virgin, and never once has any man among us dared to marry a woman he has divorced, out of fear of the severity of his jealousy.' Then Sa`d said, 'By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, I acknowledge that the verse is the truth, and that it was sent down from Allah. But I was just astonished that if I were to find a man having intercourse with my wife, I would not be able to disturb him or agitate him until I came with four witnesses; for, by Allah, I would not go off to bring them and thus allow him to finish what he was doing!' It was not but a short time later when Hilal ibn Umayya came from his farmland in the evening and found a man in his household, and saw with his own eye, and heard with his own ear; but he did not disturb him until early the next morning when he went to see the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and he informed him of what had happened. The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him felt disgust at what he was told and it was deeply distressing to him. Then Sa`d said, 'Now the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him is going to beat Hilal ibn Umayya and nullify his testimony among the Muslims.' Hilal then said, 'By Allah, I do hope that Allah will grant me a way out of this.' Then was revealed the verse: "And those who accuse their wives [of adultery] and have no witnesses except themselves." Whereupon the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: "Be of good cheer, O Hilal, for Allah has just provided you with relief and a way out." Hilal then said, 'I was truly hoping for this from my Lord.' And then the source relates the rest of the Hadith. Related by Wahidi in (Asbab An-Nuzul) (pages 180-81).*

وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ أَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُمْ شُهَدَاءُ إِلَّا أَنفُسُهُمْ فَشَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ أَرْبَعُ شَهَادَاتٍ بِاللَّهِ ۙ
إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٦﴾ وَالْخَامِسَةُ أَنَّ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِن كَانَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٧﴾

As for those who accuse their own wives of adultery, but have no other witnesses, let each one four times call God to witness that he is telling the truth [6] And, the fifth time, call God to reject him if he is lying [7] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 6-7)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* discusses those who falsely accuse free noblewomen, and makes clear the ruling for defamation, He wished to clarify the law of accusation [of adultery] when it is from a husband to his wife. This is because the issue here is different. Perhaps they have children either from him or from someone else. He is therefore obliged to be decent, observing the etiquette of the prescribed law, and not hurt the children by accusing their mother, and they are blameless. Hence the True Lord *Glorified is He* ordained a special law in this case which is mutual cursing (*al-mula'ana*); and this verse is called *al-ayat al-li'an*, (the verses of sworn allegation of adultery committed by either husband or wife).

'It is related that Hilal ibn Umayya went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him, "O Messenger of Allah, I did indeed see someone having intercourse with my wife, and if I left him in order to bring four witnesses, he would finish what he was doing and depart; and if I killed him, I would have transgressed against him.' Hence: What is the solution to the riddle? It is necessary to realize that Allah *Glorified is He* does not reveal legislation and legal judgment from the very beginning; rather, He leaves in existence domains and events of life which are in need of this judgment, such that the judgment is revealed and it coincides with the need for it. As it is said: water falls where there is someone with a burning thirst, In other words, when a judgment is revealed, it will come at the right time so people will seize upon it, They will feel that it was revealed for their sake after having keenly sought for a judgment in a matter for which no judgment had yet come.

Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed the law of mutual cursing *hukm al-mula'ana* for singular situations, for the case in which the husband witnesses such an ugly deed done by his spouse, and though he might have intervened personally, but he is unable to bring the required witnesses against the perpetrator in order to prove this case. For this reason, the Wise Law-Giver has established that the husband alone provides this testimony, and he is to repeat it four times in lieu of the four witnesses. He says: I call upon Allah as my witness that I am truthful in what I accuse my wife of, saying it four times. In the fifth time, he says: ‘and may the curse of Allah be upon me if I am lying.’ Thus, the role of the husband reaches its conclusion.

وَيَدۡرَؤُاْ عَنۡهَا ٱلۡعَذَابَ أَن تَشۡهَدَ أَرۡبَعَ شَهَٰدَٰتِۭ بِٱللَّهِ إِنَّهُۥ لَمِنَ ٱلۡكَٰذِبِينَ ٨
وَٱلۡخَٰمِسَةَ أَنَّ غَضَبَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡهَآ إِن كَانَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ٩

Punishment shall be averted from his wife if she in turn four times calls God to witness that her husband is lying [8] And, the fifth time, calls God to reject her if he is telling the truth [9]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 8-9)

The verb ‘to avert’ means to ‘ward off’ the punishment from the wife, by testifying in her turn four testimonies sworn by Allah, saying, ‘I call upon Allah as my witness that he is a liar in that which he accuses me of.’ In the fifth time, she says, ‘may Allah’s wrath be upon me if he is among those who say the truth.’ If the wife refuses to make this oath, then she is proven guilty of adultery. But if she swears the oath, they are even, and neither of them is a suitable spouse for the other, At this point, legally speaking, definitive separation is a must, without any possibility of reunion, and she is forbidden to him forever.(1) This legislation is a blessing from Allah, as it brought this matter to the best possible end. Hence, He *Glorified is He* says after this:

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(1) *In the narration, it is narrated that the wife of Hilal ibn Umayya, whom he accused of committing adultery with Sharik ibn Sahma’, swore the four oaths that she did not do it, and upon the fifth required oath, she remained silent for a time, until people thought that she was going to confess. But then she said, ‘I shall not disgrace my clan.’ And then she went on to say the [required] words. So the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him separated them and said, “Now let us wait, and if she gives birth to a child with curly hair and skinny legs, then it belongs to Sharik ibn Sahma’; but if she gives birth to a fair-skinned child with straight hair and small eyes, then it belongs to Hilal ibn Umayya.” She later bore a child with curly hair and skinny legs --in other words, verification and proof of the woman’s perjury and of Hilal’s truthfulness. Then* =

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُۥ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

If it were not for God's bounty and mercy towards you, if it were not that God accepts repentance and is wise . . .! [10]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 10)

That is to say, if it were not for this, you would be dishonoured and enmity would increase dangerously among you, but Allah's favour has safeguarded you through this wise legislation which is appropriate for this situation.

Defamation is a horrible crime against the right of the entire society, through which fornication spreads and by which bonds are severed. Such is the case for [falsely accused] chaste women, and it is even graver when it concerns one's own wife. But how would you react if such an utterance were made against a mother who is not the mother of just one, but rather a mother of all believers? This concerned the Mother of Believers 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her*. Here is an appropriate occasion to mention the context of in which 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* was slandered, and which is called the incident of the slander (*haditha al-ifk*). Why? Because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to give us an example in prophethood itself, and He wills to console 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* a woman of noble ancestry and Mother of the Believers, after what she was slandered. Hence, 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* shall remain an exemplary model for every noblewoman whose honour is the object of slander, and whose enemies are attempting to defame her image. We say to such a woman: do not take it so hard, for similar things were said about 'A'isha.

The verses concerning the incident of the slander stand as proof of the sincerity of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* in the delivery of the Message of his Lord. It was mentioned that people falsely accuse chaste women, and that they accuse their wives, but even more abominable is that they slander the wife of the Prophet and the Mother of Believers. Hence He *Glorified is He* says:

= *He peace and blessings be upon him said: "Were it not for that which was revealed of the Book of Allah concerning the two of them, it would be a serious matter for me and for her." This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (3:268).*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ جَآءُو بِٱلۡإِفۡكِ عُصۡبَةٞ مِّنكُمۡۚ لَا تَحۡسَبُوهُ شَرّٗا لَّكُمۖ بَلۡ هُوَ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡۚ لِكُلِّ ٱمۡرِيٕٖ
مِّنۡهُم مَّا ٱكۡتَسَبَ مِنَ ٱلۡإِثۡمِۚ وَٱلَّذِي تَوَلَّىٰ كِبۡرَهُۥ مِنۡهُمۡ لَهُۥ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿١١﴾

It was a group from among you that concocted the lie — do not consider it a bad thing for you [people]; it was a good thing — and every one of them will be charged with the sin he has earned. He who took the greatest part in it will have a painful punishment [11] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 11)

The falsehood here was blatant and wilful which is the most heinous type of lie because it inverts facts and fabricates a counter-reality scenario. As for the phrase 'are a group among you', it is a group whose activity is bound together by a common objective. It is thus that we say: a group/gang of drug-dealers, a gang of thieves. In other words, it is a group which is agreed upon carrying out an activity for a single goal. In a related sense, and since the people involved in this slander are a gang, it is thus inevitable that they share a single objective in maligning and disparaging, and their leader was 'Abdullah Ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, who was also the chief of the hypocrites. He is excused for being so since on the day that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered Medina, its inhabitants were fashioning a crown for 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy to choose as king over Medina(1). Hence, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* suddenly appeared and the people gathered around him and dispersed from around ('Abdullah ibn Ubayy), this left its mark upon his soul. For this reason, he is the One who said: 'They say, "If we return to Medina, the more honored [for power] will surely expel therefrom the humbler.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) He meant thereby that he was the worthiest of honour. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* replied to him, 'You are right, but honour will belong to Allah, His Messenger and the Believers, and thus the one to be driven out from it will be you.' 'Abdullah

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(1) *Ibn Hisham relates in (As-Sirat An-Nabawiya) (2:584): 'That his people had collected pearls in order to crown him and establish him as king over them. As they were in this state, then Allah Glorified is He brought them His Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. So, when his people left him for Islam, he came to bear a grudge, and he felt that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him had usurped him of a kingdom. Then when he saw that his people had refused everything but Islam, he himself became a Muslim, unwillingly and bent on hypocrisy and malice.'*

Ibn Ubayy is also the one who said: ‘Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of Allah until they disband.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) And what is astonishing is that he acknowledged that Muhammad was the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* saying it openly, and yet he rejected it by his deeds and behaviour, with blatant confusion occurring between his thought and his spoken word.

Since the True Lord *Glorified is He* labelled this incident as slander against the due right of ʿA’isha *may Allah be pleased with her* the Mother of the Believers, then they must have inverted the facts and said that which contradicts reality.

The incident occurred during the campaign against Banu Al-Mustaliq. When [The Prophet] *peace and blessings be upon him* intended to go on a military campaign, he used to draw a lot between his wives and whichever of them won would go out with him. This is what His *peace and blessings be upon him* sense of fairness required. And for this campaign, he had them draw stakes between them, and the lot fell to ʿA’isha, so she went out with him. After the campaign, and during preparations for the return, ʿA’isha *may Allah be pleased with her* said, ‘I went to answer the call of nature in the barren wasteland, and then I returned to my camel litter, looking for a necklace of mine made of Yemenite onyx of the precious kind. [So, she went back to look for it.] When she returned [to camp], she found that the people had already departed, and she could not find her camel. So, she said to herself, ‘they will surely find me missing and will return.’ But how could the people raise up the camel litter of ʿA’isha [to secure it to the camel’s back] without her in it? They say, ‘because women were slim not obese and ʿA’isha was especially slender. Hence, the men raised up her camel litter, unaware that she was not inside it. Then ʿA’isha fell asleep at the spot where her camel litter had been, in expectation of someone coming for her. Among the habits of the people then was that one of them would delay after the departure to inspect the place and comb over it, on the off chance that he might find something forgotten by the others, or a person who had fallen behind the caravan.

The rear-guard in this case was Safwan ibn Al-Mu’attal(1), and when he saw the figure of a person sleeping; he approached, and there was ʿA’isha. So, he made his she-camel kneel down near her, and turned his face away so that she could mount and then went off with her without looking at her which reflects great virtue and decency. Proof of this is that the Quran termed what they said about him as slander, that is to say, contrary to reality, as Safwan did nothing but the opposite of what they said.

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(1) *According to (Al-A`lam) by Az-Zirikli (3/206) Safwan ibn Al-Muʿattal ibn Rahda As-Salami Adh-Dhakwani Abu `Amr was a Companion who participated in the battle=*

Subsequently, when Safwan approached leading his she-camel with ʿA'isha, he was seen by some of the hypocrites, who then accused the two of them, saying against their due rights what is entirely unacceptable with regard to the Mother of the Believers. This campaign of slander was organized by the leader of hypocrisy in Medina, *'*Abdullah ibn Ubayy*,* as well as by Mistah Ibn Uthatha, Hassan Ibn Thabit and Hamna bint Jahsh, the wife of Talha ibn 'Ubaydullah and the sister of Zaynab bint Jahsh*,* who then circulated this accusation and broadcast it among the people.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not think it bad for you; rather, it is good for you.' But what is the good in such statements and in their broadcasting? When ʿA'isha was accused and her innocence was revealed by the Quran from above the seven Heavens, this will be recited and employed in worship until the Day of Resurrection. Some people will be disgraced in the Quran [due to their shameful action] while others will necessarily take heed, and will be afraid if they perform an act of disobedience that they will be similarly disgraced. Hence, this situation came as a practical lesson to the society of faith.

Yes, this incident turned into good because it was a kind of support for the Messenger of Allah and his call to faith. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* assists His Messenger in things which are joyful in order to deplete the hope of his enemies in gaining victory over him, even it be through falsification and deception, and even if it be in secret and through covert plotting. So, at the peak of the enmity of Quraysh towards the Messenger of Allah, people's belief in him was growing day after day.

They had previously conspired against him and plotted maliciously on the night of the [Prophet's] emigration, but they were not successful. Then

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= *of the Trench and all the other battles; he was present at the conquest of Damascus, and was martyred in Armenia. He narrated two Hadiths from the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. He died in 19 AH. Hakim says in his (Mustadrik) that he died in the 60 AH.*

they tried to cast an evil spell upon him, and indeed they did conjure a magic spell upon him comprised of a comb and brush which they put into the well of Dharwan. But Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* informed him of this, and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* sent ‘Ali who brought it forth(1).

Hence, they were incapable of confrontation, incapable of evil scheming and plotting, and even incapable of making use of the jinn and securing their assistance. And in this case, they were incapable of defaming the image of Prophecy or of damaging his reputation. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to his enemies, ‘Let your hopes be crushed, for you will never do harm to Muhammad.’ From this standpoint, the incident of slander was a good thing for the ummah.

Nevertheless, no one dared to inform ʿA’isha about what the hypocrites were saying against her. But the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* changed his behaviour towards her; no longer play with her as was his habit. He would enter her quarters and say ‘How goes it with you?’ ‘Aisha noticed this change, but she was unaware of any cause until one day she went somewhere with the mother of Mistah, one of those hypocrites, who stumbled and blurted out, 'may Mistah be wretched!' Whereupon ‘Aisha reproached her at the way she was speaking of her own son. The mother of Mistah, then, said, 'Do you have no idea of what he is saying?' At that, ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* went to her mother and asked her about what people were saying and she informed her.

Therefore, when the innocence of ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was revealed in the Quran, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* told her, ‘Get up and go thank Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*’ to which she retorted, ‘Rather, I thank Allah, the One Who pronounced my innocence.’(1) Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Every man of them shall have what he has earned of sin’. (*an-Nur:* 11)

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(1) *This is based on a Hadith related by both Al-Bukhari (3268) and Muslim (2189), that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: “Two men came to me [in a dream], then one of them sat at my head, and the other at my feet. Then the one at my head said to the one at my feet, or the one at my feet to the one at my head, ‘What ails the man?’ [The other man] said: ‘[He has been] bewitched.’ [The other man] said, ‘Who bewitched him?’ [The other] said, ‘Labib ibn Al-A`sam.’ [The other] said, ‘By what means?’ [The other] said, ‘Through a comb, fallen hair and desiccated male semen.’ [The other] said, ‘And where is it?’ [The other] said, ‘In the well of Dhi Dharwan.”*

Normally, the Arabic verb *kasaba* (to earn), without prefixes or infixes, is used in a positive sense, while the derivative stem of this same verb *(iktasaba)* (to come to possess, to commit) denotes misdeeds. Why? This is because a good deed is compatible with the nature of the soul, and is in harmony with its deepest nature. Thus, the person undertaking a good deed does not resist any of his innate desires, traits, or habits. This can be observed even in animals. You may notice, for example, that if you place a piece of meat down for a cat, it sits near you and eats it; but if it sneakily snatches the piece of meat from you, it will run away with it, and eat it far from you. Hence, in the very nature and make-up of a human being, and even in an animal, there is something which allows for the distinction between good and bad, between what is correct and what is wrong.

Accordingly, when you look at your daughter or your wife, you are naturally serene since your innate faculties find this natural and thus they do not feel any inconformity with you. But if you shift your gaze to what is unlawful for you, your glance becomes agitated and you steal it, and you try to conceal it so that no one will notice it. You may also feel confused and your colour may change. Why? This is because you are doing something unnatural, something which you do not have the right to do. Therefore, your own faculties feel a sense of incompatibility. This is a natural matter to which your soul reacts spontaneously. As for doing what is wrong and bad, this requires falsification (*iftial*) [this verbal noun is of the same structure as the verb *(iktasaba)* discussed here.] Consequently, the verb *(iktasaba)* implies cunning, plotting and scheming, which is similar to falsification (*al-iftial*).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and (as for) him who took upon himself the main part thereof, he shall have a grievous chastisement.’ (*an-Nur:* 11) In Arabic, *tawalla kibra ash-shay* means for someone to undertake it with an ample share in it. Alternatively, we say the person is a leading partisan in something. The one alluded to here is 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy who undertook this campaign, and took the lead in its execution and its broadcasting. ‘He shall have a grievous chastisement’ (*an-Nur:* 11). In other words, a punishment which corresponds to this crime is to be inflicted on him.

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(1) *The story of the incident of slander is narrated in all its length in the (Sahih) of Al-Bukhari (4750) and in the (Sahih) of Muslim (2770), and by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (6 / 59, 60) on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

لَّوْلَآ إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ ظَنَّ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتُ بِأَنفُسِهِمْ خَيْرًا وَقَالُوا۟ هَٰذَآ إِفْكٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٢﴾

When you heard the lie, why did believing men and women not think well of their own people and declare, ‘This is obviously a lie’? [12] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* hereby directs us to the approach the believers should have in such situation of discordant intrigue. They should think the best of one another and restrain themselves from such accusations which are inappropriate for the community of believers. Accordingly, the first ears to hear this talk from the first tongue to utter it should have rejected it. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* would not cheat Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the chosen one out of all His human creatures, by making his wife the object of doubt and accusation, to say nothing of calumniating her with this heinous crime.

It should have been expected, even before the interdiction was revealed in the Quran, that it would come from the souls of the believers themselves, so they would reject this talk.

The phrase *lawla* 'if only' is a particle used for incitement and provocation. Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘the believing men and the believing women’ (*an-Nur:* 12) since some men and women were engrossed in this discordant intrigue. Furthermore, the Quran does not urge them to think well of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or his wife, but rather to think well of their own selves. This is because this matter is inappropriate for ordinary believers, not to mention the wife of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This verse states that they should have said that what was said about ‘Aishah *Allah be pleased with her* was an evident falsehood, even before the Quran had revealed her innocence. That is to say, it is clear, blatant intentional lie because it is against the Mother of the Believers whom Allah *Glorified is He* purified and chose to be the wife of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّوْلَا جَآءُو عَلَيْهِ بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَآءَۚ فَإِذْ لَمْ يَأْتُوا۟ بِٱلشُّهَدَآءِ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ هُمُ ٱلْكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

And why did the accusers not bring four witnesses to it? If they cannot produce such witnesses, they are the liars in God's eyes [13] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 13)

The preceding verses have mentioned the legal ruling concerning slander and have prescribed that the one who accuses a married woman of this charge of adultery is obliged to produce four witnesses to prove the truthfulness of what he said, and if he cannot produce them, then he is the liar before Allah *Glorified is He* and the prescribed punishment for slander must be executed upon him.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُۥ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ لَمَسَّكُمْ فِى مَآ أَفَضْتُمْ فِيهِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٤﴾

If it were not for God's bounty and mercy towards you in this world and the next, you would already have been afflicted by terrible suffering for indulging in such talk [14] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 14)

In the Quranic verse: '…the discourse which you entered into' (*an-Nur:* 14), the Arabic word in question *afadtum* signifies that one proceeds rashly with haste to do something. This implies that a major event takes less time than what one might imagine it would require. For example, a matter which is carried out in two minutes, when you rush in order to reduce the time, takes only one minute. So, in the incident under examination, it is as if they hurried in this talk when they initially heard it- as it is said: he hastened into it and was abased. But, why was Allah *Glorified is He* magnanimous and merciful to them that He did not punish, nor made them pay for their slander against the Mother of the Believers?

The scholars say: Allah *Glorified is He* took this affair to be a moral lesson and an admonition, making it a means of clarification for Muslims. Hence, the objective was not to send down punishment upon them, but rather to teach and give them a lesson in protecting the honour and dignity of the believers.

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُۥ بِأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَتَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِكُم مَّا لَيْسَ لَكُم
بِهِۦ عِلْمٌ وَتَحْسَبُونَهُۥ هَيِّنًا وَهُوَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٥﴾

When you took it up with your tongues, and spoke with your mouths things you did not know [to be true], you thought it was trivial but to God it was very serious [15] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 15)

Look at the eloquent manner in which the Quran expresses their hastiness in spreading and broadcasting this talk without awareness, or careful thought. It is well known that, undoubtedly, receiving news is done by ears, not by tongues. But with quickness of the transfer of this talk, it was as if they were receiving it with their tongues, as if the stage of listening had been omitted, and as soon as they heard it, they repeated it.

Allah says, '…and spoke with your mouths what you had no knowledge of…' (*an-Nur:* 15). This means that the talk was simply transmitted by mouths to others without investigating it. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* says after this: '…what you had no knowledge of…' (*an-Nur:* 15). This talk is not trifling as they believed, rather, it is horrendous in the sight of Allah, as it involves the honour of a believer, and the dignity of the believer is inviolable. What would you think then when this is against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself?

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْلَآ إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ قُلْتُم مَّا يَكُونُ لَنَآ أَن نَّتَكَلَّمَ بِهَٰذَا سُبْحَٰنَكَ هَٰذَا بُهْتَٰنٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾

When you heard the lie, why did you not say, 'We should not repeat this – God forbid! – It is a monstrous slander'? [16] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 16)

It is with this that you should have encountered this gossip, that you should have said it is not permitted and not appropriate for us to spread such talk. The expression *subhanak* 'glory be to Thee!' is said at moments of amazement at some occurrence; and the meaning here is: glorified be Allah; we honour, exalt and raise Him far above allowing such abhorrent lie against His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to be circulated among us. For this talk, it is not admissible that we should speak of it, even if only to deny it. Since if talk of it affirmatively is a crime, then talk of it with the purpose of negation implies a certain suspicion that this might happen.

It is as if one says: So-and-so is god-fearing, or so-and-so does not drink wine; hence, it is as if, despite the denial, you have made him the object of suspicion of it. Therefore, it is not admissible to attribute something bad to him, even by denial, as this is disparagement against the person, not praise.

Likewise, talking about this accusation against the Mother of the Believers, ‘Aisha, is not appropriate, even if only by negation. The translation of the Quranic phrase ‘…a great calumny’ (*buhtan azhim*) (*an-Nur:* 16) is that it is a lie which flabbergasts the one who hears it, and astonishes him for its repulsiveness and horridness. Thus, we ardently refrain from engaging in such talk, even if we are only denying it.

Allah states:

يَعِظُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ أَن تَعُودُوا۟ لِمِثْلِهِۦٓ أَبَدًا إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧﴾
وَيُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْـَٔايَـٰتِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

God warns you never to do anything like this again, if you are true believers [17] God makes His messages clear to you: God is all knowing, all wise [18] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 17-18)

Al-w’az 'Admonition' means that one preaches others, stressing on the very important matters or issues. For example, When one feels that he is about to die, he admonishes his children and give counsel to them. In this case, one does not advise them on all the affairs of life, rather only on the very important matters which help people do the good with life. Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Benevolence and Mercy admonishes his slaves and gives them counsel because He does not want to punish them for their sins.

The verse ends with this condition: ‘if you are believers’ (*an-Nur:* 17) which is an incitement and provocation to the body of believers to refrain from such talk, and not to fall into it again. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to them: if you revert to the like of this, then re-examine your faith because at that moment your faith will be deficient and open to doubt.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَن تَشِيعَ ٱلْفَٰحِشَةُ فِى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَهُمْ
عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

A painful punishment waits in this world and the next for those who like indecency to spread among the believers: God knows and you do not [19] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 19)

Regarding the expression *yuhibun* 'love…' in this verse is an act of the heart, and speech is an act of the tongue and an applied translation of what is in the heart. Thus, the meaning is that this applies also to those who love this even if they do not speak of it because this matter entails phases, beginning with love, which is an act of the heart, then speaking, then listening without rejecting.

Given the repulsiveness of this crime, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions its first phase, and this is merely the act of the heart which has not been transformed into action and speech. Hence, this is a dangerous matter.

Some people may think that publicizing adultery is a disgrace only for the one who is accused. Yes, it is that for the accused, and may lead to his death, or declaring his innocence. However, what is worse is that it will be a bad example for society.

Now, this is a directive from Allah *Glorified is He* towards a general issue and precept that must be observed. When you hear a report which offends decency, violates honour, or breaks the laws of Allah *Glorified is He* then beware of spreading it among people because the diffusion of such things gives rise to a behavioural example for the listener. Upon hearing such news, one may find an excuse for oneself by saying to oneself: so-and-so did such-and-such, and so-and-so did such-and-such. This urges the person to engage in such an act. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* gives a stern warning to those who openly divulges lewd, foul acts and spreads and publicizes them among people, saying: '…they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and the hereafter…' (*an-Nur:* 19).

Allah *Glorified is He* has not made anyone immune from disobedience and misdeeds, but even worse than a bad deed is its diffusion among people. It may be that the divulging is against the due right of a man who is respected and revered in his community, whose word carries weight and who has a position of high standing. So, if you hear something said against him, which is not permissible, it may be that what you hear against this person arouses your dislike, and causes you to deny his good deeds and his positive traits. Then, it is as if you had deprived the society of the good deeds of this man.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* conceals the unseen things of people; their hidden acts of disobedience, from other people. Hence, concealment of the unseen things of people from other people is a great blessing which enriches good in society and causes it to flourish. Likewise, it causes you to interact with others and to derive benefit from them despite their defects. How true are the words of the poet who says:

So grasp hold of my knowledge and do not rely on my deeds

And harvest the fruit and leave the wood for the fire.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُۥ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

If it were not for God's bounty and mercy and the fact that He is compassionate and merciful . . .! [20]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 20)

Note how much benefit Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon his slaves through this incident. There is a Divine Grace in every phase of the phases of this incident as expressed in Allah's words: 'And were it not for Allah's grace on you and His mercy…' (*an-Nur:* 20). This is a proof that what had happened was a blessing and good for the believers, even if they thought otherwise.

But where the apodosis to the clause mentioned in this verse the conclusion is understood from the contexts and its implication is that you would have been afflicted with dishonour and destruction among many other evil things that you may think of. Allah, out of His Favour and Grace, protected you from all of this.

In another verse Allah *Glorified is He* makes clear the status of this favour affirming that it is in the Grace of Allah and in His Mercy- in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather (*Yunus:* 58). Allah *Glorified is He* has laid down legislation and loves the one who acts according to it; but one's joy is not complete with mere deeds, rather, it is by Allah's Favour and Mercy that He accepts these deeds. Therefore, the Favour of Allah is what one really needs in case of any failure to follow His Guidance.

After relating the events of this incident, Allah warns the believers of following Satan by saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّبِعُواْ خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِۚ وَمَن يَتَّبِعۡ خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ
فَإِنَّهُۥ يَأۡمُرُ بِٱلۡفَحۡشَآءِ وَٱلۡمُنكَرِۚ وَلَوۡلَا فَضۡلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَرَحۡمَتُهُۥ مَا زَكَىٰ مِنكُم مِّنۡ
أَحَدٍ أَبَدٗا وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَآءُۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿٢١﴾

Believers, do not follow in Satan's footsteps – if you do so, he will urge you to indecency and evil. If it were not for God's bounty and mercy towards you, not one of you would ever have attained purity. God purifies whoever He will: God is all hearing, all seeing [21] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 21)

It is as if Satan has multiple footsteps, not a single footstep. Allah *Glorified is He* clarified to us the Satan's enmity towards the children of Adam. This enmity has its antecedent cause, and is not merely hypothetical discourse. When he disdained to prostrate himself to Adam, and disobeyed Allah's Command to him, and even divulged what was in his soul, contending that he was better than Adam as he was created of fire, while Adam was created of dust. (*al-A'raf:* 12) Satan also said: 'Shall I make obeisance to him whom Thou hast created of dust?' (*al-Isra':* 61) Hence, he justified his refusal to prostrate to Adam on the basis that he was superior, as if his enmity to Adam *peace be upon him* is an enmity rooted in envy of his station and status with Allah.

When Allah *Glorified is He* informs us of the enmity of the Satan with reference to his refusal to prostrate, he is thereby warning us against him, alerting us to his danger, and cultivating in us immunity to him. This is because his enmity towards us is a focused antagonism, not an enmity which he applies in any which way, rather, it is enmity with a method and a line of action.

Hence, the beginning of this line of action is that he knew how to swear an oath, thereby gaining access to man through the door of Allah's Power over His creation. Thus, Satan swore by Allah's Might that he would surely make them all live an evil life. (*Sad:* 82)

Thus, if Allah *Glorified is He* had wanted to force us to be believers, Satan would have had no means against us. Instead, He *Glorified is He* left us to make a choice, and it is through this door that Satan has access to us. Therefore, he subsequently declares that he will mislead all except those who are devoted of Allah's servants (*al-Hijr:* 40). So, whoever has this quality; being devoted to worshipping Allah, then the Satan has no means of access to him. Hence, the issue of this enmity is not between Allah *Glorified is He* and Satan, but rather, between Satan and the children of Adam.

Now, Allah's Statement: 'O you who believe!' (*an-Nur:* 21) represents a summons to the believers in Allah. It is as if He *Glorified is He* is saying: 'pay attention to the honour of your faith in Him and stay away from what weakens this faith or undermines the strength of the believers in any way and know for certain that Satan has multiple footsteps.'

Allah *Glorified is He* orders the believers 'not to follow the footsteps of Satan,' (*an-Nur:* 21) for if he whispers to you from one direction and you resist him, and he finds that you have firmness on that side, he will come at you from another side, simultaneously causing you to see yourself in a favourable light. And in this manner, your enemy continues until he brings you down. For he knows that every person has a point of weakness; so Satan keeps enticing him until he attains to this point.

Shaytan 'Satan' refers to a subversive rebel of the Jinn. The Jinn are much like men, for among them are those who are obedient and those who are disobedient. The disobedient one among them is a demon, and the evillest among them is the devil (Iblis). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* when speaking of Iblis, says in the chapter of *al-Kahf* '…he was of the jinn, and he transgressed the commandment of his Lord,' (*al-Kahf:* 50).

We have previously mentioned that you can distinguish between an act of disobedience enticed from within one's soul, and an act of disobedience enticed by the Satan. The soul urges you to commit the misdeed which fulfils to own needs only. However, Satan desires that you become sinfully disobedient in any form or fashion. So, if you resist him in one act of disobedience, he will pull you towards another, whatever it might be.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and whoever follows the footsteps of Satan, then surely he bids the doing of indecency and evil…' (*an-Nur:* 21). Here, it may be asked: where is the apodosis of this conditional sentence with the relative pronoun 'whoever'? It is said: the apodosis is omitted because it can be understood from the context, and that it is signified by the mention of its reason and causes. You can surmise the apodosis to be: whoever follows Satan's footsteps Allah will make him taste the punishment of hellfire. This is because Satan only enjoins deeds of abomination and indecency, so whoever follows his footsteps shall have nothing but punishment. Hence, the causer has taken the place, grammatically speaking, of the apodosis.

The language of the Quran is not that of people, rather, it is the Word of Allah, the Lord of the Worlds and its style is sublime, requiring attentive thought which gleans the meanings; it is not merely words and prolixity.

You may consider many examples of eloquence in the Quran. Consider, for example, the Quranic verse of the chapter of *an-Naml* as Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) orders the hoopoe to take his letter and hand it over to the people of Sheba, then turn away from them and see what answer they return. (*an-Naml:* 28)

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* relates that the Queen of Sheba said: 'O chief! Surely an honourable letter has been delivered to me. (*an-Naml:* 29)

Now, contemplate all that happened between these two occurrences which has been omitted because they are known to us. Hence the attentiveness of the reader and his intelligence do not require that we tell him: 'then the Hoopoe went… etc.,' for these events are automatically put in order by the mind.

In this way, Satan himself made these footsteps clear, and proclaimed them, elucidating his ways of seduction. Did he not say that he would lie in wait for them all along Allah’s Straight Path? (*al-A‘raf:* 16) So Satan has no need for those who pursue the crooked path, for they are his followers. Hence, he does not go to pubs, for example; instead, he goes to mosques in order to spoil the prayers of the worshippers. Therefore, some are bothered by the whisperings which afflict them in their prayer, while in reality they are healthy symptoms of faith. If you were not in a state of obedience and worship, Satan would not whisper to you.

Our great problem, however, is that Satan (Shaytan) gives us only the end of the thread and we follow him and keep following the line.(1) We should only, at the moment when the Satan whispers to us, seek refuge in Allah from him saying: *A'udhu bi-Allah min ash-Shaytan ar-Rajim* 'I seek refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan'. Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to seek refuge in Him if false imputations come to us from Satan. (*al-A‘raf:* 200)

Therefore, beware of accepting the end of the thread, for if you take it, you will not have the power to resist him after that. Among the footsteps of Satan, as we find in the Quran, is that he certainly comes to us from before us and from behind us, and from our right-hand side and from our left-hand side. (*al-A‘raf:* 17)

Thus, in tempting man Satan has a method and a well-laid plan, as he comes at man from his four sides: from in front of him, from behind him, from his right and his left. Yet, nothing was mentioned about coming at him from above or from below. This is because the former alludes to the exalted heights of Divinity, and the latter to the humility of worship and servitude, as exemplified by when you raise your hands upwards in supplication, and place your forehead on the ground in your prostration. Therefore, your enemy does not come at you from these two directions.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and were it not for Allah's Grace upon you and His Mercy, not one of you would have ever been pure, but Allah purifies whom He pleases…’ (*an-Nur:* 21).

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(1) In Arabic: *Nakurru fi Al-Khayt karra.*

We said earlier that the favour of recompense is affected alternatively by two factors: recompense based on justice when you get what you deserve, and recompense based on favour in which case Allah gives you above what you deserve. Hence, in supplication we should say: *Allahuma 'Amilna bi-l-Fadl la bi-l-'Adl wa bi-l-Ihsan la bi-l-Mizan* meaning 'O Allah! Judge us with gracious favour not with justice, and with magnanimity not according to the measuring scale, and with healing power not according to mathematical reckoning'. For, if Allah *Glorified is He* dealt with us according to justice, we would all be lost.

But in what manner does this favour manifest itself? Allah's favour manifests itself on this Muslim *ummah* in that He *Glorified is He* has not punished it with annihilation, as he did with previous peoples. In addition, He *Glorified is He* granted it resistance before it was exposed to incidents, and warned us long ago about Satan, before we fall into acts of disobedience, and before we are taken unawares by events. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that He informed Adam of Satan's enmity to him and his wife (*Ta Ha:* 117). Otherwise mankind would have drowned in the whirlpool of sinful behaviour.

It is thus that warning of danger before it occurs cultivates the power of resistance in the soul. Allah *Glorified is He* does not abandon us to heedlessness so that we fall into disobedience, just as we fortify ourselves against diseases by taking the necessary immunization in order to resist them.

Concerning the Quranic phrase: '…not one of you would have ever been pure…' (*an-Nur:* 21), the verb *(zaka)* means to cleanse or to purify oneself; '…but Allah purifies whom He pleases; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.' (*an-Nur:* 21) He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah is Hearing, Knowing,' (*an-Nur:* 21) because it is stated in the preceding verse: 'Surely (as for) those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe…' (*an-Nur:* 19). This marks the conclusion of the incident of slander (*hadithat al-ifk*) which shook the Islamic society, touching Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* his companion Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* his wife, the Mother of Believers, 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* and a group of companions. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah is Hearing' (*an-Nur:* 21) i.e. of what was said, and 'Knowing' (*an-Nur:* 21) of what hearts conceal of love for spreading foul slander.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:(1)

وَلَا يَأۡتَلِ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡفَضۡلِ مِنكُمۡ وَٱلسَّعَةِ أَن يُؤۡتُوٓاْ أُوْلِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ وَٱلۡمَسَٰكِينَ وَٱلۡمُهَٰجِرِينَ
فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِۖ وَلۡيَعۡفُواْ وَلۡيَصۡفَحُوٓاْۗ أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَن يَغۡفِرَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٌ ٢٢

Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kinsmen, the poor, those who emigrated in God's way: let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is most forgiving and merciful [22] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 22)

A group of eminent and good companions of Prophet Muhammad got entangled in the incident of the slander. But they were beguiled by what was said and were pulled along behind those who circulated this rumour. Among these was Mistah ibn Uthathah, the maternal cousin of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* who used to provide for and look after him, given his poverty. So when Mistah participated and got involved in talk denigrating 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* swore that he would no longer be charitable to him, though he and his family were able to live thanks to the wealth and magnanimity of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*. It is thus that this divisive intrigue that caused some well-off people to become stingy.

This is an example of someone who ungratefully denies the good done unto him and does not give proper value to those who exercise benevolence. Such an act causes people to refrain from goodness and drives them away from acts of kindness. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to set straight this issue for us, for this perspective does not concur with the nature of faith, because he who disobeys Allah in that which concerns you can only be recompensed by you obeying Allah in what concerns such a person.

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(1) *The occasion of revelation: Al-Qurttubi says in his Tafsir (6:4742): 'According to the most well-acknowledged of the narrations, these verses were revealed concerning the story of Abu Bakr ibn Abu Quhafah and Mistah ibn Uthathah. The latter was the son of the former's maternal aunt and one of the indigent emigrants who fought at Badr. Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him used to provide him with subsistence. But during the incident of the slander, when Mistah spoke ill of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her the daughter of Abu Bakr, Abu Bakr swore that he would never again assist him financially, nor benefit him in any other way.'*

When you leave the punishment of the one who has wronged you to Allah and pardon him yourself, you have thus left him to a more severe punishment, for if you were to punish him, you would do it according to your capacity and power, but if you leave his punishment to Allah, He would punish him to the extent of His *Glorified is He* Power and Capacity.

Hence, the one who forgives is harder of heart than the one who is vengeful. We have previously given an example of this in the brother who hits his younger brother and then his father comes and finds his young one ill-treated and wronged, so he embraces him and seeks to appease him and to compensate him for the injustice afflicted upon him by his brother. The same is the case with the situation under discussion and for Allah is the highest attribute.

Accordingly, it is imperative for you to be happy with those whom Allah has placed under your care, and to be benevolent towards him, not to return a wrong with its like. Thus, this verse was revealed concerning Mistah ibn Uthathah when Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* swore he would not dispense charity on him and his family, and to withhold from him his gifts and kindness. It was revealed to rectify this perspective on the part of As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* and to direct his attention to the side of eternal good that resides with Allah, not with people.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And let not those of you who possess grace and abundance swear…’ (*an-Nur:* 22). In Arabic, the verbs *ya'tali* and *ta'alla* means to swear. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* using the expression *ulu* ‘…those of you…’ which signifies the plural, magnifying his importance in view of his precedence and status in Islam, for in every respect he has superiority. Therefore, Allah ascribed to him the same two descriptors which He *Glorified is He* ascribed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Hence, He says to As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him*: ‘…they should pardon and turn away…’ (*an-Nur:* 22), the same as He says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘…pardon them and turn away…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 13).

Moreover, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was the second of the two in the cave, and second of the two in many affairs. Thus, he is the second of the two in emigration [to Medina], and the second of the two to accept the Message of Islam in the very beginning. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said of him, ‘In pre-Islamic times, Abu Bakr and I were like two race horses.’ That is to say, in competition in doing good. ‘I preceded him to Prophet-hood and he followed me, and had he preceded me to it, I would have followed him.’(1)

As Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* has many distinctions in multiple domains, Allah does not address him in the singular form, but rather in the plural form, out of honour and magnification. For example, Although Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was known for his compassion and tenderness of heart, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away and some tribes gave up Islam and revolted against Muslims, he stood his ground and said [concerning the rebels]: ‘By Allah, if they withhold from me a camel's hobble due as obligatory alms (*zakat*) which they used to render to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* I will fight them with the sword, even if I only find a tiny bit [missing].’(2)

Such was the standpoint of As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* tender-hearted, gentle, possessed of mercy and pity, of whom his daughter said, ‘Verily he is given to weeping,’ that is to say, he weeps frequently. While ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* on the other hand, despite what is known of his severity and harshness against the disbelievers, opposed him in the matter of war. Yet this contradiction in the attitude of each of them stands as proof that Islam is not a disposition which takes possession of the Muslim, but rather a stance to which the Muslim reverts depending upon the situation. Now, the situation of apostasy is what turned As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* into a courageous lion of hard heart, and if ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* had been in his position of responsibility and had done what As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* did, one would say: this is the severity people were accustomed to from ‘Umar.

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(1) *It was related by Abu Said Al-Khudri that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘The most benevolent of people towards me in his companionship and wealth is Abu Bakr, and if I were to take a bosom companion other than my Lord, I would have taken Abu Bakr, but instead there is the brotherhood of Islam and its bonds of affection. Let there not remain in the mosque a single (private) door but that it be sealed up, except for the door of Abu Bakr.’ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, (3654).*

(2) *This Hadith is related by both Al-Bukhari (7284, 7285) and Muslim (20) on the authority of Abu Hurayra with the following wording: ‘By Allah, I will surely fight those who make a distinction between prayer and obligatory alms (zakat), for obligatory alms are due on wealth. By Allah, if they withhold from me camels [of such alms] which they used to render unto the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him I will fight them for withholding them.’*

Hence, it is as if Islam does not wish to imprint the Muslim with a particular disposition which remains unchanged in him. Rather, it is the specific situation which imprints you through faith. And this is what we mentioned regarding the Quranic verse where Allah *Glorified is He* states that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah; those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. (*al-Fath:* 29)

A Muslim is not innately inclined to harshness alone, or to mercy alone. Instead, he should act in every situation according to what suits it in the light of the laws laid down by Allah.

Now, as regards the Quranic verse: ‘those of you who possess grace and abundance…’ (*an-Nur:* 22), Allah *Glorified is He* addresses As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him*: you are a virtuous devout man, and you have ample means, so do not succumb and do not give preference to yourself over others because of anger. It is not befitting for a virtuous man to sever the bonds of kinship for the like of this error which Mistah fell into, especially since he got the retribution as Allah legislated, and received eighty lashes under the prescribed punishment for calumny. It is not right that you punish him further after this.

Among the marks of forbearance of Islam is that whoever indulges in a crime with a prescribed punishment (*hadd*) and receives this punishment, it is not permissible to abuse him for his sin. This is because he has repented and Allah has purified him of the sin through the prescribed punishment, and the matter is closed and no one has the right to come between the slave and his Lord.

So, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to Abu Bakr: go back to your state of virtue and benevolence and be a conduit of generosity and do not cut your ties of kinship. He *Glorified is He* thereby, desired to purify the souls of the effects of this divisive upheaval which shook the Muslim society in Medina.

It is not befitting for a virtuous and well-off person to treat people with simple justice. While it is true that Mistah deserved this rupture of relations and deprivation, yet meting out such a penalty is unfitting for As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him,* a man of virtue and wealth.

If you were to undertake a world survey of the number of believers and disbelievers in Allah, you would find that the believers are a minority and the disbelievers a majority. Now, does Allah *Glorified is He* say to those whom He assigned with the mission of distributing His Provision to all people: 'give to those who believe in Allah and pass over those who disbelieve’? It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* provides us with an example in Himself, since just as He gives to the one who disbelieves in Him and provides his sustenance indeed, he may even be in a better condition than one who believes so, you also should not withhold your giving from one who has wronged you.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us in another verse not to make His Name an excuse in our oaths against doing good and acting piously, and making peace among mankind, for Allah is the All-Hearer, All Knower. (*al-Baqara:* 224)

So, if you are kind to a person and he should make some unexpected blunder, then do not swear by Allah that you will not be kind to him. For your rage against him may calm down, and you may want to show him kindness, but then you may use your oath as a pretext for not following through. Therefore, do not make Allah the object of an oath which restrains you from acts of benevolence.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…against giving to the near of kin and the poor and those who have fled in Allah's way…’ (*an-Nur:* 22). It is correct that Mistah was among the near of kin to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and among the needy, but Allah gave him another distinction that is, what he said does not deprive from the quality of being from among those who migrated and his sin does not exclude him from this great honour.

For among the favours of Allah *Glorified is He* unto His slaves is that a misdeed does not negate a good deed. On the contrary, a good deed erases a misdeed which comes before it. As He *Glorified is He* explains in the Quran that good deeds do away with misdeeds (*Hud:* 114).

So, in spite of what Mistah fell into, Allah maintained him in the affection and heart-felt sympathy of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and preserved his status as one of those who migrated.

Concerning '…and they should pardon and turn away…' (*an-Nur:* 22), *al-'Afw* (pardon) means waiving punishment for a sin. But you might pardon the sinner and then rebuke him; in other words, you grant him your pardon, but constantly remind him that he does not deserve it. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* urges us to turn away from blame following pardon. Turning away (*as-Safh*) means relinquishing the notion of having granted a favour and not recalling the mistake to the one who committed it such that he feels that punishment, would be lighter on him than your having pardoned him. This is because when Allah *Glorified is He* establishes the laws which regulate people's relations with one another, He takes into account all the various morals and characters of people. He does not enact laws taking into consideration people with higher moral only, but rather considers all levels of morals. This is in order to deal with each one of us according to the extent of his faith, and of his compliance to the commands of Allah.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* orders that if we punish, then we do it with the like of that with which we were afflicted. But if we are patient, it is better for those who are patient (*an-Nahl:* 126). If we examine the true nature of equivalence in responding to a wrongdoing, we would find that it is difficult to assess. Thus, if a person gave you a blow, do you have the capability to retaliate with its exact equivalent; with the same strength, with the same pain, such that you yourself would not be the unjust aggressor? Indeed, if you gave some serious thought to this question of exact equivalence, you would surely prefer granting pardon rather than stepping into these other labyrinths.

We have already mentioned the story of the usurer who stipulated as a condition upon the borrower that if he was late in repayment that a pound of flesh would be cut from him. When the man was late in repayment, the usurer brought legal action against him before a judge, informing him of the condition upon which the two of them had agreed. But the judge was clever, and said to the usurer: take a knife and cut a pound of his flesh, but if you take more than that, we will take the same from you, and if you take too little, we will take the same from you. At this point, the usurer retracted his demand because he was unable to make a proper appraisal of the weight in question. Hence, if we abstain from retaliatory punishment, we thereby widen the scope of pardon, and the issue comes to its best possible conclusion. On another level, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions those who restrain anger and who pardon the people, for Allah loves the doers of good. (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

Allah *Glorified is He* provides us with varying levels of response to bad deeds done against us: responding in kind is one level, restraining anger is another level, granting pardon is a third level, being forbearing is a fourth level, and above all of these is the level of doing good to the one who wrongs you, for Allah loves the doers of good. (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

It is here where Allah *Glorified is He* sets an example by Himself for His slaves, hence He says: '…Do you not love that Allah should forgive you?' (*an-Nur:* 22) Just as you desire that Allah forgives your sins, why do you not yourself forgive the one who has wronged you? It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wants to bring reconciliation between us. For this reason, when this verse was revealed concerning Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'I love O Lord, I love O Lord, I love O Lord!'(1) The particle *(ala)*, translated above as: '…Do you not…' is meant to encourage and urge this good trait of character. Allah's saying, '…And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful' (*an-Nur:* 22) thus shows that whoever models himself based on the moral standards set by Allah shall have forgiveness and will have mercy on his side. Who is it that does not desire to be marked by some of the attributes of Allah? Then, let him be characterized as being forgiving and merciful.

Allah says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir (3/267), Ibn Kathir mentions that Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him said, 'Indeed, by Allah, we do certainly desire that You forgive us our sins O Our Lord'. Then he reinstated the support he used to dispense on Mistah and said, 'I shall not withdraw it from him ever again', in contrast to that which he said previously: 'By Allah I shall not make him the beneficiary of any benefit ever again'.*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَرۡمُونَ ٱلۡمُحۡصَنَٰتِ ٱلۡغَٰفِلَٰتِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ
لُعِنُواْ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿٢٣﴾

Those who accuse honourable but unwary believing women are rejected by God, in this life and the next. A painful punishment awaits them [23] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 23)

The verses first discussed the legal punishment for slander and the ramifications of the incident of slander against ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her*. The preceding verse was about the rebuke for Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* for the question of sustenance. Then the thread of discourse returned to the fundamental issue, slander. So why did the question of sustenance enter in upon this topic?

Scholars say that this is because in every battle there is a conflict which may have repercussions relating to sustenance and Allah *Glorified is He* has assumed responsibility for sustenance for all people, for it is He *Glorified is He* who brought them into existence, both believers and non-believers. So, when you give to someone in need, it is then you who are the giver out of what Allah has bestowed on you and you who are the outstretched Hand of Allah with the means of His sustenance.

Allah *Glorified is He* respects the individual ownership of man, although He *Glorified is He* is his Provider and his Benefactor. Yet, as long as He gives him, the gift becomes his possession, but if He urges him to expend it in charity, He takes it from him as a loan. Hence Allah *Glorified is He* calls it a ‘loan’ (*al-Baqara:* 245).

Thus, if the wealthy spends upon the indigent, Allah deems it as a loan and takes upon Himself to repay it. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* does not take back His gift, for as long as He gives you sustenance, He does not take it from you except in the form of a loan.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says that Muslims are called upon to spend in Allah's way, but among them are those who are niggardly and whoever is niggardly is niggardly against his own soul. (*Muhammad:* 38)

In another passage, He *Glorified is He* says concerning possessions that if He should ask Muslims for it and urge them, they will be niggardly, and He will bring forth their malice (*Muhammad:* 37). Since man works hard and exerts a great deal of strenuous effort to collect wealth, it becomes dear to him and therefore he becomes niggardly with it. So, Allah takes it from him as a loan, returned with augmentation. Sustenance and possessions have this importance being the first anchor of the fleet of man, as the establisher of civilization on earth. This is the reason why the discourse diverges from the main issue here and mentions this verse which relates to sustenance.

A similar example is also found in the Quranic verse urging Muslims to constantly attend to prayers and to the middle prayer. (*al-Baqara:* 238) This verse is mentioned in the middle of matters dealing with the prescribed waiting period following divorce (*al-'idda*), expiation of sins and the prescribed waiting period for a woman whose husband has died. So, what is the relationship between prayer and such other matters?

Scholars say that this is because angry disagreements which occur frequently alter the human soul and stir up rancour. However, once you perform ablution and offer prayers, your soul calms down and becomes serene and you face such issues of discord with a bit more acceptance and goodwill.

Let us to return to the Quranic verse: 'Surely those who accuse chaste believing women, unaware (of the evil)…' (*an-Nur:* 23). The Arabic word *al-muhsanat* translated here as 'chaste women' has three meanings: she is the married woman because fortification (*al-ihsan*) means protection, as if she has protected herself through marriage. Or it means she is modest and virtuous; even if she is not married, she is fortified in her own nature. Finally, the word *al-muhsana* also refers to the free noblewoman since the activity of prostitution and fornication was particular to slave girls.

Concerning the Arabic word *al-ghafilat*, translated here as 'unaware (of the evil),' it is the plural of *ghafilah*, and she is the one who has no idea of such matters and her mind is void of anything concerning this activity. Relevant here is the Hadith where Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was narrated to have asked Barira, the servant girl of 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her*, 'What do you have to say about 'Aisha, O Barira?' She said, 'She prepares the dough and then falls asleep next to it and the household livestock come and eat of it and she had no idea.(1)' This is tantamount to unthinking carelessness because she was still young and had not yet reached the stage of mature puberty with which comes the maturity of certainty and faith.

You can notice this unthinking carelessness in a young girl when you say to her: would you marry so-and-so? She will say: No, I will marry so-and-so. This is because she has no idea of the meaning of marital relations. However, when she grows older and understands such things, if you mention marriage to her, she becomes shy and embarrassed that you are talking about it, since she is aware of the meaning of marriage.

Thus, when the legal law commands us to seek the permission of the girl for marriage, it equates her silence with her permission, for if she remains silent that is a sign of acceptance from her and a proof of her understanding of this relationship. However, if she says: yes, I will marry him because he is handsome, etc., then this means that she still has not yet grasped the meaning of marriage. Hence, *al-ghafila* is carelessly heedless even of marriage matters and marital relations, knowing nothing of such matters, so how could she think of fornication?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the punishment for of the crime of slandering such women: '…are cursed in this world and the hereafter, and they shall have a grievous chastisement.' (*an-Nur:* 23)

And if the carelessly heedless female *al-ghafila* is the one who does not have such matters in her mind and knows nothing even about marriage and marital relations between man and woman, so how could we say that she thinks of such a criminal act?

The root of the Arabic word *al-l'an* translated above as 'are cursed', signifies expulsion and removal from Allah's Mercy. It also means expulsion and removal from the realm of the believers, since the sentence of the slanderer is that the prescribed punishment be executed upon him, that his testimony is henceforth to be considered null and void and that his standing in the community in which he lives is abolished. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* combines against him dishonour in this world by means of the prescribed punishment and the nullification of his status, in addition to the punishment of the Hereafter. In this way, the punishment he receives in this world does not relieve him of the punishment of the Hereafter.

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(1) This is an excerpt of a long *Hadith* concerning the incident of slander related by *Al-Bukhari* in his *(Sahih)*, and is commented upon in *(Fath Al-Bari)* (5:269-272) on the authority of Aisha *Allah be pleased with her. An excerpt of this Hadith provides, 'but 'Ali said, "Allah has not put restrictions on you and there are many women other than her. Furthermore you may ask the slave girl who will tell you the truth." So Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked Barira (his salve girl), "Have you seen anything that may arouse your suspicion?" She replied, "I have not seen anything more than that she is a little girl who sleeps, leaving the dough of her family (unguarded) that the domestic goats come and eat it."*

We say that *'azab* (chastisement) is causing pain and suffering to a living person. In the Quran chastisement is sometimes described as painful (*alim*), sometimes as humiliating (*muhin*), and sometimes as tremendous or awesome (*azim*)(1). These descriptions are determined according to the type of punishment and the status of the one who receives it. For there are among people those who do not feel the pain of flogging, but they feel disgraced in case of being flogged. For such people, the punishment is humiliating to their dignity. As for the tremendous or awesome chastisement, this is above what any person can imagine. This follows from the fact that painful punishment is from the punisher to the punished, and the one who is punished in this world is punished at the hands of men and to the extent of their strength. However, punishment in the Hereafter is effected through the Omnipotence and the Overwhelming Force of Allah, and for this reason it is described as tremendous or awesome (*azim*).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوۡمَ تَشۡهَدُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ أَلۡسِنَتُهُمۡ وَأَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَأَرۡجُلُهُم بِمَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٢٤

On the Day when their own tongues, hands, and feet
will testify against them about what they have done [24]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 24)

We all know that the tongue is the organ of speech, so why is it added in this verse, although it can be known without mention?

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(1) In the Quran, the description of chastisement as painful (*alim*) occurs in 72 passages, as humiliating (*muhin*) in 14, and as tremendous or awesome in 22 passages. In addition, there are eight other descriptors for punishment in the Hereafter mentioned with varying frequency.

Scholars say that in this world the tongue speaks and articulates, but in reality it is you who are the speaker, as it does not move except by your will, for the tongue is an instrument subject to your volition. Thus, it is only an instrument; however, in the Hereafter the tongue will articulate contrary to the will of its owner because its owner will then have no will-power.

To bring this matter within grasp, notice how an intelligent and eloquent man becomes mute and his tongue is held in check after being capable of fluent expression, due to an illness or similar cause, and henceforth he is incapable of speech, while he is still in the wide realm of this world. So, what happened? His faculty of speech has simply become dysfunctional. So likewise, is the situation in the Hereafter, your volition and control over all your faculties and limbs have been put out of action, and they articulate and move, not based on your will, but instead based on Allah's Will and Power.

Thus, 'On the day when their tongues… shall bear witness against them...' (*an-Nur:* 24) means testifying and articulating according to the Will of Allah and not according to the will of their owners. There is no cause to regard as far-fetched the articulation of the tongue in this manner since Allah *Glorified is He* states that His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is. (*Ya Sin:* 82) He *Glorified is He* has placed in human beings, an example which confirms the veracity of this matter. So, tell me: what would you do if you want to stand up now from some place? You need simply the volition of standing and you find yourself having stood up, without having to think about anything, and without having to collect your powers and thought and muscles. Instead, you stand up spontaneously without even being aware of the operational manner of this standing, nor which muscles you moved to execute it.

You should compare this spontaneous continuous movement with that of a mechanical digger or large cranes and how the driver has before him many control sticks and levers; each movement of the machine having its specific lever.

So, if you have this control and this domination over yourself and over your limbs, how can you think it improbable that Allah *Glorified is He* could have this control over his human creations in the Hereafter?

Hence, the tongue is the locus of speech and it is submitted to your will in this world, but in the Hereafter, this power of volition will be paralyzed and falls, just as all creation, under the Sovereignty of Allah, the One, the Subduer of all (*Ghafir:* 16).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and their hands and their feet… as to what they did’ (*an-Nur:* 24). Now, these limbs had no power of articulation in this world, but they will speak on that day. Scholars have attempted to clarify this concept saying: when a limb executes any action, an image of this is taken which records what it has done. Its articulation on the Day of Resurrection is that it will show this image which it has taken. It is more likely to say that the limb speaks in reality, as Allah *Glorified is He* states in a narrative about the limbs that when they are asked on the Day of Judgment by their owners of the wrongdoers as to why they testify against them, they shall say: 'Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak, and He created you at first, and to Him you shall be brought back' (*Fussilat:* 21). The meaning of: ‘Who makes everything speaks’ (*Fussilat:* 21), is that everything in the universe has articulated speech conforming to it, just as He *Glorified is He* gave speech to the ant [in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon)] as it tells the other ants to enter their dwellings, (*an-Naml:* 18), and gave speech to the Hoopoe, which said that it encompassed in knowledge that which Sulaiman had not encompassed and came to him from Sheba with certain news. (*an-Naml:* 22)

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the articulated speech of these things that there is not a thing except that it exalts Him by His praise, but we do not understand their way of exalting. (*al-Isra’:* 44)

However, if Allah *Glorified is He* wants you to comprehend their speech, He would instruct you as He instructed Sulaiman *peace be upon him* at the time he understood the ant and smiled being amused of her speech (*an-Naml:* 19), just as he understood the Hoopoe, when it spoke to him on a matter of doctrine.

Now, while speech is normally understood by means of the voice, each creature has its means of communication which is understood by its species. It is thus, with the progress of science that we now hear of the language of fish, the language of bees, and so forth.

We have already mentioned that there are those who say that among the miracles of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is that pebbles glorified Allah in his hand. To this I say, you need to rectify this expression and say, instead: Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the glorification of pebbles in his hand; otherwise, the pebbles were glorifying in his hand *peace and blessings be upon him* just as they were glorifying in the hand of Abu Jahl. If you were to ask these facultative limbs: 'why did you testify against me, while you were the ones who did it?' They would reply: 'We did it because we were under your orders and subservient to you, but this day we have broken free of your volition and have escaped your subjugation and we will not say anything but the truth.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يُوَفِّيهِمُ ٱللَّهُ دِينَهُمُ ٱلْحَقَّ وَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿٢٥﴾

On that Day, God will pay them their just due in full – and they will realize that God is the Truth that makes everything clear [25] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 25)

Concerning His utterance: ‘On that day…’ (*an-Nur:* 25), it means the day on which this testimony takes place, in other words the Day of Resurrection. At the end of the subsequent phrase, ‘…will Allah pay them in full their just due…’ (*an-Nur:* 25), the Arabic word *ad-din* has three possible significations: it is applied to the path of Allah for the guidance of mankind; it is also applied to the Day of Resurrection, finally, it applies to recompense (*al-jaza’*). Hence, the meaning is: He will requite them the recompense which they merit,. As regards ‘…just due…’ (*an-Nur:* 25), for which the Arabic word *al-haqq* is used, this refers to justice in which there is no iniquity or variation. For recompense is not haphazard, rather, it is recompense according to the truth. This is because they did not repent, nor did they renew their faith. Therefore, it is inescapable that there should befall them that which we warned them about and of which they were informed concerning punishment. And there is no other god to alter this judgment or to give them a respite from it.

Hence, after He *Glorified is He* said: ‘Doomed are the hands of Abu-Lahab(1), and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and all that he has gained?

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(1) *Abu-Lahab: He was ‘Abd Al-‘Uzza ibn-`Abdul-Muttalib ibn-Hashim, of Qurayshi lineage, the paternal uncle of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and among the most=*

[In the life to come] he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing, together with his wife[1], that carrier of firewood, [who bears] around her neck a rope of twisted strands!' (*al-Masad:* 1-5) He then said: 'Say: He is Allah the One: Allah the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All That Exists. He begets not, and neither is He begotten; and there is nothing that could be compared with Him.' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4) In other words, there is no other god to alter these words, so what You have said will most certainly occur.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'and they will come to know that Allah alone is the Ultimate Truth, manifest, and manifesting [the true nature of all that has ever been done]' (*an-Nur:* 25) and the '…Ultimate Truth...' (*an-Nur:* 24). *Al-haqq* (Ultimate Truth) is the enduring thing which does not change; thus, everything except Allah *Glorified is He* is susceptible to change. Therefore, Allah, with all the qualities of perfection in Him *Glorified is He* there is no change in him. Hence it is said: Allah certainly does not change for our sake, but it is we who must change for Allah's sake, for as He *Glorified is He* said: '…Verily, Allah does not change men's condition unless they change their inner selves…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

So Allah is the unalterable Truth, and this is based on rational proofs (*al-barahin al-'aqliya*) and on reality. Surely, we are all aware of numerous rational proofs; and as for reality, until now no one has come forward and said I am Allah, and claimed this universe as his own. And whoever makes a claim is proven correct if no one stands up to contest this. And the meaning of '…manifest and manifesting…' (*an-Nur:* 25) *al-mubin* is the self-evident *al-wadih*, the distinctly apparent *az-zahir* whose claim encloses of existence.

= *severe of people in antagonism to the Muslims; he was wealthy and arrogant, and he found it unbearable to follow a religion brought by his brother's son; so he insulted and hurt his supporters, and urged others against him and fought them; he was bright red of face and was thus nicknamed Abu-Lahab (the father of flame) in pre-Islamic times; he died a few days after the battle of Badr in the year 2 AH [Cited from Zirikli, (Al-A`lam), 4:12].*

(1) *She is: Umm-Jamil, and her name was Arwa bint-Harb ibn-Umayya, and she was the sister of Abu-Sufyan; she helped her husband Abu-Lahab in his disbelief and his denial and his stubbornness, and therefore on the Day of Resurrection she will be a helper to him in his punishment in the fire of hell, carrying firewood and throwing it upon him to add to what he is already suffering. [Cited by Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir), 4:563.]*

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلۡخَبِيثَٰتُ لِلۡخَبِيثِينَ وَٱلۡخَبِيثُونَ لِلۡخَبِيثَٰتِۖ وَٱلطَّيِّبَٰتُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَٱلطَّيِّبُونَ لِلطَّيِّبَٰتِۚ
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مُبَرَّءُونَ مِمَّا يَقُولُونَۖ لَهُم مَّغۡفِرَةٞ وَرِزۡقٞ كَرِيمٞ ﴿٢٦﴾

Corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men are for corrupt women; good women are for good men and good men are for good women. The good are innocent of what has been said against them; they will have forgiveness and a generous provision [26] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 26)

We have said concerning the exegesis of 'The adulterer/fornicator marries none but an adulteress or an idolatress; and the adulteress marries none but an adulterer or an idolater…' (*an-Nur:* 3) that marriage is based upon mutual equivalence *at-takafu'*, so that one party does not dominate the other. Related to this mutual equivalence is His utterance: 'corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men, for corrupt women – just as good women are for good men, and good men, for good women…' (*an-Nur:* 26). Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'these…' (*an-Nur:* 26), in other words those against whom the incident of slander was directed, and about whom people became absorbed in talk against their persons, and they are ʿA'isha and Safwan [who] '…are innocent of all that evil tongues may impute to them…' (*an-Nur:* 26), this is to say, innocent of what was said about them. Proof is furnished by this mutual equivalence (*at-takafu'*) which the verse mentioned, for who is better and purer (*aṭyab*) than the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*? And as we mentioned, that Allah *Glorified is He* would never deceive His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and make of one of his wives someone around whom suspicions hover.

Thus, it is imperative that 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* be good with a goodness that is equivalent to and corresponds to the goodness of the Messenger of Allah. Therefore, Allah declared her innocence of that which the calumniators were saying.

Regarding His utterance: 'forgiveness of sins shall be theirs, and a most excellent sustenance!' (*an-Nur:* 26), forgiveness descending from Heaven before the Resurrection, and a most generous sustenance. It is true that sustenance in its entirety comes from Allah with magnanimity, but here is meant spiritual sustenance for noble-heartedness for dignity and eminence, not material sustenance for the body such as food, drink and the like.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَدۡخُلُواْ بُيُوتًا غَيۡرَ بُيُوتِكُمۡ حَتَّىٰ
تَسۡتَأۡنِسُواْ وَتُسَلِّمُواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهَاۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَذَكَّرُونَ ٢٧

Believers, do not enter other people's houses until you have asked permission to do so and greeted those inside – that is best for you: perhaps you will bear this in mind [27]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 27)

Regarding the Arabic word for house (*al-bayt*), we understand from it that it is that which is set up for spending the night in (*al-baytutah*) such that a human being takes shelter in it in the evening, and takes rest in it from the toil of the day. It is also called *ad-dar* because it encircles *tadur* a place which belongs to you. Hence, in the past people lived only in private, independent dwellings, without partnership in their living space like the buildings of today. Thus, the expression: the house is from its door, such that no one goes in or out without your being aware of it. A dwelling of this type is protection from suspicion since it is your private house, with your family alone, with no one else sharing it with you.

However, there are matters which require that people enter into other people's houses. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* spoke here of the etiquette of seeking permission, and of the principles and organization which govern this issue. Because entering houses without this etiquette and without observing these prescribed arrangements causes things which arouse suspicion and doubt. Hence, among country folk even today, if they see an unknown person entering a self-contained residential quarter (*hara*) and he has no relation to it, they will inevitably ask: why did he enter here?

Therefore, the law of Allah does not forbid the members of society from meeting one another, but rather imposes limits and etiquette on these mutual encounters thereby eliminating suspicion and doubt which may arise in such matters.

Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says concerning the etiquette of asking permission: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not enter houses other than your own unless you have obtained permission and greeted their inmates…’ (*an-Nur:* 27).

As regards the expression: ‘…unless you have obtained permission…’ (*an-Nur:* 27), the Arabic verb *tasta’nisu* derives from the word *uns* meaning ease and familiarity, and is related to reassurance *al-itmi’nan*. Thus, when you and your family are sitting in your house and a stranger whom you do not know approaches you, if he does not proffer you words that put you at ease or seek your permission, you will of necessity feel alienation and aversion for him. So, the one asking permission to enter should speak with a voice that puts the owner of the house at ease. As we say, O people of Allah, or we knock at the door or we converse with a child to be informed as to who is in the house. This is because houses have their inviolability (*hurma*). In addition, every house has its peculiarities which the owner does not wish anyone to look at, either out of respect for the owner of the house, or out of respect for the visitor himself. Hence, seeking permission to enter enables everyone to avoid what might offend him. This is why He *Glorified is He* says after this: ‘…This is [enjoined upon you] for your own good…’ (*an-Nur:* 27).

In other words, better for all, for the visitor and the visited. Seeking permission to enter prevents anyone from spying on anyone and prevents that someone should look upon something which may offend him. Suppose that the father of a married woman wishes to visit her, and he enters into her house unexpectedly and finds her in an argument with her husband. Then he might witness things that displease him, and he might further aggravate the dispute.

The verse ends with His utterance: ‘...so that you might bear [your mutual rights] in mind’ (*an-Nur:* 27). That is to say, be on your guard lest you neglect these points of prescribed etiquette, or lest you underestimate their importance; as people say: we are family or relatives; there are no formalities between us. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* who prescribed these behavioural codes for you is more aware of what is in your souls, and more aware of what is suitable for you.

Indeed, this Islamic etiquette goes beyond the stranger to encompass the owner of the house himself. Thus, in a Noble Hadith we find that The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘forbade that the traveller should return to his family at night’(1). Instead, he should inform them of his coming so that he does not catch them unaware, and so that each of them can get ready to meet the other.

Then the True Lord says:

فَإِن لَّمْ تَجِدُوا فِيهَآ أَحَدًا فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا حَتَّىٰ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَإِن قِيلَ
لَكُمُ ارْجِعُوا فَارْجِعُوا ۖ هُوَ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

If you find no one in, do not enter unless you have been given permission to do so. If you are told, ‘Go away’, then do so – that is more proper for you. God knows well what you do [28] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 28)

So if you seek permission to enter a house in which there is no one, do not go in; for you have come to an established abode (*makin*) not a mere location (*makan*). That is, unless you intend to enter in order to stealthily intrude upon people’s affairs and to spy on them.

Regarding His utterance: ‘…until you are given leave…’ (*an-Nur:* 28), how can this be while there is no one in the house? Perhaps the owner of the house is outside of it, and when he notices you seeking permission to enter, he calls out to you from afar: Please go in. It is thus necessary for the owner of the house, or someone delegated by him, to grant you permission, for he would not give you permission unless the path was ensured to be void of what might offend you, or what might offend the inhabitants of the house.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and if you are told, “Turn back,” then turn back. This will be most conducive to your purity…’ (*an-Nur:* 28). This is because, if you persisted in entering after you were told to turn back, you would arouse suspicion in [the owner’s] soul. Therefore, you must submit to and respect the desire of the person concerned, for this is purer and preferable.

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(1) *Based on a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari (#5244) and Muslim (3:1528) on the authority of Jabir ibn-‘Abdullah.*

Indeed, consider the utterance of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Leave what causes you doubt for that which does not cause you doubt.’(1)

Regarding the final phrase of the verse ‘...and Allah has full knowledge of all that you do...’ (*an-Nur:* 28), it means: He *Glorified is He* is aware (*‘alim*) of the most innermost secrets of souls and the inner whisperings of hearts. So if the owner of the house tells you to turn back, but you nevertheless remained standing at his door and did not go away, then you would certainly cause suspicions and misgivings to arise around you. But your Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to protect you from suspicions and the concealed affairs of souls.

Subsequently, the True Lord says:

لَّيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَن تَدْخُلُوا۟ بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ مَسْكُونَةٍ فِيهَا مَتَٰعٌ لَّكُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ
يَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

You will not be blamed for entering houses where no one lives, and which could provide you with some useful service. God knows everything you do openly and everything you conceal [29] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 29)

Abu-Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘O Messenger of Allah, we are a people who practice commerce, and we go to a region in which we have no houses or family, and we are obliged to settle in places (public ones like hotels) in which we store our effects and in which we spend the night’. Thereupon, this verse was revealed.(2)

Concerning the Arabic word *(junah)* translated here as sin means misdeed or prohibition. This verse applies specifically to public places which no individual person inhabits, and a public place has laws governing entering it that are different from the laws concerning houses and privately owned places. Hence, do you ask permission to enter a hotel or a place of commerce or a bathhouse, etc. There is no restriction on you in entering these places without asking for permission.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Abu-Dawud (1178), Imam Ahmad (1/200) and At-Tirmidhi (2518).*

(2) *The context of the revelation of this verse was narrated in As-Suyuti’s (Asbab An-nuzul) (p. 127, Dar At-Tahrir edition, 1963).*

The expression ‘uninhabited…’ (*an-Nur:* 29) means by a particular group of people. As for the phrase ‘…which serve a purpose useful to you…’ (*an-Nur:* 29), it means such as sleeping, eating, drinking in it, or putting your effects in it. Hence, the word *al-mata’* in the verse meaning utility is not to be taken in its broadest sense, but rather, it is tied to what Allah has made permissible and commanded. Thus, forbidden things are not included in the notion of utility.

It is for this reason that He says after this: ‘...but [always remember that] Allah knows all that you do openly, and all that you would conceal.’ (*an-Nur:* 29) In other words, in the delimitation of making use of a place, So do not take it in its general significance, and thereby include in it what is forbidden (*al-haram*). Otherwise, be aware, that prostitutes often frequent places such as these. Therefore your Lord fortifies you and gives you the necessary immunity to assure your protection.

Following thereon, the Lord of Supreme Power (*rabb al-‘izza*) says:

قُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا۟ مِنْ أَبْصَٰرِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا۟ فُرُوجَهُمْ ۚ
ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

[Prophet], tell believing men to lower their glances and guard their private parts: that is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do [30] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 30)

From its beginning, the chapter of *an-Nur* spoke of the question of adultery and slander and fortification from temptation (*al-ihsan*), and it warned about following the footsteps of Satan (Iblis) which lead to this crime; then it spoke of mutual equivalence (*at-takafu’*) in marriage and that an adulterer is fit only for an adulteress and an adulteress for an adulterer, and that vile men are for vile women, and goodly men for goodly women.

This integral path guarantees the safety and integrity (*salama*) of society and of the Vicegerent of Allah on His earth. For Allah *Glorified is He* desires a society in which lofty values shine forth, a society free of agents of ‘ugly wrinkles', dispute, enmity and hatred. Hence, if only we would implement the procedural method (*manhaj*) of Allah which He sanctioned for us, all of us would be at ease in its shade.

The issue of lowering one's gaze which our Lord *Glorified is He* commanded us to observe in this verse is a safety valve which protects us from slipping into these repulsive crimes, and blocks the way before them. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Tell the believers to lower their gaze…' (*an-Nur:* 30).

And we have said: the human being certainly has numerous means of perception, and every instrument of perception has its objects. Thus the ear hears voices, and the nose smells, and the tongue is for speech and for tasting flavours, and the eye for seeing visible things. But the most seductive thing which affects a human being in terms of sex is the sense of sight.

Therefore, The Wise Lawgiver has placed the necessary restraint on the two sides of sight: on the eye of the beholder and on the thing which is beheld. Hence, He ordered the believers to lower their gazes and He ordered the believing women not to display their concealed beauty (*az-zeenah*). In this manner, He established immunity for both sides.

Now, when we investigate the issue of lowering the gaze, in terms of rational divisions, we find that it revolves around four possible situations (*halat*). The first is that he lowers his own gaze and that she does not reveal her own concealed beauty, thereby the line of temptation is severed between the sender and receiver. The second is that he lowers his own gaze, but she reveals her concealed beauty. The third is that he himself gazes, but she does not reveal her concealed beauty. And there is no danger to society or temptation in these three situations, since if one side fulfils the conditions, the other is negated. However, the danger lies in the fourth situation, and this is that he stares and does not lower his gaze and that she strives to make herself attractive and reveals her concealed beauty. It is in this situation only that danger exists.

Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has forbidden one situation out of four situations. This is because forbidden things (*al-muharramat*) are always fewer in number, and this is due to Allah's mercy upon us. A proof of this is found in His utterance: 'Say: "Come, let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden to you…' (*al-An'am:* 151). For forbidden things are limited and few, whereas permissible things (*al-muhallalat*) are beyond limitation and infinite, since the original state of things is to be permissible. And if the True Lord *Glorified is He* desires the prohibition (*tahrim*) of a thing, He stipulates it. So, just marvel at this benevolent treatment from your Lord *Glorified is He*.

Just as the man was ordered to lower his gaze, the woman, too, was ordered to lower her gaze, since a glance might also be towards a man possessed of good-looks or charm (*al-wasama*), etc. So, if the good fortune of a woman over a man is that her eye is capable of overwhelming him, then perchance she may look at someone else. Thus, what holds for men also holds for women in this case. This precaution and these limits which Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained and made incumbent upon us are there only to prevent this repulsive crime with which this chapter began. For the glance is the first of the means leading to adultery, and it is a message to what follows. Just take note of what the poet Shawqi *may Allah grant him mercy* says in speaking about the phases of flirtation (*al-ghazal*):

A glance, then a smile, then a greeting
Then conversation, then a rendezvous pledge, then a private meeting.

Hence, the command to lower one's gaze is in order to close the accesses to corruption of honour, and a means of preventing the causes of the pollution of offspring. This is so that Allah's Vicegerent on earth will come forth pure in a pure society, clean and noble, in which no one assumes superiority over anyone else, because one has a proper lineage (*nasab*) and nobility, while the other has no lineage.

This is so that every human being can be reassured that those who follow him in vicegerency (*al-khilafa*) from among children and grandchildren will undoubtedly issue forth through the lawful noble way. So let every human being strive to engender his children in a manner that guarantees the presence of affection, of tenderness and mercy. This he will do because he is confident that the child is his, not the object of some intrigue against him. It is most probable that those who neglect their children and do not look after their interests have doubts about their kinship relationship to them.

Society will not attain to this purity except if you guarantee it adequate preservation, so that sexual instincts would not break loose from it allowing every glance to transgress to that which is forbidden to it. For the glance is a missive to hearts, and hearts are a missive to sex, so the sexual organs will never be chaste except through chastity of the glance.

In His utterance: 'Tell the believers to lower their gaze…' (*an-Nur:* 30), we should note the precision of the Messenger's conveyance of the message of his Lord *Glorified is He* and his fidelity in transmitting the expression as it was revealed to him. As in this verse it would have been sufficient for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: lower your gazes; however, he adhered to the precise wording of what was revealed to him. This is because the Quran was not only revealed for the sake of laws; rather, the Quran is the speech of Allah descended upon His Messenger, the recitation of which constitutes worship. Therefore, it was imperative for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to convey it just as it came to him from his Lord.

Therefore, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says in conveying the message on behalf of Allah: 'Say' (*qul*) and in the Arabic verb *yaghuddu* (to lower their gazes) there is the significance of the immediate present implied by the imperative 'say', as the verb in the present imperfect tense, but despite the fact that it is not preceded by an apocopate particle, the expected final *nun* (an Arabic letter) has been omitted. This is because He made the verb 'say' to indicate the immediate present in literary style. And the meaning is thus: if you tell them to lower their gazes, they will lower their gazes; with the verb being in the apocopate form *majzum* in response to the imperative 'say' (*qul*).

Hence, the first word of the verse, 'Say…' (*an-Nur:* 30) illustrates the fidelity of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying the message, and that the Quran was not revealed only for establishing laws, but rather, it is the inimitable speech of Allah. It is for this reason that we note this here, and in every word in it. It is as if the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is saying: I have not come to you with something from myself, and my duty is to convey unto you what Allah has said to me.

As regards His utterance: '…the believers…' (*an-Nur:* 30), as long as they believe in a wise God, and have entered the realm of faith of their own choice, without it being forced upon them by anyone, then they must adhere to that which their Lord has ordered them, and to implement it as soon as they heard it.

The verbal root of the Arabic word for lowering (*al-ghadd*) means decreasing, diminishing (*al-nuqsan*). One says: so-and-so diminishes the power of so-and-so; that is: he diminishes him. But how can there be diminishing of sight? Is it to look with one eye only? It is said: Sight has an assigned duty, and through it visible things make themselves manifest; so, do not give it absolute freedom to look at everything; rather restrain it based on the commands of Allah concerning what may be seen and what may not be seen.

The Arabic preposition (*min*) as found in His utterance: '…their gaze…' (*an-Nur:* 30) is viewed by some scholars as referring to a portioning (*at-tab'id*) such as in the expression: eat some of this food (*kul min hadha at-ta'am*); in other words a portion of it. Thus, the meaning is: let them lower part of their gaze because some of it is permissible, not requiring a lowering of the gaze, while part of it is forbidden, not to be gazed at.

Another view is that the Arabic preposition (*min*) in this context is for confirmation of totality in its most insignificant phase, and we have already spoken of (*min*) in this sense. It is inevitable that the more deeply we penetrate into exegesis we will come across things which we have mentioned previously, and here we pass this aforementioned discussion on to the reader again.

We noted that the difference between your saying: I have no money (*ma 'indi mal*), and, I have nothing of money (*ma 'indi min mal*). In the first expression it is probable that you have a trifling amount of money, hardly worth taking into consideration. Whereas in the second expression it is tantamount to a complete negation of possessing anything in the category of money, however small, in this context, the preposition (*min*) in this context means the starting point of what is called money.

So, here the meaning of, 'Tell the believers to lower their gaze…' (*an-Nur:* 30), employing the Arabic phrase *(min absari-him)* signifies the beginning of what might be termed gazing, including the furtive glance, prohibiting you from intent regarding prolongation of looking.

We said that the ordained law does not intrude into the inclinations of the heart and thoughts, but rather, it intervenes in preparatory acts which give rise to action. If, for example, you pass by a garden and see a beautiful rose in it, and you marvel at it and the depths of your soul are delighted and filled with pleasure by it, all of this is permissible for you, and there is nothing standing in your way in doing this. But if the matter goes beyond this, and you reach out your hand to pick it, this is where the ordained law tells you: stop, for you have no right to this because it does not belong to you.

This is a general rule governing all acts, with sight alone being the only exception. It is as if our Lord *Glorified is He* were seeking our indulgence in it, this matter, for our sake, for our proper own good, and for our comfort; indeed as a mercy on us, and out of solicitude for us from the consequences of looking and what it leaves behind in the soul of torments and passionate sentiments.

For, as regards the look of a man towards a woman, we do not say: look as much as you like and admire your sweetheart as you wish, but if you proceeded on to a hug or a kiss, this would be forbidden. Why? Because the issue here is totally different, as the relationship of a man and a woman is made up of phases, one of which can never be separated from the other.

The moment you look at a woman, this is perception; and she pleases you and the depths of your soul take joy in her, then this is emotion. This will unavoidably leave in your constitution a chemical reaction which cannot be calmed; and before long you will yearn [to satisfy your natural inclination], and if you submit to your soul in proceeding to fulfil your yearning (*an-nuzu'*) you will have transgressed. On the other hand, if you repress this emotion, you will be afflicted by psychological complexes which will summon you to seek other means for fulfilling your yearning. Therefore, your Lord has been merciful to you from the very beginning, by avoiding perception through lowering the gaze.

Consequently, after He *Glorified is He* commands us to lower our gaze, He says: '…and to be mindful of their chastity…' (*an-Nur:* 30) as you are incapable of separating the desire to fulfil yearning (*an-nuzu'*) from emotion (*al-wijdan*), nor emotion from perception (*al-idrak*), even if this is possible in other domains. Thus, when we prevent you from plucking the rose which you found so attractive, this restraint did not leave any trace or emotion in your soul. This is opposed to what happens if you are restrained from a woman whom you are attracted to, as your emotions arouse you to desire her.

Safeguarding chastity (*hifzh al-furuj*) is affected when we restrict them [i.e., sexual organs] to that which Allah has permitted and ordained by law, so that access to it [i.e., the sexual organ] is not allowed to one for whom it is unlawful, regardless whether it be of the man or the woman. Another manner of understanding this is: I safeguard it and defend it from being seen because seeing it rouses unto evil and unto temptation (*al-fitna*). Regarding '…this will be most conducive to their purity…' (*an-Nur:* 30), the Arabic word denoting more pure (*azka*) means more chaste or cleaner (*at-har*) and sounder or healthier (*aslam*) and more conducive (*ad'a*) to peace of mind. For either one gives free reign to yearning and commits something forbidden, and thereby penetrates the honour of people; or one does not submit to yearning, and then the soul is vexed and is tormented by seeking to be patient with what cannot be endured.

Subsequently, He *Glorified is He* says: '…[And,] verily, Allah is aware of all that they do.' (*an-Nur:* 30) For He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of this human soul, and the One who put into place the matter of carnal desire and sexual instinct. This latter is the most powerful of instincts in order to bind man and woman together, and thereby actualize through it the process of procreation and the continuation of vicegerency on the earth. And if this relationship were not linked to pressing carnal desire, many would abstain from marriage and from begetting children and all that would follow from this in terms of consequences.

Imagine all the pain and toil a woman goes through in the phase of pregnancy, and while giving birth, she thinks death would be preferable, until she swears that she will never go through it again. But after she sees her child and forgets her pain, soon the longing to give birth once again returns to her. This is an instinct which Allah has planted in the human soul so that its continued survival is assured.

There are some who have a philosophical view of instincts, especially the sexual instinct as Allah made it the most powerful of instincts and linked it to a pleasure more effective than the pleasure of food, drink, smell, hearing, etc. For it is a pleasure which embraces every organ and limb (*jawarih*) of man and all of his dispositions (*malakat*) and this is only out of desire for the survival of the species and the continuation of the vicegerency on earth.

Thereafter, the True Lord says to His Messenger:

وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَٰرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ
مِنْهَا ۖ وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۖ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ ءَابَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ
ءَابَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِىٓ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوْ
بَنِىٓ أَخَوَٰتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُهُنَّ أَوِ ٱلتَّٰبِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُو۟لِى ٱلْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ أَوِ
ٱلطِّفْلِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا۟ عَلَىٰ عَوْرَٰتِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ ۖ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِن
زِينَتِهِنَّ ۚ وَتُوبُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

And tell believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; they should let their headscarves fall to cover their necklines and not reveal their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their womenfolk, their slaves, such men as attend them who have no sexual desire, or children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness; they should not stamp their feet so as to draw attention to any hidden charms. Believers, all of you, turn to God so that you may prosper [31]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 31)

Here He explicitly mentions the other side of the equation, commanding women with what he commanded men, then He adds here the issue of charms or beauty (*az-zeenah*). Now, *az-zeenah* is the added element which exceeds the bounds of innate beauty; hence one says of a woman who is naturally beautiful, and who has no need to beautify herself, that she is self-sufficient in beauty (*ghaniya*). That is to say, through her own beauty, she is able to dispense with beautification (*at-tazayyun*). So she does not need to put mascara on her eyes, nor rouge on her cheeks. She has no need to veil her own innate jewellery with bracelets, nor her chest with necklaces, etc.

But if a woman is beneath this level, she requires a bit of beautification. Yet, it is astonishing how they exaggerate in this beautification until they become like neon signs on a tilted wooden stall. Hence one sees elderly women putting on these colours, and these powders appearing in an image that is not suitable. For artificial beauty and forced beautification is what they call 'polish' (*tatriya*). In this vein, the poet Al-Mutanabbi said in describing the beauty of a Bedouin woman and the beauty of an urban woman:

The beauty of a city woman is procured with polish
And in a Bedouin woman beauty is not procured.

It is among the mercies of Allah to women that He after this says: '…and not to display their charms [in public]…' (*an-Nur:* 31). He said: '…beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof…' (*an-Nur:* 31). In other words: Those aspects which are necessary. Thus, a woman needs to walk in the street, and her eyes will show, perhaps with a bit of mascara, for example; and her hand will show, and on it is a ring or henna. There is no objection that she displays such kinds of necessary beautification.

However, she should not let her earrings show, for example because the head-covering (*al-khimar*) covers them; nor should she wear clothing with a low-cut collar (*ad-dikultih*), or a necklace, or arm-bangles or bracelets, nor anklets. For all of such beautification should not show. Hence, the ordained law permits natural beautification on the condition that it remains within certain limits, and that its display is restricted for whose sake it was put on.

Now, we should note that in His utterance: '…and [they are] not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof…' (*an-Nur:* 31) the intended meaning is the covering of beauty. In this respect, the lower body part is the foremost consideration. Since charming beauty envelops this body part, and Allah has commanded charming beauty to be concealed, then this body section is the first to fall into this category.

Regarding His utterance: '…hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms…' (*an-Nur:* 31) the Arabic term employed for head-coverings (*khumur*) is the plural of *(khimar)* being the covering of the head which hangs down to cover the back of the neck and chest. The Arabic word *(al-juyub)* translated here as bosoms is the plural of *(jayb)* which is the upper opening of a garment, called the collar (*al-qabba*) and the intended meaning is that the head covering veil the upper opening of the body garment and the area of the chest so that nothing of it shows.

It is astonishing that women have abandoned this obligation; indeed, among the mind-boggling phenomenon, they even wear necklaces upon which they hang copies of the Quran. This is an amazing contradiction, indicating an absence of awareness and an absence of knowledge of the ordained law of Allah, the one who sent down this very Quran.

Contemplate the precision of Quranic expression in His utterance: '…let them draw…' (*an-Nur:* 31) utilizing the Arabic verb (*yadribna*). Now this verb (*al-darb*) has the significance of striking or dropping something with force. Hence, the intended meaning is not that a woman simply places the head-scarf (*at-tarha*) and leaves it like that vulnerable to the winds. Rather, she must arrange it carefully on her head and chest and fasten it securely.

For this reason, when this verse was revealed, 'A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* said: may Allah have mercy on the ladies who have emigrated (*al-muhajirat*), when the verse was revealed, they did not own head-coverings (*khumur*), so took up lower body wrapping cloths (*al-murut*) and split them and made head-coverings of them.(1)

Hence the wise ordained law takes the clothing of women into consideration from the top, so He said: '…let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms…' (*an-Nur:* 31) and from the bottom, so He said: '…they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments [when in public]…' (*al-Ahzab:* 59).

Subsequently He *Glorified is He* says: '…And let them not display [more of] their charms to any but their husbands…' (*an-Nur:* 31) that is their spouses, because beauty was made for their sake; '…or their husbands' fathers…' (*an-Nur:* 31), the father of the spouse, unless there is fear of seduction from him, then the wife should now display her beauty in front of him.

Regarding the meaning of '…or their womenfolk…' (*an-Nur:* 31), this refers to women which work with her in the house, as maids or servants; '…or those whom they rightfully possess…' (*an-Nur:* 31); here the intended meaning is slaves owned by the woman who are also women excluding male slaves.

It is obligatory that these women be Muslims, for if they are disbelievers, such as those brought from other countries, it is not permitted for the woman to show her beauty in front of them, and to consider them in this domain like men. This is because they are not Muslims and not to be trusted in matters concerning a Muslim woman, for one of them might go and describe what she saw of her employer or mistress to a disbelieving man resulting in his thoughts becoming preoccupied with her.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (4757, 4759).*

Among scholars are those who believe that owned slaves (*milk al-yamin*) in this context does refer only to females, but also to male slaves. And that a woman has the right to show her beauty in front of them. They say this because in the human soul there is an emotional opposition (*istiqbal 'atifi*) and emotional abstention (*imtina' 'atifi*); thus, the servant is in a state of inadequacy (*fi al-qasr*) and would not look at his mistress or employer, nor at her daughters, since he would not deem himself worthy of this status. The exception to this would be if they encourage him, and open the door to him, but this is another matter.

Regarding His utterance: '…or such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire…' (*an-Nur:* 31), the Arabic word *(at-tabi'in)* refers to servants of the house and those who live off of its leftovers (*fadalat*). The life of such a subordinate (*at-tabi'*) derives from the life of the person whom he owes service and obedience to. Since he does not have a house to shelter him, he sleeps anywhere; and since he has no food, therefore people feed him and so forth. Hence he is wretched (*da'i'*), without any goal, nor any independence in his life. You see such as these eating table scraps and wearing patched garments, and sleeping even on the sidewalk.

Like the dim-witted of demented person whom people feel sorry for, and who has no craving for women, nor does he even understand this matter; so one has no fears for women on his account, since he has no need of them; nor would he deem himself worthy of looking at the members of the household.

As for '…[men] beyond all sexual desire…' (*an-Nur:* 31), this can refer to those who are elderly, of feeble strength, without possessing the capacity for these matters. It also refers to those who are castrated, no longer possessing required organs. In both cases, such men pose no danger to women.

Then comes His utterance: '…or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness…' (*an-Nur:* 31).

We note here that the Arabic word (*at-tifl*), translated as children, is in the singular form, although the description that follows is indicative of the plural, literally '…[those] (*al-ladhina*) who are as yet unaware of women's nakedness…' (*an-Nur:* 31). Why? It is said that this is a feature among the features of Arabic language, and it comprises precision of expression, in which the singular of the word is utilized to signify the dual or the plural.

As we say: this judge is impartial (*'adl*), these two judges are impartial (*'adl*), and these judges are impartial (*'adl*); we do not use the dual (*'adlan*) or plural form (*'udul*) of the descriptor. So if the quality (*al-wasf*) is unified for all without exception, then the quality is like a single thing. For one judge does not apply the law according to his humour or whim, and another according to his humour and whim, instead they all pronounce judgement based upon a single law and a single measure. Hence, the quality of impartiality is one, and does not call for doubt; furthermore, each one of the judges does not have an impartiality that is particular to him, impartiality is one.

Similarly in the case of '…the child (*at-tifl*)...' (*an-Nur:* 31) although the intended meaning is children (*al-atfal*), He nevertheless said 'child' because his natural dispositions (*ghara'iz*) are common to all children. He does not possess passionate whims, so all children, thus, are as if they were a single child since not one of them formulates a thought particular to him. All of them love fun and games, with no ulterior motives. So the plurality here is not evident due to the commonality of natural dispositions and inclinations.

As evidence of this, when children grow up and move on to the stage of puberty, and passionate desires, thoughts and inclinations begin formulating in them, the Quran says of them: 'Yet when the children among you attain to puberty...' (*an-Nur:* 59). Hence, the focus here is on the plural in the absence of unifying commonality (*at-tawhhud*) as found in the phase of early childhood.

Also, along similar lines is His utterance: 'Has the story of Abraham's honoured guests reached you?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 24) In this instance, 'guest' (*ad-dayf*), in the singular form, is qualified by a plural adjective 'honoured' (*al-mukramin*). This is because the word (*dayf*) also signifies the plural, for a guest is one who is added to the house, and he is due certain rights and obligations which the host must proffer, and which add to the requirements of the house. In terms of these obligations, the guest is one, regardless if this be a single person or a group. Hence, the singular is used to signify the plural.

As regards His utterance: '…[Those] who are as yet unaware of women's nakedness…' (*an-Nur:* 31), the Arabic expression utilized *(yazharu 'ala kadha)* (to be cognizant of or to overcome such-and-such) has two meanings in language. The first: carries the meaning of knowing, as in His utterance: 'for, behold, if they should come to know of you (*yazharu 'alaykum*), they might stone you to death…' (*al-Kahf:* 20), in other words, if they become aware of you and find out your location

The second: carries the meaning of gaining the upper hand over or conquering of triumphing over, as in His utterance: 'And thus [the rampart was built, and] their enemies were unable to scale it, and neither were they able to pierce it.' (*al-Kahf:* 97)

That is to say, the dam or rampart (*as-sadd*) which was built by *Dhu Al-Qarnayn* with the meaning that they were unable to ascend it or get on top of it.

And here '[those] who are as yet unaware of women's nakedness' (*an-Nur:* 31) signifies their being cognizant of and taking notice of women's private parts, or having the capacity to fulfil their requirements since they have no knowledge or acquaintance with such matters.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'and let them not swing their legs [in walking] so as to draw attention to their hidden charms'. (*an-Nur:* 31) The True Lord *Glorified is He* uncovers here the dalliances and stratagems of women in attracting attention. So if she does not draw the attention of your sight to her, your attention will be attracted by the sound which is made by her walking. As if she is saying to you: O dummy, listen, O you who cannot see, listen! In the past women used to wear anklets which would make a sound while walking, and today they put things on the bottom of their shoes which make a similar sound while walking, and the first to make use of this stratagem were dancers in order to attract glances towards them. It is obvious that the way a woman walks displays much of her hidden charm which people do not see, and causes much temptation. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says after this, and in concluding these matters: '…And [always], O you believers – all of you – turn unto Allah in repentance, so that you might prosper' (*an-Nur:* 31).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not say: O you who committed these sins which we have previously talked about; instead, He said: '…all of you…' (*an-Nur:* 31). He thereby urges everyone to repentance (*at-tawba*) to signify that every descendent of Adam *peace be upon him* is prone to error. For regardless of how firmly devoted (*mutamassik*) or strictly adherent (*multazim*) a Muslim is, he is not secure from the occasional lapse of error or sin. Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator is the Supremely Aware of those whom He has created. He has, therefore, opened for them the door of repentance and has urged them towards the Omniscient, as if saying: no harm done if you must repent, and the rest is up to me.

The True Lord says:

وَأَنكِحُواْ ٱلۡأَيَٰمَىٰ مِنكُمۡ وَٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ مِنۡ عِبَادِكُمۡ وَإِمَآئِكُمۡۚ إِن يَكُونُواْ
فُقَرَآءَ يُغۡنِهِمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضۡلِهِۦۗ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٞ ﴿٣٢﴾

Marry off the single among you and those of your male and female slaves who are fit [for marriage]. If they are poor, God will provide for them from His bounty: God's bounty is infinite and He is all knowing [32] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 32)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the issue of protecting chastity, and summons to the preservation of purity of kinship lineage, He now wishes to speak of those men or women for whom the matter of marriage has not been made easy. In this manner, He treats the subject from diverse aspects, for it is necessary for the Lawgiver to appropriate through legislation every vulnerable gaps of life, as He cannot deal with one side and ignore the other.

Concerning the word '…single…' (*an-Nur:* 32), the Arabic word *(al-ayama)*, which is the plural of *(ayyim)*, it refers to both men and women without spouses. We should note that the imperative form of '…marry...' (*an-Nur:* 32), in Arabic, *(ankihu)*, begins with the disjunctive hamza (an Arabic letter, *hamzat al-qat'*) form of the, pronounced as a glottal stop, even though the imperative form for the singular would be *('nkih)* with a conjunctive hamza (*hamzat al-wasl*) not pronounced when preceded by a vowel. This is because the imperative command here *(ankihu)* is not addressed to a single person who will marry another single person. Instead it is up to someone else to facilitate his marriage. Hence, the intended meaning is a command to the legal guardians (*awliya' al-umur*) and those men under their authority who have no wives, or women without husbands: expedite the marriage of these, and facilitate this matter for them, and do not be inflexible in regard to the costs of marriage so that you maintain the chastity of your sons and daughters; and if you do not assist them [materially], then at least avoid inflexibility and exaggerated expenses.

In a Noble Hadith, we find: 'If any of you are approached by someone [seeking marriage] whose religion and character please you, then [allow him] to marry [a girl under your authority]; if you do not do this, there will be temptation in the earth and great corruption.'(1)

Yet, in spite of this, there are in our societies customs and traditions which place obstacles in the way of the marriage of youth, the gravest of which is the exaggerated cost of dowries, and in the expense [of the wedding] and the focus on outward appearances, etc. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to the legal guardians: facilitate the matter of legal sexual union for the youth, and smooth for them the path to chastity.

The Quran provides us with an example of how a legal guardian should act in this respect, when He *Glorified is He* says to Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*: '[After some time, the father] said: "Behold, I am willing to let you wed one of these two daughters of mine…' (*al-Qasas:* 27). This is because Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was to be a paid labourer with him, and perhaps he might aspire to ask for the hand of his daughter. Hence, he offered her to him, and proposed marriage to him on her behalf, and encouraged him to accept to marry her. In this way he removed from him any hesitation due to shyness. This is the manner in which the father of a girl should behave if he finds a suitable match for his daughter, so he should not hesitate when it comes to her chastity.

Then comes His utterance: '…as well as such of your male and female slaves as are fit [for marriage]…' (*an-Nur:* 32). This should be considered in light of The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'A woman is married for four things: for her wealth, for her beauty, for her noble descent and for her [pious adherence to] religion, so aim to get the pious woman, may you be blessed.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated in slightly different versions by At-Tirmidhi (1084) and Ibn-Majah (1968).*

When *Al-Hasan may Allah be pleased with him* was asked about the matter of marriage, he told the father of a girl who had come to seek his counsel: marry her off to someone whose religion reassures you. Then, if he loves your daughter, he will treat her with magnanimity; and if he dislikes her, he will not do her wrong. What more could a man wish for in the marriage of his daughter?

Hence, devoutness in religion, character, high moral values, these are the basis upon which the choice is made. As for wealth, it is a secondary thing, and an ephemeral display. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* says: '…If they [whom you intend to marry] are poor, [let this not deter you;] Allah will grant them sufficiency out of His bounty – for Allah is Infinite [in His mercy], All Knowing.' (*an-Nur:* 32)

Poverty may be a cause for rejecting a girl [for marriage], or for the family of the girl to reject a marriage offer. But how could Allah abandon us while we fear him and seek chastity and purity? It is not possible that Allah would be stingy to a couple which had joined on the basis of these values and has come together on the basis of these morals of decency. And who knows, perhaps material provision will come to both of them together, and that their union in this lawful relationship will itself be the door of material provision which opens for them?

'For Allah is Infinite [in His mercy], All Knowing' (*an-Nur:* 32) as the giving of Allah is continuous, and does not cease because his reserves of provision (*khaza'in*) are never exhausted nor decreased. Whereas man withholds from giving because he is afraid of poverty, Allah *Glorified is He* on the other hand, gives generously because that which He has never runs out.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by both Al-Bukhari (5095) and Muslim (1477). In his (Fath Al-Bari) (9/136) Ibn-Hajar cites from Al-Qurtubi: 'the meaning of the Hadith is that these four qualities are those which are the motivating factors in seeking marriage to a woman, so it is information on what exists in these terms, not that the issue actually always comes down to this. Indeed, it is plain that it is permissible to marry with an aim to all of these, but the goal of seeking [a woman possessed of] piety has priority.*

Subsequently, the True Lord says:

وَلۡيَسۡتَعۡفِفِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ نِكَاحًا حَتَّىٰ يُغۡنِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضۡلِهِۦۗ وَٱلَّذِينَ يَبۡتَغُونَ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِمَّا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡ فَكَاتِبُوهُمۡ إِنۡ عَلِمۡتُمۡ فِيهِمۡ خَيۡرٗاۖ وَءَاتُوهُم مِّن
مَّالِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِيٓ ءَاتَىٰكُمۡۚ وَلَا تُكۡرِهُواْ فَتَيَٰتِكُمۡ عَلَى ٱلۡبِغَآءِ إِنۡ أَرَدۡنَ تَحَصُّنٗا لِّتَبۡتَغُواْ
عَرَضَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَاۚ وَمَن يُكۡرِههُّنَّ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ إِكۡرَٰهِهِنَّ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ﴿٣٣﴾

Those who are unable to marry should keep chaste until God gives them enough out of His bounty. If any of your slaves wish to pay for their freedom, make a contract with them accordingly, if you know they have good in them, and give them some of the wealth God has given you. Do not force your slave-girls into prostitution, when they themselves wish to remain honourable, in your quest for the short-term gains of this world, although, if they are forced, God will be forgiving and merciful to them [33] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 33)

In the case when we do not enable unmarried persons to get married, and do not assist them to do so, and they themselves are incapable of meeting the costs associated with it, then the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes to them an appropriate remedy, this being virtuous abstinence (*al-ist'faf*). Allah *Glorified is He* has requested of the Islamic society, whether represented in legal guardians or in the general society, to take resolute action in the matter of unmarried persons, and to help them with marriage. But if the community does not assume its role and these unmarried persons do not have their own means to get married, and then each one of them should strive for virtuous abstinence until Allah enriches them. This goes to show that ordained legislation builds up its laws, which take every situation into account, regardless of whether everyone complies or disobeys.

Concerning His utterance: '…let them live in continence…' (*an-Nur:* 33), this means they should earnestly attempt abstinence and strive for it and seek its supporting causes (*asbab*), and to make a serious endeavour to be chaste and virtuous. Now, the first means for attaining abstinence is for him to lower his gaze when he sees a desirable member of the opposite sex, thus, he will not be exposed to causes of agitation and excitement. And if he finds in himself manly vigour (*futuwa*) and strength, he should reign them in, and weaken them by lawful means as the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘O you people of youth, whoever among you has the necessary means (*al-ba’a*), that is, to provide for married life, then he should get married, and whoever cannot find [such means], then he should fast, for this is a way of reducing sexual desire.’(1) Fasting works to abate this sensual craving and to calm the intensity of the instinct. This is because he eats only the bare minimum to sustain himself, and his body is rid of what excites sensual craving, as reflected in the Noble Hadith: ‘Small morsels [of nourishment] for a man are adequate to maintain his backbone straight…’(2).

Another approach would be for the youth to apply himself fully to useful, profitable work which will pre-occupy him and drain his capacity and strength. If the latter is not directed towards the good, it will be directed towards the bad. It is through work that a youth consolidates his personality, and develops self-confidence, and earns lawful wages, which with the passing of time will encourage him to get married and to assume his responsibilities. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…let them live in continence…’ (*an-Nur:* 33), but He did not say: let them be continent. For the meaning of the Arabic word *(yasta’fif)* is to pursue the path of chastity and abstention for himself, and to strive towards it. This man does by preventing arousal through looking and calming the intensity of the instinct with fasting, or with work, so that his time is pre-occupied and he returns home at the end of the day exhausted wishing only to sleep in order to get up the next morning for work energetically. And in this way, he will find no opportunity for something which might anger Allah.

Concerning: ‘…those who are unable to marry…’ (*an-Nur:* 33), it means they cannot find within themselves the capacity, or from their community the necessary assistance to do so.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by both Al-Bukhari (5065) and Muslim (1400).*

(2) *This Hadith is excerpted from a longer Hadith narrated by Ahmad ibn-Hanbal (4/132) and At-Tirmidhi (2380) with slightly different wording, but same meaning in the context of the fault of overeating.*

As for His utterance: '…until Allah grants them sufficiency out of his bounty…' (*an-Nur:* 33), it signifies that virtuous abstinence (*al-ist'af*) is one of the means of self-sufficiency. This is because virtuous abstinence arises from the will to be Allah-fearing (*iradat at-taqwa*), and He *Glorified is He* has said in a Quranic passage: '…And unto everyone who is conscious of Allah, He [always] grants a way out [of unhappiness], and provides for him in a manner beyond all expectation…' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3). So, through this door the riches of Allah come to him.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…And if any of those whom you rightfully possess desire [to obtain] a deed of freedom, write it out for them if you are aware of any good in them: and give them [their share] of the wealth of Allah which He has given you'. (*an-Nur:* 33) Concerning the Arabic word *(al-kitab)* [translated here as: a deed of freedom], it is well known that it comprises a variety of things which are written on paper. The intended meaning here is a mutually agreed upon contract (*al-mukataba*) consisting of a written contract between you and an owned slave in which you stipulate conditions that he work for you for such-and-such a period, after which is to be granted his freedom, if he has fulfilled what was stated in the mutually agreed upon contract.

As for the statement: '…write it out for them if you are aware of any good in them…' (*an-Nur:* 33), this means that if their freedom will lead to good, it is as if you are removing from them the servility (*dhilla*) of slavery, and permitting them to work actively in life pursuing an activity that corresponds to their talents.

It is for this reason that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has rendered this mutual contract a channel of the channels of obligatory alms (*az-zakat*), hence He *Glorified is He* said: '…and spends his substance…for the freeing of human beings from bondage…' (*al-Baqara:* 177), that is to say, the owned slaves whom we wish to release their necks from the chains of slavery and its humiliation (*dhull*) by granting them freedom. And if the money of obligatory alms (*az-zakat*) is given to the poor and indigent, etc., then in the case of slaves (*ar-riqab*), the money is paid to the master so that he will grant freedom to his slave.

Similarly, Islam made the freeing of slaves a means of amends for certain sins between the slave, in the sense of piously devoted servant, and his Lord. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to abolish this phenomenon.

With regard to: '…and give them [their share] of the wealth of Allah which He has given you…' (*an-Nur:* 33), the True Lord *the Exalted* is the Provider (*Ar-Razaq*), and wealth is in truth the wealth of Allah. However, if he gives you ownership and asks you to give to your poor brother, he respects your ownership and He *Glorified is He* does not aim to take back his gift to you. Hence he takes from you charity and alms (*as-sadaqa*) as if it were a loan which the impoverished person does not repay, but rather, your Lord *the Exalted* assumes responsibility for repaying it. Thus, He says: '…Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan…' (*al-Baqara:* 245), and He *Glorified is He* did not say: give a loan to someone; instead, Allah is given the loan. For He *the Exalted* is the Creator, and among the rights of His slave whom he brought into existence is that He provides for him, and that He guarantees him his sustenance.

Respect for private ownership causes the human being to feel assured about the effects of his life's activity and the fruit of his toil, and that these will revert unto him. Otherwise, what would be the point of working and exerting efforts if its fruit were lost and he who earned them was deprived of them? In such a case, many interests would be hindered, and the individual would work only according to the extent of his need, and he would produce no surplus for charity.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: '…And do not, in order to gain some of the fleeting pleasures of this worldly life, coerce your [slave] maidens into whoredom if they happen to be desirous of marriage; and if anyone should coerce them, then, verily, after they have been compelled [to submit in their helplessness], Allah will be Forgiving, Merciful!' (*an-Nur:* 33)

A male owned slave (*mamluk*) is called a youth (*fata*) and a female owned slave is called a maiden (*fatah*) as the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* specifically forbade that a man should say: my slave (*'abdi*)(1) and my slave girl (*amati*), but instead, he should say my youth (*fataya*) and my maiden (*fatati*), for these appellations are more honourable for these, and more refined. The Arabic word *(al-fata)* is related to virility (*al-futuwa*) and strength, as if you were saying: this is my strength which helps me and assists me in the affairs of life. Thus, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wished to raise their standing. From such slaves came the group of Mamelukes (*al-mamalik*) who ruled Egypt at one time and they were of the offspring of kings, sultans, and noblemen.

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(1) *A Hadith to this effect was narrated by Al-Bukhari (2552) and Muslim (2249) as related by Abu-Hurayra.*

Prostitution was a phenomenon which was widespread at the coming of Islam. A man who owned a group of slave-girls would put up a banner for them, to signify their presence, and young men would come to them, and he would take the price for himself. Among [these owners of houses of prostitution] was ‘Abdullah ibn-Ubayy ibn-Salul, the chief of hypocrisy, and he had two [such slave-girls] called Miskina and Mu’adha, and it was concerning him that this verse was revealed.(1) The interpretation (*ta’wil*) of the verse is this: Do not force slave-girls into prostitution, as they may weep and refuse this act, and they may be harmed and subject to offensive taunting (*ghamz*) and defamation (*lamz*), and they may suffer insolence on the part of people. Among these slave-girls were ladies of good, noble lineage, but whom fate led to captivity through wars and other occurrences. At the same time a free, chaste noblewoman could go about without anyone causing her any harm or insult.

As regards the meaning of: ‘…if they happen to be desirous of marriage…’ (*an-Nur:* 33), here the Quran is speaking of the reality since if they did not desire to be chaste, then they would not have been coerced. Concerning: ‘…in order to gain some of the fleeting pleasures of this worldly life…’ (*an-Nur:* 33), it means seeking a small amount of transient money. Finally, the end of the verse: '…and if anyone should coerce them, then, verily, after they have been compelled [to submit in their helplessness], Allah will be Forgiving, Merciful!' (*an-Nur:* 33), it is to be understood that they are in a state of being coerced into prostitution and, therefore, have lost the condition of choice. Therefore, they do not bear the sin of this crime, based on the Noble Prophetic Hadith, 'My community of believers is absolved of unintentional error, forgetfulness, and that which they are forced to do.'(1)

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(1) [The famed early Hadith scholar] Zuhri said: `Abdullah ibn-Ubayy ibn-Salul had a slave-girl called Mu`adha whom he forced into fornication, then Islam came and [the verse] was revealed “And do not… coerce your [slave] maidens into whoredom…” (*an-Nur:* 33). This was narrated by Al-Bazzar in his *(Musnad) (cited by Ibn-Kathir in his Tafsir 3/288)*. According to another Hadith scholar Al-A`mash, whose narrations corroborates the context of the revelation of the verse in question, the name of the slave-girl was Miskina.

Hence, the True Lord *the Exalted* reassures those who desire protection (*at-tahassun*) and virtuous chastity but are forced by their masters into whoredom, compelling them by any means, as if Allah were telling them: rest assured for you have committed no sin in this case, and you will be forgiven, and Allah is forgiving, and Most Merciful.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكُمْ ءَايَٰتٍ مُّبَيِّنَٰتٍ وَمَثَلًا مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ
خَلَوْا۟ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

We have sent verses down to you [people] clarifying the right path, examples of those who passed away before you, and advice for those who are mindful of God [34]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 34)

The meaning here is: you have no excuse because Allah *the Exalted* has sent down to you manifestly clear verses which guarantee you nobility and probity of life, and the purity of the offspring of the vicegerent of Allah on earth. There is not a thing of the affairs of life, but these verses have addressed it and have revealed a regulation concerning it. You may have had an excuse had there been any issue or affair in your life that is not encompassed or regulated by this divinely ordained legislation (*at-tashri'*).

For this reason, Imam 'Ali *may Allah honour him* said about the Quran: in it there are laws governing your interaction, and information on what happened before you, and prediction of what will happen after you; it is the ultimate criterion of discernment (*al-fasl*) without any jest (*laysa bi-l-hazl*); whoever of the haughty and tyrannical abandons it, Allah will shatter; and whoever seeks guidance in other than it, Allah shall lead astray.(1)

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated with slightly different wording by Ibn-Majah (2045), Al-Darqutni (4/170) and Al-Hakim (2/198).*

Time continues to confirm the veracity of this utterance. Look around and you will find conflicts of views, schools of thought (*al-madhahib*), political parties (*al-ahzab*) and countries which are all based on principles against Islam, whether they be malicious capitalism or malicious communism, etc. All of them have collapsed, no longer heeded by anyone. Yes, whoever of the haughty and tyrannical abandons it, Allah will shatter, and whoever seeks guidance in other than it, Allah shall lead astray because He is your Creator, and He is more aware of what is good for you. So, therefore, it is not fitting that you should take possession of the creation of Allah and then display arrogance towards Him and lay down laws based on your own whim and design.

We have previously said: the Arabic word *(ayat)* is used with three significations: the cosmic signs which draw your attention to the Unique Maker *the Exalted* and with reference to the miracles (*al-mu'jizat*) which come to prove the veracity of the Messenger in his conveyance of the message from Allah. Finally, the term applies to verses bearing laws, and these are the verses of the Noble Quran, and in the Quran there are all of these.

And in His utterance: '…and [many] a lesson from [the stories of] those who have passed away before you, and [many] an admonition to the God-conscious.' (*an-Nur:* 34) Allah provided you with admonition and moral lesson in the peoples who came before you. They reached the summit of civilization, and yet did not possess the constituent elements for survival, and did not fashion for themselves the immunity (*al-mana'a*) to preserve it, so it collapsed. And nothing remains of them except vestiges, such as those we see now of the ancient Egyptians who had attained a level of civilization which astonishes the advanced modern scholar. These latter come now full of wonderment: how did the ancient Egyptians achieve this civilization?

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(1) *Cited by Ibn-Kathir in his (Tafsir) (3/289)*

Even greater than the civilization of the Pharaohs was that of ‘Ad about which Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] ʿAd, [the people of] Iram the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land?’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-8), in other words, it has no parallel in the entire world, ‘and with [the tribe of] Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? and with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein: and therefore your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering for, verily, your Lord is ever on the watch!’ (*al-Fajr:* 10-14) That is to say, not one of the transgressors shall escape, and the disbeliever shall not be saved from the punishment of Allah.

The parable is the same in the question of adultery and slandering chaste, virtuous women, like the incident of the calumny which has already been discussed, as it was an example and moral lesson. Similarly, the story of Maryam *peace be upon her* was an example, as her people had wrongly accused her, saying: ‘O sister of Aaron! Your father was not a wicked man, nor was your mother a loose woman!’ (*Maryam:* 28)

Likewise, was the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and the wife of Al-ʿAziz, all of them being issues related to honour, and there was no avoidance of slandering virtuous chaste women or the upright and pure Yusuf son of Ya’qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them*.

These verses are evident proofs of higher existence (*al-wujud al-a’la*) in cosmic verses, clear proofs of the veracity of the Messenger (*al-muballigh*) from Allah concerning miracles, clear proofs of the laws which regulate the activity of life in the verses of the Quran. Then we have shown them the final end of previous peoples (*al-umam as-sabiqa*) whether of those who approached Allah with obedience, or those who turned away from Him in disobedience. And none derives benefit from these admonitions and moral lessons except the righteous who fears Allah and in whom the admonition bears fruit.

ٱللَّهُ نُورُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ مَثَلُ نُورِهِۦ كَمِشۡكَوٰةٖ فِيهَا مِصۡبَاحٌۖ ٱلۡمِصۡبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍۖ
ٱلزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوۡكَبٞ دُرِّيّٞ يُوقَدُ مِن شَجَرَةٖ مُّبَٰرَكَةٖ زَيۡتُونَةٖ لَّا شَرۡقِيَّةٖ وَلَا غَرۡبِيَّةٖ
يَكَادُ زَيۡتُهَا يُضِيٓءُ وَلَوۡ لَمۡ تَمۡسَسۡهُ نَارٞۚ نُّورٌ عَلَىٰ نُورٖۚ يَهۡدِي ٱللَّهُ لِنُورِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُۚ
وَيَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡأَمۡثَٰلَ لِلنَّاسِۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٞ ٣٥

God is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like this: there is a niche, and in it a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, whose oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it – light upon light – God guides whoever He will to his Light; God draws such comparisons for people; God has full knowledge of everything [35] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 35)

We have said that Allah *the Exalted* has given us sensory light by which we see perceptible things, and has made it a vehicle of spiritual light. We have also said that when the world becomes dark each one of us makes light for himself according to his capabilities and possibilities for making light, and that as soon as the sun rises and Allah lights up existence, each of us extinguishes his light, since the light of Allah is sufficient. So, just as the light of Allah is sufficient for material things, likewise is His light sufficient for moral and spiritual things (*al-ma'nawiyat*).

So if Allah has ordained a moral law which regulates the activity of life, then you should beware of rejecting it on the basis of something of your own design. Just as you have put out your sensory lanterns before His lanterns, likewise you should also extinguish your moral lanterns before His laws and commands. This matter is evident in cosmic verses.

'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth…' (*an-Nur:* 35). As we say, to Allah belongs the highest allegory (*al-mathal al-a'la*): so-and-so has lit up the room with his presence. The verse does not provide us with a definition of God; instead, it makes us aware of His influence upon us. For He *Glorified is He* is the Illuminator (*al-munawwir*) of the heavens and the earth, and these are the vastest things we can imagine, inasmuch as all things in them are clear, not hidden.

Then our Lord *the Exalted* gives us an explanatory allegory for His light, saying: '…The parable of His light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp…' (*an-Nur:* 35). That is to say, the parable of His illumination of the heavens and the earth '…is, as it were, that of a niche…' (*an-Nur:* 35) and this is an alcove which people in former times used to set in walls, a non-piercing aperture in which they used to place a lantern or lamp. This niche confined the light and concentrated it in an area so that it would become strong and no shadow was cast in front of the flow of light.

As for the lamp: this was a small container in which oil and in later times kerosene was placed, and in the middle of it was a wick which absorbed the oil and thus remained lit. But if the wick were exposed to drafts of air, [they] would play with it and its light would dissipate, and this would cause smoke, since it would get more air than it needed for combustion. For this reason, they put a barrier of glass around the wick, to keep drafts from it, and then the light coming from it would be clear without smoke.

In this way the oil lamp evolved and its light was enhanced and its efficiency increased. Related to this is His utterance: '…the lamp is [enclosed] in glass…' (*an-Nur:* 35). However, this is not ordinary glass, rather, it is glass '…[shining] like a radiant star…' (*an-Nur:* 35). In other words, a star of pearls (*ad-dur*), and pearls give off light of themselves.

Likewise for its oil, it is no ordinary oil, rather, it is oil of a blessed olive tree. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west…' (*an-Nur:* 35). If a tree is in the east or the west, it must experience darkness when the sun sets in either direction. This olive tree is neither from the east nor from the west; it belongs to both, so nothing blocks light from it. This continuous light affects its oil; so, in terms of its purity and lustre, it: '…almost gives light even when no fire touches it…' (*an-Nur:* 35). It is the oil of a tree that is never blocked from the light of the sun. The light it produces befits its unique status and magnificence. The sun lights the world, and this olive tree derives its light from this unending source, for the light of the sun never leaves it.

Such is the likeness of Allah's illumination of the heavens and earth, as perfect as this depiction. Just think of a lamp with such qualities. Now think of the heavens and earth in the same way: would there be any dark spot in or on them? It is important to underline that this parable is not set forth to portray the Light of Allah, but only to portray His illumination of the heavens and earth. As for His Light, that is another thing beyond description. The parable here is only meant to bring the matter closer to the human mind for easier comprehension

We have previously mentioned the poet Abu Tammam who extolled the caliph in the following remarkable verses:

Brave as Amr, generous as Hatim,

Lenient as Ahnaf, shrewd as ‘Iyas.

The poet eulogised the caliph by likening him to the most famous Arabs who were known for those noble traits. However, since no one is safe from criticism, one of Abu Tammam*’s* hate-filled rivals said, ‘How can you compare the caliph to the wandering idlers of the Arabs? The prince is above the ones you have mentioned!’ To this criticism, Abu Tammam made this witty addition to the previous verses, in the same metre and rhyme (in the original Arabic verses):

Blame me not for comparing him to his inferiors

Even though he is matchless in worth and power,

For Allah has drawn a parable for His Light

With some of His creatures: a niche and a lantern!

Allah is the Light of the heavens and earth; He is the One who illuminates them. The light of the sun, the moment it rises upon the world, is so overwhelming that no other light appears alongside it. The lights of the other planets and stars disappear, vanquished by the light of the sun. A poet(1) once said in his eulogy of someone:

You are like the sun while other kings are planets!

Your splendid light blocks all their lights!

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(1) This poet is An-Nabigha.

After drawing that parable, Allah says: '…light upon light…' (*an-Nur:* 35). Besides the material light by which Allah illuminates the world, He has also sent down to us His guidance, the light which illuminates the soul. He has revealed to us through His Prophets His ordinance by which to set our lives to rights. Thus, He has sent to us light upon light: the material light and the spiritual light. Just as the former is essential for life on earth, the latter is likewise essential for the life of our hearts. Is it plausible to put out the sun and replace it by man-made sources of light? Similarly, no one who has sound understanding would find it reasonable to replace the perfect Law of Allah with imperfect man-made laws.

Allah says after that: '…Allah guides whoever He wills to His Light…' (*an-Nur:* 35). The word "Light" here refers to the spiritual light, the light of the Straight Path He has revealed to us. The light which illuminates the material world is available for everyone, but the light of Divine Guidance is granted only to those who choose faith. The disbelievers have no share in this light. They closed their eyes, ears and hearts, so did not receive the Light of Allah. They should have understood that this spiritual light is no less important than the material light that illuminates the world. It is impossible to do without it. Companion 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb said about Divine Guidance, 'Whoever abandons it out of haughtiness, Allah will rout him, and whoever seeks guidance in other than it, Allah will lead him astray'.

The more one gives himself over to devotion to Allah, the more the light increases in his soul. Allah says: 'Believers, if you remain mindful of Allah, He will give you a criterion [to tell right from wrong]…' (*al-Anfal:* 29), He also says: 'While as for those who accept guidance, He increases their guidance and bestows on them their piety' (*Muhammad:* 17).

Back to the verse we are examining; Allah then says: '…Allah draws such comparisons for people…' (*an-Nur:* 35). Allah means to teach us moral lessons and give us admonitions through such parables, for '…Allah has full knowledge of everything' (*an-Nur:* 35).

Allah says in the following verse:

فِي بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ ٱللَّهُ أَن تُرۡفَعَ وَيُذۡكَرَ فِيهَا ٱسۡمُهُۥ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُۥ فِيهَا بِٱلۡغُدُوِّ وَٱلۡأٓصَالِ ٣٦

Shining out in houses of worship. God has ordained that they be raised high and that His name be remembered in them, with men in them celebrating His glory morning and evening [36] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 36)

The verse begins with an adjectival clause: ‘Shining out in houses of worship…’ (*an-Nur:* 36). There has to be a noun, therefore, that is modified by this clause. By looking into the structure of the verses, this clause modifies the light described in the previous verse. This light shines out in houses of worship which Allah has commanded to be raised high. A house is one’s private place on which one depends for living a settled life. It is where one seeks shelter after the toil of the day. In it, one has ample opportunity to separate oneself from others and enjoy personal privacy. It is an essential need of life, as no human being would be content to live in a public place with other unrelated people. Everyone necessarily needs to seclude themselves in a place that belongs to them, a place where all the noise of life is hushed. This need is intrinsic to the natural human disposition. Not only does a family need seclusion from society, but every member of a family would also desire at times to lock himself up in his own room. A home is a covering, like one’s clothes. Everyone has things which he does not want anyone to know about.

The ‘houses of worship’ mentioned in the verse are the houses of Allah. He has taken up a house on earth, the first house of worship established for people, as Allah says: ‘the first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Mecca.(1) It is a blessed place…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96). This is the House of Allah by the choice of Allah. Then, the houses of Allah, chosen by His servants, multiplied. Mosques are the houses of worship ‘…Allah has ordained that they be raised high and that His Name be remembered in them…’ (*an-Nur:* 36).

Since all of us are the servants of Allah, anyone of us would find comfort in His house just as he would find comfort in his own house, even though nothing can be compared to the tranquillity and peace that overwhelms the soul at the houses of Allah. The comfort in your house stems from material luxury, a comfortable living room, or a kitchen well stocked with food. As for the comfort in the house of Allah, it is purely spiritual. Allah cannot be seen, but we are sure He is there, and so is comfort in His houses: it is based on non-material things that cannot be seen, but felt. Whenever he faced a momentous matter, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would betake himself to *salat* (prayer)(1) to lay his burdens before his Lord. What would you say about a machine which is displayed for examination before its maker once every day? Would there remain in it any defect or imperfection? How, then, about one who stands before His Lord and Creator five times a day? Would there remain in his soul any impurity?

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(1) *The original reads Bakka which was an old name for Mecca.*

Allah calls us to His houses in order to give us comfort and relieve us of our worries. He wants us to stand before Him in *salat* (prayer) to mend that which has been broken in our souls and put peace in our hearts. Hence, this light upon light referred to in the verse cannot be found except in the houses of Allah, which He has ordained to be raised high and His Name to be remembered in them through observing the acts of worship He has prescribed. What elevates the houses of Allah is the obedience of His servants manifested through the acts of worship they observe therein. Any other houses are apt to witness acts of disobedience to Him, but the houses of Allah are made to witness only devotion to Him by His pious servants. Allah has made His houses exalted so no one is ever permitted to desecrate them by sinning or even wasting his precious time in them by engaging in frivolous matters or anything but worship. It is incumbent on one, therefore, to leave the mundane world at the door of the mosque, just as he leaves his shoes, and let nothing dissuade him from worship.

For example, Islam forbids that we conduct business transactions in the houses of Allah or exploit them to publicize a commodity, look for something lost (by using the microphones of a mosque to announce loss of that thing or a reward for whoever finds it, etc.), or to fulfil any such worldly gains. Allah would not bless any such attempts at seeking the gains of the life of this world in His houses that should be strictly confined to displaying devotion to Him through worship. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered us to say to whoever exploits the mosque to find an object he has lost, ‘May Allah not return it to him’.(1)

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(1) *A Hadith to this effect is cited by Ahmad (5/388) and Abu Dawud (1319).*

Allah has made the entire earth a place fit for observing *salat* (prayer) and a means of attaining ritual purity – through *tayammum* (dry ritual cleansing using dust) – for all Muslims. Still, there is a difference between praying at a mosque and praying in any other place. The mosque is particularly made for worship, a place where we should not engage in worldly matters. As for other places, they are generally suitable for praying and also for the pursuit of worldly affairs. We already give most of our time to managing businesses and affairs of our worldly lives. Can a few minutes, then, be too much for worship? Can we not dedicate the short time we spend at the mosque only to showing devotion to Allah? The houses of Allah are established only for worship, so should we not be mindful of this? A believer should leave the mundane world outside the mosque and direct his intention only to showing obedience to Allah through performing acts of worship. One’s time at the mosque should be fully dedicated to glorifying Allah by remembering Him and worshipping Him. It is not appropriate to be in Allah’s house and be occupied with other than Him.

Whoever bears in mind these rulings pertaining to the houses of Allah is the one who receives from Allah ‘…light upon light…’ (*an-Nur:* 35). These are the ones who are granted relief from worry and distress, and Allah spares them the trouble of this life.

Allah has made faith innate in the natural human disposition. Everyone is born with faith already established in his soul. This is the nature Allah has created in us, however much most people may try to deny it. One may reject faith, or even deny the Existence of Allah. However, the moment he is exposed to trouble and finds no one to help, he would spontaneously turn to Allah and implore His assistance. He would not deceive himself in such a situation or persist in his defiance of the truth, but he would invoke the One Who can truly help him and save him. In this regard, Allah says: 'When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him, but once he has been granted a favour from Allah, he forgets the One he had been praying to and sets up rivals to Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 8).

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘If you see someone selling or buying at the mosque, say, “May Allah efface your transaction”. If you see someone exploiting the mosque to announce a lost property, say, “May Allah not return it to you.”’ [Cited by An-Nasa’i in his ‘Amal Al-Yawm wa Al-Laya (p.73), Ad-Darimi (1/326) and At-Tirmidhi (1321)].*

So observance of worship has priority over worldly matters. Allah conveys this meaning to us with absolute precision in His words: 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). The original Arabic text of this verse uses the word *bay'* (here rendered as 'trading') which literally means 'selling'. Forbidding selling necessarily entails forbidding buying as well, but why does Allah mention selling in particular? One might be reluctant to buy a thing. Buying means spending money, but selling means earning money. Selling concludes most activities designed to earn wealth in this world… Commerce, agriculture, manufacturing, or any other activities are concluded by the sale of the product. Once the prayer is finished, Allah commands us to resume our worldly activities: 'Then when the Prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

One needs to go to the mosque to get what we may call 'spiritual recharge', to renew one's energy to resume his activities and boost his productivity to promote his life. When your Lord orders you to leave off everything and devote yourself to the observance of the prayer, He does not mean to obstruct you from the activities of life. Rather, this is meant to refuel your soul so you can resume those activities in compliance with the commands of Allah. The time dedicated to worshipping Allah at His House is so similar, in its effect on the heart and soul of a believer, to recharging a battery. When you connect a battery to the charging device, this is not taking it out of service, but it increases its efficiency in performing its function.

A believer goes to the house of Allah driven by faith and keenness to respond to the call to prayer. At the mosque, Allah bestows on him ample light out of His bounty and such is the immediate reward of those devoted to

Him. Allah has drawn for us a parable of His Light with a lamp whose light grows and ascends because it is in a glass which intensifies its light. It is like a pearly star whose light shines more brightly, for it is lit by the oil of an olive tree that is neither of the east nor the west. Hence, we have before us many hues (of meaning) in the parable, and likewise for the light in the houses of Allah which He bestows on those devoted to Him. It has been said that just as people of the earth see sparkling stars in the sky, the angels in the sky see sparkling stars on the earth: these are the houses of Allah. This is not surprising, since they are the lights of Allah sparkling in His houses. The light of the sun is so great that it reflects on the surface of the moon and casts light upon the world, and these are only things created by Allah. How then about the Light of Allah which shines in His houses? Would He not give use that radiance which surpasses the radiance of full moons? Allah then says: '…with men in them celebrating His glory morning and evening' (*an-Nur:* 36). Mosques have been established for exalting Allah and glorifying His Name. At one time, it was the habit of pious men that when one of them wanted to travel somewhere, he would strive to reach it before the appointed time of any of the five daily prayers. Once he arrived at his destination, he would go to a mosque: if he found it full of people exalting the Name of Allah, he would know that they were devoted to the ordinance of Allah, for they were sitting at the mosque before the time of the prayer, glorifying Allah and waiting for the call to the prayer to be proclaimed. If he found the mosque almost empty, he would depart from that place, knowing that it was a town in which there was no good.(1) The verse says: '…morning and evening…' (*an-Nur:* 36) which means the mosque is never void of people remembering Allah and celebrating His glory. Those who thus fill the houses of Allah with His remembrance are described as being:

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(1) *In his Quranic Exegesis (6/4812), Al-Qurtubi narrated, 'Salim ibn Abdullah saw people of market places as they eagerly went to the prayer, so he said, "These are those whom Allah refers to in His words: "Men who are not distracted, either by commerce or profit, from remembering Allah…" (an-Nur: 37)."' Then, Al-Qurtubi said, 'Scholars have differed regarding the description of those who glorify Him. They said they are those who carefully observe the commands of Allah, seek to please Him, and are not distracted from the prayer and remembrance of Allah by anything of the affairs of the world.'*

رِجَالٞ لَّا تُلۡهِيهِمۡ تِجَٰرَةٞ وَلَا بَيۡعٌ عَن ذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَإِيتَآءِ
ٱلزَّكَوٰةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوۡمٗا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ وَٱلۡأَبۡصَٰرُ ﴿٣٧﴾

Men who are not distracted, either by commerce or profit, from remembering God, keeping up the prayer, and paying the prescribed alms, fearing a day when hearts and eyes will turn over [37] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 37)

We have already pointed out that selling is tempting and it is the conclusion of almost all production or work activities. In any field, a product is released for sale for profits to be made. Those described in the verse are men who are making profits through selling without being distracted them from the remembrance of Allah because they are aware Allah will bless their time and whatever works they are engaged in because of the time they devote to His remembrance and worship in His houses.

The verse may also be interpreted in another way. The men described in the verse are not distracted by trading from remembering Allah, for even when they are busy doing their work, they are not neglectful of the remembrance of Allah. When we were young, we would hear merchants in market places, in the midst of their conversations with customers, reiterating prayers like, ‘There is no god but Allah’, ‘Peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad’, etc. Rarely now do we hear such forms of remembering Allah repeated among people at markets. Everyone is immersed in his trade and focused only on making money however he can. Most traders depend on eye-catching displays and publicity, some even on cheating and swindling. We almost no longer hear the Name of Allah mentioned in this context among traders and customers. At one time, even when the sale was not concluded, you would hear the merchant still praise Allah and invoke a blessing on His Prophet. This in itself is profit, even if no material profit was made through selling.

In the verse, Allah says: ‘Men who are not distracted… from… keeping up the prayer, and paying the prescribed Alms…’ (*an-Nur:* 37). Five mandatory prayers are ordained daily which take some time to observe. Some are too preoccupied by their jobs and businesses that they begrudge any time given to observing their duty to Allah. They think performing the prayers would waste their time and affect the progress of their work. Similarly, some view obligatory Alms (*zakat*) as something which decreases one's wealth, but this is a faulty understanding. When a farmer takes a measure of wheat seeds from his store in order to plant them in his land, is it plausible to say that his seed stock has been diminished by a measure? No, for this measure will be multiplied at harvest time many times over.

A believer who is constant in observing the prayer receives light from Allah Who blesses his time so that he will accomplish more work than someone who abandons the prayer. Allah will open for him channels that yield far more profits than he expects. Allah's blessings come in different forms. Sometimes they are manifested in ample provisions that He grants to His servant. Sometimes Allah deprives His servant from a thing he desires out of His Wisdom, and this is also a blessing from Him, although in disguise. All of these are lights that Allah showers on those who adhere firmly to His Straight Path.

Allah concludes the verse by describing the state of those who are never distracted from remembering Him, saying: '…fearing a Day when hearts and eyes will turn over' (*an-Nur:* 37). People who care only about the life of this world immerse themselves in commerce aiming at maintaining their material gains. As for those described in the verse, they engage in commerce with Allah, a transaction that never fails to be profitable, both in this life and in the Hereafter.

If you compare the time of your temporal life with the time of your Afterlife, the former is sure to be found like dust without value, as if it were only an imagined period of time of an imagined life. No one knows when death will surprise him. As for the Hereafter, it is a certain life, an eternal one. Enjoyments here are transient, but in the Hereafter, eternal happiness awaits the righteous. So they work for the Hereafter: '…fearing a Day when hearts and eyes will turn over' (*an-Nur:* 37). Let me comment on the structure here. The verse says 'fearing the day', yet it means, 'fearing what will happen on that day'. This is like when a student says, 'I was afraid of the examination day' which means he was afraid of the examination itself. Thus, the word 'Day' is used, while what is meant is the events of the Day. As for this verse we are reflecting on, it is punishment on that Day which these men fear.

Allah says that on that Day: '…hearts and eyes will turn over' (*an-Nur:* 37). This refers to the violent trembling of the heart and its powerful palpitation on that Day. Events in this life may be terrifying enough to cause heart palpitations,; what about the Day of Judgement, then? The terror of the Hereafter is unimaginable. Likewise, eyes are thrown into disarray. A man will shift his gaze from here to there; when he sees a terrifying thing which strikes fear in him, he will jump about, looking here and there that he might see something to reassure him and relieve him of what he has seen. However, he will only see another terrifying sight, more ominous and more grievous. 'Downcast will be their eyes…' (*al-Qalam:* 43). 'On that Day will [men's] hearts be throbbing [and] their eyes downcast' (*an-Nazi'at:* 8-9)? There will be no escape and no security. On that Day, none will find security except those who have prepared for it by doing righteous deeds. On examination day, a diligent student is confident and hopeful. The idle lose themselves in fear and bewilderment.

Having described those who are never distracted from remembering Allah, Allah describes their reward in the following verse:

لِيَجْزِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا۟ وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِۦ ۗ
وَٱللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَن يَشَآءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

God will reward such people according to the best of
their actions, and He will give them more of His bounty:
God provides limitlessly for anyone He will [38]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 38)

On that Day, Allah will recompense them on the basis of the best that they had done in life. How marvellous is the Mercy of Allah! What about their misdeeds? This is left to the Mercy of Allah and His Forgiveness: '…He will give them more of His bounty…' (*an-Nur:* 38). Allah does not recompense the righteous based on His Justice; He does not give them what is exactly equivalent to their good deeds. Rather, He treats them based on His Bounty. He grants them ample reward out of His Bounty. Among reported supplications is this one, 'O Allah, treat us with Your Bounty, not Your Justice. Treat us with Your Beneficence, not based on our scales (of good and bad deeds).' No one would have any hope of salvation were it not for Allah's Mercy and Bounty. Allah says: 'Say [Prophet], "In Allah's grace and mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate"' (*Yunus:* 58).

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…Allah (provides) limitlessly for anyone He wills' (*an-Nur:* 38). Allah grants *rizq* (from which *yarzuqu* is derived) to whoever He chooses. This Arabic word has a far wider and more profound meaning than the usual English translation: 'provision'. It includes everything in which there is benefit to you. Accordingly, health is *rizq*; knowledge is *rizq*; forbearance is *rizq*; courage is *rizq*, etc. it is not confined to money or material gains only, but includes all that is advantageous to you. It is part of showing gratitude to Allah that we give out of whatever *rizq* He bestows on us. If Allah grants you knowledge, teach the ignorant. If He gives you power, help the weak. If He endows you with discernment and forbearance, be patient with fools. If He grants you talent and skill, use them to perfection and let them be in the service of those who are wanting in them. Your Lord grants you blessings limitlessly and provides you with abundance out of His Bounty. Give, then, to those in need and give out of what you have to the destitute. All blessings come from Allah; we are only recipients, not makers of blessings. When Allah grants you ample blessings, always remember that you are only the Hand of Allah stretched out for His servants. You are a means by which He means to provide for others. When you give, you give from treasuries that are never exhausted. There is no reason, then, to be miserly, for what you possess must be used up, and what Allah possesses is endless, everlasting.

When a mortal gives to others, he has to calculate what he has in his possession to know how much he may give. When it comes to Allah, His Treasuries are abundant. Therefore, He gives His servants limitlessly. He may grant us things we do not seek, reach for, or even deserve. Have you never seen someone who stumbles and finds a treasure under his feet?

On the other hand, Allah describes the deeds and final fate of the disbelievers. He says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَعۡمَٰلُهُمۡ كَسَرَابِۭ بِقِيعَةٖ يَحۡسَبُهُ ٱلظَّمۡـَٔانُ مَآءً حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَهُۥ لَمۡ
يَجِدۡهُ شَيۡـٔٗا وَوَجَدَ ٱللَّهَ عِندَهُۥ فَوَفَّىٰهُ حِسَابَهُۥۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَرِيعُ ٱلۡحِسَابِ ٣٩

But the deeds of those who disbelieve are like a mirage in a desert: the thirsty person thinks there will be water but, when he gets there, he finds only God, who pays him his account in full – God is swift in reckoning [39] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 39)

This is meant to attract the attention of those who give themselves over to the life of this world to the detriment of the Hereafter; they do many good deeds, but do not devote their intention in doing them to Allah. What makes good deeds fruitful is that they are done only for the aim of pleasing Allah. Those who forget this truth will have to face it on the Day of Judgement. It will be said to each of them, 'You did it so people would say… and it was said'.(1) They have done those good deeds so people would praise them, and they did praise them, perhaps erected statues in their honour, and immortalized their memory in history. The Quran draws this image for them to take heed, for their deeds will be fruitless unless they do them for their Lord and Creator: 'As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one thinks it to be water, until he comes up to it; he finds it to be nothing…' (*an-Nur:* 39).

They imagine their deeds to be good and anticipate reward for them. A mirage is what appears in the desert at midday, as if it were water. This phenomenon is the result of the refraction of light. Only a thirsty person would yearn for it as he is in need of water. If he were not thirsty, perhaps he would not have paid attention to the mirage, but because of his thirst, he runs after water. He will not find anything, but the matter will not end in a futile pursuit because: '…he finds Allah with him, Who will pay him his due (Hell)…' (*an-Nur:* 39). He will be confounded to unexpectedly find that there is God of Whom he was never mindful when he performed any of his good deeds. He will find that there is God in whom he did not believe. Only then will he become aware of the truth that his deeds have been in vain. Thus, he faces two calamities together: the calamity of extreme thirst which he finds no means of quenching, and the calamity of punishment which awaits him from Allah. Similarly a poet (1) once said:

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(1) *This is part of a Hadith cited by Muslim (1905), Ahmad (2/322) and An-Nasa'i (6/23, 24), on the authority of Abu Hurayra. It tells, 'The first to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who fell martyr in a battle. He will be brought forward and faced with the blessings of Allah he received in life, and he will acknowledge them. Then it will be said to him, "What did you do with them?" The man will say, "I fought in Your cause until I fell martyr in a battle." It will be said, "You are a liar! You fought so that it would be said you were courageous, and this was said." Then he will be dragged on his face and thrown into Hellfire.'*

A cloud would come, flashing with lightning.

When they see it, it disperses and vanishes.

We have previously drawn a comparison in this regard to a thirsty prisoner. The guard brings water and puts it just at his lips, and the poor prisoner aspires to quench his thirst, the guard then spills the water on the ground. Despair is much harder when it follows hope.

Allah draws for us such parables to warn us against dedicating our good deeds to people. One will do good to others who show ingratitude in the end. This is a lesson to everyone to never dedicate their good deeds to people and direct their intentions to pleasing Allah only.

Allah draws a parable for those who give money to charity to show off among people; this is like throwing water on a smooth rock: no plants can be brought forth: '…like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in Allah and the Last Day. Such a person is like a rock with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare. Such people get no rewards for their works: Allah does not guide the disbelievers' (*al-Baqara:* 264).

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…Allah is Swift in taking account' (*an-Nur:* 39). Therefore, do not think death and resurrection are so far. When one dies, he does not feel the passage of time, so when the Day of Judgement comes: '…It will seem they lingered [in this life] an evening [at most] or its morning' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46). Allah has willed that no mortal would know the cause or the time of his death. This concealment is wisdom and guidance, for it urges one to continually strive to do righteous deeds to prepare for the Hereafter, for death is expected at every moment. The instant your eyes close, they are not sure to reopen as they usually do. Death comes in the blink of an eye. Given this truth, Allah's Reckoning is so near and so swift. It has been reported, 'When one dies, it is as if his own Judgement Day came.'(1)

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(1) This poet is Kathir ibn Abd Al-Rahman Abu Sakhr Al-Khuza'i (died: 105 A.H.).

After the parable of the mirage, Allah gives another parable describing the deeds of the disbelievers:

أَوْ كَظُلُمَٰتٍ فِى بَحْرٍ لُّجِّىٍّ يَغْشَىٰهُ مَوْجٌ مِّن فَوْقِهِۦ مَوْجٌ مِّن فَوْقِهِۦ سَحَابٌ ۚ ظُلُمَٰتٌۢ بَعْضُهَا
فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ إِذَآ أَخْرَجَ يَدَهُۥ لَمْ يَكَدْ يَرَىٰهَا ۗ وَمَن لَّمْ يَجْعَلِ ٱللَّهُ لَهُۥ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُۥ مِن نُّورٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

Or like shadows in a deep sea covered by wave
upon wave, with clouds above – layer upon layer of
darkness – if he holds out his hand, he is scarcely
able to see it. The one to whom God gives no light
has no light at all [40] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 40)

Imagine the darkness of a sea, vast and large, in which waves clash, one upon the other, and above all this are clouds. Overwhelming gloom! This darkness has reached such a degree that one cannot see even his own hand if he holds it out! '…He is scarcely able to see it…' (*an-Nur:* 40). He is not even close to seeing it. This is because he has no light from Allah with which to be guided, for '…the one to whom Allah gives no light has no light at all' (*an-Nur:* 40). Just as he does not have enough light to even see his own hand, his heart is void of the Divine Light, and his own deeds will be of no use to him in the Hereafter.

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(1) *This Hadith is cited by 'Ajaluni in Kashf Al-Khafa' (Hadith number 2618), on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, and its full version is, 'Remember death often, for verily if you remember it in a state of prosperity, it will guard your heart against its lure, and if you remember it in a state of distress, it will alleviate it. Death is the herald of resurrection, so whoever dies, it is as if his own Judgement Day came.' Another version of this Hadith is cited by Ad-Daylami in Musnad Al-Ferdaws (Hadith number 1117), on the authority of Anas, too, with the wording: 'When any one of you dies, it is as if his own Judgment Day came, so worship Allah as if you see Him, and implore forgiveness every hour.'*

Allah says in the following verse:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُۥ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱلطَّيۡرُ صَٰٓفَّٰتٖۖ
كُلّٞ قَدۡ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُۥ وَتَسۡبِيحَهُۥۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمُۢ بِمَا يَفۡعَلُونَ ٤١

[Prophet], do you not see that all those who are in the heavens and earth praise God, as do the birds with wings outstretched? Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification: God has full knowledge of what they do[41]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 41)

Allah directs our attention to the signs of His Oneness, Perfection of His Control over creation and His Power. This verse follows on from several earlier verses in this Quranic chapter of *an-Nur* where Allah reveals some commands and prohibitions. This is meant to reassure us that He has prepared this universe to receive us even before the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. He has made the sky and the earth, the sun and the moon, water and air. Allah means to convey to us the message that we should rest reassured, for nothing of this universe will deviate from our service, for He has made it subservient to humankind and no part of it may ever rebel against the commands of Allah.

Allah says: '…Do you not see that all those that are in the heavens and earth praise Allah…' (*an-Nur:* 41)? It is worthy of notice that the verse uses the verb 'see' instead of 'know'. We find this also in the verse: 'Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) We know Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant and did not see that event the above mentioned verse speaks about. Why then has Allah addressed him with the words 'Do you not see' instead of, 'do you not know'? Some would say this is imprecision and the verb 'know' would have been more appropriate. However, using this verb is meant to convey the message that what Allah tells us about the Unseen is more trustworthy even than what our eyes inform us of as a direct witness. Knowledge coming directly from Allah is sure to be true. Eyesight can be afflicted with illness so that vision becomes defective, such as those who have colour blindness, myopia etc. Thus, even eyesight- which is the most reliable source of perception- may deceive you.

The Arabic word *tasbih* usually translated as ‘praising/glorification of Allah’ denotes a significant meaning not accurately conveyed in the translation. It means elevating Allah above any description of Him that can ever cross your mind. For example, Allah has existence and we have existence, but the Existence of Allah is by no means like ours. Allah has a Self and Attributes, but these are not like ours, and so on. Everything that belongs to Allah is in a manner that befits His Majesty and Perfection.

His Description is very far from anything with which we are familiar. We are beings that Allah has granted existence. As for the Existence of Allah, it has not been bestowed by other than him. No one has created Him *the Exalted*. The same applies to the actions of Allah: they are incomparably different from our actions.

We have previously dealt with this issue in our reflections on the verse: ‘Glory to Him Who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship (in Mecca) to the furthest place of worship (in Jerusalem)…’ (*al-Isra’:* 1). Certainly, those who refused to believe the news of the Nightly Journey and deemed it impossible did so on the basis of measuring the Power of Allah by the power of human beings; they failed to differentiate between the actions of Allah and those of His servants. Prophet Muhammad did not say he transported himself at night from Mecca to Jerusalem; rather, he said he was transported at night by Almighty Allah.

The objection raised against the possibility of the journey is quite illogical and groundless. It would have taken a month at that time to travel this distance by camel, if we consider the powers and capacities of people. As for Allah, he says to a thing: ‘Be!’ And it is. He has no need for time, for He has created time. Nothing is hard for Him, for He is the Creator of everything. True faith and true discipline with Allah necessarily entail that we never compare anything related to Him with anything related to His limited creatures. His Existence Attributes and Actions are all above anything that may cross our minds.

We glorify Allah and praise His Name. However, Allah has forever been glorified and has forever been elevated above every imperfection even before He created anyone to exalt Him. He has forever been the One God *the Exalted and Almighty*: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

Allah has already testified to His Divinity and Oneness before any mortal did, and before the angels did. Before Allah created humankind, the heavens and the earth have exalted Him ever since the moment He created them.

The verb *sabbaha* (glorified) which is the past tense of *yusabbihu* (to glorify Allah) is sometimes used instead of the present form, as in the verse: 'Everything in the heavens and earth *sabbaha* Allah…' (*al-Hadid:* 1). Using a past verb form in the Arabic language does not always refer to the past. Did the heavens and the earth glorify Allah once then refrained from glorification? No, they continue to do so in the present: 'Everything in the heavens and earth *yusabbehu* (glorifies Him)…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1). In this verse, the verb is in the present *yusabbihu*.

Thus, the entire universe glorifies Allah, and there remains only you, O son of Adam. 'Glorify the Name of your Lord *the Most High*' (*al-A'la:* 1). By so doing, you are in harmony with the whole of creation that constantly glorifies Allah without reluctance.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on, Allah says: '…all those that are in the heavens and earth praise Allah…' (*an-Nur:* 41). The Arabic pronoun here translated as 'that' is used to refer to animate beings, not inanimate things. Some, based on this rule, argue that the verse refers to animate beings only and the heavens and earth themselves are not included. This is quite inaccurate, for other verses prove that the heavens and earth glorify Allah: '…Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification…' (*an-Nur:* 41). Allah also says: '…the thunder sounds His praises, as do the angels in awe of Him…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 13). All existence glorifies Him.

Others say they do not actually- that is, verbally- glorify Allah, but they all submit to His Laws, His Might and Majesty, so to say that they 'glorify' Allah is meant only in a figurative sense. They glorify Him by being obedient, not by uttering verbal praises of Him. A poet once said, alluding to this meaning:

In everything there is a sign

Signifying that He is one

However, this argument is refuted by Allah's words: '…There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra': * 44). This verse proves that everything, even inanimate objects, do glorify Allah actually and verbally with languages human beings do not understand. Do you understand all the languages of your own species, so that you might understand the languages of other created things? If you have not learnt Arabic, for example, you will not be able to understand anything of it, even though it is a living language that has its grammar rules, vocabulary, etc. like your own language, not a totally different language system like those of other creatures. Therefore, it is quite groundless to argue that other creatures do not glorify Allah verbally. They do, but we do not understand them. Each kind of creature has its manner of articulation and communication. Let it suffice as evidence for this that Allah has made some of the languages of other kinds known to those He has chosen among human beings. He granted Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* the ability to understand what an ant was saying, as He tells us in the Quran: 'Sulaiman (Solomon) smiled broadly at her words…' (*an-Naml:* 19). He heard the speech of the Hoopoe and got from him news of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis).

Contemplate the hexagonal cells bees make and their exemplary accuracy. Look at a bird's nest. A bird weaves pieces of straw, interlaces them, and makes the nest an enclosure that protects its young. If you touch the internal surface of a nest made of straw, you will find it feels almost as soft as silk. Think of a spider's web and how it catches moths with it.

I once saw a film about a fight between a bear and a bull. The bear saw that the bull's horns were long and sharp and knew that they were the weapons he would use to kill him. Understanding this, the bear attacked the bull, grabbed his two horns, and continued to bite the bull's head. The bull got so severely wounded that it fell to the ground and then the bear began eating it. Why, then, do we see it as a far-fetched idea that these creatures have languages with which they glorify Allah and no human being understands except one Allah has gifted with such knowledge? Furthermore, did man not learn from a raven how to bury the dead when Qabil (Cain) killed Habil (Abel)? Allah says: 'Allah sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31). Allah has taught man by that means to teach him not to be arrogant, for he is so helpless and has no reason to entertain any improper pride.

Zoologists have found that ants build integral colonies, a wonderful model of order and cooperation. Some researchers noticed a group of ants going hither and thither until they found a piece of food, which they then left behind and returned to where they had come from. Then, a troop of ants appeared, which gathered around the piece of food and transported it to their hole. The next time, the researchers put another piece of food, twice the size of the first one. A group of what we may very well call 'scouts' came across it and again left it without attempting to carry it. Afterwards a troop of ants, double the number of the first troop, came and carried the piece of food. It seems ants are capable of accurately identifying size, weight, and mass. A white crumb in front of the ants' colony was found. Through examination of it, it was found to be a seed embryo –the ants were inspired to realize the importance of cutting it up so it would not sprout and cause their colony to collapse. To this extent do ants know the laws meant to preserve their life and kind? Small as they are, they know how to protect themselves. In light of all of this, do we still think it far-fetched that ants or other creatures have their own languages?

So all that is in the heavens and earth glorify Allah, '…as do the birds with wings outstretched…' (*an-Nur:* 41). Why does Allah single out the birds for mention although they are already included in His words: '…all those that are in the heavens and earth…' (*an-Nur:* 41)? Birds are particularly mentioned, for they have a marvellous characteristic that point to a great thing. A bird is a body that has a weight. According to the law of gravity, the earth attracts anything that is suspended in the air. However, Allah has made birds an exception to this law, for they spread out their wings in the air without falling: 'Do they not see the birds above them spreading and closing their wings? It is only the Lord of Mercy who holds them up…' (*al-Mulk:* 19). Through this miraculous creation, Allah conveys a fundamental truth: '…He keeps the heavens from falling down on the earth without His permission...' (*al-Hajj:* 65). We do not see how Allah keeps the heavens from falling, but there is sufficient evidence for this truth in the creation of birds which He keeps from falling despite gravity. There are signs wondrous enough to let us believe the truths we do not perceive. Allah then says: '…Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification…' (*an-Nur:* 41). This translation conveys one interpretation of this part of the verse, but there is another interpretation. In the original

Arabic structure, the sentence starts with the verb ‘know’, yet the subject is omitted which is a common structure in the Arabic language. Some exegetes have the opinion that this subject is ‘each’ (as the above translation shows), yet others have stated that ‘Allah’ is the subject. The Arabic sentence literally translates: ‘…(He/Each) knows their way(s) of prayer and glorification…’. He is their Creator and the One Who has inspired them to the manner of glorifying Him. Every creature knows its manner of prayer and glorification through Divine Guidance just as we, human beings, know the Straight Path prescribed for us through Divine Revelations. All things and beings submit to what Allah ordains, for they have no freewill to choose whether or not to obey Him. Only human beings have deviated because they have been given the choice.

Everything goes right when it follows Divine Guidance, and so do our lives. Everything in the universe is perfect, and a defect is only found when man interferes. The sun has never revolted nor failed to rise, and neither did the moon, the stars, and the air. They all function with absolute perfection to the extent that people depend on them to calculate time, know directions, etc. Allah says: ‘The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5). We would not depend on the sun and moon to calculate time unless they followed a perfect order that never fails.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘…Allah has full knowledge of what they do’ (*an-Nur:* 41). This is a declaration of the fact that Allah has full control over His creation.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٢﴾

Control of the heavens and earth belongs to God: and to God is the final return [42] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 42)

This verse is a reassurance to those addressed by Divine Ordinance: the One Who has charged you with obligations, has also secured for you all the necessities of life you need to fulfil your duty to Him. Never a day will come when the air is cut off from you or the sun, the moon or the earth refuse to be of service to you. They are under the Control of Allah and, therefore, no one may ever withhold them from you. Rest assured that they will fulfil their function in your service until the Day of Resurrection. No need to worry, for Allah has secured for you what you need.

Allah then says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُزۡجِي سَحَابٗا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيۡنَهُۥ ثُمَّ يَجۡعَلُهُۥ رُكَامٗا فَتَرَى ٱلۡوَدۡقَ
يَخۡرُجُ مِنۡ خِلَٰلِهِۦ وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مِن جِبَالٖ فِيهَا مِنۢ بَرَدٖ فَيُصِيبُ بِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ
وَيَصۡرِفُهُۥ عَن مَّن يَشَآءُۖ يَكَادُ سَنَا بَرۡقِهِۦ يَذۡهَبُ بِٱلۡأَبۡصَٰرِ ﴿٤٣﴾

Do you not see that God drives the clouds, then gathers them together and piles them up until you see rain pour from their midst? He sends hail down from [such] mountains in the sky, pouring it on whoever He wishes and diverting it from whoever He wishes – the flash of its lightning almost snatches sight away [43] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 43)

We have come to understand the manner by which rain is formed through the evaporation and condensation process through which clouds are formed. Water comprises three fourths of the area of the earth which ensures the abundance of water necessary to produce rain. This process, for certain purposes, is sometimes applied to water through distillation. In hot weather, water in a glass will, after a while, decrease a bit, for some of it has evaporated. If water is spilled on the ground, it dries up far more quickly, for the area of the surface exposed to evaporation becomes wider.

So 'Allah *yuzji* (drives) the clouds…' (*an-Nur:* 43). This Arabic verb denotes moving a thing gently. A poet once said describing the manner in which his lady walked:

Her gait from the house of her female neighbour

is like a cloud's movement, neither slow nor hasty.

Then, Allah compiles the clouds one upon the other, which inevitably leaves spaces between the compiled elements as they do not fuse completely with each other. Were it not for these inter-cloud spaces, rains would not fall from between them. If He so willed, He could make clouds a single piece, but

He joins them together and compiles one upon the other. In this way, spaces develop between the pieces of clouds. As a treatment for those suffering from the pain of frostbite, one places a glass upside down on the place affected by pain, and then inside of it one sets alight a piece of cloth, for example, to burn up the air inside the glass. In this manner, one prevents gaps in the juncture between the glass and the body. This phenomenon is the secret the ancient Egyptians used in construction, whereby the stones adhere to one another without any mortar to bind them.

The existence of air between two things creates a gap and prevents adhesion between them, and were it not for these gaps in the clouds, rain would not fall from them. Rain is a sign of which we are heedless. Just imagine what it takes to produce a glass of distilled water in a laboratory. What then should one think of the rain which waters the entire earth? So Allah drives the clouds, joins them together, piles them one over the other and then causes rain to fall from between the spaces which separate the clouds.

Through rain, Allah brings a dead land to life. It may also come as an affliction and a punishment, as He says: '…He sends hail down from [such] mountains in the sky, pouring it on whoever He wishes and diverting it from whoever He wishes…' (*an-Nur:* 43). We have a lesson and an admonition in the story of the drowning of the people of Ma'rib [in ancient Yemen]. Water and fire are like two natural opponents, which are both difficult to resist. At one time, Arabs viewed huge waters as a terrible threat after the collapse of the Dam of Ma'rib. They therefore preferred to move to the desert and live there. Allah used the same water to rescue Prophet Musa (Moses) and drown his enemy, Pharaoh. With the same thing, He accomplished two opposing purposes.

Allah then says: '…the flash of its lightning almost snatches sight away' (*an-Nur:* 43). The intense lightning which is caused by clouds nearly blocks sight. In the bolt of lightning, fire is generated from water. Electric discharge occurs in the midst of rain. Therefore, it should not surprise us that Allah says (describing the events on the Day of Resurrection): 'And when the seas boil over' (*at-Takwir*: 6). It should be easy to believe this will happen, for we have witnessed an example similar to it in the phenomenon of lightning.

Allah says in the following verse:

يُقَلِّبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّيۡلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبۡرَةٗ لِّأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَبۡصَٰرِ ﴿٤٤﴾

God alternates night and day – there truly is a lesson
in [all] this for those who have eyes to see [44]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 44)

The night and the day are two signs following each other. Even though they are constant daily occurrences, their shifting is far from monotonous. In some seasons of the year, the night is longer, and in others the day is longer. Sometimes they are equivalent in time. Alternation of the night and day means shifting from cold to hot weather and from darkness to light. This is not mechanical routine. Rather, it is a manifestation of Allah’s Power and Control. This is why Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘…There truly is a lesson in [all] this for those who have eyes to see’ (*an-Nur:* 44). The Arabic word for ‘lesson’ used in the original text of the verse is *'ebra*. It means admonition, a lesson we learn which transforms us from one state, belief or conduct to another. Other related words are derived from the same root. One of them is *'abra* (teardrop). It denotes the process by which feelings are transformed into a material thing. Another one is *'ubur* (crossing) which means transferring from one place to another. There is also *ta'bir* (expression) which is transforming thoughts into words. All four words are derived from the same root and they all denote ‘transformation’ from one state to another or ‘transferring’ from one place to another.

The moral lesson here is intended for those who have eyes to see! The eyes meant in this verse are the eyes of awareness and not the eyes of perception. Man possesses organs of sensation that perceive his surroundings, as well as organs of cognition that filter these perceptions and deduce hypotheses and concepts from them. Most people can look at the world, but do not conceive or arrive at any thoughts from what they see. Others possess the skills of precise vision and discerning judgment. For instance, many people have watched pots of boiling water surging and pushing at their lids throughout the ages, but only a few inventors were able to realize and conceive the power of the steam engine.

Therefore, the ‘eyes’ that are intended here in this verse are those that analyse the sensed perceptions to understand their causes. They seek to derive benefit from the concepts they observe in their surroundings. If man insightfully studies the phenomena and signs that Allah *Glorified is He* has created in the universe, he will derive from them applications that will greatly enrich and promote his life.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَآبَّةٍ مِّن مَّآءٍ فَمِنْهُم مَّن يَمْشِى عَلَىٰ بَطْنِهِۦ وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَمْشِى عَلَىٰ رِجْلَيْنِ
وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَمْشِى عَلَىٰٓ أَرْبَعٍ يَخْلُقُ ٱللَّهُ مَا يَشَآءُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤٥﴾

And God created each animal out of [its own] fluid: some of them crawl on their bellies, some walk on two legs, and some on four. God creates whatever He will; God has power over everything [45] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 45)

The Arabic word *daaba* refers to all the creatures that make a sound (*yadubbu*) as they step upon the Earth, whether these be humans, domesticated animals or wild creatures. Even ants have a capacity for melodious stepping upon the Earth. Allah *Glorified is He* has created all these beings (that step upon the Earth) from water.

Indeed, the faculties that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed in the smallest creatures rival the faculties of the massive creatures. We may find it equally challenging to determine the splendour of both the massive and the microscopic beings in existence. One of the greatest wonders of creation is that a small insect can possess all the basic tools and components of life that a massive elephant possesses. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has created giant beings that surpass our perceptions due to their enormity, as well as miniscule beings that exceed our perceptions due to their minuteness.

The Big Ben clock is an outstanding sight due to its remarkable size. Watchmakers were able to manufacture other clocks that are the size of a ring stone, but have the same mechanisms found in the Beg Ben clock. This concept is evident in Allah’s creation, where Allah *Glorified is He* created both the largest animals and the smallest insects from the same molecules in water.

You may find that a small mosquito can prevent an enormous elephant from getting a calm break. We also find that depriving living creatures from water can lead to their demise. Exalted is the Creator, Allah *Glorified is He*. We also find that these creatures do not follow a fixed shape or form. '(He has willed that) among them are (those) that crawl on their bellies, and others walking on two legs, and others walking on four legs,' (*an-Nur:* 45). The Arabic verb used in this verse is *yamshi* (walking or moving from one place to another). In the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* points out the varied types of living locomotion. Thus, there are living creatures that move on their bellies, while other creatures walk on two legs and still others walk on more legs.

This lexical simplification is in accordance with the distinctive brevity of Quranic description. For instance, the verse does not need to mention that certain creatures have tens of legs because the intended meaning is directing our attention to Allah's unlimited Power and Ability. This power is illustrated in the presence of variation in His creatures. Therefore, after this description, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah creates what He wills,' (*an-Nur:* 45) since the verse did not mention every possible type of walking.

Allah *Glorified is He* created human beings to offer their skills and services to other human beings. In the same manner, Allah *Glorified is He* created each group of animals to provide the necessities of life to other animals. Just consider the plover birds that consume the food remaining on the teeth of crocodiles, thereby also cleaning the crocodiles' teeth. The mouths of crocodiles are a source of nourishment for these birds; this results in harmony and cooperation between the two creatures. These birds even make sounds that warn crocodiles to escape when the birds notice hunters stalking them.

Incidentally, another usage of the word *mashi* (walking) in the Arabic language is the act of transmitting slander between people. Allah *Glorified is He* said in another verse: '(Or to) the slanderer that walks around (*masha'*) with defaming tales,' (*al-Qalam:* 11).

Thus, in the previous verses, Allah *Glorified is He* shows us that absolute dominion belongs to Him alone. All existing things exalt Allah with praise. To Him alone are all affairs traced back. The verses also informed us that all living creatures were created from water.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّقَدْ أَنزَلْنَآ ءَايَٰتٍ مُّبَيِّنَٰتٍ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَهْدِى مَن يَشَآءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ٤٦

We have sent verses that clarify the right path: God guides whoever He will to a straight path [46] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 46)

This verse directs our attention to the fact that Allah, the One Who reigns over this universe's dominion and created its wonders, also revealed clear rulings and commands. Therefore, you are obliged to adhere to His verses, obey His commands, and follow His righteous path because He has bestowed magnanimous favours upon you through the many elements that serve you in the skies and the earth.

These verses are described as being *mubayyinat* (clearly showing the truth). This means that they properly elucidate the necessary activities of life. In order for this life to flow without setbacks, each person should be actively engaged in accomplishing their own particular mission within it. When every person does that, these missions will complement each other without conflict. Trouble arises in the world when some people build constructions, while other people are destroying them.

Hence, it is necessary to have a moral measure that controls all of our activities. This measure should incite every worker to exercise their responsibilities with utmost excellence and sincerity. Typically, each individual may only achieve excellence in one domain in his life. Usually, this becomes their specialized occupation. Amazingly, they may not strive for the same excellence when performing the same job for themselves, since they earn no wages in such cases. That is the reason behind the Egyptian saying, 'A carpenter's door is always broken.' Yet, when the carpenter works for others, he may perform his craft with unsurpassed excellence and mastery. This happens because people work more proficiently when they receive proper pay for their efforts. We are required to carry out the jobs that we are responsible for with unselfish excellence. This will also mean that other craftsmen will magnanimously carry out their responsibilities towards you.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and Allah guides onto a straight path whom He wills,' (*an-Nur:* 46). A person might legitimately ask, 'If Allah did not will for a person to be guided, what is that person's sin?' We have previously said that guidance is of two types. Firstly, there is the guidance of indication (*hidayat ad-dalala*). Secondly, there is the guidance of assistance (*hidayat al-ma'una).* Allah *Glorified is He* bestows upon everyone the guidance of indication, as He clarified to us all the causes of good, the paths of salvation, the ways of success and the most exemplary methods for managing the activities of our lives. Those people who listen to Allah's words, have confidence in His Directives and obey His indicative guidance, will be helped with Allah's assistive guidance.

Therefore, the verses: '…for Allah does not guide iniquitous folk,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108) and the verse: '…for Allah does not guide the transgressing people,' (*al-Baqara:* 258) are related to the people who declined indicative guidance. Allah *Glorified is He* only withholds the assistive guidance from them, without withholding indicative guidance, religious directives, or evident Divine clarification (*al-bayan*).

We have remarked that the Arabic expression *anzalna* (We revealed) should cause us to hold the revealed message in the highest regard, since revelation entails the descent of a message from a higher being to a lower entity. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is elevating us from the lowly earthly level to the sublime heights of heaven. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another passage: 'Say (O Muhammad), "Let me convey unto you what Allah has (really) forbidden,"' (*al-An'am:* 151). We are not to fashion our own laws according to our opinions and ideas. Instead, we should follow Allah's way in all aspects of our lives.

Subsequently Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَبِٱلرَّسُولِ وَأَطَعْنَا ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّىٰ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُم
مِّنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ ۚ وَمَآ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ بِٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

They say, 'We believe in God and the Messenger; we obey,' but then some of them turn away: these people are not true believers [47] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 47)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Whenever they are told, "Obey that which Allah has bestowed upon you and unto the Apostle," you see these hypocrites turning away from you with aversion,' (*an-Nisa': *61). This verse is describing the hypocrites. Hypocrites are frustrated because they are possessed with conflicting psychological traits, as their tongues testify belief, but their hearts deny the truth. Typically, each individual has numerous traits that are complementary when a person has a righteous heart. On the other hand, these traits become contradictory in states of disobedience. Hence, a man finds it perfectly natural to gaze at his own wife because his innate disposition is in harmony with this act. However, if he commits the sin of gazing at someone else's wife, his glances are stealthy and he tries to cover the sin from other people's eyes because his innate disposition is disturbed during this shameful deed. Hence, it is said that righteousness improves a person's appearance and dignity.

Therefore, a man should protect his dignity while being alone in order to have true respect among the people. Some people perform good deeds in order to impress others despite being aware of the evil in their own souls. Winning all the treasures of the world or gaining the trust of all people will never compensate a person if they lose their own self-respect. People only accompany an individual for brief periods of time, but the soul accompanies the person at all times. Thus, people should not strive to be great in the eyes of other people while being contemptible in their private moments. A person living in that despicable manner is revering the opinions of other people more than being concerned with the real condition of their own selves. On the other hand, a righteous person always strives to have a positive opinion of himself.

Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding this matter: 'Are you not aware of those who claim (*yaz'umun*) that they believe in what has been revealed to you (O Muhammad,) and what was revealed before you. They are willing to obey the rules of the false powers (*al-taghut*), although they were ordered to deny these (false) rules, and Satan (Iblis) only wants to lead them astray,' (*an-Nisa': *60).

Allah *Glorified is He* describes these people's testimonies of faith as empty claims. The Arabic word used is *yaz'umun*. *Az-za'm* ('claiming') is the platform of lying. The proof that their words are merely claims is that they tend to seek the rulings of false powers (*al-taghut*), rather than the one true God, Allah *Glorified is He*. If they were truly believers in the message that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad and the messages that were revealed before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them all* they would not seek the mediating judgment of false gods. In this manner, these hypocrites exposed their own misguidance, as their action divulged the falsehood of their former claim.

This is the reason why scholars consider the disbelievers to be better than the hypocrites because the disbeliever's innate emotions are in greater harmony than a hypocrite's emotions. Disbelievers' hearts are in concordance with their disbelieving tongues. This is the reason why hypocrites will be punished in the lowest depths of the Hellfire.

Allah *Glorified is He* illustrated an image that urges us to be cautious when making judgments concerning other people's verbal statements. Allah *Glorified is He* says concerning the hypocrites: 'When the hypocrites come to you, they say, "We bear witness that you are indeed Allah's Apostle!" Indeed, Allah knows that you are truly His Apostle, and, indeed, He (Allah) bears witness that the hypocrites are liars (in claiming to have faith)' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). In this verse, the words uttered by the hypocrites: 'We bear witness that you are indeed Allah's Apostle' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) are essentially truthful words, as Prophet Muhammad is truly Allah's Apostle. However, the hypocrites were indeed lying because they did not believe the true statement they were uttering.

This verse(1) was revealed in relation to one of the hypocrites whose name was Bishr(2). This hypocrite had a dispute with a Jew (1) and the Jew sought the mediating judgment of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The hypocrite, on the other hand, sought the mediating judgment of another Jew named Ka'b ibn Al-Ashraf. However, the Jew rejected the judgment of Ka'b, due to Ka'b's history of falsehood and lack of trustworthiness. Thus, the Jewish man, even if his beliefs were false, only wanted the judgment of a person who is trustworthy and impartial. This person was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Jew won the argument and they both went to Prophet Muhammad, who judged in favour of the Jew. Indeed, the Jewish man was wise and intelligent, as he was aware of the status of Prophet Muhammad and that he was a truthful judge.

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(1) *In the opinion of the editors, the intended verses are the two following verses (an-Nur: 48-49) from the chapter of An-Nur.*

(2) *This story was cited as the cause of revelation of another verse: 'Are you not aware of those who claim (yaz'umun) that they believe in what has been revealed to you (O Muhammad,) and what was revealed before you. They are willing to obey the rules of the false powers (At-taghut), although they were ordered to deny these (false) rules, and Satan (Iblis) only wants to lead them astray,' (an-Nisa': 60). It was narrated by Wahidi in Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 92) on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him who said, 'It was revealed concerning a hypocrite who had a dispute with a Jew. The Jew said, "Come with me to Muhammad." The hypocrite said, "Rather, let us go to Ka'b ibn Al-Ashraf." Ka'b was the man whom Allah Glorified is He called Al-taghut (false power). The Jew refused to bring their dispute before anyone except Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. When the hypocrite finally accepted this, they placed their dispute before Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him=*

On the other hand, the hypocrite was not satisfied with Prophet Muhammad's judgment. Their argument continued until they told 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* about their story. When he learned that the hypocrite had rejected the judgment of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Umar got up and came back with a sword. He unsheathed it in the face of the hypocrite and said, 'This is my judgment concerning anyone who is not satisfied with the judgment of Allah's Messenger'.

Hence, some people say: 'We believe in Allah and in the Apostle, and we pay heed (to their orders),' (*an-Nur:* 47). These are fine words, and we pray that Allah *Glorified is He* bless them for these words, but this verbal utterance

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= *who judged in the Jew's favour. When they had left the Prophet's presence, the hypocrite said to the Jew, "Let us go to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab." So they went to 'Umar Allah be pleased with him. Then the Jew said, "This man and I sought to settle a dispute through Muhammad, and he pronounced a judgment against my opponent, but he was not content with the judgment. He then wanted to seek your judgment in the dispute, and he held me fast so I came to you with him." Thereupon, 'Umar said to the hypocrite, "Is it so?" The hypocrite answered, "Yes." 'Umar Allah be pleased with him told the two of them to wait for a moment. He then went into (his house) and wrapped a sword in cloth. He came out to them and beat the hypocrite with it until he ('Umar) cooled down. He then said, "In such a manner do I judge those who are not satisfied with the judgment of Allah Glorified is He and the judgment of His Messenger." Thereupon, the Jew ran away and this verse was revealed. Angel Gabriel (Jibril) peace be upon him said, "Verily 'Umar has made a firm distinction between truth and falsehood." Thus, he was called Al-Faruq.'*

(1) *The story of the conflict between the Jewish man and the hypocrite, Bishr, and the arbitration of Prophet Muhammad peace and the blessings be upon him between the two.*

is still not supported by practical actions. True faith means that the physical deeds are in accordance with the articulated expressions of faith.

When the time for actions and responsibilities arises: '…some of them turn away (*yatawalla*) after this (verbal assertion),' (*an-Nur:* 47). The Arabic verb *yatawalla* is used here to signify that they desist from an action and turn to its opposite action. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'These are not (true) believers,' (*an-Nur:* 47). This is because they have turned away from the truth. They have not obeyed Allah's commands and have not believed in the Divinity of His message.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَإِذَا دُعُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُم مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾
وَإِن يَكُن لَّهُمُ ٱلْحَقُّ يَأْتُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِ مُذْعِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

And when they are summoned to God and His Messenger in order for him to judge between them, some of them turn away[48] If they were claiming their right, they would come willingly [to the Prophet] [49] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 48-49)

These verses are also in relation to the conflict between the hypocrite *Bishr* and the Jewish man, both of whom were opposed to the judgement of Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger. Although the opposition of the hypocrite was evident, the verse is not acquitting the Jew from wrongdoing. The Jewish man was only content with Allah's judgment because he was confident that the ruling would be in his favour. He was also confident that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would only make a judgment on the basis of truth even if it were in the interest of a Jewish person. Hence, the Jewish man did not submit to the judgment of Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger willingly. His submission was not a result of love or belief in Prophet Muhammad's message, but rather, his submission was out of personal self-interest.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

أَفِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ أَمِ ٱرۡتَابُوٓاْ أَمۡ يَخَافُونَ أَن يَحِيفَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ
وَرَسُولُهُۥۚ بَلۡ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ٥٠

Do they have sickness in their hearts? Are they full of doubts? Do they fear that God and His Messenger might deal with them unjustly? No, it is they who are the unjust ones [50] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 50)

Here, the Arabic word *marad* (disease) implies that they deviated from a state of sound health. Each of your organs such as, the eyes and the ears, has a state of well-being and health. It is striking that people live without an awareness of this well-being when their organs are healthy. Then, if an ailment afflicts any of their functions, they suddenly become aware of Allah's blessings.

In the same verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Did they begin to doubt (that this is a Divine Message)?' (*an-Nur:* 50) Did these hypocrites start doubting Prophet Muhammad's message? 'Do they fear that Allah and His Apostle might deal unjustly with them?' (*an-Nur:* 50).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* answers these questions: 'Nay, it is they who are wronging themselves' (*an-Nur:* 50). They are wronging themselves before wronging anyone else. This is an example of ultimate foolishness, when a man wrongs himself without any benefit. If they had wronged someone else, we could have said, 'He did it to attain some benefits or rewards!' In addition, a person who wrongs himself is too thoughtless to be blamed for wronging others.

When Allah *Glorified is He* declares the punishment for the wrongdoers in these verses, it is for their own good. They may desist from wrongdoing and avoid the penalties that their sins will incur upon them, especially after Allah has given them hope of reward for their good deeds.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* declares the righteous actions that are a contrasting context when compared to the previous verses:

إِنَّمَا كَانَ قَوۡلَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ إِذَا دُعُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ لِيَحۡكُمَ بَيۡنَهُمۡ
أَن يَقُولُواْ سَمِعۡنَا وَأَطَعۡنَاۚ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ (٥١)

When the true believers are summoned to God and His Messenger in order for him to judge between them, they say, 'We hear and we obey.' These are the ones who will prosper[51] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 51)

You must realize that faith is only based on your own desire and choice without any coercion. Since it was your choice to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* you must respect your own choices by complying with their requirements. Otherwise, you are only deprecating your own decisions. Hence, the state of the believers is to adhere to and comply with Allah's orders, when they are summoned to listen to the commands of Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

If you look at the universe around you, you will find that it is maintained with a certain principle. Everything in the universe of Allah *Glorified is He*, except human beings, follows ordained laws without free will. Originally, the universe was given a choice, but it chose to be directed with strict laws, thereby relieving itself from freedom and autonomy. Allah *Glorified is He* described this in the verse: 'Verily, We did offer the choice (of reason and volition) to the heavens, the earth and the mountains: but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it,' (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

The noble verse we are currently studying started with the Arabic conjunction *innama* (indeed/ but). Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed (*Innama*), the only response of believers.' This conjunction indicates that its following sentence is a contrasting opposite to the sentence before it. In this case, we know that the previous verses describe the hypocrites' opposition and rejection of Allah's rulings. On the other hand, this verse describes how the believers obeyed Allah's commands with ease. The same conjunction is used, for instance, when you say, 'That person is lazy, but (*innama*) his brother is diligent'.

The believers' response is: 'We have heard (Allah's orders) and we pay heed (to them)' (*an-Nur:* 51). This means that they have attentively listened to Allah's Commands with awareness. These commands were not mere sounds reaching their ears without an appropriate effect on their actions.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another passage: ‘And when they (the believers) listen to what was revealed to this Apostle (Muhammad), you can see their eyes overflowing with tears, because of the truth that they have recognized’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 83). Thus, they consider listening to be an obligation and a responsibility. Then, they respond appropriately to Allah’s commands, ‘We have responded, O Lord, and we are resolved to comply with this response.’ This verbal promise is then followed by execution and obedience. This is very similar to the words we utter in our prayers, ‘Allah hears responsively the one who praises Him (*Sami’a Allahu li-man hamida-hu*)’. This supplication means that Allah *Glorified is He* answers the prayers of those who praise Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* ends this verse with the sentence: ‘Indeed, it is they who shall be victorious (*al-muflihuun*)’ (*an-Nur:* 51). The Arabic word *al-muflihuun* means ‘the successful ones’. These are the people who will attain the rank of blissful salvation (*al-falaah*). It is notable that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *al-falaah* which is related to the Arabic word for agriculture and cultivation of the earth (*filaha*). This usage of the word is appropriate because cultivation of the earth is our source of nourishment in this world. Mastery of agriculture provides us with good fruits, increased bounties and multiplied yields. It is such that a grain of wheat produces seven hundred grains. So if the earth gives the farmer who plants it all these rewards, we can only barely imagine the reward bestowed by the Creator of the earth, Himself *Glorified is He*.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَيَخْشَ ٱللَّهَ وَيَتَّقْهِ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْفَآئِزُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Whoever obeys God and His Messenger, stands in awe of
God, and keeps his duty to Him will be triumphant [52]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 52)

Our great teacher and scholar Sheikh Musa Sharif *Allah rest his soul* used to teach us Quranic commentary. When we reached the interpretation of this verse, he says, ‘Listen carefully, as this is a message from Allah: “For it is those who obey Allah and His Apostle, fear Allah and are pious towards Him, who shall triumph (in the end)” (*an-Nur:* 52). This verse has included every single Islamic injunction, in an abridged message that encompasses the prescribed righteous path (*al-manhaj*).'(1)

The meaning of the words: '…obey Allah and His Apostle,' (*an-Nur:* 52) is that they believe in Allah *Glorified is He* obey Him and acknowledge the truthfulness of His Messenger Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The words: '…(and) fear Allah,' (*an-Nur:* 52) mean that they are afraid of Allah *Glorified is He* on account of their previous sins. In addition, they: '…are pious towards Him,' (*an-Nur:* 52) in the rest of their lives. It is they '…who shall triumph (in the end)' (*an-Nur:* 52). In this manner, the verse brings together many concise and significant commands in a few words.

It is obvious that formulating concise expressions is more difficult than generating prolonged speeches. We have previously mentioned the story(2) of the famous English orator who was asked, "''If you were to prepare a speech to be delivered in a quarter of an hour, how long would it take you to prepare it?' He answered, 'A week.' They asked, 'And if the speech were half an hour long?' He replied, 'I could prepare it in three days.' They asked, 'And if it were an hour long?' He responded, 'I could prepare it in two days.' They asked, 'And if it were three hours long?' He said, 'I could prepare it now.'

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned in his Tafsir (6/4833) that while 'Umar Allah be pleased with him was standing in the mosque of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him a man from among the notable people of the Romans appeared in front of 'Umar saying, 'I testify that there is no deity except Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is His Messenger.' Thereupon, 'Umar asked the man, 'What is your affair?' He replied, 'I have submitted to Allah Glorified is He.' 'Umar asked, 'Is there a cause for this?' The man said, 'Yes. Verily, I have read the Torah, the Psalms, the New Testament and many books of the Prophets. Then I heard a prisoner recite a verse from the Quran that brought together everything that is in the previous scriptures. So I knew that it was from Allah Glorified is He and I embraced Islam.' 'Umar then asked, 'What is this verse?' The man replied, 'Allah's words: "For it is those who obey Allah, " (an-Nur: 52) in the obligatory acts of worship (al-fara'id) "...and His Apostle," in following the traditional Prophetic practices (as-sunnah), "...and fear Allah Glorified is He" in what has passed of their lives, "and are pious towards Him," in that which remains of their lives. "It is they who shall triumph [in the end]," (an-Nur: 52) and the triumphant person is he who is saved from the Hellfire and granted entry into Paradise.' Thereupon 'Umar said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: "I have been granted comprehensiveness of speech (Jawami` Al-kalim)."'*

(2) *The story of the famous British orator who was asked about the time it takes him in order to prepare for a speech of 15 minutes.*

It is said that Sa'd Zaghlul Pasha *may Allah rest his soul* sent a speech from France to a friend that was four pages long. He said in his letter, 'I apologize to you for the excessive length (*al-itnab*) of the letter. I did not have enough time for succinctness (*al-ijaz*).'

After the Quran described the speech of the hypocrites, followed by the contrasting speech of the believers, Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding these believers: 'It is they (the believers) who shall triumph (in the end)" (*an-Nur:* 52). Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the two opposing speeches because contrasting concepts define each other. A word of wisdom reads, 'Beauty is made evident by its opposite'.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* returns to the description of hypocrisy and the hypocrites. He says:

وَأَقۡسَمُواْ بِٱللَّهِ جَهۡدَ أَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡ لَئِنۡ أَمَرۡتَهُمۡ لَيَخۡرُجُنَّۖ قُل لَّا تُقۡسِمُواْۖ
طَاعَةٞ مَّعۡرُوفَةٌۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرُۢ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ ٥٣

[The others] solemnly swear by God that if you [Prophet] commanded them, they would march out. Tell them, 'Do not swear: it is reasonable obedience that is required, and God is aware of everything you do'[53] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 53)

The Arabic word for swearing an oath is *al-qasam*. It has various synonyms, including *al-yameen* and *al-halif.* A man swears an oath in order to confirm a concept and to reassure the person he is addressing that he is speaking the truth. In the case of these people mentioned in the verse, they did not swear an oath secretly within themselves, but rather pronounced their most solemn, exaggerated and earnest oaths. They did not swear by the lives of their parents, but swore an oath by Allah *Glorified is He* and this is the most binding of oaths. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'Let he who swears an oath, swear by Allah's Name or else be silent.'(1)

When they swore these stern oaths by Allah *Glorified is He* that they would leave their properties and families to engage in battle, supporting Prophet

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(1) *This Hadith is found in both Al-Bukhari (2679, 3836, 6108) and Muslim (1646).*

Muhammad against his enemies, they were only lying. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* uncovered their secret thoughts. He removed the veils of their lies and disclosed the falseness of their intentions. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘And they say, “We do obey you,” but when they leave your presence, some of them devise, in the darkness of night, (beliefs) other than (the words) they are voicing’ (*an-Nisa’:* 81).

Examine the Quranic precision in the words: ‘…some of them devise’ (*an-Nisa’:* 81). The Quran specified that it is only ‘some’ of them that shared in such plots. This is an important lexical precaution, as some of these hypocrites still have hearts that are attracted to Islam. Some of them may still have the desire to rectify their intentions for Allah *Glorified is He* and return to the true faith.

The Quran unmasks the affair of those who swear oaths without being truthful, and of those people who are accustomed to frequent perjury after swearing oaths. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* forbade them from such oath swearing: ‘Say (O Muhammad to them), ‘Swear not!’” (*an-Nur:* 53) Generally, it is not always easy to forbid a speaker from oath-swearing, especially if the oath is for a good cause. However, in this case, these hypocrites are committing perjury that nullifies their oaths. They are only uttering the oaths with their tongues, while violating (the same oaths) with their hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Your obedience (to Allah’s message) is well-known’ (*an-Nur:* 53). Allah *Glorified is He* is directing mockery and blame towards their perjury and false oaths. Certainly, their lack of obedience has blatant precedents, when they were compliant only with their tongues. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* confirmed this meaning when He says: ‘Verily, Allah is aware of all that you do’ (*an-Nur:* 53). That is the reason behind uncovering their lies and laying their intentions bare in these verses.

It is remarkable that these hypocrites did not take all the prior events into serious consideration. They did not derive admonition from their previous encounters with Allah’s Commands. For instance, one of them was uttering mischievous plans to himself, and Allah *Glorified is He* disclosed these plans to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad informed them of what was circulating in their minds. We can see this in

Allah's words: 'And they (the hypocrites) say to themselves, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we are saying?"' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) Yet despite this, they did not learn the lesson or acknowledge that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is assisted by Allah *Glorified is He* in every aspect. Certainly, Allah *Glorified is He* did not abandon His Prophet and did not allow them to deceive him in any manner. However, they repeated their misdeeds of hypocrisy many times without cessation and many of them never sincerely declared their true faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

After all of these descriptions, Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to continue advising these hypocrites closely without despair, so that they may repent one day. We can see this in the following verse:

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱلرَّسُولَ ۖ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْهِ مَا حُمِّلَ وَعَلَيْكُم مَّا
حُمِّلْتُمْ ۖ وَإِن تُطِيعُوهُ تَهْتَدُوا۟ ۚ وَمَا عَلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ إِلَّا ٱلْبَلَٰغُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿٥٤﴾

Say, 'Obey God; obey the Messenger. If you turn away, [know that] he is responsible for the duty placed upon him, and you are responsible for the duty placed upon you. If you obey him, you will be rightly guided, but the Messenger's duty is only to deliver the message clearly' [54] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 54)

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* does not wish to lock the door of repentance against them. He gave them a chance to renew their obedience to Him and His Messenger, and to grasp the real state of affairs in this world. This is because they are His creatures and servants. It is narrated in a Noble Hadith, that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Indeed, Allah is happier at the repentance of his servant than when one of you finds his camel after having lost it in a vast barren desert land.'(1)

It is noteworthy that the command to 'obey' is mentioned twice in this verse, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Obey Allah and obey the Apostle' (*an-Nur:* 54). In other verses the command is mentioned only once for Allah and His Apostle such as in the previous verse: ‘For it is those who obey Allah *Glorified is He* and His Apostle,’ (*an-Nur:* 52), in the verse: ‘Obey Allah and His Apostle…,’ (*al-Anfal:* 20) and the verse ‘Whoever obeys the Apostle, thereby, obeys Allah *Glorified is He*’ (*an-Nisa’:* 80). In these verses, the order of obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* and His Apostle is a single command.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by both Al-Bukhari (6308, 6309) and Muslim (2744) on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud.*

The explanation of this lexical usage is that the Quran is not essentially a book of legal jurisprudence like the previous scriptures. It is a book of inimitability that possesses a miraculous nature (*mu'jiz*). However, it also includes some foundations of jurisprudence and legal commandments. Many legal commandments are only detailed in the Noble Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* gave Prophet Muhammad the right to establish laws. This concept is evident in the verse: ‘…and whatever the Apostle urges you (to do), then adhere to it, and whatever he forbids you from (doing), then refrain from doing (it)’ (*al-Hashr:* 7).

When the Quran mentions legal commandments (*al-ahkam*), they are presented in a summarized form. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then provided the details of these commandments in his traditions. For instance, Allah’s command to practice the obligatory Prayers is outlined in the Quran. However, the details needed to perform these prayers are found in the noble Prophetic practice (*as-Sunnah*). Hence, if you want the details of a particular Quranic commandment, study the narrated Hadiths/Ahadiths of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

For instance, a governmental law may state that a civil servant who is absent from his work without a formal leave for 15 days can be dismissed from a job. The country’s constitution may not clearly state this detailed law. However, the constitution contains an article that generally addresses the rights and obligations of civil servants. The laws then lay down the specific regulations governing their work based on the constitution.

We have previously mentioned that Imam Mohammad ‘Abdu was once asked by a scholar of oriental studies, ‘The Quran says: “No single thing have We neglected in the book,” (*al-An‘am:* 38). So, can the Quran tell me how many loaves of bread can be made from a certain volume of wheat?’ The Imam related the answer he had received from a professional baker indicating the number of bread loaves that can be baked from a certain volume of wheat. The questioner objected, 'I want the specific answer from the Quran.' Thereupon, the Imam responded, 'Allah *Glorified is He* said in the Quran: "…and ask the people of knowledge *(ahl adh-dhikr)* if you do not know,"' (*an-Nahl:* 43).

Hence, there are matters for which a ruling is conveyed both from Allah *Glorified is He* and from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* like the obligatory nature of prayers, for example. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: 'Verily, for all believers, Prayer is indeed a sacred duty in the appointed times (of day)' (*an-Nisa':* 103). Similarly, we find this obligation in the Prophetic saying: 'Prayer is the pillar of religion'. In such matters, we can say, 'Obey Allah and the Messenger,' since the commands in the Quran and the *Sunnah* are successively complementary. However, we will find that detailed and specific matters regarding the number of units (*raka's*) in each prayer, the obligatory sayings in each unit, or whether the prayers are uttered silently or audibly, are only clarified by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his Hadiths.

Therefore, in such cases, there is a broad act of obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* for the command that prayers are obligatory. Then, there is a specific act of obedience to Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of be upon him, regarding the details of this legislation. For these cases, the command of obedience is repeated in the verse: 'Obey Allah and obey the Apostle' (*an-Nur:* 54).

We may also notice that there are other verses in the Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and obey the Apostle,' (*an-Nur:* 56) without mentioning the command to obey Allah *Glorified is He*. It is said that this verse is related to the matters in which no legislation is conveyed. In such cases, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the lawgiver. This is one of the attributes that distinguished Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Allah's other Messengers. All of the messengers were sent to convey Allah's Legislation to the people. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the only messenger who was Divinely allowed to legislate for his people.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if you (hypocrites) turn away (from the message), he (Prophet Muhammad) will have to answer (only) for the commandments he has been made responsible for. You, (hypocrites) (will have to answer) for the commandments you are responsible for' (*an-Nur:* 54). This is because Allah *Glorified is He* knew how keen the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was to guide his people and his struggle to call them to Allah *Glorified is He*. To illustrate this point, we can see that Allah addressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in another passage: '(Why) would you (O Muhammad), perhaps, torment yourself to death (with grief) because they (who live around you) refuse to believe (in it)?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to His Prophet, 'Speak to them and summon them a second time, if that will relieve your soul from the burden of their obstinacy.' Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say (O Muhammad to them), "Obey Allah and obey the Apostle,"' (*an-Nur:* 54) although you do not have to repeat the message for them. You are only obliged to convey (the message) a single time.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if you (hypocrites) turn away (from the message), he (Prophet Muhammad) will have to answer (only) for the commandments he has been made responsible for. You, (hypocrites) (will have to answer) for the commandments you are responsible for' (*an-Nur:* 54). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was made responsible for calling them to Allah *Glorified is He* (*ad-da'wa*) and with conveying the message (*al-balagh*). On the other hand, the disbelievers are responsible for being obedient and observant of Allah's Commands. Thus, every party is obliged to implement that which Allah *Glorified is He* has made them responsible for. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'If you pay obedience to him (Prophet Muhammad), you will be on the guided path' (*an-Nur:* 54). Here, we note that the object of the verb is singular in 'If you pay obedience to him.' Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'If you pay obedience to them,' although this could have concurred with the beginning of the verse 'Obey Allah and obey the Apostle' (*an-Nur:* 54). This is because the obedience here is not divided, but rather, it is a single act of submission to Allah's commands through His Prophet. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'The Apostle is only obliged to deliver the message (entrusted to him) clearly' (*an-Nur:* 54). This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is only obliged to deliver the complete message that encompasses all the legislative details that order the activities of our lives.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says: (1)

وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ
كَمَا ٱسْتَخْلَفَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ ٱلَّذِى
ٱرْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا ۚ يَعْبُدُونَنِى لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِى
شَيْـًٔا ۚ وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

God has made a promise to those among you who believe and do good deeds: He will make them successors to the land, as He did those who came before them; He will empower the religion He has chosen for them; He will grant them security to replace their fear. 'They will worship Me and not join anything with Me.' Those who are defiant after that will be the rebels [55] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 55)

At the beginning or our discussion of the chapter of *an-Nur* (The Light), we said that this chapter was given that name because it resembles the perceptible light in the universe. The chapter correlates our physical light with the spiritual light present in the sublime moral values. Just as we turn off our artificial sources of light when the day's sunlight appears, we should also extinguish our moral assumptions when prescribed law (*ash-shar'*) comes to us from Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) *The reason for the revelation of this verse: Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him, and his companions resided for ten years in Mecca after Allah Glorified is He sent His message to him in a state of fear from the disbelievers' wrongdoing. They used to call to Allah's way, both in secrecy and openly. Then, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was commanded to migrate to Medina, where they were also afraid, waking in the morning in arms and retiring in the evening in arms. So a man of his companions said, 'O Messenger of Allah Glorified is He! When will the day come in which we will feel safe enough to put down our arms?' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him, replied: 'You will only wait for a short while until any man among you will find himself seated in a great gathering wrapped in his garment, in a relaxed manner, without any of them carrying a weapon.' Then Allah Glorified is He revealed the verse in which He says: 'Allah has promised those of you who have believed and did good deeds…,' (an-Nur: 55) to the end of the verse. Then Allah Glorified is He made His Prophet victorious over the Arabian Peninsula, so they laid down their arms and entered a state of security. This Hadith was narrated by Wahidi in Asbab An-nuzul (p. 188) and Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (3/3101) and Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (5/4835).*

No one should have an opinion alongside the prescribed law of Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because the Creator wishes for his created servants upon the earth to live in a way that is guided by perceptible and spiritual light.

Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed for mankind the elements that are necessary for the continuation of their lives, in the form of lawful food and drink. Thus, their cells will be built from lawful elements and their apparatus for the reception of Allah's messages will be sound. Similarly, the apparatus through which they can send their transmissions and prayers to Allah *Glorified is He* will be sound.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was narrated to have said: 'O you people, verily, Allah is good and pure (*tayyib*) and only accepts the good and pure offerings. Indeed, Allah has commanded the believers that which he commanded the envoys (messengers of his revelation), as He says: "O you Apostles! Consume from the good things of life, and do righteous deeds: verily, I have full knowledge of all that you do," (*al-Mu'minun:* 51) and He also says: "O you who have believed, consume from the good things which We have provided for you as sustenance" (*al-Baqara:* 172).' 'Prophet Muhammad then mentioned the example of a man who travels extensively, with unkempt hair and covered in dust, stretching forth his hands to the sky (in supplication), asking, "O Lord," while his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, his clothing is unlawful and he is provisioned (*ghudhdhiya*) with unlawful elements. The Prophet asked, "Why should this man's supplications be answered?"'(1)

In this case, the man's instruments of reception and transmission are ruined, much like a radio which has poor reception that cannot grasp what broadcast stations emit. The transmission is ongoing and is received by others, but his reception alone is dysfunctional. Thus, if you assure the soundness of your body's consumption with lawful nourishment, Allah *Glorified is He* will grant you the definite answers to your supplications. It was narrated in a Prophetic Hadith that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Sa'd ibn

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Muslim (1015) and Ahmad (2/328) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah may Allah be pleased with him*

Abu Waqqas *Allah be pleased with him* 'Assure your food is pure and you will be a man whose supplications are answered.'(1)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* guaranteed for mankind the constituent laws for the survival of their species through marriage. This ensures the continuation of mankind's purified and clean offspring and the maintenance of their succession upon the earth. Subsequently, the verses of this Quranic chapter warned the people, "Beware of the audacity to offend the honour of people, or to slander chaste women! Do not enter into houses without their owners' permission, so that you do not see the imperfections of people."

Allah *Glorified is He* desired the soundness of society and the soundness of their succession upon the land, through the legal prescriptions and meanings that are placed forth in the following verse: 'Allah has promised those of you who have believed and done righteous deeds that, indeed, He will cause them to accede to power on Earth' (*an-Nur:* 55). Hence, whoever follows these rules will be a qualified member of this succession that Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon mankind.

Truly, this is a battle of trials and tribulations that separates the people who do good from those who do bad. Just consider how the Muslims of the earliest times were tormented and oppressed. No one dared to protect them until they were forced into emigration, firstly to Abyssinia and secondly to Medina. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do men think that on their (mere) saying, "We have believed," they will be left without a test (and a tribulation)?"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 2)

The companions were the ones who carried the beacons of guidance and conveyed the call of Allah *Glorified is He* throughout the world. Thus, it was necessary for them to undergo this rigorous training and they had to be tested by these arduous trials. Knowing well the price they had to pay and sacrifices they had to make, they expected the rewards from Allah *Glorified is He* alone. Indeed, the people of truth pay the price first, whereas the people of groundless principles seize the price first, even before they make a move towards these principles. These tribulations, which the earliest Muslims experienced, were a form of purification so that they would be qualified for power upon the earth.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Haythami in Mujama' Az-Zawa'id (10/291).*

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah has promised…’ (*an-Nur:* 55). A promise (*al-wa’d*) is an announcement of good that has not yet come so that people can prepare the means for acquiring it. Its opposite is a threat (*al-wa'eed*) or a warning (*al-indhar*) of evil that is yet to come so that people might take the necessary precautions and desist from falling into its causes. This promise is indeed truthful as it is from Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah says: ‘And whose word could be truer than Allah’s word?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 122) and in another verse: ‘And who could be more fulfilling to His covenant than Allah?’ (*at-Tawba:* 111)

The reason that people’s promises are undermined and broken by the lack of honesty is that people are naturally changing. A man may promise another man with a certain reward, but his heart could turn against him and so he does not fulfil the promise. On the other hand, the True Lord, Allah *Glorified is He* never changes and is capable of fulfilling all that He promises. There is no other power that could restrain Him, for He is One Lord and there is no deity worthy of worship except Him. Thus, His promises are always fulfilled. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah has promised those of you who have believed and done righteous deeds’ (*an-Nur:* 55). We have said earlier that faith which is based upon purity of source and doctrine is not sought for its own sake. Rather, true faith should produce particular fruits. This faith must be followed by obedience and implementation of the Divine commands. As long as you do believe in Allah *Glorified is He* you should execute what He has commanded you to do.

There are people who do good deeds, but not from the starting point of faith. We can find an example of this in some people, whom Allah *Glorified is He* describes in this verse: ‘Some Bedouins said, “We have believed.” Say (O Muhammad unto them), “You have not (yet) attained to faith; you should (rather) say, ‘We have (outwardly) submitted to Islam’” (*al-Hujurat:* 14). In other words, we have submitted to the external commands of Islam, but our deeds are not based on sincere faith. Hence, the value of faith is that you should implement its requirements. Another verse that is relevant in this context is the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Consider the flight of time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself, unless he be of those who attain to faith, do good deeds, and enjoin upon one another the adherence to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3).

What has Allah promised those who believe? Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He will cause them to accede to power on Earth’ (*an-Nur:* 55). Their accent to power upon the earth will not be a new phenomenon, as earlier ancestors preceded them in this regard, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…just as He caused (some of) those who lived before them to accede to it’ (*an-Nur:* 55).

Thus, granting the believers access to power is not a novelty. Rather, it is a phenomenon which we can easily witness in the procession of messengers and prophets. We can also see this in the earliest Muslims and companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who suffered harm and were tormented, persecuted and driven from their homes, children and possessions. At that time, they were not ordered to forcefully repel aggression. Finally, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reached Medina with a group of his companions, the *Ansar* (Helpers-Medinian Muslims) welcomed them with reverence and affection. They embraced these Immigrants (*Al-Muhajirun*-Meccan Muslims) and treated them with the sublime morals of altruism that transcend any other example of social relations in human history. Is there any greater altruism than the *Ansari* man who offered to divorce a wife so that the *Muhajjir* may marry her? The *Ansari* said, ‘Choose one of my wives, and I will divorce her for you.’ Faith affected the souls of the *Ansar* to such a sublime degree.

When the disbelievers of Quraysh saw how the *Ansar* dealt with the Muslim migrants to Medina, they were infuriated, ‘How could the *Muhajirun* in Medina live such a pleasant life?’ The disbelievers joined forces and plotted against the exemplary model of this nascent religion. They wanted to attack it with a single blow in order to eradicate the religion that, in their eyes, posed a great danger.

Things reached such a state of danger for the *Muhajirun* and the *Ansar* that they would not go to bed nor rise in the morning except in arms. They were in constant fear that their enemy would attack them at all times. One of the companions even asked his brothers, 'Do you think that we will live long enough to be secure and at ease, without going to bed armed and waking up likewise. Will a day come when we will fear none but Allah?' Another companion went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, shall we be forever in fear? Will there ever come a day when we lay down our war gear and sleep in security?' Prophet Muhammad answered with a truthful tongue that was confident in the promise of his Lord: 'You will only wait for a short while, (and soon) any man among you will find himself seated in a great gathering wrapped in his garment, in a relaxed manner, without any of them carrying a weapon.'(1) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said: 'Verily, Allah *Glorified is He* showed me the Earth, and I saw all its directions. The dominion of my community shall reach that which was shown for me from it.'(2)

During this early phase, the companions were longing for security and tranquillity. Allah *Glorified is He* says about them during this period: '…and so shaken were they that the Apostle, and the believers with him, would exclaim, "When will Allah's assistance come?"…' (*al-Baqara:* 214) In the midst of this hardship and at the peak of this anxiety, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed this verse to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '(Yet) this group (of disbelievers) shall be defeated, and they shall turn their backs in retreat (in flight)' (*al-Qamar:* 45).

The companions were astonished with this verse. Even 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* asked, 'Which group are these (that will be defeated)?' This verse was revealed when they were in Mecca under the most intense fear, not even being able to protect themselves. However, after (the battle of) Badr, they saw what had befallen the disbelievers. 'Umar said at that point, 'Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed the truth when He said: "(Yet) this group (of disbelievers) shall be defeated, and they shall turn their backs in retreat (in flight)" (*al-Qamar:* 45).

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (3/301) as the context for the revelation of the verse.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim (2889) and Ahmad (5/278, 284) on the authority of Thawban.*

Subsequently, Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad a number of verses that reassured the believers and encouraged them to be patient. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have, then, they (who deny the truth) not yet seen how We visit the earth (with Our Punishment), gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon? For, (when) Allah judges, there is no power that can repel His judgment' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41). This verse was to reassure the companions, that the land of disbelief will diminish and the land of faith will increase. These early difficult events were for their long-term benefit.

Then came the conquest of Mecca, with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entering Mecca in a solemn procession while bowing his head in humility to Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was manifesting his submissiveness and servitude to his Lord *Glorified is He*.

When Abu Sufyan, the leader of the Quraysh and the inveterate antagonist of the Prophet saw Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this procession, he said to al-ʿAbbas *Allah be pleased with him* Prophet Muhammad’s uncle, ‘The dominion of your nephew has become mighty indeed.’ Al-ʿAbbas replied, ‘It is Prophet-hood, O Abu Sufyan.’(1) This was not a mere issue of worldly dominion, but the promising sign that the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* was triumphing over the stronghold of the idols in Mecca.

Subsequently, Prophet Muhammad him marched to Khaybar, the stronghold of the People of the Scripture of Banu Qaynuqa’, Banu An-Nadeer and Banu Qurayzha. There, he was victorious over them. Later, Bahrain and the adherents of the Magians of Hajar fell into his hands and were made to pay the poll tax (*al-jizyah*).

After this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent his messengers to many kings and leaders, calling them to Islam. He sent such messages to Negus (King of Abyssinia), the Archbishop of Alexandria (al-Muqawqis), Heraclius (the Byzantine Emperor) and Khosrau (the Persian Emperor). He received gifts from these kings and emperors.

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(1) *In his As-Sira An-Nabawiya (4/404), Ibn Hisham narrated that the armies of Muslims were shown to Abu Sufyan during the conquest of Mecca, while he was with Al-‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him the uncle of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him, and he said, ‘No one could have the power to stand in the way of these. By God, O Abu Al-Fadl (Al-`Abbas), indeed the dominion of your nephew has become mighty this morning.’ Al-`Abbas replied, ‘O Abu Sufyan, verily it is Prophethood. Abu Sufyan remarked, ‘How good it is then’.*

The Islamic expansion continued, as did Allah's promise to the caliphs who succeeded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. While the Islamic expansion encompassed the whole of the Arabian Peninsula during the time of Prophet Muhammad, it went beyond the peninsula to various areas of the world in the age of the Rightly Guided Caliphs.

Ultimately, Islam dominated the entire world, with Allah *Glorified is He* making it victorious over the two greatest civilizations at that time: the civilization of Persia to the East and the Byzantine civilization to the West. Thereby, Allah's promise was realized for those that believed He would give them power on the earth.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* many other prophecies also came true. Among these prophecies was the case of Suraqa Ibn Malik who went out in pursuit of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during his voyage of emigration (from Mecca to Medina). Suraqa wished to capture Prophet Muhammad in order to obtain the reward offered by the Quraysh for his capture. After Suraqa repented and became reformed, the companions were struck by the skinniness of his forearms. They used to describe his forearms in a manner that evoked laughter.

However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say about Suraqa's forearms, 'How would they look wearing the bracelets of Khosrau (the Persian Emperor)?'(1) Afterwards, the Muslims did indeed conquer the domains of Khosrau. The bracelets of Khosrau fell to the lot of Suraqa and he wore them, with people seeing them on his arms. All of these were good tidings which Allah *Glorified is He* had promised that the companions would see themselves. 'Allah has promised those of you, who have believed' (*an-Nur:* 55). This meant that the promise would happen after a short while during their lives.

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(1) *Al-Bayhaqi narrated in his Dala'il An-Nabuwa (6/325) that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him was brought the personal possessions of Khosrau which were laid before him. Among the people present was Suraqa ibn Malik. The bracelets of Khosrau Ibn Hurmuz were given to him. He put them on his arms and they reached his shoulders. When 'Umar saw them on the arms of Suraqa, he said, 'Praise be to Allah Glorified is He the bracelets of Khosrau ibn Hurmuz are on the arms of Suraqa ibn Malik ibn Ju'sham, the Bedouin of Banu Mudlaj.' Then he mentioned the Hadith. Imam Shafi`i Allah rest his soul said, 'Suraqa wore them because Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him had told Suraqa as he was looking at his two arms, "It is as if I were with you, and you had donned the bracelets of Khosrau."'*

A similar prophecy that came true is found in the story of Umm Haram bint Milhan(1) who departed to take part in the Campaign of Dhat As-Sawari and who sailed the sea. She narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to take naps at her house, and then wake up laughing. So she asked him, 'What is making you laugh, O Messenger of Allah?' He answered: 'People from my community sailing the foamy sea, like kings on thrones'. She said, 'Ask Allah in prayer that I might be among them'. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed to Allah *Glorified is He* and Allah answered his prayer. She went out on a military campaign, and when they had sailed the Mediterranean Sea, she died.(2) Hence, the glad tidings in this verse are not just words of empty optimism. Indeed, these glad tidings became a reality recorded in history.

However, what is the intended meaning of the word 'earth' in the verse: 'He will cause them to accede to power on Earth (*al-ard*)' (*an-Nur:* 55)? If the Arabic word *al-ard* appears in this manner, as a singular word without being in a genitive construction, then it refers to the entire Earth, as in Allah's words: 'And after that We said unto the Children of Israel, "Dwell now securely on the Earth (*al-ard*),"' (*al-Kahf:* 104). In other words, they will separate and scatter in every region of it. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, regarding the Children of Israel: '…but (remember that) when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as (parts of) a motley crowd' (*al-Kahf:* 104). This means that they will be gathered from many separate lands on the earth. This is the powerful hope which we live for.

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(1) *She is the sister of Umm Salim. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to take an afternoon nap in her house and she was married to 'Ubada ibn As-Samit, and her grave is in Cyprus.*

(2) *This Hadith was narrated in this version by Abu Nu'aym in Huliyat Al-Awliya' (2/61). It was also narrated by Al-Bukhari (see: (Fath Al-Bari), 6/102) with the wording, 'The first army of my community to undertake military campaigns on the sea will indeed be rewarded with paradise.' Umm Haram asked, "Am I among them?" He said: "You are among them".'*

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…and that, indeed, He will firmly establish for them the religion which He has been pleased to bestow on them' (*an-Nur:* 55). Thus, beyond causing them to accede to power on earth, Allah *Glorified is He* shall firmly establish their religion for them. This means that their religion will gain dominance over all the activities of their lives so that all the issues of life are treated in its light and based on its guidance. Then, it shall not be a neglected religion, as we neglect it today. The firm establishment (*tamkeen*) of religion means its utilization and execution in organizing and maintaining the activities of our lives.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…and that, indeed, He will cause their erstwhile state of fear to be replaced by a sense of security' (*an-Nur:* 55). This was an answer to those companions who used to complain, 'We go to sleep in arms and wake up in arms.' Allah promised to substitute their state of fear for a state of security. When this occurred, it became incumbent upon them to safeguard this power in the servitude of Allah and to fulfil its duties.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '(seeing that) they worship Me (alone), not ascribing divine powers to aught besides Me. But all who, after (having achieved) this, choose to deny the truth – it is they, they who are truly iniquitous!' (*an-Nur:* 55) This means that those who, after Allah has caused them to accede to power on earth, firmly establishing their religion for them and granting them security, chose to deny the truth, they are the truly misguided people.

There is a differentiation between firmly establishing Islam and firmly establishing those who ascribe to Islam. Some people claim that they are Muslims, with the sole role of becoming a well-established authority. This is not the true and firm establishment of religion that is meant in this verse. We do not desire to firmly establish the ruler unto the land, but only desire to establish the religion.

وَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱلرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُرۡحَمُونَ ٥٦

[People], keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and obey the Messenger, so that you may be given mercy [56]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 56)

The Quran continually pairs these two pillars. The verses usually mention the obligatory prayers (*as-salat*) followed by the obligatory alms (*az-zakat*). This is because prayers are the sole pillar which was made obligatory by Allah *Glorified is He* directly. As for the other pillars, these were made obligatory by Divine Revelation (*al-wahy*).

We have coined a similitude for this, and to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the highest similitude. Consider a manager who traditionally assigns responsibilities to his subordinates by official written instructions or by telephone. However, if the matter is of utmost importance, he may summon the specific employee to his office and entrust him with the matter directly.

In a similar manner, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded all the legally prescribed obligations through Divine Revelation (*al-wahy*) except for prayer. He made prayers obligatory after summoning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the journey of ascension (*rihlat al-miʿraj*). There, he assigned the Prayers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* verbally without any intermediary (*wasita*). Allah *Glorified is He* knew the love of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for his community (*ummah*). Allah *Glorified is He* told him: ‘I have made Prayers obligatory upon you in close proximity, and likewise do I render it for the worshipper on the Earth (an act accomplished) in close proximity, so if he enters a mosque he will find Me.’

While the pillars of Islam are five in number, the Testimony of Faith and prayer are the two permanent pillars which never fall away from the believer under any circumstances. For it might be that you are unable to fulfil the conditions of fasting or prescribed *zakat* (obligatory alms) or pilgrimage, so then they are not obligatory upon you. On the other hand, prayer is the obligatory ritual act which is repeated five times over the course of the day and night. Through it, the Testimony of Faith in Allah is continuously expressed. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has interspersed them over time, so that the believer remains in constant contact with his Lord, such that every time the world preoccupies him, he hears 'Allah is the greatest' summoning him.

Just contemplate the greatness of the Creator *Glorified is He* when he asks his creation to meet him and stand before him five times every day. It is He *Glorified is He* who demands this meeting and makes it obligatory upon you for your well-being. You can imagine a manufactured thing which is displayed before its maker five times every day; would any sort of malfunction ever affect it?

Your Lord is the one who is summoning you, and calling you to meet Him. He says: 'I weary not, until you become weary'.(1) Out of His Mercy towards you and His love for you, He leaves you the freedom to choose the time and the place, and leaves you the freedom to end the meeting whenever you want. Though if you desire to stay in His house with Him, then you are more than welcome.

Because of the importance of prayer and its status in Islam, it encompasses all the other pillars; you repeat the Testimony of Faith during prayer; *zakat* (obligatory alms) also exists in prayer since you give of your time, and prayer takes time itself. Likewise, fasting is featured in prayer inasmuch as you abstain during it from what you abstain from in fasting, and even more. The same goes for pilgrimage since you face the *Ka'ba* in your prayer.

In short, prayer takes the place of all of the pillars in a continuous fashion. For this reason, it is the main pillar of the religion, from which the believer is not excused under any circumstances. Even if he is unable to perform the prayer standing, he can pray sitting or lying down, even if he can only gesture with his fingers or his eyes, or even simply envisage it in his mind. This is, surely, sustainability of faith in worshipful servitude to Allah, the worshipped One.

Prayer also preserves values, as it equalises people, the rich and the poor, the president, and those presided over stand in a single line. Everyone sits according to his arrival, and this brings about open access to worship in society, for prayer is a domain in which all are equal.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari (1970) and Muslim (782) both related a Hadith narrated by `A'isha Allah be pleased with her in which she said that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him used to say: 'Do of pious acts that which you are capable of, for verily Allah does not weary until you become weary'.*

If prayer is the guardian of values, then prescribed *zakat* (obligatory alms) is the guardian of material possessions for those who do not have the capacity to earn or to work. Hence, we have before us laws for life, and for the continuity of people as vicegerents on the earth. The guardian of values is prayer, and the guardian of material possessions is prescribed *zakat* (obligatory alms).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And establish prayer and give *zakat* and obey the Messenger - that you may receive mercy’. Here, in the matter of prayer and prescribed *zakat* (obligatory alms), He singles out the Messenger for obedience. This is because he is the one entrusted with the clarification of and the details of that which the True Lord *Glorified is He* has summarised in the obligatory acts of prayer and *zakat* (obligatory alms), inasmuch as the details of both of them are found in the purified *Sunnah* (Prophetic teachings). Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لَا تَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مُعْجِزِينَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَمَأْوَىٰهُمُ ٱلنَّارُ ۖ وَلَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ٥٧

Do not think [Prophet] that the disbelievers can escape God on earth; the Fire will be their final home, an evil end [57]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 57)

Do not presume that the disbelievers, however high their status and whatever they have acquired through tyranny, will escape the punishment of Allah. For they will never be able to inflict failure upon Allah; Rather, He *Glorified is He* grants them a pleasant life and respite, until when He seizes them, He seizes them with a mighty and powerful grasp. And He *Glorified is He* will catch them unexpectedly, without a doubt.

In the words of the jinn: ‘And we have become certain that we will never cause failure to Allah upon earth, nor can we escape Him by flight’ (*al-Jinn:* 12).

In His saying: ‘their refuge will be the Fire,’ the meaning is, do not think that those who disbelieve can evade [Allah’s reckoning] on earth because their ultimate abode is hellfire.

As for the final exclamation ‘and how wretched the destination,’ it refers to the place of returning and destination.

Then the theme shifts to behaviour associated internally within society, particularly the family in its most delicate private attributes, having previously mentioned at the beginning of the chapter the laws specific to society from the outward aspect. He *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لِيَسْتَـْٔذِنكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُكُمْ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَبْلُغُوا۟ ٱلْحُلُمَ مِنكُمْ
ثَلَٰثَ مَرَّٰتٍ ۚ مِّن قَبْلِ صَلَوٰةِ ٱلْفَجْرِ وَحِينَ تَضَعُونَ ثِيَابَكُم مِّنَ ٱلظَّهِيرَةِ وَمِنۢ بَعْدِ صَلَوٰةِ
ٱلْعِشَآءِ ۚ ثَلَٰثُ عَوْرَٰتٍ لَّكُمْ ۚ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا عَلَيْهِمْ جُنَاحٌۢ بَعْدَهُنَّ ۚ طَوَّٰفُونَ عَلَيْكُم
بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

Believers, your slaves and any who have not yet reached puberty should ask your permission to come in at three times of day: before the dawn prayer; when you lay your garments aside in the midday heat; and after the evening prayer. These are your three times for privacy; at other times, there is no blame on you or them if you move around each other freely. In this way God makes messages clear: God is all knowing, all wise [58] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 58)

This verse teaches us the etiquette of asking permission within a family made up of two parents and children, in addition to subordinates such as servants and others. Now, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to raise this family in the best possible manner, and He singles out those who believe for appeal here. In other words, O you who believe in Me as a wise, law-giving Lord for you, desiring your well-being, listen to these instructions: ‘let those whom your right hands possess and those who have not [yet] reached puberty among you ask permission of you [before entering] at three times’. It means teach those to ask permission of you. This etiquette is a commandment from Allah *Glorified is He* with which He charges every believer within the family. Although the command here is for those who are not charged since those ordered to ask permission are servants and children, Allah commands the adults to teach the young. This is similar to what is cited in a Hadith:

‘Teach/order your children [at the age of] seven to pray, and punish them [if they were reluctant to perform] it [at the age of] ten’.(1)

Hence, it is not the young who are given responsibility for this, but rather adults who are charged. This is because children have not yet reached the age of legal accountability for commands from their Lord; instead, it is adults who have reached the age of being held accountable. Therefore, it is they who should give the order and punish.

Ordering a child to pray or to ask permission is to inculcate in him the habit and the regularity of something which might be very hard for him when he grows older. However, if you accustom children to it now, it will be easy for them when they reach the age of being obligated [to adhere to religious prescriptions], and the regular habit on their part will become worship they will be able to maintain. Allah *the Almighty* laid down the etiquettes of seeking permission because there are certain personal affairs that are only known to man’s relatives, unlike the foreigners who only know about those affairs which are apparent to them. In other words, one’s relatives know about him/her more than anyone else. Now there are social regulations for general society, and social regulations for private society, which is the family. The freedom of a person in his family is broader than his freedom in general society, and when he is in his own private quarters, his freedom is broader than his freedom among his family.

So, there must be moral precepts which protect these private domains, and which regulate the relations between the members of a single family, just as the preceding moral precepts which regulate the relations between individuals outside of the family.

With regards to: ‘your right hands possess,’ these are servants who perform services for certain people, without taking wages in return because they are not free people. In other words, they are under the full control of their masters, thus cannot escape from them.

Concerning, ‘and those who have not [yet] reached puberty among you,’ these are young children who have not yet reached the age of legal responsibility.

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(1) *This Hadith is related by Ahmad (2/187) and Abu Dawud (495).*

They perform errands, so you see them coming in and out of the room without any restriction. But are we to leave them in this manner, taking cognisance of our most intimate affairs? Household servants by nature tend to enter and exit our rooms, and likewise for children. However, there are three times of day during which they are not permitted to enter without asking for permission: ‘before the Dawn Prayer’ because this is the time associated with sleep, and a person asleep has freedom of movement and of dress: ‘and when you put aside your clothing [for rest] at noon’ as this is the time of afternoon napping, a time of relaxation during which a person removes some of his clothes ‘and after the night prayer’ since sleep comes after the night prayer. These are the three times during which no one should come into your room except by your explicit permission.

Look at this precaution which your Lord Glorified is He provides for you so that your freedom will not be restricted in your personal matters and your private affairs. It is as if these times, O Believer, were your personal possession in which you can find relaxation and enjoy your privacy. The requirement of asking for permission gives you the opportunity to prepare yourself to meet the person requesting permission. As for all other times, everyone else, even your wife, [should] ask for permission.

‘The occasion of the revelation of this verse is that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to see ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* for some matter, so he sent a servant boy from the *Ansar* (Helpers-Medinian Muslims) to him. When the boy had gone, he pushed the door and called out, “O ‘Umar!” But he did not respond because he was sleeping. So, the boy went out and sat outside, then knocked on the door, but ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* did not wake up. So what did the servant boy do? He raised his hands to the sky and said, “O Lord, wake him up!” Then he pushed open the door and went into his room, and there was ‘Umar asleep in a posture that was not proper for anyone to see him in. ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* then woke up and noticed that the servant boy had seen him in that position. Then, when he went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, “O Messenger of Allah, we desire that our children ask permission to enter upon us in our private quarters as well as our women and our subordinate dependents (*mawali-na*) and our servants, for such-and-such has just occurred with the servant boy [you sent].” Thereupon this verse was revealed.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* terms these three times of privacy (*‘awra*): ‘[These are] three times of privacy for you.’ It is to be noted that the Arabic word *(al-'awrah)* also connotes the private parts of a person’s body, and these, whether of a male or female, should not be seen by anyone, as this is a kind of harmful breach of privacy, and Allah does not want anyone to see you in a manner that you would dislike.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: ‘There is no blame upon you nor upon them beyond these [periods].’ In other words, outside of these times, there is no sin or prohibition on you or on servants or on young children if they enter your private quarters. Apart from these three times, a person should be prepared to carry on with a normal life, and there is no objection to his receiving servants or young children without their asking for permission. This is because the nature of life in houses cannot do without the continual entering and exiting.

He *Glorified is He* says after this: ‘for they continually circulate among you – some of you, among others.’ This signifies that their movement about in the house is constant, entering and exiting [from one room to the next], so how could we restrict it at other than these times?

There follows: ‘Thus does Allah make clear to you the verses;’ which signifies an obvious clarification so that contradictions will not happen in society later; ‘and Allah is Knowing,’ about everything which promotes the welfare of people as the vicegerents on the earth; ‘and Wise,’ in His establishment of laws and His Commands. He does not lay down a law without wisdom.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *This explanation for the cause for the revelation of the verse is cited along with a different one by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir) (6/4840).*

وَإِذَا بَلَغَ ٱلْأَطْفَٰلُ مِنكُمُ ٱلْحُلُمَ فَلْيَسْتَـْٔذِنُوا۟ كَمَا ٱسْتَـْٔذَنَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ
كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٩﴾

When your children reach puberty, they should [always] ask your permission to enter, like their elders do. This is how God makes His messages clear to you: God is all knowing, all wise [59] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 59)

When the child was still a child who had not reached puberty, he would enter [into your private quarters] outside of these proscribed times, but if he has reached the age of puberty, then he is obliged to ask permission [before doing so]. We do not say: he has become accustomed to asking permission only during these times. No, rather, he must ask permission at all times, for he has become an adolescent and has grown up, and the previous state [of innocence] has come to an end in this regard.

Reaching the age of puberty signifies that a person has matured enough that he is capable of having children. Now this is a sign of the consummation of his physical development, and this does not arise except with the completion of the sexual impulse which is itself the cause of procreation. We have compared this to a fruit which is not sweet until it ripens, which, if left after ripening falls of its own accord. This is a miracle from Allah for the survival of the species, since, if we were to eat the fruit before it ripened, its seed would not sprout, and its species would become extinct. Hence, part of the wisdom of Allah in his creation lies in the fact that a fruit does not become sweet until after it has ripened.

Similarly, when the child reaches puberty, he becomes capable of begetting offspring, and we say to him: the concession granted to you by the prescribed law has ended, and you must now request permission [to enter the private quarters of adults] at all times. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women’ (*an-Nur:* 31).

For a child of this age, the [sexual] impulse is not formed, and they do not have these tendencies or desires. As for His saying: ‘as those before them have done’. In other words, from among adults who ask for permission at all times. ‘Thus,’ that is, just as we have made a clear proclamation in the matter of the first seeking of permission; ‘does Allah make clear to you His verses’ because Allah *Glorified is He* is ‘Knowing’ regarding your welfare; and ‘Wise,’ not laying down laws except on the basis of wisdom.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلْقَوَٰعِدُ مِنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ ٱلَّٰتِى لَا يَرْجُونَ نِكَاحًا فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُنَاحٌ أَن يَضَعْنَ
ثِيَابَهُنَّ غَيْرَ مُتَبَرِّجَٰتٍۭ بِزِينَةٍ ۖ وَأَن يَسْتَعْفِفْنَ خَيْرٌ لَّهُنَّ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

No blame will be attached to elderly women who are not hoping for sex, if they take off their outer garments without flaunting their charms, but it is preferable for them not to do this: God is all hearing, all seeing [60] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 60)

We know that the Wise Law-Giver has ordained rules for the Muslim woman to follow in her dress, comportment, and manner of walking for her protection and to safeguard society from disruptive temptation, and so that those possessed of sick souls do not crave her. Thus, He made incumbent upon her to wear a covering (*hijab*), which is non-transparent and modest, to shield her and conceal her beauty. As He said: ‘bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments’ (*al-Ahzab:* 59).

But women of post-menstrual age and the elderly among them are under a different rule. Women such as these no longer have desire or passion, and for this reason there is no objection to them lightening somewhat the clothing which was obligatory upon them when they might have been the cause of seduction, and they have the right to take off the headscarf, for example.

However, this issue is mentioned with misgivings, since there are women who reach menopause when they are elderly, but they remain beautiful and seductive. For this reason, our Lord *Glorified is He* has laid down a precautionary rule ‘there is no blame upon them for putting aside their outer garments [but] not displaying adornment’. Then, He directs them to what is better than that ‘But to modestly refrain [from that] is better for them’. The intended meaning of laying down garments is a slight reduction of outer garments, with the condition of ‘[but] not displaying adornment’. It is, thus, not permissible for a woman to take off her outer garments based on this concession, and then to adorn herself and make a display of her beauty. We are apprehensive about teaching women this rule, and then having them not utilise it so that we will not say of them: they are too old to be interested in men!

It is amazing to see a woman when she has reached this age, and to find her piously reserved in her dress, piously reserved in her appearance and piously reserved in her behaviour. For she is increased in beauty, radiance and even more captivating, This is in contrast to the woman who does not respect her age, putting powders and lurid make-up on her face, thus appearing disfigured and deformed.

As for ‘to refrain,’ it means to retain their garments and not to remove anything of them, for this is more conducive to modesty.

لَّيْسَ عَلَى ٱلْأَعْمَىٰ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلْأَعْرَجِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَن
تَأْكُلُوا۟ مِنۢ بُيُوتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ ءَابَآئِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أُمَّهَٰتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ إِخْوَٰنِكُمْ أَوْ
بُيُوتِ أَخَوَٰتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَعْمَٰمِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ عَمَّٰتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَخْوَٰلِكُمْ أَوْ
بُيُوتِ خَٰلَٰتِكُمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكْتُم مَّفَاتِحَهُۥٓ أَوْ صَدِيقِكُمْ ۚ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ
جُنَاحٌ أَن تَأْكُلُوا۟ جَمِيعًا أَوْ أَشْتَاتًا ۚ فَإِذَا دَخَلْتُم بُيُوتًا فَسَلِّمُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ تَحِيَّةً مِّنْ عِندِ
ٱللَّهِ مُبَٰرَكَةً طَيِّبَةً ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

No blame will be attached to the blind, the lame, the sick. Whether you eat in your own houses, or those of your fathers, your mothers, your brothers, your sisters, your paternal uncles, your paternal aunts, your maternal uncles, your maternal aunts, houses you have the keys for, or any of your friends’ houses, you will not be blamed: you will not be blamed whether you eat in company or separately. When you enter any house, greet one another with a greeting of blessing and goodness as enjoined by God. This is how God makes His messages clear to you so that you may understand [61] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 61)

The word ‘*constraint’* also means sin [in this context], thus the *constraint* which is removed from those mentioned in the verse under study is constriction or sin which is related to the rule that follows concerning the issue of eating, as indicated by His saying: ‘nor upon yourselves.’

The blind person avoids eating with people out of embarrassment since he does not see his food, and perhaps his hand reaches out to the most savoury food and he eats it and leaves its less desirable portions. The lame person has need of special comfort in his manner of sitting, and perhaps others will be bothered by this. The sick person might be met with the disgust of people. So Allah *Glorified is He* has lifted this constriction (or sin) from His servants, saying: ‘There is no blame upon you whether you eat together or separately.’

Hence, it is fit that you eat together, since the True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to establish integration of souls, not physical appearances. Yet, it can happen that if you see a youth afflicted with some disease, and then treat him in a special manner, you might hurt his feelings, even if what afflicts him is congenital from Allah, and he can do nothing about it. For [among the disabled] are those who reject having been created by Allah in a form with which they are not pleased.

For this reason, in the countryside, we hear people say, ‘the one who gives the blind man his due, [the blind man], he, then is endowed with sight. Why? Because [the blind person] is content with this affliction, and interacts with people based on his being this way, and thus asks them for assistance. Hence, one sees all people out-racing one another to assist him and take his hand, for if he has lost an eye, Allah has compensated him for it with a thousand eyes. However, the one who is averse [to his own state] and refuses to recognise his impairment, and wears dark glasses to conceal his defect, he will proceed with difficulty, wandering around bumping into things with no one to assist him.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted those afflicted by these ailments to be in harmony with society, for them not to assume a [negative] attitude with regard to it, and for society not to assume a [negative] attitude with regard to them.(1) Therefore, the passage ‘nor upon yourselves’ means, in other words, they are just like you, so there should be no impediment between you and them in anything.

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(1) *Ibn `Abbas said: When Allah Glorified is He revealed ‘And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly,’ (al-Baqara: 188) Muslims felt constrained sharing their meals with the blind, the chronically ill, and the lame. They said, ‘Food is the best of possessions, and Allah has forbidden us to eat possessions in vain, and the blind do not see the*=

‘For when you eat from your [own] houses’ The *Ansar* (Helpers-Medinian Muslims) were possessed of a certain shyness such that if one of them was sitting in someone else’s house, they would not eat [food] from it unless the owner of the house gave them express permission. A man among them might go on a journey and leave a dependent subordinate at his house without giving him leave to eat of the food of his house. Then he would return and find the food untouched, or find that it had spoiled without the dependent subordinate having eaten anything of it. So the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to lift this constriction from people, hence He says: ‘There is not upon the blind [any] constraint nor upon the lame constraint nor upon the ill constraint nor upon yourselves when you eat from your [own] houses…’

One may argue, what sort of constriction or sin would there be for a person to eat from his own house? It is said: if you strive to thoroughly examine the relatives mentioned in the verse, the answer would become clear to you. For the verse mentions your fathers, your mothers, your brothers, your sisters, your paternal uncles, your paternal aunts, your maternal uncles, and your maternal aunts, but it does not mention anything about offspring, though they are at the top of this sequence. Why?

The answer is because the houses of offspring are the houses of parents, and that when you eat from the house of your child, you are eating from your house. This is based on the notion that the child and all that he possesses are the property of his father. Thus, one can – outside the Quran – replace ‘your houses’ with the houses of your children. This is because the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not wish to make a separate reference to the houses of children alongside those of parents, since they are one and the same thing.

Consequently, there is no restriction upon you to eat from the house of your son, or your father, or your mother, or your brother, or your paternal

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= *location of tasty food, and the sick do not eat their full share of food. Thereupon Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse: ‘There is not upon the blind [any] constraint nor upon the lame constraint.’ [This is cited by Al-Wahidi in (Asbab An-Nuzul), page 189.]*

uncle or your paternal aunt, or your maternal uncle, or your maternal aunt. ‘Or [from houses] whose keys you possess or [from the house] of your friend.’ That is to say, the owner of the house gives you the keys to it,(1) and in this is permission for you to dispose of or eat of its food if you want to.

With regards to ‘or [from the house] of your friend,’ the word ‘friend’ is singular. The reason is that even if friends were a group, they will inevitably be of one heart otherwise they would not be friends.

Concerning His saying, ‘But when you enter houses, give greetings of peace upon each other- a greeting from Allah, blessed and good’ Islam wishes to render the community of faith a single unit, bound firmly together. The very greeting of Islam requires both parties to respond to each other, so it is as though one greets himself.

Another connotation is that if you enter into houses in which there is no one, greet yourselves. And when you enter mosques say: greetings of peace upon the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and upon us from our Lord. The angels hear and they respond.

As regards His saying ‘a greeting from Allah, blessed and good,’ in another verse He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet [in return] with one better than it or [at least] return it [in a like manner]’ (*an-Nisa’:* 86). Beyond its being from Allah, He describes this greeting as being ‘blessed’. A blessed thing is that which gives over and above what is expected from it. ‘Thus does Allah make clear to you the verses [of ordinance] that you may understand’?

In other words, surely the One Who charged you with these rules is a Lord who ardently desires good for you, though He is self-sufficient of any need of this. Instead, he commands you to do things, so that their benefit rebounds upon you. So if you obey Him in that which He has commanded you to do, you will derive benefit from His commands in this world, then His recompense and reward await you in the Hereafter.

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(1) *Sa‘id Ibn Al-Musayyab [one of the great second generation scholars of Medina] used to say of this verse, ‘It was revealed in connection with people who, when they went out on a journey or military campaign with the Prophet, used to leave the keys of their houses with the blind, the lame, the sick or with their kinfolk. They would tell them to eat from what was in their houses if they had need to do this. But [these guardians of the keys] would refrain from eating from [these houses], saying, “we fear that [the owners] may not have sincerely meant this”. Thereupon, Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse.’ [Cited by Al-Wahidi in (Asbab An-Nuzul), page 190.]*

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَإِذَا كَانُواْ مَعَهُۥ عَلَىٰٓ أَمۡرٖ جَامِعٖ
لَّمۡ يَذۡهَبُواْ حَتَّىٰ يَسۡتَـٔۡذِنُوهُۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَسۡتَـٔۡذِنُونَكَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤۡمِنُونَ
بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦۚ فَإِذَا ٱسۡتَـٔۡذَنُوكَ لِبَعۡضِ شَأۡنِهِمۡ فَأۡذَن لِّمَن شِئۡتَ
مِنۡهُمۡ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡ لَهُمُ ٱللَّهَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٦٢

The true believers are those who believe in God and His Messenger, who, when they are gathered with him on a communal matter, do not depart until they have asked his permission – those who ask your permission [Prophet] are the ones who truly believe in God and His Messenger. When they ask your permission to attend to their private affairs, allow whoever you see fit and ask God to forgive them. God is most forgiving and merciful [62] (The Quran, *an-Nur:* 62)

The believer is one who believes in Allah and in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveying messages from Allah. Now, inasmuch as you have affirmed your belief in the Messenger conveying messages from Allah, then it is necessary for your actions to be subject to His commands, and your own deepest self must belong to Him. Hence, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* views a matter as affecting the entire community – uniting the Muslims in a situation, or in peace or war – and he then summons all of you for consultation, so that each one of you might express his opinion or experience, thereby expanding the domain of deliberation in the community, this is in order that the resulting decision be sound and correct, in accordance with the common good.

Thus, when the true believer is summoned to participate in the discussion of such a matter affecting the entire community, he does not get up from his place of sitting until he has asked permission of the Prophet Muhammad *peace* *and blessings be upon him* who is under no obligation to grant him this permission because the matter bringing together all the Muslims may well be more important than the matter which concerns an individual.

With regards to His saying: ‘Indeed, those who ask your permission, [O Muhammad] - those are the ones who believe in Allah and His Messenger.’ Their request for permission here is among the signs of faith. [The believer] does not get up and depart from a council stealthily, sneaking out without anyone noticing him. It is necessary to ask permission of the Messenger of Allah in order that the common good does not elude the believers, for it may be that he has an opinion from which benefit can be derived.

The Messenger surely seeks the counsel of his companions in order to be enlightened by their opinions and experience. Hence, when he summons them to [participate in] a matter of important communal concern, this must be understood within the context of the Messenger’s status as part of his communication from Allah to the *ummah*. When some individual calls upon another individual for counsel, the two of them are deliberating a personal matter concerning the person in question. However, when the Messenger of Allah summons them, he is not summoning them for [deliberation about] a single personal affair, but rather about a specific matter concerning the community as a whole. Allah has willed that this community of believers be the best brought forth for mankind, and the individual shall also derive benefit from this summons. It may be that the benefit he derives from responding to the general summons which encompasses all people is better than the benefit he derives from his own personal summons. The summoned person must give proper value to this distinction.

In spite of this distinction, Allah did not forbid some people who have their personal concerns from requesting permission of the Messenger of Allah in order to leave to attend to them. That is why He ordained seeking permission for them. Nevertheless, they should bear this distinction in mind, and remember that they departed to take care of some personal affair, while the Messenger assumes the responsibility for the affairs of the entire world until the Final Hour arises.

Hence, if a person participates in this gathering, he will benefit as an individual and his community of fellow believers will benefit those living at that time and those to come until the Final Hour arises. But if he should give preference to his personal affairs over these affairs, then he has behaved badly, and has done that which is not suitable for a believer. For this reason, the Messenger of Allah was commanded to give permission to whomever he wishes, and then to ask for Allah's forgiveness for him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'when they ask your permission for something of their affairs, then give permission to whom you will among them'. So, the matter is left up to the Messenger of Allah to assess it based upon the general welfare of the Muslims, free to give leave or not to give leave.

Hence, it is imperative to ask permission of the Messenger of Allah, then he can give leave to whomever he wishes such as those whose presence and opinion he feels can be made up for by those who remain. Consequently, if someone, whose opinion might be critical to the Muslims, asks for permission, he will not be granted it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and ask forgiveness for them of Allah,' suggesting that seeking leave and departing from the council of the Messenger of Allah is something which Allah *Glorified is He* does not approve of.

This is true even if you asked leave for a matter of importance to you, and even if the Messenger of Allah grants you leave, for it is better not to request permission to leave in the first place. When the Messenger of Allah summons to a matter of communal urgency, no one should allow their concerns to divert them from what they have been summoned to nor should they give precedence to anything above the welfare of the Muslims and the council of the Messenger of Allah. In the case of a matter of communal importance, everyone should pool together their talents and thoughts on the subject at hand, and the moment you ask for permission to attend to a personal affair, you are pre-occupied and taken away from the community, abandoning them.

Subsequently, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لَّا تَجۡعَلُواْ دُعَآءَ ٱلرَّسُولِ بَيۡنَكُمۡ كَدُعَآءِ بَعۡضِكُم بَعۡضٗاۚ قَدۡ
يَعۡلَمُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَسَلَّلُونَ مِنكُمۡ لِوَاذٗاۚ فَلۡيَحۡذَرِ ٱلَّذِينَ
يُخَالِفُونَ عَنۡ أَمۡرِهِۦٓ أَن تُصِيبَهُمۡ فِتۡنَةٌ أَوۡ يُصِيبَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٣﴾

Do not make [your] calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another. Already God knows those of you who slip away, concealed by others. So, let those beware who dissent from the Prophet's order, lest Fitna [unrest or rebellion] strike them or a painful punishment [63]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 63)

There are two possible interpretations. The first of these is that you summon each other with regard to personal matters, but the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* summons you to a general matter related to the activities of life of all people until the Final Hour arises. The other interpretation is that it means calling out. That is to say, the Messenger calls out to you or you call out to him. This is because there is a particular etiquette which must be observed in addressing the Messenger, as he is not like one of you that you can call out to him: O Muhammad! The Quran found fault with a group who did not adhere to the etiquette of addressing the Messenger of Allah, as Allah says: 'Indeed, those who call you, [O Muhammad], from behind the chambers - most of them do not use reason' (*al-Hujurat:* 4). They have done wrong when they said, O Muhammad! Even if they had said, O you Messenger, they would still have done wrong since it is not proper that they should rush the Messenger of Allah. Instead, they should leave him at his ease, if he should find time to meet them, then he will come out to them. Hence, they misbehaved in two respects.

It is not fitting to address Him *peace and blessings be upon him* by his name: O Muhammad. Since what binds the Messenger and his community is not that he is Muhammad, but rather, what binds them is that he is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, it is imperative that we address him with this title. And why not, given that his Lord *Glorified is He* his Creator and the One Who chose him, and has distinguished him from all his fellow messengers, and of those possessed of unflinching resolution, by addressing only the other messengers by their names:

‘O Adam, dwell you and your wife in this garden’ (*al-Baqara:* 35).

‘O Noah! Disembark in peace from Us’ (*Hud:* 48).

‘O Abraham you have already fulfilled [the purpose of] that dream-vision!’ (*as-Saffat:* 104-105)

‘O Moses! Verily, I am Allah’ (*al-Qasas:* 30).

‘O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say unto men?’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116)

‘O David! Behold, We have made you a [prophet and, thus, our] vicegerent on earth’ (*Sad:* 26).

However, He never addressed the Messenger of Allah by his name. Instead, He addressed him using the vocative compound ‘O you!’ (*ya-ayyu-ha*) and one of his titles, such as ‘O you Messenger’ and ‘O you Prophet’. Hence, if the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not render His calling out to the Messenger the same as His calling out to His other messengers, shall we, then, call him by his name? We must say, O you Messenger, O you Prophet, O Messenger of Allah, O Prophet of Allah; for this is the fitting, elevated description.

Just as we distinguish addressing the Messenger of Allah when we call out to him, similarly when we address one another, we should give proper value to this form of address; and we should be aware that this form of address is for the common good, with its benefit rebounding upon everyone.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Already Allah knows those of you who slip away, concealed by others. So, let those beware who dissent from the Prophet's order, lest *Fitnah* [unrest or rebellion] strike them or a painful punishment.’

There is no doubt that those who ask leave of the Messenger of Allah have faith, for they respectfully attend the council and do not get up to leave except with his permission. But there are others who depart without asking for leave: ‘slip away’. They exit gradually and in a secretive manner, as if they are shuffling from one place to another until they leave. Or they delude you into thinking that they wish to speak to another person in order to get up, and then slip out of the council secretly.

Allah warns these people saying: ‘so, let those beware who dissent from the Prophet's order’; this warning of bad consequences follows withdrawing from the council of the Messenger of Allah. It is as if He were saying to them – compare between your withdrawing from the council of the Messenger and what awaits you of punishment for doing so.

‘Dissent from the Prophet's order’ bears the meaning of turning away from the Prophet. In other words, pay attention to what the Messenger of Allah says, and do not contradict him and do not oppose him. Although he is a human being like you, yet surely, he receives Divine revelation. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* defines his station as a human being and as a Messenger, saying: ‘[Divine] inspiration comes upon me – that is, from the True Lord *the Exalted* – whence I say: I am not like one of you; and [Divine inspiration] is taken from me, whence I say: I am not but a human being like all of you.’ Hence, the companions understood this concept, and they interacted with the Messenger of Allah on this basis, with suitable etiquette. They would ask him concerning something he offered: Is it from Allah’s revelation or is it a suggestion and open to deliberation? Consequently, if the issue was based on revelation from Allah, then no one would have the right to add or offer anything. But if he had not received any revelation from Allah concerning it, then each of them was at liberty to express their opinion or offer counsel.

This actually occurred during the battle of Badr when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* settled at a campsite which some of the companions thought was inferior to another one. ‘So they asked the Messenger of Allah, “Is it Allah who instructed you to settle at this campsite, or is it a matter of opinion and deliberation?” Whereupon he said, “No, indeed, it is a matter of opinion and deliberation.”’(1) So they informed him that it was not suitable, and that the suitable place was such and such.

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(1) *Al-Habbab ibn Al-Mundhir ibn Al-Jumuh said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, have you seen this campsite in a vision? Is it a campsite which Allah instructs you to settle at, there being no possibility for us to move it forward or backward; or is it an opinion, and [a question of] war and strategy?’ He replied, ‘No, indeed it is an opinion, and [a question of] war and strategy’. Whereupon [Al-Hubab] said: ‘O Messenger of Allah,=*

Regarding His saying: ‘lest *Fitnah* [unrest or rebellion] strike them,’ that is to say, in this world; ‘or a painful punishment,’ in the Hereafter. Hence if they manage to evade the trial of this world, they will not escape the punishment of the Hereafter.

Finally, the chapter concludes with Allah saying:

أَلَآ إِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ قَدْ يَعْلَمُ مَآ أَنتُمْ عَلَيْهِ
وَيَوْمَ يُرْجَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ فَيُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوا۟ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌۢ ﴿٦٤﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God:
He knows what state you are in – on the Day when all are
returned to Him, He will tell them everything they have
done – God has full knowledge of everything [64]
(The Quran, *an-Nur:* 64)

The word ‘unquestionably’ attracts the listener’s attention in case he was distracted. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want you to miss a single letter of his words, so He alerts you. So, take heed of what He says to you. He says: ‘to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth’.

The heavens and the earth are a container which encompasses everything in the higher and lower reaches of the universe. So unto Allah belongs that which is in the heavens and the earth; in other words, that which is contained in them, normally, the container is of less value than that which it contains. For example, that which is inside of a treasure chest is more precious than the chest itself; and that which is inside of a bag is more valuable than the bag. The same is true for the greatness of the heavens and the earth, with all that they contain of created things. For this reason, beware never to utilise a bound copy of the Quran as a container to safeguard something of importance to you. For nothing is as valuable or precious as the Book of Allah. Hence it is not fitting that you make of it a holder for your money, or for your important papers because things which are stored away for safekeeping are normally more valuable than the object which holds them.

= *then this is not a [suitable] site, so move on with the people until we get nearer to the water than the group [of our enemies], and settle there’. [This is related by ibn Hisham in (As-Sira An-Nabawiya) (2/620) as cited from Ibn Ishaq.]*

All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth is the possession of Allah alone, with no one sharing in its ownership with Him. And despite the multitude of false claimants to divinity, not one of them has ever laid claim to possessing dominion over anything of it.

Even Nimrod (Namrud) who argued with our forefather Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* saying, 'I am the one who gives life and death, when Abraham (Ibrahim) said to him: 'Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west!' (*al-Baqara:* 258) He was unable to do anything and was dumbfounded, and the issue was settled.

His dominion is not limited to the creation such that He created everything and then left it to perform its function by itself. Rather, He created it and He has Stewardship over what He created and administration over everything. Therefore, do not think that the universe around you serves you as an instrument, but rather, it is subservient to the will of Allah and His regulation.

Hence, water which flows for you from rains and rivers can be held back from you and your land will be afflicted by drought; or it can exceed its bounds, and become torrents, drowning and destroying. Therefore, it is not a question of the monotonous regulation of creation. Created things are not mechanical instruments; instead Allah has dominion, stewardship and free control over all that He has created.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'He knows that upon which you [stand]'. In order to understand this verse, we must grasp that the relationship of the True Lord *Glorified is He* with events is not like our own relationship. With regard to Allah, events are not bound by past, present, or future. This is not logical according to the human intelligence, but nevertheless it is logical according to the Divine.

Following on Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and [knows] the Day when they will be returned to Him and He will inform them of what they have done. And Allah is Knowing of all things'. In another verse, we find: 'And not absent from your Lord is any [part] of an atom's weight within the earth or within the heaven or [anything] smaller than that or greater but that it is in a clear register' (*Yunus:* 61).

Therefore, take care not to mistakenly believe that Allah’s perception and vision of various positions in various places is fragmentary, that it faces one thing and does not see the other. On the contrary, it is an inclusive vision, as if all things are encompassed in a single view. This is evident in His saying: ‘Then is He who is a maintainer of every soul, [knowing] what it has earned’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 33).

For He *Glorified is He* is not One Whose hearing [of one thing] distracts Him from the hearing [of another thing], nor whose sight [of one thing] distracts Him from the sight [of another thing], since His perception is all-embracing, and His cognisance is rigorously subtle. For this reason, His requital will be veracious in accordance with the meticulous accuracy of His cognisance. So beware, then, of being heedless of this truth, for your Lord is watching over you, looking at you; no secret of yours is concealed from Him.

Hence, a person who slips away secretly on false premises is to be warned. There is nothing more important than sitting in council with the Messenger of Allah. The Messenger of Allah himself was intently desirous of seeing his companions in his council on a continuous basis; and Allah *Glorified is He* made this incumbent upon him, saying to him: ‘And let not your eyes pass beyond them’ (*al-Kahf:* 28). This is illustrated in the following incident. Among the companions who used to pray behind him was a man who would make the final greeting of the prayer and then depart hastily. [The Prophet] would thus see him at the beginning of the prayer, but not at its end. ‘On the occasion of one of the subsequent prayers, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* caught hold of him and asked him, ‘Is this out of indifference to us?’ It is as if it were hard on the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad to find one of his companions not present in his company or renouncing his assemblies; for such a man would be deprived of the benefits and spiritual graces which descend upon the council of the Messenger of Allah, and be deprived of the radiance of his penetrating insight and of his looking at him. The man was embarrassed and began to explain to the Messenger of Allah what pushed him to rush out after every prayer, and that it was not due to his indifference to the presence of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the assembly councils of the Messenger. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I have a wife at home waiting for this garment of mine to pray in it.’

In other words, he only had a single outer garment in his house. Thereupon, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for his welfare. When he returned to his wife, she asked him why he had been gone so long. He told her what had happened with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: that he had stopped him and the discussion they had had. So, she said to her husband, are you complaining about your Lord to Muhammad?

Later, when she was asked about this incident, she said, 'My husband was absent for one hundred *tasbihah* (one recitation of exaltation of Allah).' Just contemplate the clock by which she regulated her time.

'Unquestionably, to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth. Already He knows that upon which you [stand] and [knows] the Day when they will be returned to Him and He will inform them of what they have done. And Allah is Knowing of all things' (*an-Nur:* 64). Ending with this verse clarifies the overwhelming power, might and kingdom that belong to Allah *Glorified is He* and makes evident that the return will be to Him on the Day of Rising for the Judgement.

the chapter of

al-Furqan

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Furqan*[1] begins by highlighting the fact that this kingdom is not a kingdom of enslavement and subjugation, but rather one of mercy that organises life in such a way that enables you (humans) to live in its guidance and light. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

تَبَارَكَ ٱلَّذِى نَزَّلَ ٱلْفُرْقَانَ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِۦ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَٰلَمِينَ نَذِيرًا ﴿١﴾

Exalted is He who has sent the Differentiator down to His servant so that it may be a warning to all people [1]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 1)

Tabarak: the root letters *'ba', 'ra' and 'kaf'* generally indicate a meaning relating to *baraka* (blessing). *Baraka* is when something gives out more benefit than the amount of benefit you think that it possesses. This is evident when you find that the food enough only for three persons feeds ten, and you say, 'this food is blessed', or, 'this food is full of *baraka.*'

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(1) A chapter the entirety of which is Meccan according to the opinion of the majority, although *Ibn 'Abbas* and *Qatada* said, 'It is Meccan except for three of its verses which were revealed in Medina. These three verses are the words of Allah *Glorified is He* 'and who never invoke any (imaginary) deity side by side with Allah *Glorified is He* and do not take any human being's life – (the life) which Allah *Glorified is He* has willed to be sacred – other than in (the pursuit of) justice, and do not commit adultery...' (*al-Furqan:* 68) until His Words, '...seeing that Allah is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy.' (*al-Furqan:* 70); and *Ad-Dahak* said, 'It is Medinan, although it contains a Meccan verse.' Tafsir of *Al-Qurtubi* 6/4863. The chapter *Al-Furqan* contains 77 verses. In terms of its order in the Quran, it is the 25th chapter of the Quran; and in terms of its order with respect to revelation, it is the 41st chapter of the Quran, having been revealed after the chapter of *Ya Sin* and before the chapter of *Al-Mala'ika*/ *Fatir.*

One of the meanings of *tabarak* is ‘may His rank be exalted;’ *so tabarak* ‘Exalted…’ (*al-Furqan:* 1) is a declaration of Allah’s exalted state and is far from having any resemblance to anything other than Him. *Tabarak* also means, 'His blessings and gifts are great and magnificent.’ As you see, these three meanings complement each other.

One of the amazing things about this word *tabarak* is that it is miraculous both in terms of the way it is written and in terms of its etymology. If you were to examine this word, you would find that it appears nine times in the Quran, seven times written with the *alif*, as it appears here: *tabarak*, and twice without the *alif*(1). Yet, why is it not written with the *alif* in all instances, or without the alif in all instances? The reason for this is to show you that the script of the Quran is *tauqify* – depending only on what is stated in the Quran or *Sunnah* and not simply decided mechanically. It is like the statement at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Alaq* when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Read! In the name of your Lord who created.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 1): (name) is written with an *alif*, here, but without an *alif* in the rest of the Quran.

So, the Quran is not ordinary in matters of script and the way it is written, nor is it ordinary when it comes to the way it is read and recited. You can read any other book in whatever state you find yourself in, but to read the Quran, you must be in a state of *wudu’* (pure after making ablution) along with all the other courtesies that we all know of as being due to the Quran.

Concerning etymology (in the Arabic language), we all know that from verbs are derived their past tense, their present tense, their imperative, their active participle and so on. However, the word *tabarak* is only ever mentioned in the Quran in this particular form. It is as if Allah wanted to make this a special term for declaring His exaltedness above everything. *Tabarak* is very much like the word *subhan* Allah (glory to Allah; He is perfect). This is why, despite the huge numbers of tyrants and despots who have come and gone throughout history and have forced their peoples to praise them and submit to them, we have yet to see anyone, no matter how deviant they are in terms of faith, saying '*subhanak* – glory be to you' to any of them.

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(1) In *Al-Itqan fi Ulum Al-Quran:It* appears in seven places in the Quran with the *alif:* (*al-A‘raf:* 54), (*al-Mu’minun:* 14), (*al-Furqan:* 1), (*al-Furqan:* 10), (*al-Furqan:* 61), (*Ghafir:* 64) and (*az-Zukhruf:* 85); and it appears twice without the *alif:* (*ar-Rahman:* 78) and (*al-Mulk:* 1). *As-Suyuti* said in *Al-Itqan fi Ulum Al-Quran* 2/188, *it* is a verb that is only ever used in the past tense and that is only ever used with Allah *Glorified is He*.

This is why we say '*subhanak* (glory be to you') when we glorify Allah, and it is not said for any other but Him. No apostate – no matter how shameless he could be – has ever uttered this word while addressing anyone other than Allah.

So, the word *tabarak* revolves around three meanings: His rank being exalted, His being far from having any resemblance to anyone or anything other than Him and His blessings and gifts being magnified. Part of His gifts being magnified is His having no one like Him: neither in terms of His Rank, nor of His Essence, nor of His Attributes, nor of His Actions. All of this is in our own best interest: there is none Great but Allah; none Almighty but Allah and none Rich and without need but Allah.

The Quran is also called *Furqan* (the Differentiator) because it differentiates truth from falsehood. The Quran was sent down to bring people out of the darkness and into the light so that they might go through their lives in guidance and with insight. Thus, the Quran differentiates, for them, what is good from what will bring about their ruin and destruction. Differentiation has its part to play in every aspect of the religion, for in the religion, the true Lord *Glorified is He* is the only summit. Moreover, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who conveys from Him. The believers are those to whom he, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sent. The Quran came to separate truth from falsehood with respect to these three things.

With respect to the summit, there are those who deny the existence of a deity that created this universe. There are others who say that there are many gods. These two points of view are diametrically opposed to one another since there is no chain of thought, whatsoever, that links them. So, the Quran came to distinguish truth from falsehood in this matter, and say that the truth of the matter lies somewhere in the middle: a deity exists, but there is only one Deity and He has no partner. So, it brings differentiation in the matter of the summit.

Similarly, it also brings differentiation in the matter of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is a human being sent to his people. When some people opposed him and became envious of this status when he was but one man among them, Allah *Glorified is He* supported him by giving him a miracle that corroborated his message and showed that he was being truthful with respect to what he was conveying from Allah. Indeed, the miracle of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in a field in which his people excelled – the field of eloquence, linguistic composition and rhetoric. The Arabs are a people of eloquent expression – that is their most saleable commodity – and so Allah *Glorified is He* challenged them with this miracle and they were unable to rise to the challenge.

Likewise, the Quran also brings differentiation in the matter of the creation, with respect to the elements and constituents that make up their lives. It clarifies the lawful and the unlawful. With respect to the preservation of their species, the Quran makes evident for them what is lawful, legislated marriage and prohibited fornication, in order to preserve the progeny of Allah's vicegerents upon the earth.

As such, the Quran brings differentiation in every matter: with respect to Allah; with respect to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and with respect to the mainstay of the lives of everyone to whom he was sent. Since it provides differentiation in all these matters, there can be no name better for it than to be called *Al-Furqan* (the Differentiator).

There is no doubt that the words that are spoken by the true Lord have rays of light and contain meanings that are only perceived by people of reflection and understanding with which Allah endowed them. The closest possible comparison to these words would be to diamonds. This is because what makes a diamond valuable is the fact that every single one of its molecules contains rays of light that are not found in any other stone. So, from whichever angle you look at it, rays of light are reflected back at you, emitting brightness and lustre that makes it glitter and sparkle. The same is true with respect to the words of the Quran.

One of the meanings of *Furqan* (Differentiator), according to some scholars, is that it was revealed in separate portions, as is mentioned in His statement: 'It is a recitation that We have revealed in parts...' (*al-Isra':* 106), that is, We revealed it in parts, not all at once as the previous Books had been revealed. There was wisdom in revealing the Quran in separate parts. This gave an opportunity for each revealed instalment of the Quran to be fully understood by people; since it was surely connected to a particular event. Moreover, this allowed for the gradual progression required for revealing the laws. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘it is a recitation that We have revealed in parts so that you can recite it to people at intervals; We have sent it down little by little’ (*al-Isra’:* 106).

The first Muslims who lived in the period in which the Quran was being revealed were a people who liked to ask questions. They would ask the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about all the matters relating to the creed, as is indicated by Allah when He says:

‘They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons...’ (*al-Baqara:* 189). He also says: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about intoxicants and gambling...’ (*al-Baqara:* 219). He also says: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about [distributing] the battle gains...’ (*al-Anfal:* 1). Thus, instalments of the Quran were revealed to respond to their questions, and to legislate for them. That would not have been possible had the Quran been revealed all at once. The Words: ‘...has sent the Differentiator down...’ (*al-Furqan:* 1) supports this meaning since the word *nazzala* (sent down) implies repetition, unlike *anzala* which only implies the action of the verb being done once.

As for Allah's words, ‘...to His servant...’ (*al-Furqan:* 1), it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying that the reason for sending the revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was because of his being a servant of Allah – that he is the slave that is trusted to receive the Quran sent down to him. We previously stated that servitude is a hateful term when it is used in connection with anyone other than the true Lord, but servitude to Allah is a way to obtain honour and glory and is a desirable expression that indicates the servitude of the creation to their creator. While servitude to creation entails that the master takes for himself the best that the servant has to offer, servitude to Allah *Glorified is He* entails that the servant takes the best that the Master has to offer. That is why Allah makes servitude the reason for the heavenly ascent to Him during the Night Journey, when He says: ‘Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night...’ (*al-Isra’:* 1). Thus, the ascent, here, came about because of the servitude to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then He says: '...so that it may be a warning to all people' (*al-Furqan:* 1). Al-*alamin*, (worlds) is the plural of *alam*. *Alam* refers to everything that is other than Allah. Among these different worlds are; the world of angels, the world of humans, the world of jinn, the world of animals, the world of plants and the world of the inanimate. However, some of these worlds were not visited by warners or bearers of good news because they had not been granted free will or the ability to choose for themselves – warnings and good news can only be given to those who have free will and the capacity to choose for themselves.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it; mankind undertook it – they have always been inept and foolish' (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

If you were to remove, from these worlds, all of those who do not have freedom of choice, the only ones that would remain would be the jinn and humans. It was to them the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a bearer of good news and a warner. However, why does Allah say here: '...so that it may be a warning to all people' (*al-Furqan:* 1), and not say 'a bearer of good news and a warner'? It was said that the true Lord, here, will talk about those who insolently speculate about the divinity. Such people warrant warnings, not good news. That is why Allah in the verse that follows this one says:

ٱلَّذِى لَهُۥ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ
شَرِيكٌ فِى ٱلْمُلْكِ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ فَقَدَّرَهُۥ تَقْدِيرًا ﴿٢﴾

It is He who has control over the heavens and earth and has no offspring — no one shares control with Him — and who created all things and made them to an exact measure [2]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 2)

At the end of the chapter of *an-Nur*, the true Lord says: 'Surely, to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth...' (*an-Nur:* 64), mentioning His possession of the contents. In the verse we are discussing He says: 'it is He who has control over the heavens and earth...' (*al-Furqan:* 2) mentioning His possession of the container, that is, the heavens and the earth.

Then, the true Lord *Glorified is He* talks about the matter of the summit which they had had the insolence to speculate about, saying: '...and has no offspring – no one shares control with Him...' (*al-Furqan:* 2).

We have previously talked a great deal about the issue of begetting an offspring and the wisdom behind it. People love sons, for they either perpetuate one's name, provide support to parents in their debility and old age, or increase the number of family members and thus enlarge the family. The true Lord, however, is the Ever-Living, the All-Sustaining who does not die and does not need someone to immortalise His name. He is the Strong who does not need anyone else. So, why then would He beget a son?

As for His words: '...no one shares control with Him...' (*al-Furqan:* 2), that is a matter that is upheld by reality since the first thing to which Allah *Glorified is He* bears witness is to Himself; He says: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge...' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). In other words, when the angels were created, they bore witness to Allah *Glorified is He* then those who are endowed with knowledge bore witness to Him based upon the evidence. So, the testimony of the true Lord for Himself was the testimony of the Essence for the Essence, the testimony of the angels was an eyewitness testimony and our own testimony was one based upon proof and evidence.

The true Lord gives us the proof that shows the truthfulness of this testimony when He says: 'Allah has never had a child. Nor is there any god besides Him – if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overpower the others…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91). He also says: 'Say, "If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne."'' (*al-Isra':* 42) This is the logical rational detailed explanation by which we refute the position of those people; for if there were to have been another god with Allah *Glorified is He* each one of them would have gone apart with his portion of creation and set up his own private domain; and each of them would have sought to gain dominance over the others and would have fought against them. If there had been other gods with Him, they would have joined together against the one who took the Kingdom from them to judge Him or to ingratiate themselves to Him.

We say that someone’s claim is affirmed if no one else lays claim to the same thing; and this is something that no one else has ever claimed. Therefore, it is affirmed and will remain affirmed as being Allah’s until someone else comes and claims all of the creation for Himself. We, previously, highlighted this with the example we gave of a group of people gathered in an assembly during which one of them had lost his wallet. Then, when they had all left, the owner of the house found the wallet and asked those who had been there about it, but none of them laid claim to it. Then, one of them got in contact with him and said that it was his. There would be no doubt that it was indeed his unless someone else also came forward claiming it; in which case we would decide between them.

Then, the True Lord says: ‘...and who created all things and made them to an exact measure’ (*al-Furqan:* 2). Allah *Glorified is He* does not create things randomly or haphazardly, but He creates things in a considered manner by His wisdom and design. He *Glorified is He* creates things in accordance with the task they are designed to fulfil, which is why He says elsewhere in the Quran: 'Who created [all things] in due proportion. Who determined their destinies and guided them’ (*al-A‘la:* 2-3).

وَٱتَّخَذُوا۟ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ ءَالِهَةً لَّا يَخْلُقُونَ شَيْـًٔا وَهُمْ يُخْلَقُونَ وَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ
لِأَنفُسِهِمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا وَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ مَوْتًا وَلَا حَيَوٰةً وَلَا نُشُورًا ﴿٣﴾

Yet the disbelievers take as their gods things beneath Him that create nothing, and are themselves created, that can neither harm nor help themselves, and have no control over death, life, or resurrection [3] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 3)

In other words, they made up gods other than Allah *Glorified is He*. These gods, according to their own admission, testimony, and viewpoint are incapable of creating anything. Not only are they incapable of creating anything, but they are themselves created. So, both deficiencies are combined in this issue.

This is one of those verses that the orientalists comment upon and claim that it is contradictory. They say: ‘Allah says: "...glory be to Allah, the best of creators!" (*al-Mu’minun:* 14). Thus, He affirms that there are others, besides Him, who have the ability to create; since He added them to Himself, and declares Himself to be the best of them. In another verse, He says: “He will send him as a Messenger to the Children of Israel: ‘I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with Allah's permission...” (*Al-‘Imran:* 49).’

In response to these people, we say, ‘let us first understand what “creating” is’. ‘Creating’ is giving existence to something that was non-existent. A previous example we gave of this was that of creating a glass cup by melting some other material. The glass cup was non-existent until a human brought it into existence. Yet, he created it from something that was already existent. Moreover, the glass will always be inanimate and will remain fixed in the state in which it was made. However, the true Lord creates things from absolute non-existence. He creates from nothingness; brings existence from non-existence, and creates it in a form that has life and is capable of growth and proliferation, on its own. It is as the true Lord Himself says: ‘And We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49).

There are those who create artificial roses, these days, trying their hardest to make them as close as possible to the natural roses that Allah has created, putting the scent of the rose on them so that they can have both shape and scent. Their artificial roses are permanently in bloom, never wilting, but, in truth, the greatness of the natural rose lies in the fact that it does wilt; since its wilting is what shows it to be alive.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes man as being a creator, giving him his due and affording him respect for bringing existence to what had not existed before. Yet, Allah is the best of creators. The superiority of His creation lies in the fact that He creates things from nothing, while you create from things that already exist. Allah *Glorified is He* creates things that have life and are capable of growth and can multiply themselves, while you create things that are inanimate and always remain in their initial state and form. Despite this, your Lord still gives you your due.

In Allah’s words: ‘…I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 49), it is clearly shown that it is in the capacity of every human being to fashion a bird out of clay and bake it so that it remains in that form, but could it be said that he has created a bird by doing this? Does the greatness lie in shaping the bird into its form? No, rather, the greatness lies in bringing it to life, and it is only by Allah *Glorified is He* that this can happen. That is why Jesus *peace be upon him* says: '…then breathe into it and, with Allah's permission, it will become a real bird...' (*Al-'Imran:* 49).

Even if we accept that these gods are capable of creating things, they are still, at the same time, themselves, created. What is more is that those gods are not even capable of protecting themselves or putting themselves upright, after they have been knocked over by the wind. If the arm of their god were to be broken, they would take him to be fixed – the god is fixed by the hands of a worker! What an astonishing situation! Such is the mentality of the foolish!

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about their gods: '...those you call on besides Allah could not, even if they combined all their forces, create a fly, and if a fly took something away from them, they would not be able to retrieve it. How feeble are the petitioners and how feeble are those they petition' (*al-Hajj:* 73).

Then, the true Lord says (in the verse we are discussing): '...that can neither harm nor help themselves…' (*al-Furqan:* 3); it does not benefit them if they worship them, nor does it harm them if they reject them. '...And have no control over death, life, or resurrection' (*al-Furqan:* 3) – they have no control over the death or the life of anyone else. They do not have the power to do any of these things since these are all attributes of The True Lord *Glorified is He* who gives life and causes death, then, resurrects humankind in the Hereafter. Thus, man goes through a number of different stages. After being non-existent, Allah *Glorified is He* brings him into existence. Then, the time of his death comes upon him and he dies. Allah then resurrects him and grants him life in the Hereafter.

Then, the true Lord says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّآ إِفْكٌ ٱفْتَرَىٰهُ وَأَعَانَهُۥ عَلَيْهِ
قَوْمٌ ءَاخَرُونَ ۖ فَقَدْ جَآءُو ظُلْمًا وَزُورًا ﴿٤﴾

The disbelievers say, 'This can only be a lie he has forged with
the help of others' — they themselves have done great wrong
and told lies[4] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 4)

After the *Furqan* declared and brought differentiation in the matter of the summit, and divinity, begetting of a son and having partners; and after having differentiated the true Deity from the false deity, Allah *Glorified is He* now wants to talk about differentiation with respect to the Message. So, He relates what the unbelievers say about the Quran: 'This can only be a lie...' (*al-Furqan:* 4) meaning this Quran which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys '...can only be a lie...' (*al-Furqan:* 4). *Ifk* is the deliberate telling of a lie that inverts the truth. We, previously, said that when a verbal proportion (utterance that follows a mental proportion) corresponds to reality it is the truth, and when it goes against reality it is a lie. *Ifk* is turning reality upside down. It is saying that what exists does not exist, and what does not exist does exists, as was the case in the episode of the *ifk* when they accused Aisha *Allah be pleased with her,* the mother of the believers, of what was contrary to the real state of affairs. The reality of the matter was that Safwan(1) bade his camel kneel down so she could mount it without him seeing her – something which indicates the highest levels of virtue and protection – however, by means of their *ifk*, they turned purity and virtue into adultery.

It is amazing that those who accused the Quran of being a lie were the very same people who said about it on another occasion: 'Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

It is clear that they acknowledged the Quran for what it was and bore witness to it, but they were troubled and disturbed by the fact that the person to whom it was revealed was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If it were to have been revealed to someone other than him, they would have believed in it.

Another sign of their foolishness is shown by them saying: 'Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment' (*al-Anfal:* 32). It was logical for them to say, 'then guide us to it.' Instead, their obstinacy and arrogance held sway.

As for Allah's Words '...he has forged...' (*al-Furqan:* 4), they mean 'which he has claimed to be Allah's words.' These people are very strange: if they accuse the Quran of being a fabricated lie, then why do they – a nation gifted with unsurpassed eloquence and linguistic expression – not, themselves, fabricate something like it?

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(1) *He is Safwan ibn Al-Mu'attal ibn Ar-Rahda As-Sulami Adh-Dhakwani, Abu 'Amr, a Companion who took part in the battle of the Ditch and all the other battles. He was present at the conquest of Damascus and was martyred at Arminiya in 19 AH, Al-'A'lam of Az-Zirikli 3/206.*

In another part of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We know very well that they say, “It is a man who teaches him,” but the language of the person they allude to is foreign, while this revelation is in clear Arabic.’ (*an-Nahl:* 103)

In ancient times, they would say, ‘If you must be a liar, then make sure you have a good memory.’ If not, then how can you accuse Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of having a non-Arab man to teach him the Quran when the Quran is in Arabic?

The True Lord says: ‘...with the help of others’...’ (*al-Furqan:* 4). The one who uttered these words was An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith. When he said them, others like him, such as Addas, Yassar and Abu Fukayha Ar-Rumi took to repeating them, so the Quran refuted all these accusations As follows: ‘they themselves have done great wrong and told lies’ (*al-Furqan:* 4) because they judged unjustly.

Zhulm (injustice), is to judge without recourse to truth, and *zur,* here, is the argument and evidence behind this unjust judgement. So, *zhulm* (injustice) should thus, come after *zur* since the judge first listens to the testimony and then makes his judgement based on that. Hence, if the testimony is a false testimony, then the judgement will be an act of injustice.

However, the true Lord says: ‘...great wrong and told lies.’ (*al-Furqan:* 4) which is a proof that they made the judgement first and then looked for evidence to back it up.

Then the true Lord says:

وَقَالُوٓا۟ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ٱكْتَتَبَهَا فَهِىَ تُمْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا ﴿٥﴾

And they say, ‘It is just ancient fables, which he has had
written down: they are dictated to him morning and
evening’[5] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 5)

Asattir (fables) is the plural of the word *usturah* (fable), like *a‘ajib* (wondrous actions) being the plural of *u‘jubah* (wondrous action) and *ahadith* (speeches/talks) being the plural of *uhduthah* (a speech/a talk). The meaning is that they used to say about the Quran that it was tales and fables of previous peoples that '...which he has had written down...' (*al-Furqan:* 5) – which he has commanded to be written down. This statement is indicative of their indecisiveness and muddled-thinking: for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was unlettered and could neither read nor write. As for their words: '...they are dictated to him morning and evening' (*al-Furqan:* 5), they mean that they were read out to him repeatedly so that he might memorise them.

The Quran responds to them with the following:

قُلْ أَنزَلَهُ ٱلَّذِى يَعْلَمُ ٱلسِّرَّ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٦﴾

Say, 'It was sent down by Him who knows the secrets of the heavens and earth. He is all forgiving, all merciful' [6]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 6)

'...It was sent down by Him...' (*al-Furqan:* 6), that is the Quran was sent all at the same time from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest heaven. By He '...who knows the secrets of the heavens and earth...' (*al-Furqan:* 6) – do not think that, merely by being created, you are able to reveal Allah's secrets in His creation. Rather, you will remain until the final hour, grasping one secret and falling short of grasping another.

Why is this? This is because the true Lord wants to refute their claims and make mention of unseen things that would have never occurred to the minds of the contemporaries of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then, these things become clearer as the centuries pass, despite the fact that the Quran was sent down in an illiterate community, and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to whom it was sent was an illiterate man. Despite these things, the Quran keeps revealing new signs from Allah to us on a daily basis. It is as Allah says: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (*Fussilat:* 53).

The true Lord revealed some unseen matters to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that his contemporaries might see them and shut the disbelievers' mouths. Thus, He revealed some secrets, such as what happened at Badr when the Prophet Muhammad having learnt that the Quraysh had sent their own lords and their own flesh and blood into battle, he stood in the battle field pointing with his stick to the places where the disbelievers would meet their demise, saying, ‘This is where Abu Jahl will fall, that is where 'Utba ibn Rabi’a will fall...’(1) and so on and so forth, mapping out the points on the earth where each of the enemy would meet their end.

Who possessed such an ability to judge before a battle even started what would happen – a battle in which there was advance and retreat, fighting and withdrawal and movement of forces – and accurately state the place in which someone would die?

Then, there was Al-Walid ibnul-Mughira, the one about whom the Quran(2) says: ‘We shall brand him on the snout…’ (*al-Qalam:* 16); he will be struck on his nose with a blow that will leave a permanent mark on it. After the battle, the people searched for him and found him to be branded in that way.

All of these things are secrets of existence about which the true Lord informed His Messenger, Muhammad. The Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then informed his community about them when there is no way he possibly could have had knowledge of them.

An example(3) of this is what has been narrated with regard to the two daughters of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who had married the two sons of Abu Lahab. When enmity sprang up between him and the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he commanded his sons to divorce the daughters of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Later on, one of the sons saw the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* walking, so he spat in his direction. When Muhammad saw that, he said to him, 'May one of the wild rapacious animals of Allah *Glorified is He* eat you.'(1) When Abu Lahab heard of that supplication, he said, 'I fear for my son on account of the supplication of Muhammad.'

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(1) *It is transmitted by Muslim in his Sahih 1779; and by Ahmad in his Musnad 3/219 & 285 as part of a Hadith from Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him who said, ‘None of them were any distance away from where the hand of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad indicated that they would be.’*

(2) *Ibn Hajar said in al-Fath 8/662, ‘There is a difference of opinion with regard to whom the verse was revealed about – it is said that it was about al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, as was mentioned by Yahya ibn As-Salam in his Tafsir (Explanation); it is said that it is about Al-Aswad ibn ‘Abd Yaghuth, as was mentioned by Sunayd ibn Dawud in his Tafsir (Explanation); and it is said that it is about Al-Akhnas ibn Shurayq, as was mentioned by As-Suhayli from Al-Qutaybi. Both these positions were transmitted by At-Tabari.*

(3) *The story of the sons of Abu Lahab divorcing the two daughters of the Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him cursing Abu Lahab's son after he spat towards him.*

It is astonishing how this unbeliever was afraid of the supplication of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was the one who accused him of sorcery and lying and denied him and his Message.

When this son of his went out on a trading mission to the Levant, he assigned people to guard him and to place the luggage and merchandise around him as a fence to protect him, fearing that the supplication of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might come about. These words of his were completely illogical! He knew Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be truthful and that he had been sent by Allah *Glorified is He,* but he was prevented from believing in Muhammad by his spite and envy of him, as well as by his overbearing arrogance towards the truth.

So, the son went out on his trading mission and despite the great care they took to protect him, one night he was attacked by a wild animal and snatched away from his companions. However, they were amazed that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said, 'One of the rapacious wild animals literally *kilab* (dogs of Allah)', and that which had attacked him was a lion, not a *kalb* (dog). However, the people of knowledge said that as long as

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(1) *This came about because 'Utba ibn Abu Lahab, when he split from Umm Kulthum Allah be pleased with her the daughter of the Messenger of Allah came to the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'I have rejected your religion and split from your daughter – she does not love me and I do not love her.' Then he laid hands on the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and ripped his shirt. So the Prophet Muhammad said, 'As for me, I ask Allah Glorified is He to set his wild rapacious animals on you.' Al-Bayhaqi narrated it in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 2/338 & 339 and Al-Haythami narrated it in Majma' Az-Zawa'id 6/19 and attributed it as a mursal statement of At-Tabarani, saying, 'Zuhayr ibn Al-'Ala' is in the chain of transmission and he is weak.' Al-Hakim transmitted it in his Mustadrak 2/539 as part of a Hadith from Abu 'Aqrab and he considered it sahih (authentic). Ibn Hajar considered it hasan (good) in Al-Fath 4/39.*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ascribed the *kalb* to Allah *Glorified is He* the *kalb* of Allah can be nothing but a lion.

So, the meaning is – Say, Muhammad, in response to them and to refute their claim: ‘It was sent down by Him who knows the secrets of the heavens and earth…’ (*al-Furqan:* 6), and the True Lord will expose you and refute your lies against the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and your accusing him of lies, fabrication and telling fables of previous peoples. Allah will abase you in front of absolutely everyone.

In the era of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a battle took place between the Persians and the Byzantines in which the Byzantines were defeated. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was saddened by the defeat of the Byzantines because they were people of the Book who believed in Allah and in His Messengers *peace be upon them*. As for the Persians, they were unbelievers who did not believe in Allah and worshipped fire and other things. Despite that both of them were united when it came to their rejection of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The fact that the Byzantines believed in Allah made the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* side with them despite their disbelief in him. So, taking their side was on account of no one but his Lord.

When the Messenger of Allah, felt sad on account of that, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following verse to him: *‘Alif. Lam. Mim.* The Byzantines have been defeated. In a nearby land, They will reverse their defeat with a victory. In a few years’ time, Allah is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice. At Allah’s help, He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful’ (*ar-Rum:* 1-5).

What mind is it that can pass judgement on a battle that is going to take place a few years later? If a battle were due to take place tomorrow, you might be able to predict its outcome, taking into account the numbers and preparedness of the opposing forces, as well as their respective military capacities; but how can one pass judgement on a battle that is not going to take place for seven years? Moreover, who would dare to make that prediction in a Quran that is going to be recited and used in acts of worship until the Day of Rising? If that period of time had passed and that which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had predicted had not come to pass, then, all of those who had believed in him would have rejected him and all of those around him would have scattered and gone away.

Therefore, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have said anything in a Quran that is going to be recited and used in acts of worship unless he was absolutely sure of the truthfulness of the One Who had informed him of that; since the One Who informed him of it was his Lord; He Who knows all the mysteries of the heavens and the earth. That is why the true Lord says here: ‘Say, “It was sent down by Him who knows the secrets of the heavens and earth…”’ (*al-Furqan:* 6).

One of the most amazing things is that the Byzantines gained victory over the Persians on the very same day that belief gained victory over disbelief at the battle of Badr, on that day about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…in a few years' time. Allah is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice. At Allah’s help’ (*ar-Rum:* 4-5).

Since the one who sends down the Quran is the One Who knows all the mysteries of the heavens and the earth, there will never be any contradictions between that which the Quran says and that which things in existence say; since their Creator is one and the same. So, how could any contradictions or differences come about?

Then, He says: ‘...He is all forgiving, all merciful’ (*al-Furqan:* 6). What is the relevance of Allah’s speaking about forgiveness and mercy here? Because, they say, Allah wants to leave those people whom He is rebuking here with room to repent, and a way back towards Him and towards the arena of faith.

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to those who advised him to kill the disbelievers, ‘Perhaps Allah will bring out from their loins people who will worship Allah alone and associate nothing with Him.’(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 3231 & 7389; and also by Muslim in his Sahih 1795 as part of a Hadith from 'A’isha Allah be pleased with her that Gabriel (Jibril) peace be upon him said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him ‘Allah Glorified is He has heard what your people said to you and the response they gave you, so Allah Glorified is He has sent the angel of the mountains to you so that you* =

The Muslims would feel the most acute pain whenever one of the leaders of the disbelievers escaped death on the battlefield, like what happened with Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* and ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As *Allah be pleased with him* before they became Muslims. They did not know that Allah *Glorified is He* was preserving them for the sake of the faith; a truth that was to follow.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...He is all forgiving, all merciful’ (*al-Furqan:* 6) so as not to block the way back for those who used to reject Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to return to believing in him. So, He is saying to them, ‘despite all that you have done, if you come back to the main road and enter into the confines of belief, Allah's Forgiveness and Mercy will be waiting for you.'

The true Lord clarifies this matter for us even in cases where significant emotions are involved. Take Hind bint 'Utba(1), for example, the woman who incited Wahshi(2) to kill Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* the paternal uncle of the Messenger of Allah Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the lion of Allah and of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. She did not stop there. Rather, she even mutilated his body after his death and chewed his liver. Despite all of that, after she became Muslim and pledged allegiance to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that act of hers was totally forgotten and it was as if she had never done it.

= *can command him to do whatever you want to them.’ So the angel of the mountains called out to me and gave me his greetings. Then he said, ‘Muhammad, if you want, I will crush them between the two mountains.’ So the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, ‘Rather, I hope that Allah Glorified is He will bring out from their loins a people who will worship Allah Glorified is He alone and not associate anything with Him.’*

(1) *She is Hind bint 'Utba ibn ar-Rabi‘a Al-Qurayshiyya, the mother of Mu‘awiyya ibn Abu Sufyan. She was present at Uhud on the side of the idolaters and did what she did to Hamza Allah be pleased with him. She became Muslim on the day of the Conquest of Mecca and died during the Caliphate of 'Uthman Allah be pleased with him Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba 8/206.*

(2) *He is Wahshi ibn Harb Al-Habashi, the client of the Banu Nawfal. He was the killer of Hamza Allah be pleased with him the uncle of the Messenger of Allah, killing him at the battle of Uhud. The Messenger of Allah commanded him to keep out of his sight. He took part in the apostasy wars and participated in the killing of Musaylama. He was present at the battle of Yarmuk and then settled at Hums and died there. He lived until the Caliphate of 'Uthman Al-Isaba, biography 9110.*

When someone said to ‘Umar ibn Al-Khatttab *Allah be pleased with him* ‘This is the killer of your brother,’ referring to Zayd ibn Al-Khattab(1) *Allah be pleased with him*. Yet, ‘Umar made no response except to say, ‘what should I do to him when Allah *Glorified is He* has guided him (Wahshi) to Islam?’

Then, the true Lord says:

وَقَالُوا۟ مَالِ هَٰذَا ٱلرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ ٱلطَّعَامَ وَيَمْشِى فِى ٱلْأَسْوَاقِ ۙ
لَوْلَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ فَيَكُونَ مَعَهُۥ نَذِيرًا ﴿٧﴾

They also say, ‘What sort of messenger is this? He eats food and walks about in the marketplaces! Why has no angel been sent down to help him with his warnings? [7] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 7)

The conduct of these obstinate people is amazing. They object to the fact that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* eats food and goes about in the market-places in order to earn his living, but have they ever seen any Prophet that did not eat food or go about in the market-places? If there had been, then, there may have been some significance to their objections, but there had not. So, their statement: ‘Why has no angel been sent down to help him with his warnings?’ (*al-Furqan:* 7) was a statement that had no real-life evidence for them to find fault with. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or for them to respond in such a way to what he said to them.

So what is it that they wanted? They said, ‘Why has no angel been sent down to help him with his warnings?’ (*al-Furqan:* 7) It is true that angels do not eat, but the meaning of: ‘Why has no angel been sent down to help him...’ (*al-Furqan:* 7) is that an angel comes to help him. In such circumstances nothing would change. The words of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would still be what they are and would not change at all. So, the angel would not add anything new to the message whatsoever. This means that these words of theirs are nothing but sophistry and meaningless argumentation.

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(1) *He is Zayd ibn Al-Khattab ibn Nufayl al-Adawi, the brother of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him on his father’s side. His mother was Asma’ bint Wahb from Banu Asad. As for the mother of ‘Umar, she was Hantama bint Hashim Al-Makhzumiyya. Zayd Allah be pleased with him was older than ‘Umar and became Muslim before him. He was present at Badr and all the other battles and was martyred at Al-Yamama Tamyiz As-Sahaba 3/27.*

Saying: ‘to help him with his warnings’ (*al-Furqan:* 7) without adding, ‘and a bearer of good news’ indicates their quarrelsome and argumentative attitude. Moreover, it indicates that they will not embrace the faith. That is why warnings will always be their lot.

أَوْ يُلْقَىٰٓ إِلَيْهِ كَنزٌ أَوْ تَكُونُ لَهُۥ جَنَّةٌ يَأْكُلُ مِنْهَا ۚ وَقَالَ
ٱلظَّـٰلِمُونَ إِن تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَّسْحُورًا (٨)

Why has he not been given treasure or a garden to supply his food?’ and the evildoers say, ‘The man you follow is simply under a spell’ [8] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 8)

We notice here that, in their quarrelsomeness, they back down from the initial demands they made, for after having requested an angel, they then say: ‘Why has he not been given treasure?’ (*al-Furqan:* 8) Why has it not been sent down to him so that he can live by means of it: ‘or a garden to supply his food’ (*al-Furqan:* 8) that is, *Jannah* is an orchard. Then, they said: ‘The man you follow is simply under a spell’ (*al-Furqan:* 8). *Mashour* (under a spell) is one whose mind has been taken away by means of magic. The mind enables man to choose between alternatives and keep his actions and movements in order. It is not possible for someone who lost his mind to be logical in terms of what he does or in terms of what he says. However, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not like that. The disbelievers knew his character and his trustworthiness. Moreover, they called him ‘the truthful and trustworthy one’ and admitted his conduct and wisdom to be sound, so how could they call him ‘mad’?

That is why the true Lord says in response to their accusations: ‘Nun. By the pen! By all they write! Your Lord’s grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman: you will have a never-ending reward. Truly you have a strong character’ (*al-Qalam:* 1-4).

A person’s *khuluq* (his morality) regulates his behaviour and makes it helpful and not corrupting. Then, how could one who possesses such character possibly be mad? So, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could not have been bewitched.

Elsewhere, it is narrated that they said he was a sorcerer. If we suppose that he was a sorcerer, why did he not bewitch them in the same way that he bewitched the believers? Their argument is that of one who has totally lost touch with the truth and a sign of derangement and total confusion when it comes to debate.

Then the true Lord says:

ٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ ضَرَبُواْ لَكَ ٱلۡأَمۡثَٰلَ فَضَلُّواْ فَلَا يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ سَبِيلٗا ﴿٩﴾

See what they think you are like! They have gone astray and cannot find the right way [9] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 9)

'See' (*al-Furqan:* 9) this speech is directed to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to soothe him and set him at ease. 'What they think you are like' (*al-Furqan:* 9), – when they accuse you of all those myriad things, such as when they say 'sorcerer', 'bewitched' 'poet' or 'soothsayer' 'They have gone astray and cannot find the right way' (*al-Furqan:* 9) because their words are nothing but lies, senseless prattle and full of contradiction.

'They have gone astray' (*al-Furqan:* 9), they are far away from drawing a true likeness of you that would cause the believers to abandon you, and cause those who do not believe to persevere in their disbelief. They proved incapable of coming up with a single reasonable likeness. They said you (O Muhammad) are a sorcerer and are lying. Then, they said that you are bewitched and are lying. They '...cannot find the right way' (*al-Furqan:* 9), to sustain their arguments against you.

Then, the true Lord(1) says:

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(1) *Reason for the revelation of the verse: Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, 'When the idolaters found fault with the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him on account of his poverty and said, "What sort of apostle is this (man) who eats food (The Quran, like all other mortals) and goes about in the market-places?" The Messenger of Allah,* ***,*** *Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was saddened. So Gabriel (Jibril) peace be upon him came down to him from his Lord in order to comfort him and said, "Peace be upon you, Messenger of Allah. The Lord of Might extends His greetings towards you and says to you, 'And (even) before thee, (Muhammad) We never sent as Our message-bearers any but=*

تَبَارَكَ ٱلَّذِىٓ إِن شَآءَ جَعَلَ لَكَ خَيْرًا مِّن ذَٰلِكَ جَنَّٰتٍ
تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ وَيَجْعَل لَّكَ قُصُورًا ﴿١٠﴾

Exalted is He who can, if He wishes, give you better things than these: Gardens graced with flowing streams, and palaces too [10] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 10)

Tabaraka 'Exalted…' (*al-Furqan:* 10) as we said before, means, 'exalted above anything being like Him and His blessings being magnified'. This is because these words also contain a gift which represents the blessings which Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon His Messenger. Allah's gifts are continuous and do not ever come to an end, inasmuch as His blessings don't stop with the gifts being given, but remain giving out blessings and goodness on a continuous basis. If He gives you something today, you know that what He will have for you tomorrow will be better than what He gave you yesterday.

Then, the true Lord says:

بَلْ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِٱلسَّاعَةِ ۖ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِمَن كَذَّبَ بِٱلسَّاعَةِ سَعِيرًا ﴿١١﴾

It is actually the coming of the Hour that they reject: We have prepared a blazing fire for those who reject the Hour [11] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 11)

There is a change from the previous topic and the speech returns to the issue of their rejection of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and disbelief in him, since belief was not in their best interests. It is because belief

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= *(mortal men) who indeed ate food (like other human beings) and went about in the market-places…' (al-Furqan: 20)." And then Gabriel (Jibril) peace be upon him said, "Rejoice, Muhammad, for here is Ridwan, the guardian of the Garden, bringing your Lord's pleasure to you." Whereupon Ridwan came up to him, greeted him and said, "Muhammad, the Lord of Might extends His greetings towards you, and there is a basket of light with him about which your Lord says to you, 'These are the keys to the treasure-houses of this world (The Quran, and they are yours) without what will be yours from Him in the next world being decreased in any way, not even by a gnat's wing.'" The Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, "Ridwan, I have no need of them – poverty is more beloved to me and I would prefer to be a steadfast and thankful slave." This account has undergone a certain amount of abridgement and alteration. From 'Asbab an-nuzul of Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi, pp. 190-191, and Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi 6/4869.*

entails accounting and requital, and they wanted to continue with their falsehoods, worthless prattle, ridiculing, and disobedience. That is why they even deceived and lied to themselves, so that they could remain doing exactly what they were doing.

Therefore, you see those who allow themselves to go to excess in this world – the materialists, unbelievers, and philosophers – wish that the premise of religion is baseless and false and reject it with every means they have at their disposal. In their view, religion is totally nonsensical and unintelligible because, if they were to accept it, they would be faced with a great calamity.

The meaning of *a'tadna* 'We have prepared' (*al-Furqan:* 11) is we have prepared and readied for them a blazing flame because it is their lack of belief in the Last Hour that brings the punishment down upon them. If they were to have believed in it and in their meeting with Allah, in the reckoning and the punishment or reward, they would have been guided, kept to the Straight Path and would have been saved from this blazing fire.

As for *sa'ir*, it is the name of the *mas'urah* (enraged and heated) fire that burnt up everything in front of it, just like we say, *Kalbun Mas'ur* (enraged or mad dog).

Then the true Lord says as a description of this fire:

إِذَا رَأَتۡهُم مِّن مَّكَانِۭ بَعِيدٖ سَمِعُواْ لَهَا تَغَيُّظٗا وَزَفِيرٗا ١٢

When it sees them from a distance, they will hear it
raging and roaring [12] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 12)

The true Lord wants, here, to imbue the Fire with a personality, so it sees those who are destined for it from afar and becomes enraged on account of them, wanting by its fury to reach out and grab them before they even reach it.

Taghayyuzh (raging) is an emotional pain that a man feels in his psyche that causes him to feel tightness as a result of what he experiences. For example, in Egypt we hear a person saying, 'I am going to explode out of my two flanks.' In other words, as a result of the rage I am holding back inside me, my interior is no longer wide enough to contain it. As long as a person's rage is more than he is able to endure and contain, he is certain to feel tight and constrained and as if he is about to explode.

Therefore, the True Lord says about the Fire in another part of the Quran: 'almost bursting with rage' (*al-Mulk:* 8). The word *tamayyaz* here means 'with its parts on the point of separating from each other'.

One would ask, why is the fire bursting with fury? Because, they say, creation in its entirety glorifies Allah and praises and thanks its Lord: therefore it is pleased with those who obey Allah *Glorified is He* and loves them, and, by contrast, is displeased with those who disobey Allah *Glorified is He* and hates them. Do you not see that the whole of creation rejoiced at the birth of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* – the inanimate objects, the plants and the animals. All were delighted and all rejoiced at his birth because he had come to bring mankind back into harmony with the rest of existence that had been created man, and to put things back into balance.

Despite this, we see humans of sound mind, beings granted the freedom of choice, rejecting their Lord and disbelieving. Therefore, the Fire feels such great fury against those people who stand outside the rows of those praising and glorifying their Lord and content themselves with being lower than the inanimate things, the plants and the animals. It is for that reason that they say, 'The places found them distasteful on account of their disbelief.' In other words, the different parts of the earth rejected them and felt irritated and constrained on account of their presence there, just as the earth rejoices when those who obey Allah *Glorified is He* occupy it and warmly greets them. This is because the obedient are in harmony with the whole of existence: the place and its inhabitants are in tune with one another, both parts of the same organisation dedicated to glorification of, and obedience to, the Creator.

Imam 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* drew our attention to this matter, saying, 'when a believer dies, two places weep for him: one place in the sky and one place upon the earth. As for the place on the earth, that is where he used to pray since it is now deprived of his prayer; and as for the place in the sky, that is where his good deeds used to be raised up.'(1)

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(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned this in his Tafsir 4/142 and ascribed it to Ibn Abu Hatim who narrated that 'Ali Allah be pleased with him said, 'There is no slave except that he has a place on the=*

The true Lord, further, develops this picture for us by His words: ‘We shall say to Hell on that day, “Are you full?” and it will reply, “Are there no more?”’ (*Qaf:* 30) So, the Fire longs for its inhabitants like one who eats without ever feeling satisfied or full, so whenever wrongdoers are thrown into it, it says: ‘Are there no more?’ (*Qaf:* 30)

As for *zafeer* (hiss) ‘…and roaring…’ (*al-Furqan:* 12), it is a sharply-exhaled breath. In another part of the Quran, Allah says: ‘They will hear it drawing in its breath when they are thrown in. It blazes forth’ (*al-Mulk:* 7) mentioning that it has both an indrawn breath and an exhaled breath, and it is in a tight space.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَإِذَآ أُلۡقُوا۟ مِنۡهَا مَكَانٗا ضَيِّقٗا مُّقَرَّنِينَ دَعَوۡا۟ هُنَالِكَ ثُبُورٗا ﴿١٣﴾

And when they are hurled into a narrow part of it,
chained together, they will cry out for death [13]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 13)

Allah *Glorified is He* gathers against them so many different forms of punishment that as soon they encounter a punishment, they will say: ‘If only I were dust!’ (*an-Naba’:* 40) Here, they pray for extinction, saying, ‘O would that there were woe! O would that there were extinction!’ In other words, ‘O my death, come and take me! This is your time to come and extricate me from the punishment in which I find myself! Nothing can save me from this punishment except for my utter destruction!’ That is why they say that worse than death is the one, who asks for death, for as the poet says,

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= *earth where he prays and a place in the sky where his actions are raised up. As for the people of Pharaoh, they did not have any good actions on the earth or any actions which were raised up into the sky.’ And it is narrated by Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him that the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘There is no slave except that he has two gates in the sky – one gate from which his provision comes and another gate into which his actions and words go. When that slave dies, they both miss him and weep on his account.’ Al-Haythami said in Al-Majma‘, ‘Abu Ya‘la narrated it, but Musa ibn ‘Ubayda Ar-Rabadhi is in the chain of transmission and he is weak.’*

It is enough of a malady for you to see death as your only cure

And it is enough of a death that it is that which you wish for.

You must try to imagine how unpleasant a punishment must be to make the one who is undergoing it to wish and pray for death!

Then, the true Lord says:

لَّا تَدْعُوا۟ ٱلْيَوْمَ ثُبُورًا وَٰحِدًا وَٱدْعُوا۟ ثُبُورًا كَثِيرًا ﴿١٤﴾

Do not cry out this day for one death, but for many [14] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 14)

The true Lord reproaches and rebukes them, ‘What a failure and what a loss! It will not benefit you to pray for one single death. Rather, you should pray for a death, then another and then another. It is something that never ends: one punishment will pass you on to another punishment until you cry out: ‘they will cry, “Malik/ if only your Lord would finish us off,” but he will answer, “No! You are here to stay”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 77). It is a punishment that is renewed again and again: ‘When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56).

Then, the true Lord mentions the opposite so that that might be more hurtful to the people of evil and enrage them further. After mentioning their punishment, He mentions the huge reward for doing good and obeying Allah *Glorified is He*. This sort of pairing of opposites happens frequently in the Quran, like in Allah’s statement: ‘The good one will live in bliss. And the wicked will burn in the Fire’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14). The True Lord says: ‘Let them laugh a little; they will weep a lot in return for what they have done’ (*at-Tawba:* 82).

After mentioning the fire and its hisses and indrawn breaths, the True Lord says:

قُلْ أَذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ جَنَّةُ ٱلْخُلْدِ ٱلَّتِى وُعِدَ ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ ۚ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَزَآءً وَمَصِيرًا ﴿١٥﴾

Say, ‘Which is better, this or the lasting Garden that those who are mindful of God have been promised as their reward and journey’s end?’ [15] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 15)

‘Say...’ (*al-Furqan:* 15) is an instruction to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say (the statement that follows). Those, to whom he is instructed to say it, are of his contemporaries who rejected his Prophethood, and who were so lost and confused when it came to these matters that it was as if they had no knowledge of reality. Their only aim was to raise objections to the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with respect to what he was calling them to. It is only natural for prophets to be subjected to objections and resistance by their contemporaries with respect to that to which they call those people. This is because Messengers are only sent to a people when corruption and wickedness has come to the fore.

We have previously mentioned that the true Lord, first, places in every self a faculty that enables its owner to do a thing and then places in it a secondary faculty by which it reproaches him for that. At that moment, there is said to be an impregnable strength in that person. This impregnable strength is called the self-reproaching self. Yet, this faculty can easily become wiped out in a person, leaving all his faculties to work together for evil, thereby leaving his self to become *ammara bis-su’a* (commanding of evil) with all its faculties. This word *ammara* (commanding) is an intense form of the word, not just the ordinary active participle form *amirah*. In other words, this commanding of evil has become the profession of the self.

So the meaning of (*ammara*) is that his self no longer has any capacity to prevent him from doing evil, rather, it constantly strengthens and reinforces all the impulses to evil in the self, and these impulses become so deeply-ingrained that they become the profession of the self. So what is the position then?

Allah *Glorified is He* must place in the selves of other people a capacity for good by which they may confront those who possess these selves that command to evil, meet them with good counsel, right guidance and exhortation, and divert them away from evil and back to good. But if a society in its entirety becomes so corrupted that not even a single self remains to hold them back from evil, then heaven must intervene by sending down a new messenger.

And it is a part of Allah’s mercy to the world that He *Glorified is He* has guaranteed to the community of Muhammad that there will always be self-reproaching selves among them, and that He *Glorified is He* has guaranteed that their societies will always enjoin the good and forbid the wrong. And that is why there is no need for any messenger after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, that preventative strength is present in the community of Islam. And if this strength were not present firstly in the self and secondly in society, then heaven would have intervened after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by sending a new messenger and a new miracle through which mankind could be brought back to right guidance.

There is no doubt that, in society, there is a faction of people who benefit from this corruption and live in luxury on its account. So it is only natural for them to rush to its defence, and it is only natural that they resist the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* – who came to redress the balance in society – and try to ambush him since his call threatens their interests and brings an end to the preferential status they had enjoyed.

Although previous Messengers had been subjected to persecution of this sort, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was subjected to levels of persecution many times greater than that to which they had been subjected. And the reason for that was so that his persecution is equivalent to the magnitude of the task with which he had been entrusted. All the Messengers before him were only sent to their own people and were only sent for a limited period of time. But his Message was for the entire human race, and is valid for all places for all of time, right up until the Final Hour. So, it is inevitable that his task will be more difficult than theirs.

Those powerful men who benefit from the corruption of society think that if money and the comforts of life were to be waved in front of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he could be made to give up his call and leave the arena open to them. And that is why the leaders of Quraysh joined together against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to him and offered him wealth, fame and sovereignty in order to dissuade him from his call and make him turn aside from it. It was these people that our professor, Sheikh Musa, called, ‘the evil dozen’ since they were twelve men in number, namely: Abu Al-Bukhtari(1), Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, Al-Aswad ibn Al-Muttalib, Umayya ibn Khalf, Al-‘As ibn Wa’il, ‘Utba ibn Rabi‘a, Munabbih ibn Al-Hajjaj, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, Shayba ibn Rabi‘a and Nabih ibn Al-Hajjaj(2).

These men(3) went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘We are a delegation to you from your people. We have come to provide ourselves with an excuse so that no one can come and blame us for what we do after this point. If you want wealth, we will gather together our wealth for you; if you want pre-eminence and nobility, we will make you a master over us; and if you want a kingdom, we will make you king over us.’

There is a difference between wealth and nobility: wealth is what makes a person rich, but a person can be rich without having any nobility or standing with people. And a person can have nobility and mastery without having any wealth.

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(1) *Abu Al-Bukhtari: His name was Al-‘As ibn Hisham ibn Al-Harith. This is what Ibn Ishaq said. Ibn Hisham said that he was Al-‘As ibn Hashim. (As-sira an-nabawiyya, 1/264).*

(2) *Ibn Hisham mentioned in As-sira an-nabawiyya (1/264) that they were nine in number and excluded from among those mentioned by the Sheikh: Umayya ibn Khalf and An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith.*
This delegation went to Abu Taleb and said, ‘Abu Taleb, your nephew has abused our gods, insulted our religion, called us stupid and pronounced our forefathers to be misguided. You must either make him desist or open the way for us to deal with him ourselves. You are like us in terms of the fact that you differ with him, so let us rid you of him.’ Abu Taleb responded to them with gentle words and turned them away with courtesy, so they left him. Ibn Hisham mentioned this in As-sira an-nabawiyya (1/265) and mentioned it in another place as well (1/295).

(3) *(The one who said this) was Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira. In another incident, it is narrated that he said to Prophet Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him *‘My nephew, if what you want from this matter you have brought us is wealth, we will gather parts of our own wealth together and give it to you so that you become the wealthiest man amongst us; if what you want by it is pre-eminence and nobility, we will make you master over us and do nothing without consulting you first; if what you want is kingship, then we will make you king over us; and if what has happened to you is that you are beset by visions that you cannot rid yourself of on your own, we will search for a remedy for you and will spend our own money for that until we have found you a cure.’ Abridged from As-sira an-nabawiyya of Ibn Hisham (1/293 & 294).*

We notice, here, that they progressed upwards in their bargaining with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from wealth to nobility and mastery and then to kingdom. But what was the position of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? His position was that which Allah *Glorified is He* set out for him – when Gabriel (Jibril) *peace be upon him* offered that Allah *Glorified is He* make all of the mountains of Mecca gold for him, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Rather, I would be full for one day so that I can be thankful, and hungry for three days so that I can make humble entreaties.'(1) And on another occasion, Gabriel (Jibril) *peace be upon him* said to him, 'Your Lord has given you the choice between being a Prophet and king and being a Prophet and slave.' He replied, 'I would be a Prophet and slave.'(2)

A Prophet is one who holds possession of the programme of heaven, while a king is one who has power and dominion such that no one is able to stand against him, like Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* to whom Allah *Glorified is He* granted a kingdom not suited to anyone after him. But, despite that, that kingship was not itself what Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* sought. And that is proven by the fact that he would eat nothing but *khawshikar*, a type of brown bread made from unsifted flour (bran), while his slaves and freedmen would eat bread made from superior sifted flour(3). So Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* did not want the kingship for itself, but rather wanted it as a means of strengthening his call, so that there would be no one to oppose him. And that is why, when the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) sent him a present to try and win him over and persuade him to turn aside from what he had resolved to do, Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* responded to her: 'Now when [the Queen's messenger] came unto Solomon (Sulaiman), he said: "Do you people mean to add to my wealth? But that which Allah has given me is [so much] better than all that He has given you! Nay, it is [only such as] you that would rejoice in this gift of yours!"…' (*an-Naml:* 36)

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(1) *From Abu Umama Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'My Lord offered to turn the valley of Mecca into gold for me, so I said, "No, my Lord. Rather, I would be full for one day and hungry for one day" - and it is said that he said three days or something like that - "When I am hungry, I can entreat You humbly and remember You; and when I am full, I can thank you and praise you."' It is transmitted by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2347) and Ahmad in his Musnad (5/254), and At-Tirmidhi said that it was a hasan (good) Hadith.*

(2) *It is transmitted by Ibnul-Mubarak inaz-Zuhd (265); and by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-kabir (10686). Al-Haythami said in Majma' Az-Zawa'id (9/20), 'The isnad [chain of narration] includes Baqiyya ibn Al-Walid who is a mudallis (a Hadith transmitter whose credibility and reliability are impugned as he used to add extra parts to the Hadith or even remove parts from it).' He traced it back to At-Tabarani in Al-Awsatt and said (10/315), 'It includes Sa'dan ibn Al-Walid whom I do not know. The rest of its narrators are the same as the narrators in the Sahih [authentic Hadith].'*

(3) *It is transmitted by Ahmad in Az-Zuhd (p. 141 in the version printed by Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Arabiyya in Beirut) from 'Atta' who said, 'Solomon (Sulaiman) peace be upon him used to knit baskets with his hands and eat barley bread while feeding the tribe of Israel.' As-Suyuti transmitted this in Ad-Durr al-Manthur (7/189) in his Tafsir of verse 35 of the chapter of Sad. Hawari is sifted white flour.*

And that is why she came to him humbled, saying: '…"O my Lord! I have been sinning against myself [by worshipping aught but you]: but [now] I have surrendered myself, with Solomon (Sulaiman), unto the Lord of all the worlds!"…' (*an-Naml:* 44).

So, this issue of money was presented to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even before the unbelievers of Mecca suggested it to him. And if he refused it from the One Who has possession of it, how could he then accept it from those who possess nothing? And that is why he said to them, 'By Allah, I have no need of what you offer me I am not one who seeks money, kingship, or pre-eminence. Rather, I am the Messenger of Allah who has been sent to you, and I have brought a Book in which there is a programme for you. My Lord has commanded me to be a bearer of good news and a warner to you. If you come into line with what I want, you will have guaranteed for yourself a portion of this world and the Hereafter, but if you throw back my words in my face, I will stay patient and wait for Allah *Glorified is He* to judge between us, for He *Glorified is He* is the best of judges.'(1)

So they resorted to approaching the uncle of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the hope that he might be able to win him over. But when his uncle spoke to him, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave his famous response, 'By Allah, if they were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand in return for me setting this matter aside, I would not. I will never set it aside until Allah has brought it victory or I have perished in the attempt.'(2)

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(1) *The like of this has been transmitted by Ibn Hisham in As-sira An-Nabawiyya (1/296).*

(2) *It is transmitted by Ibn Hisham in As-sira An-Nabawiyya (1/266), attributed to Ibn 'Ishaq, that the Quraysh said to Abu Taleb, 'Abu Taleb, you are one of our elders and have a*=

In the next part of this verse Allah says: '...this...' (*al-Furqan:* 15) is the sort of punishment you are in now better or is it' … the lasting Garden that those who are mindful of Allah have been promised…?' (*al-Furqan:* 15). You yourselves are the ones to judge in this matter and we will abide by your judgement. It is in order to infuriate the people of the Fire that Allah *Glorified is He* allows them to see the people of Paradise and the blessings that they enjoy at the same time as subjecting them to the harshest of punishments. If they were subjected to the latter alone, it would have been enough, but they are in their punishment when the people of paradise come up to them and reproach them, saying, 'Look at the blessings you have foregone!' This is also a way of rebuking them, since there is no point of comparison between Paradise and the Hellfire. For instance, you would never say that honey is sweeter than vinegar since that is something that is self-evident and plain to see.

We talked previously about *as-Siratt* (the Bridge) – about why it was built over the surface of Jahannam (hellfire) and why everyone must pass over it – and said that it was because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make the sight of the Hellfire which you are passing over while you are on the bridge another blessing for you, since it reminds you of being saved from the fire before you come into contact with the blessing of paradise. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* does not only grant us the boon of entering paradise, but also that of salvation from the fire. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...whereupon he that shall be drawn away from the Fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph...' (*Al-'Imran:* 185).

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the fire to us and mentions some of its attributes that it is like this and like that. But in the Hereafter, we will see it first hand with our own eyes, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: 'In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty' (*at-Takathur:* 7), and that takes place when you are on the Bridge (*as-Sirat*). So praise Allah *Glorified is He* for granting you your Islam which saved you

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= *position of pre-eminence and high standing among us. We have asked your nephew to desist and leave us alone, but he has not done so. We are losing patience with this man who curses our forefathers, calls us stupid, and insults our gods. Either he stops or we will come against both of you until one of the two parties is completely destroyed.' So Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him gave this response to his uncle.*

from the Hellfire and granted you access to Paradise. Each one of those blessings is greater than the other.

In Allah's Words: 'Say: "Which is better this, or the lasting Garden?"...' (*al-Furqan:* 15) There is the word (*khayr*) which linguistically is used in two different ways: the first is to indicate the 'good' which is opposed by evil; and the second is to indicate the 'good' which is opposed by something better than it, like in the divine Hadith, 'The strong Muslim is better and more beloved to Allah *Glorified is He* than the weak Muslim, although both are good.'(1) So both are (*khayr*) 'good' even though the strong Muslim is 'better'. As for the (*khayr*) that is opposed by evil, an example of its usage is found in Allah's Words: '...it is they, they who are the best of all creatures' (*al-Bayyina:* 7).

In terms of the way it is used in this world, the word jannah (paradise) is used to designate a place full of trees and plants which overlook those who walk there and spare those who own them the need of going outside, since all their life requirements are to be found therein – they spare them from needing anything else. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* follows it up with: '..."the lasting Garden"...' (*al-Furqan:* 15).

So the gardens which you see in this world, no matter how spectacular, will never be the paradise of life abiding since they will disappear and fade away – their lifespan is a life span based on this worldly nature. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to every person who owns a garden in this world, 'Do not be deceived by your garden for it is eventually going to fade away and disappear.' And the greatest sorrow that the possessor of happiness can have is that feeling of certainty that it will go away. It is as the poet said,

For me, the greatest sorrow in terms of happiness is when

He who possesses it knows with certainty that it will go away.

And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* reassures His believing slaves that the Garden which He *Glorified is He* promised them is a garden of life abiding that will remain forever – its blessing will never cease and its happiness will never be disrupted. Its pleasures are constant and permanent – they will never be cut off nor forbidden.

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(1) *It is transmitted by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/366 & 370); Muslim in his Sahih (3664); and Ibn Maah in his Sunnan (79) in a Hadith from Abu Hurayra.*

As for Allah’s Words: ‘...that those who are mindful of Allah have been promised’ (*al-Furqan:* 15), the promise that is mentioned is made by Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who has all the means at his disposal to fulfil such a promise. A ‘promise’, is giving someone the good news of something good before that good has come about, so that he can get himself ready in order to be one of those who merit it. The opposite of ‘promise’ is warning, which is threatening someone with something bad before that bad has come about so that he can set himself right and avoid those things that will bring it down upon him.

As for the words ‘mindful of Allah’, at its root it means placing a barrier between oneself and that which is evil, as in Allah’s Words: ‘...then be conscious of the fire...’ (*al-Baqara:* 24) that is place a barrier between it and yourself. It is amazing indeed that Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...remain conscious of God...’ (*al-Baqara:* 194) and ‘...then be conscious of the fire...’ (*al-Baqara:* 24), but the meaning is, place a barrier between yourself and the attributes of Allah’s overwhelming majesty, since you will not be able to endure the attributes of His overwhelming force. The Fire is one of the soldiers of Allah *Glorified is He* in His attributes of majesty, so it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying, ‘have God-consciousness of the soldiers of the attributes of Allah’s majesty.’

As for Allah’s Words: ‘as their reward’ (*al-Furqan:* 15), this means ‘as a reward for the actions you have sent forward from this world. This meaning is clear from Allah’s words: ‘Eat and drink with good cheer in return for all [the good deeds] that you have sent ahead in days gone by!’ (*al-Haqqa:* 24) This is the reason for the bliss they find themselves in – the fact that they so often tired themselves out and suffered such torment and oppression. The reward for those who are tortured on account of Our religion is that We will make them happy now in the Hereafter.

The meaning of ‘...and journey’s end’ (*al-Furqan:* 15) is that where they will end up. So do not look at where you are now and what you are suffering, but rather look to where you will most certainly end up. Reflect on your existence in this world and the fact that it is temporary and presumed, and then reflect upon your existence in the Hereafter and the fact that it is constant, permanent and will never come to an end. That is why they say, ‘Never get into anything unless you first know the way out.’

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّهُمْ فِيهَا مَا يَشَآءُونَ خَٰلِدِينَ ۚ كَانَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ وَعْدًا مَّسْـُٔولًا ﴿١٦﴾

There they will find everything they wish for, and there they will stay. [Prophet], this is a binding promise from your Lord [16]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 16)

In the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...the lasting Garden...’ (*al-Furqan:* 15), while here He *Glorified is He* says: ‘...abiding [in it]...’ (*al-Furqan:* 16). This is one of those places that superficialists think is an example of repetition in the Speech of Allah *Glorified is He* despite the fact that the difference between the two is clear – the first ‘abiding’ describes paradise, while the second describes its inhabitants. So it means that paradise will never end and that they will never leave it.

As for Allah’s Words: ‘They shall have therein [paradise] what they desire’ (*al-Furqan:* 16), this means that you will have whatever you want when you enter paradise. So, in it you will have whatever blessings you want, although you will only want the limited blessings about which you know. And in paradise, there are things that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no human mind has ever thought of.

This promise to the believers will be fulfilled only in paradise. As for this life, no one gets everything that they want, not even the Prophets. Do you not see that Noah (Nuh) *peace be upon him* asked his Lord that his son might be saved, saying: ‘...Verily, my son was of my family...’ (*Hud:* 45), and yet he was not given what he wanted.

And Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* despite all his efforts, was unable to guide his uncle Abu Taleb. But that is only true in this world, so know that when Allah *Glorified is He* denies you something you want in this world, He only does so in order to store it up for you in the way that He wants in the Hereafter. And that is despite the fact that so many think they are being deprived of something. But Allah *Glorified is He* forbids that He deprives one of His slaves of anything!

There are other gifts inherent in Allah's Words: 'They shall have therein [Paradise] what they desire' (*al-Furqan:* 16), but Allah *Glorified is He* only gives you according to the knowledge you have of His blessings. It is like your Lord gives you a 'remote control' by means of which you make your request, and then He *Glorified is He* gives it to you and stores up in the Hereafter something that is better than that which He *Glorified is He* gave you.

The faculties and attitudes by which a person wants in the Hereafter will be different from the faculties and attitudes by which he wants in this world since people's spirits in the Hereafter will be pure and clear and will desire nothing but good, as opposed to this world where they have a natural inclination towards evil. And that is because one's natural faculties here are sometimes governed by compulsion and sometimes by free choice: they are compelled in things from which they have no escape such as illness and death, and are free to choose in some other things.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: '... it is a promise which it is proper to be prayed for from your Lord.' (*al-Furqan:* 16) A 'promise' as we mentioned earlier, is giving someone the good tidings of something before its time has actually come. Some of the people of knowledge, however, consider the promise that is mentioned here to mean 'right', but does anyone have rights over Allah *Glorified is He*? Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* calls it a reward, so is it a promise or a reward? We say that as soon as Allah *Glorified is He* made His promise part of His Law, it became a reward since Allah *Glorified is He* never goes back on His promises and lets nothing that He has promised pass by without fulfilling it.

As for Allah's Words: 'prayed for' (*al-Furqan:* 16), who is it who is doing the praying and the asking here? They say Allah *Glorified is He* is teaching us to ask Him. As an example of that, read Allah's Words: 'Our Lord! Bestow upon us all that You have promised us through Your messengers....' (*Al-'Imran:* 194) We ourselves have asked for it.

And the angels have also asked it, as is mentioned in Allah's Words, when He quotes the angels as saying: 'and admit them, Lord, to the lasting

Gardens You have promised to them…' (*Ghafir:* 8). So, paradise is prayed for and asked for by those concerned with it as well as by the angels who ask forgiveness for us.(1)

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ فَيَقُولُ ءَأَنتُمْ
أَضْلَلْتُمْ عِبَادِى هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ أَمْ هُمْ ضَلُّوا۟ ٱلسَّبِيلَ ﴿١٧﴾

On the Day He gathers them all together with those they worship beside Him, He will say, 'Was it you [false gods] who led these creatures of Mine astray, or did they stray from the path by themselves?' [17] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 17)

In Allah's Words: 'the Day He will gather them' (*al-Furqan:* 17), the word 'gather' refers to when all of mankind, from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Hour, will be gathered together in a single place, and for a single purpose. If we are screaming now about how crowded things are and complaining that the earth is not big enough for all of its inhabitants – and we are but one single generation – then what do you think that place is going to be like where all of mankind from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Hour are gathered together?

'True worship', is when the worshipper obeys the commands of the worshipped, so each of us should look at those whose commands we obey and see whether they are the direct source of those commands or whether they have been conveyed to them by one higher than them, be that a messenger or a god. If they are the direct source of the command, then you must look at whether it is something permissible they have commanded you with or whether it is something that goes against the Laws of Islam. If it is something permissible, then there is nothing wrong with you obeying them, but if it is something which goes against the Laws of Islam, then by obeying them it is as if you are worshipping someone other than Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) It is transmitted by Ibn Abu Hatim and Al-Bayhaqi by way of Sa'id ibn Hilal that Mohammad ibn Ka'b Al-Qurazzi said about Allah's Words: 'it is a promise which it is proper to be prayed for from your Lord.' (*al-Furqan:* 16), 'The angels pray for that for them when they say, "...bring them into the gardens of perpetual bliss which You have promised them..."' (*Ghafir:* 8). Sa'id said, 'And I heard Abu Hazim say, "On the Day of Rising, the believers will say, 'Our Lord, we have done what You have asked of us, so bring about that which You promised us.' That is Allah's Words: "...a promise... prayed for?"' (*al-Furqan:* 16) It is also transmitted by *As-Suyuti* in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthusr* (6/241).

So, when a commander commands you to pray, pay *zakat* (obligatory alms) or fast, you have, before even obeying him, obeyed the One Who entrusted him with that task. But as for those who obey those who command them to do things that go against Allah's programme for us, they are in fact worshipping them instead of Allah *Glorified is He* and setting them up as gods to be obeyed. It is as Allah says about the devils: 'And, verily, the devils whisper unto those who have made them their own that they should involve you in argument' (*al-An'am:* 121).

And others worship false gods, or worship the sun or the moon or the stars or idols and other inanimate things. It is well known that worship of these inanimate objects is a false and mistaken form of worship since worship is obeying commands and have inanimate objects ever given a command to anyone. Worship, if it were to have been correct in this sense, would have to be to someone who possessed command or at least some sort of temporal authority, such as priests, or devils or angels or Jesus (Isa) *peace be upon him* whom some have claimed to be divine, or Uzayr (Ezra) or someone similar. Inanimate things are only included along with these others in a general sense.

And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[But as for people who are oblivious of the Lord's oneness] one Day He will gather them and that which they worship besides Allah...' (*al-Furqan:* 17). In other words, He will gather the one who misguidedly worships with the one he has misguidedly worshipped together in the same place. Why? Because when the worshipper finds himself being punished, he will look for the one he worshipped to rescue him, but he will find him in the Fire with him, having preceded him there, and so he will lose all hope of ever being saved.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…"Did you mislead these, My servants, or did they [themselves] stray from the way?"…' (*al-Furqan:* 17) This question is directed to those among them who are capable, although there is nothing to say it should not be addressed to everyone since we are only able to talk according to the laws of which we are aware and Allah *Glorified is He* has made it clear to us that everything has its own language. So why should we consider it farfetched that this address is directed at both those capable of rational thinking and those incapable of it. And the proof of the possibility of that is found in Allah's Words: '...and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!' (*al-Isra':* 44)

And Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* was one of those who were able to understand their glorification, said: '…"O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Yours with which You have graced me"...' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). When he heard the ant saying to its people in warning: '…"Get into your dwellings"...' (*an-Naml:* 18), Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* smiled and referred to what it said as 'words'. And this serves as a rebuttal to those who claim that the glorification of the ant here was internal monologue rather than articulated utterance. And that statement contradicts the text of the Quran itself, since Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!' (*al-Isra':* 44) So Allah has ruled that you will not be able to understand this glorification. If you were to say it is simply glorification by means of tacit indication, then that would imply that you have understood it, and Allah *Glorified is He* has ruled that you will not understand it unless He *Glorified is He* Himself allows you to and teaches you the languages by means of which those created beings glorify.

And why should we consider such matters so farfetched when modern science has established that every species in existence has its own special language? Do we not now speak to one another in languages that are not voiced, such as the sign language that the navy uses to communicate amongst itself?

Allah *Glorified is He* asks those who are worshipped: '…"Did you mislead these, My servants, or did they [themselves] stray from the way?"…' (*al-Furqan:* 17) Allah *Glorified is He* knows already whether it was them who led them astray or not. And that is why Jesus (Isa) *peace be upon him* responds to a question of this sort as in 'And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?'" He will say, "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within

Yourself”...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116). The question Allah *Glorified is He* asks of the worshipped is a means of rebuking the worshippers in front of those whom they worshipped, since if they had had any right to worship them, the ones they worshipped would have defended them in front of Allah *Glorified is He*. And that is why Jesus (Isa) *peace be upon him* says in his response to Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Nothing did I tell them beyond what You did bid me [to say]: “Worship Allah [who is] my Lord as well as your Lord”...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 117).

As for the others, they say, ‘We did not lead them astray; rather, they strayed from the path themselves.’

And as for the Words: ‘...“My servants”...’ (*al-Furqan:* 17), the meaning of ‘a servant’ is one who submits to the commands of his master and has no freedom to do as he wills. If you view it in this light, then every single one of Allah’s creations are slaves, since with respect to non-volitional acts nobody is able to escape the will of Allah *Glorified is He* for example the form with which one is born, or the onset of an illness or the timing of one’s death. And that is why we say to those who become accustomed to contravening the Commands of Allah *Glorified is He* and rebelling against Him, ‘You may rebel against having faith in Him by disbelieving in Him, you may rebel against having faith in His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by denying His Message, and you may rebel against one of His legal rulings by contravening it. You have the courage and the boldness to go against Him in these matters and have become accustomed to rebelliousness. But if you have made a habit of doing that, then you must also rebel against Him when it comes to illness by refusing to get ill, or when it comes to death by refusing to die. But that will never happen, for these are matters in which everyone is a slave to Allah *Glorified is He* totally subjugated to His Will, both believers and unbelievers, the obedient and the disobedient.’

There are other matters in which Allah *Glorified is He* allows us to have a choice: those for whom the Best from Allah *Glorified is He* is pre-ordained and who have been inspired to have success, give up their own free choice in favour of the choice and Will of their Lord. Such people are Allah’s slaves when it comes to matters in which they are compelled and matters in which they are not compelled. They are those who are worthy of being termed the ‘servants’ of Allah. As in His Words: ‘For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace’ (*al-Furqan:* 63).

Some of those who are not qualified to understand Allah's intents failed to grasp the function of interrogation in Allah’s Words: ‘…“Did you mislead these, My servants, or did they [themselves] stray from the way?”...’ (*al-Furqan:* 17) We say to these people, ‘Your grasp of the Arabic language is not strong enough to understand the Quran: you ask about the action when that action is not done in your presence, so you might ask someone for example, ‘Did you build the house you told me you were going to build?’ and he would then reply to you that he built it or he did not build it. But when you ask, ‘Did you build this house?’ The question is no longer about the action but about the doer of the action – was it you or someone else – since the building in question is there in front of you.

So, there is a difference between a question about an action and a question about the doer of that action. In the case of this verse, the action of misguidance is present, so the question is about the doers of that action: ‘…“Did you mislead these, My servants, or did they [themselves] stray from the way?”…’ (*al-Furqan:* 17) And He *Glorified is He* calls them ‘my servants’ here, despite the fact that they are astray, because these words take place in the Hereafter where people no longer have any free choice. Free choice is only something that is granted in this world since they are all compelled and none of them have any free choice whatsoever.

قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَـٰنَكَ مَا كَانَ يَنۢبَغِى لَنَآ أَن نَّتَّخِذَ مِن دُونِكَ مِنْ أَوْلِيَآءَ وَلَـٰكِن
مَّتَّعْتَهُمْ وَءَابَآءَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ نَسُوا۟ ٱلذِّكْرَ وَكَانُوا۟ قَوْمًۢا بُورًا ﴿١٨﴾

They will say, ‘May You be exalted! We ourselves would never take masters other than You! But You granted them and their forefathers pleasures in this life, until they forgot Your Reminder and were ruined’ [18] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 18)

The word ‘Exalted’ means ‘may Allah be praised above His Essence being like other essences, and His Attributes and Actions being like any other attributes and actions.' Allah *Glorified is He* has Hearing and you have hearing, Allah *Glorified is He* has Existence and you have existence, Allah *Glorified is He* has Life and you have life, but is your life like the Life of Allah *Glorified is He*? Allah *Glorified is He* is a Compeller and you may also be a compeller, Allah *Glorified is He* is Wealthy (beyond need) and you may also be wealthy, but is your wealth like that of Allah? Allah *Glorified is He* has Actions and you have actions, but are your actions like the Actions of Allah? So, there is a difference between inherent attributes and attributes which are given and may be taken away by the One Who gave them at any time.

Subhanallah may also be uttered with the intention of expressing amazement: when you hear something amazing, you say *subhanallah* meaning 'I deem what has been said here as being above having actually happened.'

And that is why they say here: *subhanaka*, '..."Exalted are You!" …' (*al-Furqan:* 18) meaning, 'It is amazing to think that we might actually go astray. How could we who worship You make others worship us?' In other words, their meaning is, 'This would not be right for us. How could it be when we call on others to worship You? It would not be rational for us to call others to worship You and then turn aside and set ourselves up for others to worship us: '..."Exalted are You! It was not for us to take besides you any allies!"…' (*al-Furqan:* 18)

You are our Protector to whom we seek to get close. You sent us to perform a task for You, so the fact that You never err in Your choices prevents us from doing this thing. If that were not the case, then we would not have been entrusted with this task. So (*subhanaka*) means, 'You are exalted above choosing someone to carry out a task who was not worthy to carry it out – he takes the command from You himself.'

As for the Words: '..."It was not for us to take besides You any allies"…' (*al-Furqan:* 18), they mean: it was not conceivable/proper for us to do such-and-such, like in Allah's Words: 'And [thus it is] We have not imparted to this [Prophet the gift of] poetry, nor would [poetry] have suited this [message]…' (*Ya Sin:* 69).

Poetry is a talent – it is the gift of composition and eloquence of expression – and the Arabs used to vie with one another to see who was best at making use of this gift. So, whenever a poet came to prominence amongst them, they would take tremendous pride in him and speak of him in glowing terms. This talent was one which Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* possessed. If Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* were to have become a poet, he would have been an exceptional one, but that was not proper or suitable for him since poetry is based upon imagination. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* kept him away from poetry so that people would not think that the Quran that Muhammad brought was no more than the imaginings of a poet. It was not that the character of the Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* was so rigid so as not to be suited to poetry. Rather, his senses were sharp and finely attuned. If it had been destined for him to be a poet, he would have been a great one.

Allah *Glorified is He* has said about poets: ‘And as for the poets – [they, too, are prone to deceive themselves: and so, only] those who are lost in grievous error would follow them. Are you not aware that they roam confusedly through all the valleys [of words and thoughts] And that they [so often] say what they do not do [or feel]?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 224-226) And they say about poetry, ‘The sweetest poetry is that which is most untruthful.’ And that is why the Prophet Muhammad did not enter into this field at any point throughout his life.

So, they said (*subhanaka*) in response to the question: ‘…“Did you mislead these, My servants, or did they [themselves] stray from the way?”…’ (*al-Furqan:* 17) Then He mentions the evidence that ‘…“or did they [themselves] stray from the way?”…’ (*al-Furqan:* 17) In His Words: ‘They will say…“But you provided comforts for them and their fathers until they forgot the message and became a people ruined”…’ (*al-Furqan:* 18), – when you allowed them to enjoy the pleasures of this life, O Lord, they became overwhelmed by luxury and the blessings and comforts they enjoyed distracted them from the One Who bestowed them upon them and they deviated from the Straight Path.

The verse reminds believers that they should not feel despair when they miss out on a blessing, since that blessing may be a temptation for you and turn you away from the One who bestowed it. Therefore, it is a good thing that Allah *Glorified is He* held it back from you, since you are unable to safeguard yourself when you receive blessings.

As for Allah’s Words: ‘until they forgot the message’ (*al-Furqan:* 18), they forgot the Bestower of blessings, and it is the right of a blessing that it not make the Bestower of blessings be forgotten. And that is why we previously said that if a healthy person can be said to enjoy the blessing of good health from the Bestower of blessings, then the sick person who has been denied that may not be enjoying the blessing of the Bestower of blessings, but he is with His Lord and in His Company. And it was for this reason that one of the pious men when he fell ill, used to grow angry when people made supplications for him to get better. He used to say to those who visited him when he was ill, ‘Do not deprive me of my intimacy with my Lord.’

And, in a Qudsi Hadith Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Son of Adam, I was ill and you did not visit Me,’ he replied, ‘How could I visit You when You are the Lord of all the worlds?’ Allah *Glorified is He* replied, ‘Do you not know that my slave, so-and-so, was ill and you did not visit him? If you were to have visited him, you would have found Me with him.’(1) Allah *Glorified is He* is too embarrassed to feel anxious or worried. As for the Words: ‘... “and became a people ruined”…’ (*al-Furqan:* 18).

فَقَدْ كَذَّبُوكُم بِمَا تَقُولُونَ فَمَا تَسْتَطِيعُونَ صَرْفًا وَلَا
نَصْرًا ۚ وَمَن يَظْلِم مِّنكُمْ نُذِقْهُ عَذَابًا كَبِيرًا ﴿١٩﴾

[God will say], ‘Now your gods have denounced what you say as lies: you cannot avoid the punishment; you will not get any help.’ If any of you commits such evil, We shall make him taste agonizing torment [19] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 19)

After Allah *Glorified is He* asked them – and He knows best about them: ‘...“Did you mislead these, my servants?”…’ (*al-Furqan:* 17), and they replied: ‘…“But You provided comforts for them and their fathers until they forgot the message and became a people ruined”…’ (*al-Furqan:* 18), having been violently shaken by the question they were asked, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to declare their blamelessness and innocence, so He *Glorified is He* says: ‘So they will deny you, [disbelievers], in what you say, and you cannot avert [punishment] or [find] help. And whoever commits injustice among you– We will make him taste a great punishment.’ (*al-Furqan:* 19) In other words, ‘I know that you have spoken the truth, but they denied you with respect to what you say,’ ‘...and you cannot avert [punishment] or [find] help’ (*al-Furqan:* 19) to make Him turn towards them. ‘Avert’ is for you yourself to defend yourself from the evil that anyone subjects you to, while ‘find help’ is when you are unable to defend yourself, for someone else to come and defend you.

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(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2569) in (Kitab Al-Birr wa As-Sila) as part of a Hadith from Abu Hurayra.*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And whoever commits injustice among you – We will make him taste a great punishment’ (*al-Furqan:* 19). Someone might ask here, ‘Why does Allah *Glorified is He* address His devoted followers so harshly?’ Because in reality this harshness is not used as a means of reproaching Allah’s devoted followers, but rather as a means of grabbing the attention of others and rebuking them. If Allah *Glorified is He* can address those who are obedient to Him with this harshness, how do you expect His harshness to be towards His enemies and those who act outside the bounds of His Methodology?

When those people hear this address, it is inevitable that they will say, ‘Despite the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* chose them and brought them close to Him, that still did not prevent Him from directing His attention towards them and rebuking them!’

Did Allah *Glorified is He* not say about His beloved Prophet Muhammad: ‘Now if he [whom We have entrusted with it] had dared to attribute some [of his own] sayings unto Us. We would indeed have seized him by his right hand. And would indeed have cut his life-vein’ (*al-Haqqa:* 44-46)? Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in this way in order to put fear and dread into the hearts of those others (who oppose him). ‘So they will deny you, [disbelievers], in what you say, and you cannot avert [punishment] or [find] help. And whoever commits injustice among you – We will make him taste a great punishment’ (*al-Furqan:* 19).

‘Injustice’ is taking a right that belongs to another, and as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has prohibited that, that means that He wants each person to enjoy the fruits of his own endeavours. And that is because the affairs of life will never be in order when one man takes for himself the fruit of another man's endeavours or becomes accustomed to living off the tears and sweat of others. And that is why we see in today's society certain criminals and deviants (people totally devoid of scruples) who live off the sweat of others and never ever sweat themselves.

When a right is taken from the one to whom it is due, and he can find nobody to obtain justice for him or help him recover that right that was snatched from him, he will develop a propensity for laziness, forsake work, and stop expending any effort. It is well known that the fruits of a person's labour do not just benefit him, but many others as well since his activity helps promote the interests of others and the activity of the society as a whole.

We previously said that the difference between the believer and others when it comes to work is that the unbeliever works for himself, while the believer works to obtain what suffices himself and then strives to help others. And that is why you must not limit your work according to what you need, but rather according to what you are able to do. So you give as much of your capacity as you need to fulfil your needs, and then use what reserves you have left to help fulfil the needs of those who are unable to work and have little or no capacity themselves.

In terms of the battle that rages between the unbelievers and believers, and at their head, the Messengers, Allah *Glorified is He* will decide its outcome. He *Glorified is He* says, 'None of my creation is able to wrong me, since the oppressed have within them a drop of weakness while oppressors have within them a drop of strength. And that is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'It was not Us they wronged [by their sinning] (*al-Baqara:* 57), that is, no one is able to do that but '...they wronged themselves' (*al-Baqara:* 57). They wrong only themselves, not the believers.

So Allah *Glorified is He* protects human beings from wronging themselves, since human beings have many capacities, including one for short-term greed and one for long-term planning. The hard-working student chooses to have comfort and ease in the future, while the lazy one chooses to have his comfort and ease right now. Both love ease for themselves, but there is a great difference between the love of the one who is awake and attentive and the love of the one who is a fool. The first endures difficulties in order to obtain the highest grades at the end of the course, while the other is seduced by the prospect of ease right now, but then all too soon finds himself living in the community as a beggar and vagabond. So the enjoyment of the first is more durable and better lasting while the enjoyment of the other all too soon comes to an end. This is a general principle that may be said about both the work of this world and that of the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* created man and does not want one capacity of his self to wrong another. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* does not want man's capacity to speedup things, to wrong his capacity to reflect and deliberate, since the capacity to speedup things brings him immediate good that soon comes to an end, while the capacity to reflect and deliberate brings him endless lasting good.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* wants His creation, regardless of whether they are believers or unbelievers, to not wrong themselves. And that is because Allah *Glorified is He* has honoured mankind and created the rest of creation to serve them – He *Glorified is He* has made everything work on their behalf and that is why He *Glorified is He* says to them, 'You will not be able to wrong Me and you will not wrong the believers. Rather, you will only wrong yourselves.' A Lord who punishes mankind because of the fact that they wrong themselves is the best type of Lord!

And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'Son of Adam, I love you, and that is proven by the fact that I punish you when you wrong yourself, so by My right over you, be one who loves Me.'(1)

And when Allah *Glorified is He* magnifies the punishment: 'And whoever commits injustice among you – We will make him taste a great punishment' (*al-Furqan:* 19), He only does so to deter His slaves from it, and make them keep away from what leads to it so that it does not come to pass.

The enemies of Islam all too often object to Allah's Words: 'There is no compulsion in religion...' (*al-Baqara:* 256) saying, 'Why do you kill those who apostatise and leave Islam?' These people do not know that this ruling is an obstacle that we place in the way of those who want to have faith as a word of caution to them that they must think very carefully about what they are about to embark upon if they choose to become Muslim. This ensures that they do not enter Islam except after having been completely and fully satisfied that it is the truth. After learning about this ruling, they take special care and only enter Islam of their own free accord with full understanding of the implications. Islam does not want rushed and hasty abundance, but rather wants careful thought and reflection. And that counts as something for Islam and not against it. Islam is an expensive commodity, and the one who possesses it has absolute confidence in its quality. It is like, for example, when you go to a silk merchant and he lays out his wares, demonstrating their quality and trying them out in front of you because he has complete confidence in the quality of his merchandise.

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(1) *It is narrated by Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in (Ihya 'Ulumi Ad-Din) (4/296),* where he said, 'In some books, it is written, 'My slave, I, by the right that you have, love you, so by My right over you, be one who loves Me.'

And it is on account of this that many of the verses of the Noble Quran end in the way they do, with the Words: ‘so that you reflect’, ‘so that you use your intellect’, ‘so that you take heed’. This is a proof that if you were to use your intellect or reflect or take heed, you would be guided to that which was brought by the Quran.

So, by Allah’s Words: ‘...And whoever commits injustice among you – We will make him taste a great punishment!’ (*al-Furqan:* 19), what is understood from the Quran or from Allah *Glorified is He* is that when a wrongdoer wrongs someone, he only punishes himself, since something is taken from him, but nothing is taken from Allah *Glorified is He*. Rather, He, by means of the Attributes of Perfection which He possesses, creates you and then you wrong nobody but yourselves.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says about His Messengers and Prophets:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا قَبۡلَكَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ إِلَّآ إِنَّهُمۡ لَيَأۡكُلُونَ ٱلطَّعَامَ وَيَمۡشُونَ فِي
ٱلۡأَسۡوَاقِۗ وَجَعَلۡنَا بَعۡضَكُمۡ لِبَعۡضٖ فِتۡنَةً أَتَصۡبِرُونَۗ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيرٗا ٢٠

No messenger have We sent before you [Muhammad] who did not eat food and walk about in the marketplace. But We have made some of you a means of testing others – will you stand fast? Your Lord is always watching [20]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 20)

We previously talked about Allah’s Words: ‘They also say, “What sort of messenger is this? He eats food and walks about in the marketplaces! Why has no angel been sent down to help him with his warnings?"…' (*al-Furqan:* 7) But the truth is that this attribute is shared by all the Messengers – Muhammad was not an innovator when it came to that. So, if they say that the fact that he ate food detracted from him being a Messenger, and that they wanted a Messenger who did not eat food, we say to them in response, 'By Allah, if the fact that he ate food prevents him, in your eyes, from being a Messenger, then how can they say that the one who ate food was a god? How can you say that when you were not content with him as a Messenger? Allah *Glorified is He* made Messengers eat food and go about in market-places because it is necessary for them to be examples to the rest of mankind of how to act and conduct oneself in every situation. And that is why the circumstances of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were so poor when it came to the material matters of this world such as food, drink and clothing, since it was necessary for him to be an example to all people. And that is why we also find Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to have been so keen for the members of his household to be just like him in that respect, and so the poor among them were not assigned a portion of the *zakat* (obligatory alms) as other poor people were.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'We, the Prophets, do not leave inheritance. Everything that we leave behind is *sadaqa* (charity).'(1)

And anyone who had a debt from among the Muslims, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bore his debt for him. And if all of this proves anything, it proves that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had full confidence in his Hereafter, and so did not want to partake of any part of that in this world.

And that is why we said, 'If you were to see the fundamental concepts of truth and those of falsehood placed in front of you in this world, you would see that the fundamental concept of falsehood is that you pay the price first; so for example, in order to be a socialist, you must pay the price first. But as for the fundamental concept of truth, you pay the price in advance – you get tired, and are wronged, tortured, starved, become a fugitive and are exiled from your family, lands and wealth; and then await your reward in the Hereafter. And it is by means of this standard that you are able to separate truth from falsehood.’

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(1) *It is related by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/463), with the wording, 'We, the Prophets, do not leave inheritance. What I leave behind after feeding my workers and supporting my wives is sadaqa,' as part of a Hadith from Abu Hurayrah. It is also transmitted by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4033) in Kitab Al-Maghazi in a Hadith from 'Umar ibn Al-Khatttab; as well as by Muslim in his Sahih in Kitab Al-Jihad.*

As for Allah’s Words: ‘and walks about in the market-places’ (*al-Furqan:* 20), they mean that messengers frequented them in order to carry out their business and buy whatever it was they needed to buy, as a proof of their humility and the fact that they were not arrogant and did not deem themselves as being above doing such menial tasks. And that is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* carried his own everyday commodities himself. And whenever one of his Companions offered to carry something for him, He *peace and blessings be upon him* would say, ‘He who owns a thing has more right to carry it.’(1)

As for: ‘But We have made some of you a means of testing others – will you stand fast?’ (*al-Furqan:* 20), which ‘some’ is a test for which ‘others’? Similarly, in Allah’s Words: ‘...and raise some of them by degrees above others…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) which ‘some’ are raised up and which ‘some’ have others raised above them?

We notice in matters such as this that people only look at things from a single angle – they say, ‘this one is rich and that one is poor’, but if they were to take all the different sides of a human being into account when making their comparison, they would see that Allah *Glorified is He* has given every human being unique gifts. Every one amongst us has qualities not enjoyed by our fellow human beings, and that is so that we stand shoulder to shoulder and so that creation is an integrated and unified whole. If the world were made of a single form, copied again and again, no one would ever have need of anyone else and no one would ever ask anyone else for anything. But when gifts are varied and numerous with you being given something different to what your brother has been given, the whole society is linked together by mutual need, not by the granting of favours.

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(1) Al-Haythami transmitted it in Majma‘ Az-Zawa’id (5/122) in a Hadith from Abu Hurayra, and said, ‘Abu Ya‘la and At-Tabarani narrated it in Al-Awsat, but Yusuf ibn Ziyad Al-Basi is in their chain of narrations and he is weak.’ Al-‘Ajalunisaid in Kashf Al-Khafa’ (2/25), ‘Qadi‘Iyad mentioned it in ash-Shifa’ without tracing its chain of narrations back and that is weak. Indeed, Ibn Al-Jawzi went as far as to classify it amongst the forged Hadith. And Al-Mulla‘Ali Al-Qari declared it to be wrong in ’Al-Asrar Al-Marfu‘a’ (Hadith 553).

If we were to imagine that everyone had graduated from university and become doctors, who would sweep the streets? If that were to happen, one of us would volunteer to perform that task for a day. So, need would become the reason for volunteering and doing favours. But when things are done out of grace, then no one is compelled to do any work, and things that are required in a society fall into disuse. But when it is need that drives you, you are then the first to rush out and look for work.

Do you not see those who do the hard jobs going out early in the morning searching for work? Do you not see how angry they become when they find no job opportunities in the course of that day, despite the hardship and pain that carrying out that job causes them? Why? It is because of need. One who works in the sewers, for example, and endures the discomfort that that brings, with respect to the power he has over himself and the contentment he feels with the destiny that Allah *Glorified is He* has written for him, is better than me in this matter for I am not able to do that work and he is. So, if Allah *Glorified is He* were to leave jobs such as this to people's better nature, no one would ever step forward to do it. There is wisdom then in Allah *Glorified is He* making things subservient.

Some consider jobs of this sort, or jobs that harm those who carry them out, to be lowly, but that is a mistaken way of viewing the matter, for no job which brings benefit to society may be considered lowly. There has never been a job that was lowly; there have only been lowly workers.

As for Allah's Words: 'We have made some of you a means of testing others' (*al-Furqan:* 20), they mean that every one of us is a test for others – the rich man is a test for the poor man, and the poor man is a test for the rich man and so on and so forth. When the rich man considers himself above the poor man and looks down upon him that is when the poor man is a test for him. And when the poor man resents the rich man and feels jealous of him that is when the rich man is a test for the poor man. Similarly, the healthy man is a test for the sick man, Messengers are a test for those who deny them and unbelievers are a test for the Messengers.

People flee from the trials themselves, but that is not the correct thing to do, for trials are simply a means of testing us. Rather, what we should do is to flee from what results from those trials and tests, not the trials themselves. An exam is a trial and a test for students – if they succeed then that trial was a good thing for them, and if they fail, then that trial was a bad thing for them. So the trial itself was not blameworthy in any way.

And that is why the word *fitna* (trial) is derived from a word that means the smelting of gold – it is well known that gold is the best form of mineral there is, even if there are other things that are more precious than it is. Why is that? Because it never oxidises nor rusts and is not affected by anything else, and it is also easy to shape, which is why they say, 'Like good people, precious metals are slow to break and quick to fix.' Take gold, for example, when it breaks it is easy to return it to the way it was, unlike glass.

So a trial is a means of testing someone, and the skilled person is the one who succeeds in it. So, if he is rich, he is grateful and carries out the duties that wealth brings – he is humble and searches for poor people to whom he can show compassion. A poor person is one who is unable to earn a living, not those for whom parasitism becomes a profession and who consume others wealth with lies and falsehood.

And since trials require those who are tried to endure and be patient, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'will you stand fast?' (*al-Furqan:* 20) To meet any trial, you need patience, so can you be patient in the face of this one? In order to indicate the importance of patience, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *Al-'Asr:* 'I swear by the time. Most surely man is in loss' (*al-'Asr:* 1-2), meaning mankind in general is in loss except for those who are described with the following characteristics: 'Except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience' (*al-'Asr:* 3).

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse with the Words: 'Your Lord is always watching' (*al-Furqan:* 20) in order to alert us to the fact that every movement you make while you are being tried is seen by Us, and We do not look at those movements simply to know about them, but rather to repay people for those actions in a manner commensurate to their worth.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَرۡجُونَ لِقَآءَنَا لَوۡلَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيۡنَا ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ أَوۡ
نَرَىٰ رَبَّنَاۗ لَقَدِ ٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ فِيٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ وَعَتَوۡ عُتُوّٗا كَبِيرٗا ٢١

Those who do not fear to meet Us say, ‘Why are the angels not sent down to us?’ or ‘Why can we not see our Lord?’ They are too proud of themselves and too insolent [21]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 21)

The meeting that is referred to here is the resurrection. We have believed in Allah *Glorified is He* Who is unseen, and we believe in Him in the Hereafter as One Who is seen. 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day?' (*Ghafir:* 16) Even those who did not believe in Him in this world will believe in Him in the Hereafter. That is why He *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran: 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.' (*an-Nur:* 39)

If only he had come and not found his actions there, but he found his actions there in full and found Allah *Glorified is He* there taking him to account for them. But the fact that any of that would come to pass never even occurred to him in this world and that is why he will be so surprised by it there.

As for Allah’s words: '…who do not expect the meeting with Us say,' they mean that neither expect it nor believe in it, and that is why they did not prepare for it. Why? Because they preferred well-being now over well-being later - they saw appetites and pleasures in front of them and could not muster the patience to wait. They were heedless of the final goal.

What is ‘meeting’? Meeting is contact and encounter, but can there be contact and an encounter between the True Lord *Glorified is He* and creation? This is a matter about which there has been much debate, and which has been the cause of a great hubbub that has instilled doubt among Muslims when it comes to a great number of issues.

Some say, ‘The fact that we meet Allah *Glorified is He* means that He *Glorified is He* must have a body and that is forbidden.’ Others say, ‘Meeting does not necessarily entail contact; it could mean that we simply see Him, since seeing the Lord at first does not mean actually meeting Him,’ and that is the position of the *Ahl as-Sunna.*

As for the *Mu‘tazilites* (the Rationalists), they reject even the possibility of seeing Allah *Glorified is He* and say, ‘They will not meet Him by making contact with Him nor by seeing Him, since the one who sees something encompasses and defines it by means of his sight, and that is impossible with respect to Allah *Glorified is He*.’

We say to the Rationalists, ‘You look at matters with respect to Allah *Glorified is He* in the same way that you look at matters with respect to beings created by Him. Why do you not view Allah *Glorified is He* in the light of the verse: '…there is nothing like unto Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) If your meeting with one another requires contact, your meeting with Allah *Glorified is He* does not; and if your seeing something defines and limits it, your seeing of Allah *Glorified is He* does not; you hear and Allah *Glorified is He* hears, but is your hearing like that of Allah’s? So why do you want Allah’s meeting to be like your meeting and thus necessitate His having a body? And why do you want His seeing to be like your own seeing?’

That is why when Moses *peace be upon him* [wanted to] see his Lord, he said: 'My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You,' (*al-A‘raf:* 143) asking his Lord to show Himself to him because he was not capable of seeing him on his own. Such a sight would not be right for him, unless Allah *Glorified is He* was the One to show Himself to him. So, the matter is not one which relates to the one who is seen but rather to the one who does the seeing. Did Allah *Glorified is He* rebuke Moses for making a request such as this or say that he was overly proud of himself or had rebelled against His Will with utter disdain as He said here? No, on the contrary, He said: 'You will not see Me,' (*al-A‘raf:* 143) and did not say, ‘Never will I be seen.’ Obviously, there is a huge difference between the two expressions.

It is why Allah *Glorified is He* then offers him the proof of that, saying: '…but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me.' (*al-A'raf:* 143) Are you stronger or is the mountain? ' But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He rendered it level, and Moses fell unconscious.' (*al-A'raf:* 143)

Notice what Allah *Glorified is He* says here: '…when his Lord appeared to the mountain,' He *Glorified is He* makes Himself manifest to part of His creation, but are they able to withstand that manifestation? The mountain is not more honoured in the sight of Allah *Glorified is He* than the human being to whom He *Glorified is He* made the mountain and everything else in existence subservient.

So, mankind is the most honoured, but his nature and the way he has been created render him unsuitable for seeing a sight such as this - he does not have the propensity or capacity to receive Divine Lights and that is because Allah *Glorified is He* created him for the earth. But in the Hereafter, things are different, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* will alter this creation so that its very reality will change and it will gain the capacity to see Him. If Moses fell into a swoon upon seeing that which had been on the receiving end of the manifestation - the mountain - then how would it have been for him if he had seen The Manifester Himself? For that reason, it is one of the Blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* reserves for His servants in the Hereafter: '[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, Looking at their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

He *Glorified is He* says about the disbelievers: 'No. Surely, they (evildoers) will be veiled from seeing their Lord that Day.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 15) So what separates the believers from the disbelievers is the fact that they will not be veiled from seeing their Lord after their form has been changed in the Hereafter and they have become capable of seeing what they were incapable of seeing in this world. If mankind today, with the scientific progress they have made, are able to make things for the partially-sighted that allow them to see better, then why should we consider this so far-fetched when it comes to Allah *Glorified is He*?

You find those who have wronged against themselves arguing with you with what frees them of responsibility, so you see them denying the resurrection and banishing that thought from their minds. They know what an evil outcome awaits them if they were to know with certainty that the resurrection is coming and acknowledge that fact.

There are even some who believe in Allah *Glorified is He* among those who wrong against themselves. Some of those people say, ‘As long as Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed disobedience for me, why should He then take me to account for it?’ We are amazed that these people do not mention the opposite situation and say, ‘As long as Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed obedience for us, why should He *Glorified is He* reward us for it?’ So, the position they have adopted is unsound and illogical. The first situation will bring evil to them and so they mention it, but the second will bring them good and so they neglect mentioning it.

Regarding the question: ‘Why were angels not sent down to us, or [why] do we [not] see our Lord?': it is indicative of their arrogance and their objection to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a human being. Indeed, elsewhere, they said: 'Shall human beings guide us?' (*at-Taghabun:* 6) So, all that really aggrieves them is the fact that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a human being, and that indicates their stupidity; if the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were to have been an angel, it would not have been right for him to be an example to them, and no messenger has been sent except to be an example, a teacher of the Divine Way and a model of how we should conduct ourselves. Yes, if he were to have been an angel, it would have been possible for him to teach us the way of Allah, but it would not have been right for him to have been a model of how we should conduct ourselves, since if he, as an angel, were to command you to do something, you could object by saying, ‘You are only able to do that because you are an angel. As for me, I am only human and I am not capable of doing it.’

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying, ‘You will notice that the Messengers have two tasks - that of conveying the Message and that of being a model for us of how we should act. If their nature were to have been different to that of human beings, it would definitely have been possible for them to have conveyed the Message, but it would not have been possible for them to have been a model or an example that people could have followed.’

If the Messenger were to have been an angel in its truest sense, you would not have been able to see him and would have required him to appear in human form. But if that were to happen, then you would never know if he was an angel or a human being. So, in the end, it would inevitably come back to him being a human, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if We had made him an angel, We would have made him [appear as] a man, and We would have covered them with that in which they cover themselves.' (*al-An'am:* 9)

One of the things the disbelievers suggested to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was that he ask his Lord to send down angels to be with him. This indicates that they wanted some proof of the authenticity of the Prophethood of Muhammad. But he had already brought them a miracle in a field in which they themselves excelled and they had proved incapable of matching him in that, thus proving that what he brought had come from their Almighty Lord.

The meaning of a miracle is to take the place of Allah's Words, 'My servant has spoken the truth in everything that he has conveyed from Me.' And so long as a miracle has come down to affirm the truthfulness of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can there then be another miracle that is preferable to that one?

The miracle of the Quran was enough in itself to prove the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with respect to what he had conveyed from Allah. In addition to that, he told you of unseen matters that no human being could possibly have told him about, both things that happened before his birth and things that happened after his birth and had not yet then come to pass.

The proof of the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was already there, so why do you suggest to him that he come with other miracles?

As for their words: '… or [why] do we [not] see our Lord?' if there had been a god whom it was possible for you to see, it would not have been correct to term him a god, since the one who is seen is encompassed by the pupil of the one who does the seeing. And if he is encompassed, then that means he is limited and his being is limited and hence this contradicts his being a god.

Take those [abstract] concepts such as truth and justice about which people speak, and to which they fanatically cling and fall upon to solve their problems and make their lives easier for them: can such concepts be perceived with senses? Then how can you make a request to perceive your Creator with your senses?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes this topic with His Words: 'They have certainly become arrogant within themselves and [become] insolent with great insolence.' To be arrogant and proud of oneself is to try to place oneself above one's worth. But the worth of every man among us is defined.

And that is where the proverb, 'Allah *Glorified is He* has mercy on men who know their own self-worth', comes from. So why then do human beings become arrogant? If you were a sound human being, you would feel happiness when you are protected against theft, assault or your private life was safeguarded, so why then do you get angry when we prevent you from doing something similar?

The rational approach would be for you to balance the benefits against the drawbacks: Your hand is prevented - and it is but a single hand - from stealing, but in return everybody else's hands are prevented from stealing from you; the same goes for protecting privacy. So why do you rejoice at the one and become angry at the other? You must judge yourself according to the same logic - if you love what is done for you but hate what is done for others, you are then far-removed from what is right and just.

An example of their arrogance was their opposition to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he first started calling them to Islam and their saying to him: 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) So the Quran was irreproachable in their eyes and that is the actual judgement they made of it, for they were a nation gifted with great eloquence and could see that the language and eloquence of the Quran was of the ultimate degree. What really stuck in their throat, though, was the fact that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a man drawn from the general populace. They wanted him to be someone whom they viewed of as being great, so that the one whom they followed would be someone whose social standing made him worthy of being followed.

So, arrogance is considering yourself to be above following someone else whom you see as being below you. But we reject this because they did not view Muhammad as being below them before he became the Messenger. Rather, they raised him up upon a pedestal and called him the truthful trustworthy. So, when was it then that they looked down on him? It was that gift that Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon him. It was the Message that caused you to take from him what you used to give him before he became a Messenger.

Did you ever before hear from a Messenger whose Lord accompanied him, saying to his people, ‘This is my Messenger’? As long as Allah *Glorified is He* addresses you directly in this way, there is no need for a Messenger, since Allah *Glorified is He* Himself is the One Who personally charges you with what you have to do and so ends the matter. But it is well known that such a thing never happened, so you are asking for something you have never before heard of which proves that you are backward and too proud to accept faith. And because of that, you came with a request you knew was impossible.

So, questions and requests made by the disbelievers stem from their stubbornness and their arrogance to accept the plain truth. They had already, prior to this point, demanded signs and miracles of this sort, but when Allah *Glorified is He* answered them and gave them what they asked for, they rejected it.

Despite the fact that signs and miracles do not appear simply because those to whom they have been sent demand them, rather, it is out of the grace of Allah, Who gave them the Message that they appear.

The arrogance referred to here refers to the kind where one does not have any qualities making him worthy of being great, and yet still seeks to be great. So, the meaning of 'They have certainly become arrogant,' has nothing to do with their own reality or the way they view their own beings. Rather, 'They have certainly become arrogant within themselves' to follow the Messenger. In other words, it is too big a thing for them to follow a man when they see others as being richer than him or better than him (according to what they claim).

So, for example, we see bullies before whom everyone bows and submits, when someone stronger than them comes along, they cower and humble themselves before him because the pride they took in themselves was based on something they did not have in sufficient quantity and was not their own. So, the one who is arrogant without due cause is heedless of the grandeur of his Lord. If he had been aware of the grandeur of Allah, he would have felt too embarrassed to be arrogant.

We see the people of gnosis and obedience always humbled and broken. Why? That is because they live in constant awareness of the grandeur and greatness of Allah. A human being can never be until he sees everything as being beneath him and nothing remains which is greater than him. So no human being should feel proud of anything unless it is something that is his alone and cannot be taken away from him. If you were to feel proud on account of your wealth, it may be that you will become impoverished; if you were to feel proud on account of your good health, it may be that you will be afflicted by illness; and if you were to feel proud on account of your knowledge, you will not be safe from its being taken from you so that, after having knowledge, you may then know nothing at all.

Part of Allah's Kindness and Mercy to His creation is that He *Glorified is He* alone truly has greatness, and He alone has exaltedness and grandeur. The True Lord *Glorified is He* proclaims, 'Grandeur is my cloak and greatness is my waist-wrapper, and if anyone attempts to wrest one of them from Me, I will put him in the Hell-fire.'(1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not do this in order to inflict oppression upon His creation, but rather as a mercy for them. And that is because within creation there are strong people, bullies and rich people - and when these people come to know that absolute greatness and omnipotence is Allah's and Allah's alone, each of them will come to know his own standing and worth (and recognise his own faults). So Allah *Glorified is He* is the sole Great and all of us are equal.

Even if it were conceivable for those who possess the necessary qualifications, such as being strong or wealthy, etc., to be arrogant, it is utterly inconceivable for arrogance to be found in those who are weak or poor. That is why we find in a (Hadith), 'I hate three things, but my hatred for three others is greater: I hate an arrogant rich man, but my hatred for an arrogant poor man is greater; I hate a miserly poor man, but my hatred for a miserly rich man is greater; and I hate a disobedient young man, but my hatred for a disobedient old man is greater.'(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (2/376, 414, 427 & 442); Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (4090); and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4174) in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

As for Allah's Words: '…and [become] insolent with great insolence,' the word *insolent* means that they went to extremes in terms of their wrongdoing and transgression. It is as if these were not enough of a description of them, Allah *Glorified is He* emphasises their rebelling 'with great insolence.' Why does He use so much emphasis in one single expression? Because, they say, they were not simply insolent to each other, but also to the Messenger Muhammad and even to Allah *Glorified is He* Himself. For this reason, they merited such a description and deserved to be described in such emphatic terms.

The insolent or rebellious one is the one whose wrongdoing reaches such a level that he is like a tyrant that swells in size when people fear him, keeps on going, and grows in strength. A tyrant is one whom nobody else is able to oppose or hold his head up firm in his presence.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَوۡمَ يَرَوۡنَ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ لَا بُشۡرَىٰ يَوۡمَئِذٖ لِّلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ وَيَقُولُونَ حِجۡرٗا مَّحۡجُورٗا ٢٢

There will be no good news for the guilty on the Day they see the angels. The angels will say, 'You cannot cross the forbidden barrier' [22] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 22)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks here about those who demanded signs from the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked that angels be sent down with him whom they might see so that those angels might bear witness to the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So Allah *Glorified is He* says to them, ‘You desire to see the angels and you will indeed see them, but somewhere else-not under circumstances where they will be bearing you good news and bringing you good, but under circumstances of humiliation, regret and punishment.’

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(1) *From Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, "Allah loves three people and hates three people: He hates an old man who fornicates, a poor man who is conceited and a rich man who is miserly; and He loves three: a man who is part of a battle squadron and lays in wait for the enemy then fights them until either he is killed or Allah has granted him victory; a man who travels with his people by night and then when they make camp at the end of the night...' until the end of the (Hadith). It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad and Ibn Hibban. Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi mentioned it in Muntakhab Al-Kanz (6/387).*

It will be a fearsome and terrifying sight when you see them on the day they come to collect your souls, or you will see them on the Day of Rising - on that day when they give the news of the punishment that is coming your way.

On the day that they receive the believers with the Words: 'A glad tiding for you today gardens through which running waters flow,' (*al-Hadid:* 12) the disbelievers will long to hear such words, but there will be no way, for 'there will be no glad tiding for those who were lost in sin.' (*al-Furqan:* 22) These beloved words which they had hoped and waited for will be denied, and they will instead be greeted with other words that better befit them.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَدِمْنَآ إِلَىٰ مَا عَمِلُوا۟ مِنْ عَمَلٍ فَجَعَلْنَٰهُ هَبَآءً مَّنثُورًا ﴿٢٣﴾

And We shall turn to the deeds they have done and scatter them like dust [23] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 23)

When you look at those who are not believers, you find amongst them people who act righteously and do good action, and people who are endowed with praiseworthy qualities of character, like those who joined together to form a pact to help the oppressed or those who were endowed with generosity and fed food to the poor. Indeed, among them was one who had such a huge cooking-pot that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to take shelter in its shade on a scorching day. That meant that it was huge, broad, erected, and set in place like a building, and that not just the poor and destitute used to be fed from it, but even the birds and wild animals. Even until the present day we consider Hatim at-Ta’i to be the absolute model of generosity.

And among them were those who maintained their ties of kinship and helped those who were in distress, etc. But these people and those like them did what they did for the glory of this world - it never even occurred to them that there was Allah *Glorified is He* whose pleasure they should be seeking. Workers only take their wage from those for whom they do the work, as is mentioned in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘You did it so that it might be said, and indeed it was said.’(1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes this matter most clear when He says: 'But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.' (*an-Nur:* 39) And when He says: '…their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day.' (*Ibrahim:* 18)

These people did many good actions, but they gave no thought to Allah *Glorified is He* when doing so. Rather, they only did what they did out of humanity and so that they might become well known and people might speak of them. So we see those living lives of luxury and abundance, enjoying myriad forms of blessing. But why is that? That is because they have taken hold of the means that Allah *Glorified is He* has created and made use of them with precision and finesse, and Allah *Glorified is He* does not deny any servant the fruits of his own labour, even if he is a disbeliever. Similarly, if a servant becomes lazy and leaves aside the means, Allah *Glorified is He* will deprive him even if he is a believer. There is a huge difference between blessings entailed by Allah’s Lordship that extends to both believers and disbelievers alike, regardless of whether they are obedient or disobedient, and blessings entailed by Allah’s Divinity.

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(1) *It is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (2/322); Muslim in his Sahih (1905); and an-Nasa’i in his Sunnan (6/23 & 24) in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him that he heard The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him saying, 'The first man to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who died a martyr. He will be brought before his Lord where the blessings he received will be made known to him and he will acknowledge them. Then Allah will say, "What did you do with them?" and the man will reply, "I fought for Your sake until I was martyred." So Allah will say, "You lie. You only fought so that it might be said that you were brave and indeed it was said." Then He will command him to be dragged on his face and thrown into the Fire.’ And he continued to narrate the (Hadith) in its entirety.*

Among those who disbelieve, there are those who are experts when it comes to taking hold of the means, inventing things that benefit mankind and medicines that cure numerous sorts of illness. These people must receive some sort of recompense for their goodness, but that recompense is paid to them in this world. It takes the form of them being honoured, remembered, and achieving everlasting fame. It takes the form of statues being built in their honour, medals being awarded to them and books being written about them. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* has not rejected their deeds nor disregarded their rights.

Do you not see Abu Lahab who took up such a position of enmity against the Prophet Muhammad that Allah *Glorified is He* revealed about him: "May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he. His wealth will not avail him or that which he gained," (*al-Masad:* 1-2), but despite all that, Allah *Glorified is He* will lighten his punishment because of the fact that he freed his servant girl, Thuwayba, when she gave him the good news that Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah had been born; he was so overjoyed by the news she brought.(1)

It is strange indeed that these people behave strangely when encountering a human invention merely used for entertainment to the extent of dedicating historical accounts on their inventors and the invention itself, but forget the Creator of the necessities of life that help and enable him to aspire to life's luxuries and conveniences!

Next is the word: 'dust.' Things are distinguishable to human beings because either they are very big in terms of size or because they are close by, but if they are small in size, then it is difficult to see them. So, the thing is hidden from sight because it is small in form - the eye is not able to perceive it. It is for this reason that microscopes and telescopes were invented. Sometimes things are so far away from you that you cannot see them because of their distance from the cone of light, for light starts from a single point and gradually spreads out in the form of a cone. So if you were to look through the hole of a door whose diameter was a centimetre, you would be able to see an area much wider than that. So, when you want to see something small, you magnify it, and when you want to see something far away, you bring it closer.

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(1) *Hafiẓ ibn Hajr said in Al-'Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (8/36), 'Ibn Sa'd said that Al-Waqidi told him that more than one of the people of knowledge said, 'Thuwayba was the nurse-mother of the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) peace and blessings be upon him. He maintained his ties with her when he was in Mecca, and Khadija may Allah be pleased with her used to honour her when she was in the possession of Abu Lahab and asked him to sell her to her, but he refused. Then, when the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him emigrated, Abu Lahab set her free. The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him used to send her presents and clothing and continued to do so until he received word that she had died in the seventh year upon his return from Khaybar.'*

'Scattered dust' means you are unable to assemble them together because they are scattered about and not stationary, for no matter how much you try to stop the air moving around, you will still see those particles in the light moving around because of how small they are.

If you were to say, ‘We see them today manufacturing filters to contain these particles, amass them together, and purify the air. These filters take the form of the pores of a sponge to which the particles are drawn, and so it becomes possible to amass them together.’ Then we would say, ‘Even accepting the existence of such filters, the size of their pores limits them with respect to the size of the particles they are able to amass and contain. And even supposing that you had amassed them in this filter and then emptied it out and said to me, “These are the motes of dust,” we would say in response, “Are you able to return every atom of it to the place where it came from?”’

أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ يَوۡمَئِذٍ خَيۡرٞ مُّسۡتَقَرّٗا وَأَحۡسَنُ مَقِيلٗا ﴿٢٤﴾

But the companions in the Garden will have a better
home on that Day, and a fairer place to rest [24]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 24)

After having described what results from the actions of the disbelievers, the True Lord *Glorified is He* now wants to speak about the recompense that awaits the believers, following His custom in the Quran of mentioning pairs of opposites, each one of which gives rise to the other.

This method of expression happens frequently in the Quran, like in Allah’s words: 'Let them, then, laugh a little – for they will weep a lot.' (*at-Tawba:* 82) And: 'Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure; and indeed, the wicked will be in Hellfire.' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14) In this way, the Quran shows the two opposites so that you may distinguish between them. So the believer who is in bliss looks at the Hell-fire and its blazing heat and praises Allah *Glorified is He* who saved him from it, and, indeed, that is an even bigger blessing than the first. The disbeliever, on the contrary, when he looks at the bliss of paradise, he feels sadness and sorrow and will know that it is as a consequence of his disbelief that he is to be deprived of that bliss, which makes his punishment harsher. That is why they say that things are known best by their opposites.

As for Allah's words: 'The companions of Paradise, that Day, are [in] a better settlement and better resting place', it is as if paradise is in love with its inhabitants and they are in love with it - feelings of love and companionship have sprung up between them. So, just as you love the place, the place also loves you; and the same goes for hatred. The word 'companions' also indicates possession, since they are never going to leave it, and it is never going to fade away or come to an end.

As for the word 'settlement', human beings do not prefer one place to another to settle in except when one of those places is more peaceful or restful than the other. For example, we leave our rooms when they are very hot to sit in the garden or on the balcony.

And that is why we say, 'When a bit of the earth becomes narrow for you, leave it and go somewhere else, and thereby act in accordance with Allah's words: 'And whoever emigrates for the cause of Allah will find on the earth many [alternative] locations and abundance.' (*an-Nisa':* 100) And in the words of a poet:

By your life, never has a land become too narrow for its people,
Rather, it is the feelings of its men that have been found narrow

As for the words: '…and better resting place', the Arabic equivalent (*maqil*) is that place where the Arabs spent their siesta time, which is the hour of midday heat when the sun is at its hottest. But can there be siestas in paradise when there is no heat, cold or frost? Resting place refers to a place in which a person occupies himself with matters that are private to him. Do you not see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He mentions in the chapter of *an-Nur*, the times in which one must ask leave to enter places at this time amongst them? He says: '…and whenever you lay aside your garments in the middle of the day,' (*an-Nur:* 58) and commands the young to ask permission before entering at that time since it is one of the times of privacy.

So, a 'settlement' is one thing, and a ‘resting place’ of repose for personal and mental rest is another thing since you might well settle in a place in the company of another, whereas your resting place of repose is a private place that is specific to you. So, you will have two places in paradise: a public one and a private one. And that is why they say about Allah’s words: 'But for he who has feared the position of his Lord are two gardens.' (*ar-Rahman:* 46) ‘It refers to a public garden and a private garden, just like you have a place for receiving guests and a place for yourself and your family.’

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَوْمَ تَشَقَّقُ ٱلسَّمَآءُ بِٱلْغَمَٰمِ وَنُزِّلَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ تَنزِيلًا ﴿٢٥﴾

On the Day when the sky and its clouds are split
apart and the angels sent down in streams [25]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 25)

Previously they had asked Allah *Glorified is He* to send them down some angels, and here the angels come down to them as they wished; only this time it was against their demands and thus they were in despair.

The sky is that preserved raised-up canopy that is erected above us, and which, when we look up at it, we see no gaps or fissures. Look up at the sky when it is clear and you will see that it is totally smooth without a single bulge. Despite its wide expanse with no support, you will see no crookedness therein.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* calls on you to look and reflect. He *Glorified is He* says, ‘We will never deceive you - just look at the sky and reflect': 'Then return [your] vision twice again. [Your] vision will return to you humbled while it is fatigued.' (*al-Mulk:* 4) The sky which you see above you so strongly and firmly held together is held in place above you by none other than Allah. It is like when He *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him.' (*Fatir:* 41) He *Glorified is He* says: 'And He restrains the sky from falling upon the earth, unless by His permission.' (*al-Hajj:* 65) So, there is permission for the sky to fall upon the earth and for it to be split open and changed, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: '[His promise will be fulfilled] on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens.' (*Ibrahim:* 48)

He *Glorified is He* says about the sky splitting open in the Hereafter: 'When the sky is split asunder, obeying its Lord, as in truth it must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2) Here, He *Glorified is He* says: 'And [mention] the Day when the heaven will split open with [emerging] clouds.' It will crack open and clouds will descend upon the earth out of its cracks. Clouds are also mentioned in Allah's words: 'Do they await but that Allah should come to them in covers of clouds and the angels [as well].' (*al-Baqara:* 210)

As for Allah's words: '…and the angels will be sent down in successive descent' (*al-Furqan:* 25), they indicate the power with which they descend to carry out their task of separating things on the occasion of the Resurrection.

ٱلۡمُلۡكُ يَوۡمَئِذٍ ٱلۡحَقُّ لِلرَّحۡمَٰنِۚ وَكَانَ يَوۡمًا عَلَى ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَسِيرٗا ﴿٢٦﴾

On that Day, true authority belongs to the Lord of
Mercy. It will be a grievous Day for the disbelievers [26]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 26)

This world is set up in such a way that Allah *Glorified is He* grants some of His creation sovereignty over other parts of His creation, as He says: 'Say, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will."' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) Owner of sovereignty is that you possess or have power over those who themselves have possessions, and that is something that Allah *Glorified is He* only grants to those whom He *Glorified is He* wills from within His own kingdom; like when He *Glorified is He* granted it to the one who argued with Abraham *peace be upon him*: 'Have you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship?" (*al-Baqara:* 258)

This is the way things are in this world. As for the Hereafter, there is no ownership or kingship for anyone. They have been taken away from everyone on that Day, as sovereignty and kingship belong to Allah *Glorified is He* alone: 'To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? It belongs to Allah, the One, the Prevailing.' (*Ghafir:* 16)

So, the sovereignty that you possess in this world is a sovereignty that is not permanent or lasting, for it is all too quickly taken away from you. Once, a man said to the Caliph, ‘If sovereignty were to have been granted on a permanent basis to another than you, you would never have got your hands on it yourself.’ Sovereignty is not something that is inherently yours. No, your sovereignty falls totally within the sovereignty of Allah, the One to whom sovereignty belongs. His is the true sovereignty, for it is permanent and lasting, never fading and never being transferred to another.

Even if kingship in this world is transferred from one person to another, all kingships and sovereignty is concentrated together in the hand of the True Lord *Glorified is He* on the Day of Resurrection. The concentration of kingship and power in a single person is something that is abhorrent to us in this world, since we all dislike monopolies and dictatorships which place all the power in the hands of a single individual.

But even if such a thing is disliked in this world, it is praiseworthy with respect to Allah because when it is concentrated in the hands of a single person in this world, that person is controlled by his whims and desires, whereas, in the Hereafter, it is in the hands of Allah.

Mercy in this world is when sovereignty and power are divided up, while mercy in the Hereafter is when they are concentrated together into the hands of Allah: 'True sovereignty that Day, is for the Most Merciful.' All sovereignty being concentrated in Allah *Glorified is He* is one of the main ways in which His Mercy to us is made manifest, so do not take that as being an example of monopoly or tyranny, for it is in the hand of the Most Merciful.

It is as if the True Lord is seeking to set your mind at rest: ‘Do not worry,’ He says, ‘On the Day of Resurrection, sovereignty will not be in the hands of anyone whose power you fear to be under. Rather, sovereignty on that day will be the right of the Most Merciful.’

It is something permanent and never changes, and as long as it remains constant and does not change, it can never be conflicting or contradictory. If a man were to tell you about something that happened in his life and you were to ask him to repeat it to you, he would repeat it to you a thousand times without changing his story in any way. Why? That is because his words are guided by the realities that he has witnessed. But if he were to be lying, then there would be nothing to guide his words, and it is inevitable that his story would change from one telling to another. And that is why it is said, ‘If you are going to lie, then make sure your memory is good.’

Additionally, on account of His being the Most Merciful, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And it will be upon the disbelievers a difficult Day.' He is thereby alerting us to the danger before it has befallen us. The fact that our Lord advises us and sets us right is a great mercy for us, since if He had not done so, it would have been very difficult for us when the punishment took us by surprise.

Then if you remember the reverse, you will say that it is easy on the believers. My dear fellow, aspire to be one of those for whom things are made easy and not one of those for whom things are made distressful and difficult.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَوْمَ يَعَضُّ ٱلظَّالِمُ عَلَىٰ يَدَيْهِ يَقُولُ يَٰلَيْتَنِي ٱتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ ٱلرَّسُولِ سَبِيلٗا ٢٧

On that Day the evildoer will bite his own hand and say,
‘If only I had taken the same path as the Messenger[27]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 27)

There are a number of days which these verses mention: '[The day they see the angels - no good tidings will there be that day for the criminals,' and '… [mention] the Day when the heaven will split open with [emerging] clouds,' and 'True sovereignty, that Day, is for the Most Merciful,' and '…the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands.' They are all describing the same day - the Day of Resurrection.

A wrongdoer is one who takes what rightfully belongs to another. The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies for us what this evildoing is when He *Glorified is He* says: 'And they wronged Us not - but they were [only] wronging themselves.' (*al-Baqara:* 57)

They are unable to harm or do evil against Allah *Glorified is He* or against the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The word of Allah *Glorified is He* and His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will always be uppermost, and the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* will in the end be victorious. But despite that, Allah *Glorified is He* takes them to task for doing evil against themselves. What a tolerant God, doing that with those who disobey Him!

Even when disbelievers on the surface do evil to others, they are in fact doing evil to themselves since they place themselves in a position of responsibility for those evil acts they perpetrate. So, if mankind were to investigate evildoing, they would find that it always falls back on the wrongdoer himself. When a wrongdoer sees what the consequences of his evildoing will be, and sees first-hand the recompense he will receive for doing what he did, he will bite his hands in regret and despair. There are different levels to biting, depending upon the level of fright that a person feels. In another part of the Quran, He *Glorified is He* says: '…but when they find themselves alone, they bite their fingers in rage against you.' (*Al-'Imran:* 119)

Biting fingers in frustration or rage is something that people are known to do when they find themselves in places in which it is difficult for them to move around. People bite their fingers in a manner that is appropriate to the place or appropriate to the event that has befallen them. If what has happened to them is more serious than that, then it is more appropriate for him to bite his entire hand and not just his fingers, and if it is more serious still, then he bites both hands together; and that is what happens in the verse before us: 'And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands.' The position in which they find themselves in this verse is one of despair and regret for opportunities they let slip and will never see again, sins they committed and will never be able to be set right. They punish themselves before the punishment has even come upon them. They bite both their hands together. The thing they have seen is terrifying in the extreme, and so they bite both their hands, and the only ones who punish themselves in a way such as this are those who despair of ever being saved.

Then He *Glorified is He* clarifies the reason for that: '…he will say, "Oh, I wish I had taken with the Messenger a way."' Even though this verse was revealed about a particular event and a particular person, it still applies to everyone who does that. Hence, consideration is paid to the general way in which it is worded and not the specific reason for which it is revealed. This is the recompense that every wrongdoer who strays from the right path receives.

This verse was revealed about an event that concerned two people(1): ‘Uqba ibn Abu Mu‘it(2), who was a generous man – who used to feed people – and who had, on more than one occasion, invited the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to eat with him, although the Prophet had declined and said, ‘I cannot come and eat with you until you bear witness that there is no god [worthy of worship] but Allah *Glorified is He* and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’ Then, after the man had borne witness to the two articles of faith, the Messenger of Allah visited him and ate his food. That angered Umayya ibn Khalaf, one of the companions of ‘Uqba, greatly and so he said to him, ‘You have turned, ‘Uqba!’ ‘*Uqba* replied, ‘I only said that because I wanted Muhammad to eat at my house like everyone else does.’ So Umayya said, ‘Nothing will absolve you in my eyes until you go to Muhammad in the House of Assembly, step on his neck and spit on him, etc.’ So ‘Uqba did what his companion had told him to do(3) and that was when this verse was revealed. The 'way here means saying, ‘There is no god [worthy of worship] but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’

Then He says:

يَٰوَيْلَتَىٰ لَيْتَنِى لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا ﴿٢٨﴾

Woe is me! If only I had not taken so and so as a friend [28] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 28)

‘Woe’ means destruction, so he is calling for his own destruction here. People do not ask for their own destruction except when the punishment to which they are subjected is worse than being destroyed. It is like one of them said: Worse than illness is that which takes illness away. And also like what a poet said:

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi in Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 191). Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir (3/317), ‘Regardless of whether the reason the verse was revealed about ‘Uqba ibn Abi Mu‘it or some other wretched soul, it still applies to every wrongdoer.’*

(2) *The story of ‘Uqba ibn Abu Mu‘it's invitation to the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to eat with him after he pretended to be a Muslim.*

(3) Ad-Dahhak said, ‘When ‘Uqba spat in the face of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* his spit bounced back into his face and split into two parts each of which burnt one of his cheeks. And those burn marks remained with him until the day he died.’ Al-Wahidi narrated this in Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 192).

It is enough of a malady for you to see death as your only cure
and it is enough of a death that it is that which you wish for.(1)

Given that the matter was one that was greater than him and more than he could endure, he called out, ‘O woe is me, come to me, [death] - it is time for you to release me from the torment in which I find myself.’

As for the words: 'I wish,' it is asking for something desirable that there is no way of ever getting. It is like the unattainable wish expressed by a poet when he said:

I wish the planets were brought close to me so that I could arrange them
into a necklace of praise, for words alone do not suffice to praise you.

And by another when he said:

I wish that my youth could one day come back to me,
so that I might tell it what old age has done.

As for the word '*one*,' you use it to allude to a person whose name you do not want to mention. So here, ‘Uqba ibn Abu Mu‘it did not say, ‘I wish I had not taken Umayya ibn Khalaf as a friend, but rather said ‘so-and-so’ instead because he despised him so much that he could not even mention his name.

As for 'a friend,' its meaning is friendship that is mutual and requited. About this matter, a poet said:

When we met, longing made every effort to bring close
Two friends who have melted away with lovesickness and blame,
It is as if one friend, in the course of their embrace
were seeping into the cracks of the other and disappearing from sight.

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(1) This line is from the famous poem of Al-Mutanabbi (in his Diwan, 4/281). Shihab Ad-Din Mahmud Al-Halabi in his book, Husn At-Tawassul ila sana‘at At-Tarassul (252) in the section entitled Husn Al-Ibtida’at.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the reason for that saying:

لَّقَدۡ أَضَلَّنِي عَنِ ٱلذِّكۡرِ بَعۡدَ إِذۡ جَآءَنِيۗ وَكَانَ
ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ لِلۡإِنسَٰنِ خَذُولٗا ﴿٢٩﴾

He led me away from the Revelation after it reached me.
Satan has always betrayed mankind [29]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 29)

The meaning of 'deserter' is that someone forsakes you in some matter after first raising your hopes that he will be there for you. So, when the time comes that you are in need of him, he abandons you and leaves you to your own devices.

And that is exactly what Satan (Iblis) does to his friends, as has been mentioned in other verses, such as: '[The hypocrites are] like the example of Satan when he says to man, "Disbelieve." But when he disbelieves, he says, "Indeed, I am disassociated from you. Indeed, I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds."' (*al-Hashr:* 16) In another verse: 'And [remember] when Satan made their deeds pleasing to them and said, "No one can overcome you today from among the people, and indeed, I am your protector."' (*al-Anfal:* 48)

Furthermore, he says to his followers: 'It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine.' (*Ibrahim:* 22) Then, when they say to him you misguided us and led us astray, he replies: 'Yet I had no power at all over you.' (*Ibrahim:* 22) I had no proof with which I convinced you or any power to force or compel you to obey me. Rather, you were simply advised: 'I but called you – and you responded unto me.' (*Ibrahim:* 22) Then the True Lord says about his Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

وَقَالَ ٱلرَّسُولُ يَٰرَبِّ إِنَّ قَوۡمِي ٱتَّخَذُواْ هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ مَهۡجُورٗا ﴿٣٠﴾

And The Messenger has said, ‘Lord, my people
treat this Quran as something to be shunned’ [30]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 30)

The *(people)* of a person are his family, close relatives and those who live with him and gather with him, either with respect to place or with respect to religion. They are called '*people*' because they are the ones who stand together to command things. In Allah's words: '…my people have taken this Quran as [a thing] abandoned,' He *Glorified is He* used the possessive pronoun in 'my people' because he is from them - they know him and know where he comes from, and were witness to his truthfulness, honesty and good character before he received his mission. Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not strange or unidentified to his people. Even if they are not prepared to believe in him as a Messenger, they should, as knowing his prior history, have faith in him as a model of good character.

Accordingly, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* did not need a clue or a miracle confirming the prophethood of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Conversely, he merely believed in Muhammad's Messengership once he proclaimed it. Abu Bakr admitted that as long as Muhammad proclaimed Messengership, so he told the truth. This credibility was not due to any miracle, but rather, because of his good character and sublime traits. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has never been encountered lying to any creation ever before; hence, he would never lie about the Creator.

Likewise, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* did not wait for a clue to prove his prophethood. On the contrary, just as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proclaimed prophethood is just as she supported and believed him. Additionally, she allayed his fears and said: 'By Allah, He *the Exalted* will never desert you, for you maintain your ties of kinship, bear others' burdens(1) and help the destitute.'(2)

'... Be shunned ...' (*al-Furqan:* 30) means that the disbelievers cut the ties that linked them to the Quran. Thus, they cut themselves off from the Quran and from Muhammad's Message, as they denied and disobeyed all certain proofs related to matters of belief and to Divine rulings. Therefore, they rejected the Quran with respect to all these matters: doctrines of belief, acts of worship and verification of the prophecy of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *'Bear other's burdens' means to help those who are weighed down, by giving money to the weak, the orphan or to dependants. It is cited in an-Nawawi's commentary on Muslim (2/561) and Fath Al-Bari of Al-Asqalani (1/24)*

(2) *The Hadith is narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (3) and in six other places of his Sahih; as well as in Sahih Muslim (160), excerpted from the Hadith of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her.*

If the Arabs had truly understood Allah’s words: ‘For it is a reminder for you and your people...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 44), they would have glorified the Quran and held fast to it. It is the Quran that has unified them, protected their Arabic language, and built up their reputation worldwide. But for the unifying language of the Quran, every Arabic country would have made its own particular national dialect to be a different language, and the Arabic language would have disappeared completely.

It is noticed that various peoples all over the Arabic nation speak in their own incomprehensible particular dialect. But for the unifying classical Arabic, the language of the Quran that linked all these dialects together, each of them would have segregated to a separate language, such as what has happened with the old Latin language that developed later on into French, Italian, Deutsch and English. Despite the fact that they all originated from a single language, each has its specific and distinctive rules since they had no Divine Book to unify them together.

For that reason, Allah *the Almighty* alerts the Arabs that the Quran is the source of might, honour and renown that will build up their fame and reputation. But without it, Arabs would have faded into obscurity just like all preceding unidentified nations and civilisations.

Consequently, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘If you believe in my Message, then you will be rewarded both in this world and in the Hereafter, but if you deny it, then I will wait patiently until Allah *Glorified is He* judges between us’.(1)

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلۡنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوّٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ هَادِيٗا وَنَصِيرٗا ﴿٣١﴾

But We have always appointed adversaries from the wicked, for every prophet: Your Lord is sufficient guide and helper [31] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 31)

If messengers did not have enemies, they would not have been dispatched; if everyone was expected to believe in the messengers from the very beginning, then why would they have been sent? Messengers were not dispatched except when corruption and depravity engulfed and pervaded the society, just as physicians who do not come except when illness or disease has struck the patient.

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(1) *This is mentioned by Ibn Hisham in As-Sira An-Nabawiya (1/296), excerpted from the speech of the delegation of the disbelievers of Quraysh to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.*

The people of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had enjoyed dominance and high social standing, but Islam came to make them equal to other brackets of the society and took away the supremacy that they enjoyed. Thus, it was inevitable for them to adopt the hostile attitude towards this religion. This habitual hostility continued as long as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was living among them. Actually, hostilities towards prophets were regularly familiar; there has not been a dispatched prophet without enemies, even though all previous prophets, save Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were sent to a particular people for a limited period of time, whereas the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is universal, in terms of both time and place. Accordingly, hostility towards him corresponded to the prevalence and universality of his Message in both place and time, from then until the Day of Resurrection. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was equipped to be psychologically prepared to face that.

The Arabic singular word *'aduww* is used to refer to one, two or even many adversaries, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* quotes the words of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'Verily, these [false deities] are my *'aduww* (enemies); not so the Lord of the Worlds' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77).

Allah *the Exalted* also says in chapter of *al-Kahf*: '... Are you [people] going to take him and his ospring as your masters instead of Me, even though they are your *'aduww* (enemies)?…' (*al-Kahf:* 50) In both these verses, Allah *the Almighty* uses the singular form *'aduww'* referring to the plural meaning of 'enemies' instead of the Arabic plural form *a'daa'*.

In other verses, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the plural form *a'daa'*, such as: '... Remember Allah's favour to you: you were *a'daa'* (enemies) and then He brought your hearts together…' (*Al-'Imran:* 103) If this issue simply refers to a linguistic rule, then Allah *Glorified is He* would have used the singular form *'aduww* in all the verses. In the last verse, why does the Arabic transcript of the Quran turn aside from using the singular form in favour of the plural one?

If the hostility represents one particular type of enmity, then the Arabic singular form *'aduww* is used for one, two or even many enemies. However, if there are a number of different types of hostility such as if a person displays enmity against someone else on account of his nobility, another on account of his knowledge and a third on account of his wealth, then the Arabic plural form *a'daa'* is used in order to indicate the different causes of the enmity. To sum up, concerning matters related to belief or certainty in Allah *Glorified is He* the enmity of the disbelievers is of one particular type; however, in matters related to this world, there are various types of hostilities where each person could be an adversary for whatever reason contravening his whim.

Considering the verse: '... Whether you eat in your own houses, or those of your fathers, your mothers… or [the house] of your friend…' (*an-Nur:* 61), it is noted that everything is in the plural form except for the word 'friend,' which is singular. The friendship between believers should only be for the sake of one reference, i.e. for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He*.

As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whoever embodies the following three qualities will have the sweetness (delight) of faith: that Allah *Glorified is He* and His Messenger are more beloved to him than everything else, that his love for other persons be solely for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* and that he would hate to return to disbelief as much as he would hate to be thrown into the Fire'.(1) Accordingly, if all your friends love you for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* then they are all considered one friend.

Afterwards, Allah mentions the obstinacy of the adversaries of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who regard this Quran as something that should be discarded and who adopt an attitude of stubbornness, offensiveness and scorn towards him.

In the verse under discussion, Allah refers to the wicked adversaries, i.e. those who commit sins, such as acts of disobedience and wrong actions. He *the Almighty* only discloses to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that his enemies are wicked and are great in number, to be spiritually prepared to face them and to bear their abuse. This resembles the immunisations administered for people to counter diseases.

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(1) *The Hadith is narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari (16), as well as in Sahih Muslim (43). Both of them transmitted it in their respective Book of Iman (Faith) from the Hadith narrated by Anas ibn Malik.*

It is Just as Churchill, the British leader, who governed during the Second World War, used to exaggerate and overemphasise threats posed against his troops to spiritually prepare them to be able to face any probable severe hardships so that whatever difficulties came their way, they were anticipating greater difficulties to come, so that they were always ready.

As for Allah's saying: '... Your Lord is sufficient guide and helper' (*al-Furqan:* 31), it means that He *the Almighty* is going to guide the Prophet to the Right Path through which he will gain victory over all these wicked people. It was aforementioned that when Al-Faruq 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* heard Allah's verse: 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee' (*al-Qamar:* 45), he exclaimed, 'What forces are these?' In fact, he was amazed how they would be able to defeat the disbelievers though they were not even able to defend themselves so that they were always armed with weapons even during sleep, fearing from any enemy who might come and snatch them away. As the Battle of Badr took place, the disbelievers were defeated and their leaders were killed, 'Umar said, 'Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the truth': 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee' (*al-Qamar:* 45).(1)

This only happened as Allah *Glorified is He* guides his Prophet towards the means for victory. Allah grants victory by means of something, and also by its opposite. When the most ferocious, disbelieving leaders, the rich and the powerful people of Quraysh, gathered at Badr, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Mecca has sent you its flesh and blood (best beloved sons)!'(2)

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(1) *It is narrated in Tafsir Ibn Kathir on the authority of Ibn Abu Hatim (4/266) that 'Ikrima said, 'When 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee' (al-Qamar: 45), was revealed, 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, "What forces are these!" Then 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, "Then, on the day of the Battle of Badr, I saw the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him leap into his armour and say, "Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee" (al-Qamar: 45), and it was only then that I understood the meaning of that verse.'*

(2) *It is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (3/43), and mentioned by Ibn Hisham in As-Sira An-Nabawiya (2/617) on the authority of 'Urwa ibn Az-Zubayr.*

All disbelievers went out in full readiness for war, whereas the believers were weak, few in number and ill equipped; however, Allah *Glorified is He* granted them victory. Allah *the Almighty* reassured Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers: '… How often a small force has defeated a large army with Allah's permission!' (*al-Baqara:* 249) Moreover, He says: 'And the ones who support Our cause will be the winners!' (*as-Saffat:* 173) He also says: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) That is Allah gradually decreases the area of disbelief and increases that of belief on earth. He *the Almighty* tells about matters that require real-life events to take place, and then their occurrences serve to confirm these matters.

Successively, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ ٱلْقُرْءَانُ جُمْلَةً وَٰحِدَةً ۚ
كَذَٰلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِۦ فُؤَادَكَ ۖ وَرَتَّلْنَٰهُ تَرْتِيلًا ﴿٣٢﴾

The disbelievers also say, 'Why was the Quran not sent down to him all at once?' We sent it in this way to strengthen your heart [Prophet]; We gave it to you in gradual revelation [32]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 32)

This is another fallacious pretext for their disbelief; however, how could they ask for all of the Quran to be sent down in one go, while they were unable to even produce a single verse? This simply referred to their quarrelsomeness, sophistry and complete lack of evidence that caused them to object to the Quran being sent down in gradual revelation.(1)

Consequently, they did not have any objections to the Quran *per se*. The only defect of the Quran was that it had been sent down specifically to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that it had been revealed sporadically. They assumed that their belief could bear the Quran having been sent down in a single go!

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(1) *'In gradual revelation' means that it was revealed in separate individual parts, verse by verse, according to the events and the reasons of revelation of each verse. Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir (3/318), 'An-Nasa'i narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him "The Quran was sent down all in one go to the Nearest Heaven on the Night of Glory. Then it was sent down gradually after that, over the course of twenty years."'*

As Allah *the Exalted* says: '... In this way...' (*al-Furqan:* 32); He sent it down in this manner in parts according to circumstances and due to the wisdom mentioned in the same verse: '... To strengthen your heart [Prophet] thereby...' (*al-Furqan:* 32). In the course of 23 years, the more the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be subjected to various aggravated situations, the more parts of the Quran were sent down to console and strengthen him. This gradual revelation represented a continuous uninterrupted connection between the Prophet Muhammad and the Heaven. If the Quran were to have been sent down in one single go, then the Prophet Muhammad would have only been supported and reassured once, regardless of all other traumatic events affecting him and without any further strengthening accompanying them. Undoubtedly, the connection to the Heaven reinforces the Message and strengthens faith.

Furthermore, if the Quran were to have been sent down in one single go, then it could not have been able to answer their unceasing inquiries about various matters mentioned in the Quran. Hence, its gradual revelation was necessitated by the wisdom of Allah *the Almighty* in supporting the Prophet Muhammad in all hard times.

As for Allah's saying: '... We gave it to you in gradual revelation' (*al-Furqan:* 32), it means that the Quran is sent down gradually in parts; each part corresponds to a particular event. Whenever a revealed part was sent down, people were able to memorise and rehearse the part in the prayer.

وَلَا يَأۡتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئۡنَٰكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَأَحۡسَنَ تَفۡسِيرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

They cannot put any argument to you without Our
bringing you the truth and the best explanation [33]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 33)

'Argument' is their inconceivable presumptions mentioned in Allah's saying: '… Why was the Quran not sent down to him all at once? …' (*al-Furqan:* 32) As well, their words quoted in the Quran: '… Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Thus, the 'argument' is the implausible things that the disbelievers ask for. If Allah *Glorified is He* were to have answered their requests, they would have denied and repudiated their own words, just as Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Jews: 'The foolish people will say, "What has turned them away from the prayer direction they used to face?"…' (*al-Baqara:* 142) Notwithstanding, they said the same as the Quran mentioned them as having said. Was there not any disbeliever who pays attention to the mention of his people in the Quran to warn them not to utter the same saying to put Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in an embarrassing situation? Thereby, but for their inattentiveness to the mention of their same-uttered words in the Quran, they could have alleged that the Quran is telling lies and this could have enabled them to refute its truthfulness.

ٱلَّذِينَ يُحۡشَرُونَ عَلَىٰ وُجُوهِهِمۡ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ شَرّٞ مَّكَانٗا وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلٗا ﴿٣٤﴾

It is those driven [falling], on their faces, to Hell who
will be in the worst place – they are the furthest from
the right path [34] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 34)

The pronoun 'those' refers collectively to a group of well-known persons who took up the position of enmity against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Among them was the person who previously said: '… "If only I had taken the same path as the Messenger. Woe is me! If only I had not taken so and so as a friend"' (*al-Furqan:* 27-28).

The word 'driven' refers to the people who are to be gathered for reckoning upon their faces. Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked as this verse was revealed, 'How can they walk on their faces?' The Messenger replied, 'The One Who empowers them to walk on their feet, makes them walk on their faces'.(1)

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(1) *It was narrated by Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him that a man said, 'O Prophet, will Allah gather (drive) the disbelievers on their faces on the Day of Resurrection?' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'Is not Allah, He who makes them walk on their feet in this world able to make them walk on their faces on the Day of Resurrection?' (Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [4760 & 6523] as well as by Muslim in his Sahih [2806] in Kitab Sifat Al-Munafiqin.)*

The person who walks on his face is just like the one who walks on his belly. Conceivably, he is being dragged along, whether on his face or on any other part of his body. However, in any case, it is improper for anyone to ask about matters related to Allah's Absolute Power. Allah *the Almighty* clarifies this in His saying: 'And Allah created each animal out of [its own] fluid: some of them crawl on their bellies, some walk on two legs, and some on four. Allah creates whatever He will; Allah has power over everything.' (*an-Nur:* 45)

Subsequently, the movement of creation is not limited to the known concept of walking on foot, but rather, it depends on Allah's Limitless and Absolute Power over everything.

Elsewhere, it is asked why the Quran does not mention the names of those wrongdoers hostile to Islam. The opponent is given free reins to have his full choice. The Arabic word for 'reins' has two meanings according to the diacritical mark on the first letter: it either refers to the clouds in the sky or the reins of the horse.

By loosening the reins of the horse, the horse rider enables it to choose whichever direction it wants. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* gives the opponents free reins to express their thoughts freely and to be attracted to their viewpoints willingly. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has taught His Messenger how to discuss with them calmly and in the kindest way. As they alleged that he was a liar and that the Quran was fabricated and made-up, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Or do they say, "He has devised it?" Say, "Then produce a chapter like it"...' (*Yunus:* 38).

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* goes on with arguments against them: 'If [these disbelievers] say, "He has made this up," say [Muhammad], "If I have made this up, I am responsible for my own crime, but I am innocent of the crimes you commit."' (*Hud:* 35) Additionally, He *the Exalted* says: '… [One party of us] must be rightly guided and the other clearly astray.' (*Saba':* 24)

Did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not know which party was guided from those who were in misguidance? Unquestionably, he loosens the reins for his opponents. In such verse, he was telling them that they are diametrically opposed to him, as he speaks about one deity, whereas they deny this. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them that they were at odds in this matter, while truth has only one face, so either he is or they are rightly guided, where he did not claim truth for himself. So, they are required to exercise their intellects to distinguish which of them is rightly guided and which is astray. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not have left the judgement to them unless he was confident that they would know for certain that he was on the side of truth, if they got rid of their personal whims and caprices. Thus, despite the fact that the disbelievers of Quraysh stubbornly opposed and subjected Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to all sorts of abuses, the Quran only refers to them in general terms, using the word 'those' and abandoned alerting them from punishment. Thereby, this demonstrates the courteousness of the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to them. This is a way of winning the affection of the opponents and cutting away any grounds for being quarrelsome or obstinate.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* addresses His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'By an act of Mercy from Allah, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them…' (*Al-'Imran:* 159). Allah tells the Prophet Muhammad that his gentleness with them was not merely an outcome of his innate character because their stubborn obstinacy and mistreatment would have made his kind nature turn hard against them. However, this kindness was due to the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* that encompassed and made him tolerant with them: '... Had you been harsh and fierce of heart, they would have dispersed from about you...' (*Al-'Imran:* 159).

This means that any preacher calling others to Allah *Glorified is He* should be both openhearted and patient because he turns disbelievers away from their accustomed misguidance to the faith that they hate. Thus, he can never succeed in enticing them by an unpleasant aggressive manner because he, consequently, brings down upon them two hardships at the same time. Nevertheless, he should treat them kindly, just as Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*, to call the Pharaoh to the Right Path: 'Speak to him gently so that he may take heed, or show respect.' (*Ta Ha:* 44) The deeply entrenched stubborn and obstinate person, who not only sees himself as being greater than his fellow creatures, but also claims divinity and considers himself as being greater than the Creator, should be tackled in a gentle and kind manner.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* teaches His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the technique to argue with the disbelievers. He *the Exalted* says: ‘Say, “You will not be questioned about our sins”...’ (*Saba’:* 25). It is inconceivable that the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* would commit a sin! Moreover, Allah quotes the Prophet Muhammad’s saying: ‘...Nor will we be questioned about what you do,’ (*Saba’:* 25) though the logical progression of the argument required him to say, ‘Nor shall we be questioned about the sins you committed.’ But instead, he ascribed the act of committing sins exclusively to himself alone, without ascribing it to the disbelievers. There is no greater kindliness or gentleness attracting the sympathy of others than this.

Allah *the Almighty* brings up all these matters in order to prove that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spared no effort in trying to guide his people to faith and to believe in Allah. Indeed, he was so concerned about them that he shouldered a heavier burden than that imposed on him by Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘But [Prophet] are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this message?’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) Moreover, Allah poses a similar question on His Messenger: ‘[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe?’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 3) It means that the Prophet Muhammad is completely exhausting himself in his attempts to guide the disbelievers, whereas his only task is to deliver the Message. Allah says this because He witnesses the huge concern and the intense desire of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* towards his people to be guided. Allah says: ‘... It is those… Who will be in the worst place— they are the furthest from the right path.’ (*al-Furqan:* 34) He *the Almighty* says ‘worst place’ rather than the comparative form, ‘more evil place’ to refute any connotation that the other side also had some evil. Moreover, this is another example of giving the opponent free reins.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* relates the stories of the previous peoples:

وَلَقَدۡ ءَاتَيۡنَا مُوسَى ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَجَعَلۡنَا مَعَهُۥٓ أَخَاهُ هَٰرُونَ وَزِيرٗا ٣٥

We gave Moses the Book and appointed his brother Aaron to help him[35] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 35)

As previously mentioned in Allah's saying: 'But We have always appointed adversaries from the wicked, for every prophet…' (*al-Furqan:* 31). Every prophet should have enemies. This refers to the fact that they came to maintain the balance of high moral standards that had been ferociously disturbed by the wicked autocrats and the corrupted vicious people who would be deprived from the fruits of their immorality. Accordingly, they were expected to stand up against the call of their prophets.

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* in the verse under discussion illustrates examples from the lives of previous messengers to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This verse infers that Allah *the Almighty* soothes and asks Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to endure appalling hardships in the course of his call to the disbelievers who deny the presence of a deity, whereas Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in his call to Allah, was hurt by people who fabricated that he himself is a deity. Therefore, Allah notifies Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that there are other prophets who have suffered greater hardships in the course of their call to the extent that made Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* despite being a Prophet and a Messenger, felt that it was so difficult for him to carry out his mission on his own.

In view of that, he says: 'My brother Harun (Aaron) is more eloquent than I: send him with me to help me and confirm my words…' (*al-Qasas:* 34). This means that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew the appalling hardship and the onerous task with which he was charged.

In all previous Messages, messengers were sent to a definite people for a limited time, yet they encountered all sorts of hardships. As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who has been sent with a universal, everlasting, and unlimited Message, it is inevitable that the hardships faced will be equal to all those adversities of previous messengers put together.

فَقُلْنَا ٱذْهَبَآ إِلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا فَدَمَّرْنَٰهُمْ تَدْمِيرًا ﴿٣٦﴾

We said, ‘Go, both of you, to the people who have rejected
Our signs.’ Later We destroyed those people utterly [36]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 36)

The two persons addressed by Allah in this verse are; Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. In continuing the strategy of giving the opponents free reins, Allah *the Exalted* sends them both: ‘... To the people who have rejected Our signs’ (*al-Furqan:* 36) in spite of the presence of someone among them who claimed divinity for himself. The Pharaoh rejected Allah’s signs because he disbelieved in a single deity.The conclusion of the verse: ‘...Later We destroyed those people utterly’ (*al-Furqan:* 36) relates their unpleasant end due to the enmity against Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. Thus, a battle took place between them where Allah *the Almighty* helped the believers and destroyed the disbelievers utterly. Allah *the Almighty* is soothing and telling Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that if they swerve aside from the Right Path and disobey him, then their end will be the same as this one.

وَقَوْمَ نُوحٍ لَّمَّا كَذَّبُوا۟ ٱلرُّسُلَ أَغْرَقْنَٰهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَٰهُمْ
لِلنَّاسِ ءَايَةً ۖ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿٣٧﴾

The people of Noah, too: when they rejected their messengers,
We drowned them and made them an example to all people.
We have prepared a painful torment for the evildoers [37]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 37)

Allah *the Almighty* mentions Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* after Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* because both of them have something distinctive in their call and both endured many forms of hardships. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came into confrontation with the Pharaoh who claimed divinity, whereas Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* ruled all existing people on the earth for a broad expanse of time. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was sent to all mankind; but rather, he ruled his people who exclusively lived on the earth at that time, where he lived among them for 950 years.

In the chapter of Nuh, the insurmountable difficulties faced by Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* were shown. Despite his call for his people during all that long period of time, only a few believed in him; however, in the end, victory was his.

There was also a distinctive issue related to filiation, both in terms of legitimate ancestry and of the path of guidance. The biological son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was an obstinate disbeliever. Accordingly, he beseeched Allah to rescue his son: '... My son was one of my family...' (*Hud:* 45), while Allah rejected his request saying: '... Nuh (Noah), he was not one of your family...' (*Hud:* 46). He *the Almighty* reasoned His rejection: '... What he did was not right...' (*Hud:* 46). So, Allah teaches him that ancestry is based on righteous deeds and obedience, rather than biological lineage. Hence, the real son of the prophet is the one who follows his path, even if he is not of his blood.

Additionally, it is noticed that Allah *Glorified is He* as He seeks to console Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned Prophets Musa (Moses) and Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them* together because they shared the same manifestation of a global phenomenon calling for reflection and contemplation. If people rationally, unhurriedly and definitively give heed to every existing global phenomenon, they would be able to discover things enriching their lives and bringing them happiness and luxury. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* reproaches those people who refrain from contemplating in His Signs, saying: 'And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to.' (*Yusuf:* 105)

As previously mentioned, all inventions bringing comfort and happiness to people's lives, lessening workloads and shortening working hours, have only come about as a result of people's reflection upon Allah's existing signs such as the invention of the wheel or the steam engine, etc.

Thus, the connection that links Musa (Moses) to Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them* is that Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed and saved their respective peoples by the same existing substance, i.e. water. As water is used to save Prophets Musa

(Moses) and Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them*, it drowned the Pharaoh and the disbelievers as well.

This distinction represents a way of consolation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When Allah *Glorified is He* sets His will to save people, He does, whereas if He *the Exalted* wills to destroy people, He does, even by the same substance.

The followers of Musa (Moses) faced the inescapable fact that they would be irrefutably caught when they saw the sea in front of them and the army of the Pharaoh approaching behind them. Allah states their saying: '… We shall definitely be caught...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). No one could possibly deny that; yet, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* refuted that they would never be overtaken. He assuredly rejected this because of his absolute confidence in Allah that He will never abandon him. As Allah says: 'Musa (Moses) said, "No, my Lord is with me: He will guide me."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62)

Likewise, the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* went around the same idea but used a different means, i.e. the ark. The concept of the ship or the ark had not existed before Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. No one has, by chance, ever contemplated upon this phenomenon of floating when he saw a tree thrown over the water surface and the reason that the tree does not just sink. Professional carpenters used to calculate the density of the wood by throwing it into water and measuring the immersed parts. By the means of this phenomenon, Archimedes constructed his theory of floating bodies and the fluid displaced by their immersed parts. The theory suggests that floating bodies are inversely proportional to their densities: if the density of an object increases, it gets heavier and sinks, but if its density decreases, it floats.

It is well noticed that when a metal coin is thrown into water, it sinks, but if it is flattened out to be much wider and thinner, then it would float despite its having the same mass. It is true that the mass of the coin is the same, but as the displaced amount of water in the second case is greater, it floats.

Allah *the Almighty* guides people to discover such phenomenon and to make ships that will carry them across water, since three quarters of the entire globe is made up of water. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has provided mankind with a means to travel across three quarters of the earth just as they travelled across the dry land quarter, thereby extracting the resources of the sea just as they extract the resources of the land.

Reflecting on Allah's saying: 'The people of Nuh (Noah), too: when they rejected their messengers…' (*al-Furqan:* 37), it is well-known that they only denied their Messenger Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* not all Messengers, so why does Allah *Glorified is He* use the plural form? It is recognised that prophethood does not bring mutually contradictory matters, but only consistent and congruous things. Therefore, the rejection of one messenger is the same as that of all.

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* mentions their penalty: '... We drowned them and made them an example to all people...' (*al-Furqan:* 37). This means that Allah led the disbelievers to drown and, also, saved the believers. This drowning was the first penalty of the disbelievers for ridiculing Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as he was building the ark. Allah says in this concern: '… And whenever leaders of his people passed by, they laughed at him. He said, "You may scorn us now, but we will come to scorn you."' (*Hud:* 38)

But drowning was not the final stage of their penalty, but rather, it was the first. There is also the punishment that awaits them in the Hereafter: '... We have prepared a painful torment for the evildoers.' (*al-Furqan:* 37) Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* punishes them by combining drowning in this world and burning in the Hereafter.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* illustrates another example for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

وَعَادًا وَثَمُودَاْ وَأَصْحَٰبَ ٱلرَّسِّ وَقُرُونًۢا بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٣٨﴾

As We did for the people of 'Ad, Thamud, and al-Rass, and many generations in between [38] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 38)

These are various examples of the hardships that the previous Messengers had suffered from their peoples. Similar examples are mentioned elsewhere in the Quran, such as: 'To the people of 'Ad We sent their brother, Hud...' (*al-A'raf:* 65) and: 'To the people of Thamud We sent their brother, Salih...' (*al-A'raf:* 73).

In the end, Allah *Glorified is He* ensures victory for His followers and messengers, and leads defeat to their opponents. Allah reassures Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he is not divergent from other messengers. If his people are obstinate and disbelieving, then he should be sure that Allah *Glorified is He* will grant him victory as He *the Exalted* says: ‘Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers. It is they who will be helped, And the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

In this concern, Allah *Glorified is He* is not only talking about a historical event for the sake of documentation, but also for refining the human soul. If man seeks to be victorious, then he should be among the followers of Allah and carrying His flag. The believer will never be defeated unless he fails to fulfil the conditions of serving within His army. It should be noticed that the most important criteria for serving are obedience and self-discipline. If he is ever defeated in a battle, then he should look out for which condition has been breached.

Therefore, the cause of the defeat of the Muslims at the Battle of Uhud is that the Muslim archers went against the commands of their leader, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.(1) If they were to have been victorious after going against the commands of the Messenger, they would have developed the concept that it was not necessary at all to submit to or to obey the commands of the Messenger. Accordingly, this is an actual proof that it is obligatory to obey his commands, to ever be held to the army of faith and to avoid the concept that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only teaches Muslims as long as he lives among them because he will not live among them forever.

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(1) *It is narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him appointed ‘Abd Allah ibn Jubair as the commander of the archers who were fifty (in number). The Messenger said to him, ‘Use your arrows to keep their cavalry away from us and prevent them from attacking us from behind. You must stay where you are regardless of whether the tide of battle is for us or against us so that we are not attacked from your direction.’ (Dala’il An-Nubuwwa 3/227). It is narrated in another version (3/229) that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘If you see the birds are snatching at us, do not move from this place of yours until I send for you and if you see that we defeated the people (the enemy) and trod them down, do not move until I send for you. Allah then defeated them. He (narrator) said, ‘I swear by Allah, I saw women ascending the mountain. The companions of ‘Abd Allah bin Jubair said, “Booty, O People, booty! Your companions vanquished, for what are you waiting?” ‘Abd Allah bin Jubair said, “Have you forgotten what the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him had told you?” They said, “We swear by Allah. We shall come to the people and get the booty.” So they came to them. Their faces were turned and they came defeated.’*

Moving on to a further point of discussion, Ar-Rass, which is the well or the trench believed to be found in Al-Yamamah. It is also called *Al-Ukhdud* (the trench), as mentioned in the chapter of *al-Buruj*.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... And many generations in between…' (*al-Furqan:* 38). Allah *the Almighty* does not enumerate all previous nations, but rather mentions some of them. Elsewhere in the Quran, He *the Exalted* mentions them altogether: 'And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

After that, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَكُلًّا ضَرَبۡنَا لَهُ ٱلۡأَمۡثَٰلَۖ وَكُلًّا تَبَّرۡنَا تَتۡبِيرٗا ٣٩

To each of them We gave warnings, and each of them We destroyed completely [39] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 39)

Allah shows that there is no messenger left without being provided with lessons from what happened to other messengers before him. He *the Almighty* advises them to gain experience from the previous messengers who were rejected, opposed and fought by their peoples, but were finally granted victory over them. Allah *Glorified is He* tells every prophet with these experiences so that he would be able to have the necessary forbearance and energy to endure the hardships of delivering the Message and to refuse to surrender to the enemies or to fall into despair. Thereby, every prophet would certainly know that things will end up in his favour.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... And each of them We destroyed completely,' (*al-Furqan:* 39) i.e. Allah has destroyed and annihilated everyone who rejected His messengers in many different ways by inflicting all sorts of punishment upon them. Some were punished by means of the sudden blast, swallowed by the earth, drowned and others were struck by the furiously raging storm.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَلَقَدۡ أَتَوۡاْ عَلَى ٱلۡقَرۡيَةِ ٱلَّتِيٓ أُمۡطِرَتۡ مَطَرَ ٱلسَّوۡءِۚ أَفَلَمۡ يَكُونُواْ
يَرَوۡنَهَاۚ بَلۡ كَانُواْ لَا يَرۡجُونَ نُشُورٗا ٤٠

These disbelievers must have passed by the town that
was destroyed by the terrible rain — did they not see it?
Yet they do not expect to be raised from the dead [40]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 40)

These scenes are not merely a part of the history narrated in the Quran, but were also witnessed first-hand by the disbelievers of Quraysh who had passed by these dwellings in their summer journeys, as confirmed elsewhere in the Quran: ‘You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) So, the history narrated in the Quran is authenticated by the existing historical remains.

For example, Allah refers to Sodom, the town of the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* which was destroyed by the terrible rain: ‘... Did they not see it?…’ (*al-Furqan:* 40) He *the Exalted* asks the disbelievers if they have not seen it in the course of their travels.

Allah uses the word ‘yet’ as a digressive conjunction to negate what comes before and confirm what comes after: ‘... Yet they do not expect to be raised from the dead.’ (*al-Furqan:* 40) This means that they have certainly passed by and saw it, and that they know it well. However, they neither believed in the resurrection, nor acknowledged that they would stand before their Lord on the Day of Reckoning. Allah quotes their denial: ‘… “What? When we die and turn to dust and bones, shall we really be resurrected?”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 82)

It is quite amazing that those disbelievers had no belief in the Resurrection or the Reckoning, whereas, they themselves, at the Treaty of Al-Fudul, stood against and prevented the oppressor from suppressing others. They punished the oppressor until he renounced it and returned the rights to the suppressed. However, they should have reflected on the oppressors who died without ever being punished or retaliated against by Allah in this life. Is it not fair enough that there would be another life in the Hereafter where they would be reckoned and punished?

Hence, to refute the thesis of the socialists as they backed that there is no reckoning after death, they have punished their enemies among the landowners and the capitalists and have revenged themselves. But what about those who preceded them and lived before their time? Would it not be just for the socialists to acknowledge the existence of the Day of Reckoning where people will be gathered together and taken to task?

When someone alleged that no oppressor dies except after Allah *Glorified is He* takes revenge upon him, this is refuted by the fact that there are tyrants who died, whereas nothing happened to him. There is another abode after this one in which those who do good will be rewarded for their righteous deeds and those who do evil will be punished for their malicious deeds.

After giving Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a number of illustrated stances taken against the previous prophets to soothe him, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that those unbelievers will not only cease at being obstinate and bothersome with nonsensical demands; they will also go even further and will try to mock and ridicule him. Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَإِذَا رَأَوْكَ إِن يَتَّخِذُونَكَ إِلَّا هُزُوًا أَهَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى بَعَثَ ٱللَّهُ رَسُولًا ﴿٤١﴾

Whenever they see you [Prophet] they ridicule you:
‘Is this the one God has sent as a messenger? [41]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 41)

This means that they will not do anything except ridiculing you. Then the verse mentions their mockery words: ‘… “Is this the one Allah has sent as a messenger?”’ (*al-Furqan:* 41) Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah quotes their mockery: ‘… “Is this the one who talks about your gods?”…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 36) As long as they viewed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as being degraded, they asked for a dignified person to be a messenger, as mentioned in the Quran: ‘… “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) This means that they believed in the necessity of the existence of a deity, a messenger and a divine Message. Their only objection was against the character of Muhammad to reveal the Message.

Afterwards, they contradicted themselves, saying:

إِن كَادَ لَيُضِلُّنَا عَنْ ءَالِهَتِنَا لَوْلَآ أَن صَبَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا ۚ
وَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ حِينَ يَرَوْنَ ٱلْعَذَابَ مَنْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا ﴿٤٢﴾

He might almost have led us astray from our gods if we had not stood so firmly by them.' When they see the punishment, they will know who is furthest from the path [42] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 42)

Their views are self-contradictory. They ridicule the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as being too degraded to reveal the Message, meanwhile they claim that he might almost have led them astray from their gods except for their obstinacy and pig-headedness. This is an evidence and a testimony from them that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was strong and up to the task of delivering the Message and that he spared no effort in calling them to Allah, to the extent that he might almost have led them astray from their gods.

The biggest proof that they were frightened of the inspiring effect of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was their warning to their followers not to listen to the Quran: '… "Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk: you may gain the upper hand"' (*Fussilat:* 26). So, they wanted them to speak noisily during the recitation of the Quran because they knew perfectly well its effect on the person's soul. They were a people of eloquence and fine language, so if they heard the Quran, it would inevitably have affected their hearts and attracted them.

The story of the conversion of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* to Islam shows his previous cruelty and brutality. When the opportunity finally came his way, his listening to the Quran found in him a healthy nature and pure disposition. It brought him back from the brutal state that resulted in striking and wounding his sister to his good nature and senses. Accordingly, he rushed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and embraced Islam.

Therefore, their saying in this verse proves that Prophet Muhammad fulfilled the task for which he was sent and contradicts their mocking words.

Allah's saying: '... "If we had not stood so firmly by them"…' (*al-Furqan:* 42) shows that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did many righteous deeds that required them to stand against him steadfastly(1) by their misguidance. Allah's saying: '... When they see the punishment, they will know who is furthest from the path' (*al-Furqan:* 42) means that they will come to know their deviance from the Right Path, but too late when that knowledge would not benefit them anymore.

أَرَءَيْتَ مَنِ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَٰهَهُۥ هَوَىٰهُ أَفَأَنتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿٤٣﴾

Think [Prophet] of the man who has taken his own passion as a god: are you to be his guardian? [43]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 43)

Allah *the Almighty* clarifies to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the issue that Islam only came to protect people from their desires and whims. Every human obeys his own desires, so no one will ever obey others' desires. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the heavens, the earth, and everyone in them would disintegrate…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

People's desires differ due to the nature of life which requires desires to be different. As fields of life are numerous, everyone's desire is directed towards a different area according to his needs. If two intimate and lifelong friends want to buy something, they would have differing requirements. Actually, various desires serve one another; so, for example, various designers appeal to different tastes and desires of people. Thus, it is said, 'Differences preserve accordance, while accordance leads to difference.'

This saying is illustrated by the following example: two persons went into a restaurant and both wanted chicken legs, but there was only one left. Undoubtedly, their initial accordance of desires leads eventually to disagreement with one another. Whereas, if they initially have different desires, this will lead to agreement in the end–someone will take the chicken leg, while the other will have the chicken breast.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi said, (7/4911) 'In other words, "we stood so firmly to worshipping them."'*

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Think [Prophet] of the man who has taken his own passion as a god…’ (*al-Furqan:* 43). The word ‘passion’ is used when the truth is obvious, but still the person turns away, not due to ignorance, but in full knowledge.

Accordingly, men of knowledge say, ‘whim is the plague of the opinion.’ The man’s opinion might be correct, but ‘desire’ turns it away from the truth. For example, the disbeliever who used to travel around, as he found a new rock idol more beautiful than his rock that he used to worship, he threw away his old god, replaced it with the new one and made the latter his god. So, his desire for the beauty of the rock overcame and convinced him that it was a god.

Some Orientalists have raised objections against what Allah *Glorified is He* says about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘He does not speak from his own desire.’ (*an-Najm:* 3) They exclaimed how Allah *Glorified is He* decrees that His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not speak according to his own desire, while He *the Exalted* corrects him in many instances, such as: ‘Prophet, why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you in your desire?…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1) Moreover, Allah *the Exalted* also says: ‘Allah forgive you [Prophet]! Why did you give them permission to stay at home before it had become clear to you...?’ (*at-Tawba:* 43)

In response, the concept of ‘desire’ should first be broadly grasped. If there are two choices and truth is crystal-clear found in one of them, ‘desire’ takes the person in the direction of the other incorrect path. However, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke in this instance because there was no real-life matter about which he could know the truth. Definitely, he did not follow his desires; he simply arrived at a conclusion based on his intellectual discretion.

Referring to Allah’s saying to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with respect to his adoption of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him*: ‘Name your adopted sons after their real fathers: this is more equitable in Allah’s eyes…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 5). This does not mean that his action was inequitable but that Allah’s action was more equitable.

Allah *the Almighty* does not say that He did anything wrong, but rather, He describes his action as equitable. However, the Messenger's action was a human form of justice in reward to the feeling of Zayd towards the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he preferred him to his own family. Accordingly, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could not find better compensation than adopting him.

In Allah's saying: '... Are you to be his guardian?' (*al-Furqan:* 43) 'Guardian' is the person who is responsible for guiding the disbelievers to abandon desires and follow the truth instead. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'You are not there to control them [to believe]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 22). '... So can you [Prophet] compel people to believe?' (*Yunus:* 99) And: '...Your only duty is to deliver the message…' (*ash-Shura:* 48).

Hence, Allah tells the Messenger that it is impossible to compel someone who takes his desires as a god, to believe because desires are different. There is someone who might want to enjoy other people's rights, so he steals their money; however, he would not be happy if someone else did the same with him. Thus, the desires clash with each other, but which one of them will win out? The winner will be the person who is able to make judgements without being affected, either by his or by others' desires. The intrinsic truth can only come from Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ ۚ إِنْ
هُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ ۖ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا ﴿٤٤﴾

Do you think that most of them hear or understand?
They are just like cattle – no, they are further
from the path [44] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 44)

In this verse, 'hear' means listening with discernment and reflection. If they were to have listened and used their reason, things would never have come to such a pass: '... They are just like cattle...' (*al-Furqan:* 44). Despite the fact that cattle are subjugated, carry out their tasks without contradiction, yet, Allah *Glorified is He* likens the disbeliever to cattle because they are not asked to follow guidance as they have no choice. Whereas, the person who is asked to follow guidance is the one who has the choice. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* said, “Do you think that most of them listen or use logical reasoning?”

The words: ‘...most of them’ (*al-Furqan:* 44) indicate that some of them did listen and had reasonable minds. This concept is based on the law of probability, as many of the disbelievers of Quraysh who had previously declared themselves enemies of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* embraced Islam eventually with full sincerity. Therefore, some of these disbelievers, who are referred to in this verse, listened and contemplated what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said using logical reason. Allah *Glorified is He* uses the words: ‘...most of them’ (*al-Furqan:* 44) to protect this verse from any incorrectness and to pave the way for their future guidance to Islam. This is an example of the exactness and the scrutiny employed by the Quranic words in order to convey reality truthfully.

We have talked previously about the sorrow that the believers felt at missing the opportunity to seize one of the leaders of disbelief in battle. They did not realize that Allah’s Wisdom chose to preserve these enemies’ lives as they would become believers at a later date. Indeed one of those disbelievers was Khalid ibn al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with him* who eventually became the unsheathed sword of Allah *Glorified is He*.

We have previously mentioned that animals of livestock are subjugated creatures that have no free will and are not responsible for the issue of guidance. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* used them in a verse to teach a lesson to the Jewish people. Allah says in this verse that the likeness of a disbelieving scholar: ‘…is that of a mule that carries a load of books (but cannot benefit from them).’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 5) In this case, the only responsibility that the mule has is to carry these books. On the other hand, a believer’s responsibility is to carry the scriptures and, essentially, apply their commands. Mules are not required to do that. Animals do recognize their masters, know the type of food they can eat and where they can go to drink. They recognize the habitual paths to their home and the places they are given to spend the night. If a person dies on the back of his horse, the horse would still be able to carry that person home. Thus, these animals of livestock are able to understand and use reason within the framework of the responsibilities for which they were created. They also recognize the paths of religious guidance, but are not required to carry out any part of it, as Allah says: ‘Verily, We did offer the responsibility (of reason and volition) to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be transgressing and foolish.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

These non-responsible beings chose to be governed and controlled by their natural impulses. Thus, they were initially given the ability to choose, but made their choice at the very beginning of their existence. Take, for instance, the hoopoe bird that served Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. The hoopoe said to Prophet Sulaiman: ‘I have encompassed (with my knowledge) something that you have never yet encompassed (with your knowledge), for I have come to thee from Sheba with a sure tiding.’ (*an-Naml:* 22)

Look at the level of independence that this hoopoe was granted under the rule of Prophet Sulaiman *peace be upon him*. Therefore, even animals recognize the matters of guidance, even if they are not required to do anything about it. Generally, animals only act within the capacity of their own natural impulses.

We previously gave the example of a mule’s behaviour when it is being commanded to jump from one side of a stream to another. The mule will first look at the stream to estimate if the leap is within its capacity. If the leap is a further stretch than its abilities, the mule will step back. Even if it is violently forced by its owner, the mule will only follow its natural impulses. On the other hand, human beings often venture into impractical endeavours, thereby landing themselves in situations with unfortunate consequences. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَيۡفَ مَدَّ ٱلظِّلَّ وَلَوۡ شَآءَ لَجَعَلَهُۥ
سَاكِنٗا ثُمَّ جَعَلۡنَا ٱلشَّمۡسَ عَلَيۡهِ دَلِيلٗا ﴿٤٥﴾

Do you not see how your Lord lengthens the shade? If He had willed, He could have made it stand still – We made the sun its indicator [45] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 45)

Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator of all the signs in existence is drawing the attention of His creation to some of these wondrous and remarkable signs.

Naturally, the sound mind should have paid attention to these signs without being commanded. A person who sees one of the wonders of creation should essentially stop to reflect upon it with astonishment and humility. We have previously given the example of a man who finds himself alone in a broad and barren desert. Imagine the man being overcome by tiredness and sleep. Then, when he wakes up, he finds a table in front of him laden with the most delicious types of food and drink. Would it not be the natural course for the man to question the source of this surprising and abnormal sustenance, before reaching his hand out to consume it?

Therefore, there are signs in creation that must seize your attention and cause you to study them and to trace the origins of their existence. All of these phenomenal signs are higher than our basic level of understanding and beyond our natural capacity to recreate, such as the sun, the moon, the air, and the rain. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* did not leave us to comprehend those signs on our own, but actively alerted us and drew our attentions to them. Several remarkable signs and manifestations of existence are seen monotonously and overlooked by mankind every single day. These signs are seen by the versed philosopher as well as the illiterate person, who despite seeing them daily scarcely pay heed to them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Are you not aware how’ (*al-Furqan:* 45) in the beginning of the verse. These words mean, ‘Do you not know of the following fact? Have you not looked at your Lord’s work in causing shadows to lengthen away from the light and towards the dark?’ Indeed, Allah could have made it stand still if He had so willed. Therefore, Allah made the sun a guiding torch for this shadow.

We know that these shadows occur when a massive object on the earth, such as a mountain, building, or tree, blocks the light coming from a source, such as the sun. We see this phenomenon clearly in broad daylight as a manifestation of the sun and the motion of the earth upon which we live. The earth is a rotating spheroid structure with a bright side that faces the sun and a nightly side that resides in dimness. However, in the Arabic language, we call that dimness a *zhalam* (darkness), rather than calling it a *zhil* (shadow). What is the difference between *zhil* and *zhalam*? If the earth itself blocks the sunlight, then the dimness is called *zhalam*, but if that which blocks the light is an object on the earth, the darkness is known as a *zhil* (shadow).

We see shadows throughout our days. The phenomenon is mentioned in many verses in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, the pious people shall dwell amidst (cooling) shades (*zhilal*) and springs.’ (*al-Mursalat:* 41) Allah also says: ‘There (in paradise) shall they have pure spouses and (thus) We will admit them into cool, refreshing shade’ (*an-Nisa’:* 57). He says in another verse: ‘Have, then, they (who deny the truth) never considered any of the things that Allah has created, that grant their shades to the right and left (sides)?’ (*an-Nahl:* 48)

Our Lord reminded us in these verses that shadows protect us from the stinging heat of the sun. Man continues to rise higher in terms of the way he uses shade, that he is able to produce several levels of: ‘...plenteous layers of layered shade (*dhilan dhaleela*).’ (*an-Nisa’:* 57) This means that the shade itself is shaded. So, for example, men are able to make ceilings that have two separate roofs, in order to ensure that the inside of the home is not affected by the heat outside.

Therefore, we find the shade of a tree more pleasant than the shade of a wall, for example, as the leaves of the tree shade each other in layers. In a certain manner, the shade of a tree resembles an air-conditioned room because the leaves block the heat of the sun while allowing the wind and air to pass through them. An Arab poet once said when describing a tall lofty tree:

It obstructs the sun whenever it confronts us,

blocking its rays, but permitting a gentle breeze.

Allah *Glorified is He* also mentions the word ‘shadow’ in another verse. He says: ‘And (behold) when We caused the mount to rise above the Children of Israel as though it were a shadow.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 171)

When you reflect on this phenomenon of shadows, you will see that at sunrise, the shadows of solid objects stretch out for a long distance. The shadows then get shorter as the sun rises and reaches its zenith. Then the shadows move to the opposite direction as the sun sets into the horizon. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted us to notice this phenomenon and reflect upon it. He says: ‘Are you not aware how your Lord has caused shadows to lengthen (towards the dark)’ at the time of sunrise. Then Allah says: ‘Had He so willed, He could indeed have made it stand still, and indeed, We have made the sun its guide.’ (*al-Furqan:* 45) The Power of Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of creating something and creating its opposite. He willed the shadow to change according to the time of day, but indeed, if He wanted otherwise, He could have made it stationary and unyielding.

The length of the shadow decreases at the beginning of the day and increases at the end of the day. Likewise, everything in nature that has the capacity to increase also has the capacity to decrease. These increments and decrements are forms of movement. Movement itself has different forms. One of them is the leaping discrete movement that resembles the movement of the faster (second) hand of a clock as it jumps around the dial. The clock’s pointer remains totally still for a brief moment in time before moving on.

On the other hand, it is difficult to perceive motion in the slower (hour) pointer of a clock. This is because the motion is smoothly flowing, being evenly distributed over time. An example of this type of movement is the growth of a child, which is difficult to perceive over a short period of time. You would only notice this type of movement if you look at the child after a long period of absence. This is because his growth is evenly distributed and does not occur in sudden spurts. Humans are able to incorporate this slow linear movement in the mechanical components in a watch. On the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* incorporated it in the movement of shadows through His Omnipotent Power over the sun and the earth.

The astonishing peculiarity of this phenomenon is not the only reason Allah *Glorified is He* directed our attention to it. Further than that, this phenomenon is a grand bounty that humans have taken advantage of and used for their benefits.

For example, the ancient Egyptians used to set up obelisks to accurately determine the time by means of their shadows. Likewise, the Arabs constructed sundials to determine the time according to the movement of the sun. Nowadays, we can see simple peasants telling the time by looking at objects’ shadows.

They learned how to estimate the time of day through the lengths of shadows, despite the innate inaccuracies in this method owing to the point of sunrise changing throughout the year. One of the ancient Egyptian temples has 365 apertures. The sunlight enters through a different aperture every day of the year. Nevertheless, shadows brought human beings immeasurable benefit, in terms of these ancient obelisks and sundials. Muslims moved on from this idea to make their own mechanical clocks. One of these inventions was a ticking clock that worked by utilizing the power of water. When the Muslims gave Charlemagne, the king of France, one of these mechanical clocks, he said, ‘There is a devil inside it!’ Thus, these were the early Muslims’ wondrous scientific inventions.

Allah says: ‘...and indeed, We have made the sun its guide.” (*al-Furqan:* 45) This means that the sunlight directs the length of the shadows. Then Allah says:

ثُمَّ قَبَضْنَٰهُ إِلَيْنَا قَبْضًا يَسِيرًا ﴿٤٦﴾

But We gradually draw it towards Us, little by little [46]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 46)

Allah *Glorified is He* referred to the slow movement of these shadows by describing it as being gradual. Human eyes will never perceive the shadow’s flow through time because they do not possess instruments with the necessary accuracy to perceive the delicacy of this movement. Allah says: ‘We grasp it shorter in a gradual motion.’ (*al-Furqan:* 46) This is also an indication that the process is directly sustained by Allah’s Omnipotent Power. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was saying, ‘O my servants, sleep in tranquillity. Your Lord is the One Who sustains your interests and never sleeps.’

Some transcendent minds derive interesting concepts from these phenomena of shadows. They remark how the lofty objects on earth remain humbled, prostrating themselves upon the ground in the form of shadows. Allah says: ‘And before Allah, prostrate themselves, willingly or unwillingly, all (things and beings) that are in the heavens and on earth, as do their shadows in the mornings and the evenings.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 15) Allah also says: ‘Each (of them) knows indeed how to pray unto Him and to glorify Him.’ (*an-Nur:* 41)

Therefore, shadows have a slow movement that is only encompassed by Allah's Power and Knowledge. We can never perceive the extent of its fineness. In the same manner, we are helpless in encompassing the very smallest fragments of dust. Allah then says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلَّيۡلَ لِبَاسًا وَٱلنَّوۡمَ سُبَاتًا وَجَعَلَ ٱلنَّهَارَ نُشُورًا ﴿٤٧﴾

It is He who made the night a garment for you,
and sleep a rest, and made the day like a
resurrection [47] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 47)

Allah says that He: '...makes the night a garment...' (*al-Furqan:* 47). This is the night in which the earth blocks the light. However, it is wrong to consider darkness as the evil opponent of light, as many people have tried to replace darkness with their own artificial light. One of the blights of modern civilisation is converting the night into artificial day. Indeed, scientists have recently become aware of the extent to which excess light can damage a person's health. That is why we find a Noble Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said, 'Put your torches out when you go to bed.'(1) Light serves a purpose during the times when you are active, but it has no function, and in fact, may be harmful during the hours of your sleep.

Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon us the blessings of the night and day. He says: 'Say (to them O Muhammad), "Have you ever considered that Allah may have willed daylight permanent for you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection? Is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you (the darkness of) night, wherein you might rest? Will you not, then, see (the truth)?"' (*al-Qasas:* 72)

Therefore, night and day have distinct functions. Allah clarifies their functions in His words: 'And He it is who makes the night a garment for you.' (*al-Furqan:* 47) This means that the night covers us in the same way that a garment covers the body. Sleep is an automatic restraint that overcomes living beings, and is made beyond their choice. If you try to sleep at a non-habitual time, you will feel tired and overburdened. On the other hand, when sleep overcomes you of its own accord, you feel tranquil and sound. There is a word of wisdom that says, ‘Sleep is a cumbersome guest. When you invite it, it causes you trouble and hardship, but when it invites you, it lets you rest easily.’ Sleep can overcome you in any place, even if you were lying on a bed of pebbles and stones. It is as if sleep is commanding us to calm down when it is no longer appropriate for us to be moving around. There are some people who fight the natural impulse of sleep by taking pills to help them stay awake. Still, when they stay awake for a whole night, they sleep those hours on the following day. Moreover, those who combat sleep find that they lose their equilibrium and that their movements become increasingly muddled and confused. So, you must submit yourself to this natural impulse that Allah *Glorified is He* created in you. When it besets you, do not treat it with contempt. When you submit to sleeping appropriately during the night, you will feel active in your mornings, and you will assume your daily activities in a strong and responsible manner.

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5624) and Ahmad in his Musnad (3/388) from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him. The wording is that of Al-Bukhari.*

The Sufis have made a very fine observation about sleep. They referred us to the fact that the entirety of existence glorifies its Lord, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: ‘Each (of them) knows indeed how to pray unto Him and to glorify Him.’ (*an-Nur:* 41) This means that even the particles that make up a disbeliever’s body are in complete submission to Allah’s laws. Indeed, they remain in disequilibrium while fulfilling the disbeliever’s disobedience and disbelief. In fact, there will come a time when they will testify against him on the Day of Resurrection. Despite being subservient to his disbelieving will in this world, they will ultimately be free from this malevolent will in the Hereafter.

The tongue is subservient to its host. If the host wants to believe, it will utter the two testimonies of faith: ‘There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger (*Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul-Allah*).’ On the other hand, if its host wants to disbelieve in Allah, it will utter the words of disbelief. Thus, it only serves its host’s will. Then, eventually, in the Hereafter, there is no will except Allah’s Commandments *Glorified is He*.

During sleep, these limbs and particles of the body are able to rest from the sins and wrong actions that their host commits during wakefulness. They are able to take a break from the host's disobedience of Allah. Sleep is a restraining force that comes into effect when a person is no longer capable of having a sound coexistence with his limbs. The limbs are no longer able to bear their actions, and therefore, sleep comes in to give them rest.

An example of this phenomenon is seen during the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) season, where pilgrims often find that they only need to sleep an hour or two every day. The reason is that people commit very few sins in that place and the limbs are in harmony with their hosts. Therefore, they do not force them into heavy sleep. On the other hand, disobedient people find long periods of sleep insufficient because their limbs are worn out and irritated by their actions.

This phenomenon explains why Prophet Muhammad's heart did not need to rest(1), despite his eyes resting. Prophet Muhammad's limbs accompanied him in the best possible way as they were permanently engaged in obedience. How could they induce his heart to sleep?

Allah deals with people in their general sense. Their selves are always inclined towards wrongdoing and this exhausts their energy and weakens their limbs. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to enforce an obligatory period of truce and peaceful coexistence between the people and their limbs, where they can sleep for some time to fuel their activity during the day.

Allah says in this verse: '...and (your) sleep a rest (*subat*).' (*al-Furqan:* 47) The Arabic word *sabt* means 'to cut'. Therefore, the word *subat* in this verse means 'pausing one's movements for a given period of time'. This is meant as a process of rejuvenation so that the person can return to their activities in a healthier fashion. A person who spends much of his night awake will feel tired and perturbed in the morning, unlike the person who allocates the appropriate time for sleep at night.

Allah *Glorified is He* made the amount of sleep required at night related to the amount of activity you achieve during the day. So, if you want to engage in strong and balanced daily activities, sleep an amount that is proportionate to those endeavours.

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(1) *An agreed upon Hadith: It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3569) and by Muslim in his Sahih (738) in 'Kitab Salat Al-Musafireen' that Prophet Muhammad said, 'O' A'isha. My eyes sleep, but my heart does not sleep.'*

Allah then says: ‘...and (He) causes every (new) day to be a resurrection (*nushoor*).’ (*al-Furqan:* 47) The Arabic word *nushoor* resembles the lexical form of the word *shukoor*. The word *shukoor* is the plural of the word *shukr* (gratitude) and is mentioned in a verse in which Allah says: ‘(These righteous people are saying, in their hearts,) “We feed you (who are in need of food) for the sake of Allah alone. We desire no recompense from you, or gestures of gratitude (*shukoor*).”’ (*al-Insan:* 9) Similarly, the word *nushoor* is the plural of the singular word *nashr* which means ‘moving freely about the earth’, as Allah says in another verse: ‘...disperse freely (*intashiru*) on earth and seek to obtain (sustenance) from Allah’s bounty.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرۡسَلَ ٱلرِّيَٰحَ بُشۡرَۢا بَيۡنَ يَدَىۡ رَحۡمَتِهِۦۚ وَأَنزَلۡنَا مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءٗ طَهُورٗا ﴿٤٨﴾

It is He who sends the winds as heralds of good news before His Mercy. We send down pure water from the sky [48]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 48)

When Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word ‘winds’ in its plural form (*riyah*) in the Quran, it indicates forthcoming blessings and bounties. However, when Allah uses it in the singular form, *rih* (wind), it indicates an impending disaster. Grand skyscrapers and lofty constructions are held upright as long as the wind currents surround them from all sides. Together, these multiple currents give rise to harmony and equilibrium. On the other hand, wind that comes from a single direction brings about destruction, as mentioned by Allah in the verse: ‘And as for the (people of) ʿAd – they were destroyed by a storm wind (*rih sarsar*)(1) furiously raging.’ (*al-Haqqa:* 6) Allah also says in another verse concerning their punishment: ‘Nay, but it is the very thing which you (so contemptuously) sought to hasten – a wind bearing grievous suffering.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24)

The word used in this verse to mean ‘glad tidings’ is *bushran* (recited without a *sukun* on the *sheen*) instead of the word *bushuran* (that has a

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(1) A wind that is described as *sarsar* in the Arabic language is a wind that is exceedingly cold or exceedingly loud (Lissan Al-‘Arab: subject matter: sarara).

damma on the sheen). It is worth mentioning that the original lettering of the word is actually *bushur* which resembles the word *rusul*. The word was lexically shortened to become *bushr*, to be more like the word *bushra* which refers to the good news of forthcoming blessings. The Arabs did not use the verb *yubashir* except when the news is good. Incidentally, they were able to get such glad tidings, and estimating the time until rain, through the strength of the wind blowing upon their skin.

Allah uses the words: '...between the hands (*bayna yaday*) of His forthcoming grace…' (*al-Furqan:* 48) in this verse. The Arabic phrase *bayna yadayk* means 'in front of you' or 'before you'. Therefore, the phrase is used here to signify that these rains are a manifestation of Allah's Mercy.

Then Allah says: '...and (thus, too,) We cause pure water to descend from the sky (*sama'*).' (*al-Furqan:* 48) In the Arabic language, the word *sama'* has a linguistic meaning and a metaphysical meaning. Linguistically, the word *sama'* refers to anything that is above you. However, religiously, it refers to the seven heavens we believe in.

Does rain descend from the seven heavens or does it fall down from the earthly clouds? Indeed, rain falls from the earthly clouds that originate from the condensation of water vapour in the strata of the air. Allah *Glorified is He* clarified this concept in another verse, when He says: 'Are you not aware that it is Allah who causes the clouds to move onward gently (*yuzjy sahaban*)(1), then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, until you can see the rain(2) coming forth from their midst? And it is He who sends down hail from the mountainous masses (of clouds) from the sky.' (*an-Nur:* 43)

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(1) *The Arabic verb azja means to drive something on gently. So, the phrase "yuzji sahaban" means that Allah drives the clouds wherever He wills (from the books, Al-Qamus Al-Qaweem [1/284] and the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi [6/4825])*

(2) *There are two interpretations of the word wadaq: The first interpretation, which is mentioned by Abu Al-Ash'ab Al-'Uqayli, refers to lightening. The second interpretation which is mentioned by a majority of the scholars is that it refers to rain (Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi, 6/4826). As-Suyuti also mentioned the two opinions in Ad-Durr Al-manthoor (6/211). The first opinion was from Abu Bujayla, which he ascribed to Ibn Al-Abi Hatim. The second opinion was from Ad-Dahak and Mujahid, as he narrated from Ibn Al-Abi Hatim and Ibn Abi Shayba.*

So, the mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* is manifested in this water from which He creates every living thing. In Allah's words: '...pure (*tahoor*) water...' (*al-Furqan:* 48), the Arabic word *tahoor* means that the water is pure in itself as well as being a purifying medium to other objects. For instance, water that is used for ablution (*wudu'*) has to be pure in itself, as well as being a purifying medium for the limbs. After this water is used in ablution, it is still pure in itself, but stops being a purifying medium for another person's ablution. According to this definition, rain water that falls from the sky is pure in itself as well as being a purifying medium for usage. This is because this rain water is refined and distilled, and distilled water is the purest form of natural water. In addition to water being a basic foundation of life, it also provides purity for our bodies.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِّنُحۡـِۧيَ بِهِۦ بَلۡدَةٗ مَّيۡتٗا وَنُسۡقِيَهُۥ مِمَّا خَلَقۡنَآ أَنۡعَٰمٗا وَأَنَاسِيَّ كَثِيرٗا ﴿٤٩﴾

So that We can revive a dead land with it, and We give it as a drink to many animals and people We have created [49]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 49)

Allah described the barren land as being *mayt* (dead). Here, we have to point out that there is a difference between the Arabic words *mayt* and *mayyit*. The Arabic adjective *mayt* means that the object described is already dead, while the adjective *mayyit* means that it is a mortal being that will eventually die, even if it is still living at the time of the description. An example of that is found in the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Yet, verily, you are bound to die (*mayyit*), (O Muhammad,) and, verily, they, too, are bound to die (*mayyitoon*).' (*az-Zumar:* 30)

Barren lands are desolate and devoid of vegetation. However, when rainwater falls on these lands, the soil is brought to life as plants start growing upon it. Allah describes this in His words: '...And (if you are still in doubt of resurrection, consider this:) you can see the (barren piece of) land dry and lifeless – and (suddenly,) when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of delighted plant.' (*al-Hajj:* 5)

Allah says: ‘And for the many (beings) of Our creation to drink from it (*nusqiyahu*), beasts as well as humans.’ (*al-Furqan:* 49) There is a difference between the Arabic verbs *saqahu* and *asqahu*. The word *asqahu* means ‘to give someone that which he can drink from’ even if he does not drink it instantly. This is clear in another verse talking about the rainwater, in which Allah uses the word *asqa*: ‘...and let you drink thereof (*asqaynakumuh*).’ (*al-Hijr:* 22) This means that Allah has prepared it so that they can drink from it when they so wish. On the other hand, the word *saqahu* means ‘to give someone that which he drinks instantly’. This word is used in Allah’s words: ‘And their Lord will give them to imbibe (*saqahum*) from a pure drink.’ (*al-Insan:* 21)

The word *anasiy* (humans) is the plural of the word *insan* (human). The original form of the word is *anaseen*, but was shortened to *anasiy* in this verse.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَٰهُ بَيْنَهُمْ لِيَذَّكَّرُوا۟ فَأَبَىٰٓ أَكْثَرُ ٱلنَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُورًا ﴿٥٠﴾

Many times We have repeated this to people so that they might take heed, but most persist in their ingratitude [50] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 50)

The Arabic word *sarafnahu* means ‘changing and altering’. This means that Allah has altered these warnings and signs in many ways, but despite that, most men still choose to disbelieve in them. The many people who reject Allah’s signs pay no heed to their significance, despite the great advancements of science, the swift progress of human civilisation, and the many natural phenomena that people have become aware of.

An example of altering these signs is when Allah *Glorified is He* gives abundant rainfall to a particular land, but then afflicts the land with drought and famine until its crops and livestock die out. This is to show us that eventual sustenance is not only a material matter of climate or plentiful rain. It is essentially a matter of what the Creator, Allah, wants and wills for His creation, Then, Allah said:

وَلَوۡ شِئۡنَا لَبَعَثۡنَا فِي كُلِّ قَرۡيَةٖ نَّذِيرٗا ﴿٥١﴾

If it had been Our will, We would have sent a warner to every town [51] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 51)

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to show his favour to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as if Allah is telling him, ‘It is not a lack of messengers that made Us send one single Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) to the whole of mankind for the end of time. We are perfectly capable of decreasing your responsibility by sending a messenger to every single town and village. However, We wanted to honour you with the struggle of the whole matter until the coming of the Hour.’

We can understand from this, that despite Allah’s giving Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a universal message, this does not contradict His ability to send a messenger to every village. In fact, more than that, Allah did send one messenger and gave him the capacity to bear the entirety of the Message. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَا تُطِعِ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ وَجَٰهِدۡهُم بِهِۦ جِهَادٗا كَبِيرٗا ﴿٥٢﴾

So do not give in to the disbelievers: strive hard against them with this Quran [52] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 52)

Allah has placed the burden of the universal message on the shoulders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, this verse is directing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he must adopt a stance that is appropriate to that profound task. ‘Hence, do not obey the disbelievers.’ (*al-Furqan:* 52) He was commanded to disobey the disbelievers if they offer him kingship, wealth, fame, or honour to abandon his message. He must know that what Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for him is above all of that. Furthermore, when Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad: ‘Hence, do not obey (the likes and dislikes of) the disbelievers.’ (*al-Furqan:* 52) Allah excused His Messenger in front of the disbelieving folk, for a Messenger is always obliged to carry out the commandments of Allah *Glorified is He*.

This verse does not mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been obeying the disbelievers to start with. Rather, it is very much like the verse in which Allah says: ‘O you who believe, hold fast unto your belief.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136) In this verse, Allah demanded belief from those He addressed as being believers. In fact, in this verse, Allah is ordering the believers to maintain their faith, warning them from losing the bounty with which He has endowed them. Therefore, when someone requests something from you that you have already fulfilled within you, it simply means that you are being asked to maintain its presence.

Allah says: ‘...but strive hard against them, by means of this (Noble Book), with utmost striving.’ (*al-Furqan:* 52) Victory will only be attained over them through obeying the commandments of Allah *Glorified is He* in the Quran. Believers should not neglect their responsibilities towards the call to Allah by claiming that the trend towards polytheism or disbelief is stronger in this world. Allah addressed this claim in the following verse, by giving a natural example of His Power in relation to one of the basic foundations of life, which is water. Allah says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى مَرَجَ ٱلْبَحْرَيْنِ هَٰذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ وَهَٰذَا مِلْحٌ
أُجَاجٌ وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخًا وَحِجْرًا مَّحْجُورًا ﴿٥٣﴾

It is He who released the two bodies of flowing water, one sweet and fresh and the other salty and bitter, and put an insurmountable barrier between them [53] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 53)

This verse continues to divert the attention of the obstinate opponents of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Allah’s signs in the Universe. Allah has previously mentioned the shadow, the night, and the winds. Every time that Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned their obstinate denial, He also mentioned a universal wonder that shows how they have been heedless to His signs. However, they remained inattentive to these messages.

In this verse we are studying, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned one of His clear and repeatable signs that everyone can see and that will remain until the Day of Resurrection. Allah says: ‘And it is He who has merged (maraj) two great bodies of water (*al-bahrayn*).' (*al-Furqan:* 53) The Arabic word *marj* refers to an open grazing ground full of common pastures in which a shepherd can allow his flocks of sheep to wander as they please. Thus, the meaning of the phrase *maraja al-bahrayn* (merged two great bodies of water) is that Allah allowed both the salt and the fresh water bodies to flow freely side-by-side, in whichever way they willed.

This is why we find the water currents in the salty seas and oceans, which are covering most of the planet, lacking any angled geometrical outlines. Instead, we find their waves curving and bending in turbulent patterns. Look, for instance, at the Gulf of Mexico or the Gulf of ‘Aqaba. You will observe the water flowing according to its own whims and desires, without assuming fixed geometrical shapes.

The same principle is true for the rivers that come from the rain falling on mountaintops. When a river starts to flow, it moves wherever it wills, wending and winding down the mountainside and over the land, making its way in the direction of easiest flow. So, when the water encounters a simple incline, it deviates in that direction in order to complete its course. For an example of this, look at the crookedness of the Nile River in the vicinity of Qina in Egypt.

So, water makes its way according to its own whims and desires, whether it is salty or fresh water. It does not follow regular routes like the artificial paths humans manufacture by digging canals and waterways. This is true of any water that flows freely by following the path of least resistance. When this free water encounters an obstacle in its path, it turns away according to its own nature.

The Arabic word *bahr* (sea) is used to describe any large body of water, whether it be salt or fresh water. The reason the word *sea* is used is that salt-water bodies are more prevalent upon the earth, just as the Arabic word *shamsayn* (the two suns) is assigned to the sun and the moon due to the larger size of the sun.

The freedom of movement of the two adjacent bodies of water is a sign that indicates the Power of Allah *Glorified is He*. Despite the well-known tendency of water to flow freely from the upper to the lower levels, salt water and fresh water exist side by side without ever mixing together. If they were to mix together, they would both be spoiled, since the fresh water will cease to be drinkable and the salt water will lose its appropriate degree of salinity protecting it from spoilage.

When fresh water is confined to a certain area, it becomes moribund and brackish. On the other hand, the salty seas were prepared by Allah as the natural storehouses of water and the sources of the vapour from which rivers are eventually formed. That is why Allah preserved this seawater and created this peaceful co-existence between it and its adjacent fresh water, where neither of them infringes upon the other's vicinity, despite flowing side-by-side.

Allah described the fresh water as being *furat*. This means that it is 'exceedingly sweet and pleasant to drink'. The name of the Euphrates (*Furat*) River was based on this meaning because of the sweetness of its waters. The word was assigned this meaning before the river was named. This is because the Quran is the Eternal Word of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah described the salty water as being exceedingly bitter due to its saltiness. However, despite that, many fish and other marine animals live in these waters and derive nourishment in them, just as they derive nourishment from fresh water. Allah described this phenomenon in a verse in which He says: 'And yet, from either of them do you eat fresh meat, and (from either) you take ornaments which you may wear.' (*Fatir:* 12)

Allah then says in the verse we are studying: 'Yet, Allah has wrought between them a barricade (*barzakh*) and a forbidden barrier (*hijran mahjooran*).' (*al-Furqan:* 53) A *barzakh* is a barricade between two mediums. The word *barzakh* originally referred to the dry land that separates two bodies of water. On the other hand, when the body of water falls between two parts of dry land, it is called a *khaleej* (gulf).

Allah continues: '...and a forbidden barrier (*hijran mahjooran*).' (*al-Furqan:* 53) The *hijr* (barrier) is the obstacle that prevents the salt water and fresh water from mixing. Here, this barrier is described as being *mahjoor* (forbidden). This further emphasizes the fact that the two bodies of water are prevented from mixing with one another. This description resembles another description in the Quran of another barrier. Allah says in another chapter: 'But (thus it is:) whenever you recite the Quran, We place a concealed veil (*hijaban mastoora*) between you and those who will not believe in the life to come.' (*al-Isra':* 45) Allah also described the shadows granted to the believers in paradise in a similar emphasized manner, where the believers are described as having: '…layered shadows (*dhilan dhaleela*).' (*an-Nisa':* 57)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ مِنَ ٱلْمَآءِ بَشَرًا فَجَعَلَهُۥ نَسَبًا وَصِهْرًا ۗ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ قَدِيرًا ﴿٥٤﴾

It is He who creates human beings from fluid, then makes them kin by blood and marriage: your Lord is all powerful! [54] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 54)

In a general verse about water, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and (that) We made out of water every living thing.' (*al-Anbiya':* 30) This means that water is a basic foundation in living things alone. This verse does not mean that water is a part of every object in existence. Therefore, according to that, water is an essential sign of life. That maybe the reason why drying up certain materials decreases the effects of many pathogens

Allah *Glorified is He* who honoured mankind and elevated them above other creatures, created them from water: 'And it is He who created mankind out of this (very) water.' (*al-Furqan:* 54) Allah also says: 'Let man, then, observe out of what he has been created. He has been created out of effusing water, issuing from between the backbone and the chest-bones.' (*at-Tariq:* 5-7) The water mentioned in this verse has special characteristics, being the effusing water of semen from which mankind is created. Allah says: 'Was he not once a (mere) drop of sperm that had been spilt, and thereafter became a germ-cell – whereupon He (Allah) created and formed (it) in accordance with what (it) was meant to be.' (*al-Qiyama:* 37-38)

After Allah created mankind, Allah has endowed them with lineage (*nasaban*) and marriage-ties (*sihran*). Allah divided mankind into males and females. The word *nasab* (lineage) refers to the concept of paternity and fatherhood that leads to successive generations of genes through the male line. This is because people are generally recognized through their names followed by the names of their fathers and forefathers. On the other hand, the word *sihran* (marriage-ties) refers to the links created through females. These links bring families together, as when a man marries the daughter of another man, he is referred to as a *sihr* (in-law). This is why the Arab poet said:

'The mothers of people were the carriers of new offspring,
Whereas the lineage is through the fathers'

Scientists have stated that the male sperm, and not the female egg, determines the sex of the embryo. It is a profound aspect of the Creator's Omnipotence that He created both the male and the female from the same water, as He says in another chapter: 'And He (Allah) fashioned out of it the two spouses: the male and the female.' (*al-Qiyama:* 39) Allah described this process in the following verses: 'Was he not once a (mere) drop of sperm that had been spilt, and thereafter became a germ-cell – whereupon He (Allah) created and formed (it) in accordance with what (it) was meant to be, and fashioned out of it the two sexes, the male and the female?' (*al-Qiyama:* 37-39)

Both the males and the females are coded for in the sperms of the father, in what the scientists refer to as the XX and the XY sex-determining chromosomes. Therefore, the sperms that are produced by the male can produce either a male or a female foetus. Then, the strongest sperm that is best able to fertilise the egg determines the foetus's sex.

A similar selective phenomenon is clearly visible, for instance, in bees. When the queen lays her egg, she only accepts the strongest male to fertilise it. It flies at high altitudes to choose the strongest male. In the same way in other animals, only the strongest sperm will be able to fertilize the female's egg. If the fertilizing sperm has an XX chromosome, then the foetus will be a female. However, if the fertilizing sperm has an XY chromosome, the child will be a male.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(Allah is the One) who created (everything), and thereupon moulded it (according to what it is meant to be), and who determines the nature (of all that exists), and thereupon guides it (towards its fulfilment).' (*al-A'la:* 2-3)

We refute the claims that man was created by chance through this existential sign. If mankind is composed of male bodies and female bodies that both share common characteristics and systems, except for the differences in their reproductive systems, how can their complementary reproductive connection be attributed to chance? One of the major enemies of chance is coincidence. Therefore, if males came to exist by chance and females came to exist by chance, is it also a coincidence that they can meet together in a complementary fashion, efficiently producing further males and females? Indeed, this is not a matter of chance, but rather, the deliberate design of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says at the conclusion of the verse: '…for your Lord is ever infinite in His Ability.' (*al-Furqan:* 54) Allah mentioned His Ability in this verse because this matter can only be brought through His Omnipotent Power.

Even before the Quran was revealed, Arabs had a natural inclination towards understanding this process. The wife of a man known as Abu Hamza criticised him for marrying another woman because she did not bear a son for him. She said:

'Why does Abu Hamza not visit us,
Is he angry that we have not granted him sons?
By Allah, that is not something we can control.
We are like the earth in which farmers plant their crops,
We give them the like of what they have given us.'

This matter that was guessed by the ancient Arabs was not discovered by modern science until the twentieth century.

After mentioning this existential phenomenon, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the disbelievers again so that their hearts might soften to faith. Therefore, as we have seen in these verses, Allah *Glorified is He* counsels them regarding the true faith in some verses and directs their attention to His signs in creation in the other verses. Allah says:

وَيَعۡبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنفَعُهُمۡ وَلَا يَضُرُّهُمۡۗ وَكَانَ ٱلۡكَافِرُ عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِۦ ظَهِيرٗا ٥٥

Yet instead of God they worship things that can neither benefit nor harm them: the disbeliever has always turned his back on his Lord [55] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 55)

After all of these signs have been made clear to them, does it befit them to worship deities other than Allah *Glorified is He* and wrongfully direct their worship to them? Indeed, it does not befit them.

Allah says in this verse that they worship things that can neither benefit them nor harm them. There are some people who think that these idols do not benefit them, but still believe that the false deities can do them harm. We say to these people that these false deities bring neither harm nor benefit. The only one who can bring harm is the True Lord, Allah *Glorified is He* whom they have turned away from to worship their false deities. Indeed, these idols will not reward them for this worship, nor harm them if they abandon their worship.

The Quran called their actions towards these idols a form of worship, and these idolaters themselves said: ‘We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah.’ (*az-Zumar:* 3) So, they admitted that they worshipped these idols. The reality of genuine worship is that the worshipper should obey the commands of the one whom he worships and should stay away from their prohibitions. What sort of commands can an idol possibly give? What can it possibly prohibit its human worshippers from doing? In fact, the only reason these pagans worshipped these false deities is that these idols gave them no commands. Therefore, these pagans did not have to make any genuine commitments or efforts. Their religion is a collection of mere fantasies, as it is certainly easy to worship a deity that gives no commands or prohibitions.

On the other hand, they will despise a religion that requires specific commitments and duties from them. This is because they do not believe in genuine servitude to their Lord.

People who transgress against themselves hope that the true religion of Islam is a lie because they had wanted to live according to their own whims and desires. Therefore, many imposters claimed prophet-hood in the early years following Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as Musaylima and Sajah(1). They attracted people to believe in them by reducing the number of religious obligations and making their commandments effortless. For example, when some people found it difficult to pay the purifying charities, these false prophets exempted their followers from paying such obligator charities.

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(1) *She is Sajah bint Al-Harith ibn Suwayd At-Tamimiyya from Banu Yarbu’. Her epithet is Um Sadir. She was an educated poetess who had a comprehensive knowledge of previous nations. She claimed prophet-hood after the death of the Prophet Muhammad when she was with the tribe of Taghlib in the peninsula, and a large proportion of her tribe followed her. She came forth, seeking battle with Abu Bakr. She also met and married Musaylima, who was another impostor. Then she went back to rejoin her uncles in the peninsula where she heard of the killing of Musaylama. Then she became a Muslim and migrated to Basra where she died. Samurah ibn Jundub, Mu’awiyya’s governor of Basra, prayed over her body. She died in 55 AH. (Al-A’lam of Az-Zirikli 3/78).*

Similarly, there are imposters in every age who suit the times in which they live. In the present times, there are imposters who make religious commandments easier by decreasing these commandments to match the whims and desires of the people. For instance, nowadays, they place no rules regarding the integration of the sexes, and they see nothing wrong with women wearing whatever clothes they want. They also have similar stances in many other religious matters.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse we are studying: 'Indeed, the disbeliever does turn his back on his Lord (*zhaheera*).' (*al-Furqan:* 55) In the Arabic language, the word *zhaheer* is often used to mean a person who is a helper. Allah says in another chapter: 'And if you uphold each other (*tazhahara*) against him (Prophet Muhammad), (know that) Allah is his Protector, and (that,) therefore, (Angel) Jibril (Gabriel), and all the righteous among the believers, and all the (other) angels will come to his aid.' (*at-Tahrim:* 4)

In the past, before wheelbarrows were invented, people used to carry loads upon their backs (*zhahr*). And even today, we see porters carrying heavy loads upon their backs, while using certain garments to protect their backs from strain when they carry these heavy objects. When one of the porters wants another porter to give him help, he says to him, 'Please lend me your back (*zhahr*).' Therefore, the Arabic word *zhahr* (back) had this meaning that referred to support and help.

The word *zhahr* also implies height. It was used in this sense when Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the dam built by Dhu Al-Qarnayn: 'And thus (the rampart was built, and) their enemies (Gog and Magog) were unable to rise over it (*yazharuhu*), and neither were they able to pierce it.' (*al-Kahf:* 97)

Given that the Arabic word *zhaheer* used in this verse is interpreted to mean 'a helper', how can a disbeliever be a helper against Allah *Glorified is He*? This is because the disbeliever commits acts of disobedience and others follow his example of corruption and wrongdoing. If he were an obedient servant to Allah's orders, he would have been a guide for good deeds and a role model for righteous behaviour. However, the disbeliever chose to resemble the role of Satan, who disobeyed his Lord by refusing to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* and threatened his descendants when he said: 'O my Lord! Since You (O Allah) have thwarted me, I shall indeed make (all that is evil) on earth seem goodly to them, and shall most certainly beguile them into grievous error.' (*al-Hijr:* 39) All of these devils of the jinn and mankind empower the soul against its host until it causes them to slip into wrong action. When a human being listens to the call of a devil and obeys it by doing a wrong action, that devil has helped him to disobey Allah *Glorified is He*.

Another meaning of the word *zhaheer* refers to placing a person behind your back and paying no attention to them. An Arab proverb expressed this meaning by saying, 'Do not place my request behind your back.' This is when a person is asking you to place their request in close consideration.(1)

Therefore, both meanings are possible. The word *zhaheer* could mean 'a helper'. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Know, O Muhammad, that the disbeliever is a helper against Allah *Glorified is He*. So, persevere and strive against them as much as you can.' In this manner, Allah *Glorified is He* is encouraging His Messenger to adopt a stern position and to be on his guard against his enemies. On the other hand, the word *zhaheer* could mean inattention. In this manner, the verse was revealed to calm Prophet Muhammad's heart, by telling him that disbelievers are insignificant and trifling matters in the eyes of Allah *Glorified is He* and that their schemes should not concern Him. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرٗا وَنَذِيرٗا ﴿٥٦﴾

We sent you only to give good news and warning [56]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 56)

It is true that Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O Prophet! Strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be adamant against them.' (*at-Tawba:* 73) However, this does not mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should destroy himself in his attempts to call disbelievers to Islam, or feel great pain due to their lack of belief. The task of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to simply convey the message. Prophet Muhammad was deeply saddened on account of the state of his people when his Lord addressed him with the words: 'But (why) would you, perhaps, torment yourself with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf:* 6)

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(1) Ibn Manzur said in (Lissan Al-'Arab: Subject matter: *zhahara*), 'It is said about something to which no attention is paid. An example of this is saying, "I have placed this matter behind my back," or "I have thrown it behind my back." As for the saying, "Do not place my need of you behind your back," it means, "Do not forget this request." An example of that is found in Allah's words: "...you regarded these commandments as objects that may be cast behind you (forgotten)!" (*Hud:* 92) It expresses your disdain for that person's needs. In addition, the words, "He placed me behind his back," mean that he neglected me.'

Allah *Glorified is He* only commanded him to strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites as a form of encouragement, so that he would leave no efforts unexpended in his attempts to guide them. Otherwise, Prophet Muhammad's primary task was heralding good tidings and warnings of impending punishment to the people, as Allah says: 'We have sent you only as a conveyer of glad tidings and a warner.' (*al-Furqan:* 56) He was to give glad tidings of forthcoming rewards to direct the people towards the righteous means, and to warn people of the forthcoming punishments so that they can avoid their causes. Then, Allah directed Prophet Muhammad by saying:

قُلۡ مَآ أَسۡـَٔلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ مِنۡ أَجۡرٍ إِلَّا مَن شَآءَ أَن يَتَّخِذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِۦ سَبِيلٗا ٥٧

Say, 'I am not asking for any reward for it, but anyone
who wishes should take a path to his Lord' [57]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 57)

Allah says to him in another verse: 'Or is it that they are (rejecting your message, O Muhammad) in fear that you might ask of them a reward *ajr*, and that they would be burdened with debt (if they should listen to your message)?' (*at-Tur:* 40) Did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ask them for a reward in exchange for this guidance, that they are unable to pay, or are they miserly and stingy? The fact is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not ask them for any wage for this guidance in the first place.

Does this verse mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was naturally allowed to ask them for a wage? The answer is, 'Yes.' When one person does something beneficial for another person, the giver should expect a wage in the spirit of mutual exchange and compensation. He may then choose to abandon the wage, considering it a favour in good companionship.

What is a rewarding wage *ajr*? A wage is a payment that is given in return for work, while a price is a payment that is given in return for something that someone else owns. The sum of this payment varies according to the difficulty of the job, its duration, the skill of the worker and the risks the worker faces in the course of doing it. Each one of these elements we have mentioned raises the sum of the wage.

When you go travelling, for example, you will find yourself in need of a porter to carry your bags and will pay him a wage that is related to his efforts. However, if you were to hire a car and travel a certain distance with it, the amount you paid would inevitably be more since it took a greater amount of time and effort. If you need a welder to mend something for you, you would see the enormous degree of difficulty faced in that line of work and would not act miserly towards that worker. The job may appear to be easy and swiftly done in your view, but it still needed skill and expertise. That skill was not born in an instant, and indeed, took a long time, studying, and effort for the worker to acquire.

An architect may draw up plans for your house in one or two hours. Despite that, he may still ask for a large sum of money from you because his wage is proportional to the long years he had spent studying and working hard to obtain the necessary qualifications and skills needed for that job. Therefore, the sum of every wage is calculated according to the work that is done, and should be proportionate to the effort expended, the degree of risk and difficulty, as well as the skill level of the worker.

If that is how things are, then look at the work of a Messenger from Allah and how much he benefited the people by means of his message. Look at the Divine commandments that he brought forth to facilitate their own lives, the lives of their societies and their relationship with their Lord. Look at the way he freed them from the evils of themselves and the evils of people in general.

So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has a huge job and expends an immense amount of effort. If you were able to calculate a suitable wage for that, you will find it to be considerably immense. Imagine that you had to pay someone to guard you at night, how much would you pay? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* however, brings you a program that guards and protects you, your property, your honour and every single thing you possess, and does not just protect you from one particular group but from everyone and everything. Indeed, the protection that you receive from the Divine program of Allah is not limited to this world but even extends to the Hereafter and lasts forever. If you were to work out an appropriate wage for such level of protection, how much would it be?

But, instead of that, he says to you that he does not want any wage, not out of any kind of disrespect but because you, fellow human being, will not be able to assess the value of this work nor the wage that it merits. The only one capable of assigning a value to that is Allah, the One who sent Prophet Muhammad to you. So, whatever you give him by way of payment in exchange for that, you slave of Allah, will always be too little.

We related the story(1) of the good man we met in Algeria: he was standing beside the road hitchhiking, so we stopped the car and opened the door so he could ride with us. But before he got in, he asked, ‘How much?’ He meant what price he would have to pay to ride with us. So, my companion said to him, ‘It is for Allah,’ and the man replied, ‘Then, it is extremely expensive.’ That is the meaning alluded to when the prophet says, as related by Allah, that his reward rests with none but Allah. (*Hud:* 29)

Elsewhere, Allah relays one of his prophets saying that his reward rests with none but Allah for he has been bidden to be among those who have surrendered themselves to Allah. (*Yunus:* 72) But what is the relation between being paid and between surrendering oneself to Allah? (*Yunus:* 72)

The relation is that the Muslim should not do his job for the sake of the one he is working for, but for the sake of Allah, and he should seek to get the wage the job truly merits directly from Him. If someone thinks that he gets his wage from the one for whom he is working, then he surely did what he did so it would be said that he did so-and-so; and once this purpose is served, this will be the end of it for him. Maybe he will not even be thanked for what he did!

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(1) The story of the man who rode in sheikh’s car and later asked him about how much he owed him for the ride.

That is why almost all the prophets said that they seek no reward from their people in return for what they convey. (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109) Indeed, the only instances where a reward was demanded came in this verse which we are currently discussing: ‘Say, "I am not asking for any reward for it, but anyone who wishes should take a path to his Lord…"' (*al-Furqan:* 57), and in another verse where the reward requested was nothing but the 'affection due to kin.' (*ash-Shura:* 23)

In the verse we are discussing, the reward means: seeking a way to requital by struggling in the way of Allah, or giving alms to the poor, etc. As for the phrase: ‘...anyone who wishes...’ (*al-Furqan:* 57), it indicates that people have a choice when it comes to paying the reward because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not take anything unless it is given voluntarily. The reward is: ‘...take a path to his Lord!’ (*al-Furqan:* 57) by *jihad* in the way of Allah, or by doing right deeds. It is as if the reward of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be the good deeds upon which the people will be rewarded by Allah, meaning that Prophet Muhammad took really nothing for himself. When discussing the ‘reward,’ we see it once coming as (*ajran*) like in the verse (*al-An‘am:* 90), and another time (*min ajrin*)(1) as in this verse (*al-Furqan:* 57). Some think that *min* is redundant (*za’ida*), but that sort of thing should not be said about the Speech of Allah since it is unfitting to describe the Speech of Allah as being redundant as every single letter of His has a meaning.

We previously gave an example of the two statements: ‘I do not have wealth’ and ‘I do not have any wealth.’ We said that the first negates having wealth that is worthy of mention, although it may be a small wealth, while the second negates having any wealth whatsoever, starting from what is called wealth and going beyond that. So, which of the two is an unequivocally negative? Thus, the word *min* here indicates entirety.

That is why Allah says to Prophet Muhammad if he is seeking recompense then the ‘recompense’ coming from Him is the best. (*al-Mu’minun:* 72) Why?

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(1) (*ajran*) appears in 6 verses: (*al-An‘am:* 90), (*Hud:* 51), (*Ya Sin:* 21), (*ash-Shura:* 23), (*at-Tur:* 40) and (*al-Qalam:* 46), and (*min ajrin*) appears in 9 verses: (*Yunus:* 72), (*Yusuf:* 104), (*al-Furqan:* 57), (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109), (*ash-Shu'ara':* 127), (*ash-Shu'ara':* 145), (*ash-Shu'ara':* 164), (*ash-Shu'ara':* 180) and (*Fatir:* 47).

This is because He will give you and recompense you according to His worth. He will give you a gift that reflects His unlimited generosity and munificence. Mankind, on the other hand, will only give you according to their worth and within the confines of their limited capacities.

Another indication regarding this matter comes in the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara'*, where the word 'reward' was mentioned a number of times in the course of relating the stories of eight of the prophets: Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Ibrahim (Abraham), Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them all*.

We notice that every one of these messengers(1) said that their rewards rest with none but the Sustainer of all the worlds (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109), except for Musa and Ibrahim *peace be upon them*; neither of them said these words. Why? Because when you ask a reward for something you did, this means that there was nothing enlisting you to do this thing for free. You would not, for example, demand a reward for something you did as a courtesy to a friend. The same was true with Ibrahim *peace be upon him* since the first person he called to Allah was his uncle Azar, and one does not ask a reward for doing a favour to such a close relative. Also, Musa *peace be upon him* the first person he called to Allah was Pharaoh who raised him as a child in his own house, and had he asked him for a reward the answer would have been, 'What reward would that be when I brought you up(2)?...etc.'

The second verse where a reward is mentioned is in (*ash-Shura:* 23) where the reward is 'affection due to kin'. It is as if our love of kin is the reward Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* receives in return for delivering his Message. But is it just the kin of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or our own kin?

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(1) *Nuh peace be upon him said it in (Yunus: 72), (Hud: 29) and (ash-Shu'ara': 109). Hud peace be upon him said it in (Hud: 51) and (ash-Shu'ara': 127). Saleh peace be upon him said it in (ash-Shu'ara': 145). Lut peace be upon him said it in (ash-Shu'ara': 164), and Shu'ayb peace be upon him said it in (ash-Shu'ara': 180).*

(2) *Despite the fact that Musa peace be upon him did not ask for any reward from him, nor wealth, kingdom or anything else, still Pharaoh expected gratitude from him on account that he had raised him, saying: '...Did we not bring you up among us when you were a child? And did you not spend among us years of your life?'(ash-Shu'ara': 18)*

There is no doubt that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* who made his reward to be the love and care of one’s close kin and relatives, refers to the kin of all the Muslims, as indeed Allah says about him that he has a higher claim on the believers than they have on their own selves. (*al-Ahzab:* 6)

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱلْحَيِّ ٱلَّذِى لَا يَمُوتُ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِهِۦ ۚ
وَكَفَىٰ بِهِۦ بِذُنُوبِ عِبَادِهِۦ خَبِيرًا ﴿٥٨﴾

Put your trust in the Living [God] who never dies,
and celebrate His praise. He knows the sins of His
servants well enough [58] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 58)

The True Lord sets the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at rest, saying, ‘Muhammad, do not be worried from the large number of disbelievers that walk the earth nor the plots that they hatch against you nor their allies from the devils of men and jinn; the whole lot of them will fall down and die-either at your hands or by means of a punishment from Allah. Even supposing that they were to remain living, their strength and their stratagems would never stand a chance in front of Allah’s strength and stratagems. If they place their trust in idols that neither bring harm nor benefit, then you place your trust in Allah': ‘Put your trust in the Living (Allah) who never dies…’ (*al-Furqan:* 58).

A wise man would not place his trust in anything except when he has total confidence in it, is assured of its aid and that it will consent to everything he wants. For what is the point in relying on someone to act in your interests when the next morning you might receive word of his death?

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to offer the following advice to His creation: ‘If you want to rely on someone and place your trust in them, then place your trust in One Who will bring you benefit and will never leave you. Place your trust in the One Who will remain forever with you and never abandon you and the One who is not rendered powerless by anything in the heavens or the earth. That is real wisdom!’

But what is the point of placing your trust in one who is not living? Supposing that he were to possess eternal life, what is there to guarantee that his feelings towards you are not going to change?

In the statement'... and celebrate His praise…' (*al-Furqan:* 58), the word *sabbaha* means to declare something to be high or transcendent, and that transcendence may be understood in the light of the verse that says that nothing is like unto him. (*ash-Shura:* 11) Allah has existence and you have existence, but Allah's Existence is nothing like yours; Allah has attributes and you have attributes, but the Attributes of Allah are nothing like yours; and Allah has actions and you have actions, but the Actions of Allah are nothing like yours.

So, in terms of His Essence, Attributes, and Actions, Allah is higher than being like any of His creations, so you are placing your trust in a Deity who will never be susceptible to change.

This transcendence of Allah and His Greatness are in your best interests, O mankind! It is in your best interest that there is no one else akin to Allah, not in terms of His Existence, nor the fact that He will exist forever, nor in terms of what He can do. It is in your best interest to know that there is a One Who is more exalted than all and that all of creation is governed by His laws. That will ensure that you live amongst them in safety. So, the best thing is to have none like Allah, and for Him to be exalted above all.

When you declare Allah's transcendence, it is necessary that you do not just declare His transcendence but to: '...celebrate His praise…' (*al-Furqan:* 58) You praise Him on account of the fact that He is one without partner or peer, and that there is nothing like Him. For, under the doctrines governing our belief, the strong must not oppress the weak or the rich the poor, etc.

Then He says: '... He knows the sins of His servants well enough.' (*al-Furqan:* 58) We say, '*kafaka fulan*' meaning that this person suffices you, and you do not need anyone other than him. It is similar to saying, '*hasbuka-llah*' meaning that Allah suffices you from needing other than Him since He gives you everything that you need and prevents evil from reaching you, even when you think that evil might be good for you.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* has equipped you with a control that sets your life in order and guarantees your safety. That is why, when you call on Allah and He does not respond to you, you must never think that Allah is an employee at your beck and call, ready to answer your every whim and command. Rather, you must think that He is your Lord and the One in charge of your affair and that He will choose for you what is best for you and bring you only good, even if you see it as something other than that.

As an illustration of this, we mentioned the mother who keeps calling Allah every time her son does something; at times to punish him and at times to reward him. How would it be if Allah answered each and every prayer!? So, it is from His mercy that Allah rejects some of her supplications and does not answer them. Indeed, His refusal to answer, in this case, is an answer.

The statement'...He knows the sins of His servants well enough' (*al-Furqan:* 58) means, 'If you rely on the Living One Who does not die, the effects of that reliance is His protection to you from the sins of His slaves and creatures. He alone is the One Who knows their sins. He even knows the thoughts that transpire inside them.

Did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not say to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to see how those who have been forbidden to hold secret conversations go back afterwards and hold them, and conspire with one another in what is sinful, hostile, and disobedient to him? So, when they come to Prophet Muhammad they greet him with words Allah has never used to greet him, and they say inwardly, 'Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?' But Allah vows that Hell will be punishment enough for them, an evil destination where they will burn there eternally. (*al-Mujadala:* 8) Those words were still inside them and had not yet come out, yet still Allah informed them of their inner thoughts. It is as if Allah were setting the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at rest. So, no matter how much they plan and plot against you, no matter how much the allies of jinn and men unite against you, fear not, for your Lord has knowledge of sins from which you yourself might not be able to perceive nor will you be able to protect yourself. It is enough for you that Allah knows the evils of your enemies. Allah tells us that they have always schemed, but He brought their scheming to nought; for He is above all schemers. (*al-Anfal:* 30) The *khabir* is the one who knows hidden matters. Even when it comes to our mundane affairs we say, 'Summon a *khabir* 'expert', to resolve it,' since laymen are not capable of resolving specialist matters. Elsewhere in the Quran, He *the Almighty* says: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.' (*al-Mulk:* 13)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* moves us to an existential cosmic sign that is attached to the signs mentioned previously. The reason why He mentions more cosmic signs is to trigger the emotions and inclinations of His bondsmen so that perhaps they might become attached to the Creator and turn their attention to Him.

ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ
عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ۚ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ فَسْـَٔلْ بِهِۦ خَبِيرًا ﴿٥٩﴾

It is He who created the heavens and earth and what is
between them in six Days, and then established Himself
on the throne – He is the Lord of Mercy; He is the Best
Informed [59] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 59)

Some think that the creation of the heavens and earth was something easy and that the creation of mankind was greater. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* says that the creation of heavens and earth was indeed greater than the creation of man. (*Ghafir:* 57)

Man is created by Allah, and then might die after a day or after a hundred years, and in the course of his life, he will be afflicted by trials or illnesses. But the heavens and the earth, Allah created them and engineered them with precision, following laws that never vary and never become defective no matter how much time passes. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to man, 'These heavens and this earth are My creation and My handiwork. If you were to think and reflect on them, you would find that their creation is greater than your own.'

As for the phrase: '...in six days...' (*al-Furqan:* 59), we previously discussed this matter and said, 'All of the verses of the Quran indicate that creation was completed in a period of six days except for a single chapter whose verses indicate that creation took place over a period of eight days.

In the chapter of *Fussilat* the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks us how it is possible we disregard the One Who created the earth in two days, and how we set up other Gods as His equals, when He is the Lord of all the worlds! Then, Allah tells us how He placed solid mountains to settle the earth, how He blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them - all in four days. Then He tells us how he turned to the sky, which was smoke, and He said to it and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not,' and they said, 'We come willingly'. Then, in two days He formed the seven heavens, and assigned an order to each, and made the nearest one beautifully illuminated and secure. (*Fussilat:* 9-12)

The sum of all these days is eight. But, we need to go back to the detailed description of this 'sum' to be able to comprehend what it is made up of. The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks here about creating the heavens and the earth and everything in between in six days. Then He speaks about the creation of the earth in two days; and then about placing the mountains as pegs towering over it, blessing it and measuring out its provision for those who seek it, in four days. These four days are mentioned as a supplement to the creation of the earth which means that they include the two days. So, there is an overlap here and Allah is saying that with respect to the four days, the creation of the earth lasted two days, while the creation of all the other things took up the remainder of the time until the four days were complete. Like when you say, ‘I travelled to Tanta in one hour and to Alexandria in two hours,’ meaning that the hour that it took to travel to Tanta is included in the two hours that it took to get to Alexandria. But what length of time do we assign to the ‘day’ that is mentioned here? Allah addresses us with those days which we know of and whose significance we readily understand, so the meaning is, ‘in six of the days that you live and know.’ Had it referred to a pattern of ‘day’ which we know nothing of, the verse would have made no sense to us.

Someone might ask, ‘How could creation take that long when the True Lord *Glorified is He* simply has to say, ‘Be!’ to create something and saying ‘Be!’ takes no time at all?’ In reply, they say, ‘There is a difference between the actual process of creation and the time it actually needs for setting.’

If, for example, you want to prepare yogurt, you get the milk, some yogurt from a previously-made batch, you mix them and put them in the specified temperature. Once you do this, you will have actually made the yogurt, but you still ca not eat it. The setting time needed for the yogurt is a few hours for all the elements to combine. So, you can never say that you prepared the yogurt in a few hours!

Similarly, when you, for example, go to a tailor to measure and get fit for a suit, he will say to you, ‘I will have it for you in a month.’ But does it take a full month to tailor a suit? No, this month is the time it will be at the tailor’s shop.

When it comes to the True Lord *Glorified is He* He does things and creates things outside the border of time. He simply says to something, ‘Be!’ and it is.

As for the words: ‘...and then established Himself on the throne...’ (*al-Furqan:* 59), we have discussed this matter previously. The verb (*istawa*) means ‘He rose up’, ‘He was high’, ‘He was above’ and ‘He sat’. However, we declare Allah to be exalted above doing *istiwa’* in any way that resembles our *istiwa’* which alludes to the custom kings have of sitting on their thrones after getting full control over their kingdoms, and here it is symbolic of how Allah has full control over all affairs.

The statement‘... He is the Lord of Mercy…’ (*al-Furqan:* 59) indicates that the whole process of creation takes place within the framework of Allah’s universal mercy. So‘...ask about Him one well informed.’ (*al-Furqan:* 59) This is because He created the heavens and the earth and created us, but despite that we do not know how this creation was brought about. We will never grasp the details of how this creation was done unless the Creator Himself tells us of them. If He does not tell us, then it is something that none of us saw first-hand. How come then some theorists claim things like: the earth was a piece of the sun which then got separated from it as the sun revolved around itself, or any similar theories that just come into their heads!

That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* warns us against taking such theories for granted because creation is a matter that no amount of empirical knowledge can ever fathom. He tells us outright that He did not make us witness the creation of the heavens and earth, or ourselves, nor did he take as His helpers those who lead man astray. (*al-Kahf:* 51)

So, there are among us those who want to lead men astray, claiming that they are scientists who know what other people do not know. Beware of them, for they were not witnesses to the process of creation and neither were they Allah’s helpers to know any factual information about creation. Hence, the influx of theories about how man was created or how the heavens and earth were formed proves that this verse is speaking the truth.

It is very much the same with those who like to side with the Noble Quran at the expense of the Prophet Muhammad's Hadith. They will say to you: 'Tell me what the Quran says.' Glory be to Allah! Do you side with the Quran against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* although it was him who conveyed the Quran to you and without him you would have had no knowledge of the Quran? They tend to call themselves 'Quran People,' i.e. they only acknowledge the Quran. But I say to these people, 'You pray three units (*raka's)* for Maghrib; whereabout in the Quran did you find that?'

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There will come a time when a man, leaning on his couch, will say when being told a *Hadith*, "The Book of Allah stands between me and you: what we find in it to be lawful, we take as lawful and what we find in it to be forbidden, we take as forbidden." But indeed, what the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has forbidden is identical to what Allah has forbidden.'(1)

Why? Because, Allah commands us to uphold whatever Prophet Muhammad has commanded us to uphold, and to refrain from whatever he commanded us from which to refrain. (*al-Hashr:* 7) By Allah, if no one was around today uttering statements of that sort, what would have become of this Hadith? What would we have made out of it? This Hadith exposes them for all to see how superficial they are, for it would have been well within their capacity, after learning of this Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to refrain from siding with the Quran at the expense of disregarding the Prophetic Hadith. Indeed, they could not help but expose themselves as they truly are!

Let us now return to the topic at hand: we discussed two things now, the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the meaning of the Lord being established on the Throne. These two matters are ones about which only Allah Himself may be asked because He alone is the One Who knows the hidden things which nobody has seen or been privy to and so nobody can tell us about them. That is why the verse ends with: '…so ask about Him one well informed.' (*al-Furqan:* 59)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/132), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2664), Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (12) and Ad-Daraqutni in his Sunnan (4/286). The wording is that of Ad-Daraqutni.*

As for the meaning of the word (*sa'al*), a person does not ask about something unless he is ignorant of it. There are different levels of questions: you may be ignorant of a thing but have no interest in it nor have any desire to know it, so you are one of those who do not know it. Or, you may be ignorant of a thing and yet have an interest in it, and it is that interest that drives you to ask about it.

Sometimes we say '*is'al bihi*', and sometimes we say '*is'al'anhu*'. The meaning of the first is to ask out of interest. So, by reason of your interest, you should ask a well-informed person so he could tell you what you want to know. In this case, it is Allah alone who knows the hidden dimension of things and their particulars. He has the news of the creation of the heavens and the earth, and He knows what is meant by Him being established on the Throne. That is why when you ask Allah about these matters, you have only asked One Who is truly aware.

As for those who say that the phrase: '...so ask about Him one well informed…' (*al-Furqan:* 59) means asking those who know about Allah from among the people of the Book. We say that there is no harm in that interpretation since it reverts to Allah in the end.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِلرَّحْمَٰنِ قَالُوا۟ وَمَا ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ أَنَسْجُدُ لِمَا تَأْمُرُنَا وَزَادَهُمْ نُفُورًا ﴿٦٠﴾

Yet when they are told, 'Bow down before the Lord of Mercy,' they say, 'What is the Lord of Mercy? Should we bow down before anything you command?' and they turn even further away [60] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 60)

We notice here that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the attribute that requires to submit to Him, He does not say, for example, 'Prostrate yourselves before Allah,' but instead He says: '...Bow down before the Lord of Mercy...' (*al-Furqan:* 60). He mentions His quality of universal mercy which He extends to you, thereby making it obligatory for you to obey Him and submit to Him. It is as we said earlier, 'Make your obedience to the one whom you cannot do without, and make your submission to the one whose kingdom you can never leave.' They ask: "…What is the Lord of Mercy? ..."' (*al-Furqan:* 60). It is as if they did not know this word and only knew the (*rahman*) *of* Al-Yamama (the nickname which ‘Musaylima the Liar’ gave to himself).

Their question: ‘...Should we bow down before anything you command?…’ (*al-Furqan:* 60) shows that they did not refuse to worship because of who they were commanded to worship but because of the one who commanded them to worship. As we said previously, it is like when they asked why the Quran was not bestowed upon some great man from either of the two cities. (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) In other words they are saying that if Allah had commanded them to prostrate, they would have done it, but since the command comes exclusively from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* how can they simply obey? What is it that sets him apart and gives him the right to command them? That is why Allah says after that: ‘...and they turn even further away.’ (*al-Furqan:* 60) *Nufur* literally means recoiling oneself from something out of hatred for it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

تَبَارَكَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ فِى ٱلسَّمَآءِ بُرُوجًا وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا سِرَٰجًا وَقَمَرًا مُّنِيرًا ﴿٦١﴾

Exalted is He who put constellations in the heavens,
a radiant light, and an illuminating moon [61]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 61)

The context goes back once again to cosmic signs, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* alternates in this chapter between verses requesting things from them and verses directing their attention to Allah’s power and immensity. This provides us with an indication of the extent of their obstinacy and stubbornness, and of the desire of the True Lord *Glorified is He* to bring them back to His path.

If He were to have wished, He could have listed the entire cosmic signs one after the other followed by their refutations, but He preferred to wed one with the other so that the lessons would be instilled profoundly into the hearts of the believers.

We have said before that: ‘Exalted…’ (*al-Furqan:* 61) *tabaraka* has the meaning of His being far-removed from everything, His rank being exalted and His blessings and gifts being magnified. As for *buruj*, it is the plural of *burj* which is a towering stronghold that it is impossible to conquer. Nowadays, they use the word to describe tall buildings, saying the *burj* of Al-Ma'adi, the *burj* of the Nile and so on. It is with this meaning in mind that Allah vows in one verse by the sky and its towering constellations, (*al-Buruj:* 1) and in another He reminds us that, when it is our time, death will overtake us even if we took refuge in a high tower. (*an-Nisa':* 78)

The '*buruj*' are also the astrological houses in the sky which people use to tell the time and which some have linked to horoscopes. Indeed, the first thing many of them do when they open their newspapers in the morning is to check the horoscope section. Many verses of the Quran indicate that Allah created these houses to make it easy for people to measure time, and Allah tells us that the sun and the moon run their appointed orbits (*ar-Rahman:* 5), and the same is also mentioned in (*al-An'am:* 96).

This means that it is by means of them that one measures time: the sun gives us day and night, while the moon allows us to know when a new month begins since the particular phases in which it appears clearly shows you when it is the beginning, the middle or the end of the month. Then, by means of the shadow, the sun allows us to calculate even smaller increments of time (such as hours and minutes).

It is well known that there are 12 astrological houses in the sky, all of which are gathered in these poetic verses:

The lamb, the bull and the twin of the crab,
With the lion guarding the balance's spike,
The scorpion, the bow, the goat, and the bucket,
And a fish are all we knew from the Syrian race.

These houses are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces - the first is Aries and the last is Pisces. Each of these houses of the zodiac begins on the 21st of the month and ends on the 20th.

As for His words: '...He who put constellations in the heavens, a radiant light, and an illuminating moon' (*al-Furqan:* 61), a '*siraj*' is a lamp that we set alight to provide us with self-induced heat and light. Here, the word refers to the sun, since its heat and its light are both self-induced, unlike the moon which provides light only when the rays of the sun are reflected off its surface. So, its light is not self-induced, and that is why its light is described as ‘illuminated’, since it is void of heat.

It is something quite amazing that the surface of the moon, as we have discovered, is made up of stones. But when they removed some stones from its surface to conduct experiments on them, was the light of the moon diminished in any way? No, because it is the entire body of the moon that reflects the light of the sun back to us, and so when stones are removed from its surface, the stones that lay beneath them will still reflect the rays of the sun.

Elsewhere, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes this matter clear, when He tells us it is indeed He who made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a source of reflected light. (*Yunus:* 5) *Diya’* is light that is produced by a planet from within itself while ‘*nur*’ is light that is reflected from another body. In other words, light that is not self-induced.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ ٱلَّيۡلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ خِلۡفَةً لِّمَنۡ أَرَادَ أَن يَذَّكَّرَ أَوۡ أَرَادَ شُكُورًا ﴿٦٢﴾

It is He who made the night and day follow each other – so anyone who wishes may be mindful or show gratitude [62]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 62)

We know that night is the absence of the sun from one-half of the planet earth, while day is the sun facing the other half. Day and night follow one another, hence: they ‘...follow each other…’ (*al-Furqan:* 62). The night comes and then the day succeeds it, each of them being the successor of the other. This matter is clear to us now, but how were things in the beginning when Allah created the earth? Was the sun in its place or was it absent?

If the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the sun facing the earth, then day came first. After that the sun set and the night followed the day; so the day was not preceded by night in that case. Similarly, if the sun was not in its place at the moment of creation, then night came first without being preceded by day. In each of these cases, one of the two will not be following the other, whereas we need to understand the verse in such a way that the word 'follow each other' is true for both the day and the night.

The truth is that both of them have been successors to the other from the very start of creation. As we know - and it is something about which no doubt remains - the earth is spherical. So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* first created the sun and the moon, the side of the earth that faced the sun was in daylight, while the side that faced the moon was in night. Then movement commenced, and so from the very beginning, they have both followed each other.

This theory could not possibly stand without positing that the earth is round, and that is further corroborated by Allah's confirmation that the night can never outrun the day. (*Ya Sin:* 40) Hence, the day can never precede the night, and yet Allah mentions the night because they used to believe that night was created first. Why? It is because for the Arabs the day starts by the eve of the preceding day. In *Ramadan* when we fast, do we start fasting first and then we see the new moon, or do we first see the new moon at the eve of the first day? So, the first day of *Ramadan* starts with the eve (night) preceding it. That is why they considered the night to precede the day. This was something they believed and something that none of them disputed. So, the Quran addresses them on the basis of these beliefs: 'You believe that the night precedes the day – and so the day is behind, but you should know that the night does not precede the day.'

If we were to have said that the earth was flat, then these words would have made no sense. But to which day and night are being referred? Is it my day or the day of the one on the opposite side of the globe? Every millionth of a second a day is born and a night begins because when the sun sets on me, it rises on others; and when it is midday where I am, it is mid-afternoon, sunset or even the middle of the night where others are. So, all the times are found every time. This difference when it comes to time means that the sound of the call of prayer *'adhan'* resonates with the words '*Allahu Akbar'* every moment in time. So, Allah is being worshipped in every single moment: while you say '*Allahu Akbar'* (Allah is the Greatest), someone else says '*la ilaha illa-Allah'* (there is no God but Allah), and so on and so forth.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* created the night as a time for resting, and the day as a time for toiling - that is the case for the vast majority. But that does not apply to all human beings, for some people have certain obligations that contradict this rule. Some jobs even require their holders to stay up at night, such as bakers, guards, nurses, etc.

So, what about these people who sleep at day and stay up at night? Would it not have been a contradiction, had not these people been given a justification by the Quran? That is specifically why, in another verse, Allah says that among His wonders is our sleep by night or by day. (*ar-Rum:* 23) This verse takes into account the circumstances of those who are forced to work at night and rest during the day.

As for Allah's words: '...so anyone who wishes may be mindful or show gratitude' (*al-Furqan:* 62) which mean, 'You, whose work during the day has kept you from remembering your Lord, take advantage of the night to remember Him. You, whose sleep during the night has kept you from remembering your Lord, take advantage of the day.' It is like what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah spreads open His hand during the day to turn in mercy towards the wrongdoers of the day, and spreads open His hand during the night to turn in mercy towards the wrongdoers of the night.'(1)So, anyone who misses something during the day should make up for it at night, and anyone who misses something at night should make up for it at the day. If Allah spreads open His hand during the night and spreads open His hand during the day, non-stop, this means that Allah's hand is always spread open.

As for: '...be mindful...' (*al-Furqan:* 62), it means to consider and reflect upon Allah's signs during the day and the night, and to try to capture the blessings of Allah for which you can thank Him, as opposed to the heedless ones who pay no attention to any of these things.

It is part of Allah's bounty and generosity to us to keep us mindful of these blessings and directs our attention to them, since we all tend to heedlessness.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih (2759) as part of a Hadith from Abu Musa Al-'Ash'ari Allah be pleased with him as well as by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/395 & 404).*

As for Allah’s words: ‘...or show gratitude...’ (*al-Furqan:* 62), the word (*shukur*) is the hyperbole of (*shukr*).

وَعِبَادُ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلَّذِينَ يَمۡشُونَ عَلَى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ هَوۡنٗا
وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ ٱلۡجَٰهِلُونَ قَالُواْ سَلَٰمٗا ﴿٦٣﴾

The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, ‘Peace’[63] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 63)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* provides us with a picture of true servitude and an example for those who follow the Divine program. It is as if He were saying to us, ‘No need to talk of those who turn aside from the path of Allah and reject His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and look instead at the qualities of those slaves of Mine who believe in Me, put My rulings into practice and affirm My Messenger.’

We say with regard to the two words (*‘ibad*) and (*‘abeed*) that (*‘abeed* - slaves) is the plural of (*‘abd* - slave), while (*‘ibad* - worshipers) is the plural of (*‘abid* - worshiper), just like (*rijal* - dismounted people) is the plural of (*rajil* - dismounted person) in the verse where Allah tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim pilgrimage to all people and they will come on foot (dismounted).… (*al-Hajj:* 27) So (*‘abeed*) is not (*‘ibad*).

We previously discussed the difference between (*‘abeed*) and (*‘ibad*), pointing out that we are all (*‘abeed*) of Allah, regardless of whether we are believers or disbelievers, obedient or disobedient. This is because things happen to us that we are unable to prevent despite our will; which proves that we are compelled. The disbelieving (*‘abd*) is the one who rebels against belief in Allah, rebels against the affirmation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and rebels against Allah’s rulings by not doing them.

But can any disbeliever rebel against illness or affliction? Or, can he rebel against death when his time comes? All of this makes him a slave after all. All of us are enslaved when it comes to things over which we are compelled and have no power but other than that we are given a choice.

As for the believers, they relinquish the choice Allah gave them of belief or disbelief in favour of the Will of their Lord and are deserving of being called (*'ibad*) of Allah: 'The servants of the Lord of Mercy...' (*al-Furqan:* 63). But being servants to the Most Merciful Lord makes them masters. That is why Allah honoured His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by granting him the Night Journey because of his status as a servant of Allah, and Allah tells him it is by His limitless Glory that He made His servant travel by night. (*al-Isra':* 1) Thus, his slavery to Allah was the reason Allah raised him up.

It was because of the purity and sincerity of his slavery to Allah that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* obtained proximity to Allah that no human being had ever attained. That is also why Allah describes the angels as being honoured servants. (*al-Anbiya':* 26) When we did a thorough examination of all the verses where (*'ibad*) is mentioned, we only found one verse which on the surface appeared to contradict the meaning we have given for (*'ibad*), and that is when Allah talks about the Hereafter asking the false Gods if it was them who led these servants of His astray. (*al-Furqan:* 17) In this verse, He refers to the astray people as (*'ibad*), a term that is only normally used for those who are obedient. Why? Scholars explain that nobody has a free will in the Hereafter. All people in the Hereafter are (*'ibad*) because their free will is gone.

The people of knowledge say the word *'ibad* is derived from *'ibadiya* - state of worshiping, while the word *'abid* is derived from *'ubudiya* - servitude. Hence, the state of worship *'ibadiya,* is to obey the commands of Allah and abstain from His prohibitions out of a desire for His reward in the Hereafter and out of fear of His punishment. On the other hand, *'ibadiya* comes about so that a person can obtain the reward of the Hereafter and avoid its punishments.

As for *'ubudiya*, that is when a person is not fixated on what will happen in the Hereafter, but rather only looks to the fact that Allah has already shown kindness to His slaves beforehand by creating them out of nothing, providing for them out of nothing, bringing them up and subjugating the whole existence to serve them. So, because of all the blessings bestowed on us, they find Allah deserving of obedience regardless of whether He rewards or punishes us in the next life.

As for (*‘ubuda*), it is when a slave is not fixated on the blessings that have come before nor the rewards or punishments that are yet to come. Rather, he sees that it is the Majesty of Allah that makes Him worthy of being obeyed, even if He had not ever bestowed any blessings upon him, and even if He had not set in store for him any reward or punishment.

As for *’ubudiya* to people, it is abhorred. A renowned politician once said(1), ‘When did you enslave the people when their mothers brought them into this world as free human beings?’ That is because in servitude to people, the master takes the best of his slave, whereas servitude to Allah is a source of honour and pride since the slave takes the best from his Master - it is servitude of mastery and not compulsion.

When you believe in Allah, Allah hands the reins over to you, saying, ‘If you want Me to remember you, then remember Me.’ In a Qudsi Hadith, Allah says, 'Whoever mentions Me to himself, I mention him to Myself. Whoever mentions Me to a group, I mention him to an even better group.’(2)

If He summons you to pray five times a day, He does that so you can come closer to Him. You are free to connect to Him any time you want without an appointment, and you can even specify the time you want the meeting to begin and end and what you want it to be about, etc. So, the reins are in your hands.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* acquired this quality from Allah; whenever he shook hands with one of his companions, he would not withdraw his hand until the other withdrew his hand first (3). That is one of the courtesies exercised by the True Lord *Glorified is He*. So being a slave to Allah means being a slave to One Who is Most Merciful, not being a slave to an oppressive tyrant.

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(1) He is Ahmad ‘Urabi, son of Muhammad ‘Urabi, an Egyptian leader who has left his mark on recent events in the history of Egypt. He was born in the village of Harya Wazna, one of the villages of the Zagazig in Egypt, in the year 1841 CE, and lived in the vicinity of the Azhar for two years. Then he enlisted in the army in 1855 CE when he was only 14 years old and remained in it until he reached the rank of admiral during the rule of the Khedive Taufiq. He died in 1911 CE at the age of 70. See (al-’A’lam of Az-Zirikli 1/168).

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/251, 354 & 405); Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7405, 7505 & 7537); and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3603) as part of a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra. At-Tirmidhi said that the Qudsi Hadith was (hasan sahih). Sheikh Sha’rawi gave an explanation of this Qudsi Hadith in the television series, ‘The (Qudsi Hadiths)’ (1/17-25) as edited by us.*

(3) *Narrated by the father of Sheikh Al-Asbahani in his book, ‘Akhlaq An-nabiy wa Adabih’ (p. 36 of the edition printed by ‘Ad-dar Al-Misriyya Al-Lubnaniyya in 1993), that Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him said, ‘When Prophet Muhammad shook a man’s hand,* =

The first thing we notice in this verse is that Allah adjuncts the servants to the Most-Merciful (*ar-Rahman*) to emphasize that being servants to Allah entails no humiliation; let us not forget that the Quran is the intricate speech of the Lord. Then He mentions the qualities with which these slaves are endowed - qualities with respect to themselves, qualities with respect to their relation with the society, qualities with respect to their relation with their Lord and qualities by means of which the society can be bettered and rectified.

When it comes to action, human beings are either sitting down or moving. We will exclude the state of sleep because it is a time of no-action. When one is sitting down, his movement is limited and restrained. So, the important state is that in which we are moving and walking - it is the state which we should direct our attention to.

That is why our Lord makes it clear to us how we should walk, saying: ‘The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth…’ (*al-Furqan:* 63), i.e. gently and with calm and tranquility without any arrogance or conceit. Why? Because it is walking that will bring you into contact with many different societies, and this divinely inspired way sets a humanitarian trait in the society that regards all human beings as equal.

Elsewhere in the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us of other traits, like not to turn our nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly… (*Luqman:* 18), and not to strut arrogantly about the earth, since we cannot break it open, nor match the mountains in height… (*al-Isra’:* 37).

The word *tas’ir* in the above verse, which means turning our nose up at people in pride and conceit, is derived from *sa’ar* which is a disease that afflicts camels and causes their necks to be twisted to the sides. If someone wants to walk haughtily and arrogantly upon the earth, he can do so on account of some subjective quality of his, but is there anything at all subjective that you can be sure you will continue to have?

= *he would not withdraw his hand until the man withdrew his hand first, and he would not turn his face away from him until the man had turned his face away first.’*

If you are rich, you could easily become impoverished; if you are strong and healthy, illness might strike you down; and if you are mighty today, you could easily become weak and humiliated tomorrow. So, none of the things that give you cause to be arrogant are actually yours since they are given to you by Allah, so what then are you being arrogant about?!

Like the ongoing saying: ‘He who stitches should stitch on his thigh’, but how can you stitch on the thigh of another person? The background for this proverb is that a saddle maker used to make a child, who worked for him, stretch his leg out straight and he would place his saddle on the boy’s thigh and start stitching it. A man saw this and he pitied the child, so he said to the man, ‘The boy is weak and will not be able to endure that, if you want to do it like that, then place the saddle on your own thigh and stitch it!’ The same applies here: he, who wants to act arrogantly, should only act arrogantly on account of something intrinsic to himself, not on account of something that has been given to him. An arrogant person is one over whose heart a veil has been placed, so that he no longer pays heed to his Lord *the Most High* and sees himself as being better than all the rest of Allah’s creation. If only he were to have called to mind the greatness and grandeur of his Lord, he would have felt too embarrassed to act arrogantly towards Allah’s creation. So, his arrogance is an indication of his heedlessness. That is why a poet once said:

Leave every tyrant to the mercy of time,

Time straightens out every neck twisted with pride.

In other words, there will come a time when his crookedness is straightened and his nose put out of joint.

As for: ‘...haughtily...’ (*Luqman:* 18), the word *marah* means rejoicing accompanied by *batar* - ungratefulness. *Batar* is when you take a blessing and forget the one who bestowed that blessing upon you, and then enjoy that blessing fully while disobeying the one who gave it you. So, the type of rejoicing that is forbidden is that which is accompanied by ungratefulness and a rejection of the bountiful grace of the Bestower. As for the rejoicing that is accompanied by gratitude and thanks, it is praiseworthy, as Allah Himself tells us to indeed rejoice in His bounty and His grace. (*Yunus:* 58)

Elsewhere, He teaches us the proper etiquette of walking which is to go at a moderate pace and lower our voice.… (*Luqman:* 19) They say that walking humbly means walking calmly without arrogance or conceit, but it does not mean walking in humiliation or weakness. When ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* saw a man walking languidly, he struck him and forbade him from walking in such a broken manner. Thus, the believer should take the middle stance when it comes to walking, neither walking haughtily nor in infirmity.

After that, the verse talks about the qualities which set apart the slaves of the Most Merciful and their relationships with other people, saying: ‘...and who, when the foolish address them, reply, "Peace".’ (*al-Furqan:* 63) (*Jahil*) here means (*safeeh*) - or the foolish person who does not weigh his words before uttering them nor uses them in their correct contexts, the fool who has no true understanding of the way things are nor of the way one should act.

We previously laid out the difference between foolishness and illiteracy: the illiterate is the one whose mind is empty and knows nothing, and as a result is easy to convince of the truth; whereas the foolish is the one whose mind is full of facts that contradict reality, and so it requires a great deal more effort to convince him of the truth because first we must remove the misconceptions from his mind, then introduce in their place the true concepts.

As for, ‘when the foolish address them’, it means you should not act foolishly towards them as they acted foolishly towards you. Rather, you should rebuke them with good grace and say: ‘...peace’ (*al-Furqan:* 63), thereby showing them the difference between you and them. In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* clearly describes the fruits one gets from acting in this way, and tells us to repel evil with what is better, and our enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend. (*Fussilat:* 34) In this regard, there can nothing be more beautiful than what Imam Ash-Shafi’i(1) *peace be upon him* said:

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(1) He is Muhammad ibn Idris Ash-Shafi’i al-Matlabi, the father of ‘Abdullah, one of the four Imams, the founder of the Shafi’i *madhhab,* and it is to him that the Shafi’iyya is attributed. He was born in Gaza in Palestine in 150 AH and visited Baghdad twice. He made his way to Egypt in 199 AH and died there in 204 AH at the age of 54. His tomb is well-known in Cairo. (Al-’A’lam of Az-Zirikli 6/26).

When a fool says something to you, do not reply,
For your best possible response is silence.(1)
If you speak to him, you bring him pleasure,
But if you leave him, he will die of grief.

If foolishness takes a turn for the worse, and the fool starts to oppress you and act haughtily towards you, then you must respond to his aggression equally. If you ingest his words with patience and clemency, he will think that your clemency is just a sign of your weakness. It is in circumstances such as this that you must show him the difference between weakness and good manners, just like the poet(2) who composed the following words:

We pardoned the tribe of Dhuhl,
Said, ‘The people are our brothers.’
The days might bring back,
A people like those who came before.
When evil was expressed openly,
That evening and it became clear,
When nothing was left but enmity,
We condemned them as they condemned us.
We walked with the gait of a lion,
That goes out in the morning angry,
Enraged by a blow that was debilitating,

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(1) *This verse is mentioned by Abu Al-Hasan Al-Mawardi in ‘Adab Ad-Dunya wa Ad-Din’ (p. 226), but he ascribed it to ‘Amr ibn ‘Ali. See ‘Diwan Imam Ash-Shafi’i’, Ibn Sina library edition 1988, p. 37, in which these two verses are mentioned.*

(2) *He is Shahl ibn Shayban ibn Zimman Al-Hanafi, better known as Al-Find Az-Zimmani. He was from Banu Bakr ibn Wa’il and was a poet from the Jahiliyya period before Islam. He was the leader of Bakr in his time and its greatest horseman. He was originally from the people of Al-Yamama. He was present at the battle between Bakr and Taghlab when he was nearly 100 years old. He died some 70 years before hijra. He was called Al-Find because of his great constitution. (Al-’A’lam 3/179).*

Humiliating and unified.
A stab like the mouth of a water skin
That goes out in the morning full.
Salvation may be found in evil,
When you cannot be saved by kindness
Some clemency in the face of foolishness,
Means submitting to degradation

Also, the following verses which are attributed to Imam ‘Ali:

If you have need of clement self-control,
Then I have greater need at certain times of headstrong foolishness.
I have a horse of clemency that is bridled by clemency,
A horse of foolishness that is saddled by foolishness.
For those who desire that I set things straight, I will set them straight,
For those who desire that I make things crooked, I will make them crooked.

As for: ‘...reply "peace"’ (*al-Furqan:* 63), they say that the type of peace that is meant here is to leave someone be, not like when we greet someone saying, ‘Peace be upon you.’ When you are exposed to someone who verbally abuses and assaults you, tell him, ‘Peace’ meaning leave him be and go your own way.

Some scholars think that the words: 'reply with [words of] peace' contain both these meanings: that of leaving someone be and that of greeting them and granting them safety. So, when you treat a fool with clemency, you should not be dragged to an unnecessary conversation with him lest you miss giving him the greetings of safety. An example of this is found in Allah’s words: 'And when they hear ill speech, they turn away from it and say, "For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. Peace will be upon you; we seek not the ignorant.”' (*al-Qasas:* 55)

Did Abraham *peace be upon him* not say to his uncle Azar when he persisted in his disbelief: 'Peace will be upon you. I will ask forgiveness for you of my Lord.' (*Maryam:* 47) It means that ‘If I were to stand before you, I might act aggressively towards you and so the problems that exist between us would get worse’

After having discussed the state of the servants of the Most Merciful with respect to themselves and with respect to other people, the verses move on to discuss the state of their interactions with their Lord:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَبِيتُونَ لِرَبِّهِمۡ سُجَّدٗا وَقِيَٰمٗا ﴿٦٤﴾

Those who spend the night bowed down
or standing, worshipping their Lord [64]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 64)

Nighttime is when one returns home after the toils and endeavours of the day, and after having enjoyed all sorts of Allah’s blessings. When he gets into the comfort of his home, he remembers the blessings of Allah *Glorified is He* that manifested themselves to him in the course of the day, blessings that did not come from within himself but rather were granted to him by Allah *Glorified is He*. This is why he turns to Allah *Glorified is He* in thanks, and spends the night in standing [in prayer] and prostration. It is as Allah says he is ‘one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating, and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord.' (*az-Zumar:* 9) And: 'They used to sleep but little of the night, and in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-18)

But, does Allah *Glorified is He* actually require us to spend the night awake, given that He *Glorified is He* said in another verse: 'And made your sleep [a means for] rest' (*an-Naba’:* 9)? They say the verse does not mean standing the whole night in prayer, but rather only that part when you find yourself with the vitality and energy to engage in worship. It is as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says when addressing the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O you who wraps himself [in clothing], Arise [to pray] the night, except for a little - Half of it - or subtract from it a little, Or add to it, and recite the Quran with measured recitation.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-4)

Even Ibn ‘Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Whoever prays two rak‘as or more after ‘Isha’ will be counted among those who spend the night in prostration and standing in prayer[1].’ So your Lord wants you to remember Him before you sleep, and reflect on the blessings He has bestowed on you and thank Him for them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions two positions: that of standing and that of prostration: '…their Lord prostrating and standing [in prayer],' because some people find it difficult to prostrate while others find it easy, and some people find it difficult to stand. So the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions both positions to even things out between the two types of people.

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا ٱصۡرِفۡ عَنَّا عَذَابَ جَهَنَّمَۖ
إِنَّ عَذَابَهَا كَانَ غَرَامًا ﴿٦٥﴾

Who plead, ‘Our Lord, turn away from us the suffering
of Hell, for it is a dreadful torment to suffer! [65]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 65)

This statement is in keeping with those servants of the Most Merciful who engage in good action out of a desire for reward and a fear of punishment; they are the ones who say: 'Our Lord, avert from us the punishment of Hell. Indeed, its punishment is ever adhering.' The punishment is necessary for them and binding upon them, and they will never separate themselves from the Fire because one’s final outcome will be either paradise forever or Hellfire forever.

As for the words: '…avert from us the punishment of Hell,' it is as if they imagined that Hell was hurtling towards them and that there would be a violent dispute between them and Hell, as indicated by the fact that it says: '…is there yet more [for me]?' (*Qaf:* 30)

Then the verses go on to mention the reason they uttered these words:

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(1) *From Ibn ‘Umar may Allah be pleased with him that the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘If anyone prays ‘Isha’ in congregation and then prays four rak‘as before leaving the mosque, it will be equivalent to the Night of Al-Qadr.’ It is related by Al-Mundhari in ‘At-targhib wa at-tarhib’ (1/205), and he attributed it to At-Tabarani in Al-Mu‘jam Al-kabir.*

إِنَّهَا سَآءَتۡ مُسۡتَقَرّٗا وَمُقَامٗا ﴿٦٦﴾

It is an evil home, a foul resting place! [66]
(The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 66)

For a thing to be evil means for it to be foul and ugly. Its opposite is for something to be goodly, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the counterpart of this verse: 'Good is the settlement and residence.' (*al-Furqan:* 76) And that is why evil is always accompanied by ugliness, and good is always accompanied by beauty.

He *Glorified is He* says: 'settlement and residence,' so that they do not think that the fire will only burn for a period and come to an end, and that they will then come out of it. On the contrary, it will be their permanent abode, their station that they will never leave. On the other hand, it might be that by these words, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is referring to two different sorts of people: believers who exceed the bounds in committing certain wrong actions and who do not repent or whose repentance is not accepted by Allah. Such people will be in the Fire for a time. According to this interpretation, the word *'settlement'* refers to a temporary abode while the word (*residence*) refers to the long stay. So, the fire is an evil abode for those who exceed the bounds and do not repent or whose repentance is not accepted by Allah, but not a permanent abode. But as for the '*residence*,' it is for those who will remain in the Fire timelessly forever.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَنفَقُواْ لَمۡ يُسۡرِفُواْ وَلَمۡ يَقۡتُرُواْ
وَكَانَ بَيۡنَ ذَٰلِكَ قَوَامٗا ﴿٦٧﴾

They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance [67] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 67)

Spending excessively is frittering away what you own in exchange for something for which you have no need. So, for example, we do not call someone who eats in order to preserve his life an extravagant. 'Umar *may Allah be pleased* *with him* said to his son ‘Asim(1), ‘Eat until your stomach is half full, do not throw away clothes unless it has become totally worn out, and do not put all of your provision into your stomach and onto your body.’(2)

Being wasteful means spending one’s wealth in ways that are not lawful since there is nothing wasteful in spending it for what is lawful. Even when a person spends his wealth extravagantly on permissible luxuries–although he does bring luxuries to himself–he also fulfils a necessary function for society. For example, it would be possible for the one who wears ironed clothes–and it must be said that ironing clothes is a luxury–to wear them without ironing them, but that process of ironing is necessary for the ironer, since it is by means of it that he acquires his livelihood. It is also like the person who takes a taxi when it is in his capacity to walk, or like the one who sits in the café every day so that his shoes can be shined when it is in his capacity to shine them himself. All of these things are luxuries for you, but necessities for others; so they cannot be referred to as wastefulness.

As for Allah’s words: '…but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate,' they mean between wasteful extravagance and niggardliness there is moderation. In other words, spending on others is what lies in the middle of both extremes. I remember when we were students, they taught us the principle of the lever: how to find the centre of a staff of wood whereby both arms were the same length and in perfect balance, neither outbalancing the other. When one end leans down, the other opposes it. It was as if it were saying to it, ‘We are here’. And when you hang a weight on one of the arms, it becomes necessary for you to extend the length of the other arm in order to counter that weight.

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(1) *He is ‘Asim ibn ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab Al-Qurashi Al-‘Adawi, a poet who was one of the best of people in terms of character. He was tall, stout and was the maternal grandfather of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz. He was born in 6 AH and died in Rabdha in 70 AH at the age of 65 (Al-’A‘lam of Az-Zirikli 3/248).*

(2) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned it in his Tafsir (7/4951), ‘And do not be one of those people who put what Allah Glorified is He provides them in their stomachs and on their backs.’ ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him was an example to his son in this respect, for Abu Nu‘aym related in Al-Hilya (1/53) that Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, ‘‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab gave the khutba while he was the Caliph, wearing a waist-wrapper that was patched up in 12 places.’*

It is narrated(1) that when ‘Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan(2) wanted to marry his daughter Fatima to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz, he tested him by asking him this question in order to ascertain whether he was balanced in terms of the way he lived: ‘‘Umar, what is your spending?’ He replied, ‘Prince of the believers, my spending is the good that lies between two evils.’(3) Then he recited this verse: 'And [they are] those who, when they spend, do so not excessively or sparingly but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate.' When he heard that, the Caliph knew that the future husband of his daughter would follow a course that would guarantee the basic means of subsistence for himself and his wife, as well as guaranteeing the highest means of subsistence for the whole of society.

We previously mentioned that a person who spends his entire income is not able to bring about advancement neither in his life nor in that of his children since he has been extravagant in his expenditure and has not saved anything with which he might, for example, build himself a house or buy himself a car, etc.

The calamity that miserliness brings upon a society, however, is even greater, since a society’s well-being lies in spending and saving, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And do not make your hand [as] chained to your neck or extend it completely.' (*al-Isra’:* 29)

In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* has created for us a balance between extravagance and miserliness. And that is because wealth is that upon which life is built, and because the one who is miserly is miserly to both himself and other people. There is nothing he desires to buy which he can make use of in his own life or use to benefit the lives of others. These commodities, these products, and these workers–from where would those who are involved in these crafts and trades acquire their provision if their goods were not circulated or consumed? There is no doubt that miserliness would lead to economic depression and unemployment, and they are two of the worst possible diseases that could ever afflict a society.

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(1) *The story of ‘Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan asking ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz may Allah be pleased with him about the source of his provision upon the latter's proposing to marry the former's daughter.*

(2) *He is Abu Al-Walid Al-Umawi, one of the greatest and shrewdest of the caliphs. He was born in Medina in 26 AH where he grew up as an extremely well versed jurisprudent and worshipper. Mu‘awiyya may Allah be pleased with him put him in charge of Medina when he was still just a boy of 16. The diwans were arabicised during his era, and the Arabic letters were given their dots and vowelisations. He was the first one to mint gold dinars in Islam and to emboss them with Arabic lettering. He died in 86 AH at the age of 61 (al-’A‘lam 4/165).*

(3) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned it in his Tafsir (7/4951).*

If you were to look at a loaf of bread–one of the most basic of the necessities of life–and reflect on all the workers, manufacturers, farmers, engineers, mills, granaries, factories, and bakeries that are involved in getting it to you. Consider, if you were to abstain from eating, what would happen to all those people?

So, your Lord wants you to spend some of your wealth and also save some of it, for that will help you realise your goals and give you the means to bring about an advancement to it. The verse we mentioned previously concludes with the words: '…and [thereby] become blamed and insolvent.' (*al-Isra':* 29)

Blame is on you for frittering away your wealth in ways that bring no benefit to your dependents, and grief-stricken and destitute when you see others rising above you while you remain still and do nothing. So, man is blamed when he is extravagant and destitute when he is tight-fisted. His main support lies in taking the middle way between the two extremes. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says(1):

وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَدۡعُونَ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ وَلَا يَقۡتُلُونَ ٱلنَّفۡسَ ٱلَّتِي
حَرَّمَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَلَا يَزۡنُونَۚ وَمَن يَفۡعَلۡ ذَٰلِكَ يَلۡقَ أَثَامٗا ﴿٦٨﴾

Those who never invoke any other deity beside God, nor take a life, which God has made sacred, except in the pursuit of justice, nor commit adultery. (Whoever does these things will face the penalties [68] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 68)

At this point, someone might ask, 'After enumerating all those qualities possessed by the servants of the Most-Merciful, is it really necessary to mention that they are people: 'who do not invoke with Allah another deity,’ since they would never have taken on those other qualities unless they already believed in Allah? The answer is ‘This particular matter is a doctrine of belief and a basis for the religion which must be emphasised by the Quran.’ They mean that the people of means should not call on those who were directly involved in bringing them the means, since that is hidden polytheism. An example of this is the statement, ‘I rely on Allah and on you.’ We say to these people, ‘Wake up! Nothing is due to me - the entire affair is in Allah’s hands.' Rather, you must say, ‘I rely on Allah’, and when you want, then say, ‘And then on you.’(1) We hear others say about important matters, ‘This is down to me, and the rest is down to Allah’, thereby making himself responsible for the important main part of the matter and assigning the rest of the affair to Allah. Is such a thing appropriate when, in fact, it all rests in the hands of Allah?

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(1) *Cause for the revelation of the verse: "'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud may Allah be pleased with him said, 'When the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him was asked what the worst sort of wrong action was, he replied, 'Assigning a partner to Allah when He was the One Who created you.' 'Then what?' he was asked. He replied, 'Killing your child out of fear that he will eat food that was yours.' 'Then what?' they asked. He replied, 'Fornicating with your neighbor's wife.' 'Abdullah said, 'Then Allah Glorified is He revealed the following as an affirmation of that: "those who do not invoke with Allah another deity." It is related by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (3/326), by al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (7/4952), and Al-Wahidi in Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 192). The Hadith is in the two Sahihs of Al-Bukhari and Muslim and all the collections of the people of the Sunnan.*

It is possible to interpret this verse as referring to those who are beguiled by the means, expecting them to provide them with their provision, and forgetting the Prime Causer. This is hidden polytheism.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed]. 'We talked previously about the difference between death and killing, saying that both of them brought an end to life, but in the case of death, one’s life is ended first and then one’s physical identity is wasted, while in the case of killing, one’s physical identity is wasted first, and then one’s soul leaves one’s body. Therefore, death comes about at the hands of Allah, while killing might come about at the hands of a human being.

Here, we find a clear prohibition against that crime because, ‘Whoever destroys what Allah *Glorified is He* has built is accursed.’ Also, he has brought to an end the life that Allah *Glorified is He* granted to His servants.

As for Allah’s words: 'except by right,' a right that makes it permissible to kill someone, like stoning adulterers to death, taking the life of a killer in retaliation for the life he took and killing apostates. When these people are killed, it is due to a right that demands their lives.

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(1) *Ibn Majah related in his Sunnan (2117) in a (Hadith) from Ibn ‘Abbas may Allah be pleased with them that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘When you make an oath, do not say, ‘What Allah wills and what you will’, but rather say, ‘What Allah wills and then you will.’’*

As for Allah’s words: 'and do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse,' we spoke about this matter at the beginning of the chapter of *an-Nur*, saying, ‘Allah wanted that same human being whom He *Glorified is He* honoured and made His vicegerent on earth to be pure and honourable, and to live his life according to the Laws of Allah. So He caused there to be no element within his vicegerency that went against these Laws. Allah *Glorified is He* wants the society of the believers to be based upon purity and built upon the raiser taking care of those whom he raises.

You find men taking care of their children, providing them with food, drink, and clothes and sacrificing themselves for them. Why? Because they are the children that they fathered and so they are held accountable for them. But if a man has doubts as to whether a child is his or not, then he tends to neglect him and sometimes even seeks to rid himself of him. Such a child is raised as a parentless orphan and is not worthy of receiving Allah’s vicegerency upon the earth nor of bearing that honour.

This proves that it goes against healthy human nature for there to be people on Allah’s earth whose parentage is not ascribed to their true fathers, and it was because of this that Islam forbade fornication and made it be one of the qualities of the servants of the Most-Merciful that they do not commit adultery.

يُضَٰعَفۡ لَهُ ٱلۡعَذَابُ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ وَيَخۡلُدۡ فِيهِۦ مُهَانًا ﴿٦٩﴾

Their torment will be doubled on the Day of
Resurrection, and they will remain in torment,
disgraced [69] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 69)

How can we understand what is meant by the punishment being multiplied here in this verse when Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it.' (*ash-Shura:* 40) And: 'Whoever comes [on the Day of Judgement] with a good deed will have ten times the like thereof [to his credit], and whoever comes with an evil deed will not be recompensed except the like thereof; and they will not be wronged.' (*al-An‘am:* 160) The reality is that there is no contradiction between any of the verses of the Noble Quran since the one who commits this wrong action acts as an example to society and gives others the courage to commit the same deed. It is why he is held accountable for his own sin in doing the act, as well as the sin of those others who emulate him.

It is like what Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran stating the words of the disbelievers: 'Indeed, we found our fathers upon a religion, and we are, in their footsteps, following.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) Thus, the existence of fathers as paragons of evil increases the levels of evil displayed by their sons as if they were participating with their sons in their evil acts. Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'That they may bear their own burdens in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge.' (*an-Nahl:* 25) And: 'But they will surely carry their [own] burdens and [other] burdens along with their burdens.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 13) Their first sin lies in their own misguidance and their other sin lies in their misguiding others. This is why their punishment is multiplied.

'And he will abide therein humiliated.' The punishment is sometimes described in the Quran as being ‘painful’, sometimes as being ‘terrible’, and other times as being ‘humiliating’. The one who looks at the hurt caused to the parts of the body calls it a painful punishment because it causes pain to every single one of them. Thus, the punishment is something tangible and physical. But as for humiliation, that is something intangible. Some people are hurt when words are spoken that detract from their honour, but are totally unaffected by being physically beaten.

The Creator created people and knows that they are the sons and daughters of other people, and knows that no one is protected against them apart from the Messengers. So, wrong action is passed on from them.

An example of the perfect mercy Allah *Glorified is He* shows in terms of the care He takes of us is that He *Glorified is He* leaves open the door of repentance for all His servants who sin, and that is because if the person who committed a wrong action were to have despaired of ever being forgiven, then matters would have gotten worse with him, and he would have slipped even deeper in corruption. But when you open for him the door of repentance and forgiveness, he returns to the straight path and becomes obedient once more. It is a mercy for both him and society in its entirety.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَٰلِحًا فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ ٱللَّهُ
سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمْ حَسَنَٰتٍ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٧٠﴾

Except those who repent, believe, and do good deeds: God will change the evil deeds of such people into good ones. He is most forgiving, most merciful [70] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 70)

Your Lord is both Generous and Merciful. If you turn to Him, He will turn to you and accept your good actions, and if you present Him with right actions reflecting deep repentance, He will transform your bad actions into good ones.

There are two issues that must be mentioned with respect to repentance: Allah *Glorified is He* permits it and that He *Glorified is He* then accepts it from those who do it. It is a double bounty from Allah to first permit it and then to accept it. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Then He turned to them so they could repent.' (*at-Tawba:* 118) The meaning of this is that He turned to them by legislating repentance so that they might not be too embarrassed to return to Allah.

As for Allah's words: '…except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work', those who do acts of disobedience that take them out of belief are being addressed by 'repent and attain to faith' since those who are disobedient do not do acts of disobedience except when they are heedless and have forgotten their belief, as is mentioned in the Noble Hadith: 'In the moment that a fornicator fornicates, he is not a believer; and in the moment that a drinker drinks wine, he is not a believer.'(1)

If the one who is doing the act of disobedience were to call to mind the majesty of his Lord, he would not disobey Him. The act of disobedience would become so huge in his eyes that he would turn away from it. But, whenever his belief becomes absent, it becomes necessary for him to renew it, and then to use that belief to do right action. And the reward for doing that is: 'For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good.' This does not mean that bad deeds are transformed and immediately turned into good ones, but rather that a servant's bad deeds are removed and replaced by repentance, and then, after having repented, Allah *Glorified is He* assigns a good action to him. Allah’s mercy and forgiveness has caused some people to become greedy, so that a poet once said:

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(1) *An agreed-upon Hadith. It is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2475), as well as by Muslim in his Sahih (57) in Kitab al-'iman in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

My Master, I have deliberately disobeyed You,
So that I may see You at Your most beautiful, as a Forgiver!
I committed the very worst of sins,
Avoiding the pardon You bestow when they are minor.

Some of them have gone so far that they commit as many wrong actions as possible, greedy for them to be replaced into good deeds. But who will guarantee that they will remain alive long enough to repent? Or that Allah *Glorified is He* will accept their repentance when they do?

The spiritual reason that the scholars talk about when it comes to this matter is that those who keep well from disobedience and never engage in it will never have tasted the sweetness of submitting to one’s appetites, and so it will never occur to them to do so. But as for those who rush into them, taste their sweetness and sin excessively, they suffer greatly when they hold themselves back and keep well away from acts of disobedience to Allah *Glorified is He*; and it is that suffering that grants them this rank of theirs.

وَمَن تَابَ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحٗا فَإِنَّهُۥ يَتُوبُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ مَتَابٗا ٧١

People who repent and do good deeds truly
return to God [71] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 71)

The meaning of: '…turn to Allah with [accepted] repentance' is that he turns to Him with a sincere repentance, intending thereafter to never again commit any acts of disobedience, and not go back on his repentance like those who mock their Lord, saying, ‘I will do such-and-such and then I will repent.’ It is very dangerous for a person to do a wrong action, thinking that he can always repent afterwards, for that person may well die while in the process of committing that wrong action before he ever gets the opportunity to repent.[1]

Then the verses proceed to mention another of the characteristics of the servants of the Most-Merciful:

وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَشۡهَدُونَ ٱلزُّورَ وَإِذَا مَرُّواْ بِٱللَّغۡوِ مَرُّواْ كِرَامٗا ٧٢

[The servants of the Lord of Mercy are] those who do not give false testimony, and who, when they see some frivolity, pass by with dignity [72] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 72)

To lie when bearing witness is to assert that a legal right belongs to one to whom it does not. The verse is applicable to accommodate more than simply lying when bearing witness in the courts. It applies to attending any setting where falsehood is dealt.

So, the meaning of: 'And [they are] those who do not testify to falsehood' is that they are never in the presence of falsehood of any type, be that in word, action or acknowledgment; they are never present at anything that is incompatible with truth. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'And when they hear ill speech, they turn away from it and say, "For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. Peace will be upon you; we seek not the ignorant.' (*al-Qasas:* 55) And elsewhere: 'And if Satan should cause you to forget, then do not remain after the reminder with the wrongdoing people.' (*al-An'am:* 68) And elsewhere: 'And it has already come down to you in the Book that when you hear the verses of Allah [recited], they are denied [by them] and ridiculed; so do not sit with them until they enter into another conversation.' (*an-Nisa':* 140)

It is well-known that perjury and bearing witness to other than the truth turns realities on their head and harms society since when you bear false

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(1) *Al-Qaffal said, "It is possible that the first verse refers to those who repent from among the idolaters, and that is why He says: "Except for those who repent, believe". Then he mentioned in conncetion with them those who repent from Muslims and followed it with right action so that they also have the ruling of those who repent.' (Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi 7/4956).*

witness, you take what rightfully belongs to one person and give it to another, and that brings the movements of life grinding to a halt and causes people to feel that the fruits of their own sweat and labour are no longer secure. So, as long as matters turn out in the end to be false, people will stop striving or working hard.

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Should I not tell you what the gravest of the major sins are? Associating others with Allah, being disobedient to one’s parents and bearing false witness.’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was reclining. Then he sat up and repeated [the last one] until we said to ourselves, “We wished that he would be quiet.”’(1) Why? Because bearing false witness destroys all elements of truth in a society.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: '…and when they pass near ill speech, they pass by with dignity.' It is as if the meaning here is, ‘Do not enter where people of low character congregate and engage in idle and false talk that counters truth and causes people to turn aside from it.’ An example of that is what Allah *Glorified is He* relates about what the disbelievers used to say in order to try and stop people from listening to the Quran when it was recited: 'Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it,' (*Fussilat:* 26) meaning make a disturbance so that people are unable to hear it properly.

This is an admission from them that were they to have left people to listen to the Quran unhindered, they would most definitely have been affected by it and believed in it. If the Quran had not had any effect on people’s hearts, they would never have said these words.

As for their words: '…but rather talk frivolously about it,' they mean, ‘if you do hear it being recited, then talk frivolously about it, and make a disturbance so that it does not reach anyone’s ears unadulterated.’ Why? Did ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* not believe as soon as he heard the verses recited in the house of his sister Faṭima? But why did the Quran affect ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* on that particular occasion when he had heard it on many previous occasions without being affected? That is because, they say, stubbornness and argumentation cause people to hear without hearing. But on this particular occasion, ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* heard it after having struck his sister and cut her open. When he saw the blood flowing from her wound, his heart was moved by the brotherly sentiment and concern, and that allowed him to shake off his arrogance and stubbornness. He was in a receptive state; his soul clear and his heart empty of vehemence against Islam, and he became a Muslim.

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(1) *It is related by Muslim in his Sahih (87) in Kitab al-’iman; Ahmad in his Musnad (5/37); and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3019) in a Hadith from Abu Bakra Nufay‘ ibn Al-Harith. At-Tirmidhi said, ‘This is a (hasan sahih gharib Hadith).’*

Do you not see that the disbelievers would say amongst themselves when they heard the Quran, as is stated in the Quran: 'And among them, [O Muhammad], are those who listen to you, until when they depart from you, they say to those who were given knowledge, "What has he said just now?"' (*Muhammad:* 16) They said these words to express their amazement and astonishment. The Quran responds by saying: 'Say, "It is, for those who believe, a guidance and cure." And those who do not believe - in their ears is deafness, and it is upon them blindness.' (*Fussilat:* 44)

The Quran is one, but the receivers are different: one receives it with a heart that is clear and willing, while another receives it with argumentation and a heart that is closed shut, as if he did not hear it at all. It is a matter of an action and the receiver of that action. The example we previously gave of this was of one who blows on his hands during the cold days of winter with the intention of warming them up and one who blows on his tea with the intention of cooling it down; the action is the same, but the receiver of the action is different.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمۡ لَمۡ يَخِرُّواْ عَلَيۡهَا صُمّٗا وَعُمۡيَانٗا ﴿٧٣﴾

Who, when reminded of their Lord’s signs, do not turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to them [73] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 73)

Allah’s words: 'when reminded' are only said when the addressee whom you are reminding is intimately acquainted with whatever you are reminding him and has considerable knowledge of it. The verses with which you remind them have a first coming and a second coming: the first coming is the first announcement of them, and the second coming is when you forget them; we will remind you of them. 'And those who, when reminded of the verses of their Lord,' in the Noble Quran: '…do not fall upon them deaf and blind.'

Another example of its being used in this way is what Allah *Glorified is He* says about the qualities of the believers: 'And they say, "Exalted is our Lord! Indeed, the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled." And they fall upon their faces weeping, and the Quran increases them in humble submission...' (*al-Isra': 108-109*) because they fall down under the influence of an overpowering force, brought on them by their hearing the Quran. When they are reminded of the verses of Allah, they do not throw themselves upon them like the deaf and dumb, but rather, they throw themselves upon them with their ears and eyes wide open.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَٰجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّٰتِنَا
قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَٱجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا ﴿٧٤﴾

Those who pray, 'Our Lord, give us joy in our spouses and offspring. Make us good examples to those who are aware of You' [74] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 74)

This is another of the qualities of the servants of the Most-Merciful, and in this prayer of theirs they ask for two things: '…grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes.' Offspring only come into being through marriage and that is why the supplication mentions spouses first and then offspring.

The phrase'…comfort to our eyes' indicates the fact that the eye is the most valuable jewel in the human body; the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes special care of it and protects it by giving it a different temperature to the normal body temperature of the human being which is 37 degrees centigrade; if the temperature of the eye were to rise that high, it would explode. It is one of the great marvels of the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* that the temperature of the eye stays at 9 degrees and the temperature of the liver stays at 40 degrees, yet both reside in the same body.

So '…comfort to our eyes' means, 'Make there be in our wives what brings us joy', as is mentioned in the noble Hadith that lists the desired qualities of the right-acting wife: 'Apart from piety to Allah, there is nothing that brings a believer more benefit than a right-acting wife, a wife who obeys him when he commands her, pleases him when he looks upon her, fulfils his oaths when he makes them to her, and takes care of herself and his money when he is away.'(1)

And grant us children from among our offspring who will hold firm to the path of Allah *Glorified is He* and never turn aside from it whose words and actions will not cost us more than we can bear. The reason we say that is because children who do not meet these criteria are one of the greatest trials and misfortunes that any parent could ever be forced to endure, as is proven by the fact that a man might do any number of wrongs and himself fall short with respect to the rights due to Allah, but would still feel great sadness if his son were to do the same.

A father might not pray but still he encourages his son to do so and feels great joy when he becomes upright and prays on a regular basis. Why? Because he wants to see in his son all those good and beautiful things that passed him by, and thereby be compensated for himself missing out on them. No man likes to see another better than him except for his son because he views him as an extension of himself and a means of compensating himself for all that passed him by.

If we consider: '…a comfort to our eyes' to mean clinging tight and holding firm, then the meaning is that the wife possesses good character, fine etiquette and beauty to such a degree that she pleases her husband and prevents his eyes from straying from her to other women. He is at peace with her because she has fulfilled all the conditions that he desires in a wife. It is in this light that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not extend your eyes toward that by which We have given enjoyment to [certain] categories of the disbelievers.' (*al-Hijr:* 88)

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(1) *It is related by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (1857) in a Hadith from Abu Umama. Al-Busayri said in his Zawa'id, ''Ali ibn Yazid is in his chain of narrations, and Al-Bukhari said about him that his Hadis were munkar (weak).' 'Uthman ibn Abu Al-'Atika is also someone about whom they differ (with respect to his soundness as a narrator). The Hadith is related by An-Nasa'i as being a Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him and he said nothing about it although it is backed up by a Hadith of Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him.*

In the same way, if he finds all these good qualities and manners and all this beauty in his children, his eyes do not turn longingly towards anything more than that, since he sees in his children everything that he wishes and strives for and has no inclination to strive for anything else. A child who is as blessed as this is a source of peace and rest for his parents in this world and the Hereafter, since a right-acting son's goodness to his parents does not cease upon their death, but continues after that by him making supplications on their behalf. Then, in the Hereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* gathers them all together in the abode of His Mercy: 'And those who believed and whose descendants followed them in faith - We will join with them their descendants.' (*at-Tur:* 21) Thus, the presence of all these good qualities in one's wife and children is a gift from Allah.

We notice that some husbands stay married to their wives unwillingly and reluctantly, forced into doing so by circumstances of life, or on account of the children or to maintain the stability of the family. If you were to say to such a husband, 'Your wife is going to be with you in Paradise,' he would reply, 'What! Even in the Hereafter?!' He does not think that Allah *Glorified is He* will purify her of the characteristics of hers that he had come to hate in this world. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For those who fear Allah will be gardens in the presence of their Lord beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and purified spouses.' (*Al-'Imran:* 15) And He *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, those who are destined for paradise shall today have joy in whatever they do; in happiness will they and their spouses on couches recline.' (*Ya Sin:* 55-56)

As for Allah's words: '…and make us a leader for the righteous,' despite the supplication being made in the plural (i.e. us), Allah *Glorified is He* used the word 'leader' in the singular form to indicate that the ones who go through life following the path of Allah *Glorified is He* and not deviating from it are one person since they all follow one single Lord and all follow one single path. They are not governed by whims which would cause them to separate or part like.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يُجۡزَوۡنَ ٱلۡغُرۡفَةَ بِمَا صَبَرُواْ وَيُلَقَّوۡنَ فِيهَا تَحِيَّةٗ وَسَلَٰمًا ﴿٧٥﴾

These servants will be rewarded with the highest place in Paradise for their steadfastness. There they will be met with greetings and peace [75] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 75)

'Those' refers to the servants of the Most-Merciful whose qualities were mentioned just prior to this. Their reward is that they: '…be awarded the Chamber.' The word chamber is mentioned in the singular despite the fact that there are many of them, each of whom requires one of his own. Why? Because the chamber that is being referred to here is a high station that includes many rooms, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: '…but it is [by being] one who has believed and done righteousness. For them there will be the double reward for what they did, and they will be in the upper chambers [of Paradise], safe [and secure].' (*Saba':* 37)

This reward is as a result of: '…what they patiently endured', i.e. they patiently endured the difficulties of carrying out acts of obedience. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made this matter most clear when he said, 'Paradise is surrounded by hateful things while the Hellfire is surrounded by appetites.'(1)

Paradise requires me to patiently endure the difficulties of carrying out acts of obedience, assess the reward based on the action done, and call it to mind in the Hereafter. If you grow weary of acts of obedience and reject that you will be rewarded for them in the Hereafter, then why do anything?

The example we provided for that was of a student who works hard in his studies because he is well aware that the day of the exam is coming and, after that, the day on which he receives his results, and reflects on how he is going to do on that day. So, if a human being were to call to mind the rewards he would receive for obeying his Lord, the difficulties he would face in doing so would become easy for him. Similarly, if he were to call to mind the outcome of acts of disobedience and the punishments that await him, he would steer clear of them.

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(1) *It is related by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/153 & 254), Muslim in his Sahih (2822) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2559) in a Hadith from Anas may Allah be pleased with him.*

Carrying out the duties of the Islamic Law requires patience, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: 'And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive [to Allah].' (*al-Baqara:* 45) Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us not to isolate or separate duties from the rewards that they bring. Rather, you must always weigh the consequences of an action before embarking upon it.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked one of his companions, 'How are you this morning, Haritha(1)?' He replied, 'I have become a true believer.' So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Every truth has a reality, so what is the reality of belief?' He replied, 'My self has turned away from this world to such an extent that its gold has become much the same for me as its clumps of earth. It is as if I were looking at the inhabitants of paradise in Paradise being blessed, and the inhabitants of the hellfire in Hellfire being punished.'

In their view, the matter was not one of the unseen but rather one of direct witnessing. It was as if they could actually see it in front of them such was the strength of their certainty. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Haritha, 'You have got the knowledge, so hold fast to it.'(2)

Imam 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If the veil were to be lifted before me, it would not increase me in certainty one bit.' Why? That is because his certainty in the Unseen had reached the level of direct knowledge and witnessing.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and they will be received therein with greetings and [words of] peace.' From whom do the greetings come? In the Noble Quran, it comes from three different senders:

(1) From Allah, as in Allah's words: '[And] "Peace," a word from a Merciful Lord.' (*Ya Sin:* 58)

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(1) *He is Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari Allah be pleased with him. You can read his biography in the book, 'Al-'Isaba fi tamyiz As-Sahaba', p. 1475 of Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani, and in that book, he mentions numerous narrations for this Hadith.*

(2) *It is narrated by Al-Haythami in Mujma' Az-Zawa'id (1/57), and he ascribed it to At-Tabarani in Al-Kabir, saying, 'It contains Ibn Lahi'ah and someone whose identity needs to be disclosed.'*

(2) From the angels: '…and the angels will come unto them from every gate [and will say]: "Peace be upon you"' (*ar-Ra'd:* 23-24)

(3) From the people of *'Araf*, whose good actions and bad deeds weigh exactly the same, so that they neither enter Paradise nor Hellfire. Those people say: '…and on [its] elevations are men who recognize all by their mark. And they call out to the companions of paradise, "Peace be upon you." They have not [yet] entered it, but they long intensely.' (*al-A'raf:* 46)

So, the servants of the Most-Merciful will be met in paradise with a greeting from Allah, the angels and from the people of the *'Araf.*

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ حَسُنَتۡ مُسۡتَقَرّٗا وَمُقَامٗا ﴿٧٦﴾

There they will stay – a happy home and resting place! [76] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 76)

Allah *Glorified is He* says earlier in the verse about the hellfire: '…it is evil as a settlement and residence,' (*al-Furqan:* 66) because it is ugly. The reverse of that verse is mentioned here where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Good.' It is well known that whoever enters paradise will remain therein timelessly forever. But as for those who enter hellfire, they might, at some point, come out of it if they are believers. So how can these two words *settlement* and *residence* be used for both of them? Because they say, when they come upon a particular blessing or reward, we tell them that it is not the everlasting blessing. Their temporary settlement is with each individual blessing, while their permanent residence is with all the other many blessings that continue to get better and better to the degree that the perfections of Allah's blessings never come to an end.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings the chapter of *al-Furqan* to an end with the words:

قُلۡ مَا يَعۡبَؤُاْ بِكُمۡ رَبِّي لَوۡلَا دُعَآؤُكُمۡۖ فَقَدۡ كَذَّبۡتُمۡ فَسَوۡفَ يَكُونُ لِزَامَۢا ٧٧

[Prophet, tell the disbelievers], 'What are you to my Lord without your supplication? But since you have written off the truth as lies, the inevitable will happen' [77] (The Quran, *al-Furqan:* 77)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* finishes speaking about the servants of the Most-Merciful, their qualities and the rewards that they will receive, He turns to those who do not embody those qualities and receive none of these blessings, saying to them, 'Beware of thinking that Allah will concern Himself with you or pay you the slightest bit of attention or come to your aid; for Allah *Glorified is He* cares for no one except for those servants of Him who worship and obey Him duly. You went against the primeval nature with which you were brought into being, and did not truly understand the meaning of the vicegerency on earth for which Allah *Glorified is He* created us.

Just as you turned aside from the path of Allah *Glorified is He* and attached no value to it, just as you failed to worship Him and paid Him no regard, so too does Allah *Glorified is He* attach no value to you. As for Allah's words: '…if not for your supplication,' they mean, 'were it not for your worship of Me'. But since it did not happen: 'For you [disbelievers] have denied,' you have rejected your primeval nature, which is that you were created to worship: '…so your denial is going to be adherent.' Just as you clung firm to your disbelief, declined to worship Me and remained in your disbelief, so will your recompense be by means of the same type of action which you put forward; that action will cleave to you and will never ever leave you be.

the chapter of

ash-Shu'ara'

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *ash-Shu'ara'* [1] (the Poets):

طسٓمٓ ۝١

***Ta. Sin. Mim* [1] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 1)**

We have previously discussed the disconnected letters at the beginning of chapters. We also said that there are several meanings to the matter of disconnected letters. The simplest is that the Quran is the inimitable word of Allah, revealed in letters like those we use when speaking and words from our language. But what makes the Quran inimitable and superior to our use of language? We say that the difference is simply that it is the word of Allah, but the letters are the same.

If you considered the matter, you would see that the disconnected letters at the beginning of different chapters altogether consist of fourteen different letters, which are half the Arabic alphabets. One chapter begins with a single letter, another with two, another with three, another with four, and another with five letters. This is meant to tell us that the Quran is miraculous and inimitable, even though it is in the same letters and same words that we use ourselves.

Previously, we had shed light on this issue through an illustrative story. Suppose that you wanted to test a group of people's mastery at something like

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(1) The chapter of the Poets, or the chapter of *Ash-Shu'ara'* is chapter number 26 in the arrangement of the Quran, and it is comprised of 227 verses. According to the majority of scholars, it was revealed in Mecca. It is the 46th chapter by order of revelation, coming after the chapter of *al-Waqi'a* and before the chapter of *An-Naml* [reference *(Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum Al-Qur'an)* by As-Suyuti, v.1, p. 27]. Ibn ʿAbbas and Qutada take exception and claim that four of the verses in this chapter were revealed in Medina. Those four verses being 224-227. *[Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir, v.7, p. 4965.]*

weaving, for example. If you gave one person wool, another person silk, a third person cotton and a fourth person linen, would you be able to judge the quality of each person’s weave to determine whose was the most beautiful and elegant? No, of course not because silk is smoother and finer than cotton, cotton is finer than wool, and wool is finer than linen. If you want to be able to determine the quality and skill of each weaver, then you must provide them all with the same material.

Thus, the secret of the Quran’s inimitability is that it is composed of the same material as other things that use Arabic letters and words. That is why after these disconnected letters the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلۡمُبِينِ ٢

These are the verses of the Scripture that makes things clear[2] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 2)

In other words, the clear Book that shows the truth consists of letters like these. Allah *Glorified is He* has His own meanings with signification that only Allah knows. Perhaps time will reveal their import to us. The Quran is the word of Allah, and Allah’s words are nothing but perfect and complete. The verses of Allah in His Divine Book which is clear and shows the truth, are the finite building blocks of the chapters in the Quran.

The meaning of ‘clear’ is that it is concise and all encompassing, just as Allah says in another verse: ‘We have not neglected in the Register a thing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 38)

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

لَعَلَّكَ بَٰخِعٞ نَّفۡسَكَ أَلَّا يَكُونُواْ مُؤۡمِنِينَ ٣

[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe? [3] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 3)

This is meant to comfort the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* because he was pressuring himself to convey the message more than was possible and beyond the degree of zeal that Allah asked him to have in guiding humanity and bringing them back to the Path of Allah so that they would deserve being Allah's vicegerents on earth; for one of the conditions of true faith is that you must love for your brother what you love for yourself.(1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is comforting His Messenger just as when He said to him in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: 'Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.' (*al-Kahf:* 6)

For instance, when one feels concerned about his child as he burns himself out on studying, he reproves his behaviour for his own good. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* reproves Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of compassion and concern for his well-being.

In Arabic, the word *bakhi'* translated as '…torment… to death…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) is literally to slaughter or butcher by cutting not only the oesophagus jugular vein, but going so far as to tear apart the vertebrae until bone marrow comes out. The general meaning is to get deeply overwhelmed with sadness that it gets the best of you. This suggests the extent of the grief Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* felt as a result of his people's disbelief. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to let himself perish over them in regret. (*Fatir:* 8) This is a clear, definitive prohibition, following the Quranic verse wherein Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is exhorted not to kill himself with grief because they do not believe. (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

In many other verses, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is urged not to push himself beyond his endurance, for only the duty of delivery is upon him and upon Allah is the account of people. (*ar-Ra'd:* 40) Further, Allah *Glorified is He* notifies him that he is not over them a controller. (*al-Ghashiya:* 22) He *Glorified is He* also states that he is not to compel them. (*Qaf:* 45) Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace*

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(1) *Narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik who said, "The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'By the Being who has my soul in His hand, no one believes until he loves for his neighbor (or some say 'his brother') what he loves for himself'. This is a unanimously agreed upon Hadith related by Al-Bukhari his (Sahih) Collection (13) and Muslim in his (Sahih) Collection (45) in (Kitab Al-Iman).*

and blessings be upon him: 'go easy on yourself and do not heavily burden it that you waste away.' Therefore, reproaching Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is regarded as a merit; it does not denote imperfection.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِن نَّشَأْ نُنَزِّلْ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ ءَايَةً فَظَلَّتْ أَعْنَٰقُهُمْ لَهَا خَٰضِعِينَ ٤

If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility [4] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 4)

The sign, mentioned in the verse under discussion, would not be sent down to convince people, but rather to force, humiliate and compel them to surrender with heart and soul. This is not merely a hypothetical sermon to the disbelievers, but a stark reality proven by the incidents that befell the children of Israel. It is stated in the Quran that the mountain of Sinai was raised above them as if it was a dark cloud and they were certain that it would fall upon them, and Allah says: 'Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.' (*al-A'raf:* 171)

Accordingly, they took what Allah had given them with determination because of the sign that compelled them and subdued their hearts. However, Allah *Glorified is He* does not want belief to be superficial and external. He wants that hearts submit with certainty and conviction.

Had Allah so willed, every person on earth would have believed without exception. This is evidenced by the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* created the Angels who obey His commands unswervingly, sent down Messengers whom He guarded from committing sins and protected from Satan, and that He *Glorified is He* said to Satan, when he swore to mislead humankind, that he would have no power over them. (*al-Hijr:* 42) Satan himself swore by Allah's Might that he would surely mislead all people except the chosen ones among them. (*Sad:* 82-83)

Thus, if Allah *Glorified is He* had wanted, all people would have become believers; this is not difficult for Him. However, He *Glorified is He* wants faith to be a matter of choice so that one would turn to Him of his own accord.

In this worldly life, there are bullies and despots who prosecute people, forcing them to comply with their orders. People might obey them outwardly, but can they subdue and conquer their hearts with tyranny? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'to which they would bend their necks in humility.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4) Allah *Glorified is He* specifically mentions the neck because a bowed neck is the sign of humility. Submission entails bowing necks in the first place. The word *a'naq* (necks) is used by the Arabs to refer to the elite and distinguished members of society. This is why it is said regarding serious matters: 'People will lose their necks over this.'

Only the necks of the *crème de la crème* people are intended, not those of the lower class, the weak or the infirm. Similarly, the Arabic word *sudur* refers to the front-line and most prominent people in society.

Hence, the general meaning is: you should not try to force or subdue people because if Allah *Glorified is He* had willed, He would have guided them to faith. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* maintains that: '…had He *Glorified is He* willed, those on earth would have believed, all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?' (*Yunus:* 99) How could it be that you force people to believe when Allah *Glorified is He* their Sustainer, does not? Why should there be compulsion in religion in the first place? Basically, Allah *Glorified is He* sent down the Quran to them systematically, verse by verse, so that one of these verses may have a bearing on an open heart free of resentment and prejudice against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* leading it to believe.

However, it is unlikely that people with such a stubborn and rejecting nature will be guided to faith. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that they rejected His signs, while their inner selves were convinced thereof, out of injustice and haughtiness. (*an-Naml:* 14)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَمَا يَأۡتِيهِم مِّن ذِكۡرٖ مِّنَ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ مُحۡدَثٍ إِلَّا كَانُواْ عَنۡهُ مُعۡرِضِينَ ٥

Whenever they are brought a new revelation from the Lord of Mercy, they turn away [5] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 5)

The Arabic word *muhdath* (new) means that it was new only to their minds, for Allah *Glorified is He* had called their attention to a sign after sign and yet '…they turn aside from it'. (*ash-Shu'ara':* 5) Each time a sign came to them, they denied it. This is evidence of the animosity which they harboured for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which clung to their hearts so fast that no part of the Quran found a pure heart among them. It was their enmity for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which prevented them from believing in the Quran, despite their willingness to believe in the Quran had it been revealed to someone else. It was they who said, 'Why was this Quran not revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Accordingly, violent disputes and quarrels are not directed at Allah's Guidance, but at the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* consoles and supports Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying that He *Glorified is He* knows that what they say certainly grieves him (*al-An'am:* 33), as they accused him of being an insane person or sorcerer, etc. To console him and relieve his pains, Allah *Glorified is He* tells him that it is not him whom they reject (*al-An'am:* 33), for they deem him truthful and trustworthy, but rather, it is Allah's revelation in which the unjust disbelieve. (*al-An'am:* 33)

Further, they turn away, as mentioned in the Quranic verse: '…but they turn aside from it' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 5) out of stupidity and animosity. They went so far in their hostility as to invoke Allah *Glorified is He* to rain down upon them stones from the sky or to bring them a painful punishment if this should be the truth from Him. (*al-Anfal:* 32) Much to their misguidance, they turned away instead of asking Allah to guide them to the truth.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَقَدْ كَذَّبُوا۟ فَسَيَأْتِيهِمْ أَنۢبَـٰٓؤُا۟ مَا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ٦

They deny it, but the truth of what they scorned will soon hit them [6] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara’:* 6)

This indicates that whenever some reminder or a sign comes to them from Allah *Glorified is He* the Beneficent, they insist on denying the truth. ‘Therefore the news of that which they mock shall soon come to them.’ (*ash-Shuʿara’:* 6)

In other verses, it is stated that those who act unjustly shall know to what final place of turning they shall turn back. (*ash-Shuʿara’:* 227) Furthermore, it is also stated that the disbelievers will most certainly come to know about it after a time. (*Sad:* 88) These verses generally indicate that soon the disbelievers will know the consequences of their disbelief and denial of the truth. This is because every day the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* appear more vividly before them; the number of followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* increases and the number of disbelievers diminishes; the domain of faith expands and the territory of disbelief shrinks. Addressing the disbelievers, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He sets upon the land, reducing it from its borders. (*al-Anbiya’:* 44) They could see such indications with their own eyes and should have paid heed to them, for it was clear that the call to Islam will succeed and prevail.

This is the general meaning of the verse: ‘…therefore the news of that which they mock shall soon come to them.’ (*ash-Shuʿara’:* 6) If only they had limited themselves to their stubborn disbelief instead of going too far as to mock Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Glorious Quran. Even more scornfully they said, ‘Is this the one whom Allah has sent as a messenger?’ (*al-Furqan:* 41). Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ إِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ كَمْ أَنۢبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ كَرِيمٍ ٧

Do they not see the earth, and what noble kinds of thing We grow in it? [7] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara’:* 7)

Neither did the new reminder nor the recurrent signs have a bearing on such obstinate people. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* reminded them of the physical signs that are manifestly apparent before them and which were created long before them. These signs can be observed in the heavens such as the sun, the moon and stars, and on the earth such as the seas, the deserts, the mountains, plants and animals.

All of such are physical signs that no human being can lay claim to, for they existed long before humans were brought into being. Further, these signs can be seen by the young and the old, men and women, the sane and the insane. Ought they not to contemplate these signs thoughtfully, wondering about their Creator?

For this reason, I once told you of the parable of a person who lost his way in a desolate desert until he was on the brink of death. Thereupon, he fell asleep. Though, when he woke up, in this faraway isolated place, he found a table provisioned with the finest foods and drinks. Should not he, then, before reaching for this food, ask himself who was it that prepared all this for him?

In just this way, humankind was brought to a world well prepared for him, a universe beyond his power and capacity. He cannot, for example, set the sun alight, nor can he claim to possess or have authority over these physical signs. Does that not bespeak of the Creator *Glorified is He* and the need to believe in Him? Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* maintains that if you asked them, ‘Who created the heavens and earth?’ They would surely say, ‘Allah.’ (*Luqman:* 25) Moreover, it is stated in the Quran that if they were asked who created them, they would surely say, ‘Allah.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87)

If one examines the small light bulb, he would find that it has an expiration date, not exceeding a few months, after which it is prone to smashing or malfunction. Though, a team of workers and engineers worked diligently to manufacture it. The same is true of many appliances, and yet the names of the inventors of the light bulb, the television and the radio are celebrated in the historical records, as well as the date and method of their manufacture.

It is wiser to contemplate and ponder over the creation of the sun, the magnificent star which illuminates the entire world, without the need for fuel supply or spare parts and without failing to rise even once since it was created.

However, when a Messenger comes, alerting people to their negligence and guiding them to the One Who created everything affirming that it is Allah *Glorified is He* they disbelieve and turn away from him.

Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Do they not see the earth…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 7) which is a sign appearing clearly before their eyes. They see it as being barren and desolate, but when rain descends upon it, Allah *Glorified is He* seeds it with plants. Do they not look at the mountains and deserts after winter rainfall and see their brilliant green attire of plants? Should they not then ask themselves, who is it that transported these seeds and planted them in the mountains? Thus, it is stated in another verse that we see the earth barren, but when Allah *Glorified is He* sends down upon it rain, it quivers and swells and grows something of every beautiful kind. (*al-Hajj:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…how many of every noble kind We have caused to grow in it?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 7) 'How many' is a predicate that, in the form of a question, indicates a large amount. This is similar to asking a friend, 'How kind I have been to you!' It communicates the meaning figuratively instead of enumerating all the manifestations of your kindness to him. Such a question is only asked because one is certain that the answer is in his interest. To say it in the affirmative, though, would entail making a claim, but inducing an answer to a question indicates acknowledgement. Accordingly, the general meaning is that the vegetation of the earth is too abundant to be counted.

The Arabic word *zawj* (kind or pair) is used to refer to both genders, male and female. Some people mistakenly think that *zawj* (pair) signifies two items of the pair. Nonetheless, *zawj* refers to one thing that comes together and acts in concert with another, as stated in the Quranic verse that there are: 'Eight pairs; of the sheep two (male and female), and of the goats two (male and female). Say: "Has He forbidden the two males or the two females, or (the young) which the wombs of the two females enclose? Inform me with knowledge if you are truthful." And of the camels two (male and female), and of oxen two (male and female).' (*al-An'am:* 143-144)

In the Quranic verses, there are four species, comprising eight pairs when differentiated by sex. Thus, a *zawj* is any individual member which has a pair of its own likeness. In Arabic, it is incorrect to say *zawj* of shoes, but should rather say ‘*zawja*’ of shoes, that is, literally, two pairs of shoes. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* alludes to male and female of His creation as pairs. (*an-Najm:* 45)

Similarly, there must be male and female parts in plants, even if they are not self-evident, as is the case with date palms; male date palms yield flowers that pollinate the flowers of the female palm tree so it can bear fruits. Similarly, there are male and female sycamore trees, but we do not see male and female guavas or lemons. Why is that?

It is believed that, in some plants, pollens and gynoecium exist together, such as in the corn stalk which before its fruit sprouts, ears of corn at the top of which hold male pollen. Then, when the wind shakes it, the pollen falls on the tassels of the cob of the corn, thereby completing the pollination process. This may not be recognized in some plants, as is the case with mango or apple trees, for instance. Allah *Glorified is He* makes clear that He sends the fertilizing winds (*al-Hijr:* 22), and that He created pairs of everything. (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49)

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the *zawj* (kinds of everything He created) as being *karim* (noble). Why are they noble? This is because if you take a piece of fruit and examine it closely, you would find that it encompasses many attributes and blessings as Allah *Glorified is He* states that if we were to count Allah’s favours, we would not be able to number them. [*Ibrahim:* 34] Even though a piece of fruit is deemed as a single blessing, it comprises many other blessings.

This is also because Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to realize that if we investigate the composition and constituent parts of one blessing, you will find it incorporating innumerable blessings. Accordingly, the word ‘noble’, in this context, signifies a surplus of benevolence and blessings.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً ۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨﴾

There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not believe [8] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 8)

The Quranic verse: 'Indeed in that…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 8) indicates that in the signs of vegetation and noble kinds that the earth brings forth is 'a sign…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 8). That is to say, incredible and clear evidence of the Wise Maker Who creates everything for a purpose—this must inevitably draw our attention to the Omnipotence of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

In spite of all the signs shown to them: '…most of them were not to be believers.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 8) Only a few of them who believed as Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies how many a sign within the heavens and earth they pass over, while they, therefrom, are turning away. (*Yusuf:* 105) Pondering over only one sign is, though, more than sufficient to guide one to Allah *Glorified is He*.

In everything is a sign of His
as proof that He is the One and Only God

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [9] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 9)

Following the verse: '…most of them were not to be believers,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 8) Allah *Glorified is He* mentions His Honourable attribute: '…the Exalted in Might…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 9). As such, it becomes clear that it is not against Allah's will that they disbelieved, but they only did so because Allah provided them with the ability to choose.

It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who allowed them to disbelieve, given their desire and insistence upon doing so. Had Allah *Glorified is He* deprived them of free-will, they would have never transgressed His Guidance. This can be proven by the fact that they are compelled to do many things in their lives without choice, yet they cannot interfere with such things.

Despite their obstinacy and rebellion against Allah's Guidance, they cannot resist sickness, death, or whatever fate befalls them. Can anyone of them choose the day of his birth, for instance, or the day he dies? Can they choose how tall, strong or clever one will be?

However, when Allah *Glorified is He* gave them the ability and freedom to choose, they chose to disbelieve and deny the truth. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* facilitated it for them as they pleased and sealed their hearts so that neither does belief enter therein nor does disbelief leave.

The Honourable Attribute of Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned in the verse: '…the Exalted in Might…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 9) means that He is the One Whom none can overcome nor subdue. This attribute, nonetheless, does not sufficiently do credit to Allah *Glorified is He* because it leaves room for the possibility that He *Glorified is He* has an equal counterpart. Hence, it must be added that it is He *Glorified is He* Who overcomes all.This is why Allah says that He is predominant over His affair. (*Yusuf:* 21) Allah *Glorified is He* is the Almighty, the Predominant Who overcomes all and none can subdue Him.Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* states that it is He Who feeds and is not fed. (*al-An'am:* 14) Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* states that He is the One in whose hand is the realm of all things, and He protects while none can protect against Him. (*al-Mu'minun:* 88)

Then, Allah's Honourable Attribute 'the Merciful' is mentioned. Even as Allah *Glorified is He* is the Almighty and the All-Powerful, He *Glorified is He* is also the Merciful as He subdues one and all. Did He *Glorified is He* not consecutively send sign after sign and call upon the disbelievers to think and reflect so that they might come to their senses and believe? Even when they persisted in their disbelief, He *Glorified is He* granted them respite and did not punish them by extermination as was the punishment of the earlier people who rejected their Messengers.

Prior to the coming of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* Prophets used to call people to Allah's Guidance, show them miracles, yet whoever did not believe was to be immediately punished by Allah *Glorified is He*. It is stated in the Quran that each of the disbelievers was seized for his sin and among them were those upon whom Allah *Glorified is He* sent a storm of stones, those who were seized by a blast from the sky, those whom the earth swallowed, and those who were drowned. (*al-'Ankabut:* 40)

As regards the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* Allah *Glorified is He* explains that He would not punish them, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is among them, and while they seek forgiveness. (*al-Anfal:* 33)

With the Quranic verse: 'And indeed, your Lord – He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 9), Allah *Glorified is He* reassures and consoles Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* giving him lessons from the Messengers who preceded him, for he was not something new among them. To affirm this fact, Allah *Glorified is He* says to him that it is regretful for mankind that there never came a Messenger to them but they used to mock him. (*Ya Sin:* 30) On that account, Prophets were mocked and ridiculed ever since they were sent down.

Accordingly, the following context narrates the stories of the preceding Messengers. Mentioning to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a portion of the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَإِذۡ نَادَىٰ رَبُّكَ مُوسَىٰٓ أَنِ ٱئۡتِ ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١٠

Your Lord called to Moses: 'Go to those wrongdoers [10]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 10)

Allah *Glorified is He* relates to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the stories of the Prophets which are the best of stories to gain wisdom from. It is stated in the Quran that each story Allah *Glorified is He* relates to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the news of the messengers is that by which He makes firm his heart. (*Hud:* 120)

As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went through many hard times with the disbelievers, he was in need of continuous support at times of danger or uncertainty. For this reason, the stories of the Quran were repeated to him *peace and blessings be upon him* throughout the period of his messengership. The Quranic narrations are not intended to be a historical record of the lives of previous Messengers, but only to give Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lessons and morals. This explains why a story recurs in several Quranic chapters; wherein a specific scenario reflects the pressing events and circumstances of revelation.

In the Quranic verse: ‘And [mention] when your Lord called Moses…’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 10], Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He called upon Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. But why is it that the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is mentioned first? It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* mentions to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that even though the disbelievers of Mecca rejected him, he should not despair because others have been far worse than them to the extent that some even claimed divinity. For instance, Pharaoh said to his people that he had not known them to have a god other than him. (*al-Qasas:* 38)

The context of this verse does not mention where and when did Allah call him. Instead, the dialogue is related immediately. However, this is explained in other verses.

Then comes a direct command from Allah *Glorified is He* to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘Go to the wrongdoing people.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 10) The wrongdoing people are those who do evil unto themselves by attributing partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. It is the pinnacle of evildoing to ascribe partners to Him. Indeed, associating others with Allah *Glorified is He* is a great injustice. (*Luqman:* 13)

The Quran does not clarify who these wrongdoers are because they are already infamous and well-known. Their transgression makes naming them redundant because once it is said ‘…the wrongdoing people…’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 10), they come to one’s mind, such as Pharaoh and his people. He was the only one who dared to claim divinity. After describing them, Allah *Glorified is He* specifies who they are stating:

قَوْمَ فِرْعَوْنَ ۚ أَلَا يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١١﴾

The people of Pharaoh. Will they not take heed? [11]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 11)

Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is ordered to urge his people to fear Allah and be obedient to Him. He was asked to put this order in the form of a proposal. Sometimes a request comes in the form of an outright command—'Do this'—and other times it is more palatable in the form of a question and a proposition—'Why do you not you do this?'

The verse generally means that they are supposed to fear Allah *Glorified is He* and not to wrong themselves by ascribing partners to Him because there is no God but Him. They wronged the children of Israel by slaughtering their children and sparing their women. Yet, why does Allah *Glorified is He* talk first about the people of Pharaoh, instead of broaching the topic of Pharaoh himself being the source of corruption among his people?

The answer to this question lies in the adage that says, 'When asked, "O Pharaoh, why is it that you became so tyrant?" Pharaoh replied, "Because no one stood in my way."' Thus, if his people had resisted him, he would have been deterred, but they let him be. They must have fawned over him until he became a despot, and they were so supportive of him that he was able to become a tyrant.

Then, Allah stated what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said,:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ أَن يُكَذِّبُونِ ١٢

Moses said, 'My Lord, I fear they will call me a liar [12]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 12)

When Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to go to the people of Pharaoh, he was not quick to depart. Instead, he expressed his concerns and reservations, for he knew beforehand the hardships that his mission entailed. He had lived with Pharaoh and knew his disposition. Hence, he said: 'Indeed I fear that they will deny me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 12) How could it be that someone who claims divinity would listen to a Messenger from Allah *Glorified is He*?

It was told that during the reign of the Caliph Mamun,(1) someone claimed to be a prophet. He was imprisoned, but then another person claimed it, too. Mamun then said, 'Bring them together so that they can confront each other.'

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(1) The story of the two men who pretended to be Prophets at the time of the Caliph Ma'mun and the latter facing them to one another

When the two men were brought together, they told one of them that the other claimed to be a prophet. The man said, ‘He lies. I did not send down anyone as a messenger.’ Thus, he made a god of himself after he had first claimed to be only a prophet.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* continues talking about his fears saying, as Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَيَضِيقُ صَدۡرِي وَلَا يَنطَلِقُ لِسَانِي فَأَرۡسِلۡ إِلَىٰ هَٰرُونَ ١٣

And I will feel stressed and tongue-tied, so send Aaron too[13]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 13)

He feared that, when they would reject and deny him, he would feel constricted and vexed, which would cause him to be nervous and to stammer. Thereupon, he would not be so fluent as to convince them. This is because when he would witness clear falsehood being presented as clear truth, he could not help but feel more agitated. It is noteworthy that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had a history with the problem of speaking eloquently.

This is why he says, ‘…so send for Aaron.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 13) In another verse, he is mentioned to have said that his brother Harun (Aaron) is more fluent than him, and thus asked that he should be sent with him as support, verifying him because he feared that they would deny him. (*al-Qasas:* 34)

In other words, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* wanted a proxy to help him with the talking in case his tongue was incapable of fluent speech. This suggests his sincere desire to convey the call of Allah *Glorified is He* to Pharaoh and his people.

Thus, Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* were both Prophets, even though the Quran once refers to them in the singular form, as a Messenger (*ash-Shu'ara':* 16), and another time refers to them as two Messengers (*Ta Ha:* 47) in the plural form. A messenger is the one who is sent to convey something from one person to another, be him one person, two, or many people.

It goes without saying that human beings need food and drink in order to survive. More importantly, they need to stay alive and for that they must be able to breathe. If one could endure hunger or thirst for a period of time, he cannot do so with breathing, otherwise he will breathe his last.

It was previously mentioned that Allah *Glorified is He* out of His Mercy, has ordained that food may be owned by people in most cases and sources of water also may be owned in some cases, but air cannot be owned in any way. Then why is this? This is because if your enemy were to have ownership or mastery over the air, he would be able to deprive you of it and you would die instantly. Moreover, air is the fundamental element of life and living beings. For instance, it can be noticed that if a person ascends to a high place, he pants, his heart beats rapidly, and he begins to breathe harder. This is because movement requires a great amount of air and if the air becomes insufficient, one's breast constricts as there is enough air only to sustain life but not enough for a person's external movements.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues telling us about Musa's (Moses') fears:

وَلَهُمْ عَلَيَّ ذَنۢبٌ فَأَخَافُ أَن يَقْتُلُونِ ۝١٤

besides, they have a charge against me, and I fear they may kill me [14] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 14)

Unfortunately, the issues between Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people were not only limited to his speech impediment. In addition, there was an ancient grudge because long ago he accidently killed one of them, as stated in the Quran that Musa (Moses) struck him and unintentionally killed him. (*al-Qasas:* 15) Subsequently, he feared they would kill him in retaliation.

To Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron), Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالَ كَلَّا ۖ فَٱذْهَبَا بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ ۖ إِنَّا مَعَكُم مُّسْتَمِعُونَ ۝١٥

[God] said, 'No [they will not]. Go, both of you, with Our signs — We shall be with you, listening [15] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 15)

The word 'No', translated from the Arabic word *kalla* is used to negate what precedes it. In this context, it is preceded by three sentences: '…I fear that they will deny me' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 12), 'And that my breast will tighten and my tongue will not be fluent…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 13), and '…I fear that they will kill me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 14) Then, to which of these does Allah's negation apply?

The negation here is intended for the issues related to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* but not to his concern that people would reject him. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* told him not to worry, for none of this would come to pass. However, it is not negated that he would be denied and rejected because people would do that anyway.

Thus, it is noticed how precise the language of the Quran is inasmuch as the statements to be negated immediately preceded the negative particle, whereas the statement: '…I fear that they will deny me' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 12) comes at the end of the verse prior to the negated sentences.

In the chapter of *al-Fajr*, the usage of the negative particle *kalla* (no) is made clear. Allah *Glorified is He* states that when He tries man and thus is generous to him and favours him, he says, 'My Lord has honoured me.' But when He tries him and restricts his provision, he says, 'My Lord has humiliated me.' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16)

Then, in response, the negative particle *kalla* (No) is used to repudiate man's conception. (*al-Fajr:* 17) In other words, being given an easy life is not necessarily a sign of being blessed, nor is deprivation necessarily a sign of disgrace; instead, the intention is to test and try someone through either generosity or deprivation and hardship.

The matter is not as it seems because Allah *Glorified is He* gives to you generously, but you act stingily, loving money so excessively that you do not spend any of it on orphans and the unfortunate. Instead, you compete with each other to gather more and more of it so much that you consume inheritance and seize people's wealth. As such, it is not a blessing that Allah *Glorified is He* grants you wealth because you turn it into a curse once you withhold and do not give it away.

The word *kalla* (no) had a history with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who learned it well from his Sustainer *Glorified is He*. When he and his followers were trapped, with the sea in front of them and Pharaoh and his soldiers behind them, his followers were certain of doom, but Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: '*Kalla!* (No!) Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62)

The word 'signs' in the verse: '…Go both of you with Our signs…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 15) refers to the miracles with which Allah *Glorified is He* supported Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* as proof of the veracity of their Prophethood. The miracle intended in the verse under discussion is Musa's (Moses') staff.

The verse: '…indeed, We are with you, listening' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 15] is affirmed elsewhere in the Quran as Allah *Glorified is He* tells both of them that He is indeed with both of them hearing and seeing. (*Ta Ha:* 46)

Why is it that in one verse only listening is mentioned, whereas in the other it is both listening and seeing? It is because the attitude towards Pharaoh would initially be one of argument and debate, where listening is appropriate. Subsequently, there would be moments of action and doing sorcery and throwing down the staff. These moments necessitate listening and seeing because danger might be perceptible by listening alone at the beginning of the encounter and by listening and seeing later on.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَأْتِيَا فِرْعَوْنَ فَقُولَآ إِنَّا رَسُولُ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

Go, both of you, to Pharaoh and say, "We bring a message from the Lord of the Worlds [16] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 16)

The people of Pharaoh are mentioned before Pharaoh himself in the preceding verses: '…Go to the wrongdoing people, The people of Pharaoh.…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 10-11) This is because it was they who allowed him to go so far as to claim divinity when they listened to him and aided him. In the verse: 'Then come to Pharaoh,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 16) Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* are reminded that they would be speaking to Pharaoh, the leader of disbelievers, whom when defeated, all those who supported him would fall as well.

'…and say: Surely we are the messenger of the Lord of the worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 16) Even as the word *inna* (we), in Arabic, indicates a dual form, the following word 'messenger' is used in the singular form, instead of the dual form. The reason is that the word *rasul* (messenger) signifies one who acts as an intermediary between a sender and recipient, regardless of whether it is one person or many people bearing the message.

Furthermore, it was not likely that the word *inna* (we) would be pronounced by Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* at the exact same time. No, rather one of them would present and the other would listen, as an indication of confirming the words of his companion. When relating the problems facing Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people, the Quran clarifies the extent of Pharaoh's might and arrogance to the point that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* prayed to Allah to obliterate the wealth of Pharaoh and his people and harden their hearts so that they would not believe until they see the painful punishment. (*Yunus:* 88)

In response, Allah *Glorified is He* informs Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that their prayer is accepted. (*Yunus:* 89) In spite of the prayer being uttered by Musa (Moses) alone, it is referred to in the original text with the dual pronoun. This is because it is thought that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* prayed and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* said 'Amen' to his prayer, in which case the person who said 'Amen' is included in the prayer(1).

What was the demand of the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds, i.e. Moses and Aaron?

It is as Allah *Glorified is He* states:

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(1) *Abu Ash-Sheikh narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that he said, 'When Musa (Moses) peace be upon him made his prayer, Harun (Aaron) peace be upon him said 'Amen' to it.' He also narrated on the authority of Ibn Abbas that he said, 'Musa (Moses) peace be upon him made the prayer and Harun (Aaron) peace be upon him said 'Amen.'' Ikrama was narrated to have said the same by Abd Ar-Razaaq, Ibn Jarir and Abu Ash-Sheikh. [narrated by As-Suyuṭi in Ad-Durr Al-manthur 4/380]*

أَنْ أَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ١٧

Let the children of Israel leave with us [17]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 17)

The primary cause of Musa’s (Moses’) meeting with Pharaoh was to save the children of Israel from persecution, then to convey and lead them to Allah’s Guidance. Calling upon Pharaoh to submit to faith and dispute his claims of divinity were secondary.

Elsewhere, they are told to ask Pharaoh to send the children of Israel with them and not to torment them! For indeed they brought to him a miracle from Allah *Glorified is He*. (*Ta Ha:* 47)

The stylistic variation in the Quranic narratives is meant to emphasize and illuminate different scenes and aspects of each story, even if the repetition seems redundant in synopsis. This is clear in the beginning of the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as Allah *Glorified is He* tells that Pharaoh’s family took him up that he might be an enemy and a grief for them. (*al-Qasas:* 8)

In the following verse, Pharaoh’s wife maintains that he would be a refreshment of the eye to her and to him. (*al-Qasas:* 9) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* indicates that they would take him to be a joy to the eye for them, but he will become their enemy.

Allah *Glorified is He* affirms that He intervenes between man and his heart.(1) (*al-Anfal:* 24) At the time Pharaoh was killing the sons of the children of Israel and sparing their daughters, this child came to him in this unusual manner. They ought to have known that such a child was surely put into a chest and cast into the waters in hopes of saving his life. If Pharaoh had in fact been a god, how could he have missed this simple ruse?

This goes to show that when Allah *Glorified is He* wants something done, He can dispossess intelligent people of their intelligence and intervene between a person and the desires of his heart. This also demonstrates the foolishness of the people of Pharaoh, for if they had given thought to this matter, they would have seen the falseness of Pharaoh's claims to divinity.

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(1) *This is to say that Allah Glorified is He is capable of turning aside a person’s heart and changing what he intends to do however He wants. Thus, man is not a master over his heart, whereas Allah Glorified is He is.*

Replying to Musa (Moses), Pharaoh said as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَلَمۡ نُرَبِّكَ فِينَا وَلِيدٗا وَلَبِثۡتَ فِينَا مِنۡ عُمُرِكَ سِنِينَ ١٨

Pharaoh said, 'Did we not bring you up as a child among us? Did you not stay with us for many years? [18] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 18)

Here, Pharaoh reminds Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that he grew up in his house for several years until he was a young man, as if he was reprimanding him that he was opposing him in such a way.

Pharoah further says to Moses, '…and you tarried among us for (many) years of your life' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18). It is thought that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* remained in the house of Pharaoh until he was eighteen or thirty years old. Either way, the intended meaning is that Pharaoh raised him and he remained there several years afterwards.

Upon closer inspection of the logic Pharaoh used to be in his interest, one finds that it turns out to work against him and reveal his ignorance. If he was in fact a god as he claimed, he would have known that his demise would be at the hands of this very same child whom he took in and raised.

وَفَعَلۡتَ فَعۡلَتَكَ ٱلَّتِي فَعَلۡتَ وَأَنتَ مِنَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ١٩

And then you committed that crime of yours: you were so ungrateful [19] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 19)

The deed mentioned here alludes to the incident when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck and killed a man. Then Pharoah tells Moses, '…And you are one of the ungrateful.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 19) The word 'ungrateful' here may refer to his rejection of the godhood of Pharaoh, or it could also mean that he was ungrateful for Pharaoh's generosity in raising him(1).

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(1) *Several opinions are provided regarding the explanation of the Quranic phrase: '...And you are one of the ungrateful.' (ash-Shu'ara': 19) It could mean: because you* =

People of wisdom know that if the children they raise grow up as they would be expected, it is only by the favour and help of Allah *Glorified is He*. Two children may be raised in the same environment, they might even be twins, only to find one of them is as good as the other is bad. Thus, the matter comes down to Divine intervention. One of the poets eloquently puts it:

If perchance attentiveness is not given to your child
He will deceive and disappoint the hopeful parent
For Moses whom Gabriel raised was an ingrate
And Moses whom Pharaoh raised was a messenger of Allah

Musa, the Samaritan, who made the golden calf, was born in the desert and his mother died in labour, so Allah *Glorified is He* sent the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* to take care of him. Such strange incidents could only occur by the intervention and attentiveness of Allah *Glorified is He*.

قَالَ فَعَلْتُهَآ إِذًا وَأَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Moses replied, 'I was misguided when I did it [20]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 20)

It is as though Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says, 'I do not deny that I have killed, but this happened when I was still among the misguided, meaning those who are not aware of the ensuing repercussions, and I never once thought that one blow would kill the man.'

The word *dallin* (lit. misguided) does not imply lack of guidance, rather, in this context it has the meaning of 'losing one's path to guidance unintentionally.'

The word is used in the Quran several times to communicate meanings other than misguidance. For instance, it is used to mean error in the verse

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= *killed the Coptic man, when it was not permissible to take his life, and this is the opinion of Ad-Dahhak; or it could mean you were ungrateful for the blessings we bestowed on you when we raised you and were kind to you, which is the opinion of Ibn Zayd; or that, I, Pharaoh, am your god and you disbelieve in me, which is the opinion of Al-Hasan; or it could mean that you disbelieved in our god because you were one of us and belonged to our religion, and this is the opinion of As-Sidi. [Al-Qurtubi mentioned these opinions in his (Tafsir) 7/4973]* where Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding finding witnesses that if one of the two errs the second of the two reminds the other. (*al-Baqara:* 282)

Addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says that He found him lost and guided him (*ad-Duha*: 7), meaning found him *peace and blessings be upon him* confused between the falsehood that his people were practicing and the truth for which he could not find any clear proof.

Then Moses further continues,

فَفَرَرۡتُ مِنكُمۡ لَمَّا خِفۡتُكُمۡ فَوَهَبَ لِي رَبِّي حُكۡمٗا وَجَعَلَنِي مِنَ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ٢١

And I fled from you in fear; later my Lord gave me wisdom and made me one of His messengers(1)[21]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 21)

It means that Allah *Glorified is He* endowed him with wisdom and the gift of putting things in their proper place. That this verse is mentioned after: '…I did it then while I was of those unable to see the right course' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 20) suggests the meaning, 'I struck the man, it is true and he died, but that was an unintentional error and therefore it is wrongful to blame me for this. But Allah *Glorified is He* has given me the ability to tell right from wrong.' This was not only what Musa (Moses) said, for he added: '…then my Lord granted me wisdom and made me of the Messengers.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 21)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَتِلۡكَ نِعۡمَةٞ تَمُنُّهَا عَلَيَّ أَنۡ عَبَّدتَّ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٢٢

And is this – that you have enslaved the children of Israel – the favour with which you reproach me? [22]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 22)

This alludes to what Pharaoh bestowed upon Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that he brought him up and let him stay in his house for many years. (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18-19)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says that it was a period of nearly 11 years between Musa's (Moses') departure and his return as a Prophet. [7/4973*]

It is as though Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were saying to Pharaoh, 'It is true that you made me these favours, but it is nothing compared to the torture and enslavement you inflicted upon the children of Israel, slaughtering their male children, sparing their womenfolk and subjugating them to your service.'(1)

It was not out of mercy that he let the females live instead of killing them like the males. In fact, it was a source of humiliation and shame inasmuch as they did not have male relatives to protect and defend them. In the absence of men, the women then remained in shameful servitude to Pharaoh.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ وَمَا رَبُّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Pharaoh asked, 'What is this "Lord of the Worlds"?' [23] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 23)

Pharaoh means to say that this is a new matter that you have brought before us, O Moses. Who, then, is this Sustainer of the worlds that you speak of?

Then Moses replies, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ رَبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَآ إِن كُنتُم مُّوقِنِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Moses replied, 'He is the Lord of the heavens and earth and everything between them. If you would only have faith!' [24] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 24)

The heavens with its planets and stars, the sun and the moon, celestial bodies and signs of the zodiac, as well as the earth with its seas and rivers, mountains and deserts, plants, animals and people both existed before you existed, O Pharaoh, false deity.

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(1) *Ad-Dahhak said that these words are meant to censure and reprimand, which may or may not be in the form of a rhetorical question. The meaning is, 'If you had not killed the Children of Israel, then my own parents would have raised me, so what blessing is there that you have given me, for you have only bestowed upon me something that you should not have needed to.' [narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir, 7/4972]*

Thus, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* responds to Pharaoh calling to his attention some of the innumerable things brought into being long before Pharaoh was even born. What Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* intends to say is, ‘Tell me, O Pharaoh, who claims to be a god, in what way has your divinity added to this world? If all of it, the heavens and the earth, belong to the Sustainer of the worlds, what is it which belongs to you?

This is not limited to the heavens and the earth, rather, it also includes ‘…what is between them’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 24), i.e. the atmosphere and the birds flying through the sky. At that time, they had no idea of aeronautical science nor of transfer of air waves in the modern age. There are many mysteries that merit investigation in the atmosphere between the heavens and the earth.

Then, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* acts more gently, saying to them: ‘…if you would be sure,’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 24) meaning if only you are sure that it is Allah *Glorified is He* alone Who created these things.

Bringing up Pharaoh’s argument, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

قَالَ لِمَنۡ حَوۡلَهُۥٓ أَلَا تَسۡتَمِعُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Pharaoh said to those present,
‘Do you hear what he says?’ [25]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 25)

Pharaoh said to those around him, his followers who attested to his divinity: 'are you not listening to what he says?' Pharaoh was of course talking about Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and he would not have said this unless he sensed his people were receptive to Musa’s (Moses’) words as he was refuting Pharaoh’s godhood and attributing true Divinity to Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

It is as if Pharaoh had expected his people to rebel against Musa’s (Moses’) words, to rebuff and silence him, but none of this happened. This suggests that they were hoping Musa (Moses) would prevail over Pharaoh who constricted their freedom and stifled their opinions. They were well aware of his falsehood and were waiting for the moment when they could get rid of him.

This is supported by the story that the Quran tells of the believing man among the people of Pharaoh who was concealing his faith(1), and by those who tempted Pharoah to call upon the sorcerers to challenge Moses, although they wanted him to be defeated before Moses.

Before anyone from the people of Pharaoh could respond, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, as Allah *Glorified is He* states:

قَالَ رَبُّكُمۡ وَرَبُّ ءَابَآئِكُمُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Moses said, 'He is your Lord and the Lord of your
forefathers' [26] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 26)

In this verse, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* shifts Pharaoh's attention from the physical environment surrounding him—the heavens, the earth and everything between them—to his own self. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says to him, 'You have forefathers who existed before you were born, before you claimed to be a god, so who was their Lord and Sustainer?'

Musa's (Moses') arguments began to vex Pharaoh.. So, trying to salvage his position and evade the debate which he was losing, Pharaoh said, as stated in the Quran:

قَالَ إِنَّ رَسُولَكُمُ ٱلَّذِىٓ أُرۡسِلَ إِلَيۡكُمۡ لَمَجۡنُونٞ ﴿٢٧﴾

Pharaoh said, 'This messenger who has been sent to you is
truly possessed' [27] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 27)

Pharaoh's statement betrays him, for he has just testified that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is a messenger. Thus, his words betrayed him without his knowing.

Then Moses replies,

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(1) *Regarding the story of the believing man, Allah Glorified is He states that a believing man of Pharaoh's people who hid his faith said, 'What! Will you slay a man because he says, "My Lord is Allah," and indeed he has brought to you clear arguments from your Lord? And if he be a liar, on him will be his lie, and if he be truthful, there will befall you some of that which he threatens you (with). (Ghafir: 28) The story continues in the following verses.*

قَالَ رَبُّ ٱلْمَشْرِقِ وَٱلْمَغْرِبِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَآ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

Moses continued, ‘Lord of the East and West and everything between them. If you would only use your reason!’ [28]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 28)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* responds to Pharaoh with a new argument; however, this time he closes his statement by saying: ‘…if you understand.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 28) In his previous statement, though, he said: ‘…if you would be sure.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 24). It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* were saying to Pharaoh, ‘given that you have gone as far as accusing me of insanity, I will no longer respond by referring to your certainty, rather, I will allude to your reason as the exact opposite of the insanity of which I am accused.'

Yet, Pharaoh cuts the debate short, going to what he believes is the heart of the matter, saying:

قَالَ لَئِنِ ٱتَّخَذْتَ إِلَٰهًا غَيْرِى لَأَجْعَلَنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلْمَسْجُونِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

But Pharaoh said [to him], ‘If you take any god other than me, I will throw you into prison’ [29]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 29)

This is a failure on the part of Pharaoh to make an argument. If he had had a response to what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said, then he should have answered him and refuted his argument. On the contrary, he could only gain the upper hand over his opponent by threatening to imprison or exile him. Imprisonment at that time was to serve a life sentence. Pharaoh did not consider that the people around him would witness the failure and foolishness of his response.

On the other hand, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* withheld the signs and miracles he had and continued the debate, saying:

قَالَ أَوَلَوْ جِئْتُكَ بِشَيْءٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

And Moses asked, 'Even if I show you something convincing?' [30] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 30)

This means, 'Since you are not convinced by all the previous arguments, Will you be then convinced if I bring forth a sign clearly demonstrating the truth of my Message, or will you still have me imprisoned?'

The Pharoah replies, as stated in the Quran:

قَالَ فَأْتِ بِهِۦٓ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

'Show it then,' said Pharaoh, 'if you are telling the truth' [31] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 31)

It is obvious that Pharaoh contradicts himself. As he heard Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* uttering such a statement, he should have insisted on imprisoning him. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wants this sign to be brought forth, and hence He *Glorified is He* makes Pharaoh himself demand it be produced: 'Said he: Bring it then, if you are of the truthful ones.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 31) It was not for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to show them a sign, unless demanded by Pharaoh.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَلْقَىٰ عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٣٢﴾

So Moses threw down his staff and – lo and behold! – it became a snake for everyone to see [32] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 32)

The act of throwing down the staff or rod occurs in three occasions as stated in the Quran. The first occasion took place when Musa (Moses) was selected to be a Prophet, as Allah *Glorified is He* asked him what was in his right hand. (*Ta Ha:* 17) Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* delayed the answer out of his desire to prolong this communion with Allah *Glorified is He*. Then, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* answered that it was his staff: on which he reclined and with which he beat the leaves to make them fall upon his sheep, in addition to other uses. (*Ta Ha:* 18)

In Musa’s (Moses) eyes the staff was just a wooden stick freshly cut from its source, a branch cut from a tree. However, with Allah *Glorified is He* it was a different story. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threw it down, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[Allah] said, “Throw it down, O Moses. So he threw it down, and thereupon it was a snake, moving swiftly” (*Ta Ha:* 19-20).

Once it is cut from a tree, the staff loses the aspect of plant life and becomes inanimate and dead. If it had returned to its original state and become a tree again, that might have been reasonable, but instead it surpassed the level of plant life and transformed into an animal, which is a higher form of life. That is why Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was frightened until Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[Allah] said, “Seize it and fear not; We will return it to its former condition” (*Ta Ha:* 21). On this occasion, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was trained to become familiar with this attribute of his staff, as if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to perform this display in front of Him in order to be certain of the genuineness of this sign and throw down his staff before Pharaoh without any fear of failure.

The staff was thrown, for the second time, before Pharaoh and his retinue. Then, the third time in which the staff was thrown was before the sorcerers.

Allah's saying: ‘…It was an obvious serpent’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 31) means that it was obvious to everyone, i.e. it was a living, moving serpent. This is affirmed because they had perfected the art of fooling people into imagining things like this were true, making them move and slither. But the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was different, no one doubted that it was truly and plainly a real serpent.

Following the different scenes of this incident as narrated in the Quran, one will notice that sometimes it is called a serpent *th'uban*, at other times a snake *hayya*, and at other times a little snake *jan*. Why is that? It is because it comprised the characteristics of all: in the quickness of its movements, it was like a baby snake, in its fearsome shape it was like a snake, and in its sinuousness it was like a serpent. In arabic, the word *jan* may be used to refer a baby snake.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَنَزَعَ يَدَهُۥ فَإِذَا هِىَ بَيۡضَآءُ لِلنَّٰظِرِينَ (٣٣)

Then he drew out his hand and – lo and behold! –
it was white for the onlookers to see [33]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 33)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* refers to Musa's (Moses') hand. In another verse, nonetheless, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Insert your hand into the opening of your garment; it will come out white, without disease' (*al-Qasas:* 32) In this way, the different recurrences of the same story complement and complete each other; they are not mere repetitions as some may think.

Allah's saying: 'And he drew forth his hand…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 33) means that he put his hand forth. Thereupon, '…It appeared white to the onlookers.' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 33) Despite the fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had a slightly dark complexion, i.e. his skin was tanned, when his hand emerged it was pure white, shining luminously to people's eyes.

Comparing this verse to the one mentioned above from the chapter of *al-Qasas*, one finds that the verse under discussion makes no mention of the bosom. The Arabic word *jayb* (bosom) means the upper opening of the robe, not the more commonly used meaning of the word, as in 'pocket', wherein one puts one's money for instance. In the past, they used to put their money purse inside their clothes in order to keep it safe. So if someone wanted to take something out from it, he would put his hand inside the upper opening in his robe. Thus it was called the *jayb*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ لِلۡمَلَإِ حَوۡلَهُۥٓ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَسَٰحِرٌ عَلِيمٞ (٣٤)

Pharaoh said to the counsellors around him, 'This man is a
learned sorcerer! [34] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 34)

The word *al-mala'* (chiefs) signifies people of influence, the most prominent ones of a society, those who preside over government and parliament, for instance. Pharaoh accuses Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* of being a sorcerer in order to escape from his own predicament and on account of the fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had only performed this feat once in front of Pharaoh. However, the chiefs around Pharaoh were intimately familiar with sorcery and had many sorcerers of their own.

The difference between *sahir* and *sahhar* is that a *sahir* only executes an act of sorcery one time, whereas *sahhar* is a more emphatic form of ‘sorcerer’ indicating that the person has taken sorcery as a profession. Similar word patterns include *najir* and *najjar* (carpenter), and *khait* and *khayyat* (tailor).

Further, Pharaoh described Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as ‘…skilful…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 34) meaning knowledgeable in sorcery.

Then Pharoah continues his talk to his people, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يُرِيدُ أَن يُخْرِجَكُم مِّنْ أَرْضِكُم بِسِحْرِهِۦ فَمَاذَا تَأْمُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

He means to use his sorcery to drive you out of your land!
What do you suggest? [35] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 35)

In this verse, Pharaoh tries to turn his people against Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* warning them that he will cause mischief to the populace and will have the vast majority of people on his side, following and helping him exile the chiefs around Pharaoh. In order to gain support from the chiefs around him and arouse enmity against Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the least that Pharaoh hopes to do is to incite these prominent elites from among his people against him.

It is unthinkable that Pharaoh, if he were indeed a god, would say ‘…what is it then that you advise?’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 35) This, then, is false godhood which sinks down to the level of its servants, for when has a god asked the advice of its servants, turning to them for help and counsel? If he had been a god in truth, he would have had a solution and known how to respond.

When Pharaoh stepped down from his position of godhood to ask the elites among his people for help, they exposed the truth behind his lies and found a suitable opportunity to rid themselves of him. This suggests that most of them probably tolerated Pharaoh unwillingly and were biding their time to free themselves from his tyranny and falsehood. So, they said:

قَالُوٓاْ أَرۡجِهۡ وَأَخَاهُ وَٱبۡعَثۡ فِي ٱلۡمَدَآئِنِ حَٰشِرِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

They answered, ‘Delay him and his brother for a while, and send messengers to all the cities [36] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 36)

Arjih, a verb in the imperative meaning to put someone off; it is derived from *al-irja’* which means to postpone or put off someone. They are saying, ‘Put him off and his brother for a while, and send gatherers to the cities.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 36) That is, send your summoners to gather the sorcerers from all corners of the city to fight using their sorcery against Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and (Aaron) *peace be upon him*.

يَأۡتُوكَ بِكُلِّ سَحَّارٍ عَلِيمٖ ﴿٣٧﴾

To bring every accomplished sorcerer to you [37] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 37)

Sahhar means an expert sorcerer skilled in magical arts and tricks, and is an emphatic form of (*sahir;* magician or sorcerer).

فَجُمِعَ ٱلسَّحَرَةُ لِمِيقَٰتِ يَوۡمٖ مَّعۡلُومٖ ﴿٣٨﴾

The sorcerers were [to be] assembled at the appointed time on a certain day [38] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 38)

Al-miqat translated above as ‘a day appointed,’ means at a specified point in time. It is mentioned in another verse which states: ‘Your appointed meeting is the day of the festival…’ (*Ta Ha:* 59). This day was a red-letter date among Pharaoh’s people when young girls wore their most elaborate dresses. It was a day of festivities on which they selected a maiden to be the ‘bride of the Nile’ whom they threw into the river. So the day was set, but the time for the event was not left as the entire day; rather, it was specified to be at high noon: ‘…and let the people assemble when the sun has risen high (forenoon).’ (*Ta Ha:* 59)

The location was also defined at another place in the Quran. Musa *peace be upon him* said about it: ‘… so appoint a meeting between us and you, which neither we, nor you shall fail to keep, in an open wide place where both shall have a just and equal chance.’ (*Ta Ha:* 58) In other words, a place suitable for all attendants, by it being an open flat square that would allow all people to see this sorcery competition, or perhaps by it being situated at a middle ground between the cities from where the sorcerers would come. This way the choice of place would not prevent any of them from attending. Thus, all the different shots of this incident fit together to give us a complete picture of the story.

The counsel of the prominent men around Pharaoh suggest their keen desire to make this meeting happen before the eyes of all the people because they knew that the outcomes of this contest would be in Musa’s favour and would help reveal the falseness of Pharaoh’s claims to godhood.

وَقِيلَ لِلنَّاسِ هَلْ أَنتُم مُّجْتَمِعُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾ لَعَلَّنَا نَتَّبِعُ ٱلسَّحَرَةَ إِن كَانُوا۟ هُمُ ٱلْغَٰلِبِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

And the people were asked [39] ‘Are you all coming?
We may follow the sorcerers if they win!’ [40]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 39-40)

In other words, as if they were conducting a marketing campaign, and they began to summon supporters for Pharaoh or supporters for Musa *peace be upon him* who would be on his side due to their hidden resentment toward Pharaoh. Evidently, both sides were eager to attend this sorcery competition.

We see throngs of people gather just to watch a football match, so how many do you think would come for a match between the sorcerers of a man who claimed to be a god, and Musa *peace be upon him* who came with a new message and said his was a different God? Truly it was an event that shook the entire world, and it drew people from all over to see it.

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَ ٱلسَّحَرَةُ قَالُوا۟ لِفِرْعَوْنَ أَئِنَّ لَنَا لَأَجْرًا إِن كُنَّا نَحْنُ ٱلْغَٰلِبِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

When the sorcerers came, they said to Pharaoh, ‘Shall we be
rewarded if we win?’ [41] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 41)

Look at how Pharaoh, ‘the alleged god,’ behaved toward his subjects. A true god provides food; it does not hunger for food; a true god provides succour and help; it does not seek succour or help; a true god gives, it does not take.

When the sorcerers gathered, they knew how much Pharaoh needed them as contestants in this match and so they were quick to impose conditions on him: ‘Even though you force people to labour for your sake without pay, in this matter you will not be able to let it go without paying us.’

This suggests that they were familiar with Pharaoh and knew he was a usurping tyrant. So, they imposed the condition that if they prevailed, they should have an ample reward. For who knew? Someone else might come and threaten Pharaoh’s godhood; Pharaoh reserved these sorcerers for just such an occasion.

قَالَ نَعَمۡ وَإِنَّكُمۡ إِذٗا لَّمِنَ ٱلۡمُقَرَّبِينَ ٤٢

And he said, ‘Yes, and you will join my inner
court’ [42] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara’:* 42)

Here Pharaoh ceded his lofty eminence and submitted to the conditions of his sorcerers. He even granted them more than what they demanded: ‘…and indeed, you will then be of those near....’ (*ash-Shuʿara’:* 42) They would be among his private, indispensable retinue whom he would turn to for aid in similar situations. They would become indispensable, since it was they who preserved the illusion of his false divinity

قَالَ لَهُم مُّوسَىٰٓ أَلۡقُواْ مَآ أَنتُم مُّلۡقُونَ ٤٣

Moses said to them, ‘Throw down whatever
you will’ [43] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara’:* 43)

This is condensed language which we understand from the context of the narration. In the previous verse, Pharaoh was still talking to his sorcerers, but the Quran condenses some of the events, relying on the acumen of the reader or listener. This also recurs in the story of the hoopoe bird and our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Sulaiman said to the bird: ‘Take this letter of mine and deliver it to them, then withdraw and see what answer they send back.’ (*an-Naml:* 28) Then after that the Quran says: ‘The Queen of Sheba said, “Counsellors, a gracious letter has been delivered to me.”’ (*an-Naml:* 29) From the context, we can know what was cut out between the two events.

Musa’s saying: ‘Throw what you are going to throw!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 43) was the resulting conclusion of the dialogue with the sorcerers.

فَأَلۡقَوۡاْ حِبَالَهُمۡ وَعِصِيَّهُمۡ وَقَالُواْ بِعِزَّةِ فِرۡعَوۡنَ إِنَّا لَنَحۡنُ ٱلۡغَٰلِبُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

They threw their ropes and staffs, saying, ‘By Pharaoh’s might,
we shall be victorious’ [44] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 44)

Their staffs and ropes were the instruments of their sorcery. ‘By Pharaoh’s might, we shall be victorious’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 44) was their oath. And what a false, empty oath it was! In their eyes, Pharaoh could never be conquered or subdued. We have previously explained that (*`izza*; might, power, honour, glory) signifies being invincible. However, Pharaoh’s might was merely spurious. In other words, it was pride and grandeur without substance. He was so carried away by his puffed-up pride into more sin, typically like he of whom Allah says: ‘…and when it is said to him, “Fear Allah,” he is led by arrogance to (more) crime…’ (*al-Baqara:* 206). Allah *the Exalted* also says: ‘Sad. By the Quran full of reminding, Nay, those who disbelieve are in false pride and opposition.’ (*Sad:* 1-2) That is, they are driven by false ego and grandeur into transgression.

The same theme recurs in Allah’s description of the hypocrites: ‘They (hypocrites) say: “If we return to Medina, indeed the more honourable will expel therefrom the meaner….”’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) The Quran agrees that the meaner will be driven out by those most honourable. However, the Quran adds: ‘But honour, power, and glory belong to Allah, His Messenger (Muhammad), and to the believers’. (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) So long as you would continue to behave the same, you would be contemptible and ultimately driven out. This was what actually happened.

It was said that the magic tools of Pharaoh’s sorcerers, namely their ropes and staffs, were hollowed out and full of mercury. So, when they threw them in the light and heat of the sun, they began to seem as if they were moving. This is one of the ruses of the sorcery that fools the eye through false tricks. The true reality of the object is fixed, but to the captivated watcher it seems to move.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَلْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ تَلْقَفُ مَا يَأْفِكُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

But Moses threw his staff and – lo and behold! – it swallowed up their trickery [45] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 45)

Musa's throwing of his staff did not happen directly after the sorcerers threw theirs, rather, there were several events in between that are mentioned in other snippets of the story from other verses. For example, Allah says: 'You throw,' said Musa, and—lo and behold!—through their sorcery, their ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving. Musa was inwardly alarmed, but We said, 'Do not be afraid, you have the upper hand. Throw down what is in your right hand; it will swallow up what they have produced. They have only produced the tricks of a sorcerer, and a sorcerer will not prosper, wherever he goes.' (*Ta Ha:* 66-69)

Such was the tableau. When Musa *peace be upon him* was afraid, his Lord reassured him and aided him with truth and irrefutable evidence. Allah was watching every step of Musa second by second in order to direct him, and give him steadiness, reassurance, and courage. The True Lord *the Exalted* would not send Musa *peace be upon him* as a messenger and then desert him. Previously, His Lord said to him: '…I showered you with My love and planned that you should be reared under My Watchful Eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 39) And in another verse, Allah says: 'Do not be afraid, I am with you both, hearing and seeing everything.' (*Ta Ha:* 46) The True Lord gave His Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* directions and the means to carry them out, and then He followed him with constant care and watchfulness .In the same vein, Allah *Glorified is He* said to His Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: 'Build the Ark under Our [watchful] Eyes and with Our Inspiration…' (*Hud:* 37).

When you put all the different scenes together, you find that they complete one another and present the entire event. So, although some may think that the scenes are repeated, in fact they are not.

So, Musa *peace be upon him* threw his staff after renewed directions from Allah during the confrontation. 'Throw down what is in your right hand…'

(*Ta Ha:* 69). Also here in this chapter: ‘Then Musa (Moses) threw his stick, and behold, it swallowed up all the falsehoods which they showed!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 45) The meaning of *talqaf,* translated as ‘…it swallowed up…’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 45), is to devour quickly and vehemently; the quickness, rapidity and violence of the act indicates that it was performed with force. This is evidence that Musa engaged in the confrontation with strength; his strength continued undiminished to the end and did not abandon him when he saw the tricks of the sorcerers.

(Ma ya'fikuna), translated above as ‘…all the falsehoods which they showed…’ derives from *‘ifk* meaning the inversion of facts, which is why one name for lying is *‘ifk* because to lie is to invert truths and change facts.

From the same root we get: ‘And He destroyed the overthrown cities’ (*an-Najm:* 53) where ‘the overthrown cities’ is a translation of a word from the same root as *al-‘ifk* namely *(al-mu'tafika)*, i.e. the ruined cities (of Sodom) that Allah destroyed and turned upside down.(1)

We have previously explained that lying and inverting facts happens through speech, and speech has three bearings: on the mind, on the tongue, and on reality. So, if a speech act's import corresponds with reality, then you are truthful. If it is contrary to reality, then you are a liar. What the sorcerers did is called (*‘ifk*) because they altered reality and blurred the true state of things in the eyes of the people.

فَأُلْقِيَ ٱلسَّحَرَةُ سَٰجِدِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

And the sorcerers fell down on their knees [46]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 46)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has not simply said, ‘the sorcerers prostrated themselves’, i.e. *(sajada as-sahara)*. Instead, He says, ‘*(fa'ulqiya as-saharatu*

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(1) *Meaning the towns of the people of Lut (Lot) peace be upon him, which Allah turned upside down and rained upon them stones of baked clay. Qatadah said: ‘The cities of the people of Lut comprised four thousand thousand persons (i.e. four millions) and the valley spat out fire, naphtha and tar on them like the mouth of a furnace.’ [Tafsir Ibn Kathir vol. 4, p. 259]*

sajidin),' i.e. 'And the sorcerers fell down prostrate.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 46) *Ulqiya* literally 'they fell down,' indicates the quickness of their response and that their prostration happened involuntarily, without thought. It was as if the augustness of the occasion and the fearful reverence for what they saw, threw them to the ground, prostrating to Allah, the Author of these dazzling signs. Therefore, when they declared their belief, they did not say, 'We have become believers in the Lord of Musa and Harun,' but they rather said:

قَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِرَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾ رَبِّ مُوسَىٰ وَهَٰرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

Exclaiming, 'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds [47]
The Lord of Moses and Aaron [48]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 47-48)

When we examine the reaction of the sorcerers, we see that they first fell down prostrate before Allah, and then declared their faith. It is well known that belief should precede action, and that prostrating oneself should come only after faith. How then did this happen? They say that there is a difference between the onset of belief and announcing your belief. The reaction which was late in coming was not their feeling of belief, but its announcement because the sorcerers would not have prostrated themselves without sufficient true belief to dispel all doubt. Belief gripped their hearts and made them throw themselves to the ground, prostrating themselves to Allah without pause to even declare their belief. Faith brought them back to their original spiritual state of natural belief in God, and in matters of inborn nature, there is no place for thought.

As if someone had asked them, 'Why are you prostrating yourselves?' and so they said, 'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron).' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 47-48) They uttered 'the Lord of Musa and Harun' after saying 'the Lord of the Worlds' to first preclude Pharaoh and his followers from saying things like, 'I am the Lord of all the Worlds.' Then they removed any ambiguity by clarifying, 'the Lord of Musa and Harun!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 48)

Another example of this is what Balqis (the Queen of Sheba) said when she saw her throne placed before Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. She did not say, ‘I surrender to Sulaiman’; rather, she said ‘…I have surrendered myself, with Sulaiman (Solomon), to the Lord of the Worlds.’ (*an-Naml:* 44) In other words, you and I submit ourselves to the one God Who is the Lord of all existence. Such was the Islam of kings and queens. In order that none would think she was submitting to Sulaiman *peace be upon him* she used carefully guarded speech to forestall any doubt.

قَالَ ءَامَنتُمْ لَهُۥ قَبْلَ أَنْ ءَاذَنَ لَكُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ لَكَبِيرُكُمُ ٱلَّذِى عَلَّمَكُمُ ٱلسِّحْرَ فَلَسَوْفَ
تَعْلَمُونَ ۚ لَأُقَطِّعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُم مِّنْ خِلَٰفٍ وَلَأُصَلِّبَنَّكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

Pharaoh said, ‘How dare you believe in him before I have given you permission? He must be the master who taught you sorcery! Soon you will see: I will cut off your alternate hands and feet and then crucify the lot of you!’ [49]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 49)

Pharaoh did not doubt that what the sorcerers saw was an inevitable cause of belief, nor did he attempt to cast doubt on it. Rather, the whole issue was: ‘…before I give you leave...’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 49). He was still eager to maintain his godhood and tyranny even after his lies had been exposed and the elites around him had believed in the true God.

Then Pharaoh wanted to explain away the situation to the masses so that none of them would say that he was defeated and lost his prestige. So he said: ‘…he indeed is your chief who has taught you magic! ...’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 49) Although the people knew well that Musa *peace be upon him* had never consorted with a sorcerer in his life, Pharaoh nonetheless seized upon it as a pretext to rescue as much of his ruined godliness and prestige as he could, before being divested of them all.

Pharaoh’s agitation and imbalance affected the way he threatened them. He was so shaken up that he said: ‘So verily, you shall come to know (my revenge)’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 49), using the particle *sawfa* in Arabic which indicates that the action will happen in the distant future even though he wanted his threat to be immediately carried out, as evident by his saying: ‘…verily, I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify you all.’

(*ash-Shu'ara':* 49) *(Min khilaf)* translated in the verse under study as 'on opposite sides,' means either the right hand and the left foot, or the left hand and the right foot. His saying: '…and I will crucify you all…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 49) is mentioned more specifically in another verse: '…and I will surely crucify you on the trunks of date-palms…' (*Ta Ha:* 71).

What was the response of those who believed in the Lord of the Worlds?

قَالُوا۟ لَا ضَيْرَ ۖ إِنَّآ إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا مُنقَلِبُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

'That will do us no harm,' they said, 'for we are sure to return to our Lord [50] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 50)

In other words, it does us no harm if you kill us; everyone is fated to die. But if we meet our end at your hands, we will be glad to meet our Lord, whereas you will be made wretched by the retribution of your Lord. Like the tyrant who said to his enemy, 'I shall kill you.' His enemy laughed. So he said, 'Are you mocking me with your laughter?' His enemy said, 'How can I not laugh when what you would inflect on me will be a blessing from Allah to me and cause you only misery? Thus, it does us no harm if you kill us, because we will return to Allah, our Lord. We will be liberated from false gods to meet the true divinity. As if you had done us a favour or rendered us a service, for you sped us along to this meeting. What you think is evil for us is, in fact, goodness itself. The poet understood this meaning, when he said:

I pay no mind to being killed when I am a Muslim
in any form my death is for Allah.

It means that so long as I die for the cause of Islam, nothing else matters and I shall not mind by what form of death I will die. Here the believers are keen on two things: first, to ward off harm because averting harm takes precedence over securing some benefit; and second, to affirm the good that will come to them from this death.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا نَطۡمَعُ أَن يَغۡفِرَ لَنَا رَبُّنَا خَطَٰيَٰنَآ أَن كُنَّآ أَوَّلَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ (٥١)

We hope that our Lord will forgive us our sins, as we were
the first to believe [51] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 51)

Because you, O Pharaoh, forced us to practice sorcery and to invent lies and deceptions, and caused us to spend all our lives thinking you were a god, hopefully, our rushing to faith and our becoming the first believers intercede for us with our Lord and He forgives us our transgressions. According to another place in the Quran, they said: 'We believe in our Lord, (hoping) He may forgive us our sins and the sorcery that you forced us to practice' (*Ta Ha:* 73).

In the previously mentioned verse, it is mentioned that they were coerced to practice sorcery while the verse currently under our consideration mentions the reason for their plea to be forgiven: '…as we were the first to believe' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 51).

وَأَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰٓ أَنۡ أَسۡرِ بِعِبَادِيٓ إِنَّكُم مُّتَّبَعُونَ (٥٢)

Then We revealed Our will to Moses, 'Leave with My
servants by night, for you will be pursued!' [52]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 52)

We have said that the lexical meaning of the word *wahi* is secret inspiration; while in Islamic Law, it means Allah communicating a particular law or way to one of His Messengers that will bring good to His creation.

Concerning the general sense of (*wahi*, divine revelation, or inspiration*)*, Allah says: 'And your Lord inspired the bee, saying: "Take you habitations in the mountains and in the trees and in what they erect."' (*an-Nahl:* 68) Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* also says: 'And do not eat of that upon which the Name of Allah has not been mentioned, for indeed, it is grave disobedience. And indeed do the devils inspire their allies (among mankind) to dispute with you…' (*al-An'am:* 121). And He also says: 'And We inspired to the mother of Musa (Moses), saying, "Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve…"' (*al-Qasas:* 7).

So with respect to *wahi* in general, we do not concern ourselves with the one who is inspiring, or the one who is receiving the inspiration, or the subject matter of the inspiration. It could be evil insinuations of Satan, and the one receiving *wahi* could be anything: the earth, angels, or animals. On the other hand, *wahi*, from the perspective of Islamic Law, is specific, clear, and known.

Pharaoh had widely advertised this confrontation event with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the public gathered to witness the contest. This suggests that Pharaoh had thought he would win, but Allah foiled his expectations and the round was won in favour of Musa *peace be upon him*. The sorcerers ended up as believers in Allah, the Lord of Musa and Harun *peace be upon them* both. So Pharaoh began to menace and terrorize them, for he knew for sure that the spectacular signs that they had seen from Allah compelled them to believe.

Despite this, once Pharaoh was vanquished and had lost his air of eminence, ascendancy, and power, the masses remained silent. They did not call for him to be overthrown; rather, they contented themselves with listening for news of Musa *peace be upon him*. The status-quo continued for a long time, during which seven signs were sent down by Allah upon the children of Israel.

It was foolish of Pharaoh to leave Musa *peace be upon him* alone rather than try to rid himself of him after he had gained followers and supporters. Musa's followers would only increase and his power would only grow. It was as if the seven signs that Allah brought down upon them had shaken Pharaoh's very being and completely distracted him from thinking about the threat that Musa *peace be upon him* presented.

This was how Pharaoh lost control of the situation and Musa *peace be upon him* gained a strong majority and popular support. Even the Copts,(1) the followers of Pharaoh, were favourably disposed to Musa and his followers. Therefore, before they left with Musa *peace be upon him* the children of Israel borrowed jewellery from the Coptic women, with which the Samaritan later made the golden calf that they worshipped.

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(1) The Copts were a people in Egypt; it was said that they were the original people of Egypt. *(Qubtiyyah)* is clothing of white, fine linen made in Egypt and named after the Copts [*Lissan Al-'Arab* – entry under *(qibt)*]. So the Copts were the people of Egypt before Musa *peace be upon him* came and Christianity appeared in Egypt. It follows that being Copt is an identity; it is unrelated to religion.

Here Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Then We revealed Our Will to Musa (Moses), “Leave with My servants by night, for you will be pursued!”’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 52) His Lord had previously warned him to flee after having killed a man: ‘And a man came from the farthest end of the city, running. He said, “O Musa, indeed the eminent ones are conferring over you (intending) to kill you, so leave (the city); indeed, I am to you of the sincere advisors.”’ (*al-Qasas:* 20)

As for the current incident, the conspiracy was against Musa *peace be upon him* and the believers who supported him.

The verb *asr* translated in the verse under discussion ‘leave with My servants by night,’ means to walk or travel at night. ‘…for you will be pursued…’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 52) means that Pharaoh’s soldiers would go after you.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَرۡسَلَ فِرۡعَوۡنُ فِي ٱلۡمَدَآئِنِ حَٰشِرِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾
إِنَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ لَشِرۡذِمَةٞ قَلِيلُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾ وَإِنَّهُمۡ لَنَا لَغَآئِظُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

Pharaoh sent messengers into the cities, proclaiming [53]
These people are a puny band [54] they have enraged us [55]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 53-55)

The conjunction *fa* in the verb *fa-arsala* translated in the verse under study as ‘…then sent…,’ is used to denote succession in time and order. Allah inspired Musa *peace be upon him* to go with the children of Israel by night before Pharaoh could send out the heralds or gatherers to all the cities. It is as if Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* was taking measures to ensure that His Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* left before Pharaoh could wage psychological warfare against Musa *peace be upon him* and his people to deter them from leaving, or arouse the people of Egypt and gather them against Musa through what we may call ‘brainwashing’ in modern times.

Hashirin translated as heralds or gatherers, derives from the root word *al-hashr* meaning to gather. However, this time they were gathering soldiers, not sorcerers because the sorcerers were defeated in the contest of sorcery. This time they would use a different weapon, the weapon of brute force and military might. The first weapon failed; perhaps another would succeed. But the True Lord *the Exalted* informed His Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* of what was being plotted against him and ordered him to leave with the children of Israel.

Pharaoh’s saying: ‘…those are but a small band…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 54) was meant to belittle the stature of the children of Israel, and goad his own people into conflict with them. Nonetheless, he still warned them of the danger posed by the children of Israel, saying: ‘…and indeed, they are enraging us.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 55) So equip yourself, and do not underestimate them.

وَإِنَّا لَجَمِيعٌ حَٰذِرُونَ ٥٦

And we are a large army, on the alert [56]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 56)

The phrase means we must be on our guard and prepare for the situation.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَخْرَجْنَٰهُم مِّن جَنَّٰتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ٥٧ وَكُنُوزٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ ٥٨

So it was that We made them leave their gardens and their springs [57] their treasures and their noble dwellings [58]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 57-58)

In other words, Pharaoh’s preparations would do him no good and his precautions would avail him nothing, for caution cannot prevent divine decree. ‘So, We expelled them from gardens…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 57). *Jannat* is translated as gardens and may also mean orchards. ‘…And springs…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 57) mean running springs of water. ‘…Treasures…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 57-58) refer to that which they had possessed. ‘…And every kind of honourable place…’ means life of opulent luxury, with servants and attendants.

Next the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

كَذَٰلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَٰهَا بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ٥٩

We gave [such] things [later] to the children of Israel [59]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 59)

‘Thus it was…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 59) simply means ‘it was as I am describing it to you.’ ‘…but [in the course of time] We were to bestow all these [things] as a heritage on the children of Israel.' (*ash-Shu'ara': 59*) In other words, Allah later bestowed these same blessings upon the children of Israel. Here someone might ask: how would such possessions be handed over as heritage when the children of Israel left Egypt without taking any of these blessings with them? They said that the intended meaning was that Allah bestowed upon them a land like Egypt, the territory promised to them in the Levant.

فَأَتْبَعُوهُم مُّشْرِقِينَ ٦٠

Pharaoh and his people pursued them at sunrise [60]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara': 60*)

Meaning at daybreak. Traditionally, attacks on armies are launched in the morning; for instance, Allah says: 'When it descends on their courtyards, how terrible that morning will be for those who were warned!' (*as-Saffat:* 177) Normally, when a person wakes up from sleep he is lethargic and inactive. How could anyone battle his enemy effectively in such a state?

Next the True Lord *the Most High* says:

فَلَمَّا تَرَٰٓءَا ٱلْجَمْعَانِ قَالَ أَصْحَٰبُ مُوسَىٰٓ إِنَّا لَمُدْرَكُونَ ٦١

And as soon as the two sides came within sight of one another,
Moses' followers said, 'We shall definitely be caught' [61]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara': 61*)

'As soon as the two hosts came within sight of one another…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) means that each group was able to see the other and the confrontation began. At this moment '…Musa's followers said, "We shall definitely be overtaken."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) The situation was that the sea was before them and Pharaoh's soldiers behind them, so there was nowhere to flee. Musa *peace be upon him* had previously learned the power of the word (*kalla*; no) from his Lord *the Most Exalted*; when Musa *peace be upon him* said: 'And they have a charge of crime against me, and I fear they may kill me,' his Lord replied, 'No [they will not]...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 15). From that moment onward, Musa *peace be upon him* understood this word *kalla* so well and knew how and when to say it with confidence and certitude.

قَالَ كَلَّآۖ إِنَّ مَعِيَ رَبِّي سَيَهۡدِينِ ٦٢

Moses said, ‘No, my Lord is with me: He will guide me’[62] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 62)

But how could Musa *peace be upon him* say loudly: ‘No indeed!’ when the matter was subject to the laws of the physical world and Pharaoh’s army could overtake him before he even would finish speaking? The answer is in the rest of the glorious verse: ‘My Lord is with me; He will guide me.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62) Musa *peace be upon him* did not say ‘No’ relying on his own strength and preparedness for the situation. Rather, he said it relying on his Lord and Sustainer Who would watch over him and shield him with His protection.

So, the reality is that I do not know what to do or how to act, but that which I draw strength from is the fact that ‘My Lord is with me; He will guide me.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62) Therefore, the way out of this impasse came to Musa immediately:

فَأَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰٓ أَنِ ٱضۡرِب بِّعَصَاكَ ٱلۡبَحۡرَۖ
فَٱنفَلَقَ فَكَانَ كُلُّ فِرۡقٖ كَٱلطَّوۡدِ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ٦٣

And We revealed to Moses: ‘Strike the sea with your staff.’ It parted – each side like a mighty mountain [63] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 63)

The sea was the barrier in front of them. The element in the sea is water which is subject to the unique physical laws of fluidity and capillarity. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff, it divided into two parts and each part of water became like a towering mountain.

However, after the water had turned to its opposite state (from liquidity to solidity) and hardened like a mountain, creating a path between the two mountains, would not there have been mud, silt and mires at the bottom in which a person could get stuck? We know that a person can barely lift a foot when walking in mud up to the knees. How then would they deal with mire at the bottom of the sea? That is the reason why his Lord assured him, saying: ‘…you will not fear being overtaken (by Pharaoh) nor be afraid (of drowning).' (*Ta Ha:* 77) The One Who turned the water into a mountain for you would also make for you a dry path.

Regarding the parting of the sea, the True Lord *the Exalted* did not state for us in how many places the sea was split, but scholars say that it was divided into twelve different splits for the twelve tribes of Israel so that each tribe had its own path to pass through.

As the story informs us elsewhere, thinking like a human, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* wanted to strike his staff once more to restore the sea to its natural state and close the passageway to Pharaoh and his soldiers, but the True Lord forbade him to do so. '(Allah said), "Depart you with My slaves by night. Surely, you will be pursued. And leave the sea as it is (quiet and divided). Verily, they are a host to be drowned."' (*ad-Dukhan:* 23-24) Leave it as it is so that the dry path will tempt Pharaoh and his soldiers to proceed. That is why Allah then says:

وَأَزْلَفْنَا ثَمَّ ٱلْءَاخَرِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

And We brought the others to that place [64]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 64)

That is, we drew them into the middle of the sea. Then Allah caused the sea to crash over them by ordering the water to return to its liquid state. This way, and by the same means, Allah rescued some people and destroyed others. *Al-akharin* translated above as '…the others (i.e. the pursuers) …' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 64) refers to the people of Pharaoh. *Thamma* translated above as '…to that place' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 64) refers to the middle of the sea.

The staff has a long history with Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that began when His Lord asked him: 'What is that in your right hand, O Musa?' (*Ta Ha:* 17) Musa said what he knew about it: 'It is my staff', he said, 'I lean on it, and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep, and I also have other uses for it.' (*Ta Ha:* 18)

Musa's saying: '…and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep…' (*Ta Ha:* 18), or in Arabic *(ahushu biha `ala ghanami)* is not merely a reference to the sheep or hitting them with a cane. *Ahushu* means to strike the leaves of a tree so they fall down and the young sheep who are not tall enough to reach the leaves can eat them, or the older sheep whose necks are not long enough to reach the highest leaves can have more to eat.

When Musa *peace be upon him* found himself elaborating on this issue, he said, '…and I also have other uses for it.' (*Ta Ha:* 18) such as defending myself at night if a dog or wolf attacks me, or sticking it in the ground and hanging my robe over it to give me shade when I take a nap; or laying it across my shoulders so I can hang my belongings on it as I walk.

These are the functions of the staff as Musa *peace be upon him* saw them. However, the staff had another function that he still did not know of: its role as the proof of his prophethood and as one of the signs given to him by Allah. With it he emerged victorious from the contest with the sorcerers, and with it he split the sea, emerging victorious from the confrontation with Pharaoh and his soldiers.

What is wondrous about Musa's staff is that he struck the sea with it and it became a mountain, and struck the stone with it and twelve springs gushed forth from it. These were dazzling miracles that only Almighty Allah could perform.

Musa's staff eventually became a standard symbol for victory in many situations. When Al-Khasib was the governor of Egypt and some bandits rebelled against him, and he had the power to subdue them, a poet said:

If any of the falsehood of Pharaoh lies among you
The staff of Musa is in the hand of Khasib

Regarding this meaning, another poet said:

When Moses came and cast down his staff
Sorcery and sorcerers were proven false.

So Musa's staff became an emblem of victory in any aspect of life.

وَأَنجَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ وَمَن مَّعَهُۥٓ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

We saved Moses and all his companions [65]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 65)

This confrontation was decided in favour of the party of Musa *peace be upon him* without spilling any of their blood and without losing a single fighter; victory in normal battles necessarily entails some percentage of losses in lives and equipment. This was not the case in this battle.

ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا ٱلْـَٔاخَرِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

And drowned the rest [66]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 66)

In other words, by the same means with which Allah saved Musa *peace be upon him* and his people, Allah also destroyed Pharaoh and his people. Allah alone is capable of saving and destroying with the same instrument.

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةًۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكۡثَرُهُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

There truly is a sign in this, though most of them
do not believe [67] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 67)

Allah's saying: 'In this (story)…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 67) means 'in what happened.' '…Sign…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 67) is a wondrous phenomenon or event, beyond what is ordinary or usual. It inspires the awe of people and demands their attention and reflection. Such a sign (from Allah) convinces the mind that it is Allah Who caused it to happen through Musa's hands. This sign also confirms the truthfulness of Musa's message and the revelations that he conveyed from Allah. In principle, it is an act beyond any human capacity to perform. Despite this, '…most of them are not believers.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 67) In other words, the final total of those who believed were only a few people(1) despite these signs. Even those who believed with Musa *peace be upon him* and followed him and were saved by Allah from the tyranny of the people of Pharaoh and from drowning, they too quickly regressed and slipped back into their old ways. The Quran says of them: 'We took the children of Israel across the sea, but when they came upon a people who worshipped idols, they said, "O Musa, make a god for us like theirs."' (*al-A'raf:* 138)

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his Tafsir (vol. 7, p. 4986): 'No one believed from among the people of Pharaoh except the believer from the family of Pharaoh, Hizqil, and his daughter Asia, the wife of Pharaoh, and the old woman, Maryam, who guided Prophet Musa to the grave of Prophet Yusuf peace be upon them.'*

Unbelievable! They distrusted and rejected Allah while their feet were still wet from crossing the sea and they were still in the euphoria of victory!

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٦٨﴾

Your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [68]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 68)

In other words, after all the previously mentioned grounds, Allah is indeed *the Almighty*. It is He Who cannot be vanquished or subdued, for He is the Vanquisher and the Subduer of all. Allah *the Exalted* conquers and He cannot be conquered; He feeds and is not fed; He protects and cannot be protected from. Yet despite His Invincible Might and Power, He is also '…the Most Merciful…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 68). This is because Allah is the Lord of all creation and is full of mercy towards those who repent to Him. He accepts them as soon as they return to His fold, as depicted in the following noble Hadith that says:

'Allah is more pleased with the repentance of a servant of His than one of you would be if he were to lose his riding camel, which carried his food and drink, in a barren desert. After he despaired of finding it, he came to a tree and laid down in its shade. Then, while in this desperate state, lo and behold, there it was before him, So he grabbed its reins and cried out in joy, 'O Allah, You are my servant and I am your Lord!' – making this mistake (in wording) out of his excessive joy.'(1)

وَٱتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ ﴿٦٩﴾

Tell them the story of Abraham [69]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 69)

This comes at the close of a simplified synopsis of the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh, which ends with Allah's saying: 'In this is indeed a sign (or a proof), yet most of them are not believers. And verily, your Lord! He is truly the All-Mighty, the Most Merciful.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 67-68)

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(1) *It was narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih Collection (no. 2747) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about His Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘And recite to them the story of Ibrahim.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 69) this demonstrates that the purpose of the Quran is not merely the narration of history, for Ibrahim came before Musa *peace be upon them* both. If it was intended for a recount of history, the story of Ibrahim would have come first. Instead, the purpose of the Quran is to capture moral lessons and exhortations, and provide role models from the history of previous prophets to encourage and bolster the heart of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he would face trying situations.

Anyone who examines the messages of Ibrahim and Musa *peace be upon them* will see that Musa came to treat an issue of the utmost doctrinal importance: he came to confront a man who claimed divinity, saying, ‘I am a god instead of Allah.’ As for Ibrahim, he came to deal with the issue of ascribing partners to Allah and idol worshippers, who nonetheless had a degree of faith, for, if we were to beset the idol worshippers in an argument, they would say: ‘…we worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah…’ (*az-Zumar:* 3). That is why the story of Musa *peace be upon him* is first in order here.

‘And recite to them…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 69) signifies to read or explain or express. We use a word from the same root, *tilawah*, to mean reading and recitation because only what is written, known, and understood can be conveyed through *tilawah*. Concerning those who are designated by the pronoun ‘…to them…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 69), does it include everyone to whom Islam might be preached? Or does it mean specifically those who deny the truth? They say that it means specifically those who deny the truth, because those who believe the truth of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* do not need to hear such recitation. And if it were recited to them, it would only be as a reminder or to inform them of historical events. Consequently, the intended audience are the deniers and negators of the truth so that they may learn that victory and dominance are the end results of the mission of every Messenger of Allah, while the end of all opponents and deniers of the truth has always been loss and defeat.

It is as if the Quran was saying to them: Do not get deluded by your power or high standing, and do not be deceived by your mastery over the

Arabs. It is well known that the high standing which the Quraysh enjoyed among the Arabs was only due to their custodianship of the Holy *Ka`ba*. If it had not been for the holiness and sanctity of Allah’s House, they would not have been secure in their trade routes.

If not for the *Ka`ba*, Quraysh would not have attained such a prominent status, as evidenced by Allah’s saying: ‘For the accustomed security of the Quraysh, their accustomed security during their winter and summer journeys.’ (*Quraysh:* 1-2)

And if the *Ka`ba* had been destroyed during the Event of the Elephant, the Quraysh would not have had mastery or authority over the Arabian Peninsula, since Allah *the Exalted* cared for them with such kindness: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House, Who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.’ (*Quraysh:* 3-4)

The Arabic word *naba’* in the part of verse saying: ‘And recite to them the story *naba’* of Ibrahim’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 69) means important information that must be stated and listened to in order to gain from it wisdom and moral lessons. The word *naba’* is not used for everyday information of no importance.

If you trace the word *naba’* throughout the Quran, you find that it is said only in reference to important matters, as in Allah’s saying: ‘About what are they asking one another? About the great news (of resurrection).’ (*an-Naba’:* 1-2) Also in the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the hoopoe bird: ‘…I have encompassed [in knowledge] that which you have not encompassed, and I have come to you from Sheba with certain news.’ (*an-Naml:* 22)

Thus *(naba’ Ibrahim)* translated as: ‘…the story of Ibrahim (Abraham)’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 69) means the essential or important news about him. Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was the father of the Prophets. He was highly praised by his Lord in many places throughout the Quran. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says of Ibrahim: ‘Verily, Abraham was an *ummah* (a man who combined within himself all virtues), devoutly obeying Allah’s Will, turning away from all that is false…’ (*an-Nahl:* 120).

Ummah meaning community or nation is only used to mean a collective of people who identify themselves according to some specific traits and are united by time, place and lifestyle. Likewise, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was endowed by Allah with attributes of perfection that no ordinary human being could have.

That is why the Noble Hadith says: ‘Goodness will remain in me and in my *ummah* (followers or nation based on one creed) until the Day of Resurrection.’(1)

Goodness lies exclusively in me; goodness in its general sense and with it different facets in his character as a father, a husband and as a caller to Islam, as well as the myriad attributes that he possessed, such as courage, gentleness, knowledge, generosity, etc. Goodness is also spread out among the individuals of my *ummah,* for each of them has some aspect and share of goodness. Although no one person can ever combine in himself the qualities of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or possess his perfection of character.

Similarly, our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was described as being an *(ummah* because the attributes of goodness are spread throughout the members of a community—this one is clever, that one is gentle, this one is knowledgeable and that one is wise, etc. However, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* contained within his person all the virtues that can exist in an entire community. This is not just excessive praise of the Prophet of Allah, Ibrahim *peace be upon him*; it is the truth based on his actual life experiences.

Read, if you wish what Allah says about Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: ‘And (remember) when the Lord of Ibrahim (Abraham) tried him with (certain) Commands, which he fulfilled. He (Allah) said (to him), “Verily, I am going to make you a leader (Prophet) of mankind.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 124)

Indeed, Ibrahim’s following supplication is alone sufficient to show his merit and goodness: ‘Our Lord, send among them a Messenger of their own who shall recite to them Your Verses…’ (*al-Baqara:* 129). Prophet Muhammad

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(1) *`Ajluni said in Kashf Al-khafa’ [vol. 1/p. 476], ‘It is mentioned in Al-Maqasid that our Sheikh said, “I do not know this Hadith, but its meaning is correct, in accordance with the Hadith: There will never cease to be a group from my ummah (followers) upon the truth until the Last Hour is established.”’ Ibn Hajar Al-Makki said in Al-Fatawa Al-Hadithiya: ‘There is no Hadith with such wording.’*

peace and blessings be upon him was sent in fulfilment of this supplication of his forefather Ibrahim *peace be upon him*.

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِۦ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

When he asked his father and his people, 'What do you worship?' [70] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 70)

The first person Ibrahim *peace be upon him* called to Islam was his father, the closest person to him, not some stranger. A call that is first addressed to one's closest relations rather than to distant people must be good and true because a person wishes that good things happen to himself first, then to those who are closest to him. If there is any doubt about the goodness of what he is bringing them, he would have first taken it to people who were strangers to him. The person intended as Ibrahim's father was Azar. He is mentioned in another place in the Quran.

Ibrahim's question to his father: 'What is it that you worship?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 70) is expressive of his disapprobation and rejection. It is a reasoning question that is meant to lay bare before his people the falseness of their worship. Worship, in essence, is a worshipper obeying the commands and prohibitions of that which he worships. In the case of idol worshippers, what exactly is it that they are commanded to do or not to do? Idols are gods without a law. How easy it is for mankind to worship gods like these who do not command them to do anything, nor prohibit them from doing anything. Such gods are totally incapable of requital and cannot hold their worshippers to account, for they can neither reward those who obey them, nor punish those who disobey them.

In fact, it is a mistake to use the word 'worship' in relation to idols. Despite this, people refer to them as gods. But why is that? Because the True God has commandments which the believers must carry out no matter how hard it is on them. He also has prohibitions that must be observed no matter how badly one desires or lusts for them. This is arduous worship. As for the worship of idols, there is nothing easier, for they give no commands or prohibitions and they offer no principles by which to govern life. That is why these people clung to idol worship and called their idols gods. This is pure madness.

When a true worshipper is caught in a tight spot and does not know what to do, or when circumstances demand more than he is capable of, he knows that he has a Lord to whom he can always turn for refuge and help, saying, ‘O God.’ But what about the worshipper of idols when he is exposed to similar difficulties? To whom should he direct his prayers and supplciations? To these stone-made objects, or supposing that he turns to another human being like him who might listen, is there any certainty that this person will help him? This is the reason why Allah then says: ‘They answered, “We worship idols, and we remain ever devoted to them.” He (Ibrahim) said, “Do [you really think that] they hear you when you invoke them, or benefit you or do you harm?”’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 71-73) Thus worshipping anything other than Allah is utter foolishness and stupidity.

But did this inquiry on Ibrahim’s part and this back-and-forth argument with his father and his people happen before or after he received the message from Allah? They say that Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was very enlightened and mature from a young age, so he rejected this false worship even before he became a Messenger of Allah. Therefore, Allah says of Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: ‘And We had certainly given Ibrahim his sound judgement before, and We were of him well-Knowing.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 51)

Similarly, our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* abhorred and rejected idol worship before he was made a messenger. He used to watch, astounded, as his people worshipped idols. He even saw how when the arm of one of the idols had broken off, his people sought the services of someone who could repair the idol’s broken arm! The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* laughed and was amazed at what he saw: how could a worshipper repair the god he worshipped? After that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* isolated himself from them and withdrew to the Cave (of Hira’) to reflect on the One True God worthy of worship.

It is as if no matter what religion the True God had commanded, if someone thought about it with clear-headedness, he would arrive at the truth without a messenger; Ths is because the religion of Allah is the religion of our innate, true nature. So if a person retains enough of his original pure nature, it will guide him to the truth.

This is substantiated by the successful views of `Umar *Allah be pleased with him*. He would give his opinion to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding certain situations or problems, and then Quranic verses would come down to him from Allah, and in many instances they would concur with the viewpoints of `Umar(1). An element which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* acknowledged in order to show us that a sound mind and an upright natural disposition can reach matters of religion without a messenger.

You can present any value of religion to a sound mind and you will find that it corresponds beautifully with good taste, common sense and proper thinking. For instance, lying is a behaviour that the sound mind and religion both reject. The same applies to bribery because it involves taking something that one has no right to possess in any sense. The person who is bribing you may also blackmail you and try to take what is rightfully yours, just as you have taken what rightfully belongs to the public.

If a person with a sound mind considers the rule against gazing at women who are prohibited to him, he would see that Islam has restricted his gaze as an individual, and also restricted the gaze of everyone else for his sake as an individual. Thus the religion demands obligations from you just as it demands obligations for your sake, such as the prohibitions against stealing, murder and other crimes.

Sometimes in our journeys abroad we might be asked about Allah's saying: 'He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religions, however hateful this may be to those who associate others with Allah.' (*at-Tawba:* 33) And: 'They want to extinguish the Light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah refuses except to perfect His Light, however hateful this may be to the disbelievers.' (*at-Tawba:* 32)

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(1) *One example of such incidents was on the day of the Battle of Badr, when Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'What do you say regarding these captives?' Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him said: 'O Messenger of Allah, they are your people and your kinsmen, so spare them and ask them to repent. Perhaps Allah may accept their repentance.' `Umar Allah be pleased with him said: 'O Messenger of Allah, they accused you of lying and expelled you (from Mecca). Bring them forth and strike off their necks.' The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him accepted Abu Bakr's suggestion of releasing them for ransom, but the following Quranic verse was sent down from Allah: 'It is not right for a prophet to take captives before he has battled strenuously on earth. You [people] desire the transient goods of this world, but Allah desires the Hereafter [for you] – Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.' (al-Anfal: 67) See Tafsir Ibn Kathir [vol. 2, vol. 325].*

They say: 'After fourteen centuries the Muslims are still a minority in the world and the true religion has not prevailed over all false religions. How then can we understand this Quranic verse?' To the one who may ask this question, I say: If you had comprehended the previous Quranic verse, you would have known the answer concerning Allah's saying: 'They want to extinguish the Light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah refuses except to perfect His Light, however hateful this may be to the disbelievers.' (*at-Tawba:* 32) The meaning is that Islam will overshadow other religions; however, not in the sense that these religions will cease to exist, but in the sense that the logical guidance of Islam will continue to project itself as the only source of answers. This can be evidenced by all the attacks we see on Islam, its laws and rulings, such as those related to divorce, for example, or polygamy or other affairs. Eventually, social conditions will make it necessary for them to resort to Islamic rulings, and they will find no other means to resolve their problems.

When the Bolshevik Revolution erupted in Russia in 1918, the first law they enacted was the prohibition of (*riba*; usurious interest) which had been acceptable among them. They outlawed interest even though they were not Muslim because their interests aligned with the Islamic values. This and similar other incidents are victories for the Religion of Allah and its prevalence over all other religions.

The meaning of '…to make it prevail over all religions…' (*at-Tawba:* 33) is not that all humankind will become believers. Rather, each person will continue to adhere to his own religion, or his idolatry, or disbelief, but he will not find the solutions for his problems except in Islam. This is the true implication of Islam 'prevailing over all other religions.'

Next the True Lord *the Exalted* relates the response which the people of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* gave to Ibrahim:

قَالُوا۟ نَعۡبُدُ أَصۡنَامࣰا فَنَظَلُّ لَهَا عَـٰكِفِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

They said, 'We worship idols, and are constantly in attendance on them' [71] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara':* 71)

So one of their own bore witness, for they themselves said: '…we worship idols…' (*ash-Shuʿara':* 71). To worship implies obedience to something. What then did the idols say to them? What did they order them to do? Of course, they did not have an answer to this question.

If only it stopped at the level of worship, but it also entailed: '…and we remain ever devoted to them.' (*ash-Shuʿara':* 71) In other words, they worshipped these idols day and night, and that is plausible because they were gods without commandments or laws and so their worship of them was without hardship or obligation. This was a kind of dissembling by which they gratified their attachment needs, and along with it did whatever they pleased.

But how did Ibrahim *peace be upon him* argue with them? With what did he reply to them?

قَالَ هَلۡ يَسۡمَعُونَكُمۡ إِذۡ تَدۡعُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾ أَوۡ يَنفَعُونَكُمۡ أَوۡ يَضُرُّونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

He asked, 'Do they hear you when you call? [72] Do they help or harm you?'[73] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara':* 72-73)

Idols do not hear the supplications of those who turn to them, and they do not benefit those who worship them, nor harm those who disbelieve in them. That is why the idol worshippers had no reply or incontestable evidence except to say:

قَالُوا۟ بَلۡ وَجَدۡنَآ ءَابَآءَنَا كَذَٰلِكَ يَفۡعَلُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

They replied, 'No, but this is what we saw our fathers doing' [74] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara':* 74)

So you did not really apply your minds to this matter, as they said in another place: 'We found our fathers following a certain way and religion, and we will indeed follow their footsteps.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23)

We say to them: since when have you followed the precedent set by your forefathers? If you had ever lived in imitation of your ancestors, then your lives and your standards of living would never have improved. So why do you insist on following in the footsteps of your ancestors in this matter particularly but not in any other?

قَالَ أَفَرَءَيْتُم مَّا كُنتُمْ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ أَنتُمْ وَءَابَآؤُكُمُ ٱلْأَقْدَمُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾
فَإِنَّهُمْ عَدُوٌّ لِّىٓ إِلَّا رَبَّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

Abraham said, ‘Those idols you have worshipped [75]
you and your forefathers [76] I are my enemies; not so the
Lord of the Worlds [77] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 75 -77)

So what Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is saying is: ‘Do not pin the matter on your forefathers, and do not blame them for your errors.’ Then Ibrahim *peace be upon him* stated their errors clearly as a challenge to them. As if Ibrahim were defiantly saying: ‘Go ride your highest horse.’

‘… Indeed, they are an enemy to me. …’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 77) The word ‘enemy’ is singular here even though it is preceded by and refers to a plural pronoun, ‘…they (false deities)…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 77). Nonetheless, he did not say ‘my enemies.’ It is said that enmity in religion can only be of one form, whereas enmity and animosity in worldly affairs happens for many reasons, as in Allah’s saying: ‘…And remember the blessings which Allah has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 103).

Here ‘…when you were enemies …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 103) is in the plural form because it refers to worldly animosity, which is of many different causes. As for enmity in religion, it is all the same, as if it were all from one person.

Along these same lines is what we have said in the chapter of *an-Nur* regarding Allah’s statement: ‘No blame will be attached to the blind, the lame, the sick. Whether you eat in your own houses, or those of your fathers, your mothers, your brothers, your sisters, your paternal uncles, your paternal aunts, your maternal uncles, your maternal aunts, houses you have the keys for, or (in the house) of your friend, you will not be blamed…’ (*an-Nur:* 61).

Everything is in the plural form except '…or (in the house) of your friend…' (*an-Nur:* 61) which is in the singular because true friendship is that which is sincerely for the sake of Allah. It does not have mutiple purposes, thus friendship is one of a kind.

Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) declaration of his opposition to the idols implies a challenge to them, as he openly declared his enmity to these idols, challenging them to harm him if they could. After declaring enmity to the idols, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) call to Allah succeeded and he was not harmed.

ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَنِى فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ ﴿٧٨﴾ وَٱلَّذِى هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِى وَيَسْقِينِ ﴿٧٩﴾
وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ ﴿٨٠﴾

Who created me. It is He who guides me [78] He who gives
me food and drink [79] He who cures me when I am ill [80]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 78 - 80)

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* reveals that there are reasons for devoting worship to Him, and Ibrahim (Abraham) clarifies these reasons, saying Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Who created me. It is He who guides me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78) This means that Allah created him from nothing, provided for him, established a law to guide him throughout his life and to ensure his well-being by enjoining certain commands. Allah *Glorified is He* does not gain any benefit from this, rather, the human being does. As idols cannot do any of the above-mentioned matters, only Allah deserves to be worshipped.

Allah's saying: '…It is He who guides me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78) refers to the Divine Law as the user's manual which people need to implement in order to ensure safety and good performance for their products. The purpose of every machine or product should be defined before creating it. For example, we have never seen a manufacturer creating a device without defining a certain purpose for it.

When this device fails to work correctly, you should refer to the user's manual or take it to the technician for him to repair it. Similarily, you should follow the Divine Law because Allah is your Creator, and is the only One Who is entitled to establish a law for you. Therefore, it does not make sense that anyone other than Allah establishes a law for people. For example, you never tell a butcher to make a user's manual for a television.

Then, Ibrahim (Abraham) mentions the essential elements necessary for maintaining one's life: 'He who gives me food and drink. He who cures me when I am ill.' (*ash-Shu'ara': 78-80*) The Arabic pronoun *huwa* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse emphasises that Allah is the only One Who provides guidance, food, water and health. This is because some people may claim that they provide these four things as they may think that the doctor is the one who restores us to health or that the father is the one Who is responsible for sustenance because they provide for their families.

Guidance might be wrongly attributed to those who make rules determining human behaviour. For example, Communism, Capitalism, Existentialism, Ba'athism and others claim that they involve goodness and guidance of humankind. Therefore, Allah emphasises that He is the source of all these matters. He says: '…It is He who guides me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78) Hence, guidance comes only from Allah and His laws.

You may ask a question concerning Allah's saying: 'He who cures me when I am ill.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 80) Why do we go to the doctor although Allah is the One Who cures people? The answer is: The doctor prescribes medication and treats people, but Allah cures them. This is evidenced by the fact that a doctor may fall ill and become unable to treat himself, or may give a patient an injection that accidentally leads to the latter's death.

In the Arabic syntax, the word *maridtu* which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, includes the verb *marida* in the past tense and the letter *ta* is the subject of the verb. In this case, is the person here the one who caused the illness? No. Similarly, in the sentence *'mata fulanun'* (someone died), 'someone' is the subject of the verb, but he did not cause death. Thus, one must be cognizant of when the subject is the one who did the action or the one who is described or characterized by the action. In the verse under study, the subject of the verb is not the doer of the action, rather, the subject is characterized by the action. Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) says: '…I fall ill…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 80) out of good manners and respect for Allah *Glorified is He*.

He did not say, 'Allah makes me sick', rather, he said 'I fall sick' and attributed sickness to himself.

As for those things which no one but Allah can claim, they are stated without this kind of emphasis, like in the next verse:

وَٱلَّذِى يُمِيتُنِى ثُمَّ يُحْيِينِ ﴿٨١﴾

He who will make me die and then give me life again [81] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 81)

Ibrahim (Abraham) did not say, 'It is He who causes me to die and it is He Who brings me back to life,' because life and death are unquestionably in Allah's Hand, and no one else can claim them. Someone may ask, 'What about the person who kills another? Is that not considered death?' We have previously explained the difference between killing and death as demonstrated in Allah's saying: 'Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]?...' (*Al-'Imran:* 144) Death then is the departure of the soul when the body is still undamaged and its organs are intact, and only after the departure of the soul, the body decays. However, murder entails the destruction or damage of the body which results in the departure of the soul.

So no one claims to have the power of death, and when Nimrod claimed it for himself, Ibrahim (Abraham) argued with him and exposed the fraudulence of his claim, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Have you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death," he said, "I give life and cause death" …' (*al-Baqara:* 258). All that he did was that he ordered a man to be condemned to death, then he pardoned him. Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) found an appropriate way to put an end to this argument: 'Abraham said: "Indeed, Allah brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So the disbeliever was overwhelmed [by astonishment], and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people...' (*al-Baqara:* 258). Ibrahim (Abraham) put an end to this sophistry and revealed the truth behind this stubborn and arrogant person.

Allah says: ‘He who will make me die and then give me life again.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 81) The Arabic conjunction *thumma* (and then), which is used in the Arabic version of the verse, indicates a long interval between two incidents. The preposition *wa* (and) is not used because it indicates conjunction between things or incidents that are close to each other, whereas death and the afterlife are very far apart. Allah also says: ‘Then He causes his death and provides a grave for him. Then when He wills, He will resurrect him.’ (*‘Abasa:* 21-22)

وَٱلَّذِيٓ أَطۡمَعُ أَن يَغۡفِرَ لِي خَطِيٓـَٔتِي يَوۡمَ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٨٢﴾

And He who will, I hope, forgive my faults
on the Day of Judgement [82]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 82)

It is strange for this prayer to come from Ibrahim (Abraham). He is the father of the Prophets whom Allah describes as having all the virtues of a devout community. He was not an idol worshipper, and he was tested with commandments which he fulfilled. However, he *peace be upon him* said: ‘And He who will, I hope, forgive my faults on the Day of Judgement.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 82) This is the highest degree of deference towards Allah and belittlement of his own deeds because no matter how many good deeds a person does in his life, it still does not match up to the amount of worship that Allah *Glorified is He* deserves. Therefore, Ibrahim (Abraham) hoped that Allah would forgive him.We should consider when Ibrahim (Abraham) supplicated to His Lord to forgive him, it was after stating the reasons for Allah’s Divinity and acknowledging that all the previous blessings were granted by Allah. He created him from nothing, provided him with sustenance and provided him with all the essential necessities for life.

A servant’s acknowledgment of Allah’s bounties annihilates the haughtiness of his self and purifies his soul and body, making him eligible to supplicate Allah. If he acknowledges Allah’s bounties, He will respond to his supplication for more bounties. As for the person who does not bear in mind or admit Allah’s bounties, it will be more unlikely that his supplications will be answered. Therefore, a person should supplicate his Lord after devoting worship sincerely to Allah alone.

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Whosoever works with what he knows, Allah will provide him with knowledge of what he does not know.'(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…if you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion…' (*al-Anfal:* 29). As long as a person acts according to his religious beliefs and spiritual values, Allah will give him guidance, enlightenment and success. He will enjoy drawing close to Allah and supplicating to Him.Ibrahim (Abraham), the father of all prophets, did not supplicate Allah before stating that all the previous blessings are bestowed by Allah, and thanking Him for them. This corresponds to Allah's saying: '…If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour]…' (*Ibrahim:* 7).

That is why scholars say that a believer supplicates Allah earnestly to give him what entails benefits for him, according to his understanding, logic, and limited information. It is desirable for him to admit that all graces are granted by Allah, and to have strong belief that Allah will grant him what is best for him because He gives according to His Ability and Wisdom.

The same message is clear in the Qudsi Hadith (Revelation from Allah in the Prophet Muhammad's words), 'I will give the person, who is preoccupied with remembering Me rather than supplicating, more than I give to those who ask me.'(2)

Undoubtedly, Allah's giving is greater and His choice for His servant is better than what the servant chooses for himself. For example, when you go on a trip abroad, and you ask your son to tell you about the gifts he wants you to bring from such-and-such country, and he mentions the things he wants. In so doing, he restricts the choices of the gifts which you will bring. However, if he leaves the choice up to you, it will be better than what he has chosen for himself.

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(1) *Related by Abu Na'im in 'Hilyat Al-Awliya' [10/15] from a Hadith of Anas Allah be pleased with him and Shawkani defined it as a weak Hadith in 'Al-Fawa'id Al-Majmu'a [pg 286].*

(2) *Related by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2926] from the Hadith of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri,* and he says, 'This is a good and yet Gharib (a Hadith with a single narrator usually at the beginning of the chain of narration) Hadith. It is related by Abu Na'im in *Al-Hayah [5/106 and by Ad-Darimi in his Sunnan [2/441].*

رَبِّ هَبۡ لِي حُكۡمٗا وَأَلۡحِقۡنِي بِٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

My Lord, grant me wisdom; join me with the righteous [83]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 83)

We notice that Ibrahim (Abraham) did not supplicate Allah for a worldly matter. The difference between *hukm* which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, and *hikmah* is that *hikmah* (wisdom) entails the ability to put things in their proper place, whereas *hukm* (good judgement) entails knowing first what is good and then using what you know.

In his supplication, Ibrahim (Abraham) says: '…grant me…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 83) because *hiba* means a gift that entails no compensation, This means that he admits that he wants Allah to grant him good judgement as a gift, not as a due right. Join '… me with the righteous,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 83) means that he wanted Allah to guide him to do good deeds in order for him to gain their rewards like righteous people.

Allah *Glorified is He* answered his supplication, as He says: 'And thus did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth.…' (*al-An'am:* 75) The word *malakut* (realm), which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, refers to intangible creatures that Allah showed to Ibrahim (Abraham) because he acted according to what he knew about the tangible things. Allah also says: '…verily in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous.' (*al-Baqara:* 130) So Ibrahim's (Abraham's) supplication was answered in this respect.

وَٱجۡعَل لِّي لِسَانَ صِدۡقٖ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

Give me a good name among later generations [84]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 84)

We know that the tongue is the organ for communication and expression. '*Lisan sidq*' which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse means 'good name' so that people remember him in a good manner and truthfully, unlike what happens nowadays, as they sometimes praise falsely, extolling them for what they did and sometimes for things they did not do. This is an untruthful remembrance that is contrary to reality.

We have previously explained that truthfulness is the speech that conforms to reality. This same meaning appears in five instances in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And say, "My Lord, cause me to enter a sound entrance and to exit a sound exit."' (*al-Isra':* 80) The verse means: cause me to enter a sound entrance that involves no deceit, and grant me a sound exit. Allah says: 'In a seat of honour near a Sovereign, Perfect in Ability....' (*al-Qamar:* 55) Allah also says: '… [That is] the promise of truth which they had been promised.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16) These are the five verses in which the Arabic word *sidq* is mentioned.

The verse: '…among later generations,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 84) means that he wanted his contemporaries as well as the following generations to make a good mention of him. He also wanted to leave a good effect on the following generations as well as whoever follows his footsteps. Allah answered his supplication, saying: 'And left for him [favourable mention] among later generations. Peace be upon Abraham.' (*as-Saffat:* 108-109)

وَٱجۡعَلۡنِي مِن وَرَثَةِ جَنَّةِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ﴿٨٥﴾

Make me one of those given the Garden of Bliss [85]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 85)

After supplicating Allah for a worldly matter, Ibrahim (Abraham) supplicated Him for something after his death, and then he asked Allah to be among those admitted to Paradise, the Garden of Bliss. There is no doubt that his Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* answered his supplication, as Ibrahim (Abraham) will be granted the Garden of Bliss, as evidenced by Allah's saying: '…verily, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous.' (*al-Baqara:* 130)

The meaning of 'inheritance of Paradise' is also mentioned in Allah's saying: 'Those are the inheritors, who will inherit Paradise and will abide therein eternally.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 10-11) The literal meaning of inheritance is taking possession of something from a person after his death. How, then, can one inherit paradise? Scholars said that the Creator *Glorified is He* did not create Heaven and Hell to accommodate only those who would end up there, rather, He created Paradise with the capacity to hold all people if they all believe, and He created Hell with the capacity to hold all people if they all disbelieve. This is because Allah gives people the choice, either to believe or disbelieve. Therefore, inheriting paradise means that the believers will inherit the places in paradise allocated for the disbelievers if they believed.

The heir inherits the money and properties gained by the person who died after hard work, but does not ask about the means by which they were earned. However, the heir may return wrongly acquired possessions to their rightful owners in order to acquit the inherited. Thus, the heir receives the inheritance without paying anything in return, i.e., as a gift. Similarly, inheriting paradise means that Allah gives His obedient servants Paradise like a gift from Him not as compensation equal to their worldly deeds. Paradise is an inheritance that comes to the rightful heirs. This confirms the saying of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘There is none whose deeds alone would entitle him to get into Paradise.’ It was said to him, ‘And, Allah's Messenger, not even you?’ Thereupon, he said, ‘Not even I, but that my Lord wraps me in Mercy.’(1)

The scholars say that paradise is an inheritance because a person is not entitled to be rewarded for his good deeds, as they should obey Allah’s Commands which will result in good consequences in the worldly life. If these commandments are for your own good, how can you expect a reward for them? For example, when a father urges his child to study hard, the child, rather than the father, will benefit from following advice.

As long as a person observes Allah’s Commandments which are for his own good, Allah will grant him paradise out of His Grace as a gift. This also may mean that we are granted paradise for our good deeds, but our rank in it is according to Allah’s Grace. Thus, none of us can do without Allah’s Grace. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, "In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy - in that let them rejoice; it is better than what they accumulate.”’ (*Yunus:* 58) This is the intended meaning of inheriting paradise. You should not count entirely on your deeds, your obedience of Allah and your diligence in worship, as salvation is only by the Mercy and Grace of Allah.

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(1) *Agreed upon and related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [6463] and Muslim in his Sahih [2816] from the narration of Abu Hurayra.*

In the next verse, Ibrahim (Abraham) moves on from supplicating for himself to supplicating for his father saying:

وَٱغۡفِرۡ لِأَبِيٓ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ مِنَ ٱلضَّآلِّينَ (٨٦)

Forgive my father, for he is one of those who have gone astray [86] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 86)

Ibrahim (Abraham) did not forget to supplicate for the person who raised him because the Creator *the Glorified and Exalted* made parents the direct means of giving birth. Therefore, Allah has made them the most deserving of obedience after Him. Sometimes, the parents give birth to a child, then abandon him and let someone else raise him, who takes the third position. Allah creates creatures from nothingness, parents give birth to children, and other people who raise and support children. This is clear in Allah's saying: '…say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small."' (*al-Isra':* 24)

The rationale for supplication is not because they are the parents who gave birth to their child, but because they raised and cared for him when he was a child. So, if someone other than the parents raises the child, they take their position and deserve this supplication.

However, Ibrahim's (Abraham's) supplication was not answered in this matter because he supplicated Allah before he knew that his father was Allah's enemy. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the request of forgiveness of Abraham for his father was only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became apparent to Abraham that his father was an enemy to Allah, he disassociated himself from him…' (*at-Tawba:* 114).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تُخۡزِنِي يَوۡمَ يُبۡعَثُونَ (٨٧)

And do not disgrace me on the Day when all people are resurrected [87] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 87)

What will cause a person to be disgraced in the Afterlife? This will be when his Lord reprimands him before witnesses on the Day of Judgment for his shortcomings. Thus, the easy reckoning is the one that occurs only between a person and his Lord. Ibrahim's (Abraham's) supplication in his regard was answered, as Allah says: '…and indeed he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous…' (*al-Baqara:* 130).

يَوۡمَ لَا يَنفَعُ مَالٞ وَلَا بَنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾ إِلَّا مَنۡ أَتَى ٱللَّهَ بِقَلۡبٖ سَلِيمٖ ﴿٨٩﴾

The Day when neither wealth nor children can help [88]
when the only one who will be saved is the one who comes
before God with a heart devoted to Him [89]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 88 - 89)

Allah's saying: 'The Day when neither wealth nor children can help.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 88) puts forward the issue that preoccupies everyone's mind, for everyone wants to possess money and children, whoever is deprived of either money or children are deeply saddened. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life…' (*al-Kahf:* 46). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire - of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver…' (*Al-'Imran:* 14).

In fact, money and children are the adornment of worldly life. The literal meaning of 'adornment' is beauty that is not intrinsic to a thing. For example, intrinsic beauty is embodied in the woman who is naturally beautiful without adding something to her beauty like by wearing make-up or jewels. This type of beauty is called natural beauty, as it does not need any other adornment.

Allah's saying: 'When the only one who will be saved is the one who comes before Allah with a heart devoted to Him,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 88-89) means that even though money and children are the adornments of the worldly life, this does not prevent them from benefitting their owner on the Day of Judgment if he makes good use of his money, spending some of his money for charity and raising his children as righteous people. This will be useless except: 'When the only one who will be saved is the one who comes before Allah with a heart devoted to Him.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 89)

In other words, all deeds must be based on sincerity, as hypocrisy makes one's deeds futile like scattered dust. If you do good deeds in this worldly life but do not believe in Allah or worship him without any partners, your deeds will be futile and useless, and you will not be rewarded in the Afterlife. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed.' (*al-Furqan:* 23)

In a Qudsi Hadith (Revelation from Allah in the Prophet Muhammad's words) Allah says, '…you acted so that your deeds would be praised and appreciated....'(1) Sometimes people do good deeds for them to be praised and honoured, to attain a specific goal, or for their names to be written on the door of the mosque. They attain only the objective behind their good deeds.

Allah's saying: 'The Day when neither wealth nor children can help.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 88) does not deny that wealth and children are useful as long as a person observes sincerity and his heart is devoted to Allah. This means that the person's heart remains in the original condition that it had when Allah created it. The heart is originally sound, but people spoil it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption on the earth," they say, "We are but reformers." Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive [it] not.' (*al-Baqara:* 11-12) If people reflect on things that trouble them in life, they will find that they are the results of the corruption they spread throughout the universe that Allah created and structured according to His Wisdom. Everything in which man does not interfere works properly and correctly, as man causes corruption, oppression, mistreatment of people as well as plants, animals and non-living things, although the Wise Lawgiver has forbidden all of this. This corruption happens when man acts contrary to the instructions of his religion. However, when he is guided by the religious instructions, matters will be set aright and sound.

Allah says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation. And the stars and trees prostrate. And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5-7) Everything in the universe, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the air and water, is balanced with Allah's Wisdom. All the elements of the universe work smoothly and properly in the integrated system of the universe, because man does not interfere with them.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih [1905, Ahmad in his Musnad [3/222] and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2382] from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.* At-Tirmidhi said that the Hadith *is a good and Gharib (a Hadith with a single narrator usually at the beginning of the chain of narration). It is a long Hadith explained by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi in his 'Al-Ahadith Al-Qudsiyya' (1/135-151).*

The sound heart is a heart filled only with what Allah desires. A Qudsi Hadith says: 'My earth and My sky do not encompass me, but the heart of my believing servant encompasses Me.'(1) Thus, do not preoccupy your heart with worldly affairs, but let it be preoccupied with Allah, an action which entails soundness of heart because the heart is naturally disposed for this. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect…' (*an-Nahl:* 78). Why? So that '…you would be grateful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

Wealth and children should not be related to the soundness and sincerity of the heart, as Allah says: '…But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for [one's] hope.' (*al-Kahf:* 46) Allah's verse: 'Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire…' (*Al-'Imran:* 14) ends with: '…That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return.' (*Al-'Imran:* 14)

Soundness of heart entails not attributing partners to Allah and being free of hypocrisy because the hypocrite does not sincerely believe in Allah. His heart contradicts what his tongue says and his heart is not free of evil. Therefore, his sin is more grievous than that of the sin of the disbeliever and Allah will cause him to be in the lowest level of Hellfire.

The hypocrite will be punished more severely than the disbeliever because the disbeliever's heart and tongue disbelieve, and he acts according to what he thinks. However, the hypocrite deceives Muslims and pretends to be one of them. There were hypocrites who prayed in the first row behind Messenger Muhammad, though actually they were conspirers and deceivers. Similarly, dissemblance contradicts soundness of heart. The dissembler's deeds are for the sake of people, but not for the sake of Allah. However, he blames people who are ungrateful to his favours although he is ungrateful to Allah.

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(1) *In 'Al-Asrar Al-Marfu'ah fil Akhbar Al-Mawdu'ah' (page 206) which was published by Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah in Beirut, the Mullah 'Ali Al-Qari says, 'This Hadith is mentioned in 'Al-Ihya', and Al-'Iraqi said, 'I have not found any basis for this Hadith.' Ibn Taymiya said, 'It is mentioned in 'Al-Isra'iliyyat' and does not have any known chain of narrators going back to the Prophet Muhammad. In the appendix, it is as explained. It means: 'A believer's heart encompasses Me and My love.' Otherwise, the concept of Hulul (a Sufi term meaning indwelling) entails disbelief. Az-Zarkashi said that the Hadith was forged by the atheists. See also 'Kashf Al-Khafa' [2/273] and 'Ad-Durar Al- Muntathira', (page 366) by As-Suyuti.*

Therefore, this reward suits his actions because he has not done the good deeds for the sake of Allah, but for Allah's slave, so he should not expect to be rewarded by Allah. The dissembler's deeds are futile and useless. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…His example is like that of a [large] smooth stone upon which is dust and is hit by a downpour that leaves it bare. They are unable [to keep] anything of what they have earned…' (*al-Baqara:* 264). The people loath the dissembler and deny his aid in building a mosque, a hospital or a school. If he does his deeds for the sake of Allah, he will be remembered and praised by people.

It was narrated(1) that Messenger Muhammad went to Fatima Az-Zahra' and found her polishing a coin in her hand. When he asked her about this, she said, 'I am polishing it because I want to give it as a *Sadaqah* (voluntary charity). He said, 'So give it as it is.' She said, 'I know that it will be placed in the Hand of Allah before it is placed in the hands of the poor, and Allah is good, so He only accepts good things.'

Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* mentions the effects and rewards of sound heart and sincerity of one's deeds. He says:

وَأُزْلِفَتِ ٱلْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

When the Garden is brought near to the righteous [90] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 90)

The word *uzlifat* mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means that paradise will be brought near them. However, how will paradise be brought near the pious if they are already in paradise? They say that paradise will be brought near to them before they enter it while they are still experiencing the fright and duress of Judgment and reckoning. Therefore, paradise will draw near to them in order to reassure them and give them ease during this difficult situation.

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(1) The story of Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* polishing a *dirham* before offering it.

In another verse, Allah says: ‘And Paradise will be brought near to the righteous, not far…’ (*Qaf:* 31). They will see paradise and the blessing that will await them. Similarly, suppose you were invited to dine with some great personage who had prepared their table with the utmost care, part of the blessings would be to walk around it and see all the delicious dishes on it before the time came to begin the dinner.

وَبُرِّزَتِ ٱلۡجَحِيمُ لِلۡغَاوِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

And the Fire is placed in full view of the misguided [91] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 91)

This is for those who do not worship Allah sincerely, and their hearts that have been corrupted by attributing partners to Allah in His Divinity, hypocrisy or dissemblance. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And there is none of you except he will come to it…’ (*Maryam:* 71). The Arabic word *wurud* does not mean entering; rather, it means coming to see. This is because the *Sirat* (the bridge over the fire) is over the hell. This word is mentioned in Allah’s saying regarding the story of Musa (Moses): ‘And when he came to the well of Midyan, he found there a crowd of people watering [their flocks]…’ (*al-Qasas:* 23). Musa came to the well of Midyan, but he did not drink from it.

The wisdom of coming to see the hell is that the believer will realize the virtue of faith, as it saved him from hell which he will see. This is the greatest bounty which he will receive. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained [his desire]…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185).

The word *al-ghawun* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to either the misguided or those who mislead others.

وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ هَلْ يَنصُرُونَكُمْ أَوْ يَنتَصِرُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

It will be said to them, 'Where are those you worshipped [92] beside God? Can they help you now, or even help themselves? [93] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 92-93)

Allah's saying: '…Where are those you worshipped beside Allah? …' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 92) includes an inquiry about the partners some people worshipped beside Allah.

In another verse, Allah says: '[The angels will be ordered], "Gather those who committed wrong, their kinds, and what they used to worship. Other than Allah, and guide them to the path of Hellfire. And stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned. [They will be asked], "What is [wrong] with you? Why do you not help each other?"' (*as-Saffat:* 22-25) Those partners will leave and renounce them. '[And they should consider that] when those who have been followed disassociate themselves from those who followed [them], and they (all] see the punishment, and cut off from them are the ties [of relationship].' (*al-Baqara:* 166)

Then those who associated partners with Allah in His Divinity will say: '…"Our Lord, show us those who misled us of the jinn and men [so] we may put them under our feet that they will be among the lowest."' (*Fussilat:* 29) It will be like a struggle, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Close friends, that Day, will be enemies to each other, except for the righteous.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)

Allah's saying: '…Can they help you now, or even help themselves?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 93) means that those who have been worshipped besides Allah can neither help themselves nor their followers. The verse includes censuring and belittlement for those people and their deities.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَكُبْكِبُوا۟ فِيهَا هُمْ وَٱلْغَاوُۥنَ ﴿٩٤﴾

And then they will all be hurled into Hell, together with those that misled them [94] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 94)

The verb *kubkiba* (hurled) means that those people will be thrown on their faces frequently. Every time they try to get up, they will be thrown on their faces again. In addition, the morphological pattern of the word indicates repetition of an action like that of the word *naqnaqa* and *zaqzaqah*. The verse means that the idols will be thrown on their faces and precede those who worshipped them into hell. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, you [disbelievers] and what you worship other than Allah are the firewood of Hell. You will be coming to [enter] it.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 98) Allah says: ‘…together with those that misled them.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 94) So, those who led others astray will precede those whom they misled so that their rescue from Hell will be hopeless. If their followers were to enter hell first, they would think that they will come to save them, but they find that those whom they worshipped will precede them into hell, as Allah says of Pharaoh: ‘He will precede his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them into the Fire…’ (*Hud:* 98).

وَجُنُودُ إِبْلِيسَ أَجْمَعُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

And all Iblis’s supporters[95]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 95)

Satan has supporters from among humans and jinn who will be gathered together in hellfire.

قَالُوا۟ وَهُمْ فِيهَا يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾ تَٱللَّهِ إِن كُنَّا لَفِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٩٧﴾
إِذْ نُسَوِّيكُم بِرَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

There they will say to their gods, as they bicker among
themselves [96] We were clearly misguided [97] When we
made you equal with the Lord of the Worlds [98]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 96 - 98)

This is a scene from the Day of Judgment when those who have gone astray will blame those who led them astray. The same act of laying blame is mentioned by Satan in Allah’s saying: ‘…But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves…’ (*Ibrahim:* 22). It means that Satan does not have power over them to force them to obey him, nor any evidence to convince them.

Then those who have gone astray confess their misguidance and say: ‘By Allah, we were clearly misguided.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 97) They will realise that they have been misled when ‘We made you equal with the Lord of the Worlds.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 96-98) This means that they made their gods equal to Allah in terms of love, obedience, and worship.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [yet], among the people are those who take other than Allah as equals [to Him]. They love them as they [should] love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah…’ (*al-Baqara:* 165).

وَمَآ أَضَلَّنَآ إِلَّا ٱلۡمُجۡرِمُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

It was the evildoers who led us astray[99]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 99)

This means that these polytheists want Allah to show them those gods in order to take revenge from them and to put them under their feet. In this way, they will blame these gods for the result they will reach.

فَمَا لَنَا مِن شَٰفِعِينَ ﴿١٠٠﴾ وَلَا صَدِيقٍ حَمِيمٖ ﴿١٠١﴾

And now we have no intercessor [100] And no true friend[101]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 100-101)

Ash-Shafi’i (intercessor) is the one who supports you in something which you cannot gain by yourself, so he intercedes for you for the one in whose hand lies authority. Intercession in the Hereafter will be granted by Allah to those whom they will. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and they cannot intercede except on behalf of one whom He approves…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 28). Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…they cannot intercede except on behalf of one whom He approves. And they, from fear of Him, are apprehensive…’ (*al-Baqara:* 255). Thus, not everyone is eligible for intercession. Even in the worldly life, the one who intercedes should have a high status and a strong influence on people so that they may accept his intercession. The intercessor should be backed by good deeds and benevolence which exceed the needs of the one for whom he intercedes.

In the countryside, for instance, a man who has prestige and high standing among people might arbitrate over quarrels and give judgment about blood feuds. Therefore, when he interposes between two enemies, everyone submits to him and defers to his ruling.

A similar principle is to be found in Islamic law in the kind of partnership known as a Partnership of Elites.(1) It is well-known that partnership needs money or labour, but a person may not have money and may not be able to work, yet has an excellent reputation among people, so we may make him a partner because of the advantages of having his good name attached to our enterprise.

In fact, his prestige and good standing among people was created through money, as he did not acquire it out of thin air; rather, it is the result of his efforts and considerate acts for other people, so they respect him. Therefore, when he no longer has money, having spent it for goodly purposes, he retains a good deal of love and respect among people, which one can use to gain a trademark reputation.

In Allah's 'And no true friend.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 101) there is a difference between an intercessor and a friend, as the intercessor has to be asked to intercede, whereas the friend, especially a true one, does not wait to be asked; rather, he hurries to ask his friend. The friend is described as a true friend because a normal friend will not suffice when every person is preoccupied with himself. Thus, when a person is not considered a true friend, he will not take his friend into account, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the Day a man will flee from his brother. And his mother and his father, And his wife and his children. For every man, that Day, will be a matter adequate for him.' (*'Abasa:* 34-37)

The matter of intercession has provoked much controversy and clamour among orientalists who want to find faults in the Quran. One of them said, 'You say that the Quran is a miracle of eloquence, but sometimes we see the same meaning rendered in two different styles within the Quran, one of which is perfect and the other is not.' Then the orientalists say about these verses, 'This is redundancy.' We refute these statements, saying, 'You are looking at the general meaning, and you do not have the skill or gift for Arabic necessary to understand well the words of Allah. If you had this skill, you would not find faults in the Quran, as each verse that you consider as unnecessary repetition actually has something unique that could not be said in any other way.' The two verses that tackle intercession are in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, and are similar in the first part but differ in the second half. One of them is: 'And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all …' (*al-Baqara:* 48).

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(1) *Muwaffiq Ad-Din Ibn Qadama said in his book, 'Maghna' [5/122], 'As for the Partnership of Elite, it is when two people join in partnership to buy something by their good reputation and credibility instead of by money. As for how they divide up their purchase, it is in halves, thirds, fourths or in any other way, and then they sell it and get whatever Allah Glorified is He has foreordained, as this is their recompense.*

The second verse is: 'And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all …' (*al-Baqara:* 123). Therefore, the beginnings of the two verses are the similar; the first verse ends with: '…nor will compensation be taken from it, nor will they be aided.' (*al-Baqara:* 48) The second verse ends with: '…and no compensation will be accepted from it, nor will any intercession benefit it, nor will they be aided.' (*al-Baqara:* 123)

When we truly examine the first halves of the two verses, we think they are the same, but we find that there is also a difference between them. The pronoun mentioned in the Arabic version of the verses refers to two different things. In one verse, it refers to the intercessor and in another case, it refers to the one who receives intercession. When the pronoun refers to someone on whose behalf another intercedes, the Quran states that Allah will not accept any compensation from him and intercession will not aid him. However, when the pronoun refers to the intercessor, the Quran states that intercession will not be accepted from him – which is mentioned first - no compensation will be taken from him. Thus, there is no redundancy in these two verses as you may think, for each of them conveys some meaning that the other does not convey.

We have also explained the same issue regarding Allah's saying: 'And do not kill your children for fear of poverty…' (*al-Isra':* 31). And in another verse, Allah says: '…and do not kill your children out of poverty…' (*al-An'am:* 151). The two beginnings are different, as are the endings. The second half of the first verse is: '…We provide for them and for you…' (*al-Isra':* 31). The second half of the other verse is: '…We will provide for you and them…' (*al-An'am:* 151).

When we examine the two verses, we see that they each convey a unique meaning, and include no redundancy as some people think. The first verse says: ‘And do not kill your children for fear of poverty…’ (*al-Isra’:* 31). There is no poverty, and the father fears of being poor due to his children, so he is preoccupied with his children’s sustenance but not his own sustenance because he is not yet in dire need. Thus, in the second half of this verse, the children are referred to before the father. Allah reassures the father that He will provide sustenance for his children and him. As for the other verse: ‘…and do not kill your children out of poverty…’ (*al-An‘am:* 151), there is a state of poverty, and the father is concerned with his own sustenance and then with his children’s. Therefore, the second half of the verse says: ‘…We will provide for you and them…’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). The father is mentioned before the children. Therefore, each verse has its own meaning and significance that the other verse does not convey.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that these sinners said:

فَلَوۡ أَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةٗ فَنَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ١٠٢

If only we could live our lives again, we would be true believers! [102] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 102)

The word *karrah*, which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, refers to returning to the worldly life so that they could begin a new life and believe in Allah, obey Him, follow His Path and do not have this end.

Other verses explain this issue: ‘[For such is the state of the disbelievers], until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord, send me back. That I might do righteousness in that which I left behind" No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 99-100) These people will not return to life, and they merely say that hoping for salvation, but it is preposterous for them to return to the worldly life, as there is a tremendous barrier that separates them from it, and prevents them from returning. This barrier will remain until the Day when all people will be resurrected.

In another verse of similar import, Allah *Glorified is He* shifts the focus from death to resurrection. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If you could but see when they are made to stand before the Fire and will say, "Oh, would that we could be returned [to life on earth] and not deny the signs of our Lord and be among the believers.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 27) Their promises are merely lies that do not correspond to their actions. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them saying: ‘But what they concealed before has [now] appeared to them. And even if they were returned, they would return to that which they were forbidden; and indeed, they are liars.’ (*al-An‘am:* 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً ۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not believe [103] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 103)

The word *ayah*, which is mentioned in the Arabic version of the verse, is the incredible sign that should not be skipped without giving due attention: ‘…though most of them do not believe.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 103)

Despite these clear signs, most of them will not be believers.

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٠٤﴾

Your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [104] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 104)

Although most of them did not believe, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Almighty who can subdue anything and cannot be subdued. Despite His Might, He is also Merciful to His servants and accepts repentance from those who return to Him.

The Quran moves from the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) to a story of another prophet: Nuh (Noah).

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

The people of Noah, too, called the messengers liars[105] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 105)

The word *al-qawm,* which is mentioned in the Arabic of the verse, refers to men only because it is men who oversee the most important affairs in their community. And the opposite of the word *Al-qawm* is ‘women’. This meaning was previously explained in Allah’s saying: ‘O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

Al-qawm (men) undertakes the most important affairs in the community, whereas women receive the fruits of their actions and make good use of them. An Arab poet clarifies this meaning in the following verses:

I do not know and I do not pretend to know,

If ‘qawm’ (people) of Al Hisn are women or men

We also know of man’s status as a guardian for women from Allah’s saying when He warned Adam about Satan: ‘So We said, "O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 117) Grammatically, the word *fatashqiya* would be used instead of *fatashqa* (suffer), but Allah uses *fatashqa* (suffer) because man is concerned with work and spares women hardships, although women sometimes want to bear hardships.

The verse says: ‘The people of Noah, too, called the messengers liars.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 105) How can this happen when they belied Nuh (Noah) but believed in Adam and Ibrahim (Abraham)?

Some scholars said that the Messengers of Allah convey constant and fixed principles with regard to creed and morals. Therefore, to the one who belies his Messenger has also belied all Messengers. The believers often repeat: ‘Say, "We have believed in Allah and in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Descendants, and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [submitting] to Him.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 84) Allah also says: ‘The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], "We make no distinction between any of His messengers"…’ (*al-Baqara:* 285).

What about the differences of religious laws which were conveyed by different prophets? These differences are only those necessitated by the developing changes among different societies, and they are only concerned with minor issues that are not relevant to the fundamentals of the creed.

Messengers always come in the plural form because the one who belies his Messenger concerning the creeds and morals that are preached by other Messengers has also belied the other Messengers.

إِذۡ قَالَ لَهُمۡ أَخُوهُمۡ نُوحٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ١٠٦

Their brother Noah said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of God? [106] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 106)

The word *akhuhum* (their brother) is meant to soften their hearts to Nuh (Noah) because he was closely related to them, not a stranger or a foreigner. They knew his origin, attributes, and morals.

Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed his message to people, the closest people to him were the first believers such as Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* who believed him without having heard a single verse. The same applies to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and other earlier believers. Why? Because they depended on Prophet Muhammad's previous history before the advent of the message, and knew that the one who never lied to people would not tell lies about Allah.

Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* is considered to be the first Islamic jurist and scholar. When Messenger Muhammad came to her complaining about what he experienced, as he feared that he was suffering from madness and that these revelations might be visions from Jinn or the delusions of a broken mind, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* said, 'By Allah, you maintain ties of kinship, welcome guests with hospitality, help the less fortunate and help people during their calamities. By Allah, He will never disgrace you.'(1)

When Abu Bakr learned of the events of the Night Journey and Ascension, he believed Messenger Muhammad immediately without hesitation. When he was asked about this, he replied, 'We believe him in matters revealed from Heaven, so how would we not believe him in this matter? If he said it, then it must be truthful.' Therefore, Abu Bakr's criterion for judging something as true is merely that Messenger Muhammad said it. Therefore, Abu Bakr deserved to be called 'The Truthful'. Messenger Muhammad said: 'In the pre-Islamic era, Abu Bakr and I were like two race horses (in terms of their positive attributes), so I preceded him and became a prophet while he followed me, and if he had preceded me to be a prophet, I would have followed him.' All these meanings can be grasped from Allah's saying: 'Their brother Noah said to them…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 106).

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [3, and six other places in his Sahih]. Muslim also relates it in his Sahih [160] from the narration of 'A'isha. For an explanation of this Hadith, see An-Nawawi's Explanation of Sahih Muslim [2/561] and Fat-h Al-Bari by Al-'Asqalani [1/124].*

A similar meaning is contained in Allah's saying: 'There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves…' (*at-Tawba:* 128). Sending a Messenger from among his people indicates Allah's Wisdom. However, the stubborn people said, 'We want a messenger from among the angels.' They treated the Messengers as their enemies although they should have allowed him to spread his message and should have opened their minds in order to understand the Message and not to rely on mere bias.

What makes it difficult for people to accept the truth is that their hearts are preoccupied with falsehoods; the truth cannot exist with falsehood in the same place. Then, if you want to examine an issue, you must first purge your heart of falsehoods, and then make a judgment based on a fair intellect and clear heart.

We see this even in material objects. One space cannot contain two things. This is called 'mutually exclusive'. For example, when you fill a bottle with water, the air comes out first in the form of bubbles.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

You can see, for example, that if you placed a cologne bottle with a small opening under water, the water is unable to enter the bottle. Why is that? Because the hole is too narrow to permit the air to come out and the water to enter at the same time.

The word *al-hawa* meaning capricious inclinations may be deriving its name from the word *al-hawa'* meaning air or atmosphere. For example, if air pressure were only present on one side of a building or one side of a mountain, it would incline to the opposite side. Why is that? This is because the ambient air pressure preserves the balance of these tall buildings and skyscrapers by surrounding them equally from all sides. Therefore, if air were vacuumed from one direction, the building would crumple in that direction.

Air is one of the powerful forces that people use and transform into energy. For instance, look at the powerful shaking that can be caused by vacuuming air. Or look at the massive trucks and vehicles which move on the air in their tires. Similarly, if capricious inclinations are based on falsehood, they can be extremely powerful and destructive. Therefore, falling down is called *huwiy* and we say a thing *hawa* in order to mean it fell down.

The holy statement: '…Will you not be conscious of God?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 106) is said by all messengers of God, or a messenger says it when he is first sent forth by God. It means you should fear God and protect yourselves from His punishment. The Arabic structure used in the words meaning 'Will you not be…' is a rhetorical tool to incite people to take some action, just like you might say to a negligent child, 'Will you not study?', or 'Why don't you study?'

When we analyse the rhetoric of this incitation, we see that it is in the form of astonishment that is based on negation of the verb. For instance, when you want to urge a child who does not pray to pray, you say, 'Will not you pray?' After having been asked a rhetorical question in the negative, the child might feel ashamed to answer. But in case the child prays, and you pose to them a positive question, 'Are you praying?' The child says with pride, 'Yes'. Thus, 'to incite' here means astonishment of *not* doing something and a question in the negative that has the connotation of a command.

So, the statement: '…Will you not be conscious of God?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 106) means that the Messenger of God denounces their being unconscious of God, but he calls upon them to be conscious of God; when someone disapproves of an action, they must want to approve the opposite of the denounced action.

إِنِّي لَكُمۡ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٞ ﴿١٠٧﴾

I am a faithful messenger sent to you [107]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 107)

The holy statement: 'Behold, I am an apostle [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 107) means that you might have been ignorant of God, therefore, He has shown mercy on your unmindful carelessness and sent you a trustworthy messenger to warn you, teach you and convey to you the Order of God. The Messenger is worthy of your trust and will not deceive you in anything so that you will never have occasion to say, ‘We erred out of inadvertent carelessness.’

As long as I am the one who is sent by God to you, and I am trustworthy and true to my message, you should listen to me. Therefore, the command to be conscious of God is repeated:

فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٠٨﴾

Be mindful of God and obey me [108]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 108)

It is as if he is making peace with his listeners and lightens the rhetoric of his counsel so that the command to be conscious of God is plainly and directly addressed to them now after having first been in the form of a negative question, ‘Will you not be conscious of God?’ God consciousness leads us to obey God’s Commands and Prohibitions, both of which we can know only through the trustworthy messenger who bears God’s System and conveys His Message. The words of this verse have been repeated by many of the messengers of God: 'Behold, I am an apostle [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust: [107] be, then, conscious of God, and pay heed unto me! [108]' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 107-108)

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ أَسۡـَٔلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ مِنۡ أَجۡرٍۖ إِنۡ أَجۡرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

I ask no reward of you, for my only reward is with the Lord
of the Worlds [109] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 109)

We do not hear the statement: 'And no reward whatever do I ask of you for it…' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 109] from the Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him* nor from Moses *peace be upon him*. The first one to say it was Noah *peace be upon him*. When you say to someone else, ‘I will ask no reward from you for this work’, that means you deserved some recompense or reward for your work. You are not actually renouncing your wage or reward; rather you know that if you took your reward from the person who benefited from your work, they will evaluate your recompense based on human standards. Therefore, the best thing is to take reward for your work from God.

It is as if Noah *peace be upon him* were saying, 'You, the human beings, could not truly assess the work I have done for you; I have been offering you the Path of Guidance that will bring you happiness in this world and save you from the eternal wrath in the Afterlife. You cannot fairly appreciate my deeds. My reward is with God, because human beings can only give according to their limited knowledge and ability.'

We have previously related to you the story of the man whom we met in Algeria. He had signs and bearing of a pious, respectable man, and he signalled for us to stop our car and for us to let him ride with us. When we stopped for him to get in, he leaned over to the driver and asked, 'How much?' meaning how much the fare was. The driver said to the man who was the local governor, and he said, 'We will take you where you are going for God.' And the man said, 'Good sir, you have just raised the price.' Yes, if one's wages are from God, then they are high indeed.

In another verse, God *Glorified is He* says: 'Or is it that [they who reject your message, O Muhammad, fear lest] you ask of them a reward, so that they would be burdened with debt [if they should listen to thee]?' (*at-Tur:* 40) Then, He says: '…my reward rests with none but the Lord of all the worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109) None but God *Glorified is He* is capable of truly rewarding me for my mission to call people to Islam, for it was He who charged me with it and it is He who is the Lord of all the worlds, He who made Creation out of nothing, who provides out of nothing sustenance and livelihoods for you and me. All of this is for your own benefit, because He *Glorified is He* does not derive benefit from this.

Godhood requires providence, spending, creation, and provision. It is the master of all these blessings and favours that will give me my reward.

فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١١٠﴾

Be mindful of God and obey me [110]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 110)

After explaining to them the generosity of God's reward to him for bearing His message and giving them an incentive to be conscious and heedful because they will benefit from the Messenger's message without any cost to them, he says: 'Hence, remain conscious of God and pay heed unto me!' This does not mean obey me, myself; rather, obey me because I am a messenger from God *Glorified is He*.

Then, concerning their response to Noah *peace be upon him*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوٓاْ أَنُؤۡمِنُ لَكَ وَٱتَّبَعَكَ ٱلۡأَرۡذَلُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

They answered, 'Why should we believe you
when the worst sort of people follow you?' [111]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 111)

The word *al-ardhalun*), translated above as 'the most abject', is the plural form of *ardhal* meaning someone or something that is vilest or worst. The *rudhal* of fruit is the discarded fruit which we call *niqada.* The question here expresses exclamation: 'Why would we believe in you when we are superior, and those who believe in you are only the most abject of people?' By this, they mean the poor and the labourers and other common people. These people are the most frequent soldiers of the Message because they are suffering most in a corrupt society, and it is natural for them to gather around anyone who tries to set society aright.

In another verse they say: '…We do not see in you anything but a mortal man like ourselves; and we do not see that any follow you save those who are quite obviously the most abject among us…' (*Hud:* 27).

Their saying, '… Shall we place our faith in you…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 111) demonstrates their inability to understand the true nature of faith because he did not say, 'Believe in me'; rather, he said, 'Believe in God.' Or, the meaning of 'Shall we place our faith in you…' is why we should give credence to what you say. It is the same as the other verse saying, 'But none save a few of his people declared their faith in Moses…' (*Yunus:* 83), that is few people declared their faith in what Moses said. Here, when the Arabic past tense verb *amana* (believed) is followed by the preposition *'L'*, it takes on the meaning 'to believe what someone says. If it were followed by the preposition *'Bi'*, then it would mean to have faith in someone.

قَالَ وَمَا عِلۡمِي بِمَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾ إِنۡ حِسَابُهُمۡ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ رَبِّيۖ لَوۡ تَشۡعُرُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

He said, 'What knowledge do I have of what they used to do? [112] It is for my Lord alone to bring them to account – if only you could see [113] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara':* 112-113)

The meaning is as long as the reckoning rests with my Lord, and they wanted to believe in Him, then they must have their reward, '…if you could but understand [this]!' (*ash-Shuʿara':* 113]

وَمَآ أَنَا۠ بِطَارِدِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾

I will not drive believers away [114]
(The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara':* 114)

They had asked him to drive those believers out of his company in order to give them a place at his side instead. In another verse, God *Glorified is He* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: 'Hence, repulse not [any of] those who at morn and evening invoke their Lord, seeking His countenance. You are in no wise accountable for them – just as they are in no wise accountable for you – and you have therefore no right to repulse them: for then you would be among the evildoers.' (*al-Anʿam:* 52)

إِنۡ أَنَا۠ إِلَّا نَذِيرٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿١١٥﴾

I am here only to give people a clear warning [115]
(The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara':* 115)

So, whoever hears my warning and tidings and joins my company, I swear I will remain beside them; God did not send me to keep only the company of the rich and exclude the poor. Rather, He sent me to convey His message. Then, whoever obeys me, they will be blessed by God regardless of being poor.

قَالُوا۟ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنتَهِ يَٰنُوحُ لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْمَرْجُومِينَ ١١٦

So they said, 'Noah, if you do not stop this, you will be stoned' [116] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 116)

Thus, they declared war on the prophet Noah, saying, 'Your warning is useless, yet you insist on your preaching; '…if you desist not…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 116) in spreading your message, calling upon people to obey God and be conscious of Him, and gathering the most abject of people into your company to create supporters out of many inconsequential persons. Then, '…O Noah, you will surely be stoned to death!' (*ash-Shu'ara'*: 116), i.e. if you do not desist, we will stone you. It is a bald threat to the Messenger who came to them from God to call them to their welfare in both this world and the hereafter. Similarly, God *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the call of God and the Apostle whenever he calls you unto that which will give you life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24) Their threat to the Messenger of God indicates that they were powerful, influential people in their society.

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِى كَذَّبُونِ ١١٧ فَٱفْتَحْ بَيْنِى وَبَيْنَهُمْ
فَتْحًا وَنَجِّنِى وَمَن مَّعِىَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ١١٨

He said, 'My Lord, my people have rejected me [117] so make a firm judgement between me and them, and save me and my believing followers [118] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 117-118)

It is worth pondering on Noah's civility here when he complains and reports his people's actions to God. He only says: '…Behold, my people have given me the lie…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 117), and he does not mention anything about their threatening of stoning him or declaring war on his message. Why is that? Because what concerns Noah *peace be upon him* first and foremost is to have his people believe him; this is the original objective of his mission. And his saying: 'Hence, lay You wide open the truth between me and them…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 118). To open something has either a physical or a moral meaning. An example of the physical meaning is a door closed with a padlock; when we say, ‘Open the door’, it means undo its lock. Another example is a tied bag or pack that we open by untying it. This is clear in the story of Joseph *peace be upon him* where God *Glorified is He* says: 'Thereupon, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them…' (*Yusuf:* 65), i.e. they undid the straps on their packs. This is the literal meaning of ‘to open’.

As for the moral meaning of 'opening', it is done by removing moral troubles in order for goodness and blessings to come forth. God *Glorified is He* says: 'Yet if the people of those communities had but attained to faith and been conscious of Us, We would indeed have opened up for them blessings out of heaven and earth…' (*al-A‘raf:* 96). And in another verse: 'Whatever grace God opens up to man, none can withhold it; and whatever He withholds, none can henceforth release…' (*Fatir:* 2).

The blessings that God opens up onto people can be in the form of material blessings, or they can be knowledge; God says: '…Do you inform them of what God has opened up to you, so that they might use it in argument against you, quoting the words of your Lord?...' (*al-Baqara:* 76)

Here, the ‘opening’ is the knowledge of the Torah God imparted to the Jews. They are afraid that the believers will take this knowledge and use it in arguments against them when the believers are victorious. So, the verse: '…what God has opened up to you …' (*al-Baqara:* 76) means those things that God has taught you, the Jews, and that they, the followers of the Prophet Muhammad, do not know then.

In addition, opening *al-fath* can also mean judgement or settling of a dispute by revealing the truth. God *Glorified is He* says: '…O our Lord! Lay You open the truth between us and our people – for You are the best of all to lay open the truth!' (*al-A‘raf:* 89) It also means victory, as in the holy verse saying: 'When God’s succour comes, and victory…' (*an-Nasr*: 1).

Then, Noah *peace be upon him* says: '…and save me…' from their cunning and threat of stoning me and save also '…those of the believers who are with me!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 118) because the disbelievers may cause harm not only to him but also to the believers who are with him. The response of God comes immediately:

فَأَنجَيْنَٰهُ وَمَن مَّعَهُۥ فِى ٱلْفُلْكِ ٱلْمَشْحُونِ ﴿١١٩﴾

So We saved him and his followers in the fully
laden ship [119] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 119)

The story of Noah's ark was also mentioned in chapter of *al-A'raf* and the chapter of *Hud.* There is also a complete separate chapter named after Noah *peace be upon him*, namely the chapter of *Noah,* much like the chapter of *Muhammad.* This is because in the history of the Divine Missions, Noah has a period of 950 years. God *Glorified is He* rightfully named a chapter after him.

In our common conversation, when someone frequently repeats certain words or phrases to you, you may say to them, ‘Ah, is it a chapter?’ The speech of illiterate and uneducated people has roots in the language usage.

In another chapter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* relates the story of the building of the ark. He says: 'And [so Noah] set himself to building the ark; and every time the great ones of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him…' (*Hud:* 38). This suggests that it was the first ship that people had ever seen built. Noah *peace be upon him* built his ship under instruction, guidance and protection of God *Glorified is He*: '…but build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark.' (*Hud:* 37)

God would not command him to build the ark and then abandon him; rather, God tracked his progress and whenever he committed an error or mistake, God informed him early on. Much like His saying to Moses: '…and [this] in order that you might be formed under Mine eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 39) With verses like this, we respond to those who say that God *Glorified is He* ceased to influence this world and He left it to run according to natural laws after He created it. If matters were truly as such, we would have found that the entire world functions almost mechanically, but the miraculous and inexplicable aspects of the Universe point to His perpetual presence in His creation.

Thus, God tells them to sleep soundly and without fear. Why not when they have a Lord who does not sleep? If you hired a guard for your house, for instance, you would sleep comfortably knowing that you could rely on him to be awake. Why then would you not sleep soundly when you have your Lord *Glorified is He* who does not become sleepy and does not slumber? Does that not corroborate His abiding presence? It is this abiding presence that breaks wills and nullifies natural laws. It is this abiding presence that says to fire, ‘Be cold and peaceful’ and it does, to water, ‘Become solid like a mountain’, and it does; and to stone, ‘Break open’ and it does. If the world functioned mechanically and automatically, as they say it does, then not a single natural law would be violated in the Universe.

A thing that is '…fully-laden…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 119) is something that is filled up until there is no longer any empty space in it. So, this ship was fully-laden with its load because it was constructed with such exactitude and attention to detail that it was exactly wide enough for those whom Noah was commanded to carry in it: eighty men, eighty women, and one pair, a male and a female(1), of every animal. The word *fulk* (The fully-laden ship) indicates both a singular ship and a group of ships as in the verse: '…And [behold what happens] when you go to sea in ships…' (*Yunus:* 22).

ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا بَعْدُ ٱلْبَاقِينَ ﴿١٢٠﴾

And drowned the rest [120]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 120)

The disbelievers who did not get on the ark with Noah were drowned after the believers had got on the ark and also after: '…We caused the gates of heaven to open with water pouring down in torrents, [11] and caused the earth to burst forth with springs, so that the waters met for a purpose pre-ordained [12].' (*al-Qamar:* 11-12)

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً ۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٢١﴾

There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not
believe [in it] [121] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 121)

A message, or a ‘sign’ as in other translations, is a marvellous thing that cannot be ignored and that demands consideration or attention. But who will consider it after all the rest have drowned? The believers who went on board will pay heed to it after they have seen the consequences of disbelief and the fate of the disbelievers.

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(1) *According to Ibn 'Abbas they were eighty people with their wives, according to K'ab Al-Ahbar they were seventy-two, and some say that they were only ten [said by Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir), 2/445].*

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٢٢﴾

your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [122]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 122)

Despite their denying the Messengers, and even though most of them were not believers, God *Glorified is He* is the Almighty who subdues the others and cannot be subdued and He is the Dispenser of Mercy to His servants, and He forgives those who have returned to Him.

Then, the context shifts to another story of the series of the disbelieving peoples.

كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

The people of 'Ad, too, called the messengers liars [123]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 123)

Here again the Quran says: '…message-bearers' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 123) because giving the lie to one Messenger of God is to give the lie to all the Messengers of God because all of them are sent to convey the same rules and fundamentals in creed and ethics.

ʿAd is the name of an old Arab tribe. The Arabs used to name their tribes after the most important of their fathers, the one who attains fame and brilliance among their people. So, ʿAd was the head of this tribe. They also used to call a tribe "the sons of so-and-so" or the "clan of such-and-such" person. Then, the Quran relates their story to us and when they disbelieved:

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ هُودٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

Their brother Hud said to them, 'Will you not be
mindful of God? [124] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 124)

We have previously said that 'Will you not be…?' is used to incite people to do something: when the negative structure is used as in '...Will you not be conscious of God?' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 124), it indicates the affirmative order, as if he had said, ‘Be conscious of God.’ The Quran says '…their brother…' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 124) in order to make their hearts amenable to his message, to endear him to them, and to let them know he was not a stranger but one of their own kinsfolk, for he is their brother, and the role of a brother is to give advice and to show compassion and mercy. This established a certain level of familiarity and comfort with people.

إِنِّي لَكُمۡ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٞ ﴿١٢٥﴾ فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٢٦﴾

I am a faithful messenger sent to you [125] Be mindful of God
and obey me [126] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 125-126)

This is a standard statement to all the Messengers in their preaching. Noah *peace be upon him* said it in the previous verses:

وَمَآ أَسۡـَٔلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ مِنۡ أَجۡرٍۖ إِنۡ أَجۡرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٢٧﴾

I ask no reward of you, for my only reward is with the Lord
of the Worlds [127] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 127)

The first person to say this, as previously stated, was Noah *peace be upon him*. Then, the other prophets said it after him. But why did neither Abraham nor Moses say it?

The scholars answered that the first person that Abraham *peace be upon him* called to Islam was his uncle Azar. Why would he even think about asking his own uncle for a reward? Similarly, the first person that Moses *peace be upon him* called to Islam was Pharaoh who had raised him in his own home and who had done Moses many favours. Why then would Moses ask him for a reward when Pharaoh said: '…Did we not bring you up among us when you were a child? And did you not spend among us years of your [later] life?' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 18) That is why this statement was not uttered by either of these two prophets.

Then, he says '…my reward rests with none but the Lord of the worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 127) because it is the Lord who manages spending, provision and sustenance of the creation. We said before that refraining from taking a reward is not abstaining from any reward; rather, it is done in hope of getting one's reward from God, not from people.

Hud then addresses a few issues that were particular to his people.

أَتَبۡنُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيعٍ ءَايَةٗ تَعۡبَثُونَ ﴿١٢٨﴾

How can you be so vain that you set up monuments on every high place? [128] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 128)

Construction industry was a specific trait of the people of Hud. *Ar-ri'* is a name of every raised area of land. Some people ask about the height of a building saying, how many *ri'* is your building? This means how many meters it is, as if the height of a place is a standard of evaluating the plot of land. *Ar-ri'* is used to indicate the height of everything.

The word 'landmark' in other translations 'sign', 'monument', 'message', or something miraculous (Ayah, in Arabic), coming after '…build…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 128), means the lofty palaces that were considered miracles of architecture, innovation, decoration, splendour, vastness and height.

'Will you in your wanton folly…?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 128) because they built these palaces despite knowing that they would not permanently reside in them. They built them to remain for ages after them, which is considered foolishness because human beings can live in even the smallest, most humble building, for shelter, throughout their lifetimes. Or 'Will you in your wanton folly…?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 128) because they would sit on the ramparts of these buildings to divert people away from listening to Hud and his message which would have guided them to the Path of Truth.

In modern times, we can see nothing of the ʿAd civilization, not even their ruins, like the ruins of the Pharaoh's in Egypt. The ʿAd civilization was buried under sand. They used to inhabit the part of the Arabian Peninsula that we now call the Empty Quarter because it is a region of fine sand that makes it difficult to traverse the region. So, in order to know something about this civilization, we read the holy verses in chapter *al-Fajr*: 'Art thou not aware of how thy Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] ʿAd, [the people of] Iram the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land?' (*al-Fajr:* 6-8)

If there has never been the like of them reared all over the earth, then the ʿAd civilization must have been greater than the civilization of the Pharaohs, the ruins of which we can still see today; people come from every corner of the globe to see, for example, the pyramids, which were built only to serve as tombs. Despite progress of science in the age of technology, the construction of the pyramids still remains a mystery to scholars who have been unable to unlock all secrets of the pyramids so far.

A secret that they recently uncovered is how the pyramids were built using such huge blocks of stone without any mortar. They concluded that they were built by vacuuming air between the stones. You can observe this theory in action when you place a wet cup on a table, for instance, then leave it for a while until the water beneath the cup evaporates. If you try to lift the cup from its place now, you would find that it is stuck to the table.

It is not strange that a civilization, which was the greatest in the world, disappeared beneath layers of sand. When a sandstorm blows up, it devours everything in its path. The whole tribe of ʿAd with all their men and camels have been buried beneath sand in just a single storm. So, what do you think the effects of thousands of years of raging winds and great sandstorms might be?

I am certain that if they excavated beneath the sands in the Empty Quarter, they would find monuments and fertile land there; all the archaeological discoveries we witness nowadays are underground. In Vienna, while a sewage pipeline was being dug, they found the relics of palaces of ancient kings.

Inasmuch as God *Glorified is He* says of the people of ʿAd: '…Will you, in your wanton folly, build palaces on every height?' (*ash-Shuʿara':* 128) Definitely, there are palaces and buildings buried beneath the sands.

وَتَتَّخِذُونَ مَصَانِعَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَخْلُدُونَ ﴿١٢٩﴾

Do you build fortresses because you hope to be immortal? [129] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara':* 129)

Masani' translated above as 'strongholds', is sometimes used to mean 'sources of water' as well as 'strongholds'. Why is that? According to scholars, this is because a 'stronghold' is built not only for protection against the ordinary risks of life, but also for preventing inveterate enemies from ambushing a person. It seems that they made a fruitful industry of these buildings. Why? '…that you might become immortal?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 129) Are you building these mighty, armed fortresses in order to live forever? Are you immortal in life? The span of a person's life is so short that there might be no need for these fortifications and protections. It is as much as the shade of a tree which quite quickly fades away.

وَإِذَا بَطَشْتُم بَطَشْتُمْ جَبَّارِينَ ﴿١٣٠﴾

Why do you act like tyrants whenever you attack some- one? [130] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 130)

Laying '…hand [on them] cruelly…' (*batsh* in Arabic) also means to punish violently. God *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, thy Lord's grip is exceedingly strong!' (*al-Buruj:* 12] In it 'grip' is a translation for the Arabic word *(batsh)*. He also says: '…and thereupon We took them to task as only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can take to task.' (*al-Qamar:* 42) where 'to take someone to task' is the translation for the Arabic word *akhdh* which means 'to take' or to 'treat'. Taking or treating can be in different ways. You can take something with tenderness and compassion, or you can take something violently.

Then, in this verse, the word *batsh* reoccurs to emphasize this trait of the people of Hud(1): '…whenever you lay hand [on others], lay hand [on them] cruelly…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 130).

You might take your enemy by violence, but after that your heart might take pity on them and you would forgive whatever offense they caused you. But these tyrants do not take pity on anyone.

The three previously mentioned attributes of the Hud people: 'Will you, in your wanton folly, build palaces on every height, and make for yourselves mighty strongholds, [hoping] that you might become immortal? And will you (always], whenever you lay hand [on others], lay hand [on them] cruelly, without any restraint?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 128-130), strengthen supremacy, as if ʿAd wanted to reach the supremacy that brings them closer to godhood, for no one is higher than the True Lord *Glorified is He*. Then, they also wanted to make their loftiness last eternally and preserve their assumed godhood: '…that you might become immortal?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 129)

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(1) Hud's people ('Ad)

Moreover, they seek to set themselves apart from other human beings by cruel treatment and arrogance. The Quran says: 'As for that [happy] life in the hereafter, We grant it [only] to those who do not seek to exalt themselves on earth, nor yet to spread corruption…' (*al-Qasas:* 83).

So, if you want to carry out the duties assigned to you in this life, you should not seek arrogant supremacy because if you did so, you would attain your share of it in this world, and that is all. But, when you work on your mission in this life to please your Lord and to make life easy for others, you, then, promote your work and make it fruitful. In addition, as long as people benefit from your deeds, the rewards accrued to you will continue until the Day of Judgment comes when you will attain the best and the eternal reward. This is the greatest sublimation of the human work.

The people of ʿAd did not do anything of the sort. They sought arrogant supremacy on earth, and their treatment was extremely tyrannical. But did their Lord let them continue in this manner indefinitely?

It is a kind of mercy from God *Glorified is He* that He reminds His creatures of what they have forgotten and alerts them when they become heedless. He sends them successive messengers, for people are often forgetful of the ancient covenant to which they have committed themselves. 'And whenever thy Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?" To this question they answer: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!" [Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this"; or lest you say, "Verily, it was but our forefathers who, in times gone by, began to ascribe divinity to other beings beside God; and we were but their late offspring: wilt Thou, then, destroy us for the doings of those inventors of falsehoods?"' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173)

We said before that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given His vice-regent on earth the power to resist going astray and has guided mankind to the Path of the proper and prosperous life. However, people might neglect this Path or get overcome by worldly whims and evade the Straight Path. The human soul is naturally immunized against evil and falsehood, but if one's immunity is broken, the others must remind the wrongdoer and revive in them the reasons for good. Therefore, God *Glorified is He* says: '…and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity.' (*al-'Asr:* 3) So, if you see your brother commit wrong actions or is thinking inappropriately, take his hand and lead him to the truth. The meaning of '…enjoin upon one another…' (*al-'Asr:* 3) is that each of you should exhort the other to do something. Every one of you is susceptible to occasional slip-ups and to straying from the Path, so if I were to err, you would exhort me to what is right, and if you were to err, I would exhort you. Now, in this case, our resistance to going astray is no longer an individual matter; it is a matter of a believing society where everyone tries to right the crookedness or deviance that one sees in the other.

But, what if such immunity is corrupted in the individual as well as in the community? What if people did not follow good conduct and commit themselves to integrity, and they stopped condemning abominable deeds, as God *Glorified is He* says of the children of Israel: 'They would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 79)? At this point it becomes inevitable that the Almighty Lord *Glorified is He* send a new messenger and a new miracle to revive the people and return them to the Path of their Lord.

Part of the honour of the Prophet Muhammad's *ummah* is that God *Glorified is He* has made such ethical immunity against aberration inherent in every individual; God has made them penitent and gives them pardon and peace. If one of them committed a sin, he or she would repent and go back on his actions, and if they did not go back and persisted in error, then, the faithful community would bring them back and remind them of the Path of God.

This unique characteristic will remain essential in this *ummah* until the Day of Judgment, as the Prophet Muhammad said in the Hadith: 'Goodness is in me and in my community until the Day of Judgment.'(1) That is why there will be no messenger in the Muslim community after the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* because the ethical immunity is essential in every individual, in the ever-blamer soul and in the faithful community where goodness never disappears. That is why God *Glorified is He* says: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in God…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110).

This characteristic is unique to the Muslim *ummah,* making it distinguished from all other people. Therefore, Hud *peace be upon him* gives notice to his people, saying:

فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٣١﴾

Be mindful of God and obey me [131]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 131)

That is your Lord *Glorified is He* did not leave you to such deviance, building palaces and strongholds seeking immortality and laying hands on others in tyranny. He calls upon you: 'Be, then, conscious of God and pay heed unto me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 131) So being conscious of and obedient to God will definitely clear your past and erase your sins, as well as will turn your sins into righteousness and good deeds, '…for, verily, good deeds drive away evil deeds…' (*Hud:* 114).

And when I exhort you to be conscious of God and to obey Him, I do not do so for my own sake. I did not say to you, 'Be conscious of me and obey me.' I will not benefit at all from your obedience. Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has no need for you or your obedience because He has had the attributes of complete perfection even before He created the Universe. God

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(1) *In (Kashf Al-Khafa') [1/476] Majluni said that in Maqasid Hasana Sakhawi said, 'Our Sheikh, Ibn Hajr al-'asaqlani, said, "I do not know this Hadith, but its general meaning is true", i.e. there will always be a portion of my community that is clearly cognizant of the truth until the Day of Judgment begins. Ibn Hajr Al-Makki said in (Fatawi Hadithiya), 'This saying is irrefutable.'*

Glorified is He is characterized by creation before He creates and by the power to decree before the existence of things decreed upon, etc.

Thus, your existence adds nothing to His attributes, and the divine missions were sent only for your own benefits. Then, why do not you obey the commands of God and follow His Path. He wants to benefit you. You should obey Him for the countless blessings that He has granted you. People were created in a world prepared to receive and support their lives.

The world in its entirety was created for humankind. The sky contains the sun, the moon, the stars, clouds, and rain, while the earth contains fertile soil, water, and air. All of these existed before you existed, so, your obedience to God is not a favour from you, rather it is due from you to Him for His blessings to you.

It is strange that many of the things created to be at your service live longer than you live. A person might die on the same day of their birth, or might live a few days or several years. But the sun, for instance, has lived millions of years and serves you, though you have no power over it and no control on its movement.

Then, God *Glorified is He* says:

وَاتَّقُوا الَّذِي أَمَدَّكُم بِمَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

Be mindful of Him who has provided you with everything you know [132] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 132)

This verse does not enumerate all the amenities that God has provided us. Rather, it leaves us to count them because we know them well. We live with them and perceive them with all our senses and faculties. Every sensory organ you possess directly treats with a blessing from God, or indeed several blessings. The eyes see things, the ears hear sounds, the nose identifies smells and the hand touches, holds, etc.

'…who has [so] amply provided you with all [the good] that you might think of.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 132) So speak and bear witness to yourselves and count the blessings of your Lord to you.

أَمَدَّكُم بِأَنۡعَٰمٖ وَبَنِينَ (١٣٣)

He has given you livestock, sons [133]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 133)

An'am translated above as ‘cattle’, refers to sheep, goats, camels and cows. They are eight couples.

وَجَنَّٰتٖ وَعُيُونٍ (١٣٤)

gardens, springs [134]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 134)

One might say that we pass by the area where their houses are located, but we see nothing but emptiness through which the wind blows. Definitely, they once had gardens and springs, which are now beneath layers of sand. God says in another verse: ‘… [and] canst thou perceive any one of them [now], or hear any whisper of them?’ (*Maryam:* 98)

إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ عَذَابَ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٖ (١٣٥)

For I truly fear that the torment of a grievous day will
overtake you [135] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 135)

That is, being conscious of and obedient to God is not merely out of gratitude for His blessings, but it is also for your protection from punishment in the Afterlife. Do not think that you can take God’s blessings then slip away from Him or escape meeting Him. Meeting God is an inevitable and inescapable fact, so if you do not fear God due to the blessings that have come before, fear Him for the punishment that will come after.

What was their reaction to the preaching of their prophet?

قَالُواْ سَوَآءٌ عَلَيۡنَآ أَوَعَظۡتَ أَمۡ لَمۡ تَكُن مِّنَ ٱلۡوَٰعِظِينَ (١٣٦)

They replied, ‘It makes no difference to us whether you
warn us or not [136] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 136)

Their saying, *aw'azhta* translated above as ‘… whether you advise …’ (*al-Furqan:* 136) shows that the truth must become evident, even in the words of the arrogant. Preaching, *wa'azh* is only addressed to those who were aware of teachings then forgot them. So, the 'preacher' comes to remind them of the teachings. Thus, preaching is a second phase after the first phase of teaching. This phrase of theirs, thus, betrays that they knew what was expected of them, but they strayed from it.

They say to their prophet: '… "It is all the same to us whether you advise or are not of the advisors," (*ash-Shu'ara':* 136) meaning 'save yourself the trouble, for it is all the same to us whether you preach or do not preach.' We note that they say: '…or are not of the advisors.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 136) And they did not say, 'It is all one to us whether you preach *or do not preach*,' because that would not negate his ability to preach; indeed it would affirm it. Rather, they said: '…or are not of the advisors' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 136); that is, you will never be able to preach. It is as if they do not want to be preached to at all; even in the future they will refuse to listen to him.

إِنۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا خُلُقُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ١٣٧

For we only do what our forefathers used to do [137]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 137)

In Arabic, the verse begins with the participle *in* which here functions as the negation, 'none', as in, what you have brought is none other than '…the custom..' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 137), *khulq* in Arabic, of those who came before, i.e. the same fabrications of the previous messengers. Similarly, they said: 'Indeed, we were promised this – we and our forefathers – in the past as well; it is nothing but fables of ancient times!' (*an-Naml:* 68) And they also said: '…You are nothing but mortal men like ourselves; moreover, the Most Gracious has never bestowed aught [of revelation] from on high. You do nothing but lie!' (*Ya Sin:* 15) They described their prophet and the Messengers who preceded him as liars who fabricated things that were not true and did not exist.

Al-khuluq translated above as 'custom', is a character rooted deep in the self from which actions spring spontaneously. The characters that one acquires do not reach the level of skills from the very beginning, but they develop into skills after frequent practice till they become as much as the automatic and effortless actions.

We had previously cited the example of a boy learning to sew, for example, and how his teacher trained him painstakingly to thread the needle until the boy mastered the process and could do it effortlessly, perhaps even with his eyes closed.

Another example is when you learn to drive a car for the first time; do you remember how much struggle and dangerous errors you have made? But after training and practice, you could drive skilfully, as if it were an automatic process for you. Acquiring morals is somehow like this physical automation.

Thus, '…the custom of those who came before,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 137) means, as to the disbeliever, it is the same set of claims that all the Messengers have made.

There is another reading(1) of the word *khuluq* (custom) where it is read, *khalq* which means contrivance or concoction. Thus, they would mean, 'We are no different from the peoples who came before us': '…Behold, we found our forefathers agreed on what to believe – and, verily, it is but in their footsteps that we follow!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) It was those forefathers who said: '…There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die as we come to life, and nothing but time destroys us.…' (*al-Jathiya*: 24). This customary way of thinking has become firmly entrenched in ourselves, so do not try to convince us otherwise. We are like those who came before us: we do not believe in resurrection. Do not trouble yourself for your preaching is with no avail with us.

وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

We shall not be punished [138]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 138)

They say this explicitly in response to his saying: '…for, verily, I fear lest suffering befall you on an awesome day!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 135)

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *This is the reading of Ibn Kathir, Abu 'Umar and Al-Kasa'i. Al-Harwa says the word refers to their lies and their fabrications. Arabs say, 'So and so person spoke (khalq) to us,' meaning the person told them fantastical stories [the (Tafsir) of Al-Qurtubi].*

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَهْلَكْنَٰهُمْۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةٗۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ١٣٩

They denounced him as a liar, and so We destroyed them. There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not believe [139] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 139)

Before the mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the messengers were allowed to present their miracles or preach the Divine Path, but they were not required or allowed to chastise those obstinate people who resisted them. Punishment and annihilation of the disbelievers were executed by God.

The ummah of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was exempted from being punished by annihilation. Whoever gives the lie to the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not punished by God as were those previous peoples who gave the lie to their messengers. Rather, God *Glorified is He* says: 'Fight against them! God will chastise them by your hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will succour you against them…' (at-*Tawba:* 14).

The words '…thereupon We destroyed them…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 139) are truthful and have their evidence clearly seen in our reality. God *Glorified is He* also says: 'Art thou not aware of how thy Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] ʿAd, [the people of] Iram the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land?' (*al-Fajr:* 6-8) Yes, theirs was a great civilization. It was the apex of civilization and it had no similar. Nonetheless, it was unable to save itself and God took it away as only *the Almighty*, the Omnipotent can do. God *Glorified is He* says: '…and, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) He also says: '…and [now] those dwellings of theirs are empty, [ruined] as an outcome of their evil deeds….' (*an-Naml:* 52).

That is their ruins are obvious before you when you pass by their area. You have not so far reached the level of that civilization, yet their civilization did not forestay the judgment of God *the Almighty and the Omnipotent*. So, you ought to be cognizant that you are weaker than they were and that which closed in upon these disbelievers is much like what befell other peoples.

That is why you find that all of the civilizations that followed one another passed into oblivion and you will not find a single civilization that was preserved from the beginning to the end of time. If these civilizations had been built upon sound values, then they would have possessed the power to resist annihilation. '…In this [story], behold, there is a message [unto men]…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 139) means that the destruction of these civilizations is a matter of great note warranting attention and consideration. '…even though most of them will not believe [in it].' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 139)

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ١٤٠

Your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [140]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 140)

The Quran says '…thy Lord…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 140), and not 'their Lord' to raise the rank of the Prophet Muhammad as the rank of an educated person is proportional to the status of the educator. It is as if God *Glorified is He* says, 'I am your Lord Who perfected your upbringing in the best of ways, so if anyone wants to see the power of divinity, let him witness it in your upbringing, for one attains the apex of development if the one who raised him is God the Most Great.

Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My Lord saw to my education; mine was the best of educations.'(1) It is a sign of the augustness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* that He gives us Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a model example of the precision of His *Glorified is He* educating and the majesty of His creating. It seems that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the noblest creature to be raised on earth. Thus, even though the narrative is still on the subject of the disbelievers, the Quran says '…thy Lord…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 140) instead of 'their Lord'.

He alone 'is Almighty. A dispenser of mercy!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 140) We have previously said that *the Almighty* is He who subdues and cannot be subdued. However, we should not mistake this attribute for tyranny because He is the

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(1) *In (Kashf Al-Khafa') [1/72] 'Ajluni said that Ibn Taymiyya said, 'No reliable chain of narrators is known for this Hadith, but in (Durar) As-Suyuti says that Abu Al-Fadl ibn Nasir attested to its authenticity, and in (Al-Lali'), As-Suyuti says, 'Its meaning is correct, but it comes via unreliable sources.'*

Dispenser of Mercy as well. It is part of the sublime Quranic style to combine these two attributes together: The Almighty and the Dispenser of Mercy. It directs us to an Islamic principle which shapes Islam and its followers, namely, balance. No single attribute, custom, or disposition will be predominant in you because every disposition in a person has its purpose.

Consider what God *Glorified is He* says about the attributes of the believers: '…humble towards the believers, proud towards all who deny the truth.…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) A Muslim is not predisposed to humility or pride; rather, the situation makes him humble or makes him proud. A believer is characterized by modesty toward other believers and by pride toward disbelievers. In the same vein is the verse: 'Muhammad is God's Apostle; and those who are [truly] with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another…' (al-*Fath:* 29).

Howevwer, it is known that mercy in the wrong circumstances can be a weakness. For example the father who, out of fear for his son, refuses to let his child undergo a surgery that would save the child's health. To him we would say, 'Mercy and affection are foolish in the wrong places.'

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says,

كَذَّبَتۡ ثَمُودُ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾

The people of Thamud, too, called the messengers liars [141] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 141)

After mentioning portions of the stories of Abraham, Moses, Noah and Eber (Hud) *peace be upon them*, the Quran brings up the story of the Thamud, the people of Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*. These portions of the stories have been repeated at various points in The Book of God because the Quran does not approach merely one community in one environment with one character; rather, the Quran addresses a world of many different environments, weaknesses, abilities, and inclinations. It is inevitable, then, that God bring stories of all the Messengers together and take from each of them some appropriate parable in order to convey one Path or System for all of humanity in every time and every place.

Those messengers whom God gathered together in one narrative context were not messengers for the whole of humanity; rather, each of them was for a specific community and a specific issue at a particular time and place.

But Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sent as a messenger to unite the entire world under a single order, a single set of morals, and a single Path despite the disparity of their environments, their weaknesses and abilities. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has to tell His Messenger Muhammad portions of the lives of every messenger who preceded him.

That is why God *Glorified is He* says: 'and [remember:] out of all the accounts relating to the [earlier] apostles We convey unto thee [only] that wherewith We [aim to] make firm thy heart…' (*Hud:* 120).

The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* needed God to firm his heart more than once. Every time a situation required that his heart be made firm, God made it so and He said to him, 'Remember what happened with Abraham, or what happened with Noah and Eber (Hud),' etc. The repetition of the stories was to repeat the process of making his heart firm. So, even if the whole of a story is repeated in the Quran, every individual excerpt is different from the other, and each conveys a thematic meaning that the others do not.

Here, God *Glorified is He* says what He said of the previous communities: '[And the tribe of] Thamud gave the lie to [one of God's] message-bearers' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 141) because all of the Messengers came with the same doctrine. No messenger's message differed from the others' messages and they all were sent from the same source, namely the True Lord *Glorified is He*. The difference between the messengers of God is only in issues of the social environments that were particular to each of them. That is why God *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, We have inspired thee [O Prophet] just as We inspired Noah and all the Prophets after him – as We inspired Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants, including Jesus…' (*an-Nisa':* 163).

He *Glorified is He* also says: 'In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Noah – and into which We gave thee [O Muhammad] insight through revelation – as well as that which We had enjoined upon Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus: Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein…' (*ash-Shura:* 13).

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِذۡ قَالَ لَهُمۡ أَخُوهُمۡ صَٰلِحٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٤٢﴾ إِنِّي لَكُمۡ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٞ ﴿١٤٣﴾
فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٤٤﴾

Their Brother Saleh: said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of God? [142] I am a faithful messenger to you [143] [be mindful of God and obey me [144] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 142-144)

Here as well, The Messenger Saleh (Shelah) is referred to as '…their brother…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 142] in order to soften their hearts and endear their prophet to them: '…Will you not be conscious of God?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 142) We said before that this is a rhetorical question in the negative, meaning 'Be conscious of God,' and this type of question is a form of urging and incitement to be conscious of God, for when you deny the negation of a statement, you mean its affirmation.

Since being conscious of God requires the existence of a Path by which we can be conscious of Him, He, then, says: 'Behold, I am an apostle [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 142) Because I am a trustworthy messenger, I will not deceive you. 'Be, then, conscious of God and pay heed unto me!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 142) The issue of being conscious of God is repeated here and joined together with obedience.

وَمَآ أَسۡـَٔلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ مِنۡ أَجۡرٍۖ إِنۡ أَجۡرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

I ask no reward from you, for my only reward is with the Lord of the Worlds [145] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 145)

The work I have done for your sake merits reward in terms of the common sense. A labourer who serves you a simple job gets their reward once they have finished it. As for me, I have performed a service for you that exceeds any material task in this world because it pertains to the Afterlife and will sustain your life with happiness in this world and that to come. My reward, then, must be great, which is why I do not ask it from you but from God.

أَتُتْرَكُونَ فِي مَا هَٰهُنَآ ءَامِنِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

[Do you think] you will be left secure for ever in what you have here [146] (The Quran, *ash-Shuʿara’:* 146)

He means to rebuke them. ‘Do you think that you will remain secure forever among these blessings? Or do you think to receive the blessings of God and then flee from being called into account by Him? God *Glorified is He* also said in another verse: ‘Did you, then, think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not have to return to Us?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 115) Whoever thinks this is mistaken and short-sighted, because the things that serve you in this life do not do so by your command. You do not have power over the sun to order it to rise each day; you do not have power over the clouds to command them to send down rain; you do not have power to make the earth fertile for you to grow plants in it; you do not have power over the air you breathe, yet these are the fundamental necessities that you depend on to survive.

It was incumbent upon you to think and reflect: who subdued these things and made them to serve you? Like the man who is stranded in the desert on the brink of death and has lost his mount packed with all his drink and food. If he falls asleep, then wakes up to find before him a table set with drink and delightful foods, by Allah, before he reaches forth his hand, should not he ask himself, ‘Who set this table for me in such a place?’

Similarly, you came into this world and all these blessings were prepared for you in advance, so you ought to wonder about it and about who prepared all this for you. And when a messenger comes to you from Allah to solve this riddle for you and inform you that he who did all this is Allah and that the attributes of Allah’s perfection are such and such, you ought to believe him.

Either he is telling the truth and will lead you to the solution to this burning riddle, or he is lying—and refuge is with Allah, and Allah forbid that a Prophet lie to Allah— in which case whoever is the True Lord of this world would stand up and defend His creation. He would say, ‘This messenger is a pretender and a liar. I am responsible for creating this world.’ But if no one stands up to claim creation, then the matter is affirmed to be attributed to Allah *the Exalted* until someone else appears to claim it for himself.

فِي جَنَّٰتٖ وَعُيُونٖ ﴿١٤٧﴾

Amidst [these] gardens and springs [147]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 147)

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Amidst [these] gardens and springs' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 147) as a continuation of the previous verse, meaning: do you think all of this will be yours forever? *Jannat* translated above as 'gardens,' is the plural of the word *janna* which is a place filled with blessings and everything that a person needs. Or it can also be a place where a person is covered by the shade of trees as he walks, for the verb *janna* means 'to cover,' as in Allah's saying *the Exalted*: 'Then, when the night overshadowed him with its darkness…' (*al-An'am*: 76) where overshadowed is translated from the verb *janna*.

Another word derived from *janna* is *junun*, i.e. craziness because it is a covering of the mind. Similarly a *janna* blots out all of existence because you will have no need to leave it, for it has everything you could want for yourself and everything you need in your life.

Likewise, what we call a castle a *qasr* allows you to do without (*yaqsaruka*) the outside world because everything you need is inside it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and springs' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 147) because a garden is always in need of water, so He says: '…and springs' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 147) to ensure that the gardens can exist eternally.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَزُرُوعٖ وَنَخۡلٖ طَلۡعُهَا هَضِيمٞ ﴿١٤٨﴾

Fields, palm trees laden with fruit [148]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 148)

Palm trees could be included in 'fields', but they warrant individual mention because the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took an interest in them and compared them with believers in a Hadith. {There is one tree whose leaves do not fall}.(1) The narrator of this Hadith says that people thought about the trees of the desert but could not come up with the answer. Then when ʿUmar and his son 'Abdullah left, the son said, 'O father, it just occurred to me that it is the palm tree because it is like the believer. Everything about it is good.'

Yes, if you consider the palm tree, you will see that everything about it is useful and has purpose. You can make posts and ship masts from them, and you could cover your houses with them before concrete was invented. From the leaves you can make baskets, and from the broad part of the leaf, called the *qihf* which was unsuitable for making baskets, they used to make brooms to sweep homes.

From the fibres, they made rope and upholstering for chairs and other furniture. Allah even made the thorns that you see on the palm-tree with wisdom and purpose because they protect the palm tree from rodents while it bears fruit. And Allah made the fibres that grow between the bases of the leaves in order to protect the palm trees when they are first developing and are still tender sprouts and cannot protect themselves. Thus the palm tree is a blessing like the believer. And research has at last been completed that turns the part of the palm tree called the *qihf* into good soil so that from it they can plant a new tree.

{That is why when Ibn-ʿUmar said, 'It is the palm tree,' ʿUmar *may Allah be pleased with him* went to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and related what his son had said to him. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said {Your son is right}, and 'Umar said, 'By Allah how happy I am that my son divined the answer. Indeed I am greatly blessed.'(2)}

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon by consensus. Al-Bukhari cited it in his (Sahih) [61 and 9 other places], as did Muslim in his (Sahih) [2811, (Kitab Sifat Al-Munafiqin)], and Ahmad in his (Musnad) [2/61, 123]. It is a Hadith of 'Abdullah ibn-'Umar may Allah be pleased with them.*

(2) *According to Muslim, Ibn-'Umar may Allah be pleased with them said of his father 'Umar, 'I said that to 'Umar, and he said, "If you had said 'It is the palm tree', it would have been more pleasing to me than such-and-such thing."' A narration of Ahmad's [2/123] says that 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him said to his son, 'O son, what prevented you from speaking up? By Allah if you had said that it would have been more pleasing to me than such-and-such thing.'*

Those who grow palm trees see in it signs and miracles that point to the power of Allah *the Exalted*. '…with softened fruit?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 148) refers to the spadix of the palm tree. In the female trees it is the bract from which the stalks with the dates emerge, and in the male trees it is where the fertilizing agent emerges. Of the spadix Allah says: '…and out of the spathe of the palm tree, dates in thick clusters…' (*al-An'am:* 99).

The male tree's bract produces the material that will fertilize a palm tree. The stalks or bunches of dates have stages of growth that we call *(al-khala)*, and they continue to grow until they reach their end stage at which point they harden in this shape and cease to get any bigger. Then the process of coloration begins.

They say that a palm tree *'affara*(1) meaning its green is mixed with red or yellow.

When the red has turned completely red and the yellow has turned completely yellow, the date is called a *busr* next the *busr* turns into *ar-rutab* at which point the fruit softens and its shell cracks off, but if the climate is dry then the *rutab* dries out and turns into *at-tamr* wherein the date's water evaporates and the shell clings to it.

The word '…slender…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 148) suggests a fresh sprout, which demonstrates the fertility of the soil because it produces food that will be tender and succulent.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَتَنۡحِتُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡجِبَالِ بُيُوتٗا فَرِهِينَ ١٤٩

Carving your fine houses from the mountains? [149]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 149)

If you were to go to Mada'in Saleh you would find that the houses there are hewed into the mountainside as tunnels are hewed through stone today, for example. They did not build them as we build our houses. 'With [the same] great skill' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 149) is from *al-farih* meaning with great dexterity and talent. They say, 'So-and-so is *farih* in something', meaning he is skilled at it and practices it energetically.

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(1) *Al-'afar: to pollinate or repair a palm tree. And to 'affara a palm tree is to completely pollinate it. [(Lissan Al-'Arab)—entry: ('afara)]*

فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٥٠﴾ وَلَا تُطِيعُوٓاْ أَمۡرَ ٱلۡمُسۡرِفِينَ ﴿١٥١﴾

Be mindful of God and obey me [150] do not obey those who are given to excess [151] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 150 -151)

Al-musrif translated above as one 'who is given to excesses' is someone who exceeds what is proper, and this excess exists at different levels. Allah *the Exalted* made some things legal, made other things illegal, and set down limits for both what is *halal* legal and permissible, and what is *haram* illegal and impermissible. So to be given to excess in matters of Allah's laws is to overstep what is legal and enter what is illegal.

Or this excess might come in one's earnings, in which case a person might make his earnings by illegal means. Or a person might force himself to keep his earnings legal, and the excess would occur in his expenditures if he spends his money on something prohibited by Allah. So excess can be of three types: through illegal earnings, illegal expenditures, or through something fundamentally illegal.

We notice that whenever the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about what is permissible and legal, He *Glorified is He* says: '…These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, transgress them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229).

As for those things that are impermissible and illegal, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…These are the bounds set by Allah: do not, then, offend against them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). In other words stay away from them because you are not immune to them. Whoever circles around the fire courts falling into it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say, for instance, 'Do not pray when you are drunk', rather, He said: '…Do not attempt to pray while you are in a state of drunkenness…' (*an-Nisa':* 43). In other words, embrace what is permissible fully and do not transgress into what is prohibited. As for what is prohibited, do not even approach it because it has allures that will draw you to it.

Let us dwell a while on Allah's saying *the Exalted*: '…and pay no heed to the counsel of those who are given to excesses.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 151) He did not say, 'Do not give yourself over to excesses.' It is as if Our Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* wanted to rouse us to our negligence and warn us against those who propagate falsehood, casting the excesses of our lives in a favourable light and easing us towards the impermissible. They say, 'There is no harm in this,' 'Nothing prevents you from this' and 'This is not prohibited.' Our Lord gives us the necessary power to resist these people so that we are not led astray by their deviance.

That is why a Noble Hadith says, {Consult your heart and consult your soul no matter what legal ruling they expound to you, no matter what they pronounce as law to you}.(1) This suggests that people will give ignorant religious legal opinions and convince others of that which is false by painting it in a positive light. The word *fatwa* or 'a legal ruling' comes from *futuwa* or 'youth', and *quwwa* or 'power,' such as in Allah's saying *the Exalted*: 'Said some [of them]: "We heard a youth speak of these [gods with scorn]: he is called Abraham."' (*al-Anbiya':* 60) And Allah's saying *the Exalted*: '…Behold, they were young men who had attained to faith in their Lord: and [so] We deepened their consciousness of the right way.' (*al-Kahf:* 13)

The *fatwa* entails power in religion and having influence in religious affairs. If it were merely material power in earthly affairs, there would be a limit to what one could do, but when the power is in religious affairs there is no limit because the scope of religion is vast; it is a sea without shorelines. We know of power in many forms, but the greatest power is power in religious affairs.

We say that someone is *fati)* or youthful, which means that he himself is strong. If we say that someone else *aftahu* then that someone else gave him strength or power (literally it means that they gave him a legal religious ruling), as if he had been weak in his knowledge of Islamic law, so he went to the *mufti,* that is someone who gives a *fatwa* in a religious matter. These derivative meanings of the root *fatiya* are similar in form to our use of the root *ghaniya*. Someone who is *ghaniy* is himself rich, and if someone *aghnahu* then they made him rich, as in Allah's saying: '…And they could find no fault

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(1) *Imam Ahmad cites this in his (Musnad) [4/227, 228] and Darmi cites it in his (Sunnan) [2/246] as a Hadith of Wabissa ibn Ma'bad Al-Asda. The complete version is that the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, {O Wabissa, consult your soul, for that which is pious puts the heart and soul at ease, and that which is sinful knits up the soul and causes uncertainty in one's breast. No matter what legal opinion people render to you.} And Sufyan said it was, 'No matter what legal opinion they render to you.'*

[with the Faith] save that Allah had enriched them and [caused] his Apostle [to enrich them] out of his bounty!...' (*at-Tawba:* 74)

So it is the job of the *mufti* to strengthen my faith, not to lead me to excesses in any religious matter, nor to lead or encourage me to do that which Allah has prohibited. The *mufti* should take great care in giving a *fatwa*, particularly in controversial matters that some claim are permissible and others claim are impermissible. He should dwell carefully on these matters and keep in mind the Islamic viewpoint conveyed in the following Noble Hadith: {That which is permissible is clear and that which is impermissible is clear, but between them are opaque matters, so he who at the least refrains from that which is unclear to him rather than do what is unclear to him, he has kept his religion above suspicion if he is religious, and if he is not religious, he has kept his honour above suspicion}(1)

Thus, whoever does not follow this principle and does not refrain from that which is unclear to him does not, then, keep his religion or his honour above suspicion. And any religious scholar who does not give his legal rulings on the basis of this principle weakens the religion rather than strengthens it. So instead of saying *aftahu*, i.e. he made it strong, we would say *ad'afahu*, i.e. he weakened it.

ٱلَّذِينَ يُفۡسِدُونَ فِى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا يُصۡلِحُونَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

And who spread corruption in the land instead of doing what is right [152] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 152)

Those who are given to excesses are described also as 'those who spread corruption on earth instead of setting things right.' The Creator *the Exalted* created the earth in a state where everything was right and pure, but humankind interfered and corrupted it. That is why we said previously, 'If you look at the world around you, you will find it in the best of conditions so long as it is untouched by the hand of humankind, for once humankind meddles in something, the signs of corruption appear. This does not mean that humankind should not exert any influence in the world, rather they should do so only in accordance with the Path of He who created it, in which case the world would become even purer, or at least remain in its original uncorrupted state of purity. But if humankind interferes without following the Path, then inevitably they will cause corruption.

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon by consensus. Al-Bukhari cites it in his (Sahih) [2051] as does Muslim in his (Sahih) [1599]. This is a Hadith from No'man ibn-Bashir.*

For example, if you were to pass by a well of drinking water, you should either improve it and make it of greater benefit to the people who use it, perhaps by building a low wall around it or by building a winch to help bring the water up, or you should at least leave it as it is and not pollute it or corrupt it. Thus Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘But whenever he prevails, he goes about the earth spreading corruption and destroying [man’s] tilth and progeny: and Allah does not love corruption.’ (*al-Baqara:* 205)

Regarding these people, the Quran does not stop at calling them spreaders of corruption. They are also described as spreading corruption ‘…instead of setting things to rights!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 152) That is because a person might corrupt something and then set it right again, but these people habitually spread corruption and do not ever set things right.

The catastrophes caused by inventors happen because they see purity and good in something they make, but it is in fact a source of corruption because they did not consider all of its relevant repercussions. Consider, for instance, the invention of pesticides, which they said were a scientific breakthrough and would be a big step towards exterminating the cotton worm and other agricultural pests. However, with the passing of time, these pesticides have become a curse upon all of humanity. They have poisoned the farmland, poisoned animals, and consequently human beings, even the water, the earth, and the birds to the extent that you might say they have corrupted Nature, which Allah created. Of such people Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Say: “Shall we tell you who the greatest losers in whatever they may do? [103] [It is] they whose labour has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this world’s life, and who nonetheless think that they are doing good works. [104]”’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-104)

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُسَحَّرِينَ ١٥٣

They said, 'You are bewitched! [153]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 153)

'…the bewitched!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 153) or *musahharin* is the plural of *musahhar.* This is a hyperbolic word form which denotes that magic has been done unto him more than once. If we were to say he is *mas-hur* that would indicate that magic was worked upon him only once, while *musahhar* means it happened several times. Something similar occurs in Allah's saying *the Exalted* about the counsellors surrounding Pharaoh. They said to him: '… "Let him and his brother wait a while, and send unto all cities heralds [36] who shall assemble before thee all sorcerers of great knowledge." [37]' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 36-37) where 'sorcerers' is translated from *sahhar.* They did not say *sahir;* rather, they said *sahhar* meaning the person's profession is sorcery, like a person who works with wood is a *najir,* but a professional carpenter is a *najjar* and one who works with thread is a *kha'it,* but a professional tailor is a *khayyat.*

Some people said of their Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* '… "If you were to follow [Muhammad, you would follow] only a man bewitched!"'(al-*Isra':* 47] Such people also said: '… "You are but one of the bewitched!"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 153) Those who cling to falsehood are peculiar. They waver in their attacks upon their prophets, for sometimes they will say, 'He is a sorcerer,' and other times they will say, 'He is bewitched.' But a sorcerer cannot also be bewitched because at the least he would be able to defend himself against sorcery. Some say that what is meant by 'bewitched' is that he is not sound of mind, i.e. he is not aware of what he says.

Furthermore, if your Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him* is bewitched, then who bewitched him? Is it you or his followers? If one of you bewitched him, then you can annul his bewitchment and return him to normal to see what he is truly like. If some of his followers bewitched him, no doubt they will have done so to aid him in his mission, not restrain him from it.

Thus, when they say of their Prophet: '… "You are but one of the bewitched!"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 153) they aim to deprive him of his followers.

They want a religion that is in keeping with their whims and desires, and they want worship without commands and without a Path like those who worship idols and are happy to do so. Why is that? That is because their deities do not order them to do anything and do not prohibit them from anything. Thus, every charlatan who claims prophethood eases what is commanded on his followers, which is why people strayed away from prayer long ago, and why recently scandalous mixing among the sexes became acceptable. Now nothing prevents a man from meeting with a woman, sitting with her, talking to her and even dancing with her in private. What of it when we are in the twenty-first century?

When they say ‘he is a sorcerer’, we respond to them, ‘Yes, if he is a sorcerer, he has enchanted those who believe in him, but why has he not bewitched you and simply put an end to this controversy?’ Thus, these accusations are groundless. He is no sorcerer and he is not bewitched. These are just lies and slander against the prophets of Allah, may peace and blessings be upon them, and against those who call for what is good in every time and every place.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

مَآ أَنتَ إِلَّا بَشَرٞ مِّثۡلُنَا فَأۡتِ بِـَٔايَةٍ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ١٥٤

You are nothing but a man like us. Show us a sign, if you are telling the truth [154] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 154)

Their saying: ‘You are nothing but a mortal like ourselves! Come, then, forward with a token [of your mission] if you are a man of truth!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 154) is like Allah’s saying in another verse: ‘Yet whenever [Allah’s] guidance came to them [through a prophet,] nothing has ever kept people from believing [in him] save this their objection: “Would Allah have sent a [mere] mortal man as his apostle?”’ (*al-Isra':* 94) Even if Allah sent them an angel, it would come to them in the image of a man, and their objection would remain, for who would inform them that it was not a man but an angel? ‘And [even] if We had appointed an angel as Our message-bearer, We would certainly have made him [appear as] a man – and thus We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves.’ (*al-An‘am:* 9)

In other words because the Messenger is a man, he is indistinguishable from us, so we want a sign from him, a miracle to prove to us that he is truthful is what he conveys to us from his Lord: '…if You are a man of truth!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 154)

قَالَ هَٰذِهِۦ نَاقَةٞ لَّهَا شِرۡبٞ وَلَكُمۡ شِرۡبُ يَوۡمٖ مَّعۡلُومٖ ١٥٥

He said, 'Here is a camel. She should have her turn to drink and so should you, each on a specified day'[155] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 155)

This is in response to them. They asked their prophet to bring forth for them from a boulder(1) a she-camel that would then give birth to a calf that would not be small like normal camel calves but of the same size as its mother. So: 'Replied he: "This she-camel shall have a share of water…"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 155), meaning one day let only the she-camel drink and do not let any of your livestock drink.

'…and you shall have a share of water, on the days appointed [therefore].' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 155) In other words, you shall have your share of water. And during her appointed day the she-camel would drink as much water as all their livestock combined would drink on their appointed date, which is in and of itself a miracle.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوٓءٖ فَيَأۡخُذَكُمۡ عَذَابُ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٖ ١٥٦

So do not harm her, or the punishment of a terrible day will befall you [156] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 156)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* informs His messenger of what will come to pass, that the people will not leave the she-camel be; rather, they will expose her to harm. Allah said: '…and do her no harm…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 156), but they did more than harm; they slaughtered her cruelly. Then Allah *Glorified is He* promises them: '…lest suffering befall you on an awesome day!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 156)

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(1) *Those who asked Saleh* peace be upon him *to show them a sign to prove himself proposed that he bring forth a she-camel from a massive stone that they selected themselves, which was an isolated boulder in the direction of Al-Hijr called al-Katiba. They asked him to bring forth a pregnant she-camel, so Saleh* peace be upon him *took oaths from them that if Allah answered their request they would believe in Allah and follow him. When they gave their word, Saleh* peace be upon him *prayed and supplicated to Allah, and the stone moved and a healthy she-camel emerged with an unborn camel in her womb. [The (Tafsir) of Ibn-Kathir, 2/228]*

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَعَقَرُوهَا فَأَصْبَحُوا۟ نَٰدِمِينَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

But they hamstrung her. In the morning they had cause to regret it [157] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 157)

The Quran says 'they' slaughtered her, in the plural. Then did the entire tribe participate in slaughtering her? No, only one of them did, and his name was Qadar Ibn-Salif. But everyone elected him for his task, aided him, and condoned his actions, so it is as if they all did it because he consulted them and they consented.

Then '… they had cause to regret it.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 157) And scholars say that regret is the precursor of repentance.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ ۗ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً ۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

The punishment fell upon them. There truly is a sign in this, though most of them will not believe [in it] [158] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 158)

You might say, why did suffering befall them if regret is the precursor to repentance and they had regretted what they did? Yes, regret is the precursor of repentance, but their repentance was the type of which Allah says: '…repentance shall not be accepted from those who do evil deeds until their dying hour and then say, "Behold, I now repent.…"' (*an-Nisa':* 18) Thus they felt regret and repented when the time for repentance had already passed. Or perhaps they did not feel the regret of one who repents from his or her sins; rather, they felt only the regret of those who fear the suffering that Allah has threatened them with for their deeds.

Then this story ends with a closing that we are familiar with from other parables about disbelieving peoples:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٥٩﴾

Your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [159]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 159)

The Almighty is He to Whom is subdued and is not subdued, and yet despite that He is also The Most Merciful.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* moves on to another story from the procession of prophets' and messengers' stories.

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٦٠﴾ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ لُوطٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾

The people of Lot, too, called the messengers liars [160]
Their brother Lot said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of
God? [161] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 160-161)

Here again the Quran says: '…their brother…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 161) because he is one of them, not a stranger to them, and the words are meant to soften their hearts to him: '…Will you not be conscious of Allah?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 161) This is a negative statement of Allah-consciousness, and the negation of a statement means its affirmation, as if he had said, 'Be conscious of Allah.'

إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٦٢﴾ فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٦٣﴾ وَمَآ أَسْـَٔلُكُمْ
عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ ۖ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٦٤﴾

I am a faithful messenger to you [162] Be mindful
of God and obey me [163] I ask no reward from
you, for my only reward is with the Lord of the
Worlds [164] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 162-164)

Thus were Lot's words akin to those spoken by his brethren, the Messengers who preceded him because they were all sent forth by the same source.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* singles out the people of Lot *peace be upon him* for that which they were infamous and that which was a cause of their destruction:

أَتَأْتُونَ ٱلذُّكْرَانَ مِنَ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٦٥﴾

Must you, unlike [other] people, lust after males [165]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 165)

It is as if this were a characteristic that, among all the peoples of the world, was unique to them. That is why in another place Lot *peace be upon him* says: '… "Will you commit abominations such as none in all the world has ever done before you?"' (*al-A'raf:* 80]

Thus a thing had never happened before because it is a filthy habit for a man only goes to another man in a state of filthiness, but still they did it. So Lot's description of this is that they did what no one else in the world would do, making it truly abominable.

وَتَذَرُونَ مَا خَلَقَ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُم مِّنْ أَزْوَٰجِكُم ۚ بَلْ أَنتُمْ قَوْمٌ عَادُونَ ﴿١٦٦﴾

And abandon the wives that God has created for you? You are exceeding all bounds [166] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 166)

In other words, Allah made your lawful spouses as an alternative to this reprehensible act, so you should have exercised your natural instincts in their rightful place, not transposed them elsewhere. Or rather should you have kept 'yourselves aloof from all the [lawful] spouses whom your Lord has created for you? ...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 166). In other words, they used to do this with women in the wrong spot as well. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Your wives are your tilth; go, then, unto your tilth as you may desire…' (*al-Baqara:* 223). Some think that the words '…as you may desire…' (*al-Baqara:* 223) gives them free reign in doing this, but the verse restricts this to the spot of 'your tilth,' where a woman can be impregnated, and this spot is in the front, not in the back.

Thus Allah next says: '…Nay, but you are people who transgress all bounds of what is right!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 223) One who transgresses all bounds of what is right is someone who had some lawful and rightful means of consummating his desires, but he overstepped that means to something that was forbidden to him.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قَالُواْ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنتَهِ يَٰلُوطُ لَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْمُخْرَجِينَ ١٦٧

But they replied, 'Lot! If you do not stop this, you will be driven away' [167] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 167)

So if you do not cease blaming us and opposing what we do then: '…you will most certainly be expelled [from this township]!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 167) This is much like what they said in another verse: '… "Expel [Lot and] Lot's followers from your township!"' (*an-Naml:* 56) In other words, they have no place among us. But why is that? '…Verily, they are folks who make themselves out to be pure!' (*an-Naml:* 56) Praise Allah! Their crime is that they are pure, and there is no place for purity among these wretched peoples.

Next Lot exclaimed:

قَالَ إِنِّى لِعَمَلِكُم مِّنَ ٱلْقَالِينَ ١٦٨

So he said, 'I loathe what you do [168]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 168)

The difference between my not doing something and my abhorring one who does it is that I do not do it myself and I also hate that you do it. This is an emphatic rejection of them.

Next Lot *peace be upon him* said:

رَبِّ نَجِّنِى وَأَهْلِى مِمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ ١٦٩ فَنَجَّيْنَٰهُ وَأَهْلَهُۥٓ
أَجْمَعِينَ ١٧٠ إِلَّا عَجُوزًا فِى ٱلْغَٰبِرِينَ ١٧١

Lord, save me and my family from what they are doing [169]
We saved him and all his family [170]
A except for an old woman who stayed behind [171]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 169 - 171)

Before his people's obstinate insistence on this atrocious fornication, Lot *peace be upon him* could do nothing but call upon his Lord to save him and his family, and Allah *the Exalted* did so for: '…all but an old woman, who was among those that stayed behind.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 171) The old woman meant here is Lot's wife, of whom Allah says: ‘For those who are bent on denying the truth Allah has propounded a parable in [the stories of] Noah’s wife and Lot’s wife…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 10).

So Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* made of her an example for those who disbelieve — and refuge is in Allah! Thus she was not one of those who were saved and Lot's *peace be upon him* prayer did not apply to her. She was one of: ‘…those that stayed behind,’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 171) or one of the *ghabirin*(1) in Arabic, and so she died with the rest.

ثُمَّ دَمَّرْنَا ٱلْـَٔاخَرِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾ وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِم مَّطَرًا ۖ فَسَآءَ مَطَرُ ٱلْمُنذَرِينَ ﴿١٧٣﴾

Then We destroyed the others, [172] and poured a rain of destruction down upon them. How dreadful that rain was for those who had been fore- warned! [173]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 172-173)

The’…others, …’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 172) means those who did not believe in Lot's message and did not desist from this atrocious fornication. Then the Quran clarifies the nature of this destruction: ‘…and rained down upon them a rain [of destruction]: and dire is such rain upon all who let themselves be warned [to no avail]!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 173) Before, the rain was a cause of blessing and a sign of Allah’s mercy, as the rain would come down from the sky and bring life to the barren earth. Yet of this rain Allah says: ‘…dire is such rain upon all who let themselves be warned [to no avail]!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 173) So this rain is not a blessing or a mercy, rather, it is a punishment and an affliction. Similarly, another verse says: ‘And so, when they beheld it in the shape of a dense cloud approaching their valleys, they exclaimed, “This is but a heavy cloud which will bring us [welcome] rain!” [But Hud said:] “Nay, but it is the very thing which you [so contemptuously] sought to hasten – a wind bearing grievous suffering, bound to destroy everything at its Lord’s behest!”’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25)

This is called despairing after hope, which is the most intense form of affliction when one is on the cusp of good but instead evil takes you by surprise.

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(1) *According to Qatada it was said: She ghabarat in the punishment of Allah, i.e. she remained in it. [The (Tafsir) of Al-Qurtubi, 7/5013]*

We previously explained this through the example of a prisoner who asks the guard for a drink of water to quench his thirst. If the guard were to deprive him of it from the outset, it would not be so bad, but instead he brings the cup of water for him only to pour its contents out onto the ground. This is far more hurtful because the prisoner is given reason to hope before, so this other torment is worse than mere thirst.

In another place, the Quran explains the essence of this rain, saying: 'And so, when Our judgment came to pass, We turned those [sinful towns] upside down, and rained down upon them stones of hard-baked clay, one upon another, marked out in your Lord's sight [for the punishment of such as are lost in sin]. And these [blows of God-willed doom] are never far from evildoers!' (*Hud:* 82-83) The stones are: '…of hard-baked clay…' (*Hud:* 82) i.e. they were clay fired to the point of hardening like stone, and they are '…marked out…' (*Hud:* 83) because they are each marked with the names of the people they are destined to fall upon, each stone to its intended target.

And when the disparate scenes are gathered together, the outlines of the complete story become clear.

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةٗۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكۡثَرُهُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١٧٤﴾ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٧٥﴾

There truly is a sign in this, though most of them will not believe [174] your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [175] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 174 -175)

This story closes with the same verses that closed the previous stories about obstinate disbelievers.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* shifts our attention to another people who gave the lie to their messenger Jethro *peace be upon him*.

كَذَّبَ أَصۡحَٰبُ لۡـَٔيۡكَةِ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ﴿١٧٦﴾

The forest-dwellers, too, called the messengers liars [176] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 176)

Al-Ayka translated above as 'wooded dales', is a place so heavily forested that the trees close in on each other and the branches are thick as webbing.

Here the Quran also says '…message-bearers,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 176) even though they only gave the lie to a single messenger because giving the lie to one messenger is tantamount to giving the lie to every messenger. In terms of doctrine and morality, all of them conveyed the same Path.

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ شُعَيْبٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿١٧٩﴾
وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٨٠﴾

Shu'ayb said to them, 'Will you not be mindful of God? [177] I am a faithful messenger to you [178] be mindful of God and obey me [179] a I ask no reward of you, for my only reward is with the Lord of the Worlds [180] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 177-180)

We notice the rhetorical difference here, which points to the precision of the Quran's language, for it does not say, 'their brother Jethro' as was said of Nuh, Hud, Saleh and Lut *peace be upon them* because Jethro *peace be upon him* was not one of the people of the wooded dale; rather, he was a stranger to them.

The rest of the verses match up exactly with what was said about his fellow messengers who preceded him because the doctrinal unity of the Plan produces the same treatment and conveyance of the Plan. That is why we read these verses from all the previously mentioned messengers.

Then he begins to take up the details of their specific problem because every messenger sent from Allah to a community was sent to treat a specific malady that had spread among them. Communities at the time were isolated from each other and there were no means of contact by which these maladies might travel from one community to another.

The malady of 'Ad was their pride in building and their haughtiness towards people. So Hud *peace be upon him* came to say to them: 'Will you, in your wanton folly, build [idolatrous] altars on every height, and make for yourselves mighty castles, [hoping] that you might become immortal? And will you [always], whenever you lay hand [on others], lay hand [on them] cruelly, without any restraint?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 128-130)

And the malady of Thamud was negligence and separating their blessings from The Blesser, so Saleh *peace be upon him* came to them to say: 'Do you think that you will be left secure [forever] in the midst of what you have here and now? Amidst [these] gardens and springs and fields, and [these] palm-trees with slender spathes? and that you will [always be able to] hew dwellings out of the mountains with [the same] great skill?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 146-149)

As for the people of Lut *peace be upon him,* they were marked by an abomination unprecedented in the world which was sodomy. So Lut *peace be upon him* came to restrain them and call upon them to repent: ‘Must you, of all people, [lustfully] approach men, keeping yourselves aloof from all the [lawful] spouses whom your Lord has created for you? Nay, but you are people who transgress all bounds of what is right!’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 165-166)

As for the people of the wooded dale, their malady was being stingy with the scale. So Shuʿayb *peace be upon him* came to them and said:

أَوۡفُواْ ٱلۡكَيۡلَ وَلَا تَكُونُواْ مِنَ ٱلۡمُخۡسِرِينَ ﴿١٨١﴾ وَزِنُواْ بِٱلۡقِسۡطَاسِ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمِ ﴿١٨٢﴾

[Give full measure: do not sell others short [181] Weigh with correct scales [182] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 181-182)

Al-Kail is a device for measuring quantities by volume. The unit of measure of *al-kail* is either *al-kaila* same as *al-qadah* or *al-ardab*. Similarly a balance is a device that measures things that can be weighed.

And ‘be not among those who [unjustly] cause loss [to others].’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 181) *Al-mukhsirin* is translated here as ‘...those who [unjustly] cause loss [to others],’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 181) i.e. to another party in a transaction involving a measure, by taking more or giving less than is just. And the weighing should be done ‘… with a true balance.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 182) This means that the weighing should be made with as much fairness and as close attention to the scale as is humanly possible with due consideration to the differences between the things being weighed. For example, gold weighs differently than apples, or sesame or lentils, so you have to inspect the scale’s precision as much as possible in order to weigh with a true balance.

However, why are only the measure and the balance singled out as means of assessment? Why does the Quran not mention measurement of areas or length, by the meter or foot for example? They say it is because the people of old in primitive societies did not have dealings in measurable things. They did not buy cloth, for example, because cloth has to be spun by a man or a woman and at the time there was no one to spin it or sell it—that only happened in later more civilized societies.

Long ago, people dealt with each other through barter and exchange. Under such circumstances there is no buyer or seller per se, for no one person could merely buy something and no one person could merely sell something, except when goods are exchanged for something of worth, as in Allah's saying: 'And they sold him for a paltry price – a mere few silver coins…' (*Yusuf:* 20).

But in a barter system you take some grain and eat it, and I take some dates and eat them so we benefit directly from the goods. If you choose to consider everyone in a transaction a seller or a buyer, you could say they bought and sold the goods. If you then consider things of worth that do not have any direct benefit from consumption like gold or silver or other precious metals that cannot be eaten, these are commodities of worth. As for items that are neither of these, they have the potential to be goods for consumption and also commodities of worth.

The Quran has set aside a sura especially for the matter of the measure and the scale. In the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin,* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Woe unto those who give short measure: those who, when they are to receive their due from [other] people, demand that it be given in full – but when they have to measure or weigh whatever they owe to others, give less than what is due!' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1-3)

We say *(kala lahu)* meaning he gave something to someone, and *(iktala 'alaihi)* meaning he was given something. So the verse says that whenever he takes something, he makes sure he takes exactly what he is owed, but when he gives to someone else, he gives less than he owes. The Quran does not censure him for seeking exactly what is his due; rather, it censures him for being short with what is due to others even if it is a trivial amount.

The name of the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* derives from the word *tafif,* i.e. something insignificant or trivial. So if woe befalls one who is unjust in something small and trivial, what then do you think will befall one who is unjust in everything?

Here rebuke goes to the person who does both of two things: takes extra and gives less. However, if someone were to give more than is due, there is no harm in it, and his reward is with Allah for he is one of the doers of good of whom Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…there is no cause to reproach the doers of good…’ (*at-Tawba:* 91).

With the advancement of societies human beings have begun to take an interest in evaluating the precision of the measure, the scale, and the measuring stick. There are institutions that specialize in investigating and researching the precision of these devices because with the passing of time they become susceptible to inaccuracies. For example the metal *sanja*, the weight against which we measure things, might begin to weigh more than it should if it is left in a place where it accumulates dust and grease on it or it might begin to weigh less than it should from excessive wear and tear over time just as a doorknob is worn down from excessive use and begins to bald. The smooth shining bald spot that you see is a sign that some of the doorknob has been worn off, if only a small portion of it.

In France, there is an ideal model for the yard and metre made from non-corrodible metal that is used as a reference to measure and calibrates other measuring devices. Now extremely precise equipment to measure weight and length guarantees you the utmost of precision, especially in weighing valuables. That is why we see them place delicate scales inside of glass boxes where air currents around it cannot affect the measurement.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا۟ ٱلنَّاسَ أَشْيَآءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

Do not deprive people of what is theirs. Do not spread corruption on earth [183] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 183)

Al-bakhs is to deprive someone of ‘…what is rightfully theirs…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 183) which means those things that are owed to them. Thus depriving another person what is owed to him or her is a sin, or depriving someone might be taking too much of something by force, or using something that belongs to another person without his or her permission and in a way that might displease him or her.

All of these possibilities are contained in: '…and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 183). So *al-bakhs* happens whenever you short someone by giving less than his right, or take more than your right by compulsion, or use what is his by right without his permission.

So whenever you are sure that something is someone else's due, you should be wary of misappropriating it. For example, your Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* says of charity: '…and in whose possessions there is a due share, acknowledged [by them], for such as ask [for help] and such as are deprived [of what is good in life].' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24-25)

Since Islamic law has specified what is due to the poor, you will not infringe upon it. When you reflect upon the nature of their due share, you will find that it has been wisely imposed in such a way as to preserve and encourage the efforts of the donor to increase his own capital even though some of it is owed to charity.

For inasmuch as your efforts to develop your own capital increase, the amount of charity owed from your money decreases. For example, income from land that is fed by rainwater is subject to a ten percent *zakat* tax, land that is watered mechanically is subject to five percent, and business and commercial efforts, which require the most effort, are only subject to a two and a half percent tax. This is because the Wise Lawgiver wants to exhort people to exert effort and make use of their money, that way no one will say, 'Why should I toil and let someone else reap the fruits of my labour?'

When the Lawgiver imposed this amount due to the poor, he was protecting the poor and the rich alike. He set forth this rightfully owed amount so that they would not give too little; especially in charity.

The Path of Allah wants to set the daily motions of people's lives aright; blood should only flow in a person's body by its sweat, i.e. its work and toil. And life must only be in a body that sweats in toil, otherwise society will be corrupted and those who are capable of effort will begrudge their labours because he will not be sure whether the fruits of his labours will go to him or to someone else who will seize them from him by some means.

This is what would corrupt society because the strong and the capable would renounce activity and those who take from others would accustom themselves to idleness and sloth, for why should he work when the life that runs in his veins comes from the toil of others? As time goes on it will be harder for him to do any work and industrious activity will seem burdensome to him so he will become what we call a 'social parasite', living at the expense of others.

Thus, the True Lord *Glrofied is He* wants to reassure everyone that the fruits of their efforts will return to them. So no one will wrongfully usurp the earnings of another because if he is unable to work, his Lord has guaranteed him a share of the earnings of others which will be brought to his very door, either in the form of charity, *zakat*, or alms *(sadaqa)*. This way everyone's life functions smoothly.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to give us precise scales and balances to uphold the integrity of our dealings with each other, so if you are owed something, the measurement is accurate, and if you weigh something for someone else, the scale is accurate. You can measure with a true balance and not short people what is rightfully theirs.

The issue of giving a person their due is not limited to these circumstances alone; rather, they are models for dealing with people in all aspects of life where something measurable or quantifiable is in question. Thus be wary of infringing on what rightfully belongs to others and be wary of depriving someone of what is theirs by force, thievery, fraud, or seizure.

We have previously said that among the forms of stealing *as-sariqa* is to take something from where it rightfully belongs when its rightful owner is not present, and *al-khatf* is to take something when the owner is present but you flee before he is able to grab hold of you, or if he does catch up to you, you overpower him and take it from him by force, which is *ghasb*. As for embezzlement, *al-ikhtilas*, it is when you steal money that you have been entrusted with but have no right to take.

So if every active person knew that the fruits of his activities would return to him, and every inactive person knew that he would die of hunger if he does not work so long as he is able to, then industry and activity would prevail in everyone, which is what Allah *the Exalted* wants, especially for his vice-regent on earth. He *Glorified is He* has given us a mind to think with, energy to work with and materials to use in our endeavours. All we have to do is gainfully employ the abilities that Allah created for us.

If charity, or *zakat*, is a clearly acknowledged and delineated right due to others, there is another right due to others which is not clearly defined. Allah *the Exalted* says: '... a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) He did not say that this due share is *ma'lum*, or clearly known because the due share mentioned here is just almsgiving, or *sadaqa*. The True Lord *Glorified is He* left this due share unrestricted in order to give the donor free reign according to his or her inclinations and generosity. That is why this verse comes in the midst of talk about what characterizes doers of good. '[But] behold, the God-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past: they would lie asleep during but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts; and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19)

It is because the due share here is done as an extra favour that the Wise Lawgiver has left without restriction. It is incredible to see rich people take out 2.5 % of their money, for example, and they do not give any thought to the remaining portion of their money, which is 97.5%. Instead they turn their attention to what is rightfully owed to the poor, a trivial 2.5%.

He tries to outwit his obligations, giving his *zakat* to his relatives or acquaintances, or using it in some way to relieve him of some other obligation, such as the person who gives his *zakat* to his female servant, for example, in order to please her mother so she does not persuade her daughter to leave his service. Some give their *zakat* to the construction of mosques, schools, or hospitals, which is unacceptable because the money belongs to those who are known to be deserving according to the Book of Allah. It is always wrong to channel one's *zakat* money towards something that will benefit the rich.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 183) To act wickedly is to spread corruption, so the meaning of 'do not act wickedly' is 'do not spread corruption on earth'. Why then does the Quran repeat itself, saying: '...by spreading corruption?'

(*ash-Shu'ara':* 183) They say the meaning here is 'do not act wickedly on earth' even though you are currently spreading corruption or intend to spread corruption.

There is no redundancy in the verse because it is distinguishing between corrupting something intentionally and corrupting something unintentionally—i.e. your everyday actions caused corruption. This way people are not dissuaded from thinking and trying to discover what is best through their everyday actions because so long as you intended to do what is good and proper, it is not your fault if you erred. Your Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* will see to it that your error is remedied. Indeed, he will compensate you for it, for whoever exerts himself but errs will have a reward and whoever exerts himself and succeeds will have twice the reward.(1)

So the meaning is do not spread corruption through the earth intentionally. But how does one spread corruption on earth? Corruption means to corrupt those who move and work on the face of the earth because the earth was created for humankind. 'And the earth has He spread out for all living beings.' (*ar-Rahman:* 10)

Allah *the Exalted* created the earth in a state of purity and it is humankind that corrupted it as is clear from the fact that you only see corruption in places where people are. As for the places where their influence does not reach, they remain pure and whole.

Human beings, whom Allah created as his vice-regent on his earth, are supposed to cultivate this earth and increase its purity in fulfilment of his Lord's saying: '…It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and charged you to cultivate and settle it(2)…' (*Hud:* 61).

We cannot settle the earth if it is in ruins, and when our descendants increase in number, there will be no corresponding increase in the earth's resources, so catastrophe will strike. But if the earth was cultivated and its resources increased in parallel with the increase in population, then the people would not feel the pressure of scarcity, and catastrophe would be avoided.

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(1) *On the authority of 'Amr ibn Al-'As may Allah be pleased with him the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, {Whenever a judge passes judgment and applies himself successfully, he will have two rewards, and if he passes judgment and applies himself but errs, he will have one reward}. Cited by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [7352] and Muslim in his (Sahih). [1716, (Kitab Al-Aqdiya)]*

(2) That is He gave permission for you to settle it and draw out your potential from it, and he made you settlers on it. [*(Lissan Al-'Arab)*. Entry: *('amara)*]

Now if you drive along a desert road, you see farms in the desert and new villages in which the barren earth has been transformed to lush, green earth. Where did this dramatic change happen? We were lazy and oblivious until hunger reared its head and we exceeded the limited fertile soil in the Nile Delta and River Valley.

So if humankind does not improve the earth's purity, at the least it should leave it in its original state as Allah created it. But we have seen human beings pollute the water by depositing their waste in it, corrupt the air with the exhaust from cars and factories, and corrupt the earth with chemicals and pesticides. All of this corruption is a deviation from the untainted nature that Allah created for us. This happens because we look for quick utility and neglect the long-term damages.

Allah *Glorified is He* created means of transport and transportation for us and made them without harmful side effects. 'And [it is He who creates] horses and mules and asses for you to ride, as well as for [their] beauty…' (*an-Nahl:* 8). And He says: 'And they carry your loads to [many] a place which [otherwise] you would be unable to reach without great hardship to yourselves…' (*an-Nahl:* 7). Yes, modern means of transportation are faster, and more comfortable than these animal mounts, but they also tire people when Allah created the entire world for their comfort. You might see a man driving his car and his sole preoccupation is to go faster in his car so he neglects the car's maintenance and whenever he takes off in his car, he leaves behind a cloud of noxious smoke that harms people while he is heedless to everything because the smoke is behind him and does not affect him. But take great care, Your Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* is All Sustaining. He does not forget and He does not sleep, and even as you condemn someone else, you are yourself condemned, or your children are. Also, before you can drive fast in a car, you have to pave the roads so that you do not raise dust in people's faces and impair their breathing or even do harm to nearby agriculture. All of these are forms of spreading corruption on earth because we look only to the expedient use of something and not the long-term harms of it.

So whenever you strive to do something, you should do so after making sound preparations in order to arrive at sound results so that you will not be one of those who spread corruption on earth.

Another form of spreading corruption on earth is highway robbery which is when a robber lays in wait at one place until his victim passes by. There is also burglary, wherein the burglar goes to the home of his victim and robs him of his money.

Bribery is also a form of spreading corruption on earth, and it is one of the most harmful catastrophes afflicting our society which gives birth to idleness and disorder, for when you see someone else taking advantage of you and seizing your money unlawfully, you are sure to treat him and others the same way, then matters of public interest turn to chaos of proportions that only Allah can know.

Next the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُمْ وَٱلْجِبِلَّةَ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٨٤﴾

Be mindful of God who created you and former generations [184] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 184)

You must not think that Allah *the Exalted* created us without any reason or that He left us unattended to our own devices. He created us for a purpose in the world and He made us all servants equally to Him, so He does not prefer any of us to any other, and He does not have any centre of power, which is why He has never taken a companion and never had a son.

Because we are all equal before Him *Glorified is He* and He is our Creator, He has undertaken to provide our sustenance for us and see to our interests. So you must make the effort in the place of someone who has been paralyzed as a test from Allah and you must see to that person's well-being. Doubtless Allah will look to you with an eye of multiplied blessings.

So the truly disabled and impoverished—not those who take up poverty and begging as a profession by which to earn their livelihood—these disabled and impoverished people were created by Allah and their afflictions are from Him. So when you give them the fruits of your own labours and go to them to see that they are comfortable and secure in their homes, by your deeds you are alleviating their Allah-given afflictions for Allah, for it is by you that Allah provides for them. In this case, it is inevitable that these less fortunate people will love you and pray for you to be blessed, in good health, and to receive great reward. And they will know that Allah did not forsake them.

But when the filthy rich are stingy with the destitute poor and wash their hands of those people whom Allah has tested, inevitably the poor will resent the rich, or even protest against Allah—and refuge is with Allah—because: by what fault of his own is he poor when others are rich in a merciless society?

It is astounding to see an afflicted person displaying his affliction to people and taking advantage of it to swindle them. He shows them his handicap as if he were complaining of the Creator to His creatures. If only he overlooked what Allah has afflicted him with and trusted that it was one of the blessings Allah has given him, then Allah would have put the health of someone healthy into their service and their sustenance would come to them at their door. If the afflicted are content, then Allah's gifts to them will be commensurate with their afflictions.

But 'be conscious of Him Who has created you…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 184) means, be mindful of his omnipotence, for He created you; He assures you of your livelihoods and makes sure your needs are met, even for the paraplegic, He puts an able-bodied person into his service to take care of him. And He sets a condition upon the rich. As part of their faith, they must give a portion of their labours towards the poor and take his offering for them to their houses at their ease.

Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* tells them to fear Allah, Who created them and the former generations. The word generation in Arabic comes from the word mountain. Mountains played an important role in Arab life and many of their idioms involve mountains as they represent the attributes of majesty, grandeur, firmness, and stability. Thus, they derived the word generation from mountain. This tells that generations are adhering firmly to something.

Similarly, we say a person is naturally disposed for goodness, i.e. he sticks firmly to what is good and never leaves it. In addition, we say that a person is like a mountain, that is, nothing affects him. Moreover, common people describe a person as a mountain, meaning he is heavy spirited. Some poets eulogise someone saying that they are firm as a mountain, even after their death. One poet said of someone while carrying his coffin, 'I have never thought, prior to your funeral procession, that a mountain could be carried by the hands of men.' Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And certainly He led astray numerous generations from among you' (*Ya Sin:* 62).

Thus, those former generations referred to in the verse in question are those who stick firmly and obstinately to giving the lie to their messengers. Therefore, Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* was telling his people that Allah created them and those former generations, confirming meanwhile that they were fully aware of the punishment that afflicted those generations as a result of opposing their messengers, Allah decreed that His messengers are the victorious and those who give the lie to them are the losers. Those communities which preceded you were unflagging in their disbelief. They were stubborn in their disbelief and thus nothing deterred them from it. Thus, do not be like them lest what befell them also befall you.

What was their response after all? Allah *the Almighty* says:

قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُسَحَّرِينَ ١٨٥

But they replied, 'You are bewitched! [185]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 185)

They believed that somebody casted a spell over him, as we have said previously. Allah *Glorified is He* uses a hyperbole form to mean that they accused him of being bewitched several times, not just once. If they believed that he had been bewitched just once, Allah would not have used the hyperbole form of the word. Thus, they thought that there was something wrong with his mind and thinking and that he was crazy and thereby will not listen to him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَآ أَنتَ إِلَّا بَشَرٞ مِّثۡلُنَا وَإِن نَّظُنُّكَ لَمِنَ ٱلۡكَٰذِبِينَ ١٨٦

You are nothing but a man like us. In fact we think you
are a liar [186] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 186)

They proclaimed that he was just a human being like them and is not distinguished in any way. Thus, they questioned his prophet hood? They said that they thought that he is a consummate liar like those liars who preceded him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَأَسۡقِطۡ عَلَيۡنَا كِسَفٗا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ١٨٧

Make bits of the heavens fall down on us, if you are telling the truth [187] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 187)

They asked for bits of the heavens to fall on them if he was truthful. They call for chastisement and hasten it upon themselves just as Allah says in another verse: 'They said, "Have you come to us to turn us away from our gods; then bring us what you threaten us with, if you are of the truthful ones."' (*al-Ahqaf:* 22)

Surprisingly, when punishment descended upon them, they asked to be reprieved. Why shall they be reprieved while they are the one who were impatient?

Many disbelievers have asked for bits of heaven to fall down on them, as was the case with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when they said, 'And they say, "We will by no means believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us. Or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out. Or you should cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face [with us]."' (*al-Isra':* 90-92) They also said, 'O Allah! if this is the truth from Thee, then rain upon us stones from heaven or inflict on us a painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32) They should have asked for guidance instead. This actually shows how foolish and obstinate they were.

Allah then says:

قَالَ رَبِّيٓ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ ١٨٨

He said, 'My Lord knows best what you do' [188] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 188)

Here, Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) told them that Allah *Glorified is He* is All Knowing of what they do. If they were amenable to repentance, regret, and hope, then Allah's punishment would not befall them. However, if they were insistent on disobedience and giving the lie, the punishment of complete annihilation would descend upon them. In addition, he would not stand in judgment over them in anything because he is a mere mortal like them and he does not know their inner intentions. Thus, he will entrust their fate to their Lord Who knows their affairs and what they hide.

Allah says:

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَهُمۡ عَذَابُ يَوۡمِ ٱلظُّلَّةِۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ عَذَابَ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٨٩﴾

They called him a liar, and so the torment of the Day of Shadow came upon them – it was the torment of a terrible day [189] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 189)

Indeed, they disbelieved in him and since he did not defer the matter to himself but rather to their Lord, they actually disbelieved in Allah. Thus, the punishment soon followed and the Day of Shadow seized them. It was a punishment of a witnessing day. Allah inflicted upon them a terrible hotness for seven days. They lived in scorching heat and Allah allowed just enough wind to keep the spark of life alive in them. Their suffering was all the worse. The sand beneath them burned and they began to beg for fresh air. They saw a cloud advancing towards them in the sky. They looked up at it and thought it would relieve them from the heat of the sun and send them a breeze. When they took shelter in the shade of the cloud and waited expectantly for ease and repose to come, the cloud began to rain fire upon them.

If only this cloud had dispersed and left them as they were! Instead it hurled fire and ashes upon them from above and added more pain to their suffering. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'When they saw it as a cloud appearing in the sky advancing towards their valleys, they said, "This is a cloud which will give us rain." Nay! it is what you sought to hasten on, a blast of wind in which is a painful punishment, destroying everything by the command of its Lord, so they became such that naught could be seen except their dwellings.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the suffering of this day as a torment of a terrible day. In what way is it terrible when it is just a torment? Scholars say it is because it came after their happiness and having hope of finding repose. This surprise increased their suffering. This is what is called despair after hope. This is the worst form of suffering and more difficult to bear. Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً ۖ وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٩٠﴾

There truly is a sign in this, though most of them will not believe [190] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 190)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that what He told us in this account is a sign, i.e. an admonition for us. It is an admonition that moves a person from one state of being to another. Thus, if he is a disbeliever, he comes to believe, and if he is obstinate, he yields to the truth and obedience.

So far, the stories that Allah has related from the long line of messengers include seven of the messengers of Allah with their respective communities; Musa (Moses), Ibrahim (Abraham), Nuh (Noah), Hud (Eber), Saleh (Shelah), Lut (Lot) and Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them all.* The procession of messengers proceeded according to a fixed, unwavering pattern from Allah, i.e. the messengers and those who believed are victorious, while the disbelievers and those who called their messengers liars are deserted.

Let you, *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* take a precautionary warning from these stories. There is an admonition for you, which moves a person from one state of being to another. On hearing this admonition, if a person is a disbeliever, he comes to believe and if he is obstinate, he yields to the truth and obedience. In addition, you have seen that we have never given up one of our messengers to those who disbelieved in him and they were victorious all the way. Allah says, ‘And certainly Our Word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the messengers. Most surely, they shall be the assisted ones. And most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

The Arabic word for admonition is derived from the verb meaning to cross from one side to the other. Through an admonition, one crosses from disbelief, recalcitrance, denial, and arrogance to faith, belief, and obedience. Moreover, it is connected to shedding a tear as it moves down one's cheek.

It is worth noting that Allah said that most of them will not believe. He says so in order to give those who believed their right and do not infringe upon their rights.

Allah says:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٩١﴾

Your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful [191]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 191)

A Lord is someone who undertakes another's protection and care. All the previous stories ended with this same ending verse. Despite all the disbelief they manifested, their stories end with this same ending, which shows the Might and Mercy of Allah.

After presenting lessons and morals from the stories of Allah's messengers, the narrative context of the Quran moves to the last of those prophets sent with a Divine Message, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِنَّهُۥ لَتَنزِيلُ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٩٢﴾

Truly, this Quran has been sent down by the Lord of
the Worlds [192] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 192)

To what does this pronoun '*hu*' refer? A pronoun should be preceded by something to which it refers. For example, when you say, 'A man came to visit me so I greeted him with hospitality', the pronoun 'him' refers back to the man. However, there is nothing preceding this pronoun in this verse.

In the verse where Allah says, 'Say, "He, Allah, is One"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), the pronoun refers to the word 'Allah', which comes after it, so that His Majesty is instilled in the soul. Similarly, the pronoun 'this' in the verse under discussion refers to the Holy Quran, and thus the meaning will be 'the Quran was sent by the Lord of the worlds'. Again, the pronoun precedes its referent because of its fame and constant presence in our minds. When you say, ‘He is the One’, the mind cannot help but think of Allah; and when you say, ‘It was sent down by the Lord of worlds’, the mind cannot help but think of the Holy Quran.

The verse in question tells that the Quran is the word of Allah, and not Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is especially true because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had never previously been, before receiving his Message, an orator among his people. He was not known for public speaking or eloquence. Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was by all worldly measure inferior to others in this regard. Subsequently, if the Message that came to him was of his making, why were others not able to produce the same? They had experience with public speaking and orating at marketplaces. In addition, they had a way with words. Therefore, if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* fabricated the Quran, they were far more capable of fabrication since they were practiced in the art of speech.

Allah is the Lord of all the worlds, i.e. everything that exists. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mercy and grace to all the worlds, i.e. people, jinn, angels and yet other worlds. When the verse in which Allah says, ‘And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 107), was revealed, Prophet Muhammad asked angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* ‘Do you receive any part of this grace, O brother Jibril (Gabriel)?’ Jibril (Gabriel) responded, ‘Yes, I had feared an evil fate like Satan’s, but when Allah revealed this verse to you. I felt reassured of my fate. That is the grace I have received.’

The Quran is not the only revelation from the Lord of the worlds. All the preceding Holy Books of the Abrahamic religions were bestowed by Allah, however, the difference between the Quran and previous Books is that they only represented a path and a plan for that specific messenger, then the messenger would perform miracles to prove that he was truthfully conveying his message from Allah.

The Book of Musa (Moses), for example, is the Torah and his miracles were performed with his staff, while the Book of `Isa (Jesus) is the Gospel and his miracles were curing lepers and the dumb by Allah’s Will. On the other hand, the Book of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* included his path and his miracle. So, the miracle is the path itself. Why is that? Scholars say it is because the Quran came as a path for all of humankind, for all times and all places; so it stands to reason, that is to say, the path is itself the miracle and the miracle is itself the path. Given all of this, only Allah could have created this miracle and it was sent down by the Lord of all the worlds.

Moreover, the previous Books were for a specific community at a given period of time and their meanings were divinely inspired, but not their literal words. That is why Allah gave tidings of the coming prophet on the tongue of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* 'I will cause my words to issue from his mouth,' i.e. the speech of Allah, in both meaning and word, will be uttered from the mouth of Prophet Muhammad, and inasmuch as its specific words are from Allah, it is revealed from the Lord of the worlds.

Allah *Glorified is He* says,

نَزَلَ بِهِ ٱلرُّوحُ ٱلْأَمِينُ ﴿١٩٣﴾

The Trustworthy Spirit brought it down [193]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 193)

Someone might think that the revelation took the form of inspiration or speech sent directly into a person`s mind. Thus, Allah said that it was brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit. Thus, verses were not spoken directly into the mind or the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* rather, the Trustworthy Spirit came to him and said that Allah says this and that.

The Quran was sent down exclusively through Jibril (Gabriel) acting as an intermediary. He would come to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and there were accompanying signs that he knew and felt. For example, his forehead would break out in beads of sweat, and then he would recover. These were the signs of the angel's presence and his conversation with Prophet Muhammad. This is how the divine inspiration unveiled itself, that is, not through direct revelation or casting words into the heart or mind of Prophet Muhammad.

Thus, those who accompanied him *peace and blessings be upon him* knew fully well when divine inspiration came to him. They would hear a noise above his head like the buzzing of bees. The process would weigh him down *peace and blessings be upon him* to the point that if he rested his thigh on one of the companions during the revelation, the companion felt as if it were a mountain pressing down on him. If he was on his mount when the divine revelation came to him, he became so heavy that the ride would almost collapse. This is clear in the verse wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Surely, We will make to light upon you a weighty word.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 5)

The hardship of receiving the revelation would continue to afflict him *peace and blessings be upon him* until divine inspiration left him. When it did not return for a while, Prophet Muhammad began to yearn for it, at which point Allah revealed to him the verses: ‘I swear by the early hours of the day, And the night when it covers with darkness. Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased, and surely what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before.’ (*ad-Duha*: 1-4) These verses tell that divine revelation will resume coming to you but without the hardship and without tiring you each time as you used to suffer before.

Allah says that the Quran was brought down by Jibril (Gabriel). This means that the Quran came down from above, from Allah *the Most High*, not from a mere human who might be right or wrong and who might be ignorant of what needs to be done, like the man-made laws that we see now which are amended every day and require improvement to meet the requirements of time, for new faults come to light day after day.

As the Quran was sent down from Allah *the Most High*, we must accept it with confidence and absolute trust. We should not resist it or presume anything. One might resist those who are his equals, but when one is before someone higher than him, he is obliged to be led by him, according to conviction. In the countryside, we hear people saying, ‘Religious law spills no blood when it cuts someone’s finger’. Why is that? That is because it was cut by order of one higher than you, by order of Allah, not by order of someone of your own standing.

When we contemplate a legal verse such as ‘Say, “Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you…”’ (*al-An‘am:* 151), we notice the word ‘come’ indicating a call to leave behind the lowlands of earthly law and to come up to the peaks of heavenly law. Come up, rise, do not descend to the level of the laws of humankind, otherwise you will suffer with the changing times because whoever created these laws for you was human like you, and even if they had the best intentions, they do not know the absolute truth of matters. If they prove right sometimes, more often they will be wrong and they will be forced to change and amend their laws. Thus, the most reasonable thing for you is to take your lead from Allah *the Most High* because Allah *Glorified is He* is All Knowing of what is best for you.

Thus, this verse under discussion informs us that the Quran is from Allah *the Most High*. Even iron is among the blessings of Allah sent down, as Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of it, saying, 'And We have made iron, wherein is great violence and advantages to men, and that Allah may know who helps Him and His messengers in secret.' (*al-Hadid:* 25) Allah did not mention diamonds or other precious minerals as an example. Why is that? It is because iron is one of the tools used to aid the spread of Islam and raise up the word of Allah.

Angel Jibril (Gabriel) is called a Spirit because a spirit is something alive and the angels are living, yet they are incorporeal creatures, as if they were purely spirit. However, human beings are corporeal creatures.

The word spirit is used in several ways, among them is that which gives us life; Allah says, 'And they ask you about the soul. Say, "The soul is one of the commands of my Lord."' (*al-Isra':* 85) The Quran is also called *ruh*; Allah says, 'And thus did We reveal to you an inspired book by Our command.' (*ash-Shura:* 52) So, the Quran is like a spirit and the angel that reveals it is a spirit, thus you might say, 'Why do I need a spirit then when I already have one inside me'? We say that the soul or spirit that you have is what gives life to your body and which departs from your body when you die, while the soul or spirit that comes to you through the Quran is eternal and everlasting. It is the path of Allah that gives you unending life. Thus, the soul or spirit that gives life to our bodies is present in both believers and disbelievers alike. However, the soul that you receive through the Book of Allah and His path is only for the believer, and it is eternal. Furthermore, it gives us new everlasting life after our ordinary temporary life is over. Read, if you would like, Allah's saying, 'O you who believe! Answer [the call of] Allah and His messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life.' (*al-Anfal:* 24)

Someone might ask, ‘How is that possible when we are already alive’? Yes, we are alive with the first soul of our transitory lives. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* calls us to eternal life, so it is as if Allah is indicating that the life we live now is not the true life because it will come to an end, and that there is another life which is permanent and eternal. In addition, just saying that we are alive is a bit of an overstatement. That is because those who are truly alive do not die and such eternal life comes only through the path of Allah. This is the meaning of Allah’s saying, ‘And as for the next abode, that most surely is the life, did they but know!’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) This is a hyperbolic form of referring to true life of the hereafter. As for the life of the body, what kind of life is this when man can die on the day of his birth or even if he lives to be a hundred?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* describes the spirit as being a trustworthy. He is trustworthy over the divine inspiration. Thus, the integrity of the Quran is safeguarded by Allah, by the Trustworthy Spirit that brought it down and by the Trustworthy Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to whom it was revealed. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings, We would certainly have seized him by the right hand. Then We would certainly have cut off his aorta. And not one of you could have withheld Us from him.’ (*al-Haqqa:* 44-47) In addition, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Nor of the unseen is he a tenacious concealer. Nor is it the word of the cursed, Satan’ (*at-Takwir:* 24-25).

Allah then says:

عَلَىٰ قَلۡبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُنذِرِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

To your heart [Prophet], so that you could
bring warning [194] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 194)

Was the Quran revealed to the ear of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or to his heart? The ear is the organ by which someone hears. However, Allah says that He revealed the Quran to his heart. That is because the ear is a means to reach the heart. The heart is the place of acquisition and the generator that moves the human body; it pumps the blood into our bodies' limbs and thus organs create the energy that fuels our bodily functions and movements.

That is why when a sick person takes his medicine orally, it circulates through the body along the same path as food does and is absorbed slowly. However, if you want the medicine to take effect quickly, you give him an injection in his muscles, but the fastest way is to give him an injection into his veins so the medicine mixes directly with the blood and comes into effect rapidly. So, blood is what sustains life in human beings. Therefore, the heart is the seat of contemplation and thought and the ear is of no consequence if the heart does not heed what it hears. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "Whoever is the enemy of Jibril (Gabriel), for surely he revealed it to Your Heart."' (*al-Baqara:* 97)

Thus, the meaning is that Allah brought it down upon his *peace and blessings be upon him* heart directly, as if the Message did not travel via the ears because Allah chose His messenger and created him with meticulousness for that purpose and even freed him from the normal human limitations that would impede this direct discourse. It is as if Prophet Muhammad's heart gained the faculty of perception in order to receive the words of Allah because he was created by Allah for Allah's purpose. As for those who hear the words of Allah with their ears alone, they are not well disposed to hear them, for their hearts are closed and hardened and they do not understand.

The heart is the resting place of all commandments and beliefs and all sensory perception goes to the heart. The eyes see, the ears hear, the nose smells and the hands feel, and then all of this is transmitted to the mind to sort through; then once the mind settles on an interpretation, it sends it to the heart to remain there and abide therein. That is why we call belief *`aqida* because the heart has locked onto it so it no longer resurfaces to the mind to be questioned again, instead it is rooted in the heart and become a fixed belief.

We find that there are many verses which hinge upon or dwell upon the heart. Allah says, 'It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah but your piety.' (*al-Hajj:* 37) In another verse, He explains that Allah-consciousness rests with the heart: 'all this [is ordained by Allah]: those who honour Allah's rites show the piety of their hearts.' (*al-Hajj:* 32) In addition, Allah says about bearing witness: ‘And do not conceal testimony, and whoever conceals it, his heart is surely sinful.’ (*al-Baqara:* 283) That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says in the Hadith narrated by Nu`man ibn Bashir, ‘Truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh, that, if it is sound, all the body is sound and which if it is diseased, all the body is diseased. Truly, it is the heart.’(1)

The companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* inform us that divine inspiration used to come upon him with many verses at once as many as two or three fourths of a whole chapter. Then when the angel left him *peace and blessings be upon him* he would tell them, ‘Write’. He would recite to them every verse, ordering them to put it in its place and chapter. He would recite them in prayer afterwards and they would come out exactly as he had dictated to them. That was because the Quran was revealed to his heart, not to his ears.

Out of his eagerness to memorise and preserve the Quran, he used to repeat everything Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* said after him so that he would not forget. Subsequently, Allah, sent down the verse, ‘We will make you recite so you shall not forget.’ (*al-A‘la:* 6) In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And do not make haste with the Quran before its revelation is made complete to you and say, “O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 114) Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do not move your tongue with it to make haste with it. Surely, on Us [devolves] the collecting of it and the reciting of it. Therefore, when We have recited it, follow its recitation.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 16-19)

One of the wonders of the Quran is that you cannot find someone who can speak extemporaneously for five minutes at a time and then repeat it verbatim, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to receive a chapter and then repeat it verbatim. This is in accordance with the words of Allah that He will make him recite and do not forget.

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that He could bring warning. Someone who brings warnings is he who warns of evil before it happens so that the listener can prepare and not fall to the enticements of evil. The warnings do not come when evil strikes because at that point it would be of no avail. Similarly, one who heralds good tidings precedes the coming of good in order to urge and motivate the listener to goodness.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad*

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'That you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so they are heedless.' (*Ya Sin:* 6) Likewise, just as previous messengers warned their peoples, so you too should warn yours as you join the lineage of messengers and messages.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُّبِينٍ ١٩٥

In a clear Arabic tongue [195]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 195)

If the Quran was only revealed to the Prophet's heart *peace and blessings be upon him* how would they hear it? How would they write and memorise it? Here, the Arabic tongue comes into play and sets forth the Quran to the people. Thus, the Quran was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad in the heart and, later, on the tongue because the tongue is the way to memorise, preserve and recite something. The Quran is in a clear, articulate Arabic tongue and it covers all aspects of life. However, some might ask, 'If the Quran was revealed in Arabic, what about the few non-Arabic words in it'?

We say that the meaning of an 'Arabic tongue' is the words that were pronounced by the Arabs by their tongues, for these words had become part of their Arabic language, even if they were originally from other languages. The most important thing is that the Quran did not speak in a new language unknown to the Arabs, for before the Quran was revealed, these words were widely used among the Arabs.

The Quran was revealed specifically in Arabic because it was the Arab people that received the message of Islam and carried it to other peoples. So, they had to understand the Quran as a necessity. If you wonder how non-Arabs will accept and understand it as they are addressed in this Arabic Quran as well, we respond that whoever hears the Quran from the Arabs must then convey it in the language of the people to whom the Quran is preached. As Arabs, this is our mission regarding the Book of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَإِنَّهُۥ لَفِى زُبُرِ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ١٩٦

This was foretold in the scriptures of earlier religions [196] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 196)

The demonstrative pronoun 'this' can be correctly read as referring to the Quran, as was the previous case; it can also be correctly read as referring to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was foretold in the written scriptures of earlier religions. Thus, if the minds that had opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* denied his Message and denied his miracles had first turned to the messages that preceded his instead, i.e. the Torah and the Gospel, then they would have had to believe in him because he was mentioned in those Books, as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'Most surely this is in the earlier scriptures, The scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses).' (*al-A'la:* 18-19)

The general moral and doctrinal principles, the concept of divine justice and the stories of the prophets are all constant in the different scriptures and among the different prophets. All that change is the specific legal rulings of each, for each suits the times and the circumstances in which it was revealed.

Allah says, 'He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) that keep to obedience and be not divided therein.' (*ash-Shura:* 13) On reading this verse, one might say, 'Why did Allah send down the Quran then? Why does this verse not say "that which We had enjoined upon Muhammad"'? Scholars say that is because the specific legal rulings in the Quran will be different in order to suit all the eras, places, and peoples that the Quran was sent to guide.

Thus, it is narrated that `Abdullah ibn Salam and Ibn Yamin, who were among the People of the Book, swore that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel. The Quran says of them, 'Those whom We have given the Book recognise him as they recognise their sons.' (*al-Baqara:* 146) When Ibn Salam heard this, he said, 'Our Lord is indulgent towards us in this matter as, by Allah, I do indeed know him like I know my own child, yet I know Muhammad better'.

In this regard, Allah says, 'those who follow the Messenger-Prophet, the unlettered, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel.' (*al-A'raf:* 157) In addition, Allah *the Almighty* says through the words of `Isa (Jesus) when he is addressing his people: 'And giving the good news of a messenger who will come after me, his name being Ahmad.' (*as-Saff:* 6)

Thus, the demonstrative pronoun 'this' here refers to either Muhammad or the Holy Quran as they both can be found in these Books. Both meanings are correct, because a description of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the general principles, doctrines and stories of other prophets are both present in these books.

Therefore, it was incumbent upon those who received the Quran to believe in it, especially because Prophet Muhammad was an unlettered prophet who never had a formal teacher. His biographical information in this regard is well known. He had never read or written anything prior to the revelation. The Quran puts emphasis on this point. Allah addresses His prophet saying, 'And you did not recite before it any book, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand, for then could those who say untrue things have doubted.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48) He also says elsewhere, 'And you were not dwelling among the people of Midyan, reciting to them Our communications, but We were the senders.' (*al-Qasas:* 45) In addition, Allah says, 'And you were not on the western side when We revealed to Musa (Moses) the commandment, and you were not among the witnesses.' (*al-Qasas:* 44) Moreover, Allah says, 'And you were not with them when they cast their pens [to decide] which of them should have Mary (Maryam) in his charge.' (*Al-'Imran:* 44)

All these verses, among many others, prove that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had no knowledge of these things other than what has been revealed directly to him in the Quran. So, it was incumbent upon people to believe in the Quran as soon as they heard it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says,

أَوَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُمْ ءَايَةً أَن يَعْلَمَهُۥ عُلَمَـٰٓؤُا۟ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ﴿١٩٧﴾

Is it not proof enough for them that the learned men
of the children of Israel have recognized it? [197]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu`ara’:* 197)

Allah says that the learned men of the children of Israel have recognised that the Quran is from Allah. The learned scholars from among the children of Israel hoped to use the Quran to gain the upper hand over those who disbelieved. However, when it came, they disbelieved in what they already recognised. They used to say to the Aws and Khazraj tribes in Medina, that a time shall come when a prophet shall appear whom they would follow and with him defeat the idolaters, just as `Ad and Iram were defeated. Nevertheless, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came, they denied him and gave him the lie, even though they knew he was a true prophet. Why is this?

Scholars say that is because they realised that he would wrest leadership from them as they were people of great knowledge, scholarship, vision, and martial prowess. In addition, they were preparing to crown `Abdullah ibn Ubiyya as their king the night that Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina. When he *peace and blessings be upon him* came, he ruined their plans. Thus, they envied him his higher status, for he had taken the power of secular rule from them.

Allah mentions the learned men from among the children of Israel because they had already known the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and because He revealed things that only they had known. Among these learned men are five: `Abdullah ibn Salam, Asad, Usayd, Tha`laba and Ibn Yamin.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says,

وَلَوْ نَزَّلْنَـٰهُ عَلَىٰ بَعْضِ ٱلْأَعْجَمِينَ ﴿١٩٨﴾ فَقَرَأَهُۥ عَلَيْهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٩٩﴾

If We had sent it down to someone who was not an Arab [198]
and he had recited it to them, they still would not have
believed in it [199] (The Quran, *ash-Shu`ara’:* 198 - 199)

Allah says that He has sent down the Quran in Arabic to an Arab community and if He had sent it down to non-Arabs, they would not have understood it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: ‘and if We had made it a Quran in a foreign tongue, they would certainly have said, “Why have not its communications been made clear? What! a foreign [tongue] and an Arabian!” Say, “It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing; and [as for] those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears and it is obscure to them; these shall be called to from a far-off place.”” (*Fussilat:* 44)

Why is that? It is because the receiver is jammed. If you want to receive any new information, you must first eject from your heart any information to the contrary. Subsequently, you can consider the two possibilities together and accept whichever aligns with the truth. Thus, Allah says, ‘Allah has not made for any man two hearts within him.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 4)

Describing them when they hear the Quran, Allah says, ‘And whenever a chapter is revealed, they cast glances at one another: Does anyone see you? Then they turn away: Allah has turned away their hearts because they are a people who do not understand.’ (*at-Tawba:* 127) This means that they want to sneak out and leave. In addition, Allah says in another verse: ‘and whenever a chapter is revealed, there are some of them who say “Which of you has it strengthened in faith?”’ (*at-Tawba:* 124) They wonder whether this chapter benefited any of them or increased their faith.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and there are those of them who seek to listen to you, until when they go forth from you, they say to those who have been given the knowledge: “What was it that he said just now?” These are they upon whose hearts Allah has set a seal and they follow their low desires.’ (*Muhammad:* 16) They mean to ask, ‘what is new about this message’? On the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* says about those who believed: ‘And [as for] those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding [against evil].’ (*Muhammad:* 17)

Someone who is not a native speaker of Arabic cannot speak Arabic well even if He was able to pronounce it. Thus, the meaning of the verse is that if Allah had sent down the Quran, which is in Arabic, to some who is non-Arab, they would not have understood it. However, there is a possibility of it being bestowed on some non-Arabs who have studied and mastered Arabic and would be able to understand the Quran. Allah proclaims that if Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had recited it to those non-Arabs, they would not have believed in it since they would not have understood any of it. Similarly, the disbelievers are like those non-Arabs in the way that they received the word of Allah and did not understand any of it. That is because they clung to obstinate disbelief and their hearts were gladdened by it until they became enamoured with disbelief and thereby Allah aided them in their disbelief and sealed hearts, so that faith could not enter their hearts and disbelief could not depart them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كَذَٰلِكَ سَلَكۡنَٰهُ فِي قُلُوبِ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِهِۦ حَتَّىٰ
يَرَوُاْ ٱلۡعَذَابَ ٱلۡأَلِيمَ ﴿٢٠١﴾ فَيَأۡتِيَهُم بَغۡتَةٗ وَهُمۡ لَا يَشۡعُرُونَ ﴿٢٠٢﴾

So We make it pass straight through the hearts of the guilty [200] They will not believe in it until they see the grievous torment [201] Which will suddenly hit them when they are not expecting it [202] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 200 - 202)

Allah says that He has inserted disbelief into the heart of those sinners because they were non-Arabs who could not understand anything. Thus, they will not believe in it until they behold the grievous punishment. Inasmuch as they will not believe in it until they witness a grievous punishment, their belief was not accepted. In addition, that punishment will strike them suddenly and abruptly, so fast that they are senseless to it.

Thus, when the Quran was revealed and some of the Companions believed Prophet Muhammad, they and him were oppressed and harried until they were no longer safe from the tyranny of the disbelievers; they began to go about armed, night and day, and there was no one who would protect them.

It was under these circumstances that Allah revealed the verse: ‘Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn [their] backs.’ (*al-Qamar:* 45) When `Umar *Allah be pleased with him*, heard this, he was taken aback and said, ‘What hosts are these who shall be defeated when the Muslims are in such a poor state’? However, when he saw what happened at the Battle of Badr (the defeat of the idolaters and the victory of the religion of Allah) he said, ‘Indeed, Allah speaks truth, the hosts will be routed and they will turn their backs in flight.’

Allah says:

فَيَقُولُواْ هَلۡ نَحۡنُ مُنظَرُونَ (٢٠٣) أَفَبِعَذَابِنَا يَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَ (٢٠٤)

And then they will say, ‘Can we have more time?’ [203]
How can they ask that Our punishment be brought to them
sooner? [204] (The Quran, *ash-Shu‘ara’:* 203-204)

When they see the grievous torment, they say ask for a break, and hope Allah will delay this chastisement from them. Were they not impatient to see the torment?! This is the nature of obstinate disbelievers; if Allah leaves them, they demand that torment befall them, and if torment befalls them, they say, ‘give us a break and grant us respite’!

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

أَفَرَءَيۡتَ إِن مَّتَّعۡنَٰهُمۡ سِنِينَ (٢٠٥) ثُمَّ جَآءَهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يُوعَدُونَ (٢٠٦)
مَآ أَغۡنَىٰ عَنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يُمَتَّعُونَ (٢٠٧)

Think, if we let them enjoy this life for some years [205]
And then the promised torment came upon them [206]
What good would their past enjoyment be to them? [207]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu‘ara’:* 205-207)

Allah wants us to think and tell him what if He does allow them to enjoy for some years and thereupon the chastisement which they were promised befalls them. Will not the end be the same? The end is no good since it would not avail them of the torment.

Allah says:

وَمَآ أَهۡلَكۡنَا مِن قَرۡيَةٍ إِلَّا لَهَا مُنذِرُونَ (٢٠٨) ذِكۡرَىٰ وَمَا كُنَّا ظَٰلِمِينَ (٢٠٩)

Never have We destroyed a town without sending down
messengers to warn it [208] as a reminder from Us: We are
never unjust [209] (The Quran, *ash-Shu‘ara’:* 208-209)

Similarly, in another verse Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘This is because your Lord would not destroy towns unjustly while their people were negligent’ (*al-An'am:* 131) Allah destroys them because a messenger came to call them to the divine way of guidance and to warn them, as Allah also says, 'Nor do We chastise until We raise a messenger.' (*al-Isra':* 15)

This all serves as reminder to the communities of the severe punishment that will afflict them in case they oppose their messengers. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* says that He is never unjust. It is you who did this to yourselves, as He says, 'And We did them no injustice, but they were unjust to themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 118)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says,

وَمَا تَنَزَّلَتْ بِهِ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينُ ﴿٢١٠﴾ وَمَا يَنۢبَغِي لَهُمْ وَمَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ﴿٢١١﴾

It was not the jinn who brought down this Quran [210]
it is neither in their interests nor in their power [211]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 210 - 211)

The disbelievers used to say that satanic spirits imparted the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. That was something they used to say of any skilled poet when they heard his poetry. So, every poet had an evil spirit who dictated poetry to him. They had a valley called 'The Valley of Abqar which was the valley of jinn. Thus, they thought that any smart person shall have a connection to the demons of this valley.

However, how is this possible when the Book revealed to Prophet Muhammad, opposes satanic spirits, curses them at every turn, and warns against them? Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Satan threatens you with poverty and enjoins you to be wretched.' (*al-Baqara:* 268) and 'Surely Satan is your enemy, so take him for an enemy, He only invites his party that they may be inmates of the burning' (*Fatir:* 6). Why, then, would satanic spirits help Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and dictate the Quran to him when he is their enemy? Why do the satanic spirits not give the Quran to the disbelievers when they are dearly beloved by them? This is one objection.

Allah mentions another one saying that the Quran does not suit their ends and is not in their power capacity. Truly Allah made the Quran both a miracle and a path. Miracles are beyond the power of both men and demons so that none could corrupt it if they tried. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Surely, We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9) The believers were required to preserve the previous holy books. There is a difference between Allah guarding something from corruption and commanding someone to guard something from corruption. That is because a command can be obeyed or disobeyed. Allah knows how human powers failed to preserve the previous books, thus, He has taken it upon Himself to preserve His Quran Himself and not defer it to any of His creatures.

That is why you find many wonders and paradoxes when it comes to the memorization and preservation of the Quran. Despite the passage of time and the oppression of civilizations antithetical to Islam, which rain upon us each day some new deviance or departure from the teachings of Islam. Some of us fall in line behind them and all of this impairs the application of Islamic values. However, despite it all, the Quran is relied upon even more and memorized even more. Even non-Muslims vie to memorize and record the Quran or reprint the Quran. We have witnessed a copy of the Quran that fit on a single page and a copy no bigger than a knuckle. In addition, some people nowadays pride themselves on owning the smallest copy of the Quran in the world. Regardless of their motives for doing this, the point is that Allah has made even the enemies of the Quran aid in its preservation. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And none knows the hosts of your Lord but He Himself; and this is a reminder to the mortals.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31)

Are not audio recording devices and speakerphones among the technologies used to spread and preserve the Quran? None of the previous books have received this kind of painstaking attention. Thus, the attention given to the Quran as a text is all out of proportion to the people's increasing deviation from its laws. It is as if Allah is saying to us that He will preserve this text even through non-believers and that He will make them record it and take interest in it and this will become an argument used against them.

In Germany before the World War, there was a vault with drawers and in each drawer, was a verse of the Quran and everything ever written about this verse from the explanation of Ibn `Abbas' up to the present. This suggests that they were acting under the influence of a hidden power that Allah alone controls. Allah says, ‘Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9)

We have previously mentioned how some women walk through the streets with their chests showing and despite that they hang a copy of the Quran around their necks and onto their chests. Oh, if only they would cover their chest and not hang the Quran on it!

Therefore, how can they say that satanic spirits brought down the Quran when the Quran came to announce its enmity to them and to warn against them? How can they say this when satanic spirits only descend upon the most sinful and wicked disbeliever and you are the first upon whom they descend as Allah says, ‘And most surely the devils suggest to their friends that they should contend with you’ (*al-An‘am:* 121)?

Allah said that the jinn cannot bring down the Quran because it is beyond their ability; Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّهُمْ عَنِ ٱلسَّمْعِ لَمَعْزُولُونَ ﴿٢١٢﴾

Indeed they are prevented from overhearing it [212]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 212)

Allah *Glorified is He* has explains the meaning of this when He says, ‘And that we sought to reach heaven, but we found it filled with strong guards and flaming stars. And that we used to sit in some of the sitting-places thereof to steal a hearing, but he who would [try to] listen now would find a flame lying in wait for him.’ (*al-Jinn:* 8-9)

Allah says:

فَلَا تَدْعُ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٢١٣﴾

So [Prophet] do not invoke any gods beside God, or you will
incur punishment [213] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 213)

Allah is warning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against invoking any other deity other than Allah. Was the Prophet susceptible or suspect of invoking any deity beside Allah? The scholars say no, he was not, but the intention of this verse is to give a directive and a command. As if Allah were saying to him, ‘Make this a principle of yours. Take no god other than Allah’. This is not because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had invoked some other deity and thereby the divine inspiration came to prohibit that. However, it is setting and articulating an Islamic law and commands. If the great message-bearer Muhammad received such a stern threat if he ever took another deity, what do you think would be the case for the rest of us?

Whenever people hear these words directed toward the prophet who was sent to them, they must heed the words carefully and take warning from it. It is like when the president of a country gives an order to the prime minister of that country, for example, and the highest example is with Allah, and warns him of the consequences of violating his command, doubtless the regular citizens of that country will be even more obedient than the prime minister in following this command.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَنذِرۡ عَشِيرَتَكَ ٱلۡأَقۡرَبِينَ ٢١٤

Warn your nearest kinsfolk [214]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 214)

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took the command to believe to his family and kinsfolk. This specific sequence is meant to reassure his people that He is not exempt from that which he bids them to do. He required himself to adhere to it faithfully first and after that his kinsfolk. This behaviour commands obedience and acceptance. You would probably reject my orders if I do not follow them myself, unlike when I command and act upon my own orders before you do.

Similarly, `Umar *Allah be pleased with him*, was standing at the pulpit giving the Friday sermon and said, ‘O people, hear and obey.’ A Bedouin stood up and said, ‘You have no right to ask us to obey or listen.’ Look at this. To whom such audacity is directed? To `Umar when he is standing at the pulpit. `Umar said, ‘Why is that?’ The Bedouin said, ‘Because your robe is longer than our robes.’ At that time cloth was distributed equally among Muslims irrespective of how tall or short they were. `Umar called his son `Abdullah to stand and clarify it to the people. So, `Abdullah stood up and said, 'My father is a very tall man and the cloth that Muslims receive is not enough for him, so I gave him mine and he grafted it to his robe. Thus, I stand before you in my patches and rags.' At this, the Bedouin said, 'now we will listen and obey.'

But where is the exemplary behaviour in the halls of our government agencies now? Where are the heads of government who ought to come and sit at their desks at eight o'clock in the morning to be model examples for their subordinates? The lack of exemplary behaviour among our leaders and officials is the worst of our afflictions. That is why Allah's command and His law are first directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then to those closest to him, i.e. his kinsfolk because corruption starts in one's innermost circle. So, the president or the governor might be a good person, but his close retinues might spread corruption by abusing his name for their deviant purposes, or even misleading him with giving him fake information.

Thus, whenever companion `Umar *Allah be pleased with him*,(1) had to decide something that would be hard on the Muslim community, he would gather his family and relatives to him and say, 'Allah has willed that I decide such and such. If any among you disobeys me in this matter, I will make him an example for all Muslims.' In this way, he made certain of his family and relatives, first, a matter that helps him firmly carry out the divine command.

Consider the saying of Allah, 'Warn your nearest kinsfolk' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 214); it is an act of warning, as we mentioned before, that warns people of evil before it happens. Allah *the Almighty* did not say, 'Preach to thy kinsfolk', for example. So, it is as if He *the Almighty* were saying to him, 'Do not be swept up in leniency or compassion for your kinsfolk, rather begin with them what you will do with others'.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made a model of this directive. He would say to his relatives, 'O `Abbas (uncle of the Messenger of Allah), O Safiya (aunt of the Messenger of Allah) O Fatima (daughter of Muhammad), act upon Allah's Commands, for I do not relieve you from anything of Allah's. You cannot come to me with your family bonds when other people come to me with their actions.'(1)

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(1) *The story of `Umar Allah be pleased with him with his people whenever he wished to approve something.*

At the same time Allah *the Almighty* calls upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to warn his kinsfolk, He also says:

وَٱخۡفِضۡ جَنَاحَكَ لِمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ (٢١٥)

And lower your wing tenderly over the believers who follow you [215] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 215)

After commanding him to be stern with his kinsfolk, Allah *the Almighty* orders him to be tender and to lower his *jinh* (wing) to those who believe in him. Spreading one's wing is an expression of kindness and gentleness in one's treatment of others. The saying is taken from birds when they compassionately enclose their chicks in their wings.

Spreading one's wing is a sign of tenderness, not obsequiousness, or defeat. On the other hand, Egyptians say someone is *farid ajnihatuhu* (he has overspread his wings) meaning that he is acting proud and haughty. Egyptians say someone is *mujannah* from you if he has disobeyed your orders, i.e. he has winged away from you. In another place, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…spread the wings of thy tenderness over the believers.' (*al-Hijr:* 88) Concerning one's own parents, Allah *the Almighty* says one ought to '…spread over them humbly the wings of thy tenderness…' (*al-Isra':* 24). He *the Almighty* does not say, 'Be obsequious towards them', rather 'be compassionate with them, tender towards them', because by doing this, you will find honour and salvation for yourself.

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said, 'When Allah revealed 'Warn your nearest kinsfolk' (ash-Shu'ara': 214), the Messenger peace and blessings be upon him stood up and said, 'O Qurayshi kinsfolk—or some phrase like that—purchase your own redemption, I do not exempt you from anything of Allah's. O tribe of `Abdu Manaf, I do not exempt you from anything of Allah's. O `Abbas ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib, I do not exempt you from anything of Allah's. O Safiya, (aunt of the Messenger of Allah) I do not exempt you from anything of Allah's. O Fatima (daughter of Muhammad) steal however much you want from my earthly possessions, but I* do not *exempt you from anything of Allah's.' Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [2753] and by Muslim in his Sahih [206].*

Allah says:

فَإِنْ عَصَوْكَ فَقُلْ إِنِّي بَرِيٓءٌ مِّمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢١٦﴾

If they disobey you, say, ‘I bear no responsibility for your actions’ [216] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 216)

If your relatives, O Prophet Muhammad, disobey you, do not hesitate to tell them plainly, ‘I bear no responsibility for your actions’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 216), at which point they no longer have a right to tenderness from you, nor the rights of relatives because you cease to have obligations to them. Thus Allah *the Almighty* says ‘say’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 216), this, rather than simply ‘wash your hands of them’.

He might simply cut off all ties to them, but the True Lord wants Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to announce this so that everyone will know that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by Allah. Our Lord is teaching us a lesson here so that we do not give preferential treatment to anyone simply because he is our relative or because he is someone of high social standing. It is in this way that life will run smoothly.

Hypocrisy is the main reason behind the corruption of our social life and the spread of chaos and indifference among us; in actuality, this occurs when we indulge our leaders and authorities and overlook their transgressions. People treat them with forbearance and forgiveness, even though this destroys our society’s morale and induces chaos and carelessness.

That is why Islam teaches us to announce plainly, ‘I bear no responsibility for your actions’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 216), and then to let the law run its course and bring equitable justice to all. If the transgressor knows he will be made into an admonition for others, he will be deterred from transgressing.

Thus, it is said that `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* ruled the entire world, but the truth is he ruled himself first, a matter which enabled him to rule the world. Anyone who wants to rule the world at any time and any place must first rule himself. Then none of his followers will dare to cross him. When the people see what an example he is, they will listen to him and obey.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَتَوَكَّلۡ عَلَى ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ٢١٧

Put your trust in the Almighty, the Merciful [217]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 217)

You might say, 'If you did this, my allies will fall away and my close followers will break apart around me'. Allah says to you, 'You must not think that they will do you some good or save you from some harm, for everything in the universe is done by the command of Allah *the Almighty*. So, what is good for you is to obey Allah *the Almighty* and place your trust in Him. 'Put your trust in the Almighty, the Merciful' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 217). The Almighty is He who subdues and cannot be subdued, He who conquers and cannot be conquered. Despite that, He is also a Dispenser of Mercy to you and to them. The attribute of Grace and Compassion here negates what some might think here, namely; that being Almighty necessitates tyranny or oppression. Allah *the Almighty* being God, is a Merciful Dispenser of Mercy because targeting the tyrant with His Power is a grace and mercy for the tyrant's victims.

It is as if the True Lord is teaching His vicegerent on Earth, especially those at the top of the chain of command how to be erudite and wise. He is saying, 'Do not put your trust in a human being to do something you are incapable of yourself, since he too will be incapable of doing it. Rather, under such conditions, put your trust in the Almighty, the Dispenser of Mercy Whose Might and Mercy are yours'.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

ٱلَّذِي يَرَىٰكَ حِينَ تَقُومُ ٢١٨ وَتَقَلُّبَكَ فِي ٱلسَّٰجِدِينَ ٢١٩

Who sees you when you stand up [for prayer] [218]
And sees your movements among the worshippers [219]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 218 - 219)

So long as this is the case, place your trust in Him *the Almighty* Who loves you and enables you to work and worship, getting up to offer pray to Him *the Almighty* at night when people are asleep; He *the Almighty* says, 'Who sees you when you stand up [for prayer].' (*ash-Shu'ara': 218*) From this, we understand that it is acceptable and allowed for one to stand and pray at night.

Allah's saying, 'And sees your movements among the worshippers' means that He sees your state of mind as you stand and pray. He sees the joy you feel for Him and your responsiveness to His call *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest). The word *akbar* literally means the greatest, the most important. He sees you when you stand before Him with an open heart and eagerly approach Him with enthusiastic worship, not in a state of languor or sluggishness.

If you devote yourself to Allah *the Almighty* He will give you plentiful rewards to recompense you for the profits and commerce of this world. Thus, the part of the call to prayer that pleased Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the most was *Allah Akbar*, i.e. Allah is the Greatest, greater than anything else. If you are asleep, Allah is greater than sleep; if you are engaged in business, Allah is greater than anything you might gain from your business. If you are working, Allah greater than your work, etc.

It is astonishing to see people give priority to work over prayer on the pretext that there is plenty of time and one can pray after work. This is a flimsy argument because when your Lord summons you saying, '*Allah Akbar*', He wants you to respond immediately, not whenever you please. Otherwise, how could we say, 'you responded to Allah's call' if you put if off when the *adhan* (call to prayer) was made? The large amount of time between morning and noon, or between evening and morning does not mean that you can pray at any point of time; rather; the call to prayer requires an expedient response.

We have an observation to make about *Allahu Akbar*. The word *akbar* is in the superlative, meaning the most: the greatest, the most important. If we did not use the superlative, we would say 'something is *kabir* (great or important)'. This would suggest that work and industry are not necessarily trivial things, but rather, they are important things meriting our attention because they are at the heart of life and our affairs on earth would not function correctly without them.

But while work is important, Allah *the Almighty* is more important, He is the most important. Your Lord does not induce you to abstain from work or from the world because He created the world as it is. He *the Almighty* says, 'And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on Earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah's bounty…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

Elsewhere, He *Glorified is He* says, '…do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters' (*al-Qasas:* 77) because the activities of this life aid you in carrying out your prayer and worship of Allah *the Almighty*. Through them, you are nourished, remain healthy, buy clothes to cover yourself properly in order to pray. Anything that is required to carry out an obligation is also obligatory. Despite that, Allah's call to you is foremost and should be answered first because He who created you and created the world has summoned you with the words *Allahu Akbar*.

The saying of Allah, 'your movements' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 219) means 'your moving around' or 'your changing states'. This word denotes the positions of prayer: standing, bowing, sitting, and prostration. Your Lord sees you in all these states and sees your happiness. When you put your trust in Him, you are worthy of His blessings and thus deserve His Mercy.

Taqalubbaka (your movements) (*ash-Shu'ara':* 219) could also mean that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to see his companions when they prayed behind him, he could see as if what was behind him was right in front of him. This was one of his unique traits.(1)

Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to caution them against bowing or prostrating themselves in prayer before him when he was leading prayer. In addition, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to tell them what was incorrect to do intentionally in prayer, even though he could not see them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra who said, 'One day Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him prayed, then turned to the side and said, 'O so-and-so, have you not perfected your prayer? Should not one be mindful of his prayer when he is praying? Otherwise he prays by himself. By Allah, truly I see what is behind me as if it were in my hands.' Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [422] and by An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan [2/119]*

إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٢٢٠﴾

He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing [220]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 220)

He is All Hearing of what is spoken and All Knowing of what passes through our minds.

Allah then says:

هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكُمْ عَلَىٰ مَن تَنَزَّلُ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينُ ﴿٢٢١﴾ تَنَزَّلُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ أَفَّاكٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿٢٢٢﴾

Shall I tell you who the jinn come down to? [221]
They come down to every lying sinner [222]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 221-222)

The deniers of the Truth had previously said that the Quran was revealed by evil spirits, so Allah *the Almighty* responds to them by saying, 'I shall tell you whom the evil spirits descend upon and correct this false information for you. It is true that evil spirits descend, but not upon Muhammad, for he is their enemy and they descend upon their allies'.

Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and, verily, the evil spirits whisper unto those who have made them their own that they should involve you in argument.…' (*al-An'am:* 121)

Then Allah says, 'They come down to every lying sinner' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 222), so this is what suits and pleases evil spirits. Jinn are of two kinds: the godly and the ungodly (1), the latter are those known as 'evil spirits' or 'demons'.

The word *affak* translated as 'lying sinner' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 222) means habitual liar. It is a hyperbolic form of *afak* which means to invert or pervert the truth. These people used to subvert the facts. They would say something that might coincide with the truth, and then mix it with many lies.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *Allah the Almighty says that the Jinn say, 'just as [we do not know how it happens] that some from among us are righteous, while some of us are [far] below that: we have always followed widely divergent paths.' (al-Jinn: 11)*

يُلْقُونَ ٱلسَّمْعَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ كَٰذِبُونَ ﴿٢٢٣﴾

Who readily lends an ear to them,
and most of them are liars[223]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 223)

The saying of Allah ‘*yulquna as-sama`*’ literally means to throw one's hearing. A person's means of hearing is his or her ear, thus the meaning is to lend an ear to something, as in Allah's saying, ‘in this, behold, there is indeed a reminder for everyone whose heart is wide-awake – that is, [everyone who] lends ear with a conscious mind.’ (*Qaf:* 37)

To lend an ear to someone is to listen attentively to someone even if he speaks with a faint voice, so you lean towards the person to hear him. Allah *the Almighty* says ‘…and most of them are liars’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 223). Some of them, a handful of them, might speak truthfully to cover up their lying, so you take his truthfulness this time as evidence that he is a truthful person when in fact his truthfulness is mixed with many lies.

Allah then says:

وَٱلشُّعَرَآءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ ٱلْغَاوُۥنَ ﴿٢٢٤﴾

Only those who are lost in error follow the poets [224]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 224)

Ash-shu`ara* (poets) is the plural of *sha`ir (poet), Poetry is defined as metered, rhyming words. The disbelievers had accused Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a poet. The Quran responds to them in several places, among them is Allah's saying, ‘and is not – however little you may [be prepared to] believe it – the word of a poet.’ (*al-Haqqa:* 41)

The disbelieving Arabs of Mecca were people of great eloquence, skill, and experience in rhymed, metered speech, to the extent that they would dedicate fairs to poetry in Dhi Al-Majaz, Dhi Al-Majanna and the `Ukazh markets. They would hang the finest works of poetry on the covers of the *Ka`ba*. Yet despite that, they were unable to distinguish between poetry and the stylistics of the Quran.

They must have known the difference, so as the Quran says their accusation that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a poet, must have meant instead that '… [He is but] a poet – let us await what time will do unto him?' (*at-Tur:* 30). So, by poetry, they mean honeyed speech that captures the heart and moves people emotionally, even if it is in prose form. This is what people now call free-verse poetry because they recite or write poetry, but it is unmetered and does not rhyme.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Only those who are lost in error follow the poets' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 224), it refers to *ghawi* which refers to those people who have gone astray. It is they who follow the poets because the poets used to justify their way of life through their poetry. Neither principle nor morality governed their thinking, rather, their capricious desires ruled over these two, i.e. principle and morality. So, if they loved something, the poets would praise it, if they hated something, the poets would disparage it.

This is evident in Allah's saying:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي كُلِّ وَادٍ يَهِيمُونَ ﴿٢٢٥﴾ وَأَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ مَا لَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢٢٦﴾

Do you not see how they rove aimlessly in every valley; [225]
how they say what they do not do? [226]
(The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara':* 225 - 226)

The pronoun 'they' here refers to the poets. A valley is a low place between two mountains where people would walk, where trees and gardens grew and where water was to be found.

The Arabs say that a person *hama `ala wajhihi* to mean that he walked aimlessly or without guidance. So, the meaning of the saying of Allah, 'they rove aimlessly in every valley' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 225) is that this was the condition of poets because they were men of words and imagination. One of them would praise you if he sought some boon from you; if you did not give it to him, he would mete out ridicule upon you. He practiced his art to obtain things from you, so he does not have a specific valley in which to walk through and has no code of principles to steer him, like one who wanders aimlessly through all the valleys.

Al-Mutanabbi(1) was one of the greatest poets of the Abbasid period and is cited as an example of wisdom and eloquence. Among the most famous of his poems is the verse:

The horse, the night and the wilderness know me
As do the sword and the spear, the paper and the pen.

When he was on one of his journeys, highway robbers fell upon him, but when he wanted to flee, his servant said to him, 'Are you not the one who said, 'The horse, the night and the wilderness know me/As do the sword and the spear, the paper and the pen'? At this, Al-Mutanabbi(2) felt too ashamed to flee, so he stood firm before them and they killed him.(3) Before he died, Al-Mutanabbi said, 'He would not have killed me if not for that servant of mine.' This line of poetry is famous for being the only verse to kill its author.

When(4) Al-Mutanabbi came to Egypt, he praised its ruler, Kafur al-Ikhshidi(5) hoping to win his favour. Kafur was black, so they used to call him by the name of Abu Misk, or literally, Father of Musk. When Al-Mutanabbi praised him, seeking his goodwill, he said:

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(1) Ahmad ibn al-Husayn Al-Kindi, Abu At-Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi. Born in the year 203 *Hijri* in Kufa in a neighborhood called Kinda; he was raised in the Levant and then left for the desert to learn the skills of the Arabic language and its arts. In the desert of Samawa, between the Levant and Kufa, he claimed prophet hood, but then repented and reneged on his claim. He praised Sayf Ad-Dawla ibn Hamdan and Kafur, then later satirised and mocked him when he did not appoint him to a position. See Az-Zirikli, *Al-`Alam,* 1/115.

(2) The story of the killing of Al-Mutanabbi for one of his poetic verses.

(3) Al-Mutanabbi, his son and his boy servant were all killed in Nu`maniya in the year 253 A.H. when they were accosted on the road by Fatik ibn Abu Jahl Al-Asdi with a band of his companions.
Al-Mutanabbi was travelling with a group of people as well, so the two parties engaged in combat. Al-Mutanabbi was slain near Dayr Al-`Aqul, which is on the western edge of the center of Baghdad. Fatik was the uncle of Nasba ibn Yazid Al-Asda Al-`Ayni who was the object of ridicule in Al-Mutanabbi's poem.

(4) The story of Al-Mutanabbi with Kafur Al-Ikhshidi in Egypt.

(5) Kafur ibn `Abdullah Al-Ikhshidi, Abu Al-Misk, a famous prince, was born in the year 292 A.H. and was an Abyssinian slave purchased by Al-Ikhshi. He later became the ruler of Egypt in 312 A.H. Al-Ikhshidi freed him, and Kafur rose to prominence in his ranks, until eventually he became the ruler of Egypt in 355 A.H. He died in Cairo in 257 A.H. at the age of 65. See Az-Zirikli, *Al-`Alam,* 5/216.

Father of everything good, not just father of musk

And in another poem, he said:

O Kafur, Allah, has decreed that you be the first among men
And He does not see fit to decree for you a second.

When Kafur did not grant him his request, and the relations soured between them, Al-Mutanabbi said in ridicule,

Even if the heart hides some secret and I am not
Pleased neither with myself nor with you, I will show you am I pleased
out of falseness, treachery, cowardice and malice.
Did you seem a person to me, or a source of shame?
Your sandaled feet delighted me, indeed
I saw you in sandals even if you were barefoot.
Your kind came from faraway countries
To entertain weeping, mournful ladies
And if not for the people's preferences
I would have praised you with the mockery in my soul

The poet may be stingy but he praises generosity and the generous, raising them up as high as the clouds:

When you visit someone, look closely at the light of his fire
You will find that an excellent fire comes from an excellent hearth.

The poet Hati`a, despite his clear stinginess, praised someone who was so generous that he was worried he would have to slaughter his own child to feed his guest because he had nothing else to slaughter. Hati`a provided a poetic rendering of generosity in this poem, or poetic story, which is considered one of the classics of Arabic literature. Despite that, Hati`a did not take a lesson from his own poetry and instead remained obstinately stingy and miserly.

In describing a generous person, he says,

Famished, belt tightened, for three nights the only food to eat discarded
In the sands of a desert without any trace of human habitation
A coarse man stranger to civil company
Who in his rude simplicity he makes a blessing of wretched solitude
On a narrow mountain path he left his barren wife and
three sons thin as ghosts or cattle with shrunken skins
Barefoot and hardly clothed, they have never eaten
Fresh bread or known the taste of wheat.
He saw a terrifying apparition in the midst of shadows
But when he realized it was a guest, he opened his arms and lavished him with attention
And when his son, in confused disbelief, saw the guest he said
O father, slaughter me so you can be sure to feed him
And do not make an excuse of our poverty to he who has come
For he will think we are rich and heap curses on our stinginess.
But while they were talking there appear in the distance a herd
Of wild donkeys in an ordered procession behind their leader
They came seeking water, and the man snuck towards them
Even though for their blood he was far thirstier than them.
He waited to let them slack their thirst
Then aimed at them an arrow from his quiver
And a female fell, a well-rounded body
Abounding with meat and fat
Oh how he rejoiced as he dragged her toward his family,
And Oh how happy were they when they saw her bleeding wound.

They passed the night joyful that they had acquitted a host's duties to his guest
Without losing anything, but rather gaining more than before
And the father, out of sheer happiness, felt like a father
To their guest, and the mother, out of her happiness, like a mother to him

Allah *the Almighty* speaks the truth when He says, 'Do you not see how they rove aimlessly in every valley; how they say what they do not do?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 225-226), they describe generosity when they are misers; they describe courage while they themselves are cowards, etc. Once(1) two poets gathered with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Az-Zabriqan ibn Badr and Qays ibn `Asim as well as `Umar ibn Al-Ahtam. One of them said a few words in praise of someone who was present, calling him lord of the tribe. But the praised one became angered for he thought that this was less than he deserved, whereupon he said, 'By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, he knows more of me than he says' meaning that he did not accord me all due credit. So, the poet said, 'Why, by Allah, he said what he has said, he is a stingy giver, with a fool for a father and scoundrel for an uncle.' Praise Allah! At the beginning of the session he was lord of his tribe, and now he is a stingy giver with a fool for a father and a scoundrel for an uncle!

Then the poet said, 'By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, I did not lie in the first statement and I told the truth in the second, but at first I was pleased so I described something as better than what I knew. Then I became angry so I described something as worse than what I knew.' At this point Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Truly there is beguilement in plainness.'(2)

Next the True Lord makes an exception to those poets who are lost in grievous error, saying:

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(1) *The story of the poets who gathered around the prophet peace and blessings be upon him one of them praising Az-Zabriqan ibn Badr in the beginning of the meeting and cursing him towards the end, and the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him objecting to this behavior.*

(2) *Al-Bayhaqi cites this Hadith in the context of this story in Dala`il An-Nubuwwa [5/216] with two chains of narrators. The first breaks off at Muhammad ibn Az-Zubayr al-Hanzhali, whilst the second goes back to a Hadith by Ibn `Abbas.*

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَذَكَرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَٱنتَصَرُوا۟
مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا ظُلِمُوا۟ ۗ وَسَيَعْلَمُ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓا۟ أَىَّ مُنقَلَبٍ يَنقَلِبُونَ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

Not so those [poets] who believe, do good deeds, remember God often, and defend themselves after they have been wronged. The evildoers will find out what they will return to [227] (The Quran, *ash-Shu'ara’:* 227)

Some of the poets were idolaters like `Abdullah ibn Az-Zaba`ri and Musafih Al-Jamhi who ridiculed and criticised Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The grievous, straying wrongdoers gathered around such poets who urged and encouraged them to ridicule Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* revealed the following verse about such people: ‘Only those who are lost in error follow the poets.”(*ash-Shu'ara’:* 224) At this point, the Muslim poets including `Abdullah ibn Rawaha, Ka`b ibn Zuhayr, Ka`b ibn Malik and Hassan ibn Thabit rushed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘Are we among those who are lost in grievous error, O Messenger of Allah?’ So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* recited this verse to them: ‘Not so those [poets] who believe, do good deeds…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 227).

The True Lord makes an exception of the poets who have these four traits in abundance: ‘Not so those [poets] who believe, do good deeds, remember Allah often and defend themselves after they have been wronged…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 227). It means that they remember and mention Allah *the Almighty* in their poems to call people’s attention to the obligations of their religion and the admonitions of faith. Then they came to aid Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against those who attacked him.

These three poets aided the victory of Islam and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Every time the disbelievers ridiculed him *peace and blessings be upon him* they rebutted them, proved their claims to be false and defended the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to the extent that he *peace and blessings be upon him* erected a pulpit(1) for Hassan ibn Thabit and said to him, ‘Speak and the holy spirit is with you, make a mockery of them and the angel Jibril (Gabriel) is with you.’(1)

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(1) *Cited by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrik [3/478] on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said, ‘The Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him placed a pulpit in the=*

As for Ka`b ibn Malik, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Make a mockery of them, for truly your words are harsher upon them than a rain of arrows.(2) He *peace and blessings be upon him* permitted them to recite poetry in the mosque because they were among those exceptional poets who believed, did righteous deeds, remembered Allah often, aided the victory of Islam and sang the praises of Messenger Muhammad to defend him and rebut the sharp tongues of the disbelievers.

Allah says, ‘and defend themselves after they have been wronged’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 227), means they did not foolishly contravene Islamic tenets by pre-empting the disbelievers with verbal attacks; rather, they defended themselves and refuted the abuses heaped upon Islam by the disbelievers. Thus, when Abu Sufyan ridiculed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* one of them(3) responded by saying:

Do you ridicule him when you are no equal to him?
Of the two of you, the evil one is the ransom to be paid for the good one
My father, his father and my honour
Will answer for the honour of Muhammad

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘not’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 227), after ‘have been wronged’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 227). But who wronged them? It was the people who assumed an antagonistic attitude towards Islam and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They subjected Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believed in him to their machinations and abuse. It was the people who isolated him *peace and blessings be upon him* and his family

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= *mosque for Hassan to stand on and defend the pride of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him who said, “Truly Allah aids Hassan ibn Thabit with the Holy Spirit in whatever he defends the honour of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.”'*

(1) *Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [2213 and 6153], and by Muslim on the authority of Al-Bara` ibn `Azib in his Sahih [2486]; the book of Fada`il As- Sahaba.*

(2) *Cited by Muslim in his Sahih [2390]; the book of Fada`il As- Sahaba.*

(3) *It was Hassan ibn Thabit according to Muslim in his Sahih [2490]; the book of Fada`il As- Sahaba.*

from society to the extent that they were forced to eat tree leaves for food. It was the people who conspired to kill him *peace and blessings be upon him* which led him to immigrate to Medina.

Allah *the Almighty* out of His Mercy and Wisdom permitted the oppressed to defend and relieve himself from suffering wrongful oppression. If these feelings of frustration are bottled up inside one's self, they are sure to explode. Thus Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you; but to bear yourselves with patience is indeed far better for you, since Allah is with those who are patient in adversity.' (*an-Nahl:* 126)

Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'Allah does not like any evil to be mentioned openly, unless it be by him who has been wronged [thereby]…' (*an-Nisa':* 138). Allah *the Almighty* permitted the wronged and the oppressed to express themselves, to reject oppression.

Then the chapter ends with Allah's saying, '…defend themselves after they have been wronged. The evildoers will find out *munqalab* what they will return to.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 227) This means that these deniers of the Truth will know what their end and their return will be. The word *munqalab* (a turn their destinies are bound to take) refers to the fate that awaits a person and it is to what a person returns. The True Lord promises them something that will torment them, that is, the matter is not limited to the victory of the Muslims over them. Another punishment is waiting for them in the Hereafter.

Just as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere, 'But, verily, for those who are bent on doing evil, there is suffering in store [even] closer at hand than that [supreme suffering in the hereafter] …' (*at-Tur:* 47).

In order to evoke terror and awe, Allah *the Almighty* has obscured the nature of this *munqalab*, i.e. this turn they are destined to take. It could be so awful and terrible that it is indescribable in words, such as when Allah's Words left the exact fate of Pharaoh and his men ambiguous: '…and they were overwhelmed with the agony that overwhelmed them' (*Ta Ha:* 78). This indicates something so awful that it is unspeakable. The ambiguity here speaks volumes because the mind begins to imagine every possible punishment.

The *munaqlab* (turn they are destined to take) is not in and of itself blameworthy or praiseworthy; if one ends up doing evil, it is an evil turn; and if one ends up doing good, it is a good turn. Thus, the *munaqlab* of the disbelievers who opposed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be an evil, shameful turn.

What of the fated turn of Pharaoh's sorcerers to whom Pharaoh said, '…Have you come to believe in him ere I have given you permission? Verily, he must be your master who has taught you magic! But I shall most certainly cut off your hands and feet in great numbers, because of [your] perverseness…' (*Ta Ha:* 71). What did they say in reply? 'No harm [canst thou do to us]: verily, unto our Lord do we turn!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 50). This means that they will have a praiseworthy turn for the better.

Some people might think that their fated turn will be a good one and that they will come to a happy end, but they delude themselves into thinking their deeds merit a good turn and Allah *the Almighty* has prepared some other end for them. It is like the man to whom Allah *the Almighty* gave two vineyards, between which was fertile soil for agriculture, and around which were palm trees. Upon being dazzled by all the blessings of this world, the man thought that he would have something like it or better in the Hereafter. He said, '… But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!' (*al-Kahf:* 36)

One's *munqalab* (turn their destinies) and one's place of return are left to Allah *the Almighty*. Righteous deeds will be pleased with his fated turn because he knows with certainty that it will be a reward from the True Lord. Thus, the True Lord teaches us about the mounts that transport us: 'And they carry your loads to [many] a place which [otherwise] you would be unable to reach without great hardship to yourselves...' (*an-Nahl:* 7).

He teaches us to remember Him and mention Him: 'And He it is who has created all opposites. And He [it is who] has provided for you all those ships and animals whereon you ride, in order that you might gain mastery over them, and that, whenever you have mastered them, you might remember your Lord's blessings and say, "Limitless in His Glory is He who has made (all] this subservient to our use – since [but for Him,] we would not have been able to attain to it. Hence, verily, it is unto our Lord that we must always turn."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 12-14)

Mounts and beasts of burden, as well as those means of transportation which have replaced them now, are among the greatest of Allah's blessings to us. If Allah *the Almighty* had not subjugated them for us, we would not have been able to do so and we would have had no control over them. That is why we say, '…since [but for Him], we would not have been able to attain to it.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 13), we would not have been able to domesticate them. A small boy might be seen leading a huge camel, making the camel kneel or even loading it with heavy burdens, and all the while the camel is obedient and easily led. But the same boy would be frightened by a small snake. Why is that? It is because Allah *the Almighty* has subjugated the camel for us, but not the snake.

Allah the Greatest speaks the truth when He says, 'Are they, then, not aware that it is for them that We have created, among all the things which Our hands have wrought, the domestic animals of which they are [now] masters? –and that We have subjected them to men's will, so that some of them they may use for riding and of some they may eat.' (*Ya Sin:* 71-72)

But what is the relationship between His saying, '…Limitless in His Glory is He who has made (all] this subservient to our use – since [but for Him,] we would not have been able to attain to it.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 13) and His saying, 'Hence, verily, it is unto our Lord that we must always turn.'? (*az-Zukhruf:* 14) They say these verses are correlated to each other because we will turn to Allah *the Almighty* in the Hereafter and we will be asked about these blessings. If we gave thanks to Allah *the Almighty* for this blessing, then we have given them their due acknowledgment, and whoever thanks Allah *the Almighty* for the blessings of this world will not be asked of them in the Hereafter, for he will have already given them their due.

Allah *the Almighty* says that they 'will find out' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 227) using the Arabic letter *sin* before the verb 'to know' in order to indicate the future tense. But this does not mean they will only come to know after a great amount of time, as some might think. Allah *the Almighty* hides the time of one's death as well as its cause and its place. This ambiguity is the great power of the Quran to make things clear because under such circumstances you will expect death all the time. If a person knew the time of his death, he would say to himself, ‘I will do what I wish and then repent before I die’.

Thus, the length of time inferred from the future tense in this phrase is not indefinitely long. Death may come upon you by surprise after which you can do no deeds and make no repentance. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘On the Day when they behold it, [it will seem to them] as if they had tarried [in this world] no longer than one evening or [one night, ending with] its morn!’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 46)

We have said that the verse ‘The evildoers will find out what they will return to' (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 227), indicates that there is a threat and a promise. When the True Lord emphasises a threat, He does so out of compassion and mercy for His creatures; He loves them and if He threatens them today, they will be secure and sound later. He draws their attention so they will return to Him and attain His reward and His Grace.

It seems that through the act of threatening Allah *the Almighty* wants to spread His Mercy, not His Domination, just as you might be hard on your son so he studies and you might threaten him so that he works hard. Thus, a promise of a something good brings good, a threatening promise of evil can also bring good, which is why you should know that everything that comes from your Lord is good for you, even if it is the threat of some promised punishment.

Thus, the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara’* has been provided with an example of the True Lord’s reassurances to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to lighten his sadness and remorse at the condition of his faithless people. This chapter also regaled him *peace and blessings be upon him* with stories from the procession of messengers detailing how Allah *the Almighty* aided them and made them victorious, and how He defeated their enemies.

Then his Lord comforted him by rebutting the disbeliever’s fabrications, showing their arguments to be false and revealing the emptiness of their cause. Then the narrative ends with a clear declaration that the wrong-doers have an evil turn awaiting them, and this end is left ambiguous to make it all the more awesome: ‘…The evildoers will find out what they will return to.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 227)

If something is clearly delineated, it can only be one thing. If it is left obscure, it is more forceful and effective because one begins to imagine all the different possibilities, just like when a traveller is late in returning home while we are sitting waiting for him in great apprehension and our minds wander through all the possible reasons that could have caused his delay. One fanciful conjecture spring to your minds, and each conjecture appears in your mind with burning intensity, while only one possibility will be what actually happened.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (17)

the chapter of

an-Naml

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

طسٓۚ تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ وَكِتَابٖ مُّبِينٍ ١

***Ta Sin.* These are the verses of the Quran — a scripture that makes things clear [1] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 1)**

We have spoken much about these letters that stand alone at the opening of some chapters of the Quran; in this case, they are *'Ta Sin'*. They are alphabetical letters, pronounced according to their names (ta, sin). The difference between a letter's name and the letter itself is that both educated and illiterate people speak using letters, thus being able to say, for example, 'Mohammed wrote down the lesson'. If you ask the illiterate person to spell out these letters, he will not be able to do so because he does not know the names of the letters even if he can pronounce the letters themselves. As for the educated person, he will say M-o-h-a-m-m-e-d, etc

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate and he did not know the names of the letters, and so they are from Allah *the Almighty*. The letters *Alif Lam Mim* are pronounced at the start of the chapter of *al-Baqara* with their names, whereas at the beginning of the chapter *ash-Sharh*, they are pronounced as letters: *alam* (Did not).

'These' is a demonstrative pronoun referring to the verses that will follow during this chapter. We said that the word *ayat* has many meanings: it might be used to refer to the natural signs in the universe such as the sun and the moon: 'Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon…' (*Fussilat:* 37), 'And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind so that you might incline towards them…' (*ar-Rum:* 21). These signs of the universe alert us to the magnificence of the Creator and His Infinite Power. It may also be used to refer to the miracles vouchsafed to messengers which confirm the veracity of the messages they brought from Allah *the Almighty*. It may further refer to the verses of the Quran and its rulings, which is meant here by '…These are the verses of the Quran–a scripture that makes things clear' (*an-Naml:* 1).

In the beginning of another chapter, Allah says, *'Alif Lam Ra*. These are messages of revelation – of a discourse clear in itself and clearly showing the truth.' (*al-Hijr:* 1)

So, sometimes He says, 'a discourse clear', and sometimes He says, 'verses… clear'; Allah *the Almighty* also sometimes adds 'verses' to 'Quran', while other times He adds 'Quran' (discourse) to 'verses', even though they are the same thing. How can the same thing be added to itself?

They say that if something is added to itself, this means that it is an additional attribute of the thing. If we say, 'Zayd, the poet, orator, and tradesman came to see me', all of these attributes are added to give further description. The Quran is a 'discourse' because it is recited in the heart, and it is a 'verse' because it is written down on the page. We use both these words, referring sometimes to the Quran and sometimes to the Book. The distinction is made by the attribution.

The meaning of 'clear' is plain and apparent, encompassing all of life's issues and actions by way of commands and prohibitions, as Allah *the Almighty* says, '…no single thing have We neglected in Our decree…' (*al-An'am:* 38).

I previously told the story of what happened to Sheikh Muhammad `Abdu when he was in France; one of the orientalists asked him 'You say that the Quran encompasses everything, so how many loaves are there in a measure of corn'? The sheikh called a baker, and asked him, and he told him how many. The orientalist said: 'No, I want it from the Quran', so the sheikh replied: 'The Quran says, "…If you do not know this, ask those who know…"' (*al-Anbiya':* 7).

So, it is as Allah *the Almighty* says, '…no single thing have We neglected in Our decree…' (*al-An'am:* 38).

Then the True Lord says:

هُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

A guide and joyful news for the believers [2]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 2)

The word ‘guide’ has two meanings, as follows: direction to success or giving assistance and aid. Direction is for the believer and the disbeliever alike because it guides and instructs everyone. After this, the guidance of aid comes according to whether you follow the guidance of direction.

Whoever obeys Allah *the Almighty* and believes in Him and follows His Guidance of direction, the True Lord will say to him ‘You have sought My Protection in your life’s work and you have obeyed My commands and kept away from My prohibitions; so I will make things lighter for you, make it easier for you to worship and help you to do it’. This is the guidance of aid about which Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in Allah *the Almighty* -consciousness.’ (*Muhammad:* 17)

Likewise, the disbeliever who does not follow the guidance of direction and chooses for himself another way – Allah *the Almighty* will help him to follow it and will make it easy for him to rush to disbelief. So, He *the Almighty* seals the hearts of the disbelievers so that faith does not enter it, and disbelief does not leave it.

But is the guidance mentioned here that of direction, or of aid? We say that it is guidance of aid, as is borne out by Allah’s word after it: ‘…and joyful news for the believers.’ (*an-Naml:* 2) They are only believers because they followed guidance, and glad tidings are only for believers. So, it is the guidance of aid for the believers in that it increases them in guidance to the straight path, and to paradise. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Their light will spread rapidly before them, and on their right; [and] they will pray: “O our Lord! Cause this our light to shine for us forever, and forgive us our sins: for, verily, Thou hast the power to will anything!”’ (*at-Tahrim:* 8)

If the guidance meant here was the guidance of direction which comes to believer and disbeliever alike, it would be both a glad tiding and a warning; but the verse says, ‘and joyful news for the believers’ (*an-Naml:* 2), so it is clear that the meaning is the guidance of aid and that of glad tidings.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُؤۡتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَهُم بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ هُمۡ يُوقِنُونَ (٣)

Who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and believe firmly in the life to come [3] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 3)

The believers are those who possess the creed of faith, which is faith in the One True Lord, the All-Powerful Allah *the Almighty* possessor of perfect attributes. You believe in this until it becomes a firm creed in your soul that cannot be shaken. Faith means the conviction of the heart, the pronouncement of the tongue and the work of the limbs. The pronouncement of the tongue is not sufficient; the responsibilities and duties of faith must be carried out, the most important of which are the prayer, the poor-due, fasting *Ramadan* and making the pilgrimage.

Prayer is an invitation from Allah *the Almighty* to His creation, an invitation from the Maker to the made: Allah *the Almighty* is inviting you to His presence. What a great product it is that is presented before its maker five times a day! Yet despite this, there are those who put work before prayer and when they hear the call, they say, ‘I have work to do and I am busy’. Beware of thinking that prayer impedes beneficial things, or wastes time because in your working life you are with Allah’s blessings, whilst in the prayer you are with Allah *the Almighty* Himself.

An allegory of this situation, and Allah has the highest example, is: if your father calls you and you do not answer him, what does he do with you? Do not make your Lord less important to you than your father. Your Lord calls you: ‘Allah is the Greatest’, i.e. He is Greater than your work and Greater than anything that could distract you from answering His call. In the prayer, we recharge our faith, which strengthens us in our daily lives. If you take your car battery to be recharged, do you say that you have wasted the battery?

If we counted the time that praying the five daily prayers takes, we would find that it is not even one hour out of twenty-four. So, do not begrudge yourself a meeting with your Lord where you stand before him, showing yourself to Him; He repairs everything within you that your working life has corrupted, gives you aid and assistance and the recharge of faith which allows you to work in harmony with life and the universe around you.

If the mechanic repairs a machine by material means, your Lord is Unseen and so He repairs you by unseen means, and without your being aware of it. For this reason, prayer is at the peak of the requirements of faith.

If prayer is for self-rectification, the poor-due exists to rectify wealth. That is why you always find the prayer linked with the poor-due in the majority of verses. If wealth is the result of work, work is a product of time, then prayer takes time and the poor-due takes the product of time. The poor-due takes 2.5%; as for the prayer, it takes time itself, i.e. 100%.

Despite this, we do not say that prayer wastes time because the recharge that you obtain from the prayer means that you are able to do work that would take several hours in only half an hour because it gives you a blessed increase of time.

I said before that the call ‘Allah is the Greatest’ means that meeting with Allah *the Almighty* is more important than anything that might distract you, no matter how important you perceive it to be because Allah *the Almighty* gives blessed increase, and He gives power. If work and being productive on earth is something required of us, prayer in its proper time is even more important.

If we consider between which two prayers the greatest amount of time is, we find that it is between the dawn and midday prayers, which is the appropriate time for work and between the night and the dawn prayer, which is the appropriate time for sleep. In this way, the prayer organises our lives for us: between the dawn and the midday prayer are seven hours, which are the hours of work.

If the Islamic community were only to hold fast to its law and the guidance of its Lord, after these seven hours of work, you would be free after the midday prayer. But the specification that has become predominant in our working lives has people working not just through the midday prayer, but also through the afternoon prayer.

As for those who delay the prayer from its proper time, claiming that it is valid because of the length of time that exists between every two prayers: yes, there is a period of time between them, but you are not allowed to delay your prayer. In order to illustrate this issue, suppose that a rich man who is able to perform the pilgrimage does not perform it: when does he sin?

He sins when hope for long life deludes him and then death comes to him before he performs the pilgrimage. If he remains alive until he performs the pilgrimage, he will fulfil this obligation; but who guarantees that he will live long enough to fulfil it? Hence, the Hadith was narrated: 'Perform the pilgrimage before you are unable to perform it.'(1)

Such is the case with the time for prayer. It is extended, but who guarantees that your life will too be extended? For this reason, the one who does not perform the prayer sins at the final moment of his life; if he remains alive long enough to perform the prayer, he is safe.

So, do not use the long period of time as an excuse. Allah *the Almighty* made this extended time period for a wise reason, not just so that we could use it as an excuse to delay prayer beyond its proper time. The long period of time between prayers was made for the one who is asleep, until he wakes up; or the one who forgets, until he remembers.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and believe firmly in the life to come' (*an-Naml:* 3). The verse encapsulates the entire reality of the believer, beginning with belief and faith in Allah *the Almighty* then prayer and then the poor-due. These are the two duties that are linked with the two faiths: firstly, faith in Allah *the Almighty*; secondly, faith in the afterlife, recompense, the return, and the resurrection.

His saying, 'and believe firmly in the life to come' (*an-Naml:* 3) means absolute surety of a thing's existence, without any doubts or misgivings. For this reason, we said that knowledge means that you acknowledge a fact, announce that it is the truth and give evidences for it.

I said that certainty is of different levels: the certainty of knowledge, the certainty of the eye and absolute certainty. For example, if I tell you that in one city I saw bananas half a metre long, you trust me and do not doubt me, this is the certainty of knowledge. If you see it for yourself, this is the certainty of the eye. But if you take it, go to it and pick it and divide it between all who are present, this is absolute certainty; this level cannot be permeated by doubts.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak, on the authority of Al-Harith ibn Suwayd.*

So, when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* asked his companion, Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari, ‘How are you’, he answered ‘I have become a true believer in Allah’, Prophet Muhammad asked ‘every truth has its reality: what is the reality of your faith?’ Harith replied ‘I abstained from this world and its gold and its clay became equal in my eyes; it is as though I behold the denizens of paradise being favoured therein and the denizens of Hell being tormented therein.’ The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: ‘You know, so be steadfast!’(1)

\`Ali *Allah be pleased with him* gave us a description of certainty when he said, ‘If the veil was drawn back for me, I would not increase in certainty. I believed what Allah said and my eyes are not more trustworthy to me than Allah.’

This kind of certainty is also inherent in what we mentioned before about Allah’s word "Art thou aware of how thy Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1), even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born that year, and could not witness this event. So, the meaning is ‘do you not know’, and the word ‘see’ is used for ‘know’ to tell the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah’s informing him is more trustworthy than what his own eyes see.

Allah *the Almighty* then says.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ زَيَّنَّا لَهُمۡ أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ فَهُمۡ يَعۡمَهُونَ ﴿٤﴾

As for those who do not believe in the life to come, We have made their deeds seem alluring to them, so they wander blindly [4] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 4)

These people are the opposite of those who believe, pray and give the poor-due because the True Lord presents things with their opposites in order that we make a comparison between them. About these people, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘As for those who do not believe in the life to come…’ (*an-Naml:* 4).

He did not negate their performance of the prayer, or their giving the poor-due. Why? Because they do not believe in Allah *the Almighty* to begin with, nor do they believe in the resurrection or the reckoning. If they know that, they would return to Allah, believe in Him and do good works.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Haythami in Majma\` Az-Zawa\`id (ascribed therein to At-Tabarani in Al-Mu\`jam Al-Kabir). He said: ‘Its chain contains Ibn Luhay\`a, and others who need investigating.’*

The meaning of ‘We have made their deeds seem alluring to them’ (*an-Naml:* 4) is ‘Those who do not believe in Allah or in the hereafter, and do not fulfil the obligations of faith, will not be excused because when We showed them faith and its obligations, We presented it well, made it attractive and alluring and made it seem goodly for them. Prayer is a meeting between you and your Lord which expresses your constant allegiance and gives you a recharge of faith. The poor-due protects you when you are weak and incapable and so when you are rich, We take from you so that We can give to you if you become poor. When We prohibited you from lying, We prohibited everyone else from lying to you and when We warned you not to give bribes, We said to everyone else “Do not take his wealth unlawfully” and so on. And in this way, We explained responsibilities and showed the wisdom behind them, and made them beloved to you.

Or, it means ‘We made the things they did appear goodly to them’, and that when Allah saw their yearning for misguidance and transgression, He sealed their hearts, as He says, ‘Is, then, he to whom the evil of his own doings is [so] alluring that [in the end] he regards it as good…’ (*Fatir:* 8)?

But who was it that made their deeds appear goodly? ‘…Satan has made all their own doings seem goodly to them…’ (*an-Nahl:* 63). So, sometimes Satan makes their deeds seem goodly, and sometimes it is an unknown agent and sometimes it is Allah.

An example of Allah’s doing this is His statement about Pharaoh “And Musa (Moses) prayed: “O our Lord! Verily, splendour and riches hast Thou vouchsafed, in the life of this world, unto Pharaoh and his great ones – with the result, O our Lord, that they are leading [others] astray from Thy path!...”” (*Yunus:* 88). So, when Allah *the Almighty* gave them His blessing, they became deluded by it.

Allah *the Almighty* created Satan, and gave him progeny who attempt to overcome people and tempt them. This is only a test to see who will stop at these doors. The True Lord did not place barriers around sin or create attractions for good deeds. The matter is down to you and if He sees that you incline to something and love it, He will help you to get it.

If someone's loved-one dies, or a woman's child dies, she keeps grieving for him, which will ruin her life and the life of those around her. Yet this will not help the dead one, or bring them back. We say to those who receive Allah's ordain with this resentment: When your Lord sees that you have become accustomed to grief, and that you yearn for it, He is Lord, so He will surely give you what you desire and every day open for you a door to it. So, whoever is exposed to such a trial must receive it with acceptance, close the door of sadness and not leave it ajar.

Another example of this is Allah's words, 'To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof – but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come.' (*ash-Shura:* 20)

The meaning of 'stumble blindly' is that they are confused and bewildered, not knowing where they should go.

Allah *the Almighty* then say:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَهُمۡ سُوٓءُ ٱلۡعَذَابِ وَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ هُمُ ٱلۡأَخۡسَرُونَ ٥

It is they who will have the worst suffering, and will be the ones to lose most in the life to come[5] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 5)

It means terrible suffering in the hereafter. In addition to the losses they suffered during the Battle of Badr and the defeat they endured, things did not end there, for there will be another loss in the hereafter: '…and will be the ones to lose most in the life to come'. (*an-Naml:* 5)

'Greatest loser' implies an exaggerated loss; He did not say only 'losers', but rather 'lose most' because they lost out the delights of paradise, having not offered any good deeds in this world. It would have been better for them to be left without paradise and to remain in that state, but there will also come to them terrible suffering. So, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'and will be the ones to lose most in the life to come' (*an-Naml:* 5) because they will not enter paradise, which is one loss and then they will go to hell, which is another loss.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِنَّكَ لَتُلَقَّى ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ مِن لَّدُنۡ حَكِيمٍ عَلِيمٍ ﴿٦﴾

**You [Prophet] receive the Quran from One who is all wise,
All Knowing [6] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 6)**

Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that these matters only come to him from Allah, the All-Wise, and the One Who handles things wisely. When Allah *the Almighty* rewards the virtuous or punishes the sinner, everything is performed wisely. Allah *the Almighty* knows best what recompense to give for good and what punishment to be inflicted upon the evildoers.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then tells us the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*:

إِذۡ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِأَهۡلِهِۦٓ إِنِّيٓ ءَانَسۡتُ نَارٗا سَـَٔاتِيكُم مِّنۡهَا بِخَبَرٍ
أَوۡ ءَاتِيكُم بِشِهَابٖ قَبَسٖ لَّعَلَّكُمۡ تَصۡطَلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

Moses said to his family, 'I have seen a fire. I will bring you news from there, or a burning stick for you to warm yourselves' [7] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 7)

We have recently mentioned some of Musa's (Moses's) story in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara'*. Here, it is mentioned again. The story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* has been mentioned frequently in the Quran because they followed their prophets, and then disobeyed them so that much reference was made to them.

It is strange that they are proud of having many prophets. It is not something to be proud about because, really it is a shame. A prophet only comes when his companions are in a wretched state. The Israelites were in such misguidance and stubbornness that one single messenger did not suffice them. Rather, a great number of prophets were required for them. They see this as a point of pride, when really it is a flaw and a point of shame.

The reason behind repeating the story of the Israelites and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* several times in the Quran is that the Quran does not merely tell tales, or mention events solely for the sake of chronicling them; it only mentions stories in the context of moral admonition, or to make firm the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘And [remember] out of all the accounts relating to the [earlier] apostles We convey on you [one] that wherewith We [aim to] make firm thy heart …’ (*Hud:* 120).

Because Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was exposed to many hardships and worries during the course of his call and needed to be consoled and made firm, his Lord sent him specific scenes, but He did not relate the entire story.

Allah *the Almighty* related the entire story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in the form of a story that was as tightly-woven and well-formed as any story can be. Despite this, Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* was not mentioned elsewhere except in two places: the first time is in the chapter of *al-An`am*: ‘…And out of his offspring, [We bestowed prophethood upon] Dawud (David), and Sulaiman (Solomon), and Ayyub (Job) and Yusuf (Joseph)…’ (*al-An‘am:* 84). As for the second place, it is in the chapter of Ghafir: ‘And [remember:] it was to you that Yusuf (Joseph) came a foretime with all evidence of the truth; but you never ceased to throw doubt on all [the messages] that he brought you – so much so that when he died, you said, “Never will Allah send any apostle [even] after him!”’ (*Ghafir:* 34)

Telling a story, then, in several different parts is not due to an inability to relate them all at once. If Allah *the Almighty* had done this, the consolation and strengthening would have been all at once.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Musa (Moses) said to his family, “I have seen a fire…”’ (*an-Naml:* 7). Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…he said to his family: “Wait here. Behold, I perceive a fire…”’ (*al-Qasas:* 29). So in this latter verse, there is something new that was not mentioned in the former. As for Allah’s saying, ‘And when Musa (Moses) had fulfilled his term, and was wandering with his family [in the desert], he perceived a fire on the slope of Mount Sinai…’ (*al-Qasas:* 29), this means that he saw it himself. In the other two verses, he tells his family that he sees the fire. So, each verse has its own position and there is no repetition, as some might think.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was travelling with his family along this rugged road and darkness overcame him until he was almost unable to see the road. He said to his wife: ‘I have seen a fire…’ (*an-Naml:* 7). That is, ‘I will go to light a torch from it’, so that we could find their way, or seek warmth from it.

His wife, simply, questioned his judgement, saying, ‘How could you leave me here in this wild place alone’? He replied to her: ‘…Wait here. Behold, I perceive a fire...’ (*al-Qasas:* 29). ‘Wait here and relax, I will go and get it; for perhaps it is dangerous, so you should stay clear of it’. So, the different parts of the story have been mentioned in the Quran each to give a specific piece of information. There is no repetition.

Similarly, one notices that there is a difference between the following sayings of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…perhaps I may bring you from there some tiding…’ (*al-Qasas:* 29), and ‘…I will bring you news from there…’ (*an-Naml:* 7). As for the first verse, the word ‘perhaps’ indicates hope because he was approaching something he was unsure about, in this state he honestly expressed the thoughts that came to him as unknown thing. Once he was sure, he said, ‘…I will bring you news…’ (*an-Naml:* 7). That is to say that he was certain this time.

In the same vein, he said once: ‘…perhaps I may bring you from there some tiding or [at least] a burning brand from the fire…’ (*al-Qasas:* 29) using the word *jadhwa* which means a ‘brand’ or ‘ember’; whereas here he says, ‘…I will bring you news from there *shihab qabas*, or a burning stick for you to warm yourselves’ (*an-Naml:* 7), using the words *shihab qabas* which mean ‘a borrowed flame’. This is because he did not know whether, when he reached the fire, he would find it still lit with flames from which he could light a flame, or whether he would find that it had burned out. So, every repetition here has its own meaning, adding something new to the story. So, it is completed in piecemeal form, according to the intention behind it, whether admonition or strengthening. The meaning of ‘his family’ here is a group, which is borne out by the Arabic plural verb form used when he said, ‘Wait here’. His wife was there and there were some herdsmen or servants. People need many things, which necessitate numbers: this one cooks, this one cleans this one does the laundry, etc.

But there is one thing that no one can do for you except your spouse, which are the conjugal relations and intimacy. It is also possible for the spouse to do all of these things herself so that she does not need any other family members to help her. In this case, we are able to say that no one was with him except his wife.

This is common in our language (Arabic): A man says, ‘the family’, or ‘my family’, meaning his wife. This implies that the husband is giving value and appreciation to his wife.

Allah’s words ‘I have seen a fire’ conveys a feeling and sensation that gives comfort and assurance. The opposite of this is ‘foreboding’ which is a sensation and feeling of something that causes one anxiety, as in Allah’s saying about Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘…and in his heart Musa (Moses) became apprehensive. But We said, “Fear not! Verily, it is thou who shalt prevail.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 67-68)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَهَا نُودِيَ أَنۢ بُورِكَ مَن فِي ٱلنَّارِ وَمَنۡ حَوۡلَهَا
وَسُبۡحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٨

When he reached the fire, a voice called: ‘Blessed is the person near this fire and those around it; may God be exalted, the Lord of the Worlds[8] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 8)

That is, he went to the fire where ‘a voice called’ (*an-Naml:* 8). A ‘call’ is a request for someone to approach. If you call someone, they come to you, then you tell them what you want to say. For example, Allah’s saying, ‘…O Musa (Moses)!’ (*Ta Ha:* 11) was a call. As for Allah’s saying, ‘Verily, I – I alone – am Allah...’ (*Ta Ha:* 14), it was a direct address to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. But what does the saying of Allah, ‘…a voice called: “Blessed is the person near this fire and those around it”’ (*an-Naml:* 8) mean? Allah *the Almighty* did not say ‘O Musa (Moses)’, so there is no call. They say that the address here is the call because as long as He is addressing him, He is calling him. This is similar to Allah’s saying, ‘and the inmates of paradise will call out to the inmates of the fire: “Now we have found that what our Lord promised us has come true…”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 44). The address is mentioned without any call because the call is clear from the context. Another example of this is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘And the occupants of the Heights will call out to those whom they recognise by their marks [as sinners], saying, "What has your amassing [of wealth] availed you, and all the false pride of your past?"' (*al-A'raf:* 48), and 'Thereupon [a voice] called out to her from beneath that [palm-tree]: 'Grieve not...' (*Maryam:* 24). So, the address is itself the call.

Concerning Allah's saying, 'Blessed is the person near this fire and those around it…' (*an-Naml:* 8), the word 'blessed' does not generally befit fire because fire burns. As long as Allah says, 'Blessed is the person near this fire' (*an-Naml:* 8), it must be the case that whatever is in the fire is a creation that does not burn and is not affected by fire. Who are not affected by fire? It is the angels.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saw an amazing sight: he saw the fire ablaze on the branch of a tree; as the fire increased, the branch became more verdant. The fire did not burn the leaves, nor did the moisture and water of the leaves put out the fire. Who is able to do such a thing? For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says after this: 'Allah be Exalted, the Lord of the worlds.' (*an-Naml:* 8) Be careful not to ask about such matters: 'How'? Instead, absolve Allah *the Almighty* of your own ways of acting. This is amazing and extraordinary in your eyes, but for Allah *the Almighty* it is effortless.

The story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* seems similar to this miracle when his Lord saved him from the fire. The purpose of this miracle was not solely the rescue of Ibrahim (Abraham). If Allah *the Almighty* had only wanted to save him, He would not have let them catch him to begin with, or He would have put out the fire they lit with a rainstorm. There were many ways Allah *the Almighty* could have saved Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* with. But Allah wanted them to catch him, and cast him into the fire, whilst it was ablaze and then throw him into it themselves, witnessing all this first hand and then the fire did not harm him. It was as though He were saying to them: 'I want to save him from the fire despite the strength of your means to burn him. I created fire and gave it its ability to burn, and it is bound to My command. If I tell it to be cold and harmless, it will be. There is no law that rules the universe; there is only My absolute control over My creation'.

So, what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saw in the fire that burned on the verdant tree is an extraordinary matter in your eyes; but it is not extraordinary for He Who has Absolute Omnipotence, which overrules all natural law.

The word ‘blessed’ is in the passive form, meaning that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who blessed it. No one can do this except Allah *the Almighty*. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘the person near this fire and those around it’ (*an-Naml:* 8), it might refer to the angels; or it might be the tree itself that was blessed because it did not burn, or it might be the fire because it was not extinguished and so thereby was blessed.

In another place in the Quran, the area that was blessed was extended. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘from the right-side bank of the valley, out of the tree’ (*al-Qasas:* 30). Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* spoke to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saying:

يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِنَّهُۥٓ أَنَا ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ٩

Moses, I am God, the Mighty, the Wise[9]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 9)

This call came in its true form, with both vocative particle and object, ‘I am Allah, the Mighty, and the Wise.’ (*an-Naml:* 9) That is, ‘Since I am Allah, do not be surprised by what you see. When you hear someone speaking to you without seeing anyone of your own kind, do not be amazed or alarmed’.

Allah then says:

وَأَلۡقِ عَصَاكَۚ فَلَمَّا رَءَاهَا تَهۡتَزُّ كَأَنَّهَا جَآنّٞ وَلَّىٰ مُدۡبِرٗا وَلَمۡ يُعَقِّبۡۚ
يَٰمُوسَىٰ لَا تَخَفۡ إِنِّي لَا يَخَافُ لَدَيَّ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلُونَ ١٠

Throw down your staff,’ but when he saw it moving like a snake, he turned and fled. ‘Moses, do not be afraid! The messengers need have no fear in My presence[10]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 10)

There are other details and incidents that the verse does not mention here which are mentioned elsewhere such as ‘Now, what is this in thy right hand, O Musa (Moses)? He answered, “It is my staff; I lean on it; and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep; and [many] other uses have I for it.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 17-18) Etiquette dictates that an answer should confine to the question; but Musa

(Moses) *peace be upon him* wanted to extend the time he would spend in Allah's presence. When he felt that he had extended this time long enough, he said, '…and [many] other uses have I for it' (*Ta Ha:* 18), for the staff had many functions in his life.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Now throw down your staff' (*an-Naml:* 10), i.e. 'If the staff plays such simple roles for you and these are the only functions it gives you, I have another use for it. Behold the use I have for it and behold that which you do know not about it'!

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'Now throw down your staff' (*an-Naml:* 10). When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threw down his staff, he found it 'moving like a snake' (*an-Naml:* 10), i.e. a snake wriggling and moving. The amazing thing is that the staff did not change into something else of its own genus: a staff is a plank of wood, which was once the branch of a tree and so it is a type of plant. When it is cut and dried, it becomes hard. So, if it were to turn into another object of its own genus and become green again, this would be itself an amazing thing.

As for the True Lord, He changed it into a completely different genus, making it an animal. This is a huge transformation that would elicit surprise and even fear, especially if it was 'moving like a snake' (*an-Naml:* 10), i.e. to move quickly here and there. Musa's (Moses's) natural reaction upon seeing the staff in his hand taking this form would be to grow fearful and panic; Allah says, 'and in his heart Musa (Moses) became apprehensive. But We said, "Fear not! Verily, it is you who shall prevail!"' (*Ta Ha:* 67-68) The meaning of 'it is thou who shalt prevail' (*Ta Ha:* 68) in this verse is that Allah *the Almighty* was preparing him for an immense mission, and that this staff would have a role to play against his enemies, and that he would triumph against them, and that he would be the uppermost.

When the different accounts of this story are compared, we see that sometimes it is a *jan* (serpent), whilst the word *hayya* (snake) is used in another account; still yet the word *thu`ban* (snake) which is mentioned in a third position. All these are names for the same thing, referring to the different age, agility, and size of different kinds of serpents.

Allah's saying, 'he turned and fled' (*an-Naml:* 10) means that Musa (Moses) moved away from it and turned his back to it, 'and fled' (*an-Naml:* 10). This means that he went away from it and did not return to it, and so his Lord *the Almighty* called him, saying, 'Musa (Moses), do not be afraid! The messengers need have no fear in My presence.' (*an-Naml:* 10)

One notices that in both calls, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is mentioned, as though they are a replacement for the previous call that was made in the form of an address: 'Blessed is the person near this fire and those around it…' (*an-Naml:* 8). Musa (Moses) is commanded not to be afraid for he would soon be forced to do battle and so he had to be firm and fearless, because he would not fight one man alone, but would rather face a group of sorcerers, assembled from all over the land. Allah *the Almighty* had already said to him: 'Verily, it is you who shall prevail' (*Ta Ha:* 68) so that this multitude would not frighten him.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The messengers need have no fear in My presence…' (*an-Naml:* 10). This means 'Do not fear, O Musa (Moses) because it was I Who sent you, and I am the One Who will undertake to protect you and help you', as the True Lord says elsewhere in the Quran 'For, long ago has Our Word gone forth unto Our servants, the Message-bearers, that, verily, they – they indeed – would be succoured, and that, verily, Our Hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

'You would be excused for fearing if you were far from Me, but what about if you are with Me and I am with you, addressing you'?

For Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to throw the staff this time was only a dry run for him so that he would be accustomed to this matter and be comfortable with it. Then he could practise it in order that he could perform this action in front of Pharaoh and the sorcerers with confidence, fortitude, and certainty that the staff would become a serpent.

After this, a sign came to confirm the soundness of moral responsibility for mankind, even the messengers. The messengers too, are morally responsible and every responsible person is able to obey or disobey – but the messengers are divinely protected from sin. As for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* he had an individual experience when he struck a man who then fell down dead: 'Moreover, they keep a grave charge [pending] against me, and I fear that they will slay me.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 14) In another place in the Quran, the nature of this charge is specified: 'Musa (Moses) said, "O my Lord! I have slain one of them, and so I fear that they will slay me."' (*al-Qasas:* 33)

We are considering this issue now so that we can better understand:

إِلَّا مَن ظَلَمَ ثُمَّ بَدَّلَ حُسۡنَۢا بَعۡدَ سُوٓءٖ فَإِنِّي غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ١١

I am truly most forgiving and merciful to those
who do wrong, and then replace their evil with
good [11] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 11)

The exception to Allah's saying, '…The messengers need have no fear in My presence' (*an-Naml:* 10) applies to 'those who do wrong and then replace their evil with good.' (*an-Naml:* 11)

It is as though Allah *the Almighty* is presenting the specific experience that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* went through: 'to those who do wrong' (*an-Naml:* 11), i.e. when he killed an Egyptian, but Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* confessed his wrongdoing and sought his Lord's Forgiveness, saying: 'And he prayed: "O my Lord! Verily, I have sinned against myself! Grant me, then, Your Forgiveness!" And He forgave him…' (*al-Qasas:* 16).

There is nothing more to say after Allah *the Almighty* forgives the sinner because after he did wrong, He then replaces their evil with good; (*an-Naml:* 11) that is he did good deeds after having sinned; '…I am truly Most Forgiving and Merciful.' (*an-Naml:* 11).

After this, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

وَأَدۡخِلۡ يَدَكَ فِي جَيۡبِكَ تَخۡرُجۡ بَيۡضَآءَ مِنۡ غَيۡرِ سُوٓءٖۖ فِي تِسۡعِ
ءَايَٰتٍ إِلَىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَقَوۡمِهِۦٓۚ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ قَوۡمٗا فَٰسِقِينَ ١٢

Put your hand inside your cloak and it will come out white,
but unharmed. These are among the nine signs that you
will show Pharaoh and his people; they have really gone
too far [12] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 12)

This is another sign and a new miracle. Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says about it: 'And now] put your hand into thy bosom…' (*al-Qasas:* 32).

What is the difference between ‘place your hand’ and ‘put your hand’? They say that when he placed his hand into the bosom of his robe, i.e. its opening, he would have been able to place it easily if the cloak had been open, so the word *adkhil* (place) was used.

If it was closed, however, or perhaps had buttons, he would have to put his hand into it with care, which is what is suggested by the Arabic word used here for *usluk* (put), which means to place with deliberative care.

The word used for the ‘bosom’ of the robe here is *jayb* which has a present-day vernacular use, which is the word for ‘pocket’, as well as an original lexical use, which is the opening of a shirt at the neck. People have pockets because they need to keep their money safe in their clothes, so that it is not on display where it will be noticed by thieves and crooks.

In the local Egyptian countryside, they still put pockets in their vests. So, we hear snake charmers and the like saying, in an attempt to endear themselves to people: ‘Allah bless those who put their hands in their pockets’, i.e. Allah bless those who will give me a pound.

As for Allah’s saying, ‘it will come out white, but unharmed’ (*an-Naml:* 12), it means that when he took his hand out, it would be shining and bright. It is known that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was somewhat dark-skinned and so when they saw his colour had become white, they might say that he had some kind of disease like leprosy.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* allayed this suspicion by saying ‘but unharmed’, i.e. free of disease. ‘…These are among the nine signs that you will show Pharaoh and his people…’ (*an-Naml:* 12) so that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would know that this was one of nine signs by means of which Allah *the Almighty* would strengthen him in front of his enemies, Pharaoh and his people.

These nine signs were: the staff, which had two purposes: to become a snake before the sorcerers and to be struck against the sea when Pharaoh and his hordes assailed him. Then comes the hand and then two more: drought and scarcity of fruits, as in Allah’s saying, ‘And most certainly did We overwhelm Pharaoh’s people with drought and scarcity of fruits…’ (*al-Isra’:* 130). Then came the flood, the locusts, lice, the frogs, and the blood. This makes nine signs which strengthened Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in the face of Pharaoh and his people. Was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sent to Pharaoh alone? No, He was sent to the Israelites, but he wanted to convince Pharaoh that he was a messenger sent by Allah *the Almighty* so that he would not come between him and them. The calling of Pharaoh to have faith in Allah *the Almighty* was incidental to the events of the story, and was not the essence of Musa's (Moses's) call.

The saying of Allah, '…they have really gone too far' (*an-Naml:* 12) means that even if someone is a disbeliever and disobedient to Allah *the Almighty,* he is still originally from believing stock, i.e. the original belief that Adam *peace be upon him* had, as did his progeny. However, they became depraved and abandoned the moral responsibility that encased their lives; just as a date comes out of its shell, people come out of the moral responsibility that was guarding them.

Then, the True Lord says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَتۡهُمۡ ءَايَٰتُنَا مُبۡصِرَةٗ قَالُواْ هَٰذَا سِحۡرٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿١٣﴾

But when Our enlightening signs came to them,
they said, 'This is clearly [just] sorcery!' [13]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 13)

Allah's saying, 'enlightening signs' refers to the miracles that confirm the veracity of Messenger Musa (Moses). Messages could be given light in the passive sense, but how could they be 'light-giving'? We have recently found the truth of this matter. In the past, the Greeks and the ancient civilisations believed that the eye saw things by means of rays that came out of them onto the thing that was to be seen. Then, the Muslim scientist Al-Hasan ibn Al- Haytham came along, proved the falsehood of this theory, and proved it was the other way around. Sight is achieved by rays coming from the viewed object and reaching the eye, which is proved by the fact that we do not see things if they are in the dark even if we are in the light, whereas if the object is in the light and you are in the dark, you can see it.

So, it is as though it is the messages themselves that give the light because they sent out the rays that make sight occur. Or the messages are so clear that they urge people to see and pay attention, as though they can see the truth more clearly.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

وَجَحَدُوا۟ بِهَا وَٱسْتَيْقَنَتْهَآ أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا ۚ
فَٱنظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true. See how those who spread corruption met their end! [14] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 14)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'They denied them' (*an-Naml:* 14) means that they denied them with their tongues, '…even though their souls acknowledged them as true' (*an-Naml:* 14), i.e. they believed in them. So, it was a case of stubbornness and headstrong opposition, which is why Allah *the Almighty* says, 'in their wickedness and their pride' (*an-Naml:* 14) they were too arrogant to accept the truth. '…See how those who spread corruption met their end!' (*an-Naml:* 14) That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* leaves their final outcome vague, to highlight its magnitude and its horror.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* leaves the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh and all that happened between them for another occasion, and said of Dawoud:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا دَاوُۥدَ وَسُلَيْمَٰنَ عِلْمًا ۖ وَقَالَا ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ
ٱلَّذِى فَضَّلَنَا عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّنْ عِبَادِهِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

We gave knowledge to David and Solomon, and they both said, 'Praise be to God, who has favoured us over many of His believing servants' [15] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 15)

One might wonder that since Allah *the Almighty* gave Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them* many blessings other than knowledge:

softening iron for Dawud (David), giving Sulaiman (Solomon) such sovereignty that none after him should have been able to obtain, subduing the wind and the jinn for him, and teaching him the speech of birds and so on, yet despite all this, did He bless them with nothing more than knowledge, that is, the way of religion? Scholars say that this is because knowledge is the true blessing in which the believer should rejoice, not power, wealth, or the whole world, none of which are equal to it. So, they praised Allah *the Almighty* for giving them knowledge because it is the blessing that all creatures need. As for sovereignty, nobility and the subdual of the universe for one's service, it is possible to do without them.

When Abu Dharr was exiled to the village of Rabdha for warning against the negative effect of money, building and other worldly affairs, thereby causing social strife, before he left he went to `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* to ask for his pardon. However, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* did not want to become involved, lest it be said that he had supported Abu Dharr in his opposition to the people of worldly affairs, so he said to him 'O Abu Dharr, you became angry for Allah's sake, so put your hope in the One for Whose sake you became angry. The people fear you on account of their worldly lives and their possessions. You feared them on account of your religion, so flee with that on whose account you feared them (i.e. flee with your religion) and leave aside what they feared you for. They are in dire need of that which you would forbid them. You are free of need for that which they would forbid you.'(1)

In this way, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* answered the question and highlighted the importance of knowledge and divine guidance that no Muslim can ever dispense with or can live without. By knowledge one can gain another life which is lofty and eternal, whilst he is able to live without wealth and possessions.

The Caliph sent a message to Ja`far As-Sadiq(2) in which he said: 'O grandson of Prophet Muhammad, why do you not visit us (i.e. come to us and sit with us and converse with us) like other people do?' whereupon Ja`far replied ‘I have nothing of this worldly life that I might fear you for’, i.e. I have no money that you could take, and you possess nothing of the hereafter that I could hope to take from you.’ This is the same logic that `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* previously used.

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(1) The story of the exile of Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* and `Ali's stand with him.

(2) The story of Ja`far As-Sadiq *Allah be pleased with him* with the caliph who sent for him to visit him.

Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and they both said, “Praise be to Allah, who has favoured us over many of His believing servants.’ (*an-Naml:* 15) The praise here is dedicated to knowledge and the conservation of Allah’s Guidance. This verse offers as evidence for the veracity of prophecy. Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them* said, ‘…who has favoured us over many of His believing servants’ (*an-Naml:* 15) as though there are some who were favoured more than them and as though this favouring was not confined solely to them. This was out of their humility.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَوَرِثَ سُلَيْمَٰنُ دَاوُۥدَ ۖ وَقَالَ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ عُلِّمْنَا مَنطِقَ ٱلطَّيْرِ
وَأُوتِينَا مِن كُلِّ شَىْءٍ ۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ ٱلْفَضْلُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿١٦﴾

‘Solomon succeeded David. He said, ‘People, we have been
taught the speech of birds, and we have been given a
share of everything: this is a clearly a great favour’[16]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 16)

Allah *the Almighty* says that ‘Sulaiman (Solomon) succeeded Dawud (David)…’ (*an-Naml:* 16) meaning that Sulaiman (Solomon) succeeded his father, Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon them* and became a prophet. He did not inherit wealth, a point which is clear in the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘We Prophets are not inherited from; what we leave behind is charity.’(1)

This indicates that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* came after Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* and inherited prophethood from him, even though they lived at the same time, as is shown by Allah’s statement elsewhere in the Quran: ‘And [remember] Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) – [how it was] when both of them gave judgment concerning the field into which some people’s sheep had strayed by night and pastured therein, and [how] We bore witness to their judgment.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 78)

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(1) *Agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him.*

So Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* shared with Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* in this judgement and knowledge, but the True Lord made the knowledge come in stages, as is shown in Allah’s saying, ‘We made Sulaiman (Solomon) understand the case…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79). Even though his father was present, and judged that the owner of the crops should take the sheep that had eaten them.

After Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* had left, Sulaiman (Solomon) asked them about his father’s verdict and they told him what he had said, whereupon he *peace be upon him* said that it was better for the owner of the crops to take the sheep and benefit from them (i.e. from their wool and milk, etc.), while the owner of the sheep took care of the crops until they were back to their previous state, whereupon he could take his sheep back and the owner of the crops could take his crops back.(1)

This is an example of a prophet and his son, not of two different and non-related prophets. This indicates that the paternal rights over Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* did not prevent him from differing with his father’s judgement because Allah *the Almighty* says about them, ‘…yet We vouchsafed unto both of them sound judgment and knowledge…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79). Both judged according to the knowledge that Allah *the Almighty* endowed them with.

This story conveys the permissibility of appealing and overturning legal verdicts. When a judge of appeal overrules the verdict of the first judge, this is not an insult to him; rather, they both judged according to their knowledge and according to the evidence and facts at their disposal. Perhaps the second judge noticed something that the first judge missed.

So, the statement: ‘Sulaiman (Solomon) succeeded Dawud (David)’ (*an-Naml:* 16) does not mean that he came after him. They lived at the same age, Sulaiman (Solomon) inherited knowledge, wisdom and prophethood from his father, not sovereignty and wealth. This is because Allah *the Almighty* wanted His messengers, in their pursuit of delivering His Message to be far removed from any material benefit that might come to them or their offspring.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir on the authority of Ibn `Abbas*

So, the poor people of the family of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are not allowed to receive the poor-due from the believers. Where is this wise rule nowadays, however, when rulers and leaders and people of power give authority to their relatives and plunder the nation for their sakes?

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…He said, "People, we have been taught the speech of birds…"' (*an-Naml:* 16), it means that birds have their own speech and language by means of which they can communicate with each other. As Allah *the Almighty* says, '…although there is no beast that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which are not creature likes yourselves…' (*al-An'am:* 38).

With the advance of science, scientists are now talking about the language of ants, bees, whales and so on. These creatures communicate with their languages instinctively and precisely, but we cannot understand their speech. Allah *the Almighty* teaches us 'The seven heavens extol His Limitless Glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His Limitless Glory and Praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!' (*al-Isra':* 44)

If you say, as some have, that this means the extolling of proof (of Allah), not speech, and words, we say, 'Since Allah *the Almighty* says, "…but you fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him…" (*al-Isra':* 44), this must be by speech and words, but you do not understand it'.

Linguists say that speech is specific to mankind; as for the sounds made by animals and birds, they are only sounds that they make constantly, such as the meowing of a cat, the barking of a dog, the mooing of a cow or the croaking of frog. Yet, these sounds have meanings, for the meow of a cat when it is hungry is not the same as its meowing when it is frightened.

So, they express something, but we cannot understand these expressions. How could we, when we humans do not even understand each other's languages without learning them, understand the language of these creatures?

Language is a societal necessity that we collectively establish, that is, we come to an agreement about what each word means, so that we can understand each other when we speak.

Language is born of listening. You are able to pronounce words when you hear them; you cannot say a word you have not heard, even if it is a word in your own language, and you will not know what it means. If I say to you: '*Ormulu and haemocyanin* are finer than *provenderalsacculi*', you will doubtless be unable to understand what they mean because these words are not generally known to us.

A child raised in an Arabic environment will speak Arabic because this is what he hears. He will not speak English, for example, because he does not hear it. If you put the same child in an English environment, he would speak English because language is not connected to race or blood. Language is based on listening.

The meaning of '…and we have been given a share of everything' (*an-Naml:* 16) is 'We have been given all blessings'. After a while, we will hear the very same expression used by the hoopoe about the queen of Sheba: '…and she has been given [abundance] of all [good] things…' (*an-Naml:* 23). She was akin to him in respect to other kings like her, not in respect to prophethood and the bearing of Allah's guidance '…this is clearly a great favour.' (*an-Naml:* 16), that is, favour that encompasses all favours.

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

وَحُشِرَ لِسُلَيْمَٰنَ جُنُودُهُۥ مِنَ ٱلْجِنِّ وَٱلْإِنسِ وَٱلطَّيْرِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ١٧

'Solomon's hosts of jinn, men, and birds were marshalled in ordered ranks before him [17] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 17)

Allah's statement 'were marshalled in ordered ranks before him' (*an-Naml:* 17) indicates that they were brought together from everywhere, as in Allah's saying, '…and send unto all cities heralds (*hashirin*).' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 36) 'The assembly' means the gathering of people to be reckoned on the Day of Resurrection. This gathering is called 'the assembly' because it will gather people from many different places in a single place until it becomes constrained and crowded by them. This is the same as the meaning of the word *hashr* 'assemble' in Arab's everyday use; they say, 'We randomly assemble them together'.

The meaning of 'marshalled in ordered ranks before him' (*an-Naml:* 17) is that they were restrained (the original meaning of the Arabic word 'to be in order' is to restrain). This is similar to the Prophetic saying, 'Allah restrains with power what the Quran cannot restrain', that is, power, force and might prevent what the Quran cannot prevent because they do not believe in resurrection and punishment, but power is a deterrent that is present here and now.

However, from what were they restrained when they stood gathered before Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*? They say that they were restrained from any of them overtaking another to go to Sulaiman (Solomon) so that the last of them could come and they could all enter before him at once. By this, all the subjects were treated equally.

They tell us that one of the attributes of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was that if he sat in a gathering, he would regard and look at everyone the same amount so that it would be equal for all of them and he would not look at one of them longer than he did with another, nor would he single out any of them. Henceforth, no one would think that he had favoured one over the others.

He would also not bring close to him anyone except those people of merit and piety whom he knew would not attempt to take advantage of this position in order to gain authority over the people. So, Prophet Muhammad would not set specific places and he forbade this. This is very different from what we see today, when some people reserve a place for prayer in the front row at the mosque, then go to continue their job and then come back when the mosque is full, stepping over other people to get to their place in the front – this is not their place in Allah's sight.

Allah *the Almighty* distributes places according to the order that people come. If you come to the mosque first, your reward is to be in the first row. Refraining from appointing places creates friendliness amongst the people, removes differences, and increases familiarity. In every prayer, you stand next to a different person, coming to know him and knowing how he is.

This is the meaning of ‘marshalled in ordered ranks before him’ (*an-Naml:* 17). The one in front was not allowed to move until the one behind him had come, so they all came to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* together. But in the light of this meaning for the root word *w-z-a`* ‘led forth in orderly ranks’ and ‘to restrain’, how can we understand Allah’s saying, ‘…Lord, inspire me to be thankful for the blessings You have granted’ (*an-Naml:* 19) where the phrase ‘inspire me’ is based on the same root? Here, Allah’s saying ‘inspire me’ means make me able and prevent me from being heedless of Your blessings so that I will remain grateful to you.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَتَوۡاْ عَلَىٰ وَادِ ٱلنَّمۡلِ قَالَتۡ نَمۡلَةٞ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّمۡلُ ٱدۡخُلُواْ
مَسَٰكِنَكُمۡ لَا يَحۡطِمَنَّكُمۡ سُلَيۡمَٰنُ وَجُنُودُهُۥ وَهُمۡ لَا يَشۡعُرُونَ ١٨

‘And when they came to the Valley of the Ants, one ant said, ‘Ants! Go into your homes, in case Solomon and his hosts unwittingly crush you’ [18] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 18)

The pronoun in the phrase ‘they came’ (*an-Naml:* 18) refers to Sulaiman’s (Solomon’s) hosts of men, jinn and birds, i.e. they all came together in one row and passed by ‘a valley of ants’ (*an-Naml:* 18), i.e. an ant colony. Allah’s saying, ‘to a valley of ants’ (*an-Naml:* 18) indicates that they came from the top of the mountain, or that they traversed the entire valley, as is said in Arabic: ‘He came upon the food’, meaning he ate it all.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘one ant said, ‘O Ants! Go into your homes…’’ (*an-Naml:* 18), there is a question which is ‘What was the reason for this warning’?’ This is clear in the following part of the verse, ‘…in case Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts unwittingly crush you.’ (*an-Naml:* 18) Then the ant explained the matter completely, saying, ‘unwittingly’ (*an-Naml:* 18). Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and his hosts would not have crushed an ant colony deliberately. They might crush you whilst they are unaware of your existence. This showed the ant’s just assessment and its knowledge of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and that he was neither a tyrant nor a ruffian. So, the ant saw from afar, and spoke truthfully, and judged honestly and because of all this, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* smiled.

This statement clearly shows the distinction of the ant colony in its organisation, in which everyone knows their role and fulfils it diligently. This ant must have been charged with the job of keeping guard and watching the surrounding environments like a soldier on sentry duty.

We said before that if you sit in a certain place and drop some scraps of food or cake, you will see a few ants circle around it without approaching it, then leave it. After a moment, you will see a whole group of ants come and carry off these scraps, as though the first group were scouts charged with the task of discovering places containing food and working out how many ants are needed to carry what they find. This can be shown if you double the amount of food you drop; you will see that the number of ants that come to take it away will also double. If you were to kill the first ant that came to scout, you would find that no other ants would come to this place. This is because the ant that survived would go back to its colony and warn the others not to come to this place.

There are many wonders and signs in the ant colony, Glory be to Allah, the One Who created them, and Glory be to Allah, the One Who guided them to this instinctive structural organisation!

Another wonder of ants is that in their hives, they split seeds into two. They, then, will not take root and destroy the hive; except for coriander seeds and the like, which can grow even if they are split into two: in this case, the ants break these seeds into four pieces.

Also, researchers on ants have noticed small white kernels the size of pinheads in front of ant hives. Upon examination, these have proved to be the parts of seeds that contain growth cells, which the ants have expelled from the seeds so that they do not grow.

Allah *the Almighty* the Most Great speaks the truth in His saying, ‘Although there is no beast that walks on Earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which are not creature like yourselves…’ (*al-An‘am:* 38).

Allah *the Almighty* described the ant’s statement as being speech, saying, ‘one ant said...’ (*an-Naml:* 18). It must have been the case that the warning ‘…O Ants! Go into your homes…’ (*an-Naml:* 18) was given before Sulaiman

(Solomon) *peace be upon him* and his hosts came, when they were just entering the valley. The word ‘your homes’ indicates that they had houses and dwellings to live and earn a living. As we say, they gather their provision from here and there, so you find them seeking out places of food and leftovers and finding them in the narrowest of places. We see cake shops for example, which are full of sugar, which ants love, yet we do not find a single ant there. Why? When they studied such phenomena, they found that ants do not enter places that contain any sesame products. This is another amazing fact about ants.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…in case Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts unwittingly crush you.’ (*an-Naml:* 18); ‘to crush’ is to break, as Allah *the Almighty* says about hell: ‘And what could make you conceive what that crushing torment will be?’ (*al*-Humaza*:* 5).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَتَبَسَّمَ ضَاحِكٗا مِّن قَوۡلِهَا وَقَالَ رَبِّ أَوۡزِعۡنِيٓ أَنۡ أَشۡكُرَ نِعۡمَتَكَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ
وَٰلِدَيَّ وَأَنۡ أَعۡمَلَ صَٰلِحٗا تَرۡضَىٰهُ وَأَدۡخِلۡنِي بِرَحۡمَتِكَ فِي عِبَادِكَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ١٩

Solomon smiled broadly at her words and said, ‘Lord, inspire me to be thankful for the blessings You have granted me and my parents, and to do good deeds that please You; admit me by Your grace into the ranks of Your righteous servants’ [19]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 19)

Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* smiled. It was a smile accompanied by laughter. This is because he heard her before he reached her and because she saw before the witnessed thing had arrived. Some people have discussed this matter and concluded that the wind carried the ant’s speech to him whilst he was still far away from it. This might be acceptable if it were a mechanical matter; but it was the work of the Lord and the power of the Creator who grants His blessings to whomever He wishes.

Allah says, ‘…O my Lord! Inspire me…’ (*an-Naml:* 19), i.e. prevent me from being heedless, or from forgetting these blessings, so I remain grateful, praising you always. These blessings are beyond that which You grant to other creatures, beyond that which You granted my fellow prophets before me and all the kings of this world. Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was granted both sovereignty and prophethood, even though Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was offered sovereignty but refused it, preferring to be a servant and a messenger.

So, everyone who is granted a blessing must receive it by praising and thanking Allah *the Almighty*. We said before, about Allah's words, '…and on that Day, you will most surely be called to account for [what you did with] the boon of life!' (*at-Takathur:* 8), that the right of the blessing is that you praise the One Who granted it, so that you will not be asked about it on the Day of Resurrection

Thanking Allah *the Almighty* for His blessings is so similar to what they do in the Egyptian countryside: the wife takes an egg and puts it in a safe place suitable for a hen to make a nest. When the hen sees the egg, she comes and lays more eggs on top of it. In the same way, thanking Allah and praising Him for His blessings is the nucleus around which more of Allah's blessings will accumulate.

This concept is made clear in Allah's words: '…If you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly give you more and more…' (*Ibrahim:* 7). Do you not see that if someone has knowledge and applies it, Allah *the Almighty* will give him knowledge that he did not have before? For as long as he applies his knowledge, he shows that he can be trusted with knowledge, so Allah *the Almighty* gives him more and opens for him doors that were closed. This is in contrast to the one who gains knowledge but does not apply it: Allah *the Almighty* takes the light of knowledge from him, and closes its door to him, his memory fails and he forgets what he learned. Allah *the Almighty* says, '…For he who is grateful [unto Him] is but grateful for the good of his own self…' (*Luqman:* 12). That is, the fruits of his thanks return to him because if he thanks Allah with praise, Allah thanks him with increase, for one of His names is the All-Thankful.

Allah's saying, '…the blessings You have granted me…' (*an-Naml:* 19) is specific to him; Sulaiman (Solomon) says: 'and my parents' because he inherited sovereignty and prophethood from them. This is the price of blessings;

that one does good works in the community, so that one is trustworthy with blessings and fit to be given more.

Allah *the Almighty* wants us to widen the circle of righteousness and the circle of goodness in our communities. Do you not see that Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, which He will amply repay, with manifold increase?’ (*al-Baqara:* 245) He named the goodness that you offer a ‘loan’, even though Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gives all blessings. He did this to make the hearts of His servants feel compassion for one another because He created them, and Allah *the Almighty* undertakes to provide for them.

Then Allah says, ‘…admit me by Your Grace into the ranks of Your righteous servants.’ (*an-Naml:* 19) He mentioned grace and blessing because they are the keys to salvation and by their means one enters paradise and without them no one will find salvation. Read the statement of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘None of you will enter paradise by means of your works.’ They said ‘Not even you, O Messenger Muhammad?’ He replied ‘Not even me, save that Allah covers me with His Mercy.’(1) In this same meaning, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Say, “In this bounty of Allah and in His Grace – in this, then, let them rejoice…”’ (*Yunus:* 58). The true believer does not rejoice in his own deeds; he rejoices only if he gains Allah’s Grace and blessing. It is as though he says to his Lord: ‘I will not rely on my works, O Lord; rather, I will rely on Your Grace and blessing because if I compare the worship that You have charged me with to the blessings that You have granted me, my worship will fall short of Your right over me; so if You grant me paradise, it is by Your bounty’.

Some may ask ‘How can our Lord give us blessings and increase, then forbid us from trading in usury? Are our good deeds not rewarded tenfold or more’? We say yes, but the increase here is from Allah *the Almighty* not from an equal being; it is an increase from the Lord to the servants.

Allah’s saying, ‘into the ranks of your righteous servants’ (*an-Naml:* 19) shows the humility of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Despite his position and his rank, he asked Allah *the Almighty* to make him one of the righteous and to place him amongst their ranks. Despite the sovereignty that Allah *the Almighty* gave him and that none after him could possess, he did not make himself special, or pre-eminent, or claim to be better than the rest of Allah’s servants.

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Allah *the Almighty* gave him prophethood and revelation and none of this caused him to become deluded or haughty. He asked his Lord to include him amongst His righteous servants, like when we say: ‘Fit me in with these guys’, when the car is full, for example, and there is no place for us to sit.

Who is saying this? It is Sulaiman (Solomon), son of Dawud (David) *peace be upon them* to whom Allah *the Almighty* gave sovereignty that none after him could possess. Yet despite this, he would put his slaves and retinue above himself. He would eat from the lowest quality flour, leaving the best part for his subjects.

So, he did not gain any advantage from his sovereignty, nor did he adorn himself with its outward signs. Rather, his Lord did this for Him because he was on the side of Allah’s servants, so Allah *the Almighty* supported him. When you help your brother, you help him with your limited power and capability. Allah’s help, however, comes according to His Omnipotent Power which knows no bounds. So, you are the one who benefits from this arrangement.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَتَفَقَّدَ ٱلطَّيۡرَ فَقَالَ مَالِيَ لَآ أَرَى ٱلۡهُدۡهُدَ أَمۡ كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡغَآئِبِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Solomon inspected the birds and said, ‘Why do I not see the hoopoe? Is he absent? [20] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 20)

The word for *tafaqqada* (inspected) is from the Arabic root *(f-q-d)*, the derivatives of which are all connected to the meaning of loss. An example of this is Allah’s statement about the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘Turning towards the herald and his companions, the brothers asked “What is it that you miss?”’ (*Yusuf:* 71)

When it is in the form *tafaqqada*, it indicates that the thing is present and I am searching for it in its usual places.

The meaning of ‘Sulaiman (Solomon) inspected the birds and said, “Why do I not see the hoopoe? Is he absent?”’ (*an-Naml:* 20) is that the leader or director of something must always watch over it. Whenever Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* sat in the council of knowledge or the court, he looked to those of his dominion who were present, just like a military leader does when he observes his troops. Even though this was his kingdom, under his control, he *peace be upon him* did not leave it in neglect and fail to watch over it, it is a great indication. Why did he miss this bird in particular? Scholars say it is because he wanted to go out to the desert, and the hoopoe was knowledgeable concerning this matter knowing the desert’s unexplored territories and able even to see where water lay underground, just as one of us can see oil in its vessel.

We see that one of the divine characteristics of the hoopoe is that it is given a long beak because it does not eat things from the surface of the earth, but rather digs with its beak to bring up food from under the ground.

Do you not see that when the hoopoe told Sulaiman (Solomon) about the details of belief and faith in Allah, he said about the people of Sheba, ‘for they have come to believe] that they ought not to adore Allah – [although it is He] who brings forth all that is hidden in the heavens and on Earth…' (*an-Naml:* 25). He chose this matter in particular because he knew about it, for it was the source of his provision.

When he did not find the hoopoe amongst those present, he said, ‘…Why do I not see the hoopoe? Is he absent?’ (*an-Naml:* 20) When someone asks about something that he knows the truth of, he does not do so in order to find it out, but rather asked to indicate that it was unusual for the hoopoe to be absent from his council.

Sulaiman’s saying, ‘Why do I not see the hoopoe’ (*an-Naml:* 20) means that perhaps he is present, but I cannot see him because of some fault of my own; but when he looked carefully and was sure that the hoopoe was absent, he said, ‘is he absent?’ (*an-Naml:* 20) So, he must surely be punished:

Sulaiman then says:

لَأُعَذِّبَنَّهُۥ عَذَابٗا شَدِيدًا أَوۡ لَأَاْذۡبَحَنَّهُۥٓ أَوۡ لَيَأۡتِيَنِّي بِسُلۡطَٰنٖ مُّبِينٖ ﴿٢١﴾

I will punish him severely, or kill him, unless he
brings me a convincing excuse for his absence [21]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 21)

Punishment of disobedience is necessary because if disobedience goes unpunished, this will lead to further disobedience even greater than it. When we see an employee who does not do his job well, go unnoticed by anyone, we will do the same thing he does, then chaos, laziness and indifference will spread among us. Disaster ensues when laxity is rewarded and undeserving people are promoted.

Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* threatened the hoopoe: ‘I will punish him severely or kill him…’ (*an-Naml:* 21). The scholars have discussed the punishment of the hoopoe, saying that the beautiful feathers that he boasted of before the other birds would be plucked until he was featherless and then ants would be placed on him to gnaw at him; or that he would be placed with species other than his so that he would not find companionship with them and they would not resemble him in his actions and his ways. Or that they would make him serve his fellow hoopoes that had been obedient. Or that he would be placed with his adversaries, for some birds, if they mix, begin to fight and clash, pecking out each other’s feathers because they are natural adversaries. For this reason, they say, ‘It is more confining than prison to live among your adversaries’. The poet says:

One of the calamities of this world for a man
Is to see an enemy whom he is forced to befriend

Then, he changed the act of punishment to execution. Those who reject Allah’s Religion and wish to prevent His Laws from being implemented condemned this punishment. They tried to throw obscurity on Allah’s saying about adultery: ‘As for the adulteress and the adulterer – flog each of them with a hundred stripes…’ (*an-Nur:* 2).They denied the punishment of stoning to death, claiming that it is not mentioned at all; so from where did you get it?

I say that this ruling is deduced from Allah’s Book, when He said about the flogging of a slave-girl who commits fornication: ‘…they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable.' (*an-Nisa': 25*) They said: 'But how can you halve a death-sentence'? This indicates their total lack of understanding of the divine rulings.

The meaning is: 'they', i.e. slave-girls '…shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable' (*an-Nisa':* 25). He did not say simply 'half of that to which free women are liable'; rather, He specified the penalty, so a slave is subject to fifty lashes. This specification showed that there is another punishment which is not halved, that is, execution.

Sulaiman's (Solomon's) threat to the hoopoe ended with his word '…unless it brings me a convincing excuse' (*an-Naml:* 21), i.e. a clear justification for its absence. We understand from the verse that a subordinate is permitted to act according to his opinion without asking permission from his leader, if he sees a common good that cannot be delayed.

In such circumstances, the leader must respect the opinion of his follower and excuse him because he might have a good reason which the leader should praise him for and even reward him. As a matter of fact, one's absence may be for a common good. As we say in our dialect: 'The absent person's excuse is with him', that is, he has something important to do, which is why he was not present.

So, if a subordinate sees a good that can serve the common goal and sees that his opportunity is little, he is permitted to act without permission. In the First World War, one of the German officers acted contrary to the military rules; but it was a means to victory. So, they gave him a military medal, but meanwhile they did not forget to punish him for breaking the rules and laws.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَمَكَثَ غَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ فَقَالَ أَحَطتُ بِمَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِۦ وَجِئْتُكَ مِن سَبَإٍۭ بِنَبَإٍ يَقِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

But the hoopoe did not stay away long: he came and said, 'I have learned something you did not know: I come to you from Sheba with firm news [22] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 22)

The meaning of 'stay away' is that the hoopoe stayed and remained absent for no long time, and was not very late in arriving because it knew that it was absent from Sulaiman's (Solomon's) *peace be upon him* army. The hoopoe had gone without Sulaiman's (Solomon's) permission, so it returned as soon as it could. Once it got back, it was quick to speak: 'it came and Said…' (*an-Naml:* 22). The use of the Arabic particle *(fa`)* here indicates quick succession, i.e. it arrived and began to speak immediately because it saw that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was angry and preparing to punish it. That is why it spoke quickly before Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* could speak and scold it: '…I have learned something you did not know…' (*an-Naml:* 22), i.e. I know what you know not. This statement was directed to Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* who owned the entire world, and for whom Allah *the Almighty* subdued everything. So, he *peace be upon him* was amazed by the hoopoe's speech and yearned to know what it knew, whilst he *peace be upon him* knew it not. The hoopoe went on: '…I come to you from Sheba with firm news' (*an-Naml:* 22).

First, let us consider the beauty of the expression that linked 'Sheba' to 'firm news'. In Arabic, the two words produce assonance: *saba`* and *naba`*. This is a high rhetorical style in the Arabic language, which gives the expression a beautiful sound that is in harmony with the intended meaning. The word for this rhetorical device in Arabic is *jinas* (paronomasia) which means that two words have the same letters, but different meanings, such as the poet's saying

I left my home to come to you *(asiru)*
And my heart is a prisoner of your love *(asiru)*

The two lines both end with the word *asiru*, which means 'come/walk' in the first line, and 'prisoner' in the second. Another poet said:

The right you have upon me,
Has not even partly been fulfilled *(yajibu)*
By the heart that, upon your mention,
Beats harder within my breast *(yajibu)*

Here, the two lines both end with the word *yajibu*, which means both 'what is necessary' and 'to beat' in reference to the palpitation of the heart.

An example of *jinas* in the Noble Quran is found in the saying of Allah, 'It is He Who will cause you to die, and in time will resurrect you. And when the Last Hour dawns, those who had been lost in sin will swear that they had not tarried [on Earth] longer than an hour…' (*ar-Rum:* 55). In the aforementioned verse, the word 'hour' is repeated with a different sense.

The Quranic expression '…I have come to you from Sheba with firm news' (*an-Naml:* 22) has a beautiful sound and a precise meaning. If it had said 'I come to you from Sheba with news' using the word *khabar*, both the words and the meaning would be deficient because 'news' means any kind of information, whereas 'firm' is only used to report some important, amazing news that attracts attention, as in Allah's words: 'About what do they [most often] ask one another? About the awesome tiding [of resurrection]' (*an-Naml:* 1-2).

Jinas is only beautiful when it is natural, without affectation. For example, consider the partial *jinas* (i.e. that in which not every letter of the two words are the same, but only most of them, so they rhyme) in Allah's saying: 'Woe unto every slanderer, fault-finder!' (al-Humaza: 1) The words used in the Arabic are *humaza* and *lumaza*.

The appropriate word, giving the desired meaning, has been used, without affectation. *Humaza* means someone who is deficient in speech; *lumaza* means someone who is deficient in actions. The Quran does not seek out words to produce rhymes; *jinas* only occurs when it is natural and fits the right meaning exactly.

Another example of this is the Noble Hadith: 'Goodness is inherent in the forelocks of horses.'(1) There is partial *jinas* in the words for *khayl* (horses) and *khayr* (goodness), which makes the expression beautiful and also gives the appropriate meaning.

Rhetorical devices may be sometimes artificial such as when someone artificially carves out a feeble rhyme using influential speech that makes little sense and sounds artificial, like trying to rhyme *qirab* (water-skin) with *`inab* (grapes).

The statement: '…I have learned (*ahattu*) something you did not know' (*an-Naml:* 22), means to have awareness of something from all sides. The Arabic root of this word is *muhit* which means ocean which is so wide.

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Also, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and, indeed, Allah encompasses everything.' (*an-Nisa':* 126) using the same word *muhit* for imparting the meaning of 'know'. We also get the word *ha`it* (wall) from this root which means the fence they put around orchards to protect them and demarcate their boundaries. It also gives the meaning of 'to attend to something properly'. It further carries the meaning of the area of a circle meaning the space that it surrounds from all sides with its radii.

But does the hoopoe's statement '…I have learned something you did not know' (*an-Naml:* 22) imply a deficiency on the part of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*? No; it is rather a mark of honour for him because his Lord subdued for him those who would serve him. The difference between you doing something yourself and having it done for you is that when it is done for you, this increases your dominion and raises your rank.

Also, Allah *the Almighty* commands not to neglect the talents of those who follow us, that we should give them a chance and give them the means to use their skills, so that all of them say what they know, in case we ourselves do not know, so that it can serve us.

Is it not an honour for Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* to bring forth Bilqis throne without moving?! Allah says: 'Answered he who was illumined by revelation, "Nay, as for me – I shall bring it to thee ere the twinkling of thy eye ceases!"' (*an-Naml:* 40)

The hoopoe did not explain what Sheba was, a point that indicates that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* knew about Sheba and the dominion that was there; he only did not know how great and magnificent it was.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنِّي وَجَدتُّ ٱمۡرَأَةٗ تَمۡلِكُهُمۡ وَأُوتِيَتۡ مِن كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ وَلَهَا عَرۡشٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿٢٣﴾

I found a woman ruling over the people, who has been given
a share of everything – she has a magnificent throne [23]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 23)

The statement 'a woman ruling over the people' (*an-Naml:* 23) means that she was their ruler; We have seen many instances of women who famously ruled nations of men. Then it describes her as having '…who has been given a share of everything' (*an-Naml:* 23). This seems to be an allusion to what Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said before: '…and (we) have been given [in abundance] of all [good] things…' (*an-Naml:* 16). She too had been given everything in comparison to her contemporaries, although Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was given sovereignty and prophethood above what the Queen of Sheba was given.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…she has a magnificent throne' (*an-Naml:* 23), the word 'throne' is the place where a monarch sits. Usually, a throne corresponds to the might of the sovereignty, so the tribal chief or the village chief or the mayor will have chairs that they sit on, which are appropriate to their ranks. So, a throne is the seat that the one in charge sits on.

The throne is described as 'magnificent ', even though this is how Allah's Throne is described. How can this be? They say that it was mighty compared to the other monarchs of her kind; as for Allah's Throne, it is Mighty compared to all creation, that is, with Absolute Might.

So, the hoopoe told Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* about what distinguished the Queen of Sheba in respect to the sovereignty and made her resemble him *peace be upon him* as a monarch. After this, the hoopoe went on to tell him about matters related to prophethood and faith in Allah which is what Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was concerned about and affected by.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَجَدتُّهَا وَقَوْمَهَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ
ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

[but] I found that she and her people worshipped the sun instead of God. Satan has made their deeds seem alluring to them, and diverted them from the right path: they cannot find the right path [24] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 24)

This is because when it circled the palace of Bilqis and found therein a window through which the sun shone, just as we find in the temples of the ancient Egyptians. In one of these temples, there is a window through which the rays of the sun enter one time a year. Likewise, Bilqis had a window through which the sun entered so that she could see it and face it.

So, when the hoopoe took Sulaiman's (Solomon's) letter to her, it stood at this window and covered it with its wings, so the sun was not seen at the defined time, which is why she stood up and went over to the window, where it threw the book to her.

So, the hoopoe was a believer; it had knowledge of the necessity of having faith in Allah; it was loyal to it and thus disliked seeing it perverted. Allah says, 'But I found that she and her people worshipped the sun instead of Allah'. (*an-Naml:* 24) It knew that Allah *the Almighty* alone deserves to be worshipped. In addition, it knew about Satan and that he is the cause for the abandonment of the worship of Allah *the Almighty* a point which is clear in the saying of Allah, '…Satan has made their deeds seem alluring to them, and diverted them from the right path: they cannot find the right path.' (*an-Naml:* 24) So, it was aware of all the details of this matter. At this point, one should not be amazed by what the hoopoe said and if any, let him read the saying of Allah, '…There is not a single thing but extols His Limitless Glory and Praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!' (*an-Naml:* 44)

There follows a direct admonition from a capable preacher, who understands Allah's word, knows His way and calls unto it, and who is proud of it and feels bad to see people abandoning the way of Allah *the Almighty* the Dispenser of blessings.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَلَّا يَسْجُدُوا۟ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى يُخْرِجُ ٱلْخَبْءَ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تُخْفُونَ وَمَا تُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

**Should they not worship God, who brings forth
what is hidden in the heavens and earth and
knows both what you people conceal and what you
declare? [25] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 25)**

As for the expression 'Should they not', it is formed in Arabic from the particles meaning 'that' and 'not'. The meaning is that Satan has made their deeds seem fair to them so that they will not prostrate themselves to Allah *the Almighty*. So, the conjunctive particle ‘so’ is missing here which sometimes occurs in the Arabic language because it is superfluous. Another authentic reading of the Quran reads this phrase as ‘they must’, which is also one of the meanings of the aforementioned Arabic words; in this case, it implies exhortation and urging.

We said that the hoopoe chose to say ‘…who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and earth…’ (*an-Naml:* 25) because it was familiar with this matter since it could see water beneath the earth just as one of us can see oil in its container. The meaning of ‘…what is hidden in the heavens…’ is rain; and what is hidden ‘on Earth’ is crops. From these two things come the bases of life’s sustenance: from the sky’s rain and the earth’s fertility come crops; animals then feed on crops, as do mankind.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and knows both what you people conceal and what you declare?’ (*an-Naml:* 25). In another verse, He says, ‘…for nothing whatever, be it on earth or in heaven, remains hidden from Allah.’ (*Ibrahim:* 38)

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Say, “Whether you conceal what is in your hearts or bring it into the open, Allah knows it…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 29)

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ ٱلْعَرْشِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢٦﴾

He is God, there is no god but Him,
the Lord of the mighty throne [26]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 26)

When the hoopoe spoke about Bilqis’ throne, it said: ‘…and she has a magnificent throne’ (*an-Naml:* 23). If the same expression is given a definite article, i.e. ‘a magnificent throne’, it refers to none but Allah’s Throne, for He has Absolute Might over all creation.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ سَنَنظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ أَمْ كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ (٢٧)

Solomon said, ‘We shall see whether you are telling the truth or lying [27] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 27)

As for the saying of Allah, ‘Sulaiman (Solomon) said, “We shall see…”’ (*an-Naml:* 27), sight is performed with the eye; but can truth or falsehood be known with the eye? No, so the word here does not refer to the sight of the eye, but rather to the knowledge based on evidence, so it means ‘we shall know’. In Arabic, we say, ‘this matter needs to be seen’ meaning that it needs to be studied and examined.

This verse shows an example of Sulaiman’s (Solomon’s) fine manners, and his kindness to his subjects. He was the ruler, who had to be obeyed, and yet he said to the hoopoe: ‘…We shall see whether you are telling the truth or lying’ (*an-Naml:* 27). Truth is the opposite of lying, but Sulaiman’s (Solomon’s) prophetic etiquette did not allow him to accuse one of his own forces of lying, so he said: ‘…or lying’ (*an-Naml:* 27), i.e. even if you lied, you are not alone in this; for many people lie. Another possible explanation is that he *peace be upon him* meant inclining to them and close to them. This indicates that by his prophetic inspiration, he knew that he was telling the truth, but as long as the matter was still open to investigation, he had to make sure because he would not give preferential treatment to any of his subjects.

Allah then says:

ٱذْهَب بِّكِتَٰبِى هَٰذَا فَأَلْقِهْ إِلَيْهِمْ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ فَٱنظُرْ مَاذَا يَرْجِعُونَ (٢٨)

Take this letter of mine and deliver it to them, then withdraw and see what answer they send back [28] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 28)

This is the ‘act of seeing’ that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* deemed necessary to be sure of the hoopoe’s honesty: that he should send it with a letter to these people. This is an example of the eloquent conciseness of the Noble Quran. After Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said ‘…we shall see…’ (*an-Naml:* 23), he said: ‘Take this letter of mine…’ (*an-Naml:* 28).

Was the letter ready and prepared? No; the actual account was something like this: He said: ‘We shall see whether you had told the truth or you are one of the liars’, and then he wrote her a letter that said such-and-such, and then said to the hoopoe: ‘Take this letter of mine…’ (*an-Naml:* 28). All of this was left unmentioned because it can easily be inferred from the context of the story.

His word ‘then withdraw’ (*an-Naml:* 28) means ‘go away for a while, and try and surmise to ‘…see what answer they send back’ (*an-Naml:* 28), i.e. what they say to one another and how they discuss the letter amongst themselves. An example of this usage of the word ‘return’ can be found in Allah’s saying, ‘Why – did they not see that [the thing] could not give them any response, and had no power to harm or to benefit them?’ (*Ta Ha:* 89)

The context leads us to say that the hoopoe went with the letter, conveyed it to Bilqis, she read and discussed it with her advisors and then said, as mentioned in the Quran:

قَالَتۡ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلۡمَلَؤُاْ إِنِّيٓ أُلۡقِيَ إِلَيَّ كِتَٰبٞ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

The Queen of Sheba said, ‘Counsellors, a
gracious letter has been delivered to me [29]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 29)

Notice here the quick answer to the command ‘Take’. Immediately after it, the Queen of Sheba, said ‘Counsellors, a gracious letter has been delivered to me.’ (*an-Naml:* 29) This indicates that Sulaiman’s (Solomon’s) commands were sure to be quickly obeyed. So, all of the details between his saying ‘Take’ and the answer ‘The Queen said ’ is left unmentioned because of how quickly it happened.

The meaning of ‘Counsellors’ is the prominent and eminent people, the advisors and inner circle. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…a gracious letter has been delivered to me’ (*an-Naml:* 29), she described the letter as gracious, either because she had heard of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the magnificence of his kingdom, or because the letter was written on fine paper with beautiful script and was then stamped with the official seal indicating that it was an important letter that needed to be studied and appraised.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّهُۥ مِن سُلَيۡمَٰنَ وَإِنَّهُۥ بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣٠﴾

It is from Solomon, and it says, "In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [30] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 30)

So, she knew Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*; she knew of his prophethood and his character that he was writing to them in Allah's name and calling them by Allah's command. The content of his letter was as follows, 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, and the Giver of Mercy.'

Allah then says:

أَلَّا تَعۡلُواْ عَلَيَّ وَأۡتُونِي مُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

Do not put your- selves above me, and come to me in submission to God [31] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 31)

It was a concise message of the utmost brevity: 'Do not put yourselves above me' (*an-Naml:* 31). Exaltation here means the haughtiness and superciliousness to which monarchs often become accustomed. She was a monarch like him, had a mighty throne and she had been given abundance of all things. The fact that he addressed her in this succinct way, far away from any discussion or debate, required that she should reflect and consider the matter carefully.

So, after she informed her advisors of the letter and what it contained, she asked for their opinion and counsel.

Allah then says:

قَالَتۡ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلۡمَلَؤُاْ أَفۡتُونِي فِيٓ أَمۡرِي مَا كُنتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمۡرًا حَتَّىٰ تَشۡهَدُونِ ﴿٣٢﴾

She said, 'Counsellors, give me your counsel in the matter I now face: I only ever decide on matters in your presence'[32] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 32)

We had spoken about the issue of *fatwa* (legal verdicts); the word *fatwa* is derived from the word *futuwwa*, meaning 'strength and power'. The form of the word means to give something you possess to others, so in this case, it means to give strength in the form of a judgement or an argument.

As for the saying of Allah, '…I only ever decide on matters in your presence' (*an-Naml:* 32), it means that she would not decide a matter without their presence and counsel. This indicates that she accepted the principle of consultation despite her sovereignty, power, and authority. The nobles of her people then replied to her, as shown in the following verse:

قَالُوا۟ نَحْنُ أُو۟لُوا۟ قُوَّةٍ وَأُو۟لُوا۟ بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ وَٱلْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَٱنظُرِى مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

They replied, 'We possess great force and power in war, but you are in command, so consider what orders to give us' [33]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 33)

We are physically powerful, brave, and mighty. Moreover, we have a great army which is large in numbers and equipment. As for the saying of Allah, '…but you are in command…' (*an-Naml:* 33), it means that if you, the Queen of Sheba, wish to go to war, we are ready for it. They were presenting their opinion to her without trying to force her to follow it; it was a political opinion, not a wartime counsel. She had the final decision whether to go to war if she wanted, which is why Allah *the Almighty* concluded the verse with His saying, '…so consider what orders to give us' (*an-Naml:* 33); the counsellors told her that they were ready for truce or even war, affirming that they awaited her command.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

قَالَتْ إِنَّ ٱلْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا۟ قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا
وَجَعَلُوٓا۟ أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِهَآ أَذِلَّةً ۖ وَكَذَٰلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

She said, 'Whenever kings go into a city, they ruin it and humiliate its leaders – that is what they do' [34]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 34)

Bilqis then presented her opinion, as shown in the Quran saying: 'Whenever kings go into a city, they ruin it' (*an-Naml:* 34). This is because kings desire sovereignty, so they plunder everything they pass by, and even destroy it outright. Why do they do this? Because when the covetous king arrives, he is not sure of victory, so he destroys everything; yet when he realises that he has gained victory, he looks after things and does not destroy them. As for the saying of Allah, ‘…and humiliate its leaders’ (*an-Naml:* 34), Bilqis said so because these kings’ kingdoms are built on the ruins of the previous one, and so the people of nobility and leadership are the first ones they start with because having had authority taken from them, they will be quick to try and regain it and they must surely feel rage and bitter enmity.

As for His saying, ‘that is what they do’ (*an-Naml:* 34), scholars differ over its meaning; some say that it is part of Bilqis’ statement, believing this to be a sort of addendum to what she said before. But what does: ‘…that is what they do’ (*an-Naml:* 34), add, after she said: ‘…Whenever kings go into a city, they ruin it and humiliate its leaders’ (*an-Naml:* 34)? So the correct opinion is that this expression is said by Allah *the Almighty* by way of confirming what Bilqis said and that she was correct in her view. Indeed, this is what kings do when they enter a village. This shows that Allah *the Almighty* is the Lord of all creatures and that when He hears any of His servants speak the truth, He supports them; He does not oppose them, or deny them their right.

وَإِنِّي مُرْسِلَةٌ إِلَيْهِم بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَاظِرَةٌۢ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ ٱلْمُرْسَلُونَ ٣٥

But I am going to send them a gift, then see what answer
my envoys bring back [35] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 35)

The advisors left the matter up to her; she used her intellect, intelligence, and experience of life as a monarch. She said: ‘If Sulaiman (Solomon) is a king, he must covet the wealth we possess; and if he is a prophet, he will not care about any of it’. She decided therefore to send him a gift that would suit his position as king, and her own position, too, to confirm for him that she was in position of great wealth and riches. It must have been a valuable gift in order to attract the king, or, as we say, to make him ‘sit up and pay attention’. ‘But I am going to send them a gift, then see what answer my envoys bring back’ (*an-Naml:* 35). If he was a king, he would accept it. We would know that the way to deal with him would be to send to him a tribute of money every year. If he was a prophet, he would not accept anything. This was a fine idea on the part of Bilqis, showing her intelligence and brightness, whereby she kept her people from war and conflict.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَ سُلَيۡمَٰنَ قَالَ أَتُمِدُّونَنِ بِمَالٖ فَمَآ ءَاتَىٰنِۦَ ٱللَّهُ خَيۡرٞ
مِّمَّآ ءَاتَىٰكُمۚ بَلۡ أَنتُم بِهَدِيَّتِكُمۡ تَفۡرَحُونَ ٣٦

When her envoy came to Solomon, Solomon said, 'What! Are you offering me wealth? What God has given me is better than what He has given you, though you rejoice in this gift of yours [36] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 36)

As soon as Bilqis*'* messenger came to Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* with the gift, '…he said, "What! Are you offering me; wealth? What Allah has given me is better than what He has given you…' (*an-Naml:* 36), what gift is this, when I possess sovereignty the like of which none after me could possess? 'Though', i.e. think again, '…you rejoice in this gift of yours' (*an-Naml:* 36).

He ascribed the gift to them, not to himself. Ascription means either possession, as in 'the pen of Zayd*',* i.e. Zayd's pen*;* or it means composition, as in 'a kilo of wheat', i.e. a kilo composed of wheat; or it means within something, as in 'the plot of the night', i.e. a plot made during the night. So, his saying '…this gift of yours' (*an-Naml:* 36) either means 'your gift', i.e. you would rejoice if someone gave you a gift like this, or because I will return it to you, so you can rejoice in its being returned to you as a blessing; or it means 'a gift from you', i.e. you would rejoice if you gave me a gift and I accepted it from you.

These are three possible meanings for '…though you rejoice in this gift of yours.' (*an-Naml:* 36)

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

ٱرْجِعْ إِلَيْهِمْ فَلَنَأْتِيَنَّهُم بِجُنُودٍ لَّا قِبَلَ لَهُم بِهَا وَلَنُخْرِجَنَّهُم مِّنْهَآ أَذِلَّةً وَهُمْ صَٰغِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Go back to your people: we shall certainly come upon them with irresistible forces, and drive them, disgraced and humbled, from their land [37] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 37)

Remember that the queen said, '…then see what answer my envoys bring back' (*an-Naml:* 35). It is as though he was aware of exactly what she had said and was speaking by means of revelation within him and said: 'Go back to your people: we shall certainly come upon them with irresistible forces' (*an-Naml:* 37).

In this way, it turns to be a confrontation; for his speech was the speech of revelation, which accepts no barter, not the speech of a king who chases the vanities of this world. '… and drive them, disgraced and humbled, from their land.' (*an-Naml:* 37) It is as though he was showing them that he knew she had said: 'Whenever kings go into a city, they ruin it and humiliate its leaders– that is what they do' (*an-Naml:* 34). This was also a revelation.

The meaning of 'with irresistible forces' (*an-Naml:* 37) is that they will not be capable of resisting it and will be too weak to bear it. Then Allah says, '…and drive them, disgraced and humbled, from their land.' (*an-Naml:* 37) because he would take their sovereignty, after they had been kings, they would be slaves. Then he continued his threat to them: '…and humbled' (*an-Naml:* 37) because they would have to accept a life of slavery and be mere subjects, so he added 'and humbled' because people are only humbled by being killed or captured.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

قَالَ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلْمَلَؤُا۟ أَيُّكُمْ يَأْتِينِى بِعَرْشِهَا قَبْلَ أَن يَأْتُونِى مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

Then he said, 'Counsellors, which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?' [38] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 38)

The word 'Counsellors' means prominent and eminent people and those of sound reasoning. '…Which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission' (*an-Naml:* 38)? This is also an example of Sulaiman's (Solomon's) divine guidance. It means that he knew what would happen when he returned their gift to them, and that they would be quick to surrender to Allah *the Almighty* because the return of the gift meant that they were people of principle, who possessed a divine message, which they would defend at all costs, and that they were not people who sought their own benefit.

When he saw that they would surrender willingly, he asked his hosts to bring him her throne, and assigned the time in which it was to be brought as: '…before they come in submission' (*an-Naml:* 38).

So, someone had to go to the kingdom of Sheba, take down the throne, carry it to the kingdom of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and then set it up there. Of course, such a task was beyond human capability. For this reason, none of them spoke up; even the ordinary jinn did not suggest to Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* that they were ready to perform this task.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ عِفۡرِيتٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡجِنِّ أَنَا۠ ءَاتِيكَ بِهِۦ قَبۡلَ أَن تَقُومَ مِن مَّقَامِكَۖ وَإِنِّي عَلَيۡهِ لَقَوِيٌّ أَمِينٞ ﴿٣٩﴾

A powerful and crafty jinn replied, 'I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place. I am strong and trustworthy enough' [39] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 39)

Jinn are akin to mankind in their powers and skills. Some of them are strong and cunning, whilst others are unskilled, not able to do anything well. The word *`ifrit* is derived from the verb *`affara* which means to sprinkle dust, When the Arabs would race on horses or other mounts, the one in the lead would kick up dust in the face of the other, so he would have to slow down. So, they would call such a person *`ifrit*, because he had thrown dust upon those behind him. Or, it meant that he would throw dust into the face of anyone who confronted him and so they would call him *`ifrit*.

So, an *`ifrit* is a low, scheming kind of jinn and one of extraordinary power. He was the one to volunteer for this mission, saying, and '…I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place…' (*an-Naml:* 39). This is a vague statement, because Sulaiman's (Solomon's) council sessions before his subjects for the purpose of judgement or teaching would take time, perhaps an hour, or two. The bold jinn vowed that he would bring the throne during this time, i.e. he would not postpone it for another session.

His statement '…I am strong and trustworthy enough' (*an-Naml:* 39) indicates that this bold jinni was aware of the grandeur and imposing size of the throne, that it was something precious that needed to be well looked-after, especially when being carried. With respect to its size and grandeur, he said: '… I am strong and trustworthy enough' (*an-Naml:* 39), i.e. able to carry it. With respect to its value and preciousness, he said he was 'trustworthy', i.e. he would not damage it in any way.

Then another person, whose identity the Quran did not specify, spoke up and said:

قَالَ ٱلَّذِى عِندَهُۥ عِلْمٌ مِّنَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ أَنَا۠ ءَاتِيكَ بِهِۦ قَبْلَ أَن يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ طَرْفُكَ ۚ
فَلَمَّا رَءَاهُ مُسْتَقِرًّا عِندَهُۥ قَالَ هَٰذَا مِن فَضْلِ رَبِّى لِيَبْلُوَنِىٓ ءَأَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ ۖ
وَمَن شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّى غَنِىٌّ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

But one of them who had some knowledge of the Scripture said, 'I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.' When Solomon saw it set before him, he said, 'This is a favour from my Lord, to test whether I am grateful or not: if anyone is grateful, it is for his own good, if anyone is ungrateful, then my Lord is Self-Sufficient and most generous' [40]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 40)

The *taraf* mentioned here in Arabic is the upper eyelid, i.e. before you blink. The scholars have discussed this verse much. First, they say that 'knowledge of the Scripture' here means knowledge of the Preserved Tablet. Allah *the Almighty* teaches some of His creatures' secrets from the Preserved Tablet. As for the identity of this person, scholars say that it was `Asif ibn Barkhia, who was a pious man to whom Allah *the Almighty* had shown some of the secrets of the universe.

Another opinion says that it was actually Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* himself, and that when the bold jinn said to him: '…I will bring it to you before you can even rise from your place.' (*an-Naml:* 39), he replied:

‘…I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.’ (*an-Naml:* 40) because if it had been another person, this would mean his knowledge of revelation would have been greater than that of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*.

But the others answered this by saying that the greatness of Sulaiman (Solomon) was that one of his subjects could have such knowledge of revelation that they could bring forth the throne in the twinkling of an eye, whilst being a servant to the kingdom of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and subdued to his will. Furthermore, individual distinctions do not necessarily mean superiority. Moreover, it is not a condition of sovereignty that the sovereign should know trivial things!

As for my opinion, I choose the view that it was actually Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* himself who spoke.

There is a wide gap of capacity between he who would bring the throne before the king stood from his council and he who would bring it in the twinkling of an eye. To transport the throne from the kingdom of Bilqis to the kingdom of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* would need much time and strength.

Time and strength have an inverse relationship: as strength increases, time decreases. For example, when a small child tries to move something from one place to another, he approaches it slowly and carries it slowly until he puts in it its place. As for a man, he picks it up and moves it quickly. We notice this with different modes of transport. There is a difference between travelling by car, by plane and by rocket ship, for instance.

We spoke about this issue in the story of the Night Ascension, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was taken up with such speed because it was Allah *the Almighty* who took him up, and took him from one place to another. Because of this, the journey was swifter than the human mind could imagine.

As long as time has an inverse relationship with strength, do not ascribe this event to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was Allah *the Almighty* who did it, and the strength of the All-Powerful, which has no need of time. If you ask why, then, the journey lasted a night, and took time, we say that it is because the Prophet Muhammad passed by and witnessed things, spoke and asked questions, heard things and this is what took time. As for the Ascension itself, it happened in no time at all. For this reason, before the True Lord told us of this amazing event: 'Limitless in His Glory is He who transported His servant…' (*al-Isra':* 1), i.e. He is utterly unlike everything else. The same is true in the case of the carrying of the throne in the twinkling of an eye: the one who did it must have done it with the help of Allah *the Almighty*. According to knowledge that Allah *the Almighty* gave him, it was transmitted by the word 'Be', which needs no time or external strength. As long as the matter was by Allah's will, power, and inspiration, we have nothing to say but 'Amen'.

His statement '…I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.' (*an-Naml:* 40), challenged the bold jinn, so he would not think that he was more powerful than mankind. If Allah *the Almighty* wills, He can give me power greater than yours, by means of which I can subjugate you to my service.

This is in accordance with Allah's words about the subjugation of the jinn: 'They made for him whatever he wished of sanctuaries, statues, basins as [large as] great watering-troughs and cauldrons firmly anchored…' (*Saba':* 13). So, that they knew they were ignorant, they continued to serve Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* when he was dead, supported by his staff before them, whilst they were frightened and in awe of him.

A challenge might be something higher, or it might be something lower, such as if a person says to his friend: 'I have studied Paris in depth, to the extent that I can drive around it with you and tell you wherever we are, whilst I am blindfolded'; so his friend says: 'I can tell you all this even if I am not blindfolded'!

'When Sulaiman (Solomon) saw it set before him, he said, "This is a favour from my Lord…"' (*an-Naml:* 40). This was either because Allah made him able to bring it himself, or because He subjugated for him someone with knowledge of revelation to bring it for him. Either way, it was from Allah's bounty. '…to test whether I am grateful or not' (*an-Naml:* 40), i.e. will I thank Allah *the Almighty* to pass the test, or will I show ingratitude to Allah's blessing and fail? This is because a test is only judged by its outcome.

Gratitude is to ascribe the blessing to the One Who provided it and not to be distracted by the beauty of the blessing from the might of He who bestowed it, saying for example: ‘I was only given it because of my knowledge’.

Allah’s statement ‘if anyone is grateful, it is for his own good’ (*an-Naml:* 40) means that Allah *the Almighty* is not availed by our thanks, for He possesses the attributes of perfection before anyone thanked Him. Those who thank Him only benefit themselves and this is the fruit of their thanks. ‘…if anyone is ungrateful’ (*an-Naml:* 40), i.e. he who denies the blessing and does not thank the One Who blesses, ‘then my Lord is Self-Sufficient’ (*an-Naml:* 40), i.e. He has no need of thanks, ‘…most generous’ (*an-Naml:* 40), i.e. He gives to His slave despite the ingratitude he shows because His blessings are manifold without limit; and this is due to His forbearance and the kindness He shows His creatures.

When we reflect on Allah’s words: ‘…And should you try to count Allah’s blessings, you could never compute them’ (*Ibrahim:* 34), this exact phrase is repeated in two verses in the Quran which might make some people say it is needless repetition; but if we consider the words that follow each of them, we will find that they are different: The first occurrence of this phrase is followed by: ‘…And yet, behold, man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ingrate’ (*Ibrahim:* 34), whilst the second one is followed by: ‘…Behold, Allah is indeed Much-Forgiving, a dispenser of mercy.’ (*an-Nahl:* 18).

So, they are complementary, each of them has its own meaning. The first one shows the wrong that a man does when he shows ingratitude to Allah’s blessings and denies them. The second adds that despite this, Allah *the Almighty* is Forgiving and Merciful to His servant.

We also notice that the verse says, ‘…and should you try to count Allah’s blessings…’ (*an-Nahl:* 18), using the word ‘should’ which indicates something unlikelihood because no one would dare to count Allah’s blessings in the universe as it is not possible to count them. No one has ever tried, even though they, with their modern devices, have counted everything. Yet no one has ever attempted to count Allah’s blessings, not in any institution or university specialising in statistics.

This shows that they are incapable of doing it, just as we have never found anyone, for example, who has attempted to count all the grains of sand in the desert. Also, if we consider the exact words He uses, we find He says, ‘*ni`mat Allah*’ which literally means ‘Allah’s blessing’ (*an-Nahl:* 18), in the singular, not ‘blessings’ in the plural, the incapability is to count a single blessing because other manifold blessings are embodied within it, which under investigation prove to be beyond counting.

Then, when Bilqis came, he wanted her to undergo a test of intellect and a test of faith:

قَالَ نَكِّرُوا۟ لَهَا عَرْشَهَا نَنظُرْ أَتَهْتَدِىٓ أَمْ تَكُونُ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

Then he said, ‘Disguise her throne, and we shall see whether
or not she recognizes it’ [41] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 41)

The word *nakkiru* (disguise) literally means ‘make it unrecognisable’ because he brought the throne in the same appearance as it had in Sheba so that if she had seen it is this form, she would have recognised it, and he would not be sure of her intelligence. For this reason, he said: ‘Disguise her throne…’ (*an-Naml:* 41), i.e. change some of its identifiable parts. The same word in Arabic is used for a person who alters his appearance and his clothes so that no one recognises him.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘…Disguise her throne, and we shall see whether or not she recognises it’ (*an-Naml:* 41), it means that he *peace be upon him* ordered his soldiers to disguise her throne so that they would recognise whether she would be guided to Islam or be guided intellectually to the identity of the throne.

He says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَتْ قِيلَ أَهَٰكَذَا عَرْشُكِ ۖ قَالَتْ كَأَنَّهُۥ هُوَ ۚ وَأُوتِينَا ٱلْعِلْمَ مِن قَبْلِهَا وَكُنَّا مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

When she arrived, she was asked, ‘Is this your throne?’ She
replied, ‘It looks like it.’ [Solomon said], ‘We were given
knowledge before her, and we devoted ourselves to God [42]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 42)

The question was worded: ‘Is your throne like this?’ (*an-Naml:* 42) This is in order to make the matter of the throne ambiguous to her and to test the sharpness of her perception. If he had said, ‘Is this your throne?’ it would have suggested to her the answer, and so he said ‘Is your throne like this?’ (*an-Naml:* 42) It is as though he were saying ‘this is not your throne’. When she looked at it as a whole, she recognised it to be her throne; but when she saw the changes and alterations, she thought it was another, so she chose a diplomatic answer that could be interpreted either way, saying: ‘It looks like it’ Upon this, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* realised that she possessed great intelligence, acumen and sound judgement.

This is the nature of the speech of politicians and diplomats: it is speech that is open to many interpretations, and can be applied to many situations that come after it, so that if something happens differently to how they predicted it, they will say: ‘Did I not say to you such-and such…’?

An example of this is what Mu`awiya ibn Abu Sufyan(1) said to Al-Ahnaf ibn Qays: ‘O Ahnaf, why do you not insult `Ali on the pulpit like the others do?’ Al-Ahnaf replied: ‘Pardon me, O Commander of the Faithful!’ Mu’awiya said: ‘I will reprimand you if you do not!’ Al-Ahnaf said: ‘If this is the case, I will climb the pulpit and say to the people: ‘The Commander of the Faithful, Mu’awiya, commands me to curse `Ali, so curse him with me!’ Upon this, Mu’awiya said: ‘No, Ahnaf, say nothing at all.’

It is said(2) that tailor who was blind in one eye made a robe for a poet and one of the sleeves was longer than the other, so he could not wear it. When they asked him why he was not wearing his new clothes, he told them what the tailor had done, so they said: ‘Satirise him (with a poem)!’ He replied:

I speak verse of which it is not known
Whether ‘tis praise or ridicule:
`Amr made a robe for me;
If only his two eyes were equal!

The poem incorporates two meanings: either a prayer for him (for two sound eyes), or a prayer against him (for two blind eyes). This is a diplomatic answer, by which a person may avoid confrontation.

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(1) *The story of Mu`awiya ibn Abi Sufyan with Al-Ahnaf ibn Qays about the insulting of `Ali.*

(2) The story of the one - eyed tailor.

Similarly, Bilqis gave a diplomatic answer: ‘It looks like it’. As for the statement ‘We were given knowledge before her, and we devoted ourselves to Allah’ (*an-Naml:* 42), it may be an extension of Bilqis’ words, i.e. I was given knowledge before this event, I knew you were a prophet when you gave me back the gift, you said what you said and I did not need the like of this event to recognise you as a prophet; or, it might be the statement of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*.

وَصَدَّهَا مَا كَانَت تَّعۡبُدُ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِۖ إِنَّهَا كَانَتۡ مِن قَوۡمٖ كَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

She was prevented by what she worshipped
instead of God, for she came from a disbelieving
people [43] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 43)

This means that the things that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* did along with the signs that she was shown took her from the disbelief that she had been accustomed to: ‘…for she came from a disbelieving people.’ (*an-Naml:* 43). By this, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* took her from what she had worshipped other than Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah then says:

قِيلَ لَهَا ٱدۡخُلِي ٱلصَّرۡحَۖ فَلَمَّا رَأَتۡهُ حَسِبَتۡهُ لُجَّةٗ وَكَشَفَتۡ عَن سَاقَيۡهَاۚ قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ صَرۡحٞ مُّمَرَّدٞ مِّن
قَوَارِيرَۗ قَالَتۡ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمۡتُ نَفۡسِي وَأَسۡلَمۡتُ مَعَ سُلَيۡمَٰنَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Then it was said to her, ‘Enter the hall,’ but when she saw it,
she thought it was a deep pool of water, and bared her legs.
Solomon explained, ‘It is just a hall paved with glass,’ and she
said, ‘My Lord, I have wronged myself: I devote myself, with
Solomon, to God, the Lord of the Worlds’ [44]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 44)

A *sarh* (hall) means either a grand, fortified castle, or a large hall in which kings sit. When she entered it, ‘she thought it was a deep pool of water’ (*an-Naml:* 44). She thought it was water and when someone sees water, or a wet surface, he automatically picks up his clothes so that he does not get wet. For this reason, Bilqis bared her legs, i.e. she lifted up the hem of her robe.

Upon this, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* informed her that it was '… just a hall paved with glass' (*an-Naml:* 44), so she had no need to bare her legs, for it was not water, but only a hall paved with glass, i.e. made of glass or crystal, with water filled with fish flowing beneath it. '…She said, "My Lord, I have wronged myself…"' (*an-Naml:* 44), first of all by disbelieving, by thinking ill of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and imagining that he wanted to drown me in a pool of water, '… I devote myself, with Sulaiman (Solomon) to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.' (*an-Naml:* 44) It appears that she had not previously entered a testimony of surrender to Allah *the Almighty* before this one. So, the previous statement 'and (we) have surrendered ourselves unto Allah' was Sulaiman's (Solomon's) speech.

Her statement: '…I devote myself, with Sulaiman (Solomon)…' (*an-Naml:* 44) was like the word of Pharaoh's sorcerers when they saw the miracle: '…We have come to believe in the Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!' (*Ta Ha:* 70) because faith is only in Allah *the Almighty,* in the Messenger who leads to Allah; so she said '… I devote myself' (*an-Naml:* 44), and did not say: 'I have surrendered to Sulaiman (Solomon)'. Indeed, she did yield to him and was convinced of his prophethood. The haughtiness of monarchy in her did not allow her to humble herself before him, so she announced her surrender to Allah *the Almighty* alongside Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* because he was the cause of it. It is as though she were saying to Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*: 'Do not think I have surrendered to you. I only surrendered *with* you; so we are equal, and neither of us is higher than the other, for we are both Allah's servants'.

Some Judeo-Christian reports have been related about these events, including the story that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* made the court like this so that Bilqis would reveal her legs, because he had heard that she had hairy legs, as well as other baseless, fabricated stories that are not appropriate to the station of prophets.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* tells us of another prophet in the succession of prophets:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَآ إِلَىٰ ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَٰلِحًا أَنِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟
ٱللَّهَ فَإِذَا هُمْ فَرِيقَانِ يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

To the people of Thamud We sent their brother, Saleh, saying, 'Worship God alone,' but they split into two rival factions [45] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 45)

The story of Allah's Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* and his tribe, Thamud, is in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara'*. Here, it is repeated because the Quran would tell Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stories of the succession of prophets in order to make his heart firm. Every time events occurred that shook his heart, Allah *the Almighty* gave him a Quranic revelation that fit the circumstances in which he found himself. This is not mere repetition of stories. It is a piecemeal distribution of parts, so that if they are collected together, the story is fully formed.

Allah's words 'To the people of Thamud We sent their brother, Saleh (Shelah)…' (*an-Naml:* 45) mean that He sent him with something; what was it? '…Worship Allah alone' (*an-Naml:* 45) For this reason, the particle *an* here has an explanatory role, meaning that it explains why he was sent, just as when Allah *the Almighty* says, 'We inspired [thus] the mother of Musa (Moses)…' (*al-Qasas:* 7); what did He inspire? 'Suckle him.' (*al-Qasas:* 7) The explanation might be a sentence, as in 'But Satan whispered unto him.' what did he whisper? 'Saying, "O Adam! Shall I lead thee to the tree of eternal life, and [thus] to a kingdom that will never decay?' (*Ta Ha:* 120)

So Allah explained the whispering, which is a general thing, with His words: 'Saying, "O Adam…"' Likewise, the message to Thamud, in essence, was: 'Worship Allah alone' (*an-Naml:* 45). To worship, as we said, is to obey Allah *the Almighty* by doing what He commands and leaving that which He prohibits; as for that which is neither commanded nor prohibited, it is permissible, and you can either take it or leave it. If we were to examine the actions of human beings on earth, we would find that only 5% of their actions are covered by the Sacred Law with either a commandment or a prohibition; the rest in all is permissible.

So, moral responsibility entails that you do certain things because they are good for your society, and that you refrain from certain other things because they are bad for your society. So, what was the result? They '…split into two rival factions' (*an-Naml:* 45). Contention means that one of these factions stood against the other. What is meant is that one faction worshipped Allah *the Almighty* and obeyed Him, and the other faction opposed them and disbelieved in Allah.

This verse has been taken up by some of those who desire to attack Islam and the style of the Quran whilst they lack proficiency in Arabic sufficient enough to allow them to understand Allah's words; or if they have indeed learned it, their souls are not pure enough to receive Allah's words, as within them lie impurity and ill intent.

Their accusation is that the word 'two factions' is the Arabic dual form, whilst the clause: '…split into two rival factions' is in the plural form. Why, then, did Allah *the Almighty* not say 'rival' in the dual form, since it is two groups? The Quran uses this style of language in several places.

One of these is Allah's words: 'Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two [groups] goes on acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to Allah's commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them…' (*al-Hujurat:* 9).

Analogy would suggest that the verb 'fall to fighting' should have been in the Arabic dual form, rather than the plural. But if we reflect deeply on the meaning, we will find that a 'group' here means a plurality of people opposing another, and so if fighting occurred, each member of the group would carry their own weapon; the whole group would not advance as one carrying a single sword. In the moment of fighting, they would be a plurality.

For this reason, He said 'fall to fighting' in the Arabic plural form; as for in the beginning, and when the decision to fight was made, each group had a single position of its own, which the leaders expressed. Therefore, at this point they were considered as two groups, in the dual form.

Similarly, even though the word 'group' is a singular noun, it only refers to a plurality. Each member of the group stands in combat against a member of the other group. So here, ‘they split into two rival factions’ (*an-Naml:* 45) means believers and disbelievers, ‘split into’ because every member of each group stood against a member of the other group.

In another place in the Quran, the True Lord explained this to us, when He says, ‘These two contrary kinds of man have become engrossed in contention about their Lord! But [thus it is] as for those who are bent on denying the truth – garments of fire shall be cut out for them [in the life to come]; burning despair will be poured over their heads, causing all that is within their bodies, as well as the skins, to melt away. And they shall be held [in this state as if] by iron grips; and every time they try in their anguish to come out of it, they shall be returned thereto and be told “Taste suffering through fire [to the fullest].”’ (*al-Hajj:* 19-22)

As for the other faction; Allah says, ‘[As against this,] behold, Allah will admit those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds into gardens through which running waters flow, wherein they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and where silk will be their raiment: for they were [willing to be] guided towards the best of all tenets, and so they were guided onto the way that leads to the One unto whom all praise is due.’ (*al-Hajj:* 23-24)

So, Allah *the Almighty* shows the two factions what will happen to each of them and what their recompense will be. The expression ‘and, behold’ here indicates surprise, such as when someone says: ‘I went out, and behold! There was a lion at the door’. The meaning of this is that you were surprised by something you did not expect to see. Such is the case with the disbelievers of Thamud; when their prophet said to them: ‘Worship Allah alone’, they surprised us by splitting into two factions: believers and disbelievers.

Logic, truth and natural disposition should have meant that they accepted this command to obey and submit to Allah and that they not differ in this way, some ending up in paradise and others in hell.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14).

Scholars say that Allah *the Almighty* only sends messengers when there is a corrupt society. Allah *Glorified is He* has created a reproaching soul in man that makes him return to guidance and repent from sin. Also, He has created a peaceful soul which finds repose in faith and trusts the wisdom of Allah's commands and prohibitions. He also has created the part of the soul that enjoins wickedness, recognises no good or evil, and only calls its owner to sin.

Allah *the Almighty* is a Lord and a Guardian, and, as we know, the usual habit of a guardian is to oblige those under his authority to fulfil their purpose in the best way. Have you ever seen a father raise his children except for a purpose? Since Allah *the Almighty* is the True Lord, He would not command me to do anything unless it were for my own good and the good of my community. He does not benefit from our obedience, nor is He harmed by our disobedience because Allah *the Almighty* created the entire universe with His attributes of absolute perfection. So, natural disposition should lead to the reception of Allah's commandments with acceptance and submission.

This contention divides people into believers who were united in faith, and disbelievers who agreed on disbelief. The believers are unique in that their agreement would last until the end of their lives, and even further until they meet with Allah *the Almighty* in paradise. That is because they agreed on obeying the divine commands in this worldly life, and thus they will be rewarded with the same reward which is paradise; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the Allah -conscious.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)

As for the disbelievers, they will be enemies to one another on the Day of Resurrection, to the point that they will curse and disown one another. When the Quran depicts the conflict of the denizens of Hell, it says, after mentioning the delights of paradise: 'All this [for the righteous]: but, verily, the most evil of all goals awaits those who are wont to transgress the bounds of what is right: hell will they have to endure – and how vile a resting-place! This, [then, for them –] so let them taste it: burning despair and ice-cold darkness and, coupled with it, further [suffering] of a similar nature. [And they will say to one another: "Do you see] this crowd of people who rushed headlong [into sin] with you? No welcome to them! Verily, they [too] shall have to endure the fire! [And] they [who had been seduced] will exclaim: “Nay, but it is you! No welcome to you! It is you who have prepared this for us: and how vile a state to abide in!” [60] [And] they will pray: “O our Lord! Whoever has prepared this for us, double Thou his suffering in the fire!” And they will add: “How is it that we do not see [here any of the] men whom we were wont to count among the wicked, [and] whom we made the target of our derision? Or is it that [they are here, and] our eyes have missed them?” Such, behold, will in truth be the [confusion and] mutual wrangling of the people of the fire!’ (*an-Naml:* 55-64).

So, this world witnesses contention between the believers and the disbelievers, whereas in the hereafter, it will be amongst the disbelievers themselves– those who went astray and led others astray– those who followed and those who led.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ لِمَ تَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَ بِٱلسَّيِّئَةِ قَبۡلَ ٱلۡحَسَنَةِۖ
لَوۡلَا تَسۡتَغۡفِرُونَ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُرۡحَمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Saleh said, ‘My people, why do you rush to bring [forward] what is bad rather than good? Why do you not ask forgiveness of God, so that you may be given mercy?’ [46]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 46)

When the story of Thamud was mentioned in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara’*, nothing was mentioned of hastening the coming of evil. What evil did they hasten for which their Lord reproached them? It was their saying: ‘Bring about, then, that [punishment] with which you have threatened us, if you are a man of truth!’ (*al-A‘raf:* 70)

The affair of this tribe is strange: what would they do if the punishment did indeed befall them? Together, they said: ‘If this evil comes to us, we will seek forgiveness and repent’, imagining that seeking forgiveness and repentance would be accepted from them at such a time.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Verily, Allah’s acceptance of repentance relates only to those who do evil out of ignorance and then repent before their time runs out: and it is they unto whom Allah will turn again in His Mercy – for Allah is All Knowing, Wise, whereas repentance shall not be accepted from those who do evil deeds until their dying hour and then say, “Behold, I now repent”; nor from those who die as deniers of the truth: it is these for whom We have readied grievous suffering.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 17-18)

So, why do you seek to hasten the coming of evil and punishment when you should have sought to hasten the coming of good? Your seeking to hasten the coming of evil has thus prevented goodness from coming to you because it means that good deeds will not be accepted from you; Allah says, ‘…Why do you not ask forgiveness of Allah, so that you may be given mercy?’ (*an-Naml:* 46)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُواْ ٱطَّيَّرۡنَا بِكَ وَبِمَن مَّعَكَۚ قَالَ طَٰٓئِرُكُمۡ عِندَ ٱللَّهِۖ بَلۡ أَنتُمۡ قَوۡمٞ تُفۡتَنُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

They said, ‘We see you and your followers as an evil omen.’ He replied, ‘God will decide on any omen you may see: you people are being put to the test’ [47] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 47)

‘Evil omen’ here means ‘to use birds to predict the future’. They used to do this to solve their problems, or before they travelled, for example. One of them would catch a bird and then release it, and if it flew to the right, they would see it as a good omen and would thus perform the task at hand; if it flew to the left, however, they would refrain from doing what they had planned to do. They called these ‘good omens’ and ‘ill omens’ and so the meaning is: ‘We feel bad about you and those that follow you’.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…He replied, “Allah will decide on any omen you may see…”’ (*an-Naml:* 47), that is, your fate is sealed and this auguring is of no consequence and has no effect on what is incumbent upon you; so how can you use the bird’s actions to govern your own? Your destiny, and the fate that Allah *the Almighty* has planned for you, is already sealed.

In the chapter of *Ya Sin*, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Your destiny, good or evil, is [bound up] with yourselves…’ (*Ya Sin:* 19), i.e. your bad luck is a result of the disbelief to which you have cleaved.

But why did they perceive an ill omen here when their prophet was calling them to Allah *the Almighty*? Scholars opine that this is because they opposed him *peace be upon him* once he called them to Allah. They were thus afflicted with a terrible drought, the sky withheld rain from them, and so they said: ‘It is he who has brought drought and ruin upon us’!

As for His statement ‘…you people are being put to the test (*fitna*)’ (*an-Naml:* 47), the word *fitna* here means either a test or else the grievous trial of entering Hell that would befall them.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَكَانَ فِي ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ تِسۡعَةُ رَهۡطٖ يُفۡسِدُونَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا يُصۡلِحُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

There were nine men in the city who spread corruption in the land without making amends[48] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 48)

This matter is also a new piece of information about the story that was not mentioned in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara’*. In this way, if you reflect upon all the stories in the Quran, you will find that they are in different pieces, each one adding something new and handling a matter that fitted the context within which it was revealed. The wisdom behind this is to consolidate Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to strengthen his heart.

The Arabic word used here for ‘men’ is *raht* which is a plural noun with no singular form; it indicates a number between three and nine, so ‘nine men’ suggests that they were clans or tribes or groups, each represented by a different person.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘spread corruption in the land’ (*an-Naml:* 48), we have a good question, ‘why did He then say: ‘without making amends’ (*an-Naml:* 48)’? Scholars believe this is because a person might be depraved in one matter, yet reformed in another, such as those who mix ill deeds with good, may Allah forgive such people.

As for these people, they were of pure depravity who reformed nothing and if they saw something good, they would go to it and corrupt it. They were insistent on depravity – there are always people who benefit from depravity, so they oppose those who wish to reform and bring goodness because they will stop them from gaining this benefit.

We said that any religiously committed person with good morals and principles will be despised by this group that benefit from depravity, and they will oppose him and attempt to discredit him with backbiting and slander saying that he is an extremist, or they will even mock him. None would stand in the face of the messengers except this group that benefit from depravity.

Allah then says:

قَالُوا۟ تَقَاسَمُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ لَنُبَيِّتَنَّهُۥ وَأَهْلَهُۥ ثُمَّ لَنَقُولَنَّ لِوَلِيِّهِۦ مَا
شَهِدْنَا مَهْلِكَ أَهْلِهِۦ وَإِنَّا لَصَٰدِقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

They said, ‘Swear by God: we shall attack this man and his household in the night, then say to his next of kin, “We did not witness the destruction of his household. We are telling the truth”’ [49] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 49)

These men or clans said, ‘…we shall attack this man and his household in the night.’ (*an-Naml:* 49) What foolishness, lack of intelligence and sagacity they showed! They took a vow and swore by Allah *the Almighty* that they would kill Messenger Saleh (Shelah)! This shows their foolishness, as though Allah *the Almighty* were assigning actions to them so that their foolishness and lack of intelligence will be clearly shown.

The literal meaning of the saying of Allah ‘then say to his next of kin’ in Arabic is to make someone sleep during the night until they wake up in the morning; but they wanted to make him sleep such that he would never wake up, i.e. kill him. Then, when his next kin come to seek requital for his death, they would say: ‘…We did not witness the destruction of his household. We are telling the truth.’ (*an-Naml:* 49), i.e. we did not see the slaying of his family and thus knew nothing about the perpetrators.

This is what they planned for Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*. Thinking that Allah *the Almighty* would let His messenger be slain or let them slay him, they made this plan, not forgetting to prepare their defence when the matter was investigated. This was the extent of their plotting and scheming.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَكَرُواْ مَكْرًا وَمَكَرْنَا مَكْرًا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

So they devised their evil plan, but We too
made a plan of which they were unaware [50]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 50)

The meaning of ‘So they devised their evil plan…’ (*an-Naml:* 50) refers to the plan they hatched to slay Allah’s messenger to them, but Allah made their plan futile; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘but We too made a plan’ (*an-Naml:* 50). There is a difference between Allah’s schemes: ‘…for Allah is above all schemers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 54), and the scheming of the disbelievers: ‘…yet [in the end,] such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors…’ (*Fatir:* 43).

So, if you scheme for a good thing, it is not the evil kind of scheming; it is only a counter to the scheming of the enemy. You cannot simply leave him to plan and scheme against you without doing anything yourself; and so Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…for Allah is above all schemers’ (*al-Anfal:* 30) because they scheme for evil, whilst He schemes to counter this evil, help His messenger and save him from their scheming.

The word *makr* (scheme) is derived from the word for a tall tree whose branches are all intertwined with one another, so that we cannot tell which branch is which. Each branch is twisted and hidden by another.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… they were unaware.’ (*an-Naml:* 50) This means that Allah *the Almighty* schemed with subtlety and wisdom, and thus the ones planned against were unaware of it; otherwise, it would not be a scheme.

If we reflect on Allah’s statements, ‘…yet [in the end,] such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors’ and ‘for Allah is above all schemers’ (*Fatir:* 43), we will see that a scheme is neither intrinsically good, nor intrinsically bad. It is only judged by the goal behind it, as Allah *the Almighty* says about conjecture: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Avoid most guesswork…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 12). So, it is clear that some conjecture is good, while others are evil.

Nowadays we are living a new phase in which schemes and ill opinions are prevalent. They say that honesty is the 20th century’s scheme because he who schemes against people thinks that they are all schemers too, so he does not believe anything they say and he is cautious of them even if they are telling the truth. So, scheming and mistrust have become the norm, so if you are honest to a schemer, he will not believe you and will think to himself: ‘He is trying to dupe me, or fool me’.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ مَكۡرِهِمۡ
أَنَّا دَمَّرۡنَٰهُمۡ وَقَوۡمَهُمۡ أَجۡمَعِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

See how their scheming ended: We destroyed them utterly, along with all their people [51]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 51)

This verse reflects on what happened to them when they schemed against Prophet Saleh (Shelah) to overcome him at night and kill him. It is related that when they came upon him, stones pelted them from unknown directions and they were all destroyed. Allah *the Almighty* provided angels for Prophet Saleh (Shelah) to protect him and defend him.

Or, it may be that Allah *the Almighty* made a way for him to escape and go to Hadramawt, a city in Yemen. It was there that he died. So, the place was called Hadramawt which literally means ‘death came’. Others say no; they went and waited for him at the foot of a mountain, hiding behind a stone in order to push it onto him, but the stone fell on them and killed them all. What is important is that Allah *the Almighty* destroyed them by any one of these means.

In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And none can comprehend thy Lord’s forces save Him alone.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31) The disbelievers from among the people of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) wanted to slay him and his family, yet Allah *the Almighty* destroyed them instead.

Allah then says:

فَتِلۡكَ بُيُوتُهُمۡ خَاوِيَةَۢ بِمَا ظَلَمُوٓاْۗ إِنَّ فِي
ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةٗ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٥٢

**As a result of their evil deeds, their homes are
desolate ruins – there truly is a sign in this for
those who know [52] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 52)**

Allah's saying 'their homes are desolate ruins' (*an-Naml:* 53) indicates that Allah *the Almighty* destroyed them all; none of them remained alive. It is narrated that Allah *the Almighty* left their houses empty because of their wrongdoing. As for His saying, '…there truly is a sign in this' (*an-Naml:* 52), it means a moral and an admonition '…for those who know' (*an-Naml:* 52). In contrast to the destruction of the disbelievers, Allah *the Almighty* says about the believers:

وَأَنجَيۡنَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَكَانُواْ يَتَّقُونَ ٥٣

**But We saved those who believed and were
mindful of God [53] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 53)**

This means that the believers from among Prophet Saleh's (Shelah's) tribe were saved by Allah *the Almighty* from the punishment that befell their tribe, i.e. the tribe of Thamud.

Here, the mention of the story of Thamud ends. When the events mentioned here are compared with what is related in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara',* one finds that there are new pieces of information that are added here. In addition, it is noticeable that there is no mention here of the story of the she-camel that is mentioned in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara'*, which illustrates that every verse adds something new to the story, that is, there is no redundancy at all in the verses of the Quran.

Then Allah *the Almighty* mentions a part of another prophet's story, namely Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* saying:

وَلُوطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِۦٓ أَتَأْتُونَ ٱلْفَٰحِشَةَ وَأَنتُمْ تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

We also sent Lot to his people. He said to them,
'How can you commit this outrage with your eyes
wide open? [54] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 54)

From the grammatical point of view, the name 'Lut (Lot)' here is in the accusative case, which indicates that it is an object of a verb, and so the explanation is that it means 'We also sent Lut (Lot)', as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And [likewise], indeed, We sent unto [the tribe of] Thamud their brother Saleh (Shelah)…' (*an-Naml:* 45), and 'how can you commit this outrage with your eyes wide open?' (*an-Naml:* 54)

So, he mentioned that disease had spread amongst them. In the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara'*, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'and when I fall ill, He is the One Who restores me to health' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 80).

Here, He says, 'with your eyes wide open', i.e. you do it openly and overtly. This shows that they were all doing it, and were even happy to do it, and that they no longer felt it to be shameful.

Or, it means: 'You saw with your own eyes what happened to those of depravity who came before you, and how Allah brought an end to them'.

Allah then says:

أَئِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ ٱلرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّن دُونِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ ۚ بَلْ أَنتُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

How can you lust after men instead of women? What
fools you are! [55] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 55)

This is an elucidation and an explanation of the disease that had spread among them. Even though '…What fools you are!' (*an-Naml:* 55) seems to contradict the previous statement 'with your eyes wide open' (*an-Naml:* 54), their lack of awareness was not due to lack of knowledge, but rather due to wilful impudence.

Some people think that ignorance simply means not to know; but this is what illiteracy truly means. Ignorance means that you perceive something differently to how it actually is, and this is why it is easier to convince an illiterate person because he looks like a blank page. As for an ignorant person, he has a false notion implanted in his mind, which is why it must be removed from him firstly before trying to convince him with the true one. So, ignorance is more difficult for a preacher than illiteracy.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوٓاْ أَخْرِجُوٓاْ
ءَالَ لُوطٍ مِّن قَرْيَتِكُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ أُنَاسٌ يَتَطَهَّرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

The only answer his people gave was to say, 'Expel Lot's followers from your town! These men mean to stay chaste!' [56] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 56)

How strange their situation was! The reason they expelled the believers was that '…these men mean to stay chaste!' (*an-Naml:* 56) Glory be to Allah! When did purity become a sin and a crime that a person might be banished from his home for?! It is a familiar chant that we always hear from the people of falsehood in every time and place, whenever they oppose the people of truth and attempt to expel them from the scene so that they can be alone with their falsehood.

It is out of Allah's Justice that their own speech should show their guilt and deplorable nature. The phrase, 'mean to stay chaste!' (*an-Naml:* 56), which they uttered, means that they themselves were unclean and Allah's lawful and purified rules bothered them. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* made their own speech a means of condemning them so that they passed judgement on themselves by ways of it.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says,

فَأَنجَيْنَٰهُ وَأَهْلَهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱمْرَأَتَهُۥ قَدَّرْنَٰهَا مِنَ ٱلْغَٰبِرِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

We saved him and his family – except for his wife: We made her stay behind [57] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 57)

This means that the wife of Prophet Lut (Lot) was one of those who were destroyed along with her people because she used to show her people to the neighbours of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*. So, they could go to them and perform depraved acts with them. For this reason, she too was punished as her people were.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِم مَّطَرًا ۖ فَسَآءَ مَطَرُ ٱلْمُنذَرِينَ ٥٨

And We brought rain down on them. How dreadful that rain was for those who had been warned! [58] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 58)

This rain was vile; and if the meaning of 'rain' here is ambiguous, Allah *the Almighty* made it clear in other verses, saying that it was stones of baked clay that were precisely fashioned and marked. It is stated that Allah *the Almighty* made them to exacting specifications so that each of them was struck by the stone that was marked for him and which could strike no other.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُلِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَسَلَٰمٌ عَلَىٰ عِبَادِهِ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱصْطَفَىٰٓ ۗ ءَآللَّهُ خَيْرٌ أَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ٥٩

Say [Prophet], 'Praise be to God and peace on the servants He has chosen. Who is better: God, or those they set up as partners with Him? [59] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 59)

We know that Allah *the Almighty* is praised for His blessings, but here 'Praise be to Allah…' (*an-Naml:* 59), comes after the mention of retribution, punishment and the smiting of the disbelievers. Scholars say that this statement is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is an indication that Allah's hosts are always victorious and that the final outcome will be on their side. This serves as a means of reassurance to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Also, the cleansing of the universe from those who would corrupt it so that the land and the people can be free of them, is also a blessing that deserves the proclamation: 'Praise be to Allah' (*an-Naml:* 59).

The destruction of the disbelievers and deniers of the Truth is a lesson and an admonition for others so that they do not approach that which would bring destruction upon themselves. This is another blessing that merits praise. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* commanded us to praise Him when we see some good given to those who are good, or some evil befall those who are evil. So, the meaning is ‘Say: “Praise be to Allah…”’ (*an-Naml:* 59), that the messengers were victorious and that the spreaders of corruption were defeated. Have you not heard the statement of the denizens of paradise: ‘…Till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide-open; and its keepers will say unto them, “Peace be upon you! Well have you done: enter, then, this [paradise] herein to abide!” And they will exclaim: “All praise is due to Allah, who has made His promise to us come true, and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion, so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!’ (*az-Zumar:* 73-74)

Likewise, when we see an evil person whose wickedness and corruption are widespread, receive the punishment from Allah, we say: ‘Praise be to Allah’. So, everyone spontaneously praises Allah *the Almighty* when blessing descends upon those who deserve it and when calamity descends upon those who deserve it.

Allah *the Almighty* says, about the people of evil and corruption: ‘And, indeed, We sent Our messages unto people before thy time, [O Prophet,] and visited them with misfortune and hardship so that they might humble themselves: yet when the misfortune decreed by Us befell them, they did not humble themselves, but rather, their hearts grew hard, for Satan had made all their doings seem goodly to them. Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – We suddenly took them to task: and lo! They were broken in spirit; and [in the end,] the last remnant of those folk who had been bent on evildoing was wiped out. For all praise is due to Allah, The Lord of all the worlds.’ (*al-An‘am:* 42-45)

After Allah *the Almighty* wiped out the evildoers: ‘For all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds’ (*al-An‘am:* 45). In these verses, we notice the difference between the Arabic expressions ‘to open for’ and ‘to open upon’. To open for someone means to do something for their benefit, as in the saying of Allah: ‘Verily, [O Muhammad,] We have laid before you a manifest victory.’ (*al-Fath:* 1)

To open upon, however, means that this will lead to their eventual harm, and so '…We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things…' (*al-An'am:* 44) means that Allah *the Almighty* gave them good things in order to ruin them by their hands, and so they would be in a position of favour and status, so that when Allah's punishment came for them, it would be all the more devastating.

In the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And as soon as you and those who are with you are settled in the ark, say: "All praise is due to Allah, who has saved us from those evildoing folk!"' (*al-Mu'minun:* 28) The praising of Allah here is for two things: Praise be to Allah because He drowned the wrongdoing disbelievers and thus delivered us from them; and praise be to Allah, because He saved the believers.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, 'and peace on the servants He has chosen' (*an-Naml:* 59). This refers to the believers, to whom Allah *the Almighty* gave victory and final success. Peace was upon them after they endured the misery inflicted upon them by the stubborn disbelievers – so praise be to Allah *the Almighty* Who destroyed the corrupt and brought peace to the rightly-guided.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* brings up another matter in the form of a question in order that it will be more influential than the statement; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Who is better: Allah, or those they set up as partners with Him?' (*an-Naml:* 59)

If the verse had read: 'Say, 'Praise be to Allah and peace be upon those servants of His whom He chose' because Allah is good, and what they ascribe divinity to is evil, this would have been a simple statement. A statement in itself, without considering who makes it, is open to be either believed or even denied.

If you pose the same issue as a question, you make those to whom you speak responsible for answering it. Likewise, if one of your friends ignores a favour you have done for him, rather than simply telling him, 'I did such-and-such for you', you leave him to be the one to tell you: 'Did I not do such-and-such for you'? No one speaks in this way except someone who is sure and convinced that the answer will in his favour.

So, the meaning of 'Who is better, Allah, or those they set up as partners with Him?' (*an-Naml:* 59) is: 'Tell us, and we will be happy with your verdict, after all you have seen and heard of this story: is Allah *the Almighty* better or that which they have falsely ascribed divinity to'? The answer will surely be: 'Allah is better'; and so when this verse was revealed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was moved to react to it and quickly answered: 'Indeed Allah is better and everlasting.'

This shows that reaction to the Quran is essential. By this, we mean reaction to its meanings, not reactions to a beautiful voice and fine melodies used when reciting it. Those people who nowadays encourage reciters of the Holy Quran does so by shouting and yelling in a manner which is inappropriate to the majesty of Quranic verses. They do not understand their meanings, nor are they moved by them, to the extent that one of them might hear a verse describing Hell and respond by shouting as loud as he can: 'O Allah, increase us'!

The scribes from amongst the companions would react to the meaning of the verses, to the extent that they would complete a verse and then add to it a comment that suited it before moving on to another. Why was this? It was because they understood Allah's words, and were moved by their meaning, which shows that the Quran came in line with natural disposition. An example of this is that one of them said: 'Hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of artisans' and then afterwards this very statement was revealed as a Quranic verse, exactly as he had said it.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about the chapter of *ar-Rahman,* 'I recited the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to your brothers from the jinn, and they answered it better than you did! Every time I recited "Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?" (*ar-Rahman:* 13), they said "We deny none of Your blessings, O Lord, and praise is yours!"'

So, when we hear Allah's words, we should react to them and respond to them consciously. At every verse of glorification, we should glorify; at every verse of praise, we should praise Allah *the Almighty*; at every verse of supplication, we should say 'Amen'. These are the proper emotional reactions upon hearing the Quran and responding to it, not just listen to it or read it like it were poetry.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says,

أَمَّنْ خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَأَنزَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً
فَأَنۢبَتْنَا بِهِۦ حَدَآئِقَ ذَاتَ بَهْجَةٍ مَّا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَن تُنۢبِتُوا۟
شَجَرَهَآ ۗ أَءِلَٰهٌ مَّعَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ بَلْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ يَعْدِلُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

Who created the heavens and earth? Who sends down water from the sky for you – with which We cause gardens of delight to grow: you have no power to make the trees grow in them – is it another god beside God? No! But they are people who take others to be equal with God [60] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 60)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Who is it' is another question, as though Allah *the Almighty* after having decreed defeat for the disbelievers and victory for the believers, wanted to further instil faith in the souls of the believers. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* wanted His succour to the believers to be a nucleus of faith, a new emotion that would be a source of strength that would motivate them, so that they would be ready to face the enemies of the call and those who sought to oppose it.

Allah says, 'Who created the heavens and earth? Who sends down water from the sky for you– with which We cause gardens of delight to grow: you have no power to make the trees grow in them– is it another deity beside Allah?' (*an-Naml:* 60) So, the matter does not end simply with a battle in which the believers were victorious over the disbelievers; for within Allah's creation lies that which is even greater still. If you were to ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they would say 'Allah'. If you were to ask them 'who created them?', they would say 'Allah'. They cannot deny these matters. It is as though Allah is asking them: 'Was it Allah who created the heavens and the earth and sent down to you water from the sky, or was it those to whom you ascribed divinity besides Him'?

As long as Allah has claimed creation for Himself, and there is no counter to this claim, it had been confirmed for Him *Glorified is He* so that He can ask others: 'is it another deity beside Allah' (*an-Naml:* 60). If there is another god besides Allah *the Almighty* Who created the universe, where is it? It must be either unaware of this claim, or else it is aware of it but frightened to counter it. Either way, it cannot be a god; otherwise, let this other come with creations and miracles greater than what we have seen.

If Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘I am Allah and there is no god besides Me and all of creation from the heavens to the earth is My Doing’, and there is no one to make a counter-claim, the matter is confirmed for Him. Allah says, ‘Allah [Himself] proffers evidence – and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

Monotheism is first attested to by Allah Himself, then by the angels and then by those creatures who have sagacity. Emphasising this, Allah says, ‘Say: “If there were – as some people assert – [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His Almightiness?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 42) That is, these gods would have gathered and sought vengeance against the god who stole their dominion from them, and claimed it for Himself; or, they would have gone to Him to become close to Him and gain His affection.

Allah asks, ‘…Who sends down water from the sky for you’ (*an-Naml:* 60). Whatever is high above you can be called sky. It is well known that water falls from the clouds, which are above us. Or, it means that the will for its existence comes from above because the will for the existence of all things comes from the heavens, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Indeed, [even afore time] did We send forth Our apostles with all evidence of [this] truth; and through them We bestowed revelation from on high, and [thus gave you a balance [wherewith to weigh right and wrong], so that men might behave with equity; and We bestowed [upon you] from on high [the ability to make use of] iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man…’ (*al-Hadid:* 25).

It is obvious that iron comes from the earth; but Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who predestines its existence therein.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…with which We cause gardens of delight to grow’ (*an-Naml:* 60). Water benefits our lives in many ways and is a basic source of life. The verse, therefore, mentioned only gardens because they too are a source of human life, providing food and drink. If you say that these days we consider beautiful gardens to be non-essentials, having no role in supporting our lives, we say: ‘Yes, this is the case nowadays, but in the past, they would use the word ‘garden’ or ‘orchard’ to refer to any plot of land containing fruit or crops that was surrounded by a wall.

Although Allah *the Almighty* says ‘…of delight to grow’ (*an-Naml:* 60), yet if you look at wheat, for example, a chief source of energy, you find that it is less beautiful than roses or jasmine. It is as though your Lord is saying to you: ‘I have undertaken to provide you with luxuries and ornamentation; so I will provide you with your essential needs’.

Allah wants to transcend the taste and feelings of His servants. Read, for example, His saying: ‘Behold their fruit when it comes to fruition and ripens’ (*al-An‘am:* 99). That is, before you eat this fruit, reflect upon its beauty and its fine appearance. It is as though it were a call for the elevation of taste and reflection on Allah’s beautiful creation.

Do you not see that Allah *the Almighty* has allowed you to look upon every fruit to witness its beauty? Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Behold their fruit’. (*al-An‘am:* 99) If you do not own it, you can still derive enjoyment from looking at it.

Another example of this transcendence of beauty is His saying after mentioning the benefits of cattle: ‘…and you find beauty in them when you drive them home in the evenings and when you take them out to pasture in the mornings.’ (*an-Nahl:* 6) He also says, ‘and [it is He who creates] horses and mules and donkeys for you to ride, as well as for [their] beauty…’ (*an-Nahl:* 8).

Allah has provided us the necessities of life, gave us luxuries and additional delights. Notice the precise use of language here: ‘Who created the heavens and earth?’ (*an-Naml:* 60) The subject of ‘created’ is in the third person in Arabic, refers to Allah *the Almighty* as is the case with ‘sends down’. As for ‘We cause gardens of shining beauty to grow…’ (*an-Naml:* 60), the pronoun changes to the first-person plural ‘We cause…to grow’, indicating majesty. Why is this? Scholars say it is because some divine blessings are fulfilled without mankind participating in them, such as creation and the sending of rain, and so there is no suspicion that mankind could share in them. There are other things that man is part of, such as sowing crops and growing them. It is man who ploughs, sows, waters and so on, which might indicate that it is man who causes crops to grow. Allah *the Almighty* wanted to repudiate this notion. So, He ascribes the act of causing plants to grow to Himself, directly and unambiguously, in order to remove this suspicion.

Your Lord respects your actions and mentions your hard work, saying: 'Have you ever considered the seed which you cast upon the soil? Is it you who cause it to grow – or are We the cause of its growth?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64)

Yes, you do perform some action and endeavour in this regard, but you used the earth, which Allah created; tools of iron, which Allah *the Almighty* created; seeds, which Allah *the Almighty* created and water, which Allah *the Almighty* created. As for the growing itself, you had nothing to do with it, so do not say that you are the ones who make it grow because truly it is Allah *the Almighty* Who does this; rather, say: 'I ploughed, and I watered'.

For this reason, we find the response negating any suspicion that you might have some part in making crops grow: '[For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 65). Allah *the Almighty* also uses *lam at-tawkid* (particle for emphasis) in order to completely remove this suspicion.

This is different from what He says about the sending of water which has no suspicion of it being human action, and so the very same verb in Arabic is used, but without *lam at-tawkid* (the emphatic particle) attached to it: 'Have you ever considered the water which you drink? Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds – or are We the cause of its coming down? [It comes down sweet – but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]?' (*an-Naml:* 68-70)

'…No! But they are people who take others to be equal with Allah.' (*an-Naml:* 60) The word used for 'equal' here in Arabic is *ya`dilun* which literally means 'to do justice'. Of course, 'justice' is generally a praiseworthy attribute, and so when you hear this phrase, you might think that it is a description of a good characteristic that they possessed. With words like this, we must be precise because they have many meanings. Depending on the prepositional particle used with it, the verb *ya`dil* can mean to be just, to incline, to avoid or to treat equally.

The meaning of the verb here is to avoid or evade. If only they had merely evaded it, it would have been better, but they evaded it for the sake of something else and made other things equal to Allah *the Almighty* as He says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘All praise is due to Allah who has created the heavens and the earth, and brought into being deep darkness as well as light: and yet, those who are bent on denying the truth regard other powers as their Lord’s equals!’ (*al-An‘am:* 1) That is, they consider Allah *the Almighty* equal to others.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* continues:

أَمَّن جَعَلَ ٱلْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَجَعَلَ خِلَٰلَهَآ أَنْهَٰرًا وَجَعَلَ لَهَا رَوَٰسِىَ
وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَ ٱلْبَحْرَيْنِ حَاجِزًا ۗ أَءِلَٰهٌ مَّعَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

Who is it that made the earth a stable place to live? Who
made rivers flow through it? Who set immovable mountains
on it and created a barrier between the fresh and salt water?
Is it another god beside God? No! But most of them do
not know [61] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 61)

Having spoken about the heavens and the earth in the previous verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentioned things that were common to them both; for rainfalls from the sky, the earth takes it in and produces beautiful gardens for us.

In this verse, Allah speaks about the earth, so He mentions some of the things that characterise the earth, saying: ‘Who is it that made the earth a stable place to live?’ (*an-Naml:* 61), i.e. Allah made it in a way that was comfortable, so that mankind could live upon it.

Also, He says, ‘Who made rivers flow through it?’ (*an-Naml:* 61), that is, water falls from the sky, and those upon whom it falls benefit from it directly. As for that which falls on the mountains, it gathers in the valleys and dams are made around it, so that people can use it at times of drought. Some rainwater flows into channels and they are called rivers.

We are able to differentiate between rivers and man-made waterways. In rivers, water flows from the tops of mountains, as well as from several different places, following declines in the land and courses through which the water can easily flow. You see it weaving to and fro, circling mountains, and rocks to follow its course.

As for man-made waterways, you see them following straight lines, except when, for example, a person of influence objects to its course, and so they have to change it so that it goes around his land.

You can witness this phenomenon if you pour water on sandy land and thus watch its flow. You will see it flowing here and there according to the nature of the landupon which it flows.

Allah says, '…Who set immovable mountains on it' (*an-Naml:* 61). Allah *the Almighty* explains the wisdom behind these mountains, saying, 'And He has placed firm mountains on Earth, lest it sway with you…' (*an-Nahl:* 15).

So, the wisdom behind the creation of the mountains is to keep the earth still so it does not shake. If the earth had been created in a firm, solid state, it would not need the mountains, which shows that the earth was created in a state of motion and needed to be weighed down.

The wisdom behind the creation of the mountains is not only keeping the earth still; they have other functions, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'and has made the mountains firm: [all this] as a means of livelihood for you and your animals.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 32-33)

How can mountains be a provision for mankind and animals? Indeed, they are a provision because they store water so that when rain does not fall, we find the water that fell on the mountains, in rivers or waterfalls, behind dams between valleys, and in springs and wells where the earth has absorbed it.

Just as mountains store water, they also store fertility that visits agricultural land year after year, so it remains fertile. We have already spoken about the phenomenon of the process whereby the top layer of rock crumbles and falls into valleys along with rainwater and mixes with the soil, increasing its fertility.

Were it not for the firmness of the mountains and its rocks, they would break apart in only a few years, and we would lose the source of this fertility after that. This phenomenon is a sign of Allah’s Mercy to His creation because it is proportionate to population increase, so that as population increases, the fertile land for agriculture also increases.

We also said before that if you reflect on the placing of mountains and valleys, you will find that a mountain is a triangle with its base at the bottom and its point at the top, whilst a valley is the opposite: it is a triangle with its base at the top and its point at the bottom. So, we see that every increase from the soil and silt that breaks from the mountain increase the surface area of the valley, so the fertile area increases every year along with the increase in population.

Allah *the Almighty* says about mountains: ‘Say: “Would you indeed deny Him who has created the earth in two aeons? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?” For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it…’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10).

Allah *the Almighty* made mountains a source of provisions of food and water. Consider the river Nile and its valley, and how it was made from the soil that the waters carried from mountaintops in Africa, in order to make this fertile land in Egypt.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and created a barrier between the fresh and salt water?’ (*an-Naml:* 61), i.e. fresh water and salt water because some water is fresh, some water is salty and by His Omnipotent Power and Wisdom, He placed a barrier between them, even though salt water is the origin of fresh water. Allah *the Almighty* made the surface area of salt water three-fourths of the earth. Wide as the surface area of salt water is, the volume of vapour that forms clouds are just as wide, so enough rain falls for everyone on earth to live. One poet composed a beautiful eulogy:

I brought a gift to his noble gathering,
Yet I only gave him what I gained from his largess;
Like the cloud that rains upon the sea
Yet it does it no favour, for the water came from it!

In order that we realise Allah's favour upon us in sending down rain and granting us fresh water, look at the difficulty and hardship endured in order to filter only a few centimetres of water; not to say anything about what an operation it would be to filter enough water to provide for lands and people the whole world over.

We also compared the surface area of the sea to a cup of water: if you pour it on the floor, it will dry in just a few minutes; but if you leave it in the cup for several days, it will only decrease a little.

Allah *the Almighty* made some fresh water run in springs within the earth, which a person can get if he needs it; or, He made it run in springs whereby fresh water runs alongside salt water, neither one mixing with the other, despite the free-flowing nature of water. This is a marvel of the Omnipotent Power of Allah *the Almighty*; the Creator. From the depths of the salty sea, fresh water springs flow because they each have their own path, and course, which they each follow so that neither of them disturbs the other, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they might meet: [yet] between them is a barrier which they may not transgress.' (*ar-Rahman:* 19-20)

Just as fresh water seeps into the earth to form springs and wells, salt water also seeps into the earth to form precious stones such as marble and minerals such as iron, magnesium, granite and so on.

After mentioning this verse discussing the earth in particular, Allah poses the question: '…Is it another deity beside Allah?' (*an-Naml:* 61) who could create such things? '…No! But most of them do not know.' (*an-Naml:* 61); and those who do not know, We have now informed them, and cut off their opportunity to plead ignorance.

If we examine the earth, we will find that there are other signs within it apart from that it is stable and firm. The earth is opaque and contains soil that is not pure white; this is because Allah *the Almighty* wants it to take in the heat and light of the sun so that crops will benefit from them. If the earth was transparent and reflected back the heat and light, the crops would not be able to benefit from them. So we find that some plants grow in summer and others in winter.

When they conducted some tests on plants, putting them in dark conditions and then making on opening so that light could come in, they found that the plants, because of the instinct that their Creator placed within them, would turn towards the light to obtain warmth and light. Glory be to Allah who created and measured, and decreed and guided!

Another of Allah’s signs in the creation of the earth is that He made it move and revolve, in order that every place could take its share of warmth and cold; climates vary between summer, winter, autumn, and spring. These are cycles that life’s foundations demand.

Henceforth, we find that botanists divide agricultural areas on earth into different types; there are wheat, banana, potato belts and so on. We find that each belt is apt for the growing of a particular crop, which is suitable for the population there, its environment and its climate.

So, we find that every type of plant is in its appropriate place, where it is not disturbed by any blight. As for when it is taken to another place, another environment, it will surely be afflicted in, some way.

The earth has another distinction, which is directly related to mankind. The earth is made of clay, which is also the origin of mankind, so the earth is really mankind’s first mother. When a person dies, there is no place for him except in the lap of his mother. When the closet people to him leave him, the dearest, mother Earth accepts him, takes him in, and keeps him safe from all harm.

Another distinction of the earth is that it absorbs human and animal waste and leavings. By Allah’s power, it turns them into fertilizer by means of which plants grow and yields are increased. In the countryside, they take foul-smelling animal waste out to the fields and by means of it beautiful flowers bloom, whose fragrance is beloved to people.

These are all marvels of creation, of which none are capable save Allah. Do you remember the Egyptian proverb: ‘He could make a tonic from a salted fish’? Such is Allah’s Power, which creates things from their opposites. Do you not see that the nicest fruit we eat here in Egypt comes from the yellow mountain, which is irrigated with sewage water?

After telling us about these general phenomena, which all creatures need, in the sky, and the earth, and the mountains, the rain, Allah the Almighty now tells us about things that are specifically required by mankind alone and only in certain times, asking:

أَمَّن يُجِيبُ ٱلْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ ٱلسُّوٓءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ
خُلَفَآءَ ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ أَءِلَٰهٌ مَّعَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ ٦٢

Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him? Who removes their suffering? Who makes you successors in the earth? Is it another God beside God? Little notice you take! [62] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 62)

'Answers'; a response means to realise the request of the one who asks. 'The distressed' is the one who has exhausted all his means, used them unsuccessfully, so that he has no choice but to leave the means to the One Who created them, seek His refuge; for before the Creator created mankind, He created the basic constituents for his life and its needs, and subdued them for his service.

For this reason, a Qudsi Hadith says: 'O Son of Adam, I created all things for you, and I created you for Me; so do not let that which belongs to you distract you from He to whom you belong.'

Then, Allah *the Almighty* created for you the ability to utilise these things, and He created for you your essential provisions in the form of water and plants. If you wish to make your life more comfortable, you use the means Allah created, your own energy and think of how to develop and enrich your life.

The water that runs in your house when you turn on the tap, the light that is emitted simply by your pressing a switch and the car that transports you here and there in a matter of minutes, are all applications in people's lives, which came about when they used their intellects to utilise what Allah *the Almighty* gave them of materials, minds, ideas and means. All of this is from Allah's Hand, outstretched to His slaves, which we should never refuse.

So, if you try but fail, the means do not avail you, you must immediately seek refuge in the One Who created the means because He is your Creator and your Protector.

Read Allah’s saying: ‘For [thus it is:] when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto Us, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing…’ (*Yunus:* 12).

If only, when he called his Lord and was answered, he would continue to bear his Lord in mind, expecting that misfortune might afflict him again; but no, when Allah *the Almighty* relieves his woe, he quickly returns to his old ways: ‘…but as soon as We have freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Us to save him from the affliction that befell him! Thus, do their own doings seem goodly unto those who waste their own selves?’ (*Yunus:* 12)

‘Who is it that responds to the distressed…’? So, the distressed person will surely be answered by Allah *the Almighty* if someone says, ‘I prayed, but I was not answered’, know that he was not really in dire distress. Not every difficulty that visits a person is real distress. For example, if someone prays to Allah *the Almighty* to give him a better place to live or a larger income and so on, these are matters with no distress attached to them. Perhaps Allah *the Almighty* knows that this was the best thing for them, that if He had given them more, they would transgress, and be arrogant. Allah says, ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening; whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7).

You pray for what you see to be good, but your Lord knows that it is not good for you: ‘As it is man [often] prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good: for man is prone to be hasty [in his judgments]’ (*al-Isra’:* 11).

Your Lord, therefore, corrects this mistake in your understanding, and says to you: ‘I will bring you what is best, but in a way that is better than this. If I answered you in the way you want, it will lead to a bad end’. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* our Lord and Guardian has placed a control on our prayers. If Allah *the Almighty* were some kind of employer, who had to give us all what we asked for, He would not be suitable to be a divine being – and Allah *the Almighty* is absolved of any such thing!

Man’s nature is hastiness and impulsiveness, so our Lord intervenes in His servant’s destiny in the way that is best for him, chooses what is right for him, because He knows how things will turn out, the best time for them and everything has its proper time in His plan.

Read His saying, ‘Now if Allah were to hasten for human beings the ill [which they deserve by their sinning] in the same manner as they [themselves] would hasten [the coming to them of what they consider to be] good, their end would indeed come forthwith!’ (*Yunus:* 11)

One sees, for example, that a mother who loves and adores her son, raising her hands to the sky and prays against him or even herself when he disobeys or annoys her. What if Allah *Glorified is He* were to answer these insane prayers? He answers, out of His Mercy, those prayers of ours that are best for us and pardons our foolishness and hastiness.

In addition, Allah asks, who is the one that removes the suffering? Indeed, He is Allah just as there is no one but Him who answers the distressed. If there were another deity who could answer the distressed and remove the suffering, people would have turned to him in prayer, however when someone is afflicted, he only calls on Allah and turns to none but Him. No one would cheat himself in the time of need and distress that has befallen him.

Suppose that, and Allah is the highest of examples, a barber pretended to practise medicine and did not approve the medical colleges and its graduates. People began to turn to him and he started insulting and deploring medicine and doctors. He even said that those doctors had no experience in order to keep his place. However, what would he do when his son becomes ill? He might cheat the people, but he would not cheat himself. He would take his son in the dead of night wrapped in a blanket to one of those new doctors. Thus, every distressed and suffering person and even a disbeliever says and calls, ‘O my Lord, O my Lord’. Everyone turns his eyes and his heart to the sky and to Allah at times of trial as there is no debating.

Allah *Glorified is He* then asks, ‘Who makes you successors in the earth’? In other words, who makes each of you take the place of the other, as He says, ‘That He will most certainly make them rulers in the earth as He made rulers those before them.’ (*an-Nur:* 55) Does anyone but Allah *Glorified is He* have the power to do such things? Is there any god besides Allah? This question denies the existence of any other gods besides Allah *Glorified is He* who could do these things. Thus, Allah ends the verse saying that we take little notice. This means that if we were to think and reflect, we would know that there is no god but Allah *Glorified is He*.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* asks:

أَمَّن يَهۡدِيكُمۡ فِي ظُلُمَٰتِ ٱلۡبَرِّ وَٱلۡبَحۡرِ وَمَن يُرۡسِلُ ٱلرِّيَٰحَ بُشۡرَۢا بَيۡنَ
يَدَيۡ رَحۡمَتِهِۦٓۗ أَءِلَٰهٞ مَّعَ ٱللَّهِۚ تَعَٰلَى ٱللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشۡرِكُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Who is it that guides you through the darkness on land and sea? Who sends the winds as heralds of good news before His mercy? Is it another god beside God? God is far above the partners they put beside him! [63] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 63)

In the past, the stars were the signs by which travellers on sea and land alike navigated. This is applied to some people and not others and existed before science developed. Allah says, 'And landmarks and by the stars they find the right way.' (*an-Nahl:* 16)

Many Arab scholars excelled in the study of stars and celestial bodies and the study of the seas. They established the foundations of these sciences not by their own knowledge, but rather by observing the phenomena of the universe and by the help and guidance of Allah. When we consider the development made by mankind in life, we find that it is the result of unexpected observations or even through mistakes. How did mankind find out how to use yeast in dough to make bread with this form and this taste? This resulted in making bread which has not fermented and that which has fermented. These words have been used in Arabic as metaphors for opinions. A fermented opinion means one that is well studied and thought out unlike an opinion that is not fermented is superficial and immature.

Perhaps a woman discovered this fact about yeast by mistake or by chance when she was making dough and forgot baking it until it rose. Then, when she baked it, it came out in the way we now like. Similarly, penicillin was discovered accidentally, as were submarines, steam and wheels, etc.

For example, consider why we cook some certain vegetables and not other kinds. It is the guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* who created, measured, decreed, and guided. We learned how to work iron after softening it in fire because Allah *Glorified is He* taught this to Prophet, Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* as Allah says, ‘And We made iron pliant to him.’ (*Saba’:* 10) Thus, so many discoveries and advancements are due to the guidance of Allah. As time goes by, more of the secrets of the universe are revealed to us. Each discovery comes at the time that Allah *Glorified is He* wills. It is developed either by people using means of discoveries or by unexpectedly.

Read, if you like, the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases.’ (*al-Baqara:* 255) When Allah *Glorified is He* wills, He reveals things to you and makes them accessible to you. When you are not alert to them, He unveils them by means of a sudden event. Consider the case of a Bedouin when he looks at the sky and says that it will rain in a couple of hours, however, there are no clouds in the sky nor any mist or signs of rain. Yet he knows it will rain because of his intuition based on prior experience.

Animals are another example of this divine guidance. They eat instinctively grass and avoid green mint or basil, despite its nice smell. Why is this? That is because some certain things were created for its sweet fragrance and not to be eaten. In addition, when animals eat their fill, they stop eating, unlike humans who will eat until they are bloated and then eat desserts and drink cold and hot beverages. They say that when you show your stomach all kinds of food, it shows you empty places. That is why we find that the smell of the waste of animals is less foul than that of humans, because animals eat according to the instinct that Allah instilled in them, whilst we eat according to greedy desire and without sticking to the orders.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* asks: ‘Who sends the winds as heralds of good news?’ That is winds bring glad tidings of rain and rain is one of the signs of the Mercy of Allah. Therefore, here comes the question of the possibility of the existence of another god beside Allah. There is no god but Allah. It is He who can guide you through the darkness on land and sea and Who sends the winds as heralds of good news. Thus, He is far above the partners they put beside Him for He is absolved of there being any partner to Him in His universe.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* asks:

أَمَّن يَبۡدَؤُاْ ٱلۡخَلۡقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُۥ وَمَن يَرۡزُقُكُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۗ أَءِلَٰهٞ مَّعَ ٱللَّهِۚ قُلۡ هَاتُواْ بُرۡهَٰنَكُمۡ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Who is it that creates life and reproduces it? Who is it that gives you provision from the heavens and earth? Is it another god beside God?' Say, 'Show me your evidence then, if what you say is true' [64] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 64)

Those who disbelieve cannot deny the matter of creation. Allah *Glorified is He* Himself asked them: 'and if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say, "Allah."' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) And elsewhere, Allah says: 'and if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say, "Allah."' (*Luqman:* 25) They have no means of denying it. If they do, the reply is ready, that is, let whoever created first show us some new creation of his.

Allah *Glorified is He* creates life which means that He the initiated it from nothing. In addition, He reproduces it because the One who created us from nothing decreed that we should die and told us that we will be brought forth on the Day of Resurrection and that this creation will be repeated. However, those who are unable to deny creation deny resurrection. They say, as the Quran relates, 'Qaf. I swear by the Glorious Quran (The Quran, that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) Nay! They wonder that there has come to them a warner from among themselves, so the disbelievers say, "This is a wonderful thing. What! When we are dead and have become dust? That is a far (The Quran, from probable) return."' (*Qaf:* 1-3)

They scoffed at the notion of being returned after their death and the total decay of their bodies. The philosophers debated this issue much. In response to them we say that you reward those who do good and punish those who do bad, in man-made laws. You forbid some actions in themselves and appoint for them appropriate punishments. The law states that there can be no punishment without a crime and no crime without a text and no text without an announcement. In addition, man-made law leaves no crime without a punishment. Thus, if human beings make these laws in their societies in order to regulate their lives, is not more likely that the Lord of humanity has established a system of reward and punishment? If you yourself do not like seeing a criminal evade punishment, how could you accept that such a thing could occur with respect to Allah *Glorified is He*?

Furthermore, many criminals commit their crimes without being found out by the law or evade justice and run from punishment. They escape from man-made laws in this world and if we left such people without being punished in the hereafter as well, they would truly be the winners and this will be an encouragement to everyone who breaks the law. However, if he knows that he has a Lord, who watches over him and has Power over him and that if the law of this world does not catch him, the laws of Allah will and that if he escapes punishment in this world, he will not escape it in the hereafter, he will be law-abiding.

But why do they deny the return and say that is a far from probable return. They wonder how is it possible to return a person after he dies, buried up and decays into particles that the earth absorbs. They add that a tree might grow in this place, feed on these particles and several people eat the fruits thereof. Subsequently, the particles of the dead body first are transferred to the fruits and then to those who eat them. They wonder to whom these particles will be returned when all humanity is brought back on the Day of Resurrection. To the first original person or the second who ate the fruits? If you give them to the first, the second person will be incomplete and vice-versa.

This speech of theirs is based on the supposition that a person is material only. However, a person is composed of both the material and the spiritual. Suppose a person who weighed one hundred kilos became ill and lost weight until he was only fifty kilos. When he recovered and became better, he returned to his previous state. Are the particles that he lost the same as the ones that entered him when he became healthy? Of course, they are not. Did his identity change with this decrease or this increase? Of course, it did not. He is the same person. Thus, a person has many different particles that make him up and he also has a spirit and a soul. When these things are combined, the person exists. Therefore, Allah responds to them saying, ‘We know indeed what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a writing that preserves.’ (*Qaf:* 4)

Why do you deny the return after death, while you have accepted the first creation and admitted that Allah is the Creator? Is it not easier to rebuild something that existed than to create something from nothing? In addition, power and knowledge to do this return is required. As for knowledge, Allah says, ‘We know indeed what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a writing that preserves.’ (*Qaf:* 4) This means that He knows your weight and all your constituent parts and not a single atom escapes His Knowledge. Regarding the required power, you testified to it when you acknowledged that He has the Power to create from nothing as well as the return is easier than the first creation. Allah says, ‘And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is easy to Him.’ (*ar-Rum:* 27) Although that the concept of easy and easier on the part of the Creator is not appropriate, we say it according to our own conventions to make it easier for us to understand. Moreover, Allah says, ‘Were We then fatigued with the first creation? Yet are they in doubt with regard to a new creation.’ (*Qaf:* 15)

Next in the verse we are studying, Allah asks, ‘Who is it that gives you provision from the heavens and earth? Provision is everything from which benefit is obtained. It comes either from the sky or the earth or from where they meet each other when rain falls from the sky and mixes with the earth’s soil so that crops grow. Therefore, here comes the question of the possibility of the existence of another god beside Allah. The same question is repeated to emphasise that there is no god but Allah who brings you all these things blessings.

Moreover, Allah asks them to bring their evidence if they were truthful about their claim about the existence of another god who created life and sent provision from the sky and the earth. If none proves this to his behalf, the claim is confirmed to the first one who claimed it since there is no counter-claim. In addition, the one who claims could leave aside the matter of resurrection as it is enough to claim the ability to initiate creation. If someone can create, he can bring something back. It is not impossible for someone who can create from nothing to reassemble something that already exists.

Someone might ask, 'What is the relevancy of mentioning provision from sky and earth after the matter of reproduction? There must be a relationship between the two'. We say that the crop, which is the provision that comes after rain, combines with soil, has a cycle and a reproduction similar to that of mankind. Mankind eat crops, derives energy and nourishment from them. All what remains from them exits as bodily waste, which decays in the earth and what the body absorbed decays after it dies and becomes part of the fabric of earth. Similarly, roses, for example, after their beautiful bloom, they dry up when they are picked and their water diminishes and colour and fragrance disappear into the atmosphere. What remains from the dry material decays in the earth. When we plant another rose, it feeds upon the materials in the soil and the colour and fragrance in the atmosphere.

Thus, the constitutional elements of the universe have neither increased nor decreased since Allah created all creation. In addition, the nature of the cycle of plants including its beginning, end, and return is very similar to the creation, death, and return of mankind on the Day of Resurrection. It is as though Allah is proving to us our own return through the plant cycle that we see. It is an indication of the unseen that we have not yet witnessed.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُل لَّا يَعۡلَمُ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ ٱلۡغَيۡبَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُۚ وَمَا يَشۡعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبۡعَثُونَ ٦٥

Say, 'No one in the heavens or on earth knows the unseen except God.' They do not know when they will be raised from the dead [65] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 65)

This verse is similar to the one where Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures, none knows them but He' (*al-An'am:* 59); everything that is beyond our perception and senses is considered unseen. Sometimes an unseen thing is relatively unknown matter to you and known to others. For example, I do not know what is in your pockets, but you know. When someone steals something and hides it, he only knows where it is.

On the other hand, there is an absolute unseen that none of us know. This is of two kinds. The first kind includes things that no one knows, but we might discover one day such as all the discoveries to which humanity has been guided. These discoveries are preceded by some indicators that lead to them. This kind is the partially relative unseen because it is unseen today but will be seen sooner or later and thereby ceases to be unseen. It is like algebra exercises that we give children with premises and given quantities. They work their minds to arrive at the right solution. Speaking of this kind, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And they cannot comprehend anything out of His Knowledge except what He pleases.’ (*al-Baqara:* 255) When Allah *Glorified is He* wills and when the right time comes, He guides us to it by means of precursors, i.e. researches or an unexpected occurrence that alert us to it. This notion is strengthened by the words of Allah: ‘We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth.’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

The second kind of the absolute unseen is that which is truly unknown to everyone except to Allah who Alone knows its reality. Speaking of this kind, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘The Knower of the unseen! He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a messenger.’ (*al-Jinn:* 26-27) The matter of the resurrection is an example of the absolute unseen. Allah says, ‘Say, “No one in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen but Allah.”’ (*an-Naml:* 65) No one knows when the resurrection will be but Allah. However, He has made heralds and signs that indicate its coming and its closeness.

Allah says about it: ‘I am about to make it manifest.’ (*Ta Ha:* 15) Some people are confused about the meaning of this verse and believe that it means to that Allah kept it hidden. However, it means to reveal and manifest it, not to conceal it. Thus, Allah makes the resurrection manifest as there are both great and small signs. We see some of them now and more signs are revealed to us day after day. However, it remains the case that the exact time of the resurrection is known only to Allah. He says about it: ‘None but He shall manifest it at its time.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 187) Even the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* freely admitted that he had no knowledge of when it would be. He says when he was asked about it: ‘I have no more knowledge thereof than you.’(1) It was an honour that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not know something that Allah had kept for Himself and made it an absolute unseen of which He informed no one, even the messengers.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Allah *Glorified is He* might honour some of His creatures by allowing them to know something of the unseen. For example, Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* many unseen things without there being any precursors to them. Thus, it must be a divine inspiration of the Quran. Consider the verses where Allah says: *'Alif Lam Mim.* The Romans are vanquished. In a near land, and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome, Within a few years.' (*ar-Rum:* 1-4)

The Romans were closer to Allah as they were people of the Book, while the Persians were pagan fire-worshippers. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions hoped that they would defeat the Persians. However, it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they were defeated and that they would be victorious in the end. If Allah *Glorified is He* had not specified that their victory would be within a few years, this would mean that their victory could have been at any time in the future. However, who could specify the time of the result of a battle between two great powers except Allah? In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* said that the believers shall rejoice on that day. That is because the victory of the Romans would please them as well as Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that the believers would defeat the disbelievers at Badr on the very same day the Romans would defeat the Persians.

Another example of the unseen matters that Allah *Glorified is He* granted to His servants is what happened to Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* when he was close to death. Abu Bakr gave his daughter `Aisha, Allah be pleased with her, some money. Later, he asked her to bring the money she had and said, 'they are only your two brothers and your two sisters.' We know that the two brothers were Mohammad and Abd Ar-Rrahman. However, `Aisha had no sister at the time but `Asma, so who was the other? Abu Bakr married his cousin and she was pregnant at the time of his death, but Allah revealed to him that she would give birth to a girl, who would be a sister to `Aisha and `Asma.

Allah says in the verse we are studying that they do not know when they will be raised from the dead. This means that just as we do not know when we will die, similarly we do not know when we will be raised.

Allah says:

بَلِ ٱدَّٰرَكَ عِلۡمُهُمۡ فِى ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۚ بَلۡ هُمۡ فِى شَكّٖ مِّنۡهَاۖ بَلۡ هُم مِّنۡهَا عَمُونَ ٦٦

Their knowledge cannot comprehend the Hereafter; they are in doubt about it; they are blind to it [66] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 66)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that their knowledge cannot comprehend the Hereafter although it is built up, i.e. discourse about the life to come has been given again and again by successive messengers. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the state of the disbelievers in hell saying, 'Until when they have all come up with one another into it' (*al-A'raf:* 38). This means that they have been built up and gathered with each other.

Thus, the messengers of Allah have come one after another with the proclamations of the truth of the hereafter. Every one of them called to believe in Allah and the Last Day and came with signs that indicate it. Despite this constant succession of reminders of the hereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says that they are in doubt about its reality. Why is this? Allah *Glorified is He* answers saying that this is because they are blind to it. That is, their sight and their insight are blind to it, so they have refused to be guided. If their eyes and their hearts were open, they would believe in it. Allah says in another verse, 'For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts.' (*al-Hajj:* 46) Therefore, there can be something that certainly exists, but I can fail to see it or ignore it deliberately. The signs of the resurrection exist and have been sent down successively, however people are blind to them and do not see them. Their insight is blind to the clear signs of the hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَءِذَا كُنَّا تُرَٰبٗا وَءَابَآؤُنَآ أَئِنَّا لَمُخۡرَجُونَ ٦٧

So the disbelievers say, ‘What! When we and our forefathers have become dust, shall we be brought back to life again? [67] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 67)

They are trying to use the fact that their forefathers have not been resurrected to show that they will not be resurrected too. But who told them that the hereafter will come in this world? It is only called the hereafter because it comes after this world comes to an end.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَقَدۡ وُعِدۡنَا هَٰذَا نَحۡنُ وَءَابَآؤُنَا مِن قَبۡلُ إِنۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّآ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ٦٨

We have heard such promises before, and so did our forefathers. These are just ancient fables [68] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 68)

The disbelievers say that they have been dying and prophets have been reminding them of the Day of Resurrection, but it has not yet taken place. Thus, they say that these are just ancient fables, i.e. lies and legends of those who came before. But what is their motivation for accusing the prophets who passed on the message of Allah with such accusations?

The scholars say it is because a person’s soul is dear to him and everyone who ruins himself by living a life of sin wants to assure and relax himself. He can only relax if he tells himself that this is all a lie. If he were to admit that there will be a resurrection and a reckoning, his woes would be great as he has nothing except that he denied Allah and disobeyed His commandments. Thus, how can he admit that there will be a resurrection? Naturally, a disbeliever makes himself feel better by giving the lie to the news the messengers brought.

Therefore, there are those amongst these people who say about fate, ‘If Allah decreed that I should sin, why should He punish me for it’? Logic demands that they complete the picture and say, ‘And if He decreed that I should obey Him, why should He reward me for it’? Why do they mention the bad and ignore the good? So in reality, these people want nothing more than a way out, through which they can escape the consequences of their actions.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

[Prophet], say, ‘Travel through the earth and see how the evildoers ended up’ [69] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 69)

Allah *Glorified is He* calls them to travel through the earth to witness and reflect on the consequences that came to those who sinned and gave the lie to their messengers and how Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed, annihilated them and decreed victory for the messengers. He does not call them to reflect on those who have been resurrected as the resurrection has not yet taken place.

The news of the resurrection is part of what the messengers brought, and whoever denies the messengers denies the resurrection that will undoubtedly occur, but Allah conceals the exact time when it will take place. He says, ‘None but He shall manifest it at its time’ (*al-A‘raf:* 187). Then, Allah *Glorified is He* comforts Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to lessen the pain that he faced in his call, saying:

وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُن فِى ضَيْقٍ مِّمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

[Prophet], do not grieve over them; do not be distressed by their schemes [70] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 70)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah addressed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, ‘Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was about to destroy himself with sadness. Thus, Allah emphasises here that the mission of a messenger is to deliver the message of Allah only. A prophet has nothing to do with making people believe. However, the Prophet’s love for his people and his eagerness to save them made him grieve and become sad if any of them refused to believe. Allah says, ‘Certainly a messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers [he is] compassionate' (*at-Tawba:* 128).

Allah then says:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا ٱلۡوَعۡدُ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

They also say, 'When will this promise be fulfilled if
what you say is true?' [71] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 71)

Those who deny the resurrection ask about the time of the fulfilment of the promise. In addition, they doubt its existence. They referred to the information of the resurrection as a promise even though for them it is a threat. The difference between a promise and a threat is that you promise to do good things but threaten to do bad things. Allah *Glorified is He* blotted out their words even though they were people of eloquence. This is a threat to them but a threat of evil to your adversary is a promise of good for you.

It is as though Allah were informing of two promises. He promised His messengers assistance and succour and promised the entire world a resurrection. Since the first promise was true and observable, take it as a herald and a sign that the second is true as well. You know that all the messengers were given victory against those who denied them; either by the punishment of annihilation or by the punishment of being defeated and routed.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قُلۡ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَكُونَ رَدِفَ لَكُم بَعۡضُ ٱلَّذِي تَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

Say, 'Maybe some of what you seek to hasten is
near at hand' [72] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 72)

The modal verb 'maybe' implies hope. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* says it, it implies certainty. For example, if you say, 'So and so a person might give you' this is weak hope. However, when you say, 'I might give you', it is a stronger statement because you do not have power over that person, but you have power over your own self. It would be even stronger to say, ‘Allah might give you’ because your own means do not guarantee you are able to deliver. Nevertheless, when Allah *Glorified is He* says that it might be, this implies absolute certainty of hope and its highest degree and level.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that what they seek to hasten is near. It follows them and will come after them. It is right behind them and indeed they will be afflicted with what they hastily demanded. It was not long before they were defeated at Badr. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* fulfilled His first promise as He says, ‘Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn [their] backs.’ (*al-Qamar:* 45) And since you all witnessed this, take it as a sign of the unseen about which Allah *Glorified is He* told you.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

Your Lord is bountiful to people, though most of them are ungrateful [73] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 73)

Allah *Glorified is He* delays the resurrection, out of His bounty, so that people might become aware of it. If Allah has not delayed it, it would have come upon them at the first time they disbelieved. This shows that Allah *Glorified is He* is giving mankind time so that people of guidance and faith increases amongst them. Do you not see that those who believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not all believe at the same time? They rather came to Islam across a huge expanse of time.

Thus, we observed how the first Muslims would be in pain when they missed an opportunity to kill the leaders and commanders of the disbelievers in their battles such as `Ikrima, `Umar and Khalid *Allah be pleased with them*. However, if Allah *Glorified is He* had revealed the unseen to them, they would have realised that Allah had saved them in order to serve as an instrument of victory to Islam and to be renowned and commanders against the disbelievers.

It is worth noting that Allah *Glorified is He* say that most of them are ungrateful to show that there are some who indeed do give thanks.

Allah *Glorified is He* says next:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَيَعۡلَمُ مَا تُكِنُّ صُدُورُهُمۡ وَمَا يُعۡلِنُونَ ٧٤

He knows everything their hearts conceal and
everything they reveal [74] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 74)

Someone might say, ‘since Allah knows what their hearts conceal and what they hide, He must certainly know what they reveal. Thus, why did He need to say everything they reveal’? In response, Allah mentions it because that which lies in the heart is unseen and since Allah *Glorified is He* is also unseen; someone might say that Allah only knows the unseen. Thus, say in response to this that Allah *Glorified is He* knows both the unseen and the open.

Allah says:

وَمَا مِنۡ غَآئِبَةٖ فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَٰبٖ مُّبِينٍ ٧٥

There is nothing hidden in the heavens or on earth that is
not in a clear Record [75] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 75)

Everything hidden, no matter how well hidden it is, is something unseen. Allah *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic particle *min* (from) before the word hidden. Some say that it is a linguistic addition which adds no extra meaning to the verse. However, additional words do not befit the rhetorical style and eloquence of the Noble Quran. We hold Allah’s speech high above any trace of additional or meaningless language. Others had better manners with the Quran and said that the particle *min* here is a connector. But what does it connect? It must have a meaning.

To clarify this, suppose that you want to negate that you have any money. You would say, ‘I have no money’. This means that you have no money of any worth, but you might have a few pence that are not enough to be considered money. However, if you want to say that you have no money at all, you would say, ‘I do not have any money’, using the particle *min* in Arabic; this means that you have no money at all, no matter how little it might be. Thus, using the particle *min* here is neither a meaningless addition nor a connector. Actually, it serves to show the absoluteness of the negation.

Thus, the meaning is that the Knowledge of Allah encompasses all things from pre-eternity, however small or insignificant it might seem. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but [it is all] in a clear book.' (*al-An'am:* 59)

Moreover, the Omnipotence of Allah does not stop at the point of knowledge, but rather, He also records it in a clear record, i.e. the Mother Book where Allah recorded everything that would happen in the universe. Thus, everything we see happens in accordance with what Allah *Glorified is He* recorded in pre-eternity. For example, when Allah mentioned the transportations that existed at the time the of Quran, He says, 'And [He made] horses and mules and donkeys that you might ride upon them and as an ornament; and He creates what you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 8) Were it not for the end of the verse that states that Allah creates what we do not know, this verse could have been questioned since we have cars, planes and rockets now. So, we can include all modern modes of transport under the end of the verse.

We observed before that Allah, out of His Greatness, does not rebuke for any action that people do unless they have some choice in the matter. He only informs us about those things in which we have a choice and reveals our own free choice as occurred in relation to the changing of the prayer direction. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The fools among the people will say, "What has turned them from their *qiblah* (direction of prayer) which they had?' (*al-Baqara:* 142) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* informed us of this directly and called such people as fools because they were showing enmity to Allah and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, after this dismissal and this disparagement, they still went on to say what the Quran had declared. We did not see any intelligent person among them reflect on this verse and abstain from saying what the Quran says that they will say so that they could accuse the Quran of being incorrect and denigrate its veracity and the position of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This did not happen and they indeed went on to what has turned them from their *qibla* which they had. They wonder why they stopped facing the Holy House in Jerusalem and faced Mecca instead. They said this, despite the intellects and free will with which they were endowed.

This issue also happened regarding Abu Lahab. Allah *Glorified is He* says of him: 'Perdition overtakes both hands of Abu Lahab, and he will perish. His wealth and what he earns will not avail him. He shall soon burn in fire that flames.' (*al-Masad:* 1-3) Allah revealed these verses because he said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he gathered the people to preach the message of Allah, 'Perished be you! Is this why you have gathered us?' Abu Lahab was an uncle to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just as Hamza and Al-`Abbas *Allah be pleased with them* were. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not know what future his uncle would have. He might have believed as Hamza did and become the Lion of Allah and just as Al-`Abbas ibn Abd Al-Muttalib did. When these verses were revealed, it was possible for him to prove it wrong by believing and pronouncing the testimonies of faith, even hypocritically. He did not do this even though he could have done this and it was within his free will to do so.

Thus, it is a manifestation of the greatness and miraculous nature of the speech of Allah that He could announce what the free action of disbeliever would be and reveal verses of the Quran in that was recited openly and yet they would be unable to refrain from doing these actions. Therefore, the Quran remained Allah's proof against every disbeliever and obstinate denier.

If we reflect on the verse where Allah says, 'Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9), we see that Allah revealed the Quran and undertook to preserve it Himself and did not leave this task to any other. While there are things that had not yet occurred, it is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is preserving it Himself, recording, and announcing it because it will definitely happen.

Allah does not fear that events will turn out any other way than He decreed. This is because He has dominion over them all. Do you not see that people keep the part of a bill of exchange that shows what others owe them and do not care about the part that shows what they must give? However, Allah keeps things for us, whilst it is for Him to bring them into being.

Read, 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn [their] backs.' (*al-Qamar:* 45) Allah *Glorified is He* recorded upon Himself this event and preserved it because He was able to bring it about and indeed they were defeated, turned upon their heels and the words of Allah proved true.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ يَقُصُّ عَلَىٰ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ أَكْثَرَ ٱلَّذِى هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

Truly, this Quran explains to the Children of Israel most of what they differ about [76] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 76)

There is a difference between addressing someone who has no idea about what you are saying and addressing someone who has some prior knowledge. The person with an empty mind will accept what you say, whilst the one with prior knowledge will argue with you. Thus, some of the disbelievers and the people of the Book opposed and denied the Book of Allah and what it contained. Although they were enemies to Islam and hated it, if you were to ask them about what the Quran said, they would say, ‘Yes, we know this from our own scriptures’. Allah says, ‘but when there came to them [Prophet] that which they did not recognize, they disbelieved in him; so Allah’s curse is on the disbelievers.’ (*al-Baqara:* 89)

When `Abdullah ibn Salam looked at Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew he was a true messenger and his soul inclined to Islam. He said, ‘By Allah, I know Muhammad like I know my own son or even more!’ Allah speaks the truth when He says about them that they recognize him as they recognize their sons.

`Abdullah knew that Islam was the path that led to Allah and that every intelligent person should follow it. When he decided to embrace Islam, he wanted to go around declaring his conversion, revealing the hypocrites, the disbelievers, and the people of the Book. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I have gained honour by entering Islam and I fear that if I submit to Allah, the Jews will slander me and do such and such with me.’ He then asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask them about him before announcing his conversion to Islam. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did, they said: ‘He is our learned rabbi and the son of our learned rabbi.’ They praised and lauded him but when `Abdullah announced the testimony of faith, they said: ‘He is the worst of us and the son of the worst of us’ and abused and insulted him.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَإِنَّهُۥ لَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

And it is guidance and grace for those who believe[77]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 77)

The Quran is a guidance of evidence and direction, which is for both the believer and the disbeliever, while it is a grace for the believers alone, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And We reveal of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers.’ (*al-Isra’:* 82) There is a difference between something which is a healing and which is a mercy. The mention of the two things together here implies some distinction between them. Something which is a healing is a cure for the ailment that the Quran came to treat, whilst a mercy prevents you from contracting this ailment again.

Allah says:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَقْضِى بَيْنَهُم بِحُكْمِهِۦ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٧٨﴾

Truly, your Lord will judge between them in His
wisdom – He is the Almighty, the All Knowing [78]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 78)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Almighty Who controls and cannot be controlled, Who vanquishes and cannot be vanquished and Who protects and cannot be encroached upon. Moreover, He is also All Knowing, alongside this great might. Someone might be mighty and invincible and yet have no knowledge, but Allah is Almighty and All Knowing. He puts might in its place and meekness in its place as He says, ‘Say, “O Allah, Owner of sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honour whom You will and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, You are over all things competent.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26)

The scholars have discussed the phrase that says that good is in Allah’s hand. Some came to the conclusion that this means that good and evil are in Allah’s hand. However, this explanation lacks understanding of the verse; for everything Allah does is good at all times. The act of giving the kingdom to those who treat their subjects well is good and the removal of it from those who act with tyranny and iniquity is also good, as Allah *Glorified is He* has removed their means to tyranny so that they cannot continue. Thus, in both situations, there is good.

Inasmuch as the attributes of Allah include Might, Knowledge, Wisdom, Mercy, and Bounty, then be assured, O believer and put your trust in Allah.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَى ٱلْحَقِّ ٱلْمُبِينِ ﴿٧٩﴾

So [Prophet], put your trust in God, you are on the path of clear truth [79] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 79)

To put your trust in someone means to admit your own weakness while achieving something you do not possess the strength it needs. True trust and reliance can only be in Allah *Glorified is He* who is Ever Living and cannot die. If you rely on other human beings like yourself, death might come to them before they meet your need. Allah *Glorified is He* said that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is on the path of clear truth. This means that you put your trust in Allah while you believe and obey Him and not while you disobey. Inasmuch as you rely on Allah while you keep to His obedience, He will surely succour you and aid you.

Then, Allah comforts Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and consoles him so that he will not be pained by those who stray from him and do not believe:

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّكَ لَا تُسْمِعُ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَا تُسْمِعُ ٱلصُّمَّ ٱلدُّعَآءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا۟ مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

You cannot make the dead hear, you cannot make the deaf listen to your call when they turn their backs and leave[80] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 80)

This verse advises Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be sad and not to destroy himself with grief because of those who do not believe; for his task is only to deliver the message. Delivering a message is carried out by speech that is received by means of apparatus that the listener possesses, i.e. the ear. If this apparatus does not work, they will not hear. These people's listening apparatus do not work and thereby they are like dead people or those who are deaf. The signs of Allah *Glorified is He* in the universe are all around them, yet they neither see nor hear them.

It would be better for them if they were only deaf. However, they turn their backs on the message. This is an exaggeration to indicate their refusal to hear the truth. If they stayed, they would not hear, so what if they turn their backs and leave altogether? Some of them feared that their deafness would end and that they would hear Allah's call and incline to it. This would be a disaster for them, as far as they were concerned.

This shows that they knew it was the truth and that if they had paid heed to it, they would have followed it. Did they not say 'Do not listen to this Quran and make noise therein?' (*Fussilat:* 26) This is because the Quran captivates the attention by its majesty and beauty. Therefore, they forbade listening to it and commanded that it should be covered with noise so it could not be heard and could not enter their hearts.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَمَآ أَنتَ بِهَٰدِي ٱلۡعُمۡيِ عَن ضَلَٰلَتِهِمۡۖ إِن تُسۡمِعُ إِلَّا مَن يُؤۡمِنُ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا فَهُم مُّسۡلِمُونَ ٨١

You cannot guide the blind out of their error: you cannot make anyone hear you except those who believe in Our signs and submit [to Us] [81] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 81)

There is a difference between hearing the truth with an open mind and hearing it when you are occupied by something contrary to it. In order for the listening to yield benefit, you must receive it with an open mind and use your mind to compare it to what contradicts it. Subsequently, whatever you incline to and feel comfortable with you should accept it. This is what they refer to, even in the case of material things, as the theory of displacement, i.e. that a single confine cannot be filled with two different things at the same time. We gave the example of a glass and said that when we fill it with water, the air inside it comes out in the form of bubbles because water is thicker than air.

Someone might ask ‘As long as Allah makes only those who believe in the signs and submit to Allah hear, what is the use of this hearing, since they already believe’? We say that there are three kinds of signs which are ordered together. The first kind is the signs that are inherent in the universe, which indicate the existence of an All-Powerful Creating deity so that you ask yourself who this creating deity might be. Subsequently, it comes to the role of the messengers who give you the answer to this mystery. They bring the signs necessary to prove that they are truly delivering the message of Allah. These signs come in the form of miracles. Thus, the messengers remind us of the signs inherent in the universe when we fail to notice them.

If we believe in the signs of the universe and the signs and miracles of the prophets, we must also believe in the signs and legal verses that were the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah then says:

وَإِذَا وَقَعَ ٱلْقَوْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَخْرَجْنَا لَهُمْ دَآبَّةً مِّنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ
تُكَلِّمُهُمْ أَنَّ ٱلنَّاسَ كَانُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا لَا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

When the verdict is given against them, We shall bring a creature out of the earth, which will tell them that people had no faith in Our revelations [82] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 82)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that He shall give His verdict of punishment against them. This means that the word of truth will fall as though it was its nature to fall and needed no one to make it come down. It shall be given against them as if it was a ceiling coming down on them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So the roof fell down on them from above them’ (*an-Nahl:* 26).

Giving the verdict of punishment here indicates that they will be exposed to trials and misfortunes. On exploring the occurrence of giving verdicts in the Quran, we find that it is always used to refer to difficulties, except in one place where Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And whoever goes forth from his house flying to Allah and His messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with Allah.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 100)

As long as they did not pay heed to the messages, did not accept them, did not pay attention to the guidance of Allah, and played deaf to it, they will certainly not hear the words of their fellow humans and so a creature will come from the earth to address them. Look at this humiliation and this stern rebuke. Since they did not listen to their fellow man and did not understand those who addressed them in your own tongue; so now listen to one lower than you and understand it and explain its speech.

However, what will the creature say to them? What kind of speech will it have? It will tell them that people had no faith in the revelations of Allah, i.e. they did not believe in the signs we sent them. Thus, this creature will speak to them and let whichever of them is skilled tell how it is able to speak to them.

There is a difference of opinion regarding the identity of this creature, its nature and description and how it is able to speak when it is a beast whose kind are unable to speak. But as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us of it, it is real and should not be questioned. We must consider how the occurrence of things of which the Quran informed that would happen before they actually did and take this as proof that the other things it says will happen will indeed come to pass.

Allah then says:

وَيَوۡمَ نَحۡشُرُ مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةٖ فَوۡجٗا مِّمَّن يُكَذِّبُ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا فَهُمۡ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

The Day will come when We gather from every community a crowd of those who disbelieved in Our signs and they will be led in separate groups [83] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 83)

A crowd is a group and a gathering of people. The first to be gathered on this day will be the arrogant tyrants who took lead in denying the signs of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* will gather them first, in front of everyone and they will be the first to enter Hell, as Allah says about Pharaoh: ‘He shall lead his people on the Day of Resurrection, and bring them down to the fire.’ (*Hud:* 98)

Just as he led them in misguidance in this world, he will lead them into Hell in the hereafter. In addition, when the misguided people see their leaders of misguidance are admitted to fire first, they will know that there is no escape.

They might cling to them imagining that they can save them. Nevertheless, how could this be, when he meets his ultimate fate before they do?

Allah says that they would be led in separate groups to Hell. They will be prevented from going ahead of one another and thereby, they will all enter together. Allah will gather them all together in Hell, so that the followers and the leaders will be one in the same degradation and abasement. Perhaps some of the tyrants and oppressors might attempt to go quickly so that their followers do not see and disgrace them, but Allah *Glorified is He* will hold them back, so that they will be seen.

Allah then says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءُو قَالَ أَكَذَّبۡتُم بِـَٔايَٰتِي وَلَمۡ تُحِيطُواْ بِهَا عِلۡمًا أَمَّاذَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ (٨٤)

Until, when they come before Him, He will say, 'Did you deny My messages without even taking them in? Or what were you doing?' [84] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 84)

Allah *Glorified is He* details this moment in the chapter of *al-A`raf*. He mentions the dialogue that will take place on the Day of Resurrection, saying, 'Who is then more unjust than he who forges a lie against Allah or rejects His communications? [As for] those, their portion of the Book shall reach them, until when Our messengers come to them causing them to die, they shall say, "Where is that which you used to call upon besides Allah?" They would say, "They are gone away from us"; and they shall bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers. He will say, "Enter the fire among the nations that have passed away before you from among jinn and men"; whenever a nation shall enter, it shall curse its sister, until when they have all come up with one another into it; the last of them shall say with regard to the foremost of them, "Our Lord! These led us astray therefore give them a double chastisement of the fire." He will say, "Everyone shall have double, but you do not know." And the foremost of them will say to the last of them, "So you have no preference over us; therefore, taste the chastisement for what you earned."' (*al-A'raf:* 37-39)

Allah says:

وَوَقَعَ ٱلْقَوْلُ عَلَيْهِم بِمَا ظَلَمُوا۟ فَهُمْ لَا يَنطِقُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

**The verdict will be given against them because of
their wrongdoing: they will not speak [85]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 85)**

Allah's verdict entails that punishment is obligatory upon them. The punishment would befall them as though it is a physical thing that will fall upon their heads. Thus, they will not speak, as their tongues will be shut because of the horror they will see and which will make them find nothing to say.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا ٱلَّيْلَ لِيَسْكُنُوا۟ فِيهِ وَٱلنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا ۚ
إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾

**Did they not see that We gave them the night for rest,
and the day for light? There truly are signs in this for
those who believe [86] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 86)**

The Quranic context moves from describing the Hereafter to casting light on a universal sign. This is one of the distinctive rhetorical features of the Noble Quran. It switches between the call to faith and the signs inherent in the universe. After informing us of the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* mentions these universal signs. It is as though Allah is saying that there is no excuse for those who deny His revelation because His signs are visible everywhere.

That is why Allah says, 'did they not see?' That is, He wonders whether they did not know and witness that it is He Who had made the night for them, so that they might rest therein. We know that night is dedicated for sleep and repose. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* created the day for them so that they will be able to see things and earn their living.

We mentioned before how Ibn Al-Haytham, a Muslim scientist, corrected the theory of vision. It had been thought that rays come from the eyes to the seen object, whereas the truth is that the ray starts from the seen object to the eye. Thus, it is the ray that allows the thing to be seen, that is, it is the main cause of vision without which we would not see anything. These are signs for those who believe. Allah has ordered life for mankind by means of night in which you rest, and day in which you work and seek the His bounty. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And out of His Mercy He has made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks.’ (*al-Qasas:* 73)

The way of life will not be normal unless we conform to this order that Allah has chosen for us. If people turn it and stay up night until dawn, the consequence of this will manifest itself in a lethargic, slow, and lazy attitude. Allah *Glorified is He* explains this to us when He says, ‘Say, “Tell me, if Allah were to make the night to continue incessantly on you till the day of resurrection, who is the deity besides Allah that could bring you light? Do you not then hear?” Say, “Tell me, if Allah were to make the day to continue incessantly on you till the Day of Resurrection, who is the deity besides Allah that could bring you the night in which you take rest? Do you not then see?”’ (*al-Qasas:* 71-72)

It is worth noting that Allah ended the verse that speaks about night with mentioning the sense of hearing, while He mentions the vision in the verse that speaks of the day. Why is that? Scholars say it is because the main sense of perception utilised at night is hearing; however it is the sight in the day. This indicates the nature of each of them, so that we do not change them staying up all-night and sleeping all day.

Concerning the saying of Allah, ‘And out of His Mercy He has made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of His grace’, we notice that Allah, after speaking collectively, starts to elaborate on the subject; He mentions the two things together, the night and the day and then exposes the attribute of each of them in order. Thus, resting pertains to night, while seeking Allah’s bounty is a mission to be fulfilled in the day. Moreover, after speaking about two existing examples, the night and day, Allah chose to utilise the example of their hypothetical absence. Then once again, the context returns to speaking about the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَيَوْمَ يُنفَخُ فِي ٱلصُّورِ فَفَزِعَ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَن فِي
ٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُۚ وَكُلٌّ أَتَوْهُ دَٰخِرِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

On the Day the Trumpet sounds, everyone in heaven and on earth will be terrified – except such as God wills – and all will come to Him in utter humility [87] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 87)

It is as though Allah is telling us to take admonition from the signs inherent in the universe as it will benefit us on a coming day, namely; the Day of Resurrection. On hearing the sound of the trumpet, everyone in heaven and on earth will be stricken with terror except those whom Allah wills not to be frightened. The scholars say that this refers to the angels, i.e. Israfil who will blow the trumpet and Jibril (Gabriel), Michael, and Azrael.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke about this, he said that he will return conscious and find his brother, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* clinging to the throne. This is because Musa (Moses) fell unconscious once in this world, when Allah revealed Himself to the mountain, as the Quran tells us: ‘But when his Lord manifested His Glory to the mountain He made it crumble and Musa (Moses) fell down in a swoon.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 143) Allah would not make Prophet Musa (Moses) swoon twice, and so he will not fall unconscious in the Hereafter.

Allah says that all will come to Him in utter humility and submission. None of them will be sound conceited as they have no power. The advent of resurrection spelt the end of the free will they possessed and by which they were granted some small dominion. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Say, “O Allah, Master of the Kingdom! You give the kingdom to whomsoever You please and take away the kingdom from whomsoever You please, and You exalt whom You please and abase whom You please.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26)

However, Allah gave a portion of dominion and donated it to some of His servants in this worldly material life; all dominion belongs to Allah Alone in the Hereafter and no one can wrest it from Him. Allah says, ‘To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer [of all]’ (*Ghafir:* 16). Thus, everything you possess and your power over anything including your own limbs will be taken from you. They will be beyond your control and will not respond to your orders. They served you in this life. They were your means of hearing, walking and holding; however, all of this will be taken out of your control; they will serve as evidence when they will testify against you on the Day of Resurrection.

Next, the context shifts again to mention a universal sign. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَتَرَى ٱلْجِبَالَ تَحْسَبُهَا جَامِدَةً وَهِىَ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ ٱلسَّحَابِ ۚ صُنْعَ ٱللَّهِ
ٱلَّذِىٓ أَتْقَنَ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

You will see the mountains and think they are firmly fixed, but they will float away like clouds: this is the handiwork of God who has perfected all things. He is fully aware of what you do [88] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 88)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the mountains. We think they are so firm that they do not move, yet they float away like clouds. Things are not as we deem them. They move and travel just as the clouds do, however, we are unaware and do not notice this movement because we are moving with them. Suppose that this mosque, in which we are gathering were on a rotary or a wheel that was rotating, would our positions and places in respect to one another change in any way? No, they would not. You cannot notice this movement unless you are outside the thing that is moving. Similarly, when you are on a train you see that the telephone poles outside moving, whilst you yourself are remaining still.

Inasmuch as this is an amazing phenomenon that will amaze humanity, Allah clarifies this wonderful sign and says that He has perfected all things. This is a call from Allah to mankind not to be amazed, since these signs are the creation of Allah. Thus, He chose to mention a particular attribute of His, i.e. He creates everything in this universe in a due measure.

However, some say that the movement of the mountains like clouds will be in the Hereafter. They cite in support of their opinion the verse where Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And the mountains shall be as loosened wool.’ (*al-Qari`a:* 5)

This is wide of the mark as the meaning of this verse is that the mountains will crumble and scatter and not that they will move. In addition, the statement in the verse we are studying is based on conjecture as Allah mentions the verb ‘think’. Yet there is no conjecture in the Hereafter. When it comes, every event within it will be perceived with certainty.

The clouds themselves do not move and they have no motors to move them. It is the wind that moves them. Likewise, the mountains do not move of their own accord, for we have seen no mountain moving from its position. The movement of the mountains follows the movement of the earth because they are set as pegs upon it and a peg moves with the thing in which it is planted. Thus, when Allah speaks about the mountains, He says, ‘And He has cast great mountains in the earth lest it might be convulsed with you.’ (*an-Nahl:* 15) If the earth had been created in a state of stillness, it would not require anything to keep it firm. It must be in a state of motion.

It is Allah Who has perfected all things. In the past, people, before recent modern scientific findings, thought that astrologers and astronomers had knowledge of the unseen. As for now, scientists have discovered the rules that govern the motion of the earth and other celestial bodies in the solar system and have been able to measure all this precisely, so that they can predict the time and nature of the solar and lunar eclipses with complete accuracy. In addition, they were also able to fly to the surface of the moon by measuring these motions, and launch space stations and steer them with such accuracy that one could connect with another in outer space. If these phenomena had not been based on exacting data, they would have resulted in abject failure.

Moreover, the expression at the end of the verse that shows Allah’s bounty on His creation serves as evidence for the correctness of our preferred explanation of the meaning of the movement of the mountains. Allah does not benevolently bestow His Handiwork on the Day of Resurrection, but rather, it is benevolently bestowed upon us now, in the life of this world.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَن جَآءَ بِٱلْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُۥ خَيْرٌ مِّنْهَا وَهُم مِّن فَزَعٍ يَوْمَئِذٍ ءَامِنُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

Whoever comes with a good deed will be rewarded with something better, and be secure from the terrors of that Day [89]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 89)

This verse has a subtle and beautiful connection with what has preceded it. All the signs of the universe that Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us of represent a single reality and you ascertained the truth of them when you saw and perceived them with your senses yourself. Similarly, just as Allah informed us of these signs, He is now informing us of another unseen reality which we must accept and believe in as we observed the truth of what we have seen.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that whoever comes with a good deed will be rewarded with something better. A good deed is an action that is performed for the sake of worshiping Allah. If you do something as Allah wants, it is a good deed on your part. In addition, Allah rewards good deeds tenfold and might reward them up to seven hundred times over according to the sincerity and devotion of the one who performs them.

The verse tells that whoever does a good deed in this world will be rewarded with something that stems from that good deed in the Hereafter. Some people say that saying that there is no god but Allah, for example, is a good deed and the reward for it will be better than it. However, this is an inexact understanding of the verse because it is Allah Who grants this reward and whoever comes with good deed will derive goodness from it as a result of it. Thus, the Arabic expression can mean ‘better than’ and ‘good from’. It can also mean that the reward for a good deed is better than the good deed itself; for you do a good deed in a brief moment of time, yet the good and reward that come from it last forever.

Allah then says:

وَمَن جَآءَ بِٱلسَّيِّئَةِ فَكُبَّتۡ وُجُوهُهُمۡ فِى ٱلنَّارِ هَلۡ
تُجۡزَوۡنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

But whoever comes with evil deeds will be cast face downwards into the Fire. ‘Are you rewarded for anything except what you have done?’ [90] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 90)

On the other hand, whoever comes with evil deeds will get his face casted and thrown violently downwards into the fire. Faces were singled out here, although the entire body will be thrown because the face is the noblest and most dignified part of the body. It is the seat of pride and haughtiness. Nevertheless, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes degradation and humiliation for them. Elsewhere in the Quran, He makes it clear that the entire body will be thrown into the fire, saying, ‘So they shall be thrown down into it, they, and the erring ones.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 94)

This fate is not unjust or unfairness for them. Allah says it is nothing but what they have done; He says, ‘…no injustice [shall be done] this day.’ (*Ghafir:* 17) Allah does not show courtesy to those who do good deeds, nor does He wrong those who do bad deeds.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَآ أُمِرۡتُ أَنۡ أَعۡبُدَ رَبَّ هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡبَلۡدَةِ ٱلَّذِى حَرَّمَهَا
وَلَهُۥ كُلُّ شَىۡءٍۖ وَأُمِرۡتُ أَنۡ أَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

[Say Prophet], ‘What I am commanded to do is to serve the Sustainer of this town, which He has made inviolable. Everything belongs to Him; I am commanded to be one of those devoted to Him [91] (The Quran, *an-Naml:* 91)

Inasmuch as Allah has given us this information that alerts us to His Power over the signs of the universe and has informed us of the Hereafter, the reward and punishment therein, all you have to do is to submit. Since you know, be steadfast and know that the one who passed on to you the guidance of Allah will be the first to adhere to it. All human beings must adhere to Allah’s Commands.

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that what he has been commanded to do is to serve the Lord of this town. When he *peace and blessings be upon him* asks you to do any action of moral responsibility, he has committed himself to it first. He is certain of the truth of the Message he conveys from Allah and thereby he has adhered to it.

To serve someone as we observed before is to worship and obey all commands and keep away from prohibitions. Allah created you from nothing, provided you from nothing, and ordered the motions of your life for your interest. Thus, when He obliges you to do anything, you should know that it is for your own good because it is He Who has undertaken your upbringing. If He were to leave you without any guidance, commands, or prohibitions, this upbringing would be flawed. Therefore, it is part of the perfection of the lordship to direct us, just as we direct and teach our own children. As long as your Lord has placed them there for you, you must obey Him.

Thus, we notice that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that he is commanded to serve not to obey Allah. That is because lordship is about sustenance and educative upbringing, while divinity is connected to obligations. Therefore, the verse clarifies the significance of obeying the commandments of Allah. He educates you by means of these commandments and prohibitions, and you will yield the fruits of this commitment at the end.

Thus, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* did not refer to his intellect when he heard about the Night Ascension. He did not consider its reality, but rather, he simply said, ‘If Prophet Muhammad said it, he spoke the truth.’ The criterion for him was that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had said it. Then, he would reason according to this and say, ‘I believe the news he brings from the heavens, so how can I not believe him about this?’

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the city of Mecca and signals it out because His House of Worship is there as He says, ‘Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakka, blessed and guidance for the nations.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 96). He mentions a description of Mecca and says that He has made it inviolable. It is a sacred place where no fighting is allowed. Making places inviolable was to protect the world from the destruction of wars and conflicts that lead each side to be consumed with seeking glory and find no means to this but that of the sword.

Making places inviolable make it seems as though Allah *Glorified is He* is giving His creatures a way to dissemble and hide, so that they would not be led by their delusions. One could say that he had not held back because of any weakness as it is the law that prevented him from fighting. They were prevented from waging war by the sanctity of a place such as the Sacred Mosque and by the sanctity of times such as the Sacred Months. One could say that had 'Allah not prevented me, I would have done so and so'. In this way, he can take refuge with Allah's prohibition of fighting so that he tastes the sweetness of peace and yearns to make his soul calm. It was due to the sanctity of Mecca that a man would not challenge the murderer of his father on meeting him therein out of respect for the sanctity of the Sacred House. This sanctity is also widened to include other species, it is forbidden to cut down trees or to hunt animals or birds therein.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says that everything belongs to Him. Thus, He chooses messengers from amongst angels and men and chooses certain places and certain times as well. He wants to spread this distinction to everything else. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* does not show courtesy to anyone. When He sent a messenger, this messenger conveyed His Message to everyone and the benefit of this was apportioned to everyone. In the same way, the benefits of the inviolable places and times reach everyone and thereby Allah added the words that everything belongs to Him afterwards because this inviolability was made for all of them.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says that he is commanded to be one of those devoted to Allah and those who implement His guidance. Allah made a contextual link between faith and good works because the point of faith is that you act in accordance to it. Allah says, 'I swear by the time. Most surely man is in loss. Except those who believe and do good…' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3). Allah *the Almighty* wants to interlink faith and legal rulings so that they form a practical course to follow in life.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنْ أَتْلُوَا۟ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ ۖ فَمَنِ ٱهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِى
لِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَن ضَلَّ فَقُلْ إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلْمُنذِرِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

I am commanded to recite the Quran. Whoever chooses to follow the right path does so for his own good. Say to whoever deviates from it, ‘I am only here to warn’ [92]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 92)

When you read the Quran, you are not actually reading but listening to our Lord speaking. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to recite the Quran and constantly seek solace in the Quran that has been given to him, to show that he is, out of his love to the Quran, loves the One Who revealed it and loves to listen to Him. In itself, the recitation of the Quran is a pleasure and a joy.

Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* took joy in reciting the Quran and continued conveying it to the people as he is an example for his *ummah* after all, as Allah says, ‘Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 21) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a role model to be imitated and thereby there is a part of every position he had, except that of prophethood, that can be gained by anyone who follows in his footsteps.

Thus, whoever chooses to follow the right path after the guidance reaches him and he is convinced by it does so for his own good because Allah will help him and will increase his guidance and success. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And [as for] those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding [against evil].’ (*Muhammad:* 17) Therefore, guidance and piety do not benefit Allah Who ordained them, but rather, they only benefit the one who is guided. In addition, Allah mentions the contrasting image and tells Prophet Muhammad to say to whoever deviates from that guidance that he is only here to warn him against this act. This means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is only concerned with being one of those who warn those who go astray.

Finally, Allah tells Prophet Muhammad to praise Allah *the Almighty* the One Who gave him the success to finish what His Lord has addressed him including the worshipping of the Lord of the city of Mecca, reciting the Quran, drawing solace from and listening to it and conveying it to the people.

Allah says:

وَقُلِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ سَيُرِيكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ فَتَعْرِفُونَهَا ۚ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

Say, ‘Praise belongs to God: He will show you His signs so that you will recognize them.’ Your Lord is never unmindful of what you all do [93]
(The Quran, *an-Naml:* 93)

Praise be to Allah for His blessings and His guidance. Praise be to Allah Who does not punish anyone except after He warns and establishes the evidence against him. He will show you all His signs, within yourselves and elsewhere, so that you recognise the proofs of His Omnipotence and His Oneness in yourselves and in the heavens and the earth. He is never unmindful of what you all do, but rather, He witnesses over all things.

the chapter of

al-Qasas

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

طسٓمٓ ﴿١﴾

***Ta Sin Mim* [1]**

(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 1)

The discrete letters at the beginning of some Quranic chapters occur in single letters such as *Qaf* and *Nun*, in two letters such as *Ta Sin* and *Ha Mim*, in three letters such as *Alif Lam Mim* and *Ta Sin Mim*, in four letters such as *Alif Lam Mim Ra,* or even in five letters such as *Ha Mim `Ain Sin Qaf* and *Kaf Ha Ya `Ain Sad*. Each of them has keys and secrets to its understanding of which we have not been given yet. All we have been doing are vague attempts to comment on them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

تِلْكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ٱلْمُبِينِ ﴿٢﴾

These are the verses of the Scripture
that makes things clear[2]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 2)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that the following verses are the verses of the clear Scripture, i.e. the Quran.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

نَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْكَ مِن نَّبَإِ مُوسَىٰ وَفِرْعَوْنَ بِٱلْحَقِّ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣﴾

We recount to you [Prophet] part of the story of Moses and Pharaoh, setting out the truth for people who believe [3] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 3)

Allah *Glorified is He* narrates to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh. A story is an important piece of information that deserves our attention. Is there anything more important than sending Musa (Moses) to someone who had claimed divinity to himself? Thus, Allah devoted this chapter to the two of them and did not mention any other story except that of Qarun. That is because this chapter deals with a central theme which is that of monotheism, and responds to those who claim lordship and contests Allah in His unique attributes.

Allah says that He recites the story in truth because His conveyance of the story is true, as He says elsewhere: 'Most surely this is the true explanation.' (*Al-'Imran:* 62) The word for story in Arabic is derived from a verb that means to follow a track. Some ancient Arabs were famous for their tracking abilities. They excelled therein to the extent that they could tell the difference between the tracks of a man and those of a woman and the like.

A famous story goes that a man once lost his camel and met a tracker and asked him about it. The tracker asked him if the tail of his camel was clipped. The man answered positively. The tracker asked if the camel was one-eyed and lame. The man said it was and thus became certain that it was the tracker who stole his camel. He seized him and took him to court. At the court, the tracker swore that he did not take his camel. He, however, knew that camels scatter their dung behind them but his camel left a single dung pile and thereby knew that it had a clipped tail. In addition, he noticed that one of its hoofs left no track in the sand, so he knew it was lame. Moreover, he noticed that it had eaten from one side and left the other so he knew it was one-eyed.

When Allah *Glorified is He* narrates stories to us, He tells the truth. The stories of the Quran are not embellished with fantasies like the stories of men. Therefore, Allah calls them 'True Narrations' and the 'Best of Stories' since they are in accordance with the original events.

He says:

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضْعِفُ طَآئِفَةً
مِّنْهُمْ يُذَبِّحُ أَبْنَآءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِۦ نِسَآءَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٤﴾

Pharaoh made himself high and mighty in the land and divided the people into different groups: one group he oppressed, slaughtering their sons and sparing their women — he was one of those who spread corruption [4]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 4)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that Pharaoh made himself high and mighty in the land. He raised himself above his subjects and even above his ministers and the elite of his subjects. Moreover, he even attempted to rise himself above Allah by claiming Lordship and this is the height of self-elevation and the height of insolence and disbelief. As long as he possessed such attributes while being a mere human being with desires, he would naturally utilise them to debase his subjects.

Pharaoh divided his people into different groups and independent sects. A sovereign must treat his subjects equally, that is, no group should be given any privilege over another. However, Pharaoh made the people into sects, put some of them in power, and subordinated some of them to others. Undoubtedly, turning a united people into several factions is on the side of the ruler. It is to his interest to sow conflict amongst these factions and play one off against another in order to give them no chance to be stable or devise means of disturbing the ruler and making his throne tremble beneath him. In this way, he will continue to be required by all.

The indigenous people of Egypt were the Copts. However, when Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* came to Egypt and settled therein until he was placed in charge of the stores, his brothers came to take their provisions from Egypt and settled and made families there. In addition, they retained their own identity and did not blend in to the Coptic population.

Mistakenly, many people think that the Copt means a Christian. Actually, the word Copt refers to the indigenous Egyptian race. However, when the

Byzantine Empire occupied Egypt and spread Christianity, the word Copt was used to mean Christian.

But why did Pharaoh make the people into groups enslaving one another? It is said that because the Israelites had been at the service of the Hyksos rulers who invaded and temporarily removed the rule of the Pharaohs. Thus, when the Hyksos were expelled from Egypt, it was natural for the subsequent ruler to persecute the Israelites because they had been the allies of his enemies and had been on their side. This was the main reason behind Pharaoh's persecution of the Israelites.

When the Noble Quran speaks about the rulers of Egypt, ancient and modern, it calls them Pharaohs, as Allah says, 'And [with] Pharaoh, the lord of hosts.' (*al-Fajr:* 10) Here, in the story of Musa (Moses), Allah *the Almighty* refers to Pharaoh. As for the story of Yusuf (Joseph), there is no mention of the Pharaohs; rather, Allah refers to a king. This is an example of the miraculous nature of the Noble Quran as the rule in Egypt at the time of Yusuf (Joseph) was in the possession of the Hyksos, not the Pharaohs. They did rule Egypt before Yusuf (Joseph). Thus, when referring specifically to the time of Yusuf (Joseph), Allah uses the word 'the king' because there was no Pharaoh at the time of Yusuf (Joseph).

Allah *the Almighty* says that Pharaoh oppressed one group. The Copts, who were the indigenous population of Egypt, tyrannised the Israelites, in order to exact revenge for their support to their enemies. This serves as the first evidence of the falsehood of Pharaoh's claim to lordship. He turned his people into groups, while the subjects should all be equal. Thus, Allah says about the succession of Prophets: 'Surely, they who divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them.' (*al-An'am:* 159)

The religion of Allah is one and His commandments are the same for everyone. If you were really in possession of the true religion, you would place all the people in a single group and would give none of them temporal power over any other. When you see such division and bias in a community, know that they are all guilty because Islam, as we said before, is like water that has no taste, colour, or smell. Everyone who likes water should like religion as we all need it to remain alive; but if we flavour this water according to our own tastes, you might like orange while I might like mango and another person might like lemon, and so on. As such, the matter is subject to caprice and the religion that Allah intended to be united becomes divided. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘My *ummah* will divide into sixty-some or seventy-some sects, all of which will be in Hell, except for the one that adheres to that which I and my companions are upon.’(1) So the group of Islam is one, but when we find tens of sects, groups and factions on the scene, which one would the Muslim follow? Therefore, since they divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them.

Then Allah describes this oppression saying that Pharaoh was slaughtering their sons and sparing their women. We said that to corrupt that which is sound in itself is a kind of corruption. This kind is manifested by slaughtering males and sparing females because life cannot continue if a species is not preserved. Slaughtering males prevents the species from continuing. In addition, Pharaoh chose to slaughter the males because they were the source of evil for him. As for women, they could do no harm and he did not fear them, and so he kept them alive to live in service and degradation.

When we pursue the like verse, we find that it is mentioned in three other places in the Book of Allah with different rhetorical styles. In the first verse, Allah says, ‘And when We delivered you from Pharaoh’s people who subjected you to severe torment, killing your sons and sparing your women.’ (*al-Baqara:* 49); elsewhere, He says, ‘…who subjected you to severe torment, killing your sons and sparing your women.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 141) These two verses are directly spoken by Allah. As for the third place, it is a narration from Allah of what came from the tongue of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he enumerated the blessings granted by Allah to the Israelites: ‘Call to mind Allah’s favour to you when He delivered you from Pharaoh’s people, who subjected you to severe torment, and slew your sons and spared your women.’ (*Ibrahim:* 6)

We notice that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* adds the word ‘and’ which is not mentioned directly by Allah because it is in the context of listing the blessings of Allah granted to his people and his intention was to show the magnitude of Allah's blessings to them and to remind them of all these blessings. However, when Allah spoke, He only mentioned the original blessing, which was to save them from the slaughter of the sons and the sparing of the women. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention each and every blessing. He only mentions the greater things and the slaughter of sons whilst sparing women is cruel suffering itself.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi*

We notice that Allah once said that Pharaoh was slaughtering their sons in one place and killing them in another. That is because the males were killed in different ways, sometimes being slaughtered and sometimes being smothered.

The phrase 'subjected you to severe torment' is derived from the Arabic word *sawm* which means to leave an animal to free-graze. It seeks its own provision without us feeding it ourselves, rather than keeping it tethered and feeding it. Thus, Pharaoh sought out cruel suffering for them. As long as this was the case, they must have become experts at causing suffering.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَنُرِيدُ أَن نَّمُنَّ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتُضۡعِفُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ
وَنَجۡعَلَهُمۡ أَئِمَّةٗ وَنَجۡعَلَهُمُ ٱلۡوَٰرِثِينَ ٥

But We wished to favour those who were oppressed in that land, to make them leaders, the ones to survive [5]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 5)

So, this oppression of a Pharaoh would not last forever because Allah decreed that oppressors will not have success and that an oppressor will not die until those he oppressed take their revenge on him and show him the outcome of his oppression. Sometimes, the oppressed even feel sorry for the oppressor. What a thing to see those who were oppressed yesterday feeling sorry for the oppressor today.

Here we see Allah's defence of the believers. He wished to favour those who were oppressed. To favour means to give a compensatory blessing without any effort on the part of those who are granted it as though it is a gift from Allah and His defence of His friends and those who obey Him. This is because `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Allah does not surrender the truth, He leaves it to see if people will seek to protect it; and if they do not protect it, He protects it.’ In addition, when Allah *Glorified is He* protects those who are made lowly, He does not only remove tyranny from them, but rather, He makes them leaders as well. He makes them leaders in religion and ethics and leaders in politics and rule. In addition, they are the ones to survive. They are the heirs of those who had oppressed them and become rulers and leaders. Look at what the stages of the protection of Allah over the people of truth are. Were it not that Pharaoh, who used force to make others lowly and debase, had turned his back to Allah and refused to follow Him, Allah’s Mercy would have reached him too and he would have lived in equality with his subjects.

Therefore, the leaders of revolutions, who come to end a reign of corruption and save their people from those who oppress them, must include everyone in their protection and care after they put an end to corruption and prevent its spread and realise justice in society. Thus, everyone lives together as equals in their society so that counter-revolution does not erupt.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَنُمَكِّنَ لَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَنُرِيَ فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَهَٰمَٰنَ
وَجُنُودَهُمَا مِنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَحۡذَرُونَ ﴿٦﴾

To establish them in the land, and through them show
Pharaoh, Haman, and their armies the very thing they
feared [6] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 6)

We know that the earth is a place where events take place because every event needs a time and a place. Thus, the meaning of establishing them in the land is to make the earth a place to someone who is established therein. Establishment in land means that they can act therein with authority and derive therefrom goodness.

Allah explained the meaning of establishment for us in several places in the Quran. In the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* He says, ‘Surely you are in our presence today an established, faithful one.’ (*Yusuf:* 54) This is to say you have a position and a firm base that no one can harm you. Another example is the verse where Allah says, ‘And thus did We establish Yusuf (Joseph) in the land.’ (*Yusuf:* 21) This means that Allah gave him authority by means of which he derived goodness from the land and divided this goodness amongst everyone else.

Allah mentions someone named Haman. He was Pharaoh’s minister, and of course each of them must have had their own private guards, apart from the general army of the state, as these days we have the republican guard and the royal guard and the army. Or, Haman was acting on behalf of Pharaoh as kings do not conduct their affairs except by means of viziers and in this situation the army would have taken their orders from Haman. It could also be that Haman had authority and a position of power no less important than that of Pharaoh and perhaps sometimes he would raise his head and be insolent with Pharaoh. We see this here in Egypt and thus the well-known country proverb that you say to the one who tries to deceive you, ‘Are you trying to fool Haman’? That is to say, his trick will not fool the likes of you.

Allah wanted to show Pharaoh, Haman, and their armies the very thing they feared, which was the prophecy that came to them, either from soothsaying or from a dream as Pharaoh saw a fire coming from Jerusalem and overcoming the Copts of Egypt, but not harming the Israelites. When they interpreted this dream for him, he said: ‘Surely someone will come from this land and take my kingdom from me’. In addition, it is narrated that the soothsayers told him that in that year a boy would be born who would be the cause of the loss of Pharaoh’s kingdom.

Therefore, Pharaoh and his people would see this with their own eyes and experience it directly. What they feared would eventually come true. That is why Pharaoh ordered the slaughtering of all the Israelite’s boys in order to be safe and to remain in power, however this precaution did not avail him ought.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰٓ أَنۡ أَرۡضِعِيهِۖ فَإِذَا خِفۡتِ عَلَيۡهِ فَأَلۡقِيهِ فِي ٱلۡيَمِّ
وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحۡزَنِيٓۖ إِنَّا رَآدُّوهُ إِلَيۡكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ٧

We inspired Moses' mother, saying, 'Suckle him, and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river: do not be afraid, and do not grieve, for We shall return him to you and make him a messenger' [7] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 7)

Pharaoh's affair was strange. After ordering the slaughter of Israelite children, a cradle arrived from the river carrying in it a baby. It never occurred to him that his parents had cast him into the river to save him from Pharaoh. How could this have escaped him, if he were a god? He did not see it by means of neither his lordship nor his intellect and sagacity. If the priests had informed him that his kingdom would be taken from him by means of one of these children and this prophesy was correct, the child would of course survive the slayings and grow up and bring an end to Pharaoh's kingdom. This means that the only children Pharaoh would kill would be the ones who would never grow to be the cause of his sovereignty's end.

Allah decreed that Musa (Moses) would be raised in the palace of Pharaoh and that his poverty-stricken mother would come and live with him in opulence and luxury. In addition, He decreed that Musa (Moses) would become a source of delight for the queen. Consider the heedlessness that afflicted the mind and covered the insight of Pharaoh, who claimed to be a god! In this way, we understand the verse where Allah says, 'And know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart' (*al-Anfal:* 24). And so his heart covers his insight and blinds it.

Allah revealed to Musa's (Moses's) mother to suckle him or put him in the river if she feared for his safety. What woman, if she feared for her son, would agree to cast her son into a river? Who would be happy to save him from the possible death of being slaughtered into certain death? Allah made her natural motherly emotion fade before the divine notion that came to her, which could not be touched by any notion from Satan.

Similarly, Allah also prepared the wife of Pharaoh to complete this divine plan for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* so that she said that Musa (Moses) is: ‘A refreshment of the eye to me and to you.’ (*al-Qasas:* 9) Pharaoh replied to her: ‘Nay, for you alone.’ It is as though he was in some way aware of what would happen; but the will of Allah must always come to pass and fate will run its course, prevented by nought as when Allah wills something, His will cannot be refused.

Despite what Pharaoh knew from the dream or the prophecy, he raised the child in his home. Moreover, this matter was not quite free of the power of woman over man as well. Thus, when this verse was recited before the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, ‘By He in whom oaths are sworn, if Pharaoh had said what his wife said, ‘Musa (Moses) was a refreshment of the eye to her and to him’, Allah would have guided him as he guided her.(1) But he refused the good that Allah sent to him, yet his wife surrendered to Allah and died in a state of belief. It was she who said, ‘My Lord! Build for me a house with Thee in the garden and deliver me from Pharaoh and his doing, and deliver me from the unjust people.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 11) As for Pharaoh, he died in his disbelief the worst of deaths.

Previously, we discussed the revelation of Allah to Musa’s (Moses’s) mother. We said that the word inspiration in general use means to inform in a secret way, leaving aside discussion of the meaning of the inspirer and the inspired-to and the inspired thing. In the sacred inspiration, it is when Allah reveals guidance to a messenger for His creatures. Thus, Allah inspires the angels: ‘When your Lord revealed to the angels: “I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe.”’ (*al-Anfal:* 12) In addition, He inspires the messengers: ‘Surely, We have revealed to you as We revealed to Nuh (Noah), and the prophets after him, and We revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Issac) and Ya`qub (Jacob).’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163) Moreover, He inspires the believers who serve the messengers faithfully: ‘And when I revealed to the disciples, saying, “Believe in Me and My Messenger.”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 111) As well as He inspires the bee and inanimate objects: ‘When the earth is shaken with her [violent] shaking, And the earth brings forth her burdens, and man says, “What has befallen her?” On that day, she shall tell her news because your Lord had inspired her.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 1-5)

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(1) *Narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (p. 569)*

Information by way of inspiration might also come from Satan as Allah says, ‘And most surely the devils suggest to their friends that they should contend with you.’ (*al-An‘am:* 121) It can come from those who are astray as well as Allah says: ‘Some of them suggesting to others varnished falsehood to deceive [them].’ (*al-An‘am:* 112)

The inspiration to mother of Musa (Moses) was from the fourth level, by way of a whispering in her soul or a revelation or a vision or an angel speaking to her. This all is possible.

This was inspiration from Allah and its content was an order to suckle him or cast him into the river if she fears for his safety. Then Allah prohibits her from being dreadful or sad, whilst the rest of the inspiration was glad tidings of two things. Thus, this verse combined for Musa’s (Moses’s) mother two commands, two prohibitions, and two glad tidings, in a concise, miraculous rhetorical form.

Allah orders her to suckle him as long as he is safe with her. However, when she fears for him, and Allah did not specify any particular thing to show that it applied to anything she might fear for her son, she is to cast him into the river. Allah showed concern for the feelings of a mother and her concern for her son, especially upon casting him into the river and so assured her and told her not to be afraid because Allah would ensure that he had an upbringing better than she could give him, in a home of wealth and sovereignty. He also told her not to grieve for his departure because this departure will bring goodness for you and for the whole world. He would bring an end to this tyranny and bring Allah’s guidance to rule over Allah’s creatures on earth. Furthermore, know that Allah will return him to you later and will make him a messenger. Thus, Allah protects him, not just for her but because he had an important mission.

It is said that Musa’s (Moses’s) mother continued to suckle him in her house as long as she was secure that Pharaoh would not discover him until a patrol came to search her house. She feared for the child, wrapped him in a blanket, and concealed him in an aperture next to the house, which was an oven on fire, not noticing this because of her fear. When the patrol left, she went to him and found he was unscathed. Allah wanted her to be assured that He would protect the child and that His promise was true.

The matter of Allah’s inspiration to Musa’s (Moses’s) mother is mentioned twice in the Quran, which caused those orientalists whose views are superficial to accuse the Quran of useless repetition. They mention that Allah says, elsewhere: ‘When We revealed to your mother what was revealed; saying, “Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore”; there shall take him up one who is an enemy to Me and enemy to him, and I cast down upon you love from Me, and that you might be brought up before My eyes.’ (*Ta Ha:* 38-39) However, there is a difference between the first inspiration and the other. The first inspiration was specifically about suckling him for as long as he was safe, whilst the other inspiration was that after she feared for him, Allah inspired her to cast him into the river.

In the above-mentioned verse, we notice that Allah ordered her to cast him into the river even with force and with no care or delicacy as Allah’s care would protect him either way. Moreover, the river shall throw him on the shore as it was a command from Allah to the water to deliver the child safely to shore.

In this inspiration, there was no mention of the matter of suckling the child. It is as though the first inspiration came to lay the foundations for what would happen, so that Musa’s (Moses’s) mother could be prepared spiritually for the task at hand; then, the second inspiration came to tell her to carry it out. An illustration of this might be that you warn your neighbour that thieves will come. You advise him to be cautious of this and then, when night falls, what you warned him about indeed happens and so you call him to quickly come and apprehend them.

Therefore, the rhetorical style of the first warning is different from the second. The former comes in a settled calm fashion with a calm tone because the situation is one of preparation and counsel, not action and implementation.

However, the second inspiration in the second verse comes with speed and an urgent tone. Allah says, ‘Put him into a chest, then cast it down into the river, then the river shall throw him on the shore.’ (*Ta Ha:* 39) The haste of expression here indicates that the situation is of very direct action.

In the first position, He says: ‘cast him’, whilst in the second He says: ‘throw him’. Mothers do not throw their babies, but place them with care and affection. Here, the time was short, thus there was no room for care and affection.

There is a great wisdom behind commanding water to carry the chest to the shore; wild, fearsome creatures are found in deep waters, whilst the shore contains only calm small fish. Also, the chest would be clearly visible therein, so he can be watched, protected, and saved by his family. Consequently, he could reach the decreed household to be raised therein.

The chest did indeed reach the shore. Pharaoh, his wife-Asia- and their daughter were on the beach. When the chest reached the shore of the Nile, they found the baby inside. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was dark-skinned and curly-haired with a large nose. He was not beautiful, attractive or pleased those who looked at him.

Hence, Allah reminded him of His favour, saying: '…And I spread My Own love over you…' (*Ta Ha:* 39) which means that you yourself were not beloved to those who saw you, but rather, it was by virtue of Allah's love that people loved you. Upon looking at Musa (Moses), Asia loved and admired him. She kept him despite Pharaoh's opposition to this.

Pharaoh's daughter(1) who was afflicted with leprosy, had previously seen a vision in which she saw that her medicine would come out from the sea that whose saliva would heal the leprous parts. She remembered the vision when she saw Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* thus took his saliva, rubbed it into her skin and was immediately cured; so she became attracted to him.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* became beloved to both the wife and the daughter of Pharaoh. Notwithstanding that Pharaoh would not refuse their demand. Pharaoh's constant yielded to his wife and daughter's requests.

His inclination to them, whatever he knew about the child, indicates clearly that spouses and children play at a man's weak-point, a means of overcoming his sagacity and judiciousness and pressuring him to take certain decisions.

So Allah *the Almighty* reassures us of Himself, saying: '...no consort has He ever taken unto Himself, nor a son!' (*al-Jinn:* 3) This is because a spouse can affect her husband in a way or another; a son, he can lead his father to cowardice and humiliation. Yet the True Lord has no influences that can pressurise Him in any way, for He is absolved of all imperfection.

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(1) The story of the vision of the daughter of Pharaoh and her healing from leprosy

One of the quirks about Abu Nawwas, a poet,(1) is that someone once asked him to mediate for him to the Caliph Harun Ar-Rashid. Abu Nawwas did so, but the Caliph did not grant his request. The man waited in vain, so he thought of another way. He asked someone else to intercede for him to Zubayda, the Caliph's wife. When she spoke with him, he quickly fulfilled the man's demand. Upon this, Abu Nawwas became angry and reproached his friend, the Caliph Harun, but he was not moved. So, he said to him: 'Listen to this:

The mediator who comes to you fully clothed
Is not like the mediator who comes to you naked!

As for Musa's (Moses's) divine protection, one notices that when the Lord said to him: 'go you to Pharaoh: for, verily, he has transgressed all bounds of equity', Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was afraid of this mission. The very name of Pharaoh at the time struck fear into the people's hearts, to the extent that Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* said: 'The two [brothers] said, "O our Lord! Verily, we fear lest he act hastily with regard to us, or lest he [continue to] transgress all bounds of equity."' (*Ta Ha:* 45) So Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sought his Lord's help to fulfil his mission, saying: 'O my Lord! Open up my heart [to Your light], and make my task easy for me, and loosen the knot from my tongue so that they might fully understand my speech, and appoint for me, out of my kinsfolk, one who will help me to bear my burden: Harun (Aaron), my brother. Add You through him to my strength, and let him share my task, so that [together] we might abundantly extol Your Limitless Glory and remember You without cease! Verily, You see all that is within us!' (*Ta Ha:* 25-35)

What did his Lord say in reply? 'You are granted all that you have asked for, O Musa (Moses)! And, indeed, We bestowed Our favour upon You at a time long since the past.' (*Ta Ha:* 36-37) That is, you will be given all what you ask for.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) The story of Abu Nawwas asking a man to intercede on his behalf with the Caliph Harun Ar-Rashid

فَٱلْتَقَطَهُۥٓ ءَالُ فِرْعَوْنَ لِيَكُونَ لَهُمْ عَدُوًّا وَحَزَنًا ۗ إِنَّ
فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَـٰمَـٰنَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا كَانُوا۟ خَـٰطِـِٔينَ ﴿٨﴾

Pharaoh's household picked him up — later to become an enemy and a source of grief for them: Pharaoh, Haman, and their armies were wrongdoers [8] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 8)

The Arabic word used for 'picked up' here is *laqata* that you find something haphazardly. The legal Arabic term *laqit* is the abandoned child of unknown parents, who is found by somebody, is derived from this word in question here. This was the case with the chest; for it came to the family of Pharaoh whilst they were sitting and they were not seeking it out or hoping for it. As soon as they found it, they picked it, but what was the reason behind that? The wife said: '…A joy to the eye [could this child be] for me and you…' (*al-Qasas:* 9), and from a different perspective, she said: '…he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son…' (*al-Qasas:* 9). They had no sons and wanted a brother for their daughter; the daughter, on her part, wanted him as a means for her cure; but was this reason true?

No; they took him and raised him up in order to be a joy to them, yet a different destiny came to pass; Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* became '…an enemy and a source of grief for them…' (*al-Qasas:* 9); he was not a joy to the eye. The word *li* (to) here refers to the consequences, i.e. he was thinking of one thing, but the consequence was something totally different.

This verse indicates Pharaohs foolishness and the lack of insight, for whilst he claimed to be a god, he agreed to raise Musa (Moses) in his house after the soothsayers warned him against the consequences of the vision he saw and after being fully aware of the danger this child posed against his kingdom and his life. This shows the truthfulness of Allah's words: '...and know that Allah intervenes between man and [the desires of] his heart...' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

The word *hazan* (grief) has the same meaning as the word *huzn*, as the word has two formations with the same meaning, which sometimes occurs in Arabic.

Allah's saying: '…Pharaoh, Haman and their armies were wrongdoers' (*al-Qasas:* 8) refers that they were *khati'in* (wrongdoers) because their actions were not appropriate in light of what they knew about the boy. They did not judge things properly, nor did they think about the consequences. They should have had doubt about a child who came to them in such a manner; for it was clear that his parents had tried to save him from Pharaoh.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَقَالَتِ ٱمۡرَأَتُ فِرۡعَوۡنَ قُرَّتُ عَيۡنٖ لِّي وَلَكَۖ لَا تَقۡتُلُوهُ عَسَىٰٓ أَن
يَنفَعَنَآ أَوۡ نَتَّخِذَهُۥ وَلَدٗا وَهُمۡ لَا يَشۡعُرُونَ ٩

And Pharaoh's wife said, 'Here is a joy to behold for me and for you! Do not kill him: he may be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son.' They did not realize what they were doing [9] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 9)

Allah says: 'joy to behold for me'. The root of *qurra* (joy) is *qarr* which means to stay and settle in a place, from which is derived the word *qarar* 'stability'. The Arabic word *qarr* also means extreme coolness, as in the poet's word:

Light a fire, for the night is cold (qarr),
And the wind that blows is fearsome.
Bring a guest, and you are free, son!

So, the saying of Allah, 'joy to behold for me' could mean stability and lack of movement of the eye. The stability and firmness of the eye is either literal or metaphorical. If it is metaphorical, it means that the eye settles on a certain sight and is sufficed by it so that it has no need for looking at anything else.

This is the meaning of their saying: 'He only has eyes sufficed by what he has'. An example of this is what Allah *the Almighty* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'And never turn your eyes [with longing] towards whatever splendour of this world's life...' (*Ta Ha:* 131).

So, they use the term 'eye-catching' to refer to those objects whose beauty attracts attention, as the poet says:

I fixed my eye upon the moon,
And those who saw me chastised me.
If only my critic would find some excuse;
For so eye-catching is its beauty.

Moreover, literal stability means that the eye becomes fixed so that one becomes blind. This is the basis of what the woman(1) said to the Caliph: ‘May Allah settle your eye, and complete His favour upon you!’ It seems that she was praying for him, while she was really praying against him because by ‘may Allah settle your eye’, she meant may Allah settle it with blindness. Also, when she said ‘and completes His favour upon you’, she meant end it because the completion of a thing spells the beginning of its end, as the poet says:

When a thing is completed, its deterioration begins:
Just observe the high noon when it is completed.

The Arabic word *qarr* could also mean coolness: it is known that heat spreads evenly throughout a place; yet Allah’s Wisdom decreed that the human body would be different, wherein each limb has its own particular temperature. The usual temperature of the skin is 37°C, whilst the liver, for example, does not function unless it is 40°C.

As for the eyes, if they increase in temperature to more than 9°C, they melt and one becomes blind. Amazingly enough, they are all components of the same body. This is why when we pray for someone, we say ‘May Allah *yuqerr* your eyes’, i.e. may He make them cool and safe. Do you not see that when someone becomes angry, his eyes heat up and his face reddens?

So, the statement of Pharaoh’s wife: ‘…a joy to behold for me and for you!’ (*al-Qasas:* 9) means that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will be a blessing and a delight, that with him we will be happy, joyful and satisfy our desire.

Elsewhere in the Quran, the True Lord explains to us the meaning of ‘a joy to behold for me and for you!’ (*al-Qasas:* 9), saying: ‘Allah is indeed aware of those of you who would divert others [from fighting in His cause], as well as of those who say to their brethren, “Come hither to us [and face the enemy]!”–the while they [themselves] join battle but seldom, begrudging you all help. But then, when danger threatens, thou canst see them looking to thee [for help, O Prophet], their eyes rolling [in terror] like [the eyes of] one who is overshadowed by death.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 18-19)

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(1) The story of the Arab woman who cursed the caliph and the people thought that she was praying for him

Their eyes roll here and there, as we say in Egypt: ‘His eyes never stop moving’, either from fear, or worry or discomfort; and all of this is contrary to ‘…a joy to behold for me and for you!’ (*al-Qasas:* 9) Her saying after this ‘Do not kill him’ shows that they actually wanted to kill him, so it was in their minds that the destruction of Pharaoh would come at the hands of this boy, and they were sure of this.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘…he may be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son. They did not realise what they were doing.’ (*al-Qasas:* 9) They did not sense whether he would be of use to them or not, or whether he would be a son to them or an enemy.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَأَصۡبَحَ فُؤَادُ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ فَٰرِغًاۖ إِن كَادَتۡ لَتُبۡدِي بِهِۦ
لَوۡلَآ أَن رَّبَطۡنَا عَلَىٰ قَلۡبِهَا لِتَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ١٠

‘The next day, Moses’ mother felt a void in her heart — if We had not strengthened it to make her one of those who believe, she would have revealed everything about him [10]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 10)

As for the word *fu`ad* (heart), we do not use this word unless we are speaking of something that directs your behaviour. The meaning of ‘… Musa’s (Moses’s) mother felt a void in her heart’ (*al-Qasas:* 10) is that she was empty of anything to control her actions. When she went to cast the child into the water, thinking of his loss and the dangers he would face, her matriarchy almost caused her to reveal her secret, and her emotions almost overwhelmed her.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘…she would have revealed everything about him’ (*al-Qasas:* 10), it means that she was about to reveal his matter as she ‘…felt a void in her heart—if We had not strengthened it to make her one of those who believe…’ (*al-Qasas:* 10).

I said before that a person can perceive things by his perception. This perception becomes a feeling and an emotion, and then it turns into a response and then action. As an example of this: I said that you see a flower, delight in it, then move by to pick it and then your heart says to you: ‘You have no right to pick it because the owner of the garden might refuse, or press charges against you; for the flower does not belong to you’.

Such was the case with Musa’s (Moses’s) mother. Her heart was devoid of something to reassure her about her son and prevent her emotions from revealing the secret. The statement ‘…if We had not strengthened it to make her one of those who believe’ (*al-Qasas:* 10) means that Allah revealed tranquillity on her, so that the affair for her would be a matter of sound belief that could not be assuaged by superficial emotions. Another case of this is Allah’s saying about the People of the Cave: ‘and endowed their hearts with strength so that they stood up and said [to one another]: “Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth...”’ (*al-Kahf:* 14).

So, the endowing of the heart with strength means to protect those things that influence reactions. That is if something is not right, you do not do it and if something is right, you do it. These firm matters are the behaviour determiner. The heart of Musa’s (Moses’s) mother was devoid of them.

That is why we say about one who speaks words that are devoid of meaning: ‘Abandon this empty speech!’, i.e. this speech that has no meaning or benefit. They say that someone has ‘an empty mind’ meaning that his mind is devoid of beneficial matters.

This is the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘...and their hearts an abysmal void.’ (*Ibrahim:* 43) In our local dialect, we say: ‘He has not even got any air’ because air is the last thing that something can be devoid of.

The meaning of ‘…she would have revealed everything about him’ (*al-Qasas:* 10), is that because of the void in her heart, she was close to saying, ‘he is my son’; Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…if We had not strengthened it to make her one of those who believe’ (*al-Qasas:* 10); faith is the safe side that even if you have some immediate desires, it protects you from falling prey to them. Musa’s (Moses’s) mother’s faith protected her from the instinctive desire of motherhood at this moment and prevented her from following her natural feelings and care. This immediate desire would have brought her great harm, for if they knew he was her son, they would have killed him.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَقَالَتْ لِأُخْتِهِۦ قُصِّيهِ ۖ فَبَصُرَتْ بِهِۦ عَن جُنُبٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ١١

And she said to his sister, 'Follow him.' So she watched him from a distance, without them knowing [11] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 11)

Musa's (Moses's) mother said to her daughter: 'Go after him, see where he ends up and what happens to him'. When the sister heard this request, she immediately carried it out. This is indicated by the use of the particle *fa* which grammatically indicates an immediate consequence. Allah then says, 'So she watched him' (*al-Qasas:* 11). Allah *Glorified is He* did not say 'and she followed him' because the verb 'to watch' although generally means to see, it also indicates care and concern for the thing that is seen.

The meaning of distance in 'from a distance' is from a place where no one could see her, that is, she was following him or was concerned with him. This is similar to the Samaritan who said: '...I have gained insight into something which they were unable to see...' (*Ta Ha:* 96), that is, he saw from where no one could see him.

We notice here that Musa's (Moses's) sister received the instruction from her mother to 'Follow him' (*al-Qasas:* 11) only, without telling her to do so 'from a distance' which shows the intelligence of the girl as she fulfilled her task in the best way, even though she was not instructed to do all that. This is the wisdom of the messenger who takes care to deliver his message correctly. A poet said a wonderful thing about this notion:

If you are in need of a messenger,
Send a wise man, and advise him not.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'from a distance', some people think that this means 'from a close place', but this is not the case. Actually, it means that you are not facing the person, as is the case in Allah's saying: '...and the neighbour from among your own people and the neighbour who is a stranger...' (*an-Nisa':* 36). As the neighbour who is a stranger is in contrast to the neighbour who is from your own people, so it means 'the neighbour from a distance'.

In the Egyptian local dialect, we say ‘So-and-so gave me his side’, i.e. he avoided me and stayed away from me. So, some people think this word means the opposite of what it truly means.

Consider Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) words: ‘...and preserve me and my children from ever worshipping idols.’ (*Ibrahim:* 35) This is also the case with the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...and shun every word that is untrue.’ (*al-Hajj:* 30) So, the words for ‘preserve’ and ‘shun’ here both are derived from the same root of *junub*; they mean to avoid and stay far away from something.

About the prohibition of wine, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘...Intoxicants, and games of chance, and idolatrous practices and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan’s doing: shun it...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 90). Some people say that this is not a text of prohibition because Allah did not say ‘it is forbidden’ but rather said ‘shun it’; so it is just a counsel and an advice. We say that if you knew the meaning of *ijtanib* (shun), you would know that it is even stronger than a mere proclamation of prohibition because the meaning of ‘wine is forbidden’ would be ‘do not drink wine’, whilst the meaning of ‘shun’ is that you completely avoid it, whether drinking, selling, buying, carrying or even sitting in the company of those who drink it.

The following verses discuss how destiny fell into place. Allah says:

وَحَرَّمْنَا عَلَيْهِ ٱلْمَرَاضِعَ مِن قَبْلُ فَقَالَتْ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰٓ أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ
يَكْفُلُونَهُۥ لَكُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُۥ نَٰصِحُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

We had ordained that he would refuse to feed from wet nurses. His sister approached them and said, ‘Shall I tell you about a household which could bring him up for you and take good care of him?’ [12] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 12)

It is not that. Wet-nurses were forbidden to him, as in the legal rulings of commandments and prohibitions; it means that Allah prevented him from suckling from wet-nurses who came to him one after another until his own mother came to him. The word ‘nurses’ here is the plural form of the Arabic singular *murdi`*. Some people mistakenly believe that word *murdi`a* gives the same meaning as *murdi`* which is not true. Read the opening of the chapter of *al-Hajj*: ‘On the Day when you behold it, every woman that feeds a child at her breast will utterly forget her nursling...’ (*al-Hajj:* 2). So, a *murdi`* (wet-nurse) is someone whose occupation is to nurse and who is able to do it continuously, whilst a *murdi`a* (a woman that feeds a child at her breast) is a woman who is currently feeding a child at her breast at this particular moment. On the Day of Resurrection, she will completely forget about her child out of terror for what she beholds; this refers to the woman who is breastfeeding, not the professional wet-nurse.

The pronoun in the saying of Allah ‘…Shall I tell you’ (*al-Qasas:* 12) refers to Musa’s (Moses’s) sister who was still about following the child. Haman heard her say: ‘Shall I tell you about a household which could bring him up for you and take good care of him?’ (*al-Qasas:* 12) He replied to her: ‘You must be from this boy’s family and aware of his story.’ She replied: ‘Rather, we are sincere in offering advice to the king.’ Ultimately, they indeed did as she had advised; they were excused for doing so because the child refused to suckle from any of the others.

Then, the True Lord says:

فَرَدَدْنَٰهُ إِلَىٰٓ أُمِّهِۦ كَىْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ وَلِتَعْلَمَ أَنَّ
وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

We restored him to his mother in this way, so that she
might be comforted, not grieve, and know that God’s
promise is true, though most of them do not know [13]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 13)

Allah *the Almighty* had already promised her: ‘…We restored him to his mother…’ (*al-Qasas:* 13), so the time came for the first promise to be fulfilled, which was a glad tiding of the ultimate fruition of the second promise: ‘…and shall make him one of Our message-bearers’ (*al-Qasas:* 7), but this would be in the future and it would indeed come to pass.

Allah’s saying, ‘We restored him to his mother in this way…’ (*al-Qasas:* 13) indicates that the means are dominated by Allah Who creates them. It was He Who returned him to her, not his sister, or Pharaoh. Allah *Glorified is He* directs things according to His will, paves the way for them, even intervening between a man and the desires of his heart in order that His Decree unfolds.

As for the saying of Allah ‘though most of them do not know’ (*al-Qasas:* 13), it means they do not know that Allah’s Promise always comes true.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُۥ وَٱسْتَوَىٰٓ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ١٤

When Moses reached full maturity and manhood, We gave him wisdom and knowledge: this is how We reward those who do good [14] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 14)

The word ‘manhood’ means strength and maturity, which is between the ages of eighteen and twenty. ‘Maturity’ conveys that his mind had reached its intellectual maturity. So, when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had reached physical and intellectual maturity: ‘…We gave him wisdom and knowledge: this is how We reward those who do good.’ (*al-Qasas:* 14)

Then, Allah *the Almighty* states the story saying:

وَدَخَلَ ٱلْمَدِينَةَ عَلَىٰ حِينِ غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا فَوَجَدَ فِيهَا رَجُلَيْنِ يَقْتَتِلَانِ هَٰذَا مِن
شِيعَتِهِۦ وَهَٰذَا مِنْ عَدُوِّهِۦ ۖ فَٱسْتَغَٰثَهُ ٱلَّذِى مِن شِيعَتِهِۦ عَلَى ٱلَّذِى مِنْ عَدُوِّهِۦ فَوَكَزَهُۥ مُوسَىٰ
فَقَضَىٰ عَلَيْهِ ۖ قَالَ هَٰذَا مِنْ عَمَلِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ عَدُوٌّ مُّضِلٌّ مُّبِينٌ ١٥

He entered the city, unnoticed by its people, and found two men fighting: one from his own people, the other an enemy. The one from his own people cried out to him for help against the enemy. Moses struck him with his fist and killed him. He said, ‘This must be Satan’s work: clearly he is a misleading enemy’ [15] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 15)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* wanted to enter the city at a time when the people were unaware because the Israelites were being persecuted. In some places, many Egyptians would not permit the Israelites from entering their towns. So Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* chose a time when they were unaware. He did not enter by night; otherwise he would have lost the way, so scholars say that he entered at the time people took their naps, when the people were in their houses.

Mousa '…found two men fighting: one from his own people', i.e. from the Israelites, and '…the other an enemy…' (*al-Qasas:* 15), i.e. an Egyptian enemy. And '…the one who belonged to his own people cried out to him for help…' (*al-Qasas:* 15), i.e. for aid and rescue, whereupon '…Musa (Moses) struck him down with his fist…' (*al-Qasas:* 15). The Egyptian met his end and reached his appointed time of death as the blow was struck, i.e. he did not die because of it. This happens often when people argue: one of them strikes the other, he falls down dead. When they examine him, they find his cause of death was something else.

An example to illustrate this: when you commission someone to do something for you, or delegate him for you, he goes to the responsible people and does it, you say: 'So-and-so did this for me'. Yet in reality, nothing is done on earth without Allah From above first decrees it.

But Allah wanted to honour the agent, so He made His decree coincide with their action, so we say of a case such as this: 'Allah was certainly on his side'.

As we said before, the Egyptians hated the Israelites and persecuted them. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* killed the Egyptian, their anger and hatred for the Israelites became intense, so Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sensed that this action was the work of Satan, in order to deepen this enmity: '…clearly he is a misleading enemy.' (*al-Qasas:* 15)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي فَٱغْفِرْ لِي فَغَفَرَ لَهُۥٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ١٦

He said, 'Lord, I have wronged myself. Forgive me,' so He forgave him; He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful [16] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 16)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* teaches us here that when a person commits a sin, believing that he has done wrong, he should not be stubborn, but should instead confess that he has sinned and wronged himself and then immediately repent and seek forgiveness: 'He said, "Lord, I have wronged myself. Forgive me…"' (*al-Qasas:* 16). That is, O my Lord, Your Judgement is the truth and I am a sinner, confessing my sin. This point is what made the difference between the sin of Adam *peace be upon him* and the sin of Satan. Adam *peace be upon him* sinned and then confessed his sin and admitted it, saying: 'the two replied: "O our Lord! We have sinned against ourselves…"' (*al-A'raf:* 23).

So, Allah accepted his repentance and forgave him. As for Satan, he tried to justify his refraining from prostration by saying, '…Shall I prostrate myself before one whom Thou hast created out of clay?' (*al-Isra':* 61) He further added: '…I am better than he: Thou hast created me out of fire, whereas him Thou hast created out of clay.' (*Sad:* 76) He thus rejected Allah's judgement.

I advise those who give legal rulings that contradict the Sacred Law, trying to turn the unlawful lawful for a reason or another, saying: 'Beware of rejecting Allah's judgement, because if you do so, you will be like Satan. Rather, give the correct judgement and then make the pretext that circumstances do not help you to implement it easily. In this way, at least you will preserve your faith. Sins are forgiven by repentance; but disbelief cannot be sidestepped'.

When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* sought forgiveness of his Lord, Allah *the Almighty* forgave him: '…He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.' (*al-Qasas:* 16) Allah forgives our sins for us out of His Mercy. When a person is afflicted by heedlessness, and falls into sin – if he finds no way to repent and atone-he will despair, lose hope and continue to sin. Such a person would be utterly devoid of a conscience, voracious in his pursuit of iniquity, with nothing to prevent him from committing all manner of sin.

So, the availability of repentance gives the believer a chance that he will not be expelled from Allah's Mercy; for Allah's Mercy is so comprehensive that it covers all sins, no matter how many they may be.

So, Allah *the Almighty* said about the establishment of repentance: '…and thereupon He turned again unto them in His Mercy so that they might repent…' (*at-Tawba:* 118). That is, Allah *the Almighty* made repentance possible for them and encouraged them to turn to it so that they would indeed repent and accept their repentance.

Then, the True Lord says:

قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَآ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيَّ فَلَنۡ أَكُونَ ظَهِيرٗا لِّلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

He said, 'My Lord, because of the blessings You have bestowed upon me, I shall never support those who do evil' [17] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 17)

His saying, 'My Lord, because of the blessings You have bestowed upon me…' (*al-Qasas:* 17) means 'by forgiving, excusing me and accepting my repentance. Allah says, '…I shall never support those who do evil.' (*al-Qasas:* 17), i.e. 'I give covenant to Allah that I will never help those who commit sin'.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَأَصۡبَحَ فِي ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ خَآئِفٗا يَتَرَقَّبُ فَإِذَا ٱلَّذِي ٱسۡتَنصَرَهُۥ
بِٱلۡأَمۡسِ يَسۡتَصۡرِخُهُۥۚ قَالَ لَهُۥ مُوسَىٰٓ إِنَّكَ لَغَوِيّٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿١٨﴾

Next morning, he was walking in the city, fearful and vigilant, when suddenly the man he had helped the day before cried out to him for help. Moses said, 'You are clearly a troublemaker' [18] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 18)

After Musa (Moses) killed the Egyptian man, he became frightened, '…walking in the city, fearful…' (*al-Qasas:* 18). He looked at people's faces and observed how they reacted to him. Perhaps they would come and arrest him.

As they say, the guilty man almost seems to say: 'Take me'! If a group of people are sitting somewhere and suddenly police come in, they will be calm and unafraid, except for the guilty one, who will flee. The people in the Egyptian countryside have a saying which says 'The one who has a bruise on his head cannot help but be aware of it'.

Whilst Musa (Moses) was in this state of fear and anxiety, the Israelite who had sought his assistance the day before '…cried out to him' (*al-Qasas:* 18), i.e. called for someone to help him, this is a spontaneous reaction, an appeal for rescue from peril. Allah uses this same word when quoting Satan: '… It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine...' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

We said before that the addition of the letter *hamza* (glottal stop) to an Arabic verb can change its meaning to that of removal so that the word *sarakha* means to cry out for help, while the word *`askhara* means to remove the peril that causes them to cry out. So, the meaning of the above verses is: 'I cannot stop your crying out and you cannot stop me'. Upon this, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to his compatriot who had got into trouble the day before: 'You are clearly a troublemaker.' (*al-Qasas:* 18). In other words, you wish to lead me astray by making me repeat my action of yesterday. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* would not get into the same mess again. The believer is not stung from the same hole twice.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَلَمَّآ أَنۡ أَرَادَ أَن يَبۡطِشَ بِٱلَّذِى هُوَ عَدُوّٞ لَّهُمَا قَالَ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ أَتُرِيدُ أَن تَقۡتُلَنِى كَمَا قَتَلۡتَ
نَفۡسَۢا بِٱلۡأَمۡسِۖ إِن تُرِيدُ إِلَّآ أَن تَكُونَ جَبَّارٗا فِى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا تُرِيدُ أَن تَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُصۡلِحِينَ ١٩

As he was about to attack the man who was an enemy to both of them, the man said, 'Moses, are you going to kill me as you killed that person yesterday? You clearly want to be a tyrant in the land; you do not intend to put things right' [19] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 19)

This statement 'as he was about to attack the man who was an enemy to both of them…' (*al-Qasas:* 19) means that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* again took the side of his compatriot. The Israelite sought to help him, but the Egyptian confronted him at the moment saying: '…the man said, "Musa (Moses), are you going to kill me as you killed that person yesterday?"' (*al-Qasas:* 19) So he knew what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the one who killed the Egyptian the day before. As long as they knew he was the killer, they surely must have looked for him, sought to take revenge against him.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…You clearly want to be a tyrant in the land; you do not intend to put things right.' (*al-Qasas:* 19) The Arabic particle *in* here implies negation, i.e. ‘you want nothing more than to be a tyrant in the land, for you killed someone yesterday and wish to kill me today’. So, they knew that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was the killer, thus they tried to capture him. At this point, he met the believing man:

وَجَآءَ رَجُلٞ مِّنۡ أَقۡصَا ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ يَسۡعَىٰ قَالَ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِنَّ ٱلۡمَلَأَ
يَأۡتَمِرُونَ بِكَ لِيَقۡتُلُوكَ فَٱخۡرُجۡ إِنِّي لَكَ مِنَ ٱلنَّٰصِحِينَ ٢٠

Then a man came running from the furthest part of the city and said, ‘Moses, the authorities are talking about killing you, so leave – this is my sincere advice’ [20] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 20)

This was the believing man of Pharaoh’s family, who advised Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to flee before they catch and kill him.

Allah then says:

فَخَرَجَ مِنۡهَا خَآئِفٗا يَتَرَقَّبُۖ قَالَ رَبِّ نَجِّنِي مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٢١

So Moses left the city, fearful and wary, and prayed, ‘My Lord, save me from people who do wrong’ [21] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 21)

This is because the Egyptians were persecuting us and torturing us for no reason, so what would they do if they found an opportunity and a pretext to increase their tyranny over us?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَمَّا تَوَجَّهَ تِلۡقَآءَ مَدۡيَنَ قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبِّيٓ أَن يَهۡدِيَنِي سَوَآءَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ٢٢

As he made his way towards Midyan, he was saying, ‘May my Lord guide me to the right way’ [22] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 22)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘As he made his way towards Midyan’ (*al-Qasas:* 22), it means that he went in its direction, intending to leave Egypt altogether. He did not direct to Midyan itself, but only to follow the road that led to Midyan, the land of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*.

If he had intended to go all the way to Midyan, he would not have said after heading in its direction: '…It may well be that my Lord will [thus] guide me onto the right path' (*al-Qasas:* 22). When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* left Egypt in fear, seeking to flee, he did not think of a particular place, but rather what mattered to him was to leave this land and protect himself.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَآءَ مَدۡيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيۡهِ أُمَّةٗ مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ يَسۡقُونَ
وَوَجَدَ مِن دُونِهِمُ ٱمۡرَأَتَيۡنِ تَذُودَانِۖ قَالَ مَا خَطۡبُكُمَاۖ قَالَتَا لَا
نَسۡقِي حَتَّىٰ يُصۡدِرَ ٱلرِّعَآءُۖ وَأَبُونَا شَيۡخٞ كَبِيرٞ ٢٣

When he arrived at Midyan's waters, he found a group of men watering [their flocks], and beside them two women keeping their flocks back, so he said, 'What is the matter with you two?' They said, 'We cannot water [our flocks] until the shepherds take their sheep away: our father is a very old man' [23] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 23)

The Noble Quran presents this story with eloquent brevity. Yet, it sheds light on the role of the woman in her society, the role of the man with respect to the woman and the things that necessitate a woman's going out to work.

The reference in saying of Allah 'arrived at Midyan's waters' (*al-Qasas:* 23) is that he went close to it, not necessarily that he drank from it. The word *warada* (arrived) can mean 'to drink' or 'to pass by'. It is used in this sense to clarify for us the meaning of Allah's saying: 'And every one of you will come within sight of it...' (*Maryam:* 71). The word *warid* used here is derived from the same verb *warada*. It is not that everyone will enter hell and be within its heat; it is that they will pass by it and will all see it. The expression 'we went to the stream' means that we approached it and saw it; but we did not necessarily drink from it.

'He found', i.e. at the water '…a group of men watering [their flocks] and beside them two women…' (*al-Qasas:* 23), i.e. far from the water '…keeping their flocks back…’ (*al-Qasas:* 23), restraining the flock and preventing them from going to drink because of the large crowd around the water. So he said ‘…“What is the matter with you two?”’ (*al-Qasas:* 23) that is, why are you doing this? The question here implies amazement, i.e. ‘Why are you preventing the flock from drinking when you have only come here to water them’?

Allah *the Almighty* casts light on their answer in the following part of the verse: ‘…they said, “We cannot water [our flocks] until the shepherds take their sheep away: our father is a very old man.”’ (*al-Qasas:* 23) Their saying ‘until the shepherds take their sheep away’ (*al-Qasas:* 23) means ‘until they leave the water’. The Arabic verb *sadara* is the opposite of *warada*; the latter means to come to water, while the former means to leave water. The verb *sadara* means to leave oneself, whilst *asdara* means to make another leave, i.e. to drive. So, the meaning is: ‘We cannot water the livestock until the men finish watering their livestock and leave’. ‘Shepherds’, the plural of ‘shepherd’, means ‘herdsman’. Then, the two women mentioned the reason for their coming to water and their doing of men’s work: ‘…our father is a very old man.’ (*al-Qasas:* 23)

Then, the True Lord says:

فَسَقَىٰ لَهُمَا ثُمَّ تَوَلَّىٰٓ إِلَى ٱلظِّلِّ فَقَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَآ أَنزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

He watered their flocks for them, withdrew into the shade, and prayed, ‘My Lord, I am in dire need of whatever good thing You may send me’ [24] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 24)

So, in the course of this story, we are given three rules. The statement ‘We cannot water [our flocks] until the shepherds take their sheep away.’ (*al-Qasas:* 23), their saying ‘…our father is a very old man…’ (*al-Qasas:* 23), which gives us another meaning, and the saying of Allah, ‘He watered their flocks for them…’ (*al-Qasas:* 24) gives us a third.

These three rules settle the dispute in the Muslim society concerning the issue of women’s working and the Islamic protocol in this regard. The first rule tells us that watering livestock is men’s work, whilst the second tells that women should not go out to work unless it is necessary and they should not undertake the man's responsibility unless he is incapable of doing it himself: '…our father is a very old man.' (*al-Qasas:* 23) As for the third rule, it teaches the Muslim society and all humanity that if a man sees a woman out working, it must be the case that she has no man to do it for her, so he should help her and make her job easier for her.

In 1950,(1) I travelled to Saudi Arabia and got into a colleague's car. On the way, I noticed him get out of the car and go to a house in front of which was a wooden tray covered with a piece of cloth. He put it into the car, and then we carried on. I asked him to explain what he had done. He said: 'It is usual for us that, if we see a table like this in front of a house, it means that the man of the house is not there and that the lady of the house has made the dough and needs someone to take it to the oven to bake it. If any of us passes by, we take it to be baked; we then put it back where it was.'

Allah's saying, '…We cannot water [our flocks] until the shepherds take their sheep away…' (*al-Qasas:* 23) indicates that if a woman is forced to go out and work, she must meet the need in the best way and not go mixing with men. She must not allow herself to joke around or chat with them. If a woman needs to go out and do the work of men, then it does not mean that she must become like men, allowing herself to mix with them.

As for Allah's saying, '…withdrew into the shade, and prayed, "My Lord, I am in dire need of whatever good thing You may send me…"' (*al-Qasas:* 24), it indicates that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* throughout his journey to Midyan, had travelled without any provisions, until hunger overcame him. He *peace be upon him* became malnourished until he was nothing but skin and bones, eating whatever vegetation he found on the ground. After he watered the flock for the two women, he sought repose under the shade of a tree and thereupon made his prayer: 'My Lord, I am in dire need of whatever good thing You may send me.' (*al-Qasas:* 24)

It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wants the weak person to seek aid; when he seeks it, he does not do it himself, but rather, it is Allah Who does it for him. So, we notice that when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* prayed,

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(1) The story of the friend of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi with the dough stick in Mecca

He said: ‘my Lord’, choosing to call upon the attribute of sustenance; he did not say ‘O Allah’. This is because divinity implies a being that is worshipped and that issues commandments and prohibitions. A sustaining Lord, however, is the one who undertakes to sustain, protect, and nurture. So, he said, ‘O my Lord, I am Your slave, You brought me into existence, I am hungry and need to eat’.

The meaning of ‘…You may send me’ (*al-Qasas:* 24), is that all goodness is really from Allah, even if it comes to me by means of another slave like me. This is because if you follow back the chain of any good thing in this world, it will of course return back to Allah, the Ultimate Giver. We gave the example before of the bread we eat: it begins with a seed, which would not have grown without Allah’s nurture.

we said that the phrase ‘All praise be to Allah’ expresses the absolute of absolutes because even if you praise a human being for some kindness he does for you, you are really praising Allah, with whom all kindnesses are originated.

So, praising people is implicitly praising Allah. Thanking, in all its ways and forms, always goes back to Allah. One of them said: ‘You do not truly praise Allah until you praise people’.

This is because all things are in Allah’s hand, even though He has placed the means in ours. Allah *the Almighty* alone is able to prevent the means from working. I remember that the nation of Pakistan announced that they had a surplus of wheat and that it would not only suffice them, but also allow them to export widely. Then, before the wheat had matured, it was afflicted with an epidemic blight and destroyed. So, their predictions were all incorrect and they ended up having to import wheat that year.

This is the meaning of ‘My Lord, I am in dire need of whatever good thing You may send me’ (*al-Qasas:* 24). All goodness is from You, O Lord, even if You send it to me by the hand of another of Your slaves. I have need only of You, and I ask only of You.

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had barely finished his prayer to his Lord when deliverance came to him:

فَجَآءَتۡهُ إِحۡدَىٰهُمَا تَمۡشِي عَلَى ٱسۡتِحۡيَآءٖ قَالَتۡ إِنَّ أَبِي يَدۡعُوكَ
لِيَجۡزِيَكَ أَجۡرَ مَا سَقَيۡتَ لَنَاۚ فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُۥ وَقَصَّ عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡقَصَصَ
قَالَ لَا تَخَفۡۖ نَجَوۡتَ مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٢٥

And then one of the two women approached him, walking shyly, and said, ‘My father is asking for you: he wants to reward you for watering our flocks for us.’ When Moses came to him and told him his story, the old man said, ‘Do not be afraid, you are safe now from people who do wrong’ [25] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 25)

‘One of the two’ means one of the two maidens. ‘Walking shyly’ refers to her modesty in the way she came and walked. She said: ‘…My father is asking for you: he wants to reward you for watering our flocks for us.’ (*al-Qasas:* 25) When this invitation came to him, he did not hesitate to accept it but took hold of the opportunity. He knew that it was a quick response from his Lord to the prayer he made: ‘My Lord, I am in dire need of whatever good thing You may send me’ (*al-Qasas:* 24). It was a means that Allah had extended to him and he would never reject Allah’s means. So, he did not hesitate, and he did not refuse the father’s invitation.

The narrative here does not inform us how Musa (Moses) and the maiden went to her father, but it is narrated that they went at a time when the wind was blowing from behind. The girl was walking in front to show the way, but when the wind began to flatten her clothes against her body, he said to her: ‘Walk behind me and tell me which way to go.’

This is another example of prophetic etiquette.

‘…When Musa (Moses) came to him’ i.e. to Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* ‘…and told him his story’ (*al-Qasas:* 25), of what happened between him and the Egyptian, ‘the old man said, “Do not be afraid, you are safe now from people who do wrong.”’ (*al-Qasas:* 25) That is, he calmed him down and made him feel at ease.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

قَالَتۡ إِحۡدَىٰهُمَا يَٰٓأَبَتِ ٱسۡتَـٔۡجِرۡهُۖ إِنَّ خَيۡرَ مَنِ ٱسۡتَـٔۡجَرۡتَ ٱلۡقَوِيُّ ٱلۡأَمِينُ ٢٦

One of the women said, ‘Father, hire him: a strong, trustworthy man is the best to hire’ [26]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 26)

This is a fourth rule that we extract from these verses, namely from the girl’s statement: ‘Father, hire him…’ (*al-Qasas:* 26). Her words are an indication that she did not desire to go out and work, but rather sought someone to do it instead, in order that she could stay at home. Then, the girl mentioned the basis for her making this proposal to her father: ‘…a strong, trustworthy man is the best to hire.’ (*al-Qasas:* 26). These are two essential conditions for hiring someone: strength enough to undertake the job and trustworthiness to get it done. One might wonder: how did the girl know that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was strong and trustworthy?

They say it is because when he went to water their flock, he did not disturb the people, but rather went to another place, where he found a plant that he knew only grew where there was water. In this place, he moved a heavy rock that would take many men to move, then, watered the flock from the water that was underneath this rock. She knew he was trustworthy when he did not let her walk in front of him, so as to avoid seeing the allures of her body.

Then the role of the father and the judiciousness that he should display at times like these comes. The man would be his hired worker and he had two daughters at home, so he would be coming back and forth to them day and night. Wisdom dictated that as he would be in their house, it was appropriate to create an official relationship with him. So, he decided to marry him to one of his daughters, in order to create a situation in which everyone could feel at ease.

قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أُرِيدُ أَنۡ أُنكِحَكَ إِحۡدَى ٱبۡنَتَيَّ هَٰتَيۡنِ عَلَىٰٓ أَن تَأۡجُرَنِي
ثَمَٰنِيَ حِجَجٖۖ فَإِنۡ أَتۡمَمۡتَ عَشۡرٗا فَمِنۡ عِندِكَۖ وَمَآ أُرِيدُ أَنۡ
أَشُقَّ عَلَيۡكَۚ سَتَجِدُنِيٓ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ٢٧

The father said, ‘I would like to marry you to one of these daughters of mine, on condition that you serve me for eight

years: if you complete ten, it will be of your own free will.
I do not intend to make things difficult for you: God willing,
you will find I am a fair man' [27] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 27)

The local Egyptian proverb says: 'Seek a spouse for your daughter, but not for your son'. This is because a father's pride prevents him from offering his daughter to a young man who has all the makings of a good husband – although a minority indeed do this. This wisdom on the part of the father regarding his daughter's marriage would solve many of our problems. Very often, we find that a young man is upright both religiously and morally, but his social standing, as we say, is less than that of the girl and her family, so he fears to come and ask for her hand, lest he be rejected.

In such cases as this, the father should encourage the fellow to come forward; hinting that he would accept if he did, for instance by saying to him: 'why have you not yet gotten married, son, when so many girls would have you?', or similar expressions of encouragement.

As for if we reached the level of forthrightness that Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* reached when He says, 'I would like to marry you to one of these daughters of mine' (*al-Qasas:* 27), this is something else. This is a high level of etiquette on the part of the one making the offer and on the part of the one to whom the offer is made. In our societies, many young men and women are waiting for this forthrightness and this encouragement, from the parents of the girls.

Do you not see that Allah *the Almighty* allowed us to propose marriage to those whose husbands have died, when He says: 'But you will incur no sin if you give a hint of [an intended] marriage-offer to [any of] these women…' (*al-Qasas:* 27).

We are not unaware of the hints that can capture a woman's attention and make her think of marriage.

Allah's saying: 'on condition that you serve me for eight years' (*al-Qasas:* 27), means that remaining eight years in his service was the dowry of the girl. By this, he wanted to show how much the girl meant to him, so that her husband would not think that he had married her cheaply, or that her father had simply offloaded her onto him.

If '…you complete ten, it will be of your own free will. I do not intend to make things difficult for you: Allah willing, you will find I am a fair man.' (*al-Qasas:* 27), i.e. when you live with me, you will find that I treat you well; you will know that you have been fortunate to enter this family. Moreover, the time you spend with us will make you want to stay even longer.

So Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* answered thus:

قَالَ ذَٰلِكَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ ۖ أَيَّمَا ٱلْأَجَلَيْنِ قَضَيْتُ فَلَا
عُدْوَٰنَ عَلَيَّ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

Moses said, 'Let that be the agreement between
us – whichever of the two terms I fulfil, let there
be no injustice to me – God is witness to what
we say' [28] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 28)

That is, I am ambivalent, and whether I shall stay eight or ten years, 'Let that be the agreement between us' (*al-Qasas:* 28).

The scholars have derived another ruling from this verse, which is that upon making a marriage contract, the dowry must be specified, but it does not necessarily have to be taken upon the drawing of the contract. If you like, you can delay it until later, or delay part of it and give part of it. The dowry belongs to the woman so that if she were to die it would go to her inheritors. If the man, also, were to die (before paying it) it would be taken from his inheritors (to give to the wife). This is shown by the fact that Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* hired Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for eight or ten years and made this the dowry for his daughter.

We notice that the narrative here does not mention anything about food, although Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was famished and had prayed to his Lord: 'My Lord, I am in dire need of whatever good thing You may send me' (*al-Qasas:* 24), but the biographers narrate that Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* presented Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with food, asked him to eat saying that: 'I seek Allah's forgiveness', i.e. for eating the food, as though it were recompense for his watering the flock for the maidens, 'We are a people who would not exchange the works of the hereafter for the weight of the world in gold.' Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* replied: 'Eat, for we are a people who serve food, and receive guests with hospitality.' So, he said: 'Now I will eat.'

Then, the True Lord says:

فَلَمَّا قَضَىٰ مُوسَى ٱلْأَجَلَ وَسَارَ بِأَهْلِهِۦٓ ءَانَسَ مِن جَانِبِ ٱلطُّورِ نَارًا
قَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ ٱمْكُثُوٓا۟ إِنِّىٓ ءَانَسْتُ نَارًا لَّعَلِّىٓ ءَاتِيكُم مِّنْهَا بِخَبَرٍ أَوْ
جَذْوَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَصْطَلُونَ ٢٩

Once Moses had fulfilled the term and was travelling with his family, he caught sight of a fire on the side of the mountain and said to his family, 'Wait! I have seen a fire. I will bring you news from there, or a burning stick for you to warm yourselves' [29] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 29)

'Once Musa (Moses) had fulfilled the term' (*al-Qasas:* 29), i.e. that he had agreed upon with Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*: '…and was travelling with his family' (*al-Qasas:* 29).

We said that 'family' can be used to mean 'wife'. In our local Egyptian dialect we say, 'My family is with me', or 'The group are with me', meaning our wives. This is because the things that a woman does for her husband are like the work of an entire group. Indeed, she does more than a group could, for she does something that no one else could do in her place, which is that she cohabits with her husband. So, she is performing the task of a group.

The meaning of 'caught sight' is that he saw with his eyes, or else became aware of it by sensing it. The mount of 'Mount Sinai' is the mountain where they caught sight. Allah says: '…said to his family, "Wait! I have seen a fire…"' (*al-Qasas:* 29), i.e. Musa (Moses) told his wife that the fire was there, which implies that she herself did not see it, though he did.

This is an indication that it was not an ordinary physical fire of the kind that people light, otherwise his family too would have been able to see it. Therefore, it was something special to him. 'I will bring you news from there' (*al-Qasas:* 29), i.e. maybe I will find someone to advise us on the right way to take, '…or a burning stick for you to warm yourselves.' (*al-Qasas:* 29) Allah *Glorified is He* states that Musa said to his family: 'Wait here. Indeed, I [Musa] perceive a fire [far away]; perhaps I may bring you from there some tiding or [at least] a burning brand from the fire so that you might warm yourselves' (*al-Qasas:* 29). The phrase: 'A burning brand' is a piece of burning, yet flameless ember, and the words: 'Warm yourselves' express Musa's hopes to find a source of warmth from that brand for his family. Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Most High* says: 'a glowing flame, which is a piece of fire that has tongues of flame.

At this moment, Musa and his family hoped for two things:

1- Someone to guide them to the right way; they had lost their way amid unfamiliar desert.

2- A brand of fire as a source of warmth against the cold.

Other verses in the Quran relate the same story (in the chapter of *al-Naml*) without mentioning Musa's statement 'wait here'. Some people who tend to speak without deliberation attempted to criticise the Quran because of that. However, reflecting on the situation reveals that it is a depiction of a conversation between Musa *peace be upon him* and his family. A husband with his wife is left in darkness in the wilderness about which they know nothing and they cannot find the right way to continue their journey. Furthermore, the weather was very cold. Naturally, he said, 'I see a fire; I will go and get some of it'. She must have replied 'How can you leave me alone in that desolate place? One of us might get lost!' He replied, 'wait here'. It was inevitable for the phrases to be articulated in these two different ways, just as the Noble Quran mentions it.

The same is the case for his two statements: 'I will bring you' (*an-Naml:* 7) and: 'Perhaps I may bring you' (*al-Qasas:* 29). When he saw the fire, he said with certainty, 'I will bring you', but when he reconsidered the matter, he saw that perhaps it will burn out before he reached it, and therefore he said, 'Perhaps I may bring you', expressing a hope, not certainty.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّآ أَتَىٰهَا نُودِيَ مِن شَٰطِيِٕ ٱلْوَادِ ٱلْأَيْمَنِ فِي ٱلْبُقْعَةِ ٱلْمُبَٰرَكَةِ مِنَ
ٱلشَّجَرَةِ أَن يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ إِنِّيٓ أَنَا ٱللَّهُ رَبُّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ٣٠

But when he reached it, a voice called out to him from the right-hand side of the valley, from a tree on the blessed ground: 'Moses, I am God, the Lord of the Worlds [30] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 30)

Here, the Lord *the Most High* gives a detailed map of the area. Some might say, 'the side of Mount Sinai' or 'the right side of Mount Sinai', but here the place is described as: 'from the right bank of the valley, from a tree [burning] on blessed ground' (*al-Qasas:* 30). The call was 'O Musa! Verily, I am Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!' (*al-Qasas:* 30) Musa *peace be upon him* heard this call coming from all directions because Allah is not limited by any direction. There is no need to ask where the call came from; this has nothing to do with how the Lord *the Most High* speaks. Meanwhile, he saw a fire blazing on the branch of a tree. As the fire blazed brighter, the tree became more verdant; the fire did not burn the tree, nor did the tree's moisture extinguish the fire. This, clearly, is an amazing sight which the mind cannot comprehend. We may wonder if he was able to accept all these marvels at first glance, or if he needed some time to accept them?

Then, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَأَنْ أَلْقِ عَصَاكَ ۖ فَلَمَّا رَءَاهَا تَهْتَزُّ كَأَنَّهَا جَآنٌّ وَلَّىٰ مُدْبِرًا وَلَمْ
يُعَقِّبْ ۚ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ أَقْبِلْ وَلَا تَخَفْ ۖ إِنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلْءَامِنِينَ ٣١

Throw down your staff.' When he saw his staff moving like a snake, he fled in fear and would not return. Again [he was called]: 'Moses! Draw near! Do not be afraid, for you are one of those who are safe [31] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 31)

Other Quranic verses mention that the Lord asked him a question to make him feel at ease: 'And what is that in your right hand, O Musa?' (*Ta Ha:* 17). We said that Musa *peace be upon him* tried to lengthen this moment as long as he could to enjoy the closeness of his Lord. When he felt he had talked long enough, Allah *Glorified is He* states that he said: ‘and [many] other uses I find for it’ (*Ta Ha:* 18). He spoke first at length to have more time with his Lord and then cut himself short out of good etiquette with Him.

Then there is a clear command to throw the staff: ‘“Throw down your staff!” But as soon as [Musa] saw it move rapidly, as if it were a snake, he drew back [in terror], and did not [dare to] return’ (*al-Qasas:* 31). He witnessed another amazing miracle, one which was even more astounding than what he had already witnessed. If we could accept the sight of fire blazing on a verdant green branch, could we not accept the sight of a staff turning into a snake, moving and twisting? It might be possible that the staff could transform into a verdant green branch, which is of the same genus as the staff. This will also be a miracle. However, transforming it into a different genus entirely and for a plant to become a fearsome moving animal is a wonder of the most extraordinary nature.

It is clear that some segments of the narrative discourse are left out, for the Quranic style is very lucid and concise. We can easily assume the events that have been omitted, such as the phrase, ‘Musa threw down his staff’ before: ‘But as soon as he saw it move rapidly, as if it were a snake, he drew back’ (*al-Qasas:* 31). Musa drew back in order to give himself a chance to think and to reflect upon the turn of events. The word used for ‘snake’ here is *jan*, which means a young snake. The accounts of this story tell us that the staff became like a *jan*, *thu‘ban’* and a *hayya*. The three words convey the same meaning. In agility, it was like a *jan* (young snake), whereas in length it was like a *thu‘ban* (snake or eel). Finally, it was in thickness similar to a *hayya* (serpent).

After Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘He drew back’, that is he moved away in fear and: ‘And did not dare to return’, that is he turned away and did not look back, his Lord called him: ‘O Musa! Draw near and fear not’ (*al-Qasas:* 31), come back and do not be frightened of anything.

Moreover, Allah *the Most High* told him something that he will have to keep in mind throughout the course of his mission: ‘Indeed, you are of those who are secure’. He did not say ‘Come back because I will make you safe from what you see here’. He said: ‘You are of those who are secure’. In other words, Musa's safety will be continuous and constant; Allah was with him, helping him. Whoever has Allah with him, helping him, fears no one. If he was scared at that time, how could he have reacted when he faced Pharaoh? In this way, the Lord *the Most High* trained Musa *peace be upon him* for him to be able to face Pharaoh and all his sorcerers and hosts without any fear or worry. As such, he is sure that Allah will succour him and help him in his confrontation with Pharaoh.

Musa *peace be upon him* drew many benefits from all these events and learnt from the wonders he witnessed. His surety and firmness gave him much strength. When Pharaoh, backed by huge hosts, decided to follow Musa *peace be upon him* and his people, Musa's people said: 'Indeed, we shall certainly be overtaken!' However, Musa *peace be upon him* remembered that Allah *the Most High* promised: 'You are of those who are secure!' In firm faith, He immediately said: 'Nay! Indeed, My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) Evidently, Musa *peace be upon him* was confident as he knew Allah was with him, helping him and declared this trust he had openly. It could have been very easy to deny that Allah was helping him at that time, for the sea was in front of them and Pharaoh behind them. Nevertheless, Musa showed absolute trust in Allah's Promise and Support. Allah *the Most High* promises to save all His Prophets and Messengers. He says: 'For, long ago, has Our word gone forth to Our slaves—the Messengers—that verily, they will indeed, be succoured, and that verily, Our Hosts, indeed, will [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O Musa! Fear not, for truly, in My Presence, the Messengers have no need to fear' (*an-Naml:* 10). Allah *the Most High* told the same to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who, in turn, benefited from it and trusted in Allah's Succour. As such, when they were in the cave with Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* Abu Bakr said, 'O Messenger of Allah [Muhammad], if any of them but look beneath his feet, he will see us!' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'O Abu Bakr, what do you think of two men whose third is Allah?' The Quran narrated his words to his Companion: 'Grieve not; verily, Allah is with us' (*at-Tawba:* 40). Since the One Whom no eye can encompass was with them, helping them, they too will not be seen by any eye.

Then the Lord *the Most High* showed Musa *peace be upon him* another sign to add to his miracles,

ٱسۡلُكۡ يَدَكَ فِي جَيۡبِكَ تَخۡرُجۡ بَيۡضَآءَ مِنۡ غَيۡرِ سُوٓءٖ وَٱضۡمُمۡ إِلَيۡكَ
جَنَاحَكَ مِنَ ٱلرَّهۡبِۖ فَذَٰنِكَ بُرۡهَٰنَانِ مِن رَّبِّكَ إِلَىٰ
فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَمَلَإِيْهِۦٓۚ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ قَوۡمٗا فَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Put your hand inside your shirt and it will come out white but unharmed – hold your arm close to your side, free from all fear. These shall be two signs from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs; they are truly wicked people [32] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 32)

Allah says: ‘Put your hand inside the front of your shirt *jayb*’ (*al-Qasas:* 32), that is, place it into the upper opening of your robe, widely called a *jayb*. It is where people used to keep money to protect it from being stolen. They used to put their hands down the front of their robes to get to their pockets. Notice the precision of the Quranic discourse: ‘It will come out [shining] white’ (*al-Qasas:* 32). Allah did not say ‘take your hand out’ in the form of a command, after He saying: ‘Put your hand inside the front of your shirt’ (*al-Qasas:* 32). This is because the action of removing the hand is automatic; by merely putting the hand in the robe, it will come out shining white. His control over his limbs was limited to only the placement of the hand, but getting it out was by a Divine Decree. The word ‘white’ means shining white without any blemish. Such whiteness was amazing for Musa *peace be upon him* for he was dark-skinned. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘without blemish’ in order for no one to think that he had been affected by leprosy or the like. Rather, it was a natural, miraculous white.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘And [afterwards] hold your arm close to yourself, free of all fear’ (*al-Qasas:* 32). The word used here for ‘arm’ is *janah* (wing). The wings of a bird are like the arms of human beings. If someone wishes to swim, for instance, he moves his arms as a bird does when flying. It means 'hold your arms close to you and all fear will leave you'. There are examples we see in life that illustrate this fact. When a woman, for instance, sees her child behaving badly, she reacts by beating her chest and lamenting. Moreover, Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Whoever fears should place his hand on his chest and he will be free of fears’. Try it to see if it is true.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘These’, that is, the two miracles of the staff and the hand: ‘shall be the two signs, *burhan,* from your Lord’ (*al-Qasas:* 32), that is, your True Lord: ‘to Pharaoh’, the false lord. Truth and falsehood cannot accompany each other; falsehood must surely come to nothing. It is weak and cannot stand up to the power of the Truth: ‘Rather, We hurl the Truth against falsehood and it knocks it down, and then it vanishes away! Woe be to you for the [false] things you ascribe [to Allah]’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 18).

The word *burhan* (sign) refers to the evidence of something. The sign was sent: ‘To Pharaoh and his chiefs’ (*al-Qasas:* 32) because Pharaoh claimed to be a god and had intimidated his followers into obeying him. Indeed, as Allah *the Most High* says: ‘They are a people [who are] rebellious and *fasiq (*wicked*)*’ (*al-Qasas:* 32). Both Pharaoh and his chiefs were ‘a ‘people who were rebellious and wicked’, that is, they were disobedient to the Lord. The word *fasiq* (rebellious and wicked) is derived from a verb that describes the action of a date when it breaks out of its shell. Here, it means that they had broken out of the fold of the religion that covers a person and protects him from falling into sin. If a person casts off this robe and lifts that veil in rebellion against Divine Guidance, he becomes unclothed and reveals his nakedness.

The Lord *the Most High* then states what Musa said:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي قَتَلْتُ مِنْهُمْ نَفْسًا فَأَخَافُ أَن يَقْتُلُونِ ﴿٣٣﴾

Moses said, ‘My Lord, I killed one of their men, and I fear that they may kill me [33] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 33)

Musa *peace be upon him* was still fearful about the issue of the Egyptian (that he had unintentionally killed in his youth). He asked his Lord to help him and strengthen him with his brother:

وَأَخِي هَـٰرُونُ هُوَ أَفْصَحُ مِنِّي لِسَانًا فَأَرْسِلْهُ مَعِيَ رِدْءًا
يُصَدِّقُنِيٓ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ أَن يُكَذِّبُونِ ﴿٣٤﴾

My brother Aaron is more eloquent than I: send him with me to help me and confirm my words – I fear they may call me a liar' [34] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 34)

The word *rid* refers to a helper or an assistant. We know from the story of Musa that he had been afflicted with a speech defect when he was young in Pharaoh's house. He did not find it easy to speak. For this reason, he sought the help of Harun's eloquence for his argument to be plain and resist any possible doubts. It was possible for Musa *peace be upon him* to ask his Lord to help him with his brother Harun *peace be upon him* with Harun being a mere follower. However, he wanted his brother to share his mission and gain this blessing and high status. Allah *Glorified is He* relates that Musa said: 'Send him with me, therefore, as a helper, so that he might [more eloquently] bear witness to my speaking the Truth' (*al-Qasas:* 34), that is, as a helper for me in order for people not to disbelieve me and for him to be a divinely entrusted Messenger like me.

Clearly, the verses of the Quran speak of Harun *peace be upon him* as a prophet like Musa *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Most High* says to them both: 'Go forth, both of you, to Pharaoh. Verily, he has transgressed all bounds of equity! But speak to him in a mild manner; perhaps he may be reminded or [at least] be filled with fear [of Allah]' (*Ta Ha:* 43-44). If we contemplate their Message, they appear like a single Messenger, as Allah says: 'Go, both of you, to Pharaoh and say, "Indeed, we are 'a Messenger' from the Lord of all the worlds"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 16). Pharaoh even exclaimed: '[This] your "Messenger" who [claims that he] has been sent to you is truly a madman!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 27)

He refers to them in the singular form; it is akin to a president sending a message in the hands of two or three people to his counterpart in other countries. We call these people an 'envoy', in the singular\ because they convey the same message. If you consider the one message that they delivered, Musa and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* could stand as one Messenger, but if you consider each of them individually, they are two Messengers. The Quran also speaks of them as two: ‘Indeed, we are “two Messengers” sent by your Lord’ (*Ta Ha:* 47).

To sum up, the Quran addresses them in the singular form and also in the plural form. When Musa *peace be upon him* invoked the Lord against Pharaoh and his people for their wealth-motivated deviation and indulgence in the worldly life, he said: ‘O our Lord! Wipe out their riches and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!’ (*Yunus:* 88)

Musa *peace be upon him* alone spoke here, yet when Allah *the Most High* answered, He said: ‘The prayer of “you both” has indeed been accepted’ (*Yunus:* 89). As such, they seem as one single Messenger. Musa *peace be upon him* supplicated and Harun *peace be upon him* said, ‘Amen’; and the one who says ‘Amen’ takes part in the supplication as well.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالَ سَنَشُدُّ عَضُدَكَ بِأَخِيكَ وَنَجْعَلُ لَكُمَا سُلْطَٰنًا فَلَا يَصِلُونَ
إِلَيْكُمَا ۚ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أَنتُمَا وَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَكُمَا ٱلْغَٰلِبُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

God said, ‘We shall strengthen you through your brother; We shall give you both power so that they cannot touch you. With Our signs you, and those who follow you, will triumph’ [35] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 35)

His Lord answered: ‘We shall strengthen your arm through your brother’ because Musa *peace be upon him* said, as seen elsewhere: ‘Add [O Allah] to my strength through him, and let him share my task’ (*Ta Ha:* 31-32). As for Allah's statement: ‘We shall strengthen your arm through your brother’ (*al-Qasas:* 35), it is an eloquent expression appropriate for Musa’s request. Indeed, a person does most, if not all, his work with his hands, and the muscles that lift and carry things are in the upper arm. When we praise someone for being strong, we say he has muscles. Yet, if a person is afflicted with a muscle-wasting disease, he becomes weak and unable to do anything.

Consequently, the meaning of this phrase is, ‘We will assist you with physical strength’.

The Lord *the Most High* then says: ‘And (we shall) endow both of you with power’ (*al-Qasas:* 35). This power is allegorical; the power of strong argument, logic and evidence. He gave them both physical and mental strength. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘so that they will not be able to touch you’ (*al-Qasas:* 35), that is, We will save you from them. However, the battle of Truth and falsehood does not end with saving the people of Truth; they must also prevail over the people of falsehood. There is a difference between a person who suffers hostile attacks and manages to shut the door on him, and a person who dares to face hostile enemies and defeat them, thereby saving himself from harm, and hurting the enemies. This second case is the meaning of Allah's Words: ‘By virtue of Our Signs shall you two, and all who follow you, prevail!’ (*al-Qasas:* 35) In this way, Allah saved them from evils and also gave them victory.

Notice that the phrase: ‘by virtue of Our Signs’ (*al-Qasas:* 35) lies between: ‘They will not be able to touch you’ (*al-Qasas:* 35) and: ‘shall you two, and all who follow you, prevail’ (*al-Qasas:* 35). It is through these signs and amazing miracles that they will win salvation, and again, through these signs and miracles they will defeat their enemies and gain victory. The single phrase combines both meanings. This is an example of the great rhetorical eloquence of the Noble Quran. Another wonder of the lexical use of the Quran is manifest in the word *najm* (stars), as Allah says: ‘[At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses; [before Him] the stars and the trees bow in adoration’. (*ar-Rahman:* 5-6)

The word *najm* (stars or short stemless grass) lies between the sun and the moon, which are both signs in the sky, and the tree, which grows upon the earth. Clearly, in this verse the word *najm* can mean a ‘star’ or ‘short stemless grass’; both meanings are suitable here. A poet said:

I watch the najm (star) as I come towards you,

Then my horse feeds upon it [najm, i.e. grass] in the wilderness.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُم مُّوسَىٰ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا بَيِّنَٰتٖ قَالُواْ مَا هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحۡرٞ
مُّفۡتَرٗى وَمَا سَمِعۡنَا بِهَٰذَا فِيٓ ءَابَآئِنَا ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ٣٦

But when Moses came to them with Our clear
signs, they said, ‘These are mere conjuring tricks;
we never heard this from our forefathers’ [36]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 36)

The phrase: ‘Our Clear Signs’ (*al-Qasas:* 36) refers to ‘the clearly amazing miracles’ against which the deniers fell dumbfounded. They failed to find any way to account for such wonders. Musa *peace be upon him* came to them to undermine Pharaoh's throne of false godhood. They had nothing left to say but: ‘All this is nothing but sorcery devised [by man]. Never did we hear [the like of] this, [nor has it ever been heard of] in the time of our forefathers of old’ (*al-Qasas:* 36). For this reason, the Lord *the Most High* inspired Musa *peace be upon him* how to argue with these people.

Allah seems to have said to Musa, ‘You are going to a people who stick to falsehood and protect it to achieve their worldly interests from it. They will certainly become angry if you end their falsehood and show them the Truth. They have become accustomed to falsehood. If you attempt to free them from their traditions and show them new ways, you must be gentle and carefully avoid inciting their wrath since the bitterness of forsaking their customs is coupled with the bitterness of taking on a new unfamiliar course of life. It is enough that you will take from them the authority of “godhood” in whose shadow they live. Never pursue to increase their bitterness, lest you should provoke their stubbornly obstinate enmity’. Consequently, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘But speak unto him [Pharaoh] in a mild manner, so that he may be reminded or [at least] be filled with fear [of Allah]’ (*Ta Ha:* 44). In other words, excuse him when he loses his ‘godhood’ and becomes just an ordinary person. If they respond to you harshly, saying, as Allah *Glorified is He* relates: ‘All this is nothing but sorcery devised [by man] and never did we hear [the like of] this, [nor has it ever been heard of] in the time of our forefathers of old’ (*al-Qasas:* 36), respond to them gently.

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ رَبِّيٓ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَن جَآءَ بِٱلۡهُدَىٰ مِنۡ عِندِهِۦ وَمَن
تَكُونُ لَهُۥ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلدَّارِۖ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفۡلِحُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ٣٧

Moses said, 'My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him and who will have the final Home: wrongdoers will never succeed' [37] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 37)

Clearly, Musa employs a very gentle and well-mannered way of discussing. He did not encounter them harshly or accuse them, as they did with him. Rather, he responded to them wisely and elegantly: 'My Lord knows best as to who comes with guidance from Him, and to whom the future belongs' (*al-Qasas:* 37). He did not say, 'I have come with guidance'. Then he added: 'Verily, never will evildoers prosper!' (*al-Qasas:* 37) 'The evildoers' generally include any evil party, without discrimination. He did not say, 'You are evildoers', but left it open for sound minds to contemplate.

Allah's saying: 'To whom the future belongs' (*al-Qasas:* 37) refers to what will come in the next world. This kind of prophetic etiquette of debate and dialogue is widely repeated in the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his dialogues with the disbelievers of Mecca and other opponents. His Lord addressed Prophet Muhammad: 'Do not argue with the followers of earlier revelations otherwise than in a most kindly manner' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46). Simply, you will take them out of falsehood that they love as a tradition and a way of life to lead them to the Truth which they hate. As such, do not expose them to two difficulties. Amidst the most grievous torment when the disbelievers exposed Prophet Muhammad to unbearable sufferings, he used to say, 'O Allah, guide my people, for they know not!'

Shawqi—a famous poet and writer, wonderfully and concisely summarised this idea, saying, 'Advice is heavy; do not make it as heavy as a mountian and do not turn it into a futile debate'. When you extend advice, it simply means that the advisee is wrong while you are right. For others to respond positively, you should first attract them to you so that they accept your advice. Avoid hurting their feelings, or else they will become stubbornly arrogant. Like a patient, a person in the wrong needs someone to guide him and cure his illness. Do not be like the foolish friend who once saw a friend drowning, but he just kept rebuking him for going into the sea. Naturally, the other friend will reply, ‘Save me first and then advise me!’ Relieve him first and then say what you like. Another person said, ‘Facts are bitter, so phrase them mildly’.

Sometimes the guide despairs that his advice will be of any effect, which is an entirely different case. For example, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* called his people for nine hundred and fifty years. He endured their denial patiently in the hope that they might eventually follow the guidance or even produce an upright generation who will accept what their fathers rejected. How great Nuh’s patience with his people was and how great his manners in debates with them were! After they had accused him of lies and fabrications, Allah *Glorified is He* relates that he said: ‘If I have invented it, upon me be this sin; but I am innocent of the sin you have committed’ (*Hud:* 35). He ascribed sin also to himself, not just to them; perhaps he might attract their hearts in this way. However, Allah knew that they will not believe nor will any good be expected from them. The same goes true for their children as well. After Nuh *peace be upon him* had spent his long life calling them to the Truth, Allah commanded him to pray against them, as there was no hope left that they may accept the guidance. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And Noah prayed, “O my Lord! Leave not on earth any of those who deny the Truth: Indeed, if you do leave them, they will [always try to] lead astray those who worship You and will give birth to nothing but wickedness and stubborn ingratitude”’ (*Nuh:* 26-27).

Likewise, in his discussion with the disbelievers of Mecca, The Lord *the Most High* relates Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as saying: ‘Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty of, nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing’. (*Saba’:* 25) This expression is a case of lofty humility and fine etiquette in order to win their hearts. He ascribed sin to himself, though he was a prophet. Yet, when he spoke of them, he said: ‘whatever you are doing’, calling their sins, persecution and disbelief ‘doings’. Had Prophet Muhammad simply repeated what his brother Nuh *peace be upon him* said, it will have been a sign of humble behaviour from him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلْمَلَأُ مَا عَلِمْتُ لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرِى فَأَوْقِدْ لِى يَٰهَٰمَٰنُ عَلَى ٱلطِّينِ
فَٱجْعَل لِّى صَرْحًا لَّعَلِّىٓ أَطَّلِعُ إِلَىٰٓ إِلَٰهِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِنِّى لَأَظُنُّهُۥ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

Pharaoh said, ‘Counsellors, you have no other god that I know of except me. Haman, light me a fire to bake clay bricks, then build me a tall building so that I may climb up to Moses’ God: I am convinced that he is lying’ [38]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 38)

Pharaoh was apprehensive about what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was going to say to his people; he imagined that Musa will somehow ‘brainwash’ them. He wanted to remind them of his ‘godhood’ and pretend to be unaffected by what he had heard from Musa.

Allah *Glorified is He* relates what Pharaoh says: ‘O you nobles! No deity do I know for you other than myself’ (*al-Qasas:* 38), that is, beware of believing Musa’s words, for I am your god and you have no god besides me. Pretending to affirm his ‘godhood’, he addressed his vizier, Haman: ‘Therefore, O Haman, kindle me a fire for [baking bricks of] clay and then build me a lofty tower, that haply I may have a look at the God of Musa’. (*al-Qasas:* 38) Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* states that he said: ‘O Haman! Build me a lofty tower, that haply I may attain the ways and means–the ways and means of [reaching] the heavens–and that I may have a look at the God of Musa’. (*Ghafir:* 36-37) Apparently, he wanted to assure his people. As such, he expressed his determination to search for the God of Musa. He wrongly thought that building a high tower will help him see the God of Musa. However, did Haman build him that tower? Indeed, he did not build anything, which proves the nonsense and flippant manner of the entire affair. He simply mocked his people and flirted with their minds.

Pharaoh had no need to bake the clay and make bricks, as we do now, because they had stone and granite with which they built pyramids and statues. Baking the clay takes much time and effort. The real motive was to gain some time to delay his enemy and also distract the nobles among his own people. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: ‘Haply I may have a look at the God of Musa’ (*al-Qasas:* 38). Before reaching any concrete findings, by either seeing the God of Musa or failing to see Him, he had already passed judgment over Musa: ‘I am convinced that he is one of those who [always] tell lies’. (*al-Qasas:* 38) He wished to prevent the nobles from paying any attention to the call of Musa.

وَٱسْتَكْبَرَ هُوَ وَجُنُودُهُۥ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ ٱلْحَقِّ وَظَنُّوٓا۟ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا يُرْجَعُونَ ٣٩

Pharaoh and his armies behaved arrogantly in the land with no right – they thought they would not be brought back to Us [39] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 39)

That is, they behaved arrogantly without any right or just cause. They had no right to be arrogant. A person may take pride in any great deed he did; but if the great deed is done by another person, he has no right for he himself to be proud of this deed. A person can feel proud only for something which he himself did. They say ‘if you want to take pride in anything, take it in what you yourself did’. The same is true for all other matters about which the person may feel proud, such as riches, power, esteem, or authority.

This is why Allah *the Most High* dislikes the people who are arrogant. He said in a Sacred Hadith, ‘Pride is My Cloak and Majesty is My Robe; whoever vies with Me for either of them, I shall cast into Hell’.(1) Pride and Majesty are two Beautiful Attributes of Allah. All beings have been made equal slaves and creatures in the Presence of Allah's Majesty. No one may think he is superior to any other. All are equal. If anyone shows pride before another, he is only proud of something which has been conferred on, but not made by, him. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* will help the humble people who suffer from the arrogance of others, and raise them high.

In the countryside, we say, ‘Whoever discloses a fault he finds with his brother will not die until he sees the same fault in himself’. In reality, proud people lack faith because they are only proud when they look at people lower than them. If they bear in mind the Majesty of their Creator, they will be ashamed to show pride before Him. This is why the arrogance of Pharaoh and his hosts was: 'without any right'. (*al-Qasas:* 39)

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(1) *Ahmad in his Musnad; Ibn Majah in his Sunnan; Abu Dawud in his Sunnan, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

However, being proud of protecting the weak for them to live in safety is a good and a lofty ideal of which one should be proud. And when the Lord *the Most High* describes Himself as being Sublime and Proud, we say that this is true because in this way He protects us all from being arrogant to each other. Allah *the Most High* says: 'They thought that they will never have to appear before Us' (*al-Qasas:* 39). Their arrogance in this world was a result of their belief that they will not return to Allah. They believed that Allah created and provided for them, but He let them escape Him and His Punishment, and they thought that they will never return to Him! How absurd that belief is! Surely, everyone must return to Allah.

فَأَخَذْنَٰهُ وَجُنُودَهُۥ فَنَبَذْنَٰهُمْ فِى ٱلْيَمِّ ۖ فَٱنظُرْ
كَيْفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

So We seized him and his armies and threw them into the sea. See what became of the wrongdoers! [40]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 40)

The Lord *the Most High* did not give them respite until they return to Him on the Day of Resurrection. Rather, He caused them to taste chastisement in this world before the Hereafter. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And so We seized him and his hosts' (*al-Qasas:* 40), that is, all at once, in one grip, both the followers and the leader: 'and cast them into the sea'. (*al-Qasas:* 40) We threw them into the sea. Such a seizure, taking them all in one grip, clearly shows the power of the One Who seizes. No one could do such a thing but Allah the All-Powerful and All Mighty.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'Such is your Lord's Punishing Grasp whenever He takes to task any community that is given to evildoing. Verily, His Punishing Grasp is grievous, severe!' (*Hud:* 102) The human grasp is not described in the Quran as being powerful except when Allah encourages us to follow His Message with all our strength: 'Hold fast with [all your] strength unto what We have vouchsafed you'. (*al-Baqara:* 93)

Allah *the Most High* then says: ‘See the final fate of those evildoers’. (*al-Qasas:* 40) Their end was a wonder for many ages and one of the Divine Miracles. The sea and water are among Allah's Hosts by which He succours the Truth and destroys falsehood. We have already mentioned how Allah *the Most High* saved Musa *peace be upon him* and destroyed Pharaoh with the same object. He commanded Musa to strike the Red Sea with his staff and the water immediately became parted into two great masses, like two mighty mountains. Musa *peace be upon him* and his people crossed to the other side of the Red Sea. After that, he wanted to strike the Red Sea again to return it to its previous state, but Allah commanded him to leave it as it was. The Lord *the Most High* kept guiding the steps of His Prophet Musa. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Verily, I shall be with you two, hearing and seeing [all]’. (*Ta Ha:* 46) Far be it for Allah to command his servant to do something and then leave him.

When Pharaoh saw the dry passage before him, he crossed it with his hosts behind him. Then Allah let the sea fall upon them as a sign and a lesson for others. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘[Nay], but today We shall save only your body, so that you may be a [warning] sign unto those who will come after you’. (*Yunus:* 92) Reflect on the Divine Power that saved Musa *peace be upon him* from drowning when his mother casted him into the water with her own hands, but later made Pharaoh perish in the Red Sea.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَجَعَلْنَٰهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى ٱلنَّارِ ۖ وَيَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

We made them leaders calling [others] only to the Fire: on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped [41] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 41)

The word *A’immah* (leaders) is the plural of the word ‘*imam’*. It literally means someone who is followed by others. The follower is under the control of his leader; if we are in prayer, we do not bow until the *imam* bows and we do not rise from bowing until he rises. We must follow him. If the imam makes a mistake in prayer, the follower must alert him and remind him by saying, *Subhanallah* (Glory be to Allah). We only follow him concerning what is right. Yet, when he makes a mistake, we should correct him. The leader is a role model and a good example for the followers. Referring to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him:* Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Remember] when his Lord tried Ibrahim (Abraham) by [His] commandments and the latter fulfilled them. He [Allah] said, "Indeed, I shall make you a leader of men"' (*al-Baqara:* 124). When Ibrahim *peace be upon him* wanted leadership to remain in his family, he said: '[Will you make leaders] of my offspring as well?' (*al-Baqara:* 124) In response, Allah corrected the error in his request, informing him that leadership is only appropriate for good people: 'My covenant does not embrace the evildoers' (*al-Baqara:* 124). Likewise, when Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* called upon his Lord saying, 'O my Lord! Verily, my son was of my family' (*Hud:* 45), Allah *the Most High* answered: 'O Nuh (Noah), indeed, he was not of your family, for verily, his conduct was unrighteous' (*Hud:* 46). Prophecy and leadership are based on action and behaviour, not just on ties of kin and blood.

Leadership could be in evil, as seen in the verse in question: 'We made them leaders [of evil] that invite to the fire [of Hell]' (*al-Qasas:* 41). They are evil examples and role models of evil. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Whoever establishes a good action has its reward and the reward of all who act upon it until the Day of Resurrection. Likewise, whoever establishes a bad action bears its sin and the sin of all who act upon it until the Day of Resurrection'.(1) Allah *the Most High* says about the leaders of evils: 'Hence, on the Resurrection Day they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they led astray' (*an-Nahl:* 25). Pharaoh and his nobles were leaders of evil, misguidance, terrorism, and tyranny. Consequently, they will be leaders in the Hereafter, but in Hell: 'And on the Resurrection Day no help will come to them' (*al-Qasas:* 41).

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

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(1) *Ahmad in his Musnad and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan on the authority of Jareer ibn 'Abdullah Allah be pleased with him*

وَأَتْبَعْنَٰهُمْ فِى هَٰذِهِ ٱلدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً ۖ وَيَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ
هُم مِّنَ ٱلْمَقْبُوحِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

We made Our rejection pursue them in this world,
and on the Day of Resurrection they will be among
the despised [42] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 42)

Allah's Words: 'We followed them with a curse' (*al-Qasas:* 42) means, we have made the curse to afflict them and follow them. Allah's Words: '…with a curse in this world' (*al-Qasas:* 42) means whoever mentions them in this world will curse them and they will continue to be cursed as long as the world remains, that is until the Resurrection Day. Yet this curse and being expelled from Divine Mercy is nothing but an introduction to the eternal damnation awaiting them in the Hereafter. Allah *the Most High* says: 'But verily, for those who are bent on doing evil, there is a suffering in store [which is even] closer at hand than that [supreme suffering in the Hereafter]' (*at-Tur:* 47).

Allah's saying: 'And on the Resurrection Day they will find themselves among those who are bereft of all good' (*al-Qasas:* 42). The word *maqbuh* (bereft of all good) is derived from the root *qabuha* (to become very bad and ugly). The Arabs even invoke the Lord against a wicked person using the same root '*qabbahaka Allah'* in the hope to have him expelled and banished from any mercy and any goodness. Moreover, the phrase 'q*abahatu al-dummal'* means to squeeze a boil before it has fully matured for the blood and pus to come out of it, resulting in a disfigurement of that area of the skin. As said before, if you leave a boil to the Divine Medicinal Power of your body until the immune system of the body heals it, it will not leave any mark. However, if you intervene with medicine and surgery, it will certainly leave a mark and disfigure the area.

Consequently: 'They will find themselves among those who are bereft of all good' (*al-Qasas:* 42) means that their faces will be disfigured after they used to be soft and vibrant. The Quran describes that disfigurement in several different ways, as follows:

- ‘And some faces on that Day will be dust-stained. Darkness will cover them’ (*‘Abasa:* 40-41).
- ‘On the Day [of Judgment] when some faces will shine [with happiness] and some faces will be dark [with grief]’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 106).
- ‘For on that Day We will gather all who were lost in sin, [they will be] blue [with terror]’. (*Ta Ha:* 102).

Clearly, the body only becomes blue because of severe blows that cause adverse reactions under the skin which manifest as bruises. The same is true for glaucoma (blue eye disease) which is worse than cataracts (white eye disease). Furthermore, the Arabs use the word ‘blue’ to indicate discouragement and intimidation. During the middle ages, soldiers used to paint their faces blue to frighten and terrify the enemy. Traditionally, blue is symbolic of Satan, and therefore the phrase, ‘blue demons’ is commonly used. Similarly, calling someone a ‘blue tooth’ is a way of disparaging him. The blue colour also indicates power, as in the poet’s(1) saying:

‘Will he slay me when the sword is my bedfellow,

blue and sharp like the teeth of demons?

The black colour indicates bleak faces that are distorted and repulsive. Black itself is not a blameworthy colour. Many people with black skin radiate such an attractive and luminous glow that a person does not get tired of looking at them. It is self-evident that beauty has no particular colour. Allah *the Most High* bestows beauty and radiance and causes them to be manifested in a multitude of forms. Some people may have black yet shining faces while others may have white yet gloomy, lifeless faces.

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says:

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(1) Imru’ Al-Qays

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَآ أَهْلَكْنَا ٱلْقُرُونَ
ٱلْأُولَىٰ بَصَآئِرَ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

After We had destroyed the earlier generations, We gave Moses the Scripture to provide insight, guidance, and mercy for people, so that they might take heed [43] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 43)

Allah's saying: 'And [then] indeed, after We had destroyed those earlier generations' (*al-Qasas:* 43), referring to the tribes of Nuh (Noah), 'Ad, Thamud and others: 'We revealed to Musa (Moses) [Our] revelation' (*al-Qasas:* 43). Musa *peace be upon him* came at a time when the people of other Messengers used to suffer punishment because of belying their Messengers. The Messengers before Musa *peace be upon him* did not fight. They used to deliver their Divine Messages and raise their arguments, but their people used to ask for signs. As such, whenever Allah answered their request but they remained in disbelief, Allah used to afflict them with punishment. Allah *the Most High* says in another verse: 'Each one of them We seized for his sin. So, upon some of them We let loose a deadly tornado; and some were overtaken by a [sudden, mighty] blast; and some We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some We caused to drown. It was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who wronged themselves' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40). All deniers were brought to complete destruction which no one escaped. Musa *peace be upon him* came when the deniers used to receive Divine Annihilation, but in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* commanded the Prophet to fight the disbelievers and deniers, without exposing them to complete havoc and annihilation. Prophet Muhammad's Message is universal for all times and places until the Last Hour, and he *peace and blessings be upon him* was trusted with the task of bringing peace and security to all humankind.

Concerning fighting during the era of Prophet Musa, Allah says: 'Have you not considered the assembly of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Musa (Moses) when they said to a prophet of theirs, "Send to us a king, and we will fight in the way of Allah"? He said, "Is it not possible, if you were commanded to fight, that you will refrain from fighting?" They said, "And why should we not fight in the Cause of Allah when we have been driven out from our homes and from our children?” But when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, except for a few of them’ (*al-Baqara:* 246). It has been narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah has punished no people, nor any generation, nor any community, nor any village-folk, since He revealed the Torah to Musa’.(1)

The punishment of annihilation ended with the revelation of the Torah with only one exception: in the case of the village of Ayla, located between Midyan and Jordan. The Lord *the Most High* gave us a clear example of the experience and role of different Messengers in the story of Musa *peace be upon him*. Abu Umamah *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘I took hold of the bridle of the Messenger's camel on the day Mecca was liberated. I heard him saying some fine beautiful words such as his saying, “Anyone from the people of the Book who believes in me has two rewards; the reward of believing in Musa or ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* and the reward of believing in me. Like us, he [now] enjoys the same rights and duties we have’.(2) This means that fighting was not obligatory for them.

Allah's Words: ‘We revealed to Musa (Moses) [Our] revelation’ (*al-Qasas:* 43) refers to the Torah.

The phrase: ‘After We had destroyed those earlier generations’ (*al-Qasas:* 43) means that this had been accomplished without any intervention on the part of the prophets.

Moreover, Allah’s saying: ‘[to give] insight to men’ (*al-Qasas:* 43) means that the revelation is like a light that guides them and insight that directs them. It is also a means of illuminating their hearts.

Allah’s Words: ‘And guidance and mercy’ (*al-Qasas:* 43) means the revelation is a guidance to the right path and a mercy that protects the society from corruption and misguidance. It also saves them from being denizens of hell.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak on the authority of Abu Sa‘eed Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Majah and Sa‘eed ibn Mansur on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash‘ari Allah be pleased with him.*

Then the Lord *the Most High* says: '…that they might be reminded *(yatadhakkaroon)'* (*al-Qasas:* 43). The word *yatadhakkaroon* (to be reminded) means that you are aware of a certain matter but then forget it; consequently, you need someone to remind you of it. It is not new to you, because it is part of your natural disposition: 'In accordance with the natural disposition which Allah has instilled into man'. (*ar-Rum:* 30)

However, this sound natural disposition is replaced by human desires and urges, and becomes covered by heedlessness and forgetfulness. For this reason, the Lord reminds people of the true guidance that they have forgotten. The sound natural disposition present in every soul contains the constituents that lead to faith and guidance, if people can but escape heedlessness.

Then the Lord says:

وَمَا كُنتَ بِجَانِبِ ٱلۡغَرۡبِيِّ إِذۡ قَضَيۡنَآ إِلَىٰ مُوسَى ٱلۡأَمۡرَ وَمَا كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلشَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

You [Muhammad] were not present on the western side of the mountain when We gave Our command to Moses: you were not there [44] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 44)

Allah's saying: 'The western slope' means the western face of the blessed area where the tree stood and where Allah spoke to Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* and entrusted him with the mission. The phrase: 'When We gave the Law to Musa' (*al-Qasas:* 44) means 'When We entrusted Musa with the mission and commanded him to undertake it'. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Nor were you among those who witnessed [his times]' (*al-Qasas:* 43). But you might wonder, if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not witness these events, who told him about them? We say that Allah told him. If you say that perhaps someone else told him, or he might have read about them in an ancient book, in response we say that all his people testified to his illiteracy; he could not read or write and he never sat with any teacher. They all knew the circumstances of his life and the travels he had undertaken, yet nothing of that sort of education ever took place during any of them. As such, when they accused Prophet Muhammad of learning the Quran from a teacher, the Quran replied to their accusation saying: 'Indeed, We know full well that they say, "It is but a human being that imparts [all] this to him!” [But] the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is completely foreign, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the Truth [of its source]’ (*an-Nahl:* 103). In fact, they were referring to the fact that Prophet Muhammad used to visit two Byzantine blacksmiths.

Now, if the community to which the Prophet was sent was an illiterate community, who was his teacher? Illiteracy is considered as an unattractive feature so much so that a superficial person might say, ‘Do not say that Prophet Muhammad was illiterate’. However, we say that illiteracy is a defect, but it is a virtue in respect of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The word *ummi* (illiterate) is derived from the word *umm* (mother) meaning that the person is still in his natural state as his mother bore him, knowing nothing. Consider Allah's Words: ‘And Allah has brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing’ (*an-Nahl:* 78).

In our dialect we say that someone is ‘as he was when his mother bore him’, that is, he knows nothing. This is a bad quality for most of people because they have not learned from those around them or from life's experiences. As for the illiteracy of Prophet Muhammad, it was a noble characteristic because the best a normal student can do is to learn from other fellow humans. As such, he is indebted to them for this knowledge. As for the Prophet, he took his knowledge from the Omniscient; he was not affected by any person or indebted to anyone. For this reason, the whole world was amazed at the Arab nation, this illiterate and nomadic nation that had never stood united by any common law; each tribe used to have their own laws. How were they able to conquer the world and spread their civilisation over the globe in only half a century? If the Arabs were a civilised people, people will have said that Islam was just a developed phase in their civilisation, as was said about our victory in the October War. Our soldiers proved to be extraordinary fighters and had no doubt that Allah was aiding them when they initiated their battle declaring their trust in Allah with their battle cry, ‘Allah is the Greatest!’ But after three days of battle, people began to say in the newspapers that the victory was attained due to our advanced ‘civilisation’, although on the same day, ‘*thaghrat Al-Difriswaar’* (Israelis attacking through the gap between the Egyptian 2nd and 3rd Armies, widely called the Operation Stout-Hearted Men) took place.

It is strange that our fellow brothers want to reject the Divine Blessing and deny that Allah helped them. What do you find uncomfortable in a victory that came through Allah's Aid? Have you not read the verse: ‘None can comprehend your Lord's Hosts save Him alone’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31)? After the gap occurred, what could you do to close it? Now, bring your ideas that civilisation taught you and get us out of this crisis! If these people found it too difficult to admit that Allah's Hosts were among the fighting ranks, was the engineer who was guided to the idea of using water pressure to open a way through the Bar Lev Line for the troops to cross, was he not one of Allah's Hosts?

Finding a solution to the problem took a lot of time and toil from us without any benefit until this man divinely endowed with insight came along. Allah *Glorified is He* guided him to use this procedure. He was not inspired randomly, but rather by his faith in Allah and his nearness to and humility before Him. May Allah reward him well on behalf of Egypt and Islam! It is also remarkable that after the war ended, they ran a simulation of the conflict, but they failed to cross the Bar Lev Line, even though it was during a time of peace and security. Back to the matter of illiteracy, we advise those who campaign to eradicate illiteracy in order to teach people sciences, call for the eradication of illiteracy to educate people about Allah first!

The Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Now, you were not present on the western slope [of Mount Sinai] when We gave the Law to Musa, nor were you among those who witnessed [his time]!’ (*al-Qasas:* 44) In other words, Muhammad did not see these events or attend them. The word ‘witness’ here means to attend, as Allah says about the month of *Ramadan:* ‘Hence, whoever of you witnesses this month shall fast throughout it’ (*al-Baqara:* 185). Here, the word ‘witnesses’ means ‘to be present and living during this time’.

Then, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَٰكِنَّآ أَنشَأۡنَا قُرُونٗا فَتَطَاوَلَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡعُمُرُۚ وَمَا كُنتَ ثَاوِيٗا فِيٓ
أَهۡلِ مَدۡيَنَ تَتۡلُواْ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ءَايَٰتِنَا وَلَٰكِنَّا كُنَّا مُرۡسِلِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

We have brought into being many generations who lived long lives – you did not live among the people of Midyan or recite Our Revelation to them – We have always sent messengers to people[45] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 45)

The people of Midyan refer to the tribe of Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*. They were proficient at writing. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: 'You did not dwell among the people of Midyan reciting to them Our Messages' (*al-Qasas:* 45), that is, you did not live there or read to them as a student reads to his teacher for correction.

The Lord *the Most High* continues: 'But We were the senders' (*al-Qasas:* 45), that is, all Messages came from us, both those sent to the literate and those sent to the illiterate.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَمَا كُنتَ بِجَانِبِ ٱلطُّورِ إِذۡ نَادَيۡنَا وَلَٰكِن رَّحۡمَةٗ مِّن رَّبِّكَ لِتُنذِرَ
قَوۡمٗا مَّآ أَتَىٰهُم مِّن نَّذِيرٖ مِّن قَبۡلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Nor were you present on the side of Mount Sinai when We called out to Moses. But you too have been sent as an act of grace from your Lord, to give warning to a people to whom no warner has come before, so that they may take heed [46] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 46)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Nor were you present on the side of Mount Sinai when We called out to Musa. But you too have been sent as a Mercy from your Lord' (*al-Qasas:* 46). In other words, you did not, O Muhammad, witness these things; rather, knowledge of them came to you as a Blessing from your Lord.

Allah *the Most High* then explains: 'To give warning to a people to whom no warner has come before so that they may take heed' (*al-Qasas:* 46), that is, in order for those who have forgotten to be reminded of the sound natural disposition that the Lord *the Most High* implanted in man. The phrase: ‘Nor were you present’ (*al-Qasas:* 46) occurs in several places in the Quran, all of which indicate that Prophet Muhammad brought tidings that he could not have read in a book or heard from a teacher. In fact, he could not read and he never learned from a teacher. The people of the Book knew the truth of these tidings because their scriptures mention them. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Those whom We gave the book know him (Muhammad) as they know their children’. (*al-An‘am:* 20)

He says: ‘Indeed, this is in the former Scriptures; the Scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses)’. (*al-A‘la:* 18-19)

One of the signs of prophethood is that the Lord lifted the veils on the unseen for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Things can be unseen to you because they are past events that you have no means of seeing. This is the veil of the past, which cannot be known except by reading books or studying at school; and Allah has ruled out the possibility of this for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Or the veil can be a veil of the future and events that have not yet happened, which no one can inform you of except He who has known them since pre-eternity.

And Allah says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘We will make you recite, [O Muhammad], and you will not forget’ (*al-A‘la:* 6). A Quranic revelation used to descend upon Prophet Muhammad, after which he used to dictate it to his companions, every verse in its place, arranged in the correct chapter. Then, he used to recite it as it had been revealed.

We said before that we could challenge anyone to speak for twenty minutes, for example, and then repeat what he has said word for word. He will not be able to do this. But for Prophet Muhammad, it was different because Allah *Glorified is He* promised him: ‘We will make you recite, [O Muhammad], and you will not forget’. (*al-A‘la:* 6)

We also said that when the Quran was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he used to repeat the verses in front of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* worried that he might forget them. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to him: ‘Move not your tongue with it, [O Muhammad], to hasten with recitation of the Quran. Indeed, upon Us is its collection [in your heart] and [to make possible] its recitation. So when We have recited it [through Jibril (Gabriel)], then follow its recitation'. (*al-Qiyama:* 16-18)

And: 'Do not hasten with [recitation of] the Quran before its revelation is completed to you' (*Ta Ha:* 114). That is, relax, O Muhammad, and do not fear that you will forget. Wait until the revelation of the verses is finished and you will be able reproduce them as they are without ever forgetting a single letter of them.

Concerning the lifting of the veil of the future, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [He created] the horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment'. (*an-Nahl:* 8) If the verse had ended with the mention of the animals, people will have said that the Quran only mentioned primitive things, leaving out cars, rockets and so on.

But the Lord *Glorified is He* completes the verse thus: 'And He creates that which you do not know' (*an-Nahl:* 8) in order for the Quran to make an allowance for all the different forms of transport that will be devised until the Day of Judgement.

Another example of this lifting of the veil of the future is Allah's Words: 'Exalted is He who created all pairs–from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know'. (*Ya Sin:* 36)

That is, everything in existence is based on the coupling of the male and female, even those objects that we see as inanimate, having no life.

Another example of this unveiling is Allah's Words: *'Alif Lam Mim*. The Byzantines have been defeated. In the nearest land, but they, after their defeat, will overcome. Within three to nine years'. (*ar-Rum:* 1-4)

Who could judge what the results of a battle that will take place after seven years will be? After this, Allah was proved true, and the Byzantines were victorious. The victory was for people of the Book over the fire-worshipping Persians. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And that day the believers will rejoice in the Victory of Allah'. (*ar-Rum:* 4-5)

When the Companions yearned to perform *umrah*, the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He* was inspired with this verse: 'You will surely enter

Al-Masjid Al-Haram, if Allah wills, in safety, with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone]. He knew what you did not know and has arranged before that a conquest near [at hand]'. (*al-Fath:* 27)

Prophet Muhammad set off with them until they reached Hudaybiya, twenty-two kilometres from Mecca, where members of Quraysh confronted them and prevented them from performing *umrah*. They promised them that they could do it if they came back the next year, and wrote a treaty assuring them of this. When Prophet Muhammad had the scribe write on the treaty, 'This is what Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, pledges', 'Umr ibn Suhayl said, 'If we considered you to be the Messenger of Allah, we will not have fought you or barred your entry. Write instead, "Muhammad ibn ʿAbdullah"'.

Upon this, the Companions reacted with anger, calling Prophet Muhammad back to them. 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'O Messenger of Allah, are we not on the right?' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'Indeed we are'. 'Umar said, 'And are they not on falsehood?' He replied, 'Indeed they are'. Consequently, 'Umar said, 'Then, why do we yield so humbly against the honour of our religion?' Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* then said, 'Hold fast to his stirrup (i.e. calm down and do not cross the limit), O 'Umar, for he [Muhammad] is the Messenger of Allah'. And when 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *may Allah be pleased with him* insisted on writing 'Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah', the Messenger of Allah looked at him and said, 'O 'Ali, you will suffer the like of this, so accept it'. Days and years passed by, and Prophet Muhammad passed away, and then Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. When 'Ali assumed the caliphate and dispute arose between him and Mu'awiya resulting in them meeting one another at the battle of the Camel and the battle of Siffin, 'Ali was forced to agree to a peace treaty with Mu'awiya. In the treaty he wrote, 'This is what 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, the Commander of the Believers, pledges'. But they said to him, 'If you were the Commander of the Believers, we will not have fought you'. Upon this, 'Ali remembered that Prophet Muhammad had said to him, 'You will suffer the like of this, so accept it'.

Prophet Muhammad saw beyond the veil of the past and that of the future; but what about the veil of the present? How is this veil lifted? For an example of this, consider Allah's Words: '…and say among themselves, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?"' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

So Allah showed him what was in the hearts of the people.

Moreover, during the battle of Mu'ta, the one battle in his lifetime that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not attend but which was still considered one of the Battles of the Prophet *ghazawat* because he saw it and attended it while he was still in Medina, Allah lifted the veil of the present for him. As a result, he was able to inform his Companions in Medina of the situation in Mu'ta as though he was seeing it with his own eyes.

On that day, the command was taken by a number of great Companions, namely Zayd ibn Haritha, Ibn Rawaha, Ja'far ibn Abu Taleb, and Khalid ibn al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with them*. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'So-and-so has been killed and the flag has fallen and therefore so-and-so lifted it, but he has now been killed and therefore so-and-so took hold of it'. When they came back from the battle, they mentioned the very same scene that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had described.(1)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْلَآ أَن تُصِيبَهُم مُّصِيبَةُۢ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ فَيَقُولُوا۟ رَبَّنَا لَوْلَآ
أَرْسَلْتَ إِلَيْنَا رَسُولًا فَنَتَّبِعَ ءَايَٰتِكَ وَنَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

And may not say, if a disaster should befall them as a result of what they have done with their own hands, 'Lord, if only You had sent us a messenger, we might have followed Your message and become believers' [47] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 47)

This means that if We had not sent you, Muhammad, and a disaster were to afflict them because of what their own hands had done, Allah will punish them in the Hereafter and they will complain saying: 'Our Lord, why did you not send us a Messenger so we could have followed Your Verses and been among the believers?' If Allah were to punish them without sending a Messenger to them, this will be an argument for them to use for their defence.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih)*

We said before that there can be no punishment without a prohibition, and no prohibition without a text, and no text without an announcement, and therefore laws must be published in official records for everyone to know about them for them to have no argument for any disobedience on their part; and no one can be excused or pardoned because of being ignorant of the Law.

Allah ruled out this argument when He sent Prophet Muhammad to them with true guidance to show them the way to goodness and reward in paradise, and warn them about evil and the punishment of hell. Allah explains: ‘So that men might have no excuse before Allah after [the coming of] these Messengers’ (*an-Nisa’:* 165).

The wisdom of sending Messengers is only for them to be a decisive proof against whom they are sent to, for the particulars of religion are true, innate matters which a sound mind can be guided to naturally. Consequently, orientalists have thought long and hard about the personality of ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him*.

They say, ‘You mention ‘Umar all the time: when justice is mentioned, you say ‘Umar; when strength is mentioned, you say ‘Umar; and even when Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, was alive and receiving revelation, you say that the Quran was once revealed concerning something that ‘Umar said. Do you have anything apart from ‘Umar?’

It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* showed us, by means of ‘Umar’s personality, that He does not command us with anything that is distasteful to our natural disposition, but only commands us with things that our natural disposition could accept and be guided to naturally, if they were free from the influence of desire. ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* was neither a prophet nor a Messenger, yet he arrived at the Truth because of his natural disposition towards religious belief and his sound, desire-free intellect with which he was endowed, up to the point that his sound natural disposition led him to utter the exact words of the Quran before they were even revealed.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡحَقُّ مِنۡ عِندِنَا قَالُواْ لَوۡلَآ أُوتِيَ مِثۡلَ مَآ أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰٓۚ أَوَلَمۡ
يَكۡفُرُواْ بِمَآ أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ مِن قَبۡلُۖ قَالُواْ سِحۡرَانِ تَظَٰهَرَا وَقَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا بِكُلّٖ كَٰفِرُونَ ٤٨

Even now that Our truth has come to them, they say, ‘Why has he not been given signs like those given to Moses?’ Did they not also deny the truth that was given to Moses before? They say, ‘Two kinds of sorcery, helping each other,’ and, ‘We refuse to accept either of them’ [48] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 48)

Allah says: ‘But when the Truth came to them from Us’, referring to the Messenger that they had sought: ‘They said, “Why was he not given like that which was given to Musa (Moses)?”’ Glory be to Allah! If you wanted to be a liar, you must have a good memory! First, you only asked for a Messenger and you did not ask for any accompanying miracle, when Allah relates that you said: ‘Our Lord, why did you not send us a Messenger’, but now you seek physical signs like those with which Musa *peace be upon him* was sent.

If you reflect, you will find that the signs that came before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were physical, material signs, such as Nuh’s (Noah’s) ship, Saleh’s (Shelah’s) she-camel, Musa’s staff and ‘Isa’s (Jesus’s) healing of the blind and the leper, and raising of the dead. All these were physical miracles that only lasted as long as they were performed, and this is why they were appropriate for those Messengers whose missions were limited to a certain time and place.

As for the Messenger who was sent to all people in all places and times, miracles constrained by time and place are not appropriate for him because they will only apply to their time and the eras that come after it will be bereft of any miracle. For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* gave Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an eternal miracle which is preserved by Allah and will last until the Day of Resurrection.

We said that the Messengers before Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought miracles to confirm the truth of their Prophetic Message from Allah along with the Scripture outlining the way of guidance they had brought. The Scripture itself was not the miracle in these cases. As for Muhammad, his miracle was the Scripture itself and the guidance he was sent with, for the proof of his veracity to remain alongside the guidance to which he called the people. As for his brethren Messengers who came before him, we describe the news of their miracles as pieces of information that may be believed or disbelieved by those who had been told them.

We believe in all these miracles because Allah told us about them in the Noble Quran. The Quran, which is a miracle and a guide, has the honour of keeping these other miracles alive because it has told us of them and has made their memory eternal.

Allah responds to them, saying: 'Did they not disbelieve in that which was given to Musa (Moses) before?' (*al-Qasas:* 48) He then tells us what they said about the miracle of Musa and the miracle of Muhammad: '[They are but] two works of magic supporting each other' (*al-Qasas:* 48). That is, they said that Musa worked magic and Muhammad worked magic too, and that they were: 'supporting each other' (*al-Qasas:* 48). The response to this accusation is simple. The miracle of Musa, though it was similar to magic, was not itself magic. Magic tricks you into believing that a rope is a slithering snake; yet Musa's staff truly did become a snake, rushing and devouring their magical offerings. Consequently, the magicians fell down in prostration because they saw that the miracle was nothing like their own work, and as a result they immediately believed.

As for those who say that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a magician, the response is simple, 'If this is the case, why did he not also work his magic on you, just as he did (as you claim) on the others who believed in him?'

They then confirmed their disbelief in both Messengers, Musa *peace be upon him* and Muhammad, saying: 'and indeed we are, in both, disbelievers'. (*al-Qasas:* 48)

قُلۡ فَأۡتُواْ بِكِتَٰبٖ مِّنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ هُوَ أَهۡدَىٰ مِنۡهُمَآ أَتَّبِعۡهُ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

Say [Muhammad], 'Then produce a book from God that gives better guidance than these two and I will follow it, if you are telling the truth' [49] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 49)

Say in response to them: 'Bring a Scripture from Allah which is a better guide than either of them', referring to the Torah, which Musa brought, and the Quran, which Muhammad brought, since they have not pleased you: ‘that I may follow it, if you are truthful’ (*al-Qasas:* 49). If you bring it, I will follow it.

This does point to two different ways: the way of Truth which Muhammad brought, and the way of falsehood upon which they insisted. Moreover, this challenge from Prophet Muhammad to the disbelievers implies that there is no book that offers better guidance than what he brought; not in their possession, and not in the possession of any who may come after them. When Prophet Muhammad suggested to them that there might be a book offering better guidance than his, he made them desire to find it; and if they looked for it but did not find such a book, they will realise the Truth without Prophet Muhammad even having to say it. Could any human being give the people a way that offers better guidance than Allah’s Way?

He then says to them: ‘… if you are truthful’ (*al-Qasas:* 49) knowing that they are not; for Allah made Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Seal of the Prophets. Obviously, no other Messenger will come with a new Scripture; and you, O disbelievers, cannot come up with a Scripture yourselves because if this were the case, every lawmaker will produce a system that served his own school of thought and satisfied his own desires.

From this we can say that the appropriate conditions of a lawmaker are:

Firstly, that he possesses vast knowledge in order for no fault to be found in him later–this condition cannot be satisfied by any human being. This is proved by the fact that many of the laws that were made in the past are no longer useful now and people call for their alteration only because new situations have arisen that did not occur to the people who first made these laws. And when these new issues arose, the restrictions troubled people and consequently they sought to alter these laws.

Secondly, the lawmaker must not have any capricious interest in those things that he legislates for people. The capitalists, the socialists, and others all make laws according to what will serve their ideology and way of life. Clearly, any law made for all mankind must not be based on any of these ways because it will not be free of desire.

Thirdly, the lawmaker must not benefit at all from any of the laws he makes.

If life’s issues and regulations dictate that we should make laws to govern them, no human beings have the right to make these laws save those who have mature enough intellects and sound enough minds for them to be fit to be lawmakers.

But before there were people who were fit to make laws, what system did they follow? When there was no rule of law, people lived without any laws, but we see there are laws now; therefore who was it that established the first law? The one who established the first law was the One Who was the first to create anything.

Then the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِن لَّمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لَكَ فَٱعْلَمْ أَنَّمَا يَتَّبِعُونَ أَهْوَآءَهُمْ ۚ وَمَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنِ ٱتَّبَعَ
هَوَىٰهُ بِغَيْرِ هُدًى مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

If they do not respond to you, you will know that they follow only their own desires. Who is further astray than the one who follows his own desires with no guidance from God? Truly God does not guide those who do wrong [50]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 50)

This means that Allah did not consent to what they desired. He did not give them any other Scripture. But how might such a Scripture have come to them? The Lord *Glorified is He* answers this question with His Words: ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

So their problem was not with the Book itself, but rather with the one upon whom the Book was sent. This is the meaning of: ‘then know that they only follow their [own] desires’ (*al-Qasas:* 50).

Then Allah says: ‘And who is more astray’ meaning no one could be more astray: ‘than one who follows his desire without guidance from Allah?’ (*al-Qasas:* 50) He follows the desires of his lower self. But if his soul’s desires correspond to the decrees of the Sacred Law, this is something praiseworthy which Prophet Muhammad explained in the Hadith, 'None of you believes until his desires corresponds to what I have brought'.(1)

If we are in such a state, we are not really following our desires; we are following the Sacred Law. One of the righteous people who devoted their lives to goodness and worship said, 'O Lord, I fear you will not reward me for my good deeds; for You commanded us to fight our selfish passions and I have come to love good deeds such that they have become my passion'.

The worst of all misguidance is for a person to follow his own desires because people's desires are as contradictory as they can be, and this is why conflict and contradictory actions exist in the universe. The poet Al-Mutanabbi described this conflict, saying:

We all desire life for ourselves,
And are thoroughly enamoured of it:
The coward's self-love breeds fear,
And the brave man's self-love breeds war!

We all love life and strive to hold on to it, but our means of achieving this differ. The coward, out of love for life, flees from the battle; while the brave man throws himself into it despite his love for life because he loves a different, more lasting life, which is the life of the martyr. Another poet said:

Everyone in the world is fishing;
But they use different nets!

A man gives charity despite his own needs, seeing that others are needier than him. Allah *Glorified is He* says about such a man: '…but rather give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot'. (*al-Hashr:* 9) We say, 'This poor man makes a sacrifice, but he does this seeking Divine Reward and a ten-fold recompense for what he has given, not to mention paradise on top of this. It is a matter self-interest, after all, for religion depends on selfishness, a lofty one though, not a base selfishness. Religion raises man, makes him positive and beneficial to others which makes seeking self-interest nothing to be ashamed of.

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(1) *Related by Ibn Abu 'Asim in As-Sunna, on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As.*

When the Sacred Law tells you not to steal and demands that you lower your gaze, along with the other commandments of the Law, it restricts your personal freedom as an individual, but it also restricts the freedom of everyone else for your own benefit. It gives you more than it takes from you. That is, when you look at what has been taken from you by your following the Divine Way, do not forget what has been given to you (by others following it).

Consider Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and how he used to treat the diseases of the soul. A young man(1) from the Bedouins who had embraced faith came to him and complained of his weakness for women, and his lack of patience in abstaining from this desire, saying to him, ‘O [Muhammad], Messenger of Allah, allow me to fornicate!’ Despite this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not scold him. He knew that he was in the presence of a sick person who needed to be cured of his ailment and who was complaining of the terrible malady in his soul, especially as he had been truthful in telling Prophet Muhammad his problem directly and was true to himself, and not deluded.

For this reason, Prophet Muhammad drew him closer to himself and said, ‘Brother Arab! Do you like such a thing for your mother? Do you like such a thing for your wife? Do you like such a thing for your sister? Do you like such a thing for your daughter?’ Each time the young man said, ‘No, O [Muhammad], Messenger of Allah, may I be made your ransom!’ Upon this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Likewise, other people, O brother Arab, do not like such a thing for their mothers, their wives, their sisters nor their daughters’.(2)

The young man went away, and later said, ‘By Allah, nothing was more repulsive to me than fornication after I heard this from Prophet Muhammad; and every time I had a lustful urge, I remembered what the Messenger of Allah had said about my mother, my wife, my sister and my daughter’.

What draws people into sin and makes them desire sin is their failure to think of the consequences of it; and conversely, people are negligent in doing good deeds because they fail to think of the reward for them.

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(1) The story of the youth who asked Prophet Muhammad for the concession to commit adultery

(2) *Related by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari, on the authority of Abu Umama*

I once said to some university students, ‘Suppose a young man has a voracious sexual appetite and he wants to satisfy his desires in an unlawful way, but we want him to repent and this is why we say to him, “We will give you everything you want on the condition that you agree to throw yourself into this oven after having spent the night indulging in your desires”, what will he do?’

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people’ (*al-Qasas:* 50). Elsewhere in the Quran, He says: ‘And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 108). He also says: ‘Allah does not guide the disbelievers’. (*al-Baqara:* 264)

All of these verses show that Allah does not decree that someone should be without guidance unless they first do something wrong. The meaning of ‘guidance’ here, therefore, is the guidance of faith and piety. Allah guided everyone with the guidance of evidence and signs that show the way, but these people did not follow this guidance and therefore He denied them the guidance of faith.

Then the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ وَصَّلْنَا لَهُمُ ٱلْقَوْلَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

We have caused Our Word to come to them so that they may be mindful [51] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 51)

We have sent to them Messages, one after another, and every time a Messenger’s time came to an end and the people fell into disbelief, Allah sent them another Message in order that humanity will remain connected to the Creator’s Guidance. Or the verse refers specifically to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the sense that Allah sent him the Quran verse by verse, and every time a Quranic revelation came to him, Allah followed it with another, according to the turn of events.

This point is one of the matters that the opponents of Prophet Muhammad tried to make an issue out of, saying, as the Quran tells us: ‘Those who disbelieve asked, “Why has not the Quran been bestowed on him from on high in one single revelation?”’ (*al-Furqan:* 32) The Quran responded to them showing them the wisdom of gradual revelation: ‘Thus [it is] that We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have rehearsed it [to you] in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually’ (*al-Furqan:* 32).

If the Quran had been revealed all at once, the strengthening of Prophet Muhammad will also have only occurred once; yet he needed a constant strengthening in order to deal with the things as they happened to him. Allah sent the verses to him one by one for him to continue to hear his Lord’s Words every time things became difficult for him. Quranic revelations came to console him and lighten the difficulties he encountered from his opponents.

Another wisdom for this gradual revelation is found in Allah’s Words: ‘And We have rehearsed it [to you] in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually’ (*al-Qasas:* 32). Every time a piece of the revelation was sent down, it was easy for them to remember it, arrange it, and act in accordance with it. In addition, the believers who were charged with following this guidance will of course encounter new events and situations, and need to ask Prophet Muhammad about them; how will he answer them if all the Quran had been revealed at once?

It was of course necessary that the answer be delayed until after the question had been asked; and for this reason Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they do not come to you with an argument except that We bring you the Truth and the best explanation’. (*al-Furqan:* 33)

The phrase ‘they ask you’ occurs several times in the Quran in several different chapters. How could the answer come to us if the Quran had come, as you say, in one single piece? Furthermore, Glory be to Allah, have you sufficiently mastered the rules in the Quran in its piecemeal form for you to ask for it to be given to you all at once?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* closes the verse with another wisdom of this step-by-step revelation: ‘…that they might be reminded’ (*al-Qasas:* 51). Every time a Quranic revelation came down, it reminded them of the Divine Guidance of which they had become heedless.

After that, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبْلِهِۦ هُم بِهِۦ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Those to whom We gave the Scripture before believe in it [52] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 52)

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'I will make your opponents from the people of the Book be the very ones who will testify to your truthfulness because they know you as they know their own sons, and everything in your Scripture is also present in theirs, and your physical image and description is in their possession'.

As such, you find that many verses from Allah's Book state that the people of the Book are aware of the Truth contained within the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And those who have disbelieved say, "You are not a Messenger". Say, [O Muhammad], "Sufficient is Allah as Witness between me and you, and [the witness of] whoever has knowledge of the Scripture"' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43). They are also a witness to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad by virtue of the previous Scriptures that they possess; hence, ask them about him. And Allah says: 'But you prefer the worldly life, while the Hereafter is better and more enduring. Indeed, this is in the former Scriptures; the Scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses)' (*al-A'la:* 16-19). And He says: 'And indeed, among the People of the Scripture are those who believe in Allah and what was revealed to you and what was revealed to them, [being] humbly submissive to Allah'. (*Al-'Imran:* 199)

If this was not the case, then why did 'Abdullah ibn Salam and other Jewish scholars embrace Islam? The people of the Book who are true to themselves and their Scriptures will certainly believe in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for those who do not believe, it is because they have been veiled by temporal power and the desire for the leadership they had before Islam came; leadership in matters of science, military and wealth.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ قَالُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا بِهِۦٓ إِنَّهُ ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّنَآ إِنَّا كُنَّا مِن قَبْلِهِۦ مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

And, when it is recited to them, say, 'We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord. Before it came we had already devoted ourselves to Him' [53] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 53)

When the Quran was recited to these believers from the people of the Book, they said, 'We believe in it', and they testified that it was the Truth from their Lord, and upon hearing Allah's verses, their faith increased. That is, they had already surrendered to Allah before this, for they believed in their own Scriptures first and then believed in the Quran.

أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ يُؤْتَوْنَ أَجْرَهُم مَّرَّتَيْنِ بِمَا صَبَرُوا۟ وَيَدْرَءُونَ
بِٱلْحَسَنَةِ ٱلسَّيِّئَةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَـٰهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

They will be given their rewards twice over because they are steadfast, repel evil with good, give to others out of what We have provided for them [54] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 54)

The Lord *Glorified is He* wills to teach us that whoever wants the True religion must check if any religion which is supported by a miracle has come after the religion he follows. This is because if he believed that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was a Messenger from Allah, and that he came after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* then clearly, it is not far-fetched that another Messenger might have come after *'Isa*. He must, therefore, search for the new religion, and search for proofs to justify his faith in this religion. This will be the case if the first religion had not been altered in any way; if it indeed had been altered, the matter is even clearer. This is because any alteration produces inconsistencies.

Allah says: 'Those who follow the Messenger [Muhammad], the unlettered Prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah' (*al-A'raf:* 157). They believed in him because they found his description in their Scriptures, and found pure, unadulterated doctrines in his Scripture, even though he was illiterate, knowing nothing of these matters. They took his illiteracy as a proof of his truthfulness.

Allah's word: 'Those' in this verse refers to the people of the Book who believe in the Quran and are humble before Allah, who were described earlier: 'Those will be given their reward twice for what they patiently endured' (*al-Qasas:* 54). This refers to their reward for believing in their Messengers, and their reward for believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad said, '[There are] three who will be given their reward twice over: A man from the people of the Book who believed in his prophet and then believed in me; a slave who observed the rights of Allah and the rights of his masters; and a man who owned a slave-girl, raised her well, and then set her free and married her'.(1)

Those who believed in their own Messengers and then believed in Prophet Muhammad deserved this rank and earned these two rewards, because they exposed themselves to harm from those who did not believe when they believed the first time, and then exposed themselves to harm again when they believed a second time. They were patient in the face of these two adversities, and as a result: 'Those will be given their reward twice for what they patiently endured'. (*al-Qasas:* 54)

Just as Allah will give those people of the Book who believed in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* their reward twice over, He will also give some of the other Muslims two rewards, including, as Prophet Muhammad said, 'A slave who observed the rights of Allah and the rights of his masters; and a man who owned a slave-girl...'. Moreover, this reward will not be denied to the followers of the religion that came directly before Islam, which was Christianity; it is for them, too. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have already sent Our Messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice. And We sent down iron, wherein is great military might and benefits for the people'. (*al-Hadid:* 25) The most important of these benefits is: 'and so that Allah may make evident those who support Him and His Messengers, unseen'. (*al-Hadid:* 25)

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Allah *Glorified is He* specifically mentioned iron because the weapons of war are made from it. Allah sent down the Quran for a purpose, and sent down iron for another purpose. A poet said:

There is naught but revelation, or a sharpened blade

Whose edge cuts the neck of any who stray:

The first is the cure for a wise man's ailment;

The second, the cure for a foolish man's complaint.

I have a personal experience and memories connected with this verse: 'Those will be given their reward twice for what they patiently endured' (*al-Qasas:* 54). We were in a city in which some of our Christian brethren resided, and one of them was a very intelligent and sagacious man. He used to always keep company with the Muslims, attend their gatherings and listen to the Quran, and some particular verses used to linger on in his mind. One day, he came to me and said that he had heard the reader recite: 'And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds' (*al-Anbiya':* 107).

He asked me what the phrase 'the worlds' meant. I said to him, 'Indeed, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a mercy to all the worlds, and whoever believes in him has a share of this mercy, but whoever does not believe in him does not have a share. Despite this, if you look at the Quran carefully, contemplating it well, you will find that he was not a mercy for just the believers'. The Christian wandered how this could be. I recited to him Allah's Words: 'Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in Truth so you may judge between the people by that which Allah has shown you. And do not be an advocate for the deceitful' (*an-Nisa':* 105). I pointed out that Allah says: 'between the people', not 'between the believers'.

Another example of Prophet Muhammad's mercy to the disbelievers is that he supported those of them who had been wronged, and gave them their rights. Allah *Glorified is He* then said to him: 'And seek forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful' (*an-Nisa':* 106) because Allah does not love people who are false and sinful, even if they are Muslims.

Then, I mentioned to him the occasion of the revelation of this verse which was the story of the suit of armour that a Jew Zayd ibn Samin agreed to look after for a Muslim, Ta‘ma ibn Ubayriq. The armour had been stolen from Qatada ibn Nu‘man, and when he noticed it was gone, he went looking for it. He had put it in a sack of flour, and thus he followed the trail of flour until it led him to the house of Zayd ibn Samin, the Jew, whom he accused of having stolen it, announcing this to the people. The Jew said that Ta‘ma ibn Ubayriq had left the armour with him to look after it on the pretext that he was worried it may be stolen from his own house. In this situation, the Muslims wanted to prove their companion’s innocence because he was new to Islam. They were also worried about what people might think if they heard that one of them was a thief. Consequently, they wanted to convict the Jew, and they said as much to Prophet Muhammad in order for him to find a solution to exonerate Ta‘ma, even though they knew it was not far-fetched that he could have stolen the armour.

Prophet Muhammad sat down to think about the matter, but very quickly the revelation came to him and told him that this matter did not need any thought or investigation: ‘Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in Truth so you may judge between the people by that which Allah has shown you. And do not be an advocate for the deceitful’ (*an-Nisa’:* 105). The verse convicted Ibn Ubayriq and indicated that this was not the first thing he had done, and it described him as being ‘deceitful’, i.e. untrustworthy. The verse also acquitted the Jew and corrected the misconception of those Muslims who were afraid that a Muslim may be exposed as a thief and were heedless of the grave consequences that will have arisen had justice been miscarried and the Jew been convicted.

Even though the verse convicted the Muslim, it raised the status of Islam in everyone’s eyes: the Muslim’s, the Jew’s and everyone else involved in the incident, and everyone who has read the verse. If Prophet Muhammad had sided with the Muslim, the image of Islam that everyone held will have been shaken; and if this had happened, what will the Jews who were close to accepting Islam, and who indeed did embrace Islam after this incident, have thought?

This is like the case of the false witness: the first person to lose esteem for him is the one for whom he lies. It is said, ‘If someone causes you to lower yourself, you go down in their esteem, even if you are helping them'. The false witness helps you against your opponent with his testimony, but you trample all over his honour in the process.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'they avert evil with good' (*al-Qasas:* 54). This is also one of their attributes. They repay bad deeds with good ones, and therefore their qualities include forgiveness and mercy, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And whoever is patient and forgives–indeed, that is of the matters [that require] determination'. (*ash-Shura:* 43)

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And from what We have provided them they spend' (*al-Qasas:* 54). They spend what they must on themselves and their families and they give the poor-due that is incumbent upon them, and then they give out of generosity to the needy and the disadvantaged.

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا۟ ٱللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا۟ عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا۟ لَنَآ أَعْمَٰلُنَا وَلَكُمْ
أَعْمَٰلُكُمْ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا نَبْتَغِى ٱلْجَٰهِلِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

And turn away whenever they hear frivolous talk, saying,
'We have our deeds and you have yours. Peace be with you!
We do not seek the company of ignorant people' [55]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 55)

This is another of the believer's attributes. Frivolous speech is the one that involves no benefit; it does not bring good if you hear it, nor bring harm if you miss it. The sensible person should abandon such speech because it deserves to be abandoned and ignored.

As such, one of the attributes of the slaves of the Most Merciful is: '…and when they pass by some evil play or talk, they pass by with dignity' (*al-Furqan:* 72). That is, they pay no heed to it.

The occasion of the revelation of this verse was when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received the envoys of the Negus, who were a group of priests. When they sat down, he recited the chapter of *Ya Sin* for them, and they were deeply moved by it and all began to weep. Consequently, they believed in Prophet Muhammad. When they left, Abu Jahl confronted them and insulted them, saying, 'I swear by Allah, I have not seen a more vile delegation than you! He (the Negus) sent you behind my back to bring him news about this man and you listened to him, and wept and embraced Islam! By Allah, we have never seen a more foolish delegation!' Yet they did nothing but turn away from him. This is the meaning of the Lord's Words: 'And when they hear frivolous speech, they turn away from it and say, "For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds"' (*al-Qasas:* 55). They reacted to vain speech as nobles should react, and turned away from it. In addition to this, they were not silent in the face of this frivolous speech, but rather replied: 'Peace be on you; we do not desire [the company of] the ignorant' (*al-Qasas:* 55). That is, we have our good deeds, which we must perform, and you have your bad deeds, which you must forsake; clearly, all of us have things with which to be busy.

'Peace be on you'; this is either a greeting, as in our custom, or it can be an expression of parting. If you begin a debate with your friend and you see that he will make it into a long one, and that it might become an argument, you say to him, 'Peace be on you' as a way of parting. An example of this is what happened between the Friend of Allah, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and his uncle. After he debated with him and nothing came from the debate, he said, 'Peace be on you. I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord'. (*Maryam:* 47)

Then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهۡدِي مَنۡ أَحۡبَبۡتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَهۡدِي مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَهُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِٱلۡمُهۡتَدِينَ ٥٦

You [Prophet] cannot guide everyone you love to the truth;
it is God who guides whoever He will: He knows best those
who will follow guidance [56] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 56)

This is addressed to Prophet Muhammad pertaining his preaching to his uncle, Abu Taleb, who remained upon the religion of his people while protecting the Messenger of Allah because of his family ties to him not because of his love for Islam. There was wisdom in Allah making Abu Taleb remain in disbelief because by this Abu Taleb won the hearts of Quraysh and kept their respect. This is because they were pleased that Abu Taleb did not believe in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and did not give him more than his right (as a relative), and they were pleased that he remained on the religion of his forefathers. For this reason, they respected the protection he gave his nephew which kept them from harming Prophet Muhammad and protected the cause from being severely damaged.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* very much desired to return this favour of protection–and he did not return favours with worldly offerings, but rather with that which endures for eternity. When Abu Taleb was close to death, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘O Uncle, say there is no god but Allah, a word by means of which I will plead your case with Allah on the Day of Resurrection’.

He replied, ‘O nephew, were it not that Quraysh will castigate me for it, saying that I only believed out of dread of death, I will have said them to please you’.(1)

But it is narrated that after Abu Taleb passed away, Al-‘Abbas went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, ‘O Muhammad, the word that you sought from your uncle to say, he indeed said it before he died, and I witnessed as much’.(2)

Notice here the precise words that Al-‘Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him* used. He did not say that this ‘word’ was ‘there is no god but Allah’, but rather, he called it ‘the word’. Why was this? It was because he himself had not yet entered Islam.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih, and by Al-Bayhaqi and by Al-Wahidi, on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

(2) From the proofreader: There is a difference of opinion between the scholars concerning the issue of Abu Taleb accepting Islam. The vast majority of scholars are of the opinion that he did not accept Islam. This is because Muslim in his Sahih narrated that the following verse: ‘Indeed, you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides those whom He wills. And He knows best those who are amenable to guidance’ (*al-Qasas:* 56) was revealed in relation to Abu Taleb. Moreover, Ibn ‘Abbas related a Hadith which is also narrated in Sahih Muslim and in which he narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said, ‘Among the inhabitants of the Hellfire Abu Taleb will have the least suffering; he will be wearing two shoes (of fire) which will boil his brain’. (Summary taken from:
http://islamqa.org/hanafi/daruliftaa-birmingham/87386/was-abu-talib-a-muslim-2)

We spoke before about the meaning of guidance: ‘Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He knows best those who are amenable to guidance’ (*al-Qasas:* 56). We said that guidance is of two kinds: the guidance of direction, and the guidance of assistance to those who believe in the direction. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And those who are guided–He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness’ (*Muhammad:* 17).

That is, they heard the evidence and followed it, and for this reason Allah granted them guidance: the guidance of faith and assistance.

Concerning this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance’ (*Fussilat:* 17).

That is, Allah *Glorified is He* showed them the way: ‘but they preferred blindness over guidance’, and as a result they were denied the guidance of assistance.

The guidance that is out of the capacity of the Messenger of Allah is found in Allah’s Words: ‘Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like’ (*al-Qasas:* 56). It is the guidance of assistance, providence and faith, for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* offered everyone the guidance of direction. Allah says: ‘O you who have believed, shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment?’ (*as-Saff:* 10). The guidance of direction came first from Allah, and this was passed on by Muhammad, His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوٓاْ إِن نَّتَّبِعِ ٱلۡهُدَىٰ مَعَكَ نُتَخَطَّفۡ مِنۡ أَرۡضِنَآۚ أَوَلَمۡ نُمَكِّن لَّهُمۡ حَرَمًا ءَامِنٗا
يُجۡبَىٰٓ إِلَيۡهِ ثَمَرَٰتُ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ رِّزۡقٗا مِّن لَّدُنَّا وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَهُمۡ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ٥٧

They say, ‘If we were to follow guidance with you [Prophet], we would be swept from our land.’ Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary where every kind of produce is brought, as a provision from Us? But most of them do not comprehend [57] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 57)

The phrase Allah mentioned: ‘If we were to follow the guidance with you, we will be swept from our land’ (*al-Qasas:* 57) was uttered by Al-Harith ibn ‘Uthman ibn Nawfal ibn ‘Abd Manaf. He went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘We know that you have come with the Truth, but we fear that if we believe you and follow you, we will be expelled from our land’. It is clear that he was speaking for his people, who had agreed upon this statement.

They admitted to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he had come with the Truth and that he was rightly guided, but the reason they did not enter Islam is that they might be expelled. They should have used their minds and compared the case of being with Prophet Muhammad upon Truth and guidance while being expelled from their land, and the case of remaining in their disbelief.

The worst that could have happened to them is that people might have seized their wealth and possessions–supposing that this will actually have happened–and the worst that they will have suffered is to lose the temporary delights of this worldly life, delights that, even if they had remained with them, will have been enjoyable to them only as long as they remained in this world. The goodness that you will lose out in this world is limited to the capacity of humans; and this will not harm you in the slightest if you were one of the people who longed for the Hereafter, where you will find goodness that lasts forever and which is commensurate to the capacity of the Bestower of All Good.

As for the case of them remaining upon their disbelief, they will gain only a small enjoyment in this temporal world, and they will have no share of the eternal Hereafter. Tell me, then; which way is better to follow? A rational comparison of the two cases clearly shows that the better thing to do is to follow the way of guidance and Truth that Prophet Muhammad brought.

Furthermore, who said that if you follow the guidance of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you will be torn from your land and be persecuted? This is why Allah replied to them by telling Prophet Muhammad, ‘Say to them, O Muhammad, “You have lied, for no one will banish you because of your Islam”’. Allah says: ‘Have we not established for them a Safe Sanctuary to which is brought the fruits of all things as provision from Us? But most of them do not know’ (*al-Qasas:* 57). Allah

Glorified is He provided for you, yet you disbelieve in Him and associate partners with Him, and you worship idols in ignorance. He gave you a safe life in the confines of His Sacred Sanctuary, and gave you all your life's needs; you dwell in a barren valley, yet fruits from all around are gathered there. Will the One who did all this for you abandon you after you believe in Him and follow the Truth? How could you judge things to be like this?

The meaning of Allah's saying: 'Have we not established for them?' is that we have made them stable and secure therein, as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere, using the same words: 'And thus did We establish for Yusuf (Joseph) a firm place on earth' (*Yusuf:* 21)? To establish means to make stable.

Allah says: 'a Safe Sanctuary' (*al-Qasas:* 57), even though safety and security is for those who are in the place (not the place itself, as is suggested in the Arabic). But He wanted to make the place itself safe for everyone who entered it to be safe. Even a murderer cannot be punished in the Sanctuary, animals cannot be disturbed or hunted, and plants cannot be uprooted. Even stones are safe in this place: do you not see that they pelt stones with pebbles at the pillars (in the rites of the pilgrimage) outside the Sanctuary, yet inside the Sanctuary, they honour the Black Stone and kiss it?

If we consider the Sanctuary from the time of the Friend of Allah, Ibrahim, we find that there has been a Divine Plan for it, and that the Lord *Glorified is He* prepared it to be a Safe Sanctuary. When Ibrahim *peace be upon him* came to it, Allah relates that he said: 'Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your Sacred House' (*Ibrahim:* 37).

This means that this place was bereft of all the constituents of life, except air because if there were no crops, this means there was no water. Hajar (Hagar) was at first reluctant to stay in this bleak place; but when she learned that Allah chose it for her, she said, 'Then, He will not forsake us'.(1)

She saw for herself that Allah had not forsaken her, for when she needed water for her child and ran in search of it between Safa and Marwa seven times, which was as much as she could manage, she found no water. If she herself had found water, the cause of this will have been her running and searching; but Allah wanted to show her the Truth of her words and confirm for her that He will truly not forsake her, doing so without any material means in order for her to see that her words were true. Allah willed that water will well up from beneath the child’s foot when he stamped the ground and cried out of hunger and thirst–and there sprang the well of *Zamzam*.

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(1) *Related as part of a longer Ḥadith by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas*

When Ibrahim *peace be upon him* settled with his family in this bleak place, he wanted it to be a permanent settlement for them, not just a place to rest in the middle of a journey. This is why he said: ‘…our Lord, that they may establish Prayer. So make hearts among the people incline towards them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful’ (*Ibrahim:* 37).

It is as though Ibrahim *peace be upon him* wanted to be sure that his family could live in this place, and that it will be a place dedicated to the worship of Allah, where prayer will never cease to take place. This is the difference between a house of Allah chosen by Allah, and a house of Allah chosen by Allah’s slaves.

The house that we build for Allah might be closed except for times of prayer, but the house that Allah chose for Himself is never bereft of people circumambulating and praying at any time of the day and night. Circumambulation only ceases when the Obligatory Prayers are offered; and when they finish, you see the people go straight back to circumambulating.

I saw the Sacred Mosque, one year, when there had been heavy rains and the water had flooded the area of the *Ka’ba* and covered the Black Stone. People were performing the circumambulation by swimming around the *Ka’ba,* and some of them dived under the water to kiss the Black Stone. It was as though the Lord *the Most High* wanted the circumambulation to continue around His Sanctuary, without stopping under any circumstance.

In light of this, we understand Allah’s Words: ‘…Make people's hearts turn to them…’ (*Ibrahim:* 37). The verbs *hawa* (fell) and *yahwi* (fall) literally mean: to fall. Things that fall have no choice as to whether they fall or not. Similarly, whoever comes to Allah’s House, or brings subsistence to it, will find that something pushes him to go there, without his having any choice in the matter.

We can also understand these words in another way. Any of the Lord's Commandments might be subject to people being too lazy to fulfil them; for some people do not pray and some do not pay the poor-due–except for the pilgrimage, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Proclaim the Pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you on foot and on every kind of swift mount, emerging from every deep mountain pass…' (*al-Hajj:* 27). So, by merely announcing the pilgrimage, people will come. Therefore, a man who is unable to pay for the pilgrimage goes hungry and reduces the expenditure on his family so that he can afford to perform it. It is the only obligation where you find people who are not obliged to do it falling over themselves trying to perform it.

Notice that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* prayed for security for the Holy Place twice: once when he said: 'My Lord, make this land secure…' (*al-Baqara:* 126), that is: make this place a secure city. A secure city can only be established in a place where people are sure that livelihood is secured. No city can be built, even by the disbelievers, unless they feel secured in that place. Thus, the first request was that the place be turned from a barren land to a secure place, just as all cities must be made secure when they are to be built. This indicates a general type of security.

Then he prayed again, saying: 'Lord, make this town safe…' (*Ibrahim:* 35). After Mecca had become a secure city, he prayed for it to be granted extra security which is a special type of security. Allah *Glorified is He* made it an inviolable city, where people are safe, just as animals, plants and even inanimate objects are safe.

Some people have questioned Allah's statement: '…whoever enters it is safe…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). They asked, 'Where is this safety when within *Al-Haram* (the Sacred Mosque) there has occurred violence, slaughter and a terrorising of innocents, as happened in the days of the Karmathians when they entered *Al-Haram*, killed people and stole the Black Stone; and as happened in modern times with the incident of Juhayman (Juhayman ibn Muhammad ibn Sayf Al-Otaybi was a Saudi Arabian religious activist and militant who, in 1979, led the Grand Mosque seizure of the *Masjid Al-Haram* in Mecca to protest against the Saudi monarchy and the House of Saud), and the slaughter that took place in *Al-Haram* at that time?'

But the statement: '…whoever enters it is safe…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97) is a sentence that imparts a commandment and an encouragement, as though Allah is saying, 'Keep safe all that enter the Sacred Mosque!' It is not expressing a predetermined matter; rather, it is a legal ruling. There is a difference between the two. Predetermined matters must necessarily come to pass, while legal rulings may be obeyed by some and disobeyed by others. Whoever obeys these laws for the Sake of Allah and sincerely wants to abide by His Commandments, should maintain the security and safety of all within the Sacred Mosque. As for those who wish to reject their Lord, they disturb and terrorise people therein.

Another verse that often raises questions of a similar nature is Allah's Statement: 'Corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men are for corrupt women; good women are for good men and good men are for good women…' (*an-Nur:* 26).

They say, 'Very often, bad men marry good women, and good men marry bad women, and the reality does not correspond to this verse'. We say the same thing here, 'This is a legal ruling constituting a commandment that can be obeyed or disobeyed. It is not a predetermined matter which must happen exactly as Allah *Glorified is He* has said it will, without any delay'.

Clearly, the meaning of the verse is, 'If you marry, marry the corrupt to the corrupt and the good to the good, in order for parity to be realised. In this way, they will be able to live together in harmony. If the corrupt man insults his wife, she will be able to respond to him because she is an equal with him. There must be parity between the two, even in bad qualities; otherwise, what will a good woman do with a corrupt man and what will a good man do with a corrupt woman?'

Hence, this verse and its counterparts speak of legal rulings. Although they are phrased as simple statements, they are actually commands. This is similar to when you say about a dead person, in Arabic, '*Rahimahu* Allah (Allah had mercy on him)', using the past tense; yet you do not know whether

Allah *Glorified is He* has shown him mercy or not. It is obviously a supplication for him that Allah *Glorified is He* may grant the deceased His Mercy. Here, we use the past tense in Arabic (which is customarily used when mentioning the deceased) to indicate that we hope he might be shown mercy.

Let us return to Allah's Words: 'Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary…' (*al-Qasas:* 57). We can see evidence of this establishment and security in the story(1) of the Elephant when Abraha came to destroy the *Ka'ba*, his army bringing a huge elephant named Mahmoud (the praised one). When one of the Arabs said in the elephant's ear, 'Kneel, Mahmoud, and return home safely', that is, save yourself, 'for you are in Allah's Sacred Land', the elephant immediately knelt as he was told to do.

Then the battle of the flocks of birds took place, pelting Abraha and his men with stones of baked clay reducing them to something similar to an empty field of straw and stubble, where all the corn had been eaten-up. All of this was due to the security that Allah *Glorified is He* had granted Quraysh, the dwellers of His Sanctuary, for the *Ka'ba* to remain their dwelling place. As long as they dwelled in the Sanctuary and the people came to them from all over the world to make pilgrimage, they will continue to be safe among the tribes and no one will dare to attack them or waylay their caravans in their winter and summer journeys. What security could there be more than this, and what can scare them after all this?

The pilgrims brought food and sustenance, and Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the truth: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. So let them worship the Lord of this House, Who provides them with food to ward off hunger and safety to ward off fear' (*Quraysh:* 1-4).

After this safety and security, how could anyone who believed in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* fear that he will be torn away from his land? It is a baseless fear.

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(1) The story of Abraha attempting to demolish the *Ka'ba*

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِن قَرْيَةٍۭ بَطِرَتْ مَعِيشَتَهَا ۖ فَتِلْكَ مَسَٰكِنُهُمْ
لَمْ تُسْكَن مِّنۢ بَعْدِهِمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ۖ وَكُنَّا نَحْنُ ٱلْوَٰرِثِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

We have destroyed many a community that once revelled in its wanton wealth and easy living: since then their dwelling places have barely been inhabited – We are the only heir [58]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 58)

The phrase ‘how many’ here indicates a large number, as though you have left the question unanswered, thereby implying a multitude. For example, if someone is ungrateful to you and you do not want to list every single favour you have ever done for them, you say, ‘How much have I done for you!’ What you mean is, ‘I will not list everything, I will wait and see what you have to say’. This is because you are sure that the answer will be in your favour, and they will only be able to say, ‘Yes, you have done a lot for me’. Clearly, the phrase ‘how many’ in this verse implies a multitude; and it is presented to the one addressed as an argument against him.

The meaning of: ‘a community’ (*al-Qasas:* 58) is general; that is, anything that could be called a community, from the smallest to the largest. In the expression: ‘…that was once thankless *batirat* for the means they were given to live [a life of wealth and ease]…’ (*al-Qasas:* 58), the word *batirat* (thankless) is used, and from this the word *al-batar* (thanklessness) which means to forget to thank the one who gave you a blessing, is derived. This indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* does not even enter your mind as you enjoy His Blessings. Another meaning for this expression is that these Blessings were used as means to commit sin and disobey the One Who provided them.

One example of *al-batar* (thanklessness) is for a person to look down on a blessing, demean it or fail to appreciate it. For example, a mother might give her son a plate of lentils, which he is tired of eating, and for this reason he refuses to eat it. His mother says to him, ‘You are *btetbattar* (not thankful)?’ That is, ‘Are you receiving our Lord’s Blessings with thanklessness?’ We use this same word in our Egyptian dialect, though it originally comes from Classical Arabic.

As such, it is considered thanklessness to look down on Allah's Blessings and be dissatisfied with them, and to ask for something better than them.

The phrase: 'for the means they were given to live [a life of wealth and ease]' (*al-Qasas:* 58) refers to the means that enabled them to live an affluent life. Next, Allah *the Most High* says: '…since then their dwelling places have barely been inhabited—We are the only heirs' (*al-Qasas:* 58). As long as they were thankless for Allah's Blessings, He will surely take them back from their hands; and if Allah's Blessings are wrested from a town, the people must surely come to ruin or be forced to move away. The term 'barely' means all but a few resided there after their homes had been ruined.

Allah then says: '…We are the only heirs' (*al-Qasas:* 58). Allah *Glorified is He* will inherit their place from them because they did not leave anyone behind to inherit from them. If a place is left without any successor, all its belongings return to Allah *Glorified is He*.

In another verse, the Lord *the Most High* mentions this case more extensively, saying: 'Allah presents the example of a town that was secure and at ease, with provisions coming to it abundantly from all places; but it was ungrateful *kafarat* for Allah's Blessings…' (*an-Nahl:* 112). That is, they wantonly disregarded Allah's Blessings: '…so Allah afflicted it with the garment of famine and fear, for what its people had done' (*an-Nahl:* 112).

The meaning of *kufr* (to be ungrateful or disbelief) is to cover or hide the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* exists. However, the presence of a covering means something is covered. That is, the original, basic premise is that Allah *Glorified is He* exists; but the disbeliever conceals this existence. In this way, disbelief itself is a proof of faith: faith is the original, basic premise, and disbelief is something new and unusual that is introduced to it.

An example of this is our saying that falsehood is one of the forces of Truth. When falsehood emerges, people taste its bitterness and are burned by its fire. Consequently, they return to the Truth and what is right, and seek refuge therein when they are afflicted by calamities. Following the same logic, pain is a means of cure. This is why the most dangerous diseases are those that infiltrate someone without causing them any pain, resulting in them not becoming aware of it until it is widespread and very dangerous and difficult to treat. For this reason, we call such diseases—we seek refuge with Allah from them—'malignant diseases'.

Similarly, in Allah's Words: 'But it was ungrateful for *kafarat* Allah's Blessings…' (*an-Nahl:* 112) using the word *kafarat* which is derived from *kufr*, there is an implicit proof of the existence of blessings. They still *kafaru* (denied) the Blessings, that is, they covered them, either by failing or neglecting to ponder over where they came from, or by keeping them from those who deserved them and withholding them from those who were unable to procure them for themselves. Because of this, Allah *Glorified is He* wrested these Blessings from them and prevented them from enjoying them, although they had the physical ability to work for them.

When some things are always available, they become monotonous. It may be that they understood that these things came to them automatically and naturally. When Allah *Glorified is He* took His Blessings from them and put an end to this monotony, He did this to make them understand that the monotony of obligations makes the reason and wisdom behind these obligations less effective. How is this?

We say that the Lord forbade certain things for us and allowed other things. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* forbade us from drinking wine, and now we have reached the point where we not only do not drink it, but we do not even think of it for one moment. It has become a monotonous habit for us. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make religious obligations continuous for mankind; that is why man should not become accustomed to performing them as habits. This is why Allah breaks the monotony of this habit through, for example, the fast in Ramadan.

During *Ramadan,* He forbids you that which was permissible for you all the year and that to which you had become accustomed. Ramadan comes and with it the responsibility of fasting, and you are suddenly forbidden to eat that which you had just eaten the day before. In this way, the love of worship remains kindled and the slaves of Allah *Glorified is He* continue to yearn for it. Moreover, the religious obligations make them more disciplined.

After this, the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the punishment for being ungrateful for His Blessings: 'So Allah afflicted it with the garment of famine and fear…' (*an-Nahl:* 112). Famine has two manifestations: first, the stomach complains; and then, if hunger continues, the body becomes weak. All its organs experience pain and taste the misery of hunger. Allah *Glorified is He* wants to indicate to us the encompassing nature of this pain, and for this reason He compares it to clothing that encloses the whole body and envelops it from all sides.

This is Allah's Way with wicked communities. He also says:

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ مُهۡلِكَ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ يَبۡعَثَ فِيٓ أُمِّهَا رَسُولٗا يَتۡلُواْ عَلَيۡهِمۡ
ءَايَٰتِنَاۚ وَمَا كُنَّا مُهۡلِكِي ٱلۡقُرَىٰٓ إِلَّا وَأَهۡلُهَا ظَٰلِمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

Your Lord would never destroy towns without first raising a messenger in their midst to recite Our messages to them, nor would We destroy towns unless their inhabitants were evildoers [59] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 59)

Clearly, we have to be taught the Message, and a Messenger has to come to tell us, 'Do this and do not do that'. Thus, if punishment is inflicted upon the disbelievers, it is inflicted justly—after they have been clearly warned. Allah *Glorified is He* does not leave people to sin in heedlessness and then say, 'That is all forbidden'.

We said before that the law states that there can be no punishment without a prohibition, and there can be no prohibition without a text, and there can be no text without an announcement. Allah *Glorified is He* never destroys a wicked community except as a punishment for what they had done.

Communities are of varying sizes: a *naj'* means a place where a single family lives; a *kafr* means a place where a few families live, like a hamlet; then a *qarya* (village) and then an '*umm al-qura'* (literally mother of the villages) which is a town or the capital. The Quran was revealed to an essentially nomadic people living an itinerant life, living in tents and travelling from one grazing land to another. They used the expression '*umm al-qura'* to refer to a place in which there were villages and where there were available provisions that were not found in smaller settlements, just as today people in the countryside buy their needs from the district capital. It is as though the city is a mother to the villages in that it cares and provides for the smaller settlements around it.

Next, the Lord says:

وَمَآ أُوتِيتُم مِّن شَىْءٍ فَمَتَـٰعُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتُهَا ۚ
وَمَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰٓ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

Whatever things you have been given for the life of this world are merely [temporary] gratification and vanity: that which is with God is better and more lasting – will you not use your reason? [60] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 60)

The word ‘whatever’ here refers to any of life’s needs and luxuries. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…is [only for] the [temporary] enjoyment of the worldly life and its adornment…’ (*al-Qasas:* 60). But however grand worldly enjoyment is, it is a short-lived enjoyment, as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: ‘…Say to them, “Little is the enjoyment in this world…”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 77). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wants from us that we do not become absorbed with these enjoyments or make them our goal because remaining alive to enjoy them is uncertain, and our enjoyment of them depends on our own activity and effort.

We said before that any worldly blessing will come to an end either by leaving you or by you leaving it. Your length of your life in this world is not equal to the length of the life of the Hereafter. Rather, the length of your life is only the period of time you remain in it; no matter what worldly gains you achieve—there is no escape from death. That is why our Lord shows us another life: a life of endurance and certainty, whose blessings will never leave you or will you leave them.

Next, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘…that which is with Allah is better and more lasting—will you not use your intellect?’ (*al-Qasas:* 60) It is: ‘…better…’ (*al-Qasas:* 60) because its blessings do not depend on your effort, but rather, they depend on the Omnipotent Power, Bestowal and Grace of Allah *Glorified is He*. And it is: ‘…more lasting…’ (*al-Qasas:* 60) because it is eternal and will never end. If a reasonable person were to compare the enjoyment of this world with the enjoyment of the Hereafter, he will surely choose the Hereafter.

For this reason, the Companion whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed about the reward of a martyr and who saw with certitude that there was nothing between him and paradise except his being slain in the Cause of Allah, threw some dates he was carrying in his hand aside—seeing that the time it takes to eat them came between him and this goal—and he rushed into battle to gain martyrdom.(1) Why? This is because he compared the enjoyment of this world to the enjoyment of the Hereafter.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* encourages this comparison to be made by the disbelievers and the believers, He says: 'Say, "Do you [O disbelievers] expect something other than one of the two best things to happen to us? ..."' (*at-Tawba:* 52) Either we will defeat you, abase you and take the goods you possess, or we will gain martyrdom and move on to that which is better than what we leave behind. But for the disbelievers: 'But we expect Allah to inflict punishment on you, either from Himself or at our hands…' (*at-Tawba:* 52). That is, do not expect anything to come to us except goodness, and we expect nothing for you but evil.

Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Yet you [people] prefer the life of this world, even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting.' (*al-A'la:* 16-17) This is why He ends the verse we are discussing by saying: 'Will you not use your intellect?' (*al-Qasas:* 60) If the intellect were to compare this world with the Hereafter, it will surely choose the Hereafter.

Then, the Lord *the Most High* says:

أَفَمَن وَعَدۡنَٰهُ وَعۡدًا حَسَنٗا فَهُوَ لَٰقِيهِ كَمَن مَّتَّعۡنَٰهُ مَتَٰعَ
ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا ثُمَّ هُوَ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ مِنَ ٱلۡمُحۡضَرِينَ ٦١

Can the person who will see the fulfillment of the good promise We gave him be compared to someone We have given some enjoyments for this worldly life but who, on the Day of Resurrection, will be summoned? [61] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 61)

This verse offers an explanation and emphasises what came before it. Allah's saying: '…the good promise…' (*al-Qasas:* 61) indicates a promise of some coming good. If your equal promises you something good, it will match his own capabilities; but it might be that circumstances do not allow him to keep his promise at all. By contrast, if the promise is from Allah *Glorified is He* He will fulfil it according to His capabilities to give; and His promises are never broken: '…Who could be more faithful to his promise than Allah?' (*at-Tawba:* 111) Thus, He says: '…will see the fulfillment of the good promise We gave him' (*al-Qasas:* 60), that is, without doubt, '…be compared to someone We have given some enjoyments of this worldly life…' (*al-Qasas:* 60) which will without doubt come to an end, '…but who, on the Day of Resurrection, will be *muhdareen (*summoned)' (*al-Qasas:* 61), that is, to receive chastisement.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

This word *muhdareen* (summoned) is only used in the Quran to refer to chastisement. Perhaps the one who initiated the use of the word *muhdar* from the same root and which means 'court usher' had this in mind when he did so; for a court usher never brings anything good.

Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They claim that He has kinship with the jinn, yet the jinn themselves know that they will be *muhdaroon* (summoned). Allah is far above what they attribute to Him' (*as-Saffat:* 158). Allah also relates one in paradise saying: 'Had it not been for the grace of my Lord, I will have been among those summoned [and taken to Hell] (*muhdareen*)' (*as-Saffat:* 57).

Then Allah *the Most High* says emphasising this summoning on the Day of Resurrection in order for the disbeliever not to think he can escape:

وَيَوْمَ يُنَادِيهِمْ فَيَقُولُ أَيْنَ شُرَكَآءِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ كُنتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

The Day will come when God will call them,
saying, 'Where now are those you allege are My
partners?' [62] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 62)

The question here is posed to those who associate partners with Allah, not to those whom they associated. The phrase 'The Day will come…' (*al-Qasas:* 62) is in the accusative case in Arabic, as it is an adverb of time. An appropriate verb must be implied here that is the verse means, 'Mention the day when Allah will call unto them'. The one being addressed here is

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, to whom will Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mention this? He will mention it to those who disbelieve in this day—the Day of Resurrection.

The verse gives us a glimpse of one of the events that will occur on this day: the Day of Calamity, after which there will be no calamity; the Day of Certainty which cannot be avoided; the Day of the Deafening Cry which will deafen the ears of those who did not prepare for it in the worldly life; the Day of the Overwhelming Event which will overwhelm the people; and the Day of Judgement when only religion will bring any benefit.

The Lord mentions this for two reasons: Firstly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been rebuked, attacked, scorned, and treated with derision. His opponents had exposed him to all manner of ill treatment; they had plotted and schemed against him, worked magic on him and so on.

When a prophetic mission encounters all this villainy, know that it has only been met with such a response because it means to bring an end to corruption that brings benefit to those who fear reform. This is because this prophetic mission will rob them of their advantages, the satisfaction of their passions, their prestige, their self-importance, and their oppression—and so, of course, they oppose it.

For this reason, we find that many Westerners see the might of Islam by examining the villainy and enmity of its opponents. They say, 'If this religion had not been bent against their corruption, they will not have conspired against it; if it had been an insignificant matter, they will have left it to be eliminated by the passage of time. The fact is, they knew it was the Truth that will eliminate their falsehood and bring an end to their tyranny'.

The Lord *Glorified is He* commanded His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to recall that day: remind himself of it and remind his people, for them to bear it in mind; if they heard about the hardship and strife of this day, perhaps they will look at themselves and repent to Allah *Glorified is He*. The purpose behind Allah mentioning this is not to frighten them, but rather to warn them for them not to fall into disbelief that leads them to such a place. It is similar to the situation when you tell your son about the grave consequences of idleness in his studies and you warn him that he might fail in order that he will change his ways and start to look for ways to succeed.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Day will come when Allah will call them…’ (*al-Qasas:* 62). He called to them in this world, saying, ‘O People! O Sons of Adam!’ Yet, they ignored this and rejected His call. However, on that day, He will call them with a call they cannot ignore because: ‘Who has control today? Allah, the One, the All Powerful’ (*Ghafir:* 16). It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is reminding them of this day for them to pay heed and change their ways.

Secondly, the verse is a consolation for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to whom his Lord is saying, ‘Do not despair because of what they do to you, and do not be saddened by their plots and their obstinacy; for I will deal with them’. One can comprehend the secret of this psychological consolation and its impact on the soul of the oppressed and the wronged. It is like when your son complains to you that his brother has hit him or bullied him, and to console him you say, ‘Just you wait, I will sort him out’. The child will be calmed by hearing that justice will be done, and he will feel happier. Likewise, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the consequences that his enemies will face for what they had done, it consoled him and made it easier for him to bear what he had to bear.

The content of this call will be: ‘Where are those you alleged were My partners?’ (*al-Qasas:* 62) He does not only say ‘My partners’ and stop, but adds: ‘you alleged’. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* is one and has no associates. These so-called ‘associates’ of His existed only in these people’s minds; the people say, ‘Making allegations is a way of lying’. Therefore, they will find no answer to the question: ‘Where are those you alleged were My partners?’ (*al-Qasas:* 62) If these associates were with them, they will have said say, ‘These are the ones who led us astray, and therefore punish them, O Lord, twice over!’ However, they will not answer the question which shows that these associates did not actually exist. These polytheists will be dumbfounded, unable to answer, as Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘All arguments will seem obscure to them on that Day...’ (*al-Qasas:* 66).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ حَقَّ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡقَوۡلُ رَبَّنَا هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ ٱلَّذِينَ أَغۡوَيۡنَآ أَغۡوَيۡنَٰهُمۡ كَمَا
غَوَيۡنَاۖ تَبَرَّأۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَۖ مَا كَانُوٓاْ إِيَّانَا يَعۡبُدُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

And those [ringleaders] against whom the verdict will be passed will say, 'Our Lord, these are the ones we caused to deviate. We caused them to deviate as we ourselves deviated, but now we disown them before You: they did not really serve us' [63] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 63)

The ones speaking here are the 'associates' who led the polytheists astray and deluded them. The phrase *'haqqa alaihim'* (against who…will be passed) in the verse refers to the verdict being firm, certain and inevitable; there is no way it can be removed from them, as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'Our Lord's Sentence on us is just and we must all taste the punishment' (*as-Saffat:* 31). He also says: 'The verdict will be given against them because of their wrongdoings: they will not speak'. (*an-Naml:* 85)

However, what is the meaning of the word *qawl* ('verdict', lit. 'saying') that shall be firm, certain and will be passed against them? This word will be, 'Everyone has a place with Me in Paradise, if they believe; and everyone has a place in Hell, if they disbelieve'. What did the 'associates' say? They said: 'Our Lord, those are the ones we led astray. We led them astray as we ourselves were astray…' (*al-Qasas:* 63). Glory be to Allah! Now you say, 'Our Lord', acknowledging His Lordship? Allah *Glorified is He* replied to Pharaoh when he said something similar: 'Now? And you had always been a rebel and a troublemaker!' (*Yunus:* 91)

Now you acknowledge the Truth after your free will has been stripped from you and you have no control even over your own bodies and limbs! Your hand with which you used to strike, the foot upon which you used to walk and your tongue… they are all out of your control now because they are now in the Control of Allah *Glorified is He*. The Lord *the Most High* says: 'On the Day when their own tongues, hands, and feet will testify against them about what they have done'. (*an-Nur:* 24)

His Words: ‘Those are the ones we led astray…’ (*al-Qasas:* 63) refer to the polytheists. His Words: ‘We led them astray as we ourselves were astray…’ (*al-Qasas:* 63) means: in order for both of us to be the same and this is why we led them astray, in order for them to lose out too. The people of falsehood always try their best to lure the people of Truth to join them in falsehood, in order for the people of Truth to be like them. This issue shows us the psychological reasoning inside any corrupt person when he sees someone who is virtuous and upright and does not join him in his corruption and iniquity. He does not want to be in perdition alone; why should others be different from him? Read Allah’s Words: ‘They will dearly like you to reject faith as they themselves have done, to be on the same footing [as them]…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 89).

Do you not see that the people of falsehood, corruption, and iniquity mock and vilify the people of Truth in order for the people of Truth to become disinclined to virtue and righteousness, and to tempt them into their ways of falsehood? This continues until no one who practises his religion and adheres to his Lord’s Guidance is safe from their tongues, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The wicked used to laugh at the believers. When the believers passed by them they used to wink at one another’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-30).

If only things stopped at mere winks and backbiting; these people go even further, deriving sport and play from their mockery of the people of faith and righteousness: ‘And when they returned to their people, they used to return *fakeheen* (jesting)’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31). The word *fakeheen* (jesting) means: happy and delighted with what they had done to the people of righteousness, showing that they were pleased with this state of affairs and that it satisfied something in their spiteful, diseased souls.

By contrast, the believer naturally loves to be dignified and to refrain from rising to these people’s bait, and for this reason his Lord *Glorified is He* defends him, saying to him, ‘Do not be sad for We shall avenge you and turn their mockery back upon them, making them the object of laughter and ridicule on an everlasting day in which their chastisement will be unending’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they [the believers] sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36) It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is making His believing slaves feel satisfied, saying to them, ‘Does their fate please you? Have We proved able to requite them for what they did to you?’ Yes, O Lord! The disbelievers’ mockery of the people of faith in this fleeting world of falsehood has become mockery at their expense in the Eternal Abode of Truth, an eternal, unending mockery.

Allah’s Words: ‘…We led them astray as we ourselves were astray…’ (*al-Qasas:* 63) mean: in order for us to be the same, neither of us better than the other. This is why Satan caused Adam *peace be upon him* to err; when he sinned and was expelled from Allah’s Mercy and the purity he enjoyed along with the angels, he wanted to take Adam *peace be upon him* and all his progeny to the same destination. He could not bear being doomed alone while Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny enjoyed Allah’s Mercy and Favour.

Therefore Satan—may Allah curse him—was not content with his progeny leading Adam’s progeny astray; rather, he asked Allah *Glorified is He* to reprieve him until the Day of Resurrection for him, the great teacher, to lead them astray himself. It was as though he was worried that his progeny will not accomplish this mission well enough, and therefore he took it upon himself to do task, saying: ‘And then Satan said, “Because You have put me in the wrong, I will lie in wait for them all on Your straight path”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 16).

Some people understand that Allah’s Words: ‘But Satan said, “Give me respite until the Day people are raised from the dead”, and Allah replied, “You have respite”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 14-15) mean that Allah *Glorified is He* granted Satan what he asked for. But the phrase: ‘…You have respite’ (*al-A‘raf:* 15) was not a response to his request; it was nothing more than a confirmation of something that was bound to happen even before Satan asked for it. Clearly, this means that Satan’s request was meaningless because he was already destined to be amongst those granted a respite. We may ask why? They said it is because Allah *Glorified is He* wanted Satan—who led Adam *peace be upon him* astray and caused him to fall from Paradise—to always keep reminding Adam’s progeny that he was the one who led their father astray.

As for the words of the ones the polytheists associated with Allah: ‘Our Lord, those (*ha’ula’’*) are the ones we led astray. We led them astray as we ourselves were astray…’ (*al-Qasas:* 63), let us take a moment to consider the word *ha’ula’* (those) in the verse. This is a pronoun that refers to pluralities, both of men and of women. In Arabic, the word *ha’ula’* (those) is composed of the component ‘*ha’* which is used to draw the person’s attention, and the component *ula’a’* which is a demonstrative pronoun, as is the case with other Arabic words such as *hadha* (this, masculine form), *hadhihi* (this, feminine form), *hadhani* (these, masculine dual form), and *hatani* (these, feminine dual form). The component *ha* in all these words is used to attract the attention of the listeners and to alert them that you are speaking in order for them to pay attention and not miss what you are saying.

This is the case when you are speaking to your equal because he needs to be alerted, whereas when you are addressing your Lord *Glorified is He* it is inappropriate to use such an expression, which is used to draw the attention of the listener that the Polytheists will use. Since they said ‘Our Lord’, it is bad manners for them to then say *ha’ula’* (those). Do they really think Allah’s attention needs to be alerted to call Him like this?!

On the other hand, we notice the good manners employed by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as the Quran mentions: ‘[Allah said], “Musa (Moses), what has made you come ahead of your people in such haste?” He said, “Those (*ula’a’*) are following in my footsteps. I rushed to You, Lord, to please you’’’ (*Ta Ha:* 83-84). Musa used the word *ula’a’* (those), without the prefix *ha*, which is used to draw attention, out of good manners with his Lord *Glorified is He*.

Notice also that whenever the disbelievers address Allah *Glorified is He* they use this word *ha’ula’* (those) with the prefix *ha*. Allah *the Most High* relates their words: ‘Our Lord, it is those (*ha’ula’*) who led us astray…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 38). In another verse Allah states that they said: ‘Our Lord, those (*ha’ula’*) are the partners we used to invoke beside You…’ (*an-Nahl:* 86).

As for the believer, he finds it inappropriate to try to alert Allah’s Attention. More than that, a believer should not even need to do this with another believer because the believer should always be alert.

In the verse we are discussing, the ones the polytheists associated with Allah will then say: ‘But now we disown them before You; they did not really worship us’’ (*al-Qasas:* 63). Now they are turning back; just as they said earlier: ‘Our Lord’, they now say: ‘But now we disown them before You…’ (*al-Qasas:* 63); but it is far-fetched that this disavowal could now avail them by any means since its time has already passed, as has the time of free will and moral responsibility. Now it is the time of reckoning, there is no more free will and choice. In this, they are akin to Pharaoh, when Allah *Glorified is He* says to him: ‘Now, and you had always been a rebel and a troublemaker!’ (*Yunus:* 91)

As for the saying of the ‘associates’: ‘They did not really worship us’ (*al-Qasas:* 63), it indicates that the ‘associates’ will say, ‘We did not have the power to force you to worship us or strong enough arguments to convince you to do this; you were only waiting for just a signal from us’, just as their leader, Satan, said: ‘I had no power over you except to call you and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves…’ (*Ibrahim:* 22).

These polytheists really worshipped their own selves, since their ‘associates’ were nothing more than idols, or the like, who spoke no words of guidance nor called people to worship them. What did the sun or the stars say to those who worshipped them? What did they command them to do? What did they forbid them from doing?

They were gods which did not have any systems of guidance or moral responsibility; and this is what the polytheists desired. By contrast, the one who bothers people with the matter of faith in the One God Who requires them to live by certain moral responsibilities, and Who delivers to them commandments and prohibitions, places a barrier between the human soul and its desires and keeps a tight rein of it, forcing it to stay within prescribed boundaries.

In this way, ‘…they did not really worship us’ (*al-Qasas:* 63); rather, they worshipped themselves as well as their desires and lusts. It is very easy for a person to worship gods who demand nothing at all from him, as in such a case he is free to live as he pleases. This is what made the worship of these gods so popular.

That is why the Lord *Glorified is He* wants mankind to realise—as a proof against them—that it is their own lower selves that are the primary cause of their vain desires. If this was not the case and it was all down just to Satan's whisperings, then who led Satan astray in the first place? In the same vein, a poet said:

When Iblis (Satan) disobeyed,

Who was it that whispered to him?

In essence, it is all down to the arrogance and desire of the lower self; Satan does nothing but tempt it in order for it to fall. In a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad said, 'When *Ramadan* comes, the doors of Paradise are opened and the doors of Hell are closed, and the devils are put in chains'.(1)

As long as the devils are chained, this means that they can have no influence on human beings. Allah *Glorified is He* knows that we all try to blame all our sins on Satan, and therefore it is as though He is saying, 'The devils have been shackled and chained, so who can delude you and tempt you while they are chained?' Clearly, it is your lower selves that whisper to you. Here we say, 'Every sin that you commit during *Ramadan* has nothing to do with Satan; it comes from the desires of your lower self'.

We showed before how to discern whether a sin came from Satan or from the base desires of the lower self. If the sin is the only thing in your mind resulting in you not thinking of anything else, know that it is from your own self. By contrast, if you fail to commit a certain sin but you think of committing another, know that it is from Satan. This is because Satan wants you to sin anyhow and in anyway, and as a result he is happy to lead you from one sin to another if he is able to make you commit it. The lower self is different, however, for it wants something specific and will accept nothing else.

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and An-Nasa'i*

وَقِيلَ ٱدْعُوا۟ شُرَكَآءَكُمْ فَدَعَوْهُمْ فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لَهُمْ وَرَأَوُا۟
ٱلْعَذَابَ ۚ لَوْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

It will then be said to them, 'Now call those you worshipped as partners,' and they will call them but receive no answer. They will see the suffering and wish they had followed guidance [64] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 64)

Allah *the Most High* had already called them, saying: '…'where are those you alleged were My partners?'' (*al-Qasas:* 62) That is, only in their allegations, for Allah *Glorified is He* has no associates. Here, He says to them: '…"Now call your partners", and they will call them but will receive no answer; and they will see the suffering. If only they had followed guidance' (*al-Qasas:* 64). He says *shuraka'ukum* (your partners), not *shuraka'i'* (My partners), even though the polytheists deemed them to be associates of Allah *Glorified is He*.

But does the phrase 'your partners' mean they claim that they are divine? No, because the polytheists followed them but did not worship them. Then, what does 'your partners' mean? The scholars say that the construction that associates one noun with another in Arabic has three possible meanings. It either means 'of' or 'from', as in 'an *ardeb,* a unit of measurement of wheat'; or it means 'in', as in 'plotting in the night'; or it means 'belonging to', indicating possession, as in, 'Zayd's pen', that is, 'the pen of Zayd'.

Hence, the meaning of 'your partners' in the verse is that the partners were from the polytheists or of the same nature as them, that is, they were not distinct from the polytheists in any way. Yet a god must be of a higher nature, for if it is of the same nature as them, it is therefore their equal—and in such a case it is not fit to be their god.

The meaning of 'Now call your partners…' (*al-Qasas:* 64) is 'Call them to come and save you, and intercede on your behalves', as you used to say: 'Those are our intercessors with Allah...' (*Yunus:* 18), and as you used also to say: 'We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3). Hence, call upon them that they might bring you closer to Allah and intercede for you. Someone who is able to do this must surely have a high position with Allah that of which he is sure. Yet, do these 'partners' have this status with Allah *Glorified is He*? How could they, when they cannot do as much for their own selves?

Allah *the Most High* then says: 'and they will call them…' (*al-Qasas:* 64), 'O our partners! You, who told us such-and-such, help us!' The result will be: '…but will receive no answer…' (*al-Qasas:* 64) because they will be busy enough with their own affairs. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…They will see the suffering. If only they had followed guidance' (*al-Qasas:* 64). That is, if they had followed Allah's Guidance and the guidance of His Messenger Mohammad; had believed that the torment Allah had warned them of was real and true; and had believed that they could not avoid it, this will not have happened to them and they will not have met this end.

It may also mean, when they see—in the Hereafter—that this torment is real, they will wish that they had followed guidance.

Then, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَيَوۡمَ يُنَادِيهِمۡ فَيَقُولُ مَاذَآ أَجَبۡتُمُ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ (٦٥)
فَعَمِيَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡأَنۢبَآءُ يَوۡمَئِذٖ فَهُمۡ لَا يَتَسَآءَلُونَ (٦٦)

On that Day He will call them, saying, 'How did you respond to My messengers?' [65] All arguments will seem obscure to them on that Day; they will not be able to consult one another [66] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 65-66)

Here again, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He [Allah] will call unto them…' (*al-Qasas:* 65). What is the purpose of all these calls? It is to censure, rebuke, and deride them and all that they worshipped and followed instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. The content of this call will be: 'How did you respond to My Messengers?' (*al-Qasas:* 65) To 'respond' means to agree to someone's requests; so how did you respond to them, after you believed in Allah *Glorified is He*? Did you accept the rulings they brought? Did you learn from them true self-evident knowledge?

This is meant to make them speechless because they will not be able to answer even if they tried to. Consequently, they will be ashamed and humiliated. After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All arguments will seem obscure to them…' (*al-Qasas:* 66). That is, they will have no recourse to arguments and excuses; they will be blind to them and not see them, and: 'They will not be able to consult one another' (*al-Qasas:* 66). They will have nothing to do but be silent, as the saying states, 'The best answer for what one dislikes is silence'. Moreover, it is a time, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'when no friend will ask about his friend' (*al-Ma'arij:* 10).

They will not be able to consult one another because they will all be equal in ignorance and partners in misguidance and all of them will be busy enough with their own affairs. Allah *the Most High* tells us: 'The Day man will flee from his own brother, his mother, his father, his wife, his children; each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that Day' (*'Abasa:* 34-37).

Just as the polytheists will be asked: 'How did you respond to My Messengers?' (*al-Qasas:* 65), the Quran informs us elsewhere that the Messengers will be asked: 'On the Day when Allah assembles all the Messengers… "What response did you receive?"…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109). That is: how did people respond to you with regards to what you taught the people, concerning: firstly, the knowledge of the basic matters of faith, and secondly, the knowledge of the sacred rulings: how did the people respond?

Notice the polite manners of the Messengers here, and the depth of their understanding when answering Allah's Question. They know exactly how their people responded to them; some of them believed were devoted to serving their cause, made sacrifices and were martyred, and others disbelieved and opposed them. Yet, despite all this, they will say: 'We do not have that knowledge: You alone know things that cannot be seen' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109).

How could they say: 'We do not have that knowledge' when they indeed do know? The scholars say it is because they are not certain whether those who believed did so with conviction or not; for they judge only according to the outward appearance of people, while people's inner states are known only to Allah *Glorified is He*. It is as though they are saying, 'O Lord, You are asking about true acceptance, not false pretence, and we do not know with certitude whether our peoples' acceptance was true or not, whereas you know all hidden things'.

In this way, they made the Lord *Glorified is He* the true arbitrator, the final judge and the sole authority in respect to determining Divine Justice, which will be announced for all to witness: ‘Who has control today?’ (*Ghafir:* 16)

In Arabic, a question is posed either in order to gain some knowledge, as when a student asks his teacher, or else in order to emphasise something that is already known, such as when a teacher asks his students in order that he can come to the conclusion on his own. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On that Day neither mankind nor jinn will be asked about their sins’ (*ar-Rahman:* 39). That is, they will not be asked for the purpose of gathering information because of course Allah *Glorified is He* already knows.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘And stop them, for they shall be questioned’ (*as-Saffat:* 24). That is, they will be asked in order that they can confirm what they have done. Even though Allah’s Words on the Day of Resurrection is proof enough, for it cannot be denied, He will still ask them for them to confirm and bear witness to their own actions.

The Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that He will make the events of the Day of Resurrection horrific for the disbelievers not because He hates them, but because He wants them to picture this horrific image now for them to be impelled to repent and change their ways; this is because He has opened the door of repentance for them, and He is their Merciful Lord.

In the same vein, in a Qudsi Hadith, Prophet Muhammad said, ‘The earth said, “O Lord, allow me to collapse upon the Son of Adam, for he enjoys Your blessings but neglects to thank You”. The mountains said, “O Lord, allow me to fall upon the Son of Adam, for he enjoys Your blessings but neglects to thank You”. Thus He *the Almighty* said, “Leave Me and My Creation, for had you created them, you will have been merciful to them. Leave them, for if they repent, I am their Beloved; and if they do not repent, I am their Physician”’.(1)(2) That is, I sometimes give them incentives, and sometimes give them warnings. I make them yearn for paradise and I make them fear Hell, and I open for them the door of repentance. The door of repentance being opened is not only a Mercy from Allah *Glorified is He* to the one who repents, but is also a Mercy to everyone who suffers from the disobedience of those who sin.

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(1) *Ahmad narrated the like of this in his Musnad.*

(2) *From the proofreader: This is not a Hadith. See: http://dorar.net/spreadH/465.*

If the door of repentance was closed in the face of the sinner, he will despair and become completely unscrupulous. Moreover, the society will suffer by his presence as long as he lives. Consequently, the open door of repentance is a mercy to those who repent a mercy to society and a mercy to all humanity. Moreover, it is a mercy to the sinner and to those completely immersed in sin.

Next, Allah *the Most High* says:

فَأَمَّا مَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحٗا فَعَسَىٰٓ أَن يَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحِينَ ٦٧

Yet anyone who has repented, believed, and done good deeds can hope to find himself among the successful [67] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 67)

Why does Allah use the word 'may' that indicates a hope, after having said: '…who has repented, believed and done good deeds' (*al-Qasas:* 67)? Why does He not say, '… [he] will find himself among the successful', making felicity certain for him? It is said that it is because he may have repented, but it is not sure he will continue to repent in order to attain success. Another meaning might be that when Allah *Glorified is He* says 'may', the meaning is certainty. We said before that expressions of hope have different levels: hoping for something from someone who is present is stronger than hoping for something from one who is absent. And hoping for something from Allah *Glorified is He* is the strongest form of hope. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…soon your Lord may raise you to a [highly] praised status' (*al-Isra':* 79).

What hope is stronger than a hope from Allah *Glorified is He*? Clearly, the word 'may' expresses hope when it comes from someone who is unable to attain what he hopes for. Yet, it is a certainty when it comes from One Who is able to do this: Allah, the true Lord.

After that, Allah *the Most High* says:

وَرَبُّكَ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ وَيَخْتَارُ ۗ مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ ٱلْخِيَرَةُ ۚ
سُبْحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ وَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

Your Lord creates what He pleases and chooses those He will – they have no choice – so glory be to God, and may He be exalted above the partners they ascribe to Him! [68]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 68)

From the previous verses, we expected that the context will tell us of the torment the polytheists will find in the Hereafter; but the verse says: 'Your Lord creates what He pleases and chooses those He wills…' (*al-Qasas:* 68). It is as though Allah is saying, 'I know what is best and I know how to relieve you of their evil. Let me create whatever I will and choose what I will. I am the Lord, who has sworn to educate my subjects with that which will lead them to fulfil their purpose'.

Allah's subjects are of two kinds, believers, and disbelievers. The believers will assuredly suffer because of the actions of the disbelievers. This suffering will continue as long as the disbeliever remains in his disbelief. For this reason, he has been given the possibility of repentance, and if he turns in repentance, it is accepted from him. This is the first way the believer is relieved.

The meaning of the phrase: 'They have no choice' (*al-Qasas:* 68) is, 'You have no say in the matter, then let me choose for you; after that, follow what I have chosen for you'. Another possible meaning is that this verse: 'Your Lord creates what He pleases and chooses those He wills…' (*al-Qasas:* 68) is an answer to what they said: 'And they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man from either of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) By this, they referred to Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira or 'Urwa ibn Mas'ud Ath-Thaqafi. Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them by saying: 'Are they the ones who portion out the Mercy of your Lord? We are the ones who portion out between them their livelihood in this world and We have raised some of them above others in rank…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

How could they hope to be, themselves, the ones who choose how mercy is distributed when it is Allah who distributed their means of livelihood among them in the life of this world, making one-man rich, another poor, another weak and another strong. In the affairs of this worldly life, Allah *Glorified is He* arranged things for them as He willed; how could they desire to control the affairs concerned with the Hereafter and Allah’s Mercy, apportioning it wherever they willed? Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They have no choice’, that is, they have no choice in the affairs of this nature.

Maybe Allah’s Words: ‘They have no choice…’ mean that the believers do not have the right to object to Allah accepting the repentance of the polytheists who had injured them. They may say, ‘Why do You accept their repentance when they did such-and-such to us, and we hoped to see them punished for it?’

The Lord *Glorified is He* chooses whatever He wills and does whatever He wills. When He accepts the repentance of the polytheists, He does not show mercy to them alone, but also shows mercy to the believers by relieving them from the evil that used to be done to them.

Allah’s Words: ‘So glory be to Allah, and may He be exalted above the partners they ascribe to Him!’ (*al-Qasas:* 68) mean: Allah *Glorified is He* is exalted and absolved of what they want from Him, which is for the Lord to respond to the wants of human beings who follow their wild caprices. If the Lord were to yield to the wills of human beings who follow their caprices—and their caprices are all different—all of their lives will be ruined.

Do you not see that all human beings differ in their wishes and desires, and in all aspects of life? You find that a group of people may be of the same age or have the same social status, yet even in simple things such as buying products where each will choose a different brand or type.

وَرَبُّكَ يَعْلَمُ مَا تُكِنُّ صُدُورُهُمْ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ٦٩

Your Lord knows what their hearts conceal and
what they reveal [69] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 69)

What their hearts conceal means he knows the secret: ‘…He knows [even] the secret [thoughts of man] as well as all that is yet more hidden [within him]’ (*Ta Ha:* 7). A secret is what you keep to yourself, hiding it from others for no one to know it but you. Or, it can mean something you tell someone else in confidence, at which point it is no longer a secret. The proverb says, ‘If your breast cannot hold your own secret, how can other people’s breasts hold it?’

If the Lord *Glorified is He* informs us that His Knowledge is vast and He knows all secrets, it is obvious that He must also know what is brought into the open because open matters are known to everyone. As for that which is even subtler than a secret, it refers to the fact that He knows what you keep to yourself before it even enters your heart; for He is the only one who knows things before they exist.

You might ask, ‘If one of Allah’s Attributes is that He knows secrets and what is even subtler than secrets, what is miraculous about knowing open things which are known to everyone?’ Some orientalists made an issue of this, as have some of their Muslim followers who conform to their opinions.

If we consider the verses of the Quran, we find that Allah declares His knowledge of the hidden and the open to be equal, saying: ‘It is all alike [to Him] whether any of you conceals his thoughts or bring them into the open…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 10). And He says: ‘And [know, O men, that] whether you keep your beliefs secret or state them openly, He certainly has (full) knowledge….’ (*al-Mulk:* 13). And in the verse we are examining now, He says: ‘And your Lord knows all that their hearts conceal as well as all that they bring into the open’ (*al-Qasas:* 69).

In these verses, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the hidden before the open, but elsewhere He says: ‘We will make you recite [O Muhammad] and you will not forget, except what Allah should will. Indeed, He knows what is declared and what is hidden’ (*al-A‘la:* 6-7). And He says: ‘Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you may conceal’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 110). Here, Allah referred to what is said openly before the hidden. He will not have done this if what is said openly did not possess some subtle quality; it is this quality that has gone unnoticed by those who do not study things in depth and who have therefore understood this verse incorrectly.

For example, if you keep something secret, it might come out with a slip of the tongue or be visible in your facial expressions. Or you might accidentally reveal your secret by using the wrong expression, as the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…But [even so] you will most certainly recognize them by the tone of their speech …' (*Muhammad:* 30).

So there are clues and signs by which we can deduce secrets. As for open matters, they are mentioned in the plural form: 'Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you may conceal' (*al-Anbiya':* 110), that is, He knows what you all reveal and what you all conceal, with the Arabic verbs reveal and conceal in the third person plural form. You should try to follow a public rally in which there are many people gathered, all talking at once. Can you distinguish between these voices and relate each word to the one who said it? This is the mystery of speech that is said openly and the subtle quality that these people failed to reflect on. As such, Allah informs us of His knowledge of all open speech which we ourselves can never know, no matter what technological developments we are granted to distinguish different voices.

This is why they say that you cannot solve a crime that occurs in a mob because all their voices and actions are jumbled together, each of them concealing the other. And they say, 'The individual is protected by the group'. And they say that the masses are like parrots, tending to copy others, as *Shawqi* said in his poem named 'The Death of Cleopatra', when they were defeated on the day of Actium but spread the word that they had been victorious; but such a trick could not fool the truly sagacious. They said to each other about the tumult of the masses:

Listen to the people, and how they are fed such delusions!
Their voices filled the air, praising those who, in reality, killed them.
The lie has done its work on them, and they have all been fooled:
What a bunch of parrots; their intellects are in their ears!

Clearly, knowledge of what is said openly, in such a case, is a distinction that Allah holds above all others. It is just like Him knowing the hidden.

And Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And your Lord knows…’ (*al-Qasas:* 69) to reassure Prophet Muhammad. This indicates that He *Glorified is He* is his Sustainer and will take care of him and protect him, and for this reason He has told him not to be saddened by what they say for Allah knows what they conceal and what they reveal. And if you do not know what they say, know that Allah knows and will inform you of it. Did Allah not say to His Prophet Muhammad: ‘And they say to themselves, “Why does Allah not chastise us for what we are saying?” ...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

That is, his Lord *the Most High* has informed him of what they even concealed in their hearts, as if saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Do not think that I will only hold them to account for what you know of their actions; rather, I will also hold them to account for what you do not know’. In this way, Prophet Muhammad will be assured that Allah’s Knowledge encompassed all that they did.

Then the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُوَ ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ لَهُ ٱلْحَمْدُ فِى ٱلْأُولَىٰ وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۖ وَلَهُ ٱلْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

He is God; there is no god but Him; all praise belongs to Him in this world and the next; His is the judgment; and to Him you shall be returned [70] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 70)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who truly deserves to be worshipped. He is endowed with all the attributes of perfection and: ‘There is no god but Him…’ (*al-Qasas:* 70). As long as He is One and nothing is like Him, no one can challenge Him or dispute with Him about anything. He has asked them before to bring their associates to openly settle the matter of worship and ascertain exactly who the master of the Day of Resurrection is.

The meaning of ‘the beginning’ in the verse under discussion is the creation that Allah created in beginning; that is, the universe that He prepared for His vicegerents on earth: the sun, the moon, stars, trees, mountains, water, air, and earth. Allah prepared the universe to receive man before He created him.

As such, when the Lord speaks of Adam *peace be upon him,* He does not say that he was the first thing to be created; rather, he was the first human.

This is because many other worlds were created before him. In fact, Allah says: 'Has there not been over man a period of time when he was nothing to be mentioned?' (*al-Insan:* 1) That is, the time he did not exist.

The preparation of the universe to receive mankind is a blessing that merits thanks and praise. Allah created the whole universe for you and then allowed you to benefit from it despite your lack of ability to control it or reach some parts of it yourself. The sun serves you, but you can neither control nor possess it. It works for you without any maintenance from your part and without needing any spare parts. Likewise, the whole universe is at your service and for your interest; and all of these merit praise.

After Allah *Glorified is He* created you in a universe that was prepared for your service, He left you to seek your sustenance therein. First, you were a cell in your father's loins, then an embryo in your mother's womb, and after that you were born and she held you in her lap. Allah does not consider you to be legitimately responsible until you reach adulthood and the age of rationality, and until you become mature and sane enough to reproduce. This is due to this being a sign of your complete maturity; just like a fruit, it does not reproduce until it is fully ripe and developed.

As such, we find that out of His Wisdom, Allah decreed that a fruit does not become sweet until its seeds are completely ripe in order for the seeds to sprout when you plant them after eating the fruit. If fruit is eaten before ripening, their seeds will not produce fruit and their species will die out. This is why we see that if you do not pick a ripe fruit from the tree, it will fall to the ground of its own accord, as though it were saying to you, 'I am ready to eat'.

For this reason, in the countryside we notice that mulberries and peaches, for example, fall to the ground when they ripen and then produce new plants, for their species to be preserved. If the unripe fruit were to fall, it will not be able to reproduce.

Similarly, human beings cannot procreate until they reach maturity, whereupon Allah makes them morally responsible and records their actions. Hence, we must recall the blessings that Allah granted us even before He called us into existence; and we must be sure that the One Who charges us with moral responsibilities now and issues commandments and prohibitions is our Lord, Creator and Sustainer, and that He only orders us to do that which is best for us–and consequently, we must hear and obey.

Allah's Word: 'the end [of time]' (*al-Qasas:* 70) means that He will be praised on the Day of Resurrection, as He said elsewhere: '…And their call will end with [the words] "All praise is due to Allah, the Sustainer of all the worlds!"' (*Yunus:* 10)

That is, Allah is praised in the Hereafter. He granted us limited enjoyment of this world that is commensurate with our capabilities, while in the Hereafter He will grant us endless enjoyment that is commensurate with His Omnipotent Capabilities. When we see such blessings, we will have nothing to say but, 'Praise be to Allah!' Truly, praise is due to Allah both in the beginning and at the end.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And with Him rests all judgment; and unto Him shall you all be brought back' (*al-Qasas:* 70) because the Hereafter is for nothing but judgement and the settling of differences, for everyone to know what they owe and what they are owed. You should never think that the ones who hurt and oppress you will escape Allah's Grasp.

The Lord *the Most High* says: 'And unto Him shall you all be brought back' (*al-Qasas:* 70), that is, to be accounted. One variant canonical reading of this verse in the Quran states: 'and unto Him shall you all return', with the verb in the active voice; this is because they will return to Allah of their own accord, as though they have been set to do so like an alarm clock. When their time comes, they will come forth themselves, without anyone having to drive them forth.

As for the reading: '…shall you all be brought back' (*al-Qasas:* 70), this tells them not to think they can refuse to come forth, just as they refused to pay heed to Allah's Messengers in this world; in this world, the Messengers called them gently and softly, but in the Hereafter they will be called forth forcefully and despite themselves, and they will be unable to break away: 'On the Day when they shall be thrust into the fire with [an irresistible] thrust' (*at-Tur:* 13).

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says:

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِن جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ مَنْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ ٱللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُم
بِضِيَآءٍ ۖ أَفَلَا تَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٧١﴾ قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِن جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلنَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا
إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ مَنْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ ٱللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُم بِلَيْلٍ تَسْكُنُونَ فِيهِ ۖ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘Just think, if God were to cast perpetual night over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than He could bring you light? Do you not listen?’ [71] Say, ‘Just think, if God were to cast perpetual day over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than He could give you night in which to rest? Do you not see? [72] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 71-72)

The Lord *Glorified is He* lists here some of the blessings He has granted His slaves in the form of two things connected with the movement and stillness of life. Movement brings good to people, and stillness brings repose for those who are exhausted by movement. By his nature, man cannot produce and work unless he has rested, and those who challenge this nature by staying up late at night and then working by day cannot keep this up for long, as their strength will dissipate and they will not be able to continue.

For this reason, Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it appears in glory! Consider the creation of the male and the female! Verily, [O men, the ends] you strive for are most diverse!’ (*al-Layl:* 1-4)

Night and day each have distinguished roles, and similarly do men and women; do not attempt to mix these roles as otherwise life will be ruined and its series of events will wear you out. Before electricity, television, and video, our day started with the Dawn Prayer because we were used to sleeping after the Night Prayer. As for now, you can see what we have become. We used to begin our day energetically because we used to spend the night in complete tranquillity.

The Lord, presenting His Numerous Blessings to us, says: ‘Have you ever considered…’ (*al-Qasas:* 71), that is, what you will do: ‘If Allah had willed that there should always be night over you, without a break (*sarmadan*), until the Day of Resurrection…’ (*al-Qasas:* 71), that is, for your whole lives: ‘…is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you light?’

(*al-Qasas:* 71) The word *sarmadan* (without a break) here means always, continuously, without a break.

For the word light in the verse, Allah used the Arabic word *diya'*, and not *nur*. This is because *nur* (light) can come from the stars and the moon, while *diya'* (bright light, with rays and warmth) comes only from the sun. This is why Allah says: 'He it is who has made the sun a [source of] radiant light (*diya'*) and the moon a light [reflected] (*nur*)…' (*Yunus:* 5).

He says: '…is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you light?' (*al-Qasas:* 71) He did not say, 'Who else could bring you light?' to show us that none could do such a thing but Allah and that there is no God but Him. By means of light, you see things, find your way, and go about your life's work without any commotion or turmoil. By means of light, I live safely with my surroundings. If we were to live in darkness, we will be destroyed or will destroy what is around us; this is because when you walk in darkness, either you crush what is smaller than you or you are crushed by what is stronger than you are.

Just as light is important for material matter, it also plays a role in spiritual matters, as the light of the spirit refers to the upright spiritual values that govern and rectify your life's actions and save you from crushing those who are weaker than you or from being crushed by those who are stronger than you. Consequently, it is logical that Allah says: 'He it is who bestows His Blessings on you, as do His angels, so that He might take you out of the depths of Darkness into Light…' (*al-Ahzab:* 43).

That is, from spiritual darkness to the light of true virtue, not physical darkness, because we need it to relax. Clearly, spiritual light is not less important than physical light. Allah says, describing His Own Light: 'Light upon light' (*an-Nur:* 35).

That is, two lights: a material light by which we see all around us in order not to stumble blindly but to be able to move safely; both believers and the disbelievers, righteous and the sinners benefit from this physical light, as Allah has not withheld it from any of His creatures. As for the second light: the spiritual light, the light of guidance, belief and virtue, Allah sends this by means of His Messengers. When the believer accepts these two lights, he benefits from them in this world, and this benefit stays with him until the Day of Resurrection. This is why Allah says after this: ‘Allah guides to His Light him that wills [to be guided]; and [to this end] Allah propounds parables to men…’ (*an-Nur:* 35).

Since the noble verse under discussion began with the word: ‘Say’, it is appropriate that it should end with: ‘Will you not, then, listen?’ (*al-Qasas:* 71) That is, listen to what I say to you and reflect upon it.

Next, in contrast to the verse that mentions night, Allah mentions another of His Blessings, the blessing of day: ‘Say, “Have you ever considered [this]: If Allah had willed that there should always be daylight over you, without a break, until the Day of Resurrection…”’ (*al-Qasas:* 72), that is, eternal, with no end, ‘…is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you [the darkness of] night wherein you might rest? Will you not, then, see [the Truth]?’ (*al-Qasas:* 72)

Notice that the two verses have the same structure but end with two different expressions. This indicates the miraculous nature of Quranic rhetoric, as each one has its own appropriate meaning. In the verse related to night, Allah says: ‘Will you not, then, listen’ while in the verse related to day, He says: ‘Will you not, then, see’. This is appropriate as it is the ear, not the eye that is used at night: you listen without being able to see, and you ‘perceive’ with the ear. As for the day when there is light, the eye is used to see. Hence, this is a wise way to end the verses, giving the appropriate meaning for each. Then Allah mentions the two phenomena stated in these two verses together, by saying:

وَمِن رَّحْمَتِهِۦ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلَّيْلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ لِتَسْكُنُوا۟ فِيهِ
وَلِتَبْتَغُوا۟ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

In His mercy He has given you night and day, so that
you may rest and seek His bounty and be grateful [73]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 73)

After speaking about night and day separately, Allah mentions them together here because their existence together is another manifestation of Allah’s Mercy. The verse is a fine example of the rhetorical structure which is called ‘involution and specification’; after He mentioned night and day together, Allah then describes them by saying: ‘…so that you might rest therein as well as seek to obtain [what you need] of His Bounty…’ (*al-Qasas:* 73) trusting the hearer’s intelligence and ability to link each statement to the appropriate one of the two, Clearly: ‘the night’ links with: ‘…so that you might rest therein…’ (*al-Qasas:* 73), and: ‘…the day’ links with: ‘as well as seek to obtain [what you need] of His Bounty…’ (*al-Qasas:* 73). We can see that ‘involution’ means to group the subjects being described all together and then to mention their separate descriptions after this, and ‘specification’ means to refer each description back to its appropriate subject.

An example of this is what At-Tymuriah stated:

My heart, my eye, my tongue, my Creator:
Content, weeping, grateful, Merciful

The subjects of the description are grouped together in the first line, and their descriptions are grouped together in the second, leaving you to link each one back to its subject.

Night and day are two complementary signs by which our lives are given order; for if you do not rest, you will not be strong enough to work. The energy you have is produced by things in your body. When you become tired, you find that your body becomes fatigued and exhausted, which is your body’s way of warning you that it is no longer able to work and that you must rest in order to regain your strength to be able to work again.

Rest should be commensurate with the level of tiredness. For example, you might stand still to rest from walking, and if that is not sufficient, you might sit. If you are more tired, you will be overcome by sleep, which is the natural constraint that prevents you from going against the nature with which Allah created you.

It is peculiar that some people challenge this nature, taking pep pills for them not to be overcome by sleep, and taking sleeping pills in order to sleep. If they only submitted to their natures, sleeping when they have the inclination to sleep and working when they had the energy to work, they will save themselves much inconvenience.

This is why it is said, ‘Sleep is a guest who, if he calls on you, will soothe you; but if you call on it, it will harm you’. Until now, even with the advances of science, they have still not uncovered the secret of sleep and how it takes hold of a person so gently and peacefully without him being aware of what it exactly is; and I challenge any of us to explain how sleep overtakes him.

Allah has made sleep one of His signs, just like night and day, and the sun and the moon, saying: ‘And among His wonders is your sleep, at night or in the daytime…’ (*ar-Rum:* 23).

Then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَوۡمَ يُنَادِيهِمۡ فَيَقُولُ أَيۡنَ شُرَكَآءِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ كُنتُمۡ تَزۡعُمُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

The Day will come when He will call out to them, saying, ‘Where are the partners you claimed for Me?’ [74] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 74)

Twice before now such calls have been mentioned, but there is no repetition here because each of these calls has its own specific purpose. The first call referred specifically to those whom they associated with Allah and their saying before Allah: ‘Or Lord, those are the ones we led astray. We led them astray as we ourselves were astray…’ (*al-Qasas:* 63). As for the second call, it addressed the idolaters, saying: ‘…How did you respond to My Messengers?’ (*al-Qasas:* 65) As for here, the call is intended as a means of bearing witness against them. Hence, the words: ‘Where’ and: ‘are those [beings or powers, those they associated]’ and: ‘whom you [idolaters] imagined to have a share in My Divinity’ (*al-Qasas:* 74) are mentioned in all three verses, but the purpose of each verse is different from the others. In this way there is no repetition, but rather, there is emphasis.

After that, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَنَزَعۡنَا مِن كُلِّ أُمَّةٖ شَهِيدٗا فَقُلۡنَا هَاتُواْ بُرۡهَٰنَكُمۡ
فَعَلِمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱلۡحَقَّ لِلَّهِ وَضَلَّ عَنۡهُم مَّا كَانُواْ يَفۡتَرُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

We shall call a witness from every community, and say, ‘Produce your evidence,’ and then they will know that truth belongs to God alone; the gods they invented will forsake them [75] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 75)

That is, We will call forth all the prophets from their communities to bear witness against them and will say: ‘Produce your evidence for what you have been claiming!’ (*al-Qasas:* 75) Show us the associates you worshipped instead of Allah: where are they to come to your defence? But no, they will leave them and will flee from them: ‘But all arguments and excuses will by then have been erased from their minds, and they will not [be able to] obtain any [helpful] answer from one another’ (*al-Qasas:* 66).

Their associates will be absent and their witnesses will be absent, but Allah’s witnesses will be present: ‘…And We will have called forth witnesses from within every community…’ (*al-Qasas:* 75) who will testify that they delivered Allah’s Guidance to them. If they say, ‘Satan (Iblis) and misguided men led us astray’, Allah will respond that He did not leave them to be led astray, as if He did leave them they might have an excuse for sinning; rather, He sent them Messengers to guide them and these Messengers passed on to them the Divine Message.

What will they be able to do when you (Prophet Muhammad) testify that you passed on the Message to them, fulfilled your duty, and were persecuted and harmed by them now that their associates have deserted them and they have no one to speak for them or defend them? Upon this, their excuses will run out and the case will be closed.

Then, He says: ‘…And We will say: “Produce your evidence…”’ (*al-Qasas:* 75) that proves that Allah’s Messengers did not deliver the guidance, or bring an excuse to defend yourselves. And when they are dumbfounded and realise that their witnesses are absent except the witnesses that are against them: ‘They will come to understand that all the Truth is with Allah [alone]…’ (*al-Qasas:* 75).

However, they will be surprised at this, as Allah says about the disbelievers who were deluded and kept running after false mirages: '…Instead [of that], he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him and [that] He will pay him his account in full…' (*an-Nur:* 39). And Allah refers to those who denied accountability in this world, saying: '…For they will find all that they ever did [now, in the Hereafter] facing them…' (*al-Kahf:* 49). They will be surprised by that which they did not believe and in which they did not have any faith. But why should they be surprised, since Allah has informed them of it in this world and presented to them an outlet that they surely should have followed for them to be prepared for this situation? If you warn an intelligent person about the roughness of the road they are about to follow and the dangers and perils that lie therein, he will surely avoid it if the one who advises him is an honest person. He will then be on the safe side, even if the one who advises him is untruthful; there is no harm in being on the safe side anyway. A poet(1) said:

The soothsayer and the doctor both
Claim there is no resurrection.
I say: If you speak the truth, I lose nothing;
But if I speak the truth, the loss is yours!

What will you lose if you carry a pistol while following an ominous road, even if you find nothing there to perturb you? Clearly, if you (doubter in the Resurrection) do not lose anything, you will not gain anything either; whereas if we do not gain anything, we will not lose anything.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and all their false [lies] which they invented will forsake them' (*al-Qasas:* 75), that is, all their claimed idols will disappear.

The Lord *Glorified is He* has given us an image of the Day of Resurrection; and no one fears the Day of Resurrection except those who believe in it. As for those who do not believe in the Hereafter and the Resurrection, they must be given another preventative because the Lord wants to preserve the harmony of the universe and the normal activities of life.

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(1) Abu Al-Htahya

If recompense came only on the Day of Resurrection, the non-believers will have continued unchecked with their corruption and will have made life wretched for everyone. Allah wants to protect life from those who spread corruption and do not believe in the Hereafter, and for this reason He sends upon them chastisement in this world before the chastisement of the Hereafter. Allah says: ‘But verily, for those who are bent on doing evil, there is suffering in store [even] closer at hand than that’ (*at-Tur:* 47). That is, before the chastisement of the Hereafter. As such, everything that afflicts the disbelievers in this world is a deterrent to every oppressor who tries to transgress and oppose the Truth. Consequently, our Lord now gives us an image of the worldly chastisement sent upon those who spread corruption on earth, saying:

إِنَّ قَٰرُونَ كَانَ مِن قَوۡمِ مُوسَىٰ فَبَغَىٰ عَلَيۡهِمۡۖ وَءَاتَيۡنَٰهُ مِنَ ٱلۡكُنُوزِ مَآ إِنَّ مَفَاتِحَهُۥ
لَتَنُوٓأُ بِٱلۡعُصۡبَةِ أُوْلِي ٱلۡقُوَّةِ إِذۡ قَالَ لَهُۥ قَوۡمُهُۥ لَا تَفۡرَحۡۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡفَرِحِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

Qarun was one of Moses’ people, but he oppressed them.
We had given him such treasures that even their keys would
have weighed down a whole company of strong men. His
people said to him, ‘Do not gloat, for God does not like
people who gloat [76] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 76)

He does not speak about the recompense of Qarun (Korah) in the Hereafter, but rather makes him an example in this world for all those who do not believe in the Hereafter that they might have cause to stop their oppression.

The idolaters of Quraysh persecuted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* opposed his mission and injured his companions to the point where they were unable to defend themselves. Yet, the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, saying: ‘[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the Truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!’ (*al-Qamar:* 45)

‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* was amazed by this, thinking, ‘What hosts are those that will be routed while we are unable to protect ourselves?’ Then, when the battle of Badr took place and the idolaters were routed and killed, ‘Umar said, ‘Allah has spoken the truth: “[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the Truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!" (*al-Qamar:* 45)

And thus it is said that no tyrant dies until Allah has requited him, and those whom he oppressed have been avenged. Once(1), a tyrant died in the Levant without any evidence that Allah had requited him. The people were amazed at this, and one of them said, 'It must be that Allah requited him without us being aware of it'. If he escaped the chastisement of this world, there is another realm beyond this one where the good find the fruits of their goodness and the evil find the consequences of their evil. Allah's Justice entails this reckoning.

The Lord *Glorified is He* made Qarun a sign for all those who do not believe in the Hereafter for them to fear Allah's Chastisement and beware of His Requital. From whom is this admonition drawn? It is drawn from Qarun (Korah), one of the leaders of his people and their wealthiest noble. Clearly, when Allah requited him, this requital will be an admonition to all those weaker and of a lower status than him.

A friend of mine used to work for the customs at Alexandria(2). One day he was approached by a group of his colleagues who were bullies and wanted to dominate others. All that he did was to take their leader and throw him down on the floor. When the others saw this, they all dispersed and left him alone.

This is the same principle that was manifested in Allah retaliating against Qarun (Korah). He was a bully and a symbol of wealth and pride amongst his people. Allah says: 'Behold, Qarun (Korah) was one of the people of Musa (Moses)…' (*al-Qasas:* 76). And so, when we reflect upon the life of Musa *peace be upon him* we find that he faced many tyrant disbelievers. He faced Pharaoh, who claimed godhood, he faced Haman, and then he faced the Samaritan who betrayed him in his absence by calling his people to the worship of the Golden Calf.

And from among his own people, he was sorely tried by Qarun. The meaning of: '…one of the people of Musa (Moses)…' (*al-Qasas:* 76) is either that he was a relative of his from among the Israelites, or that he lived among them and thus in this sense was one of them. The Quran does not go into this matter any deeper, but the exegetes say that he was the son of his paternal uncle. His lineage was Qarun, son of Yashar, son of Qahith, son of Lawa, son of Ya'qub (Jacob); and Musa was the son of 'Imran, son of Qahith, son of Lawa, son of Ya'qub (Jacob).

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(1) The story of the unjust man of the Levant

(2) The story of the officer in Alexandria's customs office with some of his colleagues

Some of the historians mentioned the enmity between Musa and Qarun. They said that when Musa *peace be upon him* asked Allah to strengthen him with his brother Harun (Aaron), He answered him, saying: 'He [Allah] said, "You are granted all that you has asked for, O Musa (Moses)!"' (*Ta Ha:* 36) And this was not the only time: 'And We had already conferred favor upon you another time' (*Ta Ha:* 37).

Allah sent Musa's brother Harun (Aaron) with him because he was more eloquent, and He made them partners in prophethood and addressed them together, saying: 'Go forth, [then] you and your brother…' (*Ta Ha:* 43) in order to confirm that the Message had not come from Musa by himself.

In the Quran, when Musa alone is addressed, know that Harun is also acknowledged at the same time. For example, when Musa supplicated against the people of Pharaoh, he said: 'And Moses prayed, "O our Lord! Verily, You have bestowed on Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and riches in the life of this world, with the result, O our Lord, that they lead [others] astray from Your Path! O our Lord! Wipe out their riches and harden their hearts so that they may not attain to faith till they see the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!' (*Yunus:* 88) Musa *peace be upon him* alone made this supplication, yet his Lord answered him by saying: 'The prayer of you both is accepted…' (*Yunus:* 89) addressing them both using the Arabic dual form, showing that Harun was not a Messenger allocated by Musa, but He was rather allocated by the Lord; and it also shows that the one who joins in with another who is supplicating by saying 'Amen' is like the one who makes the supplication, for Musa supplicated and Harun said, 'Amen'.

When Musa went to meet his Lord, he said to his brother: 'Act for me among my people…' (*al-A'raf:* 142). In Musa's absence, the Golden Calf was worshipped and Musa became angry with his brother Harun. But when things calmed down between them, the tasks of prophethood were divided between them. Harun was assigned the office of rabbinate; a rabbi is an authoritative scholar, and was also assigned *Qurban*, that is, the duty to perform sacred offerings that draws one closer to Allah.

Upon this, Qarun (Korah) became angry because throughout all this he was not given anything, and his nephews had been distinguished from him by prophecy and rank, despite his great wealth. Then, Musa asked Qarun to give the poor-due from all his wealth, one dinar out of every thousand dinars, and one dirham out of every thousand dirhams. Qarun refused to pay and tried to turn the people against Musa.(1)

After that, Qarun planned a scandal for Musa for people to abandon him. He bribed(2) a wanton woman with a basin full of gold to make false allegations about Musa. When Musa came to preach the people and teach them the Law, saying, ‘Whoever steals will have his hand amputated, and whoever commits adultery will be whipped if he was unmarried or stoned if he was married’, Qarun stood up and said, ‘Even if it was you, O Musa?’ Musa replied, ‘Even if it was me’.

Then the wanton woman stood up and said, ‘He seduced me!’ Musa replied, ‘By He who parted the ocean, you will say what truly happened!’ The woman began to tremble and she confessed what Qarun had planned, thereby exposing him. Upon this, the enmity between Qarun and Musa began.

Qarun began to act with iniquity and tyranny until Allah finally took him. Allah says of him: ‘Behold, Qarun (Korah) was one of the people of Musa (Moses); but he acted arrogantly and insolently *bagha* towards them…’ (*al-Qasas:* 76). The word used here is *bagha* which means to commit extreme injustice, especially as he had such great wealth that assisted him in his iniquity and in bending people to serve his goals, and he held a power position among his people. The verb *bagha* means to usurp the rights of others, to look down on people and treat them with contempt, or to be proud.

Allah elaborates on the nature of this arrogant insolence: ‘…simply because We had granted him such riches that his treasure-chests (*mafatih*) alone will surely have been too heavy a burden for a troop of ten strong men or even more *'usba* to carry' (*al-Qasas:* 76).

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba, Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, Al-Hakim and Ibn Mardawayhi, on the authority of Anas.*

(2) *The story of the woman who was hired by Qarun to claim that Musa committed adultery with her.*

The word *mafatih* which can mean both 'key' and 'treasure chest', also occurs in Allah's Words: 'For with Him are the keys (*mafatih*) to the things that are beyond the reach of created being's perception…' (*al-An'am:* 59).

If we say that *mafatih* is a plural, what is its singular form? It is not *miftaah* (key) because the plural of this is *mafaateeh* (with two long vowels). Rather, the singular is *maftah* which also means a tool used for opening like a key. Therefore, the meaning is that the keys to his treasure chest were a strong burden for ten men to carry. The purpose of this expression is to show the extent of his wealth. If something is a strong burden, this means that it is difficult to carry because it is very heavy. We do not distinguish heavy things from light things by sight, touch, or smell; we must carry them to ascertain their weight.

We said before that this sense is the muscle sense. A heavy load puts strain on the muscles and consequently you are aware of its weight, while if you carry a light object, you are almost unaware of its weight because of its lightness. If you were to hide some heavy weights in a tight space like a handbag, the weight will be visible to others because you will be struggling with it.

The word *'usba* (troop) means a group of people who adhere zealously to a particular cause, without there being any conflict between them. Another use of this word occurs in the Quran when the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) said: 'Truly, Yusuf (Joseph) and his brother [Binyamin (Benjamin)] are dearer to our father than we, even though we are a troop of strong men (*'usba*)…' (*Yusuf:* 8). This was a word of truth that came from their mouths unintentionally because they truly were a troop of men united in their opposition to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* and his brother who was young and had no strength or power. They were all born of the same mother, save Yusuf and his brother who were born from another woman. Therefore, it was natural for Ya'qub's (Jacob's) heart to be inclined to the weak.

It is also said that *'usba* means a group between three and ten. In the case of *Yusuf's* (Joseph's) brothers, the Quran specified their number when Yusuf said: 'Behold, I saw [in a dream] eleven stars…' (*Yusuf:* 4) which represented his brothers, including Binyamin: '…as well as the sun and the moon…' (*Yusuf:* 4) which represented his mother and father. From these two verses we are able to ascertain the size of the *'usba*.

Using this same methodology, based on grouping different verses together to draw conclusions, Imam 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* was able to solve a problem that confused some people. Someone told him that a woman(1) had married and then given birth after six months, which suggested that she had conceived the child before getting married, as pregnancy normally lasts nine months.

But Imam 'Ali said, 'The minimum duration of pregnancy is six months'. The questioner responded, 'From where have you ascertained that, O Abu Al-Hasan?' 'Ali replied, 'I ascertained it by Allah's Words: "…and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months" (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). And in another verse, Allah says: "And the [divorced] mothers may nurse their children for two whole years…" (*al-Baqara:* 233).' That is, for twenty-four months. Thirty minus twenty-four is six, and this must be the minimum duration of a pregnancy. In this way, the verses of the Quran complement and complete one another. It is a mistake to consider each verse in isolation, not considering the other verses that mention the same topic.

Then, Allah says: 'When [they perceived his arrogance] his people said unto him, "Exult not (*tafrah*) [in your wealth], for verily, Allah does not love those who exult [over riches]!' (*al-Qasas:* 76). They warned him against the forbidden kind of exultation. Generally, 'exultation' means the joy the soul expresses when something pleases it. There is a difference between something pleasing you because it gives you enjoyment and something pleasing you because it is beneficial for you. For example, a diabetic person might eat sugary foods because they give him enjoyment even though they are bad for him. In reality, exultation should be for something beneficial because Allah only placed true enjoyment in beneficial things.

When they said 'Exult not', they meant the exultation of mere enjoyment. But exultation and joy should only be found in beneficial things even if they are not enjoyable such as the bitter medicine which will cure one's illness. This is why Allah says: 'Say, "In [this] Bounty of Allah and in His Grace–in this, then, let them rejoice (*yafraho*)…'" (*Yunus:* 58). And Allah says: 'And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice (*yafrah*) in Allah's Help [against their enemies]…' (*ar-Rum:* 4-5). Allah called this *farah* ('rejoicing' or 'exultation') because it was exultation for something beneficial since the victory of the call means that the principles you believe in and fight for will be uppermost, and this will bring benefit to you and to the whole world.

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(1) *The story of the woman who gave birth after six months and Imam 'Ali solving this issue.*

As an example of the forbidden kind of exultation, exultation in mere enjoyment, the Quran says: 'Those [hypocrites] who were left behind rejoiced (*fariha*) in their staying away [from war] after [the departure of] Allah's Messenger' (*at-Tawba:* 81). This is exultation in mere enjoyment because they hated the Messenger of Allah and refused to go out with him, and were happy to stay behind and leave him to go and fight alone.

Clearly, Allah's Words: '…Exult not (tafrah) [in your wealth], for verily, Allah does not love those who exult' (*al-Qasas:* 76) refers to the exultation of vain enjoyment that does not consider the ultimate consequences. The one who drinks wine drinks it because it gives limited enjoyment even though it is followed by terrible harm. Nowadays we hear people saying that dancing is a fine and beautiful art because they find some kind of enjoyment in it; but the condition of a truly beautiful and fine art is that it remains beautiful all the time. If it later becomes nasty and leads to further nastiness, as is the case of dancing, it is not really considered beautiful.

After that, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَٱبۡتَغِ فِيمَآ ءَاتَىٰكَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلدَّارَ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَۖ وَلَا تَنسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ ٱلدُّنۡيَاۖ وَأَحۡسِن
كَمَآ أَحۡسَنَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيۡكَۖ وَلَا تَبۡغِ ٱلۡفَسَادَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُفۡسِدِينَ ٧٧

Seek the life to come by means of what God has granted you, but do not neglect your rightful share in this world. Do good to others as God has done good to you. Do not seek to spread corruption in the land, for God does not love those who do this' [77] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 77)

'Seek instead, by means of what Allah has granted you…' (*al-Qasas:* 77), that is, use the wealth Allah has given you to obtain: 'the life to come'. If you use the wealth Allah gave you to seek this worldly life, this worldly life will come to an end when you die; but if you are able to take it with you to the Hereafter, you will keep possession of it forever–a blessing without end.

If you love the enjoyment of this world and cling on to it tightly, you should be aware that your worldly delights will not stay forever; you will lose them by dying or they will abandon you and leave you in poverty. Hence, if you yearn for wealth and desire to keep it in your possession, send it to the eternal life to come for it to remain with you forever, as an endless possession. Send it on to meet you in the Hereafter.

The Hadith says that once Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked ‘Aisha, the Mother of the Believers *may Allah be pleased with her* about a sheep that had been given to him. She said, after giving it in charity, nothing remained but the shoulder. ‘Rather’, he said, ‘It all remained, except the shoulder’.(1)

And he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The son of Adam says, “My wealth, my wealth”. Do you own of your wealth other than what you eat and consume and what you wear and wear out, or what you give in *Sadaqah* (charity) (to those who deserve it) and what you store for yourself’.(2)

This is why some of the righteous people used to say to whoever came to them begging, ‘Welcome to the one who will carry my provisions to the Hereafter without asking any payment!’

Once(3) a man came to Imam ‘Ali and asked him, ‘Am I one of the people of this world or one of the people of the Hereafter?’ He replied, ‘I do not have the answer to this question but rather, you have it, and you are the one who will decide this matter. If you give a warm welcome to the one who gives you something, you are one of the people of this world; and if you give a warm welcome to the one who takes from you, you are one of the people of the Hereafter’. This is because people love those who give them what they love. If you love this world, you will be happy with the one who gives to you, and if you love the Hereafter, you will be happy with the one who takes from you.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and At-Tirmidhi*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad, Muslim and At-Tirmidhi*

(3) *The story of the man who questioned Imam ʿAli, 'Am I among the dwellers of Heaven or Hell?' And the response of Imam ʿAli*

But if our Lord has counselled us to seek the Hereafter, this does not mean we should abandon this world: ‘Do not forget your own [rightful] share in this world…’ (*al-Qasas:* 77). However, some people take this verse to mean it is fine to immerse oneself in this world and its delights.

If we reflect on the statement: ‘Do not forget your own [rightful] share in this world…’ (*al-Qasas:* 77), we understand that an intelligent person views the world as a trivial matter, but his Lord is informing him that he should take from it that which he needs to live. Thus, the implication is that he will have forgotten all about this world, and the Lord reminded him of it.

The people of deep spiritual knowledge have mentioned a subtle point about this matter. They say that your ‘share’ of something is that which you take with you and keep, not that which you lose. If this is the case, then your share of this world are the good deeds that you do, which will remain yours, staying with you and accompanying you to the next world. From this we learn that if your share of this world will increase your share of the Hereafter, your worldly life will serve your next life.

Or the statement may be directed to the miser, who does not spend even on himself, and for this reason, his Lord reminds him: ‘Do not forget your own [rightful] share in this world…’ (*al-Qasas:* 77). That is, take from it what will help you in the Hereafter. This is why they say of the worldly life that it is too important to forget, because it is the means to gain the Hereafter, but too trivial to be an aim in itself because it is followed by another aim that is more lasting.

Then, Allah says: ‘And do good [to others] as Allah has done good to you …’ (*al-Qasas:* 77). The Lord *Glorified is He* wants His creatures to follow the manners that he prescribed for them, just as the saying states, ‘Conduct yourselves with the manners that Allah prescribed for you’.

That is, just as Allah was good to you, be good to people; and just as you desire that Allah forgives you, forgive those who wrong you: ‘… [For] do you not desire that Allah should forgive you your sins?’ (*an-Nur:* 22)

And as long as your Lord gives to you, you must also give, without fear of poverty; Allah is the One Who called you into existence, and in doing so He took it upon Himself to sustain you and look after you. Therefore, when you see someone who is unable to earn their own sustenance–and his Lord has made him this way for a wise reason–stretch out his hand to you, know that he is actually stretching it out to Allah, and that you are merely delivering to him what Allah has allotted for him.

We can find this concept in Allah's Words: 'Who is it that will offer to Allah a goodly loan…?' (*al-Hadid:* 11) Here Allah called charity a loan to Him. Why is this? Because this slave is Allah's slave, asking Allah to provide for him and Allah has tested him for a wise reason–no one should think that this state is intrinsically his, but one should rather learn from it–and therefore, who will give Allah a loan and fulfil the need of their brother?

Allah says: 'Who will give Allah a goodly loan' (*al-Hadid:* 11) even though He is the Giver. This is a word of respect to your property and your hard work. Allah is beyond comparison, but this is like when a man needs to pay for a surgical operation for his poor son and he says to his rich sons, 'Lend me money to pay for your brother's operation and I will pay you back later'.

It is narrated in a Hadith that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to visit his daughter Fatima and found her polishing a coin. When he asked her why she was doing this, she said, 'Because I intend to give it in charity and I know that it will fall into Allah's Hand before it falls into the hand of the needy person'. So the money belongs to Allah and you are only delivering it on behalf of Allah.

Some of the orientalists had a problem with this because they read the Quran and Hadith texts superficially without any insight, and as a result imagined that there was a contradiction. They say that Allah says here: 'Who is it that will offer to Allah a goodly loan which He will amply repay?' (*al-Hadid:* 11) And elsewhere, He says: 'Whoever shall come [before Allah] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof…' (*al-An'am:* 160). But the Hadith says, 'It is written upon the door to Paradise: Charity is rewarded tenfold, and loans are rewarded eighteen-fold'.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Haythami, At-Tabarani, and Abu Na'im… It is said to be a weak Hadith.*

Here, the apparent meaning of the Hadith seems, in their view, to contradict the noble verse; and this is because they do not understand Arabic well enough to approach the Quranic discourse as it should be approached. By carefully considering the verses and the Hadith, we find that they all agree that a good deed or an act of charity is rewarded tenfold. Therefore, the apparent discrepancy concerns Allah's Words: 'He will double it for him…' (*al-Hadid:* 11) and Prophet Muhammad's words, 'Loans are rewarded eighteen-fold'.

In fact, there is no contradiction here because when someone gives a dirham in charity and Allah rewards him tenfold which includes the dirham he gave, it is as though He gave him nine. When this nine is doubled, this makes eighteen.

Then Allah says: '…and seek not to spread corruption on earth. Verily, Allah does not love the spreaders of corruption' (*al-Qasas:* 77). Corruption is the result of straying away from Allah's Guidance. If you stray away from Allah's Guidance, you become corrupt. Just as there is physical corruption, there is spiritual corruption too. Allah says: 'Hence, do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered…' (*al-A'raf:* 56).

The Lord created everything in a perfect order for His creatures to be happy; do not approach it with the intent of corrupting it. Part of this order was the bestowal of Divine Guidance; the basis of a spiritual life that is more important than the bases of the material life.

Clearly, you must act properly with the universe around you. And if you cannot make it better, then leave it alone at least without making it worse. We gave the example before of a well: you can either spoil it by filling it in, or buttress it by building a protecting wall around it.

There are five issues that the people of Qarun (Korah) presented to him in advice which included both commands and prohibitions. They must have found that his deeds contravened these issues and they must have found him to be an ingrate who was deluded by his wealth. And for this reason they said: '…Exult not [in your wealth], for verily, Allah does not love those who exult' (*al-Qasa*s: 77). They found that he had forgotten his portion of this world, not using it to prepare for the Hereafter, and that is why they said: 'Do not forget your own [rightful] share in this world…' (*al-Qasas:* 77). They found that he was miserly, not spending his wealth doing good deeds, and that is why they said: ‘And do good [to others] as Allah has done good to you…’ (*al-Qasas:* 77); that is, share your blessings with others just as Allah has blessed you. Of course, he was acting against these commands and prohibitions, or else they will not have commanded or prohibited him at all.

Then Qarun responded to these five things to which his people had alerted him, saying:

قَالَ إِنَّمَآ أُوتِيتُهُۥ عَلَىٰ عِلۡمٍ عِندِيٓۚ أَوَلَمۡ يَعۡلَمۡ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَدۡ أَهۡلَكَ مِن قَبۡلِهِۦ
مِنَ ٱلۡقُرُونِ مَنۡ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنۡهُ قُوَّةٗ وَأَكۡثَرُ جَمۡعٗاۚ وَلَا يُسۡـَٔلُ
عَن ذُنُوبِهِمُ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمُونَ ٧٨

But he answered, ‘This wealth was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess.’ Did he not know that God had destroyed many generations before him, who had greater power than him and built up greater wealth? The guilty will not be questioned about their sins [78] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 78)

But what does this response: ‘This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that I have…’ (*al-Qasas:* 78) have do to with the five things they advised him with? It is as though he was saying to them, ‘This is none of your business because the One Who gave me this wealth knows that I deserve it and was worthy of it, and that is why He trusted me with it; and I have no need of your advice’.

Or the meaning of: ‘This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that I have…’ (*al-Qasas:* 78) is, ‘I obtained it by means of my hard work, and my clever business sense’. Qarun was well known for his beautiful voice when he recited the Torah and he had also memorised it. He was also handsome and had a high level of knowledge of the Holy Book. It is strange that he could have all this knowledge, and yet say: ‘This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that I have’ (*al-Qasas:* 78), not remembering that before his time Allah had destroyed generations that were more powerful, wealthier and more numerous than him. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Did he not know that Allah had destroyed [the arrogant of] many a generation that preceded him–people who were greater than him in power and richer in what they had amassed (*jam'a*)?' (*al-Qasas:* 78) How could he have missed this despite his acquaintance with the Torah?

The meaning of 'did he not know' is: was it not part of his knowledge that 'many a generation' included people who were wealthier than him, yet Allah destroyed them; and they were whole communities, not individuals. The word *jam'a* (amassed) here could mean collecting money or it could mean that they were a large group of people.

After this, Allah says: '…But such as are lost in sin are not asked about their sins' (*al-Qasas:* 78). The incident that indicates they will not be asked is that Allah will take them suddenly, without warning. He did not say to Qarun, 'You did such-and-such and as a result I will do such-and-such to you, and I will cause the earth to swallow you along with your home'. Your deeds are known to you and the prior situations are sufficient for your punishment to take you by surprise.

For this reason, it was expected that punishment will come to him at any time. And therefore, Allah does not ask them and He does not conduct an investigation as the police do because there is no benefit in asking them, for there is no recompense for them except chastisement.

Despite his people's advice, Qarun (Korah) remained a haughty ingrate, not in the least paying any heed or even hesitating to be arrogant with others. He persisted in his arrogance, disdain of others and corruption. Allah *Glorified is He* tells his story in the Quran:

فَخَرَجَ عَلَىٰ قَوْمِهِۦ فِى زِينَتِهِۦ ۖ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَا
يَـٰلَيْتَ لَنَا مِثْلَ مَآ أُوتِىَ قَـٰرُونُ إِنَّهُۥ لَذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٧٩﴾

He went out among his people in all his pomp, and those whose aim was the life of this world said, 'If only we had been given something like what Qarun has been given: he really is a very fortunate man' [79] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 79)

Qarun (Korah) was rich and prominent in society. He was gifted with a handsome appearance and great wealth. What if a man like him appeared before his people in all his finery, in a grand procession: 'He went out among his people in all his pomp…' (*al-Qasas:* 79). As for that pomp, exegetes have said much in portraying its grandeur; he went out with a thousand slave girls, a thousand horses and so on. Many were struck with infatuation, dazzled by the lure of the pomp. They were captivated by his fortune, for they desired nothing but worldly pleasures. Allah *the Most High* describes these people, saying: '… those whose aim was the life of this world said, "If only we had been given something like what Qarun has been given: he really is a very fortunate man"' (*al-Qasas:* 79). In another verse, the Lord *the Exalted* says, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And do not gaze longingly at what We have given some of them to enjoy…' (*Ta Ha:* 131). Do not aspire to what is in the hands of others, and respect Allah's Decree concerning His creation. He has distributed provisions among people the way they are. If you feel happy for people when see blessings in their hands, the effect of these blessings will extend to you. If you look enviously at what others enjoy, you thus harm yourself first and foremost for you will be deprived of the blessings you envy. Let us imagine blessings to be a dignified lover: they will not go to those who hate them, even if hatred stems from the fact that they belong to others.

One of the attributes of a true believer is that he wishes for others what he loves to have himself. If you do not like to see others enjoying blessings, are they to blame for this? What crime have they committed? It is as though you reject Allah's Decree. When you reject and criticize the Decree of the Giver of blessings, He will certainly deny you these blessings.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Quran: 'Do not covet what Allah has given to some of you more than others' (*an-Nisa':* 32). Everyone has a role to play in life and each is gifted in the best way to fulfil that role, which makes everyone different. You may envy someone only because you do not see what you have in your hands; you may be endowed with a talent the one you envy lacks. You are gifted in your own way, but you are heedless of this. You pay too much attention to others, and that is why you do not see the treasures you have in your hand.

The Lord *the Most High* has distributed talents and provisions among His slaves on an equal basis. Before Him, we are all equal, for He neither has taken a wife nor begot a child. The total of the abilities anyone is endowed with is equal to what anyone else has been given. You may exceed me in a particular aspect while I exceed you in another. One is more intelligent;

another is physically more powerful; one has a lot of knowledge; one is more forbearing and so on.

Life needs all of us. We are complementary. Allah *Glorified is He* does not give all skills to one or some and leave the rest totally wanting in them. Everyone has a role and abilities exactly suitable for him. If you do your role well, this is sufficient. You do not need to excel in every walk of life.

Sometimes one does not benefit from his own skill and only others benefit from him. An Egyptian proverb expresses this paradox, saying, ‘The carpenter’s door is broken!’ Why does he not make a new door for himself? Perhaps it is because his own door is the only one he will not be paid for.

Therefore, if someone excels you in something, do not be resentful because his superior talent will bring you benefit. The right hand is generally more pliable and easy to use than the relatively clumsy left hand. The skill of the right hand has a useful effect that extends to the left hand, and similarly this is the case with people. Someone’s skill has a benefit that extends to those who do not have this particular skill. Therefore, do not be envious of the attainments of others, but rather be thankful for them, for they are at your service.

Furthermore, those who sought the transient pleasures of this life said: ‘… If only we had been given something like what Qarun has been given: he really is a very fortunate man’ (*al-Qasas:* 79). They considered him very lucky because they were only concerned with the life of this world and its enjoyments. As for the people of knowledge and sagacity, they had a different view and a wider perspective; they replied:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلْعِلْمَ وَيْلَكُمْ ثَوَابُ ٱللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِّمَنْ
ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا وَلَا يُلَقَّىٰهَآ إِلَّا ٱلصَّٰبِرُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

But those who were given knowledge said, ‘Alas for you!
God’s reward is better for those who believe and do good
deeds: only those who are stead- fast will attain this’ [80]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 80)

Allah *Glorified is He* will not leave those enamoured with life’s finery to sow doubts in people’s minds concerning Allah’s Decree and cause them to rebel against how He distributes provisions among His slaves. The Lord *the Most High* will not leave the people of falsehood to distort the Truth and mislead the people. A poet once said:

He Who has made the truth taste bitter
Will not leave people bereft of those who bear it [the truth].

Those who envied Qarun (Korah) cared only for the life of this world and desired nothing beyond its temporary pleasures. The other group who condemned such people's attitude are described in the Quran as: '… those who were given knowledge…' (*al-Qasas:* 80). This means that the people who desire nothing but the finery of this worldly life are shallow-minded and have no share of true knowledge. Because of this, they have fallen into the trap that the people of knowledge have evaded: they yearn too much for the enjoyments of this life, forgetting about the eternal bliss of the Hereafter.

Do not think that this life is the long time between the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and the coming of the Hour. Rather, your life is the short time between your birth and death, and it will certainly come to an end. Those of understanding are those who choose that which will last forever over that which will inevitably end. Some longed for what was in the hand of Qarun (Korah), and for this reason the people of knowledge said to them: 'Alas for you!' (*al-Qasas:* 80) Their case is quite unfortunate, indeed, for they have a superficial understanding. Woe and misery are for those who envy others for what they have and resent what Allah has decreed for His slaves. They deserve punishment for this. Allah *Glorified is He* says about those who are over-attached to the life of this world: '… but most people do not know; they only know the outer surface of this present life and are heedless of the life to come' (*ar-Rum:* 6-7). They do not know the true meaning of this life or the next, for if they knew it, they will not say such words or entertain such hopes.

The people of knowledge tried to alert the other party to the right understanding: 'Allah's Reward is better for those who believe and do good deeds…' (*al-Qasas:* 80). What the Lord *the Most High* has prepared for His righteous slaves is better than this worldly life and all its dazzling temptations. Allah's Reward is better than what Qarun (Korah) possessed. How could they crave what he possessed, whereas they criticised his actions and advised him against persisting in them? How is it that they were envious of his gains whereas they were displeased with his attitude?

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse by saying: '… only those who are steadfast will attain this' (*al-Qasas:* 80). Only the perseverant are guided to faith and righteous deeds. Only these are guided to the Truth, and therefore they devote themselves to the Hereafter and give it absolute preference over the life of this world. They are guided to be able to see the real meaning and worth of things, and are not deluded by appearances. Only those who are steadfast are guided to the Straight Path, as Allah *the Most High* says in another verse: 'And no one will be granted such goodness but only those who are steadfast in patience, none but persons of the greatest good fortune' (*Fussilat:* 35).

Patience means essentially to forbear what is apparently hard, but in essence, involves much good. This includes obedience to Divine Commands, avoidance of prohibitions and endurance of hardships. These are the three manifestations of patience.

As for the first, it consists of committing yourself to observing all that Allah enjoins on man. Such commitment weighs heavily on the soul. Allah *the Exalted* says about the Prayer (*Salat*), for example: 'This is hard indeed for anyone but the humble' (*al-Baqara:* 45). Many things can distract a person from performing prayer, and that is why one may find himself approaching it reluctantly. Let us recite what the Lord *the Most High* has said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the prayer: 'Order your people to pray, and pray steadfastly yourself…' (*Ta Ha:* 132). This implies that constancy in observing prayer is heavy on the soul. However, if you commit yourself to it and make your soul accustomed to it, you grow more attached to it. After this, it no longer remains a heavy duty but rather turns into a relief and a beloved practice that gives your soul a break from the harshness of life. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this when he said to Bilal who used to proclaim the Call to the Prayer, 'Give us relief with it (the prayer), O Bilal!'(1) Today, most of the people seem as if they say to themselves, 'Give us relief from it!'

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad and Abu Dawud*

Prophet Muhammad also said, ‘The prayer (*salat*) has been made the apple of my eye’.(1) He *peace and blessings be upon him* singled out prayers from all other acts of worship because it is repeated five times every day; it is a constant source of relief to a believer. The other tenets of Islam are not like this; some come once a year, others once in a lifetime. To conclude, constant observance of what Allah commands is the first manifestation of patience.

The second is abstention from sinful acts. This is the most obvious manifestation of patience.

If you wish to borrow money
to spend on extravagance,
spend of your soul’s patience,
in anticipation of better times.
Let your soul grant you that,
or never blame others if they deny you!

To have patience with yourself is easier than to expect others to have patience with you. If your soul is not good enough to grant you this, there is no reason why you should blame others for begrudging you what they have.

The third manifestation of patience is to bear the adverse turns of fate, even though you do not understand Allah’s Wisdom behind them. As long as fate comes from Him, the Lord and the Wise One, we should resign ourselves to it and to the fact that it is the best for us. He is your Lord, not your enemy. You are His slave and His own creation. Let us read what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘All creatures are the dependents of Allah, and the most beloved of them to Him are those who are kindest to His dependants’.(2)

To be able to bear afflictions patiently, it is sufficient to know that they come from Allah *Glorified is He*. If they are the direct outcome of your own failures, blame only yourself. If a student neglects his studies, he should know why he has failed in his exams. Another may have studied hard but have a car accident on his way to attend his exam. This is out of his control, and for that reason he should not blame himself. He should know that it is the fate Allah has decreed for him out of His Wisdom. Perhaps conceit had crept into his heart that made him forget that success comes ultimately from Allah, not because he is clever. Thus, Allah *the Most High* wills to give him this lesson to teach him that everything in the end is in His Hand and by His Will and Assistance. A poet once said:

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad, An-Nasa’i and Al-Hakim, on the authority of Anas*

(2) *Cited by Abu Na’im and Ibn Al-Jawzi*

Were it not for the help Allah sends down to all,
One's actions will be the means of his downfall!

When you do your best but success does not come, you should learn to respect Allah's Wisdom. His fate is a mercy for His creation.

We can divide afflictions into two kinds: those which involve an opponent, as in the case of assaults, murder, or the like, and those which do not involve an opponent, as in natural afflictions such as sickness or death. The Lord *the Most High* has prescribed rulings for us to deal with both. As for those which do not involve an opponent, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us, quoting Luqman's advice to his son: '…bear anything that happens to you steadfastly: that is the most resolute course to follow' (*Luqman:* 17). As for those afflictions that others cause you, Allah *the Most High* says: '…though, if a person is patient and forgives, that is truly the most resolute course to follow' (*ash-Shura:* 43). When an affliction involves an adversary, patience and forgiveness are the best policy. Enmity breeds rage and drags one into sin and revenge. Forbearance at such times is difficult and requires firm resolution. Even though this is quite lost in the translation, the emphasis laid on patience with one's adversary being the most resolute course to follow, in the second verse and which is indicated by the word 'truly', is greater than that in the verse talking about enduring hardships that involve no adversaries. This difference is clear in the original Arabic structure of the two verses.

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us the virtue of forbearance with adversaries. He says: 'Hurry towards your Lord's Forgiveness and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous… who restrain their anger and pardon people–Allah loves those who do good' (*Al-'Imran:* 134). That is, the first step is to keep your anger in check. This command acknowledges that anger exists and is a part of the natural disposition of man, but it should be restrained or channelled in the correct manner. The next step is to pardon the person who has wronged you. This means getting rid of any grudge or rage you feel towards him and forgetting their injustice, as if it never occurred. This step needs one to be really devoted to Allah in order for it to take place. This is why Allah loves those who do this; those who repay evil with good. No doubt, this is a high status that not everyone is capable of attaining. Consequently, Allah does not make it mandatory that we forgive those who have wronged us; He only recommends this behaviour and encourages us to do it. If you are unable to pardon and therefore you take only the first step–that of restraining your anger from committing oppression–there is no harm with this. Allah *Glorified is He* permits one to seek retribution for the injustices done to him. However, to keep your anger in check and also forgive, this raises you to the status of a real devotee to Allah, and let it be sufficient for you that you will be one of those Allah loves.

Let it be sufficient for you that the one who does an injustice to you thus causes you to earn the Lord’s Aid and Protection. He deserves a reward for that! A man of knowledge once said, ‘Should I not do good to the one who made Allah on my side?’ We have previously given the example of a child who has bullied his brother. The father must turn with affection to the wronged child, which should make the bully regret his conduct that has earned his brother their father’s support and protection. Although Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond comparison, we can say that Allah, likewise, is on the side of His wronged slave until he restores his right from his oppressor.

Next, the punishment came upon Qarun (Korah):

فَخَسَفْنَا بِهِۦ وَبِدَارِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ فَمَا كَانَ لَهُۥ مِن فِئَةٍ
يَنصُرُونَهُۥ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُنتَصِرِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

We caused the earth to swallow him and his home:
he had no one to help him against God, nor could he
defend himself [81] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 81)

The earth swallowed Qarun (Korah) along with his house, which contained all his treasures and everything he owned. His wealth did not avail him at all. He did not have anyone to protect him, nor could he protect himself. Who could ward off the Lord's Punishment when it comes upon him?

This poses a question: what, then, was the attitude of those who were infatuated by his pomp and splendour? The Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَصْبَحَ ٱلَّذِينَ تَمَنَّوْا۟ مَكَانَهُۥ بِٱلْأَمْسِ يَقُولُونَ وَيْكَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ
مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَقْدِرُ ۖ لَوْلَآ أَن مَّنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا لَخَسَفَ بِنَا ۖ وَيْكَأَنَّهُۥ لَا يُفْلِحُ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

The next day, those who had, the day before, wished to be in his place exclaimed, 'Alas [for you, Qarun]! It is God alone who gives what He will, abundantly or sparingly, to whichever He will of His creatures: if God had not been gracious to us, He would have caused the earth to swallow us too.' Alas indeed! Those who deny the truth will never prosper[82]

(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 82)

The day before, they had said: '… If only we had been given something like what Qarun has been given...'" (*al-Qasas:* 79). However, after they witnessed the punishment that deservedly befell him from Allah–the scourge that cannot be held back from the disbelievers–they returned to their senses and said: 'Alas [for you, Qarun]! It is Allah alone who gives what He wills, abundantly or sparingly, to whoever He wills of His creatures…' (*al-Qasas:* 82).

The Arabic word *wayy* (translated in the verse as 'alas') denotes regret. It can also be used to express surprise or wonder. They regretted coveting Qarun's wealth when they saw the earth swallow him up along with his house. They blamed themselves, for they saw the Wisdom of Allah behind the manner He provides sustenance to His creatures. 'It is Allah alone who gives what He wills, abundantly or sparingly, to whoever He wills of His creatures…' (*al-Qasas:* 82).

Abundant sustenance is not a proof that Allah is pleased with His slave, nor is scant sustenance a proof of the opposite. Allah gave abundant provisions to Qarun (Korah) only to drag him to his downfall. When his arrogance reached a peak, Allah punished him with His Might and Power. The chapter of *al-Fajr* deals with this notion. The Lord *the Most High* says: '[The nature of] man is that when his Lord tries him, giving him honour and blessings, he says, “My Lord has honoured me”, but when he tries him, restricting his provision, he says, “My Lord has humiliated me”’ (*al-Fajr:* 15-16). These verses answer both misconceptions. How can wealth be a proof that Allah is pleased with His slave, whereas the latter does not fulfil his duty to the Giver of this wealth? Allah explains: ‘No indeed! You [people] do not honour the orphans, and you do not urge one another to feed the poor. And you consume inheritance greedily, and you love wealth with inordinate love’ (*al-Fajr:* 17-20). What honour can there be in wealth that brings ignominy on its owner? Wealth is a test, a trial, and thus what honour does it bring on its owner if he fails in the test? In such a case, it will be better for him to be deprived of this wealth, which will certainly be better for him–not to disobey Allah using it! Wealth will be, in such a case, like a weapon in the hands of one who does not know how to use it: he might even kill himself with it.

And they said: ‘If Allah had not been gracious to us, He will have caused the earth to swallow us too…’ (*al-Qasas:* 82). The day before, they longed to be in Qarun’s position, but then they admitted that the Lord *the Most High* had been gracious to them when he saved them from that destiny. After that, they said: ‘Alas indeed! Those who deny the Truth will never prosper’ (*al-Qasas:* 82). The disbelievers will never attain success in the Hereafter.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states a general law:

تِلۡكَ ٱلدَّارُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةُ نَجۡعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوّٗا
فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا فَسَادٗاۚ وَٱلۡعَٰقِبَةُ لِلۡمُتَّقِينَ ٨٣

We grant the Home in the Hereafter to those who do not seek superiority on earth or spread corruption: the happy ending is awarded to those who are mindful of God [83]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 83)

One will have the right to claim superiority over others if whatever he possesses were originally his. However, since everything originally comes from Allah, none of us should exalt himself above any other. He Who has granted you power can strip you of it and leave you ill and weak. He Who has given you wealth can cause you to turn poor. Keep arrogance in check, then, and humble yourself before Him. None of the gifts you possess are intrinsically yours. Everything belongs to *the Almighty* Creator. Moreover, this world is a world of vicissitudes. What you take pride in today may well go to someone else tomorrow, and in such a case will it please you if anyone exercised superiority over you for an advantage they have and you do not have? Hence, spare others the pain too. We are all dependent on Allah *the Most High*. Can you, for example, hold yourself in the air without falling? No, because He has not given you this ability. As long as this is the case, be careful not to exalt yourself above others. You may be in their place one day. One Who belittles others does so because he cannot identify the secret talents Allah has endowed them, and this is a defect, not an advantage over others. If you reflect on the matter, you will find that everyone has some quality that you do not have. Allah *Glorified is He* has no child or wife; all of us are equal before Him. No one is favoured above another except on the basis of devotion to Him. He has distributed talents among us equally. Why, then, should anyone exalt himself above others? Arrogance is the child of ignorance of the Lord’s Majesty. He who is mindful of Allah is humble. He shrinks at the thought of His Greatness and will therefore be ashamed to hold himself above any of His creatures.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us how to respect others and how to be humble in front of them. When ‘Adey ibn Hatim went to him, the Prophet gave him his seat. He thus laid the foundation for equality and respect. ‘Adey said to him, ‘I testify that you do not seek any high rank on the earth, and I testify that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’, and he embraced Islam.

It is strange what we see nowadays at our mosques, which are the houses of Allah and the first places where this equality should exist. When an important person enters the mosque, someone spreads out a rug for him to pray on even though the mosque is already carpeted and clean. Some people reject to be treated with such a distinction, but others are happy with it, and these are the ones who seek to be exalted above others. Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins us to establish justice and equality for our hearts to be joined and for no rancour to creep into them. This is how peaceful coexistence is possible.

The Lord *the Most High* concludes the verse by saying: '… the happy ending is awarded to those who are mindful of Allah' (*al-Qasas:* 83). Eternal bliss is only for those who fulfil their duty to Him.

Allah *the Exalted* then says in the following verse:

مَن جَآءَ بِٱلۡحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُۥ خَيۡرٞ مِّنۡهَاۖ وَمَن جَآءَ بِٱلسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجۡزَى
ٱلَّذِينَ عَمِلُواْ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ إِلَّا مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٨٤

Whoever comes before God with a good deed will receive a better reward; whoever comes with an evil deed will be punished only for what he has done [84] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 84)

We have previously pointed out that the Arabic word *khayr* can be used to mean 'good' which is the opposite of *sharr* (evil), as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Whoever has done an atom's-weight of good (*khayr*) will see it, but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil (*sharr*) will see that' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8).

It can also be used to mean 'better'. For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A strong believer is *khayr* (better) and more beloved to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in both'.(1)

Allah says: 'Whoever comes before Allah with a good deed will receive a better (*khayr*) reward…' (*al-Qasas:* 84). A reward will be given him as a result of the good he has done. Whoever does a good deed will receive from Allah that which is finer and better, for good deeds are rewarded tenfold. Allah illustrates this Truth through the following parable: 'Those who spend their wealth in the Cause of Allah are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each [ear] bearing a hundred grains. Allah gives multiple increases to whoever He wishes: He is Limitless and All Knowing' (*al-Baqara:* 261).

So the verse we are reflecting on states a fundamental fact about faith: that is, the obedient will be rewarded and the disobedient will be punished.

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(1) *Cited by Muslim, Ahmad and Ibn Majah, on the authority of Abu Hurayrah*

When you say someone has come with something, it probably gives the impression that he has created something that did not exist. However, when we do good deeds, we are only employing the power to do good that the Lord *the Most High* has granted us. It only entails arousing the good Allah has created within us. Also, 'come with a good deed' may refer to the fact that the obedient will bring this good deed before Allah *Glorified is He* to be rewarded for it. When one directs his intention to Allah in all that he does, he inevitably reaps the fruit of his devotion. This poses a question: are the rewards for good deeds restricted only to the Hereafter, or is the purpose of religion to bring happiness both in this life and the next? The wisdom behind sending down Divine Guidance is to set our lives right and therefore attain happiness now and in the Afterlife. Good deeds must have an effect in this world, too, but the ultimate reward will be in the Hereafter.

This verse comes after the mention of the story of Qarun. His people advised him: '… do good to others as Allah has done good to you…' (*al-Qasas:* 77). But what is the criteria that make a deed good or otherwise? Is it the extent to which a deed makes one pleased or otherwise? Certainly not; sometimes people are pleased with things that harm them and dislike things that are good for them. What are the criteria, then? The Creator of all things is the One Who can show us right from wrong. He has created all humankind and knows what is best for them. His knowledge encompasses all creatures and all deeds, and the effects and outcomes that anything is likely to entail. We have both good and evil in our natural disposition, and we are endowed with the ability and choice to do right or wrong; sometimes we get confused and fail to determine what should be done and what should be avoided. A good deed is what the Divine Law declares to be good, not what anyone may deem good. We see many people enjoying harmful foods only because they taste good, and refraining from healthy food thinking that it is tasteless. Allah says: '… eat it with enjoyment and with a wholesome result' (*an-Nisa':* 4) for what is enjoyable is not necessarily wholesome.

The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Whoever comes before Allah with a good deed will receive a better reward…' (*al-Qasas:* 84). What Allah gives in return for a good deed is far greater than the deed itself. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… whoever comes with an evil deed will be punished only for what he has done' (*al-Qasas:* 84). Clearly, recompense in the case of a good deed is greater, yet in the case of a misdeed, recompense is just equal to the sin committed. The Lord *the Most High* bestows His Mercy on His slaves, even the disobedient, and that is why a good deed is multiplied but a bad deed is not. A sinner will be requited only in proportion to his sin. Let us recite these verses from the chapter of *an-Naba'*: 'For those who were aware of Allah there is a supreme achievement: private gardens, vineyards, well-matched companions and an overflowing cup. There they will hear no vanity or lies: a reward from your Lord, a fitting gift (*hisab*)' (*an-Naba':* 31-36). The word *hesab* (here rendered as 'fitting') does not mean that their recompense will be commensurate with their deeds. Rather, it means that they will be given what is sufficient and adequate for all their needs; their reward will be so ample that they will wish for nothing more. That is, *hesab* here refers to 'sufficiency', as when we say '*hasbi Allah'* which means 'Allah is Sufficient for me (as a protector)'. In the same chapter, Allah says about the evildoers that theirs will be: 'A fitting recompense [for them]' (*an-Naba':* 26). That is, commensurate to their deeds. This means that our Lord treats us with generosity, not justice, in order to encourage us to do good deeds. When you do a good deed that extends to others, you are rewarded for everyone who benefits from this deed. It is only one deed, yet the reward is multiplied several times, out of His Mercy and Bounty *Glorified is He*.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِى فَرَضَ عَلَيْكَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ لَرَآدُّكَ إِلَىٰ مَعَادٍ ۚ قُل رَّبِّىٓ
أَعْلَمُ مَن جَآءَ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ وَمَنْ هُوَ فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٨٥﴾

He who has made the Quran binding on you [Prophet] will
bring you back home. So say, 'My Lord knows best who has
brought true guidance and who is blatantly astray' [85]
(The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 85)

The Arabic word *farada* (made binding) originally denotes cutting. The reason this word is used to mean 'binding' or 'obligation' is that when you cut something, you change it from its natural shape, just as the Quran changes the soul, cutting off its natural cravings and base desires from it and directing it to Allah's Guidance. Allah *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of the chapter of *an-Nur:* 'This is a chapter we have sent down and made obligatory (*faradnaha*)…' (*an-Nur:* 1). The Quran cuts off base desires from the soul and directs it to what its Creator wants from it. This disciplines the human soul which usually instigates evil, looks to immediate pleasures, and hardly heeds outcomes.

The Quran represents the Guidance of Allah, composed of commands and prohibitions which are meant to regulate life by outlining the limits of the human soul and its actions. Allah *Glorified is He* has created us with the ability and freewill to do good or evil. There is a difference between the words '*ibad* and *'abid;* both mean 'slaves' yet with lightly different connotations. All human beings, both the believers and disbelievers, are *'abid* of Allah. Even though the disbelievers refuse to obey Allah, they are still subservient to Him and subject to His Will and Control. Allah *the Most High* has given us the choice to obey or disobey. Still, He has complete control over us in other things where we have no choice whatsoever. A person of sound understanding will submit to Allah with regard to the realms in which he has freewill. He should let his choice comply with what his Lord commands. He should submit his will to his Lord's Will and be content to be guided by Allah in all things. Those who make this decision are *'ibad* of Allah. This word describes those of Allah's slaves who have chosen to obey Him. In this sense, all slaves of Allah will be *'ibad* in the Hereafter because none will have the freewill to choose to disobey Him. About that Day, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists' (*Ghafir:* 16).

The revelation of the Quran is called *fard* ('an obligation' or 'binding') because it ordains moral responsibilities, which are usually difficult for the soul. Consider what Allah says about the prayer (*salat*), the most essential act of worship in Islam: 'This is hard indeed for anyone but the humble' (*al-Baqara:* 45). Only the humble understand the status of the prayer, they do not find it a heavy duty. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Bilal, 'Relieve us with it [the Prayer], O Bilal!'(1) He also said, ‘Prayer has been made the coolness of my eye’.(1) The Prophet loved it and yearned for it until it became the ultimate source of his rest and repose.

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad and Abu Dawud*

We see that moral responsibilities seem difficult at first, and consequently they require the fortitude of faith to fulfil them. One will not bear the difficulty of doing something unless he trusts it will yield ample fruit. Faith is what motivates one to struggle for the Hereafter. For example, the Lord *the Most High* says about war: ‘Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 216). Of course the soul dislikes it, but if you remember the reward for it and that it will lead to either victory or martyrdom, you will yearn for it and be quick to heed its call. Before the Battle of Badr, one of the Companions heard what the reward of the martyr will be. He said, ‘Is the only thing between me and paradise that I fight [in the battle] and be martyred?!’ He was chewing a date at that time, but he immediately threw it down and rushed to the battlefield.(2)

Thus, the Lord *Glorified is He* promises ample rewards to urge the soul of the believer to eagerly do righteous good deeds. Some devote themselves very much to Him, fully understanding the reward awaiting them, to the extent that worship has grown to be almost a desire, a longing which they crave! One of the pious men once said, ‘I fear that Allah will not reward me for my good deeds!’ Asked why, he replied, ‘They have grown to be almost a desire!’ That is, he yearned for them as if they were effortless indulgences, just as sinners yearn for sins! When faith reaches such a state of firmness, it makes one a true slave of Allah who devotes himself to Him and trusts in His reward. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to stand in prayer throughout the night until his feet swelled [from standing so long]. When 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* asked him, ‘Has Allah not forgiven you your sins, past and future [why do you exert yourself so much in voluntary worship]?’ Prophet Muhammad replied, ‘Should I not then be a grateful slave?’(3)

Then Allah *the Exalted* addressing Prophet Muhammad, says: ‘…will bring you back home…’ (*al-Qasas:* 85). This is a promise of reward, of returning to his beloved Mecca even though his people dispelled him from it.

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad, An-Nasa’i and Al-Hakim, on the authority of Anas*

(2) *Cited by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah*

(3) *Cited by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

This verse was revealed in connection with the oppression that the Meccan idolaters inflicted on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The oppression was so great that he was forced to go to Taif to seek help. The people there were no less vicious than the Meccans, and therefore the Messenger of Allah found no help there and returned home broken and saddened. He found no one to secure him a safe return to Mecca, until finally Mut'im ibn 'Adey gave him his protection. That was a hard time when Prophet Muhammad, despite his glorious rank, found no one to help him or give him protection. The Companions had no power or influence at that time; in fact, they were encountering many difficulties in the Cause of Allah. The disbelievers of Quraysh had blockaded them in the Valley of Abu Taleb and had imposed on them a complete embargo, economically and socially. Muslims were denied access to food and water. They were forbidden from trading with their boycotters or establishing marriage relationships with them. That remained the case until they were forced to eat any scraps of food they could find and leaves from the trees.

Such were the reasons that forced Muslims to emigrate from Mecca. Emigration should be either to a place of safety or a place of faith. The first emigration was to a place of safety. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered his companions to move to Abyssinia where, the Messenger of Allah explained that there was a king who allowed none to be oppressed:(1) namely, King Negus of Abyssinia. That was proved right, for when Quraysh sent someone after them to speak to King Negus to send them back to Mecca, he refused to give them up and allow Quraysh to have their way with them, even though the gifts Quraysh sent him were grand and the temptation must have been great. This shows the greatness of Prophet Muhammad's intellect and his knowledge of the surrounding regions. He chose the place that will be most suitable to which his companions to emigrate. His choosing the king of Abyssinia could only have come through Divine Inspiration, or due to his shrewdness and tact, although he was an unlettered man who lived in an unlettered community. If the delegation of Quraysh had not gone to Abyssinia to seek out the Muslim emigrants, we will not have had evidence for the truth of what the Messenger of Allah said about its king.

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(1) *Cited by Ibn Hisham in his Biography of Prophet Muhammad*

King Negus was just and good to the Muslims who migrated to his country to seek his assistance and protection. Allah *Glorified is He* rewarded him by guiding him to the true religion. He embraced Islam, and Prophet Muhammad asked him to intermediate between him and Umm Habiba, whom the Prophet wanted to marry. Umm Habiba bint Abu Sufyan, Allah be pleased with her, was among the Muslim migrants to Abyssinia. She fled with her husband from Quraysh, but he converted to Christianity there. Keen to remain true to her faith, she left him. After that, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* married her.

These events illustrate two things. First, they illustrate the extent to which the believers were subject to injury and persecution from the disbelievers. Second, they also tell us to what extent a husband should be obeyed. Umm Habiba chose to immigrate with her husband, not solely out of love for him, but because she wanted to save her religion and remain steadfast in it. Hence, when he reverted to Christianity, she did not hesitate to leave him, upon which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proposed to her.

When King Negus died, Prophet Muhammad observed the Islamic funeral prayer and implored Allah's Mercy for him. This was the first emigration of Muslims. They immigrated to a place of safety, only to save their religion.

The second immigration was to a place of faith, Medina. After the first and second pledges of 'Aqaba, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* found people who agreed to extend aid to him and share the burden of the mission. The *Ansar* (the Helpers; Medinan Muslims) made great sacrifices for the sake of the faith, the like of which has never been witnessed in human history. A man may share his house with a dear friend, lend him his car, money or any of his material possessions, but not his wife! A man is most jealous when it comes to his wife(s). He does not allow any other man to even look at her. The *Ansar*, however, looked at things from quite a different perspective. They shared everything they had with their emigrant brothers. They sympathized with the fact that they had left their families and their homes, and that they were strangers and they were, naturally, in need of female companionship. A man of the *Ansar* used to tell his bother emigrant to look at his wives for him to divorce whoever his brother emigrant liked of them for his brother to marry her! Faith was so firm in their hearts that they used to sacrifice every material gain for the cause of supporting their mission. They did not withhold anything from their fellow Muslims on whose shoulders was the responsibility of supporting Islam. They made such unprecedented sacrifices that are not even likely to be witnessed at any time after that.

Then came Allah’s Command to Prophet Muhammad to also immigrate to Medina. He left in secret, but others, like ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* did not hide their departure. Upon leaving Mecca, ‘Umar stood in public and challenged the disbelievers out loud, ‘Whoever wants his mother to mourn him, his children to be orphaned, and his wife to be widowed, let him follow me beyond this valley!’ Some might consider the secrecy of Prophet Muhammad’s departure as an adequate reason to attack him. However, they do this on flimsy grounds. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was keen on providing an example for everyone to follow. Had he left Mecca in public, he will have made it obligatory for all Muslims to do the same, but what about those of them who were weak? Thus, he spared the weak the trouble and meanwhile left the strong to choose to leave secretly or publicly. By leaving secretly, he left no room for the weak to feel ashamed of leaving secretly as well. Furthermore, it is true that Prophet Muhammad left Mecca secretly, yet he passed in front of the assassins who lied in wait to kill him, sprinkling their faces with dust and saying, ‘May these faces be disfigured!’(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was guaranteed Divine Assistance, yet he was still keen on doing his part. He took the safest way to Medina, for had he taken the usual route, the Qurayshites will have caught him. They knew he was going to emigrate from Mecca after the pledge of ‘Aqaba that he had concluded with the *Ansar* (Helpers; Medinan Muslims), and consequently they were lying in wait for him on his way to Medina. They sent spies to look for him and announced a fine reward for anyone who could bring him *peace and blessings be upon him* back to them. Anyone who reflects on the events of the Emigration will find that it was exactly planned to cover all possibilities. The Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to teach us, through the conduct of Prophet Muhammad, that we should not ignore the means claiming that the Lord *the Most High* will do everything for us. Rather, we should make our plans, exhaust the possible means, and meanwhile put our trust in the Lord, for success comes only from Him.

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(1) *Cited by Ahmad, Muslim and Ad-Darimi*

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left Mecca, which was his home and the most beloved place to his heart, he said, ‘O Allah, You have made me leave the most beloved place to me, so take me to the most beloved place to You’.(1) Mecca was the dearest place to Prophet Muhammad and Medina was the dearest to Allah. As the Messenger of Allah approached Medina, his heart yearned for Mecca, and this is why Allah *Glorified is He* consoled him with these words: ‘He who has made the Quran binding on you [O Prophet Muhammad] will bring you back home…’ (*al-Qasas:* 85). The One Who charged you with the responsibility to fulfil the hardships of moral obligations and carry the burden of the Message will surely allow you to return home in victory. The eventual return of Prophet Muhammad to his home was very similar to the return of Prophet Musa (Moses) to his mother, for Allah said to her: ‘… We shall return him to you…’ (*al-Qasas:* 85), not only return him, but also ‘… and make him a Messenger’ (*al-Qasas:* 7). Allah promised her that her child will surely return to her, and return as a victorious Messenger as well. Just as Allah fulfilled His promise in returning Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* He fulfilled His promise of returning Prophet Muhammad victoriously to his beloved home, Mecca.

The Arabic word here which is translated as ‘home’ in the verse we are discussing is *ma‘ad,* which means ‘a place of return’. It is different from the word *maw‘id* which means ‘appointment’. It was a consolation from the Lord of the worlds that He will certainly return Prophet Muhammad to the place he yearned for and to which his heart was attached. The word *ma’ad* may also be understood to mean ‘return to a renewed life’, that is, a return to the Lord, to the Hereafter, as the Lord *the Most High* says in another verse: ‘Whether We show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned’ (*Ghafir:* 77). Both meanings may be intended simultaneously in the verse under discussion.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Hakim on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So say, “My Lord knows best who has brought true guidance and who is blatantly astray”’ (*al-Qasas:* 85). Allah means here to teach Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to argue with the disbelievers in a noble, respectful manner. The disbelievers accused the believers of being apostates who forsook the religion of their forefathers which they considered to be true, and embraced, as they thought, a false religion. Here Allah teaches His Prophet how to respond to them without being harsh or provocative. Minds need to be reasoned and debated with, not insulted or provoked, as Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Argue with them in the most courteous way…’ (*an-Nahl:* 125). Harsh argument only makes your opponent more entrenched in his obstinacy, while polite reasoning attracts the heart and causes the mind to incline to what you are saying. Consequently, Prophet Muhammad replied as his Lord taught him: ‘My Lord knows best who has brought true guidance and who is blatantly astray’ (*al-Qasas:* 85). Allah knows who of the two parties are adherents to the Truth and who have strayed in plain falsehood.

After that, Allah *the Most High* gives Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a proof, drawn from his own experience of life, for the Prophet to be sure that his Lord was by his side and will never forsake him. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure Prophet Muhammad that He will keep His promise to him. Could it be that Allah has chosen him to bear the Message only to forsake him after that?! The Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَا كُنتَ تَرْجُوٓا۟ أَن يُلْقَىٰٓ إِلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبُ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً
مِّن رَّبِّكَ ۖ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ ظَهِيرًا لِّلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

You yourself could not have expected the Scripture to be sent to you; it came only as a mercy from your Lord. So give no help to the disbelievers [86] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 86)

If you are amazed, Prophet Muhammad, or doubtful that We shall return you to your home, because the disbelievers were lying in wait for you there, consider how the Message first came to you. Did you ever think or expect that you will be a Messenger of Allah? It never crossed your mind, yet Allah *Glorified is He* gave it to you and chose you for it. How would Allah Who gave you the Message, when you never expected it, deny you that which you love and yearn for? This verse confirms the truth of the phrase: '… will bring you back home…' (*al-Qasas:* 85). The Lord *the Most High* refers to the fact that Prophet Muhammad did not expect to receive the Message in another verse, saying: 'so We have revealed a spirit to you [O Prophet Muhammad] by Our Command: you knew neither the Scripture nor the faith, but We made it [the Quran] a light, guiding with it whoever We will of Our slaves…' (*ash-Shura:* 52). Putting it simply, the One who gave you the Message is in no way incapable of granting you what you seek. Exalted is He above every imperfection! Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not expect to be given the Book, but '… it came only as a Mercy from your Lord…' (*al-Qasas:* 86). It means: you did not hope that this Book will come to you, yet, We gave it to you; We did not do this except as a Mercy to you from your Lord.

When you called them to the Truth that had come to you from your Lord, the disbelievers opposed you and expelled you, therefore: '... give no help to the disbelievers' (*al-Qasas:* 86). The disbelievers had proposed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should worship their gods for one year, and then they will worship his God for one year!(1) Allah sent down this verse to warn Prophet Muhammad not to help them persist in their misguidance or to concede to their falsehood in any way.

In compliance with his Lord's Command, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never assisted any transgressor, even if he was one of his followers. We have previously mentioned the occasion on which the following verse was revealed: 'We have sent down the Scripture to you [O Prophet Muhammad] with the Truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray their trust' (*an-Nisa':* 105). A Muslim man from Medina, Tu'ma ibn Ubayriq, stole a suit of armour and accused a Jew, Zayd ibn Samin, of doing it. When the shield was found at the house of the Jew, its owner, Qutada ibn Nu'man, accused the Jew of stealing it. When the truth of what had happened was found out, Tu‘ma brought his family to intercede with Prophet Muhammad for him to rule against the Jew. The Prophet was reluctant to let the Jew win over the Muslim, especially as Islam was still new and he feared that incident will present Islam in a mistaken light. But on that occasion, this verse was revealed: ‘We have sent down the Scripture to you [O Prophet Muhammad] with the Truth so that you can judge between people…’, that is, all people, believers and disbelievers: ‘… in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray their trust’ (*an-Nisa’:* 105). Allah commanded Prophet Muhammad never to argue on their behalf or resolve any matter affected by any bias for them. In the verse that follows it, Allah says, addressing Prophet Muhammad: ‘Ask Allah for forgiveness: He is Most Forgiving and Merciful’ (*an-Nisa’:* 106). Allah *Glorified is He* commands His Prophet to implore His Forgiveness for the thoughts he had concerning that matter.

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(1) *Cited by As-Suyuti on the authority of Ibn Abbas*

Some verses of the Quran appear at first glance to be stern with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as: ‘If [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us, We will certainly have seized his right hand and cut off the artery of his heart’ (*al-Haqqa:* 44-46). All discourse of this nature found in the Quran is not actually meant to be severe against Prophet Muhammad. Rather, the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to attract the attention of all Muslims that if such admonition is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself, then how about you? For example, you tell your own child that you will inflict a certain punishment on him if he messed up the house only to send indirect admonition to your clumsy servant, as the saying goes, ‘It is you I mean, so listen well, O neighbour!’ A pious man once said:

If you find a warning in the Glorious Quran
Addressed to the Prophet, the noblest man,
Then be wise and heed the implied messages:
‘It is you I mean, so listen well, My slaves!’

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَا يَصُدُّنَّكَ عَنْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أُنزِلَتْ إِلَيْكَ ۖ
وَٱدْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

Do not let them turn you away from God's revelations after they have been revealed to you. Call people to your Lord. Never become one of those who ascribe partners to God [87] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 87)

That is, do not let the idolaters dissuade you from delivering the Message of your Lord and reciting His Revelations to people. Allah's Words: 'Never become one of those who ascribe partners to Allah' is also an example of, 'It is you I mean, so listen well, O neighbour'. Prophet Muhammad was as far from polytheism as he could be; clearly, the warning is addressed to us.

The Lord *the Most High* concludes the chapter of *al-Qasas* with the verse:

وَلَا تَدْعُ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ ۘ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ كُلُّ شَىْءٍ هَالِكٌ
إِلَّا وَجْهَهُۥ ۚ لَهُ ٱلْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

Do not call out to any other god beside God, for there is no god but Him. Everything will perish except His Face. His is the Judgement and to Him you shall all be brought back [88] (The Quran, *al-Qasas:* 88)

Here is another instance where Allah addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a message and a warning actually meant for us. The Messenger of Allah will never have even thought of ascribing divinity to any but Allah, *Exalted is He*. No deity is worthy of worship except Allah, the One True God.

If there were any other deities besides Allah *Glorified is He* they would have opposed Him and confronted His will. Allah says, 'Say (O Muhammad), 'If there were (other) deities with Him (as they claim), surely, they would strive to find a way to Him (Allah) who Owns the Throne.' (*al-Isra':* 42) If such deities existed, they would have rushed to seize the Lordship from Allah or they would have drawn themselves nearer to Him *Glorified is He* to seize more power.

‘Everything is bound to be perished, except His (Eternal) Self (*wajhahu*)’. The Arabic word used here is *wajh* (face). In the Arabic language, the word face is used to assign the first attribute encountered in a person. We must describe Allah *Glorified is He* with the attributes that He uses to describe Himself, but without overlooking the rule that Allah had mentioned in another verse: ‘There is nothing like Him’ (*al-Qasas:* 88). So, Allah *Glorified is He* has a face, but it is not like the faces of His creation. The same is true in the case of the all the other attributes that Allah ascribes to Himself. The words that Allah *Glorified is He* uses are only lexically analogous of the attributes He created in His creatures, as Allah’s Existence transcends His creation’s existence.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘everything (*kulu shay`*) is bound to be perished.’ They say that the word *shay’* (thing) is the genus of all genera. This means that every object that has an existence is a ‘thing’, however small or insignificant it might be.

Some scholars have discussed whether Allah *Glorified is He* can be named a *shay`* (thing) because He exists. They said that the origin of the word *shay`* is the verb *shaa`a*’ which means ‘willed’. So, a *shay’* (thing) is that which was willed by someone to come into existence. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be named a *shay`* because no one preceded Allah’s Existence, but rather, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Essential Existence.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘…and there is not a single thing but extols His Limitless Glory and Praise’ (*al-Isra’:* 44). This means that every existing thing that had not previously existed praises Allah *Glorified is He*. Some people say that this mention of glorification and praise is merely a figure of speech. These people say that inanimate objects do not praise Allah *Glorified is He* with actual articulations of praise, but their existence is only an indication of the Glory of their Creator. However, Allah *Glorified is He* says in this same verse: ‘…but you (O men) fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him’ (*al-Isra’:* 44). This indicates that their glorifications are real articulations of praise. Therefore, everything that exists glorifies Allah *Glorified is He* with its own language, according to its nature.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* confirmed that birds have a distinct method of speech and that the mountains glorify Him in their own right. You would be able to recognise their extolments of Allah *Glorified is He* if you had an understanding of their languages. However, since we still do not grasp the languages of other human beings fully, we are indeed further away from understanding the languages of stones and trees. If another human who speaks a language foreign to you is glorifying Allah, you would not be able to understand that extolment, even though that language is using the same methods of articulation and similar sounds as your language.

People report one of the Prophetic miracles by saying that several pebbles glorified Allah while being in Prophet Muhammad's blessed hand. However, the correct way of reporting that miracle is to say that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the stones glorifying Allah when he was near them, simply because these stones glorify Allah at all times. Another example of such miracles was the way a tree trunk yearned to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during his sermon.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and (consider how) your Lord has inspired the bees' (*an-Nahl:* 68). Allah also says concerning the earth: 'As your Lord will have inspired it (the earth) to do' (*az-Zalzala:* 5). He also confirmed that ants have a speech of their own and that the hoopoe spoke to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Therefore, every object in creation has a language by which it understands its own kind. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Each (of them) knows indeed how to pray unto Him and to glorify Him; and Allah has full knowledge of all that they do' (*an-Nur:* 41). Subsequently, by Allah's will, He may allow some of His creatures to understand the language of other creatures or objects.

As for the meaning of the words: '…bound to be perished' (*al-Qasas:* 88), some people think that cessation and expiry only applies to those things which have a soul, like humans and animals. Allah says, 'That he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth' (*al-Anfal:* 42). Perishing is the opposite of being alive, and to our minds, animate objects perish when the souls depart their bodies. However, we must always be reminded that life has a broader meaning than that, and every perishable object has its own form of life, even if we do not perceive it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…except His (Eternal) Self (*wajhahu*)' (*al-Qasas:* 88). The words, 'Eternal Self', refer to Allah, Himself *Glorified is He*. Allah did not use the words, 'Everything is bound to perish except Him' because He *Glorified is He* is not a 'thing' (*shay`*), as we previously mentioned. The word *wajh* here has another meaning, as we say in Arabic, 'I did that good deed for the sake of Allah (*le-wajh-illah*)'. This means that the good deed was performed with Allah *Glorified is He* in mind. Therefore, the meaning of this verse is that everything will perish except that which was done for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He*. These righteous deeds will never perish because they will harvest ample rewards in this world and in the hereafter.

Then, Allah says, 'With Him rests all judgment; and unto Him shall you all be brought back' (*al-Qasas:* 88). This is the judgment of Allah *Glorified is He* in the hereafter, when He will say, 'With whom does Sovereignty rest on this Day?' (*Ghafir:* 16) Why did Allah only refer to this sovereignty on the Day of Judgement, when in fact, He possesses the ultimate Sovereignty in this world and the Day of Judgment? Scholars say that in this world, Allah *Glorified is He* granted some sovereignty to some of His creatures, as He says about Nimrod: '…because Allah had granted him kingship' (*al-Baqara:* 258), and: '(You Allah) grant dominion unto whom You will and take away dominion from whom You will' (*Al-'Imran:* 26).

Therefore, the Ultimate Sovereignty belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* and He grants some sovereignty to His creatures in this world for material means. However, in the Hereafter, sovereignty will be removed from everyone except Him. Human beings will even lose control over their limbs, as the limbs testify against them as to what they did in their worldly lives. If you want to recognize the truth of this concept, even in this world, consider all the matters of fate, like illness and death that inflict human beings, while they are completely helpless in refusing them.

Then Allah says, '…and unto Him shall you all be brought back (*turja`oon*)' (*al-Qasas:* 88). They will be called to account in the Hereafter, for Allah *Glorified is He* did not create us in vain and did not disregard us. Rather, we will surely return to Him and made responsible for what we have done. Therefore, we must respect this return to Allah *Glorified is He* and revere what He has demanded from us in this world.

The passive verb *turja`oon* (you shall be brought back) is found many times in the Quran. It is used in reference to the disbelievers who disobey Allah *Glorified is He*. These words inform these disbelievers that they shall be returned to Him, without their consent, to be punished for their sins. If they refused Allah *Glorified is He* in this world, they cannot refuse His commands in the hereafter. Other verses use the verb in the active form: *tarji`oon* (you shall return). In this form, it refers to the believers who yearn for their reward in the Hereafter and are therefore rushing to accept it.

the chapter of

al-'Ankabut

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-'Ankabut* (1) (The Spider):

الٓمٓ ﴿١﴾

***Alif Lam Mim* [1] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 1)**

We have already mentioned the concept of these distinct letters that begin some chapters of the Quran. Every time this phenomenon was repeated in the verses we have studied so far, we mentioned the different concepts upon which these letters can be understood. Since Allah *Glorified is He* has repeated them in many chapters, we must also repeat our discussion of their manifest connotation in the start of certain Quranic chapters

We previously said that, lexically, the Noble Quranic verses and chapters are based on the foundation of continuation and not interruption. Consider Allah's words: '(They are) two (gardens) of the deepest green. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? In (each of) these two (gardens) will two springs gush forth. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 64-67) Allah did not stop at the verse: 'Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you *tukadhiban-e* (disavow)?', but rather, continued the concept: ‘In (each of) these two (gardens) will two springs gush forth’ (*ar-Rahman:* 66). He uses the *kasra* (denoted by the *e*) at the end of the word *tukadhiban*, and did not end the word *tukadhiban* with a *sukoon*. Therefore, it is clear that each Quranic verse is continued into the following verse without separation. For this reason, during Quranic recitation, there is no obligatory pause between the verses. A person may only stop between the verses to draw their breath. Then, they should repeat the words of the preceding verse in order to connect the verses together.

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(1) This chapter is the 29th chapter in the final order of the Noble Quran and contains 69 verses. There is a difference in opinion regarding whether the chapter was revealed in Mecca (Al-Hassan, `Ikrima, Ata` and Jabir) or Medina (Ibn Abbas and Qatada). Another opinion stated that it was revealed in Mecca except for its first ten verses that were revealed in Medina regarding the Muslims that remained in Mecca. `Ali ibn Abu Taleb stated that some of its verses were revealed in Mecca and some verses were revealed in Medina. It was revealed after the chapter of *ar-Rum* and before the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin*. It is the 84th chapter revealed in the Quran.

Likewise, the successive Quranic chapters are to be connected together, so when you finish one chapter, you are not allowed to stop the recitation with a flat consonant. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* did not end the final verse in the last chapter with the word *turja`oon*, but rather ended it with the word *turja`oon-a*. Therefore, this final vowel at the end of the word *turja`oon* connected the last verse in the preceding chapter of *al-Qasas* with the first verse of the following chapter of *al-`Ankabut*.

Therefore, this is a general feature of the verses and chapters of the Noble Quran except for these distinct letters at the beginnings of some chapters. Contrary to the recitation of all the other words of the Quran, these specific and distinct letters are to be separated with pauses and flat consonants at the end of their pronunciation. Therefore, we are to recite this verse as, ‘*Alif. Lam. Mim*’, with pauses between the letters. We should not recite them as, ‘*Alifun-lamun-mimun*’, with a *tanween (nun)* at the end of each letter. They are distinct letters that should not be combined into one whole word. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I do not say, ‘*Alif. Lam. Mim*’ is a single letter. Instead, I say *Alif* is a letter, *Lam* is a letter, and *Mim* is a letter.’(1) This Prophetic saying emphasised the notion that Allah *Glorified is He* separated these letters in recitation.

We mentioned previously that these letters are the raw components of the Quran as Allah’s Quranic speech is weaved from the likes of these letters. We gave an example to illustrate the importance of this concept. If you want to determine and compare the skill of several tailors, you should give all of them the same type of fabric from which to weave garments. You should not give one of them a piece of cotton, and then give the second tailor a piece of wool while giving the third one a piece of silk. Silk, for example, is softer and lighter than the other types of fabric. You would not be able to compare these tailors' skills properly if the raw materials they received were different.

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(1) *It is narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud, that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘‘whoever reads a letter from Allah’s book will be granted a reward. Each reward is multiplied by ten times. I do not say, ‘Alif. Lam. Mim’, is a single letter. Instead, I say Alif is a letter, Lam is a letter and Mim is a letter.’’*

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to illustrate the proof of the Quranic miracle in these letters. The letters: *'Alif. Lam. Mim.'* are distinct Arabic letters. They were presented as a challenge for the Arabs to bring verses resembling the Quranic rhetoric using these same letters which they eloquently used in their daily rhetoric and articulate poetry. Despite their assumed mastery in using these letters, they were completely unable to compile verses that can contend with the eloquence of the Quranic verses. Therefore, this clearly indicated that the rhetorical style of the Quran was a sublime revelation by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Additionally, the letters are spelt out in this verse without being combined in a single word. An illiterate person may know a particular word from daily usage, such as the collective pronunciation of the word 'write', for instance. However, that illiterate person will be unable to spell out the words of the individual letters as they have not studied them academically in a class. On the other hand, if you ask a literate school pupil to spell out the word 'write', he will say that it is composed of the letters: 'w, r, i, t and e' because he was taught these letters distinctively.

That being said, we know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, and therefore, did not know the individual letters of the Arabic alphabet. So, how did he pronounce the names of the letters *Alif, Lam, Mim, Ta, Ha, Ya, Sin* and *Qaf* that are used in the verses at the start of several chapters in the Quran? This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was taught these letters by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Furthermore, this concept of distinct letters teaches us the importance of the direct interaction between the student and a teacher when studying the Quran. A person studying the Quran on his own will mistakenly pronounce the verse: ‘Alif. Lam. Mim.’ just as they pronounce the complete word *alam* in the verse, ‘*Alam nashrah laka sadrak*’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1) which is at the beginning of the chapter of Ash-Sharh. This is because the verse: *‘Alif. Lam. Mim’* and the word, *alam* are composed of the same letters and an unaware learner will pronounce them similarly.

The verse: *‘Alif. Lam. Mim’* might also serve the purpose of alerting the attention of the listener. The Quran was revealed in the language and rhetorical style of the Arabs. Therefore, it employs many of the rhetorical devices and subtleties of the Arabic language. For example, the pre-Islamic poet `Amr ibn Kulthum once said:

Nay *(`Ala),* bring us the jug and give us our morning drink,

And leave not behind the wines of Andareena.

What is the purpose of the word `*ala* (nay) in this poet’s first verse, when the meaning is established without using it? The word `*ala* (nay) alerted the Arabic listeners when they were not paying attention, so that they do not miss any following words that the speaker had to say. This is similar to calling a person’s name out to direct his attention to your words. A surprised listener might miss certain crucial words from the speech if not alarmed by such introductions. Therefore, the purpose of the distinct letters at the beginning of these chapters might be to draw the listeners’ attention to the important speech that follows these letters.

Furthermore, the letters may still have other meanings that are still open to interpretation, just like a perpetual spring providing sustenance to every person according to their capacity, Then, Allah says:

أَحَسِبَ ٱلنَّاسُ أَن يُتۡرَكُوٓاْ أَن يَقُولُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا وَهُمۡ لَا يُفۡتَنُونَ ٢

Do people think they will be left alone after saying
‘We believe’ without being put to the test? [2]
(The Quran*, al-’Ankabut:* 2)

The Arabic verb *hasiba* is used here to mean: ‘assume’. Another similar Arabic word is the verb *hasaba* or *yahsibu* which means: ‘to count’.

Allah *Glorified is He* phrased this verse in the form of a question. This phrasing indicates that people are incorrect in assuming that Allah *Glorified is He* will not subject them to trials and tests. Allah wants people of real fortitude to carry the message of Islam, because no one can carry the call to Islam without strong faith. It is these firm believers who can bear the tribulations of the message and the integrity of conveying it.

Faith is not just a simple utterance of belief, but is a great responsibility. This responsibility prevented the idolaters of Quraysh from believing in Allah because they knew that the testament: 'There is no deity but Allah (*La illaha ila Allah*)' is a declaration that has consequences and a code of life that orders certain commandments. This testament declares that no one is to be obeyed and worshipped except Allah *Glorified is He*. The disbelievers did not want this responsibility to affect their social position and timely powers.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Did people assume (*hasiba*) that they will be left to say, 'We believe' (*al-'Ankabut:* 2) because the integrity of faith cannot be asserted by the mere declaration of certain words. On the contrary, words of faith need to be tested to prove their truthfulness. So, if the speaker of these words bears these trials and tribulations, this will indicate that their faith is true.

Allah *Glorified is He* emphasises this concept in another verse of the Quran, in which He says, 'And among mankind is he who worships Allah upon a slight edge. So, in case a charitable gain is bestowed upon him, he is composed therewith, but in case a temptation afflicts him, he turns over his face. (Thereby) he loses the present (life) and the Hereafter; that evidently is the greatest loss.' (*al-Hajj:* 11)

Allah *Glorified is He* tested the earlier believers with signs and miracles that went against natural laws. These believers trusted these miracles and believed in the truth of the messenger who brought them. Those who were unsure, confused, and in doubt, denied these signs and disbelieved in the divine message.

An example of the righteous approach of an early believer was the conduct of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* after the night of *Al-`Isra` wal M`iraj* (Prophetic Migration to Jerusalem and Ascension to the Heavens).

When the disbelievers heard the events of the night from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they related these events to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* in an accusative and disbelieving tone. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* answered their accusations by saying, ‘If he (Prophet Muhammad) indeed related that he experienced these events, he spoke the truth. I believe him in what is more difficult to accept, that the revelation descends to him from the Heavens in a short part of the day.’(1) Abu Bakr was named *As-Siddiq* (the believer in the truth) due to this event. His faithful statement was at a time when some people retracted their belief and denied the events that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* related of the Night of Ascension.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* intended these miracles to be difficult for a mind to accept, in order to examine, and test the integrity and the beliefs of those who declared their faith. Thereafter, the mission would only be undertaken by those who had firm devotion and conviction. These were the believers who were certain of the truth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and all that he brought from his Lord.

Previously, we illustrated the foolishness of the Meccan idolaters who denied that the Night of Ascension had occurred. They asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Do you claim that you went to Jerusalem in a single night, when we take a month to reach it on the backs of our camels?’(2) They ignored Allah’s words: ‘Limitless in His Glory is He (Allah) who transported His servant’ (*al-Isra’:* 1). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, ‘I transported myself of my own accord’. Rather, he related that he was transported by Allah’s Power. Similarly, if someone came to you and said, ‘I took my young child to the top of Mount Everest’, it would be foolish to ask him accusingly, ‘How could a baby climb to the top of Mount Everest’?

We also mentioned that the time taken during any action represents the strength of the one performing the action. A weight which may take a young child several trips to move, may easily be carried by a single adult’s hand.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim, on the authority of `A`isha Allah be pleased with her*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Hisham in his Sira*

Therefore, the period of time needed to move the object has an inverse relationship with the strength of the carrier, as time decreases when strength increases. Hence, the person who travels to Alexandria on a donkey will be much slower than a person using a car or a plane. So, judge the plausibility of any action according to the power of its doer.

Since the action of Ascension was done by the Ultimate Power of Allah *Glorified is He* it took no time at all. This is a concept that minds do not encompass or accept without faith in Allah’s Power.

Allah tests you because He has chosen you for a great mission. No one is fit for this mission except those who possess strong faith and certainty. Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned this concept in several Quranic chapters. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And most certainly shall We try you by means of danger and hunger, loss of worldly goods, lives and (labour’s) fruits. But give glad tidings unto those who are patient in adversity’ (*al-Baqara:* 155), ‘And most certainly We shall try you all, so that We might mark out those of you who strive (in Our cause) and are patient in adversity: for We shall put to a test (the truth of) your assertions’ (Muhammad: 31) and ‘Did you assume that you could enter paradise, without Allah choosing those of you who have striven hard (in His cause)?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 142)

These trials are like the examinations of aptitude that we require students to perform so we can assess their levels and the tasks they are able to complete. Therefore, we should not admonish these trials themselves, but rather judge their results. The results of these tests will determine which people are more capable of carrying out the mission that they have been assigned.

‘Did people assume (*hasiba*) that they will be left to say, ‘We believe’, without being put to tests and *yuftanoon* (tempted)?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 2) The Arabic word *yuftanoon* means: to be tried and tempted. This word is derived from the word *fitna*, which refers to the process of smelting gold in fire to remove its impurities. This process preserves the most valuable parts of the gold so that it fits the purpose for which it is required.

Another example of this is a similitude stated by Allah *Glorified is He* to illustrate the relation between truth and falsehood. Allah says, ‘He (Allah) sends down water from the sky, so that the valleys are filled with running rivers, each to its determined (course). The (river's) flood carries away (on its surface) a foaming scum. And, likewise, scum rises from that (metal) which they kindle upon the fire, when they seek (to make) ornaments or utensils. Thus, Allah sets forth the parable of truth and falsehood. As for the scum, it goes away as refused debris. (And) as for whatever profits mankind, it stays in the earth. Thus, Allah sets forth (similar) parables.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

Therefore, these trials and tribulations were made to identify those believers who are true to their word, in order to separate them from the liars and feigners. Those who are truthful will have patience and forbearance, and the ones who lie will deny the truth and remain hesitant in their lives, Then, Allah says:

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۖ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا۟ وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ ٱلْكَـٰذِبِينَ ٣

We tested those who went before them: God will certainly mark out which ones are truthful and which are lying [3]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 3)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* was consoling the early followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who were harshly persecuted and injured. These early companions *Allah be pleased with them* were beaten with whips under the heat of the sun and had heavy stones placed on their bellies. They were made to suffer long periods of hunger, to the extent that they ate carcasses and leaves from the trees. Allah *Glorified is He* was consoling them by informing them that they were not the first people to be tried in this way. This was a call for them to have patience as the believers before them were patient.

'(And) indeed We already tempted the ones that were before them' (*al-'Ankabut:* 3). For example, consider the trials that the children of Israel suffered at the hands of Pharaoh. Your trials are lighter than their harsh sufferings and are more lenient than their trials, by the Mercy of Allah. 'So indeed, Allah definitely knows the ones who (act) sincerely, and indeed, Allah definitely knows the liars' (*al-'Ankabut:* 3).

Some people might ask, 'Did Allah not know their true natures even before He tested them'? Indeed Allah *Glorified is He* knows the true nature of

His servants. The purpose of these trials is not for Allah to know their true states, but rather, to show the servants what is known about them. We may present an example for this, and Allah *Glorified is He* is beyond comparison. If a teacher grades his students without an exam, the failed student might exclaim, ‘If you had tested me, I would have passed’! When the teacher then chooses to test that lazy student, he does fail appropriately. The purpose of the exam was to inform the student of their true academic level.

In the same way, Allah *Glorified is He* tests His servants in this world to show them what He already knows about them. He will give them tests to show them their own states so that they cannot deny them. Therefore, they will be witnesses against themselves, just as their own limbs will testify against them in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

أَمۡ حَسِبَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَعۡمَلُونَ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ أَن يَسۡبِقُونَاۚ سَآءَ مَا يَحۡكُمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Do the evildoers think they can escape us? How ill they judge! [4] (The Quran*, al-’Ankabut:* 4)

This verse also starts with the question: ‘Do they assume?’ However, this verse refers to those people who commit bad deeds, ‘…that they can escape (outrun) Us’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 4). Do they think that can flee from Allah’s punishment and requital for their sins? When you outrun someone, this means that you are fleeing from them while they are chasing you, this verse states that these sinners will not be able to escape their punishment, and that their conjecture is indeed mistaken: ‘Indeed, wrong and false is their judgment’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 4).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَن كَانَ يَرۡجُواْ لِقَآءَ ٱللَّهِ فَإِنَّ أَجَلَ ٱللَّهِ لَأٓتٖۚ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ﴿٥﴾

But as for those who strive for their meeting with God, God’s appointed time is bound to come; He is the All Seeing, the All Knowing [5] (The Quran*, al-’Ankabut:* 5)

The phrase: ‘Whoever is hoping to meet Allah’ refers to a person who believes in the Day of Resurrection and is waiting for it while working for its reward. He believes that Allah created us, made this world to grant us blessed lives and will resurrect us again so that we are questioned for our actions. If man does not worship Allah *Glorified is He* to thank Him for the worldly blessings; he should at least worship Allah in fear of meeting His possible punishment in the Hereafter.

The people of insight maintain that there is a difference between those who seek the Hereafter hoping for Allah's rewards and Mercy, and those who seek the Hereafter purely for the sake of meeting Allah without fear from Hell or desire for Paradise. Rabi`a Al-`Adawiyya described this in the following verses of poetry:

They all worship out of fear of the fire,

Seeing salvation as enough fortune

Or to dwell amidst gardens in Paradise

In fine palaces, to drink from its springs

I have no regard for Paradise or Hell,

I seek no substitute for my Beloved Lord.

She loves Allah *Glorified is He* for His Lordship, and not due to fear from Hell or desire for Paradise. She also said, 'O my Lord. If You see that I love You out of desire for Your Paradise, deny me it, and if You see that I love You out of fear of Your Hell, burn me therein.'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: 'Hence, whoever hopes to meet his Lord (on the Day of Judgment), let him do righteous deeds, and let him not ascribe unto anything a share of the worship that is due to his Lord (alone)' (*al-Kahf*: 110). Do not hope to meet anything, even paradise because Allah's meeting is greater than every reward and should be sought for its own sake. (2)

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha`rawi *may Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

(2) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha`rawi *may Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

Allah emphasises this concept using more than one rhetorical tool of linguistic emphasis: '…for, indeed (*inna*), the appointed time set by Allah is bound to come (*la-aatin*)' (*al-'Ankabut:* 5). The words *inna* and *la* are two Arabic particles used for emphasis. Allah also used the active particle *(la-aatin)* (bound to come) which indicates the certainty of an event's occurrence. There is a similar lexical emphasis used in the verse: 'Everything will be perished (*halik*)' (*al-Qasas:* 88). Allah used the word *halik* (perished) instead of the word *sayahlak* (will perish) as the word *halik* is an active particle. Allah also tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse: 'Yet, verily, thou art bound to be dead, (O Prophet Muhammad) and, verily, they, too, are bound to be dead (*mayyit*)' (*az-Zumar:* 30). Allah addressed them in this manner telling them that they are bound to be dead *mayyit* instead of telling them that they will die (*satamoot*) because the first lexical manner issues more emphasis in the Arabic language.

When you predict something in the future, you traditionally say, 'It will happen', and when you issue a threat to someone, you may say, 'I will enforce the following punishment'. While uttering such predictions in the future, you are actually speaking about events that you do not have the means to guarantee. Indeed, you cannot be sure that you or other people will live until the following day. In addition, you may change your mind about carrying out these actions or lose the ability to fulfil your threats due to illness or accident. On the other hand, Allah has complete power over everything. Nothing can escape His commands and time has no influence over His actions. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, 'The appointed time set by Allah will be coming', but rather: 'bound to come' with absolute certainty.

We spoke previously about the meaning of the verse: 'Allah's judgment has arrived. Do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent.' (*an-Nahl:* 1) Some people with superficial perceptions objected to this verse. They asked, 'How can someone call for something that has already arrived'? They did not understand the meanings of Allah's words or the subtleties of the Arabic language. Allah *Glorified is He* controls the future. Therefore, in Allah's sight, all the events of the future have already come to pass because nothing can stop His will from being fulfilled, and nothing can stand in His way *Glorified is He*. The phrase:

‘the appointed time set by Allah’ appears in several verses in the Quran. These verses include the verse in which Allah says, ‘And for all people, an appointed term has been set: and when (the end of) their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it’ (*al-A‘raf:* 34).

The verse we are now discussing says, ‘…the appointed time set by Allah is bound to come.’ There are two set events in a person’s life. The first set point in time is death that ends the individual’s life in this world. The second set point in time is his resurrection in the Hereafter to meet Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, these two set events are connected.

When Allah presents us with a matter of His Knowledge that we have not seen, He helps us to understand it by relating it to a tangible and familiar entity so that the mind can move from the material knowledge to the unseen abstract. The life spans of people in this world are diverse. Some human beings die in the womb and never come into this world; others take a single breath and then die, while many live for years or decades until their death. So, there is no set age or time for death to come, nor any set cause. Some people die of illness, others die by drowning and many others die after old age. An Arabic poet said:

Do not think that sickness is a cause of death,
No matter how grave the sickness might be.
Many a sick man was cured of his ails,
And many a healthy man met his decree.
Another Arabic poet also said:
The one in full health, was taken by death,
The sick one remained, upon finding strength.

Sometimes, epidemics spread disease though populations of people, yet some die whilst others live. Therefore, death has no fixed order. Allah says, ‘And for all people a term has been set: and when (the end of) their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it’ (*al-A‘raf:* 34). We find that life’s events confirm this concept, for there is neither a single time for death, nor a single cause of demise.

The truth of the first promise, which we can confirm by observing how all the creatures die, should make us trust that the divinely promised resurrection is bound to come. In the first set point, people's lives ended in various ways and at different times. In the second set point, Allah *Glorified is He* will revive all the lives that He created. They will all be resurrected at the same time with a single blast of the trumpet and everyone will be held accountable for their actions. We had different experiences in the first appointed time of death, but our experiences during the second appointed time of resurrection will be uniform.

We previously mentioned that there are three forms of time. The present which we are witnessing is preceded by a past which we have lost and will be followed by a future. We are similarly ignorant of the ancient past and the coming future. Allah gives us proofs for the things we cannot see through material examples in the part of existence that is visible to us. For example, we do not specifically know how Allah *Glorified is He* created us. We were only informed that man's origins came from dust that was mixed with water to form mud. The mud was shaped in the form of dark clay and this clay was shaped in a similar manner to the formation of pottery. Then, Allah made human beings reproduce. Their children start from single drops of sperm that become leech-like clots. These clots are then transformed into morsels of flesh. Thereafter, deeply embedded in this flesh, starts the development of the bones. Although modern science has shown us these particular concepts of creation in the successive stages of embryonic development, the early creation from dust still remains a theoretical matter that is not definitely outlined.

Therefore, we should not eagerly submit to anyone who claims that they have definite knowledge of the earlier stages of creations because Allah *Glorified is He* warns us about these false guides. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves; and neither do I (have any need to) take as My helpers those (beings) that lead (men) astray' (*al-Kahf:* 51).

Since they have no definite knowledge of the earliest stages of the creation of mankind or the creation of the universe, do not submit to them or consider them as guides. Take your guidance from the Book of your Lord, who created all things. Indeed, their stumbling ignorance about the universe and the origin of mankind proves their feigning of knowledge, from which Allah has warned us. Therefore, how can we consider such concepts as the theory that man evolved from apes as an undisputed fact?

Allah *Glorified is He* ordered the angels upon the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*: 'And when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down before him in prostration' (*al-Hijr:* 29). The believer accepts these words to be true because he believes in Allah *Glorified is He* and in everything that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought.

Then, Allah provides other signs to guide the people who still do not have faith, but have a sincere desire to know the truth about this world. Allah provided them with signs that they can clearly witness. If someone does not comprehend the early stages of creation because they did not witness such events, they will certainly bear witness to the reality of death, as mankind experiences this concept every day. Death is the degeneration of life, and the degeneration of a thing often takes the opposite form of its creation. Allah informed us that the spirit was the final component that was added when man was created. Therefore, it is the first thing taken from him when he dies. Thus, the concept of death will confirm the statements that Allah *Glorified is He* informed us about our early creation.

The coming of the Hereafter is inevitable, so that the obedient servants can be rewarded for their righteous deeds and the disobedient sinners requited. Do you not see the disbelieving societies accepting this principle in their worldly life so that their people can live in stability? Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* will not let the tyrants and the criminals escape from requital in the hereafter if they escape requital in this world. Even if you punish the criminals you are able to catch, what about those who die before being punished? The existence of the Hereafter is the answer to such disharmony.

Allah *Glorified is He* ended the verse we are studying by saying, '…and He alone is All-Hearing, All Knowing' (*al-'Ankabut:* 5). Some people think that if Allah had only said, '…All Knowing,' it would have been enough, as divine knowledge would have encompassed all the things that can be heard. So, why did Allah say 'All-Hearing'? (*al-'Ankabut:* 5)

In the Arabic language, work (‘*amal*), actions (*fi`l*) and speech (*qawl*) are assigned to separate parts of the body. The tongue utters the words (*aqwal*) and the rest of the body produces actions (*af`’al*). The actions of the body and the utterances of the tongue are then collectively referred to as work (‘*amal*). Because speech is the efforts of the tongue, and actions are the efforts of the limbs, the Arabic language perceives the importance of the tongue as it performs half of the body’s efforts.

You declare your faith through the utterance of your tongue in saying, ‘There is no deity but Allah, and Prophet Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (*La illaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasul-ul-llah*)’. This is the noblest work any person can do.

Additionally, the tongue can deliver Allah’s message to His creatures. Furthermore, most of the actions of a person’s limbs are the result of words reaching their ears from another person’s tongue. Because of these important functions of speech, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have believed, why do you say one thing and do another?’ (*as-Saff:* 2) Generally, every action springs from obedience to speech or from listening to speech. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* ends this verse by saying, ‘…and He alone is All Hearing, All Knowing’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 5), as a recognition to the speech of His servants, Then, Allah says:

وَمَن جَٰهَدَ فَإِنَّمَا يُجَٰهِدُ لِنَفۡسِهِۦٓۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَغَنِيٌّ عَنِ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٦

Those who exert themselves do so for their own
benefit — God does not need His creatures [6]
(The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 6)

This verse refers to the times of trials and tribulations. A person who strives (*jahada*) and perseveres in these times of difficulty will achieve success. The word *jihad* means: to employ the utmost effort in order to achieve a desired result. It is derived from the word *ijtahada* which is used when a person has worked diligently in a particular endeavour. The word *ijtihad* refers to the process where scholars pay their utmost attention and awareness in order to derive rulings of jurisprudence.

Jihad has two spheres. The first sphere is the personal strife against one's own whims and desires. By accomplishing this sphere, that person will be more able to strive in the larger sphere against their external enemies.

The word *jahada* is embodied in the Arabic lexical form known as *mufaa'la*. This lexical template is used for reflexive or reactionary verbs that illustrate great exertions of effort. Such a verb has two opposing aspects. The first aspect is that it requires effort from the person doing it, and the second aspect is that it will invoke a resistance from the opposing force.

The first venue where *jihad* should take place is the human soul because your Lord *Glorified is He* created instincts and emotions within you that are made to serve a particular purpose. Then, Allah sent His divine guidance in order to restrict these instincts and refine them, so that they do not lead to impermissible actions.

Curiosity, for example, is a praiseworthy instinct in the realm of scientific inquiry and beneficial discoveries. However, if it develops into spying into people's private lives, it is forbidden.

Eating and drinking are instincts by which you take sustenance and gain the strength to work. However, if these basic needs swell and transform into greed and gluttony, they will have deviated from their intended purpose and use. Certainly, it is amazing the way many people eat. Cars, for instance, generally require a single form of fuel. On the other hand, many people are only satisfied by seemingly endless varieties of food. Each of these types of food has effects on the body, and when combined, can do more harm than good. Therefore, a person will need perseverance to restrict these basic instincts. This guidance follows the Prophetic tradition: 'We are a people who do not eat until we are hungry, and when we eat we do not get full. We do not drink until we are thirsty, and when we drink, we do not satisfy our thirsts.'

If we acted in accordance with this tradition, we may be able to solve a major economic problem in our country. A small and modest piece of food tastes delicious when you have been hungry. That is why the Arabs used to say, 'Indeed, hunger is a fine seasoning'! When you eat, you should not fill your stomach, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, '(Allow) a third of your meal for food, and a third for drink and a third for air.'(1) With these judicious dietary recommendations, we may better preserve our physical soundness and health.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* created your instincts for a purpose, you should not go further than this purpose. These instincts include the basic emotions of love, hate, compassion, and sadness. The only rule in their case is that you should keep them within the confines of emotions. Do not turn them into reprehensible emotional actions. Therefore, love whom you will and hate whom you will, but do not transgress or base inconsiderate judgements upon these emotions.

We have previously given an example(2) of this in a story regarding `Umar *Allah be pleased with him*. `Umar had a brother named Zayd. Zayd was killed by a man, who later, embraced Islam. Whenever `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* saw his brother's murderer, he used to tell him, 'Turn your face away from me.' This meant that he did not want to see him. The man asked, 'Does your lack of love for me prevent me from having my rights?' `Umar answered, 'No, it certainly will not affect your rights.' Then, the man replied, 'I do not cry over love.' Indeed, love and hate are emotional matters. It is the actions which these emotions lead to that are important. An important part of strife is striving against the tyrants who gain power over you. You should strive against them, and bear their persecution patiently. Your love for the truth should allow you to be patient for its sake.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And most certainly We shall try you all, so that We might mark out those of you who strive (in Our cause) and are patient in adversity: for We shall put to a test (the truth of) your assertions' (*Muhammad:* 31). All of these trials require you to persevere and strive with patience.

If you have a rival and you are able to react to their abuse with a better attitude, then do so. However, if you want to seek retaliation from them, punish them with the equal like of what they have done. This is a very difficult task, because it is difficult to measure the transgression that they have committed so that you do not overstep the bounds. For example, if your enemy strikes you, can you strike them back with the exact same force, without transgression? If not, do not allow yourself to fall into the trap of excessive retaliation. It is better for you to adhere to Allah's words: 'And (those who) pardon their fellow-men, and Allah loves the fair-doers' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ahmad and Al-Hakim, on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn Ma`di Karab*

(2) *The story of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him with the killer of his brother Zayd ibn Al-Khattab.*

If you are afflicted with a tribulation in which you do not have an adversary, as in the case of sickness, death or the other matters of fate that Allah *Glorified is He* may send upon you, say, 'My Lord wants the best for me. Certainly, my sins and bad deeds are being effaced by this tribulation, and I can gain the reward of patience through it. It might be that I was heedless towards Allah's commandments, or the worldly matters deluded me, so Allah *Glorified is He* sent me this trial in order to remind me of Him'.

Another aspect of *jihad* is struggling to make the soul accept Allah's Commandments and Prohibitions. Religious responsibility is essentially difficult for the soul to obey, so it requires struggle and perseverance. Therefore, beware of mistaking Allah's commandments for His prohibitions, or His prohibitions for commandments. If you look into it, you will find that the commandments and prohibitions in Allah's way of guidance are nearly seven percent of your daily life. The rest of your life is composed of permissible actions which you are free to take or leave.

Righteous people might find themselves attacked by the mockery and derision of other people, even from people of their own religion. This is because the people of error always feel inadequate and are aware of their own feebleness. Thus, they try to drag other people down to their level so that everyone becomes a sinner. That is why they mock and belittle the people of morality in order to make them abstain from these righteous actions.

Read, if you like, Allah's words in the following verse: 'Behold, those who have transgressed in sins used to laugh at those who have believed. (And) whenever they passed by them, they used to wink at one another (derisively). (And) whenever they returned to the people of their own kind, they returned while jesting. (And) whenever they saw those (who believe,) they said, "Behold, these (people) have indeed gone astray." (And) in no way were they sent as preservers over them. But, today, on the Day (of Judgment), the ones who have believed are laughing at the steadfast disbelievers: (for, resting in paradise) on couches, they will look down (at the disbelievers), "Have the steadfast disbelievers been requited for what they were performing?"' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36) Therefore, there is no doubt that you must bear the abuse of such people patiently, and struggle against your soul so that you do not fall into the traps that they are setting for you.

Whispered insinuations from Satan may attract you to sin and make evil seem alluring to you. In such circumstances, remember Allah's words: 'O children of Adam! Do not allow Satan to tempt you in the same way as he caused your parents to be driven out of the garden. He deprived them of their garments (of piety) in order to make them aware of their nakedness' (*al-'Araf:* 27). Therefore, you must always bear in mind the first enmity between our father Adam *peace be upon him* and Satan so that we are always on our guard.

We have previously explained how you can tell the difference between a sin that comes from your soul and a sin that comes from Satan's whispers. The soul specifies a particular sin and wants no other. However, in Satan's case, if you refuse his advances in a particular sin, he will try another method because the important thing for him is that you sin in any possible way. So, you have many enemies. Each one of these enemies requires your perseverance to resist their methods.

This verse we are studying mentioned struggling in Allah's cause after a previous verse which stated that the Hereafter is bound to come. This means that whoever believes in meeting Allah *Glorified is He* in the Hereafter, should prepare for His judgment by striving fully in this world.

Allah says in this verse: 'Hence, whoever strives (*jahada*) (in Allah's Cause) does so for his own good: for, verily, Allah is not in need of anything in all the worlds' (*al-'Ankabut:* 6). Man was placed in a universe that had been prepared to receive him. He was granted earth and a sky, as well as the Sun, the Moon, water and air. He has prepared the universe to serve them, and indeed, they cannot add anything to Allah's dominion. Therefore, all your actions and thoughts as human beings are for your own comfort and success. When you do good deeds, no one benefits from them except you and your Lord does not need your provisions.

If you strive, you only do so for your own sake. If you have an employee who tries to remind you of the service he did for you, you would think of replying, ‘No, you served yourself and your family because when you served me, you did so to make a living. I am the one who worked to make the money with which I paid you’.

In the same way, Allah *Glorified is He* says to us, ‘Hence, whoever strives (*jahada*) (in Allah’s Cause) does so for his own good’, by following Allah’s way and guidance. Allah emphasises this matter in several verses, including the verse in which He says, ‘Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good; and whoever does evil, does so to harm himself: and indeed Allah does not wrong His creatures’ (*Fussilat:* 46). He also says, ‘If you persevere in doing good, you will be doing good to yourselves; and if you do evil, it will be unto yourselves,’ (*al-Isra’:* 7). Another verse states: ‘Whatever good it (the self) does, it is in the favour (of itself) and whatever evil it does, it is against its own favour’ (*al-Baqara:* 286).

Thus, the matter is that your actions will affect you, and Allah’s Commandments are for the wellbeing and safety of His creation. Every craftsman wants his creation to be as good as it can be. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon man part of His power, knowledge, and influence. Allah *Glorified is He* granted man some attributes that resemble His own attributes. Hence, one of the people of insight said, ‘Imitate the qualities of Allah *Glorified is He*’.

Allah’s divine help is transcendent, in that He bestowed some of these attributes to His servants. Allah *Glorified is He* did not merely carry out these actions for us, but rather, helped us to do them by giving us the necessary allocations of power.

When human beings see a person who is unable to carry their luggage, they generally provide their help by carrying it for them. In this case, the incapable people remain incapable and weak. They will still need someone to help them every time they have to carry their luggage.

On the other hand, Allah’s help and bestowal is ultimately sublime. He gives you some of His Power, Omnipotence, and Self-Sufficiency so that you can do your actions for yourself. Therefore, a person who wants to imitate this sublime attribute should follow the parable, ‘Do not give a poor man a fish.

Instead, teach him how to fish for himself so that he will not need you all the time'. The more transcendent form of support is to give other people that which they are able to use without further support. So, Allah gives powers to the strong people, wealth to the wealthy people, knowledge to the people who are knowledgeable and wisdom to the wise minds. These are all manifestations of His Magnificence. He does not give the entire attribute to His servant, but rather gives the servant part of the attribute so that it becomes a part of them. In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* gives you more than that. He gives you the free will to use that attribute by merely thinking about the action. By Allah *Glorified is He* what do you actually do in order to stand up? What real efforts do you invest when you want to pick something up or move one of your limbs? Do you even have to order them to move?

When you look at a bulldozer or a crane performing a task, you will see that its every movement requires a button to be pushed in order to perform its mechanical duties. Now, think about the actions that are necessary for you to stand up, for example. You merely think about standing up and you find yourself doing so. Your limbs move and respond to your free will.

When your Lord says to you 'His (Allah's) order is such that when He wills a thing to be, He says unto it, "Be", and it is' (*Ya Sin:* 82), you should believe these words easily because you have witnessed the same thing with your own body. You may fall asleep simply by laying your head down on a pillow or move your hands merely by thinking about it. If you can move yourself at your sheer free will, indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has the Ultimate Power to affect His universe in whatever form He wills.

Your simple actions require no significant efforts because Allah *Glorified is He* has allowed you to use an attribute of His Omnipotent word, 'Be'! However, he did not make this attribute an intrinsic part of your nature, as you will be deluded by it. Therefore, if Allah wants to remove this power, He can easily take this ability from you, as He says, 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly transgressing, whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

Therefore, a paralyzed person may try to move their leg, for example, but it does not respond to their intentions. This paralysis can happen after their legs had previously followed their mere thoughts. This infliction is laid down as a sign, so that mankind recognizes the gifts of Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, He can take these gifts back if He wills, as it is not an intrinsic part of human nature.

In conclusion, striving in the way of Allah *Glorified is He* comprises many aspects. It includes striving against instincts and emotions, striving against the difficulties of adhering to the divine commandments and prohibitions, striving against the demons of mankind and the jinn and striving against the enemies of Islam who wish to put out Allah's light.

Al-Bukhari narrated that Khabab ibn Al-Arat *Allah be pleased with him* went to see Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah. We are in trouble and suffering (from the actions of the disbelievers). Will you not ask Allah's relief for us? Will you not pray for us?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Harsher events occurred with the (believing) people who came before you. A hole would be dug for a man, and he would be placed therein. Then a saw would be brought forth (by the disbelievers) and he would be cut in half, and then his flesh would be dragged from his bones with combs of iron. Yet, none of this would make him renounce Allah's religion.' Then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reassured him that this period of tribulation would not last much longer, saying, 'By Allah, Allah will establish the matter (of this religion), until a rider will be able to go from Sana`a to Hadramawt fearing nothing but Allah and the wolf that stalks his flock.'(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the Seal of the Prophets, was once visited by Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri *Allah be pleased with him*. Abu Sa`id found Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* complaining of a fever. He placed his hand on the blanket under which Prophet Muhammad was covered and felt the heat of his fever through the sheets. Abu Sa`id asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, is it not difficult for you?' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'O Abu Sa`id, just as tribulations are doubled for us, so the reward will be doubled for us.'(2)

This was to emphasise that tribulations do not indicate animosity, as they can be granted as blessings from Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* informs

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Majah*

His angels about His humble, obedient, and patient servants. The angels respond, ‘How can they not love and obey You, when You have given them all their blessings?’ The angels then mention the blessings Allah has given man, and Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Even when I took these blessings from them, they are devoted and sincere in their belief towards My Lordship.’

Allah ends the verse we are studying by saying, ‘Verily, Allah is not in need of anything in all the worlds’ (*al-‘Ankabut:* 6). This is because all these different kinds of struggle do not benefit Allah *Glorified is He* or add anything to His dominion. Rather, the struggling servant is the one who benefits from his struggle. Allah *Glorified is He* is not in need of the obedience or worship of those who obey or worship Him. In fact, Allah is the One, who provides for them from His bounty and blessings, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ لَنُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمْ
وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَحْسَنَ ٱلَّذِى كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

We shall certainly blot out the misdeeds of those who believe and do good deeds, and We shall reward them according to the best of their actions [7] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 7)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us of the final outcome of the believers saying: ‘And as for those who believe’ (*al-A’nkabut:* 7) they ‘believe that their Lord is Allah who possesses the attributes of Absolute Perfection and Wisdom, and is their Protector Who has Omnipotent Power.’ Then, Allah says, ‘…and do righteous deeds (*al-salihat*)’ (*al-A’nkabut:* 7) because righteous deeds are the natural outcomes and fruits of sincere faith. The word *al-salihat* means that these deeds do not change or spoil this world. Allah *Glorified is He* has created a world that functions in the best way for your service, so do not corrupt it. Indeed, the least you can do in the weakest form of faith is to leave good things as they are, without alteration. If you want to rise to a higher level of faith, then make them only better.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And when they (the sinners) are told, “Do not spread corruption upon the Earth”, they answer, “We are but improving things!”’ (*al-Baqara:* 11). So, Allah *Glorified is He* made the earth with all its natural laws sound for us. Do you not see that in places where rainfall is minimal, Allah *Glorified is He* allowed water to collect in the depths of the ground, in order to preserve it until it is needed, while preventing the sun from evaporating it?

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Say (to those who deny the truth), “What will you do if all of your water were to vanish underground. Who (but Allah) could provide you with water from (new) unsullied springs.”’ (*al-Mulk:* 30)

We previously gave an example that illustrates the meaning of leaving good things as they are. Imagine a well from which desert Bedouins drink. Corruption would be in throwing garbage into the well to ruin the water, or fill the well with soil to block it. Both these actions are examples of corruption. On the other hand, someone may build a wall around the well to protect it or construct a device to easily draw the water from it. If you cannot do these righteous actions, the least you can do is to leave the well alone without spoiling its sustenance.

A ‘righteous deed’ is any action or idea that benefits any social aspect of the life of human beings. Do not think that some jobs are superior than others are. Simply, every job, no matter how insignificant you might see it—as long as it serves society and people, is a noble job. The job value lies in the values of the doers who do it perfectly. No job is superior to another. However, some workers are better than others are; as said, ‘the value of a person lies in what he does perfectly’. I have previously given an example of this category. Here I repeat it, even if it is from a non-Muslim environment; there was a union leader in France, who always looked after the rights of workers and defended them. One day he became a minister. They said to him, ‘Now, grant us the rights that you used to demand for us’. Perhaps, the demands he introduced were beyond the ability and budget of the ministry. Now, he himself had become the minister. At one point, one of the workers acted rudely towards him and said, ‘Do not forget that once you were a shoe-shiner’! ‘Yes’, he replied, ‘but I used to do a good job of it!’ Note how the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the reward of faith and righteous actions, ‘We shall most certainly efface their [previous] bad deeds’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 7). Here, Allah’s Wisdom is manifest; He effaces bad deeds before rewarding the good deeds.

Actually, removing evils shall be prior to tasting the sweet of good deeds. Fending off sins and evils shall take precedence over securing good and benefits. For example, when a person throws a stone at you and, meanwhile, another throws an apple at you, which one will you deal with first? Of course, you will defend yourself against harm first. The Creator *Glorified is He* knows the nature of His slaves and that their heedlessness and keeping distant from His guidance may lead them to sin. The law defines crimes and specifies their punishments; it regards it possible for them to occur.

Allah allays the fears of His slaves with promises to forgive their sins first, before rewarding their good deeds. By his very nature, man is inclined to sin more than to do good deeds. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘We shall most certainly efface their [previous] bad deeds.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 7) Another verse declares, ‘Except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful’ (*al-Furqan:* 70). What grace is greater than exchanging their bad deeds with good ones? It is not only that He will efface them. It is like a sale of forgiveness that everyone should avail. The Quran states, ‘Verily, good deeds drive away evil deeds’ (*Hud:* 114). The Noble prophetic statement even declares, ‘Follow bad deeds with good ones and you will erase them.’(1)

Allah *the Exalted* then mentions good deeds, ‘[We] shall most certainly reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 7). As said, when the Lord *Glorified is He* wants to enrich a poor person, He does so by means of a loan from his wealthy brethren, ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, which He will amply repay’ (*al-Baqara:* 245). Even though Allah is the One who gives everything, He respects human nominal ownership, hard work, and toil. He respects their work and the fruits of their work, just as a father does with his children, taking from the wealthy one to help the poorer with promises to pay him back later. Just as you do not take back the gifts you give, Allah too does not take back the gifts He gives.

When we were in America, an orientalist asked us whether there was conflict between Allah’s word ‘whoever shall come with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof’ (*al-An‘am:* 160) and the Prophet’s words, ‘It is written upon the door of Paradise that a charity is rewarded tenfold while loans are rewarded eighteen-fold.'(1) Allah guided me to answer his question rightfully so they would not win the argument. I said to the interpreter, 'Yes, good deeds are rewarded tenfold when they are given in charity. For loans, if you give a dollar, this is worth ten dollars in reward, but your dollar is repaid to you, so only nine would remain. The double of nine is eighteen.' The Lord *Glorified is He* moves on to mention the first unit of building society, which is the family, composed of a father, a mother and children. Allah wants to rectify the first foundation for the rest of society to become healthy and right. Allah *the Exalted* says:

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(1) *Ahmad and Abu Na`aym on the authority of Mu`adh ibn Jabal Allah be pleased with him*

وَوَصَّيۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ بِوَٰلِدَيۡهِ حُسۡنٗاۖ وَإِن جَٰهَدَاكَ لِتُشۡرِكَ بِي مَا لَيۡسَ لَكَ بِهِۦ
عِلۡمٞ فَلَا تُطِعۡهُمَآۚ إِلَيَّ مَرۡجِعُكُمۡ فَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

'We have commanded people to be good to their parents, but do not obey them if they strive to make you serve, beside Me, anything of which you have no knowledge: you will all return to Me, and I shall inform you of what you have done[8] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 8)

The parents look after children until they grow up and become strong. By that time, the parents grow weaker and become in need of others to look after them. Now, the children of westerners, for example, leave their parents with no one to care for them. Sometimes, they put them in houses for the elderly if they do care for them. However, they mostly leave them without any care. When we look at this, the greatness of Islam and the wisdom of the divine guidance in Muslim society are clear for us. A wise person said that it is better to marry when you are young–not to produce children, but to produce 'parents' for you, who look after you in the 'infancy' of your old age. The Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to have families built on strong foundations and sound faith. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Now [among the best of righteous deeds which] we have enjoined upon man [is] goodness towards his parents' (*al-'Ankabut:* 8). Elsewhere in the Quran, He gives the same instruction, 'Now [among the best of the deeds which] we have enjoined upon man [is] goodness towards his parents' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15).

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(1) *Al-Tabarani and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Abu Umamah Allah be pleased with him*

In the Quranic verse (*al-'Ankabut:* 8), the word *husn* stands for goodness or excellence. It means that Allah recommends us to be good to them in an absolute sense, whilst in the Quranic verse (*al-Ahqaf:* 15), the word *ihsana* stands for kindness or beneficence. Kindness is declared mandatory. Why does He enjoin goodness here and kindness there? In response, He enjoins goodness in the verse that mentions religious dispute, wherein He says, 'Should they endeavour to make you ascribe divinity, side by side with Me, to something which you mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not' (*al-'Ankabut:* 8). Disbelief creates animosity and discord, and brings about rivalry. The Lord stresses the importance of showing goodness, not only kindness, because this situation requires strong will. However, when they do not disbelieve, it is enough to show them kindness, so He says, 'Bear them company in this world's life with kindness' (*Luqman:* 15).

When the Lord *Glorified is He* counsels us about our parents, who are the direct cause of our existence, He does so in order to make them a means for clarifying the true origin of existence. He counsels you concerning the direct cause of your existence—your parents. The Lord *Glorified is He* just reminds His slaves of this counsel and draws their attention to their responsibilities to pay due attention to parents and, meanwhile, worship and obey Allah—the real Creator, whereas parents are only a means. Faith here acts as a way for kindness and good relationship, 'Worship Allah [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. Do good unto your parents' (*an-Nisa':* 36). Parents are partial causes of existence, whilst Allah is the Absolute Cause. The orientalists tried to criticise that point. For them, the following verses are in conflict with one another:

- 'Bear them company in this world's life with kindness'. (*Luqman:* 15)
- 'You cannot find people who [truly] believe in Allah and the Last Day, and [at the same time] love anyone who contends against Allah and His Messenger–even though they be their fathers'. (*al-Mujadala:* 22)

This conflict only exists in their minds; they do not understand the language of the Quran, so they do not know the difference between love and kindness. Love designates heart's inclination, which gives rise to kind acts towards loved ones. Kindness is equally extended, to those whom one loves and those whom one does not love—to maintain life. Allah says, 'Yet, should they endeavour to make you ascribe divinity, side by side with Me, to something which your mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not. [For] it is unto Me that you all must return, whereupon I shall make you [truly] understand [the right and wrong of] all that you were doing [in life].' (*al-'Ankabut:* 8)

In other words, keep this rule in mind because I will ask you about it on the Day of Resurrection. Elsewhere the Quran says, 'Bear them company in this world's life with kindness, and follow the path of those who turn towards Me. In the end, unto Me you all must return; and thereupon I shall make you [truly] understand all that you were doing [in life]' (*Luqman:* 15). Parents' disbelief does not allow you to abuse or neglect them. Beware of that. Allah will question you whether you treated them with kindness or not.

Another Quranic verse mentions the bases of this counsel concerning parents—'We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). Note that deep concern for mothers. Allah *the Exalted* only mentions fathers in His word: 'Say, "O my Lord! Bestow Your Grace upon them [father and mother], even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!"' (*al-Isra':* 24) This grace here is expected in the Hereafter. All these directives concerning mothers because of the hardships they undergo in a child's infancy, when he is aware of his mother's favour. They endure the hardships for his sake and when he grows up and his senses develop, he finds that the father is the one who does everything for him. The favours of fathers are then plain to children whilst those of mothers need clarification, then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَنُدۡخِلَنَّهُمۡ فِي ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٩﴾

We shall be sure to admit those who believe and
do good deeds to the ranks of the righteous [9]
(The Quran*, al-'Ankabut:* 9)

Allah first mentions faith as the origin before righteous deeds. Being a righteous one is a momentous thing as manifested by the fact that even the prophets wish it for themselves, then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ فَإِذَآ أُوذِيَ فِي ٱللَّهِ جَعَلَ فِتۡنَةَ
ٱلنَّاسِ كَعَذَابِ ٱللَّهِۖ وَلَئِن جَآءَ نَصۡرٞ مِّن رَّبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا
مَعَكُمۡۚ أَوَلَيۡسَ ٱللَّهُ بِأَعۡلَمَ بِمَا فِي صُدُورِ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

There are some people who say, 'We believe in God,' but,
when they suffer for His cause, they think that human
persecution is as severe as God's punishment — yet, if any
help comes to you [Prophet] from your Lord, they will say,
'We have always been with you'. Does God not know best what
is in everyone's hearts? [10] (The Quran*, al-'Ankabut:* 10)

Allah's words: 'Now there is among men many a one who says [of himself and of others like him], "we do believe in Allah…"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 10), indicates that these people speak with their tongues but cannot bear tribulations patiently. Speech here is not backed up by action. Allah says about such people, 'O you who believe, why do you say one thing and do another?' (*as-Saff:* 2)

Allah *the Exalted* says about the hypocrites, 'When the hypocrites come unto you, they say, "we bear witness that you are indeed Allah's Messenger!" Surely, Allah knows that you are His Messenger and He [Allah] bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed false [in their declaration of faith].' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) Allah *the Exalted* does not deny their statement that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah, but He denies the sincerity of their testimony, because a testimony must convey harmony between hearts and tongues, an element missing in their case.

'But whenever he is made to suffer in Allah's Cause' (*al-'Ankabut:* 10): When one suffers because of faith in Allah without doing any injustices, 'he thinks that persecution at the hands of man is as [much to be feared, or even more than,] Allah's punishment' (*al-'Ankabut:* 10). Here, he makes human torment akin to Allah's punishment. He fears human persecution and equates it with the divine punishment for disbelief. It is absurd reasoning because human persecution will end, even by death of those persecuted, and tortured, whilst Allah's punishment in the hereafter is eternal. Human torment is also limited by human power, whilst Allah punishes according to His Own Power. Any likeness between them is a mistake.

Although this verse was revealed in relation to `Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi`a, the rule it declares is generally applicable to all similar cases. `Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi`a was a maternal brother of `Amr ibn Hisham known as Abu Jahl, and Al-Harith Ibn Hisham. Their mother's name was `Asmaa`. When `Ayyash embraced Islam and emigrated to Medina, his mother was deeply saddened. She said, 'No roof will cover me, nor will I eat, drink or bathe until `Ayyash returns to the religion of his forefathers.'(1) She remained in this state for three days until hunger forced her to stop. Her sons Al-Harith and Abu Jahl went to Medina to convince `Ayyash to return home and please his mother. They kept tempting him and causing his heart to pity her until he agreed to go home, but he refused to give up Islam. When the three of them left Medina for Mecca, they tied him up and each one gave him a hundred lashes. Abu Jahl was more lenient towards him than Al-Harith. `Ayyash swore by Allah that he would kill Al-Harith if he ever found him outside the Sacred Precinct. After pacifying his mother, `Ayyash returned to Medina. Later, his brother Al-Harith met him at Qubaa` but `Ayyash did not know that his brother Al-Harith(2) had embraced Islam, so he rushed to him and fulfilled his vow, killing him on the spot. News of this reached the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Soon this verse was revealed, 'It is not conceivable that a believer should slay another believer unless it be by mistake' (*an-Nisa':* 92).

There was also revealed, 'Now there is among men many a one who says [of himself and of others like him], "we do believe in Allah"—but whenever he is made to suffer in Allah’s cause, he thinks that persecution at the hands of man is as [much to be feared, or even more than,] Allah’s punishment’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 10). He aimed to escape human persecution by disbelief; he did not believe to escape Allah’s punishment.

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(1) *Al-Wahidi Al-Nisaburi narrated it.*

(2) *Actually, it was not his brother Al-Harith, but Al-Harith ibn Yazid ibn Aneesa, who was with `Ayyash's brothers when they tied him up and lashed him as Ibn Hajar affirmed. See Ibn Hajar, Al-Isabah.*

Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘Yet, if succour from your Lord comes [to those who truly believe], he is sure to say, “Behold, we have always been with you!”’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 10), i.e. give us a share of spoils, but ‘is not Allah fully aware of what is in the hearts of all creatures?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 10) Allah *the Exalted* knows what is in their hearts and their hope for believers. He says about them, ‘Had these [hypocrites] set out with you, [O believers,] they would have added nothing to you save the evil of corruption’. (*at-Tawba:* 47)

The Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَيَعۡلَمَنَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَلَيَعۡلَمَنَّ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ ١١

God will be sure to mark out which ones are the believers, and which the hypocrites [11] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 11)

The Lord *Glorified is He* knows the innermost of His slaves even before their creation. He knows their future choices and deeds, but there is a difference between knowledge that exists before an event and knowledge that exists after the event. If Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘I will do such-and-such with them because I know what they will do’, they would have said, ‘No, by Allah, we would not have done any such thing’. As such, He leaves them until they indeed go on to do those things He knew they would. Then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱتَّبِعُواْ سَبِيلَنَا وَلۡنَحۡمِلۡ خَطَٰيَٰكُمۡ
وَمَا هُم بِحَٰمِلِينَ مِنۡ خَطَٰيَٰهُم مِّن شَيۡءٍۖ إِنَّهُمۡ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ١٢

Those who disbelieve say to the believers, ‘Follow our path and we shall bear [the consequences for] your sins,’ yet they will not do so — they are liars [12] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 12)

Here is another form of abuse. Those who disbelieve said to the believers ‘Follow our way’, namely, the religion of their ancestors and worship of idols.

They worshipped gods who do not hold them morally responsible and expected nothing from them. Conversely, you worship Allah who expects you to follow His way of guidance and obey His Commandments and Prohibitions. As such, 'Follow our way' is to give them authority 'and we shall indeed take your sins upon ourselves' (*al-'Ankabut:* 12) is that we will be responsible for your sins. If you incur sins by doing so, we will bear them. Note the absurdity of disbelievers; they believe it is a sin and prepare to bear it. How can they bear it? How can they be responsible for it before Allah *the Exalted*? Does a disbeliever have any right to intercede on behalf of or defend others in the hereafter?

Allah *the Exalted* then says, 'But never could they take upon themselves aught of their sins. Behold, they are liars indeed' (*al-'Ankabut:* 12). He stresses that they are liars, as He says: '[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers and the latter shall see the suffering [that awaits them]' (*al-Baqara:* 166).

Their followers will say, 'O our Lord! Show us those of the invisible beings and humans that have led us astray; we shall trample them underfoot, so that they shall be the lowest of all!' (*Fussilat:* 29) The affection between leaders and followers in this world will become enmity. Since they shared misguidance in this world, they will be at odds in the Hereafter. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'on that Day, friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the Allah-conscious' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). When a pious person sees another in the hereafter, he will thank him and acknowledge their favour of education, guidance, and protection from perdition. As such, they love and praise one another, even if they did not endear one another in this life.

Conversely, the people of misguidance will curse each other and forsake one another. The absurdity of disbelievers is made clear in their statement, 'We shall indeed take your sins upon ourselves' (*al-'Ankabut:* 12). It is also clear in their saying, 'O Allah! If this be indeed the truth from you, then rain down upon us stones from the skies or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!' (*al-Anfal:* 32) and from their saying: 'Do not spend anything on those who are with Allah's Apostle, so that they [may be forced to] leave…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). They acknowledged him as the Messenger of Allah and discouraged people from giving the poor and needy around him. This is foolishness, even as a confrontational tactic. Allah then says:

وَلَيَحۡمِلُنَّ أَثۡقَالَهُمۡ وَأَثۡقَالٗا مَّعَ أَثۡقَالِهِمۡۖ وَلَيُسۡـَٔلُنَّ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ عَمَّا كَانُواْ يَفۡتَرُونَ ١٣

They will bear their own burdens and others besides: they will be questioned about their false assertions on the Day of Resurrection [13] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 13)

Elsewhere, Allah says, 'Hence, on Resurrection Day they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray. How evil the load with which they shall be burdened!' (*an-Nahl:* 25) The word used in the verse (*al-'Ankabut:* 13), for burdens is *awzar,* whilst in the verse (*an-Nahl:* 25), is *athqal.* They are synonyms. As such, they will bear their own personal burdens and more burdens for others whom they misled, 'They will most certainly be called to account on Resurrection Day for all their false assertions' (*al-'Ankabut:* 13), i.e. their deliberate lies. After declaring the general principles, the Lord *Glorified is He* now moves on to speak about the particulars of certain divine messages, saying:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِۦ فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمۡ أَلۡفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمۡسِينَ
عَامٗا فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱلطُّوفَانُ وَهُمۡ ظَٰلِمُونَ ١٤

We sent Noah out to his people. He lived among them for fifty years short of a thousand but when the Flood overwhelmed them they were still doing evil [14] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 14)

The scholars say that Nuh (Noah) *peace upon him* was the first messenger sent to humankind. Those who came before him, like Adam and Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon them* were prophets to whom Allah revealed a religious message to follow and become examples of faith and good behaviour. Whoever sees them could follow their example but those who do not are not disbelievers unless they believe in them and then deny their way.

Although a prophet and a messenger are sent by Allah, there is a difference between them. The prophet has a revealed message, but he is not commanded to impart it to others whereas the messenger has a revealed message that he shall deliver to others. Allah says, 'Yet whenever we sent forth any messenger or prophet before you' (*al-Hajj:* 52); so prophets are also sent by Allah, but sent only to themselves. Why was this the case before Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* particularly? In response, the human race was very few in numbers before Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and new to the earth. The deviations had not become widespread amongst them. When humankind spread out, the affairs of life grew complex and people needed Allah to send them messengers.

The Lord *Glorified is He* presents a short account of Nuh's (Noah's) story here. There is another Quranic chapter wholly dedicated to this story besides other parts mentioned several times elsewhere in the Quran. However, this particular context, like a telegram about Nuh (Noah), only tells the outset and end of the story, 'Indeed, [in times long past] we sent forth Nuh (Noah) unto his people' (*al-'Ankabut:* 14). As such, Nuh (Noah) was sent to his own people; they already knew him before being a messenger and knew his behaviour, character, and lifestyle among other things about him. The messenger was not distant from or unknown to them. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* first announced his mission, those who knew him well believed in him without even having to ask for a miracle; all it took was for him to say, 'I am the Messenger of Allah'. They believed in and followed him. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* for instance, immediately without the least hesitation believed the Messenger. When they said to him, 'Your friend claims to be a prophet,' he said: 'I believe in him.' Why? Simply, he knew him and thus trusted his past life. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a very fine character in dealings with people; how could he lie about Allah? The fact that the messenger belongs to his people is a way of making people feel at ease. When they said, 'we will not believe until an angel is sent to us', the reply was, 'Are you angels to await an angel as a messenger'? 'Say: "If angels were walking about on Earth as their natural abode, we would indeed have sent down unto them an angel out of heaven as a messenger' (*al-Isra':* 95).

Had the Lord sent an angel, could have they seen him? Of course, not! What will be the case when an angel is sent to humankind? He would have assumed a human form. If that happened, they would have said, 'we want an angel'.

Allah *the Exalted* then says, 'He dwelt among them a thousand years bar fifty' (*al-'Ankabut:* 14). This number is open for several meanings. He did not say ‘He dwelt amongst them nine hundred and fifty years’. The numbers in the Quran have many secrets. Read, for example, ‘We appointed for Musa (Moses) thirty nights [on Mount Sinai] and we added to them ten, whereby the term of forty nights set by his Lord was fulfilled’ (*al-A‘raf:* 142). In the chapter of *al-Baqarah*, the Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘When we appointed for Musa (Moses) forty nights’ (*al-Baqara:* 51). The latter context mentions the total number, while the former context gives the details about that number. The wisdom behind this is that no sooner had Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* gone to meet his Lord that his people began to worship the calf during the thirty-nights. Allah *the Exalted* did not allow Musa’s (Moses’s) return to his people when the thirty nights were over. He added ten more so that Musa (Moses) would not go back and see the deviation of his people.

The matter is highly precise. Without the exception in Allah’s word ‘bar fifty’, the listener might think that it was only an approximate figure. Clearly, approximate numbers befit humans, whereas the Lord expresses the absolute exactitude. It is like asking someone about the time and he says, ‘One minute and a half to ten’ i.e. giving the exact time.

The wisdom behind this quick reference to the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is to console Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after the animosity, arrogance and denial that his people showed. They persecuted his companions and tried to impede his mission. This went on so much that it took up thirteen years of his mission. His Lord consoled him, saying, ‘Be patient, Muhammad, for your brother Nuh (Noah) was patient for one thousand years bar fifty’. The time of difficulties you underwent so far is very simple. Men of fortitude among the prophets had to bear more than that.

Notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘a thousand years’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 14) using the word *sana* for ‘years’ and then, ‘bar fifty (years)’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 14) using the word *`am* for ‘years’. Indeed, both words mean ‘a year’ but some say that *sana* starts from the month of *Muharram* and ends with the end of the month of *Dhu Al-Hijja,* whereas actually *sana* means any year, whether it starts with Muharram and ends with *Dhu Al-Hijja* or not. It can begin and end at any time, e.g. ‘a year from now’. When we say that so-and-so is twenty years old, we mean from the day he was born until twenty years later on the same date. The words *sana*, *`am* and *hajja* are synonyms. They mean ‘a year’, be it a solar year, a lunar year or any other year.

Noticeably, the methods of timekeeping familiar to the Arabs were based on lunar movement. Only days are possible to calculate through the movement of the sun. We cannot use the sun to tell about months. We calculate months through the movement of the moon. When a new moon is born, this means a new month has begun. We base the year on the months, so that twelve lunar months make one year, to which eleven days can be added to make a solar year. It might be that the Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to teach us that *sana* and *`am* are the same thing, so there is no need to argue about such a thing. Then Allah *the Exalted* mentions the end that the disbelievers met, ‘Then the floods overwhelmed them while they were still lost in evildoing’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 14). The reason why they suffered is not because they are enemies, but because they wronged themselves by disbelief. As such, this short part of the story ends in a single verse consoling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at a time when his victory over the disbelievers seemed very far.

The word ‘overwhelmed them’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 14), in Arabic is *akhadha* which means literally ‘to take over’; it indicates the force and power with which they were taken. Does the word imply violence? In the case of an enemy, the word designates the violent way of taking them but with other than enemies, it means just to deal with someone gently.

A flood is an overflowing of water onto land beyond the usual amount. After having been a source of life for all living things, it becomes a source of death and destruction. The Lord *Glorified is He* wills to alert our attention to the reversals that occur in nature, so we do not think that His creation is monotonous and predictable. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea with his staff and the water became solid and rose like a mountain. Again, he struck the stone with it and water flowed out. This is absolute Omnipotent Power which relies on no means or intermediaries. They are made by Allah *the Exalted* and He does what He wills. Things are not controlled by their causes, but by the divine planning will. In his, ‘Poem on the Nile’, Ahmad Shawqi said,

When had you begun your flow through villages?

What a generous hand you give to all cities!

Do you descend from Heavens
Or your tributaries just flow over gardens?

Up to the line:

You pour water, so it becomes gold;
You drown the earth, and the drowned one revives.

Those overwhelmed here are the deniers of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. They wronged themselves by denying their messenger and turning away from the guidance. The Lord *Glorified is He* saved Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* in the Ark. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'He said [unto his followers], "Embark in this [ship]! In the Name of Allah be its run and its riding at anchor!"' (*Hud:* 41) Allah *the Exalted* commanded him to build the Ark, 'Build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the Ark [that shall save you and those who follow you]. And do not appeal to Me in behalf of those who are bent on evildoing. For they are destined to be drowned.' (*Hud:* 37)

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* knew what the end of the wicked deniers is very close. He kept it to himself whilst making the Ark in submission to his Lord. However, his people had no familiarity with ships. They knew nothing about them; they then mocked at Nuh's (Noah's) action: '[Nuh (Noah)] set himself to building the Ark. Every time the great ones of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him' (*Hud:* 38). In response, he spoke to himself saying, 'If you are scoffing at us – behold, we are scoffing at you [and your ignorance], just as you are scoffing at us' (*Hud:* 38). He knew that their end is approaching and what Allah had in store for them.

The Lord *Glorified is He* gives us this exemplum of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* in order that we reflect on his whole story and learn the moral admonition. There are many lessons to learn from the life of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. The people worshipped idols, named Wudd, Suwa`, Yaghuth, Ya`uq and Nasra. Here, we learn that the fellowship of prophets is a fellowship of morality, guidance, action, and emulation and their bond is a bond of piety and righteousness. The fact that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was a prophet did not save his evil son from destruction.

When Nuh (Noah) prayed to Allah, ‘O my Lord, Surely, my son was of my family, surely, your promise always comes true’ (*Hud:* 45) The Lord *Glorified is He* corrected Nuh’s (Noah’s) perception, ‘O Nuh (Noah), behold, he was not of your family. Surely, he was unrighteous in his conduct’ (*Hud:* 46). It does not mean that his son was illegitimate. Allah does not hide the truth from any of His prophets. Furthermore, his wife was a traitor, passing secret information to his enemies. Allah *the Exalted* said about her, ‘Allah puts forth as examples of those who disbelieved, the wife of Nuh (Noah) and the wife of Lut (Lot)’ (*at-Tahrim:* 10). The Lord *Glorified is He* explains the meaning behind His word ‘He was not of your family’ by saying, ‘He was unrighteous in his conduct’ so that we would not have any untoward thoughts about the wife of any prophet. Simply, his son was unrighteous in his conduct and the lineage of the prophets is a lineage of righteous acts, not blood ties. Then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَنجَيْنَٰهُ وَأَصْحَٰبَ ٱلسَّفِينَةِ وَجَعَلْنَٰهَآ ءَايَةً لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

We saved him and those with him on the
Ark. We made this a sign for all people[15]
(The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 15)

That is, we saved Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* ‘together with all who were in the Ark’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 15), with him. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* built the Ark for his people. It was not for him alone. He built it to save those who mocked at him and derided him for building it. The believers boarded it and saved their lives while the disbelievers refused and drowned. Here, remember that when the Lord *Glorified is He* requires the believer to give something to someone who does not possess it, be it knowledge, money, aid and the like—know that this is their right. It is not your favour for them. When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* built the Ark, Allah made it the right of people, referring to them as *Ashab As-Safina,* literally ‘the people of the Ark’. The Ark was their right. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was not supposed to build it and then lend it to them, rather, he made it especially for them. The same concept is found in His words, ‘those in whose possessions there is a due share, acknowledged’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 24). This due financial right on wealth is mentioned twice in the Quran, once in the above verse and again in Allah's words, 'A due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19). No one of these instances specify the due amount or give any details of it. Allah calls them both *haqq* (right). The right that is 'known' *ma`lum* is the obligatory poor-due, whilst the unknown right refers to the voluntary charity. The latter is not specific but left to a believer's generosity, love of good deeds and his level of nearness to the Lord *Glorified is He*. 'Indeed, the righteous will be in gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them. Indeed, they were doers of good in the past. They would lie asleep during but a small part of the night and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts; and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19)

These voluntary acts of worship indicate a person's devotion and love for good deeds and obedience. It evinces one's trust that Allah only obliges him with the smallest amount of worship worthy of His Divinity. The scholars say that you must be careful when you reach this level ordaining things on yourself, e.g., taking an oath or making a vow, one should keep it. Once you vow or take an oath, it becomes obligatory and you should not overlook it.

Keep it within your own capability because if you do it ordinarily and then give it up, it is as though you dislike it; you tested your love for Allah and have not found Him (Allah forbid) worthy of love. Allah refers to 'all who were in the Ark' (*al-'Ankabut:* 15), as *Ashab As-Safina* literally 'the people of the ark'. It shows us that the ark was built by Allah's Command for their sakes. When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* finished its building, it was rightfully theirs. How to understand His words, 'all who were in the ark' in the light of the fact that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* also carried pairs of every animal in the ark? In response, those pairs are not included in the expression *"Ashab as-Safina"* because they were owned by the people of the ark. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'which we then set up as a symbol for all people' (*al-'Ankabut:* 15). It was an incredible event, the like of which had never occurred in human history. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* built the ark in response to the inspiration from his Lord. It was matchless and unprecedented. As such, it was a ‘symbol’ and miracle that Allah taught him how to build it. It had a great religious significance for him; it saved the believers while the disbelievers drowned. It was ‘a symbol for all people.’

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentions Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* saying:

وَإِبْرَٰهِيمَ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱتَّقُوهُ ۖ
ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

We also sent Abraham. He said to his people, ‘Serve God and be mindful of Him: that is better for you, if only you knew [16] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 16)

The word ‘And’ here is used to connect the sentences; this verse is connected to ‘And, indeed, [in times long past] we sent forth Nuh (Noah).’ In other words, remember Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* ‘when he said unto his people: “worship Allah and be mindful of Him”’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 16). We said that to worship something is to obey it in all commands and prohibitions. If anyone claims godhood but has no commandments and prohibitions to obey, it cannot be a god. Those who say, ‘we worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah’ (*az-Zumar:* 3), speak untruthfully. In reality, they only worshipped idols because they neither command nor prohibit them; their godhood is merely symbolic. It entails no moral responsibility. The first proof of their false worship is that their gods offered them no guidance.

The commandment ‘be mindful’ of Allah directly follows the commandment to worship Him. It means to obey Allah’s commands and avoid His prohibitions; it is a synonym of worship. When it is mentioned in conjunction with worship, it means ‘obey His commandments out of fear of His Wrath and place a protective barrier between you and Allah’s Might and Majesty’. We said before that Allah has attributes of Majesty, such as the Compelling Power, the Mighty, the Avenger and the Degrader. He also has attributes of Beauty such as the Forgiving, the Compassionate, the Merciful and the Clement. Mindful righteousness admits a person to the attributes of Beauty and protects him from the attributes of Majesty.

Allah *the Exalted* then says, ‘that is better for you, if only you knew!’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 16) In other words, the previous command to worship Allah and be mindful of Him is best for you. If you do not know this, there is no goodness in your knowledge. Allah says, ‘[This is] Allah’s promise; never does Allah fail to fulfil His promise, but most people know [it] not. They know but the outer surface of this world’s life, whereas of the ultimate things, they are utterly unaware’ (*ar-Rum:* 6-7). The true knowledge is that of the hereafter; the knowledge of the divine laws and guidance that grants a human being the true goodness of all times. Conversely, the worldly knowledge, even if lending you some benefits, is only temporary and ends when life ends. As previously said, knowledge is to be aware of a matter of creation for which you can produce some evidence. It covers all known things in life, i.e. the empirical material knowledge, whose impact affects this world. As for the highest knowledge, it is that you know what Allah wants of you. This knowledge is for the Hereafter. For example, Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the sky, thus We produce with it fruits of various colours? And of the mountains are peaks that are white, red or some other colour and intense black. And from the people, and the animals, and the livestock, are various colours. As such, only the knowledgeable among Allah’s servants fear Him. Allah is Almighty, Forgiving.’ (*Fatir:* 27-28)

Allah *the Exalted* mentions the knowledge of plants, inanimate objects, and man (human biology), and animals (animal biology). He mentions all different species and genera. He then says, ‘As such, only the knowledgeable among Allah’s servants fear Him,’ although He mentions no specific legal ruling here.

The meaning of ‘only the knowledgeable’ refers to those who discover things about the universe and help people in their lives. They unveil Allah’s Power and incredible creation, and remind people of Allah *the Exalted*. Reflect on your own self, for example, and how the windpipe is directly next to the gullet; if you swallow even half a grain of rice in the wrong way, you cannot relax until you have it out. Reflect on the uvula, and how it works automatically with no need to control. Think of the cilia of the windpipe, and how they move upwards to expel the food which enters if the uvula is impaired and does not close the windpipe during swallowing. You sit comfortably with nothing to disturb you and then all of a sudden you find yourself in need to answer a call of nature. What happened? Simply, the digestive system has something like a trap door, which expels a certain amount of waste at a certain time. When the defecation removes the indigestive substances, a person feels the need to relieve himself to get rid of it.

Reflect on the nose, the nasal hairs, and the mucus. Everything is made in a certain way for a good reason. The hairs filter out all the dust from the air that enters the nose and the mucus collects the fine dust that the hairs miss. The air then enters into lungs clean and pure. Reflect on the outer ear and how it has several different curvatures to prevent the air from entering the ear. The signs inherent in human body are numerous and miraculous. Only the endeavours of scientists, using human minds, can interpret and discover them. Some knowledge is beyond human mind. It comes down from above and represents the law that maintains harmony; the law the Creator releases to protect the creation. Whoever is only concerned with worldly empirical knowledge denies themselves the lasting good. Simply the best that material knowledge can give is to make your material life more comfortable, whilst knowledge of the Hereafter makes your worldly life comfortable and do the same for you in the Hereafter.

As such, Allah's words 'this is the best for you' (*al-'Ankabut:* 16), refers to the divine system of harmony embodied in the divine commandments and prohibitions, which must not be confused or challenged. We compared this system to the instruction manual that a manufacturer makes for his product which, if followed, will ensure that the product works properly. The same goes true of Allah's guidance to humankind. If you do not know this, no other knowledge will be of any good to you. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, we shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, we [may] give something thereof – but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come' (*ash-Shura:* 20). The goodness that endures is the goodness of the hereafter.

Then, the Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَوْثَٰنًا وَتَخْلُقُونَ إِفْكًا ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ
تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ لَكُمْ رِزْقًا فَٱبْتَغُوا۟ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ
ٱلرِّزْقَ وَٱعْبُدُوهُ وَٱشْكُرُوا۟ لَهُۥٓ ۖ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

What you worship instead of God are mere idols; what you invent is nothing but falsehood. Those you serve instead of God have no power to give you provisions, so seek provisions from God, serve Him, and give Him thanks: you will all be returned to Him [17] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 17)

'You worship only' refers to their claim that they 'worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah.' (*az-Zumar:* 3) In reality, no worship is there, for those idols issue no command or prohibition, and have no guidance. It is senseless to worship them. They worshipped idols instead of Allah but when strictly cornered, they claim, 'we worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah.' (*az-Zumar:* 3) They are polytheists and anyone who denies their disbelief is a disbeliever. The idol refers to created things made holy, be they stones, e.g. limestone, granite, or marble; or metal e.g. gold, silver or bronze; or wood. Some would make idols out of date-paste and when they were hungry, they would eat it. `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* once ridiculed this funny behaviour. It is unreasonable and illogic to take a piece of a mountain to carve a statue and then make it into a god for worship after you made it yourself. It may be broken and then you try to repair it. No intellect accepts it. The Quran asks them, 'Do you worship something that you [yourselves] have carved?' (*as-Saffat:* 95) As the world progressed, this phenomenon disappeared. It is something that the mind cannot accept. The meaning of 'you give visible shape to a lie' is that you make and the act of making comes from nothing. They make it from nothing! Do they create a true or false object? They just make 'a lie," i.e. they deliberately reverse fact. Allah thus called the cities *al-mu`tafikaat* (turned upside down or overthrown) 'just as He thrust into perdition those cities that were overthrown' (*an-Najm:* 53). Allah overturned these cities.

As explained before, the 'truth' is identical with reality. If we say, 'Mohammad is generous', it means that there must be a person named Mohammad who possesses the attribute of generosity. If this sentence has no reality, it is untrue and goes against reality, i.e. a 'lie'. The Lord *Glorified is He* does not find fault with them for having created something. He confirmed that His creatures do create; He says, 'Hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of Artisans!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14)

However, if Allah creates from nothing, we only create from the created substances. We make clothes from cotton, glass from sand, and plough from iron and so on. We create new things from other available substances, whereas the Creator *Glorified is He* creates things that existed from nothing. As said, human creations remain as they are, so a knife remains a knife; it does not grow into a dagger; a cup does not give birth to more cups. Allah's creations grow, develop, and reproduce. Allah acknowledges that human beings create, but He is the best Creator.

The Lord *Glorified is He* does not find fault with these people because they create; He finds fault with them because they create lies and falsehoods. He says, 'Behold, those [things and beings] that you worship instead of Allah have it not in their power to provide sustenance for you. Seek, then, all [your] sustenance from Allah' (*al-'Ankabut:* 17). Elsewhere the Quran explains that they worship gods that can neither bring harm nor benefit. He mentions another important matter which is the maintenance of human life by means of physical nourishment which we call sustenance (*rizq*). The gods that they worship do not have the power to provide them with sustenance. If no rain fell and the land became dry, you would all die of starvation. You should reflect on the source of your life. Who gives it to you. As such, worship and obey the one who gives it. We say in our dialect, 'You eat my food, so obey me'! I feed you, but you obey others?! Sustenance is the prime reason why people work. At first, we all strive to eat and drink—to keep life. When things improve, we seek to save for the future. A blue-collar worker, for example, may save enough for a month, whilst a farmer saves enough for a year. It is amazing that out of all of Allah's creatures, only human beings, mice, and ants save for the future. As for other animals, they only take the food they need and leave the rest without worries for the future. They do not eat more than they need or store for tomorrow. Allah reminds His creatures of their sustenance as an important element for human lives. It is amazing that sustenance always comes even from whence you do not know as divinely decreed. The clearest sign that sustenance is divinely distributed by Allah’s decrees is that when a woman becomes pregnant, her menstrual cycle, which had come to her regularly before she became pregnant, stops. Her blood becomes the sustenance of the embryo in the womb. No one else takes it or benefits from it, even the mother. When an embryo is created, the blood becomes its nourishment. Yet, if no embryo is created, the blood comes out from the woman for her own good health. If it remains, it may damage her. Simply, it is not her sustenance; it is the sustenance of the child in her womb. If this were not the case, the woman would become weaker every time she lost this blood in the regular manner. We all have our own sustenance, which no one else can take.

A pious person once said, ‘It is wonder that a child of Adam seriously seeks for what is guaranteed for him and leaves what is required from him’. The Lord guarantees your sustenance, so be mindful of your duties and busy yourself with Allah’s Commands. It is strange that some beggars, especially those seen in the season of *Hajj* (pilgrimage), show their maladies and the maladies of their children to gain people sympathy with them. They complain to people about the Creator and show malcontent with divine decrees. Allah does not like to see His slaves complaining about Him to His creatures. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘If tribulation visits you, conceal it’ (1) By Allah, if the people of tribulation were to conceal it and wait in their houses, Allah would send their provision to their very doors.

Provision is guaranteed by Allah, so He mentions this favour to His slaves, and denies that other false gods can do the like of it: ‘Those you worship instead of Allah have no power to give you provisions, so seek provisions from Allah…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 17). And then He says, ‘…worship Him, and give Him thanks: you will all be returned to Him.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 17) So if you are not to worship Him because He gives you provisions, then worship Him because you shall return to Him and shall be held accountable for your deeds before Him.

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(1) *Al-Bayhaqi and Al-Hakim narrated it from Ibn `Umar.*

It is enough that His blessings precede any obligations with which He assigns you. He leaves you to enjoy His blessings, without requiring anything of you until you reach adulthood which is the age of physical maturity, when you become able to reproduce. After this, you respond to what He requires of you by showing ingratitude to Him?! If to worship and obey Allah was only to give Him thanks for what He has done for you, it would still be obligatory for you.

Allah orders people ‘be grateful to Him’ because He *Glorified is He* wants to give them even more. So, He makes showing gratitude for His blessings the means to bring forth this increase, saying, ‘…If you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly give you more and more…’ (*Ibrahim:* 7).

So, your Lord is waiting for you to give thanks and by merely accepting His blessings by saying, ‘Praise be to Allah’, you will surely receive more blessings.

Some of the people of deep insight say that Allah should not only be praised for His countless untold blessings, but that He should first be praised because there is no god but Him; if this was not the case, and there was another god, we would not know who to follow. So, the Oneness of Allah is one of the greatest of His blessings which merits praise.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a parable to illustrate this as He says in the Quran: ‘Allah sets forth a parable: A man who has for his masters several partners, [all of them] at variance with one another…’ (*az-Zumar:* 29).

The verse relates the example of a slave who is owned by different partners, who do not agree with each other, and another example of ‘a man depending wholly on one person’ (*az-Zumar:* 29), that is, a slave owned by a single master; then ‘…can these two be deemed equal as regards their condition?’ (*az-Zumar:* 29) Surely, they are not equal. Likewise, the one who serves Allah alone, and the one who associates partners with Him

Concerning Allah’s *Glorified is He* saying: ‘O you who believe! Partake of the good things which We have provided for you as sustenance…’ (*al-Baqara:* 172); one of the righteous people says that the thief who consumes unlawful food is eating his divinely-ordained sustenance. Although it is destined for him, he seizes it unlawfully. If he were to refrain from stealing, he would eat the same sustenance, but lawfully, as Allah would facilitate it to him in a legal way. The meaning here is that Allah created you and gave you sustenance, so do not disobey Him. If you are not to worship Him for the good He has done for you and then worsip Him in order to protect yourselves from the punishment that shall come.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن تُكَذِّبُوا۟ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أُمَمٌ مِّن قَبْلِكُمْ ۖ
وَمَا عَلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ إِلَّا ٱلْبَلَٰغُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿١٨﴾

If you say this is a lie, [be warned that] other communities before you said the same. The messenger's only duty is to give clear warning [18] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 18)

Here Allah *Glorified is He* says to them that you give the lie to what We have said to you and what Our Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* has brought you because to believe in him would mean that you would have to take on moral responsibilities, follow the way of guidance and give up some of your free will concerning some prohibited worldly enjoyments. Although you are required to give up some of your free will in this respect, it is Allah *Glorified is He* who has honoured you when He gave you free will, which nothing else in creation possesses this because they all submit themselves entirely to the will of their Lord.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

So, everything in the universe is divinely subdued to act its role, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…there is not a single thing but extols His Limitless Glory and praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44). And He says, 'Do you not see that before Allah prostrate themselves all [things and beings] that are in the heavens and all that are on earth – the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees and the beasts? And many human beings [submit to Allah consciously], whereas many [others, having defied Him,] will inevitably have to suffer [in the life to come] …' (*al-Hajj:* 18).

So, the universal principle that all creatures are submissive to Allah is all-inclusive with no exceptions, except in the case of humankind some of whom obey Allah, and some of whom do not.

So, the meaning is, 'if you give the lie' you are not the first to have done so because '… [other] communities have given the lie [to Allah's prophets] before your time…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 18). But you must pay attention to what happened to the communities who denied the end they met and beware lest you are afflicted with the same end.

Some contentious people have objected here, saying, 'How could the Quran say that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to his people, "And if you give [me] the lie – well, [other] communities have given the lie [to Allah's prophets] before your time…" (*al-'Ankabut:* 18), when there was only one community before them; the community of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*'? In this, they believe they have found a mistake in the Quran.

We reply to them that yes indeed, the community of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was a community to whom a message of faith was delivered, but before them came the communities of Adam, Sheeth (Seth) and Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon them* all of which came before Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. This can also be replied that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* spent almost a thousand years amongst his people, which amounts to almost ten generations, if we define a generation as one hundred years. Each of these was itself a community.

Then, Allah says, '…The messenger's only duty is to give clear warning.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 18) So, a messenger's mission is simply to deliver the message which people can either accept or reject. Messengers are not given recompense or payment for everyone who believes in them, so do not think that by denying the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* you are somehow reducing his reward, especially as you feel hatred towards him. So, the meaning here is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is ordered to say to his people, 'I am only obliged to deliver the message and I have delivered it, so I will obtain my reward from my Lord. You cannot harm me by your disbelief, but you can only harm yourselves'.

Our Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would become deeply sad and pained if any of his community would slip through his fingers and disbelieve in him, until his Lord said to him: ‘It is not for you [O Prophet] to make people follow the right path, since it is Allah [alone] who guides whom He wills…’ (*al-Baqara:* 272).

Allah addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Quran: ‘Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

When Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to him the following verses: ‘By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness, Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]. And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life]. And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-5), Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took this chance and prayed to his Lord, ‘So I will not be satisfied to see any of my community enter the Fire.’(1) This is because he *peace and blessings be upon him* loves his followers and is deeply concerned for them and full of compassion and mercy towards them. Allah speaks of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Quran saying, ‘Indeed, there has come unto you [O mankind] a messenger from among yourselves: heavily weighs upon him [the thought] that you might suffer [in the life to come]; full of concern for you [is he, and] full of compassion and mercy towards the believers’. (*at-Tawba:* 128)

Allah *Glorified is He* describes this deliverance of the message as being clear, that is, plain and lucid because sometimes a message can be simply a presentation of something without any corroboration or proof to support it, but this is not the case with the divine message.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Al-Khatib and Al-Bayhaqi narrated the like of it on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with them... See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, vol. 8, p. 543.*

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَيْفَ يُبْدِئُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ
يُعِيدُهُۥٓ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿١٩﴾

Do they not see that God brings life into being and reproduces it? Truly this is easy for God [19]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 19)

This is directed to the community whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was calling to Islam. This is the case of those who disbelieved in the past, just as you disbelieve now, then where are your minds? If only you reflect on the universe in which you live in which you have been placed and which was prepared for you with everything you need to live, you would have surely realized the truth.

The word *yara* (to see) in the verse under discussion means 'to know', as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'Have you not seen, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) The meaning here: Have not you been acquainted with the story of the elephant. This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see what happened with the elephant, but the word 'to see' was used in place of 'to know' in order to remind us that Allah's words to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were more trustworthy than what he would see with his own eyes.

That is why, when he heard the news of Prophet Muhammad's Night Ascension, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'If he indeed said it, he spoke the truth.'

The use of the question form 'Have you not seen …' here is a rhetorical question, like when you ask your son, 'Do you not know what happens to people when they ignore their studies'? Your intention is to warn him against doing the same, so you remind him of the consequences of ignoring one's studies, making him admit it himself 'Those who ignore their studies fail'.

Likewise, when someone denies the good you have done for him, you say, 'Did I not do such-and-such for you'? So, he admits it without you having to say it for him, which amounts to a more convincing argument.

When, in Arabic, a negative particle comes directly after an interrogative, it is called a ‘rhetorical question’, that is, the questioner criticises what the questioned is doing and try to let him admit the truth by himself. Accordingly, the intended meaning here is that: ‘Do they disbelieve as though they have not seen what happened to the communities who disbelieved in the past? Do they disbelieve as though they have not seen Allah’s signs and His overwhelming Omnipotent Power evident in the whole universe’? They should have taken a considered look in order to discover who created this universe; and if you were to ask them who created it, they would find no answer except to say, ‘Allah’, as the Quran says: ‘And if you asked them, “Who created the heavens and earth?” they would surely say, “Allah”’ (*Luqman:* 25).

But how could they admit this fact, whilst they do not believe in Allah? This is because such a matter is too obvious to be denied. The one who makes or invents an item, even the smallest and simplest, becomes very proud to call it his own and people even claim to have made things that they have not. Then what about a universe designed with such precision and such magnitude, yet which no one has claimed for themselves? A claim should be given to the one who makes it as long as there is no counter-claim.

So, I say that Allah *Glorified is He* before He said, ‘there is no god but Me’, and before He asked us to do so, He testified to it to Himself, saying: ‘Allah [Himself] proffers evidence that there is no deity save Him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). According to this testimony and all peoples’ acknowledgement thereof, Allah *Glorified is He* says to a thing, ‘Be!’ and so it is. If He did not believe he is the Only One God, He would not have said so.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do they not see that Allah brings life into being and reproduces it? Truly this is easy for Allah.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 19) Why does He say this, although we have not yet witnessed the reproduction of life, let alone the first creation?

Scholars say that we see this creation and recreation all around us in the phenomena of the universe. We see it in crops, for example, and how Allah gives new life to the land in the form of plants, which are then harvested and then replanted so that the cycle begins again. And flowers bloom with radiant colours and sweet scents, yet when they are picked the water drains from them, and then dry up and wilt and their scent disperses into the air and then another flower replaces them and so on.

For example, observe the cycle of water. Has the amount of water that Allah created in the universe increased since He prepared it for mankind when He *Glorified is He* created Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*? The amount of water has been the same from then until now despite the huge increase in population because the constituents of the universe have remained the same since Allah created them, but they follow a cycle of creation and renewal.

You may contemplate Allah's, words: 'Say, "Would you indeed deny Him who has created the earth in two days? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?" For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence…' (*Fussilat:* 9-10). It is as though as the sustenance of the whole creation has been prepared since creation began and until the Last Hour. It does not increase, but it follows a natural cycle.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Truly this is easy for Allah' (*al-'Ankabut:* 19). One may ask: which of them; the creation or the bringing people to life again is easy for Allah? As for creation, they all accept it and there is no argument about it. So, this statement refers to bringing people to life again. Is the One Who created from nothing unable to renew this creation? The first creation was from nothing, whilst the return will be from something, so which one is easier according to your own understanding? That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and He it is who creates [all life] in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew: and most easy is this for Him…' (*ar-Rum:* 27). Although it cannot be said about Allah *Glorified is He* that some things are easier for Him than others; rather, He is addressing us in a way we can understand.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying:

قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ بَدَأَ ٱلْخَلْقَ ۚ ثُمَّ ٱللَّهُ يُنشِئُ
ٱلنَّشْأَةَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

Say, 'Travel throughout the earth and see how He brings life into being: and He will bring the next life into being. God has power over all things [20] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 20)

In Arabic, *sayr* means to move from one place to another, but do we travel in the earth, or on it knowing that the Arabic verse literally says, 'Travel in *(fi)* the earth…'? In reality, we travel in the earth just as Allah *Glorified is He* says because the atmosphere that surrounds the earth is a part of the earth and without it there could be no life on earth. So, when you travel, you travel inside the earth because the ground is below you, whilst the atmosphere is above you so it is as though you are inside it.

The reason for the travelling as mentioned here is to see 'how He has created in the first instance' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20). In another verse, Allah says, 'and then contemplate…' (*al-An'am:* 11). Here the particle *thumma* which means 'and then', is used, whilst in the verse under discussion, the particle *wa* which means simply 'and', is used. This is because travelling in the earth has two motivations: either for tourism, reflection, and contemplation or for trade and business if one cannot gain enough provisions in one's own land. So, Allah's words: '…Go all over the earth and behold…' (*al-An'am:* 11), refers to a journey for the purpose of reflection and contemplation.

As for Allah's saying: 'and then behold', the word *thumma* (and then) implies that there is a succession of events with a pause between them, as though He is saying to us, 'Travel in the earth to do business and then take some time to reflect and contemplate upon what you see'. And there is nothing to prevent travelling for both reasons.

You might recall that Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Qasas*: 'Verily, [O Muhammad,] He who has laid down this Quran in plain terms, making it binding on you, will assuredly bring you back [from death] to a life renewed…' (*al-Qasas:* 85). This referred to Emigration to Midyan. And in this current chapter, He says: 'O My servants who have believed, indeed My earth is spacious, so worship only Me.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 56) This means: If your sustenance is scant in one place, seek it out in another and if the natural signs in the universe are not enough to satisfy your desire for contemplation, then travel in the earth and you will find many signs and lessons in the many different races, environments, fruits, climates and so on.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… [The angels] will say, "Was, then, Allah's Earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?"' (*an-Nisa':* 97) All the earth belongs to Allah. It is limitless and has originally no boundaries. However, when peoples divided it and established national boundaries that prevented people from moving freely within it, many problems were created and it became difficult for people to travel for tourism or to seek sustenance if it had become scant in their own lands.

We, in Egypt, are bordered by the Sudan, in which there are many fertile areas that if farmed could meet the needs of the entire Arab world. Yet can we go there to farm this land? If we did, they would say, 'They have come to colonise us'!

So, when I had the opportunity to speak at the UN, I said: 'It is not possible to solve the current problems of the world unless we apply the principle of the Creator, Glory be to Him, and return to the guidance He gave us to organise our lives. How can we establish these borders and fences between us, when our Lord says: "And the earth has He spread out for all living beings" (*ar-Rahman:* 10)'?

So, the whole earth is for all people and when we realise this principle no one will be short of sustenance because if it is scant in one place you can seek it in another. Most of the troubles of the world today either arise from lands without people, or people without lands; so why can we not seek to restore the balance that Allah wants in His creation?

So, the travel mentioned in this verse is based on reflections on '…how He brings life into being: and He will bring the next life into being….' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20) As long as we believe that Allah is the One Who created us in the very beginning, we must know that the renewal of this creation will be even easier, as He says: 'Could We, then, be [thought of as being] worn out by the first creation?...' (*Qaf:* 15) So, as people may have doubt concerning the second life, the Creator *Glorified is He* emphasises His Omnipotent Power, saying, '… Allah has Power over all things.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُ وَيَرۡحَمُ مَن يَشَآءُۖ وَإِلَيۡهِ تُقۡلَبُونَ ٢١

He punishes whoever He will and shows mercy to
whoever He will. You will all be returned to Him [21]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 21)

Why did Allah *Glorified is He* mention punishment before mercy here? Elsewhere, He mentions mercy first, saying: '…He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 18). Scholars say that this is because the speech here refers to the deniers and the disbelievers and so it is appropriate to begin with them by mentioning punishment: 'He punishes whomever He wills, and bestows His mercy on whomever He wills…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 21). However, one may ask: why does Allah *Glorified is He* mention mercy towards the disbelievers after having threatened them with punishment? I reply that this is because Allah *Glorified is He* threatens His slaves with punishment in the beginning so that they shall repent and believe in Him and then opens for them a door to His Mercy so that they yearn to obey Him and have faith in Him.

It is narrated that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'My Mercy prevails over my Wrath.'(1) So at the same time as He threatens punishment, He tells His slaves, even the disbelievers, that His Mercy prevails over His Wrath.

Allah says, '…and unto Him you shall be made to return' (*al-'Ankabut:* 21), in the passive voice, which indicates that they will be brought forth and dragged before Him. He is telling them: 'Whatever level of tyranny, arrogance and misappropriation of Allah's blessings you reach, you will still be returned to Him, and stand before Him. So, mark this well because you cannot escape Him', so it is appropriate that He says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

وَمَآ أَنتُم بِمُعۡجِزِينَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِۖ وَمَا
لَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِيّٖ وَلَا نَصِيرٖ ٢٢

You cannot escape Him on earth or in the heavens;
you will have no one to protect or help you besides
God [22] (The Quran*, al-'Ankabut:* 22)

The word *yu`jiz* means to incapacitate someone. The meaning here is that you will not be able to escape Allah or refuse Him when He wants you to stand before Him, but rather, you will come forward subdued.

Notice here that Allah *Glorified is He* says in Arabic '*wa ma antum bimu`jizin*' which literally means 'You cannot escape Him'. He did not say, 'And you will not escape from Me when I come for you', or something like this. To negate a verb is not like negating an adjective. For example, if you say to someone, 'You did not make me a shirt', this means that one is able to do so, but you did not, so the ability is there but the will to act is not. However, when you say to someone, 'You are not a tailor', this means that you negate that he has the ability to make clothes.

Likewise, Allah did not negate the verb for them so that we would not imagine that such a thing is even possible for them; to run and escape from the meeting with Allah in the hereafter is something utterly unimaginable. Therefore, He negates that they could even be described with this adjective, saying: 'You cannot escape Him on earth or in the heavens…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 22).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse, '…you will have no one to protect or help you besides Allah' (*al-'Ankabut:* 22). One may say, 'If they cannot hope to escape, someone else might be able to elude Allah, or might be able to intercede for them, or defend them'. So Allah *Glorified is He* negates this too because no one and nothing can elude Him.

So, Allah says to them in another verse, 'How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?' (*as-Saffat:* 25) meaning, where are the strong people whom you used to resort to for help? So, He negates that they will have any protector or any succour. In Arabic, there is a difference between *al-wali* (a protector) (someone who is close to you and beloved to you, who defends you with prudence and diplomacy and intercedes for you if you need him to) and *an-nasr* (succour) (one who defends you with strength and force).

So, He negates their ability to elude Him and negates that they will have any protection or succour, but He clarifies this by saying ‘besides Allah’. This means that they may have a protector or succour, but this cannot be attained except through Allah. So, if they want a true protector and helper, they should believe in Allah and then He will be their protector and helper. It is as though He is saying to them, ‘If you repent, renounce your disbelief, and confess your sins, I will be your protector and helper’.

Elsewhere in this chapter, He says: ‘…and you will have none to succour you’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 22). Here Allah does not say ‘besides Allah’ because this refers to the hereafter and in the hereafter, there is no repentance or confession. So, Allah’s words ‘besides Allah’ only refer to this world.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِقَآئِهِۦٓ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَئِسُوا۟
مِن رَّحْمَتِى وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

Those who deny God’s Revelation and their meeting with Him have no hope of receiving My grace: they will have a grievous torment [23] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 23)

If the disbeliever insists on his disbelief and his worship of idols that bring neither benefit nor harm, nor offer any counsel or guidance, he will have no refuge or recourse to Allah’s Mercy because he has worshipped useless idols and disbelieved in Allah and so there is no one to protect him from Allah. Moreover, the idols he worshipped can offer no succour and so he can do nothing but abandon all hope.

All the disbelievers’ hopes will be abandoned because they worship that which could neither benefit nor harm them and disbelieved in He who possesses all benefit and harm.

I reiterate here that Allah’s signs either refer to the cosmic signs that confirm Allah’s Omnipotence and indicate the Wisdom of the Creator *Glorified is He* such as night and day, the sun and the moon; or else it refers to the miraculous signs which the messengers are supported with and by means of which Allah helps them and shows the truthfulness of their divine messages. It may also refer to the verses of the Quran and according to this meaning this verse means that they disbelieved in the verses of the Quran which convey to them Allah's Injunctions.

Those people disbelieved in all these signs. Since they disbelieved in these signs and disbelieved also in their meeting with Allah in the hereafter, then Allah's Mercy is far from them and they shall abandon all hope of it.

So, their end will be that '…they will have a grievous torment.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 23)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُواْ ٱقْتُلُوهُ أَوْ حَرِّقُوهُ فَأَنجَىٰهُ
ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

The only answer Abraham's people gave was, 'Kill him or burn him!' but God saved him from the Fire: there truly are signs in this for people who believe [24]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 24)

Having called them to worship Allah Alone and associate nothing with Him in worship and had explained to them the falsehood of worshipping their idols which neither can help nor cause harm to them, the people of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* were expected to give a logical answer. They should have debated him, defended their idols, and proved why they were right to worship them.

Nonetheless, their answer proved their intellectual bankruptcy. 'The only answer Ibrahim's (Abraham's) people gave was, "Kill him or burn him!"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 24). Is this your answer for what had been said to you, people of Ibrahim (Abraham)? It is nothing but evasion and a proof of the total absence of any strong argument. It is the answer of the one who has no answer, who has nothing but issuing threats and showing signs of strength and aggression. This is the language of those who have no argument to make.

But why did the Quran even call this an answer? Scholars say that this is because if they had not said this, it would have been said about them that they did not even notice their prophet's words or pay any attention to them, as though his words had no worth and did not need to be answered. So, although their speech was no kind of answer, it was in the form of an answer, though a very poor one.

They said: 'Kill him'. We know that to kill means to destroy the physical body in such a way that the soul is released because it finds no sound body in which to live. As for death, this is when the soul is released first, and then the body is destroyed when it decays in the grave. So, they are both equal in that they mean the end of life.

I have explained this before using the example of an electric light bulb. Electricity does not emit from the light bulb, but rather, it is outside of it. The effects of the electricity on the lamp appear if it is working correctly and can turn the electrical current into light. If you break it, you will find no evidence of the electricity's presence and there will be no light; you could also turn off the electricity, whilst the lamp is still working properly.

Then they said, 'or burn him'. Is burning someone a more severe punishment than killing him? Killing is a worse punishment. A person may be burnt and then he might be rescued and treated so he does not die. Killing someone means making sure that he dies, whilst burning someone does not necessarily do the same. So, why did they not just say 'Kill him' or put the punishments in order of severity and say, 'Burn him or slay him'?

They started with the worst punishment they can inflict on him because of the extent of their fury they felt against him, so they said, 'Kill him'. Then they had another idea: 'Why do we not burn him in a fire so that perhaps he will renounce his call because of the pain of the burning'? This would have been a triumph and victory for them.

But who was the one who said 'Kill him'? Who ordered the execution, and to whom did the order was issued? They all agreed to kill him, so there was no difference between the one who gave the command and the one to whom it was directed. This can be inferred from the wording of the verse itself which reads: 'The only answer Ibrahim's (Abraham's) people gave was…':

'Kill him or burn him!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 24) The wording of the verse refers that all of them agreed on the matter. It may be also inferred that the ones who gave the order were the ruling elite to whom the people were subjected. As for the carrying out of the order itself, it was the job of the subordinates.

When a crime is committed, the masses get angry and their reactions vary; some would say 'Kill him', others would 'put him into prison!' As such, these proposals as well as reactions are theirs, all of them.

Then the verse continues, 'but Allah saved him from the fire' (*al-'Ankabut:* 24). Some philosophers raise an objection here, saying, 'How could this happen, although the nature of fire is to burn? How could this natural law be broken'? In reply I say to them, 'How could it be a miracle if it had not happened in this way'?

Allah *Glorified is He* created the universe and placed within it natural laws whose causes and effects occur simultaneously. For example, when you plough the earth, sow seeds in it, and water it, natural law states that it will produce crops. However, in order that no one imagines that the universe simply follows these laws and does not follow Allah's will, we find that from time to time He breaks these laws to show us His Absolute and Omnipotent Power over His creation.

So, if Allah *Glorified is He* has not decreed that you will gain provision from your farm, your crops will fail or they will be destroyed by a plight or a storm before they are full-grown. So, the matter all depends on Allah's Absolute Power and Sustenance; it is not simply a matter of mechanics.

Allah *Glorified is He* broke natural laws for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he struck the sea and it parted into two huge walls of water and the flowing water became a solid mountain. Allah *Glorified is He* also broke natural laws for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when Allah said to the fire: '[But] We said: "O fire! Be cool, and [a source of] inner peace for Ibrahim (Abraham)!"' (*al-Anbiya':* 69)

Allah *Glorified is He* broke these natural laws to produce miraculous wonders and to show that Allah's Hand always has control over His dominion. He did not create these natural laws and then leave them to control the universe without His ever intervening in it, as philosophers say. Allah *Glorified is He* created natural laws to act, but His Infinite Power and Omnipotence can overrule these natural laws.

Here Allah says, '… but Allah saved him from the fire: there truly are signs in this for people who believe.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 24) But when we refer to the story of the Ark, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We then set [the Ark] up as a sign for all people'. So there, Allah says 'a sign', whereas here He says 'signs'. Moreover, there He says, 'for all people', whereas here He says, 'for people who believe'. So, the difference in phrasing revolves around two things: Allah *Glorified is He* called the Ark 'a sign' because the amazing thing about the Ark was not how it was built because anyone who saw it could have built one like it, but rather that Allah *Glorified is He* told Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to make it before there was any sign that he needed to do so and then prevented the storms and hurricanes from sinking it and drowning its passengers. As for the matter of burning, it involved many marvels and wondrous signs. It was possible for Allah *Glorified is He* to prevent them from getting Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in the first place or it was possible that, once they had gotten him and thrown him in the fire, Allah could have sent down rain to put out the fire and save him or Allah *Glorified is He* could have sent some of the people who had compassion and mercy in their hearts to save him from being cast into the fire. But none of this happened, for Allah *Glorified is He* allowed them to seize Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and throw him into the blazing fire, whilst he was tied up with rope, and despite all that, the fire did not harm him, so the signs were clear and obvious to the eyes of all who witnessed this.

The second thing is that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'for all people' when talking about the Ark because when it cast off and saved its passengers from the flood, the ark remained there in its place for all to see and reflect upon, so it left a clear trace to which anyone could bear witness.

As for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him,* Allah says, '…for people who will believe' (*al-'Ankabut:* 24) because the rescue of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from the fire was an admonition for those who witnessed it alone and we believe in it because Allah, in whom we believe, has told us about it. So, these represent signs only for those who believe in Allah, not for all people.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ إِنَّمَا ٱتَّخَذْتُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَوْثَٰنًا مَّوَدَّةَ بَيْنِكُمْ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ
ثُمَّ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ يَكْفُرُ بَعْضُكُم بِبَعْضٍ وَيَلْعَنُ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا
وَمَأْوَىٰكُمُ ٱلنَّارُ وَمَا لَكُم مِّن نَّٰصِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Abraham said to them, 'You have chosen idols instead of God but your love for them will only last for the present life: on the Day of Resurrection, you will disown and reject one another. Hell will be your home and no one will help you' [25] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 25)

According to this verse, it is as if Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his people, 'You do not believe in the cosmic signs that prove Allah's Omnipotence and you do not believe in the miracle you witnessed when my Lord saved me from the fire. You should have believed that no one save Allah could do such a thing. So why is it that you insist on disbelieving'?

It must be, therefore, that you disbelieve in Allah and worship idols, not because you are intellectually convinced that they should be worshipped and not because they deserve to be worshipped, but rather, you worship '…and your love for them will only last for the present life…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 25). This means that it was insincere love and flattery for one another because they have seen their rulers worship these idols so they blindly follow them with their own worship. It may also mean that they did so out of love for their forefathers, following their example, as the Quran says: '…Behold, we found our forefathers agreed on what to believe – and, verily, it is but in their footsteps that we follow!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23).

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Enough for us is that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104).

But this love, flattery and hypocrisy only last as long as this worldly life exists, after which this love between you will be severed as 'On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes to one another…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). This love and flattery will become enmity and will become war, as the subordinates will say, as the Quran states: '…O our Lord! Show us those of the jinn and humans that have led us astray: we shall trample them underfoot…' (*Fussilat:* 29). And the Quran relates also: '[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers, and the latter shall see the punishment [that awaits them], with all their hopes cut to pieces!' (*al-Baqara:* 166)

In the verse under discussion, this truth is confirmed: '… on the Day of Resurrection, you will disown and reject one another. Hell will be your home and no one will help you.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 25) This is because everything that had gone before should have caused them to believe, yet they did nothing but to insist on disbelief.

At the same time as the love of the disbelievers will become enmity, the enmity of the believers who cooperate in good deeds will become love and affection. Then a believer will say to his brother who drew him to obedience and goodness and encouraged him to stick to it, despite his initial reluctance, 'May Allah reward you with goodness, for you have saved me'!

The punishment will not end with the disowning and cursing that they have brought upon themselves, but rather, they will then move onto an even more severe punishment as Allah says to them, '…Hell will be your home and no one will help you.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 25) Notice here that Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'And you have none save Allah to succour you' because the discourse here relates to the hereafter, where there shall be no repentance and no going back, so it is too late for them to seek a friend or a helper to protect them from Allah. Likewise, they will find no help from those they worshipped instead of Allah, since they seek the aid of idols and statues who can neither speak nor answer their calls.

And so ends this quick reference to the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* although his full story is long and he is the elder of the messengers and the 'Father of the Prophets'. If one wants to tell the whole story of Ibrahim (Abraham), it will take a long time. To show his greatness, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a nation…' (*an-Nahl:* 120).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَـَٔامَنَ لَهُۥ لُوطٞۘ وَقَالَ إِنِّي مُهَاجِرٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّيٓۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ٢٦

Lut (Lot) believed him, and said, 'I will flee to my Lord: He is the Almighty, the All Wise' [26] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 26)

This verse refers to the people of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* remained in their disbelief, whilst Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* believed in him. Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was Ibrahim's (Abraham's) nephew. They were originally from Iraq and would later move to the Levant.

Investigating the word *amana* (came to believe) in the Glorious Quran, we find that it revolves around the concept of security, inner peace, tranquillity and peace of mind, but its meaning differs according to the different contexts in which it is used. Here, Allah says, '…Lut (Lot) believed him…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 26). Did Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* believe in Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*? Usually when we speak of belief we say, 'He believes in Allah'. The meaning in this context must be different from this and it does not refer to belief in Allah.

So, the meaning of the Arabic verb *amana* here is like its use in Allah's word about Quraysh: '…and made them safe from danger.' (*Quraysh:* 4) Here the word *amana* is used to mean 'to keep safe'. Here the verb is transitive. The subject is Allah and the direct object is the Quraysh whom Allah kept safe from fear. The same is true of the same verb *amana* in Allah's saying: '...Shall I trust you with him…' (*Yusuf:* 64).

The meaning of the verb *amana* in the verse under discussion is that he believed him, not believed in him.

Another example of this usage is found in Allah's *Glorified is He* saying: '… [But [we know that] you will not believe us even though we speak the truth' (*Yusuf:* 17) which means that 'You will not think our words are true'. As for believing in Allah, it means to have faith and conviction in His Existence and His, attributes of Absolute Perfection.

Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* would not have believed Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* unless he also believed in Allah, Who sent him. So, it is as though he believed in Allah and then believed in everything that came from Him. The story of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* is elaborated on in another occurrence in the Quran. It is only mentioned here because it was a result of the debate and struggle that went on between Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and his people. When he called them to believe in Allah, no one believed in him except Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* his nephew.

I may now recall my late teacher Sheikh Musa, Allah have mercy on him. Once he was teaching us Quranic exegesis and we were discussing the story of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*. I asked him, 'Why do we ascribe the bad thing that Lut's (Lot's) people did to him, as we call the one who do such a practice *Luti* (in Arabic meaning 'homosexual', derived from the name 'Lut (Lot)'), when all Lut (Lot) did was to fight this depravity and bring an end to it?' The Sheikh replied, 'Then what should we call it?' I said, 'The Arabic language is rich in its derivative possibilities. For example, we make an adjective from \`Abd Al-Ashhal by saying Ashhali, and from \`Abd Al-\`Aziz by saying \`Abdazi, and from Bakhtanasar by saying (Bakhti), and these days we call someone who studies at the Dar Al-\`Ulum school-a faculty at Cairo University, Egypt- dar\`ami and so on; so why can we not merge the words *qawm* and Lut (Lot) (the people of Lut (Lot) and make it into *qawti* to describe them, so that we save Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* from having something ascribed to him that he had nothing to do with?'

Another time, I attended an event honouring Taha Hussein. In my speech, I said to praise him, 'You have a Tahsani approach in knowledge that is a unique approach only peculiar to you!' This is because we find many scholars named Taha, and many named Hussein. Therefore, I merged his first and last names to refer only to him.

So, Allah's saying: '…Lut (Lot) believed him…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 26) is a parenthetical statement within the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* because Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* represented the final result of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) call to his people. Therefore, the discourse shifts back to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: '…and said, "I will emigrate to my Lord…"'

(*al-'Ankabut:* 26). The meaning here is 'I will leave this place because it is not a good place to establish the call'.

In Arabic, the word *hijra* (emigration) as well as all its derivatives signify the meaning of leaving one thing for another. But the verb *hajara* means that someone forsakes according to his own choice, whilst the verb *haajara* denotes the involvement of another one meaning that one is forced to leave one's land. Prophet Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina therefore would be described using the verb *haajara*. This means that he did not emigrate because he wanted to, but rather his people abused him and drove him to leave his home. Accordingly, the people of Quraysh were the second party which forced Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to immigrate to Medina. The poet Al-Mutanabbi said:

If you are forced to leave a people who were able
To keep you with them, then they are the ones who are leaving

The precise rhetorical style of the Quran is evident in this matter, as it termed Prophet Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina as a *hijra*, a word which is derived from the triadic root verb, instead of the usual verbal noun of *hajara* which is *muhajara*. The reason for this is that the connotations of the word *muhajara* imply that the person dislikes the thing he is leaving. Therefore, Allah uses the verb *hajara*, but when He uses the noun, He says *hijra*, not *muhajara* because Prophet Muhammad did not leave Mecca due to his detestation to it.

I have mentioned before that the first emigration of Muslims to Abyssinia was an emigration to a place of security only, not a place of religious faith; for when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directed them to Abyssinia specifically, he said '…Therein is a king with whom no one suffers oppression.'(1) It is as though the map of the entire world were shown to Him *peace and blessings be upon him* and he chose this particular place because he saw that it was a place of safety for his believing companions. As for the emigration to Medina, it was an emigration to a place of faith, which is clear to us when we consider the relationship between the Meccan Emigrates and the people of Medina, *Al-Ansar* (The Helpers).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Hisham on the authority of Umm Salama*

Here, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* says, '… "I will emigrate to my Lord"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 26). So, he did not intend to go to a certain destination, but rather turning to his Lord was what was important. If not, one might well ask, 'How one can emigrate to one's Lord, when He is everywhere, both there and here'?

So, the meaning is: 'I will emigrate according to my Lord's command and I will go wherever He bids me'. You might move from one place to another because your boss tells you to, for example, whilst even before he tells you to go you want to move to this place, so you welcome this turn of events because it is a means for the realisation of your own wishes. So, you are not really going because you have been ordered to; you are going because you want to. To clarify this meaning, Prophet Muhammad says, 'The emigration of one who emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger is for the sake of Allah and His Messenger; and the emigration of one who emigrates for gaining a worldly advantage or for marrying a woman is for what he has emigrated.'(1)

The meaning of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) saying, as mentioned in the Quran: '… "I will emigrate to my Lord…"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 26) is: 'I am not moving out of my own desire and will, but rather I am going where Allah has directed me'. I remember that once something of this nature happened to me. I was a member of a group of seventy men and we did something that violates our boss's commands, so he decided to transfer us all to different places. We went to him to try and persuade him to change his mind, but he was impassive, saying, 'How can I be the boss if my demands are not met by my staff'? One of us, who was a brave man, said to him, 'Well, we will go wherever you like, but you should know that you cannot send us to a place where Allah is not present'. This word of truth affected the boss and he saw sense because the truth is powerful. And then things went our way and the boss changed his mind.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of `Umar*

So, the meaning of '…and said, "I will emigrate to my Lord…"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 26) is: 'My Lord directs me, and Allah *Glorified is He* is everywhere'. This is supported by Allah's saying, '…and wherever you turn, there is Allah's Face…' (*al-Baqara:* 115).

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us: 'Know that I only directed you to the *Ka`ba* in your prayers to confirm this fact; for you turn to it from wherever you are and from whatever direction you face, it is your direction when you perform prayer'.

Then the verse concludes, '…He is the Almighty, the All Wise.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 26) Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* chose, out of all his Lord's attributes, to mention that He is 'the Almighty', that is, He Who is invincible and can overcome anything. This attribute was evoked by what happened when they tried to burn him, as though he were saying to the people, 'I am going to the protection of He who cannot be overcome'.

Ibrahim (Abraham) chose to describe Allah *Glorified is He* as 'the All Wise', that is, 'He is truly Wise in all His actions, so He will surely take me to a place where my call will be heard, to people who deserve to be given this call because of their attentiveness and willingness to listen to the truth and hearts that yearn and eagerly await the word of truth that you have rejected'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُۥٓ إِسْحَٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِى ذُرِّيَّتِهِ ٱلنُّبُوَّةَ وَٱلْكِتَٰبَ
وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ أَجْرَهُۥ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَإِنَّهُۥ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ لَمِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

We gave Isaac and Jacob to Abraham, and placed prophethood and Scripture among his offspring. We gave him his rewards in this world, and in the life to come he will be among the righteous [27] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 27)

The time of reward came so that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* could gain from his Lord recompense for his patience in the face of tribulation and for his remaining steadfast upon his faith. When he was on his way to being thrown into the fire, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to him and said, 'Ibrahim (Abraham), do you need anything?' And Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* replied, ‘Nothing from you.’(1) So his Lord rewarded him, broke the laws of nature for him, gave him blessings and bounties, and praised him by saying: ‘Verily, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a man who combined within himself all virtues, devoutly obeying Allah’s will…’ (*an-Nahl:* 120).

Moreover, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was not considered by his people to be a person of importance which is shown by the fact that when he broke their idols, some of them said: ‘… “We heard a youth speak of these [gods with scorn]: he is called Ibrahim (Abraham).”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 60) So, he was not well known amongst them, but rather was anonymous, known to no one. So, when he called to Allah, Allah supported him and said, ‘I will make you the “Friend of Allah”, the “Elder of the Messengers” and I will put your name on every tongue after you have been anonymous’. Now, we, Muslims, are required to mention him *peace be upon him* in *at-tashahud* (the closing benediction) every time we pray.

To make sure of this inference, consider Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) supplication when he prayed to his Lord: ‘And give me a good name among later generations’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 84). It is as though he was saying, ‘Lord, my people have belittled me, so grant me renown in Your Sight’.

It is well known that certain natural laws govern reproduction and childbearing. Therefore, when Hajar *peace be upon her* conceived Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) wife, Sarah *peace be upon her* became angry that the slave-girl Hajar *peace be upon her* had been given this distinction.(2) But how could she herself have a child when she was ninety years old at the time, and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was a hundred years old?

Natural law would state that to conceive at such an age would be impossible; yet Allah broke these natural laws and allowed them to conceive as a gift from Him: ‘We gave Ishaq (Issac) and (then later) ‘Ya`qub (Jacob) to Ibrahim (Abraham)’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 27). And in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and [Ishaq’s (Issac’s) son] Ya`qub (Jacob) as an additional gift…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 72).

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(1) *Narrated by As-Suyuti in his Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, vol. 5, p. 64*

(2) *This is mentioned in the Old Testament, see Genesis, 21: 9-12.*

This means that Ya`qub (Jacob) was as an added increase. This is because Ibrahim (Abraham) showed patience when he was ordered to sacrifice Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*. Therefore, Allah said to him, ‘Now do not sacrifice your son; you have done what was required of you and you have passed the test, so I will spare him for you and what is more I will give you a brother for him, who will in turn conceive Ya`qub (Jacob)’.

Allah further told Ibrahim (Abraham) that He would make them prophets: ‘and placed prophet hood and Scripture among his offspring’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 27). So, when we consider the genealogy of prophets, we find that most of them were from Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) line; all those who came after him were from his offspring.(1)

The word ‘offspring’ mentioned here refers to Ishaq (Issac) and Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them* who were both miraculously born to Sarah *peace be upon her*, whilst Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* came in the conventional, natural way common to all human kind, including Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is using this matter to demonstrate how His Omnipotent Power is manifested by effects that show the power of the absolute Causer, saying to Ibrahim (Abraham), ‘If your people have disbelieved you and refused to believe, I will give you offspring who not only are rightly guided believers, but who also will be guides for all people’.

Although the progeny of Ishaq (Issac) and Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them* dominated the next four thousand years of prophetic succession, it would be from the line of Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* that the Seal of Prophets and Leader of the Righteous, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would come; and his message would remain until the Day of Resurrection. The messengers from Ishaq’s (Issac’s) *peace be upon him* line were dispersed amongst the nations, each having their own limited time, whilst the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* encompasses all times and places, and no messenger will come after him until the Day of Resurrection.

Allah’s saying: ‘and Scripture’ refers to all the divine Books that were revealed to the prophets who came from Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) line, which were the Quran, the New Testament (the Gospels), the Old Testament (the Torah) and the Psalms.

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(1) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, vol. 7, p. 5229.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We gave him his rewards in this world’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 27). Scholars say that this refers to his having been unknown and then becoming famous and renowned and his having been poor and then being given riches by Allah. The scholars of prophetic biographies say that he owned so much livestock that one person could never hope to count it and that he had twelve guard dogs and so on. All of this was only his reward in this world.(1)

Then Allah further tells us, ‘…and in the life to come he will be among the righteous.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 27) Allah will not say to him that he has been granted all the goodness he deserved in this worldly life, but rather in the next world too he will be amongst the righteous. This is the dearest wish of all the prophets. So, his reward in this world subtracted nothing from his reward in the hereafter.

But why did Allah *Glorified is He* describe Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as being righteous in the hereafter? Scholars say that there are three things related from Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that those people who like to ferret out faults call lies, or sins: the first is that he said to the King of Egypt that Sarah *peace be upon her* was his sister; the second is that when his people asked him to come out with them to celebrate their festival, he said, ‘I am ill’;(2) the third is that when he broke their idols, they asked him: ‘Have you done this to our gods, O Ibrahim (Abraham)’? ‘He answered: “Nay, it was this one, the biggest of them, that did it…”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 63). These seekers of faults say that these statements prove that the prophets are not free from sin. But what can they say when the ultimate Judge declares that someone will be righteous in the hereafter?!

In any case, anyone who reflects on these three statements will find that they are all types of the ambiguous phrases of which Prophet Muhammad

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(1) *See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Ibn Kathir, vol.3, p. 411. See also Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, vol. 7, p. 5229; As-Suyuti in his Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, vol. 6, p. 459.*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Abu Hatim, on the authority of Zayd ibn Aslam*

peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Ambiguous speech is an alternative to lying.’(1) As for his saying that Sarah *peace be upon her* was his sister, she was indeed his sister in faith, a fellow believer; and maybe if he had said, ‘She is my wife,’ the king would have killed him to take her for himself. As for his saying ‘I am sick’, it was an excuse preferred to avoid attending a profane ritual that no believer should attend. It may not be a reference to physical illness, but something related to heart, i.e., my heart gets disheartened to see his people’s disbelief. As for His saying, ‘…Nay, it was this one, the biggest of them, that did it…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 63), he intended by this to give a convincing argument to show the falsehood of their idol-worship. He wanted to make it so that they themselves would say what he wanted to say, to convince them that their idols could not bring benefit, or harm, or even move.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلُوطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِۦٓ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ ٱلْفَٰحِشَةَ مَا
سَبَقَكُم بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنَ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ٢٨

And Lot: when He said to his people, ‘You practise outrageous acts that no people before you have ever committed [28] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 28)

Now the focus turns from the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to the story of his nephew Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* Notice that when the Quran speaks of Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham) and Lut (Lot) *peace be upon them* it mentions their names first; although the normal practice in the Quran when it speaks of messengers is to mention their people first, as in: ‘And unto [the tribe of] `Ad [We sent] their brother Hud (Eber)…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 65), and ‘And unto [the tribe of] Thamud [We sent] their brother Saleh (Shelah)…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 73), and ‘And unto [the people of] Midyan [We sent] their brother Shu`aib (Jethro)…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 85).

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn `Udayy on the authority of Imran ibn Husain… See Al-Kamel fi Du`afaa` Al-Hadith, vol. 3, p. 96.*

They say it is because the peoples of Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham) and Lut (Lot) did not have any distinctive names, so Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the prophets first. As for `Ad, Thamud and Midyan, they were well-known names for particular nations, and well-known settlements. The basis is that the people are the ones for whom the divine message and guidance is intended, so they are mentioned first as they are the target of the message. As for the messenger, the message is not something that Allah *Glorified is He* intends for a single person.

‘And Lut (Lot), [too, was inspired by us] when he said unto his people: “Verily, you commit abominations such as none in all the world has ever committed before you!”’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 28) He called his people’s vice an ‘abomination’, so the scholars say that its punishment should be the same as the other abomination; for Allah *Glorified is He* also called adultery an abomination, saying: ‘…for, behold, it is an abomination and an evil way’ (*al-Isra’:* 32). The legal punishment for adultery is stoning, so the punishment for those who commit the crime that the people of Lut (Lot) committed is also stoning.

His saying, ‘…such as none in all the world has ever committed before you’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 28) does not mean that no one had ever done such a thing before them; rather, when done before it had been an individual matter, not a widespread epidemic as it was with these people.

أَئِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ ٱلرِّجَالَ وَتَقْطَعُونَ ٱلسَّبِيلَ وَتَأْتُونَ فِى
نَادِيكُمُ ٱلْمُنكَرَ ۖ فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِۦٓ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوا۟
ٱئْتِنَا بِعَذَابِ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

How can you lust after men, waylay travellers, and commit evil in your gatherings?’ the only answer his people gave was, ‘Bring God’s punishment down on us, if what you say is true’ [29] (The Quran*, al-’Ankabut:* 29)

The statement ‘Must you indeed approach men…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 29) shows their perversion of sexual instinct. Allah *Glorified is He* placed sexual instinct within mankind in order to preserve the species. The wisdom behind it is procreation, and procreation only occurs by means of a male-female relationship so that the male’s sperm can fertilize the female’s ovum, and then develop into an embryo in the womb. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* referred to the woman as ‘tilth’ because she is a locus for growth; so a condition for approaching a woman is that she be approached in the right place for growth to occur.

So, the people who wanted to make it permissible for a woman to allow her husband to approach her from any way he liked adduced as evidence for Allah’s words: ‘Your wives are your tilth; go, then, unto your tilth as you may desire…’ (*al-Baqara:* 223).We say to these people: You are mistaken in your understanding of the verse because ‘tilth’ means the crops that are grown from the earth, so the meaning of the expression ‘as you may desire’ means ‘as long as cultivation is possible’; so their argument is invalid which is a result of their not understanding the meaning of ‘tilth’. Correctly understood, the verse means, ‘Approach them in any way you desire as long as it is in the place of cultivation’.

In His Wisdom, Allah *Glorified is He* connected the preservation of the species with sexual instinct, and gave it a pleasure and enjoyment greater than any other pleasure in life. For example, if you see a nice view it pleases your eye, and if you hear a nice sound it pleases your ear and so on. All your senses have certain stimuli that give them enjoyment.

But by which of these senses is sexual pleasure felt, and which of your faculties is pleased by it? All your senses and faculties derive enjoyment from it, so the human being cannot resist it. For this reason, they say that it is the one moment when a person can truly be unaware of his Lord, and that is why we are commanded to take the purification bath afterwards.

If the Creator had not linked the survival of the species to this pleasure, many people would not have bothered with it because of all the hardships and responsibilities that necessarily come with raising children.

We mentioned before the proverb: ‘The religiously permissible cuts off the nose of jealousy’. For example, a man is jealously protective of his daughter, and does not want men from outside the family to even look at her, and he becomes enraged if anyone tries to woo her; but when a young man comes to his door to seek his daughter’s hand in marriage, he welcomes him, and the people of the house greet him with cheers, and serve drinks and decorate the house. What is the difference between the two situations? At first, he was boiling with rage, but in the second situation when Allah’s words are mentioned, while observing their marriage rites, they have placed within his heart coolness and tranquillity.

As for the aberration of the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and their approaching men, it represents a perversion of nature by which the species cannot be preserved, and this is also the case with approaching a woman in other than the place of procreation.

Allah’s words ‘and thus cut across the way’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 29) means that they cut off the way for the species to be preserved because even if adultery brings a child, it will not give him a noble, honourable existence in society. Allah *Glorified is He* has made one way alone for the species to be preserved, so there should not be any reproduction except by this way, whether it involves a man or a woman.

The word ‘way’ is a broad term meaning a direction or a road, whether a physical road that we walk upon or a metaphorical way of life that we follow, as in Allah’s words: ‘Say [O Prophet], “This is my way…”’ (*Yusuf:* 108).

That is, this is my way and my path of guidance. So, the moral way is one single way so that we do not collide with one another or have any conflicts in our lives. As for material ways, there are many so that our physical lives do not become congested.

The physical way or road upon which we travel is considered a mark of civilisation in a nation. Before the war began in 1939, Hitler was very concerned with building a network of roads because a non-conventional war requires additional roads at wartime. One example of this is the road they call the ‘Road of the Pact’, commemorating the pact of 1936.

So, every time there is more activity, extra roads are needed; these roads are built in a way that is appropriate to the environment in which they are built. In cities, we call them streets, whilst in the countryside we call them roads according to how built-up an area is. These roads and streets branch out into side streets, which are smaller, and these side streets branch out further into alleys, which are smaller still. Every time a place becomes more crowded, the people resort to widening the means of movement in order that life can go on comfortably.

For example, in Cairo there are many underground passageways and overpasses, so that things will not come to a standstill, and so that people can move freely.

Underground passages are more apt to preserve a city's beauty, and overpasses are better when they are out of the city, because you can get beautiful views of the distant horizon from them, whereas if the reverse is done, and overpasses are built in the city streets, they tarnish the beauty of the place and make the street look like nothing more than a warehouse, and disadvantage the people living in neighbouring buildings.

Governments should be aware of these issues when they plan cities. Consider Allah's words: 'And then makes it easy for him to go through life' (*'Abasa:* 20).

We should make roads easy for people to traverse because their lives and work depend on traversing these roads. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and thus [you] cut across the way…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 29). Amongst Lut's (Lot's) *peace be upon him* people were highwaymen who waylay people as they travel and take their money and rob them of their possessions, and kill them if they try to resist. After having cut off the way for people to travel, they then cut off the way for the species to be preserved.

And Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that they committed these shameful deeds in their open assemblies. They did not abstain from doing and saying vile things, and sitting in the streets and mocking the passers-by, like those who in our day sit in cafes and loiter in the streets abusing Allah's creatures, and openly saying and doing vile things so that no one is safe from their abuse.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us the proper way of behaving in the street. When someone asked him, 'What is the right of the street, O Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'Lowering the gaze, and avoiding harm, and returning greetings.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri*

Bad manners had spread amongst the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* so that they did not keep one another in check, as Allah *Glorified is He* said about the Jews: ‘They would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 79).

An ‘assembly’ means a place where people gather. This word also occurs is Allah’s words: ‘and then let him summon [to his aid] the counsels of his own [spurious] wisdom’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 17). That is, the place where the chiefs and leaders of the people meet, as we see today with the word ‘club’ (in Arabic, the *nadi* is used for both). The public assembly is considered the final stage for defining the proper behaviour that a society should observe. For example, you have your own room in your house, where you have your own way of acting; and in the living room of your house you have wider rules to adhere to, and in the street you have even more.

Adherence to this decorum depends on the situation in which you find yourself. When you are with people you do not know, your behaviour is not the same as when you are with people you do know, such as the employee in his office and the student at school.

So, these people cut off the way for the preservation of the species by their perversion and deviation from the natural way; and they also cut off the physical way by waylaying people and frightening them and stealing their possessions, and kidnapping them with the intention to perform these vile acts. Moreover, they would flaunt these acts of theirs, and perform them openly in their assemblies and meeting places.

And how did the people answer Lut (Lot)? ‘…But his people’s only answer was, “Bring down upon us Allah’s chastisement, if you are a man of truth!”’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 29) That is, if you truly are a messenger from Allah, and we truly are sinners, then show us the torment with which you threaten us. They said, ‘Bring down upon us Allah’s chastisement’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 29), even though chastisement is a painful thing that no one would wish upon himself. This shows that they did not understand their own words, and that they did not believe him to be truthful; otherwise, if they thought he was truthful, they would not have asked for Allah’s chastisement.

Elsewhere, the Quran says about them: ‘But his people’s only answer was this: “Expel [Lut (Lot) and] Lut’s (Lot’s) followers from your township! Verily, they are folk who make themselves out to be pure!”’ (*an-Naml:* 56)

So they had two positions, and two replies: the first was, ‘Bring down upon us Allah’s chastisement’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 29); and when he did not answer this ridiculous request, and continued to call them to the truth, not having yet despaired of them, they followed another course, saying, ‘Expel [Lut (Lot) and] Lut’s (Lot’s) followers from your township’ (*an-Naml:* 56), and the reason for this was: ‘Verily, they are folk who make themselves out to be pure’ (*an-Naml:* 56). In their eyes, purity was a fault, and righteousness was a crime, which shows their corrupt minds and their rotten judgement.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱنصُرۡنِي عَلَى ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلۡمُفۡسِدِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

So he prayed, ‘My Lord, help me against these people who spread corruption’ [30] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 30)

There is a difference between someone being corrupt in himself, and someone spreading corruption to others. It would have been better for them had they been only corrupt in themselves; but they were corrupt as well as corrupters, spreading their corruption to others.

وَلَمَّا جَآءَتۡ رُسُلُنَآ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ بِٱلۡبُشۡرَىٰ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا مُهۡلِكُوٓاْ
أَهۡلِ هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡقَرۡيَةِۖ إِنَّ أَهۡلَهَا كَانُواْ ظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

When Our messengers brought the good news [of the birth of a son] to Abraham, they told him, ‘We are about to destroy the people of that town. They are wrongdoers’ [31] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 31)

Now Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is mentioned in the midst of the story of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* just as before Lut (Lot) was mentioned in the midst of the story of Ibrahim (Abraham). The meaning of ‘Our [heavenly] messengers’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 31) are the angels, as Allah says:

‘[In His Almightiness,] Allah chooses message-bearers from among the angels as well as from among men…’ (*al-Hajj:* 75).

The angels brought glad tidings to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him,* but the content of these tidings is not mentioned here. The glad tiding was the birth of Ishaq (Issac) and Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon them* and the righteous progeny that would come from them. The messengers also brought a warning that Allah *Glorified is He* would destroy the people of that land, so the glad tidings and the warning provided balance: Allah *Glorified is He* told Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* of the righteous lineage that would come from him, bringing goodness to the world, and Allah told him of how He would destroy those who deviated from His way.

Notice that the verse does not mention the cause of the glad tidings, not saying, ‘Because he was a loyal, virtuous believer’, whereas it did mention the cause of the destruction of the people: ‘…for its people are truly evildoers’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 31). Why is this? It is because the bestower of a grant does not ostentatiously flaunt about his giving nor does so in return for some equal service, whilst the chastiser must give the reason for his punishment.

What was Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) first reaction when he heard these glad tidings and warnings? He did not ask anything about the glad tidings even though he was yearning for them, but rather was concerned with the matter of the land’s being destroyed, whilst his nephew Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* still dwelt there. So, he said:

قَالَ إِنَّ فِيهَا لُوطًا ۚ قَالُوا۟ نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن فِيهَا ۖ لَنُنَجِّيَنَّهُۥ
وَأَهْلَهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱمْرَأَتَهُۥ كَانَتْ مِنَ ٱلْغَٰبِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Abraham said, ‘But Lot lives there.’ They answered, ‘We know who lives there better than you do. We shall save him and his household, except for his wife: she will be one of those who stay behind’ [32] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 32)

So Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not immediately rejoice in the glad tidings, but was rather concerned with the destruction of the land of the people of Lut (Lot) because Lut (Lot) was still there. This shows us that a person should not be concerned with his own good fortune and forget about the misfortunes of others. So, the angels replied: ‘We know fully well who is there’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 32). This matter was known to them.

Then they reassured him about his nephew: ‘most certainly we shall save him and his household’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 32). The word ‘household’ includes the whole family, and therefore they made an exception: ‘…all but his wife: she will indeed be among those that stay behind’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 32).

In Arabic, *ghabirun* (Those who stay behind [singular *ghabir*]) has two lexical usages; we use it with the word ‘time’ to mean ‘the past’, and we also use it to mean something that remains; so the same word gives two opposite meanings. This is because the angels came to destroy that land, and Lut’s (Lot’s) wife stayed behind to be destroyed with the others; she stayed behind to receive chastisement, and so the use of the word *ghabir* implied both these meanings. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَمَّآ أَن جَآءَتۡ رُسُلُنَا لُوطٗا سِيٓءَ بِهِمۡ وَضَاقَ بِهِمۡ ذَرۡعٗا وَقَالُواْ لَا تَخَفۡ وَلَا
تَحۡزَنۡ إِنَّا مُنَجُّوكَ وَأَهۡلَكَ إِلَّا ٱمۡرَأَتَكَ كَانَتۡ مِنَ ٱلۡغَٰبِرِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

When Our messengers came to Lot, he was troubled and distressed on their account. They said, ‘Have no fear or grief: we shall certainly save you and your household, except for your wife – she will be one of those who stay behind [33] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 33)

Ibrahim (Abraham) had witnessed the very same thing that now happened to Lut (Lot), and knew why they had come to him; but why was Lut (Lot) grieved by their presence, when they were angelic messengers from Allah *Glorified is He* occupying the most beautiful forms? They say it is because angels come in the most beautiful forms; if we want to praise a person for his beauty, we say they are like an angel, as the women said to the `Aziz’s wife (Zulaykha) about Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘…This is no mortal man! This is nought but a noble angel!’ (*Yusuf:* 31)

When Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* saw them in this beautiful form he felt fear, not joy because his people were iniquitous and evil, and he was sure that they would try and visit wickedness upon his guests: ‘he was sorely grieved on their account’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 33), that is, he was aggrieved because ‘…seeing that it was beyond his power to shield them’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 33). The Arabic idiom here is literally ‘he was straitened as regards the reach of his arm on their behalf’ meaning his arm was not long enough to protect them, i.e. he did not have the power to save them from the people.

There is a difference in the Arabic between the phrase ‘And so, when Our [heavenly] messengers came to Ibrahim (Abraham)’ and the phrase ‘And when Our messengers came unto Lut (Lot)’; an extra particle *an* occurs in the latter phrase. The reason for this is that the angels were delayed somewhat with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* so the meaning is ‘When Our messengers at length came to Lut (Lot)…’.

When he was aggrieved by their presence instead of being overjoyed and feared for them, they reassured him: ‘…but they said: “Fear not, and grieve not! Behold, we shall save thee and thy household – all but thy wife: she will indeed be among those that stay behind.”’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 33) Do not fear for us because of these wicked men, for we are not human beings, we are angels who have come to rid you of them, and cut the roots out from under this heinous perversion; and we will save you and your household from the punishment that afflicts them.

Then all his household were to be saved but his wife: ‘all but thy wife’; she had grieved him much, and revealed his secrets and told the men where to find his guests; ‘…she will indeed be among those that stay behind’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 33) remaining to be punished.

But how exactly would they bring an end to those people?

إِنَّا مُنزِلُونَ عَلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِ هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡقَرۡيَةِ رِجۡزٗا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَفۡسُقُونَ ٣٤

And we shall send a punishment from heaven down on the people of this town because they violate [God’s order] [34]
(The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 34)

‘Horror’ here means a torment that would fall upon them from the sky in the form of rocks that Allah *Glorified is He* would rain upon them ‘…in requital of all their iniquitous doings' (*al-'Ankabut:* 34), i.e. because of their corruption and deviation from Allah's way.

وَلَقَد تَّرَكۡنَا مِنۡهَآ ءَايَةَۢ بَيِّنَةٗ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

We left some [of the town] there as a clear
sign for those who use their reason [35]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 35)

This is because this punishment annihilated them, and wiped them out, and made them an admonition for every sagacious person and a sign in the land for anyone who passed it by, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time' (*as-Saffat:* 137). The admonition of the people of Sodom will remain as long as people pass by their dwellings. Allah *Glorified is He* called it 'a clear sign', a sign meaning something amazing that makes one reflect, which was 'clear' as a symbol that remained plain for everyone to see, 'for people who use their reason', i.e. those who search and reflect upon the cause of the affliction that visited those people, and the torment that Allah *Glorified is He* sent upon them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِلَىٰ مَدۡيَنَ أَخَاهُمۡ شُعَيۡبٗا فَقَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱرۡجُواْ
ٱلۡيَوۡمَ ٱلۡأٓخِرَ وَلَا تَعۡثَوۡاْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مُفۡسِدِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

To the people of Midyan We sent their brother Shu'ayb.
He said, 'My people, serve God and think ahead to the
Last Day. Do not commit evil and spread corruption in
the land' [36] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 36)

Midyan was one of the sons of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* for whom his tribe was later named. It was the usual practice to name tribes after their most famous members, the individual's name becoming the name for the whole tribe. Then, the name became to mean the place where they lived, as can be seen by Allah's words: 'Now when he arrived at the wells of Midyan…' (*al-Qasas:* 23). So Midyan became the name for the place which they say extended from Sinai to the Euphrates.

This is a concise reference to the story of the people of Midyan and their brother Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* which was also mentioned during the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘their brother…’ to show that when Allah chooses people to bear the message, He chooses those who are beloved to their people, and those whose characters and histories are known to them, and those of whom the people have some prior experience, so they know them to be people of righteousness, not corruption; and so when they pass on their messages from Allah *Glorified is He,* the people will believe them, and they will have foundations to assist them in guiding others.

Allah says, ‘O my people! Worship Allah’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36). The word *qawm* (people) in its strictest Arabic sense refers only to men, because they are the ones who undertake missions (which in Arabic is *yaqumun*, derived from the same root as *qawm*) most important and weighty matters. And so, Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: ‘O you who have attained to faith! No men shall deride [other] men: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves; and no women [shall deride other] women: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 11). The word *qawm* is used here to mean men, in contrast with women.

We said that worship means obedience, so ‘Worship Allah…’ means: Obey Allah in everything that He has commanded, and abstain from everything that He has forbidden. If you believe in Him as God and Creator, you must listen to what He says when He advises you with commandments and prohibitions.

You know that Allah *Glorified is He* with His attributes of Absolute Perfection has created you, and created everything for you, so by worshipping Him you do not add to Him any new attribute. Allah was God before you existed; He was an Omnipotent Creator before you existed and He created the universe for you before you existed. And after all this you disobey Him and disbelieve in Him, yet He still does not deny you His favour, or hold back His blessings from you. Allah *Glorified is He* deserves your worship and obedience because to obey Him brings benefit to you.

We said before that the word ‘slavery’ is a blameworthy word that the self dislikes if it is intended and directed to a human being because when one human being is a slave to another, the master takes the utmost benefit from the slave. But when a human being is a slave to Allah, it is the slave who takes benefit from his Master. Slavery to Allah is an honour, and strength, and a means of avoiding disgrace and ignominy. You find that reformers everywhere fight against human slavery, and call for slaves to be emancipated.

The first thing that Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* commanded his people to do was ‘Worship Allah…’, just as Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to his people, ‘Worship Allah and be conscious of Him’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36); Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* did not command his people to worship Allah *Glorified is He* first, but rather concerned himself with the vile act that had spread amongst them, even though all the messengers came to call people to worship Allah.

Regarding this, we say that Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* did not command his people to worship Allah *Glorified is He* because he was one of Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) people, and followed his religion, which is indicated by Allah’s words: ‘Thereupon Lut (Lot) came to believe in him…’ So he was a follower of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and practised the teachings that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had brought. He did not command the people to worship Allah because Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* had already done so. Rather, he took on a different responsibility, and Allah *Glorified is He* singled him out for a different mission which was to stop his people from continuing with the vile practise that had spread amongst them.

He then said, ‘and look forward to the Last Day’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36), which shows that the Last Day was not on their minds, and that they had not made any preparations for it, as though they thought they could escape from Allah *Glorified is He* and that they would not return to Him. He reminded them of this day, and encouraged them to work for it.

And how can we not prepare for the Last Day, when in our worldly lives, we act according to the same logic as should be the case with the Last Day? For example, you might work and toil in the fields, sowing and planting and watering for a whole year, but when you gather your crop at the time of harvest, and fill your stores, you forget all about the hard work and the toil. At this time, the lazy person who did not do any work will feel regret. On the day of harvest, you will see that the measure of wheat you took from your storage, and considered it a loss at the time, has now brought you ten more measures; so when you took it from the storage this was not a decrease but rather an increase.

And so we should understand the Last Day with this same logic. We bear the hardships of worship and obedience in this world in order to gain everlasting delight in the hereafter; for whatever the delights of this world might be, they can only come to one of two eventualities: either you will leave them by dying, or they will leave you and be replaced by poverty.

As for the hereafter, you will not be taken from its delights nor will its delight be taken from you. And so it is more fitting that you sow seeds for the hereafter, and make a thousand preparations for it. If your worship is difficult, and your faith involves hardships, think of the greatness of the reward. If you remember the reward for obedience, its difficulties and hardships will seem easy to you; and if you feel the heinousness of the punishment for disobedience, you will easily forgo it and reject it.

So, the only thing that makes a person insist on sin is that he does not remember the punishment for it, and he does few good deeds because he does not remember the reward for it.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘The fornicator is not a believer when he fornicates, and the one who drinks wine is not a believer when he drinks it.’(1) This means that if they had remembered their faith, they would not have done it; they were heedless of their faith and so fell into sin.

Whoever remembers the reward of acts of obedience finds sweetness when he performs them, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about the prayer, ‘Give us comfort in it, O Bilal!’(2)

‘…And do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36). The verb *ta`thaw* here (act wickedly) is derived from the word *`athw* which means corruption that is concealed. So, the Arabic construction here is of two different words with the same meaning, which is a kind of Arabic idiomatic expression used for emphasis.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad and Abu Dawud*

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…who thereupon said, "O my people! Worship Allah…"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 36) indicates that this statement was added to another statement that came before it, of which the approximation is: 'And so We sent to the people of Midyan their brother Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* who said, "O my people, I am Allah's messenger to you' after which he told them what they had to do: 'Worship Allah' (*al-'Ankabut:* 36). The combination of worshipping Allah *Glorified is He* and looking forward to the Last Day means: Do not separate worship from its goal, and its reward, and do not separate disobedience from its punishment.

Allah says, '…and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption' (*al-'Ankabut:* 36), so I do not say to you that you should make things better, but only that you should at least leave things alone and do not corrupt them. This is because the Creator made the universe for us in a perfectly sound state, such that we only have to preserve its soundness.

The river Nile, for example, is a gift from the Creator, and an artery of life flowing with cool water. You all remember the days when it used to flood, bringing up mud that made its waters look exactly like clay, from which we filled jars, and after a while the mud receded, taking all the dirt with it, and the water remained clear and pure. As for these days, it is polluted, and its waters have been spoiled by all the waste cast into it, and we have become the first people to suffer from the effects of this pollution.

And so city-dwellers, no matter how advanced their civilisations are, have reached the point where they cannot relax unless they leave the city and go to places of pure nature, which remain as Allah created them without any noise, or pollution, or electricity, or civilisation.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَتۡهُمُ ٱلرَّجۡفَةُ فَأَصۡبَحُواْ فِي دَارِهِمۡ جَٰثِمِينَ (٣٧)

They rejected him and so the earthquake overtook them.
When morning came, they were lying dead in their
homes [37] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 37)

Why do people deny the call to good? They say that the only people who deny the call to good are those who benefit from evil because if good comes, it will cut off the way to their evil, and take from them their social position, power and their leadership. All those who opposed Allah's messengers were leaders and people of high social standing who had become accustomed to leadership and greatness, and to having people be their slaves; so why would they make way for the messengers to remove them from their positions?

If not, then why did `Abdullah ibn Ubayy hate Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*? He hated him because the day that he *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived in Medina, they were preparing a crown for `Abdullah ibn Ubayy to make him king of the city; but when Prophet Muhammad came to them, they were distracted by this great event, and they abandoned their previous plans.

But what did Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* say to his people that they could give the lie to? He gave two commands: 'Worship Allah [alone], and look forward to the Last Day', and one prohibition: '…and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption' (*al-'Ankabut:* 36). It is obvious that commandments and prohibitions are not to be either believed in or denied because they are orders, not reports; for what is a lie? A lie is that you say something is the case when actually it is not, or that something is not the case when actually it is; and these are both reports.

If your speech reflects reality it is truthful, and if it does not it is a lie. So how can we pass judgment over something that has nothing to do with telling the truth or lying? If I say to you, 'Stand up', can you reply, 'You are lying'? Of course not, because the resulting action of such speech does not come until after it has been spoken, and that is why they divide Arabic speech into two categories: reporting speech (*khabar/ikhbar*) and initiative speech (*insha`*).

In order to make this simple for learners, we say that when a person speaks this makes what we call a vocal attribution. Before they spoke, this matter was already in their mind, so before I say 'Zayd is hard working', this thought occurs in my mind, and there is in reality a person named Zayd who is hard working.

So, we have a mental attribution, and a vocal attribution, and an actual attribution. If the actual attribution exists before the mental and the vocal, the speech is a report, and is therefore open to be believed or denied.

So, the actual attribution is not the result of the vocal attribution. However, when we say, ‘Stand up’, the actual attribution comes as a result of the vocal attribution. As long as the actual comes after the vocal, the speech cannot be said to be open to being believed or disbelieved.

Let us return to what Allah’s prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* said. We find that he expressed two commands: ‘Worship Allah [alone], and look forward to the Last Day’, and one prohibition: ‘…and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36). Commands and prohibitions are types of initiative speech that cannot be judged as either true or false; so to what did they give the lie?

So, the first difficulty is that the Quran says, ‘they gave him the lie’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 37). This is only a difficulty for someone who does not possess the level of understanding of the Arabic language to grasp the gist of Allah’s words. Allah *Glorified is He* says here ‘but they gave him the lie’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 37) because Shu`aib (Jethro) commanded them to worship Allah *Glorified is He* in his capacity as a messenger sent by Allah to give them this command because it was obligatory for them to worship Him, so he only ordered them to do what was incumbent upon them. And he told them that the Last Day is a reality, without doubt, so look forward to it, and that spreading corruption in the land is forbidden.

So, the meaning of his words can be expressed as a report: the two commands and one prohibition he gave were obligatory matters, and they gave the lie to the grounds for them.

The meaning of ‘worship Allah’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36) is: Single Him out for worship, which means obedience in all that Allah commands and forbids. This worship is required from everyone, and it is the basis of the law brought by all the prophets and messengers: ‘In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) – and into which We gave thee [O Muhammad] insight through revelation – as well as that which We had enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham), and Musa (Moses), and `Isa (Jesus): Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein…’ (*ash-Shura:* 13).

The issues of worship and belief in the Last Day are general matters over which the divine messages do not differ. As for the sacred laws of commands and prohibitions, these differ from prophet to prophet.

The meaning of ‘look forward to the Last Day’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36) is: act in such a way that reflects your anticipation of the Last Day. Why should you love the Last Day, and look forward to it? No one loves it or looks forward to it except those who do good deeds, and so wait for it in order to gain the reward for what they have done. If the meaning were something else, he would have said, ‘And fear the Last Day’.

So, the meaning is: Do such works as will make it appropriate that you should hope for the Last Day. A person only hopes for that which will benefit him. We might well ask here: If a person believes in Allah and obeys his Lord’s commandments and prohibitions, is their reward in the hereafter something for them to hope for, or is it their right? It might be supposed that Allah would say to those who obey Him: ‘Enter Paradise because of what you used to do, it is your entitlement and your right’. So why does the Quran call it a hope when it is actually a certainty?

They say it is because our reward in paradise is a favour from Allah, for He created us, and created things for us and gave us many strengths and blessings before He required anything of us. So when you worship Allah *Glorified is He* as He should be worshipped, you are not repaying the favours He did for you, or giving Him what He truly deserves; and so if He rewards you in the hereafter, He does so purely out of His favour and Generosity.

Allah says, ‘Say: “In [this] bounty of Allah and in His Grace – in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!”’ (*Yunus:* 58)

If you hire a worker for one hundred pounds a month, for example, and give him his pay in advance, will he ask you to pay him again? If the end of the month comes and you give him another ten pounds, this is out of your favour and generosity.

And so He said, ‘and look forward to the Last Day’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36) because upon reflection and deep thought it becomes apparent that reward in the hereafter is pure favour from Allah *Glorified is He* And so the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘None of you will enter paradise by means of his acts.’ They said, ‘Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?’ He replied, ‘Not even me, unless Allah enfolds me in His Mercy.’(1)

The prohibition in the words ‘…and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 36) means: Do not spread corruption openly, or it means: Do not do things that seem beneficial to you but are actually harmful. Remember when cotton was the principle produce in Egypt, and the chief source of income. It was threatened by worms that fed on cotton, and so we fought this infestation with our hands until the Americans introduced pesticides to us, and we used one called DDT, which quickly eliminated all the worms and the farmers thought that the problem was solved once and for all.

But after a few years, the worms became resistant to this chemical, and DDT became like a narcotic for them, and we began to suffer the negative effects of these pesticides on our water, soil and crops, and on the health of people and animals. So, we should always consider the consequences before beginning anything, and weigh up the pros and cons.

Likewise, when they invented cars they said that they would make it easier for people to travel and transport goods; yet after the revolution in modes of transport that the world has undergone, if we weigh up its benefits with its ills, we will find that its ills are greater because of the pollution it has caused, and that if we were to return to primitive modes of transport, and travel by horseback, it would be better.

I remember(2) that when we came to Egypt in 1936 or 1937, there were spaces set aside for parking donkeys in public places, just like the car parks we have today. They were the only means of transport then. It is enough to say that donkey droppings can be used to fertilize the earth, whilst the exhaust fumes of cars cause disease and death.

What happened after Shu`aib’s (Jethro’s) people gave their prophet the lie?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

(2) The story of the donkey squares

Allah's way with the messengers that came before Prophet Muhammad was that they would deliver their Lord's message, but were not charged to fight the disbelievers with the sword; if they disbelieved His signs, the Lord of Might would punish them Himself, and the matter would end with the destruction of the deniers.

The fact that Allah *Glorified is He* did not command people to fight the disbelievers is logical, which we can see if we consider what happened when the Israelites asked Allah to allow them to fight: 'Are you not aware of those elders of the Children of Israel, after the time of Musa (Moses), how they said unto a prophet of theirs, "Raise up a king for us, [and] we shall fight in Allah's cause"? Said he: "Would you, perchance, refrain from fighting if fighting is ordained for you?" They answered: "And why should we not fight in Allah's cause because we and our children have been driven from our homelands?" Yet, when fighting was ordained for them, they did turn back, save for a few of them.' (*al-Baqara:* 246)

No one was commanded to fight to spread the call except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he and his followers could be trusted with this responsibility, and because he *peace and blessings be upon him* was the last of the prophets and messengers, and so naturally he met all the necessary criteria.

The result of their denial was: '…Thereupon an earthquake overtook them: and then they lay lifeless, in their very homes, on the ground.' [*al-'Ankabut:* 37] This was Allah's punishment because He *Glorified is He* took care of the deniers Himself. In the chapters of *al-Hijr* and *Hud*, Allah *Glorified is He* says 'the blast' (rather than an earthquake). Of course, the verses are not contradictory. A blast means a loud, alarming sound, which we hear when the wind blows violently, as when it blows softly we do not hear any blast.

So a blast means a violent wind, and such a wind will surely lead to a tremor (*rajfa*, which can mean 'trembling' or 'earthquake') of the sort that destroys houses and buildings when bomb explodes, for example. So the blast comes first, and the tremors follow; and so the Quran sometimes mentions the cause, saying 'blast' *sayha*, and sometimes mentions the effect, saying 'earthquake' or 'trembling' *rajfa*.

‘…And then they lay lifeless, in their very homes, on the ground.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 37) The word used here in Arabic is *asbahu* which means ‘they became’, or literally ‘they became in the morning’, so the time that this happened is specified as morning. The usual practice is for attacks to be made at dawn, before the enemy is ready to face you, still being drowsy with sleep. Until this day, military strategists and leaders still prefer to attack at dawn, in order to surprise the enemy.

To attack at this time has become the norm to the extent that to attack at another time is considered a cunning stratagem of war, as was the case with the decision our leaders took in the October 1973 war, when they surprised the enemy by attacking at midday. They completely surprised them, and caught them in an unguarded moment because they did not choose the usual time to attack, which is dawn. So, a person should not be completely regular with everything he does, but should rather vary his routine according to circumstances.

There is a story that a man was very keen to wake his son up early so he could go to work and earn his living, and so the father said, ‘So-and-so’s son got up early, and found a wallet with one hundred pounds in it’! So the son, who was lazy and did not want to get up early, replied: ‘That wallet was dropped by someone who got up even earlier than him’!

The meaning of ‘lifeless’ is completely still, without any motion.

Then, the verses of the Quran take us to another brief mention of part of the story of the succession of divine messages, as concise as a telegram:

وَعَادًا وَثَمُودَاْ وَقَد تَّبَيَّنَ لَكُم مِّن مَّسَٰكِنِهِمْۖ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ
ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَكَانُواْ مُسْتَبْصِرِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

[Remember] the tribes of ′ Ad and Thamud: their history is
made clear to you by [what is left of] their dwelling places.
Satan made their foul deeds seem alluring to them and
barred them from the right way, though they were capable
of seeing [38] (The Quran*, al-’Ankabut:* 38)

Notice that each of these quick references introduce the story and then swiftly move on to the end: ‘And the tribes of `Ad and Thamud…’

(*al-’Ankabut:* 38) is the introduction, and ‘as should have become obvious to you from [whatever there remains of] their dwellings’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 38) is an allusion to what happened to them. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us: ‘I will not tell you what happened to them because you can see their dwellings for yourself, and you pass them by night and day’: ‘and, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time, and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138)

With the advances in science, they are now able to photograph what lies under the ground, and much archaeological evidence of the settlements of `Ad and Thamud and the sand-dunes they inhabited has emerged. Read Allah’s words: ‘Are you not aware of how thy Sustainer has dealt with [the tribe of] `Ad, [the people of] Iram the many-pillared?’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-7)

Naturally, the remnants of previous people are now generally found underground, and we have to dig to reach them because they have been buried by dust as time has passed. How should this not be so, when if we leave our houses for a month we return to find them covered with dust, even though all the windows and doors were closed? You can imagine for yourself how the dust would cover places open to the elements for thousands of years.

And they tell us that hurricanes and sandstorms could bury whole caravans entirely; and so why would we expect the remnants of these settlements to still be above ground? We can witness today how desert roads can be left covered by sand after storms so that they cannot be traversed until the sand is cleared.

And so we should say: ‘Yes, Lord, we have seen their dwellings, and have passed by them, even if we have only done so by virtue of the modern photography that has shown them to us’. ‘…Satan had made their [sinful] doings seem goodly to them’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 38), that is, he tempted them with disbelief, and convinced them that it was the right way to live their lives, ‘…and thus had barred them from the path’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 38). As long as Satan drew them to his path, he of course barred them from the path of faith, ‘…despite their having been endowed with the ability to perceive the truth’ (*al-'Ankabut:* 38), that is, Allah *Glorified is He* did not take them, whilst they were unaware of the truth.

This is because the principle that Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen for His creatures is: '…Moreover, We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] ere We have sent an apostle [to them].' (*al-Isra':* 15)

That is, a messenger who shows them the way, and warns them of the consequences of disbelief. And so Allah *Glorified is He* only punished them after He had sent them a messenger whom they then denied.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَٰرُونَ وَفِرۡعَوۡنَ وَهَٰمَٰنَۖ وَلَقَدۡ جَآءَهُم مُّوسَىٰ
بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ فَٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا كَانُواْ سَٰبِقِينَ ٣٩

[Remember] Qarun and Pharaoh and Haman:
Moses brought them clear signs, but they behaved
arrogantly on earth. They could not escape Us [39]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 39)

The discourse is still concerned with the line of divine messages, having moved on from discussing `Ad and Thamud to making mention of '…Qarun (Korah) and Pharaoh and Haman…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 39). The proof of Allah's words in the previous verse, '…despite their having been endowed with the ability to perceive the truth' (*al-'Ankabut:* 38), is His word here: 'to them had come Musa (Moses) with all evidence of the truth…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 39), that is, with plain matters that left no room for doubt as to the truth of Allah; *Glorified is He* and the messenger who had come to deliver His message.

'But they behaved arrogantly on earth' (*al-'Ankabut:* 39), that is, they deemed themselves to be mighty. He did not say, 'They were proud', but rather 'they behaved arrogantly' (*al-'Ankabut:* 39), as though He is saying that they possessed no intrinsic quality that they could have been proud of, A proud person is proud not of something that is intrinsically his, but rather of something that was given to him. It could be taken from him at any time, so how can he be proud of it? And so, we say that the proud person has forgotten to see the effects of Allah in His creation; if his Lord was on his mind, he would be too ashamed to be proud.

If a person is cognizant of his Lord's Might, he feels humble in himself and ashamed to be proud. A person proud of his strength and health is deluded, because he does not consider that the weak person whom he belittles might actually surpass him in something else, or be gifted in something more important than strength and vigour. Does he not see that this vigour is a contingent thing, which came to him from somewhere else, and will soon pass from him to something else?

So, when Musa (Moses) *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Qarun (Korah), Pharaoh, and Haman bearing Allah's clear signs, they behaved with arrogance and refused to follow him, not because of something naturally occurring within them, but simply reacting unjustly: '…and withal, they could not escape' (*al-'Ankabut:* 39). Allah *Glorified is He* negated the possibility that they could outrun Him, as He says elsewhere: '…but there is nothing to prevent us' (*al-Waqi'a:* 60).

To outstrip (the literal meaning of verb *sabaqa* from which this expression is derived) is not inherently good or bad; it is the destination that determines this: what is it that is reached first? For example, we hear people today describing others as 'backward' or 'reactionary'. To go back is not inherently bad: a person might sin against himself, and then return to his Lord's guidance; and what a fine return this is. So, arriving first is also not inherently bad, as in Allah's words: 'And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness…' (*Al-'Imran:* 133). That is, strive to arrive to His forgiveness as soon as possible.

'…And withal, they could not escape' (*al-'Ankabut:* 39). (Literally 'they did not outstrip'.) Races take place in arenas; if the arena is the hereafter, could anyone outstrip Allah *Glorified is He* and escape from Him? They will not outstrip Him, and they will not escape His Grasp, and they will not be able to stop Him from reaching them.

Allah says:

فَكُلًّا أَخَذْنَا بِذَنۢبِهِۦۖ فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِ حَاصِبًا وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ أَخَذَتْهُ
ٱلصَّيْحَةُ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ خَسَفْنَا بِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ أَغْرَقْنَاۚ وَمَا
كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned. It was not God who wronged them; they wronged themselves [40] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 40)

The discourse here refers to the deniers and the disbelievers who have just been mentioned: `Ad, Thamud, Midyan, the people of Lut (Lot), Qarun (Korah), Pharaoh, and Haman. It was appropriate that Allah *Glorified is He* should give a comment included all these people because they were in reality a single faction. And so Allah says, 'Every one of them', that is, all the deniers We just mentioned.

He says: 'For every one of them did We take to task for his sin…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40). This taking to task reflected the power of Him who performed it, and so Allah *Glorified is He* says about His taking to task of the deniers: '…We took them to task as only *the Almighty*, who determines all things, can take to task.' (*al-Qamar:* 42)

That is, a Mighty One Who cannot be overcome, and an All-Powerful One Who can take whom He wills to task without their being able to resist Him in His Might.

The reason for this taking to task is 'sin'; so it is not a case of injustice or tyranny, but is rather pure justice, and so Allah *Glorified is He* says at the end of the verse: '…And it was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who had wronged themselves' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

Allah specifies the way in which these deniers were dealt with: '…upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm wind…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40), that is, a wind that carried in it small stones that would not cut them but rather burn and scratch them as the wind pelted them. He did not say, for example, 'We sent upon them a fire' because fire might simply have burned them so they died immediately and painlessly; rather, He sent upon them a storm of burning pebbles to scratch them painfully. We hear some people say, ‘I’ll burn him with a cold fire!’, that is, in order to maximise the duration of his pain.

Then, He says, ‘and some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) meaning a calamitous sound that shakes the earth which was the fate of Thamud; ‘and some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) which was the fate of Qarun (Korah); ‘…and some of them We caused to drown…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) which was the fate of the people of Nuh (Noah), and Pharaoh.

These are the four ways by which the deniers were annihilated: fire in a storm, air in a blast, enveloping in earth and drowning in water. May Allah have mercy on the scholar Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi, who said that this verse encompassed the elements by which humans have life, which are four in number: water, fire, earth, and air. In the past, they called these the Four Elements, but since then science has made a distinction between elements and substances.

Elements can be extracted from substances, but nothing further can be extracted from elements, because they are recurrent atoms from which nothing else can be taken. For example, the air around us is a substance from which can be extracted oxygen and so on, and water is a substance comprised of several elements. Mendeleyev composed a Periodic Table of Elements; giving each of them a number he called the atomic number. For example, the element with the number 1 contains one single proton, and the one with the number 2 contains two protons, and so on until number 93, although he found some gaps in these numbers which he left blank and were later filled in by other scientists.

For example, Madame Curie discovered the element radium, and they found that indeed its number was one of the ones missing from Mendeleyev’s table, and so they put it in its proper place. This shows how the universe has been created with its elements in perfect order, elements of which, thanks to the advances in science, 105 are currently known.

When scientists analysed the fertile soil upon which we raise crops, they found it to contain 16 elements, the most abundant of which was oxygen, the least abundant magnesium, which accounted for less than 0.1% of the total. When they analysed the human body, they found these exact same 16 elements. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* even used the disbelievers to show the truth of His assertion that He created man from mud so that we would know that when Allah *Glorified is He* wants to reveal a secret of His universe; He does so even by the hand of the disbeliever.

The first person to talk about the four elements from which the universe is made was the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who died in 384 BC. Using these four elements as their bases, they would interpret the stars. For example, in the case of marriage they would consider the star-signs of the couple according to these elements, so if the man's sign was an air sign and the woman's was a fire sign, they would say 'They will make a blazing fire'; or if the woman's sign was a water sign and the man's was an earth sign, they would say 'They will make clay.'

It is patent that Allah *Glorified is He* in His Omnipotent Power makes the elements of life the same as the elements of death. Allah *Glorified is He* is able to bring life and destruction with the same thing just as He destroyed Pharaoh with water and saved Musa (Moses) with water.

Likewise, if we reflect on the four elements we will see that they are the constitutional elements of the human being. Allah *Glorified is He* created him from water and soil to make mud, and then He dried him with heat so he became like potter's clay, and then he began to breath air. So, the same four elements of creation were the elements of destruction.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants His creation to approach the universe with all its signs and phenomena with acute discernment so that they can take heed of its lessons and secrets. We can see that all new discoveries come as results of careful scrutiny of the phenomena of the universe. Our Lord draws our attention to the importance of empirical knowledge when He says, 'and there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to' (*Yusuf:* 105).

Thus, we should reflect on what we see; for mankind did not arrive at the age of steam and Archimedes' principle of displacement, the discoveries of electricity, gravity, or penicillin, except by means of careful observation of the nature of things. Therefore, observation is the first principle of every empirical science after which comes experimentation, and then repeated experimentation until a scientific conclusion is disclosed.

Air is a principle means of human life, and by means of it balance exists in the universe. Yet, if Allah *Glorified is He* wills, He makes it into a hurricane or a destructive storm. We said before that you can go without food for a month and without water for ten days, but you can only go without air for a very short time. Thus, air is the most important means of preserving life. That is why we hear people who are in a state of rage saying: ‘By Allah, I will smother him!’ because it is the most direct way to bring about death. Therefore, the need for air is one of the well-known key agents used for killing. Moreover, air keeps things balanced. Mountains and skyscrapers do not stand by the power of reinforced concrete, but rather by the balance of the air. This is borne out by the fact that if you remove all the air from one side of them they will quickly collapse on that side. This is how bombs cause their destruction. They depend on the notion of creating vacuums, and the principles of what they call the forces of contraction and expansion. Everything around you is only standing because air is surrounding it from all sides.

We said that when the Noble Quran talks about air, it talks about it with the precision of an All Knowing Creator. Every time the word ‘wind’ is mentioned in the singular, it refers to destruction and annihilation; and every time it is referred to as ‘winds’ in the plural, it refers to growth goodness and nurturing. For example, consider Allah’s words: ‘We send the winds to fertilize…’ (*al-Hijr:* 22). Here, it is *ar-riyah* (winds) in the plural. In another verse, the True Lord says, ‘and as for `Ad, it was destroyed by a furious wind.’ (*al-Haqqa:* 6) Here it is *rih* (wind) in the singular, coming from one direction, causing destruction. Then, the verse we are discussing, ends with this truth: ‘…It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) because the Creator *the Exalted* ennobled the children of Adam *peace be upon him*: ‘We have honoured the children of Adam…’ (*al-Isra’:* 70). He singled them out from all other creatures and ennobled them with intelligence and free will. If you examine the universe, and scrutinise all the different species in existence, you will find that mankind are the masters of this entire universe.

The different species in the universe form a hierarchy: mankind comes first; then the animals; then the plants then the inanimate objects. If one of the wonders of Allah’s bounty is manifested in an inanimate object, it develops and becomes a plant; and if a plant is given one of the wonders of His bounty such as sensation, it becomes an animal; and if the True Lord manifests His Grace in that animal and gifts it with intellect, it becomes a human being. Yet, when a plant takes on the quality of growth, thereby rising above the inanimate object, does it lose its inanimate qualities? No, it does not. Rather, it retains them, for if it ceases to grow, it becomes fixed like a stone. Likewise, the animal has the quality of sensation which raises it above plants, yet it retains its plant-like qualities of growth and development.

Just so, the human being, master of the universe, who is honoured by his Lord with intelligence, still retains qualities of the inanimate object which is seen by the effects of gravity on him; if he hurls himself from a great height, he cannot simply grasp the air and stay there. Likewise, he retains his plant-like and animal-like qualities. Thus, within him there are qualities inherent in all the species that are lower than he is, and he is marked out from them by his intellect. So, Allah *Glorified is He* does not make him morally responsible until after his intellect has fully developed. Moreover, he is only held responsible on condition that he is free of mental defects such as insanity; and that he acts freely, for the one who acts under compulsion is not responsible for his actions, as he, then, is deprived of his free will.

Hence, it is not appropriate for mankind who is honoured by his Lord with intellect and free will, and is favoured above all other creatures to worship anything unless it is of a higher rank than himself. If he lowers himself by worshipping a being occupying a lesser rank than himself, it is bizarre and inappropriate. The worshipper must occupy a lower rank than the worshipped. You are higher in rank than the animal, plants and inanimate objects below you; how can you suppose that a statue has control over you, when you make it yourself, and place it wherever you desire to and repair it if it breaks?

Your Lord honoured you, yet you dishonoured yourself, and were content with your degradation. He made you a master, and you made yourself a slave to the lowest of creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* says, in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘O Son of Adam, I made you for Myself, and I made the entire universe for you; let not what is made for you distract you from the One Whom you are made for.’(1)

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(1) *Ahmad and Ibn Kathir narrated the like of it.*

The words, ‘It was not Allah who wronged them’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) means ‘It was not appropriate that Allah should wrong them’. When you say such a thing is inappropriate for someone to do, this implies that they were able to do it, but it was not right for them to do so. The True Lord denies that He wronged them, not because He was unable to do so, but because it is not appropriate that He wrongs anyone. This is because to wrong someone means to take what is rightfully theirs; and Allah *Glorified is He* owns everything, so why would He need to wrong anyone?

Another example of this is the negation of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* being a poet, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We have not taught the Prophet poetry, nor could he ever have been a poet…’ (*Ya Sin:* 69). The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* could have become a poet because he possessed all the necessary means to do so, but it was not appropriate for him *peace and blessings be upon him* to be a poet because poets are liars (usually speak of things that are not real), wandering from valley to valley. So, there is a difference between something being appropriate and its real existence. This notion is supported by Allah’s words: ‘…your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.’ (*Fussilat:* 46)

Here, the word *zhallam* (unjust) is used, which is an exaggerated form of the word *zhalim* (wrongdoer). He did not simply say *zhalim*; why not? It is because if Allah *Glorified is He* were to allow Himself to do wrong, it would be a wrong commensurate with His Omnipotent Power, and so He would not be called merely *zhalim,* but rather *zhallam* with the exaggerated adjective form – and Allah *Glorified is He* is far removed and above ever being any such thing. When we, before, spoke about *sighat al-mubalagha* (the exaggerated adjective form), we said that the exaggeration might refer to the action itself such as when you eat a single piece of bread with your meal whilst someone else eats five pieces; or it might refer to the action being repeated such as when you eat three meals and someone else eats six; in this case we would, in Arabic, call such a person *akul* or *akkal* (one who eats a lot). Thus, the exaggeration of the adjective form comes from magnifying the action itself, or from its being repeated.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.’ (*Fussilat:* 46) He did not say ‘To His creature’ in the singular form because the plurality of the people would necessitate the plurality of the wrongdoing—if it could possibly be imagined — and so the exaggerated adjective form *zhallam* is used here. A linguistic rule (in Arabic) states that to negate an exaggerated adjective does not necessarily negate the minimal amount of the quality of this adjective, and that to assert the minimal amount does not assert the exaggerated amount. So, if you say that someone is *akul* (that is he eats a lot), all the more so he is *akil* (that he, first, eats). Yet, if you say that he is *akil,* this does not necessarily mean that he eats a lot. In Allah's words, '…your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.' (*Fussilat:* 46), the negation of the exaggeration of Allah's being *zhallam* (an extreme aggressor) does not in itself negate its origin *zhalim* (aggressor). Yet, of course, we know that He is absolutely absolved of aggression whatsoever.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…they wronged themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40) The form of this self-wronging of theirs is that they lowered and abased themselves by disbelieving after Allah had honoured them. They should have risen higher by means of this honour instead of abasing themselves by worshipping lesser beings.

After having informed us of the disbelievers who associated partners with Allah *Glorified is He* and denied the messengers, and what became of them, the Quranic discourse now gives us a parable to illustrate these truths to us, saying:

مَثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُوا۟ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَوْلِيَآءَ كَمَثَلِ ٱلْعَنكَبُوتِ ٱتَّخَذَتْ
بَيْتًا ۖ وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ ٱلْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ ٱلْعَنكَبُوتِ ۖ لَوْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

Those who take protectors other than God can be compared to spiders building themselves houses – the spider's is the frailest of all houses – if only they could understand[41] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 41)

The word *mathal* 'parable' and its derivatives are mentioned in the Quran many times. The root stem *m-th-l* expresses concepts of which we must be aware. The word *mithl* indicates a simile, specifically a simile where one thing is compared to another. This is found in Allah's words: 'There is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). This is also found in His words: 'And the recompense of evil is punishment like it…' (*ash-Shura:* 40).

As for the word *mathal*, it means a similitude in the form of a story, or a comparison of numerous things to other numerous things such as in the case of Allah's words: 'tell them, too, what the life of this world is like: We send water down from the skies…' (*al-Kahf:* 45). Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not simply compare one thing to another here, but rather compares two complete concepts: the life of this world, with its splendour, allure, verdure and enjoyment, and then its end after all this, is like water when it falls from the sky and mixes with the soil of the earth which gives forth beautiful flowers, and it quickly becomes bare, dry earth.

That's why some people who have had problems with the rhetorical style of the Quran objected to the True Lord's statement about `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'In Allah's eyes `Isa (Jesus) is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, "Be", and he was…' (*Al-'Imran:* 59).

The cause of their objection is that the word *mathal* (which is usually used to compare concepts or plurals) is used here to compare one singular person to another, namely comparing `Isa (Jesus) to Adam *peace be upon them*. We say in response that this is actually comparing one complete concept with another, and this objection has actually resulted due to an imperfect understanding of the verse. The True Lord is not comparing `Isa (Jesus) to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* in their capacity as two personalities; rather He is comparing the story of Adam's creation *peace be upon him* with that of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: Adam was created without a father, and so was `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*. Thus, the meaning is: if you are amazed that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was created without a father, then you should be even more amazed at Adam's creation, for he had had neither a father nor a mother. If you believe in `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as a god because he had no father, the analogy requires that this misbelief should have pertained to Adam *peace be upon him* not `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

The truth is that Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to show His creation the extent of His Absolute Omnipotence, and that He is not bound to create in any specific way, but rather, He can create however He wills whether with a father and mother, or with neither mother nor father, or with a mother alone or a father alone. This matter does not depend on causes, but rather on the will of the One Who causes, Allah *Glorified is He* Who simply says to a thing, ‘Be!’, and it is. A couple might come together but be destined not to conceive, so they do not. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* might heal an infertile woman so she can conceive, or He might make an old woman fertile again so she can conceive. The evidences for these cases are obvious. Thus, the absoluteness of Allah’s Omnipotence in this matter covers every possibility, and has no limit.

When the True Lord gives us parables, He wants to explain something abstract by means of something concrete; and something vague by means of something plain; and something general by means of something specific. In this respect, the Quran follows the conventions of the Arabs who made much use of parables to explain and clarify.

It is related(1) that someone was very well-respected and admired by the people, and another man was jealous of him, and wanted to attach some accusation to him to mar his reputation so that he could usurp the position he held amongst the people. So, he accused him of frequently visiting a beautiful widow. Indeed, the people had seen him going to her house, whereupon a woman would come out and take something from him. When the people looked into the matter, they found that she was an old woman with many children, and they were very poor, and that the man had been sharing with them the provision that Allah *Glorified is He* had given him. When they realised this, they lauded the man, and honoured him, and he became even more noble and worthy in their eyes. A poet took this theme and expressed it as a parable:

If Allah wills to unfurl a hidden virtue,
He makes it liable to the tongue of the jealous:
If fire does not burn all it touches
We would not have discovered the fragrance of incense.

The incense mentioned here is *oud* (aloes: odorous wood), the fragrance of which only emerges when it is burned. Another word derived from the root *m-th-l* is *mathulah* (exemplary punishment), as in Allah’s words: ‘…and indeed there have been exemplary punishments before them’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 6).

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(1) *The story of accusation of the good man with adultery by those who envy him*

Al-mathulat ‘exemplary punishments’ refers to the punishments that overtook the previous denying nations, making them an example and cautionary tale for others. When a parable becomes famous, it spreads on people’s tongues and they use it as an example. For instance, Hatim At-Ta’i became so famous for generosity that people began to use his name as a metaphor for it. A short phrase might become so famous amongst us that it becomes a proverb that we use in suitable situations. For example, if a student neglects his studies all through the year and then studies hard all the night that precedes this exam, we say, ‘Before you shoot, the quivers should be filled’. We always use the exact wording of the proverb, even though the situation involves no shooting of arrows, or any quivers. Thus, proverbs are said just as they are without making any changes whether the situation is that of a singular noun, a dual or a plural, or a masculine or feminine noun. We say, ‘What is behind you, O Isami (Arabic name)?’ using the Arabic feminine second person pronoun because in its original context it was said to a woman.

The True Lord says, ‘The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41). This is a parable concerned with the highest of doctrinal matters which Allah *Glorified is He* has given us in order to clarify and explain, and to make the matter easier for us to comprehend. Beware of saying, when Allah *Glorified is He* draws a parable for you, ‘What does Allah mean by using this example’? For Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or anything above that…’ (*al-Baqara:* 26).

Some people wonder that since a gnat is a trivial thing: how could Allah draw a parable from it? The reality of the matter is that a gnat is one of Allah’s creations, and it contains many wonders and secrets that call us to reflect and contemplate. It is not a trivial thing as you might think; rather, for you to arrive at an understanding of the secret of divine greatness that it contains within it would be sufficient cause for you to be proud. This tiny creature contains within it all the constituents of life and sensation; do you know where its brain is, or where its circulatory system is…etc.? Aside from flies, mosquitoes and other tiny creatures, do you not see that microbes that you cannot even see with your naked eye can cause you harm, despite your strength, preventing you from sleeping, and causing you discomfort?

So, do not ask why Allah *Glorified is He* draws parables from these things because ‘Allah does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or anything above that…’ (*al-Baqara:* 26), i.e. that which is even smaller and harder to see. This is because just as the might of the Creator is found in immense things, it is also found in the smallest and most delicate of things. For example, the ‘Big Ben’ clock tower, the largest and most famous clock in the world by which the world sets its time. If you consider this clock, you will see that it is as big as it is in order that people can see it from afar, and tell the time by it, and so it shows the greatness and skill of the designers and engineers who made it. Its greatness lies in its size and grandeur. Yet if you consider the clock they are able to set into a ring, you will find that it too comprises greatness and skill because of the precision required to manufacturing such a small clock. Likewise, the first radios were the size of the old threshing machines, and now they are small enough to fit in one’s pocket.

Some of Allah’s creatures are so delicate that you cannot perceive them with your senses. It is curious that people demand to see Allah *Glorified is He* with their own eyes, when they cannot even see the outcome of his creation. You cannot see jinn, nor can you see microbes and germs, and you cannot even see your own soul which lies between your two sides and on which your life depends. You cannot see these things, or perceive them with your other senses; and so one aspect of the greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* is that He sees all, but all cannot see Him.

Let us return to the parable that Allah *Glorified is He* is giving us: ‘The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41), i.e. partners in divinity and intercessors, ‘is as the parable of the spider’, the frail creature that makes its web with the delicacy that we all see, and which spun its web over the cave in which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* stayed during his emigration, sharing with the pigeon the duty of throwing off the polytheists, ‘…that makes for itself a house’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41) from these fragile threads, ‘…and most surely the frailest of the houses is the spider’s house’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41). The fault of the spider is not that it makes a house, but that it makes it from these fragile threads which can be blown away by the wind. A house should be a sanctuary that protects its inhabitants, and that it has doors, windows, walls and so on. As for its use as a net to catch prey, it is perfectly appropriate. Just so, the idolaters took idols as gods, whereas if they had simply taken them as indications of Allah's Omnipotent Power of creation, it would have been more fitting and more beneficial for them. Just as the spider's house can be destroyed by a gust of wind, and when you clean your house you might kill the spider itself, Allah *Glorified is He* does likewise with the deeds of the idolaters: 'and We shall turn to the deeds they have done and scatter them like dust.' (*al-Furqan:* 23) Also, He draws another parable to illustrate this: 'The deeds of those who reject their Lord are like ashes that the wind blows furiously on a stormy day…' (*Ibrahim:* 18).

The meaning of '…did they but know.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 41) is if they could but understand the reality of things. The spider's web is no kind of house, but it is effective for catching insects; just so, idols and stones cannot be taken as gods, but they can be useful if they are seen as evidences of the Creator's power. Had they reflected on this, and reflected on the secrets of their creation, they would have been guided to faith by means of them. So, they are evidence of Allah's Omnipotence, if they but knew. The mountain, this rock from which you hew your idols, is the first thing to serve you, and to serve those creatures which are lower than you, namely animals and plants. We said before that inanimate objects serve plants, and plants serve animals, and they all serve mankind. In this way, inanimate objects are the servants of all servants, yet you have made them into gods. Look at this transformation, and the baseness of this notion of yours, and your unfortunate disposition in making the lowest and basest of things into the highest and noblest—according to your claims.

How could this be, when Allah *Glorified is He* has singled you out from all other creatures? It was more fitting that you search for something higher than yourself that merits your worship; and were you to do so, you would find nothing to take as a god except Allah *Glorified is He*. If you wish, read what Allah *Glorified is He* says about inanimate objects: 'Say, "How can you disregard the One Who created the earth in two days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!" He placed solid mountains on it (the earth), blessed it, and measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them—all in four days.' (*Fussilat:* 9-10)

It is as though the immense, solid mountains are stores that release resources for mankind with the passage of time. Rocks break from them, and become the silt which rainwater carries to us in the wet seasons, from which is formed the topsoil of the plains and valleys, becoming a source of fertility and growth that is constantly renewed and uninterrupted. You remember the floods we had before, and the goodness that the Nile would carry to us, renewed each year, and how the water would resemble nothing so much as *tahini* (sesame paste) because of all the silt it carried. If only the idol-worshippers who carve rocks into idols would reflect on these signs indicating the power of the Creator instead of worshipping them in His place.

Elsewhere in the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a parable which also illustrates this essential doctrinal issue: ‘Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to Allah, though most of them do not know.’ (*az-Zumar:* 29) There is a difference between a servant who serves and obeys a single master and a slave who is owned by several masters; if only they were in agreement, but they are ‘…at odds with each other…’ (*az-Zumar:* 29), each one issuing his own orders, and having his own demands; so how can he please them all? How can he meet all their needs when they are at odds with one another?

The one who worships Allah *Glorified is He* alone with no associates is like the servant to a single master, and the one who worships idols is like the servant who has several disputing masters. This is how the True Lord gives people parables illustrating truths, in order to make them plain and clear.

Then, the True Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦ مِن شَىْءٍۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٤٢﴾

God knows what things they call upon beside Him: He is the Mighty, the Wise [42] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 42)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Surely, Allah knows whatever thing they call upon besides Him…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 42) because when they were pressed, they said, ‘We do not worship the idols; we worship the stars or angels that control these idols'. Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them by saying, 'Surely, Allah knows whatever thing they call upon besides Him…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 42). The words: 'whatever thing' here imply insignificance, as though what they invoke besides Allah *Glorified is He* is not even considered as a thing, or that it is too trivial to be considered a thing; or it means that whatever it might be that they invoke, Allah *Glorified is He* knows it.

The word *shay`a* (literally: thing) here used to mean 'whatever thing', is derived from the verb *sha`a*, *yasha`a* and *shay`an,* (willed, wills, thing). *Shay`a* means something that someone else is wanted to do, and the one who wants is Allah *Glorified is He*. It is as though they are worshipping the thing, leaving aside its Creator. After Allah *Glorified is He* ennobled them, they abased themselves, and chose degradation for themselves, worshipping that which occupies a lesser rank in creation than they do. Idols are inanimate objects which are the basest form of existence. Then, He says, '…and He is the Mighty, the Wise.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 42) He is Almighty: that is, He overcomes and cannot be overcome; and He is Wise in everything He decrees and commands.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَتِلْكَ ٱلْأَمْثَٰلُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ ۖ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَآ إِلَّا ٱلْعَٰلِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Such are the comparisons We draw for people, though only
the wise can grasp them [43] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 43)

No one who hears a parable from Allah *Glorified is He* and then fails to understand it is truly learned, and so those who objected to Allah's words: 'Allah does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or anything above that…' (*al-Baqara:* 26), disdaining the gnat, and seeing it as unworthy of having parables drawn from it, are not learned. We say to them: you possess neither intelligence nor awareness of the subtlety of this parable. Read Allah's words: 'those you call on beside Allah could not, even if they combined all their forces, create a fly…' (*al-Hajj:* 73).

Leave aside the matter of creation, and consider the simplest of things: if a fly lands on your food and takes some, can you get it back, however much power and force you use? The fly is not a trivial thing as you imagine, and even those things smaller than it, like mosquitoes, and microbes which cannot be seen with the naked eye; they are all Allah's creations, and they embody secrets which indicate His Omnipotent Power.

The True Lord says, 'Allah does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or anything above that…' (*al-Baqara:* 26), meaning: something even smaller. Consider the gnat, which is even smaller than the fly, and how it possesses a tiny proboscis by which it pierces the skin and extracts the blood which you yourself can only extract with difficulty. You cannot see microbes with your naked eye, yet they can invade the body and cause it to sicken, demolish its foundations, and perhaps cause its death.

In essence, these creatures which you find insignificant contain many lessons and signs, but only those who are aware can understand them. Most of these signs and secrets were discovered by people who do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. Some of them understood and so became believers, whilst others did not and remained on their disbelief, even though of all people, they were the ones who should most have believed in Allah *Glorified is He* because they had the knowledge to discover the Creator's secrets of creation. It is said in an Islamic tradition: 'the truly knowledgeable person is the one who knows who created him, and why.'

Then, the True Lord says:

خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَةٗ لِّلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ٤٤

God has created the heavens and earth for a true purpose.
There truly is a sign in this for those who believe [44]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 44)

Here, the True Lord wants to direct us to His Omnipotent Power, and so says: 'Allah has created the heavens and earth with truth…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 44). Creating is to bring the non-existent into existence, but for a special purpose and a role it has to play. So, if you create something in this way but without it having any purpose, this is not considered truly to be creation. The issue of creating is the one thing that those who do not believe in Allah agreed with: 'If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, "Allah"…' (*Luqman:* 25).

Why did they admit this, of all things? Why did it stump them so? This should not be surprising, since we see that whenever someone brings something new he is eager to ascribe it to himself, to show people his efforts and his experience and to declare that he has invented or discovered such-and-such, as is the case with those who discovered electricity or invented the telephone or the television.

To this day, we still remember that it was Archimedes who discovered the law of displacement, and that Newton discovered the law of gravity. Nowadays, people register patents so that no one can steal their work, and to ensure that people of intellectual endeavour and genius are able to hold onto the fruits of their labours. Likewise, Arabs, in old days, used to recognise people's achievements to the extent that they even gave credit to the first person who for instance, said: *amma ba`d* (an Arabic expression used to begin speeches and which means: and then),(1) and the first people to do other things. Therefore, we know the first people to do all kinds of things, and every product, invention, and discovery is ascribed to the rightful person, so we immortalize their memory, and make statues of them and so on.

What about the Greatest Creator Who created the heavens and the earth, as well as everything and everyone within them? Does He not have the right to announce Himself? It is not His right that His servants should acknowledge that He created them, especially when no one else has claimed to have created the heavens and the earth, and the True Lord has no rivals in this matter? Furthermore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to us by Allah *Glorified is He* to inform us of this fact, and no one disputed it—putting in our minds that all claims are granted to those who make them unless another claimant comes forth.

We gave the example before—and Allah has the highest examples—of a company of people who sit down at a gathering, and when they disperse, the host finds a wallet full of money belonging to one of them, and asks them whose it is. If all of them say it is not theirs except for one person, who claims it, will the host doubt that it belongs to him?

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(1) *Ibn Abu `Asim and At-Tabarani narrate that Abu Musa Al-Ashari said that the first person to say this was the Prophet Dawud (David) peace be upon him.*

You might ask ‘Since Allah asks them “…If you ask them who created the heavens and earth...” (*Luqman:* 25), and they replied “Allah”, why does Allah even mention this issue’? They say that it is because the True Lord *the Exalted* does not intend by this verse simply to inform us that He created the heavens and the earth, but rather, He intends to inform us that He created the heavens and the earth in accordance with a true purpose. The truth is something firm and unchanging which does not conflict with the wisdom attached to everything in existence. If we consider the creation of the heavens and the earth, we will find that it is firm, and unchanging. Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: ‘The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind…’ (*Ghafir:* 57).

The heavens and the earth represent a mighty, immense creation such that if you compare it with the creation of mankind you will find mankind’s creation to be lesser. Consider for example the life span of the heavens and the earth next to the life span of mankind. The longest human life that we know about until now is that of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and after this life we consider to be so long, he died. Whether a person lives for one year, or a thousand years, he will eventually have to die.

The heavens and the earth, and all the other creations they contain, were created to serve mankind. Thus, the servant (the heaven and the earth) lives much longer than the served (mankind). Allah *Glorified is He* created the sun millions of years ago, and it has remained the same without changing, or failing to fulfil its purpose; and the same is true of the moon: The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5) That is, they move according to a precise arrangement so that they can predict the coming of solar and lunar eclipses down to the exact date and time, and indeed they occur just as they said. This shows that they were created according to a precise calculation. It is enough that we set our clocks by the sun, and that despite what is known of the huge sizes of the sun and the moon they travel in the solar system without colliding, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…each floating in its orbit.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 33)

All of this is part of the meaning of the heavens and the earth having been created with truth: according to a precise, firm system which neither changes nor fails to operate in any of its phenomena. As a human being, you yourself can change because Allah *Glorified is He* has given you free will so you can choose whether to obey Him or not, and whether to believe in Him or to disbelieve—Allah forbid. Creating the heavens and the earth, however, was done in the form of subdual and absolute control; although they had the ability to choose, by the general law and the first choice, as Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it; mankind undertook it—they have always been inept and foolish.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72) So, they were given the choice, and they chose not to choose; they gave up their free will in favour of their Lord’s will.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…There truly is a sign in this for those who believe.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 44) Why did He say, ‘for those who believe’ when it is a message for all people? Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the disbelievers saying: ‘…who created the heavens and earth’ (*Luqman:* 25). So why did He specify the believers here and not the disbelievers? Some said: there is a difference between the creation of the heavens and the earth, and their being created in accordance with truth. Everyone believes that they are created, but only the believers know that they are created with truth.

Then, the True Lord says:

ٱتۡلُ مَآ أُوحِيَ إِلَيۡكَ مِنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَۖ إِنَّ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ تَنۡهَىٰ عَنِ
ٱلۡفَحۡشَآءِ وَٱلۡمُنكَرِۗ وَلَذِكۡرُ ٱللَّهِ أَكۡبَرُۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ مَا تَصۡنَعُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

[Prophet], recite what has been revealed to you of the Scripture; keep up the prayer: prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behaviour. Remembering God is greater: God knows everything you are doing [45]
(The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 45)

After having spoken about some of the Prophets, namely Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Nuh (Noah), Saleh (Shelah), Hud (Eber), Lut (Lot) and Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them* and then speaking of those who disobeyed them ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40), Allah

Glorified is He then wanted to console His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by assuring him that he should not be disturbed or distressed or downcast by the attitude of those who disbelieved in him and tried to bar the way of Allah *Glorified is He* showing enmity to his call. The True Lord says, by way of consolation: '[Prophet], recite what has been revealed to you of the Scripture…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45), that is: Why are you sad, O Muhammad, when you possess the greatest means of solace, which is without end: the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* and His miracle which has been sent down to you. Therefore, concern yourself with it, because every time you read it you will find solace with your Lord. If your contemporaries (O Muhammad) do not believe in it, and do not pay heed to its miraculous qualities, continue to recite it yourself; it might be that Allah *Glorified is He* will bring from these people progeny whose hearts are pure enough to receive the message of Allah and believe in that which these people reject; the miracle will remain as long as it is recited as per Allah's Command. 'Recite' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45), that is, recite, and do not be defeated, and do not despair; for the Quran will bring comfort to your heart. When human beings send a messenger to others and then is denied, the messenger returns to the one who sent him. Since your people (O Muhammad) have denied you, return to Me by listening to the Book that I have sent as a miracle to aid you, and wait for the coming of a people who will listen to the Word of Allah *Glorified is He* that you convey unto them, which will penetrate their pure hearts so they will believe.

People react to things in different ways, and the Quran sheds light on this matter. There are those people who, when they hear the Quran, their hearts are moved, and their skin quivers, whilst there are others who, when they hear it, respond to it with mockery: 'what was that he just said?' (*Muhammad:* 16) They attempt to make light of the Quran, and of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Quran emphasises this reality in another passage: '…Say, "It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it; it is as if they are being called from a distant place."' (*Fussilat:* 44) Thus, the Quran is a single entity, but those who receive it differ from one another. The lessons of the Quran can only be absorbed by those who receive it purely since the transmission is one. Do you blame the radio station if your own radio is broken and so does not receive the signal? Likewise, those who want to receive the transmission of Allah must do so with a heedful ear and a pure heart that is not distracted by that which is in opposition to the divine message. You must first remove from your soul any prejudices against the Quran you might have, and only then can you receive the Word of Allah *Glorified is He* and react to it appropriately.

To illustrate the different ways in which a single action can be reacted to, we gave the example before of someone who blows on his hands to warm them up, and someone who blows into his tea to cool it down. One seeks warmth, the other coolness; the action is the same, the reaction different.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '[Prophet], recite what has been revealed to you of the Scripture…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). This is the distinction of your miracle, (O Muhammad); you can repeat it at any time, and recite it as much as you want. Moreover, all who come after you who hear it can do the same; and it will keep on being repeated until the Day of Resurrection.

As for the miracles of the previous messengers *peace upon them,* they were uniquely meaningful to those who witnessed them only. Once those who had witnessed them had died, no one else could have real knowledge of them even if they lived at the same time but were not there to physically witness them. For example, consider those who lived at the time when Musa's (Moses's) staff became a snake but did not witness it for themselves: what did this miracle represent for them? Nothing; but we trust in it and believe in it because the Quran tells us that it took place. Thus, the miracles of the previous messengers came in the form of brief moments, like the striking of a match which then cannot be struck again; some witnessed them, and that was that. The Quran, however, informs us of all the miracles of the previous messengers *peace be upon them*; so see the benefit that all the messengers took from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and how the Quran immortalised their memory so that their miracles are preserved with his miracle. It is as though the Quran brought benefit to all the other messengers *peace be upon them* and all their miracles. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Quran: 'We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it and with final authority over them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48).

We return to the verse we are discussing. Allah then says: '…keep up the prayer…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). It is clear that 'recite' refers to speech, the act of the tongue, whilst 'prayer' refers to the actions of the body. The human being has various limbs, of which five are the most important: the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, the nose for smelling, the tongue for tasting, and the fingertips for touching.

Just as a precaution, some called them 'the five visible sensory organs'. Indeed, with the advance of science, they have discovered that human beings have other senses and means of perception that were not known before such as the muscles which establish the weight of an object; for which of your five senses will tell you the weight of an object without your lifting it from the ground? We also have the sense of ascertaining, by which we sense the thickness of objects by holding them between our fingers. When you go to a draper, for example, and examine different fabrics, rubbing them gently, you can determine which one is thicker than the other.

The curious thing is that the tongue alone takes half the importance of all the parts of the body. The actions of the five senses are collectively referred to as 'action', and action is comprised of words and deeds. So, every deliberate movement of the limbs is called an *`amal* (action), but the action of the tongue is called *qawl* (speech), whilst the actions of all the other limbs are called *fi`l* (deeds). The reason the tongue has this position is that it is the instrument of divine warning and divine glad tidings. Moreover, by means of the message is passed on. The True Lord says, 'You who believe, why do you say things and then do not do them?' (*as-Saff:* 2) Allah *Glorified is He* did not use the word '*amal* here, but rather the word *fi`l* deed because speech is the compliment of deeds, and they are both actions *`amal*; and actions are determined by the intention of the heart.

Yet, why did Allah *Glorified is He* choose to mention prayer here as the act of the limbs? They say it is because prayer is the pinnacle of actions, as the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Prayer is the pillar of faith.'(1) Prayer marks the difference between the believer and the disbeliever. The question remains: why does prayer hold this rank out of all the Pillars of Islam?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Ad-Daylimi*

At this point, we would like to mention that the enemies of Islam, and even some of those who are Muslims but who fear that its spread will remove them from their positions of power and tyranny, wish to restrict Islam to its five pillars alone. If you mention this tradition, they will leave you alone, and let you be free to say what you wish as long as you are restricted to the boundaries of the five pillars; but beware of saying that Islam came to organise every facet of life—because their prosperity depends on Islam being restricted to the five pillars only.

These people do not understand that the five pillars do not represent Islam as a whole, but are rather the bases and foundations upon which its edifice stands. They want to remove Islam from people's lives, and so we say to them: Indeed, these are the Pillars of Islam; as for Islam itself, it encompasses everything in our lives, starting with the pinnacle of doctrine in the form of our saying, 'There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah', and ending with the action of removing of harmful objects from the street. Islam is a religion that pervades all aspects of life; how should this not be the case when it teaches us about even the simplest details of our lives?

Do you not see that Islam is even concerned with the proper way to enter the bathroom and relieve oneself, and all the etiquette and details that apply to it? Do you not see that the inspector who is responsible for watching over the marketplace and ensuring that Allah's laws are followed therein, if he sees a butcher blowing into a carcass to inflate and then skin it with his mouth, will dispose of this carcass because it has been inflated in an unsanitary manner, with air filled with carbon dioxide and other harmful gases which will damage the meat? Furthermore, He is charged with visiting the barbers and making sure their premises are clean and germ-free; and if he smells garlic or onions on them, for example, he will order them to close their premises and not work that day so that people will not be offended by the smell.

What law is this that gives such regard to people's safety and feelings? It is the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* and His way which leaves no aspect of life, big or small, without assigning certain rules and codes of conduct to govern it. Would a system of this nature leave ordinary life aside, and be confined only to matters of worship?

When you look at all the different problems in the developing world—leaving aside the developed world—you find that they are economic problems. If you sought out the root of these problems, you would find that they all stem from the abandonment of Allah’s guidance and His law. By Allah, if they were to apply to their economic crisis Muhammad’s saying: ‘We are a people who do not eat until we are hungry, and do not fill ourselves when we eat.’(1) If they were to apply this, and follow the way of their Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him,* they would find a way out of this crisis, and they would live comfortable lives. If you followed this principle when eating and drinking, a couple of morsels would suffice you; and the most delicious food is that which is eaten when one is truly hungry, however simple it might be.

As for now, we see people eating ‘appetizers’ before their meals and snacks afterwards. Why? Because they have rejected the guidance of their Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* eating until they are full and then eating even more. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘and eat and drink [as we have permitted] but do not be extravagant’ (*al-A‘raf:* 31). The Arabs, who lived very simple lives, used to say, ‘The best sauce is hunger.’ This is the true ‘dipping’, and the best of appetizers.

Let us return to the matter of the rank of prayer amongst other acts of worship, and the reason why it is the buttress of the religion. The meaning of ‘Prayer is the pillar of faith’(2) and ‘Islam was built upon five things’(3) is that the religion is composed of many other things, but these are its bases and foundations. If we consider these foundations, we find that the first of them, ‘There is no deity worth of worship but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’, only needs to be said once to be fulfilled; and the poor-due is not obligatory for needy people; and sick people do not have to fast, nor do travellers, or menstruating women and so on; and the pilgrimage is only obligatory for those who can afford to perform it.

So, what is the pillar that is obligatory for all Muslims, and is not excused under any circumstances? It is prayer. Thus, it takes a large portion of one’s time both at day and night, and it constitutes the sign of allegiance to Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, it distinguishes between the believer and the disbeliever. If you see someone who is not fasting, not paying the poor-due or not performing the pilgrimage, it might be that he has some reason that excuses him; but if someone does not pray, and repeats this many times, you will certainly have doubts about his adherence to the religion of Islam. Thus, prayer has held this position amongst all the other acts of worship ever since it was first enjoined. Every one of the obligations of this religion was established by means of divine inspiration except the prayer which was given directly by Allah *Glorified is He* to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Night Journey.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Al-Miqdad*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Ad-Daylami*

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar*

Previously, we gave an example for this—and Allah has the highest examples—of an employer who issues his orders by various means according to the importance of the order. He might simply write a memo and have it delivered, or he might call the employee on the telephone; if it is a very important matter, he calls him personally to his office and commission him with what he needs.

This summoning was a great honour for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because of the close proximity of the Sender to the one sent to. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not want the community of Muhammad to be denied a share of the grace He gave to him. It is as though He were saying, 'Whichever of My servants wishes to be as close to Me as Muhammad was, closer than two bow's lengths, let them pray.'

The meaning of 'keep up the prayer' is to be constant in something, that is to do it in the best way possible, and so the prayer that is required is prayer which meets all the criteria that He who established it requires: '…prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behavior…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). If someone offers prayer that fulfils all its necessary criteria, it will restrain him from all that is loathsome and wicked; and so if your prayer does not restrain you from what is loathsome and wicked, know that it is deficient, and below the standards that Allah *Glorified is He* expects. The level of this deficiency determines the effect prayer has on the conduct of he who offers it. So, if you fall into any outrageous and unacceptable acts, this indicates the degree to which your prayer is correct, and the degree to which you are concerned with perfecting it and making it constant.

The meaning of '…prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behavior…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45) is made clear by what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said when they told him that there was a man who prayed, but whose prayer did not prevent him from performing loathsome and evil acts: 'leave him alone; for his prayer indeed will restrain him.'(1) This means that it is not a question of a natural law that is never broken; rather, it is a legal directive which can either be obeyed or disobeyed. If it was a natural law, no one who prayed would be able to commit loathsome acts. It is as though I say to my sons on my deathbed: 'All who enter this house are to be honoured'. I say it as though it is a fact, rather than saying, 'Honour all who enter this house'; so whoever amongst them respects my advice will honour all who enter the house, and those who do not honour my advice will not. If I had said 'Honour all who enter this house', I would have obliged them all to obey.

A clearer example still is Allah's words about the Sacred Mosque: '…whoever enters it is safe…' (*Al-'Imran:* 97). When some capricious people attacked it, and fired shots within its walls, killing innocent people, there were many who questioned this verse, asking how this could have happened when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'whoever enters it is safe'. They used this incident as evidence that the verse was incorrect—Allah forbid. The reason they did this is that they did not understand the difference between a natural law and a legal directive. Allah's words 'whoever enters it is safe' is a directive, which can either be obeyed or disobeyed, as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying, 'Protect whoever enters the Sacred Mosque'. Some people obeyed the command and gave protection to all who entered the Sacred Mosque, whilst others disobeyed and terrorised the people, and murdered them within its walls. If it were a natural law, it could not possibly have been broken, just as the sun has never failed to rise.

The same is true of '…prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behavior…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). The prayer is a commandment from Allah

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(1) *Ahmad narrated the like of it from Abu Hurayra.*

Glorified is He. He who established it is He who says, ‘Allah commands justice, doing good, and generosity towards relatives and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy…’ (*an-Nahl:* 90). Allah *Glorified is He* forbids us these things, but do we all obey? Thus, prayer itself will not prevent you because this is a directive, not a natural law.

Some people think that His words: ‘prayer restrains outrageous and unacceptable behavior’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 45) mean that there are no loathsome and irrational deeds in the prayer. This is also correct because when we enter the prayer by saying the opening *takbir: Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest), this makes all those things that were permissible a moment ago forbidden as long as we are praying. For example, you cannot eat, drink, or unnecessarily move in the prayer even though these things are all permissible outside of it. So, what about something that was forbidden even before you began praying? It is clearly forbidden a priori.

According to this understanding, prayer restrains you from outrageous and unacceptable behavior for as long as you are praying because the opening of the prayer with ‘Allah is the Greatest’ means that Allah *Glorified is He* is greater than everything in existence, including the desires and whims of the soul. If not, how can you stand before your Lord and then disobey His guidance? According to this understanding, prayer indeed restrains one from all outrageous and unacceptable behavior. The meaning of ‘outrageous’ is everything word and deed that repulses; ‘unacceptable’ means everything that sound human nature dislikes. ‘…Remembering Allah is greater’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 45). The word *dhikr* (remembrance) is a gerund; gerunds can be ascribed to both active agents and passive agents, like when you say: ‘I like the prince’s hitting of Zayd’ or ‘I liked the hitting of Zayd by the prince’. So, when you say ‘remembrance of Allah’, this could mean either mentioning that Allah *Glorified is He* makes, or remembrance and glorification that the servant makes of Allah *Glorified is He*. If the meaning is the remembrance and mentioning that Allah *Glorified is He* makes, i.e. of the one who prays, this means that when someone prays, and remembers and glorifies Allah by saying ‘Allah is the Greatest’, and glorifies Him by saying, ‘Glory be to Allah’ and prostrates before Him in humility, he has truly performed an action in which he remembered and glorified Allah with word and deed. Allah *Glorified is He* rewards this by mentioning that person; so the mentioning is Allah’s mentioning the one who remembered and glorified Him in the prayer.

There is no doubt that Allah’s mention of you is greater and more magnificent than your mention of Him. You glorify Him from adolescence to death; whilst He gives you, as a reward for remembering Him, an exalted abode which has no end in which you will never die nor will its blessings be taken from you. The meaning is: Allah’s remembrance of you by reward and mercy is greater than your remembrance of Him by obedience—this is according to the understanding that the remembrance here refers to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The other meaning is that the remembrance here is the servant’s remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He*. In this case, it means that the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* outside of the prayer is greater than remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* within the prayer. How is this? They say it is because you prepare for the prayer by performing ablution, getting ready to enter your Lord’s presence after the prayer begins. When the prayer ends, and you continue with your ordinary life, your remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He,* whilst you are far from His presence and bust with your life is greater than your remembrance of Him, whilst you are in His Presence.

An example to illustrate this—and Allah has the highest examples—is of someone who praises a ruler whilst in his presence, and someone else who praises him in his absence. Which one of them is more pleasing, and which one of them is more honest in his remembrance?

Read what Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Friday Prayer: ‘Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9). This indicates remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* in the prayer; but do not think that the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* is confined only to the prayer: ‘…then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah’s bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10) Therefore, you should never overlook remembering Allah because remembrance of your Lord outside the prayer is greater than remembering Him during the prayer.

It is narrated on the authority of `Ata` ibn As-Sa`ib that Ibn `Abbas asked `Abdullah ibn Rabi`a about his opinion on the meaning of ‘and the remembrance of Allah is greater’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 45). He replied: ‘Reciting the Quran is good, prayer is good, glorification of Allah is good, and praise Allah is good, and saying ‘Allah is the Greatest’ is good saying ‘There is no god but Allah’ is good, but the most preferable thing to do is to when a person remembers Allah as he is about to commit a sin, so abstains from it.’

Although Ibn `Abbas understood the verse in a different way, he said, ‘By Allah, how wonderful!’ He was impressed by Ibn Rabi`a’s saying, praised his understanding of the verse, and did not criticise his effort to understand it. It is normal that a person remembers Allah when he does good deeds, but remembering Him when one is about to commit an act of disobedience and abandoning it is more preferable and greater. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and the remembrance of Allah is greater’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 45).

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Seven people Allah will give them His shade on the Day when there would be no shade but the shade of His Throne (i.e., on the Day of Resurrection); among them is a man whom an extremely beautiful woman seduces (for illicit relation), but he (rejects this offer and) says: “I fear Allah.”’(1) This is the greatest remembrance of Allah because when it comes to acts of obedience, a person needs great efforts to turn from sin into obedience.

As for the opinion of Ibn `Abbas about ‘…and the remembrance of Allah is greater’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 45), it was that Allah’s remembrance of people by means of reward and mercy is greater than the people’s remembrance of Him by means of acts of obedience. The evidence on this is that your Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* does not hold you accountable for your deeds until the age of puberty, letting you enjoy His blessings for fifteen years without any responsibilities. In addition, He does not suspend His sustenance even if you stray from His guidance and disbelieve in Him.

Therefore, Allah’s remembrance of you by creating you from nothing and sustaining you constantly with His blessings is greater than your remembrance of Him by obeying Him. Allah *Glorified is He* has remembered you even before He enjoined on you to remember Him. In addition, your remembrance of Allah in this life is transitory, while His remembrance of you by means of reward and mercy in the Hereafter is eternal and endless.

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(1) *Related by Muslim from Abu Hurayra*

Allah ends the verse, saying: '…And Allah knows that which you do.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). This can be understood as glad tiding for the believers and a warning for the disbelievers. When a teacher says to his students on the day of the examination, 'The hard working will succeed', this is a glad tiding to the hard workers and a warning to the lazy. The sentence is one, and for the person to choose for himself the category he wants.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تُجَٰدِلُوٓاْ أَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِلَّا بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحۡسَنُ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ مِنۡهُمۡۖ وَقُولُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا
بِٱلَّذِيٓ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكُمۡ وَإِلَٰهُنَا وَإِلَٰهُكُمۡ وَٰحِدٞ وَنَحۡنُ لَهُۥ مُسۡلِمُونَ (٤٦)

[Believers], argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him' [46] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 46)

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us in this verse how to argue with the people of the Book. Before mentioning the different forms of argumentation in the Noble Quran, let us understand the meaning of argumentation.

The Arabic word *jadal* (argumentation) literally means twisting something soft to make it hard, as we do with our ropes in the countryside. Cotton and wool, for example, are fluffy, and take up a lot of space. If we want to make a cotton or wool thread, we take a few strands and wrap them around one another to make them strong. By interweaving threads in this way, we can make a strong rope; the purpose for which we intend to use the rope determines how strong it will be.

The words *jidal*, *jada*, and *mujadala* are derived from the word *jadl* which refers to argument, debate, and discussion. It also suggests that there are two parties who have different points of view, and each of them tries to support and defend his point of view in order to convince the other.

If the intention of argument, debate, and discussion is to arrive at the truth, it is appropriate to use these terms, but if the discourse involves dispute and obstinacy, the intention cannot be reaching the truth; rather, it involves seeking to defeat the other party. In this case, *jadal* has many names in Arabic, including the word *lijaj* (persistent arguing), as mentioned in Allah's saying: '...they would persist in their transgression…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 75).

If we twist something until it is contracted, it will become stronger; do you want to make your opponent stronger when you argue with him? No, you try to strengthen yourself to face him. Some scholars explained this point saying that when you bring your opponent away from following falsehood, and direct him towards the truth, you strengthen his certainty about something that will benefit him. It is as though he was filling more space than the size required for him because of the falsehood that he adhered to, so you strengthened him with the truth (like twisting a fluffy piece of cotton to make thread). In our dialect, we say that someone is 'full of air', as though he is filling more space than his own size requires. Therefore, we should be aware that the objective of debate should not simply be to defeat the opponent, but to support the truth that will benefit and strengthen him.

In other words, the literal meaning of the word *jadal* (debate) is also derived from the word *jidal* (the ground). It seems as if the stronger contender throws the weaker to the ground in wrestling, for example. Debate takes place between two persons, each one of whom has an opinion which he prefers and of which he is convinced. When you debate someone, you try to make him abandon the opinion he prefers and accepts your opinion and convince him with it which he does not prefer. Therefore, you cannot do this using a way that he dislikes, not to make things harder for him.

Therefore, you must be gentle and win his heart in a tender manner since giving advice is something hard. Shawqi, Allah rest is soul, said, 'Do not make advice as hard as a mountain, or impart it by means of argumentation. The one who gives advice usually seems to be better than the one he advises.' Some people say that the truth is harsh, and so it should be said by gentle words because you try to make your opponent abandon what he is accustomed to. Therefore, you must do this in a way he likes.

A person may express a single fact in different ways; whether pleasant or unpleasant. For example, there was a king who had a dream that all his teeth fell out, and so he asked for someone to interpret this dream. An interpreter came, listened to the dream, and said: ‘The meaning is that your whole family will die.’ Therefore, the king was disheartened, as this expression did not please him. Another interpreter said that the dream means that he will live longer than anyone else in his family. Then king was pleased by this interpretation. The meaning was the same, but the expressions used were different.

One man went to see another and found him weeping. He asked him why he wept, so he replied, ‘I was wrongfully punished.’ The first man was amazed and replied, ‘What would you do if you had been punished rightfully? Would you laugh?’ This means that those who are wrongfully punished should not weep because they have done nothing wrong; the ones who really should weep are those who have been punished justly and rightfully for their wrongdoing.

A man suffered the loss of a loved one, so he was wailing and crying. The friend came to comfort the bereaved man and said, ‘My son was killed unlawfully!’ His friend replied, ‘Praise be to Allah, Who made your offspring a victim of murder, rather than a murderer!’

Therefore, sound logic and gentle words are important, and the one who debates must choose his words carefully, and wait for the opportune moment. Do not debate with your opponent, while he is angry with you, or you are angry with him. Some people said that a man was walking along by the sea when he came across a child drowning, so he threw himself in the sea in order to save the boy. Once he had saved him, he began to chastise him and beat him, and the boy said, ‘Thank you, may Allah bless you!’ Why did this happen? It is because he treated him cruelly after rescuing him. What would happen if he had stood on the shore and shouted at the boy without throwing himself into the sea in order to save him? Wise people say: ‘Save and then advice’.

Our Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us the basics and etiquette of debate because He wants to take people from disbelief to belief and from denial to certainty. This can only be achieved by gentleness and leniency, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way…' (*an-Nahl:* 125).

Allah teaches us that there are different levels of debate, according to the state of the opponent. Those who deny Allah's existence have a specific form of debate, those who believe in Allah but assert that He has partners should be debated with in a different manner, and those who believe in Allah but will follow their prophet should be debated with in a different manner. In addition, those people who belong to your own religion but dispute with you should be debated with in a manner that suits them.

Therefore, argumentation has many levels which we can find in the Quran. The Quran argues with those who do not believe in the existence of Allah, saying, 'Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather, they are not certain.' (*at-Tur:* 35-36)

Therefore, it presents to them the plain issue of creation, which none has claimed for themselves or could deny, even the polytheists and the atheists. They know that even the simplest product has a maker, even if it is a cup or a pencil.

Is the One Who created the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon and other creatures not more deserving to be recognized as the Creator? They themselves are created and do not claim to have created themselves. Therefore, who created them?

We said before that a claim is given to the one who stakes it unless a counter-claim is made. Allah *Glorified is He* stated plainly via His messengers and in a Quran which will be recited until the Day of Resurrection that He created this universe. If any obstinate person asked, 'Who created Allah?' we say that whoever created Him should declare this. Allah *Glorified is He* testified that there is no god but Him: 'Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). No one claims that he is a god. This is relevant to the argumentation with those who deny the existence of Allah.

As for those who believe in Allah but ascribe partners to Him, we should debate them in this way: Can you see those to whom you ascribe partnership with Allah, or are they unseen? If they say that they are unseen, then they should be aware that Allah has declared His Oneness, and that He has no partner. Therefore, where are their partners?

Why do they not defend their claimed divinity? Either they are unaware of Allah's declaration or else they are aware of it but unable to answer it. Either way, they do not have the attributes of divinity. What kind of god is this who does not know what goes on around him or fears to face his rival?

If they say that their associates are idols, trees, stars and so forth, they are made by them, so how can they worship these idols? Moreover, they are gods that offer no system of guidance or moral responsibility; what commandments or prohibitions have they issued? Their worship is utter falsehood.

Then, we ask those who associate partners with Allah: 'Do those whom you associate with Allah all work together with the same powers or they have specific things which they are able to do'? If they all share in the same tasks, so one of them will be sufficient, and the others are useless; if they handle things in turns, this means that each of them is capable of doing one thing and incapable of doing another, but a true god cannot fail in doing anything.

Allah *Glorified is He* answered these people by, saying, 'Say, [O Muhammad], "If there had been with Him [other] gods, as they say, then they [each] would have sought to the Owner of the Throne a way."' (*al-Isra':* 42) This means that they would have gone to Him to oppose Him or seek their due from Him. They would have prevented Him from taking everything for Himself or would have sought His favour. In another verse, Allah says, '...then each deity would have taken what it created, and some of them would have sought to overcome others...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91).

After explaining how we debate with those who do not believe in Allah, and those who associate partners with Him, let us move onto how we debate with the People of the Book. Debate with these people can be friendlier than with other people because they believe in Allah, the Creator, and in the messages He has sent and the Books He has revealed. The only difference between us and the people of the Book is that they do not believe in the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* although we believe in their messengers and their scriptures, which is the first thing that distinguishes Islam from other religions.

We believe in other messengers who were sent before Messenger Muhammad; so why do they deny that another messenger could come after their messenger? When a messenger comes after another, he does not contradict him regarding the basics of the religion. All the messengers agree with each other concerning the fundamentals of creed and morality, and agree that they are Allah's servants who love one another. Therefore, they should not disagree with each other.

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us: '[Believers], argue only in the best way with the people of the Book except with those of them who act unjustly…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46) as they are neither atheists nor polytheists; but they believe in your Lord, messengers and books, and the only difference is that they do not believe in your messenger.

Some people object to the fact that Islam allows a Muslim to marry a Jewish or Christian woman, but prevents a Muslim woman to marry a Jewish or Christian man. The reason for this ruling is that responsibility in marriage is held by man. When a Muslim man marries a Jewish or Christian woman, he believes in her prophet; as for the Jewish or Christian man, he does not believe in the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* of the Muslim woman. Therefore, there is a huge difference between the two situations.

The meaning of 'only in the best way' is that debate can have different levels of kindness. An example of kind debate is found in Allah's saying: '…And indeed, we or you are either upon guidance or in clear error.' (*Saba':* 24)

Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was also kind when he debated his people, saying: '…Say, "If I have invented it, then upon me is [the consequence of] my crime, but I am innocent of what [crimes] you commit."' (*Hud:* 35) He ascribed the invention of falsehood to himself, and said that he would have sinned if he had spoken falsehood; if he was not the liar or the sinner, they were surely the sinners.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his people: 'Say, "You will not be asked about what we committed, and we will not be asked about what you do.”’ (*Saba’:* 25) He *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned guilt in connection with himself, and he did not mention it in connection with those obstinate deniers. This is the politest manner of spreading the call to Allah.

In conclusion, debate the non-believers in a kind manner, and debate the people of the Book in the best manner because they excel over other people in their belief in Allah. If they transgress and wrong themselves in matters relevant to faith, claiming that Allah has a son or anything else, they become at the rank of polytheists. When they say such things, we should debate in a kind way, but not in the best way.

Can the sword impose beliefs? No, the sword can only harm people’s physical forms. As for the heart, it yields only to faith; Allah does not want physical forms, but wants hearts. Allah says in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara’:* ‘Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain humbled.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 3-4) If Allah wanted to subject all bodies and hearts to Him so that no one would reject faith, there would not be any disbelievers, and the disbeliever only disbelieves because of the free will that Allah has given him. Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to love and worship Him because He deserves to be worshipped.

Those who go beyond the limits of their Book by saying that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah, or that Allah is the third of three have become disbelievers and polytheists. We ask those people to follow their messenger and Book which was revealed by Allah and they will find therein glad tidings of the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘…the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 157).

Those people do not only disbelieve in Muhammad and the Quran, they also disbelieve in the Book revealed to them. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘They have certainly disbelieved who say, “Allah is the third of three”...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 17) and, ‘They have certainly disbelieved who say, “Allah is the third of three.”...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 73).

This means not to treat them as people of the Book. When we were asked abroad by Muslim youths about marrying Christian women, we told them to ask these women about Prophet `Isa (Jesus); if they say that he is a messenger of Allah, you can marry her because they belong to the people of the Book. However, if they say that he is the son of Allah, consider her as though she is disbeliever and polytheist.

This is the meaning of Allah's saying: '…except with those of them who act unjustly…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46). We do not deal with such people with the sword because the sword is only to protect people's right to choose. I have the right to manifest and clarify my religion to others. If they prevent me from doing so, I will deal with them with the sword; if they let me clarify my religion, they are free to believe or disbelieve, according to their wish.

If they believe, this will be good; if they do not believe, they will have rights and responsibilities as we do. They pay the *jizya* (tax) in return for living on our land and enjoying our protection and the services we provide for them. How could we oblige the believers to pay *zakat* (obligatory alms) and leave others without paying anything?

We find many opponents of Islam object to the issue of paying *jizya* (tax) saying that Islam spread by the sword. This is a contradictory statement because we only oblige them to pay the *jizya* (tax) for letting them to embrace their religions; if we forced them to convert to Islam, they would not have to pay *jizya (tax)*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong...' (*al-Baqara:* 256).

You will not be forced to do something unless your arguments are weak; since truth is clearly distinct from falsehood, there will be no need to do this.

Some people understand this verse incorrectly so that when you tell them to pray, they say, 'There is no compulsion in religion'. We say to them, 'You have not understood the meaning. There is no compulsion in the basis of religion: with regard to believe or not, as you are free in this matter. However, once you believe and testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, you do not have the right to trespass the boundaries of Islam. There is a big difference between 'There is no compulsion in religion' and 'There is no compulsion in religious observance'.

Part of the wisdom of Islam is that it announces the penalty for apostasy to anyone who wants to believe. He should know before embracing Islam that embracing Islam then apostatising entails the penalty of death. Those who wish to embrace Islam should know about this ruling first, so that they reach it after deep reflection and with full conviction.

'people of the Book' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46) means the Book which was revealed by Allah Who taught His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* how to debate the idolaters by saying: '...So ask the people of the Book if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43)

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew to refer things to the people of the Book, and trust their testimony. In another verse, Allah taught him what to say to those who refused to believe: 'And those who have disbelieved say, "You are not a messenger". Say, [O Muhammad], "Sufficient is Allah as witness between me and you, and [the witness of] whoever has knowledge of the Scripture."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43)

Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* referred to the people of the Book because of the clear proofs and indications they possessed of his sincerity, so that `Abdullah ibn Salam said, 'I recognised him when I saw him as I recognise my own son, and my recognition of Muhammad was even stronger.'(1) How could they not have recognised him when he was mentioned in their books with his name and his description: '…the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel ...' (*al-A'raf:* 157).

They used to foretell their victory over the idolaters in Medina, saying, 'The time has come for a prophet to be sent to Mecca, and we will follow him and slay you with him as `Ad and Iram were slain!'(2) When the Prophet whom they recognised came, they denied and disbelieved in him: '...although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but

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(1) *Stated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir*

(2) *Stated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir*

[then] when there came to them-that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it...' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

How could it be that Allah testified to the sincerity of His Messenger in their Books, and then they belied him? They said that they belied him because they were afraid of losing their temporal power, believing that Islam would take it from them.

The phrase 'in the best way with' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 46) occurs in another verse in the Quran, but not in the context of religious debate. It occurs in reference to everything that causes people to debate: '...Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.' (*Fussilat:* 34)

A man came to me and mentioned this verse and matters pertaining to good conduct, saying: 'I acted in accordance with this verse, but I did not find the true friend'! I replied to him: 'The fact that you have this on your mind proves that you did not actually repay with that which is better because Allah does not state something in the Quran that is contrary to real life. If you really repay bad turns with something better, your rivals will certainly become like true friends to you. One of the wise men said:

If you are bothered by what someone does,

Pay your ransom of 'that which', and you will see.

This means that if a person treats you badly, '…Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better…' (*Fussilat:* 34) so that '…thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.' (*Fussilat:* 34)

I remember a young man came to me and said, 'My uncle is rich and I am poor, but he does not let me have a share in his wealth, while he lets others enjoy his wealth.' I replied, 'By Allah, does it please you that your uncle is well-off?' He kept silent, so I said, 'It seems it does not please you. But you should know that bounties love their owners more than their owners love them, so they do not go to those who hate to see them in the possession of their owners. You should repent to Allah, remove the feelings of hatred for your uncle, and put your trust in Allah, the Provider. If you want to share in someone's bounties, you must be pleased that he has these bounties, so they will gain some of them. When you hate to see someone else having bounties, you object to Allah's decree'. A short while after I talked to this man – and Allah is our witness – my doorbell rang, only to find him back again, saying to me, 'Do you know what happened? My uncle came to me an hour before dawn. When I opened the door, he began to scold and beat me, saying, 'Why do you abandon me and allow strangers to consume my wealth when you are present?' Then he gave me the keys and said, 'From this morning onward, you will undertake the responsibility of work.' I replied to the man, 'You are pleased to see your uncle enjoying these bounties, and so they have received some of them.'

Allah's saying 'except with those of them who act unjustly' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46), means those who wrong themselves by committing idolatry, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice.' (*Luqman:* 13) You wrong yourself, not Allah, by committing idolatry because the oppressor is always stronger than the oppressed. Associating partners with Allah is considered great oppression, as other sins can be forgiven by either by repentance or Allah's Mercy and Forgiveness: 'Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills...' (*an-Nisa':* 116).

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us the best way to answer those who wrong themselves: 'Say, "We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our Lord and your Lord are one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46)

Why do we differ as long as our Lord and yours is one, and your Book mentions the messenger who will come after your messenger? Just as other messengers came before yours, you should have believed in him and accepted him.

A woman came to me complaining that her husband had not fulfilled his promises. Before they married, she had stipulated that he would not go to his first wife again. I asked her, 'Do you mean that you are his second wife, and you accepted him while he is married to another?' She said, 'Yes.' I replied, 'Why did you accept him?' She said, 'I liked him and he liked me.' I said, 'There is nothing to stop him from liking another woman and marrying her, and she may tell him not to go to your second wife. Would this please you?' Therefore, respect the right of the first wife so that the third wife will respect your right.' Then, she stood up and left.

Allah says, 'our Lord and your Lord are one [and the same]' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46) because the verse is relevant to those who wronged themselves by associating others with Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…we are devoted to Him.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 47); He did not say, 'It is Him in whom we believe'. Why? It is because faith lies in the heart and entails trusting Allah and accepting His legislation which includes commandments and prohibitions. There are people who are not real believers, as they behave like Muslims, but actually they are hypocrites.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'The Bedouins say, "We have believed." Say, "You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], 'We have submitted', for faith has not yet entered your hearts…"' (*al-Hujurat:* 14). Therefore, there is a difference between faith and submission; one of them might be fulfilled without the other. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'By time. Indeed mankind is in loss. Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds...' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3).

Allah says, '…we are devoted to Him.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46),. It means that they follow the teachings of their religion.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ ۚ فَٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِۦ ۖ
وَمِنْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ مَن يُؤْمِنُ بِهِۦ ۚ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ إِلَّا ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

This is the way We sent the Scripture to you [Muhammad].
Those to whom We had already given Scripture believe in
[the Quran] and so do some of these people. No one refuses
to acknowledge Our revelations but the defiant [47]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 47)

'This is the way We sent the Book to you [Muhammad]…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 47); this means that as Allah revealed a Book upon those who came before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He revealed to him a Book which contained the divine message. All the Books of Allah contained commands and prohibitions, but the Quran is the only Book of Allah that contained both the divine message and the miracle.

All the messengers who preceded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were sent down with a Book of Allah that contained the divine message, and were accompanied by a miracle that was separate from the Divine Book. Musa’s (Moses’s) Book was the Torah, and his miracle was the staff; `Isa’s (Jesus’s) Book was the Gospel, and his miracle was to bring life to the dead with Allah’s leave. As for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* his Book and Miracle are the Quran. The miracle is connected to the divine message and will remain connected to it. As Muhammad’s divine message will remain until the Last Hour, his miracle will remain existent before all people.

However, no one can say, for example, that `Isa’s (Jesus’s) miracle is present because we only know about it from the Quran. This shows us the favour that the Quran did for the previous messengers and their miracles, as they confirm them for those who did not witness them and everyone who believes in the Quran also believes in them.

Did every messenger bring a miracle? Miracles only accompanied the messengers who were challenged and accused of lying. Miracle confirmed that these messengers were truly sent by their Lord. Therefore, we find that, for example, Prophet Shayth (Seth), Idris (Enoch) and Shu’aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them* were not accompanied by miracles.

Did Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and the Mother of the Believers, Khadija, need a miracle in order to believe Messenger Muhammad? Of course not, as when Prophet Muhammad told them that he was the Messenger of Allah, they believed him, so they did not need any miracle.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad differed from all the other messengers in the fact that his Book was also his miracle. We said before that Allah *Glorified is He* sends miracles in what the contemporaries of the messengers excelled because if Allah challenged them with something that they knew nothing about, they would say that they had no knowledge of this matter, so it is not possible to challenge them with it. The Arabs were people of eloquence and rhetoric, and they held festivals and events for demonstrating their skills in speech, so Allah challenged them with the eloquence and rhetoric of the Quran to create something like it, then to create ten chapters like those contained in the Quran then to bring even one chapter, but they could not. The Quran is in their language, but the speaker is Allah *Glorified is He* so no one could create anything like the Quran.

The Quran is a Book that encompasses all the Divine Books that preceded it, preserving the laws that Allah wishes to preserve, and abrogating that which He wishes to abrogate. On the other hand, principles of faith are fixed and cannot be abrogated, nor can stories and historical events. Abrogation only applies to laws, commandments and prohibitions because laws should be appropriate to the environments to which they are applied.

Therefore, some messengers lived at the same time, such as Ibrahim (Abraham) and Lut (Lot), and Musa (Moses) and Shu`aib (Jethro), but each of them had his own message because each of them was sent to a particular place for him to treat a particular ailment at a time when it was difficult to travel between different environments. Therefore, a group of people in one place might be utterly unaware of other people in a neighbouring environment.

As for Prophet Muhammad, he came at a time when different environments communicated with each other and civilisations intermingled. People have managed to see and know incidents which take place in different parts of the world. The ailments of different societies have become similar to each other, so one messenger for all people will be enough to treat these ailments.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Those to whom We had already given Divine Book…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 47), this means the people who preceded Prophet Muhammad. '…believe in [the Quran] …' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 47) because no temporal power holds them back from the new revelation; they consider the attributes of the new messenger that are mentioned in their Divine Book and match them with the attributes of the Messenger Muhammad. Therefore, when Salman Al-Farisi heard that there was a new prophet in Mecca, he went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and began to examine him closely. He found two signs that the previous Divine Books mentioned: that he accepted gifts not voluntary charity. Salman searched for the third sign, but Messenger Muhammad realised what he was doing because of his Prophetic insight, so he said, ‘Perhaps you are looking for this’, and revealed the Seal of Prophet hood, which was the third sign.(1)

`Abdullah Ibn Salam showed courteous behaviour when he went to Messenger Muhammad while he was still embracing Judaism. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, the Jews are slanderers, and I fear that if I declare embracing Islam they will insult and slander me, so I want you to ask them about me. Once they answer you, I will declare that I have embraced Islam.’ When a group of Jews came to Messenger Muhammad, he asked them about their opinion about `Abdullah ibn Salam. They replied, ‘He is our chief, rabbi and leader…’ `Abdullah Ibn Salam said, ‘As they have said this about me, I testify that there is no god but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.’ Then the Jews immediately said, ‘Rather, you are the worst of us, and the son of the worst of us’, and they insulted him further. Therefore, `Abdullah said, ‘Did I not tell you, O Messenger of Allah, that they are slanderers?’(2)

‘…Those to whom We had already given Scripture believe in [the Quran]…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 47) means that there will come after the idolaters who lived in Mecca other people who will believe in the Quran.

‘…No one refuses to acknowledge Our revelations but the defiant.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 47). The word *jahd* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to deliberate denial because denial may result from ignorance, for example, *judud* is denial or affirmation of something. The tongue may say something positive, while the heart is negative, or vice versa.

The Quran differentiates between expressions and actual feelings in the heart of those who make them. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘When the hypocrites come to you, [O Muhammad], they say, “We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah”…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1).

Their statement was acceptable. ‘Allah knows that you are His Messenger…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). This means that their statement was in line with Allah’s

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Salman, the Persian Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *Related by Al-Bayhaqi and Al-Bukhari on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him*

Knowledge; but: '…Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) How does Allah say that they are liars when what they said is in line with His Knowledge?

Allah's sayings require deep reflection on their meanings. Allah said that they were liars, not because of their saying that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger - as this is true - but because of their testimony, as the testimony of their tongues did not match the belief of their hearts. What they testified is true, but the testimony itself is a lie.

However, why does Allah ascribe deliberate denial to the disbelievers? They said that the believer is in a state of certainty and wakefulness, and so he would never dare to say such things because he knows that Allah does not immediately punish people for their sins, but delays the punishment until the Day of Reckoning, as this knowledge keeps them from denial.

وَمَا كُنتَ تَتْلُوا۟ مِن قَبْلِهِۦ مِن كِتَٰبٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُۥ
بِيَمِينِكَ ۖ إِذًا لَّٱرْتَابَ ٱلْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

You never recited any Scripture before We revealed this one to you; you never wrote one down with your hand. If you had done so, those who follow falsehood might have had cause to doubt [48] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 48)

The word *tatlu*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means 'recite', because you only recite that which you have already heard. It is as though your speech follows what you heard. 'you never wrote one down with your hand' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48); the phrase *takhuttahu biyaminik* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means writing.

There is a difference between reciting and writing. You might be able to recite something because you have memorised it after hearing it, such as people whom Allah has afflicted with the loss of sight, so they recite what they have heard from memory. As we said before, hearing is the first sense that a person uses. It is possible to memorise what you hear, but writing it down is a different matter.

This discourse is a kind of argument in order to convince the idolaters of Quraysh who belied Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to console and reassure him. Allah confirms to Messenger Muhammad that what the disbelievers said about him is mere fabrication, as he never before recited a book, nor did he write it with his hand, and they were well aware of his way of life. Allah says in another verse in the Quran: '...I had remained among you a lifetime before it. Then will you not reason?' (*Yunus:* 16)

Before his prophetic mission, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spent forty years among his people, during which they never saw him recite, write or deliver a speech or compose a poem, so how could they deny him?

If they say that Muhammad had a special genius which he kept hidden for forty years, we will say that genius generally comes forth towards the end of the second decade of a person's life, at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Who guaranteed for Muhammad that he would even live until the age of forty, when he himself witnessed the deaths of his grandfather and parents?

If he had read and written something, they might have had an excuse for doubting him, as they said: '...Legends of the former peoples which he has written down, and they are dictated to him morning and afternoon.' (*al-Furqan:* 5)

They also said: 'It is only a human being who teaches the Prophet', so Allah responds to them, saying, '...The tongue of the one they refer to is foreign, and this Quran is [in] a clear Arabic language.' (*an-Nahl:* 103)

The disbelievers said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a sorcerer, a poet and an insane person, which were fabrications which can be easily refuted. If he was a sorcerer, why did he not cast a spell on them? If he was a poet, did they ever hear him recite poetry before his mission?

If he was mad, madness means losing one's intellect so that he cannot choose between several options, had they ever seen Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* showing something like this? How could an insane person have such lofty morals and noble character? They testify that he was a truthful and an honest person, and he was in control of his actions, so how could they accuse him of insanity?

The phrase ‘before We revealed this one’ has many wonderful indications in the Book of Allah, one of which occurs in the following verse: ‘you never wrote one down with your hand’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 48). Some scholars say that the verse means that he did not read or write before the revelation of the Quran, but it is possible that he learnt to read and write after the Quran was revealed to him, so that there would be no one in his *ummah* better than him in any good attribute.

The following saying of Allah requires reflection: ‘…Then why did you kill the prophets of Allah before...’ (*al-Baqara:* 91). If the phrase ‘*min qabl*’ (before) had not been included in the verse, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might have thought that those disbelievers would kill him, causing him to fear them. In addition, the disbelievers might have thought of killing him as other prophets were killed. The verse asserts that although this happened in the past, it would never happen again, and Allah would never allow them to slay His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The phrase ‘*wama kunta*’ (you were not) is also repeated several times in the Book of Allah, indicates that the Quran has transcended the past, present and future.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and you, [O Muhammad], were not on the western side [of the mount] when We revealed to Musa (Moses) the command...’ (*al-Qasas:* 44). Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘...And you were not a resident among the people of Midyan, reciting to them Our verses...’ (*al-Qasas:* 45). Allah also says, ‘...And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Maryam (Mary)...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 44). Allah also says, ‘You never recited any Book before We revealed this one to you; you never wrote one down with your hand...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 48).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* as described him as: ‘…the Messenger, the illiterate prophet…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 157). Beware of imagining that Messenger Muhammad’s illiteracy was a defect in his personality. Although it may be a defect regarding other people, it entails honour for him because the meaning of *ummi* here is that he was in his natural state, just as he was when his mother gave birth to him, not learning anything from anyone. He received learning directly from the Creator, so his knowledge was far beyond that of all other people.

This was the basis for the sublime knowledge and sound judgement that `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* possessed to the extent that `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who himself is well known for his sound judgement and the Quran corresponded to his reasoning and opinion. said: ‘Woe be it to any place on earth in which Abu Al-Hasan (`Ali) is not found.’(1) Why did he say this?

It is because `Ali, Allah be pleased with hem, was a man of sound reasoning, logic and eloquence. `Umar changed his verdict in the case of a woman(2) who gave birth after six months of marriage. `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* wanted to charge her with adultery because pregnancy usually lasts for nine months. Therefore, some people said that she had had sexual relation before marriage. However, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* thought differently, and said to `Umar, ‘But Allah says other than this.’ `Umar asked what he meant. `Ali said, Allah says, ‘Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period]...’ (*al-Baqara:* 233). `Ali added that Allah also says, ‘...his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months...’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). By subtracting two years from thirty months, we get six months. Therefore, if a woman gives birth after only six months, this is considered as a normal matter which should rise no suspicions.(3)

Once Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* came to `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who asked him, ‘How are you, Hudhayfa?’ He replied, ‘O Commander of the Believers, I have begun to love trial, hate the truth, pray without ritual purity and possess on earth what Allah does not possess in Heaven.’ `Umar became angry and was about to strike him with the cloth he had in his hand, whereupon `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* came in and found `Umar in this state of anger. Therefore, he told him what Hudhayfa said. Then, `Ali said, ‘Indeed, Commander of the Believers, he loves trial, as Allah says: ‘Your wealth and your children are but a trial…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 15). He hates the truth because he dislikes death, which all people dislike. He also invokes blessings upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* without being in a state of ritual purity and he has a son and a wife, but Allah has neither of these in Heaven.' Therefore, `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said his famous statement, 'Woe be it to any place on earth in which Abu Al-Hasan (`Ali) is not found.'

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(1) *Related by Al-Hakim and Al-Bayhaqi*

(2) *The story of the woman who gave birth after 6 months and the stance of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him from her and `Ali Allah be pleased with him saving her*

(3) *Related by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir*

Why was 'Ali distinguished by this knowledge, sagacity, and wisdom? It is because he was raised in the Prophetic household, and received the Islamic sciences when he was young. He knew nothing of the pre-Islamic ignorance, so the Islamic sciences resulted in his sound judgement and sagacity.

If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had learnt reading or writing: '…those who follow falsehood might have had cause to doubt' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48), and would have had an excuse and a reason to be doubtful. The word *irtiyab* means uncertainty coupled with accusation. They might have accused Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of knowing how to read and write, so Allah describes them as 'follow falsehood' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48). They followed falsehood with regard to their accusation.

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

بَلْ هُوَ ءَايَٰتٌۢ بَيِّنَٰتٌ فِى صُدُورِ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمَ ۚ
وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ إِلَّا ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

But no, [this Quran] is a revelation that is clear to the hearts of those endowed with knowledge. No one refuses to acknowledge Our revelations but the evildoers [49]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 49)

'But no' indicates the negation of what comes before it, and an affirmation of what comes after it. It means that the Quran: '…is a revelation that is clear to the hearts of those endowed with knowledge…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 49). Allah says: '…to the hearts…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 49), rather than 'to the minds' because the ear receives speech and presents it to the mind. If it accepts it, it settles in the heart where it becomes creed and faith which cannot be shaken by doubts. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Quran: 'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down. Upon your heart…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193-194). It means that the revealed verses settled in his heart, not his ear.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوا۟ لَوْلَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَٰتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ ۖ قُلْ إِنَّمَا
ٱلْءَايَٰتُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَإِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

They say, 'Why have no miracles been sent to him by his Lord?' Say, 'Miracles lie in God's hands; I am simply here to warn you plainly' [50] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 50)

After the Quran was revealed and utterly confounded them, they asked for other signs. We previously said that when people ask for signs from Allah's messengers, He gives them what they ask for, and if they still disbelieve, He seizes them with a seizure of one Exalted in Might and Perfect in Ability.

Allah say: '...We gave Thamud the she-camel as a visible sign, but they wronged her…' (*al-Isra':* 59).

When they belied the sign that they had requested, Allah ruined them because the matter is not that of signs and convention, rather, it is a matter of stubborn insistence on disbelief. Therefore, their request for a special sign does not prevent them from disbelieving in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…nothing has prevented Us from sending signs…' (*al-Isra':* 59). The verse refers to the verse which they requested; 'except that the former peoples denied them.' (*al-Isra':* 59) When the sign was revealed and they still disbelieved, they were punished by Allah. However, Allah *Glorified is He* vowed not to punish Messenger Muhammad's people, while he was among them: 'But Allah would not punish them while you, [O Muhammad], are among them, and Allah would not punish them, while they seek forgiveness.' (*al-Anfal:* 33)

This is the reason why signs are not given to them; moreover, the signs they desire are temporal phenomena, just as a matchstick can only be lit once and then goes out. Those who see it become fully aware of it, while it is merely a tale for those who have not seen it.

The Arabic particle *lawla* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse (Why have no) has two uses: if it precedes a nominal sentence, it indicates prevention of something for a certain reason such as if I say, '*lawla Zayd `indak lazurtuk*' (If Zayd were not with you, I would come and see you). Therefore, the presence of Zayd prevents the visit. If it precedes a verbal sentence such as '*lawla tudhakir durusak*' (Why do you not revise your lessons?) indicates encouragement or incitement.

Their saying: '…Why have no miracles been sent to him by his Lord?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 50) means that they do not want to acknowledge the sign that had already come to them from their Lord. Then, they contradicted themselves when they said: 'Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

They acknowledged the Quran and were convinced of it, but what bothers them was that it was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from among all people. They further contradicted themselves and admitting that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah when they said: '…Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of Allah until they disband…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7).

Since you acknowledge him to be the Messenger of Allah, why do you oppose him? Their spontaneous natural dispositions contradicted them, and the truth manifested on their tongues without their even noticing it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* responded to them by saying: '…Say, 'Miracles lie in Allah's Hands…'' (*al-'Ankabut:* 50). They are from Allah, not me, and they do not come according to your desires. '…And I am only a plain warner,' (*al-'Ankabut:* 50) that is, such is my role. The word 'warner' is only used in this context, even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as both a bearer of glad tidings and a warner, because they were a people given to falsehood and obstinate denial. So, it was more appropriate to warn them than to give them glad tidings.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِهِمْ أَنَّآ أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ
فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَرَحْمَةً وَذِكْرَىٰ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

Do they not think it is enough that We have sent down to you the Scripture that is recited to them? There is a mercy in this and a lesson for believing people [51] (The Quran*, al-'Ankabut:* 51)

The question here is rhetorical expressing astonishment and rebuke, that is: How could the Quran be not sufficient to convince them when it is the greatest of all signs, of which they have not been able to reproduce even a single verse, and which has brought them so many lessons and wonders? So it is clear that they only wish to dispute, and disbelieve; for if they truly sought truth and guidance, a single verse of the Quran would have been enough to make them believe.

Allah's saying, 'which is recited to them' refers to the fact that several verses of the Quran would be revealed at once to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* perhaps as much as a half or three-quarters of a section (*hizb*), and once the process of receiving the revelation was finished, he would recite them to his companions so they would write them down. He would recite them exactly as they had been revealed, and some companions would record them, and others would memorise them; for they were a people skilled in recitation and memorization.

Then when the time of the prayer came, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would lead the people in prayer and recite the verses that had been revealed to him, repeating them exactly as he had dictated them to his companions. This was a divine gift that Allah bestowed on His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. He announced it to him, saying, 'We shall make you to recite (the Quran), so you (O Muhammad) shall not forget (it).' (*al-A'la:* 6) If you do not think so, then challenge any person who is acclaimed as the best memorizer to repeat a speech or a statement that he made half an hour ago exactly as he said it the first time.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…Verily, herein is mercy and a reminder (or an admonition) …' (*al-'Ankabut:* 51); for whom? 'For a people who believe…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 51). This is because the Quran only benefits those who receive it sincerely and believe in it. As for the non-believers, their ears are deaf to it, and their eyes are blind to it. They neither understand nor reflect on its meanings. This is because they do not receive it with a serene soul, but rather with disdain and resentment, and so shut themselves off from its light, its blessings, and its guidance. Therefore Allah *the Most High* says of those who receive His words in a gracious, thoughtful manner: 'Say, "It is for those who believe a guide and a healing. And as for those who disbelieve, there is heaviness (deafness) in their ears, and it (the Quran) is blindness for them…' (*Fussilat:* 44). And He says of those who deny the Quran and receive His Words in a bad, rejecting manner: '…and as for those who disbelieve, there is heaviness (deafness) in their ears, and it (the Quran) is blindness for them…' (*Fussilat:* 44).

We said before that the action is the same, but the response is different. We gave the example of a person who blows on his hands to warm them, and another who blows on his tea to cool it. And you also blow on a candle to put it out, yet you blow on a fire to make it burn. Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe…' (*al-Isra':* 82). There is a difference between healing and mercy. Healing signifies that there was a sickness and it has been healed. Mercy, on the other hand, is that the sickness or ailment should never return. So, the Quran came to heal spiritual ailments. Through recitation, the Quran heals your ailments and gives you protection against them. If you fall prey to any of these spiritual maladies, recite the parts of the Quran which are prescribed for healing, and you will be cured by Allah's leave. So, the healing influence cures those ailments which arise because of spiritual heedlessness.

If we apply the lessons of the Quran to our own souls, we will attain this mercy. A human is composed of a physical body in addition to morals, ethics, and values. They call the totality of these spiritual values 'psyche'. A person might be physically healthy on the outside, but spiritually sick. For this reason, one area of medical specialization is that of psychology. When doctors cannot find any physical cause for a person's illness, they diagnose it as a psychological condition. But if you consult a psychiatrist, you find that all he can offer is a sedative drug that soothes the patients and induce them to sleep and think of nothing. Is this any kind of cure?

On contemplating our Lord’s Book, we would find that is contains two cures: a physical cure and a psychological cure. The health of the body is maintained through enjoying the things that Allah has allowed and abstaining from the things that He has forbidden. All you have to do is be constant in following your Lord’s guidance, and you will be safe from physical ailments. If you are one of those who love to eat lawful foods, but do so to an extent close to gluttony, read what the Quran says in this regard: ‘O Children of Adam, dress well whenever you are at worship, and eat and drink [as We have permitted] but do not be extravagant; Allah does not like extravagant people.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 31)

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* shed further light on this Quranic verse: ‘Enough for the son of Adam are a few mouthfuls that will keep his back straight. But if it is indispensable, then a third (of his stomach be) for his food, a third for his drink and a third for his breath.’(1) A person should eat to live, not live to eat. Some superficial people have said: ‘What does ‘a third for his breath’ mean? Do we breathe with our stomachs’? But with the advances is science, we now know that overfilling the stomach puts pressure on the diaphragm and constrains the lungs, making it difficult to breathe.

As for the psychological side, psychological ailments result either from a constriction of the senses that limits their natural capacities, or else their dilation beyond their natural capacities. This is like an egg which has a particular size: if you try and constrict it or stretch it, it will break. This is also the cause of the ailments that afflict the human soul. The soul’s faculties must remain in a state of balance and equilibrium. You find this balance in the Guidance of your Lord *Glorified is He* Who says, ‘[Know this,] so that you may not despair over whatever [good] has escaped you nor exult [unduly] over whatever [good] has come to you…’ (*al-Hadid:* 23).

The part of the verse saying: ‘[Know this,] so that you may not despair over whatever [good] has escaped you…’ refers to psychological contraction;

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(1) Narrated *by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2380) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2349) on the authority of Al-Miqdam*

while '…nor exult [unduly] over whatever [good] has come to you…' refers to psychological expansion. Both these extreme states are blameworthy and prohibited; but who is it that does not regret that which he loses, or rejoice in that which he gains?

And so we find that slow-witted people, who are not overly affected by the turn of events, often enjoy good health because they do not worry about things. This notion has not escaped the poets, where one of them(1) said:

The strength of firm resolve lies in dullness too:
Also, a simpleton has a strong and resilient soul;
Ask the people of fortitude, if fortitude's foundations
Would crumble - were they any weaker than the dull-spirited!

So, what you might think to be dull is actually strong fortitude in accepting events and not being crushed under them. Accordingly, mercy in Allah's law lies in attaining safety and secure from diseases, whether they be physical or psychological, by continually adhering to its guidance.

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ بَيْنِى وَبَيْنَكُمْ شَهِيدًا ۖ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ
وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِٱلْبَٰطِلِ وَكَفَرُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ ٥٢

Say, 'God is Sufficient witness between me and you: He
knows what is in the heavens and earth. Those who believe
in false deities and deny God will be the losers' [52]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 52)

'Say', that is, to those who deny your station as a prophet, '…sufficient is Allah between me and you as Witness…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 52). That is, 'It is enough for me that Allah testifies that I have delivered His Message. Your testimony regarding me does not benefit me at all, just as it would not benefit me if you believed in me. Similarly, it will do me no harm if you disbelieve in me. I will take my reward from my Lord for simply delivering the message, and I have done so. Allah has testified to this'.

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(1) *It was Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi himself Allah rest his soul.*

Allah *the Exalted* says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘And those who have disbelieved say, “You are not a messenger.” Say, (O Muhammad), “Sufficient is Allah as Witness between me and you…”’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 43). That is, ‘You have not been satisfied with the signs, nor have you believed in them, but I am satisfied with the Lord of these signs as a Witness between me and you’. And so there was a dispute regarding the divine message between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people who denied that he has brought any message from his Lord.

This dispute must be resolved. If we consider the disputes that occur between people, we find that either the accused party confesses or a truthful witness – not a false one – gives testimony. Then the judge is left to pass judgement based on the given testimony or other incontestable evidence. The judge must not be an arbitrary person; neither should be the executive authority that is charged with implementing the issued verdict. The verdict must be implemented honestly. And so disputes between human beings go through various stages. Rights are liable to be violated when one of the responsible parties does not meet the necessary conditions. If the witness lies or the judge or the bailiff are prejudiced and deliberately commit miscarriages of justice, everything will come out wrong.

As for the settlement of disputes under the government of the True Lord *Glorified is He* as in the dispute between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people, Allah alone suffices as Witness, Judge, and Executive Authority. Why is this? It is because He ‘knows what is in the heavens and earth’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 52). Nothing whatsoever on the earth or in the heavens is hidden from Allah, He knows what is secret and what is yet more hidden; so what testimony is more just than His? He is the Just Arbitrator Who judges with absolute truth because He has no prejudices and biases that could lead Him to err. He alters nothing in the execution of His judgements since He executes them Himself.

Who would be the winner, then, in a court whose judge was the True Lord *the Most High* and in which the litigants were Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people? Since Allah was the Witness, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* won indeed; and, the disbelievers lost when they denied Allah and were dissatisfied with the proofs that the Noble Quran presented to them.

Allah's Knowledge of the unseen is not a process of deliberation and study that enables Him to know. Rather, all things occur at the time He has set for them since pre-eternity, and the world has come into being in exactly the way He has determined it since pre-eternity. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Verily, His command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, "Be!" and it is!' (*Ya Sin:* 82) That is, Allah gives this command to a certain thing, which suggests that it already existed and was waiting for Allah's command before it would reveal itself to mankind. So, Allah's word 'Be!' only serves to manifest the thing; as for creation itself, it was done with in pre-eternity. The model is already present. So, The True Lord *Glorified is He* perfectly knows all that is concealed in the heavens and the earth, and we do not even know what lies concealed within our own selves. A question presents itself regarding Allah's saying, 'Verily, He knows what is secret and what is yet more hidden' (*Ta Ha:* 7): is there anything more hidden than a secret? Scholars explain this by saying that a secret is something you conceal within yourself, and what is yet more hidden than this signifies that Allah knows it even before it occurs to you.

Some people have paused at Allah's words: '…Allah knows what you reveal and what you conceal' (*an-Nur:* 29), and His words: 'He (Allah) knows that which is spoken aloud (openly) and that which you conceal' (*al-Anbiya':* 110). They ask why Allah states that He knows all that is said openly and knows what we reveal, even though this is something unconcealed, known to everyone? We answer this by saying: Try to grasp Allah's Intention. Allah did not say, 'I know what one of you reveal and what one of you say openly,' but rather said that He knows what all of us reveal and what all of us say openly. In order to clarify this, imagine a demonstration made by hundreds or thousands of people, and how their voices will all mix together as they shout so that you cannot tell one voice from another.

But The True Lord *Glorified is He* can tell these voices apart, and identify each one. In a demonstration, everyone can say what they like, and give voice to sentiments they would never dare to express alone, because their voices are all mixed together. They can conceal their voices among those of the crowd so that no one can tell whose voice is whose. Hence, we can understand how the knowledge of loud, open speech can be even more powerful than knowledge of that which is concealed.

If you hold the view that scientists, with their discoveries and researches, have been able to find out much that have previously been concealed in the universe such as electricity, atoms, and other elements, and that therefore they possess knowledge of the unseen, we answer this by saying: Indeed, they learned things which had been hidden in the universe, but they came to know them thanks to the precursors that Allah has placed in the universe and facilitated finding them. Scientists used these precursors as a means to make their discoveries. This is like if your son solves a geometry problem by making use of the given data. And so in reality, these are not matters of the unseen. Rather, they were already existing matters that had a specific time in which they were destined to appear. When their time came, Allah helped His creatures to discover them by means of direct observation, or triggered by precursors. When the time for a thing's appearance coincides with human research, it is said, 'Humans have gained cognizance of some part of Allah's unseen world'! Allah *the Exalted* says, '…they will never compass anything of His Knowledge except that which He wills…' (*al-Baqara:* 255). That is, Allah decides the time when something should emerge. Even if the time comes for a certain secret to appear, but humans have not approached it with their researches or lighted upon its precursors, Allah reveals it to them, even if by accident. In fact, mankind has discovered many secretes of the universe by accident.

The real unseen is that which has no precursors to lead to it, and which no one knows except Allah. Concerning it, Allah *the Exalted* says, '(He Alone) the All-Knower of the unseen, and He reveals to none His unseen. Except to a messenger whom He has chosen…' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27). So, the messengers of Allah did not inherently know the unseen, but were rather informed about the unseen.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* says, '…and they who have believed in falsehood' (*al-'Ankabut:* 52) by worshipping that which is other than Allah such as statues and idols; 'and disbelieved in Allah' the Creator, the Necessary Being. '…It is those who are the losers' (*al-'Ankabut:* 52) because the disbelief on the part of Allah’s creatures does not harm His Essence in any way or detract from His attributes of Perfection. By all His attributes of Perfection, He created all creation; these perfect attributes inherently characterize His Eternal Nature, whether people believe in Him or not.

But there is a difference between believers and disbelievers. A human is naturally keen on life, firmly clinging to it. And so when he falls ill, he seeks treatment to preserve his life, and he fears death. He sees people dying all around him and sees how his grandparents have preceded him in death, and how none of them is left. He sees how death comes without any cause; as they say, ‘Death, without any cause is its own cause’. So, death is a certainty, but people doubt it. They do not imagine that it will happen to them because they hate to think of it. And so the Hadith goes, ‘I have never seen a certainty more closely resembling doubt than people’s certainty about death’. Because a person knows he will die, he tries to live on through his children and grandchildren so that his memory remains for as long as possible. But since this is the reality, why do they not believe in Allah so that their belief endows them with eternal life which they will never leave behind or be parted from: the life of the Hereafter? So, who will the losers be? The losers shall be the disbelievers who thought their lives would only be as short as the time they spent in this worldly life.

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِٱلْعَذَابِ ۚ وَلَوْلَآ أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى لَّجَآءَهُمُ
ٱلْعَذَابُ وَلَيَأْتِيَنَّهُم بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

They challenge you to hasten the punishment: they would already have received a punishment if God had not set a time for it, and indeed it will come to them suddenly and catch them unawares [53] (The Quran*, al-’Ankabut:* 53)

It is strange that a person should call down punishment upon himself, and hasten it if it is slow in coming to him. Yet, evidently these people only asked for it because they believed it would never come to them; if they gave any credence to such a possibility, they would not have sought punishment.

'…And had it not been for a term appointed, the torment would certainly have come to them' (*al-'Ankabut:* 53) because Allah has decreed a specific appointed time for everything. The decreed time differs from one person to another with respect to how long they live and when they die. But there is one decreed time that will visit them all at once – the decreed time of the Last Hour.

And so Allah *the Most High* says, 'There is a time set for every people; they cannot hasten it, nor, when it comes, will they be able to delay it for a single moment' (*al-A'raf:* 34) that is, their own individual times of death? As for the decreed time of the Resurrection, it is one single moment for all, which Allah has appointed. A wondrous aspect of the difference between these two divinely ordained terms is that the separate times of individual deaths in this world end life, while the decreed time of the Hereafter begins a new life. So, the meaning of 'and had it not been for a term appointed, the torment would certainly have come to them' (*al-'Ankabut:* 53) is that the time of punishment is not a matter subject to human inclinations and desires. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Man is created of haste. I will show you My signs. So ask Me not to hasten them.' (*al-Anbiya':* 37)

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concluded the Al-Hudaibiyah Treaty between him and the disbelievers in Mecca and accepted to return to Medina with his companions without performing *`umrah* (lesser pilgrimage), the companions, including `Ali and `Umar *Allah be pleased with them* became angry and dissatisfied with this treaty to the extent that they almost disobeyed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* out of protective jealousy for their religion. Consequent upon this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* and said, 'The Muslims are ruined.'(1) She asked him why, and he replied, 'I commanded them but they did not obey.' She replied, 'Pardon them, O Messenger of Allah, for they are distressed. They came full of yearning for the House of Allah and got so close to it, and then they were refused entry and their passage was barred. Excuse them, O Messenger of Allah, and go out and do what Allah has commanded you and leave them be.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 4, p. 326) on the authority of Marwan ibn Al-Hakam*

When they see you doing them (the rites), they will start doing them; they will then know that it is a resolute task.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* went out and performed the final rites of `*umrah*, and the people did the same. The advice of Umm Salamah *Allah be pleased with her* succeeded and it saved the situation.

Then Allah revealed to them the wisdom behind their return that year without there being any fighting: they had brothers in Mecca who believed, but they concealed their faith. If they had entered Mecca by force, they might have killed them without knowing of their faith.

`Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was, as usual, extremely concerned for the cause of truth, and so he said, 'O Messenger of Allah, are we not in the right?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Yes indeed (we are).' `Umar said, 'then why do we yield in such a lowly way against the honour of our religion?' Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* then said, 'Do not overstep your position, O `Umar, he is the Messenger of Allah.'(1) That is to say, restrain yourself and do not go beyond your limits. Then later on, in praise of this treaty, he said: 'There was no victory for Islam greater than the victory of Al- Hudaibiyah – not even the conquest of Mecca.' Why? Because the Al-Hudaibiyah Treaty forced the *mushrikin* (those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity or worship) to acknowledge Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when before they had opposed him and refused to recognise his cause. Now they were writing treaties with him and making agreements with him. What is more, it gave the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* the opportunity to move freely and spread the message of Islam throughout the regions of the Arabian Peninsula. But at the same time, people did not know the extent and the depth of what was between Muhammad and his Lord. People usually seek to hasten matters, while Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be hastened by the impatience of His servants, but He leaves matters to unfold as He wills.

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(1) *Muslim and Al-Bukhari narrated a similar Hadith on the authority of Sahl ibn Hunayf Allah be pleased with him; Muslim in his Sahih (1785) in the Book of Jihad (Striving) and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4844).*

Then, Allah *the Exalted* says, '…and surely, it will come upon them suddenly while they perceive not!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 53) That is, they will be taken unaware by it. It will not be according to their desire. '…While they perceive not!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 53) can mean they will be taken unaware when it comes, or that they are unaware now that it is true, and that it will happen at an appointed time? (The Arabic could suggest either possibility). The meaning is that they are not aware now that it is drawing near, and that it has an appointed time, and that it will come upon them unexpectedly with all its terrors. So, it was appropriate that they should realize this truth from the beginning and believe in it. Evidently, the meaning is not that they will not notice the shock of the Hour when it comes because their awareness of it then will do them no good.

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says (1):

يَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِٱلْعَذَابِ وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمُحِيطَةٌۢ بِٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

They challenge you to hasten the punishment: Hell will encompass all those who deny the truth [54]
(The Quran*, al-'Ankabut:* 54)

That is, say to them: 'If you wish to hasten your punishment, know that it is certainly coming. If you yearn for it, Hell is waiting for you; and it will be filled with you and then ask, "Are there any more?"' The severity of punishment is commensurate with the power of the Punisher in its strength or weakness, and its range and capacity. When the Punisher is Allah *the Most High,* none in the universe can punish as He can.

In the part of the verse saying: '…and verily! Hell, of a surety, will encompass the disbelievers' (*al-'Ankabut:* 54), to encompass means to envelop and surround on all sides. There are four chief directions: north, south, east, and west, between which are subsidiary directions, which can also be broken down into further subsidiary directions. To encompass is to envelop and surround from all these directions. Another example of this is Allah’s statement: ‘Verily, We have prepared for the wrongdoers a fire whose walls will be surrounding them.’ (*al-Kahf:* 29) That is, it envelopis them on all sides.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his Tafsir (vol. 7, p. 5247): 'It was said that it was revealed concerning `Abdullah ibn Abu Umayyah and other polytheists when they said: "…or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen…"' (al-Isra': 92).*

One of the striking phenomena of fire in the Hereafter is that in this world, you could torment someone with fire that surrounds him so he cannot escape it. But fire naturally rises because the flames go upward; and if it were under someone’s feet, he could stamp it out with his feet like people stamp out cigarette butts. When you stamp on a flame, you deprive it of oxygen, and so it goes out. As for the fire of the Hereafter, it can attack from all sides.

يَوۡمَ يَغۡشَىٰهُمُ ٱلۡعَذَابُ مِن فَوۡقِهِمۡ وَمِن تَحۡتِ أَرۡجُلِهِمۡ
وَيَقُولُ ذُوقُواْ مَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

On the Day when punishment over- whelms them from above and from below their very feet, and they will be told, ‘Now taste the punishment for what you used to do’ [55]
(The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 55)

Allah *the Exalted* says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘They will have layers of fire above them and below...’ (*az-Zumar:* 16). In this world, fire does not attack from these two directions (above and below) because the nature of fire is to rise upwards, and if it is beneath someone’s feet it is extinguished. And so this is another dimension that will intensify the severity of the punishment in the Hereafter; fire shall not only encompass them from all sides, but also comes to them from above and below.

But a person may toughen himself up to withstand the torment and try to remain strong so that no one gloats over his suffering. In this person’s case, the torment comes to him in another form, in a way that degrades and humiliates him. For this reason it shall be said to him: ‘Taste it – you who [on earth] has considered yourself so mighty, so noble!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) Therefore, Allah describes His punishment as being humiliating, painful, mighty, and severe.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and they will be told, ‘Now taste the punishment for what you used to do.’’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 55), and has not said, ‘Taste the fire’.

That is, taste the consequences of what you have done, as though their actions themselves will be the fire that burnt them.

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَـٰعِبَادِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِنَّ أَرْضِى وَٰسِعَةٌ فَإِيَّـٰىَ فَٱعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

My believing servants! My earth is vast, so worship Me and Me alone [56] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 56)

To keep a balance in the speech, after speaking of the disbelievers and the deniers, the True Lord then mentions the believers in order to further stress the wretched condition of the disbelievers. They and the chastisement they will face are directly followed by the delights which the believers shall attain. And so the torment of the disbelievers is all the more severe; for if the believers were not destined for these delights, the state of the disbelievers would seem lighter.

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'O My slaves who believe! ...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 56). We said before that all of mankind are Allah's slaves, and Allah's slaves are of two kinds: believers and disbelievers, all of whom Allah has given free will. The believer is the one who gives up his choice and submits to his Lord's choice, and prefers Allah's wishes to his own wishes. In doing so he becomes a slave in everything, even in his free choices, and when he does this, he becomes a true servant and worshipper of Allah. The disbeliever, on the other hand, refuses to acknowledge his Lord's will and chooses disbelief over belief and disobedience over obedience, forgetting that either way he is Allah's slave and under His control in many things over which he has no power of free will. It is as though Allah is saying to him, 'O disbeliever, you have rebelled against your Lord and refused to obey His Commandments and Prohibitions. You transgressed against your Lord's law of 'Do this' and 'Do not do that' and grew accustomed to rebel against Allah, but why do you not rebel against Him also in the turns of fate He sends you? Why do you not rebel against illness or death'? So, it is clear that you are in your Lord's Grip and you cannot slip from it.

Accordingly, the believers and the disbelievers are equal in slavery to Allah, but the difference between the two lies in the fact that a believer chooses freely and contentedly to follow Allah’s will. Indeed, there is a difference between a slave who obeys you because you drag him in chains, and a servant who voluntarily serves you while he is free and unrestrained. And so the believer accepts faith in Allah of his own accord and has the freedom to disbelieve if he chooses. This constitutes both slavery and servanthood at the same time.

The address, ‘certainly, spacious is My Earth’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 56) indicates that their Lord is saying this to the believers, while they are still on the earth, in the midst of its vastness, in order to draw their attention that they shall be persecuted and tormented and that abuse and pain shall be inflicted upon them by opponents. Allah says to them: ‘Do not be driven away by the harsh conditions you shall meet and do not give up your mission. If this place is no longer good to you, go somewhere else; for My Earth is wide, so do not restrict yourselves (to a single land)’.

For this reason, our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘All the lands belong to Allah and all the people are the slaves of Allah. So, wherever you find *khair* (pleasant and favourable circumstances for life) settle down there.’(1)

The problem we face today is these borders and restrictions that we have placed in the geography of Allah’s territory, thereby narrowing what Allah had widened for us. Allah’s Earth is wide, and it has no visas, passports, or ‘black lists’.

I said once at the United Nations: ‘If you were to simply apply a single Quranic principle, there would be no evil upon the earth; this principle is: ‘And the earth He (Allah) has spread out for all living beings.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 10) This means that the earth is for all people, and so if the provisions are scarce in one place, seek them in another. The problem we have today is that there are lands without people, and people without lands. Our neighbour Sudan, for example, contains some of the best lands for farming, yet there are none to farm it. Why is this? Because of the restrictions we have imposed on ourselves, thereby constraining our lives. A poet was truthful when he said:

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(1) *Ahmad narrated a similar Hadith in his Musnad (vol. 1, p. 166) on the authority of Az-Zubayr ibn Al-`Awwam Allah be pleased with him.*

It is not the land that narrows and contracts for its people
But rather the manners of men narrow and contract.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…therefore worship Me (alone).' (*al-'Ankabut:* 56) Since we have accepted the principle of emigration, we must then know that it has conditions, the first of which is that you immigrate to a place where your faith will be protected, not diminished. Before you leave your homeland and settle in another land, consider whether or not you will be able to follow your religion as Allah has required you in the place to which you plan to move. If this is possible for you, there is no objection; if not, then you cannot immigrate to a place that will cause you to abandon your faith or come between you and the practice of your religion.

Would it please you to be living in a non-Muslim land simply to make money, and then see your daughter coming home holding hands with a boy about whom you know nothing, but who has now been forced upon you since your daughter has gotten to know him in the conventional way of the inhabitants of this land? When such a thing happens, none of the money you have made will help you or repair the damage that has been done to your honour.

We explained before that emigration may be to a land of safety only, where you are safe to practice your religion, and safe from being turned away from it. Such was the case with the emigration that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered some of his companions to make to the land of Abyssinia which was not a land of belief but rather a land of safety. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained his rationale for ordering this emigration by saying: 'There is a king there in whose presence none is wronged.'(1) After the emigration was undertaken to this land, the truth of Messenger Muhammad's words was shown, as though he had absolute knowledge of the environment around him and the state of their people.

Therefore, he did not order them to emigrate to any of the regions of the Arabian Peninsula since they were all subservient to Quraysh because of their guardianship of the *Ka'ba*. Consequently, they could not extend protection to those whom the Quraysh wanted. Even when they emigrated to Abyssinia for the sake of their religion, they were not safe from the Quraysh who sent to the Negus an envoy(1) to request their handing over and offered him gifts to tempt him to give up the emigrants who believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. But this plan did not work with the just king whose heart was inclined to believe, and so he loved the believers and defended them, and refused to give them up. It was narrated that he, too, believed after that, and when he died the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* offered the funeral prayer for him.(2)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala`il Al-Nubuwwah (vol. 2, p. 301) on the authority of Umm Salamah Allah be pleased with her*

As for the emigration to Medina that followed the emigration to Abyssinia, it was a move to a place of both security and belief, where you could be safe to practice your religion, and spread it and preach it, and find there believing brethren who would assist you with their wealth and with all their possessions. Surely, the *Ansar* (Supporters from Medina) gave the finest example of beneficence and solidarity in history, whereby a Supporter from Medina would see that one of his brothers from among the Meccan Emigrants (*muhajirun*) had left behind all his family and wealth in Mecca, and so would provide him with companionship and support – so behold what effect faith had upon the Supporters.

The structure of Allah's saying: '…therefore worship Me (alone)' (*al-'Ankabut:* 56) is an Arabic stylistic formation also found in the following verse: 'You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5) There is a difference between saying, 'We worship you' and, 'you alone we worship.' Saying, 'We worship You' does not rule out the possibility that we might worship others as well, but 'You alone we worship' limits worship to Allah *the Exalted* alone and to no other. So, the meaning is: If you wish to emigrate, let your emigration be for Allah's sake, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained in the noble Hadith: 'Whoever's emigration is to Allah and His Messenger, then his emigration is for Allah and His Messenger; and whoever’s emigration is for some worldly gain which he may acquire or a woman he will marry, then his emigration is for that for which he emigrates.’(1)

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(1) *Namely `Amr ibn Al-`As Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *Narrated on the authority of `Imran ibn Hussain by Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 4, pp. 439 446), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (p. 1039) and he classed it as authentic, and Al-Nasa'i in his Sunnan (vol. 4, p. 70).*

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَآئِقَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِۖ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

Every soul will taste death, then it is to Us that you will be returned [57] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 57)

That is, if you would say – and indeed they did say this – that we have no land or property in neither Medina nor any source of income,(2) so how can we leave our children and the community in which we live? Know that you must eventually leave behind all such belongings, if not while you are alive, you will surely do so when you die; for ‘Every soul shall taste death …’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 57).

And it may well be that you shall return to your homes again, as Allah *the Exalted* says to His Messenger: ‘Verily, He Who has given you (O Muhammad) the Quran will surely bring you back to a place of return…’ (*al-Qasas:* 85). And even if you never return, this will not harm you in the slightest, because inevitably you have to leave everything behind when you die. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* was making it easier for them to leave behind their relatives, homeland, possessions, and offspring.

We can also perceive by Allah’s saying, ‘Every soul shall taste death…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 57), right after His saying, ‘…certainly, spacious is My Earth…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 56), that when Allah makes a statement like ‘…certainly, spacious is My earth…,’ which stirs up in a person’s soul emotions such as the love of accumulating wealth and the desire for ownership, He then makes another statement to calm down these emotions. Therefore, Allah declares, ‘Every soul shall taste death (*al-’Ankabut:* 57) so that we do not become greedy for the trifles of this world, enticed by the prospects of wealth, and emigrating for its sake, since all will end in death, and everything that has been gathered will be lost.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1) and Muslim in his Sahih (1907) on the authority of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir on the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him who narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to the believers in Mecca when they faced persecution from the mushrikin: ‘Set out to Medina, emigrate to it, and do not live near the oppressors.’ They replied: ‘We have no dwellings or properties there, and no one to feed us or give us water.’ Hence, the following Quranic verse was revealed: ‘And how many a living creature that does not carry its sustenance! Allah sustains it and you...’ (al-’Ankabut: 60).*

This issue was also made clear by Allah’s statement: ‘O believers, those who ascribe partners to Allah are truly impure; so do not let them come near the Sacred Mosque after this (final) year…’ (*at-Tawba:* 28). When Allah wanted to prohibit the presence of the *mushrikin* (those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity or worship) in the Sacred House, He *Glorified is He* knew that the Muslims would think of the material consequences of this prohibition, and how it would affect their trade and livelihoods during the seasons of pilgrimage and trade. Allah says, immediately after issuing this prohibition: ‘…and should you fear poverty, then (know that) in time Allah will enrich you out of His Bounty…’ (*at-Tawba:* 28). On hearing this alongside the ruling, they would know that Allah had seen what was in their souls, and had responded to their concerns and worries even before they had voiced them. This shows that Allah’s law deals with all the soul’s emotions and thoughts, and that it does not put you in a position that causes you fear without also providing you with the means to eliminate your fears.

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَنُبَوِّئَنَّهُم مِّنَ ٱلْجَنَّةِ غُرَفًا
تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ نِعْمَ أَجْرُ ٱلْعَٰمِلِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

We shall lodge those who believed and did good deeds in lofty dwellings, in the Garden graced with flowing streams, there to remain. How excellent is the reward of those who labour [58] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 58)

This is the contrast of ‘…and verily! Hell, of a surety, will encompass the disbelievers. On the Day when punishment overwhelms them from above and from below their very feet…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 54-55). Allah mentions the contrary side to heighten the exasperation of the disbelievers, as when He says, ‘Indeed, the righteous will be in delight (Paradise), and indeed, the wicked will be in Hellfire.’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14)

Certainly, mentioning the two contrasting states together increases the joy of the believer, and the woe of the disbeliever. '… We shall surely give lofty dwellings in Paradise…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 58), that is, Allah will lodge them in paradise enabling them to reside in its dwellings. The word used here for 'give or assign dwellings' is *(nubawwi`)* which also occurs when Allah addresses His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '(O Prophet), remember when you left your home at dawn to assign battle positions (*tubawwi`*) to the believers…' (*Al-'Imran:* 121), that is, to post the believers at their stations.

The word *jannah* (garden or paradise) can mean a land in this world in which there are plants, and trees, and flowers, as in Allah's saying: 'Would one of you like to have a garden of palm trees and grapevines...?' (*al-Baqara:* 266) And His saying, 'Verily, We (Allah) have tried them as We tried the people of the garden…' (*al-Qalam:* 17). And His saying, 'And present to them the parable of two men, upon one of whom We had bestowed two vineyards...' (*al-Kahf:* 32). If the gardens of this world are so rich in verdure, fertility, and beauty and are filled with all kinds of sustenance and comfort – if this is the case in this world of causality in which we live, what do you imagine Allah has prepared for His servants in the Hereafter?

One of the wonders of paradise is that 'underneath it rivers flow.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 58) We know that in this world, rivers flow through channels with banks on either side, which hold back the water; whereas in paradise, the rivers flow without banks.

When we used to travel to civilized and modern countries and see all the conveniences and comforts of life provided there, I used to say to my companions, 'Take a lesson from this luxury and ease: this is what the humans have made for themselves – imagine what the Lord of all humans has made for them!' And so when you see someone who is blessed with whatever bounty, do not envy him, but rather make it a cause that strengthens and deepens your certainty that Allah exists and that what is with Him is better for you than this. Do you not see that when The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us of paradise, He says, 'This is the similitude of Paradise which the pious have been promised.…' (*Muhammad:* 15)

Allah illustrates paradise with parables and examples because our language cannot arrive at a proper description of the splendours of paradise.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in describing it, said: ‘In it (Paradise) there is what no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has imagined.’(1) Everything that we have heard about paradise is not actually a description of it, but is only a similitude for it. Yet despite this, when Allah *the Exalted* gives us a simile for paradise, He frees it from all impurities, and so says, ‘…therein are rivers of water that does not alter rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change, rivers of drink delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey...’ (*Muhammad:* 15). In the end, it is enough for us to know that the delights of paradise will be commensurate to Allah’s infinite Power and Ability.

Allah’s saying, ‘to live therein forever’ points to the fact that however great or varied a delight may be, its owner is always anxious and worried that sooner or later he will lose it, either by dying or becoming poor. On the contrary, the delights of paradise are eternal and will never end or vanish. You will have them forever without losing them or leaving them behind, as Allah says, ‘Neither limited nor out of reach.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 33) Nothing will ever spoil or blemish the perfection of these delights.

Indeed, the successful are those who prefer the next life to this one because the delights of this world are bound to end. Do not say, ‘This world is millions of years old’; rather, its true age is how long you remain alive in it. For what have you got to do with other people’s ages? Moreover, in this world your enjoyment is commensurate with your own capability and power because the delights of this world are gained by employing means; while the delights of the Hereafter are given by the Creator of all means, and so they are pure delights that nothing can blemish. You might eat food in this world which then causes you problems and discomforts like colic or wind, in addition to the discomforts of relieving yourself and ridding yourself of the body wastes produced from this food. But in the Hereafter, Allah will provide you with food which is exactly commensurate with your needs, and so it produces no waste because it has been directly prepared by Allah’s Command ‘Be!’

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (pp. 3244, 7498) and Muslim in his Sahih (p. 2824) on the authority of Abu Hurarya Allah be pleased with him.*

One of the Muslim scholars was once asked: ‘You say that you will eat in paradise, but will not need to relieve yourselves. How can this be?’ He answered: ‘Why should this sound strange? Do you not see that an embryo in its mother’s womb feeds and develops without needing to defecate? Allah gives it the exact amount of sustenance it needs to grow, and so it produces no waste. If it were to expel waste into its placenta, it would die in the womb.’

Allah says, ‘…excellent is the reward of the workers.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 58) Indeed, what an excellent reward this shall be because before reaching the age of moral responsibility you lived for years enjoying Allah’s blessings without Him holding you responsible for anything. Then He will reward you for the short time you have been morally responsible with an everlasting, unending reward. Can there be a more generous reward? It is enough that Allah Himself is the One Who stresses this fact when He says, ‘…excellent is the reward of the workers.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 58)

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا۟ وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

Those who are steadfast, those who put their trust
in their Lord! [59] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 59)

This is one of the attributes of the good doers: ‘Those who are patient…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 59). So, do not think that they carried out righteous deeds in an easy, comfortable atmosphere and opulent environment. A true worker for Allah is the one who shows patience. The phrase ‘those who are patient…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 59) indicates that they will suffer trials and afflictions, as Allah says in another place: ‘Do people think they will be left alone after saying ‘We believe’ without being put to the test?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 2)

The believers who were persecuted and tormented until they were forced to emigrate for the sake of their religion had patiently endured through the difficulties. However, there is a station even higher than patience because your enemy may also be patient, and this necessitates that you vie with them in patience, as Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* instructs: ‘You who believe, be steadfast, more steadfast than others...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 200); that is, *al-muthabarrah* means to strive to have more patience and perseverance than others.

Patience is required to bear the struggles of life, the difficulties of moral responsibility, and the temptations of sin; they say, ‘Patience to obey, and patience not to disobey’. The poet spoke the truth when he said:

Be a man like a grinder: it keeps to its place
And chews (food); it cares not whether it is sweet or bitter.

So ‘Those who are patient…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 59) means exhibiting patience in the face of adversities. ‘…And put their trust (only) in their Lord (Allah)’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 59), that is, regarding their sustenance and provisions. The Meccan Emigrants were very concerned about their sustenance when they wanted to emigrate, they said, ‘We have no house or property, or land and so on’. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to reassure them about their sustenance: ‘…and put their trust (only) in their Lord (Allah).’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 59)

He who created you will surely provide for you. One of the amazing things about provision is that your provision is not what you own, but is rather what you truly benefit from. You might own something and have it stolen from you. Or you might have food cooked for you but then not eat it. Or you might eat it, but it does not reach your stomach. Or it might reach your stomach, and then you vomit it all out. Or it might reach your blood stream but then be spilled because of an injury or an insect bite or the like – this is because it is not your destined provision, but rather the provision of another creature.

It is amazing how a crocodile, despite its huge size and the fear it inspires in people, after eating comes onto dry land and opens its mouth so that small birds can come and clean between its teeth, and in the process, get some bits of food. They work together in perfect harmony and positive cooperation. If a crocodile is threatened by a hunter, for example, the bird gives a cry which the crocodile understands to mean it should flee. Consider from where this bird obtains its sustenance, and where Allah has placed its provision! And so they say, ‘The One Who created him created his provision’.

We gave the example before of the uniqueness of the embryo’s sustenance in its mother’s womb, and how when the woman becomes pregnant, the blood becomes sustenance for the embryo. If she had not been pregnant, it would have been expelled without the mother's having any use for it. Why is this? Because it is the divinely-ordained provision of the embryo, not the mother.

And so the next noble verse says:

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن دَآبَّةٖ لَّا تَحۡمِلُ رِزۡقَهَا ٱللَّهُ يَرۡزُقُهَا وَإِيَّاكُمۡۚ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٦٠

How many are the creatures who do not store their sustenance!
God sustains them and you: He alone is the All Hearing ,
the All Knowing [60] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 60)

Allah *Glorified is He* wants His creatures to be assured of their provision, and so He says: 'How many a living creature' (*al-'Ankabut:* 60). The Arabic particle *ka`ayyin* has several meanings, one of which is 'how much' or 'how many' or 'how often' with the intention of a rhetorical question, as in: 'How many favours have I done for you'? That is, you have done him countless favours. This is also the case here, and in Allah's saying, 'And many a Prophet fought (in Allah's Cause) and along with him (fought) large bands of religious learned men. But they never lost heart for that which did befall them in Allah's way…' (*Al-'Imran:* 146).

The Arabic word *dabbah* (moving living creature) literally means anything that crawls upon the earth. In this context, it means everything that is alive and has movement. Since the word *dabbah* can imply 'something which has footsteps' and we cannot hear the footsteps of the ant, is the ant considered to be a *dabbah*? It is, because it steps on the earth, but we cannot hear it. Its Creator is the One Who can hear its footsteps; for what applies to the large also applies to the small, although you yourself do not have the means to hear it. This is borne out by the fact that someone who is hard of hearing will be advised to use a hearing aid so he can hear, and the same is true of glasses for the shortsighted.

So, everything can be heard and seen, but what is important is the instrument of hearing or seeing. And so they say, by way of exaggeration, 'So-and-so can even hear the footsteps of an ant'.

The significance of Allah's statement: 'And how many a living creature that does not carry its sustenance' (*al-'Ankabut:* 60) is that not every creature carries its sustenance; many do not store up provisions, yet they still eat and live. It may be that the meaning is that such creatures are unable to carry their sustenance, or that they are able to carry it but do not. For example, do lice and fleas that accumulate as a result of poor personal hygiene carry their own provisions? Likewise, the mosquitoes that, despite their weakness, feed on the blood of the powerful human being, and the microbes that assault him, also do not carry their own sustenance. A donkey, however, is able to carry its own sustenance, but does not. It stops eating when it is full and does not save anything, and might even trample on the remaining food or urinate on it. The same is true of almost all other animals. Therefore, it is said that no creature knows how to hoard except humans, mice, and ants.

Allah makes these particular creatures hoard for wisdom, to show His Absolute Power. The fact that these creatures hoard is no oversight on Allah's part when He decreed that some other creatures do not hoard; rather, He created for them their own means of sustenance, of which you yourself are utterly incapable.

Reflect on an ant colony and the wonders it contains. Researchers in this field have remarked that if you leave a crumb of food, an ant will come and encircle it, and then go and send a number of ants to it who can carry it. If you double the amount of food, the number of ants sent to bring it will also double. The ants live in a kingdom of the utmost organisation, precision, and specialization. What is more amazing still is that they have remarked that ants expel small white specks from the ground around their hives, and when they examined these specks they found that they contain the seed which causes crops to grow, and that the ants expel them so that crops do not grow under their hives and so destroy them. Glory be to the One Who created and proportioned, and Who decreed and guided!

More amazing still, they discovered that ants break down coriander seeds into four pieces because it is possible for half a coriander seed to germinate on its own, and so they break the halves again to prevent this.

So, many creatures do not bear their own sustenance, yet '…Allah sustains it and you…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 60). With respect to sustenance, Allah first mentions living creatures and their provisions, and then, in addition, mentions the humans '…and you.' So, the matter of our own provisions and livelihood is included with that of other living beings. Although mankind is the essential creature and the one honoured by Allah, and this entire universe was created to serve mankind, still Allah did not say, 'We provide for you and for them (the other creatures)'. Why is this? Scholars say it is because we, humans, might think that these living creatures cannot bear their own sustenance, or bring it, or manage it, and so Allah enlightens us to the fact that He provides for them before us.

Some of the orientalists who try to analyse the Quran while not possessing sound knowledge of Arabic have objected to Allah's saying: 'And kill not your children for fear of poverty. We (Allah) provide for them and for you…' (*al-Isra':* 31). And His saying: 'kill not your children because of poverty' (*al-An'am:* 151) [Where the word *khashiya;* (for fear of) is not mentioned, and the word used instead is *min* (because of)]. They ask, 'Which one is more eloquent than the other? If one of them is eloquent, the other one must be ineloquent'.

The basis of the objection which they make is that they believe that the two verses mean the same thing, while actually they do not. The first one says, 'And kill not your children for fear of poverty…' (*al-Isra':* 31) which implies that there is no actual poverty yet, but rather only fear of it; as for the second verse, which says 'kill not your children because of poverty' (*al-An'am:* 151), this implies that poverty exists in this case. So, the first halves of the two verses in question are different, and their second halves are different as well. In the first case, Allah says (in the second half of the verse), 'We provide for them and for you' (*al-Isra':* 31); this is because in this case there is no poverty, and you are not worried about your own provisions and livelihood, and so He mentions the children first. As for the second instance, He says, (in the second half): '…We provide sustenance for you and for them…' (*al-An'am:* 151). Here Allah mentions the parents first because this refers to a situation where poverty exists, and so people are more concerned with their own sustenance before that of their children. So, each verse has its own meaning, and there is harmony between its first and second halves. It is very important to contemplate the diction of the Quran and try to grasp Allah's words.

Allah *the Exalted* then says, '…He is the Hearing, the Knowing.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 60) He chooses to mention the divine attributes of hearing and knowing here because the True Lord *the Most High* sustains and watches over His creation. He did not create it and then leave it under the control of natural laws, but rather, He created it and continued to look after it and sustain its existence. And so Allah says, when declaring His guardianship and care for His creatures and creation: '…neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him...' (*al-Baqara:* 255). That is, 'O My servants, sleep peacefully, for your Lord sleeps not'.

The divine attribute of 'Hearing' is appropriate in this context because when hunger pangs strike, a person might cry out or say something to indicate that he is hungry, and so it is as though Allah were saying, 'I will not make you do so'.

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَئِن سَأَلۡتَهُم مَّنۡ خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ وَسَخَّرَ
ٱلشَّمۡسَ وَٱلۡقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ ٱللَّهُۖ فَأَنَّىٰ يُؤۡفَكُونَ ٦١

If you ask the disbelievers who created the heavens and
earth and who harnessed the sun and moon, they are sure to
say, 'God.' Then why do they turn away from Him? [61]
(The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 61)

Allah *the Exalted* says to those who were not satisfied by the Quranic verses that were sent down to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and demanded other signs from him: 'Allah placed signs for you in the universe before He sent you messengers, and He gave you signs that showed the miraculous nature of the heavens and the earth. Is there any of you who could create the like of even the tiniest part of this universe'? The creation of the heavens and the earth is an unending miracle; so why do you ask for more signs, when Allah only made them to support the truthfulness of His messengers in their prophetic missions so that people believe them?

Allah *the Most High* says, in response to them: 'This is the creation of Allah. So show Me that which those (whom you worship) besides Him have created…' (*Luqman:* 11). The creation of the heavens and the earth and the sun and the moon was a miraculous sign to the whole world, especially the disbelievers.

This matter of creation is plain and evident, and no one can deny it, as we explained before. Therefore, the answer to this question: '…they will surely reply, "Allah"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 61). This confession of theirs should inspire the believer to praise Allah, saying: 'Praise be to Allah that they have admitted this fact themselves. Praise be to Allah Who inspired their tongues to pronounce the word of truth, and made plain the argument that would show the falsehood of their disbelief'.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'How misguided, then, are their minds?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 61) After their admission, how could they stray from the truth of Allah's way?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُۥٓ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

It is God who gives abundantly to whichever of His servants He will, and sparingly to whichever He will: He has full knowledge of everything [62] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 62)

'Allah grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure' (*al-'Ankabut:* 62). Most people understand the word 'sustenance' to refer solely to money. In reality, sustenance refers to everything that a person draws benefit from. Knowledge, patience, discretion, power, humility, and good workmanship are all forms of divine sustenance. Allah *Glorified is He* gives abundant sustenance to whom He wills, and withholds it from whom He wills. Those who receive scant sustenance must therefore be given more by others who were sustained abundantly by Allah *Glorified is He*. In addition, Allah may also grant a person abundantly in one aspect of sustenance, while withholding another aspect of their provision. For instance, a man might be granted abundant intelligence, but barely adequate material wealth.

It is as though the Allah *Glorified is He* dispersed His gifts and blessings evenly amongst His creatures without combining them all in one individual.

We previously mentioned that the sum of each person's blessings is ultimately equal to that of every other person's blessings. So, whoever is highly gifted in one aspect will certainly be lacking in another. This guarantees that all the members of society will remain connected by the link of mutual need, as people will be dependent on other individuals' talents and support.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* gives abundant sustenance to one of His servants, while withholding the same form of sustenance from another servant, this does not mean that He loves the former individual or hates the latter individual. If you were to examine every form of sustenance and provision given to both servants, you would find that they were blessed equally.

Reflect upon Allah's words: 'But is it they who distribute your Lord's grace? (Nay, as) it is We who distribute their means of livelihood among them in the life of this world, and raise some of them by degrees above others.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) Which of these groups of people are raised and blessed more than the other groups? Which group of people is consistently overpowered? Upon examination, you will find that every group of individuals is blessed in the matters that they are specialised in and surpassed in other matters of sustenance and talent.

We have previously illustrated an example to explain this concept. Imagine a wealthy person living in a remarkable mansion. One day, he may need a plumber to repair his lavatory to get rid of a revolting stench. That seemingly independent man may need to leave his comfortable abode to look for the plumber. After visiting the plumbers' workshop, he may need to plead with him to pay a quick visit if he was busy, or even drive him to his house to carry out the task quickly. In this instance, the plumber will be overpowered above the rich person. Therefore, superiority is only revealed when the superior person is needed.

Furthermore, if there were no poor or rich people in this world, who would work in a country's farms, factories or markets? These forms of labour are mostly based on need and not on voluntary service. Therefore, if you wish to compare two individuals' blessings, do not look down on either person because each of them might have a talent that others might direly need one day.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّن نَّزَّلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَحْيَا بِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
مَوْتِهَا لَيَقُولُنَّ ٱللَّهُ ۚ قُلِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

If you ask them, 'Who sends water down from the sky and gives life with it to the earth after it has died?' they are sure to say, 'God.' Say, 'Praise belongs to God!' Truly, most of them do not use their reason [63] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 63)

Once again, the polytheists did not deny that these signs were created by Allah *Glorified is He*. They admitted that it is Allah who sends the rainwater from the sky and gives life to the barren land because these clear signs of creation cannot be attributed to other powers. 'They will surely answer, "It is Allah"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 63). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded us to reply to their admission by saying: 'All Praise is due to Allah' (*al-'Ankabut:* 63) who inspired them to speak the truth in response to an unshakeable argument. However, although these polytheists admitted to the existence of Allah's signs in creation, '…most of them will not use their reason' (*al-'Ankabut:* 63) because they still disbelieved in Allah's Oneness *Glorified is He*.

Allah then says:

وَمَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَآ إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱلدَّارَ ٱلْءَاخِرَةَ
لَهِىَ ٱلْحَيَوَانُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

The life of this world is merely an amusement and a diversion; the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew [64] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 64)

We know that the Arabic word *al-hayat* (life) refers to the sensations and movements that man experiences. If his sensations and movements cease, he is no longer described as having a life. In this verse, the life of this world is given three descriptions. Firstly, it is described as the lower life (*dunya*). The word *dunya* suggests that there must be a higher life which is the Life of the Hereafter. It is also described as a passing distraction (*lahu*) and a playful engagement (*la`ib*).

Although, we have defined the worldly life as the presence of sensations and movements in a being, the true reality of things is that everything in existence has its own unique form of life. We can find evidence for that in a verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says about the end of this life: ‘Everything is bound to be perished, except His (eternal) Self’ (*al-Qasas:* 88). Therefore, everything that can be called a ‘thing’ must come to perish. At the same time, we find in another verse that the process of ‘perishing’ is the opposite of ‘living’, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So that anything that would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and everything that would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth’ (*al-Anfal:* 42). Therefore, according to this verse, living (*al-hayat/al-a’ish*) is the linguistic opposite of perishing (*al-halak*).

You may define your own life as the sensations and movements which you experience as a human being, but everything else, including inorganic matter, has its own form of existence. We can see that a mountain is composed of many pieces of rock that may transform over time into materials that are more valuable. These reactions which we cannot comprehend are a form of existence, though utterly different from our own lives.

Consider the force known as ‘magnetism’. When we magnetise a piece of iron, it will have the ability to attract pieces of iron filings and move them in particular directions. These particles and their reactions are a distinct form of existence. Now consider the words of Allah *Glorified is He* in this verse: ‘And they will ask their skins, “Why did you bear witness against us?” – (and) these (skins) will reply, “Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us (as well).”’ (*Fussilat:* 21) Therefore, our body parts have their own unique life and will develop their own speech and discourse. We cannot sense this phenomenon because their lives do not resemble our lives. If you were to observe certain many materials, you would see that their colour changes gradually with the passage of time. This change of colour indicates the presence of some kind of movement in their constituting particles.

Allah *Glorified is He* described the life of the Hereafter by saying that it is the only life. He used the word *hayawan* rather than the usual word for life, *hayat*. There is a difference between the two words. The word *hayat* refers to the life of plants and animals in this world which ends in death and obliteration. The word *hayawan* refers to the true, higher, and eternal life in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* illustrates the material life of this world when He describes the creation of Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* while commanding the angels to prostrate to him: 'And when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My *ruhy* (Spirit), prostrate…' (*al-Hijr:* 29). So, Allah *Glorified is He* formed Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* from clay and breathed His Spirit into his material body. Thereby, material life was granted to him. However, there is a higher form of life which Allah *Glorified is He* described in His words: 'O you who have believed! Respond to the call of Allah and the Apostle whenever he calls you unto that which will give you life' (*al-Anfal:* 24). Why did Allah *Glorified is He* address the believers in that manner, when they were already alive in this world? The life meant in this verse is not the material life of this world, but is the moral life that results when we follow the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Hence, the commandments ordaining Allah's way are also referred to as a *ruh* 'life-giving spirit' in the following verse: 'And thus, too, (O Muhammad,) have We revealed unto you a life-giving spirit (*ruh*) according to our Order' (*ash-Shura:* 52). Similarly, the angel who brought down this message was called a *ruh* in the verse: 'The trustworthy divine spirit (*ruh*) has come down with it (the message)' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193).

Therefore, the statement: '…whereas, behold, the life in the Hereafter is indeed the only (true) life (*al-hayawan*)' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) means that it will never leave you or be taken from you. You will never be parted from its eternal blessings. Moreover, if your enjoyment of this world is based on your abilities and power, the blessings of the Hereafter are solely based on the power and ability of Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator of the worlds.

After that, the life of this world is described as being: '…a passing distraction (*lahu*) and a playful engagement (*la`ib*)' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64). These are two activities that human beings engage in with no foreseen benefit, except the momentary joy and delight they garner from them. Generally, when someone performs an action that has no benefit, we refer to his behaviour as being futile.

Therefore, passing distractions (*lahu*) and playful engagements (*la`ib*) are both futile actions. However, they are still different in a certain aspect. An act of play brings no benefit, but it does not necessarily keep the person from doing beneficial necessities. When a child plays, they are not being distracted from imperative moral responsibilities. The word *la`ib* (playful engagement) is thus used for someone who has not yet reached adulthood. As for an older, morally responsible person, playful actions are referred to as *lahu* (passing distractions). As a result of these distractions, that person was probably abandoning their responsibilities and kept from performing their righteous duties. This is the essential meaning of the Quranic expression *lahu al-hadith*, which refers to ‘distracting and frivolous plays with words’.

Therefore, Allah’s words: ‘…the life of this world is nothing but a passing distraction and a playful engagement,’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) means that it distracts people from the higher moral life that occurs when we follow Allah’s Guidance. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…if they but knew this’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64). This phrase could have been an indication that they were prevented from knowing this by an outside force. However, in actuality, this is an expression of desire. It states that if the disbelievers gave themselves the chance to realize the truth of this world and the Hereafter, they would accept their Lord’s Guidance in order to obtain His eternal blessings. Certainly, they would choose the way of faith instead of the way of disbelief. Hence, the meaning of the verse is that they actually chose to deny this truth out of their own accord.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا۟ فِى ٱلْفُلْكِ دَعَوُا۟ ٱللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ
ٱلدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّىٰهُمْ إِلَى ٱلْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

Whenever they go on board a ship they call on God, and dedicate their faith to Him alone, but once He has delivered them safely back to land, see how they ascribe partners to Him! [65] (The Quran, *al-’Ankabut:* 65)

The discourse in this verse, mentioning a ship fighting a stormy sea, comes after discussing the true natures of this world and the Hereafter. What is the connection between these two distinct topics? Firstly, we need to realize that the Quranic verses are the noble words of Allah and that Allah *Glorified is He* always puts everything in its right place. You should reflect upon Allah’s words closely to grasp the deeper meanings of the Quran, as Allah *Glorified is He* ordered: ‘Will they not, then, try to contemplate this Quran?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 82)

The previous verse stated that this world is a place of futility. Its merry distractions may cause people to be distanced from Allah’s Guidance without preparing for the next truer life. On the other hand, intelligent people should have the utmost concern for the next life. They should work fervently for its sake by following Allah’s Guidance in this world. Therefore, since this world is a means to the Hereafter, and a field in which we sow the seeds of its following life, therefore, this life resembles a ship. It is a material channel or tool that is designed to take you to an ultimate end, and is not a desirable end in itself.

‘And so, when they embark on a *fulk* (a ship) (and find themselves in danger), they call unto Allah, (at that moment) sincere in their faith in Him alone’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 65). The Arabic word *fulk* can be used to refer to a single ship, but may also be used as a plural word referring to a fleet of ships. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* used it in the singular form. He also used this form in another verse in the Quran: ‘And Nuh (Noah) set himself to building the Ark’ (*Hud:* 38).

‘They call unto Allah, (at that moment) sincere in their faith in Him alone’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 65). It is clear from the context of their words that their calls are not prayers of praise such as the praise we find in the following supplication: ‘Praised is He (Allah), Alone without partners, Who has made this (vehicle) subservient to our use – since (but for Him,) we would not have been able to attain to it’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 13). Rather, their calls in the verse we are studying are distress calls of urgency and dire need that resulted from their exposure to grave dangers and hardships. This is proved further when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…but as soon as He has brought them safe ashore, they (begin to claim and) ascribe partners to His Divinity’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 65). When their ship was exposed to peril, their means did not avail them. Therefore, they called upon Allah *Glorified is He* out of distress, sincere in their faith to Him alone. Then, when Allah saved them, they disbelieved.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse illustrating a similar example: ‘And (behold what happens) when you (the disbelievers) go to sea in ships. They sail in them in a favourable wind, and they rejoice therein – until there comes upon them a tempest wind, and waves surge towards them from all sides so that they believe themselves to be encompassed (by death; and then) (*uheeta behem*) they call unto Allah, (at that moment) sincere in their faith to Him alone (calling upon Him), “If You will but save us from this, we shall most certainly be among the grateful.”’ (*Yunus:* 22)

The Arabic phrase *uheeta behem* (encompassed) in this verse indicates their realization that they had no escape or refuge, except to turn to Allah *Glorified is He* with a sincere faith that nothing can save them except Him. At the beginning of their maritime journey, they were happy, rejoicing in their apparently safe voyage. Allah *Glorified is He* was not on their minds in the least. Yet, when they lost all their material means, they returned to the truth, for there was no time for artifice.

This is because all people, including disbelievers, do not usually deceive themselves when they reach the points of highest distress. Their hearts immediately shift to their Creator, Allah *Glorified is He* and they forget everything else that they worshipped besides Him. At these distressing times, they do not submit themselves to their lies or charades of false deities and idols. Therefore, their prayers when they call unto Allah at these life-threatening moments are sincere supplications. Then, they are inspired by firm certitude in the One True Lord, Allah *Glorified is He*. It is a call unsullied by any trace of idolatry, for nothing can help at such times except Allah *Glorified is He* who alone deserves to be worshipped.

We previously explained this before using an example from our own lives. Barbers used to perform the role of healers in some of our rural villages. There were no professional physicians in these rural areas at that time, and these barbers had the same social positions that physicians have today. However, when many physicians started residing in these rural areas, the barbers were the first to attack the genuine practitioners of medicine. This is because the physicians were affecting the barbers’ sources of livelihood by taking their patients away from them. However, when one of those barbers saw his own child falling ill with a fever, he said to his wife, ‘Wait until the night falls, and I will take him to the physician, when no one is watching’.

Therefore, a person will not deceive himself during times of real danger. There is a natural disposition of faith that resides within the human soul that only believes in the single power of Allah *Glorified is He*. Even atheists may spontaneously cry out, ‘O my Lord! O my God’, at starting hints of danger. They exclaim these calls subconsciously before submitting them to their intellects because they can only deny Allah’s Existence on a conscious level. They may have been able to cover these natural dispositions of faith by material means, but when these means are made redundant by a catastrophic event, the natural disposition of faith emerges and influences these disbelievers against their wills.

We may notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And behold when your Lord brought forth the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam. He called upon them to bear witness about himself; “Am I not your Lord?” They answered, “Yes, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!”…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172) All human beings testified at that time because they were still in the elemental world of spirits, and before they were swayed by their conflicting human impulses. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, “Verily, we were unaware of this (truth)”, or lest you say, “Verily, it was but our forefathers who, in older times, began to ascribe divinity to other beings with Allah; and we were but their late offspring (who followed their wrong ways).”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172-173)

Allah *Glorified is He* created mankind to be accountable and responsible towards His creation on this earth. He also subdued everything in the universe for them. If mankind remained in steadfast adherence to Allah’s Guidance, and stayed within the bounds of this responsibility, they would find success. However, if they consider themselves unanswerable inhabitants of this universe, they would fail. Allah *Glorified is He* created man and knows the whims and desires of His creation. Therefore, Allah informed mankind in this verse that they were responsible and accountable to Allah upon His Earth. They must follow their obligations in order to avoid spoiling their lives and clashing with other beings in Allah’s creation. In order to harmonise with the other beings on this earth, human beings must follow Allah’s Guidance and remain submissive to the commandments of the Creator who granted them their responsibilities.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* alerted them to another concept. The material means of this world will serve mankind as they need, but they have no power or sovereignty over these means. Thus, they should not allow these means to distract them from their accountability to Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly transgressing whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7). When everything is going your way and all the material means serve you easily, remember the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Behold, to your Lord everything will return’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 8). Events will occur in your life in which no material means can defend you, and from which you will find no refuge except according to Allah’s Will.

How can mankind transgress, when Allah *Glorified is He* has granted them emanations of His Perfection? He has given them abilities that emanate from His Omnipotent Influence. He has bestowed awareness upon them, which emanates from His All-Encompassing Knowledge. If you take a simple look at the blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* has showered you with, you will find that they are endless. For instance, what conscious efforts do you actually exert when you wish to stand up or move your limbs? You simply will these actions and your limbs respond without deep thought. These limbs even obey your will without your prior understanding of their methods.

We previously compared between the movement of a human being and the movement of a mechanical crane. The mechanical crane performs many complicated actions, but every movement may require a separate button to be pressed by the operator. Now, consider your own human movements. What buttons do you need to control if you want to perform similar movements to move your body? Your limbs obey your mere desires, as though you had a share of Allah’s Attribute: ‘His (Allah’s) Command is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, “Be”, and it is.’ (*Ya Sin:* 82)

If you are able to perform the actions of your limbs simply by willing them, it is more logical that Allah *Glorified is He* can move His creation according to His Omnipotent Will. In addition, the movements and reactions of your limbs are not inherently yours, since your Creator can take these abilities from you. For instance, you may easily lose the ability to move your hand at mere will.

Therefore, you are always a subject of Allah's absolute power. He did not grant you some of His Attributes without accountability. In fact, our Lord has warned us, 'If you think yourself free of any needs, you will transgress. So, remember that all things will come to an end according to your Lord's Will'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* warned us regarding another crucial matter: 'Know that if Allah should touch thee with misfortune' (*Yunus:* 107), do not request the support of His material means. This is because: '…there is none who could remove it (the misfortune) except Him' (*Yunus:* 107). This is Allah's advice to His creation, as He loves His creation to be as perfect as they can be. So, if harm befalls you and you are unable to repel it by your own means, only seek the help of your Lord.

These are the three points of advice that Allah *Glorified is He* stated to us before we are met by trials and tribulations. Firstly, avoid considering yourself free of need, as that arrogant state will lead you to transgress against Allah's creation. Secondly, know that your final return will surely be to your Lord. Thirdly, if harm befalls you and you find no way to repel it by your own means, only seek Allah's refuge. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* alerted us to these dangers as an emanation of His Mercy.

So, you love this worldly life, and when harm and peril befall you aboard a ship, you fear death and call upon Allah *Glorified is He* to save you. This is because you are eager to cling to the life of this world. So, why do you not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and gain another life which is more lasting? The way to this lasting life in the Hereafter is to have faith and certitude, and to follow Allah's Commandments and Prohibitions.

This issue which was mentioned in the Quran has been confirmed by the events of our lives. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'For (thus it is:) when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto Us, whether he be lying on his side, sitting or standing.' (*Yunus:* 12) The word 'man' in this verse refers to all the believers and disbelievers. The words: '…whether he be lying on his side, sitting or standing' (*Yunus:* 12) mean that people confronted by afflictions cry unto Allah *Glorified is He* in whatever state they might be.

These states represent the different stages of the human mind. If you are walking with a heavy load on your shoulders and you become tired, you put the load down and stop walking. If you are still tired, you will sit or even lie down. When you are standing, you carry the weight of the whole body on your two feet, thus deriving minimal rest from this. When you sit down, your weight is supported on the hips. Then, when you lie down, half the body is supported by the other half and you derive the greatest rest from this position. In the light of this verse, we understand that Allah *Glorified is He* will answer you when you call unto Him, whether you are standing, sitting, or reclining.

Generally, once Allah *Glorified is He* saves man from his fears and averts harm from his way, man still continues to wrong himself again. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…but as soon as We have freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Us to save him from the affliction that befell him' (*Yunus:* 12). Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says of this matter: 'Now (thus it is) when affliction befalls man' (*az-Zumar:* 8), whatever affliction it might be, '…he is likely to cry out to his Lord, turning unto Him (for help); but as soon as He (Allah) has bestowed upon him a blessing by His Grace, he (man) forgets Him whom he had invoked before' (*az-Zumar:* 8). Many people do not only forget Allah's blessings, but may actually worship other deities besides Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding such a person: '… (he) claims that there are other powers that could rival Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 8) by attributing the help he was granted to his fellow human beings.

Notice that the discourse in these verses discussed the case of a single individual seeking Allah's refuge on their own, without anyone seeing their supplications and need. In this case, the matter is between the individual and his Lord *Glorified is He*.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* also illustrated examples in which individuals were exposed to the perils of danger in front of their fellow human beings. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the following verse: 'And whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those (powers), which you are used to invoke, forsake you, (and nothing remains for you) except Him (Allah)' (*al-Isra':* 67). This verse illustrated how a large group of people also seek refuge in Allah's help. Each person in this ship will be exposed to their peers during the moments of their dismal weakness.

The benefit of this exposure will be seen later on, as people tend to avoid wrongdoing after their moments of distress are witnessed by other human beings.

During the stages of the pilgrimage, for example, people of all social classes move equally as they perform the circumambulation around the *Ka`ba*. Some people of elevated social status may be witnessed in a state of submission as they weep for forgiveness in Allah's House of Worship. A superior manager or an executive seen in such a modest state by their subordinates should find sufficient humility in their hearts. This humility should prevent them from any future wrongdoing towards their subjects.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted us to abstain from our sins after He has delivered us from harm, as though He was saying to us: 'Beware and realise that your life's events have been declared in Allah's Book'. Each one of us should know that we have been watched throughout our lives and all our thoughts were recorded by Allah *Glorified is He*. The truth of the Quran is that it never changes. Every fact that Allah *Glorified is He* states in the Quran will surely come to pass as He says it would.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِيَكۡفُرُواْ بِمَآ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمۡ وَلِيَتَمَتَّعُواْۖ فَسَوۡفَ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٦٦

Let them show their ingratitude for what We have given them; let them take their enjoyment – soon they will know [66] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 66)

The Arabic particle *le* ('thus/let them') is the commanding particle *lam-ul-`amr*. It is not used in this verse to suggest causality since ingratitude was not the goal of the disbelievers. When they returned to their old ways after Allah had saved them, they were only returning to their original state. The Arabic particle *le* is used here to resemble the command used in sentences such as, 'Let `Umar stand up'. Thus, the meaning of the verse is: 'Let them show their ingratitude'. However, the command used here is also a threat, that their ingratitude will surely be punished.

Examples of this commanding particle *le* in the Quran are found in the verse: '…and let them walk (once again) (*le-yattawafu*) around the Most

Ancient House' (*al-Hajj:* 29) and the verse: '(In all these respects,) thus, let him who has ample means spend (*le-yunfiq*) in accordance with his amplitude; and let him whose means of subsistence are scanty spend (*le-yunfiq*) in accordance with what Allah has given him' (*at-Talaq:* 7).

In its general grammar, the Arabic particle *le* can either be used as an indicator of causation (*lam-ut-ta`leel*) or as a commanding particle (*lam-ul-`amr*). However, as we said, the word *le* is used in our current verse as a commanding particle (*lam-ul-`amr*), and in this case, implies a threat. The proof that it is a commanding particle is that the commanding *le* causes the following word to be read with a *sukoon* (without a vowel) as in the more authentic recitation of this verse. The proof that the verse implies a threat can be found in its final part, as Allah *Glorified is He* concluded the verse by saying: 'Indeed, in time, they will come (*fasawfa*) to know (the truth) (*ya`lamun*)'

Generally, in the Arabic language, one of two particles (either *sa* or *sawfa)* is used to indicate an event that will happen in the future. *Sa* is used for the near future and *sawfa* is reserved for the distant future. Therefore, in this verse, the phrase *fa-sawfa-ya`lamun* (…they will come to know) was used instead of the phrase *fa-sa-ya`lamun* (…they will soon know'). This is because the phrase *fa-sawfa-ya`lamun* is a more appropriate reference to a more distant future, including the Hereafter, and lexically encompasses further points in time than the phrase *fa-sa-ya`lamun*. In the early days of Islam, the Muslims were weak and unable to defend themselves. They went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him to call upon Allah *Glorified is He* to protect them from the disbelievers' harm. Had the verse said to the idolaters at that early period in Islamic time, 'You will soon know', it would not have been factually appropriate. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* stated the longest possible breadth of time for the threat to be fulfilled, by saying: 'Indeed, in time, they will come to know' (*al-'Ankabut:* 66).

We find a similar degree of lexical precision in the pact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made with the *Ansar(* supporters) *may Allah be pleased with them* who embraced Islam in Medina. When they met Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they said to him, 'State your conditions (in our pact with you).' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him* replied, ‘Protect me in that which you protect yourselves, and your honours, and your possessions.’ The *Ansar* asked, ‘And what will be our reward if we do so?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could have said to them, ‘You will possess the earth’, or ‘You will spread Allah’s call and be given victory against your foes’. However, some of these *Ansar* would die at an earlier date without witnessing the fulfilment of any of these promises. So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* promised them a reward that every one of them would surely witness, whether they lived for a long time or died shortly after the pact. He made the promise to them that they would be granted: ‘Paradise.’(1)

Furthermore, to have taken them from one worldly gain to another would have been a wretched bargain. Rather, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to take them from the worldly gains to a reward that is greater than the world’s finite treasures. Indeed, paradise is greater than all of this world’s riches.

One companion was chewing some palm-dates on the battlefield when he was told that paradise had been prepared for the martyrs. He asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Messenger of Allah. Are you telling me that, all which stands between me and paradise is that I have to be killed in Allah’s Cause?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied affirming the statement. Thereupon, the companion threw away his palm-dates, and rushed to the battlefield to anticipate this reward.(2)

The Quran uses the particle *sa* to refer to the imminent affairs of this world that are to happen in the near future, as in the verse: ‘We shall show them (*sa-nureehim*) Our signs in the horizons (of the universe) and within themselves’ (*Fussilat:* 53). This verse’s vision lasts from the time of Prophet Muhammad’s message until the coming of the Last Hour, as we are continuously being shown scientific phenomena in the universe that show Allah’s Omnipotent Power. So, the word *sa-nureehim* (we shall show them) was true at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and will still be proven truthful until the end of time.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad on the authority of Abu Mas`ud Al-Badri*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Jabir may Allah be pleased with him*

We can also note that this part of the verse: ‘And thus, (let them) (thoughtlessly) enjoy (*le-yatamata`u*) in their worldly life’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 66) contains the verb *yatamata`u* proceeded by the particle *le*. According to our previously mentioned interpretation, if the particle *le* is considered as a commanding particle (*lam-ul-amr*) instead of a causation particle (*lam-ut-ta`leel*), the word should be correctly recited as *le-yatamata`u* with a *sukoon* (non-vowel) after the Arabic letter *l*, and not *lee-yatamata`u* with a *kasra* (vowel) after the letter *l*. This interpretation is not taken into consideration in many copies of Quranic recitation which use the recitation ‘*lee-yatamata`u*’*,* contrary to our interpretation. This shows that the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* is All Conquering and cannot be contained by any scholarly effort.

I remember that the great scholar Sheikh Mohammad Fo`ad `Abd Al-Baqi *Allah rest his soul* and may He reward him with the best reward for his services to Islam, once wrote a book to count the frequency of all the words that appeared in the Noble Quran. He tried his best to give the accurate count of every word especially the word ‘Allah’, for whose sake he had prepared his effort. Despite this, he forgot to include the word ‘Allah’ that occurs in the connotation of the *basmala* ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy (*Bismillahi ar-Rahman ar-Raheem*).’ Instead, he began his count with the verse: ‘All praise is due to Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds.’ (*al-Fatiha:* 2) Therefore, his account of the number of occurrences of Allah’s name was shorter by one than the real count. Indeed, the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* is too great to be fully encompassed by any scholar, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَمۡ يَرَوۡاْ أَنَّا جَعَلۡنَا حَرَمًا ءَامِنٗا وَيُتَخَطَّفُ ٱلنَّاسُ مِنۡ حَوۡلِهِمۡۚ
أَفَبِٱلۡبَٰطِلِ يُؤۡمِنُونَ وَبِنِعۡمَةِ ٱللَّهِ يَكۡفُرُونَ ٦٧

Can they not see that We have made [them] a secure sanctuary though all around them people are snatched away? Then how can they believe in what is false and deny God’s blessing? [67] (The Quran*, al-’Ankabut:* 67)

The Arabic word used in this verse to indicate the meaning of awareness is *yaraw* (have they not seen) which is derived from the word *ra`a* (to see). We previously said that this Arabic word can be used to refer to either having visual sight or having knowledge. For instance, a person can say in the course of a discussion, ‘I see (*ara*) the same opinion which that person sees.’ There is a phrase of wisdom that says, ‘To see is a level higher than to know.’

In the discourse of the Quran, the word ‘to see’ is sometimes used when addressing someone who did not in fact see the matter being mentioned. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Did you not see how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?’(*al-Fil:* 1) It is well-known that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not witness that event because he was only born that year. Therefore, the word ‘see’ in this regard is used to mean, ‘Did you not know?’ Why did Allah *Glorified is He* not simply use the phrase: ‘Did you not know?’ rather than the phrase: ‘Did you not see,’ regarding the event being narrated? The scholars say that since the speaker in this instance is Allah *Glorified is He* the use of this phrase established that Allah’s divine narrations are more certain than what human beings can witness with their own sights.

‘Are they, then, not aware (*yaraw*) that We have set up a secure sanctuary (for those who believe in Us), with people (living in the areas) around them being carried away (by fear and despair)?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 67) The sanctuary of the *Ka`ba* is secure, despite the disturbance that happened to it before Islam when Abraha threatened it. It still remains as a secure sanctuary despite the recent event when Juhayman disturbed it.

When the phrase ‘secure sanctuary’ in the Quran refers to the *Ka`ba*, it has three applications. Firstly, those who lived in the sanctuary at the time of the revelation of these verses saw that it, indeed, was a safe place. This security had been granted to them since the time of the prayer made by Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Your Sanctified House’ (*Ibrahim:* 37).

When Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* made this prayer, the area was unsettled and empty, as it did not possess the basic constituents of life. Generally, people only build homes and settle in places where they feel secure, and where all of life’s basic needs can be met. Therefore, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) prayed to Allah *Glorified is He* to make this place secure for a city to be built upon it. ‘O my Lord! Make this a secure land’ (*al-Baqara:* 126). The word ‘land’ used here has an indefinite outline. It could have been a land prepared for the settlement of any people, whether believers or disbelievers. When Allah *Glorified is He* answered Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) prayer, by making it a land able to provide the basic needs of people’s lives, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) prayed again, saying: ‘O my Lord! Make this land secure’ (*al-Baqara:* 126). That is, I desire that this land, which has become a city, to be distinguished and secured than any other city. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* prayed this prayer because the city contained the House of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, it remained a place where a man might see his father’s murderer in its Sanctuary, yet not be allowed to confront him until he leaves it. Therefore, even a criminal was safe within the boundaries of its Sanctuary. However, it was permitted for people to limit the criminal’s sustenance to force him to leave Mecca so that no one can disturb the sanctity of the House of Allah *Glorified is He*. It follows that the activities of hunting and cutting trees were all forbidden in the Sanctuary, as well as any other activity that disturbs the Sanctuary’s residents.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was asking the idolater: ‘Why do you not believe in the religion that has given you this secure land, at a time when the people around your land are being snatched in grave battles? Why do you not respect your existence in this place which Allah has given you’? It was audacious that some of these disbelievers said: ‘If we were to follow the guidance to which you (Muhammad) invite us to follow, we would be torn away from our very land’ (*al-Qasas:* 57). How could this be? If Allah *Glorified is He* had protected you when you were idolaters, would He abandon you after you declared your faith in Him alongside His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?

The story of this security began with the incident of the elephant. In this event, an army general known as Abraha came to destroy the *Ka`ba* in order to force its people to visit his temple in Yemen. Allah *Glorified is He* thwarted Abraha’s plot and destroyed his army in the same way crops are eaten by cattle. You can grasp this meaning easily when you recite the chapter of *al-Fil* and connect it with its following chapter of Quraysh. You will be able to see the reasons for this security and protection that Allah *Glorified is He* granted to the tribe of Quraysh in Mecca. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Fil*: 'Are you not aware of how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not utterly confound their artful planning? Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying birds which smote them with stone-hard blows of pre-ordained chastisement, and caused them to become like a field of grain that has been eaten down to its stubble' (*al-Fil:* 1-5). Then, the next chapter of Quraysh starts with the verses: 'So that Quraysh might remain secured and protected in their winter and summer journeys' (*Quraysh:* 1-2).

The reason Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed the transgressing army of Abraha, leaving them defeated like the stalks of chewed crops was the protection of Quraysh's security and agreements. This is lexically shown by the presence of the Arabic particle *le* at the start of the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'So that Quraysh might remain (*Le-eelafi Quraysh*).' The particle *le* in this case is the causative particle *le* (*lam-ut-ta`leel*). This particle differs in function from the commanding particle *le* (*lam-ul-`amr*) that was discussed in a previous verse (*al-'Ankabut:* 66).

The causative particle (*lam-ut-ta`leel*) means: 'this is for'. This causes the Arabic phrase at the beginning of the chapter of Quraysh: '*Le-eelafi Quraysh*' (*Quraysh:* 1) to literally mean: 'This is for the benefit of Quraysh, to remain in its agreements'. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not allow the army of Abraha to destroy the Sanctuary, in order to preserve the dignity and position of Quraysh amongst the Arabs. Indeed, the dignity of Quraysh was based on the presence of the *Ka`ba*, and the fact that people travelled to visit this *Ka`ba* from the surrounding lands. This position protected the businesses of Quraysh during the winter journey to Yemen and the summer journey to the Levant. No one desired or dared to harm their journeys because they were the custodians of the temple. Therefore, they remained secure and beloved to all the Arabs, and their trade journeys continued without problems.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Let them, therefore, worship the Lord of this House Who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger,' (*Quraysh:* 3-4). They should have worshipped the Lord of the House who gave them these blessings of safety, security, food and drink, which they did not possess due to their own power. Rather, it was their proximity to the Sacred House of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, when these disbelievers audaciously said to the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘If we were to follow the guidance to which you (Muhammad) invite us to follow, we would be torn away from our very land’ (*al-Qasas:* 57), their own words constituted an argument against them. At the time when people were being attacked in the lands surrounding them, the people of Quraysh were safe by Allah’s Grace and His blessings upon their sanctified land. The first part of their conditional clause: ‘If we were to follow the guidance to which you (Muhammad) invite us to follow’ (*al-Qasas:* 57) is not a logical premise to the second part of their argument: ‘...we would be torn away from our very land’ (*al-Qasas:* 57).

If they recognised that the religion that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought to them was‘ guidance’, they should have believed in it. However, since they did not believe it to be a true religion of guidance, their statement certified that they were liars. They had previously claimed that the Quran was fabricated, false and a book of magic. How did they call it ‘guidance’ then? This was one of their strange contradictions.

The pagan disbelievers also asked: ‘Why was not this Quran revealed to a great man of either of the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) This meant that they saw no problem with the Quran itself, but it had a problem that it was revealed to this man, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in particular.

Allah *Glorified is He* says concerning their disbelief: ‘Will they, then, (continue to) believe in things false and vain, and thus, deny Allah’s blessings?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 67) Their false and vain beliefs are their beliefs in their idols. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned that they denied His blessings, and did not mention, for instance, that they denied ‘faith in Allah’. The reason is that if these disbelievers had nothing to encourage their faith in Allah *Glorified is He* except His blessings, the way He fed them when they were hungry and kept them safe from fear, it would be sufficient and obligatory for them to believe in Him *Glorified is He*.

Falsehood is the opposite of truth and it is ever diminishing. Indeed, falsehood comes to its end quickly. You might ask, 'Since falsehood will always be vanquished, what is the need for a battle between truth and falsehood'? If falsehood did not assail society, people would not feel the need for truth to save them from it. Therefore, falsehood is itself one of the forces of truth, just as disbelief is one of the forces of faith. Were it not for disbelief and the way transgressors mistreated people, no one would yearn for a true faith that would give them firm security, sincere tranquillity and peace of mind.

The Arabic word *kafara* (to disbelieve) is derived from the root word 'to cover'. This is because disbelief is an effort to hide the true faith in Allah *Glorified is He* the Only Necessary Being in all existence. Therefore, even the word of disbelief is a proof of faith.

We previously mentioned that a person might dislike certain things that Allah *Glorified is He* has created for his benefit. We gave the example of pain. In reality, pain is a signal that incites a person to search for its cause, in order to protect oneself from illness and seek any appropriate remedies. In this manner of looking at things, we can perceive pain as one of the forces of health. Observe, for instance, that the most dangerous of illnesses are those that cause no pain to alert the body until these diseases reach terminal intractable states. Such illnesses are 'malignant' because they sneak into the body without leaving any traces to alert us of their presence.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* created pain for a beneficial reason, which is to alert us to any problems in our bodies. The limbs which feel pain may not be in their best states to perform their normal roles. For this reason, one of the definitions of health is not noticing the different parts of the body as they perform their daily functions. For instance, you may use your teeth to eat for a long time without noticing their presence. Then, when you are attacked with a toothache, you start noticing the hidden blessings of teeth. At that point, the toothache is a message that is guiding you to seek medical attention.

Similarly, when falsehood prospers in a society, it reminds people of the sweetness of truth so that they yearn and hope for it. This is why Islam spread through the world, not by the sword as some people claim, but because people saw its moral principles and tolerance. In Persian and the Byzantine Empires, people had experienced many hardships because of their corrupt religions and laws. When they heard about the morals and teachings of Islam, they easily embraced it. If falsehood had not afflicted them, they would not have sought refuge in the true faith. Therefore, Islam was able to spread widely in half a century not because of the faithful urgency of Muslims to convert people to Islam, but rather because the falsehood drove the people to the true faith of Islam. In that manner, Islam was spread by two means. Firstly, its adherents were keen to see its guidance spreading. Secondly, existing falsehoods drove people to embrace its teachings.

Allah *Glorified is He* gave us a clear example of truth and falsehood in His saying: 'He (Allah) sends down water from the sky, so that the valleys are filled with running rivers, each to its determined (course). The (river's) flood carries away (on its surface) a foaming scum (*zabad*). And, likewise, scum rises from that (metal) which they kindle upon the fire, when they seek (to make) ornaments or utensils. Thus, Allah sets forth the parable of truth and falsehood. 'As for the scum, it goes away as refused debris. (And) as for whatever profits mankind, it stays in the earth. Thus, Allah sets forth (similar) parables.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17)

The Arabic word *zabad* (scum) refers to the refuse and dirt that is carried by floods. This refuse forms a film on the surface of the water and is then blown off to the sides by the air, so the water remains clean and pure. This scum resembles falsehood, in that it hastily rises to the surface. However, you should not consider it to have a high status or that its prosperity will last forever. Indeed, it is only a worthless film that will quickly disintegrate, leaving behind the valuable clean water.

Likewise, when a jeweller smelts gold or silver metals, scum also rises from the metal when it is heated so that the precious metal is cleansed of its impurities. A wise righteous man once said, 'Allah never abandons the truth. He never submits the truth to the powers of falsehood but only tests the people's concern for it. If they show no concern for its presence, He takes care of it Himself'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ
لَمَّا جَآءَهُۥٓ ۚ أَلَيْسَ فِى جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِّلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

Who could be more wicked than the person who invents lies about God, or denies the truth when it comes to him? Is Hell not the home for the disbelievers? [68] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 68)

This is a rhetorical question posed by Allah *Glorified is He*. The answer to this question will highlight the crucial matter to which Allah is referring in this verse. Allah *Glorified is He* did not convey a direct statement, stating that people who deny the truth are wicked. This is because direct statements are open to being believed or disbelieved. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* posed a question that we must answer ourselves.

If you ask a rhetorical question to a person who has denied your favours towards them, 'Who gave you these favours?' the humility of your question may confront them, 'I gave these favours to you'; such a statement might incite the person's arrogance to reply, 'You gave me nothing'.

Therefore, a statement made in the form of a rhetorical question is a stronger way of encouraging someone to admit the truth than a simple direct statement. In addition, a direct statement is a declaration from your side alone, whereas a rhetorical question might harvest a more valuable declaration from the other person. Hence, people generally use rhetorical questions when they are confident that the reply will be the answer they were looking for.

So, the question: 'And who could be more transgressing (and wicked) (z*dhlamu*),' (*al-'Ankabut:* 68) actually states that no one is more transgressing or wicked than those who deny the truth. The Arabic word z*hulm* means: taking the right of someone and giving it to another individual. Some forms of wickedness are more grave and severe than other forms, and these include the wicked and corrupt doctrines propagated by some people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Behold, such (a false) ascribing of divinity (to others besides Allah) is indeed a severe transgression (z*hulm*)!' (*Luqman:* 13)

Some forms of wickedness might be simple and trivial. However, inventing lies about Allah *Glorified is He* is the most transgressing act a person can commit.

If that person had invented lies about his fellow creatures, it would have been a lesser grave matter. However, lying about the Creator, Allah *Glorified is He* is the most immense form of wrongdoing. In addition, it is foolish to lie about Allah *Glorified is He* because He is stronger than you are, and can defeat your premises and endeavours. In fact, those who dare to commit such an act of wickedness are only wronging themselves.

We previously said that the fabrication of a lie (*iftira`*) is the deliberate formulation of words that do not correspond to reality. This process is different from involuntary lying which is when a person issues an untruthful statement that he sincerely believes is truthful. However, despite his sincerity and lack of awareness, his speech is still a lie because it is still contrary to reality.

In essence, the scholars have defined truthfulness (*sidq*) to mean the conformity between a person's speech and the reality in existence. On the other hand, they defined untruthfulness (*kadhib*) to be when a person's speech is contrary to reality. So, if I say something that I believe to be true, not intending to speak falsehood, but my speech is contrary to reality, it is still termed as an untruthful lie, although I am not termed a liar.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the most wicked of people: '…or denies the truth when it comes unto him (through revelation)' (*al-'Ankabut:* 68). That person did not only invent and fabricate lies about Allah *Glorified is He,* but they transgressed further by denying matters of utter sincerity and truthfulness. Allah *Glorified is He* then declared the punishment prepared for their denial, again using a rhetorical question: 'Is the hell-fire not a (sufficient) abode for all who (thus) deny the truth?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 68) Will the hell-fire not have enough space to accommodate all the disbelieving people? Indeed, there is space in the hell-fire for every disbelieving individual. In fact, the hell-fire will yearn for them when it is asked: 'Are you filled with people?' – and it will answer, "(Nay,) is there yet more (for me)?"' (*Qaf:* 30)

Why are these people inventing lies about Allah *Glorified is He* and denying the truth? Do they not know that there are places in the hell-fire prepared for them? Therefore, this divine rhetorical question was a condemnation of the notion that the hell-fire has no sufficient places for the disbelievers. It was the will of Allah *Glorified is He* to create mankind, from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the rising of the Hour, and to give them free will, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it' (*al-Kahf:* 29). When He did this, He allowed for the possibility that they would all believe, and so made places for all of them in paradise. Similarly, He allowed for the possibility that they might all disbelieve, and so made places for all them in the hell-fire.

When the judgement is finally established on the Last Day, the people of Paradise will enter its gardens and the people of Hell will enter its perils. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* will give the believers the places in paradise that would have been given to the disbelievers had they believed. The believers will share these gardens amongst themselves. Likewise, the disbelievers will share amongst themselves the places of the believers in hell. So, if someone had one place in hell, he will be given two places therein.

As previously mentioned, the rhetorical question: 'Is the hell-fire not a (sufficient) abode for all who (thus) deny the truth?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 68) makes the listener join in the discourse. It also serves as an admonition and a condemnation for the disbelievers, as in the case of Allah's words: 'Behold, those who have transgressed in sins used to laugh at those who have believed. (And) whenever they passed by them, they used to wink at one another (derisively). (And) whenever they returned to the people of their own kind, they returned while jesting. (And) whenever they saw those (who believe,) they said, "Behold, these (people) have indeed gone astray." (And) in no way were they sent as preservers over them. But today, on the Day (of Judgment), the ones who have believed are laughing at the steadfast disbelievers: (for resting in paradise) on couches, they will look down (at the disbelievers), "Have the steadfast disbelievers been requited for what they were performing?"' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36)

After the believers enter paradise, Allah *Glorified is He* will ask those believers who have been mocked in this life, 'Did we amply requite these disbelievers, and give you your rights back'? This is meant to comfort the believers and rebuke the disbelievers. The believers will exclaim, 'Yes, O lord! Yes, O Lord! Yes, O Lord'! Allah *Glorified is He* wants the believers to exasperate the disbelievers without sympathizing with their destinies. This is because these disbelievers were transgressors and tyrants. They were provided proofs and sound arguments and have denied these signs in their stubbornness and extended transgression, after this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ جَٰهَدُواْ فِينَا لَنَهۡدِيَنَّهُمۡ سُبُلَنَاۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَمَعَ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ٦٩

But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those
who strive hard for Our cause: God is with those
who do good [69] (The Quran, *al-'Ankabut:* 69)

The Arabic word *jahadu* refers to the people who strive hard in any endeavour. It is derived from the root letters *j*, *h* and *d*. The verb *jahada* means to work hard, and *ijtahada* means to do work diligently in a particular effort. The Arabic verb *jahada* is a reflexive or reactionary verb which means that the verb has two opposing aspects. The first aspect is that it requires effort from the person doing it, and the second aspect is that it will invoke a resistance from the opposing force. The word *jahada* is embodied in the Arabic lexical form known as *mufa`ala*. This implies that one of these two parties or aspects has a greater share of the action, and the other is more passive. For example, you can say that Zayd cooperated with `Umar, or that `Umar cooperated with Zayd. Generally, the one who plays a greater role in the partnership will be the subject, and the other will be the object.

After Allah *Glorified is He* declared that the final abode of the disbelievers will be in Hell, Allah *Glorified is He* urged the believers to stand up to the transgressors. Since these transgressors have perpetrated gross injustices, they must be disciplined in some way. This discipline is not to force them into believing, since Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, rejects it' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Rather, this discipline is simply calling for our message loudly and clearly, and giving our support to the words of truth. After we have done this, people are free to either believe, or remain as they are. Therefore, this verse clarifies the position of the believers in the face of these deniers: 'But as for those who strive hard (*jahadu*) in Our cause – We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us' (*al-'Ankabut:* 69). The meaning of the words: 'strive hard in

Our cause' is that these believers have worked hard for Allah's sake, with the aim of bringing victory to their religion.

We must strive sincerely against many rivals. We have rivals in the highest matter of doctrine which is the existence of Allah *Glorified is He*. Atheists claim that there is no god. There is a specific way of striving against such people. Pagans and idolaters accept the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* but claim that He has partners. There is a different strife and effort to be exerted in their regard.

Atheists are striven against with logic and reason so that they themselves may come to admit that Allah exists. We say to them: Is there anyone who claims to have created himself or herself, or created anyone else? Consider the simplest things you use in your lives: this glass cup, which is a luxury item, do you say that it simply exists without a maker? Is there a tree that fruits these cups for us? Of course, there is not. They are a product made by a producer who used the intellect Allah gave them, and utilised the substances Allah placed in the universe to produce glass.

Another example is the light bulb which Edison invented; how much effort, research, and study did it take to invent it? Then, it needs factories, workers, and engineers to manufacture and service it. Then it can be broken easily. Yet, Edison is very famous, and we have immortalised his memory, and all humanity still praise him for his achievement.

Why do they not then consider the sun which gives light to the whole world since Allah has created it, and will do so until the day of Judgement, without needing any maintenance or spare parts? Could anyone approach it to process any repair in it? Has the sun ever failed to rise, or has it continued to provide you with warmth, light, and heat?

You know who made the light bulb, but do not know who made the sun? You know all about the most trivial things, and who made them. Moreover, you have chronicled the histories of their inventions, and immortalised the memory of their inventors. Had not it better that you reflect on the greatness of Allah's creation and find faith in Him?

Then tell me, O atheist: When the darkness of night covers you, how do you make it light? They say that lights differ from a person to another according to everyone's capacity; in the darkness of night, we see different sources of light. Some people sit in the glow of a candle, some use a gas-lamp, some use an electric lamp some a neon lamp. The sources of light used at night clearly indicate the capability of those who use them. Once the sun rises, however, and the lamp of Allah shines forth, all these other lights are put out, and they have no effect when the lamp of the Almighty Creator shines forth.

Is not this a sign that when a ruling comes from Allah, we should abandon our own rulings and seek light in Allah's judgement? Do material realities not indicate the truth of spiritual ones?

As for those who claim Allah has partners in His sovereignty, we ask them: Who was it who said Allah has partners? You invented this notion yourself because when Allah said, 'I am One God, and I have no partners', no one contradicted Him, and no one else claimed to be a partner to Allah. This proves that either such a 'partner' does not exist, or else it does but is unaware of what Allah said, or else it is aware, but is unable to respond. Either way, such a partner could not possibly be Allah.

But supposing such a being did exist, what is its system? What does it command and forbid? What delights does it promise you if you worship it? What punishment does it prepare for you if you deny it? Then, such an alleged god has no system, and consequently, to worship it would be absurd.

As for those who believe in a divinely-revealed religion but do not believe in the Mission of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* we say to them: It is enough for you, to believe in Muhammad's Mission, to note an aspect of the greatness of the character of Muhammad Ibn `Abdullah which is he never fanatically took his own side because his heart was attached to all who believed in Allah, even if they denied him. Muhammad loves all those who believe in Allah, even if they disbelieve in Muhammad; he took the side of his Lord, even with regard to those who disbelieved in him personally.

Another hint is addressed to the Jews or Christians who lived at the time when Islam emerged, yet still denied it. Your own religion was successive to other religions preceding it, and the same is true to your messenger; so why, when Muhammad came to you, did you disbelieve in him and deny him? Why do you allow that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* have come after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* but deny that Muhammad has come after `Isa (Jesus)?

So, every kind of controversy on Allah's religion has its corresponding kind of debate, relating to the verse 'But as for those who strive hard in Our cause – We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 69). You should first consider the type of striving you need to make. There is a specific style of striving against the atheist, another against the polytheist and another against the people of the Book. The struggle that one Muslim undertakes against another also has its own way, if differences arise between them. However, Allah *Glorified is He* has said, 'Verily, as for those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects – thou hast nothing to do with them...' (*al-An'am:* 159).

Then, when you see two Muslim parties opposing one another and you cannot follow either of them, then both are wrong since Islam is a single entity. Previously, we compared it to pure, clear water which has not been mixed with any colour, flavour, or scent; if caprices colour it, and people break into factions within it, just as different juices have different colours, they will lose their way, and miss the truth.

This is because we are all agreed on those matters about which Allah has given us a clear, direct verdict; as for those things which Allah has left for us to exercise our judgement about, we must all respect the opinions of others concerning them, and say, 'My opinion is correct, but there might be something wrong with it; the other party's opinion is not so true, but it might be correct'. In this way, we can coexist with our different views.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* give us a clear example of this; if there is a matter which He wishes to be absolutely unequivocally clear, He makes it clear with a single statement which cannot be differed over. For example, when describing the lesser ritual ablution, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have attained to faith! When you are about to pray, wash your face, and your hands and arms up to the elbows...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). He did not specify the exact area meant by 'face' since everyone agrees on what the face is; he did specify the area meant by 'arms', since people differ about this. And so, the issues over which Muslims differ should be discussed in a particular way in light of this without any zealous bigotry. If something is clear, and is not subject to personal judgment, all must accept it; and if a text is subject to a difference of opinion, everyone should follow his own understanding of the text.

For example, the prepositional particle *bi* in Arabic is used as a partitive, supportive or additive; if you suggest using it in one of these, do not deny another person's right to interpret it according to another usage.

If fighting breaks out between two factions of Muslims, there must be another moderate party which can mediate between and reconcile them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two [groups] goes on acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to Allah's Commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice, and deal equitably [with them]: for, verily, Allah loves those who act equitably!' (*al-Hujurat:* 9)

Notice that Allah *Glorified is He* called them 'believers'. This means that our shared belief does not mean that we will never have differences of opinion. This faith, that does not exclude a possibility of disagreeing, obliges us to ensure that there is a third neutral party who assumes reconciliation between the two fighting parties and deterrence of the transgressor until it returns to the right path and abide by the order of Allah.

If they do return, we do not simply leave the winner-loser scenario shade over the place. Rather, we reconcile between them, and remove the rancour and enmity from their hearts; for the stronger party will be humbled if we chastise them, and the weaker party will gain strength if we support them. Thus, balance is achieved, and both sides will be equal, and everyone will return to the realm of peace and security.

We have still to talk about a more important form of striving which is the striving by a person against his own soul. Upon returning from a battle, the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, said, 'We have returned from the lesser struggle to the greater struggle.'(1) So, he described the struggle one does against their own soul as the greater struggle. Why? Because on the battlefield, you face a tangible, clearly defined enemy whose numbers and methods are clear to you; but if your enemy is inside yourself, it is difficult to fight it. Indeed, you love to fulfil the desires your soul longs for, and to obey its whims and inclinations, and all the while it induces you from your inside.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi in (Tarikh Baghdad)*

When striving against your soul, you should make a comparison between the gain of immediate desires of your soul and their consequential eternal woes, and the loss of the reward of your Lord in paradise where there are the delights that no eye has seen, nor any ear has heard nor has any human heart imagined.

Make this comparison between your soul and your Lord and reflect, and know that your Lord has done much for you, and that He prepared many blessings for you before you even existed. The One Who created this universe for you, and placed it at your service, is certainly worthy of your trust. You are His servant and His creation; have you ever seen an artisan take one of his products and destroy it?

If you see a carpenter take a plane and run it across a piece of wood, know that he is getting it ready to serve its purpose. I remember the story(1) of the little boy Ayman who came crying to his mother one day because the maid was beating the rug; so his mother took him and showed him the dust that was falling from the rug every time the maid hit it, and so the child understood as best he could.

Likewise, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* tests His creatures, He does not do so to harm them, but rather to improve them. We sometimes hear a mother here (in Egypt) say to her only child: ‘O Allah, let me drink his fire!’ meaning ‘Allah kill you’. By Allah, what would she feel if Allah answered her prayer? But in reality, she does not hate her child, the apple of her eye; rather, she hates the characteristic of his that has made her angry.

Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not hate His servant, but rather, dislikes his bad characteristics. Therefore, He wishes to purify him by afflicting him by tribulations so that he may become pure again like the day he was born. Then, you should think well of your Lord, O man!

Thus, we say that one of the greatest forms of striving is to strive against your own soul because it is always urging you to fulfil its desires, and it is open to the temptation of caprice, and the whispers of the devil that makes every evil alluring to it, and every foul thing beloved.

We explained before how to differentiate between the enticement of the devil and the enticement of the human soul. The soul certainly has part in driving man to commit sin. The evidence on this is the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* saying, ‘When *Ramadan* comes, the gates of Paradise are opened, and the gates of Hell are closed, and the devils are shackled.’(1)

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(1) *The story of the boy Ayman and the beating of the carpet*

If all sins were caused by only the work of the devil, this would mean that no one would sin in *Ramadan.* Yet, many sins are committed in *Ramadan,* which means that they must be the result of the soul’s enticement. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to show up the sons of Adam and says to them: ‘See how I have chained the demons, yet you still sin’!

If you want to know whether a sin was caused by your soul or by the devil, know that the soul will insist on a specific sin, for which it will accept no substitute, and will keep on urging you until you fall into that sin; the devil, on the other hand, wants you commit whatever sin no matter its form; if you refuse to do a certain sin, he will try and make you do another.

A prudent person must reflect on this: a sin gives you immediate pleasure, and a passing enjoyment, which can never be appropriate for the human being whom Allah has honoured, making him His vicegerent on earth, and a master of the universe. The entire universe, heaven and earth, serve him; does it make sense that a servant lives longer than its master?

You will die, whether after one year or a hundred years, whilst the sun that serves you has lived for millions of years. Then, you must have another life which is more lasting than that of your servant; if you are now living this life that is called *dunya* (lower life, that is/the life of this world), this means there must be another ‘higher’ life which is your life in the hereafter, where there is no more death.

When the Noble Quran speaks to us of striving, it sometimes says: ‘…and strive hard in Allah’s Cause with your possessions and your lives…’ (*at-Tawba:* 41). And it says, ‘But as for those who strive hard in Our cause…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 69).

Striving in Allah’s Cause means to strive in the way to Allah to demonstrate faith in the One God and the sincerity of the Messenger He sent with a miracle and a system of guidance. Once this way has become clear to you, and you have come to believe in the One God. He says to you: take every action in your life in the light of ‘But as for those who strive hard in our cause…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 69); that is with complete sincerity and devotion to Allah, not considering anything else but Him.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad, on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

However much a person seeks sincerity in his actions, intending Allah’s regard alone, he will not be completely safe from the possibility that his action might be tainted with ostentation, or showing-off. Even Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* who was protected by Allah from committing sins, said, ‘O Allah, I seek your forgiveness for every action I intended to devote to you alone, but which might be intermingled with something that was not completely for you.’(1)

This is the meaning of ‘…strive hard in Our cause…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 69); that is our actions are exclusively dedicated to only Allah. Otherwise, what is the difference between the believer and the disbeliever? They both work hard in this life to make a living and support their families, and so they are equal in their action. What, then, is the advantage of the believer?

The distinction is that the disbeliever works as much as they can to satisfy only their needs, while the believer works as much as they can to satisfy their needs and to give a hand to those who are unable to work for themselves. A believer intends to work for themselves and for the needy.

An example of this is a grocer who one day sold a lot of products in the morning and made the money he needed for himself, then he closed his store. He did not consider the buyers dealing with him for the settlement, or the housewife who was waiting for her husband to come home so she can go out and buy what she needs. He only considered his own needs, and forgot the needs of others.

It is worthy reading the verses saying: ‘Truly, to a happy state shall attain the believers; those who humble themselves in their prayer, who turn away from all that is frivolous and who are intent on inner purity’. (*al-Mu’minun:* 1-4) Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, ‘Who pay the poor-due’, but rather, ‘who are intent on (giving) the poor-due', that is, who work for the sake of the poor-due, working as hard as they can, not only as much as they need to. Those who cast their actions in the light of 'But as for those who strive hard in Our cause…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 69), always have Allah on their minds.

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(1) *This is a prayer of Mutraf ibn `Abdullah, as narrated by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali.*

In order to understand this issue, let yourself think about a favour you have done for someone, but you intended a worldly purpose, not to please Allah. The person you did the favour for might deny it; some may even dispraise you. If this happens, blame only yourself because your intention was wrong. If you did the favour for the sake of people expect your reward from them as might be. If, on the other hand, you act for Allah's sake, trust that your good deed will be honoured by Allah, and by the people, too.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* has given mankind free will to choose whether to believe or disbelieve, He draws our attention to the fact that if you do someone a favour and he then denies your favour and is ungrateful for it, do not be sad because the people even did this to Allah *Glorified is He*; He created them and provided them with their livelihood, and then they denied Him.

Then comes the reward for striving in Allah's Cause: 'But as for those who strive hard in Our cause, We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 69). That is, We shall guide them to Our paths; as though there is more than one path to Allah. Therefore, you should not belittle any good deed, no matter how small it seems. Allah forgave a man who gave water to a dog that was panting with thirst.(1) As well, you should not belittle any sin; Allah sent a woman to hell for imprisoning and starving a cat.(2) Moreover, you do not belittle any person, whoever they are, for Allah has hidden secrets within His creatures. Many a person with dishevelled hair and covered with dust, whereas he is held in such high esteem by Allah that if he were to adjure in the name of Allah about anything, Allah would fulfil that.

Thus, if you know that you have some type of quality that distinguishes you from others, consider those things in which the other surpass you, and beware of looking at them with pride, and of deeming yourself better than others; if you are superior in one thing, you are inferior in many others. We said before that Allah divided talents among people so that people would remain in need of each other.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of 'Umar*

Allah's words: '...We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 69) means the ways that will lead to the delights of paradise, and ways that enhance the certitude of faith of which Allah says, '…with their light spreading rapidly before them and on their right…' (*al-Hadid:* 12).

`Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz *Allah rest his soul* said, 'What prevents us from learning things unknown to us is our failure to implement what we do know.'(1) That is the reason we are unable to know Allah's secrets is our failure to abide by His commands. How, then, should He give us from His Grace, while we have not utilised what He gave us before? But if you implement what you know from His orders, you become a guardian on the system of Allah, and, indeed, He will give you more of His Grace. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] Guidance...' (*Muhammad:* 17); and: 'O you who have attained to faith! If you remain conscious of Allah, He will endow you with a standard by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal:* 29).

'Standard' or 'Criterion' is also one of the names of the Quran; and so when you are conscious of Allah as you should be, following the guidance He lays out in the Quran, He will give you another criterion and another illumination, by which you will perceive the reality of things, and be guided to sound judgement. This is the illumination Allah gave to `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* when he went to see `Umar ibn al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* and found that he intended to punish, for adultery, a woman who had given birth after six months of marriage, while a pregnancy usually lasts nine months. `Ali said to `Umar: 'But Allah says otherwise, O Commander of the Faithful!' `Umar replied, 'What did He say, `Ali?' `Ali explained that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the [divorced] mothers may nurse their children for two whole years, if they wish to complete the period of nursing...' (*al-Baqara:* 233); That is, for twenty-four months. And in another verse, He said: ‘and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). By subtracting the two numbers, we are left with six months, which is therefore the minimum period a pregnancy can last.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his (Tafsir)*

This is the criterion that Allah gives the believers who act upon what they know from the Lord’s teachings. Then, considering how magnificent `Umar was, he was such an inspired man that the divine revelation would come down in support of his opinion. He used to say henceforth: ‘A wretched land it is where Abu Al-Hassan (`Ali) is not present.’

It is well-known that `Ali, *Allah be pleased with him*, grew up in the household of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was closely related to, and gained his knowledge directly from, him; that is to say that `Ali’s background was purely and entirely Islamic, and he is an authority and master of logic to argue for the sake of the truth. For example, at the Battle of Siffin, which raged between `Ali and Mu`awiya, `Ammar ibn Yasir was amongst `Ali’s troops, and was killed by one of Mu`awiya’s troops. The Companions there present then remembered the statement of Messenger Muhammad: ‘Alas for `Ammar! The unjust faction shall slay him!’(1) Thus, they realised that Mu`awiya’s faction was the unjust one. Therefore, the Companions began to abandon Mu`awiya’s troops to join `Ali’s. `Amr ibn Al-`As, who was on the side of Mu`awiya rushed to Mu`awiya and said: ‘O, Commander of the Faithful, a rumour has spread amongst the army, and if it continues there will be none left with us!’ Mu`awiya asked what it was; `Amr explained: ‘they remembered that Messenger Muhammad said: “Alas for `Ammar! The unjust faction shall slay him!”’ Mu`awiya replied, ‘Spread the word amongst them that no one killed him save the one who brought him out to fight’ meaning `Ali. When `Ali heard this, he replied using the sound criterion and logic he possessed: ‘Then ask him who killed Hamza ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib!’

So, if you act in accordance with your knowledge, Allah will teach you, by whatever method, what you do not know. We previously gave an example on this issue; suppose you have a clumsy son who is not successful in his worldly endeavours. Your brothers advise you to try him even with a simple project, costing only one hundred pounds. If you did this, and your son wasted the money and made no good use of it, would you dare to give him more? But if he had invested this money wisely, and profited from it, you would have been happy to give him more.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad and Al-Bayhaqi, on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for, behold, Allah is indeed with the doers of good' (*al-'Ankabut:* 69). 'Doing good' means to worship Allah as though you see Him; if you do not actually see Him, He indeed sees you. Literally, *ihsan* means to do something excellently especially in worshipping Allah, while abiding by the instructions of Allah. If you do good deeds, Allah will do good deeds to you by increasing your illumination and brilliance, and alleviating difficulties of obedience to you, and making sins seem naturally vile to you.

One of the righteous men loved doing good deeds so much that he said, 'O, my Lord, I fear that You will not reward me for my obedience because it has turned into a desire to me.' That is, if there were no Paradise and no Hell, I would still obey You, because Your obedience has become a desire to me. Yet You commanded us, Lord, to resist the soul's desires, and so I fear You will not reward me for it. Responding to this pious man, Allah says: '…behold, Allah is indeed with the doers of good' (*al-'Ankabut:* 69).

The word 'with' implies company, which in our human understanding means someone meets with another. But, for Allah to be with you, it is different. It must be understood considering the verse: 'there is nothing like unto Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11). You exist, and Allah exists, but is your existence like Allah's existence? Allah knows that we are now recording this lecture in Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Mosque; but is our knowledge like His Knowledge? Allah knew this before this mosque was even built, and before we were even born.

Therefore, Allah gives us a parable, saying: 'just as [there are signs thereof] within your own selves: can you not, then, see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) This is an answer to those who demand to see Allah *Glorified is He* even though He is unseen in this worldly life. This reminds us of those who said to their prophet: 'Make us see Allah face to face' (*an-Nisa':* 153). How can they see Him, when part of the Majesty of Allah is that He cannot be seen, or sensed by human faculties? Allah *Glorified is He* gives us evidence of this in our own selves: ‘just as [there are signs thereof] within your own selves: can you not, then, see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) Think of the closest things to you in your own self, not the horizons around you. Is there not a spirit within you, which controls your body, makes you live, and moves your limbs? This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that if this spirit were to leave your body, it would become a lifeless corpse? Have you ever seen this spirit, though it lies between your two sides? Have you ever perceived it with any of your senses?

Then, it is with you, but not under your capacity of perception, though it is a simple creature of Allah’s. So, how can you hope to see the Creator *Glorified is He* while you cannot even see a creature? If you ask, ‘But what about the believers’ vision of Allah in the hereafter?’ we reply that, in the hereafter, Allah will create us in another form with which we will be able to see Him *Glorified is He* because all creatures will exist according to different standards. Is it not true that you will eat and drink in paradise, but yet never have to relieve yourself?

When the ruler of Byzantium asked one of the Muslim scholars how we could eat and drink in paradise but need not to relieve ourselves, the Muslim scholar replied: ‘What is amazing about that? Do you not see that a foetus in its mother’s womb eats and grows, but it does not produce waste? If it were to defecate in its placenta, it would choke itself.’

Then, the emperor asked the scholar: ‘How do you say that you will enjoy the delights of paradise without them decreasing or ending?’ He replied, ‘Suppose you have a flame, and everyone in the whole world comes and lights a candle from it, will this flame be decreased? Then the emperor asked, ‘So, where do all the spirits that were inside us go when we die?’ He replied, ‘They go to wherever they were before they came to dwell within us.’

These are examples of the Allah-given success and guidance to the truth implied by the verse: ‘But as for those who strive hard in Our cause – We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 69), as well as described in the verse: ‘… If you remain conscious of Allah, He will endow you with a standard by which to discern the true from the false ...’ (*al-Anfal:* 29).

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد [18]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (18)

the chapter of

ar-Rum

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

الٓمٓ ﴿١﴾

***Alif. Lam. Mim* [1] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 1)**

‘Alif. Lam. Mim.’ We have spoken much about the separate letters with which certain chapters begin. I do not wish to repeat what we have said. However, I do wish for the scholars to consider this matter in an illuminating way that shows and reveals to us all the wisdom and secrets within these letters

We have said that these three letters, *‘Alif. Lam. Mim’* are recited separately with a pause between each letter and the following one. However, the Quran recitation is generally based on continuation and connection between its verses and chapters; that is the last letter of one chapter is connected in recitation to the first letter of the next chapter. For example, when ending the recitation of the previous chapter and starting this chapter, we say: ‘But as for those who strive hard in Our cause – We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us, for, behold, Allah is indeed with the doers of good. In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy….’

Moreover, *an-Nas*, the final chapter of the Quran, is connected to the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, the first chapter. So, when we want to continue reciting from the chapter of *an-Nas* to the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, we read: ‘From amongst the jinn and mankind.’ and then follow with ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. All Praise is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds’.

Thus, the Quran is circularly connected, not broken up. So, why are the separate letters at the beginning of certain chapters pronounced with pauses?

Why do we not say, '*Alifun Lamun Mimun*', with the nominative case marking? The scholars say it is because Allah did not want to make these letters a single word, and so they were revealed with pauses. We are comforted by the Hasith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* saying: 'I do not say that *Alif Lam Mim* are all one letter, but rather, *Alif* is a letter, and *Lam* is a letter and *Mim* is a letter.'(1) And so we are waiting for someone, of those who worship Allah excellently and do good deeds, to tell us what secrets these letters contain that must be paused at, and not connected to anything else.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

غُلِبَتِ ٱلرُّومُ ﴿٢﴾

The Byzantines have been defeated [2]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 2)

The word 'Defeated' implies that there was a battle where one army was victorious, and the other was defeated. Here, it was the Byzantines who were defeated. They were from the people of the Book based in the Levant and the Arabian Iraq, as Iraq had two parts, one of which is towards the Arab peninsula and the other towards the Persians. The Arabic word for Byzantines is *ar-Rum*, and they are said to be descended from Rum, son of Yeshu, son of Ishaq (Issac) son of Ibrahim (Abraham).

فِىٓ أَدْنَى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَهُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ غَلَبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ ﴿٣﴾

In a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat
with a victory [3] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 3)

'In the lands close-by…' means the nearest of lands to the Arabs, This is similar to the verse: 'when you were at the near end of the valley [of Badr], and they were at its farthest end…' (*al-Anfal:* 42). The 'near end' here means the one closest to Medina, while the 'far end' means the one furthest from it. So, 'the lands close-by…' (*ar-Rum:* 3), means the lands closest to the Arabian Peninsula.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

The part of the verse saying '…yet it is they who, notwithstanding this, their defeat, shall be victorious' (*ar-Rum:* 3) was a glad tiding to the believers because the Persians were fire-worshippers while the Byzantines were people of the Book. So, the difference between us and the Persians is in the doctrine of divinity, while the difference between us and the Byzantines is in the doctrine of the prophecy and mission of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, they were closer to us because they believed in Allah, but not in our Messenger.

This is part of the greatness of Islam; those who believe in Allah are closer to us than those who do not because the former are at least connected to Him. Thus, when the Byzantines were defeated, the idolaters of Quraysh rejoiced and the believers mourned. The idolaters of Quraysh rejoiced because the defeat of the Byzantines seemed to show that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers would be defeated in the same way.

The word 'their defeat' is translated from the Arabic word *ghalabihim* which is formed from the attachment of the infinitive *ghalab* (defeat) to the Arabic pronoun '*him*' (their). In Arabic, this infinitive is sometimes attached to a subject and others to an object. This may be similar to the gerund when you say, 'I liked the ruler's flogging the criminal', you have attributed the gerund to the active agent (the ruler); if you say, 'I liked the criminal's flogging', you have attributed the gerund to the passive agent (the criminal). Likewise, 'defeat' here is attached to the object pronoun referring the Byzantines.

But why did Allah *Glorified is He* say, '…shall be victorious' (*ar-Rum:* 3) using the particle *sa* in Arabic which implies the future tense, and then say 'within a few years', which also implies the future tense? The scholars said that it is because victory does not come out of the blue, but rather, it is the result of long preparations, and seeking the necessary means and preparing the force necessary to accomplish it. It is as though they would, in these few years, prepare for victory, and every finished part of preparation is a step closer to the final victory. That is to say that victory would not come merely after a few years, but as a result from work continuing for many years.

Germany, for example, was defeated in the First World War when all nations joined forces to oppose him. Then, in 1939, its Leader Hitler had declared war on the world. Had the force which he used to threaten them with simply been an act of magic? No, rather, he spent years preparing, and forming his army, and constructing roads and weapons until he had amassed the force he could use to threaten the world.

فِي بِضۡعِ سِنِينَۗ لِلَّهِ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ مِن قَبۡلُ وَمِنۢ بَعۡدُۚ وَيَوۡمَئِذٖ يَفۡرَحُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ
﴿٤﴾ بِنَصۡرِ ٱللَّهِۚ يَنصُرُ مَن يَشَآءُۖ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥﴾

In a few years' time — God is in command, first and last.
On that day, the believers will rejoice [4] At God's help. He
helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful [5]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 4-5)

The joy of the idolaters roused the believers' anger until the following part of the verse was revealed: '…yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with Allah rests all power of decision, first and last…' (*ar-Rum:* 3-4), whereupon the believers rejoiced, and Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'I swear, Allah would not give joy to such people (the Arab idolaters); the Byzantines will defeat the Persians after three years pass!'

This is because the word 'a few' (*bid`*, in Arabic) literally means 'three to ten'. But why did Abu Bakr understand it to mean the minimum of this range? It is because he was As-Siddiq (one who has great faith), and he knew that the True Lord *Glorified is He* would not make the believers bear nine years of difficulties; and this is part of the great faith and trust by which Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was characterised.

And so Abu Bakr(1) said to Ubayy ibn Khalaf (one of the disbelievers at that time): 'I swear, Allah will not let your joy last (i.e. your joy upon seeing the disbelievers triumph), for Allah has told us that it will end within a few years.' Ubayy replied, 'Would you like to lay a wager on such a thing?' Abu Bakr said, 'I will wager you for riding she-camels: if after three years the Byzantines triumph, I will take ten from you; if the Persians triumph, I will give you ten.'

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(1) *The story of Abu Bakr's bet with Ubayy ibn Khalaf regarding the victory of the Romans*

When Abu Bakr went to Messenger Muhammad and told him of this, Messenger Muhammad said: ‘O Abu Bakr, offer him higher stakes for a longer time’ that is, offer him a wager of one hundred she-camels and increase the time from three to nine years. Indeed, Abu Bakr went to Ubayy and offered him this wager, and the later accepted the wager of one hundred she-camels.(1)

Later, when the idolaters’ persecution against the believers became severe, and Abu Bakr went out to emigrate,(2) Ubayy ibn Khalaf saw him and said, ‘Where are you going, Abu Fusayl?’ They used to mock Abu Bakr by calling him this, as ‘Bakr’ means a strong camel, whilst Fusayl means a small one. Abu Bakr replied, ‘I am emigrating.’ ‘What about the wager we have?’ asked Ubayy. Abu Bakr replied, ‘If you win it, my son Abd Ar-Rahman will cover the wager.’ Then, when the battle of Badr came, Abd Ar-Rahman saw Ubayy going out to fight, and said to him: ‘Where are you going?’ ‘To Badr’, he replied. ‘and what about our wager, should you be killed?’ he asked. ‘My son will give it to you’, Ubayy replied.

At Badr,(3) Ubayy ibn Khalaf was given a mortal injury by the Messenger of Allah, and so his son gave the prize to Abd Ar-Rahman, the son of Abu-Bakr. They took it to Messenger Muhammad, and he told them to give it in charity.(4)

Here, there is a miraculous sign of faith that is worth noting. We talked before about the unseen and the seen worlds. We said that there are several types of the unseen things: there are those unseen things which are indicated by premises, such as a geometry exercise given to a student to solve, and the secrets of the universe which scientists discover by means of the clues in the universe, such as the discovery of the principles of the steam engine, and Archimedes’ discovery of the principles of floatation, etc. We do not say that such people knew unseen things; rather, they utilised existing data to lead them to the discovery of previously unknown things.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabari, Al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Abu Hatim, on the authority of Qatada*

(2) *As narrated by Ibn Hisham in his (Sira)*

(3) *It was actually at the battle of Uhud, not Badr. The one killed at the battle of Badr was `Umayya ibn Khalaf, who was killed by Bilal. (See Al-Bayhaqi’s Dala`il.)*

(4) *Narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur*

The absolute unseen things, on the other hand, have no premise or clues to indicate. Thus, the unseen world is invisible to all people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He [alone] knows that which is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception, and to none does He disclose aught of the mysteries of His Own Knowledge, unless it be to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect…’ (*al-Jinn:* 26-27).

Another kind of the unseen things is the things that are invisible or unknown to you, but are visible or known to others. For example, if something is stolen from you, it is unseen to you because you do not know where it is, but it is not unseen for the thief.

The problem with people is that they do not use the available known data to search for the secrets of the universe, but instead they use them to seek out other people’s secrets. We say to them: If you want to know other people’s secrets, then allow them to know yours; I do not think anyone would agree to such a thing.

So, keeping the unseen things hidden from people is one of Allah’s greatest blessings, for He *Glorified is He* is the Lord of all people, and He wants His creatures to draw benefit from one another. Do you not see that if you know something bad about someone, it may make you ignore all their good deeds, and may make you hate them, and hate all their good qualities? Therefore, Allah hides from you the secrets of others, so you can benefit from their good qualities.

Allah hides the unseen world from us either by means of the veil of the past, or the future or the veil of place. You do not know what happened in the past, before you were born, unless someone you trust tells you about it. Likewise, you do not know what will happen in the future. As for the veil of place, you do not know what exists in a place other than where you are now; something might even be in the same place as you, but it is hidden so you do not see it.

An example of this is in the verse: ‘…and they say to themselves, “Why does Allah not chastise us for what we are saying? ...”’ (*al-Mujadala:* 8). Who told the Messenger of Allah what they said to themselves? Allah lifted the veil of place for him, and told him what was in the hearts of those people, and then Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them the same. Should not this have been enough for them to believe in Allah, who revealed the secrets of their hearts? Thus, their attitude was purely one of stubborn obstinacy and denial.

The same is the case regarding what happened to Messenger Muhammad at the military expedition of Mu`ta. It took place in the land of Jordan while Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in Medina. We know that the authors of the Prophetic Biography did not use the term *ghazwa* (military expedition) except for those wars in which Messenger Muhammad was physically present. Every military warfare that took place without Messenger Muhammad's presence is termed a *sariyya* (detachment), except for Mu`ta which alone amongst these is given the name *ghazwa*. Why is this, since Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not physically present there? They said it is because Messenger Muhammad did witness the battle while he was in Medina because Allah lifted for him the veil of place and allowed him to see what was happening there. So, he could inform his companions about the events of the battle as though he was seeing them by himself. He told them that so-and-so took up the standard and was slain, and then so-and-so took it up and was also slain.' When word from the battle reached them, they found that the incidents took place exactly as Messenger Muhammad had told them.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* also lifted for him the veil of the past, telling him about what had happened to previous nations. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Now [as for thee, O Muhammad,] thou wert not present on the sunset slope [of Mount Sinai] when We imposed the Law upon Musa (Moses)…' (*al-Qasas:* 44), and '…And neither didst thou dwell among the people of Midyan, conveying Our messages unto them…' (*al-Qasas:* 45).

He also revealed the veil of the future for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as is revealed in the verse we are currently examining: '…yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years…' (*ar-Rum:* 3-4). Is there a computer which can tell us the result of a battle that will take place three to nine years in the future?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him*

Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* the Unlettered Prophet who lived in the Arabian Peninsula, knowing nothing of the forces of Persia and Byzantium, told us what the result of their conflict would be because He, Who Knows how things are and how they will be, told him. The fact that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* announced this, and challenged the world with it in the Quran that would be recited, until the Day of Resurrection, is enough to prove he truly was speaking for Allah, and that he was completely convinced that things would play out as Allah said they would.

Because of this absolute trust, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was named As-Siddiq, when someone told him what Messenger Muhammad had said about the Miraculous Night Journey he had made, he simply replied, 'If he (Muhammad) said it, then, he spoke the truth.'(1) So the Messenger of Allah announced the result of the then-coming war, and made a wager (it was not prohibited then) with the idolaters on it, and adhered to it; and this was only because he was convinced of this revelation, and convinced that it could never be wrong.

Allah's words: 'with Allah rests all power of decision, first and last' (*ar-Rum:* 4) means: 'Do not imagine that the Persians' victory over the Byzantines, or the Byzantines' victory over the Persians is beyond the will of Allah; Allah has all power of decision before the victory, and He still has it after the victory'.

So, when the Byzantines triumphed, Allah has been in control, and when the Persians triumphed, Allah has been in control. The True Lord *Glorified is He* awakens the righteous people by allowing the bad ones to gain victories; this way excites the former's passions and deepens their feelings towards their enemies, alerting them that it is not fitting that their enemies be in a better position than they are.

So, the victory given to those whom Allah dislikes over those whom Allah likes is timed by Allah. Then, do not be sad if you find you have an enemy; only a fool does. A wise man sees that his enemy is in his favour because an enemy reminds him that he should always be strong and prepared, and reminds him to be always upright so that his enemy cannot exploit his weaknesses. The enemy makes you use all your faculties in the way of goodness so that you can be better than him; and so the poet said:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Hakim on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her*

My enemies are a blessing and a kindness for me:
I ought to thank them for all their help;
They are like a cure that comes with a bitter pill,
So, may Allah always keep my enemies near!
They seek out my flaws, so I work to avoid them;
They compete with me, and spur me to win.

Thus, Allah has all power of decision, first and last, and He has His own wise reasons for allowing falsehood to gain victories. Consider the Battle of Uhud, and how the Muslims were defeated when they disobeyed the command of Messenger Muhammad and left their positions in search of battle-spoils. They were defeated even though Messenger Muhammad was amongst them because the rule of Allah necessitated that they be defeated when they disobeyed the command of His Messenger. What would have happened if the Muslims had won despite disobeying their Messenger? If they had triumphed, the command of the Messenger would have lost its value and esteem, and they would never have obeyed him again after that.

And on the day of the Battle of Hunayn: '…and [He did so, too,] on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers…' (*at-Tawba:* 25).

Even Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* himself said, 'We shall not be defeated today through lack of numbers!'(1) When they looked to their own strength and forgot about Allah's aid, they began to be defeated; then Allah took pity on them, and showed them His Mercy, and gave them victory in the end.

So, all power of decision rests with Allah, first and last. Therefore, you should not imagine that the victory of falsehood was contrary to Allah's will, or out of His control; rather, Allah willed it, and made it happen for a wise reason.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Ar-Rabi` ibn Anas*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…And on that day, will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice in Allah's succour' (*ar-Rum:* 4). What succour was it that would make the believers rejoice? Would they rejoice in the victory of the Byzantines over the Persians? The scholars say that their joy was caused by a series of interrelated events. First, they would rejoice in the victory of people who followed a divinely-revealed religion, People of the Book over people who were disbelievers and atheists; and they would rejoice because the prophecy of Messenger Muhammad had proved true; and they would rejoice because they believed in Messenger Muhammad, and they knew him to be truthful even before he made this prophecy.

They rejoiced because they had made the right choice, and every time a sign or a verse was revealed they all rejoiced in themselves because they were right to believe in the One God Who knows how everything will come to pass, and they followed His Messenger *peace and blessing be upon him*. So, their joy was not for only one thing, but rather was for several interrelated things.

Moreover, the day the Byzantines defeated the Persians coincided with the day the Muslims were victorious at the Battle of Badr.(1)

'He gives succour to whomever He wills' (*ar-Rum:* 5), whether Byzantine or Persian, since all power of decision rests with Him alone at all times, '…since He Alone is Almighty, a Dispenser of Mercy' (*ar-Rum:* 5). The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes himself here with two attributes: The Almighty and the Dispenser of Mercy. Although 'Almighty' means that He cannot be defeated or overcome, highlighting His Overwhelming Power, He follows it with the attribute of Mercy in order that this balance of Might and Mercy be reflected in the heart of the believer.

Also, mentioning the attribute of might here reminds us that nothing can happen without Allah's leave. Thus, when one party wins and another loses even if it were falsehood that wins, this only happens according to His will. Allah only allows falsehood and disbelief to exist in order to reveal the truth. When people are harmed by falsehood, and made wretched by disbelief, they will seek refuge in faith, and cling fast to it.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri*

Read Allah’s word, ‘…and brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah’s cause remained supreme…’ (*at-Tawba:* 40). He did not say, ‘And He made Allah’s cause supreme’ because He did not need to make it so, since to make something change means to take it from one state to another, whilst Allah’s Cause has always been and always will be supreme, even if the cause of falsehood surfaces from time to time.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِۖ لَا يُخۡلِفُ ٱللَّهُ وَعۡدَهُۥ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ٦

This is God’s promise: God never breaks
His promise, but most people do not
know [6] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 6)

A ‘promise’ *wa`d* means to inform someone of something good that will happen to them. ‘Never does Allah fail to fulfil His promise’ (*ar-Rum:* 6). There is a difference between Allah’s promise and man’s promise because you might promise someone something good but then fail to deliver because of circumstances such as changing your mind, or not being able to do what you promised or because the reason for promise changes.

So, you do not possess the means to guarantee that you will fulfil your promise. The promise of the True Lord *Glorified is He* on the other hand, is a promise that will surely be realised because there is no power that can prevent Him from keeping His promise, and there is nothing on the earth or in the heavens that can hold Him *Glorified is He* back. If Allah promises something, be sure He will deliver.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us: ‘and never say about anything, “Behold, I shall do this tomorrow,” without [adding], “if Allah so wills.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24)

This means that you should give yourself a way out of inadvertently lying, should things turn out and you cannot fulfil your promise. Place your affairs under your Lord’s control, not yours, because you have no power at all to guarantee anything.

So, remind yourself, and say, ‘If Allah wills’ so that if circumstances prevent you from fulfilling your promise you can say, ‘I willed it, but Allah did not’.

Allah *Glorified is He* never breaks His promises because He knows how everything will happen, and there is no power that can prevent Him from implementing His will, and He has no associate who can contradict Him, or act against His will.

If you like, read Allah’s words: ‘Doomed are the hands of him of the glowing countenance, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and all that he has gained? [In the life to come] he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing; together with his wife, that carrier of evil tales, [who bears] around her neck a rope of twisted strands!’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5) Was not Abu Lahab able, at that time, to embrace Islam, just as Hamza, Khalid `Ikrima *Allah be pleased with them* and others did? Did he not have free will, just as they did? Did he not hear this chapter? On the contrary, he kept to disbelief, and never spoke the words of faith. Even, he never tried to vex Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by falsely pretending to turn to Islam, saying to Quraysh: ‘Muhammad said I would not believe in Allah and his message, even though I testify that there is no Allah but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; does not this show his foolishness’?

So, as long as the Quran predicts something, it will surely come to pass just as predicted. We notice that the word ‘promise’ here means glad tidings taking place in the future. The discourse concerns two groups, one that will be victorious and rejoice in victory and the other that will be defeated and mourn defeat. How could this be a promise of glad tidings then, since the believer’s joy is the disbeliever’s sorrow?

To explain this, let us remember that the orientalists argued Allah’s word in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the jinn He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 14-16) They said that this makes sense, and is a clear example of Allah’s blessings; but what about: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) What blessing is there in the flames of fire and smoke?

These people have forgotten that it is a blessing to be warned about danger before it befalls you; Allah warns us about the result of disbelief so that we can avoid it. It is like a father saying to his son: ‘If you neglect your studies, you will fail, and I will do such-and-such to you’.

So, mentioning Hell and torment is a blessing for all those who go against Allah’s guidance; when they hear this warning, they may repent and refrain from disbelief.

Allah’s words: ‘…but most people know [it] not’ (*ar-Rum:* 6), deny that they have knowledge of the inner reality of things.

Then, Allah says of them:

يَعۡلَمُونَ ظَٰهِرٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَهُمۡ عَنِ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ هُمۡ غَٰفِلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

They only know the outer surface of this present life and are heedless of the life to come [7] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 7)

If there is a verb that is negated at first occurrence and affirmed in the other occurrence, this means that there are some aspects of difference. They do not know the inner reality of things, but only know their outer surface; and they do not even know the outer surface of all things; they know only the outer surface of the things of this worldly life, knowing nothing of their inner reality; so what about the hereafter?

If we reflect on the affairs of this world, we find that the positive laws adopted at some time are argued and abandoned later. It is as if we know nothing of this world except its outer surface. For example, here in Egypt we have been implementing the agricultural reform law since 1952, we used to be very eager to follow it, we took it very seriously, and we would not accept it to be tampered with in the way they are discussing today. They now want to reconsider it, or even cancel it altogether because it is no longer applicable in these times. Likewise, Russia, which built the communist system and defended it with all its might, is the one that has now gone against this system, and brought it down.

It was not America that brought it down, for example, and if it had done so, the power and haughtiness of communism would have been transferred to it. Thus, it is said that communism was not destroyed, but rather, it committed suicide by means of its followers; it is possible that these people commit suicide just as their system did. Therefore, it would be better for them to be upright for Allah's sake, and be honest with the people.

So, we only know the outer surface of this worldly life, not its reality. These days, we are suffering because of the pesticides that we once thought would make things easier for us, and save us the time and effort needed to control pests manually.

The world is also suffering because of the use of cars, and the pollution and death caused by them every day. Compare the means of transport in the past to those of today. Although today's means of transport have an immediate benefit, they ultimately cause much harm. It is enough to observe that the waste of the natural creatures created by Allah bring benefit to the earth, whilst the waste of the human-made products spoil the earth. Why is this? It is because we only understand the outer surface of things. If the one who discovered diesel fuel, for example, had known the reality of it, he would not have used it for the things we use it for today.

This is regarding our knowledge of this worldly life; as for the hereafter, we are ignorant of it. Therefore, Al-Hasan *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'I am amazed by the man who holds a coin in his fingertips and thereby deduces its weight, and taps it and thereby knows if it is forged or not, yet he does not pray properly.'(1)

An example of this is Allah's word: '…and it was not thou who cast [terror into them, O Prophet], when thou didst cast it, but it was Allah who cast…' (*al-Anfal:* 17). Allah *Glorified is He* negated and then affirmed the action of casting in the same verse. This is because the perspectives are different; the affirmation targets one thing, whereas the negation targets another. It was previously illustrated that the student who is compelled to study, opens the book, turns the pages, and pretends to read. On testing him, he was found that he has not understood anything. He performed the action of studying, but in reality he did not study at all because he could not retain anything.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, and Ibn Mardawayhi*

Likewise, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* flung a handful of pebbles at the army of the disbelievers; however, as Allah says: '… It was not your throw [that defeated them] but Allah's…' (*al-Anfal:* 17). The Prophet's human power could not possibly cause this single throw to defeat the whole army; rather, it was the power of Allah that did it.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, '… But most people do not know' (*ar-Rum:* 6), He excludes the minority of people from this lack of knowledge. Even though the worldly laws and systems are changed for the sake of all people, yet there is a minority who opposes and refuses to acknowledge them. Thus, not everyone is guilty of this lack of knowledge.

It is deceivingly apparent to many people that this worldly life comprises much enjoyment and satiation of passions, forgetting the punishment in the Hereafter for giving themselves absolute freedom in this life. The people in the countryside say about those who do not consider the consequences of things: 'The wolf ate a scythe', while another one say: 'When it comes out the other end, we will hear his howl'!

As Allah says, 'The love of desirable things is made alluring for men— women, children, gold and silver treasures piled up high, horses with fine markings, livestock, and farmland— these may be the joys of this life, but Allah has the best place to return to' (*Al-'Imran:* 14). People remember the enjoyment of this worldly life and forget the everlasting bliss of the hereafter; however, the wise person is the one who can make a balance between the two. As previously mentioned, the lifetime of this world as far as the person is concerned is only as long as he remains within it. It is his life span alone which is concerned, rather than the whole lifetime of the entire world. The man's life in it is limited and certainly ended in death.

However, the hereafter is an enduring and endless world of everlasting sheer bliss. So, the wise person should not let the limited worldly pleasure distract him from the endless absolute one or to accept such a bad deal.

When someone asked `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* 'I want to know whether I am one of the followers of this world, or among the devotees of the hereafter,' he replied: 'Allah does not grant me the answer; you have the answer yourself. When two people come to you, one with a gift and the other with a request, if you are delighted by the one with the gift, you are a devotee of this world, whereas if you are delighted by the one with the request, you are a person of the next world.'

This refers to the fact that the person loves people who provide him with the means to the desired life; if he desires the hereafter, he will surely love those who preserve it for him, whereas, if he desires this world, he will surely love those who preserve it for him. Some time ago, whenever a pious man received a beggar, he used to smile in his face, greet him as a friend and say, 'Welcome to the one who would carry my provisions to the Hereafter for free!'

In Allah's saying: '… And are heedless of the life to come' (*ar-Rum:* 7), the Arabic words have an additional repeated pronoun which stresses their being aware of recklessness. The extra pronoun here means that their heedlessness is of their own making; for they have plain evidence that they are warned, but evidence does nothing for people who choose to be reckless.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا۟ فِىٓ أَنفُسِهِم ۗ مَّا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَآ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ
وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِلِقَآئِ رَبِّهِمْ لَكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨﴾

Have they not thought about their own selves? God did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them without a serious purpose and an appointed time, yet many people deny that they will meet their Lord [8]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 8)

This means that they know nothing but the superficial aspect of this worldly life; they are heedless of the hereafter and they do not reflect on their own selves; however, evidence (of Allah) comes to them sometimes within themselves, and other times within the heavens and the earth.

As for the evidence in themselves, Allah advises people to make their own selves the subject of their contemplation and reflect upon the inner secrets proving the omnipotence of Allah, the Creator. Despite all advances of science, there are other secrets within the human being that are not discovered yet.

By considering the essential elements for human's survival; food, water and air, it is noticed that man can go without food for up to a month subsisting on the stored energy and he can go without water for three to ten days depending on the amount of the stored water within his body, but he cannot go without air for more than a few breaths. Thus, Allah is All-Wise that He secured these essential elements to mankind. Allah *the Almighty* makes man able to go without food for a certain period because others might hoard and keep food from him so he is forced to seek it out. However, man's capacity to go without water is less, so Allah *the Exalted* has made the hoarding of water less common.

As for air, the person cannot go without except for a few breaths. Allah's Wisdom made it impossible that anyone could ever take possession of it; otherwise, people would hoard air whenever they could as punishment, and others might die before they are excused.

In the digestive system, there are two adjacent pipes, the trachea for air and the oesophagus where food passes down to get to the stomach. On swallowing food, if a single grain of rice goes down the wrong pipe; gets stuck in the trachea, the person chokes, and keeps on resisting it until it is expelled. The involuntarily uncontrollable action of the epiglottis is achieved when it closes the trachea during swallowing.

It is also perceptible that there is a ring of muscle at the opening of the stomach, known as a sphincter, which closes the stomach after food enters it so that stomach acidic contents will be prevented from returning upwards into the oesophagus. Otherwise, sphincter disorders can cause bad breath, technically called halitosis.

Moreover, the way that food wastes are naturally and comfortably expelled from the body is observable. After getting rid of food wastes, man feels relieved; likewise, in the case of the excess of liquids that surpassed the amount held in the bowels and the bladder, he needs to expel them.

The more science advances and studies undertaken, the more Allah's blessings are. There are still more signs to be discovered remained within the human body, as per Allah’s saying: ‘And in yourselves too, do you not see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

Allah calls people to explore their own selves before studying the surrounding signs in the heavens and the earth; for their capabilities might fall short of seeing all far-fetched signs, but their own selves are the closest and strongest evidence they can witness.

As Allah says, ‘Have they not thought about their own selves?...’ (*ar-Rum:* 8) He asks people to reflect on their own selves, paying no attention to the arguments and debates of the people. On debating with people, the person exhibits obstinacy and a desire to win even by use of falsehood. On the contrary, when man thinks alone and reflects on himself without any obstinacy, intervention, timidity of being defeated in a discussion or desiring for acquiring status, then, he is able to reach the truth.

Hence, The Quran tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Say [Prophet], “I advise you to do one thing only…”’ (*Saba’:* 46). Those sceptics, who are wondering about the veracity of the Messenger, accusing him of lies, fabrications and sorcery, were asked to do one thing: ‘Stand before Allah, in pairs or singly’. They were asked to bear witness, whether in pairs or alone, each one by himself, as Allah says, ‘And think: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet]— he is only warning you before severe suffering arrives’ (*Saba’:* 46).

Thus, the quest for the truth is not established by means of public debate, but rather by the person’s sole reflection on the matter, or his contemplation with a peer. However, in public discussions, the soul is stirred with the desire for success and victory; so the wise person advises the debating party to ‘think the matter over by himself’ to be unaffectedly closer to objectivity and to the truth.

After Allah commands people to contemplate within themselves, He, then, directs them to reflect on the surrounding signs in the heavens and the earth: ‘… Allah did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them without a serious purpose and an appointed time…’ (*ar-Rum:* 8). However, there is another verse that encourages people to reflect first on the heavens and the earth before their own selves: 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind…' (*Ghafir:* 57).

The person might die before he is born, after several years or even after a hundred; however, all signs in the heavens and the earth remain unchangingly as first created and still fulfil their roles unmistakably without requiring any maintenance or vacation. Indeed, they are greater and more magnificent than the creation of mankind.

Consequently, there are signs within human's bodies and others in the heavens and the earth; but which of them are greater? It is said that since the heavens and the earth are greater than the creation of mankind, their signs must be stronger. If the person is not convinced by them, then he can switch to reflect on the signs in his own self. The scholars who study the two points of views of the negotiation (strong and weak) assume that they depend upon the Benefactor and the beneficial. When Allah, the Benefactor gives a parable, He uses the greater one; if the person cannot understand it, He *the Exalted* gives me a lesser one, whereas, the beneficial is the human being who moves from the lesser signs to the greater ones.

Allah *Glorified is He* by: '… And everything between them' refers to the planets and stars in the sky. In the past, many great scholars, to simplify religious facts to the people, alleged that the seven planets denoted the seven heavens. However, the reality is that these seven planets are all within the Nearest Heaven of this world, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '… We have made the nearest one beautifully illuminated and secure…' (*Fussilat:* 12).

What a small part of the sky that embraces the seen celestial bodies! Do you know how many seconds it takes light to reach you from the sun or from the moon? The sun is eight light minutes far from the earth, whereas the Andromeda Galaxy is approximately two-and-half-million light years.

To determine this enormous distance, multiply one million years by 365 days, then by 24 hours, then by 60 minutes, then by 60 seconds and finally by 300,000 kilometres.

People only stopped alleging that the seven planets [of the ancient Ptolemaic geocentric system] denoted the seven heavens, as scientists discovered one more planet orbiting the sun, followed by another one discovered after a few more years. Moreover, when man landed on the moon, the sophists quickly assumed, ‘The Quran previously predicted this, as Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Jinn and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so: you will not pass without Our authority’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33).

They alleged that the ‘authority’ refers to that of the science which has allowed them to reach the surface of the moon. This is an eccentric allegation uttered by such great scholars, for the moon does not denote the sky; it is merely a part of it, such as ‘New Cairo’ that is a suburb of Cairo! Furthermore, if ‘authority’ here means the authority of science, then this makes no sense in relation to the directly following verse: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35).

The reason for this nonsense is the mixing of religious science with a secular one. The problem comes from religious scholars trying to comment on things they do not know. The secular science is meant to prove to the people the Greatness and the Might of Allah, the Creator; rather than deriving legitimate rulings.

Those people denied the theory that the earth is spherical and that it orbits the sun, and supposed that the scientists, though disbelievers, had somehow obtained knowledge of the unseen by developing ways to measure the earth’s movement and to predict solar and lunar eclipses with complete accuracy.

As previously mentioned, such things are not truly from the absolute unseen realm; but rather, they are examples of the unobserved matters for which Allah has given us clues to discover them. Scientists came to this knowledge by researching and studying physical phenomena; this is highlighted in Allah’s saying, ‘We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth…’ (*Fussilat:* 53).

This is also one of the verses where the signs of the heavens and the earth are aforementioned prior to the proofs within the human being. Accordingly, science is based on facts and studies, rather than on religion. Religion came to show people their obligations and prohibitions and left science to those who are able to understand it.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Without a serious purpose’ because the heavens, the earth, and the celestial bodies in between all move in a fixed and unchanging orderly system. The movement of the celestial bodies follows a precise order in perfect harmony.

The sun never declines to rise upon certain people because it follows a firm and fixed subjecting law. As long as these signs were perfectly and steadily created, they can be used to determine man’s calculations and to adjust his time according to them, such as a clock which would adjust the time only if it was properly ordered in itself.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5). This means that they are created with precision because He *the Exalted* has created them according to a precise calculation in order that they could be used as tools for calculation, as He says, ‘We have determined phases for the moon until finally it becomes like an old date-stalk. The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day: each floats in [its own] orbit.’ (*Ya Sin:* 39-40)

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… Determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time…’ (*Yunus:* 5). Of course, the moon could not be used to count years and measure time except it has been created according to a precise calculation.

Despite the fact that Allah has created the universe in a stable form for a serious purpose, yet this stable role will not function the same forever; for Allah has created it in this stable form to last for a set amount of time, as Allah says, ‘… Allah did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them without a serious purpose and an appointed time…’ (*ar-Rum:* 8). Once the appointed time runs out, the sun will be shrouded in darkness, the stars will be dimmed and the earth and the heavens will be changed beyond recognition. Thus, these once-stable signs will not only discontinue the same functions, but will also be utterly wiped from existence.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘… Yet many people deny that they will meet their Lord’ (*ar-Rum:* 8). In recurrent debates with the communists, they were opposed that they have severely punished and tortured their capitalist and feudalist opponents; they replied that those opponents deserved this because they had oppressed, and corrupted society! Hence, their thesis that there is no reckoning after death is refuted; though they have revenged themselves, but what about those who preceded their time and died without ever getting the punishment they deserved? Would it not be just for the communists to acknowledge the existence of the Day of Reckoning where people will be gathered together and punished for what they previously did?

This is a proof on the inevitability of the Resurrection; if someone does not get his deserved punishment in this world, he will be penalised in the hereafter. Thereby, the principle of reward and punishment is established in everything because if the person does whatever he wishes in this world and spreads corruption on earth without being punished, he will thus unfairly be the winner if there is no other world where he is reprimanded.

Hence, the belief in both the hereafter and the meeting with Allah is a logical inevitability, yet many people deny this: '… Yet many people deny that they will meet their Lord' (*ar-Rum:* 8).

Thus, the believer should be sure of the certainty of this meeting because the worldly laws only combat apparent evil, whereas the hidden one is only known and punished by Allah, so there should be another day to punish the unknown evildoers.

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَـٰقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ كَانُوٓا۟ أَشَدَّ
مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارُوا۟ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَعَمَرُوهَآ أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا عَمَرُوهَا وَجَآءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم
بِٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتِ ۖ فَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَـٰكِن كَانُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

Have they not travelled through the land and seen how their predecessors met their end? They were mightier than them: they cultivated the earth more and built more upon it. Their own messengers also came to them with clear signs: God did not wrong them; they wronged themselves [9] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 9)

This verse asks how the disbelievers deny meeting Allah, while they have travelled and seen contemplatively what happened to those deniers of previous nations. They have not taken heed of what happened in this world, in addition to what will happen in the Hereafter.

As the punishment afflicted the deniers in this world is witnessed and believed by other nations, it is also a must to believe what Allah tells about the hereafter. If someone wants to find out an unknown matter, he should utilise what he knows to disclose it. So, people should travel, reflect on what happened to those who denied the truth and pay attention to what Allah did to them.

To ‘travel’ means to go from one place to another: ‘Have they not travelled through the land …’ (*ar-Rum:* 9)? The preposition used is ‘through’, which literally means ‘in’, but do we travel in the earth, or on it? This is an example of the precise rhetorical style and miraculous nature of the Quran. Travelling seems to be on the earth, but in reality it is in it, as Allah says: ‘… Travel safely in this land by night or by day’ (*Saba’:* 18). The earth is not merely the terrestrial surface including the dry land and the aquatic areas, upon which people dwell, but rather, it also includes the atmosphere that surrounds it. Hence, the atmosphere is part of the earth because it is essential for the existence of life on it; thus, travelling in reality is not on earth but through it.

Islam considers travelling in the earth in two ways; tourism for reflection and other for trade. The former allows the person to reflect upon the signs in the earth as he passes by them. For example, the Arabian Peninsula is a mountainous desert where vegetation is rare, on the contrary to Spain the green meadows of which spread everywhere so that it the land is hardly seen from greeneries.

However, both places embrace a different kind of bliss because Allah, the Creator distributes good things over the universe. Though the inhabitants of this dry and arid land could barely live, yet they were patient so Allah granted them blessing from beneath the earth, and they became able to supply the greatest and most advanced powers on earth with indispensable fuel. When the Arabs cut fuel off in 1973, they panicked, and were about to die from cold.

When a person travels and reflects upon the signs of earth, he finds that it is like a watermelon; if you cut it into pieces lengthwise, each piece will be equal to the other. Similarly, Allah equally endows various places on earth with all kinds of goodness so that the total of good things in any place in the earth will be equal to that of another.

The ignored and so-called lifeless mountains are now stores of wealth and goodness so that all people have turned to live nearby and get benefit from them. For example, the urban rebirth that is taking place in Sinai is highly noticeable.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* distributes goodness equally over the world’s countries, such as He endows people with different talents so that they would remain connected by common needs to each other and that they would not feel dispensable for one another. This highlights a significant point of faith that all mankind are Allah’s servants and creatures and all lands are His property; and that Allah has no son or a family relationship with any of His creatures, so they are all equal. As previously said; people should not be resentful or jealous of a wealthy person because the blessings he has been given will definitely benefit you in the end.

Allah’s saying: ‘Their predecessors’ (*ar-Rum:* 9) refers to the nations who denied their Messengers. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* states the consequences suffered by these deniers: ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow and some We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) Allah *Glorified is He* says to the disbelievers of Quraysh: ‘You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138)

Thus, when a person travels to engage in a trade, he sees the dwellings of Saleh and the other townships that were destroyed but left traces that can still be witnessed by any person. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of `Ad, of Iram [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land?’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-8) Allah tells that they dwelt amongst sand dunes, ‘and Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excesses in their lands, and spread corruption there: your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them.’ (*al-Fajr:* 9-13)

All those people possessed civilizations which still amaze the most advanced present peoples who visit their traces and seek out their secrets and wonders. However, those previous civilizations could not protect themselves from destruction, or fend off Allah's torment once it came to them; accordingly, this is a lesson to be learned from them.

Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Have they not travelled through the land and seen how their predecessors met their end?…' (*ar-Rum:* 9) as if He tells the disbelievers of Quraysh that they are the humblest among other nations; they have no power, no wealth, no civilisation and no architectural constructions. Thus, it is easy for Allah to simply punish them as He previously did with those who were more powerful, but for their being secured by Allah's promise: 'But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness' (*al-Anfal:* 33).

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…They were mightier than them: they cultivated the earth more and built more upon it…' (*ar-Rum:* 9). The previously truth-denying nations who were illustratively punished by Allah were stronger, their lands were more fertile and they left a strong impact on the earth so that they farmed and built upon it, whereas the disbelievers of Quraysh dwell in a barren valley devoid of crops. The word 'farming' or 'ploughing' can be used in Arabic to mean 'crops', as in Allah's words: 'Destroying crops and livestock' (*al-Baqara:* 205).

It is noticed that land does not produce good crops unless it is farmed and turned over so that air can permeate the soil and help it to fulfil its purpose in the best way. If the plot is simply left as it is, without ploughing the compact soil, it will prevent the fragile shoots from pushing through the earth, especially in the first stages of germination.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says of plants: 'Consider the seeds you sow in the ground, is it you who make them grow or Us?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64) In the story of the cow and the Israelites, when they were reluctant to slaughter it and asked for further details about it, Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: '… He replied, "It is a perfect and unblemished cow, not trained to till the earth or water the fields" …' (*al-Baqara:* 71).

It is a free-range cow that is difficult to be led, not used for ploughing, tilling, or irrigating the land. The perfect farmer should till and turn the soil before sowing it, and then leave it for a while so that air and sunlight can infuse it. This revitalises and renews the soil, as they say: ‘Before you sow what you need, you should get rid of what you do not need’. So, these peoples had farms and crops, which they enjoyed and gained much good things.

Afterwards, Allah says, ‘And (they) built more upon it’; i.e. they built upon it with the capabilities and talents granted by Allah and gained from the earth its goodness, as Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘… He is Who brought you into being from the earth and made you inhabit it…’ (*Hud:* 61).

Thus, ‘building up the earth’ can take the form of any manifestation of development and life; whether farming and cultivation, construction, digging rivers and canals, building roads or any other sign that brings benefit to people. There is a distinction between farming and cultivation; the former means to sow something and then reap it all at once, such as wheat, whereas, cultivation means to plant something which then continues to provide people with produce for a long time; its yield being constantly renewed such as the fruit orchards. Farming is achieved by planting seeds, whilst cultivation is a matter of tending to plants that have already been planted beforehand.

Allah *the Exalted* then says, ‘…Their own messengers also came to them with clear signs…’ (*ar-Rum:* 9). After Allah has given people the constituents of life and material means and after they reaped the fruits of this, He did not leave them to the material life alone, but also, He has given them the means to ethics and religion. Thus, Allah sent them the messengers ‘with clear signs’; i.e. with clear proofs indicating the veracity of these messengers and their revealed messages which are so-called ‘miracles’.

As previously mentioned, the Arabic word *ayat* has three meanings; it either refers to the signs of the universe showing the Omnipotent Power of Allah such as the sun and the moon; the miracles proving that the messengers are truly sent by Allah or the verses of the Quran revealing Allah’s ordinance and guidance. All these matters are clear and evident.

Allah then says, ‘…Allah did not wrong them; they wronged themselves’ (*ar-Rum:* 9). Indeed, Allah did not wrong them because He firstly gave them all constituents of life and the material needs and then gave them the constituents of the spiritual life and the moral needs. Afterwards, if they still strayed from Allah's guidance, they only wronged themselves.

Furthermore, Allah does not undeniably wrong anyone. A person may wrong another person because he resents him and wants to gain what he has. The oppressor usurps the rights of the oppressed who has no power to protect them; so how could we imagine that Allah *Glorified is He* might wrong anyone, while He owns everything and has no need of anything? Hence, Allah *the Almighty* did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves as they deviated from His path and guidance.

ثُمَّ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسَٰٓـُٔوا۟ ٱلسُّوٓأَىٰٓ أَن كَذَّبُوا۟
بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَكَانُوا۟ بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ١٠

Later the evildoers met a terrible end for rejecting
and [repeatedly] mocking God's revelations [10]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 10)

Evildoing is the opposite of benevolence. As aforementioned, benevolence is to leave good things as they are, or make them better. For example, if there is a well from which people drink; a person might block it or pollute its water, whereas another might build a water catchment around it or install equipment to extract the water easily. The latter is benevolent while the former is an evildoer, because if the person cannot do good, he should at least refrain from doing evil and leave things as they are.

If people left the universe created by Allah *the Almighty* intact in a good state, it would remain good as is. Corruption only arises as a result of human interference, so Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption in the land", they say, "We are only putting things right", but really they are causing corruption, though they do not realise it.' (*al-Baqara:* 11-12)

Thus, human beings should get benefit from those good phenomena of the universe. For example, when I travelled to Mecca with a company in 1950, and as they were thirsty, they waited for the man who brings water for payment. They put the water in a large container and whenever they made ablutions, each of them only used a single jug of water from the container for ablutions because they had to pay for the water. However, nowadays, people are not even sufficed by a whole bucket of water, making their ablutions from a running tap. Using water rationally is also a matter of health, and of preventing the leftover water from damaging buildings and agricultural land. Hence, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warned people against wasting water, even if they are beside a running river.(1)

Accordingly, the meaning of 'the evildoers' is those who corrupted something good, or created a new means to corruption. Logically, their end will be the same as their deed, as Allah says, 'Later the evildoers met a terrible end…' (*ar-Rum:* 10).

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* says, '…For rejecting and [repeatedly] mocking Allah's revelations' (*ar-Rum:* 10). Thus, the matter is not limited to denying the revelations, but extended to derision as well. The deviant person has a strange attitude when he mocks other virtuous people; this resembles the failing student who often mocks the hard-working one.

The great hope of the failing person is that the hard worker comes to a standstill, as well as the hope of the wrongdoer is to turn the virtuous to be deviant like him. This is the cause to their making sarcastic remarks to others, as the Quran says, 'The wicked used to laugh at the believers; they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own people, and say, when they saw them, "These people are misguided."' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-32)

However, the wicked should not be hasty and should wait for the final reward of the believers who will have their places in paradise, and sit on their couches and thrones, as Allah says, 'So today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36)

This question mentioned in the verse is a rhetorical one addressed to the believers who bore the scorn and derision in this world, asking them whether Allah's punishment fits the crime done by the disbelievers to them.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Majah on the authority of `Amr ibn Al-`As*

So, the philosophy of derision refers to the fact that the wicked people are unable to urge themselves to be virtuous, teased by virtuous people and hurt to see them blessed with the magnificence of good conduct and obedience, whereas they are bogged down in sin. Hence, they mock virtuous people, hoping that they will abandon their virtue and obedience.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

ٱللَّهُ يَبۡدَؤُاْ ٱلۡخَلۡقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُۥ ثُمَّ إِلَيۡهِ تُرۡجَعُونَ ⑪

God brings creation into being; in the end He will reproduce it and it is to Him you will be recalled [11]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 11)

Although Allah *Glorified is He* has finished the creation in its primary state first, He still brings creation into being and He remains its Creator. As long as Allah created it in the first instance, He is also Who will bring in forth anew: 'Allah brings creation into being; in the end, He will reproduce it…' (*ar-Rum:* 11).

As for human understanding, it is clear that remaking something is easier than creating it for the first time because the first time, it is made from nothing, whereas, remaking things is done from something that already exists, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'He is the One who originates creation and will do it again— this is even easier for Him…' (*ar-Rum:* 27). Allah explains that originating creation is easier according to human's standards and understanding, whereas, in reality, the concept of easy and easier is not applicable to Allah because He *the Almighty* does not exert effort to create things, but rather, he only says 'Be!' and it is. He *the Exalted* speaks to humans according to the level of their understanding.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* originates and recreates, such as crops which are harvested and their seeds will be replanted in the next year. Hence, crops are in a regular cycle of creation and renewal.

As previously illustrated, the implanted flower is fresh, sweet-scented, and brilliantly coloured. However, when it is cut, it dries up because its stored water evaporates, its colour and fragrance disperse into the air and then its remnant disintegrates into dust. Recurrently, when a new flower is planted, it takes the water, colour, and fragrance from the surrounding environment.

In this way, a life cycle begins and another ends because the means for sustaining daily life that Allah has originated in the beginning are the same that exist today, without any change. The amount of water found nowadays is the same as it was when Allah originated it. For example, if someone drinks twenty tons of water in the course of his life; of course, he is not carrying all this water now. Definitely, it has left and evaporated from his body as; sweat, urine, mucus, earwax etc. and has begun a new cycle.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says, '… And it is to Him you will be returned' (*ar-Rum:* 11). Allah is speaking about creation, but then the discourse moved from the third person singular (creation) to the second person plural (you). All creation unanimously agrees that they are all originated and recreated by Allah. Nevertheless, they differ in the manner in which they respond to Allah's Message; there are believers, disbelievers, obedient, disobedient and those who are in the middle. Upon returning to Allah, this agreement will be split up into two different paths; that of the felicitous, and the other of the wretched. Thus, Allah uses the singular form in speaking of origination and recreation and changes to the plural form in speaking of returning to Him in different ways.

Successively, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ يُبْلِسُ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

On the Day the Hour arrives, the guilty will despair [12] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 12)

'… The guilty will despair' (*ar-Rum:* 12) means that they will be silent as the person who has no further argument to suggest, unknowing what to say and finding no one to defend him, even his leaders and followers, who will have already begun their own torment. Therefore, he will have no hope of being saved, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He will be at the forefront of his people on the Day of Resurrection…' (*Hud:* 98). For that reason, Satan is named 'Iblis', taken from the Arabic root word *balas*: to despair because he despairs of Allah's Mercy.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* says, 'So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, We opened the gates to everything for them.

Then, as they revelled in what they had been given, We struck them suddenly and they were dumbfounded.' (*al-An'am:* 44) This means that when they forgot Allah's guidance, He punished them for this in this world. Thus, Allah firstly loosened the reins for them and gave them abundant worldly delights and allures, to have the severest punishment and to suffer the steep fall.

Similarly, the person would not take vengeance of his enemy when he is already down, but rather, he should first be raised up to administer the heaviest punishment. If Allah punished them at a time when they were already undergoing hardships and poverty, there would not be great difference between them; for poverty is close enough to torment.

Furthermore, it is noticed in Allah's saying: 'We opened… for them' that He *the Almighty* uses the Arabic preposition *`ala* (translated as: 'for them') to express that the opening was not good for them. However, the preposition *`ala* refers in Arabic to 'against', meaning that the opening is contrary to their interest, such as in scoring points; 'against' means failure.

وَلَمۡ يَكُن لَّهُم مِّن شُرَكَآئِهِمۡ شُفَعَٰٓؤُاْ وَكَانُواْ بِشُرَكَآئِهِمۡ كَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

And they will have no intercessors among those partners
they ascribed to God – they will deny these partners [13]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 13)

Indeed, none of their 'partners to Allah' will intercede for them because the partners disassociate themselves from them, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'When those who have been followed disown their followers, when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them are severed.' (*al-Baqara:* 166)

Likewise, those followers will say, 'The disbelievers will say, "Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misled us and we shall trample them underfoot, so that they may be among the lowest of the low."' (*Fussilat:* 29)

The subject and object relationship is just like two bad students who wasted their time all year long in playing, distracted one another from their studies and encouraged each other to loiter around in the streets until the exam came and the bitter truth surprised them both. So, each of them cursed and reviled the other blaming each other for what happened.

When things become serious, all weak ties that bound the people of falsehood in this world will be severed, as Allah says, '… They will deny these partners' (*ar-Rum:* 13). This will be done, since all the truth will have been revealed and the falseness and error of the wrongdoer will have become manifest.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَفَرَّقُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

When the Hour arrives, on that Day people will be separated [14] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 14)

This means that those wrongdoers who grouped together in this world in the cause of evil and misguidance will be separated on the Day of Resurrection and will become enemies and adversaries after having been companions. The believers will be in a distinctive place far from the disbelievers; even the sinful believers who offered only the slightest good deeds will not be abandoned by other believers, but rather, they will intercede for them and bring them into their companionship.

The phrase 'On that Day' refers to the phrase 'When the Hour arrives' (*ar-Rum:* 14), so the meaning is 'when the Last Hour arrives they will be separated.'

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ فَهُمْ فِى رَوْضَةٍ يُحْبَرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

Those who believed and did good deeds will delight in a Garden [15] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 15)

As long as people will be separated on the Day of Resurrection, there will be two sections; that of the believers and the other of the disbelievers. Therefore, this verse shows us the section of the believers and their reward in the Hereafter. A garden is a place filled with greenery, rivers, trees, and flowers; the matter which represents something rare for the Arabs because they lived in the desert where gardens and pastures were few.

Consequently, gardens and orchards are wondrous things and tremendous blessings for them. 'Will delight' refers to the joy felt on having a blessing. This is the reward of the believers in the Hereafter; the coming verse tackles the status of the disbelievers.

Allah *the Exalted* says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَكَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَلِقَآيِٕ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ فِي ٱلۡعَذَابِ مُحۡضَرُونَ ١٦

While those who disbelieved and denied Our messages and the meeting of the Hereafter will be brought for punishment [16] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 16)

The phrase 'Will be brought' is passive, implying that someone is given over by another one else. This is only said in the case of an evildoer who is being convicted and found guilty; or else, he would have come of his own accord. This is a fearful expression of bad connotation because if someone is brought by another has only a bad reference. This is the status of the disbelievers and the deniers of the Day of Resurrection; the angels will drive them to attend the Hereafter unwillingly.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَسُبۡحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ حِينَ تُمۡسُونَ وَحِينَ تُصۡبِحُونَ ١٧

So celebrate God's glory in the evening, in the morning [17] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 17)

Hereby, the greatness of faith and Allah's love for His creatures are manifested, as He calls them to glorify Him at all hours of the day and the night. Allah *the Exalted* asks His servants to believe in Him because He loves them and wills to abundantly grant them His blessings. Allah's attributes of Perfection imply that He is utterly free of need of them, where the faith of the believer does not increase His kingdom nor does the disbelief decrease His kingdom.

Thus, Allah kindly treats and honours His creatures and servants, so He calls them to glorify Him. As previously illustrated; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection, if someone wanted to meet a highly ranked person, he should bear several appalling hardships during this meeting. First, he needs permission to meet the ranked person, then the time and the date that should be set, the duration, and the purpose of the meeting and perhaps he should even have to choose the exact words to be said. Additionally, the ranked person would end the meeting whenever he wants, rather than the person needing the meeting.

This is the case, if someone wants to meet another human being, so what about if he wants to meet Allah, the Creator (in prayer)? It is enough that He invites the people to His presence, makes this an absolutely obligatory request, seeks them before they seek Him and remembers them before they remember Him, not only once a day, but five times. If people answer His call, He showers them with His Mercy, blessings and manifestations. If a product is maintained five times a day by its producer, it will never be affected.

Additionally, the Lord leaves all details of this meeting up to the human being; he is free to choose the time, the place, the subject and the duration of the meeting, if the person wants to extend the duration, the Lord does not end it until the servant does. Therefore, the people of insight, who know Allah's Power and Generosity, and who know the importance of seeking His refuge, say:

It is enough honour as a subservient creature
Whose Lord welcomes without appointment:
Despite His Holiness and Magnificent nature
I can meet Him however and wherever I want.

Slavery is always disliked by human beings because being submissive to another human is a demeaning and humiliating relationship where the master exploits the resources of his slave. However, slavery or submissiveness to Allah is the pinnacle of honour because the human being, thus, benefits from the good of his Lord. Therefore, Allah honoured Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by ascribing this slavery to him (Messenger Muhammad), as He says, 'Limitless in His Glory is He who transported His servant…' (*al-Isra':* 1).

Thus, Allah's words: 'So, Glorify Allah…' are, in itself, worship and a glorification of Allah, as they absolve Allah from the allusion that anything could ever be like Him. So, the people of insight say: 'Whatever came to mind, Allah is other than that', because: '…There is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Allah *the Exalted* is glorified in His Essence, Attributes, and Actions; however, if there is a shared attribute between Allah and the creation, it should be understood in the light of this verse: '… There is nothing like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Scrutinising the root of the Arabic verb *sabbaha* (glorify) in the Quran, it is found in the beginning of the chapters of *al-Is*ra`: 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night…' (*al-Isra': 1*), *al-Hadid*: 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah…' (*al-Hadid: 1*), and *al-Jumu`a*: 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a: 1*).

Thus, Allah has been glorified in pre-eternity before He created anyone to glorify Him. Hence, as glorification is first confirmed for Allah and then the heavens and the earth have glorified Him unceasingly until now, so mankind should not deviate from this universal norm, but rather, you should also glorify Him, as the Quran says: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*' (*al-A'la: 1*).

Likewise, everything in existence glorifies Him, as Allah says: '… There is not a single thing that does not glorify His praise, though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra': 44*). However, some scholars have tried to explain the glorification of the inanimate objects, which cannot be heard or felt, that it is simply a matter of their being signs of Allah. Refuting this thesis, if the glorification of the inanimate objects can be explained, thus, it is understood, but Allah *the Almighty* says: '… Though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra': 44*). This means that as long as Allah says that they glorify Him, thus, they indeed glorify Him incomprehensibly. Likewise, Allah has given us examples of ostensibly mute things glorifying Him; such as the mountains which glorified Him along with Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. As Allah says, '…You mountains, echo Allah's praises together with him, and you birds, too...' (*Saba': 10*). Moreover, Allah confirms that the ant and the hoopoe bird spoke, as well as He says about all creation in general: '… Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification…' (*an-Nur: 41*).

Subsequently, everything in existence glorifies Allah but in its distinctive language. If someone does not know French, for example, he would not understand it; although, it is a spoken language, with letters and sounds, and the person can hear it as he hears his own language.

The glorification of Allah is used to absolve Allah from any likeness to mankind. As Allah says, 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night…' (*al-Isra': 1*). This means that Allah is absolved from any likeness to mankind and from the laws that govern them, so people should not be astonished how Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could have gone from Mecca to Jerusalem, then to the heavens and return back again in a single night.

With respect to the laws governing human beings, it would be difficult to understand such a thing. This was the case with the disbelievers of Mecca, when they doubted the Messenger and said, ‘How could you claim to have gotten there in a single night, while we hardly get there on our camels within a month’.(1) They judged the matter and measured the distances according to their own standards, thus, they deemed this impossible and denied it.

As a people of rhetorical skills, if they had reflected on the verse: ‘Glory to Him who made His servant travel…’ (*al-Isra’:* 1), they would have realised that the Night Journey was not a result of Muhammad’s power, but rather, it refers to Allah, Who ‘made His servant travel’. So, Muhammad’s human nature played no part in this matter, but rather, he was taken up by the power of Allah who raised him.

Allah is not restricted by the laws of time and space that govern human beings. Making this matter easier to be grasped, distance is covered in time that is proportionate to the means of transportation; the walking traveller is not like the one who rides an animal or the one who travels by car, plane, or rocket ship and so on.

If human law states that as power increases, time decreases; yet, Allah’s Power is not the same where there is no time at all in this equation. But why did Allah mention time here, specifically that it occurred over one night? This is because the journey was not simply a matter of going and coming back, but rather, it was full of many incidents. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was shown many things and spoke with many prophets. These actions of the Messenger that took the time; yet, as for the departure and arrival, they took no time at all.

When this verse was revealed, people knew that plants were composed of pairs, because they used to pollinate palm trees; and they knew the same about human beings because they married and reared children; and they knew it about animals too – and this was the limit of mankind's knowledge of this dual polarity.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Hisham in his Sira*

But the verse did not stop there, but rather added: 'and in that of which [as yet] they have no knowledge' because the future would reveal to them other things which share this polarity; and we now know that this phenomena exists in electricity, for example, where there are positive and negative charges, and in atoms where there are protons and electrons, and so on.

So when you hear expressions of glorification in the Quran, be aware that you are about to encounter something unique, completely unlike the actions of human beings, and not subject to the laws that govern you.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَهُ ٱلۡحَمۡدُ فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَعَشِيّٗا وَحِينَ تُظۡهِرُونَ ١٨

Praise is due to Him in the heavens and the earth – in the late afternoon, and at midday [18] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 18)

Notice that His statement '…unto Him is due all praise in the heavens and on earth…' (*ar-Rum:* 18) comes between mention of specific times, so that 'when you enter upon the evening hours, and when you rise at morn' (*ar-Rum:* 17) is on one side of it, and '…in the afternoon as well, and when you enter upon the hour of noon' (*ar-Rum:* 18) is on the other, despite the fact that they are all times of the day and night. Why is this? They say it is because Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make us feel that praise is due to Him, and that we should praise Him for His being utterly without comparison because it is in our own best interests to do so, and we will gain the fruits of this glorification. If Allah wants good for you, there is no being like Him who could prevent Him from giving it to you, and He alone possesses the magnificence that protects you from anyone else trying to raise themselves above you, and to Him alone you submit and prostrate, and you bow down in prostration to none besides Him. Your prostration before your Lord suffices you of the need to prostrate to anyone else, as the poet said,

The one prostration that you assent to make

Saves you from thousands of other prostrations

So it is in your best interest that Allah be the only One Who is without equal, and the Strong next to whom there is no stronger, and the Proud by right, whose pride protects the weak from the pride of those who are stronger than them. You should praise Allah, who bade us worship Him by prostrating to Him alone, and submitting to Him alone because by this He saved you from the humiliation of having to prostrate yourself before all those who are stronger than you, and this is a sign of His greatness and the mercy He shows His creatures, and therefore it is right that He be praised for it.

So we say in our dialect, 'The one who does not have a guardian needs to go and get one,' because he cannot live an honourable life unless he has someone to protect him and defend him; likewise, you cannot have any honour except by your slavehood to Allah.

In Allah's eyes, all of mankind are equal, for He has no son or relative from amongst His servants, and He has no influences that might make Him prefer one over another, and we all share Allah. And so He says: 'no consort has He ever taken unto Himself, nor a son!' (*al-Jinn:* 3) That is, nothing can influence Him.

After mentioning glorification, He says '…unto Him is due all praise…' (*ar-Rum:* 18) because glorification should be followed by praise, so one says, 'Glory be to Allah, and praise be to Allah', that is, praise be to Allah that I am one of those who glorify Him.

If we reflect on the times in which Allah tells us to glorify Him, namely evening, morning, midday and afternoon (that is between mid-afternoon and sunset), we find that they are general times that always exist upon Allah's earth; so which morning is meant and which afternoon? Is it my morning, or the morning of others, my afternoon, or the afternoon of others somewhere else on earth?

If we reflect on the cycle of time, we will find that in every moment it is afternoon somewhere, and morning somewhere, and evening somewhere, and midday somewhere, this means that Allah is glorified and worshipped in every moment of time that passes.

In light of this, we can understand the saying of the Prophet *peace be upon him*: Allah stretches out His hand at night so the sinner of the day can repent, and

He stretches out His hand in the day so the sinner of the night can repent.’(1) The earth is never without night or day, and this means that Allah’s hand is always outstretched, and never withdrawn: ‘Nay, but wide are His hands stretched out…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 64).

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يُخْرِجُ ٱلْحَىَّ مِنَ ٱلْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ ٱلْمَيِّتَ مِنَ ٱلْحَىِّ
وَيُحْىِ ٱلْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

He brings the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living. He gives life to the earth after death, and you will be brought out in the same way [19] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 19)

Firstly, what has occasioned this mention of the Resurrection, and of bringing forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living, after mention was just made of the glorification and praise of Allah? They say it is because He spoke about morning and evening which both resemble life and death. In the evening, darkness falls, and people settle down and sleep, so it is a time of stillness, calm, and sleep, which is an image of death; that is why we call it the ‘lesser death.’ Morning, however, is a time of movement, and work, and the seeking of a living, and so it is full of life; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and made the night [its] cloak. [10] And made the day [a symbol of] life [11]’ (*an-Naba’:* 10-11).

Death and the Resurrection are represented by sleep and waking, as the saying goes, ‘You will die just as you sleep, and you will be resurrected just as you wake.’

As we have seen these two states, and we have witnessed sleeping and waking for ourselves, we should take them as a sign of the Resurrection that will come after death; and if the Quran informs us of this, we should believe it, and let what we see be evidence for us of what we do not see; and this is what the verse tells us: ‘He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive… (*ar-Rum:* 19).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash‘ari Allah be pleased with him*

The words ‘alive’ and ‘dead’ here refer to our understanding, and our knowledge of how things are, for in reality everything in existence has its own life, and no true death exists except in the Hereafter, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] Self…’ (*al-Qasas:* 88). To ‘perish’ is the opposite of to live, as is borne out by Allah’s words: ‘…that he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth…’ (*al-Anfal:* 42).

Since everything will perish save Allah, this means that everything must be alive, but with a life that is specially its own. I remember when they taught us how magnetism works, and how to magnetise a piece of iron by rubbing it in one direction against another piece that was magnetised, and indeed we saw how the iron would become magnetised itself.

You could then attract other pieces of metal to it: is this not a sign of life? There is movement in these objects we believe to be inanimate and lifeless, and they react to one another, and within them are atoms which move in a fixed way, governed by their own laws.

So we say that everything in existence has its own special kind of life, even if we ourselves are unaware of it because we perceive that life only exists in those things we consider as living beings, whilst in reality there is life in everything; if you do not understand the nature of the life of these things, that is something else.

And so Prophet Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* heard the speech of the ant, and how she understood, and stood as a sentry for her colony, and understood the movement of the army and what would happen if they stood in its way, and so warned her colony to return home, and how she was wise and fair in her words: ‘…“lest Solomon (Sulaiman) and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware!”…’ (*an-Naml:* 18) She knew that if the army crushed the ants, it would be unintentional on their part, and when Solomon (Sulaiman) *peace be upon him* heard this he became aware of how Allah has blessed him by giving him knowledge that no other man possessed, and so he said: ‘…“O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Thine with which You have graced me and my parents”…’ (*an-Naml:* 19).

So ‘He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead…’ (*ar-Rum:* 19) refers to our customary understanding of life and death. Some say that it means that Allah brings eggs out of chickens, and chickens from eggs, but this does not make sense because does every egg necessarily produce a chicken? No, because it should be a fertilised egg. So do not narrow your understanding down just to the example of chickens and eggs, but rather say that He brings the living forth from the dead in everything that exists.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says ‘…and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive…’ (*ar-Rum:* 19). Elsewhere in the Quran He says: ‘…bringing forth the living out of that which is dead, and He is the One who brings forth the dead out of that which is alive…’ (*al-An‘am:* 95). Here, He used the active participle *mukhrij* ‘The One Who brings forth’ instead of using the present tense verb.

Some of those who are doubtful about the rhetorical style of the Quran have objected, saying, ‘If one of these is eloquent, the other must not be.’ This is a natural result of their lack of understanding of the language of the Quran because they do not understand Arabic well enough to appreciate Allah’s speech.

About this matter, we say, ‘the one speaking here is the Lord, who gives every word its proper due, and places every word in its proper place, where no other word would do.’

When Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘…He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead…’ (*al-An‘am:* 95) who does this benefit? It benefits us because people naturally love life, and some of them might be proud of it, and become deluded in their pride, as our Lord says: ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening [6] Whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient [7]” (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7).

And so our Lord reminds them of the opposite, saying, just as I bring the living forth from the dead, so I bring the dead forth from the living too, so be aware of this, and be careful not to be proud or arrogant, and understand that life is a gift for you from your Lord, which He can take away at any time.

Allah *Glorified is He* expresses this reality either by using the present tense verb ‘(He) brings forth’, which implies continuity and renewal, or by using the active participle '(He is) the One Who brings forth', which indicates the fixed nature of the attribute and its constant application to the One being described, and so it is not only describing a finite action.

And so notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hallowed be He in whose hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything: He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2).

We might think that life should be mentioned before death, but the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to eliminate mankind's delusions about life, and so He preceded mention of life by mentioning that which is in direct contradistinction with it, and so says: 'He who has created death as well as life' (*al-Mulk:* 2). He mentions death before life, so before you think about life, think about death, so you will not be deluded, and you will not transgress.

This concept is also manifested in Allah's words: 'Have you ever considered that [seed] which you emit? [58] Is it you who create it – or are We the source of its creation? [59] We have [indeed] decreed that death shall be [ever-present] among you: but there is nothing to prevent Us [60]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 58-60).

That is, 'Be aware and understand that I give life, and I can take it away, so do not be deluded by it, and be not tyrants.' It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to eliminate the attributes of pride and arrogance from the human soul, and so He always makes this contrast between remembrance of death and life in the verses of the Noble Quran. Moreover, do you not see that the Creator *Glorified is He* did not make death dependent on the causes of age, so that one person might die before they are even born, whilst another dies after a few days or months, and another dies after a number years, and another after a century? So death has no determined cause except Allah's decree, and the appointed time He set, and this is a sign to mankind: Beware, for the life from which your delusions spring might be taken from you at any moment, without you even realising it, and without any prior warning or precursors; so cleave to your Lord's guidance, and do not dare to sin because you might die before it occurs to you to repent.

And so they say that when the True Lord *Glorified is He* concealed from us the exact moment of our deaths; this concealment made death all the more apparent to us. How? It is because if He told you the exact time you will die, you would only prepare for death shortly before it happened, whereas by concealing it, He has inspired you to prepare for it every moment of your life.

Then, He says: ‘and gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless’. Elsewhere in the Quran, He says: ‘And [if, O man, you are still in doubt as to resurrection, consider this:] you can see the earth dry and lifeless – and [suddenly,] when We send down waters upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of lovely plant!’ (*al-Hajj:* 5) So the earth is dead and lifeless and dry, with no sign of life in it, but when the rain falls upon it, it springs to life, and produces all manner of lovely plants; and this is a direct example of the creation of life for all to see.

In another verse, He says: ‘Are you not aware that it is Allah who sends down water from the skies, whereupon the earth becomes green?’ (*al-Hajj:* 63) Does the earth become green the moment the rain falls upon it? No, it happens after a period of time, so it is as though Allah were saying to you, ‘Look at what happens, and imagine it: after the rain falls, the earth becomes green little by little, even though you did not plant any seeds there because it is full of seeds the wind has carried which then settled in the soil and remained there, even for years ready to grow, waiting for water in order to fulfil their purpose.’

People who live in the desert witness this phenomenon, and we saw it at Mount ‘Arafat after rain fell upon it and we returned after a few years to find the land covered with green. So do not think that every crop that grows was planted by a human being, for if this was the case, where did the first seeds man planted come from? There are many crops that grow without man playing any part.

Read the story of Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her*: ‘And lo! The angels said: “O Mary (Maryam)! Behold, Allah has elected you and made you pure, and raised you above all the women of the world”…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 42).

He did not say from whom Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her* had been elected, so the meaning is that she was elected from all humanity by being purified by Allah, and made virtuous, and pious, and righteous, and so on. As for the second use of the verb *istafa* (to elect, to raise), it did not refer to all people, but to all women, because she alone amongst all women would be mother to a child conceived with no father.

The reason we are mentioning this is that Joseph (Yusuf) the carpenter(1), when he saw that Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her* was with child, knowing who she was, and that she had never left the prayer-niche her whole life, never imagined that there was anything untoward going on; but he wanted to ask Mary (Maryam) *Allah be pleased with her* to explain what was happening. So he asked her with good manners, ‘Mary, did any tree ever grow from no seed?’ She replied, under inspiration from Allah. ‘Indeed it did: the tree that produced the first seed.’

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of His blessing, and then reminds us that He has the power to take it away and end it, in order that we do not become deluded by it. This is not only the case with life and death, but also in the case of crops, and water, and fire, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have you ever considered that [seed] which you emit? [58] Is it you who create it – or are We the source of its creation? [59] We have [indeed] decreed that death shall be [ever-present] among you: but there is nothing to prevent Us [60] from changing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being [anew] in a manner [as yet] unknown to you. [61] And [since] you are indeed aware of the [miracle of your] coming into being in the first instance – why, then, do you not bethink yourselves [of Us]? [62] Have you ever considered the seed which you cast upon the soil? [63] Is it you who cause it to grow – or are We the cause of its growth? [64] [For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff, and you would be left to wonder [and to lament], [65] “Verily, we are ruined! [66] Nay, but we have been deprived [of our livelihood]!” [67] Have you ever considered the water which you drink? [68] Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds – or are We the cause of its coming down? [69] [It comes down sweet – but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]? [70] Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle?

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(1) The story of Joseph (Yusuf) *peace be upon him* asking Mary (Maryam) *peace be upon her*: "Is there a tree without seeds?"

[71] Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel – or are We the cause of its coming into being? [72]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 58-72)

Notice the precision of the Quran's rhetorical style here in the phrase 'We could indeed turn it into chaff' where the word 'indeed' is used in the case of crops because human beings play a part in their production by ploughing and sowing and watering, perhaps thinking that they themselves have power over this.

But when He speaks about water, He says 'were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter' without saying 'indeed'. Why is this? It is because no one plays any part in the bringing of rain, nor does anyone even claim to. You did not evaporate the water, or send down the rain, and so He says simply 'we could make it' without any emphasis.

And when He mentions fire as one of His blessings, He does not mention the possibility of its disappearance. He says: 'Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel – or are We the cause of its coming into being?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 72)

He did not then say, for example, 'If We willed, We could extinguish it.' Why not? They say it was so that the image of fire would be of its blazing before us forever, never going out, as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* was using it to alert every sinner so that they might return to their senses.

Then He says: 'and even thus will you be brought forth'. 'Even thus' is an allusion to what has just been mentioned about the revival of the earth after its death: in the same way, you will be brought forth and resurrected. So whoever denies the Resurrection let him consider how the hard earth is revived with plants when rain falls upon it.

وَمِنْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦٓ أَنْ خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ إِذَآ أَنتُم بَشَرٌ تَنتَشِرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

And among Hi One of His signs is that He created you from
dust and – lo and behold! – you became human and
scattered far and wide [20] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 20)

This refers to the beginning of creation. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And among His wonders is this: He creates you…' (*ar-Rum:* 20) addressing us in the plural form, whilst the ultimate meaning is the creation of Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*, from whom Allah brought forth many men and women.

If we consider the world today, with all its billions of people, and follow it back into the past, it will eventually come back to two people, Adam and Eve *peace be upon them*. When they met, they produced offspring; but did this progeny come from lifeless matter that came from Adam *peace be upon him* or from living matter in the form of living sperm?

If the sperm were dead, procreation would not have taken place; so the sons of Adam *peace be upon him* came from sperms from their father, Adam, and spread throughout the earth, and reproduced, each one of them carrying atoms from their original father, Adam *peace be upon him*. Moreover, each one of us has within him living atoms from the time of Adam, and they have still not come to an end. This is the atomic realm that witnessed Allah's creation of Adam *peace be upon him* and the parts of us that witnessed the first pact made between creation and the Creator, *glorified is He*: 'And whenever thy Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?" – To which they answer: "Yes, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!" [Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this"' (*al-A'raf:* 172).

So within each of us, now and until the Day of Resurrection there lies a living atom from our father Adam *peace be upon him* which is the atom that witnessed this pact, and the one that represents the natural disposition of faith in every human soul, but this natural disposition is covered over by heedlessness, and sin, and so on.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us that He creates everything and brings them into existence by saying 'Be!' His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be" – and it is' (*Ya Sin:* 82).

All except for mankind, for his Lord honoured him by fashioning him with His own hands, and making him His vicegerent on earth, and manifesting within him His attributes, giving him strength from His Strength, and knowledge from His Knowledge, and wisdom from His Wisdom, and riches from His Riches.

When our Lord *Glorified is He* created us in this way, He wanted us to use these attributes He gave us in the same way He Himself uses them. By His power, Allah created for us that which benefits us; and so you, with the power Allah gave you, must also strive to do beneficial things. And by His wisdom, Allah arranged all things; and so you by your own wisdom should strive to arrange things; and so on.

But it must be understood that these powers are different: there is a power that works for you, and a higher power that causes you to work for yourself. Suppose you meet a weak man who is unable to carry his load, and so you carry it for him: in doing so, you have loaned the effects of your own power to him, whilst he himself remains weak.

As for The True Lord *the Exalted* He does not only lend the effects of His power to His servants, but also lends him the power itself, and in doing so He strengthens the weak so he can carry his load by himself.

So it is a great honour to mankind that the Creator *Glorified is He* says: ‘I created him with My own hands’, as He said to Satan (Iblis): …“O Satan (Iblis)! What has kept you from prostrating yourself before that [being] which I have created with My hands?”...’ (*Sad:* 75)

It is up to you, mankind, after this great honour, to either honour yourselves as Allah has honoured you, or else to bring yourselves as low as can be: you will end up wherever you choose to put yourself.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Verily, We create man in the best conformation;[4] and thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of low [5] excepting only such as attain to faith and do good deeds [6]’ (*at-Tin:* 4-6). So choose for yourself which of the two positions you wish to take.

The phrase ‘out of dust’ refers to the origin from which Adam *peace be upon him* was created. When dust is mixed with water, it makes mud, and if its smell changes it becomes fetid mire, and if it dries, it becomes clay like that of a potter; and these are the stages through which the human being went as it was created, all of which are different forms of dust or soil, and different states which it took.

So if anyone tries to say that creation took place in a different way, do not believe them because the One Who created mankind has informed them of how He did so; as for these others, they did not witness any part of mankind's creation, and in the eyes of the religion they are people who lead others astray, and their ideas should be treated with caution, because Allah *Glorified is He* says about such as them: '…and neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray' (*al-Kahf:* 51).

By Allah, if scientists had never been concerned with the issue of creation, whether of mankind, or the sun and moon and earth and so on, and we had never heard of Darwin's theory, would this verse have been truthful? If not, they would have said, 'Where are these people who lead others astray that the Quran mentions here?' And so they announced their theories to us, attempting to deny Allah's religion and spread doubts about it, though all the while they were proving the truth of it without realising.

Similar to these are those people who try to cast doubt on the narrated sayings of the Prophet *peace be upon him* doubting their authenticity. In reality, this is a natural phenomenon that proves the truthfulness of the Prophet because he *peace be upon him* was not unaware of this matter, but rather told us and warned us about it, and gave us an immunity to it, and he gave us the 'triple immunisation', like the one we are now hearing about from doctors.

He *peace be upon him* said, 'There will come a man from amongst my nation who will lie on his couch, speaking about my sayings and will say: "You and we all have the Book of Allah, and so what we find permissible therein we will permit, and what we find forbidden therein we will forbid" – yet indeed, what the Prophet forbids is like what Allah forbids.'(1)

Why is this? It is because Allah *Glorified is He* gave him the right to legislate for his community, saying: '…Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Apostle gives you [thereof], and refrain from [demanding] anything that he withholds from you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ad-Daraqatni, on the authority of Al-Miqdam Allah be pleased with him*

So the Messenger has the right to command, and to issue commandments and prohibitions, which must be obeyed just as Allah is obeyed. So any who denies the importance of the *Sunnah*, and says we only need the Quran, ask him, when he prays the sunset prayer, how many cycles he prayed. He will say that he prayed three. So how did he know that the sunset prayer is three cycles? Did he know it from the Quran that he argues for, or from the *Sunnah* that he denies? So how could he base his worship on the statements of the Prophet, and then deny them?

So the True Lord *Glorified is He* explained to us the stages of human creation from dust which became mud which then became mire, then to become clay like that of a potter; Allah then blew an aspect of His Spirit into it. We did not witness any of this, but rather, He informed us of it; and in the mercy He extends to His creatures so that their minds would not be confused by looking into this matter, He gave us signs in the universe we witness to explain to us the unseen that we do not witness.

In our own customary understanding, the destruction of something occurs contrary to its formation so that the first thing to be formed is destroyed last, and the last thing to be formed is destroyed first. You did not witness the first creation, but you can witness death; and death is the opposite of life.

Reflect on how a person dies. The first thing that happens to the body is the exit of the spirit, which was the last thing to be added when it was formed. Then the body becomes firm and hard, just as it was when it was in the clay stage; then it rots and its odour changes, just as occurred in the putrid mire stage; then the earth absorbs all the moisture in it so that it becomes dust, just as it was when its Creator began it. So Allah was truthful when He showed us how death occurs; so we trust Him in what He said about life.

Just as dust and mud are the sources of man, they are also his source of sustenance and development, and stores for his nutrition. They represent one of the basic constituents of our lives, and so when Allah mentions soil in the Quran, He says: ‘Say: “Would you indeed deny Him who has created the earth in two aeons? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?”[9] For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it… [10]’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10).

‘For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it…’ (*Fussilat:* 10), that is, either in the mountains (since “it” here in Arabic could also mean ‘them’) since they are the last thing mentioned, or else on the earth in general, because the mountains are on the earth, ‘…and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence…’ (*Fussilat:* 10).

So our means of subsistence come to us from the clay of the earth, and the soil that crumbles from the mountains and becomes silt that is washed down to us by rain. So the earth is our true mother, from which we were created, and from which come the basic constituents of our life.

It is amazing that some non-Muslim scientists confirm the truth of the Quran in the matter of mankind’s creation from clay when they analysed the components of the earth and found them to be sixteen components, all of which are found in the human body. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses certain people to prove the truth of His signs, even if they are disbelievers.

And Allah Almighty speaks the truth when He says: ‘In time We shall make them fully understand Our messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth…’ (*Fussilat:* 53).

The Quran contains verses that illustrate proportions which, if a modern computer were to search for them, we would have to believe that this speech is from Allah, and that it is the truth.

Consider the phenomenon of language, how we speak and understand one another. If you never learned Arabic, for example, you will not understand the one who speaks it, and he will not understand you. Why is this? It is because language is the product of imitation, and so the tongue repeats what the ear hears; and it is a social phenomenon, so if a person lived alone his whole life he would not need language, because he will simply do whatever occurs to him, and nothing more.

If he lives with others, he must be able to communicate with them, taking from them and giving to them, hearing them and having them hear him. Even mute people need some kind of language with which to communicate with those around them, and so they use sign language which Allah has made them capable of understanding.

Allah *Glorified is He* also allows people who can speak to communicate in this way, as in the case when you are forced to speak with food in your mouth, and so you signal with your hand to your son, or your servant, for example, and they understand what you mean and do as you ask.

So even we who can speak have within us elements of muteness which we can put into use when we are unable to speak. Communication is therefore an essential thing, and language is the product of imitation. This is why you tell your young son not to go out into the street, so that he does not hear vile speech and imitate it.

So how did I learn language? I learned it from my father, and those around me; and my father learned it from his father, and those around him, and so on. You can follow this chain back just as you can with the matter of human procreation, and you will eventually get back to our father Adam *peace be upon him* upon which you might ask who taught Adam *peace be upon him* language, to which the Quran replies: 'And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things…' (*al-Baqara:* 31).

This is a logical, inductive statement which clearly shows the truth of the verses of the Quran.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and then, lo! You become human beings ranging far and wide…' (*ar-Rum:* 20). The word 'then' here means after Allah created us from dust, the human race increased rapidly because the word 'lo!' here indicates something sudden, as when someone says, 'I went out, and lo! There was a lion standing by the door!' That is, it surprised me. So the meaning is: You reproduce and increase throughout the land rapidly.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦٓ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُم مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَٰجًا لِّتَسْكُنُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ
بَيْنَكُم مَّوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَـَٔايَـٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect [21] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 21)

We said that a wonder (*aya*) means something amazing that dazzles and astounds the mind and provokes certainty in the wisdom of the Creator. One of these amazing wonders is that '…He creates for you mates out of your own kind…' (*ar-Rum:* 21), that is, of your own species and type.

So Allah *Glorified is He* did not will that reproduction should take place between humans and cows, for example, but rather between humans and other humans, differing from one another only in their gender, either male or female. Difference in gender is a difference of mutual completion, not a difference of struggle and conflict. Women are characterised by gentleness, mildness, and compassion, whilst men are characterised by strength and roughness, and so she is pleased by his strength and masculinity, and he is pleased by her softness and femininity, and this causes the mutual completion that Allah willed and intended as the means for the human race to increase.

It is curious that some people think that masculinity is the 'opposite' of femininity, trying to sow meaningless emotional conflict between the two. Masculinity and femininity are two necessary, mutually completing realities, like night and day, which are two signs that all people accept; do we try and compare night and day, and decide which of them is best? So reflect on the precision of the Quranic discourse when it mentions night and day and masculinity and femininity on the same occasion, and think deeply about the meaning of this: 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, [1] and the day as it rises bright! [2] Consider the creation of the male and the female! [3] Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends! [4]' (*al-Layl:* 1-4)

That is, each of them is different, and has its own purpose, just as night brings repose and stillness, and day brings action and work, and by the integration of each of your roles, higher integration comes.

So there is no need for me to seek equality with women, or for a woman to seek equality with men; we have been given headaches by those who call for this supposed ‘equality’, which is utterly meaningless in the light of Allah’s words: ‘Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends!’ (*al-Layl:* 4)

It is strange that we hear even men saying that women should take the place of men and fulfil their roles, to which we say: A woman cannot take on the role of a man unless a man can take on the role of a woman becoming pregnant as she does, and bearing children as she does, and suckling them as she does; so spare us from the calls of the ‘bullies’, who are lauded for that of which they have no comprehension.

Similar to this are Allah’s words: ‘Indeed, there has come unto you [O mankind] an Apostle from among yourselves…’ (*at-Tawba:* 128). That is, from your own human kind, so he was a soul with all the usual human abilities, in order that he could be a model for others; if the Messenger had been an angel, he could not have been a role model, and people would have said, ‘This is an angel, and we cannot do what he can.’ Or, ‘from among yourselves’ means from the Arabs, and the Quraysh.

Some people think that ‘out of your own kind’ here means Eve’s (*Hawwaa’s*) creation from Adam’s rib, thus being a part of us; but ‘out of your own kind’ here is directed to males and females alike, just as the word ‘mates’ refers to both men and women. Some people think that a ‘mate’ (*zawj*) means two people, but in reality it means one of a pair, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and created thereon two sexes of every [kind of] plant…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 3).

In the past, we used to think that a foetus’ gender was determined by either the woman’s fluid or the man’s, but the Quran tells us: ‘Was he not once a [mere] drop of sperm that had been spilt?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 37) So the woman has nothing to do with determining the gender of the foetus, whether it is male or female; both masculinity and femininity are determined by the fluid of the man.

Modern science has since confirmed this; and so the meaning of ‘He creates for you mates out of your own kind’ (*ar-Rum:* 21) is that they are created from the male side of the pairing, from which are created the XX and XY chromosomes, as modern science terms them, meaning male and female.

In connection with this, we mentioned before the story[1] of Abu Hamza, the Arab who took another wife because the first bore him no male children and he forsook her for this reason, and as a way of criticising this reasoning, she said, with eloquent Arabic, with words that prove that the ancient Arabs had knowledge of this fact, which modern science has recently proven,

Why does Abu Hamza not come to us,
Angry that we bore him no sons?
By Allah, such things are not in our hands:
We are but a tilth of lands to our farmers,
Giving to them the fruit of that which they had sown

By this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to say: 'I desire a vicegerent who shall multiply and fill this wide earth.' So if you see a place that is too cramped for its inhabitants, know that there is another place that is empty, and that the problem is the poor distribution of Allah's creatures in Allah's earth.

And so they say the cause for all crises is that a land has no people, or that a people have no land. We gave the example before of the fertile lands of Sudan which no one is farming, and which if farmed would suffice the whole Arab world, whilst we live in the valleys and the delta until it cramps us. Yet if I decided to immigrate to those empty places, I would meet the problems of the boundaries set by men, for which Allah gave no authority.

And so when I was given the opportunity to speak at the United Nations, I said to them: There is one verse in the Book of Allah which, if you implemented it, would solve all the economic problems of the world, which is Allah's words: 'And the earth has He spread out for all living beings' (*ar-Rahman:* 10). So the whole earth is for the people, absolutely all the people.

Read what Allah *Glorified is He* said about this matter: '…Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?' (*an-Nisa':* 97) So do not violate Allah's way and His decree in His laws, and then complain about corruption, congestion, and crisis: if you consider the universe as a

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(1) The story of Abu Hamza and his wife

whole, you will find that there is no corruption within it except where the hand of man has interfered with it against the laws and way of the Creator of the universe. As for those things in which mankind have not interfered, you will see that they are in perfect order, with no disturbances or conflicts.

So problems and crises only come about as a result of our acting in the universe contrary to Allah's guidance, and in violation of His law. And you hear people say, 'Life is wretched', and nothing comes to mind when you hear these words except the problem of poverty. Yet, 'wretched' means a lot more than just poverty, for some people are wealthy, and comfortable, and living in luxury, yet, they are still in a state of extreme wretchedness.

Look at Sweden, for example, which is one of the wealthiest countries on earth, yet has high numbers of madness, homosexuality, and psychological problems, and where suicide rates are high because of the wretchedness people experience there, even though they are wealthy and have high incomes.

So it is not a matter of economic situation, but rather a case of Allah's guidance not being implemented or put into practice; and Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the truth when He says: 'But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me – his shall be a life of narrow scope; and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him up blind' (*Ta Ha:* 124).

And so if we live according to Allah's guidance, we will find life's sweetness even if we are impoverished.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'so that you might find rest with them'. This is the primary function of marriage, that the husband and wife find rest with one another; and rest comes after activity, for the man has spent his day working and earning a living with toil and strain, and so he wants to spend the end of the day inclining towards someone who will give him rest and repose, and no one but his wife can give him this comfort, warmth, and love, wherein he can find repose and prepare for the next day's labour.

But imagine that a man comes home tired and does not find this repose, but rather finds his wife, and the place he is supposed to find rest and comfort, actually makes him even more tired, and spoils his calm. So women must strive to understand the meaning of 'rest' here, and do their duty so that life will be in order.

But it is not only a matter of rest, but also '…He engenders love and tenderness between you…' (*ar-Rum:* 21). Love means mutual affection in the partnership of life. The man strives and works to provide life's needs, and the woman strives to keep the household in order and raise the children because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends!' (*al-Layl:* 4) And all this takes place in an atmosphere of love and mutual affection.

As for 'tenderness', it is mentioned last: rest, love, and tenderness. This is because human beings tend towards constant change, their states always shifting; the strong can become weak, and the rich can become poor, and a beautiful woman can change with time, or be struck down by illness, and so on.

And so the Quran makes us aware that there might come a phase when we lose our love, and lose our affection; yet tenderness will suffice at such times, so that the husband is tender with his wife if she is no longer able to do all the things she used to, and the wife is tender with her husband if he becomes ill, or impoverished, and so on.

Many elderly Allah-fearing people who pay heed to these teachings live their married lives according to this principle of tenderness, and so when people make insinuations to a woman whose husband has been made infirm by illness, she says, 'Is it fit that I should benefit from him at times of ease, then forsake him when he is in trouble?' Such is the truly religious woman, which brings us back to the saying of the Prophet *peace be upon him* about choosing a wife: 'A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her noble birth, her beauty' – and all of these are temporary delights – 'and her religion; so choose the one who is religiously committed, may you prosper.'(1) So both you and she are subject to change, and you will not remain forever as you are now, and so you should both refer to something firm, and a neutral way which is not influenced by any caprice that might favour one of you over the other; a way of guidance in which you are equal – and you will only find this with the religion of Allah.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad, Abu-Dawud, and Ibn-Majah, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

And so the Prophet *peace be upon him* warned us: 'If there comes to you he whose religion and character please you, marry him (to your daughters); if you do not, there will be wickedness in the land, and much corruption.'(1)

So beware of saying, when your wife gets older, that she is no longer physically attractive to you because Allah made wives to be a source of rest and comfort for you, and so if your instinctive desires are aroused, as is natural, you will find a way to satiate them, as the Prophet *peace be upon him* said: 'If any of you sees a woman who attracts him' – that is, who provokes his desire – 'he should go to his wife, for she has the same as the other has.'(2)

As long as the couple act according to the standards of the religion, and conduct themselves with the good manners of the religion, they will each be pleased with the other, and even though physical beauty will fade, spiritual beauty and dignity will remain, and the woman will retain the beauty of her character and behaviour; and every time you think of her faithfulness to you, and her devotion in serving you, and her eagerness to give you the comforts of life, and her concern for maintaining the honour of your home, you will become closer to her, and love her more and more.

The same is the case for the wife. And so every stage of life has its own attractions and beauty, which make up for those that came and went before.

And since the usual case for women is that their age shows on them more than in the case of men, the husband should treat this matter delicately; and so when someone told Al-Hasan *Allah be pleased with him* (the Prophet's grandson) that a man had asked for his daughter's hand in marriage, and then described the man to him, he replied, 'Do not marry her to any but a believing man: if he loves her, he will treat her with honour; and if he dislikes her, he will not wrong her.'

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think' (*ar-Rum:* 21). They think about these matters, and about these stages, through which married life passes, and how Allah has given us mates from our own kind, not from another species, and how He has built this relationship on the foundations of rest, love, and affection, and then in the stage of old age on the tenderness with which the married couple must live for their entire lives together.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad and Muslim on the authority of Jabir Allah be pleased with him*

The, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنۡ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ خَلۡقُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱخۡتِلَٰفُ أَلۡسِنَتِكُمۡ
وَأَلۡوَٰنِكُمۡۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّلۡعَٰلِمِينَ ٢٢

Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know [22] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 22)

There are many signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, of which the most readily apparent to us is that they stand without any visible means of support, as Allah says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘He [it is who] has created the skies without any supports that you could see…’ (*Luqman:* 10).

So the sky that we see spread out over the horizons stands without means of any physical support;(1) and if you like you can travel throughout the earth and search for these supports, and you will never see them. Or, ‘without any supports that you could see’ means that these supports do exist, but that they cannot be seen.(2)

Yet logic dictates that a high thing must have either some kind of support to hold it up from below, or a power that holds it up from above. And so we must consider other verses together with this one in order to make sense of this matter. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, elsewhere in the Quran: ‘Verily, it is Allah [alone] who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate…’ (*Fatir:* 41).

So the sky rests on no support, but rather, its Creator *the Exalted* holds it from above, so that it cannot fall to the ground unless He wills it. Do not be amazed at such a thing, for Allah has given us a similitude for this that we can see for ourselves, as He says: ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never considered the birds, enabled [by Allah] to fly in mid-air, with none but Allah holding them aloft? ...’ (*an-Nahl:* 79) If you say that the thing which keeps them in the sky is the movement of their wings and the way they flap them against the air, which means they are keeping themselves in the sky, we say: They are also kept in the sky without moving their wings; if you like, read: ‘Have they, then, never beheld the birds above them, spreading their wings and drawing them in? ...’ (*al-Mulk:* 19) So you can see birds in the air with their wings outstretched hovering in one place without moving, yet they do not fall to the earth; and so nothing keeps them in the air except Allah’s power.

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(1) This is the opinion of Al-Hasan and Qutada.

(2) This is the opinion of Ibn Abbas, ‘Ikrima, and Mujahid.

Take what you see as evidence of what you cannot see. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth…’ (*Ghafir:* 57). This is so even though they were created to serve mankind.

So, although, O mankind, you are a manifestation of Allah’s power, and the entire Greater World is rolled up within you, your life span is short, and amounts to nothing next to the life of the earth, and the sky, and the sun, and the moon, and so on.

Then the discourse turns once more to another of Allah’s signs which is manifested in the human being: ‘and the diversity of your tongues and colours’ (*ar-Rum:* 22). The word ‘tongue’ means language, as in Allah’s word: ‘in the clear Arabic tongue’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 195).

And his words: ‘…the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth’ (*an-Nahl:* 103). It also means of course the well-known appendage. The reason the word ‘tongue’ is used to mean language is that most language requires the use of the tongue and the sounds it makes, although the tongue only plays one simple part in the process of speech, being joined in this by the mouth, and the teeth, and the lips, and the vocal cords, and so on. However, the tongue is the main support of all these actions; and so ‘diversity of tongues’ means diversity of languages.

We said before that language is a social phenomenon that a person picks up from the environment around him, and that if we follow it back we will arrive at our father Adam *peace be upon him*. We also said that Allah is the One Who taught Adam *peace be upon him* language when He taught him the names of everything, and then Adam *peace be upon him* and his progeny used these names to communicate with each other, and added to them new names.

And so with our children, for example: we teach them nouns, the names of things, before we teach them verbs because nouns are more obvious. Do you not see that we use nouns to indicate actions and events, so that even the word ‘verb’ is itself a noun?

But when did languages begin to differ? If we consider the Arabic language, for example, we find that it is one language, but that the environs where it is spoken are varied: Egyptians, Sudanese, Syrians, Moroccans, Iraqis, and so on, all share a single language, but each environ has its own special dialect that the others do not understand; yet when we speak in proper Classical Arabic, the language of the Quran, we understand one another.

So the cause of the variances in language was the isolation of communities from one another, which led to the development of new languages. For example, English, French and German all go back to a single origin, which is Latin; but when communities became isolated, they each wanted their own identity in the form of a unique language with its own vocabulary and syntax.

Or, ‘the diversity of your tongues’ may mean the different sounds which can be made by the tongue and the other vocal instruments, like the latest announcement we have heard from linguists which states that the voice has a ‘print’ unique to the speaker just like in the case of fingerprints, and that this ‘voice-print’ is an even more accurate means of identification than fingerprints.

And so they have made safes which are programmed to recognise the voice of their owners, so that when they hear his voice they open.

What is amazing and extraordinary about sounds is that the different ways they are made are so varied; they include inanimate objects like the rustle of trees and the splash of water; and animals, like the croak of a frog, the whinny of a horse, the bray of a donkey, the bleat of a sheep, the groan of a camel, and so on. But I ask you, by Allah: if you hear a donkey bray, can you tell whose donkey it is? No, because the voices of all creatures except mankind are uniform, having no distinction from one specimen to the next.(1)

As for mankind, each of us has his own voice, unique in its tone, pitch, and range, or in its softness or coarseness, and so on. So why, then, are human voices distinguished in this way above all other voices?

They say it is because inanimate objects and animals do not have responsibilities that require that they each be identified and singled out, whilst humans do. Otherwise, how could we single out the one guilty of crime, if we did not know his name, or anything about him? And even if we did know how to describe him, this would not be enough to prove to us beyond any doubt that he was responsible, and so warrant his punishment.

And Allah says: 'and (your) colours'. So tongues and colours are diverse in order that people can identify one another; and so because mankind are morally responsible, Allah created in them differences of language and colour in order that they could be used to describe a person, along with his height, and the clothes he wears, and so on.

So this is a means of regulating human behaviour, and making sure that people are upright, since they know they are unlikely to get away with any illegal action, since some of these marks of distinction are bound to give them away.

And so we find that criminal investigators spend a long time planning searches for criminals. Why is this? It is because they want to close the circle of the investigation, and discount all suspects who do not match the descriptions they have, and so they keep shortening the list of suspects until they have their man.

The True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another…' (*al-Hujurat:* 13).

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha'rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

Distinction and recognition are essential for life's order. Do you not see that a man gives each of his children their own name, which identifies them; and if he likes the name Mohammad, for example, and wants to call all his children by this name, he must at least add some other name to distinguish them, so that one is Mohammad the Elder, and another is Mohammad the Younger, and another is Mohammad the Middle, and so on. Hence, identity is intrinsic for setting and determining accountability.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'in this', that is, in this wise and deliberate manner of creation, 'there are messages indeed' for us to ponder. When the Creator unifies things, this indicates His wisdom; and when He makes them diverse, this indicates His absolute power. Notice, for example, how an artisan who makes glass vessels takes the molten glass and pours it into a mould, so that they all come out the same; whilst the baker, for example makes bread from the dough, and no two loaves are exactly alike.

As for the Creator *Glorified and Exalted is He* creates with wisdom and absolute power, and He creates whatever He wills, and is not constrained by any particular mould.

The statement'…For those who are possessed of innate knowledge' means those who look into things and do not stop at the outer crust, but rather delve into the inner realities, and peel the layers to reach the real core.

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* criticises us in one verse wondering how we often pass by His various signs in the heavens and earth and yet we remain oblivious and turn our backs (*Yusuf:* 105). So, it is not appropriate that people who possess minds should be heedless of these signs. Rather, they should reflect on them in order to gain from them that which will bring benefit to their lives, just as is the case with the modern inventions and discoveries that have served mankind, like the steam engine, the wheel, and discovering electricity, gravity, and penicillin and so on. So, we must pass by Allah's signs with our eyes open, and all the empirical sciences are the result of this.

'Those who are possessed of innate knowledge' is in Arabic *'alimun* which is the plural of *'alim* 'scholar' or 'scientist'. In the past days, it meant someone with knowledge of the lawful and unlawful, but now it means much more than that. What '*alim* actually means is anyone who has knowledge of either the cosmic sciences or Islamic sciences, and so one is a ‘scientist’, whilst the other is a ‘scholar’. In another verse, Allah tells prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to consider how He sends water down from the sky and that He produces with it fruits of varied colours; and to see the mountains layers of white and red of various hues, and jet black; and the various colours among the human beings, wild animals, and livestock too. Then Allah concludes that it is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of Him; for He is almighty (*Fatir:* 27-28). Here Allah *Glorified is He* mentions plants, then inanimate objects, then people, then animals, and then He declares that it is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of Him (*Fatir:* 28). So, He did not specify what kind of people of knowledge, whether farmers, biologists, geologists, or religious scholars. Hence, the word '*alim* encompasses all those who have knowledge about something in existence, whether science or faith.

But why did they use the word ‘scholar’ to refer to people fervent in Islamic laws and sciences in particular? They say it is because this was the foremost of all types of beneficial knowledge of which they were aware; and so we believe that it is part of good Islamic etiquette that the scholars of Islamic sciences should not try to theorise in secular science, and that secular scientists should not try to theorise in the religious sciences.

What caused tension between these two fields is that secular scientists, for example, said that the sun rotates around the earth, while some Islamic scholars said that this is contrary to religious teachings, even though they have never studied such things. By Allah, why are you intruding on something of which you know nothing. What difference should it make to you, as a religious scholar, whether the world is a sphere, or whether it rotates around the sun or not? What legal ruling has been added or deducted by the earth’s orbit? The same thing happened when man landed on the moon; some religious scholars objected to that.

Likewise, we hear people who have no knowledge of the Islamic sciences objecting to some of it, saying that ‘the mind does not accept such things.’ So, the blight of any scientist is to try and involve himself in a field of which he has no knowledge. If each were to stick to what they knew, everyone would be happy, and every field would be left to its experts.

It is strange how some Islamic scholars interpreted Allah’s words about the ‘spreading out’ of the earth (*al-Hijr:* 19), to mean that the earth is flat! If they reflected on the meaning, they would have had no cause to object, since the meaning of ‘spread out’ here is that whenever you walk on its surface it spreads out ahead of you endlessly, till you return to the very same point where you started. This means that it is definitely a sphere because if it were flat or triangular it would have an end.

So, we say to all scientists – do not interfere in that of which you have no knowledge – leave the fields to their specialists. As Allah *Glorified is He* tells us, each people knew its drinking place (*al-Baqara:* 60).

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنۡ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ مَنَامُكُم بِٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ وَٱبۡتِغَآؤُكُم مِّن فَضۡلِهِۦٓۚ
إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَسۡمَعُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day, and your seeking His bounty. There truly are signs in this for those who can hear [23] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 23)

Another of the wondrous signs that indicate Allah’s power is ‘your sleep’, as now scientists have yet to discover the secret of sleep which they still do not know – despite their best efforts. Yet it exists, and it is invincible, and no one can resist it, however strong they are; and however hard they try to stay awake, sleep will surely overtake you, even if you lay on a stone slab or thorns, or even if you were standing up, or carrying something; you have to sleep, no matter what.

The philosophy of sleep is not about comprehending *how* we sleep, but *why* we sleep. They say it is because the human being is made up of many parts, each of which has its own capacity, the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, and so on. So, when we use these parts, we reach a point where we cannot function any more, and without even realising it, instinctively, we seek rest, as if saying, ‘Enough, you cannot do any more, so sleep.’

One of the wonders of sleep is that it does not come by our own volition; you might try all kinds of things to get to sleep, but sleep will not obey you; and if it comes to you, it will overcome you no matter what you are doing, and even if there is a lot of loud noise, you will fall asleep. So, an Arab once said, ‘Sleep is a phantom: if you seek it, it will torment you; and if it seeks you, it will soothe you.’

The people of insight have noticed a beautiful universal truth about sleep, connected with Allah’s word that there is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise (*al-Isra’:* 44). Everything in existence praises Allah, even the body organs of the disbelievers, whilst it is only their free will which has disbelieved. Their limbs will remain in submission to their owner’s will until this will is taken from them on the Day of Resurrection, whereupon these limbs will bear witness against him because of the sins they forced them to endure.

We gave an example for this before of a military leader, whose troops obey him even when he is wrong because obedience is mandatory – until they come to a higher ranking officer and complain to him, and tell him what their leader did.

We also mentioned that in the Second World War, a military leader wanted to use a trick to overcome his enemy, even though it was contrary to the rules of engagement, and when his strategy worked and he defeated his enemy, they praised him for his ingenuity, but they had no choice but to punish him for breaking the rules of engagement, even though the punishment was symbolic to instil the awe of respecting rules.

Likewise, the limbs of the disbeliever obey him in this life, and will testify against him on the Day of Resurrection. Allah tells us that their tongues, hands, and feet will testify all that they did (*an-Nur:* 24). This is despite the fact that it was these same limbs which uttered words of disbelief, or stole, or did other wrong deeds, Allah made them yield to the will of their owners; but on Resurrection Day, they will have no control over their limbs; they will ask their skins: ‘…“Why did you bear witness against us?”...’ and the skins will reply, ‘…“Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given us speech too”....’ (*Fussilat:* 21)

At this point Allah will reign and ask: ‘With whom does sovereignty rest today?’ Surely, with Allah, the One who controls all that exists (*Ghafir:* 16).

But when the disbelievers sleep, their body parts and limbs are free of their control. They are free of their evil intentions. This is why our brethren who make the pilgrimage to Allah’s House say that sleeping there is so blessed, and you only need a little to feel energised. Why is this? Because on the Pilgrimage, you are saturated with thoughts of Allah’s obedience, and all your time is devoted to worship, and so your limbs are in a state of rest and tranquillity, with no sin to disturb them, so they only need a little sleep to recharge.

In view of this, we can understand Prophet Muhammad’s Hadith, ‘My eyes sleep, but my heart sleeps not.'(1) This is because his entire life was devoted to worship, so his limbs were always at peace, and a simple doze sufficed him.

The country folk here say in their dialect: ‘The sleep of the wicked is an act of worship.’ Why? Because as long as he is asleep, he is not commanding his limbs to do evil, or compelling them to do sin, and so they are free of him, and the people around him are free of his evil; what act of worship is greater than this?

Notice that the verse says: ‘Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day and your seeking His bounty…’ (*ar-Rum:* 23). Here Allah mentions that both night and day are for sleeping or seeking His bounties. In another verse, He details them respectively saying that He has given us night and day, so that we may rest and seek His bounty and be grateful (*al-Qasas:* 73) meaning that at night we rest and at day we seek His bounties.

This rhetorical style is known in Arabic as ‘*Al-laff wal-nashr*’ which is a compound form of metaphor and a rhetorical device similar to chiasmus. In this form of rhetoric, you mention some designated attributes in their respective order, and then you mention their collective designations, thus evoking the wit of the listener to link each attribute with its appropriate designation. An example of this is the poet’s words:

My heart, my eye, my tongue, my Creator:
Content, weeping, thanking, forgiving

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her*

So, the subjects are grouped together, and their descriptions grouped together afterwards; the former is termed 'involution', and the latter 'evolution'.

These two verses have caused the scholars to pause since it is not possible to comment on one without considering the other, and we should not attempt to understand each verse in isolation. Notice that in this verse: 'Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day, and your seeking His bounty…' (*ar-Rum:* 23), Allah makes both night and day times of sleep, and times of work.

In the other verse, we mentioned above (*al-Qasas:* 73), this is a universal sign, as night is a time of sleep, stillness and rest, while day is a time of work, and activity; yet, there is nothing to prevent us from working at night, too. Indeed some jobs are only done at night, like night watchmen, security guards, police, bakers, and such. The time of rest for these people is during the day; and with this understanding, the two similar verses complement one another.

So, Allah's word '…and your seeking His bounty…' (*ar-Rum:* 23) means that the seeking of one's livelihood can be done at both day and night, although the majority work at day and sleep at night, and the minority do the opposite.

You might say that this is true for us, where night and day are almost equal, but what about the places where night can last three months, as can the day? If we understand the verse in this way, does that mean they work three months and then sleep three months? Or, do they break the long night into days and nights, and the long day into days and nights as well? They can surely do so, since mankind are able to rest at night and work at day, or the opposite, since both day and night are times for work and rest.

The True Lord tells us of the blessing He gave us by making day follow night, asking prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ponder; what if Allah were to cast perpetual night over us until the Day of Resurrection, what God other than He could bring us light? And if He were to cast perpetual day over us until the Day of Resurrection, what God other than He could give you night in which to rest? (*al-Qasas:* 71-72) This verse ends with an exclamatory phrase urging us to 'see' and think. But why 'see'? This is because day is a time of seeing and watching, while at night our vision is limited, so it is more related to hearing; and the ear is the tool that serves its purpose at night, when our sight is limited.

Elsewhere, in the Quran Allah says that it is He Who made the night and day follow each other – so anyone who wishes may be mindful or show gratitude (*al-Furqan:* 62).

So, night follows day, and day follows night; this is true of this life which we live now, but when creation first began, which of them came first, and which followed? If you say that the night came first, this means that the day is its successor, but in this case the night is not a successor; yet the aforementioned text states that each of them succeeds the other, so how can we explain this? The answer to this comes by considering the spherical shape of the earth. If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* said this to the people at the start of his mission, no one would have believed him; how could they, when there are still those who deny this even today?

But the True Lord would not leave such an important fact of nature without at least alluding to it subtly, so that when knowledge progressed people would recognise it. If the earth was flat, and Allah has created the sun facing the earth, day would have been the first ever incident to happen; hence, it would not have been possible to say that day followed the night. But since the Creator *Glorified and Exalted is He* has informed us that night and day both follow each other, then He must have created the earth in such a way that both night and day existed at the very same time, and so when the universe went into motion, day and night followed each other. This could only be the case if the earth were spherical, and the part of it facing the sun was at 'day', while the part facing away from it was at 'night'.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse that neither may the sun outrun the moon, nor the moon outrun the sun, since all the celestial objects orbit through space (*Ya Sin:* 40).

In this last verse, why does the True Lord *Glorified is He*; negate the ability of the night to precede the day? It is said that because at that time, people believed that night was the very first incident at the start of creation. Till this day, we even consider *Ramadan* (for instance) to start on the eve (night) that precedes its first day. This means that they did not think that day preceded the very first night at the start of creation. So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* negates their perception saying that the night cannot outrun the day (*Ya Sin:* 40). He affirmed what they believed about the day not outrunning night, but negated the ability of night to outrun the day. So, neither night nor day can outrun the other, which could only be the case if they existed at one and the same time; the part facing the sun would be ‘day’, and the part facing away from it would be ‘night’.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ يُرِيكُمُ ٱلْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَيُحْىِۦ
بِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَآ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Among His signs, too, are that He shows you the lightning that terrifies and inspires hope; that He sends water down from the sky to restore the earth to life after death. There truly are signs in this for those who use their reason [24]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 24)

Sometimes, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the verses addressing people who think, other times addressing people who possess knowledge, or people willing to listen, or people using their reasoning. So, different instruments of perception are mentioned.

Some think that reason is a tool which is utilised for everything since reason is the means by which we accept something or reject perceptions. In reality, however, you only use reason in religious matters a single time, which then relieves you of the need to use it again. You use your reasoning to decide whether you will believe or not, and if your reason guides you to the realisation that this universe has an All-Powerful and Wise Creator, and that this Deity is only One, you will gain conviction in this matter and the thought would rarely bother you again, nor will your intellect revisit it. After this, in respect to subsequent branches of faith, you approach them according to the primary issue of faith, and so you need not recourse to reason.

So, the wise ones say that reason is like a vehicle that takes you to the court of the king, but does not enter with you. Likewise, reason takes you as far as belief, and then its role ends. So, if you hear that Allah has said something, you are convinced of the truth of what He says without needing to use your reason.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* refers to people who ‘use their reason’, or ‘think’, or ‘know’, and when He calls you to reflect and take admonition, He is only alerting the instruments of argument within you to confirm it; the role of reason here is to consider the alternatives, the premises and conclusions.

For example, if you go to the fabric merchant, he shows you his fabrics; pure wool or pure cotton, and he also shows you the excellence of his handiwork, bringing a thread of the wool and a thread of the cotton to fire so you can see how the wool does not catch fire while the cotton does.

He provokes your critical thinking, so you can be sure of the quality of his merchandise. As for the one who is not sure of his talent, he resorts to using tricks and ruses to fool his customers into buying.

The Creator *Glorified is He* encourages us to reflect and ponder His signs, saying to us, ‘Reflect, ponder, and reason; be aware of what goes on around you.’ This shows us that if we were to look into these signs, we would arrive at His true intent, which is believing.

Lightning is a natural phenomenon, and when we hear the resounding explosion we call it thunder. Thunder happens moments after seeing the bright flash in the sky: lightning. It is one of the electric reactions that occur in the sky as modern science has come to understand, but before this, when people saw lightning they thought it to be one of two things; either it had come to strike them with fire, or rain would fall upon them, and so they would fear the thunderbolts and hope for the rain. ‘Among His signs, too, are that He shows you the lightning that terrifies and inspires hope; that He sends water down from the sky…’ (*ar-Rum:* 24) so that we remain in this middle ground between fear and hope.

But do all people hope for rain? Imagine you are a traveller, or that you are in the countryside with no shelter to protect you from the rain. A person without shelter would not hope for rain nor wait for it, and so out of His mercy, Allah gives precedence for restoring the life of the earth after its death: ‘…He sends water down from the sky to restore the earth to life after death…’ (*ar-Rum:* 24).

The word ‘sky’ in Arabic *sama’* has two meanings; its primary meaning is the seven heavens above us, and its secondary lexical meaning is everything above our heads, which is the meaning meant here by: '…He sends water down from the sky…' (*ar-Rum:* 24) since rain actually comes from the clouds; so 'sky' here means that which is above us.

If you reflect on the rain that falls from the sky, you will see that it comes from built-up clouds. Allah tells us to see how He drives the clouds, then gathers them together and piles them up until we see rain pouring from their midst (*an-Nur:* 43).

We have already spoken about how clouds are formed, and how they are the result of water vapour because out of His wisdom Allah covered three quarters of the earth with water and made the other quarter dry land, so the area which produces water vapour would be vaster; and hence three quarters of the earth serves the remaining quarter, to ensure enough rain to suffice all who live on earth.

We also explained the importance of a large surface area of water for the evaporation process, and said that if you leave a cup of water on the window ledge it will stay as it is for a long time because only a small amount can evaporate, whereas if you pour the water on the floor, it will dry in a matter of minutes because the surface area becomes bigger, in the latter case, and so it evaporates more quickly.

We also compared the process of cloud formation to the distillation we do at laboratories in order to produce clean, pure water. This is done by boiling the water until it turns into steam, which then rises to a cold surface where it condenses in the form of pure water. So, when you receive rainwater, you are receiving distilled water of utmost purity, without pondering much about what has taken place, and without having to do anything.

Reflect on the amazing natural engineering of rain production. The sun heats the earth's surface and causing water to evaporate, and rise to high altitudes where the temperature is low, so the water condenses and clouds are formed. It is amazing that every time we rise 30 metres, the temperature decreases by a degree, even though we are getting closer to the sun. This is because the sun does not heat up the atmosphere, it only heats the surface of the earth, which in turn conducts heat, so the further we go up from the earth, the colder it gets.

Out of His wisdom, Allah made much of the water of the earth, from which fresh water evaporates, salty, because salt prevents it from becoming stagnant, or changing its odour, and prevents harmful parasites from growing in it; and so it remains intact, to replenish the fresh water that irrigates the earth.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦٓ أَن تَقُومَ ٱلسَّمَآءُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ بِأَمْرِهِۦ ۚ ثُمَّ إِذَا
دَعَاكُمْ دَعْوَةً مِّنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ إِذَآ أَنتُمْ تَخْرُجُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Among His signs, too, is the fact that the heavens and the earth stand firm by His command. In the end, you will all emerge when He calls you from the earth [25] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 25)

Here, ‘heavens’ means the seven heavens, which stand without any pillars. We said that if something is above you, it must either be supported from below or held up from above, like a suspension bridge. Likewise, the sky is a raised ceiling which has no pillars we can see. This means it must be held up another way, and Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He is the One holding the celestial bodies so they may not fall upon the earth (*al-Hajj:* 65).

‘Among His signs, too, is the fact that the heavens and the earth stand firm by His command…’ (*ar-Rum:* 25). This balance is never disturbed, and we see no cracks in it because it is constructed with precision. Look at the sky when it is free of clouds, and you will find that it is smooth and uniform throughout its entire expanse. Can any painter paint for us an expanse that big in a single consistent colour?

If you understand ‘heavens’ here to mean everything that is above us, then consider the sun, the moon, the stars and planets, and how at the behest of Allah they all maintain a precise order which never shifts, so we never see two planets colliding, for instance, or anything exiting its fixed orbit. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us they all orbit in space (*al-Anbiya’:* 33) each at its own speed, its own orbit and its own precise balance. This is because they are all held up at Allah’s behest, and His omnipotent power and they each perform their purpose exactly without any deviation or error.

The meaning of ‘stand firm’ here is that they remain as they are without any disruption; it is a present tense verb implying continuity. Reflect on this: before man created the telescope, we saw nothing of the solar system but the sun, and when the telescope was created we were able to see the other planets that revolve around it.

It is amazing that their orbits are not perfectly circular but elliptical – wider at one side and narrower at the other. These planets all orbit the sun, and revolve around their own axes at the same time. The earth, for example, orbits the sun, which gives rise to the four seasons, and it revolves around its axis, giving rise to night and day. These calculated movements are the result of a precise system of absolute order.

These planets differ in their proximity to the sun, the nearest being Mercury, then Venus, then Earth, then Mars, then Jupiter, then Saturn, then Uranus, then Neptune, then furthest away from the sun is Pluto.(1) They each have their own orbit around the sun, and so each lap around the sun is termed a ‘year’, while each rotation around their own axis is termed a ‘day’.

It is amazing that a single day for Venus, the second planet from the sun, is equivalent to 244 days for Earth, whilst a single year for Venus is equivalent to 225 days for Earth – so the year is shorter than the day. This is because its orbit around the sun is one thing and revolving around its own axis is another. In this case it orbits the sun quickly, but revolves on its own axis slowly.

If you knew that in Allah’s vast universe there are a million solar systems like ours just in our galaxy: the Milky Way. This is just in the galaxy we know – if we pondered this we will be able to appreciate the magnificence of this universe, of which we only know a little. So, when you read Allah’s word that it is He who has built the universe and it is He who is steadily expanding it (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47), you realise that these things are only infinite according to our knowledge and minds – but for Allah, they are indeed finite.

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sh’arawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

Nothing more clearly illustrates the precise order of celestial movements than the way it is possible to exactly predict the solar and lunar eclipses, which are projected by scientists and then occur at the exact moment predicted. They base their calculations on the movement of the planets and their orbits, and so we say to those who are still obstinate enough to deny that the earth is moving: You must be thinking that the scientists who predict eclipses possess knowledge of the unseen! But wouldn't it be better to admit that it is indeed Allah, who created them in this precise order; thus attributing it to Allah, rather than to the scientists?

Then, He says: '…In the end, you will all emerge when He calls you from the earth…' (*ar-Rum:* 25). This is about the second blast of the trumpet. The first blast is the one Allah *Glorified is He* describes as being one single blast after which we will all fall down lifeless (*Ya Sin:* 29). This will be followed by the second blast which Allah describes as the one single blast which will bring us all aligned before him (*Ya Sin:* 53).

The first blast will cause everything to die, and the second will cause everything to be resurrected; and if you consider these two blasts, and the secret Allah has placed within them, you will be amazed to find that it corresponds to the secret of life.

In every moment of our time, births and deaths are taking place. We have widely varying dates of birth and death, but in the hereafter we will all be the same; even though we might have different birth dates we will all be resurrected on the very same day, to be aligned in front of Allah (*Ya Sin:* 53). Also, those who died on different days will all fall down lifeless on the same day (*Ya Sin:* 29). This means that birth corresponds to resurrection and death corresponds to falling down lifeless. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says that He will gather us all on the Day of Gathering (*at-Taghabun:* 9).

The second blast will be made by the Angel Israfil upon Allah's Command because the True Lord does some things Himself, and we all know that He created man with His own hand, and then said to Satan (Iblis): '…"What has kept you from prostrating yourself before that which I created with My Hands?"…' (*Sad:* 75). Otherwise, Allah delegates to His creatures all the affairs of the cosmos.

At one instance Allah tells us that it is He who causes all human beings to die at their appointed time (*az-Zumar:* 42). At another instance, He tells us that the one who reclaims us is the angel of death who has been put in charge of us (*As-Sajda:* 11). Also, at another instance the task is delegated to the 'messengers' who cause our death (*al-An'am:* 61); the helper-angels, who are the hosts of the Angel of Death. So, Allah first ascribed death to Himself because He is the One Who has command over it, and who issues orders to the Angel of Death; and in his turn, the Angel of Death commands his hosts; so, all goes back to Allah.

When Allah tells us that we will 'emerge', this means that the dead will all come back to life when they hear this blast. This implies abruptness and shock – and this is the difference between the birth of this world and the birth of the Hereafter. The birth of this world is not a surprise, but rather comes after a period of expectation; before a woman gives birth, we see the signs of her pregnancy for several months, and she endures for several months; so there is no surprise.

وَلَهُۥ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ كُلّٞ لَّهُۥ قَٰنِتُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Everyone in the heavens and earth belongs to Him,
and all are obedient to Him [26] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 26)

Since 'everyone' means intelligent life, we might ask why He chose to specify this when everything in the universe serves Allah, obeys Him, glorifies Him and is in devout obedience before Him. They say it is because insubordination can only be the outcome of a thinking mind. As for inanimate objects with no intelligence, their case is simple since they are not capable of disobeying Allah in any way – elements, plants, animals and so on.

Consider a donkey used in carrying garbage. If you elevate its status by using it for a mount instead, it will not protest; it did not disobey in the first place, and it will not disobey in the second place because it is subjugated for you by Allah's will not because of your intelligence or power. Allah tells us to look how He created for us things made by His hands, and created livestock we control, and made them obedient, so that some can be used for riding, and some for food (*Ya Sin:* 71-72).

Look at the camel; since Allah subdued it for us, even a small child can steer it and make it kneel, and ride on it and load it; whilst a small snake would frighten you despite its small size because Allah did not subdue it for you.

We should pause for a moment to consider His word: '…Everyone in the heavens and earth…' (*ar-Rum:* 26). Those in the heavens are indeed in devout submission to Allah, serving Him and obeying His will; these are the blessed angels who never disobey Allah in whatever He commands them, but they always do what they are bidden (*at-Tahrim:* 6). They also extol His limitless Glory by night and day without ever tiring (*al-Anbiya':* 20).

But what about the human beings, where some of whom are atheists and disbelievers who do not devoutly obey? How, then can we understand 'all are obedient to Him'? They say that when these people defied Allah by disbelieving, or defied His Laws by disobeying Him, their innate selves never participated in this defiance, but rather, they did so with the free will that Allah created for them. Had Allah wanted to compel them, none of them would have ever strayed from His will; but Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* does not want to compel mankind by force. He rather wants His servants to come to Him freely and willingly, with the option to disbelieve and yet choosing to believe, and with the option to disobey yet choosing to obey.

If Allah wanted to force them to believe, they would have found no way to disbelieve, and He would have made them infallible like the Prophets. Your Lord wants your faith to be an outcome of love and sincerity, not compulsion and force; and so Satan (Iblis) swore by Allah's Might that he will beguile us into grievous error, except for the ones who are true servants of Allah (*Sad:* 82-83).

So, he has no power over Allah's sincere servants, whom Allah has chosen for himself, and he cannot influence them. So, Satan (Iblis) is not in a battle with his Lord, but rather, his battle is with mankind. Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* tells him that he shall have no power over His true servants (*al-Hijr:* 42).

When the insubordinate choose to defy Allah, and they reconcile with it, Allah gives them more of it and aids them to it. Allah does not benefit from those who obey Him, nor is He harmed by those who disobey Him. So, He seals their hearts till faith cannot enter, and disbelief cannot exit. He has no need for any of His creatures, and so when He created paradise; He made it vast enough for all mankind to enter if they believed, and when He created Hell, He made it vast enough for all mankind to enter if they disbelieved, and He left it up to them; he who wants to believe can believe and he who wants to disbelieve can disbelieve (*al-Kahf:* 29).

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to us, 'You are free, and I am ready to reward you all, for My Paradise is vast enough for you all, if you all believe; and Hell is not too small to take you all if you disbelieve.'

We say to those who defy Allah – you should be logical with yourself, and defy everything without being selective; so when sickness comes to you, defy it, and when death comes, defy it. If you cannot, then you are under the power of Allah, and subservient to Him: '…all are obedient to Him…' (*ar-Rum:* 26). All things submit to Him either willingly or compulsively in all matters over which they have no free will. So, you are submissive despite yourself, and your submission paired with your defiance is the clearest argument supporting the presence of Allah.

So, the believer submits to Allah within the area of free will, and this area covers belief and moral responsibilities. He also submits to Allah in those things which he cannot control, like fate, and compulsory acts, and he accepts them happily. As for the disbeliever, he also submits to Allah, and cannot break away from His decree or His will no matter how hard he tries in those things in which he has no free will; yet he receives them with the bitterness and dissatisfaction of a disbeliever in Allah, and a hater of His decree.

So, we say to those who try to defy Allah and disbelieve in Him, or His Law – why do you not defy Allah in the involuntary acts He compels you to do? In fact, you did not choose correctly because you have to choose all or none.

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى يَبۡدَؤُاْ ٱلۡخَلۡقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُۥ وَهُوَ أَهۡوَنُ عَلَيۡهِۚ وَلَهُ
ٱلۡمَثَلُ ٱلۡأَعۡلَىٰ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

He is the One who originates creation and will do it again – this is even easier for Him. He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth; He is the Almighty, the All Wise [27]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 27)

The Quran frequently mentions this matter to us, reminding us of the first creation and its subsequent recurrence. The Quran is concerned with this issue, and emphasising it, because it is the hinge of the Quranic message; if people believe that they will return to Allah, they will fear His punishment, and so Allah emphasises to them in numerous places the certitude of their return, and the absolute truth of it.

He says: ‘He is the One Who originates creation and will do it again…’ (*ar-Rum:* 27). The verse begins with the word ‘He is’, whilst in an earlier verse He says, ‘Allah is the One Who originates creation and will do it again….’ (*ar-Rum:* 11) So, the word ‘He’ here refers to Allah. As we know, it is a third person pronoun, called in Arabic *ghayb* which literally means ‘unseen’. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is unseen to the eye, and this is an aspect of His greatness, if He were to be perceived by the usual senses, He would not be a Deity; and how could we hope to perceive Him when we cannot even perceive many of His creations?

Allah has created certain concepts to govern life, concepts like ‘truth’ and ‘justice’; ‘truth’ is what the whole judiciary supports and proclaims, and ‘justice’ is what governs the criteria of life, to establish balance between whims and facts. These concepts cannot be perceived by the senses; have you ever seen justice, or heard it, or smelled it? The high concepts cannot be encompassed by the senses because they are higher than the senses, and it is only through them that anything can be perceived. In this case can some of the creations of Allah be too lofty to be perceived by the senses, whilst He Himself could be perceived?

So, when you hear the word ‘He’, know that it only applies to the One Allah, who because of His greatness cannot be perceived by the senses. Allah tells us that no human vision can encompass Him, while He encompasses all human vision (*al-An'am:* 103). That is why we read in the chapter of *al-Ikhlas*: 'He is the One Allah' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). We see that the word 'Allah', the Divine Name signifying the One Whose existence is necessary (The Necessary Existent), coming after the word 'He', emphasising that the word 'He' is more of an indicator of the Divine Presence than the Divine Name 'Allah'. As if the pronoun 'He' is not rightfully ascribed to anyone except Allah since nothing necessarily exists except Him.

Allah's words: 'He is the One Who originates creation…' (*ar-Rum:* 27) here are in the present tense, indicating continuity. Somewhere else Allah tells us that He first created us (used here in the past tense), so we will come back [to life] again (*al-A'raf:* 29). Hence, Allah began the creation, and it became a continuously renewed creation. He also starts and continues creation in every moment we see something new created. Creation did not come all at once and then it stopped; it rather began and then continued. So, we notice that the Quran sometimes mentions this in the past tense, and sometimes in the present; for indeed the True Lord *Glorified is He* began creation by creating Adam *peace be upon him* the first man, and He excelled in creating everything He creates, and began the creation of man out of clay (*as-Sajda:* 7).

By His All-Sustaining nature, He remains a Creator, every day and every moment bringing a new creation into existence, as we see in the case of men, animals, plants and so on.

By the constant renewed creation of mankind, and how every moment a new child is born, we refute the argument of those who believe in reincarnation; those who think that when souls leave the body at death they are reborn in new bodies. This would mean that the rate of births and deaths would have to be equal, and that the world census would have to stay fixed; yet we all witness the overpopulation that the world complains of today, and this is enough to invalidate this theory.

The True Lord warns us not to take the story of the first creation from anyone but the Creator, for there are many people who misguide others about this matter; so do not listen to them. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He did not make them witness the creation of the heavens and earth nor the creation of their own selves; neither did He take as His helpers those who lead men astray (*al-Kahf:* 51).

We have all seen that some of these misguiding people say that the origin of mankind was the apes, and then they evolved into humans. The answer to these delusions is simple: if apes evolved into humans, then why did the rest of the apes not evolve as well? Why has mankind, since Adam *peace be upon him* was created, not evolved into something else? How can we believe these delusions, when our Lord says that He created pairs from all things so that people might take note? (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49) He also says that He created pairs of all things which the earth produces, from our own selves and from that of which we have no knowledge (*Ya Sin:* 36).

So, beware of saying that something has evolved from something else; for every species has been what it is since Allah created it. Beware of these ideas, and do not take the story of the first creation from anyone but Allah Himself.

The phrase ‘brings it forth anew’ (*ar-Rum:* 11) means that He recreates it; so the meaning is: He creates things for the first time, then causes death, then revives. Some people think that ‘brings it forth anew’ refers to the resurrection in the Hereafter, but Allah *Glorified is He* says that He first brought creation into being and in the end He will reproduce it (*ar-Rum:* 11). This means that ‘bringing creation into being’ is distinct from ‘reproducing it’; it is the Resurrection.

He says: ‘this is even easier for Him’ (*ar-Rum:* 27), that is, according to your human perception of things, otherwise it cannot be said that things are easy or easier for Allah, or simple and simpler, since Allah does not deal with things as we do, and His actions do not require any effort; rather, He simply says ‘Be!’ and it is.

An example of this is what He said to Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he expressed amazement at the notion that he might be given a son despite his old age and his wife’s infertility. But Allah revealed to him that this is easy for Him (*Maryam:* 9) because Allah’s absolute power is not limited by our human concepts. Likewise, He said to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* that it is easy for Him (*Maryam:* 21).

So, it was incredible in Maryam's (Mary's) eyes that she should conceive a child without any husband, but it was not incredible in view of Allah's Omnipotent Power. Although the usual thing is that a child is born through specific means, yet Allah is the Creator of these means, and He is free to do as He wills without utilising any of them.

We spoke before about the manifestation of Allah's Omnipotent Power in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when his people wanted to burn him. If it was merely a matter of saving Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from the fire, Allah would not have allowed them to get hold of him in the first place; or even if they had caught him and thrown him in the fire, Allah could have sent down rain to extinguish it.

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to silence all the arguments of the disbelievers, and show the falsehood of their disbelief, and so they caught Ibrahim (Abraham) and threw him into the fire as it blazed and burned; yet they forgot something important. Allah is the Lord of that fire and its Creator, and the Creator of its power to burn, and He alone is able to take from it this power so that His Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* could be cast into it without getting burnt. So, His greatness was manifested, and His proof was made plain, and He said to the fire to be cold and peaceful for Ibrahim (Abraham) (*al-Anbiya':* 69).

Notice the eloquence of Allah's words: 'He is the One Who originates creation…' (*ar-Rum:* 27). The rhetorical style here is one of restriction since information which could have been left to the end of the phrase is mentioned at the beginning. This is similar to Allah's words: 'You alone do we worship…' (*al-Fatiha:* 5).

In this case, the object is brought to the beginning, although objects are usually mentioned after their subject and verb. It is brought forward here in order to restrict our declaration of worship to Allah alone, and no other, so that we could not add anything else to Allah. So, if we said, 'We worship You', we could add to this, 'and we worship you and others.' The same is the case with 'He is the One Who originates…' (*ar-Rum:* 27) which affirms that creation is solely the work of Allah, without our being able to add any other.

He says ‘this is even easier for Him’ (*ar-Rum:* 27) although in reality there is no question of easy and easier where Allah is concerned, hence the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying so to help us understand that He does not act in the way that we act, rather, He simply says ‘Be!’ and it is.

Reflect on the statement of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* when the angels gave her the news of the birth of Al-Masih (the Messiah), and she asked how she could have a son when no man has ever touched her! (*Al-‘Imran:* 47) How did Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* come to understand this, and who told her that she would conceive a child without any human touching her? She understood this when the angel told her that Allah is sending her the glad tidings of a word from Him, who shall become known as Al-Masih ‘Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary) (*Al-‘Imran:* 45).

If the child were to have a father, the angels would have mentioned his name (would have called him ‘son of so-and-so’), yet since they named him after his mother, this showed he was to have no father.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth…’ (*ar-Rum:* 27). This means that Allah is beyond comparison, and so if any of His creatures seem to resemble Him in any of His attributes, then we have to perceive it in view of: ‘He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth…’. You have existence, and Allah has existence, but your existence is not like Allah’s; you have life, and Allah has life, but your life is not like Allah’s, and so on.

Concerning the phrase: ‘He is the Almighty, the All Wise’ (*ar-Rum:* 27), the word ‘almighty’ in Arabic *a‘la* is the superlative form of *‘ali* which means ‘high’, meaning something that cannot be compared or likened to anything else; and this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…He is above all comparison…’ (*ash-Shura:* 11). This negates not only that there could be anything like Allah, but that there could be anything like a likeness of Him because the two Arabic words *ka* and *mithl*, which both mean ‘the like of’, are used together, so literally it says ‘there is nothing like His likeness.’

The way the Arabs draw comparisons would be to say, for example ‘Zayd is as brave as a lion.’ You want to give us an impression of *Zayd’s* courage, so you use the clearest example to this attribute which is the lion. Hence, the lion actually possesses more of this attribute – of bravery – than *Zayd*, otherwise you would not have used it as the basis of your comparison.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…He is above all comparison…' (*ash-Shura:* 11), this means that even if there were a likeness to Allah, there could be no likeness for this likeness. This constitutes an a priori negation of any likeness to Him because the weaker element, which is the object of the comparison (*Zayd*), has to be lesser than the object used to compare it with (the lion). If it were the other way round (like saying that the lion is braver than *Zayd*), there would be absolutely no point from this comparison.

Look at how beautifully the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives His creatures examples from their own world, and draws the analogy from His own Being. In order to help us understand the reality of His Light, He tells us that He is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like a niche, and in it is a lamp, the lamp is inside a glass, and the glass is like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, and its oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it; light upon light and Allah guides whoever He wills to his Light and He draws such comparisons for people; and He has full knowledge of everything (*an-Nur:* 35).

So, He compares His Light to that of a niche (*mishkat*) which people superficially mistake as meaning a lamp, but Allah says it is 'a niche and in it is a lamp' (*an-Nur:* 35). A niche is like an alcove in the wall, and inside it they used to place lamps to light up the room. This niche would gather the light from the lamp and reflect it so that the light inside the niche would be brighter than it is in the rest of the room.

If we reflect on this notion, we will see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is not giving us a simile of His Light, but rather of His Illumination, so Allah's Illumination is like that of a niche wherein there is a lamp, and the lamp indicates a more modern way of lighting. Beneath the lamp comes the candle, which is a wick on which a naked flame burns, and it emits black smoke. As for a lamp, its flame is encased in glass which only provides it with enough air for the flame to stay lit without burning off the wick, so the light that comes from it is pure.

Moreover, this light is not in any ordinary glass, but rather in one ‘like a glittering star’ (*an-Nur:* 35) which is producing its own light. This lamp is lit from an olive tree which is perfectly balanced, ‘from neither east nor west’. Imagine such a lamp in a small space, not simply hung in the centre of the room, but rather in a niche; how bright would its light be?

This is the nature of Allah’s illumination of the heavens and the earth. Despite their vast size, Allah’s light bathes them in their entirety, just like the niche into which this lamp we are discussing is placed.

This parable has a famous story attached to it from the chronicles of Arabic literature. It occurred to the poet Abu Tammam(1) when he was praising one of the caliphs and wanted to convey that he combined all of the virtues and gifts of the Arab people such as generosity, bravery, forbearance, and intelligence, saying,

‘Amr’s bravery with Hatim’s largess,

Ahnaf’s patience with Iyas’ cunningness.

ʻAmr ibn Mu'adda Kurb was famous for his bravery, Hatim At-Ta’i for his generosity, Ahnaf ibn Qays for his forbearance – he was known as the ‘mildest of the Arabs’, never becoming angry or losing his patience. Once a group of people(2) attempted to make him lose his patience, to win a wager of being the first to do so. They followed him in the street and ridiculed him, whilst all the time he smiled until they reached his neighbourhood, whereupon he looked to them and said, ‘My fellows, we are close to home, so if you have any more insults for me, now is the time; for if my folks catch you, they will kill you.’

As for Iyas ibn Mu'awiya, he had exemplary intelligence. In his praise of the caliph, Abu Tammam ascribed to him all the virtues that Arabs valued. Upon this, one of his rivals said, ‘Do you compare the caliph to such inferiors? Who were those men next to the caliph?’ The following famous verses express this criticism:

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(1) The story of Abu Tammam writing panegyrics to Ahmad Ibn Al-Mu’tasim and those who envied him out of spite

(2) The story of the youth who were testing the patience of Ahnaf and his response to them

His praising poet compares his magnificence
To those who are like his feeblest servants:
In his army are countless superiors of Antar
And among his servants a thousand Hatim!

Faced with this criticism, Abu Tammam paused a little then said:

Do not censure me for comparing him to inferiors,
Such examples of valour and munificence,
For Allah Almighty gives an example of His Light
By a niche in which a lamp is shining bright!

Even though his reply appeared spontaneous, his rivals saw that it was too prompt to have been composed on the spot. They accused Abu Tammam of having prepared these lines earlier, and some of the scholars of literature hold this view. It is reported, however, that when the paper Abu Tammam had with him was inspected, the aforesaid verse were not found there. Anyway, even if he did prepare them earlier, this also bears testimony to his brilliance, for he was clever enough to expect their criticism and prepare his reply to it.

Allah then says: '… He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth…' (*ar-Rum:* 27). Allah is the Highest Example on earth, for nothing is like Him. Likewise, He is the Highest Example in the heavens, for nothing there is like Him either. Even though the dwellers of the heavens; namely, the angels, are unknown to us, we know that they have their own attributes and they are nothing like the Attributes of Allah. He is beyond all comparison in the heavens and earth.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '… He is the Almighty, the All Wise' (*ar-Rum:* 27). Allah has absolute Power over all things, yet He also has absolute Wisdom by which He applies His Power, so He does not wrong anyone.

Allah says in the following verse:

ضَرَبَ لَكُم مَّثَلٗا مِّنۡ أَنفُسِكُمۡۖ هَل لَّكُم مِّن مَّا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُكُم مِّن
شُرَكَآءَ فِي مَا رَزَقۡنَٰكُمۡ فَأَنتُمۡ فِيهِ سَوَآءٞ تَخَافُونَهُمۡ كَخِيفَتِكُمۡ
أَنفُسَكُمۡۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لِقَوۡمٖ يَعۡقِلُونَ ٢٨

He gives you this example, drawn from your own lives: do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you? Do you fear them as you fear each other? This is how We make Our messages clear to those who use their reason [28] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 28)

Drawing parables is one of the ways used in the Quran to explain the matters pertaining to faith and make them easier to comprehend. In another verse of the Quran, Allah says: ‘Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or of something [even] less than that…’ (*al-Baqara:* 26). He also says: ‘O people! A parable is set forth, therefore listen to it...’ (*al-Hajj:* 73). Using parables to clarify truths is quite frequent in the Quran.

The Arabic verb often used to mean ‘give (an example)’ or ‘draw (a parable)’ is *daraba* which also means ‘strike’ or ‘hit’. These meanings seem to have nothing in common. However, they both denote ‘making a profound effect’. Allah says, for example: ‘… some of you *yadrebun* through the land seeking Allah’s bounty…’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). This is a present form of the verb *daraba* which here denotes ‘traveling through the land, making a change in it and seeking livelihood’. This verb is also used to describe the minting of coins. So it is as though the meaning of this verb is to leave a lasting mark on something. People *yadrebun* through the earth means searching it, unveiling its treasures, and employing its resources. As for coins, *darb* is done by leaving a mark on it that cannot be erased when the coins are taken from one hand to another; so is the case with *darb* (drawing; propounding) parables and examples. They serve to explain matters so that they become clearly ingrained in the mind.

This takes us to proverbs. These too are used for expressing or underlining facts or notions. A man once went hunting; the moment he saw a good catch, he started preparing his tools to hunt it, yet the animal would not wait for him to be ready, hence the proverb, ‘Before shooting, fill your quiver!’ It is no longer confined to the particular occasion of hunting, but the saying now goes for any situation where one fails to be ready for something. It can be said, for example to a student who waits until just before his exam to cram information. Another example is, 'If you are wind, you have just met a tornado!' This would be said by someone who wants to threaten or deter a tough opponent.

So Allah gives us parables to explain things to us so we understand them. Therefore, He says: 'Allah does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat or of something [even] less than that…' (*al-Baqara:* 26). The Arabic structure of this verse has been subject to little debate among exegetes. It literally translates:… of a gnat or of anything above that…'. Some argue that so long as Allah does not disdain to draw a parable of a gnat, it necessarily entails that He would not disdain to draw a parable of anything above that. However, they do not know that the verse actually means: '… of a gnat or anything above that [*in littleness*]…', so the verse means anything even smaller or more insignificant, not anything larger, than a gnat.

This is another parable through which Allah explains the concept of His Oneness: 'Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to Allah, though most of them do not know' (*az-Zumar:* 29). So those who take other gods beside Allah are like a servant who serves several masters who disagree with one another, so if he pleased one, he would displease the other. What a wretched position between them all! Is such a servant equal to another who serves one master? So is the case of worshipping Allah alone with no partners. Thus, Allah does not shy away or disdain from drawing parables to explain the truth of things to His servants.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on, it presents a parable through which Allah explains the concept of monotheism. This verse emphasises the Oneness and Unity of Allah. He is One, for there is no God but Him, and He is One also in the sense that He is not made up of parts.

Allah says: 'He gives you this example, drawn from your own lives…' that is, a real example, not far from you. The clearest illustration of something we cannot see is through something with which we are familiar. People learn what they do not know through what they know. This is also why Allah has sent us human Messengers, not angels, for example; He says: ‘A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves…’ (*at-Tawba:* 128). That is, from your own kind, so you know his character and history.

Now, what is the parable we are examining? Allah says: ‘… do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you? Do you fear them as you fear each other?...’ (*ar-Rum:* 28) This parable illustrates that it is an intellectual necessity that no partners be ascribed to the One God. Allah provides for His servants and showers His blessings on them. He makes some of them servants and bondsmen to others. Would you allow your servants to be your partners and share control of everything you possess? Would you give them absolute control and freedom as if they were freemen like you? Would you fear that they might outdo you, just as you fear your equals? Have you ever done this? Would you accept such a thing for yourselves? Then why do you accept such a thing for Allah? Why do you ascribe to His servants a share of His sovereignty? You would not accept your servants to be your equals, even though they are human beings like you, so judge by your own standards. They are Adam’s progeny just like you, and your ownership of them is not absolute. You confine their freedom, but you do not own their souls, hearts, or their wills. Even slaves are not really *owned* by their masters, for they may sell them to others, free them, or their slaves may die. Thus, they do not ultimately belong to their masters. Despite this, a master would not take his slave as an equal partner. How shameful it is, therefore, that you are happy to ascribe to Allah what you would be loath to ascribe to yourselves!

Notice that Allah does not address them in this matter by a statement, but rather, He poses a rhetorical question which is the best way to bring out the truth: ‘… do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you? Do you fear them as you fear each other?...’ (*ar-Rum:* 28) Using a rhetorical question means he who poses it is sure of the answer he would receive from his addressee. A statement is open for affirmation or negation. A rhetorical question, on the other hand, is a way of getting the addressee to acknowledge the truth with which you are indirectly facing him. By posing a rhetorical question, one receives either the expected answer or the addressee answers by silence which is itself an implied acknowledgement of the truth of what the other party has said. So by posing the question: '… do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you?...' (*ar-Rum:* 28), the only answer to be expected is, 'No, we certainly do not!' This leads to the more important question: so why do you ascribe partners to Allah?

Allah says in the verse: '… an equal share in what We have given you…' (*ar-Rum:* 28). What Allah gives us is not confined to money. We spoke about Divine provision before and said that Allah is the Provider, yet He respects the rights of His servants. He respects their hard efforts and preserves their rights to own what they have worked to gain even though everything originally comes from Him and He is the One Who possesses everything. He bestows His bounties on whomever He wills of His servants and does not take back the gifts He gives them. Even when Allah urges the rich to give charity to the poor and needy, He says: 'Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over?…' (*al-Baqara:* 245) So you should consider the charity you give to your poor brother as a loan to Allah, which He will repay many times over.

As we said before, provision does not only mean money, as some think. Rather, your provision is everything from which you draw benefit, and so you should share it with those who need it and give out of it to those who lack it. Strength is a gift from Allah, so the strong should employ his strength to help the weak. Useful knowledge is also a Divine gift, so those who are blessed with it should pass it on to the ignorant. Forbearance is a gift, a sort of Divine bestowal. Those gifted with this personality trait should manifest it with others by being patient with them and restraining anger, and so on. Thus we see that money is the least valuable form of provision. Poverty has solutions in Islam. A particular share is prescribed for the poor, and in case of extreme poverty and lack of means, the afflicted person is permitted to beg for food. No one would die of hunger if Islamic rulings were truly applied. If circumstances force a poor person to beg, he should do that politely and gently. If he is hungry, he should not ask for money, but rather for food. This can remove every doubt concerning him. One who begs for food, undoubtedly, needs only to satiate his hunger. Begging for money, however, may be suspected to be only out of greed and a desire to hoard. Begging for food spares us doubt or wondering. It spells out a real need.

In the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) and Khidr, Allah says in the Quran: '… They came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality…' (*al-Kahf:* 77). So when they refused to give them even a morsel of food, they deserved to be called the meanest of people. Islamic Law permits a hungry person to seek food, and even take it by force if he is denied it. If the owner of the food complains to the judge, the latter's verdict should be in favour of the hungry beggar. In such a case, a person who only wants a piece of bread to save his life cannot be called a transgressor.

Allah has undertaken to provide for you, yet He meanwhile commands you to do the effort you can, to employ the means He has created to make your livelihood. Only do your best and you will have no need to worry about anything else. Do not suppose that your work is the source of the provisions you earn. Rather, work is only the means we should employ, but provision comes only from Allah. Let it suffice as evidence that you may do effort yet fail to achieve the desired profit, for Allah has withheld it from you for a reason. Even if you think your provisions are rather straitened, stay reassured, for everything is already predestined by your Creator: He will send you your provisions in full. What Allah has decreed for you is sure to come to your door. Worry about provision is a primary source of anxiety and sadness. If people knew that the One Who has created them has undertaken to provide for them, that would put their hearts at ease. If you fail to attain a particular thing you wanted, be sure then it would not be good for you had you got it. Be sure also that Allah will make the right thing reach you in another way.

It may be appropriate here to mention the story of 'Urwa ibn Adhinah who was a friend of Hisham ibn 'Abd Al-Malik in Medina, before the latter came to power. Having become the caliph, Hisham moved to Damascus. 'Urwa fell into poverty and went through difficulties. Remembering his old friendship with Hisham, he set out for Damascus in the hope that the caliph would help him in his time of need. 'Urwa arrived at Damascus and asked permission to see the caliph which was granted to him. He met his friend and explained his tough circumstances. Hisham was not successful in the answer he provided, 'You came from Medina to ask for help even though you are the one who once said:

Voracity and greed are alien to my character!
Whatever my provision, it will come from my Master!

This was the reply of 'Urwa, 'May Allah reward you well, for you have alerted me and reminded me of what I had forgotten.' Then he left.

Hisham reflected on the matter and, recalling the friendship that had bound him to 'Urwa, he regretted the way he had treated him. He allocated a large grant for 'Urwa and sent someone to follow him and give it to him. The envoy could not catch 'Urwa on the road and had to travel all the way to his home in Medina. The envoy was an intelligent man, so when 'Urwa opened the door and asked what he wanted, he said, 'I am Hisham's envoy, and this is his grant to you. He did not want you to carry it yourself, for fear you would be waylaid or that it would be a burden to you, so he sent it with me.' 'Urwa said, 'May Allah reward the Prince of the Believers. Tell him he recalled the first line, but had he remembered the second line as well, he would have spared all of us the trouble:

Voracity and greed are alien to my character!
Whatever my provision, it will come from my Master!
I struggle to seek it, and it tires me endlessly!
Had I just waited, it would come to me effortlessly!'(1)

Back to the verse we are reflecting on ; Allah concludes it by saying: '…This is how We make Our messages clear to those who use their reason' (*ar-Rum:* 28). Allah shows them plainly and clearly so that when they are presented to an unbiased mind, it will surely accept them. The Arabic for 'reason' or 'mind' is *'aql* which linguistically denotes 'fastening' or 'discretion'. This is because the mind is what checks people and prevents them from overstepping their limits.

Some people wrongly believe that the mind's role is to give free rein to whatever thoughts occur to them. The truth is quite the reverse. The mind's role is actually to keep you clear of such thoughts and govern your behaviour. It is to sort out your thoughts, to study them. It is to check your whims, not indulge in them and act based on what they dictate. Its role is to guide you to do and say what is right. Thus has Allah made everything clear in His Message.

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(1) Al-Asfahani narrates this story in his Al-Aghani.

A pure mind leads one to the truth about things. An example of this was wonderfully represented by Companion ‘Umar Al-Farouq *Allah be pleased with him*. He would suggest a thing to Prophet Muhammad, and then Allah would send down a revelation in agreement with what ‘Umar had suggested. Allah thus showed that when the mind is free of prejudices and caprices, it responds to right guidance and is even able to reach the truth by itself.

The mind is the means by which one forms one’s perception. Allah says: ‘And Allah has brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful’ (*an-Nahl:* 78). The mind gathers data through the senses, which is how it forms its beliefs. The eyes see, the ears hear, the tongue tastes, the skin touches, the nose smells, and so on for all the other senses. There is the sense by which we determine weight, the thickness of objects and so on. Scientists call the well-known ones ‘the five external senses’ in order to leave room for the discovery of more. These senses perceive data and transmit these perceptions to the mind which analyses them and arrives at conclusions that form the basic foundational laws for life. We know through experience that honey is sweet, cheese is salty. This is how the mind forms its notions then passes them to the heart. When these notions settle in the heart, they become beliefs that do not need to be thought about again. They become ingrained in the heart and do not need to be considered by the mind again. The role of the mind is to choose between alternatives; those things for which there is no alternative do not need to be considered by the mind. For example, if you want to go to a place to which only one road leads, there is nothing to think about; if several ways lead to your destination, the mind has to compare them and choose the best.

The mind is the scale by which things are weighed and judged. The mind itself must be sound so it can reach sound, objective conclusions. We know that scales differ based on the thing that needs to be weighed. The mind has to be fit for making choices so it can be depended on and held accountable for whatever it chooses. Take the sun and the moon for example; Allah says: ‘The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5). They function according to a precise system. If this were not the case, and if they themselves did not follow an appointed course, we would not be able to use them to determine time. By the sun we know day and night and by the moon we know the months.

So when Allah says: ‘… This is how We make Our messages clear to those who use their reason’ (*ar-Rum:* 28), disbelief is in no way to be justified. Allah has explained everything clearly in His revelations, so it only remains that you use your reason.

Since the mind is the means of perception, analysis, and choice-making, Allah exempts immature minds from moral responsibility: He excuses the young who have not yet reached the age of puberty because their minds are not yet fully developed, nor have their senses fully matured. Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Teach your children to observe *salat* (prayer) at the age of seven and beat them (gently) for leaving it at the age of ten.’(1) So he made it the responsibility of parents to convey to children their own responsibilities at this age in order to make them accustomed to obedience of Divine commands and prohibitions even though they do not yet bear this responsibility. When the child grows, he accepts Allah’s Commands as he first accepted his parents’ commands. Allah allows the parents to give commands as well as punishment in the case of disobedience.

Besides young children, another category exempted from moral responsibility is that of the insane, for they cannot differentiate between right and wrong.

So Allah’s revelation has made everything clear, one only has to use one’s reason, which polytheists do not. What reason or wisdom can polytheism ever represent? What is the meaning of worshipping idols, trees, the sun, or the moon? They say: ‘… We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah…’ (*az-Zumar:* 3). Worship means obedience in the first place. It is to comply with the Divine commands and prohibitions, and what laws have those false deities set? What guidance have they revealed to their worshippers? What rewards have they promised for the obedient or punishment for the disobedient? Nothing at all and nothing is easier for anyone than to worship a god that assigns to him no responsibilities, a god that does not command him to check his whims and desires or fulfil his duties. Worshipping such false deities is a sufficient proof that their worshippers do not use their reason.

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(1) *Cited by Abu Dawud and Ahmad*

In this universe, Allah has created various kinds and species and has made some of His creatures superior to others. Some kinds of creatures have things in common with humankind, like feeling and movement. Still, they have no intellect or ability to consider alternatives because they are ruled by their instincts. These are the animals which never act contrary to their instincts. We have previously given the example of the sexual instinct and made a comparison between desire in humans and desire in animals. Allah has made desire for the purpose of procreation and preservation of the species. Animals, governed by instinct, fulfil the purpose of procreation and stop there. Once the male has impregnated the female he does not approach her again. Smelling her odour and discovering that she is pregnant, a male would not mate with her.(1) People, however, are different in this respect. They too have desires. Women bear the difficulties of pregnancy and the pain of childbirth, and then the parents bear the difficulties of raising children until they reach adulthood. Allah has made this labour – which is necessary for the preservation of humankind – come about as the result of such strong pleasure because otherwise no woman would ever consent to bear her second child.

What we have said about the sexual instinct can also be said about eating and drinking. Animals are governed in these matters by pure instinct, untainted by caprice, and so when they are full, they eat no more, no matter how hard you try to make them.(2) A donkey would not eat a single piece of clover when it is full. It would pass by mint leaves and mallow without eating them and seek out dry grass instead; they know their own food because of the instinct that Allah has placed within them. As for people, they eat until they are fit to burst, not forgetting desserts, foods which aid digestion and so on. Many people would thus eat more than their capacities because they are enslaved by the desires of their stomachs. They would not leave the table until they are full to the brim.

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(1) This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha’rawi *may Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true. [Reviewer’s Note]

(2) [From Proofreader] This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Sha’rawi *may Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

I have known men who have worked at the zoo here in Egypt. They told me something a little peculiar about animals' behaviour during the earthquake of 1992. They saw the caged animals become very agitated before the quake began. The first that showed this agitation were bats, then giraffes, crocodiles, apes, then finally donkeys. They almost broke their cages to escape. Immediately after, the earthquake struck. In Agadir of Morocco, something similar to this was noticed before an earthquake: donkeys broke free from their confinements and ran to the open space, and then the earthquake struck. So animals can feel earthquakes before they happen.

Allah mentions in the Quran the crow that taught humankind how to bury the dead. Allah tells us about the story of the two sons of Adam *peace be upon him*: 'Allah sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31).

So Allah has created humankind, animals, and plants that all have life and experience growth, and lifeless objects which represent the lowest class in existence. Each of these kinds has been made in the service of the higher kinds. By worshipping false deities, the disbelievers make the lowest class of creatures into the highest and greatest form: they make objects or animals gods to worship. What can prove the deficiency of their minds more strikingly?

Then, Allah says:

بَلِ ٱتَّبَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓا۟ أَهْوَآءَهُم بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۖ فَمَن
يَهْدِى مَنْ أَضَلَّ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن نَّٰصِرِينَ ٢٩

And still the idolaters follow their own desires without any knowledge. Who can guide those God leaves to stray, who have no one to help them? [29] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 29)

They follow their own desires in that they choose to worship that which has no guidance to give them and no duties to assign to them. They worship gods that neither command nor forbid anything and neither punish wrongdoers nor reward the righteous. They are false gods they have invented out of their desires and prejudices.

When one's choice is based on desire or prejudice rather than reason, the mind is spoiled. It becomes nothing but an apologist, always trying to justify incorrect choices without considering the consequences. Rather, the mind should control desire and make all one's actions conform to principles, not caprices. Some people think that desire is inherently evil. However, this is quite inaccurate. Conflicting desires are a great evil, but when one makes his desires submissive to Divine law, they are all moulded into one, which creates harmony rather than conflict. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you [truly] believes until his desire is in line with what I have been sent with [from Allah].'(1) So desire is not essentially evil. Rather, when it conforms to what Allah loves, it motivates one to struggle in His cause. Evil exists when desires are conflicting, when each follows his own whims irrespective of Allah's guidance. Allah wants the members of the believing community to subject their desires to Divine laws, to support one another rather than contradict one another. The conflict of desires destroys the flow of life and squanders its fruits. When our desires agree with what Allah wills, our lives can yield the desired fruits: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware' (*al-Mulk:* 14). Every maker knows best what he has made. Allah has made us and knows best what sets our lives on the right course. He has sent down guidance to teach us the limits of our desires, yet some people defy His laws and replace them by defective manmade laws.

For someone to set laws to regulate life and manage all its affairs, he must be infallible. He must possess omnipotent knowledge. Nothing should escape him in the entire existence. Does this apply to any mortal? Our knowledge is limited, and what we hold as truth is subject to change and amendment later when it becomes clear that it was inaccurate or incorrect. We constantly change our views when we discover things we have not known before.

Furthermore, a lawgiver must be disinterested and all the subjects of his authority must be equal in his eyes. Otherwise, prejudices will interfere with the laws he sets, as we have seen in communism, capitalism, and many other manmade doctrines.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Abu 'Asim*

Omnipotent Knowledge and Absolute Wisdom belong only to Allah. Also, all creatures are equal before Him, so no prejudices or inaccuracies are ever likely to taint His judgements. Before Allah, we are all equal, for He has neither a spouse nor a child towards whom He would be biased. He reassures us, saying: ‘and that He − exalted be the glory of our Lord! – has neither spouse nor child’ (*al-Jinn:* 3). He has no spouse to influence Him or a child to indulge. Wives and children are among a man’s points of weakness. They would cause a man to stray from justice.

Furthermore, Allah has no interest whatsoever regarding anything He legislates for us. He has created us with His omnipotent power, and He is free of any need of us; obedience of His servants does not benefit Him, nor does their defiance harm Him. Therefore, He alone sets laws for us. He alone is worthy of obedience.

As for Allah’s Commands and Obligations, we have stated before that it is not appropriate to consider only the rights that you have to fulfil. Rather, consider obligations also as a means to protect you. Just as you are forbidden to transgress against others, the same law forbids all others from transgressing against you, and so the law is in your favour.

Thus, if we use our intelligence, we will willingly act upon what Allah ordains; the problem is that most people do not listen and do not understand. ‘And still the idolaters follow their own desires without any knowledge…’ (*ar-Rum:* 29). They were evildoers because they allowed their desires to go at variance with the Law of Allah. With no laws governing them, desires conflicted and they strayed into misguidance and confusion. By their idolatry, they only wronged themselves, as Allah says: ‘…attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong!’ (*Luqman:* 13) By attributing partners to Allah *the Almighty* in worship, those polytheists actually wronged none but themselves, for they wrongly preferred the temporal lusts and desires of this worldly life to the permanent blessings of the Hereafter, paying no attention at all to the bad results of following their own whims. Here, we stress that they did so because they either did not really like doing good to themselves, or they did like it, but in a way that leads to nothing but destruction and this is the damage done when desires are given preference over reason and are allowed to govern the mind.

So they follow their desires: '… without any knowledge…' (*ar-Rum:* 29). What is knowledge? It means proving what we hold as true. We teach the young that Allah is One. If we can support this fact by proofs, this is knowledge. Otherwise, this is blind imitation. The opposite of knowledge is ignorance. It does not mean 'not to know', but to insist that you know while what you hold to be true is proven to be wrong. It has been proven that the earth is spherical. Whoever does not know this fact is illiterate, for if they are told about it, he would just agree having no evidence or background to argue it is untrue. Ignorance is to claim the earth is not spherical, while you have no proof to support your claim. So there is a difference between being ignorant and being uninformed. An uninformed person has no idea one way or the other, so if you tell him something, he will just accept it without argument. An ignorant person, however, stubbornly clings to a notion which is incorrect, so first you need to rid him of the wrong notion before you instil the right one.

If a notion has not reached the level where we accept it completely, consider: if the possibility of its truth is equal to that of its falsehood, we call this doubt. If the possibility of its being true is stronger, this is an assumption, and if the possibility of its being false is stronger, this is illusion. So the different kinds of notions are: knowledge, ignorance, imitation, assumption, and illusion.

Allah wants our lives to be governed based on knowledge and certainty, notions proven by evidence to be true. When people follow their conflicting desires and act upon them without knowledge, Allah leads them far astray, so long as this is their choice and preference; He says: '… Who can guide those Allah leaves to stray? …' (*ar-Rum:* 29) They let desire prevail over reason and preferred to disbelieve in Allah despite all the proofs He has sent down to them. None except Allah can help them. Due to their persistence in defying Him, He places a seal on their hearts so that faith may not enter and disbelief may not leave. Allah assists all of His servants with whatever they choose: He grants guidance to those who choose faith, and leads further astray those who choose disbelief. He says: ‘Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil; and awesome suffering awaits them’ (*al-Baqara:* 7). Let everyone, therefore, take heed. Allah tries us with hardship to test the firmness of our faith, not to torture us. Some choose to immerse themselves in grief and sorrow. They do not try to forget or find solace in anything, out of resentment towards Allah’s decree. Consequently, Allah increases their sadness, for this is what they choose to have. Life is not an incessant cycle of tragedy. Do not leave the door open to misery and lamentation, but rather close it and nail it shut with the power of contentment. Do not let your hearts surrender to sadness. Seek out Allah’s help and trust Him. If you choose to give in to sorrow and resentment, He will grant you whatever you choose.

‘… Who can guide those Allah leaves to stray? …’ (*ar-Rum:* 29) Who can save them and give them laws to protect them if their Lord leaves them to do whatever they please? No one can. If you advise your friend time and again and he does not listen to you, you finally give up. It was once said, ‘Advise your friend from dawn until noon, and from noon until midday. If he pays you no heed, give him false advice, and spend the rest of the day deceiving him!’

We spoke before about the correct way to scrutinise a matter in order to make a sound judgement about it. Do not study anything with any prior prejudices, but uproot them from your heart and consider the matter objectively. Then, submit the matter to your mind, and if the mind approves it, pass it to your heart. A considerable amount of bias against Islam is owed to the fact that we discuss it while our hearts lean towards communism, for example, which of course yields unsound conclusions.

So those who choose to follow their desires ‘… have no one to help them’ (*ar-Rum:* 29), an assertion by which Allah concludes the verse. No one can save them after Allah has let them stray and placed a seal on their hearts so that faith cannot enter them. Allah alone protects all, and none can be protected from Him.

Then, Allah says:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّتِى فَطَرَ ٱلنَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ
ٱللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلدِّينُ ٱلْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ٣٠

So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition God instilled in mankind – there is no altering God’s creation – and this is the right religion, though most people do not realize it [30] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 30)

This is addressed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* As long as they have followed their desires and insisted on misguidance, then leave them and do not grieve on account of their rejection, O Prophet. It pained him *peace and blessings be upon him* that many insisted on going astray, so Allah addressed him, saying: ‘[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) He also said to him: ‘But [Prophet] are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this message?’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) Allah has made it clear to His Prophet that he was responsible only for delivering the Message. He did not have to be disturbed by their stubbornness or saddened because they plotted against him, for Allah has already decreed that they would never gain victory over him. Allah has promised Prophet Muhammad victory over his opponents: ‘Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173). He also says: ‘And Allah will most certainly succour him who succours His cause…’ (*al-Hajj:* 40). He says in another verse: ‘… If you help [the cause of] Allah, He will help you…’ (*Muhammad:* 7). These are fundamental matters about faith, settled and complete. They are recited by the tongues and established in the hearts. Allah thus reassured His Messenger, Muhammad that even though the condition of Muslims at that time seemed at variance with that truth, things would certainly change, for this is what happened to previous nations. It is the law of Allah and must certainly apply to you as well: ‘So be patient [Prophet], for Allah’s Promise is sure: whether We show you part of what We have promised them [the disbelievers] in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned’ (*Ghafir:* 77).

Since this is the case: '…stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion…' (*ar-Rum:* 30). Leave them to their misguidance so long as they persist in obstinacy. Devote your time to your mission of calling for Allah's religion and do not let them distract you from it. Allah uses the word *wajh* (face) as we have pointed out, for the face symbolises direction: '… stand firm and true in your devotion to [set your face to] the religion…' (*ar-Rum:* 30). It means: devote yourself to your Lord alone and do not turn from Him. The word *wajh* also means 'self' or 'being', as in the verse: '… Everything is bound to perish, save His [eternal] *Wajh* Self…' (*al-Qasas:* 88).

In the verse, Allah describes His religion by the word *hanif*. This has been subject to much debate by those who like to search for 'mistakes' in the Word of Allah. This word literally denotes 'bending' or 'deviating'. Arabs use it to refer to the bowlegged. In what way is the religion of Allah 'bending' or 'deviating', then? Those who question the accuracy of the Quranic rhetoric simply do not understand it. Prophet Muhammad was sent to reform a corrupt, perverted society whose only religion was idolatry. Religion came to show people the Straight Path, and in this sense, it just 'deviates' or 'bends' the course of behaviour from the path of corruption and evildoing. The meaning is therefore 'deviation from falsehood' which means following the truth.

Even though the command in this verse is directly addressed to Prophet Muhammad, it is also meant for all Muslims. What is addressed to the Messenger of Allah is also addressed to the entire community of the believers. In the next verse, there is a proof that the verse we are considering is addressed to all Muslims, for Allah says: 'Turn to Him alone, all of you…' (*ar-Rum:* 31) which means the command is addressed to all. An example of this can also be found in the verse: 'Prophet, when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). Apparently, the address is for Prophet Muhammad only, yet it is clear from the structure of the verse that it is meant for the whole community of Muslims. Address is directed to Prophet Muhammad because he was the one who delivered the Message. Allah directs our attention to this understanding when He says: 'The Messenger of Allah is an excellent model for those of you who…' (*al-Ahzab:* 21).

Messengers were sent to societies where corruption reigned absolutely. Just as Allah has created physical immunities in the body, He has also created spiritual immunities. The lower self would insinuate one to chase his desires, and he would obey it, but then he regrets what he has done and his conscience stings him for his sin. He would perhaps even hate those who helped him commit it. This is the self-reproaching soul, and this behaviour is a sign that goodness lies within that person. This self-reproach is the intrinsic immunity with which Allah has endowed us. It comes from within.

Some seek out sin and rush to it, craving unlawful indulgences. Others, on the other hand, do not seek it or plan for it, but they just fall prey to it when the temptation comes in their way. This is clear from Allah's words: 'But Allah only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent…' (*an-Nisa':* 17). One would travel to a place known to be rife with temptations and indulgences on purpose to attain transient pleasures. Another would travel to the same place to study. Then, he inadvertently meets with a temptation, a girl for example, and falls because of his weakness into sin. The former had intended sin and planned for it. The latter never planned for it, let alone sought it out. He would regret his weakness, and the self-reproaching self would stir up within him. As for the other person, his soul has grown accustomed to sin, so his spiritual immunity has almost deteriorated. Since nothing within him prevents him from sin, society has to deter him.

Spiritual immunity does not mean a perfect society where sin does not exist. Sins will inevitably be committed. Each person has weaknesses and strengths, so one is responsible for offering advice in areas where he can control himself. A thief needs an honest person to advise him. One who inclines to looking at women when he has no right to needs a virtuous man to advise him, and so on. This is why Allah says: 'By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3). Sometimes corruption grew so rife that no one at all urged another to the truth, as Allah says about the Jews: 'They would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 79). In such cases, not only the individual loses spiritual immunity, but society in its entirety. It was in those cases that Allah sent new Messengers with new miracles to save people and restore them to the Straight Path.

As we have said earlier, Allah has endowed us with natural physical immunity to resist diseases. He has also made the truth intrinsic to our natural disposition, as He says: '… This is the natural disposition Allah instilled in mankind…' (*ar-Rum:* 30). Allah says about the formation of the human foetus: 'People, [remember,] if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped…' (*al-Hajj:* 5). Allah forms the body organs and also provides the body with what is needed to repair any defects in them. He has created mechanisms in the body by which injured organs mend and renew themselves. In addition to this, Allah has also created in us the basis of high morality; His religion is instilled in the natural disposition of humankind. So Allah has given us a conscience to alert us when we grow heedless. He has also set laws for society to deter sinners who lack this self-reproaching mechanism. Finally, when all fail, He would send Messengers to call people for His guidance.

Since Allah has willed that no other Messenger will be sent after Prophet Muhammad, He guarantees that righteousness and virtue will remain among his followers until the Final Hour. The community of Muslims will never be corrupted to the extent that it loses all goodness in individuals and in society. Even if some go astray, others will always be there to restore them to what is right, and this is clear in the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'There will always be a part of my community who support the truth and who will not be harmed by those who forsake them until Allah's decree comes while they are so.'(1) He also said, 'Goodness will be in my community [Muslims] until the Day of Judgement.'(2)

In the Arabic structure of the verse we are considering, the word *fitra* (natural disposition) is in the accusative case, even though no verb is mentioned before it. The style here is intended to alert us to a verb that is omitted. This verb may be estimated, and so the meaning can be literally as follows:

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(1) *Cited by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

(2) *Cited by Al-Qari, As-Suyuti and Al-Ajluni*

'…*keep* to *fitra* (natural disposition)'. Thus the verse implies a command that we turn away from all that is false and remain steadfast in faith, based on the creed Allah has instilled into our natural disposition. Grammarians term this style 'inducement', for it is meant to alert us to a truth and induce us to commit ourselves to it. Here Allah has commanded Prophet Muhammad to keep to natural disposition, the true religion, and not be concerned with evildoers who sought to hinder him.

The word *fitra* also means 'creation'. In the following verse, we find one of its derivatives: '… *Fatir* (Creator) of the heavens and the earth...' (*Yusuf:* 101).

Allah says: 'I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56). This is the truth. This is the pledge we have given to our Lord since we were still in the realm of the unseen before we came into existence. Allah says: '[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness"…' (*al-A'raf:* 172). We have previously explained that in every one of us there is a living atom from our father Adam. A human being is formed by the male sperm that fertilises the female ovum, and if we follow this chain back we will surely arrive at Adam *peace be upon him*. This atom that remains within each one of us is the one that has made the above-mentioned testimony, the first covenant Allah took from us. Otherwise, how could the disbelievers who lived during the pre-Islamic era of ignorance admit that creation was the work of Allah? He says: 'If you [Prophet] ask them, "Who created the heavens and earth?" They are sure to answer, "God"…' (*az-Zumar:* 38). How did they know this truth? It was transmitted to them through the aforesaid first covenant, and since this covenant, none of Allah's creatures have dared to claim that he is the creator. Everyone actually knows that Allah is the creator, despite the distorted religious beliefs many people hold. Even a disbeliever or an atheist, at hard times, would call none but the True God. They do not call their idol. They do not implore the false gods they have invented, for they know this is plain falsehood. When there is danger, they would not cheat themselves or lie to themselves. At this point, when times are hard, they have no one but Allah, the One God, to turn to, and this is because of the truth He has instilled into us all.

Since Allah has instilled the truth in our natural disposition, there can be no changing His Will: '… there is no altering Allah's creation…' (*ar-Rum:* 30). No one can claim that they have created the heavens and earth or anything in them.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '… and this is the right religion, though most people do not realise it' (*ar-Rum:* 30). They do not possess true knowledge which we have explained to mean a matter which conforms to reality and can be proved by evidence.

Allah says in the following verse:

مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيۡهِ وَٱتَّقُوهُ وَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَلَا تَكُونُواْ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ (٣١)

Turn to Him alone, all of you. Be mindful of Him;
keep up the prayer; do not join those who ascribe
partners to God [31] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 31)

Turning to Allah means cutting off all ties with falsehood. It means directing your soul to Him only and never letting anyone or anything influence your religious creed. It means employing reason and keeping to the truth Allah has made intrinsic to our natural disposition.

Allah then says '… Be mindful of Him…' (*ar-Rum:* 31). One cannot profess faith in Allah, while he deviates from the guidance He has given us to regulate our lives. Faith must be associated with obedience to Him *the Exalted*. This is why whenever Allah talks about faith in the Quran, He necessarily associates it with good deeds: 'Not so those who believe, do good deeds…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 227). Faith is to believe in the One True God and that His Guidance is the Truth. It is to believe that Allah's Guidance is for our own prosperity in this life and the next. All those aspects of faith can be proven and clearly manifested through righteous deeds. To believe and not act upon your belief is insincere.

Mindfulness of Allah is to fear His Wrath and avoid anything that may lead to it, which is attained only through obeying His ordinance. It means to build a barrier between you and His Wrath and punishment, Hell Fire, by committing yourself to His commands.

Allah then says: '… keep up the prayer…' (*ar-Rum:* 31). Offer it in the best way you can, and offer it as Allah loves. When you hear the call to prayer (*salat*), 'Allah is the Greatest!' respond to Him, Allah is in no need of our obedience, nor does He gain any benefit from our worship, but rather, we are the ones who benefit from this worship. We benefit from standing before Him in prayer. It is a chance to connect with Allah and derive assistance and strength from Him. *Salat* is a wonderful way of nurturing our faith. What do you think of a machine checked five times daily by its inventor? Will it ever break down? This is what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has taught us: if ever any harm befalls us, we should immediately seek refuge with *salat* which is just what He used to do whenever he faced any difficulty. What is the meaning of faith in Allah if you do not seek refuge with Him?

Just as we do not see Allah, we do not see how He takes care of us and manages our affairs. He governs everything in our lives, but we do not always notice His ways. Allah has enjoined on us to perform the five daily prayers and has made them one of the tenets of faith from which we are never excused. As for *zakat* (obligatory alms) and *hajj* (Pilgrimage), for example, they are obligatory only for those who can afford it. One may be exempted from observing *sawm* (fasting) if he is sick or traveling, for the missed days must be made up for afterwards when he heals or returns from travel. As for *salat* (prayer), however, it has to be observed daily at the five appointed times. It is a means of renewing our pledge with Allah. It is our covenant with Him, the five daily meetings by which He has honoured us.

We said before that if you want to meet with an important person or a highly ranked person, you have to go through all sorts of procedures just to get permission. He gets to choose the time, place, even the subject of the meeting, what will be discussed and then he has the right to end it whenever he pleases.

Henceforth, you have no control over any part of this meeting. Yet when you meet your Lord *the Almighty* it is completely different: your Lord is the One Who seeks you and calls you to come to Him, not only once but five times a day. He allows you to say what you like to Him and ask whatever you like.

You can end the meeting by saying, 'Peace be upon you'. If you want to make it a long meeting, or stay in your Lord's house, He will not lose interest until you do. So this is not slavery, but rather a kind of majesty and nobility. A poet once expressed this concept nicely: (1)

It is enough honour for me that I am a worshipper

Whose Lord welcomes him without appointment?

Despite His holiness and magnificence,

I can meet him however and wherever I choose.

Because prayer holds this high position amongst the Pillars of Islam, it was not established by means of revelation as the others were, but rather, it was given directly by Allah to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when his Lord called him to meet with Him in the heavens at the Night Ascension.

We compared this before (and Allah is beyond compare) to a company director who usually gives his orders by telephone, or memo, yet if the matter is very important he calls the employee into his office and gives him the instruction directly as it is so important. This was the case with the prayer and how it was given to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directly.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and be not among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him' (*ar-Rum:* 31). We have to stop and consider here for a moment. Why, after mentioning the return to Allah, and Allah-consciousness, and the establishment of prayer, did He say: '…and be not among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him'? (*ar-Rum:* 31) What does idolatry have to do with those who fulfil these teachings in this way? They say that the ascription of divinity prohibited here is not to associate other gods with Allah, but rather to include others in an intention that should be solely for Allah. Consequently, it means ostentation, showing-off and looking to other people instead of Allah.

They, then, say that doing good deeds for the sake of other people is ostentation, and leaving good deeds for the sake of other people is idolatry. So the one who prays, or builds a mosque for Allah, desiring thereby to be famous and to be praised by the people is guilty of ostentation and he loses out and fails thereby because the people benefit from his action but he himself benefits nothing. Giving up a good action because one fears he will fall into ostentation, or not paying the poor-due, for example, because one fears he will be accused of ostentation, makes this person an idolater. This is because the people would have benefitted from the action even if it was ostentation, but if you give up the action altogether, no one benefits anything from you.

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(1) It is Sheikh Ash-Sha’rawi's own poem *Allah rest his soul.*

So the meaning of '…and be not among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him' (*ar-Rum:* 31) is the hidden idolatry of ostentation. So we see that Prophet Muhammad, the role model for the faithful, prayed to his Lord: 'O Allah, I seek your forgiveness for every action for which I sought Your Countenance but in which there was intermingled a part that was not for You.'(1)

So a faithful deed is that which is sincerely for Allah, and its reward is according to its sincerity. There are those who do good deeds because it benefits them in some way to do so, perhaps by helping them to organise their lives, or to save money, or some such thing, so they do it not for Allah but for their own interests. About such people, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And there is, too, among men many a one who worships Allah on the borderline [of faith]: thus, if good befalls him, he is satisfied with Him; but if a trial assails him, he turns away utterly, losing [thereby both] this world and the life to come: [and] this, indeed, is a loss beyond compare!' (*al-Hajj:* 11)

Look at a salesman, for example, who might be honest in his dealings not out of honesty itself but rather out of a desire for renown and a good reputation so they can attract more customers. Such people get what they can in this world and Allah *the Almighty* does not deny them the fruits of their labours, as He says: 'To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest; whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof – but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come' (*Ghafir:* 20). Such people are, in their intentions, so similar to a travelling party all going the same way, but each with their own reason for travelling: this one wants delicious food, this one is going to see a beautiful woman, this one wants to study and benefit from his learning, this one wants to visit his loved ones. A poet expressed this notion by saying:

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Rajab and Abu Na'im*

I joined them to visit my beloved, and said,
‘Eat, all of you, and take what you need,
But leave me to meet with the one I seek,
My eyes already see him, my longing calls me.’

Just so, the True Lord *the Almighty* wants His servant to seek Him for His own sake, not out of fear of His Hell or longing for His Paradise. There is a difference between enjoying Allah’s bounties and enjoying the looking at Allah. You eat in paradise, but not because of any hunger, or need, but rather simply for enjoyment.

Allah *the Almighty* says about the martyrs: 'But do not think of those that have been slain in Allah’s cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Lord have they their sustenance' (*Al-‘Imran:* 169). It is enough for them to experience this togetherness, and to look upon Allah *the Almighty.*

So Rabi‘a Al-‘Adawiyya *Allah be pleased with her* said: ‘O Allah, if You see that I worship You out of desire for Your Paradise, deny it to Me; and if You see that I worship You out of fear of Your Hell, put me in it; rather, I worship You because You deserve to be worshipped.’

Doubtless, only a small amount of people worship Allah with pure sincerity. The majority act completely randomly without any intention at all, so this matter does not concern them, and they are not interested in it, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And most of them do not even believe in Allah without [also] ascribing divine powers to other beings beside Him'. (*Yusuf:* 106)

مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ فَرَّقُواْ دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُواْ شِيَعًا كُلُّ حِزْبِۭ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Those who divide their religion into sects, with each party rejoicing in their own [32] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 32)

They broke their religion apart like a group of travellers who disperse to their different destinations. As to 'Into sects', the word ‘sect’ means a group that cooperate with one another in something, whether good or evil. An example of a *shi‘a* 'good sect' is: 'And, behold, of his persuasion was Abraham (Ibrahim), too' (*as-Saffat:* 83); a bad one is: 'Behold, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes…' (*al-Qasas:* 4).

In another verse: '…It is He alone who has the power to let loose upon you suffering from above you or from beneath your feet, or to confound you with mutual discord and let you taste the fear of one another…' (*al-An'am:* 65) with 'each party rejoicing in their own' (*ar-Rum:* 32).

Here, Allah says: 'with each party rejoicing in their own' (*ar-Rum:* 32) because of the temporal power they gain thereby, and because of the position of power they fear to lose such as that which prevented the Jews of Medina from believing in the Messenger of Allah even though they recognised him as they recognised their own sons. They knew it was his time and had been living in Medina waiting for his coming. All of this was written in their Torah, and they would even clash with the idol-worshippers and used to say to them, 'The time is long due for the Prophet of the end of time to come and we will follow him, and with him slay you as Iram and 'Ad were slain!'(1)

'...Whenever there came unto them something which they recognised [as the truth], they would deny it…' (*al-Baqara:* 89). They disbelieved because they wanted to preserve their temporal power. They were a people of knowledge, wealth, and high status. When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, this power was annulled, for his was the absolute last word. As for those of them who kept to their true religion and did as the Torah commanded, they believed in Muhammad. These included 'Abdullah ibn Salam and other rabbis like him.

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(1) *Mohammad ibn Ishaq narrated from 'Asim ibn 'Umar, from Qutada Al-Ansari, that certain leaders of the Helpers said: 'By Allah, this story was revealed about us, and them (the Helpers), and the Jews who lived amongst them', meaning 'And whenever there came unto them a [new] revelation from Allah, confirming the truth already in their possession – and [bear in mind that] aforetime they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the truth...' (al-Baqara: 89). They said: 'We were always stronger than them in the time of pagan ignorance, and we were idolaters whilst they were followers of scripture, and they would say: 'A prophet will soon be sent whom we will follow, and his time is long due, and with him we will slay you as Iram and 'Ad were slain!' Then, when Allah sent His Messenger peace and blessings be upon him from Quraysh and we followed him, they disbelieved in him.' Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his (Tafsir) (i. 124)*

So it is temporal power that comes between people and the truth in which they believe; and this is the temporal power that we see now being contested by different sects and parties all claiming that they have the truth and that all else is falsehood. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them [would long ago have perished]...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71); so each of them vies with the other to make his way of thinking supreme and to gain authority.

After this, the True Lord *the Almighty* tells us that those who disbelieve in Allah or rebel against His guidance will remain prisoners to this temporal power, yet when an affliction befalls them from which their means cannot defend them, they have no choice but to turn to Allah. He says:

وَإِذَا مَسَّ ٱلنَّاسَ ضُرٌّ دَعَوْا۟ رَبَّهُم مُّنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَآ
أَذَاقَهُم مِّنْهُ رَحْمَةً إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُم بِرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

When something bad happens to people, they cry to their Lord and turn to Him for help, but no sooner does He let them taste His blessing than – lo and behold! – some of them ascribe partners to their Lord [33] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 33)

Affliction *durr* is something which harms us, and to which the soul is averse. When affliction befalls them, and their material means cannot rid them of it, 'they cry to their Lord and turn to Him for help,' that is, they return to Him *the Almighty* and now they know they have a Lord to turn to. This reminds us of what the Arabs said when the Revelation ceased for a while to come to the Messenger of Allah. This pleased them, so they said, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him.'(1) Glory be to Allah, so now you recognise that Muhammad has a Lord!

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(1) *Ibn Kathir narrates in his (Tafsir) (iv. 522) from Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna from Aswad ibn Qays, who heard Jundi say: 'Gabriel did not come to the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for a long time, so the idolaters said, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him!' So Allah the Almighty revealed: 'Consider the bright morning hours, [1] and the night when it grows still and dark. [2] Thy Sustainer has not forsaken thee, nor does He scorn thee [3]' (ad-Duha: 1-3).*

We said before that at times of strife and trial, the believer does not lie to himself or deceive himself; we told the story of the local barber-surgeon who used to fulfil the role that doctors now perform, when a medical school opened and began graduating doctors, one of them went to the village of this barber-surgeon, the barber began to attack him, claiming that he had no medical experience. Yet when the barber's own son fell ill, he was worried for him, and he secretly took him at night to the doctor because at such a moment, he would not cheat himself.

But '… no sooner does He let them taste His blessing than – lo and behold! – some of them ascribe partners to their Lord' (*ar-Rum:* 33), that is, they return to the idolatry they had practised before. If we reflect on this matter, we find that the Quran sometimes presents it referring to a single individual, as in: 'Now [thus it is:] when affliction befalls man, he is likely to cry out to his Lord, turning unto Him…' (*az-Zumar:* 8). He says: 'For [thus it is:] when affliction befalls man, he cries out unto Us, whether he be lying on his side or sitting or standing; but as soon as We have freed him of his affliction, he goes on as though he had never invoked Us to save him from the affliction that befell him!...' (*Yunus:* 12).

Focusing on a single individual is not enough by itself to confirm this phenomenon because a single person might humble himself before his Lord, return to Him after daring to disobey Him, keep this to himself so that no one else knows about it. But Allah wanted to emphasise that this happens with all people, in order to expose each of them to the other, so here He says: 'When something bad happens to people, they cry to their Lord and turn to Him for help…' (*ar-Rum:* 33).

He says: 'and so, when they embark on a ship [and find themselves in danger], they call unto Allah, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone; but as soon as He has brought them safe ashore, they [begin to] ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut:* 65).

So here the plural form is used in order to expose the disbelievers to one another. Amongst those who prayed in this circumstance might have been one who attempted to dissuade them from calling on Allah, and keep them from believing in Him, yet now he too is praying with humility. If their matter is fully exposed, this will be all the more reason for them to become upright, and all the more reason for none of them to look down on any other.

I said that one of the special qualities of prayer is that it makes people equal, so that an ordinary man sits next to those with whom he cannot have hoped to sit, and they are all submissive, and obedient to the Imam, and so on. In the prayer, everyone is equal, and everyone benefits from this equality, and takes admonition from it so that they will never look down on anyone again.

The word used here for ‘happens’ is *mass* which actually means a light touch. So the meaning here is that a slight affliction befalls them, and yet still their material means failed them, and they panicked and cried for aid.

As for the phrase 'He lets them taste', taste is one of man’s senses, by which he senses food as it passes over a specific area of the tongue; and once the food has passed over this area, the person no longer tastes it. So the pleasure of food is confined to this particular area of the mouth. Taste is the strongest influence over whether the soul will accept the tasted thing or not, so the popular saying goes, ‘Once something gets past the tongue, only putrefaction remains for it.’

Consider how the True Lord *the Almighty* uses the concept of taste in connection with torment when He gives us this parable: 'And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah’s blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought' (*an-Nahl:* 112). The mention of taste along with clothing (literally ‘the all-embracing garment’) implies a complete encompassing of the body, the same is the case with fear and hunger, for they also overcome the whole of a person; so He says 'caused it to taste,' because taste is the most powerful of the senses. The phrase 'of His' here means of Allah’s, that is directly, without any intermediary means. Or, it means that He replaces their affliction with mercy and gives them relief from affliction in the form of mercy. Also, although taste can mean a strong reaction upon receiving something, it can also mean subtle, muted consumption, as is the case when we taste food, or when we say, ‘By Allah, I have not tasted a thing from so-and-so’, that is we have never eaten a thing at his house.

So the True Lord *the Almighty* speaks here of mercy as being tasted because the mercy that exists in this world does not comprise the totality of His mercy; only a small part of it exists in this world, whilst most of it is in the Hereafter.

Notice also that Allah *the Almighty* says here '… lo and behold! – some of them ascribe partners to their Lord' (*ar-Rum:* 33), whilst in the other verse He says: 'And so, when they embark on a ship [and find themselves in danger], they call unto Allah, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone; but as soon as He has brought them safe ashore, they [begin to] ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut:* 65). So why did He say 'some of them' in this verse, whilst in the other He said '…they ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut:* 65) without excepting any of them? Scholars say it is because the first verse speaks of those who call upon Allah on dry land; people on dry land tend to differ from one another and they include the pious and the iniquitous, the obedient and the disobedient. So they differ in their responses, so when the believers were given grace and mercy from Allah, they said, 'Praise be to Allah, who has saved us!' whilst the idolaters returned to their disbelief and stubbornness.

As for the other verse, it describes those who call upon Allah at sea; and it is usual that a group of people sailing together will be of similar character. They are not sailing in order to travel, but rather for pleasure, similar to how some people buy yachts or sailboats and gather their followers and like-minded friends. It is clear that in such a case they will be united in the things they love, and will be of a single school of thought, and a single way of life. So as long as they were at sea, this means that they must all have been equal in their recalcitrance and idolatry, and in their abandonment of Allah the moment they were safe from harm, which is why He used the phrase here 'as soon as…', suggesting immediacy, and used it in the other verse, saying: '…they [begin to] ascribe to imaginary powers a share in His divinity' (*al-'Ankabut:* 65). After Allah saved them, they rushed back to the idolatry they had held to before.

So in this verse, the True Lord *the Almighty* shows us the true nature of man, and his anxiousness to bring himself benefit, and the way he allows the good that Allah gives him to make him reckless and wanton, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening [6] whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient [7] ' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

Yet he has no choice but to turn to his Lord when He deprives him of all the material means to benefit, causes him to fear for his self and his soul which never benefitted from the signs Allah placed in the universe so that it will return to the protecting security of Allah; and so He sends him an affliction which negates all the means he has employed in the way of wantonness, evil and tyranny.

Yet he does not give himself up to the affliction which threatens him, but rather remembers that he has a Lord he can turn to. He finds no refuge except with Him because he knows that the ones who took him away from Allah so that he believed in them and disbelieved in Allah cannot help him in any way because instead of worshipping Allah Alone he has worshipped gods which can neither help nor harm. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those [powers] that you are wont to invoke forsake you, [and nothing remains for you] save Him…' (*al-Isra':* 67). Those you call upon do not know how to get to you, and even if they did know they could never reach you; yet as for Me, I am your Lord, and I know you best, and I can help you, and show you mercy.

So these idolaters associate partners with Allah in times of ease, yet in times of difficulty and strife they do not deceive and cheat themselves, they do not call upon idols because they know that these idols cannot hear them or answer them, so they are no good to them and no one can save them but the True Allah. Necessity forces them to recognise Him and call upon Him.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

لِيَكۡفُرُواْ بِمَآ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمۡۚ فَتَمَتَّعُواْ فَسَوۡفَ تَعۡلَمُونَ ٣٤

Showing no gratitude for what We have given
them. 'Take your pleasure! You will come to
know' [34] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 34)

The first thing that comes to mind is that the word 'to' here in the phrase 'to show no gratitude' (*ar-Rum:* 34) implies a cause, or a reason, meaning that what comes after it is the reason for what comes before it, as when you say, 'Study to succeed.' This is like a conditional sentence, where you say 'if you study you will succeed', so the ultimate success is the motivation for the study.

But does the verse make sense if understood in this way? Did Allah save them and give them a taste of His Mercy in order that they could show ingratitude to Him? We say: a cause is not the reason for its effect, as people who view language superficially might think, but rather, the effect is the reason for the cause; they do not differentiate between a motive and an actual cause. The student studies because he thinks of success, the benefits it will bring, and so he studies. So the effect is the justification for the cause here, that is, a motivation for it; if you want to refer to the actual causality, you should consider the cause first, then the effect.

If you say, ‘I got into the car to go to Alexandria’, this does not mean that the act of getting into the car was the whole reason for your going to Alexandria; rather, you wanted to go first so you got into the car. Once you had done so, you did indeed go there. So we say that the effect creates the cause from the point of view of motive, whilst the cause creates the effect from the point of view of actual causality.

So here, Allah saved them from harm and let them taste of His mercy not in order that they will show Him ingratitude, but rather to show them that there is no safety for them except with Him so that they will cling fast to Him *the Almighty.* The disbelievers among them will believe, and the believers among them will increase their faith. But their reaction is the opposite of this: they disbelieve in Allah. And so the meaning of the word 'to' here is that their ungrateful disbelief was the outcome which followed the safety and mercy they were given.

To illustrate this (and Allah is beyond compare), suppose you were to take an orphan child into your care and raise them well, and then when he grew up he defied you, and treated you poorly. You might say to people, ‘I raised him, only for him to treat me badly.’ This means, ‘I raised him to love and respect me, but things did not turn out that way.’ This indicates the false evaluation of the one who raised the child, and the bad nature of the one who was raised.

The phrase 'To show no gratitude…' (*ar-Rum:* 34) here could also imply a rebuke because what comes after 'to' is not the true reason for what came before, but rather the true reason was the exact opposite of this. He gave them to taste His Mercy, and saved them in order that they would believe, or increase in faith, but all they did was disbelieve again.

This issue is alluded to many times in the Quran such as His words in the story of Prophet Moses (Musa): 'and [some of] Pharaoh's household found [and spared] him: for [We had willed] that he becomes an enemy unto them and [a source of] grief…' (*al-Qasas:* 8).

It is clear that actually they took him in to be a source of joy for themselves. If they had known what the outcome would be they would have drowned him or slain him as they slew the other children of the Israelites. As they say in the popular expression, 'He raised his own executioner.' This showed that the one who took him in had no idea what would happen, it also shows that he was foolish. How could the one who was killing children at this very time not have doubts about a boy who came to him in a box floating in the sea? Was this not a sign that his family had tried to save him from being killed? But, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…know that Allah intervenes(1) between man and [the desires of] his heart…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). So you are in the midst of slaying children because of a vision your soothsayers gave you; yet the very child you fear will come to your door and you will raise him in your household and the end of your kingdom will come by his hand – so do not think you can plot against Allah.

So the story also shows the failure of Pharaoh and his soothsayers. If you believe the soothsayers about what they told you, what use will killing children be, when you will never know who will be the cause of the loss of your sovereignty and you will never catch him? Why do you bother with such comprehensive measures, then?

One should consider such matters in light of the fact that one has a Lord; and the Lord is able to make His enemy create an enemy of his own to defeat him. He is the best of planners and the successful plan should be so subtle that its object has no way of sensing it.

The state in which we find ourselves in the 20th century, however, allows us to say that 'truthfulness is the 20th century's best plot', that is, if someone wants to plot, he should simply tell the truth and be direct. These days it is rare to find people telling the truth and being straightforward to the point that if you tell people the truth, they will suspect you and find it far-fetched that what you say could be true. It is as if a person says to those who wish to kill him, ‘I will go to such-and-such place at such-and-such time.’ They will think he is trying to deceive them, even if he tells them the truth about where he will be.

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(1) That is, Allah can turn a man's heart and change his intention as He wills since a man does not own his heart but rather, Allah owns it. *(Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, i. 179)*

After Moses (Musa), had been raised in the household of Pharaoh, given Message by his Lord and had gone to Pharaoh to call him to Allah, Pharaoh said to him:” "Did we not raise you among us as a child, and you remained among us for years of your life?”’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 18) Yes, you raised me as a child, but the one who truly raised me and raised you was the One Who sent me here to you and I will obey the Highest One Who raised me before I obey you. This is a sign that the care of Allah is the basis for raising those you love; so do not say, ‘I raised my son until he became such-and-such’, but rather seek the means to upbringing and leave Allah to do the real raising. This is the concept alluded to by the poet who said:

If your children are not given Divine care,

Your hopes will be dashed, and your wishes denied;

For the Moses raised by Gabriel disbelieved,

Whilst the Moses raised by Pharaoh was a Prophet

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…take your pleasure! You will come to know' (*ar-Rum:* 34). This is because they disbelieved in order to gain the profane enjoyments of this worldly life, for faith has some hard demands that weigh heavy on the soul. It requires that you do things that are difficult for your ego to bear and forbids you the things you love. As for the idols they worshipped instead of Allah, and the other false gods, they asked for nothing and revealed no way.

But these are only the enjoyments of this worldly life, and the delights of this worldly life are scant because this world only lasts as long as you are alive in it, so do not say that it lasts from prophet Adam until the end of time; this long period of time has nothing to do with you – all that concerns you is however long you live within it.

However long a person lives in this world, it is a short life and its enjoyments are scant. Moreover, it can only be presumed that this short life will continue and it is not guaranteed. Death might come to you at any moment; and when a person dies, it is as though his Resurrection Day has come.(1) So the True Lord *the Almighty* made death ambiguous, and made its time different for everyone: this one dies before he is born, this one dies as a child, this one as a young man, and so on. The ambiguity of the time, cause, and place of death is a clear message because it makes death a reality for all of us that we must expect at any moment, and so prepare for it.

Notice here that the Quran adds an imperative verb 'Take your pleasure' to a present tense verb 'to show ingratitude', whilst elsewhere it says: 'and thus they show utter ingratitude for all that We have vouchsafed them, and go on [thoughtlessly] enjoying their worldly life…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 66).

In this case, the enjoyment is not subject to an imperative verb, but is rather subject to causality: 'and thus they show utter ingratitude', 'and go on enjoying their worldly life'. So there is a difference of opinion over the particle *lam* preceding this verb in the Arabic, as to whether it implies the imperative or causality. Here in the verse in question of the chapter of *ar-Rum*, the saying of Allah: 'but in time you will come to know' comes after 'enjoy, then, your [brief] life' (*ar-Rum:* 34), while in the chapter of *al-A'nkabut*, this word 'enjoy' comes after 'to show ingratitude...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 66). It is thus as if He *the Almighty* is saying, 'Disbelieve, and enjoy your lives; but you will find out the consequence of this.'

The reason they say that the *lam* here is for causality is that it is marked by the *kasra* 'short vowel' which is usually used for the causal meaning. But those who understand the verse properly say that since the imperative verb 'enjoy, then, your [brief] life' is added on to this present tense verb preceded by the particle *lam*, the *lam* must also imply the meaning of an imperative because it is immediately connected to an imperative verb, which is used here as a warning.

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(1) *Ad-Daylami relates this Hadith in his (Musnad) (1117) on the authority of Anas with the wording: 'When one of you dies, his Resurrection has begun.' 'Ajluni said in Kashf Al-Khafa' (2618): 'It was related that Anas said: 'Remember death much, for if you remember it at times of wealth, it will make it seem scant; and if you remember it at times of poverty, it will make it seem like affluence. Death is the Resurrection, and when one of you dies his Resurrection has begun, and he sees the good and evil which he possesses.'*

But why then is the *lam* marked by the *kasra* vowel, when usually it would have no vowel? One of the grammarians said that this is also permissible, and demonstrated this by reference to this verse: 'and thus they show utter ingratitude for all that We have vouchsafed them, and go on [thoughtlessly] enjoying their worldly life…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 66) in which both verbs are imperatives preceded by *lam* marked with *kasra*.)

To those who say that the verbs in this verse are actually both preceded by the *lam* of causality, we say: If you hear it as a *lam* of causality, be aware that in that case it is actually the *lam* of consequence because their disbelief and enjoyment of this life was not the cause of His letting them taste His mercy.

As for those who say it is the imperative *lam* in both cases, they will ask you why it is marked with *kasra*. Yet in the Quran there are plenty of examples to prove that it can indeed be marked with *kasra*, such as: 'Hence, [O Muhammad,] proclaim thou unto all people the [duty of] pilgrimage: they will come unto thee on foot and on every [kind of] fast mount, coming from every far-away point [on earth], [27] so that they might experience much that shall be of benefit to them…[28]' (*al-Hajj:* 27-28). The *lam* here is marked with *kasra* because it implies causality. Then, He says: 'Thereafter let them bring to an end their state of self-denial, and let them fulfil the vows which they [may] have made, and let them walk [once again] around the Most Ancient Temple' (*al-Hajj:* 29). All instances of *lam* here have no vowel because they imply the imperative.

Yet in another verse, both kinds of *lam* occur: 'let him who has ample means spend in accordance with his amplitude…' (*at-Talaq:* 7). So the first *lam* is marked with a *kasra* because it is at the beginning of the sentence. In Arabic a sentence cannot begin without a vowel on its first letter, and so the purpose of the *kasra* is to prevent this. He *the Almighty* then says: 'and let him whose means of subsistence are scanty spend in accordance with what Allah has given him…' (*at-Talaq:* 7), so the imperative *lam* has no vowel because it is in the middle of the sentence.

So those who write the Quranic text must be aware of this matter and must know that the Word of Allah is all-conquering. The people who write the texts have in some cases forgotten that the Quran is considered to be linked from beginning to end, without any pauses and that even when we come to the end, it should be connected back to the beginning without a pause, so we say: 'who whispers in the hearts of men [5] from all [temptation to evil by] invisible forces as well as men [6]' (*an-Nas:* 6), 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' (*al-Fatiha:* 1). The end of the Quran is therefore connected to its beginning so that it will never end. Bearing this in mind, the first verb of: 'let him who has ample means spend in accordance with his amplitude…' (*at-Talaq:* 7) should not be marked with a *kasra* since it is connected with what comes before it.

The phrase 'but in time you will come to know' is general, and includes the whole future, both short and long-term. It includes those who would die immediately after hearing it and those who would die a long time after.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

أَمۡ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ سُلۡطَٰنٗا فَهُوَ يَتَكَلَّمُ بِمَا كَانُواْ بِهِۦ يُشۡرِكُونَ ٣٥

Did We send them down any authority that
sanctions the partners they ascribe to God? [35]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 35)

The word ‘or’ does not usually come at the start of a sentence because it is a conjunction used to separate two alternatives, like when you say, ‘Did Zayd come, or ‘Umar?’ So it must come between two contrasting things. The approximation of this is therefore: ‘Do they follow their own desires, or has a scripture been sent down to them to sanction their idolatry?’ Since no book has come down to them to sanction their practises, the only alternative remaining is that they are following their own desires.

The phrase ‘send them down...' (*ar-Rum:* 35) implies that the one who sends is higher, and the one who receives is lower. This takes place between the heights of divinity and the depths of divinity. We ourselves do not see this descent, rather, the one who received the Quran for the first time by direct revelation is the one who saw it and then informed us of it.

The root of revelation is that it comes from Allah. When Allah sends revelation down to us, He does so in order to give us a small fraction of this loftiness; whether it be a metaphorical loftiness, for He is not in a single place; or a physical loftiness, as is the case with His saying: '…and We bestowed [upon you] from on high [the ability to make use of] iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). The word for 'authority' here is *sultan* which is derived from the verb meaning ‘to control’ or ‘to have power over’. This indicates power and strength, whether the power of strong arguments and proofs, for he who defeats you with arguments and proofs is more powerful than you; or the power of compulsion and coercion, such as someone who forces you to do something against your will, unlike the power of argument, which convinces you to do it willingly.

If we look into the word *sultan*, we find that Allah *the Almighty* tells us Satan will use this word in the Hereafter when he absolves himself of those who followed him: '…Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves…' (*Ibrahim:* 22). That is, ‘I had no power to capture your hearts with arguments and proofs and I had no power to compel you and coerce your hearts. In reality, you were all ready and waiting and all I had to do was call you and you came, eager to obey me freely.’

This concept explains something in the Quran that people have been wondering about and discussing for a long time – whether with good intentions or ill – which is that Allah *the Almighty* is reported once as saying to Satan: '…What has kept thee from prostrating thyself…' (*Sad:* 75),whilst elsewhere He is reported as saying: '…What has kept thee from prostrating thyself…' (*al-A‘raf:* 12). (The difference in Arabic is the addition of the particle *la* in the second case, so literally it reads 'What has prevented thee, that thou dost not prostrate thyself…'). It is that the former refers to the power of compulsion, as though he wanted to prostrate but something prevented him from doing so, whilst the latter refers to the power of argumentation, so he did not prostrate out of willingness, and conviction that it was correct not to do so.(1)

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(1) Scholar Zakariyah Al-Ansari says that actually the addition of the *la* serves to emphasise the negation of the prostration, but that the meaning is no different.

Allah's word: ‘that sanctions the partners they ascribe to Allah?' (*ar-Rum:* 35) means that this alleged divine writ would tell them what to associate with Allah, commanding them to do such-and-such, but that all these commands would be in line with their own desires.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

وَإِذَآ أَذَقۡنَا ٱلنَّاسَ رَحۡمَةٗ فَرِحُواْ بِهَاۖ وَإِن تُصِبۡهُمۡ
سَيِّئَةُۢ بِمَا قَدَّمَتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ إِذَا هُمۡ يَقۡنَطُونَ ٣٦

**When We give people a taste of Our blessing,
they rejoice, but when something bad happens to
them – because of their own actions – they fall
into utter despair [36] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 36)**

It is good that people rejoice and celebrate Allah’s Blessing, but why, when evil befalls them as a result of their own actions, do they despair? The source of the blessing was the same as that of the evil, but they rejoiced in the former because they saw it as good and they despaired in the latter because they saw it as bad. They should have known that it is all from Allah and that there is wisdom behind His blessings and the trials He sends, too.

So you remembered one thing but ignored the other: you remembered the mercy you received, and the tribulations, but you forgot about who made this mercy and this tribulation. If you had linked the mercy and the tribulation with their Maker, you would see that He was Wise in making them both. The problem with people is that they separate destiny from the One Who destines it. So you should not consider the event itself, but rather the One Who made it.

If your son comes to you crying because someone has hit him, the first thing you say is, ‘Who did it?’ If he tells you it was so-and-so, you say, ‘Yes, he hates us and wants to hurt us,’ but if he tells you it was his uncle, you say, ‘You must have done something to make him angry, or you behaved badly so he punished you.’

So you do not consider the event itself, but rather, you made a link between the event and the one who caused it: if it was an enemy, it is clear he intended evil; if it was a loved one, it is clear he intended good.

Henceforth, we should make a link between things and their makers. If the maker is our Lord, we must search for the wisdom behind it. We will not talk about mercy because its benefit is plain for all to see; but let us discuss the tribulations that make people grieve so that they despair and lose hope.

We say: if you were to consider who it was that sent it to you, you would rest assured, and be at peace because *musiba* (an affliction) means anything that afflicts you, whether it is good or bad, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Whatever good happens to thee is from Allah; and whatever evil befalls thee is from thyself…' (*an-Nisa':* 79).

So an affliction is not inherently bad, but the results of it can be. The fact that the word used here for both 'happen' and 'befall' is *asaba*, literally 'to hit' means that it is like an arrow which has been shot at you. It will certainly reach you and will not miss, for the One Who fired it is a God and a Wise Lord. If it is a good thing, it will come to you without your having to exert yourself, or compete with others over it; and if it is a trial, beware of saying, 'I will prepare for it and defend myself from it' because you cannot hope to avoid it.

But why should you despair and lose hope if a tribulation affects you? Why do you not wait and see if there is any wisdom behind it, or some good that you cannot see now? Perhaps that which is difficult now has for it relief lying in store in the near future. Read His word: '…but it may well be that you hate a thing the while it is good for you, and it may well be that you love a thing the while it is bad for you…' (*al-Baqara:* 216).

We all remember the event that happened here with the 'building of death' when they fired the doorman and his family and he took the matter to court; then after the building had collapsed, the doorman and his family found that what they had thought was evil and tribulation was actually a good thing.

So do not despair because of harm that befalls you. You should know that it was your Lord that sent it to you, and that there is wisdom behind it, so wait until it is revealed to you. No one despairs except he who has no lord to turn to.

Let us discuss the tribulations which cause people to despair: Did you have something to do with it, or did you have nothing to do with it? If you had something to do with it, like the student who neglects his studies and so fails the test, you should accept this tribulation gladly because failure helps you to correct your mistakes and alerts you to your negligence so you can fix it and try harder.

If you had nothing to do with the tribulation, like the one who studies and works hard but does not succeed because he gets sick the night before the exam, or has an accident, we say: Beware of separating the tribulation from its source and its Maker, but rather reflect on the good that comes from it. Do not separate the tribulation from the One Who sent it to you, and do not despair. Search for your Lord's wisdom in sending you this tribulation, like the mother who says to her son: 'My son, you always do well, and the people envy you because of it, so perhaps your failure this time will put an end to their jealousy of you and save you from their evil eyes, so they will leave you alone.' His father might say to him, 'Son, be easy on yourself; perhaps if you had passed this year you would not have attained the grade that you wanted, so this is an opportunity for you to become stronger and get the top grade.' So do not rule out that there could be a benefit behind the tribulation because your Lord is All Sustaining and He wants nothing but good for you.

So if you reflect on things you will find that some people are wrongfully accused and convicted for things of which they are innocent, falling victim to false testimony or a capricious judge and so on. Because your Lord, however, is All Sustaining, and aware of all things, He will make it up to this oppressed person and say to them: 'You now have a mark in My account. You were wrongfully accused, and so I will forgive you for those wrongful things which you did do, and save you from being punished for them. And as for you who were blind to justice, and gave false testimony, or took what was not yours, or escaped punishment: I will cause you to take the blame for a crime you did not commit.'

So there is no place for despair when tribulations come, and if you link the tribulation to its Maker you will see that He is Wise, and He must have a wise reason for doing it which is unknown to you now, but which you will come to understand if you reflect on the matter.

When we consider the rhetorical style of the verse, we find that there are several contrasts. When speaking of mercy, He says: 'When We give people a taste of Our blessing, they rejoice…' (*ar-Rum:* 36) using the conditional particle *idha* ‘when’. But when speaking of tribulation, He says: '…but if something bad happens to them – because of their own actions – they fall into utter despair' (*ar-Rum:* 36) using the particle *in* ‘if’. Why did He change from using 'when' to using 'if'? They say that when you compare the blessings and tribulations that come to man in his worldly life, you find that the blessings are manifold and the tribulations scant. Allah’s blessings are constantly visiting you every moment beyond all reckoning, whilst the tribulations could be counted on one’s fingers.

And so for blessings He uses the word 'when' which implies certainty, and for tribulations He uses the word 'if' which implies possibility. Another example of this is Allah’s word: 'When Allah’s succour comes, and victory' (*an-Nasr:* 1). He used 'when' here because it implies certainty, and confirms that victory will come; and on the other hand He said: 'And if any of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah seeks thy protection, grant him protection…' (*at-Tawba:* 6).

Notice also that the verse does not mention the reason He gives them to taste of His mercy, but does mention the reason he sends them afflictions: 'because of their own actions' (*ar-Rum:* 36). This shows His justice when it comes to the sending of afflictions and His grace when it comes to mercy because mercy is from Allah and all blessings are graces from Allah.

So in the case of tribulation, He says: 'because of their own actions' mentioning the cause so that no one would think that Allah sends tribulations to His slaves unjustly. Rather, it is because of what their hands wrought and so the matter proceeds according to Divine Justice.

There is a wide gap between grace and justice. If two rivals ask you to judge between them, you say, ‘should I judge between you with justice, or with something better than justice?’ they will say, ‘Is there anything better than justice?’ So we all want justice, but be careful, because justice only gives you your rights, whilst grace excuses you the rights you owe.(1) It is as though the True Lord *the Almighty* were saying to us: ‘Do not think that you will be saved by your works; rather, you will be saved by My grace: ‘Say: “In [this] bounty of Allah and in His grace – in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!”’ (*Yunus:* 58) That is, however many good deeds you amass, it will not be enough and you will not be saved except by Allah’s Mercy and Grace.

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants us to know that His Mercy encompasses everything. Despite the many favours and uncountable blessings with which He has showered us, He only punishes us for the things we do that deserve punishment because He is a Wise, Merciful Lord.

As long as this is so, consider the effects of your Lord’s mercy in the universe; reflect on His blessings and consider the precision of the wording when Allah *the Almighty* says: '…And should you try to count Allah’s blessings, you could never compute them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34). Counting necessitates plurality, but the word *ni‘mat* here literally means ‘blessing’ in the singular form; so how do we count it, Lord? They say that indeed it is a single blessing, but within it are other blessings, and if you examined it you would find that the good that flows from it is beyond reckoning or computing.

The verse uses the word *inn*, meaning ‘should’ or ‘if’ which indicates doubt and low probability because it is not possible to count these blessings, but even if you tried to count them you would not be able to. With the advances of science, and the existence of colleges dedicated to the study of statistics, producing for us statistics and counting all kinds of things in our lives, they could never presume to enumerate Allah’s blessings. Why not? It is because you only begin to count something if you believe it can be counted; if it is beyond your capability to do so, you would not presume to try and count it, just as no one has tried to count the number of grains of sand in the desert. So Allah *the Almighty* shows the unlikelihood of our being able to count them by saying 'and should you try to count'; it is something implausible, which will never happen.

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(1) It means that it decreases them, as the Noble Quran says: '…and never will He let your [good] deeds go to waste' (*Muhammad:* 35) that is, He will not decrease any of your reward. What this means is that a verdict of justice gives both adversaries their right; as for grace, the one who judges might see the virtue, high aspiration, and nobility of one of them and therefore decrease his right because he knows that his intelligence, conviction, and mercy are greater. Allah knows best.

أَوَلَمۡ يَرَوۡاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَبۡسُطُ ٱلرِّزۡقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيَقۡدِرُۚ
إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّقَوۡمٖ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ٣٧

Do they not see that God gives abundantly to whoever
He will and sparingly [to whoever He will]? There
truly are signs in this for those who believe [37]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 37)

'Gives abundantly' means to give a lot, and 'gives... sparingly' means to give a little. This means: Do they not see this, and how to one person Allah gives much provision, whilst to another He gives little. Perhaps the one who has a lot did not even work for it, but rather inherited it, whilst the one who has little works hard and strives, yet his means are meagre. The philosophers responded to this situation according to the presence or lack of faith in their hearts; so the atheist Ibn Ar-Rawindi said:

How many wise men have seen their works fail?
Whilst the ignorant one is well-sustained;
This is what leaves the mind perplexed,
And turns the skilled scholar into a heretic

So one of those whose heart is filled with faith responded to him:

How many wise men have lived in hardship?
And how many fools have lived in ease;
The people were baffled, and so I said to them:
'This proves the existence of Divine Decree.'

The world does not run in a firmly mechanical way, but rather by means of the sustenance of its Creator *the Almighty.* Bear in mind that abundance is for those to whom Allah gives, and scarcity is for those from whom Allah withholds. Do not separate the act from the Doer *the Almighty* and remember that Allah is One; All His slaves are equal before Him, yet He gives plenty to some and little to others.

So there must be some wisdom behind both of these states. If we look into the results of this wealth and this poverty, the wisdom will become clear to us.

Have you never seen someone who is blessed with much wealth and comfort, yet is unable even to raise his own children because their comfortable position in life has led them to misguidance and made their careers fail? On the other side, do we not see poor men who live in meagre circumstances watch their children rise above them, and gain better-paid jobs? So, He '…gives abundantly to whomever He will and sparingly [to whomever He will] ' (*ar-Rum:* 37) according to His Wisdom.

We mentioned before that there are two schools of atheist thought in Germany, one associated with Goebel and the other with the Butcher. One of them denies that the world has any God and says that if the world was created by a Wise God, there would be no blind people or disabled people and so on. Wisdom in creation necessitates (in their view) that all creatures be equal and so they take the abnormalities of creation as a proof of their atheism.

The other school says that the universe has no God – it moves in a monotonous, mechanical way – if there were a Creator, He would have created the universe in many different forms, and His will would be free of any mechanism. So, they take the order of the universe as a proof of their atheism, contradicting the previous view. So in reality, they simply want to be atheists in any way they can, and so they use a flawed argument to serve as 'proof' of the belief to which they adhere.

In answer to the first argument which takes the existence of abnormalities as a proof of the absence of a wise Allah, we say: The abnormalities you mention exist in individuals who make up for one another's defects; for every one blind man there are millions of fully-sighted people, so the presence of this tiny proportion does not break the general rule of creation, nor does it affect human life; for the sound make up for the unsound.

As for the orderly system which the second school cites as proof, we say that if you consider the higher spheres of existence, the macrocosm of suns, moons and stars, you will see absolute order because if these things were to break their order the entire universe would come to ruin. So, Allah created them in absolute order without any abnormalities.

In the order of the universe we find stability, whilst in the sphere of individuals who are free of need of one another, we find abnormalities and differences. So the stable things confirm the stability of Allah's power and the differences confirm its omnipotent all-possibility.

So for those who desire an orderly system as a proof of faith, the system exists. For those who desire exceptions to the rule as a proof of faith, the exceptions exist; all you have to do is agree, share your ideas with each other and you will find the truth.

The issue of sustenance has its own philosophy in Islam. The True Lord *the Almighty* informs us that He is the Provider, sometimes providing by material means and sometimes without them. Do not be deluded by material means, for you might utilise them, still receive no provision and your work might come to nothing, like the farmer who uses all the means at his disposal until the crops are almost ready. Then a disaster comes and the crops fail. So do not be deluded by means, but rather keep in mind the Creator of all means *the Almighty*.

We said before that you should use the means at your disposal and then not worry about anything else, because your Creator who called you into existence, has undertaken to do the rest. A poet once expressed this by saying:

Seek provision with its means,
Then think not on it further,
You might not know where it dwells,
But your provision knows where to find you.

Then He *the Almighty* says: '…There truly are signs in this for those who believe' (*ar-Rum:* 37). He said 'for those who believe' because this notion of sustenance requires faith in the wisdom of the Provider *the Almighty* in His giving and withholding.

Concerning the rhetorical style of the verse, notice that Allah *the Almighty* says '…to whomever He will…' (*ar-Rum:* 37) after mentioning abundant giving, and then after mentioning scant giving says simply '… and sparingly [to whomever He will]' (*ar-Rum:* 37). He is not saying 'unto whomever He wills' this time. This is because we humans consider abundant provision as a good thing in which we rejoice, and for which we hope, and so He says '…to whomever He will…' (*ar-Rum:* 37) to reassure us that we will be amongst those He gives to in abundance; whilst in the case of giving scantly, He does not say ‘to whomever’ in order to keep it ambiguous, and something that we all hope will not apply to us.

Then, the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

فَـَٔاتِ ذَا ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُۥ وَٱلْمِسْكِينَ وَٱبْنَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ
يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ٣٨

So give their due to the near relative, the needy, and the
wayfarer – that is best for those whose goal is God’s
approval: these are the ones who will prosper [38]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 38)

If we reflect on the flow of the Quranic discourse here, we find that Allah mentioned firstly abundant provision, then scant provision and then immediately emphasised the rights of near kin, the needy and wayfarers. It is as though He were alerting us to the fact that these rights are not only incumbent on those who have been given abundant provision, but rather that they apply to everyone; even those who have their own needs and whose provision is scant, should not forget about these people.

And so Allah *the Almighty* ends the verse by saying ‘…and the wayfarer – that is best for those whose goal is Allah’s approval these are the ones who will prosper’ (*ar-Rum:* 38). Everyone, whether rich or poor, seeks Allah’s Countenance.

Compare this verse to the verse about obligatory alms: ‘The offerings given for the sake of Allah are [meant] only for the poor and the needy and those who are in charge thereof and those whose hearts are to be won over and for the freeing of human beings from bondage and [for] those who are overburdened with debts and [for every struggle] in Allah’s cause and [for] the wayfarer: [this is] an ordinance from Allah – and Allah is all-knowing, wise’ (*at-Tawba:* 60).

Unlike the verse we are discussing, (*ar-Rum*: 38), the near kin are not mentioned in the above verse. It is as though the verse attracts attention to the fact that it is incorrect to give our near kin money that is intended for obligatory alms. This is a mistake that many rich people make, even the religiously committed ones amongst them. Very often, someone asks, ‘I have a cousin or a relative; can I pay some of my obligatory alms to him?’ I used to answer those people, ‘By Allah, if your cousin knows that you are giving him the money from your obligatory alms, he will not accept it because the relative has a right to be helped, whether you are rich enough to afford to pay the obligatory alms or you do not own enough to have to pay it.’

So do not connect these three – the near kin, the needy and the wayfarer – with the obligatory alms here because they have a right even over the poor person who does not possess the minimum amount of wealth which obligates the obligatory alms and over those who have scant provision.

Despite this duty, which the Sacred Law emphasises, we find many people usurping the right of their relatives and trying to prevent them from getting it. For example, some people do not have any male children, so register all their possessions in the name of their daughters so as to prevent their uncles or cousins from inheriting from them when they die, even though a daughter inherits half the legacy and two daughters inherit two-thirds and the other third goes to the uncles or cousins. This is because in this situation, the daughters do not have any male relations to protect them, so the Sacred Law gives this right to the uncles and cousins.

Allah *the All Wise Lawgiver* treats all sides fairly, giving to you and taking from you; so why, when the father dies leaving these daughters behind him and they have no inheritance, do they then demand that the paternal cousin or uncle support them and take them to court – why do we deny them their rights and then demand our own rights? This is a kind of wilful ignorance.

Why do we not give to the paternal uncle or cousin, who will protect the daughters and do all he can to keep them secure and stand by their side when they are in dire need?

Beware, then, of including your relatives in the obligatory alms you give, or linking their aid with your ability because they have a right over you whether you are going through easy times or hard times.

It is enough that Allah *the Almighty* singled them out by saying ‘the near relative’ (*ar-Rum:* 38) and did not say ‘those of need’ or ‘farers of the way’;

the word 'of' *dhu* here means 'possessor of' an indication of constant and fixed possession. We do not say that a person is 'a man of knowledge' if he only knows one or two things, but only if he is characterised by broad knowledge which he has mastered. Likewise, we do not say that someone is 'a man of good character' unless good character is a constant attribute of his from which he never departs.

In the same way, we say that someone is a 'near relative', that is, he is attached to you and can never be removed from you. So you must attend to the rights he has over you and give him his share, even if you do not possess the minimum for the obligatory alms. The same is the case for the needy and the wayfarer, since Allah mentioned them together outside the context of the obligatory alms which indicates that they have a right other than the obligatory alms.

We can observe that the Quran ordered them according to their importance and need: the first of them is the relative because of his fixed nearness to you. Then comes the needy person who is local and known to you. Then follows the wayfarer who passes through so you see him one day and then never see him again and he must be considered according to his present situation. The status of the needy person might change and Allah might make it so that he receives abundant provision and the wayfarer might return home. So the fixed attribute is that of the near of kin, which is why Allah described them in a way which indicates this permanence.

He then says 'and the wayfarer' (*ar-Rum:* 38); so his due is obligatory for him and he has the first right to it. This is why He did not say, for example, 'And give the near of kin his due and the needy and the wayfarer their dues.'

They gave an example of this by saying, 'The ruler said, "Let so-and-so enter and so-and-so and so-and-so."' The permission to enter was given to the first one and then it followed for the others.

So these three kinds of people have a special status since Allah has commanded you to give them some of your own meat and not just link them with the obligatory alms or simple provision. As for the other seven categories of people who have a right to the obligatory alms, He did not oblige you to give them anything except the obligatory alms.

When there was a debate amongst the scholars about the meaning of *miskin* 'needy' and *faqir* 'poor' and which of them is the neediest, they said that a 'needy' person means someone who possesses something, but it is not enough to suffice him.(1) Abu Hanifa *Allah be pleased with him* adduced this definition by citing Allah's words: 'As for that boat, it belonged to some needy people who toiled upon the sea…' (*al-Kahf:* 79). So He affirmed that they owned something and called them 'needy'. As for *faqir* 'the poor person', this is the person who has nothing at all. According to this understanding, the poor person is even needier than the needy person, which means that he is included in this verse *a fortiori*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'This', that is to give to these people 'is best…' The Arabic word *khayr* 'best' can be used linguistically to mean one of two things: Sometimes it means 'good' the opposite of 'evil', as in Allah's words: 'And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it; [7] and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil, shall behold it [8]' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8).

Other times, when we say *khayr* we mean 'best' meaning the Arabic comparative/superlative form, as when the poet said:

> Zayd is the best of people and the son of the best.

But the word *khayr* is most often used to mean 'best' or 'better', as when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The strong believer is *khayr* 'better' and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer. There is good (*khayr*) in both.'(2) So the first use of the word *khayr* here means 'better'. But for whom is it best?

It is '…for those whose goal is Allah's approval…' (*ar-Rum:* 38). That is, by giving what is due to the near of kin, the needy and the wayfarer, one seeks the countenance of Allah and does not seek to be seen or heard by others. The one who does a good deed takes his reward from those for whom he does it. Whoever works sincerely for Allah will be rewarded from Allah and whoever works so the people will see and hear him and praise him can take his reward from them.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him narrated that the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'The needy person is not the one who goes around like this asking the people, who give him a morsel or two and a date or two.' They said, 'Then who is the needy person, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'The one who finds no wealthy man to enrich him and no one notices him and so gives charity to him and he asks nothing of the people.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4539) and by Muslim in his Sahih (1039), in Kitab az-zakat; and the wording here is that of Muslim*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (ii. 366/370), Muslim in his Sahih (2664) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (79) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

These are the ones whom Allah *the Almighty* describes by saying: ‘But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!’ (*an-Nur:* 39) That is, he will be surprised by the existence of a god who was not on his mind at all and for whom he did not work.

So the meaning of ‘for those whose goal is Allah’s approval’ is that when they act, they seek Allah’s countenance, regardless of whether anyone sees what they do, or they conceal their act so that their left hand does not know what their right hand does. This is because the whole matter is based on intention. You might give to others in front of the people whilst your intention is that they follow your example, or to stop them from speaking ill of you and slandering you.

But when you give publicly with a pure intention for Allah, it is an act of charity which will produce giving and produce reward, because you will thereby be a good example for others to give and you will be rewarded the same as they will. Whoever establishes a good practice will have the reward of it and the reward of all who act upon it until the Day of Resurrection.

The Noble Quran presented this issue to us when Allah *the Almighty* said: ‘You who believe, do not cancel out your charitable deeds with reminders and hurtful words, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in God and the Last Day…’ (*al-Baqara:* 264). Then He *the Almighty* clarifies it by an example: ‘…Such a person is like a rock with earth on it: heavy rain falls and leaves it completely bare. Such people get no rewards for their works: God does not guide the disbelievers’ (*al-Baqara:* 264).

So the likeness of the ostentatious person is as the smooth and bare stone covered with a thick layer of soil: when rain falls on it, it washes off this soil and it is left bare and smooth and retains nothing and nothing can grow from it.

This parable embodies for us the loss of the ostentatious person's efforts. It shows that he is wilfully ignorant: he worked hard and people benefitted from his work and he passed his goodness on to others; but he ended up completely devoid of goodness and reward.

Allah *the Almighty* then gives the opposite image: 'And the parable of those who spend their possessions out of a longing to please Allah and out of their own inner certainty, is that of a garden on high, fertile ground: a rainstorm smites it and thereupon it brings forth its fruit twofold; and if no rainstorm smites it, soft rain [falls upon it]. And Allah sees all that you do' (*al-Baqara:* 265).

So giving charity whilst seeking Allah's countenance is like fertile land when rain falls upon it, so it brings forth its crops twofold and blessed. If heavy rain does not fall upon it, soft rain is enough for it to bring forth its fruits. Had He merely said 'that of a garden', it would have been enough; but He said '…a garden on high, fertile ground…' (*al-Baqara:* 265), that is, on high-lying ground which indicates its fertility; for the more a land is raised, the more fertile it is and it is free of the ground water which affects crops. This garden is irrigated by rain which comes to it from above, washing the leaves and stems, thereby increasing their lushness and quality and leaves are the lungs of plants.

Allah *the Almighty* causes the effect you have on others to remind and admonish you: one might do good for someone else in order to buy him with it, or to make him subservient by this favour. The natural result of this is that the person is ungrateful for this favour and even hates him and resents him and this is the appropriate reward for someone who does a deed without seeking Allah's countenance.

This is the meaning of the Arabic proverb: 'Fear the evil of the one for whom you do a kindness' But, why? Because when he sees you and mentions how he is beholden to you and the favour you did him, he will feel ashamed and humiliated because your presence hurts his pride. For this reason, he will hate your presence and hate to see you.

Allah *the Almighty* therefore highlights that, we should beware of annulling good deeds by ostentation, or by base intentions because the good you do will be denied and the good you offer will come back to you as evil. So you must dedicate your good deeds to Allah's countenance, not to anyone else. If your favour is met with ingratitude your reward is preserved with Allah. It is as though your Lord is jealously protective of you and wants to preserve your good action and keep it safe with Him. A poet(1) expressed this concept by saying:

I say to generous people words
Which will give them peace if they do good for others:
The needy ones become subjected to you,
And if they discover this, they will leave you and flee.
So do not claim your goodness, however much it is repeated,
For the reward of Allah is greater and more bounteous.

I mentioned before the story of the man we met on the road in Algeria, who indicated that he needed a ride, so the driver stopped and opened the door for him, but before he got in he said, 'How much?', that is the price of taking him. The driver said, 'For Allah's sake,' the man replied, 'Too expensive, sir!'

For this reason, one of the wise ones said that those who seek Allah's countenance when they act thereby make their actions dear; that is, they raise their value and multiply their reward.

Allah's saying, 'Hence, give his due to the near of kin, as well as to the needy and the wayfarer…' (*ar-Rum:* 38) after having said, '…or gives it in scant measure…'(*ar-Rum:* 37) seemingly indicates that He takes from you even if you do not have much; and this falls within the confines of Allah's words: '…(they) give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot…' (*al-Hashr:* 9).

We said before that the Lawgiver *the Almighty* is Wise, so if He obliges you and takes from you, He does this in order to give to you if you become needy. It is as though He is saying to you, 'Rest assured that I have secured your life for you; if poverty afflicts you, or one day you are needy or a wayfarer, just as you did shall be done unto you.'

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(1) It was Sheikh Ash-Sh'arawi himself *Allah rest his soul*.

This matter is clear in the case of guardianship of orphans. If a faithful society replaces his father for him in accordance with the words of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘I and the guardian of the orphan shall be as close as these two (fingers) in paradise’,(1) every father would feel secure about his children if he ever were to die and leave them because they would be in a society which would replace their father for them with many fathers.

If a person is secure and blessed, the only thing that spoils this blessing is the knowledge that it might pass away; so Allah wants to assure for His servant a noble life for those who succeed him when he dies. This is the true insurance, which Allah sent as a matter of insurance in existence; it is not to be found with the insurance companies, but rather, it is to be found in Allah’s hand, when He says: ‘And let them stand in awe [of Allah] , those [legal heirs]– who, if they [themselves] had to leave behind weak offspring, would feel fear on their account – and let them remain conscious of Allah and let them speak [to the poor] in a just manner’ (*an-Nisa’:* 9). If they are conscious of Allah and speak in a just manner, their orphaned children will find people to look after them and be concerned for them and handle their affairs.

When we, previously, studied the chapter of *al-Kahf* (the Cave), we looked at the story of the wall which Al-Khidr *Allah be pleased with him* volunteered to build even though it was in a village whose inhabitants were ignoble people who refused even to feed them. We said that asking for food is the most truthful of requests and no one should ever refuse the one who asks for it. Yet despite this, Al-Khidr *Allah be pleased with him* built the wall and then later explained this by saying: ‘And as for that wall, it belonged to two orphan boys [living] in the town and beneath it was [buried], a treasure belonging to them [by right]. Now their father had been a righteous man…’ (*al-Kahf:* 82).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6005) on the authority of Sahl ibn Sa‘d and by Muslim in his Sahih (2983) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him and the rest of the Hadith is: ‘And he gestured with his index and middle fingers.’ The index finger is called sababa in Arabic because at the time it was used to curse (sabb) Satan (Iblis); it is also called the sabbaha because it is used to indicate praise tasbih in the prayer and to accompany the Testimony of Faith. (Ibn Hajar ‘Al-Asqalani, Fath Al-Bari, x. 426)*

So the righteousness of the parents benefitted the boys and Allah brought them someone to build the wall and protect their treasure for them until they grew up and were able to protect it from those ignoble people who, had they known of it, would have seized it from these two boys.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us the difference between a gift and an act of charity, saying:

وَمَآ ءَاتَيۡتُم مِّن رِّبٗا لِّيَرۡبُوَاْ فِيٓ أَمۡوَٰلِ ٱلنَّاسِ فَلَا يَرۡبُواْ عِندَ ٱللَّهِۖ وَمَآ
ءَاتَيۡتُم مِّن زَكَوٰةٖ تُرِيدُونَ وَجۡهَ ٱللَّهِ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُضۡعِفُونَ ٣٩

Whatever you lend out in usury to gain value through
other people's wealth will not increase in God's eyes,
but whatever you give in charity, in your desire for
God's approval, will earn multiple rewards [39]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 39)

Allah *the Almighty* knows that His worshippers do good deeds and that they seek reward for this. This request, however, might come to nothing if they are ostentatious in their actions and the reward might be commensurate with the action if it is free of ostentation. Allah wants to raise the act of charity or the obligatory alms to a high level so that the reward from the Hand of Allah for the one who does it is multiplied and the desire for increase is part of the intention.

For example, the believer knows that if he is greeted with a phrase of greeting, he should answer it with a better greeting. A poor person might come and offer to a wealthy person whatever gift he is able to afford, with the hope that the wealthy person will return the gift with something which reflects his wealthy status. So when he gives, he is hoping to get more back, although this is not actually stipulated; it is possible that the wealthy person will return the gift with something better, or that he might not even return it at all.

Allah's words 'Whatever you lend out in usury…' (*ar-Rum:* 39) here refer to any kind of increase of what you give, an increase which is not stipulated in the contract; the increase might be money, or anything else which brings benefit because they define usury by saying that any loan which brings benefit is usurious.(1)

Abu Hanifa(2), the pioneer scholar, used to sit in the shadow of his neighbour's wall. When his neighbour asked him to loan him some money and he gave it to him, the neighbour noticed that he would no longer sit in the shade of the wall as he had used to do. He asked him about this and he replied: 'I used to sit in the shade of your wall and I knew that it was a favour from you; but now I fear to sit there, so you do not think that this sitting is for the money which you took from me.'

So the meaning is: The usury you give out hoping that it might bring you increases, whether in the form of benefit or money, or something else and whether it is stipulated or not. They say: so what is the ruling in the case of a gift for which something better is given in return? What is my sin if I am the one who is given this? They say that there is nothing wrong with this, as long as your intention is not to get more and that your gift is unconditional; it is an act of love and kindness between people and you do not get any reward for it from Allah.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…to gain value through other people's wealth…' (*ar-Rum:* 39); the word 'through' implies encapsulation since wealth is a receptacle and what you put into it decreases it and increases what you have; '…will not increase in Allah's eyes…' (*ar-Rum:* 39), it will increase what you have by the extra which you take from the one you greeted, but it will not increase in the sight of Allah.

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(1) *Ash-Shawkani said in Nayl Al-awtar: A proof of the unlawfulness of any loan which brings benefit to the creditor is what Al-Bayhaqi narrated in Al-Ma'rifa on the authority of Fudala ibn 'Ubayd, who said in his own words: 'Every loan which brings benefit is a kind of usury.' It was also narrated in As-Sunan Al-kubra on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullah ibn Salam and Ibn 'Abbas, in their own words. Al-Harith ibn Abu Usama also narrated it from 'Ali with the wording: 'The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him forbade loans which bring benefit.' Another narration has it, 'Every loan which brings benefit is usury'; the chain of transmission includes Sawar ibn Mus'ab, who is considered to be rejected; 'Umar ibn Zayd said, in Al-Mughni, 'There has not been anything rigorously authenticated narrated about this matter.'*

(2) *The story of Abu Hanifa Allah be pleased with him and the shade of the wall*

This is what Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said,(1) although some of the scholars say that it refers to usury itself and this was a matter which needed to be legislated on; but Ibn ‘Abbas believed that the verse of usury was already known, whilst this verse referred to increases in the matter of greetings and favours between people.

Then Allah says: ‘…but whatever you give in charity, in your desire for Allah’s approval, will earn multiple rewards’ (*ar-Rum:* 39). That is, those who give the obligatory alms intending Allah’s countenance, ‘…will earn multiple rewards’ (*ar-Rum:* 39). This word does not come from the verb *id‘af* ‘to weaken’, but rather from the noun *ad‘af* ‘multiples’ since the obligatory alms is rewarded *ad‘af* ‘manifold’, as is clear from His words: ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, which He will amply repay?...' (*al-Hadid:* 11) As for usury, it is *id‘af*, ‘weakening.’

Some of the orientalists, who used to criticise Allah’s word, have objected to this, saying: ‘There are verses in the Quran which contradict Prophetic hadiths. The Quran says: ‘Who is it that will offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, which He will amply repay?...’ (*al-Hadid:* 11).

So the reward of a goodly loan is doubled by Allah and you say that a good deed is rewarded tenfold. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘It is written upon the door to Paradise: “Charity is rewarded tenfold and loans are rewarded eighteen-fold”.(2)’ If a goodly loan doubles a good deed which is rewarded tenfold, this makes eighteen, not twenty.

We said to him: ‘If you give a dollar, for example, in charity, you have performed one good deed which will be multiplied for you tenfold; but will the dollar which you gave be returned to you? No, so the reality of the matter is that you have taken nine, which is then doubled to make eighteen.'

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(1) *Ibn ‘Abbas, Ibn Jubayr, Tawis and Mujahid Allah be pleased with them said that this verse was revealed in connection with gifts given in search of reward; Ibn ‘Utayya said: ‘As for everything else which a person does in order to be rewarded, such as giving a greeting and so on – although there is no sin in it, there is also no increase with Allah.’ Al-Qurtubi, At-Tafsir, v. 5293*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Majah in his Musnad on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him, who said that the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘The night I was taken up, I saw written on the door to Paradise: “Charity is rewarded tenfold and loans are rewarded eighteen-fold”.’ So I said, ‘O Gabriel, why are loans better than charity?’ He said, ‘Because the beggar may ask while he possesses something, whilst the one who asks for a loan is certainly in need.’*

They ask why the reward for a loan is more. My reply is: It is because when someone gives charity, his hope for what he has given ends immediately; but the one who gives a loan continues to think about the loan and wait for its return and the more he is patient he is rewarded for this. Moreover, the one who asks for a loan only does so because he has a real need of it, whilst someone might accept charity, whilst he has no need of it and he might be one of those people who hoard money.

So Allah *the Almighty* wants to promote lending; why? They say it is because Allah wants the motions of life to proceed and to be self-completing; you hold your wealth dear and fear for it and want it to increase and you will ensure all of this by lending; so give loans, for this is the way Allah has given you to attain increase and reward.

In addition to this, Allah *the Almighty* respects your ownership of your wealth and He is concerned with protecting it for you, saying: 'O you who have attained to faith! Whenever you give or take credit for a stated term, set it down in writing…' (*al-Baqara:* 282).

Allah preserves your wealth for you in order that your mind be at peace concerning this. Despite this He leaves room for the peace of mind and dignity of the one to whom it is given: '…but if you trust one another, then let him who is trusted fulfil his trust and let him be conscious of Allah, his lord...' (*al-Baqara:* 283).

By this faithful philosophy, wealth is circulated and the motions of life proceed by means of it, in a way that secures the wealth of he who owns it because he loves it and is concerned for it and also secures for the one who has no wealth a chance to work by the wealth of another. If there is a trust to be fulfilled, everyone who owes a trust must give it to the one to whom it rightfully belongs.

If these balances are disturbed and the poor person is lax in repaying the wealthy person and does not give back to him what is rightfully his, society will be corrupted and these values will disintegrate in it. When this happens, we cannot blame the one who is able to give for refusing to give his wealth to those who need loans and why not? People are usurping the rights of others and this will cause the motions of life to stop and society will be held back from the course of progress.

If the usury is not stipulated, meaning the gains which people get in the exchange of giving gifts, favours and greetings which Allah has made as ways of expressing affection and dignity amongst people, Allah *the Almighty* neither rewards this nor punishes it and He says that it '…will not increase in Allah's eyes (*ar-Rum:* 39).

As for that usury which is stipulated, Allah declared a complete prohibition of it and ordained punishment for it, making this punishment akin to the opposite of what is intended by the one who takes usury: you take usury in order to increase your wealth, so Allah *the Almighty* replies to this by decreasing from you: 'Allah deprives usurious gains of all blessing...' (*al-Baqara:* 276). Why is this? Scholars explain this as follows: the one who gives is wealthy and well-off and has an excess of wealth from which he can give, as for the needy one who takes the loan, how can we ask a needy person to increase the wealth of the one who is rich and free of need? What will the needy person think of you when he knows that you have more wealth than you need yet you refuse to give him a goodly loan but rather stipulate that he must pay you back even more, taking more from him when he is needy?

Then suppose that I take this loan to invest and seek to make it grow, but this fails. Is it not enough that I fail in my own work and that my effort is wasted? Is it justice that I fail in my own work and then am forced to pay back even more? This is not justice because the condition of a contract is that it protects the welfare of both sides, whilst the contract of usury only protects the welfare of the creditor.

We see that even in man-made legal systems of economics, when a bank gives money to someone for a project, for example and then he fails and they want to settle his affair, the first thing they do is to forgo the interest. This accords with what Allah legislates when He says: '…But if you repent, then you shall be entitled to (the return of) your principal: you will do no wrong and neither will you be wronged' (*al-Baqara:* 279). 'You will do no wrong' means that we will return your principal to you; and 'neither will you be wronged' means we will not wrong you in any other way, so we say to you: If you want to repent, then, return the usury you have taken in a retroactive manner because what you have taken has been spent and it is difficult to return it. In this way, we look after the welfare of the creditor by returning to him his principal and we look after the welfare of the debtor by not forcing him to return more than he is able.

Let us reflect on the following matter: are nations stronger, or individuals? Nations are stronger. Have you ever seen a nation take a loan from another nation and then be able to repay even the interest on this loan, never mind the principal? Likewise, there are powerful people who take loans and then do not pay back even the interest and are unable to repay it or to settle their affair and thereby fall into disputes and problems.

Another thing: suppose that a man has one thousand pounds and another man has nothing: the one who has a thousand is able to circulate it and to live on it, whilst the one who has nothing must take loans to live like his friend. If you tell him that in order to borrow one thousand, he must pay back an additional hundred; wherefrom will he get this hundred?

If he takes it from the revenue the money brings him, he will lose out. If he takes it from the products he sells by decreasing their quality, or reducing the active ingredients of the product or its packaging, the product will be below standard and will not sell well. So the consumer will bear the brunt of this and this will harm him even though he has nothing to do with the contract; and the contract is therefore unsound.

When we say that Islam is right for every time and place, we must understand this issue properly. Beware of saying that Islam is not right for such a time, or such a place.

Now we hear some people straying from the teachings of Islam and saying to you, 'Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear...' (*al-Baqara:* 286). That is, he is not well able to bear the implementation of Allah's Law in this time. But we say to him: Who is it that defines what you are well able to bear? Do you define it, or does the Lawgiver?

As long as Allah has held you responsible for something, know that this responsibility is within the limit of what you can well bear. Define what you can well bear according to that for which Allah holds you responsible; do not define what you can well bear whilst forgetting that for which Allah holds you responsible. This is why you see that when your ability is diminished, Allah lightens the burden for you without your even asking Him to do so, such as is the case with prayer and fasting for the one who is ill or on a journey and so on and as is the case with the *tayammum* 'dry ablution' for the one who is unable to use water.

So it is meaningless for us to say that the teachings of the religion do not suit the current times: in that case, make the current time into the lawgiver and set aside the Law of Heaven for that which the current time allows.

This is why we said that when Allah *the Almighty* issues responsibilities, He says: 'Say: 'Come…' (*al-An'am:* 151). The meaning of 'come' here is: rise above the level of human caprices and ascend to the responsibilities given by Allah. If you bring down these responsibilities to your own level, saying that the circumstances of the age prevent you from doing such-and-such, you have thereby subjected the decree of Heaven to the decree of the earth. The decree of Heaven only came to raise you up.

If we look at the positions of the scholars regarding usury, there are those who deem it lawful and those who deem it unlawful – and they are the majority. Even if we imagined that those who deemed it unlawful were equal in number to those who deemed it lawful: what is Allah's judgement concerning cases where juristic opinion is evenly split?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this matter saying, 'The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear; and between them are doubtful matters, unknown to many people. And so those who stay clear of doubtful matters thereby free themselves of suspicion regarding their religion and their dignity; and those who fall into doubtful matters fall into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who tends his flock near the reserved pasture and is on the brink of entering it. Every king had his reserved land and the reserved land of Allah is all He has prohibited.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim: Al-Bukhari narrated it in his Sahih (2051) and Muslim narrated it in his Sahih (1599), on the authority of Nu'man ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him.*

Did the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say: ‘So those who engage in doubtful matters…’ or ‘so those who leave aside doubtful matters…’? So those who fall into doubtful matters do not free themselves of suspicion, regarding neither their religion nor their reputation; would anyone like to be described in this way? It is strange that we hear people say, ‘What does dignity have to do with this issue?’ We say: By Allah, even those who do not believe in any religion do not like to be called ‘usurers’; their dignity does not accept this, never mind their religion.

This is why those schemers who wish to exploit this and to live on the blood of others do not realise that benefit is the law with which Allah rules His creatures, giving them ten rewards for every good deed; this is why the Jews say, ‘How can you forbid usury when Allah deals with you with it?’ Yes, Allah *the Almighty* does indeed deal with us with usury and He gives us an increase because this increase does not take anything away from what Allah has, whilst the increase that people take from the needy overburdens them and makes them even poorer and needier.

Furthermore, reflect on the surroundings in which you live: in every land there are people who love usury and deal in it, yet have you ever seen a usurer die a good death? Did a usurer ever die with his fortune in one piece? No, because Allah *the Almighty* would not say ‘Allah deprives usurious gains of all blessing…’ (*al-Baqara:* 267) and then leave a usurer to see his money grow and be secure for him until he died. Even if he is rich for a while, his wealth is nothing but a trap for him and a way of harming him even more, as the saying goes: ‘If Allah is angry with someone, He sends them unlawfully-gained provision. If His anger with them becomes even more severe, He gives it to them abundantly.’

Read Allah’s words: ‘Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all [good] things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted – We suddenly took them to task: and lo! they were broken in spirit’ (*al-An‘am:* 44). This is why we hear people say, ‘So-and-so is a brilliant businessman’, or ‘Everything so-and-so touches turns into gold’ and so on.

We clarified before the difference between ‘We threw open for them’ and ‘We threw open to them’: ‘for them’ means for their own good, whilst ‘to them’ means as a trap for them and a challenge and a means of ruin. Allah gives to the disbeliever and showers him with the fortune of this world so that whatever he takes is a cause of pain for him, as we said: If you want to trap your enemy, do not trap him from a low place, but rather from a high place so that his fall will be all the more painful.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted…' (*al-An'am:* 44). Rejoicing in a blessing is not forbidden; but there is a kind of rejoicing which is praiseworthy and another which is blameworthy since Allah ascribes rejoicing to the believers in the chapter of *ar-Rum* when He says: '…And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice [4] in Allah's succour... [5]' (*ar-Rum:* 4-5). He says: 'exulting in that [martyrdom] which Allah has bestowed upon them…' (*Al-'Imran:* 170) and He says: 'in this, then, let them rejoice...' (*Yunus:* 58). So He affirmed for them the acceptable kind of rejoicing, which is the kind which follows our word, 'Such is Allah's will! There is no power save by Allah' and then you give thanks to Allah, Who gave you this blessing. As for the blameworthy kind of rejoicing, it is to rejoice in that which causes you to be proud, boastful, and arrogant.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ رَزَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ۖ هَلْ مِن
شُرَكَآئِكُم مَّن يَفْعَلُ مِن ذَٰلِكُم مِّن شَىْءٍ ۚ سُبْحَٰنَهُۥ وَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

It is God who created you and provided for you, who will cause you to die and then give you life again. Which of your 'partners' can do any one of these things? Glory be to God, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him [40] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 40)

We said before that the matter of creation is a postulate. It is something which no one has ever claimed for himself despite the profusion of those who flaunt their disbelief and atheism. This is why when Nimrod, who argued with Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* about his Lord, claimed this by saying, 'I grant life and deal death', Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* saw that he only wanted to be obstinate and employ useless sophistry; if not, how could killing one person be described as ‘dealing death’ and leaving another person alone and pardoning him as ‘granting life’?

Then what about those who were created before you and born before you were born? So you have not created or given life to anyone. I explained before the difference between killing and death, although they are alike in that they both mean the end of life and the setting loose of the spirit; but death means that the spirit is released first after which the material shell is broken and the body is destroyed. As for killing, this means to break the body first in a way which necessitates the exit of the spirit, since the spirit can only live in a sound body. We illustrated this with the example of a light bulb which burns out so that its light goes out: does this mean that the power has been cut off from it? No, it is still present, but it needs a sound form to work, which is proved by the fact that if we change the bulb it will light up again.

Allah *the Almighty* explains to us this difference when He says: ‘And Muhammad is only a messenger; all the [other] messengers have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144) So Nimrod did not grant life, but rather, he left life as it was. He did not deal death, but rather killed and released the spirit forcibly.

It was within the ability of Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* to rebut this argument of his and show its fallacy, but he wanted to move him to another area in which he could not concoct or contrive any false argument, so he said to him: ‘“Verily, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west!” Thereupon he who was bent on denying the truth remained dumbfounded…’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). The same is true in the case of provision; it is acknowledged to be Allah’s work, which no one else has claimed for himself: ‘It is Allah who created you and provided for you’ (*ar-Rum:* 40).

This is borne out by the fact that Allah has made some places barren so that both the able-bodied and the incapable go hungry and the wealthy and the poor go hungry; if there were any provider other than Allah, he would bring life to these barren places.

Allah *the Almighty* then says ‘…who will cause you to die and then give you life again…’ (*ar-Rum:* 40) – He did not say ‘then He will kill you’ – ‘…can do any one of these things?' (*ar-Rum:* 40) That is, ask them this question and leave them to answer it for themselves: can the idols which you associate with Allah do any of the acts of creation, provision, granting life, or dealing death?

Is any of this within their power, when you are the ones who make them and carve their stones with your own hands and shape them as you like and if a storm comes and blows one of them over and breaks its arm, you set it aright and repair it? Where, then, are your intellects? What is the matter with you? This is why He says about them: 'Now those beings that some people invoke beside Allah cannot create anything, since they themselves are but created: ' (*an-Nahl:* 20).

And He says: '…Behold, those beings whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create [as much as] a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end!...' (*al-Hajj:* 73) And more than this, '…And if a fly robs them of anything, they cannot [even] rescue it from him! Weak indeed is the seeker and [weak] the sought!' (*al-Hajj:* 73) By Allah *the Almighty* can anyone get back that which a fly takes from him?

We notice here that Arabic particle *min* (any of) which indicates partition has been repeated in the original Arabic verse (*ar-Rum:* 40). '…can do any one of these things? Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him' (*ar-Rum:* 40). This means: none of those to whom you ascribe a share of divinity can undertake any kind of creation, provision, granting life, or dealing death of even the smallest thing. This is why you must comment on these matters which Allah *the Almighty* conveys to you with a single expression: '…Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him' (*ar-Rum:* 40).

There is nothing further to add. This is why when our master Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* spoke about idols, he said: '…verily, these [false deities] are my enemies...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77). That is, you and all that you worship instead of Allah because they associated their gods with Allah, so Allah *the Almighty* was included in this association which is why he then excepted his Lord from this: '…save the Lord of all the worlds, [77] who has created me and is the One Who guides me [78]' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77-78).

We notice here that when he said ‘who has created me…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 78), he did not emphasise it in any way, such as by saying ‘who is the One Who has created me’, because as we said the matter of creation has not been claimed by anyone. When he, however, spoke of guidance, which is something for which claims have been made, he said: ‘…and is the One Who guides me’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 78). This is an indication that the law which governs my life and the way of teachings which guide me, is the law of my Lord and I take it from no one else besides Him. There are many people we see who claim to have guidance, saying, ‘I have created a law which will make people’s lives happy and do such-and-such’; we have heard this claim once from the capitalists and once again from the socialists and the communists and so on.

So this is an area in which many claims have been made, so Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* specified it and limited it to Allah since there is no way except Allah’s way and no law governs us except the law of our Lord, as we say in our dialect: ‘There is nothing but Him.’

Likewise, in the matter of providing food, he said: ‘and is the One Who gives me to eat…’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 79). He used the words ‘is the One’ before the pronoun ‘who’ in order to emphasise that the One Who gave him food was Allah Alone, since a person might imagine that his father is the one who feeds him, or that his mother is the one who feeds him because she prepares food for him; they are the outward causes of this, which means that further emphasis is needed.

Then he *peace be upon him* says: ‘and who will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life?’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 81) without any emphasis because life and death are two things which are acknowledged to be Allah’s work and that is that. Likewise, he says: ‘and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on Judgment Day!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 82) This is also something which can only apply to Allah.

So for those things in which other than Allah might appear to play some part, he emphasises them and ascribes them to Allah Alone. As for those things which no one other than Allah plays any part in, he mentions them in a general way without any special ascription.

The only way to comment on this wondrous thing is to say ‘Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him’ (*ar-Rum:* 40). That is, He is exalted above any association. If the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has told us that Allah says, ‘There is no deity but Me’ and no one made a counter-claim in this regard and no one claimed it for himself, this means that it is an accepted fact. Otherwise, if there is another deity, then where is he? Why does he not defend his right to divinity? If he does not know, then he is ignorant. If he knows and does not object then he is a coward; either way, he is not fit to be a God.

This is why our Lord passed judgment over this matter with a single word, saying: ‘Say: "If there were – as some people assert – [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His almightiness”’ (*al-Isra’:* 42).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ظَهَرَ ٱلْفَسَادُ فِى ٱلْبَرِّ وَٱلْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِى ٱلنَّاسِ
لِيُذِيقَهُم بَعْضَ ٱلَّذِى عَمِلُوا۟ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ (٤١)

Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people’s actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions so that they may turn back [41] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 41)

‘Has flourished’ means: has become clear and plain; to appear means that something already existed, but we do not see it. As long as Allah *the Almighty* said ‘Corruption has flourished…’ (*ar-Rum:* 41), the corruption must already have existed, but the harbingers of corruption concealed it and obscured it until it crept in and took root in society.

Corruption itself does not appear, but rather, its effects appear. Do you remember the earthquake which struck and revealed the corruption, cheating and fraud of the building contractor and the architect: the buildings were standing and the corruption was concealed, either because of our unawareness of it, or our complicity in it, or our lack of concern for things – until things came to a head and Allah opened the ground with an earthquake to reveal to us the corruption which existed in our midst.

If cheating increases and negligence becomes widespread, it is inevitable that Allah will reveal it to the people. There is no one left who can oppose corruption or prevent it, so Allah *the Almighty* intervenes and exposes the harbingers of corruption and makes them experience the effects of what they have done.

The Arabic word *zhahara* here means ‘flourished’, it can also mean ‘to prevail’, as when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…But [now] We have given strength against their foes unto those who have [truly] attained to faith: and they have become the ones that shall prevail’ (*as-Saff:* 14), where the word *zhahirin* is used for ‘the ones that shall prevail.’ And in the chapter of *at-Tahrim*, He says: ‘…And if you uphold each other *tazhahara* against him…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 4). It can also mean ‘to go up’ or ‘to scale’, as in: ‘and thus [the rampart was built and] their enemies were unable to scale it and neither were they able to pierce it’ (*al-Kahf:* 97).

So the meaning of ‘corruption has flourished’ is that it has prevailed against soundness and gained ascendancy over it. Allah created the universe in a state of soundness and prepared it wonderfully to receive mankind. In order to confirm the truth of this, look at the universe and the genera, celestial bodies and environments which it contains and you will see no corruption except in those things in which man has had a hand.

As for those things which have been left untouched by man, you see no imbalance in them because Allah *the Almighty* created them to be harmonious in their genera and their form: ‘[and] neither may the sun overtake the moon, nor can the night usurp the time of day, since all of them float through space [in accordance with Our laws]’ (*Ya Sin:* 40).

So did Allah *the Almighty* create us and create our free will so that we could spread corruption in the universe? No, it is only the trial of free will when He sends His way down to you and makes it a law which governs your motions based on ‘do’ and ‘do not’: ‘In those things in which I did not say “do” or “do not” you are free since to do it or not do it will not cause any harm to the universe; as for Me, I have said “do” with respect to those things where harm will arise if they are not done and I have said “do not” with respect to those things where harm will arise if they are done.’

Corruption occurs when you interfere in something whilst violating Allah's law of 'do' and 'do not do'; as for soundness, it exists and contains within it a defence mechanism to combat corruption; and if corruption gains the upper hand and prevails against soundness, it becomes plain for the people to see.

At this point, Allah *the Almighty* alerts us to what is happening to us and says: 'Look at what has happened to the one who violated Allah's way.' This is why, when the ends of events become clear, our love for Allah and our eagerness to obey Him increase and you see people 'treading on eggshells' in their caution; but they quickly return to their previous state of negligence and heedlessness, as the poet said:

Funerals scare us as we walk to them
Yet we walk away from them heedless,
Like sheep are stricken by the howl of a wolf,
And go back to grazing once it falls silent.

Allah *the Almighty* says 'corruption has flourished…' (*ar-Rum:* 41), that is, it has prevailed over the law of soundness upon which Allah based the order of this universe which is corrupted if the hand of man touches it, as He says: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71).

The phenomena of the universe exist for everyone and it is wisdom that man's hand should not touch them, because Allah wants the universe to continue to exist and the time has not yet come for it to end. This is why Allah *the Almighty* placed within us a defence mechanism which makes us accept corruption up to a certain point and when this point is reached everything explodes.

Allah's words 'corruption has flourished on land…' (*ar-Rum:* 41) refer to the answer to a supplication made by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because the word 'has flourished' indicates that something occurred. It is as though He is saying to us: 'If you keep repeating this corruption and heedlessness, the appearance of corruption will keep being repeated.' He is thereby giving us a summary of what actually happened as a result of the enmity they showed the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and their embargo against him and their ostracising of him, and the way they encouraged the simpletons amongst them to abuse him, and then the enmity they showed his Companions and how they forced them to emigrate to Abyssinia because it was impossible for them to stay peacefully in Mecca.

For this reason, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* supplicated against them, saying: ‘O Allah, bring down Your grievous wrath upon Mudarr and send upon them years like the years Yusuf (Joseph) endured!’(1) And they were afflicted by drought and famine, to the point that it is related that they would go to the sea to fish and the fish would avoid them and refuse to be caught by them, so that they went home empty-handed.

This is the meaning of: ‘corruption has flourished on land and in the sea...’ (*ar-Rum:* 41). Allah *the Almighty* then gives the reason for this corruption: ‘…as a result of people’s actions…’ (*ar-Rum:* 41).

One can observe here that when Allah *the Almighty* mentions mercy, He does not give a cause for it, but He does mention the cause for corruption. This is because mercy is, from beginning to end, pure grace from Allah *the Almighty,* whilst chastisement and torment are based on His justice, which is why He explains to you that you have done such-and-such so you deserve such-and-such; the cause is plain.

There is something else which I would like to clarify for you, which is that Allah *the Almighty* treats His creatures in a certain way when it comes to reward. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘whoever comes [before Allah] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof…’ (*al-An‘am:* 160).

So a single good deed effaces ten bad deeds. This is also the case with the human body, as some of the scientists of biology and anatomy say that the kidney contains a million cells of which one tenth works at a time, taking it in turns; one group works while the others rest and so on. Look at how the cell rests until its turn comes to work.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his Musnad (ii. 470, 502, 521) and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1006), on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said that: when the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him raised his head from the final obeisance of the prayer, he said: ‘O Allah, bring down Your grievous wrath upon Mudarr! O Allah, send upon them years like the years Joseph endured!’*

It is as though our Lord *the Almighty* created it so that one tenth of the million does the work of all of it. This is why they say that if an office contains ten employees and one of them is a good worker, he will conceal the ineptitude of the others. We see this phenomenon very often in government offices: you find that most of the workers are distracted, one reading a newspaper, another drinking tea, another not even turning up at all.

And behind a stack of files you find a single emaciated member of staff drowning in work, everyone seeking him out and he makes up for the negligence of the others and does their work for them and things are held together by him. But if we lack his presence too, there will surely come the time of: ‘corruption has flourished…’ (*ar-Rum:* 41). So if you see corruption, know that it is the result of negligence and heedlessness which has gone beyond all limits.

As long as Allah *the Almighty* says ‘…as a result of people’s actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions’ (*ar-Rum:* 41), it must be that this corruption has come from their doings. By Allah, have we ever complained about a critical shortage of air, for example? But we complain about the pollution of the air as an outcome of what men’s hands have wrought; yet when we go to the countryside where no human beings live, we find that the air there is clean just as Allah created it.

And Allah *the Almighty* undertook to provide us with nourishment, saying: ‘…and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence…’ (*Fussilat:* 10), yet we complain of food crises. Why? Because food requires work and we have been indolent and we have behaved badly in the universe, by indolence and laziness in extracting the good things of the earth and its nourishment, or else by selfishness when the one who has refused to give the one who has not.

For example, we read that America pours excess milk into the sea and destroys a great deal of produce, whilst there are people in the world starving to death. This is selfishness, then; as for indolence, we have been guilty of it in the past.

For example, look at our desert which was barren and empty and how it is now lush and has become a source of goodness once we took interest in it and made it easier for people to own. If the earth gave up nothing in one area, Allah gave us abundantly in another area; for the Creator did not make the earth for one race or one nation, but rather, He made it for all of Allah’s creatures alike.

Read His words: ‘…Was, then, Allah’s earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 97). This is why I said to the United Nations: There is one verse in the Quran which, if the world applied it, would secure for it ease, stability and security, which is His word: ‘And the earth has He spread out for all living beings’ (*ar-Rahman:* 10).

The earth, all the earth, is for living beings, all living beings; but what is happening in reality goes against this, since they have made boundaries in the world and placed barriers and walls around them, so that if you want to go from one country to another you must undergo a great deal of hassle in the form of paperwork and visas and so on. The result of this is that there exists, in the world, men who are cramped together with no land, whilst in other parts of the world there are lands with no men; if there could be integration between the one and the other, things would be put right.

So the ones who made borders and barriers on Allah’s earth took them for themselves, it did not remain the wide earth of Allah which could accept people from anywhere, but rather, they turned it into their own earth and subjugated it to their own laws. You can be amazed by studying national borders on a map and see how they intermesh with one another, so that part of one country seems to enter the space of another country in a triangular shape, for example, or the area of one country extends into another in the shape of a tongue, or a zigzag shape. As long as you have made borders between each other, why not make them straight?

The ones who made these borders wanted to make them a source of conflict between nations; and these divisions are never free of caprice and tribal, ethnic, national, and religious partisanship. Yet if we were to apply Allah’s saying: ‘He set down the earth for His creatures’ (*ar-Rahman:* 10), we would not have to suffer all these difficulties.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…have wrought…’ (*ar-Rum:* 41). In Arabic, we have the verbs *kasaba* and *iktasaba*, and usually *kasaba* means to do a good deed, whilst *iktasaba* means to do an evil deed because good deeds come from the believer naturally without any affectation or artifice, so they can be described using the simple root verb form *kasaba.* As for the evil deeds, they are unnatural. Therefore, they need affectation and artifice from you, so they can be described using the derived verb form which indicates artifice, namely; *iktasaba*.

Do you not see that when you are at home, you look at your wife and daughters as you wish, yet when you look at an unrelated woman you steal glances at her surreptitiously? All of your movements are artificial: why? This is because you are doing something unlawful and forbidden. As for good deeds, you do them automatically and naturally without any affectation.

Moreover, good deeds do not require any strenuous effort from you, whilst evil deeds require you to muster your strength for them, and to be cautious. Anyone who steals, for example, must use a lot of effort, and fight his limbs, since in reality they object to what he is doing.

Despite this, we see that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Truly those who do (*kasaba)* evil and are surrounded by their sins will be the inhabitants of the Fire…’ (*al-Baqara:* 81). So here He describes evil deeds with the verb *kasaba*, not *iktasaba*. The scholars said this is because evil deeds for this person have become habitual and easy so that they have become something natural which he does without thinking about it, just as another person does good deeds. This kind of person – God forbid – has come to love and adore evil deeds so that he does them in the open and does not conceal them, to the extent that he exults in doing them. We call such a person ‘unscrupulous’ because evil and corruption have become a profession for him, and he is not affected by them, nor does he feel ashamed of them. This is like a person who accepts bribes and exults in them, and if you ask him about it, he says: ‘so what? I am not robbing people!’

Allah then says: ‘… He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions…’ (*ar-Rum:* 41). The tasting here is a punishment, but it is a punishment of correction, just like when you punish your son and cause him pain because of your concern for him. We said before that we must not separate an action from its doer. Another boy might attack your son and cut him, so you take him to the doctor, and he cuts him even worse: but one is the cut of the attacker, and the other is the cut of the healer. When Allah makes a person taste the evil of some of his doings, He thereby wakes him up from his heedlessness and rouses in him the natural disposition of faith so that he becomes cautious and is neither negligent nor remiss; and this faithful awakening will stay with him according to the level of his faithful conscience: one person will remain alert for a month and then go back to how he was, whilst another will remain for a year, and a third will remain for the rest of his life without going back to his heedlessness. Allah *the Almighty* caused the people of Mecca to taste the result of their disbelief when they were hungry and found nothing to eat except a mixture of the blood and hair of camels, called *'ilhiz* in Arabic.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…so that they may turn back' (*ar-Rum:* 41) because this discourse refers to the life of this world which is not the world of requital; Allah *the Almighty* lets them taste the evil of some of their doings so that they take heed of Him, and repent and return to the confines of faith; for they are His servants, and He is more merciful to them than a mother is with her child.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Corruption has flourished…' (*ar-Rum:* 41), this refers to the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to show us that the Messengers only came to save mankind from this corruption; but as long as the matter has a cause, this means it will continue to be linked to this cause with respect to when it is present and when it is absent. This means that whenever corruption appears, the punishment will be liable to occur, and you can take this as one of Allah's signs in the universe until the end of time.

Corruption appeared in the past; Allah says: 'and We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40). But this taking to task occurred to the nations which came before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it was a complete annihilation. This is because the previous Messengers were not commanded to wage war in order to spread their call; they only had to pass on the religion and give the Message whilst being aided by miracles; and if their people refused them, Allah *the Almighty* took care of their punishment. As for the *ummah* of Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* was generous with them by not punishing them with the torment of annihilation; He *the Almighty* says: ‘But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness’ (*al-Anfal:* 33). Then the corruption would appear later, and the punishment for it would also appear; so the Islamic *ummah* did not do anything new in this matter. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَـٰقِبَةُ
ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلُ ۚ كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّشْرِكِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Say, ‘Travel through the land, and see how those
before you met their end – most of them were
idolaters’ [42] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 42)

‘To travel’ means to move from one place to another; we said before that the superficial view of the matter says that we travel on the earth, not in it because we live on the earth, not in it. But Allah *the Almighty* makes us aware with His Words: ‘Say, “Travel through the land”…’ (*ar-Rum:* 42) that the earth does not only mean the dry land and water on the surface of the planet, but rather includes its atmosphere, which is why it revolves along with it since there could be no life in the earth without it.

So, the air of the earth is part of the earth, and is the most important constituent of life on it. When Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence…’ (*Fussilat:* 10), this includes air; and this is why He says: ‘Say, Travel through the land…’ (*ar-Rum:* 42). We said that if you consider all the genera of existence, you will find that you are the highest genus in existence, and all the genera below you serve you: you benefit from animals, plants, and minerals; and even the lowest genus in existence, the mineral, has a purpose to serve.

In addition, if you, O man, whom Allah honoured above all the other genera of existence, do not search for a role to play in life, and a purpose to serve, you are thereby lower in rank than the lowest of genera, the mineral. If you do not use your mind to search for something you are linked with and which suits your mastery above all that is below you, you are more worthless than a stone; for the stone has a purpose which it serves, whilst you have no purpose.

But, if Allah *the Almighty* wills, He can give this lowest genus honour above the master it serves, namely, man: on the obligatory pilgrimage, it is part of the Prophetic tradition for you to kiss a stone, and try your level best to reach it and kiss it. Reflect on man – who is the master of this existence – as he tries to kiss a stone, and becomes angry if he is not able to do so. Reflect also upon the response which stones could give to those who worshipped them, as the poet(1) said:

They worshipped us, yet we worshipped Allah more
Than those who pray in the watches of the night;
They took our silence as a proof against us,
So we became the fuel of the Fire for them;
They blamed us ignorantly, just as they blamed
The Son of Mary and the Apostles;
The deluded will be requited; as for the object
Of their delusion: the mercy of the All-Forgiving will save them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and see how those before you met their end…' (*ar-Rum:* 42). Travelling upon the earth is done either for the purpose of sightseeing and reflecting on Allah's signs in His universe, which is why the Arabic particle *fa* implying causality, is used for: '…and see…' (*ar-Rum:* 42), or else, it is done for the purpose of seeking provisions.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say, "Travel throughout the earth and see"…' (*al-An'am:* 11). This means: 'travel in the earth to invest, seek sustenance, and find needs; but do not neglect to look at and reflect on Allah's Signs in His creations, in order to take admonition and guidance from them.'

The saying of Allah, '… how those before you met their end…' (*ar-Rum:* 42) refers to those amongst whom corruption emerged so that Allah made them taste the pain of what their hands had wrought; for this is not for you alone, but rather, it happened to the previous nations, as Allah *the Almighty* said: ‘You [people] pass by their ruins morning’ (*as-Saffat:* 137). There are the settlements of Saleh, and dwellings covered by the Ahqaf desert, and the dwellings of ‘Ad, Thamud and the Pharaohs, and so on. Look at what happened to them after the civilisation and advancement they had achieved, and after the advanced knowledge of mummification and stone-work which they attained, the secrets of which science has not yet discovered even now, and how they could place seeds of wheat or oats alongside dead bodies and they remained as they were so that if they were planted now after thousands of years, they would grow.

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(1) It was Sheikh Ash Sha'rawi himself.

This is a highly advanced level of scientific prowess; yet this civilisation was unable to protect itself from decline. If the Quran says of the Pharaonic civilisation: ‘and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh?’ (*al-Fajr:* 10) and it says of *Iram*: ‘whose like has never been made in any land’ (*al-Fajr:* 8), what kind of civilisation must this have been? And where is it now? It is concealed beneath the sands of the Ahqaf desert,(1) which buried it beneath layers of earth. Do not be surprised by this, since in that region if a single sandstorm blows, it can cover a whole caravan, with its camels and men, beneath the earth; so what about the accumulation of many storms over the years? This is why we find that all archaeological investigations are done by digging. So, despite their greatness, these civilisations could not defend themselves from extinction which proves that there is a Power higher than them which eliminates them and causes them to come to an end. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘… most of them were idolaters…’ (*ar-Rum:* 42). That is, a minority of them were not idolaters; scholars said that this minority were the children and the insane, and those who had no free will; and if this minority were taken along with the idolatrous majority, Allah only wanted the best for them because their destiny would be to enter paradise without any account. This is why when we spoke about Moses (Musa) and the righteous servant in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, we said that when Al-Khidr killed the young man, Moses (Musa) was astounded: the first time he holed a ship and violated property, whilst the second time, he actually separated a spirit from its body. This is why after the first incident, Moses (Musa) said: '…What a strange thing to do!' (*al-Kahf:* 71) That is, a strange thing, whilst after the second incident, he said: '…What a terrible thing to do!' (*al-Kahf:* 74) Then Al-Khidr explained the wisdom behind killing the young man saying that his parents were righteous and Allah knew that he would corrupt their religion for them, since strife usually comes to a man either from his spouse or from his child, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Believers, even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies – beware of them – …' (*at-Taghabun:* 14). Why? Because they will try to make you do more than you are able to, and perhaps force you to steal or take bribes in order to get for them what they desire; and since corruption can come because of them, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…He has neither spouse nor child' (*al-Jinn:* 3) which means: 'Rest assured, my servants, that no one can influence My Will.'

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(1) Al-Azhari said: ‘The Ahqaf are sand-dunes in the land of Yemen where ‘Ad used to reside.’ Lisan Al-‘Arab, under the definition of the root h-q-f.

So, Al-Khidr did the parents a favour when he saved them from this son, and he also did a favour to the boy by killing him before he reached the age of responsibility and thereby making paradise his final end; had he left him alone, he may have become a disbeliever in Allah and a source of hardship for his parents. All of this was only done according to Allah's Commandment and His Wisdom: '… I did not do [these things] of my own accord…' (*al-Kahf:* 82). It is as though He *the Almighty* conveyed this matter to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* beginning with: 'Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people's actions…' (*ar-Rum:* 41). Then He sent His chastisement upon them as requital for what their hands wrought, saying: 'I answered the supplication you made against them. All of this only means that I am giving strength to your cause, and I will not desert you; and as long as this is the case, do not allow their plotting to affect you when they say to you, "Worship our gods for one year and we shall worship your God for one year."(1)' But Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *Concerning the revelation of the chapter of al-Kafirun, Al-Wahidi mentions that a group of Quraysh said, 'O Muhammad! Come, follow our religion, and we shall follow your religion: worship our gods for one year and we shall worship your God for one year.' Al-Waqhidi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p. 279*

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ ٱلْقَيِّمِ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَّا مَرَدَّ لَهُۥ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصَّدَّعُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

[Prophet], stand firm in your devotion to the upright religion, before an irresistible Day comes from God. On that Day, mankind will be divided [43] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 43)

Allah's saying: '[Prophet], stand firm in your devotion to the upright religion…' (*ar-Rum:* 43) means: 'Rest assured, O Muhammad, and devote your time to the Worship of Allah because I have promised to succour you, and I answered you when you said: "O Allah, bring down Your grievous wrath upon Mudarr, and send upon them years like the years Joseph (Yusuf) endured!"(1)' Allah *the Almighty* says: '…whether We The Forgiver show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned. Retribution takes place – know that, in the end, it is unto Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir:* 77). That is, those who are not punished in this world will be punished in the next. He *the Almighty* says: 'Then turn thy face straight…' (*ar-Rum:* 43) because the face is the place of nobility and the foremost part of the human being. It is what shows man's honour. This is proved by the fact that prostration and humility before Allah *the Almighty* is expressed by placing one's face on the ground. This is why when you send someone with a message or give him a task which he will fulfil with his foot or his hand or his tongue, or any of his limbs, you say to him, 'I hope you will brighten my face!' This is because the face is foremost. An example of this is Allah's saying: '… everything will perish except His Face…' (*al-Qasas:* 88) because you only know people by their faces, and if someone wants to hide or conceal his identity, he can do so by simply covering his eyes so what if he covers his whole face? You do not identify someone by the back of his head, or his shoulders, or his leg, but rather by his face. The Arabic words *wajih* (notable) and *jaha* (high standing) both come from the word *wajh* (face).

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(1) *Abu Hurayra who said: 'When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him raised his head from the final obeisance of the prayer, he said: O Allah, bring down Your Grievous Wrath upon Mudarr! O Allah, send upon them years like the years Joseph (Yusuf) endured!' Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (ii. 470, 502, 521), and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1006).*

As long as He singled out the face, the noblest part of you, all the other parts of your body are included a fortiori in this, since they are subordinate to the face. Therefore, the meaning is: ‘use your hand to do that which Allah has commanded you to do, and use your leg to go where Allah has commanded you to go, and occupy your heart with that which Allah commanded you to occupy it with, and set your eye upon that which Allah commanded you to behold, and so on.’

That is, make the most of the opportunity of your life: ‘…before an irresistible Day comes from Allah…’ (*ar-Rum:* 43), namely; the Day of Resurrection, ‘…which cannot be averted…’ (*ar-Rum:* 43). This means that when Allah brings it forth, no one will be able to wrest it from Allah, or take it from His hand, or prevent Him from bringing it forth; or, it means that once Allah *the Almighty* has decreed something, He does not go back on it or change it.

So, the words ‘…from Allah…’ (*ar-Rum:* 43) give us both meanings, just as is the case with Allah’s saying: ‘each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah’s Command...’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 11). How could these helpers protect him from Allah’s Command? Scholars said that this means that their being angels of guardianship is a result of Allah’s Command, and based on His command for them to guard. He then says: ‘…On that Day…’ (*ar-Rum:* 43) that is, on the Day which cannot be held back from Allah, ‘…mankind will be divided’ (*ar-Rum:* 43) those who banded together to fight you, oppose you, and hurt you and who conspired against you ‘…will be divided’ (*ar-Rum:* 43). They will be separated from one another; a point which is frequently mentioned in many verses of the Quran.

The division is either one of faith and disbelief that is, the happy people and the unhappy people; or has to do with that which will take place amongst those who were obstinate and followed others into idolatry, for each of them will disown the other, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘When those who have been followed disown their followers…’ (*al-Baqara:* 166). Allah *the Almighty* then clarified for us the mode and cause of the division in the Hereafter, for He *the Almighty* does not wrong anyone. So, He then says:

مَن كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُۥ ۖ وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلِأَنفُسِهِمْ يَمْهَدُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection, and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves [44] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 44)

As long as the Resurrection is something from Allah and thus cannot be averted, let us pay heed to its consequences and make preparations for them. Those who disbelieved will have to bear the burden of this disbelief: it will be against them, not for them; and this is something which urges us to say in contrast: ‘and those who had faith will have their faith counted for them.’ After showing us the clear proofs of His Oneness in the universe and showing us the universal proofs in that regard, and giving us parables and details – after all this, He *the Almighty* said: ‘I will tell you that you have been given a choice, that is, I created within you the freedom to choose to fulfil responsibilities so that I would not force anyone to believe in Me.’ The creation of the freedom to choose to fulfil responsibilities, after we had been made compelled in other things, indicates that Allah does not want His servants to be mere shells which react to commands of compulsion, but rather, He wants people to be attracted by their loving instinct to The Unique One.

Otherwise, it would have been possible to create them all in a state of guidance, that is, in such a way to which disbelief would have nothing to do with, and they would be compelled to obey Him. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* gives examples of such creatures which have no ability to choose, saying: ‘…they said, “We come willingly”’ (*Fussilat:* 11). When Allah *the Almighty* spoke clearly about this matter, He said: ‘We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it …’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72). This refusal was not based on arrogant rebellion against Allah’s Will, but rather, they thought objectively, saying, ‘We will not bear this trust because we do not trust ourselves, and we cannot guarantee that we would live up to it.’ Man is likewise subject to vicissitudes; he might bear the trust and be sure that he will live up to it at the moment he takes it on, and yet no longer be sure of himself when the time comes to live up to it. We gave the example for this before of someone who takes on a trust and welcomes it when he first takes it on, but then certain events of life overwhelm him so he is forced to usurp this trust: even though he originally intended to return it, when the time comes, he cannot do so. Another person foresees this responsibility and so refuses to take on the trust; and this is the intelligent one who foresees changing circumstances and conditions. It is well known that a trust is not written down; if you write it down and have it witnessed, it is no longer a trust. A trust, therefore, is down to the free choice of the one who is trusted: if he wills, he can acknowledge it and if he wills, he can deny it. Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the heavens, the earth, and mountains '…refused to undertake it and were afraid of it…' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) because they foresaw their responsibility. As for man, he was offered the chance to take on the trust and thus said, 'I have an intellect with which to think, and I can choose between alternatives, and I will fulfil the trust.' He gave a guarantee at the time when he assumed the trust, but not when the time came to fulfil it; and thereby he wronged himself and was ignorant of the nature of things. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Mankind undertook it, they have always been inept and foolish' (*al-Ahzab:* 72). He was wicked to himself, and foolishly ignorant of the vicissitudes that could come to him. As long as man is subject to vicissitudes, he does not remain in the same state, which is why we said that if a person climbs to the top of a mountain, and he is subject to vicissitudes, there is nothing else for him to do but to go back down. Wise people fear to be given blessings which are complete because there is nothing after completion except decline, as the poet said:

If something is completed, it begins to decline:

Look out for waning when you hear, 'It is complete!'

If you say, 'Why did Allah create free will in man and not in the other genera which serve Him including minerals, plants and animals?', we say in reply: 'Be precise, and understand that they were also given their choice, when He says: "We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it…" (*al-Ahzab:* 72).' So, these genera were also offered the choice of free will, but they made a single choice which sufficed them of the need to make any further choices: they said, 'O Allah, we want to be subjugated to Your every Will.' Since we have free will, Allah *the Almighty* conveyed to us this matter: 'those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection…' (*ar-Rum:* 44). The words: '…will bear…' (*ar-Rum:* 44) refer to debt and burden, whilst the words: '…will have for them…' (*ar-Rum:* 44) indicate benefit; so if we wanted to state the contrast of this, we would say, 'And those who have faith will have for them [the good of] their faith', as in the saying of Allah: 'The good will live in bliss, [13] and the wicked will burn in the Fire [14]' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14). But the Quran does not make this contrast here; rather it moves to another matter: '… and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves' (*ar-Rum:* 44). Why is this? Scholars said it is because the benefit of faith is that you believe in the existence of a single all-powerful deity, namely, Allah, and you have faith in Him, so you should obey if He commands you. The reason for faith is therefore one of moral responsibility, so when you approach any responsibility, do not look for the reason for it; instead say: 'He *the Almighty* made me responsible for doing such-and-such, and the reason and wisdom of this responsibility are known to Him.'

If we say, for example, that the wisdom behind fasting is that the rich person feels and experiences the pain of hunger and therefore feels compassion for the poor: does this mean that the poor and the needy do not have to fast? So, this is not the wisdom behind fasting, and it is better to say: 'I fast because Allah wants me to fast, and the wisdom of fasting is known to Him.' We gave an example to illustrate this – and Allah is beyond compare: when you complain of a pain or an illness, you ask after a skilled and specialist doctor until you find him, whereupon the role of your intelligence comes to an end and you place yourself in his hands, while he examines you, diagnoses your ailment and prescribes for you treatment. You do not object to anything he does, and you do not ask him why he prescribed this medicine.

If a visitor, for example, asked you why you are taking this medicine, you would not say, 'Because it has such-and-such properties, and such-and-such effects', but rather, you would say, 'Because the doctor prescribed it for me' even though the doctor is a human being who could make a mistake, and he might prescribe for you a medicine or give you a shot which kills you; yet you trust him in whatever he sees is best for you. If you do not question the doctor, when he is subject to error, how could you question Allah in what He obliges you to do, and ask for a reason for everything?

No one is questioned about why he does things except by an equal to him; no one questions a doctor except another doctor like him. In this way, we must trust Allah about the reasons and wisdom for things until there is an equal to Him who can question Him.

Allah *the Almighty* explains to us that the reason for faith – not faith itself – is obedience to the commandments of Allah; and the harmony of the created order depends on obedience of these commandments. This is proved by the fact that Allah tells the believers to spread the call and pass it on to others, and to fight those who oppose it and prevent its spread. The sword was not used by Islam for any reason other than to protect the spread of the call; if they leave it alone, leave them alone. This is proved by the fact that the countries which Islam conquered still contain followers of other religions who remained adherent to their religions, which shows that Islam did not force anyone to embrace it. But as long as Islam had conquered a land, it necessarily had to be dominant in this land, and everyone had to live in adherence to Allah's way of guidance so that the same applied to the disbeliever and the irreligious as applied to the religious. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wants His laws to govern whether you believe in them or not because the soundness of the universe can only be ensured by these laws. So you are free to choose whether to believe or not, but those who believe are required to protect the call so it can be passed on, and then to leave people free: if someone believes, it is a splendid blessing for him; and if someone rejects, we say to him: what is for us is for you, and what is required from us is required from you. So the basis of faith is the soundness of man's succession. Allah *the Almighty* is not concerned whether you believe or not as long as the way of this succession is established; and the benefit of this way goes to both the believer and the disbeliever. If faith coaches a person so that he only does what is good and sound, the disbeliever will inevitably benefit from this soundness. Did the Sacred Law say to the believer: 'Do not steal from believers'? No, it also told him not to steal from the disbeliever; and so on. In the sight of Allah's way of guidance, all are equal. There is a verse in the Quran to which we must pay attention, and inform the non-believers of, so they will know that faith protects the interest of all people, which is Allah's saying: 'We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust [105]. Ask Allah for forgiveness… [106]' (*an-Nisa':* 105-106). That is, if it occurs to you to be on the side of the false, seek Allah's forgiveness for this: '…Allah does not love anyone given to treachery and sin' (*an-Nisa':* 107) even if they are believers.

This verse has a famous story behind it, the story of the Jew named Zayd ibn As-Samin, to whom came Ta'ma ibn Ubayriq(1) – who was a believer – and said, 'O Zayd, keep this shield as a trust for me.' Zayd consented to do this, but the shield was actually stolen, as Ibn Ubayriq had stolen it from Qatada ibn An-Nu'man(2) and placed it in a sack of flour. The shield was marked by the flour, and when Ibn An-Nu'man searched for his shield, the track of flour led him to the house of Ibn As-Samin, the Jew, so he accused him of stealing it. They then brought him to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pass judgement on him, and he told him about how Ibn Ubayriq had given the shield to him as a trust. Upon this, it was a grave matter for the Muslims that one of them could have stolen, and that the Jews would have something for which to castigate them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* began to turn the matter over in his mind; if he judged against the Muslim, the Jews would make an argument out of it, whilst if he judged in favour of the Muslim, it would be a blemish and a disgrace for the religion. So, Allah assisted him by means of this verse: 'We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust' (*an-Nisa':* 105). And He said: '…between people…' (*an-Nisa':* 105) not only 'between believers.'

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(1) *The story of the Jew Zayd ibn As-Samin and his accusation of stealing a shield.*

(2) *Qatada ibn An-Nu'man ibn Zayd Al-Ansari Al-Awsi was a Companion who fought at Badr, one of the most valiant, and was a famous archer. He accompanied Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him on all his great campaigns, and bore the flag of Bani Dhafr on the day of the Mecca Conquest. He died in Medina in the year 23 AH at the age of 65. He was the half-brother of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari on his mother's side. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam, p. 189.*

Although some scholars said that Allah's saying: '…Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust' (*an-Nisa':* 105) means 'do not oppose those who are false lest they persecute you'; it actually means: 'do not be a contender for those who are false'. Allah's saying: 'Ask Allah for forgiveness…' (*an-Nisa':* 106) means that if the matter of Islam and its image amongst the non-Muslims occurs to your mind, Allah does not love those who are treacherous and sinful. If the non-Muslims were to become aware of this matter, and saw that Allah was All Just in the Judgement He gave to the believers, and conveyed this to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and that He showed the absolute truth, and that in His sight all are equal whether believer or non-believer, they would know that Islam is the true religion and they would embrace it. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whoever transgresses against a non-Muslim citizen *dhimmi*, I will contend (for him) against them on the Day of Resurrection.'(1) This is because if you transgress against him and persecute him, or threaten his life, his dignity, or his wealth, he will then have a reason not to believe, and will be able to say, 'If this is the state of the believers, what is so special about Islam that would make me embrace it? Rather, it is in my interest to stay away from it.' But if you treat him with truth, goodness, and virtue, you will cause him to become attached to Islam and to censure himself for not being a believer. This is why we said before that a man came to our master Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* who sensed that he was not a believer; and when he asked him, he said, 'I am a Magian', he closed the door in his face; so the man went away. But then Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* received revelation from Allah, saying: 'O Abraham (Ibrahim), you did not consent to grant him hospitality because he does not follow your religion; yet I have accepted him his whole life to dwell in My dominion, even though he disbelieves in Me.'

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (3053) on the authority of several sons of Companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him who heard from their fathers that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him. said: 'Indeed, whosoever harms one who is protected by a treaty, or degrades him, or makes him do more than he is able to, or takes anything from him without consent, I will argue (for him) against them on the Day or Resurrection.' As-Sakhawi said in Al-Maqasid Al-Hasana: 'Its chain of transmission is unobjectionable, and it does not matter that the sons of the Companions were not named since they were of a number which makes up for this.'*

So Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him*[1] rushed after the man until he caught up with him and appeased him. ‘What has happened,’ said the man, ‘after you sent me away and rebuffed me only moments ago?’ He said, ‘Allah rebuked me for your sake.’ The man said, ‘A Lord who rebukes His prophets for the sake of His enemies is truly worthy of worship! There is no deity but Allah, and Abraham (Ibrahim) is the Messenger of Allah!’

So we can understand from this that righteous action is the requirement of faith; if you believe in a God whose rulings you take and who you are certain is a true God, it does not then matter whether you believe or not; what matters is the basis of soundness in the universe and in the motions of life. This is why He did not say, ‘and those who have faith will have for them [the good of] their faith’, as though the meaning of faith is action. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and those who did good deeds will have made good provision for themselves’ (*ar-Rum:* 44). That is because he would not do what is right and just if he was not a believer. We can notice here that the verse first speaks in the singular. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘those who rejected the truth will bear the burden of that rejection, and those who did good deeds…’ (*ar-Rum:* 44), and then it switches to the plural: ‘…will have made good provision for themselves’ (*ar-Rum:* 44). He did not say, ‘…Will have made good provision for himself.’ Why is this?

Scholars said it is because the one who does good deeds does not do them for himself alone, but rather for himself and his offspring who come after him, as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith…’ (*at-Tur:* 21). So when He spoke about faith, He used the Arabic singular form, yet when He spoke about reward He used the plural form.

Moreover, good deeds come from a person’s being and he also receives them from others. The Arabic word *man* which here means: ‘…those who…’ (*ar-Rum:* 44) can be used for the singular, dual, and plural in both their forms, and can be used in place of all the different personal pronouns: you can use the Arabic word *man* to mean ‘he who’, or ‘she who’, or ‘they who’ in the

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(1) *The story of Abraham (Ibrahim) peace be upon him and his guest the fire worshiper*

dual form, or ‘they who’ in the plural form, and so on. In this way, the verse uses the word *man* to indicate both the singular and the plural.

Reflect on Allah’s saying: ‘…When you enter any house, greet yourselves…’ (*an-Nur:* 61). The word *anfusikum* literally means ‘yourselves.’ Does a person greet himself? Scholars said yes, because the believers are a single entity, and if you greet one of them it is as though you have greeted them all. Also, if you say to your friend, ‘Peace be upon you’, he replies ‘Upon you be peace’, so it is as though you have given greetings of peace to yourself. The word *yamhadun*: ‘…will have made good provision…’ (*ar-Rum:* 44) is derived from the root word *mahd* which means ‘cradle’; the baby does not lay out his own cradle and spread it smooth and prepare it, but he must have a loving carer to spread it out for him and lay it and prepare it. It is as though the one who does righteous deeds in this world thereby prepares a bed for himself in the Hereafter. Abu Mansur ibnul-Hazim related that Abu ‘Abdullah ibn Al-Hussayn said: ‘The righteous deed proceeds ahead of the one who does it to paradise, where it lays out his bed for him, just as a servant lays out a bed for someone.’

This is why we said before that those who put others before themselves thereby sacrifice things of the ephemeral world in order to store them up in the eternal world. When our master the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was given a ram as a gift and went back later to ask the Mother of the Believers ʿA’isha *Allah be pleased with her* about it, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘What did you do with the ram? she said, ‘It is all gone, save its shoulder’ meaning that she gave all of it away as charity except the shoulder, whereupon our master the Messenger of Allah, *peace and Blessings be upon him*, said: ‘Rather, it all remains, save its shoulder.’(1) In another Hadith, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘O Son of Adam, you say, “My wealth, my wealth!” – yet do you have any wealth save that you spend it on clothes and thereby wear it out, or spend it on food and thereby put an end to it, or give it in charity and thereby preserve it?’(2) Someone asked Imam ‘Ali *Allah be*

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (vi. 50), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan, p. 2470, on the authority of ‘A’isha; At-Tirmidhi declared it to be rigorously authentic.*

(2) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (iv. 24, 26); Muslim in his Sahih (2908), and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2342); he declared it to be rigorously authentic.*

pleased with him: ‘Am I one of the people of this world, or the people of the Hereafter?’ The Imam said: ‘You yourself have the answer to this question.’ He said, ‘How?’ He said: ‘Suppose one person comes to you with a gift, and another person comes to ask you for charity: which of them will you greet the most warmly? If you would give a warm welcome to the one who gives to you, you are of the people of this world; and if you would give a warm welcome to the one who takes from you, you are of the people of the Hereafter.’ This is because a man loves that which gives him more of his beloved: if he is one of the people of this worldly life, he will love that which gives him more of it; and if he is one of the people of the Hereafter, he will love that which gives him more in his Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then tells us why they will have made good provision for themselves:

لِيَجْزِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ مِن فَضْلِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ٤٥

From His bounty God will reward those who
believe and do good deeds; He does not like those
who reject the truth [45] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 45)

He mentioned faith here, saying: ‘from His bounty Allah will reward those who believe…’ (*ar-Rum:* 45), and then: ‘…and do good deeds…’ (*ar-Rum:* 45) so that no one would think that perhaps righteous deeds are sufficient on their own without the need for faith, This is something which has incensed many philosophers, who have said: ‘How can a disbelieving man who does good deeds not be rewarded for them?’ I say to this: ‘He was indeed rewarded for his good deeds, but in this world, because he did not act for the sake of Allah, but rather, he acted for the sake of fame and celebrity, and from them he attained honour and fame, and his memory was immortalised, and they made statues of him, and so on. As for the reward of the Hereafter, it is for those who act sincerely for the countenance of Allah.

The Quran alerts us to this issue and says: ‘Beware of being deceived by those who act only for the sake of this worldly life’, affirming: ‘and We shall turn to the deeds they have done and scatter them like dust’ (*al-Furqan:* 23). It was narrated in a Hadith: ‘You did it so that such-and-such would be said about you; and it was said.'(1) Yes, you built a mosque, but you wrote upon it 'built by so-and-so, and opened by so-and-so', and so on. So what are you waiting for after this? Your Lord wants you to devote your actions sincerely to His countenance, as a Hadith says, '…And a man who gave charity and concealed it so that his left hand did not know what his right hand gave.'(2)

So Allah's saying: 'From His bounty Allah will reward those who believe…' (*ar-Rum:* 45) indicates that if a deed is truly righteous, it will benefit its doer in this world, but it will not benefit him in the Hereafter unless it is based on faith in Allah; and therefore faith is linked with righteous action so that neither can do without the other.

The saying of Allah: '…from His bounty…' (*ar-Rum:* 45) means 'as a grace from Allah', so that no one is deceived by his actions, thinking that he found salvation because of them; and this is a point of contention amongst the scholars, who say that the Quran here says: '…out of His bounty…' (*ar-Rum:* 45), yet elsewhere it says: '…Enter the Garden as a reward for what you have done' (*an-Nahl:* 32) which implies that it is your right to enter it because of the works you offered. So is paradise the right of the believers, or is it a grace from Allah?

I say: 'who benefits from the actions for which Allah holds the believers responsible?' They benefit man, and Allah draws no benefit from them because He has the attributes of Absolute Perfection, and had them even before He created man.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him related that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: 'The first of people to be judged on the Day of Resurrection will be a man who was martyred. He will be brought forward, and shown his blessings, and he will acknowledge them. (Allah) will say: 'What did you do with them?' He will say: 'I fought in Your cause until I was martyred.' He will say: 'You have lied; you fought so it would be said: (He is) brave; and it was said.' Then, He will order for him to be dragged away on his face, and thrown in the fire. Then, a man who studied, and taught, and recited the Quran, will be brought forth, and shown his blessings, and he will acknowledge them. He will say: 'What did you do with them?' He will say: 'I studied, and taught, and recited the Quran for Your sake.' He will say: 'You have lied; you studied so that it would be said: scholar, and you recited the Quran so it would be said: He is a reciter; and it was said.' Then He will order for him to be dragged away on his face, and thrown in the fire….' Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih, 1905; An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1031) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, as part of the Hadith which begins: 'There are seven whom Allah will cover with His shade on a Day when there is no shade save His….'*

This is why He said in the Sacred Hadith, ‘O My servants! If the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you, were as pious as the heart of the most pious man among you, it would not increase My dominion even as much as a gnat’s wing. And if the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you were as wicked as the heart of the most wicked man among you, it would not decrease My dominion even as much as a gnat’s wing. And if the first of you and the last of you, and the human and the jinn of you, stood on one hilltop, and all asked Me what they wanted, and I gave it to them, it would not decrease what I have, except as a needle does if one of you dips it into the sea. This is because I am Munificent, and Glorious, and Wealthy; My bestowal is speech, and My torment is speech: My command to that which I will is no more than that I say to it, “Be!”, and it is.’(1)

And Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘What you have runs out but what Allah has endures…’ (*an-Nahl:* 96). So actions of religious responsibility are for man’s own good, even if on the surface they seem to constrict his movements. For example, he may wish to steal and increase his wealth, but we hold him back and prevent him, saying to him: Reflect that we have prevented you from stealing, and you are only one person; and we have prevented all people from stealing from you. Therefore, you are the one who benefits from Allah’s way of guidance; so do not look at what responsibility takes from you, but rather look at what this responsibility gives you from others. As long as all responsibility is for your own benefit and good, if Allah rewards you for it after this, it is a grace from Allah to you. It is like when you say to your son, for example, ‘If you succeed, I will give you such-and-such’, even though he is the one who will benefit from his success, so any reward you give him after this is an act of grace.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (v. 77, 153) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2495) on the authority of Abu Dharr. At-Tirmidhi said: ‘This Hadith is sound; its chain of transmission includes Shahr ibn Hawshab, whom some have declared weak, though Al-Bukhari considered his narrations of Hadith sound and declared him to be strong.’*

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* loves for His servant to do his work well, and to exert his effort therein; for this reason, He gives us recompense for it even though we are the ones who benefit from it.

He *the Almighty* says: ‘on that Day, Allah will pay them their just due in full…’ (*an-Nur:* 25) making it a matter of justice due on His part, just as He says: ‘…We make it Our duty to help the believers’ (*ar-Rum:* 47). If we consider the word ‘due’ philosophically, we find that every right which is due to you is contrasted by a duty incumbent upon someone else; it can only be your just due if it is someone else’s duty. This means that your just due here is a duty for Allah; yet a duty must be obliged by someone, and who could oblige a duty on Allah? No one, but rather, He obliged it on Himself.

So the just due which He gave you is an act of grace from Him, and it is a just due for you because He has made it so; it is like the person who has no right to inherit, so someone is gracious with him and writes him a bequest from his assets so that he comes to have a rightful just due, which he can legally demand from the heirs because the benefactor was gracious with him and assigned a just due to him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…He does not like those who reject the truth’ (*ar-Rum:* 45). We notice that this verse speaks about the reward of the believers; so what occasions the mention of the disbelievers here? Scholars said it is because Allah wants to alert His disbelieving servant’s attention to faith and its distinctions, as though He is saying to him: ‘Come to faith so you can attain to this reward.’

An example to illustrate this – and Allah is beyond compare: a man with three sons promises to give a gift to the ones who succeed in their studies, and at the end of the year, two of them succeed and take their gifts, whilst the third, who fails, feels bad and wishes he has done what his brothers have done

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* does not love the disbelievers because He loves for all men to be believers so they can obtain the reward of faith; for all are His servants, and He is more merciful with them than a mother is with her child, and they are His creations and His handiwork; and have you ever seen an artisan break his handiwork and smash it? So Allah is concerned for His servants, even the disbeliever amongst them.

A Qudsi Hadith states that the sky said, "'O Lord, allow me to fall in pieces upon the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You." The earth said, "O Lord, allow me to swallow up the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You." And the mountains said: "O Lord, allow me to fall upon the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You." And the oceans will say: "O Lord, allow me to drown the Son of Adam, for he desires Your goodness, yet neglects to thank You." And what did The Lord and Creator say to them all? "Leave Me with that which I created; for had you created them, you would have been merciful to them. If they repent to Me, I am their Beloved; and if they do not repent, I am their Doctor."'(1)' This is why Allah rejoices in the repentance of His servant when he comes back to Him after having turned away; and our master the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us a parable to illustrate this when he says: 'Allah rejoices at the repentance of His believing servant more than one of you does when he comes across the camel which he had lost in the wilderness.'(2) That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* wants all His Slaves to be prosperous and to be qualified to receive His Grace and Bounty, which is why He *Glorified is He* does not like the disbelievers who throw themselves into destruction and thereby go against the Divine Will for all mankind.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) Abu Hamid al-Ghazali narrated it in Ihyaa' 'Ulum Ad-Din as a saying of one of the early Muslims with the wording: 'No servant commits sin save that the earth upon which he stands asks permission to swallow him up, and the sky which covers him asks permission to fall upon him in pieces; so Allah says to the earth and the sky: "Leave My servants and give them respite, for you did not create them; and had you created them, you would have mercy on them. Perhaps he may repent to Me in which case I shall forgive him; and perhaps he will become righteous instead in which case I will make his deeds righteous instead."'

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6309) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2747), on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, and the wording here is that of Al-Bukhari.* The meaning of 'comes across his camel' is that he unexpectedly finds it without having been looking for it, getting it back after it had been lost to him. 'Wilderness' means barren desert.

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦٓ أَن يُرْسِلَ ٱلرِّيَاحَ مُبَشِّرَٰتٍ وَلِيُذِيقَكُم مِّن رَّحْمَتِهِۦ وَلِتَجْرِىَ
ٱلْفُلْكُ بِأَمْرِهِۦ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا۟ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Another of His signs is that He sends out the winds bearing good news, giving you a taste of His grace, making the ships sail at His command, enabling you to [journey in] search of His bounty so that you may be grateful [46] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 46)

These are five of the blessings which Allah gives to His servants. Sending forth the winds is itself a blessing, and their bearing the glad tidings of rain is a blessing, and the sailing of ships is a blessing, and to quest after Allah's bounties is a blessing, and then to give thanks for all of this is another blessing.

Ayat (wonders) is the plural of the Arabic word *aya*, which, as we said, means something amazing which will surely draw one's gaze, and of which one will not be heedless for even the blink of an eye. This is why we say in Arabic that so-and-so is 'a wonder of eloquence', or 'a wonder of beauty', and so on.

The word *Ayat* can mean three things: the wonders of the universe which point to the Maker and affirm the omnipotent power of the Creator: 'the night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His signs…' (*Fussilat:* 37). The word *Ayat* also means the miracles which accompany the Messengers to prove that they are truly sent by Allah to deliver His Message. Then there are the *Ayat* which convey the Sacred Law and its rulings, namely; the *Ayat* of the Noble Quran, which convey unto us Allah's way of guidance. Here, Allah *the Almighty* is speaking about the wonders of the universe: 'another of His signs is that He sends out the winds bearing good news…' (*ar-Rum:* 46). The word *riyah* is the plural of *rih*, and here it is used in its general meaning of 'air' which takes several forms: there is still air; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'if He willed, He could bring the wind to a standstill…' (*ash-Shura:* 33). And the still air is uncomfortable for a person because it makes it difficult for him to breathe, so he has to bring the air to himself either with his hand or with a fan. Why? In order to renew the oxygen in the air around him so that he can breathe. Sometimes air is so hot that it scorches the face; other times it comes as a breeze which is cool, refreshing, and pleasant; other times it comes as a destructive hurricane, and so on.

Allah *the Almighty* – as we explained before – arrayed the constituents of life for the creatures of earth in the following order: air, then water, then food, according to the importance of each constituent. Air is the most important constituent of life for living beings, since a man cannot do without it for more than the short time it takes to breathe in and out, and if it is withheld from him he will die. Then there is water, which a man can do without for up to ten days; then there is food, which he can do without for a month.

For this reason, the wisdom of the Creator decreed that He did not give possession of air to anyone; if air belonged to someone and he was angry with you, you would die before he became pleased with you. As for water, people rarely own it; and as for food, people frequently own it because a person can go without it for a long time which gives him a chance to earn it and contrive a way to get it; or on the other hand, the heart of the one who owns the food might soften so that he gives it to you.

This is why we hear people saying, by way of threat, ‘By Allah, I will stop his breath!’ It is as though this is the cruellest thing that can be done; because you might stop him from getting water or food without him dying, but if you stop him from breathing this will be the end of him; and this is the quickest way of killing a person and the easiest and the one which leaves the least trace, since no blood spills because of it, nor are any injuries caused; it takes nothing but a cloth soaked with water. So air is an important constituent of life and security.

We said that if air is cut off or is still, the oxygen in it is not renewed and this makes a person uncomfortable because his breaths are restricted. If there is a foul smell in a room, everyone is quick to shout, ‘Open the window!’ Why? So the air is renewed.

So sending forth the winds is a blessing in itself; and if they bear coolness and you feel their moisture, they give you glad tidings of rain; this is why the Arabs used to know of rain before it fell, and they could predict the course of the clouds which would bring rain. So the glad tiding of rain is another blessing.

In these two blessings, the sending forth of winds and the sending down of rain, man plays no part: ‘…giving you a taste of His grace…’ (*ar-Rum:* 46), that is, through rain. As for the wonder of ships: ‘…making the ships sail at His command…’ (*ar-Rum:* 46), the sailing is ascribed to the ships because man has a hand in them and plays a part in them, as he makes them and sets them on their course at Allah’s behest: ‘…to [journey in] search of His bounty so that you may be grateful’ (*ar-Rum:* 46). That is, you travel in the sea to fish and seek provision, or even for fun and tourism.

So the wonders in which man plays no part are ascribed to Allah Alone, whilst if man has something to do with them He ascribes them to him, as is the case when He says: ‘Consider [the semen] you eject. [58] Do you create it yourselves or are We the Creator? [59] We ordained death to be among you. Nothing could stop Us [60] if We intended to change you and recreate you in a way unknown to you [61]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 58-61). So He gave us the blessing of life, and then mentioned that which causes it to end, so that we would not receive life with delusion. And since man plays no part in the wonder of life and the wonder of death, it was enough for Him to ask the question: ‘do you create it yourselves or are We the creator?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 59) and no one could say, ‘I created.’

As for the wonder of farming, He ascribes farming to man, since he has much to do with this wonder when he ploughs, sows, irrigates, and so on. This is why when He came to speak of the end of this blessing, He said: ‘… indeed, if We wished, We could turn your harvest into chaff…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65) using the word ‘indeed’ to emphasise the verb, so that you would not be deluded by the part you play in farming.

As for the matter of water, He did not use this emphasis because water is a blessing which man has nothing to do with, so when He spoke of its end He said: ‘If We wanted, We could make it bitter…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 70) without any extra emphasis.

The fifth blessing is: ‘…so that you may be grateful’ (*ar-Rum:* 46), and this blessing is the treasure and stronghold of all blessings; for if you thank Allah for the blessings He gives you, He gives you even more: ‘Remember that He promised, “If you are thankful, I will give you more”…’ (*Ibrahim:* 7).

After this, Allah *the Almighty* consoles His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ رُسُلًا إِلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِمۡ فَجَآءُوهُم بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ فَٱنتَقَمۡنَا
مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَجۡرَمُواْۖ وَكَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيۡنَا نَصۡرُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Before you [Muhammad], We sent messengers, each to their own people: they brought them clear proofs and then We punished the evildoers. We make it Our duty to help the believers [47] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 47)

This means: ‘O Prophet Muhammad, if your call has made you tired and you have encountered harassment, obstinacy, injury, plotting and scheming from the leaders of Quraysh. We have given you succour despite all this; and take as an example your brothers from the previous Messengers who were exposed to the like of that which you are exposed to, yet did We give Our Messengers over to their enemies? So rest assured that they will not have any success over you.’ The meaning of the saying of Allah: ‘…they brought them clear proofs…’ (*ar-Rum:* 47) refers to the miracles which proved that they were truly sent by Allah to deliver His Message; yet despite this, their people did not believe in them and lied to them. As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…and then We punished the evildoers…’ (*ar-Rum:* 47), there is an abridgment of something which can be understood from the context; the Quran did not say that the people lied, but rather, it directly went to the consequence of this denial, affirming: ‘…and then We punished…’ (*ar-Rum:* 47). This style of abridgment can be clearly seen in the story of the hoopoe of Solomon (Sulaiman) when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Take this letter of mine and deliver it to them, then withdraw and see what answer they send back’ (*an-Naml:* 28) and then follows it up immediately by saying: ‘The Queen of Sheba said, “Counsellors, a gracious letter has been delivered to me”’ (*an-Naml:* 29), leaving out the events which took place between the two statements since they can be clearly understood from the context; this is one of the aspects of the rhetorical style of the Noble Quran. The previous nations’ denial of the signs brought to them by the Messengers is a proof that they were people of corruption, and that they wanted to benefit from this corruption. So it was natural that they opposed the Messengers who came to bring an end to this corruption, and that they persecuted them, so that Allah *the Almighty* had to protect His Messengers: '…and then We punished the evildoers…' (*ar-Rum:* 47). Then He affirms this matter: '…We make it Our Duty to help the believers' (*ar-Rum:* 47). Allah would not send a Messenger and then leave him to the mercy of his enemies, or abandon him, which is why He *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: 'Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: [171] it is they who will be helped, [172] and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners' [173] (*as-Saffat:* 171-173). We said before that it is not appropriate to look into these forces and ask: 'Was this soldier sincere in defending Islam, or was he not?' Rather, look at the results; if he was victorious, this means that the force of faith in him was sincere; if not, then he must look at himself and search for the meaning of the defeat against Islam in his own soul; for if he were truly one of Allah's Forces, the principle of 'and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners' (*as-Saffat:* 173) would have been applied to him; the Forces of Allah can only be defeated if one of the necessary attributes of these forces is missing. Reflect, for example, on what happened at the battle of Uhud, when the Muslims were defeated – although the word 'defeated' here is not completely accurate since the battle was a draw – they found success at first, but the end was not in their favour because the archers disobeyed the command of Allah's Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*(1) so they were defeated after they had achieved victory in the very beginning. O Muslim, would it have pleased you if the Muslims had been victorious after disobeying their Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*? By Allah, had they been victorious despite their disobedience to his command, all of his proceeding commands would not have been taken seriously, and they would have said, ‘We disobeyed his command and were yet victorious.’ So the meaning of this is that Muslims were not defeated, but rather, the defeatism within them was defeated, and Islam was victorious by the truth of its principles. Likewise, on the day of Hunayn of which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…even on the day of the Battle of Hunayn. You were well pleased with your large numbers…’ (*at-Tawba:* 25). Even Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘We shall not be defeated today by such a small force’; yet at first they were almost defeated, but the matter was, as you say, a case of ‘The Lord took pity on them’, so He *the Almighty* sent tranquillity upon them, and it was His Will to forgive them for this mistake for Abu Bakr’s sake.

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(1) *Al-Bayhaqi narrated in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (iii. 209), on the authority of Musa ibn 'Uqba, as part of a long Hadith: 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him selected fifty archers and instructed them to face the cavalry of the enemy, and appointed 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr to be their commander, and said to them: 'Archers, once we have taken our positions, if you see the cavalry of the idolaters galloping and the enemies of Allah fleeing, do not leave your positions. I implore you, let no man amongst you leave his post; keep the cavalry from us. He peace and blessings be upon him strongly advised them not to leave their places, yet all that which befell and afflicted Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him that day was a result of their disobedience. When the fifty archers saw that Allah the Almighty had given victory to their brethren, they said: 'By Allah, we are sitting here for no reason; Allah has destroyed the enemy and our brethren are in the midst of the idolaters' troops!' And some of them said, 'Why should we keep rank when Allah has put the enemy to flight?' So they left the posts which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him had implored them not to leave, and they contended and failed as a result of their disobedience to his peace and blessings be upon him orders.*

So Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘… We make it Our Duty to help the believers.’ (*ar-Rum:* 47). Yes, indeed, to succour the believers is a duty upon Allah, which He has made incumbent upon Himself; and it is an act of grace from Him, just as the benefactor is gracious with his wealth by leaving a bequest to someone. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى يُرْسِلُ ٱلرِّيَٰحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَيَبْسُطُهُۥ فِى ٱلسَّمَآءِ كَيْفَ يَشَآءُ وَيَجْعَلُهُۥ كِسَفًا
فَتَرَى ٱلْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَٰلِهِۦ ۖ فَإِذَآ أَصَابَ بِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦٓ إِذَا هُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

It is God who sends out the winds; they stir up the clouds;
He spreads them over the skies as He pleases; He makes
them break up and you see the rain falling from them. See
how they rejoice when He makes it fall upon whichever of
His servants He wishes[48] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 48)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a detailed reminder of the process of the wind’s motions, and the propulsion of the clouds, as well as the sending down of rain. When the word ‘winds’ is used in the plural, this indicates goodness, as when He *the Almighty* says: ‘We send the winds to fertilise…’ (*al-Hijr:* 22). That is the winds fertilise plants by taking from them the male spores and dropping them into the females; one of the amazing things about this process is that you see both male and female in a single stalk, as is the case with maize, for example: the crest, the highest part of the stalk, contains the male pollen, whilst in the small shoots, which come out of the cob connected to the seeds, are found the female parts; and with the motions of the winds, the pollen falls from above and lands on these shoots, which is why the seeds connected to it will grow, whilst the ones, which the pollen does not reach, will die. This is why we can observe that the stalks which are directly facing the wind or the sea tend to give lower yields than the ones behind them. Why? Because the wind carries their pollen to the other stalks behind them so that their yield increases. If we know that some plants have both male and female elements such as the date palm and the sycamore, for example, where are the male and female elements of wheat, the guava, and the banana trees? When they studied these pollen seeds, they found that every seed, no matter how small it is, contains tiny cilia like velvet which are scattered in the wind and then carried to distant places. This is why you see mountains and deserts becoming verdant after a fall of rain; here arises the question, ‘Who planted those seeds there?’ It was the winds, which fertilise by the power of the Creator. We have thus to reflect on Allah’s saying: ‘If He pleases, He causes the wind to become still so that they lie motionless on its back…’ (*ash-Shura:* 33), that is, the ships which sail by the force of the winds remain motionless on the surface of the water without anything to move them. If you say, ‘How can we understand this matter now, in view of ships nowadays sailing by steam power, or diesel, or electricity, and no longer needing wind?’

We say: ‘One of the meanings of *rih* ‘wind’ is air, and it also means power in general, as in the case when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and do not quarrel for then you will be weak in hearts and your power *(rih)* will depart…’ (*al-Anfal:* 46), that is, your power. So wind means power of any kind, whether the ships sail by winds or by engines, Allah *the Almighty* is fully able to still them. For this reason, we find that ‘winds’ in the sense of ‘power’ have both current power and also latent power; ‘current’ means that it is in action now and ‘latent’ means that it will come later. Likewise, every person and everything in the universe has breath, wind and a unique chemical make-up which distinguishes it from everything else; this is the role of the police dogs which smell the scent of suspects and criminals in narcotics cases. For example, a person's perfume may remain in the place he was in even after he leaves it. This is why the Quran tells us that scent is the firmest of a person's traces: read what Allah says about Joseph (Yusuf) and Jacob (Ya'qub): '…take this my shirt and cast it on my father's face, he will (again) be able to see…' (*Yusuf:* 93). Joseph (Yusuf) was in Egypt, whilst Jacob (Ya'qub) was in the land of Palestine, yet when the caravan set off(1) with Joseph's (Yusuf) tunic and left behind the buildings which might have held back the winds, Jacob (Ya'qub) said: '…Most surely I perceive the greatness of Joseph (Yusuf)…' (*Yusuf:* 94); he said this despite the great distance between them. In addition, if the word rih "wind' is used in the singular, it indicates evil; and the meaning of 'winds' is that one wind comes from here, and another from there, so that it brings you oxygen wherever it comes from, and carries to you all kinds of fragrances, and therefore it brings you benefit. I said that those firm things attain their firmness from the presence of air which surrounds them from all sides and directions; and if you removed the air from any one side, the object would immediately fall down. Likewise, if wind comes in the singular form, it is destructive and brings havoc, as is the case when Allah *the Almighty* says: '… and in 'Ad: When We sent upon them the destructive wind' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41) and '… by a roaring, violent blast' (*al-Haqqa:* 6); so when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah is he who sends forth the winds…' (*ar-Rum:* 48), the act of sending forth of the winds is itself a blessing, a fact which is clear in the Saying of Allah: '… so they raise a Cloud…' (*ar-Rum:* 48) meaning that the winds stir the cloud and move it, which is another blessing. A cloud is water which evaporated from the earth and then collected in the atmosphere; as for rain, it is water which has been filtered by Allah's Power, just as we now perform processes of filtration in factories, for example. Rain brings us fresh, clean, cool water, which is filtered by the care of the Creator, without us having anything to do with it. If the filtration of a single cup of water requires all these processes and all this effort, what do you think about rainwater? I said before that out of His Wisdom, the Creator made three quarters of the earth's surface water, so that the surface area of the evaporated water would be broad enough to suffice the remaining quarter. To illustrate this, we gave the example of a cup of water which you leave on a table, for instance; the water will remain for a long time because only a little will evaporate. Then if you pour it onto the floor of the room, it will evaporate quickly. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…then He spreads it forth in the sky as He pleases...' (*ar-Rum:* 48). Look at the Absoluteness of the Divine Will: Allah distributes rain as He wills to the places which require rain; and it is amazing that when Allah wants to provide sustenance to a person, He might provide for him by means of clouds which never actually pass over his homeland. Look at the Nile, for example, where does its water come from? Where does the rain, which irrigates the land of the Nile from the beginning of it to the end, fall?

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(1) This means that they left the city and went on their way *(Al-Qamus al-Qawim, ii. 83).*

As for His Saying: '…and He breaks it up…' (*ar-Rum:* 48), the word *kisaf* is a plural noun meaning 'pieces'; as for His Saying: '…so that you see the rain…' (*ar-Rum:* 48), it means from within these clouds. Regarding Allah's saying: '…then when He causes it to fall upon whom He pleases of His servants, lo! They are joyful' (*ar-Rum:* 48), rain might come to them directly so that it falls right onto them, or it might come to them indirectly if the land is on an incline so that it flows down from it and waters another place, and also passes on fertility and growth to it, as the Nile used to carry silt from Abyssinia to Sudan and Egypt. This silt would continue to flow with the water all the way up the Nile to Damietta; so why did it not settle on the river-bed during all that distance? It did not settle because of the power of the water's current and its strong flow such that this silt could not sink to the bottom and settle therein. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…lo! They are joyful' (*ar-Rum:* 48) because when the winds blow over them, they bring them glad tidings of the coming of rain, and when the rain falls upon them, it gives them glad tidings of the imminent production of crops, growth, fertility, and goodness, as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: '… and you see the earth sterile land, but when We send down on it the water, it stirs and swells and brings forth of every kind a beautiful herbage' (*al-Hajj:* 5). I remember when I was young in our home on the Nile which stretched out wide in front of us, there were several islands on it in which people used to farm. I remember that we were planting maize when a flood came and drowned it when it was still green and had not ripened. The people were going to it and gathering it up in boats, and the women were cheering and all the faces were joyful, so I asked my father *Allah rest his soul* ‘The Nile has drowned the crop, so why are the women cheering?’ My father laughed and said, ‘The women are cheering because the Nile has drowned the crop, which is the source of goodness and cause of the earth’s fertility.’ When I grew up, I read the poem of *Ahmad Shawqi*(1) *Allah rest his soul* about the Nile:

How long is it since you first gushed through the villages,

And what is this generosity that makes you flow through the towns?

You sent forth water which becomes pure gold (2),

And you drown the earth – and the drowned one comes to life!

When I read this poem, I realised why the women were cheering when the Nile drowned the crops.

Joy at of the coming of rain comes according to circumstances: if it comes after desperation, famine and drought, the joy is all the greater, yet it is even deeper if the rain comes unexpectedly; Allah says: ‘… lo! They are joyful’ (*ar-Rum:* 48). As for when the rain comes in an ordinary fashion, there is less rejoicing. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِن كَانُوا۟ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِم مِّن قَبْلِهِۦ لَمُبْلِسِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

Though before it is sent they may have lost
all hope [49] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 49)

The Saying of Allah, ‘…abandoned all hope’ (*ar-Rum:* 49) means that they had despaired of rain ever coming; and if rain came to them after this despair, their joy would be doubled and multiplied. The scholars(3) have a point of contention concerning this verse because it repeats the words ‘*min qabl’* (‘a short while ago’) and (‘[just] before’), both of which in Arabic are ‘*min qabl’*, and which literally carry the meaning of ‘before.’ Upon reflection, we find that it means ‘before rain was sent down to them, although before this (the sending down of rain), they had despaired.’ So there are two uses of ‘before’. We must understand that there is the movement of the winds which bring tidings of rain, and there is also the sending down of the rain. In fact, when the rain is sent down, there is something before this, namely, the movement of the winds. Before the movement of the winds, people felt despair, yet after the winds came, they said, ‘Perhaps there will be no rain.’ So how many instances of ‘before’ is this? There is ‘before’ the sending down of the rain and ‘before’ the movement of the winds; so the meaning is that before this – that is, before the sending down of the rain, they felt despair.

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(1) Ahmad Shawqi ibn ‘Ali ibn Ahmad Shawqi is the most famous of the modern poets; he is known as ‘the Prince of Poets.’ He was born in 1868 AD in Cairo, and died in 1932 at the age of 64. He grew up in the care of the royal household, studying law and becoming acquainted with French literature. He depended upon his own personal experience in composing most of his poems. He became very wealthy and lived a life of comfort and luxury. *See, Az-Zirkili, Al-Alam, p. 137.*

(2) The word ‘*asjad* means gold; it is said that it is a general word for all precious stones such as pearls and gems (*Lissan al-‘Arab*).

(3) *Al-Qurtubi mentions these opinions in his Tafsir (vii. 5301): Akhfash says that this repetition is meant for emphasis, and most of the grammarians are also of this view;=*

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

فَٱنظُرۡ إِلَىٰٓ ءَاثَٰرِ رَحۡمَتِ ٱللَّهِ كَيۡفَ يُحۡيِ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ بَعۡدَ مَوۡتِهَآۚ
إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمُحۡيِ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ٥٠

Look, then, at the imprints of God’s mercy, how He restores the earth to life after death: this same God is the one who will return people to life after death – He has power over all things [50] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 50)

It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wanted to use what can be felt and seen in the universe to give us proof of the unseen matter. In this regard, He *the Almighty* wanted to tell us about the Resurrection and the Hereafter, which is why He explains by saying: ‘… Allah is the one who will return people to life after death – He has power over all things.’ In connection with the earth, Allah *the Almighty* used the present tense verb ‘gives life’, and the present tense indicates renewal and continuation, which is a tangible process for us. As for

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= *Qatrab said that the first ‘before’ refers to the sending down, whilst the second ‘before’ refers to the rain, that is, ‘even though before it was sent down before the rain, they were…’; it is also said that the meaning is ‘before the clouds, before they had been seen’; this is the opinion which is preferred by An-Nahhas.*

the raising of the dead to life, He *the Almighty* used the noun *muhyi* (the One that can bring back to life). We know full well that a noun is used to indicate the constancy of the attribute, which here is to emphasise the act of raising the dead to life. It is obvious that no one doubts the matter of death because we ourselves witness it; as for the Resurrection, it is a matter of doubt for some because it is of the unseen. Despite this, He says of death: 'Then after that you will most surely die' (*al-Mu'minun:* 15) emphasising this once with the word 'behold' (*al-Mu'minun:* 15), and then again with the Arabic participle *la*. Death is a reality which we do not doubt, so why all this emphasis? Scholars said: Indeed it is a reality which we do not doubt, but it is a reality which is ignored, and it is as though to ignore it is to deny it; if you were truly sure of it, you would not ignore it. When He mentions the Resurrection, He says: 'Then surely on the Day of Resurrection you shall be raised' (*al-Mu'minun:* 16). He only used one form of emphasis here, even though it is a point of doubt. It is as though once the proofs of it had been given, it should not have been doubted; this is why He *the Almighty* did not emphasise it in the same way He emphasised death. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'look, then…' (*ar-Rum:* 50). The command to behold here is not for the sake of fantasy, spectacle, or fun, because when we say: 'This is something to look at', we mean that it should be investigated and studied until we arrive at the truth which lies within it. This actually happens by giving deference to the weightier proofs over the lighter ones. So, the Saying of Allah: 'Look, then…' (*ar-Rum:* 50) means 'behold with reflection and deliberation' because we want to compare what we cannot see and what we wish to be informed of concerning the Hereafter with that which we can see, namely, the restoration of life to the earth after its death. This verse therefore contains a new proof of the Power and Unity of Allah *the Almighty* tangible evidence which we can all see. Allah *the Almighty* gives all kinds of different proofs to alert the created being to His Omnipotence so that man will believe in Him as the One, All-Conquering, All-Sustaining, All-Powerful; these proofs serve as arguments which enlighten the mind, cosmic signs which prove the truth, parables which He makes for the people, promises for those who believe and warnings for those who defy. Here, we also have a cosmological proof which can be witnessed in the universe, that is, the One Who gives life to the lifeless earth, as you can witness, is the One

Who shall bring the dead back to life in the Hereafter as He tells you; a point which is emphasised by the fact that He *the Almighty* used the Arabic active participle indicating the constancy of the attribute of life-giving even before He gives life. When we say: ‘So-and-so is a poet’, he did not earn this attribute simply by composing poetry, but rather, he was a poet even before he composed it. Likewise, the Creator was the One Who grants life even before He ever performed this action; He was All-Powerful even before He created anything to have power over; He was the Creator even before He created any creatures, and it was by this Attribute of His that He created. In order to make clearer the similarity between giving life to the earth and giving life to the dead on the Day of Resurrection, I say: If we look at man, we find that this large body which can weigh a hundred kilos or more, has the origin of its formation in a microbe which cannot be seen with the naked eye so that they say that the spermatozoa from which the whole population of the earth grew could be fitted into a thimble, and it would only fill half of it. Then this spermatozoon takes its nourishment and sustenance, and develops and grows in size only; but the character remains the same. When the person dies, the body decays and breaks down until all that remains is the coccyx which remains and does not break down, and the earth does not consume it so that it then becomes the seed from which the person grows again by Allah’s Power on the Day of Resurrection. This is why the Hadith about the raising of the dead to life on the Day of Resurrection says: ‘…And they will grow just like herbs grow.’(1) In this small bone are stored all the attributes and special characteristics of the person, and from it he will become once again as he was before he died. It is like the sesame seed, for example; despite its smallness, it contains all the special characteristics of this plant. So smallness is an indication of Allah’s Omnipotence, and if you place this small seed in the right environment, it will take its nourishment from the soil and the air and grow and develop; this growth and development do not give a new character, but the character remains the same; they only give it a larger size. This is why when they studied the anatomy of the rabbit, they found that it has a form which follows the basic anatomy of the human being, meaning that it has all the body parts and organs of the human being. Even the gnat, with its tiny size, contains all these organs; but where is its digestive system, its circulatory system, its nervous system, its sympathetic nervous system, its urinary system, and so on? The minuteness of these creatures is proofs of Allah's Omnipotence. In our modern civilisation, we find that one of the signs of scientific progress is that we make large things as small as possible. For example, look at the radio: when they first invented it, it was the size of a threshing machine; yet now it is the size of a matchbox. So greatness stems from your ability to put all these devices in this small object, or even by making them bigger than usual and bigger than what could be done before such as the 'Big Ben' clock bell. This is why we see that the Creator created things which are so small that the naked eye cannot see them, and yet which contain all the special characteristics found in large things. He also created creatures so big that you cannot confine them. So, when something develops, it does not obtain new attributes, but rather, the same attributes and characteristics which it originally contained grow in it. I said before that if a man weighing a hundred kilos, for example, contracted an illness (Allah forbid) which caused him to lose half his weight, we say: 'where did this loss go?' It went with the waste which he excreted because a person grows when the nourishment he takes is more than the waste he excretes; yet if they are equal, he remains at a certain limit and does not gain or lose weight. If Allah sends this ill person a doctor to treat him, he regains his health so that he returns to his previous weight of one hundred kilos; does the exact same thing, which he lost and caused his weight to decrease, return to him? Or does an equal amount of nourishment and constituents return to him? An equal amount to that which he lost returns to him. So the character remains as it is, without losing or gaining anything. Likewise, the character or the attributes exist in this tiny microbe or in this little seed until it is placed in the right environment whereupon it gives the same characters or attributes as its kind. They even say that the ancient Egyptians used to place seeds with the dead, and they preserved them for thousands of years so that if one of these seeds were to be placed in the right soil, it would grow. If man can grow a seed after thousands of years, will it be difficult for Allah to make the seed of man grow again when the rain falls on it by His Command on the Day of Resurrection? Moreover, if the single seed which man grows gives him thousands of others like it, whilst the seed of man and the atom which remains of him produces only a single person, will this be difficult for the Divine Omnipotence? This is why Allah *the Almighty* urges us to reflect upon His Words: ‘look, then…’ (*ar-Rum:* 50) which does not mean the beholding of the eye, but rather that of reflection, discernment and reasoning. Allah reproaches those who are heedless of reflecting on His Signs in the universe, as He says: ‘and how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it’ (*Yusuf:* 105).

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(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated that Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘Between the two trumpet-blasts shall be forty.’ He (Abu Hurayrah) said, ‘Forty days?’ ‘Longer’, he said. ‘Forty months?’ he said. ‘Longer’, he said. ‘Forty years?’ he said. ‘Longer’, he said, ‘Then Allah will send down water from the sky, and they will grow just like herbs grow. There is no part of a man which does not decay, save a single bone, the coccyx bone, from which mankind will be reconstituted on the Day of Resurrection.’*

We call argument with the intention to bring out the truth ‘debate’ *munadhara* derived from the word *nadhara* (to look): each of us debates the other, not with the looking of the eye, but rather with that of the mind and reason. Allah then says: ‘look, then, at the imprints of Allah’s Mercy, and how He restores the earth to life after death: this same Allah is the One who will return people to life after death…’ (*ar-Rum:* 50). That is, the One Who gave life to the earth ‘… will return people to life after death…’ (*ar-Rum:* 50). As long as He *the Almighty* is confirmed as possessing the Attribute of life-giving, if He tells you that He will bring the dead to life, believe this and take what you have seen as proof of what you have not seen. Allah *the Almighty* then ends this verse with another attribute which emphasises the attribute of creation and life giving, saying: ‘…for He has the power to will anything!’ (*ar-Rum:* 50) Besides the fact that He *the Almighty* is Alive and the One Who gives life, He *the Almighty* possesses the Attributes of Perfection and the Power to do anything, in knowledge, power, wisdom, releasing, retaining, benefitting, harming, and so on. After mentioning the act with the present tense verb which indicates continuation: ‘…He gives life…’ (*ar-Rum:* 50) and mentioning the name which indicates the constancy of the attribute: ‘… The One that can bring the dead back to life…’ (*ar-Rum:* 50), He then combines all the Attributes of Perfection by saying: ‘…for He has the power to will anything!’ (*ar-Rum:* 50) Allah wants to show that man is an ingrate and that he was created impatient, so that when misfortune touches him, he is filled with self-pity; yet when good fortune comes to him, he withholds it from others. When he despaired of the winds ever coming to him, Allah *the Almighty* sent him winds; and when he despaired of the rain ever falling, Allah sent him abundant rain. Yet did he take this bestowal to mind, so that if he despaired of anything he sought his relief from Allah, and cast his despair aside and said, 'I have a Lord to whom I can turn, and I should not give up hope as long as He exists?' The One Who relieved you from the despair of wind and the despair of rain is able to relieve you of any misfortune; so the motto of every Muslim should be, 'There is no misfortune when You are Lord.' As long as you have a Lord, do not worry, or despair, for there are no problems with Allah – there would only be a problem if you had no Lord to turn to. This is the difference between the believer and the disbeliever; the believer has a Lord to whom he can turn when his means are exhausted. As for the disbeliever, how unhappy he is, for if his means become scant, he finds no shoulder to cry on, which is why he often resorts to suicide. For this reason, when something gave Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* cause for concern, he would stand and pray, and he would say: 'Give us peace with it (the call to prayer), O Bilal!'(1) In the prayer, you are alone with your Lord and Creator; you present your need to Him and derive strength and aid from Him *the Almighty.* Likewise, Prophet Moses (Musa) taught us this lesson: when he escaped with the Children of Israel and Pharaoh and his people came after them, they found themselves surrounded; the sea in front of them and the enemy behind them, and they said to Moses (Musa) *peace be upon him* '…Most surely we are being overtaken' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). This is the human logic and realism, yet Moses (Musa) *peace be upon him* had another logic which was based on the existence of an All-Powerful Lord to whom he could turn at times of peril, so that He would give him relief for every distressful matter. So Moses (Musa) *peace be upon him* said confidently: '…By no means…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62). He said it out of certainty, the words of one who trusts that his Lord will not desert him. He did not base it on anything he had in store, but rather, he based it on his faith in Allah *the Almighty*: '…surely my Lord is with me: He will show me a way out' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62). As a matter of fact, this is the sanctuary of every believer. Why not? If you are faced with a legal case, you relax when you appoint for yourself a lawyer to defend you; what, then, do you think if you have on your side the Lord of earth and sky, since He *the Almighty* is the lawyer, the judge, the witness, and the One Who issues the verdict? You see that the judge of this world might rule based on evidence which has been falsified. Also, he might rule something based on a confession which he is unable to extract from the accused, or rule based on testimonies which are in fact false. Then beyond this, he cannot ensure that his verdict is carried out because there is the judicial authority which rules, and then the executive authority which executes; and the criminal might even be able to escape from the executive authority. As for the court of Divine Justice, its Judge is Allah *the Almighty* and He requires neither evidence nor confession, nor witnesses, and no one can deceive Him or escape His Verdict; and this is why He says of Himself: '…and He is the best of the Judges' (*al-A'raf:* 87).

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(1) *Hudhayfa said, 'When the Prophet had cause for concern, he would pray.' Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (v. 388) and by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan, p. 1219*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَئِنۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا رِيحٗا فَرَأَوۡهُ مُصۡفَرّٗا لَّظَلُّواْ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦ يَكۡفُرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

Yet they will continue in their disbelief, even if We send a [scorching] wind and they see their crops turn yellow [51]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 51)

You can observe the difference between the style of this verse: 'But thus it is: if We send a wind…' (*ar-Rum:* 51) and the previous verse: 'It is Allah who sends forth the winds…' (*ar-Rum:* 48). The saying of Allah, 'sends forth' uses the present tense verb which indicates continuation; we said before that the plural word 'winds' is only used to mean something good. It is as though the act of sending forth of the winds is something abundant, and which happens often as a grace and a generous gift from Allah. As for the word 'wind', and whenever wind in the singular is spoken of, we said before that it is always used to mean something evil, so He did not say 'He sends forth', but rather chose to say 'if', which indicates doubt; why? This is because the wind of evil rarely occurs, and Allah rarely unleashes it upon His servants. For example, the simoom wind comes only once a year and the life-destroying wind only ever came once in the past, as is the case with the furious storm-wind. So it is rare and infrequent, yet if it were to afflict them, they would feel self-pity and despair, yet it is not appropriate for them to do so: do they not have prior experience which should keep them from despairing when they despaired at the absence of winds and then Allah sent them to them, and they despaired at the lack of rain and then Allah sent it down to them? So why lose hope when the Lord exists? The meaning of: '…and they see it…' (*ar-Rum:* 51) is that they see the crops which had been green and lush: '…turn yellow…' (*ar-Rum:* 51), that is, changed and withered: '…they will continue in their disbelief' (*ar-Rum:* 51). They disbelieve because of the despair which removes Allah *the Almighty* from events, even though they had prior experience, and they had despaired before and then Allah gave them relief. This is because man has no patience for bearing trials; if they afflict him, he quickly resorts to self-pity. Had he only said, 'I have a Lord to whom I can turn and He will lift this trial from me, and there is wisdom behind it which I will come to know', he would relax and the matter would become easy for him. You might ask: why does the Quran say: '…even if We send a [scorching] wind…' (*ar-Rum:* 51), and not just 'but if…'? We say that the Arabic word *la* ('thus it is') here is what they call 'the *la* which states the content of an oath'; so the implied statement is: 'By Allah, thus it is: if We send'. The Arabic word *wa* here introduces the oath, and the *la* states its content. Allah *the Almighty* can swear by anything He wills about anything He wills, and every oath requires a complement: you say, 'By Allah, I shall strike you!' Likewise, the Arabic word *in*, which introduces a conditional clause, requires a complementary main clause. Here, Allah *the Almighty* combines an oath and a conditional in a single sentence; if this is the case, does the complement here answer the oath, or the conditional clause?

Scholars said that the Arab linguistic genius rejects the notion of two different complements in a single sentence, so the context brings a single complement which suffices us of need for the other; the complement is for whichever comes first: if the oath comes first, the complement is for the oath, and if the conditional clause comes first, the complement is for the conditional clause. Here, we have: '…even if We send a [scorching] wind…' (*ar-Rum:* 51) so the oath comes first because the implied statement here is 'By Allah, if We send a wind…'. The word: '…they will continue *[zhallu]*…' (*ar-Rum:* 51) – *zhallu* is derived from the word *zhill* (shade), and *zhalla* is a perfect-tense defective verb (*f’il naqis*) like *bata* which means ‘to spend the night *baytuta*,’ or *adha* which means ‘to continue though the midmorning (*duha*)’, or *amsa* in the afternoon (*masa*); likewise, *zhalla* means to continue through the time when there is shade *zhill*, namely throughout the day. So we take the time from the etymological root of the verb. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَإِنَّكَ لَا تُسْمِعُ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَا تُسْمِعُ ٱلصُّمَّ ٱلدُّعَآءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا۟ مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

You [Prophet] cannot make the dead hear and you cannot make the deaf hear your call when they turn their backs and leave [52] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 52)

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to console His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he did not feel pain because of the way his people were treating him, so He said to him: ‘O Muhammad, do not wear yourself out because these people will not believe, and all you have to do is pass on the message. Do not despair because of their rejection, and do not hesitate to pass on your call, and struggle for the sake of it, and declare it openly; for I sent you for a purpose, and I shall not desert you, and Allah *the Almighty* would not send a Messenger and then desert him or give him up.’ And He said to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement’ (*al-Kahf:* 6). ‘If I wanted, I would have made them believers by force, and they would not have been able to disbelieve.’ Allah’s saying: ‘If We please, We should send down upon them a sign from the heaven so that their necks should stoop to it’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 4) means ‘I only want them to come to Me willingly out of love, not compulsion; for I do not want outer forms which submit, but rather, I want hearts which are devout.’ Any man, by his tyranny, can make the people submit to him or prostrate to him, but no matter how much power he has been given he cannot make their hearts submit, or force them to love him. Here, Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘You [Prophet] cannot make the dead hear…’ (*ar-Rum:* 52). He puts them on the level of the dead, even though they are living beings who partake of sustenance. Why? Because the one who does not react to what he hears, and is unaffected by it is no different to one who is dead. Or, we can say that a person has two lives: the life of the spirit, in which the believer and disbeliever are alike, as are the obedient and the disobedient; and the life of God's way and moral values, which is for the believer alone, and about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! Answer (the call of) Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). He *the Almighty* addresses them with these words even though they are already alive because the meaning here is the life of Allah's way of guidance and moral values which is the life which earns you eternal bliss which is without end, lasting forever so that it does not leave you nor do you leave it. This is why He *the Almighty* said about this life: '…as for the next abode, that most surely is the life – did they but know!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) This is also why Allah *the Almighty* called the way which He revealed to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* a 'life-giving message' *ruh*, literally 'spirit'. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And thus did We reveal to you an inspired book by Our command…' (*ash-Shura:* 52) because Allah's way of guidance gives you an eternal life which never fades or ends. And He also called the angel which brought this message a *ruh*. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The Faithful Spirit has descended with it' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193). Allah's Way of Guidance is a spirit from Him brought down by the archangel Gabriel (Jibril) upon the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that a chosen Messenger would bear it and spread it amongst all the people, thereby giving them life in the Hereafter. The disbelievers in this live the life of the spirit in the outward form, in which all mankind is equal, but they are dead with respect to the second spirit, the spirit of moral values and Allah's way of guidance. For this reason, if there is a wretched person or a gangster who corrupts society more than he benefits it, we say to him, 'Your existence is equal to your absence.' Why? This is because if life is not used for the sake of eternal benefit, it is meaningless.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Do not grieve, and do not let yourself be overcome with sorrow because of these people, for they are dead, having not accepted the spirit of Allah's way of guidance and the spirit of moral values; and as long as this spirit has not entered them, there is no hope for their reform, and they will not respond to you, since response comes from those who utilise their hearing and apply their minds to the universe around them in order to arrive at the reality of life and solve the riddle of existence.

We said before that if your plane crashes in the desert, for example, and you are cut off from the people so that you have no company and nothing around you, and then suddenly you see before you a table laid with the finest food and drink, then before you stretch out your hand to it, you must certainly ask yourself, ‘Who brought this here?’

Likewise, as a human being you came into a universe which is prepared to receive you, filled with all this goodness: by Allah, does this not prompt you to ask who prepared this universe for you? Furthermore, no one ever claimed this universe for himself, and then a messenger came to you from Allah telling you about the facts of the universe, and solving for you the riddle of life and existence. But when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came to these people, they refused to listen to him, and they did not accept the spirit which he brought to them.

Allah *the Almighty* presents this matter to us in another verse, saying: ‘And there are those of them who seek to listen to you until when they go forth from you, they say to those who have been given the knowledge: What was it that he said just now…’ (*Muhammad:* 16)? This means that the spirit of the way did not reach their hearts. Allah *the Almighty* responds to them thus: ‘…Say: It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing; and (as for) those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears and it is obscure to them; these shall be called to from a far-off place’ (*Fussilat:* 44). The Quran is one, but those who receive the Quran vary: one listens with an attentive ear and a receptive heart and so benefits, and arrives at the solution to the riddle of the universe and creation because he responds to the new spirit which Allah sends to him; and another person simply turns away. Those who turned away from the Quran only feared for their positions and their authority; they were a people of corruption and tyranny, and they knew that this Divine way had come to rein in their freedoms and bring an end to their corruption and tyranny, so they rejected it. This is why you find that those who barred the way of the calls of the Messengers and opposed them were the people of authority and power. Read what Allah *the Almighty* tells us they said:

'…surely we obeyed our leaders and our great men, so they led us astray from the path' (*al-Ahzab:* 67).

So do not be surprised that one person hears the Quran and says in rapture, 'Allah! Repeat it!', whilst another turns from it without understanding what it says. There are two kinds of people who turn away from the Quran: they turn away in pride, that is, they hear the Quran and understand it, but they are too proud to obey its commandments; another person hears it, but he does not understand it because Allah has set a seal on his heart. The mission of the caller is to care for the one he calls, and not to despair if he does not respond, and to repeat the call to him in case he happens to catch him at a moment of clarity, natural disposition and a clear soul so that the call will have an effect on him and he will respond to it. If not, we have seen that many of the people of pagan ignorance embraced Islam after the call had existed for a long time such as Khalid ibn Al-Walid, 'Amr ibn Al-'As, 'Ikrama, and others. And we know how long 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab hated Islam and showed enmity to those who professed it, and the story of how he struck his sister after she embraced Islam is a famous story because it was the cause of his own embrace of Islam. When he struck her and wounded her so that blood flowed from the wound, his heart inclined to his sister; and when she read the text of the Quran to him it struck his heart when it was clear, and pure natural disposition shook from him the false fanaticism of pagan ignorance, and he reacted to the verses, and their splendour pierced his heart, and he embraced Islam.(1) This is why Allah *the Almighty* commanded His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to announce the call openly, and to do as he was commanded, that perhaps the listener might hear it at a time when his natural disposition was awakened for him, as was the case with ‘Umar. When we notice the Arabic word *fa* (and) which begins this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘You [Prophet] cannot make the dead hear…’ (*ar-Rum:* 52);we find that the implication of this is, ‘Be then not sad, and let not their rejection worry you because you have not been remiss in delivering the message, but rather those who received the message are remiss because they have not accepted the Divine Spirit which has come to them, but rather, they have evaded listening to it, and encouraged one another to evade it’, just as the Quran says of them: ‘And those who disbelieve say: Do not listen to this Quran and make noise therein, perhaps you may overcome’ (*Fussilat:* 26). The fact that they enjoined one another not to listen to the Quran proves that they knew that those who hear the Quran with an attentive ear will surely believe in it and be convinced. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and you cannot make the deaf hear your call when they turn their backs and leave’ (*ar-Rum:* 52). And elsewhere He said: ‘…and (as for) those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears…’ (*Fussilat:* 44), and He also said: ‘deaf, dumb…’ (*al-Baqara:* 18). We know from the science of physiology that dumbness comes as a result of deafness because the tongue repeats what the ear hears, so if the ear is deaf the tongue will inevitably be dumb, having nothing to repeat. This is why we find that the Arab child who grows up in an English environment will speak English because he hears it and learns it; furthermore, we find that if a person comes to an unusual word in his own language, he does not understand it – why? Because he has never heard it before; so when an Arab describes an old person as being *hayzabun* and

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik said: 'Umar went out with his sword unsheathed and met a man, who said to him, 'Where are you going, 'Umar?' He said, 'I want to kill Muhammad.' He said, 'How can you be safe from Bani Hashim and Bani Zahra if you kill Muhammad?' 'Umar said to him, 'I see that you too have become a monotheist, and have left your old religion!' The man said, 'Shall I tell you something stranger still? Your own brother-in-law and your sister have become monotheists and left your religion!' So 'Umar angrily walked to them, and they were with one of the Emigrants named Khabab, and when Khabab heard 'Umar coming he hid in the house, andUmar came in and found the two of them, and said, 'What was that jabbering I just heard coming from you? Have you become monotheists?' His brother-in-law said to him, 'O 'Umar, what if the truth was in another religion to yours?' 'Umar became enraged at his brother-in-law and struck him a mighty blow, and his sister came to defend her husband and 'Umar struck her with his hand, and her face became bloody. She said angrily: 'Since the truth is in another religion than yours, I testify that there is no deity but Allah, and that Muhammad is the=*

= *Messenger of Allah!’ This caused Umar to go to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him at the house of Ibn Abu Arqam, whereupon the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him went out to meet ‘Umar, and took hold of his belt and his sword’s sheath, and said, ‘You shall not cease, O ‘Umar, until Allah sends upon you the ignominy and exemplary fate that He sent upon Walid ibn Mughira! Here is ‘Umar ibn Al- Khattab: O Allah, give strength to Islam (or He said ‘the religion’) with ‘Umar ibn Al- Khattab!’ ‘Umar said: ‘I testify that there is no deity but Allah, and that you are His servant and Messenger’, and he embraced Islam. (Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dalail An-Nubuwwa, (ii. 219-220).*

dardabis[1], and so on, you say, ‘What does this mean?’, even though it is Arabic, but your ears have never heard it. The ear is the primary means of reception for the delivery of the Message; and as long as Allah *the Almighty* has judged them as being akin to the dead, this means they have no senses: the ear does not hear the verses of the Quran, and the eye does not see the signs of the cosmos or reflect on them. This is why Allah *the Almighty* said about them: ‘…For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts’ (*al-Hajj:* 46). We use the word ‘blind’ to refer to someone whose eyes are sound when he makes a mistake in something; you say to him, ‘Are you blind?’ Why? Because even though his eyesight is fine, he did not use it to serve its purpose, so it is as though he is blind. Allah *the Almighty* described these people first of all as being akin to the dead, and then that they are afflicted with deafness so they cannot hear the message; and the image is completed by their being blind so that they cannot see the signs of wonder in the universe. If only they were only deaf, since you can communicate with a deaf person by signs so he can use his eyes if he is facing you; but what will the case be if he has his back to you, as the Quran says: ‘…when they turn their backs and leave’ (*ar-Rum:* 52) meaning that they give you their backs. So they have no further way of receiving or perceiving; they are deaf and dumb, and their turning their backs has also nullified their sense of sight. So there is no hope for these people, and no way of guiding them.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَمَآ أَنتَ بِهَٰدِ ٱلۡعُمۡيِ عَن ضَلَٰلَتِهِمۡۖ إِن تُسۡمِعُ
إِلَّا مَن يُؤۡمِنُ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا فَهُم مُّسۡلِمُونَ ٥٣

You cannot lead the blind out of their error: the only
ones you can make hear you are those who believe in
Our revelations and devote themselves [to Us] [53]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 53)

Showing someone the way and guiding them to it cannot be done with the blind, especially if the blind person deliberately persists in his blindness. We say about the one who is haughty in his blindness that ‘he does not give blindness its right’ meaning that he disdains to seek the aid of those who can see; if he were to seek the aid of the people around him, he would find that they would serve him, and he would be able to see by means of their sight. Allah’s saying: ‘…the only ones you can make hear…’ (*ar-Rum:* 53) means you cannot make hear. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘….the only ones you can make hear you are those who believe in Our revelations and devote themselves [to Us]’ (*ar-Rum:* 53). These are those who are pure of heart and disposition, who pay heed to Allah’s universe and reflect on its secrets and the aspects of wonder and omnipotence it contains, seeing in creation evidence of the Creator, and in the universe evidence of the Maker of the universe. And why not, when we know who invented the simplest of things in our life, and we chronicle their lives and immortalise their memory; do we not know Edison, the inventor of the light bulb? It is all the more essential that we know Allah, the Creator of the sun. If a Messenger comes to you from Allah telling you of His existence, and solving for you the riddle of this existence by which you were confounded, you must believe him and have faith in what he brings you. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* teaches the Messengers to say to the people at the outset of their mission: ‘And I do not ask you any reward for it…’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109). This indicates that the work which the Messengers do for their people logically deserves to be rewarded, but they forgo their reward for their work is so valuable that no one could appraise its worth except the One Who sent them to do it, and He Alone is able to give them their reward in full.

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[1] Two words meaning old and advanced in years (*Lisan Al-‘Arab*).

The meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘…those who believe in Our revelations…’ (*ar-Rum:* 53) is look upon them and reflect on them, and stop to behold the wonders of creation in the universe which prove the omnipotent power of the Creator; and when a Messenger from Allah comes to those who do this, they accept him and believe in him; this is why He *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and devote themselves [to Us]’ (*ar-Rum:* 53).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن ضَعْفٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ضَعْفٍ قُوَّةً ثُمَّ جَعَلَ
مِنۢ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْقَدِيرُ ﴿٥٤﴾

It is God who creates you weak, then gives you strength,
then weakness after strength, together with your grey hair:
He creates what He will; He is the All Knowing,
the All Powerful [54] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 54)

After presenting to us some of the proofs which exist in the universe around us, Allah *the Almighty* says to us: Why do you go so far? If the signs in the universe around you are not enough, then look at the signs within your own self, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) And He combines both types of signs when He *the Almighty* says: ‘We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth’ (*Fussilat:* 53). Here, He says: Reflect upon your own self. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It is Allah who creates you weak…’ (*ar-Rum:* 54). If a morally responsible person now says, ‘I did not witness the stage in weakness in which I was created’, I say: Indeed you did not witness it in your own self, since at that time you did not have the means to witness anything; but you have witnessed it in others: you witnessed it in the simple fluid from which the embryo is formed, and in the pregnant mother, and in the woman when she bears her small, weak child, who cannot walk on its feet, or grasp with its hand, or bite with its teeth; and yet it is raised by Allah’s care until it reaches the stage of strength which you are in now. So the proof of weakness can be witnessed by all people, not in themselves but in others, and in the things they witness every day. Each one of us sees hundreds of children in different stages of development; the infant is born having no strength or power, then it begins to develop and grow so that it can sit, and then crawl, and then walk, until its systems are completely formed and it reaches the stage of adulthood and maturity.

And when Allah *the Almighty* makes the person morally responsible, we must also make him responsible, and utilise this period of youth in beneficial work. We see that if a ripe fruit is not picked, it falls down of its own accord; it is as though it wants to fulfil the purpose for which Allah *the Almighty* created it. For this reason, our great failing and the reason why our societies are behind is that we extend the period of childhood of our young people, and we treat a young man like a child until he is twenty-five; we must meet all his desires, and the only thing we do not do is nurse him!

Our problem is that we have an indulgent sentimentality which is meaningless. In other countries outside our own, as soon as a boy reaches maturity he no longer has any right over his father, but rather, his father comes to have a right over him, and he assumes responsibility. Allah *the Almighty* teaches us, when raising children, to make them used to assuming responsibility at this age: ‘and when the children among you have attained to puberty, let them seek permission as those before them sought permission…’ (*an-Nur:* 59). Consider – as a human being – who has made all of the genera which are stronger than you serve you? Consider your own self and the signs which are to be found there, and the manifestations of Allah’s omnipotent power which exist within your body; you came into existence in a state of weakness, unable to do anything, and relying on others to serve you. It is from His wisdom that the infant’s teeth do not emerge during the period of nursing so that it does not harm its mother, and then some teeth emerge temporarily which they call ‘milk-teeth’ because the child is still small and cannot clean them so Allah *the Almighty* makes them temporary until he grows and becomes able to clean them, whereupon they fall out and the permanent teeth grow in their places. If you reflected on your own self, you would find signs beyond counting. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It is Allah who creates you weak, then gives you strength…’ (*ar-Rum:* 54), that is, the strength and vigour of youth. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…then weakness after strength, together with your grey hair…’ (*ar-Rum:* 54), that is, the weakness of old age; and this weakness runs through all the parts of the body, and even through knowledge and memory. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…so that after having knowledge he does not know anything…’ (*al-Hajj:* 5).

This weakness remains with you until you behave like an infant in everything, requiring someone to carry you and serve you. So do not ascribe this matter to the nature of your constitution, but rather to the Will of your Maker, Allah *the Almighty*; for after you were weak, He made you strong; and

He *the Almighty* is fully able to make you weak once more so that none of the medicines of this world can give you back your strength.

This is why an intellectual mocked those who take vitamin supplements in on old age, saying, ‘Woe to he whose vitamins do not come from his own back!’ For this reason, you can observe the precision of the words of Zechariah (Zakarriya) *peace be upon him* when he said: ‘He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened…’ (*Maryam:* 4). This is because the bone is the final repository of a person’s nourishment, where he stores the energy which is surplus to the needs of the body; and if the body does not receive nourishment through food, it draws it from the repositories of fats, then from the muscles, and then from the bone marrow which is the last repository of nourishment in your body. The meaning of Zechariah’s (Zakaryya’s) words: ‘He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened…’ (*Maryam:* 4) is, ‘I have come to the point of infirmity where there is no hope of regaining strength’, and this is confirmed by his proceeding words: ‘… and my head flares with hoariness…’ (*Maryam:* 4). I said before that the whiteness of hair is not a result of the change of the colour itself, but rather, it is the result of the absence of colour, which is why ‘white’, is not one of the colours of the spectrum. With old age, the organs of the body become weak and the glands responsible for colouring the hair become too weak to produce the black colour, so the hair comes to have no colour. You can observe that usually when people become grey-haired, they do so in what they call ‘streaks’, from here and there. Why is this? They say it is because a hair is a tiny tube, and when it is cut off during shaving, this tube opens up and some chemical components, such as soap and cologne, enter into it, thus affecting the colouring pigments and destroying them. This is why we see this phenomenon especially in wealthy people. In addition, we find that many young people become grey-haired in these particular parts of the head. Prophet Zechariah (Zakarriya) mentioned the signs of weakness according to the order of their importance, starting with: ‘He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened…’ (*Maryam:* 4); then: ‘… and my head flares with hoariness…’ (*Maryam:* 4); and despite the old age of Zechariah (Zakarryya) *peace be upon him* and his weakness, and despite the fact that his wife was barren, Allah *the Almighty* answered his plea for a son to inherit the prophethood from him, giving him glad tidings of a son whom He named John (Yahya). It is as though Allah *the Almighty* was saying to us, 'Do you think that I am not able to create despite grey hair, old age, and weakness?' This is why He says elsewhere in the Quran: '…He creates what He pleases…' (*ar-Rum:* 54). Concerning the matter of Zechariah (Zakarryya) *peace be upon him* He *Glorified is He* says: 'He said: So shall it be, your Lord says: It is easy for Me, and indeed I created you before, when you were nothing' (*Maryam:* 9). As for His Saying: '… and He is the Knowing, the Powerful' (*ar-Rum:* 54), it means that this creation is a result of His Knowledge. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware' (*al-Mulk:* 14). But knowledge alone is not enough since you might have knowledge but not the power to implement what you know such as an electrical engineer who has wide knowledge of this subject but does not have the ability to make a grid or a power plant, so he goes to a financer to ask for help in doing so. Because of this, Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself as having both knowledge and power. So this is the microcosmic proof of the True, Active, Free Creator Who does things with knowledge and power, and Whose actions require no effort or time; for He merely says to a thing 'Be!', and it is. Do not be surprised that your Lord merely says to a thing 'Be!' and it is because even you – a weak creature – do this with your body parts and limbs. If not, then tell me what you do when you want to stand up, for example, or pick something up: simply by wanting to move, you find that your limb obeys your will, without you even realising all the reactions and processes going on within you. If you say, 'I am an adult, and I can make all these movements as I will', then what do you think about a young infant? I explained this before with the example of the bulldozer: every movement it makes has a specific lever which the driver moves, and a button he presses, and the driver might need to use more than one control at a time to make this machine perform a single movement. As for you, simply by your wanting to move the body part, you find that it moves just as you want it to, without your knowing the muscles and nerves which participated in its movement. If you are this way, are you surprised that Allah can say to something 'Be!', and it is?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا۟
غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ كَانُوا۟ يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

On the Day the Hour comes, the guilty will swear
they lingered no more than an hour – they have
always been deluded [55] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 55)

After presenting the proof which may be followed by all those who wanted to be guided, Allah *the Almighty* then gives the following warning to those who do not wish to follow the Divine Way of Guidance, saying: ‘On the Day the Hour comes, the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour…’ (*ar-Rum:* 55). As for the saying of Allah, ‘…the Hour comes…’ (*ar*-Rum: 50), the word taqum (stands) means that the Hour is already present, but it is sleeping and waiting to be summoned forth, whereupon it will dawn; it is waiting for there to be said to it ‘Be!’, whereupon it will be.

So the notion of dawning here is meant to imply something since the Last Hour is not something which dawns of its own accord, but rather, Allah *the Almighty* will cause it to dawn. So His saying: ‘the Hour comes’ (*ar-Rum:* 55) indicates that it is as fixed as an alarm clock, for example, and it has a time for which it is waiting, and when its time comes, it will dawn automatically. When you reflect on the saying of Allah: ‘…the Hour comes…’ (*ar-Rum:* 55), you find that ‘standing’ is the final stage for man when he fulfils his purpose, contrasting what comes before it: before standing comes sitting, before which comes lying, before which comes sleeping. So the meaning of the ‘standing’ of the Last Hour is that it comes to fulfil its purpose fully.

It is called the ‘Hour’ because it indicates the time at which Allah will bring about the end of the world, although for us an hour is a unit of measure of time, so we say ‘AM’ or ‘PM’, according to the government or the population and whatever time zone we are in. As for those watches which tell us the time, it does not matter if they are a few seconds or minutes fast or slow. They run automatically on batteries; they were first made in Switzerland or China. As a matter of fact, what seriously matters in this regard is the Final Hour, the Hour after which there is no hour and which has been set by Allah *the Almighty* which is why there is nothing for man but to prepare for it in one way or another. It is strange that the disbelievers will swear, on the Day of Resurrection, that: '… the guilty shall swear (that) they did not tarry but an hour…' (*ar-Rum:* 55). If they lied in this world, will they also lie in the Hereafter? Scholars said 'no', they will actually say this according to what they think to be the case since the words they speak at this time will not be a product of free will, as the time of freedom will have passed, and no one will any longer be able to lie.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says at the end of the verse: '…thus are they ever turned away' (*ar-Rum:* 55). They used to alter facts in this worldly life, whilst in the Hereafter they will not be able to do so but will rather speak according to what they think to be the case. As for 'those who had been lost in sin', the one lost in sin *mujrim* is the one who goes against what is required from him by committing a sin, so we say that he has *ajrama* (sinned), and the law calls this act *jarima* (crime).

The meaning of: '… they did not tarry…' (*ar-Rum:* 55) refers to the long time they remained in this world; it may also refer to the time they had tarried in their graves after dying until the dawning of the Last Hour; or it may refer to the time they had tarried after the first trumpet-blast which deals death until the second trumpet-blast which gives life.

So these are three periods during which they will have to wait in their graves: the longest period is for those who died at the time of Adam; then in the middle are those who came after this, such as us; then the shortest period of waiting will be for those who die between the two trumpet-blasts. In all of these times, there were disbelievers: in the time of Adam there were disbelievers, and in the times which came after him there were disbelievers, and even between the two trumpet-blasts there will be disbelievers. So the word 'tarried' here is general, referring to the longest wait including that which is long, that which is short and that which is the shortest.

These people will say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We tarried not longer than an hour' even though there can be no lying in the Hereafter, but they will say this according to what they think to be the case; for the one who is absent from a time does not sense its passing, and time is a locus for the occurrence of events just as space is the locus for their place. The one who sleeps, for example, does not feel the passage of time because time is measured by the succession of events which occur in it; if you are not aware of the event, you will certainly not be aware of the time, whether because of sleep like the sleep of the People of the Cave, or death like the death of the one whom Allah caused to die for one hundred years and then revived.(1)

When they awoke from sleep or death, they estimated that there had passed only the normal amount of time people sleep, saying: '…We have tarried for a day or a part of a day…' (*al-Kahf:* 19). This is because in such a situation one does not perceive time, but rather, time is only perceived if it involves the succession of events. In addition, as long as a person in such a state does not perceive time, he is truthful when he tells what he thinks to be the case. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: 'He will say: How many years did you tarry in the earth? [112] they will say: We tarried a day or part of a day, but ask those who keep account [113]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 112-113). That is, ask those who keep time and count it which means the angels,(2) since they are the ones who have known events and recorded them since Adam was created until now, and they will do so until the dawning of the Last Hour. No one can be asked about a number except the one who has actually counted it, or someone who knows how to count; as for something which cannot feasibly be counted and enumerated, it is not counted: has anyone in the world, for example, ever counted all the grains of sand in the desert? This is why we hear the joke which says that a man asked another, 'Do you know how many stars there are in the sky?' He replied, 'Nine billion, five hundred thousand and ninety-three stars.' The other man said, 'You are lying', so he said, 'Fine, count them yourself!' But why will the disbelievers underestimate the time and swear on the Day of Resurrection that they tarried no longer than an hour? Elsewhere, He *the Almighty* says of them: 'On the day that they see it, it will be as though they had not tarried but the latter part of a day or the early part of it' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46). Scholars said it is because time differs according to the state of people in it: one person wishes that the time could be longer, whilst another wishes it could be shorter. The time which you spend with your loved ones goes quickly and you wish it could be longer, whilst the time you unwillingly spend with one you dislike stretches on slowly; it is as the poet said:

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(1) *This was Ezra ('Uzair), as Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim ascribed to Ibn 'Abbas, Hasan, Qatada and Suddi; this is the most widely held opinion. Salman ibn Burayda said that it was Hizqil ibn Bawar. Ibn Kathir who said: 'As for the town, the widely-held opinion is that it was Jerusalem, which he passed by after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it and killed its inhabitants.' See Tafsir Ibn Kathir, p. 214.*

(2) *This is the opinion of Mujahid, As-Suyuti narrated in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (vi. 123), ascribing it also to Ibn Abu Shayba, 'Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim.*

Happy times are weighed with a regular scale,
Whilst trials are weighed with heavy weights (1)

Another said:

The loved one who bids you farewell bids farewell to patience, too,
Letting out the secret he gave to you to keep;
He gnashes his teeth in regret that he did not
Take a few more steps with you when he showed you out.

He continued until he reached the line:

If the night I spent after you left was long, it is because
I spent it complaining of the shortness of the night I spent with you.

Therefore, on happy occasions the time moves quickly, whilst on glum occasions the time moves slowly and heavily. Did you not hear what was said by that person who was united one night with the one he loved? He is reported to have said:

O night, be long! O sleep, be gone!
O dawn, hold back, and do not rise!

In the same way, the one who waits for something pleasing finds that time moves slowly, and he wishes that it could move more quickly so that he would get the pleasing thing for which he is waiting. As for the one who expects something bad or waits for it, he wishes that time could move more slowly in order to keep him distant from the bad thing which he fears. This is why you find that the believers wish that time could move more quickly because they are sure of the goodness that is waiting for them and the delight that they have been promised. As for those who are lost in sin, they are the opposite: they wish that time could move slowly to keep them from the torment that awaits them, which is why they will say, ‘we only stayed in the worldly life for a short time; and if only it had been longer!’ This is either because they are unaware of the passage of time and so they just say what they think to be the case, or because they want something to keep them away from the torment. So they will swear that they tarried no longer than an hour either because they think this to be the case or because the one who is unaware of events does not perceive the passage of time and cannot measure it, such as Ezra ('Uzair), whom Allah caused to die for one hundred years and then raised him to life, thus said: ‘…then look at your food and drink – years have not passed over it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 259). And then his Lord informed him that he had stayed one hundred years: ‘…and look at your ass; and that We may make you a sign to men, and look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothed them with flesh…’ (*al-Baqara:* 259). The thing which is beyond doubt is that Allah *the Almighty* is truthful in what He tells others, and yet Ezra ('Uzair) was also truthful in his appraisal of how much time he had spent which is why the True Lord *the Almighty* gave proof for the truth of both statements, saying: ‘…But look at thy food and thy drink – untouched is it by the passing of years…’ (*al-Baqara:* 259). Food does not go bad in the course of a day or part of a day, so the food and drink were proof of the man’s truthfulness. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and look at your ass! And [We did all this so] that We might make you a symbol unto men. And look at the bones [of animals and men] – how We put them together and then clothe them with flesh!’ (*al-Baqara:* 259)

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(1) The word used here is qafzan, which is the plural of qafiz, a measure equivalent to 288 kilograms.

So the bare bones were proof of His Truthfulness about the one hundred years. Do not say, ‘Can this verse convey the two possible explanations?’ Yes, it can, because the One Who made this event come to pass was the Lord, and He is the Withholder and the Expander: He withholds time for some people, and unleashes it for others.

This verse, which begins with the saying of Allah, ‘…And when the Last Hour dawns…’ (*ar-Rum:* 55) was revealed after Allah *the Almighty* had removed all excuses from those who disbelieve in His Messengers meaning that He nullified the excuse they gave that He *Glorified is He* had not shown them the proofs for the most important element of faith, namely, faith in One God, and the proofs for faith in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by means of miracles so that they would believe in the verses of legal rulings in the form of ‘do’ and ‘do not do’.

As we said before, there are three kinds of *ayat* (signs): there are signs which affirm the essential matter of doctrine which is faith in the existence of the All-Wise, All-Powerful God (Allah *the Almighty*); there are also signs which affirm the veracity of Allah’s Message delivered by His Messengers which are the miracles; and there are signs which convey rulings. Allah *the Almighty* does not do ask those who believe in Him to believe in His Rulings of ‘do’ and ‘do not’ unless they are first convinced about the Messenger who delivers His Message to them by means of a miracle; and they cannot believe in the Messenger who delivers the Divine Message to them unless the Existence of Allah *the Almighty* is confirmed for them, which is confirmed by the signs of the universe.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* is always presenting to us His signs in the universe, but He presents them one by one, and does not reveal them all at once. He brings a sign, and then He follows it with the denial and rejection which comes from the disbelievers. So He brings a sign whose result is finally decided by the disbelievers. In this way, their excuses are continually refuted until they have no excuse not to believe.

We can observe this continual repetition when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Another of His signs is that He sends out the winds bearing good news, giving you a taste of His grace, making the ships sail at His command, enabling you to [journey in] search of His bounty so that you may be grateful’ (*ar-Rum:* 46). Then He *the Almighty* mentions that these signs did not work for them: ‘before you [Muhammad], We sent Messengers, each to their own people: they brought them clear proofs and then We punished the evildoers. We make it Our duty to help the believers’ (*ar-Rum:* 47). And then He *the Almighty* mentions further signs: ‘It is Allah who sends out the winds; they stir up the clouds; He spreads them over the skies as He pleases; He makes them break up and you see the rain falling from them. See how they rejoice when He makes it fall upon whichever of His servants He wishes [48] though before it is sent they may have lost all hope. [49] Look, then, at the imprints of Allah's Mercy, how He restores the earth to life after death: this same Allah is the one who will return people to life after death – He has power over all things [50]' (*ar-Rum:* 48-50). Allah *the Almighty* then mentions what their response was after all these signs: 'Yet they will continue in their disbelief, even if We send a [scorching] wind and they see their crops turn yellow' (*ar-Rum:* 51). In this way, He *Glorified is He* mentions the sign and then follows it with the denial which they show, and repeats this until they have no further argument for their disbelief, and then this verse comes; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the Day the Hour comes, the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour…' (*ar-Rum:* 55) in order to say to them, 'Even if you denied all these signs, a sign which you cannot deny, will come to you, which is nothing but the Resurrection.' It is strange that they will swear by Allah in the Hereafter that they had tarried for no more than an hour, yet they disbelieved in Him *the Almighty* in this world. This verse contains a use of the rhetorical feature of complete paronomasia *(jinas tam)* in the two uses of the word 'hour'; it is the same word, but the meaning is different. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the Day the Hour comes…' (*ar-Rum:* 55), that is, the Resurrection. And Allah *the Almighty* says: '…the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour…' (*ar-Rum:* 55), that is, an hour of time. This is also clear in the following verse of poetry:

I left the city to travel to you,
And my heart is a captive of your love

This is where the word *asir* in Arabic means both 'travel' and 'captive'. My colleague Dr. Mohammad 'Abd Al-Munim, *Allah give him long life*, and I have a story about paronomasia: in a rhetoric class, the teacher said that there is no 'complete paronomasia' (*jinas tam*) in the Quran except in this verse between the words 'hour' and 'hour', but there are cases of incomplete paronomasia (*jinas naqis*) in it. Dr. Mohammad raised his hand and said, 'Teacher, I do not like to hear it said that the Quran contains something incomplete!' The Sheikh laughed at this and said to him, 'So what should I say? The scholars of rhetoric divided paronomasia into complete and incomplete: the former means that the two words are exactly alike in the number, form and identity of their letters, whilst if they differ in any one of these things the paronomasia is incomplete, such as in Allah's words: "Woe to every slanderer, defamer" (*al-Humaza:* 1). This is where the words *humaza* (slanderer) and *lumaza* (fault-finder) have incomplete paronomasia since their first letters differ.'

I remember that the sheikh pointed to me and said, 'What do you think of what your friend is saying?' I said that we should call it 'full paronomasia' and 'partial paronomasia' based on whether the letters in the words agree fully or only partially; in this way, we would not have to say that the Quran contains 'incomplete paronomasia.' So when they say that: '…they lingered no more than an hour…' (*ar-Rum:* 55), this refers to the hour of time which we know. Time has different measurements: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries, epochs and so on and they are speaking about the hour of time which is known to us. So they will underestimate the amount of time they spent in the world or in their graves when the Resurrection surprises them. We previously told them, when they were in the ease of this worldly life, that the pleasure of this life is scant and that it is short and must end, yet they did not believe this; and now they are saying that it was only a single hour, and not even a month or a year. So how could you underestimate that which you previously overestimated, thinking that you would be there forever so that you even said: 'And they say: There is nothing but our life in this world; we live and die and nothing destroys us but time…' (*al-Jathiya:* 24). In the worldly life, you denied and lied, and you did not answer the one who called you to faith, yet now in the Hereafter you will give an answer which will be accompanied by praise for Him, as He *the Almighty* says: 'On the day when He will call you forth, then shall you obey Him, giving Him praise…' (*al-Isra':* 52). That is, you will say, 'Praise be to Allah!' As a matter of fact, a person only gives praise for something beloved to him.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…they have always…' (*ar-Rum:* 55), meaning with this untruthfulness: '… they have always been deluded' (*ar-Rum:* 55). The word *ifk* (delusion or lie) is derived from the verb *afika*, which means to turn something around so it is backwards, which is why a lie is called *ifk* because the liar states something which contradicts reality and thereby turns it around, or he brings it into existence when it does not really exist, or he denies that it exists.

Another use of this root word is found in His *the Almighty* saying: ‘And the overthrown cities did He overthrow’ (*an-Najm:* 53). The word *mutafikat* refers to the cities which Allah overturned so that their highest became their lowest. So His saying ‘…they have always…’ (*ar-Rum:* 55) means ‘just like this delusion were they are wont to delude themselves’, that is, they lied to the Messengers concerning the truths which they brought from their Lord.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمَ وَٱلْإِيمَـٰنَ لَقَدْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِى كِتَـٰبِ ٱللَّهِ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ
ٱلْبَعْثِ ۖ فَهَـٰذَا يَوْمُ ٱلْبَعْثِ وَلَـٰكِنَّكُمْ كُنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

But those endowed with knowledge and faith will say,
‘In accordance with God’s decree, you actually lingered till
the Day of Resurrection: this is the Day of Resurrection,
yet you did not know’ [56] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 56)

He *the Almighty* says here: ‘…knowledge and faith…’ (*ar-Rum:* 56), so does knowledge contradict faith? No, but there is a difference between them. Knowledge is acquired, whilst as for faith, you have faith in Allah even though you have not seen Him. So you see something and therefore know it, whilst if someone else tells you of something they have seen and you have faith in his honesty, then you believe it. There is belief for knowledge as well as belief for faith, which is why it is always said that faith is for those things which are unseen for you, whilst if your faith becomes stronger and your certitude becomes stronger, the unseen thing becomes as though it were something you have seen. We clarified this issue when we spoke about what Allah *the Almighty* said to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1). He said ‘Have you not seen?’ even though the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, thus could not have witnessed those events; they say that this is because Allah’s informing him of this was more believable than the vision of his own eyes. So Allah *the Almighty* says: '… those endowed with knowledge and faith…' (*ar-Rum:* 56) because you acquire knowledge by deduction, proof, and so on; or you take it from someone who informs you of it and you believe what he tells you. This is why when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to one of his Companions, 'How did you awake this morn?' he replied, 'I awoke as a true believer,' whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Every truth has its nature, so what is the nature of your faith?' This means, what is the proof of the words you have spoken? The Companion said, 'I have withdrawn myself from this worldly life so that its gold and its clay are alike to me; and it is as though I behold the denizens of paradise receiving bliss in paradise and the denizens of hell receiving torment in hell' – he meant to tell the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* 'I awoke in such a state that it was as though I beheld all that you have told us about.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'You have come to know, so be constant!'(1) But who are the ones who were endowed with knowledge? They are the angels who live to witness all things; or it means the Prophets because the One Who sent them told them of it; or it means the believers because they believed in the Message of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in all that he told them. He *the Almighty* says: '…those endowed with knowledge…' (*ar-Rum:* 56), not that 'they knew', as though 'knowledge' is not acquired but rather comes from One Who knows more than you and gives it to you. If you say, 'Do the scholars not play a role in adducing evidence and examining it?' I say 'yes', but who showed this evidence to them? So knowledge is a gift from Allah. He *the Almighty* then says: '… In accordance with Allah's Decree, you actually lingered till the Day of Resurrection…' (*ar-Rum:* 56). This means that it was something fixed and set in the Preserved Tablet until the Day of Resurrection. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…this is the Day of Resurrection…' (*ar-Rum:* 56) which you had denied, whilst now you must surely believe, since something has come to you which you cannot deny because it has become a reality; it is in your interest that your excuse be accepted, yet it shall not be accepted from you, and We shall not hear your words because We already refuted all your excuses before. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '… yet you did not know' (*ar-Rum:* 56). At the start of the verse, He *Glorified is He* says: '… those endowed with knowledge…' (*ar-Rum:* 56), ascribing knowledge to Allah; yet here He *the Almighty* ascribes it to them, because Allah presented the proofs to them but they did not take anything from them, and He *the Almighty* presented to them all the arguments, evidence and signs, yet they were heedless of them. So they did not take, from the proofs and arguments that which would have led them to knowledge.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Haythami in Majma' Az-Zawai'd, p. 57; he ascribes it to At-Tabarani in Al-Kabir on the authority of Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَيَوۡمَئِذٖ لَّا يَنفَعُ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ مَعۡذِرَتُهُمۡ وَلَا هُمۡ يُسۡتَعۡتَبُونَ ٥٧

On that Day the evildoers' excuses will be of no use to them: they will not be allowed to make amends [57] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 57)

He *the Almighty* says: 'on that Day…' (*ar-Rum:* 57), that is, on the Day of the dawning of the Last Hour, Allah *the Almighty* says: '… the evildoers' excuses will be of no use to them: they will not be allowed to make amends' (*ar-Rum:* 57); this means that no excuse will be accepted from them. The meaning of the saying of Allah: '…evildoers'…' (*ar-Rum:* 57) is that they did evil against themselves; and the evildoer resorts to evil because he wants to take from others that which he was unable to get for himself. *Zhulm* (evil) means to take the fruit of the effort of another and usurp it for yourself like blood transfusion; but if your blood is not from your own vein, it is rotten blood and is not suitable for you, and no positive works in life will ever come from it, but rather, its result will assuredly be works of evil because it is unlawful blood, so how can it act in the cause of the lawful? This is why it is narrated in a Hadith that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'O people! Allah is good, and accepts only that which is good; and Allah commanded the believers with the same as that with which He commanded the Messengers, saying: "O Messenger! Eat of the good things and do the good; surely I know what you do" (*al-Mu'minun:* 51), and He *the Almighty* says: "O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided you with, and give thanks to Allah if Him it is that you serve” (*al-Baqara:* 172). He then mentioned the man who travels far and is covered with dust, and then raises his hands to the sky and says, “O Lord! O Lord!” – yet his food is unlawfully gained, and his drink is unlawfully gained – so how will his prayer be answered?’(1) So how can our prayers be answered when every part of us is unfit to call upon Allah with personal supplication?

It is not only a matter of their excuse not being accepted, ‘… but also they will not be allowed to make amends’ (*ar-Rum:* 57). To ‘make *i‘tab* (amends) refers to a dialogue of kindness and conciliation which takes place between two people about something which has angered one of them, this dialogue might not take place unless one of them approaches the other in order to settle the matter. For example if your friend passes you by without greeting you, you become angry with him; if you are earnest in your affection for him, you will go to him and say, ‘By Allah, I have an issue with you because you passed me by and did not greet me the other day’, so he says to you, ‘By Allah, I was busy with such-and-such and I did not see you’, and this excuse removes the ill feeling you harboured towards your friend. We say that so-and-so *a‘taba* (reproached) his friend, who then made *a‘taba* (amends) with him, that is, he removed his reproach, which is why they say, ‘Love remains as long as there is reproach’, as the poet said,

As for reproach, it is more chivalrous for those who love each other,

For love is mended with reproach, and made sincere.

And the additional glottal stop added to the verb *a‘taba* ‘reproach’ to make amends is called ‘the glottal stop of removal’, as the poet said:

In my mind I want to forget you, but my heart refuses,

And I make amends with you and take my fill of reproach!

An example of this is found in the words Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he addressed his Lord on the day of At-Tai'f after its people treated him so badly until he sought refuge in an orchard and began to entreat his Lord, saying, 'Lord, to whom will You entrust me? To some far off stranger who will ill-treat [(1)] me? Or to a foe whom you have empowered against me? So long as You be not wroth with me, I care not; but Your favouring help is for me the broader way…' until He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Yet it is for You to reproach until You are well pleased.'[(2)] This means, 'O Lord, if You are angry because of something I did, I wish to make amends with You and end Your reproach.'

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad, p. 328, Muslim in his Sahih, p. 1015, and Ad-Darimi in his Sunnan, p. 200, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Another use of the so-called *hamzat al-izala* (the glottal stop of removal) occurs in our verb *'ajama* which means to make a word clear and to remove its *'ajm* (obscurity) and clarify its meaning; this is why we call a dictionary a *mu'jam*, because it removes the obscurity of words and explains them.

Also in His saying: 'Surely, the Hour is coming – I am about to make it manifest…' (*Ta Ha:* 15), the verb *ukhfiha* (to keep it hidden) could also mean 'I am close to removing its obscurity with signs and signals.' As for the word *yusta'tabun* in Allah's saying: '…excuses will be of no use to them…' (*ar-Rum:* 57), it occurs three times(3) in the Quran, and one other time in the active voice(4) because they ask for their reproach to be settled. As for '…they will not be allowed to make amends' (*ar-Rum:* 57), it is because they did not ask to make amends themselves, but rather, they made for themselves intercessors to ask for them; but their expectations were dashed both in the one regard and the other. So, the meaning of Allah's saying: '…they will not be allowed to make amends' (*ar-Rum:* 57) is that no 'intercessor' will dare to say to them, 'seek to make amends with your Lord, and ask Him to make amends with you', that is, to settle His Reproach with you. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *This word in Arabic is jahma, which means to greet someone with an unpleasant face, that is, 'who will meet me with harshness and a scowling face'. If someone is said to have a face which is jahm, this means he has a gloomy face. Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab*

(2) *This supplication was narrated by Ibn Hisham in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, p. 430; the situation was that the people of At-Tai'f goaded their simpletons and slaves to abuse him peace and blessings be upon him insulting him and shouting at him until the people were all gathered together against him and he was forced to take refuge in an orchard belonging to 'Utba and Shayba, the sons of Rabi'a; and once Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him felt himself to be safe and at peace, he made this supplication.*

(3) *The word 'to be allowed to make amends' in the passive voice occurs three times in the Quran: '…then shall no permission be given to those who disbelieve, nor shall they be made to solicit favour' (an-Nahl: 84). Allah's saying: 'On that Day the evildoers' excuses will be of no use to them: they will not be allowed to make amends' (ar-Rum: 57), and Allah's saying: '... So on that day they shall not be brought forth from it, nor shall they be granted goodwill' (al-Jathiya: 35).*

(4) *This occurs in Allah's saying: '…and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so' (Fussilat: 24).*

وَلَقَدۡ ضَرَبۡنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٖۚ وَلَئِن
جِئۡتَهُم بِـَٔايَةٖ لَّيَقُولَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ إِنۡ أَنتُمۡ إِلَّا مُبۡطِلُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

In this Quran We have set every kind of illustration before people, yet if you [Prophet] brought them a miracle, the disbelievers would still say, 'You [prophets] deal only in falsehood' [58] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 58)

This verse means that We have not left any excuse for any of those who disbelieve in their Messengers, because We gave them numerous parables and all manner of proofs which they could see and use as evidence of that which they could not see, taking what they see and feel as proof of what is unseen to them. When Allah *the Almighty* wants to convince them to believe in One God who is without partner, He gives them this parable from the experience of their own lives: 'Allah sets forth an example: There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition…' (*az-Zumar:* 29). Is a slave with one master equal to a slave with several masters who vie with each other for his services, so that if he pleases one he angers the others? He then makes the matter even clearer with a parable drawn from men's own souls – and there is nothing closer to a man than his own soul – so Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He sets forth to you a parable relating to yourselves: Have you among those whom your right hands possess partners in what We have given you for sustenance, so that with respect to it you are alike; you fear them as you fear each other? Thus do We make the communications distinct for a people who understand' (*ar-Rum:* 28). This means: if you would not accept for your bondsmen to share with you that which Allah *the Almighty* provided for you so that you would be equal with respect to this provision, how could you accept that Allah *the Almighty* could have any partners? When He *Glorified is He* wants to show the falsehood of their idolatry and their polytheism, He gives them this parable: '…surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it weak are the invoker and the invoked' (*al-Hajj:* 73). A *mathal* (parable) means to compare one thing to another, and attach something obscure to something clear in order to clarify it and make it settle in the mind of the one who hears it such as if you compare someone unknown with someone known, as this is called in Arabic *mithl* or *mathal*, so you say, 'So-and-so is like (*mithl*) so-and-so.' As for a *mathal* (proverb), it is the words of a wise person which have become well known to the people so that people relate it whenever the occasion for it comes. We gave the example before for this of the king who sent a woman to pass his offer of marriage to the mother of Iyyas bint 'Awf ibn Mahlam As-Shaybani, and this woman's name was 'Isam; and when she came back from her mission, he met her by saying, 'What is behind you, 'Isam?' This has now become a proverb which people say on these kinds of occasions, although originally it was said about a specific incident. Proverbs are always said as they are, without anything being changed; we say, 'What is behind, you 'Isam?' to both men and women, and to individuals, pairs, or groups of people. In the same way, we symbolise generosity with the name of Hatim, and bravery with 'Antara, and so on. This is because Hatim At-Tai' was the model of generosity, while 'Antara was that of bravery. Another proverb is that we say to one who is confronted by one who is stronger than him, 'If you are a wind, you have just run into a hurricane!' and we say to the one who has not properly prepared for something, 'Before firing the arrows, fill the quiver!'

So a proverb is a statement of comparison which is given now but taken from an earlier saying because that saying was powerful and succinct, so it was memorised and passed on from one mouth to another. The Quran uses the rhetorical styles of the Arabs, and their ways of expression and clarifying meanings using parables so that it even bases a parable on a gnat to the extent that some people found it far-fetched that the Quran, with its majesty and greatness, would base a parable on a gnat not knowing that Allah *the Almighty* '… is not ashamed to set forth any parable – (that of) a gnat or anything above that…' (*al-Baqara:* 26). The saying of Allah: '… or anything above that…' (*al-Baqara:* 26) does not mean above it in size, as some people think, saying, 'why would He *the Almighty* say "or something above it" when this is obvious?'; rather, the meaning is that which is beyond it in smallness, and partakes even more in the diminutiveness which you people disdain, such as microscopic creatures and viruses and so on.

But why does Allah *the Almighty yadrib* (strikes) parables unto men? Scholars said it is because man has many senses: he sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and so on; and were you to reflect on all these senses, you would find that the thing which has the biggest impact on the senses is to strike. This is why if you want to wake someone from sleep, he might not hear your calls, so you go to him and shake him as though you are striking him, and he wakes up.

So striking is the mark which never falls short of its intended target; this is what it means when Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and others who travel in the land seeking of the bounty of Allah…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20), that is, who will leave a clear mark on it, such as ploughing, for example, which resembles nothing so much as striking the earth. Striking cannot fulfil its purpose and leave an effect unless it causes pain in the one struck without hurting the striker; otherwise, you might strike something hard and hurt your own hand, in which case it is as though you are striking yourself. A poet recognised this when he said to those who do not believe in Allah's predestination

O you who scoff at the vicissitudes of fate,

It is not fate you hurt, but rather yourself;

O you who strike a rock with a staff:

Do you strike the staff, or strike the stone?

Allah *the Almighty* propounds parables to make you feel them, and feel them like the pain of being struck. If a person does not feel the impact of a parable, he is like the one who does not feel it when he is actually physically struck; and this is the one who is insensible or paralysed – Allah forbid! So the meaning of Allah's saying: 'In this Quran We have set every kind of illustration before people…' (*ar-Rum:* 58) is: We have brought parables and proofs which no one can receive except as he receives a block struck to him because being struck is the final stage of the stages of sensation. I said before that, Allah *the Almighty* gave a parable of His Own Self when He said: ‘Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche…’ (*an-Nur:* 35). The parable here is not that of His Light as some people think, but rather it is a parable of how He *the Almighty* lights up the expansive universe, and how He *the Almighty* gives you light physically with the sun, moon and stars, and gives you light spiritually with His way of guidance and His moral values. The benefit of physical light is that it removes darkness so that you can move in guidance and sight and prevent your steps and movement from destroying that which is smaller than you, or your being destroyed by that which is more powerful than you; the upshot is that you do not harm that which is weaker than you, and you are not harmed by that which is stronger than you. Likewise, the spiritual light of Allah’s way of guidance and moral values prevent you from harming others, and prevent others from harming you; and just as the physical light saves you from physical damage, the light of morality saves you from spiritual damage. This is why He *the Almighty* says, after giving us this parable: ‘…light upon light. Allah guides to His Light whom He pleases, and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is Cognizant of all things’ (*an-Nur:* 35). Before, we mentioned the praise poetry which Abu Tamam(1) dedicated to the caliph:

Brave as Amr, generous as Hatim,

Lenient as Ahnaf, shrewd as ‘Iyas.

Upon this, one of those who envied his closeness to the caliph said, ‘Do you compare the caliph to such boorish Arabs?’ He lowered his head for a moment, and then completed those lines with others which were in the same Arabic metre and rhyme,

Blame me not for comparing him to his inferiors
Even though he is matchless in worth and power,
For Allah has drawn a parable for His Light
With some of His creatures: a niche and a lantern!

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(1) His full name was Habib ibn Aws At-Tai'; he was born in a village in Syria in 180 AH. He had a humble upbringing, working as a weaver’s assistant. He died in 231 AH at 51 years of age.

What is amazing about this is that they found the papers which he owned, and these two lines of poetry could not be found anywhere on them, which means that he came up with them on the spot. I said, ‘By Allah, even if they had found that he had prepared these lines beforehand, it would not detract anything from him, but rather, it would have showed his intelligence, and his preparedness, and his expectation that the jealous and envious people might say such a thing to him.’ But these parables did not affect them, and they did not benefit from them; and if only things had gone no further than that, but Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…yet if you [Prophet] brought them a miracle…’ (*ar-Rum:* 58), that is, a new one, ‘…the disbelievers would still say, ‘You [prophets] deal only in falsehood’ (*ar-Rum:* 58). So they accuse the Messengers, concerning that which they convey from their Lord, of being people of falsehood and deceit.

Allah *the Almighty* justifies to the people that He did not agree to send them the signs for which they asked by virtue of the fact that the nations who denied their Messengers before this would ask for signs, and Allah *the Almighty* would give them that for which they asked, and this would only make them deny all the more. This is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘And nothing could have hindered Us that We should send signs except that the ancients rejected them…’ (*al-Isra’:* 59). So the truth is that they want nothing more than to draw out the proceedings and stretch out the length of this useless argument; moreover, to give them what they asked for despite their denial of the previous signs would be to show respect for their lack of faith, and to imply that the previous signs were insufficient since He *the Almighty* then gave them further signs. So the lack of any further signs means that the previous signs were sufficient for faith; yet they did not have faith, so Allah *the Almighty* will not fulfil their request for any further signs. This matter is clear in the debate between Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* and Nimrod, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Have you not considered him (Namrud) who disputed with Abraham (Ibrahim) about his Lord because Allah had given him the kingdom? When Abraham (Ibrahim) said: My Lord is He who gives life and causes to die, he said: I give life and cause death…’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). At this point, Abraham (Ibrahim) *peace be upon him* felt that his adversary was inclined towards argumentation and sophistry, and simply wanted to drag out the argument and waste time with back-and-forth disputation. So he set aside this argument – even though his adversary did not really deal death or grant life – and moved him on to another argument from which he could not extricate himself, and which he had no way of evading, so he said: '…"Allah brings the sun from the east, so bring it from the west"...' (*al-Baqara:* 258). So, what answer could this adversary give? '… The disbeliever was dumbfounded. Allah does not guide those who do evil.' (*al-Baqara:* 258)

Likewise, Pharaoh resorted to this same kind of argumentation in his debate with Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*. At every stage he would say, '… Musa (Moses), who is this Lord of yours?' (*Ta Ha:* 49) This is a vacuous argument which is only resorted to by those who are intellectually bankrupt and have no other arguments to utilise

We can observe that the verse uses the singular form when it says, '… and if you should bring them communication …' (*ar-Rum:* 58), and then switches to the plural form when it says: '… the disbelievers will surely say, "You are but false claimants.'' (*ar-Rum:* 58) They did not say to their messenger *peace be upon him* for example: 'You are making false claims' addressing him using the singular pronoun. Why did they not they do so? They say as such because if people of a messenger denied him by saying, 'You are making false claims', perhaps some of his believing followers might defend him and testify to his truthfulness; so the plurality is addressed in order to be more comprehensive, as though they were saying, 'You are making false claims as are all those who stand up for you.' The meaning may also be 'You', all the messengers, '… are but false claimants.' (*ar-Rum:* 58) In other words, you yourselves are liars who are inventing these things and saying it is from Allah. It is strange that these people believe in Allah and then deny His messengers, such as the disbelievers of Mecca who mocked the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Revelation did not come to him for a long spell, saying, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him!'(1)

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(1) *Jandab ibn 'Abdullah Al-Yajli said that the Messenger Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him *was ill and did not rise for a night or two, and a woman came to him and said, 'O, Muhammad, I see that your devil has left you!' So Allah* Glorified is He *sent down: 'Consider the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark.* =

They did not know that the Revelation exerted the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it was very difficult for him at first so that he went to his wife Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* and said, ‘Cover me, Cover me! Wrap me up, wrap me up!’ And his forehead dripped with sweat. Furthermore, he would say of the angel, ‘And he whelmed me in his embrace until he reached the limits of my endurance.’(1) This was only due to the meeting of angelic nature with human nature; this is why Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* would assume, for our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the form of a man who had no traces of having travelled upon him and whom no one knew. Once, he came to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was gathered with the Companions, asking him about Islam, faith and excellence.(2)

= *Your Sustainer has not forsaken you, nor does He scorn you.’ (ad-Duha: 1-3). Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim; in another narration, Jandab said: ‘Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him was long in coming to the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him so the idolaters said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him!’ Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir iv. 532.*

(1) *'Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, ‘I saw him peace and blessings be upon him when the Revelation was coming down to him on a very cold day, and when it had finished coming to him, his forehead was dripping with sweat.’ Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 2, Kitab Bad’ Al-Wahy. Ibn Hajar said in Fath al-Bari i. 21: ‘The phrase tafassama jabinuhu ‘his forehead dripped with sweat’ is a metaphor taken from the word fasm which means to open a vein so that blood pours from it, an exaggerated way to depict the copious flow of sweat.’*

(2) *['Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him said, ‘One day, we were with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when a man came to us wearing clothes of brilliant white, with jet black hair, upon whom were no traces of his having travelled, and none of us knew him. He came and sat right before the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him placed his knees against his, placed his hand on his thigh and said, "O, Muhammad, tell me about Islam." And he peace and blessings be upon him answered him. "And tell me about faith." he said. He peace and blessings be upon him answered him. "And tell me of excellence," he said, and he answered him. "And tell me of the Hour," he said, and he answered him…' ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'Then, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, “Do you know who the questioner was?" "Allah and His Messenger Muhammad, know better," I answered. He replied," It was Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him. He came to you to teach you your religion."’ Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih 8, Kitab Al-Iman, and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 50, but on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

The fact that the Revelation intermitted a while for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was intended by Allah *Glorified is He* to give respite to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the difficulty of the Revelation until this pain and exhaustion had left him, whereupon he would once again yearn for the Revelation, and it would be easy for him to bear it. Likewise, he would become used to receiving it from an angel, for when a person yearns for something, he becomes willing and able to bear hardships for its sake, and what was difficult becomes easy for him. It becomes like the one who walks towards his beloved and does not care if he walks on thorns or is faced by perils and dangers.

Revelation is a meeting between the human and the angelic; so either the messenger is transferred to the level of the angel, or else the angel is transferred to the level of the human. This kind of proximity did not occur at the beginning of the descent of the Revelation; rather, it wore out Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he needed this period of rest when the Revelation intermitted for a while. This is why Allah says: ‘and remove the burden that weighed so heavily on your back.’ (*ash-Sharh:* 2-3). What this means is that We have made this burden light so that it does not exhaust you.

Allah says, in reply to them (those who said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him!’): ‘By the morning brightness and by the night when it grows still, your Lord has not forsaken you [O, Prophet], nor is He displeased with you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-3) It is strange that they said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him’, acknowledging The Lord of Muhammad at the moment of difficulty and disquiet which had come to him which caused them to mock him to the extent that they said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has abandoned him.' Yet, his Lord resumed once again sending him Revelation, and he called them to faith; however, they disbelieved and denied.

كَذَٰلِكَ يَطْبَعُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

In this way God seals the hearts of those who
do not know [59] (The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 59)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, *kadhalika* translated as ‘in this way’ (*ar-Rum:* 59) which means that in their denial of all the signs which came to them, ‘…Allah seals the hearts of those who do not know.’ (*ar-Rum:* 59) He seals their hearts closed and fastens them shut.

If you say that it is better for their hearts to remain open so that they might receive some guidance and light, we say that the sealing of the hearts of these people only takes place after all the means of calling them have been exhausted without their responding so that there is no hope for guiding them, and there is no purpose in trying to make them pay heed.

The True Lord *the Most High* is a Lord Who helps His servant to do what he loves and grants him that which he desires, even if it is disbelief. These people wanted disbelief and loved it, so Allah *the Almighty* helped them with that which they wanted and sealed their hearts so that faith would not enter them and disbelief would not leave them.

Therefore, we have formerly warned that who undergo misfortunes and lose loved ones not to mourn perpetually and become accustomed to mourning, lest Allah *Glorified is He* aids them in their desire to love and adore grief so that woes and misfortunes continually afflict them. Beware of leaving the door of grief ajar; rather, close it with the nails of contentment, for if grief stays with you, it will not leave you a single loved one.

We also say that if someone is too busy to keep close to you, do not remind them of your presence but help them in staying away from you by not thinking about them.

If you say: ‘If the True Lord has described them as not knowing, then why does He seal their hearts and why does He call them to account?’ We say that it is due to the lack of knowledge being a result of their negligence. Allah *the Exalted* gave them evidence and cosmological signs which proved His Existence, yet they did not pay heed to these signs. Moreover, they did not adduce from this evidence the existence of the All-Powerful Creator and the necessity of Allah’s Message. Thus, their lack of knowledge is the result of their heedlessness and negligence.

However, what followed was their rejection of messengers and denial of the signs, but will the course of the call come to an end just because they refused to listen to it? Allah *Glorified is He* created the universe and dispersed throughout it signs which prove the existence of the One Single Deity and placed within it miracles which conform the truthfulness of messengers in what they convey from Allah *the Almighty.* The True Lord does not benefit from these signs since His dominion is not increased by our worship nor decreased by our disobedience. The whole matter from top to bottom is for our benefit, and so the upshot of this matter is the following: 'Put those deniers out of your mind, O, Muhammad, and hold fast to what you are doing.'

The True Lord *the Most High* then says:

فَٱصۡبِرۡ إِنَّ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقّٞۖ وَلَا يَسۡتَخِفَّنَّكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُوقِنُونَ ۝٦٠

So be patient, for God's promise is true: do not
let those with no firm beliefs discourage you [60]
(The Quran, *ar-Rum:* 60)

Be patient (O, Muhammad) in the face of their hatred and in the face of their obstinacy and stubbornness. Be patient in the face of their persecution of you and of those who believe in you. Be patient in the face of all of this since the final end will be on your side: '… for Allah's promise is true …' (*ar-Rum:* 60). Allah *Glorified is He* promised His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* succour and victory, and His promise is true. Thus, be certain that succour is coming.

Yet, as long as succour is coming, why is there this struggle between the believers and the disbelievers, and why is there all this hardship and toil in the cause of the call? Some said that it is because Allah *the Almighty* wanted to test the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and train them in the matter of the responsibility of bearing the trust of the call and the carrying the torch of light after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and taking it not only to the people of the Arabian Peninsula, but to the entire world.

There must be people who adhere firmly to principles and are not shaken by hardships. The proof of this is that they are injured and persecuted, yet they bear this patiently; this is the most important quality of those who are being groomed to assume such trust.

If you see any way or principle which is indulgent with its followers at first, know that it is false because the true principle demands that its followers sacrifice their lives and their wealth, giving to it before they take from it. Why is this? It is due to the preacher of false principles not being able to find anyone to join him in his falsehood unless he first seduces them with money and buys their conscience. Otherwise, how will he attract them to this false principle and make them follow him? They must take the reward first.

As for the true principle, the one who follows it knows that its reward is delayed until the Hereafter, and he aspires to things beyond this world in which he believes and for which he works. Thus, he freely gives his own life and his wealth in the cause of this principle.

In the course of the call, we saw that many people apostate when a significant event befell Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or a calamity alarmed the people. It is as though hardship is a sieve which separates these people from those so that no one remained under the banner of ‘There is no deity but Allah’, except those who were valiant, strong and able to carry this banner to the whole world.

Allah *the Exalted* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Be patient in the face of their rejection, their denial and their plotting against you, for We shall aid you, and We shall not desert you. This aid was clearly shown to you when they opposed you publicly, and you defeated their public opposition. Moreover, they plotted against you secretly, and you defeated their plotting. They even sought help from jinns to ruin things for you, yet, Allah *Glorified is He*, exposed their plans, and saved you from them. So, be at peace, for We are waiting for them, and We shall never give you up. Rather, We shall show you the punishment they deserve in this world, and you shall see it with your own eyes or else in the Hereafter, after your death.’ The True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘… whether We show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned.’ (*Ghafir:* 77).

Part of this punishment which was sent upon them in this world and which our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* witnessed was what happened to them on the day of Badr when they were slain, captured and put to flight. We said before about ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him*—and what a man he was—that even the Quran would come down and affirm his opinions, yet when the Words, 'Their forces will be routed, and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar:* 45), were revealed, he was amazed and said, 'What forces are these which will be routed, when we are unable even to defend ourselves?' Then, when the battle of Badr took place, and he saw what he saw there, he said, 'Allah spoke the truth! "Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee' (*al-Qamar:* 45).

Allah *the Almighty* says: '… for Allah's promise is true …' (*ar-Rum:* 60). A promise is glad tidings of something good whose time has not yet come. The difference between a promise of good from a human being and a promise of good from Allah *Glorified is He* is that you might fail to live up to your promise because you are subject to vicissitudes, and you do not possess all the necessary means to ensure that you keep the promise. Moreover, when the time to keep it comes, you might not be able to do so; you might change your mind about it and covetously withhold it or see that the other does not deserve it, etc.

The vicissitudes which might change you, change him, or change the value of the good thing which you promised to give are all in play and might prevent you from keeping the promise you made. For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* teaches us to take precautions for this fact by saying: 'Do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow" without adding, "Allah willing"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24). This means to link your actions to Allah's Will, which facilitates the realisation of the action for you. You should not assert that you will do something when you do not intrinsically possess any of the means to do it.

We said before to suppose that you say, 'I will meet you tomorrow in such-and-such place and give you such-and-such.', you say this and make this promise without being able to guarantee that you will live to see tomorrow, nor that your friend will live to see tomorrow; if you do both live to see tomorrow, your opinions might change, or something might happen to you which would prevent you from keeping the promise. So, your words: 'if Allah so wills' protect you from being called a liar if you do not keep the promise because you had promised. But Allah did not will it, so you had nothing to do with it. Then, from whom do true promises come? They come from the One Who possesses all the means of fulfilment and cannot be stopped by any impediment.

Allah *Glorified is He* then, says: '… Do not let those with no firm beliefs discourage you.' (*ar-Rum:* 60) The verb *khaffa* means not to have weight any more. The verb *istakhaffa* literally means to seek to make something light. For example, when you are harsh with someone, another person comes and says, 'Ease up on him!' The verb *istakhaffa* also means the same as *istafazza* (to agitate), namely to move someone and disturb him from his immobile state so that if he were sitting, for example, he would stand up. This is why, on occasions like this, we use expressions like, 'Stay firm! So-and-so is trying to disquiet you' which means that he wants to make you lose your forbearance and composure; in other words, he says, 'Stop being so shaky (*khafif*, literally lighten)', and so on. We say to a boy, '*fizz!*' which means 'stand up'; an example of this is Allah's Words: 'And incite [to senselessness] whomever you can amongst them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers …' (*al-Isra':* 64). He says *istafziz* (incite). Thus, the meaning of *istakhaffa* is to attempt to make someone uncertain and to cause him to be shaken from his current state of composure.

The meaning, therefore, is the following: 'Beware, O, Muhammad, lest the people agitate you or remove you from your state of composure so that you clash with them. Rather, remain firm and composed in your call, and do not worry because Allah has promised you succour, and Allah's Promise is true.' When the True Lord *the Most High* loosens the reins of those who disbelieve, He only wants to bring out all that they have so that they will have no further excuse. Then, He will confront them with some of that which they deserve in this worldly life, and they will see the rest in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Our word has already been given to Our servants, the messengers. It is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

From the life story(1) of 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* we learned that he was sorely tried by two groups: the *Khawarij* who called him a disbeliever and the *Shi'a* who deified him and elevated him to the status of prophethood so that the words of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to him came true, ‘Two shall be ruined through you: the one who loves too much and the one who hates and scorns.’(1)

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(1) *The story of 'Ali Allah be pleased with him with one of the Kharijites in the Fajr Prayer*

It is also narrated that he *Allah be pleased with him* was leading the people in the dawn prayer one day, and when he recited, ‘…nor of those who go astray’ (*al-Fatiha:* 7), one of the *Kharijites* approached him and recited, ‘It has already been revealed to you [O, Prophet] and to those before you, "If you ascribe any partner to Allah, all your work will come to nothing. You will be one if the losers."’ (*az-Zumar:* 65). What he means he means by this is, ‘You are a disbeliever, and your works will not be accepted from you.’ 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* quickly realised what the man intended by this and immediately recited: ‘so be patient, for Allah’s promise is true. Do not let those with no firm beliefs discourage you.’ (*ar-Rum:* 60) Tis means the following, ‘You shall not remove me from my composure and my forbearance, and you shall not disquiet my mind.’

The greatness of this event was that he spontaneously replied with the most appropriate answer from the Book of Allah without any preparation or arrangement. Why does this seem surprising when he was 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* who was given such a vast amount of eloquence, articulacy, and skilled reasoning?

As for the Words, *la yoqinun,* ‘… those with no firm beliefs …’ (*ar-Rum:* 60), the word *yoqinun* is derived from *yaqin* (certainty) which means firm faith that cannot be shaken, so that it becomes a belief inside the heart that does not surface to the mind to be reasoned any further.

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(1) *‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him said, ‘Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him called me over and said, "There is in you the likeness of Jesus. The Jews hated him so much that they slandered his mother, and the Christians loved him so much that they elevated him to status which was not his." Indeed, two kinds of people shall be ruined through me: those who love so much that they praise me for things which are not mine, and those who have such hatred for me that they slander me. Indeed, I am not a prophet, and no revelation comes to me, but I act according to Allah's Book and the Sunna of His Prophet peace and blessings be upon him as much as I am able.’ Narrated by Al-Haytami in Majma' Az-Zawid ix. 133, where he ascribed it to Bazzar and Abu Ya‘la Al-Mawsuli.*

the chapter of

Luqman

In the Name of God(1), the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Luqman*(2):

الٓمٓ ١

Alif. Lam. Mim **[1] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 1)**

Previously, we spoke at great length about the disjointed letters that appear at the beginning of many *suras*, or chapters. In our discussion, we offered all that is humanly possible in terms of discerning the meaning of these letters. Our only recourse at this point is to say that Allah *Glorified is He* knows best as to what He intends by mentioning them. Indeed, it really makes no difference what level of knowledge we are granted; we will never be able to offer anything conclusive about these letters. In the end, there will always remain shades of meaning—in their usage—that we are simply incapable of arriving at.

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) The chapter of *Luqman* is the 31st chapter within the current arrangement of the scripture. It contains 34 verses and is classified as a Meccan chapter: it was revealed after the chapter of *as-Saffat* and before the chapter of *Saba'*. Concerning the chapter, Qurtubi, in his book *Tafsir* (meaning explanation), mentions: It is entirely a Meccan surah (chapter) apart from just two verses. Qatada counted the first of them as the following: 'And if all of the trees on earth were pens …' (*Luqman* 27). Along with this, he counts the subsequent verse. Ibn Abbas considers the chapter Meccan apart from three verses: he concurred with Qatada concerning the first two, but also adds to them the verse: 'Art thou not aware that it is Allah Who makes the night grow longer by shortening the day and makes the day grow longer by shortening the night …' (*Luqman* 29).

If, however, one was to ask: 'What is the benefit of these disjointed letters if their meaning cannot be known?' we would respond by pointing out: First of all, our rebuttal is based on logic and reasoning. The Quran was revealed upon the linguistic patterns of the Arabs. Linguistically, it challenged them, while they were indeed a people of marked eloquence, rhetoric, and clear exposition. They were the possessors of expressions of exquisiteness and styles of marvel. Additionally, the Quran was revealed in the dialect of the Quraysh who within their unique dialect had joined amongst all of the various dialects of Arabic being spoken at the time. Amongst the people of Quraysh were those who most notoriously rejected Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and proclaimed that he was a liar. Yet, we have never heard of any of them disdainfully questioning: 'What is the meaning of *"Alif Lam Mim*" or *"Ha Mim*"?'

By Allah, if these letters provided any occasion to attack the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the Quran, they would not have neglected the chance to exploit it. Therefore, this should be considered evidence that they understood the meaning of these letters. Clearly, they knew these letters contained meaning; if nothing else, we can certainly say they are ‘ways of attracting attention’ which were used amongst the Arabs. In this, the disjointed letters would be similar to *ala* (ho), which was mentioned by a poet(1) in the following selection:

Ho! Rise from sleep O, (female) sommelier, and from your chalice, pour me my morning drink.

Don not hoard the wines of this town of Al-Andarun.

Ala is used to attract attention. Attracting attention at the beginning of a speech shows that the speaker has control over the logic behind what he is saying; so, he arranges and prepares his speech and intellectually manages things in his own mind. On the other hand, the listener could be totally heedless and unprepared so that he ends up being surprised by the speech, and even may miss some of it. Thus, ways of attracting attention (like *ala*) come in handy; they remove the listener from his state of heedlessness and capture his attention. At full attention, he would not miss any part of the speech. As such, the easiest of all possible scenarios dealing with these 'disjointed letters' that we can imagine will admit that they are the 'ways of attracting attention' which Arabs commonly used in their speech.

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(1) The poet whose work is being referenced here is 'Amr ibn Kulthum ibn Malik ibn 'itab Abu Al-Aswad. He is one of the poets of the pre-Islamic period; he was born in the northern region of the Arabian Peninsula in a township known as Rabia. During his times, people would see him travel about the area of his birth as well as the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq and Najd. In addition to his prominence as a poet, he was also known as a valiant warrior. His most widely known piece of poetry was that which received the honour of being posted in the *Ka`ba*. This verse is extracted from that poem. He died sometime around 40 B.H. *(The Quran, Al-'Alam 5/84, Az-Zirikli).*

Earlier, we explained that the entire Quran—in its original revelation—was sent down as one continuous revelation. This implies that its verses and chapters run together. In fact, even its ending should be connected with its beginning; for instance, as soon as we reach the last verse in the Quran reading, '…whether they be jinns or people.' (*an-Nas:* 6), we follow it by the first verse of the Quran: 'In the name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy! Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.' (*al-Fatiha:* 2) Here, we have the very beginning of the Quran recited directly after the end of the Quran. Hence, in all of the verses of the Quran as well as its chapters, the unbroken arrangement of the scripture is maintained. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* does not want you to separate any particular verse of the Quran from that which follows it. This explains why they refer to an expert reciter of the Quran as 'one in a constant state of travel'. Indeed, he finds himself situated in a certain verse or chapter but not soon after, he 'journeys' to the verse which follows it.

In essence, we are able to conclude that connectedness is a general characteristic of the Quran. The only exceptions to this general characterisation we find are the 'disjointed letters' which appear at the beginning of the chapter. As their name reveals, they are disconnected from each other. We would not, for instance, say, *'Alifun Lamun Mimun'* using Arabic diacritics. No; however, the proper way to recite those letters is *'Alif. Lam. Mim.'* Then, why are these letters at variance with the connectedness which generally characterises the Quran?

Many have mentioned that this has been done to indicate that *Alif* as well as *Lam* and *Mim* all have independent meanings. This would suggest that they are not simply Arabic characters like the other ones that make up the text of the Quran. This is why they are recited differently than the other letters of the Quran; they are disjointed because they convey meanings that are independent of that which precedes and follows them.

This explains the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Whoever reads a single character of the Book of Allah shall be granted a reward equal to ten times the amount he reads, and bears in mind, I do not consider *Alif. Lam. Mim* to represent one character, On the contrary, *Alif* is a character, *Lam* is a character, and *Mim* is a character.’(1)

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

تِلْكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

These are the verses of the wise Scripture [2]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 2)

The word *tilka*, or ‘These are’ is a demonstrative pronoun that corresponds with a feminine object (its male counterpart is *dhalika*). When we analyse the word piece by piece, we find that the Arabic character *Ta* that appears at the beginning of the word is for pointing (to the person or thing which is being indicated), while the character *Lam* conveys a certain sense of distance between the speaker and that object—this distance could be physical, emotional or related to status. Lastly, the character *Kaf* which indicates that someone or something is being addressed in the second person. The *kaf* usually corresponds to the person or thing being addressed; so it will be masculine or feminine in the singular, dual or plural.

For example, addressing someone or something in the masculine/singular form, you would say, *tilka*. In the feminine/singular, on the other hand, you would say, *tilki*. In the dual form, you would say, *tilkuma*. An example of this can be found in the statement that the wife of the nobleman Zulaykha made in reference to Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘…"This is the one you blamed me for …"' (*Yusuf:* 32). The word *fadhalikunna,* or 'This' is a demonstrative pronoun. In it, the character *dha* is representative of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*; the *Lam* as used in *li* conveys a sense of distance, while *kunna* is the pronoun that corresponds to a feminine/plural audience.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2910 from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. Concerning the authenticity of the Hadith, he said that related in this particular way, the Hadith is hasan, sahih and gharib.*

Addressing Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…"These shall be two signs from your Lord …"' (*al-Qasas:* 32). This is a reference to the two signs: the shining hand and the staff. The word *dhanika*, or 'These' is a demonstrative pronoun. The first portion *dhan* indicates that the object being referred to is in the dual form, while the character *Kaf* indicates that someone is being addressed in the second person in this case, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

The demonstrative pronoun here within the verse we are currently exploring, 'These are the verses ...' (*Luqman:* 2) is being used to refer to a feminine object: 'the verses'. The individual being addressed in second person is the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and an address to him is considered an address to his community after him. At times, the Quran refers to the verses that make up the scripture, and at other times it refers to the Book itself. So, we find the words, the Book, *Al-Furqan* (the Criterion) or the Quran, being used; each of these has a particular meaning.

The word *Al-Kitab* (the Book) refers to the fact that the scripture is written and contains lines. The term the Quran refers to the fact that the scripture is recited and contains sections. As for the term *Al-Furqan* (the Criterion), it refers to one of the functions of the scripture: to decisively separate the truth from falsehood.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'These are the verses of the wise Scripture.' (*Luqman:* 2) Thus, He describes the scripture as wise. However, at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* (The Cow), He says: 'This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance …' (*al-Baqara:* 2). In this verse, the Quran is not described the wise Quran; the possibility of it containing doubt or misgiving is negated instead. The phrase, '…in which there is no doubt …' (*al-Baqara:* 2) confirms the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in conveying what he received from Allah *Glorified is He*. It also confirms the truthfulness of the angel who carried the revelation from the preserved tablet unto Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This angel was praised by Allah *the Exalted* within the following statement: 'Who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne.' (*at-Takwir:* 20)

Concerning our master, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*—in respect to the conveyance of the Quran—Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us, We would certainly have seized his right hand and cut off his lifeblood.' (*al-Haqqa:* 44-46)

Thus, the Quran is the same Quran that descended from Allah *Glorified is He*; not a single character of its text has been changed, and it will remain preserved by the permission of Allah *the Exalted* until the establishment of the Final Hour. We will continue reading: '…in which there is no doubt …' (*al-Baqara:* 2) and those who will come after us will continue reading this statement in the Quran until the establishment of the Final Hour as well. The True Lord Himself has decreed that no doubt will be allowed to approach this Quran; this guarantee has stood from the time it was first revealed and will continue until the Last Hour. If we are troubled by even the slightest bit of doubt concerning the Book of our Lord, we only have to read and contemplate the following: 'This is the Scripture, in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of Allah.' (*al-Baqara:* 2)

This is a conclusive decree (that the Quran would remain preserved) which Allah *the Almighty* issued, and it will remain as long as the world is in existence; the verse we mentioned before reads: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves…' (*Fussilat:* 53) encompasses the future: the future of those who witnessed the revelation of the Quran, the future of those who come after the revelation of the Quran, the future of those who will come after the previously mentioned until the Day of Judgment and even the future of those upon which the Hour will come.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not reveal the Quran to uncover all its secrets and miracles in a certain period of time only, nor did He reveal it to one community only, depriving all successive generations of His giving. Allah *the Most High* wants the Quran to remain fresh and continually renewed; every community and historical epoch will derive something meaningful from it and uncover its secrets, miracles, and signs within creation.

As for the meaning of His Words, '…the wise Scripture' (*Luqman:* 2), a book cannot be described as wise; only someone who is knowledgeable can be described so. Thus, 'the wise Scripture' refers to the All-Wise, the one who speaks in this book and He who revealed it. The word *Al-Hakim* (wise) means He who puts things in their proper places. The only One Who can put everything in its proper place is Allah *the Almighty* for He knows the true purpose of everything and where it belongs.

By contrast, we humans think that a certain place is the proper one for something, and then afterwards, we discover that we have been wrong, and accordingly, we are forced to make changes and modifications. An example of this is many of the new inventions that we had thought were serving humanity and later witnessed and suffered from their harmfulness. Each verse reflects an aspect of the Quran's perfection and a feature of its magnificence. In essence, the Quran is a collection of different parts of one big structure that has several faculties of perfection. The next verse is an example of multiple perfections:

هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْمُحْسِنِينَ ٣

[with] guidance and mercy for those
who do good [3] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 3)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[With] guidance and mercy for those who do good.' (*Luqman:* 3), whereas in the opening of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: '…containing guidance for those who are mindful of Allah.' (*al-Baqara:* 2) There is a difference between the two meanings: being mindful of Allah that requires faith and faith that requires complying with the obligations, i.e. to perform what Allah *the Almighty* has made as an obligation upon you.

Ihsan (doing of good) requires more than that. *Ihsan* in performance means to excel in doing something in matter of quantity as well as quality. The quality of a particular act is increased when it is accompanied by sincerity toward the One for Whom the action is being performed: The True

Lord *the Most High*. To excel in doing something, in matter of quantity, is to truly love the obligation you are performing, which will lead you to move beyond the obligation and start performing extra worship. So, instead of praying a mandatory two units of prayer, you might perform an additional unit or two of prayer. This is how *ihsan* is expressed in regards with quantity.

Taqwa (being mindful or conscious of Allah) is one of the wonders of Quranic exegesis. The Quran uses exactly the same word when saying '*ittaqu* Allah' (be conscious of Allah) and '*ittaqu An-nar*' (be conscious of the fire of Hell). The meaning, after close study is you being conscious of the fire of Hell that entails that you will make sure that there is a barrier and a protective blockade between you and it. Being conscious of Allah does not indicate that you make a barrier between you and your Lord because a believer always seeks togetherness with Allah.

Alternatively, place a protective barrier between you and the attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* which tell of His overpowering awesomeness. Place a protective barrier between yourself and Allah's Attributes of retribution, force, overwhelming dominance, etc. This is due to you not being able to withstand the manifestations of these Attributes. There is no doubt that the fire of hell is merely one of Allah's forces. It is a manifestation of Allah's Attributes of overpowering awesomeness. The meaning, then, is exactly the same.

Nonetheless, some people limit their search for meaning to the obvious and ask, 'How can we be conscious of Allah in the same way we are conscious of the fire of Hell? Does this type of consciousness not imply putting distance between oneself and something harmful?' We would respond by stating, that it is indeed correct. The harmful thing you are getting away from is disbelief. In fact, this is the very essence of being mindful of Allah. Those who are conscious of Allah are those who find contentment in being aware of Him, by always guarding against disbelief in Him. As long as people is guarding against disbelief with this type of vigilance, they should be considered *muhsinin* 'doers of good' and true believers. At times, the Quran introduces an obligation, and at other times, it introduces those who are obligated; each renders a new meaning.

That is why when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was questioned about *ihsan*—in the famous Noble Hadith by the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*—he responded, 'It is to worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, know that He sees you.'(1)

When we compare the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* with this verse, '[with] guidance and mercy for those who do the good' (*Luqman:* 3), we arrive at the conclusion that the Quran does not depend on repetition. Truthfully speaking, it contains miraculous scenes representing different meanings. Although there are some who, on account of their shallow understanding, assume that this is an instance of repetition in the Quran; the reality reveals that each verse is giving us something different when we think deeply about it.

In this verse, the Book has been described as wise; the fact that it is a source of guidance and mercy has also been included. Guidance leads to goodness through the shortest possible route. Indeed, the Quran had descended for the purpose of guiding a people who had gone astray, and after it had guided them to the right path, it had shown them the light; it had wanted to preserve the guidance for them and maintain its presence amongst them. The '…mercy …' (*Luqman:* 3) that is mentioned in the verse refers to Allah's being merciful to them and not allowing them to return to disbelief again.

Another example of this can be observed in the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe …' (*al-Isra':* 82). This asserts that the Quran is a healing for those who are sick, but it also mentions that the Quran is 'a mercy to those who believe': This implies that after getting well, they will not ever, by the mercy of Allah, get sick after that.

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(1) The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. Al-Bukhari narrated it in his Sahih 50. Muslim also narrated it in his Sahih 8. The Hadith was narrated on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* and in its full version it is known as the Hadith, of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*—the Hadith in which he appears in the form of a man whose clothes were exceedingly white, hair exceedingly black, without any signs of travelling showing upon his person. The Hadith also makes clear that no one had ever seen the man before and that he proceeded to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Islam, faith (*Iman)* and spiritual excellence or the doing of good (*Ihsan*).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَهُم بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed
alms, and are certain of the Hereafter [4]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 4)

This verse comes as a description of the *muhsinin* (doers of good). Nonetheless, do these represent all of their characteristics: being constant in prayer, paying the prescribed alms and being certain of Hereafter? They replied in the negative. Rather, these are the foundational aspects of their characteristics. The True Lord *the Most High* wants that His creation stand on an equal footing regarding worship. Indeed, this equality in worship will not materialise unless it does so as an extension of their overall equality.

In prayer, this equality is manifest ever so precisely. In prayer, the Exaltedness of Lordship is evident and the inherent humbleness of being a servant. Prayer represents the fullest expression of submission and humility before Allah *Glorified is He* and is performed repeatedly: five times throughout the day and night.

As for other religious obligations, they would not be described this way. So, paying the poor-due, for instance, is only an obligation once a year: '…paying what is due on the day of harvest…' (*al-An'am:* 141). Additionally, the payment of the poor-due is only an obligation for those who are able to pay it. The same can be said of fasting during the month of *Ramadan* and making the Great Pilgrimage to Mecca. This creates the impression that prayer is the cornerstone of all worship. On account of its goodness and high priority with Allah *the Exalted* He has made it an obligation upon every believer. There is no situation in which a believer is freed from the responsibility of praying. To be sure, there is a specific legislation that handles the prayer of the infirm, travelling, one in fear, etc.

To be sure, prayer brings about '*istitraq* of being a servant (which means all kinds of people, including the poor, rich, etc., share the same behaviour of submission to Allah, standing in prayer in ranks) for the entire creation. When the time of prayer commences, we cast off our statuses just as we cast off our shoes and leave them at the door of the mosque. During prayer, in a line of worshippers, you find the leader as well as the one being led; the old and the young; the noble and those of humble standing. However, when pointing to certain people as being of humble standing, it is important that we clarify what we mean (only in the eyes of people this person is viewed as being of humble standing) with his Lord, his standing might not be humble at all. Nevertheless, what we are attempting to convey here is that all are equal. Surely, when we observe eminent personalities, rulers and leaders standing with us in ranks, all in submission to Allah *Glorified is He* and being totally humbled before Him, the differences that separate us dissipate. Any of the conceit that might have taken root in their souls abates: Indeed, in the Muslim community, no one has any business treating anyone else in a condescending manner.

Also, due to the high standing of prayer and its importance, we recognise that it is the only religious obligation that Allah *the Almighty* made binding on us by issuing a declaration directly from Himself. Conversely, all of the other religious obligations were clarified through the medium of revelation. Earlier, we attempted to give an analogy for this difference: We mentioned a manager in the workplace; when he receives an important notice, he does not issue it through his secretaries or by telephone. To be sure, he will summon the particular employee the matter concerns to his office and give him the order directly.

This also applies to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; His Lord summoned him to the heavens, and he experienced the tremendous favour of being near to Allah *the Most High*. Certainly, Allah *Glorified is He* knows Muhammad's love for his community and his desire to see them guided aright. He also knows that His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desires for his entire community to experience the sublimity of nearness to Him, nearness like that Prophet Muhammad experienced during The Night Journey, and with being in His presence.

In light of this, his Lord addressed the following statement to him: 'your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied.' (*ad-Duha:* 5) The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'Then, I will not be pleased, while a member of my community dwells in the fire of Hell.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Khatib in Talkhis Al-Mutashabih; on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him who said, 'Muhammad will not be pleased while one member of his*=

Just as prayer brings about '*istitraq* of being a servant (that means all kinds of people, including the poor, rich, etc., share the same behaviour of submission to Allah, standing in prayer in ranks), so does the payment of the poor-due when it generates 'economical *istitraq'*. Thus, all people, which include the rich and the poor, will have a decent, easy life. In this way, no single person will overeat to the point of indigestion while another dies of hunger. Then, what do you think of a community in which the elders do not treat the youth with disdain and in which the wealthy do not withhold their support from the impoverished? As such, we can confidently state that the establishment of the prayer and the payment of the poor-due can maintain happiness for the entire community.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has made the payment of the poor-due an obligation, for when He brings His servant into existence, He takes it upon Himself the responsibility of providing him with life's essentials. How could He decline to do so when you, the human, invite someone to your home; do you not assume the responsibility of treating him with generosity and providing him with at least the bare essentials, not to mention a warm reception, good hospitality, appetising food and drink, etc.?

Allah *the Exalted* has summoned all His servants forth into existence: not only believers amongst them, but disbelievers as well. Thus, it is Allah's responsibility to guarantee provision for all of them. In fact, more than just basic provision, it is Allah's responsibility to provide them with all of things on which life's quality rests. Additionally, Allah *Glorified is He* grants this guarantee to the disabled just as He grants it to the able-bodied. For this reason, the payment of the poor-due has been made a binding religious obligation for him who begs and for him who is denied. While paying the poor-due is *silat* (represents the strong social bonds that Islam fosters amongst believers), praying is *salat*.

In Arabic literature, there is a story which demonstrates this principle. It is narrated that Ibn Al-Mudbir who is also known by Abu Al-Hassan, was sought

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= *community dwells in the fire of Hell.' In Shu'ab Al-iman, Al-Bayhaqi also narrated this Hadith on the authority of Ibn Abbas, but with a slightly different wording; it reads: 'His- the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him- contentment resta in every member of his community being admitted to Paradise.'*

after by the poets of his time so that they could benefit from his generosity. They would say, ‘Nothing opens the mouths like giving.’ That is to say that bestowal will cause people to praise you.

Nevertheless, when Ibn Al-Mudbir(1) was praised in a piece of poetry that he did not like, he would order his men to take the poet to the mosque and remain with him until he completed one hundred units of prayer. Due to this practice, the poets of his time feared him and in many cases were afraid to approach him. The only one of them who defied this general attitude was Abu 'Abdullah Al-Husayn ibn 'Abd As-Salam Al-Bashri who went to him and said, ‘I have some poetry that I would like to recite to you.' Ibn Al-Mudbir answered, ‘However, there is one condition. Do you have any idea what it is?’ ‘Yes,’ he quickly responded. ‘Very well then, recite what you have,’ it was said to him. So, he began:

We wanted a good praise for Abu Hassan ... As the praise of the governors

(Poets were going to them in order to benefit from their largesse.)

He continued the poem:

We said, ‘the most generous of all men and jinn’…and from his palms the Tigris and Euphrates emerge’

They said, ‘He receives the eulogisers very well, but His reward to them is prayer.’

So, I said, ‘My praying will not enrich my children. No, it is charity I hope to encourage’

So, he will order that the word salat (prayer) be changed and turn it to become silat (building a bond with me by being generous to me)

Afterward, someone found the courage to approach Ibn Al-Mudbir and questioned, 'Why do you punish the one whose poetry does not impress you by commanding him to perform one hundred units of prayer?' He responded, ‘Indeed, each poet who approaches me is either a good composer of poetry or a bad one. If he is a bad composer, consider the one hundred units of prayer expiation for his bad poetry. If, on the other hand, he is a good composer, the units of prayer serve as expiation for the lies he told about me during his performance.'

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(1) *The story of Ibn Al-Mudbir with the poets*

In the verse we are studying Allah *Glorified is He* then says describing them as: '…certain of the Hereafter.' (*Luqman:* 4) Truthfully speaking, faith in the Last Day means that we must act according to the Way of Allah *Glorified is He*—presented in 'do' and 'do not do' such-and-such—while being confident that there is no way to escape Allah *the Almighty* or evade His Punishment in the Hereafter, for we will be called to account. This is because we were not created without purpose, nor will we be left to wander blindly through life. Allah *Glorified is He* captures this reality when he says: 'Did you think We had created you in vain and that you would not be brought back to Us?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 115)

In terms of the rhetorical style being employed in this verse, we notice that the detached personal pronoun *hum* (they) has been used twice: Again, Allah *Glorified is He* says: *'hum bil'akhirati hum yuqinun'* '…and are certain of the Hereafter.' (*Luqman:* 4) This should be taken as an indication that belief in the Hereafter is confirmed, and there is no doubt in its occurrence. Though people believe in that day and are sure that they will be called for account; furthermore, they believe that Allah did not hold them responsible for no purpose for the True Lord still explicitly emphasises this issue of the Hereafter. This is because it is an issue that most people see as being far-off, and as a result, they often fail to take heed of it. However, this is not surprising: people are heedless of death although they witness it before their eyes daily. Humans are apt to see death as far-off in relation to them. This provides a good context for the statement of Al-Hasan Al-Basri(1) which reads: 'I have never witnessed a type of certainty that is as similar to doubt as people's certainty of their own mortality.'

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(1) *He is Al-Hasan ibn Abu Al-Hasan Abu Sa'id Al-Basri Allah be pleased with him. He was raised in Medina, during the caliphate of 'Uthman. He memorized the Book of Allah and even heard 'Uthman deliver a couple of addresses. He was a scholar, high-minded, reliable, and secure. He was also devoted worshipper and a man of great spiritual presence. It has also been said that he was handsome, eloquent and elegant. He died in 110 AH at the age of 88. (The Quran, Tadhkirat Al-Hufazh 1/71, Adh-Dhahabi)*

As for disbelievers, they openly proclaim their disbelief in this day and incredulity concerning it. This is why Allah *the Almighty* emphasises it.

When the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* questioned Hudhayfa (1) *Allah be pleased with him* 'How are you this morning, Hudhayfah?' The latter responded, 'I woke up as a true believer.' 'Every truth has its manifestations so what are the manifestations of your belief?' asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* answered, 'My soul has turned away from the life of this world. Its gold and its crumbled pieces of soil have become as one for me. It is almost as if I can see the people of paradise enjoying the comforts that exist within it, and I can see the people in the fire of Hell being punished.' The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then said to him, 'Now you know. So, stick to the truth as long as you live.'

Allah's phrase, '…are certain …' (*Luqman:* 4), refers to certainty in the Hereafter. Certainty describes the state in which faith is deeply rooted and unwavering. This state does not admit the possibility of doubt rising to the intellect to be considered anew. Previously, we pointed out that all things that can be known are essentially known at three levels or phases: *'ilm al-yaqin, 'ain al-yaqin and haqq al-yaqin*.

As for *'ilm al-yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty), it occurs when someone whom you trust informs you of something. When you personally observe what that individual informed you about, it becomes *'ain al-yaqin* (the eye of certainty). When you are directly involved past the level of merely witnessing or observing, it becomes *haqq al-yaqin* (the truth of certainty).

We have given an analogy for this: the Sacred House in Mecca, for instance, was such-and-such details, and it underwent such-and-such expansions. As far as you are concerned, this knowledge represents '*ilm al yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty). If you were to see the Sacred House perhaps in a picture, you will have attained '*ain al-yaqin* (the eye of certainty). If Allah *the Exalted* facilitates your access to the Sacred House, and you are able to perform the Great Pilgrimage or even the Lesser Pilgrimage, you will have directly experienced being there, and your knowledge will have arrived to the level of *haqq al-yaqin* (the truth of certainty).

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(1) *What is narrated is mentioned in relation to Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari: It was cited by Haythami in Mujma' Az-Zawa'id 1/57. In Al-Mujma' Al-kabir 3/302, Haythami also upheld the authenticity of what had been narrated by At-Tabarani. He said concerning its chain of narrators: 'The chain includes Ibn Lahia.' To nearly the same effect, it is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, 'The Prophet met a man who was referred to as Harith in some of the passes of Medina and said to him, "How did you rise from sleep this morning, Harith?"' This version of the Hadith has graded as authentic by Al-Bazzar despite the fact that the chain includes Yusuf ibn 'Atiya who is not relied upon.*

There are two *c*hapters in the Quran, which the True Lord *the Most High* deals with these different levels of perceiving reality: ‘Striving for more distracts you until you go into your graves. No indeed! You will come to know. No indeed! In the end you will come to know. No indeed! If only you knew for certain. You will most definitely see hellfire. You will see it with the eye of certainty. On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.’ (*at-Takathur:* 1-8) This verse describes them when they will traverse the bridge of *Sirat*, which is when they will be able to see the fire of hell with their own eyes.

As for *haqq al-yaqin*, as it relates to the fire of hell, and its description occurs in the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘If that dying person is one of those who will be brought near to Allah, he will have rest, ease and a Garden of Bliss. If he is one of those on the Right, [he will hear], "Peace be on you" from his companions on the Right. However, if he is one of those who denied the truth and went astray, he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in Hell. This is the certain truth. [O, Prophet] Glorify the name of your Lord, the Supreme.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 89-96)

Yet, did the Quran descend as guidance for all who are conscious of Allah or strictly solely for the ‘doers of good’? We would respond by stating that guidance occurs in the Quran with two meanings: *hedayat dalalah wa irshad* (guidance to the correct way by being shown and instructed and *hedayat ma’unah* (guidance to the correct way by aid and facilitation). If we are speaking of the first type of guidance, it has been made accessible to all, the believer and the disbeliever. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘As for Thamud, We gave them guidance, but they preferred blindness in preference to guidance.’ (*Fussilat:* 17) The True Lord *the Most High* has guided all to that they are His servants; some have accepted this guidance and have been convinced thereby, whereas others have rejected it and made the conscious decision to disbelieve. As for those who accept this and believe in it, Allah *the Exalted* grants them additional guidance; He grants them Divine aid and facilitation in attaining faith. Afterward, He continues to make faith endeared to them until they find it irresistible. As their faith continues to deepen, Allah’s assistance to help them realise their faith never ceases. Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path and given them their awareness [of Him].’ (*Muhammad:* 17)

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدٗى مِّن رَّبِّهِمۡۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ ٥

These are rightly guided by their Lord, and it is
they who will prosper[5] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 5)

The True Lord has already described the Quran as guidance, whereas in this verse He says: ‘Those are on [right] guidance …’ (*Luqman:* 5). Bear in mind that the Speaker within the text is Allah *Glorified is He*. As such, we must carefully consider the meaning of this passage. Our Lord wants inform us that indeed the Quran is guidance. Nonetheless, by no means should you believe that you are benefitting Allah *the Almighty* by accepting and following His guidance. On the contrary, you are the beneficiary of your choice to follow His guidance. When you allow guidance to lead, it not only shows you where good lies but accompanies you to it. One can almost think of guidance as a riding animal that delivers you unto all that is good and wholesome. It is as though you are riding on guidance; thus, you rise above it, but in fact, it is over you because it lawfully places demands on your actions.

After establishing that the Quran is guidance, a question arises: 'From whom is guidance?' The answer is ‘…guidance from their Lord…’ (*Luqman:* 5); it is He Who is not corrected by anyone. So, when He guides you, it is true guidance. Suppose that humans are guided to something that contains good, only to oppose that same very thing a short while later. Indeed, they might discover the harm and injury something contains only long after its development.

Maybe this will prompt them to come back and make amends to what had initially developed, or maybe they will abandon it to a new course of action. So, consider the amount of laws that had been developed by human beings and which then were cancelled or have been modified.

Therefore, true guidance can only come from Allah *Glorified is He* and the law that should govern us and in which we should feel confident can only come from Allah, *the Exalted*. Why is this? Without a doubt, humans benefit from the laws that were developed. Additionally, humans may likely succumb to vain desires or might unfairly incline towards a specific party as opposed to his adversary. By contrast, the True Lord is the Only One Who does not benefit from what He legislates for His servants at all, nor does He side with one party over another; to Him, all people are simply His servants, and they stand upon equal footing.

For this reason, the True Lord *the Most High* gives reassures us with the justice and equity that exist within the system of law that He has given us; He says: '…and that He—Exalted be the Glory of our Lord!—has neither spouse nor child.' (*al-Jinn:* 3) This means that the True Lord has no companion who can influence his choices, nor does He have a son whom He will allow to wrong others and who would enjoy His protection and favour. Then, be assured that all of you are equal in His regard.

Furthermore, there is a difference between guidance from Allah and guidance from the Lord. The Lord is the One Who nurtures you; He is the One Who created you from nothing and provides for you, thereby removing you from deprivation. Your Lord gives you before you even knew that you can ask Him! Your Lord granted you a dwelling in this world, exploring His creation and enjoying His blessings.

In the same sense, your Lord is teaching you not to ask Him about your provision for tomorrow (as though you are in doubt that it will be present); He provided for you before you even know how to ask! On top of that, He does not request anything from you today concerning the worship you are obligated to perform tomorrow. This emphasises the necessity of a slave to observe manners when dealing with His Lord *Glorified is He*. This makes it clear to us that Lordship — in the sense that Allah is our Lord—implies giving. Godhood, on the other hand, entails its primary feature of issuing responsibilities and duties to creation.

Next, the True Lord offers one additional description of these people: '…and it is those who are successful.' (*Luqman:* 5) Attainment of a happy state or felicity is the outcome of their living in accordance with guidance. This is supported by Allah's statement: 'Truly, to a happy state shall attain the believers' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1). The Arabic word *falaah* is originally derived from the idea of cultivating the earth (*filaahat al-ard*) by planting, seeding, watering, etc. When the Quranic idiom uses the word to refer to good deeds, it is actually borrowing the word from its original context. The similarity between its meaning in the Quranic language and its original meaning is clear. A farmer throws a seed into fertile dirt, and his Lord multiplies it for him seven hundred times. The same is true for the one who performs good deeds; their reward is multiplied for him. A good deed is rewarded anywhere from ten to seven hundred times by Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says in this connection: '…Allah grants manifold increase unto whom he wills, and Allah is infinite, All Knowing.' (*al-Baqara:* 261)

Read the following parable in the Book of Allah: 'The parable of those who spend their possessions for the sake of Allah is that of a grain out of which grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains, for Allah grants manifold increase unto whom He wills, and Allah is Infinite, All Knowing.' (*al-Baqara:* 261) There is an interesting conclusion that can be drawn here: If the earth—one of the creations of Allah—is giving a yield so plentiful, how vast is the giving of the One Who created it? In this, we can see that they are indeed in a state of felicity; that is, they will reap the good fruits of their labour. When compared with the fruit that they will earn, the hardship and struggle that they faced—in order to grow the fruits—will seem like nothing. As we said earlier, this is similar to a farmer who cultivates his land and plants his seeds to be given manifold increase in what he planted at the time of harvest.

Afterward, the True Lord *the Most High* says(1):

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(1) *There are factors that surrounded the revelation of this verse, and Kalbi and Muqatil have mentioned: This verse was revealed in reference to An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith. He=*

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَشْتَرِى لَهْوَ ٱلْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا ۚ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿٦﴾

But there is the sort of person who pays for distracting tales, intending, without any knowledge, to lead others from God's way, and to hold it up to ridicule. There will be humiliating torment for him! [6] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 6)

The True Lord *the Most High* has mentioned the Book and its verses; affirming that there are guidance and grace in them for those who follow their instructions. Allah *the Exalted* has also made clear that he who proceeds on the path of guidance can be assured that he will enjoy felicity. Now, He is highlighting the fact that there is another category of people: those who benefit and profit from misguidance, along with that what makes misguidance spread amongst people with its different forms.

From this, we recognise that there are particular groups of people whose luxuries in life are inextricably linked to the survival and proliferation of misguidance. The presence of misguidance could be needed to maintain their earnings and leadership, or—perhaps more disappointingly—the enslavement of others and the ability to seize the fruits of their labour.

Of course, if there is a law that would aid in bringing some balanced improvement to the public, in the sense that it contains good for many different groups of people, none would fight its enactment and contest those who advocate it except such people.. They go about making false accusations and trying to cast doubt onto their intentions. However, what is even more

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= *would travel to Persia on business and pay to gain access to some of the information and knowledge that was in circulation amongst the Persians. Once obtained, he would narrate what he learnt to others and would particularly seek out members of the tribe of Quraysh to prevail upon, he would say to them, 'So, Muhammad tells you of stories concerning 'Ad and Thamud, I will tell you the stories of Rustum, Asfindiyar, and other Persian kings.' They became fond of his storytelling and would listen to him instead of listening to the Quran. This verse was revealed to address his activities.*
Mujahid, on the other hand, holds the opinion that this verse was revealed about the purchase of slaves and chanteuses and that were used to distract people from the revelation of the Quran. [Asbab An-Nuzul pg. 197, Wahidi]

despicable is that they even begin to combat them by the use of ridicule and sarcasm and at other times by outright transgressing on their rights.

They may also try to make life impossible for those who support the good—by cutting off their access to necessities. This is similar to what they attempted to do with the Messenger of Allah when they ostracised him in the fields of Abu Taleb. Moreover, they forced the people of truth to migrate and make them leave behind their families and property to take up residence first in Ethiopia and then in Medina. Why did they go to such great lengths to stop the progress of the truth? Indeed, their very lives depended on the continued presence of misguidance; as such, they were ready to give everything they had for its preservation.

Allah *the Almighty* informs us that these people who attempt to stifle the truth and impede the progress of the call to faith are fully aware that if they allowed people to have an unbiased listening to the Message of Allah and the one who calls for it, they would undoubtedly incline towards it. This is why they took such pains to ‘block’ the ears of the people and silence the logic of truth. They said to them: 'Do not listen to this Quran, rather talk frivolously about it.' (*Fussilat:* 26)

They only responded in this manner because they were well versed in the language of the Quran; they understood the beauty of its style, its amazing ability to reach the hearts of men and women and the clarity of its mode of expression. If the ear of someone with a true sense for Arabic language listened to the Quran, he cannot prevent himself from being affected by it and taken by its miracles which simply cannot be duplicated by human beings. Needless to say, this will lead him to faith.

If they could not dissuade someone from listening to the truth (the Quran), they would use distractions to effectively divert his attention from the truth to falsehood.

The phrase 'But amongst men …' (*Luqman:* 6) includes the use of the word 'amongst' which, in this case, indicates that a particular group of people are being referred to: these are the ones who benefit from the preservation of misguidance. This is a group amongst the people who would be distressed at the idea of people assembling around one worldview, a common goal, and a single source of guidance. Indeed, this assemblage would spell an end to their being distinguished and their ability to impose their will on others through oppression on earth. This explains why they would spare no effort in attempting to preserve misguidance: 'But amongst men there is many a one that prefers a mere play if words [to Divine Guidance], so as to lead [those] without knowledge astray from the Path of Allah …' (*Luqman:* 6).

The word choice of Allah when He says: 'prefers' (*Luqman:* 6) is a translation of the Arabic word *shira*' which literally means ‘purchasing’ as people do concerning their transactions. Of course, in order to complete a transaction, there must be buying and selling; this means that you will pay a price in order to receive a commodity or saleable item in return. This is a basic description of transactions since the invention of currency. Before the invention of hard currency, however, people would complete their transactions through bartering one commodity for another. In this case, both items are sold and bought in the same time. The owners of such property, when engaged in a transaction, were simultaneously buyers and sellers.

We observe the same thing being expressed in the story of Yusuf (Joseph): 'And they sold him (*sharawhu*) for a paltry price –a mere few silver coins; thus, low did they value him.' (*Yusuf:* 20) Although a derivative of the word *shira* (which we already mentioned that it actually means ‘purchasing’) was used, the actual meaning indicates that they sold him.

We find another instance of the word acquiring this particular sense in the statement of Allah: 'But there is [also] a kind of man who would willingly sell (*yashri*) his own self in order to please Allah …' (*al-Baqara:* 207). Again, this also means, ‘he is willing to give, or "sell", his soul’. Accordingly, we can see that the verb *shara* occurs throughout the text with the meanings of buying or selling.

On the other hand, if the verb *shara* occurs on the pattern of *ishtara*, it specifically denotes the process of purchasing something for a price that is paid in cash. In this sense, Allah has mentioned: 'And, behold, amongst the followers of earlier revelation, there are indeed such as [truly] believe in Allah and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon you as well as in that which has bestowed upon them. Standing in awe of Allah, they do not barter away (*yashtaroon*) Allah’s Messages for a trifling gain …' (*Al-‘Imran:* 199).

We also find the statement of Allah: ‘Behold, Allah has bought *(ishtara*) of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them Paradise in return.’ (*at-Tawba:* 111)

Normally, the Arabic character *Ba’* (which in this case would mean 'with') is attached to the item that was paid during a transaction. For instance, we would say, 'I bought such-and-such (with) this.'

When we seriously consider the statement of Allah, 'But amongst men there is many a one that prefers a mere play of words …' (*Luqman:* 6), first we find that this process (of preferring to purchase a mere play of words) cannot be completed without searching for the thing that is being preferred. Next, the process is also in need of a price that one is willing to pay in order to acquire that which he prefers. They did not even purchase something that contained some benefit, '…a mere play of words …' (*Luqman:* 6) is such an unworthy purchase: it is valueless.

Therefore, these individuals who wanted to get people away from Allah’s Way carry the burden of both searching for the purchased thing and paying for it. Then, in light of the fact that they have contented themselves with such a worthless object, they must be described as losers. Yet, what is worse than this and even more agonising is the fact they have chosen this in opposition to the truth, the truth that they were given freely; Allah *the Exalted* has sent it to them with His Messenger, and they were not required to exert any effort nor pay any price for it. The truth came to them as a result of Allah’s favour and will to honour them: '…Say [O, Prophet]: "No reward do I ask of you for this [Message] other than [that you should] love your fellow men…"' (*ash-Shura:* 23).

What is there that can even be said about the level of stupidity with which they are described! As for the word *lahw* ‘passing delight’ (translated here as ‘a mere play of words’), the Quran mentions it and *la’ib* (play) in various places. *La’ib* was mentioned before *lahw* in many verses like the following: 'And nothing is the life of this world but a play (*la’ib*) and a passing delight (*lahw*), and the life in the Hereafter is by far the better one for all who are conscious of Allah. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*al-An‘am:* 32). Also, they are in Allah’s statement: 'know ... that the life of this world is but a play (*laib*) and passing delight (*lahw*)…' (*al-Hadid:* 20). In the following verse of Allah, *lahw* was mentioned before *laib*: '…the life of this world is nothing but a passing delight (*lahw*) and a play (*la'ib*) …' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64).In two of the verses, references to *la'ib* precede those to *lahw*. Indeed, *la'ib* (play) is when you engage in an action without a purpose or objective. The activity of children is described as play; it is activity, but it is aimless. Often, we use the term 'child's play'. This term has become popular because a child plays before he has been charged with any serious responsibility; he does not engage in aimless play while neglecting other duties.

Nonetheless, when he reaches the age of maturity if idle play distracts him from performing his duties, it becomes *lahw* in this case. This is what is being indicated in the saying of Allah: 'Yet it does happen that when people become aware of [an occasion for] worldly gain or a passing delight, they rush headlong toward it and leave you standing [and preaching] …' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11).

Hence, we can confidently state that *lahw* is something that contains no benefit but distracts you from that which is required of you.

The verse of the chapter of *al-'Ankabut*, in which *lahw* is mentioned before *la'ib*, implies that the activities that distract one from fulfilling religious responsibilities have reached their limit. People have become inundated with corruption and idle amusement; what has also occurred is distraction from responsibilities as a result of that has become far too common. Structuring the verse in this way strikes at the core of the issue more effectively than mentioning *la'ib* before *lahw*; indeed, play, *la'ib*, as opposed to *lahw* does not affect one's responsibilities.

Then again, what is this 'mere play of words' that they have purchased for diverting people's attention away from the truth and call to Islam? When they heard the Quran, they heard the stories of 'Ad and Thamud as well as the stories about Midyan and Pharaoh that recur throughout the Book. Their goal then was to divert the attention of the people—from the stories of the Quran—by providing them with similar alternatives.

One of them(1) (An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith) had travelled to Persia and returned with a collection of entertaining stories about Rustum and the Persian rulers and kings of Himiar, These were stories that he purchased and returned with, and he arranged a special gathering for telling them. People would assemble to hear him relate the stories he had collected. Through these stories, he would divert the attention of the people from the truth that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would unceasingly preach. In addressing the circumstances that occurred that lead to the revelation of this verse, a separate opinion offers that one of them hired a chanteuse to sing bawdy and ribald songs.

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(1) *The story of the accursed Nadr ibn Al-Harith*

The meaning of '…a mere play of words …' (*Luqman:* 6) is what scholars refer to as 'that which distracts from something that Allah has made a requirement'. Interestingly enough, even if something is not essentially a distraction in itself, it could still be considered *lahw*. For instance, some albeit purposeful work—perhaps within manufacturing, farming, etc.—can be considered forms of *lahw* if they prevent an individual from praying or performing some other task which Allah has made an obligation. Yet, there are some actions which are considered *lahw* in themselves, even if they do not distract you from your worship, such as singing.

Much has been written by the scholars of Islam about this particular topic, especially after singing began to be accompanied by music, instruments and obscene dances and gestures. The legal scholars of the past have issued their verdicts about this issue. However, contemporary legal scholars, those who want to create allowances within the issue, take only a small portion of what was written by past authorities and implement it in a way that these authorities never intended.

Yes, our scholars have permitted singing to create festive environments during weddings and feasts. In this, they relied on the statement the Prophet made to Abu Bakr As-Siddiq when the latter saw two slave-girls singing in the home of the Prophet and admonished them. He said, ‘One of the instruments of Satan in the house of the Messenger of Allah?’ The Prophet responded, 'Let them do, Abu Bakr. These are the days of celebration!'(1)

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(1) *This is a Hadith whose authenticity is agreed upon. Al-Bukhari narrated it in his Sahih (987). Muslim also narrated it in his Sahih (892) in the chapter of the two occasions of=*

They have also permitted the use of short songs which are used to lift up the spirits of troops when engaged in fighting. Likewise, they permitted the songs that are sung by labourers to provide themselves with comfort and rest, enabling them to forget the hardship of their work. Also, in this regard, they have allowed a woman to sing lullabies to her child as she puts him to sleep.

The songs that are used by cameleers in order to increase the speed of the camel's gait also fall within this category. We certainly cannot overlook the statement of the Prophet in which he said to Anjasha,(1) 'Be gentle. You are carrying fine porcelain!'(2) The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* compared women, on account of their delicateness and fragility, to fine porcelain. If a camel moved about hastily by his singing, with the women, it would rattle the howdah and disturb them.

Therefore, in essence we can find no objection to every lyrical arrangement which is applied towards a noble end. As for those arrangements which stir the natural instincts of the human being, they are forbidden. Remember, here we are discussing songs solely made up of words. Indeed, the Creator *Glorified is He* knows the nature of the instincts that are a part of human beings. In fact, this is why they have been termed instincts *ghariza*; they represent responses

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= *celebration. The Hadith was narrated on the authority of 'A'isha. Within the narration that Muslim has narrated the wording states that they were 'singing the song that was sung by the Ansar the day the troops were dispatched'. That is to say that they were singing a song about bravery, war, skill in combat and other things which do not contain corruptive influences, as An-Nawawi explained in Sharh Muslim. The same can be derived from the version of the Hadith that asserts, 'They were not professional chanteuses.' An- Nawawi explains this by mentioning, 'This means that they were not from a troop of singers who sang the standard fare which consisted of things that stir emotions and ardour that which excites people to commit indecency, rhapsodizing about lost love and whatever else that moves the souls of men and women.'*

(1) *Baladhari mentions that Anjasha was an Ethiopian who also went by the name Abu Mariya. He had a melodious voice and would sing cameleer tunes beautifully. [Al-Isaba Fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba 1/68 entry no.259]*

(2) *This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6202) and likewise by Muslim in his Sahih (2323). The Hadith was narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik who said, 'Umm Sulaym was with the women of the Prophet while one of the cameleers was carrying them in a howdah, when the Prophet cried out, "Yes, Anjasha! Move gently, you are carrying fine porcelain!"'*

that take place within you without any outer effect. Instincts possess an irresistible power, that is to say, ‘When they come knocking, you will answer the door.’ If you are moved by an instinctual response, you could very well take part in something the outcome of which is less than praiseworthy.

Previously, we explained that perception is expressed within a human being on three successive levels: Initially, you perceive with your senses. Next, as a result of that initial perception, there is an emotional response that takes place within the soul. Finally, there is the drive that translates this emotional response into action.

Truly, it is from Allah’s vast Grace that the Divine Law only confines one level of this entire process, namely the last stage, which is the action that results from the emotional response that takes place within the soul. The Divine Law states: 'Stop! Do not extend your hand toward that which does not belong to you.' To make this process clearer, earlier, we gave the analogy of a rose that you observe in a garden. In our scenario, we mentioned that you are pleased by the sight of the rose and feel attracted to it because of its fragrant scent. In the end, your intrigue becomes desire, and you adore the rose. As far as the Divine Law is concerned, this is fine. Yet, if you extend your hand in an effort to pick the flower, the Lawgiver tells you, 'Stop! It is not your right to pick the flower!'

Therefore, we can conclude that the Wise Lawgiver does not issue Divine Rulings in this process at the level of perception nor at the level of emotional response. The only exception to this rule is when a man looks at a woman who is not lawfully wedded to him; this is an occasion in which the levels of perception, emotional response, and action cannot be separated, for they all become one thing. Nonetheless, we want to address the question of why this is so.

Many have offered that a matter is never settled at a pleasing glance. The pleasing glance creates a special sensation within you. That sensation will keep affecting you until you will be left with no choice but act on it. In this sense, it is a Mercy from Allah on you that He issued a Divine Law in this matter from the beginning, to prevent you from even doing so much as looking intently at a member of the opposite sex. Indeed, if you look intently, you may be affected emotionally, and if your emotions are affected, you will desire to act according to their dictates. Once this is done, one of two things will certainly become your lot: you will follow up the desire with action and thereby commit a sin that, in addition to personal degradation and degrading others, or you will be forced to restrain yourself (from acting), thereby placing yourself under undue emotional strain. Your Lord wants to not only protect you from sin but also from emotional pain; therefore, it is much safer for you to simply lower your gaze.

As this is the case, do not flatly and summarily say singing is permissible, rather look at the content of what is being sung; if it encourages praiseworthy feelings, it is permissible. On the other hand, if it stirs the sensual instincts, it is impermissible and is considered a type of falsehood. This would definitely apply to the genre of song in which past loves are recounted, their attractiveness and charms remembered. In fact, this is impermissible even if it is being expressed via a medium other than song. Also, if one adds musical accompaniment, melodies, and any indecent actions, the foulness of what he is doing only increases, and his sin becomes compounded.

As for what we hear today that they refer to as singing, it nearly always is accompanied by inappropriate movements, dances, depravity and loud clamorous music, and there is no doubt that it is impermissible.

As a matter of fact, anything that removes a human being from a state of thoughtfulness and dignity, i.e. it makes him disregardful of the demands of polished character, is impermissible. Another thing is that within the context we are discussing, singing is a function of the voice; if it transgresses to include other parts of the body like hands, legs, eyes, waist, etc. to excite and entertain, such behaviour is completely impermissible.

A sincere believer who is in control of himself should never say, 'Well, musicians impose such songs upon us.' This is absolutely not true. A believer has insight by which he is guided; he is able to distinguish between right and wrong and between truth and falsehood. You should be able to judge what you see and hear and even what your family sees and hears. Metaphorically speaking, the control levers are in your hands; if you want, you can choose to listen, and if you want, you can turn off the machine. This idea of there being an uncontrollable force exerted upon you does not justify your actions. No one is capable of forcing you to hear or see what you do not want.

During the month of *Ramadan*, for instance, we fast during the days and stand in prayer at night; it is a month of worship. As such, it is only right that we honour it appropriately by preserving not only the heightened respect that we have for it but also taking advantage of the elevated spiritual states that the month gives us the opportunity to attain. Nevertheless, there are still certain people who attempt to present us with different types of entertainment which run counter to the nature of fasting. If you ask these people (about what they are doing), they will respond, 'People have different tastes and temperaments. We are just providing them with what they like!'

However, a believer, on the other hand, is the caretaker of his own soul and in control of that which affects it. Hence, there is absolutely no reason to blame anyone else. The caretaking of your own soul is something which Allah has made your responsibility, and it is your duty to uphold it. If you succeed in this, you place in your own hands ninety-five percent of the things which affect your life; others only decide things in the remaining five percent.

Then again, that which is permissible within singing is conditioned by the idea that it does not become a habit. What this means is that it does not become a consistent practice or the most important element of a person's life. This explains the meaning of the Prophet's statement: 'Delight your heart, but only from time to time.'(1)

These singers and chanteuses who, by dancing and performing all sorts of movements, add to the simple concept of singing a tune that is not inherently a part of it, and they have no idea that they are exciting the carnal instincts. This disproportionately affects young people who are not able to get married; these singers are lighting the fuse to some people's deepest feelings and jealousy. By doing so, they expose them to many harms.

Therefore, the matter is clear; we do not need to engage in a philosophical discourse in order to know the ruling on music or singing. Anything which excites carnal passions and removes one from a state of thoughtfulness, moderation, and dignity is impermissible, and this represents the bottom line. It makes no difference whether it is only lyrics with no musical accompaniment, musical arrangement without lyrics or a musical arrangement which is accompanied by other things (that conform to the above description) that have nothing to do with singing.

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(1) *Cited by Al-'Ajiluni in Kashf Al-khafa' (1/524); he attributed it to Daylimi and Abu Na'im and Qada'i on the authority of Anas (which connects the chain to the Prophet). He also mentioned that the Hadith that appears in Muslim as well as other Hadiths which reads: 'O Hanzhala, from time to time!' This is a reference to the same event. The latter Hadith was narrated on the authority of Hanzhala Al-Asyadi and narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2750).*

Yet, the matter we still need to address is why have they burdened themselves and purchased a mere play of words? The reason is clear, as Allah says: '…so as to lead [those] without knowledge astray from the Path of Allah…' (*Luqman:* 6).

Someone who purchases meaningless entertainment to amuse himself limits his misguidance to himself. He is in a different category than someone who intends not only to follow a way of misguidance himself but also lead others down the same path. The latter of the two carries the burden of his misguidance and the misguidance of those who follow him down that path.

Allah's phrase, '…a mere play of words …' is not limited to singing or speech in general. It also encompasses action. In fact, it might apply to action even more than speech. Allah's phrase, '…without knowledge…', indicates that they have not even a clue about anything, not even the basics of buying and selling. A true merchant is he who purchases the commodity which renders a benefit greater than the price he paid for it. These people, on the other hand, have purchased misguidance, which does not render any benefit. This explains why the True Lord *the Most High* says: '…and neither has their bargain brought them gain …' (*al-Baqara:* 16).

The path (*As-sabil*) is the route which leads to good through the most direct way. This is the straight path that Allah is referring to when He mentions: 'Guide us to the straightway' (*al-Fatiha:* 6); indeed, this is even supported by what we learn in engineering: the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

Consider Allah's saying: '…and turn it in to ridicule…'. Although in Arabic, originally the word which corresponds with 'it' in the translation is a feminine pronoun, this actually refers to the Path (*sabil*) of Allah. The word *sabil* can be masculine or feminine; if it is a reference to the word 'way' *tariq*, it becomes masculine, such as in Allah's statement: '…and though they may see the Path of rectitude, they do not choose to follow it…' (*al-A'raf:* 146). If, however, the word occurs with the meaning of ‘direction’ (*shir’a*), it becomes feminine such as in the statement of Allah: 'Say [O, Prophet]: "This is my way, resting upon conscious insight accessible to reason …"' (*Yusuf:* 108). This is pointing out that those who purchase misguidance for the purpose of misleading people do not simply content themselves with that. Absolutely not, they stoop even lower and begin to ridicule the righteous. They make a practice out of mocking the people of the straight path and then have the utter audacity to consider those upon it as unintelligent.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us the end of all this: '…for such there is shameful suffering in store.' (*Luqman:* 6) The people of misguidance are those who have been addressed by this verse, and the description of the punishment as ‘shameful’ here indicates that punishment is not necessarily shameful; in other words, there is a type of punishment which is not shameful. In fact, some punishment may even be thought of as honour to the one upon whom it falls. Take for instance a man who chastises his son in order to teach him; he is not disciplining him in order to inflict pain or cause him shame; the reverse is quite true, he only hopes that his son will not commit the same mistake again. In this respect, a poet has said: Displaying harshness for the sake of rectifying is a sign of a judicious leader. At times, he even behaves harshly towards the one with whom he normally is compassionate.

Indeed, there are some forms of chastisement which are reminders and some forms which are purification, while there are some forms which indicate the high future expectations that are held for the one being punished. This type of punishment is referred to as a penalty. In fact, it has so little in common with punishment—as people generally conceive of it—that they can scarcely be referred to with the same name.

In this respect, Az-Zamakhshari(1) said, to imagine a scenario in which there is a king and his servant. The servant does something wrong to his master. In turn, the king commands that the servant be arrested and punished for his misdeeds. As commanded, the forces responsible for keeping order seize the servant and punish him, but they refrain from doing so severely, for they are aware that he will be reinstated into the service of his master. In this scenario, the punishment inflicted on the servant is strictly in accordance with the misdeeds that he committed; it is not intended to be shameful for him. Conversely, if it were said, ‘Take this servant and remove him from service or dismiss him’, it would imply that he would never be returning. This would obviously cause humiliation and pain for him.

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(1) *He is Jarallah Abu Al-Qasim Mahmud ibn 'Umar Az-Zamakhshari (d. 538 A.H.), the author of Tafsir Al-kashhaf 'an Haqa’iq ghawamid At-Tanzil wa 'iyun Al-Aqawil Fi Wujuh At-Ta’wil, one of the works of Quranic exegesis that was authored by a person of the Mu'atazilite rite; by Mu'atazilite we are referring to those held the famous stance of ‘the space in between the two spaces’ in reference to those who commit major sins: They did not consider such persons believers nor disbelievers. They also held the position that=*

In this way, what we refer to as punishment in a generic sense can actually serve as a means of honouring (by rectifying) and purifying someone for whom you have great concern. On the other hand, a humiliating and shameful punishment is only directed towards he whom you entertain no hope of his being rectified or returning on the course of right action. To be succinct, the presence of the shameful or humiliating within a form of punishment is an indication that its effects are intended to last eternally.

Next, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَٰتُنَا وَلَّىٰ مُسْتَكْبِرًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَسْمَعْهَا
كَأَنَّ فِىٓ أُذُنَيْهِ وَقْرًا ۖ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٧﴾

When Our verses are recited to him, he turns away disdainfully as if he had not heard them, as if there were heaviness in his ears. Tell him that there will be a painful torment! [7] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 7)

'For whenever our messages are conveyed to such a one, he turns away in his arrogance…' Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioning this after stating: 'But amongst men there is many a one that prefers a mere play with words [to Divine Guidance], so as to lead [those] without knowledge astray from the Path of Allah…' (*Luqman:* 6). All in all, we emerge with a clear picture of the

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= *is was something tantamount to a duty for Allah to admit believers into Paradise and disbelievers into the fire of Hell. They also gained notoriety for nullifying the attributes of Allah. These represent the major issues in which they differed with Ahl As-Sunna.*

Prophet’s enthusiasm in conveying the message with which he had been sent; even amongst those whom he knew that they were misguided or, perhaps even more, sought to misguide others.

Turning to the word *walla* (he turns away), we can approximate its meaning as one who insolently turned his back. In Arabic, the expression is originally ‘he turned his shoulders'. The tone of the entire statement is consistent with the way we would say, ‘He arrogantly turned his back.’ The portion of the verse which reads: '…he turns away in his arrogance…' (*Luqman:* 7), creates the effect of someone flagrantly rejecting that which he is being called to. So you (the individual being addressed in the verse) are being called unto the truth, and you swell with pride. If the source of your pride is something intrinsic to your own being, why did you need to resort to purchasing falsehood? How can you be too full of pride to accept the truth while you are in need of falsehood?

How can you behave so arrogantly while you do not even possess the means of substantiating your arrogance? It is acknowledged that the type of arrogance which prevents one from accepting something is usually an outcome of the fact that he is already in possession of something superior to that which is being offered. How can you arrogantly reject, then, the guidance that you are being offered while you do not even possess something inferior to it and not to mention something superior to it?

In essence, arrogance is misdirected. The arrogant individual is in a state of heedlessness of his Lord. Indeed, when he is sizing himself up, he is comparing himself to other people. If this forms the basis of his comparison, he might be driven to arrogance because he has more of the things which enhance life than do other people. His fallacy is being heedless of Allah: If the Magnificence of Allah and His (well-deserved) Pride are brought into the picture, the same individual would feel ashamed to behave arrogantly. Pride is one of the great attributes of majesty which is unsuitable to characterise anyone besides Allah. If truth be told, the Pride of Allah contains honour for us; it protects us from ever becoming slaves to other than Allah.

This would explain the popular adage, ‘The one who has no master should take someone as a master.' How exactly this conveys the following point: if I am in the companionship of someone of great strength, people will fear me, and I will have thus gained protection through my association. This can also be applied to the affair of a sincere believer: He gains protection through the Pride of his Lord. Indeed, Allah is Exalted above all creation. As such, all people are equal in His regard; there is no one who is capable of proudly raising his head before the True Lord.

This establishes a general principle: The Pride of Allah *Glorified is He* is for our benefit.

The arrogant individual that we have been discussing in the context of the verse under discussion has unjustifiably deemed himself above listening to Allah's sayings: '…as though there were deafness in his ears …' (*Luqman:* 7). This is saying that he fails to pay heed to the Quran as though he were afflicted with deafness or some other condition that would prevent him from hearing: '…Give him, then, the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come].' According to what we know, tidings are only given concerning things which promise future good. When you assure your child of success before the test results are released, you are giving him a tiding.

As for giving a 'tiding' that assures an impending doom, it is being employed in the verse's scenario by way of mockery and derision. In context, it is similar to how you would say to a negligent student: I would like to give you the good news of your failure this year. By beginning with, 'I would like to give you the good news', it is almost as if you are surprising him and quickly taking him from elation to dejection when you conclude, 'of your failure this year'. This is perhaps intended to be injurious to his feelings; however, it is an instance of injuring feelings for the purpose of preventing the injury that comes from Divine Punishment. So, returning to the analogy of the negligent student that we mentioned earlier, when you say to him, 'I would like to give you the good news', naturally he expects to hear something pleasing and will probably assume that he has passed. Yet, when you proceed to tell him what actually happened, the pain sets in. A poet has expressed what this emotional blow feels like in his words:

It is like when the clouds gather during a day of intense thirst, but when the people recognise them, they disperse and clear skies appear.

Another poet has offered the following verse:

What I got from Laila that morning was like someone trying to grasp water but being betrayed by the spaces between his fingers.

This explains why they say that there is nothing harder on the soul than an auspicious beginning that leads to a painful ending. To illustrate this, previously, we gave the analogy of a prisoner who, in his need for water, is in dire straits. In this extreme fit of thirst, he asks a prison guard to bring him a cup of water. His spirits begin to rise and he looks forward to quenching his thirst, for indeed, he regards the guard as a sensible, good-natured fellow. After the guard brings the cup, he gives it to the prisoner who promptly raises it to his mouth to take that much sought after drink, and then the guard abruptly hits his hand, spilling the water all over the floor.

There can be no doubt that this would be more painful and harder on the prisoner. If the guard would have simply denied his request to bring him a cup of water from the very beginning, it would have been less painful. This entire process is referred to as ‘despair after hope'. He starts with an enticing beginning but ends with a painful ending. We certainly seek refuge with Allah from being constrained after having been at ease.

Next, the True Lord *the Most High* mentions the end result of leading others astray from His Path, turning away from His verses and displaying arrogance: '…Give him, then, the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come].' (*Luqman:* 7). On one occasion their punishment was described as humiliating and on another it was described as grievous.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَهُمۡ جَنَّٰتُ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ٨

But for those who believe and do righteous deeds, there will be Gardens of bliss [8] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 8)

Those who believe and perform acts of righteousness are being mentioned as the opposite of those who would purchase a ‘mere play of words’ for the purpose of leading people astray from the Path of Allah. This feature of introducing items and then presenting their opposing elements is one of the distinct qualities of the Quran. Indeed, mentioning something alongside its opposite helps to clarify its meaning. By this use of contrast, you emerge with a clearer picture about what is actually being represented in the description.

For an example of this method, look at the saying of Allah: 'Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14). This is a good example of gathering opposites; first, Allah will delight a believer with comforts. Next, a believer will be further delighted to find his enemies from amongst disbelievers, those who attempted to persecute, torture and punish him, in the fire of hell.

Earlier, we said that when Allah *the Exalted* speaks about faith, He always links it to doing righteous deeds: '…those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds…' (*Luqman:* 8). Faith is the belief in things which are unseen; nonetheless, what is the value of faith if you fail to act according to its demands?

We find the same thing in the chapter of *al-'Asr*: 'Consider the flight of time. Verily, man is bound to lose himself unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works …' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3). This clearly indicates that the value of having faith is acting according to its demands. If not, what then, can possibly be the use of just believing in a lot of things but failing to give any meaningful expression to what you believe? For this reason, if you have made yourself content with the type of faith that is simply a word that is mentioned but goes unaccompanied by action, you have, in actual effect, made faith evidence against you, not for you.

As for the meaning of the following, '…and do righteous deeds …', we find that it refers to good deeds. In fact, the True Lord *the Most High* created the entire universe in a state of uprightness. When you encounter something upright within creation, your task is increasing it in the qualities that make it upright. If you are incapable of this enhancement, or at least keep its uprightness, then leave it alone and do not corrupt it.

Furthermore, Allah mentions the reward of faith and the performance of righteous deeds: '…gardens of bliss'. According to the verse, they are gardens—not a single garden—that they will receive in exchange for their faith and righteous deeds. Additionally, these gardens that have been designated for their comfort have been described as blissful. This description implies that none of what they offer will pass you by, nor will you pass them by.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۖ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقّٗاۚ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ٩

Where they will stay: that is God's true promise, and He is the Almighty, the All-Wise [9] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 9)

When reflecting upon these verses, we are given a glimpse of the Mercy of Allah when dealing with His servants—even a disbeliever who is not just simply misguided but also exerting a corruptive influence on others. In spite of this, Allah's Mercy extends to him; He even does so when dealing with their punishment. Have you not observed that, although Allah referred to their punishment as *muhin (*shameful) and *alim* (grievous), He has not mentioned eternity in connection with their punishments in the way that He has mentioned it in connection with the comforts of paradise? Another aspect of Allah's Mercy becomes apparent as we observe that the punishment has been described as singular, while paradise, on the other hand, has been described as consisting of gardens, which indicates plurality. Then, Allah informs us that this represents: '…Allah's true promise …'

A promise is given for good fortune that will reach you in the future. Here, we would like to point out that a human being can make a promise and actually be preparing to fulfil it, but still fail to do because he does not have the final say about all the factors that determine whether or not he can fulfil the promise. Alternatively, if a promise is given by Allah, its fulfilment is guaranteed. Indeed, unlike a human being, all of the factors involved in fulfilling the promise are in the hands of Allah: No one can prevent him from bringing about what He wants. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has no partner; this is even acknowledged by the individual who belittles someone by saying, 'The definitive proof that Allah is One is the fact that He created you! For had there been a co-sharer in His rank and divinity, he would have said, "There is certainly no good reason for You to create the likes of this creation!"'

Accordingly, the True Lord *the Most High* instructs us to conclude all of our promises by stating, 'If Allah so wills'. In this way, we are able to preserve our integrity before the people in case that we are unable to fulfil the promise. This protects us from people accusing us of being dishonest or untrustworthy. I always have a disclaimer of sorts; I can say: ‘I wanted to (fulfil) my promise, but Allah wanted something else.’ With this disclaimer, you effectively place the matter outside the realm of human control and inside the domain of the Will of Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He*…

So with the Divine prerogative, Allah is essentially protecting human beings from the tongues of others: Thus, if you charge me with some responsibility, and I am unable to fulfil it, you can be assured that matter might have been decreed by Allah. Yet, its time has not come. You must acquaint yourself with the fact that a matter does not take place on the earth until it has first been decreed in the heavens. Do not direct your anger at people nor hold it (the failure to fulfil commitments despite after diligence and effort) against them. Actions do not take place according to the will of humans; on the contrary, all things occur according to the Will of Allah.

In light of this, when you strive to aid your brother in Islam and one of his needs winds up being fulfilled as a direct result of your involvement, you, as a true believer in the role of Allah‘s Divine Predestination (*Al-qadr*), should display good manners with Him by reminding your brother: Your need was fulfilled with me not because of me! That is to say that it was Allah’s Will to fulfil your need, and thus He made me able to do it. In the same sense, a physician who is a true believer should always say, 'The cure is given to me. It does not come from me.'

If people truly understood this issue of Divine Predestination, it would help them to relax. When you see an earnest, hard-working individual demoted and devalued, while a hypocritical sycophant is gaining access to the halls of power and ascending the ranks, do not get upset. Even if you do not have respect for the individual on account of his character, you must respect the fact that it is Allah’s Will that he occupies that position.

The affairs that take place within the creation of Allah do not happen in a mechanistic way. Quite the reverse is true, for at every stage the predestination of Allah is effective; Allah raises whomever He wants and debases whomever He wants. Indeed, all of His actions are defined by an overriding wisdom;

every single issue is for a purpose. If this were not so, we would be forced to adopt the position of philosophers who proclaimed that Allah has created the universal issues and then left them to people to manipulate and control!

Allah *the Almighty* has never left these issues. This is evidenced by the saying of Allah: 'Allah's alone in the dominion over the heavens and earth. He creates whatever He wills. He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills, or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills] and causes to be barren whomever He wills…[50]' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50).

After considering this verse, it is not correct for anyone to say, 'Why could so-and-so not father a child, or why could so-and-so not conceive a child?' Indeed, these cases are determined by the Will of Allah. If an individual who is prevented from producing children were to respect the predestination of Allah, in that being decreed his lot, Allah would make all the children such that an individual sees as if they were his own. As long as Allah says '…He bestows…' you, it indicates that in any case your situation was given to you by Him. No one has any say whatsoever concerning males, females, sterility, infertility, etc. Therefore, how can you accept the bestowal of Allah if you are given males, but you fail to accept it if you are given females or are even infertile?

We have already discussed the practice of burying female offspring that was prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. Indeed, a female child would not grow up to ride horses, carry weapons, defend her family, etc. With the dawn of Islam, this practice was effectively stopped, and women were accorded a position of respect. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Islam raised the status of women, there still remains a popular tendency to regard the birth of male children as more of a cause for celebration than the birth of female children.

At present, there is a conflict raging among those who purport to represent the interest of men and those who claim to do so for women. In truth, Islam has nothing to do with this conflict. In Islam the relationship of men and women is not adversarial, but complementary. It is very strange to see some women display reverse-sexism towards men but yet act completely hysterical if they fail to give birth to a male child! Despite the nature of their protest, this seems to be proof that they regard males as superior to females.

It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is teaching us that he who respects the predestination of Him in respect to giving birth to girls, He offers him, 'You have shown due respect for my predestination, so I will grant you all that I have predestined.' Subsequently, he is blessed with the birth of sons, or Allah bestows his daughters husbands who become even more dutiful and obedient to him than his own children.

Additionally, did you not observe that Allah actually mentioned female children before mentioning male children (when speaking of His bestowal); He says: '…He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills…' (*ash-Shura:* 49). Why is this? The reason is that Allah knows the love that the people have for male children: 'for whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger, avoiding all people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received' (*an-Nahl:* 58-59).

As for the saying of Allah, '…for He alone is Almighty, truly Wise.' (*Luqman:* 9), Allah's Might implies that He cannot be overtaken nor does He consult anyone before He acts. The second part of the statement which makes reference to Allah's Wisdom indicates that He knows what He is promising very well, and He knows that He can fulfil the promise that He has made.

Next, the verses within Allah's Book turn towards one of the evidences which substantiate man's natural inclination toward faith in the existence of Allah:

خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ بِغَيۡرِ عَمَدٖ تَرَوۡنَهَاۖ وَأَلۡقَىٰ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ رَوَٰسِيَ أَن تَمِيدَ بِكُمۡ وَبَثَّ
فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ دَآبَّةٖۚ وَأَنزَلۡنَا مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءٗ فَأَنۢبَتۡنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ زَوۡجٖ كَرِيمٍ ١٠

He created the heavens without any visible support, and He placed firm mountains on the earth — in case it should shake under you — and He spread all kinds of animals around it. We sent down water from the sky, with which We made every kind of good plant grow on earth [10] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 10)

First, the True Lord *the Most High* mentions a sign that exists with creation, a sign that not a single disbeliever or even an atheist would dare lay claim to.

Indeed, this is a sign which is clearly visible and observable. When Allah clearly states, 'I am the Creator of the heavens and earth', no one objected to this assertion. By that, we are referring to someone who will come and lay a counter claim to Allah’s by saying, 'No, on the contrary, I am the creator of the heavens and earth.'

Previously, we mentioned that any case that only has one claimant must be submitted to that claimant on account of the fact that there is no one raising a counter claim. Proceeding on the basis of this sound logical principle, the True Lord, Allah is undoubtedly the Creator (of the heavens and the earth), and there is nothing else that needs to be said about this issue. If there is another creator besides Him, then where is he? Is he aware that someone else has ‘taken’ the creation from him? What is preventing him from speaking on his own behalf and upholding his right (to be recognised as the Creator)? Or is he unaware of that? If he does not possess any of the aforementioned knowledge, how can he legitimately be considered an ‘Allah’? Likewise, he is asleep or unaware of the affairs of His creation. In either scenario, such an entity is not suitable to be deemed Allah.

This explains why Allah has mentioned: 'Allah [Himself] proffers evidence …that there is no deity save Him …' (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). This is an instance in which Allah is testifying to the singularity of His own essence. Again, in the light of the fact that no one has come forward to raise an objection, He must be considered true to His claim until someone comes along and claims otherwise.

Earlier in this work, we attempted to give an analogy to elucidate the point we are discussing, and always, even the noblest analogy does not approach Allah’s unreachable Glory. We mentioned a group of some sort that gathers in the home of one of its members. When the meeting ends and the people have dispersed, the owner of the house finds a billfold full of money that he cannot link to any specific member of the group. Subsequently, he calls the people who attended the meeting at his house and asks them about it one by one, but none of them claims the wallet. At last one of them knocks on the door and says, 'By Allah, I seemed to have forgotten my wallet here.' At this point, there can be no doubt that the wallet belongs to him and that he is its actual owner: To be sure, no one else came forward to claim the wallet.

Establishing this principle, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Say: "If there were–as some people assert–[other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him Who is enthroned on His Almightiness."' (*al-Isra':* 42) This is asserting that they would have gone to seek out the One Who had taken the creation and humanity from their charge, the One Who had taken the right to be worshipped as Allah from them.

If they offer that it is true that above us is the High Allah, nonetheless, we are still demigods. Allah *the Almighty* rebuts this fatuous claim by stating: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves, and neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

Turning our attention to the portion of Allah's statement which reads as follows, '…without any supports you can see…' (*Luqman:* 10), we find that indeed, if you explored every angle of the earth, from north to south and east to west, you would find the canopy of the sky covering you at every point. Yet, despite the expansiveness of the sky, you do not find any supports or pillars holding it up. The wording that appears in the verse, '…you can see…', can support two meanings: either the sky does not have any supports (as we can see) or it does have supports, but its supports are imperceptible to us. The meaning of '…without any supports you can see …' is that we do not see the supports. In accordance with the second meaning, the sky does actually have supports. However, we are unable to perceive them or take measure of them.

If you were to pose the following question: What are these supports that we are unable to perceive? Some would indicate gravity (as the invisible support being referred to within the verse). This is not right; the True Lord has ended this issue by saying: '…and [it is He Who] holds the celestial bodies, [in their orbits], so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His leave …' (*al-Hajj:* 65).

In the light of this, the only sensible thing left for us to do is to state that the firmament is being upheld by the Power of Allah. Nonetheless, in order that we do not spend time debating about how Allah performs this task, He has given us a living example of the same phenomenon which is the bird as it glides through the sky, Allah *the Exalted* is upholding it: 'Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never considered the birds, enabled [by Allah] to fly in mid-air, with none but Allah holding them aloft …' (*al-An'am:* 79).

In a separate place, the True Lord mentions the following: 'Verily, it is Allah [alone] Who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate…' (*Fatir:* 41). This makes it sufficiently clear that Allah *the Almighty* is upholding them according to law; yet, it is a law that we are unable to perceive.

Linguistically, (*As-sama')* the sky refers to everything that covers you from above. The clouds are included within this definition despite the fact that they seem closer than the sky when you observe them. To be sure, Allah mentioned the word *As-sama'* in the verse: '…And we send down water from the skies …' (*Luqman:* 10). In a literal sense, water descends from the clouds not from the skies which tower above them. The major difference between the two is that clouds seem restricted to certain places, which means that you see them in some places and notice their absence in others; the sky, on the other hand, represents one consistent mass without a single break or fissure anywhere. When the True Lord *the Most High* speaks of the earth and the skies, He explicitly says that the skies are seven in number, yet He never explicitly says that the 'earths' are also seven in number. Rather, He says: '... and like them, of the earth …' (*at-Talaq:* 12).

This indicates that the earth and skies are of like number. If the sky, then, is everything which covers you from above, the earth must be regarded as everything that is situated below you. Then again, the question persists: Where are these seven earths?

To be certain, the Quran has alluded to the fact that the skies are seven in number. Additionally, it has informed us that the Prophet passed through all of them during the Ascension (*Al-mi'raj*). In fact, upon returning, the Prophet could readily inform people of what each sky contained. As long as the sky is considered all that covers creation (in any particular realm) from above and earth is considered all that is situated below them; all of creation in the first sky regards the second sky as that which covers them from above, while they regard the first sky (our sky) as being below them or equivalent to their ground: This relationship continues as you move through the seven skies.

Next, Allah says: '... and has placed firm mountains upon the earth…' (*Luqman:* 10). This is a reference to firm mountain ranges that are deeply embedded beneath the earth's surface; they are rooted deeply enough to stabilise the earth. As a matter of fact, the purpose of the creation of mountains was clearly expressed in the verse: '…lest it sway with you…' (*Luqman:* 10); what this means is lest it tilts and trembles while you are upon it. Nevertheless, if the earth were actually stable, as it does seem to have been created, why would it need something to stabilise it?

Accordingly, this verse stated that the earth is moving and that the mountains were created to stabilise and regulate its movement. This verse also indicated the concept of the earth's rotation. We can find the same concept asserted in another verse in which Allah says: 'And you see the mountains, assuming them to be firm, when they are travelling as clouds passing away' (*an-Naml:* 88).

This establishes the concept that the mountains have a movement that is inextricably linked to the earth's movement. Nevertheless, a person may be tempted to ask, 'Why do we not perceive the movement of mountains?' The answer is that an observer moving at a certain speed amongst his immediate surroundings will be unable to discern the speed of the surroundings.

For instance, if a mosque we are sitting inside was built on a slowly rotating platform, we would not be able to sense its constant subtle rotation as we are sitting inside. This is because the objects inside the mosque are stable and unchanging as we have the same spatial formations relative to each other. Hence, we will not be able to sense the rotation of the entire mosque unless we open a window and notice the scenery outside it shifting with its rotation.

Accordingly, it is not possible for people dwelling upon the earth to feel its movement since they are moving at the same speed with it. Since the mountains are described in one verse as pegs or dowels embedded in the earth and are then described in another verse as cloud-like travellers, these verses are an indication to the earth's movement

Allah *Glorified is He* compared the movement of the mountains to the movement of the clouds. We know that clouds do not move on their own, but their movement is the result of moving winds. Similarly, we can conclude that mountains are not moving on their own, but their movement is an extension of the earth's movement.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* mentioned another reason for the creation of mountains: '…and has caused all manners of living beings to multiply thereon.' (*Luqman:* 10) We have previously mentioned that mountains are abundant storehouses of Divine provisions that nourish living beings. We highlighted that the top layers of mountainous soil is continuously eroding due to prolonged exposure to climate changes. Rainwater descending upon this soil carries debris into river valleys. This increases the fertility of riverbanks, year after year. Furthermore, water flows down the mountains to form rivulets and river basins that are potential sources of water during times of need.

Allah's Divine Wisdom ordained that mountains become firm and unyielding. If mountains were not such solid, persistent structures, they would gradually become eroded by rainwater and climate changes over the years. If this had occurred, river valleys would be deprived from the benefit of organic silt that annually descends from mountaintops. This explains Allah's Words: '…and nothing do We bestow except in accordance with a measure well-defined' (*al-Hijr:* 21). Therefore, fertile lands increase due to these annual mountainous silt deposits.

In elucidating this point, it would serve us to look at Allah's saying: 'Say, "Would you indeed deny Him Who has created the earth in two periods? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?" For He (it is who) placed firm mountains on it (the earth) (towering) above its surface, and bestowed (so many) blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence' (*Fussilat:* 9-10). Allah *Glorified is He* has made the mountains anchored so that the earth does not convulse and shake while we are residing on it. Additionally, He made them solid since they are abundant storehouses that play a pivotal role in providing vegetation that nourishes our existence.

Another expression of the immeasurable Mercy of Allah upon human beings is that He has placed nutrient stores inside our bodies, which can sustain our survival in times of need. If a human being is prohibited from food and drink, he will begin to derive nutrition from his own body's stores. First, the body will utilise fatty tissue. Then, it will take nutrition from flesh and bones. Thus, even bones can serve as a source of sustenance for a starving body. Indeed, this understanding helps us to comprehend the statement of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* when he said, 'Feeble have my bones become' (*Maryam:* 4). This indicates that he had reached a terminal stage in his life's nourishment.

This fact leads us to observe another form of Allah's Mercy upon His creation. If food a body eats surpasses its daily requirements of satiety, strength, and energy, this excess sustenance is not completely discarded. Indeed, it can still be utilised to build stores of nutrition to prepare for events of deprivation. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* has given human beings the ability to survive without food for more than a month. As for water, one can survive without it for a period ranging from three to ten days. This period depends upon other factors, such as the amount of food and water stored in the body at the beginning of its starvation.

Conversely, people can only survive without air for a very short amount of time. Nonetheless, even this reveals Divine Mercy and Wisdom within creation as Allah *the Exalted* has not allowed air to be owned by anyone! If your enemy owned your air, you would most likely die before your enemy's pleasure!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and has caused all manners of living beings to multiply thereon.' (*Luqman:* 10) The Arabic verb *bath-tha* means to spread something or allow it to multiply or propagate. The word *daaba* (all forms of living beings) corresponds with the Arabic word *dabeeb* which refers to the sonorous crawling or stepping of living beings when they move upon the ground. In a generic sense, every created being that uses the ground to get from one place to another can be said to crawl. This means that every living thing has a way of transporting itself. We can hear the movement or 'crawling' of larger animals, while we lack the ability to hear the crawling of smaller creatures, like ants, for example. Thus, even though ants do make sounds as they step upon the ground, these sounds need a higher and more intensive form of listening.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…all manners of living beings' (*Luqman:* 10). Therefore, this statement encompassed all created beings that move and step about. In other words, it includes everything that could legitimately be called an animate living being, ranging from the microscopic creatures to the largest animals roaming the planet.

Allah *the Almighty* has made it permissible to eat some of the created beings mentioned in this verse. He also made other creatures impermissible to consume. This has led some people to question the purpose for which these animals were created. Along similar lines, they also enquired if every animal that has been created can be eaten. Of course, some of these animals, created by Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be eaten by human beings as these creatures have been made to serve other purposes.

If you consider this concept comprehensively, you will find that the things which you have been prohibited from consuming may serve you in other ways. Some of these prohibited animals are actually preys of the animals you are allowed to consume. Furthermore, you may derive from these animals benefits other than food.

For example, a snake is considered a purely harmful creature by most people. However, snake venom can be used in several areas in medicine. In addition, their skins can provide other forms of benefit. Therefore, although we do not eat snakes, we can still benefit from them in other ways.

Interestingly enough, some people asked similar questions regarding the consumption of pork. They asked, 'If Allah has made pork impermissible to eat, why did He create pigs?' Glory be to Allah (*Subhan-Allah*)! Do these people think that Allah *Glorified is He* has created everything for the purpose of being eaten by human beings? There is no need for you to eat everything as indeed, Allah *the Almighty* has already made other foods that are appropriate for your consumption.

Do you, for instance, eat petroleum products? Even automobiles, trains, and planes are fed with distinct forms of fuel. Likewise, everything has a source of fuel that is appropriate for its use. Your Lord has granted your appropriate sustenance just as He has given every other form of creation its appropriate form of livelihood.

A forest that has been left undisturbed by human interference will be filled with a wide range of living plant and animal species. Its ecosystem will be balanced and devoid of aberration and putridity since these wild creatures maintain an environmental equilibrium amongst themselves. The weaker beings provide food for the stronger animals and the excrement of some creatures will sustain the life of others. This is a system that functions on the basis of natural and pure instinct as opposed to human motivation or prejudice.

Interestingly enough, every natural system, which human beings are prohibited from changing, flows according to the most detailed and precise laws. Indeed, natural systems do not demonstrate massive corruption until human interference occurs. If you would like to observe this for yourself, pay a visit to any of the gardens or recreational grounds after a celebration. Take *Sham Al-Naseem* celebration, for example. Such disturbing scenes may give you a basic concept of the wide destruction that human interference can leave behind. Why are we linking human interference with corruption? The primary reason is that human beings handle natural systems without applying the laws of the Creator to their interferences. On the other hand, obeying the commandments of the Creator will not cause corruption in the natural order of the environment.

We previously pointed out that human beings do not have autonomous power over anything in existence, except that which Allah *Glorified is He* has subjugated and subjected to their use. For instance, a little boy may have the ability to ride an elephant or guide a camel to his destination, while burdening these beasts with heavy weighted objects. On the other hand, almost all people will not possess the same powers over smaller creatures, such as snakes, or even the smallest insects such as ticks! This is due to the fact that Allah *the Exalted* has subjected certain beings to our use as opposed to others.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concluded the verse we are studying by stating: ‘And We send down water from skies, and thus We cause every noble kind [of life] (*zawj-in kareem*) to grow on the earth.’ (*Luqman:* 10) The phrase: ‘from skies’ means that Allah *the Almighty* sent this water from the direction of the skies. We know that rain does not descend from the heavens, but it actually descends from the clouds.

The word *zawj* (each member of a pair) refers to the living pairs of plants. Some people wrongly consider the word *zawj* to refer to both members of a pair when the word actually refers to each singular member of the pair by itself. For instance, in the Arabic language, we refer to the husband alone as a *zawj* and to the wife alone as a *zawj.* Allah *Glorified is He* also described the propagation of populations upon the earth in the following Words: 'And in everything We have created two counterparts (*zawj-ayn*)' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49). Since the male and the female are included within this designation, each of them is referred to using the term *zawj*.

The Arabic word *taw'am* (twin) is similar to the word *zawj* in this regard. It also refers to one sibling of any two siblings born together. Some people use the Arabic word *taw'am* when referring to both individuals together, but this is incorrect. You must use the word *taw'am-an* (two twins) if you are referring to both of them.

Allah *the Exalted* described the vegetative growth which is cultivated from rainwater, as coming from a generous pair. The word *kareem* (generous) is used because vegetation propagates abundantly and liberally. Indeed, a single seed can produce up to seven-hundred seeds! If this is the generosity of Allah's creation, how can we describe the generosity of the Creator Himself *Glorified is He*?!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذَا خَلْقُ ٱللَّهِ فَأَرُونِى مَاذَا خَلَقَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن دُونِهِۦ ۚ
بَلِ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١١﴾

All this is God's creation. Now, show Me what
your other gods have created. No, the disbelievers
are clearly astray [11] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 11)

This verse is addressed to the people of arrogance and obstinacy who rejected the verses of Allah *the Almighty*. In the beginning of the verse, the Words, '[All] of this…' (*Luqman:* 11) are a reference to the many parts of Allah's creation that were mentioned before this verse. These included the heavens which were created without visible supports, the mountains which stabilised the earth, the created beings living in our midst and the rainwater that descends from the sky to give life to vegetation. All of these beings are examples of Allah's creation, and no one else would ever claim responsibility for them because Allah *the Exalted* originated them with no partners. In the next part of the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Show me, then, what others [than He] may have created' (*Luqman:* 11). This verse challenged the polytheists to give an example of what their idols had created.

They did not have an answer to this question because, even in their overweening arrogance, they had no material proof to establish their responses or replies. Indeed, the truth was clear, and their falsehood was jumbled and confused. None of them was bold enough to proclaim that their deities created the mountains, the sun, or the moon. Despite their repulsive disbelief and obstinacy, they could not find any answers to this Quranic challenge. Allah *the Almighty* made it clear that the issue did not stop at their inability to originate creation. These disbelievers did not know how they, themselves, were created. Allah says: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves, and neither do I (have any need to) take those who were leading (men) astray as My helpers' (*al-Kahf:* 51). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '…and neither do I (have any need to) take as My helpers those (beings) who lead (men) astray' (*al-Kahf:* 51). This is evidence of the truthfulness and miraculous nature of the Quran as Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that there would be entities who would lead people astray regarding the issue of creation. They would turn women and men away from the truth by using false speech.

Indeed, we have heard those who deceived people by offering speculations regarding the origin of the earth or claiming that human beings were the offspring of apes, as well as other misguided concepts. Their false, ungrounded speculations regarding creation have made the truth of this verse apparent. Indeed, long before these theories were presented, the Quran has informed us about such people, who did, someday, lead men and women astray by claiming wrong concepts regarding their creation.

In a sense, every explanation of creation is misguided if it opposes the statement: '[All] of this is the creation of Allah.' (*Luqman:* 11) Even in offering their misguidance, such people are unaware that they are unintentionally confirming the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and neither do I (have any need to) take as my helpers those (beings) who lead (mankind) astray,' (*al-Kahf:* 51).

We notice the same principle regarding the tradition of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Some people only want to resort to the Quranic text, while constantly attempting to discredit the authority of Prophet Muhammad’s Hadiths. These people insincerely say, 'The legislation that we have in common (with other Muslims) is the book of Allah *Glorified is He* (the Quran). Whatever it makes permissible, we consider permissible, and whatever it makes impermissible, we consider impermissible amongst us.' Then, these people go on to neglect the prophetic sayings as a source of religious legislation.

Indeed, all Glory belongs to Allah! Their misguided statement actually establishes the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad’s Hadiths! Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us about them when he said, 'There will be (a time) when a man, who will speak about my traditions nonchalantly as he is reclining on his couch, and will say, "The thing we can follow is the Book of Allah. Whatever it says is permissible, we make permissible amongst ourselves, and whatever it says is impermissible, we make impermissible."'(1) Indeed, we have seen these people in our times who reject prophetic Hadiths while claiming to accept the Quran alone.

The meaning of Allah’s Words, '[All] of this is the creation of Allah' (*Luqman:* 11) refers to Allah’s created beings. The portion of the verse which says, '…Show Me, then, what others (than He) may have created!' (*Luqman:* 11) did not challenge them to create anything as impressive as the heavens, mountains or rain falling from the clouds to give life to vegetation. On the contrary, this verse only challenged them to create the smallest and most insignificant creatures they can find. Generally speaking, there are rarely any visible creatures that are more visibly insignificant than a fly. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, as the (idols and) false deities whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create (as much as) a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end' (*al-Hajj:* 73). However, the parable did not stop at this point. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'And if flies grasp anything from them

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(1) *This Prophetic saying was narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (4/132), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2664) and Ibn Majah (12) and Al-Daraqutni (4/287) respectively, in their Sunnan. This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'adikarib Allah be pleased with him.*

[the idols], they will not retrieve it [from the flies]! Weak indeed is the seeker, and [weak] is the deity that is sought,' (*al-Hajj:* 73).

Allah *Glorified is He* then concluded the verse by stating: 'Nay, but the transgressing people are in clear misguidance' (*Luqman:* 11). This indicates that they are completely engulfed in misguidance. Once misguidance completely envelops someone, the prospect of guidance reaching them is diminished. It is as if this statement is telling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'these are people who will never be guided, O, Muhammad. The only thing you must do is persevere in your conveyance of the message, until Allah *Glorified is He* grants you people who will be better than them in receiving your message. In due time, you will be surrounded by an army of believers who will be better at aiding you in your mission.' Indeed, that is exactly the way it happened!

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا لُقْمَٰنَ ٱلْحِكْمَةَ أَنِ ٱشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ ۚ وَمَن يَشْكُرْ
فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَنِىٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾

We endowed Luqman with wisdom: 'Be thankful to God: whoever gives thanks benefits his own soul, and as for those who are thankless — God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise' [12] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* has provided His sustenance for us, even before He created us. Then, after our creation, He blessed us with a clear and natural inclination to worship solely Him. Furthermore, He continued to reveal successive Divine Messages to mankind. Each of these messages introduced detailed commandments that were suitable to the social environment and age intended for their Message.

Before Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* undertook the burden of being Allah's vicegerent on the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* subjected him to a test. This objective of the test was to teach him faithfulness to His Lord's commandments regarding the performance or avoidance of certain actions. It was meant to teach Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* caution and avoidance of Satan's cunning plots.

Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* went through this demonstrative test before Allah *the Exalted* chose him to be a prophet. Many people wrongly think that Adam's act of disobedience occurred after he was chosen as a prophet. Consequently, we find them asking, 'How could Adam disobey his Lord? Is he not a prophet, and are not prophets Divinely protected from error?' Indeed, Adam did disobey his Lord (regarding the tree). However, he committed this misdeed before he was chosen as a prophet. Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned this incident in the following verse: 'And [thus] did Adam disobey his Lord, and thus, did he fall [into a grievous fault]. Thereafter, [however,] His Lord elected him [for His grace], accepted his repentance, and bestowed His guidance upon him.' (*Ta Ha:* 121-122)

This establishes that Adam became a prophet after the act of disobedience. Nevertheless, one might still be led to ask, 'Why was an act of disobedience committed by Adam, while he was being prepared to become a prophet?' Many scholars have reasoned, 'Indeed, Adam is the father of humanity, and humanity is of two types. Firstly, there are human beings who are divinely protected from error, and these are the Prophets. Secondly, there are human beings who do not enjoy this Divine protection from error, and these are the rest of mankind. Since Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* was the father of both types of human beings, it was necessary for him to represent both types of people. Therefore, he lived a portion of his life as a regular person, and that was the period when he succumbed to disobedience. Thereafter, after he repented to his Lord and was chosen by Him, he lived the following portion of his life as a prophet. In this respect, Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* was able to combine the two different ways of existing in this world.'

Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying concerning Luqman *peace be upon him*: 'And, indeed, We *atayna* (granted) wisdom unto Luqman' (*Luqman:* 12). The Arabic term *atayna* (granted) is used in several instances in the Quran to denote the process of Divine Revelation (*alwahy*).

However, there are two types of this revelation (*wahy*). If the term 'granted' *atayna* or *awhayna* is used while referring to a messenger of Allah, it indicates a Divine Revelation in which Allah's Way is being transmitted to that messenger. On the other hand, if it is used in connection with a normal person, it is referring to the process of inventive inspiration. This is when an idea which was previously unknown, is secretly revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* to His creation.

In this regard, consider the following verse that refers to Allah's Revelation to the angels: 'Lo! Your Lord inspired [*yuhee*] to the angels [to convey this message to the believers]: "I am with you!" [And He commanded the angels:) "And firmly support those who have believed."' (*al-Anfal:* 12)

Allah *the Most High* also granted inspiration to human beings, as we recognise in Allah's Words: 'We inspired (*awhayna*) [thus] to the mother of Musa (Moses), "Nurse him."' (*al-Qasas:* 7). Likewise, He granted inspiration to animals: 'And [consider how] your Lord has inspired (*awha*) to the bees, "Prepare for yourself dwellings in mountains."' (*an-Nahl:* 68)

Allah *Glorified is He* also mentioned that He inspired the righteous supporters of the messengers: 'and [remember the time] when I inspired (*awhaytu*) to the disciples, 'Believe in Me and in My Apostle,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 111).

Conversely, we know that the minions of Satan amongst the jinns also inspire their human counterparts: 'and verily, the devils whisper [within the hearts] (*layuhuna*) to their [human] servants, [instructing them] to argue with you.' (*al-An'am:* 121)

These were all examples of the linguistic forms of the Arabic word *awha* 'revealed'. To summarise its linguistic meanings, the first general definition of the term *wahy* (revelation) refers to the process of inspiration where a fact that was previously unknown is secretly understood by a person or being. Conversely, the second specific definition concerns our religious understanding where the term *wahy* refers to any inspiration that conveyed and revealed a Divine Message from Allah to one of His appointed messengers. Thus, this second definition excludes most of the examples highlighted above.

Allah *Glorified is He* expressed the religious concept of 'granting revelation' in its general sense when He says: 'And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him other than through sudden inspiration, or [by a voice, as it were] from behind a veil, or by sending an apostle to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal].' (*ash-Shura:* 51)

Revelation in its religious sense is the disclosure of a Message from the Divine Knowledge of Allah to one of His messengers. Yet, this transmission will not occur unless the human being possesses certain virtuous qualities that are a pre-requisite for a receiver of Divine Inspiration.

As a simple analogy, consider a simple radio set. The radio set must have necessary attributes for it to receive the transmission of certain radio waves. When your radio set suddenly loses this connection, you immediately conclude that there is a problem with your system's antenna or receiver, and not with the radio broadcaster. This is because radio broadcasters function professionally, and their radio waves are mostly transmitted without interruption. Indeed, this is a simple analogy that will never appropriately illustrate the transcendent Glory of Allah's Messages.

Allah *Glorified is He* maintains a consistent line of communication with His servants, but it is only detectable to those who possess the necessary qualities to accept it. As we previously mentioned, the servant's suitability is measured by the extent to which they conform to the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* in performing His Divine Obligations and refraining from His Prohibitions.

If a person has consumed excessive amounts of unlawful means of sustenance and was nourished illegally, he will not be suitable for receiving Allah's revelations. Indeed, his unlawful actions will ruin the natural inclination towards righteousness that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed inside His servants. This inclination was placed at the time that Allah *the Almighty* took the oath from all human beings, as He says in the following verse: 'And when your Lord brought forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, [thus] calling upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?"—to which they answered: "Indeed, we do bear witness thereto,"' (*al-A'raf:* 172). If the descendants of Adam had remained in that initial state of purity and adhered to the Way of their Lord concerning His obligations and prohibitions, they would have all been able to receive this inspiration from Allah *the Exalted* without disruption.

Consider the inspiration that was granted by Allah *Glorified is He* to the mother of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'Nurse him (for a time), and then, when you have cause to fear for him, cast him into the river and have no fear and do not grieve.' (*al-Qasas:* 7) What are the qualities present in her heart that allowed her to receive Allah's inspiration with immediate acceptance and satisfaction? How could a mother be convinced that an action of probable death (casting her child into the river) would save her child from possible death [Prophet Musa (Moses) being caught and executed by Pharaoh]?

Indeed, if Allah's Revelation coincides with virtuous qualities that make one suitable to receive it, the soul of the recipient will not hesitate (in implementing the orders of Allah), nor will the soul search for further evidence. Prophet Musa's (Moses') mother applied Allah's Command just as it was given to her. This is the perfect example of Divine Inspiration!

Regarding this, we can also mention the following verse: 'They both found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed grace from Ourselves and unto whom We had imparted knowledge (issuing) from Our Knowledge' (*al-Kahf:* 65). This righteous servant (1) was Al-Khidr, and he was not a prophet. In spite of this, Allah *Glorified is He* gave him direct inspiration, and he was appointed as a teacher for Prophet Musa (Moses), one of Allah's prime prophets. The only thing that earned him such a lofty rank was being a servant to Allah *the Most High* according to the commandments that were introduced by Prophet Musa (Moses) himself. Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* worshipped Allah with utmost sincerity and was, therefore, granted blessings which only Allah *the Almighty* can grant.

Read Allah's verse: 'O, you who have believed! If you remain pious towards Allah, He will bless you with a standard by which to discern the truth from the falsehood' (*al-Anfal:* 29). Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Just as for those who are (willing to be) guided, He increases their (ability to follow His) guidance and grants them piousness' (*Muhammad:* 17).

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(1) *In his interpretation (3/92), Ibn Kathir explained, "This is a reference to Al-Khidr peace be upon him as he has been mentioned in many authentic prophetic Hadiths. For instance, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said in a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari (3402), Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi (3151) and Ibn Abu Hatim, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him 'He is referred to as Al-Khidr because when he would sit upon a white piece of fur, it would resonate with a green colour.' This Hadith was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (5/420). Ibn Hajar was quoted as saying in his book Fath Al-Bari (6/434): 'In his book about history, At-Tabari mentioned that Al-Khidr was alive during the time of Ifridun according to the dominant opinion of Jewish sources. He appeared right before the Great Dh Al-Qarnayn.' An-Naqash made narrations that speak of his immortality. However, according to Ibn 'Atiya, these narrations are inauthentic as there are no means of establishing the truth of their claims.*

Therefore, if we would like to benefit ourselves with Divine Inspirations from Allah *Glorified is He* we would need to preserve the purity of our physical bodies by using the prescriptions of their Creator. We can do that if we adhere to Allah's Way by following His Commands and avoiding His prohibitions.

Luqman *peace be upon him* had these pure and genuine qualities of servitude to Allah *the Most High*. He had never allowed his body to consume any unlawful sustenance and was always adherent to the Way of his Lord. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* granted him wisdom and said concerning this: 'And, indeed, we granted wisdom unto Luqman,' (*Luqman:* 12).

The scholars differed on whether or not he was a prophet, but the dominant view stated that he was not a prophet.(1) Those who stated that he was a prophet did not have a Hadith that bears a sound chain of narrators upon which they based their opinion.

Thus, the majority of scholars' opinions stated that he was a pious servant who was sharply perceptive and very wise. As we pointed out before, perception and discernment are the foundation upon which information is gathered, and Luqman *peace be upon him* did not allow any concept to pass without contemplating it on the basis of his clear insight and deep perception. Accordingly, he had internalised many subtle realisations and established their truths. Therefore, he was able to possess moral values and a good character, and this had a tremendous bearing on the way that he lived his life. Thereby, Luqman *peace be upon him* benefited himself and had a sound reasoning and judicious articulations that delighted the people around him. This is how Luqman lived his life.(1)

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(1) *Ibn Abu Hatim narrated on the authority of Qatada Allah be pleased with him that the latter said, 'Allah Glorified is He gave Luqman peace be upon him the choice between wisdom and prophethood, and he chose wisdom. Accordingly, Angel Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him came to him while he was asleep and placed wisdom upon him. When Luqman awoke, he found himself speaking with profound wisdom, and it was thus said to him, 'How could you choose wisdom over prophethood, and your Lord gave you the right to choose either of them as you pleased?' He answered, 'If Allah Glorified is He would have sent prophethood unto me, I would have asked Him to aid me in living up to it. If He would have made me a prophet, I would have given all that I have in order to fulfill the responsibility of such a lofty post. However, Allah allowed me to choose, and I feared that I might not be strong enough to endure the hardships of prophethood. As a result, I saw wisdom as a more pleasing choice for me.' This narration is cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (6/511) and by Al-Qurtubi in his interpretation (7/5317).*

The scholars have submitted many works of research in an attempt to uncover the person and ethnicity of Luqman *peace be upon him*. Some of them have arrived at the conclusion that he was dark-skinned and bore a strong resemblance to the people of southern Africa, in terms of his facial features. His skin was deeply pigmented, his heart was radiant, and his soul was pure. Fine wisdom flowed out of his thick lips, rich with subtlety and wise meanings.(2)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke truthfully when he said, 'Verily, Allah does not look at your bodies or appearances. Rather, He looks at your hearts.'(3) Accordingly, whenever you see someone who is less fortunate than you in terms of their financial status, health, social standing or even appearance, do not be deceived or deluded by these elements.

It is more important to consider the areas in which that person exceeds you. Indeed, as we previously pointed out, the Creator *Glorified is He* has distributed His favours unto His servants upon a basis of perfect equality. This means that each human being enjoys the same amounts of advantages and disadvantages as all other people. The only attribute that sets one apart from other individuals is piety and righteousness (*taqwa*). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There is no preference given to an Arab over a non-Arab except for the preference that is associated with piety and acts of righteousness.'(1)

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(1) *It is related on the authority of Abu Ad-Darda' Allah be pleased with him that he mentioned Luqman, the wise man, and stated, "He was not given that which he was given on account of his family, wealth, lineage or appearance. On the contrary, he was a firm person with strong character. He would observe long periods of silence, while spending significant amounts of time in thought and deep contemplation. He did not sleep during the daytime, and no one saw him spit, clear his throat loudly or perform the bodily functions in public. They had never seen him bathe, aimlessly joke around, or laugh. He would not repeat any of his axioms except for the purpose of deriving additional wisdom from them.' This narration was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr-Al-Manthur (6/512). and he attributed it to Ibn Abu Hatim*

(2) *Amongst some of the narrations that have been narrated from the wise Luqman was the narration in which he commented to a man that was staring at him, 'You look upon my thick lips with disgust, yet fail to notice the fine speech that flows from them. Indeed, you may recognise the darkness of my skin, but it prevents my heart from not being radiant.' (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 7/5317)*

(3) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih (2564), by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/287, 539) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4143). However, the wording that appears here is from Muslim.*

There are people who classify occupations into honourable occupations and menial ones. This classification is misguided because as long as the community is in need of a certain occupation, it can never be considered demeaning. Without many such occupations, the community would hardly be able to function. In light of this, how can you think of these jobs as demeaning? Perhaps more importantly, how can an honourable person look upon those who perform these tasks as insignificant?

By Allah, if all of the cabinet ministers stayed home for an entire week, no substantial change would take place in most of our lives. On the other hand, if sanitation workers or people responsible for handling the sewer drains were to strike for a single day, our world would turn into a cesspool. How can some people deride these occupations and those who perform them?

Indeed, people who perform such jobs are pleased with very modest sustenance, and in many cases, they endure burdens that others would find overwhelming. In all of our mocking and scoffing, we forget that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O, you who have believed! No men shall ridicule [other] men. It may well be that those [whom they ridicule] are better than they [who ridicule].' (*al-Hujurat:* 11)

If we refocus our attention on Luqman *peace be upon him* one might be led to ask, 'If he was not a prophet, why did Allah grant him this wisdom?'

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/411) on the authority of Abu Nadra who related it from one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. It was also narrated by Abu Na'im in Hilyat Al-Awliya' (3/100) on the authority of Abu Nadra who related it from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Allah be pleased with him who said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him addressed us during the Tashreeq days of the pilgrimage. He said, "O, you assembly of men and women! Your Lord is One and your father is one! There is no preference given to an Arab over a non-Arab, nor any shown to a non-Arab over an Arab, nor a white over a black, nor a black over a white, besides through piety!"'*

Allah *Glorified is He* granted him wisdom by assisting and inspiring him to make sound judgments. Allah *the Almighty* provided Luqman these blessings, in accordance with His saying: 'If you remain conscious of Allah, He will bless you with a standard by which to discern the truth from the falsehood' (*al-Anfal:* 29). This means that whoever uses the guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* to preserve the original state in which they were created, they will be capable of receiving direct inspiration and wisdom from Him.

For instance, your son may ask for a certain sum of money so that he can try his hand at some business in the local market. You would probably give him a smaller amount (than the amount he requested) to preliminarily test his abilities. If he succeeds at investing this amount of money and his venture proves profitable, your confidence will increase. Later, you may probably grant him more money on a second occasion. Human beings are in the same situation (with their Lord). If they excel at being in the constant company of Allah *Glorified is He* He will unceasingly grant them additional favours and will shower them with His blessings.

This explains why ‘Umar ibn ʿAbd Al-ʿAziz(1) said, 'The only thing that prevents us from being granted the knowledge that we do not know is our inability to put the things we do know into practice.' Certainly, if we deserved to receive more blessings, Allah *Glorified is He* would have granted them to us. If we had been faithful to what we had already learnt, applying this knowledge in enhancing our lives, we would unceasingly receive a further transcendental form of it from our Lord. Conversely, if we attain knowledge without acting according to its wisdom, what could possibly be the benefit of more knowledge? Indeed, we would have then failed to profit from the knowledge we already had!

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(1) *He is 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz ibn Marwan Al-Umawiy Allah be pleased with him. He was known as Abu Hafs and was born in Medina (61 AH) where he was also raised. He served as its governor for Al-Walid, and then he was chosen to serve in the Eastern Mediterranean region as a cabinet minister for Sulayman ibn 'Abd Al-Malik. In the year 99 AH, the time immediately following the reign of Sulayman, he became the Caliph and was given the oath of allegiance in the Mosque of Damascus. Upon taking office, he made it illegal to curse 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him. This was a reversal of the policies of the Umawiy leaders before him, who had made a practice of cursing `Ali Allah be pleased with him from the pulpits. His life ended in the year 101 AH, when he was forty years of age. He spent roughly two and a half years in office.*

Just as scholars have exerted great effort in knowing the character and ethnicity of Luqman,(1) *peace be upon him* they have also written a great deal about his wisdom. It is written that one of his contemporaries spoke to him at length and questioned him, 'Were you not a slave? Did you not work in the service of another man. On what account then, were you granted wisdom?'

Luqman replied, 'On account of my deep respect for the authority of my Lord, my responsibility to the work that He has placed upon me, speaking truthfully and not indulging in matters which do not concern me.'(2)

These characteristics contain enough guidance to suffice every believer. Anyone who faithfully adheres to these principles will speak words of wisdom. By Allah *the Almighty* if the only characteristic he mentioned was truthfulness in speech, it would have been sufficient.

These were the attributes by which Luqman *peace be upon him* a servant of humble origins, ascended to such a lofty rank. Allah *the Exalted* gave him great wisdom despite the fact that he was not a prophet or a messenger. Indeed, a chapter of the Noble Quran was even named after him. All of this serves to prove that if a regular human being is principled and sincere in his obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* Allah will grant him His abundant favours and raise him to be amongst prophets and messengers *peace be upon them*.

The following narration(3) is often cited as an expression of the wisdom that Luqman was said to possess. On one occasion, his master told him to slaughter a goat and bring him the two best pieces of its meat. Luqman *peace be upon him* slaughtered the goat as he was ordered, but subsequently presented his master with the heart and tongue of the animal. The next day the master said to him, 'Slaughter a goat, but this time, and bring me the two worst pieces of the animal.' Again, Luqman *peace be upon him* returned to him with the heart and tongue of the animal. At that point, his master asked him, 'Did you not present these yesterday on the basis that they were the choicest parts of the goat?' Luqman *peace be upon him* answered, ‘When these two are good, there is nothing better than them. On the other hand, when they are bad, there is nothing that is worse!'(1)

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(1) *The story of Luqman peace be upon him with those who mocked him for his black skin and slavery.*

(2) *This was narrated by Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya in Kitab As-Samt (Narration # 675) (Dar Al-i'tisam, 1986 c.e.). The following version of the tradition was also narrated by Ibn Jarir on the authority of Ibn Qays. 'One day, a man passed by Luqman peace be upon him and a group of people that were with him and asked, "Are you not the slave of other people?" "Indeed, I was," Luqman responded. The man then asked, "Did you not tend sheep at the foot of a mountain?" Again, Luqman responded in the affirmative. At this, the man asked, "So what is to account for all that I see in you?" Luqman replied, "Piety, speaking truthfully, upholding the trusts that are given to me, and observing silence regarding those matters which do not concern me."' This narratioin was cited by As-Suyuti in Al-Durr Al-Manthur fi At-tafsir bil Ma'thur (6/512).*

(3) *The story of Luqman peace be upon him with his master when the latter ordered him to slaughter a goat.*

Interestingly enough, after the time of Luqman, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of a similar adage when he said, 'Indeed, within the body is a morsel of flesh that, if pure, the entire body is pure, and if corrupt, the entire body is corrupt. Indeed, this part of the body is the heart.'(2) In another Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever can preserve what is in between his jaws (*al-lahyan*)(3) and what is between his legs will enter Paradise.'(4)

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(1) *This was narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba as well as Ahmad and Ibn Jarir. They narrated the narrationon the authority of Khalid Ar-Rabe'y. This was mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (5/516).*

(2) *The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2051), and by Muslim in his Sahih (1599), from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Nu'aman ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him. The complete version of the Hadith is as follows: 'Indeed, that which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is also clear. However, between them there are dubious matters whose statuses of legality are unknown by the majority of people. Whoever steers clear of these dubious matters will preserve the integrity of his faith and honour, while the one who falls into these dubious matters will easily fall into the unlawful. The latter is like a shepherd who grazes his flock near a sanctuary, while being close enough to wander into the sanctuary! Indeed, every king has a sanctuary. Indeed, the sanctuary of Allah consists of the actions that He has made impermissible.' The conclusion of this Hadith is the segment cited above (in the text).*

(3) *Al-lahyan* are the bones that support the roof and the floor of the mouth. These are the two bones which support the teeth of every organism that has jaws. *(Lisan Al-'Arab, under the heading: l, h, a).*

(4) *This was narrated by Abu Nu'aym in Hilyat Al-Awliya' (3/202) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Sahl ibn Sa'ad, with this exact wording. The same Hadith appeared in the Sahih of Al-Bukhari (6474). This Hadith, also narrated on the=*

It was also narrated that Luqman *peace be upon him* answered his people's legal questions and that they had a great deal of confidence in his judgment. However, this was before the era of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. Once Prophet Dawud (David) was sent, Luqman *peace be upon him* discontinued the practice of issuing opinions on the legal matters of the people. The people asked him, 'Why did you stop judging in our legal matters?' He gave a response which reflected his wisdom by replying, 'Do I not find it sufficient when someone has been sent to suffice me?' He did not want to claim this high responsibility, when Allah *Glorified is He* has already sent Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* to carry the responsibility.

This response makes it clear that Luqman *peace be upon him* plainly acknowledged being a righteous servant of Allah *Glorified is He* who only had a natural wisdom. On the other hand, Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was a Divine messenger from Allah, the Exalted. The wise choice for Luqman was to hand over the task of issuing legal judgments. Perhaps, Prophet Dawud (David) would offer opinions that excelled than the opinions of Luqman *peace be upon them*. In light of this consideration, Luqman relinquished his position with a good heart and without resentment.

Some scholars have said that Allah *Glorified is He* gave Luqman the choice between being a noble prophet or merely being a wise man. Luqman replied, 'Verily, You gave me the choice, O, Lord, and I have chosen to cast my lot with comfort as opposed to difficulty. Nonetheless, if you choose difficulty for me, O, Lord, I will accept it willingly as soon as I recognise it. Indeed, I know that You will never forsake me.'(1)

= *authority of Sahl, contains the following wording: 'Whoever can offer me a guarantee to preserve what is in between his jaws (refraining from misdeeds of the tongue) and what is between his legs (by refraining from the misdeeds of the private parts), I will guarantee him Paradise.'*

(1) *This was narrated by Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi in Nawadir Al-Usul on the authority of Abu Muslim Al-Khawlany Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, "Verily, Luqman was deeply contemplative, optimistic and overly silent. Indeed, he truly loved Allah so He loved him and made him wise. Before the time of Prophet Dawud (David) peace be upon him he was called upon to assume political office. It was said to him, "Luqman, would you like that Allah make you a leader who ruled justly over the people?" He responded, "If my Lord=*

Allah *Glorified is He* gave Luqman *peace be upon him* the ability to speak wisely concerning some matters, with articulations that preceded some prophetic Hadiths. This was to demonstrate that it is possible for a regular human being to reach such transcendental levels of righteousness, as Allah *the Almighty* said in a prophetic Hadith: 'O, My servant, obey me and become righteous. You will say to the things you want, "Be!", and they will exist as you commanded.'(1) The favour of Allah *Glorified is He* has no boundaries, nor does it entail difficulty of any sort. The door of Allah is always wide open. However, you must be eligible to enter that door and unceasingly enjoy the company of your Lord.

We also find the following story (2) that tells about one of the wise sayings that have been attributed to Luqman *peace be upon him*. Luqman went on a long journey and was greeted by one of his students when he returned. He asked the student, 'How is my father?' And the student replied that Luqman's father had passed away. Luqman responded, 'Now I have more control over my affairs.' Then, he asked about his mother. Upon learning that she had also died, Luqman said, 'I have been relieved of my greatest concern.' 'What about my wife?' Luqman asked. Once the boy informed him of her death, he said, 'This means that I will renew my bed.' Then, he learnt of his sister's death,

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= *obligates me, I have to accept His orders. Indeed, I know that were He to obligate me, He would aid me along the way, teach, and protect me. Nevertheless, if He is giving me the choice, I choose ease and well-being over difficulty."' This narration was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (6/511).*

(1) *Al-Bukhari narrated a Hadith to the same effect in his Sahih (6502) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, who said, 'Prophet Muhammad said, "Verily, Allah has pronounced, 'I am at war with whoever shows open enmity towards a friend of mine. Indeed, My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than what I have made an obligation upon him. Afterwards, My servant continues to draw near to Me by performing non-obligatory acts of worship until I love him. Once I love him, I become the hearing with which he hears, the vision with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps and the leg with which walks.'"' The remainder of the Hadith has been quoted above (in the text). Concerning this text, At-Tufi (Sulayman 'Abd Al- Qawiy As-Sarsari d.716 A.H.) commented, 'All scholars of considerable rank agree that this Hadith is metonymical and expresses a metaphor for aiding, protecting, and assisting a servant. It is as if Allah Himself is becoming the means through which the slave seeks support.'*

(2) *The story of Luqman peace be upon him and his follower when he asked him about the state of his father.*

upon which he said, 'She has preserved my honor, for now I am free of the responsibility of protecting her.' Lastly, he asked the student about his brother. Conversely, when he learnt of his brother's death, he said, 'This news has broken my back!'(1)

These words can only be said by a person blessed with wisdom, for indeed, in many instances, undutiful children are pleased to learn of their fathers' deaths. Unfortunately, the source of their elation is the inheritance that they will get to enjoy.

Conversely, at learning of the death of his father, Luqman *peace be upon him* said, 'Now I have greater control over my affairs.' This implies that while his father was alive, his father had a great control over his affairs. In light of this wisdom, we can understand the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You (the son), as well as what you own, belong to your father.'(2) This indicates that it is shameful to say: 'I own this and that,' during the lifetime of your father. In the present day and age, children have mostly lost such lofty values. Lamentably, nowadays, we find sons ordering their fathers to assign assets for them in their wills!

Additionally, within the statement of Luqman regarding his wife's death, 'I will (now) renew my bed,' we are able to understand a very significant point. He would never think of sleeping with any other woman during his wife's life. This means that he chose not to marry another woman during the life of his first wife and showed respect to her jealousy which is inherent to women.

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(1) *The following was narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Zawa'id on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Dinar. 'Upon returning from a journey, Luqman was greeted in the street by a young man whom Luqman questioned, 'what happened to my father?' After learning from the young man that his father had passed away, he said, 'Praise be unto Allah. I now have greater control over my affairs.' Then, he asked about his mother. Upon learning that she had also died, Luqman said, 'I have been relieved of my greatest concern.' 'What about my wife?' Luqman asked. Once the boy informed him of her death, he said, 'This means that I will renew my bed.' Then, he learned of his sister's death, upon which he said, 'She has preserved my honour, for now I am free of the responsibility of protecting her.' Lastly, he asked the student about his brother. Conversely, when he learnt of his brother's death, he said, 'This has broken my back!' This was cited by As-Siuyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (6/519).*

(2) *On the authority of 'Amr ibn Al-'As who said, 'On one occasion, a Bedouin came to the Messenger of God and said, "My father wants to ruin my fortune." The Messenger responded, "You and your money belong to your father. Indeed, the best of what you eat is that which comes from your own efforts, and the money of your children is from your efforts, so enjoy it in good spirits!"' Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/179, 214) and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (3530).*

Furthermore, we could understand another meaning from the phrase, 'I will (now) renew my bed.' Out of consideration for the feelings of his new wife, Luqman would not allow a second wife into the bedroom he shared with his first wife. Indeed, this could cause conflict and ignite her envy, even if the first wife had passed away. He desired to enter the new partnership without spite and wanted to block every pretext that could prevent her from being a source of tranquillity for him. Likewise, he wanted to prevent every pretext that could prevent him from being a source of tranquillity for her.

The Mother of the Believers, 'Aisha, Allah, be pleased with her, was found to be jealous when the name of Khadijah *Allah be pleased with her* was so much as mentioned, even though Khadijah had passed away before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had married 'Aisha. Indeed, on one occasion, Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, entered upon her father in a state of frustration. He asked her, 'What angers you, O, daughter of her father?'

Fatima replied, 'By Allah, 'Aisha said to me, "indeed, the Messenger of Allah (Prophet Muhammad) had married your mother as a widow, and thus, I am the only virgin he has ever taken in marriage."' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, told his daughter Fatima, 'If she mentions this to you again, tell her, "My mother (Khadijah*)* married the Messenger of Allah while he was a virgin. His marriage to you occurred after he had become a widower."'(1)

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(1) *If truth be told, 'Aisha was somewhat jealous of Khadijah despite the fact that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him did not marry 'Aisha until after Khadijah's death. An expression of this occurs in the following Hadith which was collected by Muslim in his Sahih (2437) in a chapter entitled 'The virtues of Khadija': 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him "Why must you consistently mention an old, rosy-cheeked Qurayshi woman (Khadija)? Her time has passed. Besides, after her, Allah has given you better than her." Prophet Muhammad's face changed and he scolded 'Aisha angrily, saying, "By Allah, He has not given me better than her. She believed in me when the people disbelieved. She confirmed my truthfulness when people were calling me a liar. She aided me with her money when the people ostracised me, and it was through her—and her alone—that Allah granted me a child."'*

Observe the manners as well as the quick thinking displayed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this Hadith. Afterwards, 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* never repeated those words to Fatima *Allah be pleased with her*.

Someone might be led to ask, 'How could 'Aisha be jealous when she is one of the Mothers of the Believers and a wife of the Messenger of Allah?' Some scholars have pointed out that she only meant love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by her jealousy. Despite the age difference that existed between them, Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was content with Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, this jealousy was due to the sublime qualities that she recognised in his behaviour. She did not simply view him as a man of advanced years. On the contrary, she saw qualities in him that surpassed any younger man.

Now, we return to Allah's description of Luqman: 'And, indeed, We granted this wisdom unto Luqman,' (*Luqman:* 12). This makes it clear that Allah *Glorified is He* was the source of Luqman's wisdom. If we explore the meaning of the word itself, we find that the Arabic word *hikma* (wisdom) refers to the process of placing things in their rightful positions. The word *haakim* (ruler) is derived from the same linguistic root, for indeed, a ruler is supposed to put justice in its proper place.

We even observe some derivatives of this root within our daily usage. For instance, the iron implement that we place in the mouth of the horse, in order to guide its movements, is named the *hakama*. The objectives for which people ride horses differ. On one occasion, I might ride a horse for the purpose of taking a brief stroll. On another occasion, I may ride it for the purpose of hunting or advancing in a battle. Performing each of these requires that the horse assume a specific gait. My responsibility is guiding my horse in a way that enables it to perform any of these intended tasks.

Therefore, wisdom refers to the process of placing things in their rightful positions. It is the outcome of many praiseworthy character traits and the source of many others. We find that the judgments which emanate from a wise mind are easily and effortlessly placed in their proper positions. For instance, when you ask a scholar of Islamic law who has spent twenty years teaching at Al-Azhar University about a particular religious ruling, he usually answers you with ease and without effort. He can generally articulate the appropriate answer without giving the matter extensive thought or preparing his response. Indeed, at this point in his career, his legal opinions resemble natural reflexes, in that they are not laborious or taxing to his energies.

Another expression of wisdom is when Allah *Glorified is He* guides you to interpret and extract novel benefits from former things that He had created.

Allah *Glorified is He* started this verse we are studying with the words: 'And, indeed (*wa laqad*)' (*Luqman:* 12). In the Arabic language, the words *wa laqad* (and indeed) are typically used to express an oath. The gravity of the oath is emphasised by the use of the word *laqad* (indeed) since it indicates the authenticity of the forthcoming assertion.

Then, Allah *the Most High* says: '…We granted (*atayna*),' (*Luqman:* 12). The word *atayna* (we granted) refers to the process of Allah *the Almighty* giving His blessings. Generally, Allah grants both obvious bounties as well as hidden blessings to His servants, in accordance with His Divine plan for them. Before Allah *Glorified is He* created human beings, He created the forms of sustenance that they would need. Therefore, Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* the first human being arrived upon a world that contained all of the essential needs of his life such as air, water, soil, sky, food and drink. All of this had been submitted to the use of man. He played no part in achieving this process although he was the principal beneficiary of this submission. This is the first expression of Allah's 'giving'. Even prior to the creation of the human body in the primordial realm of spirits, Allah *the Almighty* blessed human beings with the moral qualities and vitality of spirit needed to sustain them.

Every craftsman specifies a clear objective before he engages in his work. The first thing that he does is lay out his blueprint. He does not construct anything before determining what it is and how it could be used. Furthermore, even before a craftsman can determine what he is going to produce, he must have a clear method to proceed upon his construction.

Before Allah *Glorified is He* created human beings, He had provided them with life's physical and moral essentials. In addition to the basic essentials, He also provided them with a practical guide that would lead them upon the proper course in life. Therefore, He had clarified the purpose of their existence. Allah *the Exalted* calls our attention to this event when He says: 'The most gracious (Allah) has imparted this Quran (unto man). He has created man,' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-3). Thus, before Allah *Glorified is He* created the human being, He provided him with the Quran as the practical methodology to sustain his life.

Accordingly, we can conclude that Allah’s bounties are either manifest or hidden. Additionally, these bounties are one of two forms. Firstly, there are material bounties, such as air, food, and drink, which enhance life’s material qualities. Secondly, there are sublime bounties which enrich life’s spiritual value. These are Divine Revelations and Messages that were conveyed by Allah’s messengers, regarding His Commandments and Prohibitions.

Considering that Allah *the Almighty* has given generously to all the beings of His creation, why did He mention Luqman in particular in this chapter? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And, indeed, We granted wisdom unto Luqman,' (*Luqman:* 12). Many scholars have stated that Allah *Glorified is He* prepared His messengers’ hearts, even before conveying His Message to them. Through the story of Luqman, Allah informed us that a man’s pure uncorrupted nature can be guided towards Him, even without the assistance of revelation.

In this sense, it was narrated that “Umar *Allah be pleased with him* made suggestions to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about certain issues. Later, Divine verses confirmed several of 'Umar’s suggestions! It is striking that 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* made these suggestions in the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the principal source of Islamic legislation after the Quran. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to establish the fact that the innate and sincere disposition of human beings can enable them to naturally perceive certain truths. Indeed, their pure human disposition may recognise the truth, even before revelations descend to inform their minds about it. Nevertheless, Allah’s bounties are not granted haphazardly.

The first bounties were given to Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* decreed that He would make Adam His vicegerent on this Earth. However, this does not imply that Adam was Allah’s first creation, as Allah *Glorified is He* never said, 'Verily, the first thing I created was mankind.' We can find evidence that Adam was not the first form of creation in the following verse: 'We had created the invisible jinns [long] before that, out of fire with scorching winds' (*al-Hijr:* 27).

Therefore, we can understand that the matter of creation is, indeed, feasible and easy for Allah *Glorified is He*. We only need to observe Allah’s statement: 'Are you not aware that Allah has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth? He can, if He so wills, do away with you and bring forth a new creation (instead). Indeed, this is not difficult for Allah' (*Ibrahim:* 19-20). This means that this issue of creation is not a rare occurrence or a single event that had only occurred once.

The scholars have produced a great deal of literature about the possibilities of other created beings before ours, like the worlds of the hinns,(1) binns, jinns and other living beings that only Allah *Glorified is He* knows about. You should, however, bear this in mind if you encounter an injudicious argument against our faith, saying: 'Archaeologists have settled upon the fact that there were created beings present before Adam. How then, can you say that Adam was the first member of creation?' No scholar has ever said that Adam was the first member of creation. We only maintain that he was the first member of the species we refer to as human beings. However, in the overall scope of things, he was preceded by other created beings. It was Allah’s Will to make Adam as Allah’s vicegerent on this earth. Afterwards, He informed the angels: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.' (*al-Baqara:* 30)

Indeed, when Allah *the Exalted* informed the angels of this news, He was not taking their advice. He was only informing them about a matter that had already been decided. In fact, the angels were informed of this event because they would play a role regarding the existence of this newly appointed vicegerent (of Allah *Glorified is He*). Thus, those who were addressed by Allah’s Words, 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it' (*al-Baqara:* 30), were only a small group of angels. Those were angels who had been selected to play a role in the life of this new created being. The rest of the angels were not familiar with Adam *peace be upon him* and their only concern was Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) Ibn Sayyid said, ‘The hinns are creatures that differ from jinns. It is said that hinns were created during the interval that separated the creation of jinns and mankind. Al-Farra’ mentioned that hinns were the dogs of the realm of jinns.' *(Lisan Al-'Arab, under the entry: h-n-n).*

The Quran gave us a very detailed account of this event, when it told us how Allah *the Almighty* addressed Satan (Iblis) as he refused to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* asked Satan, 'Are you too proud [to bow down before another created being] or are you one of the superior creatures (*Al-'aaleen*)?' (*Sad:* 75) The Arabic word *Al-'aaleen* refers to the other angels who were not commanded by Allah *Glorified is He* to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him.*

It is important to point out that Allah *the Almighty* honoured Adam as soon as He had created him with His own hands. This means that Allah *the Exalted* did not create Adam in the same way He had originated other created beings, through the command, 'Be.' Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said to Iblis, 'O, Iblis! What has kept you from prostrating yourself before that [being] which I have created with My hands?' (*Sad:* 75).

As such, we can conclude that Allah's creation of Adam *peace be upon him* with His hands indicates concern for this created being. Indeed, the hand is the means by which we perform most tasks. Interestingly enough, we still place a tremendous amount of value on things which are made by hand, as we say proudly about any man-made object, for instance, 'This was handmade.' In this statement, we are asserting that the product was not made by an inanimate machine. On the contrary, it was made by a thinking individual who had mastered his craft.

There are some ignorant people who find it pleasing to claim, 'It is due to Adam that we were removed from Paradise!' Allah *the Most High* did not say that He created Adam to dwell in paradise! Indeed, it was not his disobedience to his Lord that caused him to be removed from it. Allah *Glorified is He* said, before the creation of Adam: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.' (*al-Baqara:* 30) This makes it clear that Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* was created to dwell on this earth. Therefore, his initial moments in creation were not in the Garden of Eternity. It was only a temporal garden in which he was tested. Some people believe that the word *janna* (garden) refers only to the Gardens of Paradise. This is not the case as

Allah *Glorified is He* said in another story: '[As for such sinners,] behold, We [but] try them as We tried the owners of the garden (*janna*), who vowed that they would surely harvest its fruits on the next morning.' (*al-Qalam:* 17)

Regarding this, we can cite Allah's statement, ‘Propound unto them the parable of two men, upon one of whom We had bestowed two gardens’ (*al-Kahf:* 32). Linguistically, the word *janna* (garden) refers to any place rich with dense trees that enshroud walkers through it. Additionally, a true garden obviates the need to leave it; indeed, what it contains suffices its dwellers and fulfils any need they might have. All essentials are available. The garden that Adam *peace be upon him* entered during the initial phase of his life, immediately after he was created, was this type of garden. He entered it because Allah *the Exalted* wanted to test him first. Do not we do the same when testing candidates for a certain position before taking their place even a soccer player?

Once we have the trainee, we rehabilitate him for a test. We assure that the testing conditions are suitable; he has all necessary needs. In fact, we are normally willing to take on the responsibility of providing all things, which would optimise their performance. Allah *the Most High* did the same with Adam *peace be upon him*. He said to him, ‘O, Adam, dwell you and your wife in this garden, and eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers.’ (*al-Baqara:* 35).

When we begin to compare what Allah *the Most High* made lawful for Adam *peace be upon him* to what was forbidden, we find that He made everything in the garden lawful excepting one particular tree, which was clearly specified. We notice the wording of the statement of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘do not approach’ (*al-Baqara:* 35). He did not say, ‘Do not eat from.’ Approaching something increases the temptation to enjoy it. Therefore, make it easier on yourself and maintain a healthy distance. This duty ordained on Adam is symbolic of human responsibility to refrain from certain acts by following Divine commands and prohibitions.

The Lord *the Most High* calls Adam's attention to the adversarial beginning that would come to mark his relationship with Satan. Pursuant with his status as an enemy, Allah *the Most High* advises Adam *peace be upon him* to be cautious of Satan. Evidently, arrogance and conceit led Satan to refuse prostrating himself to Adam *peace be upon him* in obedience to the Divine command. If truth be told, when Allah *the Exalted* issued the command to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* His focus was obedience and submission to His command. That is to say, it was not a prostration to Adam for some inherent worthiness. This explains why the orders of Allah *the Almighty* differ according to the commanded one. On one occasion, He might prohibit a certain thing only to command performing it on a different occasion. The point of both orders is to test the range of your adherence to Divine commands and prohibitions. Within the Great Pilgrimage, for example, Allah orders that you to kiss a stone, but also He orders to stone a pillar (made of stone)! Both of these activities are performed with rocks. However, the inherent value of rocks is not the issue here; rather, it is about Allah's Commands and Prohibitions. Ultimately, the worth of Allah's Commands and Prohibitions has nothing to do with ascertaining their underlying wisdom or attaining benefit thereby. For instance, whenever the use of water to perform ablution is impossible, the use of dust is an alternative. Someone might comment, 'Ablution is for cleanliness, so how can dust achieve it?' In response, there is a difference between cleanliness and purification.

Dry ablution (*tayammum*) purifies spiritually through the use of the element that is actually the substance of your creation. More importantly however, performing this practice expresses the level of your adherence to Divine commands. Such is the command to do in preparation for prayer. You are not to enter prayers without some sort of preparation. Besides, prayer is the principal means of rectifying your soul and life. Of which, the latter is based on water that you use in normal ablution and the dust that you use in dry ablution. Accordingly, we must acknowledge that these two elements have special distinction: they can be used to prepare for entering the prayer and dialoguing with Allah.

Truthfully speaking, it is not appropriate for a believer to question the acts of worship in a pretentious search after meanings and wisdom or even their worldly advantages. It is sufficient to say that the underlying reason for performing this particular act of worship is that Allah commanded it, or the rationale behind this prohibition is that He prohibited it. Therefore, it is narrated that 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘If the crux of the matter were logic, the bottom of our leather socks would be more deserving of being wiped than the upper part.'(1) Thus, we can conclude that the issue is actually one of obedience and adherence to Divine commands and prohibitions. It is completely inappropriate to say that the wisdom of fasting is that it makes rich people feel the pain of hunger and results in their being more compassionate towards those who are. Indeed, I would only need to respond by asking, 'Why then, does the poor person fast?' Previously, we repeatedly used analogy to explain this issue. For example, the most valuable thing to man is his health. If he contracts some type of illness, the first thing that crosses his mind is to contact a physician who specialises in treating his illness. Once he arrives at the physician, he submits himself to his examination. At the completion of the diagnosis, the physician will prescribe some medication. The man will then take the prescribed medication without enquiring about the reasons for a certain medication or recipe. We see this procedure daily. Why do not we question it? Simply, the physician is trusted and reliable for his learning, studies and specialisation. You do not debate him about the medication. Meanwhile, the physician is still a human being and is prone to forgetfulness, errors and absent-mindedness. Yet, as pointed out, he is rarely debated. The underlying reason for a certain medication is simply that it was prescribed by a physician. In fact, the principal reason for performing any command is the Commander.

In terms of worship, it is the Lord. Accordingly, it is not befitting of a believer, after professing belief in Allah, Divine Wisdom and Power, to seek the wisdom of every command from his Lord *the Most High*. Let us now return to Adam *peace be upon him*. We said that the garden he entered was for the purpose of testing and training. It was not the eternal Garden of Paradise. Within it, Adam *peace be upon him* was tested on upon Allah's Command (eat freely) and His prohibition (do not approach). Additionally, he was informed: 'Beware of Satan. Verily, he is your enemy. He will incite you to do evil by planting his insinuations in your heart. His desire is that you join him in disobedience. He wants to drag you down the road to perdition with him.' Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife stayed in the garden and ate therein.

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(1) *'Ali Allah be pleased with him said, 'If the basis of faith were logic, the bottom of our leather socks would be more deserving of being wiped than the upper part. To be sure, I witnessed the Messenger of Allah wiping the upper part of his leather socks for ablution.' Abu Dawud, Sunnan, (Hadith Number: 162)*

Allah informs us, ‘of whatever they wished’ without approaching the tree that was pointed out to them by Him. They thus remained until the insinuations of Satan and his temptation—to eat of the tree—came upon them, despite the fact that Allah *the Most High* had already ‘immunised’ them against Satan's attack. Indeed, even with this, Adam *peace be upon him* still succumbed to heedlessness.

Allah *the Almighty* called this heedlessness to the attention of Adam's descendants after him: Indeed, Satan will never give up attacking you. He will persistently approach you with tricks just as he approached your father Adam *peace be upon him*. They too were alerted about Satan. Use your minds carefully to sort through the impulses that he induces by way of the insinuations he plants in your hearts. What did Satan tempt Adam *peace be upon him* to eat from the forbidden tree? Simply, ‘Satan whispered unto the two with a view to making them conscious of their nakedness, of which [hitherto] they had been unaware, and he said, "Your Lord has but forbidden you this tree lest you two become [as] angels, or lest you live forever."’ (*al-A‘raf:* 20) Is it not logical to ask Satan why you have not eaten from the tree to be an angel or eternal being? You would not have had to say, ‘Grant me a respite until the Day when they shall be raised from the dead!’ (*al-Hijr:* 36) It was Adam's responsibility to be cautious of satanic tricks and ploys.

In the account of this story, the Lord *the Most High* informs us that Satan will lie in wait for us to prevent us from obedience. If Adam *peace be upon him* and his wife would have approached the tree and eaten from it, there would have been no need to entice them. This is evidence that at first they were very careful in following Allah's orders; they did not go near the tree following the Divine command. This is why Satan intervened.

In light of this, we say that Satan only intervenes to disrupt obedience to Allah. Satan has no need to tempt a sinner. In other words, Satan tempts those who frequent mosques, not taverns. One who goes to the tavern has himself become a dupe of Satan. Allah recounts the words of Satan, ‘I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along your straight way.' (*al-A‘raf:* 16) He will hinder ways to righteous deeds and paths to guidance and decency. Satan situates himself in such areas to ruin good works and destroy human relationship with their Lord. Actually, we notice when praying, for example, that you might forget something. After struggling to remember it, you fail to call it. Nevertheless, once you enter the prayer, surprisingly the thing comes directly to mind. If only we follow the way prescribed by our Creator and say, 'We seek refuge with Allah from Satan, the cursed', Satan would take notice and recognise that we were not heedless. He would know that we had uncovered his plot and were acquainted with his devices. Allah *the Almighty* speaks truthfully when He says: ‘If it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs you up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 200)

Allah *the Exalted* has described Satan as an elusive tempter. In other words, when Allah's name is mentioned he withdraws and recedes. Therefore, if you feel a tempting notion from Satan—even while you are reading the Quran—you should confidently say, ‘I seek refuge with Allah from Satan, the cursed.’ By doing this, you convey to Satan that you are not unaware of his ploys. He will soon leave you. On the other hand, if you give in to his advances, he will place the tool of deception in your own hands and create a means to preoccupy you with it. Afterward, he leaves you mired in self-deception while he sets off to prompt someone else's heedlessness.

Satan does possess a certain measure of knowledge. Yet, in spite of his knowledge, he is given to carelessness. Indeed, the strongest evidence for this assertion is the fact that he, himself, has articulated his plan and spelled out his ploy even before attempting to mislead us thereby. Allah says in the Quran:

- ‘I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along your straight way.' (*al-A‘raf:* 16)
- ‘There will I come upon them from their front and from their backs and from their right and from their left …’ (*al-A‘raf:* 17).

It is unusual for the one who plans intrigues and plots to inform those intended with his plots. This means that it is our responsibility to take special precaution against his schemes; our enemy has already informed us about them! You must be cautious concerning the devilish plans. Indeed, he will come at you from four directions. The good news is that there are six directions. He does not approach from two directions. Why did Satan not mention (in his plot) that he would also come to us from above us and below us? Many pointed out the 'above and below directions' represent the directions from which we behold the Glory of Allah. The servant gazes upon the grandeur of Divinity from above and experiences the submissiveness of worship when he prostrates from below.

Therefore, you should consider above and below directions in which you enjoy the accompaniment of your Lord. Satan—lest we forget—has no means to approach you unless you are distanced from your Lord. We have already offered an analogy for this; perhaps restating it here is beneficial. A boy walking in the company of his father and holding his hand will have no naughty peers to harm him. Only when he walks alone, he exposes himself to such a threat. This proves Satan's knowledge and deceptiveness. We catch a glimpse of that in the Quranic account of his statement, 'I shall most certainly beguile them all in to grievous error, [all] save such of them as are truly your servants!' (*Sad:* 82-83) He says to the Lord, 'I will not come near the servants who are constantly in Your Providence and company.' Despite his knowledge, Satan proved conceited and heedless as he chooses to rebel against His Lord. Accordingly, Allah *the Most High* forewarned Adam *peace be upon him* against the plot of Satan. Adam's first responsibility was to prevent the ruse that led him to eat from the tree. However, he gave in to heedlessness, disregarded the command of his Lord and ate from the tree. After he disobeyed the command of his Lord, his nature began to change; he and his wife felt shame. When he defecated, it marked the first time Adam sensed his own nakedness.

Again, what is the difference between the opening through which food enters and that through which it exits? Why was it through the evacuation of his bowels that he began to sense his nakedness and why not when he was putting the food in his mouth? In response, Adam *peace be upon him* was following the guidelines of his Lord by enjoying the fruits of the garden and the 'cuisine' provided Him. It is a cuisine given with wisdom and according to a specific measure. It catered to his every need without excess. Adam's system had nothing left; he did not experience gas or flatulence and did not feel the urge to answer the call of nature. In that state, his anus had yet to acquire a specific function; it was simply an orifice of the body, much like his mouth.

He disobeyed the order of his Lord and tasted the tree and the food he consumed began to change in his stomach. He experienced other physiological changes. For the first time, he experienced flatulence and had to defecate. As soon as Adam tasted the food, he became embarrassed and felt uncomfortable; he felt that his anus was a private part that should be concealed. To be sure, natural human disposition will lead men and women to purify themselves of filth. This explains why Adam *peace be upon him* attempted to protect himself from filth by covering his private parts with leaves. From that time on, Adam was never able to block the release of waste from that orifice, and the release of waste thereby will always be something that characterises the physiology of his descendants.

We can see that the Lord *the Most High* arranged this test for Adam *peace be upon him* in the garden. He prepared his food but forbade him a particular tree.(1) Allah *the Exalted* had given him a positive command to enjoy the garden as liked. He only prohibited him to eat from a certain tree and warned him against the devilish enmity. Once he submitted to Satan's temptations and fell into incongruity with the command of his Lord—he failed to follow His guidance, Allah forced him to leave the garden and go out to the land. Nevertheless, he would carefully consider that experience that would serve as a sign for him and his descendants after him. Briefly, if you proceed upon My Way in accordance with my prescription, you will never suffer imperfection in creation. We observe practical examples of this fact. Noticeably, human community suffers imperfection when Divine commands are disobeyed. This was the first human contact. Allah *the Almighty* then willed that human communities fall to heedlessness. As a result, He sent them messengers to proclaim His Way. His Messengers marked another contact. Allah *the Most High* says, ‘We vouchsafed unto Dawud (David) a book of Divine wisdom.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163) Regarding

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(1) *Allah says, ‘O, Adam, dwell you and your wife in this garden, eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish, but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers’ (al-A‘raf: 35). In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir said, ‘There is much debate about what this tree exactly was. Ibn 'Abbas, Sa'eed ibn Jubayr, and others said it is the grape tree. The Jews and Wahb ibn Munabbih said it is wheat. Mujahid, Qatada and Ibn Jurayj said it is the fig tree. Ibn 'Abbas is also quoted to say that it is a spike of grain. Abu Malik said that it is date-palm tree. Ibn Kathir said, 'These are the six opinions on this tree. Abu Ja‘far ibn Jarir mentioned that the correct approach to this issue is to say, “Allah prohibited Adam and his wife from eating a particular tree in the garden. Although we know they ate from it, we do not have any sure knowledge about the type of that tree. Allah has not given any evidence to this effect, nor do we find any evidence on it in the authentic Hadith of the Prophet. In fact, the knowledge of that forbidden tree is of little or no benefit. The fact that it is unknown results in no harm."'*

'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says, ''Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), upon whom We bestowed the Gospel.' (*al-Hadid:* 27)

This other 'Divine contact was given secretly as an invisible grace, so it is called 'revelation'. Therefore, faith in the unseen is essential. It is not a part of belief to say that I stand before a group of brothers at Sheikh Sulaiman (Solomon) Mosque. Belief is connected with unseen matters. Throughout ages, the Lord *the Most High* supported His prophets with miracles as well as life systems. Nevertheless, Divine generosity is not limited to messengers but also to other human individuals and even animals. Allah *the Exalted* presents us an example of the wisdom given to Luqman *peace be upon him*: 'Be grateful unto Allah' (*Luqman:* 12). Gratitude is a foundation of wisdom. Show gratitude to the Lord for His Graces given before you exist or ask. He guided your body organs perform their functions even when you are asleep. Allah *the Most High* just says to His servants, 'Take rest and fear nothing. Neither sleep nor slumber overtakes your Lord.'

Gratefulness to Allah actually destroys the cornerstone of self-delusion. Indeed, the most threatening element to human stewardship over the world is their propensity to self-delusion in abuse of Divine graces. A human being often forgets that he is a vicegerent; he considers himself a ruler of the creation. Gratitude to Allah *the Most High* is an acknowledgement that He is the source of the blessings you enjoy. In this regard, we would like to cite the following: 'Allah has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, but He has endowed you with hearing, sight and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78) It asserts that we must thank Allah for the past graces. We were born without the slightest hint of information. Afterward, human senses and faculties gradually develop until human minds are rich with axioms and values. It is incumbent upon humans to thank Allah for that. He made for us senses and faculties so that we can give thanks for Divine blessings we enjoy.

There is also another form of gratitude for the present blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'From amongst His wonders is this:

- He sends forth the winds that bear glad tidings so that He might give you a taste of His grace [through life-giving rains].

- Ships might sail at his behest and that you might go about in quest of some of His bounties' (*ar-Rum:* 46).
- After enumerating these blessings, Allah concludes the verse by saying, 'And that you might have cause to be grateful' (*ar-Rum:* 46).

Showing gratefulness just came after these numerous favours of Allah gave humanity to prove that it is a grace itself from Him. This form of thanksgiving is identical with the verse in which Allah *the Exalted* says, 'If you are grateful [to me], I shall most certainly give you more and more' (*Ibrahim:* 7). This thanksgiving is equally for past and present blessings. The gratefulness in the statement of Allah *the Most High* 'Be grateful unto Allah' (*Luqman:* 12) is confined to Him. As for showing gratitude to others because of their favours, this gratefulness you display towards a generous friend is finally shown to Allah Who placed him in a position to perform that service for you. This explains why they say, 'You only thank Allah when you thank people who were proven to be good to you.' In other words, Allah *the Almighty* has such generous individuals become a means to meet your needs. The one who performs some good services for you has not created them himself, but Allah did and enabled him to do this kindness. If you trace the successive links of gratitude of anything, you will always end at gratefulness to Allah *the Most High*. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'for he who is grateful [unto Him] is but grateful for the good of his own self, whereas he who chooses to be ungrateful [ought to know that], verily, Allah is self-sufficient and is not in need of the worlds!' (*Luqman:* 12)

We knew that gratefulness to Allah is the fountainhead of wisdom. Why is that so? Simply, the one who gives thanks enjoys the fruits of his gratitude. Never think that your gratitude affects the Divine self-subsistence. Your gratitude or ingratitude is of no effect on the Lordship. Allah *the Most High* even sustains a disbeliever and does not deprive him of His favours. Truly, Allah *the Exalted* is perfectly self-sufficient: '…he who chooses to be ungrateful [ought to know that], verily, Allah is self-sufficient and is not in need of the worlds!' (*Luqman:* 12) Allah *the Almighty* is aware of His status as Lord, and no disbelieving ingrate can alter it! We are taken by the splendid style employed in this verse. In reference to gratefulness, Allah says, 'he who is grateful' (*Luqman:* 12). In reference to ungratefulness, He *the Most High* says, 'he who chooses to be ungrateful' (*Luqman:* 12).

He did not say, 'he who is ungrateful'. Let us explore the difference between the two styles. We should observe that this is the Lord's speech (each word is exactly selected to convey a precise meaning). When speaking of the grateful individual, Allah uses the present tense verb 'is' to indicate a person's current as well as future states of gratefulness. Gratefulness differs markedly from ingratitude in that it requires constant renewal to remain intact. The verse suggests that Allah *the Exalted* does not want His servants to remain in a state of perpetual ungratefulness. Perhaps a servant could repent and resume faith. Accordingly, when speaking of ungrateful individuals, Allah alters the wording by saying: 'he who chooses to be ungrateful' (*Luqman:* 12). He chose in the past to be ungrateful, but in the future he may return to the path of gratitude. This is another example of the miraculous Quranic style of conveying its message.

Hameed, or translated as 'not in need of the worlds', or to be ever praised (*Luqman:* 12), expresses a hyperbole of the meaning of praise. It may be used as an agent noun or objective. Here, it means that Allah is worthy of all praises. It comes after the attribute 'self-sufficient' (*Luqman:* 12) which denotes that if a disbeliever knows that Allah does not deprive him of His favour in spite of his disbelief, he will recognise His Lordship, for such Divine forbearance and tolerance are worthy of praise, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَٰنُ لِٱبْنِهِۦ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُۥ يَٰبُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ
بِٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّ ٱلشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٣﴾

Luqman counselled his son, 'My son, do not attribute any partners to God: attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong' [13] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 13)

The Lord *the Most High* gives us a glimpse of Luqman*'s* wisdom as mentioned in the Quran: 'and Luqman spoke thus unto his son, admonishing him' (*Luqman:* 13). The introductory sentence 'And' calls Prophet Muhammad to mention the wise account of Luqman *peace be upon him* with his son. In fact, the wisdom and advice of Luqman were aimed to offer guidance to his son.

They prove that he used to give legal opinions and spiritual counsel to people before the time of Dawud (David). Once Dawud (David) became a prophet, Luqman ceased to assume those responsibilities in the community. He said, ‘I should now stop, for a more qualified person has undertaken my role.’ He then restricted his advice to his beloved son. This elucidates Abu Hanifa's response(1) to Justice Ibn Abu Laylah *Allah be pleased with him*(2) who complained to the caliph of Abu Hanifa. Ibn Abu Laylah accused Abu Hanifa of discrediting his judgments and claims. The caliph sent a word that Abu Hanifa should stop issuing legal opinions. Then, while home, his daughter came to him and said, ‘Father, this and that happened to me (she was asking for a legal opinion)?’ He said, ‘Ask your brother Hammad. Indeed, the caliph has prohibited me from issuing legal opinions.’ There is a difference between how someone speaks to common people and how he speaks to his son. A father's love for a son is such that the father's only wishes are that his son excels him and avoid his own mistakes.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘admonishing him’ (*Luqman:* 13). Admonition is to remind of well-known thing lest a person may forget it. In reference to new information or directives, you cannot give an admonishment concerning them. Indeed, admonition only recalls past things to alert attention. Therefore, there is difference between a teacher and a preacher who admonishes. Admonishing one's son implies that he is already well acquainted with the issues concerning that which he is being reminded. His father's role is to jog his memory and stimulate him to think. Contemplating the style of the verse, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* informs us about Luqman *peace be upon him* by saying, ‘And Luqman spoke thus unto his son’ (*Luqman:* 13). When Luqman addressed his son, he said, ‘O, my dear son’ (*Luqman:* 13). He did not just say, ‘Son!’ Rather, he said, ‘My dear son'. It is reminiscent of how one calls a young child out of tenderness for him. Perhaps the use of this gentle term conveys a very subtle message to his son: Indeed, you are still in need of my advice. By no means should you figure that because you have grown, married and started a life of your own, that you are no longer in need of me.

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(1) *The story of Imam Abu Hanifa with the judge Ibn Abu Laylah.*

(2) He is Muhammad Ibn ʿAbd Al-Rahman ibn Abu Layla Al-Ansari of Kufa (74-148 AH). He was a judge and jurist. For about thirty-three years, he was the judge of Kufa during the reign of the Umayyad Caliphate and the early years of Abbasid dynasty. He had some famous accounts with Abu Hanifa and others. See Al-Zirikli, Al-Aʿlam, 6: 189; Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat Al-Hufazh, 1: 171.

The first admonishment the father offered the son was ‘Do not ascribe Divine powers to aught besides Allah' (*Luqman:* 13). This is the apex of creed and most important to begin with. Luqman *peace be upon him* wanted to correct any misgivings his son might have about existence and turn his attention to the fact that the things which were enjoyed by his father and grandfathers are still enriching the environment. It is quite remarkable that these things remain. They continue to enrich despite the fact that the one to whom they were given—and who initially benefitted from them—has long passed away.

Consider how long it has been since Allah created the earth and how many generations of human beings have benefitted from the sun. Nevertheless, all those people have now passed away, but the sun remains as it has always been. In fact, the same could be said of the moon, air, mountains, etc. Indeed, the human being is the steward of creation. Nonetheless, even though it is at your service, it will outlast you. Therefore, it is primarily the responsibility of intelligent human beings, whom Allah honours over other created beings, to say, 'I must have a life span, which exceeds that of the various elements in creation that serve me. The only possible way to attain this end is to connect human life span in this world with that of the Hereafter.' Pondering this reality summons one to have faith in Allah and refrain from ascribing Divine power to anything besides Him. He is the Creator of these things for you, and He is the One Who prepared them for your service before you existed. Allah says: ‘[All] of this is Allah's creation. Show me, then, what others [than He] may have created!’ (*Luqman:* 11)

How dare anyone declare that Allah had partners in originating the creation? Those claimed to be Allah's partners have never claimed to be gods or created anything from nothing. How can you make such a fatuous claim when you walk in the desert, observe a stone that pleases you, take it, shape it and mould it into God? If the wind blew vigorously, it would carry your ‘god’ away! What are the ways of these gods, namely their commands and prohibitions? What type of reward have they prepared for those who worship them in earnest? What punishment have they prepared for those who disbelieve in them? These gods declare no accountability. The very essence of worship is located in a worshipper's obeying of the command of his worshipped Lord. In the absence of accountability, these are but ‘false gods'. In truth, this falsity is very clear to anyone with sound mind.

As such, Luqman *peace be upon him* said, ‘…such [a false] ascribing of Divinity is indeed a tremendous wrong!’ (*Luqman:* 13) Associating partners with Allah is but a particular strain of the larger concept of *zhulm* (wrongdoing). Indeed, the precise meaning of *zhulm* is to give what rightly belongs to one party to an undeserving party. The height or perhaps the depth of this type of wrongdoing is to divest Allah of His right. Subsequently, you give it to someone besides Him. Have you not observed that the companions of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* were disconcerted when the following verse was revealed,(1) ‘those who believe and have not polluted their faith with associating partners with Allah; they will have security, and they are guided.' (*al-Anfal:* 62) They said, ‘O, Messenger of Allah, who amongst us has never obscured his faith by committing an act of wrongdoing?’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* then proceeded to calm their disquietude and ease their discomfort by informing them that the wrongdoing intended in the verse is the most egregious act of wrongdoing, associating Divine power to other than Allah *the Most High*: ‘such [a false] ascribing of Divinity is indeed a tremendous wrong!' (*Luqman:* 13)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَوَصَّيْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ بِوَٰلِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُۥ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصَٰلُهُۥ
فِى عَامَيْنِ أَنِ ٱشْكُرْ لِى وَلِوَٰلِدَيْكَ إِلَىَّ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٤﴾

We have commanded people to be good to their parents:
their mothers carried them, with strain upon strain, and it
takes two years to wean them. Give thanks to Me and to
your parents – all will return to Me [14]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 14)

This statement is either a part of Luqman’s advice to his son or a new introductory idea that came as a comment concerning the advices of Luqman.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 4776); Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 124), Kitab Al-Iman,* from 'Abdullah ibn Masʿud.

The strongest opinion(1) is that the Lord *the Most High* is introducing a new idea. For evidence, they cite the subsequent verse as follows: ‘Yet, should they endeavour to make you ascribe Divinity, side by side with Me, to something which your mind cannot accept [as Divine], obey them not’ (*Luqman:* 15).

Thus, it was an honour to Luqman *peace be upon him* that Allah *the Almighty* inserted these instructions after his many pieces of advice to his son. The way Allah mentions them makes it seem as if they are part of his advice.

- ‘We have enjoined’ (*Luqman:* 14) which means that Allah instructs mankind and reminds them about their own welfare and happiness. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* addressed people during the Farewell Sermon.(2) He mentioned the principal religious virtues. He selected this topic because it was the last opportunity he would get to address them. He did not have an occasion to mention all the details of religious practice. Thus, he was content to mention the most salient features of faith. It is akin to a dying father gathering his children and offering them some parting advice; it goes without saying that he will select only the most important matters and speak as specifically as possible.

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(1) It is said that this was a part of Luqman's advice to his son and Allah just narrated what he said. This means that he said to his son, ‘Do not ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah and do not obey your parents if they order you to falsely ascribe divine power to something besides Allah. Yet, Allah has commanded that they be obeyed in anything that does not entail polytheism or disobedience to Him the Most High.

It is also said Luqman mentioned to his son that he should not ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah and Allah then enjoined every human being to honour his parents. Al-Qurtubi quoted these two opinions (7/5320) from Al-Qushayri. He added that the preferable view is that these two verses were revealed concerning Saʿd ibn Abu Waqqas.

(2) *In his Farewell address, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'O, people, verily your blood and property is sacred and will be until you meet your Lord. Their sacredness is like this day and this month—that you venerate and honour so faithfully. Indeed, you will meet your Lord, and He will question you concerning your actions. Verily, I have conveyed the message. Whoever is in possession of a trust, let him fulfil it and return to the one by whom he was entrusted. The interest accrued on all past transactions is now void; however, you are entitled to the principal sums of those transactions. Do not oppress others, and you will not be oppressed.' See Ibn Hisham, Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyyah, 4: 603-604.*

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents’ (*Luqman:* 14). Instruction about filial servitude and loyalty is given significant attention within the Quran. Yet, in this verse we are given the reason why filial servitude and loyalty is afforded its significance: ‘his mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his weaning lasted two years’ (*Luqman:* 14). Five Quranic verses on filial servitude and loyalty mention the word ‘good’ as follows:

- ‘And lo! We accepted this solemn pledge from [you,] the Children of Israel: "You shall worship none but Allah, and you shall do good unto your parents.’ (*al-Baqara:* 83)
- ‘Worship Allah [alone] and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, in aught beside Him. And do the good unto your parents.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 36)
- ‘Say: "Come, let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden unto you: ‘Do not ascribe divinity to, in any way, to aught beside Him, and [do not offend against but, rather,] do good unto your parents’" (*al-An‘am:* 151).
- ‘For your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him. And do good unto [thy] parents’ (*al-Isra’:* 23).
- ‘Now [amongst the best of the deeds which] We have enjoined upon man [to be] good towards his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his weaning took thirty months’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15).
- In the twenty-ninth verse of the chapter of *al-'Ankabut*, the word ‘goodness’ (*husn*) is used to describe the treatment of parents: ‘Now [amongst the best of righteous deeds which] We have enjoined upon man [is] goodness towards his parents.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8)

Only the verse in question enjoins filial servitude and loyalty without the use of either the words goodness (*husn*) or good (*ihsan*). Nevertheless, what is the difference between *husn* and *ihsan*? The word *ihsan* is the verbal noun of the verb *ahsana* which means to make good. For instance, you would say, 'So-and-so does this or that excellently (*ahsana*).' *Husn* (goodness), on the other hand, is the verbal noun of the verb *hasuna* which means to be inherently good. *Husn* is the original root of all related derivatives. When you say, ‘So-and-so acts justly’, you describe him with the attribute of justice. However, when you want to elaborate, you say, ‘So- and-so is just.’ In the latter case, you have mentioned justice as a quality inherent in his being, not simply a description of his actions.

As such, *husn* (goodness) conveys a stronger meaning than *ihsan* (good). Why does goodness then occur in the verse of ‘Now [among the best of righteous deeds which] We have enjoined upon man [is] goodness towards his parents’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8)? Many have mentioned that this verse addresses a very difficult area. It touches upon the essence of our creed: how does a son respond to his parents if they command him to ascribe Divinity to something other than Allah? This explains why it was required that Allah *the Exalted* reminds the son that He has enjoined goodness upon him towards his parents. At the place where he wanted to convey the most expressive meaning, He did not say *ihsan* (good). Rather, he says, ‘goodness’. Allah *the Almighty* stresses a son's duty to his parents in this very illustrative language to help him realise that their calling him to associate partners with Him is not a license to mistreat or abandon them. Allah *the Exalted* instructs us, ‘obey them not, but [even then] behave with them in this world's life with kindness...’ (*Luqman:* 15).

This is a general order to show kindness to parents. However, the order specifically deals with the role of motherhood: ‘His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his weaning lasted two years’ (*Luqman:* 14). He did not mention anything about the role of fathers. Why is this? In response, some said that it is your responsibility to put your intellect and heart to work in order to arrive at its detailed conclusions. Here, Allah *the Most High* makes a point to make a particular mention of a mother's role. She sacrifices a great deal for you while you are young and unable to recognise her sacrifices. The favour she confers upon you is hidden from you. As for a father's sacrifices, you see them when you are mature, obtaining the ability to understand the world around you. Most sons acknowledge the things their fathers provide for them.

Fathers' sacrifices mostly occur after maturity when intellectual ripeness is complete. Therefore, a child recognises what his father does for him. On many occasions, he hears, ‘Your father has gone off to do this or that (for your sake)’ or ‘Your father brought this for you’ or ‘When your father arrives, such-and-such will happen.’ Indeed, the role of fathers is quite different from the role of mothers. A father's role is obvious. Accordingly, the Lord *the Most High* mentions a mother's role: ‘His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain’ (*Luqman:* 14). Some wondered, is not the child the outcome of an act shared by a mother and a father. Are not they equal? ‘Certainly,’ we would respond. However, the hardship that mothers bears in pregnancy and labour is more observable. If Allah *the Almighty* would not have attached procreation to sensual gratification, people would have engaged in sexual intercourse sparingly. In that case, mothers would not have been willing to endure the hardship of child bearing, and fathers would not have been willing to endure the responsibility of a family.

We all are aware of the story of the woman who raised a case before the courts because her husband attempted to deprive her of her custody rights. After she addressed the court, the judge asked her, ‘Is not this child both of yours?’ She then responded, ‘Of course, he is. Yet, he carried him when he was weightless and released him with pleasure and delight. I, on the other hand, carried him while he was a burden.’ The judge ruled in her favour.

The meaning of ‘strain upon strain’ (*Luqman:* 14) is weakness upon weakness. Women are purely the gentler sex. The inherent gentleness of women is combined with additional hardship whose source is the foetus that is deriving nourishment from them. Day after day, the foetus grows inside the womb. Allah *the Almighty* wisely created the womb with elasticity and expandability; it can contain the foetus during the various stages of pregnancy until it reaches a size at which its continued growth is no longer possible inside. At this point, the womb pushes the baby out. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘We bring [all] this into being as a new creation. Blessed, therefore, is Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu’minun:* 14)

The foetus is entirely dependent on the mother for nourishment, breathing and movement. Nevertheless, when the order of Allah is issued, He decrees the birth of that child and brings him forth as a new creation, providing him with all essentials for survival. He is no longer part of the mother. This process of travails is like the explosion of balloons; you cannot inflate it with more air than it can hold. It is nothing short of a wonder of Allah that the womb expands to the point of containing twins, triplets, quadruplets, etc. as we often witness. The fact that the provision of the child is independent of that of its mother is a manifestation of the greatness of the Creator. Each of them has their own provision. Neither of them can infringe upon the provision of the other. As soon as a woman is destined to conceive a child, there is a cessation in her menstrual cycle. This very blood forms the principal source of nourishment for the new child.

Before birth, a woman's body rejects this blood monthly without benefiting from it. Why is this? Indeed, the blood is not there for her nourishment. Seemingly, the Creator informs us that each of us has a provision. None shall encroach upon that which has been assigned to someone else. Additionally, another sign of the Divine wise plan in placing the foetus in the stomach of a mother is that it comes out with head first. Healthy children are borne in this natural way. Indeed, the first of life's demands that the new-born must confront as soon as it separates from its mother is to breathe. The baby's head comes out of the birth canal during delivery to help him breathe. Specialists of the field of obstetrics/gynaecology attempt to ensure that, even if the birth is difficult. If it comes out oppositely, he may suffer shock and die.

The Lord says, ‘his weaning two years’ (*Luqman:* 14). *Fisal,* namely weaning, refers to the period after a child completes the nursing phase. On the basis of the same linguistic root, a young camel that is no longer dependent on the milk of its mother is called '*faseel*', or a young camel that can eat and live without his mother's care. Ironically, weaning children is difficult for both children and mothers. Parents share the sexual intercourse that produces a child. In light of this, we must acknowledge that the mother enjoys a larger role in the life of the children and carries a weightier burden than that of fathers in terms of rearing. This explains why she received a greater mention in the advice of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. One of his Companions once asked, ‘Who is worthiest of my good companionship, O, Messenger of Allah?' He responded, 'Your mother (he repeated it three times) and then your father.'(1) In this, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* gave each of them in accordance with their sacrifices.

- The Quran sets out the issue of weaning in other verses: 'The [divorced] mothers may nurse their children for two whole years for those, if they wish to complete the period of nursing' (*al-Baqara:* 233). The verse in question asserts this point: 'his weaning lasted two years.' (*Luqman:* 14)
- Another verse combines the length of time spent in pregnancy and the subsequent nursing period: 'Her bearing him and his weaning took thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). Subtracting two years from thirty months leaves us six months only. This is the shortest time for a successful pregnancy.

ʿAli *Allah be pleased with him* depended on this reasoning, while the opinion of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was that the relevant punishment of adultery should be implemented to a woman(2) who gave birth six months after marriage. Indeed, his reasoning was that pregnancy requires nine months. Indeed, ʿAli mentioned to 'Umar, 'O, Commander of the faithful, Allah mentions otherwise!' Then he said to 'Umar the above two verses: (3) 'Her bearing him and his weaning took thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) and 'his weaning lasted two years' (*Luqman:* 14). Looking at these two verses, ʿAli could conclude that the six months was an acceptable time for pregnancy. Upon this, 'Umar remarked, 'Unfortunate indeed is a place without Abu Al-Hasan.'(4)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 5971); Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith Number: 2548) in Kitab Al-Birr was-Sila. It is narrated from Abu Hurayra.*

(2) *The story of the woman who gave birth after six months*

(3) *Ibn Katheer, Tafsir, 4: 157.*

(4) *Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, (Hadith Number: 1/457); Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, from Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. He said, 'We made the pilgrimage with 'Umar. Once he had performed his circumambulations and kissed the black stone. 'Umar then said, "I know that a stone has neither the power to harm or benefit me."' This is the beginning of a long Hadith in which "Umar Allah be pleased with him is narrated to have said, 'I seek refuge with Allah the Most High from ever living in a place that you are not present Abu Al-Hasan.' This was after 'Ali said, 'No, indeed, it does harm and benefit! On the Day of Judgment, will it not bear witness for those who kissed it?'*

Allah *the Most High* then says, ‘[Hence, O, man,] be grateful towards Me and towards your parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys’ end’ (*Luqman:* 14). Gratefulness is due to Allah first, for He is the Creator from nothing and the One Who sustains all living beings. Then, gratefulness is due to parents who are the immediate cause of child birth and subsequent growth. The Lord is the ultimate source and cause of creation. His creative act occurs *ex nihilo* and that parents are a means to accomplish this end. You can only prove being grateful to the ultimate cause when you thank your parents. Indeed, they are the secondary cause of your existence.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘[Hence, O, man,] be grateful towards me and towards your parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys' end' (*Luqman:* 14) is a particular reference to the gratefulness that should be shown to Allah and then to parents for your creation. Nonetheless, in a different place we read: ‘Say: "O, my Lord! Bestow your grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!"’ (*al-Isra’:* 24) Show gratitude for them, for they form the immediate cause of your existence, education and upbringing. This alludes to a type of biological paternity and another type which is the outcome of raising and rearing a child. Instances in which someone other than the biological parents rears a child are not rare. Accordingly, as much as Allah has stated the reason for filial servitude and loyalty, ‘Say: "O, my Lord! Bestow your grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!’" (*al-Isra’:* 24), those who fulfil this role must be afforded the same standard of gratitude, loyalty and kindness. The well-known Islamic legal maxim offers the following wisdom: ‘The reason for performing an action and the action itself are inseparable; whenever the reason is present the action follows, and whenever it is absent, the action is not performed.’ Thus, if the biological father is not present, the one who was responsible for the child stands for the parent. This surrogate father is to be shown kindness, gratitude and love equal to a biological father. In fact, a surrogate father should have more kindness. Simply, there is a natural impetus—to take care of your own physical offspring—that drives a biological father to care for his children. A surrogate father, on the other hand, is only motivated by his religious responsibility and compassion. This issue is entirely different; it is not one simply of paternity.

Now, are you commanded to show gratefulness to Allah first as a way to show gratefulness to parents who are the immediate causes of your existence? Or are you to show gratefulness to parents first as a way to show gratefulness to Allah, the Creator? We would offer them together. Showing gratefulness to Allah entails showing gratefulness to parents and vice versa. Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘with Me is all journeys’ end’ (*Luqman:* 14) which means that the ultimate end lies with Him. In other words, I command you, so be careful and never violate My orders. Or else, I can punish those who violate my orders. Allah *Glorified is He* says,(1)

وَإِن جَٰهَدَاكَ عَلَىٰٓ أَن تُشْرِكَ بِى مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِۦ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا ۖ
وَصَاحِبْهُمَا فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا ۖ وَٱتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَىَّ ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَىَّ
مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

If they strive to make you associate with Me any- thing about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life according to what is right, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. You will all return to Me in the end, and I will tell you everything that you have done [15] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 15)

Allah *the Exalted* stresses the issue of gratefulness to one's parents leaving no excuse for anyone. A companion was questioning the Messenger of Allah

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(1) *Concerning the occasion of this verse, Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas said, ‘I was a very dutiful son to my mother. When I embraced Islam, she said to me, "O Sa'd, what is this you have decided to do? I swear, I will not eat or drink until you give up this new religion." She would continue rebuking me. It even came to be said that I was killing my mother. At this, I said, "O, my dear mother, do not do this to yourself, for indeed, there is nothing that could make me consider giving up my faith." Afterward, she went the first day without eating. Then, she awoke and continued her self-imposed hunger for another day and night. By now, I could tell that this was really beginning to wear on her. When I saw this, I said, "O, my dear mother, by Allah, you can be assured that even when you pass away and the soul departs the body, I will not relinquish my faith. The choice is yours. You can choose to eat or you can choose to starve yourself." When she heard this, she ate. It was after this occasion that the verse was revealed.' See As-Suyuti, Al-Durr Al-Manthur, 6: 521. He attributed it to Abu Ya'ala, Al-Tabrani, Ibn Mardawayh, and Ibn 'Asakir from Abu 'Uthman Al-Nahdi.*

peace and blessings be upon him about this issue. What shall I do to show them gratefulness if they actively call me to disbelief? Do I obey them? Such was the context in which the verse in question was revealed.

In the verse of chapter *al-Ankabut*, we read: ‘Now [amongst the best of righteous deeds which] We have enjoined upon man is goodness towards his parents. Yet [even so,] should they endeavour to make you ascribe Divinity, side by side with Me, to something which your mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not. For it is unto Me that you all must return, whereupon I shall make you [truly] understand [the right and wrong of] all that you were doing [in life]’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8).

- We find the word 'goodness' (*husn*) mentioned; it does not say, ‘but [even then] behave with them in this world's life with kindness’ (*Luqman:* 15). The word *husn* is all-inclusive of forms of good and gentle kindness; it includes good company and other types of good treatment.
- ‘Yet, should they endeavour to’ (*Luqman:* 15). The Arabic term *jahad* is to strive for a personal aim, whereas the term *jaahada* is to compete with another person for a goal, or in other words a mutual strife. It is common to say, 'So-and-so is competing (*jaahada*) with so-and-so.' We use this term in the same way we use the term *qaatal* to indicate a mutual fight. Indeed, the linguistic patterns of these verbs indicate the collective action. This general rule can also be observed in the sentence: Zayd and ʿAmr shared (*sharaka*) in this or that. The use of this verb indicates that each of them takes part in the action. Nevertheless, in all likelihood, one of them takes a more active role, while the other was passive.

Thus, Allah's statement, ‘Yet should they endeavour to’ (*Luqman:* 15), should not be taken to mean that if they gently exhort you to ascribe Divinity to an entity besides Allah, they spare no effort and energy in their attempt to coerce you to join them in polytheism, My command to you is ‘obey them not’ (*Luqman:* 15). Yet, after you refuse to acquiesce to their wishes, this should not be a reason to treat them unkindly or sever your ties with them.

Even in their state of blatant disbelief, they are still afforded the privilege that Allah *the Most High* mentions in the verse, 'but [even then] behave with them in this world's life with kindness' (*Luqman:* 15). Actuality, they have disbelieved in Me. Yet, I am still commanding kindness to them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'And follow the path of those who turn towards me' (*Luqman:* 15). It asserts that you will never be alone. Indeed, there are many people who are penitent and constant in turning to Allah. Join them, for Allah says, 'In the end, unto Me you all must return' (*Luqman:* 15) which means that the ultimate return of all will be to Me.

Many scholars say that this verse refers to *Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas*,(1) the companion whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, *'Sa`ad* is my uncle, so let anyone show me an uncle finer than he is!(2) When Saʿad embraced Islam, his mother was angered.(3) She had a deep love for her son; in fact, his embracing Islam nearly drove her to insanity, and she vowed to refrain from eating, drinking, bathing and to go stark raving naked under the intense heat of the sun until he recanted his religious conversion. When Saʿad learnt of this, he said, 'Leave her alone. By Allah, if hunger begins to set in, she will eat. If her thirst becomes unbearable, she will drink. If she is afflicted with lice, she will bathe. As for me, I will never abandon the religion I have accepted.' Then, the verse: 'Yet, should they endeavour to…' (*Luqman:* 15) was revealed.

Should a disbeliever who actively strives to mislead believers, whether their sons or others, so that believers may join them in disbelief, were they to knew that Allah *Glorified is He* enjoined that such a disbeliever father or mother should still be treated with respect in spite of his opposition to the truth, they would know for certain that He is merciful onto them and does not deserve their attitude of denial and rejection.

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(1) *The story of the mother of Sa'ad Ibn Abu Waqqas and how she was upset by his conversion to Islam*

(2) *This Prophetic Hadith was mentioned by Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani in Al-Isaba (entry no. 3187). He sourced it to At-Tirmidhi from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Jabir who said, 'Sa'ad approached the Messenger of God peace and blessings be upon him who said, "Sa'ad is my uncle, so let anyone show me an uncle finer than he is!' This Prophetic Hadith was also narrated by Hakim in his Mustadrak (3/498), concerning it, he said, 'This Prophetic Hadith is authentic upon the criteria of Al-Bukhari and Muslim, but neither of them narrated it.' Ibn Sa'ad also narrated this Prophetic Hadith in At-Tabaqat (3/128).*

(3) *She is Himna bint Sufyan ibn Umayya. In Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (entry no. 3187 in biographical entry of her son Sa`ad) Ibn Hajr wrote: 'She was the paternal cousin of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb ibn Umayya.'*

Previously, we mentioned the Qudsi Hadith in which the earth said, 'O, Lord, permit me to cave in while the sons of Adam (human beings) dwell upon me. Indeed, they have availed themselves of the sustenance You provide to them, but failed to thank You.' The sky, then, said, 'O, Lord, permit me to fall to pieces upon the sons of Adam. Indeed, they have availed themselves of the sustenance You provide to them, but failed to thank You.' Then, the seas said, 'O, Lord, permit us to drown the sons of Adam. Indeed, they have availed themselves of the sustenance You provide to them, but failed to thank You.' This continued throughout the other elements of creation until the True Lord *Glorified is He* said to them, 'If you created the sons of Adam, you would have mercy upon them.'(1)

The reason for this is that they are the servants and the created beings of Allah. Have you ever witnessed an originator, or an inventor of something, senselessly smash their invention to bits. In addition, there is a Prophetic Hadith saying: 'Allah is more pleased at the repentance of His servant than one of you would be if he fortuitously found his camel which he thought had lost in a deserted land.'(2)

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(1) *This Qudsi Hadith was cited by Imam Al-Ghazali in Ihya 'Ulum Ad-Din (4/52). As a saying of some of the pious predecessors (As-Salaf) it was worded in the following manner: 'There is not a single servant of Allah that acts disobediently without the place he is standing on earth asking permission to cave in around him. Likewise, the sky requests permission to fall to pieces upon him. However, Allah Glorified is He says to the earth and heavens, 'Refrain from harming My servant and leave him to his own devices for now. Indeed, neither of you created him. If you were responsible for his creation, you would deal with him mercifully. Perhaps, he will repent unto Me, and I will forgive him. Or perhaps he will seek to replace his misdeeds with good deeds, and I will grant him that which he seeks.'*

(2) *The authenticity of this Hadith is undisputed. It was narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6309) and likewise by Muslim in his Sahih (2747). Within the collections of both, the Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik; however, the version that Muslim has narrated is as follows: 'Allah is more pleased at His penitent servant (as he repents) than one of you would be if he were in an unfamiliar land, abandoned=*

How great is our Lord!

It is narrated[1] that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was visited by a stranger; however, he recognised that he carried himself differently than did believers at that time. When Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* questioned him about his beliefs, he revealed that he was a fire-worshipper. Upon hearing this, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* slammed the door in his face, and the man promptly went away. Allah *the Almighty* then admonished His prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) concerning the way he had dealt with the stranger; He said, 'O, Ibrahim (Abraham), must he allow you to turn him from his religion in order to be worthy of being hosted for a single night. Although he disbelieves in Me, I have provided for him throughout his life.'

Afterward, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* rushed behind the man until he caught up with him. Upon reaching him, Ibrahim (Abraham) informed him of how Allah *the Almighty* had admonished him for his earlier behaviour. The man then said, 'How great is your Lord! He admonishes those whom He loves on account of His enemies.' The man then accepted the testimony of faith in the One True Allah.

If a disbeliever who desires that others join them in disbelief knew that, in spite of their disbelief, Allah *the Exalted* has still commanded that they be treated with respect and kindness, they should return to the fold of the faith in Him. This explains our advice to the adherents of other religious traditions who admire and eventually choose Islam, but thereby earn the contempt of their families. We say to them, 'Persist in the practice of your new faith and be more devoted and kinder to your family than you were before you embraced Islam. If you can do this, you will have forced them to recognise the good qualities of your religion. Thus, you should double your devotion and benevolence towards them. This will help to soften their hearts and gently make them incline towards your faith.'

= *by the mount which is carrying his only food and drink. In despair about his fate, he sits beneath a tree lamenting about his lost mount. Then, he notices that the camel is beside him. He quickly seizes the camel and after he tethers it, he is taken by such rapturous joy that he screams out, "O, Allah, You are my servant, and I am your Lord." His seemingly blasphemous effusion is the result of the intensity of his joy.'*

(1) *The story of the guest of Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him with his disbelieving guest.*

Contemplate the sublimity of the style being employed in the holy statement: '…behave with them in this world's life with kindness…' (*Luqman:* 15); the verse did not say: ‘give them kind treatment’. Rather, it makes kindness an outcome of behaving kindly to them. This entails that one should look after them and routinely check on them. A son is obligated to know the needs of his parents and should fulfil them before they ask. Indeed, he is careful not to expose them to the inherent humiliation that is associated with asking something of someone. This level of attentiveness to the needs of one’s parents is itself a tremendous show of goodness towards them.

It is like the man (1) who heard a knocking at his door. He answered it and found a friend of his who secretly confided in him that he needed some help. The man entered his home and promptly fulfilled his friend's need; nevertheless, when he entered his home, he burst into tears. When his wife came and asked him why he was weeping when, in fact, he did fulfil the need of his friend, he replied to her, ‘I am crying due to my failure to check on his situation. I was not able to provide for his need before he was forced to humiliate himself by asking me.’

When the True Lord *the Most High* mentions, '…In the end, unto to Me you all must return: and thereupon I shall make you [truly] understand all that you were doing [in life].' (*Luqman:* 15), after the command to observe filial servitude and loyalty, it serves a purpose. Indeed, He is making us aware that filial servitude and loyalty, along with behaving well towards parents with goodness are not things which will be forgotten; on the contrary, they will be recorded as good deeds for your favour. In other words, on the Day of Judgment, they will be placed on the scale which weighs your good deeds. Their weight will be that of obeying Allah’s order and command. Indeed, because you chose to perform that which you were commanded, you will receive your reward, and how could it be otherwise, you performed an act of faith; you must be commended for it.

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(1) *The story of the man whose friend had a request*

يَٰبُنَيَّ إِنَّهَآ إِن تَكُ مِثۡقَالَ حَبَّةٖ مِّنۡ خَرۡدَلٖ فَتَكُن فِي صَخۡرَةٍ أَوۡ
فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ أَوۡ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ يَأۡتِ بِهَا ٱللَّهُۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٞ ﴿١٦﴾

[And Luqman continued], ‘My son, if even the weight of a mustard seed were hidden in a rock or anywhere in the heavens or earth, God would bring it [to light], for He is all subtle and All-Aware [16] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 16)

'O, my dear son,' he [Luqman] continued. …' (*Luqman:* 16): Again, we notice that Luqman *peace be upon him* is calling his son by a term of endearment. Next, we turn our attention to the following part of the verse: '…Verily, though there be aught of that is the weight of a mustard-seed…' (*Luqman:* 16). In this verse, Luqman *peace be upon him* wants to instruct his son about an attribute of the True Lord *the Most High*. It is the attribute of absolute knowledge; it is the Knowledge from which nothing escapes or is hidden. It is as if he is saying to his son, 'By no means should you be given to the idea that what eludes people also eludes Allah *Glorified is He*: "How could it be that He Who has created [all] should not know [all]? Yes, He alone is unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware!"' (*al-Mulk:* 14)

In the same way that not even something weighing a mustard seed, even if it were hidden inside of a rock or in the sky or even buried deep in the earth, eludes the knowledge of Allah; good deeds and bad deeds, no matter how subtle, also fail to elude Him in the slightest. Whatever effort the one performing the deed makes to conceal, it makes no difference at all.

We previously said that the orientalists argued the issue of Allah’s intimate knowledge of everything in His creation as particularly expressed by the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you would conceal.' (*al-Anbiya’:* 110) They said, ‘The knowledge of what you conceal is one special ability of Allah. We are willing to grant that. However, how is there anything special about Allah’s Knowledge of what is said openly? Is this not obvious to everyone?’

We responded that Allah *the Exalted* in His statement, 'Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you would conceal.' (*al-Anbiya’:* 110), is not addressing a person; quite the opposite is true; He is addressing a group, collectively. This means that He knows all that is said openly by a group of people at one time. Previously, we gave an example for this by a public demonstration. Thousands of people converge on one place, speaking in different voices and shouting different slogans; yet, some might be saying things which are punishable by law. Given the veritable cacophony of voices that are in that place, could you even attempt to distinguish one from the other and correctly pinpoint the source of each statement?

Of course, it goes without saying that you would not be able to do such a feat despite the fact that we are only asking you to decifer statements which are being made openly. On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* knows every single word that is mentioned; He knows who spoke each word, and He is able to isolate every word and identify its source. Accordingly, we can conclude that knowledge of what is said openly, in the truest sense, is also rightfully considered the special ability of Allah. In fact, the knowledge of what is said openly is more impressive and far-reaching than even that of what is concealed.

The verse mentioned '…the weight of a mustard-seed …' (*Luqman:* 16) because, at that time, it was the smallest thing that could be readily identified, and people used it as a unit of measurement to represent minuteness. However, this does not imply that in the present age you would be justified in saying, 'Is a mustard-seed the smallest thing in existence?' The Quran mentioned it as an example of minuteness because it is appropriate to the level of knowledge of the people living at the time during the revelation of the Quran. In terms of verification, the Quran does mention the atom and even alludes to particles that are smaller in size than those in it at other places.

For this reason, when they invented the particle accelerator in Germany, they were able to split the atom. Many believed that the findings uncovered by this process opened the Quran to new criticisms. However, the Quran does mention the atom; in fact, it made it a religious measurement for the human actions. Indeed, Allah says: 'And so, he who shall have done an atom’s weight of good shall behold it, and he who shall have done an atom’s weight of evil shall behold it.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8) Within these two verses, the Quran does not mention anything smaller than the atom; it is well known that a part of something is smaller than its whole.

We also would like to point out (to those who are eager to impugn the provenance of the Quran): Indeed, you have read some things, but many others have eluded you. If you possessed thorough knowledge of the Word of Allah, you would know that it has contained enough precautions against the false conclusion you have arrived at as well as those that you might arrive at in the future. Read, if you will, Allah’s statement about the atom: '…and neither is there anything smaller than that, or larger, but is recorded in [His] clear decree.' (*Yunus:* 61) We can even say that the Quranic precaution is compound. Allah does not say small (*saghir*); rather, He says smaller (*asghar*); this means that the Word of Allah presages the discovery of every particle the atom is composed of.

And '…though it be [hidden] in a rock, or in the skies, or in the earth, Allah will bring it to light …' (*Luqman:* 16). As for the portion which reads, '…and though it be [hidden] in a rock …', this means that despite the utterly complicating interlacing of the elements of the universe and even such a seed of mustard is in the most confined place. '…or in the skies, or in the earth …' it refers to the vastness that has no limitation. In essence, what is being asserted is that nothing escapes Allah: neither in an extremely constricted place, nor in the vastness of earth and space. '…Allah will bring it to light …' because He *the Most High* has the characteristics enabling Him to do so: '…for behold, Allah is unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware.' (*Luqman:* 16)

Allah combines both of these characteristics because one could be aware of something and possess knowledge of where to find it but be incapable of reaching it as it is located in a constricted spot which you cannot reach with your hand. In order to reach this object, you must use a tool like tweezers, for example. Thus, in the aforementioned situation, you have experience, but you need the subtle ability to reach the object.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the All-Subtle: No matter how small or intricate something is, He is capable of exerting His Will upon it. This leads directly to His being All-aware; He is aware of all things, no matter how small, and He is capable of bringing all things to light, no matter how elusive they may seem. Indeed, the range of His Power is unfathomable; there is none that can prevent Him from carrying out what He wills. The characteristic of subtlety concerns penetration into things.

It is known that the smaller something is, the greater its ability is to cause harm. This is a connection we recognise in different created beings. Previously, we explained this by mentioning the example of someone who builds a home in a vast open space; in order to protect himself against animals and harmful insects entering his windows, he fixed a metal net upon them. With the addition of this iron net, the entry of thieves and large animals is blocked, but when he remembers mice and snakes, he is forced to tighten the spaces in the net. After this, he remembers flies and mosquitoes, and concludes that he needs something even tighter and more intricate in order to keep them out. Thus, the smaller and more harmful your enemy is, the more extensive your precautionary measures against him must be.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '…for behold, Allah is unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware.' (*Luqman:* 16) means that He does not lack the knowledge of where things exist. The statement also entails ease and effortlessness in exerting His Will upon them.

Thus far, Luqman *peace be upon him* has only given some advice and sermons to his son; he has not issued him any religious assignment. His ardent desire is simply to make his son aware: You have committed yourself to belief in Allah; the system of Allah has reached you, and you have listened to its contents. Your responsibility is to follow the system and bring your actions into conformity with its commands and prohibitions. Nevertheless, before you take to the system of your Lord as your manner of conduct, you should be rest assured that you are engaged in the worship of an all-sustaining Allah, for He is not overtaken by sleep or slumber, nor is there anything that escapes Him. As you enter upon His Way, bear this in mind.

Likewise, by no means should you be given to the idea that your faith is somehow unsubstantiated because you do not physically see Allah, for indeed, even if you do not see Him, He sees you. You can be certain that you will be held accountable for every action you perform; it makes no difference whether it occurs in the nook of an inanimate rock, in the sky or anywhere on Allah's vast earth.

This issue is emphasised by the Qudsi Hadith that says: 'O, My slaves, if you do not believe I am watching you, your faith is plagued with doubt. On the other hand, if you do believe that I am watching you, why have you made Me the least significant of all observers?'(1)

Afterward, Luqman *peace be upon him* resumes preaching his son, addressing the topic of religious assignment and responsibility before Allah; he says:

يَٰبُنَيَّ أَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأۡمُرۡ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَٱنۡهَ عَنِ ٱلۡمُنكَرِ
وَٱصۡبِرۡ عَلَىٰ مَآ أَصَابَكَۖ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ عَزۡمِ ٱلۡأُمُورِ ١٧

Keep up the prayer, my son; command what is right;
forbid what is wrong; bear anything that happens to
you steadfastly: these are things to be aspired to [17]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 17)

These are four points of religious assignment which Luqman *peace be upon him* begins with a command to perform prayer. Prayer (*salat*) is the second pillar of Islam after the testimony of faith: there is nothing worthy of worship besides Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. We have already learnt that because of its importance and priority, the assignment of prayer was delivered directly from Allah to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Also, due to its overwhelming importance, prayer has been made absolutely binding on a believer in all situations; there is never a time in which he is exempt from praying. The rest of the 'pillars' of the faith such as fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, paying the poor-due and making the Great Pilgrimage, on the other hand, may not be performed for some reason or another, and a believer is excused for the same. If you are exempted from these three duties, only the two testimonies of faith and prayer remain. This explains why Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made prayer the foundation of the faith.(2)

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(1) *Part of this Hadith has been established as a saying that was popular amongst those who concerned themselves with intuitive knowledge of Allah. To this end, it appears in Hilyat Al-Awliya' (8/142). It is narrated that a man said to Wahib ibn Al-Ward, 'Advise me!' To which Wahib replied, 'Beware of Allah lest you might make Him the least insignificant observer (in your regard).'*

(2) A Prophetic Hadith says: ' The prayer is the foundation of the faith. Whoever establishes it has established his faith. And whoever fails to perform it has destroyed his faith.' Al-Hafizh=

For this reason, Luqman *peace be upon him* began with the prayer: 'O, my dear son! Be constant in prayer…' (*Luqman:* 17). This is due to the fact that prayer represents the constant declaration of loyalty to Allah, occurring five times a day. When your Lord summons you, by calling to prayer (*Allahu Akbar!*), it is not appropriate for you to busy yourself with whatever affair in preference to the call of the Creator. For example, what should be the attitude of a father who summons his son, while the latter ignores the former? You should be very careful not to make the mistake of failing to respond when your Lord summons you.

So, contemplate the call to prayer (*Adhan*); the wording of the *Adhan* was first revealed in a vision to two of the prophet's Companions, such people with pure and sound human nature. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* adopted it: *Allahu Akbar. Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest. Allah is the Greatest)! That is Allah is greater than everything else which occupies your mind and time. It is absolutely unjustified for you to claim an excuse for not performing prayer on the basis of work, be it related to agriculture, manufacturing, or business.

As a matter of fact, I entered into a debate with a surgeon about this very issue. He said: 'How can I leave a surgery to perform prayer?' I responded to him, 'If you were overtaken by the sudden urge to relieve yourself in the bathroom, would you go or not?' He laughed, and then said, 'I would go.' I added, 'Well, the prayer is to be given more priority.' Do not be under the false impression that Allah *the Almighty* charges people with obligations but then gives them an insufficient amount of time to fulfil them. Indeed, Allah always takes the time constraints, individual capacity, and peoples' worldly benefits into account. For example, while travelling, shortening and joining prayers have been legislated for you.

You may perform prayers conveniently within the religious time permissions matching your circumstances. There is the permission of joining prayers by either

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= Al-ʿIraqi, (in his work [1/147] sourcing the Hadiths that appear in Ghazali's Ihya ʿUlum Ad-Din) mentioned. 'Bayhaqi narrated this Hadith in Ash-Shuʿab with a chain of narrators that he had already proclaimed weak in a tradition that was narrated by Umar.' Mulla ʿAli Al-Qari, in Al-Asrar Al-Marfuʿa (Hadith # 578) mentioned In Mushkil Al-Wasit, Ibn Salah wrote: 'Indeed, this Hadith is not known.'

advancement or postponement. To be sure, you are allotted a considerable amount of open time (during travel) if you make advancement joining of the Afternoon and Late afternoon prayers by praying both in the time of the Afternoon prayer, then make postponement joining of the Sunset and Night prayers by praying both at the latest allowed time of the Night prayer. Likewise, you can conserve a great deal of time by making a postponement joining of the Afternoon and Late afternoon prayers by praying them during the latest allowed time of the Late afternoon prayer and pray the Sunset and Night Prayers by advancement joining during the earliest allowed time of the Sunset Prayer.

Thus, there is actually a great deal of convenience and no time tightness, as might be thought, to perform your prayers. There is absolutely no plea for anyone to abandon prayer. Some seek excuses based on the holy verse that says, 'Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear …' (*al-Baqara:* 286), and they claim being unable to perform the daily prayers. We draw their attention that one should not make their capabilities the judge on the appropriateness of a Divine ruling; rather, a Divine assignment itself is the fair judgment and the appropriate standard. As long as your Lord *Glorified is He* has commissioned you with religious duties, you can be certain that He knows your capacity and has designated your responsibility in accordance with your capacity. Indeed, this is evidenced by the dispensations given in case of inability to fulfil your obligations.

He says: '…Be constant in prayer …' (*Luqman:* 17). Prayer is the first step toward building a community of believers that will implement the system of Allah. Through prayer, a human being is able to develop true faith. Previously, we pointed out the difference between the pillars of Islam and the pillars of a Muslim individual. The pillars of Islam are the five well-known religious practices around which the faith revolves. The pillars of a Muslim individual, however, are the practices constantly associating him in all situations, and he cannot be excused for neglecting them; these are the two testimonies of faith and prayer. Although it is the responsibility of a Muslim to believe that all of the pillars of Islam are perpetual obligations upon them, the ones other than the two testimonies and prayer can be skipped for any given reason.

After this, Luqman *peace be upon him* explained to his son that faith does not end with maintaining these two essential religious duties. Indeed, the perfection of faith is expressed in loving for your fellow members of humanity that which you love for yourself. To this end, he says to his son: '…and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong…' (*Luqman:* 17). After you have fulfilled your responsibility of establishing prayer, make yourself busy with enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong. Prayer is a source of personal rectification while enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong is a function of transmitting that rectification to others. This expresses the height of faith, its perfection.

When you enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong, you should not think that you are doing others a favour; quite the opposite is true, you are performing an action whose benefit will ultimately devolve upon you. By engaging in this endeavour, you will feel the abundant relief of your faith in addition to self-satisfaction and inner-peace. You will be content that you fulfil your duties while others omitted theirs.

There is no doubt that, when the others adhere to the Way of Allah, you will attain comfort too. Otherwise, the entire community will suffer from the evil of a handful of persons dissenting from the Way of Allah.

Undeniably, the loftiness of knowledge is expressed in a sense that you will not attain complete benefit from it unless you transmit it to others. If you withhold knowledge, and others are prevented from benefiting from the good of what you know, you will ultimately be unhappy because of their evil. Accordingly, we also maintain that you will not be able to benefit from the good of what others know unless you appropriately perform your duty of transmitting what you know. By commanding others to do what is good and to eschew what is evil, you demonstrate that you love for them exactly what you love for yourself. This way, you will gain two good fortunes: the good fortune of having performed your duty to Allah and the good fortune of being a member of a community that is working together to perfect each other's faith, a community which benefits you as opposed to harming you.

Additionally, another thing that can be observed about the verse we are currently discussing is that it breaks with the familiar pattern of linking the establishment of prayer with the payment of the poor-due. Normally, we find it stated: '... and be constant in prayer and spend in charity …' (*al-Baqara:* 43).

When we index the word *zakat* (poor-due, charity, alms giving), we find that it occurs thirty-two times in the Quran. Two of these references, however, do not pertain to the well-known poor-due that is paid on assets annually; rather, they refer to purification. The story of Musa (Moses) and Al-Khidr *peace be upon them* provides us with one of those references: '…Have you slain an innocent human being without [his having taken] another man's life…' (*al-Kahf:* 74).

Then, in the subsequent verses of the same chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and so we desired that their Sustainer grant them in his stead [a child] of greater purity than him and closer [to them] in loving tenderness.' (*al-Kahf:* 81) The meaning of this statement is that Allah purified them by ridding them of a source of both temptation and trial in their devotion to Him.

The second place is the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* saying: 'as well as by Our grace, [the gift of] compassion and purity …' (*Maryam:* 13). The meaning of this statement is that Allah granted Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* something to purify her thereby. An essential meaning of *zakat* (charity) is that a well-off person gives a poor one something the latter is lacking. Since Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* was not married, she was, in a sense, lacking in this aspect. Therefore, Allah granted her a special charity: He breathed into her a spirit from Himself Allah *Glorified is He*.

In one place, the term *zakat* occurs as a reference to the payment of the poor-due, but it is unaccompanied by the command to establish prayer. In this instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [remember] whatever you may give out in usury so that it might increase through [other] people's possessions will bring [you] no increase in the sight of Allah–whereas all that you give out in charity, seeking Allah's countenance, [will be blessed by Him], for it is they [who thus seek His countenance] who shall have their recompense multiplied!' (*ar-Rum:* 39)

In this verse of the chapter of Luqman, he says to his son: 'O, my dear son! Be constant in prayer and enjoin the doing of what is right …' (*Luqman:* 17); he did not say, after commanding him to be constant in prayer, 'and pay the poor due.' Why not?

It is worth mentioning that the Quran joins the establishment of prayer with the payment of the poor-due because the prayer entails sacrifice of time; time is needed to work, and through work we earn our living. Therefore, the time that you spend during prayer is a sacrifice of the most important element needed to earn money. During prayer, it is almost as if you give in charity one hundred percent of the money which you may earn during that time span. On the other hand, when paying the poor-due, you may give a tenth, a fifth or even as little as 2.5% of your earnings. You retain the larger part of your earnings. In fact, the monetary sacrifice entailed in performing the prayer is greater than that entailed in paying the actual poor-due!

Since giving charity is involved in both the prayer and alms giving, the Quran always mentions them side-by-side with the exception of this verse. When we contemplate this, we find it is an expression of the deep preciseness of the Quranic style. The Quran reports these advice in the context of Luqman's commandment to his son, and it provides us with two observations: Firstly: Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* does not charge the human individual with accountability for abiding by the Divine and religious rulings until he or she reaches the age of puberty except for prayer for which a Muslim individual bears responsibility at the age of ten. However, Allah requires the father or caretaker of a child to supervise the child's undertaking of this assignment. It then becomes responsibility of the father or caretaker of a child to command him to pray and to chastise him for neglecting it. The purpose of this seemingly early assignment of maintaining prayer is to impress upon the child the practice of praying regularly, so that when he does reaches the age of sexual maturity, praying would have become something familiar to them. As an act of worship, prayer is something which requires training and repetition to learn. The early years of age are better suited for this to take place.

A father commands his son to maintain prayer on the basis of the former being the secondary, but the worldly direct, source of existence of the latter. It is as though Allah says: 'I am the ultimate source of all of your existences, and in that capacity I am delegating the task of commanding your child to establish prayer to you. Indeed, the contributions you, the parent, make to your child's well-being are apparent, and your efforts to support them are numerous and seen to them. You are perpetually in pursuit of ensuring their benefits, making every possible attempt to furnish their requests. Thus, if you command your child and he obeys you, it is an obedience for which you have already paid the price.

In so much as I (Allah) have delegated the responsibility of assigning establishment of the prayer unto you, it naturally follows that I must also delegate unto you the right to punish your child for failing to fulfil their duty. In case of omission by a child, you, the parent, will be held responsible for it. It is your fault, not theirs as I have commissioned you with supervising them to achieve this task.’

This explains why Luqman began instructing his son with the command to establish prayer because Luqman was responsible before Allah for issuing this command to his son. At the time that Luqman was offering these instructions and advice to his son, the latter was still of a relatively young age. This is evidenced by Luqman’s calling his son, 'O, my dear son …' (*Luqman:* 17). Here, the assignment is issued by a father. If the son had already reached the age of maturity at the time he received this advice from his father; thus, the meaning is to be conscious of your obligation before Allah to establish regular prayer.

Paying the poor-due is also an obligation that has been issued by Allah, but Luqman *peace be upon him* did not mention it here. This is an example of his wisdom and precise language. The Quran cites it so that we may derive principles that guide us in our daily life.

Secondly: If he ordered his son to pay the poor-due saying to him to establish prayer and pay the poor due, it would mean his son owned property. However, it is known that a son is not considered a complete owner of his property while his father is living. This assertion is proven by the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You and what you own belong to your father.'(1) We have already mentioned that Luqman, upon receiving word of his father’s death, said, ‘Now, my affairs are under my control.’(2)

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(1) *On the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As who said, ‘A man approached the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and proclaimed, "My father is attempting to destroy my wealth." The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him responded, "Indeed, you as well as what you own belong to your father." The Messenger of God peace and blessings be upon him also said, "Verily, your children are your most wholesome acquisitions, so take from their property as you wish."' This Hadith was worded by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2292), Ahmad in his Musnad (1/179). The wording that appears above is from Ibn Majah’s collection.*

(2) *Worded by 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Hanbal in Zawa’id Az-Zuhd on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Dinar, ‘Indeed, upon returning from a journey, Luqman met a young=*

This implies that during the lifetime of his father, his affairs were not under his control. This explains why he did not command his son to pay the poor-due. At the time when he was advising his son, the command to pay the poor-due was not the responsibility of his son, it was Luqman's own responsibility. This issue is reinforced for us when we read the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '[All of you, O, believers, are brethren. Hence,] No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for accepting charity from the healthy], and neither to yourselves for eating [whatever is offered to you by others, whether it be food obtained] from your [children's] houses, or your fathers' houses, or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses, or [the house] the keys whereof are in your charge, or [the house] of any of your friends …' (*an-Nur:* 61).

Allah has relieved us of difficulty in terms of eating at any of these places. Then again, we recognise that the verse mentions all of the immediate relatives except for children. The normal arrangement in which the relatives are mentioned requires mentioning the homes of children after mentioning the homes of mothers. Why not, then, is this not the case here? Many have pointed out that the homes of your children are included in the designation of 'your houses', which above actually includes the word children's parenthetically to further emphasise this point; this means that the home of the son is the home of the father. Indeed, whatever the son owns is the property of his father.

Next, Luqman *peace be upon him* instructs his son: '…and bear in patience whatever [ill] may befall you…' (*Luqman:* 17). Patience means bearing difficulty with equanimity and composure. In order to combat feelings of fear and anguish that often attend difficulty, patience is an essential quality. Confronting a tough set of circumstances, you need additional strength. Then you should not weaken your own ability to respond effectively by submission to fear and sadness.

= *man (from his village) along the way. He questioned the young man, "What's my father been doing?" When the young man replied, "He died," Luqman said, "Well, all praise is due to Allah. Now my affairs are under my control."' [Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/519]*

Distress is caused by either a human or an act of Allah. An act of Allah is, for example, when one falls, breaks his leg or suddenly gets sick. These accidents are part from your predetermined fate in this worldly life, there is no necessary cause for their occurrence, nor must they be regarded as attempts to antagonise you. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* places them on the scale of your good deeds: either they will elevate your rank before Him, or they will expiate your sins. A relative hint in this respect is that disbelievers have always been happy whenever Muslims are afflicted by calamities, such as they were at the battle of Uhud; nevertheless, Allah *the Exalted* responded to them and clarified the foolishness entailed by their approach. He *the Most High* says: 'Say: "Never can anything befall us save what Allah has decreed for us…"' (*at-Tawba:* 51). Examining the preposition 'for' used in this verse, we notice that Allah did not say, ‘decreed *upon* or *against* us'. This implies that what befalls believers is actually intended for their good, and not to harm them. It is not, then, wise that disbelievers be joyful about hardships befalling Muslims, is it not?

Within the arrangement of Luqman’s advice, the counsel to be patient is mentioned after the command to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. Indeed, when a person abides by these two principles, he will be exposed to some harm. Therefore, Luqman advises his son to confront enmity and hostility, in the course of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong, with patience. It is your patience that secures you a great reward.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified that the process of changing evil occurs at different levels, for he said: 'Whoever sees something wrong should change it (into good) with one's hand. If they cannot change it by his hand, let it be by speech. If this is also impossible, then they should abhor evil in his heart, and this is the weakest of faith.'(1)

To be sure, Allah has commanded you to change what is wrong; however, he has placed the responsibility of assessing the situation and to what extent you can positively affect it, in your hands. Faith demands that you become a righteous reformer; yet, it does not necessitate that you give yourself to ruin in order to do so. When you run into wrongdoing, change it with your hand; if you have authority over a person responsible for the wrong action, your child, younger sibling, etc., you may chastise or forcibly prevent them from doing it.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (49) in the chapter entitled Kitab Al-Iman, by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/20, 49, 52), and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2173) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him.*

For example, you may physically punish your son if you were to see a cigarette in his mouth or break a glass of wine from which he is drinking. Naturally, the same may be said of destroying any other intoxicants he is using. If you are unable or not allowed to practise physical punishment, it is sufficient for you to speak out against it, provided that you make a thoughtful statement which is not injurious to others or a cause for unrest. Indeed, some statements can cause greater harm than benefit.

Nevertheless, if you find yourself in a situation in which you are unable to take even this second-level step, wrongdoing should be changed with your heart. This occurs when you witness something wrong and possess only the power to say, ‘O, Allah, I acknowledge that this is an act of wrongdoing, and I know that You are not pleased by it.’ However, is this self-talk, action of heart or inner denouncing considered a method for changing a bad reality which we are required to change primarily by hand?

Scholars have said that changing wrongdoing with one's heart is considered an effective conduct only when there is a truthful inner feeling of denouncing which is reflected and confirmed by a visible physical attitude. This way, a Muslim individual rids himself of hypocrisy; in other words, if your heart bears witness that a particular action is wrong and displeasing to Allah, but you are unable to prevent or advise the doer against the bad behaviour, the least you can do is to forsake the wrongdoer. How can it be said that you are changing anything with your heart or otherwise if you continue to interact with this person as though you approve their actions?

Therefore, changing wrongdoing with one's heart only occurs if the one responsible for the wrong action senses that he is being ostracised. You should not congratulate them on good occasions, nor offer him condolences in case of bad ones; if you work in commerce, you cease to do business with them, etc.

The morally corrupt and dissolute would not be able to prosper and strut around boastfully if people deal with them like social outcasts; instead, people probably have an increased level of respect for them because of fear of their corruption and wrongdoing.

Changing evil with one's heart does not occur by merely mentioning a word; it is more properly understood as an action and a disposition. Our Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us about this issue when He says: 'And, indeed, He has enjoined upon you in this Divine writ that whenever you hear people deny the truth of Allah’s Messages and mock at them, you shall avoid their company until they begin to talk of other things – or else, verily, you will become like them. Behold, together with those who deny the truth Allah will gather in hell the hypocrites.' (*an-Nisa’:* 140) In another verse, He says: 'Now, whenever thou meet such as indulge in [blasphemous] talk about Our Messages, turn thy back upon them until they begin to talk of other things, and if Satan should ever cause you to forget [yourself], remain not, after recollection, in the company of such evildoing folk.' (*al-An‘am:* 68)

A clear example in this respect is Prophet Muhammad's story(1) with ‘the three companions who failed to join the Campaign of Tabuk without reason'.(2) This story teaches us how to isolate those who commit major wrong actions; it is not by placing them in prison as we do now. On the contrary, it is by creating a situation in which the entire community shuns them. In mentioning the community, we are not simply referring to the general community; we are also intending their immediate circles and even their closest relatives.

As for the story, there was a group of men who offered excuses to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as to why they could not accompany him in that battle; Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accepted the excuses on the basis of their outward import and left the ulterior motives they were concealing for the judgment of Allah. Yet, the three men around whom the story revolves failed to find any excuse for their non-participation, nor did they consider themselves capable of lying to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not imprison them physically; rather, he imprisoned them spiritually, making the entire community, including their relatives, forsake them. In fact, each of the three men walked amongst people, attempting to pick an argument with someone in hope that this would force them to start talking to him, but no one paid him any attention. As for Kaʿab ibn Malik,(1) he scaled the wall of his cousin's garden and said to him, 'You know I love Allah and His Messenger', but his cousin did not respond to him. Moreover, Kaʿab was keen to pray beside Muhammad (*peace and blessings be upon him*) hoping that the Prophet would look at him, but the Prophet did not acknowledge him.(2)

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(1) *The story of the three who defaulted from the battle of Tabouk*

(2) ‘The Three’ refers to Ka`ab ibn Malik, Hilal ibn Umayya and Marara ibn Ar-Rabiʿa Al-ʿAmiri

Once this social isolation was successfully established at level of the outer community, the Divine law extended it to include their closest confidants: their wives. These three men were required to retreat from their wives. Their wives were ordered to refrain from contact with them until Allah *the Almighty* issued a definitive judgment concerning their case.(3) One of the concerned wives(4) came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, indeed my husband "wears a very tight garment" (a colloquialism that marks him as not being particularly libidinous).' Consequently, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed her to remain in his service with the condition they refrain from engaging in conjugal relations.

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(1) *He is Ka'ab ibn Malik ibn Ubayy Ka'ab Al-Ansari, 'Poet of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him'. His mother is Layla bint Zayd from the tribe of Banu Salama. He was also known by the surname, Abu 'Abd Ar-Rahman. He was one of the seventy members of the Ansar present at `Aqaba. He fought at Uhud, Khandaq and all of the other notable battles besides Tabuk, but Allah forgave him for this. Near the end of his life he migrated to Basra, and finally died there in the year 50 A.H. during the reign of Mu'awiya. He reached 77 years of age before he died which means that he was born 27 years before the Prophet's migration to Medina.*

(2) *Ka'ab ibn Malik recounted for us the feelings he experienced during those tense days. He said, 'As for Hilal ibn Umayya and Marara ibn ar-Rabi'a, they retreated to their homes and wept. As for me, I was at the high point of my youth and regarded myself as fairly resilient so I went out amongst the people, performing prayers, walking through the marketplaces, etc., but no one would speak to me. On one occasion, I came to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and attempted to greet him while he was sitting in a gathering after prayer. As I turned to walk away, I questioned myself, 'Did his lips move as he was returning my greeting or not?' Next, I prayed near him and glanced at him, and when I had finished performing prayer, he looked at me. Nevertheless, when I attempted to approach him, he turned away.' [Sahih Muslim (2769) in the chapter entitled Kitab At-Tawba].*

(3) An emissary of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Kaʿb ibn Malik and said to him, 'Indeed the Messenger of Allah has commanded that you refrain from conjugal relations with your wife.' I answered, 'Am I to divorce her, or what should I do?' 'No', he continued, 'just refrain from having relations with her.' *[Sahih Muslim (2769)]*

(4) This refers to Khawla bint ʿAsim, the wife of Hilal ibn Umayya, one of the three men who failed to report for duty (during the Campaign of Tabuk) [Ibn Hajr, Fath 8/121] There is also a narration narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2769) and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4418)=

These three men remained isolated from the general community and their families for a period of thirty days and an additional ten days for the general community. The general community as well as their families succeeded in making them feel the brunt of their poor decision-making. This is the manner in which the Divine law teaches us to isolate those who have been proven guilty of major wrong actions and crimes. The community withdrawing from them is a more effective rehabilitative strategy than withdrawing them from the community (as in the case of imprisonment). In the light of the aforementioned principle, the community's collectively shunning them proved to be utter misery for the three men.

Ka'ab ibn Malik narrated his story and how he was feeling in this event; he said: 'Despite its vastness, the earth was becoming too narrow for me.' The True Lord *Glorified is He* described this state in this verse: 'And [He turned in His Mercy, too,] towards the three [groups of believers] who had fallen prey to corruption, until in the end–after the earth, despite all its vastness, had become [too] narrow for them and their souls had become [utterly] constricted. They came to know with certainty that there is no refuge from Allah other than [a return] unto Him, and thereupon, He turned again unto them in His Mercy, so that they might repent, for verily, Allah alone is an Acceptor of Repentance, a Dispenser of Grace.' (*at-Tawba:* 118)

As soon as the general community as well as their families and loved ones united in implementing the Way of Allah, Allah gave these three men relief

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= which reads: 'Indeed, the wife of Hilal ibn Umayya came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, "O, Messenger of Allah, Hilal ibn Umayya is in a state of decrepit old age and does have a servant who can assist him. Do you find it objectionable for me to remain in his service?" "No," he responded, "However, he is not to approach you (for conjugal relations)." She replied, "By Allah, that hardly even seems to cross his mind. Indeed, he has not stopped crying since the day this happened until now."'

from their trial, and the verse of relief was revealed: '…thereupon He turned again unto them in His Mercy so that they might repent, for, verily, Allah alone is an Acceptor of Repentance, Dispenser of Grace.' (*at-Tawba:* 118)

A person(1) rushed to Kaʿb to convey the good news to him. Upon receiving the news, Kaʿb was elated and commented, 'I was so happy that I would give him all my garments, as a reward, and then borrow a garment from elsewhere so that I could go to meet the Messenger of Allah!'(2)

Thus, we think it is a better method that the entire community isolate itself from interacting with an evildoer than imprisoning him. Nonetheless, that begs a question: 'Who will guarantee that our community faithfully assumes this task as the community of believers during the time of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* assumed it?

Returning to our examination of the types of calamities, we point out that if a distress were an act of Allah, it might be less bitter to you and you might find it easier to patiently endure; the case is between you and your Lord. On the other hand, if you were to experience a disaster clearly caused by someone antagonising you, the case would be quite different. For example, if a criminal burns your crops or murders your child, this will require a greater deal of patience and composure. Whenever you see your adversary, you are stirred with anger, and your blood nearly boils in your veins. It certainly requires a heightened level of equanimity and self-control to patiently endure such afflictions.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of this issue: 'But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!' (*ash-Shura:* 43). The word 'indeed' is used to emphasise the additional amounts of self-control and self-discipline needed to prevent you from lashing out against your adversary each time you see them. On a slightly different note, it must also be observed that this verse is one of the places orientalists have sought evidence in their attempt to discredit the Quran.

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(1) *This refers to Hamza ibn 'Amr Al-Aslami. He was mentioned by Ibn Hajr Al-Asqalani in Fath (in the explanation of tradition # 4418).*

(2) *This is an excerpt from the narration of Kaʿb ibn Malik which was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4418) and Muslim in his Sahih (2769).*

They mockingly question: 'What is the difference between the verse, "…This, behold, is something to set one's heart upon!" (*Luqman:* 17), and the verse, "…this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!' (*Fussilat:* 43)?

Which of them is the most eloquent? If it is the first, then, the other must be deemed second-rate or at least not as eloquent as the first. In response to this query, we say that each of the previous two verses represents the height of eloquent delivery in their respective contexts. The verse with the emphasis structure, which is translated into the word 'indeed', is referring to a trial or test in which one is confronted with an adversary and thus employs emphasis to express the added measure of patience needed to overcome the trial. The other verse is mentioned within a context that also includes a trial or affliction of some sort but does not involve an adversary; in which case, it is a matter between you and your Lord. Patiently enduring the latter of these two occasions is comparatively easier.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* addresses this issue in order to purify the soul and prevent it from inclining toward vengeance; He says: 'But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil …' (*ash-Shura:* 40). This checks one's thirst for revenge, reminding him that there must be parity amongst retaliation and the initial act of aggression. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrates the moral high ground by opening the door of forgiveness, He says: '…hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah …' (*ash-Shura:* 40). In a different verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you; however, to bear yourselves with patience is indeed far better for [you, since Allah is with] those who are patient in adversity.' (*an-Nahl:* 126)

Indeed, your Lord has permitted you to take revenge (when you have legitimately been wronged) but only with certain limits, so you must exercise a measure of self-control. As a matter of fact, once the right to avenge a wrong has been placed in your hands, you might decide to forfeit it and forgive the guilty party. Indeed, this serves as a good explanation for the particular phenomenon we see occurring in Upper Egypt, an area rife with blood feuds. There, a killer bears his own funeral shroud in his hands and submits himself to the guardian of victim. With this show of submissiveness, the guardian is only left with the choice of forgiving the murderer.

Even in case of the crime of murder and its legally sanctioned retaliation, the True Lord *the Most High* has provided an option which elevates the human soul and grants it an opportunity to rise above the natural desire for revenge. In fact, Allah *the Exalted* has referred to both sides of the dispute involving a wrongful death as brothers; He *Glorified is He* says: '…And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness …' (*al-Baqara:* 178).

In the midst of what appears the most unlikely circumstance, with blood spilling, our Lord is summoning us to fraternity, forgiveness, and spiritual excellence. There is a well-known difference between having a legitimate right and taking that right into your own hands.

Allah is the Creator of the human soul and is well aware of the instincts and emotions that are inherent in it. He also knows the values and principles that it settles upon. Yet, He *the Most High* does not establish rulings on the principle of moral sublimation; on the contrary, He has issued His Way in accordance with the nature with which He has created people. Indeed, not every member of humanity is at a level of scrupulousness that would allow him to seriously tolerate a command to forgive and pardon. This explains why Allah has granted the right to take retribution in the form, in which you were harmed, from the person that transgresses you: 'But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil …' (*ash-Shura:* 40). He also says: 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you …' (*an-Nahl:* 126).

In spite of this, when contemplating these verses, you find that implementing them 'on the ground' is quite a thorny issue. Who is there that actually possesses the self-control and detailed account of their actions in terms of their being appropriate or excessive so that they will force them to halt at the point of perfect reciprocation as Allah *the Almighty* commanded?

Previously, we clarified this issue by posing the question: If someone wrongs you and let us say, strikes you, for instance, will you be able to strike him just as he struck you, without exceeding the boundaries of exact reciprocation?

Indeed, if you exceed that limit, you become guilty of wrongdoing. Read the rest of the verse: '…hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah, for verily, He does not love evildoers.' (*ash-Shura:* 40)

In our earlier discussions we mentioned the story (1) of a Jewish financier who agreed to cut a pound (a weight consisting of about 449.28g) of flesh from the body of his debtor if the latter failed to repay a loan by a specified date. Nevertheless, the date of clearing the debt arrived, and the debtor was not able to pay. Consequently, the financier decided to take his affair before a court of law and explain the agreement before a duly appointed judge. The judge was granted special insight by Allah, the Exalted. He said to the financier, 'Yes sir, you do have the right to carry out that which was stipulated in the contract. In fact, I will give you the knife myself. If I understand things correctly, you do intend to cut a pound of flesh from the body of your debtor, right? Well, you must do so with a single blow and with the condition that if you fail to cut a pound or exceed it, the difference must be cut from your own body!' At this, the financier decided not to hold the debtor to the terms of the contract and immediately left the courtroom. If truth be told, exact reciprocation of harm is impossible to realise. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* with the inclusion of this condition of exact reciprocation is turning your attention towards the fact that forgiveness and clemency are better for you and a superior demonstration of righteousness.

As such, the True Lord *the Most High* speaks to us about forgiveness and spiritual excellence when discussing a trial or test (in our lives) that involves a direct adversary. He makes it clear for us: Indeed, if you exercise the right that He has given to you and inflict reciprocal harm on the individual that has wronged you, you have relieved your conscience. However, you will deprive yourself from reaping the reward that Allah would have given you had you exerted forgiveness.

It seems as though the True Lord *the Most High* wants to turn the causes of hatred into causes of peace and friendliness. Indeed, if you forgive a murderer whom you are entitled to demand justice from (in the form of having his life taken), his life will become a testament to your forgiveness. Could he, afterward, ever think an evil thought about you?

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(1) The story of the Jewish usurer who lent a man money under the condition that if he delays in paying the debt he would cut off a pound of his flesh

This explains the teaching of our Lord: '…Repel (evil) with that (benign and graceful way) which is best, and lo, the person between whom and you there is enmity will behave as if he were your warm-hearted friend.' (*Fussilat:* 34)

Here, I would like to point out that someone came to me and said, ‘By Allah, I have repelled evil with something that is better when dealing with my adversary. Nevertheless, I have not found him to have become as close, true friend, as Allah *Glorified is He* said.’ I responded to him, ‘You must reconsider your attitude. Perhaps, you think that you have repelled evil with something that is better while the reality indicates otherwise. If you truly encounter evil with good, Allah will realise His Word in your regard. You would witness your adversary become a true friend. However, you seem as though you desire to test the soundness of Allah’s Word. In fact, testing Allah reveals doubt in Him.’

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to remain steadfast in our reliance upon Allah. This means that our disposition is characterised by trust without asking how the promises of Allah are fulfilled. The story of Um Malik,(1) a female companion of the Prophet, illustrates this: She owned some sheep that she used to milk, and from the milk exceeding her needs and those of her children, she used to churn butter, or ghee. She used to give some of this ghee to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a small container of skin named *`akka* (in Arabic) as a gift. The household of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would empty the ghee out of the container, place it in some of their own smaller vessels and promptly return her container.

This continued until Um Malik(3) finally concluded, ‘By Allah, the only way I get the ghee needed to make broth is from this container.’ Thus, every time she needed ghee, she would empty the container and find that it contained some. This went on, and she continued to lend the container to the household of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* finding it to contain ghee even after they emptied it. Yet, one day it appeared to her that she had used the container to liberally, and she figured that it did not contain enough to suffice her, so she began to squeeze it; attempting to get the last of what it held, she found nothing inside. Immediately, she began to think that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was angry with her. Consequently, she went to him and told him of what had occurred. In response, he asked her, 'O, Um Malik, did you squeeze it?' After she replied in the affirmative, he explained to her that testing Allah reveals doubt in Him; furthermore, he informed her that had she refrained from squeezing the container and fought back the doubt (that Allah's blessing was about to expire), the container would have continued providing for her in the way that it had been.(1)

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(1) *She is Um Malik Al-Ansariya. She was mentioned by Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani in Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (8/278)*

It is noticed that the phrase 'may befall you' (in the verse in question) contains an indication that this 'ill' (as it has been parenthetically included with the verse) was decreed for you, and you would have never been able to avoid it. In the truest sense, it represents Allah's Divinely Pre-ordained Will that is merely reaching you. After the Decree of Allah is issued, it is inevitable that you will eventually be forced to deal with this misfortune. The issue is one of time; when will this 'arrow' of misfortune or calamity that has seemingly been hurled at you reach its target? By no means should you ever say, 'If only I had done this or that, the outcome would have been different.' This is absolutely not the case; as a matter of fact, the very reason the word *musiba,* or misfortune, has been used to describe the ill luck that befalls you highlights the fact that it has been particularly decreed for you; in other words, it comes from the same tri-lateral Arabic root (ص- و- ب) as the word *sa'iba* which indicates something apropos or particularly suitable. It follows, quite naturally, that you are unable to escape that which has been decreed especially for you. It is as they say concerning death: You can certainly be sure that you will die; your life is the time span which the arrow of death takes until it reaches you.

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(1) *In his Sharh Muslim (15/46), An-Nawawi wrote: 'The scholars have commented upon this Hadith. The wisdom is that squeezing—as she did with the container—is an action diametrically opposed to consignment to the Will of Allah and reliance upon His provision. Conversely, squeezing does imply an (unwarranted) dependence on one's own devices, forcefulness and placing oneself under duress in order to uncover the secrets of Allah's Wisdom and favour. Such an orientation can only result in the loss of the blessing that one is seeking to acquire or preserve.'*

As for Allah's saying, 'Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination' (*Luqman:* 17), we find that it includes the Arabic word *'azm* (determination). This is similar to how we would say, 'So-and-so has resoluteness.' Observe how the Quran uses the word: '…And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah …' (*Al-'Imran:* 159).

'Azm (determination) refers to what is often called the point of no return; in other words, it means committing to something in a way that does not allow one to renege. The statement of Luqman *peace be upon him* provides a good example of how the term *'azm* is used: When his Lord gave him the choice of being a messenger or a wise man, he subsequently chose the latter; he found within his choice ease and the alleviation of difficulty. He said to his Lord, 'O, Lord, if this–my being selected for prophethood–is a command from You, then I hear and obey.' When he mentioned, 'If this is a *'azma* (command) from You', the meaning is something which has been ordained, which means it would be unsuitable to abandon.

Resoluteness implies determination and firmness of purpose in performing an action. Concerning Islamic legal terms, there is a difference between *'azima* and *rukhsa.* The funeral prayer is not considered *'azima* (a religious duty that every Muslim should perform at its due designation) because it is a collective obligation whose performance by some Muslims frees others of its responsibility. This differs from the practice of performing a full-length prayer while travelling as opposed to shortening the prayer (which Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah rest his soul* actually considers *'azima*). So, according to his opinion, completing a full-length prayer while travelling would constitute wrongdoing.(1)

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(1) *The Hanafi and Maliki scholars agree that shortening the full-length, four-unit prayer while travelling and offering two units instead is a highly emphasised Sunnah (practice) of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. However, they disagree upon its reward. The Hanafi scholars maintain that the one who completes the full-length, four-unit prayer is a sinner as he violates a religious duty. However, this does not mean he deserves to be punished in Hellfire. He will be entitled to receive the intercession of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him on the Day of Judgment. The Maliki scholars,* =

Indeed, his opinion is based on the statement of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Verily, Allah loves for you to perform the dispensations (that He has given you) just as He loves for you to perform those acts which express the highest levels of resolve.'(1)

The meaning underlined here is that you should not reject the facilitation Allah offers you regarding prayers while you are travelling.

The advocates of the opinion that prayer shall be shortened during travel cite another opinion that when prayer was made obligatory in the beginning, it was of two units. It was kept as such during travel as a continuation of this original obligation and was increased to four units for residents. Accordingly, prayer that is offered while travelling represents the original ruling; hence, it is not entirely correct to add any units of prayer to the original number.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تُصَعِّرۡ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمۡشِ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مَرَحًاۖ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخۡتَالٖ فَخُورٖ ١٨

Do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly, for God does not love arrogant or boastful people [18] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 18)

As for the word *tusaghghir* (translated as 'turn your nose up at people'), we find that *Al-Sa'r* (the verbal noun of the Arabic verb stated) originally refers to a disease which afflicts camels and made them lean forward to accommodate any swelling that occurs in their necks as a result of this disease. An arrogant person who turns his nose up at people, turning away from people, to whom he deems himself superior, is described with the word

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= *on the other hand, maintain that if a traveller abandons the shortening of the prayer and instead opts to pray four units of prayer, he is not a sinner; yet, he is not entitled to the reward of for the recommended Sunnah. However, this does not mean that he will be prevented from enjoying the intercession of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. See Al-Fiqh 'ala Al-Madhahib Al-Arba'a, Dar Ihya At-Turath Al-'Arabi, vol. 1, p. 431.*

(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad, vol. 2, p. 108 and Ibn Hibban (545, 914) on the authority of Ibn Umar Allah be pleased with him*

sa'ara because he resembles the diseased camel we mentioned above. To describe an arrogant person, a popular colloquial Arabic saying that goes as follows: ‘So-and-so walks his head cocked.’

Therefore, in His saying: 'Do not turn your nose up at people…' (*Luqman:* 18), Allah chooses this simile in order to draw out attention that false pride and arrogance are diseases. The etymology of the term reveals a physical disease, and its usage in this verse reveals a moral one. Indeed, these are the meanings a poet had in mind when he said:

Leave alone the arrogant, for with them, time will deal
　　Indeed, time has a way of always causing arrogance to heal

This verse of poetry states that if the people who are present—during a certain time and place—are unable to break an arrogant person of this terrible character trait, one need not be troubled, for indeed, time itself shall show this person the recompense of such behaviour. Without a doubt, it is not unusual that we observe people behaving arrogantly and haughtily only to find that later in life those same people are hardly able to stand or even sit up properly! As a matter of fact, some become incapacitated to the extent of being unable to drive off flies which bother him.

A human being does not feel arrogance and haughtiness towards people unless he feels that he has distinction over them. This is proven by the fact that when such person encounters someone that he deems superior to himself, he expresses humility and humbleness. Take for instance, a tough guy who used to have authority at local domains. He sits in the café with his legs folded, appearing to be unconcerned about anyone. Nevertheless, when a stronger tough guy appears, you find that the former straightens up.

This explains the wisdom of the maxim which states, ‘Beware the man who has received charity from you.’ Why is this so? This is because the one to whom you have been charitable was experiencing a hard time where he was weak and needy. Your help and favour provided to him at that time aided and supported him. Now experiencing ease and richness, whenever he sees you, he remembers those hard times he had experienced and thus may harm you in order to overcome this situation. Nevertheless, he must always express humility when he sees those who showed him good favour—when he was in a time of need. It is as though the presence of the one who helped him at his time of need is a point of weakness which prevents him from showing his powerful and self-confident image he attempts to project. This is why they say: ‘Beware the man who has received charity from you.’

The other thing to be emphasised at this point is that if someone is going to be arrogant regarding something, it would make sense for him to do so concerning that which is inherently his, and not something which has been given to him. If you do, in fact, recognise that you possess some sort of distinction above others, be sure to consider that others also have distinction over you. When you begin to look at the creation in this way, you will find that the Creator has given all of His created beings special qualities.

In this connection, there is a story to be told. Once upon a time, there was a maid who would entertain her mistress as she was beautifying her. The maid used to pray to Allah that her mistress would indeed meet Prince Charming. On one occasion, her mistress said to her, ‘I am really disheartened at your sort. Indeed, you are of dark complexion and unlikely to attract the attention of any worthy suitors.’ The maid responded, ‘O, mistress, remember that your beauty is only recognised by people on account of their recognition of my ugliness.’ Indeed, the one who you see as ugly could, in fact, be beautiful; if nothing else, he does reflect the beauty of the creative power of Allah *Glorified is He*. The servant once again addressed her mistress, ‘Be careful not to anger Allah by speaking in that way. Do you find fault with the creation, or do you find it with the Creator? If you only realise my honesty towards all what you command me and your negligence with regards to fulfilling your father demands, you would understand my beauty.’ Indeed, a poet has expressed the same meaning:

Faces are like the first light of morn, shining. And hair is enveloped in darkness like night

It is perfect when opposites are joined; each brings the other’s beauty into sight

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us the same lesson when He says: 'O, you who believe! No men shall deride [other] men. It may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. No women [shall deride other] women;

it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11). This means that if you notice that a person has less status than you in a certain regard, look deep inside yourself and search for the thing in which he excels you. Undoubtedly, there must be something in which he excels you. This maintains the balance of nature. Allah distributes His gifts among the entire creation. He has not shown any favouritism or impartiality in this. I reiterate what I have just said that the aggregate sums of God-given endowments granted to all human beings are equal.

I have mentioned earlier that a man said to Luqman *peace be upon him* 'We know that you are a swarthy slave with very pronounced lips who serves so-and-so and tends sheep.' Did Luqman *peace be upon him* not respond to him saying, 'Yes, those are accurate descriptions. However, my heart is radiant with light. And from these pronounced lips wisdom—sweet and delicate—is said.'(1)

In relation to Luqman *peace be upon him,* it is sufficient honour that Allah *Glorified is He* has recounted his words in the Glorious Quran. Essentially, Allah has made his words eternal; thus, they are recited, memorised and rehearsed during worship—until the Day of Judgment.

I have some observation about Allah's saying: 'Do not turn your nose up at people …' (*Luqman:* 18); the word 'people' in this verse has significance. It is as if that Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to the one who turns his nose up at people: 'Do not lead people to disobedience and rebellion against Allah's Decrees by your arrogant display of the advantages that have been conferred upon you and simultaneous disregard those that have been conferred upon others. Indeed, there is a chance that someone struggling in his faith could be led to rebel against Allah and flagrantly reject the idea that He has rightly decreed all things which take place on earth when he observes you flaunting and exulting in what you have been given, while recognising his own status as lowly. If, on the other hand, this type of flaunting and parading is so dear to you that it has become something of an enterprise, then let it be a private affair. You may then stand in front of a mirror and strike poses to satisfy your heart's desire for this sickness.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir, vol. 7, p. 5317 in which he mentioned the following: Luqman peace be upon him said to a man that looked at him, 'If I really have pronounced lips, remember that they only pronounce refine words. And although my skin is dark, I am light-hearted.'*

Accordingly, the word 'people' in this verse signifies that Allah *the Almighty* wants to prevent people from observing you in this state because it will inevitably become a challenge for those who are weak in their faith, frustrating their contentment with their Lord.

Afterward the verse continues with Luqman's advice to his son, stating: '…nor walk about the place arrogantly…' (*Luqman:* 18). Allah *the Almighty* does not prohibit you from walking upon the earth. However, he prohibits you from walking amongst people in a swaggering manner, i.e. in a way which indicates smugness. Allah *Glorified is He* commands us: '…go about, then, in all its regions, and partake of the sustenance which He provides, but [always bear in mind that] to Him you shall be resurrected.' (*al-Mulk:* 15) This means that going about the earth is desirable. Then again, it is only desirable if it is done in a certain manner, in a way that implies balance and moderation. It is narrated that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* once saw a man going about in a sluggish, listless manner. Therefore, 'Umar upbraided him and said, 'O, so-and-so, why are you carrying yourself this way? Indeed, Allah has given you wellness and good health. Let this be your case when you become old!'(1)

On the other hand, when 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* saw a man walking like a bandit; he prevented him from walking hurriedly, running and rushing. Thus, the desired speed when one is walking is to maintain a balanced pace. This is why we shall see that the advice of Luqman *peace be upon him* includes: 'Go at a moderate pace …' (*Luqman:* 19). This means that one shall not walk sluggishly and listlessly, nor walk excitedly—as though one is nearly jumping—like the people of immorality and bandits.

This verse concludes: '…for Allah does not love arrogant or boastful people.' (*Luqman:* 18) *Al-Mukhtal* (arrogant) is the person who finds that he has been given some sort of distinction amongst people, while *Al-Fakhur* (boastful person) is normally a person who deems himself superior to all people. In truth, Allah *Glorified is He* does not like either of them. Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* desires to judge creation on the basis of equality so that they all make sure that He is the Lord of them all. Only Allah can be justifiably haughty. If we submit to the fact that the only justifiable haughtiness belongs solely to Allah, this prevents people from dealing with us haughtily. Conveying this same meaning, one poet once said,

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(1) See Imam Al-Ghazali in Al-Ihya', vol. 3, p. 296. It is narrated that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him upon seeing a man hanging his head, said, 'Raise your head, O, downcast one! Humility is not in the neck. It is in the heart.'

It is the prostration that you perform in sincere adoration to Allah
that saves you from performing a thousand others in subjugation

Therefore, we collectively prostrate to Allah, the Only One truly worthy of our prostration, and in doing so, we protect ourselves from surrendering and prostrating to misguided, conceited and supercilious oppressors. Indeed, the greatness of Allah *the Almighty* is in the best interest of His servants.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* — narrating the dialogue that took place between Luqman *peace be upon him* and his son — says:

وَٱقْصِدْ فِى مَشْيِكَ وَٱغْضُضْ مِن صَوْتِكَ ۚ إِنَّ أَنكَرَ ٱلْأَصْوَٰتِ لَصَوْتُ ٱلْحَمِيرِ ﴿١٩﴾

Go at a moderate pace and lower your voice, for
the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses [19]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 19)

This is a command from Allah to people to walk moderately and to speak in a lower tone of voice. It is sufficient that you speak in a tone, which only the listener hears. However, why has the Quran joined between walking and the tone of one's speaking voice? Scholars say that human beings have certain necessities in their lives. They acquire these necessities either by walking—I walk to places in which I expect to attain some sort of benefit or goal—or by speaking—if I am unable to arrive at something or catch up to someone by walking, I call out to him using my voice.

Accordingly, either you go to the things that you wish to acquire or you summon them to you. The idea of moderation in seeking your attainments, however, is central to all matters. To be sure, all things have two extremes:

exaggeration or negligence. This explains why a maxim states: It is contemptible to seek either of the two extremes in your affair.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* compares the loud, impudent voice to the braying of a donkey: '…for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses' (*Luqman:* 19). Ironically, some have understood this verse to contain an offensive reference to donkeys. Truth be told, often times we do find that people consider the donkey to be a representation of stupidity and lowliness. This is expressed in the following couplet of poetry:

The only things that are fit to have unrestricted weight heaped upon them are the two lowly ones: wild asses and pegs

Ignominy is inherently tied to these things

And if one of them is misused or broken, no one finds cause to lament

However, we find fault with the poet's description of the donkey as worthless and lowly. In describing its worthlessness, he links it with a peg, an instrument that has become parable for lowliness. In fact, there is even a saying: 'more worthless than a peg'. Indeed, one may bang a peg with a heavy tool until it splits in two without any one objecting to or feel angry at your action. However, a donkey is subjected to human beings, and not worthless. To be sure, it should not be regarded as lowly simply because Allah *the Almighty* has decreed it to be a beast of burden.

If you take a moment to seriously contemplate the life of a donkey, you find that it is constantly abused by human beings. You can force a donkey to carry manure and other forms of filth and leave it to spend the night sleeping in mud, and no one would object to your actions. In addition, if you want an animal for riding, you simply wash off the donkey, place a saddle upon its back and reins in its mouth, and it will promptly deliver you to your destination without objection or complaint.

People say that the wisdom of a donkey making such a unique loud sound is that it is of short stature, especially when compared to larger animals like camels. Therefore, when it goes out to feed from fodder, there is a chance that it will be blocked by a hill or a tree, which would make it nearly impossible for its owner to see it unless it begins to bray. It is almost as if its braying is one of those natural and necessary mechanisms that is particularly suited to the one that possesses it, thus, securing one of its essential needs.

This is why it is essential that we understand the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* '…for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses' (*Luqman:* 19) as clarifying that the braying of a donkey is not ugly when it is being done by a donkey. Actually the reverse is quite true; it is ugly when the speaking voice of a human being resembles the braying of a donkey! Indeed, the braying of a donkey is one of its essential characteristics and may even be said to perfect its unique nature. Conversely, when your voice resembles this sound, it is contemptible and loathsome. In light of this, can a donkey be considered guilty of any wrong?

Consider the camel, for instance, it is bigger and stronger than a donkey, but when you place a heavy load upon its back, it neighs. The donkey, on the other hand, when loaded beyond its capacity, makes an attempt to bear the load without giving you the slightest indication that it is overburdened. A donkey is governed by the natural disposition that when it faces a small ditch, it senses its ability to pass it; if it is able to leap the opening, it will jump and if, on the other hand, the opening is wider than would allow the donkey to successfully clear it, it will instinctively pull back. After making its assessment, it makes no difference how much you attempt to compel the animal to leap.

Interestingly enough, if we contrast a donkey's actions with those of a human being, we find that the latter—if placed in a similar situation—would likely be persuaded by hubris to attempt something clearly above his capacity. On a different note, it is said that when a donkey brays, it sees a devil.(1) Based on experience, we know that some animals, including donkeys, are able to sense that an earthquake is forthcoming. Before an earthquake, you will see it severing its reins and taking cover. This was observed before an earthquake that occurred in Agadir, Morocco. We also noticed a similar phenomenon during an earthquake that took place in Egypt in 1992, for the animals at Giza Zoo were said to have been strangely restive shortly before the earthquake.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said, 'When one of you hears the crowing of a rooster, ask for Allah's favour because it has just seen an angel. Likewise, if one of you hears the braying of a donkey, seek refuge in Allah from Satan, for it has just seen a devil.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3303) and Ahmad in his Musnad (2/307, 321, 364).*

It is worth mentioning that when you ride a donkey in a certain path, it makes no difference how long, it will be capable of returning down the same path without needing to be guided. In fact, even if you returned to a path it travelled a long time ago, the donkey will follow the course without deviating in the slightest. Nevertheless, those who hold to views, which mark the donkey as inherently deficient, maintain that a donkey does not intelligently retrace the route; rather, it is simply placing its hooves in the tracks that were left behind. Yet, even if this is the case and a donkey does not actively pursue the path by the use of its intellect, it still deserves to be commended for this ability as it follows the dictates of instinct.

This applies also Allah’s saying: 'The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]…' (*al-Jumu‘a:* 5). In this verse, the verb is affirmed and negated in the same sentence. Is it normal to do as such? The meaning of this seemingly complicated verse then is that that they had learnt the scripture and preserved it, both within their books and hearts. However, they did not act according to its dictates and failed to implement its teachings. Thus, the parable of what they were doing, '…is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books] …' (*al-Jumu‘a:* 5), should this in any way be regarded as an expression of contempt for the ass? Absolutely not, indeed, the duty of an ass is to carry loads. Quite the reverse is true, the contempt is being directed at their carrying the Book of Allah while failing to act upon it. To put it differently, a donkey is supposed to carry books, but people, on the other hand, are supposed to understand the content of the books they are carrying and implement their teachings.

Accordingly, a believer shall be of moderate tone-of-voice while he performs prayer as well as all other acts of worship. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us: '…And [pray to Him; yet] be not loud in your prayer nor speak it in too low a voice, but follow a way in-between' (*al-Isra’:* 110). As for the prayers and Quranic recitation that you hear broadcast during the night on megaphones, bullhorns and loudspeakers, the only thing they succeed at doing is earning the scorn of the sick and those who need to rise early for work the next morning, not to mention countless others who are disturbed by this practice. Having conducted a survey, we found that the number of people who attend the mosque stays relatively the same; it does not increase as a result of our disturbing people with microphones!

The same can be said of those who recite the Quran in an unnecessarily loud tone of voice while in the mosque: This practice is also a source of annoyance for people. Is it not better for us to allow each person—who is present in the mosque—to focus on the devotional act which they have selected for themselves? Such individual might desire to pray, someone else may want to recite litanies of repentance and praise, or perhaps one of the mosque-goers simply wants to sit and quietly read the Book of Allah, the Quran. Why then, do you force everyone to be involved in your voluntary act of devotion?

After we have completed the verses which give us a glimpse of the wisdom and counsel that Luqman *peace be upon him* was imparting to his son, the verses of this chapter of the Quran discuss a new topic related to our existence.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَوۡاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَأَسۡبَغَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ نِعَمَهُۥ ظَٰهِرَةٗ
وَبَاطِنَةٗۗ وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يُجَٰدِلُ فِي ٱللَّهِ بِغَيۡرِ عِلۡمٖ وَلَا هُدٗى وَلَا كِتَٰبٖ مُّنِيرٖ ٢٠

[People], do you not see how God has made what is in the heavens and on the earth useful to you, and has lavished His blessings on you both outwardly and inwardly? Yet some people argue about God, without knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture [20] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 20)

The Arabic word *taskhir* which is derived from the verb *sakhkara* (translated in the verse as 'made useful to you'). *Taskhir* refers to what happens when the Creator *the Most High* gives something in creation a specific function to perform without giving that object any choice in the matter. Indeed, a good example of this is the way that Allah has made the sun, moon, and other elements of creation subservient, in spite of the fact that many men and women turn away from Allah and His Guidance. The sun never, not even for a single day, fails to shine upon them; nor does the air ever refuse to provide them with oxygen. In addition, the earth does not withhold its produce from them; or the sky its water. The question, however, is why does this not happen? This is because all these created beings have no choice in the matter.

In mentioning the subservience of the various created beings and objects, it is fitting for us to point out that these elements have not been subjected to the service of humanity against their will. This is a shallow way of looking at this issue. Unfortunately, some consider the human being as the only member of creation who has been given the choice to accept legislation or not. In fact, the entire creation has actually been put the test of choice. This is clearly stated in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

Thus, we can see that all of the various elements which make up creation have been given choice: the sky, earth, and mountains. However, each chose to be constantly obedient and submissive, instead of having free will.. In contrast, a human being chose to be of free will. This choice was primarily based on the fact that he possesses an active intellect which can be used to weigh between competing alternatives.

Taskhir, i.e. making things subservient to people, means that man cannot independently make things submissive to his will through his intelligence, ability to reason or even by legislation. As proof of this assertion, consider the following: If you catch a bird, confine it to a cage, prevent it from flying, and then desire to ascertain whether the bird is subservient to you or not. Would confining the bird to this cage make it legitimately subservient to you or not? Simply open the door of the cage; if the bird elects to remain in the cage, it is truly subservient to you. It is content to remain with you, secure in the place that you provide and content consuming the feed that you give it. Alternatively, if it leaves and abandons your care, you should realise that it is not subservient to you, and that confining it in spite of its will to be free is not legitimately subservient.

Once ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* passed by a little boy who was playing with a small bird. ‘Umar wanted to teach the boy an important lesson as he was young and still very impressionable. ‘Umar convinced the boy to sell the bird. Once in possession of the bird, ‘Umar released it and let it fly away. At this, the boy remarked, 'By Allah, after that, I never confined an animal again for the sake of amusement.'

I talked about the idea of subjugation of creatures to man previously. Indeed, the way that Allah has subjected a camel, with its immense size, to human beings so thoroughly that a small child can guide and direct it to where he would like it to go is amazing. At the same time, Allah *the Almighty* has not subjected a seemingly insignificant creature like a tick to your use. This clearly proves that has Allah not made such creatures submissive to man, man would have never been able to make use of them.

Then the verse continues: '…and has lavished His blessings on you both outwardly and inwardly?…' (*Luqman:* 20) Here, we find the word *asbagha* (lavished) which means to fulfil or complete. Another form of this Arabic word is mentioned in another Quranic verse as Allah says, addressing Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*: '…Make full coats of mail…' (*Saba':* 11). This is a command from Allah to Prophet Dawud (David) to make chain mail that shields and protects the one who wears it from sword and spear attacks. Chain mail or armour is usually placed over the vital organs of the body, such as the heart or lungs. Indeed, it was Allah *Glorified is He* who taught Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* to make chain mail in the ribbed, corrugated iron style as opposed to a smooth metal design. The notches within the ribs of the chain mail help to lessen the impact of the blow and prevent the sword or spear from moving and hurting another place of the body.

It is narrated that Luqman *peace be upon him* once went to Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* while the latter was forging iron. Luqman was amazed by the sight; however, he refrained from questioning Prophet Dawud (David) about what he was doing until he finished blacksmithing the chain mail and had tried it on while saying to himself: ‘What a perfect armour for battle.’ At hearing this, Luqman commented, ‘Silence is wisdom, but those who practise it are few.’(1)

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(1) *Worded by `Askari in Al-Amthal, Hakim, and Bayhaqi in Shu`ab Al-Iman on the authority Anas: Luqman was a slave who belonged to Dawud (David) peace be upon him. Needless to say, he was amazed when he found his master constructing chain mail. As Dawud=*

This statement of Luqman *peace be upon him* eventually became an aphorism that will be repeated until the end of time.

The phrase ‘and has lavished upon us His blessing’ means that Allah has completed his favour upon you so thoroughly that it encompasses all aspects of your life. He is consistently providing for you all means of livelihood, which help you survive in this world as He is the One Who created you, and therefore, He knows all what you need.

However, if you happen to notice any deprivation or shortage, it should be understood that the real shortage is in the creatures themselves. In other words, they have an inability to make beneficial use of what their environment provides for them. Furthermore, what they do acquire, they hoard stingily and withhold from others. The last of these problems, namely hoarding and stinginess, are the biggest problems facing our world today. Indeed, we often find a group of people that have lazily neglected to make use of their environment to derive good while other people have been exerting themselves to do so. However, the unfortunate thing is that the latter group does not allow others to benefit from the fruits of their labour. One group of people might attain fortune in such abundant measure that it can afford the whole humanity, but they opt to dump it in the sea. This means that at a time when others are dying as a result of hunger and poverty, they are destroying the resources of which hungry and impoverished people are sorely in need.

In this way, we can conclude that the problem with our world is not that human beings are unable to find that which suffices them. On the contrary, the problem is that human beings have failed to equitably utilise that which they have found from amongst the good things that Allah *Glorified is He* has provided for them. This proves the truthfulness of Allah’s saying: '…and has lavished His blessings on you both outwardly and inwardly?' (*Luqman:* 20) It

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= *(David) peace be upon him began to shape the iron, spinning and twisting it, Luqman’s curiosity began to surge (and he wanted to ask him about what he was doing), but his wisdom prevented him. Once Dawud (David) peace be upon him had finished the mail, he tried it on and said to himself: ‘Armour for battle is exceptional.’ Upon hearing this, Luqman peace be upon him said, Silence is wisdom, but those who practise it are few. Truthfully, I wanted to ask you (about what you were doing), but I opted to remain quite until you informed me.’*

is an absolute truth; do you deny that He *the Most High* created you? Or do you deny that He created from yourselves, mates for you, with whom the process of procreation is complete?

Do you deny that He created the skies and all that they contain namely the planets and the other celestial bodies? Or do you deny that He created the night, during which time you take rest, and the day, during which you strive to earn a livelihood? Also worth mentioning in this regard are the senses—both physical and non-physical—that He has given you; not only has He has created each sense to fulfil a specific purpose, but He has also made these senses perform their tasks involuntarily so that you do not even feel that your body contains miraculous signs and wonders. It is simply amazing; not nearly a day passes without there being some breakthrough which sheds more light upon the blessings that Allah has placed within us, and the world around us.

The word 'outwardly' refers to that which is apparent to us, whereas the word 'inwardly' refers to that which we have yet to realise. Accordingly, we recognise from this statement that there are blessings of Allah *the Exalted* that are apparent to us and to those which have not yet become apparent.

Think about the kidneys for a moment, particularly about how they are functioning within your body. They purify the blood from urea. This means that they are literally purifying your insides, but you cannot even feel them at work. Researchers began to think about creating a replacement for kidneys in order to deal with the occurrence of acute kidney failure. To this end, specialised scientists came up with a design that took up one large room filled with instruments in order to perform the function of that organ of small size, the kidneys. It then occurred to them that the kidney was made up of millions of cells, but only a hundred at timework to perform its function through alternating.

Scientists then concluded that kidney failure occurs when the one hundred cells that are responsible for performing its function are not alerted by the body at an appropriate time. Allah has perfected the creation of the human being to such an extent that He created two kidneys; when one of them fails, the other assumes its function.

Concerning the inward blessings of Allah, they are the things which will be discovered in the future. For example, centuries or even years ago, nothing was known about electricity, automobiles, simple machines, the age of the wheel or steam power, etc.

Now, all of these things have become outward blessings. However, before their discovery, they were concealed from us. They were discovered through scientific inquiry and research. When one reflects over such discoveries, he finds that roughly 3% of them were developed by scientific research and about 97% of them were discovered simply by chance!

Previously, we confirmed that Allah *Glorified is He* has placed innumerable secrets and blessings in this universe. No one may argue that such signs and secrets have performed their respective functions. This is absolutely not true as they shall last as long as this world exists. Such signs and secrets shall not perish, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…until—when the earth has assumed its artful adornment and has been embellished, and they who dwell on it believe that they have gained mastery over it—there comes down upon it Our Judgment, by night or by day, and We cause it to become [like] a field mown down, as if there had been no yesterday …' (*Yunus:* 24).

In the Afterlife, we will see something entirely different from amongst Allah’s signs and the wonders that He has created. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is informing us: ‘Verily, you witnessed My signs in this life and grasped them. Now, come so that I shall show you My greatest signs, which I have prepared for you in the Afterlife.’

In the Afterlife, I shall create you in another shape; you will eat, but not feel the urge to defecate or pain that comes as a result of eating without defecating. You will not grow old, become sick, or die. In this worldly life, your lives were based on the means I have created for you, but in the Afterlife, on the other hand, you shall not be in need of any means such as the sun and moon etc., as you shall live according to Provider of the means.

This is why I say that to show their humbleness, scientists should say, 'We have discovered such-and-such', instead of 'We have invented such-and-such.' This is because the Allah's signs and Blessings are already hidden in this universe. They are simply in need of someone to explore and develop them using general rules of laws, which Allah *the Almighty* has placed in the universe.

I have previously said that every secret in this universe has a birth date exactly like a human being. When the time of its 'delivery' arrives, Allah brings it into existence. Either he does this by way of the research of scientists, or it simply appears without effort, as a manifestation of honour from Allah *Glorified is He* to His creation, whose concerted efforts to discover such secrets have not been very successful.

This is considered evidence for us to believe in the unseen of which Allah informs us. As we come to discover the blessings of Allah that were at one time hidden in this universe, then, by extension, we should also have faith in such unseen things that Allah is informing us about. In this, we are using that which is clearly manifest as evidence of the existence of that which is hidden.

In this connection, refer to Allah's saying: '…they cannot attain to aught of his knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain] …' (*al-Baqara:* 255). This verse is stating that it is Allah's Will that determines what remains unseen as well as what becomes manifest to humanity—after having been unseen. If Allah *the Exalted* has decreed that the 'uncovering' of an element of the unseen will occur as the result of research, this is what takes place. Conversely, if He determines that this will be unveiled without any effort being exerted by human beings at all, this is what takes place. This is proven by the fact that Allah states that people may attain knowledge only when He wills.

Nevertheless, regarding the matter of the unseen for which Allah places no indication in this universe, He solely knows them. He *the Most High* asserts this saying: 'He [alone] knows that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and to none does He disclose aught of the mysteries of His Own unfathomable knowledge, unless it be to a messenger whom he has been pleased to elect' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* divides His Blessings and Favours into 'both outward and inward' (*Luqman:* 20) because the outward blessings stimulates, or encourages, us to believe in Allah *the Most High*. On the other hand, the inward blessings are of two categories: those whom Allah saves that every successive generation unveils a part of them, and those which Allah will not reveal for believers until the Hereafter.

Muslim scholars have made other attempts to explain the relationship between the outward and inward blessings. The outward blessings are those which Allah gives us in this worldly life and makes them apparent. On the other hand, inward blessings are those about which Allah has informed us. For example, when you set to engage in fighting, you would prepare all the required supplies: weapons, brigade, etc. In other words, you would make use of the means necessary to achieve that end. Yet, if Allah wills, He may assign hosts which you did not see to accompany you which, upon this understanding, would be considered from amongst His inward blessings as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Remember when Your Lord inspired the angels [to convey this His message to the believers]: "I am with you …"' (*al-Anfal:* 12).

Informing us about some of these inward blessings, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'The believer benefits from three actions which are not his own. The first is that Muslims perform funeral prayer for him after his death. The second is that Allah gives him permission to bequeath up to a third of his wealth as he chooses. That is to say, he is not obligated to leave all of his wealth to heirs; rather, he can bequeath up to a third of his estate to any entity he deems suitable. It makes sense for one to enjoy one's wealth during his life, but after his death, it is the heir's. However, Allah gives one the right to bequeath up to one third of one's estate as a means for one to atone for his sins by bequeathing some of his estate for charitable purposes. As for the third action, Allah *Glorified is He* conceals your bad deeds from the rest of creation, for indeed if He were to expose your bad actions to people, you would be rejected by your own family, loved ones and relatives.'(1)

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(1) *It is on the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'I asked the Messenger of Allah about Allah's saying: "...lavished upon you His blessings, both outward and inward?..." (Luqman 20). Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad responded, "As for the outward blessings, they are Islam, you being created by Allah and His furnishing your provision abundantly. The inward blessing, on the other hand, is the fact that Allah has concealed your bad actions. O, Ibn `Abbas, verily Allah Glorified is He says: 'I have made three things for the believer: the prayers of the Muslims for him after he dies; I have given him a right to bequeath up to one third of his wealth to charity by way of which I forgive him of his sins, and I have concealed his bad deeds. There is not a single one that I expose with the purpose of heaping shame upon him. Indeed, if I were to expose his misdeeds, his family and others would disassociate from him.'"' This Hadith was rnarrated by Ibn Mardawyh, Al-Bayhaqi, Ad-Daylami, and Ibn An-Najjar [See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al Manthur, vol. 6, p. 525.*

One of the greatest blessings we enjoy is that Allah conceals our own affairs from people. If you give anyone the choice to know the private affairs of people, provided they, in turn, know the details of yours, there is no doubt that no one would agree to do as such.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarifies this by saying, 'If all of you were to know each other's personal affairs, you would no longer bury each other!' That is to say, if people come to know hidden affairs of a person, they will disassociate from him and when he dies, there will be no one to bury him. They might even be so disgusted with him so as to say, ‘Leave him for the dogs to eat. It is a fitting recompense for what he has done.’

Yet, as Allah conceals the details of our personal affairs, we find that even a person’s enemy is willing to fulfil the service of carrying him to his final resting place or burying him. Someone has been quoted as saying, ‘Death removes all of the causes of animosity between us.’ Conversely, prying into the unsightly aspects of others’ lives and trying to dig up their personal secrets reveals a gross level of stupidity of an individual. Would you like for people to treat you the same way: to seek your personal secrets and search for your faults?

Indeed, one misdeed that people come to know about you is enough to make them completely overlook all of your good deeds. However, Allah *the Almighty* desires that human beings mutually benefit from one another, for this is crucial in order to enhance the lives of all members of a community.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying: 'Yet some people argue about Allah, without knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture.' (*Luqman:* 20)

The word *mujadala* (arguing) signifies that there are two parties who argue about a certain matter in which neither of them is convinced of the other party's opinion. Argument is meant to lead to the truth. When an argument fulfils this fundamental condition, it becomes what we refer to as a ‘real debate’: one which can be judged on an objective basis and in which there is not any recalcitrance simply for its sake. Such debate is judged according to knowledge, guidance and a light giving revelation. In order to enrich this debate, each side provides his arguments. In this connection, we should call to mind the statement of

Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And otherwise do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation except in the most kindly manner …' (*al-'Ankabut:* 46).

At the other end of the spectrum, we have the debate in which each party desires to simply makes his opinion superior, even if it is a false one. This is nothing but a display of sophistry and glimmering rhetoric which leads to nothing worthwhile.

The word *jadal* (argument) is derived from the word *jadl* which refers to something that is intertwined as when something is intertwined with a counterpart causing it to become stronger. Thus, in debate, the argument of one side is supposed to strengthen the argument of the other. The goal of both sides is to arrive at the truth. In other words, the only thing being sought in a real debate is the reinforcement and demonstration of truth.

As we pointed out, whenever an argument is not characterised by the principles mentioned here, it is limited to being an emotional dispute in which the goal of each side is simply to raise its banner, whether true or false.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that some people love to argue about Him without knowledge, guidance, or recourse to a Divine Book. For example, they passionately argue: Does creation really have a living god? If it does, in fact, have a living god, is He one or divisible? If this living god is present, does he know the minute details of affairs or simply their major aspects? Is He devoted to controlling His dominion at all times? Or, has He created inexorable laws, leaving them to regulate the outcome of affairs within creation? This last argument would entail that Allah *Glorified is He* only exercised His authority over creation one time only!

Allah *the Exalted* is the Sustainer of all existence and is unceasingly controlling the affairs of creation. This is evidenced by the miracles He decreed for His messengers, which defied the natural laws that ostensibly govern the cosmos in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of the Divine Messages communicated by the messengers of Allah to their respective people. Indeed, a good example of this is the well-known story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in which his people attempted to burn him alive. If it was meant only for saving Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from perishing in the fire, Allah would not have allowed them to seize him in the first place, or He could have allowed them to apprehend him and even attempt to burn him, but then sent rain to douse the flames, thereby frustrating their plan. Then again, it was Allah's Will that they would build a fire and would throw Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* into it, only to watch him emerge unscathed so that they could be eyewitnesses to this miracle which defied natural law. In divesting fire of its most essential property—the ability to burn and consume—Allah was thwarting their argument and cutting off the pretext that would grant them the opportunity to mislead people. For indeed, if Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* would have been rescued and removed from their clutches, they would have said to people, 'If he we had him, we would have done this and that to him.'

The phrase 'without knowledge or guidance' (*Luqman:* 20) which appears in the verse refers to definite knowledge that which is real and enables its possessor to offer evidence concerning its soundness. If you believe wholeheartedly in something which is not real, this is not referred to as knowledge. On the contrary, this is called ignorance. An ignorant person is not the opposite of one who possesses knowledge because an ignorant person cannot be said to not possess any knowledge; rather, he has knowledge concerning that which is not true. Indeed, an earnest attempt to convince this person about anything will leave one sufficiently worn out. The reason is that he is not simply without knowledge—and thus, ready to learn. Quite the reverse is true, you must first dispel the falsehood that he has settled upon so that truth can take its place. Conversely, the truly unlearned individual has not settled upon anything true or false.

If one has settled upon the truth but is unable to offer proof concerning it, he is like a small child in whose mind the idea that Allah is One has become fixed. To be sure, this is the outcome of his father and/or teacher consistently repeating this formula to him until it reached the status of becoming a fundamental truth in his regard. The proof that he might need to anchor his belief is provided by those who instruct him until he matures and acquires the ability to offer evidence concerning his beliefs.

Knowledge exists at various levels. The first one is intuitive knowledge; this is the knowledge that is arrived at through intuition. For example, when we see a person breathing, we know, intuitively, that he is alive. We also intuitively know that one is half of two, the sky is above us and the earth is below us, etc.

If you look at the mankind legacy of knowledge, you will find that intuitive knowledge is their foundation. The science of engineering, for instance, is based on principles, the first of which is used as a premise for the second, and the second is used as a premise for the third, and so on.

If you want to trace back the engineering theories, you will inevitably return to the first theory, which is something established intuitively, namely if two straight lines meet, their being adjoined will produce two angles.

Therefore, even the most complicated concatenations of theories, you must return to the first principle, which, as we demonstrated, is something that can be observed within Allah’s creation on the basis of intuition. Yet, this needs someone to notice and observe. Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But [then] – how many a sign is there in the heavens and on earth which they pass by [unthinkingly], and on which they turn their backs!' (*Yusuf:* 105).

The saying of Allah, '…Yet some people argue about Allah…' (*Luqman:* 20) refers to their arguing about His existence and attributes despite the fact that they argue '…without knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture. …' (*Luqman:* 20) This verse implies that if debate is conducted on the basis of knowledge, guidance and an illuminating revelation, then there is no harm with it. On the other hand, if a dialogue violates these stipulations, it cannot be properly referred to as a debate. It is a hotly contested battle to trample the position of the other side at all costs. Needless to say, there is no benefit that can be gained by engaging in such disputes.

The meaning of the word guidance—as it appears in this verse—is something which is used in order to draw an inference or arrive at a conclusion. It is like a Bedouin who loses his way in the desert, but once he sees animal droppings or footprints, he regains familiarity with his surroundings and knows that he is on a beaten track. When this Bedouin person was asked to believe in Allah, he used what he saw around him to reason deductively about what he cannot see by saying,(1) 'If you see the camel dung, you know that a camel has passed this way, and if you see a footstep, you know that a person has passed this way. So the heaven with its stars and the earth with its mountain passes and the oceans with their high waves,(1) does not all of this point to the existence of the All-Hearing, All-Seeing?!'

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(1) These are the words of Qis ibn Sa’ida ibn `Amr Al-Iyadi, one of the sages of the Arabs and one of their most revered orators before the advent of Islam. He was an archbishop=

When a human being looks at creation and its myriad signs, he will inevitably arrive at the fact that all of these prove the existence of the Creator *Glorified is He*. The idea that creation came from nowhere is preposterous. In addition, none of the people who have rejected Allah as the Creator of the universe has claimed it as his own handiwork. As we pointed out earlier, even the simplest implement could not come into existence without a designer. Consider a glass, for instance; does it come from nothing? Of course, it does not; there must be a designer who conceives of the need for the invention in the first place. In terms of the drinking glass, it was invented after human beings first drank water by lapping it up or sipping out of the palm of their hands. We did not arrive at the use of the glass—in its modern guise of convenience and cleanliness—until a group of intelligent people began to look at the elements available in the universe. Only after this, were they able to design the glass, the transparent vessel out of which we drink. They found that glass could be formed from sand when it was melted in combination with other oxides under high temperatures. This means that a drinking glass which, truthfully, is something we could make do without, only came into existence as the result of someone deploying knowledge, ability, their circumstantial findings, etc.

= in the Church of Najran. He lived a long life and even encountered the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* before he received his call to prophethood. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* met him in the market of `Ukazh. He died 23 B.H. *See Az-Zirikli, Al-Al`alam, 5/196.*

(1) This is an excerpt from a speech that he gave in the market of Ukazh: 'People, hear my words well and lend me an attentive ear, for indeed, you will only benefit if you are attentive. Verily, whoever lives will die, and whoever dies will dematerialise. All things that are bound to come to pass will do so: plants and precipitation, sustenance and provision … Indeed, the firmament bears revelation, and in the earth are lessons learnt. The sky is intense with darkness, but it contains celestial bodies. The earth contains winding passes, and the seas, waves …' *[This was mentioned by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 2/108].*

What, then, can be said about the sun which has been radiating creation since Allah originated it? The sun has never neglected to perform its duty or even done so sluggishly for a single day; it has never been in need of maintenance or of having its parts replaced. Does this not warrant being enquired about? Who originated it and created it in this way? This question is especially pertinent given the fact that creating something similar to it is something which is far beyond our capabilities or potential.

This is just a succinct example of how we look upon these phenomena. We take them as signposts which can only lead us to one destination that, indeed, there must be a creator and an originator for the wondrous signs that we observe in the universe. Nevertheless, unaided intellect can never offer details about this creator: Who is He? What is His name? This implies that there must be a process by which Allah discloses information about Himself to some messenger, who, in turn, conveys to us who this Creator is, what He requires of us, what He has prepared for those who obey Him and what He has prepared for those who disobey Him.

Bear in mind that there is a marked difference between understanding something as a concept and being able to assign positive qualities to that which I understand. In fact, it is the failure to separate the two that has vexed philosophers. My conceptual understanding that creation, by necessity, must have an Originator is the result of my observing it. The nearly futile attempt at assigning positive qualities to this originator occurs when I begin to ponder: Who is this originator? What is His name? How would one describe Him? What are His Attributes? Sufficient answers to these questions cannot be provided by the intellect; only messengers sent by the One Creator, Allah, can furnish this information.

As always, before using an analogy as a teaching tool, we like to make it clear that even the most elevated similitude can never truly describe the Glory of Allah. I have previously told you an analogical scenario. Assume, for example, that we were sitting inside a locked room and then heard someone knock on the door. Everyone agrees that there is someone knocking at the door; however, they disagree in their attempts to qualify the one knocking. Someone might say, ‘It is a man', while another might say, ‘It’s a child.' Some might maintain that it is a woman, some might say that it is a person who has come to bring us good news, and yet others might think that it is someone who comes to give them a warning (about something).'

As such, it can be said that as for the idea that there is someone knocking at the door, we are all in agreement. Nevertheless, our disagreement occurs when we attempt to imagine how, who or what this 'knocker' is. In spite of our actions to the contrary, a much more intelligent approach for us in this situation is to simply ask, 'Who is it?' This gives the one knocking at the door the opportunity to tell us about himself: Who he is, why he has come, etc. He could end our senseless bickering.

Allah *Glorified is He* informs us about Himself by means of the person He selects as His messenger who is qualified and prepared to receive His Revelation. Allah does not send His Revelation to every person directly.

We elucidated this meaning previously by giving the example of an electric light bulb or a radio that does not tolerate a direct electrical charge. Therefore, it needs a transistor or similar device that emits electrical charge suitable to it. If this process (of using the transistor) is ignored, the radio will be damaged. Thus, even in the material world there must be a process by which power is transmitted from stronger to weaker objects.

Allah *the Almighty* prepares certain persons from amongst mankind to receive His Revelation and convey it to others. Allah speaks to the angels who convey the speech of Allah to the messengers whom He selects from amongst mankind. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation …' (*ash-Shura:* 51).

If Allah *the Exalted* speaks directly to all people, what is the need for messengers? When 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'Have you known your Lord through Muhammad or Muhammad through your Lord?' He said, 'If I say that I have known my Lord through Muhammad, it means that Muhammad is a more compelling reason (to submit to Allah) than Allah Himself. If I say that I have known Muhammad through my Lord, what is the reason for sending messengers? I have known my Lord through my Lord Himself, and then Muhammad conveyed what my Lord enjoins on me.' Therefore, a messenger is utmost needed.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example which clarifies this matter in His saying about Prophet Musa (Moses): '…My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You …' (*al-A'raf:* 143). Allah *the Exalted* responded to him by saying: '[Allah] said, "You will not see Me"…' (*al-A'raf:* 143). Allah did not say, 'I cannot be seen.' This means that if Allah prepared Musa (Moses) to see Him, he would be able to see him. This is proven by the fact that in the Hereafter we will be prepared to see Allah *Glorified is He*: '[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

Allah *the Almighty* says about disbelievers who will be prevented from seeing Him: 'No! Indeed, from their Lord, that Day, they will be partitioned.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 15)

When Allah *Glorified is He* appeared to the mountain, which is created from a material stronger and more rigid than that of Musa (Moses), the mountain collapsed. Once Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* looked at this mountain, he fell unconscious. What would happen if he looked directly at Allah?

Whenever Allah *the Almighty* wills to address one of His created beings or appear to them, He prepares and strengthens him for this. Allah said about Musa (Moses): '…you would be brought up under My eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 39) Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'I made you for myself' (*Ta Ha:* 41). Then, the person who was prepared by Allah cultivates and teaches people what he has learnt from Him.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* educated his nation for a period of twenty-three years. If Allah were to speak directly to every person individually, this would inevitably consume a large period of time. Therefore, Allah *the Most High* chooses messengers and gives them special characteristics which enable them to cultivate and educate the nations after they themselves have been cultivated and educated by Him.

Sending messengers to convey Allah's Message is inevitable. They give detailed answers about people's questions concerning Allah: 'Who is He?' 'What is His Name?' 'What are His Attributes?' 'What does He demand of us?' 'What has he prepared for those who obey Him?' 'What has He prepared for those who disobey him?' Therefore, the first evidence on the falsity of associating partners with Allah is to ask the person who worships the sun, moon, or any idol, 'What do these things ask you to do? If you are unable to be provided with a response to this question, why do you worship these objects?' The true meaning of worship is that a worshipper should fulfil the commands and abstain from the prohibitions of the one he worships.

Then, why do these people willingly worship these things? It is because religiousness is something inherent to humans. We previously clarified that every single person has something inherited from Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* which is his innate nature. This innate nature testifies to the covenant made with Allah: '…Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf:* 172) If you manage to keep this innate nature pure and bright by following the Path of your Creator and nourishing your body with things that He has made lawful, Allah *the Almighty* will illumine your face and insight.

This explains the meaning of the following Hadith: 'The servant of Allah may complain, "I have supplicated Allah, but my supplication has not been answered." How can his supplication be answered while his food, drink, and clothes are gained through unlawful means?'(1) This person has destroyed his pure innate nature has along with neglecting the law by which he can maintain it. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding this: '…whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter]. And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind.' (*Ta Ha:* 123-124)

'Depressed life' and we seek refuge in Allah from this, results from the lack of faith and loss of the purity of the innate nature which testifies that Allah is our Lord. If you maintained it, the religious teachings and instructions would become clear and you would not lead a distressed live which results from the negligence of the Path of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who have believed, if you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion …’ (*al-Anfal:* 29). This means that Allah *the Almighty* will give one light and criterion, which will guide and enable him to distinguish between the Truth and falsehood.

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (1015) on the authority of Abu Hurayra who said that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allah the Almighty is Good and accepts only that which is good. Verily Allah has commanded believers to do that which He has commanded the messengers. So the Almighty says, "O, (you) messengers! Eat of the tayyibat [all kinds of halal (legal) foods], and perform righteous deeds." (al-Mu'minun: 51) and the Almighty says, "O, you who believe! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you." (al-Baqara: 172) Then Prophet Muhammad mentioned [the case] of a man who, having journeyed far, is disheveled and dusty, and who spreads out his hands to the sky saying, "O, Lord! O, Lord!," while his food is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, his clothing is unlawful, and he has been nourished with unlawful, so how can [his supplication] be answered?'*

Allah *the Exalted* clarifies the two matters which obscure the natural inclination towards faith: heedlessness about which Allah says: ‘…lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were unaware of this."’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172) The second matter is the exemplar: ‘It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them …’ (*al-A‘raf:* 173).

Therefore, heedlessness towards Allah’s religious teachings obscures the natural inclination towards faith, while producing a generation that does not adhere to the Path of Allah. The first generation neglects the Path of Allah, and the successive generations will be also heedless and have a bad example to follow. In addition, a bad pattern and heedlessness increase more and more with the passage of successive generations. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* sends messengers one after another in order to remove heedlessness and provide people with good examples, so that they can compare between the Path and religious teachings of Allah and the different paths others take.

Thus, whoever desires to dispute about Allah *the Exalted* should present his argument on the basis of knowledge, guidance and a light-giving Book that has been revealed by Allah. The Book is described as ‘light-giving’ because it is ascribed to Allah. However, this light can be obscured if it is exposed to distortion, alteration, and forgetfulness.

Allah *Glorified is He* described these various phases when He says: ‘So when they forgot that by which they had been reminded …’ (*al-An‘am:* 44).

Allah also says: ‘…those who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance …’ (*al-Baqara:* 159).

People are pardoned for forgetfulness, but they are not pardoned for concealing Allah’s Guidance. Those who do not fall into forgetfulness and concealment of Allah's sayings fall into distortion: '…those who distort words from their [proper] usages…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). In addition, they fabricate sayings and ascribed them to Allah: 'so woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah"…' (*al-Baqara:* 79). All of the four ways of obscuring the Book of Allah were done by the Jews.

The books they currently have are not suitable for arguing about Allah because they lack knowledge, guidance, and decisive evidence. They also do not fall into the category of 'illuminating books', which are absolutely free of errors resulting from forgetfulness, concealment, distortion, and fabrication.

Thus, whoever desires to debate about Allah should do so on the basis of intuitive knowledge, deductive reasoning, or illuminating book. There are many Divine Books: the Scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses), the scriptures of former people, the Psalms of Dawud (David), the Torah that was revealed to Musa (Moses) and the Gospel that was revealed to 'Isa (Jesus). All of these are Divine Books, but they experienced the factors that obscure their light and guidance due to the desires and delusions of people. This resulted from the delusion of temporal power which has the greatest impact on the distortion of scripture.

In fact, the delusion of temporal power prevented the Jews from believing Prophet Muhammad although they knew that he would come from the lands of Arabs, and they also knew his characteristics, the time he would be sent and that he is the seal of messengers. Therefore, the Quran says about them: '…Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons …' (*al-An'am:* 20). He also says about them: '…a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it].' (*al-Baqara:* 146)

'Abdullah ibn Sallam said his famous statement about Prophet Muhammad, 'By Allah, I recognised him as soon I saw him, in the manner I know my own son. As a matter of fact, I was more certain of his identity than that of my son!'(1)

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Umar that he asked 'Abdullah ibn Salam, 'Are you as certain about Muhammad's identity as that of your own son?' He said, 'Certainly, Al-Amin [Jibril (Gabriel)] descended onto the one who is deemed trustworthy from amongst mankind. I knew him from his description (which had been mentioned in earlier scripture). I am unable to say exactly what his mother may have been doing at the time that he was conceived.' This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (1/194).*

The Quran says that the Jews were awaiting the arrival of Prophet Muhammad so that they could secure their dominance over disbelievers. They said to disbelievers that there would be a new time in which a prophet would come, and they would dominate them and kill them, as the people of `Ad and Aram were killed.'(1) The Quran says: '…And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognised, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

They knew that the new prophet would take from them the status that they had enjoyed and their dominance in the fields of knowledge, economics, war, etc. In fact, they were preparing someone to be(2) the king of Medina at the night of Prophet Muhammad's migration. As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered the city, leadership belonged solely to him, so the new king was rejected.

All the Divine Books have been distorted and altered, for Allah *Glorified is He* has not guaranteed that they will be preserved in the manner He guaranteed that He would preserve the Quran. This highlights the esteem of the seal of prophets. The Divine Books which preceded the Quran contained legal rulings and were not miracles. The previous messengers were granted miracles apart from the scriptures they were given; the miracles of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for instance, were the stick, the hand, etc. His book and the religious instructions that he was calling to were represented in the Torah. The miracles of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* were curing the blind and the leper and giving life to the dead by permission of Allah, and His Book and religious instructions were represented in the Gospel.

As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Quran represented his miracle, Book and religious instructions. The Quran represents a miracle and contains religious instructions that will remain until the Last Hour as it is the last Message.

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(1) *This was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (1/124). It was worded by Ibn Is-haq from some of the learned individuals from among the Ansar (Medinan helpers).*

(2) *This is a reference to `Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul. Sa`ad ibn Ubada said to Prophet Muhammad, 'By Allah, before He granted us the special favour of being your followers and blessed us with your arrival, we were actually about to crown `Abdullah ibn Ubay and make him a king.' [Stated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/500)]*

Concerning previous prophetic messages, the miracles were temporary and were specific to those who witnessed them and lived at the time when they occurred. If Allah did not inform us about these miracles, we would not know anything about them and would not believe them. We previously likened this situation to a match which burns once in front of the person who has seen it, but afterward, this incident becomes a report. Although we believe in the miracles of Musa (Moses), we did not witness them.

Since previous Divine Books contained religious teachings and were not considered as miracles, Allah *Glorified is He* entrusted the duty of preserving them to the people who believed in them. This duty is considered as a moral obligation which may be obeyed or disobeyed; some people disobeyed Allah by neglected the duty to preserve the Divine Book, causing distortion to these Books.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the Jews, as did the rabbis and scholars by that with which they were entrusted of the Scripture of Allah …’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 44).

When an Arabic verb begins with the letters *hamza’*, *sin* and *ta*, this means that it is used as a request; the verb *istahfazhtuka* means ‘ask you to preserve something’ and the verb *istafhamtuka* means ‘ask you to understand something’. Other verbs should be understood in the same way such as *istakhrajt* and *istawdaht*, etc.

When people were asked to preserve the Divine Books but failed to do as such, Allah *the Almighty* assumed the responsibility of preserving the Quran, as He says: ‘Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran, and indeed, We will be its guardian.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9). Therefore, the Quran has remained the way it was revealed without any distortion; nothing has been added to it or removed from it. Allah spoke the Truth when He said at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘This is the Book about which there is no doubt…’ (*al-Baqara:* 2). There will be no doubt concerning this Book until the Last Hour. In fact, even the enemies of the Quran acknowledge its authenticity, regarding it as the only authenticated religious text.

One of the remarkable matters about the preservation of the Quran is that in most cases one preserves something in order to be evidence for him. For instance, a person may preserve a bill of exchange in order for it to be proof for him. Allah *the Exalted* has guaranteed the preservation of the Quran while it contains information concerning matters which will materialise in the future. Allah *the Almighty* preserves these matters as He is sure that they are true and will materialise in the future. Hence, Allah's preservation of the Quran means that nothing will contradict it: '…If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.' (*an-Nisa':* 82).

We said previously that the Quran has decided upon some things which will take place in the future, concerning that which people are offered the right to choose. Regarding this, people's choices correspond to what the Quran has already decided although they belie and disbelieve in it. However, they never act in a manner contrary to Allah's Decree.

How do you deal with a person who debates about Allah without knowledge, guidance or a light-giving book? We should draw their attention to knowledge, guidance and the light-giving book.

We should ask them to look at the signs which Allah has created and the axioms which prove the existence of the Creator *Glorified is He*. We should also call them to guidance and ask them to reflect upon the miracle which accompanied Prophet Muhammad: the Quran, It reports the siege imposed by the disbelievers of Mecca on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims so that they were forced to eat carrion and tree leaves at times.

The Quran stated during this time: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].' (*al-Qamar:* 45) This statement was so surprising that 'Umar exclaimed: 'which assembly is this referring to, for we are not even able to take care of ourselves?' When he witnessed the defeat that befell the disbelievers on the Day of Badr, he said, 'Allah is Truthful, as He says: "[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat]'. (*al-Qamar:* 45)

The Quran says about Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira(1): 'We will brand him upon the snout.' (*al-Qalam:* 16) Actually, on the Day of Badr, people were only able to identify Al-Walid from amongst the dead by a mark upon his snout.(2)

In addition, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specified the places where many warriors would die before the battle commenced.(3) When the battle had ended, they found that the people who were named by Prophet Muhammad died exactly at these places he specified.

Allah *Glorified is He* has given many proofs in the Quran concerning the fact that it is a Book that illumines the past, present and future. We previously mentioned that the unseen is concealed by the veils of time or space. This means that the preceding incidents are concealed by the veils of the past, and the coming incidents are concealed by the veils of the future. The incidents which take place around you at present are concealed by the veil of space. Moreover, a person may be meeting another in a room, but each one of them does not the real and hidden intentions of the other.

Allah *Glorified is He* removed these veils for His Messenger Muhammad. For example, before the battle of Mu'ta,(4) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings*

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(1) *Ibn Hajar stated is his book entitled 'Al-Fath' (8/662): There is some difference of opinion concerning who was intended by this revelation. In his Tafsir, Yahya ibn Salam mentioned that it referred to Walid ibn Al-Mughira. However, it is also said that it refers to Al-Aswad ibn `Abd Yaghuth. The latter of these opinions was stated by Sanid ibn Dawud in his Tafsir. Al-Suhayli said on the authority of Al-Qutaybi that Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq is the one to whom the verse refers.*

(2) *It was narrated on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that he made a statement concerning the verse: 'Cruel, moreover, and an illegitimate pretender.' (al-Qalam: 13). He said, 'This refers to a man from Quraysh who had surplus money as the result of extra livestock he owned and had earned notability thereby.' As-Suyuti mentioned in Ad-Durr Al-Mamthur (8/249): This was related by Al-Bukhari, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawyh and Abu Na'im. In relation to the verse: "We will brand him upon the snout." (al-Qalam: 16). Ibn `Abbas also mentioned that it refers to someone who fought at Badr and was branded on his nose, but he did not mention Walid ibn Al-Mughira.*

(3) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (1779) from a Hadith that was narrated by Anas Allah be pleased with him and Ahmad in his Musnad (3/219, 258) that Prophet Muhammad said, 'This is the place where so-and -so will die.' Afterward, he placed his hand on the ground and said, 'Right here, right here.' The narrator of the Hadith then added, 'None of them exceeded the places Prophet Muhammad had marked.*

(4) *The Battle of Mu'ta occurred during the month of Jumada Al-Ula in 7 A.H. Mu'ta is the name of a town in the region of Balqa' in the Levant. This battle is also referred to as=*

be upon him decided to remain in Medina, but as he dispatched his army he instructed them on of the matter of carrying the flag and defined the Companions who would carry the flag in case of its carrier's death. The Prophet selected the first three persons then said, 'When these persons are killed, you should choose someone from amongst yourselves to carry the flag.'(1)

After the battle commenced, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sat with his companions in Medina and described it in detail. When the army returned from Mu'ta, the Prophet and his companions in Medina found that the battle actually took place as Prophet Muhammad had described.

This reveals the reason for naming the battle of Mu'ta as a *ghazwa,* for this name refers to the battles in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took part. As for the other battles in which he did not take part, they were called *sariyya*. When Prophet Muhammad described to the Muslims the course of the battle, the Muslims considered him present on the battlefield, so they referred to it as a *ghazwa*.

Even more remarkably, Allah *Glorified is He* informed His Messenger the inner thoughts and feelings of his people(2): 'Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

These instances reveal that the Quran encompasses the past, present and future.

= *Battle of Al-Umara'. It was an intense battle: Ja`afar ibn Abu Taleb, Zayd ibn Al-Haritha, and `Abdullah ibn Rawaha were all martyred. They fought the Romans in this battle.*

(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4262) and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwah (4/366); in the narration, Prophet Muhammad announced their deaths before news of their deaths reached anyone in Medina.*

(2) *In his Tafsir (4/323), Ibn Kathir mentioned, 'They do this and covertly twist the meaning of what they say and make it seem as if they are sending greetings of peace (upon the Prophet) when actually they are cursing him. This led them to say amongst themselves, "If he is really a prophet, Allah will punish us for what we secretly intend when speaking to him if Allah really knows what our hearts conceal. If he is really a Prophet, Allah will punish us in the worldly life for what we secretly say about him." Allah Glorified is He responded to them by saying: '... Sufficient for them is Hell, which they will [enter to] burn and wretched is the destination.' (al-Mujadala: 8)*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱتَّبِعُواْ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ قَالُواْ بَلۡ نَتَّبِعُ مَا وَجَدۡنَا عَلَيۡهِ
ءَابَآءَنَآۚ أَوَلَوۡ كَانَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ يَدۡعُوهُمۡ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ ٱلسَّعِيرِ ﴿٢١﴾

When they are told, ‘Follow what God has sent down,’ they say: ‘We shall follow what we saw our forefathers following.’ What! Even if Satan is calling them to the suffering of the Blazing Flame? [21] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 21)

The phrase, ‘…what Allah has sent down…’ (*Luqman:* 21) generally refers to all revealed scriptures. The closest meaning can be the following: Adhere to the Books that Allah has revealed to the messengers in whom you believe. If you do so, you will acknowledge the truth of Muhammad’s Message.

An alternative way of understanding the meaning of this part of the verse which reads, ‘…what Allah has sent down…’ (*Luqman:* 21), is that it is a command to correct their affairs by thinking deeply about Islam.

They rejected this call and refused to adhere to what Allah revealed. They said, ‘…We shall follow what we saw our forefathers following…’ (*Luqman:* 21). In another verse, they said, ‘Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing …’ (*al-Baqara:* 170).

The apparent similarity of these verses leads us to ask, 'What is the difference between the Arabic verb *wajadna*, which is used in the former verse and *alfayna*, which is used in the latter verse?' Some scholars point out that those who were addressed had spent varying lengths of time in the company of their forefathers, so they were affected by their forefathers in different ways: Some of them had lived with their forefathers and followed them in for a short length of time, while others had lived with their forefathers for long periods of time. Therefore, they became familiar with the ways of their forefathers. Therefore, the Quran used two different verbs *wajadna* and *alfayna* to express the same meaning.

The second difference between the two verses is noticed at their ends. One of the verses ends with the following: ‘…Even though their fathers reason nothing, nor were they guided?' (*al-Baqara:* 170) The other verse ends with the following '…even though their fathers knew nothing, nor were they guided?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104)

What is the difference between the Arabic verbs *ya'qilun* and *ya'lamun*? The verb *ya'qil* refers to a person who is capable of reasoning and deducing things. If he does not have a deductive mind, he relies on the deductions of others. Therefore, knowledge is a more comprehensive and inclusive than reason because reason knows only what a person deduces, whereas knowledge encompasses what a person deduces as well as what he learns from others. Hence, the verse in which Allah says *ya'lamun* (know) includes the meaning of *ya'qilun* (reason).

If the use of reason is negated, it does not necessarily mean that the possession of knowledge in general is negated because you may benefit from others' reasoning and deductions. For example, a simple countryman can use the television and could watch various channels despite the fact that he inherently knows nothing about the nature of this machine, and someone has taught him how to use the television. Therefore, a person knows things by reasoning them and by accepting what is deduced by reasoning. Thus, negating the possession of knowledge indicates extreme ignorance, which cannot be rectified and changed.

We also notice that Allah says: '…We shall follow what we saw our forefathers following…' (*Luqman:* 21). In another verse, Allah says: '…Sufficient for us is that upon which we found our fathers …' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104). The former verse indicates the possibility of them adhering to the truth, as denial of the truth is not severe. However, the subsequent verse indicates that they found what their forefathers followed sufficient for them, so they do not need anything else. This indicates severe denial of the Truth. Thus, in the former verse, Allah negates their use of reason while in the subsequent example Allah negates their knowledge of anything. This proves that the end of each verse is suitable to its beginning.

Allah *Glorified is He* says at the end of the following verse: '…What! Even if Satan is calling them to the suffering of the Blazing Flame' (*Luqman:* 21).

This means that the insinuations of Satan were the primary cause which led to their forefathers' idolatry and disbelief. In this case, Satan is a common denominator between them and their forefathers. This suggests that enticement toward evil can come from oneself or result in both cases in the effacement of the light of faith and that of the religious instructions.

We previously clarified the difference between disobedience to Allah is caused by you own self and that which is caused by Satan; Satan desires that you always disobey Allah. If you resist his temptation in regard to a particular act of disobedience, he will try to tempt you to commit a different act of disobedience.

However, the *nafs* (self) desires a particular act of disobedience to which it is inclined. Therefore, relinquishing it becomes very difficult. Every person has a particular weakness or an appetite that he favours. Through practice and experience, some people have learnt other peoples' weaknesses and how to make use of these weaknesses in order to exploit these people.

We see that many people who commit acts of disobedience blame Satan only. For instance, one of them may say (after an act of disobedience) that has tempted him and does not blame himself for committing it. The idea of regarding Satan responsible for each act of disobedience is negated by the Hadith: 'When the month of *Ramadan* comes, the doors of Paradise are opened, the doors of Hell are closed and devils are confined.'(1)

If devils were the source of all acts of disobedience, we would not find any act of obedience or crime committed during *Ramadan*. As these acts of disobedience are committed, this means that there is a reason other than Satan that causes them since devils are confined during *Ramadan*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (1079) and Ahmad in his Musnad (2/357) from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

وَمَن يُسۡلِمۡ وَجۡهَهُۥٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحۡسِنٞ فَقَدِ
ٱسۡتَمۡسَكَ بِٱلۡعُرۡوَةِ ٱلۡوُثۡقَىٰۗ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡأُمُورِ ﴿٢٢﴾

Whoever directs himself wholly to God and does good work has grasped the surest handhold, for the outcome of everything is with God [22]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 22)

This verse means that a person who wants to save himself from arguing without knowledge, guidance and a light-giving scripture should direct himself wholly to Allah, as He says in another verse: ‘(Satan) said, "By your might, I will surely mislead them all.”’ (*Sad:* 82) Then, he made an exception: ‘Except, amongst them, Your chosen servants.’ (*al-Hijr:* 40)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…directs himself wholly to Allah…’ (*Luqman:* 22). This verse means that the one who surrenders completely and sincerely to Allah without associating any partners with Him and who is in the accompaniment of Him, Satan will not tempt him. In fact, Satan tries to tempt the inattentive people. Therefore, one can be saved from the temptation of Satan when he surrenders completely to Allah.

For example, when a small child is accompanied by his father, none of his peers will attempt to attack him. However, if he walks alone, he will be vulnerable to their attack. If a servant of Allah abstains from being in the accompaniment of Him, he will be vulnerable to the temptation and insinuations of Satan. This meaning is also expressed in Allah’s saying: ‘Yes [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah …’ (*al-Baqara:* 112).

However, there is a slight difference between the verse stated in the chapter of *al-Baqara* and the verse stated in the the chapter of *Luqman:* In the chapter of *al-Baqarah*, the word *lillah* is mentioned, but in the chapter of Luqman, the words *ila Allah* are mentioned. The Arabic preposition *ila* (to) means that the ultimate objective is Allah. This objective requires a guide which helps you to reach it. However, the Arabic preposition *li* indicates an immediate and direct arrival to Alla, which can only be attained with the highest levels of sincerity.

Allah's saying, 'Whoever directs himself wholly to Allah…' (*Luqman:* 22) indicates that one follows the path which leads to Allah as he fulfils the obligations enjoined by Him.

An example of surrendering completely to Allah was stated by the Queen of Sheba: '…I submit with Sulaiman (Solomon) to Allah, Lord of the worlds.' (*an-Naml:* 44) These words were uttered by the Queen; she did not say, 'I have surrendered myself to Sulaiman (Solomon).' Rather, she said, 'I submit with Sulaiman (Solomon) to Allah.' (*an-Naml:* 44) There is no objection to what she said.

Surrendering completely to Allah or observing sincerity to Him entails tremendous effort on behalf of a worshipper. A soul can never be completely free of lapses and mistakes. Actually there are many cases in which a person may outwardly seem sincere to Allah, but as soon as the love for reputation enters his heart, his action becomes tainted with ostentation, even if it is slight.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has alleviated this burden and has given us something which the heart of every Muslim should find contentment. He said in his supplication, 'O, Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for every action I began solely seeking Your contentment, but might have become influenced by other factors.'(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not in need of this supplication to remedy personal failings; however, Allah *Glorified is He* taught him this supplication for removing hardship from his *ummah* (followers of Islam). Allah *the Exalted* also alleviated the burden of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when He said: 'We know that you, [O, Muhammad] are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful…' (*al-An'am:* 33). This means that Prophet Muhammad is more honourable and should never be considered as a common liar. '…they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.' (*al-An'am:* 33)

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(1) *Sufyan ibn Al-Uyayna said, 'Mutraf ibn `Abdullah said the following supplications sometimes, "O, Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for the things for which I have repented and then fallen back into. Forgive me for the things I intended to do, but failed to be committed to it. O Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for things that I did seeking Your contentment, but my heart is affected by other desires, which You know."' This was mentioned by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in Jami' Al-`Ulum wal Hikam (p.27) See also Hilyat Al-Awliya' (2/207).*

Allah’s says: ‘…and does good work has grasped the surest handhold …’ (*Luqman:* 22). The word *istamsaka* (grasp) indicates strength and firmness, a meaning which is not indicated by the verb *masaka* (hold).

The first aspect of grasping is that you know that you are weak, so you rely upon Allah’s support more firmly. For example, when you descend a mountain, you cling to it firmly so that you do not fall. If you do not cling to it firmly, you will fall. Gripping the mountain firmly indicates that you are sure of your weakness. The only thing that can protect you is the rope to which you must grip tightly. A person who submits entirely to Allah and takes hold of His surest handhold will be saved and protected by Him. The literal meaning of the Arabic word *Al-‘urwa* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to the handle with which we grasp tankards, mugs or watering vases. This handle differentiates between a mug and a cup, for a mug has handle. The word *wuthqa*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means sure or steady. It is also the feminine derivative of the adjective *awthaq* which means strongly attached to something and cannot be separated from it.

The *`urwa* (handle) differs according to the one who makes it; if it is made by a dishonest craftsman, it will be so weak and fragile that it may be loosened as soon as you attempt to grip the vessel. This is an unethical business practice as a person may purchase a car at an affordable price only to find its spare parts very expensive.

Making a weak handle benefits the deceitful craftsman. If Allah is the One Who supports the handhold, then it will be the surest and strongest handhold.

Allah says in another verse: ‘And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 103). This verse clarifies that the surest handhold is the Rope of Allah which brings us together. Therefore, a buttonhole on a shirt is called *`urwa* because it fastens and brings the garment together so that it does not come part. In another verse, Allah described this *`urwa* (handhold) as follows: ‘…with no break in it …’ (*al-Baqara:* 256).

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…for the outcome of everything is with Allah.’ (*Luqman:* 22) This asserts that everything comes back to Allah *the Exalted* and we should believe that He has created us for an important purpose and that He will not leave us without reckoning: ‘Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you would not be returned?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 115) If Allah left us without reckoning, a morally depraved person who satisfies all of his vain desires would have better luck than he who leads his life uprightly and virtuously. Allah *the Most High* does not ever deceive His servant who adheres to His Path.

The ultimate outcome of all events rests with Allah in the Hereafter; however, He allows us to witness some of the consequences of our actions in the worldly life, so that progress and development achieve primacy. This is clarified by making exams for students at the end of the school year to distinguish between the diligent students and their negligent counterparts. If students’ performances were never assessed at the end of the year, all of them would be equal and would neglect their studies. Therefore, there must be recompense for good and bad action, so that life does not become corrupt. Rewarding praiseworthy behaviour and punishing blameworthy behaviour is a well-established practice during the worldly life, so why do some people disapprove of reckoning in the Hereafter?

Is it sensible to believe that this world, which was created by Allah with such perfection, wisdom and exactitude will be left corrupted, and people are not held to account? If this was the end, every believer and upright person will be at loss.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن كَفَرَ فَلَا يَحْزُنكَ كُفْرُهُۥٓ ۚ إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُهُمْ
فَنُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٢٣﴾

As for those who refuse to do this, do not let their refusal sadden you [Prophet] – they will return to Us and We shall tell them what they have done. God knows all that hearts contain [23] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 23)

After Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that the final outcome of all affairs rests with Him, He willed to console His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. After debating with knowledge, guidance, and light-giving book and clarifying the importance of surrendering completely to Allah, the Prophet should not let their refusal sadden him.

This clarified Allah knows that His Messenger loves that his *ummah* (followers of Islam or people he was sent) become believers. This also implies he becomes sadden to see any disbeliever from amongst his people he was sent. The Quran conveys this meaning in many verses: ‘Then, perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O, Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) Allah *the Exalted* also says: ‘you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 3) Allah *the Almighty* reassures His Messenger by informing him that the purpose of sending him is to convey the Message. As Prophet Muhammad performed his mission, then this mission was fulfilled. There are many verses that gently blame Prophet Muhammad for saddening for the disbelievers. This Divine blame to Prophet Muhammad is actually in his favour exactly like the situation when a father blames his hard-working son to study more and more, lest his efforts be in vain.

An instance of this is Allah’s saying to His Prophet blaming him: ‘The Prophet frowned and turned away because the blind man came to him, [interrupting] but what would make you perceive [O, Muhammad] that perhaps he might be purified.’ (*‘Abasa:* 1-3) Allah blames His Prophet for neglecting the believer who had come to him to enquire about some religious matters, and the Prophet went to call the disbelievers who belied him. In so doing, he chose the difficult matter and left the easy one. Hence, this blame was in the interest of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and not against him as some people, who misunderstood this verse, said.

Another example of Allah’s blame occurs in His saying: ‘O, Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1). In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* blames His Prophet because he tightened matters for himself, for he prevented himself from enjoying that which Allah *the Almighty* made lawful for him.(1)

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(1) In his *Tafsir* (4/386), Ibn Kathir mentioned: ‘Substantial debate revolved around determining the occasion in which the starting verse of the chapter of *at-Tahrim* was revealed. It was said that the verse was revealed in relation to Mariyah. It was narrated on the=

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…they will return to Us …' (*Luqman:* 23). The verse means that Allah informed His Messenger that if he did not see the negative consequences of those people's disbelief, they would return to Allah in the Hereafter and would be held accountable. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '…whether We show you some of what We promise them, [O, Muhammad] …' (*Ghafir:* 77). It means that Allah *the Most High* will show His Prophet the consequences of their disbelief. '…or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned.' (*Ghafir:* 77)

Therefore, the part of the verse which reads '…they will return to Us …' (*Luqman:* 23) reveals the ultimate outcome of their affair. Nevertheless, Allah *the Most High* showed His Prophet the signs of his triumph over the disbelievers and the signs of their humiliation and defeat. In fact, this is what happened in the Conquest of Mecca when the Prophet entered Mecca triumphantly but modestly lowering his head.(1)

He knew that his victory had come from Allah *the Almighty*. He wanted to convey to the people of Mecca that they wanted power to show arrogance, but he showed modesty due to this power. This is the fundamental difference between how a believer and a disbeliever understand might and honour.

= authority of Anas, who mentioned, "Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in possession of a maiden with whom he had relations. However, `A'isha and Hafsa gave him such a difficult time about this that he eventually treated their relationship as though it were forbidden." The correct narration concerning this verse is that it refers to an occasion in which Prophet Muhammad prohibited himself from consuming honey. It was narrated on the authority of `A'isha, who said, "The Prophet was in the habit of eating a particular type of honey with Zaynab bint Jahsh and would spend lengthy periods of time in her company. This led to a secret agreement between Hafsa and me, as we agreed that if the Prophet visited either of us, we would say, "Have you been eating *maghafr* (a type of food which has bad smell)?" Prophet Muhammad said, "I will never eat it again and do not tell anyone about this."'

(1) Ibn Hisham mentions in his book entitled *As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah* (4/405): 'Once Prophet Muhammad came to the site of Dhu Tawa. He rode his mount, and he was wearing a turban without an extremity (made of Yemeni cloth) and a reddish shawl. The only thing Prophet Muhammad could do after witnessing the Conquest of Mecca is to lower his head in humility. As a matter of fact, his head was so inclined that his beard nearly touched the riding animal.' Although the generic term 'beard' was used in the excerpt above, it specifically refers to the hair which grows underneath the chin. It is also said that the word 'beard'—as it appears here—can refer to the hair upon the jaw.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to do after he had fully secured the ability to do whatever he wanted to do with them—after they annoyed and troubled him extremely—he gathered them and said his famous statement, ‘O, people of Quraysh, what do you think I am going to do with you?' They replied, ‘Good! You are a magnanimous man and the son of a magnanimous man.’ Then he said, ’Go. You are free.’(1)

It is worth noting that the style changes from singular in *‘man kafar fala yahzunka’* (do not let their refusal sadden you) to plural in *‘ilayna marji’uhum’* (they will return to Us). This is because *man* is an Arabic relative pronoun, which can be used either in the plural or in the singular form.

Allah’s saying, ‘…We shall tell them what they have done…’ (*Luqman:* 23) indicates that Allah records all their actions. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…Allah had enumerated it, while they forgot it …’ (*al-Mujadala:* 6). Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘…Allah knows all that hearts contain.’ (*Luqman:* 23) This refers to the hidden thoughts which have not been turned into a saying or an action. Allah knows the envy, hatred, enmity, and conspiracy against Prophet Muhammad.

The word *aleem,* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is an Arabic hyperbole. There is a difference between the word *’alim* and *’aleem*: *’alim* refers to an entity than has knowledge, but *’aleem* refers to an entity that has full knowledge which has not been acquired from anyone. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…over every possessor of knowledge is one [more] knowing.’ (*Yusuf:* 76)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

نُمَتِّعُهُمْ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ نَضْطَرُّهُمْ إِلَىٰ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

We let them enjoy themselves for a little while, but We shall drive them to a harsh torment [24] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 24)

Allah clarifies to believers that they should not be deceived by the apparent affluence, well-being, and power that disbelievers may enjoy because this is transitory enjoyment. Allah *Glorified is He* wants that the followers of prophets to have faith without having the intention to gain worldly advantages.

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(1) This was mentioned by Ibn Hisham in his book *As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah* (4/412): 'After the Conquest of Mecca, Prophet Muhammad said, "O, people of Quraysh, what do you think I am going to do with you?" They replied, "Good! You are a magnanimous man and the son of a magnanimous man." Then, he said, "Go. You are free."’

We previously clarified a way you can separate in the principle of truth and that of falsehood. The one who seeks the Truth is willing to sacrifice for his principle, while the one who seeks falsehood thinks for the recompense when he will receive. This explains of the tendency of the early Muslims to be in service of faith. History records many instances in which they abandoned their homelands and accepted to sacrifice their souls and money, thus leaving their homeland and children for the sake of their religion. This is because their motive was to undertake a universal humane. This mission can only be done by those who are ready to sacrifice themselves. As for communists, they think first of control of material resources.

Indeed, it is narrated that when one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* realised that the only thing that stood between him and eternal felicity was to fight and be martyred, it became his immediate wish. In fact, he threw down some dates he was holding in his hand (1) as soon as he heard the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* issue the glad tidings of paradise (for a soldier martyred treading upon Allah's Path)! He did not even spare time to finish eating the dates! He rushed to the battle seeking martyrdom, aspiring to attain Allah's Promise. It was narrated that some of those who strove were heard calling out in the battlefield, 'Blow, O, winds of Paradise!' Another one was heard saying, 'Truly, I can smell the fragrance of Paradise from beyond Mount Uhud.'(2)

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(1) Narrated *by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4046) on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah, who said, 'A man asked Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him on the Day of Uhud, "Tell me, if I am killed today, where will I end up?" He said peace and blessings be upon him "In Paradise." On hearing this, the man threw the dates he was holding in his hand and fought until he was martyred.'*

(2) Narrated *by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2805) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, who said, 'My uncle Anas ibn An-Nadr did not attend the Battle of Badr. He said, "O, Messenger of Allah, I was absent from the first battle you fought against the pagans. If Allah were to let me participate in a battle against the pagans, Allah will see what I will do." When the day of Uhud arrived, and the Muslim ranks were exposed (due to some soldiers failure to hold their positions), he said, "O, Allah, I beg of You to excuse these people (meaning his Companions) for what they have done, and I declare my=*

Allah's statement, 'We (Allah) let them enjoy themselves for a little while, but in the end We shall drive them to a harsh torment' (*Luqman:* 24) is referring to the transient enjoyment from the temporal joys of this world. In relation to the disbelievers, these temporal joys only lure them into their own destruction, and by no means, should they be regarded as a sign of Allah's Favour. Earlier, we mentioned that you do not push your enemy down a rug; rather, you elevate him and raise him so that his fall will be harder and more painful. In a similar sense, the True Lord *Glorified is He* grants disbelievers a transient enjoyment, remaining only for a brief time to increase the intensity of their losses and regret when they are divested of these fleeting joys.

The same meaning has been expressed elsewhere in the Quran in Allah's saying: 'So, when they forgot (the warning) with which they had been reminded, We opened to them the gates of every (pleasant) thing, until in the midst of their enjoyment in that which they were given, all of a sudden, We took them to punishment. Lo! They were plunged into destruction with deep regrets and sorrows.' (*al-An'am:* 44) The verbal form *mublisun* which is translated as plunged into destruction with deep regrets and sorrows means they have totally lost hope for any type of good thing.

The Arabic word *fath* which is translated as 'opened to them the gates' does not necessarily connote that something desirable or favourable will happen unless it occurs with a definite article, i.e. *Al-fath* (manifest success or victory). This leads us to our next point that there is a difference between something being thrown open to you (*fath laka*) and something being thrown open upon you (*fath `alayka*). When you use the expression *fath laka*, that is 'thrown open to you', this implies that it is something in your favour. Conversely, when you say *fath `alayka*, that is such-and-such has been 'thrown open upon you', it connotes that something (in this case, enjoyment and the trifles of this world) has been given to you as a burden.

On this basis, do not be deluded when you see the good things of this world lavished upon some people. You should be well aware that they have

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= *innocence before You of what these people (meaning the idolaters) have done." Afterward, he proceeded toward the enemy but was first met by Sa`ad ibn Mu`adh, to whom he said, "O, Sa`ad ibn Mu`adh, Paradise! I swear by the Lord of An-Nadr, I can smell its scent from behind Uhud."'*

forgotten Allah’s Warnings. Interestingly enough, there is a non-prophetic Hadith which states that when Allah is angry with someone, He issues their provision from unlawful sources, and if His Anger intensifies, He makes the person’s unlawful enterprise highly lucrative.

The purpose of this lies in keeping such a person in comfort, luxury and enjoying high status until Allah seizes him suddenly with a mighty, painful grasp. Indeed, seizing a disbeliever at the height of his worldly power and the peak of his tyranny indicates the strength and power of the seizure. There is nothing characteristic about seizing a weak person. This is, in some way, similar to an athlete who sets out to break a world record; he goes and breaks the highest record to establish his worthiness.

In this connection, it is also worth noting that when the Quran challenged its opponents to match its rhetorical brilliance and linguistic marvel, it issued this challenge to Arabs. They were a people known for eloquence, rhetoric, and oratory skills. It goes without saying that it would not be worthwhile to issue this challenge to someone who was unskilled in the art of language or non-fluent speaker.

The meaning of the part of the verse saying, ‘…but in the end We shall drive them to a harsh torment’ (*Luqman:* 24), means that the grip would be tightened around them until they find nothing except harsh punishment. Or this part of the verse can signify that the judgment and time preceding punishment will be more agonising for them than the punishment itself as stated in the Noble Hadith: ‘Verily, the sun will draw near the heads (on that day) until people would wish to only go away, even if it were to Hellfire!’(1)

Here, their suffering has been described as *ghalizh* (harsh). The Arabic word *ghilzh* refers to thickness. This means that their suffering will take the form of a tremendous punishment, making it impossible to move the soul away from it. On the other hand, if their punishment had been described as thin or slight, it would have given them some hope of being able to flee from it.

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(1) *Narrated in Sahih Muslim on the authority of Al-Miqdad ibn Al-Aswad, who said, ‘I heard the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him say, "On the Day of Judgment, the sun will draw near the created beings until it is something like a mile away from them. People will be immersed in sweat according to their deeds. It will be up to the ankles of some of them, and up to the knees of some of them, and up to the waists of some of them, and sweat will completely muzzle some of them."’ At-Tadhkirah by Imam Al-Qurtubi (p.274).*

Afterward, the Quran continues to address the disbelievers:

وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّنْ خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ
ٱللَّهُ ۚ قُلِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, 'God.' Say, 'Praise belongs to God,' but most of them do not understand [25] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 25)

This is a sufficient confutation; they themselves testified that Allah *the Exalted* is the Creator of the heavens and earth. After this acknowledgement on their part, it is amazing to consider how they could turn away from worshipping the Creator *Glorified is He* and instead worship objects that cannot create, see, or hear.

For this reason, after their testimony and their openly acknowledging that Allah is the Creator of the heavens and earth, the True Lord *the Exalted* follows this by saying: 'Say, "All praises and thanks be to Allah!"' (*Luqman:* 25) Praising Allah is appropriate in this verse because they are making a confession against themselves. In fact, it is common amongst us to say the same thing in our dealings with one another such as when you are engaged in an argument and the opposing side inadvertently acknowledges the superiority of your position, you usually exclaim, 'All praise is due to Allah!'

This expression of praise and gratitude is said on many different occasions. When your opponent (in a debate) acknowledges your argument as valid, you say, 'All praise is due to Allah.' Likewise, when Allah *the Almighty* rescues you from being harmed by the misconduct of a bad person, you say, 'All praise is due to Allah.' What this truly means is the following: 'All praise is due to Allah for saving me from the evil of this corrupt person.'

Also, on hearing the news of the death of an outlaw or any wicked person, we say, 'All praise is due to Allah.' Again, in this example we are praising Allah *the Almighty* for protecting us from the illegal or harmful actions of such a wicked person. When an iniquitous person dies, it is as if Allah is freeing the land and its people from his evil. This is similar to Allah's saying: 'The evildoers were wiped out. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!' (*al-An'am:* 45)

'All praise is due to Allah' is also said when a victimised person receives justice, and his grievance is redressed or his innocence is proven. Allah willing, in the Hereafter, we will be amongst those who have the privilege of saying, 'All praises and thanks be to Allah Who has removed from us (all) grief. Verily, our Lord is indeed Most Forgiving, Most Appreciative.' (*Fatir:* 34)

'And those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to Paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, and its gates will be opened, and its keepers will say, "Peace be upon you! You have done well, so enter here to abide therein." And they will say, "All praises and thanks be to Allah Who has fulfilled His Promise to us and has made us inherit (this) land. We can dwell in paradise where we will. How excellent a reward for the (pious, good) workers!"' (*az-Zumar:* 73-74)

You also say, 'All praise is due to Allah' when you are delivered from a state of distress, sorrow or grief. Most importantly, 'All praise is due to Allah' will be said when we enter paradise and enjoy its everlasting bliss. We will have fully realised the truthfulness of what Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us of concerning the delights of paradise.

In essence, whether we are praising Allah *the Most High* for relieving us from evil or bestowing good upon us, we are praising Him for His Blessings. Yet, beyond this praise lies an even higher kind of one. Have you not read the Qudsi Hadith saying: 'Verily, Allah will manifest Himself to His believing servants in Paradise and say, "O, My servants, shall I not give you something better than this?" They will say, "O, Lord, what could possibly be better than this when You have given us that which no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no human heart has ever imagined?" Allah will say, "I will bestow upon you My Good Pleasure, and I shall never thereafter be angry with you."'(1) After earning Allah's eternal Contentment, what else is thereto which to aspire?

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(1) Agreed upon Hadith. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6049) and also by Muslim in his Sahih compilation (2829) on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri. Its=

Allah *the Exalted* also says: ‘You [O, Prophet] will see the angels surrounding the Throne, glorifying their Lord with praise. True judgment will have been passed between them, and it will be said, "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."’ (*az-Zumar:* 75) This is the highest and ultimate praise. At first, you were in a state of praise because of the blessings of Allah that you were enjoying. Now, you are in a state of praise because of your proximity to the Giver of those blessings Glorified is He!

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…But most of them know not.’ (31: 25). Either this part of the verse is speaking about people who are heedless of Allah *the Almighty* or ‘…But most of them know not’ (*Luqman:* 25) refers to lack of real, beneficial knowledge, even if they possess unscriptural knowledge or knowledge that only fulfils physical desires.

Afterward, the chapter shifts into a different scene. It introduces a verse that deals with Allah’s Signs within the creation. Allah *the Exalted* says:

لِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْغَنِىُّ ٱلْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٦﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God.
God is self-sufficient and worthy of all praise [26]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 26)

After Allah *the Exalted* has recorded their acknowledgement and testimony that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, He *the Most High* wanted to make it clear to us that the heavens and the earth are, in fact, simply receptacles which contain the created beings that dwell within them. To be sure, many things are contained within the heavens and the earth–some of which we know and some of which we do not know. As a principle, that which is held by a

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= wording is as follows: ‘Verily, Allah will say to the inhabitants of Paradise, "O, inhabitants of Paradise!" They will respond, "Here we are! At Your service, O, Lord, and all the good is in Your Hand." Then He will say, "Are you contented?" They will reply, "And how should we not be contented, O, Lord, when You have given to us that which You have given to no one else of Your creation?" Then, He will say, "Shall I not give you something better than that?" They will say, "O, Lord, what can be better than this?" He will say, "I shall bestow My Good Pleasure upon you, and I shall never thereafter be displeased with you."'

container is always more valuable than the container itself. Take a wallet, for instance; the money inside the wallet is usually worth more than the wallet itself. The same can be said of a safe. The jewels, money, and important documents are usually more precious and important than the safe itself.

This explains why we have always said: Never use the Quran as a safekeeping place for something important to you. The Quran is more precious than anything else. It should not be used to preserve things; quite the reverse is true, it should be preserved.

The noble verse also contains an indication that just as they have acknowledged that Allah *Glorified is He* is responsible for the creation of the heavens and earth, it is also necessary for them to acknowledge that He is the owner of all that is in them. In many ways, it represents the most basic logical deduction (Allah is the Creator of the heavens and earth; Allah is the owner of whatever is in the heavens and the earth); anyone with sound faculties will arrive at this conclusion. As long as the heavens and the earth belong to Allah, He is the owner of whatever is in them. Imagine that you owned a plot of land and one day something valuable happened on your land; in this case, the object you found is considered your property both legally and logically.

This is an issue that every person endowed with reason should reflect upon. Allah is the Owner of all that exists in the heavens and on the earth, including humans—who have been especially honoured by Allah *the Most High*. Indeed, Allah has made the human being the steward of the rest of creation and has elevated mankind above all other created forms. For proof of this, one only needs to observe the way in which the creation has been subjected to the use of human beings: plants, animals, and inanimate objects have been all harnessed to their service. This gives rise to the question: Is it proper for a ward to be greater than his steward is or to have a longer life span?

Again, as we mentioned, rational people must contemplate this issue. They must survey creation and question: How can this inanimate object, which serves me, outlive me?

There must certainly be another plane of existence upon which my years will extend beyond those of the sun, moon, and the other inanimate objects which serve me. This plane of existence is referred to as the Hereafter. Indeed, in it the sun will be extinguished and the rest of creation will evanesce, but mankind will remain.

Therefore, you are in need of Allah's created beings and creation that exist in the heavens and on the earth. Indeed, only Allah is capable of maintaining these various created beings within His creation; however, He is absolutely Self-Sufficient and in no way dependent on or in need of any of His created beings. This explains why He says: '…Indeed, Allah is the Rich (Self-Sufficient, Free of all wants or needs), worthy of all praise.' (*Luqman:* 26) To be sure, Allah—with His Perfect Attributes—performed the act of creation, yet, it is important to remember that the act of creation did not endow Him with new attributes. In other words, He was the Giver of Life (*Al-Muhyi*) before He had created anything to which He gave life. He was the Exalter (*Al-Mu`iz*) before there was anyone to exalt!

As we have mentioned many times throughout the pages, you do not say that so-and-so is a poet simply because you saw him compose poetry. He was a poet even before he composed his first bit of poetry. Of course, he was; otherwise, he could not have composed poetry.

When Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says, '…Indeed, Allah is the Rich (Self-Sufficient, Free of all wants or needs) …' (*Luqman:* 26), He means absolute self-sufficiency. In relation to Allah, everything in the heavens and on the earth is part of His Dominion. It has been related in a Qudsi Hadith that the heavens and the earth within Allah's Kingdom can be likened to a ring that someone has flung in a vast desert.(1) In spite of the fact that we have made many advancements within the field of natural sciences, such as engineering and light years measurement, do not think that Allah's Kingdom is limited to such spaces, created beings and inanimate objects that we are able to perceive.

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Abu Dhar Al-Ghifari that he asked Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him about the Kursi and he replied, 'By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, the seven heavens and the seven earths in comparison to the Kursi (Allah's Footstool) are nothing but like a ring thrown in a vast desert. Likewise, the superiority of the `Arsh (Allah's Throne) over the Kursi is like the superiority of the desert over that ring.' Narrated by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari in his major historical compendium, At-Tarikh (vol. 1, p. 150), Ibn Hibban in Mawarid Az-Zam`an (p.52) and Abu Na`im in Al-Hilya (vol. 1, p. 166)*

As we pointed out earlier, Allah *the Most High* is perfectly Self-Sufficient. He originated creation, but He has absolutely no need for it. After He originated creation, He placed it at the disposal of His servants. Thus, it follows naturally that this Creator should be worthy of praise: '…Indeed, Allah is the Rich (Self-Sufficient, Free of all wants or needs), worthy of all praise.' (*Luqman:* 26) The word used in the Arabic text *hamid* (worthy of all praise) appears on the empathic pattern *fa`il* and means *mahmoud* (the praiseworthy, honourable, laudable, meritorious). Allah has also been described as *Hamid* (the One Who gives praise or thanks) such as His saying: '…indeed, Allah is Appreciative and Knowing.' (*al-Baqara:* 158) So, this noble verse mentions Allah as being 'Appreciative', but to whom?

Some scholars say that since Allah has taught His servants to respond kindly or with something better whenever they are greeted, in the present situation, you are thanking your Lord. He returns your gratitude on the basis of the aforementioned principle. This means that if you thank Him (for what He has given you), He responds to your gratitude by giving you more. The extra you receive is an expression of His Gratitude and Appreciation for the thanks you have offered. In other words, Allah's responsiveness to gratitude is His Way of rewarding you for your gratitude.

Next, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَلَوۡ أَنَّمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مِن شَجَرَةٍ أَقۡلَٰمٞ وَٱلۡبَحۡرُ يَمُدُّهُۥ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦ
سَبۡعَةُ أَبۡحُرٖ مَّا نَفِدَتۡ كَلِمَٰتُ ٱللَّهِۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ٢٧

**If all the trees on earth were pens and all the seas,
with seven more seas besides, [were ink,] still God's
words would not run out: God is almighty and
all wise [27] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 27)**

Turning our attention to Allah's statement, 'And if whatever trees on the earth …' (*Luqman:* 27), we find that the word *min* (which appears in the Arabic text, and whose function is performed by the word 'whatever' in the translation) is used to convey generality. It refers to anything that could remotely be called a tree. There is a difference between saying, 'I do not have money' and saying, 'I do not have whatever money.' The first statement does not preclude the possibility of you owning a small insignificant amount of money. Conversely, within the second statement you have effectively negated your possession of even the smallest denomination of currency. This means that you have no money whatsoever, not a small amount, and certainly not a larger one. Another example of this linguistic rule is how you would say, 'There is no one at home.' Perhaps you are aware that there is a child or woman in the house as you make this statement. On the other hand, were you to say, 'There is not a single soul in the house', this would mean that the house is completely empty of anyone that could be referred to as a soul.

The Arabic word *shajarah* (tree) encompasses every type of vegetation that has a trunk. Speaking of trees, one of the things that will be noticed about them is that their branches intertwine and entangle, which is what Allah is referring to when He says: 'By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you [O, Muhammad] decide between them in all matters of dispute [*shajara baynahum*]…' (*an-Nisa':* 65); in the Arabic text, the verbal form *shajara* is the word used to describe their disagreement.

As for the types of vegetation that do not have stalks, they are usually classified as grass, herbs, or shrubs. These can usually be found growing plentifully on the earth's surface, especially after rainfall. The reason these types are excluded from the parable mentioned in the verse is that it would be counterintuitive to think of pens being fashioned out of shrubs. It is much more sensible to use an analogy in which trees with branches and boughs are linked in association with pens.

Indeed, the Quran mentions both types of vegetation in its own inimitable address as in the following verse in which Allah says: 'The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation. And the stars and trees prostrate.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5-6) Notice that when describing the sun and moon, Allah says: '…[move] by precise calculation.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5); this refers to their precise calculated courses because they are the means through which time is calculated. Hence, their courses must be exact. 'And the stars and trees prostrate.' (*ar-Rahman:* 6); that is to say, they are in a state of submission to Allah *the Exalted*.

The word *An-najm* (star) appearing in this noble verse can be viewed as relating to the sun and moon, in which case it would linguistically signify ‘stars', and serve as a continuation of Allah’s Speech about heavenly bodies—or relating to trees—in which case it would signify plants without stalks or grass and serve as Allah’s introduction of a new point about vegetation. It is a word that can be read with a certain meaning and understood with entirely different meaning according to the attached personal pronoun within the same construction. Indeed, a poet paid attention to this subtle difference when he said:

When travelling to you, my guides are the stars (An-najm)

Likewise, my steed, eyes fixed on the path; it too is guided by An-najm (grass)

The poet mentioned that he looks to the stars (*An-najm*) to find his way on the path. He extended this meaning by pointing out that his riding animal also looks to *An-najm* for guidance; however, in the case of the riding animal, he does not mean the stars; rather, he is referring to the grass. Words that possess multiple meanings are common to Arabic language. Take the word *`ain*, for instance; it can be used to refer to gold and silver, to a spy, to water or to the physical organ of sight.

Refocusing our attention on the current verse, we find that Allah says: ‘…with seven seas behind it to add to its supply…’ (*Luqman:* 27). This means that Allah’s Words would not be exhausted even if these additional seas served as back-up supply for the sea—in the hypothetical case that it might run dry. A thought-provoking question that one could ask after pondering this parable is the following: Why has the reserve been mentioned in relation to the ink instead of the pens? Many scholars hold the opinion that it is due to a single ink pen being capable of writing with many different ink cartridges. In fact, the amount of ink cartridges one can insert into a pen is unlimited. Therefore, it is more likely to assume that the ink would expire as opposed to the pen. The depth of the parable becomes apparent if you consider the fact that trees and branches grow and multiply—in this, their ability to be unlimited is similar to that of a pen—while the water in the ocean is a relatively set amount that does not increase, making its comparison with ink particularly apposite.

In terms of understanding this issue, it is also beneficial to read the following noble verse: ‘Say, "If the sea were ink for [writing] the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like of it as a supplement."’ (*al-Kahf:* 109)

When the verse in the chapter of Luqman proclaims, ‘…with seven seas behind it …’ (*Luqman:* 27), the objective is not to give a specific amount; rather, it is simply to convey abundance. A similar construction has been employed in Allah’s following Words: ‘…sevens heavens …’ (*at-Talaq:* 12). The seven heavens being referenced in this verse pertain to our solar system. Have you given any thought to the heavens in other galaxies? Bear in mind, we have already established that the terms 'sky' and 'heaven' refer to everything above you.

As such, seven, the specific number mentioned in connection with the heavens, is mentioned to convey abundance, not to state an exact amount. In fact, it was customary amongst Arabs to use seven as the highest number one could reach. In essence, numbers are simply numerals which clarify the amount of an object being enumerated. This means there is a difference between a number and the item being counted. Uncovering this difference enables us to respond to the orientalists and their objection to the Prophet’s plural marriages. As we mentioned, numbers are numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), and an object being counted is being described by numerals.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to prohibit unrestricted polygamy, on account of Allah’s Revelation, he ordered whoever was married to more than four women to choose four of them and to divorce the rest.(1)

At the time of this revelation, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was already married to nine women. The fact that this ruling did not apply to him, namely the Messenger of Allah, for he remained married to all of them, and this fact is well known. This is where orientalists cite a bone of contention, for they ask, 'Why did this ruling not apply to Muhammad as it applied to others?' How could he be allowed to retain nine wives, while everyone else in the Muslim community was restricted to four? Indeed, their objections reveal the inadequacy of their understanding. They do not understand the difference between a number and the item to which it relates. Did Allah *Glorified is He* make his Messenger exempt from the prohibition of the number (which in this case is four wives) or exempt from the prohibition of that which was being numbered (his wives)?

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Malik in the Muwatta’, Book of Talaq (p. 587) that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said to a man from Thaqif who was married to ten women at the time his tribe converted to Islam, ‘Keep four wives and divorce the rest.’ At-Tirmidhi narrated it also from Ibn ‘Umar as a mawsul (connected) Hadith in his Sunnan (1128); this version maintained that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him told him to choose four of them. The man’s name was related as Ghailan ibn Salamah Al-Thaqafi.*

We would respond to them by saying that Allah only gave him an exemption from the prohibition of that which was being counted (the number of the women he was married to at the time of the Divinely revealed ruling). This is due to that in a different verse Allah addresses his Messenger by saying: ‘It is not lawful for you (to marry other) women after this, nor to change them for other wives even though their beauty attracts you …’ (*al-Ahzab:* 52). This verse obligated Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to limit himself to the women to whom he was currently married. He was not allowed to marry more women, nor was he allowed to marry after them—even if all of them died.

Accordingly, Allah did not grant him an absolute exemption regarding the number of women he could marry; for sure, being granted this by Him would mean that if one or all of his wives died, it would be lawful for him to simply marry other women.

Concerning this, it is reasonable for you to inquire: Why did Allah make an exception for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding that which was being counted (the women he was married to at the time of the revealed ruling, which limited the number of women a man could be married to at any one time to four) as opposed to the number of women he could marry? Many scholars point out the fact that all other wives, namely the wives of other than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had the option of remarrying if they were divorced by their husbands. The wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other hand, were the ‘Mothers of the Believers'. This status amongst the Muslim community entailed that, for a believing man, marrying any of them was illegitimate or illegal. Hence, if one of them was divorced by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* she must remain single for the rest of her life.

For this reason, the Messenger of Allah was ordered to retain his wives—despite the fact that they were nine in number—with the condition that he could not marry any more women. Conversely, other men were given the right to exercise choice; they could marry as many times as they wanted, provided that the number of women they were married to at any given time did not exceed four. When viewed through this prism, one can see how this ruling actually placed limitations on the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* while allowing more freedom and choice for his community in this regard.

We also know that most of the wives of the Prophet were elderly women, and some of them had no longer physical desire. Rather, these women desired the honour of being associated with the Messenger of Allah and the esteem of being regarded as ‘Mothers of the Believers'. As a matter of fact, one of them, when faced with the possibility of jeopardising this rank, preferred to relinquish her right to conjugal relations—granting the day she would normally spend with the Messenger to a co-wife—as opposed to the option of no longer being married to him. The honour of remaining his wife was simply enough for her.(1)

Recognising how an exemption from a ruling that sets something at a specific number differs from an exemption that exists in connection with what is being numbered is critical in refuting the aspersions, lies, and baseless accusations cast by orientalists on the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding his marriages. As we have shown, their ‘claim’ that he ‘created latitude' for himself while placing restrictions upon the members of his community is demonstrably false.

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(1) *This is in reference to what Sawda bint Zam`ah Allah be pleased with her the wife of the Messenger of Allah, did. She granted the day she would normally spend with the Messenger of Allah to `A’isha Allah be pleased with her as an alternative to not being divorced from the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him (as he would not deprive her of her rights). She said to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him ‘Keep me, O Messenger of Allah. I will give my appointed night to `A’isha. I do not desire what women desire.’ Al-Isabah by Ibn Hajr (vol. 8, p. 117).*

This issue of differentiating between a number and a thing numbered is quite vast; even some students of Arabic grammar find it confusing. For instance, there is nothing problematic about saying number one and number two. Both these numbers have masculine singular and feminine singular forms. So, we say one in its masculine singular form as *wahid*, and in its feminine singular form as *wahida*. The same applies with the number two. In its masculine singular form, we say *ithnan*, while its feminine singular usage is *ithnatan*. When using these two numbers, the gender of the number should conform to the gender of the object being counted. However, starting from three, the number should differ—in terms of its gender—from the object being counted. This means that if one (number three and above) is using a number to refer to a feminine object, the masculine form of the number should be used. The inverse is also true. If one is counting or enumerating an object that is masculine, the feminine form of the number should be used. Nonetheless, we must ask 'From where did this difference in counting objects come?'

Scholars have noted that the one pondering this issue should be aware that the foundation, or original state, of words is masculinity. This explains why the feminine item within the language is in need of a suffix or some other type of sign which indicates that it is feminine. Conversely, the masculine form of a word does not need any additional signs to indicate that it is masculine, so one simply says, *qalam* (pen). In contrast, when using the Arabic word for inkwell, *dawat*, one must use an additional *ta'* at the end of the word in order to indicate that it is feminine.

Now, let us focus our attention on the numbers from three to ten. You say, for example, *thalathat* (three), *arba`at* (four), *khamsat* (five), *sittat* (six), etc. Pronouncing these numbers in Arabic, you recognise that each number ends in *ta'*. However, this (*ta'*) does not indicate that the word is feminine. It should be carefully noted that the numbers in our example do not have corresponding objects, for when numbers are mentioned by themselves (without objects) they, by default, include *ta'*. Now, in the event that we want to make these numbers (three to ten) feminine—in order to serve as modifiers for their corresponding objects—we omit the original *ta'*. We do not add another *ta'*. The omission indicates that the number has become feminised. Although the most common way to feminise a word in Arabic is attaching an additional *ta'* to the end of the word; conversely, if the number is being used to modify a masculine object, it remains in its original form, i.e. ending with the letter *ta'*.

Having established that, our next question returns us directly to the context of the verse under study: What is the significance of the number seven in particular, which is used in this verse as well as elsewhere throughout the Quran? Some scholars mention that the foundation and template for all numbers is the number one. When counting, it is customary to increase by units of one. This means that one is like the raw material from which other numbers are made. When we add one to one, we get two. If we add one more, we wind up with three and so on.

In Arabic, it is generally well known that three is the smallest collective number (to which we may assign a noun in its plural form). Similarly, it is known that all numbers fall into one of two categories: even or odd. Even numbers are those which can be evenly divided by two, whereas odd numbers, on the other hand, are those which cannot be evenly divided by two. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'By the even and the odd.' (*al-Fajr:* 3) Allah begins with the even and then mentions the odd. This means that He started with the even number two and then progressed to three. Three is usually considered the first odd number. As for, one—which cannot be evenly divided by two—it is not considered the first odd number because of its status as the foundation upon which all proceeding numbers are built.

Indeed, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'By the even and the odd' (*al-Fajr:* 3), the fact that He began with two and then progressed to three is significant. Two is the first even number, and three is the first odd number; four is the second even number, and five is the second odd number; six is third even number, and seven is the third odd number.

We have already mentioned that in Arabic language the smallest unit of items which can be considered plural is three. Accordingly, the early Arabs considered number seven as the greatest collective number in general, with respect to odd or even. As a result, seven was normally where they would stop counting. If they wanted to count past seven, before mentioning the eighth item, they would place the conjunction 'and,' which they called *waw al-thamaniyah* (*waw* of eight or the *waw* that usually precedes any mention of or reference to the number eight). Hence, the Glorious Quran conformed itself to the speech patterns and rules of numbers used by the people amongst whom it was first promulgated.

You can read, if you wish, the following glorious verse: ‘And those who disbelieved will be driven to Hell in groups, till, when they reach it, the gates thereof will be opened …’ (*az-Zumar:* 71).

When speaking of paradise, Allah says: ‘And those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, and its gates will be opened …’ (*az-Zumar:* 73).

What is the difference between the two noble verses? Why does only the second one include the conjunction *waw*?

Some scholars have responded to these questions by pointing out that in the former the phrase, ‘…the gates thereof will be opened …’ (*az-Zumar:* 71) represents an action which takes effect only after the fulfilment of a condition (*jawab ash-shart).* The disbelievers have been in denial concerning the fulfilment of the condition which begins thus: ‘…till, when they reach it…’ (*az-Zumar:* 71). Something will happen as a result of their reaching hell, but what? The answer is the following: ‘…the gates thereof will be opened…’ (*az-Zumar:* 71). An important question to ask at this point is: Have the believers, whose piety and God-consciousness will lead them to paradise, denied the occurrence of the Day of Judgment?

The answer is 'Definitely not'. Therefore, ‘…and its gates will be opened…’ (*az-Zumar:* 71) is not considered the consequent of a conditional statement (*jawab ash-shart*) in relation to believers. That is to say, believers have never regarded the Day of Judgment as merely probable. They have known for certain that the gates of paradise shall open for them. In relation to them, the condition that will be fulfilled and the action that will take effect after its fulfilment is embodied in the following: ‘And its keepers will say, "Peace be upon you! You have done well, so enter here to abide therein." And they will say, "All praises and thanks be to Allah Who has fulfilled His Promise to us and has made us inherit (this) land. We can dwell in Paradise where we will. How excellent a reward for the (pious, good) workers!"’ (*az-Zumar:* 73-74)

Since the doors of Hell are only seven in number, there is no need to mention *waw at-thamaniyah* or the *waw* of eight when speaking of them. When the address relates to paradise, on the other hand, Allah mentions *waw at-thamaniyah* because it has eight gates.

In the same manner, read Allah's following statement and notice the way that it employs the use of the *waw* of eight: 'Perhaps his Lord, if he divorced you [all], would substitute for him wives better than you - submitting [to Allah], believing, devoutly obedient, repentant, worshipping, and given to fasting, [ones] previously married and virgins.' (*at-Tahrim:* 5)

You find that the *waw* of eight appears before the eighth characteristic (of the women who Allah could grant the Prophet in marriage). Indeed, the Arabs would normally stop at seven when enumerating items in a series because of its status as the count limit, whether for odd or even—as we explained earlier.

Allah's statement, '…with seven seas behind it to add to its supply …' (*Luqman:* 27) is describing a hypothetical scenario in which the water of the sea would be turned into ink and used to write Allah's Words. However, even in this case: '…yet the Words of Allah would not be exhausted …' (*Luqman:* 27). Allah's Words are the cause of bringing into being all the amazing creatures and creation that have been predestined to come to the world. Allah *the Exalted* states that 'When He wills a thing to be, He but says to it, "Be"—and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) Everything Allah has ever wanted to come into existence materialised by the simple command, 'Be.'

There is something particularly wondrous here that we should ponder: Allah *the Most High* says 'Be' to something which has not been created yet, and it comes into being. This reveals a profound point: all things that will come into existence have been recorded and are present with Allah *the Almighty* in the eternal realm. They are simply awaiting Allah's Decree 'Be' so that they can materialise within our realm. Indeed, this is the source of the aphorism—which is popular in the circles of those who possess knowledge of Allah—which reads as follows: 'Allah is no longer originating affairs; He is simply manifesting them.'

Therefore, '…yet the Words of Allah would not be exhausted …' (*Luqman:* 27) denotes Allah's Word 'Be' and all else which expresses Allah's

Decree in every matter of the universe. This includes the decrees which we know or will know in the future, and even those which will remain unknown to us until the Day of Judgment.

In relation to the creation of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* which is a wondrous sign of Divine Power, did Allah not say: '…and His Word, ("Be!" - and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit created by Him…' (*an-Nisa':* 171)? This means that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was not created in the normal way, as other human beings, that is, from a mother and a father. He was created by the direct Divine command 'Be.' Nevertheless, the question is why; why was `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* created in this unique way?

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to establish as an indisputable fact His unrestricted ability to originate creation. This means that He wants to demonstrate that He creates however He wants. He originated a human being without a male or female progenitor as in the case of Adam *peace be upon him*. He created `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* through a female parent but without a male. He has also created a human being through the presence of a male progenitor but without a female, as in the case of Hawwa (Eve) *peace be upon her*. Surely, all possible creative scenarios that can be thought of are present and each of them bespeaks Allah's Creative Power.

As long as we recognise Allah's Creative Power as being unlimited, the means that He uses to effectuate the process of creation are unimportant. For example, if you wanted to form a drop of water, you would need to combine the elements oxygen and hydrogen under specific conditions in order to actualise your goal; otherwise, forming water would be impossible. Conversely, the Creator *Glorified is He* can create out of nothing or out of something pre-existing. In relation to Allah, none of these elements of creation possess the ability to independently effectuate an end; quite the reverse is true, they only do what Allah wills.

Next, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…Verily, Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.' (*Luqman:* 27) The Divine Attribute of *Al-`Aziz* (the Almighty, the Most Honorable) is a description of Allah which indicates that He is invincible and indomitable. There is no one who can discuss or try to rectify an act of Allah.

The fact that Allah's Actions may be disagreeable to the finite minds of some members of creation means nothing. Consider the meanings of might and honour and how they have been stated in Allah's Words addressed to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'and (remember) when Allah will say (on the Day of Resurrection), "O, `Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Did you say unto people, 'Worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?' He will say, "Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it. You know what is in my inner self though I do not know what is in Yours. Truly, You, and only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen. Never did I say to them aught except what You (Allah) did command me to say, 'Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them, but when You took me up, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a Witness to all things."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116) At the end of the dialogue `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* proclaims: 'If You punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily, You, and only You, are the Almighty, the All-Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118)

From the standpoint of human logic, most people would conclude a mention of Allah's Ability to forgive them with a statement that would call to mind His Perennial Position as the Dispenser of Mercy and the Oft-Forgiving. However, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* does not mention forgiveness and mercy. Instead, he opts to beseech Allah on the basis of His Might, Majesty, and unlimited Sovereign Power. Through this, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is affirming that no one can censure Allah's Actions, no matter what they are.

'…verily You, and only You, are the Almighty, the All-Wise.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) This statement of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* makes a point very relevant to his mentioning that Allah *the Exalted* could forgive them. If Allah did forgive them, and people questioned, 'O Lord, how could You forgive them after they made this or that erroneous statement?' Allah would answer, 'Verily, I am the Almighty; the Conqueror Who is never overcome. There is none who can censure My Judgment.' Thus, Allah also concluded verse 27 of the chapter of Luqman with the mention of might, for His Sovereign Might over His creation.

Next, the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

مَّا خَلۡقُكُمۡ وَلَا بَعۡثُكُمۡ إِلَّا كَنَفۡسٖ وَٰحِدَةٍۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعُۢ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

Creating and resurrecting all of you is only like creating or resurrecting a single soul: God is all hearing and All-Seeing [28] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 28)

One of the most consistent themes throughout the Quran is the True Lord's emphasis on the resurrection and judgment of human beings. The emphasis placed upon this issue is an expression of Allah wants to establish the scales of reward and punishment within the lives of humans. Every action which lacks the scales of reward and punishment is considered invalid. Only some infallible or non-free willed beings have no need for requital. What this means is that an infallible being who is divinely protected from error is perpetually engaged in the performance of good deeds and so need not be concerned about whether his actions warrant reward or punishment. As for non-free willed beings, they do not possess the volition to act or not to act in a certain manner.

If, with the exclusion of these two categories of beings, the principle of accountability for one's actions, good or bad, is not sufficiently established all during life, corruption will inevitably ensue. If the one who chooses to perform righteous deeds is not rewarded and the one who chooses not to avoid bad good deeds is not punished, life will lose its essential balance. In fact, even the communities that do not profess belief in Allah, or God, have established the law that good should be rewarded and evil punished amongst the principles that govern their communal lives.

In the story of Dhu Al-Qarnayn, the True Lord *the Exalted* provides us with an example of how this principle works when He says: 'Indeed, We established him upon the earth, and We gave him to everything a way. So he followed a way.' (*al-Kahf:* 84-85)

In this previous verse, the True Lord *the Exalted* aims to clarify that a human being who has been given power and ability on the earth bears a certain responsibility. His responsibility is to show gratitude to Allah *the Almighty* for putting him in such a privileged position. The truest expression of his gratitude for being given power on earth is to balance the scales of justice in the universe. ‘Until, when he reached the setting place of the sun…’ (*al-Kahf:* 86), that is to say, how the sun looked to Dhu Al-Qarnayn. Actually, the sun never really sets. It may appear to set on one group of people in a certain location, but it is rising amongst another group in a different one. ‘Until, when he reached the setting place of the sun, he found it [as if] setting in a spring of black muddy (or hot) water, and he found near it a people. We (Allah) said (by inspiration), "O, Dhu Al-Qarnayn! Either you punish them, or treat them with kindness."’ (*al-Kahf:* 86)

Such an authorisation to punish people or treat them with kindness can only be given to a person of high moral standards and balance in making decisions. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* says concerning Dhu Al-Qarnayn: ‘…and We gave him to everything a way…’ (*al-Kahf:* 84); this involves a two-fold process: Allah bestowed blessings upon him and also gave him the balance to distribute those blessings effectively. Allah’s Gifts to him were not limited to wielding leadership and authority, for he was also given an ample supply of life’s core elements and a tremendous sense of fairness that enabled him to optimise his use and diffusion of Allah’s Blessings.

This story also displays the code of conduct expected of someone given free choice (in a position of power). The individual who has been given a post to establish justice is responsible for clarifying his organising principles and clearly stating that his position will not be manipulated by desires. This explains his next statement: ‘As for him who does wrong, we shall punish him, and then he will be brought back unto his Lord Who will punish him with a terrible torment (Hell)’ (*al-Kahf:* 87), this is an expression of the manner in which he would punish. However, he balanced that proclamation with the following: ‘But as for him who believes and works righteousness, he shall have the best reward, (Paradise), and we (Dhu Al-Qarnayn) shall speak unto him mild words (as instructions).’ (*al-Kahf:* 88) That is to say that after he has received his reward, we still provide him with motivation. We celebrate his pursuit of righteousness to induce others to emulate him.

This demonstrates the necessity of the principle of rewarding good and punishing evil at every level of human endeavour. If we adhere to this principle when sifting through our day-to-day worldly transactions, what is to be said for the inevitability of applying its criteria to our religious matters and the values that shape our lives? Again, we firmly assert that there must be a time for reward and punishment. When we fail to apply this principle, injustice and assassination would gain momentum amongst people. Once this becomes the status quo, it will have an adverse effect on their lives and eventually deprive them of life's blessings. In a situation that would be ironic as well as lamentable, the person who caused the corruption would be empowered while those dedicated to the religion of Allah—its values and principles—would be disconsolate.

This explains why we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* consistently emphasising the issues of resurrection, judgment, and accountability. You will also notice the enemies of the faith attempting to make people doubt these issues. They employ various means to rattle the faith of people in these principles.

Philosophers have played a role in the attack on the fundamentals of Islamic belief, as well as atheists who have played a role, along with the people of the Book also having a hand in this. Recognising this issue helps us to understand why the entire Torah—as it currently exists—is nearly free of a single reference to the Last Day. Needless to say, this is strange. In fact, it is unimaginable that a heavenly religion which purports to offer guidance for the (God-conscious) living would have its key teachings represented in a text which does not provide ample reminders about the Day of Judgment.

The only plausible conclusion that can be drawn from such acts of suppression of texts is that the Jewish community desired to undermine the faith of people in these fundamentals of belief. Indeed, in as much as these principles rectify and inspire people, widespread acceptance of these principles could threaten the Jewish community's monopoly over temporal authority. Their penchant for authority had even driven them to crave to elevate their position of dominion above human reality—closer to that of Allah's. The Quran relates the following statement of theirs: 'Remember when you said, "O, Musa (Moses), we will not believe you until we see Allah face to face."' (*al-Baqara:* 55)

When Allah *the Most High* made manna, a sweet substance which resembles cream, descend upon them plentifully, and when He gave them birds which resemble quails ready to eat, they failed to show gratitude. They rejected

Allah’s bestowal and declined the food that He had prepared for them. They said, ‘No (we do not want to eat of what Allah has provided), we want to eat food that we have prepared with our own hands.’ The Quran quotes them as saying, ‘O, Musa (Moses), we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food’ (*al-Baqara:* 61), and so it was said to them, ‘…Go you down to any town and you shall find what you want! …’ (*al-Baqara:* 61).

As long as the most important things in life—as far as this community appears to show any care—are material concerns, the tendency to give scant measure to the Hereafter, the Day of Judgment and human accountability will be a consistent pattern in their behaviour. This explains why they have attempted to raise doubts about these truths. Philosophers, on the other hand, say, 'When Allah resurrects the human being, this event will inevitably occur after the members of his body have become dust, and a tree or some other form of vegetation has grown upon this dirt. If the aforementioned tree bears fruits and people eat from them, they will be eating from fruits that contain something of the dirt from which they have been nourished. In as much as the dirt contains elements of the body of the human being who has been buried in it, the consumption of the fruit means that some particles of a former human being are transferred to another human!' If any resurrection would occur, would the consumed parts be resurrected with the former person who was initially buried or the latter person who ate the fruit that was nourished by the decomposed remains? Philosophers maintain that if these parts were resurrected with the body of the individual who was initially buried, it would result in a deficiency in the physical constitution of his counterpart, and vice versa.

Philosophers have wandered blindly around this question. They have yet to thoroughly comprehend the unseen aspects of living beings that give essence to their existence. Earlier, we cited an analogy in order to clarify our assertion, we questioned them: If a human being weighed 100 kg, but contracted an illness that reduced his weight to 60 kg, what would this reduction in weight mean to who the person is?

This issue is essentially governed by two factors: nourishment and elimination. During the period in which one is growing, the body’s intake exceeds what it eliminates. Conversely, during the period of old age the body's intake (of nourishment) is less than what it eliminates. When intake and elimination are equal, one experiences a stasis within his weight; his weight will be steady.

So, for instance, the person who lost 40 kg (due to illness) but then was cured by Allah so that he regained his health and his weight returned to normal, was his essence changed throughout the periods of his fluctuating weight? Was it changed when his weight reduced? Was it changed when he returned to his natural weight? Or, was his essence, namely that most essential element of who he is, the same throughout?

Based on what has been discussed, clearly the issue of bodily constitution is not merely about the atoms and molecules that make up the physical body. This is absolutely not true. It is about each individual's unique moral personhood, even with the composition of the human body by the same sixteen elements, starting with oxygen and ending with magnesium. These are the same elements that make up the dirt which covers the ground which gives us the produce that we eat. In truth, each person contains these elements in varying amounts.

In this regard, the True Lord *the Exalted* says: 'We know that which the earth takes of them (their dead bodies), and with Us is a Book preserved.' (*Qaf:* 4) This verse asserts that Allah possesses precise knowledge of how much the body of each deceased person has decomposed into its constituent elements. This means that He knows the exact amount of oxygen, zinc, or phosphorus, etc. that has been separated away from the body of each deceased person since his death (and returned into the earth).

Thus, the resurrection of a human being is accomplished by Allah *the Exalted* raising that individual from the dead. Again, this is not an issue of molecules and atoms; rather, Allah raises the essence of the person, namely his personhood, and in the process, reassembles the person in precise amounts according to His Knowledge of what the person's physical make-up contained. When Allah finishes this process, the human being emerges anew, but unmistakably the same person who has lived before.

Another spot of controversy which they stir up and one of the ambiguities which they make concerning the resurrection is their saying that Allah creates a human being over a six to nine month period. During this time the embryo experiences a number of phases: from being a drop of semen, to a clinging clot, to a lump of flesh and then out of that little lump of flesh bones develop and then the bones are covered with flesh, etc. They maintain that if this is the amount of time that it takes to create one human being, then how long will it take to re-create humanity in its entirety, from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Judgment?

We would respond to this group by mentioning the following: Your analysis takes the creation of the human offspring into consideration, namely the process of creation—with which we are all familiar—that can take from six to nine months. However, it neglects the original direct creation of the human being, which is the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. If you recall correctly, Allah created him a fully formed, adult man. Adam *peace be upon him* never experienced childhood, followed by a period of maturity and fullness of power. Rather, from the beginning his body was fashioned into a perfectly mature and fully developed human form, and then the soul was breathed into him.

Another point on this issue is that any action is comprised of key elements: the action itself, the actor, and the object of the action. To these elements, one can add the amount of time that it takes to complete the action. So, for instance, if I want to move some cargo from one place to another, the action is represented in my transporting the cargo. I am the person responsible for performing the action, and the cargo is the thing upon which being acted. Of course, we cannot forget to include the amount of time it takes to complete the process. When one looks at it closely, he notices that the duration it takes to complete the process is really an expression of how the parts of each event—in this case, transporting the cargo—extend over the parts of time. Thus, fashioning a garment by hand requires significant amounts of time, whereas employing the use of a sewing machine greatly reduces the amount of time one must spend to complete this task.

Therefore, the amount of time that an action requires is directly related to the strength of the individual or thing performing the action. Remember, in the past, streets were lit with oil lamps. This meant that every location needed a designated worker whose job it was to light each lamp. Contrast that with our current state of technological advancement: We can light an entire city simply by pushing a button! What we are trying to establish is that each time the power of the actor of a particular action increases, the amount of time required to perform that action decreases.

Coming full circle, in a sense, let us now return our focus to the issues of the resurrection and the reconfiguration of the human being after death. Has anyone proposed that this process will occur according to your power—which would mean that you should estimate the amount of time that it will require on the basis of your strength and ability? Of course not, this process will occur according to the power of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah does not perform actions in the same manner as we, nor does His effectuation of events require concerted effort. Allah *the Exalted* performs actions by the simple proclamation of 'Be.' The upshot of all of this is that an action attributed to Allah does not require any time at all; this means that the process we described earlier, particularly how each part of an action consumes small amounts of time, is completely irrelevant to Him.

There is no reason for us to consider this far-fetched in respect to Allah *the Almighty*; He has given you a glimpse of this reality despite your comparatively limited ability. Are you not able to sit in a gathering like this and observe all of us at one time, in a single glance? Or, for that matter, are you not able to hear all of our voices at once? Are you not able to rise and move about simply by your desire to do so? When you perform any of these actions, are the organs and muscles of your body not acting at what could be termed as a slight impulse that crosses your mind? Honestly, do you think about the muscles you are using to perform an action, or even more so about the physiological changes and dynamics that must take place to enable you to come to your feet from a sitting position?

Previously, we clarified this issue by calling attention to the movements of a human being. Consider the movements of a human being (with all fluidity and voluntariness associated with them); the way the limbs move freely at the request of their possessor. Now compare those with the movements of a drilling rig: it cannot move unless you press a specific button.

If you—and you must be mindful that you are a mere servant of Allah—exercise control over your limbs and external organs to such an extent that they function according to your will, is it reasonable for you to regard the prospect of Allah *the Exalted* exercising control over them by the use of the word ‘Be’ as far-fetched? How can you regard this as far-fetched while your limbs and external organs do as you wish without you saying anything to them! The idea that you would like your limbs to perform a certain action only needs to cross your mind for them to perform the desired function.

Considering all of this, you might be compelled to ask, 'How is it that my limbs perform the functions I desire them to perform without my saying anything to them, whereas Allah *Glorified is He*. (Who presumably wields more control over my limbs than I) must say the word ‘Be’ in order to exert His control over them?' We would respond by saying, 'True, it is not necessary for you to say the word ‘Be’ (to make your limbs do as you want). However, your will is only the secondary cause in making your limbs act according to your command. The primary reason is that they were first subjected to Allah’s proclamation ‘Be’; indeed, Allah *the Most High* commanded the limbs to be obedient to the wishes of their owner. Therefore, you must conclude that you are not the primary source of your ability to exert your will upon your limbs. On the contrary, it is only by Allah’s initial proclamation of ‘Be’ that you have come to exercise this authority: When Allah *Glorified is He* issued the first proclamation of ‘Be’, its effectiveness extended to everything in creation.'

Additionally, this understanding helps us to understand the occasion of the Night Journey and the Ascension. A thorough understanding of these events enables us to respond to those who deny them. To be sure, Allah says: 'Exalted is He Who took His Servant by night from Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa.' (*al-Isra’:* 1)

As soon as the disbelievers learnt of this event, they outright rejected it as falsehood, they quipped, 'How can this be true?' Even riding upon our sturdiest camels, that journey takes us no shorter than a month’s time. The fact that it takes you no less than a month to complete the journey in question travelling upon your sturdiest camels is a given. Indeed, your travel requires time, persistence, drive, etc. As we mentioned earlier, the total amount of time required for a trip will boil down to how much time each part of the trip consumes. The case of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other hand, represents something altogether different: He did not say, ‘I travelled by night’, for if he had said this, it would place the same human limitations on his travel as is placed on yours. On the contrary, he said, 'I was transported by night.'(1)

The statement is delivered in the passive voice which means that the action is being attributed to someone other than the speaker. In this case, it means the action should not be attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; rather, his transportation should be attributed to Allah *Glorified is He*. 'As the power or capability of one performing an action increases, the amount of time required to perform the action decreases' is the principle we laid out earlier. Proceeding upon this principle, if an action is attributed to the power of the Allah *the Almighty* it does not require any time at all. This explains Allah's Statement about creation and its subsequent repetition (for the reckoning of humanity): '[For Him], the creation of you all and the resurrection of you all are but like [the creation and resurrection of] a single soul …' (*Luqman:* 28). This matter is facile for Allah *the Most High*. Why is that so? Indeed, the creation of one soul, like the creation of all souls, is completed by the simple utterance of the word 'Be.' This proclamation, simply and plainly, is not a process which requires six to nine months!

Another way of thinking about this issue can be found in the examples about manufacturing we cited earlier. Take yogurt, for example. You begin with some milk and then ferment it by the use of bacteria. Afterward, you allow it to sit at a specific temperature for a while, and it will become yogurt as you intended. Did you sit in front of every container of milk and manually change it contents to yogurt? Or did you simply perform a well-known process whose success meant that you could leave the bacteria and the enzymes within the milk to naturally transform.

The process we just described above is identical to the manner in which Allah *Glorified is He* creates the foetus which is in the womb of its mother. Of course, this comparison takes for granted that the foetus experiences growth and development (in the womb). Nonetheless, on its basis, the creation of a human being should not be considered time-consuming for Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4710) and Muslim in his Sahih (170) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah.*

Indeed, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* gave the most comprehensive explanation of this matter when he was questioned, 'How does Allah weigh the deeds of all of humanity—from Adam *peace be upon him* to the Day of Judgment—at one time?' He responded, 'He weighs their deeds all at once in the same manner that He has granted them their provisions all at once.(1) His comment is asserting that the Power of Allah *the Exalted* is not such that performing an action distracts Him from performing a different action.

Finally, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse with His statement: '…for, verily, Allah is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (*Luqman:* 28). Within the Arabic original, both of these expressions *sami`a* and *basir* (All-Hearing and All-Seeing) represent forms intended to convey superlative expression, namely the attributes of hearing and sight in superlative measure. We have already established that you, servants of Allah with comparatively limited ability, are able to glance at this entire group of people and see them all at once. You can also hear many disparate sounds in the same manner.

Considering the remarkableness of your own sight and hearing, what do you conclude must be the range of Allah's Sight and Hearing?

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُولِجُ ٱلَّيْلَ فِى ٱلنَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فِى ٱلَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ ٱلشَّمْسَ
وَٱلْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِىٓ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

[Prophet], do you not see that God causes the night to merge into day and the day to merge into night; that He has subjected the sun and the moon, each to run its course for a stated term; that He is aware of everything you [people] do? [29] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 29)

This verse contains cosmic signs which relate to creation; these are signs which are clear to everyone: the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the disobedient, etc. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* distributes time in periods of night and day; nevertheless, this 'distribution' is not always equal. That is to say that there is nothing mechanical about this phenomenon. We certainly do not see 24 hour periods of day followed by 24 hour periods of night alternating on a 'fixed schedule'. Hence, the day is sometimes shorter. At times, moments near the end of a day are considered as belonging to the subsequent night and vice versa.

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(1) Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him was questioned, 'How will Allah weigh the deeds of humanity when their numbers will be so numerous?' 'In the same manner that He provides for them in spite of their large numbers,' he responded. [Sharh nahj Al-Balagha, Sharif Ar-Rida, Dar Ash-Sha`ab (pg. 404, # 298)]

Indeed, during the time of Ptolemy, a year was considered to be 365 days, 5 hours, 55 minutes and 2 seconds. After this period, a year came to be regarded as 365.25 days, determined on an algebraic basis. Every four years this fourth of a day catches up with us, and we refer to it as a leap year. This is a year that is longer than the customary 365.25 day year. The years that can be evenly divided by four are referred to as leap years. As a matter of fact, this is why February sometimes contains 29 days (as opposed to the regular 28). This happens during a leap year, due to the accounting for the fourth of a day, we lose when we count the year as 365 days (without including the additional 6 hours).

The word *yawm* (roughly translated as 'day') actually encompasses the day and night; however, they are not divided equally. Allah *the Almighty* according to His wise plan, desired to give every inhabited region on earth intermittent periods of warmer and cooler weather. Allah *Glorified is He* gives each region of the world that which it needs to maintain its particular vegetative system. He *the Most High* gives us the things which are necessary to maintain our lives. Indeed, the system that He has created for the maintenance of His creatures is precise; as a matter of fact, there are some types of plants which only grow during summer months, while there are other types which only grow during winter. This phenomenon is not limited to the summer and winter; on the contrary, the same can be said of spring and autumn equinoxes.

Part of what these phenomena reveal to us is the fact that the Creator made Earth's axis tilt at an angle of 23.5° from its centre position. In other words, Earth does not rest at an angle that makes it equally distributed on all sides. During the winter, Earth's larger portion is titled away from the sun while the smaller portion is tilted towards it. As a result, you find the days of winter to be longer and cooler than the days of summer. Night reaches its longest stretch, 12 hours, during the fourth month of the Coptic year (*Kiahk*).

Local farmers have even come to say, ‘In *Kiahk*, your morning is your evening. As you rise from sleep, you might as well get ready for dinner!’

The opposite is observable during summer. It is as if Earth being tilted on its axis is one of the secrets of the (Divine) engineering that went into the layout of creation. Accordingly, on the 21st of (*Haziran*) June, the summer solstice occurs, and we begin to progress towards winter. On the 23rd of (*Kanun*) December, the winter solstice occurs, and we begin to progress towards spring and summer. Afterward, the spring equinox occurs on the 21st of (*Adhar*) March. In addition to these dates, we can add the autumn equinox, which occurs on the 22nd of (*Aylul*) September. During the equinoxes, you will notice that day and night are the same amount of time. Additionally, the weather of these dates is generally mild and temperate, neither extremely cold nor hot.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see that Allah causes the night to enter the day and causes the day to enter the night …' (*Luqman:* 29); the implicit message of this verse is the following: Do not consider day and night fixed quantities of equal amounts. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He*—in accordance with His wise plan for creation—has decreed that a part of the day will eventually over time become a part of the night, and vice versa. For a wise purpose, that benefits both men and women and was decided upon by the Creator, as the length of one of them (either the night or the day) increases, the other decreases. Perhaps one of the wisdoms being intended here is to grant men and women an extension of the essentials upon which their lives rest. Another is possibly for one to learn that the changes which occur within the length of the days and nights are the result of an intricately planned system of Divine Wisdom.

When we separate the day between the hours of daylight and those of darkness, which, as we mentioned, is not a balanced or equally distributed separation, we recognise that night has a specific purpose and that day also has a specific purpose. To be certain, this is what the statement of Allah indicates: 'and made the night [its] cloak, and made the day [a symbol of] life.' (*an-Naba’:* 10-11)

Within the previous verse, night is referred to as a cloak because you achieve a measure of tranquillity at night, and during its time you are covered and concealed. To mention as a brief side note, it is interesting to point out that we now know that sleeping with lights on is unhealthy; the first basis upon which we can form this conclusion is the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'When you are prepared to take rest, blow out your lamps.'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this issue within His statement: 'Consider the bright morning hours and the night when it grows still and dark (*ad-Duha:* 1-2). He also says: 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, and the day as it rises bright!' (*al-Layl:* 1-2) Within these verses, He makes it clear that both night and day have specific purposes which aid in the continuation of life. The primary purpose of the daylight hours is activity and movement, while the primary purpose of the night is rest and stillness. You must be careful not to unnecessarily jumble the purposes of these individual parts of the day. This is a general principle; however, we must make exceptions for individuals for whom the nature of their occupations entails that they work at night and rest during the day.

The Creator *Glorified is He* has endowed the movement of night and day with secrets and wonders which warrant our attention. Speaking of the secrets and wonders of the Creator, it is interesting to note that He *the Most High* has originated every secret within His creation, which means that each secret in creation is ‘born’ at a specific time. Also, it is worthy to note the fact that He has elected to gradually distribute the knowledge of these secrets amongst His creation over the course of time, as opposed to issuing the knowledge of these matters in one generation. Indeed, if He would have desired the latter and the Quran exposed all the secrets of creation to the community of unlearned people who lived to witness its revelation, it would have amounted to neglect of the generations—all of whom would also engage in the process of calling people to Allah. To be certain that this would have been the case, they (successive generations) would have declared these secrets, some of which even present-day minds—in spite of the great progress they have achieved in the fields of science and knowledge—have a difficult time accepting to be falsehoods. For example, look at what scholars said about the roundness of the planet Earth and its revolving around the sun; generally, we were unable to accept these realties until satellite images confirmed them.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5624) and Ahmad in his Musnad (3/388) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah; the wording here is taken from the collection of Al-Bukhari.*

Previously, we pointed out that the ‘birth’ of a secret concerning the creation of Allah could, by chance, coincide with human effort to uncover it. In this case, when the creational secret is discovered, it appears to be the outcome of that individual’s search. However, in the deepest sense, Allah *Glorified is He* is manifesting the creational secret, and they are simply discovering it by chance; this is what Allah, does as a favour to humanity. Indeed, if one pays attention, he will notice that the overwhelming majority of breakthroughs happen by chance. That is to say, their discovery was not even ostensibly the outcome of human effort and preparation.

As for the Quran, it speaks of night and day in very general terms. In fact, nearly everyone, regardless of the level of scientific advancement in their societies or lack thereof, can comprehend: 'And We have established the night and the day as two symbols …' (*al-Isra’:* 12). He also says: 'And it is He Who has made the night and the day, one following the other; [He has done it] for [the benefit of] the person who would care to receive exhortation and who would care to be grateful.' (*al-Furqan:* 62)

The word *khilfa’* (which appears in the verse as ‘one following the other') indicates that day and night outstrip one another. This is something that we are able to confirm; indeed, we often witness the night outstripping the day, and vice versa. However, an interesting question would be asking how this process functioned at the dawn of creation.

As a first consideration, it would seem that if Earth, when first created, inclined on its axis in the direction of the sun, and this would mean that day preceded night and was not itself preceded by anything; in other words, it is only at the setting of the sun did night appear for the first time. On the other hand, if Earth, at the time it was created, was not inclined towards the sun, it would mean that Earth’s first moments occurred at night.

Getting to the bottom of this issue would be nearly impossible if it were not for Allah’s statement: And it is He Who has made the night and the day, one following the other…' (*al-Furqan:* 62); that is from the beginning of creation, night and day have been succeeding one another. In order for this assertion to be regarded with seriousness or hold any weight, we must conclude that earth is round. Indeed, the side of the earth which is inclined towards the sun is experiencing daylight, while the side of the planet which is not inclined towards the sun (at any given time) is experiencing the darkness of night. Thus, the occurrences of day and night are happening at the same time. As earth revolves, night and day are succeeding each other; upon this understanding, the question of which came first has no meaning at all. At bottom, this reveals one of the fundamental aspects of the Quran: The mind is capable of comprehending its contents; you will never find the Quran to be at odds with sound reason and intellect.

Do you remember the time around the early thirties, specifically during the year 1928, when they had begun to explain the idea of the sky containing seven heavens as the seven planets that had been, which up until then being identified within the solar system? Undoubtedly, they adopted this interpretation in order to help people grasp the realities being discussed within the Quran; however Allah *Glorified is He* decreed that they would soon discover Neptune and Pluto.(1) The discoveries brought the total number of planets to nine, and through them Allah *the Exalted* exposed the weakness of their interpretation.

Creation is brimming with wonders. Many of which we are aware of; in fact, disbelievers have (unintentionally) helped us to realise some of the wonders of Allah's creation. Certainly, this creates the impression of Allah subduing creation and leaving it with no choice but to affirm (the necessity of) faith in Him.

Returning to our previous discussion, we would like to propose the following question: If we know that a day on earth consists of twenty-four hours, with alternating phases of night and day, what does this say about what constitutes a day on other planets? When they learnt of the orbits of other planets, which, of course, are also revolving around the Sun, they found that the closest of them to the Sun was Mercury followed by Venus, then Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, the farthest planet from the Sun.

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(1) From linguist: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true. Pluto is no longer considered a planet.

When one considers the length of time a day comprises on each of these planets, he encounters one the most wondrous elements of Allah’s creation. A day on Venus, for example, is equivalent to 244 days on Earth. As for its year, it consists of 225 days on Earth. This means a day on Venus is longer than a year (on Venus)! How is that? Specialists have responded by pointing out the differences between its rotation on its axis and its revolution around the Sun; therefore, regarding Venus, both of these are quite different from their corresponding equivalents for earth. Its rotation on its axis determines the length of its day, while its revolution around the sun determines the time of its year.

The statement of Allah *Glorified is He* "[Allah] has subjected the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term …' (*Luqman:* 29) should be noted for the way in which it displays the precision of the Quranic address. Notice the way in which the verb tense being used changes from present in the early portion of the verse, 'Do you not see that Allah causes the night to enter the day and causes the day to enter the night?…' (*Luqman:* 29) to the past tense later on in the verse: '…has subjected…' (*Luqman:* 29). When speaking of the alteration of day and night, Allah says, '…Allah causes…' (*Luqman:* 29), but when speaking of the sun and the moon, He says: '…has subjugated…' (*Luqman:* 29). What is being indicated in this verse?

Some have pointed out that subjugating the sun and moon, i.e. making them subservient, was completed on a single occasion. Afterward, they simply continue to perform their respective functions. On the other hand, the shortening of the day and night is a continuous command that must be performed every day. In light of this, when discussing the latter, the use of the present tense verb is more accurate because it indicates repetition.

Next, moving our analysis to the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '…each running [its course] for a specific term …' (*Luqman:* 29), we find that it refers to the sun and moon completing the respective tasks they have been assigned. This also sheds some light upon why we refer to the final hour of each individual human being by the same name *ajal*. When this term is used along with the word *Musamma* (term, set, fixed, named, etc.), it actually refers to the Day of Judgment. Indeed, on the basis of the previous observation, it seems as if the Creator is promising us that the sun and moon will perform their respective functions until the Day of Judgment. This is something we can exercise a measure of comfort and security concerning them.

Next, we must comment to ourselves: Truly, the heavenly body which illuminates the entire world was created by Allah, and He has ensured that it will perform this function until the Day of Judgment. Moreover, the sun is not in need of any maintenance or spare parts. Indeed, it is subservient, which means that it has no choice whatsoever about whether or not it wants to perform its duty of rising. Furthermore, this is not unique to the sun; the same thing can be said of the moon. In all, this subjugation of the heavenly bodies is one of the greatest expressions of Divine Mercy, an expression which believers and disbelievers alike must acknowledge.

Within this verse, the expression occurs as such: '…for a specified term…' (*Luqman:* 29). In other places within the Quran the expression is worded differently: '…for a term set [by Him] …' (*Yusuf:* 2).

The same contrast can be observed in the thirteenth verse of the chapter of *Fatir* and the fifth verse of the chapter of *az-Zumar*, respectively. Each of these prepositional phrases conveys a specific meaning. The phrase, '…for a specified term…' (*Luqman:* 29) gives us a sense of the sun and moon traversing their individual courses before arriving at their set terms. Conversely, the phrase: '…for a term set [by Him]…' (*Fatir:* 13) conveys the sense that their (sun and moon) arrival at the set terms are immediate.

Just as we pointed out that night and day each have specific functions, the sun, and the moon also perform specific tasks. Indeed, this is what is intended by the following statement of Allah: 'He who made the sun a [source of] radiant light and the moon a light [reflected] …' (*Yunus:* 5). In a different place, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Blessed is He Who has set up in the skies great constellations and has placed amongst them a [radiant] lamp and a light-giving moon.' (*al-Furqan:* 61); the sun is described as a radiant lamp because it produces light and heat. This differs significantly from the light of the moon which seems cool and reflector-like, for it does not produce any heat.

One of the amazing things about the moon is that, to us, it appears as though it is a piece of pearl, glowing, and suspended in the sky. Indeed, more than a few poets have compared their muses and lovers to the moon. If they knew the reality of the moon—as we do now—these comparisons would not be as romantic. We have recently learnt that the moon is only made up of rocks and other inanimate matter; it does not produce any light. Quite the reverse is true; it only reflects the light of the sun. Perhaps this explains why one 'beloved' muse rejected this comparison, when a poet compared her to the moon:

I likened her to the full moon, but this only humoured her, for she met my remarks with derision.

What this means is that his comparing her to the full moon was a cause for laughter.

She deemed my words silly and quipped, 'When did I become unsightly enough to sustain such a comparison!'

This gives us occasion to ask: How did this woman know of the 'unsightliness' of the full-moon, a fact that the full-moon is made up of rocks that would hardly be considered beautiful? In her equally poetic response, she addresses this query:

The full moon does not gaze delightfully as I do, nor is its 'smile' free of gaps

It does not seductively remove the sash of its garment, nor does it wear necklaces around its neck

Alas! I pray that whoever compares my comeliness to the moon should remain a prisoner of disassociation with me

Therefore, the actual composition of the moon—whose knowledge we have only recently came upon—is amongst the apparent and hidden signs of Allah *Glorified is He* within creation. Through the use of science, Allah *the Exalted* has enabled us to acquire in-depth knowledge concerning the moon. Indeed, after travelling to the moon and traversing its surface became possible, we learnt that its surface is made up of dark rocks and stones that do not produce light. As previously mentioned, the moon only shines because it reflects the rays of the sun. As a result, moonlight shines on earth in the form of a calm, dreamy type of illumination. The moon appears as quoted, 'Getting water out of a stone.'

The fact that the sun should be used to indicate the length of days and the moon used to indicate the length of months is also from amongst the immense Wisdom of the Creator *Glorified is He*. This separation of how time should be measured is the basis of all religious obligations. The moon, as opposed to the sun, has been chosen as the marker of the new month because it takes on a unique and distinctive shape at the beginning of the month. This explains the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'He it is Who has made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light [reflected] and has determined for it phases so that you might know how to compute the years and to measure [time]…' (*Yunus:* 5).

The impressiveness of the process through which Allah *the Almighty* charges creation with responsibilities and its connection to the phases of the moon, is shown ever so clearly concerning the occasion of the Pilgrimage (*Al-Hajj*). Indeed, the time of *Al-Hajj* moves throughout the solar calendar; one year it might occur during the winter, while it may occur during the summer in another year. When one thinks about it, this arrangement means that each person who is able to make the pilgrimage will be able to do so at a time which is appropriate for him. Thus, there is no excuse to neglect this religious obligation.

In fact, this idea of lunar time creating a situation in which *Al-Hajj* occurs at different times throughout the year has caused some to remark that the much sought after the Night of Power is roaming throughout the calendar—when lunar dates are compared with their solar equivalents. If we agree that the Night of Power occurs during the 27th night of *Ramadan*, it means that it might fall in the beginning of January during one year, February the next and in March the year after that. This is an expression of Allah's Mercy upon His servants.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and that Allah, with whatever you do, is Acquainted?' (*Luqman:* 29). This serves as a potent reminder: Allah *Glorified is He* is still fully aware of all of your actions. In truth, He has—by His Knowledge, Wisdom, Power, and Self-subsistence—created the conditions in which you can perform your duties (religious and otherwise) in the most suitable way. In other words, He has commanded that you perform the actions which will aid you in organising and arranging your religious and worldly affairs. Thus, we find that *Ramadan* begins at night, the one in which the new moon is sighted is considered the first of *Ramadan*. On the other hand, gathering upon the plain of *`Arafa* is commemorated during the day, for this makes participating easier for a greater number of people.

The words of Allah *Glorified is He* '…and that Allah, with whatever you do, is Acquainted' (*Luqman:* 29) is attached to the His words which precede them: 'Do you not see that Allah causes …' (*Luqman:* 29) mean that the latter portion of the verse can be approximated as the following: ‘and that Allah, with whatever you do, is Acquainted' (*Luqman:* 29).

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِ ٱلْبَٰطِلُ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْعَلِيُّ ٱلْكَبِيرُ ٣٠

This is because God is the Truth, and what they invoke
beside Him is false. He is the Most High, Most Great [30]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 30)

Allah *Glorified is He* begins the verse: 'Thus it is' (*Luqman:* 30); this refers to that which precedes it, namely the previous reference to the day entering the night, night entering day, and the subservience of the sun and moon (to terms appointed by Allah). All of the aforementioned realities and phenomena have only accrued 'because Allah alone is the Ultimate Truth' (*Luqman:* 30). Indeed, all of the realities and phenomena we enumerated stem from one of the attributes of Allah; He, namely the attribute of His being Allah the Ultimate Truth (*Al-Haqq*). The term *Al-haqq* refers to something well rooted and unchanging. If you look at the creational phenomena that we have been analyzing, they relate this concept of *Al-haqq* in that they are natural laws that govern the cosmos and all of creation (by the permission of Allah), and furthermore, they are well-rooted and unchanging. The nature of these laws is reflective of the One responsible for creating and originating them: 'Thus it is because Allah alone is the Ultimate Truth …' (*Luqman:* 30).

In as much as Allah *Glorified is He* is *Al-Haqq*, the True Lord, those so-called ‘partners’ or ‘sharers’ in His Divinity that they invoke represent nothing besides falsehood: '…so that all that men invoke instead of Him is sheer falsehood …' (*Luqman:* 30). Indeed, this implies that a right that is preserved for a single individual cannot be shared by two individuals. If one of them rightfully deserves a single rank, the other must be deemed a mere false claimant to that rank. *Al-Haqq* is a single solitary entity; all that opposes it is false. Speaking of falsehood, what could be a grosser display of falsehood than their worship of idols, taking them as 'gods' and objects of divinity to be worshipped besides Allah?

How could they even consider such an absurd conclusion: Were these anything besides stones they fashioned with their own hands, erected and then proceeded to worship alongside Allah? Stones are just one of many types of inanimate objects contained within the earth. Amongst creation, inanimate objects are at the absolute bottom of the 'totem pole'. They are subjected to the indiscriminate use of human beings, animals, and even plants. In a sense, inanimate objects are the permanent servants of all (categories of) living things.

In light of this, how can you, a human being who Allah has honoured and endowed with an active intellect, debase yourself by feeling contented to worship the lowest order of created things? This is precisely what you are doing if you take inanimate objects as objects of worship besides Allah. Moreover, you can witness what something as simple as a gust of wind can do to Al-lat or Al-'Uzza: Blow them down and even perhaps break one of their limbs! Imagine, if one of their limbs was severed or damaged, your 'god' would be in need of repair! Thus, '…all that men invoke instead of Him is sheer falsehood …' (*Luqman:* 30).

Consistent with the same line of reasoning, we have made a point of mentioning that wars that break out amongst people do not involve two parties that may be said to equally fight for the cause of truth; on the contrary, the truth is always with one party. The truth is always solitary, and never multiple. If one party is upon the truth, it follows quite naturally that the other is upon falsehood. The alternative to such scenario that we have just mentioned is that both parties could be upon falsehood. Nevertheless, when truth and falsehood clash, the result is usually an expedient victory for truth: Falsehood, by its very nature, is constantly receding.

The end—even if it is the ultimate end—must be for truth. As we alluded to above, falsehood must eventually give way to the truth. Interestingly enough, you will find that when war is engaged by opposing sides, both of whom are fighting for causes rooted in falsehood, the battles between them are prolonged. The reason being is that neither side is deserving of the help of Allah. They will continue on, engaged in bitter internecine warfare until they are mutually destroyed and the losses on both sides reach staggering proportions. In the end, if they hope for reconstruction and redevelopment, they will have to humbly resort to the path of rectification (in order to reclaim all that they had lost).

The same point can be recognised within the distribution of inheritance and the estates of the recently deceased. We often see those who are entitled to shares thereof resorting to bitter rivalry by retaining lawyers and filing cases in court in an effort to secure what they can of the wealth that has been left behind. In fact, even after the liquid assets of the inheritance have been given to the rightful inheritors, they will, in many instances, attempt to augment their legitimate holdings by dealing in falsehood. You see various sides expressing a willingness to collude in order to successfully divide the remaining wealth.

Regarding this, reading the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which is instructive: 'Whoever gains wealth as a result of dealing in falsehood will have it consumed by Allah in the form of calamity and misfortune.'(1) The meanings of calamity and misfortune are identical in this respect. Actually, it implies that Allah *Glorified is He* will consume his illegitimate wealth in various ways. The money was acquired on the basis of falsehood; naturally, Allah, *the Almighty*, destroys it by causing it to be squandered on that which does not contain benefit.

Previously, we used an example to describe the difference between how illegitimate and unlawful earnings are consumed; we said they were like a father who returns to his home to find his son sick and suffering from an intense fever. As the father rushes the child to a physician, he is overcome by fear when he sees an apparition of his son’s sickness. As the result of his fear, he proceeds to spend hundreds on his son’s recovery. All the while, there is an individual who lives on an amount just sufficient to sustain him, making his living by the ‘sweat of his brow'. Furthermore, he only derives his wealth from lawful and legitimate sources. If he is placed in a similar situation, he is sufficed by simply taking some aspirin and a cup of lemon juice. The essential difference between the two individuals we described is that the former earned his money unlawfully and illegitimately, while the latter earned his money in a lawful manner.

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(1) *Cited by Ajluni within the text Kashf Al-Khafa' (2/313) in which he attributed it to a chain which includes Qada`i relating on the authority of Abu Salama Al-Hamsa, and subsequently going back to Prophet Muhammad. However, Abu Salama is an unreliable narrator, and his status as a companion of the Prophet is unsubstantiated. Subki maintained that he did meet Prophet Muhammad, but this is incorrect.*

Therefore, the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* 'Thus it is because Allah alone is the Ultimate Truth …' (*Luqman:* 30) implies that truth is evident and prevailing. Someone given to adopting contrarian stances would probably offer: How can this be true when we constantly see falsehood overcoming the truth and triumphing? We would respond by saying that although this can be true, falsehood does seem to gain the upper hand from time to time. However, this is only temporary. Indeed, during the times in which falsehood seems to be gaining the upper hand on the truth, it can be viewed as a soldier in truth’s army. Of course, an assertion to this will demand an explanation: When falsehood is triumphing, it usually asserts itself by the use of tyranny; it is nearly inevitable that people will feel the lash of this tyranny. As falsehood abuses and violates them, they will begin to see truth as an alternative. As their desire for an alternative mode of living intensifies, their desire to experience the truth similarly intensifies.

In other words, if it were not for falsehood, we would not know the superiority of truth. A good example of this is the pain a human soul experiences to alert the body to the presence of illness and disease. Only after experiencing pain do you begin to request medication. Thus, the pain is a soldier in ‘recovery’s army'. We meant exactly the same thing when we say, ‘Disbelief is a soldier in faith’s army.’

In light of this, you should not despair when you see falsehood prevailing; as we mentioned, from time to time the prevalence of falsehood serves the cause of truth. Indeed, your Lord has mentioned: '[Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure …' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). This verse indicates that every valley is filled with water to its maximum capacity: '…the stream carries scum on its surface…' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). This is referring to straw and other sediments that collect on the water’s surface: '…and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make metals and utensils, there rises scum. In this way, does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood …' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). This verse contains examples of each: '…as far as scum is concerned, it passes away…' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17). This means that it is rejected and placed at a distance because it is loathsome: '…but that which is of benefit to man abides on Earth. In this way, does Allah set forth the parables …' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17).

After Allah *Glorified is He* clarified that He is '…the Ultimate Truth…' (*Luqman:* 30) and clarified that all other objects of worship, namely the gods of idolaters are falsehood, He *the Most High* concludes the verse by mentioning two of His other attributes: '…and because Allah alone is Exalted, Truly Great!' (*Luqman:* 30) He mentions the Exalted and Truly Great. Allah and His truthful Messenger, Prophet Muhammad, use these attributes when describing Him. Could there be a better precedent? Of course not, for as a result, we also use these attributes when describing Allah. However, the main idea in this verse is that those who disbelieve must also testify to Allah’s worthiness of these two attributes. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us to praise Him when a disbeliever is compelled to praise Him in spite of his disbelief. As a matter of fact, we covered a verse which demonstrates this perfectly earlier in this chapter: ' And if you ask them, "Who has created the heavens and the earth", they will certainly say, "Allah." Say, "All the praises and thanks be to Allah!" But most of them know not ' (*Luqman:* 25).

This testimony of theirs deserves to be seconded by a believer; indeed, he should say, ‘All praise is due to Allah.’ This is a response to the first testimony, one which is issued by he who professed disbelief in Allah, declared His Messenger to be liar and made war against the Prophet. Furthermore, think deeply about a scenario in which this disbeliever who flagrantly rejected the Way of Allah and declared His Messenger to be false is afflicted with an illness, for example. Will he be able to deny the disease that he has been afflicted with in the same manner that he denied Allah? The individual, who dismissed the Way of God and became an open rebel to Him, will he be able to rebel against death when it approaches?

Read the following verse of Allah: And when you encounter some distress on the sea, [at that time all] those [deities] whom you call upon are lost [to you], but not He. Yet when He brings you safe to the land, you turn away [from Him]. Of course, such a person is very ungrateful.' (*al-Isra':* 67) What this means is that at the point of hardship and difficulty, they are aware that they can only rely upon Allah. It is true; these are the times in which a human being does not delude himself or cling to things that he knows are untrue. By Allah! Have you ever seen someone in the midst of drowning, surrounded by waves, starring at his destruction right in the face, say, 'O, Hubal?!' Obviously, they recognise the futility of such supplications. Therefore, Allah is *the Exalted* the Truly Great, and everything taken is an object of worship besides Him represents falsehood.

Previously, we gave a parable for the human being. We particularly addressed a concept which offers that human beings are not given to the idea of cheating or deceiving themselves. This is especially true when they are forced to visit a shaman or as some call them 'healers'. Whatever name you prefer, we are referring to the individual who provides home remedies and cures for people who live away from big cities. In most cases, this local healer will attempt to belittle the practitioner of modern medicine by accusing him of being inexperienced. Nevertheless, when his son falls ill and he feels the situation has become grave, he will slink away in the darkness of night—to avoid the embarrassment of people witnessing him consult the doctor he attempted to demean—and make his way to the physician.

Allah is the only One Who truly possesses exaltedness. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* is the only rightful possessor of haughtiness. When anyone, even a disbeliever (in Allah), is forced to confront circumstances which push him to the brink of his mortality and from which there is no conceivable escape, the only words of supplication he can utter are 'O, Allah! O, Lord!' Is this anything other than an acknowledgement of Allah from them?

After establishing the testimony, to Allah’s Greatness, of those who ostensibly disbelieve in Him, Allah mentions that He is Exalted. Next, He follows the attribute of Exaltedness by mentioning that He is Truly Great. Indeed, someone can wind up occupying an exalted station as the result of usurpation and other factors which would indicate that he is not deserving of the rank which he occupies. This explains why the Allah *the Almighty* mentions that He is Exalted and Truly Great, for this is by virtue of His inherent greatness that He is worthy of the exalted rank He assumes.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* turns our attention to another sign of His Deity within creation:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱلۡفُلۡكَ تَجۡرِي فِي ٱلۡبَحۡرِ بِنِعۡمَتِ ٱللَّهِ لِيُرِيَكُم مِّنۡ
ءَايَٰتِهِۦٓۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٖ شَكُورٖ ﴿٣١﴾

**[Prophet], do you not see that ships sail through the sea,
by the grace of God, to show you [people] some of His
wonders? Truly there are signs in this for every steadfast,
thankful person [31] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 31)**

After Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned some of the more abstruse signs within creation, He now desires to turn our attention to some of His signs we witness during our daily comings and goings. He began the verse: Do you not see that the ships sail through the sea carrying bounty by the favour of Allah?…' (*Luqman:* 31). The portion of the verse which reads, ‘Do you not see' should be taken to mean, ‘Do you not know'. The word ‘ships’ which occurs in the verse refers to the well-known seafaring vessels.

Perhaps Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had never personally witnessed these ships traversing the waters of the sea. Even the ships that were in use during that time were nothing like the mountainous ocean liners that have appeared during our time. Indeed, this is being alluded to within the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas.' (*ar-Rahman:* 24)

When did multi-level structures which almost appear like mountains first appear? They have only appeared recently. Therefore, these references must be regarded as expressions of the miracle of the Quran—it foretold the invention and proliferation of a technology that had yet to be introduced at the time it was revealed. This can also be observed within the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He* 'And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people would become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses and [silver] stairways whereon to ascend.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 33)

If one looks at the Quran intently, he will find a number of verses which establish not only its veracity but also the truthfulness of the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad in what he conveyed from Allah.

We have already mentioned the story of the woman who embraced Islam after she read an account of Islamic history. She read some of the prophetic biography and in particular came across the story of how the believers would take turns guarding and defending Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from his enemies. She was surprised when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* relieved these guards from such service by saying, ‘Verily, Allah has revealed the following verse unto me: '…And Allah will protect you from [disbelieving] men …' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 67). The woman paused at this verse and said to herself: ‘By God, even if this man would be content to deceive the masses, he would not deceive himself and risk his own life!’

As we pointed out above, the meaning of Do you not see…' (*Luqman:* 31) is ‘Do you not know'. The verb *tara* (which literally means 'to see') is used within the Arabic original. This implies that the information you learn directly from Allah is more conclusive and unerring than that which you witness with your eyes.

Let us continue to the portion of the verse which reads: '…sail through the sea carrying bounty by the favour of Allah …' (*Luqman:* 31). The words ‘sail through’ imply, at the very least, steady movement from place to place. Beyond that basic description, the movement can either take place calm and placidly or quick and pacey. However, we would like to focus our attention on inquiring, ‘How is the movement (of ships) counted from amongst Allah’s favours?’ First of all, one must understand that the first ships were made out of pieces of plywood that were bound together by rope and dowels. The draft of such ships would usually only contain water up to about the depth of a hand span, the draft being the distance between its water line and the lowest part of its hull, water needed to be removed from the draft at different rates according to the weight of the ship. In the event that additional weight was laid upon the draft, it would dip, which allowed more water to enter. If the weight of the water exceeded the weight of the ship and its freightage, the ship would sink.

This idea was used in the construction of the submarine. Balloons are used to complete the movement of the submarine when it is underwater. Now, it is a normal occurrence for us to see huge ocean liners built from steel. Nevertheless, the way the soft flowing water steadies the solid iron ship and transports it is a cause for wonder. Indeed, the process is as simple as allowing the wind to blow the ship into the direction that you desire. In fact, windsailing is so effective that one can even flow against the current if he utilises the sails properly. By the use of a few simple implements, the captain of the ship is capable of steering the sail in any direction, and the ship will follow suit and flow upon his chosen course—even against the direction of the wind! They refer to this manoeuvre as declivity (*tasfih*). This explains the following statement of Allah concerning the movement of ships: 'if He so wills, He stills the wind, and then they lie motionless on the sea’s surface …' (*ash-Shura:* 33).

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is clarifying that—by His irresistible Power—one of the least dense objects in creation can be made to carry an extremely dense object. In fact, for another example of the same phenomenon, it would be instructive to look at the tractors which pull heavy loads. We know that these huge tractors are capable of pulling tons of steel; however, what are powering them, or in other words, how are they able to move? They make use of the compressed air being funnelled through the wheels. If truth be told, the power derived from the air is so abundant that it can become dangerous: The tractor being powered by the compressed air runs the risk of the pressure becoming consumed within the wheels, in which case the wheels will explode.

The statement of Allah, '…[He has ordained it so] that He may show some of His signs to you …' (*Luqman:* 31) is asserting that Allah *Glorified is He* desires to show humanity some of the remarkable elements of His creation, especially concerning the seas. In the past, we were not fully aware of the life forms that existed in the depths of the sea; aside from the fish that were caught by fishermen, we were unaware of the other life which existed in the sea. Now, on the other hand, with the development of marine biology and photography, namely pictures that can now be taken underwater, we are able to witness more breath-taking seascape than we do landscape!

Next, we will turn our attention to the portion of the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Surely, in this are important signs for every patiently persevering and grateful person.' (*Luqman:* 31) Allah's mentioning the following. '…for every patiently persevering …' (*Luqman:* 31) reveals that in spite of the fact that His signs abound within creation, each individual must make an effort to uncover His signs through a persistent and patient search. Patience is very important when engaging this search, for one will inevitably encounter difficulty and hardship, especially if the signs he wishes to uncover are hidden beneath the sea. Look again at this portion of the verse; however, this time read how Allah *Glorified is He* follows His mention of those who are patient in adversity: '…for every patiently persevering and grateful person.' (*Luqman:* 31) Indeed, if we are allowed to witness the wondrous seascape that Allah *the Almighty* has endowed the depths of His creation with, we are obligated to show gratefulness. Remember, gratefulness is only shown for a new blessing that you have received.

Essentially, Allah *the Exalted* desires that we encounter His signs in creation with inquisitiveness, reflection, and ultimately contemplation. The opposite of these would be receiving Allah's signs with heedlessness, or worse, denial and ambivalence. Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned this in the following Statement: And many are the signs in the heavens and the earth, which they pass by turning away [arrogantly] from them.' (*Yusuf:* 105)

Mentioning those whom He was referring 'for every patiently persevering' before mentioning 'grateful person' is an indication that patience in the face of adversity which is often associated with work, research, reaching conclusions and discovery will lead to great blessings, those which will necessitate gratefulness.

Afterward, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا غَشِيَهُم مَّوۡجٞ كَٱلظُّلَلِ دَعَوُاْ ٱللَّهَ مُخۡلِصِينَ لَهُ ٱلدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّىٰهُمۡ إِلَى
ٱلۡبَرِّ فَمِنۡهُم مُّقۡتَصِدٞۚ وَمَا يَجۡحَدُ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ إِلَّا كُلُّ خَتَّارٖ كَفُورٖ ٣٢

When the waves loom over those on board like giant shadows they call out to God, devoting their religion entirely to Him. But, when He has delivered them safely to land, some of them waver – only a treacherous, thankless person refuses to acknowledge Our signs [32]
(The Quran, *Luqman:* 32)

The verse opens with the Words: when a huge wave covers [the sailors] ' (*Luqman:* 32). This conjures up images of a party out to sea being completely covered and enclosed by waves. This is drawn into sharper relief by the following simile: '…like [so many] canopies …' (*Luqman:* 32).

Remember, a canopy normally describes something which towers above a human being and covers him. Likewise, describing a wave as canopy conveys the sense that the wave is taller than the human beings aboard the vessel. This means that the water has ceased to flow calmly and monotonously, and instead, has collected and risen above those on board like a great canopy. Most assuredly, this is what Allah *Glorified is He* intends by the following verse as well: 'And [make them recall the time] when We shook [due to the quake] the Mount [Sinai] above them, as though it were to be a shade above them [like a wall] …' (*al-A'raf:* 171).

If you ever go out to sea, you will witness phenomena such as these. You can look from far away and see waves many times larger than you. Due to its massive size, when viewing one of these waves you conclude that it could very easily wipe you out. However, when the wave approaches, you experience yet another manifestation of Allah's gentleness: It disintegrates and passes tranquilly beneath you. When one reflects upon this, it is really something remarkable, something for which we should show gratitude.

The wave being described within the verse is a terrifying sight. Thus, when it engulfs them, they are assured of their demise: '…they call upon

Allah bearing sincere faith in Him…' (*Luqman:* 32). They are calling unto Allah *the Almighty* in spite of the fact that they disbelieve in Him. Yet, in situations like these, a human being does not deceive or lie to himself. This verse is describing what takes place when matters become critical: He will not call upon Al-Lat or Al-‘Uzza, nor will any among them cry out, 'O, Hubal!' At this critical moment, they will sincerely call upon Allah *the Exalted*. Even if they are given to the worship of idols, when faced with their mortality (at a moment like the one being described in the verse), they will direct their worship exclusively to Allah *Glorified is He*. This ‘change of heart’ (so to speak) is a reflection of their acknowledgement of the inability of their idols to aid them; this is an acknowledgement that their idols are absolutely devoid of any ability to harm or benefit them. Benefit and the removal of affliction or tribulation rest in the hand of Allah, the True Lord.

One may comment, 'Yes, this is accurate in describing the state of their worship in a life and death situation. Nonetheless, what moved them to neglect the worship of Allah for the worship of idols in the first place?' We would respond by pointing out that religiousness is something inherent to the human soul. This is something that humanity has retained from their earliest moments, i.e. from the time Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam. Adam’s progeny was taken from his loins; after which, they were made to bear witness on their own accounts: '…Am I not your Sustainer…' (*al-A‘raf:* 172). Naturally, they testified to Allah’s position as their Sustainer.

All of us have at least one atom within our physical make-ups which witnessed the taking of this covenant. This atom, or particle, is the source of all of the heavenly illuminations that occur within the soul of the believer. Accordingly, every believer should move to preserve this particle by taking its ‘service manual’ from the One responsible for its creation. Conversely, one should never allow the spiritual light which emanates from this source to be obscured by neglecting the rules of maintenance that its Lord has prescribed. If one is not careful, he could wind up like the individual Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned with the following Words: 'But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me, his shall be a life of narrow scope, and on the Day of Resurrection, We shall raise him up blind.' (*Ta Ha:* 124)

Additionally, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified this issue for us by saying, 'Every child is born on the innate religion of goodness. Afterwards, his parents raise him as a Jew, a Christian or fire-worshipper.'(1)

A human soul can always be said to possess a measure of good as long as something of these initial Divine illuminations remain within it. Lest we forget, these Divine illuminations were produced by the covenant in which we bore witness to Allah’s Lordship. On the other hand, if a soul’s light becomes obscured or foggy, moral corruption and ultimately disappointment will result.

In light of the preceding points, we can conclude that religiousness is innate to the human soul. However, what is more, and often neglected, is the fact that religiousness has demands and an attendant set of instructions which affect what the religious person is to do as well as refrain from doing. Strangely enough, there are some people who would be pleased to assume a religious identity; however, they wish to sidestep the obligations of religious commitment. What is such a person to do? Well, they can make the object of their religious devotion something which does not require anything of them. This was the basis of much of the idolatry and idol worship that was practised amongst them.

To summarise, we have but one thing to offer someone who worships idols: There will come a time in your life when you would not consider relying upon an idol, a time in which you will only turn to Allah, the True Lord. The irony of this will be that you are being forced to rely upon the One Whose worship you turned away from simply because you wanted to sidestep the obligations that pertain to His worship in the first place! Assuredly, this will take place; the nature of life with its shifting vicissitudes bears this fact: Willingly or unwillingly, you will be forced to rely upon Allah. This reminds me of saying in our colloquial dialect: ‘You do not want to see his face, but circumstances will force you to need his back.’

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(1) The authenticity of this Hadith is agreed upon. It was worded by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4775) and likewise by Muslim in his Sahih (2658). The Hadith was narrated in the authority of Abu Hurayra, who related that the Messenger of God *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “There is not a single newborn that is not born upon the innate religion of goodness.' (The rest of the Hadith is quoted above).

Consider this: You have turned away from Allah and disbelieved in Him. Yet, when you are placed in a critical circumstance, like being surrounded by waves and facing death, you become like little rabbits! Why are you resorting to Allah now? What has prevented you from persisting in your inflexibility and arrogance before Allah?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* moves on to say: '…but as soon as He has brought them safe ashore, some of them stop halfway [between belief and unbelief]…' (*Luqman:* 32) After they have recognized Allah as the True Lord *Glorified is He* after they have prayed to Him for aid and placed their trust in Him and perhaps most importantly, after He has delivered and rescued them, their believing in Him and obeying Him should be something taken for granted. We would expect this experience—which shook them tremendously—to have a profound impact on them. Yet, they return to the disbelief and disavowal (of Allah) that was their hallmark before Allah rescued them. In other words, they return to submitting to their undisciplined passions and whims. This is how the disbeliever responds when he faces adversity and trial: He reverts (to disbelief) and does not use his experience as a reminder. The situation of the believer is the exact opposite; when he is subjected to a test like this one, it increases him in faith and certainty.

The idea of stopping halfway between belief and unbelief (as represented in the Arabic term *muqtasid* which describes someone in between to definite states: When faced with calamity and turbulence, he returns to Allah, but when this trial is removed from him, this spirit (of exclusive servitude to Allah) weakens and he reverts. This represents a particular type of person; this becomes evident when we consider the following statement of Allah *the Exalted*: '…Yet none could knowingly reject Our messages unless he be utterly perfidious, ingrate.' (*Luqman:* 32) The last part of the verse also represents a particular type of person: The individual who stops halfway between belief and unbelief is distinct from the individual who knowingly rejects Allah's messages.

The façade of disbelief that some of them put on must begin to crack when the impulse of faith is awakened inside them. Nonetheless, when they are saved the world deceives them again. On the other hand, some of them are downright ingrates, themselves actively engaged in their own deception.

You should be cognizant of the sharp contrast that exists between the wholly patient and the individual that has been described with perfidy, as well as the difference between the deeply grateful and the ingrate.

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses all women and men:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱتَّقُواْ رَبَّكُمۡ وَٱخۡشَوۡاْ يَوۡمٗا لَّا يَجۡزِي وَالِدٌ عَن وَلَدِهِۦ وَلَا
مَوۡلُودٌ هُوَ جَازٍ عَن وَالِدِهِۦ شَيۡـًٔاۚ إِنَّ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقّٞۖ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ
ٱلۡحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِٱللَّهِ ٱلۡغَرُورُ ٣٣

People, be mindful of your Lord and fear a day when no parent will take the place of their child, nor a child take the place of their parent, in any way. God's promise is true, so do not let the present life delude you, nor let the Deceiver delude you about God [33] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 33)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* begins His address to His servants by saying 'O Men!' it is an indication that He desires to grant all of them felicity in Hereafter. We have already mentioned the Noble Hadith in which the earth exclaimed, 'O Lord, permit me to cave in around the son of Adam!' And in which the seas said: 'O Lord…to drown the son of Adam, etc. The Creator *the Exalted* responded to these requests: "Leave My creation to Me. If you were responsible for their creation, you would deal mercifully with them. If they repent unto Me, I am their beloved; and if they fail to repent unto me, I am their healer."'(1)

Moving on, I would like you to focus your attention on the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* '…Be conscious of your Lord…' (*Luqman:* 33). The word

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(1) Cited by Ghazali in Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din (4/52), it was a popular saying among some members of the Pious Ancestors. The version which is attributed to them is worded as follows: "There is not a single servant who commits a sin except that the place within the earth where he is standing asks permission to cave in around him. While this is happening, the sky is also asking permission to fall upon him in smithereens. To the earth and sky, Allah *Glorified is He* replies: 'Restrain yourselves from harming My servant and give him respite. Indeed, neither of you created him; if he was your creation you would deal mercifully with him. Perhaps he will repent to Me; in which case I will forgive him. Or perhaps he will replace his misdeeds with righteous actions which will be a cause for Me granting him reward.'

taqwa (which could be approximated above as consciousness) means to place a protective barrier between yourself and that which harms you. This explains the statement of Allah *the Exalted* which occurs elsewhere: 'and beware of the fire…' (*Al-'Imran:* 131). In both of these verses *taqwa* (expressed in the former as 'be conscious' and in the latter as 'beware') conveys the same meaning. The declaration 'be conscious of Allah' is a command to erect a protective barrier between yourself and the attributes of Allah that tell of His overwhelming might and vengefulness. The phrase, 'beware of the fire' connotes the same thing: Place a barrier between yourself and the fire.

The address contained within this verse is directed to all people: those who disbelieve as well as those who believe. Allah wants to enter all of them in to the fold of faith and obedience. There is not a single one among them Allah does not desire to show generosity, favour, and aid. It is as if Allah is saying to them: Not only do I desire the treasures of the life of this world for you; but I want to give you the blessing of the Hereafter as well.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was also merciful with all people; even with those who had professed disbelief in his message and persisted therein. This brings the story of the Jewish man who attempted to accuse a Muslim of stealing a coat of armour. It was considered a blow to Muslim pride for a member of the community to be accused of theft; as such, they resolved to remunerate the Jewish man. However, afterward, they presented the case to the Prophet, how would he decide?

At this point Allah *Glorified is He* aided the Prophet, and intervened, revealing the following verse: 'Behold, we have bestowed upon you from on high this Book, setting forth the truth so that you may judge between people in accordance with what Allah has taught you…' (*an-Nisa':* 105). Hence, he is not strictly a judge for the believers: '…do not contend with those who are false to their trust…' (*an-Nisa':* 105). That is to say: Don' not argue on behalf of someone given to treachery; even if he happens to be a Muslim. Commanding to justice is dictated by faith: Before the dictates of faith all people are equal.

It should be noted that there is a difference between the command, 'Be conscious of your Lord' and the command, 'Be conscious of Allah.' The difference hinges on the idea that the divine generosity that emanates from

Allah's position as Lord is different from the generosity that stems from His position as God. The former is expressed in Allah's originating creation and protecting them from being destitute by providing for them. Additionally, the edification and cultivation that Allah grants humanity—in His capacity as Lord—is given to believers and disbelievers. Allah's generosity which reflects His position as Allah, conversely, is expressed in Him granting (some among creation) the will to perform the actions He has commanded—in a spirit of worship and obedience. Within the verse we are currently examining, Allah chose to refer to exhort people to be conscious of Him while referring to Himself as Lord, i.e., the One Who created and cultivated. It is as if Allah is informing all men and women: God-consciousness should be an expression of gratitude for the favour Allah has shown you; even if you have ultimately proven to be ungrateful for this favour.

This matter is not concluded with the simple command to be conscious of Allah within the life of this world. In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and stand in awe of the Day on which no parent will be of any avail to his child…' (*Luqman:* 33).

This is a command to fear the day you will be returned to your Lord. The word 'day' can occur as an adverb denoting time or as a noun—which conforms to all of the rules of grammar. If a future occurrence is mentioned in connection with the word, it is classified as an adverb, for instance: 'The strenuous review required for the test is something I fear on that day.' In this example the fear is being produced by the test; not by the day. Conversely, if you said, 'I fear the day of the test,' it would mean that you are afraid of everything connected with that day. In other words, you fear the day itself.

The statement, '…stand in awe of the Day…' (*Luqman:* 33) implies that the 'Day' itself is frightening, not to mention the reckoning that will occur. During this 'Day:' '…no parent will be of any avail to his child…' (*Luqman:* 33). Here, Allah especially mentions the parent and child. Allah has advised people to be kind to their fellow men and women in general, however, He has singled parents out for good treatment in His well-known statement: 'And [Allah says:] 'We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents…' (*Luqman:* 14).

Directly following His advice concerning the treatment of parents, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions its basis: '…be grateful towards Me and towards your parents….' (*Luqman:* 14) In this, we recognize that Allah has given parents special distinction, favour, and rank with Him. The role of parents has been emphasized so thoroughly that it would not be farfetched to assume they possessed the ability to benefit us on the Day of Judgment. With this verse, Allah is clarifying that for all the benefit parents provide their children with in the life of this world, on the Day of Judgment that benefit will be restricted. Every soul will be preoccupied with its own fate; no one will be able to benefit others, even if those others were the people closest to him in the life of this world.

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah says: 'and remain conscious of [the coming of] a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another…' (*al-Baqara:* 48). Within this verse, Allah asserts that no human being will be able to avail another: This takes the idea that no parent will be able to avail his child and generalizes it so that it suspends the idea of any person benefiting someone else.

Statements nearly identical to the above-mentioned verse have occurred in two places in the Quran. These two verses begin the same way but end differently. In fact, they discuss two types of souls: The first is the soul which seeks to intercede on behalf of someone else, while the second is the soul which is deserving of punishment—but vicariously rescued by someone else; in the sense that someone else assumes responsibility for their bad deeds. The verse which focuses on the soul which is hoping for some sort of vicarious atonement ends thus, '…nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them…' (*al-Baqara:* 123).

Ransom refers to the money paid for someone's redemption. When this type of soul first realizes its reckoning it will look to avert punishment by ransom, but none will be accepted. However, it will not fall into despair; on the contrary, it will begin seeking an intercessor from among the people of high standing and elevated rank (with Allah) to serve as its medium before Allah. Sadly (for this soul at least), this will also be of no help.

As for the soul which seeks to benefit someone else by its good works, it looks to intercession right away. Only after the possibility of intercession has been negated does it attempt to offer ransom. This explains why the negation of intercession occurs before the negation of ransom within the latter verse: It is discussing the soul which benefits others by its good works. Therefore, the end of the first verse is addressed to the soul that may harbour hopes of evading punishment by ridding itself of the bad deeds it earned, while the second verse is addressed to the soul that harbours hopes of benefiting someone else with its good deeds.

Refocusing our attention on the current verse: '…no parent will be of any avail to his child (*walad*)…' (*Luqman:* 33), we find the reason behind its mention is that a parent is always willing to show his child compassion. When a father witnesses his son being punished he will want to offer himself in his place. First, Allah mentions the parent, i.e. the parents' desire to offer themselves in place of their children. Next, He says: '…nor an offspring (*mawlud*) will in the least avail his parent…' (*Luqman:* 33). Here, when mentioning the inability of children to benefit their parents, Allah changes the wording slightly. Instead of saying (*walad*) child He opts to say *mawlud* a word which also means child but highlights the child's origin from its parents, one might say 'offspring'. Consistency would dictate that the word *walad* be used in the latter clause just as it was used in the former. Why did Allah change the wording here?

These are Allah's words. As such, His choice to use an alternative word is significant, i.e., there is a palpable difference between the words *walad* and *mawlud*. Indeed, many of the early Muslims had fathers who died upon disbelief. They (the Muslims) thought Allah's Commandment to treat parents well meant that they would be able to intercede for them on the Day of Judgment. Allah revealed this verse in order to remove their misgivings about alleviating the burdens of their fathers who died upon disbelief. This is why Allah did not use the word *walad* here—but instead used the word *mawlud*: *Mawlud* highlights the direct link between the parents and the children. Indeed, one is called the *walad* of his grandfather, and his grandfather is called his *walid* (father); irrespective of the years and generations that separate them. Thus, if intercession from the *mawlud*—for his parents—will not be accepted, it goes without saying that his intercession for his grandfather will also be rejected. To highlight this connection; when Allah changes the wording from *walad* to *mawlud* Allah's speech must always be viewed as purposeful; never haphazard.

Yet, there is another question we must address here: When does the parent attempt to avail his child and when does the child attempt to avail his parents? Addressing this issue, many have pointed to the dependency of children on their parents: The child is in constant need of tenderness and care from the parent. Whenever a parent notices his child in pain he rushes to comfort him and relieve him of the pain. Alternatively, the child is not as concerned about relieving the parent of pain, but rather, diligently defends the parent from ridicule and harassment. Thus, the parent defends the child against pain, and the child defends the parent against humiliation and ridicule: Each of these is significant.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Verily, Allah's promise [of resurrection] is true indeed…' (*Luqman:* 33). We know that a promise is defined as: information concerning a forthcoming event that will please the one being told when it occurs. The opposite of a promise is a threat which is defined as: a declaration of the intent to cause someone harm in the future. With both terms defined, we would like to pose the following question: What is the purpose of either of these?

The purpose of a promise is to prompt one to take the means to prepare for it. A promise motivates one to work and strive to actualize it. A good example of this is the promise you might make to reward your child if he passes a test. As we mentioned, the opposite of a promise is a threat: It foretells of something which frightens you. As a result, you are likely to become cautious and take the necessary means to avoid it.

In essence, the promise of Allah is truth just as His threat is truth. The special mention of His promise here suggests that He intends to give souls what they desire. His threat, conversely, entails preventing people from indulging their desires. Previously, we clarified this issue by highlighting that Allah speaks about blessings, or gifts; yet, from the perspective of those who receive them, there are negative and positive gifts.

In this connection, read the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Lord’s favours will you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35 - 36)

To be sure, paradise is a blessing for which we should show gratitude—Allah has given it to the believers out of His mercy. What, then, could possibly be the blessing in flashes of fire, smoke, and punishment? In responding to this question, many have concluded that the flash of fire, smoke, and punishment being mentioned here are blessings because they represent a threat of punishment from Allah. As such, they prompt one to distance himself from the things which lead to it, and thus save himself before falling into punishment. The truest expression of the blessing contained in this and other threats from Allah is that He does not punish us before warning us of His punishment. On the contrary, He informs us of the danger before we arrive at it.

Again, to reiterate: The Promise of Allah is truth. Indeed, it is a promise from One Who is capable of effectuating all that He promises, and realizing all that He says will happen. As for others, they are not in total control of the factors which affect their ability to fulfil their promises. Therefore, a promise from other than Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be described as truth. This must explain Allah’s words in the chapter of *al-Kahf,* when He said: ‘And never say about anything, “Behold, I shall do this tomorrow”, without [adding], “if Allah so wills…’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24).

You could make an earnest promise, and truly intend to fulfil it—as you may see yourself as reasonably capable of its fulfilment. However, you can not guarantee that you will retain your ability to fulfil your promise. In fact, even if you personally remain committed to the fulfilment of your promise, circumstances may change and your ability to come through might be altered. Remember, none of the factors that ultimately determine your ability to make good on something you said are in your hands—in an ultimate sense.

In light of this, we should observe proper decorum with Allah: We should leave the ultimate outcome of events to the One Who possesses the unrestricted ability to effectuate all that He promises. Thus, when I say that I am not going to do something in the future, I always append that statement with ‘if Allah so wills.' In doing this, you provide yourself with a cushion if the situation changes and you fall through on your ability to deliver, you can always say: 'I was fully intent on doing so and so, but it was not Allah's will that it be done.'

Indeed, it nearly seems as if our Lord *the Exalted* wants to hide our dishonesty; as if He wants our weakness of will to remain concealed. He has informed us that it is better to consign the outcome of affairs to Him *Glorified is He*. In this sense, the divinely preordained will serve as a mechanism which enables the servants of Allah to deal with each other more tolerantly. It is common for us to say, 'It was not Allah's will,' when we are unable to make good on a promise, 'What do you want me to do,' we often continue. To be sure, nothing can occur on earth until after it has been predestined in the heavens.

As long we are in the protective space provided by the divinely preordained will of Allah, and all of us recognize its wisdom, you should not get angry with me if I am unable to come through on my end of a promise; and I should extend you the same the courtesy. When an intelligent person does a favour for someone else he knows wholeheartedly that he has only been the means of that action being performed; he wasn't the cause of anything. In an ultimate sense, Allah's preordained will is what causes things to occur. In terms of the intelligent person we just spoke of, his was an affair in which what he wanted to do was in conformity with what Allah wanted. It almost seems that Allah is honouring him by allowing him to perform this action. Although we have mentioned it a few times, this is a good time to recount what we have always held about physicians who are firm in their belief in Allah, they should say: 'The cure comes through me but not from me.' The doctor administers medical procedures, but the healing and cures come from Allah. In summary, the only promise which qualifies to be described as a 'promise of truth is the promise of Allah *the Exalted*.

In as much as we have established that the promise of Allah is truth, one must take the necessary measures to do what He has promised will lead to good, and to avoid that which He has promised leads to evil. Do not allow yourself to be deceived by the world: '…let not, then, the life of this world delude you…' (*Luqman:* 33). This refers to the world's capacity to delude men and women with its luxuries and comforts. Indeed, the world is but an elaborate mirage: there is nothing behind what you see. Allah *Glorified is He* addressed this with His statement: ‘Did you, then, think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not have to return to Us?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 11)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us an example of the life of this world and its deceptiveness: ‘And propound unto them the parable of the life of this world…’ (*al-Kahf:* 45). Allah *Glorified is He* has named the life of this world *(dunya)*; if truth be told, there is not a name that could be more accurate in conveying its worthlessness: ‘…like the water which We send down from the skies, and which is absorbed by the plants of the earth: but [in time] they turn into dry stubble which the winds blow freely about…’ (*al-Kahf:* 45); there could not be a more accurate description of the world: It dazzles and impresses, but is short-lived. I suppose one could say, ‘the life of this world begins convincingly and persuasively but ends disappointingly.

Let us refocus our attention on Allah’s statement: ‘…let not [your own] deceptive thoughts about Allah delude you’ (*Luqman:* 33). *Gharur* (Which corresponds to the phrase ‘deceptive thoughts’ used in the translation) conveys a sense of being deceived through temptation. Indeed, one of the poets (1) of the pre-Islamic period has brought this word to life. This couplet of poetry is set in a dialogue he is having with his lover:

O Fatimah, would you stop acting indifferent to me,
If you are firm in your intention to part with me, please let me down gently
Are you deluded to such behaviour by knowing that your love has such a hold over me
And that no matter what you command of my heart, it will comply helplessly

The meaning of deluded (as it is mentioned above) means: Is there something whose temptation has led you to behave this way; that is, is there some reason you are conducting yourself as if you are proceeding in the shadows and are unable to see clearly.

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(1) *He is Imru' Al-Qays, and the verses being quoted here are from of the poems that received the distinction of being posted on the Ka’ba.*

The word *gharur* also refers to Satan (Iblis) who, for all intents and purposes, has many different mechanisms and means through which he deludes people. He has ways which he attempts to delude the obedient (servants of Allah) and ways which deludes the disobedient servants of Allah. Each of these represents a particular set of gimmicks and tricks that Satan (Iblis) will employ to delude the servant—based on whether he/she is obedient or disobedient. Unsurprisingly, when he dupes the disobedient it results in disobedience; he comes to the disobedient servant and persuades him to view his Lord as forgiving and merciful; he points out that his forefather, Adam *peace be upon him* sinned but was ultimately forgiven by Allah. For this reason, after reading the following verses: ‘O man! What is it that lures you away from your bountiful Lord, who has created you, and formed you in accordance with what you are meant to be, and shaped your nature in just proportions’ (*al-Infitar:* 6-7) one righteous man commented, ‘I have been lured away by His bounty,’ he said ‘He created me and made my form pleasing; dealt with me honourably and even overindulged me. As a result, I have become deluded (concerning my own worth), if Allah would have dealt with us harshly we would not have become deluded.’

Once there was a man who was indebted five piasters to one of his fellows, so he paid his debt. Once the individual who received the payment opened the coffer he found it filled with money (far more than the five piasters he was due). After he returned the extra money to the one who was indebted, the latter said, ‘By Allah, if you were really noble you would have accepted the payment without checking it.’ Interestingly enough, a preacher (who obviously knew of this occurrence) wanted to use it to teach the man who was owed the debt a lesson concerning his prayers. He did not focus during his prayers, so the preacher said to him: I find the way you perform your prayers unimpressive; you look like a chicken pecking seeds (going up and down really quickly). Have you ever thought about this: If someone who owed you money attempted to pay his debt with you (this is perhaps an allusion to the prayer; that could be considered a debt he owes Allah) gave you an old and unsatisfactory note, would you accept it? Humorously, the man responded, ‘If I were really noble I would accept it instead of returning it to him.’

Next, the True Lord *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of Luqman with the following verse:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عِندَهُۥ عِلْمُ ٱلسَّاعَةِ وَيُنَزِّلُ ٱلْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِى ٱلْأَرْحَامِ ۖ وَمَا تَدْرِى نَفْسٌ
مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا ۖ وَمَا تَدْرِى نَفْسٌۢ بِأَىِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌۢ ٣٤

Knowledge of the Hour [of Resurrection] belongs to God; it is He who sends down the relieving rain and He who knows what is hidden in the womb. No soul knows what it will reap tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die; it is God who is All Knowing and All-Aware [34] (The Quran, *Luqman:* 34)

After our Lord *the Exalted* has warned us about being deluded by the life of this world, He reminds us that after the life of this world is finished we will enter another realm: This brings the Day of Judgment and the Last Hour directly to mind. 'Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come…' (*Luqman:* 34) Within this verse, the Last Hour is not limited to being a reference to the Day of Judgment; quite the reverse, each one of us has a Last Hour: When someone dies the time of his reckoning always seems to immediately follow his death. Why? Indeed, the dead person can no longer perform good deeds. There is no way for him to realize the faith or good works that have passed him by. As such, at the time of death, the faith and good works he has are what he will stand before Allah with.

Earlier, we mentioned that as far as you are concerned the length of the world's existence is equal to the amount of time you spend in it. Even if the length of time the world has actually been in existence extends from the time before Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Judgment, how would you benefit from the time of others?

Therefore, it is nonsensical to speak of the *(seemingly)* infinite amount of time the world has been, or even will be in existence: Remember, your time in the life of this world is short, and this is what matters. Additionally, you do not know when your days will end, nor are you able to control it: Allah has concealed the knowledge of each human being's final moment in the same way that He has concealed the knowledge of the final moments of creation.

Indeed, the concealment of this knowledge serves a vital purpose: Allah's choice to make the time of a human being's final moment remain unknown forces the human soul to be vigilant about preparing for its occurrence at any time. This means that every passing moment could very well be your last.

This is the way it is been in every time and place: Death is ubiquitous. Of course, no one needs to be told that this is constant—extending into our time as well. Thus, each one of us should be aware and afraid of the possibility of dying in a state of disobedience. This is why the time of death has been concealed.

We also mentioned previously that those who died during the time of Adam *peace be upon him* have been in their graves from then until now. Nonetheless, when the Day of Judgment is established: 'On the Day when they behold it, [it will seem to them] as if they had tarried [in this world] no longer than one evening or [one night, ending with] its morn!' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46) Why does it appear this way? Many have pointed out the fact that time is known through the passage of events; hence, if there are not any events, there is not any time.

In support of this position, we cited the example of the People of the Cave. They remained inside the cave in which they had taken refuge for a period of 309 hundred years. In spite of this, when they began to ask one another: '…"How long have you remained thus?" [The others] answered: "We have remained thus a day or part of a day…' (*al-Kahf:* 19).

Again, why did they figure the amount of time they had resided in the cave to be so short? Indeed, sleep insulates. That is to say, the one who is asleep ca not sense what is taking place around him and is thus unable to sense the passage of time. Indeed, by an act of Allah, after this period of time had elapsed they looked at each other and none of them had aged or changed physically as a result of their long period of repose. Waking from sleep, looking upon his fellows and not noticing a significant change in their appearances, the most he could consider as having taken place is that they had been resting 'a day or part of a day.'

We observe a similar phenomenon in the story of Uzayr (Ezra), in reference to whom Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Or [are you, O man, of the same mind] as he who passed by a town deserted by its people, with its roofs caved in, [and] said, "How could Allah bring all this back to life after its death?" Thereupon Allah caused him to be dead for a hundred years; whereafter He brought him back to life [and] said: "How long have you remained thus?" He answered: "I have remained thus a day, or part of a day…' (*al-Baqara:* 259).

He responded as such because 'a day or part of a day' is the longest amount of time a human being can sleep—under normal circumstances.

After his guess, his Lord informed him as how many years he had actually slept, saying: '…"Nay, but you have remained thus for a hundred years…' (*al-Baqara:* 259). The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to demonstrate the man's accurateness (in his estimation that he had slept 'a day or part of a day') while at the same time demonstrating His truthfulness in uncovering the reality (that the man had actually slept a hundred years). In order to satisfy both ends, Allah *Glorified is He* wisely said: '…But look at your food and your drink—untouched is it by the passing of years…' (*al-Baqara:* 259). This, of course, means that there were no visible effects of change on them. With the proof of the man's accurate judgment in concluding that he had been resting 'a day or part of a day' established, Allah goes on to say: '…look at your donkey…' (*al-Baqara:* 259). This represented proof of the True Lord's assertion: '…for a hundred years…' (*al-Baqara:* 259). Indeed, both statements were true; Allah *the Exalted* is The Constrictor and The Out spreader: He might make an amount of time seem constricted to some while making it seem outspread to others.

Refocusing our attention on the verse we are currently examining, it contains five matters which none besides Allah *the Exalted* can know with any measure of certainty: 'Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs: whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he will die…' (*Luqman:* 34).

Doe this verse cover all of the unseen matters within creation? Of course not; creation is filled with matters which we are unaware of. These must represent unseen matters which are regularly inquired about. As such, this verse must be regarded as answers to questions which are posed regularly. By

Allah, if the wind blows and carries away a few grains of sand, is there any among us who would claim to know where the sand was carried, or even in what direction? For that matter, is there any among us who knows the number of leaves which fall from a tree?

These would also classify as unseen matters which are unknown to anyone besides Allah. Speaking of ourselves, we are not even able to enumerate the blessings we' are granted by Allah: '…and should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

Therefore, the five things mentioned in the verse should not be considered an exhaustive list of the unseen within creation; on the contrary, they are just a carefully selected sample of the things which are only known by Allah. To be sure, Allah *Glorified is He* has said: 'And if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were ink], with seven [more] seas yet added to it, the words of Allah would not be exhausted: for, verily, Allah *is Almighty,* Wise.' (*Luqman:* 27)

Many of the things in creation which are now known were, at one time, only known to Allah—at which time they belonged to that innumerable category of secrets only known by Allah. Allah simply appointed a time at which they would become known. The lesson contained in this process is that we should always sense that our knowledge of that which is with Allah is inadequate. Every day we find scholars and researchers uncovering some heretofore-unknown secret concerning the creation of Allah. This is something that takes place regularly; however, the amazing thing to consider while we are in the midst of these discoveries is that we are still living the life of this world. If the secrets of the creation of Allah are being uncovered on this scale within the life of this world, what do you think will happen in the Hereafter, in paradise—if Allah wills we reach its gates?

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has informed us about paradise; he said, 'It contains things which no eye has witnessed, no ear has ever heard, and which has never passed the mind of any human being.'(1)

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(1) *On the authority of Abu-Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him who related the following from the Prophet peace be upon him: Allah the Exalted has said: 'I have prepared for My righteous servants things which no eye has witnessed, no ear has heard, and which haven not even been imagined by a single human being.' Indeed, this is confirmed by=*

The human being—perhaps by nature—accumulates information; either by witnessing with the eye or listening with the ear. Additionally, it is well known that the range of information that can be grasped with the ear is greater than that which can be grasped by the eye. Indeed, you can only see with your own two eyes, but you can learn about what others witnessed by listening to them. On top of that, you can only hear and see things which are existent.

However, there are some things which have never been conceived of by human beings; things which belong to the unseen realm and do not occur to the human mind. Perhaps this can help to explain the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘now no person knows what delights of the eye are kept hidden (in reserve) for them as a reward for their (good) deeds’ (*as-Sajda:* 17). A story has been related concerning the events that occasioned the revelation of the (five) aspects of the knowledge unknown to all except Allah that occur within the verse we are currently exploring: A man (1) from the tribe of Maharib who went by the name of Al-Harith ibn-‘Amr ibn Haritha (2) made his way to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and questioned, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I want to know when the (Final) Hour will occur? Also, I have sewn my seeds; I would like to know when it will rain. My wife is pregnant, and I

= *the Book of Allah: “And [as for all such believers,] no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them [in the life to come] as a reward for all that they did.” (as-Sajda: 17) This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2824), Ahmad in his Musnad (2/466), Abu Nai’m in al-Hilya (2/262); the narration that was narrated by all of aforementioned collectors was the version narrated on the authority of Abu-Hurayra.*

(1) *The story of Al-Harith Ibn-‘Amr ibn-Haritha who asked the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him about doomsday.*

(2) In reference to the events surrounding the revelation of this verse, Al-Wahidi (in his well-known book dedicated to uncovering the occurrences surrounding the revelation of various verses of the Quran) mentioned (p 198) the following: ‘The verse which states, “Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come…” (*Luqman* 34) was revealed in reference to Al-Harith ibn-‘Amr ibn-Haritha ibn-Maharib ibn-Hafsa, an outlander who came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him about the Hour—when it would arrive. He also mentioned that the lands on which he and his people farmed were seeded and he wanted to know when it would rain. He informed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that his wife was pregnant and wanted to know if she would give birth to a male or a female. Lastly, after pointing out that he knew where he was born, he asked, ‘In which land shall I die?’ Afterward, Allah *the Exalted* revealed this verse.

would like her to give birth to a male child, as I have already made preparations for his arrival, will she? What does tomorrow hold?' Finally, he mentioned, 'I am fully aware of the place in which I am living; however, how can I know the place of my death?'

These five questions are addressed by the verse; that is, their answers have been issued by Allah *the Exalted*: 'Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends sown rain; and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs: whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he will die…' (*Luqman:* 34)

Strangely enough, we notice some people attempting to offer 'correction' in reference to the five things Allah identified as being His exclusive knowledge within this verse to what has been mentioned by Allah! Like those who attempt to prophesy about the occurrence of the Final Hour; all of them are liars. If they were given the good fortune of believing in Allah and knowing what He said concerning the Hour, they would not have dared to approach this issue.

We have already pointed out that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has concealed the knowledge of when the Final Hour will occur so that we can assume a constant state of readiness for it; that is, we are aware that it could arrive at any time. In fact, even those who doubt the Final Hour or even disbelieve in it are prompted to work for it because people around them are working for it and preparing to encounter its horrors. In a certain sense, this is similar to how Allah has concealed the knowledge of when each individual will die as well as the place in which she will die. Allah has made death the constant companion of His servants; indeed, the way in which different people die often seems arbitrary:

Some die only minutes after being born while some live to be a hundred years old. To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* hasn not made death the outcome of illness or anything else. There are a great many sick persons who recover and a great many persons in good health who pass away. It reminds me of how they say: 'The one in your care who is ill; how is he doing? Indeed, the one among us in good health has passed away!' He spoke truthfully the one who mentioned the following: Do not think of illness as the precursor to death; even if that illness be critical verily, you may witness one who is gravely ill recover, while the one in good health may soon be enshrouded in the cloth of his burial.

The idea that death does not always result from old age has also been expressed poetically:

Death may claim a girl in the prime of youth, and spare her aging mother
One's final moment may be sluggish, but eternity in this life is not attainable

As such, we recognize that Allah has concealed the knowledge of when the Day of Judgment will arrive just as He has concealed the knowledge of when the moment of death will arrive. In light of this, our awareness of death's immanence should never waver. We should be aware that we could die at any moment and should thus act accordingly. Simply put, we expect to meet Allah; consequently, we prepare for that meeting. In fact, it must be stated definitively: When a person dies, the Day of Judgment is established in his regard. Indeed, his ability to perform good works (or bad ones for that matter) has been cut off. All of the previous examples bespeak one fundamental truth: The concealment of the knowledge of when the Day of Judgment will arrive and the concealment of the time of death expresses the essence of what these two events should mean to us. Their concealment means we should prepare for each because either could occur at any time.

Allah *the Exalted* also says: '…He [it is who] sends down rain…' (*Luqman:* 34) This also represents something which is only known by Allah. As a result of the progress of the natural sciences, some have attempted to offer predictions about the dates and times of precipitation. Using extremely precise readings about wind speed, temperature, etc. they are able to extrapolate—and be as it may—their calculations might be accurate. Nevertheless, the reality that Allah causes things that were not taken into consideration by their inquiry to occur within creation has completely eluded them. It is not uncommon for us to be surprised by a sudden change of weather or wind direction. When this occurs, all of our forecasts—and the sophisticated methods they were based upon—are 'turned on their heads.'

Indeed, when one of the most wondrous things within creation is the fact that the higher one rises in the atmosphere, although you come closer to the sun—the primary source of heat in the universe—the temperature decreases steadily. Conversely, as you descend nearer to earth's surface, although you move farther from the sun, the temperature rises!

As such, the issue of the earth and the heavenly bodies is not one that conforms to an independently functioning ‘routine.’ At all times, it is the power of Allah *Glorified is He* which determines their activity. Your extrapolation should be considered a demonstration of Allah: Allah is demonstrating to you all of the factors which are included in Him effectuating certain ends within creation. Thus, you can observe the limitless scope of His power when He says to something ‘Be’ and it becomes as He decreed.

Indeed, in the pilgrimage we have been commanded no less than to kiss one stone adoringly and pelt another with rocks! Performing either of these actions is an expression of faith and obedience. This stone is caressed and that one is trampled under our feet. This stone is kissed and that one is thrown, why is this? Allah simply wants us to comply with what He has commanded of us. The believing soul recognizes the position of its Lord, the One Who gave life and subsequently made humanity accountable unto Him.

Continuing on to the statement of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘…and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs…’ (*Luqman:* 34), it too, represents one of the ‘keys’ of the unseen we have been discussing. Regardless of how advanced the techniques of modern science become and regardless of how much people claim to know what is in the wombs, this knowledge remains the exclusive preserve of Allah. The machines (ultrasound scanning) currently in use; those that enable us to view the foetus and identify its gender seem to make this verse problematic for some. Indeed, this technological advancement has caused a stir in the souls of some men and women (who believe in the divine origin of the Quran). They have begun imagining that doctors know the contents of the womb. Consequently, they have ceased to consider this issue from among those unseen matters that are only known to Allah.

We would respond to them by saying: True, science has enabled you to know whether a foetus is male or female, while it is still in the womb, but only after it has formed, its features have become defined, and its creation has nearly been finished. The Creator *the Exalted* on the other hand knows what is ‘in the womb’ before the mother of the child even conceives. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Exalted* gave His Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* glad tidings of his son Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* before he was conceived by his mother. On top of that, we have not arrived at our current knowledge of what is in the womb by tapping into some intrinsic ability that we have; on the contrary, we were taught by Allah. The doctor who informs you of the gender of the child is not, properly speaking, a knower (*'alim*) of the unseen. Quite the reverse, he has been taught something that exists with the realm of the unseen. There is nothing unusual about this; at times Allah *the Exalted* teaches certain men and women things that hitherto existed in the unseen.

What occurred in the life of, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* is an example of this phenomenon. Particularly the occasion on which he was advising his daughter ʿA'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* on his deathbed, he said to her: 'O ʿA'isha, it is only your two brothers and two sisters'. ʿA'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* was somewhat startled by this statement as she counted her siblings as three: two brothers, Mohammad and ʿAbd Ar-Rahman and one sister, Asma'. However, at the time As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* was married to Bint-Kharijah who, during her husband's final days, learned of a child that she conceived. After his death, she would eventually give birth to a girl.(1) Would we look upon this story and conclude that Abu Bakr knew the unseen? Of course not; it would seem more appropriate to say that he was taught an element of the unseen by Allah. Bear in mind, here, we are only ruling out the possibility of possessing an inherent means of apprehending the knowledge of the unseen.

This brings us to the present; the modern physician is able to detect the gender of the child; through the use of either ultrasound or other analytical techniques he might employ. In the strictest sense, this is not considered knowledge of the unseen. It is nothing short of disingenuous to inform a pregnant woman sitting before you: 'Allah willing, you will give birth to this or that type of child.' Normally, this does not happen.

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(1) *This is a reference to Um-Kulthum bint-Abu Bakr. Her mother is Habiba bint-Kharija ibn-Zayd, she learned of her pregnancy during the final days of her husband, Abu Bakr, and eventually gave birth after his death. [Ibn-Sa'ad from At-Tabaqat 3/155].*

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow…' (*Luqman:* 34). The human being is constantly toiling; either to secure benefit related to this world or related to the Hereafter. This verse touches upon the reality of the material gain you seek to acquire through work and which helps you attain a comfortable life. At the same time, this verse also deals with what you earn (or reap) in terms of your moral obligations: The human soul is either doing good actions or bad ones; performing acts of righteousness or those of evil. In all, we must remember that more than any other thing, the human being is defined by changing states.

This explains why some have been attributed the following saying to Allah: 'O child of Adam, do not ask Me concerning your provision for tomorrow. Indeed, I do not ask you about the deeds you must perform (for My sake) tomorrow.

The statement of Allah *the Exalted* '…and no one knows in what land he will die…' (*Luqman:* 34). This issue too has created some controversy because the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* informed the Ansar that he would pass away in Medina. This refers to the occasion in which he distributed the booty among all of the people with the exception of the *Ansar.* No doubt, this was something that angered them and allowed some resentment to crop up in their hearts; to them it appeared that the Prophet had prevented them from enjoying that which should have rightly been theirs. Nonetheless, the Prophet gathered them and addressed them with the aim of consoling them. He recognized their tremendous position among the ranks of the believers; he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them: 'By Allah, if you said that I came to you after I had been nearly exiled (from Mecca), and you accepted me, you would be telling the truth…Yet, is it not pleasing to you that people around you are returning to their living quarters with goats and camels while you are returning with the Prophet?'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4330); on the authority of Ibn Zayd ibn-Asim who said: When Allah Glorified is He granted His Messenger peace and blessings be upon him abundant spoils of war on the day of Hunayn, the Messenger used it as an opportunity to win the support of those who had hitherto been disinclined to Islam. As a result, he finished the distribution (of the spoils of war) without the Ansar having received anything. Predictably, this left them feeling excluded and left out. Recognizing this, the Messenger gathered them and addressed them thus, 'O company of the Ansar, before I=*

On a separate occasion, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was quoted as saying: ‘The truly living are those who live among you and those who have died while belonging to your ranks have died worthy deaths.’(1)

To be sure, this suggests the Prophet was told that he would die in Medina, whereas Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘…whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow and no one knows in what land he will die…’ (*Luqman:* 34). However, we would be quick to point out that the mention of ‘land’ here can be understood as general or specific. Medina, for instance, was the place the Prophet was informed his death would take place. Then again, where in Medina, in what ‘land’ in Medina, in which apartment—from among the homes of his wives? Therefore, you might know the general place; yet, the specific land in which you will expire remains unknown to anyone.

It has been related that Abu-Jaʿfar Al-Mansur, the Abbasid caliph was a man of liveliness and vivacity. Savouring life and loathing death, he would consult astrologers and soothsayers presumably in hope of alleviating his fear of death through learning of its time so that he could prepare for it. The story continues that Allah desired to sever the caliph’s reliance on these practices so He showed the caliph a dream in which he saw a large hand with outspread

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= *dwelled among you, were you not in misguidance before Allah guided you? And with my arrival, did Allah not join among you, making you a unified people after you had been warring factions? And with my arrival, were you not enriched, after you had been needy?’ They responded with an acknowledgement of the blessings of Allah and the favour of His Messenger. The Prophet continued, ‘What then? What has prevented you from responding to the Prophet?’ Every time the Prophet would say something, they would respond with an acknowledgement of Allah’s blessings and His favour upon them. ‘If you wanted, you could say, “you came to us in this or that condition.” Yet, does it not please you that people are returning to their homesteads with sheep and camels while you are returning to yours with the Prophet? If it was not for the fact that I migrated to Medina, I would consider myself a person from amongst the Ansar. If all of the people were traversing one valley, and the Ansar, by themselves, were traversing another valley, I would go the route of the Ansar. The Ansar are the backbone of this community the rest of the people are just its cover.’*

(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1780), Hadith # 86 in Kitab Al-Jihad wa As-Siyar: It is narrated (in an extended Hadith) that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said to the Ansar: ‘I am Muhammad, the servant of Allah and His Messenger, I migrated unto Allah and unto you, the truly living are those who live among you and those who have died while belonging to your ranks have died worthy deaths.’*

fingers emerging from the sea and extending in his direction. Upon waking, the caliph immediately summoned those skilled in dream interpretation. The ‘optimistic one among them, that is, the one seeking a handsome compensation said, ‘Each of the fingers represents a year (presumably years he had left to live).’ The others said either five months, five days, or even five minutes!

The last of those present to state his opinion was Abu-Hanifa *may Allah be pleased with him* who said to the caliph, ‘Verily, Allah desires to inform you that there are five things which are only known to Him: ‘Verily, with Allah alone rests the knowledge of the time when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs: whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he will die…’ (*Luqman:* 34). In as much as this verse expresses five things which are only known to Allah, it is only fitting that the verse conclude: ‘…Verily, Allah [alone] is All Knowing, All-Aware.’ (*Luqman:* 34)

Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to alleviate the burden of His creation: They do not need to exhaust themselves by thinking about these five issues. The important thing for us to know is that all of the precise measures upon which life rests are functioning by the power of Allah and for a wise purpose that He has dictated. Secondly, we must recognize that all of the things mentioned in the verse take place at appointed times. That is to say, even being capable of predicting when they are going to occur does nothing to advance them or postpone them. By Allah, what would it mean if you knew the precise time of your death? Certainly nothing desirable; it would only mean that you would go through life sad and dejected; unable to find the vigour to experience life fully.

This explains why Allah has concealed this issue from us: To enable us to turn toward Allah with confidence, assured that His divinely preordained will is at work among us.

the chapter of

as-Sajda

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *as-Sajda*(1):

الٓمٓ ﴿١﴾

Alif. Lam. Mim **[1] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 1)**

'Alif. Lam. Mim' (*as-Sajda:* 1) are from among the mysterious disjointed letters which begin several chapters of the Quran. In classical Arabic, words have a voweling(2) on their last syllable which is read as long as there is a proceeding word connected to it in the same sentence; when the sentence ends, the last word is read in pausal form, that is, the final voweling is left silent. In contrast to the disjointed letters, the rest of the words in the Quran are written with final voweling which connects them from beginning to end. When we recite the Quran, we should keep reading the text with its full voweling for as long as our lungs allow; only when we need to take a breath should we stop, leaving the last word in pause form.

The scholars of Quranic recitation point out that there is no reason to pause between the various words, verses, or even chapters. Nevertheless, since we do eventually need to catch our breath, scholars have inserted certain symbols to indicate the points where it would be preferable to stop. But again, the overarching rule is to read the Quran continuously without any breaks between the various passages.

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(1) The chapter of *As-Sajda*, which is the thirty-second chapter in the textual order of the Quran, is Meccan except for three Medinan verses (out of thirty verses total): 'Is, then, he who [in his earthly life] was a believer to be compared with one who was iniquitous? [Nay,] these two are not equal! [18] As for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds – gardens of rest await them, as a welcome [from Allah], in result of what they did; [19] but as for those who are lost in iniquity – their goal is the fire… [20]' (*as-Sajda:*18-20) the chapter of *As-Sajda* was revealed after the chapter of *Al-Mu'minun* and before the chapter of *at-Tur*.

(2) A Voweling adds on the sound of an Arabic Vowel to a word, indicating that once you have read this word it will flow into the next word within the sentence continuously until a pausal indicator is met. Then the word will be read without the Voweling indicating a pause or a stop to the sentence.

The clearest indication for this rule is the fact that the word *an-nas* (people), which is the last word of the last [eponymous] chapter, is fully voweled (again, normally, we would read the final word of any section in the pause form). After having us dwell on the word *(an-nas)*, Allah then has us seamlessly journey on in our recitation to the opening invocation of the first chapter – 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy.' (*al-Fatiha:* 1) The point is that we should not artificially disconnect the end of the scripture from its beginning. In this vein, those who recite the Quran are known as 'the travelling residents' because no sooner have they 'dwelled' on one passage than they are already 'moving on' to the next, continuously, without linear end.

Given that the five keys to the Great Beyond are mentioned immediately before at the end of the previous chapter of *Luqman*, it could be argued that these three enigmatic letters *'Alif. Lam. Mim.'* (*as-Sajda:* 1) are connected to them. These letters are a mystery whose secret Allah has concealed in His knowledge. Hence our interpretations can only begin to approach their true meanings. Accordingly, we must always append our interpretations with the disclaimer that 'And Allah knows best as to the intended meaning,' in contrast to the rest of the verses in the Quran whose meanings are more straightforward.

Just imagine: one day we will recline on the seat of truth in the presence of the Sovereign who determines all things, listening to the Quran directly from Allah *the Exalted* Himself. Undoubtedly, our ears will catch many things they did not hear before, and we will be able to discern manifold layers of meaning which we had previously failed to uncover. Then – and only then – will we know the full meanings behind the disjointed letters of the Quran; it will become fully clear to us how far our intellects were from fully comprehending them, how utterly thick-skulled we were when it came to understanding what Allah was trying to get across.

The three letters *'Alif. Lam. Mim.'* (*as-Sajda:* 1) are usually proceeded in the Quran by a mention of the Holy Scripture, as in this chapter:

تَنزِيلُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ مِن رَّبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

This scripture, free from all doubt, has been
sent down from the Lord of the Worlds [2]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 2)

The root word meaning ‘to be revealed’ (*n-z-l*) appears in the Quran in three different forms: *nazala* (to be revealed) and *nazzala* and *anzala* (to reveal). *Anzala* is transitive, meaning that Allah Himself *Glorified is He* is the agent who had the Quran transported from the Imperishable Tablet to the lowest heaven, from where it waited until it was brought down to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in accordance with its mission.

The verb *nazzala* has the same meaning as *anzala*, but it is used when referring to the angels as the agents of revelation. Thus, in (*al-Qadr:* 1), the Quran uses the form *anzala* ‘Behold, from on high have We bestowed this (*anzalna-hu*) [Book] on the Night of Destiny’ (*al-Qadr:* 1) to stress the agency of Allah in carrying the Quran from the Imperishable Tablet to the lowest heaven. And from the lowest heaven, the angels brought the scripture down piecemeal as required by the events unfolding among the nascent Muslim community; as the Quran notes: ‘The Faithful Spirit has alighted with it (*nazala bihi*) from on high’. (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 193)

‘And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high (*anzalna-hu*); with this [very] truth has it come down (*nazala*) [unto you, O Prophet]…’ (*al-Isra’:* 105) this book had been preserved with Allah on the Imperishable Tablet ‘which none but the pure can touch’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 79) whence Gabriel, that Faithful Spirit, then transported it to our earthly abode.

‘[T]he Faithful Spirit has alighted with it (*nazala bihi*) from on high’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 193) meaning that the Quran came down with Gabriel; this corresponds exactly to ‘And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [revelation] from on high (*anzalna-hu*); with this [very] truth has it come down (*nazala*) [unto you, O Prophet]…’ (*al-Isra’:* 105). The difference is that in one, the process of revelation is attributed [intransitively] to the Quran itself, and in the other [transitively] to the Faithful Spirit.

All the derivates of the root *(n-z-l)* indicate movement from one entity who is higher to another who is lower. And if you take your orders from a higher authority, you should never look anywhere else for direction.

This is why, when Allah *the Exalted* addresses the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* He says, 'Say: "Come (*ta'alaw*), let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden to you…"' (*al-An'am:* 151). The word *ta'alaw* can mean 'come!' (as translated above), but it also has buried in it the meaning of 'loftiness, sublimity' (*'uluww*), thus providing the more nuanced interpretation of 'come from what is lowly to what is lofty!' or 'leave your worldly condition and draw nigh to the sublimity of your Lord in the Heavenly Host!'

This means that we should not take our direction from ourselves or from our fellow mortals, but that we should rise up from our finite world and our finite intellects and take from the One Who has laid out the Way for us; for His prescriptions are inevitably safer and surer for us. His knowledge is all Encompassing; He will not tell us to do one thing one day and then the opposite the next.

Furthermore, not only is Allah's law the truth, but it embraces all aspects of our life. Allah is more merciful to us than the mother toward her child; He would never decree any law for us unless it was in our own interest. After all, unlike us humans who invariably craft laws with our own individual self-interests in mind, Allah *Glorified is He* does not have any selfish ulterior motives that could taint the justice of His code.

Whenever the capitalist oligarchs, for instance, promulgate a new law, they formulate it in such a way that makes them the foremost beneficiaries of it. But it is precisely because of this unhealthy partiality that the whole political system soon enough collapses in on itself. Since a true lawgiver may never champion laws that serve their own self-interests, it follows that only Allah Almighty deserves the appellation 'lawgiver' in the proper sense of the word. This is why the rejecters of truth and the idolaters inevitably seek out the answers to life's hardships from Islamic law, after their own laws fail them.

One time, when I was in San Francisco, someone asked me about the two verses 'He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with the [task of spreading] guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He may cause it to prevail over all other religions – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah" (*at-Tawba:* 33) and 'They aim to extinguish Allah's light with their utterances: but Allah has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth.' (*as-Saff:* 8) Someone posed the question, 'If this verse is saying that Islam was supposed to have prevailed over all other religions fourteen hundred years ago, why is it that most people today are non-Muslim?' My response was that if they truly understood the nuances of the Arabic language and truly pondered the meaning of this verse, they would find the answer to their question. Note how the verses end with 'although they who associate others with Allah dislike' (*as-Saff:* 8) and, 'however hateful this to the disbelievers.' (*at-Tawba:* 33)

The implication of this is that disbelief and polytheism did in fact coexist with Islam. The word 'prevail' here does not mean that non-Muslims will be wiped off the face of the earth but that, rather, Islam will 'prevail' in the sense that everyone will find themselves forced by life's circumstances to seek recourse in its legal injunctions even though they may not believe in Islam's ultimate truth. Indeed, the fact that non-Muslims are flummoxed to find any solution to their problems except in the Quran is the most demonstrative proof of the religion's 'prevail' imaginable.

The best example of this is how the Christians used to attack Islam for permitting divorce and polygamy, accusing Muslims of being uncivilized, bestial even. But in the end, the exigencies of life forced the Christians to legalize divorce, which the Vatican did not even bother trying to intervene to stop. But did they come around and start believing in Islam? No; the realities of the world merely compelled them to accept the wisdom of Islamic law because it alone had the answer to their problems.

This, then, is the testimony of Allah's enemies to the wholesomeness of His religion; this is the greatest proof of Islam's supremacy over all other religions. If these Christians had embraced the faith, people would dismiss their adoption of Islamic law simply because of their religious allegiance, but the fact is that they borrowed from our legal code even while rejecting its divine provenance.

‘Beyond any doubt’ As we discussed before, things can be described with varying degrees of certitude on a scale between what is definitively established and what has not been definitively established. For instance, the roundness of the earth is a definitively established fact which can be proven through physical evidence.

Issues which have not been definitively established fall under one of three categories: doubt, assumption, or conjecture. ‘Doubt’ means to have equal perception of something as true or false; ‘assumption’ is to adjudge something more likely true than not; and ‘conjecture’ is to tend toward believing something even though it is likely not true.

‘Beyond any doubt’ Again, given that ‘doubt’ refers to the equal likelihood of something being true or untrue, the categorical negation of even the (possibility) that this could be untrue is an affirmation of its veracity in the highest degree.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* proceeds in this chapter with:

أَمۡ يَقُولُونَ ٱفۡتَرَىٰهُۚ بَلۡ هُوَ ٱلۡحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ لِتُنذِرَ قَوۡمٗا مَّآ
أَتَىٰهُم مِّن نَّذِيرٖ مِّن قَبۡلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَهۡتَدُونَ ٣

Yet they say, ‘Muhammad has made it up.’ No indeed! It is the Truth from your Lord for you [Prophet], to warn a people who have had no one to warn them before, so that they may be guided [3] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 3)

It is rather inexplicable that the Arabs would react to Allah’s Word with these slanderous accusations, given that they were renowned for their eloquence and their rhetoric. Again, given this preoccupation with the nuances of their language’s beauty, it is rather inexplicable that the Arab idolaters simply refused to concede any difference between the speech of their fellow mortals and the speech of the Omniscient Allah, particularly given how the Quran openly challenged them to produce one verse similar to the Quran’s verses. Keeping in mind that the weak are never challenged in such a manner, the Quran is implicitly recognizing the Arabs’ stature and their prowess in the linguistic arts. Even though they were inevitably bound to fail this test, it was enough of an honour for Allah to have even bothered with them in the first place.

Given their utter inability to produce anything similar to the majestic Quran, the idolaters began to accuse the Prophet of being nothing more than a poet, a magician, insane, or of having took his Quran from a non-Arab, and so on. But this served nothing other than to demonstrate the utter invalidity of their arguments. They tried to call the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* a liar even though it was crystal-clear to them that the Quran could not have sprung from a mortal mind, as conceded by Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, for instance, 'By Allah, [the Quran is like a fertile tree] its uppermost [branches] bristle with fruits, while its lower [branches] overflow in oceanic abundance. It towers high, shadowed by nothing.'

The idolaters' failure to find anything to criticize in the Quran was effectively an implicit recognition of its divine origin. Accordingly, they started to complain, not about the veracity of the Book, but about the fact that it was revealed specifically to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This indicates how the rejectionists of truth themselves concluded that the Quran is miraculously inimitable, and that it is unquestionably from Allah. Nevertheless, despite having become convinced of the Quran's truthfulness, the rejectionists of truth impudently prayed: 'And [remember] when they said, "O Allah, if this should be the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment."' (*al-Anfal:* 32)

Given that no one in their right senses would ever say such a thing, this only demonstrates their utter and complete foolishness. What they should have said is, 'O Allah! If this should be the truth from You, (then guide us to it)!'

The Quran refuted all of their lies against the Prophet. When they claimed that the Prophet was possessed, Allah refuted them, 'Nun (the Arabic letter Nun). By the pen and what they inscribe. You are not, [O Muhammad], by the favor of your Lord, a madman. And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted. And indeed, you are of a great moral character.' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4)

The clinically insane are never known for their strong morality because they are helplessly dominated by their instincts, unable to control their behaviour, just like an animal. Under these circumstances, how could they ever become paragons of virtue?

By contrast, those in control of their mental faculties have the ability to freely choose what course of action they want to take. If someone transgresses against them, they might respond in kind or – contemplating that such a response might only cause more violence against them – they might opt instead to exercise forbearance. Some might suppress their anger, while others might completely wipe out whatever anger is in their hearts, seeking Allah's reward instead, as per the verse(1), 'Would you not like that Allah should forgive you?' (*an-Nur:* 22) where Allah exhorts us to perform good deeds

Once*,* Al-Hasan Al-Basri was asked, 'How can Allah possibly expect us to practice goodness toward those who would transgress against us?' He said, 'There are varying degrees of virtue. While Allah has allowed us to respond to evil similarly: 'And the recompense of evil is evil the like of it.' (*ash-Shura:* 40) He has also left open the door of perseverance for the magnanimous believers: 'but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is [due] from Allah.' (*ash-Shura:* 40)

This sort of forbearance may seem unwarranted, but let us analyse this issue rationally: all of creation are Allah's dependents and they are all equal before Him. If one of your dependents were to transgress against another, there is no doubt that you would take the side of the wronged party, hold them in your arms, and cuddle them. Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes the side of His servants whenever they are wronged. The oppressed believers should be good to their tormentors who have unwittingly placed them on Allah's side.

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(1) *This verse (aya) was revealed regarding Abu Bakr As-Siddiq may Allah be pleased with him when he vowed never again to provide any sort of assistance to Mastah ibn Uthatha who had slandered 'A'isha. When Allah proclaimed her innocence, He then ordered Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him to show mercy on his nephew who had absolutely nothing except what Abu Bakr gave him, and who was duly punished for his sin. When Allah Glorified is He revealed, "Would you not like that Allah should forgive you?" (an-Nur: 22), Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him responded: of course, Allah, I want You to forgive me my sins, at which point he resumed his stipend for Mastah. [(Ibn Kathir's Quranic Exegesis) (Tafsir Ibn Kathir) 276/3]*

Given this, some people say that you gain divine rewards not from accompanying the righteous people, but from spending time with the wicked whose injuries you are forced to bear with benevolence. This is also the logic behind the saying that 'He may be a good guy, but spending time with him does not bring any heavenly reward because he is too darn helpful and humble.'

It has been narrated that once, our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sitting among his companions, he [suddenly] smiled. The companions asked him what the reason was, so he said, 'I had a vision where I saw my Lord with two litigants seated before Him. The accuser declared, 'Lord, this person has wronged me, so I ask You to take my due from him' to which Allah responded, 'How am I supposed to do that?' The man answered, 'Give me from his good deeds the equivalent of the injury he has wrought on me.' 'But,' Allah pointed out, 'he does not have any good deeds to begin with!' 'In that case, take my sins and give them to him!' Allah responded, 'Would you not prefer not to have any sins at all?' 'In that case, Lord, how am I supposed to take my due from him?' 'Look to your right.' When the man looked to his right, he saw chateaus and gardens, replete with wonders which no eye has ever beheld, no ear has ever heard, and which no human heart has ever even conceived. 'To whom does this belong, Lord?' Allah *Glorified is He* answered, 'To those prepared to pay the proper price.' 'And what, Lord, is the right price?' 'To take your brother's hand and enter Heaven together.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* concluded, saying, 'I smiled because I was in utter awe of a Lord who would do this to make things right between His servants.'(1)

This is the response to the charge that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was crazy or possessed. With regards to the accusation that he was some sort of magician, the refutation is easy enough: If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had bewitched certain people into becoming his followers, why was not he able to bewitch you as well? The fact that you are free from the influence of any magic is proof enough that he was nothing of the kind, and that this is nothing more than a libellous slander.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Hakim in the (Addendum to the Authentic Narrations of Al-Bukhari and Muslim) (Mustadrak) (576/4) who noted that, 'The chain of narrations is authentic even if Al-Bukhari and Muslim did not include it.' Adh-Dhahabi on the other hand stated that, ''Abbad is weak on top of which his teacher is not known to us.' Abu Bakr ibn Abu Dawud As-Sijistani quoted this Hadith as well in (The Resurrection) (Al-Ba'th wa-An-Nushur) (p49-50) also from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him.*

As for the charge that Muhammad was nothing more than a poet who made up the Quran, this is also a rather perplexing thing for the Arabs to say given that they were renowned for their fantastic eloquence. They, more than anyone else, could appreciate the difference between poetry and prose, having refined perhaps more diverse forms of literary presentation than any other culture. Allah took it upon Himself to respond to this accusation: 'And We did not give Prophet Muhammad, knowledge of poetry.' (*Ya Sin:* 69) Similarly, in the chapter of *al-Haqqa*, He *Glorified is He* declares that: 'And it is not the word of a poet; little do you believe. Nor the word of a soothsayer; little do you remember.' (*al-Haqqa:* 41-42)

All their ruses having been foiled, and all their slanderous lies having been proven false, the rejectionists of truth then asserted that the Prophet had the Quran dictated to him by a jinn – a common assumption, actually, of poets who displayed a flawless command of the language. It was also widely accepted among the Arabs that these jinn-muses resided in a valley called *'*Abqar.

Classical Arabic poetry is characterized by a strict adherence to a traditional rhyming scheme within one of the sixteen established metrical forms, a format to which the Quran definitely does not conform. Thus, the claim that the Quran was somehow nothing more than a generic Arabic poem was as blatantly false as the claim that it was nothing more than the product of Muhammad's imagination. 'Or do they say, "He invented it"? Rather, it is the truth from your Lord' (*as-Sajda:* 3). Do they concede that this Book is from the Lord of the universe and that its truth is beyond all doubt? Or are they saying that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invented it?' The 'or' is meant to negate the previous statement. 'Rather, it is the truth from your Lord.' The word 'rather' has the force of negating the preceding claim that 'he invented it.' Thus, when the idolaters claim that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just made up the Holy Scripture, Allah *Glorified is He* rebutted the claim with, 'it is the truth from your Lord,' since their accusations are utterly baseless.

As we have discussed before, the truth is by definition immutable and unchanging. Similarly, facts are facts, and cannot change from one moment to the next. For instance, suppose a car accident happens; we have a plaintiff, a defendant, and some witnesses, all of whom are brought before the judge. Although the plaintiff or the defendant might change their testimony, or some of the witnesses may lie under oath, the seasoned judge's training and experience will enable him to uncover the facts and to sort out the conflicting testimonies to determine who is telling the truth. The judge will piece together the truth because there was only one incident with one set of complementary facts. Through subtle wit, the judge can expose the contradictory false claims and weigh in on the side of truth which is free of contradictions.

In this vein, there was once a judge who tricked two litigants into admitting the truth. The plaintiff charged that the defendant had failed to return money which the latter had borrowed from him, while the defendant for his part claimed that he had in fact repaid the loan at an exact place and time which he specified. The judge then ordered the defendant to return to the place where he allegedly repaid the money to check whether the money had perhaps fallen out of his pocket. The man went off, while the judge and the plaintiff stayed behind, waiting. The minutes kept going by until they started stretching into hours. The judge turned to the plaintiff and said, 'Your friend is sure taking his sweet time,' prompting the latter to remark offhand that, 'Probably because the place is so far away.' And thus was the judge able to trick the mendacious litigant into unwittingly saying the truth.

The phrase 'That you may warn a people to whom no warner has come before you [so]' (*as-Sajda:* 3) means that although it is well-known that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came as both a bringer of glad tidings and as a warner; his role as warner is singled out here to stress his mission to rectify people's corrupted beliefs. Allah's goodly reward is not mentioned in this context, even though it usually precedes the admonishment of Hell, since the disbelievers' refusal to avail themselves of the latter disqualified them from Heaven in any case.

The phrase 'a people to whom no warner has come before you [so]' seems to be at odds with other verses in the Quran such as 'And there was no nation but that there had passed within it a warner.' (*Fatir:* 24) and 'never would We punish until We sent a messenger.' (*al-Isra':* 15) But there really is no contradiction here, since the former verse simply means that no warner has come to them recently. It is also perfectly conceivable that one came to them at some more distant point in the past, as alluded to in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*: 'O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger to make clear to you [the religion] after a period [of suspension] of messengers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19) Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that the pre-Islamic Arabs recognized Allah as the creator of the universe: 'And if you asked them, "Who created the heavens and earth?" they would surely say, "Allah". Say, "[All] praise is [due] to Allah."' (*Luqman:* 25) This can only have come from the teachings passed down from the ancient prophets, an idea which is further reinforced by the fact that some of the pre-Islamic Arabs known as hunafa' followed the true religion, whereby they shunned all idol worshipping and strove to live according to their primordial nature, untainted by sin.

'Perhaps they will be guided.' (*as-Sajda:* 3) The word 'perhaps' indicates hope; and when Allah employs this word, it is certain that this hope will become a reality. Allah *Glorified is He* wants all of His servants to join the faith so that He can lavish them with the wonderful rewards of Heaven just as He has lavished them with His blessings here on earth since they are all without exception His creatures. We mentioned earlier the Qudsi Hadith which states 'Leave those I have created to Me; if they repent to Me, I am their beloved, and even if they do not, I am still their doctor who cures them of their sins'.(1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks in the following verse on the origin of the universe:

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(1) Cited by Al-Ghazali in his (*Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din*) (52/4) from some of the early Muslims: "Every time a servant sins, the piece of earth beneath them asks Allah to allow it to swallow them up, while the piece of sky above them asks Allah to allow it to fall down on them. But Allah *Glorified is He* says to both the heavens and the earth, 'Restrain from injuring My servant; if you had created them, you too would have shown mercy on them. Perhaps they will repent to Me and have their sins forgiven, and start doing righteous deeds in lieu of their sins so that they can be rewarded accordingly."

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ
عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ۖ مَا لَكُم مِّن دُونِهِۦ مِن وَلِىٍّ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ ۚ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ٤

It is God who created the heavens and the earth and everything between them in six Days. Then He established Himself on the Throne. You [people] have no one but Him to protect you and no one to intercede for you, so why do you not take heed? [4] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 4)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling us here that He has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them for our benefit. We humans are honoured above everything else; all the other creatures – the animals, plants, and even inanimate objects – stand at our service. We are veritable masters in this universe although we need to appreciate that we did not gain this mastery because we possess some inherent greatness, but rather because of Allah’s grace. Before all else, we should express our gratitude to the One Who has granted us such a distinguished station in the hierarchy of creation.

On top of which this supposed ‘master of the world’ lives for no more than a fleeting moment; no matter how long our life span stretches out, it will eventually be cut off by death. We should really ponder the fact that the length of our life span pales in comparison with the life span of the lowly inanimate objects around us.

The only explanation which could possibly resolve this perplexing discrepancy is that there is another, more enduring life where our life span is indefinitely extended to more perfectly match the supreme honour with which Allah has crowned us. In the Hereafter, all these other creatures will vanish into the tides of time, whereas we shall live on. We will no longer need them because our immediate proximity to the First Cause *Glorified is He* will have rendered the physical laws of cause and effect obsolete; we will spontaneously find everything which we could desire before us without any effort on our part. But this honour will belong exclusively to those who obey the Giver Who raises His servants by degrees.

Accordingly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that while we humans may be the masters of the universe with every other creature standing at our service, the grandeur of the cosmos is greater than the creation of the human being: ‘The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind.’ (*Ghafir:* 57) This is because we have a very limited life span which, no matter how long it may stretch out, will inevitably expire. Furthermore, our life span does not come with any guarantees: the wealthy is liable to go bankrupt; the healthy is liable to fall cripplingly ill, while the strong is liable to become debilitated. The celestial bodies, on the other hand, which are not prone to such vicissitudes, never weaken or die. And in any case, we cannot even begin to approach their grandeur; for, while we may be able to affect ourselves, and our immediate environment, the stars affect the destiny of literally entire galaxies.

The fact that even the rejectionists of truth concede that Allah is the originator of the heavens and the earth is indeed one of the fundamental proofs for His existence.

The creation of the cosmos is one of the mysteries Allah has concealed in His infinite knowledge. No one can definitively say how they or the human race was created, since none of us have personally witnessed this event. Allah says: ‘I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken the misguiders as assistants.’ (*al-Kahf:* 51) These misguiders constantly try to herd us off the path of truth and onto the path of falsehood with their all-too-familiar fabrications regarding the origins of the universe

The point is that the truth of how the cosmos came about should only be taken from the One Who created it as stated by the Quran. Creation is a process, an action, and any given action presupposes a certain quantity of time wherein the events concerned are able to unfold. Hence, a dilemma arises from this phrase ‘in six days,’ (*as-Sajda:* 4) which is: does Allah *Glorified is He* need time in order to execute an action?

Whenever we mortals try to do something, we need to operate within the framework of the fourth dimension – i.e., time – whereby each division of our action is carried out within a certain subdivision of time. Allah, on the other hand, operates outside the constraints of our space-time continuum and simply declares something ‘Be!’ for it to immediately come into existence. Let us provide an example to illustrate ‘in six days’– keeping in mind, of course, that to Allah belong the loftiest of parables!

When you want to make yoghurt, you first mix together some yeast and milk, and then cook it for seven or eight hours. Now, did it actually take you seven or eight hours to make this yoghurt? No, it just took you the few minutes to prepare the mix, after which the ingredients themselves reacted with one another until they transformed into a new substance.

Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the elements of the cosmos through His command, after which they interacted with one another to fashion the heavens and the earth as we now know them.

This topic is taken up in seven different chapters, three of which (*al-Furqan, as-Sajda, Qaf*) mention the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them(1), the other four (*al-A‘raf, Yunus, Hud, al-Hadid*) mention only the heavens and the earth(2).

The heavens and the earth were created as an envelope, and only after this initial creation were the contents poured in – which is, after all, the logical order.

Remember that Allah is immediately addressing the ancient Arabs for whom a ‘day’ was defined by the movement of the sun and the moon. But how could there be any ‘days’ if neither sun nor moon had existed up to this point? It could mean that Allah created the universe in a period of time equivalent to one-hundred forty-four hours; otherwise, we could understand ‘day’ as being an exponentially more expansive measure of time, given that the passage of time is different for Allah, as the Quran makes clear ‘And indeed, a day with your Lord is like a thousand years of those which you count.’ (*al-Hajj:* 47)

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(1) ‘He who has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days’. (*al-Furqan:* 59)
– ‘It is Allah who has created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days’ (*as-Sajda:* 4) – ‘And [who knows that] We have indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days.’ (*Qaf:* 38)

(2) ‘Verily, your Sustainer is Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*al-A’raf:* 54)
– ‘Verily, your Sustainer is Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*Yunus:* 3)
– ‘And it is He who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*Hud:* 7)
– ‘It is He who has created the heavens and the earth in six days.’ (*al-Hadid:* 4)

Similarly, in reference to the Hereafter, the Quran says, ‘The angels and the Spirit will ascend to Him during a Day the extent of which is fifty thousand years.’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 4)

Allah *Glorified is He* has one measure for a ‘day’ in this world and another for the Hereafter.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* only delves into this issue in any detail in the chapter of *Fussilat*: ‘Say, “Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds.” And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures’] sustenance in four days without distinction – for [the information] of those who ask.”’ (*Fussilat:* 9-10) Two days plus four days equals six days.

‘Then He rose over towards the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth: “Come both of you willingly or unwillingly.” They both said: “We come, willingly. And He completed them as seven heavens within two days.”’ (*Fussilat:* 11-12) And with these two more days we now have a total of eight.

A question arises here: how are we supposed to reconcile between the more general verses which state that Allah created everything in six days and with this more detailed verse which claims that He did so in eight? The answer is that we should use the more general verses as the reference point to understand the more detailed verses. This is so since the subsets of days in the latter could be counted either separately, or as having occurred contemporaneously, whereas the former is final and unambiguous.

Let us count the number of days together: ‘Do you indeed disbelieve in He who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds. And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures’] sustenance,’ these are the fixtures of the earth – ‘in four days.’ The point is that the time for the creation of these fixtures should be subsumed under the time for the creation of the earth as a whole, which is mentioned in the first verse.

This all happened in four days; the first two days being included in the total four, It is like when you say, ‘It took me an hour to get from Cairo to Tanta, and two to get to Alexandria,’ meaning that it took you two hours total to go from Cairo to Tanta to Alexandria, the first hour being included in the total.

Since the adornment of the earth was merely the completion of its overall creation and not a separate event per se, so too should the time period of four days be seen as embracing both the initial and secondary creation. Thus, the sum total is six days, there being no contradiction with the other verses quoted above. ‘If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 82) On a side note, it is rather interesting that this issue would be treated in detail in a chapter whose name literally means ‘Treated in Detail.’

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘and then He rose over the Throne,’ or, more literally, He seated Himself upon the throne. We need to keep in mind that the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses us with language meant to drive home for us deep metaphysical truths. In this instance, He uses the image of a monarch who can mount their throne only after their kingdom has been set in order.

The word for ‘seated’ *istawa* means to rise up, sit, and then settle in, all of these meanings being applicable to the verse, with the proviso of course that ‘There is nothing like unto Him.’ (*ash-Shura:* 11)

Just as Allah possesses an existence that is qualitatively different from our existence, and just as He performs actions fundamentally different from our actions, so too does He ‘seat’ Himself in a manner that is categorically different from how we sit. Thus, for instance, if there is a state function with various officials of different ranks – mayors, governors, and the president himself – of course each person would hold a certain seat and posture themselves in a certain manner as appropriate to their rank. So if we humans have different protocols for how various ranks of people seat themselves, how can we assume that the way that Allah *Glorified is He* establishes His authority could in any way be similar to our own?

‘You have not besides Him any protector or any intercessor.’ A ‘protector’ is someone close to you who you can seek refuge in, while an ‘intercessor’ is someone who tries to use his connections to help you out. In other words, a protector is someone who can himself succour you, while an intercessor is someone who tries to influence those who have direct authority over you. Either way, you have no protector or intercessor outside of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Hence the verse ‘And when adversity touches you at sea, lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him.” (*al-Isra’:* 67) means that no one can rescue you except Allah, ‘so will you not be reminded?’ (*as-Sajda:* 4) This issue should constantly be on our minds since we live in a protean world whose vicissitudes we are constantly subject to. We are perpetually swinging between the scales of wealth and poverty, health and illness, strength and weakness.

Accordingly, if we always keep in mind that we have no protector or advocate save Allah, our hearts will find rest; and how could we not feel secure knowing that Allah would never fail us for even a second? Once this conviction becomes entrenched in our hearts, we can plunge into life with unmitigated audacity; if we plunge into life with no a holds-bar attitude, it will never be able to suck our strength away from us.

Those who are too timid to take life by the horns are like the father who, fearing he might die, abandons his children to prevent them from having to endure the pain of possibly becoming orphans. Instead, he should have realized that he is not the one who created them and that, should anything happen to him, their true Creator will take care of them and will provide them with parents from the community of believers if need be. If we really understood this point, we would not worry about what will happen to our children. As the poet once sang, ‘through orphanhood have you soared to the threshold of perfection?’ Or as another poet once said,

Thus said one blessed with a mother and father: ‘If only I were parentless’.

This wish may sound utterly bizarre, but the fact is that Islam provides for orphans to be better taken care of than children with biological parents.

The point is that knowing Allah has our back gives us the strength to confront life’s challenges with conviction and certainty. When we are in our hour of urgent need, when everyone has abandoned us and the whole world is failing us, all of us – even the rejectionists of truth – cry out the Lord's name, whether voluntarily or otherwise.

The word 'except in 'except for Him' means that there is no one else; any human being or other creature who helps you only does so because Allah has inspired them to have compassion towards you. All goodness ultimately has Allah as its source.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

يُدَبِّرُ ٱلْأَمْرَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ إِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يَعْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ فِى يَوْمٍ
كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُۥٓ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِّمَّا تَعُدُّونَ ﴿٥﴾

He runs everything, from the heavens to the earth, and everything will ascend to Him in the end, on a Day that will measure a thousand years in your reckoning [5]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 5)

This verse rebuts the philosophers who claim that Allah *Glorified is He* created the universe, set up the laws of nature, and then left everything to run by itself like a wound-up clock. But as this verse notes, 'He arranges [each] matter' He is actively sustaining existence at all times.

Otherwise, how could we reconcile the philosophers' claims with the fact that 'Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep.' (*al-Baqara:* 255)? The truth is that, not only did Allah *Glorified is He* initiate the creation of the universe, but also He has never ceased managing even its most minute affairs. We know this because, while He has established physical laws which are constant, He sometimes bends these laws; He suspended the law of burning for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the law of liquidity for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. This definitively demonstrates that the order of creation is constantly upheld by Allah *Glorified is He*.

If the philosophers were right, the universe would be nothing more than a mechanical alarm clock set ahead of time to later go off by itself. If this had been the case, the fire would have simply extinguished when Abraham *peace be upon him* was hurled into it.

Regarding the verse ‘every day He is bringing about a matter’ (*ar-Rahman:* 29), a wise man was once asked, ‘What affair could the Lord possibly be engaged in now that the pen of destiny has dried?’ He replied that it does not mean that Allah creates from scratch any longer, merely that He manifests latent realities to raise up some people and lower others.(1)

The point is that the ongoing process of creation is merely the manifestation of what already exists – not creation out of nothing. All future events have already been created, and are merely awaiting Allah’s word to be brought to light.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘He arranges [each] matter from the heaven to the earth’ (*as-Sajda:* 5) after which the results are brought back to Him: ‘then it will ascend to Him in a Day.’ (*as-Sajda:* 5) Just as Allah *Glorified is He* sends the angels down to earth, so too does He recall them, with each angel carrying out a special task. What Allah is doing, in other words, is follow-up, like a manager who follows up with his employees to evaluate them and reward them according to what they have earned.

It is the angels who bring back the results of Allah’s Commands: ‘the extent of which is a thousand years of those which you count.’ (*as-Sajda:* 5) The stride of the angels is not like our stride; the distance which would take us a millennium to traverse, the angels can cross in a single day.

This disparity between the ability of different creatures to traverse space and time is also alluded to in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* where he says, ‘O assembly [of jinn], which of you will bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?’ (*an-Naml:* 38) Out of the mixed group of humans and jinn Sulaiman *peace be upon him* was addressing, none of the humans offered to take up the challenge; the only person to step forward was (a) *‘ifrit* which is not an ordinary jinni, but a jinn with above-average capabilities. Because like humans, there are both jinn who are capable and on top of things, and then there are jinn who are bumbling incompetents.

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(1) Abu Ad-Darda’ *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said regarding the verse, “every day He is bringing about a matter” “Allah busies Himself – among other things – with forgiving people’s sins, relieving their anguish, raising up some people, and lowering others.” In (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (699/7), As-Suyuti noted that “This is related by Al-Hasan ibn Sufyan in his Al-Musnad as well as Al-Bazzar, Ibn Jarir, At-Tabarani, Abu Ash-Sheikh in his (Al-‘Azma), Ibn Mardawayh, Al-Bayhaqi in his Shu‘ab Al-Iman and Ibn ‘Asakar.’

So this *'ifrit* said to Sulaiman *peace be upon him* 'I will bring it to you before you rise from your place' (*an-Naml:* 39) meaning that he could do it, but that he would need perhaps an hour or two. But one who was enlightened with the wisdom of revelation suddenly spoke up, 'I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you' (*an-Naml:* 40) meaning that their superior knowledge would enable them to retrieve the throne so speedily. When Sulaiman *peace be upon him* saw the throne before his eyes only a moment later, he declared, 'This is from the favor of my Lord to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful.' (*an-Naml:* 40)

The point is that the amount of time which any given action requires is conversely proportional to the capability of the agent; the stronger and more capable the agent is, the less time they need – as we explained in our discussion on the Prophet's journey to Jerusalem and subsequent ascent into Heaven (*al-isra' wa l-mi'raj*) the 'extent of which is a thousand years of those which you count.' (*as-Sajda:* 5) A thousand of our human years.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in the chapter of *as-Sajda:*

ذَٰلِكَ عَٰلِمُ ٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ٦

Such is He who knows all that is unseen as well
as what is seen, the Almighty, the Merciful [6]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 6)

The demonstrative 'such' refers to Allah's arrangement of affairs of all of creation between the heavens and the earth and His following-up of the affairs and their results. Allah has the power to do this because He *Glorified is He* 'the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed' and because He *Glorified is He* is 'the Exalted in Might, the Merciful.' (*as-Sajda:* 6) The True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us to understand that those in positions of authority are responsible for following up with their subordinates.

Although the fact that Allah possesses knowledge of what is beyond our mortal ken assumes that He possesses knowledge of our visible world, He

Glorified is He nevertheless mentions the latter as well so that no one will think that Allah is oblivious to what is present in our world. The True Lord *Glorified is He* can discern every sound and trace it back to its speaker; indeed, in this context, knowledge of what is openly said can actually be more subtle than knowledge of the Great Beyond.

'The Almighty' refers to the fact that Allah is indomitable, that He cannot be led astray, that His will toward the universe cannot be deflected – and yet, He is 'The Merciful.'

ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحۡسَنَ كُلَّ شَيۡءٍ خَلَقَهُۥۖ وَبَدَأَ خَلۡقَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنِ مِن طِينٖ ٧

Who gave everything its perfect form. He first created man from clay [7] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 7)

'To create' means to bring something into existence from nothing, and then imbue it with a specific wisdom, a special purpose and mission. Allah has not created anything in vain, having fashioned everything to operate according to His law. Before Allah *Glorified is He* sets out to create something, He already knows exactly what He is creating and what purpose it will fulfil; to this end, He moulds everything with very precise specifications which enable them to carry out their purpose.

This divine design in everything may not be immediately apparent, as some creatures seem poorly designed. But as a wise man once realized after contemplating Allah's universe, it would be impossible to create a more ingenious or wondrous world. Similarly, there was once a child who, seeing a blacksmith take ramrod iron poles and then bend and curve them, asked his father why the blacksmith did not just leave the iron rods straight. The father then explained that the iron cannot fulfil its purpose unless it is bent. After all, if a hook were arrow-straight, it certainly could not carry out its intended function.

This also helps us understand the Hadith where the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* says that, 'Women were created from a [bent] rib. The most curved part of the rib is the uppermost part; if you try to straighten it out, you will break it, and if you leave it, it will remain bent. So take care of your womenfolk and gently advise them.’(1)

The ribcage can only fulfil its job of protecting the heart and lungs if it is crooked. Just as in women, it is this very crookedness which lends it the attributes of compassion, nurture, and protectiveness. Thus, a pregnant woman will show unparalleled gentleness to her unborn baby and go to great lengths to protect it, and when she bears it, she becomes that much more loving and protective.

The Prophet was not trying to insult or belittle women, but rather to point out that this ‘crookedness’ complements their role. For women, their role in life demands that their compassion outweigh their rationality, while for men, their rationality dominates their emotions so that they can better carry out the jobs they are charged with.

The point is that Allah has created everyone for a specific purpose. Every one of us, despite whatever manifest deficiencies we may have, possesses some strength that sets us apart. For instance, you might wonder why Allah would create someone without their full mental faculties, but perhaps they may compensate with some other skill, such as Herculean strength. Conversely, you might belittle someone for being short, but perhaps their limited height might make them more suitable for certain jobs.

There is another reason for this. If, for instance, you compare the number of students in elementary school with the number in college, of course there are significantly more in the former. Had it been otherwise, there would be no balance in society because if everyone were an alpha with a PhD, who would perform the more humble menial labour? This disparity is a social necessity because it might sound great to have a million Einsteins with a million genius plans, but if there are not legions of people willing to do the more monotonous work of implementing them, the plans are fairly useless. The worth of each person derives from how well they perform their trade, regardless of what that trade might be.

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(1) Quoted by Al-Bukhari in his *(Authentic Narrations)* (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*) (3331) and Muslim in his *(Authentic Narrations)* (*Sahih Muslim*) (1468) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra. As An-Nawawi noted in his commentary on Muslim, ‘i.e., the woman was created from the most bent part of the rib so that there is no use except to have patience with her crookedness.

And as we discussed before, no one should ever consider themselves superior to anyone else given that, while they might excel in one specific trait, others will excel them in other areas. The Creator has spread diverse talents among all of us. That is as the Quran says in this regard: ‘O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them’. (*al-Hujurat:* 11)

Allah is the One ‘Who perfected everything which He created’. (*as-Sajda:* 7) Every creature has a specific function for which it has been formed. The tides of destiny can indeed be most strange: you can have identical twins – one working in a perfume shop and the other working at a sewage treatment plant; – both perfectly content with their line of work.

Indeed, those who are content with the defects Allah has decreed for them can surpass those who are otherwise well formed. A one-armed man will often have considerably larger hand capable of dealing a knockout blow. Such people often have skills or strengths lacking in ordinary folk.

You might object: If Allah has perfected everything He has created, then what about disbelief? After all, Allah created it, and it still exists; how is this supposed to be beautiful and wondrous?

I swear to Allah, if it were not for the excesses and crimes of the disbelievers, no one would have come to love faith, just as if it were not for inequity, we would never have truly savoured the sweetness of justice. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* creates the antithesis of something in order to drive us to it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then continues, ‘And began the creation of man from clay.’ (*as-Sajda:* 7) This creature, this human, which Allah has honoured above all other beings, has been created from clay which, as an inanimate object, is on the lowest possible rung of the hierarchy of creation. As we mentioned before, all other creatures ultimately serve us, whether directly or indirectly: animals (which are closest to us), plants, and then inanimate objects. And it is from the latter that we are fashioned.

Allah makes it up to these lowly inanimate objects by obligating us to bow down and kiss one at least once in our lifetime. More specifically, when we are performing the pilgrimage, we are required to express our reverence to the Lord by kissing the black stone on the *Ka'ba.* The pilgrims push through the immense throngs and fight over this honour, even though it is a lifeless stone and they are nothing less than Allah's deputies on earth. The sole purpose of this exercise is to smash our sense of superiority so that we can learn to be humble toward our fellow man.

As previously discussed, those who have an agenda to try to find mistakes in the holy scripture claim that the Quran is inconsistent in defining the primordial substance of humankind, since in one verse it says that we are created '…out of a liquid…' (*al-Mursalat:* 20), while in another it says, '…out of dust…' (*al-Kahf:* 37) and in yet a third it says, 'out of the essence of clay' (*al-Mu'minun:* 12), while in yet a fourth it says, 'out of sounding clay' (*al-Hijr:* 33) and in yet a fifth it says, 'out of sounding clay, out of dark slime transmuted.' (*al-Hijr:* 26)

But these merely represent different stages of a single substance; the wording does not necessarily indicate that any of them are the primary substance. Water plus dust produces clay, which when left out will start emitting a different odour and become a transmuted dark slime, which in turn, if left out, will dry and harden into sounding clay. Hence, there is no contradiction between these various verses and it is perfectly correct to say that humankind was made out of any one of them.

When these verses speak of the creation of humankind, they are referring specifically to that primordial man Adam *peace be upon him* whose essence Allah formed from a liquid disdained. Allah *Glorified is He* first fashioned us from clay and then provided us with mates with whom we reproduce to form other men and women.

Nevertheless, despite having laid out these intricate biological processes, the Lord *Glorified is He* still retains His absolute power to create as He pleases. He basically is saying to us: Do you not dare think that I cannot create more humans without both a man and a woman, for I can create without any parents as I did with Adam, I can create someone without a mother as I did with Eve, and I can create someone without a father as I did with 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

Conversely Allah may furnish all the necessary conditions for procreation to occur, but then make the woman barren.

Allah has demonstrated His ability to create a human being with every conceivable combination of factors: ‘To Allah belong the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what he wills. He gives to whom He wills female [children], and He gives to whom He wills males. Or He makes them [both] males and females, and He renders whom He wills barren. Indeed, He is Knowing and Competent.’ (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

The point is that human reproduction is completely subject to Allah’s power, and is not simply a mechanical operation. Indeed, it is nothing less than a divine present: ‘He gives to whom He wills female [children].’ Note how the Quran mentions the gift of girl babies first, which is the less-preferred gender for many people. But those who are blessed with a baby girl should rejoice at Allah’s gift and know that Allah may compensate them by marrying their daughter to a man who will prove to be more loving than their biological son ever would have been.

Similarly, those who are barren should see their sterility as a gift from Allah and should trust that Allah will compensate them by providing them with other people’s children. After all, why should we not view sterility as a blessing, given how some children are perfectly capable of committing patricide in cold blood?

We should always express contentment and faith toward Allah, whether we are given children or deprived of them.

When Adam was created from clay, he was immediately fashioned as a full-formed adult; he did not start out as a child who had to go through the usual cycle of growth. As the Hadith mentions, Allah created him according to his image – i.e., Adam’s own image.

The ambiguity in the wording of the Hadith in Arabic(1) has led some to claim that the pronoun ‘his’ in ‘his image’ actually refers to Allah, meaning that Adam was created according to Allah's image (not to be confused with His reality); for Allah *Glorified is He* is living and bestows us with His life, He is strong and bestows us with His strength, He is rich and bestows us with His wealth, just as He is All Knowing and bestows us with His knowledge.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated from the Prophet* peace and blessings be upon him *that, “Allah created Adam according to his/His image, making him sixty cubits tall.” Related by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) (6227) and Muslim in his (Sahih) (2841). In other words,=*

Hence the saying, 'Adorn yourselves with Allah's virtues', i.e., the traits of His manifested (as opposed to inherent) attributes. We should adorn ourselves with the divine attributes and make them our distinguishing virtue. Among these traits is that we should be harsh with the oppressors and gentle to the oppressed, as Allah *Glorified is He* describes the true believers: 'forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves.' (*al-Fath:* 29)

'Humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54): These contradictory traits come together in the true believer who takes on the characteristics appropriate for the given context.

In fact, laboratory testing has established that the sixteen primary elements which constitute the human body are the very same elements found in soil which include (from most to least): oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, sodium, magnesium, and potassium.

ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُۥ مِن سُلَٰلَةٍ مِّن مَّآءٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿٨﴾

Then made his descendants from an extract of underrated fluid [8] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 8)

Allah creates this posterity from a 'liquid disdained,' which is the mixture of the man's semen and the woman's ovary.

Allah describes this liquid as 'disdained,' because it flows through the urinary tract and is then simply washed down the drain like filth. But this seemingly humble fluid is truly filled with wonders. Allah bless Al-'Aqqad(1)

= *Allah Glorified is He created Adam in a certain image which he continued to have until the end of his days, even after he had descended to earth. This statement was meant to refute the idea that Adam possessed different traits in paradise [as narrated by Ibn Hajar: (Fath al-Bari' 3/11)].*

(1) 'Abbas Mahmud Ibrahim Al-'Aqqad hailed from a family originally with roots in Damietta, Egypt, but which had subsequently relocated to Al-Mahallat Al-Kubra. One=

who once remarked, ‘The elements of the entire world could fit in half-a-thimble.’ Just think how many sperm shoot out of a man all at once. The supreme intricacy of how this simple seed contains the complete blueprint for a fully formed human being with their hue, sex, and other traits, is a powerful demonstration of the Creator’s grandeur.

As we mentioned before, every single one of us carries a living part of our father Adam within us. The True Lord *Glorified is He* continues in this chapter:

ثُمَّ سَوَّىٰهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِهِۦۖ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلسَّمْعَ
وَٱلْأَبْصَٰرَ وَٱلْأَفْـِٔدَةَۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ٩

Then He moulded him; He breathed from His Spirit into him; He gave you hearing, sight, and minds. How seldom you are grateful! [9] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 9)

It was that primordial man who was the first to be fashioned in due proportion from clay by Allah; as the Quran notes elsewhere: ‘And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration.’ (*al-Hijr:* 29) During the course of this, Adam progressed through the various stages of development mentioned above – just as his progeny do – from a drop of sperm, into a germ-cell, then into an embryonic lump, etc, after which the spirit was breathed into him.

Although none of us have witnessed our own creation or the creation of the species, Allah *Glorified is He* has provided us with visible evidence to deduce this, namely through death. For the antithesis always represents the reverse image of the thesis; thus, when you go to tear down a huge building, you send the wrecking ball to take down the top floor, which was the last

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= of his ancestors was known for 1) braiding silk, hence the surname Al-‘Aqqad. ‘Abbas himself was born in Aswan in 1889 C.E. to a Kurdish mother whose elementary school he attended. He worked in the railways, the Ministry of Religious Endowments in Cairo, as a teacher in several civil schools, and finally as a journalist and author. He was very popular for over half a century during which time he composed eighty-three books, the most famous of which was *(Ingenuities)* (*Al-‘Abqariyyat*). He passed away in Cairo in 1964 at seventy-five years *[(The Notables) (Al-A‘lam) 266/3].*

thing to be finished during construction. Similarly, by rewinding the stages of our own demise, we can reconstruct how we came to be imbued with life.

The first thing to go in death is the spirit, which was the last element to be placed in at birth. Then the body starts to become rigor mortis, i.e., it stiffens up, corresponding to the sounding clay-stage in creation. Then the cadaver putrefies, becoming like transmuted dark slime, after which it decomposes and all the water in the body evaporates, leaving only dust, from which it all began.

The point is that we should take death, which we have witnessed with our own eyes, as proof of the veracity of the Quranic narrative of our origins.

He '…made for you hearing and vision and hearts' As mentioned earlier, anatomists have delineated what purpose each organ serves and when exactly they begin to function after birth. After the child exits the womb, it is their ears which start working first; notice how, if you snap your fingers in front of their eyes, they will not blink, but if you snap them next to their ears, they will definitely flinch. This is because infants are born with a fully developed auditory sense, while their eyesight takes another three to ten days to kick in. Also note how our hearing is always on, even when we are asleep, while our eyes conk out with us while we rest.

This contrast is alluded to in the story of the people of the cave. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to put these righteous youth in a deep slumber, He made sure to cover up their ears to keep them from being disturbed by the howls of the winds and the wild beasts that fill the desert landscape: 'So We cast [a cover of sleep] over their ears within the cave for a number of years' (*al-Kahf:* 11).

The ear is the first organ to become fully operational, followed by the eyes, followed by the other organs, the last of which is the nervous system. That is why an infant can have a fever of forty degrees and still go on bouncing around in blissful oblivion. This is because their nervous system has still not developed to the point where this would cause them discomfort. This is why the Quran always mentions the faculty of hearing before the faculty of sight, with the single exception being the verse where Allah *the Almighty* says: '…we have seen and heard…' (*as-Sajda:* 12). This is because the Quran wants to emphasize the visualization of the scene of Resurrection, where the deniers of truth are suddenly confronted with the terror of the Hereafter. The visual scene arrests them before they can hear voice summoning us to Allah's judgment. With regards to the Quran's rhetorical style, it is really interesting how the plural for 'hearing' *asma'* shares the same morphological form as the plural for 'sight' *absar* given how Arabic plurals are often wildly divergent. Nevertheless, this verse uses the singular for 'hearing' but the plural for 'sight'. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…He gave you hearing, sight…' (*as-Sajda:* 9). The question is: why? Scholars have said: Our ears cannot seal themselves up, whereas our eyes can be covered in darkness by the eyelids. Thus, while you and I will always hear external sounds in an identical manner. With regards to vision, my eye might perceive something differently than yours. 'Sight' is never mentioned in the singular in the Quran except for in one verse where Allah *the Almighty* says: '…surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that.' (*al-Isra':* 36) This is because the verse is discussing how each organ must testify to the truth, and since they all have one responsibility, there must be one generic faculty to carry this responsibility. It is appropriate that Allah *the Almighty* mentions these senses after discussing our creation, given that, when we are in our mother's womb, we are completely oblivious, and it is only after these organs develop that we can learn and acquire an understanding of what is going on around us. As Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers— you did not know anything— and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks.' (*an-Nahl:* 78) These organs are essential conditions for us to carry out our duty as Allah's deputies on earth because it is only through them that we can engage our social environment. In order to really learn, we need to use each of our senses in their appropriate context: the tongue for speech, the eye for vision, the ear for hearing, the nose for smell, and the fingers for touching. These 'exterior senses' allow us to discern all other derivative physical traits. For instance, our sense of measuring distance enables us to sense the thickness of an object, while our sense of muscle allows us to sense weight and heaviness. The point is that when we are born, we need these senses to be able to engage in society. If we lived in isolation, we might be able to do without some of these senses, such as speech. But since it is our nature to live in a group, we need to be able to communicate with others, which before anything require that we are able to hear so that we can learn how to express our thoughts. Language is acquired through listening; a child reared in an Arabic-speaking environment will end up speaking Arabic, while a child who is brought up in an English-speaking environment will grow up speaking English. The tongue imitates what the ear hears; without immersion in a living spoken language, it is impossible to acquire fluency. The chapter of *al-Baqara* describes the hypocrites as: ‘deaf, dumb…’ (*al-Baqara:* 18), the latter quality being a direct consequence of the former, Hearing, which is our first functioning sense, provides us with the necessary grounding to be able to start to interact with our environment. Learning how to read requires a teacher to explain how to pronounce the written letters. Conversely, without someone to read the letters and words out loud, it is not possible to learn how to correctly pronounce or write them. Furthermore, it is through hearing that Allah’s Word is conveyed from the heavens down to the earth; and this is why hearing is usually given precedence over seeing in the Quran. The Quran tells us that Allah *the Almighty* taught humanity words such ‘earth’ and ‘sky’ by articulating them out loud, just as we humans teach our children by pointing to our ear and voicing ‘e-a-r.’ After the students learn how to read from their teacher, they can then read by themselves, switching their focus from listening to seeing. They can then foster their academic bent further by learning and figuring new things out on their own which even their teacher might not know. This is in fact the function of the heart-mind (*Al-fu’ad*); Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and made for you the ears and the eyes and the hearts…’ (*as-Sajda:* 9). Concepts are formed through all these senses, enabling us to become fully-formed with the faculty to learn and to teach in turn. Spoken language can only be passed on through the spoken word. I learned how to communicate from my parents, who in turn learned from their parents, all the way back in an unbroken chain to Adam *Allah’s peace be upon him* the father of all humankind. But from whom did Adam acquire his language? From Allah *the Almighty* Who taught him the names of all things? He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; then He said: Tell me the names of those if you are right.’ (*al-Baqara:* 31) This makes sense, given how it would have been impossible for us to have come up with the idea of a spoken language without ever having experienced it. Nevertheless, some people object to this explanation of the origin of language, since it seems to posit that language is immutable. This is true to a certain extent, however, we are capable of using the language Allah *the Almighty* gave Adam *peace be upon him* to coin new words for new concepts. So, where did words like ‘radio’ or ‘television’ come from? As new concepts, they needed new and unprecedented appellations (although it should be noted that words can only be used to indicate pre-existing concepts). This is the job of the language academies, that is, to produce new coinages or approve of those already in circulation. The point is that we come up with new terms and then agree on them so that they can be used to express certain concepts. But even though they are new and unprecedented, these terms are still ultimately driven from the language which Adam *peace be upon him* was taught. Although language may have originally come from a stock of unchanging words and structures, it has subsequently developed into a system very much shaped by human innovation. After mentioning His Favours on us, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…little is it that you give thanks.’ (*as-Sajda:* 9)

Even though we are obliged to express our gratitude for these blessings, very few of us do so. We really should thank Allah *the Almighty* every time we use our ears, eyes or minds to explore new ideas. The true believer never ceases thanking their Lord *the Almighty*; every day for them is a holiday, a special occasion to celebrate Allah’s Praise. We celebrate special holidays like *Eid Al-Fitr* when we break the fast and perform the *Eid* prayer, and *Eid Al-Adha* when we commemorate Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* offer to sacrifice his son – which was meant to spare all of us from having to undergo such a terrible ordeal – by sacrificing an animal and fulfilling the rites of the pilgrimage. But outside of these two official holidays, should we not rejoice every time we pray, or fast, or give alms? Why do not we celebrate every time we obey Allah’s Commands and avoid His Prohibitions? Why do we not rejoice here in this world in anticipation of that day of supreme joy when we shall be recompensed for all these good deeds with the bliss of Heaven? In another chapter, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely (as for) those who believe and do good, their Lord will guide them by their faith; there shall flow from beneath them rivers in gardens of bliss. Their cry in it shall be: Glory to You, O Allah! And their greeting in it shall be: Peace; and the last of their cry shall be: Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.’ (*Yunus:* 9-10)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَقَالُوٓاْ أَءِذَا ضَلَلۡنَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ أَءِنَّا لَفِي خَلۡقٖ جَدِيدِۢۚ بَلۡ هُم بِلِقَآءِ رَبِّهِمۡ كَٰفِرُونَ ١٠

They say, ‘What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?’ In fact, they deny the meeting with their Lord [10] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 10)

As for the saying of Allah: ‘…we have disappeared into the earth…’ (*as-Sajda:* 10), it indicates their wonder of how could they be created anew after their mortal organs have faded into the ground and the last traces of their existence have vanished, having been recycled back into other living organisms. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘… shall we really be created anew…’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) meaning that will Allah really piece us back together? Allah *the Almighty* responds to them: ‘…nay, they deny the meeting with their Lord.’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) The word *bal* (nay) indicates that what was just said is false, and that the truth of the matter is as follows: they are not really trying to question the veracity of Resurrection – the clear signs of its reality making it rather difficult to plausibly deny – but rather of the inevitable meeting with Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…nay, they deny the meeting with their Lord.’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) The word ‘nay’ refutes their claim and introduces a new fact that they do not deny the Resurrection but the meeting with their Lord. He *the Almighty* says: ‘…nay, they deny the meeting with their Lord.’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) This is because it is impossible to deny Resurrection with its clear evidence. Or as Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘Were We then fatigued with the first creation? Yet are they in doubt with regard to a new creation’? (*Qaf:* 15) Allah’s Ability to create from nothing assumes His Ability to recreate, given that He merely needs to reorder substances which are already there, since to recreate something is of course easier than to create it from scratch, a point which is clear in the following verse in which Allah says: ‘And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is easy to Him…’ (*ar-Rum:* 27). Although they are denying only the meeting with Allah, and not Resurrection itself, their denial of the former necessarily amounts to a denial of the latter, for the Last Day is the stage which allows for our meeting with Allah *the Almighty* – for which they have no small amount of aversion.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُلۡ يَتَوَفَّىٰكُم مَّلَكُ ٱلۡمَوۡتِ ٱلَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمۡ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمۡ تُرۡجَعُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Say, ‘The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you, and then you will be brought back to your Lord’ [11]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 11)

Note how the disbelievers focus on Resurrection, which represents the renewal of life. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They say, ‘What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew…’ (*as-Sajda:* 10)? Yet the Quran here focuses on death and its very antithesis to remind them of the reality of the next life. The verb *tawaffa* (gather) originally comes from the expression ‘I reclaimed (*tawaffaytu*) my loan from him’, that is, I completely took back all my money. Here, of course, this refers to death (*Al-Wafat*) which also shares the same root. Sometimes, the Quran attributes the process of death to Allah *the Almighty* as in Allah’s saying: ‘Allah takes the souls at the time of their death…’ (*az-Zumar:* 42), while others to the angel of death, as in Allah’s saying: ‘…Say, ‘The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you…’ (*as-Sajda:* 11), and sometimes to another one of Allah’s angelic deputies, as in Allah’s saying: ‘…until when death comes to one of you, Our Messengers cause him to die, and they are not remiss.’ (*al-An‘am:* 61) Allah *the Almighty* Alone is the One Who can bestow life and revoke it. This is why He *the Almighty* has forbidden killing, and has damned those who commit murder because they destroy Allah’s Creation. When someone is destined to die, Allah *the Almighty* permits ‘Azra’il(1) to take his soul. There are three stages in this process: first, when He *the Almighty* decides to reclaim someone’s soul, He issues His Order to ‘Azra’il who then sends the order down to the angels responsible for this task; lastly, these angels carry out the command. In the chapter of *al-An‘am,* Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…Our Messengers cause him to die…’ (*al-An‘am:* 61) which means that the angels completely reclaim his soul Note how the Quran does not say that the angels destroy his soul. So, we describe someone who has passed away as having had his soul seized, meaning that his soul has returned to the Heavenly host where it had abided before it was embedded in the body. After the soul is taken, the body decomposes back into its original elements, which then dissolve into the earth to be subsequently recycled into various organisms. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They say, "What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew"'? (*as-Sajda:* 10) Death does not entail annihilation; both the soul and body still exist, albeit in modified form, and they can be reassembled by Allah *the Almighty* at any time. This point is essential to understand the story of 'Isa (Jesus); Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and when Allah said: O 'Isa, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me…' (*Al-'Imran:* 55). Some Scholars maintain that this verse means that 'Isa *peace be upon him* passed away first, after which he was raised up to Allah. Here, the preposition *waw* (and) does not indicate chronological order. For instance, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when We made a covenant with the Prophets and with you, and with Nuh (Noah) and Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam…' (*al-Ahzab:* 7), the *(waw)*-preposition cannot possibly indicate chronological sequence, given that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came thousands of years after Nuh *peace be upon him*. The reason Allah *the Almighty* mentions the passage of 'Isa *peace be upon him* before his being raised up is to stress that the Messiah was a mortal, subject to death. Again, the verb *tawaffa* does not only mean that Allah *the Almighty* caused 'Isa to die, but also that He *the Almighty* completely reclaimed his soul, which in turn indicates that he was completely raised unto Allah, and therefore could not have been crucified. Allah's saying: 'Say, 'The Angel of Death put in charge of you will reclaim you…' (*as-Sajda:* 11) is a response to the disbelievers' statement in which they say: '…When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew…' (*as-Sajda:* 10). Allah *the Almighty* Who has created us, is not saying that He will completely eliminate our existence at the termination of our life span, but rather that He *the Almighty* will reclaim us. After we die, our souls and the elements which make up our body remain with Allah. Given that the Lord created us from nothing, He is perfectly capable of piecing back together every atom of our body. As for the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…put in charge of you…' (*as-Sajda:* 11), it means that the angel of death constantly accompanies us, attentively watching over us – there can be no escape. As the Gnostics say, 'death is an arrow which is unwaveringly flying toward us, our life span representing nothing more than the distance between us and that arrow which will need eventually pierce our heart.' As we discussed before, the Arabic word *musiba* (catastrophe) is derived from the verb *asaba* because it is something that will ineluctably befall (*yusibu*) you. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and then you will be brought back to your Lord' (*as-Sajda:* 11), it means that this will take place on the Day of Judgment.

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(1) ‘Azra’il is the Hebrew name of the Angel of Death.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰٓ إِذِ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ نَاكِسُوا۟ رُءُوسِهِمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ رَبَّنَآ
أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَٱرْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَٰلِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

[Prophet], if only you could see the wrongdoers hang their heads before their Lord: 'Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard, send us back and we shall do good. [Now] we are convinced' [12] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 12)

This verse describes for us one of the scenes from the Resurrection where the wicked will be humiliatingly dragged to their well-deserved torment. This is similar to witnessing a criminal being dragged away in handcuffs by the police in utter humiliation; just watching them being given their just desserts after all the mischief they have caused makes you feel better. During this scene, Allah *the Almighty* is immediately addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and by extension, the Muslim *Ummah* (adherents of Islam), in general: '[Prophet], if only you could see the wrongdoers hang their heads before their Lord…' (*as-Sajda:* 12). The implicit message in this verse is, '…this extraordinary sight would make you feel better about all the suffering they had caused you.' Notice the nuance of this expression: '…[Prophet], if only you could see…' (*as-Sajda:* 12); the Quran did not say, for instance, 'If you only knew…' because when Allah *the Almighty* conveys something to you, it is even more real and certain than if your very eyes had seen it; after all, your eyes can deceive you, whereas Allah's Word is the immutable truth. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the wrongdoers hang their heads…' (*as-Sajda:* 12), the Arabic word *nakas* means to lower that which is normally raised up. In this context, what is being lowered is the head, which is the highest and most dignified appendage of the human person. This verb also appears in the scene in the chapter of *al-Anbiya'* wherein Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* smashes the idols with a hatchet, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then they were made to hang down their heads: Certainly you know that they do not speak.' (*al-Anbiya':* 65) In response to Ibrahim's challenge to ask their idols about who was responsible for this vandalism, the polytheists momentarily came to their senses and reproached themselves for their sin, before relapsing back into their wicked ways; Allah *the Almighty* says about this: '…Certainly you know that they do not speak.' (*al-Anbiya':* 65) This root also appears in the chapter of *Ya Sin* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And whomsoever We cause to live long, We reduce (him) to an abject state in constitution; do they not then understand?' (*Ya Sin:* 68) This means that after bestowing on someone youth and vigour, Allah *the Almighty* will later make them old and decrepit, a point which is proved by the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that after having knowledge he does not know anything…' (*an-Nahl:* 70). After a lusty youth full of vitality, we end up walking with a cane, or perhaps not walking at all, needing someone to carry us like an infant; this is the natural decline *(Al-Tankis)* which awaits us in old age. This should make us realise that dying before our twilight years can be a huge blessing, as it both spares us our physical suffering and relieves our family of the burden of having to take care of us. The scene of the wicked bowing their heads in shame is also meant as a warning to those who would dare sin against Allah. Those who comport themselves with arrogance in this world will be forced to lower their heads in shame in the next, while those who humble themselves before Allah *the Almighty* will have their heads raised up high in dignity in the Hereafter. This is the meaning of the Hadith: 'Those who humble themselves before Allah will be raised up by Him.(1) But this also has another significance:

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(1) *See Abu Na'im, Hilyat Al-Awliya', 46/8, on the authority of Abu Hurayra who related that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Those who humble themselves=*

in the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* will punish the wicked with what they themselves used to do; in this case, it was the disbelievers who themselves used to hang their heads low, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Now surely they fold up their breasts that they may conceal (their enmity) from Him…’ (*Hud:* 5). This means that they would lower their heads so that they would not have to confront Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*. The truth exudes a certain authority, a certain force, which causes falsehood to melt in front of it. Hence, when the followers of the Truth challenge the followers of falsehood by saying, ‘Come and face us; look us straight in the eye!’ the latter inevitably run away in shame, as an open confrontation would most definitely not be in their interest. This unwillingness to face the truth can lead people to commit the most horrendous crimes, including murder. Murder, instead of being a sign of strength, is actually a sign of weakness and cowardice because, if the murderer were truly strong, they would not feel threatened by the presence of their nemesis. Another example of how Allah *the Almighty* punishes the sinners with their own actions is the way He deals with those misers who hoard their wealth; He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and (as for) those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah’s way, announce to them a painful chastisement; On the day when it shall be heated in the fire of hell, then their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it; this is what you hoarded up for yourselves, therefore taste what you hoarded.’ (*at-Tawba:* 34-35) Glory be to Allah! This is almost exactly what they themselves used to do to others. If a poor person came to them to ask for some help, they would give them an evil look, and then turn away from them and show them their side and then show them their back – the very limbs which Allah *the Almighty* brands in punishment. The point is that those who have any sense should take care to avoid committing these sins; otherwise they will find themselves repaid in kind later on. On the Last Day, when the wicked are bowing their heads in shame before Allah *the Almighty* they will proclaim: ‘…we have seen and heard…’ (*as-Sajda:* 12). This is a direct quote even though the Quran does not segue into it with ‘They would say…’, since classical Arabic does

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= *before Allah the Almighty will be raised up by Him’; and also from the Hadith of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (129/7), ‘People, be humble, for I heard Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him say: ‘Those who humble themselves before Allah will be raised up by Him.’*

not employ quotation marks, it is usually necessary to indicate a quote with the verb ‘to say’. This omission alludes to how supremely difficult it will be for them to spit out these words, to admit their cardinal sin and beg for forgiveness. As noted above, this is the single verse in the Quran where the faculty of sight is mentioned before the faculty of hearing, the reason being that when the Hour arrives, we will behold the terrors of the Judgment with our eyes before our eardrums reverberate with any sound. Allah *the Almighty* visualises for us this overwhelming terror by describing how it will be, saying: ‘…and you shall see men intoxicated, and they shall not be intoxicated but the chastisement of Allah will be severe.’ (*al-Hajj:* 2) Going back to our conversation on the Quranic treatment of the heart and the faculties of hearing and seeing: there is another important verse I forgot to mention; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great punishment for them.’ (*al-Baqara:* 7) Here, the heart is mentioned first. Both the heart and the ears are ‘sealed,’ while the eyes are ‘veiled.’ In the previous verse, these organs are mentioned as Allah’s Gift to us, starting with hearing, moving to sight, and then ending with the heart. But since this verse describes how Allah *the Almighty* takes these blessings away, it accordingly begins with that which is most important. So He *the Almighty* mentioned heart, hearing and sight, respectively. Going back to Allah’s saying: ‘…Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard…’ (*as-Sajda:* 12), what exactly is it that they finally saw and heard? On the Day of Judgment, the deniers of Truth will admit the Existence of Allah; He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and there he finds Allah…’ (*an-Nur:* 39) meaning that the first thing they see is that Allah *the Almighty* is Unique, completely disassociated from any of the alleged partners in His Divinity which they used to worship. Only then do the disbelievers realise that they have no protector or intercessor beside Allah *the Almighty*. As for the saying of Allah: ‘…we have heard…’ (*as-Sajda:* 12), it means they have finally heard the revelation and have born witness to the veracity of its provenance. Now they finally admit that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not making up the Quran, that he was not some rhymester, or voodoo artist, or liar, or any of the other awful things they used to call him with.(1) But what good does this admission do them now? How can it avail them anything(1) now that they have been brought to the realm of judgment, and are no longer in the realm of work and moral responsibility? This very much resembles what Pharaoh said in his last moments as he lay drowning beneath the billows of the Red Sea; Allah *the Almighty* says: '…he said: I believe that there is no god, but He in Whom the children of Israel believe…' (*Yunus:* 90). But as Allah *the Almighty* responded: 'What! Now! And indeed you disobeyed before and you were of the mischief-makers.' (*Yunus:* 91) He *the Almighty* says: '… Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard…' (*as-Sajda:* 12). The deniers of Truth are confessing that they were in the wrong and that they now want to do what is right, as the Quran says elsewhere: 'Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: Send me back, my Lord, send me back. Haply I may do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 99-100). But as Allah *the Almighty* says in this regard: '… By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 100) because the truth of the matter is what Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: '…and if they were sent back, they would certainly go back to that which they are forbidden, and most surely they are liars.' (*al-An'am:* 28) Similarly, in this scene, the deniers of Truth cry out as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Our Lord, now that we have seen and heard, send us back and we shall do good. [Now] we are convinced.' (*as-Sajda:* 12) Can they really claim to have achieved 'certainty' under these circumstances? After all, to possess certain faith (*yaqin*) entails holding an absolute conviction in something beyond your senses. Given that these disbelievers have become certain of the truth only after it has become physically manifest before them, their newfound faith does not really amount to the proverbial mound of beans(2).

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(1) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, 5353/7; he says: ‘The meaning of the saying of Allah, ‘...[Now] we have seen...’ (as-Sajda: 12) refers to what they used to reject as a lie, while ‘...we=*

= *have heard…' (as-Sajda: 12) refers to what they used to deny as true. Another possible interpretation is: '… [Now] we have seen…' (as-Sajda: 12) refers to the truth of Allah's threats, and '…we have heard…' (as-Sajda: 12) refers to Allah's Affirmation of the veracity of His Prophets.'*

(1) *Qatada notes that, 'They finally regained their vision when it could no longer be of any use to them, just as they finally regained their hearing when it could no longer be of any use to them.' See As-Suyti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 544/6, on the authority of 'Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abu Hatim.*

(2) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, 5354/7; he says: 'It has been said that the meaning of '…[Now] we are convinced…' (as-Sajda: 12) is that their doubts have been cleared up and that=*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَوۡ شِئۡنَا لَأٓتَيۡنَا كُلَّ نَفۡسٍ هُدَىٰهَا وَلَٰكِنۡ حَقَّ ٱلۡقَوۡلُ مِنِّي لَأَمۡلَأَنَّ
جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ ٱلۡجِنَّةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ أَجۡمَعِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

‘If it had been Our will, We could certainly have given every soul its true guidance, but My words have come true. “I shall be sure to fill Hell with jinn and men together” [13]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 13)

At this point, you might pose the question: ‘Why does Allah *the Almighty* make some people believers and others deniers of the Truth, some people righteous and others wicked? Why did Allah *the Almighty* not create all of us to be good Friday mosque-goers? Is this too difficult for Him *the Almighty*?! No, of course, this is not arduous for Him *the Almighty* in the slightest, as demonstrated by the fact that He has made the angels completely obedient to Him and ready to carry out all His commands whenever He orders them. As He *the Almighty* says: ‘…they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6) So too are the earth, heavens and mountains perpetually engaged in His Worship and glorification: ‘…He knows the prayer of each one and its glorification…’ (*an-Nur:* 41). Allah *the Almighty* also says: ‘… and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification…’ (*al-Isra’:* 44). Allah *the Almighty* does in fact enable some people to comprehend the hymns of other creatures, as is the case with Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* for instance: ‘…and We made the mountains, and the birds to celebrate Our praise with Dawud…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79). The mountains of course praise Allah *the Almighty* simultaneously with all the other creatures in their environs, but with Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* they would sing in harmony, a single chorus echoing a single hymn. The story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* similarly tells us how creatures such as the hoopoe bird appreciate

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= *although they had heard and seen during their worldly lives, they had not engaged in contemplation, and were therefore no better than those who were deaf and blind. When, in the Hereafter, they finally woke up to reality, it was as if they had just started hearing and seeing for the first time.’*

the Oneness of Allah, and so do the most pious human; thus, after the hoopoe carried out a reconnaissance mission on the court of the Queen of Sheba (Balqis), it said: '... I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah, and the Shaytan (Satan) has made their deeds fair-seeming to them and thus turned them from the way, so they do not go aright.' (*an-Naml:* 24) It also said: 'That they do not make obeisance to Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth and knows what you hide and what you make manifest.' (*an-Naml:* 25) One of the ways in which Allah *the Almighty* demonstrates His Unbounded Power is to make the weak strong and the strong weak. The first believers were meek and oppressed, but after they entered Islam, Allah *the Almighty* raised them up and made them masters. There is a famous story(1) where Abu Bakr once invited lowly people such as 'Ammar and Bilal into his domicile, while leaving the big-shots of Quraysh standing outside the door. His father reproached him for letting in the slaves while leaving the nobles out in the cold, but Abu Bakr responded, 'Father, these wretches have been exalted by their submission to Allah; if the leaders of Quraysh have their noses bent out of shape because these servants have been let into my house before them, how much more apoplectic do you think they will be when Allah *the Almighty* lets them into paradise first?' The fact that – of all people – Abu Bakr would do this is pretty amazing, given how he was usually known as being extremely gentle. These are characteristic examples of the sort of paradoxical characteristic traits and ironic table turning we find in the Islamic canon. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* has the believers mock their erstwhile tormentors in the Hereafter: 'Surely they who are guilty used to laugh at those who believe. And when they passed by them, they winked at one another.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-30); this means that the Arab polytheists used to mock the early Muslims, just as today the sinners sarcastically say to the pious, 'Lift us up with your wings.' It would have been bad enough if this were all the sinners did, but they then go back to their buddies and brag about how they have harassed the believers; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when they returned to their own followers they returned exulting. And when they saw them, they said: Most surely these are in error.

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(1) The story of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq and his father rebuking him

And they were not sent to be keepers over them.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31-33) But He *the Almighty* has the last word: 'So today those who believe shall laugh at the unbelievers. On thrones, they will look.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-35) He *Glorified is He* then rhetorically asks: 'Surely the disbelievers are rewarded as they did.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36) Here, He *the Almighty* says that no one should dare think for a second that they can resist His Will. Allah *the Almighty* tells us what He wants us to do, and then gives us free will, to see who actually commits himself to a life of faith in practice. It is He Who has the power to make someone believe or to not believe. Allah's Knowledge of all things stretches from pre-eternity, so He already knows all events past, present, and future, including whether we will turn out to be righteous or wicked. But, nevertheless, He has enabled us to live our lives so that our own actions justify our fate. Thus, we should never ever dare think that we are able of our own volition to resist the overwhelming Will of Allah, the Most-High. As for those who arrogantly defy Allah's Commands, I say: 'Why do you not defy sickness and death?' They cannot because they are still nothing more than His slaves despite their own supercilious selves. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If it had been Our Will, We could certainly have given every soul its true guidance…' (*as-Sajda:* 13). In other words, He *the Almighty* could have made us all angels, devoid of the free will to choose sin because all other creatures – and not just the children of Adam– were given the ability to choose or reject the great trust of free will, but only our species accepted it with all that it entailed, whereas the others decided to use their choice to submit to Allah *the Almighty* and not risk the potential of sin latent in free will. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and man has turned unfaithful to it; surely he is unjust, ignorant.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'If it had been Our will, We could certainly have given every soul its true guidance…' (*as-Sajda:* 13), this means the guidance of succour whereby Allah *the Almighty* provides the believers with through various blessings to help them advance on the path of faith, in contrast to the guidance of direction, whereby He *the Almighty* merely points out the path of goodness. Everyone is granted the latter, but only those who prove themselves completely ready to follow the code of faith are granted the guidance of succour, as Allah *the Almighty* notes: ‘And (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil).’ (*Muhammad:* 17) The difference between these two types of guidance is illustrated in chapter of *Fussilat* where Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way…’ (*Fussilat:* 17); this means that He *the Almighty* showed them the way of truth, ‘…but they chose error above guidance…’ (*Fussilat:* 17). Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…but My words have come true. “I shall be sure to fill Hell with jinn and men together.”’ (*as-Sajda:* 13) He *Glorified is He* wants to make it clear to us that He understands our nature far better than we ourselves ever could, as forcefully shown by experience that any deviation from Allah’s Will inevitably leads to the degeneration of society. Allah *the Almighty* allows the innocent to be harmed by the wicked so that they may be spurred to return to the fold of His Law. For it is then that they appreciate that only by implementing the Heavenly Way can they lead wholesome lives free of the disruptions inevitably wrought by evil. This is why when Allah *the Almighty* executes His vengeance on the wicked; we praise Him for sparing us their mischief. The point is that rebelling against Allah’s Commands and defying the very core tenant of the Way, i.e. belief in Allah makes clear, in the starkest manner possible, the virtues of faith. Those of us who are morally accountable should commit ourselves to the Divine Law with all what it entails of rights and obligations, which are ultimately both sides of the same coin; thus, when Allah *the Almighty* forbids us from stealing, He is simultaneously upholding our own property rights. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…but My words have come true…’ (*as-Sajda:* 13), it means that the Word of Allah has been definitively established or, as articulated by the chapter of *as-Saffat*, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the Messengers.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171), and by the chapter of *al-Mu’minun* with regards to the story of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* Allah, ‘…take into it of every kind a pair, two, and your followers, except those among them against whom the word has gone forth…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 27), Or as the deniers of Truth are quoted as saying on the Day of Judgment: ‘So the sentence of our Lord has come to pass against us: (now) we shall surely taste.’ (*as-Saffat:* 31) As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…I shall be sure to fill Hell with jinn and men together.' (*as-Sajda:* 13), as we know, Allah *Glorified is He* has created both Paradise and the people He intends to fill it with, just as He has created both Hell and the people He intends to fill it with. Now, this is not an issue of space: Paradise could easily encompass everyone in creation if they all turned out righteous, as could Hell if everyone were adjudged wicked transgressors. This is why when the believers enter Heaven, they are said to 'inherit' the places reserved for the disbelievers who end up south of the border (1). Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and it shall be cried out to them that this is the garden of which you are made heirs for what you did.' (*al-A'raf:* 43) The term 'Invisible beings' refers to the jinn and the *'ifrits* (powerful jinni).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَذُوقُوا۟ بِمَا نَسِيتُمْ لِقَآءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَآ إِنَّا نَسِينَٰكُمْ ۖ
وَذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابَ ٱلْخُلْدِ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

**So since you ignored the meeting on this Day of yours,
now We shall ignore you: taste the lasting suffering for
all you have done [14] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 14)**

The implicit message is: 'taste the torment of Hell!', as stated explicitly in the chapter of *al-Qamar* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: '…taste the touch of hell' (*al-Qamar:* 48). This also will be said to the chief disbelievers. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Taste; you forsooth are the mighty, the honourable.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) Although any of our senses can be utilised to indulge in epicurean delights, the sense of taste is singled out because it is directly related to our most basic function of survival: eating and drinking. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* elaborates on the effect of this 'tasting', saying with regard to a certain community which had rejected their Lord: '…Allah made it to taste the utmost garment of hunger and fear because of what they wrought.' (*an-Nahl:* 112) The image here is of hunger being a piece of clothing which envelops your entire body. He *the Almighty* says: '…garment of hunger…' (*an-Nahl:* 112), this means that 'to express the comprehensiveness of this deprivation where every organ – and not just the stomach – is forced to taste the bitterness of famine.' Could this poetic meaning possibly be articulated more forcefully than by this wonderful image? Once, a certain poet had an epiphany of how divine love can be so utterly enveloping when it alights upon our heart and emanates into all of our other appendages:

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(1) *See Ibn Majah, As-Sunnan, Hadith no. 4341, on the authority of Abu Hurayra who narrated that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Every single person has two stations: one in Paradise and one in Hell. If someone dies and enters the Fire, their station is inherited by one of the inhabitants of Paradise; and this is the meanings of the verse: 'These are they who are the heirs.' (al-Mu'minun: 10) Al-Busayri notes in his Az-Zawa'id that, 'The chain of narration of this Hadith fulfills Al-Bukhari and Muslim's conditions for authenticity.'*

Flashes of Your memory stoke my love
Making me feel a throbbing in my bosom
Every limb is filled with yearning passion,
As if each appendage were a beating heart.

The reason Allah *the Almighty* has made the disbelievers taste this torment is because they had: '…So since you ignored the meeting on this Day of yours…' (*as-Sajda:* 14) which Allah *the Almighty* had warned them of. They have no excuse; they cannot pretend to have been blissfully unaware like so many doe-eyed innocents. Given that Allah *the Almighty* had very much made clear the enormity of the terror of the Judgment, they really should have sat up and paid a little bit more attention. Conversely, when the believers witness the torment enveloping the deniers of the Truth, they will be that much happier to have been spared such a fate. The punishment for ignoring the inevitable meeting with Allah is that: '…We shall ignore you …' (*as-Sajda:* 14). For having thrown aside Allah's Commands and for having been apathetic to His Warnings, He *the Almighty* will now abandon you – not out of forgetfulness, but as a deliberate punishment to expel you from the umbrella of Divine Mercy which used to shade everyone in the worldly life, both the good and the wicked. Nature gives everything it has to humanity – all of humanity, without any differentiation between the believers and the deniers of the Truth – as long as they play by her rules. In the Hereafter, on the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* will forsake the disbelievers from this mercy which they have proven themselves singularly unworthy of: '…taste the lasting suffering for all you have done.' (*as-Sajda:* 14) Although your rebellion against Allah *the Almighty* may only have lasted for a very brief moment in time, the torment which will overtake you now will be eternal and everlasting. A loss more grievous, a disaster more immense could not be imagined. It is very, very important that we correctly calculate the equation which computes the relationship between how much we are rewarded in the Hereafter and how much work we put in here on earth. The duration of the universe is already very short, and our own life span is that much more fleeting. Our life span in the Hereafter, on the other hand, is eternal. Even if the pleasures of this world could rival those of the next life – which they most certainly do not – the infinitely greater timeframe to enjoy them in would still load the scales in favour of Heaven. Furthermore, you can only experience pleasure in this world within the limited scope of your own mortal faculties, whereas in Heaven, you can experience the infinite pleasure afforded by Allah's Infinite Powers. Similarly, the delights of this world might pass you by, whereas you will have plenty of time to enjoy the delights of paradise wherein you will abide eternally.

This is a deal which we need to think over real well. It certainly would not be too much for us to barter all the riches in the world to achieve what the Prophet once called 'that most lucrative bargain.' This imagery of bargaining for one's eternal fate is one very much rooted in Quranic discourse. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'These are they who buy error for the right direction, so their bargain shall bring no gain, nor are they the followers of the right direction.' (*al-Baqara:* 16) Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّمَا يُؤْمِنُ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُوا۟ بِهَا خَرُّوا۟ سُجَّدًا
وَسَبَّحُوا۟ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ۩ ﴿١٥﴾

The only people who truly believe in Our messages are those who, when they are reminded of them, bow down in worship, celebrate their Lord's praises, and do not think themselves above this [15] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 15)

The Arabic word *Kharra* (To fall down) means 'to tumble down' or 'to collapse'; this word also appears in Allah's saying: '…so the roof fell down on them from above them…' (*an-Nahl:* 26) and in His saying: 'Say: Believe in it or believe not; surely those who are given the knowledge before it fall down on their faces, making obeisance when it is recited to them. And they say: Glory be to our Lord! Most surely the promise of our Lord was to be fulfilled.' (*al-Isra':* 107-108) Thus, the meaning of 'To fall down' here is to involuntarily fall prostrate to the ground.

Derivatives of this word are mentioned whenever the root *(s-j-d)* (prostration) appears in the Quran, alluding to how this demonstration of submission to the Lord is second nature to the believer, as reaffirmed by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…fall down on their faces…' (*al-Isra':* 107), an act which represents the upmost humility, even more so than the regular prostration performed in the five daily prayers on the seven points of the human body, i.e. the two feet, the two knees, the two hands, and the face. This word is also mentioned with bowing (*Al-Ruku'*) in one verse of the Quran relating to Prophet Dawud (David); Allah *the Almighty* '…so he sought the protection of his Lord and he fell down bowing and turned time after time (to Him).' (*Sad:* 24)

Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they fall down on their faces weeping, and it adds to their humility.' (*al-Isra':* 109) The more they humble themselves, the more reverent they become. Because they yearn to carry out Allah's Commandments, they completely and utterly submit themselves to Allah *the Almighty*. This in turn illuminates the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'The closest the servant approaches the Lord is when they are in prostration to Him; thus, when you are in prostration, supplicate to Allah as much as you can.(1) Prostration means to place your face and forehead – those very symbols of our dignity and prestige – on the ground in submission to Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no 482; Ahmad, Al-Musnad, Hadith no. 421, on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

تَتَجَافَىٰ جُنُوبُهُمۡ عَنِ ٱلۡمَضَاجِعِ يَدۡعُونَ رَبَّهُمۡ خَوۡفٗا
وَطَمَعٗا وَمِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡ يُنفِقُونَ ١٦

Their sides shun their beds in order to pray to their Lord in fear and hope; they give to others some of what We have given them(1) [16] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 16)

'To shun' means 'to part from' when you part from someone or something, it can be a bittersweet mixture of yearning and pain, as when you bid adieu to your beloved. But the word 'shun' explicitly denotes an aversion to what you are leaving behind. In this context, this means that the believers' flanks have no love lost for the snugness of their mattresses because they are plunging themselves into the greater and more lasting ecstasy of communing with the divine. When 'Ali went to bury Fatima *Allah be Pleased with them* he stopped by the grave of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and said: 'Peace be upon you, Messenger of Allah *the Almighty*! The departure of your friend has worn hard on me, my only consolation being that no loss after your loss can be too great. Since your soul poured forth between my neck and my breast and I laid you to rest in your grave, my nights have been sleepless and my sorrow unending. And so shall it be until Allah *the Almighty* transports me to the realm in which you currently abide. Your daughter can tell you herself how your community has violently set upon itself. All this has come to pass even though your memory still lingers with us, and even though not much time has elapsed since you took leave of our company.'

When 'Ali was about to depart, he said: 'I send you the greetings of peace to bid you adieu. If I must now go, then know that it is not because I have wearied of you or do not love you; and if I stay, then know that it is not because I doubt Allah's promise to those of His servants who exercise patience.' As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Their sides shun their beds…’ (*as-Sajda:* 16), it means that they have an aversion to them, even though they are the greatest instrument of rest for the human being. When a person throbs with life, they have the strength and vigour to perform a myriad of tasks. Activity is a vital component of our existence. Through our strength we can walk around and pick things up, carry them, and put them down somewhere else. If we become tired from carrying things, we put them down, and then continue walking without our load. After walking makes us tired, we stop and stand in one place. When standing makes us tired, we sit down. We can conversely ask our friends to carry our load for us, but they might have trouble simply carrying their own weight, as we do. This fatigue arises from the weight of the body pushing on the feet. This is why, for instance, if the imam recites a long chapter in prayer, the congregants will switch their weight between one foot and the other. By contrast, sitting relaxes us because it distributes the body’s weight over the greater surface area of the gluteus. When we become so fatigued that even sitting does not relieve us, we can lie on our side and stretch our whole body out on the ground so that our full weight is distributed over the entire surface area of the body, each limb having to carry no more than its own share. If you still feel tired after this, you can turn on your other side or onto your back; nevertheless, the only way to achieve complete rest is through immersing yourself in sleep. These various stages are known as the stages of muscular progression, where the state of sleep represents the most perfect form of rest given that, when we are in it, we do not feel any of the pain that may plague us during our waking hours. The believers pass through all these various stages of activity and rest in their lives until they arrive at death, the Great Sleep, after which they are resurrected and brought into Heaven, where they are granted the ultimate repose in the embrace of their Creator. The point of all this is that the bed represents the last stage in a multi-layered progression of fatigue. But despite the supreme comfort it symbolizes, the burning desire of the believers to stand before Allah *the Almighty* makes them shun this amenity. In another passage, Allah *the Almighty* similarly says about the believers that: ‘They used to sleep but little in the night.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17) Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…pray to their Lord…’ (*as-Sajda:* 16), that is, they supplicate their Lord even though their eyes are drooping from exhaustion. Their prayers give them energy – even if they have not been answered yet – because the believers have entrusted their affairs to One Who is perfectly capable of taking care of them and because the joy of communing with the Lord in prayer makes them forget the pangs of sleep deprivation. The believers supplicate Allah *the Almighty*: '…in fear and hope…' (*as-Sajda:* 16): in fear of their failure to fully live according to Allah's *the Almighty* will and to exhibit an appropriate level of Allah *the Almighty* consciousness, and in hope of His forgiveness. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…they give to others some of what We have given them.' (*as-Sajda:* 16) refers to paying the alms-tax. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Their sides shun their beds…' (*as-Sajda:* 16), it refers specifically to the performance of the ritual prayer, since the Quran often mentions these two pillars in conjunction with one another. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…they give to others some of what We have given them.' (*as-Sajda:* 16) Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *Regarding the occasion surrounding the revelation of this verse, Al-Bazzar narrated that Bilal ibn Rabah said, 'Once, while we were in a gathering, and some of the Companions of the Prophet were praying [continuously] from the time after sunset until nightfall, the verse: 'Their sides shun their beds in order to pray to their Lord…' (as-Sajda: 16) was revealed." As-Suyuti relates this incident in his Asbab An-Nuzul, attributing the narration to Al-Bazzar, although he considers the chain of narration to be weak because of Al-Bazzar's sheikh, 'Abdullah ibn Shabib.*

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّآ أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَآءًۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for
them as a reward for what they have done [17]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 17)

Allah *the Almighty* has veiled the full secrets of His benefaction from us, giving us in this world only what we need. But when He *the Almighty* rewards His believing servants in Heaven, He does not reward them only with the finite blessings which their mortal vessels could handle, but with the possibilities which He knows, and which are commiserate with His own unlimited powers. We are incapable of articulating Allah's powers because our human language is too limited; we cannot coin a term for something unless it corresponds to a pre-existing concept which we already comprehend. So as Allah *the Almighty* says in this regard: 'No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them…' (*as-Sajda:* 17). The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said of paradise that, 'In it are wonders which no eye has ever beheld, which no ear has ever heard, and which no human heart has ever conceived.'(1)

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, no. 2824; Ahmad, AL-Musnad, no. 466/2; Abu Na'im, Hilyat AL-Awliya', no. 262/2 from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra.*

Given that these things are utterly beyond our mortal experience, how can we possibly formulate words to describe them? Indeed, how are we even supposed to imagine them? We will be completely taken aback when we do finally encounter them – Allah *the Almighty* willing! Notice how, when Allah *the Almighty* discusses Heaven, He does not speak about it in literal terms, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'A likeness of the garden which the righteous are promised…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 35) that is, what follows is not a 100% exact report of what paradise is like, but merely a metaphor. Since our language is incapable of capturing the reality of the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* gives us an approximate image to drive home the idea for us. When providing metaphors from our worldly surroundings, Allah *the Almighty* nevertheless makes sure to emphasize that, in paradise, these things are free of the deficiencies of their earthly counterparts. As Allah *the Almighty* says of the bliss of paradise: 'a parable of the garden which those guarding (against evil) are promised: Therein are rivers of water that does not alter…' (*Muhammad:* 15) in contrast to earthly water, which can become rancid if kept in storage too long. Similarly, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change…' (*Muhammad:* 15), the old Arabs hated the milk that soured during travel. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and rivers of drink delicious to those who drink…' (*Muhammad:* 15). The problem with worldly alcohol is that it shuts off the brain, on top of which its flavour is not that great. That is why those who do take up the bottle gulp it down all at once because the actual act of consuming spirits is not that enjoyable. I mean, ask yourself: have you ever really seen someone slowly sip wine to savour its flavour like they would a glass of tasty fruit juice? But Allah *the Almighty* describes the wine of Heaven as follows: 'There shall be no trouble in it, nor shall they be exhausted therewith.'(1) (*as-Saffat:* 47)

Allah *the Almighty* then continues in this description of paradise: '…and rivers of honey clarified…' (*Muhammad:* 15). While the honey of this world is often filled with small rocks and other gunk that get into it when it pours off the beehive, the honey of Heaven will be purified of this grit. No matter how much luxurious wealth we might enjoy here on earth, no one is rich enough to construct a river of wine, or milk, or honey. Furthermore, these heavenly rivers are not bound by any shores, and indeed interlace with one another without their contents mixing together. This is from Allah's unbounded power. The point is that when Allah *the Almighty* describes for us the bliss of Heaven, He is only conveying to us a metaphorical image, not the reality of Heaven; but even so, He still makes sure to disassociate these metaphors from the deficiencies inherent in their worldly analogues. In the same vein, the old Arabs used to enjoy Lote trees because of the shade they afford and their tasty fruit. The proverbial fly in the soup, however, was that, in order to obtain its fruits, they would have to risk tearing their flesh against the tree's fierce thorns. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says that the believers in Heaven shall abide: 'Amid thornless lote-trees.(1)' (*al-Waqi'a:* 28) so that nothing will spoil their pleasure. Similarly, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the *houris* of paradise, He notes how: 'Man has not touched them before them or jinni.' (*ar-Rahman:* 74) This is due to reassure the male believers that their companions' virginity – that most important component of the feminine beauty for a man – has not been tainted. Regarding all of these things, Allah *the Almighty* says that: 'No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them…' (*as-Sajda:* 17) The word blissful delights (*qurrat a'yun*) literally means 'tranquillity of the eyes.' From this root is derived the verb to settle (*qarra/ istaqarra*) because, when you want to settle down in a certain neighbourhood or buy an apartment, you ask about the facilities that are available, the utilities, and the location, etc., since you would not settle down in a certain place unless you find it comfortable and equipped with the provisions you need. One of the greatest places of true tranquillity is, of course, the countryside, where we can still commune with our primordial nature, unsullied by the artificiality and gaudiness of urban civilization. Everyone feels the tug to get in touch with their inner nature; no matter how much we advance materially, no matter how many creature comforts we may possess, no matter that we may inhabit buildings that bore through the very sky, at some point we all feel compelled to flee back into nature's embrace. Because it is only in the countryside that we can find rest and tranquillity (*qurra*), we make a weekend retreat there from time to time to escape the cacophony of the city. Going back to the term *(qurrat a'yun)*: this means that the eye settles (*tastaqirr*) on something and no longer roams around looking for anything else – i.e., the eye is 'delighted' by this object, finding in it all sort of pleasure. From this we have the two expressions 'Their eye is full' – meaning that they need no more visual stimulation – and 'Their eye is empty' – meaning that their eye is not satisfied by what it beholds, wandering around looking for something to fill its craving.

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(1) (Anzafa) means 'to completely finish off a beverage,' just as it can refer to the drying up of a well. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-'Arab – entry on (N-Z-F)]. Ad-Dahhak related that Ibn 'Abbas once said, 'Alcohol leads to four things: drunkenness, a hangover, puke, and piss The wine of Heaven, on the other hand, has been described by Allah *the Almighty* as being free of these side effects.' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 7/4.

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(1) Lote tree (*As-Sidr*) refers to the Christ's-thorn, of which there are two kinds: a wild variant whose fruit is inedible, and a variant which grows in water, whose fruit is yellow and bitter. See Ibn Mandhur, Lissan Al-'Arab– entry on *(s-d-r)*.

In the paradise, people will be content with the bliss they will be provided with; they will thus not aspire for anything else but living eternally in it.

In this vein, Allah tells His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…and do not gaze longingly at what We have given some of them to enjoy, the finery of this present life: We test them through this …' (*Ta Ha:* 131).

If someone's eyes are 'empty', their eyeballs will impatiently move from side to side searching for their aspirations and needs, whereas if their eyes are 'full', they will focus on what is at their hands.

Another meaning which is derived from the root *qarr* is *al-qurr* (severe cold), which can act as a figure of speech for happiness. A 'cool eye' is a content one, whereas a 'hot eye' is one that feels painful and sad.

Qurur al-A'ayn can also be used to refer to the paralysis of the eye due to blindness or some other medical condition. A woman once entered the court of the caliph and called out: '*Aqarr Allah 'aynak* (May Allah still your eye), and complete His blessing on you.' All the attendants in the presence of the caliph thought that she was sending her benediction to the ruler, but the caliph was the only one who understood her real intent: 'Actually, she means, "May Allah still your eye so that it becomes paralysed, and may He complete your blessing so that it is terminated"' because there is nothing after perfection but decrease.

Allah *the Almighty* then explains that He would give these blessings to His believing servants '…as a reward for what they have done.' (*as-Sajda:* 17) This passage has prompted controversy between scholars. A group of them claim that the believers will be admitted into paradise as a result of their good deeds, as noted by this verse. In other words, they will enter the paradise because of Allah's Justice, and not His Grace. Another group of scholars yet disagree with this opinion, claiming that the believers will enter the paradise only by the Lord's Grace, as the Quran says elsewhere: 'Say [Prophet], In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate.' (*Yunus:* 58)

Furthermore, they cite in support of their opinion the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said: 'None amongst you can get into Paradise by virtue of his deeds alone. They said: Allah's Messenger, not even you? Thereupon he said: Not even I, but that Allah should wrap me in His Mercy.'(1)

When the debate has been intense, the two groups tried to reconcile their views, so they articulated the following compromise position: 'By the time we become old enough to be morally accountable, Allah has already given us the best of His Blessings. Before we are even born, He sets up the conditions necessary for our survival, and then lets us bask in these blessings without asking us to do anything until we reach puberty at which we become spiritually accountable for our actions.' Thus, it is at this particular age that we start practicing our religious commitments. At that point, we should now that our duty to obey Allah stems from our obligation to recognise all the wonderful gifts He has already bestowed on us. Hence, our reward in the Hereafter is not for our deeds, but rather purely out of Allah's Grace.

The point is that when we fulfil our religious obligations, we are basically paying Allah back for His previous favours to us, which means that the delights of Heaven are really an extra gift from Him *Glorified is He*. Allah graces us both in our earlier life and in our later, otherworldly life.

Not only that, but when Allah *the Almighty* lays down rules for us, that in fact is viewed as a favour to us. For whenever we do good, we are rewarded at least tenfold for it, and perhaps exponentially more. We are the servants of Allah *the Almighty*; thus it is His Right to give us whatever He wants, just as it is His Right to hold back from us.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6463; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2816.*

Some Sufi Islamic scholars claim that since Allah has given us His Best, we are obliged to repay Him by giving Him our best; this meaning is deduced from the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Shall the reward of good be anything but good?' (*ar-Rahman:* 60) And when we give Allah our best, He in turn rewards us with His Best, which in turn prompts us to give Him our best, and so on forever.

Allah *the Almighty* then says(1):

أَفَمَن كَانَ مُؤْمِنًا كَمَن كَانَ فَاسِقًا ۚ لَّا يَسْتَوُۥنَ ﴿١٨﴾

So, is someone who believes equal to someone
who defies God? No, they are not equal [18]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 18)

Given that the words 'sinner' and 'believer' are used in the singular, we would have expected the phrase '…they are not equal' (*as-Sajda:* 18) to use the dual case. Whereas English only has a singular and plural case for its verbs and nouns, Arabic also has a dual case to indicate exactly two subjects. Here, though, the plural is used. And, as we mentioned before, the relative pronouns *man* (who) and *ma* (what)– which can be singular, dual, plural, masculine or feminine – sometimes conform to the outward grammatical form they refer to, and sometimes the implied form.

As for the saying of Allah: 'So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah? …' (*as-Sajda:* 18), it means that even though the Quran uses the singular, it refers to the plural, each word representing a class of people, and not a specific individual – and accordingly, the relative pronoun *man* (who) is treated as a plural '…No, they are not equal.' (*as-Sajda:* 18)

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(1) *As-Syutui said in his book that the occasion which prompted the revelation of this verse is as follows: Al-Wahhidi and Ibn 'Asakir quote a narration from Sa'id ibn Jubayr who related from Ibn* 'Abbas that Al-Walid ibn 'Uqba ibn Abu Ma'it once challenged 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* saying: 'My sword tip is more piercing than yours, my tongue broader than yours and I am more generous to the soldiers,' whereupon 'Ali responded, 'Given that you' are nothing more than a godless sinner, why do you not just shut up?' upon which the verse 'So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah? No, they are not equal.' (*as-Sajda:* 18) was revealed." See As-Suyuti, Asbab An-Nuzul. p.136.

Alternatively, the Quran could in fact be referring to two individuals, with the intent of emphasising the general import of this comparison, and not the particulars; thus, although it commences by talking about a specific believer and a specific denier of the Truth, it ends up with the general rule that these two categories of people '…are not equal!' (*as-Sajda:* 18) Indeed, it is an axiom of Islamic Law that the precepts of the Quran are deduced from the general import of the text and not the historical particulars which inform the text(1).

Some people say that this verse was revealed regarding Al-Walid ibn 'Uqba ibn Abi Ma'it(2) when he challenged 'Ali *Allah be pleased with them* saying: 'I am stronger than you, my powers of perseverance are greater than you, both my tongue and my sword tip are sharper than yours, my heart is braver than yours, and I am more generous than you,' but 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* shot back, 'Well, you are just some godless sinner, which means that all your talents are worthless, so why do you not just shut up?' meaning that even if you are in fact everything you claim to be, it does not matter because you have squandered all of your good qualities in the pursuit of sin and falsehood.

Thus, the verse combines the particularity of the incident referred to in the saying of Allah 'So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah?' (*as-Sajda:* 18) with the generality of the rule that '…No, they are not equal.' (*as-Sajda:* 18)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*, '…No, they are not equal.' (*as-Sajda:* 18) is the response to the question 'So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah?' (*as-Sajda:* 18) Instead of simply declaring that 'one who believes definitely cannot be compared to one who is a profligate sinner,' the Quran uses this rhetorical style to force the godless sinners to admit the Truth themselves.

For instance, if you say to your friend, 'You were not there for me in my greatest hour of need,' you thus leave him manoeuvring space to issue a denial: 'No, no, I was with you on such-and-such a day.' By making a simple declarative statement, you make it possible for someone to dispute your claim. On the other hand, if you use a question, you can force them into a corner: ‘Did I not give you my help on such-and-such a date?’ If you know for certain what the answer is, you can force them to concede your point and make them bear witness against themselves.

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(1) *See Manna' Al-Qattan, Mabahith fi 'Ulum Al-Quran, Wahba Publishing House: 1988; p. 80.*

(2) *The story of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him with Al-Walid ibn 'Uqba ibn Abu Ma'it*

With the same logic in mind, Allah *the Almighty* poses the following question: ‘So, is someone who believes equal to someone who defies Allah?’ (*as-Sajda:* 18) There is no other way for us to answer except to reaffirm, ‘No, indeed, a believer can in no way be compared to a godless sinner.’

Since the believers and wicked transgressors are not equal in their spiritual worth, each group must be rewarded with a fate commiserate with their deeds, which is why Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards:

أَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ فَلَهُمْ جَنَّـٰتُ ٱلْمَأْوَىٰ
نُزُلًۢا بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Those who believe and do good deeds will have Gardens awaiting them as their home and as a reward for what they have done [19] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 19)

This verse further reaffirms that although the word ‘believer’ in the previous verse is presented in the singular, it is meant to refer to all the believers, and therefore should be understood as a plural: ‘Those who believe and do good deeds…’ (*as-Sajda:* 19). This general statement which refers to a ‘believer’ once again shows how ‘believer’ is used in this context to refer to all the believers. Similarly, in the chapter of *al-‘Asr*, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-2).

Even though *al-Insan* (the man) is singular, it is obviously referring to the generic category of human beings, since a plural noun is subsequently excluded from the general statement regarding this man; Allah says: ‘…except for those who believe, do good deeds...’ (*al-’Asr:* 3). The point is that a singular noun can be used to refer to a class of things.

Similarly, in this passage under study, Allah *the Almighty* switches between the singular noun ‘believer’ and the plural one ‘Those who believe…’ (*as-Sajda:* 19), just as He switches between the singular noun ‘one who is sinner' and the plural construct 'As for those who defy Allah…' (*as-Sajda:* 20). Both nouns refer to two contrasting classes of people, each of which will be driven to a different fate as befitting their spiritual state.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Those who believe and do good deeds will have Gardens awaiting them as their home...' (*as-Sajda:* 19); the word *ma'wa* here means a 'retreat' or a 'sanctuary', as Allah *the Almighty* says regarding 'Isa (Jesus) and Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them*: '…We gave them shelter on a peaceful hillside with flowing water' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50) meaning that Allah brought them to a place where they could settle down and enjoy everything they needed.

Similarly, the son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* says in the chapter of *Hud* to his father: '…I will seek refuge on a mountain to save me from the water…' (*Hud:* 43). But his father anxiously warns him that '…Today there is no refuge from Allah's Command except for those on whom He has mercy…' (*Hud:* 43).

Notice the tender compassion that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* felt towards his son even though the latter was a sinner; the Quran mentions that Noah said to Allah: '…My Lord, my son was one of my family…' (*Hud:* 45), but Allah corrected him, saying: '…he was not one of your family, What he did was not right…' (*Hud:* 46).

The point is that our true family should not be determined by blood, but rather by our connection through faith, which is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said of Salman Al-Farisi *Allah be pleased with him* who was not even from the Arabs: 'Salman is a member of the Prophetic household.'(1)

Although, as in the case of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* parents cannot help their disbelieving children in the Hereafter, they can benefit their believing progeny – and this is not confined to the Prophets but for all people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith— We do not deny them any of the rewards for their deeds…' (*at-Tur:* 21).

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, 418/3; see also Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 598/3; Adh-Dhahabi considered the chain of narration of this Hadith to be weak because of Kuthayr ibn 'Abdullah.*

It is an honour for parents to have their children admitted into the paradise through their parents' faith and good works. If children pass away before reaching puberty when they would have become morally accountable for their actions, then of course they will be reunited with their parents in the Heaven. Indeed, their station will be even greater than their parents because those who die as young children are not assigned a certain position in the paradise, but rather, they are roaming freely in it.

It is like when you take your kid to a friend's house; while you are sitting in the living room talking with the adults, your child is running all around the house, getting into every nook and cranny. This is why children are called the fowls of Heaven (1).

At this point, you might bring up a related issue, namely; if our fate is determined by our own deeds, if – as the Egyptians say – everyone is responsible for his actions and we cannot benefit from other people's good deeds, then why do we bother praying for the dead? After all, they did not make that prayer him/herself. This means that they will either benefit from a good deed someone did on their behalf, or else the prayers for them are meaningless– and Allah forbid that anything in Islam would be meaningless!

Here, we should ask the following question, 'Do you pray for every single person who dies, whether he is a believer or a disbeliever? No, of course, we only pray for our fellow believers. Thus, our prayers are a direct consequence of their faith, and can subsequently be counted as one of their own deeds; after all, if they had not accepted faith, we would not have prayed for them.

Going back to the word *ma'wa* (place of rest); we stress that the paradise is a sanctuary for the believers because it shields them from the horrors of the hellfire: '…as a reward for what they have done...' (*as-Sajda:* 19), that is, as a reward for their righteous deeds. The word *nuzul* refers to lodgings prepared for any guests that might drop in at any time; this word can also be used in Arabic to refer to hotels. And if you think our four-star hotels are luxurious, imagine then the lodgings that Allah has prepared for the righteous in the paradise!

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2635 and Ahmad, Musnad, p. 510, 477/2.*

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ فَسَقُواْ فَمَأْوَىٰهُمُ ٱلنَّارُۖ كُلَّمَآ أَرَادُوٓاْ أَن يَخْرُجُواْ مِنْهَآ أُعِيدُواْ فِيهَا
وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ ذُوقُواْ عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ٱلَّذِى كُنتُم بِهِۦ تُكَذِّبُونَ ٢٠

As for those who defy God, their home will be the Fire. Whenever they try to escape it, they will be driven back into it, and they will be told, 'Taste the torment of the Fire, which you persistently denied' [20] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 20)

The Arabic phrase *alladhin fasaqu* (those who stray) is derived from the verb *fasaqa* which means 'to stray', 'separate', or 'deviate', a meaning which is clear in the saying of the Arabs, 'The date became separated (*fasaqat*) from its peel.' Thus, 'to commit *fusuq* (iniquity) is an abbreviation for *fasaqa* (to deviate) from Allah's Commands'. The punishment prepared by Allah for these people will be the fire; Allah *the Almighty* says: '…their home will be the Fire…' (*as-Sajda:* 20). As we discussed above, a *ma'wa* refers to a sanctuary where you are protected from all sorts of evil. But how can the blazing inferno of hellfire be described as a sanctuary here?!

Commenting on this point, scholars say that although *ma'wa* usually refers to a place where we like to spend time in, the disbelievers are forced against their will to check into this hotel of fire. That is, this word is used sarcastically to mock at them, just as the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Give news of agonising torment.' (*Al-'Imran:* 21)

Normally, of course, you are only supposed to give 'glad tidings' for good news. As a matter of fact, these statements which are laden with irony are mentioned so many times in the Quran. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Taste this, you powerful, respected man!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 49)

This rhetorical style which excoriates the deniers of Truth is very common in the Quran.

Allah *the Almighty* then depicts for us the utter despondency of the inhabitants of the Hell. He *Glorified is He* says: '…Whenever they try to escape it, they will be driven back into it…' (*as-Sajda:* 20), or as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: 'They will cry, 'Malik, if only your Lord would finish us off,' but he will answer, 'No! You are here to stay.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 77) They have no glimmer of hope of ever escaping their fate; indeed, they are denied even the morbid hope of an eventual death to spare them this agony. Whenever they try to come out, the angel guarding hell makes sure to thrust them back into the blazing fire telling them, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Taste the torment of the Fire, which you persistently denied.' (*as-Sajda:* 20)

This 'tasting' will engulf the tongue and then spread to each limb until every particle of their being will be forced to savour the agony of the flame as punishment for their refusal to acknowledge their inevitable return to their Creator.

But not only are the godless sinners punished in the Hereafter, they are also given a taste of their punishment here in this world. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُم مِّنَ ٱلۡعَذَابِ ٱلۡأَدۡنَىٰ دُونَ ٱلۡعَذَابِ ٱلۡأَكۡبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَرۡجِعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

We shall certainly make them taste a nearer torment [in this life] prior to the greater torment, so that perhaps they may return [to the right path] [21] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 21)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…a nearer torment [in this life]…' (*as-Sajda:* 21) refers to this world; as for His saying, '…prior to the greater torment…' (*as-Sajda:* 21), it refers to the punishment that they will experience in the Hereafter. This punishment which afflicts them here on earth is actually a blessing from Allah, because it is meant to prompt them '…so that perhaps they may return [to the right path]…' (*as-Sajda:* 21). More specifically, this lesser punishment refers to the humiliation which the believers visit upon the sinners. In this vein, did 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud *Allah be pleased with him*(1), who was known for being slight[1] not flung Abu Jahl to the ground in one of the Muslim battles against the pagans, putting his foot on the latter's neck. History tells us that Abu Jahl looked up at 'Abdullah and sardonically remarked, 'You have come a long way, shepherd boy.'[2]

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(1) *'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud ibn Ghafil Al-Hudhali Allah be pleased with him was one of the greatest Companions, one of the most intelligent, and one of the closest to Prophet=*

The Quran describes the chastisement of the Hereafter as 'that supreme suffering,' because it will be utterly encompassing and inescapable.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…so that perhaps they may return [to the right path]…' (*as-Sajda:* 21), it expresses the hope that they, i.e. the wrongdoers will return to the fold of faith. As we have noted before, when the preposition *la'alla* (so that…might) is used to refer to Allah *the Almighty* it expresses a hope that will definitely be realised; yet when it refers to a human being possessed of free will, it expresses a hope that may or may not materialise. Thus, some people repent, while others do not.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

= *Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him. He was the first to publicly recite the Quran in Mecca. He was vertically-challenged to the point where, when sitting, he was almost hidden by the bodies of those around him. After the passing of Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him he was put in charge of the treasury in Kufa. He later moved to Medina during the Caliphate of 'Uthman Allah be pleased with him where he died at about sixty years.*

The story of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him and the killing of Abu Jahl.

[1] *In At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, Ibn Sa'd said, 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Utba related that 'Ibn Mas'ud was short and skinny.' Ibrahim At-Taymi narrated, 'Once when Ibn Mas'ud climbed a tree, some people started laughing at him for having such skinny legs. But Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him intervened, 'Why are you laughing at his legs? His legs are weightier in the Scales of Allah than Mount Uhud.' See Ibn Sa'd, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, 3/143.*

[2] *In As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, Ibn Hisham said, 'This took place at the battle of Badr. Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him had ordered the Companions to search for Abu Jahl among the corpses strewn out on the battlefield. 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him came across him as he was about to give up the ghost. He put his foot on Abu Jahl's neck, saying to him: "Has the Lord not disgraced you, enemy of Allah?" Abu Jahl responded, "You' have come a long way, shepherd boy," at which point 'Abdullah chopped his head off. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 2/276, 277.*

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن ذُكِّرَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِۦ ثُمَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهَآ ۚ
إِنَّا مِنَ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ مُنتَقِمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

Who does more wrong than someone who, when messages from his Lord are recited to him, turns away from them? We shall inflict retribution on the guilty [22] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 22)

Allah *the Almighty* once again poses a question to force us to reaffirm a certain point. He is basically saying, ‘My servants, tell me the truth: is there anyone more wicked and sinful than someone who hears My Messages and then ignores them?’

If we analyse this logically, then we have to admit that there is no one more wicked or unjust than such a person who denies the Message of Allah. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* once again presents this idea as a rhetorical question to prompt us to concede this point.

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Who does more wrong than someone who, when messages from his Lord are recited to him, turns away from them?’(*as-Sajda:* 22), meaning that the implication being that all of Allah’s Messages to us are nothing more than a reminder of that primordial pact of faith which the Lord took from us when He says: ‘…He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172) As we mentioned before, we all have given this vow to Allah *the Almighty* which is why we must make sure to foster the spiritual illuminations of this part of our soul by nourishing it with what is religiously permitted and by exercising it with the obedience of Allah.

This point is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…by the soul and how He formed it, and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety! The one who purifies his soul succeeds, and the one who corrupts it fails.’ (*ash-Shams:* 7-10)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَٰبَ فَلَا تَكُن فِى مِرْيَةٍ
مِّن لِّقَآئِهِۦ ۖ وَجَعَلْنَٰهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ﴿٢٣﴾

We gave Moses the Scripture – so [Muhammad]
do not doubt that you are receiving it – and We
made it a guide for the Children of Israel [23]
(The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 23)

Different Prophets have been granted different things: some have only been given a law, some only a miracle, while others have been given both. Similarly, there are Prophets who have been given a Scripture meant only for a specific time and place, while others have been given a Scripture valid for everyone until the end of time.

The word *al-kitab* (revelation) in this verse literally means 'book' or 'scripture,' referring specifically to the Torah. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…so [Muhammad] do not doubt that you are receiving it…' (*as-Sajda:* 23). The pronoun here is ambiguous: does it refer to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or to the Torah? If the former, then the verse is announcing that Allah will bring together Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was alive during the revelation of this verse, and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who was not. The only way that this interpretation could be accepted would be if the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the miraculous journey from Mecca to Jerusalem *(Al-Isra'*) and the subsequent Ascension to the Heaven where he related his meeting meeting with Musa was an authentic historical incident(1).

There is a relevant verse from another chapter which we should take a moment to carefully consider and contemplate. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Ask the Prophets We sent before you: 'Did We ever appoint any gods to be worshipped besides the Lord of Mercy?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 45) In other words, Allah *the Almighty* is commanding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the other Messengers, which clearly indicates that there will be a time when they will actually meet, whereas (*as-Sajda:* 23) alludes to the meeting between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Musa *peace be upon him;* the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Anbiya',* (*az-Zukhruf:* 45) refers to a meeting between him *peace and blessings be upon him* and all the other Messengers and Prophets(1). Thus, if we adopt the interpretation that (*as-Sajda:* 23) refers to the meeting that will take place between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Musa *peace be upon him* we need to accept the authenticity of the Hadith which relates Prophet Muhammad's miraculous journey to Jerusalem and then to Heaven (*al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*) where he *peace and blessings be upon him* had met with all the previous Messengers and Prophets, led them in prayer and talked to them.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Imam Ibn Kathir said, 'Ibn 'Abbas related that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The night I was [miraculously] transported to Jerusalem, I saw Moses, the son of 'Imran Allah's peace be upon him. He was tall, with curly hair, and of dark brown complexion, as if he were from the tribe of Shanaw'a. I also saw 'Isa (Jesus) Allah's peace be upon him; he was of medium built, with a fair-ruddy complexion and lank hair.' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azhim, 463/3.*

Alternatively, we could understand the verse in question as referring to the Torah. Yet, since the Torah had been distorted and altered with over the centuries, this verse would then mean that sincere Jews who know the original Torah, such as 'Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* will confide its true teachings to you. Of such people, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…There are some among the people of the Book who are upright, who recite Allah's Revelations during the night, who bow down in worship.' (*Al-'Imran:* 113)

After all, did 'Abdullah ibn Salam(2) not confront his Jewish brethren, saying to them, 'How can you call Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a liar and you used to pray for him to come and grant you victory against those who disbelieved? You used to tell the pagans, 'The time is fast approaching when a Prophet will come, under whose leadership we will slaughter you as uncompromisingly as the people of ‘Ad and Iram(1) were slaughtered.’ The persecution which you suffered in the Diaspora has led you to come to Yathrib to await the arrival of this last Prophet. So, after all this, how can you now call him a liar?!’

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(1) *See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 4/129.*

(2) *In his book, Imam Al-Zirikli said, 'Abdullah ibn Salam ibn Al-Harith Abu Yusuf the Israelite converted to Islam with the arrival of Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him to Medina. He was present with 'Umar at the conquest of Jerusalem and Al-Jabiyya, but when the civil war broke out between 'Ali Allah be pleased with him and Mu'awiyya Allah be pleased with him he took a wooden sword and forsook the fighting. He settled in Medina until his death in 42 A.H.' See Al-Zirikli, Al-'Alam. 4/90.*

The Quran says about them: ‘When a Scripture came to them from Allah confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 89).

It is narrated(2) that when ‘Abdullah ibn Salam wanted to believe in Allah and Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* he came to Prophet Muhammad and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, the Jews are mendacious; if they know that I have converted, they will falsely slander me. Therefore, you should ask them what their opinion of me is before I announce my conversion.’ When the Jews had gathered before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he asked them what they thought of Ibn Salam. ‘A gentleman and a scholar, from a family of gentlemen and scholars!’ they replied. But when he came out and said, ‘I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,’ they changed their earlier assessment: ‘He is scoundrel, from a family of scoundrels.’ ‘Abdullah then turned to Prophet Muhammad and said: ‘Did I not tell you that they are a mendacious people?’(3)

As for the saying of Allah: ‘…We made it a guide for the Children of Israel.’ (*as-Sajda:* 23), it means that Allah *the Almighty* made the Scripture of the Torah a source of guidance. This also reaffirms that there are Jews who are rightly guided: Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…There are some among the people of the Book who are upright, who recite Allah’s Revelations during the night, who bow down in worship.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 113)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Imam ibn Kathir said, 'Several elders from the Ansar have related, ‘During the pre-Islamic days, we, the pagan idolaters, had for a long time gained the upper hand over the Jews, who were followers of a monotheistic Scripture. So, they used to say to us, “A Prophet shall be sent to us shortly, for his time has come. Under his leadership, we shall slaughter you as uncompromisingly as ‘Ad and Iram were slaughtered.” But when Allah the Almighty finally sent His Prophet who is from Quraysh, we were the ones who followed him, while the Jews rejected him.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 1/124.*

(2) *The story of ‘Abdullah ibn Salam's conversion to Islam.*

(3) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3938; and Ahmad, Musnad, vol. 3, P.108, 271, 272.*

Allah says:

وَجَعَلۡنَا مِنۡهُمۡ أَئِمَّةٗ يَهۡدُونَ بِأَمۡرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُواْۖ وَكَانُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

When they became steadfast and believed firmly in Our messages, We raised leaders among them, guiding them according to Our command [24] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 24)

Their being ‘leaders’ or ‘imams’ here does not refer to their temporal power from their own inherent strength, but rather to the leadership of moral authority granted to them by Allah, which is why He *the Almighty* stresses that they as Allah says: ‘…guiding them according to Our Command’ (*as-Sajda:* 24) since whatever they excelled in was only through the Divine Guidance.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Anbiya’:* ‘We made all of them leaders, guiding others by Our Command, and We inspired them to do good works, to keep up the prayer, and to give alms: they were Our true worshippers.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 73)

As for the Arabic word *Alaiqan* (sure faith), it means an unshakeable conviction which your mind no longer debates back and forth, but which has become axiomatic, firmly embedded in your soul.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ يَفۡصِلُ بَيۡنَهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُواْ فِيهِ يَخۡتَلِفُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

[Prophet], it is your Lord who will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences [25] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 25)

The first part of the verse reads, ‘…it is your Lord who will judge between them…’ (*as-Sajda:* 25). Note that Allah *the Almighty* has used the pronoun ‘who’ for emphasis and to indicate that absolutely no one beside Allah will sit in judgment on the Last Day; a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…Who has control today? Allah, the One, the All Powerful’ (*Ghafir:* 16).

Again, the use of the pronoun is meant to clear up any doubt about that none, but Allah *the Almighty* will be sitting in judgment on that Day of Resurrection.

Note the use of this pronoun in question in the following verses of the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘They are my enemies; not so the Lord of the Worlds, Who created me. It is He Who guides me; He Who gives me food and drink; He Who cures me when I am ill; He Who will make me die and then give me life again.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77-81)

Again, the use of this pronoun in question is meant to indicate the exclusivity of Allah being the source of our guidance, food, drink, good health, etc. However, someone may claim that he has the ability to do so. Note also how the pronoun is not used when referring to Allah’s Power over life and death, so no one can claim to have the ability to do so; since no one would dare claim such a prerogative.

Back to the verse in question: given that Allah *the Almighty* has appointed certain angels to run the affairs of the universe, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah’s Command…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 11). That verse means that the certain angels are appointed by Allah will abide by His Command. Yet, some people might be led to think that these angels will play a role in serving judgment among mankind, since after all they carry out so many other important tasks on Allah’s behalf here on earth.

Notice also that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It is your Lord…’ and He *the Almighty* doesn’t say, ‘Verily, it is Allah…’ which means that He *the Almighty* by this verse asserts His *Rububiyya* (Lordship). By using this Attribute of Lordship in this context, He *the Almighty* wants to assure people that none will be wronged on that Day because He *Glorified is He* will be the One Who judged people. Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, ‘…concerning their differences…’ (*as-Sajda:* 25) to indicate that Judgment is only rendered for disputes which require the review of a judge.

Allah says:

أَوَلَمۡ يَهۡدِ لَهُمۡ كَمۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِهِم مِّنَ ٱلۡقُرُونِ يَمۡشُونَ
فِي مَسَٰكِنِهِمۡۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٍۚ أَفَلَا يَسۡمَعُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Is it not a lesson for them [to see] how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose homes they now walk? There truly are signs in this – do they not hear? [26] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 26)

Allah *the Almighty* has spoken about the Message with which He sent His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to call people to a more sublime faith in Allah *the Almighty* the One Who has no partner. He *the Almighty* then tells that people will have another meeting with Him *Glorified is He* after the end of the world when people will be admitted either to the paradise or to the Hell.

When Allah *the Almighty* displays His signs in the world, He does so to establish that He is the One Who creates these wonders. He did not create them for our idle amusement, but to urge us to carefully reflect upon them. If Allah had wanted to deceive us, He certainly would not have been trying to awaken our souls or telling us to deeply ponder over His Revelation.

Furthermore, if He *the Almighty* had not been confident that we could reach enlightenment through this contemplation, He would not have bothered alerting us to His signs in the first place. Similarly, a salesperson who is confident in the quality of his wares will not hesitate to have you closely inspect them because he knows that you will be impressed.

On the other hand, a salesperson who is hawking defective products will try to dupe you and gyp you off. For instance, if you want new shoes, but the pair you try on is too tight, the salesperson might disingenuously claim that they will break in after you have walked in them for a while, or conversely, if they are too wide, they will try to make you think that they are a good fit. These sorts of tricks are painfully obvious.

But while a slippery merchant will try to veil the truth from your probing intellect, Allah *the Almighty* Himself forcefully pushes us to think and reflect, repeatedly saying in the Quran: ‘will they not listen?’, ‘will they not use their reason?', and 'will they not ponder this Quran?' It is very much in the interest of Islam that we should seek to seriously intellectually analyse it. Conversely, when you speak to members of certain other religions, they might say, 'Do not try to rationally analyse this issue' because they know too well that if you did, you would not be able to accept it. But Allah *the Almighty* does not want to give us any excuse for not embracing Islam after we hear about it. And indeed, the original, pristine message of this religion has been accurately and clearly conveyed. Such are the signs of Allah in the world.

In order to establish the truthfulness of His Prophets, Allah *the Almighty* grants them miracles –contrary to the laws of the universe –in the field which their people are known for excelling in magic, medicine, etc., so that their people will have no excuse to not believe in the Divine Revelation. Allah then reveals His Commandments and explains that in order for us to lead wholesome lives we need to implement the Divine Way of Guidance. So, when we turn away from His Guidance, defects come on the scene, a matter which clearly indicates that the Laws of Allah in this regard had been violated.

Allah *the Almighty* then makes clear that He has sent many Prophets since Adam *peace be upon him*. We, humans, who are supposed to be Allah's successors on earth, often lose sight of our true mission because of how easily our immersion in the trappings of this world overwhelms our every thought. It is all too human of us to ignore everything that does not serve our immediate needs. This is also why people often forget what they owe others while remembering quite well what others owe them.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, 'you have no more excuses. Allah has strewn out His clear signs everywhere for us to read; we cannot plead ignorance. Indeed, even though there are a lot of people who deny the Truth, no one has ever gone so far as to claim that they themselves created the sun or the moon, or that they are the ones who cause the wind to move through the land, or the plants to sprout up, or the rain to cascade from the sky.

Allah *the Almighty* also warns us to never forget that we are nothing more than His successors on the earth and that we are neither self-created nor self-perpetuating. The moment we lose sight of this, Allah will abandon us to our own faculties, and we will soon enough expire. This is what happened when Qarun was enriched by Allah: he led himself misguided by thinking that his wealth came from his own inherent abilities and greatness. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We caused the earth to swallow him and his home…’ (*al-Qasas:* 81) as a warning to everyone else that wealth is not our inalienable property, but merely a trust placed in our charge. After all, if our wealth truly were our intrinsic property, we would be able to protect it from dilapidation and destruction. Allah afflicts us with catastrophes in order to snap us back to the reality that we are His successors on earth, and that we are wholly dependent on Him. It is this illusion of self-sufficiency that is the root of all corruption.

As we mentioned before, if we were to examine the world thoroughly and objectively, we would invariably come to the conclusion that whatever is left untrammelled by humans carries out its functions just fine and that all disruptions in the natural order come from our actions which contravene Allah’s law. Conversely, when we intervene in nature in accordance with Allah’s Law, everything continues to operate in a good working order.

Whenever you see something wrong with the world, it is because one of Allah’s Rights has not been honoured. For instance, if you see a poor person writhing in pain from hunger or shivering from the cold because they cannot afford enough clothing to even properly bundle up, then it is because the wealthy have failed to duly fulfil Allah’s Right of the prescribed almsgiving. Allah has precisely calculated the amount to be given in *zakat*, and if those who possess the means paid their necessary dues, there would not be any needy people in society.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* wants us to preserve the spirituality embedded in our inner nature, that primordial depository of faith in our soul which has not been adulterated by the lust of desire or the numbness of oblivion – that part of our soul which witnessed the pre-eternal pact of faith. He *Glorified is He* says regarding this: ‘[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they replied, ‘Yes, we bear witness.’ So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We were not aware of this’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172). This means that we made this covenant to Him *the Almighty* before our carnal desires and the torpor of this world overwhelmed us and suborned us: and then say as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…We were not aware of this,' or, 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to Allah, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173) Those who preserve this part of their soul and this divine sense which Allah Himself has put in our breast, and abide by the pact taken with Allah – it is they who keep the flame of their true inner nature burning brightly, otherwise it would be wiped out by sin

In this vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave the following parable: 'Temptations will be presented to men's hearts as reed mat is woven stick by stick and any heart which is impregnated by them will have a black mark put into it, but any heart which rejects them will have a white mark put in it. The result is that there will become two types of hearts: one white like a white stone which will not be harmed by any turmoil or temptation so long as the heavens and the earth endure; and the other black and dust-coloured like a vessel which is upset, not recognising what is good or rejecting what is abominable.(1)

The point is that our good deeds and our sins accumulate on our heart just as the threads of a mat are strewn together. The heart is made either white by righteousness or dark by sin. We are made up of both a soul and a body, the former endowing the latter with movement and thought. Before the two were conjoined, they were immersed in glorifying Allah, just like everything else in the cosmos; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification.' (*an-Nur:* 41)

We need to properly appreciate this truth and accordingly preserve the faith which animates in our heats so that they can continue to be illumined. But if you neglect this part of your soul, ominous things may happen and you will become alienated from your own self. When your mind forces your body and your soul to commit sin, they hate you for it because, as we noted above, their natural state is to glorify their Creator *the Almighty*.

Sleeping is a mercy from Allah to the sinners because during that time, their limbs and their soul can take a break from their misdeeds, thus worship

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/ 386, 405; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 144.*

Allah for a while. This is why everyone feels recharged after sleeping: for that fleeting time, they were in tune with the rest of their being.

In this vein, it has been narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while his eye would sleep at night, his heart would stay awake.(1) His limbs were always in tune with each other, whether during his waking hours or when he was sleeping. That is why, if you see someone who is exhausted, it is because they have worn out their limbs, which want to take a break from them. The limbs are basically saying to their owner: Go to sleep! We cannot take you anymore!

The point is that Allah *the Almighty* tries to wake us up from our spiritual stupor by sending the Prophets. He further reinforces their message by referring to the previous scriptures, having us ponder the fate of those who dared defy the previous Prophets who came before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and how the end of the deniers was. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is it not a lesson for them [to see] how many generations We destroyed before them…’ (*as-Sajda:* 26)? He *the Almighty* also says in the chapter of *al-Fajr*: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of ‘Ad, of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land, and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh?’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-10)

These ‘tent-poles’ refer to the famous pyramids which people come far and wide to behold. This tourist attraction is a sign from Allah reminding us of the annihilation of these once-great rulers who had the temerity to call the Prophets liars. Allah *the Almighty* prevents us from having any excuse to not believe by revealing the cosmic signs which testify to His Oneness, the miracles which establish the veracity of the Prophets who convey His Message, and the scriptural laws which cannot be made any more perfect and which provide us with a panacea for our social diseases.

The ruins of those who dared deny Allah’s messengers were still there for the Prophet’s contemporaries to see for themselves. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138)

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3569; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 738.*

Here are the vestiges of the people of ‘Ad and Thamud attest their presence although they were buried under the earth, some were still visible above ground. Given that the average sandstorm in that region can engulf an entire caravan, you can well imagine how sandstorm after sandstorm from then until now would bury the tall buildings of Iram. The moral here is that these ruins should stand as a stark lesson on the fate of those who rebel against Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is it not a lesson for them [to see]…’ (*as-Sajda:* 26)?

This means that: ‘does this not point out to them and make clear to them the following…?’ ‘Guidance’ is comprised of three separate components: someone who provides guidance, someone who is guided, and the object of guidance. The root for ‘guidance’ is used in the Quran for three different purposes:

- When mentioning the Guide Allah *the Almighty*;
- When mentioning those who are guided, the human race;
- And when mentioning the object of guidance, that is, the end which Allah wants us all to arrive at.

The verb *hada* (to guide) often takes a direct object; as in *al-Fatiha* (the Opening) chapter. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Guide us to the straight way.’ (*as-Sajda:* 26) In this context, Allah is the guide, we humans are those who are to be guided, and the Straight Way is the goal to which we should be guided.

Elsewhere in the Quran, the verb ‘to guide’ also employs *al-lam* (the auxiliary preposition) to indicate its indirect object, as in the verse when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Praise be to God, who guided us to this…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 43). Or *ila* (the auxiliary preposition) as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…God guides whoever He will to a straight path.’ (*al-Baqara:* 213)

Notice how only one Guide is ever mentioned, Allah *the Almighty* just as only one beneficiary the human race is ever referred to; however, the object of guidance differs from context to context. And while the prepositions ‘*lam’* is usually used to refer to the object of guidance, in the verse at hand. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is it not a lesson for them [to see]…’ (*as-Sajda:* 26)?

It refers to those receiving this guidance, otherwise, this verse could have been phrased as ‘Has not Allah guided these people *(to)* this (*li-hadha*)?’

Why is this the case? Some people feel that the religious obligations that come along with Allah's guidance are too high a price to pay, so we see some people deny of the religious obligations and considered them like a burden. Therefore worship things like stone idols, the sun, the moon, or so on because they do not impose any rules on their followers. Obviously, adoring these objects is much less taxing than submitting to the Lord.

Such religious obligations truly are a heavy burden for these sinners, being fundamentally at odds with their false desires. In any case, although indulging in our guilty pleasures may give us some degree of passing enjoyment, it is inevitably followed by undesirable consequences and the concomitant guilt.

A good example is that of a diligent student who perseveres through the toil of constant study, yearning to savour the sweetness of academic excellence. On the other hand is the indolent student who prefers to indulge in the quick fix of their fun and games at the expense of their studies, only to face the humiliation of failure at the end of the semester.

The point is that the toil of our work and the fruit it bears are really just two sides of the same proverbial coin. Knowing that the reward for our travail is far greater and more lasting than the temporary pain we have to endure helps put things in perspective.

Allah *the Almighty* wants us to fully apply ourselves to our religious commitments and to appreciate that, not only are they for our own benefit, but that we should consider ourselves honoured for being charged with this responsibility. Allah does not need anything from us, He does not in any way benefit from our actions; no, He provides us with this opportunity out of compassion for us, so that we might prove ourselves worthy of His grace.

Has Allah *Glorified is He* not promised that as He *the Almighty* say: '…If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour]…' (*Ibrahim:* 7)? All of our deeds are both by us and for us; Allah is certainly not in need of our work, given how He already possessed the attribute of complete perfection before we even existed.

Thus, the preposition *lam* in the verse: 'Is it not a lesson for them [to see]…' (*as-Sajda:* 26) lends the meaning that 'Is it not a guidance *(for their* *own sake and their own benefit)…*'? This guidance is in the interest of the guided, and not the Guide. If we truly appreciated this fact, we would bow down and kiss the hand of anyone who conveyed this truth to us.

If you are insightful, you will discern this meaning in verse the saying of Allah: 'these are rightly guided by their Lord…' (*Luqman:* 5). In other words, divine guidance is not a burden which they have to carry on their backs, but is a mount which carries them to the noble end willed for them by their Lord.

But what is it exactly that Allah is trying to 'guide' us to here? What truth is He trying to point out?

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose homes they now walk?' (*as-Sajda:* 26) Look and see how those who rejected the Prophets before you ended up: Allah did not let them lay a finger on His messengers but gave His messengers the upper hand.

The word 'how many' is meant rhetorically to indicate a great multitude, Just like when you say to someone who refuses to acknowledge all the favours you have done for them, 'How many times have I done something for you?' meaning, you have helped them out an innumerable number of times. Thus, the verse is not really asking a question, but is reaffirming that Allah has related to you the fate of many nations which were inimical to their prophets. And how did they end up? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We punished each one of them(1) for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned. It was not God who wronged them; they wronged themselves.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40)

It is for our own benefit that Allah tells us the fate of those who deny the truth, so that we can make sure to avoid meeting the same end. As we mentioned before in our discussion of the saying of Allah in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36), we should consider this flash of fire a blessing, a blessing which we should not deny because Allah uses it to warn us of an evil end.

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(1) *See Ad-Durr al-Manthur fi at-Tafsir bi-l-Ma'thur, 6/463: Qatada said: 'The saying of Allah '...some We struck with a violent storm…' (al-'Ankabut: 40) refers to the people of Lut (Lot) Allah's peace be upon him, whereas the saying of Allah '... some were overcome by a sudden blast…' refers to the peoples of Saleh and Shuaib (Jethro) Allah's Peace be upon them. As for His saying: '...some We made the earth swallow…', it refers to Qarun; while '...and some We drowned…' refers to the people of Nuh (Noah) Allah's peace be upon him.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…how many generations…' (*as-Sajda:* 26). The word for *qarn* here is (generation) which also encompasses the meanings of 'century' and 'era.' When used in the sense of *qarn* (generation), it actually refers to three generations which stretch over approximately a century. Otherwise, if meant in the sense of 'era' – whether one associated with a particular religion or with a particular monarch, for instance, then *qarn* can stretch far longer in time, perhaps for a thousand years, as in the case of Nuh's (Noah's) *qarn*.

A *qarn* is thus defined by what it is associated with *ma qurina bihi*: hence, *Al-'Asr al-Jahili* (Pre-Islamic Era), the Era of the Dawn of Islam, the Umayyad Era, the Abbasids Era, and the Mamelukes Era. And nowadays, of course, we live in the Modern Era.

As Allah *the Almighty* has explained to us, while human civilisation is constantly progressing materially, it is retrogressing spiritually. As each generation passes, people slip further and further away from the bond of religion. This is because material advancement produces luxuries which seduce us, and inevitably cause a decline in our morality. If our progress were absolute, as the modernists claim, our advance in the moral sphere would have been proportional to our advance in the technical sphere.

As Allah *Glorified is He* says in this regard: '…But when the earth has taken on its finest appearance, and adorns itself, and its people think they have power over it, then the fate We commanded comes to it, by night or by day …' (*Yunus:* 24).

If you carefully study the history of the major civilizations, even those from the Great Age of Progress, you will notice how they were unable to prevent their own decline. At first there was the Stone Age, then the Age of Steam, and now we are in the Space Age.

The point is that our evolution is limited to the material dimension of our civilization, and that we are de-evolving spiritually. A question arises: Can our material progress be attributed to our possessing Allah's Guidance here on earth? No, as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran: 'We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We ourselves will guard it. Even before you [Prophet]' (*al-Hijr:* 9).

That is, it is Allah who has revealed this reminder; it is He who has preserved it. He has not left this task to us, as we are too feeble. Thus, the Book has been with us since the beginning as a witness against us.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…in whose homes they now walk…' (*as-Sajda:* 26)?

That is, Allah does not present us with an issue without providing evidence to back it up. In this case, the evidence of what happened to the sinners of old is standing right in front of the Prophet's contemporaries; indeed, they walk by them every day as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…There truly are signs in this- do they not hear?' (*as-Sajda:* 26) Here, Allah drives them to prick up their ears to the tale of how the obstinate deniers of truth were ultimately engulfed by Allah's wrath.

Even if you have not lived a very long life, you must at some point have seen a criminal get their just desserts. Or even if you yourself have not seen as much, you definitely have heard about it from someone else. Most people are kept in line simply by the knowledge that divine vengeance seeks out the sinners even before the Day of Resurrection. There is a profound wisdom in this: since the oppressor usually does not desist from their transgressions of their own accord, a taste of the punishment in store for them might snap them back to their senses; even if not, they can still serve as an example for others.

For their part, the Sufi Scholars say that no tyrannical oppressor shall pass away until Allah wreaks His vengeance on them. Those who persecute others may very well end up becoming weak and persecuted themselves. If you want to know how things turn out for the wicked, look no further than what happened to the disbelievers in the past.

Reflect on the saying of Allah: 'In this way, We make some evildoers have power over others…' (*al-An'am:* 129). You could almost say that the wicked are driven to visit vengeance upon their fellow transgressors. Thus does Allah have the evildoers destroy each other, instead of commissioning the righteous believers to do this, since they, by their very nature, possess a good heart which is more inclined to forbearance than violence?

After all, did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not say to the pagans of Mecca after his conquest of the city, ‘You may go, for you are free.’(1) Allah is basically saying to the righteous, Just relax and leave the wicked to Me; I will send people even more wicked than them to shape them up.

Notice how the Truth emphasises the sense of hearing; Allah says: ‘…do they not hear?’ (*as-Sajda:* 26) because it is through our sense of hearing that we can imbibe the stories of the ancient disbelievers and take to heart their moral; Allah also mixes it up, alternating between each of our senses to warn us of what is coming saying for instance in the following verse: ‘…Do they not see?’ (*as-Sajda:* 27) and then, in another chapter Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Do they not use their reason?’ (*Ya Sin:* 68), thus alternating between each of our senses to warn us of what is coming.

Allah’s saying: ’…do they not hear?’ (*as-Sajda:* 26) means; ‘will not they listen to the story of the downfall of the wicked?’ Even though Allah keeps reminding them of this, His warnings fall on deaf ears, with the disbelievers continuing to adore their false idols.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ أَنَّا نَسُوقُ ٱلْمَآءَ إِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ ٱلْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِۦ زَرْعًا
تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَٰمُهُمْ وَأَنفُسُهُمْ ۖ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ (٢٧)

Do they not consider how We drive rain to the barren land, and with it produce vegetation from which their cattle and they themselves eat? Do they not see? [27] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 27)

Note how both here and in (*as-Sajda:* 26), the end of the verse complements the beginning. ‘Is it not a lesson for them [to see]…’ (*as-Sajda:* 26) meaning,

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(1) *See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 4/412; it is reported that Ibn Ishaq said that certain scholars have related to me that when Messenger Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him delivered his speech at the portal of the Ka'ba, he proclaimed, 'There is no god but Allah, Who is Alone without a partner. Allah has been true to His Word: He has granted victory to His servant, and He has single-handedly defeated the confederates… How do you think I will treat you now [that I have full power over you]?' The people of Mecca responded, 'You will treat us well because you are a noble man from a noble family.” Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him turned to them and said, 'You may go, for you are free.'*

‘Are these historical stories not a guide to them…?’ Such stories are of course conveyed through the auditory faculty. Allah says: ‘…do they not hear?’ (*as-Sajda:* 26) In contrast, since this verse refers to visible scenery, it follows with ‘…Do they not see?’ (*as-Sajda:* 27) One aspect is meant to be heard, whilst the other is to be seen.

A further contrast between the two verses: whereas the saying of Allah: ‘how many generations We destroyed before them…’ (*as-Sajda:* 26) focuses on how Allah destroyed [past tense] the disbelievers of the bygone eras. That draws our attention to one of Allah’s recurrent signs in creation: namely, how He drives [present tense] the rain. Then comes the saying of Allah: ‘…We drive rain to the barren land…’ (*as-Sajda:* 27). The use of the present tense indicates how Allah is continually carrying out this process. At every moment Allah propels the clouds onward and sends rain down unto the dry barren land to imbue it with the verdure of a myriad of plants. By perpetually being manifested before all of us, this sign beckons to us to witness and ponder it: ‘…Do they not see?’ (*as-Sajda:* 27)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have adorned the earth with attractive things so that We may test people to find out which of them do best, but We shall reduce all this to barren dust.’ (*al-Kahf:* 7-8) The word *juruz* – which in (*as-Sajda:* 27) was translated as ‘dry barren land’ and here as ‘barren dust’ – has the basic meaning of soil without any plants on it, whether due to drought or simply because all its plants have been completely harvested.

In the saying of Allah: ‘…We drive rain to the barren land…’ (*as-Sajda:* 27) ‘To drive’ means ‘to prod along quickly,’ as when you say to someone who is pushing you to hurry up, ‘Why are you trying to drive me along so fast?’ To drive something of course indicates that you are pushing from behind, as opposed to dragging it from the front. When you drive someone along, you make sure they are in front of you; otherwise if they were in back, they would be able to slip away unnoticed.

The direct object referred to in Allah’s saying may be the clouds. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is Allah who sends forth the winds; they raise up the clouds; We drive them to a dead land and with them revive the earth after its death: such will be the Resurrection.’ (*Fatir:* 9)

It may also refer to the rain, as is the case in Allah's saying: 'Do they not consider how We drive rain to the barren land, and with it produce vegetation from which their cattle and they themselves eat? Do they not see?' (*as-Sajda:* 27) After driving the rainwater from the clouds, Allah then drives it from the soil either into the rivers or form aquifers beneath the earth's surface.

Our Lord *the Almighty* has given us these deposits of water beneath the earth, so that we can access them in times of need. Also, since the water lies in the subterranean layers of the soil, we are spared, having to deal with various other issues, such as having to build dykes to control water flow or to build other mechanisms to prevent evaporation.

In this vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said, 'The parable of the guidance and knowledge which Allah has sent me with is that of abundant rain cascading onto the ground: the fertile patches of the earth absorb some of it, producing pasturage; the arid patches of the earth store some of it, from which people quench their thirst and in turn give drink to their cattle and irrigate their crops; while the lowlands neither store the rainwater nor produce any herbage. Such is the parable of the guidance and knowledge which Allah has sent me with.'(1)

These three types of earth represent the three types of knowledge from which people get benefit. The first type absorbs the water and produces herbage, while the second reserves the water for our direct benefit. But what is the benefit of the lowlands which neither retain any water nor produce any pasturage? Why did Allah bother creating them in the first place?

It is these lowlands which store the rainwater inside the earth. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…We bring down water from the sky for you to drink- you do not control its sources.' (*al-Hijr:* 22) He *the Almighty* also says: 'Say, 'Just think: if all your water were to sink deep into the earth who could give you flowing water in its place?' (*al-Mulk:* 30)

The point is that these lowlands do have a specific function, if you understand their role in this whole process; Allah *the Almighty* after all, would never create anything in vain. Back to our parable: the fertile earth and the arid earth both refer to people from whom we derive the direct and immediate benefit of knowledge, while the lowlands represent those whose benefit may not become apparent until the next generations.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (399/4), 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad in his Az-Zawa'id 'Ala al-Musnad (399/4); Al-Bukhari, Sahih, the 'chapter on Knowledge' (20); Muslim, Sahih Muslim (2282) on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari.*

The freshwater which Allah forms into aquifers inside the earth does not simply dissipate into the ground, nor does it otherwise mix with the saltwater; rather, it courses along in quasi-tubes. Indeed, such springs can even be found beneath the bed of a salt lake.

This is one of the wonders which point to the Lord's Omnipotence. The barrier existing between the freshwater and the saltwater when they meet in the open sea is a case in point. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet, yet there is a barrier between them they do not cross.' (*ar-Rahman:* 19-20) There is also a barrier between freshwater and saltwater under the surface of the earth.

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants to draw our attention to this visible sign. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not consider how We drive rain to the barren land…' (*as-Sajda:* 27). It goes without saying that all of us have physically witnessed this phenomenon. What the Quran is really asking us here is whether we have truly contemplated this reality to come to a realisation of Allah's Omnipotent Power?

The phrase '…We drive…' (*as-Sajda:* 27) further alludes to Allah's constant maintenance of creation. Although it is the angels who directly carry out this task, nevertheless, they are ultimately acting under His Commandments.

The True Lord *the Almighty* has ordained that cattle be allowed to munch on our crops before us, even though they were created to serve man. This is because they mostly consume plants that are still green, not totally ripe. In letting these cattle fatten up off our plants, Allah is actually preparing food for us so that we can dig into these walking bourguignon.

Once again, the nuance of the Quran comes out in the ending of this verse wherein Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Do they not see?' (*as-Sajda:* 27) This is because this issue is related to the faculty of our vision. You may notice a similar use of such nuance in the following passage as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say [Prophet], “Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual night over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than He could bring you light? Do you not listen?” Say, “Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual day over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than He could give you night in which to rest? Do you not see?”’ (*al-Kahf:* 71-72)

Notice how the first verse in this quote ends with His saying, ‘…Do you not listen?’ while the second ends with His saying, ‘Do you not see?’ This is because the darkness of night forces us to rely on our sense of ‘hearing’, whilst ‘seeing’ is the primary sense we utilise during the day. The point is that the Quran’s expressions are full of that most inimitable subtlety commiserates with the Speech of the Lord, Who arranges every word in its proper place.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا ٱلْفَتْحُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

And they say, ‘When will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?’ [28] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 28)

The word ‘when’ is usually an interrogative particle used to inquire about the timeframe of something; in this context, it indicates how the disbelievers perceived the Last Day as something far off and unlikely.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his people that he had been sent with a Divine Message and Miracles from Allah to back him up. He furthermore described what the fate of those who chose to follow him would be, and what the fate of those who chose to defy him would be.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* also made clear that Allah *the Almighty* would not have sent him merely to abandon him, and that, on the contrary, it is Allah’s Law to grant victory to His Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Our Word has already been given to Our servants the Messengers: it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our Cause will be the winners.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

Every time the Muslims have failed to secure victory – including those episodes from the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* –

can be attributed to the warriors' failure to fulfil the true conditions of being Allah's Soldiers, since those who fight only for Allah's sake never taste defeat.

Thus, with regards to the (partial) defeat at the battle of Uhud, Allah taught the believers that the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in their midst would in no manner exempt them from the spiritual and social laws of the universe. This is because Allah's Law is immutable.

What happened at Uhud is that some of the Muslim archers disobeyed Prophet Muhammad's orders to stay in their stations until the fighting had ceased. When it seemed as if the pagans were retreating, some of the archers ran out into the battlefield to grab the spoils, at which point the pagans turned around and wiped out the few archers that had remained in place. As a result of this lapse in discipline, the Muslims – while perhaps not being defeated per se – certainly did not win a clear victory, given that the tide of battle turned against them even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself was in their midst.(1)

Some people take issue with the outcome of Uhud, wondering how it is conceivable that an army led by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could possibly be defeated. But this setback definitely does not detract from him in the slightest. Since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not going to live among his Companions forever, it was necessary for them to see with their own eyes the result of disobeying his orders, so that they could come to appreciate their sanctity.

If the disobedient Muslims had secured victory in this situation, they would have lost confidence in the efficacy of the Prophetic instructions, since such orders, under the case if they were granted victory, would obviously prove less than necessary for success in the balance of things.

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(1) Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr, the brother of 'Amr ibn 'Awf, to lead the archers who numbered fifty. He then commanded him, saying: 'Keep the [The people of Mecca] cavalry at bay with your arrows so they can not attack us from behind. Regardless of whether the battle is turning in our favor or against us, stay in your positions; for our part, we will make sure they do not attack from the front.' Ibn Hisham's A*s-Sirat An-Nabawiyya* (10/3). Al-Bayhaqi quoted in *Dala'il An-Nubuwwa* (229/3) that after the defeat of the pagans, the archers abandoned their positions to grab the war booty. Ibn Jubayr reproached them, 'Do not you remember what the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to you?' to which they responded, 'We are going to join the others and collect our war booty!' After this, the people of Mecca swung back and fought the Muslims until only twelve men were left with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*.

Similarly, with regards to the battle of Hunayn, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…even on the day of the Battle of Hunayn. You were well pleased with your large numbers, but they were of no use to you: the earth seemed to close in on you despite its spaciousness, and you turned tail and fled…' (*at-Tawba:* 25).

The believers felt so assured of their vast numbers that even Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* exclaimed, 'Only a force more immense than ours could possibly stop us!' Allah let them dangle over the very precipice of defeat in order to teach them a lesson, but in the end, He pulled them back out of His Mercy, and turned the tide of battle in their favour.

The True Lord *the Almighty* teaches us to obey His Commandments, to sincerely fight for His cause Alone and to discipline ourselves so that we can achieve the goal at hand. If we disregard Allah's Commands, we will necessarily be deprived of this reward, since if Allah rewarded us regardless of whether we listened to Him or not, His commandments would lose their prerequisite gravitas.

Then He *Glorified is He* relates what the idolaters said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And they say, when will this Decision be…' (*as-Sajda:* 28), which was promised to you by Allah. Such a victory seemed quite distant at the time, given how the believers amounted to no more than a rag-tag band.

This is why, when Allah *the Almighty* revealed His following saying: 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar:* 45), 'Umar was utterly dumbfounded, exclaiming, 'What forces could this verse possibly be referring to, given we cannot even protect our own selves?!' But the True Lord *the Almighty* did not leave them in this situation for long; for soon after this passage was revealed, the battle of Badr took place, 'Umar saw with his own eyes the fulfilment of Allah's Promise as the army of the idolaters was actually routed. At the end of the battle, he, i.e. 'Umar muttered in awe, 'Lord, the forces indeed have been routed, and they truly have turned their backs in flight.'(1)

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(1) *'Ikrima Allah be pleased with him said that 'When the verse, "Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee." (al-Qamar: 45) was revealed, 'Umar Allah be pleased=*

‘It is most peculiar how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* revealed to his Companions the outcome of the battle before it even had gotten underway. Before the onset of the fighting, he pointed with his cane to the exact plots of earth where Abu Jahl, ‘Utba and Al-Walid – among many others – would meet their fate.(1)’

How could anyone have predicted the battle in such detail, given how battles are a jostle of blows, attacks, and retreats, with soldiers from both sides jumbling together in a confused melee? Furthermore, the Muslims had set forth only with the intention of raiding a caravan, not engaging a full-blown army. I mean, think how much more redoubtable the Muslim company would have been if they had been fully decked out for a serious military showdown. The idolaters were well aware of this, and took this into consideration when they sized up this nascent military force. Allah trumpeted the fact that a rag-tag band not even fully prepared for battle managed to vanquish a much larger and much more prepared company, in order to fill the hearts of the disbelievers with dread.

The question which the deniers of truth pose here as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…And they say, when will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?’ (*as-Sajda:* 28) is not meant as a serious inquiry, but rather, it is posed in a sarcastic sense, as made clear in Allah’s Response. They thought that the possibility that Allah would actually deliver on His Victory which He promised His believing servants with, was somewhat farfetched – to say the least. But while the disbelievers perceived this event as being far off in an unlikely future (even though it did come to pass relatively quickly), they conversely prayed for Allah’s later Judgment to be hastened on them. Allah *Glorified is He* says about their attitude in this regard: ‘…If what you say is true, bring us the punishment you threaten.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 70)

= *with him said, “What hosts could this be referring to?!” He continued, “On the day that the battle of Badr took place, I saw Messenger Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him don a coat of chain mail, reciting the verse 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (al-Qamar: 45), It was then that I understood its meaning.”’ This narration is quoted in the (Tafsir) of Ibn Kathir (226/4) and is attributed to Ibn Abu Hatim.*

(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1779) and Ahmad in his Musnad (219/3, 258) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

Because the word *al-fath* (victory) is used here with the definitive article, we know for sure that it is meant in a positive way, and that its benefit will definitely be realised. Otherwise, if it were used in the indefinite, it would need some sort of qualifier to make clear whether this ‘victory’ were for or against us. For instance, Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the chapter of *al-Fath*: ‘Truly We have opened up a path to clear triumph for you [Prophet].’ (*al-Fath:* 1) The adjective *mubin* (manifest) indicates that this *fath* is one in the Prophet’s favour. For him, it is a profit, not a loss; or, as they say in banking, it accrues to your account and does not subtract from it.

Conversely, you have the verse, ‘So, when they had forgotten the warning they had received, We opened the gates to everything for them...’ (*al-An‘am:* 44).

The point is that we should be very careful not to become deluded with the *fath* (victory, revelation, opening) Allah gives us. We need to consider whether it is meant to help us or to work against us. Do not let the toothy smile of this world cause you to become complacent and arrogant, because your *fath* might be nothing more than a temptation or a test. The word *fath* carries both these positive and negative connotations. Also, consider this passage in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If the people of those towns had believed and been mindful of Allah, We would have showered them with blessings from the heavens and earth…’ (*al-An‘am:* 44). In other words, do not let these blessings make you arrogant and deluded.

Fath encompasses several meanings (each of which is clarified by context) as many words in Arabic, such as the multifaceted word *‘ayn* (eye). Thus, we can say, ‘I saw them with my *‘ayn*, or ‘I gave them lots of my *‘ayn* (cash),’ or ‘I let them use the water from my *‘ayn* (well) to irrigate their fields,’ or ‘They act as his *‘uyun* (lit. ‘eyes’, metaphorically used for spies).’ Words such as these, which are identical in spelling and pronunciation but different in meaning, are known as homonyms.

The root-word *fath* and its derivatives are primarily used in the physical sense of ‘opening,’ as in *fatahtu al-bab* (I opened the door). This is the primary epistemological meaning of the word. Thus, the chapter which relates the story of Yusuf (Joseph) says: ‘Then, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their goods had been returned to them…’ (*Yusuf:* 65).

Conversely, it can also be used in the metaphorical sense of Allah granting us goodness and knowledge, as He *Glorified is He* says in the following verse: ‘…But when they are alone with each other they say, ‘How could you tell them about Allah’s Revelation [to us]? They will be able to use it to argue against you before your Lord! Have you no sense?’ (*al-Baqara:* 76)

The verb *fataha* can also mean ‘to adjudge the truth of a matter,’ which is why in Yemeni Arabic, the word ‘*al-ftih*’ refers to a judge.

In the verse under study, the word has the meaning of ‘victory’ or ‘domination’; Allah says, ‘And they say, ‘When will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?’ (*as-Sajda:* 28) For their part, the believers respond that it is not theirs to tell the truth or not since it is completely out of their hands. The inevitable victory of the righteous is Allah’s Prerogative, and it is He Who has said that it will happen one day.

If we are going to make any claims to objectivity, we need to properly attribute actions to their true Maker. This is why, after his miraculous journey to Jerusalem, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Last night, I was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem’,(1) indicating that it was a Higher Power which enabled his little sojourn. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he did not claim to have travelled with his own intrinsic ability, the disbelievers still complained, ‘Are you trying to say that you travelled in one night what takes us a month to cross with our camels at top speed?!’ But given their mastery of the intricacies of Arabic expression, it is rather difficult to conclude that they were not deliberately misconstruing his words.

The point is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not complete this journey with his own abilities; it was His Lord *Glorified is He* Who transported him. Those who are not completely convinced that this incident took place need to look at it within the context of Allah’s Omnipotence, and within the context of how the passage of time relates to Allah. As we discussed before, an action which unfolds within a certain amount of time is known as a verb of engagement *al-fi'l al-'ilaji*. The Lord *the Almighty* for His Part, does not engage in actions, merely issuing His Order of 'Be' and it is! There is a conversely proportional relationship between an action and the time needed to undertake it whereby the greater the power of the agent, the less time is needed. Since Allah was the Main Doer of Prophet Muhammad's miraculous night journey to Jerusalem, no time actually elapsed, given how Allah's Infinite Power made it happen instantaneously.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4710); Muslim, Sahih, the ‘Chapter on Faith’ (170) on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah Allah be pleased with him.*

The True Lord's subsequent answer to the disbelievers' question, '…When will this Decision be…' (*as-Sajda:* 28) shows us how the question was really meant in a dismissive and derogatory sense, and not out of actual curiosity.

Allah says:

قُلْ يَوْمَ ٱلْفَتْحِ لَا يَنفَعُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ إِيمَٰنُهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Say, 'On the Day of Decision it will be no use for the disbelievers to believe; they will be granted no respite' [29] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 29)

In other words, why are you, o disbelievers, asking about the Day of the Final Victory? What point is there to you knowing its date? All you need to know is that, when it does eventually come to pass, the curtain will be lifted on your heinous crimes. A sudden 'conversion' or bout of penance on your part will not do you any good, nor will Allah *the Almighty* grant you any more time to mend your ways.

As is well known, you can only enter faith when there is still some life left in you; yet to believe in Allah only at the throes of death when your soul is rising up to your throat on its way to make its final exit, is no better than what Pharaoh did when he was drowning; Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…he cried, 'I believe there is no God except the one the Children of Israel believe in. I submit to Him.' (*Yunus:* 90) But Allah did not accept Pharaoh's last-minute conversion. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Now, When you had always been a rebel and a troublemaker!' (*Yunus:* 91)

At this juncture, there was no point in Pharaoh believing because he was already on his way to his Creator. The time to perform righteous deeds for him had passed, and the time for judgment had arrived. To truly believe means to practice faith, while you are still in good health and still yearn for life. True faith cannot be born out of distress. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…they will be granted no respite…' (*as-Sajda:* 29).

Your grace period has ended. Allah created you and knows your innermost secrets; He knows that if He gave you more time to mend your ways, you would go right back to the false you were doing; a fact which is realized in His saying, '…And even if they were returned, they would return to that which they were forbidden; and indeed, they are liars.' (*al-An'am:* 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَأَعۡرِضۡ عَنۡهُمۡ وَٱنتَظِرۡ إِنَّهُم مُّنتَظِرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

So [Prophet], turn away from them and wait: they too are waiting [30] (The Quran, *as-Sajda:* 30)

Like what we say in the following Egyptian proverb, 'Show me your backside' – meaning, 'Get out of my face!' The command here is to leave them alone because there is no common ground with them anymore, no point in trying to discuss things further. They have proven impervious to all means of persuasion; only the sword will restrain them now, as the poet once sang,

If perseverance should prove insufficient, follow up with a threat,
And if the threat does not do the trick, fall back on your resolve.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed his Message unto the Arabs, giving the glad tidings of paradise to those who believe, and the grim warning of the hellfire for those who do not. But they paid him no heed; thus,

Either revelation or a sharpened blade:
An intelligent person is convinced by revelation,
while an ignorant one is deterred only by the sword.

Allah's saying: '…and wait…' (*as-Sajda:* 30) is a direct command from Him *the Almighty* to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* meaning, 'Wait for the coming of My Promise when you will be granted victory.' As we discussed earlier, Allah's Promise is always actualised without fail because no one and nothing can stop Allah from carrying out His Plans. We humans, by contrast, need to always be cognisant of our mortal limitations and of the fact that we do not really control the means to implement our designs. This is why the Lord taught us that, saying, '…do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow," without adding, "Allah willing", and whenever you forget, remember your Lord and say, "May my Lord guide me closer to what is right?"' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24)

This addendum referencing Allah's Will protects you from becoming a liar if you should end up being unable to fulfil your word because it is only Allah who controls the means by which we can do anything. In addition, when He *the Almighty* promises to do something, rest assured that His Word will inevitably be brought about.

If you say to your friend, 'I will meet you tomorrow, and we will do something together', you might be sincere, but you do not control any of the myriad variables that comprise the morrow. Something urgent might unexpectedly come up, or you might otherwise have a change of heart.

The difference between the 'waiting' of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the 'waiting' of the disbelievers is that the former is biding his time with perseverance for something that will definitely come about, whereas the latter are impetuously waiting at the behest of the devil's whisperings and their base egos.

Allah *Glorified is He* says '…they too are waiting…' (*as-Sajda:* 30); this means that the deniers of the truth are waiting for something to happen to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that will prevent him from conveying the Message. This was stupid of them, because they should have realised that he had Allah's backing. Allah *the Almighty* would never have abandoned him to the machinations of the disbelievers because it is His Law to make His Prophets victorious, regardless of how much power their foes may command.

The point is that these deniers of truth have no chance of bumping Allah's Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* off or even of intimidating him to stop calling the people to Allah’s Way. This idea also appears in the word *tarabbasa* (to lie in wait for, or to hopefully wait for), as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse, ‘…Wait, for indeed I am with you, among the waiters.’ (*at-Tur:* 31)

He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Say, “Do you await for us except one of the two best things…’ (*at-Tawba:* 52) meaning that what do you possibly hope is going to happen to us, given that either we will vanquish you and humiliate you, or we will achieve martyrdom and thereby earn eternal bliss; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…while we await for you that Allah will afflict you with punishment from Himself or at our hands? So wait…’ (*at-Tawba:* 52). This means to wait to see what will happen to us because we are most definitely waiting to see what will happen to you. The difference, of course, between the two types of waiting could not be greater.

This chapter is entitled *as-Sajda* (The Prostration) because it contains a passage where we are supposed to pause for a moment and fall down in prostration to Allah *the Almighty* to express our appreciation. The act of prostrating represents the ultimate gesture of submission to the True Lord *the Almighty*. When we reach those parts in the Quran which convulse our very being, the Lord tells us not to ignore that feeling, but to immediately bow down instead of waiting for the next prayer to do so.

You could say that this verse holds within it a powerful command and an awesome secret calling on us to perform the prostration even though we are not in prayer – a bowing down ordered by the very One Who ordained the first act of prostration. All the passages in the Quran which enjoin our prostration radiate the beautiful energy of Allah’s Grace.

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants us to feel that we are being showered with extraordinary blessings which we need to appropriately express thanks for, the regular prostrations of the ritual prayer not being enough.

The verse also contains certain symbolisms which the most righteous view as representing paradigms for how to preserve our soul and how to keep it connected with the wisdom of its Creator. For instance, while the eye can adjudge the outward beauty of something, we still need to contemplate the true meaning of beauty and ugliness. True ugliness is not necessarily what looks ugly to your eye, but what distorts the Allah-ordained natural beauty of something, for Allah *the Almighty* has created everything beautiful; He *Glorified is He* says: '…Who gave everything its perfect form…' (*as-Sajda:* 7).

If something seems repulsive to you, keep in mind that you are looking only at the aesthetic dimension. Instead of dismissing something which might appear unseemly to you, you should rather say to yourself that you have not yet realised its inner beauty.

As we discussed earlier, Allah has spread out the various talents among all humanity, so that the aggregate talents of any one person are no less than the aggregate talents of any other. Thus, we should not praise some people for being rich or dismiss others for being poor, but rather, we should try to evaluate all their virtues.

There is a story(1) that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* once spat on a mangy dog. Allah then empowered the canine to speak, saying, 'Is it me that you find fault with or the One Who created me?' The moral of the story is that Allah has created everything – even mangy ole dogs – for some deeper wisdom.

Most true do the words of the poet(2) ring:

For ugliness, there is a time when its beauty does appear,

Even the slipshod architect is praised when his building must be demolished.

Similarly, the True Lord *the Almighty* has strewn out His Wisdom in various places, just as He has strewn out His Blessings in the Scripture of which no verse can do without the other, no word can suffice alone, and even no letter is enough without its companions. But it is only those endowed with Divine insight that can capture the Lord's secrets.

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(1) *The story of Nuh (Noah) peace be upon him with the dog which suffered from a skin disease.*

(2) These lines are composed by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi himself.

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In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (19)

the chapter of

al-Ahzab

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Ahzab*(1) (The Clans):
Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِىُّ ٱتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ وَلَا تُطِعِ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ وَٱلْمُنَـٰفِقِينَ ۗ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ١

Prophet, be mindful of God and do not give in to the disbelievers and the hypocrites: God is all knowing, all wise[1] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 1)

The Word of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Prophet…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 1) is an address to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the one who is delivering that address is the True Lord *the Almighty*. ‘Messenger of Allah’ is his title, but his name is Muhammad or Ahmad as is mentioned in the Quran. When a human being is born, he is given a name which denotes him. So, when that name is mentioned, people’s attention is drawn to the one to whom that name has been given. People who are named have a particular environment in which they are known, while other people possessing the exact same names have another environment in which they are known. So the name ‘Mohamed’ of this environment is not the same as the name ‘Muhammad’ of that environment.

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(1) *The chapter of al-Ahzab is the 33rd chapter in the order of the Noble Quran. It is a chapter revealed in Medina and comprises of 73 verses. It was revealed to address the hypocrites’ criticism of Messenger Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him and the harm they were inflicting upon him, the issues surrounding his marriages to women and especially his marriage to his cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh Allah be pleased with her and the correct courtesy that must be shown upon entering the apartments of Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him. The chapter of Al-Ahzab was revealed in Medina just after chapter of Al-'Imran and just before the chapter of al-Mumtahana. It was the 89th chapter to be revealed in terms of the order of revelation. See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum Al-Quran, 1/27.*

A human being is identified by either his name, his *kunya* (nickname) or his *laqab*. (title). A name is what a person is called by – it is given to him to identify him and distinguish him from others. A *kunya* is a name which begins with *Abu* (Father of) or *Umm* (Mother of) such as Abu Bakr or Umm Al-Mu'minin. However, if a name such as this is given to a person right from the very beginning, then it is not a *kunya* (nickname) but a name. A *laqab* (title) is that which is used to indicate the highness or lowness of a person's status such as the poet So-and-so or the clever So-and-so and so forth.

If a number of people are given the same name making it impossible to tell them apart, then each of those people must be given a secondary descriptive name. So, for example, if a particular family loved the name Mohamed and gave all of their sons that name, it would be necessary for the parents to call them Mohamed the eldest, Mohamed the middle, Mohamed the youngest, and so on and so forth.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a name, a nickname, and a title. His name was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it appears four times in the Holy Quran: Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Muhammad is only a Messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone…' (*Al-'Imran:* 144). He *Glorified is He* also says: 'Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is Allah's Messenger…' (*al-Ahzab:* 40); 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other…' (*al-Fath:* 29) and '…and believe in what has been sent down to Muhammad—the truth from their Lord …' (*Muhammad:* 2).

He is also mentioned in one place with the name Ahmad: Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and bringing good news of a Messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad…' (*as-Saff:* 6). We have already talked about the reason for this name earlier in this *Tafsir*. His *kunya* was Abu Al-Qasim and his title was Messenger of Allah.

Thus, our master, the Messenger of Allah's full name encompassed all its three aspects – name, *kunya* and title.

A title is sometimes also bestowed upon a person by his parents or by someone else who knows him – they might give him a title indicative of high status out of hope that he might one day become a person of substance, or a title indicative of low status. This latter form of title is usually given by parents to children when they fear that those children may one day become exposed to the evil eye. So, in order to protect them against that, they give their young children a title which indicates inferiority, debasement or some other form of lowliness.

The title of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was chosen for him by his Lord. And naturally the title given to him *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* indicated a loftiness of the highest degree, for his high rank was not just with creation but also with the Creator. When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born, his grandfather named him with the name that he loved the most. He said, ‘I name him Muhammad so that he may become praised in both the heavens and the earth.’(1)

When Al-Qasim was born, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was given the *kunya* of: the father of Al-Qasim, or: Abu Al-Qasim. And when Allah chose him to be the bearer of the Message and His Ambassador to creation, He *the Almighty* gave him the twin titles of ‘Messenger of Allah’ and ‘Prophet’. If these two titles were to have been bestowed upon him by men, they would have indicated the loftiness of his station, so how much more must that be the case when they were bestowed upon him by Allah!

When you set out criteria for judging something, you set out criteria limited by the extent of your own knowledge or capacity. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* however, is the Messenger of Allah and the Prophet of Allah according to the criteria of Allah and so he is rendered noble in your eyes and noble in the eyes of the One Who sent him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…But Allah knows best where to place His messages…' (*al-An‘am:* 124).

So the most beloved way for us to refer to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to say Muhammad, Abu Al-Qasim, Messenger of

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(1) *Ibn Hisham mentions in his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (1/170) said that Amina bint Wahb, the mother of Messenger Muhammad* peace and blessings of Allah be upon him *said that when she was pregnant with him* peace and blessings of Allah be upon him *a voice came to her saying, ‘You are pregnant with the master of this nation. So, when he is born, say ‘I seek the protection of the One from every envier, and name him Muhammad.’*

Allah or Prophet. On all the occasions that the True Lord *the Almighty* addresses His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* He never once addresses him by his name – He never once says 'O Muhammad'. Rather, He only addresses him by the title which indicates the lofty rank he holds with the True Lord *the Almighty*. So, He either says: 'Prophet…' (*al-An'am:* 65), or *Glorified is He* says: 'Messenger…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41).

If you look at the way Allah addresses His messengers, beginning with Adam *peace be upon him*, you will find that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the only one whom Allah does not address by name. Yes, the word 'Muhammad' does appear in the Quran but never as an address. It only appears in the context of informing that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. And, indeed, even on many of the occasions that Allah does inform about him *peace and blessings be upon him* he informs about him by means of his title: Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves…' (*at-Tawba:* 128).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The Messenger has said, "Lord, my people treat this Quran as something to be shunned…' (*al-Furqan:* 30).

So, it is only 'O Prophet' and 'O Messenger' that is used when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is addressed. However, when He *peace and blessings be upon him* is being informed that his actual name must be mentioned – we must say Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. If it is not mentioned then how could it be known that it is he who is the Messenger of Allah? So, when he is mentioned for the first time, both the name and the one to whom the name is applied must be mentioned together.

It is to honour Him *peace and blessings be upon him* and show him esteem that he is addressed as 'O Prophet' or 'O Messenger'. Whenever one of us addresses someone and wants to show our esteem for them, we mention their titles first before mentioning their name. So, for example, we might say, 'O lord So-and-so' or 'O your Excellency *(sheikh)* So-and-so' or 'O possessor of might' and so on.

The reason that the word *ayyuha* precedes *munada* (the vocative) here is because of the presence of the definite article *al* in the vocative – it is not possible grammatically in Arabic to directly address a word that has been made definite with *al* except in the case of the Name of Majesty '*(Allah)*', for we do say '*(Ya Allah)*'. Thus, even when it comes to being addressed, the True Lord *the Almighty* is unique. This is in terms of addressing the singular.

The True Lord *the Almighty* addresses His Messenger with 'O Prophet' and 'O Messenger'. A Prophet or Messenger is the ambassador between Allah and His creation, sent by Him to transmit to them the program by which He wants them to lead their lives. So the Messenger is the one who transmits. The Prophet is the one who has been sent by the True Lord *the Almighty* but without bringing a new set of laws. Rather, he follows the laws of those messengers who were sent down before him. The role of the Prophet is to act as a living example for his people and thus show them how to act.

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* embodied both these roles – he was both a Prophet and a Messenger. There were certain specific things he was commanded to do but was not commanded to transmit to others – these being those matters that were particular to his role as Prophet; and there were other matters that he was commanded to do and commanded to transmit to others.

It is well known from what scholars of the past have said that every Messenger was a Prophet but that not every Prophet was a Messenger in the technical sense of the word, even though every one of them was sent by Allah. The Arabic word for Prophet *nabi* is derived from the word *naba'* which means 'an important piece of *khabar* news. The type of news that passes from one human being to another is called *khabar* whereas when that news comes from the Creator of mankind it is *naba'*, a matter of the utmost immensity and importance. The ultimate derivation of the word *naba'* is *nabwa* which refers to a large rounded bump in the middle of a flat plain.

So, if we were to say, 'I saw So-and-so today', that would not be considered a *naba'* but would rather be a *khabar*, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'What are they asking about? The momentous announcement' (*an-Naba':* 1-2). This means that the disbelievers are asking about that frightening piece of news which reached all ears and which shook the entire earth and caused the throne to convulse.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, directly addressing His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…be mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1). We have previously mentioned in this *Tafsir* that there are two types of Arabic speech: *khabar* and *insha'*.

Khabar is a verbal ascription that started out as an intellectual ascription before the words were spoken and became verbal after they were spoken. If the verbal ascription makes sense and has meaning then it is an actual ascription. *Khabar* is the type of statement that can be described as being true when it corresponds to reality or being false when it does not.

Insha' is the opposite of *khabar* – it is every type of speech that cannot be described as being either true or false, such as when you say to someone, 'Stop!' Since this is an imperative, the person saying it cannot be described as saying something true or something false.

This statement of Allah *the Almighty* to His Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…be mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) is a verbal ascription from Him to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring about what is meant by this command and that is fearful consciousness of Allah (*taqwa*). But does the fact that the Lord commanded Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to have fearful consciousness of Him mean that he was not God-fearing before that? Our answer to that is no; it does not necessarily follow from this that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was disobedient and so Allah commanded him to have fearful consciousness of Him. Rather, the reality of the matter is that this was something that the True Lord *the Almighty* said to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* initially before any incidence of disobedience took place. This is comparable to a parent's instruction to his child to work and study hard even before that child has embarked upon his studies. Despite the parent's knowledge that the child is indeed hard working, it is his duty to ensure that, right from the onset, that principle is firmly embedded in his psyche.

Moreover, there are three time periods during which events take place: the past, present and future. Sometimes a person is requested to do something that he is already actually doing, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You, who believe, believe in Allah and His Messenger…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1). Here, Allah *the Almighty* commands them to have belief even though he describes them as having faith and addresses them as such, since the meaning of the verse is, 'You had belief before I spoke to you, but the belief that precedes my speaking to you is in the past, so I want you to take on a new belief, both now and in the future. I want you to renew your faith and to make it endure.'

So, the meaning of what Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…be mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) is 'Continue to have fearful consciousness of Allah in the present as you have done in the past and continue to have it in the future and never ever stop.'

Or, to put it another way, fearful consciousness of Allah is the quality that binds the human being to his Lord. Allah imposes certain things but then makes permissible for you other things of the type that are normally imposed.

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…be mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is not the same as when He *Glorified is He* says: '…be mindful of Allah…' to us. When He says it to us, He is telling us to fulfil what has been obligatory for us, but when He says it to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He is telling him, 'Enter the station of *ihsan* and keep on renewing it, for the staircase to Allah's acceptance is never-ending and the perfections of Allah's gift are without limit.'

This is the reason Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If someone's two days are the same, then he has been duped,'(1) meaning that if someone finds that his closeness to Allah has remained the same from one day to the next, then he is a loser. Why is he a loser? Because a believer's closeness to, love of and connection to Allah should increase and get stronger every single day. As Allah's blessings to him never cease then so too should his praise and thankfulness never cease.

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(1) *This Hadith is mentioned by Az-Zarkashi in At-Tadhkira fi Al-Ahadith Al-Mushtahara (p. 1238) in its full version which reads, 'If someone's two days are the same, then he has been duped; if his final days are marked by evil then he is cursed; and if he is not in increase, then he is in decrease and he would be better off dead. If he longs for paradise, then he should make haste to perform right action; if he fears hell then he should deny his appetites; if he expects death then he should turn away from worldly pleasures; and if he does without in this world, then afflictions will seem small and unimportant.' Then he, i.e. Az-Zarkashi said, 'The author of Musnad Al-Firdaws, Ad-Daylami, narrated its chain of narrations as being from Mohamed ibn Sawqa from Al-Harith from 'Ali from Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him but that is a weak chain of narrations.' Al-Hafidh Al-'Iraqi said in Takhrij Ahadith Al-Ihya' (4/335), "I do not know of this Hadith except from 'Abd Al-'Aziz ibn abu Rawwad who said, 'I saw Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him amongst the people so I said to him, "O Messenger of Allah, counsel me." Then he replied with that along with an addition at the end of it.' Al-Bayhaqi narrated it in Az-Zuhd.*

In the same way, Allah *the Almighty* does not content himself from His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with what he has contented himself from the rest of creation. So, therefore, when we talk of the *taqw*a of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we are talking of a *taqwa* that is not that of the rest of creation – the *taqwa* of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was vast in scope and Allah's overflowing bounty to him was constant and without end.

Therefore, know that when your Lord calls you to the prayer five times each day, the favour that He grants you is not repeated but is new each time: what He gives you for praying *Zhuhr* is not the same as what he gives you praying *ʿAsr* or praying *Maghrib*. In the same way, fearful consciousness of Allah is a constant and never-ending act.

It is for that reason that the people of right action warn against persevering for a time in an act of obedience and then leaving it. And it is for that reason that *Shari'a* warns us against making a vow to Allah that we will be unable to fulfil since, whenever you make a vow to Him, it becomes obligatory for you to fulfil that vow. It would be better for you to keep your acts at the supererogatory level so that when it is easy for you to perform acts of obedience you can do so, but when you are unable to do them you have done nothing wrong.

Those acts of obedience you have made obligatory upon yourself are of the same type as those which Allah himself made obligatory upon you. In other words, you have come to love obedience so much and you have come to find worship so sweet that you have gone to Allah for more. So you say, for example, 'I make a vow to Allah to pray such-and-such an amount of *rak'as*,' or 'to give such-and-such an amount of money in charity.' It is on account of the radiant lights and abundant gifts that Allah has given you in the five prayers that you have gone back to Him for more.

When the True Lord *the Almighty* calls us to the prayer, He also asks us to go quickly to the mosque. This is despite the fact that He has made the entire earth pure and the entire earth a mosque. The mosque is a place that has been set aside for prayer and so it behoves us to perform our prayers in that place. And add that to the fact that you are considered to be in the prayer for the entire time you are making your way towards the mosque to perform it. So, even if someone lives a long way from the mosque, he must still make sure that he remains in a state of dignity and calm for the duration of his trip to the prayer. And he should remain in that state of silence even if he is late and misses the *takbir* for entering into the prayer.

It has been narrated in a Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When the *iqamat* for the prayer is called, do not come to the prayer running but walk to it calmly (and with dignity). Then pray (the part of the prayer) that you have caught and complete (the part of the prayer) that you have missed.'(1)

Belief requires certain things of you and *ihsan* requires certain things of you. What belief requires is that you do what Allah has made obligatory upon you. We find in a Qudsi Hadith, 'My slave does not come close to Me with any action more beloved to Me than that which I have made obligatory upon him.'(2) If you want to get closer to Allah then you must do so by doing what He loves.

The type of things that Allah has made obligatory upon you includes prayer, fasting, and giving alms. If you find these acts of worship delightful, then do more of them, above and beyond what Allah has made obligatory upon you. And when you do more, know that it is because you have you felt the touch of the radiant lights within worship and have said to yourself, 'Allah is entitled to more from me than that which He has imposed upon me.' This is the station of *ihsan*.

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(1) *This Hadith is transmitted by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/237, 239 & 270); by* Muslim *in his Sahih (602) in Kitab Al-Masajid, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *This is part of a Qudsi Hadith. It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6502) on the authority of Abu Hurayra. It is also narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (6/256) on the authority of 'A'isha. Sheikh Mohammad Mitwalli Sha'rawi examined this Hadith in great detail in his book "Al-Ahadith Al-Qudsiyya" (1/87) It was checked by us for accuracy.*

This matter has already been discussed by us in relation to what Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs. They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before: sleeping only little at night, praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness.' (*al-Kahf:* 15-18)

Has Allah made it obligatory upon His slave to lie asleep during but a small part of the night? No, on the contrary, you have the right to pray *'Isha'* and then remain asleep until *Fajr*.

And the same is true with respect to asking forgiveness *istighfar* – those who sleep for only a small part of the night and get up before *Fajr* in order to ask their Lord's forgiveness must take delight in worship and standing in His Presence. They have entered the station of *ihsan*.

Ihsan is of two types: the *ihsan* of how much and the *ihsan* of how. The *ihsan* of how much is doing more than that which has been made obligatory upon you, so you pray more prayers than is obligatory and give more alms than is obligatory. The *ihsan* of how is being truly sincere in your worship of Allah –it is that you worship Allah as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you,(1) meaning, if you do not experience the illumination or transparency that enables you to see Allah, then the least you can do is worship Him in the knowledge that He sees you.

Once you have reached the station of *ihsan*, you are free to do as much *ihsan* as you want. As Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…there is no reason to reproach those who do good…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1). So you are free to do as many acts of obedience as you find easy, be that praying five *rak'ats* or praying ten *rak'as*, giving five per cent of your wealth in alms or ten per cent – however much you want to do, you are free.

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(1) *This is from the famous Hadith of Gabriel peace be upon him which was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (50) as well as by Muslim in his Sahih (8) on the authority of* 'Umar *ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him that while Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him was in the company of his Companions, Gabriel peace be upon him, came to him in the form of a man whose clothes were exceedingly white, whose hair was exceedingly black, upon whom no trace of travel could be seen and whom none of us knew and began to ask Him peace and blessings of Allah be upon him about Islam, faith and ihsan, so Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him answered him.*

Do you not see that when the True Lord *the Almighty* talks about this station He *Glorified is He* says: 'giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19), but when he talks about the obligatory alms He *Glorified is He* says: 'who give a due share of their wealth…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24).

So, Allah's saying, 'Prophet, be mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) means to 'Remain conscious of Allah with a *taqwa* that befits your station with your Lord'; since Allah's Perfections have no limit and His Gifts have no end. And it was because of this that our master, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to stand in prayer during the night for so long that his feet would split open. 'When ʿA'isha *Allah be pleased with her* asked him about that, saying, 'Why do you do that when Allah has forgiven you all your past wrong actions?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Should I not be a grateful slave?'(1) In other words, worship is not only done for reward or forgiveness, there are other higher levels of worship.

Taqwa, as we have said, is to place a barrier between yourself and that which might cause you harm. But how can one place a barrier between oneself and one's Lord when the whole point of *taqwa* is to enable us to fully be with Allah? And by this, we are referring to the one who gains complete control over his self and makes it follow the program Allah has laid out for it.

The answer to this is that Allah *the Almighty* has two types of attributes: those of majesty and those of beauty, each one of these coming into effect when required. Allah *the Almighty* as well as being the Much-Forgiving and Dispenser of Mercy, is also the All-Dominant, the All-Compelling and the Lord of Retribution. He is both the Inflictor of Harm and the Bestower of Benefit. Thus, the attributes of beauty are those which provide man with the good things that he loves and the attributes of majesty are those which overwhelm those who go against Allah. So every slave of Allah should spend his life in a constant state of fear of the attributes of majesty and in a constant state of hope for the attributes of beauty.

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(1) *It is transmitted by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4837) as well as by Muslim in his Sahih (2819) on the authority of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her.*

So, *taqwa* of Allah *the Almighty* is that placing a barrier between oneself and the attributes of majesty, since a human being is incapable of standing in the face of these attributes. Indeed he is incapable of standing even the smallest touch of the Fire and that is but a single one of Allah’s soldiers, so take care and be warned!

When it comes to the issue of intercession, we know that both fasting and the Quran will act as intercessors, that Allah will make some of the believers intercessors, that He will make the Prophets and Angels intercessors, and that He Himself, the Most Merciful of the merciful, will be the final intercessor. But how does Allah intercede with Allah?(1)

Their answer is that Allah’s attributes of beauty intercede for us with His attributes of majesty. So when a slave of Allah does a wrong action that entails a punishment and places him under the sway of Allah’s attributes of majesty, the attributes of beauty get in their way and intercede with them to relinquish their claim over him.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: addressing Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*: '…and do not give in to the disbelievers and the hypocrites…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1). Should Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as part of his fearful consciousness of his Lord, defer to the deniers of truth and the hypocrites? Their answer is that the Quran brings together the command to have *taqwa* and the prohibition against deferring to the deniers of truth and the hypocrites out of necessity. As saying, 'Honour so-and-so as well as so-and-so,' is not the same as saying, 'only honour so-and-so', it makes it necessary to add. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and do not give in to the disbelievers and the hypocrites…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1).

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(1) *Abu Bakr As-Siddiq peace be upon him narrated as part of a long Hadith that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him said, “I have been shown what will be in this world and the Hereafter. The earlier and the later peoples will all be gathered in a single plain…” Then he peace and blessings of Allah be upon him said, “Then it will be said, ‘Call forth the true,’ and they will come and intercede. Then it will be said, ‘Call forth the Prophets’ and then every Prophet will come forward, some accompanied by a large group of people, some by five or six and some by none. Then it will be said, Call forth the martyrs,’ and they will come and intercede for whoever they want. Then, when the martyrs have done that, Allah the Almighty will say, ‘I am the Most Merciful of the merciful. Anyone who did not associate anything with Me may enter Paradise.’ And they will enter Paradise.” This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/4); Al-Haythami in Al-Mujma' (10/374), and As-Suyuti in Al-Budur As-Safira fi ’Umur Al-’khira p. 119.*

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came, he came following the system of existence that Allah *the Almighty* had set out for His creation. For, when Allah created His creation, He made a covenant with every single member of the human race from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the coming of the Final Hour: He made a covenant with them when Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: '...He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied…' (*al-A'raf:* 172). Thus, mankind bore witness to Allah *the Almighty* before they were forbidden from committing acts of disobedience or following their appetites.

Then, whenever mankind forgot this pledge, Allah *the Almighty* sent them a Messenger to remind them. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* addressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* with the words, '…But you are only there to give warning…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 7).

And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Messengers: 'They were messengers bearing good news and warning…' (*an-Nisa':* 165) meaning that it is not them who bring obedience or *taqwa* into existence; they merely remind us of a matter that every one of us knew about before in the time before creation, bringing us the good news of a reward for those who obey and warning us of a punishment for those who disobey. Allah *the Almighty* wants His slaves to remember this reality at every moment and never forget it for even an instant.

Forgetfulness is caused by either the self's appetites or by its laziness and reluctance to perform acts of worship which it finds difficult, or it is caused by the whispering of another disobedient being, whether that be a Satan from amongst the jinn or from amongst men. This is confirmed by Allah *the Almighty* when He *Glorified is He* says: '…They suggest alluring words to one another…' (*al-An'am:* 112).

We say that deviant people envy right-acting people their right action but because they find themselves unable to do those acts of obedience, they try to pull the right-acting people down to their level by whispering to them to get them to abandon that attribute of perfection with which they had previously been endowed. Therefore, the first thing you should realise when a companion of yours whispers some act of disobedience to Allah in your ear, is that he hates you and does not want you to get any good that he feels himself unable to get – he does not want you to have any quality that makes you superior to him.

So, because the unbelievers and hypocrites who fight against the call of Islam are unable themselves to handle the burden of following Allah's program or to keep to it in the way that the believers do, they try to prevent the believers from implementing the new program brought by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We also say that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only came because it was an absolute necessity, a necessity brought about by the disappearance of all traces of the Divine Program amongst those people to whom he had been sent, and by their lack of any personal or social inhibition. When someone forgets, his self-reproaching self-reminds him and dissuades him against committing acts of disobedience. However, when the power of that type of self grows weak, then the self that commands to evil takes him over and turns him away from all that is good, leaving him with only one remaining inhibition, a social one whose role is that of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. And it is this quality that set this nation apart and made it better than those that came before. And, for that reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Believers], you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110).

When this principle also disappears from a society so that no one remains who enjoins the right or forbids the wrong, it becomes necessary for heaven to once again intervene by sending a new Messenger with a fresh reminder. However, by way of honouring the followers of Muhammad and honouring their Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* has granted them these distinctions of being the best by guaranteeing that there will never come a time when it lacks for people enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. And because of the fact that his *ummah* is protected in this way, there will not be another messenger after Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

However, even when an *ummah* is imbued with this social strength whereby right is enjoined and wrong is forbidden, it must still understand the task well and be fully aware of its implications with respect to belief. There is a narration from our, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he reminds of this matter and explains it with full clarity. He Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* said, 'If you see a wrong then change it with your hand. If you are unable (to do that then change it) with your tongue, and if you are unable (to do that then change it) with your heart, but that is the weakest form of belief.'(1)

So, the whole matter is based on the extent of a person's lack of ability to act, and this is true of every instance of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. However, when should I change a wrong with my hand? When should I change it with my tongue? And when should I change it with my heart?

I should change it with my hand when the transgressor is someone over whom I have authority thereby giving me the capacity to bring about that change. If the wrong is done by someone over whom I do not have authority, however, then I should change it with my tongue making sure that, in light of what Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Prophet], call [people] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way…' (*an-Nahl:* 125). I do so with kindness and courtesy.

Despite all this, we find some Islamic preachers calling on others without proper discernment. They neglect the condition of ability; leave no room for man's inability. They look forward to amending every wrong situation with their hands directly. This goes against the command of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

If you expect that you might be harmed, then change the wrong with your heart, since the ultimate goal is to bring the wrongdoer back to the Straight Path. This will only be achieved with tenderness and compassion, not with harsh words. This is in order not to put double shares of difficulty on him, that is, to ask him to leave and get rid of his beliefs and to do that in a difficult and harsh manner.

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(1) *It is transmitted by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/10, 52); Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (1275, 4013); and by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (1140) on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri with the wording, 'If you see a wrong you are able to right with your hand then change it with your hand. If you are unable [to do that then change it] with your tongue, and if you are unable [to do that then change it] with your heart, but that is the weakest form of belief.'*

This concept of changing the wrong with the heart is misunderstood by many people. They think that it is simple to say, 'O Allah this is a wrong with which You are not pleased so I reject it.' In fact, this is nothing more than a rejection by the tongue. It is not an utterance issuing from their mouths that Allah *the Almighty* wants. No, He wants the heart to act in a way that leads to physical action; He wants your body to follow your heart in rejecting the wrong.

When you see someone deeply engaged in disobedience or tyranny, while you are powerless to confront him or stop him by means of words or actions, then you must condemn his action in your heart and turn away from him. You must leave that person alone, neither providing him with words of comfort in times of sadness nor words of congratulation in times of joy, nor help in times of need, etc.

You must isolate him and keep him alone from the rest of society. If everyone else in the society acts in the same way towards him, then he will be left completely alone, thus prevents himself from doing the wrong he was doing.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never established a prison to hold those who were disobedient. Rather, their prison was in the way that the wider community of believers would isolate them, imprisoning themselves off from them and not communicating or interacting with them with any way. Indeed, the *Shari'a* of Islam is so strict in this regard that it isolates a wife from her husband, not allowing him to touch her until his affairs have been set straight with his Lord.

Do you recall the story(1) of Kaʿb ibn Malik(2) and the way in which he was isolated by the rest of the Companions? He was one of the three men(1) who remained behind when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* led the believers on the expedition of Tabuk, and even those who were the closest to him cut him off completely. When he scaled the wall of an orchard belonging to his nephew and said to him, 'Do you not know that I love Messenger Muhammad?' his nephew was silent and did not reply to him.

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(1) *The story of Ka'b ibn Malik and the three who defaulted from the battle of Tabuk.*

(2) *He was Ka'b ibn Malik Al-Ansari, the poet of Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him. His mother was Layla bint Zayd from the Banu Salama. His (kunya) was Abu 'Abd Ar-Rahhman. He was one of the Ansar who pledged allegiance to Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him at Al-'Aqaba and took part in the battles of Uhud and the Ditch as well as all the other battles except for that of Tabuk during which he remained behind in Medina. Allah the Almighty however, forgave him for that. He became blind towards the end of his life and died at the age of 77 in 50 AH during the Caliphate of Mu'awiya.*

When the wife(2) of Hilal, one of the three, went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, Hilal is a very old man and does not have (the normal desires) that men have for women’, he *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Serve him, but do not let him come close to you.'

These three remained in their state of isolation until a verse of the Quran came down about them saying, '…until in the end – after the earth, despite all its vastness, had become [too] narrow for them and their souls had become [utterly] constricted – they came to know with certainty that there is no refuge from Allah *the Almighty* other than [a return] unto Him…' (*at-Tawba:* 11).

In this way, the early Muslims held firm to the Law of Allah *the Almighty*. They were able to do so not by imprisoning the wrongdoers, but by cutting off the wider community from them. This is the same matter which has brought the crisis from which our country suffers today: are those not criminals who pass amongst us known to those who inhabit the houses, or even the streets and districts, in which they live? Have any traders refused to trade with them when they ask to be served? Or have any of us ignored their greetings and turned away when they greet us?

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(1) *The three who remained behind were Ka'b ibn Malik, Hilal ibn Umayya and Marara ibn Rabi'a.*

(2) *She was Khawla bint ‘Asim, the wife of Hilal ibn Umayya (this what Ibn Hajr said in Al-Fath (8/121). It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2769) and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4418) 'that his wife came to Messenger Muhammad and said, 'O Messenger of Allah the Almighty Hilal ibn Umayya is a poor old man who has no servants. Do you dislike for me to serve him?' He replied, 'No, but do not let him come close to you.' Then she said, 'By Allah the Almighty he has not made any move towards doing anything. By Allah the Almighty he has continued to weep from the day that that happened to him right up until the present day.'*

So then, we can see that the society is responsible. It is the entire society that bears the weight of their sin since it provides shelter for them. Indeed, we could almost say that society is a bigger criminal than the criminals themselves.

However, before talking about criminals, we should first speak with them. Before cutting them off, we should first engage with them in conversation, give them good counsel and treat them well. This is what we understand from the words of our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'the greatest form of *(jihad)* is to give a word of truth in front of a tyrannical ruler'(1), since he did not say 'against a tyrannical ruler'. Therefore, before exposing a person’s faults or denouncing him, you must first speak with him and give him good counsel. That way, he will know that you only want good for him and want him to return to the fold. That way, he might accept your words or, at the very least, not harm you. The fact that we automatically denounce criminals is one of the banes of our society. Indeed, such is our eagerness to do so that, for every crime they have actually committed, we additionally accuse them of a thousand that they have not.

So, changing something with the heart means ensuring that one’s outward is in harmony with his inward. Doing these costs, you nothing, unlike when you change something with your hand or tongue, which is why it is described by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the weakest form of belief. In other words, it is something that any weak person can do.

When a society cuts its criminals adrift, the incidence of crime comes to a halt. Crime only escalates and becomes unmanageable when a group of people fears the criminals within their midst and so try to ingratiate themselves with them in order to avoid incurring their wrath or displeasure. In such circumstances, why should a criminal not embark upon ever-greater crimes?

This is the reason why the All-Wise Lawgiver does not, in the case of accidental killing, make the killer alone liable for the payment of the blood money, but calls on his *'aqila* (entire family) to pay it. This is because the family are the ones who are responsible for disciplining those who have gone astray amongst them and setting them aright, since it is they who will ultimately have to endure the consequences of their actions. It is this process that brings balance to society.

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(1) *It is transmitted by Ahmad in Musnad (3/19, 61); At-Tirmidhi in Sunnan (2174) and he classified it as Hasan; Abu Dawud in Sunnan (4344) on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari. The wording in the version of At-Tirmidhi is as follows, 'One of the greatest forms of (jihad) is speaking a word of justice in front of a tyrannical ruler.'*

When the True Lord set out a Divine Way of Guidance to regulate the lives of His creation, He did so for their own good. He is the source of good but does not Himself derive any benefit from it. If every person in creation were to have a heart the like of that of the most Allah-fearing person amongst them, that would not increase Allah’s kingdom in any way whatsoever.(1)

Then He created mankind, assigned them their life’s purpose, and gave them laws to protect them and keep them safe. He is just like the toolmaker who constructs a tool with a particular purpose in mind and then provides instructions and rules on how to keep it in good working order. Like, for example, someone who makes washing machines who, having seen how exhausting it can be for women to wash clothes by hand produced a machine to perform that task for them. Tools or machines are always made to fulfil a predetermined purpose, not aimlessly. You will not find any toolmaker who makes a tool without a purpose in mind and then asks people to find out some way of utilising it after it has already been made.

Therefore, world's failure lies in human beings relying on themselves to work out what it is they should be doing and with what laws they should be governed, forgetting that both they themselves and the world are the constructs of Allah *the Almighty* and that it is always the Constructor who decides for what His constructs are.

The True Lord assigned us a task before even calling upon us to fulfil it. If you want proof, then look to the words of your Lord: 'The Most Gracious has imparted this Quran [unto man]. He has created man.' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-3)

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(1) *This is a part of a long Qudsi Hadith . It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2577) in Kitab Al-Birr wa As-Sila; by Ahmad in Musnad (5/154, 177) on the authority of Abu Dharr. The wording of the (Hadith) is as follows, 'O my slaves, if the first of you and the last of you, the jinn amongst you and the men, were all to have a heart the like of that of the most Allah-fearing person amongst you, that would not increase my kingdom in any way whatsoever. O my slaves, if the first of you and the last of you, the jinn amongst you and the men, were all to have a heart the like of that of the most immoral person amongst you, that would not decrease from my kingdom in any way.'*

The True Lord, before even creating man, laid out a Divine Way of Guidance for him in the Noble Quran, assigning him his task and setting out the laws by which he would be protected, as is the case with any other creator who assigns a purpose to his machine before embarking upon its construction. If, however, something were to go wrong with the machine, then we would have to either return it to its maker or closely follow the instructions for using it properly and safely. Since Allah *the Almighty* is the Ultimate Creator, He is also the One Who knows what is right for creation and how its well-being may be preserved. Read His words: 'How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Yea, He alone is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware!' (*al-Mulk:* 14) and His Words: '…and if you are at variance over any matter, refer it unto Allah and the Apostle...' (*an-Nisa':* 59).

So, the bane of human society lies first in the fact that it wants to assign a task to what has been created by Allah *the Almighty* trying to interfere in a creation that was not its own; and second is the fact that when its societies go corrupt, it tries to come up with its own laws to reform them. Do we think that Allah *the Almighty* has left us without a Divine Way of Guidance or that He has left us without the necessary laws to ensure our well-being?

In the same way, we, when something goes wrong with one of our machines, we run straight to the engineer or mechanic to get him to fix the fault, our exemplar, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he found himself in difficulty, would run straight to his Lord and stand before Him in prayer.

The mechanic uses something material to fix its material fault. As for the True Lord, He is unseen and so when He fixes you, He fixes you using the law of the unseen, meaning that you do not know exactly how He has fixed you. The important thing for you is that when you have gone before your Lord and Creator, you come back content, light of heart and in good spirits.

The True Lord says to His Messenger: '…and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) because they are the people who practise immorality and benefit from corruption, bringing them of necessity into direct conflict with the Truth and the Divine Way of Guidance. The basis of all corruption in existence is man’s desire to take away good from someone else and to build his fortune on the backs of others. Then, whenever anyone comes along striving to redress the balance, they lie in ambush for him in order to stop him since what he is calling for goes against their best interests.

Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that in the course of the procession of Messengers that came throughout the ages, no Messenger was ever sent without enemies or people who resisted and denied him. He *the Almighty* however, did make it in His Destiny that His Messengers always have the final victory, as He says in the Quran: '…for, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they – they indeed – would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

So then, He *the Almighty* wants us to go straight along His Path and implement His Divine Way of Guidance while the people of immorality and corruption want us to deviate from and go astray. Read Allah’s Words: 'And [know] that this is the way leading straight unto Me…' (*al-An‘am:* 153) meaning that the way is completely and absolutely straight so, is there anyone amongst you who can find even the slightest curve or bend in it? He *the Almighty* also says: '…follow it, then, and follow not other ways, lest they cause you to deviate from His way.' (*al-An‘am:* 153)

There is only one straight path. Truth has only one way, while falsehood and corruption have many. Our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alerted(1) us to this fact when he drew a single straight line for his Companions on either side of which he drew other lines and then recited the verse: 'And [know] that this is the way leading straight unto Me: follow it, then, and follow not other ways, lest they cause you to deviate from His way…' (*al-An‘am:* 153).

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(1) *‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud narrated that Messenger Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him drew a line in the ground with his hand and then said, 'This is the Way of Allah which is straight.' Then he drew (lines) to the right and left of it and said, 'Every single one of these ways has a devil which calls people to it.' Then he recited, 'And [knows] that this is the way leading straight unto Me…' (al-An’am: 153). It is tnarrated by Ahmad in Musnad (1/465) and by Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak (2/318) and he classified it as authentic.*

In Geometry, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. So, for example, if an engineer, when making a straight road between two cities, were to deviate at the beginning of the road by only a few centimetres from the right direction, he would end up at a point many miles away from his intended destination.

A single straight path shortens the distance and makes your journey easy, whereas many little paths thwart all your efforts and make your journey long and difficult. That is why people say to each other in Egyptian dialect *(ta'al dughri)* which literally means 'Come by the straightest route' and *(balash laff wa dawaran)* or 'Say it without detours and evasions'. That is also why your Lord says to you: 'And [know] that this is the way leading straight unto Me: follow it, then, and follow not other ways…' (*al-An'am:* 153)

If the path of truth is one, then the paths of misguidance are many: some made corrupt by money, some by women and some by power and influence, etc.

So whenever a Messenger is sent by Allah *the Almighty* to curb their excesses, these people automatically rise up against him. That is why the True Lord alerts His Prophet to the fact that the first stage of piety *(taqwa)* is being fearfully conscious of Allah *the Almighty* Alone and then not deferring to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites, since they are the ones who want to take you to evil while Allah *the Almighty* only wants good for you.

The fact that Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) also implies that there is nothing with deferring to other than them. So it is fine to follow the opinion or counsel of another believer in any matter for which a direct order from Allah *the Almighty* has not come down. This was why when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took up his position on the battlefield at *Badr*, he did so based on the opinion of the great Companion Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir.(1)

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(1) *He was Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir ibn Al-Jamuh Al-Ansari As-Sulami. Ibn Sa'd and others said of him, 'He was present at Badr and his (kunya) was Abu 'Umar.' Ibn Sa'd said, 'He died during the Caliphate of 'Umar when he was more than 50 years old. ' See Al-I'saba, 1/316.*

When he *peace and blessings be upon him* had halted earlier in a different place, Al-Hubab had said to him, ‘O Messenger of Allah! Is this field where we are now a field that Allah *the Almighty* has revealed to you, or is it a matter of strategy in war?’ And then, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had confirmed that it was a matter of strategy in war, Al-Hubab told him that where they were was not the place to stay and that they should move to another more strategic place.'(1)

On another occasion, when Salman Al-Farisi(2) *Allah be pleased with him* suggested to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should dig a trench, he *peace and blessings be upon him*, acted upon his suggestion. The legal principle states that it is not permissible to use opinion in a matter for which there is an existing text. If, however, there is no existing text regarding the matter, then there is nothing to prevent you taking the advice of believers who counsel you to what is good. Even Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself was not forbidden or prevented from accepting the advice of other Muslims or from asking them their opinion.

People, however, do differ about whether the advice received by a ruler in consultation is binding upon him or not. The answer may be found in the words of Allah *the Almighty* : '…And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern; then, when you have decided upon a course of action, place your trust in Allah *the Almighty* …' (*Al-‘Imran:* 159).

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(1) *Ibn Hisham trnarrated this in his Sira (2/259) and attributed it to Ibn Ishaq. The complete version is as follows: 'Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, this is not the place to stop. Take us on until we reach that well which is closest to the enemy. Then let us halt there, stop the wells that lie beyond that point, and build a cistern which we will fill up with water. Then, when we fight the enemy, we will have water to drink and they will have none.’ Then the Messenger said Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him ‘I made the decision based on opinion.’"*

(2) *Salman Al-Farisi Allah be pleased with him was one of the foremost Companions: he originally came from a family of Magians in Isfahan and lived for a very long time. He wandered the land in search of the truth and read the books of the Persians, Byzantines, and Jews. Then he became Muslim and believed in Messenger Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him who said about him, 'Salman is one of us, the household of Prophet Muhammad.' He was made governor over Al-Mada’in and lived there until he died in 36 AH. He used to weave together palm leaves and eat barley bread bought with money he had earned. See Az-Zirikli, Al-‘ALam, 3/112.*

The ruler may listen to advice and weigh up and compare the views of his advisers, but in the end he alone must make the final decision; Allah says, '…When you have decided upon a course of action…' (*Al-'Imran:* 159) i.e. when you have decided on your own.

Today, in the modern world, we see many organisations asking people to give them their opinions on a particular topic. However, when they come to make their final decisions, they do not give precedence to the side chosen by their president. This is completely wrong.

The different opinions are only there to light the way for the president, to give him as clear a perspective as possible. Then he must make the final decision and that is only logical considering the fact that, by voting him in, you have already borne witness to his superiority in that regard. Thus, it is the president's support that gives one view a greater weight than another.

There is a difference between the processes of consultation and authorisation. When a president authorises a particular person or committee to look into a particular matter or come to a decision, then it is they who make the decision and the president merely rubberstamps what they have decided, they make the decision because the president has delegated his authority to them. So the process of authorisation permits you to make the decision yourself, whereas the process of consultation only permits you to relay your point of view to the person in charge.

On the occasion of the battle of Uhud, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want to go out to battle. But when he consulted with his Companions, they indicated to him their desire to go out to the battle because of their might and burning desire to see Allah's Religion victorious. The Companions continued to advise him *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight until he donned the garb of battle and got himself ready for war at which point they changed their minds and told him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he had been right in the first place when he said that they should not go out to war. So he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'It is not for any Prophet who has donned the garb of war…'(1) then whatever happened at Uhud was by the Will of Allah and the Muslims ended up not being victorious.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that when the idolaters came to (fight) Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him on the day of Uhud, it=*

As for Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* he ignored the advice of his counsellors during the *Ridda* wars (wars of apostasy) and decided against them(1) saying, 'By Allah I will fight them even if (they withhold from me) but a single atom they used to give Messenger Muhammad.'

Then he fought and was victorious, and the credit was all his for saving Allah's Religion from the strife that had all but destroyed it.

The fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was chosen by Allah meant that it was his opinion that swayed the decision one way or the other. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would listen to other people's opinions and advice and then do that which seemed right to him.

Know too that there is a difference between disbelievers/deniers of the truth and hypocrites. There are certain terms that each one of us should know and understand what they refer to: they are *iman* (belief), *kufr* (disbelief), *nifaq* (hypocrisy) and *jahd* (denial).

Belief: Every one of us has a heart wherein his intentions are made, and a body whereby those intentions are expressed in words or actions. It is as a poet once said:

= *was his opinion that they, i.e. Muslims should stay in Medina and fight them there. However, the people who had not been present at Badr said to him, 'Go out with us, Messenger of Allah and let us fight them at Uhud' wanting to get something of the reward that the people of Badr had received. They continued to plead with Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him until he donned the garb of war whereupon they repented and said, 'Messenger of Allah, remain here. You were right in your opinion.' But he Allah's peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'After a Prophet dons the garb of war, he should not take it off until after Allah the Almighty has decided the outcome between him and his enemies.' It is narrated by Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak (2/129) and he said about it, 'Its chain of narrated is (Sahih) although neither of them Al-Bukhari and Muslim had narrated it.*

(1) *Al-Bukhari said in his Sahih; Kitab Al-'I'tisam; chapter on Allah's Words, '...And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern…' (Al-'Imran: 159). Fath Al-Bari, 13/338, Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him paid no regard to their counsel because of a legal judgment he had heard directly from Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him about those who separate prayer from zakat and alter the rulings of the religion. Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said, 'If someone changes his religion then kill him.'*

The place of speech is the heart,

The tongue was only created to give expression to what lies therein.

So when there is truth in the heart and a person's tongue and limbs speak and act in accordance with that truth, then that is belief.

But when it is upon falsehood that a person's heart and tongue agree, then that is disbelief. That is why we say that the disbelief of a disbeliever is perfectly logical from his point of view since he is merely giving voice to what is in his heart, but is completely illogical with respect to the truth, since he is denying it with both his heart and tongue. Therefore, there is no difference between what is in his heart and what comes out of his mouth.

Hypocrisy, on the other hand, is when a person holds disbelief in the heart, but keeps that secret and proclaims belief with his tongue. In other words, the hypocrite is the one whose words are not compatible with what is in his heart. The hypocrite is neither logical with respect of view of himself nor with respect of view to the truth, and that is why he is considered worse than the disbeliever and is in the lowest level of the fire. This is the reason that, when our master, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked his people to say, 'There is no god but Allah', only a small group of believers said it and the vast majority of people refused. They refused because they knew what it meant. Otherwise they would have simply uttered those words and there would never have been any confrontation between belief and disbelief. The fact that they refused proves that they understood the true significance of the words and knew what would become required of them upon uttering them.

Denial (*jahd*) is the complete opposite of hypocrisy. It is when a person accepts the truth in his heart and has belief, but finds himself unable to affirm that truth with his tongue. It is to these people that Allah *the Almighty* is referring when He says, 'and in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth...' (*an-Naml:* 14).

Then, after a long and hard debate with Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* they said, '…O Allah! If this be indeed the truth from Thee, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!' (*al-Anfal:* 32) rather than asking Allah *the Almighty* to guide them to the truth, showing that they already knew it.

Then, after they had made their allegations that the Quran was nothing but sorcery, myths, legends and so on and so forth, their falsehood vanished, and their denial was exposed by their own words. Allah *the Almighty* quotes what they had to say in the Quran, 'And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?”" (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

What they are saying is that the Quran is incontrovertible – it is the truth. We would have believed in it if it had not been revealed to this man, but had rather been revealed to one of the great men of Mecca or Medina. This proves that they believed in the Quran, which necessitates believing in Prophet Muhammad.

It is well known in whose ears the first call to Islam was given – it was to the disbelievers of Mecca, the leaders of Quraysh and of all the other tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. Quraysh were held in high esteem by all of the Arabs and their words were respected on account of the way they served and looked after the pilgrims on the *Hajj*, and on account of the location of their city, slap bang in the middle of the great trade routes of the north and south.

So then, Islam did not choose a weak people to direct its first call towards but chose the leaders and rulers. Despite that fact, however, Allah *the Almighty* did not want Islam to be victorious in Mecca because, if it had been victorious then and there, then people could have said that Islam was just a pretext for Quraysh to form a group around one of its own which might enable it to rule over the world, not just the Arab peninsula.

This is why Quraysh hastened to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he first invited them to enter Islam and said, ‘Muhammad, if it is a kingdom that you want, then we will make you our king. If it is money that you want, then we will collect enough money for you to make you the richest person amongst us…’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them his famous reply, ‘By Allah even if you were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left in exchange for my abandoning this affair before Allah *the Almighty* Himself has brought it victory or I have perished in the attempt, I would not abandon it.’'(1)

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(1) *Ibn Hisham attributed this in his Sira (1/266), to Ibn Ishaq. He narrated that Quraysh came to Abu Taleb and said, 'O Abu Taleb, you are one of our elders and hold a* =

So, although Allah *the Almighty* wanted the people of power and influence in Mecca to be those who heard the first call of Islam, by making Medina the place in which He gave victory to His religion, He was able to show the entire world that it was belief in Muhammad that created the strong partisanship that built up around him and not strong partisanship around Muhammad that led to belief in him.

There is another meaning that we may understand from Allah's words, '…and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1). It means that there is no obedience due to those who are neither disbelievers nor hypocrites when they issue a command contradicting one already given by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Anyone who believes in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will take from him.

This is why it is such a huge mistake for you to say, 'How could Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have done such-and-such?' That is you are finding fault with his actions and seeking to put them right. What right do you have to pass judgement on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? How can you, a believer, set yourself up as the yardstick against which the actions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are measured?

Like those, for example, who object to Messenger Muhammad taking more than one wife, even going so far as to criticise him. It is as if they were instigating legal proceedings against him! How can we remonstrate with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for doing this when Allah *the Almighty* Himself neither remonstrated with him nor stripped him of his Mission? No, on the contrary, Allah *the Almighty* approved of the action of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave it His blessing, so

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= *position of honour amongst us. We have already asked you to ask your nephew to desist, but you have not done so; by Allah the Almighty we can no longer bear the insults to our fathers, the mocking of our dreams and the dishonoring of our gods, so make him stop or we will fight both of you until one of us is destroyed. So Abu Taleb sent for Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him and said to him, 'Nephew, your people came and said such-and-such to me. So spare me and yourself and do not make me carry a burden that I am unable to bear.' Whereupon the Messenger Allah's peace and blessings be upon him gave the response mentioned above.*

do not make yourself the standard against which you measure Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the standard and yardstick against which we must measure our own actions. The first thing we must ask ourselves before embarking upon an action is, 'Did Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* do this thing or not?' If the answer is that he did do it, then we do it as well.

It was because of this that Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* came to be called As-Siddiq 'the Truthful One': when the people of Quraysh told him that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that he had travelled to the *Bayt Al-Maqdis* in Jerusalem and back in a single night, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'If that is what he says then he is speaking the truth.'(1)

Another reason the True Lord forbade His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* from deferring to the deniers of truth and the hypocrites was that he might be fully aware of their true nature and the enmity which they held towards him. Allah *the Almighty* was telling his Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that their advice could not be trusted and that he must treat with suspicion anything which they told him to do or not to do. How could we even think that such a people could be sincere in the advice they gave to a man who had come to strip away their power and destroy their religion?

Even supposing that these people were sincere in their advice towards you because you were from Quraysh and they wanted to see you succeed, still their advice would be lacking in knowledge or wisdom, while Allah *the Almighty* is Wise and All Knowing. So, no matter how sincere they are with you, avoid drawing any parallels between being obedient to them and being obedient to Allah *the Almighty*.

Likewise, we note that when the people actually did ask Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for something, it was as if Allah

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(1) *This story is mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (5/4012). The completion of the story is as follows, 'Then he was asked, 'Do you believe him before even hearing him yourself?' so he replied, 'Where are your brains! I believe him when he tells me of heaven so how could I not believe him when he tells of Jerusalem? Heaven is much further away.'*

the Almighty had already alerted him to the disobedience and contradiction inherent in their requests before they had actually made them. Obedience requires that there be someone who obeys and someone who is obeyed.

They wanted themselves to be the ones obeyed and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be the obedient one, the one who followed their orders. But this is the reverse of how things should be – how could it be like this when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only came to legislate laws for people that they then obey? He *peace and blessings be upon him* should be the one giving the orders and he should be the one who is obeyed.

It was as if Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were saying to these people, 'How could I place you on the same level as Allah *the Almighty*?' And that is proved by the following account: Having been given safe passage by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Abu Sufyan, ʿIkrima ibn abu Jahl, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, Al-Aʿwar As-Sulami and a delegation from Thaqif came to Medina and met with ʿAbdullah ibn ʾUbayy and ʿAbdullah ibn Saʿad ibn abu As-Sarh. Then they came before the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'Muhammad, leave our gods, *al-Lat*, *al-ʿUzza* and *Manat* alone and bear witness that their intercession on our behalf is accepted by Allah *the Almighty*. We want to maintain our position of nobility and dignity among the Arabs, so if you leave us our gods for a year and acknowledge them, we will leave you be with your Lord.'(1)

But Allah forbade him from that, saying, '…defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) since you should never back down in their presence or fall back into their ways. If you were to have deferred to them then you would be submitting to their illusory authority and giving them the chance to tell everyone that Muhammad obeys their commands, thereby making them those who guide and you the guided.'

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(1) *It is transmitted by Al-Wahidi in Asbab An-Nuzuul (p. 26) that the words of Allah: 'Say: 'O you who deny the truth! [1] I do not worship that which you worship [2]' (al-Kafirun: 1-2) were revealed about a group of men from Quraysh who said to Messenger Muhammad: 'O Muhammad, come! If you follow our religion then we will follow yours. Worship our gods for a year and then we will worship yours for a year. Then, if what you have brought is better than what we have, we will have got some share of it along with you; and if what we have is better than what you have brought, you will have got some share of it along with us.' Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'Allah forbid that I associate anyone with Him!'*

Given that this command from Allah *the Almighty* to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he not defer to these people came at a time when they were the leaders and rulers of the land and Islam was still new and in need of truces with its enemies. Some people might ask, 'Why did Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not conclude a truce with these people thereby making the call of Islam more robust? Were they not the leaders of the people, holding a position of power and influence amongst them?' He did not do so because such a truce would be completely at odds with the logic of reason and truth – it is not acceptable for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to depend on anyone but Allah *the Almighty* for help. This is why Allah *the Almighty* addresses him in one of the verses following this one, saying: 'And place thy trust in Allah *the Almighty* [alone]: for none is as worthy of trust as Allah *the Almighty*.' (*al-Ahzab:* 3)

Then He says: '…for Allah *the Almighty* is truly all knowing, wise.' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) Knowledge is not the same as wisdom: knowledge is knowing the issues whereas wisdom is knowing where and when to apply them. So knowledge on its own is not enough. These two attributes are complementary and inseparable from one another as is shown by Allah's words: '…the best [man] that you could hire is one who is [as] strong and worthy of trust [as he]!' (*al-Qasas:* 26)

A strong person will not protect you if he is unworthy of trust, while the trustworthiness of the trustworthy person will be of no use to you if he is weak. It was this fact that led a Commander of the Faithful to complain to one of his confidantes from Iraq about the people of Iraq, saying, 'If I were to put a strong man over them, they would go against him, forcing him to act like a tyrant and take away their rights; and if I were to put a weak man over them, they would treat him with scorn and contempt.' The man replied, 'If you were to put a strong man over them, then his strength would weigh for you in the balance, while his tyranny and corruption would only weigh against him.' So the Commander of the Faithful said, 'For as long as you remain aware of this, you will be the only one I place in authority over them.' So knowledge marks all the good matters, while wisdom is putting things where they belong and using matters in the situations where they fit best.

Then the True Lord says:

وَٱتَّبِعۡ مَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَيۡكَ مِن رَّبِّكَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٗا ۝٢

Follow what your Lord reveals to you:
God is well aware of all your actions [2]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 2)

Here we notice that Allah *the Almighty* has placed a prohibition in the midst of two commands. So, between the two commands 'O Prophet? Remain conscious of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) and 'Follow what your Lord reveals to you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 2). Allah *the Almighty* places the prohibition, '…and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1). It is completely natural for this prohibition to fall between these two commands. By remaining fearfully conscious of Allah *the Almighty* you champion the cause of truth causing pain and consternation to the people whose power derives from falsehood and corruption. It is inevitable that they will then come to you and whisper in your ear to make you turn aside from the revelation given to you by your Lord, so you must go back to what has come to you through revelation and follow but that.

Revelation or inspiration is informing about a matter which is hidden and unknown: if the matter had been public knowledge, then informing about it would not be termed revelation. There are many ways in which Allah *the Almighty* communicates with his creation by means of revelation, including the following: Revealing things to the inanimate objects of the World and inspiring them, since it is within Allah’s power to speak directly to them such as when He said about the earth, 'on that Day will she recount all her tidings, as your Lord will have inspired her to do.' (*az-Zalzala:* 4-5)

Revealing things to animals such as when He said about the bees: 'And [consider how] your Lord has inspired the bee: "Prepare for thyself dwellings in mountains and in trees, and in what [men] may build [for thee by way of hives].' (*an-Nahl:* 68)

Revealing things to human beings, who are neither Prophets nor Messengers, such as when He said, 'and [remember the time] when I inspired the white-garbed ones: ‘Believe in Me and in My Apostle!' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 111) and when He said, 'And so, [when he was born,] We inspired [thus] the mother of Moses: ‘Suckle him [for a time]…' (*al-Qasas:* 7).

This is revelation in the wider sense of the word. As for revelation in its specific sense, that is limited to the Messengers whom Allah *the Almighty* sent from Himself to creation and there are a number of ways in which it occurs. Sometimes it is by means of an inspiration that comes directly to the heart, sometimes by means of incorporeal voice from an unknown source and sometimes by means of a messenger coming down from among the angels. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, or [by a voice, as it were,] from behind a veil, or by sending an apostle…' (*ash-Shura:* 51).

As for the Noble Quran, it did not come to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by means of sudden inspiration or a voice speaking to him from behind a veil. No, the Quran was brought down to him by an angel and it is thus that the entire Quran was revealed.

This form of revelation inevitably requires the human messenger to be in close proximity to the angelic messenger. As both types of beings have their own unique natural forms, it becomes necessary for one of two things to happen when they meet: the human must either be brought up to the level of the angel so that he can receive the message directly or the angel must be brought down to the level the human so that he can dictate it to him.

That is why, in the *Hadith*, when Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* visited Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his assembly, he took on the form of a man in order to teach the people the matters of their religion.(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him that, while Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was in the company of his Companions, Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him came to him in the form of a man whose clothes were exceedingly white, whose hair was exceedingly black, upon whom no trace of travel could be seen and whom none of us knew.*

This is why, whenever Jibril *peace be upon him* brought the revelation to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* He *peace and blessings be upon him* would start to tremble and shake, and sweat would drip from his forehead, as soon as the revelation came over him, a necessary side-effect of the encounter between the angelic and human forms. The process was so exhausting for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he used to cry out to his wife Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* 'Wrap me up! Wrap me up!' and 'Cover me! Cover me!'

If revelation came to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was next to one of his Companions, with his knee resting upon his, the Companion would feel as if the weight of an entire mountain were pressing down upon his knee.(1) If it came to him while he was riding upon his camel, it would let out a groan of protest at the weight it suddenly had to bear.(2) This is why, after each period of revelation, there would a period without revelation to give Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* time to recover from his exertions. When his tiredness went, only the sweetness of the revelation would remain, making him long for it to come to him once again.

After that, his Lord addressed him, saying: 'Have we not opened up thy heart, and lifted from thee the burden, that had weighed so heavily on thy back? And [have We not] raised thee high in dignity?' (*ash-Sharh:* 1-4)

When a goal is one which is lofty and exalted, then no effort or exertion seems too great to bring it about. Then, after his longing for it has been aroused, the revelation came back to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. His Lord addressed him, saying: '…for, indeed, the life to come will be better for thee than this earlier part [of thy life]! And, indeed, in time will thy Lord grant thee [what thy heart desires], and thou shalt be well pleased.' (*ad-Duha:* 4-5)

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(1) *Zayd ibn Thabit said, 'Allah the Almighty* sent down the revelation to his Messenger *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him,* while his thigh was resting upon mine, whereupon his thigh became so heavy that I was afraid that it might crush my own.' It is transmitted by Al-Bukhari without a chain of narrations.

(2) Asma' bint *Zayd* is narrated to have said, 'I was holding on to the reins of *Al-'Adba'*, the she-camel of Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* when the whole of *Al-Ma'ida* chapter was revealed to him and was so heavy that it almost caused the forelegs of the camel to buckle.' It is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* (6/455).

So, it has been established that the Quran was revealed by means of an angelic messenger, not by means of an inspiration coming upon to the heart or a voice from behind a veil. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And thus, too, [O Muhammad,] have We revealed to you a life-giving message, [coming] at Our behest. [Ere this message came unto thee,] you did not know what revelation is or what faith [implies] (*ash-Shura:* 52)

But the revelation mentioned in the verse: 'Follow what your Lord reveals to you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 2) is from whom? It is '…your Lord…' (*al-Ahzab:* 2). Allah *the Almighty* did not say, for example, that revelation is from the Lord of creation, even though He is indeed the Lord of all creation. But since Muhammad is the master of creation, it is all the more appropriate that the One Who is his Lord be the Lord of all the rest of creation as well. The words 'your Lord' *(rabbuka)* indicate to love and concern that Allah *the Almighty* has for his Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. He will never disappoint him, shows that the connection He has with His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is for the good of him and his community.

Then He says: '…Allah is well aware of all your actions.' (*al-Ahzab:* 2) Truly aware is the one whose knowledge of something extends even to its most minute details, the expert in other words. That is why we say, ‘Ask the people of expertise’, in other words, ‘Do not ask the people of superficial knowledge.’ The ‘truly Aware’ is the One from whom absolutely nothing is hidden.

You will notice that Allah *the Almighty* finished the previous verse with the words: '…for Allah *the Almighty* is truly all-knowing, wise' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) meaning that He has full knowledge of all the laws He laid down for you and the wisdom to put every matter in its rightful place; and finished this one with the Words: '… Allah is well aware of all your actions.' (*al-Ahzab:* 2) meaning He is fully aware of how you responded to the laws He laid down for you, whether with acceptance or rejection. So, your Lord does not lay down laws for you and then leave you be unmonitored, but remains fully aware of everything you do and even of every intention that comes to your heart.

‘Awareness’ refers to utmost knowledge, to knowledge that is broad and wide-ranging. this meaning of awareness is clear from what Allah *the Almighty* says in the story of Luqman *peace be upon him*: '"O my dear son," [continued Luqman,] "verily, though there be aught of but the weight of a mustard-seed, and though it be [hidden] in a rock, or in the skies, or in the earth, Allah will bring it to light: for, behold, Allah is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware." Allah is well aware of all your actions.' *(Luqman:* 16)

So 'All-awareness' indicates knowledge that is so wide-ranging that it does not overlook even the smallest detail, while *lutf* 'unfathomable' is penetrating deep into the heart of things no matter how slight or insignificant, and that is why we say that the smaller something is *latufa*, the greater its capacity for violence.

It is as if the True Lord is saying to His Messenger, 'Set your heart at rest and know that, no matter how much you suffer at the hands of your enemies and no matter how much they plot and conspire against you, your Lord will always be with you and will never ever abandon you. Your enemies are part of my creation –it is I who gave them their capacity to think and their capacity to plot. It is I who will ensure that the victory is yours at every stage in their plotting against you. That is why they never got the better of you in any debate and that is why they failed in the attempt when they made up their minds to kill you and act as one single man, all of them striking you down together thereby ensuring that the responsibility for your death be divided up amongst all the tribes. You walked away from them safely, leaving them far behind. Then, when they tried to use magic and jinn against you, I informed you of their plans and did not abandon you to their plots.'

Then the True Lord says:

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿٣﴾

Put your trust in God: God is enough to trust [3]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 3)

Beware of thinking that any of these people can help you or bring you benefit or harm. Do not have a good opinion of their commands or prohibitions and do not place any trust in them whatsoever. Rather, only place your trust in Allah *the Almighty*. However, here we must, draw a distinction between two words: *Tawakkul* and *Tawakul*. *Tawakkul* is when you, acknowledging your incapacity to do something, go to someone who is more capable and rely on him to do it for you. It is an important condition of *Tawakkul* however that you try every means available to you before acknowledging your incapacity. *Tawakkul*, then, is that combination of outward action and inward trust.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us a good example of this when He *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* drew a parallel between the one who places his trust in Allah *the Almighty* and the bird. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'If you were to place your trust in Allah *the Almighty* with the trust due to Him, then He would provide for you in the way that He provides for the birds – they leave their nests in the morning with an empty stomach and come back in the evening with a full one.'(1)

Tawakul, on the other hand, is when you do nothing, rejecting the means granted to you by Allah *the Almighty* making no use of them and saying that you are 'placing your trust in Allah *the Almighty*. That is not placing your trust in Allah *the Almighty* – you must first try out all the means that your Lord has opened up to you. If those means prove insufficient to carry out the task, then do not despair. Keep in mind that you have a Lord who is more powerful than those means since it was He who created them. That is why we say to the many people who complain that Allah *the Almighty* did not answer their supplications, 'Yes, what you say is true. But what Allah *the Almighty* said to you is also true since it was He who granted you the means to do what you ask of Him and you ignored them. Be confident, however, that as soon as you exhaust all the means available to you and then seek refuge in your Lord, He will answer you.'

Read what Allah *the Almighty* says: '…who is it that responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him, and who removes the ill [that caused the distress]…' (*an-Naml:* 62).

The 'distressed' man is the one whose means prove insufficient to the task and do not let him carry out what it is he is trying to carry out.

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(1) *It is transmitted by Ahmad in Musnad (1/30, 52), Ibn Majah in Sunnan (4164), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2344), classified it as good and authentic, on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him.*

This is like what happened to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his people when they were surrounded by Pharaoh and his troops. The people of Musa *peace be upon him* said to him, '...'Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!' (*ash-Shu'ara': *61) Yes, they were about to be caught because they had the sea in front of them, stopping them from going forward, while the enemy behind them. This was what the people thought and this was the reality of their situation. Musa *peace be upon him,* however, had access to another way out and so he said, '...Nay indeed!' (*ash-Shu'ara': *62), they shall not overtake us. '...My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara': *62) Musa *peace be upon him* said this out of an unswerving belief and confidence that Allah *the Almighty* would answer his supplication.

To those people who complain that Allah *the Almighty* did not answer their supplications even though they had first used up every means at their disposal, we say, 'Yes, but you were not distressed or in absolute need. Rather, you made your supplication when you were already living in a state of ease, like someone who asks to live in a palace when he is already living in a flat. When your circumstances are such then you are not truly 'distressed'.'

Then the True Lord mentions the essential thing that must be understood with respect to *tawakkul*, saying: '...for none is as worthy of trust as Allah *the Almighty*' (*al-Ahzab: *3) In other words, it is enough for you to place your trust in Allah *the Almighty* since nothing can withstand Him and nothing is impossible for Him.

Let me tell you a true story (1) of something that actually happened to me. A group of us were walking along when we saw a blind man trying to cross the road, so we told one of those who were with us to go and take him by the hand and help him cross the road. Then, after he had helped him cross the road, our companion asked the blind man where he was going. He replied that he was going to number such-and-such in that street, so our companion took out ten pounds from his pocket and placed in the man's hand. When the man felt the paper of the ten-pound note in his hand, rather than turning towards the one who had given it to him, he raised his face towards the sky and exclaimed, 'Nothing is ever impossible for You.' Then he said to our companion,

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(1) The story of Ash-Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi may Allah rest his soul with the blind man.

‘My boy! Take me back to the place you found me in.’ The need which had driven him to make his journey had been fulfilled!

Yes, indeed! '…Allah is enough to trust.' (*al-Ahzab:* 3), since He is not reliant on means and nothing can turn him aside from what He has willed '…all that is with you is bound to come to an end, whereas that which is with Allah *the Almighty* is everlasting…' (*an-Nahl:* 96).

There is something else that you should take note of when it comes to *Tawakkul*. This is if you are going to rely absolutely on someone else to do something for you, you have to be able to guarantee that he will remain alive long enough to do it. With people, that is not possible – how can you place all your hopes and trust in a person when that person might be dead the next morning?

No, you should place your trust in no one but Allah *the Almighty* since only He is Ever Living and will never die: 'Hence, place thy trust in the Living One Who dies not, and extol His limitless glory and praise...' (*al-Furqan:* 58), by placing your trust in Him, dispense with your need of placing your trust in anyone else: '…Allah is enough to trust.' (*al-Ahzab:* 3)

Then the True Lord says:

مَّا جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لِرَجُلٖ مِّن قَلۡبَيۡنِ فِي جَوۡفِهِۦۚ وَمَا جَعَلَ أَزۡوَٰجَكُمُ ٱلَّٰٓـِٔي
تُظَٰهِرُونَ مِنۡهُنَّ أُمَّهَٰتِكُمۡۚ وَمَا جَعَلَ أَدۡعِيَآءَكُمۡ أَبۡنَآءَكُمۡۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ قَوۡلُكُم
بِأَفۡوَٰهِكُمۡۖ وَٱللَّهُ يَقُولُ ٱلۡحَقَّ وَهُوَ يَهۡدِي ٱلسَّبِيلَ ٤

God does not put two hearts within a man’s breast. He does not turn the wives you reject and liken to your mothers’ backs into your real mothers; nor does He make your adopted sons into real sons. These are only words from your mouths, while God speaks the truth and guides people to the right path [4] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 4)

This verse is linked with those came before it since, in them, Allah *the Almighty* mentions two camps: one camp that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to obey as represented by Allah’s words, 'O Prophet! Remain conscious of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) and His Words, 'And follow [but] that which comes unto thee through revelation from your Lord…' (*al-Ahzab:* 2). One camp that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is forbidden from obeying as represented by Allah's words, '…and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites...' (*al-Ahzab:* 1).

So, here we stand before two camps, one representing the truth in its clearest possible form and the other representing the false. This is when our heart must make an unequivocal choice: it must either align itself fully with the side of truth or align itself fully with the side of falsehood – there is no third option. As long as you are faced with two contradictory matters that can never come together in a single place, you must give priority to the truth since 'Allah does not put two hearts within a man's breast…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). The choice is stark and unambiguous – either truth or falsehood. It is not possible to both be fearfully consciousness of Allah *the Almighty* and to defer to the disbelievers and hypocrites since you have but one heart in your breast.

It is well known that the heart is the most important organ in the entire human body and this is clearly demonstrated if we look at the way doctors treat ill people. If the patient is suffering from a mild illness then the doctor prescribes a remedy to take orally. However, the effect of such a remedy is not immediate since it must first be assimilated into the body by means of the digestive process. If the illness is more severe, then the doctor prescribes a remedy that is injected straight into the muscle so that its effect is felt immediately; and if the illness is really bad, then he prescribes a remedy that is injected straight into the vein. Why does he do that, you might ask? He does that so that the remedy in a ready form may be inserted straight into the blood which is then pumped around the entire body by the heart, ensuring that the remedy reaches every organ in the body in the quickest possible time. So, the blood is the vehicle that carries healing properties around the body and the heart is the motor that powers it. That is why you must keep it healthy by ensuring that it is filled with truth and not corrupted by falsehood.

We have previously made it clear that it is not possible for a single space to contain two things at the same time, let alone two things that are mutually contradictory! We gave the example of an empty glass – if you want to fill that glass with water, then you must remove the air so that the water can take its place.

The same is true in the world of meaning – it is not possible for truth and falsehood to ever come together in a single heart. It is not possible for you to dedicate one heart to truth and another to falsehood since your Creator has only given you a single heart, and has limited that heart in such a way that there is no room in it for anything but belief in Him.

It is narrated(1) that, among the Arabs, there lived a man by the name of Jamil ibn Asad al-Fihri (2) who was famed for his eloquence and intelligence and who used to boast about himself, saying, 'I have two hearts each of which gives me an understanding of things the like of that of Muhammad.' Henceforth, it was willed by Allah *the Almighty* that Abu Sufyan should see this man making his way home after suffering defeat at the battle of Badr. So Abu Sufyan approached him and said, 'Jamil, how did our people do?' (Jamil) replied, 'Some of them were killed and some ran away.' Then Abu Sufyan said, 'Why is it that I see you in such a state?' so (Jamil) replied, 'What state are you talking about?' Abu Sufyan said, 'You are carrying one of your sandals in your hand and wearing the other on your foot.' (Jamil) replied, 'By Allah *the Almighty* I thought that both of them were on my feet!' When he heard that, Abu Sufyan laughed out loud and said to him, 'Where then are your two hearts?'

The heart is the pump by which blood is pumped around the body. So, if the heart is physically healthy, then nutrients and healing properties will be carried by the blood to every limb and organ in the body. Likewise, if the heart is spiritually healthy and filled with the sound doctrines of belief, then those doctrines will also be carried by the blood to every limb and organ in the body causing them to act only out of obedience to Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, the legs will only walk towards that in which there is good, the eyes will only look at that which is lawful, the ears will only listen to the best of what is said, and the tongue will only speak the truth. Every limb exudes the quality of truth that it has absorbed from the good energies found in the heart.

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(1) *The story of Jamil ibn Asad Al-Fihri who claimed to have two hearts.*

(2) *Ibn Hajr Al-'Asqalani mentioned this story in his 'Al-'Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba' (1/255) in his biography of Jamil ibn 'Asad Al-Fihri, who had the Kunya Abu Ma'mir and the nickname 'the two-hearted'. He also mentioned this story in his biography of Wahb ibn 'Umayr Al-Jumhi (6: 327). Then he said, 'Ath-Tha'labi mentioned that this story was about someone called Jamil ibn Ma'mir and that Abu Sufyan was the one who met him and asked him about his state. Ibn Al-Kalbi, on the other hand, said that the man's name was of Jamil ibn Asad, relating the story in his Tafsir with a chain of narrations from Abu Saleh from Ibn 'Abbas.'*

This is the lesson Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was trying to teach us when he said, 'In the body there is a lump of flesh which when sound the whole body is sound, and when corrupt the whole body is corrupt. (That lump of flesh) is the heart.'(1)

Then the True Lord uses this topic of two contradictory things coming together in a single heart as a means to introduce a wider discussion about certain contradictory practices that had become prevalent amongst the Arabs. He says: 'Allah does not put two hearts within a man's breast. He does not turn the wives you reject and liken to your mothers' backs into your real mothers…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). In the time of ignorance before Islam, it had become commonplace amongst the Arabs for men who despised their wives to say to them, 'For me, your body is like that of my mother's.' It is well known that, in terms of sexual intercourse, a mother is forbidden to her son forever. So the Arabs used to consider such pronouncements, when uttered by a husband to his wife, as being tantamount to divorce.

Then Islam came and ruled that those who performed this practice were not divorced, but did have to carry out the expiation for lying, since it is a lie to equate one's wife to one's mother. This expiation consists of doing one of three things: freeing a slave, feeding sixty poor people or fasting sixty days.(2)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by the two Imams Al-Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of An-Nu'man ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) Allah *the Almighty* says about the expiation for *(zhihar)* (equating one's wife to one's mother): '…hence, as for those who would separate themselves from their wives by saying, "Thou are as unlawful to me as my mother," and thereafter would go back on what they have said, [their atonement] shall be the freeing of a human being from bondage before the couple may touch one another again: this you are [hereby] exhorted to do - for Allah *the Almighty* is fully aware of all that you do. [3] However, he who does not have the wherewithal shall fast [instead] for two consecutive months before the couple may touch one another again; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty=

This topic is dealt with in the chapter of *Al-Mujadala*: 'As for those of you who [henceforth] separate themselves from their wives by saying, "Though are as unlawful to me as my mother," [let them bear in mind that] they can never be [as] their mothers: none are their mothers save those who gave them birth: and so, behold, they but utter a saying that runs counter to reason, and is [therefore] false…' (*al-Mujadala:* 2) i.e. it is a lie since one's wife is not one's mother.

The True Lord brought up one matter that was inherently contradictory and then used it, by association, to indicate the inherent contradiction in another matter. So, in the same way that it is not possible for obedience to Allah *the Almighty* and obedience to the disbelievers and hypocrites to come together in a single heart, it is also not possible for one's wife to be one's mother – she is either one's mother or one's wife, not both.

Another inherently contradictory practice that was prevalent amongst the Arabs of the time was that of adoption. If a man found a child who possessed admirable or noble qualities, he would adopt him and make him his son. He would allow him to intermingle freely with his household, receive the same share of inheritance, and enjoy all the rights of his actual biological children. This practice is just as contradictory as those that preceded it. In the same that a man may not have two hearts and one's wife may also not be one's mother, so too may an adopted boy not be a son. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '… nor does He make your adopted sons into real sons…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). The Arabic word used for adopted son, *da'iy*, indicates one who is called 'Son of So-and-so' without actually being his son. Allah *the Almighty* wanted to bring an end to this practice as well as that of the practice of *zhihar* 'equating one's wife to one's mother', so he abolished them both in the Quran, telling us that we must always place things in their rightful places and imposed an expiation upon the practitioners of *zhihar* and prohibited people from adopting in the manner mentioned above.

= needy ones: this, so that you might prove your faith in Allah *the Almighty* and His Apostle. Now these are the bounds set by Allah *the Almighty* and grievous suffering [in the life to come] awaits all who deny the truth.[4]' (*al-Mujadala:* 3-4)

Whenever the True Lord wanted to abolish a practice, He would put the one entrusted with the call to Islam forward first to show people what He wanted them to do. This is why He made Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the first one to openly renounce the adoption that he himself had carried out.

As you well know, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was married to Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* a lady whom he held in great esteem. One day, Hakim ibn Hizam(1) bought Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* a slave called Zayd ibn Haritha(2) *Allah be pleased with him* a man from Banu Kalb. He had been stolen away from his family by a gang of thieves and sold by them into slavery markets. Then Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* granted Zayd to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who made him his servant. Zayd, then, served Prophet Muhammad for many years. What an extraordinary honour that was to serve him *peace and blessings be upon him*!

'Zayd loved Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deeply and adored serving him. Indeed, he said about the way the Messenger treated him, ‘I served Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for ten years and never once in that time did he ask me why I did one thing or did not do something else.’(3)

One day, a man from the Banu Kalb tribe saw Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* walking through the streets of Mecca. The man went back to his family and told them about him. So Zayd’s father hurried to Mecca to search for his son and was directed to the house of Prophet Muhammad. When he came to his *peace and blessings be upon him* house, he told him about what had befallen his son and asked that he be allowed to return with him to Banu Kalb.

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(1) *He is Hakim ibn Hizam ibn Khuwaylyd Al-A’sadi – Khadija bint Khuwaylid was his paternal aunt. He was born 13 years before the Year of the Elephant and was one of the leaders of Quraysh. He was a friend of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him before his Mission and continued to have great love for him after his Mission had begun. However, he delayed embracing Islam until the Year of the Conquest of Mecca. As for the year of his death, scholars differed on appointing it. However, it is known that he was 120 years old when he died. See Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba, 2/33.*

(2) *The story of Zayd ibn Haritha with the Prophet Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him.*

(3) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6038; a At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2015, on the authority of A’nas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not going to relinquish a servant who loved him as deeply as that so easily, so he asked his father to give Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* the option to choose where to go. He said, 'If Zayd chooses you, then take him, but if he chooses me, then I will be his father.' Then, when they left the matter to Zayd, he said, 'By Allah, I would not choose anyone but Prophet Muhammad.'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to recompense Zayd for his action and devoted service, so he adopted him in the manner practised by the Arabs, thus called him 'Zayd, son of Muhammad'.(1)

Thus, when the True Lord *the Almighty* came to abolish this practice of adoption, He began by abolishing the adoption carried out by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he might be an example for others when it came to this matter. But how did Allah actually go about doing that?

Our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had married Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* to his cousin, Zaynab bint Jahsh *Allah be pleased with him* the sister of 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh. It had taken great pains to get Zayd and Zaynab to agree to the marriage since Zaynab (2) *Allah be pleased with her* had initially rejected it, saying, ‘How can I marry Zayd when he is a slave and I am one of the noblewomen of Quraysh?’

Then Zaynab married him in order to please Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to ensure that her actions accorded with Allah’s saying: 'Now whenever Allah and His Apostle have decided a matter, it is not for a believing man or a believing woman to claim freedom of choice insofar as they themselves are concerned…' (*al-Ahzab:* 36).

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(1) *It is narrated by Ibn Sa'ad in At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra (3/40); Ibn Al-A’thir in Usdu Al-Ghaba (2/282); Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani in Al-Isaba (2/599). In their account, Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘When Zayd chose him instead of his father and paternal uncle, ‘I ask those present to bear witness that Zayd is my son – he is my heir and I am his.’ When his father and paternal uncle saw that, they felt glad at how things had turned out and went home.*

(2) *It is narrated by Ibn Sa'd in At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra (10/98) that Zaynab bint Jahsh Allah be pleased with her said to Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him ‘Messenger of Allah, I am not satisfied with him for myself since I am a widow of Quraysh.’ The Messenger Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'But I am satisfied with him for you.' Then Zayd ibn Haritha married her.'*

However, after the marriage, she continued to despise him, constantly telling him that she was a noblewoman of Quraysh and he was just a slave. Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* disliked the way she treated him and found it difficult to bear, thus felt a strong desire to divorce her. So he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* complained to him that Zaynab was treating him badly and that he wanted to end their marriage. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* however, told him to hold onto his wife. Zayd repeated the compliant for the second time, yet received the same answer.

But when he *Allah be pleased with him* came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a third time, he *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that the desire of him and his wife for divorce is a pre-ordained matter. He knew that there must be wisdom in the aversion that Allah had created between Zayd and his wife *Allah be pleased with them*– aversion that, on her part, came about as a result of her looking down upon him, and, on his part, as a result of the feelings of hurting his pride.

In order to show that Prophet Muhammad's adoption of Zayd was not valid, Allah *the Almighty* decreed that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would marry Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* after her divorce from Zayd. It is well-known that it is forbidden for a man to marry any woman who has been previously married to his son, so the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did marry Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* meant that Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* was not really his son and so showed the whole practice of adoption to be invalid since it did not entail any of the same things that a true father/son relationship would.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* felt a little uncomfortable about marrying Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*. He was hesitant about doing so since he was frightened that people might say that it was he who instructed Zayd to divorce Zaynab because he secretly loved her and wanted her for himself, as some orientalists say today. These are blatant lies against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Any man who loves a woman does not tire himself out trying to get her to marry another man, nor does he tell this woman's husband, when he wants to divorce her, 'Hold onto your wife.'

Furthermore, it is not our place to guess what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hid within himself, falsely claiming things like he loved her. Rather, we must only look at what Allah *the Almighty* brought to light since what he *peace and blessings be upon him* hid and what Allah *the Almighty* brought to light were one and the same, a fact which is proved by Allah's saying: 'And [thus] would you hide within yourself something that Allah was about to bring to light – for you did stand in awe of [what] people [might think], whereas it was Allah alone of whom thou should have stood in awe!' (*al-Ahzab:* 37)

So, from this, we know that what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hid within himself was his fear of what the Arabs might think of him, his fear that they might interpret the affair in a matter unbefitting to it.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '… [But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union with her,(1) We gave her to thee in marriage…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). Why did Allah *the Almighty* do this? The answer is provided in the following part of the verse, '…so that [in future] no blame should attach to the believers for [marrying] the spouses of their adopted children…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). In this way, the True Lord *the Almighty* established the principle of the invalidity of adoption through the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself.

He *the Almighty* invalidated the practice of adoption because it is a blameworthy one since it destroys the whole foundation upon which families are built. In addition, it leads to uncertainty with regards to paternity and the loss of rights. An adopted son interacts with a man's household as if he were actually his son, so we find his wife acting towards him as she would towards an actual son and his daughter acting towards him as if he were an actual brother, even though, in reality, he is nothing of the sort. No one can fail to see the levels of corruption to which this situation might lead.

It does not end there. Allah *the Almighty* made your father the direct cause of your existence, so how can you reject that causality and give it over to another to whom it does not truly belong? If you reject your father's causal link to you, then it becomes easy for you to also reject the initial causer, your Creator. Why would that not be the case when you have had the audacity to reject the favour He has bestowed upon you?

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(1) *The Arabic word used for union here is (watar) which literally means desire or need. In other words, after Zayd had finished with her and left her, we gave her to you, O Prophet Muhammad, in marriage. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir 3/491. In Al-Qamus Al-Qawim (2/343), Al-Watar is a need with which people concern themselves. Then, when they meet that need, they are said to have fulfilled their watar. In other words, they have satisfied their desire. It is also said that fulfilling one's watar with one's wife means divorcing her.*

Furthermore, by rejecting the causal link between you and your father, you are guilty of misattribution, of making a link where one does not exist. So you link your worship to someone other than the One Worthy of worship, and ascribe creation to someone other than the Creator.

If this were not the case, then why does the True Lord *the Almighty* urge us constantly to act well towards our parents? And why does He *the Almighty* directly link worship of Him to kindness towards ones' parents more than once in His Mighty Book? He *the Almighty* says: 'And worship Allah [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do The good unto your parents…' (*an-Nisa':* 36) and He says: '…for your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him. Do good unto [your] parents…' (*al-Isra':* 23).

They say that the reason Allah *the Almighty* does this is to show clearly that your father is the direct cause of your existence – without him you would not be here. So, when you do not treat him well, but reject his paternity over you and rebel against him, it is as if you are also rebelling against the primal cause of all existence: our Creator. Therefore, even when your parents are disbelievers, they have a right to your kindness and good treatment.

That is why, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked whether a man steals while he is a believer? He replied, 'Yes', and when he was asked whether a man fornicates while he is a believer? He replied, 'Yes', but when he was asked whether a believer lies? He replied, 'No.'(1) The fact that crimes have been assigned *Hadd* 'legal fixed penalties' within the Islamic Law indicates that such crimes will happen within an Islamic society. Lying, however, despite the fact that it is worse than fornication, has never been assigned a *Hadd* in Islamic Law, Why is that, you might ask? That is because, according to some scholars, it is inconceivable for a Muslim to lie. No Muslim would have the effrontery to do so since, if he were known for telling lies, people might even say that his declaration of faith was a lie and consider him outside the fold of Islam.

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(1) *See Malik ibn Anas, Muwatta', p. 990, on the authority of Safwaan ibn Salim.*

Then the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…these are…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4) refers to the aforementioned practices of equating one's wife with one's mother or calling an adopted child a son. Your wife can never be your mother since your mother is the one who gave birth to you. Similarly, no child can have more than one father; Allah says these '… are only words from your mouths…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). Can words come from anywhere else apart from the mouth? If not, then why did Allah *the Almighty* include the words 'your mouths' in this verse? The answer is that speech is uttered by the mouth, but it originates in the heart. The tongue is nothing but an indication of what is in the heart. It is as the poet says:

The place of speech is the heart,
The tongue was only created to give an indication of what lies therein.

Speech must start out in the heart that and then uttered by the tongue. But is there any reality to that which you are saying? Is one's wife one's mother? Or is an adopted son a son? No, these are only figures of speech uttered by mouths since they do not correspond to what is in the heart nor to reality. Speech of this sort, then, is false, while truth is what the True Lord *the Almighty* himself says: '… while Allah speaks the truth and guides people to the right path…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). The truth is established when the heart's beliefs correspond to reality.

It is possible for a person to believe something to be true in his heart even though it is not. If he then says that to someone else, the person himself is not termed a liar even though his statement was, in fact, a lie. That is because the statement corresponded to his personal belief. Therefore, there is a difference between an untrue statement and a person who himself tells lie.

The True Lord *the Almighty* deals with us according to what we believe in our hearts: if what the heart believes corresponds to reality, then the statement is true as is the speaker, but if what the heart believes does not correspond to reality, then the statement is a lie, while the speaker himself is truthful.

So, when the belief corresponds to reality, then it is true, otherwise it is a lie. However, if your heart does not believe something to be the case, then saying it is no more than uttering words with your mouths. That is a lower form of lying than saying something false which you believe to be the truth.

‘The truth’ mentioned in Allah’s Words: '…while Allah speaks the truth…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4) means the reality that must be believed in. The inimitability present in this verse does not lie in the fact that the True Lord *the Almighty* speaks the truth, expressing the reality of things as they truly are, but lies in the fact that He *the Almighty* told us of things that came to pass in the future in the exact way that He *the Almighty* described.

Read Allah’s words: '[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!' (*al-Qamar:* 45) When the True Lord *the Almighty* says: '…while Allah speaks the truth…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4), it is as if He were saying, ‘compare two types of speech: that which is uttered by the mouths, and that which expresses what is real and what one believes in. If Allah’s speech is stronger than belief alone, then it is even more appropriate that it is stronger than speech which is only uttered by mouths.’

As for Allah’s saying: '…and guides people to the right path…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4), it means that it is He *the Almighty* Alone who can show you the way to speak the truth.

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

ٱدۡعُوهُمۡ لِأٓبَآئِهِمۡ هُوَ أَقۡسَطُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِۚ فَإِن لَّمۡ تَعۡلَمُوٓاْ ءَابَآءَهُمۡ
فَإِخۡوَٰنُكُمۡ فِي ٱلدِّينِ وَمَوَٰلِيكُمۡۚ وَلَيۡسَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ جُنَاحٞ فِيمَآ أَخۡطَأۡتُم
بِهِۦ وَلَٰكِن مَّا تَعَمَّدَتۡ قُلُوبُكُمۡۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمًا ٥

Name your adopted sons after their real fathers: this is more equitable in God’s eyes — if you do not know who their fathers are [they are your] ‘brothers-in-religion’ and protégés. You will not be blamed if you make a mistake, only for what your hearts deliberately intend; God is most forgiving and merciful [5] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 5)

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Name your adopted sons after their real fathers…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5), He means to name Zayd after Haritha, not after Muhammad. But how to strip Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* of such a crown? How to take away from him an honour bestowed upon him directly by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Yes indeed, this was a very difficult matter for Zayd *Allah be pleased with him*. But '… this is more equitable in Allah’s Sight' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) even if not in your sights.

The expression '…more equitable…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) is in the comparative form. It is like saying that is equitable but this is more equitable, or that is just but this is more just. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that the choice of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ascribe Zayd to himself was equitable and just in human terms, since he felt for him like a son and had become a father to someone who had preferred him to his own father.

The True Lord *the Almighty* however, wanted a greater form of equitability and justice for us, and that was for us to call children by their actual father’s names. But '…if you do not know who their fathers are [they are your] ‘brothers-in-religion’ and protégés.' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) In other words, we define them by the fact that they are our brethren in faith.

The word *mawali* (protégés) refers to those servants and helpers who had, at one time, been called slaves. So even if you do not know the name of a particular boy’s father, that boy is still your brother in faith and so you should choose a general name for him to indicate that fact. You might, for example, call him Zayd ibn 'Abdullah since we are all slaves of Allah *the Almighty*.

There are two ways of establishing paternity, either by means of the Law or by means of the intellect. When a man enters into a legal marriage and sires a boy, that boy is legally and biologically his son. If the wife, Allah forbid, commits adultery while ‘on her husband’s bed’, i.e. while she is married to her husband, then the boy is legally his son even though it is not biologically his. This is because there is a legal principle that states, 'The child belongs to the bed, and the adulterer deserves stones'(1).

Similarly, in the case of a wife who remarries after the death of her husband or after being divorced and then gives birth six months later, there is some uncertainty as to the child’s paternity since its father could have been her previous husband, so the boy is considered to legally but not biologically be the son of the new husband since he was born ‘on his bed’.

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(1) *This is from a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/ 239, 280, 386 & 409) and by Muslim in his Sahih (1458) in Kitab Ar-Radaa‘ – chapter on the child belonging to the bed (10) in a Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

If the child is, Allah forbid, conceived in fornication, and born out of wedlock, then he is considered to biologically be his father’s son but not legally be his. That is why such a child is referred to as illegitimate.

If you examine Allah’s saying: '… this is more equitable in Allah’s eyes…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5), you will see that they honour Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If Allah *the Almighty* were to have said instead; ‘it is equitable in the sight of Allah,’ that would have entailed that what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had done was tyrannical and unjust. His use of ‘more equitable’, however, means that what he *peace and blessings be upon him* had done was equitable and just.

Allah’s saying: '…You will not be blamed if you make a mistake, only for what your hearts deliberately intend…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) removes a great difficulty that this ruling might place us in, for we often address children who are not our own as ‘my son’, using that as a term of love and affection. We may also address the elderly as ‘My father’, using that as a term of respect. Allah *the Almighty* protects us and excuses us of any sin since, when we say those words, it is not our intention to claim that they are really our sons or our fathers, but only to show honour and respect to the old, and sympathy and affection to the young. So, you incur no sin when you err in this matter. When we say ‘err’, we mean that you unintentionally do what is not correct.

If our Lord *the Almighty* can remove hardship from us for the oaths in which we swear by His Essence without thought, as is stated in His saying, 'Allah will not take you to task for oaths which you may have uttered without thought, but He will take you to task for oaths which you have sworn in earnest…' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 89), then how can He *the Almighty* not remove the hardship from us in this matter?

Then He *the Almighty* says: '…Allah is most forgiving and merciful.' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) We mentioned previously that when a verb is used to indicate an action of Allah *the Almighty* it has nothing at all to do with time.

Therefore, when the past tense verb (*kana*) is used in the verse '…Allah is most forgiving and merciful' (*al-Ahzab:* 5), it means that He *the Almighty* was and still is Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy. The different tenses only apply to the actions of beings who are subject to change; and Allah *the Almighty* never changes.

For that reason, we fear changeable people for they are fickle and capricious. The people of gnosis say, ‘Change for the sake of your Lord’, meaning ‘Change from deviancy to rectitude’. Allah *the Almighty* does not change for your sake, so you must change for His sake. Indeed, He *Glorified is He* does not change for anyone’s sake. So, if He *the Almighty* was Much-Forgiving and a Dispenser of Mercy and He *the Almighty* has not changed, then He must still be Much-Forgiving and a Dispenser of Mercy.

You will notice that it is the way of the Quran to always link these two attributes, the Much-Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy (i.e. the Most Merciful), together. This is because forgiveness is taking away the punishment for someone’s crime while mercy is giving them something good anew after the crime has been forgiven. So, for example, if you get your hands on a thief who has entered your house to steal from you, you can either call the police or forgive him and allow him to go on his way. But you also have the option to help him out by giving him what you can, to help him meet his daily needs. That is mercy: that is giving him something good after he has been forgiven.

This matter is dealt in the verse: 'Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you…' (*an-Nahl:* 126). This directive lays down for us the first foundation upon which forgiveness is built, since it is not possible for anyone to ever determine exactly what equivalence entails nor to guarantee that their retaliation will be of exactly the same degree as and no worse than the initial wrong done to them. Therefore, he falls on the side of forgiveness in order to ensure that he does not become embroiled in a new act of aggression that might require him to pay reparations.

Earlier, we related the story of the usurer who stipulated upon his debtor that if he did not pay back his loan before the agreed date, he would owe him a pound of flesh. When the debtor came late, the usurer took him to court and told the judge about the stipulations he had made on the loan. The judge upheld the stipulation but was inspired by Allah to say to the usurer, ‘Yes, you may take a pound of his flesh, but with one condition – if you take more or less than a just pound, then it will be paid for from your own flesh.' Thereupon the usurer reconsidered and retracted his stipulation.

So, at the first stage, the Islamic law makes permissible a level of retaliation that is exactly equivalent to the wrong done, in order to make it as difficult as possible to implement. Then, at the second stage, Allah *the Almighty* opens the door to pardon and forgiveness, saying: '…But if you pardon [their faults], and forbear, and forgive – then, behold, Allah will be much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy.' (*at-Taghabun:* 14)

Then He, *Glorified Is He*, explains the matter from a different viewpoint when He *the Almighty* says: '...and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow men because Allah loves the doers of good.' (*Al-'Imran:* 134)

Holding one's anger in check means not falling under the influence of the feelings of anger and rage that cause one to react vengefully but rather repressing them and placing them inside one's heart. That is the first stage. The second stage is to remove those feelings of rage and anger from your heart and to pardon and forgive the one who did you wrong.

As for the third stage, it has to do with the rank of *ihsan*– being good to the one who did you wrong and that is what we call mercy. Mercy means to bring something good to someone who is not capable of getting that good for himself, not the other way round. If someone who is incapable, like a slave, brings something good to his master, then that is not called mercy.

In all the examples we have given so far, mercy comes after forgiveness. This is the natural sequence of events, but there are some circumstances in which mercy can come before forgiveness such as, for example, when you get your hands on a thief who is robbing you and discover him to not be a hardened criminal but merely someone who has been forced by circumstances into that course of action, so your heart softens towards him and you give him something to help him out. Then you release and pardon him for what he did. In circumstances such as these, mercy comes first and then comes forgiveness.

After all, somebody might ask what happened with Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* after Allah *the Almighty* annulled his adoption: did he go back to being

Zayd ibn Haritha after being Zayd ibn Muhammad? How did he feel about the tremendous honour and blessing that he had been granted being taken away from him? Add to that the trouble he received at the hands of the rumourmongers and others who want to make him feel bitter and resentful and wanted to come between him and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the man he had preferred to his own father.

There is no doubt that the faith-filled drink that Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* had imbibed gave him the strength to remain above all of those things that were going on around him – for his heart had become infused with love of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As well, the Words of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Now whenever Allah and His Apostle have decided a matter, it is not for a believing man or a believing woman to claim freedom of choice insofar as they themselves are concerned' (*al-Ahzab:* 36) had become deeply rooted in his soul.

Then the chapter goes on to make it clear to people that they are not more loving towards Zayd than Muhammad, since Prophet Muhammad is a greater friend to all the believers than their own selves, not just to Zayd *Allah be pleased with him*.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

ٱلنَّبِيُّ أَوۡلَىٰ بِٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ مِنۡ أَنفُسِهِمۡۖ وَأَزۡوَٰجُهُۥٓ أُمَّهَٰتُهُمۡۗ وَأُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَرۡحَامِ بَعۡضُهُمۡ
أَوۡلَىٰ بِبَعۡضٖ فِي كِتَٰبِ ٱللَّهِ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَٱلۡمُهَٰجِرِينَ إِلَّآ أَن تَفۡعَلُوٓاْ
إِلَىٰٓ أَوۡلِيَآئِكُم مَّعۡرُوفٗاۚ كَانَ ذَٰلِكَ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ مَسۡطُورٗا ٦

The Prophet is more protective towards the believers than they are themselves, while his wives are their mothers. In God's Scripture, blood-relatives have a stronger claim than other believers and emigrants, though you may still bestow gifts on your protégés. All this is written in the Scripture [6]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 6)

The meaning is that if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a greater friend to all the believers than their own selves, then how do you suppose it is with respect to Zayd *Allah be pleased with him*? No, you are not more loving towards Zayd than Allah *the Almighty* nor than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

If you can see the badge of honour which was taken away from Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* when he returned to being Zayd ibn Haritha after he had been Zayd ibn Muhammad, then why do you pretend not to also see the even greater honour that Allah *the Almighty* bestowed upon him *Allah be pleased with him* by clearly and unambiguously mentioning him by name in His Quran, the Noble Book that is recited and will be recited by every worshipper until the Day of Resurrection? What badge of honour could possibly be greater than that? Allah's saying: '… [But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union with her, We gave her to thee in marriage…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37) is eternal and Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* will be forever mentioned within the Quran. This is how Allah *the Almighty* recompensed Zayd for what he lost as a result of his name being changed.

What is this 'preference' with respect to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that is being referred to in Allah's Words: 'The Prophet is more protective towards the believers than they are themselves…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6)? They reply that it refers to different rungs on the ladder of perfection – first acting goodly to one self and then to others. A person first acts goodly to himself, then to his closest relatives, then to his distant relatives and then to those who are very far removed from him. This is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Begin with yourself then with your dependants.'(1)

It is also said that where a person considers his home to be differs depending upon his aspirations. So one man might make his self his home, seeing everything as being for himself and himself as being for no one; another might make his children and family his home; another might go beyond his ascendants to include his descendants; another might make his city or village his home, while yet another might make the entire world and all of humanity his home.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah that Prophet Muhammad said to a man from Banu 'Udhra, 'If you want to give charity, start with yourself. Then, if anything is left over, give it to your family. If anything is left over after that, give it your kinsmen, and if anything is left over after that, give it to such-and-such) a grouping of people.' See Muslim, Sahih (997) in Kitab Az-Zakat, chapter on starting by spending upon one's self.*

The goodness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* extended in a general way to all of humanity and in a specific way to the believers. 'This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used not to pray over someone from his community who died leaving outstanding debts but no means to pay them, but rather instructed (his Companions) to be the ones to pray over him.'(1)

We might ask, following a surface reading of this Hadith, 'Where is the crime in dying with outstanding debts, and why did the Messenger not pray over him?'

The answer is that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not prevent the prayer being prayed over him, but, on the contrary, instructed his Companions to pray over their brother because of what he had said in another *Hadith*: 'If someone takes other peoples' money with the intention of paying them back – and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say 'and pays them back' – Allah *the Almighty* will pay it back for him.'(2)

However, when someone dies without paying his debts, it is more than likely that they did not intend to pay it back and that is why he did not pray over them. Then, with the revelation of Allah's words: 'The Prophet is more protective towards the believers than they are themselves…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6), Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took upon himself the outstanding debts of any Muslim who died leaving debts behind and paid them off for them. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'The Prophet is more protective towards the believers than they are themselves…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6), it means that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is more responsible for a Muslim than himself.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Qatada that when a man was brought before Prophet Muhammad for him to pray over, he Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Pray over your companion for he has an outstanding debt.' Abu Qatada said, 'I will take responsibility (for the debt).' So the Prophet Allah's peace and blessings be upon him asked him if he would take responsibility for the full amount and he replied that he would. So he Allah's peace and blessings be upon him prayed over him.' See It At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan (1069); he classified it as good and authentic.*

(2) *See Ahmad, Musnad (2/ 361 & 417); see Al-Bukhari, Sahih (2387); see also Ibn Majah, Sunnan (2411) on the authority of Abu Hurayra.*

Furthermore, did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not say in front of 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* '"None of you believes until I am more beloved to him than his self, his wealth and all other people.' 'Umar, being honest and true to himself, replied, 'Yes indeed, Messenger of Allah, you are more beloved to me than my family and my wealth, but as for myself…' So the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By the One Who holds my soul in His Hand, none of you is a believer until I am more beloved to him than his own self!'"(1) When 'Umar found it obligatory, he understood what the right response was. He knew that the sort of love Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was talking about was the intellectual love, not the type of love he had initially understood. So, according to that understanding, Messenger Muhammad was more beloved to him than himself. This is like when someone loves bitter medicine – he only loves it at an intellectual level not at an emotional one. Or like when someone loves clever children even when they are the sons of his enemy – that love is not the emotional love that you feel for your own children, or like when someone loves someone who is widely praised even though that person is foolish and mentally-retarded.

The story(2) of the rich man whom Allah *the Almighty* had tested with a mentally retarded son is well known to Arabs everywhere. When the boy grew up and became adult, he remained mentally retarded, but supplicants who came to his house seeking gifts would still shower him with praise whenever they saw him in order to gratify his father and get him to be generous to them. This was despite their knowledge that the boy was stupid and backward. This state of affairs continued until one of the men amongst them found himself in need, so they advised him to go to the rich man, mentioning that he had a weak point when it came to his son.

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(1) *The grandfather of Zahra ibn Ma'bad said, 'We were with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when he took hold of the hand of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him so 'Umar said to him, 'By Allah, Messenger of Allah, you are more beloved to me than everything except for myself,' whereupon Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'By the One Who holds my soul in His Hand, none of you believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self!' So 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'Now, by Allah, you are more beloved to me than myself.' The Prophet replied, 'Now (you have it) 'Umar.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 4/ 336.*

(2) *The story of the wealthy man whom Allah the Almighty favoured with a stupid boy.*

So he went to the rich man to seek his help. Then suddenly, while he was sitting with him in the hall, the son came down the stairs, playing around like a little child; his stupidity and backwardness were plain for all to see. When he saw him, the man turned to the master of the house and said, ‘Is this your son, the one whom everyone invokes blessings upon?’ When he replied that it was, the man said, ‘May Allah relieve you of him! Allah is the One Who provides.’

As for Allah’s saying: '...while his wives are their mothers…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6). They mean wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are the Mothers of the Believers. This meant that Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* was a mother to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since she was the first of the believers. This was why she did not act towards him in the manner of a wife, but in the manner of a compassionate mother.

Do you not see how she sympathised with him and clasped him close to her chest when he was exposed for the first time to the awesome power of the revelation and the descent of the angel? Or how she calmed him down? If she had been a young girl, however, then things would have been quite different because she would have doubted his sanity. At that particular juncture, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had need of a compassionate mother, not a young inexperienced wife.

All the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were considered to be mothers of the believers which is why Allah *the Almighty* addresses the believers saying: '…Moreover, it does not behove you to give offence to Allah’s Apostle – just as it would not behove you ever to marry his widows after he has passed away…' (*al-Ahzab:* 53). Why should they not marry his widows? It is because when one man marries a woman who was previously married to another man, there will be feelings of hatred and resentment between the two men forever.

A man might hate his wife when he divorces her, but as soon as she marries another man, his feelings of attraction return and he finds himself hating the man whom she married. These are all things that do not behove the person of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is not right for anyone who was a wife of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ever share the bed of another man. This is why Allah *the Almighty* made them all mothers of the believers. This unlawfulness did not, however, extend from the mothers of the believers to their daughters – their daughters were free to marry whomsoever they wished.

So, it is not permissible for any man who believes in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and acknowledges his worth to marry one of his wives after him.

In the time of ignorance before Islam, there was no limit to the number of wives a man could take – a man could marry as many women as he so wished. Then, when Islam came, it wanted to impose limits on this number, so it commanded anyone who had more than four wives to keep hold of four of them but divorce the rest.(1) This meant that no man could have more than four wives at any one time. As for Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him* himself, he kept hold of nine wives. The orientalists have tried to use this fact to criticise the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and to criticise the Law of Allah. There are a number of Muslims who have imitated them and said the same thing. To these people, we say, 'You are stupid, as is everyone else who affiliates themselves to you. The reason for this exception being made in the case of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is clear from Allah's words: "No [other] women shall henceforth be lawful to you – nor art thou [allowed] to supplant [any of] them by other wives…" (*al-Ahzab:* 52).

In other words, if any of them die, you, O Prophet Muhammad, may not marry someone else, indeed, even if they had all died, it would still not have been lawful for him *peace and blessings be upon him* to marry anyone else, unlike the rest of the community were free to replace their wives whenever they wished. If their wife died or they divorced her, then they could just find another one. As long as they did not have more than four wives at any one point, they could marry and divorce whomsoever they willed. Who is restricted by this ruling – Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or his community? So, do not wrong Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar that when Ghaylan ibn Salama Ath-Thaqafi became a Muslim, the ten wives he had had in the time of ignorance before Islam become Muslims with him, so Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him commanded him to choose four of them. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, 1128; see also Ibn Majah, Sunnan (1953); see also Malik, Muwatta'...*

These people should also distinguish between two types of exception: one in terms of the number and one in terms of the specified women themselves. The fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had to make do with those nine wives and was not permitted to marry anyone else shows that the exception was in terms of the specified women themselves. So, even if any of those women died, still no other women would be lawful for him. However, if the exception had been in terms of number, then it would have been permissible for you to say what you say.

Consider the matter from another angle: when a man keeps hold of four of his wives and divorces the rest, those divorced wives have the right to marry someone else, but how would it have been for the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the mothers of the believers, if he had divorced five of them? It is not lawful for any Muslim to marry them so they would have been left alone. No, it was in the best interest of the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remain married to him.

As long as 'The Prophet is more protective towards the believers than they are themselves' (*al-Ahzab:* 6), the believers should give preference to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* more than themselves in order to return the favour. In other words, they should obey him whenever he commands.

Then He *the Almighty* says: '…In Allah's Scripture, blood-relatives have a stronger claim than other believers and emigrants…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6). The term *ulu al-Arham* (they who are [thus] closely related) is derived from the word *rahim* meaning 'womb', the place within a woman's belly where the embryo develops; it also refers to one's close relatives. The reason Allah made them have a higher claim over one another is as follows: when the first Muslims emigrated to Medina, they left their families, wealth and homes behind in Mecca. The Helpers did not want the hearts of their Emigrant brothers to remain constantly turned towards the wives they had left behind in Mecca and so, because of the preference they had for them, some offered to divorce their wives and marry them to their Emigrant brothers.(1) This kind of altruism is unique in the whole of human history and had never been witnessed before since it is possible for men to be generous with the most valuable things they possess except for women. The altruism of these Companions was indeed truly unique.

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(1) *This happened with 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf, the Emigrant from Mecca, and Sa'd ibn Ar-Rabi' Al-Ansari: '...when Sa'd said to him, 'O my brother, I am one of the wealthiest men of Medina, so see which half of my wealth you want and take it for* =

This pact of brotherhood that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* planted between the Emigrants and the Helpers meant that the Emigrants inherited from the Helpers. Then, when Allah *the Almighty* made Islam strong and the Emigrants found their own means of making a living, Allah *the Almighty* wanted things to return to their natural course since there was no longer a need for an Emigrant to inherit from his brother Helper. So the verse was revealed to establish that close relatives had more right to each other's inheritance than anyone else. So, when Allah *the Almighty* revealed: '…In Allah's Scripture, blood-relatives have a stronger claim than other believers and emigrants…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6), the financial position of the Emigrants had become stable and each of them had their affairs in order, so in those circumstances, close relatives had a higher claim to that inheritance.

Allah's words '…blood-relatives…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6) are a reminder to human beings that they must maintain their ties of kinship from the beginning of Adam because, if you truly reflect upon the way that the human being was created, you will find that we are all from Adam *Allah's peace be upon him* alone, not from Adam and Eve.

It is narrated (1) that a chamberlain came into Muʿawiyya's room and said to him, 'There is a man at the door who says he is your brother.' Muʿawiyya *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'How is it that you, my chamberlain, are unable to recognise my brothers?' The chamberlain replied, 'That is what he said,' so Muʿawiyya *Allah be pleased with him* told him to show the man in. When the man entered, Muʿawiyya, asked him, 'So which of my brothers are you then?' The man replied, 'I am your brother through Adam.' So Mu'awiyya *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Yes, that is a tie that has been cut. So, by Allah, I will be the first to re-establish it.'

= *yourself. I have two wives, so see which one you like the most and I will divorce her [so that you may marry her].' 'Abd ar-Rahman replied, 'May Allah bless you in your family and your wealth! Just show me where the marketplace is.' The full version of this story is narrated by Ibn Sa'd in At-Tabaqat (3/117).*

(1) *The story of the man who claimed to be brother Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan's Allah be pleased with him.*

When Allah *the Almighty* says: '… though you may still bestow gifts on your protégés...' (*al-Ahzab:* 6), He says that in order to leave open the possibility of acting charitably towards the Emigrants. So, whenever any one of them is present at the distribution of inheritance, they will still be able to receive a share, even though that is not obligatory, as is mentioned in Allah says: 'And when [other] near of kin and orphans and needy persons are present at the distribution [of inheritance], give them something thereof for their sustenance, and speak unto them in a kindly way.' (*an-Nisa':* 8)

Allah says: '… All this is written in the Scripture…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6). The Arabic word Kitab (Book) refers either to the Preserved Tablet or the Quran. The meaning thus is that everything is stated in the Preserved Tablet or in the Quran.

Then Allah *the Almighty* goes on to mention a matter that is general to all the Messengers, saying:

وَإِذۡ أَخَذۡنَا مِنَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ مِيثَٰقَهُمۡ وَمِنكَ وَمِن نُّوحٖ وَإِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ
وَعِيسَى ٱبۡنِ مَرۡيَمَۖ وَأَخَذۡنَا مِنۡهُم مِّيثَٰقًا غَلِيظٗا (٧)

We took a solemn pledge from the prophets – from you [Muhammad], from Noah, from Abraham, from Moses, from Jesus, son of Mary – We took a solemn pledge from all of them [7] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 7)

The Arabic particle *idha* or *idh*, meaning 'when' or 'if', is a conjunction that makes one action dependent upon another. So, when you say, 'When so-and-so comes to you, honour him', the act of honouring is conditional upon the act of coming. In this particular verse, the meaning is, 'Remember when Allah *the Almighty* made a covenant with the Prophets,' and this matter was general to all the Messengers. Then Allah *the Almighty* sub-divided the Messengers, saying: '...from you [Muhammad], from Nuh, from ibrahim, from Musa, from 'Isa, son of Maryam–' (*al-Ahzab:* 7).

The word *mithaq* (solemn pledge) is a covenant that is drawn up between two people, like the first covenant that Allah *the Almighty* made with mankind when they were still unformed atoms, about which He says: 'And whenever your Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172)

So what is this covenant that Allah *the Almighty* made with his Prophets? This covenant is His Act of choosing a human being to be a Messenger and an ambassador between Him *the Almighty* and His creation. When He *Glorified is He* does choose a Messenger to convey His Laws to people, that choice is not rejected. No, the offer is accepted, and when the Messenger accepts that offer, it is as if he has made a pact and a covenant with Allah *the Almighty* to bring His Message to people. Thus it is a transaction where there is an offer and an acceptance.

In the verse: 'We took a solemn pledge from the prophets–' (*al-Ahzab:* 7), the one who makes the covenant is Allah *the Almighty* and the ones with whom the covenant is made are the Prophets. A *mithaq* is a ratified contract. The contract is an agreement between two parties to do something that is in both their interests. If one of the two parties does not agree, then the contract does not come into effect; if both parties are equal, then each of them may put clauses into the contract to suit themselves; but if the contract is made between a higher power and a lower power, then it is the higher power who sets the terms of the contract. Why should that be? Because you have put him in the position where he draws up the contract and binds you to him. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and the solemn pledge by which He bound you to Himself…' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 7).

Muwathaqa (binding) is an action that takes place between two parties: you bind him to you, and he binds you to him, for when Allah *the Almighty* chose the Messengers, there is no doubt that He knew best where to place His Message. When Allah *the Almighty* chooses a Messenger, that Messenger’s acceptance of the Message shows that he approves of what Allah *the Almighty* wants him to do in the covenant drawn up between them.

In the procession of Messages throughout the ages, have we ever seen a single Messenger reject the Message that was offered him? No, we have not. Therefore, the acceptance of a Message is like a contract, the terms of which have been set by one of the parties since that party is the higher power. As for the aspect of ratification, that lies in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* chooses that Messenger and makes him worthy of being chosen for such a Message.

That is why we see in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that, when Allah *the Almighty* chose him for the Message, he saw that it was a formidable matter for him to bear but, instead of rejecting it, asked Allah *the Almighty* to allow his brother Aron, to support him in taking on that responsibility, and addressed Allah *the Almighty* saying: 'And my brother Aron – he is far better in speech than I am. Send him with me, therefore, as a helper, so that he might [more eloquently] bear witness to my speaking the truth…' (*al-Qasas:* 34).

Musa *peace be upon him* did not say, ‘I am not fit to take on this responsibility.’ No, he submitted to the command of Allah for Allah *the Almighty* knows best where to place His Message, and he knew that Allah *the Almighty* would help him overcome the problem of the knot in his tongue by means of his brother.

So, the word *mithaq* refers to matters that are ratified and confirmed, and a usage of the word is found in Allah’s words about what is done with enemies: 'Now when you meet [in war] those who are bent on denying the truth, smite their necks until you overcome them fully, and then tighten their bonds…' (*Muhammad:* 4).

Then this general matter is made specific in the Words that follow: '...from you [Muhammad], from Nuh, from Ibrahim, from Musa, from ‘Isa, son of Mary– We took a solemn pledge from all of them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 7). When He *the Almighty* says ‘from you’, He *the Almighty* means from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers. But why did He *the Almighty* mention Muhammad before Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* when Nuh *peace be upon him* is the second father of all of humanity after Adam *peace be upon him*?

We know that all of mankind is descended from Adam *peace be upon him* until, at the time of Nuh *peace be upon him* and they came to be divided up into believers and disbelievers. Then the Flood came, after which no one remained on earth except for Noah *Allah’s peace be upon him* and those who believed in him. Therefore, he was the second father of humankind after Adam.

That is why some people say that the Message of Nuh *peace be upon him* was general in the same that the Message of Muhammad was general. We say, however, that the Message of Nuh *peace be upon him* was only general to those who believed in him and boarded his ship and was only general for a particular period of time in a particular place. The Message of Muhammad, on the other hand, is general for every time and every place.

As for why Muhammad is mentioned first, it is because the Arabic particle *waw*, 'and', is not usually used to indicate any order or succession, but is only used to gather things together. Muhammad is mentioned first because he is the one who is being addressed by these words, and one of the ways that Allah *the Almighty* honours His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is by mentioning him first in places such as this. Another reason for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* being mentioned first may be understood from what he said about himself when he said, 'I was a Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay.'(1)

Then He makes special mention of Nuh *peace be upon him* since he is the second father of humanity, then Ibrahim, Musa and 'Isa *peace be upon them*. Ibrahim *peace be upon him* is mentioned because the Arabs believed in him, knew him to be the forefather of Prophets, and valued his relationship to the *Ka'ba*, the fact that he laid its foundations, and the fact that he was the example that they followed with respect to the sacrifice and the *sa'y* 'walking between Safa and Marwa'.

Musa and 'Isa *peace be upon them* are mentioned because Judaism and Christianity were the two religions that were contemporary at the time at which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was delivering his call to Islam – the Jews were present in Medina and the Christians were present in *Najran*. They were the people of the Book with whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had various contacts and encounters. They were the people who were in a position of scientific, economic, cultural, and military supremacy over the entire Arab peninsula. Indeed, it was as if they were the owners of that land.

It was amazing to think that Allah has made covenants with the prophets of Judaism and Christianity to witness to the trueness of the call of Muhammad.

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(1) *As-Suyuti said in Ad-Durar Al-Muntathyra (p. 342), 'There is no basis to the (Hadith) with this wording'. It is narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3609) in a Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayra who said, 'They said, 'Messenger of Allah Allah's peace and blessings be upon him when did Prophethood become yours?' He replied, '[When] Adam was as yet between the soul and the body.' At-Tirmidhi judged it as authentic but strange.*

That is why they sought victory under the leadership of Muhammad over the disbelievers. They said to the idol-worshippers, ‘The time of a Prophet has come whom we will follow, and, through whom, we will kill you in the same way that the people of ʿAd and Iram were killed.’ They knew the time and place in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be sent. They knew that he would be sent in a land in which there were palm trees. Moreover, they knew his signs and the physical characteristics by which he would be known. That is why, after Allah *the Almighty* split them up into different nations and spread them throughout the earth, He enabled those who devoted their lives to knowledge came to Yathrib to await the coming of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And [if] they who are bent on denying the truth say [unto thee, O Prophet], "Thou hast not been sent [by Allah]," say thou: "None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does; and [none can bear witness as does] he who truly understands this divine writ."' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 43)

So, the people of the Book should have been the first to bear witness to the trueness of the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but that did not happen. The Quran relates about them after all this happened: '…whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it. Allah’s rejection is the due of all who deny the truth.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

How did this transformation come about? How did the belief of the heart come to be transformed into the rebellion of the limbs? This came about, they say, because of the temporal authority which they enjoyed in Arabia at that time and which they wanted to remain. When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, they were the people of wealth and trade, ran the businesses and held the property and so were frightened of what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would do to them: they were frightened that the new religion would strip them of their exalted status and bring an end to their supremacy. That is why the Quran references them: 'Vile is that [false pride] for which they have sold their own selves by denying the truth of what Allah has bestowed from on high, out of envy that Allah should bestow aught of His favour upon whomsoever He wills of His servants: and thus have they earned the burden of Allah’s condemnation, over and over, for those who deny the truth there is shameful suffering in store.' (*al-Baqara:* 90)

That is why a special mention is made here of the succession of Prophets and of Musa and ‘Isa *peace be upon them*. We notice that the verse mentions Musa *peace be upon him* but does not mention a father in connection with him, whereas, when it mentions ‘Isa *peace be upon him* it says: '…and 'Isa the son of Maryam…' (*al-Ahzab:* 7). This shows that great emphasis is placed on the source of a person’s lineage – if the father exists alongside his wife then he is the source, but if he does not, then paternity is attributed to the wife; and that is why the lineage of ‘Isa is ascribed to his mother.

This matter is mentioned in order to prove the unlimited nature of the Divine Power. Creation is not some sort of mechanical process that is subject to certain laws – no, it was the Power of Allah that created Adam *peace be upon him* without a father or mother, created Eve with a father but without a mother, created ‘Isa *peace be upon him* with a mother but without a father, and created everyone else in creation from both a father and a mother. Thus, every conceivable possibility for parenthood is found in creation.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: '… We took a solemn pledge from all of them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 7), he means ‘from the Prophets’. When He says ‘Solemn’, he means ‘emphatic’. He expanded the covenant and emphasised it when He informed His Prophets and Messengers that they would be persecuted and fought by their peoples.

That is why the covenant is nowhere described as being ‘weighty’ except here and when it is used to describe the relationship between a man and his wife when he divorces her and has to pay her the dowry that he allotted her, even if that be a full qantar (of gold). Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And how could you take it away after you have given yourselves to one another, and she has received a most solemn pledge from you?' (*an-Nisa’:* 21)

The covenant between a husband and wife is described as being *ghalidh* 'solemn’ or ‘strong’ because it deals with their *‘ird* (honour). But covenants that deal with other matters are not described as being ‘weighty’.

Details of this covenant which Allah *the Almighty* made with His Messengers, whom He sent to remind mankind, bringing them good news and a warning, are found elsewhere in the Quran: 'And, lo, Allah accepted, through the Prophets, this solemn pledge [from the followers of earlier revelation]: "If, after all the revelation and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession, you must believe in him and succour him. Do you" – said He – "acknowledge and accept My Bond on this condition?" They answered: "We do acknowledge it." Said He: "Then bear witness [thereto], and I shall be your witness"' (*Al-'Imran:* 81).

When Allah *the Almighty* testifies to something, that testimony does not require any judge ratification. But why did Allah *the Almighty* extract such a promise from His Prophets? He did that because, while those who do not believe in a god have no religion with which they side when a new Messenger comes, those who do have a religion find it difficult to accept that Messenger when he tries to turn them aside from their old religion. Herein lies the greatest difficulty that Messengers face. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says to the Messengers, 'Part of the fulfilment of your covenant is that you say to your people, "If there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession, you must believe in him and succour him."'(1) Then he sought their acknowledgement of that and asked them to bear witness to it, so they did so. The meaning of the verse is, 'Beware of leaving the nations who believe in you without first putting this principle to them, for this principle is what will protect them.'

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *Ibn Jarir At-Tabari narrated that 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb said, 'There was not a single Prophet, from the time of Adam, that Allah sent except that he extracted from him a promise that he would believe in and help Muhammad if he were sent while he were still alive, and that he would extract the same promise from his people.' Then he recited: 'And, lo, Allah accepted, through the prophets, this solemn pledge [from the followers of earlier revelation]: 'If, after all the revelation and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you...' (Al-'Imran: 81) (Suyuti mentioned in Ad-Durr Al-manthur fi At- tafsir Al-ma'thur 2/253).*

لِّيَسۡـَٔلَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ عَن صِدۡقِهِمۡۚ وَأَعَدَّ لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا ٨

God will question [even] the truthful about their sincerity, and for those who reject the truth He has prepared a painful torment [8] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 8)

The particle *lam* in *li-yas'ala* means 'so that', is called a *lam* of *ta'lil* (cause) and is used to indicate reason or purpose. So, the meaning is: We have made this covenant with the Prophets and we will ask them about it: 'We took a solemn pledge from the prophets–' (*al-Ahzab:* 7). Why? 'So that Allah will question [even] the truthful about their sincerity…' (*al-Ahzab:* 8). But if the conveyor is truthful then how can his truthfulness be questioned?

When Allah *the Almighty* asks a truthful person about his truthfulness, He does not do so to reproach him but rather to reproach those who denied him. So, He *the Almighty* is saying, 'We will ask the Messengers whether they conveyed (the Message) to those people.' Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the day when Allah shall assemble all the apostles and shall ask, "what response did you receive?"'(*al-Ma'ida:* 109) Allah *the Almighty* asks the people: 'Have there not come unto you apostles from among yourselves, who conveyed unto you My Messages and warned you of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]?' (*al-An'am:* 130) The question in this verse is intended as a rebuke of the deniers, not as an actual question.

It is also possible that 'So that Allah will question [even] the truthful about their sincerity…' (*al-Ahzab:* 8) means, 'You have given people the good news that there is Only One Allah, and you are telling the truth because you made with this covenant with Me and then, when the Hour comes, you will not find any other gods protecting the unbelievers. So, because you found Only One Allah in the Hereafter, you will see that I have been truthful with regards to what I said to you and you have been truthful with regards to what you conveyed from me.

This is why He *the Almighty* says: '…he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full…' (*an-Nur:* 39). If there had been another god with Him, then Allah would have protected those unbelievers and prevented them from being punished.

The Messengers are also asked about whether they informed their peoples about the Resurrection which Allah *the Almighty* promised would come to pass, or about the Reckoning and the punishment or reward contained therein. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were asking them, ‘Has anything I told you about failed to come to pass? Have I been lax in rewarding the good-doer or punishing the evildoer? No! Then, believe everything that I say.’

This is like when you have sat with your son, gone over his schoolwork with him and encouraged him to study, so that he could succeed in his exams. Then, when he comes back, you ask him, ‘What did you answer for such-and-such a question?’ You do so not in order to actually question him, but rather to remind him of the glory that he actually achieved and of the success that Allah *the Almighty* granted him. In the same way, Allah *the Almighty* is merely reminding his Messengers in that inescapable Hour of the way they stood with respect to the religion of Allah *the Almighty* and the way they raised high the word of the Truth.

Thus, by asking the people of Truth about their truthfulness, He is actually honouring them and bearing witness to the fact that they fulfilled what was required of them, while, at the same time, rebuked those who denied them.(1)

Then He *the Almighty* says: '… and for those who reject the truth He has prepared a painful torment.' (*al-Ahzab:* 8) The fact that the verb *a'adda* (He prepared) is in the past tense proves that everything was already prepared and was in existence beforehand; it also proves that Allah does bring anything new into being. Elsewhere in the Quran, He *the Almighty* said something similar about paradise: '…which has been readied for the Allah-conscious.' (*Al-‘Imran:* 133)

Previously, we explained that Allah *the Almighty* created a paradise that was large enough to fit all of mankind if they believed in Him, and He created a Hell that was large enough to fit all of mankind if they denied Him. This means that there will be no shortages or problems when it comes to space. Rather, when the people of belief have taken their places in paradise, and the places of the unbelievers have remained empty, Allah *the Almighty* will say to the believers, ‘You take them’(1): 'for such will be the paradise which you shall have inherited by virtue of your past deeds.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 72)

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(1) *In his Tafsir of this verse in question, Al-Qurtubi said, ‘There are four aspects to this: firstly, to ask the Prophets about conveying His Messages to their people. This interpretation is mentioned by An-Naqqash. Secondly, to ask the Prophets about how their people responded to them. Thirdly, to ask the Prophets about their fulfilment of the covenant He made with them. This interpretation is mentioned by Ibn Shajara; and fourthly, to ask truthful mouths about sincere hearts. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 7/5388.*

Punishment is sometimes described as being ‘painful’; others ‘humiliating’; yet others ‘immense’ and still yet others ‘strong’. Each of these types of punishment has its own particular qualities: a painful punishment is one which involves harshness and the infliction of pain, while a humiliating punishment is one which involves degradation and the stripping away of dignity. There are people who are able to endure pain and are not particularly bothered by it, but suffer badly as soon as you take away their honour and dignity. It is these people for whom a humiliating punishment is suitable.

There is a story(2) that is told regarding physical endurance: a man entered upon Muʿawiyya *Allah be pleased with him* when Muʿawiyya was ill but was presenting to people that he was well and in good health. When he saw him, the man recited the following verse of poetry,

When death gets its claws into you,
You will not find any amulet to benefit you

Muʿawiyya understood immediately what he meant, so he answered with another verse from the same poem, written by Abu Dhu’ayb Al-Hudhali (3),

By my patient endurance I show those who gloat,
That I am not rendered feeble by the uncertainties of time

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(1) *It is narrated by Abu Hurayra that Messenger Muhammad Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Everyone has a place in paradise and a place in hell. But the unbeliever inherits the believer’s place in hell while the believer inherits the unbeliever’s place in paradise. That is what is meant by the verse: '...for such will be the paradise which you shall have inherited by virtue of your past deeds.' (az-Zukhruf: 72)’ This is narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (7/394) and has been traced back to Ibn Abu Hatim and Ibn Marduwayh.*

(2) *The story of the man who visited Mu‘awiyya Allah be pleased with him during his sickness.*

(3) This poem is attributed to Abu Dhu’ayb Al-Hudhali by Shihab Ad-Din Mahmud Al-Halab in his book ‘*Husn At-Tawassul ’ila Sina‘at At-Tarassul*’, p. 132; see also p. 3 of the first section of *Diwan Al-Hudhaliyyn. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-‘Arab, entry (da‘a‘a).*

As for an immense punishment, it is described as being ‘immense’ because of the immensity of its nature or the largeness of its size. In other words, such a punishment is not physically small. Or it might be physically small, but immense in terms of its characteristics or in terms of its effects remaining over a long period of time.

A punishment is described as ‘strong’ on account of the strength of the Punisher, for when He *the Almighty* seizes someone, He, does so with the seizing of One Who is Almighty, All-Powerful.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَةَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَآءَتْكُمْ جُنُودٌ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ
رِيحًا وَجُنُودًا لَّمْ تَرَوْهَا ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا ﴿٩﴾

You who believe, remember God’s goodness to you when
mighty armies massed against you: We sent a violent wind
and invisible forces against them. God sees all that you do [9]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 9)

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to provide proof for His Words to His Messenger in one of the preceding verses: 'And place you trust in Allah [alone]: for none is as worthy of trust as Allah.' (*al-Ahzab:* 3), so He mentioned an incident that brought about the defeat of all enemies after they had united against him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had already defeated each of them when they were separate: first he defeated the unbelievers of Mecca at Badr, and then he defeated the Jews at Banu Nadir and Banu Qaynuqa’. But on this occasion, they had all united to make war on him and Muslims. Despite the unity of the disbelievers against Islam, Allah *the Almighty* assures Prophet Muhammad that their assembly will prove unable to turn him aside from his call, affirming meanwhile that they will be defeated by soldiers sent directly by Him *the Almighty*.

So, the circumstances for ‘Place your trust in Allah’ (*al-Ahzab:* 3) are found in the verse: 'You who believe, remember Allah’s goodness to you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 9). A *Ni‘ma* (blessing) is something that fills someone with happiness, joy and the desire for it to last. Such qualities are only found in faith, since the blessing represented by it is truly lasting, transcending the limited time of this world, and going on forever in the limitless time of the Hereafter, while the blessings of this world are limited by your own capabilities and resources, the blessings of the Hereafter are determined by the infinite capacity of the Giver of blessings, making them the ultimate blessings.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* is addressing believers. Belief means having utter conviction in the Unique Existence of Allah *the Almighty* Who embodies all the Attributes of Majesty and Perfection. Allah *the Almighty* made it within the capacity of the intellect to find its way to the single creative force that none may deny. However, it is not part of the intellect's job to know the name of this God itself, nor to know what His Will is. For these things, a direct communiqué from Allah *the Almighty* is required.

We previously gave an example for this of someone knocking at the door: we all know intellectually that there is a knocker at the door – that is the job of the intellect – but is it also part of the intellect's job to tell us who that person is? Or to tell us what the knocker wants? No, that is what we call imagination.

The bane of human intellect is that it is not satisfied with merely being aware that there is an irresistible effective force. No, it is enough for it to know that, behind existence, there is a force, and that this force has attributes of perfection by which it brought existence into being. But, if we want to know what that force is, then we must let that knocker tell us about himself. We must let he himself tell us what his purpose is and why he has come. It is only through a messenger that any of that can happen: one who has been sent directly by Allah *the Almighty* to tell us about that force, to tell us about Allah, His Names, His Attributes and the Way of Guidance He *the Almighty* has sanctioned for His creation, and to tell us about the Blessings that He *the Almighty* has prepared for those who obey Him and the Punishment that He *the Almighty* has prepared for those who disobey Him.

If we deny this messenger and ask him to prove that he is telling the truth in what he has conveyed to us, he comes with miracles that back up his words and convince us to believe in him, since he makes miracles that prove his veracity. Amazingly enough, these miracles are from the same field in which his people exceled in.

Thus, intellectual understanding is the first stage of belief. This is why the simplest way of refuting the position of those who worship other than Allah *the Almighty* is to say to them, ‘What do your gods command you to do? What do they forbid you from doing? What rewards have they prepared for those who obey them? What punishments have they prepared for those who disobey them? What form of worship do they require of you?

As soon as a Messenger comes to us from Allah *the Almighty* it is logical, intellectually speaking, for us to seek him out and ask him about those mysteries of life and existence about which we had no knowledge. Then we should listen to him and obey his orders, since his sole purpose in coming is to give us a way out of a conceptual predicament – an intellectual dilemma that none of us are able to solve. People should pine for this Messenger, not to meet him with hostility and resistance because of their worldly power which they think will last forever.

What is meant by *dhikr* (calling to mind) mentioned in Allah’s Words: '… remember Allah’s goodness to you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 9)? When the intellect receives information from the senses it first weighs it up and sifts it through, then it stores it in a region of the brain that acts as a storehouse for knowledge. The intellect resembles most the camera in terms of the way it takes in information. All people take in information in the same way; the important thing is that the piece of information encounters a mind that is free of distraction so that it could be memorised so easily.

This region of the brain is called the conscious mind and it can only hold a single mental image at any one moment. Then if you want to retrieve a piece of information from your memory or from your subconscious, it is your *dhakira*, your ability to recall, that allows you to retrieve it and bring it out of the subconscious back into the conscious mind. Then there is something called association of ideas. That is when one thing reminds one of something else. Then there is the imagination which is the faculty by which you use information stored in your brain to make up something completely new. We call this *takhayyul*. When an Arab poet liked the way a green tattoo looked on the white skin of a young lady, he imagined her in the following way:

A beautiful girl – it is as if her fingertips on

The perfectly formed interlocking tattoo

Were a crystal fish in
A net made of Chrysolite

This is an imaginary picture that is specific to the poet, for who else would see in that girl a crystal fish in a net made of Chrysolite? The poet has his own peculiar way of viewing things.

We previously mentioned the picture painted by a poet (1) of a hunchback when he said:

Shortened neck veins and submerged occiput
As if he were bowed down waiting to be slapped,
And as if the back of his head had already been slapped once
And he had gathered himself expecting the slap once again

Since ancient times, poets have considered the heart to be the locus of love and feelings. However, this poet brings forth a new and different picture of this from the depths of his imagination when he says:

Thoughts of you awaken my love
So I feel it pervading my heart.
In each of my limbs love is to be found,
As if each of them were created a heart

The meaning then of the saying of Allah, '… remember Allah’s goodness to you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 9) is, ‘Do not be heedless of blessings because they appear to you as something mundane, but always remember them and keep them firmly in your conscious mind.’ This is why Allah *the Almighty* considers remembrance to be an act of worship and, indeed, it is an act of worship that does not entail any hardship whatsoever unlike the prayer, for example, which takes time and effort to be fulfilled and for which you have to first perform

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(1) The poet is ibn Ar-Rumi ʿAli ibn Al-ʿAbbas ibn Jurayj; he is a great poet from the same poetic class of Bashar and Al-Mutanabbi. He was Byzantine by birth and his grandfather had been one of the clients of the Banu Al-ʿAbbas. He was born in Baghdad in 221 AH, grew up there and died there as a result of consuming poison in 283 AH when he was 62 years old. *See Az-Zirikli, Al-‘Alam, 4/297.*

wudu' (ablution) and to go to the mosque, or *zakat* (mandatory alms) for which you have to give up some of your wealth; *Dhikr* costs you nothing.

That is why when Allah *the Almighty* calls His slaves to the prayer in the chapter of *al-Jumu'a*, He *the Almighty* says: 'O you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave all worldly commerce…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). There are two movements that are mentioned here: a positive movement whereby people hasten to the prayer; and a negative movement whereby people leave all forms of buying and selling and everything else that distracts one from the prayer.

Then He *the Almighty* says: 'and when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah's bounty; but remember Allah often…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

Elsewhere He *Glorified is He* says: '...and remembrance of Allah is indeed the greatest [good]…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). So do not think that Allah *the Almighty* only wants you to remember Him at the time of the prayer; no, you should remember Him in every moment. The prayer might have a particular time in which it must be performed, but there is no specific time for the Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* and that is why He *the Almighty* made it easy. There is no difficulty when it comes to the Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* neither in terms of time nor in terms of effort. Indeed, to meet the conditions of the Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* it is enough for you to reflect on everything that passes in front of your eyes and try and see the Power of Allah *the Almighty* in them.

Allah *the Almighty* reminds of the blessings He has bestowed upon us because when a human soul receives blessings on a constant basis, it becomes used to them and they become mundane to Him so he stops paying any attention to them. A good example of this is the sun – you see it rising every morning and yet rarely remember that it is a sign or a blessing from your Creator. The reason for that is because you have got used to seeing it and so have come to see as something mundane and unremarkable.

Another way that Allah *the Almighty* calls our attention to His Blessings with is when He *the Almighty* takes them away from others. So seeing someone who is ill reminds you of the blessing of good health, and seeing someone who is blind reminds you of the blessing of sight, and so on and so forth. But, as soon as you see those people, you must remember to thank the Giver of blessings for relieving you of that affliction with which He tried others. So, Allah *the Almighty* makes these exceptions a means of reminding the rest of creation of the blessings that He, the Creator, gives them.

The Arabic word for blessing '*ni'ma*' appears in this verse in the singular form, and so is the case in the following verse in which Allah says: '...and should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34). The enemies of Islam have raised objections to this verse on the basis that the word for 'blessing' is used in the singular, saying, 'How can something which is single be counted?' This objection of theirs stems from their lack of understanding of the Quran's meanings and stylistic styles.

We say, 'If you were to reflect on what you think of as a single blessing, you would find a countless number of other blessings within that one blessing.' That is why the Quran uses the word *'in* (if), which indicates doubt, since Allah's Blessings, like grains in the sand in the desert, are not subject to being counted or enumerated. Has anyone ever sat down to try and count them? No, because no one applies themselves to counting anything unless that thing is something which is thought to be countable.

And that is why Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear to us that if we try to count His Blessings – and no one would ever actually try to do that – we will not be able to do so, despite the fact that that there is now an entire science 'statistics' devoted to the act of counting and which is taught, researched and studied in universities and colleges the world over.

If you can take any single one of the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed on you and reflect on it – if you reflect on the constituent parts that make it up, the benefits it brings you and the characteristics that describe it, you will find many other blessings wrapped up within it. Take apples, for example, outwardly, they appear to be a single blessing, but if you consider their taste, colour, make-up, smell and the many different varieties in which they come, you will see that there are many blessings within a single apple.

Allah made these blessings general to both believers and unbelievers alike because He made it that they come about through means. So, if someone uses those means well, he will be given the blessing even if he is an unbeliever.

Then we notice that verse: '…and should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34) appears twice in the Quran, but each time with a different ending to the verse. On one occasion, He *the Almighty* says: 'And [always] does He give you something out of what you may be asking of Him; and should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them. [And yet,] behold, man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ingrate!' (*Ibrahim:* 34), and on the other occasion, He says: 'For, should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them! Behold, Allah is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.' (*an-Nahl:* 18)

There is an indication in this that, if Allah *the Almighty* were to have blessed people in His creation according to their level of belief, He *the Almighty* would have bestowed His Blessings upon the believers and taken them away from the unbelievers. But He *the Almighty* did not do that because He is Much-forgiving and Dispenser of Mercy to His creation. It is through these two Attributes that Allah *the Almighty* bestows blessings upon absolutely everyone in creation. All of the blessings that you acquire in the course of your life are traces of Allah's Forgiveness and Mercy. The first thing He *the Almighty* does is to forgive your defects for you. Forgiveness is covering up what is ugly in someone who is beneath you.

Then comes Mercy when you stretch out your hand to do something good for someone who is beneath you. We mentioned previously that the general rule is that forgiveness precedes mercy, although it is possible for mercy to sometimes precede forgiveness. The reason for this is that unpleasantness should be removed before blessing is given; or that harm should be pushed out before benefit is pulled in.

The example we provided for this was that of the thief whom you find in your home: first you cover up his crime by not handing him to the police, and then your heart softens towards him to the extent that you stretch out your hand to do something good for him. In this case, forgiveness preceded mercy. However, you could have acted in a different way towards him, for you could have shown him mercy before showing him forgiveness. Forgiveness is only possible from a higher being to a lower one; you can only cover up a person's ugliness when you are above him. It is never said of a servant that he forgave his master.

Then Allah *the Almighty* sends us this message that proves His Support for His believing slaves: '…when mighty armies massed against you: We sent a violent wind and invisible forces against them. Allah sees all that you do.' (*al-Ahzab:* 9) The word *junud* (forces) notifies us of war; it appears in the indefinite form twice in this verse: '… We sent a violent wind and invisible forces against them. Allah sees all that you do.' (*al-Ahzab:* 9)

The nature of these hosts is not mentioned; the only thing that is mentioned is that they came directly from Allah *the Almighty* to drive back the unbelievers and cause their plots to come to naught. Then Allah *the Almighty* provides us with an explanatory reminder to clarify to us who those hosts were, saying:

إِذْ جَآءُوكُم مِّن فَوْقِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنكُمْ وَإِذْ زَاغَتِ ٱلْأَبْصَٰرُ
وَبَلَغَتِ ٱلْقُلُوبُ ٱلْحَنَاجِرَ وَتَظُنُّونَ بِٱللَّهِ ٱلظُّنُونَا۠ ﴿١٠﴾

They massed against you from above and below; your eyes rolled [with fear], your hearts rose into your throats, and you thought [ill] thoughts of God [10] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 10)

This is a description of what took place during the battle of *Al-Ahzab* when all the defeated factions of the enemies of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* joined together. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had already fought against each of them when they were separate, but now they had joined together in a single army to fight him: Quraysh and those who followed them from the tribes of Ghatafan, Asad, Banu Fuzara and others came, as did the Jews from Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayzha. Given the enmity and disagreements between these disparate groupings, it is quite amazing that they joined together to fight Islam.

As we said before, the people of the Book used to seek victory by means of the Prophets *peace and blessings be upon them* over the unbelievers. Then verses were revealed to make the people of the Book bear witness to the truthfulness of Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*

Allah says: 'And [if]they who are bent on denying the truth say [unto you, O Prophet], "you have not been sent [by Allah]," say you: "None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does; and [none can bear witness as does] he who truly understands this divine Book."' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43)

If the people of the Book had attached any value to this testimony, which Allah *the Almighty* linked directly to His Own, then it would have been necessary for them to believe in the truthfulness of Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*.

The meaning of 'They massed against you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 10) is 'Remember, O Prophet Muhammad, and picture in your mind that time when the clans gathered together to make wage war against you.' As for the saying of Allah, '…from above…' (*al-Ahzab:* 10), it refers to the direction of the East. As a matter of fact, those who came from this direction were Ghatafan, Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayzha. As for the saying of Allah, '…and below…' (*al-Ahzab:* 10), it refers to the direction of the West; and those who came from this direction were Quraysh and those who followed them from the tribes of Asad, Banu Fuzara, etc. As for His saying, '…your eyes rolled [with fear]…' (*al-Ahzab:* 10), it means 'Remember when your eyes rolled.' The verb *zagha* (rolled) literally means 'wavered', and it is used in that sense in Allah's Words: '… the eye did not waver, nor yet did it stray…' (*an-Najm:* 17).

So the expression *zaghat al-'absar* (eyes rolled) means 'wavering from top to bottom'. Allah *the Almighty* created the eye in a particular form, giving it the ability to move upwards, downwards, to the right and to the left; and every one of these directions has a specific name in the Arabic language: if you look at someone from the centre of the eye, you use the verb *ra'a* (to look/ saw); if you look at someone out of the corner of the eye, you use the verb *lamaha* (to glance); if you look at someone over your nose, you use the verb *ramaqa* (to regard/glance); and so on and so forth.

So, when we say the eye wavers from top to bottom, we mean that it moves in all of these directions. When it takes fright, it deviates from its lowest point and starts to revolve. This is why He *the Almighty* says: '…But then, lo! The eyes of those who [in their lifetime] were bent on denying the truth will stare in horror…' (*al-Anbiya':* 97), and also says: '…He but grants them respite until the Day when their eyes will stare in horror…' (*Ibrahim:* 42). The Arabic phrase *shukhus al-basar* refers to when the upper eyelid lifts up and the eye fixates itself upon an object and does not look away from it for even a moment.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says about the hypocrites and those who hinder others from fighting: 'Who begrudge you [believers] any help. When fear comes you [Prophet] see them looking at you with eyes rolling like someone in their death throes…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19).

This is because one of two things happens to the eye when it becomes overpowered by terror: it either, out of sheer terror, fixates itself upon whatever it sees and does not look away for even a moment, or starts to dart this way and thus looking for a way to escape. These are the states experienced by those who find themselves in terror's grip.

As for Allah's saying: '… your hearts rose into your throats…' (*al-Ahzab:* 10), it is well-known that the *hanjara* (the larynx) is the cavity at the topmost part of the windpipe, so how can a heart possibly come up to it? This is another effect that terror has on a person: when someone becomes frightened, he starts to become agitated, his heartbeat increases and his breath quickens. His heart continues to beat faster and faster, and harder and harder, until it feels to him as if it were about to burst from his chest. Indeed, in Egyptian dialect, people say, *qalbi hayanut minni* or (My heart is going to jump out of me).

Allah says: '… and you thought [ill] thoughts of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab:* 10). As a matter of fact, this part of the verse tells that this happens when conflicting ideas take hold of them and overpower them. Everyone had thoughts serving their own purposes: the believers thought that Allah *the Almighty* would never abandon them or give them up to their enemies, while the unbelievers thought that they would be victorious and wipe out the believers completely, leaving them no base from which to operate.

In this verse, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* does not limit Himself to merely stating what happened, but makes Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* himself be the one to recall the picture of the events. So He *the Almighty* says to him, 'Remember when such-and-such happened.'

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

هُنَالِكَ ٱبۡتُلِيَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ وَزُلۡزِلُواْ زِلۡزَالٗا شَدِيدٗا ﴿١١﴾

There the believers were sorely tested and deeply shaken [11] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 11)

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'There the believers were sorely tested…' (*al-Ahzab:* 11), He means that they were put to the test. So those with strong faith would say, ‘Allah *the Almighty* will never give us up’, while the hypocrites would say, ‘This is the end of Islam and the end of the Muslims.’ Then He *the Almighty* says: '… and deeply shaken.' (*al-Ahzab:* 11) The Arabic word *zalzala* refers to a violent and forceful convulsion that causes things to tremble and shake but without uprooting them. What is meant by the term here is that they were subjected to such a high degree of distress that their whole being shook. Allah *the Almighty* however, distinguishes between those who believed and those who were hypocrites, and that is why He *the Almighty* says immediately afterwards:

وَإِذۡ يَقُولُ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقُونَ وَٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٞ مَّا وَعَدَنَا ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥٓ إِلَّا غُرُورٗا ﴿١٢﴾

The hypocrites and the sick at heart said, ‘God and His Messenger promised us nothing but delusions!’ [12] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 12)

It was the hypocrites themselves who were the ones who had disease in their hearts, so the two categories of people mentioned here are, in fact, one single category. This type of conjunction is known as *‘atf al-bayyan* (an explanatory conjunction).

‘Delusions’ take place when human beings are deceived by something which outwardly appears delightful but which is, in reality, distressing. So when you say, ‘What has deluded you in respect of such-and-such a thing?’, it is as if you are saying that there is something in its outward form that tricks and deceives you, but when you actually examine it in detail, you do not find it to be as you thought.(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim that Qatada said, ‘The hypocrites, when they saw the clans on the day of the battle of the clans, said, ‘They have surrounded us on all=*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِذْ قَالَت طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَـٰٓأَهْلَ يَثْرِبَ لَا مُقَامَ لَكُمْ فَٱرْجِعُوا۟ ۚ وَيَسْتَـْٔذِنُ فَرِيقٌ
مِّنْهُمُ ٱلنَّبِىَّ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّ بُيُوتَنَا عَوْرَةٌ وَمَا هِىَ بِعَوْرَةٍ ۖ إِن يُرِيدُونَ إِلَّا فِرَارًا ﴿١٣﴾

Some of them said, ‘People of Yathrib, you will not be able to withstand [the attack], so go back!’ Some of them asked the Prophet’s permission to leave, saying, ‘Our houses are exposed,’ even though they were not – they just wanted to run away [13] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 13)

The particle *idh* (when) here means ‘remember when’. So, the verse means, ‘Remember 'When some of them said, ‘O you people of Yathrib…' (*al-Ahzab:* 13). Yathrib is the name for the bit of land, upon which Medina stood, but Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* changed its name to ‘Tayba’.

As for the saying of Allah, '…you will not be able to withstand [the attack…' (*al-Ahzab:* 13), it means ‘You cannot stand against them in battle.’ Regarding His saying, 'so go back!’ (*al-Ahzab:* 13), it means ‘Leave Muhammad and his followers alone on the battlefield and go way’; Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…you will not be able to withstand [the attack…' (*al-Ahzab:* 13) which means ‘You cannot stand up for this religion which you reject in your hearts but support with your limbs’.

Then the Quran discloses the stratagem used by another group who wanted to run away, saying: '… Some of them asked the Prophet’s permission to leave…' (*al-Ahzab:* 13). This tells that they asked permission for not to go out to battle, '…saying, ‘Our houses are exposed,’…' (*al-Ahzab:* 13), i.e. they are unprotected and there is nothing there to stop those who desire them ill. A

= *sides!’ And because of their doubts regarding Allah’s Command, they said, ‘Muhammad promised us that we would conquer Persia and Byzantium, but here we are, so thoroughly surrounded that it is not even possible for us to go out to meet the call of nature!’ So, Allah revealed His saying: ‘And [remember how it was] when the hypocrites and those with hearts diseased said [to one another], “Allah and His Apostle have promised us nothing but delusions!”’ (al-Ahzab: 12) See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 6/577.*

house is described as *'awra* (being exposed) when it has no fortifications or protection against those who might come to it during the night with evil intentions, such as when its walls have collapsed or are too low making them easy to scale, or when its doors are not strong and reinforced, etc.

We use the word *manat* to describe this state of affairs in Egyptian dialect. Allah *the Almighty* however, exposed their lie and invalidated their arguments. He says '…even though they were not…' (*al-Ahzab:* 13) meaning that their only purpose in saying that was because '…they just wanted to run away' (*al-Ahzab:* 13), i.e. to run away from the battle, fearing what might result from it and fearing that they might be killed.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَوۡ دُخِلَتۡ عَلَيۡهِم مِّنۡ أَقۡطَارِهَا ثُمَّ سُئِلُواْ ٱلۡفِتۡنَةَ لَأٓتَوۡهَا
وَمَا تَلَبَّثُواْ بِهَآ إِلَّا يَسِيرٗا ﴿١٤﴾

Had the city been invaded from all sides, and the enemy invited them to rebel, they would have done so almost without hesitation [14] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 14)

Allah's saying *dukhilat 'alayhim* (entered upon them) means if their houses were overrun *min 'aqtariha* (from its districts), i.e. from every side '… and the enemy invited them to rebel…' (*al-Ahzab:* 14), i.e. if they had been asked to embrace unbelief, ' they would have done so almost…' (*al-Ahzab:* 14), i.e. they would have become unbelievers '…without hesitation...' (*al-Ahzab:* 14). Allah *the Almighty* would only have left them alone for a short time before laying His vengeance down upon them.(1)

He *Glorified is He* then says:

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(1) *Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir of this verse (3/473), 'Allah is telling those who said, '...'Our houses are exposed,' even though they were not– they just wanted to run away' (al-Ahzab: 13) that if their enemies were to have overrun them from every direction and from every part of the city and asked them to embrace unbelief, they would have done so without delay. As soon as they felt the slightest amount of fear, they would have ceased to hold firm to their belief and would have become unbelievers. This is the way that Qatada, 'Abd Ar-Rahman and Ibn Jarir interpreted this verse.*

وَلَقَدۡ كَانُواْ عَٰهَدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مِن قَبۡلُ لَا يُوَلُّونَ ٱلۡأَدۡبَٰرَۚ وَكَانَ عَهۡدُ ٱللَّهِ مَسۡـُٔولٗا ﴿١٥﴾

Yet they had already promised God that they would
not turn tail and flee, and a promise to God will be
answered for [15] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 15)

The meaning of the saying of Allah, '… promised Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 15) is that Allah *the Almighty* presented them with a pledge that they accepted. This is what the *Ansar* did at the Pledge of *‘Aqaba* when they vowed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they would help and support him, or these words might be directed at those (1) who did not fight at Badr or at Uhud, but said, ‘By Allah, when another battle comes, we will take part in it and demonstrate our bravery.’

A pledge to Allah *the Almighty* is made when you make a vow before Him *the Almighty* to do something. Your first pledge to Allah *the Almighty* is to believe in Him, and so long as you believe in Him *the Almighty* you must take note of those things which He requires of you and makes you responsible for; you must beware of failing to fulfil any of His commands, since your failure to fulfil a matter required of you by Him *the Almighty* signifies that your faith is lacking. So, it ill befits you to break faith with the assurance you made to Allah *the Almighty* to believe in Him. No, rather, you must keep your promise since if you keep your word to Him, then He *the Almighty* will keep His Word to you. Do not look at the matter from your side alone, but look at the opposite side as well.

Know that Allah *the Almighty* is watching you, and know that He *the Almighty* knows what you conceal within your breast, so beware of making a promise to Him when you fully intend to break that promise. Do not think that your promise to Him can deceive Him, since your Lord knows everything that you do.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *Yazd ibn Ruman said, ‘They are Banu Haritha, who were on the point of losing heart along with Banu Salama on the Day of Uhud. Then when what happened to them happened, they vowed that they would not do that again so Allah is reminding them of the pledge that they themselves gave.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 7/5410.*

قُل لَّن يَنفَعَكُمُ ٱلۡفِرَارُ إِن فَرَرۡتُم مِّنَ ٱلۡمَوۡتِ أَوِ ٱلۡقَتۡلِ وَإِذٗا لَّا تُمَتَّعُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا ﴿١٦﴾

[Prophet], say, ‘Running away will not benefit you. If you manage to escape death or slaughter, you will only be permitted to enjoy [life] for a short while’ [16]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 16)

When Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Say...' (*al-Ahzab:* 16), He means, ‘Say to those people who want to run away from the battle’. As for His saying, '…Running away will not benefit you. If you manage to escape death or slaughter…' (*al-Ahzab:* 16), we talked previously about the difference between dying and being killed, and it is because of this difference that Allah *the Almighty* says about His Prophet *Muhammad:* 'And Muhammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?...' (*Al-‘Imran:* 144).

The only one capable of bringing about death is the One Who gave life. First, by a Command from the Creator, a person’s soul is plucked out and then his body is destroyed. As for killing, that is something of which creation is capable. It happens the other way round: first a person’s body is destroyed and that then leads to his soul departing, since a soul cannot remain in a body that is no longer serviceable, a body that has lost those characteristics that made it a fitting home for the soul.

In this matter, there is nothing to be gained from running away since the time of everyone’s death is set and cannot be avoided. It makes no difference whether your end is brought about by the Giver of life or by some created being who disobeys Allah *the Almighty* and destroys the physical frame that He *the Almighty* Himself created. What use is there in running away from a battle when we have seen many people who fought in all the battles and yet still died in their own beds? People such as Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* said,

‘I took part in approximately one hundred attacks (against the enemy), and there was not a single inch of my body that escaped the blow of a sword or the thrust of a spear. Yet, here, I am dying on my bed like a camel. May the eyes of the cowards never sleep.’(1)

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(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned this in Al-Bidaya wa Al-Nihaia (7/117), and he traced it back to Al-Waqidi from ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn abi Az-Zinad from his father.*

Then the Quran debates with them, saying: ‘Even supposing that you had succeeded in running away from death or being killed, do you really think that your good health will last? Do you think this life will go on forever? No, it will not, for '... you will only be permitted to enjoy [life] for a short while.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 16)

How quickly does life come to an end, and you come face to face with death from which there is no escape! Death is the ultimate destiny of every one of us.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ مَن ذَا ٱلَّذِى يَعْصِمُكُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ سُوٓءًا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ رَحْمَةً ۚ
وَلَا يَجِدُونَ لَهُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿١٧﴾

Say, ‘If God wishes to harm you, who can protect you? If
God wishes to show you mercy, who can prevent Him?’
They will find no one but God to protect or help them [17]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 17)

The meaning of this verse, ‘Say to them, O Prophet Muhammad, ‘Who is the One Who 'protects you' (*al-Ahzab:* 17), i.e. prevents you '…If Allah wishes to harm you, who can protect you? If Allah wishes to show you mercy, who can prevent Him?’ (*al-Ahzab:* 17) This is like what He says in another verse: ‘Today there is no protection [for anyone] from Allah’s Judgment, save [for] those who have earned [His] Mercy!' (*Hud:* 43)

When Allah *the Almighty* desires evil for a people, there is no one who can protect them since no one can prevent Allah *the Almighty* from fulfilling His Promise– there are no other gods to avert the evil from those people.

There is one riddle thrown up by this verse and which requires a certain amount of clarification, and that is to be found in Allah’s saying: ‘If Allah wishes to show you mercy, who can prevent Him?’ (*al-Ahzab:* 17) How can someone be protected from mercy? They reply that the explanation for this lies in the fact that *‘isma* here means ‘prevent’, not ‘protect’. So the meaning of the verse is that none of your enemies can stop Allah’s Mercy from encompassing someone when He desires mercy for them.

Another thing we notice in this verse is that it is phrased as a question, not as a statement of fact. The Quran did not say to Muhammad, 'Say to them, O Muhammad, that there is no one to keep you safe from Allah *the Almighty* if He desires evil for you' because statements may be said to be true or false. Rather, He *the Almighty* wanted him *peace and blessings be upon him* to phrase the statement as a question so that they themselves would affirm the reality of the situation with their own mouths. It is as if He *the Almighty* were saying to them, 'I am content to accept your judgement on the matter.' If Allah *the Almighty* had not been confident that their reply would have been, 'No one', He would not have used the interrogative here. Therefore, we can say that the truthfulness of this statement is better established by the use of the interrogative case.

You also resort to this particular stylistic device when someone displays ingratitude to you after you have done them a good turn: you might say to him, for example, 'Did I not do you a good turn on such-and-such a day?' and he would then have no response except to say, 'Yes.'

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '... They will find no one but Allah to protect or help them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 17). The Arabic word *waliy* (one to protect them) means one who is close to you. In fact, no one allows anyone to get close to them except when they hope for some benefit from them. So a *waliy* is someone who remains near you and befriends you; someone whose love for you precedes any eventuality which might occur, so when something actually does happen, he is there to protect you.

As for the Arabic word *nasir* (one to bring them succour), its meaning is similar to that of *waliy*. A *nasir* is also someone who protects you, but his protection for you comes after the event. It is often the case that he is someone who was not previously near to you.

So, the meaning of the verse is, 'When Allah *the Almighty* desires evil for someone, he will not find a single friend, or helper to protect him from Him *Glorified is He*.'

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says (1):

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(1) *Ibn Abu Hatim tnarrated that Ibn Zayd said regarding Allah's saying: 'Allah knows exactly who among you hinder others…' (al-Ahzab: 18), 'This was on the day of the battle=*

قَدۡ يَعۡلَمُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡمُعَوِّقِينَ مِنكُمۡ وَٱلۡقَآئِلِينَ لِإِخۡوَٰنِهِمۡ هَلُمَّ إِلَيۡنَاۖ وَلَا يَأۡتُونَ ٱلۡبَأۡسَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٨﴾

God knows exactly who among you hinder others, who [secretly] say to their brothers, ‘Come and join us,’ who hardly ever come out to fight [18] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 18)

Qad is a particle to indicate perfect certainty, especially when it is used in connection with an action of Allah *the Almighty*. Usually the verb to which it is connected is in the past tense, but here the verb is in the present tense, which means that the event which is happening now will prove that Allah *the Almighty* knows the diverters and that he knew them from the pre-eternity before time even began.

If you were to say, ‘This means that Allah *the Almighty* knows of the act of diverting others from taking part in the battle before it actually happens’, we would reply that there is a difference between being aware of something before it happens and being aware of it while it happens. Someone might say, ‘I knew, and you will repay me according to what you knew of me previously, but if you were to leave me be in the future then I will not be the source of any infringement.’ It is this matter that Allah *the Almighty* desires to emphasise. A *mu‘awwiq* (diverter) is one who obstructs you from what you want, holds you back from what you aspire to and tries to make you give up.

Allah’s saying: ‘Come and join us…' (*al-Ahzab:* 18) means, ‘Approach’ or ‘Come here’. The word *halumma*, which appears here in the singular form,

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= *of the clans. A man left the presence of Prophet Muhammad and found his brother sitting with bread and grilled meat laid out before him, so he said to him, ‘You are here surrounded by bread, grilled meat and nabdh (i.e. date nectar), while the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him is surrounded by spears and swords!’ His brother replied, ‘Come hither to me. The game is up for you and your companion. By the One in Whose Name he swears, Muhammad will not be able to stand up in the face (of his enemies).’ So the man said, ‘You lie, by the One in Whose Name he swears!’ – and the man was his full brother – ‘By Allah, I will tell the Prophet about you.’ So he went to him Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him to tell him of what had come to pass. But when he got there he found that Gabriel had already brought the news to the Prophet Muhammad Allah peace and blessings be upon him when he brought him the averse: 'Allah knows exactly who among you hinder others, who [secretly] say to their brothers, ‘Come and join us,’ who hardly ever come out to fight.' (The Quran, 33: 18) See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 6/580.*

is indeclinable. In other words, the same form of the word is used for the singular, dual and plural, and for the masculine and feminine, like when it appears in Allah's Words: 'Say: 'Bring forward your witnesses who could bear witness that Allah has forbidden [all] this!' (*al-An'am:* 150) meaning that 'You lot bring forth.' This is how the word is used in the purest form of the Arabic language.

However, in one of the *Tuhama* variants of the language, the different suffixes are attached to *halumma* to indicate the number and gender of those addressed by the word. So you say *halumma* for masculine singular; *halummi* for feminine singular; *halumma* for dual; *halummu* for masculine plural and *halumna* for feminine plural.

As for Allah's Words: 'who hardly ever come out to fight' (*al-Ahzab:* 18), the word *ba's* (fight/peril) means 'war' or 'battle' and is used in the same sense as when it appears in Allah's saying: 'And We taught him how to make garments [of Allah-consciousness for you, [O men,] so that they might fortify you against all that may cause you fear…' (*al-Anbiya':* 80).

Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and are patient in misfortune and hardship and in time of peril…' (*al-Baqara:* 177). The difference between *ba's* (peril) and *ba'sa'* (misfortune) is that *ba's* simply refers to war, whereas *ba'sa'* refers to every affliction or misfortune which befalls a person outside of what happens to his body, such as losing a child, losing all one's wealth or something else of that sort. As for *darra'* (hardship), it refers to those afflictions which do impact a person's body, such as illness or something of that sort.

This is the sense in which it is used in Allah's saying: 'And We taught him how to make garments [of Allah-consciousness] for you, [O men,] so that they might fortify you against all that may cause you fear...' (*al-Anbiya':* 80). This refers both to the armour which man creates to fight in them and to protect the living organs of his body, such as his heart, chest, and head, for which a special piece of armour called a helmet, is made. And each suit of armour was made to be corrugated so that, when its surface was struck by a sword, it would hold up the sword and not allow it slip down to wound him in another part of his body.

That was why Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* about the making of them: '...and give deep thought to their steady flow...' (*Saba':* 11), i.e. 'Take great care in how you fit together the links of the chain-mail'.

This verse also highlights the difference between the two terms *libas* and *labus*: *Libas* is those types of garments that protect you from the elements and cover up your nakedness in times of peace and security. They are those types of clothes that people wear on a day-to-day basis, and which are referred to in the Words of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And among the many objects of His creation, Allah has appointed for you [various] means of protection: thus, He has given you in the mountains places of shelter, and has endowed you with [the ability to make] garments to protect you from heat [and cold], as well as such garments as might protect you from your [mutual] violence. In this way does He bestow the full measure of His blessings on you, so that you might surrender yourselves unto Him' (*an-Nahl:* 81).

The word *labus*, on the other hand, refers only to garments that people don in times of war, such as helmets, armour, and other things of that type. This is why the Arabic morphological form used for the word *labus* is one that customarily indicates bulkiness and great size.

This verse is a wonderful example of the precise and miraculous wording of the 'an, for it mentions 'heat' here but does not mention its opposite, 'cold'. It has been the custom of many of the scholars, in their commentaries on this verse, to maintain that the word 'cold', even though it is not mentioned, is implied by the context. So, they say the verse means 'to protect you from heat and cold'(1), thereby seeking to supplement the words of the Quran. That is not permissible.

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(1) Ibn Mandhur said in *Lisan Al-'Arab* – entry '*sarbala'*, 'It is said that in the verse: '...garments to protect you from heat…' (*an-Nahl:* 81), they refer to shirts that protect you from both heat and cold, but that Allah made do with mentioning the word 'heat' because clothes that protect you from heat will also protect you from cold.'
And Abu Yahya Zakariyya Al-Ansar said in his book, '*Fath Ar-Rahman bi-Kashfi ma Yaltabisu fi Al-Quran*', '...garments to protect you from heat…' (*an-Nahl:* 81), i.e. and from cold. The only reason He omitted 'cold' is because it is indicated in its opposite, just like the verse: '…In Thy hand is all good…' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) The reason that heat was chosen is because the first group of people to be addressed by the Quran were the people of the Hijaz, and, because of the fact that the severity of the heat was greater than the severity of the cold in that region, they attached more importance to protecting themselves from the heat than protecting themselves from the cold. And, in the other averse, good is mentioned instead of evil because that is what slaves hope for from their Lord.'

When we take a detailed look at this verse, we find that Allah *the Almighty* created darkness, clothing, and places of shelter in the mountains to protect us from the heat of the sun. And there is a reason why Allah *the Almighty* created this form of heat that people find unbearable, and that is because it plays a vital role in our lives: the heat of the sun serves you in many ways even though it sometimes makes you uncomfortable. Allah *the Almighty* leaves the sun in place so that you may benefit from its good, and then protects you from its harm by providing you with shade, clothing, and shelter.

But those things also protect us from the cold, you might say. The truth is that they do not because the warmth that you feel when you wear thick clothes or wrap yourself in a thick blanket comes from your own body, not from the clothes or the blanket. You are the one who warms the bed and quilt when you sleep in them; and that is proven by the fact that when you first get into bed you find it cold but, the next morning, after you have spent the night in it, you find it warm.

So, heat is transferred from your own body to your covers warming them up. Then the covers simply hold in your own warmth inside them, not letting it disperse into the surrounding air.

That is why when scientists looked into the matter of human body heat, they found in it a manifestation of the Power of Allah *the Almighty*: human beings emit enough heat in a twenty-four hour period to boil seventeen litres of water; and the average temperature of the body remains constant at 37°C whether in the heat of summer or the cold of winter, all of which proves that the thermo system of your body is completely separate from that of the surrounding atmosphere.

One of the most remarkable things about the way the human being has been created is the way that temperature varies from limb to limb and organ to organ despite the fact that they are all within a single body. There are some organs, such as the nose, ears and eyes, that have a temperature of between 7°C and 9°C - and if you were to raise the temperature of the eye above that level it would explode; and others, such as the liver, that have a temperature of 40°C; and so on and so forth. And this is despite the fact that it is the nature of heat to evenly spread itself out in a single body or a single place.

Another of the most remarkable things about the way the human being has been created in this particular regard is the phenomenon of sweating: whenever you are subjected to severe heat, sweat exudes from the pores of your skin to reduce your temperature, acting like a cooling system similar to that found in car motors. Indeed, some people, such as farmers who work the land, work so hard and sweat so much that their bodies come to be encrusted in a layer of something resembling lime but which is in fact salt created from the sweat that has poured out of their bodies. That is why those farmers eat so much *mish* 'pickled vegetables and other salty foods' in order to replace the amount of salt their bodies lose through perspiration. So, the reason Allah *the Almighty* did not say ‘and cold’ is because warmth is produced from within the human body.

As for Allah’s words: ' who hardly ever come out to fight' (*al-Ahzab:* 18), the word *qalil* ‘few’, either means that none of them joined battle except for a ‘few’, or it means that they did join battle but only a few of them fought with energy or resolve, while the rest went out merely to pull the wool over people’s eyes and make it impossible for them to be accused of remaining behind the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.*

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَشِحَّةً عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَإِذَا جَآءَ ٱلْخَوْفُ رَأَيْتَهُمْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ تَدُورُ أَعْيُنُهُمْ كَٱلَّذِى يُغْشَىٰ
عَلَيْهِ مِنَ ٱلْمَوْتِ ۖ فَإِذَا ذَهَبَ ٱلْخَوْفُ سَلَقُوكُم بِأَلْسِنَةٍ حِدَادٍ أَشِحَّةً عَلَى ٱلْخَيْرِ ۚ
أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا۟ فَأَحْبَطَ ٱللَّهُ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرًا ﴿١٩﴾

Who begrudge you [believers] any help. When fear comes, you [Prophet] see them looking at you with eyes rolling like someone in their death throes; when fear has passed, they attack you with sharp tongues and begrudge you any good. Such men do not believe, and God brings their deeds to nothing – that is all too easy for God [19] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 19)

Although the term *shuh* referred to in the verse as 'begrudging you any help…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19), is commonly used to mean the same thing as *bukhl*. There is in fact a difference: The *shahih* is one who, while miserly to others, might well be generous to himself and his family, while the *bakhil* is one who is miserly to absolutely everyone, including himself. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'begrudging you any help…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19), i.e. but not begrudging it to themselves.(1)

When you reflect on blameworthy attributes in existence, you will find them to be an essential part of the natural order of things and to have an important role to play in existence. This fact was understood by the poet when he said:

Of all people, misers are the most generous,
Since they own the world but benefit from it not
They only deny people part of what they own,
In order to give them all they have accumulated.

Another poet considered misers to be doing himself a good turn. He said:

Misers are rewarded with a good turn
From me for the ease they bring my self

Yes, misers are easy on yourself since they never do anything good for you or give you anything that places you in their debt. Yes, they are easy on you because you owe them nothing. This is according to the definition of another poet:

Do people a good turn and you enslave their hearts
For good turns all too frequently enslave people

So, even though miserliness is blameworthy, Allah *the Almighty* has made it part of certain people's characters in order to help bring about its opposite. And the opposite of miserliness is generosity, so when we say, 'help bring about its opposite', we mean that misers help generous people in their task of being generous. It is habitual amongst generous people to give without restraint, expending money here and there until they have nothing left. And some generous people do not stop there but are driven to sell their lands or even their homes so that they have something to give. But who would be there to buy those things from them if everyone was like them and no one hoarded wealth? Who would buy them if there were no misers?

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi narrated a number of opinions in his (Tafsir) (7/5412) regarding how the verse: 'begrudging you all help…' (al-Ahzab: 19): 'It is said that 'begrudging you all help' means 'in terms of digging the trench and spending in the way of God'. This was the view of Mujahid and Qatada.*
It is also said, 'in terms of fighting alongside you'.
It is also said, 'in terms of giving to your poor and needy'.
It is also said that they were miserly with the booty they plundered. This was the view of As-Suddi.

If you look at any single thing in existence you will find that it is there for a purpose, even if that thing is inherently blameworthy. Then there is the fact that misers are often witty, their circles never being short of a witticism or two. In the early days of our youth, when some of us used to smoke cigarettes, it was the custom for one of us to take out his packet of cigarettes and distribute them amongst those who were present, and if one packet was not enough, to take out another. We had a person of that sort (i.e. a miser) in our group who, when that happened, looked at me in exasperation and said ‘How could you have the heart to do that, my brother?’

However, young people should know that those cigarettes were the cause of ruining our youth, and that their effects remain with us even in old age. No, people should safeguard their youth and not destroy it by partaking of nasty forbidden substances such as this!

Then He *the Almighty* says: '... When fear comes you [Prophet] see them looking at you with eyes rolling…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19), i.e. when terror comes, it takes hold of a person’s eyes and causes them to look here and there without remaining fixed or resting on any object for even a moment. Their eyes rolled '… like someone in their death throes…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19). For that reason, it says in the Hadith: 'There are many of you in times of fear, but few of you in times of greed.' This was their state in times of fear and terror and '… when fear has passed, they attack you with sharp tongues and begrudge you any good…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19). The meaning of '…they attack you sharp tongues…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19) is that they will harm you and cause you pain by means of their words. They will say to you, ‘Give us what is rightfully ours for we fought alongside you. If it had not been for us, you would not have gained victory over your enemies’, and give voice to many other spurious grievances and words of blame.

All of these meanings are to be found in the Arabic word *salq*, but its root meaning is to cook something, like meat, on its own in boiling water without the addition of any other ingredients. A similar term is *salkh* ‘flaying’ since it shares with it the idea of causing pain.

It is often the case in Arabic that when two tri-literal words have two root letters in common with the third one being different, that there is some wider meaning that links those two words together. This is true with *salaqa* and *salakha*, and it is also true with *qatafa*, *qata'a,* and *qatama* since all three words share the sense of something being separated from something else.

In Allah's words, '...with sharp tongues...' (*al-Ahzab:* 19), the Arabic word used for 'sharp' meqning *hidad* is high-pitched, forthright and in a loud voice, like in Allah's saying: '...and sharp is your sight today!' (*Qaf:* 22)

The meaning of: '…begrudging you all that is good...' (*al-Ahzab:* 19) is this: After earlier saying: 'begrudging you all help...' (*al-Ahzab:* 19), Allah *the Almighty* re-emphasises their feelings to the Muslims by saying here: '…begrudging you all that is good...' (*al-Ahzab:* 19), i.e. in its general sense

Such '... men do not believe…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19) since, if they had believed, they would have known that it was not in their interests to begrudge you and that, by doing so, they were in fact begrudging themselves since generous people seek increase from the bounty of their Lord while misers have no increase from anywhere. It is for that reason that Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Behold, [O believers,] it is you who are called upon to spend freely in Allah's cause: but [even] among you are such as turn out to be niggardly! And yet, he who acts niggardly [in Allah's cause] is but niggardly towards his own self...' (*Muhammad:* 38).

When your Lord *the Almighty* sees you spending out from that which He *the Almighty* has given you, He *the Almighty* will give you more, since your provision from Him is guaranteed. That is why a righteous person once said, 'O Allah, you have made me accustomed to good things, and I have made (parts) of your creation accustomed to good things, so do not cut me off from what you have accustomed me to so I do not have to cut off people from what I have accustomed them to.' So giving allows Allah's blessings to flow and causes them to increase and become abundant.

Suppose, for example, that you had many children: if you were to give one of them a pound and he were then to go out, buy some sweets with it and distribute them amongst his siblings without giving any preference to himself over them, then you would most certainly put your trust in him and give him more since when he is entrusted with something good, it spills over from him to encompass the rest.

The result of their lack of faith is that: '…, and Allah brings their deeds to nothing– that is all too easy for Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19), i.e. they did what they did, but their works lacked any worth in terms of faith, so Allah *the Almighty* made them come to nought. In other words, He made them such that they would never derive any benefit or profit from them. This is clearly stated by Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran when He *the Almighty* says: '[This, then, is] the parable of those who are bent on denying their Lord: all their works are as ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day: [in the life to come,] they cannot achieve any benefit whatever from all [the good] that they may have wrought: for this [denial of Allah] is indeed the farthest one can go astray.' (*Ibrahim:* 18)

It is easy for Allah *the Almighty* to make their works equal nothing. Here, we stress that there is nothing difficult for Allah *the Almighty*. This is because everything is easy for Him *Glorified is He* since He does not make things by manipulating or handling them, but merely by saying to them ‘Be’, and they are. Previously we gave an example of someone manipulating or handling things; a man who wants to transport a huge amount of wheat from one place to another: the only way he can do so is by dividing it up and carrying it in small loads. So he must first take one sack from here to there, and then another sack, and so on until he finishes moving the entire amount. The amount of time and effort that this job takes corresponds to the strength of the man who is doing it. Then as science progressed and human thinking evolved, we invented machines that enabled us to carry and transport the entire amount in a single go by simply pressing a few buttons or turning a few keys. So, if a slave who has been created by Allah *the Almighty* is capable of doing things with this degree of ease, then how easy do you suppose things must be for the Creator *the Almighty* Himself? That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) Do not be amazed by this matter since your Lord *the Almighty* has given you yourselves something like that. You should not astonish; Allah *the Almighty* is fully able to do things by simply saying ‘Be’; when you see how your own limbs move around simply because you want them to. By simply willing yourself to stand up, you find that you have stood up without giving any commands to your limbs or muscles. If someone asks why someone does not command their limbs and organs to do what he wants of them, I reply that you do not have the ability to command them. They thus submit to you dues to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* has commanded them, for everything, without exception, carries out the commands of the Creator *the Almighty*. Nothing ever goes against what He *the Almighty* has commanded. Have you not read what He *the Almighty* said about the sky? ‘And obeys its Lord and it must.' (*ash-Sharh:* 2) The sky, despite its immensity, hears and obeys the command of its Creator. As for you, a weak slave, what is it that you command when you have no idea whatsoever to whom you direct your commands? Do you know each of the muscles, organs, and nerves which come together within you to enable you to stand? With your lack of knowledge of what commands to give them, Allah *the Almighty* has made all your organs and limbs act in response to your will alone. As for Him, He *the Almighty* says ‘Be’ because He is the Creator of all things and all things submit to His Commands. Allah *the Almighty* said ‘Be’ so that you would not have to say it yourself. It is as if He *the Almighty* said ‘Be’ beforehand with your own interests in mind; in other words, it is from that first command of ‘Be’ that all of your actions emanate.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

يَحْسَبُونَ ٱلْأَحْزَابَ لَمْ يَذْهَبُوا۟ ۖ وَإِن يَأْتِ ٱلْأَحْزَابُ يَوَدُّوا۟ لَوْ أَنَّهُم بَادُونَ فِى
ٱلْأَعْرَابِ يَسْـَٔلُونَ عَنْ أَنۢبَآئِكُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ كَانُوا۟ فِيكُم مَّا قَٰتَلُوٓا۟ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٢٠﴾

They think the joint forces have not gone, and if the joint forces did come again they would wish they were in the desert, wandering among the Bedouin and seeking news about you [from a safe distance]. Even if they were with you [believers], they would hardly fight at all [20] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 20)

The Noble Quran relates the position of the hypocrites and exposes their bad intentions. Even after the clans had banded together and gone out to make war on the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* those hypocrites still, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ' … think the joint forces have not gone…' (*al-Ahzab:* 20). This huge concentration of troops scared them out of their wits, so they did not believe it. They saw that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* defeated his enemies when they were separate, but this was the first time that all the enemies of Islam, despite their individual differences, had banded together into a single mass. So the hypocrites found it hard to believe that the clans would band together in such a way.

The use of the word *husban* (think) indicates that they were merely speculating and not speaking of the reality of the situation. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and if the allies should come (again) they would fain be in the deserts…' (*al-Ahzab:* 20) meaning that if the clans did indeed band together, and then the hypocrites would prefer to become Bedouin and live with the desert Arabs. In other words, they wanted to go into the desert far away from Medina and live there because they feared the huge enemy army and because if they remained in Medina, they knew they would have to either fight the clans without being sure of victory, or not to fight and thus become enemies of the Muslims. So, because they wanted to remain living in hypocrisy, they wanted to go out and live in the desert with the Bedouins, and then, from a position of safety far away from danger, they were, as Allah *the Almighty* says, '…asking for news about you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 20), meaning that they asked about how you fared in the battle. Then the Quran affirms this reality when Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and if they were among you they would not fight save a little.' (*al-Ahzab:* 20) This means that they will fight in order to allay your suspicions and prove that they fought with you. Therefore do not despair about them and do not be sad about the fact that they remain behind.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَّقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ ٱللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ
يَرْجُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلْيَوْمَ ٱلْءَاخِرَ وَذَكَرَ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٢١﴾

The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you
who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember
Him often [21] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 21)

The Arabic word *uswa* means 'role model' or 'example of good behaviour'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in addition to his mission of conveying Allah's Way of Guidance prepared for man to safeguard his progress through life, was also an example for good character and correct behaviour. It is all too easy for you to speak or preach to others. What is important, however, is that your own actions accord with what you say and want, and this is how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was both a conveyor of the Message and a paradigm for good conduct. It is for this reason that ʿA'isha *Allah be pleased with her* said about him *peace and blessings be upon him,* 'His character was the Quran.'(1) But what is the good example shown to us by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this regard of the war of the clans? When the clans banded together against him, one of the supplications he *peace and blessings be upon him* used to make against them was, 'O Allah *the Almighty*! O You Who sends down the Book and is swift in reckoning, destroy the clans! O Allah *the Almighty* defeats them and shakes them up!'(2) He *peace and blessings be upon him* later made the slogan of belief, 'There is no god but Allah Alone. He was true to His Promise, gave victory to His slave, made His army mighty and He alone defeated the clans.'(3)

And as long as that is the slogan of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he is an example for you. Allah *the Almighty* says about the believers during this battle: '…distress and affliction befell them and they were shaken violently so that the Apostle and those who believed with him said: When will the help of Allah come…' (*al-Baqara:* 214). During the battle of Badr, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Lessen your appeal of your Lord, for He will surely fulfil His Promise to you.'(4) If someone were to ask, 'If Allah *the Almighty* had promised victory to His Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* then why was he so persistent in his supplication to Him?' I would reply, 'It was not for the purpose of victory that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so persistently supplicated, since that was a certain promise from his Lord. Read the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And when Allah promised you one of the two parties that it shall be yours and you loved that the one not armed should he yours and Allah desired to manifest the truth of what was true by His words and to cut off the root of the unbelievers.' (*al-Anfal:* 7) So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want victory over the caravan or over the trade network of Quraysh, but wanted victory over the band of men who had come out from Mecca to make war on him.

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 163, 6/91; Al-Bayhaqi, Dalail An-Nubuwwa, 1/310, from a Hadith narrated on the authority of 'A'isha that Sa'd ibn Hisham ibn 'Amir said, 'I went to 'A'isha and said to her, 'Mother of the faithful, tell me about the character of Prophet Muhammad.' She replied, 'His character was the Quran. Have you not read the saying of Allah the Almighty in the Quran: '...and most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality' (al-Qalam: 4)?*

(2) *This Hadith is agreed upon. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no.2933; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.1742. .*

(3) *This Hadith is agreed upon. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4114; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2724. in Kitab Adh-Dhikr wa Ad-Du'a' in chapter (18) from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra with the wording, 'There is no god but Allah Alone. He made His army mighty, gave victory to His slave, overcame the confederates on His own and there is nothing after Him.'*

(4) *See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, no. (2/627). It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him straightened the ranks of the Muslims on the day of the battle of Badr, then returned to his hut and went inside. And the only other person in the hut with him was Abu Bakr As-Siddiq. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was beseeching his Lord for the victory that He had promised him with, and said as part of his supplication, 'O Allah, if this band of men perishes today=*

So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: '…in the Messenger of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 21), it is as if He is saying that it is in the entire being of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the good example is to be found. The good example is within him, in every one of his limbs and organs. There is a good example in his tongue; there is a good example in his eyes; there is good examples in his hands; and so on and so forth. Every part of him is a good example. But he is an example to the one whom Allah mentioned in the Quran: '… for those of you who put your hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Him often.' (*al-Ahzab:* 21) Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* is described with the adjective 'plentiful' (unceasing) because, unlike the other duties of Islam which require preparation and are cumbersome and difficult, remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* as we said previously, is not difficult at all and costs you nothing; and that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and certainly the remembrance of Allah is the greatest…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45) meaning that it is greater than any other act of obedience to Allah *the Almighty* since it is light on the tongue and you can do it at any time and in any place, regardless of whatever else you are doing. That is why He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Jumu'a*: 'but when the prayer is ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah's grace, and remember Allah much…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

= *You will not be worshipped anymore.' Then Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him drowsed off for a short while then woke up and said, 'Rejoice, Abu Bakr, Allah's victory is at hand. Here is Gabriel leading a horse by its reins with dust on his front teeth.'*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَمَّا رَءَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ٱلْأَحْزَابَ قَالُوا۟ هَٰذَا مَا وَعَدَنَا ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥ
وَصَدَقَ ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥ ۚ وَمَا زَادَهُمْ إِلَّآ إِيمَٰنًا وَتَسْلِيمًا ﴿٢٢﴾

When the believers saw the joint forces, they said, ‘This is what God and His Messenger promised us: the promise of God and His Messenger is true,’ and this only served to increase their faith and submission to God [22] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 22)

This means that when the believers saw the clans withdrawing in defeat from the battlefield, they said as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they said, "This is what Allah and His Messenger promised us: the promise of Allah and His Messenger is true"…' (*al-Ahzab:* 22) meaning that this victory and this promise had already come true: '… and this only served to increase their faith and submission to Allah.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 22) Here is one of the proofs that faith both increases and decreases: faith increases as belief in the secondary matters that advance it increases, for after belief in Allah *the Almighty* comes belief in those secondary matters that prove the Trueness of Allah *the Almighty* in everything that He *the Almighty* does. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…and submission to Allah’ (*al-Ahzab:* 22) means to surrender to Allah *the Almighty* in every situation that He *the Almighty* places His slaves in.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

مِّنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا۟ مَا عَٰهَدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ ۖ فَمِنْهُم
مَّن قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُۥ وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَنتَظِرُ ۖ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا۟ تَبْدِيلًا ﴿٢٣﴾

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least [23] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 23)

This verse was revealed about a group of believers who were true to their faith(1), but had not taken part in either the battle of Badr or the battle of

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(1) *'Ali ibn Abu Taleb said about Talha ibn 'Ubayd Allah, ‘He was the man about whom the verse: ‘...some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting...' (al-Ahzab: 23) was revealed. Talha was one of those who redeemed his pledge and so there will be no*=

Uhud, so they vowed to Allah *the Almighty* that if there was another battle, they would be the first ones there and would be tested in it in an excellent way. It is transmitted that this verse was revealed about Anas ibn An-Nadr who vowed to Allah *the Almighty* after missing Badr, that if another battle against the idolaters came along, he would be tested in it in an excellent way. And, indeed, when Uhud came, he was tested in it in an excellent way, so much so that he was martyred. When they found his body after the battle, they found more than eighty spear and sword wounds in it (1). This is the meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the men who honoured their pledge to Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 23). Whenever you heard the word *rijal* (men) mentioned in the Quran, you know that the case that is being referred to is one of gravity, adherence to the truth and pride with firm, unwavering resolve and hearts in which faith has firmly taken root. These men fulfilled the promise they made before Allah *the Almighty* that they would put their lives on the line in order to bring about the victory of Islam, even if that meant dying as martyrs. In the saying of Allah: '…some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting...' (*al-Ahzab:* 23), the phrase *qada nahbah* means that they fulfilled their promise and died. The root meaning of the word (*nahb*) is 'pledge', so the phrase means 'fulfilling what he pledged to do', or 'fulfilling his vow to Allah *the Almighty* to fight.' Then the word (*nahb*) is also used to mean 'death'.

= *reckoning for him in the future.' 'Isa ibn Talha said that the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him passed by Talha and said, 'This is one of those who have redeemed his pledge.' See Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi, Asbab An-Nuzul, pp. 202-203.*

(1) *Anas ibn Malik said, 'My paternal uncle, Anas ibn An-Nadr, was absent from the battle of Badr and that matter weighed down heavily upon him so he said, 'I was absent from the first battle in which Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him took part but, by Allah the Almighty if Allah the Almighty gave me the opportunity to take part in a battle, He would see what I would then do!' Then, when the day of the battle of Uhud came and the Muslims were exposed to defeat, he said, 'O Allah the Almighty free me from blame for what those idolaters have brought and excuse for what these Muslims have done.' Then, with sword in his hand, he walked forward until he met Sa'd ibn Mu'adh who said to him, 'By the One Who holds my soul in His hand, I have smelled the scent of Paradise below Uhud.' Then Anas ibn An-Nadr fought the enemy until he was martyred.' Anas ibn Malik continued, 'When we found his body among the dead, we discovered that he had received more than eighty wounds, some from sword strikes, some from spear thrusts and some from arrow piercings, and that he had been mutilated by the enemy. In fact, we did not even know whose body it was until his sister recognised him by his fingers. Then the verse was revealed. See Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p 4/329.*

But what is the relation between making a pledge and death? Scholars replied that when you make that pledge, you make your life the price of fulfilling that pledge. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…some of them have fulfilled it by death…' (*al-Ahzab:* 23) is there to let you know that there must be a solemn pledge from you to die. In other words, you must make an oath to Allah *the Almighty* that you will die, on condition that this must be done in support of Truth and the Way of Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if He *the Almighty* were saying that the believer is the one who pledges his life and soul to Allah *the Almighty* and as if death were required of him to make his actions truly be in the Way of Allah *the Almighty*.

When the believer looks into the matter of death, he sees that death is one of the established facts in the universe; people, from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the present day, are subject to it. That is why his life is of so little importance so long as he is acting in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* and so he willingly and gladly pledges it to Him *the Almighty*. And why not! For by doing that, you have swapped a life that will cease to be replaced with a life of eternal luxury and blessing. We find narrated in a Hadith, 'I have not seen any form of certainty more similar to doubt than the certainty of people that they will die.' Despite our awareness that death comes to everyone, there is still some part of each of us that imagines that we will never die. It is every believer's right to pledge his life and sacrifice it in the way of Allah *the Almighty*. This is because Allah *the Almighty* Himself says: 'And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord; Rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His grace and they rejoice for the sake of those who, (being left) behind them, have not yet joined them, that they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. They rejoice on account of favour from Allah and (His) grace, and that Allah will not waste the reward of the believers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 169-171) This life in the Hereafter is the real, not metaphorical since *rizq* (provision) or (sustenance) is a characteristic of alive creatures who eat, drink, sleep and so on and so forth: you must not think that only a metaphorical form of life is being described here. You might well hear some people scoff and say to you, 'Does that mean that if I were to open up the graves of those who died as martyrs, I would find them be alive?' We reply to those who love to dispute over this matter; Allah *the Almighty* says: '… they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord.' (*Al-'Imran:* 169) meaning that they are not alive with you, so do not use your own laws to judge this life that is described here. Do not transpose the laws of this world to the Hereafter. Believers should view death in the way described by one of the mystics; they should see it as an arrow that has already been fired at you, and that your life takes place in the length of time that it takes for that arrow to reach you. In the course of the Quran's discussion of this matter, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Blessed is He in Whose hand is the kingdom, and He has power over all things, Who created death and life…' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2). Allah *the Almighty* mentions death before life so that it is not with the illusion of living that we go into life but with its opposite so that we are protected from its deception. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and some are still waiting…' (*al-Ahzab:* 23), it means that they await the fulfilment of their pledge to Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if He *the Almighty* were saying, 'Good will remain in you, O *Ummah* (followers of the Prophet) of Prophet Muhammad, until the Day of Resurrection.' Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…They have not changed in the least.' (*al-Ahzab:* 23) The meaning of *tabdil* (change) refers to those things that they pledged to Allah *the Almighty* with but then failed to do. But whenever a war came after that point, none of them ever again failed: none of them entered a war to show off, avoiding the heat of battle by fighting from a distance, or retreated because of fear of death. No, rather, they remained in the front ranks where the fighting was at its fiercest until they achieved martyrdom. The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

لِّيَجْزِيَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ بِصِدْقِهِمْ وَيُعَذِّبَ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ
إِن شَآءَ أَوْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٢٤﴾

[Such trials are ordained] so that God may reward the truthful for their honesty and punish the hypocrites, if He so wills, or He may relent towards them, for God is forgiving and merciful [24] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 24)

Reflect here upon the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty* to His creation, that mercy which no one is denied, not even the hypocrite, for Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and punish the hypocrites, if He so wills, or He may relent towards them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 24). We previously discussed the two Attributes of Forgiveness and Mercy; we previously mentioned that the two words *ghafur*

(Much Forgiving) and *rahim* (Dispenser of Mercy) were intensive forms. In other words, their morphological roots are indicative of much forgiving and much mercy. These two words are often linked together in the Quran, so Allah *the Almighty* forgives people first by covering up their faults and defects, then He follows that up with His Mercy by extending His Hand towards them in charity and kindness. We gave a clear example of that of the thief whom you find in your home, and then towards whom your heart softens, to the extent that you might offer him the sort of support that will help him not have to commit such a crime again. Then we mentioned that forgiveness usually precedes mercy, although mercy does on certain rare occasions precede forgiveness. We also mentioned that one of the preconditions of forgiveness is that it comes from a higher being to a lesser one: when a slave covers up something ugly in his master, it cannot be said of him that he forgave him. The same is true with respect to mercy – if a lesser being does an act of kindness towards a higher being, this is not called mercy since he might have done that to repay an act of kindness done to him or in anticipation of getting something back at a later date.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

وَرَدَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِغَيْظِهِمْ لَمْ يَنَالُوا۟ خَيْرًا ۚ وَكَفَى ٱللَّهُ
ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ٱلْقِتَالَ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ قَوِيًّا عَزِيزًا ﴿٢٥﴾

God sent back the disbelievers along with their rage
– they gained no benefit — and spared the believers
from fighting. He is strong and mighty [25]
(The Quran, *al-Ahẓab:* 25)

The word *Ghayzh* (fury) is when one burns with hatred for an opponent. The meaning of the verse is that Allah *the Almighty* repulsed the unbelievers whose hearts were filled with fury at the fact that they were forced to leave without taking anything from the Muslims; He *the Almighty* says: '…they gained no benefit…' (*al-Ahzab:* 25). This does not refer to good in its general sense, but to what they perceived as good. So, the verse means that they did not achieve victory over Muslims, which would have been good for them but bad for Islam. Allah *the Almighty* inflicted such a reverse on the unbelievers that they were unable to ever come back from it, for after that defeat, they never again thought of attacking the Muslims. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said after they withdrew in defeat, ‘They will never attack us again. We will, however, attack them.’(1) And, indeed, the conquest of Mecca came soon after. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…and Allah spared the believers from fighting…' (*al-Ahzab:* 25), it means that it was not your strength or fighting prowess that defeated the unbelievers, but Allah *the Almighty* Himself is the One Who took care of that, repulsing them and sparing you the need of fighting them. It is true that there were a few skirmishes but nothing came close to turning the fighting into a full-blown war. And, indeed, it would not have been in the best interests of the believers if a battle had taken place since there were only three thousand Muslims, while there were ten thousands of the idolaters. So, it was Allah’s Mercy to the believers that caused their victory. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* ends the verse with His saying, ‘…He is strong and mighty.' (*al-Ahzab:* 25) meaning that He is All Powerful, All Strong in the sense that He gave you victory without you even engaging in fighting. In addition, He is Almighty in the sense that He *Glorified is He* was the Conqueror, not the conquered. This is what happened to Quraysh and its allies.

As for Banu Quraydha, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَأَنزَلَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَٰهَرُوهُم مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مِن صَيَاصِيهِمْ وَقَذَفَ
فِى قُلُوبِهِمُ ٱلرُّعْبَ فَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ وَتَأْسِرُونَ فَرِيقًا ﴿٢٦﴾

He brought those People of the Book who supported them
down from their strongholds and put panic into their hearts.
Some of them you [believers] killed and some you took
captive[26] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 26)

The word *Zhaharuhum* (supported them) refers to those who helped them. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...from their strongholds…' (*al-Ahzab:* 26), it means from their citadels and fortresses. As for His saying: '…and put panic into their hearts…' (*al-Ahzab:* 26), it refers to fear, which is one of the hosts of Allah *the Almighty*. It was this terror that He *the Almighty* cast into the hearts of the unbelievers and which caused them to split up and made the sheer size of their army meaningless, since of what value are legions of soldiers who are all terrified out of their wits as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they think every cry to be against them…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 4)! Did the Companions not tell us that when they were cleaning their teeth with their *siwak* (sticks), the unbelievers thought that they were sharpening their teeth to eat them? This is the level of terror by which Allah *the Almighty* gave victory to His believing slaves. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Some of them you [believers] killed…' (*al-Ahzab:* 26), it refers to those combatants who bore weapons against you. As for His saying: '…and some you took captive.' (*al-Ahzab:* 26), it refers to the women, children and those who were not armed.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4109 & 4110; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 4/262, from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Sulayman ibn Sard. Al-'Asqalani said in Fath Al-Bari (7/405), ‘This contains one of the signs of prophethood for he went on ‘umra (voluntary pilgrimage) the following year and then, when Quraysh blocked him from coming to the House, he made a truce with them which remained in effect until they broke it. And that was the cause that led to the Muslim’s conquering Mecca. So everything happened as he said it would.’*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَوۡرَثَكُمۡ أَرۡضَهُمۡ وَدِيَٰرَهُمۡ وَأَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ وَأَرۡضٗا لَّمۡ تَطَـُٔوهَاۚ
وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٗا ﴿٢٧﴾

He passed on to you their land, their houses, their possessions, and a land where you had not set foot: God has power over everything [27] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 27)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He passed on to you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 27), it means that He *the Almighty* gave you the land, houses and possessions of your enemies after they had been wiped out and defeated. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and a land where you had not set foot…' (*al-Ahzab:* 27), it means new places you, O Muslims, have never been to before. This part of the verse refers mainly to the land of Khaybar. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were saying to them, 'If you wait a while, then you will take a lot from them.' He *the Almighty* then says: '… Allah has power over everything.' (*al-Ahzab:* 27) Thus ends the Quranic description of the tale of the clans.(1) But it would be useful for us to now consider the philosophical implications of the various things that happened in the story, and look at the numerous acts of heroism that took place during it, and the roles that those heroes played.

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(1) *Ibn Abu Shayba, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim all narrated that Qatada said about the saying of Allah the Almighty: 'He brought those people of the Book who=*

The story(1) begins when two of the leaders of Banu Qurayzha, i.e. Huyayy ibn Akhtab and Sallam ibn Abu Al-Huqayq went to see Quraysh in Mecca and said to them, ‘We have come to help you bring an end to the Call of Muhammad. If you attack from below and we attack from above, then we can surround him and his followers, thus destroy them completely.’ Quraysh had a certain amount of discernment, so they said to Huyayy ibn Akhtab, ‘You are people who have a Book and have more knowledge in matters of religion than we do, so tell us whose religion is better: ours or Muhammad’s?’ They replied, ‘You are the ones who are upon the truth.’(2)

= *supported them…’ (al-Ahzab: 26) that it refers to Banu Qurayzha who offered their aid to Abu Sufyan, kept a line of communication open to him and broke the pact they had made with Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him. Then, while he Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him was with Zaynab bint Jahsh, washing his head after she had already washed his side, Gabriel came to him and said, ‘Allah the Almighty pardons you! It is forty days since the angels last put down their weapons. Go forth to the Banu Qurayzha. I have cut loose the pegs of their tents, flung open their doors and left them confused and shaken up.’*

So Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him set out, laid siege to them and called out to them, addressing them as the brothers of monkeys. So they replied to him, saying, ‘Abu Al-Qasim, you never used to use bad language!’ Then they came down under the agreement that their fate would be in the hands of Sa‘d ibn Mu‘adh. He had been an ally of theirs, so they hoped he would treat them with mercy and compassion. However, Abu Lubaba gestured to them what their fate would be, so Allah the Almighty revealed the verse: ‘O you who believe! be not unfaithful to Allah and the Messenger…’ (al-Anfal: 27). Then Sa'd ruled that their combatants be killed, their children be enslaved and their lands and property be distributed among the Emigrants not the Helpers. Thereupon (some of) the Helpers said, ‘The Emigrants have been given preference over us by being given that property,’ so Sa'd said, ‘You are people who already have property, whereas the Emigrants have not had any property of their own.’ It is said that Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him then said the Takbir and said, ‘You have judged them with the Judgment of Allah the Almighty!’ See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur fi At- Tafsir bi Al-Ma’thur, 6/591.

(1) *The preparation and beginning for the battle of the clans.*

(2) *Allah the Almighty says: Have you not seen those to whom a portion of the Book has been given? They believe in idols and false deities and say of those who disbelieve: These are better guided in the path than those who believe.' (an-Nisa’: 51) It is* =

Quraysh heard these words pandering to their desires and wishful thoughts, and as the saying goes, ‘Wishful thinking is the bane of good sense.’ That is why they, i.e. the people of Quraysh did not engage with them, i.e. the Jews in any discussion about the matter but simply went along with them; they even neglected to bring up the way the people of the Book had used to deal with them before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appeared on the scene, or the fact that they had used to pray for victory over them, i.e. Quraysh through the awaited Messenger, saying, ‘The time is at hand of a new Prophet whom we will follow, and with whose support, we will kill you as ʿAd and the people of ’Iram were killed.’(1)

Quraysh missed an opportunity to call Huyayy ibn Akhtab to account and ask him why their opinion about Muhammad had changed. Then, after that, the Quran showed up both these groups of people: ‘Have you not seen those to whom a portion of the Book has been given? They believe in idols and false deities and say of those who disbelieve: These are better guided in the path than those who believe.' (*an-Nisa’:* 51) This was the first example of brainlessness and unsound reasoning in the battle. Quraysh, finding someone

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= *narrated that 'Ikrima said, ‘Huyayy ibn Akhtab and Ka'b ibn Al-Ashraf came to the people of Mecca who said to them, ‘You are people of the Book and people of knowledge, so tell us about us about Muhammad.’ ‘What about you and Muhammad?’ they asked. Quraysh replied, ‘We maintain our ties of kinship, sacrifice camels, give water to drink in exchange for (laban), let our prisoners go and give water to the pilgrims, while Muhammad is a solitary palm-tree who has cut off his ties of kinship to us and who has been followed by those thieving pilgrims from Ghifar. So who is better than the other: we or him?’ They replied, ‘You are better and more surely guided.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 1/513.*

(1) *Mohamed ibn ’Ishaq narrated from 'Asim ibn 'Amr from Qatada Al-’Ansari that one of his teachers said, ‘By Allah the Almighty this story – meaning the verse: 'And when there came to them a Book from Allah verifying that which they have, and aforetime they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieve, but when there came to them (Prophet) that which they did not recognise, they disbelieved in him...' (al-Baqara: 89) – was revealed about us and about them – meaning about the Helpers and the Jews who were their neighbours. The Helpers said, ‘In the time of ignorance before Islam, we, the idolaters, subjugated them, the People of the Book, and held the upper hand over them, so they would say to us, ‘A Prophet will now be sent whom we will follow: his time is at hand, and when he arrives, we will kill you as 'Ad and the people of ’Iram were killed.’ Then when Allah the Almighty sent a Prophet from Quraysh, we followed them and they rejected him.’ See Ibn Kathir , Tafsir, (1/124).*

willing to help them against Prophet Muhammad and his religion, seized the opportunity and gathered together its soldiers as well those from its allies from Banu Fudhara, Banu Murra, Ghatafan, Banu Asad, the people of Al-Ashja‘ and others. All of these tribes banded together to try to finish off the new religion. The first act of heroism that took place in this battle was not by an Arab, but by someone from Persia, the nation of fire-worshippers – May Allah *the Almighty* protect us from ever doing that. It was as if Allah *the Almighty* were committed to bring about the triumph of Truth even if that had to be through something false. The hero in question was the esteemed Companion, Salman Al-Farisi,(1) who had spent his whole life wandering the earth searching for the Truth until the winds of fate brought him to Medina; and it was there that he encountered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and believed in him. By suggesting the construction of the trench to him *peace and blessings be upon him* Salman became the first hero of the battle. He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, when the fighting became intense, we – meaning the Persians – built trenches,’ meaning that they placed ditches between themselves and the enemy. Both the Emigrants and the Helpers met this idea with approval and so both of them tried to claim Salman as one of their own. But when their dispute reached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he denied both of them and said, ‘Salman is one of us, the people of the House (*Ahlu Al-Bayt*).’(2) This was the greatest honour that could possibly have been given to Salman. This idea of Salman's is a proof that Allah *the Almighty* even conscripts falsehood to serve in the army of Truth – we had never even seen a trench before nor met the Persian people who came up with the idea, and yet, by means of this great Companion, Allah *the Almighty* conveyed it to us and made it serve in our defence as one of His Hosts. He did this so that we might know, as He *the Almighty* says, '…and know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). We fully illustrated this point when we commented on the story of Pharaoh in which he slaughtered the children of the Israelites after hearing the prophecy that one of them would bring about his downfall. Then, one day, an infant came to him in a way, not normally expected, carried to him in a box floating upon the water. Everyone well-knows that the reason the infant's family did that to him was to get him as far out of the reach of Pharaoh as possible but, despite that, Allah *the Almighty* intervened between Pharaoh and the desires of his heart, thus caused him to be the one who took the child into his home and raise him as a son.

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(1) *Salman Al-Farisi was one of the foremost Companions: he originally came from a family of Magians in Isfahan. He travelled to Sham and Nisabin and read the books of the Persians, Byzantines and Jews. Then he heard about Islam, sought out Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and heard what he had to say. He did not become Muslim, however, until after he had been freed from the bondage of slavery. He used to weave together wool and eat barley bread bought with money he had earned. He died in 36 A.H. See Az-Zirkili, Al-‘Alam, 3/112.*

(2) *'Amr ibn 'Awf Al-Muzni said, ‘In the year of the battle of the clans, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him dug a trench, beginning at the place where the palm trees were at their thickest at the edge of (the lands of) the Banu Haritha, and assigned work crews of ten people to every forty arm’s length of the trench. While this was being done, the Emigrants and the Helpers quarreled over Salman Al-Farisi who was a strong man, with the Helpers saying that he was one of them and the Emigrants saying the same. So, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Salman is one of us, the people of the House (Ahlu Al-Bayt).’ See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 3/418; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 3/598. Adh-Dhahabi, however, considered this Hadith to have a weak chain of narrations because of the presence of Kathir ibn 'Abdullah as one of the narrators.*

A poet expressed this beautifully when he wrote:

If you find no concern in your children
Then know that hopes are often dashed and left unrealised:
The Moses who was raised by Gabriel became an unbeliever,
While the Moses who was raised by Pharaoh became a Messenger!

The second hero of this battle was a man called Nu'aym ibn Mas'ud Al-'Ashja'i.(1) He came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah, my heart has become favourably disposed to Islam, but there is not one of my people who knows that.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'What use are you alone? What you can do, however, (is to go among them) and use trickery on our behalf,'(1) meaning that 'use whatever means available to you to rid us of them – such as making them get lost on the way or go far away or instilling fear in them by telling them that our army is huge.' This is a man who was only the previous day an unbeliever, and yet look what effect faith had on his heart even though it had been there for but a short while. Nu'aym looked around and saw that Quraysh and its followers were coming from below and Banu Quraydha and its followers were coming from above. He wanted to create discord between the two parties, so he went to Abu Sufyan and said, 'Abu Sufyan, I am your friend and you know I have no connection to the religion of Muhammad. However, I have heard a rumour that Banu Qurayzha have made peace with Muhammad, saying that Quraysh and her allies do not live in Medina so, if they achieve victory, the victory will be theirs, but if they lose, then they will run home leaving Banu Qurayzha at the mercy of Muhammad. That is why they have decided not to fight by your side unless you leave ten of your top men with them as hostages.' After Abu Sufyan had heard these words, he went to his people and said to them, 'Stay here, this is not part of the homeland of Banu Qurayzha. They are planning to leave you to fight Muhammad alone, so if you want them to hold to their agreement to fight Muhammad, then you must ask them to give you some hostages to act as guarantors that they will support you. Then, after that, Abu Sufyan went to Banu Qurayzha to speak to them about this matter. He said to them, 'Our camels and horses have perished and we are not in a place where we are resident, so let us go and fight Muhammad now.' And this after they had already spent more than twenty days in consultation and making promises to one another. Banu Qurayzha, however, replied, 'Today is the Sabbath. We are not prepared to pervert our religion in order to fight Muhammad, and in any case, we are not going to participate in the fighting with you anyway unless you leave ten of your top men with us as hostages.' As soon as Abu Sufyan found out what Nu'aym ibn Mas'ud Al-'Ashja'i said to be true, he gathered together his people and said to them, ‘This land is not one in which we are resident and our camels and horses have perished, so let us save ourselves.’ When Nuʿaym ibn Masʿud came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him what happened, he *peace and blessings be upon him* felt a feeling of calm come over him and said, ‘Is there any man among you who will go to them and then come back and tell us what has become of them? He will be my close companion in Paradise.’ What he meant was that he wanted someone to insinuate himself among the ranks of the enemy and find out what they were up to. But despite the good news that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave of the one who might perform this task, not one of those present stepped forward. This proved that the level of fear felt by the Muslims at that time was huge and that the danger they confronted was acute – the people were suffering from exhaustion, hunger and fear and so felt themselves unable to carry out this task that was asked of them. So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entrusted the task to a man named Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman. Hudhayfa said, ‘Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* however, said to me, “Do not do anything until you come back to me.” So I went and spent a night mingling with the army, sitting among the people. Then, when Abu Sufyan brought back his report from the Banu Quraydha, wanting to go away with those who were with him, he said to the people, out of fear that there might be a stranger among them, ‘You should all look at the person you are sitting next to in order to make sure that you know them.’ It was at this point that the ingenuity and quick thinking of Hudhayfa came to the fore: he said, ‘I quickly turned to the man on my right and said, “Who are you?” He replied, ʿMu‘awiyya ibn Abu Sufyan.’ Then I turned to the man on my left and said, ‘Who are you?’ and he replied, ‘ʿAmr ibn Al-ʿAs.(1)’ I then heard Abu Sufyan say to the people, ‘Our camels and horses have perished and this land is not one in which we are resident, so let us go and I will be the first of you to do so.’ And in his rush to leave, he mounted his camel without untethering it first.’ Hudhayfa said, ‘I decided to kill him so I got out my bow, strung it and placed an arrow in its notch. At that point, however, I remembered the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* “Do not do anything until you come back to me’ so I stopped myself from killing him. Then when I came back to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* I found him praying. When he felt my presence, and knowing it to be a very cold day, he made a gap between his legs, bade me come and sit at his feet and threw the end of his wrapper over me to warm me up. Then, after he finished his prayer, he said to me, ‘What is your news?’ so I related my story to him.(1)

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(1) *Nu'aym ibn Mas'ud 'Amir Al-'Ashja'i, Abu Salama, was a famous Companion who embraced Islam during the battle of the Trench. It was he who instigated the disagreement between the tribes of Qurayzha and Ghatafan, which led to Ghatafan leaving Medina. Nu'aym was killed at the battle of the Camel during the beginning of the Caliphate of 'Ali before 'Ali had come to Basra. It is also said that he died during the Caliphate of 'Uthman, and Allah the Almighty knows best. See Ibn Hajar, Al-'Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba, no. 8780.*

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(1) *In his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, Ibn Hisham says: 'Nu'aym ibn Mas'ud came to Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'Messenger of Allah, I have become Muslim, and my people have no knowledge of that fact, so tell me what I should do.' Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'If you stay here with us you are but a single man, so, if you can, (go back to them) and use trickery to relieve us of them. War is deception.'*

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(1) *In his Dala’il An-Nubuwwa (3/451), Al-Bayhaqi mentioned in a Hadith from Hudhayfa that, ‘Abu Sufyan felt that there was a stranger in their midst, so he said, “Let everyone take hold of the hand of the man sitting next to him,” so I tapped the man to my right and took hold of his hand, and tapped the man to my left and took hold of his hand.’ See Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, 3/31. In his Tafsir (3/471), Ibn Kathir mentioned another narration and attributed to Ibn ’Ishaq that Abu Sufyan said, ‘O people of Quraysh, let every man among you look to who is sitting next to him.’ Hudhayfa said, ‘So I took hold of the hand of the man beside me and said, “Who are you?” He replied, “I am so-and-so,”’ mentioning neither Muʿawiyya nor ʿAmr, and Allah the Almighty knows best.*

After conscripting both Nuʿaym ibn Masʿud Al-’Ashja‘i and Hudhayfa to serve the Truth, Allah *the Almighty* then brought forth other armies that they were unable to see. That happened during an exceedingly cold and blustery night. A gale, which uprooted their tents, came and overturned their cooking pots and drove them back so that whoever remained fled as fast as they could. This is what is meant by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…He is strong and mighty.' (*al-Ahzab:* 25) and ‘…none knows the hosts of your Lord but He Himself…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). Then, after Allah *the Almighty* repulsed the rage-filled unbelievers of Mecca and spared the believers the need of fighting them, He wanted to turn their attention to another front, that of the Banu Quraydha Jews. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned from fighting the clans, Jibril (Gabriel) met with him and said, ‘Have you laid down your arms, Muhammad, when the angels have not yet laid down their own weapons of war? Go and seek victory for yourself over the Banu Quraydha.’ So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his people, ‘If you are truly one who hears and obeys, then do not pray the *ʿAsr* prayer unless it is among Banu Quraydha.’(2)

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 3/451; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 3/471.*

(2) *Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani narrated it with this wording in his commentary on Al-Bukhari [Fath Al-Bari 7/408] from something said by Ibn ’Ishaq. The original version of the Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4119) from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said on the day of [the battle] of the clans, ‘Let none of you pray 'Asr until he is in (the houses of) the Banu Qurayzha.’*

The Companions did not agree among themselves about what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* meant: some of them took his words literally and betook themselves to the houses of the Banu Qurayzha as quickly as possible, making an intention to pray the *ʿAsr* prayer there; while others, fearing that they might miss the time of *ʿAsr*, prayed it immediately and then left. Then, when the two groups gathered together with him *peace and blessings be upon him* he declared both opinions to be correct. This occurrence is one of the reference points in Islamic thought for the principle of *ijtihad* (personal reasoning). ‘*Asr* is an event, and events have a fixed time and a fixed place. Some of the Companions looked at the time element and saw that the sun was on the point of setting so they prayed; and others looked at the place element and so made sure that they did not pray until they were in the houses of Banu Qurayzha. And that is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* approved both groups.(1) Every Muslim should be wary of delaying a prayer beyond its time. The time of ‘*Asr*, for example, extends from the time in which an object’s shadow is twice as long as the object itself until sunset, but that does not mean that you delay its performance until the end of its time. It is true that if you pray at the end of its time, you incur no sin, but what guarantee do you have that you will still be living till the end of its time? Therefore, even though you incur no sin for praying a prayer at the end of its time, if you were to die then without praying that prayer you would be spending the last moments of your life in sin. And that is the reason why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘The best form of action is praying the prayer in its time.’(2) So the fact that a prayer’s time is prolonged does not give you an excuse to delay it. Another case of heroism in the battle of the clans was that of ʿAli ibn Abu Taleb. His heroism demonstrated itself when some of the unbelievers found a section of the trench narrow enough for their horses to leap over, thus allowing them to venture against the Muslims. After they had leapt to the other side, their horses patrolled the marshy area between the trench and Sal ‘Mountain. Then one of the unbelievers stepped forward – that unbeliever was ʿAmr ibn Wudd Al-‘Amiri(1) who was at that time considered to be the bravest and strongest warrior among all the Arabs and whose battle prowess was considered to be equivalent to that of one thousand horsemen. ʿAmr ibn Wudd Al-ʿAmiri stood in front of the Muslim camp brandished his sword and called out, ‘Who will meet me in battle?’ So ʿAli said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘May I fight him, Messenger of Allah?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘No, ʿAli, stay seated for it is ʿAmr.’ Then ‘Amr repeated his challenge and said, ‘Where is this Paradise that you promise to those who are killed in this way? Give me an answer!’ ʿAli again said, ‘May I fight him, Messenger of Allah?’ but he again replied, ‘No, ʿAli, stay seated for it is ʿAmr.’ Then, on the third time, ‘Amr said,

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(1) This is an agreed upon Hadith. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no .4119; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1770 in Kitab Al-Jihad in the chapter on ‘Going out to battle’ from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar, in which he states that the time for the ʿAsr prayer arrived while some of the Companions were on the way (to the Banu Qurayzha), so some of them said, ‘We will not pray until we reach them,’ and others said, ‘Rather, we will pray now. That is not what he wanted of us.’ Then, when this was mentioned to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him he did not rebuke either party.

(2) Ibn Masʿud said, ‘I asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what the best form of action was. He replied, ‘(Praying) the prayer in its time.’ ‘Then what?’ I asked. He replied, “Then jihad in the way of Allah *the Almighty*.’ This Hadith is agreed upon. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. (2782); Muslim, Sahih, no (85) in Kitab Al-’Iman

I have become hoarse from calling out.
Is there not one man amongst your group who will fight me?
I stand here when brave men show themselves cowardly
As a true peerless warrior
In young men, bravery
And generosity is the best qualities.

Upon hearing this, ʿAli leapt to his feet and said, ‘Let him be mine, Messenger of Allah.’ So he *peace and blessings be upon him* gave him permission to fight. Then ʿAli motioned to ʿAmr and said,

Do not be hasty. One comes
To answer your call who is no weakling.

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(1) He is ʿAmr ibn ʿAbd Wudd, a Qurayshi from the Banu Lu’ay. He was a horseman of Quraysh in the time of Ignorance before Islam, but he was still around after the advent of Islam without becoming Muslim. He lived until the battle of the Trench, and despite having reached the age of eighty, he took part in the fighting. ʿAli ibn Abu Taleb killed him in the year 5 AH. See Az-Zirikli, Al-‘Alam, 5/81.

A man of firm resolve and keen insight
Truth is the saviour of everyone successful:
Indeed I hope to be the cause
Of women mourning over your dead body
Killed by the blow of a spear
Which will be remembered as long as there's war' (1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had at that time a loose-fitting piece of chain mail armour known as 'Dhat Al-Fudul, so he gave, it to ʿAli to wear. He also gave him his sword, Dhu Al-Fiqar, and his turban, As-Sahhab, which was wound around seven times. Then ʿAli went out to meet 'Amr in single combat. When they met, 'Amr struck him on the shield and split it. But ʿAli quickly aimed a blow with his sword at his shoulder and ʿAmr fell to the ground dead. As soon as he fell, ʿAli shouted out, 'Allah *the Almighty* is the Greatest.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard those words and said, 'The enemy of Allah *the Almighty* has been killed.' Then the dust of war rose and obscured the battle so that nothing could be seen. So ʿUmar went out to find out what had happened, and he found ʿAli wiping his sword clean on the armour of ʿAmr ibn Wudd and so called out, 'Allah *the Almighty* is the greatest.' So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'By Allah, the enemy has been killed!' This event highlighted some of ʿAli's good qualities of character. When he returned from killing ʿAmr, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him, 'Did you strip him of his armour? It is the best armour that any Arab possesses.' ʿAli replied, 'By Allah *the Almighty* because his private parts were to be exposed, I felt too ashamed to do that.'(2)

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(1) *These verses are mentioned in a context of this sort by Abu Bakr Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (3/438 & 439).*

(2) *In his Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (3/439), Al-Bayhaqi said that the one who asked ʿAli that was ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab. He related that ʿUmar said to him, 'Have you stripped him of his armour? There is no armour better than it among the Arabs.' ʿAli replied, 'When I struck him down, he turned his private parts towards me, so I felt too embarrassed, my cousin, to strip it from him.' Allah the Almighty knows best.*

Then, pointing at ʿAmr(1), he recited the following:

In his stupidity he fought for bits of stone
While I rightly fought for the Lord of Muhammad
I turned away when I left his body prostrate upon to the ground
Lying like a stump between the rocks and the sand
I refrained from taking his garments even though
Were I the one fallen, he would have stripped me of mine.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about this particular event: ‘Even if you were not to do anything else for Islam, (what you have done today) would have been enough for you.’ This is the reason those with gnosis of Allah *the Almighty* say that, by killing ʿAmr ibn Wudd, ʿAli became the subject of envy and was thus afflicted by the evil eye which led to him eventually being killed by Ibn Muljim. Because of this, they said that the most beloved blow in Islam was that delivered by ʿAli to ʿAmr ibn Wudd, and the most calamitous blow in Islam was that delivered by Ibn Muljim to ʿAli. Another case of heroism in the battle was that of Saʿd ibn Muʿadh(2) about which he said, ‘On the day of the battle of the clans, Hibban ibn Qays ibn Al-ʿAriqa struck me a blow and said, “Take that from me, the son of Al-ʿAriqa(3)!” So I replied, “Allah *the Almighty* make your face sweat in Hell!” When he hit me in the vein – and this vein is the one into which needles are injected and from which blood is let when people undergo cupping – I said to myself, “O Allah, if this is the final battle in which I take part between Quraysh, and us then grant me martyrdom. But if You know that they are going to come back another time, then prolong my life so I can take vengeance on those who drove out and insulted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and do not let me die until I have quenched my thirst for revenge on Banu Qurayzha.”’(1)

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(1) *In his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (3/225), Ibn Hisham mentioned these verses and ascribed them to Ibn ’Ishaq. Then he said, ‘Most of those with knowledge of poetry doubt whether it was really 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb who said these verses.*

(2) *He is Sa'd ibn Mu'adh ibn An-Nu'man Al-Awsi Al-Ansari, one of the heroes of the Companions from Medina. He was the leader of the tribe of Aws and took part in the battles of Badr and Uhud. He was struck by an arrow on the day of the battle of the Trench and died as a result of that wound in the year 5 AH when he was 37 years old. See Az-Zirikli, Al-‘Alam, 3/88.*

(3) *Al-'Ariqa was Qilaba bint Sa‘d ibn Sahm. Her patronymic (kunya) was Umm Fatima, but she was known as Al-'Ariqa because of the beautiful way she smelled. She was the grandmother of Khadija, the mother of her mother Hala. See As-Suhayli, Ar-Rawd Al-’Unuf.*

And it came to pass as he asked. After the siege of the clans, Banu Qurayzha had held out for approximately twenty-five days without any fighting, when finally negotiations brought the whole affair to an end; Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed Saʿd ibn Muʿadh to be the arbiter in this affair. So, Saʿd passed judgment that the combatants of the Banu Quraydha be killed, their women, and children be taken into captivity and their wealth be confiscated. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard his judgement, he said, ‘You have passed judgment over them according to the judgement of the Lord of the seven heavens.’(2) Then the wound that Saʿd had received flared up again until it became so bad that he died of it. So they carried him to the tent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had set up in the mosque, whereupon the angels came down and said to him *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Who is this who has died? The throne of the Most Merciful shook on his behalf!’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘It is Saʿd ibn Muʿadh.’(3)

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(1) *In his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (3/226), Ibn Hisham and in his Dala’il An-Nubuwwa (3/441), Al-Bayhaqi mentioned it in with the addition, ‘O Allah the Almighty if you have appointed war between us and them, then grant me martyrdom by means of it, but do not let me die until You have given me satisfaction with respect to Banu Qurayzha.*

(2) *From Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri that people came down [from their fortresses] to hear the judgment of Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, so he was sent for and came on the back of a donkey. Then, when he had neared the mosque, Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Stand up for the best of you – or he said, ‘for your master.’ Then he said, ‘Sa'd, these people have come down [to hear and submit] to your judgment.’ Sa‘d replied, ‘Then I give judgment that their combatants be killed and their children be enslaved.’ Whereupon Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘You have passed judgment over them according to the judgment of Allah the Almighty – or he said, ‘the judgment of the King.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3804.*

(3) *In his Mustadrak [3/207], Al-Hakim mentioned that ‘in a Hadith from 'Abdullah ibn Ka'b ibn Malik that Sa'd lived for about a month after being wounded by an arrow until, on the command of Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him he passed judgment over Banu Qurayzha. Then, that night, after returning to the city of=*

Allah *the Almighty* said: '… Some of them you [believers] killed and some you took captive.' (*al-Ahzab:* 26) As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and a land where you had not set foot…' (*al-Ahzab:* 27) it means that Allah *the Almighty* gives the believers the good news that those lands would be conquered by them without them even having to fight. And, indeed, such was the case in most of the lands the Muslims came to: it was the noble conduct of the Muslims of that era that opened up most of those countries to them, not their weight of arms. By this, we are able to refute those who claim that Islam was spread by the sword. If Islam was truly spread by the sword, then whose sword was it that caused the very first Muslims to enter into Islam, since they were the weakest of people and were not even able to defend themselves?! No, it was nothing but the noble conduct they witnessed that caused them to take on the faith. We mentioned previously that 'Umar, a man known for his strength and severity, said when he heard the saying of Allah: 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs.' (*al-Qamar:* 45) 'What hosts are those, when we as Muslims are unable to even defend ourselves?' showing how weak he saw the Muslims and how strong the unbelievers.(1) And if Islam had indeed spread by the sword, then all of the inhabitants of the lands conquered by Islam would have become Muslim and there would have been no need for the *(jizya)* tax in Islamic jurisprudence. But the fact that there is a *jizya* (tax) levied on those who do not believe proves the lie of that assertion and proves that there is no compulsion in religion in Islam. The reality was that the Islamic conquests guaranteed freedom of belief. Allah *the Almighty* says:

= *Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him his wound erupted and he died. [At that moment], Gabriel came to him Allah's peace and blessings be upon him and said to him, 'Who is this for whom the gates of Paradise have been thrown open, and on whose behalf the throne of the Most Merciful has shaken?' Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him went out to where Sa'd was and found that he had died.' Ibn Hajar said in (Al-Fath) [7/124], 'The shaking of the throne signifies its joy and happiness at the arrival of his soul.'*

(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir ascribed to Abu Hatim [4/266] that 'Ikrima said, 'When the verse: "Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs." (al-Qamar: 45) was revealed, 'Umar said, "Which hosts will be routed? Which hosts will be defeated?" 'Umar said, "On the day of the battle of Badr, when I saw Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him leap into his armour and say, 'The hosts will be routed!' I finally understood the significance of the verse.'*

'…so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve…' (*al-Kahf:* 29) and pay the *jizya* (tax) to the Muslim treasury in exchange for certain services done for him by the state. Therefore, *jizya*, which some of you use as a reason to curse Islam is, in fact, a proof that Islam acknowledges your religion. The only reason the sword was used was to protect the ability to call people to Islam, if I want to present Islam to the people, I have the right to fight those who try to prevent me from doing that with weapons. I have the right to set the principles of Islam before the people. Then, if they believe in it, they are gladly accepted, but if they do not, then they come under our protection. Then Allah *the Almighty* transports us to the houses of the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* says(1):

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ قُل لِّأَزْوَٰجِكَ إِن كُنتُنَّ تُرِدْنَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا
فَتَعَالَيْنَ أُمَتِّعْكُنَّ وَأُسَرِّحْكُنَّ سَرَاحًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٢٨﴾

Prophet, say to your wives, 'If your desire is for the present life and its finery, then come, I will make provision for you and release you with kindness [28] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 28)

Someone might ask what the significance is of this incredible jump from speaking about the war against the clans and the Banu Qurayzha to mentioning this directive from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to his wives. The answer is found in the verse that ends the story of the battle of the clans, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He passed on to you their land, their houses, their possessions, and a land where you had not set foot…' (*al-Ahzab:* 27). It might well be that the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* upon hearing this, demanded that he give them a portion of the wealth of those lands that had been opened up to him by Allah *the Almighty* and so Allah

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(1) In his *Tafsir,* Al-Qurtubi (7/5422) said: 'Our scholars say that there is a connection between this verse and the understood meaning of the previous verses that it is forbidden to harm or wrong Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* And he had been disturbed by some of his wives when they made certain requests of him: it is said that they asked him for the good things of this world; it is said that they asked him for an increase in their maintenance payments; and it is said that it was their jealousy of one another that caused him pain.

the Almighty revealed the verse: ‘Prophet, say to your wives…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 28) to establish the fact that Islam does not afford any special privileges to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or to his family. Indeed, not even the proceeds of *(zakat)* may be given to the descendent of the Banu Hashim. But the fact that this verse appears in the imperative form thus: ‘Prophet, say to your wives, ‘If your desire…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 28) proves that some of the Prophet’s wives did something that indicated their desire for the charms and good things of life. It is narrated by ‘Umar that they gathered together to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for maintenance payments and that he be munificent towards them, after hearing what he said about the unbelievers [of Quraysh] when he said, They will never again attack us, but we will attack them’ (1), and after the verses had been revealed giving the Muslims the good news of those lands that would become theirs. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…then come, I will make provision for you and release you with kindness’ (*al-Ahzab:* 28), it means that I do not have those charms and things of this world that you want.’ As for the word *ta'alayn* (then come), it normally means ‘Come here’, but here means ‘Rise above’. In other words, ‘Rise above the programs of mankind and the earth to the programs of the Creator of mankind and the Creator of the earth, for it is in the Program of Allah *the Almighty* that dominion is found, not in the baubles and charms of this world.’

This meaning of the word *(ta'alaw)* is also found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Say: Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you…’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) meaning: rise above the laws of mankind and the laws of the earth to the laws of Heaven since the condition stipulated for those who draw up laws is that they not be the sole beneficiaries of those laws, and that they be fully cognizant of all of the secondary issues that might come up in relation to those laws. There will always be things that mankind is ignorant of no matter how powerful or knowledgeable they become, so the only one who should draw up laws for them should be their Creator. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…umatti 'kunna…' (*al-Ahzab:* 28), it is translated as 'I shall provide for you'; it literally means 'I shall give you the legal compensation due to a wife when she is divorced by her husband'. This legal compensation is referred to in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*:(1) 'and for the divorced women (too) provision (must be made) according to usage; (this is) a duty on those who guard (against evil).' (*al-Baqara:* 241) As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...and release you...' (*al-Ahzab:* 28), release refers here to divorce. As for His saying: '…and release you with kindness.' (*al-Ahzab:* 28), this indicates that if a man and wife separate, they should separate in a becoming manner – in other words, their split should be amicable and kind, not vicious and spiteful. The reason for this is because the act of separating from one another is painful in itself, so Allah *the Almighty* wants to avoid there being two agonies in a single act: the agony caused by divorce and the agony caused by vicious and spiteful words. You may notice that the word *(jamal)* is often mentioned in the Quran in connection with difficult matters that cause people distress. For example, look at the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…so patience is good…' (*Yusuf:* 83). Patience is beautiful and goodly when it is not accompanied by complaints, feelings of exasperation or going beyond the limits of moderation. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is offering his wives an amicable divorce without rancor or ill-feeling if that is what they want for themselves – it was not for him to remain married to a woman who chose something else instead of him, no matter what that thing was that she chose. The scholars said a lot concerning whether offering a choice such as this to a woman is tantamount to divorce or not. They say that this process of offering her a choice is like handing over the right of divorce to the woman – it is the same as saying, for example, that the bond of marriage is in her hands. Then she is free to choose for herself – if she chooses the first option then the divorce comes about, but if she chooses the second option, then the marriage is still alright and the matter is at an end.(1) Allah's Command to His Messenger to say these words to his wives indicates that those sorts of thoughts must have occurred to his wives when they saw Islam conquer all those lands and amass all those riches and so they hoped for some of that to come their way. The Arabic word *azwaj* (wives) is actually the plural of the word *zawj* (spouse) which applies equally to both men and women. The word, however, does not mean 'couple', it does not mean both of them together as some people think. Rather, it refers to one for which another of its type exists (i.e. one of a pair). It is exactly the same as the word *(taw'am)*, 'twin' which refers to a single being that is accompanied by another being that is like it. The proof of this is found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And of everything We have created pairs…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49); it means male and female. The male on his own is a *(zawj)*, and the female on her own is a *(zawj)*. This division (into males and females) exists in all creatures. The word *(zawj)* also has the plural *(zawjat)*.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. 4109&4110; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. (4/262) from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Sulayman ibn Ṣard. In a second narration in Al-Bukhari, it says, ‘We will go to them.’ Ibn Hajar said in (Al-Fath) [7/405], ‘This contains one of the signs of prophethood for he went on (‘umra) (voluntary pilgrimage) the following year and then, when Quraysh blocked him from coming to the House, he made a truce with them which remained in effect until they broke it. And that was the cause that led to the Muslim’s conquering Mecca. So everything happened as he said it would.’*

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(1) *Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) [1/297], 'Those scholars who viewed this form of compensation for divorced women as being obligatory used this verse as proof, regardless of whether or not the amount of the compensation was agreed in advance, and regardless of whether or not the woman was divorced before consummation. This was the opinion of Ash-Shafi'i, which was the position adopted by Sa'id ibn Jubayr and others of the (Salaf) and was that chosen by Ibn Jarir.*

We notice with regard to the literary style of the verse that when Allah *the Almighty* proposes to His Messenger that he offers his wives the choice between the trinkets of this world and the delights of the Hereafter, He uses the word *('in)* which indicates doubt and does not use the word *idha* which indicates certainty. This indicates that the accusation against them was not particularly strong, and that it amounted to no more than a few thoughts crossing the minds of a few of his wives.

As you know, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was married to nine wives at the same time: five of these wives were from Quraysh, namely; ʿA'isha, Hafsa, Umm Habiba, Sawda bint Zam'a and Umm Salama bint abu 'Umayya; four from outside Quraysh, namely; Safiyya bint Huyayy ibn Akhtab (whose father's story was mentioned in the story of the battle of the Confederates), Juwayriyya bint Al-Harith from Banu Mustaliq, Maymuna bint Al-Harith AL-Hilaliyya– and anyone who visits Tanʿim will find a well there called the 'well of Maymuna' – and Zaynab bint Jahsh from the Banu Asad. These were the nine mothers of the believers who were all married to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the same time. When(1) they came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asking him for maintenance payments, the boldest one amongst them was Hafsa bint ʿUmar! Words were exchanged between her and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so he asked her whether she wanted someone to come and decide between them. When she agreed, he sent for ʿUmar. Then, after ʿUmar had arrived, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Hafsa, 'Speak your piece,' meaning that she should set out what she wanted. She, however, replied, 'No, you speak your piece first, and only say what is true!' Her words awoke feelings of anger in the heart of ʿUmar: indeed he became so angry that he went up to her and slapped her. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tried to restrain him, but he still took hold of her and slapped her a second time. Then ʿUmar said to her, 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only ever speaks the truth! By Allah *the Almighty* if it were not for the fact that Iwas in his salon, I would not have stopped beating you until you were dead!' Thereupon, the Messenger got up from where he was sitting in order to bring the argument to an end. Then he went to his room and secluded himself therein. Indeed, he stayed there, cutting off relations from everyone for a full month.(2)

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(1) *Ash-Shafi'i said, 'Offering a choice (takhyir) is an indirect declaration of intent (kinaya) – if a man offers his wife a choice, wanting her to choose between divorcing him or remaining under his matrimonial authority, and then she chooses herself, intending that choice to constitute a divorce, then the divorce is ratified. If she were to say, however, that she did not intend divorce by choosing herself, then her word is accepted.' Al-Qurtubi said in (Al-Mufhim) that when a woman offered the choice says she chooses herself, that choice of hers represents a divorce even though she has not uttered any word that indicates divorce itself. As for Al-Hafizh Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani, he said, 'But the most obvious meaning of the verse indicates that offering the choice does not bring about divorce in itself, but it is still necessary for the husband to instigate the divorce [after she makes her choice clear to him]. This is because the actual wording of the verse is: '…then come, I will make provision for you and release you…' (al-Ahzab: 28), means 'I shall release you after you have made your choice.'*

Reflect on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…If your desire is for the present life and its finery…' (*al-Ahzab:* 28). What description of this world could possibly be lower or more derogatory than calling it *dunya* (literally, ‘the lowest’)? And all the enjoyments in it are no more than decoration – in other words, delightful on the surface but lacking in any real substance. It is as Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse in the Quran: ‘Know that this world’s life is only sport and play and gaiety and boasting among yourselves, and a vying in the multiplication of wealth and children…’ (*al-Hadid:* 20).

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(1) *The story of the misunderstanding between 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab and Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and the latter calling her father.*

(2) *The narrations disagree with one another regarding this matter: some narrates the protagonists of this event as being 'A'isha and her father Abu Bakr; and some narrates them as being Hafsa and her father 'Umar. For the first, See Ibn Sa'd, At-Tabaqat, 10/79, and for the second, see Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2468 within the confines of a much longer Hadith. It is possible, however, that this event happened on more than one occasion. Allah the Almighty knows best.*

Then Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* presents his wives with the second choice – the alternative to this world:

وَإِن كُنتُنَّ تُرِدْنَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَٱلدَّارَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةَ
فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَعَدَّ لِلْمُحْسِنَٰتِ مِنكُنَّ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٢٩﴾

But if you desire God, His Messenger, and the Final Home,
then remember that God has prepared great rewards for
those of you who do good [29] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 29)

Anyone who reflects on the two sides of the choice they were presented with will find that, in reality, there is no comparison between the two.

One of the two sides was always going to be rejected since who would accept the life of this world in exchange for Allah *the Almighty* or the baubles of this world in exchange for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or nothing whatsoever in exchange for the life eternal in the Hereafter? Even if this world in which we live were not described as being *dunya* 'the lowest', it would still be incumbent upon us to do without in it.

The truth is that the prophet's wives understood this and so chose Allah *the Almighty,* His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the life of the Hereafter, and who would be satisfied with anything else as an alternative! Praise is due to Allah!

Then Allah *the Almighty* describes the reward that is obtained by those who choose Him, His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the life of the Hereafter: ' then remember that Allah has prepared great rewards for those of you who do good' (*al-Ahzab:* 29) A woman is *muhsina* ‘doer of good’ if she gives her husband more love and compassion than is required of her

يَٰنِسَآءَ ٱلنَّبِيِّ مَن يَأۡتِ مِنكُنَّ بِفَٰحِشَةٖ مُّبَيِّنَةٖ يُضَٰعَفۡ لَهَا
ٱلۡعَذَابُ ضِعۡفَيۡنِۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرٗا ٣٠

Wives of the Prophet, if any of you does something clearly outrageous, she will be doubly punished – that is easy for God [30] (The Quran, *al-Ahẓab:* 30)

After offering the wives of the Prophet their choice and after they had chosen Allah *the Almighty* His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the life of the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to give them a program and teach them principles that would make their lives easier for them. It is noteworthy indeed that the choices offered in the previous verse were words of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* from His Lord, while the words in this verse are directly from Allah *the Almighty* to the wives of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for He addresses them saying: 'Wives of the Prophet...' (*al-Ahzab:* 30).

The matter started with the words: 'O Prophet! Say unto thy wives…' (*al-Ahzab:* 28). Then they chose Allah *the Almighty* His Messenger and the life of the Hereafter, and it as if that choice made them worthy of being addressed directly by Allah *the Almighty* himself. It is as if they had fulfilled what had been required of them in the previous verse when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, *ta'alayn*, '...well, then…' (*al-Ahzab:* 28).

We all know that, although the Arabic word *nisa'* 'women', translated as 'wives', is a plural; it does not have any etymological singular form.

No, the only way of referring to women in the singular is by using a different word entirely: *'imra'a*. In Arabic, there are singulars of certain plurals that are often forgotten when the singular of another word is better-known or easier to use. That word is *'imra'a* or *mara*; singular form for 'women' which is derived from the word *'imru'* meaning 'man' This word, *'imru'*, is unique in the Arabic language in terms of the way it is inflected. Unlike the rest of words in Arabic, changes in syntactical inflection are not limited to the final letter but also impact the preceding letter, so you say, '*'imru'u al-Qays* said', 'I heard *'imra'a al-Qays*' and 'I read to *'imri'i al-Qays*.'

Some linguistic theoreticians said, ‘The word *nisa’*, ‘women’, is derived from a word that means delay or deferral because of the fact that the creation of women until after that of men.’ Therefore the singular of the word must be *nas’* even though using that word would be an unnecessary burden.

After addressing them with the words: 'Wives of the Prophet!' (*al-Ahzab:* 30), Allah *the Almighty* mentions the first instruction in the program directed at them: '…if any of you does something clearly outrageous, she will be doubly punished–…' (*al-Ahzab:* 30). We notice, here, that when Allah *the Almighty* addressed the wives, he did not begin by saying, for example, ‘Whichever of you has *taqwa* (fearful awareness of Allah)’, but instead began by warning them against engaging in immoral conduct. The reason He did that because the legal maxim for legislation and reform is that 'The prevention of harm takes priority over the attraction of benefit.' Similarly, before we can perform *wudu’* for the prayer, we must first make sure we are free of all physical impurities.

We mentioned the following scenario, as an example: Supposing that one person threw an apple to you, while at the same time someone else threw a stone at you, what would you do first, try to catch the apple or try to protect yourself against the stone? Without doubt, you would try to do the latter and protect yourself against the harm the stone might cause you. In the same way, if you want to iron your clothes and find them dirty, you would wash them first.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* began his instructions to the wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: '...if any of you does something clearly outrageous…' (*al-Ahzab:* 30). But is immoral conduct i.e. acts of sexual indecency on their behalf not somewhat far-fetched? Is one of the worst types of sin truly to be expected of the wives of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? ‘Why not?’ Scholars reply. Did Allah *the Almighty* not address His own Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Words: '…if thou ever ascribe divine powers to aught but Allah, all thy works shall most certainly have been in vain...' (*az-Zumar:* 65)? Since it is well-known that there is no suspicion of *shirk* 'associating others with Allah' attached to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* the meaning of the verse must be, ‘O Muhammad, the fact that you have been chosen does not mean that you are above being taken to account.’ The same interpretation may be applied to the verse above dealing with his wives: in other words, the verse means, ‘If any of you were to commit some act of indecency, we would give her double the punishment and would not overlook her act simply because of her standing with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So do not make the mistake of thinking that your standing somehow mitigates your crime.’ 'If that had not been the case, then that would be the same sort of thing as commoners stealing and being punished while nobles steal and are let off.'(1)

So, the status that each of you holds lies not in the fact that you are wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* but lies in the extent to which you obey the commands of Allah *the Almighty*. If you do not, then know that there are wives of Prophets who did betray(2) their husbands. Read the following verse: 'For those who are bent on denying the truth Allah has propounded a parable in [the stories of] Noah’s wife and Lot’s wife: they were wedded to two of Our righteous servants, and each one betrayed her husband; and neither of the two [husbands] will be of any avail to these two women before Allah when they are told [on Judgment Day], ‘Enter the fire with all those [other sinners] who enter it!' (*at-Tahrim:* 10)

You might well ask, ‘If the ruling for the socially-manifest immoral behaviour is that their punishment be doubled, then what is their ruling when they are guilty of immoral behaviour that is not socially-manifest?

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(1) *This is from an agreed-upon Hadith. It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [6788]; and by Muslim in his (Sahih) [1688] in a (Hadith) from 'A’isha that Messenger Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him *said, ‘O people, those who came before you went astray by letting off their nobles when they stole while they punished their weak for the same crime. I make an oath by Allah that if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, Muhammad would cut her hand off.’*

(2) *Ibn Kathir said in his (Tafsir) [4/393], ‘When Allah says that ‘they betrayed them’, he does not mean that they cheated on them by having an affair but that they betrayed them with respect to their religion. Because of the inviolability of the Prophets themselves, their wives are protected from ever committing acts of sexual indecency.’ Ibn 'Abbas said, ‘They did not commit fornication. The betrayal of the wife of Nuh (Noah)* peace be upon him *lay in the fact that she used to tell people that he was mad, while the betrayal of the wife of Lut (Lot)* peace be upon him *lay in the fact that she used to lead her people to her guests.’*

This ruling is specific to the wives of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* according to scholars. If one of them were to commit a wrong action in the privacy of her own home, then that would be between herself and her Lord and would only be counted as a single sin restricted to her own person. However, if she were to commit a wrong action in the public domain, then that sin would be counted as double because the wives of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are role models whose behaviour is closely scrutinised and imitated by other Muslim women. So, if one of them were to commit an act of indecency that would persuade others to also commit that act. And why should anyone else not do that act when one of the wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did it?

The reason, therefore, for their punishment being doubled, is because when they are immoral, their immorality is not just limited to them but spreads from them to others. They would be making the house of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* home to bad role models and so would deserve their double punishment because they would have hurt his feelings, disrespected his home and preferred another to him by committing their act of indecency with him. All of this would merit their punishment being multiplied many times over. So if Allah *the Almighty* were to only double their punishment, that would be an act of kindness and mercy on His part because of their shared marital history with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In the same way, if one of them were to perform a good action, her reward would be multiplied, since she would have performed a right action for herself just like anyone else, but would also be providing others with a good example because of her position as role model to Muslim women.

Consider the Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Whoever establishes a good *sunna* will be rewarded for it and the reward of everyone who acts by it until the Day of Rising; and whoever establishes a bad *sunna* will receive the wrong action for it and the wrong action of everyone who acts by it until the Day of Rising.'(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his (Musnad) [4/361 & 362] (al-Ahzab); by Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) [207] (al-Ahzab); and by At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) [2675] (al-Ahzab) in a (Hadith) from Jarir ibn 'Abdullah. At-Tirmidhi classified the (Hadith) as (hasan sahih).*

It tells us that a person's reward for a good action is not only doubled, but is multiplied by as many times as the number of people who imitate him and put that good action into practice. There is a difference between the two Arabic words *di'f* the word which is used in this verse and *du'f*. The *di'f* of something is its exact equivalent, while the *du'f* is the loss of this equivalent and so is less.

Then He *the Almighty* says: '...for that is indeed easy for Allah.' (*al-Ahzab:* 30). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were saying, 'the doubling of your punishment is an easy matter: your standing with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* matters not to Me one bit. This is a matter that no one will question Me about and a matter in which I show no favouritism to anyone. I allow things to run in the way that they must and in that none may oppose Me. That is why so many rulings of Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran are followed by the Words: '…[but] behold, Allah is almighty, wise!' (*al-Baqara:* 220) His might means that the execution of the ruling is something inevitable and unavoidable and that none may oppose it.

This meaning is clear in the words Allah *the Almighty* spoke to 'Isa (Jesus), *Peace be upon him*: 'And lo! Allah said: "O 'Isa, son of Maryam! Did you say to men, 'Worship me and my mother as deities beside Allah'?" ['Isa] answered: "Limitless are you in your glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [say]! Had I said this, You would indeed have known it! You know all that is within myself, whereas I know not what is in Thy Self. Verily, it is You alone who fully know all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception." [116] "Nothing did I tell them beyond what You did bid me [to say]: 'Worship Allah, [who is] my Lord as well as your Lord.' And I bore witness to what they did as long as I dwelt in their midst; but since You has caused me to die, You alone has been their keeper: for You are witness unto everything." [117] "If thou cause them to suffer – verily, they are Thy servants; and if You forgive them – verily, You alone are almighty, truly wise!"[118]' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116-118).

His words: '…and if You forgive them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) require him to say: '…verily, You are forgiving, merciful!', but instead of them, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…verily, You alone are almighty, truly wise!" (*al-Ma'ida:* 118) because the sin into which the people had fallen was one which involved the pinnacle of their faith, for they had taken the divinity from Allah *the Almighty* and placed it in the person of ‘Isa. This is a sin for which common sense demands a severe punishment. Allah *the Almighty* is never questioned about what He does: He *the Almighty* punishes whomsoever He wills and forgives whomsoever He wills. If He *the Almighty* does forgive them, it is by means of His Attribute of Might; against which none may stand. It is as if common sense dictates that Allah *the Almighty* be asked why, given the seriousness of their crime, He did not punish them. That is why He *the Almighty* deals with them with the attribute of might against which none may stand and the attribute of wisdom which never misses the mark.

After mentioning immoral acts and their consequences, Allah *the Almighty* then mentions their opposite:

وَمَن يَقْنُتْ مِنكُنَّ لِلَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَتَعْمَلْ صَٰلِحًا نُّؤْتِهَآ
أَجْرَهَا مَرَّتَيْنِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهَا رِزْقًا كَرِيمًا ﴿٣١﴾

But if any of you is obedient to God and His Messenger and
does good deeds, know that We shall give her a double
reward and have prepared a generous provision for her [31]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 31)

The word '…is obedient…' (*al-Ahzab:* 31) means to submit to Allah’s Will completely and utterly and to humbly abase oneself in supplication before Him. Allah *the Almighty* chose the Arabic Word *qunut* (devout obedience) because He *the Almighty* does not want those who obey Him to pride themselves on their obedience and look down on others as a result. That is why the people of inward knowledge say, ‘Disobedience that brings about abasement and contrition might well be better than obedience which brings about self-importance and pride.’(1)

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(1) *This is one of the aphorisms from the (Hikam) of ibn 'Ata’illah Al-’Iskandari, a Sufi from the Shadhili Tariqa. He was one of the scholars of his day and died in 709 AH. 'Abd Al-‘Al Kahil mentioned this aphorism of Ibn 'Ata’illah on page 76 of his book ‘(Abu Al-‘Aynayn Ad-Dusuqi)’, published by Dar Ash-Sha‘b.*

Or 'But if any of you is obedient to Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 31) means that you ‘go to such utmost lengths to do right action and be scrupulous that you reach the level of *qunut*’, i.e. complete submission and abasement to Allah *the Almighty*.

And the result of this devout obedience is that: '…We shall give her a double reward…' (*al-Ahzab:* 31). While the previous verse establishes that the punishment of the one who commits an indecent act will be multiplied, this verse establishes that the reward of the one who submits to Allah *the Almighty* abases herself and does a right action will be multiplied.

'…and have prepared a generous provision for her' (*al-Ahzab:* 31), i.e. We have just now prepared it for her, and it will be here waiting for her until she comes.

When you reflect on the literary style applied in these two verses, the extraordinary nature of its composition confronts you: when it mentions immoral conduct and the doubling of punishment, it uses the verb *yuda'af* 'double' in the passive voice, but when it mentions devout obedience, it says: '…and have prepared a generous provision for her' (*al-Ahzab:* 31), linking the action of the verb directly to Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* did not want to confront people with Himself in the position of punishing them but merely with the punishment itself.

By using the verb *yuda'af* in the passive voice, it indicates Allah’s mercy and the subtlety of His expression. Allah *the Almighty* loves all of His creation and wants to get them to love Him – He hopes for the one who is disobedient to come back into the fold and, when a believing slave of His repents, rejoices more than one who finds his camel after losing it in a waterless desert.(1)

In a Hadith, we find, 'Son of Adam, do not fear anyone who has dominion so long as I have dominion, and My dominion will never come to an end. Son of Adam, do not fear that your provision will become straitened, for My storehouses are full and will never become empty. Son of Adam, I have created you for worship, so do not play about - and by ‘play about’, He means

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(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his (Sahih) [2747] (al-Ahzab:) in a (Hadith) from Anas ibn Malik.*

‘engage in useless action that brings no benefit’ – and I have assigned you your provision, so do not tire yourself out.'

By ‘tire yourself out’, He meant ‘Do not cause your heart to become distracted.’ There are different types of tiredness: there is tiredness of the limbs of the sort mentioned in the Noble Prophetic Hadith, 'Whoever spends his night exhausted by work and physical exertion, spends his night being forgiven.'(1) And when the Prophet *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* saw a hand that had been coarsened by hard work, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'This is a hand that both Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* love.'(2)

Then there is the tiredness of the heart. Something that your heart is able to stand and you are able to bear does not tire you out. Henceforth, we find people whose hearts are free of concern calmly breaking rocks, humming tunes and singing songs to strengthen their resolve and help them keep going. Despite, all their strenuous efforts, you find them to be happy and content. An Arab poet showed wonderful understanding of this when he wrote:

A burden is not that which is borne on the backs of men.
No, a burden is that which preoccupies the heart.

So the meaning is, ‘Wear out your limbs but do not wear out your heart. Tiredness and exhaustion do not destroy one’s limbs; they only destroy one’s heart. Make your limbs weary with useful serious work that gives you with enough to fulfil your needs and have some left over for those who are unable to work for themselves.

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(1) *It is narrated by As-Suyuti with this wording in (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur) (Hadith 401) in a (Hadith) from Anas from the Prophet, and he ascribed the (Hadith) to Ibn 'Asakir; and it is narrated by Al-Haythami in Majma‘ Az-Zawa’id [4/63] in a (Hadith) from Ibn ‘Abbas who said that he heard Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him say, ‘Whoever spends his evening exhausted by work and physical exertion, spends his evening being forgiven.’ Al-Haythami said, ‘It is narrated by At-Tabarani in (Al-’Awsat), but there are a number of people I do not know in [his chain of narrations]. Al-Hafizh Al-'Iraqi said in his (Takhrij) of the (Hadiths) of Al-’Ihya’ [2/90], ‘There is weakness in [this (Hadith)].’*

(2) *Another (Hadith) narrated in this regard is that Messenger Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘None of you will eat any food better than that which himself has worked for and earned,’ and that he himself only ate from what he himself worked for and earned. It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [2072] in a (Hadith) from Al-Miqdam ibn Ma‘dikarib.*

Then He *the Almighty* says, 'If you are content with what I have allotted you, then I will bring rest to your heart and body and you will be one who is praised in My presence. If you are not content, however, with what I have allotted you, then, by My might and majesty, I will make the world your master: you will run around in it like a beast in the wild but will get nothing from it except that which I have allotted to you, and you will be one who is blamed in My presence. Son of Adam, I created the heavens and the earth and was not wearied by creating them, so should I be wearied by bringing you a loaf of bread? Son of Adam, I do not demand of you your work of tomorrow, so do not demand of Me your provision for tomorrow. Son of Adam, I do not forget those who disobey Me, so consider how it is with those who obey Me.'

Here we witness the words with which Allah *the Almighty* completes this Qudsi Hadith, 'Son of Adam, I love you, so by the right which I have over you, love Me.'(1)

So your Lord appears to you directly when He *the Almighty* wants to bring you something good or beneficial, but when it is something bad, He *the Almighty* points it out to you from a distance and draws your attention to it with gentleness and solicitude.

Another thing we notice in terms of the literary style of the verse is that when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But if any of you is obedient to Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 31), addressing the wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* he uses the masculine form of the verb *yaqnut* (obeys), and not the feminine form *taqnut*. Then, later in the verse when he says: '…and does good deeds…' (*al-Ahzab:* 31) He reverts to the feminine form for the verb *ta'mal* (does). So, on one occasion, he takes the word into account and on the other occasion he takes the meaning into account. As we mentioned previously, the word *man*, 'who' is a relative pronoun that is used for the singular, dual and plural, and for both masculine and feminine.

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(1) This section of the (Hadith) is narrated by Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in ('Ihya' 'Ulum ad-din) [4/296], and he said, 'In some books, it has, 'My slave, I love you as is your right [over Me], so by the right which I have over you, love Me.'

Another matter that gives us food for thought here is the fact that *rizq* (sustenance) or (provision) is described as being *karim*, ‘generous’ or ‘excellent’ in Allah's Words: '…and have prepared a generous provision for her' (*al-Ahzab:* 31). *Rizq* is the food, drink, clothing, lodging and appurtenances that a person receives in the course of his life, although the word may also be used to refer to matters which are not material such as knowledge, clemency etc. However, it is not the provisions that we receive in this world that are described as being generous.

No, the one who is described as being generous is the Provider Himself *the Almighty*. So, why then, in this verse, is provision described as being generous?

They reply that the difference between provision in this world and provision in the Hereafter is that provision in this world requires the presence of a medium between you and the Provider. That medium might be a father, an administrator, an employer, a merchant or someone else, but it is he who conveys your provision to you with his own hands and so he is the one who is described as being generous. In the Hereafter, however, your provision comes to you directly without there being any medium, so it is fitting that the provision itself be described as being generous. If provision may be described as being generous, then what about the True Provider himself

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

يَٰنِسَآءَ ٱلنَّبِيِّ لَسۡتُنَّ كَأَحَدٖ مِّنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِۚ إِنِ ٱتَّقَيۡتُنَّ فَلَا تَخۡضَعۡنَ
بِٱلۡقَوۡلِ فَيَطۡمَعَ ٱلَّذِى فِى قَلۡبِهِۦ مَرَضٞ وَقُلۡنَ قَوۡلٗا مَّعۡرُوفٗا ﴿٣٢﴾

Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other woman. If you are truly mindful of God, do not speak too softly in case the sick at heart should lust after you, but speak in an appropriate manner [32] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 32)

The word *ahad* ‘one’ is used in a number of different ways in the Arabic language. For example, when it comes to number, if we want to refer to eleven of something, we say *’ahad ‘ashar* if the object being counted is masculine, and *’ihda ‘ashra* if the object being counted is feminine, The word *ahad* is used, also, to refer to the singular, dual and plural, and both masculine and feminine, so you would say, ‘There is no one (*ahad)* with me, not one man or one woman, not two men or two women, and not many men or many women.’ That is why the word *ahad* is used in, Allah’s Words: 'and there is nothing that could be compared with Him.' (*al-Ikhlas:* 4)

Allah *the Almighty* says: '… you are not like any other *[ahad]* woman…' (*al-Ahzab:* 32). This is particular to them because things divide up into species with every species dividing up into types.

The human being, for example, is a species. Within that species there are males and females. Then, under each of these types, there are individuals. Such division of a single species into male and female would not have taken place without there being differences between them over and above their shared characteristics. So the limits imposed on them by being a single species are shared – they are both living creatures capable of speech and thought – but their differences make us divide them into two types, each with its own special characteristics that distinguishes it from the other.

Another good example is time, which may be described as the envelope for events: if those events are events of movement and motion, then that time is the day. If they are events of stillness and lack of motion, then that time is the night. So, night and day are two types under a single genus, time, and each of them has special characteristics which we must be aware of if we want to avoid mixing them up.

Reflect on Allah’s Words: 'Consider the night as it veils [the earth] in darkness, [1] and the day as it rises bright![2] Consider the creation of the male and the female![3] Verily, [O men,] you aim at most divergent ends! [4]' (*al-Layl:* 1-4)

Night and day are complementary and contrasting but without being contradicted. The same applies to males and females: each type has its own role and task that is specific to it. If you were to try to make the night into day or vice versa, or to make a man into a woman or vice versa, you would be going against the natural form chosen for it by Allah *the Almighty*.

We have already told you the story(1) of the man who passed by the chief of his village, found him beating his guard, so stood up in defence of the guard, saying, ‘Why are you beating him, uncle of Abraham?’ The chief replied, ‘I found him sleeping on the job’, so the man said, ‘He was sleeping because he spent the whole day irrigating your fields. An irrigator cannot also be expected to guard!’

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(1) *The story of the village Mayor who used to beat his guard*

So, under every species there are types; types are not equal with each other, for if they were, they would simply be copies of each other and there would be no use in that. Every individual is different and has his own distinguishing characteristics. Therefore, do not think yourself superior to others since Allah *the Almighty* has distributed His gifts amongst all His creation: you might be superior in one thing but someone else will be superior in something else.

The reason for this is so that the connection formed between people in everyday life is one of mutual need, not one of some being preferred over others.

Therefore, a man who cleans the streets is superior to you by the fact that he performs a job that you have an aversion yourself to doing. If this worker were to perform a job for you, you would have to pay him a wage, whereas if he were to ask you a question – and you were a scholar, a dignitary or something similar – you would give him an answer without asking him to pay you something in return, even though you spent so many long years acquiring knowledge, reading books and listening to others until you reached the level, and obtained the distinction, whereby you were able to answer his query. Therefore, every single one of us, male or female, has his own unique personal individuality that sets him apart from others.

It is in this light that Allah *the Almighty* says to the wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…you are not like any other *[ahad]* woman…' (*al-Ahzab:* 32). This is the special quality that sets them apart from other women. It is not women in general who role models are. No, rather that is a special characteristic of the wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: they are the role models for all other women; they are the ones whose examples are there to be followed.

After this negation comes the proviso: Allah *the Almighty* says: '… If you are truly mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 32). In other words, it is not your marriage to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that sets you apart, it is the strength of your *taqwa* 'piety' of Allah *the Almighty* for there were wives of other Prophets who did not have *taqwa*.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…not speak too softly in case the sick at heart should lust after you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 32), i.e. 'Cut off the path of indecency at its source! Do not go near that which leads to it and leave those matters about which you have doubt!' What is meant by 'over-softness in speech' is either when a woman addresses a man with a soft, broken and quavering voice, or when her words are accompanied by enticing glances or by her drawing close to him.

If you are forced to speak to men then beware of characteristics such as these '...in case the sick at heart should lust after you…' (*al-Ahzab:* 32). This means, 'It is not that I am accusing you of anything, but the simple fact is that none of you can vouchsafe for any of the men with whom you speak, for some of them might have sickness in their hearts.(1)Therefore, do not present them with any opportunity.'

Not being over-soft in speech does not mean that you should use harsh or crude words when you address people; rather, it means that you must keep things within the limits assigned to them. And this is why He *the Almighty* follows this with the Words: '…but speak in an appropriate manner…' (*al-Ahzab:* 32). The Quran, after prohibiting inappropriate unrestrained behaviour, presents us with the appropriate alternative, that is, *qawl ma'ruf* 'speaking in a kindly way'. When this term is being used to describe the speech of a woman, it means that she should moderate her words and listen with her ears without letting her eyes dwell upon the speaker because if she were to look at him like that, it might cause him to desire her and embolden him to proposition her, and that is what Allah *the Almighty* wants to prevent happening.

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(1) Ibn 'Arafa said, 'Sickness of the heart is slackness with the truth; sickness of the body is slackness in the limbs, and sickness of the eye is slackness in the gaze – when an eye becomes sick it becomes lazy. An example of this is in His Words: '...in case the sick at heart should lust after you…' *(al-Ahzab:* 32), i.e. his heart is lax when it comes to carrying out the commands and prohibitions [of the Lord]' Ibn Manzur narrated this in (Lissan Al-'Arab: subject matter: *(marada)*). Ibn Kathir said in his *(Tafsir)*, 'By sickness, it means *(daghal)* which is a form of defectiveness and corruption. The root meaning of *daghal* is a luxuriant and leaf bush within which the people of corruption conceal themselves.' (*Lissan Al-'Arab)*: root: *daghala*).

That is why a story (1) is told of a man who saw his servant girl standing at the door of his house speaking to a handsome young man who was asking her about something. When he saw her remain there speaking with him for a long time, her master beat her and scolded her for her unbecoming conduct. Then, when another young man came the next day to ask her about the very same thing that the other man had asked her the previous day, she greeted him straight away with curses and imprecations, having been made aware of the sickness in the heart of that young man and those like him.

Later on, in another part of this same chapter, we find: 'O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters, as well as all [other] believing women, that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments [when in public]: this will be more conducive to their being recognized [as decent women] and not annoyed. But [withal,] Allah is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy!' (*al-Ahzab:* 59) The reason for this is because when a man comes upon a woman who is modest and covers up her physical endowments, he is not emboldened against her: he knows that she is not a cheap sort of woman, so he respects the boundaries she has set.

Wise people have said, ‘As for those women whom you see flaunting their assets to men who are not their relatives and insist on exposing themselves to men, it is as if they were putting a sign round their necks saying, ‘Open for customers’. It is as if they were telling those who paid them no heed to take note, thus arousing their passions and giving those men the courage to make a move on them.’ Allah *the Almighty* wanted the wives of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* firstly, to speak to people from behind a curtain, and secondly, to speak to them in a correct fashion without using a soft and quavering voice. For, by doing that, they do not expose themselves to evil; give no encouragement to the bawdy or irresponsible to make a move on them.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) The story of the she- servant and the lad

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ ٱلْجَٰهِلِيَّةِ ٱلْأُولَىٰ ۖ وَأَقِمْنَ
ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتِينَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَأَطِعْنَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥٓ ۚ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ
لِيُذْهِبَ عَنكُمُ ٱلرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ ٱلْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

Stay at home, and do not flaunt your finery as they used to in the pagan past; keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet's] House, and to purify you thoroughly [33] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 33)

The meaning of: '... 'Stay at home…' (*al-Ahzab:* 33) is do not go outside a lot. This is, in fact, the proper behaviour for women in general since, if a woman busied herself with what is required of her when it comes to running the household, serving her husband and children and looking after their best interests, she would not have enough time in the day to go out as well. That is why it is often the case that husbands come home to find their wives completely engrossed in their household chores. That situation can be a source of annoyance to some husbands because that means their wives cannot devote all their time to them. So, the woman who is bankrupt in her own home is the one who goes out a lot and fulfils the requirements of her home from outside of it.

If she were, however, to learn a simple handicraft, then she could fulfil the requirements of her home and put a little money aside for her husband. For example, some people have told us about the women of the Egyptian city of Dumyat, how they do every sort of work and help their husbands. Some girls there are even taught a trade, so when they get married they do not place a huge financial burden upon their fathers. No, quite the reverse, In fact, they have enough money themselves to put some aside and help their husbands out after they have married. As for the verb *tabarraj* 'flaunt', used in the verse: '...and do not flaunt your finery as they used to in the pagan past…' (*al-Ahzab:* 33), it is derived from the word *burj* meaning 'fortress' so the root meaning of *tabarraj* is to emerge or jut out from one's fortress. The meaning of the verse, therefore, is 'Do not come out of the fortress that is your clothing that covers you, and do not expose your bodily charms and assets which you are obligated to cover up.' As for: '…as they used to in the pagan past…' (*al-Ahzab:* 33), it refers to the way women – and by women, we mean slave girls and not freewomen – used to dress before the advent of Islam. In those days, they would expose their most alluring physical endowments for all to see – indeed, they often appeared to be almost naked and thought nothing of it. The situation was very much like what we have seen ourselves of the way women dress in sub-Saharan Africa. Freewomen in the time of paganism before Islam, however, were women of chastity and honour while at the same time slave girls were set up in brothels. This was the reason why the wife of Abu Sufyan(1) said to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when he asked the believing women to pledge an oath that they not fornicate, ‘Do freewomen ever fornicate, Messenger of Allah?’ In other words, ‘that is something that freewomen detested even in the time of ignorance before Islam.’

Another of the meanings of the word *burj* is becoming wide or extended. So, according to that interpretation, the verse would mean, ‘Do not extend the circle of what is exposed outside the area delineated by the *Shari'a*, that is, the face and the hands.’

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And [know that] women advanced in years, who no longer feel any sexual desire, incur no sin if they discard their [outer] garments, provided they do not aim at a showy display of [their] charms...' (*an-Nur:* 60).

It is astonishing to see women of the age of fifty or sixty today, putting powder and blusher upon their faces, feeling no embarrassment about the wrinkles thereon and having almost no feeling of their ages. Then He *the Almighty* says: '… keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms…' (*al-Ahzab:* 33). The Quran frequently joins together prayer and *zakat.* Prayer comes first because it is the central pillar around which all the other duties of Islam are built. The act of *zakat* entails that you expend some of your wealth. Wealth is a derivative branch of action and action is a derivative branch of time and when you are in the prayer it is time itself that you expend and sacrifice. So, it is as if you expend 97.5% of it in the prayer, on top of the 2.5% you expend in *zakat.* Another thing that is understood from the payment of *zakat* being mentioned in this context is that women have their own individual financial responsibilities, separate from those of their fathers or husbands. The proof of this lies in the fact that Allah *the Almighty* commands them here to pay their *zakat,* 'to render their purifying dues'. However, modern society considers the money a woman has before marriage to belong to her father and after marriage to belong to her husband. Another thing modern society does when she gets married is to take away from her her father's family name and give her husband's family name instead. This is even harsher on the woman than taking away her money, since calling her by her husband's name neglects her own identity. Take a look at ʿA'isha *Allah be pleased with her* for example, we still call her ʿA'isha bint abu Bakr' – no one refers to her as 'ʿA'isha wife of Muhammad'.

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(1) *She is Hind bint 'Utba ibn Ar-Rabi'a. The transmissions about her before she became Muslim are well-known – she took part in the battle of Uhud as an unbeliever and did what she did to Hamza. She became Muslim on the day of the conquest of Mecca after her husband, Abu Sufyan, did so, and she died during the Caliphate of 'Uthman. (Al-'Isaba of Ibn Hajar 8/206). Ibn Sa'd mentioned in his At-Tabaqat (10/226) that this comment was made by her when the women pledged allegiance to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. Hind was the mother of Mu'awiyya ibn abu Sufyan.*

Then He *the Almighty* says: '…and obey Allah and His Messenger…' (*al-Ahzab:* 33) because the matter is not limited to simply performing the prayer and paying zakat – there are many other things that also require obedience to Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is interesting to note that this verse places Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Apostle in conjunction with Allah *the Almighty* but only mentions the imperative verb 'pay heed' once: '…and obey Allah and His Messenger…' (*al-Ahzab:* 33). When we search through the Quran for this same command, we find that, on some occasions, the verb is repeated and, on other occasions, it is not.

So, one time, Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Pay heed, then, unto Allah, and pay heed unto the Apostle...' (*at-Taghabun:* 12). Another time, He *the Almighty* says: 'And pay heed unto Allah and the Apostle...' (*Al-'Imran:* 132). Another time, He *the Almighty* says: '...Pay heed unto Allah, and pay heed unto the Apostle and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority...' (*an-Nisa':* 59). Each of these different forms of the command has its own sense and its own meaning: When it says, 'pay heed to Allah *the Almighty* and pay heed to the Messenger', it is as if it is saying that one must obey

Allah *the Almighty* in terms of His general commands, but obey His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in terms of their specifics. So Allah *the Almighty* gave us the general command to pray and pay *zakat,* then the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified the general command for us and taught us the specifics of how it is done by saying to us, 'Pray as you see me pray'(1), and 'Take your religious rites from me'(2).

So, the reason that the verb was repeated here was because it deals with two forms of obedience: obedience to Allah *the Almighty* by fulfilling His general command, and obedience to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by taking from him its finer details. If the verb is only mentioned once, as in: 'And pay heed unto Allah and the Apostle...' (*Al-'Imran:* 132), it means that the command of Allah *the Almighty* and the command of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* happen to be identical, so only one act of obedience is necessary. Suppose that Allah *the Almighty* did an action and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did an action and that it was impossible to separate one's action from the other. The proof that this happens is found in the verse: '...And they could find no fault [with the Faith] save that Allah had enriched them and [caused] His Apostle [to enrich them] out of His bounty!' (*at-Tawba:* 74) Allah *the Almighty* did not say, 'and His Apostle enriched them' because some might say then that each one of them enriches according to his own ability. No, he only used one verb for both: '…save that Allah had enriched them and [caused] His Apostle [to enrich them]...' (*at-Tawba:* 74). Read also, the verse: '…the while it is Allah and His Apostle whose pleasure they should seek above all else, if indeed they are believers!' (*at-Tawba:* 62) Allah *the Almighty* did not use the dual pronoun and say *yardawhuma*, (seek their pleasure), no, He *the Almighty* used the singular pronoun and said *yardawhu*, (seek his pleasure).

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(1) *It is narrated by Bukhari in his Sahih (631); and by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/53) in a (Hadith) from Malik ibn Al-Huwayrith that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'When the time of the prayer arrives, call the (adhan) then call the iqama, then let the eldest amongst you lead the prayer. You should pray as you see me pray.'*

(2) *Jabir ibn 'Abdullah said, 'I saw the Prophet on the day of Sacrifice throwing (his stones) from the back of his camel, and telling us, 'Take your (Hajj) rites from me, for I do not know whether I will perform another Hajj after this one.' It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/318); by An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan (5/270); and by Muslim in his Sahih (1297).*

As for when He *the Almighty* said: '...Pay heed unto Allah, and pay heed unto the Apostle and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority...' (*an-Nisa':* 59), the reason He did not repeat the verb 'pay heed' for 'those among you who have been entrusted with authority' is because we are not obligated to obey those who have been entrusted with authority unless their commands correspond to those of Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then He *the Almighty* says: '…Allah wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet's] House, and to purify you thoroughly' (*al-Ahzab:* 33).

The word *rijs* 'all that might be loathsome', is the same as the word *rijz* which means filth and impurity, regardless of whether the filth is physical such as corpses and alcohol or abstract such as sins and wrong actions. These different types of filth are gathered together in the verse: '...Intoxicants, and games of chance, and idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan's doing: shun it, then, so that you might attain to a happy state!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90) The word *rijs* can also be used to mean hypocrisy and sickness. Although the Arabic word *ahl* is said to originally refer to the clan or close relatives of the husband, it became customary to use it to refer to a man's wife. A remnant of this usage is the way we use the word today: when we go to visit a friend, for example, we might say to him, 'The *ahl* is with me' or 'The group is with me' or 'The children are with me' meaning by all of those expressions that we are accompanied by our wives. Why do we use these expressions?

Because, they say, being covered up is the principle around which a woman's life is built. If her name itself is built upon the principle of being covered up, then most of her duties too are covered up within those of the man. It is rare indeed for rulings to be directed specifically at women. This is exemplified by the story (1) of 'Asma' bint ʿUmays (2) *Allah be pleased with her* the wife of Jaʿfar ibn abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* who was one of those who emigrated to Abyssinia. When she came back, she asked, ‘has anything been revealed in my absence concerning women?’ They replied that nothing had been revealed, so she went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, how great is our loss and disappointment! There are no rulings concerning us at all.’ Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied to her, ‘You are kept hidden and safe by your men.’'(1) Still, despite that, the following verse of Quran was revealed: 'Verily, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto Allah, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves [before Allah], and all men and women who give in charity, and all self-denying men and self-denying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember Allah unceasingly: for [all of] them has Allah readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward.' (*al-Ahzab:* 35)

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(1) The story of 'Asma' bint 'Umays with the Prophet *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*

(2) She is 'Asma' bint ʿUmays ibn Al-Harith Al-Khath'ami. She was a Companion who became Muslim before the Prophet *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* went into Dar Al-'Arqam in Mecca. She emigrated to Abyssinia with her husband Jaʿfar ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him*. She was widowed when Ja'far *was killed at the battle of Mu'ta in 8 AH and was then married by Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him*=

You may also note in the verse: '... Allah wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet’s] House, and to purify you thoroughly' (*al-Ahzab:* 33), that, although it is talking about women, it observes the principle of keeping women covered by making use of the masculine form of the pronoun, *kun*, and not the feminine form *kunna*, in the words, '...to keep uncleanness away…' (*al-Ahzab:* 33) as well as in the words, '…and to purify you thoroughly...' (*al-Ahzab:* 33). However, it would also be correct to say that He *the Almighty* intended the phrase *ahl al-bayt* as referring to all the members of his household, be they male or female.

= *with whom she had a son called Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr. Then, after Abu Bakr died, she was married by ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb with whom she also had children. She died after ‘Ali. Abu Nu'aym described her as one of those who emigrated twice and prayed to both (qiblas). (Al-’A‘lam of Az-Zirikli 1/306)*

(1) *I could not find this particular (Hadith). However Ahmad narrated in his Musnad (6/256) in a (Hadith) from‘A’isha that, ‘Women are the (other halves) of men.’ This is also tnarrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (113). Al-Khattabi said in (Ma'alim As-Sunnan 1/79), ‘In other words, they are their equal in terms of character and natural attributes: it is as if they had been split off from men.’*

وَٱذْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِى بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ
وَٱلْحِكْمَةِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

Remember what is recited in your houses of God's
revelations and wisdom, for God is all subtle, all aware[34]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 34)

'Remember what is recited in your houses…' (*al-Ahzab:* 34), O wives of the Prophet, '…of Allah's revelation…' (*Al-'Imran:* 34), i.e. the verses of the Noble Quran '…and [His] wisdom', i.e. the Hadiths of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Another interpretation is that the verse is making use of the Arabic stylistic device of having the adjective appear as a noun in conjunction with the word it is describing, so the meaning would be 'of the wise messages of Allah'. However, the first interpretation is preferable as long as there is some leeway in the matter. As for the meaning of *wa-dhkurna*, 'Remember…' (*al-Ahzab:* 34), we have already said that *dhikr* is the process of taking a piece of information from your subconscious and bringing it into your conscious mind. So the meaning of the verse is, 'Bring remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* into your mind and be constantly mindful of it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '...and remembrance of Allah is indeed the greatest [good]...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45), i.e. greater than any other type of worship since, as we mentioned before, other acts of worship require time, preparation and that you be free of distraction and responsibility, and entail a degree of hardship. The same is not true of *dhikr*: it can be on your lips at any time of day of night and without any preparation or hardship –your tongue can occupy itself with it regardless of the time and regardless of the state in which you are. This is indicated *al-Jumu'a* chapter: 'and when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah's bounty; but remember Allah often so that you might attain to a happy state!' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) So, as long as *dhikr* is being mindful of Allah *the Almighty* no form of work or endeavour should prevent you from doing it. And, although *dhikr* is the lightest form of worship there is and the easiest for yourself to bear, it also weighs the heaviest for you in the balance.

Now reflect on this verse: 'Verily, in the Apostle of Allah you have a good example for everyone who looks forward [with hope and awe] to Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah unceasingly.' (*al-Ahzab:* 21) Part of the greatness of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lay in the fact that never once, not even for an instant, did his heart cease to be engaged in the remembrance of his Lord. That is why it has come down to us that He *peace and blessings be upon him* said about himself, 'My eyes sleep, but my heart never sleeps.'(1) Then the verse is finished off by the words: '...for Allah is all subtle, all aware' (*al-Ahzab:* 34). *Lutf* (subtlety) is dealing with matters with delicacy and finesse and doing them well no matter how difficult they are to accomplish. We clarified this meaning previously when we mentioned that the smaller something is *latufa*, the greater its capacity for violence. The metal you place over your windows to protect yourself from wolves is different from that which you use to protect yourself from snakes and that which you use to protect yourself from mosquitoes and flies and so on and so forth. That is why we find that the deadliest diseases come from microscopic viruses that take us unaware. Doing things well entails penetrating deep into the heart of things no matter how slight or insignificant. So, for example, there might be an object that you want to get, but in order to access it you have to pass your hand through an opening which is too narrow for it. So, finding that your own hand is incapable of carrying out the task, you either enlist the help of a young boy to do it because his hand is much smaller and finer than your own, or you use a tool that is narrow enough to fit through the gap.

The attribute of Allah, *al-Latif*, the ‘Unfathomable’, is complemented by His attribute *al-Khabir*, the ‘All-aware’. If *lutf* is dealing with matters with delicacy and finesse and doing them well, then *khibra* knows the place in which they are found. *Lutf* is not possible without *khibra*. Then Allah *the Almighty* says (2):

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon. It is tnarrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2113) in Kitab Salat At-tarawih; and by Muslim in his Sahih (738) in Kitab Salat Al-musafirin in a Hadith from 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her that she said, ‘Messenger of Allah, do you go to sleep before you pray the Wetr prayer?’ He replied, ‘'A'isha, my eyes may sleep but my heart never sleeps.’*

(2) *The reason for the verse being revealed: It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (6/ 301 & 305) that Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her said, ‘I said, 'Messenger of Allah, why are we not mentioned in the Quran in the same way that men are mentioned?' Then, I heard nothing of it until one day I heard him call out from the pulpit, 'O people!' I was combing my hair at the time so I wrapped a cover round it, approached the door of the=*

إِنَّ ٱلْمُسْلِمِينَ وَٱلْمُسْلِمَٰتِ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ وَٱلْقَٰنِتِينَ وَٱلْقَٰنِتَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ
وَٱلصَّٰدِقَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ وَٱلصَّٰبِرَٰتِ وَٱلْخَٰشِعِينَ وَٱلْخَٰشِعَٰتِ وَٱلْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ
وَٱلْمُتَصَدِّقَٰتِ وَٱلصَّٰٓئِمِينَ وَٱلصَّٰٓئِمَٰتِ وَٱلْحَٰفِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَٱلْحَٰفِظَٰتِ
وَٱلذَّٰكِرِينَ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَٱلذَّٰكِرَٰتِ أَعَدَّ ٱللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٣٥﴾

For men and women who are devoted to God – believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often – God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward [35] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 35)

We say that this verse was revealed in order to set the mind of ‘Asma’ bint ʿUmays *Allah be pleased with her* the wife of Jaʿfar ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* at rest, after her conversation with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding rulings, during which she had made the observation that those that had been revealed were mainly directed at men. It appears that she brought up the topic of women with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and mentioned that there were Muslims and believers etc. amongst them just like men. In this verse, we notice that it mentions Islam first and then mentions faith. But which of these two comes first with regard to people? We find an answer to this question in the Words of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The Bedouin say, ‘We have attained to faith.’ Say [unto them, O Muhammad]: ‘You have not [yet] attained to faith; you should [rather] say, 'We have [outwardly] surrendered' – for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14).

= *mosque and stood to listen next to the palm branches, and I heard him say, 'Allah says: Verily, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto Allah, and all believing men and believing women…' Until the end of the verse’*

It is narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his sunnan (3211) in a Hadith from Umm ‘Ammara Al-’Ansariyya Allah be pleased with her that she went to the Prophet Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him and said, ‘Everything I see seems to be for the men: I have not seen anything mentioned about women.’ Then this verse: 'For men and women who are devoted to Allah– believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women…' (al-Ahzab: 35) was revealed. At-Tirmidhi classified the (Hadith as (hasan gharib).

Islam is carrying out the obligatory acts of Islam regardless of whether one has or does not have belief in them. Islam is simply obeying rulings. Faith, on the other hand, is believing in the One Who made those rulings and affirming the One Who conveyed them to you. According to this, faith precedes Islam. This is why this verse was revealed, exposing those Bedouins who hid themselves behind their outward performance of acts of Islam that they did not believe in. But Islam can come after faith when you start to find the performance of those acts sweet and enticing – the acts themselves can attract you towards faith and affirmation. And that is why those Bedouins rejoiced and said, ‘Praise belongs to Allah’, when they heard, the verse says: '...for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts...' (*al-Hujurat:* 14). The word in the verse *lamma*, not yet, is only used for things that have a possibility of happening. It is like when you say, ‘Our orchard has not borne fruit yet although orchards have borne fruit.’ What you mean is that it will bear fruit at some point in the future. About this matter, they say, ‘That is because there are many rulings whose maker you do not believe in until you have first tasted their sweetness. For example(1), there was a man who came to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and asked permission to stay the night at his house and partake of his hospitality, so Ibrahim *peace be upon him* asked him what religion he followed.

He replied that he was a Magian 'Fire-worshipper', so Ibrahim *peace be upon him* shut the door in his face. His Lord *the Almighty* however, reprimanded him for that and said, ‘Ibrahim, do you really expect him to change his religion in exchange for one single night of your hospitality when I have provided for him his whole life despite the fact that he does not believe in Me?’ So Ibrahim *peace be upon him* hurried after the man and, when he caught him up, invited him to his home. So the man asked him, ‘Did you not turn me away just a short while ago? What happened?’ Ibrahim *Allah’s peace be upon him* replied, ‘My Lord reprimanded Me because of how I treated you.’ So the man said, ‘What an excellent Lord! A Lord who reprimands His loved ones for their treatment of His enemies! I bear witness that there is no God but Allah.’ This verse makes mention of ten attributes: it begins with that of Islam surrendering to Allah when it says men and women who have surrendered themselves unto Allah *the Almighty* and finishes with that of *dhikr* remembrance when it says men and women who remember Allah *the Almighty* unceasingly. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* had brought the desire of ‘Asma’ bint ‘Umays *Allah be pleased with her* into being through these ten attributes which men and women share and which contain the bases for all types of religious duty. This is a message from Allah *the Almighty* to show that women’s rulings are hidden within those of men, and that the bases for all those rulings are these ten attributes. The meaning of: '... obedient men and women…' (*al-Ahzab:* 35) are those who are constant in their worship of Allah *the Almighty* and obedience to Him, and do so with humbleness and humility. As for His Words: '…charitable men and women…' (*al-Ahzab:* 35), they indicate that women have their own independent financial obligations and are free to use their money how they wish without needing permission from their husbands to do so. If money comes into a woman’s possession through inheritance, a gift from her husband or any other means, no one has the right to dictate to her how she uses it. We clarified this matter previously when we discussed the topic of *zakat*. These are some of the distinctions that Islam grants women who, before Islam – and indeed in certain contemporary societies – were considered to be completely under the financial authority of either their fathers or their husbands. The Arabic word *sadaqa*, ‘alms’, is inclusive of *zakat*, ‘the obligatory alms tax’, since Allah *the Almighty* says: 'the offerings given for the sake of Allah are [meant] only for the poor and the needy, and those who are in charge thereof…' (*at-Tawba:* 60) using the word *sadaqa*.

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(1) *The story of the guest of Abraham Allah’s peace be upon him with his disbelieving guest*

Sadaqa is the more general word, and it means that you affirm Allah *the Almighty* when He entrusts you with wealth which derives from your striving in the earth that He created. It is as if you were putting into practice what Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* did when he was asked by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what he had done with his share of the booty they had collected from the war and he replied that he had given it all away as *sadaqa*. Then, when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him what he had left for his family, he replied, ‘Allah and His Messenger.’ When the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* asked the same question of ʿUmar *Allah be pleased with him* he replied that he had given away half of it as *sadaqa* and kept half of it for his family.(1)

So each of them disposed of their money in a logical way that best befitted their respective characters, while one desires the growth and purification of one’s wealth by paying *zakat*, the only thing one desires when giving *sadaqa* is the face of Allah *the Almighty* and a reward in the Hereafter, It is as if the one who gives *sadaqa* desires nothing except to do good for another and acknowledge that the favour is from Allah *the Almighty* the Giver, since it was Allah *the Almighty* who granted him a level of wealth that he had not granted to the weak or incapacitated. Then Allah *the Almighty* mentions the religious duty of fasting: '…fasting men and women…' (*al-Ahzab:* 35). In all of the rulings in Islam, fasting is unique: Allah *the Almighty* put the reward for every single religious duty in the hands of its own specific cadre except for fasting for which there was no specific cadre. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '...except for fasting – it is Mine and I will reward people for it.'(2) In other words, it holds a high rank over all the other duties. But why is such a high rank granted to fasting?

They reply that it is because fasting is the only form of worship which human beings have never used to worship other human beings. It is possible, for example, when it comes to the testimony of faith, ‘there is no Allah except Allah’, for someone to use statements like it to praise others, such as when a person says to another, ‘there is no one in the universe except you: you are the one who brings benefit and you are the one who brings harm’, or to use statements like it to praise themselves, such as when a person says about himself, ‘I am the one and only leader.’ Similarly, when it comes to the prayer, we see people bowing and prostrating to other than Allah *the Almighty* in the same way that we bow and prostrate to Allah *the Almighty* and when it comes to *zakat*, we try and draw close to the great and mighty of this world by giving them or those around them money and gifts.

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(1) *It is narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (1678); by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3675); and by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (1/414). Al-Hakim considered it (Sahih), and At-Tirmidhi classified it as (hasan sahih).*

(2) *An agreed-upon Hadith It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1904); and by Muslim in his Sahih (2/806) in a Hadith from Abu Hurayra. This is a (Qudsi Hadith) from the Lord of Might.*

But, has any human being ever said to another, ‘I will fast a month – or even a day – in order to draw closer to you’? No, this has never been said because fasting for one who is not your equal would be a source of bother to the one for whom the fast is being done, not the one doing the fasting. Do you not see that he would be forced to place the one doing the fasting under constant observation to check whether he had eaten or not?

No, this has never been said, because fasting is the only act of worship which human beings cannot use to draw closer to other human beings. Allah *the Almighty* says about it in a Qudsi Hadith, 'Every action that the son of Adam does is for his sake except for fasting – it is mine and I will reward people for it.'(1) In other words, its reward is outside those that have been fixed, as we mentioned earlier. The greatness of the religious duty of fasting lies in another direction too. This is that Allah *the Almighty* has made some things lawful for us and other things forever unlawful for us. So the one who takes on his religious responsibilities becomes accustomed to what is lawful but not to what is unlawful, thereby helping this doctrine to take firm root in his soul. And this continues until such a time that it no longer even occurs to him to partake of what is unlawful. So, for example, he never once thinks of drinking alcohol or eating carrion – with respect to him such things are anathema and completely finished with. Allah *the Almighty* wanted to make the pleasure of taking one’s religious responsibilities last for people, so He *the Almighty* made fasting obligatory on them, an act of worship during which people deny themselves during one day what had been lawful for them and what they had grown accustomed to the previous day in order that such self-denial should become habitual for them. There is a difference between the continuance of a habit and the pleasure that an act of worship brings. Reflect on the day of *Eid of Fitr*, for example: *fitr* (eating during the daytime) is something that is usual for you to do on other days throughout the year when you are free to either fast or not as you wish. However, when the day of *Eid* of *Fitr* comes, your Lord takes you out of the world of habit into the world of worship and makes a religious duty for you to have something to eat during the daylight hours before you go out to the *Eid* Prayer.(1) Then He *the Almighty* says: '...chaste men and women…' (*al-Ahzab:* 35). So the topic of guarding one's private parts comes immediately after that of fasting because fasting is abstaining from the appetites of both the stomach and the private parts: Allah *the Almighty* gave us the appetite of the stomach so that we could preserve our lives by means of eating and drinking. He gave us the appetite of the private parts so that we could preserve our species by means of marriage and procreation. We say that Allah *the Almighty* satisfied the wish of 'Asma' bint 'Umays *Allah be pleased with her* the representative of womankind, by mentioning the various different types of religious duty once in the masculine form and once in the feminine form. However, in doing that, He *the Almighty* took into account the need to keep women shielded. He *the Almighty* is still taking that consideration into account when He *the Almighty* says here '...chaste men and women…' (*al-Ahzab:* 35): when He *the Almighty* speaks of the men, He *the Almighty* says, '... '...chaste men and women…' (*al-Ahzab:* 35), but when He *the Almighty* speaks of the women, He *the Almighty* does not say 'all women who are mindful of their chastity' since matters relating to women should be protected and shielded from the public gaze. Then He says: '…men and women who remember Allah often–' *(al-Ahzab: 35)* Then, once again, returns to the matter of keeping women shielded when He says: '...Allah has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward (*al-Ahzab:* 35) using the masculine pronoun *hum* 'them', subsuming the matters of women within those of men. The reason this is done is to honour and protect women, not to disregard or ignore them as some have claimed. A form of this protection can be found in the words that we ourselves use to describe our wives when we refer to them saying, 'My family is with me' or 'The children are with me', or 'The gang are with me'. By saying those things, we seek to protect them and shield from harm, not to disregard or belittle them.

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(1) *An agreed-upon Hadith. It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1904); and by Muslim in his Sahih (2/806) in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

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(1) *From Burayda Al-Aslami who said, 'Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him did not used to go out (to the prayer) on the day of the Eid of Fitr until he had eaten something; and he did not use to eat on the day of the (Eid) Sacrifice until he had returned (from the prayer), whereupon he would eat from the meat of the animal he had sacrificed.' It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/353). Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq said in (Fiqh As-Sunna 1/268), 'Ibn Qudama said, 'With regards to hurrying to eat (before the prayer) on the day of the Eid of Fitr, I know of no difference of opinion (among the scholars).'*

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* had satisfied Asma` bint `Umays *Allah be pleased with her* by including her on behalf of all the Muslim women in the same reward that will be provided for those male believers whose characteristics are mentioned in the verse in question so as to indicate women are also legally responsible.

We notice in the context of this verse that 'forgiveness' is mentioned before 'reward'. This is because of the principle that reads: 'The prevention of harm takes priority over the attraction of benefit'. Allah *the Almighty* prepares a reward for His worshippers for the good actions that they do even though He *the Almighty* derives no benefit whatsoever from those actions. No, the benefit that results from those acts returns solely to the one who is responsible for doing them – it is he who derives benefit from his acts of obedience and receives his reward for them in the Hereafter. As for Allah *the Almighty* He has no need of us, nor does our obedience avail Him anything, a point which is clear in the following Qudsi Hadith: 'O My slaves, if the first of you and the last of you, the jinn amongst you and the men, were all to have a heart the like of that of the most Allah-fearing person amongst you, that would not increase My kingdom in any way whatsoever. O my slaves, if the first of you and the last of you, the jinn amongst you and the men, were all to have a heart the like of that of the most immoral person amongst you, that would not decrease from My kingdom in any way.'(1)

So, we ourselves benefit from the religious duties for which we are responsible: they safeguard our well-being in this world and then we receive a reward for doing them on the Day of Resurrection. That is why we find so many of the messengers saying to their people, 'And no reward whatever do I ask of you for it…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109). It is as if they were saying, 'It would be reasonable for me, according to the customs of economics and exchange, to take some sort of reward for the task I am performing for you, that is, conveying Allah's Message to you, since I am doing you all a service. But what is there that you could give me, O poor ones, when I have a reward that is so high that no human being is capable of granting it? The verse says: '…my reward rests with none but Allah…' (*Yunus:* 72).

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, no. 2577; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him.*

Allah *the Almighty* alone is capable of rewarding me in the manner that I deserve. The describing of the reward in the verse as being ‘mighty’ indicates that it will be large in size, valuable in nature and will last for a long time. These are the elements by which something is defined as being *`azhim* (great). How could any reward be greater than the one Allah *the Almighty* prepares for His worshippers in the Hereafter? Then Allah *the Almighty* says(1):

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥٓ أَمْرًا أَن يَكُونَ لَهُمُ ٱلْخِيَرَةُ
مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ ۗ وَمَن يَعْصِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَٰلًا مُّبِينًا ﴿٣٦﴾

When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter: whoever disobeys God and His Messenger is far astray [36]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 36)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘...it is not fitting for any believing man or woman…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 36) includes both men and women. Thus, this verse acts as an extension to the previous one, that is, it supports what comes before it. It also serves what comes after it, for it contains the main cause of that whole issue. It is narrated that this verse was revealed about 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh *Allah be pleased with him* and his sister Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* when they refused to marry Zaynab to Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him*. So, from the point of view that they were the reason why the verse was revealed, the believing man referred to in the verse is `Abdullah ibn Jahsh *Allah be pleased with him* while the believing woman is his sister Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*. But in its more general meaning, the verse refers to all believing men and all believing women alike.

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(1) *The cause of revelation of the verse. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, vol. 3, p. 489 and As-Suyuti, Asbab An-Nuzul, p. 220. As-Suyuti says: ‘It is narrated on the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him that he said, ‘Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him married Zaynab bint Jahsh Allah be pleased with her to Zayd ibn Haritha Allah be pleased with him but she looked down on him and said, “I am better than him in terms of lineage.” She was a woman of passion prone to bouts of anger, so Allah the Almighty revealed: “When Allah and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter…”’ (al-Ahzab: 36).*

We mentioned the story(1) of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* previously, but it can be summarised as follows: he was stolen away from his family and sold as a slave in the slave market of Mecca, where he was bought by Hakim ibn Hizam who gave him to Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* the Mother of the Believers.

Khadija then gave Zayd to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who made him his freedman. Then, one day, while he was in the marketplace, a group of people from Zayd's tribe saw him and knew him at once, so they went and told his father that they had seen Zayd in the city. So, his father and his uncles came at once, told their story to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him to allow Zayd to go back with them. So he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'Leave the choice to him: if he chooses you then, you can take him, but if he chooses me, then it will not be for me to hand him over to you.' Then, when Zayd returned, he said, 'By Allah, I would not choose anyone before Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.' For this reason, Messenger Muhammad wanted to honour Zayd for the way he had acted, so he adopted him in the manner that was practised by the Arabs at that time and called him 'Zayd ibn Muhammad'.(2) Then, when Allah *the Almighty* wanted to bring an end to this practice, as well as the practice of *zhihar* (equating one's wife with one's mother), He *the Almighty* revealed the following words: 'Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body: and [just as] He has never made your wives whom you may have declared to be 'as unlawful to you as your mothers' bodies' [truly] your mothers, so, too, has He never made your adopted sons [truly] your sons…' (*al-Ahzab:* 4). As man may only have a single heart, so too he may only have a single father, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to begin with the adopted son of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he might be a practical example to other people of what they should do. The adopted children, at the time, were to inherit from the adoptive parents after they passed away. In addition, it was forbidden for women who had been married to adopted children to marry their adoptive parents.

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(1) *The story of Zayd ibn Haritha Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *See As-Sirat An-Nabawayya of Ibn Hisham, vol. 1, pp. 248 – 249.*

It's true that ending this practice was, in effect, an end of a corrupt social order that had engulfed the entire Arab peninsula, but at the same time, it was a proof that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* practised adoption in exactly the same way as the rest of the Arabs and that it was Allah *the Almighty* Who rendered these actions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invalid.

This opens the door for those who oppose him *peace and blessings be upon him* to set their tongues wagging and gloat over his misfortune, so Allah *the Almighty* handled the situation in the manner of a Lord Who sends out a command to bring aid to someone beloved to him: Allah *Glorified is He* did not revile the action of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. No, on the contrary He *the Almighty* classified his action as equitable and just. But His judgement was more equitable and more just, so He *the Almighty* says: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). It means, 'if you have made it part of justice and love to make yourselves the legal guardians of these children and give them your names, then know that it is not human justice, but that judgement of Allah *the Almighty* is more equitable and more just'. It is a great honour for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring back his ruling to that of his Lord. It was a great honour for him *peace and blessings be upon him* that the matter of prohibiting adoption started with him: he *peace and blessings be upon him* made a ruling and then Allah *the Almighty* abolished it and replaced it with another, which is viewed as an extraordinary tribute to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; He *the Almighty* says: '…this is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) meaning that the action of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was equitable and just with respect to the laws of mankind, but he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to replace the laws of mankind with the laws of the Lord of mankind. This was how he *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to find his way out of this issue.

As for Zayd, Allah *the Almighty* recompensed him for the distress that he experienced as a result of losing his ascription of paternity to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since he had reverted to simply being called Zayd ibn Haritha after being called Zayd ibn Muhammad; Allah *the Almighty* recompensed him and did justice to him by making his name the only name from amongst all the companions to be mentioned word-for-word in the Noble Quran; He *the Almighty* says: '...[But] then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union with her, We gave her to thee in marriage…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). So the mention of Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* will remain forever in the Book of Allah that is recited out loud and whose recitation is used for the acts of worship until the Day of Resurrection. As for the connection of Zayd to the verse under discussion, '...it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter…' (*al-Ahzab:* 36), it is that he was married to Zaynab bint Jahsh *Allah be pleased with her* - Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had married him to her - and this verse was revealed about Zaynab and her brother `Abdullah(1).

As for the saying of Allah: '...it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter…' (*al-Ahzab:* 36), it means that it is this act of disobeying Allah and His Messenger is inconceivable to take place on the part of the true believers. The use of negation indicates that this matter is totally rejected, that is, as long as belief remains in their hearts (the hearts of believers), it is not possible for believing men and women to abandon the commands of Allah and His Messenger and put their own choices first; He *the Almighty* says: 'It is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter…' (*al-Ahzab:* 36). If this were not so, then they could be said to possess any belief in either Allah *the Almighty* or His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

If you were to ask, 'How can that be so when Allah *the Almighty* has confirmed that we do indeed have choice?', we would respond by saying, 'There is a difference between choice in terms of doing one's religious duties - you can choose to do them or to not - and choice in terms of determining what is or is not a religious duty: the worshippers of Allah *the Almighty* have no say whatsoever in determining what their religious duties consist of. If I were to charge them with the performance of certain religious acts, then I would be the one determining their religious duties, whether or not they obey me, this would be an entirely different matter. Worshippers cannot suggest religious acts for themselves. No, I would be the one who imposes their duties on them. Then, they would have the choice of either obeying or rejecting what I have imposed on them'. However, as long as it is established that they believe in Allah *the Almighty* and in His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is inevitable that they will be content with what they have been commanded and will not turn away from it to something else. The story of the divorce of Zayd and Zaynab *Allah be pleased with them* and how Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then married her is a one that has been exploited by orientalists and prejudiced scholars alike. They have had the nerve to say things about Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that should not be said of one such as him. For example, they say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* loved Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* and wanted her for himself, so he commanded her to act badly towards Zayd so that he might divorce her and thus leave the way open for him to marry her. We say, in response, to them that, first of all, Zaynab bint Jahsh Al-Asadiyya was the daughter of the paternal aunt of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He himself was responsible for looking after her money and arranging her affairs. She grew up under his supervision, so if he had indeed wanted her for himself, he could have married her first. The textual evidence for this is found in the Quran itself where Allah says: '...you hid in your heart what Allah would later reveal…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). If you want to know that which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was hiding within his heart, then your answer is to be found in the verse under study; He *the Almighty* clearly shows the profound wisdom behind this law in His saying, '…so that there might be no fault in believers marrying the wives of their adopted sons after they no longer wanted them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). This destroys all the false claims they make about Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *He is `Abdullah ibn Jahsh ibn Ri`ab Al-Asadi Allah be pleased with him a Companion who was one of the early converts to Islam. He migrated to Abyssinia and then went to Medina. He was one of the commanders of the battles and was the brother-in-law of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him since he was the brother of Zaynab bint Jahsh Allah be pleased with her the Mother of the Believers. He was killed as a martyr on the day of the Battle of Uhud and was buried along with Hamza Allah be pleased with him in a single grave in 3 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, Al-`Alam, 4/76. Hamza ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib, the paternal uncle of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was the maternal uncle of `Abdullah ibn Jahsh since his mother was Umayma bint `Abd Al-Muttalib.*

As for the claim that his heart was preoccupied with Zaynab, we reply by asking why they make out the preoccupation of the heart of Messenger Muhammad a sexual one? If they were to have followed the story right from the very beginning, it would have been obvious to them that it was nothing of the sort. For when he *peace and blessings be upon him* first sent someone to propose to Zaynab, both her brother, `Abdullah, and her sister, Hamna, thought that he had come to propose on behalf of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then, when they found out that he had come to propose on behalf of his freedman, Zayd, they all became very angry, for how could a noblewoman from Quraysh, and indeed a cousin of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* marry a slave? But when they found out that it was a command from Allah *the Almighty,* they immediately submitted and agreed to the marriage. But even after Zayd and Zaynab *Allah be pleased with them* were married, she continued to look down upon him. Indeed, Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* felt as if she despised him because of the disparity between their classes, so he used to go to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to complain about how badly his wife was treating him and that she was making his life a difficult. He complained that the married life they shared was an empty shell, void of all substance or feeling. It was only his love for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that prevented him from divorcing her, as well as the fact that he did not want to lose the tremendous honour he had acquired by being married to a woman who was a cousin of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Every single time Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* complained to him *peace and blessings be upon him* he used to say to him: '…Keep your wife and be mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). If he *peace and blessings be upon him* had truly wanted her for himself, then he would have told him to divorce her when he had the opportunity to do so and then the way would have been open for him. At this point, it is necessary for us to examine what the relationship between men and women: The Creator created men for women and women for men. This is why we find the Arab woman, Umm Iyas giving her daughter the following advice when Al-Harith proposed to her, 'My daughter, if one could be left without advice, then you of all people would be the least in need of it. If a woman were able to do without a husband by virtue of her parent's wealth and the strength of their need for her, then you of all people would be the least in need of him, but women were created for men, while men were created for them. If this advice could be dispensed with because of a person's good manners, then it would be dispensed with in your case. However, this advice can still serve as a reminder to those who are heedless, and a help to those who are heedful.'

We say, 'A man can live a life of the highest luxury in terms of food, drink, clothing and lodging, but despite all of that he will still himself be unable to do without a wife. The same is true for women. That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If I were to command any human being to prostrate to another, I would command a wife to prostrate to her husband.'(1) This is because her husband gives her what her father; mother and siblings give her and, on top of that, gives her things that they are all not able to give her. It is a demonstrable fact that women are for men and men are for women, no matter how many walls of power or might they build around themselves.

With regard to Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* the matter was a difficult one because Allah *the Almighty* had made three different stages in marriage, which are mentioned in His saying: 'And among His Wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind so that you might find tranquillity in them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you...' (*ar-Rum:* 21).

The first stage is when the husband finds tranquillity with his wife and begins to feel at peace with her. He feels at ease with her when she wipes the sweat from his brow and takes him into her embrace at the end of a day full of hardship and toil. If peace and tranquillity prove impossible due to the trials of everyday life, then there is love and affection to bring them together. Why should it not be so since, when you remain in the company of a friend for a long time, you will find affection towards him growing in your heart. You will find that there is a value in this affection that enables you to bear his mistakes and forgive him his trespasses. And if it is so with a friend, then how should it be with a wife? Is she not more deserving of this love and affection?

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, 4/381, on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Abu Awfa that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'If I were to command any human being to prostrate to another, I would command a wife to prostrate to her husband. A woman has not fulfilled all the rights Allah has over her until she has first fulfilled all the rights her husband has over her. Even if he were to ask her to give herself to him, while she was on top of the camel-saddle, she should give herself to him.'*

If this love is lacking in their relationship, then there is still compassion between them, meaning that they treat one another with mercy and tenderness when they grow old and infirm. However, Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* had reached a stage in his marriage wherein all three of these qualities, i.e. tranquillity, love and compassion, were absent because of the social differences between him and his wife. Another matter is that if we accept that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did indeed have thoughts (of marrying) Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* then why do you interpret those thoughts to be his natural instincts? Why do you not interpret them in the light of the act of fairness? For he was the one who forced Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* to marry Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* even though she was a noblewoman of Quraysh and he was a slave. So, because he was the one who got her into her predicament, he wanted to make it up to her by marrying her himself and making her one of the Mothers of the Believers.

Anyway, why should a messenger whom Allah *the Almighty* has described as being a human being not have desires of this sort when all of the messengers who preceded him had such desires. This is based on supposing that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did desire Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*. However, people are lacking in good opinion.

This law was for sure a divinely revealed one, a point which is crystal clear by the fact that there was no enmity whatsoever among the three main figures in this story, namely; Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* his freedman Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* and his cousin Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*. All of them were brought together through a bond of faithful purification, which enabled every one of them to meet defeat with high spirits without any feeling of hostility or resentment and to submit to the command of Allah *the Almighty*. As for those who understand the verse: '…you were afraid of people, but it is more fitting that you fear Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37) as a source of disgrace to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they should know that there are two types of *khashya* (standing in awe): standing in awe of something that you fear might harm you and standing in awe in the sense of feeling shy. As for the act of ‘standing in awe’ referred to in ‘…you were afraid of people…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 37), it is that of feeling shy. It is enough that Allah *the Almighty* said regarding His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*(1): ‘…that, behold, might give offence to the Prophet, and yet he might feel shy of [asking] you [to leave]: but Allah is not shy of [teaching you] what is right….’ (*al-Ahzab:* 53). So the act of ‘standing in awe’ referred to Messenger Muhammad’s fear of what the disbelievers might say about him concerning his marriage to the ex-wife of his adopted son. However, those people did not know that Allah *the Almighty* had abolished the practice of adoption and so they had no case against him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It was perfectly natural for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be afraid of what the disbelievers might say about him since he had come to abolish the customs and practices of the pre-Islamic period. He, also, was the first one to have to suffer the consequences of that change since it was firstly implemented on him personally. Such feeling of shyness that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* experienced regarding his marrying Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* or to what the people might say, was only prompted by his desire to keep his reputation and honour clean of anything that might sully it or detract from it. As a matter of fact, Messenger

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(1) This came about because when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* moved in with Zaynab bint Jahsh *Allah be pleased with her* he prepared a feast of bread and meat and invited the people to come and partake of it. So, a group of people came, ate their fill and left; then another group came, ate their fill and left; (and this continued) until only three people remained who had not left yet. They sat therein chatting with each other while Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to be alone with his bride, Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*. So he *peace and blessings be upon him* went out, then returned, then went again, then returned and *continued doing that until he was informed that the people had left, for he was an exceedingly shy man. It was then that Allah the Almighty sent down the words: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not enter The Prophet’s dwellings unless you are given leave; [and when invited] to a meal, do not come [so early as] to wait for it to be readied: but whenever you are invited, enter [at the proper time]; and when you have partaken of the meal, disperse without lingering for the sake of mere talk: that, behold, might give offence to the Prophet, and yet he might feel shy of [asking] you [to leave]: but Allah is not shy of [teaching you] what is right….*’ (*al-Ahzab:* 53). *See Al-Wahidi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p.205 and Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 3/503.*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* always sought to protect himself against suspicion. This was why when some of his companions saw him with a woman and so steered clear of him in order not to cause him any embarrassment, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, ‘Be at ease! She is Safiyya.’ When they replied, ‘We did not doubt you, O Messenger of Allah.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Satan is in the blood of the sons of Adam, flowing where it flows.’(1)

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to shake off any doubts or suspicions with regards to his character. He wanted to make sure that no one needed to do him a good turn by covering for him. There is no greater proof of the shyness of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* than the story of `Abdullah ibn Sa`d ibn Abu As-Sarh, which reads: ‘When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered Mecca after his victory over Quraysh, he ordered `Abdullah ibn Sa’d ibn Abi Sarh to be murdered, since he was wanted by Muslims for major crimes.(2) Then 'Uthman ibn 'Affan *Allah be pleased with him* stood up and begged Messenger Muhammad to have `Abdullah ibn Sa`d ibn Abu Sarh pardoned- i.e. he asked that he give him safe passage- but he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not respond and continued to wait for someone amongst the people to get up and go and kill him. 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* however, repeated his request again and again until he *peace and blessings be upon him* felt shy in the presence of 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* and so granted him his request, guaranteeing the safety of `Abdullah. Then, after his safety had been guaranteed, 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* took hold of 'Abdullah and led him away from the salon of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. After he left, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his Companions, ‘Was there not a single right-acting man among you who would have stood up and killed him?' He meant that he wished if this man could be killed by his companions, yet after 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* had asked pardon for him, the opportunity had been missed. So `Abdullah ibn Bishr *Allah be pleased with him* stood up and said, 'Messenger of Allah, your eye was fixed upon mine and I was looking into it waiting for a green light from you that I should kill him. But you did not give one' whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'The treachery of the eye does not befit a Prophet.'(1) I would like to mention a story(2): we used to have a professor called Sheikh Musa Sharif *Allah rest his soul* who was a pious man. He taught us the interpretation of this verse. Before attending his class, we, students, used to get together to discuss previous lessons. He used to choose me from amongst all my fellow students, including the likes of Sheikh Hasan Jad, Dr. Khafaja Abu Al-`Aynayn and others, to tell him about the difficult points that had confronted us in the course of our discussions. So, one day, he called me by my mother's name which he had known from my father. So, I went up and stood before him, whereupon he struck me on the back of my neck in such a way that the problem which had been confronting us completely and suddenly resolved itself. It was exactly like when you strike someone suffering from hiccups on the back, so it goes away just like that. Then, the following day when the Sheikh told us this story of 'Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* he said, 'My boys, I saw 'Uthman last night with all of his shyness, so I said to him, 'How could you beg pardon for a man who said such-and-such about Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?' He replied, 'Do you not know that Allah *the Almighty* loves those who repent and seek forgiveness?' Then I said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*' - and notice that he did not say, 'I saw Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*'- 'What made you accept the intercession of 'Uthman?' He replied, 'Should I not feel shy in front of a man in whose presence the angels feel shy?'(3)

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6219; and Muslim, Sahih Hadith no. 2175, on the authority of Safiyya bint Huyayy Allah be pleased with her.*

(2) *See Ibn Sa`d At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, 9/502; he said: `Abdullah ibn Sa`d ibn Abu Sarh was one of the early converts to Islam and had served as a scribe for Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him writing down the revelation. Then he was tempted from the path, reverted and left Medina to Mecca, so Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him ordered the shedding of his blood on the day of the conquest of Mecca.’*

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(1) *See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4359 and An-Nasa`i, Sunnan, Hadith no.7/105 & 206, on the authority of Sa`d ibn Abu Waqqas Allah be pleased with him. The wording of Abu Dawud and An-Nasa`i is as follows: 'It is not proper for a Prophet to make use of treachery of the eye.'*

(2) The story of Sheikh Musa Sharif with Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi, *Allah rest their souls.*

(3) This expression is used by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to refer to `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him*. On another occasion, Imam Muslim narrated=

So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was, by nature, an exceedingly shy man.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '...whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger is far astray' (*al-Ahzab:* 36). In this verse, there are three literary particles that are used for emphasis: the particle *qad* which is used to indicate assertion, especially when it is followed by a verb in the perfect tense; the use of the cognate accusative of *dalal*; and the use of the adjective 'far' to describe this act of *dalal* (going astray).

Dalal is defined as lacking the guidance necessary to find the path that leads to the goal. However, it is possible for someone to go astray from the path and then for someone else to come and guide him back to it. Those who rebel against Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* however are described as going clearly astray, meaning that they are unable to ever find anyone to guide them back. The reason for that is because this path that we follow leads to the Hereafter and there is nothing of that sort allowed there. This is a glimpse of the interaction of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with 'Uthman ibn 'Affan *Allah be pleased with him*. 'Abdullah ibn Bishr *Allah be pleased with him* has served to clearly show us the quality of shyness possessed by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Now, we can return to the topic under discussion which is the quality of faithful purification that linked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to both Zayd and Zaynab *Allah be pleased with them*. Messenger

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= that `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, 'While Messenger Muhammad, was reclining on the bed in my apartment with his upper-leg or lower-leg uncovered, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* came and sought permission to enter. So, he bade him enter, remaining in the same position that he was in, and talked with him. Then `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* came and sought permission to enter. So, he bade him enter, again remaining exactly as he was, and talked with him. Then `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* came and sought permission to enter. So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sat up and straightened out his garments (and covered his leg properly). Then, after he had left, `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, 'When Abu Bakr came in, you did not stir or seem particularly bothered; when `Umar came in, you did not stir or seem particularly bothered; but when `Uthman came in, you immediately sat up and straightened out your clothes. Why was that? Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Should I not feel shy in front of a man in whose presence the angels feel shy?'

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* always used to go and ask after Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* whenever he was absent. One time, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* went to ask after Zayd, he saw Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* busy with her household chores, looking very pretty, so he said out loudly, ‘Blessed be Allah, the best of creators’, in exactly the same way, for example, that one of us might say: ‘*Masha` Allah*’ (What Allah wills!), when you see a daughter of yours looking very pretty. It was as if Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to make her feel good and give her spirits a boost that was large enough to counter the drop in spirits she had felt as a result of being forced to marry Zayd and live with him against her will. Then, when Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* came back, she said to him, ‘Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to ask after you and said to me, “Blessed be Allah, the best of creators.”’ So Zayd said to her, ‘Zaynab, I think that you should be married to Messenger Muhammad, since he loves you. I think that I should divorce you so that he could then marry you.’ When he said this, she appeared joyful, but also looked amazed as if she could not believe that, ‘If you divorce me, I will marry Messenger Muhammad?’

This conversation between them amounted to no more than words, but by Allah, if such had been uttered elsewhere to someone other than Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* they would have made that person jealous and he would not have acted like this! So, reflect deeply on this faithful purification with which Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* was endowed.

Allah *the Almighty* says about this matter:

وَإِذۡ تَقُولُ لِلَّذِيٓ أَنۡعَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِ وَأَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيۡهِ أَمۡسِكۡ عَلَيۡكَ زَوۡجَكَ وَٱتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ
وَتُخۡفِي فِي نَفۡسِكَ مَا ٱللَّهُ مُبۡدِيهِ وَتَخۡشَى ٱلنَّاسَ وَٱللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَن تَخۡشَىٰهُۖ فَلَمَّا
قَضَىٰ زَيۡدٞ مِّنۡهَا وَطَرٗا زَوَّجۡنَٰكَهَا لِكَيۡ لَا يَكُونَ عَلَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ حَرَجٞ فِيٓ أَزۡوَٰجِ
أَدۡعِيَآئِهِمۡ إِذَا قَضَوۡاْ مِنۡهُنَّ وَطَرٗاۚ وَكَانَ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ مَفۡعُولٗا ﴿٣٧﴾

When you [Prophet] said to the man who had been favoured by God and by you, ‘Keep your wife and be mindful of God,’ you hid in your heart what God would later reveal: you were afraid of people, but it is more fitting that you fear God.

When Zayd no longer wanted her, We gave her to you in marriage so that there might be no fault in believers marrying the wives of their adopted sons after they no longer wanted them. God's command must be carried out [37]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 37)

The meaning of the saying of Allah: 'When you [Prophet] said to' (*al-Ahzab:* 37), is, 'Remember, O Prophet Muhammad, the matter of Zayd well and think of it carefully. Remember when you said to the one to whom Allah *the Almighty* showed favour by granting him, i.e. Zayd faith and to whom you showed favour, first by granting him his freedom, then by using human law to make him your son, third by marrying him to a noblewoman from Quraysh who was your own cousin despite his being a slave and finally by saying to him when you did: "Keep your wife and be mindful of Allah…" (*al-Ahzab:* 37).

But why did you say those words to him, O Prophet Muhammad? Was it out of fear that people might say that you married your adopted son's wife? How could that be when this is what Allah *the Almighty* himself intends to come to pass? He *the Almighty* wants to bring an end to the custom of adoption and wants to bring about its end through you. So, you have hidden a matter within yourself that Allah *the Almighty* brought out into public when He *Glorified is He* told you about this matter, affirming you that it will end through your hands by you marrying the ex-wife of your adopted son. Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…it is more fitting that you fear Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37), meaning to stop fearing people! This is what made Allah *the Almighty* say in another verse: '… [and such will always be His way with] those who convey Allah's Messages [to the world], and stand in awe of Him, and hold none but Allah in awe…' (*al-Ahzab:* 39). We have previously made it clear that the fear felt by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not the type of fear that one experiences when he is afraid of something that might harm him, but was a feeling of shyness by which he *peace and blessings be upon him* would deflect any doubts with regard to his character. Then the verse says: 'When Zayd no longer wanted her We gave her to you in marriage…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). The word *watar* is used to refer to the things in a man's life that fit in with his lifestyle, but literally means 'aim' or 'need'. As we mentioned previously, a man's *watar* with respect to his wife (i.e. what he needs from her) is tranquillity. If that is absent, then it is love which keeps them together and if that is absent then there is a mutual feeling of tenderness. Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* went through all these stages and looked for all these qualities within his wife but did not find a single one - he found neither tranquillity nor love nor tenderness. So why then did he remain married to her? That was why he used to go to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to complain to him about what he had to endure from Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her*. In response, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would say to him: 'Keep your wife and be mindful of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37).

Now reflect again on the faithful purification of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Zayd and Zaynab *Allah be pleased with them*: 'after Zayd divorced Zaynab, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left her to complete her *`idda* (period of waiting). Then, when she completed her period of waiting, he said to Zayd, 'Go to Zaynab and propose to her on my behalf.'(1) How incredible is that? Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent the divorcer to propose on his behalf to the divorcee! This indicates how much Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* trusted Zayd; it also indicates that Zayd's desire for Zaynab had run its course and that he no longer had any need of her, which is why he went in to see Zaynab and said to her, 'Rejoice, Zaynab, for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has sent me to propose to you on his behalf.' She replied, 'By Allah, I will give no reply until I have first prostrated to Allah in thanks.' So Zaynab stood up to make her prostrations and Zayd returned to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell him what Zaynab had said. So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to Zaynab's home and went in to see her without seeking her permission.'(1)

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(1) *See Ibn Sa`d, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, vol. 10 p.101. Anas Allah be pleased with him said, 'When the period of waiting of Zaynab bint Jahsh came to an end, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to Zayd ibn Haritha Allah be pleased with him 'I can find no one in my family whom I trust as much as you, so go to Zaynab and propose to her on my behalf.' Zayd Allah be pleased with him said, 'Rejoice, Zaynab, for Messenger Muhammad, has mentioned you.' But Ibn Sa`d is narrated to have said that when the waiting period of Zaynab ended, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him fainted. Then he came to, smiling, and said, 'Who will go to Zaynab to give her the good news that Allah the Almighty has married her to me from Heaven.' `Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, 'So Salama, the servant of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him rushed out to tell her about that, and so she gave her anklets.' See Ibn Sa`d, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, vol. 10 p.99.*

Perhaps you wonder why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went in to see her without seeking her permission first? He did that, they say, because at that moment she had become his wife: as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'When Zayd no longer wanted her We gave her to you in marriage…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). In other words, Allah *the Almighty* had married him to her from above the seven heavens.

This was why Zaynab, when she sat with the other wives of the Prophet- and this is another example of faithful purification- she used to say to them, 'I have a source of pride over the rest of you, for while all of you were given in marriage by your guardians, I was given in marriage by my Lord. So, do not any of you dare answer me back?'(2) This was not all; she also used to act boldly towards Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'Messenger of Allah, there are three matters which allow me to act boldly towards you.' He would laugh and reply, 'What is the first matter?' So, she would say, 'The first is that I have the same grandfather as you; the second is that Allah *the Almighty* married me from above Seven Heavens; and the third is that my messenger in the marriage was not Zayd but was Jibril (Gabriel)'(3)

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(1) This was said by Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* who said that Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* replied to Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* saying: 'I will not do anything until I receive a command from my Lord.' So, she got up and went to her place of prostration. Then the verse: 'When Zayd no longer wanted her We gave her to you in marriage…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37), was revealed. So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came and went in to see her unannounced.' *See Ibn Sa`d, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, vol. 10 p.101; and Ibn Al-A`thir, Usdu Al-Ghaba vol. 7 p.125.*

(2) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7420, on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him who said that Zaynab Allah be pleased with her used to boast in front of the other wives of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him saying, 'Your families married you, but Allah the Almighty married me from above seven heavens.'*

(3) *See Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari vol. 13, p. 412 as part of a mursal Hadith narrated on the authority of Ash-Sha`bi, using some of the words mentioned here. In this narration, Zaynab Allah be pleased with her said, 'Messenger of Allah, my right to you is greater than that of all your other wives, since I had the best man, the noblest Messenger and am the closest of them in lineage to you: it was the Most Merciful who married me to*=

What greatness we have witnessed in this story! What faithful purification demonstrated by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions! So he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not marry Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* out of his own accord, but rather, he was married to her by the command of his Lord. That is why we say to those who love to dwell on this matter, thinking that it brings dishonour upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You must understand the difference between *zuwwij* and *tazawwaj*: *tazawwaj* is when you marry someone yourself according to your own wishes, while *zuwijja* means that somebody else gives you away in marriage. The Quranic phrase: 'We gave her to you in marriage' (*al-Ahzab:* 37), includes the verb *zawwaja* (to give in marriage); the pronoun *na* (we) which is the subject and which refers to Allah *the Almighty*; the pronoun *ka* (you) which is the first object and which refers to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the one being addressed in the verse; and the pronoun *ha* (her) which is the second object of the verb *zawwaja* and which refers to Zaynab.

So, in this matter and with respect to his marriages to all his wives, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never went against the command of his Lord. So be fair in how you judge him since the matter was not decided by him *peace and blessings be upon him* but by his Lord *the Almighty* a fact which is clear in His saying, '[O wives of the Prophet!] Were he to divorce [any of] you, his Lord might well give him in your stead spouses better than you – women who surrender themselves unto Allah, who truly believe, devoutly obey His will, turn [unto Him] in repentance [whenever they have sinned], worship [Him alone], and go on and on [seeking His goodly acceptance] – be they women previously married or virgins.' (*at-Tahrim:* 5)

Then suppose, falsely, that Muhammad did so. What would have been wrong with him doing that? Polygamy was commonly practised at the time; it was not Muhammad who instituted it. Polygamy was also practised by the prophets and messengers who preceded him and you yourselves still practise it today.

= *you from above seven heavens and it was Jibril (Gabriel) who brought news of that. As I am the daughter of your paternal aunt, there is not one other wife who is more closely related to you than me.' See At-Tabari and Abu Al-Qasim At-Tahawi in his book Kitab Al-Hujja Wa At-Tibyan.*

As for those who accuse Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of expanding the parameters of the law for his benefit by marrying nine wives while constricting its parameters for his nation by only permitting them four, the response to them is that his wives are the Mothers of the Believers, thus it is impermissible for anyone to marry them after him *peace and blessings be upon him*. But that is not the case with other believing women, so, for example, if a man had seven wives, he would be obliged to divorce three and then those three would be free to marry someone else if they so wished. Therefore, it was incumbent upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* to hold onto all of his wives, while it was incumbent upon others to separate from any wives they had over the four that were permitted them.

Another thing: you think that Allah *the Almighty* was expanding the parameters of the law for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in these matters, whereas the truth was that He was constricting them. Compare his position with that of all the other believers: they were allowed to hold on to four wives at any one time and then, if they divorced one or one of them died, they could replace her with another. Indeed, even if a believer divorced all of them or they were all to have died, he could still continue replacing them until he reached his divinely defined number. This means that ordinary believers had the right to marry a huge number of women, which is not allowed for Prophet Muhammad himself.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other hand, despite the fact that he married nine, was addressed by Allah *the Almighty* with the following words: ‘No [other] women shall henceforth be lawful to thee – nor art thou [allowed] to supplant [any of] them by other wives, even though their beauty should please thee greatly…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 52). So, who has truly been restricted - Muhammad or his *ummah*?!

Another thing to be aware of is the difference between an exception in terms of the number and an exception in terms of the specified women themselves. Did Allah *the Almighty* except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the ruling in terms of its number, allowing him nine instead of four, or did He limit the exception to those specific women whom he married and no one else? The answer is that the exception was in terms of the specified women themselves, not the number, since, if it had been in terms of number, he would have been permitted to replace them with other women if any of them had died. No, the exception was limited to the specified women to whom he was married, so even if they were to have all died, he still would not have been permitted to marry any other wives after them.

Did the ruling remain thus for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until he passed away? The answer is ‘No’: it was like this at the beginning of his prophethood and then, when things settled down and Allah *the Almighty* had made His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* reach a significant position, He said to him, ‘Do what you want, for you are a guarantor from your nation.’(1)

There is something else we want to say: ‘Even suppose that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had had a choice in this matter and that it was not something already decided, did his action not lead to the abolishment of the practice of adoption? There is the matter of his mission: did Allah *the Almighty* strip him of it after he did what he did? Of course not, because there is no contradiction whatsoever between what Allah *the Almighty* wants and what His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* wants. Those who take Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to task for this matter are like those who take Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* to task for what is said of him in Allah’s words: ‘And, indeed, she desired him, and he desired her…' (*Yusuf:* 24) acting as if they were even more jealous of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* than his Lord. Yes, it is true that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace and blessings be upon him* desired her, i.e. that he thought about her. We will not say to you that it is right for you to remain in the state of confusion in which you find yourselves, but we will ask you this: did Allah *the Almighty* strip Yusuf (Joseph) *peace and blessings be upon him* of his mission after he desired her? No, He did not, so we must conclude that his desire of her did not contradict his mission in any way. So, what you say about this matter is nothing more than a set of interpretations you have added yourselves.

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(1) *As is mentioned in the verse: ‘[know that] you may put off for a time whichever of them you please, and may take unto you whichever thou please...’ (al-Ahzab: 51). However, Al-Qurtubi, in his Tafsir, stated that he considered the position of those who considered this verse to abrogate the verse: ‘No [other] women shall henceforth be lawful to you...’ (al-Ahzab: 52), to be weak, which is why he favoured the interpretation that the purpose of the verse was to allow Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him leeway with respect to how much time he gave each wife - this verse meant that he no longer had to divide his time between them equally. Al-Qurtubi said, ‘This interpretation best fits what came before, and that is what is established in the Sahih from `Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said, ‘I used to be jealous of those women who gave themselves to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and say about them, ‘Does a woman give herself to a man?!’ Then, when Allah the Almighty revealed the verse: ‘[know that] you may put off for a time whichever of them you please...’ (al-Ahzab: 51), `Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, ‘By Allah, I do not see your Lord do anything except rush to fulfil your desires.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, vol. 8, p. 5483.*

Then the reason for the entire matter is mentioned: '…so that there might be no fault in believers marrying the wives of their adopted sons after they no longer wanted them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). Then the verse concludes in such a way that leaves no room for doubt with respect to the motives of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…Allah's Command must be carried out' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). In other words, this matter had to happen and could not have been left to any other person since that would have undermined the ruling abolishing the practice of adoption. So, the only reason for the marriage of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the ex-wife of his adopted son was to remove the restriction from the Muslim community that prevented Muslim men marrying the ex-wives of their adopted sons and to show them that it was now permissible.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

مَّا كَانَ عَلَى ٱلنَّبِيِّ مِنۡ حَرَجٖ فِيمَا فَرَضَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُۥۖ سُنَّةَ ٱللَّهِ
فِي ٱلَّذِينَ خَلَوۡاْ مِن قَبۡلُۚ وَكَانَ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ قَدَرٗا مَّقۡدُورًا ﴿٣٨﴾

The Prophet is not at fault for what God has ordained for him.
This was God's practice with those who went before – God's
command must be fulfilled [38] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 38)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'The Prophet is not at fault…' (*al-Ahzab:* 38), it means that there is no sin or blame upon him *Allah's peace and blessings upon him* '…for what Allah has ordained for him.' (*al-Ahzab:* 38) In other word, how can you blame Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings* *be upon him* for doing something that Allah *the Almighty* ordained for him. Reflect on what He *the Almighty* says here: Allah says '*farada lahu*' (Allah ordained for him) and does not say '*farada 'alayhi*' (Allah made obligatory on him). As long as Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who ordained this, He is the One with whom the matter should be raised- Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bears no sin in this regard.

This matter is almost like that of the Night Journey - when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave his people an account of what he had done on his Night Journey, they said to him, 'Muhammad, are you claiming that you went all the way to Jerusalem in a single night when we have to flog our camels half to death in order to get there in a month!'(1) This was a pretty senseless thing for them to say since Muhammad did not say, 'I journeyed', rather he said, 'I was taken on a journey.' The One Who took him on the journey was his Lord. So, it was not a matter of what Muhammad did, it was a matter of what Allah *the Almighty* did.

When we talked about this matter earlier, we gave a likeness or example to illustrate it - and the Highest Likeness belongs to Allah *the Almighty*. Our example went as follows: Suppose a man told you that he took his baby boy to the summit of mount Everest, would you then say to him, 'How can a baby boy climb mount Everest'?

However, we ourselves can now benefit from the statement of those who rejected the Night Journey, 'Muhammad, are you claiming that you went all the way to Jerusalem in a single night when we have to flog our camels half to death in order to get there in a month!' since the foolishness of a denier inevitably leads to the opposite of what himself intended by his inanity. Today, we take this statement of theirs as evidence against those who claim that the Night Journey was no more than a dream, or that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* travelled in spirit alone. For, if

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(1) *Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, vol. 2, p. 4; says: 'On the morning after he had been taken on his Night Journey, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him went out to Quraysh and told them what had happened. Whereupon most of the people replied, 'By Allah, that is plain foolishness! By Allah, a caravan takes a month to go to Syria and a month to come back, so how can Muhammad go there and back in a single night?'*

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were to have said to them, ‘I saw in a dream that I went to Jerusalem’, they would not have said what they said.

So, the people must have understood Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to mean that he had gone to Jerusalem in body and spirit. If that were not the case, then why did they compare the way he went there with the way they went there themselves? This is what those who lived at the time of this event said, so how can people come along today and say that the Night Journey took place in his sleep, or that he travelled to Jerusalem in spirit and not in body?

The verse: ‘This was Allah’s practice with those who went before –’ (*al-Ahzab:* 38) either refers to the Prophet’s fellow messengers who came before him, or to those who practised polygamy before Islam. Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not an innovator when it came to this matter.

As for the saying of Allah, ‘Allah’s Command must be fulfilled’ (*al-Ahzab:* 38), you will notice that the previous verse finished with the words: ‘…And [thus] Allah’s will was done.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 37) So, based on that, it might be possible for someone to say, ‘Yes, His will was done at the time during which these events took place, but what about at other times’? So, Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘…Allah’s Command must be fulfilled’ (*al-Ahzab:* 38), to indicate that what happened to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was pre-destined to come to pass, and that there is nothing that happens outside of Allah’s decree. It has been narrated in a sound Hadith that the pen has become dry from writing what has been written and what has been decreed.(1)

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1904, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him ‘I am a young man and I am afraid to commit fornication since I cannot find any women to marry.’ He remained silent, so I repeated what I had said. Again, he remained silent, so again I repeated what I had said. Yet again he remained silent, so yet again I repeated what I had said. So, he said to me, “Abu Hurayra, the pen has become dry with regard to what you shall meet.”’ See Ibn Abu `Asim, As-Sunna, vol. 10, pp. 50 - 51; and An-Nasa`i, Sunnan, vol. 6, p. 59.*

ٱلَّذِينَ يُبَلِّغُونَ رِسَٰلَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَخۡشَوۡنَهُۥ وَلَا يَخۡشَوۡنَ أَحَدًا إِلَّا ٱللَّهَۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ حَسِيبٗا ﴿٣٩﴾

[And with all] those who deliver God’s messages and fear
only Him and no other: God’s reckoning is enough [39]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 39)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were taking us back to what He said about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘…you were afraid of people, but it is more fitting that you fear Allah.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 38) So the messengers fear nothing when it comes to conveying what they are charged to convey from Allah *the Almighty*.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is denying that the fear felt by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a fear of conveying the message. On the contrary, the fear he felt was merely his feeling shyness and embarrassment about what the people might say about him, since they had no power whatsoever to harm him or cause him terror.

In this verse, it is noteworthy that the phrase: ‘[and with all] those who deliver Allah’s messages and fear only Him and no other…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 38), is a *mubtada`* (subject)(1) without a *khabar* (predicate) since the phrase: ‘…Allah’s reckoning is enough’ (*al-Ahzab:* 39) is not actually its predicate, but is merely a commentary on it. So where is this subject’s predicate? They reply that it is hidden and that the implicit meaning of the verse is, ‘as for those who convey Allah’s messages...it is not possible to level the accusation against them that they fear people when it comes to conveying what they are charged to convey’.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘…Allah’s reckoning is enough’ (*al-Ahzab:* 39), it means that you will never bring them to account, for only Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who will bring them to account. In this vein, we should know that one of the necessary consequences of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* being held to account is that, if he were to have done something that was not right for him to do, he would have been stripped of his mission and Allah *the Almighty* would have replaced him with another prophet. But none of that actually happened. Then the chapter returns to the subject of adoption, but in an entirely different context.

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(1) It is permissible to consider the verse: ‘those who convey Allah’s messages [to the world]…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 39), to be an adjective describing Allah’s words: ‘...those that have passed away afore time...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 38).

Allah *the Almighty* says:

مَّا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَآ أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَٰكِن رَّسُولَ ٱللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ
ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٤٠﴾

Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is God's Messenger and the seal of the prophets: God knows everything [40] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 40)

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men…' (*al-Ahzab:* 40) because it was more important for the matter of adoption to be dealt with than for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be able to claim paternity over any of you (men). The benefit that a man derives from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lies not in the fact that he is his father, but rather in what Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys to him from Allah and the divine program he brings that guarantees success and happiness in both the religious and temporal aspects of his life.

So, the joy you feel about Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on account of him being a messenger is preferable to the joy you feel about him on account of him being a father. If this is not how you feel, then simply look around you and see how many people there are in the world who have fathers, and yet still their lives are wretched and without value.

The particle of negation in this verse, *ma kana*, implies denial and rejection - in other words, it rejects and denies that Muhammad is the father of any of your men. Now, reflect on the greatness of the literary structure used by the Quran in the phrase: '...of you men…' (*al-Ahzab:* 40) since Allah *the Almighty* did not say, as He *the Almighty* might have done, 'the father of one of you'. Why is that? They say that it is because Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was father to 'Abdullah, Al-Qasim and Ibrahim - they were all from them and the Prophet *peace and blessings* *be upon him* was their father. So, in order to exempt those three from the generality of the statement, the verse used the words: ‘you men’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40) since none of them had lived long enough to actually become men. So, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was never a father to any of your men, even if he had been a father to some young boys who never reached adulthood or became men.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘but’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40) meaning Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* being a Messenger of Allah is more important than being a father of anyone of you. Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘but is Allah’s Messenger’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40), and not only that but also ‘the Seal of Prophets’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40) meaning that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger and Prophet who completes the chain of divine messages - no one will come after him with a new Message to rectify and amend what he brought.

This issue is one about which the Orientalists like to object. They say, ‘It says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘And, lo, Allah accepted, through the prophets, this solemn pledge [from the followers of earlier revelation]: “If, after all the revelation and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession, you must believe in him and succour him…”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 81). And Muhammad is amongst those messengers with whom this pledge is made, as is proven by the verse: ‘And [remember] We did accept a solemn pledge from all the prophets – from you, [O Muhammad,] as well as from Nuh (Noah)…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 7).

So, one of their prime responsibilities of the prophets in the pledge Allah *the Almighty* made with them was to inform their people about the coming of a new Messenger and extract an oath from them that they would believe in him and succour him. An example of this is found in the good news `Isa (Jesus) *peace and blessings be upon him* gave his people about the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said: ‘...and to give [you] the glad tiding of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad...’ (*as-Saff:* 6).

So how could Allah *the Almighty* possibly state that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Seal of the Prophets when he was one of them? Our response is this, ‘Yes, it is true that he was one of them, but while they were commanded to give their people the good news of a messenger coming after them, he was commanded to give his people the news that he was the Seal of the Prophets and messengers'.

That is why when a man claimed(1) prophethood during the reign of the caliph Al-Ma`mun, the caliph arrested him. Then, some months later, when another man appeared claiming prophethood, Al-Ma`mun thought it might be a good idea to have the two men meet face-to-face. So, he summoned the first claimant and said to him, 'This man claims that he is a prophet. What do you say about him?' The man replied, 'He is a liar: I have not sent anyone.' So, the man had ascended in his own eyes to the level of being a god, not simply a prophet!

Also there was a woman who claimed prophethood in the time of Al-Ma`mun: when he tried her, saying: 'Do you not know that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "there will be no prophets after me(2)?"' She replied, 'Yes, but he did not say that there would not be any prophetesses after him!'

Then Allah *the Almighty* brings this topic to an end with His words: '…Allah knows everything…' (*al-Ahzab:* 39). Since Allah *the Almighty* has full knowledge of everything, none may object since it was He who sent the appropriate messenger to the appropriate place at the appropriate time and it was He who knew that the message of Muhammad would encompass every place and every time.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *The story of the man who claimed to be a prophet during the time of Al-Ma`mun*

(2) *Ahmad, Musnad, vol. 1, p.182; said: 'One of the Hadiths that are narrated as proof that no prophets will come after Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is that of Sa`d ibn Abu Waqqas. He said, "Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked `Ali ibn Abu Taleb to stay behind in Medina when he went on the expedition to Tabuk, so `Ali said to him, 'Messenger of Allah, are you leaving me behind with the women and children?' Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'Are you not content that you enjoy a position to me like that of Harun (Aaron) to Musa (Moses), with the only difference being that there shall be no prophets after me?'"' See Ahmad, Musnad, vol. 1, p. 182.*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱذۡكُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ ذِكۡرٗا كَثِيرٗا ﴿٤١﴾ وَسَبِّحُوهُ بُكۡرَةٗ وَأَصِيلًا ﴿٤٢﴾

Believers, remember God often [41] and glorify Him morning and evening [42] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 41- 42)

Our Lord *the Almighty* commands us to remember Him a great deal since *dhikr* ‘remembrance’ is the central pillar around which all the other acts of worship are built and is the easiest of them for the believer to do. That is why we find our Lord *the Almighty* commanding us to do it upon the completion of other acts of worship such as the prayer, Fasting and *Hajj* and that is why He *the Almighty* termed it the greatest in His saying: ‘…and remembrance of Allah is indeed the greatest [good]…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 45).

‘Remembrance’ is the job of *dhakira* (the memory) which is a specific area of the brain. As we said before, when a human being receives information, it enters into his conscious mind, then, if he wants to store that piece of information for a time at which he might have need of it, he deposits it into either his memory banks (*hafizha*) or his subconscious. An example of this would be when you encounter someone you have met before: as soon as you see him, you remember and say to yourself, ‘I have not seen this man for over twenty years - the last time I saw him was in such-and-such a place’. Therefore, ‘remembrance’ is for things that are already present in a person’s conscious mind. ‘Remembrance’ is for matters which already actually exist in your mind having entered it at a particular time and place, but of which you have then been unmindful thereby relegating them to your subconscious mind or to your memory banks. So, what we want from you is that you do not leave these matters lost or forgotten in the subconscious or a distant region of the brain so that it would require a tremendous effort on your part to extract them, but rather that you place them in a region of the brain which is close to your conscious mind so you can recall them easily and without difficulty or strain.

This is exactly how your remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* should also be, for that is the vital matter of which you should always remain in constant remembrance. How could you forget to remember your Lord *the Almighty* when He took a solemn oath from you when you were still in your atomic state that you would remember him and got you to acknowledge that He was your Lord?

Allah *the Almighty* created intellect to take in information by making use of the means of perception available to us, as is mentioned in the Quran: ‘And Allah has brought you forth from your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing – but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight and minds so that you might have cause to be grateful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78).

It is as if hearing and sight are the leaders for all other the senses. It is only through them that we come to know that which we did not know when we came forth from our mothers’ wombs. When it comes to actually taking in information, many people assume that people’s capacities vary according to the level of intelligence with which they are endowed, so one person might absorb a piece of information in one go while another might require several goes to absorb the same piece of information. This assumption is false: intellect is very much like a camera - it takes in information in a single go, but on condition that it is empty, ready to receive and not occupied with something else, since the conscious mind only has the capacity to handle one thought at a time. This matter is what we dealt with earlier when we commented on the verse: ‘Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 4).

An intelligent person is one whose mind is not occupied with two matters at the same time; he does not think of one thing when his mind is busy with something else. When the conscious mind is empty, all people are exactly alike in their capacity to take in information. That is why successful teachers are those who are able to attract the full attention of their students, and give them no opportunity whatsoever to become preoccupied with something unrelated to the lesson at hand. And the only way they are able to do this is by treating their students with kindness and courtesy and actively involving them in the class by asking them questions from time to time. This keeps the student on his toes and does not allow him to become distracted since he is expecting to be questioned about the topic at any moment. That is why we see that the most successful form of teaching is that which involves discussion and debate. As for the method whereby the teacher does all the talking and the students simply listen, it places the teacher in one valley and the students in another, with each of them engaged in their own individual lines of thought.

We said previously that when a student knows how important a particular lesson is, he revises it while on his way to the exam and even while he is going up the stairs to the exam hall. Then, if that lesson comes up in the exam, he is able to repeat it word for word. Why is that? Because the time period he had for revision was so short and limited that it would not have allowed his mind to wander or become occupied with anything else. So, his intellect focused solely on the lesson, took in every single word, and recorded it into the conscious part of his brain. Then, when he needed to recall the lesson, it was there exactly as it was when he revised it. Why? Because the lesson had encountered a brain that was empty and free of distraction. Look at how our memory works and reflects on the greatness of the Creator: despite that the *dhakira* (memory) is only a tiny part of the brain, we find children under the age of eight who have memorised the entire Quran and are able, at any time, to recite it back to you. Yet we are amazed when a tape records a single lesson or two! The Quran is not simply a matter of mere memorisation; rather, one must carefully ponder over its letters and verses while reading it. This is because every letter of the Quran is entrusted to an angel, and these angels love those who love them. When you have a connection to the Quran, you recite it a lot which means that you love those angles. Then when you want to recall the Quran that you have memorised, the angels crowd together for you and the words of the Quran flow from your tongue very smoothly. But if you leave (reciting) the Quran, then it leaves you and slips from your memory, and that is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us against leaving the Quran, saying: ‘Maintain (your recitation) of the Quran, for by Him in whose Hand is my soul, it slips away faster than a camel from its rope.’(1)

We also said previously that ‘remembrance’ is the only form of worship which costs you nothing and leaves your limbs free to do whatever it is you were doing: you do not have to put aside a particular time for it nor do you have to make a special effort for it, for there is no specified time for remembrance. One may remember Allah *the Almighty* standing, one may remember Him sitting and one may remember Him lying on his side, but all are counted among the people of remembrance. This is regarding the physical position that you adopt; the same is also true with regard to the time at which you do it: one may remember Allah *the Almighty* in the morning and one may remember Him in the evening, one may remember Him early and one may remember Him late, but all are counted among the people of remembrance. So, anyone who says, ‘Glory be to Allah, praise be to Allah, there is no god but Allah, Allah is the greatest and there is no power and no strength except through Allah *the Most High* the Magnificent’ thirty times in one day is written as one of the People of Remembrance. Also, anyone who gets up in the night, wakes up his family and prays two *rak`as* (units) is one of the People of Remembrance. So, remembrance of Allah is a simple matter: you can remember Him while chopping wood with an axe or writing down something with a pen; you can also remember Him *Glorified is He* while eating or while drinking, that is, whatever you are doing you can remember Allah *the Almighty*. So even though His remembrance, He is the greatest, it is also extremely easy for a believer to do. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and glorify Him morning and evening.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 42) As for the word *tasbih* (glorification), it means declaring it to be holy. As a matter of fact, to declare something to be holy means to declare it to be exalted. But what are we declaring Allah to be exalted above? We declare Him *Glorified is He* to be Exalted in His Essence, Attributes and Actions. So, while He has Existence, you have existence and so do the rivers and so do the mountains, yet His Existence is not like the existence of everything other than Him: Allah’s Existence, unlike any other thing, is not preceded by non-existence. This is with respect to His Essence. As for His Actions, He has actions just as you have actions. However, your Lord is Exalted above having actions that are like yours. This is what we were saying when we talked about the Night Journey and the Ascent. We mentioned the difference between making a journey and being taken on a journey. If Allah *the Almighty* is the One doing the action then do not look at the time it takes, since it is not you doing the action, it is He. Also, Allah’s Actions do not involve Him manipulating anything; rather, He simply says, ‘Be!’, and it is! We also said: ‘Even when we look solely at human beings, we find that the amount of time a particular action takes depends on the strength of the one doing the action. So, a small child might take an entire hour to move something that a large man might move in only a minute.

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, 1/423; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. (791), Kitab Salat Al-Musafirin.*

Therefore, by analogy and given the limitless nature of Allah's Power, it logically follows that His Actions would take no time whatsoever'. In the same way, we declare Allah *the Almighty* to be Exalted in terms of His Attributes: Allah has Hearing which is Exalted above being like your hearing, and a Face which is Exalted above being like your face and so and so forth. All of this is understood within the framework of the verse in which Allah says, '…There is nothing like Him: He is the All Hearing, the All Seeing.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) When you consider the verses dealing with glorification in the Quran, you will find that there are many of them. But glorification has a particularly special quality when it is used to open a chapter of the Quran, as in the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra`* wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night…' (*al-Isra':* 1). The chapter begins by declaring Allah *the Almighty* to be exalted above the strange and marvellous events that are mentioned in it, which is why the verse says at the very beginning: 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night…' (*al-Isra':* 1). Allah's Transcendence and Holiness are established before His Acts. As well, He is Glorified before any glorifier has even been brought into being. In the same way, He is the Creator even before anything has even been created, that is, His Being a Creator came first before He even embarked upon creation. It is like when we talk about a poet: when we say, 'So-and-so is a poet', are we saying that out of the fact that we have actually heard one of his poems, or because he is a poet even before composing a poem? The answer is that he himself is a poet even before he composes a poem, because if he were not, he would never have composed it. So, if we follow the sequence of the glorification phrases used in the Quran, we find that Allah's Glorification was first established before any glorifiers actually existed, as shown in His saying: 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night…' (*al-Isra':* 1), that it was established again after He had created creation, as shown in His following saying: 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah…' (*al-Hashr:* 1), and that creation continues to constantly glorify Him up to the present day, as shown in the following verse: 'Everything in the heavens and Earth glorifies Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1). Allah *the Almighty* was glorified, still is glorified and will continue to be glorified until the Last Hour, and that is why the True Lord commanded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his *ummah* (followers of Muhammad) not to step outside of the ranks of those who glorify Him. Allah *the Almighty* says, '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*.' (*al-A'la:* 1)

The command to remember Allah *the Almighty* is followed immediately by the command to glorify Him, so it is if Allah were saying to you, 'Whenever you remember Him, also remember that He is Exalted above everything else in terms of Essence, Attributes and Actions'. It is in your own best interests as you journey through life that Allah does not have a partner, peer, or equal since that means that everyone will be under His Justice. So, O glorifier, declaring Allah *the Almighty* to be transcendent is in your own best interest.

We previously mentioned the saying of the country folk in this regard which reads: 'Whoever does not have a leader ought to have a larder'. So, the existence of one who is bigger than all the rest protects you from one of them arrogantly lording it over you. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* being described with greatness and magnificence, is one of the greatest blessings with which we have been blessed. So, at the same time that you glorify and exalt Him *the Almighty* for being Exalted, praise and thank Him for not having a partner and for making all people equal before Him, praise and thank Him *Glorified is He* for the fact that His sayings and His commands apply to absolutely everyone, praise and thank Him for not taking a wife or having a son and for not having a familial link to anyone in His creation. How could we not remember Allah *the Almighty* glorify Him and praise Him when He is the One Who created all creatures?! And even before creating them, He assigned them purposes and goals, for creation is to bring something into life for a particular purpose. Allah *the Almighty* also created all what helps man in the fulfilling of his mission on earth, that is to say that mankind came into a universe that had already been readied to receive them and had been created for them before they were even brought into being. Then, instead of making you responsible for following His way of guidance, Allah *the Almighty* let you live and enjoy His Blessings without responsibility from the moment you were born until you reached the age of adulthood. When we say 'age of adulthood', we mean the age of maturity when you are able to make your way to Allah *the Almighty* intellectually by means of reflecting on His signs. The religion of Islam is not based on *taqlid* (the blind following of others), but rather on belief and conviction. We previously compared the maturing of a human being to the ripening of a fruit: a fruit does not become sweet until its seeds reach maturity and become fertile so that if they were to be planted in the ground, they would grow into plants. This is one of the signs of the Greatness of the Creator *the Almighty* for if fruits were to ripen and become sweet before their seeds had reached full maturity, all species of fruit would only be eaten once, and no one who came along after us would ever be able to benefit from them. The example we gave of this was the seed of the watermelon: when you find a seed that is hard and black, you know that the fruit is sweet, ripe, and fit to eat. The reason the Creator *the Almighty* made it like this was to ensure the preservation of species. Another thing: after you reached puberty, were you held responsible for absolutely every movement you make in the course of your life? And were your responsibilities a cause of restriction for you? When you reflect on the matters for which you are held responsible, you will find that they all fall within a narrow band of actions that Allah *the Almighty* has commanded you to do and not to do. Also, you will find that those actions represent less than five percent of the total actions that a man performs in the course of his life. So, with respect to the remaining ninety-five percent of your actions, Allah *the Almighty* has given you total freedom to either do them or not as you wish. How incredible is that! What compassion our Lord shows us by dealing with us in that way! If this proves anything, it conclusively proves that the Creator Loves His creation. So, does this not oblige us not to be unmindful of remembering Him? Does this not oblige us to glorify and thank Him every morning and every evening? In addition, greater still than everything we have mentioned here is the fact that Allah *the Almighty* made it in your own best interests to remember Him and glorify Him; He made it something that weighs heavily in the balance in your favour, and that is why He says in the very next verse:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُصَلِّى عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتُهُۥ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ
إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ ۚ وَكَانَ بِٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا ﴿٤٣﴾

It is He who blesses you, as do His angels, in order to lead you out of the depths of darkness into the light. He is ever merciful towards the believers [43] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 43)

As for Allah’s saying: ‘It is He who blesses you’ (*al-Ahzab:* 43), the word used for bestowing blessings is *salat* which literally means supplication. The act of supplication takes place when someone asks another for something good. But someone only asks another who is capable of providing that good, so if this is the reality of *salat*, how are we to interpret it here? Does our Lord *the Almighty* supplicate to Himself?!

They reply: 'If the outcome of *salat* is asking for good, and if this good comes to pass when it is asked for, then the True Lord is the Duplicator and the One Who possesses all the keys to good; He is the One Who calls down Blessings on you, He is the One Who bestows blessings on you and He is the One Who treats you with compassion'.

The angels also call down blessings upon you since Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and His angels' (*al-Ahzab:* 43). Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* has told us about them saying that they are '…honoured servants: they do not speak before He speaks and they act by His Command.' (*al-Anbiya':* 26-27) Allah *Glorified is He* also says about them '...who never disobey Allah's Commands to them, but do as they are ordered.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6) There are different groups of angels: some are charged with serving us and our interests upon the earth, some protect us from events that might come upon us suddenly, having been given power over those events by Allah *the Almighty* and some are noble, recording guardians. It is these very-same angels connected to us who were commanded to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* as is mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'When I have fashioned him and breathed My Spirit into him, bow down before him.' (*al-Hijr:* 29) This is an indication that they would later serve him, i.e. Adam. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were saying to Satan: 'I asked you to prostrate to Adam and I asked the angels whom you are with (to prostrate to him), so if you are one of the angels, then you should comply; and if you are not one of them, but one whom I have placed in their company because of his obedience, then you must obey and prostrate since that is what those who are more exalted than you have done'. We provided an example to clarify this matter, saying: 'If it was announced in a governmental department that the president was going to visit this department on such-and-such a day and that the ministers also had to be there, lined-up to greet him, should that instruction not apply equally, if not more so, to the ministers' deputies'?

So, when Allah *the Almighty* told the angels to 'prostrate to Adam', out of the fact that Satan was there with them and was of a lower rank than them, it was obligatory for him to also prostrate. Even if your obedience had raised you to a rank higher than the angels, Satan, your obedience to Allah *the Almighty* must continue to be worthy of that rank. So, whichever way you look at it, you are to be blamed. But Satan was one of the jinn, a group of beings who were granted freedom of choice, and maliciously deviated from his Lord's Command. There is a further category of angels who have no interaction whatsoever with human beings or with the world of human beings; they are the exalted angels, the ones who are infatuated with love of their Lord. It was to this group of angels that Allah *the Almighty* was referring when He said to Satan after refusing to prostrate, '…Are you too high and mighty?' (*Sad:* 75) These exalted angels were not included in the command to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* since they had no knowledge of Adam *peace be upon him* and no connection to him. The most special of all these exalted angels are the Throne-bearers, for they are the noblest of them all. It is these angels who call down blessings upon you after Allah *the Almighty* has called down blessings upon you. Indeed, the True Lord gives us a clear indication of this role that they play in calling down of blessings and forgiveness upon us when He describes them in the Quran, saying: 'Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those who surround it celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him. They beg forgiveness for the believers…' (*Ghafir:* 7).

So, the noblest and the most special of all the angels glorify their Lord with praise and believe in Him. Here arises the following question, which is, 'what is the point of saying "…have faith in Him" (*Ghafir:* 7), after it has already been stated that they glorify Him'? They reply: 'It is because glorification can sometimes stem from fear and so the verse wants to make it clear that the glorification of these angels stems from faith and love, and that Allah *the Almighty* merits their glorification. The verse also mentions a further task of these angels, which is asking forgiveness for all those who believe. Even though they have no connection with people and are not charged with serving them, they still call down blessings upon them and ask for their forgiveness'. So, to sum up, we say that the *salat* of Allah *the Almighty* Who owns the call and has the power to respond, is His Mercy and Compassion to the believers; and that *salat* of those beneath Him is their asking Him, the All-Powerful

Owner *the Almighty* for good. So, they call on Allah *the Almighty* for the believers and ask Him to forgive them, even going to great lengths in their supplication and making impassioned pleas on their behalf, saying: '…Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who turn to You and follow Your path. Save them from the pains of Hell.' (*Ghafir:* 7) They do not stop at merely asking Allah to save the believers from hell-fire, but also ask Him to grant them paradise as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and admit them, Lord, to the lasting Gardens You have promised to them, together with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and offspring: You alone are *the Almighty*, the All Wise.' (*Ghafir:* 8)

Then, on top of all of that, the angels add the following as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Protect them from all evil deeds: those You protect on that Day from [the punishment for] evil deeds will receive Your Mercy – that is the supreme triumph.' (*Ghafir:* 9) By Allah, even if he had wanted to and even if he were asking for himself, no believer could have come up with a supplication as inclusive or comprehensive as that of the angels, for after asking for them to be forgiven and kept safe from the hell-fire, they did not simply leave them standing on the ramparts, neither in paradise nor in hell, but yet asked Allah *the Almighty* to admit them into paradise, in accordance with His saying: '…Whoever is kept away from Hell and admitted to Paradise will have triumphed.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185)

This matter is one of those that the orientalists like to dwell on, claiming that it contradicts the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says: 'There is no day which dawns without two angels calling out (to their Lord), one of them saying: "O Allah, give compensation to those who give out (from their wealth)" and the other saying: "O Allah, give ruin to those who withhold (their wealth)."'(1) They say: 'How can you say that the angels ask good for people and that they ask bad for people'? In a sense, their objections are justified since the faculties with which they have been endowed make it impossible for them to correctly understand the subtle observations of the meaning of the Noble Hadith. In their view, the contradiction lies in the saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O Allah, give ruin to those who withhold (their wealth)', since the first supplication is clear and contains no contradiction as it asks for good. The second one, on the other hand, asks for bad: 'O Allah, give ruin to those who withhold (their wealth).' If you were to reflect, however, on the way this expression is worded, you would find your answer. Is the 'ruin' that is mentioned given or taken? 'Ruin' is something that is normally assumed to be taken, but by the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'O Allah, give ruin to those who withhold (their wealth)', we know that it was something given, not taken, even though on the surface it appeared to be ruin and destruction. What the supplication is actually asking is for you to be rid of that thing which preoccupies you, captivates your attention, and brings down calamity upon you, so that you may then return to your Lord. So, while it appears on the surface to be a request for something to be taken away, it is in actuality a request for something to be given. Then the True Lord *the Almighty* reveals the reason why He and His angels call down blessings upon the believers, saying: '…in order to lead you out of the depths of darkness into the light.' (*al-Ahzab:* 43) It is if the way adopted by Allah *the Almighty* in telling us to do this and not to do that was the first part of His calling down blessings upon us, since it was the means by which He took us from the darkness into the light. Although the phenomena mentioned in this verse are physical, they are meant to be taken as a metaphor for the spiritual world. So, this is actually an example to what happens in the worldly life, that is, when there is light, you are able to see the path and follow it to its end without hindrance, but when there is darkness, you grope about blindly, quickly lose your way and wander around without direction or clarity of purpose, crushing those who are weaker than you and being crushed by those who are stronger. One of the things Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed us to do was to turn off our lights before we go to sleep at night, saying: 'Extinguish your lamps when you go to sleep.'(1)

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1010.*

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3280. It is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'When night falls - or when the darkness of night has set in - hold back your children (from going out), for that is when Satan's minions are abroad, and only release them after an hour of the night has passed. Then close the door and mention Allah's Name, extinguish your lamps and mention Allah's Name, tie the mouth of your water-skin and mention Allah's Name, and cover over your utensils and mention Allah's Name, even if you lay something on top of them.'*

Modern science has proven that sleeping under bright lights adversely affects a person's health, and prevents him from ever truly being at rest. It also warns against overexposing ourselves to the lights and rays that emanate from our televisions. Therefore, in the physical world, light has an important function as does darkness. Similarly, Allah's way of telling you to do this and not to do that is the spiritual light that protects you from injury, and gives you the necessary illumination to find the right way through life's myriad paths. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says immediately afterwards: '…He is Merciful towards the believers.' (*al-Ahzab:* 43) But if this is how Allah *the Almighty* is *raheem* (a dispenser of mercy) towards the believers, then how is He towards the disbelievers? They reply that towards them, He is *Rahman* (Merciful) since the word *rahman* relates to Allah's Mercy in this world. In this world, Allah's Mercy and Bounty encompass believers and disbelievers alike. As for the word *Raheem*, it relates to Allah's Mercy in the Hereafter; it indicates that His Mercy in the Hereafter is only for the believers and no one else. Also, when He says: '...Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth...' (*an-Nur:* 35), He does not mean it in the sense that it is an Attribute of His Essence, but rather in the sense that He is the One Who illuminates them. It is like when we call the lamps in the mosque 'the mosque's lights'. When we discussed this matter previously, we clarified it by mentioning what Abu Tamam says in a poem praising Al-Mu`tasim:

(He has) the bravery of `Amr and the generosity of Hatim,
The clemency of Ahnaf and the intelligence of Iyas

Amongst the Arabs, `Amr was held up as the epitome of bravery; Hatim as the epitome of generosity; Ahnaf ibn Qays as the epitome of clemency; and Iyas ibn Mu`awiyya as the epitome of intelligence. When Abu Tamam said these words, one of the men present in the court of the Caliph stood up and said to him, 'The commander of the faithful is greater than you say; how can you compare him to those uncivilised Arabs?' Then he started to say the following lines of poetry:

The panegyrists compare him in courage and generosity
With those who would be the least of servants if seen by him.

There are fifty thousand like `Antar in his army,
And a thousand like Hatim in his treasure houses

When he heard that, Abu Tamam bowed his head for a short while, then stood up and said:

Do not criticise me for finding in those beneath him,
A passing likeness in terms of courage and generosity
For Allah Himself compared the least of things to His Light,
Using the example of a niche and a lantern

So, spiritual light keeps you out of spiritual harm's way just as physical light keeps you out of physical harm's way, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about His Light: '...light upon light!' (*an-Nur:* 35), i.e. physical light protects from physical harm and hindrance while spiritual light protects you from spiritual harm and hindrance, a point which is clear in His saying, '…Allah guides whoever He wills to his Light…' (*an-Nur:* 35); the light referred to here is the spiritual light by which believers are guided and by which they travel along the path. As for the disbelievers, the only sort of light they know is the physical light. If you were then to ask your Lord: 'Where can we find this light'? He would reply to you: '…shining out in houses of worship. Allah has ordained that they be raised high and that His Name be remembered in them, with men in them celebrating His Glory, morning and evening: men who are not distracted, either by commerce or profit, from remembering Allah…' (*an-Nur:* 36-37). If you desire the true light, then you will find it when you spend time alone with your Lord *the Almighty* in His House, for that is when His Light flows over you and illuminates your heart.

Before leaving this topic of Allah *the Almighty* and His angels calling down blessings on the believers behind, we should mention the blessings that we ourselves call down upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in accordance with the saying of Allah: 'Allah and His angels bless the Prophet- so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace.' (*al-Ahzab:* 56) *Salat* of Allah *the Almighty* means mercy, tenderness and compassion, whilst *salat* of the angels means supplicating and entreating the One Who owns (everything), i.e. Allah *Glorified is He*. As for our own *salat* on Messenger

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is thought by some to be a supplication which we make for him. That is not what it is, however, because when you say the prayer on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* you say: ‘O Allah, bless Muhammad’. So, you do not bless him yourself, rather, you ask Allah *the Almighty* to bless him. But this begs the question: ‘how is it that you can ask Allah to bless Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*’? They reply that we can do that because every good that Allah gives Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is distributed amongst his *ummah*. Also, you should know that the True Lord does not leave Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to receive the blessings of all those who believe in him, without requiring him to respond in kind by making a similar prayer for them. He says: ‘…and pray for them- your prayer will be a comfort to them…’ (*at-Tawba:* 103). It is as if this prayer was Messenger Muhammad’s *peace and blessings be upon him* way of returning the greetings and prayers of those believers who prayed for him.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

تَحِيَّتُهُمۡ يَوۡمَ يَلۡقَوۡنَهُۥ سَلَٰمٞۚ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمۡ أَجۡرٗا كَرِيمٗا ﴿٤٤﴾

When they meet Him they will be greeted with ‘Peace’–
and He has prepared a generous reward for them [44]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 44)

This verse refers to what happens in the Hereafter, and the greeting that is mentioned, the *salam* (peace), is not given by us but rather is given to us by Allah *the Almighty*; it is like when He says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘“Peace”, a word from the Lord of Mercy.’ (*Ya Sin:* 58)

The mercy, compassion and tenderness that we receive from Allah *the Almighty* in this world shows itself in our doing the right thing at the right time, conducting ourselves with probity, feeling at ease and enjoying peace of mind. But despite all of this, we are still, sometimes, beset by trouble and misfortune. As for Allah’s Mercy in the Hereafter, it is perfect peace and nothing whatsoever happens to disturb it. Then there is enjoyment: human beings do derive enjoyment from the Blessings Allah *the Almighty* Who has bestowed upon them in this worldly life, but their enjoyment is spoiled somewhat by their fear that they will pass away. As for the enjoyment of the Hereafter, it is pure and completely unspoiled since the blessings in that abode are eternal, everlasting and never came to an end. They went from living in this life in a world of causes to living in the Hereafter with the Primary Causer; *Glorified is He* Who says with regard to Himself: ‘Who has control today? Allah, the One, the All Powerful’ (*Ghafir:* 16). But what is meant by the saying of Allah: ‘when they meet Him…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 44)? Is it referring to the Day of Resurrection? Or is it referring to the day their life comes to an end and they meet Him in death using the common idiom for death of ‘So-and-so met his Lord’? They reply: ‘The Angel of Death never comes to take the soul of a believer without first greeting him with the word, ‘peace’, which is why if he does greet someone in that way, then this means that that person is one of the people of peace. This is the first degree of peace. It is also possible, however, that ‘peace’ refers to the perfect peace which the believers encounter on the Day of Resurrection, for nothing will ever happen thereafter to disturb the peace they find on that day’.

That is why when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was suffering from the throes of death, Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* having seen the pain he was in, said to him: ‘Oh what sorrow you are undergoing, my father!’, whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to her, ‘No sorrow will ever again afflict your father after today.’(1) What sorrow could Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* possibly feel after being transported to the vicinity of his Lord, to an abode of ultimate peace wherein fear no longer exists!

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and He has prepared a generous reward for them.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 44). The adjective used to describe *ajr* (reward) is *karim* (generous). This adjective is normally used to describe the one who readies the reward, not the reward itself, so the fact that it is used here to describe the reward means that the Lord’s Generosity spread from Him into the reward that He prepared until it too became generous. Another example of that is found in His saying, ‘…and have prepared a generous provision for her.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 31) Here, the generosity spread from the Provider to the provision because while provision in this world comes to you by means of some other creatures, provision in the Hereafter comes to you without any means whatsoever, that is, no one else plays a role in bringing it to you. So, since it comes to you without any effort on your behalf at the merest thought of it, it immediately appears in front of you, thus why should it not be described as being generous?! Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *See Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1629, on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him who said that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to Fatima Allah be pleased with her after hearing what she said: ‘No sorrow will ever again afflict your father after today, for that (time) has come for him which will come for every man until they come (before their Lord) on the Day of Resurrection.’ See the origin of this Hadith in Al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 4462.*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ إِنَّآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ شَٰهِدٗا وَمُبَشِّرٗا وَنَذِيرٗا ﴿٤٥﴾
وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى ٱللَّهِ بِإِذۡنِهِۦ وَسِرَاجٗا مُّنِيرٗا ﴿٤٦﴾

Prophet, We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and warning [45] as one who calls people to God by His leave, as a light-giving lamp [46]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 45 - 46)

A witness is one who validates a claim or confirms a right on behalf of the one to whom it is due; and that is why judges always ask to hear the testimony of witnesses before delivering their judgement; they want to make sure that when they rule on a matter, their rulings are accurate and based on solid evidence and proof. That is why they say that judges do not rule according to what they know, but only according to the evidence that is laid before them. So, if a case came before a judge dealing with matters about which he had prior knowledge from his own private life, he would be required to leave that case and refer it to another judge in order to ensure that the eventual ruling was not based on what he knew but only on evidence alone. When you reflect on this matter, you will find that Allah *the Almighty* desires to distribute the responsibility for making the ruling amongst many people so as to ensure that the ruling is only issued after due process and proper weighing up of the evidence, thereby guaranteeing that justice is established.

For example, when an incident happens in our society, we go to the records office which makes a record of the event. That record is then transferred by a police officer to the district attorney's office, which in turn transfers it to the judge, so that he can make a judgement concerning it. Then the ruling is sent back to the executive authority who then carry it through. This process is circuitous but it has a point, that is, making sure that justice is done. If this is how it is with us, then how must it be when Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who bears witness, the One Who judges, and the One Who carries through the judgement? There is no doubt that this would guarantee that absolute justice is achieved. If you were to say, 'Then what is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bearing witness to'? They would reply: 'He *peace and blessings be upon him* is bearing witness to the fact that he conveyed his Message to his *ummah* in the same way that all the other messengers conveyed their messages to their people, as is shown in the saying of Allah: "What will they do when We bring a witness from each community, with you [Muhammad] as a witness against these people?" (*an-Nisa':* 41) So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be a witness against this *ummah* to which he conveyed the Divine Message, just as all the previous messengers and prophets will witness against their nations. But you are singled out from your entire fellow messengers who came before you by the fact that you are their 'Seal', that is, no prophet will come after you. So, for that reason, I will assign people from amongst your *ummah* to play the same part with respect to you as the prophets played with respect to the messengers who preceded them.

That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a Noble Hadith: 'The scholars of my *ummah* are like the prophets of the tribe of *Isra`il*.'(1) So, Allah *the Almighty* has guaranteed that there will be people in the *ummah* of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who would take on the task that the prophets had with respect to conveying the Message. This is the meaning of the saying of Allah: '…so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others…' (*al-Baqara:* 143).

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(1) *Ash-Shawkani said, 'Ibn Hajar and Az-Zarkashi said that this Hadith had no basis.' Similarly, As-Suyuti said in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, p. 309 that Al-`Ajluni said in Kashf Al-Khafa`, 1744: 'Some people added that (this Hadith) was not known to figure in any book of any note...' However, At-Taftazani, Fath Ad-Din Ash-Shahid, Abu Bakr Al-Mawsuli and As-Suyuti in Al-Khasa` is all indicated that its meaning was sound.*

The word 'others' is used in its most general sense here, including Adam *peace be upon him* and every single one of his descendants until the Final Hour comes. If you were to ask how that could be, then we would reply: 'With respect to those people who came before you, you bear witness against them according to the testimony of the Quran that the messengers had actually conveyed their messages to their respective peoples. As for those who are yet to come, you are required to testify against them that you conveyed the Message to them just as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is required to witness against you that he conveyed the Message to you'.

Therefore, in the *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* there is a portion of prophethood represented in the fact that its members will be called upon to testify against people on the Day of Resurrection. That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prepared his *ummah* for this task by saying to them: 'Allah illuminates the man who hears my words, understands them and then conveys them to others to hear them, for perhaps the one to whom they are conveyed will understand them better than the one who hears them directly.'(1) In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'We have made you [believers] into a just community…' (*al-Baqara:* 143), so why? The answer is '…so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you…' (*al-Baqara:* 143). This *ummah* is on the middle course in the sense that it is not characterised by extremes, neither going to excess nor falling short. It is very much like a set of scales whose two hands are in perfect balance, neither hand outweighing the other until something is placed into it. This is exactly how the community is perfectly balanced and neither tending to this side nor to that. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…as a bearer of good news…' (*al-Ahzab:* 45) meaning that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to those who believe in their reward from Allah *the Almighty*. The word *bishara* (glad tidings) is giving people the news of something good that is going to happen before it happens. As for the saying of Allah: ‘and warning’ (*al-Ahzab:* 45), the word ‘a warner’ means that he was also sent to those who do not believe in him to warn them against the punishment that will afflict them be Allah *the Almighty*. The Arabic word *indhar* is instilling fear in people’s hearts about something bad that will happen before it happens. As for Allah’s *Glorified is He* saying: ‘as one who calls people to Allah by His leave’ (*al-Ahzab:* 46), it means according to what He commands you to do, not according to what you come up with yourself, for many leaders and reformers throughout history have come up with programs and ideologies which they have promulgated amongst their societies in order to bring about reform. So, in order to clearly differentiate between these people and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘by His leave’ (*al-Ahzab:* 46). In other words, the way of guidance brought by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was directly from Allah *the Almighty* and it was only by a command from his Lord that he *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed the Divine Message to you. There are three conditions that anyone calling others to the way of guidance must meet:

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, 1/437; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, p. 2657-2658; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, 232.*

The first condition is that the one calling others to the way of guidance does not profit from what he is calling people to. But as we have seen, no human being (not sent by Allah *the Almighty*) has ever met this condition: when the capitalists made their laws, they short-changed the workers; when the socialists made their laws, they short-changed those with capital and so on and so forth. The reason for this is that human beings have many conflicting desires, which shows itself in the fact that every single human being who comes to make a law does so according to his own personal desires or according to what serves his best interests. Then inevitably, even if it is after a long period of time, the deficiencies in those laws are shown up by everyday practice and the realities on the ground, which is why the legislators themselves come to recognise the shortcomings in the laws they have passed. So, they themselves revolt against them, rise up against themselves and go back to the laws in order to amend them.

The second condition is that he should have full knowledge of the likely repercussions of his laws being passed; and that not one single detail of the area he is legislating for escapes his attention, since that would necessitate him having to amend that law.

The third condition is that he should be wise with respect to the laws that he legislates - in other words, he puts things in their rightful place, not treating people with a double standard law. In addition, he should treat everyone who comes before him equally. When you reflect on these conditions, you will find that no one except for the True Lord fulfils all the three. Therefore no one should legislate laws for mankind except for the Lord of mankind.

We previously demonstrated this fact very clearly with an example we gave from real life: when it is dark, people need a bit of light in order to carry out the tasks they need to perform, so each person brings out what best suits him for producing that light. So, one person lights a candle, another lights a 'model 5' paraffin lamp and another lights a 'model 10' paraffin lamp. Yet, after the advent of electricity, we began to also see ordinary lights, fluorescent lights, neon lights, crystal chandeliers and so on.

So, you light up the darkness around you making use of whatever means are available to you. But what do you do when the sun rises and daylight appears? Do you continue to use those artificial lights? No, of course you do not. You switch them off because the light that the sun brings is according to the capacity of your Creator *the Almighty* not your own capacity. That is why we say: 'Switch off your lights for the sun of Allah has risen'. If this is how things are with respect to material light, then the same must also be the case with respect to spiritual light. So, when the light of divine legislation and the light of Allah's way of guidance come, then extinguish all other programs and all other forms of legislation.

Then He says, 'as a light-giving lamp' (*al-Ahzab:* 46). Here, the True Lord likens Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to a lamp or beacon. But do not think that this description belittles him *peace and blessings be upon him* since the type of lamp referred to here is not like one that lights up your room, for example, but is like the one mentioned in the saying of Allah: '…and make a blazing lamp' (*al-Ahzab:* 46), where the word 'lamp' refers to the sun. If you were to then ask: 'Why is Prophet Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him* not being described as a sun'? The sun is described by the saying of Allah: "It is He Who made the sun a shining radiance…" (*al-Ahzab:* 46), and is clearly more powerful than a lamp'.

If you were to ask that, then they would reply: The words used here are the words of the Lord and they demonstrate a very precise and miraculous turn of phrase: it is true that the sun lights up the entire world. But the situation with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was different, since his *ummah* took on the responsibility of promulgating the religion after his lifetime. So, the analogy of a lamp for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is more apt since light can be taken from a lamp without decreasing its light in any way (i.e. you can use its light to light up another lamp or torch) but light can never be taken from the sun.

When the lights of guidance brought by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they shone out upon the world, earlier systems of law no longer had any zone in which to operate. This fact is well expressed in the following line of poetry:

It is as if you were a sun and the kings' planets,
Since when it rises not even a single planet may be seen

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says(1):

وَبَشِّرِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِأَنَّ لَهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ فَضْلًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٤٧﴾

Give the believers the good news that great bounty awaits them from God [47] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 47)

We say in our supplications: 'O Allah, treat us with bounteous *fadl* (grace) and not with *`adl*, (justice)' because justice is that you receive a reward equivalent to the action you did or that you get what is yours by right, while bounteous grace that you get more than is yours by right. Something of this sort is mentioned in the saying of Allah: 'Say [Prophet], "In Allah's Grace and Mercy let them rejoice…"' (*al-Ahzab:* 47).

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(1) *Ibn `Attiyya said, `Ubayy Allah be pleased with him said to us, 'In my view, this is the most hopeful verse in the Book of Allah since in it Allah Himself commands Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to give the believers the good news that He set aside for them a great bounty. And the nature of this great bounty is clarified elsewhere in the saying of Allah: "you will see them fearful because of what they have done: punishment is bound to fall on them- but those who believe and do good deeds will be in the flowering meadows of the Gardens. They will have whatever they wish from their Lord: this is the great bounty" (as-Sajda: 27).' See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir 8/5470.*

And there is the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'None of you will enter paradise on account of his actions.' The companions said: 'Not even you, Messenger of Allah?' He replied: 'Not even me, unless Allah covers me with His Mercy.' Since when I weigh up my actions against the blessings that my Lord bestowed on me, both before I was created and up until the moment that I reached the age of responsibility, I find that even if I were to spend my entire life in perfect obedience to Him, I would never be able to pay off the debt that I owe Him.

And then there is also the fact that all the benefits for performing acts of worship and obeying our Lord reflect back on us - Allah *the Almighty* Himself derives no benefit from anything that we do. So, if we, not Allah *the Almighty,* are the ones who benefit from our worship and obedience, then His rewarding us for doing them is an act of pure bounteous grace on His part. The example of this that we gave - and to Allah belongs the Highest Example - was that of a son whom you encourage to revise throughout the year, presenting him with the necessary books and tools and financially supporting him. Then, when he succeeds in the exams at the end of the year, you give him some sort of prize or gift. That gift that you gave him was out of your bounty. Therefore, if you come across two people involved in a quarrel or feud and want to reconcile them with one another, say to them: 'Would you like me to judge between you with justice or with bounteous grace'? They will then reply to you: 'There is nothing better than justice', so say to them: 'No, that's not true. Bounteous grace is better than justice since justice is that you take your right from your opponent while bounteous grace is that you leave the right you have over your opponent in order to receive it from your Lord'. This is exactly what we see practised in the story of the slander between Abu Bakr and Misttah(1) when Abu Bakr

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(1) *He was Misttah ibn Athatha ibn `Abbas ibn Al-Muttalib whose name was actually `Awf. As for Misttah, that was merely a nickname. His mother was the maternal aunt of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him and so, because of their close family connection,=*

peace be upon him pardoned him after Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the verse: ‘Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kinsmen, the poor or those who emigrated in Allah’s way: let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? Allah is Most Forgiving and Merciful.’ (*an-Nur:* 22) So, whoever wants Allah *the Almighty* to forgive him his wrong actions should first forgive his Muslim brother for the slips and wrong actions that he has committed.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تُطِعِ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ وَٱلْمُنَـٰفِقِينَ وَدَعْ أَذَىٰهُمْ
وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿٤٨﴾

Do not give in to the disbelievers and the
hypocrites: ignore the harm they cause you and put
your trust in God. God is enough to trust [48]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 48)

At the beginning of this chapter, Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘Prophet, be mindful of Allah and do not give in to the disbelievers and the hypocrites…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 3), while here, He addresses him with saying, ‘do not give in to the disbelievers and the hypocrites: ignore the harm they cause you and put your trust in Allah. Allah is enough to trust.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 48) The first verse was revealed at the beginning of Prophet Muhammad’s Mission when the disbelievers first started plotting against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, if that was the case then, how do you think it was when Prophet Muhammad’s Mission became much stronger and his call to Islam much more open? They

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= *Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him used to send him provisions. Then when he became involved with the slanderers in spreading the lie about `Aisha Allah be pleased with her, Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him made an oath that he would no longer support him financially. Then Allah Glorified is He revealed the verse: ‘Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kinsmen…’ (an-Nur: 22). So Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him went back to supporting him. Misttah died in the year 34 A.H. during the caliphate of `Uthman Allah be pleased with him. It is also said that he died in the year 37 A.H. and participated in the battle of Siffin on the side of `Ali. See Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba, p. 7929.*

plotted against him all the more, of course! And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* refers to this matter once again: ‘Do not give in to the disbelievers and the hypocrites: ignore the harm they cause you...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 48). But that does not mean that I will forsake you; no, it merely means that I will be your representative as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and put your trust in Allah. Allah is enough to trust.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 48). If you were to say: ‘How could Allah be a representative when the representative is beneath the principal’? We would respond: ‘The principal only appoints another to represent him when he finds himself unable to the task at hand and so chooses someone stronger than himself to do it on his behalf’.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا نَكَحۡتُمُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ ثُمَّ طَلَّقۡتُمُوهُنَّ
مِن قَبۡلِ أَن تَمَسُّوهُنَّ فَمَا لَكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِنَّ مِنۡ عِدَّةٖ تَعۡتَدُّونَهَاۖ
فَمَتِّعُوهُنَّ وَسَرِّحُوهُنَّ سَرَاحٗا جَمِيلٗا ٤٩

Believers, you have no right to expect a waiting period when you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them: make provision for them and release them in an honourable way [49] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 49)

This verse discusses a sociological institution that is dedicated to the preservation of the species, for the preservation of humans is only truly feasible through marriage, since it is the means for propagation. The first stage of marriage is engagement. However, many people do not understand what engagement means nor where its limits lie with respect to the man or the woman. An engagement is simply when a girl’s suitor goes to her guardian and says to him: ‘If I were to put forward a request for your daughter’s hand in marriage, would I be worthy of acceptance?’, and the guardian replies ‘You are welcome to do so’. This is what is classified as an engagement and it may well be that he never actually asks for her hand. However, if he does ask for her hand then he has the right to see her a single time in the presence of her *mahram* relatives, since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to a young man who wanted to get engaged to a girl: ‘Look at her (first), for it may produce love between you.'(1) It is astonishing that many people mix up the engagement with the actual marriage contract and think that it needs to be carried out in the same way. So, when the girl's guardian accepts the suitor, he agrees with him upon a certain amount of jewellery as dowry co-ordinates with him all the details of the marriage, allows him to sit beside his daughter and talk with her, and perhaps even allows him to spend time alone with her in private. If only they were to have made the engagement a contract, they would have extricated themselves from this difficult situation and made things much easier upon themselves! The advantage of an engagement is that if a suitor wants to break it off, all he has to do is go to the girl's guardian and say to him: 'I did ask you for the hand of your daughter, but I now release myself from what I asked you'. As for an actual contract, that can only be annulled, even before consummation, by divorce. So, do not make an arrangement which is an engagement in form, but a contract in substance.

In this noble verse, Allah *the Almighty* clearly tells us what the rulings are for when a man divorces his wife before moving in with her and consummating their marriage: 'Believers, you have no right to expect a waiting period when you marry believing women and then divorce them before you have touched them: make provision for them and release them in an honourable way...' (*al-Ahzab:* 49). The word *nikah* (marriage) is only used here to refer to the marriage contract since, if another meaning had been intended, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have said: 'before you have touched them' (*al-Ahzab:* 49), for the word *mass* (touching) is an indirect allusion to sexual intercourse, an activity that the Quran never mentions directly but always hides by using other words to allude to it. As for the ruling mentioned in the saying of Allah: '…you have no right to expect a waiting period' (*al-Ahzab:* 49), it means that a man who divorces (2) his wife before consummating his marriage with her cannot expect her to undergo a waiting-period. This is because there are several wisdoms behind the waiting-period: it gives a husband the chance to take his wife back in the case of a revocable divorce; and it allows enough time to be sure that the wife is not carrying a child in her womb. But sometimes the waiting-period is for neither of these reasons but rather for the fact that her husband has died and left her a widow. So, there is one ruling which governs the waiting-periods for divorces in unconsummated marriages and another ruling which governs the waiting-periods for divorces in consummated marriages. This difference also clearly shown when we look at what happens with respect to the dowry. If a woman is divorced before consummation then she only gets half of the dowry as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: '…then give them half of what you had previously fixed…' (*al-Baqara:* 237), and as He says here: '…make provision for them and release them in an honourable way.' (*al-Ahzab:* 49) If the (amount of the) dowry was mentioned in the contract, then she gets half of what was mentioned, but if it was not, then she gets half of the dowry that a woman of her sort would normally get. As for the waiting-period for a divorce that takes place after a marriage has been consummated, some elaboration is necessary since its length varies from case to case according to what best fits the case for which the waiting-period was legislated. As we mentioned before the Arabic word *`idda* (waiting-period) indicates that is something that is counted. So, if the woman is capable of menstruation, the waiting-period is three menstrual periods in order to make sure that her womb is empty. But surely one menstrual period would be enough to ascertain that, so why did Allah *the Almighty* make her have to wait three menstrual periods?

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(1) *Al-Mughira ibn Shu`ba narrated: 'I asked for a woman's hand in marriage, so Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked me if I had looked at her. When I replied that I had not, he said: "Then look at her, for it may produce love between you."' See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 4/ 245 & 246; At-Tirmidhii, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1087 and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1865. Al-Busayri said in Az-Zawa`id: 'Its chain of narrations is Sahih and its narrators are all trustworthy.'*

(2) *This applies when the husband divorces the wife before consummating the marriage with her. However, if he dies before consummating the marriage with her, then she must wait the=*

They reply that the reason for her having to wait three periods is to give the husband the opportunity and time to calm down, reconsider, and take his

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= *normal waiting-period of a woman whose husband died after consummation because of the saying of Allah: 'If any of you die and leave widows, the widows should wait for four months and ten nights before remarrying…' (al-Baqara: 234). The only reason she still must wait this waiting-period even though he did not consummate the marriage with her, is out of loyalty to him and in consideration of his rights. See Fiqh As-Sunna 2/342. Ibn Qudama said in Al-Mughni 9/78: 'Every non-pregnant woman whose husband dies leaving her a widow, regardless of whether he consummated his marriage with her or not, and regardless of whether she is free or a slave girl, has a waiting-period in months.'*

wife back. So, in this particular matter, the law is made with the integrity of the family in mind. Do you not see that Allah *the Almighty* has prescribed the coming together of a husband and wife by means of a single phrase: ‘Marry me (to her)’, (to which the guardian replies): ‘I have married you (to her)’, but when it comes to divorce or separation, He has made there be three stages. Allah *the Almighty* has done this because He does not want to leave the way open for a moment of fleeting anger to revoke Allah’s saying when it comes to marriage. I remember that there was a tricky question that they used to ask: it was either ‘Do men having waiting-periods?’ or ‘Is there a waiting period that women can expect from men?’ The answer was: ‘Yes, there is a set of circumstances in which men have a waiting-period, and that is when he marries a woman, divorces her and then wants to marry her sister. In such a case, he must wait for the waiting-period to pass in order to marry her’. As for the waiting-periods of the other sorts of women, the one who has gone past the age of menopause must wait three months, the one who is pregnant must wait until after she gives birth and the one whose husband has died must wait four months and ten days. But what if a woman’s husband has died and she is pregnant, how long must she wait then? They reply that in such a circumstance her waiting-period is whichever of those two periods of time is longer-her pregnancy running its course or four months and ten days.

A question that might well have occurred to you is why the waiting-period of a divorced woman is only three months while the waiting-period of a woman whose husband has died leaving her a widow is four months and ten days. The reason, they reply, is because there is a difference between divorce and death in terms of the relationship of a man to his wife. The source of this difference lies in the phrase that the One Who created the male and the female made to join them together. That phrase is ‘Marry me. I have married you’, but on condition that it is uttered out loud in the presence of witnesses. And do not underestimate this phrase, for although you do not know what it does to the human form at an atomic level, you do know the effects it leaves behind. And we said, ‘Suppose, for example, that it came to your attention that a young man was in the habit of making improper advances to your daughter (behind your back). What would you do? There is no doubt whatsoever that you would be furious. Your blood would boil; you would feel jealously protective of her and would perhaps even go as far as to harm him. If, however, he were to have knocked on your door and asked you for her hand, you would have welcomed him with open arms, felt happy and everyone would have been pleased. So, what changed? What is the difference between the two scenarios? It is clear that the thing which really made you angry was the fact that he snuck up on her without the permission of her Creator and that is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'Have *taqwa* (fear) of Allah with respect to women, for you have taken them on the security of Allah, and intercourse with them has been made lawful for you by the saying of Allah.'(1)

When a famous man known for being very jealous of his daughters came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to invite him to marry one of them, he *peace and blessings be upon him* laughed and said, 'The lawful has cut off the nose of jealous protectiveness!'

By means of the marriage contract that joins the husband and the wife together in the light of the word of Allah, He causes a lawful impulse to come into being in each of the two parties. These two impulses then meet by virtues of a lawful act and under the law which joined the couple in matrimony.

Divorce is ordinarily accompanied by feelings of hatred; either the two parties hate each other or just one of them hates the other. Out of the fact that hatred resulting from divorce may cause the two parties to hate one another, Islam legislates that the waiting-period shall last for three months, or until the woman gives birth to her child.

But usually, in cases when the husband dies, the marriage is thus brought to an end by a divine decree; the wife still loves her husband and feels great sadness at his loss. Indeed, the tragedy of his death often causes her love for him to grow. In circumstances such as these, the impulse that linked them does not easily nor quickly fade away, so the Creator extended the length of the waiting-period so as to give the impulse enough time to die, thus ensuring that no fresh impulse comes into her heart while she still feels an impulse towards her late husband and leaves her feeling conflicted inside. That is why the waiting-period of the woman whose husband has died is longer than the waiting-period of the woman who has been divorced. The verse: ‘then divorce them before you have touched them’ (*al-Ahzab:* 49) indicates that the practice of divorcing women before the consummation of marriage had already existed among the previous nations, just as it exists today. In fact, it happens when the couple rush to contract their marriage even though the husband does not have the financial means necessary to support the wife or fulfil the costs of marriage. The man only hastens matters because of the personal benefit that such a tie will bring him.

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1218; Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no.3074 and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1905.*

History tells us of many families, especially purebred Arab families, who have done this for that reason. However, under such circumstances, those families never used to permit the husband to spend time alone with the wife even though he was contractually married to her. There are some wonderful stories of girls who conducted themselves with great honour in this matter. One that is typically related in this regard is the story of Buhaytha bint ``Aws ibn Haritha At-Ta`i and Al-Harith ibn `Awf, one of the noblemen of the Banu Murra. Al-Harith ibn `Awf had a close friend called Ibn Sinan. One night, when he was sitting and chatting with him, Al-Harith asked Ibn Sinan, ‘Do you suppose that even one man exists amongst the entire Arab race who would deny me the hand of his daughter if I asked for it?’ He said these words boastfully, proud of the position of nobility he enjoyed amongst his people. When his companion saw the state he was in, he replied, ‘Yes, there is someone who would deny you.’ ‘Who is that?’ asked Al-Harith, so Ibn Sinan replied, ‘It is ``Aws ibn Haritha At-Ta`i.’ When he heard that, Al-Harith immediately summoned his servant and said to him, ‘Prepare the carriage and take us to the house of `Aws ibn Haritha At-Ta`i.’ So, they went to see `Aws and found him sitting in the courtyard of his home. When `Aws saw Al-Harith, he bade him welcome, so Al-Harith went up to him. Then `Aws said, ‘Shame on you! What has brought you here?’ He left Al-Harith sitting on his camel. Al-Harith said, ‘I have come to ask for your daughter’s hand in marriage.’ `Aws replied, ‘You are not here!’ meaning that he did not think that he was worthy of her. So Al-Harith turned his mount around and went away, while an expression of relief came over the face of Ibn Sinan because what he had said to his companion had proven to be true. Then, when `Aws went back indoors and saw his wife, she said to him, ‘Who was that man with you who only stayed for a short time and did not dismount from his camel?’ He replied, ‘It was Al-Harith ibn `Awf, one of the noblemen of the Banu Murra.’ She then asked, ‘Why did you not invite him to dismount?’ He replied, ‘He was acting like a fool!’ She asked, ‘How is that?’ He replied, ‘He came to ask for my daughter’s hand in marriage!’ She said, ‘Amazing! Do you not want your daughters to get married?’ He replied, ‘Of course, I do,’ so she said, ‘If you will not allow them to marry the noblemen of the Arabs, `Aws, then who will you allow them to marry? Go and set things right with him!’ He replied, ‘How can I do that when I said what I said?’ She said, ‘Go after him and say, “When you came to see me, I was very angry about something that had nothing to do with you personally. Then, when I came to myself after you left, I realised what I had done. So I have come to apologise and to ask you to come back with me. You will have what you desire”.’ So, the man went outside but found that the riding party had already left. So, he set out after them until he had caught up with the riding party, whereupon Ibn Sinan turned around and said to Al-Harith Ibn `Awf, ‘Here comes `Aws. He has come after us.’ So Al-Harith said, ‘What will I do with him. Tell him to go away.’ So Aws called out to him: ‘Harith, stop for a moment’ - meaning, ‘wait’ - ‘and you will get what you want from me.’ When he heard that, Al-Harith rejoiced and went back with him. When `Aws got back to the house, he said to his wife, ‘Call down your eldest daughter.’ Then, when she came, he said to her, ‘My daughter, Al-Harith ibn `Awf, the nobleman from the Banu Murra, has come to ask your hand in marriage.’ She replied, ‘Don not do it, father.’ He asked her, ‘Why not?’ She replied, ‘I am a woman with a repulsive face’, i.e. a face that is so ugly that it repulses people - ‘and my manners are lacking’, i.e. defective. ‘He is not a cousin of mine who will honour the marriage because of his close family connection, nor is he a neighbour of yours who will honour it because he would be ashamed not to, so I am scared that he might see something in me that he does not like and divorce me. Then I would be left with that stigma.’ So Aws said to her, ‘Get up then and may Allah bless you.’ Then he said to his wife, ‘Call down your middle daughter.’ Then, when she came, he said to her exactly what he had said to her sister. She replied, ‘Don not do it, father.’

He asked her, ‘Why not?’ She replied, ‘I am a clumsy woman, a woman who does not do things well and I have not learnt any craft, so I am scared that he might see something in me that he does not like and divorce me. And then I would be left with that stigma.’ So `Aws said to her, ‘Get up then and may Allah bless you. Call your younger sister to come to me.’ This younger sister was Buhaytha, about whom the story is told. When her father presented the matter to her, she said to him, ‘Do as you see fit, father.’ He replied, ‘My daughter, I presented this matter to your sisters and they both refused.’ She said, ‘But I am the one who has the beautiful face, who is good with her hands and who has the noble character, so if he divorces me, Allah will not recompense him.’ So he said to her, ‘May Allah bless you.’ Then he went to Al-Harith and said to him, ‘You have been blessed, Harith, for I have married my daughter Buhaytha to you. May Allah bless both of you.’ Al-Harith replied, ‘I accept the marriage.’

Then Aws said to his wife, ‘Get your daughter ready and make a tent for her in the house courtyard.’ Then, when the tent was finished, Buhaytha was carried inside. Then Al-Harith went in after her. However, after only a very short time had passed he came back out, so Ibn Sinan said to him, ‘Have you completed your business with her?’ He replied, ‘No, by Allah, Ibn Sinan, I have not.’ Ibn Sinan asked him why he had not. He replied, ‘When I tried to get intimate with her, she said to me, ‘In the house of my father and my brothers? By Allah, that will never happen.’ So I came back out.’ When he heard this, Ibn Sinan said, ‘As long as she remains in the house of her father and brothers, she is never going to consent. Let us leave.’ So Al-Harith ordered that they leave. Then, after they had been riding for some time, Al-Harith said, ‘Ibn Sinan, you and the others go ahead’, i.e. and give us an opportunity to be together. So Ibn Sinan and the rest of the riding party went ahead, while Al-Harith stayed back with his wife and set up a tent. Then, when he went inside with her, she said to him, ‘O Allah! Do you want to treat me like some woman whom you have captured in war or a foreign slave girl?! By Allah, that is not going to happen! Nothing is going to happen until we reach your home and until you have held a party in my honour. You must sacrifice some animals for me, invite the Arab nobility and do what people like you normally do for people like me.’

The moral of the story is that today’s girls could do well to learn from it; Buhaytha did not give herself to her husband, nor did she accept his advances while she was in her parent’s home or while she was on the road. She did not climb down from anything that she felt was hers by right, even though she was already his wife. Everything did indeed come to pass as she wanted - the animals were sacrificed and the Arab nobility was invited. Then, when he came in to see afterwards and tried to get intimate with her, she said, ‘You mentioned your nobility to me, but I have yet to see any trace of it.’ He said, ‘How do you mean?’ so she replied, ‘Are you one who spends his time with women when the Arabs are killing one another?’ By this statement, she meant the war that was going on at that time between the tribes of `Abs and Dhubyan - ‘Go and make peace between them, then come back to your family. I am not going anywhere.’ So Al-Harith and Ibn Sinan went and made peace between `Abs and Dhubyan and took upon themselves the payment of the blood money of three thousand camels, which they paid over a period of three years to the families of those who had been killed. Then, when Al-Harith finished doing that, he went back to her and she said to him, ‘Now you may have what you want.’ This verse: ‘Believers, you have no right to expect a waiting period when you marry believing women and then divorce them…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 49) simply gives a way out to some of those people who want to disentangle from certain religious rulings that have placed them in a spot of bother, such as, for example, a man who has divorced his wife three times and thus has completely used up all of the divorces permitted to him by Islamic law. The ruling on such a man is that he is not permitted to marry this wife again until she has first married another man. Someone could come along basing his position on the verse above, and say that, as the word *nikah* (marriage) refers to the contract(1), the contract alone is enough for a woman who has been divorced three times. In other words, in order to make herself lawful once again for her first husband, she need only enter into a marriage contract with another man and does not need to consummate it. In response to this, we say, ‘But it has escaped your attention that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was entrusted by his Lord with the task of legislation, and it was his job to clarify the rulings that came down in the Book of Allah *the Almighty* and elaborate on them. For Allah *the Almighty* says, addressing his Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘...And upon you [too] have We bestowed from on high this reminder, so that you might make clear unto mankind all that has ever been thus bestowed upon them...’ (*an-Nahl:* 44). If the *Sunnah* of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had not had anything to say on this matter, then your understanding of the verse - that the marriage contract alone is enough to permit a wife to go back to her first husband again - would have been permissible. However, Prophet Muhammad is the one to whom Allah *the Almighty* entrusted the task of clarifying the Quran and about whom Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘...whatever the Apostle gives you [thereof], and refrain from [demanding] anything that he withholds from you...’ (*al-Hashr:* 7), that is, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who has the right to legislate, and he did provide us with some clarification as to what is meant by Allah’s saying: ‘...unless she first takes another man for husband...’ (*al-Baqara:* 23). So, although Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained the word *nikah* as meaning the marriage contract, he provided further clarification of the true meaning of the verse when he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to the man, ‘Not unless she tastes his sweetness and he tastes her sweetness’(1) Therefore, a full understanding of the verse does not make it permissible for anyone to say that the contract alone is enough to allow a man to take back in marriage a wife who he has divorced three times. No, she must first taste the sweetness of her second husband and he shall also taste hers. In other words, they must consummate the marriage. The reason that Allah *the Almighty* made the ruling thus was to punish and discipline those men who fall into the habit of divorce, those men who find it so easy to utter the words of divorce, to the extent that those words are almost always on their tongue. It is due to the Mercy of the Creator and the importance Allah *the Almighty* attaches to the bonds of marriage that while He made a single phrase, 'Marry me- I have married you' sufficient to make a woman lawful for a man. Allah *Glorified is He* did not make a single phrase sufficient to separate them. No, instead, He made divorce be in three stages in order to leave space for the love and mercy between the two parties to reassert itself. If the man uses up all these opportunities, however, and divorces his wife for a third time, then he must be made to pay. This is accomplished by his wife properly marrying another man and doing the act with him, since there is nothing harder for the first husband to bear than that. One thing we notice here is the subtlety of the law: the difficulties that the law creates in certain matters are not because Allah *the Almighty* wants to make those matters difficult for people, but rather because He wants to scare them away from doing them. Allah *the Almighty* wants you to keep away from the words that bring about divorce and not to resort to them unless it is an absolute necessity.

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(1) *See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, vol. 3, p. 497. Ibn Kathir says, ‘This noble verse contains several rulings, one of which is using the word nikah (marriage) to refer to the contract alone, and on that particular matter, there is no verse in the Quran which is clearer. There is a difference of opinion about the literal meaning of the word nikah and whether it refers to the contract, to the sexual act or to both. All three opinions exist. As for the way the word is used in the Quran, it is used everywhere else to refer to the contract and the sexual act that follows, except for this one verse where it is used to refer to the contract alone.’*

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1433, Kitab An-Nikah, chapter 17 from a Hadith on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her ‘When the wife of Rifa`a Al-Qurazhi came to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and said, “I was Rifa`a’s wife, but he divorced me and the divorce was irrevocable. Then I married `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Az-Zubayr, but his penis is like a limp edge of cloth (he is impotent).” [In another narration, it is added that when she said that, she took hold of the edge of her dress.] Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him smiled and said, “Do you want to go back to Rifa`a? You cannot do that until you have tasted his sweetness and he has tasted your sweetness.”’*

That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that, 'The most hated lawful act with Allah *the Almighty* is divorce.'(1) Because of this, there are those who object to divorce being a part of our law and even express their astonishment that a man can divorce his wife with only a single word after years of close companionship, love and affection. But what these people fail to observe is that while divorce is hated, it is still lawful. So, it is enough that Allah *the Almighty* has made it be in three stages, and has instructed that it only be resorted to when absolutely necessary; it is enough that Allah *the Almighty* has warned men against speaking the words of divorce lightly and saying them so frequently that it becomes habitual for them.

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(1) *See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2018; see also Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2178, from a Hadith on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him.*

We also note here that Allah *the Almighty* specified believing women in this verse, saying: ‘If you marry believing women’ (*al-Ahzab:* 50), even though believers are also permitted to marry the women of the people of the Book(1), be they Jewish or Christian. So, it is as if the verse contains a subtle indication from Allah *the Almighty* that any believing man who wants to marry should marry a believing woman and not allow anyone else into his bed. This is a sensible precaution with respect to his religion, since a believing woman may be trusted with his life, reputation, children and wealth whereas a non-believing woman may not be trusted with any of those things. We have seen young men from this society who have gone to the West and married foreign women, and whose marriages have then been beset by insurmountable problems: mothers do not forget that they are Jewish or Christian and so they fill the children’s heads with ideas and beliefs from their own faiths. So, believing men should choose believing women because they can trust them with their lives and homes. I would also like to mention when we ourselves travelled abroad and were asked when we got there, ‘Why do you allow yourselves to marry women from the people of the Book while at the same time forbidding us from marrying Muslim women?’ Some fathers used to bring their daughters who had been born abroad, such as in Germany for instance, back to Egypt with them, and those daughters used to argue this point and question why they were not allowed to go and marry German men in the same way that their fathers had gone and married German women. We used to respond to our daughters who lived there by saying to them, ‘A Muslim man is permitted to marry a woman of the people of the Book because he believes in her Book and believes in her prophet. But as for you, how can you get married to a man of the people of the Book who believes in neither your Book nor your Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?’ Therefore, a Muslim man may be trusted with a woman of the people of the Book, while a non-Muslim man may not be trusted with a Muslim woman. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘...make provision for them and release them in an honourable way.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 49)

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(1) *Ibn Kathir says, ‘The saying of Allah ‘Believing women’ is an example of His using the majority to refer to the whole since all the scholars agree that, in terms of the ruling, there is no difference whatsoever between believing women and women of the people of the Book.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, vol. 3, p. 497.*

On the same topic, elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And if you divorce them before having touched them, but after having settled a dowry upon them, then [give them] half of what you have settled...' (*al-Baqara:* 237). Reconciling these two verses can be done as follows: the first one was revealed concerning those whose dowry had not yet been agreed upon, while the second was revealed concerning those upon whose dowry had been agreed. So, the one whose dowry has not been agreed gets a divorce gift: 'make provision for them' (*al-Ahzab:* 49), while the one whose dowry has been agreed gets half of it. Each verse deals with its own specific set of circumstances and so there is no abrogation involved here. There is nothing to prevent the man giving a woman whose dowry has been agreed a divorce gift on top of the half dowry that he is obliged to give her, according to some scholars. This opinion has much to recommend; justice entails giving her half of the dowry that had been agreed, while bounteous grace would be giving her a divorce gift as well as the half-dowry. Transactions between people should always be based on bounty, not just on justice, as our Lord Himself has taught us. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* deals with us on the basis of bounty, not justice. If Allah *the Almighty* were to have dealt with us with justice, we would all have perished and been destroyed.

This is why some of the most pious servants of Allah *the Almighty* say in their supplications, 'O Allah, treat us with bounteous *fadl* (grace) and not with *`adl* (justice)'; treat us with kindness and not according to our scales; and treat us according to decree and not according to reckoning. Yes, if there was nothing in the Hereafter except for the reckoning, none of us would earn anything. It has been narrated in a Hadith, 'He whose reckoning is argued about will be punished.'(1) Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "In [this] Bounty of Allah and in

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2876, on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever will be called to account about his deeds on the Day of Resurrection will be punished.' `Abdullah ibn Abu Mulayka said, 'Does Allah not say, "he will in time be called to account with an easy accounting" (al-Inshiqaq: 8)?' so the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'That is not the actual reckoning - that is merely when one is presented with one's accounts. He whose reckoning is argued about on the Day of Resurrection will be punished.' An-Nawawi said in his commentary, 'The meaning is that most slaves fall short when their actions are weighed up, so if a person's accounts were properly reviewed and=*

His Grace – in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!"' (*Yunus:* 58) One cannot experience joy unless one is first encompassed by the Bounteous Grace of Allah *the Almighty* and covered by His Mercy. We find in a Noble Hadith, 'None of you will enter Paradise on account of his actions.' The companions asked, 'Not even you, Messenger Muhammad?' He replied, 'Not even me, unless Allah covers me with His Mercy.'(1) If you were to ask, 'How can we reconcile the different statements in the Quran and *Sunnah* when it comes to the position and status of actions in Islam? For Allah *the Almighty* says in the Quran: "...Enter paradise by virtue of what you were doing [in life]!" (*an-Nahl:* 32) The reply would be, 'It is true that action has a special status in Islam, but when you worship Allah *the Almighty* you are not doing Him a service. No, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who has done you the service by legislating that you do worship. Even if that were not so, there is still the fact that Allah *the Almighty* with all His Attributes of Perfection, created you and created the whole universe for you. So, if Allah *the Almighty* assigns some task for you to do after that, He only does that with your best interests in mind, just as you charge your son with diligence, revision and study.

Then, if you were to place all your actions in one hand, then puts the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed on you in the other hand, you will find that your actions never even come close to counterbalancing the blessings of your Lord. So, if Allah *the Almighty* rewards you after that in the Hereafter, it is purely on account of His Bounty and Mercy to you. The example we mentioned to illustrate this - and to Allah belongs the highest example - was that of a man saying to his son, 'If you succeed in your exams at the end of the year, I will give you a present or a reward'. Despite the fact that he is the one who derives all the benefit from his success, you still give him something extra because you love him and want the best for him. Therefore, we should deal with one other according to this principle, and we should make it part of our nature, especially in cases such as those when a

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= *he did not receive a pardon from His Lord, he would perish and enter the hellfire. However, Allah does pardon and forgive everything except for associating others with Him.'*

(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith No. 6463; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2816, from a Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

woman has been divorced before her marriage has been consummated. If you were to ask, 'Why should a woman who has been divorced before her marriage has been consummated take a divorce gift as well as half of her dowry'? We would reply, 'They are to compensate her for the pain of separation. However, if she is the one who desires the divorce, she does not receive any part of the dowry or any divorce gift. On the contrary, she has to return to her husband everything that he gave her, as is mentioned in the Hadith of the woman who came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell him that she no longer wanted to remain with her husband, so he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to her, 'Give back to him everything that he gave to you.'(1) Scholars call this type of divorce a *khul`*. Then, after mentioning the matter of the divorce gift, Allah *the Almighty* says, '...and release them in an honourable way.' (*al-Ahzab:* 49) *Sarh*, in its original meaning, is used to designate a particular type of fruit-bearing tree that is found in the desert. Sheep love to graze upon this tree, with the larger animals in the flock usually eating from the leaves at the top of the tree.

As for the smaller animals in the flock, the shepherd can make sure they are looked after if he is skilled in the art of shepherding. If he strikes the branches at the top of the tree with his staff, he can make some leaves from the tree fall to the ground, and these can then be eaten by the smaller animals. This is what is referred to in Allah's saying concerning the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '...and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep; and [many] other uses have I for it.' (*al-Kahf:* 20) It has been narrated that one time when `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* passed by a shepherd, he addressed him, saying, 'O shepherd!' The shepherd looked up at the Commander of the

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5273; from a Hadith on the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him that the wife of Thabit ibn Qays came to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'Messenger Muhammad, I do not have any complaints about Thabit ibn Qays with respect to his character or his religion. However, I dislike disbelief in Islam.' So, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Will you give him back his orchard?' She replied that she would, so the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to Thabit, 'Accept the orchard from her and grant her a single divorce.' See also Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2056. Ibn Maja mentioned the name of Thabit's wife, calling her Jamila bint Salul. In another narration no. 2057, he called her Habiba bint Sahl.*

Faithful and replied, ‘Yes, O shepherd of ours’ - meaning, ‘I am a shepherd of sheep ,while you are the shepherd of shepherds, and shepherds do not act haughtily towards one another’, so `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘At such-and-such a distance from here, there is a land in which there are some *sarh* (trees that are more beautiful and more fertile) than these, so take your flock there.’ This is a fine lesson in taking the responsibility for one’s flock upon oneself and showing concern for them. `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was one of the best at bearing responsibility in this way. It is narrated that he and `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Awf *Allah be pleased with them* saw a group of travelling salesmen sheltering in the mosque, looking to spend the night there. When `Umar and `Abd Ar-Rahman *Allah be pleased with them* saw that some of the traders were carrying produce, while others were carrying the money they had made from the produce they had sold, they became frightened that that might persuade someone to try and steal from them. So, they themselves also spent the night in the mosque, staying awake the entire night until dawn in order to guard those travellers. And even today, it is common for farmers to say *nasrah* meaning to go out to the *sarh* (trees) when they go out to the fields in the morning; they also use the word *naruh* when they return from the fields in the evening. The word *nasrah* has entered common usage so that it is now used to describe any act of going out somewhere. This is where the common saying, ‘Give me permission to leave’, comes from: it is as if I was imprisoned and was asking you to release me. This is also how *tasrih* comes to mean releasing one’s wife. However, this release of the wife is described by Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran as being: ‘... in an honourable way.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 49)

Everything that is described in the Quran with the attribute of beauty, like this and like patience, Allah says, ‘patience in adversity is most goodly’ (*Yusuf:* 18), has some specific intrinsic worth. Since the release of a wife is usually accompanied by agitation and anger, the actual release should be carried out in a beautiful manner without any harshness or vehemence such as by saying to her, ‘This is what was fated to happen. I hope that Allah *the Almighty* gives you one who is better than me in exchange’ or whatever else the man thinks appropriate for helping to lessen her pain. The separation and tragedy of divorce are painful enough for her to bear, so where is the beauty in insulting and cursing in the process and hurting her by denying her some of her rights?! This verse deals with a matter that is very important with respect to families. It is something that is desired by Allah *the Almighty* Himself. Allah *Glorified is He* created a human vicegerent, namely; Adam *peace be upon him* and then created his wife from him so that Allah *the Almighty* could bring about through them man's vicegerency upon the earth. But why did Allah *the Almighty* grant them this vicegerency? They reply, 'So that mankind could enjoy what their Lord brought into being in His creation by means of His Power and Wisdom. It is like when you bring some tasty food to your children and then rejoice when you see them eat and enjoy what you have brought them. The reason you rejoice is because you have passed something brought about through your power to someone else - and to Allah *the Almighty* belongs the highest example!' Since Allah *the Almighty* put the vicegerent on the earth and set him the task of inhabiting it, as indicated in His words: '...He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon...' (*Hud:* 61); He had to then guarantee for that vicegerent the means to live and survive, which depend entirely on the existence of the means for the preservation of his species, since he could not live on his own in the world until the end of time. The continuation of life is dependent upon food and sustenance. That is why your Lord, before creating you and summoning you into existence, first created certain things for you: Allah *the Almighty* created the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, the earth, the air and the water, thus prepared the way for His vicegerent by putting into existence all of things necessary for his survival. Read the following verse: 'Say, "Would you indeed deny Him who has created the earth in two days? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Lord of all the worlds?' For He [it is who, after creating the earth, placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it: [and all this He created] in four days.' (*Fussilat:* 9-10) So the storehouses are full to the brim with food '...and nought do We bestow from on high unless it be in accordance with a measure well-defined.' (*al-Hijr:* 21) Since it is the Creator of mankind Who decrees mankind's provision in advance, you do not have the right to say that there is a ‘population explosion’. Rather, you should acknowledge that it is you, through your own laziness and poor planning, who has fallen short in extracting the provision that is available to you. We notice something of this sort in the parable mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah’s blessings: and therefore, Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought.’ (*an-Nahl:* 112) An aspect of being ungrateful for the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed on you is leaving them hidden because of your laziness and disability of making any effort to extract them. A generation’s laziness can make life miserable for the next generation. That is why when we first began to take note of this matter and started to irrigate and cultivate the deserts, our crisis, to a certain extent, even became worse. But if we had irrigated the deserts earlier, we would not be suffering from this crisis and would not be complaining of overpopulation and a lack of space. Allah *the Almighty* teaches that when a place becomes too small, we should not cling obstinately to it since there is plenty of space elsewhere, a fact which is clear in Allah’s saying, ‘Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves, [the angels] will ask, “What was wrong with you?” They will answer “We were too weak on Earth.” The angels will say, “Was, then, Allah’s Earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 97) That is why Allah *the Almighty* addresses this matter to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even during the part of the night that he spends alone with Him, when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Behold, [O Prophet,] Your Lord knows that you keep awake [in prayer] nearly two-thirds of the night...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 20) until the words: ‘...He knows that in time there will be among you, sick people...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). ‘Sick people’ are those who are not able to work. Thus, those who are able to work should satisfy their own needs and the needs of those who are not able to work, ‘...and others who will go about the land in search of Allah’s Bounty, and others who will fight in Allah’s cause...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 20).

From this, we understand that the law that Allah *the Almighty* has made for putting the life of mankind in order is built upon two pillars: travelling through the earth and walking through its broad trails where the means for one's physical survival are found; and fighting in the way of Allah *the Almighty* in order to preserve the call of Islam. The first of these two pillars is for the outer vessel and it is by means of that which we eat, drink, live and breathe. The second is for our values. If the Muslim *ummah* stops fulfilling either of these two pillars or becomes lazy with respect to them, then it will wither and die. Its wealth will become coveted by its enemies. That is why, today, you find that the undeveloped nations are poor and only survive because of the handouts they receive from the rich nations. This is because they were ungrateful of the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* gave them, left them hidden and did not try to extract them or implement them in any way leaving their lands unsettled and uncultivated. As for the rich, they have a surplus. They do not give it to the poor, however, but rather throw it into the sea or destroy it in order to maintain their economic supremacy. That is why we are able to say that all of the evil and corruption in the world stems from people being ungrateful of Allah's Blessings, either by leaving them hidden and not extracting them or by being miserly with them and not giving them to those who do not have. A sign of the importance of food that comes at the front of the list of things that oblige the worshippers of Allah *the Almighty* is to be grateful to Him; He says, 'Let them, therefore, worship the Lord of this House, who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger.' (*Quraysh:* 3-4)

In the same way that Allah *the Almighty* has guaranteed his vicegerent on the earth the means for his survival, so too has Allah *the Almighty* also guaranteed him the means for preserving his species and having offspring. This is carried through the marriage system which Allah *the Almighty* legislated for His slaves. Allah *Glorified is He* legislated marriage so that children come into the world in such a pure and noble way, not in a dirty and ignoble way. The difference between these two lies in the fact that a legitimate child is welcomed proudly by its parents, while the other is not. In fact, if its mother does not get rid of the illegitimate child before it is born, she quickly gets rid it afterwards because it brings shame and dishonour down upon her and her family. So, Allah *the Almighty* legislated marriage to keep Muslim society pure, clean, and healthy, to make it worthy of being boasted about by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the Last Day. It has been narrated in a Hadith: ‘Marry and procreate, for I will boast about you before the other nations on the Last Day’(1).

Then Allah *the Almighty* says(2):

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ إِنَّآ أَحۡلَلۡنَا لَكَ أَزۡوَٰجَكَ ٱلَّٰتِيٓ ءَاتَيۡتَ أُجُورَهُنَّ وَمَا مَلَكَتۡ يَمِينُكَ مِمَّآ
أَفَآءَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡكَ وَبَنَاتِ عَمِّكَ وَبَنَاتِ عَمَّٰتِكَ وَبَنَاتِ خَالِكَ وَبَنَاتِ خَٰلَٰتِكَ ٱلَّٰتِي
هَاجَرۡنَ مَعَكَ وَٱمۡرَأَةٗ مُّؤۡمِنَةً إِن وَهَبَتۡ نَفۡسَهَا لِلنَّبِيِّ إِنۡ أَرَادَ ٱلنَّبِيُّ أَن يَسۡتَنكِحَهَا
خَالِصَةٗ لَّكَ مِن دُونِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۗ قَدۡ عَلِمۡنَا مَا فَرَضۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ فِيٓ أَزۡوَٰجِهِمۡ وَمَا
مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُهُمۡ لِكَيۡلَا يَكُونَ عَلَيۡكَ حَرَجٞۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمٗا ﴿٥٠﴾

Prophet, We have made lawful for you the wives whose bride gift you have paid, and any slaves God has assigned to you through war, and the daughters of your uncles and aunts on your father’s and mother’s sides, who migrated with you. Also any believing woman who has offered herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet wishes to wed – this is only for you [Prophet] and not the rest of the believers: We know exactly what We have made

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(1) *See Kashf Al-Khafa` by Al-`Ajluni, vol. 1, p. 380; he says: ‘It is narrated by `Abd Ar-Razzaq and Al-Bayhaqi as a mursal Hadith from Sa`id ibn Abu Hilal with the wording, “Marry and have many children, for I will boast about you before the other nations on the Day of Resurrection.”’ See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2050, on the authority of Ma`qal ibn Yasar who said, ‘A man came to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and said, ‘I have found a woman who possesses both beauty and nobility but cannot have children. Should I marry her?’ The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him replied, ‘No.’ Then the man came another time and asked him again and he again said ‘No.’ Then the man came and asked him a third time and the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him answered, ‘Marry women who are loving and bear plenty of children, for I want your numbers to exceed that of other nations in the past.’*

(2) *Ibn Kathir says, ‘The ruling in this verse is balanced, being neither too strict nor too lax. While the Christians do not allow men and women to marry unless they are removed from each other by at least seven generations, and the Jews allow men to marry their nieces, our perfect pure law came and demolished the excessive laws of the Christians, allowing men to marry their cousins, and forbade the overly lenient laws of the Jews whereby they permitted the marrying of nieces.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, vol. 3, p. 499.*

obligatory for them concerning their wives and slave-girls – so you should not be blamed: God is most forgiving, most merciful [50] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 50)

The True Lord does not address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by his first name (given name) as Allah *the Almighty* does with the other Prophets, like when He says, 'O Nuh (Noah)!', 'O `Isa (Jesus)!', 'O Musa (Moses)!', 'O Ibrahim (Abraham)!' and so forth. No, the Lord either addresses him *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: 'O Apostle!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41) or saying, 'O Prophet!' (*al-Ahzab:* 50) Calling someone by his first name indicates that he does not have any distinguishing characteristics since if he did have some distinguishing characteristic, he would be called by it. So, you would address him, saying, for example, 'O brave one!', 'O poet!' or something like that. Today, everyone shares the same names. So, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with 'O Prophet!' and 'O Messenger!' was to honour him. Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '…We have made lawful for you the wives…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50). But what does Allah *the Almighty* mean by '...We have made lawful...' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), given that the discussion is centred on his wives?

Scholars reply, 'It means that they had been unlawful for him and then Allah *the Almighty* made them lawful for him, and this meaning is clearly indicated by the words of Allah *the Almighty* that follow immediately after: '...whose bride gift you have paid…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50). It is as if Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* worked firstly as matters are lawful, as proved by the fact that he paid them their dowries. Some scholars have an issue with calling a dowry an *ajr*, saying, 'How can a dowry be called an *ajr* when the word *ajr* literally means, "payment for a service rendered by a hireling for a hirer in a set period of time", and marriages do not have set periods of time, since a precondition of marriage is making the intention that the union be permanent'? In answer to this question, we say, 'It is not correct to read verses in isolation; rather, we should gather all the verses that are revealed on a particular issue and place them side by side so that we can arrive at a complete understanding of that issue'. Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in regard to his wives: '[know that] you may put off for a time whichever of them you please...' (put off your enjoyment of them) '...and may take to you whichever you please...' (*al-Ahzab:* 51), i.e. draw them to you. So, because you have the right to put off whichever of your wives you want and deny them their allotted turn and then bring others of them to you, it is as if the service rendered was only for a set period of time. So, it is fitting for the word *ajr* to be used for their dowries. In every phase and aspect of his life, Allah *the Almighty* granted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the purest and noblest of positions. As for the saying of Allah, '... whose bride gift you have paid…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), it indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not benefit from any of his wives until he first paid them their dowries. This is even though it is permissible for men who have agreed upon a dowry with their wives to have sexual relations with them before actually paying them any part of it, since the whole or part of a dowry may be deferred. However, delaying the dowry does give the wife the right to refuse to sleep with her husband. And so, when she does permit him to sleep with her, it is an act of favour from her to him. So, the way chosen by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the most perfect.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* came in order to make it clear to people what has been sent down to them. Allah *the Almighty* made him a living example of how to behave in matters which people find difficult to confront by having him be the first one to do those things, as we already mentioned with regard to the matter of adoption. Similarly, with respect to polygamy, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, polygamy was a common practice amongst the Arabs and had even been practised by the prophets who came before him. Allah *the Almighty* however, wanted to limit the number of wives men were permitted in such a way that would still absorb the extra women in society but stop them from marrying as many as they wanted. So, Allah *the Almighty* commanded Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to his community, 'Any one of you with more than four wives should hold onto four of them and divorce the rest', while at the same time allowing him *peace and blessings be upon him* to keep the nine wives that he had. If this ruling were to have included Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well, and he had held onto four and divorced the other five, those five would have suffered greatly since they would have been left hanging, neither being married nor being free to marry. That is because being the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Mothers of the Believers, they were not permitted to marry any other man after him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, the ruling was different when it came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, it should be noted that the nine wives that he was permitted to marry were those nine he was married to and no other: if any of them were to have died or been divorced, he would not have been allowed to marry anyone else to replace them, since Allah *the Almighty* addresses him, saying: 'No [other] women shall henceforth be lawful to you – nor are you [allowed] to supplant [any of] them by other wives, even though their beauty should please thee greatly...' (*al-Ahzab:* 52). We have clearly demonstrated to those Orientalists who take this matter up that the exception of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the ruling was not in terms of number but was in terms of the specified women themselves. So he *peace and blessings be upon him* had to stop at those specific nine women to whom he was married and could not marry anyone else, while every other man in his community was free to marry many times that number so long as he did not have more than four at any one time. The verse: '…We have made lawful for you the wives…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), was revealed before the verse: 'No [other] women shall henceforth be lawful to thee...' (*al-Ahzab:* 52), and yet it has been narrated from `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not die until after Allah had first given him the permission to marry whomsoever he wished.(1) How could that be?

Scholars reply that it was because Allah *the Almighty* wanted to give Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the distinction of showing loyalty to his wives. For, even though Allah *the Almighty* had given him permission to marry others, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never did out of loyalty to the wives he had. He *peace and blessings be upon him* did that because whenever he was greeted, he would either give a better greeting in response or respond in kind. He had previously seen a good gesture from his wives when he had offered them a choice and they had chosen him, preferring life with him to the baubles and finery of this world, so it was as if he wanted to return that gesture with one that was even better than it.

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(1) *See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3216; see also An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 656 in a statement from `Aisha Allah be pleased with her. At-Tirmidhi classified it as Hasan.*

The verse: '…We have made lawful for you the wives…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), coming before the verse: 'No [other] women shall henceforth be lawful to you...' (*al-Ahzab:* 50) was also a proof of how he *peace and blessings be upon him* was honoured and given special treatment, since Allah *the Almighty* made it lawful for him before making it unlawful. Another example of him being honoured in this way is found in Allah's saying: 'May Allah pardon you [O Prophet]! Why did you grant them permission [to stay at home]…' (*at-Tawba:* 43), for the rebuke is preceded by the pardon. Another thing we notice in the verse: '…We have made lawful for you the wives…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50) is that Allah *the Almighty* uses the masculine form *`azwaj* for wives and not the feminine form *zawjat*. This is because the word *zawj* (spouse) applies to both men and women. Linguistically, *zawj* means one for which another of its type exists, i.e. one of a pair. It does not mean 'two' as some people think. It is like the word *taw`am* (twin) which also means one for which another of its type exists. An example of this is found in Allah's saying: '[His followers would have it that, in certain cases, any of these] four kinds of cattle of either sex [is unlawful to man]: either of the two sexes of sheep and of goats...' (*al-An'am:* 143). Then Allah says: '... and any slaves Allah has assigned to you through war…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50). We know that 'what your right hand possesses' means slave girls, but Allah *the Almighty* added the words: '...Allah has assigned to you through war…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), as a precaution in order to indicate that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only obtained his slave girls by legally-accepted means, that is to say from those who were captured in the course of war. He *peace and blessings be upon him* was directly at hand when the prisoner were captured, so he could be sure those women were actually slave girls, since some women who were sold at the time as slave girls in the slave markets were actually freewomen who had been illegally abducted and then forced in slavery. A prime example of that is what we witnessed in the story of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him*. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* says: '...Allah has assigned to you through war…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), Allah *Glorified is He* means 'those regarding whom you are one hundred per cent sure that they are slave girls and that they are from among the captives whom Allah *the Almighty* has made lawful for you'.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '... and the daughters of your uncles and aunts on your father's and mother's sides, who migrated with you. Also, any believing woman who has offered herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet wishes to wed– this is only for you [Prophet] and not the rest of the believers…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50). Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* made it lawful for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to marry the daughters of his paternal uncles, the daughters of his paternal aunts, the daughters of his maternal uncles and the daughters of his maternal aunts. When we say 'paternal', we mean his relatives on his father's side; and when we say 'maternal', we mean his relatives on his mother's side. We note, however, that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never did marry any daughters of his paternal uncles, daughters of his paternal aunts, daughters of his maternal uncles or daughters of his maternal aunts. The reason Allah *the Almighty* made it lawful for him *peace and blessings be upon him* to marry these women mentioned was so that his family would look out for him in the future and support him in his task. When you reflect upon this verse, you will notice that the Arabic words for paternal uncles and maternal uncles are in the singular while the Arabic words for paternal aunts and maternal aunts are in the plural. Why is that? They say it is because the words for paternal uncle and maternal uncle are generic nouns, and generic nouns may be used for both singular and plural. And this is proven by the fact that, in the Quran, you find generic nouns with exceptions being made to them in the plural, as in: 'By time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself. Except for those who believe, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity.' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3)

'Man' is a singular generic noun. The exception that is made to it is 'those who believe' which is in the plural. As for the Arabic words for paternal aunts and maternal aunts, they are not generic nouns and so they were used in the feminine plural.

Another thing: because paternal uncles are the brothers of the father, and presupposing that there are many of them, they enjoy the same status of the father. An example of this is in Allah's words: 'Nay, but you [yourselves, O children of Israel,] bear witness that when death was approaching Ya`qub (Jacob), he said unto his sons: "Whom will you worship after I am gone?" They answered, "We will worship your Lord, the Lord of your forefathers Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac)..."' (*al-Baqara:* 133). In this verse, the paternal uncle Ismail (Ishmael) was included in the general category of fore fathers. Another example of a paternal uncle being called a father is in Allah words: 'And, lo, [thus] spoke Ibrahim (Abraham) unto his father Azar...' (*al-An'am:* 74), since it is well-known that Azar was Ibrahim's (Abraham's) paternal uncle, not his father.

In another place in the Quran, the word for paternal uncle appears in the plural. This is clear in Allah's saying: '[All of you, O believers, are brethren: hence,] no blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for accepting charity from the hale], and neither to yourselves for eating [whatever is offered to you by others, whether it be food obtained] from your [children's] houses, or your fathers' houses, or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses...' (*an-Nur:* 61). Here, both the word for paternal uncle and the word for maternal uncle appear in the plural. Why is that? They say that it is because it is the houses from which you are allowed to eat that are being discussed in this verse and the word for houses appears in the plural. Since the generic paternal uncle only has one house and multiple houses are mentioned, we must use the plural form *a`mam* for paternal uncles and the plural form *`akhwal* for maternal uncles. Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '... Also any believing woman who has offered herself to the Prophet' (*al-Ahzab:* 50). The Arabic word *wahb* means giving something to someone freely without seeking any recompense, So, when we say 'So-and-so *wahaba* (gave) you such-and-such', we mean that he gave it to you free of charge, not as part of a sale or in exchange for something else. That is why when this verse was revealed `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, 'I am amazed that there could be a woman who values herself so lightly that she would give herself to a man for free without seeking any recompense!' Then when the following verse: '...Also any believing woman who has offered herself to the Prophet' (*al-Ahzab:* 50) was revealed, she *Allah be pleased with her* said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Messenger Muhammad, I see that Allah hastens with what you desire.' So he *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'If you were to have *taqwa* (fear) of Allah, `Aisha, then Allah would hasten what you desire.'(1)

What he *peace and blessings be upon him* meant was, 'Allah hastens what I want because I have hastened with what He wants: because I did everything that He requested of me, He makes whatever I want come to pass before I even ask it of Him'. The verse says: '...any believing woman...' (*al-Ahzab:* 50) because the ruling is specific to believing women; if the woman was from the people of the Book, it would not be valid for her to give herself to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for free. One question that arises from this ruling is: 'Is the act of offering herself to him *peace and blessings be upon him* for free enough to make her lawful for him?' They reply that it is not, for there must also be acceptance. So, if the woman were to say to him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'I give myself to you freely', he must first accept her offer before she becomes lawful for him. That is why Allah *the Almighty* attaches a condition to the offer, when Allah *the Almighty* says: '...who has offered herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet wishes to wed–' (*al-Ahzab:* 50); the reason for this is because marriage is one of the matters for which both offer and acceptance are necessary. There has been some discussion about this matter among scholars: some of them(2) said that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never accepted any woman who offered herself to him freely, and others(3) said that he married four women who gave themselves to him freely, namely, Maymuna bint Al-Harith Al-Hilaliyya *Allah be pleased with her* Zaynab bint Khuzayma Umm Al-Masakin (mother of the poor) *Allah be pleased with her* Umm Sharik bint Jabir *Allah be pleased with her* and Khawla bint Hakim *Allah be pleased with her*. However, there is no riddle when it comes to this contradiction, since it is easy for us to reconcile these two statements when you look at the exact wording of what Allah *the Almighty* says: '... Also any believing woman who has offered herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet wishes to wed–' (*al-Ahzab:* 50) Thus, it is possible that a woman offered herself to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* free of charge but he was not willing to wed her; and it is possible that a woman offered herself to him free of charge and that He *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to honour her and give her a dowry anyway before marrying her. The word *yastankihuha*: 'to wed' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), is like *yankihuha* - both words mean exactly the same thing, like the words *`ajila* and *ista`jala* which both mean 'to hasten'. The implication of: '...this is only for you [Prophet] and not the rest of the believers...' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), is that Allah *the Almighty* singles out His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* with certain rulings that set him apart from the rest of his community. And the reason for that is because the task of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* does not only relate to himself but relates to all of mankind, not just his contemporaries but every single person who will set foot upon this earth until its Final Hour. This means that the concerns of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are massive, both in terms of size and in terms of number, and this is indicated by Allah's words: 'Behold, We shall bestow upon thee a weighty message' (*al-Muzzammil:* 5). Allah *the Almighty* wanted

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4788, 5113; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1464 in Kitab Ar-Rida`; see also Ahmad, Musnad, 6/134, 158, 261 from a Hadith on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her.*

(2) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, vol. 6, p. 630; he said: 'This was what Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him held.' As-Suyuti attributed it to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abu Hatim, At-Tabarani, Ibn Mardawayh and Al-Bayhaqi that Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, 'The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him did not marry any woman who gave herself to him free of charge.'*

(3) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir vol. 8, p. 5477; Ibn Kathir , Tafsir, vol. 3, p. 500; and As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur vol. 6, p.p. 628-630. Al-Qurtubi said, 'That which is narrated in=*

= *the two books of Sahih strengthens and reinforces this opinion: it is narrated by Muslim that `Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, 'I used to be jealous of those who gave themselves to the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him free of charge and say, "Does a woman not feel embarrassed to offer herself to a man free of charge?" When it was revealed, "[know that] you may put off for a time whichever of them you please, and may take to you whichever you please..." (al-Ahzab: 51). I said to the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him "By Allah, I see that your Lord only hastens with what you want."' Al-Bukhari narrated that `Aisha, Allah be leased with her, said, 'Khawla bint Hakim was one of those who gave themselves to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for free.' This indicates that more than one woman did so.*

there to be nothing to distract Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from this task of his. Allah *the Almighty* wanted His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to devote all his attention to fulfilling that task with which he was entrusted so that when he was in love with the process of conveying the message from Allah *the Almighty* and totally absorbed in it. All his personal desires and wants would die, leaving nothing in his heart except for his preoccupation with the task of calling to Islam. This is proven by the fact that when the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* first started to receive the revelation, he found it exhausting: his forehead would drip with sweat and he would run to his wife and call out to her, ‘Cover me! Cover me!’ or ‘Wrap me up! Wrap me up!’ Then, after that, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to relieve him of his suffering and remove the load that had weighed down his back and tired him out, so He caused the revelation to abate for a time so that the nerves and strength of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* might have time to rest and recover. During that period, however, the sweetness of what had been revealed to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* remained with him, and that sweetness caused him to long for the revelation to return. And the longing that you feel for something makes you forget the hardship and toil you went through to acquire it.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘By the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark. Your Lord has not forsaken thee, nor does He scorn thee. For, indeed, the life to come will be better for thee than this earlier part [of thy life]! And, indeed, in time will your Lord grant you [what you heart desires], and you shall be well pleased.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-5) It is quite amazing that the idolaters said when the revelation stopped, ‘The Lord of Muhammad has forsaken him.’ So, when they thought him forsaken, they acknowledged Muhammad had a Lord who (they believed) had forsaken him, but when he was conveying the Message in secret and in public, they said he was a liar, a poet etc. The verse: ‘for, indeed, the life to come will be better for you than this earlier part [of your life]!’ (*ad-Duha:* 4) means that the return of the revelation will be better for you the initial stages of revelation since, when it first came to you, it was more than your strength could readily bear and so it tired you out. But when it comes back, you yourself will be calling for it come and longingly waiting for it. So, you will have gathered your strength and readied yourself to receive it and will, as a consequence, be able to bear it without effort or exhaustion. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* gave Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what would make it easier for him to absorb himself completely in the revelation. So when, it did return, his forehead no longer dripped with sweat and he *peace and blessings be upon him* no longer became physically exhausted as he had in the initial stages of revelation because the potency of his longing and love had won out over the tiredness and exhaustion that had previously afflicted him. Then Allah *the Almighty* says, '...We know exactly what We have made obligatory for them concerning their wives and slave-girls– so you should not be blamed…' (*al-Ahzab:* 50), i.e. with respect to the number that they are limited to four and with respect to the dowry that is agreed upon at the time of the contract. The meaning is that everyone has a ruling and law that relates to them, so you, Messenger Muhammad, have a ruling that befits you and your community has a ruling that befits its members. While we are on the topic of polygamy and the rulings relating to wives, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of the hue and cry that is raised by many of the enemies of Islam about 'polygamy', even though the practice of marrying more than one wife in Egypt is scarcely a noticeable feature of the society, let alone the epidemic that some people imagine it to be.

A survey was carried out and revealed that three men out of one hundred got married to two wives while those who got married to three wives are one out of every one thousand; yet those who got married to four are one in every two thousand. Thus, why do people make such noise about a matter that Allah Himself legislated? In addition, has not polygamy helped with allowing unmarried women to get married?

We see wives complaining and asking, 'Why would their husbands marry another after living with him and serving him for such-and-such a period of time'? In response, I ask such wives, 'Did that marriage harm you?' They would take 'yes' as an answer. Hence, I say, 'But that marriage brought benefit to another woman. Why do we then consider the affairs of married women and ignore the others? Do they not have the right to get married as well? In addition, those who accept being the second and the third wife only do so because they are unable to be the first and the second.' Moreover, we say to those who protest about polygamy that Allah has not made it compulsory; however, Allah's Wisdom decreed that polygamy is a recommended act and not an obligatory one. Thus, if you do not like polygamy, keep it to one wife.

Those who make this fuss about polygamy have raised an even bigger controversy about the practice of slavery in Islam. They accused Islam and Muslims, wondering how it is for a man to possess such-and-such a number of slave girls on top of his wives. However, it is well known that slavery was practised before Islam and continued to be practised throughout the world until common international law called for putting an end to it. On calling for freedom of all slaves, people began to release them to the level that some people bought them from others in order to secure their release. Certain slaves returned to their former owners, preferred to live under their protection and serve them because they were happy with their life under their masters' protection. Yet some of them took pride in their status as slaves and felt no shame to say that they were the emancipated slaves of such-and-such a family.

Anyone who examines the matter with a fair and unbiased eye will find that slavery is far from being a source of shame for Islam. It was actually a source of pride that slavery was restricted to only one way, namely; legally sanctioned wars. Thus, Islam did not come to institute the practice of slavery, but rather came to institute the practice of emancipation. It came at a time when slavery was practised everywhere. Slaves were sold here and there, and there was no way for freedom unless their master decided to emancipate them. Slavery was present in many ways. For example, debtors who found themselves unable to pay off their debts would sell themselves or their children to pay off their debts. Robbers and highwaymen would abduct free people and sell them in the slave markets and so forth.

However, when Islam emerged, it prohibited all the means of becoming a slave except for one, i.e. being taken prisoner in a legally sanctioned war. Wars did not even necessarily lead people to becoming slaves, as exchanges of prisoners and like-for-like transactions often existed. In addition, the social worth of a prisoner was taken into consideration. A leader, philosopher or great scholar would not be ransomed in exchange for just one ordinary man, but for as many as befitted his social value and status as the following verse proves: 'And afterwards either set them free as a favour or let them ransom (themselves) until the war terminates.' (*Muhammad:* 4)

The reason for this is because wars in Islam were not legislated to force people to adopt the religion, but rather to defend their right of choosing the religion they wanted. It is manifest through the fact that large numbers of non-Muslims continued to live in conquered lands for years after the conquest. These people, however, were required to pay *jizya* in lieu of the *zakat* that was paid by the Muslims and in exchange for services rendered to them by the Muslims' state.

One should reflect on the way that Islam treats prisoners. Here, we should stress that those unjust societies that criticise Islam on this particular point should know that capturing someone in a battle means that the capturer has complete power over him, and that he is free to kill him if he so wishes. But when the law intervenes and makes the prisoner your slave, it aims at sparing his blood and allowing you to derive some benefit from him through demanding a ransom or having him serving you directly. Therefore, the comparison here is not between slavery and freedom as some people mistakenly think, but rather it is between slavery and death.

Thus, the only reason that slavery was legislated with respect to prisoners of war was to spare their blood and give their captor a chance to profit from them. In addition, if there was no ransom or exchange of prisoners and prisoners were to remain in your possession, then you must know that they have certain rights that may never be violated, since they are fellow humans, created by Allah. Thus, Allah only permitted you to take possession of prisoners so that you spare their blood, not to humiliate them.

Read the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Your slaves are your brothers. Allah has put them under your authority. If someone has his brother under his authority, he should feed him from what he eats, and clothe him from what he wears and not burden him with anything that will be too much for him. If you burden him with what will be too much for him, then help him.' What greater hospitality could be shown to a prisoner than this? First, Islamic law spares his blood and honours him by making him your brother and by respecting the common humanity through treating him well. Furthermore, it opens many ways for him to secure his freedom and emancipation. Although there is but a single door through which a person may become a slave, there are many doors through which he may exit from it, including expiation for one's sins that lie between him and Allah.

And even when there is no sin, Islamic law still encourages emancipating of slaves, in order to help one break through the difficult road. Allah says, ‘But he would not attempt the uphill road. And what will make you comprehend what the uphill road is? (It is) the setting free of a slave.’ (*al-Balad:* 11-13)

This is the case of a male slave and it also applies equally to a female slave. She receives the same good treatment as a male slave receives it. However, on top of that, she has a special position within the household of her master. She sees her mistress enjoy herself with her husband and the daughter of him gets married and moves to the matrimonial home with her husband and many other such matters. Since she cannot stand observing all that and may cause her to start to feel jealous, Allah honours her and makes her lawful to her master, allowing her to enjoy the same things as her mistress. In addition, if she delivers a child to her master, she becomes free as a result, which is another way of putting an end to slavery.

Allah concludes the verse we are studying saying that He ordained this in order that there will be no discomfort upon Prophet Muhammad and such is a privilege granted to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* says to His Prophet, ‘So that you can devote yourself completely to your difficult task, we do not wish to burden you with any sort of worry or anxiety whatsoever. Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 50)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

تُرۡجِي مَن تَشَآءُ مِنۡهُنَّ وَتُـٔۡوِيٓ إِلَيۡكَ مَن تَشَآءُۖ وَمَنِ ٱبۡتَغَيۡتَ مِمَّنۡ عَزَلۡتَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ
عَلَيۡكَۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدۡنَىٰٓ أَن تَقَرَّ أَعۡيُنُهُنَّ وَلَا يَحۡزَنَّ وَيَرۡضَيۡنَ بِمَآ ءَاتَيۡتَهُنَّ
كُلُّهُنَّۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمۡۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَلِيمٗا ﴿٥١﴾

You may make any of [your women] wait and receive any of them as you wish, but you will not be at fault if you invite one whose turn you have previously set aside: this way it is more likely that they will be satisfied and will not be distressed and will all be content with what you have given them. God knows what is in your hearts: God is all knowing, forbearing [51] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 51)

Speaking of the marital right of copulation, Allah says that Prophet Muhammad may put off the night of whichever of his wives that he pleases to another time and may embrace and take to his bed whichever of them that he pleases. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* reassures him *peace and blessings be upon him* that there is no blame upon him by desiring any of his wives and putting off another wife to another time.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…this way it is more likely that they will be satisfied and will not be distressed and will all be content with what you have given them.' (*al-Ahzab:* 51) This means that both those whom you draw close to from among your wives and those whom you put off to another time will rejoice. They will all be content with their lot because they know that your wishes are a reflection of the command of Allah. Thus, the ones whom the Prophet of Allah takes shall rejoice because of his love to them and their pleasure at being in his company, and those whose time has been put off shall also rejoice because he *peace be upon him* kept on them, embraced them and drew them near to him at another time, which shows that they held an important role and a high rank. Furthermore, the fact that this happened as a result of what Allah legislated to him *peace and blessings be upon him* does not mean that he *peace and blessings be upon him* hated them or was forsaking them, but rather than that he, despite the difficulty it caused, was obeying and acting on the command of Allah and thereby got a reward for doing that.

It is a truism that every word in the Quran looks like a diamond with special rays shining from every individual atom within it. That is why they say the Quran is glittering due to the abundance of its bright rays that not one ray puts out the light of another, just like the words of the Quran.

The Arabic word for being satisfied appears very often in the Quran. Allah says, 'And Pharaoh's wife said, "A refreshment of the eye to me and to you."' (*al-Qasas:* 9) The literal meaning of the word is to settle down or dwell, as we say: 'someone settled down in a place and dwelled there'. It also means 'coldness', a meaning which is clear in the phrase 'Someone is *qurrat al-`ayn*', which bears the two meanings; for the eye gets attracted to something and does not move because of the beauty of this very thing since it has captured its gaze. In this regard, they say that so-and-so a person's gaze is transfixed. And for the opposite, they say that so-and-so a person has a wandering eye, meaning that his eye does not rest for long on any one thing.

In the language of politics, they say that so-and-so a person has an eye of aspirations, meaning that whenever he gets promoted to a particular post, he eyes up the post above it.

As for the meaning of coldness or refreshment regarding the eye in the phrase *qurrat al-`ayn*, this is an allusion to its being happy as the eye becomes warm at times of sadness and pain. It has recently been scientifically proven that the eyeball is a precise thermometer to the condition of the rest of the body and can be accurately used to determine how healthy or sick a person is.

Another example of the importance of the eye is shown by how it is used to indicate emphasis. For example, we say, 'So-and-so himself (literally 'with his eye') came to see me'. We previously mentioned the phenomenon of temperature equilibrium in the human body. We observed that it is one of the miracles of the human being that the temperature equilibrium is maintained within his body in an amazing way. The temperature varies from a body organ to another with each one maintaining a degree that best befits it. If we say that the temperature of the body as a whole stays constant at an ideal temperature of 37°C, which is amazingly the same even for people at the north pole and people at the equator, the temperature of the liver never drops below 40°C. However, the temperature of the eye never rises above 10°C because if it did, it would explode.

Thus, the gladness of the eyes of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them,* and their satisfaction lie in the acceptance of whatever he wanted with respect to bringing them close or putting them off to another time, because the main source for his desires was the command of Allah.

Then Allah says that the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will all be content with what you have given them, regardless of the circumstances. Allah finally concludes the verse saying that He knows what is in their hearts and that He is All Knowing and Forbearing. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* indicates that the mentioned contentment here was not limited to their outward forms, but rather was in their hearts. In other words, their hearts were content to carry out the commands of Allah, without any resistance in the innermost parts of their beings.

Allah is All Knowing and He fully knows what is in people's hearts, but He is All Forbearing. He does not recompense you for what He knows of in your hearts, for if He does so, it will completely tire you out. Reflect on the Forbearance and Mercy of Allah regarding the matter of starting things with uttering the phrase '*bismillah*' (In the Name of Allah), Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that every action that does not begin with *bismillah* is cut-off from being blessed. When a human being embarks upon an action, he does not carry it out with his inherent power, but rather by means of the One Who created that subject for him. So, when you say, 'In the Name of Allah, I will do such-and-such a thing', you are, in fact, doing that thing in the Name of the One Who made that thing subjected to your use.

That is why Allah says: 'And He Who created pairs of all things, and made for you of the ships and the cattle what you ride on. That you may firmly sit on their backs, and then remember the favour of your Lord when you are firmly seated thereon, and say, "Glory be to Him Who made this subservient to us and we were not able to do it."' (*az-Zukhruf:* 12-13) Therefore, you must begin any action by saying 'In the Name of Allah' even if you are a sinful person. Beware of thinking that you are not worthy of saying those words, for Allah is Forbearing and All Merciful.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّا يَحِلُّ لَكَ ٱلنِّسَآءُ مِنۢ بَعۡدُ وَلَآ أَن تَبَدَّلَ بِهِنَّ مِنۡ أَزۡوَٰجٖ وَلَوۡ أَعۡجَبَكَ
حُسۡنُهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا مَلَكَتۡ يَمِينُكَۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ رَّقِيبٗا ﴿٥٢﴾

You [Prophet] are not permitted to take any further wives, nor to
exchange the wives you have for others, even if these attract you
with their beauty. But this does not apply to your slave-girls:
God is watchful over all [52] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 52)

We explained the meaning of this verse in the course of discussing the previous few verses, but it can be summarised here as follows: Allah started off by making these marriages lawful for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Prophet, We have made lawful for you the wives whose bride gift you have paid.' (*al-Ahzab:* 50) Allah *the Almighty* then restricted what was lawful for him *peace and blessings be upon him* in this verse under study. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* starts with what is light and easy first and brings what is heavy and difficult afterwards, to let people know that Allah began His dealings with Prophet Muhammad with tenderness, compassion and sympathy and to show His Favours upon him. It is like the verse wherein Allah *the Almighty* starts with mentioning His Forgiveness before blaming the Prophet *Muhammad:* ‘Allah pardon you! Why did you give them leave?’ (*at-Tawba:* 43)

The verse we are studying clearly shows that the law legislated for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with respect to his wives was different from that of the rest of his *ummah*. Allah has not ordained a specific number for Prophet Muhammad, but rather specified particular women as his *peace and blessings be upon him* wives. If He had permitted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to marry nine wives, he would be unable to marry another nine if they were all to die. Also, if one of these wives were to die, he could not marry another one to replace her, that is, the exception that was made with respect to him *peace and blessings be upon him* however, was not in terms of number like the rest of his *ummah*, but rather in terms of the specified women themselves. This means that Prophet Muhammad was limited to those women and could marry no others. The wisdom behind this ruling lay in the fact that any woman other than the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was free to marry again if she was divorced by their husband. His *peace and blessings be upon him* wives, however, could not do so since they were the Mothers of the Believers, thus were not permitted to remarry after him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We made it clear that the matter of slavery was far from being a mark of shame for Islam, but rather, one of its greatest marks of distinction. Allah enabled the possession of slaves in order to protect them from being killed. Thus, the comparison here is not one between slavery and freedom, but rather between slavery and death, as we made clear earlier. Anyone who reflects upon the circumstances of male and female slaves under the protection of Islam will have no recourse but to recognise the great Wisdom of Allah in this matter.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَدۡخُلُواْ بُيُوتَ ٱلنَّبِيِّ إِلَّآ أَن يُؤۡذَنَ لَكُمۡ إِلَىٰ طَعَامٍ غَيۡرَ
نَٰظِرِينَ إِنَىٰهُ وَلَٰكِنۡ إِذَا دُعِيتُمۡ فَٱدۡخُلُواْ فَإِذَا طَعِمۡتُمۡ فَٱنتَشِرُواْ وَلَا مُسۡتَـٔۡنِسِينَ
لِحَدِيثٍۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكُمۡ كَانَ يُؤۡذِي ٱلنَّبِيَّ فَيَسۡتَحۡيِۦ مِنكُمۡۖ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَسۡتَحۡيِۦ مِنَ
ٱلۡحَقِّۚ وَإِذَا سَأَلۡتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَٰعٗا فَسۡـَٔلُوهُنَّ مِن وَرَآءِ حِجَابٖۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ أَطۡهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمۡ
وَقُلُوبِهِنَّۚ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمۡ أَن تُؤۡذُواْ رَسُولَ ٱللَّهِ وَلَآ أَن تَنكِحُوٓاْ أَزۡوَٰجَهُۥ مِنۢ
بَعۡدِهِۦٓ أَبَدًاۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكُمۡ كَانَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ عَظِيمًا ﴿٥٣﴾

Believers, do not enter the Prophet's apartments for a meal unless you are given permission to do so; do not linger until [a meal] is ready. When you are invited, go in; then, when you have taken your meal, leave. Do not stay on and talk, for that would offend the Prophet, though he would shrink from asking you to leave. God does not shrink from the truth. When you ask his wives for something, do so from behind a screen: this is purer both for your hearts and for theirs. It is not right for you to offend God's Messenger, just as you should never marry his wives after him: that would be grievous in God's eyes [53]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 53)

Allah *Glorified is He* tells clearly that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his *ummah* are obliged to act upon His commands. For, just as Allah *the Almighty* commanded Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of this chapter to remain conscious of Allah *Glorified is He*. He later commands his *peace and blessings be upon him ummah* to remember and obey Him; and just as Allah talks of a matter relating to the Prophet Muhammad, He then talks of a matter relating to his community when He says, 'Believers, you have no right to expect a waiting period when you marry believing women and then divorce them.' (*al-Ahzab:* 49)

After that, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet *Muhammad:* 'Prophet, We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and warning.' (*al-Ahzab:* 45), to show how comprehensive the benefit he *peace and blessings be upon him* brought to his *ummah* was. Thus, Allah made his community repay him by calling down blessings upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* and exhibiting proper etiquette when they are inside his home. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* calls out those who believe, saying: ‘Believers, do not enter the Prophet’s houses for a meal unless you are given permission to do so…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 53) because being responsible for one’s actions must be the characteristic of those who believe in Allah.

We have mentioned before that the Allah is the Lord and the True God. He is the Lord because He creates, brings up and bestows blessings and favours. This creation, upbringing and bestowal of blessings and favours are not specific to the believers but includes absolutely everyone that Allah called into being, regardless of whether they believe or not. The sun shines down upon everyone; the rain irrigates the land of the believer and the land of the disbeliever alike; and the land responds to everyone and yields up its produce. Anyone who makes good use of the means that Allah has given him through his attribute of Lordship reaps the reward and obtains a limited portion in this world. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Whoever desires the gain of the hereafter, We will give him more of that gain; and whoever desires the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the Hereafter he has no portion.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20) Allah does not let the wage of those who do things well go in vain.

A believer who does not make use of the means of Allah, which is stretched out to him, and completely ignores it, lives in a state of backwardness and total reliance upon others. He lives his life begging from disbelievers in order to gain his power. Moreover, when the way is left clear for the disbelievers to make use of the means and they do all full due, they shall take the gifts that Allah has to offer, while it is all the more appropriate for believers not to neglect those same gifts and not allow themselves to fall behind the onward march of civilisation, even if it is the materialistic civilisation that has been created by today’s disbelievers.

As for morals and values, they have declined in these societies. This is proven by the fact that when you go to those countries and spend the night in a hotel, you find a printed message on the door of your room that says, ‘If thieves come into your room, do not resist them. Your life is the most valuable thing you have. And when you walk down the streets, you only take as much money as is absolutely necessary’. Thus, they have progressed in one area and regressed in another.

In addition, if you say that their progress in the economic sphere is the greatest manifestation of their civilisation, then look at Sweden. It is the country with highest income per capita. However, despite their material wealth, they have a very high incidence of psychological and nervous disorders, suicide, madness, deviancy, and many other such sociological disorders.

These countries have developed a materialistic civilisation because they have taken hold of the means of this world. Everyone does his job well using their work hours for work. You will not find anyone in the streets between the hours of eight and twelve, and you will not find anyone lounging around in coffee shops or wasting the hours he has set aside for work. Then, on their lunch breaks, everyone goes out to the restaurants to eat ready-made sandwiches and then hurry back to work. This is how a materialist society lives and anyone who does not work in such a society dies of hunger. Praise is due to Allah that the young men in our own societies have realised the importance of work and left behind the childhood characteristics that had lasted until they were thirty years old during which they were reliant upon their parents.

Allah *Glorified is He* in this verse in question teaches us the correct way of behaving with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He makes him an example to all of us since he lived a life of abstinence in terms of his food, clothing, and dwelling. He had only a limited number of rooms for each of his wives and had no living room or reception room. It was thus necessary for his community to learn the necessary etiquette for visiting in such circumstances, especially with visiting the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in his dwellings.

Allah orders the believers not to enter the Prophet’s houses for a meal unless given permission to do so. Houses have been specifically prepared for sleeping. This sleeping, in most cases, happens during the night because it is a time of peace and rest, unlike the day which is a time of movement and activity. It is necessary to have a place where you can find refuge during the night to rest from the hard work and toil of the day. This place is that where you can come back to. Therefore, a house is a place of rest, similarly as a person's wife is also a place of rest. A house is a place where a person's body finds its shelter and rest; whereas the wife is what gives a person's heart shelter and rest. They both are sources of rest for a person.

The Arabic word *bayt* is also used to refer to lines of poetry. Arabs were people of extraordinary eloquence and linguistic mastery; they named a line of poetry as such because lines of poetry are 'homes of meanings'. Just as we seek shelter in our houses and dwell therein, meanings dwell inside lines of poetry and thereby the lines impart wisdom in their own right.

Wisdom remains homeless until it finds shelter in a line of poetry that can be memorised and passed from generation to generation throughout the ages, as we still quote lines of poetry written by Al-Mutanabbi, Al-Ma`arri and Shawqi today.

Sleeping time depends on the circumstances of every person. Those who work during the day sleep during the night and those who work during the night sleep during the day, even though the genuine time for sleeping is at night. Thus, take care not to disturb someone during the time they have set aside for sleep, regardless of whether that time is during the night or during the day, that is, the time of work is for work and the time of rest is for rest. That is why wise farmers say, 'The one who guards' i.e. guards the fields during the night, 'does not plough', i.e. plough the fields during the day. That is because when a person works during the time, he customarily rests, that is, he does not do his job properly.

Regardless of whether the time of rest is during the night or during the day, when you reflect on those countries in the far north where the sun shines for three or even six whole months and then sets for three or even six months, do you see the people there working for three whole months and then sleeping for three whole months? Of course not! They divide each day up into a period of work and a period of sleep, regardless of whether it is night or day. One great aspect of the Quran is the way it makes provision for situations like these. Allah says, 'And one of His Signs is your sleeping and your seeking of His Grace by night and [by] day' (*ar-Rum:* 23). So, sleep is at night, but can also be during the day for those whose job demands them to work during the night.

The type of a house depends on the financial wherewithal of a person. However, what matters is that he has a place in which he can take shelter and relax. It does not matter how small it may be, even if there is only enough space in it for him to lay down on the ground. But if he does have a spacious house, it is better for him. Further, he who knocks on people’s doors should make sure to respect the sleeping time and not to knock at those times.

Similarly, as people differ in terms of the size of their houses, people also differ when it comes to the level of luxury and the means of rest at their disposal. Thus, since means of rest depends upon the financial capability of a person, everyone should be satisfied with what he has and the link between his job, his income and how luxurious he wants his lifestyle to look like. Before you decide upon an opulent lifestyle for yourself, get a job that is at the same level of opulence first to give the necessary means to pay for that lifestyle.

It is as the saying goes, ‘Stretch your legs as far your mattress is’. So, if your means offer you no option to live a fancy life, be content with that and if you are going to rebel against that and seek more, rebel against yourself first and find a job that provides you with such means that afford the lifestyle you seek. However, the biggest economic affliction that affects people today is that they first decide upon the type of lifestyle they want and then stretch their income to meet that lifestyle. Thus, their efforts are swiftly met by failure because their incomes fail to match up to their requirements. Things really ought to be the other way around. A person should determine his standard of living considering his means and income and thereby live a happy and relaxed life that is not weighed down by the burdens of expectation. Further, we must not forget to make sure that we earn our income and means of living lawfully and spend it in lawful ways.

In addition, since houses and the means of rest vary according to the means of their owners, then their psychological condition should also vary according to their means and thereby the hearts of the poor do not fill up with envy and spite against the wealthy. Therefore, we should be satisfied and content with what we have because perhaps that man of wealth you know might have inherited his wealth but still, even if he did not himself work hard to acquire that wealth, his parents, or his grandparents did. We have previously explained a man might get rest in his life after working hard for ten years; yet if he works for twenty, he might bring rest to his children, whilst his work of thirty years will bring rest for his grandchildren. Who is there who has sweated and toiled and has not received the fruit of his sweat and toil? So, whoever wants to be honoured and revered when he is old should work hard while young and strong before that day arrives when his strength fails him as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was alluding when he said, 'Give the worker his due before his sweat dries.'(1)

As for those who loiter around in the streets or spend their days in coffee shops, they do not deserve to have that sort of noble life when they grow old; the same applies to those workers who do not show due care and attention to their work; they do not master it, they sit around watching their boss and waiting for an opportunity to skive off and waste time. It is a well-known fact that when someone acquires money illegally, that money shall be a source of evil and misfortune for him since he exerted no effort in acquiring it.

Read if you like the saying of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'When someone acquires his money through unlawful means, Allah will cause his wealth to be wasted in worthless pursuits.' He gained his money through ways against the law, thus the doors open for spending this money in matters that have absolutely no benefit whatsoever. We see people who live the lives of paupers with no sign of that wealth apparent on them or their children in spite of their enormous incomes and salaries.

People differ when it comes to the way they look at the wealth in other's hands. As for those who have strong faith; when they see someone blessed with wealth, they do not envy him but rather see it as an example of Allah's Bounty to His slaves. They pray to Allah to bless him and observe that such a person deserves this wealth and more besides because he has worked hard for it; a believer, upon seeing Allah's Blessings upon a person, says, 'It is what Allah wills. There is no power except in Allah. O Allah, bless him and bestow your Favour upon me'.

He sees the blessings of this world as a miniature model of how the blessings will be in the Hereafter. He says, 'If this is what man has made ready for himself, then how about what Allah has prepared for His creation!? Thereby, the delights of paradise will appear before him and he will advance towards them with a heart full of certainty and faith. This way of looking at the blessings in other people's hands represents happiness at other people's good fortune. As for those who lack faith, may Allah protect us from being among them, they resent those whom Allah has blessed with wealth, believing that they do not deserve it, thus envy them and desire that it be taken away. Feelings of this sort are a sign of a weak faith and dissatisfied with what Allah has decreed to pass in His creation.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Maja*

On the other hand, we call mosques the 'Houses of Allah' because they are especially constructed to be places in which we go and stand in front of our Lord when we hear the call to prayer. That is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us against bringing the matters of this world into the Houses of Allah. He warned us against concluding business transactions inside the mosque or using them as places to call for lost objects. There is no better proof of this than what the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to a man who concluded a business transaction in the House of Allah; he said to him, 'May Allah make your business transaction void of all blessing.' Further, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to a man who was calling out for his lost property in the mosque, 'May Allah not return your lost property to you.'

This is all because human beings live their whole lives for this world. Thus, they are not permitted to carry the affairs of this worldly life with them at times of prayers. The time of the prayer is set for meeting with Allah. It does not render your life's works inactive; however, it stocks you up with faith and gives you the strength to carry out the missions of your life. We previously compared this stock of faith to the charge of a battery. Do we say to someone who takes away a battery to recharge it that they have rendered the battery inactive?

Similarly, humans are created by Allah. So, do you think that a creation of His that presents itself before Him five times a day would go wrong? Therefore, when you pray, you use that meeting to stock up with certainty and faith and rid worries and problems. That is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace* *and blessings be upon him* used to take refuge in the prayer when matters became serious. For when you are praying, you hand over all your problems to your Lord. Allah is Who gave existence to its means, so when you have difficulty with the means and cannot derive any benefit from them, leave it aside and resort to their Causer.

In addition, we have said that mosques are chosen by creation to be the Houses of Allah, but the Sacred House is chosen by Allah Himself and that is why Allah made it the main direction of all the mosques. Thus, when you visit it even for once in your lifetime, it will set right your entire life.

Now let us return to the topic of the houses of the Prophet Muhammad and how the believers should conduct themselves when they enter therein. Let us discuss the actions that must be considered when entering those houses of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in particular, since they possessed a special character as befit the importance of their owner.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Believers, do not enter the Prophet's houses for a meal unless you are given permission to do so.' (*al-Ahzab:* 53) This commands the believers not to enter the Prophet's houses without permission since they are very cramped and there is no room in them for him to host guests at any time. Further, this permission to enter is conditional upon being offered food. However, even when you have been invited to a meal at one of the houses of the Prophet, do not go there before the appointed time. If lunch is at 2 o'clock, for example, do not show up at 10 o'clock since it would not be right for you to busy the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when he has tasks that he needs to do within his house. Some tasks relate to his Lord, while others may relate to his family. That is what is meant by the saying of Allah: 'Do not linger until [a meal] is ready.' (*al-Ahzab:* 53)

Here, the believers, upon being invited by Prophet Muhammad to have a meal with him, are being warned against going early to his houses and waiting there for the food to be cooked. Rather, they should not go into his house except when the food is already cooked and prepared. They should wait until he says to them, 'Please come and eat'. However, Allah continues and says: 'When you are invited, go in; then, when you have taken your meal, leave.' (*al-Ahzab:* 53) Just as Allah forbids you from coming early before the meal and waiting around for the food to be cooked, He also forbids you from hanging around after the meal. What you should do as soon as you have finished eating is to disperse.

Dispersal is what happens when an object spreads out into a space that is larger than its size. This process of dispersal helps with realising the intended aims. Do we not spread out our clothes after washing them? Why do we do that? Because spreading out things that have been washed helps them dry out. If you were to leave them balled up in their own confined space, they would take weeks to dry. So, there is tremendous benefit in spreading things out and dispersing them. We previously explained this phenomenon by using the example of a cup of water. When you leave some water in a cup, travel for a few months and return, you would find the water still in the cup with its amount having barely decreased at all. However, when you pour that water on the ground in your room, it would dry up even before you make it out the door.

Thus, when Allah orders the believers to leave, He orders them to spread out, for the house of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrow and confined. Then everyone should go out to do his work. For what should a believer do after he eats his food? He should seek his provision in the broad trails of the earth and not laze around and be a burden upon others. Reflect upon what Allah says in the chapter of *al-Jum`a*: ‘But when the prayer is ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah’s Grace.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10)

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* commands His believing servants to disperse freely on the earth for a particular purpose, namely; working hard and seeking provision. What do you think you should do after eating your food? Is it appropriate to sit around in the house of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* do nothing when you know that he himself lives a life of abstinence in terms of every aspect of his life?

The Arabic word for disperse (*intashiru)* means to travel around/spread out as well. It is derived from a word used with water that means to overflow and fill up a larger space. Thus, dispersal or travelling around should be done in a systematised way, just as a drop of water falls on a bit of cloth and spreads out evenly in all directions, forming a circle. In the same way, when you disperse in the earth to seek provision, you must do so in a systematic and organised way so that people are not crammed together in one area while another is left empty and uncultivated with all its resources going to waste.

Allah wants us to disperse freely through the earth for two reasons: first to do so in search of provision and sustenance as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and others who travel in the land seeking of the Bounty of Allah.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20)

To travel throughout the earth does not mean just dispersing freely over it, but rather to work hard and extract its resources since the Creator distributed food and crops equally throughout the land and dispersed resources over it. That is why the earth gives up Allah's Blessings anew every single day. The only things we used to know of the blessings of the earth were crops, but as the sciences progressed, new discoveries were made and new types of tools were developed and thereby we knew metals, minerals, oil and underground treasures that were hidden under Allah's Earth. We would never have come to know of any of these treasures without travelling throughout the earth and exploring it.

We used to be amazed at those people who lived in the desert and feel pity for them. We were wondering how they live in that dry, barren, and waterless condition and why they did not move somewhere else more hospitable. But now, after the discovery of oil, they have become the wealthiest of people with the treasures of this world at their feet. How did that happen? They clung to their lands and endured the times of hardship until the time came for them to harvest its treasures. If they had despaired of those lands, they would have never acquired all that wealth. Moreover, we already explained that the resources of the earth are divided up equally and we gave the example of a watermelon when it is cut lengthways. That is the case even if those resources are of many different types and vary from place to place

The second purpose of travel is to reflect on the signs of Allah in existence, for by travelling throughout the earth, one sees signs that do not exist in his homeland. In this regard, Allah says, 'Say, "Travel in the earth and see how He makes the first creation, then Allah creates the latter creation; surely Allah has power over all things."' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20) He also says elsewhere: 'Say, "Travel in the land, then see what was the end of the rejecters."'

(*al-An'am:* 11) What this means is that when we travel throughout the earth to seek our provision, it should be accompanied with reflection and contemplation on the Signs of Allah.

Next Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do not stay on and talk, for that would offend the Prophet, though he would shy from asking you to leave. Allah does not shy from the truth.' (*al-Ahzab:* 53) This means that the believers should not remain seated after having finished eating to chat with one another in the house of the Prophet of Allah. This prohibition had a direct cause of revelation. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not make a wedding banquet for any of his wives except for Zaynab bint Jahsh *Allah be pleased with her*. On that occasion, he slaughtered a sheep and prepared a special dish.

When the people finished eating, they sat down to chat to one another. He *peace and blessings be upon him* waited for them to get up and go, but no one moved. His shyness prevented him from telling them to go. He wanted to show them his desire to go, so he himself stood up and went outside, but still no one got up. Further, he found more people sitting down outside the door. He went back inside and then the people finally sensed that he wanted them to leave. Anas *Allah be pleased with him* narrates that he went and told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they had gone and thereby he came back and went inside. Anas went to go after him, but he *peace and blessings be upon him* threw a veil between them as saying no one should enter, not even you. Hence, the verse was revealed because he *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted them to leave, but his shyness held him. The house of the Prophet was small and cramped and it was his wedding night. Therefore, it was not appropriate for them to sit around in his house. However, Allah says that He does not shy from the truth.

Thus, in the beginning of the verse, it talks about the etiquette of entering, the etiquette of asking for permission, the etiquette of eating and the etiquette of sitting in the house of the Prophet of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Next, the verse talks about the etiquette relating to dealings with the wives of the Prophet Muhammad.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When you ask his wives for something, do so from behind a screen: this is purer both for your hearts and for theirs…'

(*al-Ahzab:* 53). The word ‘something’ here refers to those household items that are not present with everyone. Usually in the past, there was one or two houses that have things of this sort in a neighbourhood, such as vessels, sieves, strainers, mortar and pestle and so on. Generally speaking, poor people do not possess items of this sort. Thus, they go to their neighbours and borrow such things from them. This is what Allah is referring to when He says, ‘Have you considered him who calls the judgment a lie? That is the one who treats the orphan with harshness. And does not urge [others] to feed the poor, so, woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayers. Who do [good] to be seen, and withhold the necessaries of life.’ (*al-Ma‘un:* 1-7)

When Allah demanded a special etiquette concerning entering the houses of the Prophet, eating and sitting therein, He did not forbid us from taking advantage of the household items that he had. Generally, one requests these household items by knocking on the door of the household that possesses them and saying, ‘Please give me such-and-such an item’. Further, that request is usually directed to the woman of the house since she is its mistress and is responsible for items such as those. Thus, when you request something like this from the wives of the Prophet, make your request from behind a screen, for ‘this is purer both for your hearts and for theirs’.

We previously said that perceptions, feelings, emotions, and beliefs that get implanted in a person’s soul manifest themselves in three distinct phases: first a faculty perceives, the psyche meets it with either love or loathing and finally the self tends to action. We gave the example of a rose. You first see its beauty in a garden; you smell its sweet and fragrant smell. This is the stage of perception via your sense of sight and sense of smell. That perception produces feelings of admiration and delight in your psyche which results in you reaching out your hand to pluck the rose. That is what we mean by inclination.

The law does not intervene in the stage of perception nor at the stage of emotion, but it does intervene at the stage of inclination. You can look at a rose as much as you wish and smell its beautiful fragrance. However, if you were to stretch out your hand towards it, we would say to you, ‘Stop! Do you have the right to the rose’? If you do then go ahead and take it, but if you do not, then you are forbidden from taking it since it does not belong to you. By saying this, we are not restricting your freedom since the same law that limits your freedom when it comes to infringing upon the property of others, limits their freedom when it comes to infringing upon your property. Thus, the law reassures you before taking anything away and thereby is in your own best interests.

We say that the law does not intervene except in the stage of inclination. It is not the case however when it comes to men and women. In such cases, the law steps in at the very beginning and makes even the stage of perception forbidden for you because when you see a beautiful woman and she is more beautiful than your wife or that you have yet to get married, her beauty causes you to become enamoured of her. This feeling of attraction will most certainly induce some form of inclination or action. How would inclination be like in such situations for there are certain conditions that must be met. The first is only acting in a way which is lawful and if there are no lawful avenues open to you, you either restrain yourself or trample upon the honour and dignity of others. That is why the law intervenes right from the start when it comes to this matter and does not let you fall into or incline towards something that is not lawful since there is no doubt that beautiful women arose certain specific urges in men.

Furthermore, a man who claims that looking at beautiful women does not arouse him is contrary to human nature even if he is already married. Beware of thinking that a beautiful wife will protect you from being affected by the beauty of others, for women are like wine. Every vintage has its own individual flavour. Thus, no matter how beautiful your wife is and no matter how much her appearance appeals to you, you will always find some new pleasing quality in another woman which is not in your wife. Therefore, Allah, out of His Mercy, forbids you from embarking even upon the first stage and makes looking at women forbidden.

If this is the ruling with respect to women in general, then how must it be with respect to the wives of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Thus, Allah addresses the believers saying: ‘it is not right for you to offend Allah’s Messenger.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 53) This is by looking to his wives since looking is a form of perception that stirs up feelings within the psyche. And, although it is true that you cannot proceed with these feelings since they are the mothers of the believers, but your heart would be occupied with them. And those thoughts and desires themselves cause offence and pain to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, Allah says immediately afterwards: ‘just as you should never marry his wives after him.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 53)

It is narrated that a man saw `Aisha before the advent of the screen, got attracted, and said, ‘By Allah, when the Prophet dies, I will marry this rosy coloured girl.’ He thereby had to make penance for this statement, went to *Hajj* on foot and emancipated slaves so that Allah forgives him his trespass against the Prophet Muhammad.

Thus, the pronoun ‘this’ in the saying of Allah; ‘this is purer both for your hearts and for theirs’ refers to the command of Allah to ask the wives of the Prophet Muhammad from behind a screen. This command was a protection for both parties and for the believers’ hearts and then for the wives’. Then Allah says, ‘It is not right for you to offend Allah’s Messenger.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 53) This means that offending the Prophet Muhammad is not and will not be proper. In other words, the mere thought is considered offensive since it is related to a right of him *peace and blessings be upon him*. When Allah says, ‘just as you should never marry his wives after him…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 53), He, thus, honours him *peace and blessings be upon him* and his wives not only in the course of his lifetime but even after his death since they are the ‘Mothers of the Believers’ and since no one has the right to marry them after him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It is a well-known fact that women hold a unique and special position to their husbands. It is quite normal in terms of human nature to see men encompassing all sorts of good characteristics. So, if he is a generous person, there is nothing that he would deny you if you ask him to either give it to you or loan it to you; he would give you money, give you furnishings from his home, lend you his car and so on, except when the request relates to his wife. For, when it comes to his wife, he is so jealous that he could not even bear you looking in her direction. And that is not only the case when she is in his possession; it is even true when he dislikes her or after he has divorced her since men even feel jealous when their ex-wives marry some other man.

Women are the only thing that occupy this position and that are so jealously guarded and attentively looked after. But why is that? It is because they are the receptacle of the future generation of offspring. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wanted the community to have many children, but on condition that they come into the world by pure and virtuous means, so Allah *the Almighty* placed into the heart of men, love for their wives and jealous protectiveness towards them. In this regard, you should reflect on how Allah *the Almighty* described the *Ansar* (Helpers) when they welcomed the Emigrants and made rooms for them in their homes and gave them of their possessions. The description Allah *the Almighty* gives of them is loftier than any position occupied by the influential and powerful. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Those who were already firmly established in their homes [in Medina] …' (*al-Hashr:* 9). It is as if they were actually living in faith, a point which is clear in the saying of Allah: '…and firmly rooted in faith, show love for those who migrated to them for refuge and harbour no desire in their hearts for what has been given to them. They give them preference over themselves, even if they too are poor: those who are saved from their own souls' greed are truly successful.' (*al-Hashr:* 9)

The only thing which made the *Ansar* (Helpers) worthy of being described by the True Lord in this way was the fact that they preferred their brothers from amongst the Emigrants to themselves and gave them something that no man had ever before given to a fellow man. It is historically recorded that there were men from among the *Ansar* (Helpers) who offered to divorce one of their wives so as to allow their Emigrant brothers to marry. This definitively proves that the faith of these men was such that it overcame everything else in their lives and had even become more beloved to them than their own wives; their faith had subjugated their feelings of jealousy and protectiveness.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'that, verily' (*al-Ahzab:* 53); this part of the verse refers to what we mentioned earlier with respect to asking the Mothers of the Believers from behind a screen, and with respect to not causing pain or offence to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or marrying his wives after him. All of that, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...would be grievous in Allah's Sight.' (*al-Ahzab:* 53) And how could you cause pain and offence to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he himself was only sent to protect us from what brings us pain in this world and in the Hereafter?

Allah says:

إِن تُبۡدُواْ شَيۡـًٔا أَوۡ تُخۡفُوهُ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٗا ﴿٥٤﴾

God has full knowledge of all things, whether you reveal them or not [54] (The Quran, *al-Ahẓab:* 54)

This verse is likely to give a warning: it is as if Allah *the Almighty* were saying to us, 'Beware of the thoughts that steal over you with respect to this matter, for nothing is hidden from your Lord and nothing escapes His Sight'. Even though people are not held to account for their innermost thoughts and desires, still such thoughts are forbidden when it comes to matters that relate to the rights of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is narrated in a Noble Hadith: 'Anyone who intends a wrong action but does not do it has a good action written for him.'(1) This is the ruling when it comes to matters in general. However, when the matter relates to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is not like this, since it is the will of the True Lord for all His Messenger's energy to be directed towards the task for which he was sent and for him to not be distracted by anything. What task could be greater than that of bringing guidance to the entire world, not only during his time upon this Earth, but from the moment his mission commenced until the coming of the Final Hour? As for the saying of Allah: 'Whether you do anything openly...' (*al-Ahzab:* 54), it refers to anything whatsoever regardless of what it is, a meaning which is also clear in the saying of Allah: '...or in secret, [remember that,] verily, Allah has full knowledge of everything.' (*al-Ahzab:* 54) The word *`aleem* (All Knowing), in terms of its morphology, indicates the utmost degrees of knowledge, for Allah's Knowledge is timeless and does not respond to events as they happen; Allah *the Almighty* knows what will happen before it happens, as it already happens and after it happens. That is why we say, 'For us, time is past, present or future, but for Allah *the Almighty* there is no past, nor present nor future, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* talks of the future as if it were in the past'. Read, for example, the saying of Allah: 'Allah's Judgement is coming, so do not ask to bring it on sooner…' (*an-Nahl:* 1). Allah *the Almighty* uses a past tense verb *`ata* (came), despite the fact that He says immediately afterwards: '…so do not ask to bring it on sooner…' (*an-Nahl:* 1).

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Kitab Al-`Iman, Hadith no. 130.*

Calling for something's speedy advent only happens when the time for the thing being called for has not yet come. So, the word *`ata* in our views means 'will come', but with respect to Allah *the Almighty* and His Knowledge, it has already happened since all times are the same for Him *Glorified is He*.

The saying of Allah: '...verily, Allah has full knowledge of everything.' (*al-Ahzab:* 54) means that Allah *the Almighty* had full knowledge and still has full knowledge. As long as Allah remains, He has full knowledge because change is not conceivable with respect to Him. So, Allah *the Almighty* had full knowledge in the past and still has full knowledge because He does not change. The word *kana* (was) does not mean here that His Knowledge resulted from events that you enacted, but that He knew of those events before you even enacted them.

This verse is one of the verses that the orientalists used (to call into question) and thought that the words used by Allah *the Almighty* here required amendment and correction. The orientalists always accuse us of considering the words of the Quran as being holy and thereby preventing us from using our intellects when we read them. They also claim that they examine them much more meticulously and have the courage to research them much more thoroughly, thereby enabling them to find the faults and shortcomings of the Quran.

Their objection against the saying of Allah: 'Allah has full knowledge of all things, whether you reveal them or not.' (*al-Ahzab:* 54), and similarly against His saying: '…Allah knows everything you do openly and everything you conceal.' (*an-Nur:* 29), goes as follows: they say that if Allah knows what we conceal, then where is the advantage and greatness in knowing what we do openly? We reply to these people, 'Beware of reading Allah's saying and judging them according to your whims without first believing that those words are from Allah *the Almighty* and that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who says them. When you accept that, then you can use your intellect and reflect on them until you perceive the wisdom and inimitability of His sayings. When Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Whether you do anything openly...' (*al-Ahzab:* 54), Allah *the Almighty* is not addressing an individual but addressing the seething masses of humanity. When a large mass of people are doing something openly, then you cannot determine the source of the actions made by people; you cannot trace back every sound to the person who made it, or every movement. The example we previously gave of this was that of a public demonstration where people's shouts and calls are mixed together into one great cacophony of sound. Then from among these people, we hear someone shout for the downfall of so-and-so. In such circumstances, would we be able to determine who exactly said that? The answer is 'no'. We would not be able to do so because of the mixed voices. However, the person spoke openly and announced the downfall of so-and-so to the masses at the top of his voice. You would be totally unable to determine who it was. Allah *the Almighty* however, knows the voice, the owner of the voice and what is produced by it. So, He traces back not only every single word, but also every single breath, to the one who uttered them. Those who try to hide themselves and their actions by doing this in a mass should beware: even if they may have confounded other people and successfully hidden from them, they will never be able to conceal themselves from Allah Who is not confounded by different languages, nor confused by different voices.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِنَّ فِيٓ ءَابَآئِهِنَّ وَلَآ أَبْنَآئِهِنَّ وَلَآ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ وَلَآ أَبْنَآءِ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ
وَلَآ أَبْنَآءِ أَخَوَٰتِهِنَّ وَلَا نِسَآئِهِنَّ وَلَا مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُهُنَّ ۗ وَٱتَّقِينَ
ٱللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدًا ﴿٥٥﴾

The Prophet's wives are not to blame [if they are seen by] their fathers, their sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, or their slaves. [Wives of the Prophet], be mindful of God. God observes everything[55]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 55)

After the verse of the screen: '…When you ask his wives for something, do so from behind a screen…' (*al-Ahzab:* 53), was revealed, the close relatives of the Mothers of the Believers complained about it and asked, ‘Does that even apply to us, Messenger Muhammad’? Then Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following verse: ‘There is no blame upon women concerning their fathers…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55). The saying of Allah: ‘There is no blame upon women…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55) means that there is no objection or sin on or against any of these people who are mentioned here in case they come in to see their relative women since their position with respect to these woman is known and so there is nothing to be feared from them going in to see them. These people are fathers, sons, brothers, and nephews (both the brothers’ and sisters’ sides). As for the saying of Allah: ‘their women’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55), it is to be understood in the light of the grammatical rule of *`idafa* (genitive), which is used, linguistically, to convey one of three meanings: either the meaning of ‘from’ as in our saying, ‘*ardab qamh’* or (an ardab of wheat); or the meaning of ‘in’, as in ‘the plotting of the night’, i.e. plotting in the night; or the meaning of ‘belonging to’, as in our saying ‘*mal* Zayd’ or (The money belonging to Zayd). This ‘belonging to’ can refer to something that is possessed either by someone or something that is a characteristic of him. So, the meaning of ‘the money of Zayd*’* refers to that money which is possessed by Zayd, but when you say ‘the bridle of the horse’, the bridle is not a possession of the horse, but rather, something which is specifically assigned to it. Here, in the saying of Allah: ‘their women’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55), the *`idafa* is used to convey both the meaning of ‘from’ and that of ‘belonging to’, i.e. women belonging to them or women from them, but not the meaning of ‘in’. When we say ‘women from them’, we mean women from their close family; and when we say ‘their women’, we mean women who are subordinate to them, like their servants, but on condition that they are believers since only a believer may be trusted to safeguard a believer. As for women from the people of the Book or disbelieving women, it is not correct that they serve a believing woman since they might give a description of her to their own people. That is why we note that the subtlety of the expression used here does not mention the paternal and maternal uncles, since a paternal or maternal uncle despite the fact that his position is almost that of a father, might well give a description of the girl to his own son. If, however, the paternal or maternal uncle does not have a son, then the underlying reason (for him not seeing the girl) is lacking, and so it becomes permissible for the girl to relax in front of him and display her charms to him and for him to go in to see her. As for the saying of Allah: ‘or their slaves’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55), we have said that the only people who can become slaves are those who have been taken prisoner in a legitimate war and in whose capture you have been directly involved. In other words, the act of serving is not allowed on the part of someone who was a freeman and then was kidnapped and sold as a slave. Then, after someone has been captured in a legal war, it is possible for you to take possession of him by buying, inheriting, or even being given him as a gift. These owned slaves could be women, in which case they would fall under the category of being ‘their women’; and they could also be children who have yet to reach the age of puberty as Allah *the Almighty* has indicated elsewhere in the Quran: ‘…or children who are not yet aware of women’s nakedness…’ (*an-Nur:* 31). Others who may enter into this category are the servants who work in a person’s house, such as doormen, drivers, and cooks. Islamic law gives a certain leeway when it comes to these people since society’s conventions shall refuse any relationship between these people and the members of the household.

These servants work in houses in which women and their beautiful daughters abide, and yet how many of these servants would ever be so bold as to even look at their mistresses? The reason for that is because social convention has placed a barrier between them. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘be mindful of Allah’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were saying here, ‘I have made clear to you what the ruling is when it comes to entering into the presence of a woman and I have made clear to you the different types of people for whom there is no objection against them coming in to see women, but know that which keeps you safe and watches over you when it comes to this matter is your *taqwa* (fearing) of Allah. It is your *taqwa* of Allah that moves you to obey Him and stops you from disobeying Him’. After your command to have *taqwa* of Him, it is enough for you to know that: ‘Allah was’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55), and still is ‘...witness unto everything.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 55)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتَهُۥ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى ٱلنَّبِيِّۚ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُواْ صَلُّواْ عَلَيۡهِ وَسَلِّمُواْ تَسۡلِيمًا ٥٦

God and His angels bless the Prophet – so, you who
believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace [56]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 56)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought good to his *ummah*, giving glad tidings to the believers and a warning to the disbelievers. He was eager to bring guidance to his *ummah*, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him: he is deeply concerned for you and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 128) He used to feel pain and distress when anyone slipped from his fingers and stepped out of the arena of faith and belief. He used to charge himself with doing more to call people to Islam than he himself was physically capable of or was actually required to do so that his Lord even addressed him, saying: ‘But [Prophet] are you going to worry yourself to death over them if they do not believe in this message?’ (*al-Kahf:* 6)

It is well-known that nothing more was required of our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* except to convey the Message, for guidance can only come from Allah *the Almighty* as shown by the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If We had wished, We could have sent them down a sign from heaven, at which their necks would stay bowed in utter humility.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4) So, it was on account of the intensity and force of his eagerness to bring guidance to his people, that Allah *the Almighty* blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for making things too difficult for himself. Here, we stress that Allah *the Almighty* wanted him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to make things difficult for himself, as is shown by His saying elsewhere: ‘Prophet, why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you in your desire to please your wives? Yet Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1) This rebuke most closely resembles that you deliver to your son when he is working himself so hard in revising (for his exams) that you become worried about him. You are not criticising him for falling short, but rather for going to excess and trying to do more than that of which he is physically capable. In the same way, the greatest concern of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for his *ummah* became clear when Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following verses about him: ‘By the morning brightness and by the night when it grows still, your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate you, and the future will be better for you than the past; your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-5) As soon as he *peace and blessings be upon him* received those verses from his Lord, he immediately applied them to his *ummah* and said, ‘In that case, I will not be well pleased if even one of my community is in the Hell-fire.’(1) If Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had this level of concern for you, then he is deserving of your prayers upon him, since every good thing that he acquired also extended to you, and was for your benefit as well as his. That is why Allah, Glorified is, He says: ‘Allah and His angels bless the Prophet- so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 56) As you probably noted, the verb: ‘bless’ has two subjects, which are Allah *the Almighty* and His angels. So, the True Lord joins His Blessing with that of His angels. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once heard a preacher saying in his sermon, ‘Allah will reward anyone who has *taqwa* (fearing) of Allah and Messenger Muhammad and Allah will punish anyone who disobeys them both’, so he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘You are the worst sort of preacher a people could have!’(2) Why did he *peace and blessings be upon him* say that?

They reply that he *peace and blessings be upon him* said that because the man joined together between Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said, ‘disobeys them both’, instead of saying, ‘disobeys Allah and His Messenger’ and it is Allah *the Almighty* Alone Who has the right to join others with Himself, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…being spiteful was their only response to Allah and His Messenger enriching them out of His Bounty…’ (*at-Tawba:* 74).

It is never permissible for us to use a linguistic form that joins Allah *the Almighty* with anyone from His creation. Yes, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *See Al-Khatib, Talkhis Al-Mutashabih; see also Al-Bayhaqi, Shu`ab Al-`Iman.*

(2) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 870; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. (4/256 & 279) and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no.1099.*

'Allah and His angels bless the Prophet…' (*al-Ahzab:* 56). This is how it is said by Allah *the Almighty*; He joins with Himself any of His creation (the angels) that He so wishes. But it is not permissible for you to use this form unless you are reading it in the Quran. If you want to use your own words to express a similar concept, then it is incumbent upon you to say, 'Allah blesses Prophet Muhammad and the angels also bless him'.

That is why the scholars of *tafsir*(1) take great care when it comes to this matter and say that the saying of Allah: 'bless' (*al-Ahzab:* 56) is not the predicate for both the two subjects that precede it. Rather, there are some words elided, the implicit meaning of the verse thus is: 'Allah blesses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the angels bless Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*'. If Allah *the Almighty* calls down blessings upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* and the angels call down blessings upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* then what about you? It is necessary and obligatory upon you to also call down blessings upon him *peace and blessings be upon him*; Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace.' (*al-Ahzab:* 56) We previously made it clear that *salat* (blessing) from Allah *the Almighty* has a particular meaning, blessing from the angels has a particular meaning, and blessing from the believers has a particular meaning. *Salat* came from 'supplication' which necessitates the existence of the one who supplicates, and the One to Whom the supplication is made and the one to whom we supplicate. So, for example, when I ask Allah *the Almighty* to forgive a person, I am the one who supplicates; a person is the one to whom we supplicate and Allah *the Almighty* is the One to Whom the supplication is made. But if the one who supplicates and blesses is Allah *the Almighty* then to whom is the supplication addressed? Therefore, the meaning of supplication cannot apply to the *salat* of Allah *the Almighty*. That is why we say, 'If you were to think deeply and imagine that a friend, for example, said to you, "I promise to give you such-and-such a thing tomorrow", that would be a promise from him about something which he has no power or control over. If he were to say to you, however, "I ask Allah to give you such-and-such", and attributed the act of giving to Allah *the Almighty* then there would be more hope in that thing to be realised, since the act of giving would be attributed to Allah *the Almighty* and so if He accepts the supplication, the desired outcome is achieved. And if Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who commands this gift to come to you, then it will come into your possession; of that there is no doubt'. So, *salat* from Allah *the Almighty* does not mean supplication, rather, direct implementation of His Commandments and a Mercy for all his creation. It is enough of a Mercy from Allah *the Almighty* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He made him the seal of the Messengers; no one will ever come to amend his Message. Would it not be enough for Prophet Muhammad to get Allah's Mercy, Blessing and Praise when Allah *the Almighty* links His Name with him?! Do not be surprised, for Allah *Glorified is He* addresses him saying: 'and raise your reputation high' (*ash-Sharh:* 4). What an honour that Allah has bestowed upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* accepts his intercession on the Day of Resurrection, not only on behalf of his *ummah* but also on behalf of the rest of creation! It is enough for him *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah *the Almighty* addresses all the messengers by their personal names (except him *peace and blessings be upon him*) whom He addresses with an honorary title, such as when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O Prophet!…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12), and 'O Messenger!' (*al-Ma'ida:* 41)

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(1) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, Al-Jami` li Ahkam Al- Quran, p. 8/5500.*

As for the *salat* of the angels, it is a supplication. Read the saying of Allah: 'Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those who surround it celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him. They beg forgiveness for the believers: "Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who turn to You and follow Your path. Save them from the pains of Hell and admit them, Lord, to the lasting Gardens You have promised to them, together with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and offspring: You alone are *the Almighty*, the All Wise. Protect them from all evil deeds: those You protect on that Day from [the punishment for] evil deeds will receive Your Mercy-that is the supreme triumph."' (*Ghafir:* 7-9) If the blessings, supplication and asking forgiveness of the angels are directed to the whole of mankind, even to those who committed sins but repented to Allah, then imagine how their blessings would be when it comes to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the one who brings guidance to the entire humanity!

As for the *salat* of the believers, it refers to forgiveness. When they ask for forgiveness, they are not asking it for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but rather for themselves since he *peace and blessings be upon him* only came as a mercy for them. In addition, since he came as a mercy for them, they should never cease to venerate and revere him for even a moment. When a believer blesses him *peace and blessings be upon him* what does he actually possess to give him? What could we possibly give to him? Reflect on what you actually say when you bless him *peace and blessings be upon him*; you do not say, ‘I bless...’, but rather, you say, ‘O Allah, bless Prophet Muhammad’, or ‘Allah has blessed Prophet Muhammad’.

You ask the One Who is higher than you to bless him *peace and blessings be upon him* because you do not have anything whatsoever that you could give him *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, *salat* from Allah *the Almighty* is absolute and all-encompassing mercy, *salat* from the angels means supplication while *salat* from the believers is asking for forgiveness. For this reason, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘O Messenger Muhammad, that is the *salat* of Allah and that is the *salat* of the angels, so how should we send *salat* upon you?’ He replied, ‘Say, O Allah, send *salat* upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad, as You sent *salat* upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and the family of Ibrahim (Abraham), and send blessings upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad as You sent blessings upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and the family of Ibrahim (Abraham) among the nations. You are indeed Worthy of Praise, Full of glory.(1)

A companion once came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I have never seen you cheerful and happy like you are now’ whereupon the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘Jibril (Gabriel) just came to me and told me that whoever blesses me once, Allah will bless him ten times, ten good deeds will be written down on his behalf, and ten of his bad deeds will be erased.’(2) `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* narrated, ‘A man came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him, “What is the prayer upon you, Messenger of Allah?”

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4797.*

(2) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, p. (6/650); see also Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad.*

He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, “That is from the unseen. If you were to ask me about it, I would not say what it is. Allah has assigned two angels to me. When one of you says the prayer upon me, those two angels say, ‘May Allah forgive you’, then Allah, says, ‘Amen’ and the angels say ‘Amen’.””(1)

Glory be to Allah! Allah *the Almighty* says ‘Amen’ to the supplication of the two angels!

They say that, just like *Hajj* (pilgrimage), it is obligatory for the believer to say the prayer upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once in his lifetime. However, it is also obligatory upon him to say every time a mention is made of him *peace and blessings be upon him* which is why he says in the Hadith, ‘The most miserly of all the misers is the one who does not pray upon me when I am mentioned in his presence.’(2) Then Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards: ‘...and give him greetings of peace’ (*al-Ahzab:* 56). You will notice that in the first part of the verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Allah and His angels bless the Prophet-…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 56), He does not say, ‘and give themselves up to him in utter surrender’, with respect to Himself and His angels, but then when He issues His command to the believers, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...bless him too and give him greetings of peace’ (*al-Ahzab:* 56) adding the phrase, ‘give yourselves up to him in utter surrender’. The scholars explained this reason saying that this is because the prayer on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is meaningless except when it is accompanied by surrendering to him; in other words, obeying him, following his commands and handing over the reins to him when it comes to every large thing and small thing in your life. If that were not so, then how could you say the prayer for him when you are actively disobeying his commands? Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute, and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them totally.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 65)

One of the meanings of *taslim* (greeting of peace) is saying, ‘Peace be upon you, O Prophet’, as we say in the *tashahhud. As-Salam* (peace) is one of the Names of Allah *the Almighty,* so the meaning of ‘peace be upon you, Messenger of Allah’ is ‘may Allah *the Almighty* grant you protection so that no one will ever be able to harm you’.

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(1) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, Hadith no. (6/652), At-Tabarani, Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn An-Najjar.*

(2) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no.1/201; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 2388.*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ لَعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا ﴿٥٧﴾

Those who insult God and His Messenger will be rejected by God in this world and the next – He has prepared a humiliating torment for them [57] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 57)

The Arabic word *idha* (harming) is the process whereby one person causes pain to another, regardless if it is done through words or actions. However, it is not suitable to use such an understanding of the word *idha* with respect to Allah *the Almighty* so what does it mean when it says that they cause pain to Allah *the Almighty*? They reply that Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be affronted by any action since they are incapable of that - that is something which is not possible. However, it is possible for Him to be affronted by words, and that would mean that, with respect to Allah *the Almighty* `*idha*` means incurring His Wrath by saying something that does not befit Him such as when they say, ‘Allah is poor, while we are rich’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 181); some of them even deny the Existence of Allah *the Almighty*; also when they say: ‘Allah is tight-fisted’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 64) or ‘…Ezra is the son of Allah…’ (*at-Tawba:* 30). Falling under this category of harming Allah is what Allah *the Almighty* says in the following Qudsi Hadith, ‘My slave harms Me when it is not for him to harm Me: he curses time and I am time. The affair is in My Hands and I turn the night into day.’(1)

Is time to be blamed for the events that cause you pain? No, time is simply the envelope in which the event is contained. As for the Actor - it is Allah *the Almighty*. So, do not curse time, for time is Allah *the Almighty*. People themselves say: ‘There is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys us.’ (*al-Jathiya:* 24)

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4826, 6181, 7491; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2246; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 2/ 238 & 272.*

All these are examples of statements that cause affront. However, we should look into them further and see whether they are simply barefaced lies, or truthful words that may be verified by evidence and proof. A person could say some words to cause you offence and yet you suffer no harm from them. In such circumstances, he incurs the sin for what he said and yet you are protected from their evil and their capacity to cause pain. So, these words that they utter really do cause pain and offence, but not to Allah *the Almighty* but rather to themselves; how is that? When Allah *the Almighty* put a successor (mankind) on Earth, Allah *Glorified is He* created the universe for him to inhabit before He even created him. So, mankind came into a universe that had already been readied to receive him - all the ingredients for his own survival and that of his species were already in place. Then, Allah *the Almighty* also prepared a law for him by which he could preserve and sustain himself so that, if anything went wrong, he would know how to fix it and make it right. That law was the divine way of guidance that Allah preserved in His Book. Read the saying of Allah: 'It is the Lord of Mercy Who taught the Quran. He created man and taught him to communicate.' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-4) The law of preservation existed in the Quran before mankind was even created because mankind is Allah's creation, and Allah *the Almighty* created them in the finest state and with the best of forms. Allah *the Almighty* wanted them to remain that way, well proportioned in every way. But, if this successor then leaves aside the law of preservation with which his Lord has provided then there is no doubt that Allah *the Almighty* will become angry, since He wants His creation to remain in that beautiful form in which He created them. Therefore, those who deny the Existence of Allah or associate others with Him, and those who say, 'Allah is poor while we are rich!' or 'The angels are Allah's daughters' or any similar statements, all incur His Wrath; since His successor did not fulfil what was required of him according to the divine way of guidance. We say to these people, 'Beware! Do not think that your disbelief has placed you outside the grasp of the True Lord *the Almighty*. On the contrary, you are within His Grasp and subject to His will - if He so wished, He could compel you all to obey Him and create you all in a right-acting form whereby it would be impossible for any of you to disobey, as He did with the angels. But He gave you free will with respect to those things He made you responsible for so that anyone who wishes to accept may do so and anyone who wishes to reject may do so, in order that Allah *the Almighty* would know the ones who come to Him through love and not compulsion'. The proof for this is that Allah *the Almighty* has created you in two distinct aspects - one aspect in which you have free will, which relates to those things you are held responsible for; and the other one in which you are completely within the Lord's Grasp which relates to your fate and destiny. So, as long as it is your wont to rebel against Allah *the Almighty* with respect to the things Allah *the Almighty* has commanded you with, why do you not also rebel against Him with respect to those things Allah *the Almighty* has destined for you such as death and poor health? And since you have chosen unbelief because He is your Lord and is required to help you get what you want, He will place a seal over your heart to stop belief ever getting in, and prevent your beloved unbelief from ever getting out. So, He brings you what you want - and that proves that your unbelief neither harms Him nor causes Him pain. It has been narrated in a Qudsi Hadith, 'My slaves, you will never attain to the extent of my benefit so as to be able to benefit Me, nor attain to the extent of my harm so as to be able to harm Me.' (1) If this world is a zone of free will when it comes to matters for which we are held responsible, that will not be the case on the Day of Resurrection. On that day, there will be absolutely no free will whatsoever - no one will have a choice with respect to anything. On that day, Allah *the Almighty* will say, 'Who has control today' (*Ghafir:* 16), but no one, whether king or slave, will reply. Allah *the Almighty* will provide the answer, saying, '…Allah, the One, the All Powerful.' (*Ghafir:* 16) All of what we have said here is with respect to what is meant by causing harm to Allah *the Almighty*. As for causing harm to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he is a human being and so can be harmed by both actions and words. Just as they used to say about Allah *the Almighty* that He was poor, while they were rich, they used to say about Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was a soothsayer, a magician, a mad man and a poet. Then they went beyond that into the realm of action and caused him physical harm and pain. Was he not pelted with stones in Ta`if until his feet bled(1)? Was the embryonic sac of a camel's foetus not placed on top of his noble back when he was in Mecca?(2) Was his tooth not broken on the day of the Battle of Uhud?(3) Was his face not cut open and did he not bleed? So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* like his Lord, was subjected to verbal abuse, but was also, on top of that, subjected to physical abuse; a human form of abuse that caused him physical pain. And the worst form of physical offence against him *peace and blessings be upon him* was what related to his wives and womenfolk.

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.2577; Ahmad, Musnad, hadith no. 5/160; Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. (6/93); and Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, p. 172 & 490.*

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…It is not right for you to offend Allah's Messenger…' (*al-Ahzab:* 53), i.e. by going against that which he brought, making false accusations against him or subjecting him to physical pain and torture. But Allah *the Almighty* does not mention any of the ways of causing harm or pain to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by name except what relates to his wives when Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…just as you should never marry his wives after him…' (*al-Ahzab:* 53). He mentions this matter specifically and unequivocally, taking into consideration how human nature works. For, as we said before, men are able to give away to their companions and loved ones the most expensive and prized assets in their possession, but when it comes to their wives, they will not even permit another man to look at them. They guard their wives jealously and protect them from the gaze of others. An example of this is found in the conversation of Hudhayfa with his wife. He loved her greatly, so he asked her, 'Would you like to be with me in paradise?' She replied, 'Of course I would,' so he said, 'Then, if I die, make sure that you do not marry another man after me' - he was even jealously protective of her after his death - 'for I heard Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'A woman will be for the last of her husbands (in Paradise)'.(4) However this Hadith is countered by another in which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘Which of a man’s wives will be with him in Paradise?’ He replied, ‘the ones with the best character will be with him.’(1)

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(1) *See Ibn Hisham As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, Hadith no. 2/421, Al-Bayhaqi, Dala`il An-Nubuwwa, p. 2/415.*

(2) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala`il An-Nubuwwa, Hadith no. 2/278; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3185 and Muslim, Sahih, Kitab Al-Jihad Wa Asayr, Hadith no. 108.*

(3) *See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, p. 1428.*

(4) *See Al-'Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa`, Hadith no. 2/410.*

Some people think that these two Hadiths contradict each other, but, in actuality, there is no contradiction whatsoever between them, since the Prophet’s saying (for the last of her husbands) referred to something leaving one’s consciousness but not in terms of time. It would be much like if you were to have had an enjoyable trip in the company of one of your friends twenty years ago and then, when you reminded him of it, he would reply that it was the last enjoyment he had, despite the fact that he had enjoyed many journeys after that. In other words, that journey left the most lasting impression on his consciousness. So, the meaning of the Hadith is that she will be with the last of her husbands in terms of enjoyment; the one whose memory was the last to leave her consciousness even if he was an earlier husband in terms of time, by virtue of his good character. So, the meanings of the two Hadiths agree and there is no contradiction between them.

The jealous protectiveness that a man feels towards his wife is a matter that has been well documented in Arab history and literature. An example of this is found in the words of a poet(2):

I will love Da`d for as long as I live, but if I die
What sadness, for there will be one who comes and loves her as I did.

His infatuation for her was so great that it even extended beyond his death. However, this line of poetry is criticised by the fact that he is fretting about someone who will come and take his place in terms of the love he felt for his beloved. So, the following words, composed by another(3), are considered more eloquent:

I will love Da`d for as long as I live, but if I die
She may not fall in love after me.

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(1) *See Ibn `Uday, Al-Kamil Fi Du`afa` Ar-Rijal, 3/262 and Ibn Al-Qayyim, Hadi Al-`Arwah, p. 216; Abu Hatim considered it weak.*

(2) He is Nusayb ibn Rabah Abu Mihjan; he died in 108 A.H. and was the freedman of `Abd Al-`Aziz ibn Marwan. He was a poet of great renown. (Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya).

(3) He is `Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan, the Umayyad Caliph who had found fault with the line of poetry composed by Nusayb.

Therefore, it can be seen that there are differing degrees of jealous protectiveness.

History tells us (1) that one of the Abbasid Caliphs –I believe it was Al-Hadi – used to love a slave girl named Ghadir; his love for her was so strong that he married her and, during one of the loving and intimate moments they spent in each other's company, he said to her, 'Promise me that if I die – and at the time he said that, he was not in the best of health – you will not marry anyone after me.' And so she gave him her word that she would not do so. But after Al-Hadi died, it was not long before Ghadir forgot the love she had felt for him and the sorrow she had felt at his passing – and, indeed, it is one of Allah's great mercies to us that everything in creation starts out small and gets bigger except for misfortunes which start out big and then get smaller. So, after a bit of time passed, Ghadir married Al-Hadi's brother. Then, one day, she woke up from her sleep, terrified and screaming so loudly that the entire palace heard her, so they gathered around her and asked her what is wrong. She replied, 'Al-Hadi came to see me in my dreams and said to me:

You broke your promise to me after
The inhabitants of the grave became my neighbours.
You married my brother in your treachery,
Truthful was he who named you Ghadir.
The new lover will not enjoy you,
Nor will calamities pass you by.
You will catch up with me before the morning,
And will become as I have become.

She barely said those words than she breathed her last breath and died. That is why Allah *the Almighty* takes these natural human instincts into account when imposing laws upon mankind. Do you not see that the waiting period for a woman whose husband had died was originally a full year, as is mentioned in the saying of Allah(2): 'If any of you die and leave widows, make a bequest for them: a year's maintenance and no expulsion from their homes [for that time].' (*al-Baqara:* 240) But then, this waiting period for widows was reduced to four months and ten days out of respect for this natural instinct that women also possess.

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(1) *The story of the caliph Al-Hadi with the slave girl Ghadir.*

(2) *Most of the scholars say that this verse is abrogated by the verse that comes earlier in the same chapter when Allah Glorified is He says, 'If any of you die and leave widows, the=*

Then Allah *the Almighty* makes clear what will be the just requital for those who abuse Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'will be rejected by Allah' (*al-Ahzab:* 57) which means that He will exclude them from His Mercy: '…in this world and the next- He has prepared a humiliating torment for them' (*al-Ahzab:* 57). Allah *the Almighty* then gives us an indication that this just requital that He has prepared for those who abuse Him and Messenger Muhammad is not out of any form of partisanship to Him *the Almighty* or to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* which is proven by the fact that anyone who abuses a believing man or a believing woman will also be repaid for his abuse. Allah places believing men and believing women at the same level as Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when it comes to wanting to abuse them and cause them harm.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُؤۡذُونَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ بِغَيۡرِ مَا
ٱكۡتَسَبُواْ فَقَدِ ٱحۡتَمَلُواْ بُهۡتَٰنٗا وَإِثۡمٗا مُّبِينٗا ٥٨

And those who undeservedly insult believing men and
women will bear the guilt of slander and flagrant sin [58]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 58)

When Allah *the Almighty* talks about the harm directed towards believing men and women, He specifies the particular type of harm with His saying: '...who undeservedly…' (*al-Ahzab:* 58) since there is another form of harm which Allah *the Almighty* has legally sanctioned – that harm is the punishment that Allah *the Almighty* has obliged us to inflict upon those who step outside the bounds Allah *the Almighty* has set for us, such as the *hadd* (legal punishment)

= *widows should wait for four months and ten nights before remarrying...' (al-Baqara: 234) See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-`Azhim, 1/296.*

for fornication, slander, drinking alcohol and so on. Although all these punishments cause pain and harm to believing men and women, that form of harm is sanctioned by the law and so the ones who carry them out are not punished as they would have been if they had harmed Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says about those who commit unlawful sexual intercourse: 'If two men commit a lewd act, punish them both…' (*an-Nisa':* 16). The only reason Allah *the Almighty* legislated these *hadd* punishments, an infliction of harm upon believers, was to punish those who had overstepped His bounds and purify them of their sin, while at the same time acting as a deterrent for others. When `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* read the verse: 'and those who undeservedly insult believing men and women…' (*al-Ahzab:* 58), he started weeping, so one of the men who was sitting with him asked him, 'Why are you crying, Commander of the Faithful?' He replied, 'Because I have brought pain upon the believing men and women.' So, the man said, 'Commander of the Faithful, you only cause them pain in order to educate them and set them right. Allah *the Almighty* commands us to stone and cut off.' When he heard that, `Umar laughed and was happy.'(1)

Concerning the legal penalties laid down by Islamic law, Allah says, 'Do not let compassion for them keep you from carrying out Allah's law…' (*an-Nur:* 2). This is because compassion with respect to the bounds of Allah *the Almighty* is foolish and a false sort of mercy, for we are not more merciful towards creation than the Creator.

When Allah *the Almighty* emphasises a punishment and makes it severe He does so because He wants to deter us from overstepping His bounds and exposing ourselves to such punishments. When you read the saying of Allah: 'Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding…' (*al-Baqara:* 179), you might ask, 'How can there be life in death'? But yes, there is life in retribution because when you know that if you kill, you yourself will be killed, you will never dare to kill anyone. So, with this ruling, Allah *the Almighty* protects the person who intends to kill from committing his crime, and meanwhile protects the person to be killed from being a victim. So how can this be considered as an infliction of harm? The meaning of: ‘and those who undeservedly’ (*al-Ahzab:* 58) is ‘without them having committed a crime that merits pain or harm being afflicted upon them’. For the word(s) *iktasabu* ‘...undeservedly...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 58) which is(are) used here, we have said that there is a difference between the two verbs *fa`ala* and *ifta`ala – fa`ala* refers to an ordinary action that involves no trouble or exaggeration while *ifta`ala* refers to an action that does involve trouble and exaggeration. The same thing is true in terms of *kasab* and *iktasab*: *kasab* is when you take for something more than you gave for it, such as, for example, when you buy something for five and sell it for seven, making a profit (and this is why it is a linguistic custom to say *kasab* when what is gained is good and *iktasab* when what is gained is bad), such as in the saying of Allah: ‘…each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad…’ (*al-Baqara:* 286), where *laha* (for) informs of what is possessed and *`alayha* informs of what is owed. That is because the lawful comes naturally and spontaneously, while the unlawful comes only after much effort, care and hard work. When you look at your wife, you do so easily and naturally, but when you look at a beautiful woman in the street, you do so guiltily and surreptitiously fearing that someone might see you doing it – this is the difference between the lawful and the unlawful.

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(1) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Dur Al-Manthur, p. 6/657 and Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jami` li Ahkam Al- Quran, 8/5509.*

There is only one verse in the entire Book of Allah in which the verb *kasaba* is used to refer to something bad, which is the saying of Allah: ‘Truly those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins will be the inhabitants of the Fire’ (*al-Baqara:* 81).

Why in this verse? As they say, it deals with those who have become accustomed to doing bad deeds – those whom bad deeds have surrounded them so thoroughly that they have become second nature, and have become so easy for them that they have taken on the characteristics of lawful acts so that they do them without difficulty. Indeed, they even declare openly that they are doing them and boast about them. It was their flauntering of their sins that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was referring to when he said, ‘All the sins of my followers will be forgiven except those of the *Mujahirin* (those who commit a sin openly or disclose their sins to the people).'(1) And part of what he said in this Hadith was, 'Allah screens it (bad deed) from the public and yet, in the morning, he himself exposed it.' This person who finds happiness in committing acts of disobedience and boasts of that is a professional at concealing all signs of perturbation when committing unlawful acts – he does them as easily as he would do acts that are lawful. And that is why the verb that is used here is *kasab*, since, for this person, doing wrong has become second nature. On the topic of the hardship and extra effort that unlawful acts require, I remember the story(2) of a man from our town called Sheikh Mustafa. One day, he went to the market to buy a cow and so he put the money he needed into his pocket. But so great was his anxiety and fear of thieves that he put his hand over his pocket and kept it there. But when he arrived at the market and they saw him with his hand clutching his book, all that did was tell them where their target was. But what tricks did they employ to rob him of his money? First one of them soiled his shoulders with camel dung and then rubbed himself up against Sheikh Mustafa until the Sheikh's clothes became soiled. Thereupon Sheikh Mustafa became angry and started to clean the dung off his clothes, completely forgetting the money that was in his pocket, so the thieves used that opportunity to steal it. In the same way that the unlawful is hard at work and comes at great expense, so the punishment for it also involves hard work and great effort so that the punishment befits the crime.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says regarding the punishment of those who abuse believing men and women without their having done any wrong: *ihtamal*, and does not say *hamal*, for there is a difference between *hamal* and *ihtamal*: *hamal* is used for something that it is within your power to bear, while *ihtamal* is used when the thing is beyond your power to bear and even if you were to bear it, you would only be able to bear it with great difficulty. So, the punishment here is of the same sort as the action – it is characterised by hardship and great effort just as the original act of disobedience was. '…will bear the guilt of slander and flagrant sin…' (*al-Ahzab:* 58); *buhtan*, (slander) is saying something about another person which is not true - in other words, lying about him. *Ithm*, on the other hand, is committing a sin against another by saying something about him which is true but that he would dislike hearing, such as addressing a blind man, for example, with the words, ‘O! Blind man’!

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6069; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2990.*

(2) *The story of Sheikh Mustafa and the purchase of the cow*

That is why it is narrated in a Hadith that when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘Tell me how the matter stands if what I say about my brother is true? He replied: ‘If what you say of him is true, you have slandered him, and if what you say of him is not true, you have reviled him.’(1) That is you have told a lie about him. Allah *the Almighty* describes the word *ithm* here with the adjective *mubin* (manifest), for Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…flagrant sin…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 58). The word *mubin* means clear and obvious. Wrongdoing becomes clear either by you confessing to it or by their being indisputable evidence linking you to it. So, if we were to ask you, ‘You addressed this man with the words, “O! Blind man”, but would you yourself like someone to describe with a characteristic of yours that you did not like’? You would of course reply that you would not like that. So, the wrongdoing here is clear and your confessing to it is enough to make it so. You should always treat people in the way that you yourself would want others to treat you so, just as you would not like others to rob you, you should also not rob them.

And just as wrongdoing harms you, so too does it also harm them. Then Allah *the Almighty* moves on to another one of the courtesies connected to family life when Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ قُل لِّأَزْوَٰجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَآءِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِن
جَلَٰبِيبِهِنَّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰٓ أَن يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٥٩﴾

Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful [59] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 59)

We notice that the first group towards whom the command is directed is the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then his daughters. This means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not command his *ummah* to do anything that he himself was exempt from, but only commanded them to do something that he had first commanded the members of his own household to do. And commands of this sort are much easier to accept and much more likely to be implemented. It is as if he were saying, 'Before I command you to do something, I command myself first to show that I am not granted any special privileges'.

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Kitab Al-Birr Wa-Sila, Hadith no. 2589; and Ahmad, Musnad, 2/230,384 & 386.*

That is why we find mentioned in the story of the Muslim leader, Tariq ibn Ziyad(1), when he went to conquer Andalusia, he stood with his troops on one sea coast while his enemy were on the opposite coast. Then he said to his troops, 'My people, I will never command you to do anything that I exempt myself from. I will be the first of you to meet the enemy and will challenge their leader to single combat. Then, if I kill him, you will have been spared the trouble of fighting him, and if he kills me, then there will be no leader who needs you after me. I will be the first of you when it comes to fighting and will not send you into battle while I sit back and observe what happens.' This meant, 'I will not grant myself any special privileges'.

It was also by means of this principle of equality that `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* governed the people - he ruled over the world from Medina wearing a patched-up robe. One time, a man saw him sleeping under a tree like the common populace, so he said, 'You governed and were just, so you were able to feel safe and sleep, O `Umar.' `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* knew that the first place in which corruption would appear would be amongst his retinue, close relatives, immediate subordinates and the centres of power which had built up around him, so, whenever he wanted to make a decision regarding any matter relating to his subjects, he would first gather his relatives around him and warn them, saying, 'I have decided to issue a resolution concerning such-and-such a matter. And, by the One Who holds my soul in His hand, if anyone amongst you opposes any aspect of that decision, I will make an example of him to all the Muslims! People, beware of anyone who comes amongst you claiming some sort of connection to me so that you then give him something that belongs by right to someone who does not know me. For, by Allah, if any of you do that, I will make an example of him to the rest of the Muslims!'

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(1) Tariq ibn Ziyad Al-Laythi was the one who conquered Andalusia. He was originally of Berber stock. He became Muslim at the hand of Musa ibn Nusayr who put him in command of twelve thousand troops, most of them Berbers themselves. He crossed the sea with them and took control of the mountain *Jabal Tariq* (Gibraltar) which was named after him. And he continued to conquer more parts of Andalusia with Musa ibn Nusayr. He was born in 50 A.H. and died in 102 A.H. at the age of 52. *See Az-Zirikli, Al-`Alam, 3/217.*

As the Quranic text was revealed with the wording: 'O Prophet! Tell your wives...' (*al-Ahzab:* 59), it indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to pass on the text that came to him with the exact same wording with which Allah *the Almighty* revealed to him, that is, without changing it in any way whatsoever. If that had not been the case, he could have passed on that command to his wives by saying, 'O Prophet, your wives and daughters should draw over themselves some of their outer garments'. But the fact of the matter was that he conveyed the Quranic text in exactly the same form as it was revealed to him so that everyone might know that the command was from Allah *the Almighty* and that Muhammad was only conveying what Allah *the Almighty* Himself had commanded. So, if anyone wanted to argue about a particular command, he would have to argue with the one who originally issued this command. When this particular verse was revealed, Allah *the Almighty* had honoured the Prophet's nine wives and given them a choice (between this world and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* yet they had chosen him. Five of them were from Quraysh, namely; `Aisha, Hafsa, Umm Habiba, Umm Salama and Sawda bint Zam`a *Allah be pleased with them*; three from other tribes, namely; Maymuna bint al-Harith, Zaynab bint Jahsh, and Juwayriyya bint Al-Harith of Banu Mustaliq *Allah be pleased with them*; in addition to an Israeli descendant, Safiyya bint Huyayy ibn Akhtab *Allah be pleased with her*.

As for the children of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is known for certain that he *peace and blessings be upon him* sired both sons and daughters. All of his sons died young, but Allah *the Almighty* destined all of his daughters to live long enough to get married. Those daughters were Zaynab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthum and the youngest, Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* who was the only one who lived after his *peace and blessings be upon him* death. As for Zaynab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum *Allah be pleased with them* they all died during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

There is a story about Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* which involved both laughing and crying. Some ascetic scholars used to understand the verse: 'and that it is He Alone who causes [you] to laugh and to weep.' (*an-Najm:* 43), as that Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* used to say when she was asked what caused her to laugh and weep? She replied: 'When I went in to see my father when he was ill, he said to me, "This is the illness from which I will die, Fatima", so I cried. Then, as I turned to leave, he gestured to me and said, "Fatima, you will be the first of the people of my family to join me", so I laughed.' So, this is the reason why Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* did not remain on this earth for longer than six months after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had passed away.(1) Scholars have understood from this Hadith that souls meet after death and do not have to wait until they are resurrected, since if it is so, then the order in which people died would make no difference with respect to the order in which they met. Prophet Muhammad's words to her, 'You will be the first of my family to join me' indicated that he would meet with her directly after she died.

The actual point of reference in this story is indicated by what someone - I think it was companion `Ali - said to Fatima that Allah says: "and that it is He Alone who causes [you] to laugh and to weep" (*an-Najm:* 43), so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* causes you to weep first and then to laugh, so as not to cause you to laugh and then to weep as his Lord does.'

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(1) *See: Ahmad, Musnad, 6/77 & 240 from a Hadith narrated on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him summoned his daughter, Fatima Allah be pleased with her to his side and whispered something to her which caused her to cry. Then he whispered something else to her which caused her to laugh. `Aisha Allah be pleased with her adds, 'I asked Fatima what Prophet Muhammad had whispered to her that made her cry and what he had whispered to her that had made her laugh.' She replied, 'The first time he whispered to me, he told me about his death so I cried. Then, the second time he whispered to me, he told me I would be the first one of his household to follow him, so I laughed.'*

As for Zaynab[1] *Allah be pleased with her* she married Al-`As ibn Ar-Rabi`[2] before it was forbidden to marry disbelievers. Al-`As was captured by the Muslims at the battle of Badr, so Zaynab *Allah be pleased with her* went to ransom him, giving a necklace that she had with her. 'When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw it, he found that it was a necklace that had belonged to Khadija that she had given to her daughter. So, he said, 'If you find it proper to return the necklace to her and free the prisoner, then do it', thus putting the matter into the hands of those who were in the position to benefit from her. So they waived their right to the necklace.'[3] As for Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum *Allah be pleased with them* they faced so many difficulties in their lives, as follows: before prophethood, Ruqayya *Allah be pleased with her* had been engaged to `Utba ibn Abu Lahab, and Umm Kulthum *Allah be pleased with her* to his brother, `Utayba. Then, upon prophethood and Abu Lahab's hostility to Prophet Muhammad, Allah *the Almighty* Allah revealed the verses: 'Doomed are the hands of him of the glowing countenance, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and all what he has gained?' (*al-Masad:* 1-2) Abu Lahab thus said to his son `Utba, 'My head and your head are unlawful for me until you divorce Ruqayya', so he divorced

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(1) *See Al-`Alam of Az-Zirikli, 3/67: Zaynab Allah be pleased with her the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings bu upon him, was the eldest of all his daughters, She married the son of her maternal aunt, Abu Al-`As ibn Ar-Rabi`, and bore him (two children), `Ali and `Umama. `Ali died when he was young, but `Umama survived and married `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him after Fatima Az-Zahra' died. Zaynab died in the year 8 A.H. - i.e. two years before Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him himself died.*

(2) *See Al-`Alam of Az-Zirikli, 5/176: 'He was Abu Al-`As ibn Ar-Rabia ibn Abd Al-`Uzza Allah be pleased with him; he was one of the Companions. He married Zaynab, the eldest of the daughters of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. He married her in the time of ignorance before Islam in Mecca, and did not become Muslim until quite late. She was staying with her father in Medina until he became Muslim and then she was returned to him. He was most commonly given the nickname of Abu Al-`As, but was also nicknamed, 'Jarw Al-Bathaa' – 'the puppy of the valley' and 'the trustworthy one'. He died in the year 12 A.H.*

(3) *See Ibn Sa`d, At-Tabaqat, 10/31: 'He was taken prisoner during the battle of Badr by `Abdullah ibn Jubayr, so his brother `Amr ibn ar-Rabi` came to ransom him. Zaynab Allah be pleased with her the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, who was at that time still living in Mecca, sent with him a necklace that had belonged to her mother Khadija Allah be pleased with her. Khadija had given that necklace to her on the occasion of her marriage to Abu Al-`As.*

her. Then, later on, ‘Utba walked past Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and did something in front of him in order to mock him, so he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to `Utba, ‘You have been eaten by one of the dogs of Allah.’(1) So, `Utba told his father what Prophet Muhammad had said in his supplication against him. Abu Lahab knew well that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truthful and that his supplications were answered and not rejected, so he became frightened for his son and started to take great care to safeguard him, appointing people to even accompany him on his trading trips. For surprise, despite all of this, he still did not believe. And so it came to pass on one of his trading trips that `Utba was sleeping amongst his companions, surrounded on all sides by them. Then, one night, a lion came and snatched him from the midst of his people, leaving nothing behind of him except that by which he could be recognised. Some of those biased against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have commented on this story, saying, ‘Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said ‘dog’, but what actually took him was a lion. However, one of the people of gnosis responded, saying, ‘When a dog is attributed to Allah, it must be a lion (at the very least). For Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, ‘One of your dogs’, but said, ‘One of Allah’s dogs.’(2) This is what happened with respect to `Utba. As for `Utayba, he divorced Umm Kulthum *Allah be pleased with her* but did not subject Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to any harm. Indeed, they say that he was too shy to even face him *peace and blessings be upon him* and that is why Prophet Muhammad did not supplicate against him. As for the times of happiness in the lives of Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum *Allah be pleased with them* they were when Allah

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala`il An-Nubuwwa, 2/338 & 339; see also Al-Haythami, Majma' Az-Zawaai'd. 6/19. At-Tabarani traced the Hadith back to a mursal statement and said, ‘The chain of narrations contains Zuhayr ibn Al-`Ala` who is weak.’ It is also narrated by Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 3/539 in a Hadith from Abu `Aqrab who classified it as Sahih. As for Ibn Hajar, he classified it as Hassan. See Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 4/39.*

(2) *See Fath Al-Bari, Ibn Hajar Al-`Asqalani, vol. 4, p.39: The word kalb may be used to refer to every rapacious beast of prey, including lions. Ibn Sayyidih said, ‘The word kalb has commonly come to mean the sort that barks, although taklib (rapaciousness) may also be used to describe panthers and birds of prey.’ Imam Malik said in the Muwatta`, ‘Every animal that bites, attacks and terrifies people, like lions, tigers, panthers and wolves, are rapacious.*

the Almighty replaced `Utba and `Utayba with someone better than them both, for first Ruqayya *Allah be pleased with her* married `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* and then, when she died, her sister Umm Kulthum *Allah be pleased with her* married him. And that was why `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* was given the nickname ‘the possessor of two lights’. When `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* married Ruqayya *Allah be pleased with her* a woman sang the following song:

The best thing that any human being has ever seen
is Ruqayya and her husband `Uthman(1)

Look at how great their recompense was! For whom did Allah *the Almighty* replace `Utba and `Utayba with? They were replaced with `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* and what a wonderful replacement he was! In addition, receiving recompense in matters such as these is only really feasible when one accepts one’s fate in similar situations. So, when a human being is struck by affliction, he should completely submit to Allah *the Almighty* hand the matters over to Him and say, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has taught us, ‘We belong to Allah and to Him we will return. O Allah, protect me during my affliction - whatever affliction is - and replace it with something better than it.’(2) If he says that in full knowledge of the fact that there is wisdom in everything that Allah *the Almighty* has decreed for us, then He *the Almighty* will certainly recompense him with something better. A famous story that illustrates this well is that of Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her*. When her husband, Abu Salama *Allah be pleased with him* died, she felt extreme sadness at his departure. During her mourning, when some women came to see her to offer their condolences, one of them said to her, ‘O Umm Salama, say as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘We belong to Allah and to Him we will return. O Allah, protect me during my affliction and replace it with something better than it.' When she heard that, Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her* exclaimed, 'But is there anyone better than Abu Salama?', since, in her eyes, he was the best of people.

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(1) *The wording in the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi (8/5510) is:*
The best two people mankind has ever seen are Ruqayya and her husband `Uthman.

(2) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 918 in theJana`iz chapter from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her that she said, ‘I heard Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him say, “There is no Muslim who has been struck by affliction who says what Allah has commanded Him to say, ‘We belong to Allah and to Him we will return. O Allah, protect me during my affliction and replace it with something better than it’ except that Allah will replace it with something better than it.’ It is also narrated by Ahmad, Musnad, vol. 6, p. 309.*

However, despite that, she accepted what Allah *the Almighty* had decreed. No sooner had her waiting-period come to an end than she heard someone knocking at her door, saying, 'Umm Salama, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself asks for your hand in marriage.' When she heard that, she laughed out loud because Allah *the Almighty* had indeed replaced Abu Salama *Allah be pleased with him* with someone who was better than him.(1)

After Allah *the Almighty* had first commanded the wives and daughters of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to take on this aspect of courtesy, He followed that by commanding the believing women to do the same, saying: 'Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters and the believing women to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognised and not insulted: Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (*al-Ahzab:* 59)

The reason He does so is because the family of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not just extend to his wives and daughters, but to the entire world. The word used for women here, *nisa`*, is a plural for which there is no singular from the same root. While the word *`azwaj* (wives) has the singular form *zawj*, and the word *banat* (daughters) has the singular form *bint*; the word *nisa`* has a singular form derived from its meaning only, not of its etymological root, i.e.*`imra`a*. As it is difficult to say *`imra`at*, we say *nisa`* instead. *Nisa`* originally comes from the word *nasi`* (delaying); because the creation of the woman was delayed to be after the creation of the man.

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(1) *See, Ibn Sa`d, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, vol. 10, p. 87, in a Hadith from Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her that Abu Salama Allah be pleased with him said when he was on his deathbed, 'O Allah, give my family someone better than me as a replacement for me.' Then, when he died, I said, 'We belong to Allah and to Him we will return. O Allah, my affliction is reckoned in an account with You, so protect me during it.' I wanted to also say, 'Replace it with something better than it', but I kept on thinking to myself, 'Is there anyone better than Abu Salama?' However, I persevered until I actually said it. Then, when her waiting period came to an end, Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him proposed to her, but she rejected him. Then `Umar Allah be pleased with him proposed to her, but she also rejected him. So Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him sent a proposal to her and she responded, saying, 'Welcome to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and his messenger.'...until the end of the Hadith.*

Then Allah *the Almighty* mentions His command to the wives and daughters of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well as the rest of the believing women, saying: '...to make their outer garments hang low over them...' (*al-Ahzab:* 59). The verb used in this command is *yudnina*. It is in the jussive case because it is the apodosis of the imperative *qul* (say). It goes like *`uskut taslam* or 'be quiet and you will be safe', or *dhakir tanjah* 'revise and you will succeed'. In the verse, there is an implied conditional: 'If you say "draw (your garments) closer to you", then let them draw (their garments) closer to themselves'. This is similar to what is found in Allah's words: 'Hence, [O Muhammad,] proclaim to all people the [duty of] pilgrimage: they will come unto thee on foot...' (*al-Hajj:* 27), since those who are being addressed here are the believing women, headed by the wives and daughters of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If any one of them fails to submit to the command, they would be leaving one of the conditions of faith unfulfilled.

As for the meaning of the word *idna`*, it is bringing one thing close to another. The same root word is used by Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran to describe the fruits of paradise when He says: 'with its fruits within easy reach.' (*al-Haqqa:* 23), thus using the word *daniya* (easy reach). In other words, they are close by and easy to reach and pick. The meaning of the phrase 'draw their outer garments close to them' is to pull them up off the ground and cover their bodies with them. As for Allah's words 'low over them' (*al-Ahzab:* 59), they indicate that the garments shall cover the entire body, wrap around it completely and hang down as far as the ground.

As for the word *jalabib* (garments), it is the plural of the word *jilbab* about whose meaning there is some difference of opinion. Some people say that it is a garment which is worn over the top of an undergarment, such as an undershirt or a shirt and trousers. It is permissible for these undergarments to be short, but the *jilbab* itself must be loose, long and reach right down to the ground.(1) Other people said that a *jilbab* was a scarf that was used to cover the head and drawn over their breasts, i.e. the area just below their necks. However, that is not enough, for they must also be allowed to hang as far as the ground in order to cover the woman up completely since her entire body is considered to be an `*awra* (a private area). When it comes to garments, there are some that leave a woman uncovered, some that describe the contours of her body and some that attract other people's attention. However, it is a legal precondition in Islam for a woman's clothing that it should not expose her body, describe it or attract attention. But some women still wear clothes that they, in spite of covering their bodies completely and leaving no parts exposed, are very tight, describe the shape of her breasts and hips and magnify her feminine charms so much that it is almost as if she were not wearing any clothes at all.(1) A great literary expression of this may be found in the following statement written by one of them - and indeed, he is completely right in what he says - 'By going to extremes in making herself pretty and displaying her charms, a woman is insisting upon offering herself up to men.' In other words, she wants to attract their attention to her, and make those who are unaware of her notice her. It is as if she were saying to them, 'Here we are'! Although sometimes we give girls who have yet to be married a certain amount of leeway in this regard, since they might be considered to have an excuse, but what is the excuse of those who are married?! Then Allah *the Almighty* explains the wisdom behind this act of decorum when it comes to wearing clothes, saying: 'so' (*al-Ahzab:* 59), i.e. making one's outer garments hang right down to the ground and cover one's body completely, as well as making sure not to display one's feminine charms is 'to be recognised and not insulted' (*al-Ahzab:* 59).

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(1) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, vol. 8, P. 5511: He said, 'Jalabib is the plural of jilbab, which is a garment that is bigger than a khimar (headscarf). It is narrated from Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him and Ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him that it was a rida`, (cloak), and it is also said that it was a qina` (veil), but the soundest position is that it was a garment that covered the entire body.'*

Muslim women are known by their modest clothes, and thereby prevent anyone from being so bold as to subject them to sexual harassment or molestation.

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(1) *See Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, vol. 4, P. 187, Hadith from Dahiyya ibn Khalifa Al-Kalbi that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him sent him to Heraclius. Then when he returned, he peace and blessings be upon him gave him a qubtiyya (an Egyptian garment) and said, 'Make half of it into a shirt for yourself and give the other half to your wife to use as a head-covering. When he had followed (those instructions), Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Command her to put something on underneath, so that it does not describe the contours of her body.' Al-Hakim said, 'This Hadith has a Sahih chain of narrations even though neither of them (i.e. Al-Bukhari and Muslim) narrated it. Adh-Dhahabi, however, said, 'Part of the chain is cut off.'*

A Muslim woman's dress and deportment tells you that she is not one of those cheap sorts of women who await any sort of signal from you, nor is she one of those women who exhibit themselves to men in a provocative way, seeking their full attention. Then, after that, Allah *the Almighty* uses the following words to complete the verse: 'Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (*al-Ahzab:* 59) The Attributes of Mercy and Forgiveness here tells that His Punishment is not retroactive - those occasions upon which we have overstepped the mark beforehand are pardoned and forgiven by the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty*. The important thing is how women act after hearing the command to draw their outer garments about them and cover themselves up. By means of acts of decorum of this sort, Allah *the Almighty* insures the life of the Muslim woman. How does He do that, you might ask? Our response is 'The reality of insurance is taking from you during those times that you are wealthy and have means, and giving it back to you during those times that you are in need and do not have means'. In the same way, Islam protects women and allows them to keep their pride and dignity.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

لَّئِن لَّمۡ يَنتَهِ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقُونَ وَٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٞ وَٱلۡمُرۡجِفُونَ فِي
ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ لَنُغۡرِيَنَّكَ بِهِمۡ ثُمَّ لَا يُجَاوِرُونَكَ فِيهَآ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا ﴿٦٠﴾
مَّلۡعُونِينَۖ أَيۡنَمَا ثُقِفُوٓاْ أُخِذُواْ وَقُتِّلُواْ تَقۡتِيلٗا ﴿٦١﴾

If the hypocrites, the sick at heart, and those who spread lies in the city do not desist, We shall rouse you [Prophet] against them, and then they will only be your neighbours in this city for a short while [60] They will be rejected. Wherever they are found, they will be arrested and put to death [61] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 60 - 61)

Anyone who closely examines the procession of messages throughout history will notice that there were three different types of people that each messenger came into contact with in the course of spreading his message: those people who believed; those people who rejected; and those people who wavered between belief and rejection. This last group are the hypocrites. It is because whenever a messenger is sent, he is only sent to change the social condition of a people whose society has become so depraved and corrupt that people can no longer bear it. So, the people who are suffering in that society await the coming of a new messenger, and so they rush to believe in him as soon as he appears since he brings with him new social principles that contain no injustice, no subjugation, no tyranny, no bribery, and no corruption. Therefore, those who have been badly bitten by events and made miserable by corruption, hurry to become believers. Such was the case with the people of Egypt, for as soon as Islam entered their country, they rushed to accept it. Why? Because, before Islam appeared, they had been living in great misery under the yoke of the Byzantines. In this same way, Persia believed simply by hearing about Islam and seeing the excellent example of the Muslims, after undergoing years of corruption at the hands of the non-Muslim rulers who had ruled them previously.

In the very moment that people start suffering from corruption in terms of the conditions in which they live, they start to look for a saviour, and if one comes to them, they will follow him, especially if he is someone from among them who has a distinguished past and from whom they have never once experienced a lie or any form of defect. A good example of this is found in the story of how Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* entered Islam: no sooner had Prophet Muhammad announced that he was sent by Allah, Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* rushed to believe in him without asking about a single thing. Why did he do that? Because he knew Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be truthful and trustworthy, and so he trusted him absolutely. Something similar also happened when Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* became a believer: no sooner had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to her, disturbed by the experience he had had of the angel descending upon him, than she took him in her arms, set his mind at rest, told him that he was just and right and took him to see Waraqa ibn Nawfal to prove to him that he was in right and that Allah *the Almighty* had not abandoned him nor left him to his own accord. Part of what she said to him was, 'By Allah, you give hospitality to your guests, bear other people's burdens, help the destitute and give aid to those who have afflicted by calamities...'(1).

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3; it is also narrated in six other places in his Sahih; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 160 from a Hadith narrated on the authority of=*

That is why the people of knowledge say that Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* was the first jurisprudent in Islam, even before Islam was revealed. As for the people of corruption and all of those who benefit from it, it is natural that they would oppose him *peace and blessings be upon him*, since they profit from corruption and tyranny and want that state of affairs to continue. They want their lordship, hegemony, and social position to remain as it was and for everyone else to remain enslaved to them, giving them all their resources and abasing themselves before them. Those who had enslaved the people and set themselves up as their rulers, and in some cases, their gods, knew that the Messengers *Allah's peace and blessings be upon them* had only come to bring their rule and false godhood to an end. Hence, they saw no option but to oppose the call and to reject it; they saw no option but to fight against it if they wanted to preserve their rule and temporal dominion. It is amazing that we find people amongst the general populace who become accustomed to this servitude and are content to be humiliated in this way and live under the protection of these people, no matter the consequences may be. These people and those like them are the ones who say: 'And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Even after Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came bringing them salvation, they continued to look to the 'great' men who had enslaved them. Both of these two groups (the believers and the disbelievers) are being logical and consistent with what is in themselves since the believer believes in his heart and articulates that belief with his tongue, while the disbeliever rejects in his heart and also rejects with his tongue since he does not utter the testimony of oneness. A human being is made up of a heart and an outer shell; thus when it comes to belief, they must both be in harmony with one another. As for the third group, i.e. the hypocrites, they are neither

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= *`Aisha Allah be pleased with her. The meaning of 'bear people's burdens' is helping those who are in difficulty and includes spending money on the weak, orphans and so on. 'Turn the non-existent to profit' means turning non-existent money into profit, for the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him had very good fortune when it came to trading. 'Give hospitality to guests' means feeding with the food that is typically given to guests, and 'calamities are the daily events. Look at An-Nawawi's commentary on Muslim 2/561 and Fath Al-Bari of Al-`Asqalani 1/24.*

logical nor consistent with what is in themselves since they claim belief with their tongues, while their hearts are void of belief. They are cowards who outwardly show you love and affection but inwardly despise you, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* has placed them in the lowest levels of Hell. In addition, that is why the Arabs when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked them to say, ‘There is no god but Allah’ in order to bring an end to the dominion of the leaders of disbelief, refused to do so. Why? Because they knew that this statement was not just something that they had to say, but rather, it would bring with it consequences and responsibilities that they did not feel ready for, If it had simply been something that they could say and then that would be the end of it, they would have said it and the enmity between them and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have come to an end.

This statement, ‘There is no god but Allah’ means ‘There is no worship except to Allah *the Almighty*; there is no humble submission except to Allah *the Almighty*; there is no legislation except for the sake of Allah *the Almighty;* there is no one who brings benefit except Allah *the Almighty* and so on. How could such meanings feel right to one who had become accustomed to worshipping and humbly submitting to other than Allah *the Almighty*?

When He *the Almighty* talks about hypocrites, He specifically mentions Medina, saying: ‘If the hypocrites, the sick at heart, and those who spread lies in the city do not desist…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 60). Hypocrisy did not appear in Mecca, the stronghold of unbelief and idolatry, but rather in Medina, the city where the Emigrants sought refuge with and where the majority of its inhabitants were people of the Book, people who were nearer to belief than to unbelief. So, why did this phenomenon appear therein?

The reason, they say, is because Islam was weak in Mecca and only became strong when the Muslims moved to Medina. Hypocrisy is a sign of the healthiness of Islam since had it not been strong, the hypocrites would have had no reason to pretend to be Muslims. So, the appearance of hypocrisy in Medina was a sign that Islam had become strong there and had become a force to be taken into account. So, those whose faith was weak and lacking became hypocrites and pretended to believe in order to partake of the good that Islam had brought and take advantage of the protection it provided. If that had not been the case, then there would have been no incentive for the weak (of faith) to become hypocrites. Yes, hypocrisy appeared in Medina, about whose inhabitants Allah *the Almighty* Himself says: ‘And [it shall be offered, too, unto the poor from among] those who, before them, had their abode in this realm and in faith – [those] who love all that come to them in search of refuge, and who harbour in their hearts no grudge for whatever the others may have been given, but rather give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot...’ (*al-Hashr:* 9); about whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Faith will draw back into Medina like a snake draws back into its lair.’(1)

It is also the Quran, however, that says about the people of Medina: ‘...and among the people of the [Prophet’s] City [too] there are such as have grown insolent in [their] hypocrisy...’ (*at-Tawba:* 101). But, by saying this, it is not saying that Medina is weak. On the contrary, this proclaimed the strength of Islam within it, since it had come to possess the level of power and might that made hypocrisy viable. Here Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘If the hypocrites…do not desist…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 60). As soon as you hear the words: ‘...not desist…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 60), you know that Allah *the Almighty* has made an oath by something and that this is the apodosis of His Oath clause. Allah *the Almighty* only makes an oath when the matter is of great importance. We, human beings, make oaths to place greater emphasis on what we want to say, such as when we say, ‘By Allah, if so-and-so does not do such-and-such, then I will do such-and-such.’ What Allah *the Almighty* says, however, is true and comes to pass without any oath, so how do you think it is when He does make an oath?! That is why some of the people of gnosis say when they hear Allah *the Almighty* make an oath, ‘Who is that who made the All-Generous so angry that He resorted to using an oath?’

The word *munafiqun* (...hypocrites...) is the plural of the word *munafiq* which is derived from root *nafaqa’* of the jerboa. The jerboa is a small animal that resembles a mouse and lives in holes in the ground. The people of the desert know these animals well and hunt them by watching their holes and waiting for them to come out. However, these small animals have iniquitous and cunning minds. What is that they do? They construct two separate entrances to their holes; one well known and in the open and the other covered over by something. Then, when they feel the hunter's presence at that entrance, they hurry to the other. In this regard, they closely resemble the hypocrite who has the heart of an unbeliever and the tongue of a believer. You will notice that Allah *the Almighty* describes the hypocrites here in this verse with three different attributes: '…the hypocrites, the sick at heart, and those who spread lies in the city…' (*al-Ahzab:* 60), for the conjunction here, 'and', does not mean that those mentioned are three different groups. Rather, it is simply listing three different attributes of a single group.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1876; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 147, in Kitab Al-’Iman, from a Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

These attributes are mentioned independently of one another because they were so clearly practiced amongst them that each one had almost come to represent its own separate group.(1) The Quran describes the hypocrites elsewhere as having a sickness in their hearts. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And there are people who say, 'We do believe in Allah and the Last Day,' the while they do not [really] believe. [8] They would deceive Allah and those who have attained to faith – the while they deceive none but themselves, and perceive it not. [9] In their hearts is disease, and so Allah lets their disease increase; and grievous suffering awaits them because of their persistent lying. [10]' (*al-Ahzab:* 8-10) This indicates that the conjunction 'and' is being used to list a series of attributes for a single group, not a number of different groups. This is similar to how conjunction is used in Allah's words: 'And [it shall be offered, too, unto the poor from among] those who, before them, had their abode in this realm and in faith...' (*al-Hashr:* 9), for in this verse, both *dar* (realm) and *'iman* (faith) are used to refer to Medina. The word *murjifun* '...they who, by spread 'If the hypocrites, the sick at heart, and those who spread lies in the city' (*al-Ahzab:* 60) is the plural of *murjif*, which is derived from *irjaf* meaning ‘the violent shaking that happens in an earthquake’. Allah *the Almighty* Himself uses this word when He says: ‘[Hence, think of] the Day when a violent convulsion will convulse [the world], [6] to be followed by further [convulsions]! [7]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6-7) so, the *murjifun* are those who attempt to shake loose something that is stable and firmly rooted. The hypocrites are the same - whenever they see that Islam has become strong, they try to upset it and shake it loose in order to weaken it and bring about its end. These are those people whom we refer to in modern political speech as the ‘fifth column’. They are that group of people who spread rumours and falsehoods that undermine a nation’s solidarity and threaten its stability. The hypocrites often remained behind and said, ‘the tribe of so-and-so and the tribe of so-and-so have joined together in order to attack Medina and bring an end to Muhammad and the Message that he has brought.’ Their aim in spreading these rumours was to weaken the spirit of those Muslims who were new or weak. They even used this ploy against particular individuals. When they heard that someone was thinking about becoming Muslim or his heart was leaning towards it, they would come to him and say, ‘Do you not know that so-and-so was taken by his family - or taken by his master - and tortured until he died because he followed Muhammad?’ By such statements, they sought to turn people away from Allah’s Religion. So the *murjif* is the one who tries by means of lies and intrigue to turn the people of Truth away from that Truth, filling their ears with falsehoods and lies. That is why Allah *the Almighty* threatens them, saying, ‘If those hypocrites do not desist from spreading false rumours in Medina and trying to lead people astray, then they will have to answer to Us.’ This was at a time when the truce between the Muslims and the Jews and their followers from among the hypocrites was in effect, so it is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to them: ‘We said nothing of their crimes until Islam became strong and powerful. But Islam has now become strong and powerful, so if they break the contract they have made with us, we shall confront them.’ And it is an amazing thing that these murjifun thought that neither Allah nor His Messenger Muhammad knew of the lies they were spreading. He *the Almighty* says: ‘Or do they in whose hearts is disease think, perchance, that Allah would never bring their moral failings to light? [29] Now had We so willed, We could have shown them clearly to thee, so that you would know them for sure as by a visible mark: but [even so,] you will most certainly recognise them by the tone of their voice. And Allah knows all that you do, [O men;] [30]' (*Muhammad:* 29-30). The meaning of *lahn al-qawl* (tone of their voice) is twisting words so that they deviate from their meaning, such as when they greeted, him *peace and blessings be upon him* with *as-samu 'alaykum*, using the word *sam* (death) instead of the word *salam* (peace); or when they twisted the word *ra'ina* (look at us), saying instead *ra'una* (stupidity). Even stranger than that is what the Quran relates about them: '...and they say to themselves, 'Why does not Allah chastise us for what we are saying?' (*al-Mujadala:* 8)

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(1) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, 8/5513; Abu Razin said, 'They were one thing.' In other words, they had gathered together all of three of these attributes within themselves. It is also said that, among the hypocrites, there were some spread false rumours; some who followed women around in order to create doubts as to their chastity and some who tried to instill doubts into the hearts of the Muslims.*

This statement of theirs indicates how stupid they truly are in two ways: firstly by the fact that they wish to be punished; and secondly by the fact that they say those words to themselves, not to other people and not even to one another. We know that, because 'they say' is in the plural and 'themselves' is in the plural, and so it is as if every one of them were saying those words to himself. So, how could a single one of them then not ask himself who it was who told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what they said to themselves in secret? Did that not prove that Muhammad had a direct connection to his Lord and that he would inevitably expose them and reveal the secrets concealed within their breasts? This shows the level of their stupidity. Anyone who studies the history of the Jews and hypocrites in Medina will find that Islam did not take them unawares, but rather made a pact with them, guaranteed their safety and security and gave them the space they needed to live their lives to the full, so long as they did not do harm to the Muslims. However, it reached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that they were conferring secretly in wrongdoing and enmity, so he sent for them and forbade them from doing that. However, they went back to doing that a second time, as Allah *the Almighty* Himself relates about them: 'Are you not aware of such as have been forbidden [to intrigue through] secret confabulations, and yet [always] revert to that which they have been forbidden...' (*al-Mujadala:* 8). So, no course remained except to confront them, as the following lines of poetry by the poet(1) prescribe:

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(1) The poet is Ibrahim ibn Al-'Abbas As-Suli, the most recognised writer in Iraq during the time that he lived. He was originally from Khorasan, but was brought up in Baghdad.=

Patience, but if it does not suffice, then follow it
with a warning; and if that is not enough, then firm resolutions.(1)

That is why in the apodosis of the conditional clause: 'If the hypocrites, the sick at heart, and those who spread lies in the city do not desist, We shall rouse you [Prophet] against them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 60), Allah *the Almighty* says: '...We shall rouse you against them…' (*al-Ahzab:* 60). The verb in this apodosis *nughriyann* (give mastery) is derived from the word *ighra'*, which is the name of an Arabic grammatical structure whose opposite is (attraction): it is to say something to make some act or matter beloved or attractive to the person you are addressing in order to make him do it, such as, for example, when you say to your son, 'Hard work! Hard work!'

As for warning, it is to scare someone away from some disagreeable matter in order to get them to steer clear of it, such as, for example, when you call out to them, 'Lion! Lion!' or say to them, 'Laziness! Laziness!' So the meaning of: '...We shall indeed give thee mastery over them, [O Muhammad]…' (*al-Ahzab:* 60) is 'We will give you power over them and make it desirable for you to confront and oppose them.' It is as if this act of confronting them had become something beloved and desirable, because it would serve as a means of paying them back for the fear and alarm that they had caused you. And while you have this mastery over them and possess strength and power coveted by others, they will never be able to remain in Medina with you. As for the saying of Allah, '...and then they will only be your neighbors in this city for a short while.' (*al-Ahzab:* 60), it refers to Medina. As for word *qalil* in the phrase: '...for a short while' (*al-Ahzab:* 60), it either refers to 'a few of them' or 'only a short period of time'. 'They will be rejected. Wherever they are found, they will be arrested and put to death.' (*al-Ahzab:* 61)

The *mal'un* (rejected one) is either one who is bereft of Allah's Mercy or who is exiled from Medina after their wicked innermost thoughts and

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= He was the court scribe of Al-Mu'tasim, Al-Wathiq and Al-Mutawakkil; he was born in 243 AH. He was one of the poets of the Abbasid era.

(1) This line is from a poem written in the (Tawil) metre. *See Al-'Aghani of Al-'Asfahani and Al-'Awa'il of Abu Hilal Al-'Askari (p. 419).*

intentions were revealed to all by Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* expelled them from the Mosque, for, in their wickedness and iniquity, they had been attending the Mosque and even praying in the front row, thinking that it would keep their hypocrisy secret. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* however, would expel them by name, saying, 'So-and-so and So-and-so, get out of the mosque!'(1) He used to know them by name, and why should he not when Allah *the Almighty* said about him: 'Now had we so willed, We could have shown them clearly to you, so that you would know them for sure as by a visible mark...' (*Muhammad:* 30).

'...wherever they may be found...' (*al-Ahzab:* 61), i.e. 'they are found', '...they shall be arrested...' (*al-Ahzab:* 61), i.e. 'taken into captivity' '...and put to death' (*al-Ahzab:* 61) Here, we should note the exaggeration and emphasis in the phrase: '...and put to death...' (*al-Ahzab:* 61). In other words, kill them violently and do not let compassion get in the way of repaying them for the wrongs they have committed against Islam and the Muslims. (Kill them) because the nature of a hypocrite whose hypocrisy is innate has become so poisoned and polluted that it can never ever become pure again - hypocrisy is in their blood and constantly accompanies him wherever he goes. Indeed, their nature is such that it is inevitable that they will ultimately be expelled from any place in which they settle. Thus, although Allah *the Almighty* has split mankind up into different nations, He has placed every nation within its own land, giving them a level of internal cohesion such that they do not split into other societies and maintain their own identities. This means that they each have specific places and locations by which they are known. And in each of these countries, the quarter in which the Jews resided was well known, but it was inevitable that people would eventually come to realise their ignominy and shameful behaviour and so expel them or wipe them out. The last example of this was what took place in Germany. Allah *the Almighty* speaks truly when

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(1) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, vol. 8, p. 5515; it is narrated that when the chapter of At-Tawba was revealed, the Companions assembled and the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'O So-and-so, get up and leave for you are hypocrite! And you, O So-and-so, get up!' Thereupon, their fellow Muslims got up and took charge of expelling them from the Mosque.' See also (Zad Al-Masir) of Ibn Al-Jawzi (3/492).*

He says about them: ‘And lo! Your Lord made it known that most certainly He would rouse against them, unto Resurrection Day, people who would afflict them with cruel suffering...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 167).

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

سُنَّةَ ٱللَّهِ فِي ٱلَّذِينَ خَلَوۡاْ مِن قَبۡلُۖ وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ ٱللَّهِ تَبۡدِيلٗا ﴿٦٢﴾

This has been God’s practice with those who went before.
You will find no change in God’s practices [62]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 62)

After Allah *the Almighty* explains how His enemies will meet their end by being slain and how His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be victorious, He makes it clear that this is not some new development in terms of how He deals with His Messengers, but, on the contrary, has been a *Sunna* (usual practice) that He has followed and repeated again and again throughout history. Look at the previous Messengers sent by Allah *the Almighty* - is there even one whom Allah *the Almighty* sent and then deserted or abandoned and gave His enemies the final victory over him? A *Sunna* is a way that someone follows and that corresponds to his nature, that he repeats time and again and that he never abandons. So, if something happens once or twice, it cannot be called a *Sunna* - it must be something that is of a continuous and repetitive nature. In this particular case, *Sunna* refers to truth overcoming falsehood: ‘...with those who went before…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 62) i.e. those who have passed away from previous nations, Allah’s *Sunna* of giving Truth victory over falsehood still stands, and it will continue to stand until the Final Hour is established. ‘...You will find no change in Allah’s practices.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 62) Yes, it will never be altered or changed in any way because this is Allah’s *Sunna*. It is Allah’s *Sunna*, and Allah *the Almighty* has no equal or partner who can change what He has caused to be, nor emend any judgement He has caused to pass. Then, after making this clear, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to let us know that the Way of Guidance brought by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from His Lord, containing His Commands and Prohibitions and the means for us to be rid of our enemies, must be respected since it will hand all of mankind over to another life where their reception will be totally dependent upon the actions that they have done; another life in which they will live with the One Who is the cause of all, not with secondary causes. So, beware of thinking that Allah *the Almighty* created you, and gave you your provision and the blessings and comforts you take for granted in this world, and that that is the end of the matter and that anyone who abandons His Way of Guidance will escape His Punishment. No, rather, you must always remember that it is to Him that you will return and that you will never slip from His Grasp.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَسۡـَٔلُكَ ٱلنَّاسُ عَنِ ٱلسَّاعَةِۖ قُلۡ إِنَّمَا عِلۡمُهَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِۚ
وَمَا يُدۡرِيكَ لَعَلَّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ تَكُونُ قَرِيبًا ٦٣

People ask you about the Hour. Say, 'God alone has knowledge of it.' How could you [Prophet] know? The Hour may well be near[63] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 63)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was often asked about the Last Hour. Indeed, asking questions about matters about which we are held legally accountable is a healthy sign, since to ask such questions is a sign that someone believes in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loves his religious duties and wants his life to be based on Islamic principles right from the start. Presupposing that Islam came upon certain practices that had been carried over from the time of ignorance before Islam and affirmed them, it is to be expected that people would come and ask what the position of Islam was concerning them, seeking by that to safeguard their religion and make sure they were doing the right thing. Allah *the Almighty* however, wanted to make matters easy for people, so He said: 'O you who have attained to faith! Do not ask about matters which, if they were to be made manifest to you [in terms of law], might cause you hardship...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 101). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave me with what I have left to you, for those who came before you were only destroyed because of their excessive questioning of their prophets, and their opposition to them.'(1)

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, 2/247; Muslim, Sahih, no. 1337, in Kitab Al-Hajj; and by Ibn Maja, Sunnan, no.2 in a Hadith from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The actual wording of=*

So, the type of question that is sought is that which is about matters that a Muslim is held responsible for, even when those matters had been carried over from the time of ignorance before Islam. And, indeed, there were many matters and practices from that time that Islam affirmed, such as blood money, for example, the payment of which pre-dated Islam, was practiced by the pre-Islamic Arabs, and was then confirmed by Islam. Allah *the Almighty* commands Muslims to ask about matters such as these when He says: '...and if you have not [yet] realised this, ask the followers of [earlier] revelation.' (*an-Nahl:* 43) As for asking about the Last Hour, the Last Hour is an unseen matter that only Allah *the Almighty* knows so there is no use in asking someone about it. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied when he was asked when the Last Hour would be, 'What have you prepared for it?'(1) thus directing his questioner to the question he should have been asking and with which he should have concerned himself. This noble verse: 'People will ask you about the Last Hour...' (*al-Ahzab:* 63) came down after the battle in which the affront to Allah *the Almighty* His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers took place. Those who instigated this affront were those who did not believe in Heaven, or in Allah or in the fact that a transmission had come down from Allah *the Almighty* to them through the medium of a Messenger.

The reality of the matter, however, was that their effrontery against Allah *the Almighty* did not harm Him *the Almighty* but merely harmed themselves since harm does not reach Him *the Almighty*. Allah *the Almighty* desires nothing but

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= *the Hadith is as follows: 'Leave me with what I have left to you, for those who came before you were only destroyed because of their excessive questioning of their Prophets, and their opposition to them. So when I command you to do something, do as much as remove as of it as you can, and when I forbid you to do something, stop doing it.'*

(1) *Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him narrated that a desert Arab said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him 'When will the Last Hour be?' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'What have you prepared for it?' The man said, 'Love of Allah and His Messenger.' So Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'You will be with those whom you love.' It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2639); and by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6167 & 6171). In the wording of the version narrated by Al-Bukhari, the man said, 'I have not prepared lots of prayers for it nor fasting or charity. But I love Allah and His Messenger,' so the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'You will be with those whom you love.'*

good for them since they are His slaves and His creation. So when they abandon the program that He *the Almighty* has set up for them, they are harming none but themselves. As for their causing harm to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they caused harm to both his person and his family. They subjected him to the type of effrontery that any self-respecting human being would reject, attacking him both physically and verbally. But despite that, prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bore it with patience and stoicism, as did his Companions against whose persons and property abuse had also been directed. Anyone who reflects upon this will find meaning and philosophical significance in this abuse, for it was something that Allah *the Almighty* Himself wanted in order to test the believers and find out - and Allah knows best - which of them were firm in their faith.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Do men think that on their [mere] saying, "We have attained to faith," they will be left to themselves, and will not be put to a test?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 2) We have already previously made it clear that faith is not merely a phrase that is said. Rather, it is a responsibility that demands action. It is for that very reason that the disbelievers of Mecca refused to utter the words of faith - they were fully aware of their true significance because they were a people who understood the power and meaning of words. The unshakeable resolve and stoicism of prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers prove that they had compared the degree of harm that human beings with their limited capacities could cause them in this world and that which Allah *the Almighty* could cause them in the Hereafter. Since the degree of harm that Allah *the Almighty* could cause them in the Hereafter would be consistent with His power and capacity, it is not something from which anyone could possibly escape. So, we say that there was a wisdom and philosophical significance to the abuse since, Allah *the Almighty* could have seized the enemies of His religion with the seizing of One Who is Almighty, All-Powerful if He *the Almighty* had so wished, just like He *the Almighty* seized the people of Noah by means of the Flood, the people of Pharaoh by drowning them and Qarun by making the ground swallow him up. But, instead, Allah *the Almighty* wanted them to receive their punishment at the hands of His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. Indeed, if a general punishment had come down upon them, they would probably have said that it was simply a natural disaster like earthquakes and volcanoes. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, addressing the believers: ‘Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will succour you against them...’ (*at-Tawba:* 14). Then Allah *the Almighty* comforts and consoles His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the words: ‘...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what we hold in store for those [deniers of the truth], or whether We cause you to die [before that retribution takes place – know that, in the end], it is unto Us that they will be brought back.’ (*Ghafir:* 77) Thus, there are two ways in which Allah *the Almighty* responds to this abuse: one in this world by giving His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* victory over them, like when He *the Almighty* says to him: ‘[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!’ (*al-Qamar:* 45); and one in the Hereafter on the Day of Rising. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘People will ask you about the Last Hour...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 63). The question which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked was directed towards two matters, the first of which was in order to show him up and give him something that he would find impossible to answer. There were certain matters which the Jews knew about from their own books and prophets, so they wanted to embarrass prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by asking him questions about them, thinking that he would be unable to respond because he was illiterate, having never learnt to read or write, and had never received instruction from any teacher. However, Allah *the Almighty* helped His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and taught him the answer. Then, when he answered their questions correctly, they would be overcome with fury and try to pick holes in his answer in order to prove to themselves that Prophet Muhammad did not really know the answer. An example of this was the question they asked about the People of the Cave when they asked him how long they had remained there. Allah *the Almighty* replied to them by saying: ‘And, ‘They remained in their cave three hundred years’; and some have added nine [to that number]!’ (*al-Kahf:* 25)

They replied, ‘According to what we know, they remained there for three hundred years, so where do you get those extra years from?’ But they were ignorant of the fact that divine rituals in religion are always measured according to the lunar calendar and not according to the movements of the sun. This is because the sun can only tell us when days begin and end, not when months begin and end. As for the Arab lunar calendar, it does have a sign that distinguishes the months from each other and that is the appearance of the new moon at the start of each month. If you were to compare the lunar year to the Christian solar year, you would find the lunar year to be shorter than the solar year by eleven days. Therefore, three hundred Christian years is the equivalent of three hundred and nine Muslim lunar years. It is as if they wanted to show Muhammad to be ignorant, so Allah *the Almighty* showed them that they were the ignorant ones. And it is amazing that the Jews would object to this method of reckoning time, since it was the very same method of measuring time that was used by Moses *Allah’s peace be upon him* in worshipping his Lord. Did Allah *the Almighty* Himself not say: ‘and [then] we appointed for Moses thirty nights [on Mount Sinai]; and we added to them ten, whereby the term of forty nights set by his Sustainer was fulfilled...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 142)?

Allah’s words: ‘...and some have added nine [to that number]’ (*al-Kahf:* 25) are eloquent and miraculous in terms of the way they are expressed since they indicate that the extra nine years came about from within the three hundred years and are not outside of them. Then they asked him about a man who wandered the earth, so Allah *the Almighty* sent down the words: ‘And they will ask you about The Two-Horned One...’ (*al-Kahf:* 83). That should have been enough to show them the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and make them ask themselves how he could possibly know such things when he was illiterate and had never received instruction from any teacher. That is why we say that, although it is a defect for any human being to be illiterate, it was a mark of honour and distinction with respect to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since it proved their accusations that a human being had instructed him to be false. Rather, it was his Lord who instructed him.

In the same way, the community to whom the Quran was revealed was also illiterate. This fact was also a mark of honour with respect to them, if their community had been noted for its culture and learning, people would have said that Islam was simply an example of them taking their civilisation to the next level. But the fact is that they were an illiterate people governed by means of a tribal system whereby each individual tribe had its own structure and laws and its own leader. But despite that, a person came from amongst those people with a universal system of governance that was suitable for administrating the entire world from then until the end of time. And that is not possible without a Divine Way of Guidance. So, with respect to the Arabs, illiteracy was a mark of honour. Another mark of honour was their inability to imitate the Quran or produce anything like it, since the fact that Allah *the Almighty* challenged them with the literary style of the Quran proves how great they were when it came to using language - one does not challenge one who is weak in something, one only challenges those who are strong and proficient. So, the fact that Allah *the Almighty* challenged the Arabs to do this bears witness to the fact that they were the most eloquent of creation and the most skilled in the use of language. So the miracle that was sent to them was in that field in which they were unsurpassed.

Then the Jews asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Last Hour: ‘People will ask thee about the Last Hour...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 63). When it says that they asked about the Last Hour, it means that they asked about the Day of Rising, since they denied its occurrence. Indeed, it was in their own best interests that such a day never comes since, on it, they would be questioned and taken to task for the crimes that they perpetrated in this world, including tyranny, associating others with Allah *the Almighty,* quarrelsomeness, slander, and spilling the blood of others. If these people were to look at matter of the resurrection and reckoning with their intellects - not with Quranic texts - they would discover that it is something that is completely logical and that will inevitably come to pass. Take us, for example: we were contemporaries of the rise of the Communist Party in Russia in 1917 and saw how they seized the feudal lords and capitalists in their country and punished them, doing terrible things to them and confiscating their possessions and holdings as a repayment for the injustice that they had visited upon the people. To these communists we used to say, ‘It is indeed logical to seek retribution from those who have oppressed you, but what about all those other tyrants and oppressors who died before your time or slipped from your grasp because you were unable to get to them in time? By Allah, if some people were to come to you and lead you to the place where one of these tyrants was living, would you not praise him and thank him for his help? So how about if he were to say to you that he would fetch the tyrant himself, then take him to task and exact vengeance upon him? Would that not be of help to you in your task of taking revenge upon the tyrants and oppressors?' That is why we say, 'Communists should be the first people to believe in the Day of Rising, the Resurrection, and the Reckoning, since on that day they can set matters right and get recompense from those who slipped from their grasp.' Another thing - do you not, whatever legislative system you follow, strive to create systematised and organised laws? What are laws but sets of rules that define for citizens what it is they can and cannot do? Do these laws of yours not contain the principle of rewarding those who do right and punishing those who fall short? It is inevitable in every society that there will be people who operate outside the system and so deserve to be punished. But what will the punishment be for those who, despite the extent of their corruption and tyranny, are able to deceive the entire society and conceal their crime?

Therefore, we must believe that there is another power from whom nobody can hide, whom nobody can deceive and from whom nobody can flee; a power that knows people's secret crimes, exposes them and calls them to account for them. This inevitably and naturally drives you to believe in Allah *the Almighty* as well as in the fact that He *the Almighty* is All-Aware and All Knowing: '...and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything living or dead, but is recorded in...' (*al-An'am:* 59).

Why do you deny that the Rising will occur when your own earthly organisations and governments enlist spies and intelligence operatives and listen in to the hushed whispers of the people in order to find out who is trying to operate unnoticed by the law? Is it not an example of Allah's bounteous grace that He *the Almighty* knows what is kept hidden from you and retaliates against your opponents on your behalf? It is natural and instinctive for man to believe in the Rising and Reckoning which is why you find those who deny them are those who have transgressed against themselves and fear the punishment that awaits them on that day. So, the only thing left for them is to deny it and refuse to acknowledge its occurrence. For them, it is as if fleeing from it solves the problem. The chapter of *al-Kahf* (the cave) provides us with a good example of one of these people, and that is the companion of the garden who said: ‘And neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come...’ (*al-Kahf:* 36), after having transgressed against himself and been ungrateful for the blessings that Allah *the Almighty* had given him, And then when he came to and came back to his nature, he said: ‘...But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Sustainer, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!’ (*al-Kahf:* 36) Because his instinct to reject was more dominant, he used an expression of doubt when he said: ‘...But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Sustainer...’ (*al-Kahf:* 36). In other words, ‘And even supposing that I am brought before my Lord on the Day of Rising, He will have something in store for me there that is better than what he gave me in this world, for just as He honoured in this world, He will also honour me there.’

This is, however, a wrong-sighted and foolish belief, since Allah *the Almighty* only honours in the Hereafter those who honour themselves in this world by following the Divine Program He *the Almighty* has set up for them. Those who do not honour themselves by following Allah’s Divine Program here will never be honoured by Him there. We often hear people say, ‘I make my supplication, but Allah did not answer me’, especially women. One time, a woman came to me, complaining that she had turned in supplication to Allah *the Almighty* and yet, despite that, her daughter had not married, her son had not got such-and-such and her husband had not got such-and-such. So I said to her, ‘Lots of good things have come to you. Firstly, you have the knowledge that you have a Lord with whom you can take refuge in times of hardship, unlike those about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘yet when the misfortune decreed by us befell them, they did not humble themselves...’ (*al-An‘am:* 43). Let me ask you something: did you first answer Allah *the Almighty* with regard to the things He *the Almighty* asked of you, so that now you are in a position to expect Him to answer you with regard to the things you ask of Him? Did you answer Allah *the Almighty* with regard to this hair of yours? Did you answer Him with regard to your see-through clothes and the way you have changed Allah’s creation?’ The only response that she had to this was to say, ‘By Allah, my heart is pure and I harm no one...etc.' So, you take Allah *the Almighty* to task for not answering you when you supplicate to Him, but do not take yourselves to task for not answering Him when He *the Almighty* calls on you, despite the fact that He *the Almighty* called on you first. If you first strive to answer Allah's call to you, then you can be confident that He *the Almighty* will answer your call to Him. Now, let us return to the topic at hand, which was our discussion of the question that was related in the Noble Quran. By asking about the Last Hour, the questioner either wants to gain certainty that it is going to happen or thinks that it is taking too long to come, and wants it to happen now. Questions appear often in the Book of Allah *the Almighty* and the reason for that is because the Quran was not revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in one go. No, rather, it was revealed in instalments according to the events that unfolded around him in order to give people the opportunity to ask questions about them. And these questions either came about as a challenge to prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or a request for more information about the rulings which Allah *the Almighty* had sent down to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Such latter form of question came from those who were passionate in their belief and wanted every movement they made in life to be based completely upon the guidance their faith brought them. These people even ask about matters whose roots stretched back into the time of ignorance before Islam. Why did they ask when these actions had been affirmed by Islam? Because they wanted the actions upon which their lives were built to be based on worship, not pre-Islamic custom. When dealing with questions such as these, the Quran says on one occasion: 'And they will ask you about [woman's] monthly courses. Say: 'It is an impurity...' (*al-Baqara:* 222). So, when prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked this question, he did not say, 'It is a vulnerable condition' because he was not the one giving the answer, he was merely passing on a message from Allah *the Almighty* for it was Allah *the Almighty* who had said those words. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, '...Say: 'It is an impurity...'(*al-Baqara:* 222). The word *qul* (Say) is part of what Allah *the Almighty* said to me, and I am transmitting what He *the Almighty* said, word for word, exactly the same as He *the Almighty* said it to me.

Amazingly, some people call for the omission of the word ‘say’ from the Quran on the basis that it adds nothing new to the meaning. In fact, this word in question proves the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the fact that what he brought was divine and not out of him. He is no more than a conveyor of Allah’s Message. Allah orders him to ‘say’ and he conveyed it exactly as it was. For example, Allah says, ‘And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say, “What you can spare.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 219) Allah *the Almighty* also says elsewhere: ‘They ask you as to what they should spend. Say, “Whatever wealth you spend, it is for the parents and the near of kin.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 215)

However, the Arabic word for ‘say’ sometimes appears in the Quran linked to the conjunction *fa* and sometimes not. Why is that? This is one of the miraculous features of the linguistic construction of the Quran. Whenever it is used directly without the conjunction, it indicates that the question has already been asked such as the question in the verse that reads: ‘They ask you concerning the new moon. Say, “They are times appointed for [the benefit of] men and [for] the pilgrimage.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 189) While when it is linked to the conjunction, it indicates that the question had not been asked yet but would be asked in the future, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And they ask you about the mountains. Say, “My Lord will carry them away from the roots.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 105) Thus, it means when they ask you in the future about the mountains, say, O Prophet Muhammad, ‘My Lord will carry them away from the roots’. The answer was prepared in advance for a question that would inevitably be asked by them. Such is another instance of the miraculous nature of the Noble Quran as they could have abstained from asking that question. However, no way anyone can contradict the Speech of Allah or His Knowledge!

Since Allah says that they will say it, they will most definitely say it. Similarly, is the case we made very clear when we discussed the verse that reads: ‘Perdition overtake both hands of Abu Lahab and he will perish. His wealth and what he earns will not avail him. He shall soon burn in fire that flames and his wife, the bearer of fuel, upon her neck a halter of strongly twisted rope.’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5) Allah decreed that this stubborn disbeliever would die as a disbeliever and that he and his wife would end up in the

Hellfire. Abu Lahab and his wife heard these verses and knew that they were true. Yet, they did not believe, not even hypocritically, while others whose disbelief and stubborn rejection of Allah were even stronger such as `Amr ibn Al-`As and Khalid ibnul Walid, among many others, did believe in Allah.

That is because the One Who passed that judgement and informed us that Abu Lahab would never believe, knew that he would meet his end in that state, no matter how often he was warned. Abu Lahab was a striking example of the inanity of disbelievers for if he were to have gone to one of the assemblies of Quraysh after the revelation of those verses and announced his acceptance of the religion of Islam; he would have embarrassed the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and proved the falsehood of the Quran. Nevertheless, he did not and would never do it despite that he was a human being with free will.

Moreover, there is only one verse in the Quran where the answer for the question appears without being preceded by the word 'say', whether linked to the conjunction or not. That verse reads: 'And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near.' (*al-Baqara:* 186) Why is that? Scholars observed that the question here is related to Allah and thereby He answers it directly with no intermediary. The question was about something which was near and directly connected to you, thus the answer is also direct and immediate.

Before, we mentioned the aspects of the words relating to what they ask you. Next comes the Hour, about which they asked. The Arabic word for the Hour is the same as a clock (a well-known instrument) which tells the time during the day or night, equally for there is no hour longer than another. The clock or sundial that the Arabs invented was a repeater clock using water. It was a tank from which drops of water were dripping. Every drop of water that fell would cause the hands of the clock to make an equal move. The reason a clock used the same word as hour was because the hour was the shortest division of time for day and night known of at that time. It was only after that that we came to know of the minute, the second, and the milliseconds.

The Arabs in particular, were so keen to calculate time, thus thought of creating an instrument to measure it because Islam is based entirely around acts of worship with prescribed times during which they must be performed. Hence, they invent the clock. Therefore, it seems that Allah, by calling the Day of Judgement an Hour, is using the nature of human beings; He is saying that the Hour that you are waiting for is like that instrument of measuring the times that make up the movements of your lives. That is why Shawqi *Allah rest his soul* said:

Every heartbeat that a man has is telling him
That life is minutes and seconds

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to both the technical hour and the Hour saying: ‘And at the time when the hour shall come, the guilty shall swear [that] they did not tarry but an hour.’ (*ar-Rum:* 55) Thus, Allah brings together the Hour that refers to the Day of Judgement and the hour that is part of our days and nights. Thus, the meaning of the verse under discussing is that people will ask whether the Day of Judgement exists or not. However, when you tell them it does exist, they will say, ‘Then bring to us what you threaten us with, if you are of the truthful ones.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 70)

Allah mentions the inquiry of people about the Last Hour twice in the Quran. The first one occurs in the verse we are discussing, while the second is in the chapter of *ash-Shura* where Allah says, ‘Allah it is who revealed the Book with truth, and the balance, and what shall make you know that haply the hour be near?’ (*ash-Shura:* 17) We first notice that the Arabic word for near is not in the feminine form even though the word Hour is feminine. The scholars said that the reason for this is that it refers to the time when the Hour will occur and the word for time is masculine. Thus, the meaning of the verse is, ‘And what shall make you know that haply the hour be near’. Some of the grammarians say that the Arabic word for near has the morphological form *fa`il* which remains the same regardless of whether it is in the masculine or feminine as in verse where Allah says, ‘and the angels after that are the aiders’ (*at-Tahrim:* 4).

We notice that in the first verse, Allah adds the verb ‘to be’ in the first verse, whereas, in the second verse, He omits it. Why is this? Scholars say that is because there are two types of questions that were asked about the Last

Hour, one about whether it existed or not and the other about a secondary matter that followed on from the fact that it did exist.

In our grammar lessons, we teach our students about (*kana*) and her sister verbs. Grammatically speaking, *kana* is a defective past tense verb that puts the predicate in the nominative case and the object in the accusative case. However, it can sometimes be used as an intransitive complete verb, making do with its subject, as in the verse: ‘And if [the debtor] is in hardship’ (*al-Baqara:* 280). Thus, Allah replies in these two verses to those who asked questions about the Last Hour, either because they denied its existence or because they believed in it but wanted to know when it was going to come.

As for the statement: ‘what shall make you know’ (*ash-Shura:* 17), it means who informed you of such-and-such a time as you ask someone; ‘did you know of something’?

In ‘*Ilm al-Usul* (the science of the principles of Islamic Jurisprudence), they divide knowledge into two types: ‘*ilm al-diraya* (the science of comprehending the text of Hadith), and ‘*ilm al-riwaya* (science of the narration of prophetic tradition). *Ilm al-riwaya* is like the one who memorises the Noble Quran in all its seven, ten, or fourteen variant readings, without knowing the meanings of its verses. This is because He, only, has the knowledge of the Quran, at the level of *riwaya*. As for the one who specialises in the commentary of the Quran and understanding its rulings and meanings, his knowledge is called knowledge of *diraya*. From this, we can say that *diraya* is: knowing something in a detailed way, while *riwaya* is: knowing something in a general way

It is due to Allah’s wisdom that those who have memorised the Noble Quran are — except in a few cases — not themselves scholars; for when scholars fail to remember a word while reciting the Quran, they are often driven by their learning to insert another word with a similar meaning, such as, for example, replacing *tabayyanu* (check it) with *tathabbatu*(1) (verify it); whereas those who have memorised the Quran by *riwaya* alone, when confronted by the same situation, will not recite beyond that point until they remember the word they have forgotten. It is by this that Allah *Glorified is He* preserves His Words.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘(Hence,) O you who have attained to faith, when you go forth (to war) in Allah's Cause, use your discernment...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 94).

One thing we notice about this word *(diraya)* is that sometimes it comes in the present tense, as in: *wa ma yudrika* '...How do you know?' (*ash-Shura:* 17), and sometimes it comes in the past tense, as in: *wa ma adraka* 'what made you know...' (*al-Mursalat:* 14). Each of these two usages has its own special significance: when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...How do you know?...' (*ash-Shura:* 17), it means that there is no way that anyone could ever tell you about this matter, not now and not in the future; whereas when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'what made you know...' (*al-Mursalat:* 14), it indicates that it was not possible for anyone to tell you about this matter before, but it is possible for Us to tell you about it now.

Examples of this (*wa ma adraka)* include Allah's words: 'And what makes you know what *Saqar* [scorching Fire] is? It spares nothing and leaves nothing.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 26-28) He also says: 'And what made you know what the Day of Judgement is? Woe, that Day, to the deniers.' (*al-Mursalat:* 14-15) He also says: 'The Inevitable Hour. What is the Inevitable Hour? And what made you know what the Inevitable Reality is?' (*al-Haqqa:* 1-4) He also says: 'The Striking Calamity. What is the Striking Calamity? And what could make you know what the Striking Calamity is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 1-4) He also says: 'But he has not broken through the difficult pass. And what could make you know what [breaking through] the difficult pass is? It is the freeing of a slave. Or feeding on a day of severe hunger.' (*al-Balad:* 11-14)

He also says: 'But as for one whose scales are light, his refuge will be an abyss. And what could make you know what that is? It is a Fire, intensely hot.' (*al-Qari`a:* 8-11) He also says: 'and what made you know what the Day of Recompense is? Then, what made you know what the Day of Recompense is? It is the Day when a soul will not possess for another soul [power to do] a thing; and the command, that Day, is [entirely] with Allah.' (*al-Infitar:* 17-19) He also says: 'Indeed, We sent the Quran down during the Night of Decree. And what made you know what the Night of Decree is? The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months.' (*al-Qadr:* 1-3)

So, every time the phrase, 'And what made you know...' is used, it means that you did not know about it before, but Allah *Glorified is He* will tell you about it now or in the future. As for *wa ma yudrika*: '...How would you know?' (*al-Ahzab:* 63), it means that the matter under discussion is unknown and will remain unknown since Allah *Glorified is He* is not going to tell you about it. The timing of the Last Hour falls under this category: 'How would you [Prophet] know? The Hour may well be near.' (*al-Ahzab:* 63)

The True Lord did not inform us of its time because, sometimes, things can be more clearly shown by being left concealed. Allah *Glorified is He*, for example, keeps the time of our death secret from us, so, no human being knows when he will die. This concealment makes us expect it in every moment of our lives, and that makes death all the more real for us.

In the same way, Allah *Glorified is He* hides *laylatu al-Qadr* (the Night of Decree) among the final ten nights of *Ramadan* because He does not want you to simply to strive to worship Him on a single night, but wants you to strive to worship throughout those ten nights so that your reward is increased and so that you come to love worship for its sake and not simply for the reward that it brings.

Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* has hidden the timing of the Last Hour from us so that we may be in a state of constant expectation, awaiting it at every moment. Such a state is more conducive towards going straight and fearing to commit acts of disobedience since, for all you know, the Last Hour might come when you are engaged in an act of disobedience to Allah *Glorified is He*. So, it is precisely by keeping it obscure that it is made manifest.

It is one of the aims of the True Lord to make sure that rulings apply at all times since, if man were to know when his appointed time is, he would be on the loose (make his way through life without restraint): he would do whatever bad things he want to do and then repent just before he dies. That is the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* does not make death have a cause. So, when someone dies without a cause, you say that he died because he was dying. He spoke truly who said, 'When death comes without any cause, it is the cause.'

May Allah have mercy on Shawqi for what he wrote about death when he said:

> When it comes to death and what causes it, man is powerless
> For he is held hostage by the contents of his book
> By your life, the one who dies by the claws of a lion

Is the same, at the moment of death, as he who dies by its fangs
If death overlooks you, then every medicine will be of benefit,
But if it does not, then medicine will be one of its helpers.

How often do we see sick people die because of an injection that they are given by the doctor to cure them or because their operation was unsuccessful. A poet spoke truly when he said:

Glory be to the one who inherits doctors and their medicine
And shows the patient death at the hands of his doctors

Despite this, Allah *Glorified is He*, due to His kindness and mercy, has given us signs that tell us when it is coming; both minor signs and major signs. That is why the True Lord says about the Last Hour: 'The Hour is coming, though I almost keep it hidden...' (*Ta Ha:* 15). That is, 'I have almost removed its hiddenness by the minor and major signs I have given of its coming, for it is close at hand.' We said, before, that the *hamza* in *ukhfiha* is a *hamza* of removal .i.e., remove its hiddenness. It is very much like the *hamza* in *a'jama* (obscurity), for you say *a'jama al-kitab*' .i.e. he removed the obscurity and ambiguity of the book by putting in the diacritic dots on the letters. It is for that reason that books that clarify the meanings of words are known as *ma'ajim* (lexicons). This meaning of removal can also be added to a verb by doubling its middle radical, as in *qashshartu al-burtuqala* meaning, I removed the *qishra* (peel) of (the orange).

As for: '...How would you know?...' (*ash-Shura:* 17), it means, 'No one will tell you about it nor will I'. In the same way that the True Lord withheld the knowledge of the Final Hour from creation, He also withheld it from His beloved Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If He were to have told anyone about the Last Hour, He would have told His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* even if that meant telling Him in secret without him then conveying it to others, but this never happened. This is why when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the Last Hour, He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'The one who is asked (he himself) knows no more about it than the one who asks.'(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 50; and by Muslim in his Sahih 10 in Kitab Al-'Iman in a Hadith from Abu Hurayra that among what Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him said=*

Then, the True Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَعَنَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ سَعِيرًا ﴿٦٤﴾
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ۖ لَّا يَجِدُونَ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿٦٥﴾

God has rejected the disbelievers and prepared a blazing fire for them [64] There they will stay permanently, with no one to befriend or support them [65] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 64-65)

By *la'ana* the unbelievers, means that He has removed them out of His mercy and sent them far way in this world '...and prepared a blazing fire for them.' (*al-Ahzab:* 64) That is, it is a fire that flares up, blazes and burns fiercely. This is what happens to them in the Hereafter on that day about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We shall say to Hell on that day, 'Are you full?' and it will reply, 'Are there no more?'' (*Qaf:* 30)

This blazing fire will remain forever, never going out, and '…There they will stay permanently...' (*al-Ahzab:* 65). We have heard some scholars say about the word *abada* (eternally or permanently), that it is mentioned in every verse that talks about the delights of paradise but never mentioned in reference to the punishment of the unbelievers on the Day of Rising. However, those who say this cannot have read the Quran thoroughly, for the phrase: '…There they will stay permanently...' (*al-Ahzab:* 65), containing the word *abada* (permanently), is mentioned twice with reference to the unbelievers: the first time, here in this verse which we are currently discussing; and the second time in the chapter of *al-Jinn* when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger will have hell's fire as his permanent home.' (*al-Jinn:* 23)

The fact that Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the word *abada* in every single verse that refers to the delights of paradise but only twice when the verse refers to the people of hellfire is one of the ways that His Mercy to His slaves

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= *to the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He peace and blessings be upon him when he had taken on the form of man was, 'Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, when will the Last Hour arrive?' The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'The one who is asked knows no more about it than the one who asks.'*

manifests itself, since it shows that His mercy precedes His anger, thus emphasising to the believers that the delights of paradise will abide forever. By contrast, when He refers to the recompense of the disbelievers, He says *khalidin fiha* (timelessly in it) without using the word *abada*, (permanently). Perhaps the reason He does that is to soften the hearts of those disbelievers so that they might incline to the Path of Allah *Glorified is He* Who was merciful to them.

In these two verses, He only mentions the word *abada*, (permanently) to establish the principle. It is part of Allah's mercy to us that He gives the good news first and then gives the warning as gently as possible. This divine act of wisdom is purposeful and has often borne considerable fruit since it was a doorway through which many disbelievers embraced the faith and became believers. We previously mentioned the story (1) of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and the guest who came and knocked on his door. When Ibrahim *peace be upon him* asked him about his religion and discovered that he was not a believer, he shut the door in his face, and the man went on his way. However, Allah *Glorified is He* straightaway criticised His Prophet, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* for doing so and said to him, 'Ibrahim! I have given him what he needs from my kingdom for his entire life despite the fact that he disbelieved in Me, so do you want him to change his religion for one single night of your hospitality?' Consequently, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* hurried after the man until he caught him up and invited him to come back and enjoy his hospitality, so the man said, 'Did you not just deny me your hospitality a short while ago?' Ibrahim *peace be upon him* replied, 'Yes, but my Lord reproached me for what I had done to you.' When he heard that, the man said, 'What an excellent Lord! A Lord who reproaches His pious worshippers on behalf of His enemies! I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.'

The disbelievers' permanent stay in hellfire will be '...with no one to befriend or support them.' (*al-Ahzab:* 65), i.e. no possessor (other than Allah) who would take care of them, '...or support them.' (*al-Ahzab:* 65) That is, there will be none to help or defend them.

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(1) *The story of the guest of Ibrahim peace be upon him with his disbelieving guest*

Then, the True Lord says:

يَوْمَ تُقَلَّبُ وُجُوهُهُمْ فِي ٱلنَّارِ يَقُولُونَ يَٰلَيْتَنَآ أَطَعْنَا ٱللَّهَ وَأَطَعْنَا ٱلرَّسُولَا۠ ﴿٦٦﴾

On the Day when their faces are being turned about in the Fire, they will say, ‘If only we had obeyed God and the Messenger’ [66] (The Quran, *al-Ahẓab:* 66)

After mentioning the eternity that the unbelievers would spend in the Hellfire, the True Lord, then, provides a description of the state they will be in when they are there, saying: ‘‘On the Day when their faces are being turned about in the Fire...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 66). *Tuqlabu* is the verb, while *taqlib* is the noun which means changing something from one state to another. Another example of its usage is found in Allah’s words: ‘[Prophet], do not be deceived by the disbelievers’ [lucrative] trading to and fro in the land: this is only a brief enjoyment, after which Hell will be their home—a miserable resting place!’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 196-197) That is, the trips they used to make between Syria and Yemen, the trade they used to conduct on those trips and the wealth they accumulated on account of that trade.

As for Allah’s words, ‘On the Day when their faces are being turned about in the Fire...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 66), they mean when the angels turn them over. So, every time one side of their bodies is fully cooked, they turn them on to their other side, just as we do when we are cooking a kebab skewer over the fire in order to ensure that every part of the kebab is cooked.

The reason that the face is specifically mentioned is because it is the noblest part of the body by which a person is identified. Indeed, both *wajahah* (Honour) and *wajih* (Honourable), which are two words indicating nobility and honour, are derived from *wajh*, the Arabic word for face. Being the noblest part of the body, all the other parts of the body protect and defend it. We previously posed the following hypothetical question: if a car were to speed past you and spray your face and clothes with mud, what would you do? You would first turn your attention to your face and remove the muck that had landed there and then you would move on to your clothes.

To understand the important position that the face occupies, you should read Allah’s words: ‘What about the one who will only have his bare face to protect him from his terrible suffering on the Day of Resurrection?…' (*az-Zumar:* 24). The punishment that he will be subjected to will be so severe that he even uses the noblest part of his body, his face, as a shield to protect him from it.

Taqlib could also mean being moved from one punishment to another. The True Lord paints numerous pictures for us of how the faces of the unbelievers will be when they are in the Hellfire, may Allah *Glorified is He* protect us from that. In one place, He says: 'On the Day of Resurrection, you [Prophet] will see those who told lies against God, their faces darkened…' (*az-Zumar:* 60). In another, He says: 'and on that Day there will be the sad and despairing faces* of those who realize that a great calamity is about to befall them.' (*al-Qiyama:* 24-25)

Thus, the face does not take on a single form in the hellfire, but takes on many different forms and appears in many different states, indicating the many different forms of punishment and pain to which they will be subjected. The face is the primary guide to identify a person and what is going on inside of him. So, for example, when a companion of yours changes towards you, you notice that in his face and ask him: 'what are you turning your face away from me?' Those disbelievers say — while they are being overturned and tossed into the fire: '…"If only we had obeyed Allah and the Messenger."' (*al-Ahzab:* 66) It was those same people who, yesterday, had been giving affront to Allah *Glorified is He*, His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers.

As for the word *yalaytana* (derived from *layt*) in: '…If only we had...' (*al-Ahzab:* 66), it is used to indicate wishful thinking: a wish the self wants and fixates itself upon even though it is highly unlikely to ever come about. In fact, generally speaking, it is used to indicate that which is impossible, just as the poet once said:

> If only that youth could return one day
> And be told what old age had done.

And also in the verse of another:

> If only the planets could be brought close to me so I could arrange them
> Into necklaces in your honour since my words alone do not gratify you.

One's youth never returns nor are the planets brought close to anyone. These are merely things for which the selves wish. It is exactly the same for the disbelievers who wish, in the Hereafter, that they had obeyed Allah and obeyed His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. There is no way that those wishes will be of any avail, since the time for doing that will have already passed.

Then, the True Lord mentions their counter argument as to why they did not obey Allah *Glorified is He* and they did not obey His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when He says:

وَقَالُواْ رَبَّنَآ إِنَّآ أَطَعۡنَا سَادَتَنَا وَكُبَرَآءَنَا فَأَضَلُّونَا ٱلسَّبِيلَا۠ ٦٧
رَبَّنَآ ءَاتِهِمۡ ضِعۡفَيۡنِ مِنَ ٱلۡعَذَابِ وَٱلۡعَنۡهُمۡ لَعۡنٗا كَبِيرٗا ٦٨

And 'Lord! We obeyed our masters and our chiefs, and they led us astray [67] Lord! Give them a double punishment and reject them completely' [68] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 67 - 68)

Sadah is the plural of *sayyid*: a leader of others whose orders are obeyed and are changed by no one. As for *kubara'a*, they are those who take on positions of authority among their people according to how great the service that they do for them is. Masters and chiefs do not occupy such positions for nothing, but rather attain them because of the gifts and capabilities within them that make them worthy of such positions. That is why people have no objection to addressing them with the words, 'My master.' They have paid the price for their leadership and so they are the true leaders and masters.

Leadership can also be taken by force and the might of arms, without the leader presenting anything that makes him worthy of leading his people. This is a usurpation of leadership and people hate it. Therefore, Islamic Law does not disregard true leadership or the nobility and status that certain people occupy in society, but considers that to have monetary value in what can be called 'Faces Company', in which each partner's capital is not his money, but rather his honour, his position in society and the love and respect that people have for him.

People love this true leadership where the leadership is taken by right because they love to reap its benefits. The same is not true with stolen leadership where the leadership has been taken by force. The people derive no benefit from it whatsoever. On the contrary, it brings them harm and consumes their possessions and resources.

For this reason, slave-hood is a concept that we despise when it refers to the enslavement of one man to another because slave-hood gives the good of the slave to his master. By contrast, all pride lies in slave-hood being for Allah *Glorified is He*, whereby the slave takes good from his Master.

Reflect on how Allah *Glorified is He* made slave-hood to Him a mark of nobility for our master, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a means of honouring, when He addresses him, saying: ‘Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship…’ (*al-Isra’:* 1) So, Muhammad’s slave-hood to Allah *Glorified is He* was what allowed him to reach a station with his Lord that no other human being had ever managed to reach. The poet(1) spoke truly when he said:

It is sufficient pride for me that I am a slave
Welcomed without need for appointments, by his Lord
He, in His sanctity, is the Most Mighty,
But I meet with Him whenever and wherever I wish!

If you want to meet your Lord, the matter is in your hands, for it is you who specifies the time and place of the meeting: whether in the street or at home; whether at work or in the mosque. The only thing you have to do is perform *wudu’* and say *Allahu akbar* (Allah is the Greatest), and you are at once in the Presence of your Lord. Then, it is you who brings the meeting to an end if you want to, for your Lord does not become tired of your company until you become tired of His. What greater honour could there be than this?

On the other hand, if you wanted to meet a president or a minister in this world, there would be many bridges you would have to cross and obstacles you would have to overcome before you would be able to do so. Even then, you would have no say with respect to the arrangement of the meeting. He would specify the time and place and even what you would be permitted to say during it. Then, he would bring it to its end.

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(1) *From a poem written by Sheikh As- Sha’rawi himself*

By contrast, your slave-hood to Allah *Glorified is He* is different, for your Lord is the One Who asks you to come into His Presence and He is the One Who grows angry when you do not respond to His invitation. What an excellent lord your Lord is! What an excellent form of slave-hood your slave-hood to Him is!

Here, in the verse we are discussing, the disbelievers throw the blame at the feet of their masters and chiefs, saying: '…'We obeyed our masters and our chiefs, and they led us astray.' (*al-Ahzab:* 67) By this, they want to take revenge upon their masters and chiefs, and give themselves some relief by seeing them also being punished as payment for plunging them into idolatry and encouraging them to commit acts of disobedience. They will say: ''Lord! Give them a double punishment...' (*al-Ahzab:* 68), i.e. give them double the punishment because their misguidance was doubled too: they were themselves misguided and they misguided others.

In another part of the Quran, the True Lord tells us what the disbelievers say on the Day of Resurrection: '…'Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misled us and we shall trample them underfoot so that they may be among the lowest of the low.'' (*Fussilat:* 29)

Indeed, there are many verses in the Quran in which the conversations which circulate among the disbelievers are related and the accusations that they level at one another, such as what Satan is narrated as saying: '...'I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with God before. A bitter torment awaits such wrongdoers.'' (*Ibrahim:* 22) They were not content with their leaders receiving double the punishment, but also wanted them to be rejected; not just rejected, but rejected completely: '...and reject them completely.' (*al-Ahzab:* 68) The rejection is because they themselves went astray, and it should be complete because they led others astray.

One thing we notice here is that whenever the Lord is addressed, no vocative particle is used. Why is that? Because, they say, the vocative uses different particles depending upon the distance between you and the addressee. You use the vocative to ask someone to come to you. If someone is right beside you, you say, for example, 'Mohamed, do such-and-such'; if someone is some distance away, you say, '*a* Mohamed...'; if someone is even further away, you say, '*ya* Mohamed...'; and if they are a very long way away, you say, '*aya* Mohamed...'. The further you are from the addressee, the more extended the vocative particle, and the more you raise your voice.

So, what should you say when you call your Lord, since even if you are not close to Allah *Glorified is He*, He is close to you? You should not use any vocative particles whether those for calling a close one, nor those for calling a far one. That is why the word *rabbi* (my Lord), to address the Lord, appears in sixty-five verses in the Quran without a vocative particle. The first instance of that is the call of Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: '…'My Lord, make this land secure...' (*al-Baqara:* 126). The last is that of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: ''My Lord, forgive me, my parents, and whoever enters my house as a believer. Forgive believing men and women...'' (*Nuh:* 28).

Sufficient proof of this closeness of Allah *Glorified is He* is found in His words: 'We created man — We know what his soul whispers to him: We are closer to him than his jugular vein.' (*Qaf:* 16) Therefore, when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, 'Is Allah near so we should commune with Him or far away so we should call out to Him?'(1) So, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the words: '[Prophet], if My servants ask you about Me, I am near...' (*al-Baqara:* 186).

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is close to us, and any distance that develops between you and Him is from you alone. The time when a slave usually finds himself closest to his Lord is when he is in trouble and distress, even if he had been far from Him before those troubles started. There are only two verses in the Book of Allah in which the Lord is addressed with the vocative particle *ya*, the first in His words: 'The Messenger has said, "O my Lord, my people treat this Quran as something to be shunned."' (*al-Furqan:* 30) The second is when He says: 'The Prophet has said, 'O My Lord…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 88).

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(1) *It is transmitted by As-Suyuti in 'Asbab An-nuzul p. 30 and he attributed it to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawayh, Abu Shaykh and others in a Hadith from Mu'awiyya ibn Hayda who said, 'A desert Arab came to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'Is our Lord close to* us so that we may converse intimately with Him or far away so that we must call Him?' The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him remained silent until Allah Glorified is He revealed to him, 'And if my servants ask thee about Me – behold, I am near...' (*al-Baqara:* 186).

These two verses are relating the words of the Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so why was the vocative particle not used except when it was Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was calling upon his Lord? Some said: because our master, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was so passionate and concerned about his people being guided and his call being victorious and successful that his Lord even addressed him, saying: '[Prophet], are you going to worry yourself to death because they will not believe?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

The Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He peace and blessings be upon him* had gone through such difficulty that he had begun to see the victory as slow in coming, so Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following words to him: 'We support Our messengers and the believers in the present life...' (*Ghafir:* 51).

Despite this, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with him were very shaken, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: '...and they were so shaken that even [their] messenger and the believers with him cried, 'When will Allah's help arrive?'…' (*al-Baqara:* 214) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was frightened that he had gone far from his Lord, but that farness was simply a misgiving of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* or an accusation that he had levelled against himself.

When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to call on his Lord and complain to him that his people had abandoned the Quran, he addressed him from the station of one who is far, saying, *Ya rabbi* (O My Lord). It was as if he thought there was some shortcoming in himself or that he had failed in his task, and that had placed him far away from his Lord. His Lord showed him that he was in the right and emphasised his call, even going so far as to make an oath by it. The True Lord says: 'Consider his cry, "O My Lord, truly these are people who do not believe." So turn away from them and say, "Peace": they will come to know.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 88-89) In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* is saying, 'I swear by your call, Muhammad, in which you said: '…"O my Lord! My people treat this Quran as something to be shunned."' (*al-Furqan:* 30) The True Lord swears by what He wishes on what He wishes: He swears by the angels and by inanimate things, and He swears by the plants but never once does He swear by any jinn or human being except the Messenger

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in His words: ‘By your life [Prophet], they wandered on in their wild intoxication.’ (*al-Hijr:* 72) *La’amruka* means: ‘by your being granted life’ or ‘by your life, O Muhammad!’

Just as He swears by His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so, too, does He swear by his words: Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Consider his cry, ‘O My Lord, truly these are people who do not believe.’’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 88)

Then, the True Lord addresses His believing servants, saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّذِينَ ءَاذَوْا۟ مُوسَىٰ
فَبَرَّأَهُ ٱللَّهُ مِمَّا قَالُوا۟ ۚ وَكَانَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَجِيهًا (٦٩)

Believers, do not be like those who insulted Moses – God cleared him of their allegations and he was highly honoured in God’s eyes [69] (The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 69)

After speaking about those who caused affront to Allah *Glorified is He*, His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers, He clarifies that such behaviour is not something that is specifically directed against Muhammad, but has been the prevailing response against every messenger of Allah *Glorified is He peace be upon them*. Moreover, the prohibition against giving offence to Muhammad does not mean this behaviour is allowed with any of his fellow messengers *peace be upon them*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O Believers, do not be like those who insulted Moses. Allah cleared him of their allegations…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 69).

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had two distinct relationships in the course of delivering his message, one with the people of Pharaoh and one with the tribe of Israel. But Musa *peace be upon him* was not a messenger to the people of Pharaoh, he was only sent to the tribe of Israel. And that is why Musa and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* said to Pharaoh: ‘…‘We are your Lord’s messengers, so send the Children of Israel with us and do not oppress them…’ (*Ta Ha:* 47). So, his main aim was to free the tribe of Israel from the enslavement of Pharaoh. As for calling Pharaoh to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and showing him miracles to convince him to do that, he did that as a sideline to his main call to the tribe of Israel. Despite this, Musa *peace be upon him* was not safe from Pharaoh's attempts to harm him. Pharaoh said about him: '...'this messenger who has been sent to you is truly possessed.'' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 27) Pharaoh also said: 'Am I not better than this contemptible wretch who can scarcely express himself?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 52)

It was natural for Musa *peace be upon him* to suffer harm at the hands of Pharaoh since he had come to show the falseness of his self-proclaimed divinity; but how was it that he also suffered offence at the hands of the tribe of Israel, a people whom he can come to save from the clutches of Pharaoh, the torment and servitude which had been their daily lot in life?

Scholars said that the tribe of Israel gave offence to Musa *peace be upon him* by causing affront to the One Who sent him, Allah *Glorified is He*, when they said about Him: '…'Show us Allah face to face'...' (*an-Nisa':* 153); and when they said: '…'So Allah is poor, while we are rich…'' (*Al-'Imran:* 181).

Moreover, they gave offence to Musa *peace be upon him* when they said in protest about the Manna and Quails with which Allah *Glorified is He* had provided them: '…"Moses, we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth's produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions." He said, "Would you exchange better for worse? Go to Egypt and there you will find what you have asked for...' (*al-Baqara:* 61).

It is known that *mann* (manna), was a type of liquid resembling honey that fell from the trees in the early morning like morning dew; and that *salwa* were birds closely resembling Quails that Allah *Glorified is He* drove into their arms so that they did not have to tire themselves at all to get them. However, they were a people who did not believe in the Unseen and did not want that ready-made food. Rather, they wanted something tangible which they could grow and prepare by themselves.

Then, they abused Musa *peace be upon him* personally by accusing him of killing his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* when they both climbed the mountain(1) and Harun *peace be upon him* died there. They said, 'Musa harboured feelings of rancour towards his brother so he killed him.' For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* made the angels carry the body of Harun *peace be upon him* past the tribe of Israel so that they could see that it was whole and uninjured. That is the meaning of Allah's words: '...Allah cleared him of their allegations…' (*al-Ahzab:* 69).

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(1) *According to Ibn Abu Hatim, this was what 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah be pleased with him said. Ibn Kathir mentioned it in his Tafsir 3/520 in his commentary on this verse, saying, 'Musa and Harun peace be upon them went up the mountain and Harun peace be upon him=*

Others said, 'Rather, they accused Musa *peace be upon him* of having something wrong with his body because of the fact that he was so shy and modest, being very careful to always keep himself properly covered whenever he bathed or went to the toilet saying that he only did that in order to cover up some physical defect he had.'

Some of them said that he had leprosy, while others had the effrontery to accuse him of having something wrong with his reproductive organs. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to show him to be free of that which they ascribed to him, so, one day, when Musa *peace be upon him* went into the river to bathe, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded the rock on which he had placed his clothes to take them far away. So, Musa *peace be upon him* ran after the rock, calling out, 'O rock! My clothing! O rock! My clothing!' and the people saw him to be free of the defects of which they had accused him.(1)

= *died there. So, the tribe of Israel said to Musa peace be upon him 'You killed him because he was shyer and easier on us than yourself.' They continued to abuse him in that way until Allah Glorified is He commanded the angels to take up the body of Harun peace be upon him and carry him past the circles of the tribe of Israel and tell them about his death. None know where he is buried except from the vulture and Allah Glorified is He made it deaf and dumb.'*

(1) *From Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Musa peace be upon him was a shy man who kept himself fully covered. His shyness was so great that no portion of his skin was left visible. So, the tribe of Israel abused him on account of that and said, 'It can only be the fact that he has some defect in his body that causes him to cover himself thus - he must have leprosy or scrotal hernia or plague or some such thing.' Allah Glorified is He wanted to show Musa peace be upon him to be free of that which they ascribed to him. So, one day, Musa peace be upon him went alone to a secluded spot, placed his clothes upon a rock and bathed himself. Then, when he finished and had come back to the rock to take his clothes, the rock suddenly began to run away with them. So Musa peace be upon him took hold of his staff and walked naked, his body in the best form that Allah Glorified is He had created. And in that way Allah Glorified is He cleared him of the accusations that had levelled against him. Then the rock came to a halt so Musa peace be upon him took his clothes, put them on and struck the rock such a blow with his staff* =

It is also said that when the dispute between Qarun (Korah) and Musa *peace be upon him* came to a head, Qarun (Korah) hired a woman who was a prostitute to stand up in front of the people and accuse Musa *peace be upon him.* So, Allah *Glorified is He* willed it that when the people gathered around her, she said instead, 'Qarun (Korah) did such-and-such,' thereby clearing Musa *peace be upon him* of that which he had been accused.(1)

The True Lord says here: 'O Believers do not be like those who insulted Moses— Allah cleared him of their allegations…' (*al-Ahzab:* 69), first clearing him of defect and then establishing his nobility and honour

The True Lord says: '... and he was highly honored in Allah's eyes.' (*al-Ahzab:* 69) What greater honour could there possibly be than for Allah *Glorified is He* Himself to establish the innocence of Musa and show up the lies of his enemies? This great honour demonstrated that his hopes and supplications were accepted. Thus, no one would ever again have the effrontery to ascribe any defects to him or accuse him of a crime that he had not done because they knew that Musa *peace be upon him* had a Lord who protected him and defended him.

It is an example of the just way in which Allah *Glorified is He* deals with His creation that He recompenses anyone who is falsely accused of a crime that he has not done, by covering up a crime that he has actually done and not exposing him to the people: one in exchange for the other. This applied except for one thing in the case of Musa *peace be upon him*: when he saw that

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= *that, by Allah Glorified is He, it left three or four or five deep gashes in it. That is the meaning of Allah's words: 'O you who have attained to faith! Be not like those [children of Israel] who gave offence to Musa ...' (al-Ahzab: 69). It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 6/436.*

(1) *It is narrated by As-Suyuti in ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/436. He attributed it to Ibn Abu Shayba in Al-Musannaf; Ibn Al-Mundhir; Ibn Abu Hatim; Al-Hakim who classified it as sahih; and Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him that they accused him of fornication, and brought the woman forward, saying to her, 'Will you testify against Musa peace be upon him?' So Musa peace be upon him said to her, 'I entreat you to say nothing but the truth.' So she said, 'If you entreat me to tell the truth, then by Allah Glorified is He, they summoned me and gave me a wage in exchange for accusing you of fornicating with me. I bear witness that you are innocent of that, and that you are the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He.' So Musa peace be upon him fell to the ground in prostration to his Lord, weeping.*

his Lord has responded to his supplication, he was almost deceived by the extent of the generosity of his Lord towards him, and so he said, ‘O my Lord, since they said such-and-such about me. I ask you to prevent any more false sayings about me.’ So Allah *Glorified is He* replied, ‘O Musa, I did not do this for Myself (prevent people from speaking untruthfully of Allah), so how is it that I should do that for you?’ This meant that what they were saying about Allah *Glorified is He* was even worse than that.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* allowed disbelief to remain so that the hearts of all those who were treated ungratefully for whatever good they made could be at rest. It was as if He were saying, ‘Do not be sad, for I am your Creator and your Provider. Yet, they still disbelieved in Me and were ungrateful for what I had granted them.’ Then, the true Lord says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَقُولُواْ قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ﴿٧٠﴾ يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَٰلَكُمْ
وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٧١﴾

Believers, be mindful of God, speak in a direct fashion and to good purpose [70] and He will put your deeds right for you and forgive you your sins. Whoever obeys God and His Messenger will truly achieve a great triumph [71]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 70 - 71)

We previously discussed the meaning of *taqwa*, (being mindful and fearful of Allah), which is to shield yourself from your Lord’s Wrath. The True Lord has two types of attributes: those of Majesty and those of Beauty. The attributes of Beauty are bounteous favour, mercy, forgiveness, richness, benefit etc., while the attributes of Majesty are compulsion, revenge, seizing by force and so on. Thus, *taqwa* is to place between yourself and your Lord’s attributes of Majesty a shield that will protect you from them, for you will not be able to bear the grip or vengeance of Allah *Glorified is He*. Despite this, one of the men of knowledge said, ‘Strive to be fully with your Lord.’ That is possible because, by putting up a shield between yourself and your Lord’s attributes of Majesty, you are drawing near to His attributes of Beauty.

If you find yourself confused by the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* says: *wa ittaqu Allah*, ‘…“Beware of Allah...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 112) and: *wa ittaqu* *an-Nar*, ‘Beware of the Fire...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 131), then you should know that the fire is a soldier in the army of Allah’s Wrath and that; whoever has *taqwa* of Allah *Glorified is He* automatically has *taqwa* of the fire. Thus, there is no contradiction.

As for the meaning of Allah’s words: ‘...speak in a direct fashion and to good purpose’ (*al-Ahzab:* 70), the word *sadidan* means: true words lead to the truth. The word *sadid* is derived from the *sadad* (aiming) of an arrow when it hits the target and does not miss. Your target, in saying those words, is to find delight in The Essence of Allah *Glorified is He* in the Hereafter, and to throw aside the means of this world and live with the Causer of means.

In this world, when you want to eat, you must look to the food that has been prepared for you and consider the time, the effort, and the money it needed to be prepared. By contrast, in the Hereafter, the mere fact of your thinking about something causes it to appear in front of you. This state of being fully with your Lord is something you must assiduously strive to attain to.

Then, the True Lord mentions what will result from us speaking true words: ‘He will put your deeds right for you and forgive you your sins. Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will truly achieve a great triumph.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 71) That is: this will happen in the Hereafter. He described the triumph as mighty because, in this world you receive Allah’s gifts through the means He granted you, whereas in the Hereafter, you receive Allah’s gifts directly from the Essence of Allah *Glorified is He*; and there is nothing greater or mightier than this!

Then, the True Lord says:

إِنَّا عَرَضۡنَا ٱلۡأَمَانَةَ عَلَى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱلۡجِبَالِ فَأَبَيۡنَ أَن
يَحۡمِلۡنَهَا وَأَشۡفَقۡنَ مِنۡهَا وَحَمَلَهَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ ظَلُومٗا جَهُولٗا ﴿٧٢﴾

We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it; mankind undertook it – they have always been inept and foolish [72] (The Quran, *al-Ahẓab:* 72)

The word ‘*ard* (offer) is parading an exhibit before those to whom the exhibit is directed. An example of this is a military parade, where soldiers who are representatives of the army and other weapons are paraded before the leader such as in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* that Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about: '[Mention] when, there were paraded before him, in the afternoon, well-bred light-footed horses.' (*Sad:* 31) Another example of this is when you say: '*aradtu* 'I presented the matter to so-and-so,' meaning, 'I told him about it so that he could form an opinion about it and say whether he accepted it or not. So '*ard* is offering a choice and incurs no obligation.

The True Lord says that He offered the trust to His creation - i.e. the entirety of creation, including mankind, the animals, the plants, and inanimate objects - to see which of them would accept the responsibility of bearing it and which would refuse. The implication of there being an offer is that there are ones who will accept and ones who will reject.

Therefore, we say that it is mistake to say that the earth, the sky, the mountains, and so on are compelled and have no free will. Rather, we must amend the expression somewhat and say that they are compelled by their own free will, since when Allah *Glorified is He* offered them the trust, giving them the choice of whether they wanted to bear it or not, they were afraid of it and said, 'Let us escape this trial through the gate of grace…' (rather than putting ourselves to the risk of opening the door of wronging ourselves), and chose not to have choice or free will.

In common usage, the word *amana* (trust), customarily means either money or objects of value which you are afraid to lose, and so you entrust someone with them: a person you believe will look after them until such time that you need them again. It is not for you to take a cheque from the one with whom you entrust your money nor to bring forth witnesses, since if you did, it would not have become a trust. Thus, there is no way of proving its existence except through the trustworthiness of the one who took it—if he chooses, he can admit that he has it and gives it back, and if he chooses, he can deny it.

Thus *al-amana* (a trust) is the self's carrying the burden of being capable to choose actions…etc. If the self is compelled by means of a cheque or by the testimony of witnesses, then it is no longer termed an *amana* (a trust).

The *amana* which the True Lord offered to His creation was the *amana* of free will— choosing the ability to choose to believe or not to believe; to obey or not to obey. Every creation apart from mankind refused to bear that trust as they felt no enthusiasm at the time it was offered to them; the same time they will bear the trust, for fear that when the time comes to give it back, their conscience fails them.

There is a difference between the time of receiving and bearing a trust and the time of giving it back. Those who only take notice of the time of receiving the trust accept it, but those who also take note of the time of giving it back refuse it. That is because, despite one's best intentions to give it back, circumstances might change; conscience might change or something might happen to you that puts you in need of it and forces you to make use of it. Then the time of giving it back to its rightful owner arrives and you are unable to do so.

Everything in existence refused to bear the burden of the trust and chose to have no free will and be fully controlled by the Creator, apart from man because he was as his Lord described him: '...inept and foolish.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

That is how the righteous servants of Allah *Glorified is He* reach the station of true slave-hood to Allah *Glorified is He*—by directing their own free will according to the Will of their Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who gave them the choice between believing and disbelieving and they choose to believe; He is the One Who gave them the choice between obeying and disobeying and they choose to obey. So they directed their free will towards that which their Lord loved, and entered into the ranks of His slaves who have been brought near.

It is as if you had relinquished your lower self's choice to act as it pleased, and accordingly became like the heavens, mountains, and earth when they gave up their own free will in favour of the Will of their Lord. Moreover, you arrived at the point where—despite the fact that you are endowed with free will—you chose to only follow the path that your Lord had laid down before you.

At this point, it pleases some to ask, 'How could the trust possibly have been offered to the heavens, mountains and earth when they are inanimate objects, how did they refuse?' They may ask many other similar such questions. Our reply to them is this: 'You have walked straight into a maze! Was the offer made by you to the inanimate objects so that they were not able to understand, or was it made by their Lord and Creator?'

When you see an action is done by you or done by Allah *Glorified is He*, beware of disassociating the action from the actor. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk:* 14) He is their Creator and is the One Who addresses them, and you have not denied that. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* taught some of his Messengers *peace be upon them* the language of the birds, allowing them to communicate with them and understand what they were saying like His Prophet Sulaiman *peace be upon him* whom He states his saying: '...we have been taught the speech of birds, and we have been given a share of everything...' (*an-Naml:* 16). He also says about him: '…Sulaiman smiled broadly at her words...' (*an-Naml:* 19).

Furthermore, He says about the mountains singing the praises of their Lord with David (*peace be upon him*): '…"You mountains, echo Allah's praises together with him, and you birds, too."…' (*Saba':* 10) Yes indeed, the mountains praise and glorify their Lord in every moment. But the thing that distinguished Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was the fact that his glorification was in perfect harmony with that of the angels so that it seemed that they were all one single group singing one single song.

So, the Creator addresses whatever of His creation He so wishes to, and if He were to have taught you how to speak to inanimate objects, you would also have been able to address them. Reflect, for example, on the story of the Hoopoe bird whom Sulaiman *peace be upon him* sent to the people of Sheba and whom, when he got there, found them worshipping the sun instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. Reflect on that bird's perfect understanding of the doctrine of *tawhid* (oneness of Allah). So, relax and attribute the action to the one who did it. By doing so, you will be at peace. Indeed, in your own daily lives, there are good examples for you of this. Say, for example, that your son was to come into the house with an appearance that showed you that he was hit by somebody: would your first question to him not be, 'Who did this to you?' You must first establish who the perpetrator is before you can form any judgement or come to any decision regarding the matter. If the perpetrator was your neighbours' son, for example, then you would have moved heaven and earth to bring him to rights, but if your son were to have said instead, 'Uncle So-and-so hit me', you would have calmed down and said to the boy, 'You must have done something to deserve being punished thus.' Then, if you were to have gone to see that uncle later, you would have found out that your son had indeed done something bad. Thus, one action can be both bad and good—the important thing is who actually did the action.

The different verses of the Quran support one another when it comes to this matter, and enable us to understand it better since the One Who says: '"We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains...' (*al-Ahzab:* 72), also says: '... There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise...' (*al-Isra':* 44). Every single thing in creation extols the glory of Allah *Glorified is He*. This proves that everything in existence is able to express itself. We are amazed when we hear scholars say that this communication is simply mute expression and not spoken word, for that opinion is refuted by the words of Allah *Glorified is He* Himself: '...though you do not understand their praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44).

We are able to understand one aspect of their glorification when we see the harmonious way in which the different elements of creation are knitted together and the wondrous order of things. Yet the True Lord tells us that we will never understand their glorification. The glorification He is referring to must be one that is actually spoken and no one can understand that glorification except for those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has acquainted with their language. We do not think it is farfetched for things to glorify their Lord when we look around and see members of various parties or professions communicate with one another using sign language and ciphers that no one else can understand.

Indeed, it is possible for you to hear words in your own language that you do not understand the meaning of, let alone all the other different languages used by the different races of mankind. If you are unable to understand certain meanings in your own language, and if you do not understand the language of other peoples who are from your own species, then why do you reject the notion that other species in existence also have languages by which they communicate with one another and express themselves?

Furthermore, are all languages and means of communication actually spoken? Are there not, for example, sign languages that some people use to communicate with and understand others? Despite all of this, there are certain forms of communication and certain expressions that are the same in every language and that everybody is able to understand such as the ability of those who are mute to understand each other, and such as laughter and weeping; for there is no such thing as Arab laughter or French weeping.

‘Bearing the trust’ means taking it on and putting it into practice, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says when He discusses the meaning of bearing a burden: ‘Those who have been charged to obey the Torah, but do not do so, are like asses carrying books…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 5).

They did bear it in the sense of taking it as a way and memorized it, but they did not bear it in the sense of actually implementing that way and putting it into practice. Thus, in Allah’s eyes, their likeness became that of a donkey that carries a load of books but cannot actually benefit from them. This, in itself, is not a criticism of donkeys or an accusation that they are stupid as some people claim; for it is not a donkey’s job to understand, but merely to carry. The one who accepts a path without benefiting by it or putting it into practice resembles the donkey in this matter, adopting a characteristic specific to donkeys—carrying things they do not understand.

When it comes to other matters, donkeys understand well enough and carry out their tasks in ways that human beings may well be unable to do. For example, it is a well-known fact about donkeys that they never forget a place they have been to before and never lose track of the way even if a long time has passed. However, human beings often lose their way on paths they have walked some time before. Even if you were to allow a donkey absolute freedom of movement, it would take you back to the same place. So which of the two is stupid, the human, or the donkey?

Therefore, some people ask, ‘why do they accuse donkeys of stupidity?’ Some people answered: ‘Because they try to assign a task to them that Allah Himself did not assign them. Donkeys were created to carry things, but you want them to have a level of understanding about things that rational human beings may themselves lack.’

We said previously, ‘If you were to try to make a donkey jump over a trench that was too wide for it to be able to get to the other side, it would never obey you no matter how hard you beat it and would refuse to make the jump, whereas, if it is something it is capable of, it looks at the trench as if it is calculating its exact width, and then leaps over it without you forcing it. This behaviour indicates it is a being that has a good grasp of the consequences of its actions and understands what it is doing.

Hence, a thing cannot be viewed in isolation of the task for which it was made, and cannot be asked to do any more than that. As an example for this, we mentioned the iron rod. The beauty of the iron rod is seen in its straightness, but if you were to want it to be a hook, it could only be made fit for that task by bending it. So, when it is bent, you cannot say that it is crooked because that crookedness is the very thing that makes it right for its task.

That is why we said when we discussed Allah’s words: ‘...for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses (Donkeys).”’ *(Luqman:* 19) This is not a criticism of the voice of the donkey because Allah *Glorified is He* made donkeys’ voices high in that way because of the fact that they live in the wild countryside and often disappear from sight behind rocks or trees or simply wander off far from their owners. So their voices were made thus in order to indicate where they were and to help their owners to find them.

Loud high-pitched voices are only ugly when they are not performing a task and are used out of place. A single thing might be diversified, but its task requires it to be unified. For example, if the blood—upon which a human being’s life depends—clots while still inside the veins, it leads to paralysis of the limb and needs an injection of medication in order to start flowing again. By contrast, if the blood becomes too liquid, it leads to haemophilia, meaning that, if a person were to be cut, the bleeding would not stop and the wound would not scar over because the blood did not clot and block places from which it was coming out. So, clotting of the blood is necessary outside of the veins and liquefaction of the blood is necessary inside the veins. There is wisdom to both of them when they are in their rightful place.

As for Allah’s words: ‘...and were afraid of it...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72), they mean that the earth and the mountains were afraid at the time of taking on the trust, out of fear that when the time came to give it back, they would be unable to do so. So '...mankind undertook it...' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) because of his capacity to think, to choose (for himself) and try things out, However, sometimes, his thinking brings harm upon him.

As previously illustrated, human being might stuff himself to eat his favourite meal; thus, he distends his stomach until he suffers from indigestion and becomes ill, whereas, when animals such as donkeys and buffaloes, are full, they will not overeat because they are governed by a natural instinct that does not permit them to go to excess. This instinct preventing animals from going to excess is a defining characteristic. Hence, man is described in Allah's saying as: '... They have always been inept and foolish' (*al-Ahzab:* 72). The Arabic morphological form used in these two adjectives emphasises the intensiveness of the man's incompetence and ignorance. It is understandable that someone could do wrong to others because he thinks that he could get benefit somehow from them, however it is unbelievable to do wrong to himself by denying it good things or bringing harm; that defies logic and is a sure sign of stupidity. When someone disregards an act of obedience to satisfy a temporary worldly desire for himself, he denies it infinite good and limitless pleasure; he is his own self's enemy. Therefore, Muslim scholars say that the person's inner self is the worst of enemies. If his enemy is another person, he is able to notice and take precautions against him, but when the enemy is inside him, the matter is much more difficult.

Allah *Glorified is He* has made it clear that the gravest wrong deed is to associate others with Allah, as He *the Exalted* says: '... for, behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong!' *(Luqman:* 13) This wrongdoing brings no harm to Allah, but only to the person who associates others with Him. Accordingly, the person, after being described as a wrongdoer, he is then described as an ignorant and foolish; this is a sure sign of his ignorance and lack of knowledge. The Arabic description here indicates the compositional wisdom of Allah's words which denotes the extremely oblivious person, who falls into error and turns away from truth because of ignorance.

لِّيُعَذِّبَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ وَٱلْمُنَٰفِقَٰتِ وَٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَٱلْمُشْرِكَٰتِ
وَيَتُوبَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٧٣﴾

God will punish the hypocrites and the idolaters, both men and women, and turn with mercy to the believers, both men and women: God is most forgiving, most merciful [73]
(The Quran, *al-Ahzab:* 73)

It is remarkable that the previous verse ends with the two descriptions: '... Inept and foolish' (*al-Ahzab:* 72), while this verse ends with Allah's Attributes: '... Most Forgiving, Most Merciful' (*al-Ahzab:* 73). Thus, the descriptions of the wrongdoer 'inept' and 'foolish' are counterbalanced by Allah's Attribute 'Most Forgiving' and 'Most Merciful' respectively. Allah *Glorified is He* forgives those who transgress and do wrong, and dispenses mercy to those who are ignorant. Indeed, the layout of the Quran is a way of manifestation of Allah's Mercy.

Allah *the Almighty* is known by those who believe in Him to be 'Most Forgiving' and 'Most Merciful', but they should not let Allah's Attributes fool them into thinking that they can transgress and commit wrong action, relying on the fact that He will forgive them and act mercifully towards them. Thus, they say with reference to Allah's words: 'Mankind, what has lured you away from Allah' (*al-Infitar:* 6). This means that man is deluded with Allah's Mercy and Generosity, the matter which makes him disobeys or reject Him.

Thus, mankind has been taught to refer their aberration to Allah's Generosity. In rural communities, a farmer may say to another, 'Why do you not stand still in your prayer? Why do you fidget so much? Do you not know that if you were to owe a shilling to someone, it would not be right to give him a worn-out coin?' The other replies, 'By Allah, if he were generous, he would accept it!'

The verse raises another key issue, as Allah says: 'Allah will punish the hypocrites and the idolaters, both men and women...' (*al-Ahzab:* 73). The purpose of offering the trust to mankind and making them responsible for their actions was neither to punish them nor to impose the ruling on them because the Arabic verb 'will punish' is prefixed by a particle for consequence, not for causation. Allah *the Almighty* made mankind responsible for their actions so that they would follow Him, not so that they would be punished. This particle merely indicates what will eventually result, as in Allah's saying: ‘Pharaoh’s household picked him up—later to become an enemy and a source of grief for them...’ (*al-Qasas:* 8). When the Family of Pharaoh took Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in, they did so to be a source of delight to them, not to be their enemy. But what eventually happened was that he became their enemy and source of grief. So, the particle is used when the person does an action for a specific reason, whereas it results in another consequence to demonstrate the stupidity of the doer of the action.

As for Allah's words ‘The hypocrites and the idolaters, both men and women...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 73), hypocrisy is earlier defined. It is worse than disbelief because the disbeliever is at least consistent with his beliefs; within his heart and on his tongue. His words conform to his heartedly belief; whereas, the hypocrite is not consistent with himself, as he believes in one thing and says the other. The hypocrite outwardly displays belief while keeping his true feelings of disbelief hidden; i.e. his thoughts are conflicted. Therefore, he deserves to be called the worst of enemies and to be positioned in the lowest level of the hell-Fire. His treachery and deception show his bad soul that apparently appears to be with you, but is, in reality, the enemy. Furthermore, this verse shows that Allah clearly draws a distinction between the punishment that is due to the hypocrites and idolaters, and the recompense that is due to the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* does not conjoin mercy with punishment in the same phrase; but rather, He *the Almighty* separates the two verbs from each other in two different sentences by repeating the subject of the verbs, to make sure that each requital is kept separate from the other, and that the rulings are kept apart. As previously mentioned, Allah *the Exalted* shows His Attributes of Majesty in dealing with the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and the Attributes of Beauty in dealing with the believers; each of them is used in its own specific and independent context.

the chapter of

Saba'

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of S*aba'* (1).

ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى لَهُۥ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ
وَلَهُ ٱلْحَمْدُ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ٱلْخَبِيرُ ﴿١﴾

Praise be to God, to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and earth, and praise be to Him in the life to come. He is the All Wise, the All Aware [1]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 1)

'Praise be to Allah...' (*Saba':* 1) is Allah's saying uttered by Him to teach people to say Praise is directed towards Allah who merits being praised on account of His Beautiful Attributes; contrariwise, dispraise is directed towards someone who merits criticism on account of his awful characteristics.

The person might praise something without any interest simply because he likes its characteristics worthy of being praised such as when people praise the manufacturer for perfecting a product without serving any purpose.

So, applause sometimes takes place because the object is praiseworthy; nonetheless, they have no impact upon the commending person in any way.

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(1) *The chapter of al-Ahzab is the 33rd chapter in the order of the Noble Quran. It is a chapter revealed in Medina and comprises of 73 verses. It was revealed to address the hypocrites' criticism of Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him and the harm they were inflicting upon him, the issues surrounding his marriages to women and especially his marriage to his cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh Allah be pleased with her and the correct courtesy that must be shown upon entering the apartments of Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him. The chapter of Al-Ahzab was revealed in Medina just after chapter of Al-'Imran and just before the chapter of Al-Mumtahana. It was the 89th chapter to be revealed in terms of the order of revelation. See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum Al-Quran, 1/27.*

Undoubtedly, praise becomes obligatory especially when the effects of praising, glorifying, and exalting Allah influenced the person

Thus, it is said that, ‘Every act of praise, even if it is directed towards a human being, in reality comes back to Allah *Glorified is He* because when a human being is praised, he is only applauded due to a good trait granted to him by Allah *the Almighty*. Accordingly, all acts of praise, without exception even if to a human being, are in fact praise to Allah.’

The phrase: ‘Praise be to Allah...’ (*Saba’:* 1) appears 38 times in the Quran, five times of which appear at the very beginning of *al-Fatiha*, *al-An‘am*, *al-Kahf*, *Saba’ and Fatir* chapters.

Allah *the Exalted* begins these chapters with praise because He has formed creation from absolutely nothing, so they owe Him praise for that blessing. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* provided mankind with the essential elements of life with regard to the material needs of the human being such as the abundant foodstuffs ensuring the preservation of life, then the ability to thereby procreate ensuring the preservation of the species. However, the human being is also required to lead his life in perfect harmony with others, so it is imperative that they support and coordinate each other. Otherwise, creation would have destroyed itself.

This mutual support would be impossible, but for the presence of the way adjusting this coexistence and curbing people’s whims and desires in this world. Otherwise, some people would set affairs right, while others destroy. As for the Hereafter, Allah prepares people in a different way to something better because they live in this world with each other, but in the Hereafter, they will live with Allah, the Original Causer.

In this world, people pay attention to worldly means; they sow, reap, cook, bake, weave, spin, etc.; whereas, in the Hereafter, they live by the Will of Allah, the Original Causer. In this life, they fear to miss the worldly delights, but in the Hereafter, the delights will be unceasingly everlasting. The enjoyment in this world is limited to the capabilities of the human being, whereas, the enjoyment in the Hereafter is unrestrictedly granted by the Power of Allah.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* created people and gave them blessings out of nothing, set out the way protecting values and regulating life even before creation. Before Allah created mankind, He created the entire universe subservient to him such as the craftsman who assigns a particular function to his handiwork before making it.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He is the Lord of Mercy [1] who taught the Quran [2] He has created man: [3] and taught him to communicate [4]' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-4). The way that is mentioned in the Quran has been laid down at first to assign the task and designate the laws that will preserve the mankind, before his creation.

Anyone, who reflects on the verses of praise with which these five chapters begin, will find that they encompass all these stages, for in the beginning of *al-An'am* chapter: 'Praise belongs to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light; yet the disbelievers set up equals to their Lord!' (*al-An'am:* 1) Allah *the Exalted* speaks about the beginning of creation. Then He says: 'He is the one who created you from clay…' (*al-An'am:* 2), this being the first stage of creation

Then, in the beginning of *al-Kahf* chapter, Allah mentions the matter of putting the way and the values into place, saying: 'Praise be to Allah, who sent down the Scripture to His servant and made it unerringly straight' (*al-Kahf:* 1). This is the governing law that curbs whims and appetites and regulates the life so that human beings are mutually supportive rather than being mutually opposing.

In the beginning of *Saba'* chapter, in the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions praise in the Hereafter: 'Praise be to Allah, to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and earth, and praise be to Him in the life to come…' (*Saba':* 1). Praise in the Hereafter is compounded and multiplied because Allah, in this world, is praised for creating the means by which people live. But in the Hereafter, there are no means – but rather, the one who directly causes things is Allah the Exalted. So, praise in the Hereafter is greater because man lives with Allah Himself.

Moreover, Allah says, in the beginning of *Fatir* chapter: 'Praise be to Allah, Creator of the heavens and earth, who made angels messengers with two, three, four [pairs of] wings. He adds to creation as He will…' (*Fatir:* 1). People praise Allah for the values and the way He lays down for them through His angels, who are Allah's messengers to human beings; some of them are guardians, others direct their affairs and the third group prostrates to them.

The chapter of *al-Fatiha*, *Um Al-Kitab* (the Epitome or the Mother of the Quran), combined all these matters, as Allah says: 'Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds' (*al-Fatiha:* 2). The Lord is the Creator and the Provider, as Allah says: 'The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [3] Master of the Day of Judgement [4]' (*al-Fatiha:* 3-4). Afterwards, Allah highlights the importance to follow the way: 'It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help [5] Guide us to the straight path: [6] The path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray [7]' (*al-Fatiha:* 5-7). As *al-Fatiha* combined the beginning and the end of the creation as well as the life in this world and the Hereafter; thus, it is called the Opening (Epitome) of the Book, the seven Oft-repeated verses and the Mother of the Quran.

Thus, Allah teaches people to glorify Him by saying: 'Praise be to Allah...' (*Saba':* 1). As people are different from each other in their gifted talents, capabilities as well as in way and word-choice of glorification; the well-educated is dissimilar to the illiterate person in choosing words to glorify Allah. Accordingly, Allah soothes people that He *the Exalted* teaches them the most preferable wording of praise to Him.

In the Noble Hadith, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* praised and extolled Allah, as follows: '"Glory be to You, we cannot count Your praises. You are as You have lauded Yourself"(1) In giving a long sermon on the way of praising Allah, the lecturer says, 'All praise is due to

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(1) *It is narrated in Musnad Ahmad (6/58 & 120), and in Sahih Muslim (486) excerpted from the Hadith narrated by 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her as she said: 'One night I missed the Messenger of Allah from his bed. I searched for him. My hand fell over his feet while he was in prostration with his feet erect. He was supplicating: "Allahumma inni a'udhu biridaka min sakhatika, wa bi-mu'afatika min 'uqubatika, wa a'udhu bika minka, la uhsi thana'an 'alaika, Anta kama athnaita 'ala Nafsika (O Allah! I seek protection against Your Wrath in Your Pleasure. I seek protection in Your Pardon against Your chastisement; I am not capable of enumerating praise of You. You are as You have lauded Yourself)."'*

Allah' and he does have fallen short at all. This particular wording taught by Allah is another blessing that deserves praise because it puts everyone on an equal footing in praising and extolling Allah's Graces.

When someone praises Allah for having taught this formulation of praise, he says, 'All praise is due to Allah'. So, there is a continuous chain of specific unchanged form of praise that never comes to an end; the person praises Allah for teaching him this form of praise and so on. The significance is that the person continues to praise Allah forever; thus, He is incessantly praised.

As previously mentioned, the different times on earth and the difference between the time in the east and that in the west ensure that Allah is being worshipped unceasingly and continuously in every moment of the day. In every single minute round the clock, the prayer is being performed, the phrases of supplication; 'Allah is the Greatest', 'I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah' and 'I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' are repeatedly proclaimed as well as all acts of worship are carried out. The whole universe constantly worships and supplicates to Allah in a wondrous perfect order; the most important thing is that the human maintains it well.

As for Allah's words '... and praise be to Him in the life to come…' (*Saba':* 1), it is already made clear that praise in the Hereafter is greater and more substantial than that in this world because people live in this world with means granted by Allah, whereas they live in the Hereafter with the Essence of Allah, the Original Causer. In this world, bliss is limited and terminable; whereas, bliss, in the Hereafter, is everlasting. Hence, Allah says on the Hereafter: '... And the last part of their prayer, "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds"' (*Yunus:* 10).

Allah *the Exalted* says, relating the words of the believers in the Hereafter: 'And they will say, "Praise be to Allah who has kept His promise to us and given us this land as our own. Now we may live wherever we please in the Garden." How excellent is the reward of those who labour!' (*az-Zumar:* 74) Additionally, Allah also says '"Praise be to Allah, who guided us to this: had Allah not guided us, we would never have found the way"' (*al-A'raf:* 43).

Upon being asked on the reason of praising Allah for owning the earth and the heavens, the reply is that the most remarkable thing is the people being served by Allah’s blessings that they do not possess. The stupendous thing is that He is benefiting them by means of things that are not in their possession, for the heavens and the earth are Allah’s possessions, but despite that He *the Almighty* places them under their service.

Likewise, a person who does not buy a car for himself, despite his affordability, because he has many brothers owning cars and every day, he rides in one of theirs; the matter which costs him nothing, So, it is a remarkably greater advantage to get benefit from others’ holds than to benefit from one’s own possessions. Whatever Allah *the Almighty* possesses of blessings, He places them for people’s benefit; the matter which deserves their praise to Him. O Allah! Do not deprive us of Your blessings!

Another notable thing is that Allah soothes His slaves that he is the only Controller of the Dominion of the earth and the heavens; otherwise, they would have been barred from them. Allah *the Exalted* has the sole ownership of the Dominion and Power where He has no partner to prevent His blessings from reaching them.

Therefore, when Allah says to something: ‘… “Be”, and it is’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 47), He knows that it cannot be but to ‘be’, as Allah says about the earth: ‘obeying its Lord as it rightly must’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2). Allah *Glorified is He* never says ‘Be’ to something without being sure that it will certainly obey Him.

Hence, as previously said that Allah firstly testifies that there is no deity but Him before He asked people to bear witness: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). This testimony is from Allah to Himself because He is the Controller in His creation with no partner.

Afterwards, the angels and then His slaves who have knowledge bore witness, as Allah says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

The testimony of Allah is testifying from Himself to Himself, however that of the angels is based on witnessing, whereas that of His slaves who possess knowledge is based on knowledge and proof.

It is also noticed that Allah says: ‘... To whom belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth, and praise be to Him in the life to come…’ (*Saba’:* 1).

He repeats the relative pronoun in Arabic ‘in the heavens and in the earth’. This is similar to the way Allah says with respect to glorification on one occasion: ‘Everything in the heavens and in the earth glorifies Allah…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 1). Whereas, on another occasion, Allah says: ‘… Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Him…’ (*al-Hashr:* 24).

There is a difference between the two kinds of expressions, as there are some common creations shared by the heavens and earth, some creations that exclusively belong to the heavens and others that only belong to the earth.

Thus, when Allah wants to take account of them all, He says: ‘…Everything in the heavens and earth…’ (*al-Hashr:* 24), whereas, when He wants to distinguish between them or to distinctively mention each group on its own, He repeats the pronoun and says: ‘... All that is in the heavens and is in the earth and praise be to Him in the life to come…’ (*Saba’:* 1).

The heavens and the earth are the outside cover encompassing all blessings that are found therein, so whoever owns the cover, owns also the contents.

Then, Allah concludes this verse by saying: ‘... He is the All Wise, the All Aware…’ (*Saba’:* 1). The All-Wise is the One Who puts things in their rightful places, and no one can do this except Allah, the All-Aware, the One Who has full knowledge of the intricacies and hidden details of things.

Subsequently, Allah illustrates an example that shows this wisdom and knowledge, as He says:

يَعۡلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا يَخۡرُجُ مِنۡهَا وَمَا يَنزِلُ مِنَ
ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَمَا يَعۡرُجُ فِيهَاۚ وَهُوَ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ٱلۡغَفُورُ ٢

He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it; He knows all that comes down from the heavens and all that goes up to them. He is the Merciful, the Forgiving [2]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 2)

The verb ‘goes into’, meaning ‘is merged into’, is also used in another verse: ‘He makes the night merge into the day and the day into the night…’ (*Fatir:* 13). Allah makes each of them merge into the other, so the increase in the length of the night decreases the length of the day and vice versa. This causes the difference between times.

There are things that go into the earth without the interference of mankind such as, the rainwater that comes down from the sky. From rain, people take their own needs while the remaining seep into the ground, as Allah says: '…Guides it along to form springs in the earth…' (*az-Zumar:* 21).

Furthermore, the implanted seeds go into the earth to feed people to guarantee the preservation of their lives. These foodstuffs come about as a result of seed multiplication for many times over. Moreover, the dead corpus buried into the ground goes also into the earth. There is a significant point of comparison between the implanted seed and the buried corpus that is mentioned in Allah's words: 'From the earth We created you, into it We shall return you, and from it We shall raise you a second time' (*Ta Ha:* 55). By following the same thought process, as the grain sprouts into seven ears, which in turn produce a hundred grains, also the dead corpus buried into the ground after death, will lead a better life after death as well as its disgraces will be covered over.

As for Allah's words 'He knows all that comes down from the heavens' (*Saba':* 2), what are things that descend from the heavens? Life-preserving rain comes down from the sky. But for water, everything would have died, with respect to the material aspect of human's existence. However, as for his spiritual existence, angels come down with the values and the approach that will bring life to his heart and soul. Guarding angels who administer the affairs of all created beings also come down, about whom Allah says: 'Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him from (by) Allah's Command... ' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

Some people do not actually grasp the meaning of this verse, asking, 'How can angels protect him from the Command of Allah *the Almighty*; whereas, Allah's Command ought to be carried out, so how can they protect him against it'. The verse means that their protection stems from the command of Allah - not a voluntarily deed resulting from themselves.(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him that: 'Allah's protection is from His Command by His Command.' This is narrated by Abu Ash-Sheikh, who added: 'By=*

Allah *Glorified is He* shows His Power of sending down rain; however the process of filtering water in laboratories requires a lot of money, time, and effort to produce it. Conversely, Allah's Power filters water for human beings without being even aware of this. The heat of the sun evaporates the water which rises and forms clouds, afterwards the winds drive the clouds to the place where Allah sets His will to fall down to the ground as rain. Allah's Wisdom decrees that the water surface covers three quarters of the earth to be as wide as possible so that there could be enough rain to meet the needs of all living organisms.

This phenomenon is illustrated by a glass-full of water which, if left exposed to the air for a month, will only decrease by a few centimetres, but if it is poured onto the ground, if would dry up quickly because water surface area is expanded so it is easily evaporated. Rainwater is the sweet and cold potable water used to quench the thirst of humans, animals, and birds, to water the crops and the high ground and, whatever remains, to be guided along to form springs in the earth, until it is needed. Rain is one of the greatest signs of Allah's Power.

Allah's saying: '... And all that goes up to them...' (*Saba':* 2) means the act of rising up, as that being mentioned in Allah's saying: '... Good words rise up to Him and He lifts up the righteous deed...' (*Fatir:* 10). Rising up means that the reactions of people towards Allah's Commandment imposed upon them are gone up

It is noticed that Allah uses the literary style of the words, as He uses the preposition (in) rather than (to) in the Arabic verse: '... And all that goes up in (to) them...' (*Saba':* 2). It is known that prepositions have intrinsic meanings, but other words should be attached to them to be able to express and understand such meanings. So when the preposition (in) is used in conjunction with another word, it has the meaning of being contained within something, such as, 'water is in the cup', but if you were to use it on its own, it would not indicate any meaning whatsoever.

= *the permission of Allah.' It was narrated by Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu-Hatim. Sa'id ibn Jubayr narrated, 'He protected it for them by His Command of Allah.' This version was narrated by Ibn Jarir. These were narrated by As-Suyut in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (4/612).*

The scholars thought that many linguistic expressions contained particles that were thought to be additional or express the meaning of a totally different particle. An example of this is their interpretation of Allah's words: '... And all that goes up in (to) them...' (*Saba':* 2) that (in) here has the meaning of (to) because it holds some aspect of the meaning of something contained.

Another instance clarifies this issue, as Allah says: '... Then crucify you (in) on the trunks of palm trees...' (*Ta Ha:* 71). Some scholars say that (in) here means 'on' the trunks of palm-trees. However, this is an imprecise interpretation of Allah's saying since the word (in) here bears both meanings; (in) and (on).

Crucifying someone is tying him up onto another thing, the matter which is expressed by the preposition (on). Nevertheless, this somewhat falls short, since if the person wants to use the preposition (on), he should say, 'I will most certainly crucify him strongly on the trunks of palm-trees,' thereby making the parts of the crucified person enter into the cross on which crucifixion takes place. Yet, the only way to convey the exact full meaning of crucifixion, without adding the word 'strongly' is by using the particle (in) to convey both the meaning of being tied onto something as well as that of being contained within it.

To further illustrate this point, if a matchstick is tied loosely with a fine thread onto somebody's hand or finger, the thread barely holds the matchstick in place. But if the matchstick is tied forcibly with the thread, the matchstick will be pushed so far into the skin that it almost disappears within it. This is the same form of crucifixion intended by the verse; forcibly crucifying the victim to the crucifix by using nails ropes or something else.

Similarly, Allah says: '... And all that goes up in (to) them...' (*Saba':* 2) because (to) does not convey the intended meaning, It only conveys the meaning of final destination, such as, 'I travelled from Cairo to Alexandria', while the sky is not the final place to which good words ascend, but rather, their final destination is Allah. The sky which is defined as everything that is above earth is no more than the path that channels them to their final destination.

This meaning of the preposition (to) is also clear in Allah's words: 'Hurry towards your Lord's forgiveness...' (*Al-'Imran:* 133). The preposition (to) is used because forgiveness is the final destination towards which believers rush. However, Allah says: 'They are the ones who race into (towards) good things...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 61) because 'good works' are not the final destination to which they are rushing, but rather, they are the stages through which a believer rises, Once the believer reaches a good thing, he looks out upon another better one. So, good works resemble the path on which he moves, rather than a target at which he aims.

Similarly, Allah says about those who denied the Messengers: '... But they tried to silence them...' (*Ibrahim:* 9). Some scholars allege that this means that they put their hands to their mouths. Contrariwise, this is not the case because the verse expresses their full rejection of the faith principles that had been brought by the messengers. When the Messengers brought the faith principles, the disbelievers rejected the means and said, 'Save your words! They will not avail you with us at all.' Afterwards, they placed their hands inside their mouths and chewed on their knuckles in exasperation and fury against what they had heard from their messengers. This meaning could not be expressed except by this formulation.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… He is the Merciful, the Forgiving' (*Saba':* 2). Allah's Attribute, the Merciful, means 'the One Who prevents any harm happening right from the beginning, as in Allah's words: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe...' (*al-Isra':* 82). The word 'Healing' means that the person was afflicted by an illness arising from heedlessness, so the Quran reminds and heals him of that heedlessness. In case that there is no heedlessness, then the Quran is a mercy that prevents illness from taking place right from the beginning, The word (Merciful) is an intensive adjective derived from the word (mercy).

In the same way, (Forgiving) is an intensive adjective derived from the word (forgiveness). Allah often emphatically uses this particular Attribute throughout the Quran because He created man and knows that he will not always keep to the Straight Path. Rather, it is inevitable that he will, one day, go astray from it, hence Allah says: '... Our Messenger has come to make clear to you much of what you have kept hidden of the Scripture and to forgive much [you have done]...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15).

But for the Attributes of Mercy, Pardon and Forgiveness, sinners would go on acting sinfully and would feel despair of returning back to the Straight Path. That person is called the loser, who disturbs the whole society; but if he knows that Allah forgives his wrong actions and accepts his repentance, then he will repent and seek Allah's forgiveness.

Allah establishes repentance to grant mercy to the whole creation and do them a good turn. As Allah forgives the sinner, He shows mercy to the whole society by sparing them from his evil and shows mercy to the sinner by sparing him the consequences of his sins. Hence, Allah says: '... He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return [to Him]…' (*at-Tawba:* 118). This means that Allah establishes repentance in order to open the way before the sinners to travel back to Allah, so they could leave their wickedness and evil means to keep them from turning into tyrants.

On reflecting on Allah's words: '... If you tried to count Allah's blessings you could never calculate them...' (*Ibrahim:* 34), it is found that there are two verses of the Quran starting with this exact wording, but each ends differently from the other. In the first verse, Allah says: '... If you tried to count Allah's blessings you could never calculate them: man is truly unjust and ungrateful' (*Ibrahim:* 34). In the second verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'If you tried to count Allah's blessings, you could never take them all in: He is truly most forgiving and most merciful' (*an-Nahl:* 18).

Some people may object to this verse because the word (blessing) appears in the singular form in Arabic which cannot be counted. The refutation of this objection is that the blessing that may ostensibly seem to be single actually comprises many different ones. This has become clearer as science has advanced and people have become aware of the different elements that make up a thing. Apple, for example, appears to be a single blessing, but science shows that it contained many different elements and benefits.

In addition to the blessing itself, there is the giver and the receiver. As for the blessing, there is so much grace included within one blessing so that it can never be counted or computed. Thus, Allah uses the word 'if', indicating doubt, instead of saying, 'when', because nobody can be eager to count the blessings, i.e. they are not expected to be countable. Indeed, no one has ever dared to try to count Allah's blessings even after the establishment of universities and colleges specialising in statistics, which enumerate everything except this. The impossibility of attaining this matter is based on the fact that counting process implies the possibility of having an accurate evaluation of the blessing; the matter which cannot be achieved.

Concerning the receiver of the blessings, the man, he is a persistently wrongdoer for himself and the others and a stubbornly ingrate for the blessings he receives. If he is taken to task for that, then he would be deprived of that blessing, but he is protected from being deprived because Allah, the Giver of the blessing, is All Forgiving and All-Merciful.

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَا تَأْتِينَا ٱلسَّاعَةُ ۖ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّى لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ عَٰلِمِ
ٱلْغَيْبِ ۖ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَلَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَآ
أَصْغَرُ مِن ذَٰلِكَ وَلَآ أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِى كِتَٰبٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٣﴾

Still, the disbelievers say, ‘The Last Hour will never come upon us.’ Say, ‘Yes, by my Lord, [it will], by Him who knows the unseen! Not even the weight of a speck of dust in the heavens or earth escapes His knowledge, nor anything smaller or greater. It is all recorded in a clear Record [3]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 3)

Allah mentions here the Last Hour, i.e. the Day of Judgment, as He does in the end of *al-Ahzab* chapter: ‘People ask you about the Hour...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 63). In another verse, the disbelievers are said to deny its coming, as Allah says: ‘Still, the disbelievers say, “The Last Hour will never come upon us”…’ (*Saba’:* 3).

Indeed, they deny it because they have sinned against themselves and insistently followed the path of misguidance and know that the Day of Judgment will not be in their best interests. Accordingly, they evade it by denying such as other refuters of that Day allege, ‘If Allah has really foreordained everything for His slaves, so He foreordained their obedience and disobedience. Thus, why does Allah punish the sinners for disobeying Him?’ It is noteworthy that none of them thought about the contrary of that claim, ‘Why does Allah reward the believers for obeying Him?’ This shows that their claim is erroneous and illogical and that they fear the punishment. Those disbelievers who uttered these statements are quite sure that they have committed a lot of wrong deeds, so they deny the Resurrection such as the person who is stated to have said: 'Or that the Last Hour will ever come—even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there' (*al-Kahf:* 36).

Their recurrent questions and rejection of the Last Hour indicates their fear, in addition to their terror of even believing in it. They knew well that even if they were able to keep their actions hidden from people, they could not do so with Allah. Moreover, if they were able to evade the punishment of this world, they would not be able to avoid the judgement on the Day of Reckoning. They recognised that no controversial debate or falsification of facts would benefit on the Day of Resurrection.

As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Verily, I am only a human and the claimants bring to me (their disputes); perhaps some of them are more eloquent than others. I judge according to what I hear from them). So, he whom I, by my judgment, (give the undue share) out of the right of a Muslim, I in fact give him a portion of (hell) fire.'(1)

So, the judge adjudicates according to the evidence he has, but it is possible for a clever speaker to mislead him, thereby unjustly taking the rightfully share of others, just as some lawyers do today. This manipulation takes place in this life only, but as for the Hereafter, people will stand before Allah, the Utterly-Just Judge.

Those disbelievers deny the Resurrection because it is the mystery that bewilders them. Its reality terrifies and robs them of sleep, shakes them out of fame and brings their leadership to an end. Despite feeling safe in this world due to their fame and power; yet they will come on the Day of Rising defeated and broken before Allah, as mentioned in the verse: '[Allah will say], 'Now you return to Us, alone, as We first created you: you have left behind everything We gave you…' (*al-An'am:* 94).

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2458 & 2680), as well as by Muslim in his Sahih (1713). It is excerpted from Hadith Um Salama Allah be pleased with her. It is also narrated, in another narration, that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'I am a human being and the claimants bring to me (the dispute) and perhaps some of them are more eloquent than the others. I judge him to be on the right, and thus decide in his favour. So he whom I, by my judgment, (give the undue share) out of the right of a Muslim, I give him a portion of Fire; he may burden himself with it or abandon it'.*

Similarly, in the world of economics, there are some people who recurrently ask about the bank interest in Islam, to the extent that they might even ask a thousand scholars the same question. They do not make do with the opinion of one scholar because they want to hear a favourable answer that conforms to their own personal whims; they wish to have a scholar's opinion that lawfully approves bank interests. This is a thorny issue that occupies the minds of many people, but as long as it continues to uncomfortably create doubt, it will remain one of those vicious matters about which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Virtue is noble behaviour, and sin is that which creates doubt and you do not like people to know about it.'(1)

Afterwards, Allah responds to their rejection of the Final Hour and says, addressing His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: '… Say, "Yes, by my Lord, [it will]…"' (*Saba':* 3). This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would negate their negative previous statement in a loud voice. It is known that whenever the negative is negated, thus, the opposite meaning is actually affirmed.

Furthermore, the verse emphasises the matter by making an oath: '… Say, "Yes, by my Lord, [it will]…"' (*Saba':* 3). Allah teaches Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make an oath by His Essence, in absolute confidence that it will come; indeed, Allah does not teach His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* a false oath. Allah always speaks the truth when He does not make an oath, so how is it like when He does make an oath?

As for Allah's words after that, 'By Him who knows the unseen…' (*Saba':* 3), they indicate that He only tells people about the Last Hour and swears about its coming because He possesses the knowledge of the Unseen. Not only will it inevitably come, but also people will be reckoned for their sins; the major and the minor ones as well as the known and the hidden ones, for Allah, the All-Knower of the Unseen knows everything.

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(1) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/182) as well as by Muslim in his Sahih (2553) in Kitab Al-Birr wa As-Sila. It is excerpted from the Hadith of An-Nuwas ibn Sam'an who said: 'I asked Messenger of Allah peace and blessings of Allah be upon him about virtue and sin, and he said, "Virtue is noble behaviour, and sin is that which creates doubt and you do not like people to know about it'.*

Then Allah says: '…By Him who knows the unseen! Not even the weight of a speck of dust (atom) in the heavens or earth escapes His knowledge, and nor anything smaller or greater. It is all recorded in a clear Record' (*Saba':* 3) meaning that 'nothing escapes his knowledge'. In a great number of verses, Allah resembles the tiny object to the atom or the speck of dust, which could be seen in the sunrays, but due to its incredibly small size, it does not cast any sort of shadow. Thus, anything that could not be seen does not mean that it does not exist, but rather, it is minute to the extent that people need precise visual tools to see it. The naked eye cannot see everything, but a strong beam of light helps to see incredibly minute things. Hence, it is said that light and atom are the most precise measures of existence.

Thus, the engineers use these elements to check the erectness of their buildings and ensure the precision of the works. If the newly built wall that seems to be flat and straight is left for a number of days, the dust will reveal any bumps or protuberances. This happens due to the specks of dust on the wall that fall down vertically. Similarly, the faults only appear by shedding a bright light on them, even when they are so small that they cannot be seen by the naked eye. Allah says: 'He does not wrong anyone by as much as the weight of a speck of dust…' (*an-Nisa':* 40) because the speck of dust was the smallest thing known to man, However, this is not the case nowadays.

When Germany was defeated in World War I, it refused to be vanquished and resolved to take revenge on its enemies. So, every German citizen occupied himself within his own field of studies. Among their accomplishments is that they came up with the way of breaking up the atom; i.e. breaking up the indivisible part. This was the first time that the world thought of splitting the atom. This process is similar to the pressing of the sugar cane between two cylinders; as the distance between the two cylinders is reduced, pressing is effectively increased. In the same way, Germany made a cylinder for breaking up the atom.

After this invention, the people, trying to refute Allah's words, say, 'The Quran mentions that the atom is the smallest part in existence, but the atom is now broken up into smaller parts.' Yet, if they carefully examined the whole Quran, they would have read this verse: 'Still, the disbelievers say, "… By Him who knows the unseen! Not even the weight of a speck of dust in the heavens or earth escapes neither His knowledge, nor anything smaller or greater. It is all recorded in a clear Record' (*Saba':* 3). The Quran takes into account the progress that science would make in breaking up the atom and the Words of Allah are prepared for every scientific advance.

The stylistic precision in this verse shows that Allah firstly mentions the atom as the smallest known thing to man then and afterwards He mentions the smaller fragment, no matter how many times it would be broken down, to always prove the authenticity of Allah's words.

Somebody might ask here, 'If Allah grants us knowledge of the atom and the tiniest of things, then what is so special about mentioning that He knows things that are bigger than that?' Others reply, 'This is an example of the subtle language of the Quran that things are hidden either because they are extremely delicate such that people's instruments are not fine enough to perceive them, or because they are extremely greater than their perception - their size is too great for them to encompass them. So, this means that Allah has mastery over the smallest of things and the largest of things.

Not only Allah's knowledge encompasses everything in existence, but also He *the Almighty* records this in the Incomparable Eternal Book. There is a great difference between informing someone of a piece of information and recording this. When knowledge is not recorded, the person may say whatever he wants, otherwise, it becomes a proof of his words.

Whenever Allah highlights any issue, He keeps it in the Quran. As long as Allah keeps something in the Quran, this means that it will inevitably come to pass; otherwise, He would not have recorded and preserved it. He *the Exalted* fully knows that nothing will come to pass in His Dominion without knowing about it. So, His knowledge came first then He writes it.

As they denied the Day of Reckoning, Allah reminds them of the fact that His knowledge encompasses absolutely everything big and small for a profound wisdom. The reason is to distract them from thinking about the Last Hour, to make them instead think about their own sins and to know that they will be taken to task for them and that nothing escapes Allah's Knowledge. When all these happen, they will regret that they had asked about this, as Allah says: 'You who believe, do not ask about matters which, if made known to you, might make things difficult for you...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 101). So, as they asked about the Last Hour, as Allah distracted, troubled, and upset them as they came to know that the knowledge of Allah encompasses everything in the Heavens and the earth. Therefore, it is not merely a matter of showing up knowledge, but rather, it is a matter of knowledge that will result in their being reckoned after getting this information. So Allah says:

لِّيَجْزِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِۚ
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةٞ وَرِزۡقٞ كَرِيمٞ ﴿٤﴾

So that He can reward those who believe and do good deeds: they will have forgiveness and generous provision [4] (The Quran, *Saba':* 4)

It is quite an amazing thing that the provision is described as being generous, for this is the Attribute of the Provider of the provision. This is a rhetorical usage to convey the abundance in the provision itself which makes its way to the believer, as the poet (1) says:

Use the means to gain your provision,

Then do not occupy your mind with it.

For you do not know its address,

While your address is known to it

Afterwards, Allah says:

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(1) These lines are an excerpt of Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi's poems.

وَٱلَّذِينَ سَعَوۡ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا مُعَٰجِزِينَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٞ مِّن رِّجۡزٍ أَلِيمٞ ٥

But as for those who work against Our Revelations, seeking to undermine them, there will be a torment of painful suffering [5] (The Quran, *Saba':* 5)

If the Arabic word *sa'aw* refers to the act of swiftly walking across a distance, what is meant by the phrase *sa'aw fi ayatina* (swiftly walked against Our messages)? How can the disbelievers swiftly walk against Allah's signs or verses? The answer to this question can be deduced from other Arabic phrases, such as the phrase, 'That man walked (*sa'a*) to the manager against his colleague.' This means that the man reported disgraceful matters about his colleague, perhaps to promote and benefit himself.

Therefore, the phrase: 'And those who swiftly walked against Our messages,' (*Saba':* 5) means that they claimed scandalous issues regarding these divine messages in order to incite and turn people against them. They wanted to encourage those who started paying attention to these messages to forsake them, and perhaps, wanted to force those who were convinced by their concepts to leave them behind. They strove against Allah's messages in order to nullify them because they knew the effects that the Quran would have on other people's hearts. Indeed, if people gave it their ears, it would inevitably affect them and pull them towards belief in Allah *Glorified is He*. People's hearts would fall under its influence and their tongues would never stop reciting its verses.

These are similar to the people who said: 'Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it, so that you might gain the upper hand' (*Fussilat:* 26). If the Quran had only been ordinary words without any effect, they would not have forbidden people from listening to it. Indeed, they would have not raised their voices over its recitation, in fear of what it would do to those who heard it.

Allah *Glorified is He* said regarding their efforts: '…trying to defy them (*mu'ajizeen*)' (*Saba':* 5). This means that they tried to defy Allah's messages. The Arabic word *mu'ajizeen* is the plural form of the word *mu'ajiz*, the active participle of the verb *'ajaza*. Lexically, its structure resembles the structures of the words *qatala* and *muqatil*. Regarding meaning, the verb *'ajaza* means to race or compete with a person (*naafasa*). The Arabic word *naafasa* (competed with) was used to refer to a competition that involved two opponents holding their breath (*nafas*), as in underwater competitions.

It is narrated(1) that when 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* and 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him* passed by a lake, 'Umar said, 'Let us dive underwater to see which of us can hold his breath for a longer period.' They used to compete in that manner because they considered the length of time a person can spend underwater an indication of the strength of their respiratory system and the healthiness of their lungs. Later on, the Arabic word *munafasa* was used for every form of competition.

Similarly, the word *'ajaza* means that each of two parties strove to prove the weakness of the other party. Therefore, the word *a'jazani* means, 'They forced me to do a job that I was incapable of doing.'

From this lexical interpretation, we can understand that the purpose of the disbelievers in striving against Allah's messages was to disprove the capacity of these messages. That was their way to prevent the Prophetic call from reaching Allah's creation.

How could they try to disprove Allah's messages, when He has guaranteed that His messengers would eventually be victorious and that He would never abandon them? The battles that were fought between the messengers and those who rejected them were a reason through which Allah *Glorified is He* granted His messengers victory.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will succour you against them; and He will soothe the hearts of those who believe,' (*at-Tawba:* 14). He also said: 'For, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they indeed would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts would (indeed) be victorious,' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173). It might be admissible to say that the disbelievers only sought to disprove and fight

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(1) *The story of the diving race between 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab and 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with them*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon* him and the believers with him. As for Allah, the All-Powerful and the All-Conquering Being, it is indeed not possible for anyone to overpower Allah *Glorified is He* or render Him incapable.

So, the words: '...strive against Our messages...' (*Saba':* 5) meant that they used their schemes and obstacles to undermine the call of Islam. They sought to defeat the purpose of its message and wanted to render Allah's words powerless. Indeed, they wanted to put their authority in place of its divinity, by trying to disprove the messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* stated the punishment that awaits those disbelievers opposing His messages: 'Those will have a torment of painful and grievous (*rijz*) chastisement' (*Saba':* 5). The words *rijz* and *rujz* refer to 'sins that have a heavy burden'. At its lexical root, it refers to any sinful act that deserves a serious punishment. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And all the defilements (*rijz*) you should shun!' (*al-Muddaththir:* 5) We should avoid committing these sins in order to avoid the weighty punishment that results from such sins.

Their suffering will be grievous because of their vile actions. In the Quran, the punishment of the disbelievers is sometimes described as being painful (*aleem*) or humiliating (*muheen*). At other times, it is described as being considerable and tormenting (*atheem*). These descriptions indicate different realms of punishment.

A painful (*aleem*) punishment causes pain to the one who is subjected to it. If that person is stoic and claims to be able to bear it, or is a person who considers himself as an esteemed individual, then a humiliating (*muheen*) punishment will be more effective in affecting his condition. However, a punishment that is described as a humiliating punishment does not have to be painful. Some people may feel humiliation when they are just chided or rebuked without any physical pain. Therefore, the most effective description of a punishment is to describe it as a tormenting (*atheem*) punishment.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَيَرَى ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ هُوَ
ٱلْحَقَّ وَيَهْدِىٓ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطِ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْحَمِيدِ ٦

[Prophet], those who have been given knowledge can see that what has been sent to you from your Lord is the truth, and that it leads to the path of the Almighty, worthy of all praise[6] (The Quran, *Saba':* 6)

These are words of encouragement to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. His Lord is telling him in this verse, 'O Muhammad. Do not despair or become concerned due to those people who strive against our signs, seeking to defeat the purpose of your message. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* was the One who allowed them to strive in spreading corruption. However, He was also the One Who supported you with other people who believed in your messages. These believers supported your call when they realized that it was the truth, and that the disbelievers' words were calls of drivel and falsehood.'

Allah *Glorified is He* reassured His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by telling him that those disbelievers would never be able to put out the Light of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* said in another verse: 'They aim to extinguish Allah's light with their utterances: but Allah has willed to spread His light in all of its fullness, however unbearable it may be to the disbelievers,' (*as-Saff:* 8). He also said in another verse: 'He (Allah) it is who has sent forth His Apostle with the (task of spreading) guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over all (false) religions – however unbearable this may be to the polytheists,' (*at-Tawba:* 33).

Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying: 'And those who are blessed with (innate) knowledge are aware that (it is) the message that has been revealed upon you, from your Lord, (that) is indeed the truth,' (*Saba':* 6). This means that they bear witness that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke truthfully, and that His message lead to the true path. These believers are the contrasting opposite to the disbelievers, who were mentioned in the previous verse.

The disbelievers were futilely seeking to defeat the Prophetic message, and are therefore, unsupported by the aid of Divine Power. In fact, their efforts will be effectively opposed and eradicated. On the other hand, knowledgeable believers who bear witness to Prophet Muhammad's message are supported by this Divine Power. Therefore, this group of believers will be triumphant.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Those who(1) are blessed with (innate) knowledge are aware,' (*Saba':* 6). These are either the knowledgeable people who believed in Prophet Muhammad and affirmed his miraculous message, or are the knowledgeable people from among the people of the Book, namely the Jews and Christians. Indeed, the sincere and impartial individuals among the people of the Book knew the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just as they knew their own children. These were the ones who travelled to Yathrib before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* became a Messenger. They stayed there, waiting for him to be sent. They even used to pray for Allah's victory over the polytheists by saying to them, 'The time has almost come for a new prophet. We will follow him, and he will support us in defeating you, just as the people of 'Ad and Iram were killed.'

However, only some of them eventually believed and testified to the truth of Prophet Muhammad's message. Many of these people of the Book denied the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was eventually sent. Allah *Glorified is He* said describing their disbelief: 'Whenever there came unto them something which they recognized (as the truth), they would deny it,' (*al-Baqara:* 89).

Allah *Glorified is He* said in the Quran: 'And (if) the disbelievers say (unto you, O Muhammad), "You have not been sent (by Allah)," say to them, "None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does, and (none can bear witness as) those who truly understand the divine book,"' (*ar-Ra'd:* 43). These people who truly understood the concept of divine revelations were the people of the Book (the Torah and the Gospel), namely the Jewish and the Christian people.

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(1) *With regard to the interpretation of those who are endowed with knowledge, there are two positions. Some scholars say that they are the Companions of Prophet Muhammad. This is what Qatada said, according to As- Suyuti's explanation in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (6/674). It was also the view of Ibn 'Abbas, according to Al-Qurtubi's explanation in his Tafsir (8/5530). The other view was that they were the believers from the people of the Book. This is what Muqatil and Ad-Dahhak said, according to the explanation of Al-Qurtubi. Al-Qurtubi said, 'It is also said that these are all the Muslims, and that is the most correct position because of its comprehensiveness.'*

Knowledge is defined as every certain matter that corresponds to reality and has evidence that proves it. Any issue that does not meet those criteria is not considered to be a part of knowledge. If an issue is not certain, it may be a matter of doubt, assumption, or delusion. On the other hand, if an issue is certainly believed by a person but does not correspond to reality, then it is a form of ignorance.

We previously said that the ignorant person is not the person who does not know a particular fact, but rather, he is a person who believes in a concept that does not correspond to reality. The person who does not know a particular fact is uneducated or unlettered. His mind is devoid of that issue and resembles an unpainted canvas. Hence, an illiterate person may accept knowledge more easily than an ignorant person. This is because, with an ignorant person, you must first show them the error of their ways before you can convince them of true knowledge.

If a matter is certain and does correspond to reality, but you find yourself unable to find any evidence to back it up, then the receiver can only accept the matter by blind imitation. This is like teaching your children verses from the Quran, such as the verses: ‘Say, “He is the One Allah: the Eternal, the Cause of All That Exists,”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-2). The child memorises these verses exactly as they are but is unable to provide evidence for their concepts. In such circumstances, the child is merely an imitator of another trustable person, such as their father or teacher. Later on, when the child reaches a stage at which they are able to provide evidence for the truthfulness of such matters, they will have truly reached a level of knowledge.

Despite the many different types of knowledge, it is possible to divide all known knowledge into two categories. The first category is the knowledge of Divine Law. The second category is the knowledge of the material world. The source of religious knowledge and its jurisprudence is Allah *Glorified is He* and it is conveyed to us through a Messenger by means of a miracle. No people are to have any influence over this type of knowledge. Indeed, the only role that humans are obliged to carry out, regarding religious knowledge, is transmitting and delivering it to other people, exactly as it was conveyed by their Messenger. It is this knowledge that defines the lawful and unlawful actions according to the divine commandments. Knowledge of this Divine Law should not interfere with material knowledge, but rather, was revealed to bring people's different whims under control. That is the reason people differ with respect to this form of knowledge.

As for the worldly knowledge of this material world, it is composed of the sciences that look into all the different forms of existence: inanimate objects, plants, animals, and human beings. This knowledge arises from the activity and discernment of human minds. People do not differ with one another with respect to this knowledge, because material sciences are based upon observation, research, and direct experience. That is why people fight to acquire this knowledge and sometimes even steal it from each other.

It is by means of this material knowledge that mankind can make advancements in the course of their life. The Creator has given us all the ingredients of life and its necessities. If people want to acquire life's luxuries, they must make use of their intellects and reflect upon the existence that surrounds them in order to discover the secrets and signs that Allah *Glorified is He* has hidden within His creation. Then, they can use these discoveries to improve their lives.

In the past, when people wanted water, they would need to get it from a river or a well. When water became scarce or difficult to obtain, people would pray to Allah *Glorified is He* to send down rainwater from the sky. They could do nothing else.

However, when better material and scientific methods developed, mankind obtained access to special sources of water and learned how to bring it down from higher levels to the low plains. They invented water tanks and pipes, and even started to receive water directly in their own homes, simply by turning on a tap. When the water is cut off from these people, they do not call upon Allah *Glorified is He* to send water from the clouds. Instead, they try to find out the reason behind the water shortage. To them, it could be a broken pipe or an electricity cut that has caused the pump's motor to stop. Therefore, technological advances have made people more reluctant to ask for Allah's bounties directly.

This material knowledge is based on reflection and intellectual efforts, and is not related to religious contemplation. In fact, with respect to these material triumphs in scientific research, believers and disbelievers are the same. The people who strive harder to take hold of this material knowledge will be granted its means. That is why we find that the majority of inventions and discoveries, such as the discovery of electricity, the telephone, and the television, were mostly made by disbelieving scientists.

So the knowledge referred to in the words: ‘Those who are blessed with (innate) knowledge are aware,’ (*Saba’:* 6) is, most probably, the religious knowledge of Divine Law. The religious scholars are the ones who believed that Prophet Muhammad’s message was the truth, by means of the miracle that he brought.

However, the scientists who are blessed with material knowledge still have a great role in affirming the truth of Allah’s Messengers and supporting them, by presenting the scientific signs of Allah’s existence. Indeed, just as the Quran is the recited Book of Allah (*Kitab-ul-Allah Al-Maqru’*), the material world around us, in all of its forms, is the witnessed Book of Allah (*Kitab-ul-Allah Al-Manthoor*).

This is clear when we recite the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Are you not aware that Allah sends down water from the skies, whereby We bring forth fruits of many hues. (And) in the mountains are streaks of various shades of white and red hues, as well as (others) that are raven-black, just (as) there are in men, and in crawling beasts, and in cattle, different hues as well’ (*Fatir:* 27). Therefore, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the plants, the inanimate objects, the human beings, and the animals.

Then he completed the verse with the Words: ‘Of all His servants, only those who are blessed with knowledge will, indeed, stand in awe of Allah’s Might’ (*Fatir:* 28). Thus, these particular verses referred to the scientists who were blessed with material knowledge of the universe and who carried out research in its different forms and laws. Such laws may be concerned with scientific, sociological, or medical principles, or they may involve other specialities in existence.

People who have these forms of material knowledge are more likely to fear Allah’s Might than non-scientific people because they saw the secrets in His creation and can effectively show them to other humans. Moreover, if they are believers, they can be supporters of Allah’s way by calling people to believe in Him. Furthermore, in addition to showing Allah’s Divine Power to the people, their words can also provide material proofs to support the scholars of Divine Law. Therefore, material knowledge or sciences have a great role in guiding people to Allah’s way.

In conclusion, both types of knowledge can build awareness that the messages conveyed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were the truth.

On the one hand, the scholars of Divine Law bear witness to the truth of Prophet Muhammad’s direct messages. These scholars were primarily the Muslim scholars who believed in Prophet Muhammad’s Message. However, they also included the knowledgeable scholars from the people of the Book, who testified to the truth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

On the other hand, many scientists also supported Allah’s way and testified to His existence, by revealing the secrets of His Power. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘(He is) The Knower of the Unseen; not so much as a dust’s weight in the heavens or in the earth shifts away from Him; neither is anything smaller than that, or greater, except that it is in an Evident Book,’ (*Saba’:* 3). A speck of dust is a miniscule particle that cannot be seen by the naked eye, except with the help of rays of sunlight. This verse means that Allah *Glorified is He* knows everything in existence, and there is not a single particle in the heavens or the earth that escapes His attention. Therefore, believing scientists should research the scientific phenomena that prove the Omnipotence of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The polytheists of Quraysh were asked, ‘Who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them?’ They answered, ‘Allah.’ Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And thus it is (with most people): if you ask them, “Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?” They will surely answer, “Allah.”’ (*Luqman:* 25) Allah *Glorified is He* also said: ‘Now if you ask those (polytheists who worship deities with Allah) as to who it is who has created them, they are sure to answer, “Allah.” How then, are their minds astray?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87)

These polytheists did not dare to claim that Allah *Glorified is He* was not the Creator of this world! Furthermore, none of the disbelievers or heedless atheists in our times can claim that they created any part of His magnificent universe.

People are amazed by certain inventions and seek to immortalise the names of their inventors in the books of history. If you were to ask a primary school student, ‘Who invented the light-bulb?’ they would immediately say, ‘Edison.’ If you were to ask them about the first man to walk on the moon, they would say, ‘Neil Armstrong.’

Although people seek to immortalize such pioneers and create statues in their honour, yet, they rarely ask themselves, ‘Who created the sun? Who created the moon? Who makes the wind blow?’ These phenomena are basic concepts of our life and are not luxurious items like the achievements we already mentioned. Therefore, when this matter of creation is presented to you, it is inevitable that you call the following verse to mind: ‘Thereupon, the disbeliever was dumbfounded,’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). The modest disbeliever has no option but to recognize, even if momentarily, that Allah *Glorified is He* had created this world.

When Allah *Glorified is He* makes a statement and a human being makes a different statement, the human’s statement will always be obliterated in the face of Allah’s statement. That is because human beings base their laws only on events that they have seen, and do not take the emergent events of the future into account. Therefore, laws made by human beings are impotent, inadequate and always need to be amended.

Human beings illuminate their houses to the degree of their financial ability, but when Allah’s sunlight comes in, it makes all other forms of light futile. For instance, we are now sitting in a mosque, and the mosque is illuminated by electricity. We can seemingly see everything, but are still not able to see the particles of dust in the air of the mosque. However, if you were to look at the rays of sunlight shining through the window, you would see the particles of dust floating in the air. So, this dust cannot be seen except in the light of the sun.

In the same sense, the knowledge of human beings does not reveal all the unseen concepts of this life. These concepts can only be revealed by the light of Allah *Glorified is He* which we represented in our example by the light of the sun. If the sun, which is a structure created by Allah *Glorified is He* was able to show us the miniscule dust particles that were hidden from us, how could the Creator of that sun not know what is hidden from us? Thus, the major role of material science is to provide proofs that help support the truth of the Messenger's call.

There is another concept which clearly illustrates the importance of science in calling people to believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. We can see this concept in a verse that described the punishment of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment: '(And) every time their skins are burnt off, We shall replace them with new skins, so that they continue to taste the suffering,' (*an-Nisa':* 56). These words were reported to us as a subtle reference to the pain receptors in the skin. Indeed, we knew nothing about them, until scientists studied the physiology of the body. They discovered that these pain receptors, from which the impulses of pain originate, are present in the skin. Then, the impulses pass to the spinal cord and the brain.

Therefore, the scholars of Divine Law used this matter as a proof for the truth of Allah's Words. The skin is the organ through which they will be made to taste the pain. In this way, science has helped us to prove the truthfulness of the Noble Quranic words.

Similarly, science has benefited us by proving that the earth is round and that it orbits around the sun. Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that the night and the day succeed one another. This is also a subtle reference to the round shape of the earth. This is clear during our times, as we see the day and night are flowing in continuous succession. However, at the beginning of the earth's creation, had the earth been flat, one of the two phases would have existed without the other! The only way for this succession to be true, since the beginning of creation, is if the earth was created as a sphere. Therefore, Allah's statement could only be understood that the earth was created as a sphere. It had a side in daylight as it was facing the sun, and another side in darkness as it was facing away from the sun. Therefore, the day and night were both there at the first moment of the earth's creation. Then, when the earth moved around, the night and the day succeeded one another. This phenomenon could not be possible without the earth being round.

Therefore, the verse we are studying can be referring to those who have been given knowledge of the Divine Law, revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* or to those who have been given knowledge of material existence, based upon research and observation.

In either case, Allah *Glorified is He* referred to them as: '...those who are blessed with (innate) knowledge' (*Saba':* 6). This show us that, regardless of whether a person's knowledge is of the Divine Law or of the material existence, this knowledge has been granted to that person by Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, people's knowledge is not attained by their own power, but, indeed, is a divine blessing. Allah *Glorified is He* does not refer to these people with knowledge as, '…those who know,' but rather said: '...those who are blessed with (innate) knowledge...' (*Saba':* 6).

In fact, although knowledge is a blessing from Allah *Glorified is He* even forgetfulness can sometimes be a great divine blessing that serves mankind. Here is an urban tale that illustrates that concept. It is said that the idea of using yeast to make bread rise during baking was a result of forgetfulness. Yeast causes bread to rise because it forms a gas that, when heated in an oven, expands the dough. This creates the gap between the two faces of the bread. It is this yeast that gives bread its distinctive appearance.

The urban tale told the story of a woman who made some dough. Then, she became distracted with other chores and forgot to bake it. After some time had passed, she remembered the dough and baked it as it was. At that moment, she discovered that this dough that was left for some time rose higher than her previous bakes. If this story was true, every piece of proper bread that we eat today could be, possibly, a result of that woman's distraction.

A similar urban tale is narrated regarding the discovery of roasting of raw meat. The tale told the story of a man who slaughtered a sheep to eat it, and then lit a fire to keep himself warm. A wolf then came along, seeking to take the sheep away from the man's grasp. The man got involved in a struggle with the wolf and a piece of the meat fell into the fire. After he had finally rid himself of the wolf, he liked the smell of the roasting meat.

Aside from these urban tales, we do observe that Allah *Glorified is He* guides His creation, even if by events of forgetfulness or apparent coincidences. We should realize that all types of knowledge, even material forms of knowledge, are gifts from Allah *Glorified is He* to His creation. Sometimes, Allah may not give you the knowledge itself, but can give you the tools that will guide you and enable you to arrive at that knowledge.

When we were learning about elementary geometry, we studied a book written by the authors H. S. Hall and S. R. Knight. The book described the method of proving the validity for a geometrical conclusion. If we have a number of successive inferences to reach the final conclusion, each of these inferences has to be established in itself before establishing the final assumption. However, the first essential calculation does not have to be proven because it is instinctively accepted.

Similarly, the source of any knowledge comes to us instinctively, as it was created by Allah *Glorified is He* for us. Any form of knowledge is a gift from Allah, whether it was derived from religious divine law or from the material world. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘And be pious to Allah, and Allah teaches you (herewith),’ (*al-Baqara:* 282). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* inspires and guides us to our needs, even if by means of apparent coincidences. We previously said that every secret in creation has a method for its delivery. These secrets may be disclosed as a result of human research, or can be revealed through seemingly coincidental encounters, like the way that penicillin was discovered, for instance.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘(It is) Allah. There is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Lord of all beings. Slumber does not overtake Him, nor does sleep. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His permission? He knows all that lies before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to any of His knowledge, except that which He wills (them to attain)’ (*al-Baqara:* 255).

Thus, regarding the material knowledge, Allah *Glorified is He* said that His creatures will never attain any gifts from this knowledge, ‘…except that which He wills (them to attain).’ This refers to the elements of knowledge which Allah *Glorified is He* permits to be born in this world. If He wills, He can give you this knowledge through your own research. Even in the absence of research, He can give you this knowledge by means of an apparent accident.

There is knowledge that Allah *Glorified is He* alone knows, and this is the unseen *ghayb*, which He does not disclose to any of His creation. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '(He is) The Knower of the Unseen, so He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, unless it be to an apostle whom He has been pleased to select (for that knowledge),' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27). Therefore, no one has any part of this knowledge, except by his divine selection. As for material knowledge, there is a time and place in which it is born.

Now, we can return to the verse we are studying. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And those who are blessed with (innate) knowledge are aware that it is the message that has been revealed upon you, from your Lord, (that) is indeed the truth,' (*Saba':* 6).

In the literary style employed by the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* did not just say that these people of knowledge, '…are aware that the message that has been revealed upon you, from your Lord, is the truth.' Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* emphasized the uniqueness of this message by saying: '...are aware that (it is) *huwa* the message that has been revealed upon you, from your Lord that is indeed the truth.' This was done by the employment of the Arabic pronoun *huwa*. This word indicated that anything other than this Prophetic message is not a reliable account of the truth. The only truth is this message which has been revealed to His messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

This is similar to the words that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said: '(Allah,) who has created me and, it is He (*huwa*), the One Who guides me,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78). He did not say, 'Allah *Glorified is He* who has created me, guides me.' This would allow the possibility of someone else guiding him as well. It is only through saying: '...and, it is He (*huwa*), the One Who guides me,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78) using the pronoun *huwa*, that he confined the source of his guidance to Allah *Glorified is He* alone.

Prophet Ibrahim also said: 'And it is He (*huwa*), the One Who gives me to eat and to drink, and, when I fall ill, it is He (*huwa*), the One Who restores me to health,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 79-80). Here, Prophet Ibrahim confined the source of his food, drink and healing to Allah *Glorified is He*. A human being might think that their created guardian, as their parents, is the source of their food and drink, when they are simply the means through which these blessings are delivered to us from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Similarly, you might think that healing comes at the hands of a doctor. However, the doctor is only a person who tries to treat you, and the healing comes from Allah *Glorified is He* alone. Allah *Glorified is He* stated that Ibrahim said regarding the matters of life and death: 'And (Allah) will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 81). Here, he does not use the pronoun *huwa* because bringing about life and death are not attributed to anyone other than Allah *Glorified is He* in the first place. Therefore, there is no presumption of them being shared by any other power. It is obvious that the words in this verse are referring to death, and not to murder. There is a distinctive difference between both, as we previously clarified.

Therefore, Allah's words: '...that it is the message that has been revealed upon you, from your Lord, that is indeed the truth,' (*Saba':* 6) clarified that there is only one truth. This truth was revealed by Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger. Everything else is false.

There cannot be two truths in one matter, despite the fact that a matter maybe viewed from a separate angle. For example, you might say that you paid farewell to a friend at the airport, at a particular time, before he travelled away to another city. Somebody else could object to that incident by saying that he saw your friend in his house an hour later. At that point, you may both accuse each other of lying. If you hurry to the phone and call the friend who you thought had travelled, he may inform you, for instance, that he did not travel and had to return from the airport due to a family emergency. Therefore, in this case, both the opposing statements were true, but they were viewed from separate angles.

Truth is a fixed concept that does not change and cannot be denied. How could you deny the truth when you support your claims by using the words, 'Truth be told, this is my right.' Your rights in this life are based upon the fact that they are your true shares in worldly sustenance. Thus, this truth brings you a personal benefit in this life, in addition to it being the fixed and contrasting opposite of falsehood.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said after that: '…and that it guides to the way of the Almighty Allah, the One to Whom all praise is due,' (*Saba':* 6). If you cannot accept the truth for what it abstractly is, and cannot support it with intrinsic dedication, at least accept it because of the benefit that it brings you. These are two distinct reasons for holding steadfastly to the concept of truth.

The terms: '...the Almighty (*Al-Aziz*),' (*Saba':* 6), declare the Divine attribute of Absolute Might, which states that Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be conquered or overcome. The Arabic word used is *Al-Aziz* (the Omnipotent Almighty Being).

As a simple lexical example, the Arabic word *azeez* can be used in the phrase, 'This task is difficult (*azeez*) for me,' which means that you are not able to overcome the task's difficulty. In the more transcendental and absolute sense, the word refers to the divine attribute of Absolute Might, which cannot be overcome by any other power. This is an attribute that should instil awe in the hearts of Allah's servants. Therefore, when you choose to reject the divine truth in His messages, you should realize that you are disobeying the Almighty Allah *Glorified is He* who cannot be overcome. His Omnipotent Power can conquer your world, and indeed, can never be conquered.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned another Divine attribute that inspires His servants to yearn for His blessings. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...The One to Whom all praise is due (*Al-Hameed*),' (*Saba':* 6). This refers to the fact that all creatures praise Allah *Glorified is He* for the blessings that He bestowed upon them. This attribute increases your yearning for further blessings from Allah *Glorified is He* by praising His previous bounties.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ يُنَبِّئُكُمْ إِذَا مُزِّقْتُمْ
كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍ إِنَّكُمْ لَفِى خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ٧

But the disbelievers say, 'Shall we show you a man who claims that, when you have been utterly torn to pieces, you will be raised in a new creation? [7] (The Quran, *Saba':* 7)

Allah says' And the disbelievers said (unto their companions)' (*Saba':* 7). Generally speaking, any statement that is said must be directed from a speaker to a potential listener. The disbelievers were the ones who said these words. Either they were saying this statement among themselves during their nightly gatherings for entertainment, or these words were uttered by the leading disbelievers to those who followed and imitated them.

These disbelievers said, 'Shall we point out to you a man (*rajul-in*) who will tell you that (after your death,) when you will have been scattered in countless fragments, you shall – lo and behold! – be (restored to life) in a new act of creation?' (*Saba':* 7) When we read these words, our attention is drawn to the fact that they describe Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the word *rajul-in* (a man) without identifying him, thereby seeking to mock and belittle his message.

This fact in itself indicates their inanity and heedlessness, for they themselves described Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* as the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He* in another instance. Their words in that instance were narrated in the Quran: 'Do not spend anything on those who are with Allah's Apostle' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). Similarly, when they found that a long period of time had passed between two revelations to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they claimed, 'The Lord of Muhammad has forsaken him.'(1) This was also another astonishing statement from them, as they acknowledged that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a Lord, in a moment of greatest trial and hardship for him! They said: '"Shall we point out to you a man who will tell you that (after your death,) when you will have been scattered in the smallest forms of fragments, you shall – lo and behold! – be (restored to life) in a new act of creation?"' (*Saba':* 7) As for their Words: '...who will tell you (*yunabi'kom*) that...,' the Arabic verb *yunabi'kom* is derived from the word *naba'* which is used to indicate the revelation of an important piece of news. So, for instance, if I were to say to you, 'I ate this food today in that restaurant,' that would not be considered a *naba'* since it refers to an ordinary everyday activity. It is only a *naba'* when the piece of news is noteworthy, important and of immense value like that which is mentioned in Allah’s words: ‘About what do they (most often) ask one another? About the overwhelming news (*naba’*) (of resurrection)’ (*an-Naba’:* 1-2).

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(1) *Jundub ibn 'Abdullah Al-Bajli said, 'Angel Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him did not come to Prophet Muhammad may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him for a period of time, so the idolaters said, "Muhammad has been abandoned by his Lord."' This was narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (4/522).*

As for the meaning of the verse: ‘...when you will have been scattered (*muziqtum*) in the smallest forms of fragments (*kulla mumazzaq*),’ (*Saba’:* 7) the word *mumazzaq* is derived from the word *tamzeeq* which is ripping something that is whole into parts and scattering the parts far and wide. For example, a chair is a whole (*kull*) that is made up of parts: wood, nails, glue, cotton, and fabric. In order to do *tamzeeq* of that whole chair, I must separate all the parts which it is made up of from each other, thereby breaking that whole structure down into parts.

Here, we must draw a distinction between the two words *kull* which means ‘whole’ and the word *kulli* which means ‘generic class’.

A *kull* is a whole structure that is made up of lots of distinct and different parts. For instance, in our example of the chair, the material of wood is different from the material of nails which are different from the glue which is different from the fabric. Every part of the whole (*kull*) chair has its own unique class of material.

On the other hand, the word *kulli* is the ‘generic class’ that is used to refer to many separate things which all share the same reality. For instance, the word human, when used to refer to a number of individuals, is generic, since the word human can be used for a whole group of people, and every individual within it can be referred to as a ‘human’. However, with the word *kull* (whole), I cannot say that wood is, by itself, a chair.

After clarifying the process of *tamzeeq*, why are the words ‘*kulla mumazzaq*’ added afterwards? These words indicate that the ripping process will be strong enough, that the whole body is ripped to its parts, and furthermore, these individual parts are also ripped to their basic particles. Thus, this process of degeneration has different stages and forms, and the words: ‘...you will have been scattered in the smallest forms of fragments,’ (*Saba’:* 7) indicated that they will be broken down into the smallest structures that things can be broken to. We do observe this process in the disintegration of dead bodies into their most basic constituents and elements until they completely disappear into the earth and nothing whatsoever remains of them.

Another example of this concept is found in Allah's words: 'For (many are) they (who) say, "What! After we have been (dead and) lost in the earth, shall we indeed be (restored to life) in a new act of creation?"' (*as-Sajda:* 10) They were referring to the process in which they will disappear inside the earth and get lost within its labyrinths.

The process of *tamzeeq*, where the body is broken into tiny fragments, can happen due to any one of numerous causes. For example, the body of someone who dies and is buried disintegrates in the soil, while the body of someone who is burnt is dissipated by the fire and then, perhaps, his ashes are blown around and scattered by the wind. The body of someone who is eaten by wild animals or birds is torn apart by them. Despite this disintegration, fragmentation, and scattering, the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* is able to resurrect that human body anew after they have died.

Read Allah's words in the following verses: '*Qaf* (An Arabic letter). Consider this sublime Quran! But nay – they deem it strange that a warner should have come unto them from their own kind; and so these disbelievers said, "A strange thing this is! After we have died, and become mere dust, how will we be resurrected? Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!"' (*Qaf:* 1-3). Therefore, the Quran responded to them: 'We do know how the earth consumes their bodies' (*Qaf:* 4). Do not be astonished, as Allah *Glorified is He* knows the place of every atom that has been scattered, and is indeed, able to return these atoms to each other. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...for with Us is a record unfailing' (*Qaf:* 4). It is not just knowledge that Allah *Glorified is He* possesses, but this knowledge has been recorded, and so it cannot be changed or altered.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* said, stating their statement of disbelief: 'Shall we point out to you a man who will tell you that (after your death,) when you will have been scattered in the smallest forms of fragments, you shall – lo and behold! – be (restored to life) in a new act of creation?' (*Saba':* 7) This is a new act of creation because the body will be brought back into its original form, just as a suite is rewoven after being brought apart.

أَفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَم بِهِۦ جِنَّةٌۢ ۗ بَلِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ
فِى ٱلْعَذَابِ وَٱلضَّلَـٰلِ ٱلْبَعِيدِ ﴿٨﴾

Has he invented a lie about God? Is he mad?' No! It is those who do not believe in the life to come who will suffer torment, for they are in gross error [8] (The Quran, *Saba':* 8)

This is another spoken statement that has a speaker and a potential listener. It is possible that the one who said this sentence was the same person who previously said: 'Shall we point out to you a man who will tell you that…,' (*Saba':* 7), and it is possible that it was his listener who replied: 'Does he (Muhammad) (knowingly) attribute his own lying inventions to Allah – or is he afflicted by insanity?' (*Saba':* 8)

They said: 'Does he (knowingly) attribute (*aftara*) his own lying inventions to Allah' (*Saba':* 8). The verb *aftara* is derived from the word *iftira'* which means 'telling deliberate lies.' They also said: '...or is he afflicted by insanity (*jinna*)?' (*Saba':* 8) The word *jinna* means madness. Generally, an insane person's words tend to be idle and senseless chatter. No weight can be attached to them and one cannot describe them as either true or false.

Why did they accuse Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being insane, immediately after accusing him of telling deliberate lies? This is because their accusation was itself a lie, and every liar is afraid that they will be exposed for everyone to see. Therefore, the disbelievers tried to plot another fabrication to save themselves if their first fabrication is eventually disproven.

They said: 'does he (knowingly) attribute his own lying inventions to Allah, or is he afflicted by insanity?' (*Saba':* 8) It could easily be established that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was an honest person who had always told the truth, and that he was neither a liar nor a fabricator of falsehood. Thus, they needed to resort to a second fabrication to continue to disprove his message. That would allow them to claim nonchalantly, 'We did not know whether he was a liar or was simply insane.'

It is astounding that the disbelievers of Mecca claimed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would falsely attribute verses to

Allah *Glorified is He* when they had always considered him a truthful and a trustworthy man. Indeed, they had never heard a lie pass his lips, nor had they seen him orate sermons or compose poetry. They were a people of eloquence and fine words, and had a taste for the nuances of language and a strong understanding of the stylistic devices of Arabic speech. Indeed, they should have used their intellects first before directing such accusations against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Additionally, eloquence or outstanding talents of speech do not suddenly appear in a person after the age of forty years. Generally, such remarkable talents appear near the end of the second decade or the beginning of the third decade of a person's life. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had spent forty years amongst them before conveying a single word to them from Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is why the Quran used such proofs to argue against them. In the following verse, the Quran states the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said: 'Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you before this (revelation came unto me): will you not, then, use your reason?' (*Yunus:* 16) They should have reflected upon the matter of his truth using their intellects, as they were a people versed in eloquence and the fine arts of the Arabic language. They had seen orators and poets living among them, who have filled the world with words. Have they ever seen anything like these orations or poems from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?

Thus, when some of them claimed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was afflicted with insanity, it was a precautionary alternative fabrication. When the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was easily pointed out, they said, 'We said that he was either a liar or a madman.' Allah *Glorified is He* responded to these people by saying: 'Nay (*Bal*), (there is no madness in this Prophet) but they who will not believe in the Hereafter are (bound to lose themselves) in suffering and a profound aberration,' (*Saba': 8*).

Generally, the Arabic word *bal* is used to negate and deny the false concepts that were mentioned in the sentence before it. It also affirms the sentence coming after it. So, here, the word *bal* (nay) completely negated and refuted that Prophet Muhammad was a liar or a madman. Certainly, the disbelievers have never heard him utter a lie nor seen upon him any sign of madness *peace and blessings be upon him*. The disbelievers themselves, had previously praised Prophet Muhammad and called him, 'The truthful and trustworthy one'. Generally, insane people are neither praised nor blamed for their words, and cannot be judged for the truth or falsehood of what they say. Indeed, these disbelievers never saw any signs of insanity in his character.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: *'Nun* (An Arabic letter), Consider the pen, and all that they write (therewith)! You are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman! And, verily, for you shall be a reward never-ending. For, behold, you indeed have sublime morals,' (*al-Qalam:* 1-4). Can a madman be described as having a noble character? Can he be described with fine manners or trustworthiness or any of the other noble qualities of nature?

They claimed that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was insane when they had previously bore witness that he had the most praiseworthy qualities a human soul can possess. It was to the extent that they used to place their valuable possessions in his trust, and that is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, left 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb in his place when he immigrated to Medina. 'Ali was charged with the obligation of returning the trusts and deposits that had been left with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to their rightful owners.(1)

After Allah *Glorified is He* had shown the falsehood of their lies against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He also declared the punishment that they will meet on account of their lies. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Nay, (there is no madness in this Prophet), but they who will not believe in the Hereafter are (bound to lose themselves) in suffering and a profound aberration.' (*Saba':* 8) They will suffer because they accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of lying and falsely attributing things to Allah *Glorified is He* and indeed, Prophet Muhammad never lied.

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(1) *Ibn 'Ishaq said, 'According to what has been narrated to me, no one knew of the departure of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when he went except for 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq may Allah Glorified is He be pleased with him and the family of Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him. As for 'Ali, according to what has been narrated to me, Prophet Muhammad peace and th blessings be upon him told him about his departure and commanded him to take his place in Mecca so that he could return the things that had been placed in the trust of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was in Mecca, whenever any person feared for some property of theirs, they would leave him in his trust because of the trustworthiness and truthfulness with which he was known for. (The Sira of Ibn Hisham 2/485).*

They were also in a profound aberration because they described Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as being insane. That claim aimed to discredit his message, even if he did not lie. So, they will meet a severe punishment for accusing him of telling lies against Allah *Glorified is He* and they will also be profoundly misguided for accusing him of insanity.

Allah *Glorified is He* said:

أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ إِلَىٰ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ
وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ إِن نَّشَأْ نَخْسِفْ بِهِمُ ٱلْأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطْ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسَفًا
مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ ﴿٩﴾

Do they not think about what is in front of them and behind them in the heavens and earth? If We wished, We could make the earth swallow them, or make fragments from the heavens fall down upon them. There truly is a sign in this for every servant who turns back to God in repentance [9]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 9)

The Arabic *hamza* was used in the beginning of this verse, in the word *a-falam*, to indicate that it was a question. The meaning is, 'How can they see these warnings and fail to take heed of Allah's signs in His creation?' Those signs were obvious to them because they lived in a desert, where the sky was totally exposed to them. There were no tall buildings to block the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* from their view, as is the case with the city-dwellers, who rarely see the sun or the moon clearly. Indeed, when eclipses happen, city residents only know about them from reports they read in the newspapers. As for the Bedouins, they live in the vast desert where the full extent of the sky can be seen. The sun is their intimate companion during the day, and the moon and the stars are their intimate companions during the night. They can easily look upon these signs and reflect upon them.

That is why an Arab man[1] once said, when he was in his natural state reflecting upon the sky that surrounded him, 'The sky is full of constellations, the earth is full of broad valley ways, and the ocean is full of waves. Footsteps indicate the presence of a travelling person and droppings indicate the presence of camels. Do not all of those things indicate the existence of the All-Pervading, the All-Aware (Allah)?'

Thus, Allah's clear signs were in front of these disbelievers, while they accused Prophet Mohammad and paid no heed to the signs of Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Did they, then, not see how the sky and the earth lie open before and behind them?' (*Saba':* 9)

The meaning of the words: '...the sky and the earth lie open before them,' (*Saba':* 9) was that these monumental parts of creation were in front of their eyes. The meaning of the words: '...behind them,' was that most (of these spectacles) were still hidden from their views. It is also possible for us to add, that these monuments extended, 'to the right of them and to the left of them.' Indeed, whichever direction they looked, they would have found nothing but skies. However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, '…under them,' because human beings are not capable of piercing through the earth right to the other side.

Reflect upon that immense sky that has been created without being held up by a single visible support! We are not even able to keep up a small tent without fastening it with ropes and pegs and raising it on top of a tent-pole. Then, if a strong wind were to blow upon it, it would uproot its poles and pegs and cause it to collapse upon itself. So how can you pass by Allah's signs in the sky and the earth without reflecting upon them?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* said: '(Or that,) if We so willed, We could cause the earth to swallow them,' (*Saba':* 9) like it swallowed up Qarun (Korah).

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(1) *He is Qiss ibn Sa'ida ibn 'Amr from the tribe of Banu Iyad. He was one of the wise men of the Arabs and one of the greatest orators among them in the time of ignorance before Islam. He was the bishop of Najran, and came as a visitor to the emperor of the Byzantines, who honoured and exalted him. He lived to an old age and met Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him before his Prophethood. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saw him at 'Ukaz, and when he was later asked about him, said, 'He will be gathered as a nation on his own.' (Al-'A'lam of Az-Zirikli 5/196)*

He also said: '...or cause fragments of the sky (*kisafan*) to fall down upon them,' (*Saba':* 9) like the claps of thunder that came down upon those who denied the Messengers in previous times. The word *kisafan* is the plural of the word *kisfa* which means 'a piece'.

'In all of this, behold, there is a message (*aya*) indeed for every servant (of Allah) who is wont to turn unto Him (in repentance)' (*Saba':* 9). The word *aya* (lesson) here means that it is a warning lesson for every servant who tries to turn his back upon his Lord's Commandments. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* has placed these signs in creation to remind every heedless person and to answer every disbeliever. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to awaken their hearts by a desire to go back to their Lord, for if a disbeliever were to come back to his Lord, his Lord would accept him. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has created this creation and wanted them to have a pleasant abode. However, they must be tested to select those of them who deserve happiness, and make a distinction between those who are obedient to the way of Allah *Glorified is He* and those who disobey Him.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The likeness of me and you are that of a man who lights a fire, and then the flies and moths started to crowd around it. I grab unto you to stop you from falling into the fire while you slip away from me.'(1) So, Allah *Glorified is He* keeps the door of hope open for his servants, to allow the disbelievers among them to return to His commandments.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was related to have said, 'Allah *Glorified is He* is more pleased with the repentance of one of His servants than any of you are pleased at finding a camel after losing it in the desert.'(2)

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(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2285) as part of a Hadith from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah may Allah be pleased with him. It is agreed upon by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6483) and Muslim in his Sahih (2284) as being part of a Hadith from Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2747) as part of a Hadith from Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allah's pleasure at the repentance of a slave who turns back to him is greater than that of one of you who is riding his camel, and then that camel escapes from him, taking with it all of his food and drink. So that man, losing all hope of finding it, makes=*

Therefore, through repentance and turning back to Allah *Glorified is He* Allah will open the door by which one can return to Him. This continues to be true, even if the person is forced to repent by forces such as old age or illness.

These forces may help keep people at a distance from the clutches of their appetites. This may prompt them to turn to Allah *Glorified is He* and fix the things that have gone wrong in their relationships with their Lord and Creator. Eventually, when they come back to Him on the Day of Resurrection, they will be purified from their sins. Indeed, this is because all of mankind is Allah's creation and is crafted by Him, and certainly, every creator wants goodness and happiness for his creation.

We previously mentioned a Qudsi Hadith which made it clear that the heavens, earth, mountains and oceans, all rebelled against the children of Adam, and asked the permission of their Lord to wipe them out. The sky said, 'My Lord, give me permission to drop fragments of the sky upon them, for they have eaten up all your resources and prevented you from being thanked.' What did Allah *Glorified is He* say in response to this? He said, 'Leave Me and My creation alone! If you had created them, you would have been merciful towards them. If they turn back to Me, I am their Beloved, and if they do not turn back to Me, then I am their cure.'(1)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

= *his way to a tree and lies down in its shade, and while he is there, he suddenly finds his camel standing before him, so he grabs it by the halter, and mistakenly says in his immense joy, 'O Allah Glorified is He You are my slave and I am your Lord.' He made a mistake because of his excessive joy.*

(1) It is narrated by Al-Ghazali in 'Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din (4/52) as a statement of a man from the early generations of Muslims. The wording was as follows, 'No slave disobeys me except that his place upon the earth seeks permission to swallow him up, and the ceiling of sky above him seeks permission to drop portions of the sky upon him. So Allah Glorified is He said to the earth and the sky, 'Keep back from My slave and grant him time, for it was not the two of you who created him. If you had created him, you would have shown mercy to him. For, perhaps, he will turn back to Me and I will forgive him, and perhaps he will be transformed into a righteous man and I will transform (his bad actions) into good actions.'

وَلَقَدۡ ءَاتَيۡنَا دَاوُۥدَ مِنَّا فَضۡلٗاۖ يَٰجِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُۥ وَٱلطَّيۡرَۖ وَأَلَنَّا لَهُ ٱلۡحَدِيدَ ١٠
أَنِ ٱعۡمَلۡ سَٰبِغَٰتٖ وَقَدِّرۡ فِي ٱلسَّرۡدِۖ وَٱعۡمَلُواْ صَٰلِحًاۖ إِنِّي بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ بَصِيرٞ ١١

We graced David with Our favour. We said, 'You mountains, echo God's praises together with him, and you birds, too.' We softened iron for him [10] saying, 'Make coats of chain mail and measure the links well.' 'Do good, all of you, for I see everything you do'[11] (The Quran, *Saba':* 10-11)

After opening the door of repentance to His servants and giving them hope, even the unbelievers among them and despite the harm they caused to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and the false controversy they exerted against the Word of Allah, the True Lord *Glorified is He* remains merciful to them and loving for their welfare; He kindly draws their attention to the enormous wideness of His mercy.

It is as if He *Glorified is He* was saying to them, 'However your bad actions and sins are too many, it is not so before the Mercy of Allah; do not let those sins prevent you from repenting and coming back to Allah. If you have sinned, there are messengers who incidentally made a mistake despite being prophets. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* were, despite all of these things, still searching for excuses for them.

Therefore, He mentions after that the story of the Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*: 'And [thus], indeed, did We grace Dawud with Our favour...' (*Saba':* 10). In another verse of the Quran, He *Glorified is He* clarified the matter with David: '...And [suddenly] Dawud understood that We had tried him: and so he asked his Sustainer to forgive him his sin, and fell down in prostration, and turned unto Him in repentance.' (*Sad:* 24)

So, do not be embarrassed to repent and go back to your Lord, for a master of the human beings to whom I gave such-and-such of power and grace, made an error, and asked forgiveness of his Lord; he fell down in prostration and turned to Him in repentance. Thus, Allah wants to soften their hearts so that they can return to their Lord.

And similarly, a small mistake occurred at the hands of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* because of which our Lord tried and blamed him.

Then, he repented and sought forgiveness. Read the verse: 'But [ere this], indeed, We had tried Solomon by placing upon his throne a [lifeless] body…' (*Sad:* 34); a lifeless body means that Sulaiman could not make any movement: '...and thereupon he turned [towards Us; and] [34] he prayed: "O my Sustainer! Forgive me my sins, and bestow upon me the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after me: verily, Thou alone art a giver of gifts!" [35] (*Sad:* 34-35); Then, Allah accepted his repentance and rewarded him: 'And so We made subservient to him the wind, so that it gently sped at his behest whithersoever he willed, [36] as well as all the rebellious forces [that We made to work for him] – every kind of builder and diver – [37] and others linked together in fetters. [38]' (*Sad:* 34-38)

It is, therefore, said that one time when Sulaiman *peace be upon him* was riding his flying carpet, a trace of pride entered his soul, whereupon the carpet veered to one side. So, he said to it, 'Straighten up, carpet', and the carpet replied, 'We are only commanded to obey you when you obey Allah *Glorified is He*. (1)' That is, 'It is by Allah's will and power, not by yours, that we are subjected to you.'

'And [thus], indeed, did We grace Dawud with Our favour...' (*Saba':* 10). Favour is the translation of the Arabic word (*fadl*) which literally means surplus, overabundance, etc. Allah *Glorified is He* gave Dawud *peace be upon him* many blessings not given to many of the other Prophets: Allah made him a prophet and revealed to him the Divine System. Allah also bestowed Dawud an additional blessing that was specific to him which is He *Glorified is He* made iron ductile for him; He *Glorified is He* says: '...And We made iron malleable to him [and inspired him thus:] "Make full-length coats of mail."' (*Saba':* 10-11) The words of Allah *Glorified is He*, '...with our...' (*Saba':* 10) indicate that the blessing is not gained by the work of Dawud; rather, it is a grace from Allah. In the Arabic verse, the structure of the preposition and pronoun, *minna* precedeing the object *fadl* shows that the capacity to grant that blessing is confined to the Bestower of blessings *Glorified is He*. It is similar to the same structure of the preposition and pronoun that comes in the story of our Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '...And [thus early] I spread My Own love over thee...' (*Ta Ha:* 39).

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(1) I did not find this Prophetic Hadith in any of the source books I was able to check. But if we were to subject this Hadith to what we find mentioned in the Quran and *Sunna*, we would become certain that it is not sound, and God *Glorified is He* knows best. God: 'And so We made subservient to him the wind, so that it gently sped at his behest...' (*Sad:* 36). Ibn 'Abbas said that this means that it is obedient to him, going wherever he wants it to. *(Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 7/189)* By means of this, it is shown that it is not possible the wind rejected any command of his. As for the pride and haughtiness which possessed Solomon *peace be upon him* at that time, it is refuted by that which Salman ibn 'Amir Ash-Shaybani narrated. He said, 'It has reached me that the Messenger of God *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'Have you not looked at Solomon and the kingdom which God granted him - he did not raise his gaze once to the sky until he passed away, so great was his humility.' *(This is narrated by both Ibn Abu Shayba and 'Abd ibn Hamid)* Ibn Abu Hatim narrated the like of this Hadith from Ibn 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who said that the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* said: 'Out of humility, Solomon did not raise his gaze to the heavens until he passed away.' *(These Hadiths are all narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 7/189)* God *Glorified is He* is more exalted and knows best.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to His Prophet, Musa *peace be upon him*, 'The family of Pharaoh took you, and picked you out of the river at a time when they were killing all the male infants. You came to them in a doubtful manner and yet they loved you and you became a source of delight to them. At that time, you were dark-skinned, big-nosed, and curly-haired; there was nothing about your appearance that would especially attract their attention. But remember that I spread My own love over you and so they came to love you.'

Allah's bounties and favours cover all people, but the Messengers are granted special blessings and a special form of bounty in the form of the miracles with which Allah provides them. Allah *Glorified is He* explains His favour to the Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him*: '..."O you mountains! Sing with him the praise of Allah! And [likewise] you bird!" And We softened all sharpness in him' (*Saba':* 10).

'..."O you mountains!' is a vocative statement; Allah *Glorified is He* is calling to the mountains because they can hear His call and are aware of it: '...Sing with him the praise of Allah…' (*Saba':* 10), i.e. repeat after him what he says and what he recites from the Psalms and glorification of Allah. This is the proof that he understood the language of the mountains and that they could understand and repeat his words after him. So, the mountains have a form of speech and language which Allah *Glorified is He* made His Prophet, Dawud *peace be upon him* to understand.

We dealt with the topic of the inanimate objects glorifying their Lord when we discussed the Holy verse: ‘...and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him’ (*al-Isra’:* 44). We have refuted the statement of those who claim that it was unspoken glorification, not spoken one because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!…’ (*al-Isra’:* 44), and as Allah *Glorified is He* judges that we cannot understand their glorification that indicates that their glorification is in some form of speech.

Those who say that the glorification of mountains is by connotation consider it to be astounding that a mountain might have a language and a means of communication and understanding, but are we saying that the mountains speak to you? No, it speaks with its Lord and Creator, the One Who says: 'How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Yea, He alone is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all aware!' (*al-Mulk:* 14) So, what does this matter have to do with you? And why do you deny it?

Reflect upon Allah’s words: 'and the thunder extols His limitless glory and praises Him, and [so do] the angels, in awe of Him...' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 13). Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the glorification of an inanimate object, the thunder, in conjunction with that of the angels, the highest form of created being. But what is the connotation in connection with the angels' glorification? Why is that amazing when it has been shown that every single thing has a language that becomes it? For we have seen that hoopoe birds have their own language, ants have their own language and so on.

An aspect of the greatness of Dawud lays in the fact that he understood the language of the mountains and was able to hear their glorification, and that their glorification corresponded exactly to his own. Likewise: '...you bird!’…' (*Saba’:* 10), i.e. ‘O bird, sing with Dawud the praise of Allah, and repeat the glorification after him.’

'...And We made iron malleable for him' (*Saba’:* 10). This is another miracle of the miracles of Dawud *peace be upon him*. If Allah *Glorified is He* mentions several things and then one of them happens in reality exactly as He said, should I not believe Him with respect to all the others?

So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...And We made iron malleable for him' (*Saba’:* 10), we must believe that it is true and believe that, in the hands of Dawud, iron did indeed become like the plasticene clay that children mould and fashion into whatever shapes they desire.[1] Some people think that: '...And We made iron malleable for him,' simply means that Allah *Glorified is He* taught him that fire melts iron; if that was the case, then it would not have been miraculous in any way, and it would have been something that set him apart from other people.

Iron has many special properties and comes in many different types, and the extent of its importance depends to a great extent on how hard it is. It is because of its importance that Allah *Glorified is He* sent it from on high just as He sent down the Books. Therefore, after speaking about Messengers such as Musa and ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* and speaking about sending down the Books, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions iron in the chapter of *al-Hadid*: '...and We bestowed [upon you] from on high [the ability to make use of] iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man…' (*al-Hadid:* 25).

‘… We bestowed [upon you] from on high' is the translation for the Arab phrase *'anzalna'* (we sent down to you). It is well known that things can only be sent down from somewhere up high; so, the True Lord *Glorified is He* sent down the Books which the Messengers conveyed to guide those who accept guidance and listen to it, and sent down iron to deter the disobedient and drive them back. Thus, there is great force in iron in times of war, and much benefit for people in times of peace.

That is why He *Glorified is He* says after that: '...and [all this was given to you] so that Allah might mark out those who would stand up for Him and His apostles, even though He [Himself] is beyond the reach of human perception. Verily, Allah is powerful, almighty!' (*al-Hadid:* 25) How would they stand up for Allah and His apostles? It is by using iron against His enemies in times of

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(1) *‘Abd Ar-Razzaq, ‘Abad ibn Humayd and Ibn Al-Mundhir all narrated that Qatada said about the Words: '...And We softened all sharpness in him,' (Saba’ 10) ‘After God Glorified is He softened iron for him, he used to form it into rings in his hand, manipulating it in his hands in the same way that one manipulates clay, without putting into a fire or striking it with a hammer. (It is narrated by As- Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/676).*

war. Dawud *peace be upon him* was given by Allah *Glorified is He* both the Book for guidance and the iron for war.

Thus, Allah says to him: '[and inspired him thus:] "Make full-length coats of mail…"' (*Saba':* 11), i.e. make broad armours. These are the war garments soldiers put on, especially over the chest where the heart and the two lungs are contained, in preparation for battle to protect themselves from being killed. Allah *Glorified is He* did not say here, 'Make a hoe' or 'Make a plough' since such things are used for cultivating land. On the contrary, Allah *Glorified is He* wants the believers to protect the Divine System and drive back the disobedient.

Before Dawud *peace be upon him* armours used to be made smooth and slippery so that swords would slide off it and be deflected to a less vital part of the body. So, people used to make armours to the size that fits only the chest area. But then Allah *Glorified is He* taught Dawud to make it wider and longer so that it could protect as large an area of the body as possible. Allah says: '[and inspired him thus:] "Make full-length coats of mail…"' (*Saba':* 11).

Allah also taught Dawud to make it in the form of intermeshed iron rings: '…measuring the links with care'…' (*Saba':* 11), i.e. do perfect the method of making these iron rings interlink with one another so that when the armour is struck by a sword, the sword sticks in one of them and cannot move.

The armour of 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* had only one front part and hand not a back part. When some people asked him why he did not have armour for his back as well, he replied, 'May my mother be bereaved of me if I ever allow an enemy to attack me from behind!'(1)

Then, reflect on the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* did not first teach His prophet, Dawud *peace be upon him* production of instruments used for peace, but first taught him manufacturing military equipment and preparing the tools to fight those who break their word to Allah and deviate from His way: Allah taught him to arm himself with all the powers he could muster.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Qutayba Ad-Dinwara in his book, ''Uyun Al-Akhbar' (1/131), wherein he said, 'The armour of 'Ali Allah be pleased with him had a front part and no back part. When he was asked about that, he said, 'When my enemy is able to attack me from my back, then that will not save me.'*

The words '...measuring the links with care…' (*Saba':* 11) mean: design and shape them using precise measurements, making sure they are carefully knitted. Scholars said the word *'links'* (*sard*, in Arabic) refers to the rings from which chainmail armour is composed. These rings have holes into which nails are driven to fasten the rings together.

So, the meaning of: '…and measuring the links with care…' is 'Do not make the holes so large that the nails come loose, nor so small that the nails close the ring and prevent them from linking to one another.' Others have said that: '...measuring the links with care…' means, 'Make as many of them as you need', and it is in this sense that the following story is told:

It is narrated(1) that prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* used to live off the public purse of the believers since he was the one in charge of their affairs. So, Allah *Glorified is He* sent down to the people at that time an angel in the form of a man. Then, people began to ask him, 'How does Dawud live?' He replied, 'He does have many good qualities, but he lives off the public purse.' When news of these words reached Dawud, he became angry, felt pain on account of them and started to weep. So, he called on his Lord, saying: 'My Lord, why have You made this issue of mine?' So, Allah *Glorified is He* taught him how to make suits of armour so that he could make a living from them. (2)

He used to make a suit of armour for four thousand (3), from which he would live until it ran out. Then, he would make another suit of armour and so on. So, when Allah *Glorified is He* commanded him to make armours, He said: '...and measuring the links with care…' (*Saba':* 11) meaning, 'Make them according to your needs, and do not go to excess in terms of the number you make'

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(1) *The story of Dawud peace be upon him with the shields*

(2) *Al-Hafizh ibn 'Asakir mentioned this story in his biography of Dawud peace be upon him by way of Ishaq ibn Bashar from Abu Ilyas from Wahb ibn Munabbih. Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir (3/527) after narrating the Hadith, 'Ishaq ibn Bashar is the subject of dispute.'*

(3) *Ibn Shawdhab said this, according to what was narrated by Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi in Nawadir Al-Usul, and Ibn Abu Hatim said, 'Dawud would make a suit of armour every day and sell it for six thousand dirhams, two thousand of which were for his family and four thousand of which he used to use to feed white bread to the tribe of Israel.' (It is narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/676).*

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...And [thus should you all, O believers,] do righteous deeds: for, verily, I see all that you do!' (*Saba':* 11) It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* was saying to his Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* 'Remember, when you do what is demanded of you, that I see and overlook all that you do.' This reminder is given to a Prophet who is immune to doing wrong action, so how do you think it is with us?

We notice that whenever a worker is being watched by their employer, they do it well, but when the employer is absent, the worker neglects the work and acts dishonestly towards them; Allah *Glorified is He* warns us about this matter.

This is a brief account of the story of Dawud *peace be upon him* mentioned in this chapter, and there are stories of him in other chapters of the Holy Quran.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلِسُلَيْمَٰنَ ٱلرِّيحَ غُدُوُّهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوَاحُهَا شَهْرٌ ۖ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُۥ عَيْنَ ٱلْقِطْرِ ۖ وَمِنَ ٱلْجِنِّ مَن
يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِۦ ۖ وَمَن يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ ٱلسَّعِيرِ ﴿١٢﴾

And [We subjected] the wind for Solomon. Its outward journey took a month, and its return journey likewise. We made a fountain of molten brass flow for him, and some of the jinn worked under his control with his Lord's permission. If one of them deviated from Our command, We let him taste the suffering of the blazing flame [12] (The Quran, *Saba':* 12)

That is, just as Allah gave Dawud a great favour from Him, part of which was that Allah caused the mountains to sing the praise of Allah *Glorified is He* with him and caused iron to be soft for him, Allah also favoured his son Sulaiman *peace be upon him* making the wind subservient to him, obeying his commands.

We previously explained that when the word '*reeh*' (wind) is used in the singular, it indicates that it bears evil and punishment, and when it is used in the plural, it indicates that it bears goodness and mercy. An example is the following verses: 'And [you have the same message] in [what happened to the tribe of] 'Ad, when We let loose against them that life-destroying wind [41] which spared nothing of what it came upon, but caused [all of] it to become like bones dead and decayed. [42]' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41-42) Another example is: '...[But Hud said:] "Nay, but it is the very thing which you [so contemptuously] sought to hasten – a wind bearing grievous suffering,"' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24).

Regarding the plural form '*Riyah*' (winds), this verse is an example: 'And We let loose the winds to fertilize [plants]…' (*al-Hijr:* 22). To make things clearer: when there is a single wind, it is considered destructive because it comes from one direction. Things remain upright and perfectly balanced because the winds surround them from all sides. Skyscrapers, for example, are supported by air that surrounds them; if air were to be emptied from one particular direction then they would fall down in that direction. That is why a single wind is considered a type of a punishment, while multiple winds are considered a kind of mercy. Do you not see that the hurricanes that bring destruction come from a single direction?

But, did Allah *Glorified is He* make the winds subservient to Sulaiman *peace be upon him* or did He make the wind subservient to him? Scholar said that not all winds were subjected to Sulaiman, but it was one particular wind which Allah *Glorified is He* subjected to obey his instructions. That wind gave Solomon so great might and power that no one could oppose or resist him.

Therefore, Sulaiman was the only Prophet and king against whom no one waged war; indeed, no one dared to challenge his kingship or prophethood. How could they dare to when he possessed a power that no one else had? His sovereignty was a sovereignty of force; if he desired something, he could compel everyone to bow to his will.

As for our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* his message has come to capture the hearts, not to compel the bodies that contain the hearts. Therefore, Allah points out to him this issue in the verse saying: 'Had We so willed, We could have sent down unto them a message from the skies so that their necks would [be forced to] bow down before it in humility.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4)

'...its morning course [covered the distance of] a month's journey, and its evening course, a month's journey...' (*Saba':* 12): 'Morning course' (*ghuduw*) is travelling at the beginning of the day and 'evening course' (*rawah*) is returning at the end of the day.

'...And We caused a fountain of molten copper to flow at his behest…' (*Saba':* 12), i.e. We melted copper for him in the same way that We made iron soft for his father. This is one of the favours for which Allah *Glorified is He* singled out Sulaiman. You remember the story of the dam which *Dhu Al-Qarnayn* built; when he finished building it, he said: '…Bring me molten copper which I may pour upon it.' (*al-Kahf:* 96); that is 'melted copper' so that no one would be able to drill through the dam.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions another specific characteristic of Sulaiman *peace be upon him*: '...and [even] among the invisible beings there were some that had [been constrained] to labour for him by his Sustainer's leave...' (*Saba':* 12). The meaning of: '...by his Sustainer's leave...' is that Allah *Glorified is He* made everything that is mentioned here subservient to his Prophet, Solomon; he himself had nothing to do with it.

Therefore, Allah says: '...and whichever of them deviated from Our command…' (*Saba':* 12), i.e. deviates or turns aside from it, or disobeys the command: '...him would We let taste suffering through a blazing flame' (*Saba':* 12). So, the command of Sulaiman to the jinn was, in effect, deriving its power from the command of Allah *Glorified is He*; thus, if anyone were to disobey the command of Sulaiman, they would be considered disobeying Allah.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَعۡمَلُونَ لَهُۥ مَا يَشَآءُ مِن مَّحَٰرِيبَ وَتَمَٰثِيلَ وَجِفَانٖ كَٱلۡجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٖ
رَّاسِيَٰتٍۚ ٱعۡمَلُوٓاْ ءَالَ دَاوُۥدَ شُكۡرٗاۚ وَقَلِيلٞ مِّنۡ عِبَادِيَ ٱلشَّكُورُ ١٣

They made him whatever he wanted – palaces, statues,
basins as large as water troughs, fixed cauldrons. We said,
'Work thankfully, family of David, for few of my servants
are truly thankful' [13] (The Quran, *Saba':* 13)

Maharib which is translated into 'sanctuaries' is the plural of *mihrab* which designates both a huge, roomy palace and a place which people designate for worship. An example of this latter usage is found in Allah's Words: '...Whenever Zakaryya visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food' (*Al-'Imran:* 37).

Tamathil (Statues) is the plural of *timthal* which is sculptures carved out of stone, for example, or fashioned into the form of a human being, an animal, a bird etc. With particular regard to this matter of statues, a question arises: Does Allah *Glorified is He* bestow blessings upon His Prophet Sulaiman by having the jinn construct statues for him despite the fact that statues are known to be the symbol for polytheism, and despite the fact that the Prophets have always destroyed them and forbade people from worshipping them instead of Allah?

Scholars said that those statues were only destroyed when people started to take them as deities and objects of worship. But before that, people did not worship them, but used them as instruments of service(1) and in indication to their humiliation and insignificance.

For example, in the antiquities from ancient times, there are chairs and tables the legs of which are in the form of lions and such like. And even today, there are palaces whose balconies are in the form of a man crouched over carrying a balcony on his back instead of the concrete balconies we build today. So, statues were originally used to indicate something's lowness and insignificance, and then when they started to be worshipped, they were made forbidden and people were commanded to destroy them.

In '...and basins as [large as] great watering-troughs...' (*Saba':* 13), the word jifan (watering troughs) is the plural of *jifna* which is a well-known form of dish: '...as [large as] great watering-troughs...', i.e. like the huge, wide-open basins. This is an allusion to his generosity and the amount of food he used to feed people. '...and cauldrons firmly anchored...' (*Saba':* 13), i.e. cauldrons that remained in place due to their great size; they could not be lifted or moved from their place due to their massiveness.

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(1) *As he has mentioned 'service' here, it is necessary to mention what Al-Hakim At-Tirmidhi narrated in Nawadir Al-Usul from Ibn 'Abbas Allah be please with him regarding God's words: '...and statues...' (Saba' 13). He said, 'Solomon took statues made from copper and said, 'My Lord, breathe the spirit into them so that they can be stronger for their service.' So God breathed the spirit into them and they used to serve him. Isfidiyar was a remnant of them.' (Mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/679).*

Likewise, we have been told in the biography of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* that the Companion Abu Mut‘im *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* used to have a dish (a platter for food) with which I would shade myself on scorching hot days in Mecca.’ This is an indication of its great breadth and size and of the number of people who used to be fed from it. (1)

When King ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz of the Saudi Royal family built Riyadh, he placed within it cauldrons for food. Each of those cauldrons was big enough for a camel to stand inside it. I recall that the first time I went to Mecca; I entered the Mubarra(2) and found huge cauldrons there, so I stood inside one of them and found that it was wide enough for me.

‘... [And We said:] “Labour, O David’s people, in gratitude [towards Me]…’ (*Saba’:* 13); i.e. be thankful to Allah *Glorified is He* for His blessings, and not simply to feed yourselves.’

So, your Lord is teaching you not to labour simply to meet your own personal needs because there are people in your society who are unable to work. Then, you should work as much as you can to fulfil your needs, and then give your surplus to the needy. It is well-known that being grateful for a blessing maintains that blessing to you and makes it last and even increases it, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...If you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly give you more and more...’ (*Ibrahim:* 7).

Or: ‘... [And We said:] “Labour, O David’s people, in gratitude [towards Me]…’ (*Saba’:* 13) means ‘Be grateful that We have given you the capacity to work so that you can support those who are unable to work. ‘...and [remember that] few are the truly grateful [even] among My servants!’ (*Saba’:* 13): there are very few people who show gratitude in exchange for Allah’s blessings.

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(1) *Among the Hadiths that have been narrated in this regard is that which Abu Dawud narrated in his Sunnan (3/348) in a (Hadith) from ‘Abdullah ibn Bisr who said, ’The Prophet used to have a platter called al-gharra’ that was carried by four men.’ This was also narrated by Abu Sheikh Al-Isbahani ((Hadith) 614) in the edition printed by the Egyptian Lebanese Press.*

(2) *Mubarra is a charity belonging to the Egyptian Ministry of Religious Endowments that was set up to serve the poor. There were two of them: one of them in Mecca and the other in Medina. There was also a 'sebil' (public fountain) in Mina.*

It is narrated(1) that ‘Umar *Allah be pleased him* once heard a man say, ‘O Allah, make me be of the few.’ ‘Umar was amazed at the supplication of this man and did not understand what the man meant, so he asked him about it. The man said, ‘I heard Allah *Glorified is He* say, ‘...and [remember that] few are the truly grateful [even] among My servants!’, and so I wanted to be one of them.’ So, ‘Umar said in amazement, ‘All people are more knowledgeable than you, O ‘Umar!’(2)

Some people have the ability to pick up meanings immediately and put them to use: an example of that is found in the story (3) that is told of a man who was walking in the Watermelon Market in Baghdad. He was fasting on a hot day and passed by a man selling a drink like liquorice juice and heard the juice seller call out, ‘May Allah forgive who drinks from me.’ So, the first leant towards the latter, and said to him, ‘Give me some of your drink’, whereupon his companion reminded him that he was fasting. He said, ‘By Allah, I had hoped for that seller’s invitation!’

Another man was hurrying between Safa and Marwa; at that time there was a street, in the area between Safa and Marwa, lined with shops, with buying and selling and hustle and bustle. That street was later developed and expanded into its present state. On that street, there was a man selling cucumbers (*khiyar* Arabic for cucumbers and the same word is a plural form of the word *'Khaier'* which means good people) and calling out, ‘Ten for one riyal, O *khiyar*!’ The man who was hurrying heard him, and said in amazement, ‘If ten of *khiyar* (good people) cost one riyal, then how much do *Ashrar* (bad people) cost?!’

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *The story of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him with the man who used to implore God saying ' God make me one of the few'.*

(2) *It is narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba, ‘Abd ibn Humayd and Ibn Al-Mundhir from Ibrahim At-Taymi. As-Suyuti narrated in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (6/682), and Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (8/5546) without ascribing from where he got it.*

(3) *The story of the fasting man in the watermelon market of Baghdad.*

فَلَمَّا قَضَيۡنَا عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡمَوۡتَ مَا دَلَّهُمۡ عَلَىٰ مَوۡتِهِۦٓ إِلَّا دَآبَّةُ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ تَأۡكُلُ مِنسَأَتَهُۥۖ فَلَمَّا
خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ ٱلۡجِنُّ أَن لَّوۡ كَانُواْ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٱلۡغَيۡبَ مَا لَبِثُواْ فِي ٱلۡعَذَابِ ٱلۡمُهِينِ ١٤

Then, when We decreed Solomon's death, nothing showed the jinn he was dead, but a creature of the earth eating at his stick: when he fell down they realized – if they had known what was hidden they would not have continued their demeaning labour [14] (The Quran, *Saba':* 14)

We said that among the things Allah *Glorified is He* made subservient to Sulaiman *peace be upon him* so as to realise a kingdom for him the like of which would never be granted to anyone after him, was that Allah made the wind subservient to him, and made the jinn subservient to him to make for him whatever he wished of magnificent palaces and statues, etc.

Subjecting the jinn to Sulaiman means that Allah *Glorified is He* had subjected to him the lightest and most hidden of all His creatures; the jinn have a peculiar nature. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says of Satan: '...Verily, he and his tribe are lying in wait for you where you cannot perceive them!' (*al-A'raf:* 27)

They are also characterized by swiftness in performing actions meaning that they can do things in a very short period of time and carry huge amounts. The proof is that when Sulaiman *peace be upon him* asked for the throne of Bilqis which was in Sheba, he said to those sitting around him: '...Which of you can bring me her throne ere she and her followers come unto me in willing surrender to Allah?' (*an-Naml:* 38) None of the people who were present spoke up because Solomon *peace be upon him* had limited the time for fetching the throne to a degree beyond the capacity of human beings. He only requested the throne after learning that the delegation of Sheba were on route towards him, and wanted someone to bring the throne of Bilqis into his presence before they arrived. Even among the Jinn, no ordinary jinni proposed to undertake this task. Yet an (*'ifrit*) from among the Jinn said to Sulaiman: "I shall bring it to thee ere thou rise from thy council-seat...' (*an-Naml:* 39).

The word *'ifrit* means a jinni who is highly-proficient, skilful and able to do things that other members of his race are not able to do. This proves that there are different types of Jinn, some who are highly skilled (*'ifrit*) and some who are awkward (*labkha*); the same is true for the human beings. Still today, in our native Egyptian dialect, we say, ‘So-and-so is an *'ifrit* meaning that he is highly-skilled and is able to do something better than most other people.

But there was someone in the inner council of Sulaiman who was even more skilled than the (*‘ifrit*), possessing an even greater level of expertise and swiftness when it came to performing actions; this was the one who was given an amount of particular knowledge: ‘Answered he who was illumined by revelation: “[Nay,] as for me – I shall bring it to thee ere the twinkling of thy eye ceases!”…’ (*an-Naml:* 40)

If the *‘ifrit* was going to fetch the throne of Bilqis before Sulaiman rose from his council-seat, and Sulaiman could well have remained in his session for an hour or even a number of hours, then the one who possessed particular knowledge of the Book promised to bring it: ‘...ere the twinkling of thy eye ceases!”…’ (*an-Naml:* 40); the eye twinkling does not require a lot of time. Indeed, eyes can even twinkle many times within a minute.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* illustrates the speed of response of this act: ‘...And when he saw it truly before him, he exclaimed: “This is [an outcome] of my Sustainer’s bounty, to test me as to whether I am grateful or ungrateful! However, he who is grateful [to Allah] is but grateful for his own good; and he who is ungrateful [should know that], verily, my Sustainer is self-sufficient, most generous in giving!’ (*an-Naml:* 40)

The context of the verses does not go into any details about how the throne was brought, nor does it even mention that Solomon commanded that person to bring it. Rather, it says: ‘...I shall bring it to thee ere the twinkling of thy eye ceases!" And when he saw it truly before him...’ (*an-Naml:* 40); the throne was fetched before Sulaiman straight away. It is as though fetching the throne took no time at all, and so the statement also came quickly and directly.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* knows that the Jinn were listening stealthily to the heaven before the Mission of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. But after the Mission of Muhammad had begun, Allah *Glorified is He* prevented them from listening stealthily, saying: ‘...and anyone who now [or ever] tries to listen will [likewise] find a flame lying in wait for him!’ (*al-Jinn:* 9)

This is one of the special characteristics of his Message, for before the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was sent, most of the secrets of Heaven had been protected whereas after him all of the secrets of Heaven were protected. Before the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was sent, the Jinn used to ascend to Heaven and listen stealthily, trying to steal a few of the words of the angels. Then they would go and inspire their satanic human friends(1), as Allah, says: '...And, verily, the evil impulses [within men's hearts] whisper unto those who have made them their own that they should involve you in argument...' (*al-An'am:* 121).

Then, they would inform humans of what they had heard, and the humans claim that they know the Unseen. Things would happen exactly as they said. So, they were able to trick and mislead people and keep them captivated. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to expose the Jinn for this particular thing they were doing, so He said: 'Yet [even Sulaiman had to die; but] when We decreed that he should die...' (*Saba':* 14), i.e. when Sulaiman passed away. The word 'decreed' was used to show that death is an inevitable destiny and there is no escape from it; it is not resultant of illness, old age or anything else. It is just as they say, 'Dying for no reason is itself a reason.' In other words, he died because he must die.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses the human beings, among whom is our master, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* with the Words: ‘Yet, verily, thou art bound to die, [O Muhammad,] and, verily, they, too, are bound to die’ (*az-Zumar:* 30) mentioning this reality first to Muhammad and then to his community. The word *mayyit* ‘bound to die’ means you are destined to death. So, we and all other living creatures are [(*mayyitun* (the plural of *mayyit*)] since we are all going to die. As for those who have actually died, they are called *mayt* like in the words of the poet: A mayt (dead person) is none other than the one who is carried to the grave. Thus, giving us a physical illustration of what death is, scholars say ‘In the very moment that your life begins, the arrow bearing your death is fired in your direction. So, your life span is the length of time that arrow takes to reach you. Therefore, despite the fact that we are living, we are all *mayyitun*.'

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(1) *From Abu Hurayra Allah be please with him who said, 'The Prophet Muhammad said, 'When God decreed the entire affair in Heaven, the angels beat their wings in submission to His Words with a noise like a chain striking stones. Then, when the fear entered their hearts, they said to each other, 'What did your Lord say?' And [others] replied, 'He said the truth - He is the Great and Exalted.' Those from the jinn who were listening stealthily heard these words, these jinni stand upon the shoulders of each other, hear a single word and then pass that on to one beneath them. Then that one would, in his turn, pass it on to another beneath him until it was eventually passed on, on the tongue of a magician or soothsayer. That [stealthy listener] jinni would either be struck down by the fiery meteor before passing it on to a magician, or he would pass it on before it reached him; the magician adds a hundred lies to this word of truth. Then, the people who attended the magician say, 'did he not say such-and-such to us on that other day?'' Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (8/380 & 537 with the commentary of Ibn Hajar), by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (1/69) and At-Tirmidhi in an abridged wording (5/362). And At-Tirmidhi said that it was (hasan sahih).*

The statement‘...nothing showed them that he was dead...’ (*Saba’:* 14) is: ‘nothing showed the Jinn...’ The third person pronoun in ‘showed them’ goes back to those who were referred to in the initial context of Allah’s words: ‘...and [even] among the invisible beings there were some that had [been constrained] to labour for him by his Sustainer’s leaved...’ (*Saba’:* 12).

Relating the story of our Sulaiman *peace be upon him* it is said that he used to worship Allah and show Him gratitude as much as he can for blessings and kingship. Despite the enormous grace Allah granted to Sulaiman, he still used to go through the entire week and even month eating nothing but *khushkar*. *Khushkar* is the bran which is known to be the lowest component of grain. It is the food of servants and the poor. As for the masters and the rich, they only eat high-quality flour, the ‘class A’.

Strangely enough, modern science has shown the benefits of eating bran that the poor eat. It is even made into a pill and prescribed as a remedy and treatment for certain illnesses. Even those people who live in luxury and spend their whole lives eating the finest grade of flour and lunching on croissants, doughnuts etc., when they approach the end of their lives, their doctors come to them and forbid them to eat all their delicacies and find no other remedy for them but the bran that had never once in their lifetimes passed their lips. It is as if this were a necessary way of balancing things up between the rich and poor. The researches that have shown us the importance of bran also draws our attention to Allah’s words: 'and grain growing tall on its stalks, and sweet-smelling plants.' (*ar-Rahman:* 12) and allows us to understand them better.

Similarly, Sulaiman *peace be upon him* used to worship Allah standing upright; he would not ever take up a restful position. He used to be very hard on himself to show his gratitude to Allah *Glorified is He* and would stand up in worship until he grew tired. Then, he would stand on one foot and left the other up to relieve it and do vice versa, and then when he grew very tired, he would lean on a staff to help continue to remain upright.

When Allah *Glorified is He* decreed death for him he was standing in that position and none of the Jinn were aware that he was dead. So, they continued to do their work in front of him and expend effort on his account because of their great fear of him (1).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to use the death of Sulaiman *peace be upon him* as a means of settling a matter that concerned both jinn and men, namely the claim of the jinn to know the Unseen. Allah wanted to expose them and show their total lack of ability to know the Unseen, since it is only Allah *Glorified is He* who has knowledge of the Unseen.

Sulaiman died standing up and leaning on his staff, and remained in that condition until Allah *Glorified is He* subjected his staff to the gnawing of an earthworm, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...nothing showed them that he was dead except an earthworm that gnawed away his staff...' (*Saba':* 14).

Some have understood the earth that is referred to in the Words: *dabbat al-ard* (earthworm) refer to the earth that is the opposite of the heavens, but really the meaning here is the worm (*dabbat*) that gnaws (*taqrid*), like when we say, 'The rat gnawed such-and-such.' The declension of this verb is: *qarada*, *yaqridu*, *qardan*, like *daraba*, *yadribu*, *darban*. This creature that is referred to here is the worm that attacks and eats wood.

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(1) *Abad ibn Humayd narrated from Qatada: 'The Jinn used to tell certain people that they knew things of the Unseen, and that they knew what was going to happen tomorrow. So they were tested by means of the death of Solomon peace be upon him; he died and remained standing, leaning on his staff, for a full year, and for that entire year, they were totally unaware that he died and in their ignorance continued to serve him and work for him unceasingly. (Narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/684)*

This woodworm continued to eat away at the staff until it upset the balance of Sulaiman and he fell to the ground: '...And when he fell to the ground, those invisible beings [subservient to him] saw clearly that; had they but understood the reality which was beyond the reach of their perception, they would not have continued [to toil] in the shameful suffering [of servitude]' (*Saba':* 14), i.e. they would not remain in their state of servility. As for the word *kharra* 'fell to the ground', it means to fall down in a disordered fashion, like in Allah's words: '...so that the roof fell in upon them from above...' (*an-Nahl:* 26).

'*Khurur*' (noun of the verb *kharra*) is the falling down in a disorderly fashion. It was only when that happened that the Jinn knew that Sulaiman *peace be upon him*, was dead, just like men, and knew that they did not know the Unseen.

For, if they had known the Unseen, they would have discovered the fact that he was dead before that, and would not have remained for that entire time in toil, hardship and suffering(1). That was the moment in which the truth about them was laid bare, their lies were exposed and their claims to know the Unseen were shown to be false.

They '... would not have continued [to toil] in the shameful suffering [of servitude].' (*Saba':* 14) That is Jinn can be worn out by work, and are subject to the same feelings of tiredness as all other living creatures.

The Arabic word for 'staff' is *minsat* which derives from the verb *nasa'a* meaning 'to delay.' *minsat* is so-called because people used to drive away insects and other harmful creatures with them.

Musa *peace be upon him* said about his staff when his Lord asked him: '"Now, what is this in thy right hand, O Musa?" [17] He answered: "It is my staff; I lean on it; and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep; and [many] other uses have I for it.' [18]' (*Ta Ha:* 17-18) Musa spoke at such great length to Allah *Glorified is He* because Allah *Glorified is He* had intimated to him that he should speak at length by saying: 'Now, what is this in thy right hand, O

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(1) *It is narrated by Sa'id ibn Manṣur, 'Abad Ibn Humayd, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim that Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him said, 'Solomon remained leaning on his staff for a year after he died, and then fell down immediately after the year ended. So people took a staff like his staff and got a worm like his worm, and set the worm on the staff, and the worm ate the staff in a year.' (Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/683)*

Musa?' (*Ta Ha:* 17), and not saying instead, for instance, 'What is in your hand?' Then, who can help themselves speaking at length with their Lord when He addresses them? However, Musa *peace be upon him* still corrected himself, and said in summary: '...and [many] other uses have I for it.' (*Ta Ha:* 18)

From Allah's words: '...they would not have continued [to toil] in the shameful suffering [of servitude]' (*Saba':* 14), it is understood that the work they were doing was difficult and a source of humiliation for them. That is because Jinn think that they are better than mankind and that they are the higher form of species, as is proven by the words of their forefather at a previous time: '…"I am better than he: Thou hast created me out of fire, whereas him Thou hast created out of clay.' (*al-A'raf:* 12)

A source of humiliation and suffering for them was the fact that they were subjected to a human being, and knew that they were but still had to obey him. So, even if the work they did for Sulaiman was not exhausting in a physical sense, still it was exhausting in a psychological sense. Why not, since they were subjugated by someone beneath them, in their viewpoint.

One may ask, 'How could someone who is serving and living in close proximity to a prophet ever be in suffering?' we would reply, 'This particular complaint was uttered by the Jinn, and from it we understand that all of the Jinn without exception were placed under the authority of Sulaiman *peace be upon him*. But the truth is that the Jinn were so-called because they are hidden and we cannot see their movement and actions. Those of the Jinn who were subjugated were the devils, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'as well as all the jinn [that We made to work for him] – every kind of builder and diver –'(*Sad:* 37). He also says: 'And among the jinn [which We made subservient to him] there were some that dived for him [into the sea] and performed other works, besides' (*al-Anbiya':* 82). These groups have undergone the humiliating punishment, while the believer among the jinn was not subjected to the commands of Sulaiman *peace be upon him*.

The word *kharra*, meaning fell, indicates that a person's dignity lies in his soul and spirit which is the divine Allah *Glorified is He* placed within his body. Here he is Sulaiman, a great Prophet of Allah, a man who enjoyed a high station with his Lord, and yet it is said of him: '...And when he fell to the ground...' (*Saba':* 14), as if he were but some inanimate object falling to the ground, That is because when the soul leaves the body, the body becomes something almost inanimate, like a staff or stone.

We said previously that the moment the soul is snatched from the body, the first thing it forgets is its name no matter how great it was. They call it 'a body', and then when it is placed in the bier, it takes the name of 'bier'.

Glory be to Allah! This lump of matter no longer has any attribute worth mentioning. Rather, its family and loved one's rush to get rid of it and bury it as fast as they can. If it were to have remained in their possession, none of them would have been able to bear it because of the changes it undergoes and the smell that emanates from it and hurts those who were once closest to it.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about the land of Sheba and its people, saying:

لَقَدۡ كَانَ لِسَبَإٖ فِي مَسۡكَنِهِمۡ ءَايَةٞۖ جَنَّتَانِ عَن يَمِينٖ وَشِمَالٖۖ كُلُواْ
مِن رِّزۡقِ رَبِّكُمۡ وَٱشۡكُرُواْ لَهُۥۚ بَلۡدَةٞ طَيِّبَةٞ وَرَبٌّ غَفُورٞ ﴿١٥﴾

There was a sign for the people of Sheba, too, in their dwelling place: two gardens, one on the right, one on the left: 'Eat from what your Lord has provided for you and give Him thanks, for your land is good, and your Lord most forgiving' [15] (The Quran, *Saba':* 15)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* takes us from the story of Sulaiman *peace be upon him* to the story of the people of Sheba. What is the connection between the two of them? Reflecting on the chapters and verses of the Quran, we will find that they are linked and in perfect harmony. The correlation here is that Sulaiman had one of the most striking stories in terms of the elements and doctrines of belief, namely his story with Bilqis, the queen of Sheba. Then, there is a relationship between the two of them, and so this leap from one story to the next is fitting.

The story(1) of Sulaiman with the hoopoe bird and Bilqis is a famous one, and within it, there are many great indications and proofs relating to belief and relating to the fact that animals have knowledge of belief and knowledge of Allah's secrets in His creation.

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(1) *The story of the seeress with Sheba*

Sheba was the name of a man called ‘Amr ibn ‘Amir, who was given the nickname of Maziqiba’. His father was called *Ma' as-Sama'* (Water of Heaven), Karra ibn Nusayk [1] *Allah be pleased with him* asked the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* about Sheba, and he replied, {‘Such-and-such...}. He had ten sons: Azad, Kinda, Madhhaj, Ash‘ariyyun, Anmar, Ghassan, ‘Amila, Lakhm, Judham and Khath‘am.’[2]

Each one of these men formed a large tribe, six of which moved to Yemen and four of which went to the Levant. Those who went to Yemen lived in bountiful welfare. It is narrated that when Bilqis saw the rainwater flowing into the valleys and being absorbed into the ground so that they could not derive any benefit from it, she thought of building a dam between two mountains to hold in the rainwater. Then, she placed a number of fountainheads very much like the Barrages at the entrance of the Nile delta. These could be opened up when water was needed. Therefore, there was growth in Yemen and the amount of resources increased so that eventually it is called the ‘Fertile Yemen’ or ‘Fortunate Yemen’.

But one day, a fortuneteller or a wise woman said to Sheba, ‘The dam will fall apart, and its waters will drown Yemen so leave the country.’ So, Sheba did indeed leave and they moved to the Hijaz and the Levant: the Ghassanites went to the Levant, the Mundhirites went to Iraq, the Anmarites went to Medina and the Azadites went to Amman in Jordan.

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(1) *The correct version of the name is Farwa ibn Musayk Al-Muradi Allah be pleased with him and he was ranked among the Companions. He is considered to be one of the people of Kufa, although he was originally from Yemen. His patronym was Abu Sabra. He came in a delegation to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessing be upon him) who made him governor over Murad, Madhhaj and Zubayd. His arrival [in Medina] occurred in the ninth or tenth year AH. ‘Umar Allah be please with him put him in command of collecting the zakat of Madhhaj. Then he moved to Kufa where he became one of its most eminent people. (A summary taken from Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba of Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalani, biography number 6975. And in his account is mentioned the question he asked the Messenger of Muhammad about Sheba.)*

(2) *It is narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3222), and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan in an abridged form (9388) in Kitab Al-Huruf wa Al-Qira'at as part of a (Hadith) from Farwa ibn Musayk Allah be please with him.*

The name Sheba, after originally being used as the name of a man, moved beyond that to be used as the name for a tribe and then finally as the name for the place in which they lived. 'Indeed, in [the luxuriant beauty of] their homeland, the people of Sheba...' (*Saba':* 15); that is the place where they lived. A place where a person lives is called *sakan* or *bayt* or *manzil*. Each of these words has its own particular meaning. *Sakan* is a place where a person lives and relaxes from work effort and the activities of life. Humans only live in places in which they find safety and all of the necessary facilities of life.

Therefore, when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* left his wife and son near the Sacred House, he called on his Lord, saying: 'O our Sustainer! Behold, I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Thy sanctified Temple' (*Ibrahim:* 37).That place was totally barren; there was no vegetation, water or any of the other vital components of life to be found there except for air. The meaning of: '...I have settled...' (*Ibrahim:* 37), is 'I have made this a homeland for them.'

As for *manzil*, it is a place where you camp down from time to time and then move on; it is not a place where you take up permanent residency. It is like those public rest houses that are there in case of emergency and which people spend no more than a few days in the entire year.

An example of this is the Prophetic Hadith regarding part of the battle of Badr when the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* reached Badr, the great Companion, Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir (1) *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, 'O, Messenger of Allah, is this a place in which Allah has commanded you to camp down, or is it one that is based on opinion and battle tactics?' He replied, 'It is one that has been chosen based on opinion and battle tactics.' So Al-Hubab said, 'Then, I do not think that this is a good place to set up camp. Rather, get the people up and keep moving until we get to the nearest watering hole of the people; it is there that we should alight. Then we can sabotage all the wells behind it and build a basin above it which we can fill with water. Then, when we fight the enemy, we will be able to drink and they will not be able to drink.' So, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'I will command as you have suggested.'(1)

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(1) *He is Al-Hubab ibn Al-Mundhir ibn Al-Jumuh Al-Ansari Al-Khazraji Allah be pleased with him. He was present at the battle of Badr, and had the patronym of Abu 'Umar. Ibn Sa'd said, 'He died during the Caliphate of 'Umar Allah be pleased with him when he had passed the age of fifty.' (Al-'Isaba of Ibn Hajar, biography number 1547)*

So, *sakan* is a place of permanent residence where people settle, while *manzil* is a resting-place at which you may stop and set up camp or leave behind.

As for *bayt*, the etymology of the word suggests spending the night. People only sleep restfully in a place in which they feel safe with respect to themselves and to their belongings. Therefore, those who are frightened or very hungry find themselves unable to sleep.

Another place in which the word '*sakan*' is used is in Allah's words to the sons of *Isra'il*: 'And after that We said unto the children of Israel: "Dwell now securely on earth – but [remember that] when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!"' (*al-Isra':* 104).

One of the Orientalists took hold of this verse and said that it was a proof that the entire earth had been made permissible to the Jews, but how could that be when they are on the earth? When you want to say something of that sort, you always specify a place, for example, 'Make Cairo your dwelling' or 'Make Tanta your dwelling'. But as for: '..."Dwell now securely on earth…' (*al-Isra':* 104), it has quite a different meaning. It means they are dispersed throughout the earth into different places, as in Allah's words: 'And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth…' (*al-A'raf:* 168).

In other words, they do not have any particular homeland but rather will be spread out throughout the land so that no one will be able to strike at them or annihilate them. They will remain in that state of dispersal until the Command of Allah *Glorified is He* comes and gathers them all into one place, at which point it will be come easy to bring an end to them.

As for the word, '...evidence...' (*Saba':* 15), it is the translation of the Arabic word *Ayah* which means a sign, a miracle, a lesson, proof or example; for instance, we may say, 'So-and-so is an example of generosity' or 'So-and-so is a sign of good manners'... etc. That is to say that someone or something is unique and remarkable. The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us of three different types of (evidences):

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(1) *Ibn Hisham narrated it in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (2/259 & 260), and ascribed it to Ibn Ishaq from some men from the Banu Salama.*

The first type is the universal or cosmic evidence such as in His Words: 'Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon...' (*Fussilat:* 37) and His Words: 'For among His signs is this: thou see the earth lying desolate – and lo! When We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life]…' (*Fussilat:* 39).

The second type of evidences or signs is miracles and things which go against the norms of this world such as those Allah gives to His Messengers to support them and prove they are speaking truthfully with respect to what they convey from Allah *Glorified is He*; for example: '[And now] put thy hand into thy bosom: it will come forth [shining] white, without blemish...' (*al-Qasas:* 32).

And thirdly, the word 'evidence or sign' is used to refer to the verses of the Book that carry within them the divine rulings of Allah in the Noble Quran. All of these, whether they are cosmic signs or miracles or verses of the Quran, are all wonders. Just as these wonders are clear and apparent in the universal signs and miracles, they are also apparent in the verses of the Wise Book. The Quran is a wonder in terms of the way it organises the life of the human beings; this is proven by the fact that the unbelievers will be forced to adopt its rulings and obey its laws, not because they are a religion, but because they are the necessary rules of life.

The example we gave to show this previously was that of the laws of divorce: despite their continuous criticism and attack against these rules, and, ignorantly and unfairly, accusing the religion of Allah of being harsh, still we find them taking refuge in it. They find no solution to their problems except for divorce and so they come back to the rulings of Allah *Glorified is He* despite the fact that they do not believe in them. This is the ultimate victory for the religion of Allah; the fact that unbelievers come back to it. That is the victory of truth and the victory of proof.

We also previously mentioned that one of the orientalists once asked us the following question when we were in San Francisco: 'the Quran says: 'He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with [the task of] spreading guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He make it prevail over all [false] religion, however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught but Allah.’ (*as-Saff:* 9), and yet after fourteen centuries, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc. still exist in the world. [How is that]?’This man's words indicate a lack of understanding of the meaning of the verses; the meaning of: ‘...that He makes it prevail over all [false] religion...’ (*as-Saff:* 9) is not that all people are going to become believers, as the very verse ends with the words: ‘...however hateful this may be to those who ascribe divinity to aught but Allah.’ (*as-Saff:* 9)

So, Islam’s victory over them will be by its evidence and its superiority to their laws; since problems will crop up in their lives for which they find no solution except in the Law of Allah *Glorified is He*. That is the victory to which the verse refers.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us exactly what the evidence was that Sheba had in their dwellings, saying: ‘...two [vast expanses of] gardens, to the right and to the left …’ (*Saba’:* 15). Since Allah *Glorified is He* describes these two gardens as being evidence, there must be something wonderful about them and they must be different in some way from gardens as we know them.

Scholars have spoken about the wonders of these two gardens; they said that these two gardens contained no scorpion, snake, fly, flea...etc. If someone visited one of these gardens with a louse on their body, that louse would die as soon as they stepped into them.(1) These were wonders of these gardens.

One notes here that the word 'evidence' is in the singular even though it refers to many wonders. This is because the Arabic word *Ayah* (evidence, sign, verse, symbol, and example) can also refer to the plural, such as in Allah’s Words about ‘Isa *peace be upon him*: ‘And [as We exalted Musa, so, too,] We made the son of Maryam and his mother a symbol...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50). Allah *Glorified is He* does not say here 'two symbols'. That is because, as scholars say, the two of them shared one marvellous event: *'Isa peace be upon him* was born without any male parent, and Maryam *peace be upon her* bore him without having a male partner. So, the two miracles are but a single one.

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(1) *Ibn Abi Hatim narrated from Ibn Zayd that he said about God’s words: 'Indeed, in [the luxuriant s ever seen in their city. Riders would come with lice and vermin infesting their clothes. But as soon as they look upon the houses of the people of Sheba, those vermin fell down dead. And if any man were to enter the two gardens carrying a basket on his head, when he got out that basket would be full of all sorts of fruit without him having taken any of them with his hand.’ (Narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 6/687)*

As for the Words: '...two [vast expanses of] gardens, to the right and to the left…' (*Saba':* 15), it is possible that every one of them had two gardens, one to the right and one to the left, with his house in the middle; and it is possible that the two gardens were for the entire people of Sheba, meaning that there were gardens all connected to each other to the right and gardens all connected to each other to the left, indistinguishable from one another and not separated by walls or fences.(1) And that indicates that security was the norm amongst them. We have witnessed the like of this in America where fields and crops stretch out, closely connected to one other, separated by no more than a piece of wire.

As for Allah's words: '"eat of what your Lord has provided for you, and render thanks unto Him"' (*Saba':* 15), how can we understand the Words: '..."Eat of what your Lord has provided for you"' (*Saba':* 15) when all people eat from what Allah *the Exalted* provides them? People, they say, generally eat from what Allah *the Exalted* provides them through secondary causes, but in this case, Allah provides for them directly without any secondary causes. And that is why Allah *the Exalted* says elsewhere: '"Partake of the good things which We have provided for you as sustenance...' (*Ta Ha:* 81).

Not all provision is good to eat, except for here: '"eat of what your Lord has provided for you"' (*Saba':* 15): i.e. all of it is good and all of it is sweet. The fruits in these two gardens are never ruined - they are never afflicted by rot as other fruits are. And that is why Allah *the Exalted* says in another verse: '...a land most goodly and a Lord much-forgiving!"' (*Saba':* 15)

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(1) *A number of opinions have been narrated with regard to these two gardens, among which are the following: 1) That the gardens were between two mountains in Yemen. This was what Qatada said. 2) One of the gardens was to the right of the valley and the other was to its left. This was what Sufyan said. 3) He does not mean two gardens, but rather, they are a metaphor for wealth and good fortune. This was what Al-Qushayri said. Al-Qurtubi narrated it in his Tafsir (8/5553) and said, 'i.e. their land was full of gardens, trees and fruits whose shadows covered the people.'*

It is well-known that the amount of work necessary to maintain a garden is minimal, which is why we often see farmers who struggle to plough their crops and pay their workers' wages, turn instead to fruitful orchards and gardens. And that is mainly because they cost less and do not require a great deal of supervision at those times in which they bear their fruit.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'Have you ever considered the seed which you cast upon the soil? [63] Is it you who cause it to grow – or are We the cause of its growth? [64]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-64), establishing the fact that they do work and sow the fields. But, as for the matter at hand - the two gardens about which we speak - they were a gift from Allah *the Exalted* with no secondary causes, requiring no work from them. Allah *the Exalted* is the cultivator, and He was the One Who chose for them a gentle climate, no subject to heat or cold. There was no weariness nor fear, nor any need to abstain from any of Allah's blessings since they were all plentiful.

So, there was no work that they had to do in their gardens to produce what they enjoyed from them – rather, their only work was to thank the Bestower of blessings so that He *the Exalted* could then increase the good things He had bestowed on them. Showing thanks for a blessing is part of the wisdom of a slave towards his master, which is what Allah *the Exalted* says about Luqman *peace be upon him*: 'And, indeed, We granted this wisdom unto Luqman...' (*Luqman:* 12). What is this wisdom to which He *the Exalted* refers? Be '…'grateful unto Allah...' (*Luqman:* 12) because being grateful for blessings increases them.

As for Allah's words: 'a land most goodly' (*Saba':* 15), they mean that the land gives forth good things without anything loathsome therein. And that is because there are things that initially give you good in which you take pleasure, but later exhaust and spoil things for you.

But, as for this land, all that is in it is good which you will eat with pleasure and good cheer. And that is because it is provision that has come from Allah *the Exalted* directly without any input from His slaves. For whenever His slaves have a hand in Allah's gift, troubles, and disturbances always appear in the blessings that come. And that is exactly what we are suffering from today because of the interventions we have made in the lifecycles of our crops by spraying them with chemical fertilisers and insecticides - those chemicals have ruined our lives and brought us more harm than good. Indeed, today, we have traced the cause of all the diseases we know back to our meddling with the gifts that Allah *the Exalted* gave us. If we had left the earth alone and allowed it to be irrigated naturally by the sky just as it was in the beginning, we would have had a taste of unspoilt goodness. So it is absolutely imperative that we act well towards Allah *the Exalted* with respect to His gifts.

And that is why you find that so many people of wealth, culture, knowledge, and philosophy love to escape from the tumult and din of the big cities and from their polluted atmosphere and water, and get out into the countryside. They are fleeing from the harmful effects of modern civilisation into the open country where shepherds live and where nature is as Allah *the Exalted* created it, where creation is healthy and unspoilt by the meddling of human beings.

You will remember that in the past we used to combat the worms that ate our cotton naturally, removing them with our own hands. Then, the advancements made by science led to the chemical insecticide DDT being developed to combat these worms. But this poisonous substance killed off everything in the fields, killed the fish in the canals and water ditches, killed the white egret, a close friend to agriculture, polluted the water and crops...etc. The only thing that developed a resistance to it was the cotton worm! It became, as we say, immune to DDT.

As for Sheba, it was: ‘a land most goodly’ (*Saba’:* 15): everything in it was good - its water, air and soil, never having being once touched by any sort of pollution. And if the land itself was good, then how good do you think the things on it are?

In the verse, there are two requests: ‘...“eat of what your Lord has provided for you, and render thanks unto Him…’ (*Saba’:* 15) as well as the warning: ‘Beware of being fooled by the blessings, thinking that they belong to you and forgetting the One Who bestowed them upon you. Beware of being like the one about whom Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening [6] whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient [7]’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7).

Beware of thinking that you are deep-rooted in this matter and always remember that the Bestower is Allah *the Exalted* and that where you are and what you have is part of Allah’s gift to you. And then you must thank Him because it is by means of gratitude that blessings are bound to you.

In another place, the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about being grateful for blessings, saying: ‘...and [remember that] few are the truly grateful [even] among My servants!”’ (*Saba’:* 13) May Allah *the Exalted* be praised that He did not say instead: ‘and few are the thankful among My servants’, using the word *shakir* instead of the instead of *shakur* which, as you know, is either the intensive form of the adjective from the verb *shakara*, ‘to thank or be grateful’, or is the one who gives thanks for the blessing and then thanks Allah *the Exalted* for inspiring him to give thanks for the blessing. So it is as if he offers thanks twice.

Then there is the fact that the blessing to Sheba was not confined to this world alone, but rather extended to the Hereafter as well. In this world, they have: ‘...a land most goodly...’ (*Saba’:* 15), and in the Hereafter they have: ‘...and a Lord much-forgiving!’ (*Saba’:* 15). In other words, Allah *the Exalted* will disregard any mistakes or slip-ups that you make.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes clear what the result will be and how they will react, saying:

فَأَعۡرَضُواْ فَأَرۡسَلۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ سَيۡلَ ٱلۡعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلۡنَٰهُم بِجَنَّتَيۡهِمۡ جَنَّتَيۡنِ ذَوَاتَيۡ أُكُلٍ خَمۡطٖ وَأَثۡلٖ
وَشَيۡءٖ مِّن سِدۡرٖ قَلِيلٖ ﴿١٦﴾ ذَٰلِكَ جَزَيۡنَٰهُم بِمَا كَفَرُواْۖ وَهَلۡ نُجَٰزِيٓ إِلَّا ٱلۡكَفُورَ ﴿١٧﴾

But they paid no heed, so We let loose on them a flood from the dam and replaced their two gardens with others that yielded bitter fruit, tamarisk bushes, and a few lute-trees [16] In this way We punished them for their ingratitude – would We punish anyone but the ungrateful? [17]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 16 - 17)

When Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘But they turned away...’ (*Saba’:* 16), He means that they turned away from what they were commanded, that being: ‘...“Eat of what your Lord has provided for you, and render thanks unto Him…’ (*Saba’:* 15). They stopped eating from what Allah *the Exalted* had provided them and instead ate only from what their own efforts and skills brought them, or so they claimed. This was their first failure. Then they failed to thank Allah *the Exalted* for those blessings because the blessings had brought them luxury and opulence and so they forgot to give thanks for them.

There is a difference between the two verbs *tarafa* and *atrafa*: we use *tarafa* when we want to say that a person lives a life of luxury and comfort. But, as for *atrafa*, we only use it when a person has been deceived and deluded by the blessings that have come his way. And that is why Allah *the Exalted* says: 'But when [this has been done, and] it is Our will to destroy a community, We convey Our last warning to those of its people who have lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures; and [if] they [continue to] act sinfully..." (*al-Isra': *16).

There is no harm in you living in luxury - your troubles only start when those blessings come to dominate your life and deceive you. The first way you go to excess with respect to blessings is attributing them to yourself, saying, 'I earned them by my own efforts and cleverness', like the one who said: '...This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!…' (*al-Qasas:* 78) And then you forget the Bestower of the blessing and neglect to thank Him for it.

And in another place in the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* summarises this matter for us, saying: 'And Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [Imagine] a town which was [once] secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings: and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought.' (*an-Nahl:* 112)

And He *the Exalted* says about the people of Prophet Noah *peace be upon him*: '[Know] then, that if they [who have heard Our call] keep firmly to the [right] path, We shall certainly shower them with blessings abundant' (*al-Jinn:* 16).

So, the fact that blessings are preserved by recognising them and giving thanks for them can all be attributed to the Bestower of blessings. Indeed, even when it comes to human beings, we say, 'So-and-so remembers good turns with gratitude' and so we give him increase and are not stingy towards him with other good turns. So how do you think it is with the True Lord *Glorified is He*?

The word *i'rad* implies something greater than mere negligence and forgetfulness, for *i'rad* is to turn away from the one to whom you are speaking and show him your side. It is just like when you say to someone whose speech does not please you, 'Show me the side of your shoulders.'

So, *i'rad* is deliberately leaving something with complete indifference. As for heedlessness, forgetfulness, mistakenness or when asleep, all of those are things for which we will be pardoned, for Allah *the Exalted* in His mercy does not take us to task for them since He only judges us according to what we do when we are aware and awake and what we do deliberately.

Read if you will Allah's words: 'But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me – his shall be a life of narrow scope; and on the day of Resurrection We shall raise him up blind.' (*Ta Ha:* 124) Why? Because turning away suggests that one is paying little attention to the one giving the commands, and so the punishment is greater, as opposed to when you do pay attention to the one giving the commands, but later turn your concern to yourself for some other reason.

Allah *the Exalted* also says about *i'rad*: 'And, too, when We bestow Our blessings upon man, he tends to turn aside and keep aloof [from remembering Us]…' (*Fussilat:* 51). And then the recompense will come according to the degree to which one turns away, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes clear in His Words: '...But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come]: [34] on the day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told:] "These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures [35]"' (*at-Tawba:* 34-35).

Just as we say, 'You have raised the one who will later kill you', so too will those who hoard wealth enjoy it for a short time in this transient world, and then they will reap the consequences of that on the day of Rising - their foreheads, sides and backs will be branded by flames and the pain will be so bad that they will wish that those treasures had been less so that they would have been branded in less places.

If you reflect on the order of these words: foreheads then sides then backs, you will find that, that is the same order in which the parts of the body of a person of wealth are turned aside from a needy person who asks him for money in this world. For the first thing he does when he sees him is to turn his face aside, then he shows him his side and finally he turns his back on him. So the recompense is just like the act which merited it, and has all the same details.

What was the result of this turning aside of theirs? Allah *the Exalted* says: '... and so We let loose upon them a flood that overwhelmed the dams...' (*Saba':* 16), i.e. after the dam of 'Arim collapsed, its waters flooded and drowned them. It is an amazing thing that Allah *the Exalted* made every living thing out of water, but when He *the Exalted* wants, He *the Exalted* can use it as a means to destroy your people. It was by means of water that Allah *the Exalted* destroyed the people of Nuh (Noah), and by means of it that He *the Exalted* destroyed Pharaoh and his army. And that is a proof of the absoluteness of Allah's Power, since He *the Exalted* directs a thing towards life and it brings life and directs it towards death and it brings death.

When they wanted to find somewhere to settle after the terror of the flood of the dam of 'Arim, they chose to settle in places in which there was no water. And then, when they wanted water, they would fetch it from nearby wells. It was as if water caused them to develop a complex.

This ancient case has echoes in a modern story(1) of which we were a part: when we were in the Azhar, we used to wear *kaftans and kakula* robes. One of our colleagues had very limited means and only possessed a single *kakula* robe, which he wore continuously until it became worn and torn, and it became a habit of his to stretch out his hand from time to time to the place where it was torn in an attempt to conceal it. Then Allah *the Exalted* provided for him by means of a brother of his finding work and buying a new *kakula* robe for him, which he started to wear. But his hand would still stretch out to the same spot, and he would still try to cover the tear that no longer existed in the new robe, so one of his colleagues asked him what was up with him, and he replied, 'The old one still haunts me.'

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(1) The story of the Azhar student with the old beverage

S*ayl* is water that flows on the surface of the ground: after the ground has absorbed as much of the water as it can, the overflow flows from there to another place. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is teaching us that before we search for sources of water, we should search for drainage areas so that it does not drown us. Read Allah's words: 'And the word was spoken: "O earth, swallow up your waters! And, O sky, cease [your rain]!"…' (*Hud:* 44)

The first command was to the earth to swallow up and absorb the water, and then the second was to the sky to hold back its waters. And that is why we say, when the ground has had its fill of water, that it has *'unninat*, meaning that it has become filled to the brim with underground water. If that ground is agricultural, then no crops emerge from it, and if that ground is urban, then the water damages the buildings, overflows into the streets, destroys the pipes...etc. Those who work the earth know well the importance of good drainage.

The *'Arim* to which the 'flood of 'Arim' is ascribed has many different meanings, for an *'arim* is either the stone upon which the dams were built or the rat which breached the dam (1) and created a gap through which the water passed. The water then caused that gap to widen until it became like a spring.

We have seen the role that water had to play in destroying the Bar Lev Line, when Allah *the Exalted* inspired one of our engineers with the thought of using a water pump that was strong enough to eliminate the earthen barrier that was the main obstacle in the way of our gaining control over that defensive line and destroying it. And, in truth, that particular idea astonished the entire world.

The word *'arim* is in the plural: its singular is *'arima*. It is just like *labin* and *labina*, although *labin* are clay-oven bricks while *'arim* are stone bricks.

Then He says: '...and changed their two [expanses of luxuriant] gardens into a couple of gardens...' (*Saba':* 16), one of the characteristics of which was that they yielded: '...bitter fruit...' (*Saba':* 16). In other words, Allah *the Exalted* changed the two gardens that were described earlier into two other gardens.

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(1) *This is what Az-Zajjaj and Ibn Al-A'rabi said. Mujahid and Ibn-Najih said, ''Arim is the red water that Allah the Exalted sent against the dam and which split it and destroyed it.' It is also narrated from Ibn-'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him that, ''Arim is fierce rain.' (Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi 8/5554)*

But these latter two gardens produced: '...bitter fruit...' (*Saba':* 16), i.e. bitter-tasting fruit from which one naturally recoils; and the trees of these latter two gardens were: '...tamarisks, and some few [wild] lote-trees.' (*Saba':* 16).

The *ithl* is the tamarisk tree, a tree of little benefit that produces no fruit whatsoever; and the sidr is the well-known thorny lute tree, another tree of little benefit. So could such a place be called a garden? They say the True Lord *Glorified is He* only called it a garden out of irony? And how could that not be so, for there would be no trees such as these in the Garden? And even when it came to their punishment, we note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* was merciful towards them, for He *the Exalted* did not make the garden empty.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* confirms that that which befell them was not something unjust, but rather was a just recompense for what they had done, saying: '...thus...' (*Saba':* 17), i.e. by means of those things that we have just mentioned: the bitter fruit, tamarisks and lute-trees: '...We requited them...' (*Saba':* 17), i.e. as recompense: '...for their having denied the truth...' (*Saba':* 17): here *kufr* refers to ingratitude for blessings. The ingratitude of these people for the blessings that Allah *the Exalted* had bestowed on them lay in the fact that they thought that it was their own hard work and effort that had brought them those blessings. They showed their ingratitude by not turning towards the Bestower, not thanking Him and not obeying Him when He commanded them: '..."Eat of what your Lord has provided for you...' (*Saba':* 15), and when He *the Exalted* commanded them: '...and render thanks unto Him…' (*Saba':* 15).

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* declares Himself above that by means of the rhetorical question: '...But do We ever requite [thus] any but the utterly ingrate?' (*Saba':* 17), making use of the emphatic adjectival form *kafur* and not the active participle form *kafir*. And that is a sign of Allah's mercy to His slaves since He *the Exalted* only recompenses the *kafur* those who persist in their ingratitude and are constantly ungrateful.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَعَلۡنَا بَيۡنَهُمۡ وَبَيۡنَ ٱلۡقُرَى ٱلَّتِي بَٰرَكۡنَا فِيهَا قُرٗى ظَٰهِرَةٗ
وَقَدَّرۡنَا فِيهَا ٱلسَّيۡرَۖ سِيرُواْ فِيهَا لَيَالِيَ وَأَيَّامًا ءَامِنِينَ ١٨

Also, We had placed, between them and the towns We had blessed, other towns within sight of one another to which they could travel easily –' Travel safely in this land by night and by day'[18] (The Quran, *Saba':* 18)

This is another blessing that Allah *the Exalted* bestowed on the people of Sheba, for: 'Now [before their downfall,] We had placed between them...' (*Saba':* 18) means between the people of Sheba: '...and the cities which We had blessed...' (*Saba':* 18), meaning the cities of the Levant which Allah *the Exalted* refers to in the story of the Night Journey when He *the Exalted* says: 'Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Makka/Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem] – the environs of which We had blessed – so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.' (*al-Isra':* 1)

Q*ura* is the plural of the word *qarya* which is the name of a place in which the dwellings are humble and in which one can only find those things that are absolutely necessary for survival. If you were to stop off at such places, you would be offered *qira* which are food and drink.

We know that the people of Yemen were a people who used to use to engage in trade between Yemen and the Levant, so Allah *the Exalted* placed on their trading routes: '...[many] towns within sight of one another…' (*Saba':* 18), i.e. closely connected to one another, resting-places along the way like (*The Rest House*). And the reason for that was because of the great distance between Yemen and the Levant when they made their winter journey and summer journey. And so the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make those journeys easier for them and allow them to cross that distance without hardship.

And '...thus We had made travelling easy...' (*Saba':* 18), i.e. We made their journey divided into parts of short distances, with the towns conspicuous and close by to them on their journeys so that when they passed them by they could see them without difficulty from the route upon which they were travelling. These towns and villages were distributed at regular intervals along the route so that every time they travelled a distance along the way, they found another town waiting there for them.

And that meant that they would be safe, there would be nothing to make them fearful, and that they would have no need to carry provisions with them. And that is because the towns they passed by on the way spared them the need of carrying any supplies, for they found within them everything that they needed, and that also meant that they would need to take a large number of pack animals with them.

As-Sayr means travelling in the morning, but the word is commonly used for travelling in the morning and in the evening. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* sets them at ease with respect to this matter, saying: '..."Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day!"' (*Saba':* 18) So they would travel in the early morning to a place where they would rest in the early afternoon, and then they would travel to the early evening to a place where they would spend the night. In other words, they had daytime resting stations and nighttime resting stations. Their journeys took place in an atmosphere of total safety and security, guaranteed to them by the True Lord *Glorified is He* - there was nothing to cause them fear or alarm, neither wild animals nor people.

When we compare what Allah *the Exalted* says here: '...safely...' (*Saba':* 18) with what He says about Quraysh: 'who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger' (*Quraysh:* 4), we find that their security is ensured by them being given food and that they are given safety from fear and danger, whereas here Allah *the Exalted* simply says: '...safely...' (*Saba':* 18) and makes no mention of fear or danger. The reason for that is because the phrase: '...safely...' (*Saba':* 18) means 'in total safety' and includes both security from hunger and safety from danger. And that is known by the fact that: '...safely...' (*Saba':* 18) has nothing attached to it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَقَالُواْ رَبَّنَا بَعِّدۡ بَيۡنَ أَسۡفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمۡ فَجَعَلۡنَٰهُمۡ أَحَادِيثَ
وَمَزَّقۡنَٰهُمۡ كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٖ شَكُورٖ ١٩

But [still] they complained, 'Our Lord has made the distance between our staging posts so long!' They wronged themselves and, in the end, We made their fate a byword, and scattered them in countless fragments. There truly are signs in this for every patient, thankful person [19] (The Quran, *Saba':* 19)

Reflect on this quarrelsomeness and wanton disregard of the blessings of Allah *the Exalted*! They were not pleased at the fact that Allah *the Exalted* had placed the towns so close together and so they asked: '..."Long has our Lord made the distance between our journey-stages!"…' (*Saba':* 19), i.e. 'Put these towns further apart from one another by placing great deserts between them so that no one can reach them but the rich and capable, those who possess strong pack animals capable of bearing heavy loads.'(1)

So, their point of view of the matter was an economic point of view based entirely upon greed and covetousness - they wanted to deny the poor and incapable from making the trade journeys with them. At the time the towns were so close together and the resting-places so frequent along the way that as soon as a traveller left the outskirts of one town, he could see the next one in the distance, and that made it easy for the poor to make the journey on the back of weak animals. For the riding animals that people had depended upon their financial means: some had horses, some had camels, and some had donkeys.

The closeness of the towns to one another encouraged the poor to make the trip to the Levant, and that is why these people asked Allah *the Exalted* to make the distance between those towns longer. It was a request motivated solely by selfishness and greed, and that is why Allah *the Exalted* says straight after that: '...for they had sinned against themselves...' (*Saba':* 19). Yes, they had sinned against themselves because they had denied themselves the rest with which Allah *the Exalted* had provided them; they had sinned against themselves because they had sought to monopolise that trade and prevent others, especially the poor, from going out with them. Or may be they had sinned against themselves because they had shown themselves up as having imperfect belief, for a person's belief is not complete until he wants for his brother what he wants for himself and these people wanted to keep all the blessings to themselves and prevent others from accessing them.

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(1) *This is like the statement of the tribe of Israel when they showed wanton disregard for the blessing Allah the Exalted bestowed on them by sending down to them manna and quails without them having to expend any effort to get them. They said: '...we cannot endure but one kind of food; pray, then, to your Lord that He bring forth for us aught of what grows from the earth – of its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils, its onions." Said [Moses]: "Would you take a lesser thing in exchange for what is [so much] better?..."' (al-Baqara: 61). Their punishment for that was that: '...ignominy and humiliation overshadowed them, and they earned the burden of Allah's condemnation: all this because they persisted in denying the truth of Allah's messages and in slaying the Prophets against all right: all this because they rebelled [against Allah], and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right.' (al-Baqara: 61)*

But how could that greater distance that they requested on their trading routes come about? We know from the science of engineering that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line and that the straighter the road, the easier it is to travel along and the less time and effort one takes in making one's journeys. The only way to make the distance longer is either by destroying some of those towns so that the distance between the remaining ones is longer, or by making the path windy and crooked or causing to go around in circles.

The result of this hubris and greed was: '...And in the end We caused them to become [one of those] tales [of things long past], and scattered them in countless fragments...' (*Saba':* 19), i.e. a subject of people's conversation or a tale told by them. Just as when a criminal is captured by the police and they make an example of him so that what happened to him becomes a cautionary tale for others, in the same way Allah *the Exalted* made an example of the people of Sheba until what happened to them became the proverbial tale. Indeed, they say in an Arabic proverb used to indicate separation and splitting up, 'They split up like the hands of Sheba' meaning that they split up after having been together just as the people of Sheba split up.

As for: '...and scattered them in countless fragments...' (*Saba':* 19), it means that they were scattered and split in every way possible - no matter how small the parts, they were split from each other. '...Herein, behold, there are messages indeed...' (*Saba':* 19) meaning that there are lessons in it that any rational person can make use of in his own life.

For'...all who are wholly patient in adversity and deeply grateful [to Allah]' (*Saba':* 19): both *sabbar* and *shakur* are intensive adjectival forms. *Sabbar* is the intensive adjectival form deriving from *sabr* (patience), and that is because these people suppressed the poor, treated them unjustly and wanted to prevent them being able to access any blessing, and kept all the good things to themselves. And they did that time and again. And that is why Allah *the Exalted* does not use the active participle form *sabir* and say, 'for all those who are patient in adversity.' Rather, he uses the intensive form because the amount of abuse they were forced to bear required them to possess a great deal of patience.

We said previously that if an unjust oppressor were to know what Allah *the Exalted* holds in store for the oppressed, he would only act unjustly towards him begrudgingly. It is enough for someone who is oppressed that Allah *the Exalted* is going to be on his side on the Day of Rising.

It is a sign of the stupidity of unjust oppressors that when they wake up to their oppression and their enthusiasm and nervousness die down, they want to make expiation for them oppressing other people, so they direct their energies to good and build mosques or schools...etc. thinking that they will get the reward for them. But the reality is that all of the reward for them will go to those whom they oppressed and whose property and money they appropriated. And that is because Allah *the Exalted* says: '...and none can take count as We do!' (*al-Anbiya':* 47)

Allah *the Exalted* also says *shakur* which means greatly thankful to Allah *the Exalted* that he has given him the capacity to be patient and endure. And that is why they say, 'You were not patient - rather, it is We who made you patient.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ صَدَّقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُۥ فَٱتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Satan was proved right in his opinion of them, for they all followed him – except for a group of believers [20] (The Quran, *Saba':* 20)

The particle *laqad* contains a double emphasis: the first emphasis is achieved by means of *la* and the second by means of *qad*. '...Satan (Iblis) did prove...'

(*Saba':* 20), i.e. he was sure and certain: '...that his opinion of them...' (*Saba':* 20), i.e. of the people of Sheba and other similar types of people who followed their ways: '... had been right...' (*Saba':* 20). But what was Satan's opinion? His opinion was that the appetites of men would enable him to lead them astray. We all know his story, when Allah *the Exalted* commanded him to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him*. But he refused, saying by way of threat: '...Now that You have thwarted me, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Your straight way,' (*al-A'raf:* 16), and saying: '...Then [I swear] by Your very might: I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error.' (*Sad:* 82) But he had not completely lost all shame and so he added: '[all] save such of them as are truly Your servants!' (*al-Hijr:* 40)

So the opinion of Satan (Iblis) is that he said, 'I led your forefather astray and gained power over him when I did so, for he ate from the tree despite the fact that he was the first and strongest member of the human race, and despite the fact that Allah *the Exalted* Himself entrusted him and only entrusted him with one single thing. For Allah *the Exalted* gave him the permission to eat all the fruit of the Garden except that of one single tree. But despite that, I still gained power over him. So, I will also be able to gain power over his offspring, for they are not as strong as he was, they were not entrusted with their affair directly by Allah *the Exalted* and they have been entrusted with many things. So the same power which enabled me to gain control over their forefather will also enable me to gain power over them.'

This opinion of Satan is not knowledge of the Unseen, but rather is an analogy that he has drawn on the offspring of Adam *peace be upon him* based upon his experiences with their forefather. If Adam *peace be upon him* were the first man created, directly by the hand of Allah *the Exalted* the one to whom He *the Exalted* made the angels prostrate, the one that He *the Exalted* entrusted directly and the one who was only entrusted with doing one thing, but despite that I still gained power over him, then I will have even more power over his offspring. Satan (Iblis) did not arrive at this analogy by means of some miracle or a close friendship with Allah *the Exalted* and that is why it is called an 'opinion'.

And then, when Satan actually did gain power over [some of] the offspring of Adam *peace be upon him* and lead them astray, he said, 'My words came to pass exactly as I said they would', for they really did follow him: 'Now, indeed, Satan (Iblis) did prove that his opinion of them had been right: for [when he called them,] they followed him...' (*Saba':* 20). Then comes the exception to that: '...all but some of the believers [among them].' (*Saba':* 20) This exception corresponds exactly to the first exception: '[all] save such of them as are truly Your servants!' (*al-Hijr:* 40)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُۥ عَلَيۡهِم مِّن سُلۡطَٰنٍ إِلَّا لِنَعۡلَمَ مَن يُؤۡمِنُ بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ
مِمَّنۡ هُوَ مِنۡهَا فِي شَكّٖۗ وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٍ حَفِيظٞ ﴿٢١﴾

Even though he had no authority over them. But [We aim] to distinguish those who believe in the life to come from those who doubt it: [Prophet], your Lord observes everything [21] (The Quran, *Saba':* 21)

If Satan leads mankind astray, do they then have an excuse for them being astray? And is Satan the only who is in the wrong? The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us here about him and about them in the context of the story of Sheba: 'And yet, he had no power at all over them: …' (*Saba':* 21). Satan takes this expression and uses it to proves his case on the day of Rising: when people say to him on that day, 'You are the reason for us being astray and in a state of misguidance', he will reply: '...Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves...' (*Ibrahim:* 22) meaning, 'do not blame me and do not wrong me. I only gave you a signal. I did not have any power over you - I did not use my strength to force you to do it, nor did I compel you to obey me, and nor did I have any strong evidence with which I convinced you.' The difference between being forced to do something and being convinced to do it by strong evidence is that when you are forced you do it unwillingly, but when you are convinced you do what is requested of you gladly and willingly.

Our Lord warns us of Satan and his whispers and insinuations, and we know that we will not be forced to anything except by Allah *the Exalted* especially with regard to this prescription, about which Allah *the Exalted* says:

'Hence, if it should happen that a prompting from Satan (Iblis) stirs you up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah…' (*Fussilat:* 36).

Simply by reminding him of Allah *the Exalted* he draws back, retreats and runs away. He has power over you when you are alone, but as soon as you take refuge in your Lord, he becomes frightened and runs away. And that is because he has no power and no ploys when Allah *the Exalted* is mentioned and remembered. And that is why one of the Gnostics said, 'Say this word with strength and it will be as if you can see him and throw him to the ground.'

So what should you do if he comes to you when you are reciting Quran? They say that you should stop reciting and say in a loud voice, in a tone different to that with which you have been reciting, 'I seek refuge with Allah *the Exalted* from the accursed Shaytan.' We have tried to get this matter across to youthful minds by putting it in the following way, 'If a wealthy man were to spend the night on the balcony and witness a burglar trying to break into his house, and get up from where he was and say, 'Ahem!' what would the burglar do? He would run away! Then, if the burglar were to tell himself that it might have only been a coincidence and come back the next night, and the owner of the house were to have noticed him again and again said, 'Ahem!', then this time the burglar would flee and never come back, since he would know that the owner of the house was vigilant and could not be taken unaware.'

And the same is true with the expression, 'I seek refuge with Allah *the Exalted* from the accursed Shaytan' - it frightens Shaytan and drives him away. And then, if he comes back another time and another time, every time you become aware of his whispering and insinuations, say, 'I seek refuge with Allah *the Exalted* from the accursed Shaytan.' And then he will know that you are on to him and that there is no way that he can get to you.

When Shaytan was arguing with his Lord, he knew exactly how to get at mankind, and said: '... I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Your straight way' (*al-A'raf:* 16). And it is exactly as we have mentioned, for he does not, for example, lie in wait for you in a bar, but rather in the mosque. He knows that there you will be engaged in worship, and his fondest wish is to spoil your worship and make it come to naught. Do you not see how he reminds you in the prayer of all the tasks you have forgotten to do in the course of your day? So it is incumbent for the believer to attach great value to the time he spends standing before Allah *the Exalted* and not let anything distract him while he is in the presence of his Lord.

It is the prayer that is the straight path upon which Shaytan lies in ambush for you, and that is why our *fiqh* scholars *may Allah have mercy on them* and be pleased with them, have taught us that we must infuriate Shaytan.

So, if he whispers to us in the prayer so that we lose track of whether we have prayed two or three rak'as, we consider it as if we have only prayed two rak'as, building upon the lesser of the two. And we must do the same when it comes to *wudu'* (ablution) and the like, in order to infuriate him and cause him to despair of us.

The phenomenon of forgetfulness in the prayer is in reality a healthy sign of belief. So, do not make yourself ill on account of it, but rather be strong in your belief, take heart in your battle against this enemy and say to him, 'I will not give you the opportunity to wreck my meeting with my Lord.' If you say this and shout out the shout of belief, you will burn him up. And if he returns then you return also, safe in the knowledge that the ploys of Shaytan are weak indeed, for Allah *the Exalted* says: '...verily, Satan's guile is weak indeed!' (*an-Nisa':* 76) He has no power over you so long as you are with Allah *the Exalted* and so long as you remember and mention Him, for you have the vigilance of faith and the vigilance of belief.

We previously related the story(1) of Imam Abu-Hanifa *may Allah be pleased with him* when a man came to him to ask a legal opinion and said, 'Imam, I hid some money in a place in the desert and marked the spot with a stone. But a flood came and washed it away so that I can no longer find the place.' The Imam laughed and said to the man, drawing on all of his expertise, experience, and ability to formulate legal opinions, 'My boy, there is no science that deals with such matters, but I will suggest a stratagem you could employ. After you have prayed *'Isha'*, go and do *wudu'* again with the intention of Allah *the Exalted* guiding you to that which you lost. And then pray two *rak'as* and tell me what happens.' So the man did what the Imam had advised him to do. And when he was in the course of the prayer, Shaytan came to him to ruin his prayer and said to him, 'Your money is in such-and-such a place.' So, the man went out and found his money. Then he went back to the Imam and told him what had happened, so the Imam said, 'By Allah *the Exalted* I knew that Shaytan would not leave you to complete your night in the company of your Lord!'

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(1) The story of the man who asked Abu-Hanifa *may Allah be pleased with him* about money he has buried in the desert and lost it

So, have trust in the phrase, 'I seek refuge with Allah *the Exalted* from the accursed Shaytan' and say it with strength and conviction.

Would Allah *the Exalted* make a statement that was then shown to be false the reality of somebody's life who believed in him?! Try it out for yourself and you will see.

As for Allah's words,'... [for if We allow him to tempt man,] it is only to the end that We might make a clear distinction between those who [truly] believe in the life to come and those who are in doubt thereof…' (*Saba':* 21). If Satan (Iblis) has no power over mankind and they are but following his suggestions, then that means that their belief is not firmly rooted and that they have forgotten one of the rulings of Allah *the Exalted*. And that is because Allah *the Exalted* warned them about him and described to them how they could overcome him, and yet they did not do it.

Satan was only allowed to mislead them: '...that We might make a clear distinction between those who [truly] believe in the life to come and those who are in doubt thereof…' (*Saba':* 21), i.e. knowledge by it happening. It could not mean anything else since the True Lord *Glorified is He* knew what they were going to do in pre-time. But they must actually physically do the act before it can become a proof against them. It is like a teacher who sees all the signs of failure in a student and warns him about that. Then, when he goes into the exam and fails, he goes and blames the teacher who predicted that he would fail, so the teacher says back to him, 'did I hold back your hand or prevent you from answering the questions? No, I simply judged you according to what I saw in you before you went in.'

It is still possible, however, for that student to cheat in the exam and succeed despite what his teacher said, and that is because the knowledge of the teacher is imperfect, unlike the knowledge of Allah *the Exalted* which is perfect. So, knowledge of its happening is necessary for there to be proof.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...for your Lord watches over all things.' (*Saba':* 21): *hafizh* is the intensive adjectival form from *hifzh* - Allah *the Exalted* guards over and preserves treasure, provision, knowledge and everything else. It is as Allah *the Exalted* says: 'For no single thing exists that does not have its source with Us; and nought do We bestow from on high unless it be in accordance with a measure well-defined.' (*al-Hijr:* 21) And for as long as Allah *the Exalted* is the Preserver, no one is able to transgress against this matter.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلِ ٱدْعُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِى
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَلَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِن شِرْكٍ وَمَا لَهُۥ مِنْهُم مِّن ظَهِيرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

Say, 'Pray to your so-called gods besides God: they do not control even the weight of a speck of dust in heaven or earth, nor do they have any share in them, nor are any of them any help to God [22] (The Quran, *Saba':* 22)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* moves on to a general matter, and that is the matter of those people who worship other than Allah *the Exalted* argues with them in order to show them the unsoundness of their path and the futility of worshipping other than Allah *the Exalted*. These people responded by saying: '...We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah...' (*az-Zumar:* 3).

The first thing we say is, 'What is worship?' Worship is what happens when the worshipper obeys the commands and prohibitions of the one who is being worshipped. So, when unbelievers worship the sun or the moon or idols or the like, what is it that those 'gods' have commanded them to do? And from what have they prohibited them? And what rewards have these 'gods' set in store for those who worship them? And what punishments have they set in store for those who reject them?

No, the truth is that you are lying when you say, 'We worship them'. And if you were really worshipping them because they bring you closer to Allah *the Exalted* then why do you not worship Allah *the Exalted* directly instead? How can you worship gods that have no path and do nothing for those who worship them or anything against those who reject them?

These created beings (idols made of stone) that they worship instead of Allah *the Exalted* are created by Allah *the Exalted* are subject to His Will and all glorify Him. They are innocent of this *shirk* and idolatry and do not approve of it. Indeed, they are more worshipful of Allah *the Exalted* than they are, and that is why the rocks spoke on the tongue of this poet (1), saying,

They worship us, but we are more worshipful of Allah
than those who stand in prayer in the time before dawn.
They took our silence as a proof against us,
but we have become for them fuel for the Fire.
In their ignorance, they have committed a crime
Just like they did against 'Isa and his disciples
The one who exceeds the bounds will have his recompense,
While the one against whom bounds have been exceeded will be saved by the mercy of the All-Forgiving.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* argues this matter with them, saying, 'Say: "Call upon those [beings] whom you imagine [to be endowed with divine powers] beside Allah…' (*Saba':* 22): Call upon these alleged Allahs of yours! But they did not call upon them because they knew that their supposed Allahs would never respond. And that is why Allah *the Exalted* completes it for them and tells them what the result would be, if you were to call upon those Allahs, '...they have not an atom's weight of power either in the heavens or on earth…' (*Saba':* 22).

So, on what basis do you worship them when they do not possess anything, have never done anything good for you and have never offered you any service? '...nor have they...in [governing] either' (*Saba':* 22), i.e. the heavens and earth, '...any share...' (*Saba':* 22), i.e. any share alongside Allah *the Exalted* they do not have any part to play in the process of creation. '...nor does He

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(1) Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi himself, from a poem he wrote on the *Hijra* of the Prophet *peace be upon him*

[choose to] have any helper from among them.' (*Saba':* 22), i.e. they did not help Allah *the Exalted* when it came to create the heavens and the earth. A (*zhahir*) is a strong helper. Another example of its usage is found in Allah's Words: '...and all the [other] angels will come to his aid.' (*at-Tahrim:* 4)

Zhahir comes from the word *zhahr* meaning 'back'. The back is the strongest part of the body when it comes to lifting and pushing, so a *zhahir* is one who uses all the strength at his disposal to help you.

There are many things one can use to argue against those who call on 'gods' other than Allah *the Exalted*. And the first of those is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* created man and made him His vicegerent upon the earth. And before creating man, He *the Exalted* created all of the necessary ingredients by means of which he could sustain his life. Then He left him to enjoy those blessings and did not charge him with doing anything until he reached the age of puberty and maturity. And man reaches maturity when he becomes capable of begetting another like himself.

We previously exemplified that by means of fruit: fruit does not become ripe nor taste sweet to human beings until its seeds reach full maturity so that, were they to be planted in the ground, they would grow into a plant bearing fruits exactly like it. And that is one aspect of Allah's kindness to us, for if fruits were to taste sweet before their seeds had matured, then we would have eaten all the fruit in one go and that species would have come to an end and would no longer be available to anyone after that.

But the Creator wants there to be, for the great number of the descendants of man, an even greater number and variety of descendants of good things, for they represent a resource that safeguards the needs of the human race. For example, one melon seed produces a tree bearing any numbers of fruits, in each of which are one hundred seeds. And that is because we plant some of them and take delight in the nuts of many of them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* made a covenant with us at an atomic level when mankind were all still in the loins of Adam *peace be upon him* making them bear witness against themselves before any of them developed appetites going against the way of Allah *the Exalted* and saying: '"...Am I not your Lord?" – to which they answer: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!"'

[Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the day of Resurrection, “Verily, we were unaware of this” [172] or lest you say, “Verily, it was but our forefathers who, in times gone by, began to ascribe divinity to other beings beside Allah; and we were but their late offspring… [173]”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172-173).

This pledge is a natural part of every human psyche. Indeed, the only reason religions come about is in an attempt to shake the dust of heedlessness and the dust of appetite from this natural human state. And that is why no Messenger came to establish a religion but rather to simply remind people of this ancient covenant: ‘And so, [O Prophet,] exhort them; your task is only to exhort’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 21).

And that is why whenever we, human beings, are beset by problems or find our means constricted or find ourselves in situations from which we can see no escape, this natural part of us brings us back to that hidden strength that will save us. So, you might see someone calling out for help, saying, (*Ya huwah*), meaning, ‘O He!’ ‘He’ is a pronoun that indicates absence, and is a stronger way of notifying than using the proper noun. Why is that? Because when you say it, you are not directing your attention except to one whom you cannot see, that being Allah *the Exalted*.

And that is why He *the Exalted* says: ‘Say: “He is the One Allah”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), and does not say, ‘Say: “Allah is One.”’ When you say ‘O He’, the only one who comes to your mind is Allah *the Exalted* especially in times of hardship. When your means are tightly constrained, nobody comes to your aid except for your Lord, as He Himself says: ‘...all those [powers] that you are wont to invoke forsake you, [and nothing remains for you] save Him...’ (*al-Isra’:* 67). In times of hardship and constraint, human beings do not lie or deceive themselves. For instance, you even see unbelievers exclaiming when things are hard, ‘O Lord!’ - Their nature brings them back to Allah *the Exalted* the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

But if natural belief has such power, then what thing in a human being has the ability to blot it out? They reply that what blots it out is a person’s desire when they move in a direction contrary to the way of Allah *the Exalted*. For the Way of Allah *the Exalted* aims to refine a person’s desires and impulses and sharp edges. And that is not considered to be suppression of those instincts, since if it was, then why did He create them?

However, there must be a reason for these appetites. Take the sexual impulse, for instance - it was given to us to ensure the preservation of the species, not to violate other people's honour. Anger is another impulse that has a role to play, for the True Lord permits you to become angry when you are provoked. And that is why they say, 'anyone who when he is provoked does not become angry is a donkey.'

But, despite that, our Lord still commands us to be forbearing, for He *the Exalted* says: '...and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 8), i.e. do not let your anger cause you to go beyond the limits of what is reasonable and just. Do not let it make you do something unjust. So the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not suppress those feelings within you, but rather limits them so that we do not do something excessive because of them.

There is a story (1) of 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* that highlights this principle for us perfectly. It is narrated that when 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* saw the man who had killed his brother Zayd ibn Al-Khattab on the battlefield, he turned aside from him. And when he was reminded that that was the man who had killed his brother, he said, 'And what should I do to him when Allah *the Exalted* has guided him to Islam?' It was as if Islam had cooled down the fire for vengeance that burned within him. And Islam, as we all know, erases all that comes before. (2)

And, similarly, Islam wipes away anger. So, when 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* saw his brother's killer, he said to him, 'Turn your face away from me - I do not have any love for you.' He said that because of the anger that remained within him, so the man said, 'Does your lack of love for me get in the way of any of my rights?' 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* replied,

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(1) *The story of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him with the killer of his brother Zayd ibn Al-Khattab*

(2) *From 'Amr Ibn Al-'As may Allah be pleased with him that when he came to enter into Islam, he said, 'Messenger of Allah, I pledge allegiance to you on the basis that you forgive all my sins, those in the past, including ones I no longer remember, and those in the future.' the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him replied, ''Amr, Pledge allegiance, for Islam wipes out everything that comes before, and the hijra wipes out all that comes before.' So 'Amr may Allah be pleased with him said, 'I have pledged allegiance.' Then he went away. It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/199, 204 & 205).*

'No,' so the man said, 'The only ones who cry on account of love are women(1)!' meaning that it 'does not concern me whether you love me or hate me. The only thing that is important is that my rights are guaranteed.'

Similarly, curiosity is an impulse that Allah *the Exalted* gave to human beings in order to help them discover the secrets of His creation - He *the Exalted* did not give it so that people should spy on others or expose their innermost secrets.

So, Islam has not come to suppress man's impulses or bring an end to them, but rather to refine them, keep them within the bounds of what is reasonable and just and cause them to be used for the task for which they were created.

And that is why we say that, in some situations and circumstances, Islam gathers two opposite things within the heart of a believer, like when Allah *the Exalted* says: 'Muhammad is Allah's Apostle; and those who are [truly] with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another...' (*al-Fath:* 29). And may Allah *the Exalted* have mercy on 'Ali, when he said(2):

If I am in need of forbearance, then certainly
there are occasions when I am more in need of impetuosity.
I have a horse of forbearance that is bridled by forbearance,
And I have a horse of impetuosity that is saddled by impetuosity.
Whoever desires me to set them straight, I will set them straight,
And whoever desires me to make them crooked, I will make them crooked.

Severity is required and has its place, and abasement is required and has its place - it is position granted you by faith that makes you. The only reason

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(1) *A number of narrations have come down of a similar meaning, in one of which 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him said to Tulayha Al-Asadi, 'You killed Ukasha ibn-Muhsin. There is no love for you in my heart.' So Tulayha said, 'Close companionship is a thing of beauty, Commander of the Faithful. And people even keep close company with one another when they hate each other.' ('Uyun Al-Akhbar of Ibn-Qutayba 3/9). Ibn-Qutayba also narrated that one of the caliphs said to a man, 'I hate you.' So the man replied, 'Commander of the Faithful, it is only women who feel anxiety because of an absence of love. Rather, [what is important], is fairness and justice.'*

(2) *Ibn-Qutayba Ad-Dinuri narrated these verses in his book, 'Uyun Al-Akhbar (1/289), but he ascribed them to Muhammad ibn-Wuhayb and not to 'Ali.*

Allah *the Exalted* gave us the Way was to straighten out our life’s affairs. So when Allah *the Exalted* charges you to do something that clashes with one of your appetites, do not say, ‘The law clashes with my impulses!’, but rather view it in a more generous matter and add, ‘and it also clashes with the impulses of others for my sake.’ So, for example, when the Law tells you not to steal and you are but a single person, it also tells the millions not to steal from you.

When a person’s unimpaired nature and natural religiosity clash with his lower appetites, he searches for a religious solution that satisfies his appetites and gratifies his impulses. He wants to be religious, but in that very moment, he desires that his appetites remain unfettered. So what does he do? He resorts to worshipping gods that have no Way and do not make him responsible for anything. And that is what led to people worshipping other than Allah *the Exalted*. Set aside those who worship trees and rocks, and reflect instead on those who, for example, worship angels. Have they ever commanded them to do anything or forbidden them from doing anything?

That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say: “Call upon those [beings] whom you imagine [to be endowed with divine powers] beside Allah…’ (*Saba’:* 22).

If we were to use our intellects to examine the matter of partner gods, their falseness would swiftly become apparent, for if Allah 'God' were to have had partners - or if there were other gods alongside him - then, where are they? Do they know that Allah has taken sole possession of Godhood? Did they know He bears witness to that Himself and openly declares that it is His alone? If they do know that, then why do they leave Him to His monopoly of Godhood? And if they do not know that, then they are heedless gods. In both cases, they are not worthy of Godhood.

And that is why the touches upon this matter in a beautiful way, saying: ‘Say: “If there were – as some people assert – [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His almightiness”’ (*al-Isra’:* 42) meaning, ‘If it were really the case that there are gods other than Allah, then they would go to him and argue with Him, asking Him why He took sole possession of Godhood without them, or they would go to Him to seek His protection and get closer to Him.

The highest thing that idolaters worship is the angels, as if worshipping them became similar to worshipping Allah. But Allah says about the angels: ‘...Nay, [those whom they regard as Allah’s “offspring” are but His] honoured servants: [26] they speak not until He has spoken unto them, and [whenever they act,] they act at His behest. [27]’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 26-27)

He refutes the reasoning of those who worship them, saying: ‘Those [saintly beings] whom they invoke are themselves striving to obtain their Lord’s favour – [even] those among them who are closest [to Him] – hoping for His grace and dreading His chastisement’ (*al-Isra’:* 57).

These angels whom you worship instead of Allah are also striving to get close to Him and gain access to Him. Indeed, the closest ones among them seek to gain access to Him and get closer to Him still. And if the closest ones desire access and closeness to Him, then how is it for those who are merely close? Or those who are far away or the furthest?

So, you are stupid to worship the angels. And do you think that there is any creation like the angels that would approve of you worshipping them instead of Allah, or would be prepared to approach Him to intercede on your behalf? Thinking that is the very heart of foolishness.

For the True Lord has put in place certain conditions for intercession. He says: ‘On that Day, intercession shall be of no avail [to any] save him in whose case the Most Gracious will have granted leave therefore, and whose word [of faith] He will have accepted’ (*Ta Ha:* 109).

Then, the True Lord says:

وَلَا تَنفَعُ ٱلشَّفَٰعَةُ عِندَهُۥٓ إِلَّا لِمَنۡ أَذِنَ لَهُۥۚ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا فُزِّعَ عَن
قُلُوبِهِمۡ قَالُواْ مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمۡۖ قَالُواْ ٱلۡحَقَّۖ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَلِيُّ ٱلۡكَبِيرُ ﴿٢٣﴾

Intercession will not work with Him, except by those to whom He gives permission.’ They will be asked, after the terror is lifted from their hearts [on the Day of Judgement], ‘What did your Lord speak?’ and they will answer, ‘The Truth. He is the Most High, the Most Great’ [23] (The Quran, *Saba’:* 23)

The people of knowledge say, ‘A condition of intercession with respect to the one on whose behalf intercession is made is to be one of those who acknowledge the Oneness of Allah; and a condition of intercession with respect to the intercessor is to be given the permission to intercede, as is stipulated by Allah when He says: '...Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave?' (*al-Baqara:* 255) So the intercessor cannot simply stand up and make intercession - he must first wait for him to be granted permission to do so. And it is then that the one on whose behalf intercession is to be given starts to feel perturbed, afraid, and anxious. "Will the intercessor be granted permission", he asks himself, "or will his intercession be rejected?"'

And that is why He says here: '...so much so that when the terror [of the Last Hour] is lifted from their hearts...' (*Saba':* 23) meaning, 'when terror is removed from their hearts.' The doubling up [of the middle letter] in the verb (*fuzzi'a*) gives us the meaning of removing the action (i.e. terror) implicit within the verb. It is very much as when we say *marradahu* meaning, 'he removed his illness', or *qashshara al-burtuqal*, meaning, 'He removed the skin from the orange'... etc.

They '…[who have been resurrected] will ask [one another], "What has your Lord decreed [for you]?" – [to which] the others will answer, "Whatever is true and deserved..."' (*Saba':* 23), i.e. 'He speaks the truth and gives permission of intercession to those with whom He is content.' Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And, before Him, intercession can be of no avail...' (*Saba':* 23), and does not say, 'intercession will not be accepted' because the goal of an intercessor is to benefit the one on whose behalf he has interceded. If the intercessor had gone to intercede, and the one whose intercession he sought to say to him, 'I am not pleased that you intercede on behalf of that one', that would mean the intercession was of no benefit, not that it was not accepted, for there is a difference between there being an intercession and that intercession being of benefit.

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, there are two verses that have the same opening but different endings. The first of those two verses is: 'and remain conscious of [the coming of] a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom taken from them, and none shall be succoured.' (*al-Baqara:* 48) And the second verse is: 'and remain conscious of [the coming of] a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them, and none shall be succoured' (*al-Baqara:* 123)

These two verses are one of those places which the orientalists came to and thought that they have found a flaw in the Words of Allah- the meaning is the same and even the same words are used, but in the first averse, the Words: '...nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them…' come first, while in the second, the Words: '...nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them...'. And in the first, He says instead: '...nor ransom taken from them....'

This objection of theirs arises from their lack of understanding for the words of Allah, for the two verses are speaking about two different categories when it comes to intercession. The first verse is speaking about the one doing the intercession, while the second is speaking about the one on whose behalf intercession is being done. The intercessor has his place before God, and the one for whom intercession is being made has a place before Him as well. And the reason for that is because the intercessor was only brought forth because the one for whom he intercedes was unable to bring an end to the matter himself. So, in the first verse, the pronoun refers back to the intercessor, while in the second verse, it refers back to the one for whom intercession is being made. How is that?

The meaning here is, 'no interceding person will avail any person for whom intercession is made.' The interceding person is the one whose intercession is accepted, while the person for whom intercession is made is the one for whom intercession is of use. So, the first verse singles out the intercessor, since he goes to intercede and his intercession is not accepted. So he offers to pay the ransom and act as guarantor for the one on whose behalf intercession is being made, but that too is not accepted from him.

As for the second verse, it refers to the one on whose behalf intercession is made, since he offers to pay what he has first, and because that ransom is not accepted, he searches for someone to intercede for him.

Intercession is called *shafa'a* because even *shaf'* is the opposite of *watr* (odd). And the person who asks for intercession is one. Then, when the intercessor is joined with him, they become two. In other words, they are *shaf'*.

Then the True Lord says at the conclusion of the verse: '...for He alone is exalted, great!"' (*Saba':* 23): Exalted above being asked about any of His deeds. And Great in the sense that He is greater than the intercessor and greater than the one on whose behalf intercession is made. So the True Lord says the truth and speaks it, and that means that He is always on the side of what is right. So He does not care how exalted the status of the intercessor is, or how lowly the status of the one on whose behalf intercession is made, for He is the Exalted, the Great.

After that the True Lord goes back to discussing the matter in a rational way, saying:

قُلْ مَن يَرْزُقُكُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ قُلِ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَإِنَّآ
أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْ فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

Say [Prophet], 'Who gives you sustenance from the heavens and earth?' Say, 'God does,' and '[One party of us] must be rightly guided and the other clearly astray' [24] (The Quran, *Saba':* 24)

That is to say, 'Say to them, O Muhammad, "Who provides you with sustenance from the heavens and the earth?"' But if Muhammad was the one to ask the question, then who is it who provides the response? Naturally, the people to whom it was addressed would not answer. And that is why Allah provides the answer, saying, '...Say: "It is Allah...' That is the reality with which they cannot argue. And even if they were to acknowledge that, God would then ask them, 'Why then do you not believe in Allah although He is the One Who provides for you?'

Is it fitting for you to reject Him when he is the Provider, and believe in other gods who can neither benefit nor harm you? Their acknowledgement of this reality forces the proof upon them and establishes the evidence against them of how stupid their thinking really is. It is as if the True Lord wanted to get them out of this predicament and so He answered instead of them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* asks them this question because the answer will only ever be in accordance with what He wants. It is just like if you were to buy a suit for someone and then in some situation or other he were to deny the favour you had bestowed upon him, so you would say to him, 'Who is it who bought this for you?' And you would not ask that question unless you were confident that the answer would be in your favour and that he would be incapable of denial. And if he were to deny it, then you would say to him, 'Come with me to the merchant from whom I bought it so we can see who bought it!' Thus, you have the ability to establish evidence against him if he denies it.

As for Allah's words: '...And, behold, either we [who believe in Him] or you [who deny His oneness] are on the right path, or have clearly gone astray!' (*Saba':* 24), Guidance *huda* means indicating what is good and showing people the way to it, while misguidance *dalal* means straying from what is good and not showing people the way to it. These words are found in Allah's words: 'And has He not found you lost on your way, and guided you?' (*ad-Duha:* 7)

Huda and *dalal* are examples of things that are opposites in Islam, and opposites never meet. So, there must be one who is on the right path and another who is astray.

A lot of people do not understand the difference between a *naqid* and a *didd*: a *didd* opposes something without negating it, so you might say, for example, 'Is such-and-such a thing red or green?' and be told that it is neither green nor red, but rather white. So, although two *didds* never meet, they can both be removed at the same time so that neither of them is there but rather, something else. But as for two *naqid*s, if one of them is taken away, the other one must be there, just as is the case here with *huda* and *dalal*.

The meaning of: '...And, behold, either we [who believe in Him] or you [who deny His oneness] are on the right path, or have clearly gone astray!"' (*Saba':* 24) is that if one of us is on the right path, then the other must be astray - there is no third category. So, what is being spoken about here is the path of good represented by the side of belief, and the path of evil represented by the side of disbelief. So the Messenger of Allah says to them, 'You and we are on opposite sides - we say there is no god but Allah 'God' and call to good, while you reject Allah and call to evil. But despite that, I do not pass judgement on myself that I am guided or against you that you are astray. Rather, I say that you and I are opposite sides of the same coin - if one of us is guided, the other one must be astray.’

By Allah, have you ever seen an argument more finely presented than this one? The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* did not pass judgement on himself or the believers with him that they were guided despite guidance clearly being on their side, nor did he pass judgement on the unbelievers that they were misguided despite misguidance clearly being on their side. The likeness of that is if two men were both to swear that a particular item belonged to them in the presence of a blind man, would that blind man say to one of them, ‘You are a liar’, and to the other, ‘You are truthful’? No, rather, he would say, ‘One of you is truthful and the other is a liar.’ This is a preliminary judgement that does not obligate anyone.

But, when you look into the matter deeper, it becomes clear to you which ones are guided and which ones are astray: ‘... And, behold, either we [who believe in Him] or you [who deny His oneness] are on the right path, or have clearly gone astray!”’ (*Saba’:* 24). In the phrase: ‘...are on the right path...’ the preposition 'on' (*‘ala*) gives the meaning of being above or over, so it is as if guidance is not over you but you are over guidance and on top of it. It is as if it were a riding animal which takes you to the good that you seek and to the straight path. As soon as you read the word *‘ala*, you know that there is a high place and another place that is beneath it.

Reflect, for example, on Allah's words: ‘...Now, behold, your Lord is The Owner of forgiveness to men despite all their evildoing…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 6). Here, forgiveness is above evildoing, for evildoing necessitates that you be punished, but then forgiveness comes along, rises over it and wipes away its traces. Some of the scholars of *Tafsir* (interpretation of the Quran) think that *‘ala* is being used here to express the meaning of, i.e. 'with the evildoing (1) they commit'.

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(1) *Jamal Ad-Din ibn Hisham Al-Ansari mentioned in his book Mughni Al-Labib (1/126) that the particle (‘ala) can be used to express the meaning of accompanying, just like (ma‘a), like in: '...and spends his substance – however much he himself may cherish it...' (al-Baqara: 177) and '...Now, behold, thy Lord is full of forgiveness unto men despite all their evildoing…' (ar-Ra’d: 6).*

But the meaning of with does not work here because it places forgiveness at the same level as evildoing and makes them equal. If that were the case, then how could forgiveness ever overcome evildoing? So, forgiveness must be above evildoing, not with it.

And the same is true in Allah's words: 'All praise is due to Allah, who has bestowed upon me, in my old age, Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac)' (*Ibrahim:* 39): Here He *Glorified is He* uses the word *'ala* in the phrase: '...in my old age...' because old age was the thing that was preventing him from begetting a child. So, the True Lord broke this fundamental law for him and gave him *Ismail* and *Ishaq peace be upon them* overcoming his old age(1). We say, 'Old age is the single most powerful occurrence to which a human being is exposed, and that is why Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah), said: '...and I have become utterly infirm through old age?' (*Maryam:* 8)

The word *'utuw* means might and strength, while old age is weakness, emaciation and the lack of ability to do even the simplest of things no matter how much one tries to combat it with vitamins and good nutrition. There is nothing that is stronger than it or can prevent it, and that is why in this age when a body becomes riddled with diseases, the only reason for that is old age. Indeed, when a person reaches the age of seventy or eighty, he complains of aches and pains in every part of his body. And that is why they call those aches 'the diseases of old age', mainly because there is no cause for them other than old age.

So, when we use *'ala* in the phrase: '...are on the right path...' (*Saba':* 24), we mean that guidance is going to be the riding animal which will carry you to paradise and Bliss. But when He talks of misguidance, He says: '...or in clear error' (*Saba':* 24) using the preposition *fi* (in). So it is as if darkness surrounds the misguided person and he stumbles around in it, not knowing where he is going.

As for the word *mubin*, it means clear and apparent

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(1) *Ibn'Abbas said, 'Abraham was ninety-nine years old when his son Ishmael was born, and one hundred and twelve when Isaac was born (Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi 5/3713). So there were thirteen years between Ishmael and Isaac.*

قُل لَّا تُسْـَٔلُونَ عَمَّآ أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْـَٔلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Say, 'You will not be questioned about our sins,
nor will we be questioned about what you do' [25]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 25)

This is another fine point and a further progression in the argument against the unbelievers, for it indicates the extent of the Prophet's desire to remove the rancour from the hearts of the unbelievers. Reflect on: '...Neither shall you be called to account for whatever we may have become guilty…' (*Saba':* 25): The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* places guiltiness on his side, and does not this time make the two sides equal to each other as he did there when he said: '...And, behold, either we [who believe in Him] or you [who deny His oneness]…' (*Saba':* 24). Rather, he describes his own actions as wrongdoing while at the same time says about the unbelievers: '...nor shall we be called to account for whatever you are doing.' without describing their actions as wrongdoing.

And there is another fine point to be found in the verse, which is that the verb *ajramna*, (we did wrong), appears in the past tense, indicating that the wrongdoing had actually happened, while the verb *ta'malun* (you are doing), appears in the present tense, indicating that they had not yet done it. That is another fine point and a further progression in the argument. It is also a means to gaining the friendship of one's opponent so that perhaps they might return to the right, and Allah will then rejoice with their repentance and the fact they have come back to Him.

There is no way that the style of debating found in these two verses could have come from anyone except for a debater with a strong proof, as if saying, 'Suppose that you are right, and we are wrong', why? Because you are sure that you are right and that after investigation, the truth will be at your side.

But despite that, how could the True Lord *Glorified is He* command His Prophet to ascribe wrongdoing to himself? Because, they say, what is meant by 'wrong' depend on who is being addressed. It is as they say, 'The good actions of the right-acting are the wrong actions of those brought nearer to Allah.'

Then the verses end with a summary of this entire matter when Allah says:

قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَهُوَ ٱلْفَتَّاحُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾

Say, 'Our Lord will gather us together, then He will judge justly between us; He alone is the All Knowing Judge' [26]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 26)

The meaning of this is, 'We will not spend long in presenting to you our arguments and proofs because our words are backed by the truth while you are simply playing around with falsehood. So, the heart of the matter is that Allah will judge between you and us in His divine court: 'Say: "Our Lord will bring us all together...', i.e. on the Day of Rising: '...and then He will lay open the truth between us, in justice...', i.e. then He *Glorified is He* will judge between us. Even today, in some countries, they refer to the judge as *al-fattah*, 'The opener': "...for He alone is the One Who opens all truth, the All Knowing!"' i.e. He is the One Who, when He passes judgement, has full knowledge of everything and overlooks nothing.

A judgment is known as an opening because it makes an opening between two things and sets up a gap between them. It is as if the two of them were tightly bound together, with truth mixed up with falsehood. And then as if there was a battle between them, so the ruling came in order to break apart that network. The breaking apart of this network is the opening we referred to, and no one can open a way between truth and falsehood except for Allah *Glorified Is He*.

قُلْ أَرُونِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَلْحَقْتُم بِهِۦ شُرَكَآءَ ۖ كَلَّا ۚ بَلْ هُوَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

Say, 'Show me those you joined to Him as partners. No indeed! He alone is God, the Almighty, the All Wise' [27]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 27)

The True Lord commands His Prophet to say to them, 'Show me those whom you have associated with Allah.' But he *peace be upon him* had actually seen them, for he had seen the idols that they worshipped instead of Allah so what was the point of him saying, '..."Point out to me...'? Because when he made this request of them, he knew that they would be too embarrassed to point them out to him, and would not dare to do that since they knew that they were dumb stones, unable to harm or benefit anyone.

As for the meaning of: '...those [beings] that you have joined with Him [in your minds] as partners [in His divinity]', *ilhaq* is bringing something new and attaching it to something already established. So it is as if the Godhood of Allah *Glorified is He* is the true established Godhood, while their new gods are something unexpected and inauthentic. Belief is something that is primal, natural, and firmly established in the human psyche, but as for those gods, they are innovated, inauthentic, and false. And that is why He negates them with the Words: '...Nay - nay...'

Then he turns aside from what He had previously been saying in order to affirm that godhood is God's alone, saying: '...but He [alone] is God *the Almighty* the Wise!' The word *bal* (but gives the sense of turning aside from what came before, and affirms the ruling that comes after - that the True Lord is Allah.

In another part of the Quran, the True Lord argues with them, saying: 'Had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than God, both [those realms] would surely have fallen into ruin!' (*al-Anbiya': 22*) We know from studying grammar that the Arabic word *illa* is a particle of exception that excludes what comes after it from the ruling governing what comes before, and that the thing that is excluded after it is in the *mansub* case, (it has *Fatha,* a grammatical mark in Arabic, at the end). So, for example, we would say, 'The students were present except for Muhammad', with Muhammad in the *mansub* case.

If we were to apply this principle to this verse, the meaning would be, 'If there were gods apart from Allah, then they would be ruined, but if Allah is one of those gods, then they would not be ruined.' This is the sense of the verse if *illa* were to be taken as a particle of exception that excludes what comes after it. But the reality is that this *illa* is not a particle of exception, but rather, it is a noun that has the same meaning of *ghayr* (1), (other than). And the proof of that is the fact that the word that comes after it, the Majestic Name 'Allah', is in the *marfu'* case (has *Dammah,* also a grammatical mark, at the end), and not in the *mansub* case which is what it would be in if *illa* really were a particle of exception. So the meaning is, 'If there were gods other than Allah, they would be ruined.

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(1) Given that (*illa*) is being used with the meaning of (*ghayr*), the noun after it (Allah), has the same syntax it would have if it were after (*ghayr*), and so it is in the (*marfu'*) case.

As for the Words: '...but He is Allah...' (*Saba':* 27), Allah *Glorified is He* again uses here the absent pronoun, *huwa* (He). And it is well known that an absent pronoun is never used unless there is a previously mentioned word to which it goes back. So, for example, 'Ali came to see me, so I honoured him.' This principle is true except in the case of Allah, for here with Him the pronoun precedes the word to which it refers back: '...but He is Allah...''. Why is that? We say it is because *huwa* is a pronoun that refers in this case only to Him, namely the Existent *the Most High*.

Then the True Lord says:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ إِلَّا كَآفَّةٗ لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرٗا وَنَذِيرٗا
وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ٢٨

We have sent you [Prophet] only to bring good news and warning to all people, but most of them do not understand [28] (The Quran, *Saba':* 28)

The meaning of: '...We have not sent you...' is, 'We have not made you a Messenger': '...except to mankind at large…'. The Arabic word *kaaffah* (at large) makes the station of the Seal of the Messengers clear, for before our Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, was sent, a Messenger was always sent to a particular people, like when God says: 'and [will make him] an apostle unto the Children of Israel. "I have come unto you with a message from your Lord...' (*Al-'Imran:* 49).

That is because mankind became numerous as Allah says: '…and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women…' (*an-Nisa':* 1), they scattered all over the earth, some remaining here and some going there. And at that time the world was still primitive and in its infancy, and there were no developments for these diverse communities to meet with one another. So, communities lived in isolation from one another without any communication between them. Each area had its own maladies: some people were cheating in measuring, while others were worshipping idols...etc. So a Messenger came to a particular people to treat their malady, a malady that had no connection whatsoever with that of other peoples.

As for Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, he was the seal of Messengers and was sent to all mankind because Allah had eternal knowledge of the fact that after his era, all the people of the planet would be close and those groups that were previously dispersed and isolated from one another would come into contact. And here we are today, living in a world that is like one village. We hear of events that take place in the farthest lands of this planet, and even see them as they are taking place. And as long as all the communities and continents of the world are connected like this, they will share the same maladies. And that is why one single Messenger came to treat all these maladies in all these societies. That is the meaning of: ‘Now [as for you, O Muhammad,] We have not sent you but for mankind at large...’ (*Saba’:* 28).

When we say he is the Seal of the Messengers; that means he is the one for whom others bear witness and not the one who bears witness for others. For Allah has taken the covenant from the Messengers that when Muhammad came they would bear witness for him. And indeed, they all did bear witness for him. But as for Him *peace be upon him* he did not bear witness for anyone, since no Messengers came after him.

The people of knowledge say that the word *kaaffah* means, ‘for all people’. And, indeed, Allah says elsewhere: ‘Say [O Muhammad]: “O mankind! Verily, I am an apostle of God to all of you…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 158). This means that there is no more confining, neither in terms of time nor place. And when we reflect on the word *kaaffah*, we find that it has a correlation to the language we speak today, for it has become an established part of the everyday speech of the common people. For example, when a tailor stitches a garment, first he uses his scissors on the cloth, cutting it along the warp and the woof. But when they cut the cloth, the threads at the edges of the cloth are left frayed and unravelled. So they gather these thread ends together and fold them over so the edges of the cloth are facing the inward. This process is called *kafkafah* (hemming). Similarly, the word *kaaffah* means gathering the people who are scattered throughout time and space together so that no race, community, or individual is excluded.

In the countryside, there is a plant that grows on the banks of the canals the name of which is *najil*; it is different from the well-known grass. This *najil* does not rise up above the surface of the earth, and its roots and branches interlock with one another in such a way that they prevent the banks from collapsing, and stop debris from falling into the canals and blocking them. So, this *najil* performs a task, namely holding the banks and preventing them from collapsing. In other words, it holds *kaffa* a particular type of thing back from straying from its task, just as our prophet holds the people back from straying away from their task.

The word *kaaffah* derives from the verb *kaffa*, 'to hold back', and then the *ta'* of femininity is added for emphasis, just like with *'allam* and *'allamah*. And that is why our Lord says about Himself: '...knows fully all the things that are beyond the reach of human perception ('*Allam*)' (*at-Tawba:* 78). If you were to ask, 'Why did he not say *'allamah*?' then we would say, 'the knowledge of God is not susceptible to increase or decrease.'

So: 'Now [as for you, O Muhammad,] We have not sent you otherwise than to mankind at large...' (*Saba':* 28) means, 'We have not sent you except to hold them back and stop them from doing all those evils that corrupt the earth. That is the task of the path that the Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* brought, which is why Allah says: 'hence, do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered...' (*al-A'raf:* 56).So, the word *kaffa* is either a description for the people meaning 'everyone', or a description for the Messenger of Allah, meaning 'one who holds people back from evil', with the *ta'* of femininity being added for emphasis.

As for: '...to be a herald of glad tidings (*bashir*) and a warner (*nadheer*)...' (*Saba':* 28), the word *bashir* is derived from *bisharah* which means giving someone the news of something good the time of which has not come yet. And its opposite is *nidharah* which means giving someone the news of something bad the time of which has not come yet. The distinction of *bisharah* is that it informs you of good that is coming your way, so you can put the means for it to come about into place, move towards it and work hard for it to happen. And all the time you are in a state of longing for it. And it is similar with *nidharah*, it warns you of a coming danger so that you can avoid its causes and drive it away.

A good example of that is a teacher: he gives his hard-working student the good news that he will have success and superior performance, and warns his negligent student of failure and inferior performance. Why does he do that? Because he wants the hard-working student to further increase his efforts, and the lazy negligent one to leave behind his laziness and negligence so that he can be superior as well.

As for Allah's words: '...but most people do not know [this],' (*Saba': 28*), they mean that they do not know that you are the final Messenger, or that you are the Messenger who came to hold back evil from the entire human race and put them right. And if the majority of people do not know, that means that there are only a few who do know. And that few who know are the source for all the good in existence, which is why no matter how great people's intransigence and disbelief, and no matter how far from the path they stray, there must always be a small group from among them who cling to the truth, strive for it and call others to it. This group is there in every time and every place, even if they are only a few. And that is why our master, the Messenger of Allah, says, 'Good is with me and will be within my community until the Day of Rising'.(1)

So, this group must remain among us as an example and cells for the propagation of good, so that good remains within the human race no matter how dark the world around them becomes.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا ٱلْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾
قُل لَّكُم مِّيعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَّا تَسْتَـْٔخِرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْتَقْدِمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

And they say, 'If what you say is true, when will this promise be fulfilled?' [29] Say, 'You have an appointment for a Day which you cannot put off nor bring forward, even by a single moment' [30] (The Quran, *Saba': 29 - 30*)

Anyone who reflects on the Book of God will find that the True Lord did not divide the Quran up into separate chapters, one for prayer, one for *zakat*, one for usury...etc., but rather, He mixed up these rulings in amazing arrangements and stirring combinations, moving from one style to another so that the reader never gets bored and never abandons it.

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(1) *Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani said, 'I do not know it, but its meaning is sound.' Al-Qari mentioned it in Al-Asrar Al-Marfu'a (457), as did As-Suyuti in Ad-Durar Al-Muntathira (20), and Al-'Ajluni in Kashf Al-khafa' (1/476).*

The Quran is not a Book of Law in which one finds a separate section for each crime, but rather deals with crime in a unique way, first mentioning the crime, then showing how repugnant it is and clarifying its effects so that when it assigns a punishment to it, you find the punishment to be perfectly natural and easy to accept because you can see that the perpetrator deserves it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, relating what the unbelievers say: "and so they ask, 'When is this promise [of resurrection and judgment] to be fulfilled?" (*Saba':* 29) A promise only ever refers to something good, whereas a threat only ever refers to something bad, so it is strange that the unbelievers call Judgement Day a promise. They should have said, 'When is this threat?' Perhaps Allah has twisted their tongues so that they instead spoke the truth, for it is indeed a true promise from Allah, even though with respect to them it is a threat.

There are many things contained within Allah's promise; it ends with the resurrection and reckoning, and then with Paradise or Hellfire. But is Allah's promise only fulfilled in the Hereafter? No, rather, a part of it can be seen in this world. If that were not the case and Allah were to leave them untouched till the Hereafter, then their corruption would intensify, and unbelievers would cause a huge decay without anyone being there to prevent them.

And this is why, out of His Wisdom, Allah has chosen to realise some of His promise to them in advance so that it can be seen in this world, like when He says: '[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!' (*al-Qamar:* 45) And, indeed, the day of Badr came and Allah has defeated them. Some of them were killed and others were taken prisoners. And just as the initial promises were shown to be true, in the same way the promises that follow them will also be shown to be true in the Hereafter.

And that is why the True Lord addresses His Prophet, saying: '...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the truth], or whether We cause you to die [ere that retribution takes place – know that, in the end], it is unto Us that they will be brought back.' (*Ghafir:* 77)

Those for whom Allah's promise is not realised in this world and who do not see it here with their own eyes will see it in the Hereafter, as there are unbelievers who died before Badr, and did not witness any of the victories or conquests of the Muslims and were not subjected to any of the punishments of this world.

As for the Words: '…"When is this promise [of resurrection and judgment] to be fulfilled?…' (*Saba':* 29) They mean that they thought the punishment to be a long time in coming. Then Allah commands His Prophet to reply to them: 'Say: "There has been appointed for neither you a Day which you can delay nor advance by a single moment."' (*Saba':* 30). It is the day of your victory over them, like at the battle of Badr when God gave them a taste of humiliation, abasement, and death, and brought their tyranny to an end, or it is the Day of Rising.

The One Who has made this promise to you is also the One Who is able to fulfil it, and there is no power that can prevent Him from fulfilling His promise or even delay it for a single instant. He is the One Who knows that none of the Signs of existence can deviate from what He wills.

We previously made it clear that when human beings promise something, they do not possess the means to fulfil their promises, and that is why our Lord teaches us to be wary of that, saying: 'And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow," [23] without [adding], "if God so wills."… [24]' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24)

That is because Allah loves His slaves to be truthful, and so when he attaches his action to the Will of Allah, he relieves himself from lying or breaking a promise when he finds himself unable to fulfil that promise, for none of the elements for making it come about is in his hands. So, instead, leave the matter to the One Who does possess all those elements. That is why we call a promise made by people, 'a promise', and a promise made by God is 'the true promise', i.e. that which will never be broken.

As for the Words: '...which you can neither delay nor advance by a single moment"' (*Saba':* 30), they mean that it is a precise appointment. It is as if the True Lord wants mankind to receive all of the gifts that He has given them, and for those gifts to remain in their consciousness at all times and not be forgotten.

The word ‘day’ appears in this verse in the indefinite and is obscure, but in this case, obscurity is the very essence of clarity, just as we explained previously. For example, when Allah leaves a human being’s death unspecified, that person constantly thinks of it, awaits its coming in every moment, and expects it at every breath and every instant without linking it to illness or anything else. For dying without a cause is itself a cause.

Then the True Lord says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَن نُّؤْمِنَ بِهَـٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانِ وَلَا بِٱلَّذِى بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ۗ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰٓ
إِذِ ٱلظَّـٰلِمُونَ مَوْقُوفُونَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ٱلْقَوْلَ
يَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسْتُضْعِفُوا۟ لِلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ لَوْلَآ أَنتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

The disbelievers say, ‘We will believe neither this Quran nor the Scriptures that came before it.’ If only you could see [Prophet] how the wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord, hurling reproaches at one another. Those who were oppressed will say to the oppressors, ‘If it were not for you, we would have been believers’ [31] (The Quran, *Saba’:* 31)

Their statement: ‘…We shall never believe in this Quran...’ indicates their hesitancy, for in another part of the Quran, God relates them as saying: ‘...Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) This means that the Quran is incontrovertible and incontestable. The only thing they could find to contest was the one to whom the Quran was revealed. Another example of their stupidity may be found in their words: ‘...If we were to follow the guidance to which you invite us. We would be torn away from our very soil!’ (*al-Qasas:* 57), since here they admit that he brought guidance with him. And another example is their words: ‘...Do not spend anything on those who are with Allah's Apostle...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7).

The reality is that falsehood hesitates and stutters, stumbling from one position to another, with its confused thought, not flowing in a coherent fashion. And, indeed, that blind groping reveals the falsehood upon which they are. We have said before that a skilled investigator is the one who can reach the truth by arguing with the accused person in such a way that he causes him to unknowingly implicate himself. That is because the one who is telling the truth tells you about what happened in a particular way, and no matter how many different ways you repeat the question, he will give you the same answer. But as for someone who is lying, he will not tell you what actually happened, but will instead lie and make up a story in which one will inevitably find contradictions and inconsistencies. It is like that liar who said to people, 'I returned from *'Bandar*' on the festival night, it was lit up by the moon in the afternoon!'

In ancient times, the Arabs used to say, 'If you are a liar, then remember what you say.' In other words, remember what you said before. And that is necessary because you are not basing your words on what actually happened.

As for the Words: '...and neither in whatever there still remains of earlier revelations...' (*Saba':* 31), they refer to all the books that were revealed prior to the Quran, like the Torah and the Gospel.

After them saying these words, the True Lord wants to respond to them in a way that is terrifying, so He says: '...But if you could only see...' (*Saba':* 31), i.e. O Muhammad: '... [How it will be on Judgment Day,] when these evildoers shall be made to stand before their Lord...' (*Saba':* 31), i.e. when they are standing before Allah, waiting for the judgement and the reckoning

You know that *law (if)* is a conditional particle that needs an answering clause. But that answering clause is elided from the verse for a purpose, in order to make it all the more horrible and terrifying. The implication here is, 'If you could see how it will be when these evildoers are made to stand before their Lord, you would see something awesome.' This stylistic device makes a person's thoughts fly in every direction, imagining all the sorts of punishment and humiliation that the unbelievers will be subjected to while they are standing there before Allah. Eliding the answering clause here is more expressive and eloquent than mentioning it.

In the past, we used to see tyrants, oppressors and those parasites who hang around in cafés the entire day, being served by other people who took care of all their needs because they feared the wickedness they might inflict upon them. But as soon as they fall foul of the law and are taken by the police - and you well know what the police do to criminals - those self-same people rejoice and make fun of them, saying, 'If you could see what happened to so-and-so,' meaning, 'Something serious happened to him that is incompatible with the tyrannical way he used to treat people, and blunts his claws.'

So, the answering clause was elided so that we can understand as referring to something very frightening. For if it had been mentioned, it could only have come in one form.

And it is for this reason that the orientalists object to the Words Allah uses to describe the *zaqqum* tree when He says: 'Its fruit [as repulsive] as Satan's heads' (*as-Saffat:* 65), saying 'We have neither seen the *zaqqum* tree nor the heads of Satan, so how can the Quran compare one thing that is unknown to another unknown thing?'

Yes, a simile should compare something which is unknown to another thing which is known, or something hidden with something apparent. But these people are trying to hunt out mistakes and look for ways to criticise the Book of Allah, and that is something impossible, for all of their objections to the Book of Allah stem from their lack of understanding of the verses, their lack of familiarity with the language of the Quran and rhetorical devices of the Arabs, and them not having a basic grasp of Arabic. This particular style of simile was used by one of the ancient Arabs(1) when he said:

Will he kill me when my sword is my bedfellow?
And the points of my spears are like the fangs of hellish ghouls.(2)

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(1) He is Imru'u Al-Qays ibn Hajr ibn Al-Harith Al-Kindi. He was a pre-Islamic poet, and indeed was the most famous of all the Arab poets and was Yemeni in origin. He was born in Najd in the year 130 BH. His father was the king of the tribes of Asad and Ghatafan. And he started composing poetry when he was just a boy. Then, when he grew up into a young man, he began to muck around and associate with the Arab vagabonds, so his father banished him to Hadramawt when he was about twenty years old. Then he made his way around the various tribes of the Arabs after Al-Mundhir, the king of Iraq, had requested his presence. Until, finally, the emperor of the Byzantines gave him a princedom in Palestine, so he travelled there. Then, when he was at Ankara, boils appeared on his skin. And he remained there until he died in the year 80 AH when he was 50 years old. (Al-Mawsu'a Ash-shi'riyya - Al-mujma' Ath-Thaqafi CD -2003).

(2) The meter of this verse is *(tawil)*. Ibn Salam Al-Jamahi mentioned it in (Tabaqat fuhul Ash-shu'ara'), and Yaqut Al-Hamwa mentioned it in (Mu'jam Al-Udaba').

In this way, an ancient Arab saw the points of spears being like the fangs of ghouls, but has anyone ever seen a ghoul? So, the Quran is Arabic, and it addresses the Arabs with stylistic devices that they themselves use. And it is enough for you to see how loathsome this image is that you try to form in your own mind the picture of a ghoul or a Satan. If you do that, it will cause your thoughts to fly down one terrifying path or another. And the proof of that is that were we to ask all the caricature artists in the world to draw a picture of Satan, each one of them would make a drawing according to his imagination. So there would be many pictures, all of them different from one another because none of them had ever actually seen Satan, but rather only imagined what he would look like.

Imagine if the Quran were to have defined what the *zaqqum* tree looked like and said, ‘It looks like such-and-such or such-and-such’, would that simile have given you an image more horrific than that given by Satan’s heads? In this way, the True Lord illustrates this meaning.

Then the verse goes on to describe the situation in which those evildoers stand before Allah, not only will they stand in humiliation and abasement, but rather, they stand: ‘...hurling reproaches back and forth at one another!…’ (*Saba’:* 31) They argue and dispute with one another, hurling the blame backwards and forwards between them. The Arabic verb *yarji‘u* here indicates that one person says something and another throws his words back at him and rejects them. In the Quran, there are many places in which this exchange between those who follow and those who are followed is described, and this is one example of that.

‘...Those [of them] who had been weak [on earth]...’ i.e. the weak and those who blindly imitate: “...will say unto those who had gloried in their arrogance…” i.e. the masters and the great men whom others follow: ‘...“Had it not been for you, we would certainly have been believers!”’ (*Saba’:* 31) It is enough of an indication of the immensity of the resurrection that the weak can stand in front of the strong and confront and answer back to them, despite the fact that both of them are hopeless losers. And that is because that weakness was in this world, as was the arrogance and subjugation. But as for now, in the arena where the Reckoning takes place, all are equal. Here, the weak say to their masters: '..."Had it not been for you, we would certainly have been believers!"' (*Saba':* 31)

And as long as the affair is one of exchange, with each party answering back to the other, the ones who were arrogant must respond and give their answer to those who had been weak.

Then the True Lord says:

قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ لِلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتُضۡعِفُوٓاْ أَنَحۡنُ صَدَدۡنَٰكُمۡ
عَنِ ٱلۡهُدَىٰ بَعۡدَ إِذۡ جَآءَكُمۖ بَلۡ كُنتُم مُّجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

The oppressors will say to them, 'Was it we who prevented you from following right guidance after it had reached you? No! You yourselves were sinners' [32] (The Quran, *Saba':* 32)

Those who were arrogant respond, saying: '..."why – did we keep you [forcibly] from following the right path after it had become obvious to you? Nay, it was but you [yourselves] who were guilty!"' i.e. 'We did not prevent you from following guidance, and we did not come between you and belief.' '...Nay, it was but you [yourselves] who were guilty!"' It was because of your own natures, you find it easy to follow our way, since our worship entailed no responsibility on your part, for you did not have to fast, pray or pay *zakat*. If you were but to have reflected and made use of your intellects, you would not have followed us!

And that is the exact same logic employed by Satan (Iblis) when he argues with his followers on the Day of Rising, and says to them: '...Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine…' (*Ibrahim:* 22). So the meaning of Satan's words is, 'I am unable to take away your cry for help, and you are unable to take away my cry for help.' So the matter is ended - nothing will save or be of benefit to anyone except for the good actions they have performed. Then those who had been weak respond, again answering back to those who had been arrogant, saying:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتُضۡعِفُواْ لِلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ بَلۡ مَكۡرُ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ إِذۡ تَأۡمُرُونَنَآ أَن
نَّكۡفُرَ بِٱللَّهِ وَنَجۡعَلَ لَهُۥٓ أَندَادٗاۚ وَأَسَرُّواْ ٱلنَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُاْ ٱلۡعَذَابَ وَجَعَلۡنَا ٱلۡأَغۡلَٰلَ
فِيٓ أَعۡنَاقِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْۚ هَلۡ يُجۡزَوۡنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

The oppressed will say to them, ‘No, it was your scheming, night and day, ordering us to disbelieve in God and set up rivals to Him.’ When they see the punishment, they will fall silent with regret, and We shall put iron collars on the disbelievers’ necks. Why should they be rewarded for anything other than what they have done? [33]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 33)

This is a continuation of their exchange and dialogue, with both parties throwing the responsibility for their predicament on the other. So when those who had been arrogant accused them of being guilty, and of having followed them because of their desire for an easy religion that demanded no responsibility from them and placed no limits on their appetites, those who had been weak replied: ‘...“Nay, [what kept us away was your] devising of false arguments, night and day…’ i.e. the plots that took shape in the night and the plots that took shape in the day, since you spent your days and nights harassing us and whispering into our ears until we followed you.

‘...when you persuaded us to blaspheme against God and to claim that there are powers that could rival Him!’ i.e. partner gods, ‘...And when they see the suffering [that awaits them], they will [all] be unable to express [the full depth of] their remorse…’ (*Saba’:* 33). So remorse takes hold of them, but despite that they do not voice it out loud nor show it is there, in order to ensure that others do not gloat over their predicament. And there is a difference between a person feeling regret and him being forced through circumstance to announce his regret.

Then the True Lord says: ‘...for We shall have put *aghlal* (shackles) around the necks of those who had been bent on denying the truth: [and] will this be aught but a [just] requital for what they were doing?’ (*Saba’:* 33) *Aghlal* are chains or shackles. As for the words: ‘... [And] will this be aught but a [just] requital for what they were doing?’ they are a warning to those believers who hear these words and this recompense, saying to them, 'Beware of letting compassion for the circumstances in which these people find themselves in the Hereafter take hold of you, but instead look at the crimes they did in this world. For then you will see that Allah is just and does not wrong anyone. Rather, it is people who wrong themselves.'

An example of that is found in what Allah says in the verses: 'Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin are wont to laugh at such as have attained to faith' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29) till He says, 'Are these deniers of the truth being [thus] requited for [aught but] what they were wont to do?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36)

That is because when the time of a crime is finished and its effects have died away, people tend to forget how abominable the crime was, and only remember how abominable the punishment for it is. Or the hearts of those who never witnessed the crime soften towards the criminal. And that is why the True Lord reminds us of His being just, and reminds us that the recompense corresponds to the crime. So, do not let compassion for the criminals take hold of you, and do not feel sorry for them on account of the humiliating and lowly position in which you find them. Rather, place their punishment alongside their crime when they denied the Messengers.

Then the True Lord says:

وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا فِى قَرۡيَةٖ مِّن نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتۡرَفُوهَآ
إِنَّا بِمَآ أُرۡسِلۡتُم بِهِۦ كَٰفِرُونَ ٣٤

Never have We sent a warner to a community
without those among them who were corrupted by
wealth saying, 'We do not believe in the message
you have been sent with [34] (The Quran, *Saba':* 34)

One thing we note in this aya is that it mentions *nadheer* (warning) but does not mention *bashir* (giving good news). Why is that? Because it is talking about a city in which corruption had become so prevalent that the only avenue left open for it was that of warning. For its people had rejected the Messengers and treated their call with enmity and contempt. Good news is part of the general call, but here the verse is speaking about a specific call to these rejecters.

As for the words (*fi qaryah*), literally ‘to a village', they mean ‘to the people of that village’, with ‘village’ being a place noun. Allah *Glorified is He* uses a place noun even though He is referring to the inhabitants of that place because the place, as an inanimate object, glorifies Allah. And so it feels joy when it is occupied by believers glorifying Allah, and feels sad and depressed when it is occupied by unbelievers. And that is why the ancient Arabs used to say, ‘So-and-so is rejected by the place’, meaning that the place dislikes him. And that is why, when they said to a wise man, ‘Do you know that so-and-so sold his land?’ he replied, ‘Rather, his land sold him.’

As for the words: ‘... those of its people who had lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures would declare…’ it means that they have been captivated and overpowered by comforts. So the True Lord does not stop his slaves from enjoying blessings, but warns them against letting those blessings take control over them.

Allah may grant a slave a life of ease and comfort in order to lead him on - He may shower him with blessings until those blessings gain mastery over him. Reflect, for example, on God’s words: ‘Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open upon them...’ (*al-An‘am:* 44): He did not say ‘for them’, as his opening is not in their best interests despite the fact that it looks like a blessing: ‘...the gates of all [good] things, until – even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted...’ (*al-An‘am:* 44) after having become accustomed to those blessings, ‘...We suddenly took them to task: and lo! They were broken in spirit’ (*al-An‘am:* 44). That is why it is not right for you to use the preposition ‘*alyaka* (on you) when asking Allah to ‘unlock or unfold’ things for your brother. Instead you should use *laka* (for you). So, say, *fatah Allah laka* and not *fatah Allah ‘alayka* (May Allah unfold/unlock things for you), Look at Allah telling us that No one can withhold the blessing Allah opens up for people, nor can anyone but Him release whatever He withholds. (*Fatir:* 2)

We were told a story about a great politician who had an opponent. One day, the people around them were surprised when this politician decided to promote his adversary to an important post. ‘How could he promote his opponent?’ they asked. So, he replied, ‘I am raising him up to a high place so that when he falls from it, his fall will be all the more painful.' We said previously, 'If you want to throw down your enemy, then do not throw him from a very low place!'

An example of how Allah leads people on by granting them ease and comfort comes in the verse where He tells us that when He decides to destroy a town, He commands those corrupted by wealth to reform, but they persist in their disobedience. So, Allah's sentence is passed, and He destroys them utterly. (*al-Isra':* 16)

Some people misunderstand this verse thinking that these people were disobedient because Allah commanded them to be so. But Allah never commands people to act sinfully or immorally. He only commands people to obedience and worship, as He Himself tells us that all He ordered people to do was to worship Him alone. (*al-Bayyina:* 5), and He ordered them to enjoin justice and do good. (*an-Nahl:* 90) The above verse means, 'We commanded those who have lost themselves in the pursuit of pleasures to do what Allah commands, but there was not a single one of them who did anything but act sinfully and deviate from it.' So, acting sinfully was not because of Allah's Command, but because it was their choice!

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* presents the matter of living a life of comfort and being lost in the pursuit of pleasures, He says: 'I bestowed upon my slaves those blessings that they enjoyed, and the only thing I wanted from them in return was that they receive those blessings with gratitude and thanks, and pass on those blessings to those who had not been granted them, in order to create a society with the proper levels of social solidarity and cohesion, to end the spite and resentment the poor might harbour for the rich.

When the poor see the rich benefiting from those blessings and enjoying them, while denying the poor, they become envious towards the rich and wish that their blessings be taken away. But if the rich gave them some part of those blessings, they will love them and ask Allah to grant them more. This is with regard to the poor.

As for the rich, the True Lord *Glorified is He* knows that in general, it is in the nature of human beings to desire benefit and good for oneself. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* deals with them according to the logic of benefit;

He recompenses them when they spend on others and rewards them for doing good. So, He says to them that one good act will be rewarded tenfold. So, if you lower your gaze from things which are forbidden to you in this world, He will reward you with the wide-eyed maidens of paradise...etc.

That is why they say, 'Being religious is the thing which is of the highest benefit to you. Every time you put the needs of the poor ahead of yours, giving him whatever you find in your pocket, you can expect many times that in return from Allah.' So, even in your transactions with Allah, you desire benefit for yourself.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives to the rich and those with high determination, those who toil, who work hard and bring wealth into being. He gives them their due, respecting their sweat and effort and even their self-interest. So, when He asks them, He only asks them for a portion of their wealth, not all of it. He tells us that the life of this world is only a game, a pastime, but if we believe and are mindful of Him, He will recompense us. Allah does not ask us to give up all our possessions; otherwise we would be grudging if He were to ask us and press us for them, and this would bring out the bad side of us. (*Muhammad:* 36-37)

He employs the same logic to instil in us a love of spending upon others, telling us that though now we are called upon to give a little] for the sake of Allah, and some of us are grudging, but whoever is grudging is doing so only towards himself because Allah is the source of wealth and we are the needy ones. Then Allah warns us that He will substitute other people for us if we turn away, and these people will not be (or do) like us. (*Muhammad:* 38)

So, it is this spending freely on others that removes resentment from the hearts of the rich, just as it removes it from the hearts of the poor. It creates a more even distribution of belief and wealth throughout the society, since those who possess wealth praise Allah for His blessings and are not miserly with it towards the poor. While those who are poor will praise Allah for putting His blessings in the hands of those who are generous with it towards them. This is how balance is instilled in the society.

Let us now go back to the words of Allah that we were in the process of discussing: 'Never have We sent a warner to a community without those among them who were corrupted by wealth saying, "We do not believe in the message you have been sent with."' (*Saba':* 34). Why is it that they rejected what the Messengers brought?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants for His slaves not to place the strong ahead of the weak, the rich ahead of the poor, and the learned ahead of the ignorant. He wants the good to encompass everyone so that anyone who possesses a good quality passes it on to others.

The people mentioned here in this verse, chose disbelief, and were content with it because the blessings they were granted gained mastery over them and they lost themselves in the pursuit of pleasures. So, they tended towards haughtiness and iniquity until they became totally obsessed with it. Then, when Islam came to set right their conduct, they opposed it and tried to wipe it out and destroy its call because they got accustomed to leadership and oppressing others and did not want any of that to be taken away from them. If it were not like that - if the world were balanced and upright - then there would have been no need for Messengers. So, Messengers were sent when corruption became rife and completely permeated a society.

We said before that Allah created a faith-immunity in human beings, stemming from their innate nature, but the desires and customs of wrongdoers overruled that nature. So, they needed reminders to revert back to the original nature with which Allah created them. That is why Allah says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that his task is only to warn them. (*al-Ghashiya:* 21) That is, he will not come up with something new.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear that when it comes to good and evil, people are of three types: Allah tells us that He gave the Scripture as a heritage to His chosen servants: some of them wronged their own souls, some stayed between the right and wrong, and some, by Allah's leave, were foremost in good deeds.… (*Fatir:* 32)

Those who wrong themselves are those who commit wrong actions and do not reproach themselves, those who feel no regret and never repent. They wrong themselves because they deny themselves reward and everlasting bliss. Those who stay between right and wrong are those who alternate between the right and wrong actions: when they do something wrong, they remember, reproach themselves and repent, and then do something good to wipe away the wrong. These latter people are the ones who have confessed their wrongdoing, who have done some righteous deeds and some bad ones. Allah says that He may well accept their repentance, for He is most forgiving and merciful. (*at-Tawba:* 102)

When Allah says that He gave the Scripture as a heritage to His chosen servants (*Fatir:* 32), this stands for the community of Muhammad, since the word ‘heritage’ implies that the inheritance is passed on from an earlier generation to a later generation. So, the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are the heirs of all the previous Messengers with respect to all the good things they commanded. They took on the responsibility of deterring evil in all its forms, and by doing so became heirs to all the messages. That is because they command the good and forbid the wrong. Allah says that they are the best community singled out for people: they enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah. (*Al-‘Imran:* 110) Allah also tells us that He made the believers into a just community so that they may bear witness to the truth before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness to it before them. (*al-Baqara:* 143)

So, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness that he conveyed it to you, and you bear witness that you conveyed it to others after him. Allah entrusted Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the task of making laws for you, and entrusted you with the task of holding on to his program after him. That is why the messages came to an end with Prophet Muhammad because his community took on the task of passing the message. This is all the more proof that they are indeed a community in which good will remain until the coming of the Final Hour.

As for the Words: '...We do not believe in the message you have been sent with.' (*Saba’:* 34), we ask with what were the Messengers sent? They were sent with the doctrine of monotheism - that there is no Deity but Allah. They were sent with a transmission from Allah; with miracles, and with rulings and programs that govern the movements of life. The disbelievers denied all of this because they wanted to keep living in comfort, to persist along the path of oppression and to monopolise whatever they wanted.

But their words: '…the message you have been sent with…' (*Saba':* 34) indicate their stupidity, for they could have said instead, 'what you brought' or 'what you claim', but they did not. Rather, they said, 'the message you have been sent with', thereby admitting that they are talking to a messenger. This is the word of truth that Allah put on their tongues, just as He also put it on their tongues when they enticed the people not to spend anything on those who are with 'Allah's Apostle'. (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) They also said something similar when the revelation stopped coming to prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a while, they said {'The Lord of Muhammad abandoned him.'}(1)

So, they admitted that prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was receiving a message, and since a messenger is always lower in rank than the one he is getting the message from, then the message was not from Muhammad. Allah told Muhammad to tell them that if Allah had so willed, Muhammad would not have recited the Quran to them, nor would Allah have made it known to him. For Muhammad lived a whole lifetime among his people before the Quran came to him; if only they used their reason! (*Yunus:* 16)

But what is the reason for their rejection and disbelief?

وَقَالُواْ نَحۡنُ أَكۡثَرُ أَمۡوَٰلٗا وَأَوۡلَٰدٗا وَمَا نَحۡنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ٣٥

They would say, 'We have greater wealth and more children than you, and we shall not be punished' [35] (The Quran, *Saba':* 35)

We have said that Islam came to create balance in the society, and bring about a level of social, economic, and religious justice. So, the logic of those who rejected it was that they thought they had no need for any such balance, since they already had wealth, children, and all the pleasures of life. 'They would say…' (*Saba':* 35), i.e. this is their justification: '...We have greater wealth and more children than you…' (*Saba':* 35). Indeed, their self-indulgence led them to go even further and say, '...and we shall not be punished.'" (*Saba':* 35).

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(1) *It is narrated that Jundub ibn 'Abdullah Al-Bajli said, 'Jibril peace be upon him was slow in bringing the revelation to prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him, so the idolaters said, 'Muhammad has been abandoned by his Lord.' It is narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (4/522).*

Why? Because, they say, ‘Allah would not give them such bliss in this life, and then withhold it from them in the Hereafter.’

But we say to them, ‘You are deluded, for there is a difference between the gifts of Divine Power and the gifts of Lordship. Allah gives you the gifts of Lordship which is given to everyone; believers and disbelievers, to the obedient and the disobedient. But the gift of Divine Power is ‘responsibility’. Allah grants you in this life His gifts of Lordship, and punishes you in the Hereafter using His Divine Power.

This justification of theirs: '...We have greater wealth and more children than you…' (*Saba’:* 35) is a proof against them, not a proof for them, since where do those good things they have come from? Also, having a large amount of money should inspire you to do all sorts of good, and having numerous children should encourage you to make of them a good flock to follow you on the path of truth. So, the fact that you still reject faith after being granted these blessings proves that you have used them in falsehood, wrongdoing, and oppression.

There is a close similarity between their words: '...and we shall not be punished."' (*Saba’:* 35) and the words of the owner of the garden when he said that he did not think his garden will ever perish, or that the Last Hour will ever come, and that even if he were to be taken back to his Lord, he would certainly find something even better there. (*al-Kahf:* 36) This is insolent arrogance and ungratefulness for the blessings of Allah. There is no family tie or kinship between Allah and any of His creation so they would be given the pleasures of this life and the hereafter without any effort to make themselves worthy of it. Such people have been misled by their wealth and mislead by their offspring. That is why Allah tells the believers to be careful, for even from among their spouses and children they will have some enemies... (*at-Taghabun:* 14). Praise be to Allah that He used the word *min* meaning ‘from among’. This means that other spouses and children will still be good.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ٣٦

Say [Prophet], ‘My Lord gives in abundance to
whoever He will and sparingly to whoever He
will, though most people do not understand [36]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 36)

In other words, ‘Say in response to their deluded comments about their wealth and children’: “...My Lord gives in abundance to whomever He will and sparingly to whomever He will…” (*Saba’:* 36): *yabsutu* means abundance, and (*yaqdiru*) means in moderation for whomsoever He wills through His wisdom. Provision is one of the necessary manifestations of the Lordship attribute that brought mankind into existence, and so it was necessary to also guarantee man the ingredients for maintaining life. But the Provider does not give everyone exactly the same amount or type of provision, since He wants societies to be co-operative and share benefit. If every person were to have enough to suffice him, then no one would have any need of anyone else, and there would be no social cohesion in the society as a whole.

We previously made it clear that the society network hinges on the basis of need rather than the basis of bestowing favours. If we were to suppose that each and every one of us were to have graduated from university or obtained a doctorate, then who would sweep the streets? Who would polish people’s shoes? If we were to do these things out of favour, then none of us would take it upon himself to do them.

We also said that if a self-important man go home once and found a bad odour, he would ask about it. If he is told that it is because the pipes are acting up, there is no doubt that he would not rest until that problem had been resolved. Indeed, he might get into his car and go himself to get a plumber to rid him of the problem. In such cases, we say that the plumber is of more benefit than the self-important man because Allah has given the plumber skills and capabilities not within the capacity of the self-important man. This plumber would not endure such a job unless there was a need for it, otherwise, he would not accept to do it.

That is why the poet (1) spoke well when he said:

People belong to people, whether from the desert or the city,
Some, even if they do not realise it, are but servants to others. (2)

So, mankind exchange services since the True Lord *Glorified is He* has not created one people to serve and one people to be served. Rather, you serve people on some things and are served by them in others. Hence, every one of us is both a servant and is served. Every human being must know that, whatever his circumstances, nothing is guaranteed to last in this life and that his leadership is not something which is his by right. If he enjoys a high rank, then he must value that rank and work hard to maintain his post. If he sees someone lower than him, he must not look down upon him, but instead should value the role he has to play in serving him, and realise that one day he might need that man to do something for him that he himself cannot do.

That is why Allah tells us that He bestowed more abundantly on some than on others. (*an-Nahl:* 71) Many people think that *rizq* means wealth, but *rizq* is a general word that refers to everything that is beneficial to human beings. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has favoured some over others in some things. So, each person is favoured in some things and less favoured in others; you are favoured in those things for which you have been granted a talent, and less favoured in those things for which you have not been granted a talent. That is what creates solidarity in a society and enables its citizens to integrate and stand together on the basis of need rather than on the basis of granting favours.

Reflect on Allah’s words telling us that when He tries man through honour and blessings, man would say that his Lord honoured him. (*al-Fajr:* 15), and he would thank Him. Allah has multiplied the good that you have because you have attributed the act of generosity to your Lord. But when Allah tries man through the restriction of his provision, he says that his Lord humiliated him. (*al-Fajr:* 16) But Allah negates both assumptions assertively. (*al-Fajr:* 17) It means, 'You are lying when you say this because plenty of provision is not a proof of you being honoured, just as lack of it is not a sign of you being humiliated.' Otherwise, how could plenty of provision be a proof of being honoured, if those who have been given that provision do not use it to give generously to orphans or the poor and instead consume their inheritances greedily; loving wealth with all their passion? (*al-Fajr:* 18-20)

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(1) The poet is Abu Al-‘Ala’ Al-Ma‘arri, who was Ahmad ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Sulaiman At-Tanukhi, a poet and philosopher. He was born in the year 363 AH and died in the year 449 AH in Ma‘arra An-Nu‘man at the age of 86. He became blind in his fourth year and started composing poetry when he was 11 years old. He used to forbid people from harming animals and did not eat any meat for 25 years. His most famous book was ‘Risalat Al-Ghufran’. (Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-shi‘riyya - Al-majma‘ Ath-Thaqafi Cd - 2003).

(2) The wording of this verse that is found in Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-shi‘riyya reads as follows: People belong to people, whether from civilisation or the countryside, Some belong to others even if they do realise they are servants. The meter of this poem is (Al-Basit).

So, human beings must be courteous with Allah with respect to what He does, for Allah knows how to give provision, and He wants to make people into good examples for others. That is why Allah will cause the rich man who lies about his wealth to be exposed to the poor man for the liar he is. He wills see the punishment of Allah overcoming him so that he may know that Allah possesses the Divine Power and is Self-sustaining and that wrongdoers cannot get away from punishment in this life before the Hereafter. It is with this message that Allah addresses Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when He tells him to be patient, for Allah's promise is sure: whether He will show him part of what He has promised them in this life or whether He will take the prophet's soul back to Him first, it is to Allah that they will be brought back. (*Ghafir:* 77)

We also need to know that provision is not dependent on skill, expertise, or knowledge. Surely, there are people who work hard to get their provision and sow their crops, but when the time comes to harvest them, those crops could get destroyed. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to us, 'Beware of attributing Divine Power to the means and forgetting the Divine Power of the Causer of means.'

A person's provision is assigned to them even when it is being carried by others. For example, when an embryo is in its mother's womb, its nourishment comes from its mother's blood. Even though that blood is carried by the mother, it is not part of her provision because that blood goes down into her womb to nourish the baby. But when she is not pregnant it is expelled from her body through the process of menstruation and she gets no benefit from it. Why? Because it is not part of her provision! That helps us to understand when Allah says that it is Him who shall provide sustenance for the children as well as the parents. (*al-Isra':* 31)

That is why they said, ‘Your provision is not all of what you have, but it is all of the things from which you derive benefit.’ Something may be owned by you and in your possession so you think it is yours, but then you may lose it or it may be stolen or destroyed. Or, it might be even more extreme than that, for you may have food which you eat and which is transformed by your body into the blood that runs in your veins, only for that blood to be spilt from a cut, wound, or surgical operation. So, that blood is not part of your provision.

A believer should always be at ease when it comes to the process of getting provision: he should know that it is through Allah’s attribute of being the Sustainer that believers and disbelievers alike are provided for. He should know that a person’s provision is assigned to him as if his name is written on it so that no one else will ever be able to take it, no matter what. So, when you are granted more provision, then thank Allah.

If you are tested with decreased provision, then know that it is on account of Allah’s Wisdom, and remember Allah’s words when He says that there is not a thing whose storehouses are not with Him, and He sends it down only according to a well-defined measure. (*al-Hijr:* 21)

Our verse ends with: '...but most men do not understand (Allah’s ways).' (*Saba':* 36), i.e. Most people do not understand Allah’s Wisdom when it comes to giving some more provision than to others. In other words, it is only the few who do understand, so we ask Allah to make us from among those few!

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ أَمۡوَٰلُكُمۡ وَلَآ أَوۡلَٰدُكُم بِٱلَّتِي تُقَرِّبُكُمۡ عِندَنَا زُلۡفَىٰٓ إِلَّا مَنۡ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ
صَٰلِحٗا فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ جَزَآءُ ٱلضِّعۡفِ بِمَا عَمِلُواْ وَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡغُرُفَٰتِ ءَامِنُونَ ٣٧

Neither wealth nor children will bring you nearer to Us, but those who believe and do good deeds will have multiple rewards for what they have done, and will live safely in the lofty dwellings of Paradise [37] (The Quran, *Saba'*: 37)

These words are directed towards the disbelievers, those who use their wealth and children to err. But neither that sort of wealth nor those children will ever, in themselves, be the means for them coming close to Allah. But if one uses them in the Way of Allah and sincerely for Him, they become one of the greatest means for coming closer to Him. This is because, wealth may be spent for good, and children may be brought up properly so that they become good role models for their communities. That is why Allah excludes this exception saying: '…but those who believe and do good deeds…' (*Saba':* 37). Next, Allah opens the door for His blessing when wealth and children are used to do good acts saying: '...will have multiple rewards for what they have done…' (*Saba':* 37).

So, wealth and children are not necessarily a blessing, since there are some forms of wealth that will drag a person towards destruction and cause him to be hurled in the hellfire, and some types of children whom you think will be an honour for their families' names, but instead they turn out to be a disgrace to them.

We have seen many of those who are so keen on the power they get from family ties, but in truth Allah wants to humiliate them by means of that with which they have become enamoured. A man may betroth his son to the daughter of an important or wealthy person, or a man of office, and he feels pride on account of the family connection he has made. But can he guarantee that he will be happy with that girl? Or that he will never disagree with her? That is why so many times the tide turns around, and that family connection become a source of shame instead of pride: Allah humbles him by means of something he thought would be a source of honour and pride.

As for Allah's words: '...will have multiple rewards for what they have done' (*Saba':* 37), it is only good actions which receive a recompense that is multiplied. On the other hand, bad actions are not multiplied, but rather requited with their like. That is an example of Allah's mercy towards us.

You will note here that Allah says '...multiple...' (*Saba':* 37) and does not say 'multiples'. It is because 'multiple' is a generic noun that can refer to both a little and a lot. An example of this type of linguistic construct is found in Allah's words where He swears by the declining day, that man is deep in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness. (*al-'Asr:* 1-3) Here Allah excludes *Al-ladhina* which denotes the plural of *insan* (man) since *insan* is a generic noun.

‘Multiple’ here, could mean either the multiplication of the act of charity or the multiplication of the reward. One of the meanings of *di‘f*, ’multiple’, is that when you weigh what you originally gave, you would find it weak and light in comparison to the recompense that you received in exchange.

Multiplication is not the limit of Allah’s bounty. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in one of his Hadith, {A good action will be multiplied from ten to seven hundred times.}(1)

So, Allah gives whomsoever He wills multiple rewards according to the intention that person had when he did the act of charity: one person gives, thinking that it is from his own wealth and efforts; while another gives believing that he is simply passing over what belongs to Allah - he knows that his wealth is Allah’s wealth and that the one who gives is Allah.

A great illustration of giving is found in the story of Fatima *Allah be pleased with her*. {It is narrated that when prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went in to see her, he found her polishing a *dirham* of hers, so he asked her about that. She replied, ‘I am doing that because I have made the intention to give it away as charity, and I know that it will pass through Allah’s hands before it reaches the hands of the poor.’}

Some people would give out charity, and as soon as it passes through their hands, they cease to think of it, their hearts are no longer attached to it and they no longer look out for what will come to them because of it. Others would lend money, their hearts remain attached to it and they do not forget it, so every time they remember it they would long to get it back, but they wait patiently; these get the reward for both the loan and for their patience and steadfastness.

That is why orientalists objected noisily about the recompense one gets for giving charity and that which he gets for giving a loan, claiming that the verse and the Hadith contradict each other with respect to this matter. In a

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(1) *It is narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih (Kitab As-Siyam - chapter on the excellence of fasting, (Hadith) number 164), as well as by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (1638) and Ahmad in his Musnad (2/443 & 516) in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Every action of the human being is multiplied: one good action will be multiplied ten times to seven hundred times to how ever many times Allah wishes to multiply it.’*

Hadith, prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, {'It is written on the gate to Paradise that a good action is rewarded tenfold, while a loan is rewarded with eighteen-fold.'}(1) As for the verse, it says: 'Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over?…' (*al-Baqara:* 245) (They say), if you combine these two, then a loan should be multiplied twenty times, not eighteen times.

Praise be to Allah that He has unlocked for us what was previously locked: we say to them that if a man were, for example, to give a *dinar* away as charity, that Allah would recompense him ten times that amount. But would that original dinar that he spent return to him? No it would not, because that *dinar* went in exchange for the ten he got back. So, in reality, he got nine-fold, and when those nine are doubled they become eighteen.

Now let us return to the verse in hand: '...but those who believe and do good deeds…' (*Saba':* 37): There are many places throughout the Book of Allah where He combines faith and doing right deeds - why is that? Because they are two wings without which no action can ever be properly accomplished: good deeds without faith are empty and worthless like the acts of charity of the disbelievers - they get a reward for them in this life in the form of fame, honour, and the immortalisation of their names, but no portion of the reward of the Hereafter. Similarly, there is no value in faith if it does not translate into good deeds.

The verse says: '...but those who...' (*Saba':* 37), i.e. those who have faith and do good deeds: '...will have multiple rewards for what they have done, and will live safely in the lofty dwellings of paradise.' (*Saba':* 37) *Ghurufat* is the plural of *ghurfa*, which is the penthouse that is specifically set as a private den. That is why, even today, we find that in villas, the ground floor is used for dining and receiving guests. But when it comes to rest and quality time, this would be in the upper floor which is set as a private den.

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(1) *From Abu Umama Sada ibn 'Ajalan Allah be pleased with him that prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'A man will enter Paradise and see written upon its gate: An act of charity will be multiplied ten times, while a loan will be multiplied eighteen times.' Narrated by At-Tabarani and Al-Bayhaqi, both of whom narrated it by way of 'Utbah ibn Hamid (At-Targhib wa At-Tarhib of Al-Mundhari 2/34)*

Every human being has private quarters, even when he is inside his own home and surrounded by his own children. Because when a man is in his bedroom, he has the freedom to wear whatever he wants or even to be nude, but if he wants to go out to the living room, he must get himself ready and put on the appropriate attire. If he wants to go out into the street, he must again get himself ready and put on the suitable attire. The same is true if he was going to the club or other places where people get together - each place has its dress code and way of behaving.

When it comes to privacy, we all see how parents today put their sons and daughters into separate rooms, and if they do not have the space for that, they would keep one bed for the son and another for the daughter. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* preserves His slave's status and privacy to be totally safe and undisturbed: 'and will live safely in the lofty dwellings of Paradise' (*Saba':* 37).

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَسۡعَوۡنَ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا مُعَٰجِزِينَ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ فِي ٱلۡعَذَابِ مُحۡضَرُونَ ٣٨

**Whereas those who work against Our messages,
seeking to undermine them, will be summoned to
punishment [38] (The Quran, *Saba':* 38)**

We say that when someone strives *sa'a* against another in the presence of the Sultan, it means that he strives to slander or defame him. The people referred to in this verse strive against the verses of Allah and speak badly about them in order to turn people away and distract them from listening to them.

As for the Word: '*mu'ajizin*' (*Saba':* 38), its singular is *mu'ajiz*. *Mu'ajaza* is in the morphological form *mufa'ala* which is used when one person does an action to another. So, *mu'ajaza* is a form of battle, but beware of thinking that it is a battle between the believers and disbelievers, or between the Messengers and those who deny them. No, it is a higher battle since those who engage in this *mu'ajaza*) are those who seek to neutralize the signs of Allah. But no matter how much they plot, they will never render Allah incapable and will never escape from Him. Allah says to Prophet Muhammad, if he could only see their terror on Judgment Day! There will be no escape for them when they are seized from a nearby place. (*Saba':* 51)

Allah says: they ‘…will be summoned to punishment…’ (*Saba’:* 38). The meaning of *muhdarun* is that they will be brought forth against their will. It is the passive participle from the verb *ahdara*, so they are tied up and dragged there like someone who has been arrested. Another word derived from this verb is *muhdir* who is the one who fetches the accused regardless of his will.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبۡسُطُ ٱلرِّزۡقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ مِنۡ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَقۡدِرُ لَهُۥۚ وَمَآ
أَنفَقۡتُم مِّن شَيۡءٖ فَهُوَ يُخۡلِفُهُۥۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ٣٩

Say, ‘My Lord gives in abundance to whichever of His servants He will, and sparingly to whichever He will; He will replace whatever you give in alms; He is the best of providers’ [39] (The Quran, *Saba’:* 39)

We say that *yabsutu* means expanding provision and *yaqdiru* means making things tight - these meanings were explained just a few verses ago. But here, Allah adds a new twist, for He says immediately afterwards: ‘...He will replace whatever you give in alms; He is the best of providers.”’ (*Saba’:* 39) It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is directing our attention to the fact that mankind in its entirety is created by Him, and they are all His slaves. He is capable of giving to everyone and providing for everyone abundantly, but instead of doing that, He wants people to love one another and be responsible for one another, so he gives abundant provision to some and scant provision to others. Then he gives those who have been granted abundant provision an indication of the reward they will get by spending generously on others so that they might spend on those to whom He has granted scant provision.

This verse gives us a summarised account of the economy of the entire world. An economy is essentially the balance of expenses and income; where expenses are concerned with things we expend of and income is concerned with things we receive. So, in any given place, there must be a group that gives and another that takes: there must be rich and there must be poor. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not make that abundance of wealth freely available to all, nor did He make everyone experience the pangs of poverty. Instead, He made it an exchange of giving and taking.

Afterwards He tells us: ‘Say, ‘My Lord gives in abundance to whichever of His servants He will, and sparingly to whichever He will…’ (*Saba’:* 39), He qualifies it with His Words: ‘...He will replace whatever you give in alms; He is the best of providers.”’ (*Saba’:* 39) So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes into account the principle of self-interest, and the love that the rich have for money. That is why He puts their hearts at rest with respect to their wealth and He guarantees to replace it.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives abundant provision to the rich, those who love money, but says to them, ‘If you have a debt that is owed by a poor person, and this person transfers his debt to a richer person who is capable of paying off that debt (in this case Allah), then accept the deal because you cannot guarantee that the poor person will pay what he owes. So, if your money is with Allah then He will surely pay.’ Thus, Allah reassures the rich that their wealth will never decrease on account of them spending it on others because their debt has been transferred over to Allah and He has undertaken to pay it back. That is what prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was teaching us when he said, {‘The Son of Adam says, “My wealth, my wealth.” But do you get anything (of benefit) from your wealth except for that which you ate and finished, or that which you clothed yourself with and wore it out, or that which you gave as charity and have spent?}’(1) {When prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was given a sheep as a gift, ‘A’isha *Allah be pleased with her*, gave it away as charity, leaving only its shoulder for prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since she knew that he loved the shoulder. When prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came back, he asked her, ‘What did you do with the sheep?’ She replied, ‘All of it is gone except for its shoulder.’ So, he said, ‘actually, all of it remains except for its shoulder.’}(2)

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(1) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/ 24 & 26); Muslim in his Sahih (2958) in Kitab Az-Zuhd; and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2342). The wording of the (Hadith) in Muslim is, ‘The son of Adam says, ‘My wealth! My wealth’, so Allah says, ‘Is there any of your wealth you truly possess, son of Adam, except for that which you have eaten so it is consumed, dressed up in so it becomes worn out, and given away as charity so it remains for you in perpetuity.’*

(2) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (6/50); and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2470) in a (Hadith) from ‘A’isha Allah be pleased with her. At-Tirmidhi said that it was a (Sahih Hadith). The wording of Ahmad is that ‘A’isha said to prophet Muhammad, ‘Messenger of Allah, nothing remains except for its shoulder.’ He replied, ‘Actually, all of it remains except for its shoulder.’*

Why? Because it is a wealth that has been transferred into the custody of Allah and He has promised to replace it. How do you think it will be when that repayment is coming from the Allah who says to the believers (even if they were in a battle) when you are offered a greeting, then respond with a better one, or at least return it. (*an-Nisa':* 86) You have greeted Allah by greeting the poor, so there is no doubt that He will give you in return a greeting that is better. Not just that, but He multiplies it for you innumerable times. The example we gave of that was of the single seed that the farmer plants in the ground. That seed gives him seven ears of corn, in each ear there are one hundred seeds. If that is what the earth (which was created by Allah) gives you, then what do you think of the Creator Himself?

As for Allah's Words: 'He will replace whatever you give' (*Saba':* 39), they are a reassurance to the rich that their wealth will never diminish, and a reassurance to the poor that Allah will never abandon them or leave them alone in their poverty, That is proven by the fact that He takes out a loan on their account, for He says: 'Who will give Allah a good loan?…' (*al-Baqara:* 245) So, Allah borrows from mankind to give to mankind even though it is within His power to give abundant provision to all. But it is His aim that people live together with the love and affection that charity brings - that way the rich will love the poor and the poor will feel no resentment towards the rich. That is why the verse ends with the words: '...He is the best of providers.'" (*Saba':* 39) He says 'the best of providers' because a provider is everyone who extends his hand to you in a way that brings you benefit. According to that definition, your father can be considered as your provider, as anyone else who supports and takes care of you. Likewise, your Lord is a provider, but there is a difference between the two: although your father is a provider in the sense that he brings you your provision, yet if you ask him where that provision came from, he would say, 'From Allah'. So, he is delivering it to you. But as for the True Lord, He is the One Who creates provision to start with, and that is why, '...He is the best of providers.'" (*Saba':* 39)

We previously illustrated that when you see an attribute that is common to both the Creator and His creation, you must know that the definition befitting each is completely separate and different. What gives superiority to Allah's attribute here is that He is the provider as well as the One Who creates provision and the One Who clears the way for it to reach you.

They say that Allah's superiority, when it comes to providing, stems from three things: Firstly, He does not keep your provision back until the time you need it, but rather creates it for you before you are even created, and He puts in place all the necessary ingredients for your life before summoning you into this world. Secondly, He does not charge you anything for what He provides you. Thirdly, He does not demand any reward in exchange for what He granted you. For all of these reasons the True Lord *Glorified is He* was and still is the best of providers. Reflect, for example, on the Pharaoh - after he had raised Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and demanded his gratitude, reminding him of how he raised him as his child and how he spent with them years of his life! (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18) What he meant was, 'You should speak courteously towards us, Musa, remember my favours upon you, and do not come set a collision course with me.'

On the other hand, Allah says of Himself that He will judge among us, for He is the best of Judges. (*Yunus:* 109) Allah also says of Himself, that He is the best of creators. (*al-Mu'minun:* 14)

In all of these verses, the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes into account the talents that He has given to people, and appreciates their positive effect upon life - that is the reason He attests to them possessing features of His own attributes, namely that of creation. 'Creation' means bringing into being something that had not been in existence before. Human beings can be considered creators when they make things like crystal out of sand. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not begrudge them that and so calls them creators. But if humans are creators, then the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the best of creators. Why? A number of different aspects demonstrate His superiority when it comes to the act of creation: Firstly, humans can only create things out of existing elements, whereas the Creator can create things out of nothing. Secondly, mankind's creations remain in one state - with no ability to grow or proliferate, whereas Allah's creation possesses the quality of life - they eat, grow, and proliferate...etc.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ أَهَٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾
قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَٰنَكَ أَنتَ وَلِيُّنَا مِن دُونِهِم ۖ بَلْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْبُدُونَ ٱلْجِنَّ ۖ أَكْثَرُهُم بِهِم مُّؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

On the Day He gathers them all together, He will say to the angels, 'Was it you these people worshipped?' [40] They will reply, 'May You be exalted! You are our supporter against them! Really, they worshipped the jinn – most of them believed in them' [41] (The Quran, *Saba':* 40 - 41)

The meaning is, 'Remember that Day upon which He will gather them all together'. The day that includes the gathering and bringing together all mankind is the Day of Rising. But why would Allah mention to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that day? Because this is a sign to Prophet Muhammad, that Allah has neither forgotten him nor left him alone. That is proven by the fact that He will take revenge upon his enemies and those who reject him on that day. It is as if Allah were saying to him, 'You will see what We shall do to them', just as He asks at the end of *al-Mutaffifin* chapter, if the disbelievers have not been repaid for their sins? (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36), and when He asks the angels if it was them that these people worshiped. (*Saba':* 40) It is well known that disbelievers worship many gods, so why does Allah mention the angels in particular here in this question? Because angels are the highest species that are worshipped other than Allah, and the closest of them to Him. That is why they dubbed them 'the daughters of Allah'. They thought that the angels could plead for them with Allah, or intercede on their behalf and defend them if they worshipped them. So, Allah mentions the angels here, rather than the stones or trees they also used to worship.

But why is the question directed towards the angels who are being worshipped, and not towards those worshippers who associated others with Allah? Why does Allah not rebuke them for worshipping other than Allah? Because the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants the idolaters to hear the response directly from the angels themselves so that the proof against them is established more eloquently.

Allah asks the angels: '..."Was it you these people worshipped?"' (*Saba':* 40) i.e. the idolaters, Their first response was: 'May You be exalted!…' (*Saba':* 41) meaning you are exalted, Lord, above anyone being worshipped apart from You. '...You are our supporter against them!' (*Saba':* 41), means, 'It is a greater honour and source of pride for us to be your lowly servants than for them to worship us. '...Really, they worshipped the jinn, most of them believed in them.' (*Saba':* 41), i.e. they were not worshipping us at all, but instead were worshipping the jinn. '...most of them believed in them."' (*Saba':* 41) But why did they worship the jinn(1)? Why did most of them believe in them?

The jinn are the counterparts of human beings. They are called jinn because they are hidden from us - they see us, but we do not see them. Allah says to us that Satan and his tribe are lurking for us where we cannot see them. (*al-A'raf:* 27) Those who worship the jinn do not worship all of them, but rather worship the shayatin (Satans) of the jinn. They worship them because they obey them, and most of them to believe in them. Why? Because the jinn used to snatch snippets of what Allah said to His angels and pick up information about certain events or realities. Then they would reveal them to their friends from among the men, and those people would take those snippets and tell them to other people claiming that they were telling them about the future. But in reality they were mixing those realities with a great deal of falsehood. Then, when some events happened in the way that they had predicted people would be fascinated by them and think that they did indeed know the hidden future.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned in his Tafsir (8/5579) 'that a tribe called Banu Mulayh ibn Khuza'a used to worship the jinn, claiming that the jinn appeared to them and that they were really angels and the daughters of Allah.' But Abu Yahya Zakariyya Al-Ansari narrated a question in his Book, 'Fath Ar-Rahman Bi-kashf ma yaltabisu fi Al-Quran' (p 345), 'If you were to ask, 'How could the angels say what they said with respect to the idolaters when it has never been narrated that any of them worshipped the jinn?', we would say that what they meant was that they used to obey the shayatin (Satans) when they commanded them to worship other than Allah. So the meaning of jinn here is the shayatin. On the other hand, Al-Karmani was certain that they used to worship the jinn as well.'*

فَٱلْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ نَّفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُوا۟ ذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ٱلَّتِى كُنتُم بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

**‘So today neither of you has any power to benefit or
harm the other,’ We shall tell the evildoers, ‘Taste the
torment of the fire which you called a lie’ [42]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 42)**

‘...Neither of you...’ (*Saba’:* 42), i.e. neither the angels nor those idolaters who worship them, ‘...today...’ (*Saba’:* 42), i.e. on the Day of Rising, ‘...has any power to benefit or harm the other…’ (*Saba’:* 42) even though they think that the angels are but honoured slaves who enjoy a high rank with Allah, and that this will make them intercede on their behalf; yet the angels would make it clear to them that they can only intercede on behalf of those with whom Allah is pleased. Indeed, no one can intercede without first being given the permission to do so. Then there is the fact that the angels would be too ashamed to intercede on behalf of someone who worshipped other than Allah, for the absolute sincerity of their devotion will prevent them from supporting people such as these or interceding on their behalf.

We saw a similar situation with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he gave those who believed in Allah but denied his message precedence over those who denied Allah, thus demonstrating that he sides more with his Lord than with himself.

As for Allah’s words: ‘…We shall tell the evildoers, “Taste the torment of the fire which you called a lie’ (*Saba’:* 42), this is one of the verses with which the orientalists had problems, saying that the words of Allah contradict. They said that this verse says that the evildoers call ‘the Fire’ a lie, whereas in another verse it is “the torment” of the fire which the evildoers call a lie. (*as-Sajda:* 20), so which one is it, they asked?

So, did the evildoers call the fire, or its torment, a lie? Our answer is that there were some disbelievers who rejected the existence of the fire, and to those Allah says: ‘...Taste the torment of the fire which you called a lie.”’ (*Saba’:* 42) Their denial was directed at the fire, and so the relative pronoun *al-lati* denotes the ‘Fire’.

As for those who believed in the existence of the fire, but rejected the fact that they would be punished by it, Allah says to them to taste the 'torment' of the fire which they called a lie. (*as-Sajda:* 20) In this case, their denial was directed at the torment, not the fire, and so the relative pronoun *al-ladhi* denotes the 'punishment'.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ قَالُوا۟ مَا هَٰذَآ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَن يَصُدَّكُمْ
عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ ءَابَآؤُكُمْ وَقَالُوا۟ مَا هَٰذَآ إِلَّآ إِفْكٌ مُّفْتَرًى ۚ وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا۟ لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَآءَهُمْ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٤٣﴾

When Our messages are recited to them, clear as they are, they say, 'This is only a man who wants to turn you away from what your forefathers worshipped,' and, 'This [Quran] is nothing but lies he has made up.' When the Truth comes to the disbelievers, they say, 'This is just plain sorcery' [43]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 43)

The meaning of: 'to turn you away' (*Saba':* 43) is take you away: 'from what your forefathers worshipped!' (*Saba':* 43) This proves that their worship of other deities than Allah was no more than their blind following in the footsteps of their forefathers. By saying this, they were not coming up with anything new, for Allah had already told us that they would say that when they were still in the world of unformed atoms when He extracted from them their solemn oath that they would take Him as their Lord. Allah says to prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that He took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, and asked them, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' Hence, they cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this,' or, 'It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to Allah, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173)

After saying what they said about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this is what they said about the Quran: '...This (Quran) is nothing but lies he has made up…' (*Saba':* 43): *ifk* is turning realities or events upside down, and it was on account of this that lies came to be called *ifk* because lying is saying something that contradicts reality, whereas telling the truth is saying something that supports reality. When you turn a reality upside down, you change it altogether.

It is like when Allah says in one of the verses that it was He who 'turned down' the ruined cities. (*an-Najm:* 53): *mu'tafika* are villages that Allah has turned upside down. Another example is when Allah asks how they can 'turn away' from the truth; (*al-An'am:* 95) i.e. how have you turned away from the truth and inverted it until it became falsehood? Did they stop at that description of the Quran? No, they added the word: '...made up...' (*Saba':* 43), i.e. deliberately invented. Then Allah says: 'When the Truth comes to the disbelievers, they say, "This is just plain sorcery,"' (*Saba':* 43). Of the words '...This is just...' (*Saba':* 43), they mean, 'this thing that you brought, Muhammad, is just: "...plain sorcery!" (*Saba':* 43) It is amazing that they described that which Muhammad brought as magic, since magic is what is used to cast a spell over people's eyes. Nothing that a magician does is real - it is all illusion. That is why we say that there is a difference between the magic that the magicians of Pharaoh cast and the staff of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Their magic was as Allah *Glorified is He* describes it when He *Glorified is He* says: 'they bewitched the eyes of the people,' (*al-A'raf:* 116) and when He *Glorified is He* says: 'seemed to him from their magic that they were moving [like snakes].' (*Ta Ha:* 66) It was nothing more than pretence - there was nothing real about it. But when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threw his staff, it turned into a real snake. Had it not turned into a real snake, then Musa *peace be upon him* would have been afraid of it, for Allah *Glorified is He* says of him: 'And he sensed within himself apprehension, did Musa' (*Ta Ha:* 67)?

If it had not been a real snake, then the most skilled of the magicians would not have believed in him, for the Quran relates that once they saw what the staff did, they said, 'We have come to believe in the Lord of Musa and Harun (Aaron)!" (*Ta Ha:* 70) In other words, they recognised that it is not something that came from Musa *peace be upon him* but rather from Allah *Glorified is He*.

So, where then is this magic that Muhammad brought? If Muhammad truly were a magician who had bewitched the believers as they said, then why did he also not bewitch you, thereby bringing an end to this matter? It is also well known that those who are bewitched never get anything good from the one who bewitches them. So, this statement of theirs is a clear lie against the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and an indication of their stubborn refusal to accept the truth brought by him.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَآ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُم مِّن كُتُبٖ يَدۡرُسُونَهَاۖ وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡهِمۡ قَبۡلَكَ مِن نَّذِيرٖ (٤٤)

Though We have not given them any books to
study nor sent any warner before you [44]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 44)

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were asking, 'Where does this statement of theirs originate? And where do those accusations come from? Have we given them books which they are studying [and from which they quote]? Did they learn that from them?' Then He *Glorified is He* Himself gives the answer to that unvoiced question: 'And We had not given them any scriptures which they could study.' In addition to, 'and We had not sent to them before you, [O Muhammad], any warner;' meaning a Messenger who told them those things. So, from where then did they get them?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَّبَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡ وَمَا بَلَغُواْ مِعۡشَارَ مَآ
ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمۡ فَكَذَّبُواْ رُسُلِيۖ فَكَيۡفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ (٤٥)

Those who lived before them also denied the truth – these
people have not attained even a tenth of what We gave their
predecessors – they, too, rejected My messengers, and how
terrible My condemnation was! [45] (The Quran, *Saba':* 45)

The meaning of this is that whatever they said about the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or about those who brought them guidance before him, is simply a denial of the truth, just like the earlier people who denied the truth. Their denial is a closely-followed custom, and indeed a natural tendency in those to whom Messengers are sent; whenever a new religion is brought to them that brings an end to their oppression, tyranny, lordship and their enslavement of others. So, in order to protect their instruments of oppression and corruption, they felt that they had to oppose religion and deny the Messengers. In this context, the meaning of: 'And those before them denied,' is that there were nations who came before you and denied your brothers, the previous Messengers, so you are not the first to receive this reaction, O Muhammad.

'And they have not attained a tenth of what We had given them.' This means not even a tenth of the message, guidance, proof, and evidence that we have given you, O Prophet, reached those previous peoples who denied their Messengers. The reason is that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought the complete religion and the perfect way, not open to any amendment.

Or it means the disbelievers of Mecca who denied Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'And they have not attained,' even a tenth of the power that we granted to those earlier peoples. In other words, those peoples who denied previous Messengers were more powerful, more influential and more civilised than the disbelievers of Mecca, when compared to 'Ad, Thamud or Pharaoh. Read Allah's words: 'Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with "Ad, Who were very tall like lofty pillars; the likes of whom had never been created in the land? And [with] Thamud, who carved out the rocks in the valley? And [with] Pharaoh, owner of the stakes [All of] whom oppressed within the lands' (*al-Fajr:* 6-11).

Where is the strength of Quraysh when compared to the strength of these people whose strength, power, oppression, and tyranny is infamous!? And despite that, still what befell them of Allah's might befell.

As for Allah's words: 'so how [terrible] was My reproach,' they mean, 'Look at how I took hold of the deniers and did not leave them be without punishment. No, on the contrary, I seized them with the seizing of One Who is Almighty, All-Powerful. As for 'My reproach,' it means 'My rejection of them by destroying them and punishing them, and My rejection of them at the same level that they rejected Me.'

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ إِنَّمَآ أَعِظُكُم بِوَٰحِدَةٍ ۖ أَن تَقُومُوا۟ لِلَّهِ مَثْنَىٰ وَفُرَٰدَىٰ ثُمَّ تَتَفَكَّرُوا۟ ۚ مَا
بِصَاحِبِكُم مِّن جِنَّةٍ ۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَّكُم بَيْنَ يَدَىْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٤٦﴾

Say [Prophet], 'I advise you to do one thing only: stand before God, in pairs or singly, and think: there is no sign of madness in your companion [the Prophet] – he is only warning you before severe suffering arrives' [46]
(The Quran, *Saba':* 46)

After having given them a warning and a lesson by mentioning what happened to those deniers of the truth who came before them, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses His Words towards them once again and says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Say' to them, 'I only advise you of one [thing].' When you counsel someone, you are not issuing a new ruling, but rather are reminding someone of a previous ruling that people have forgotten. So an exhorter is one who clarifies matters in religion that people already know and believe in. But the desires and heedlessness of people caused them to forget those matters, so he comes and reminds them of the previous rulings. And counsel is only given by those who love you and desire the best for you.

For that reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a good example of what counsel is in the story of Luqman when he was counselling his son: 'And [mention, O Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, "O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah."' (*Luqman:* 13)

As for the Words: 'of one [thing],' they mean 'a single admonishment containing all the ones'. In other words, 'I do only counsel you with this one thing.' What is that thing? 'That you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually,' beware of standing up for your own personal desire or for leadership that you look out for; beware of standing out of a desire to stand above this Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* but rather make your standing be only for Allah *Glorified is He* stripped of all desires, stripped of all appetites and stripped of any partisanship.

And as long as you make them want to stand for Allah *Glorified is He* it is inevitable that Allah *Glorified is He* will come to occupy a place in their hearts.

He *Glorified is He* is indeed in their hearts, as is proven by the Words: ‘And if you asked them, “Who created the heavens and earth?” they would surely say, “Allah.” Say, “[All] praise is [due] to Allah.”’ (*Luqman:* 25)

And by the Words: ‘And if you asked them who created them, they would surely say, “Allah.”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) So, they used to believe that Allah *Glorified is He* was the One Who created them and the One Who created the heavens and the earth because that was a matter that was abundantly clear and something that nobody could possibly deny, no matter how far they have fallen into disbelief. Why? It is because creation is something that no man has ever claimed for himself. Such claims can only be made when a matter is ambiguous to such an extent that falsehood can easily be confused with the truth. But this matter is a clear one that indulges no ambiguity, for no matter how much they search, they will never find anyone who can create them or the universe around them except for Allah *Glorified is He*. This is why He *Glorified is He* uses this logic to argue with them, saying, ‘Based on your position, there are two possibilities before you: either you yourselves created this creation, or you were created without a creator.’ The first is rejected because there is no one who claims to have created creation; the second is rejected because things that are smaller and more trivial than the heavens and earth or human beings need a maker to make them - for example, do not the shoes you wear on your feet require someone to make them?

So, the heavens, earth, and human beings must also have a maker that befits their grandeur and greatness. And how could anyone deny this fact when they are able to recognise each other based on the smallest of things: They know the one who possesses those things and take pride in him. For example, so-and-so used to bury his daughters alive, so-and-so used to have a platter of food from which such-and-such a number of guests used to eat, so-and-so was the bravest of the Arabs, etc. And, indeed, the words, ‘I am the son of so-and-so, and I am the son of so-and -so’ feature heavily in their poetry.

So, when it came to this matter of creation, not one of them dared to deny it. And as long as they recognise that Allah *Glorified is He* is the one who creates, they must then also stand for that Allah *Glorified is He* whose role in creation they affirmed. They must ensure that their standing is sincerely for

Him and that no one other than Him is in their hearts and minds. If you do that, then have absolute confidence in the fact that that standing will bring you to the truth, for nothing shuts out truth from the intellects of those who search for it so much as personal whim, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71)

The standing that is meant here is not conditional upon there being a congregation or a crowd since it is a standing for the purpose of reflection. That is why it should be done, 'in pairs and individually,' whereby each person is left alone to reflect upon the matter of Muhammad in stark and real terms: How was he when he was amongst you? How was his conduct and character? Did you ever experience from him lies or magic or soothsaying? Did he ever claim anything as his that was not his own? Did you ever see a single sign of madness in him before his mission began? '"And then give thought." There is not in your companion any madness.'

This reflecting on the state of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* requires a person to be objective; it is why Allah *Glorified is He* chooses that they are separate and do it singly or in pairs. When a human being is on his own, there is no opponent for him to lose to and no opponent to drive him to other than the truth. In such circumstances, his own point of view will be much closer to the truth.

When someone is alone and reflects, he will arrive at the truth because he is not going to trick or deceive himself and he is not going to be too arrogant to return to the truth. But when people are in a group, every one of them must establish his own proof, even if that means that he is forced to lie and cheat. As we have seen many times in such circumstances, everyone swears that he is in the right and everyone else is in the wrong.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were protecting us by means of this way of reflecting from the clamour and din of crowds, that clamour that we witness, for example, in protest marches where everyone shouts out for what he wants, and their voices run together and become so mixed up with each other that it becomes impossible to make out what is being said.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us how to reflect singly or in pairs, for that is what protects from the deafening clamour. This matter takes us back to the objection the orientalists have with Allah's words: 'Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you conceal.' (*al-Anbiya':* 110)

The nub of their objection is this: if Allah *Glorified is He* honours us by knowing what it is we conceal, then where is the benefit in Him knowing what we say openly? Does every one of us not know what is said openly? We say that here He is addressing us in the plural. So what the verse is saying is that He knows what all of you are concealing or saying openly at any given moment - if your voice becomes mixed up with those of others, still He knows it. He is able to trace each voice back to the one it belongs.

Indeed, having knowledge of what is voiced out loud but is mixed up is greater than having knowledge of what is concealed since something that is concealed may well be indicated and given away by certain outward signs. But as for what is voiced out loud and mixed up with other sounds, it is very difficult to distinguish it from those other sounds.

It is similar when people are in pairs, for two is, as they say, one opinion and its opposite. Even if one opinion were to be defeated by the other, that defeat would be a secret one. We hear people all the time say to their opponents, 'I want to sit alone with you, just the two of us.' It is because you represent the two sides of an issue, and there is no third side to embarrass you or cause you to feel humiliated if you change your position over to his when you are with him.

'There is not in your companion any madness.' Allah *Glorified is He* says this because they used to say that the Prophet Muhammad was mad. But it is strange that they used to describe him as being mad when they were the ones who knew him the best, and had never once seen on him any of the telltale signs of madness. Indeed, he never once did anything against the society in which he lived. They used to refer to him before his mission began as the 'honest truthful one'. They themselves were shown up as being liars by saying that he was a magician and saying that he was mad.

But were one of these people to go somewhere alone and reflect sincerely on the person of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him,* he would arrive at the truth by himself. And if he were to allow those accusations to pass through his mind, he would find the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to be innocent of all of them. And as long as he remains alone with those reflections, he will never feel too ashamed to come back to the truth because he will never be defeated by anyone else.

The Noble Quran has tackled every one of the lies they directed at the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and exposed their untruth. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[That] indeed, the Quran is the word of a noble Messenger. And it is not the word of a poet; little do you believe. Nor the word of a soothsayer; little do you remember.' (*al-Haqqa:* 40-42) And He says: 'For this companion of yours is not a madman' (*at-Takwir:* 22).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not mention here what the result will be of our reflecting and searching for the truth singly and in pairs because it is something which is obvious and which we all know. The only thing He says is: 'He is only a warner to you before a severe punishment.'

Moreover, did all people automatically start believing in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* after hearing this miraculous Quran from him so that we could then say, 'This Quran is the miracle that proves the truthfulness of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*?' The answer is no because from among those people, there were some who did not believe after hearing the Quran as well as others who believed before the Quran was even revealed. For them, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'I am the Messenger of Allah' was enough a proof. The first of those people were Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* and Abu Bakr A-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him*. But what made them believe in the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*? What was the miracle by means of which they recognised him to be telling the truth? The proof and the miracle for these people were first and foremost the way He *peace and blessings be upon him* conducted himself among them - that alone was enough to make them believe him when he said, 'I am the one whom Allah *Glorified is He* has sent to you.' As for the Quran, it is a miracle and a challenge to those who deny him.

We see the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reminding his people of the way he had conducted himself among them and using that as a proof to back his position up. For when he was sent to Safa and called his people, they gathered around him and he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Tell me, if I were to tell you that a group of cavalry were behind that mountain, coming here to attack you, would you not believe me?' They replied, 'We have never heard you tell a lie.' So he said, 'I am the Messenger whom Allah *Glorified is He* has sent to you.' They replied immediately, 'You are a liar. May you meet your doom! Is that the only reason you brought us together?!"(1)

It is narrated in the account of 'Abdullah ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him* one of the great rabbis of the Jews, becoming Muslim "that when his heart had been put to rest after seeing that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* possessed all the qualities and characteristics with which he had been described in their books, and after he had become convinced that he really was the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* he went to him and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, Allah *Glorified is He* has guided me to faith! Know, O Messenger of Allah, that the Jews are a people given to telling lies, and if I become Muslim, they will say things about me that are not true. So call them now, Messenger of Allah, and ask them about me. Then I will announce my Islam in front of them after you have heard what they think of me.' And so the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* called them and asked them, 'What do you say about Ibn Salam?' They replied, 'He is our master and the son of our master, and our rabbi and the son of our rabbi.' They ascribed to him all manner of praiseworthy attributes. At that moment Ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'As for me about whom they have said what they said, I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah.' So, they said, 'Rather, you are the worst of us and the son of the worst of us!'(2)

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(1) *From Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him who said, 'When the verse: "And warn, [O Muhammad], your closest kindred," (ash-Shu'ara': 214) was revealed, the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him went out and stood on the peak of Safa (the mountain of Mecca), whereupon the people gathered around him. So he said to them, Tell me, if I were to tell you that a group of cavalry were coming from the foot of that mountain, would you not believe me?' They replied, 'We have never heard you tell a lie.' So he said, 'I am here to warn you of a severe punishment that is coming.' So Abu Lahab said, 'May you meet your doom! Is that the only reason you brought us together?!' And that was when this chapter: "May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he." (al-Masad: 1) was revealed.' It is related by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/307); Muslim in his Sahih (355) in Kitab Al-'Iman; and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (8/738 - Fath Al-Bari).*

(2) *It is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (8/165 - Fath Al-Bari); and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/ 527-529) in a Hadith from Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him.* =

So, Ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Did I not tell you, Messenger of Allah, that they were a people given to telling lies?’

You will notice that those who opposed the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* at the beginning of his mission, and those who accused him of lying were from his own family and those who were closest to him. Indeed, it was his own paternal uncle who said to him, ‘May you meet your doom! Is that the only reason you brought us together?!’ And in this fact, we find a nugget of wisdom and a proof that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent. Allah *Glorified is He* used that to let people know that it was not the status and pre-eminence of Quraysh in the Arab peninsula that led to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* receiving his message. He did not receive the message so that Quraysh might rule the world, for his fiercest enemies were from Quraysh. And his victory did not come in Mecca, but rather came in Yathrib (the city of Medina was known as Yathrib before the Prophet emigrated).

We said previously that it was belief in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that created the partisanship around Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not the partisanship around Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that created the belief in him.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ مَا سَأَلۡتُكُم مِّنۡ أَجۡرٖ فَهُوَ لَكُمۡۖ إِنۡ أَجۡرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱللَّهِۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ شَهِيدٞ ﴿٤٧﴾

Say, ‘If I have asked you for any reward, you can keep it. It is God alone who will reward me: He is witness to everything’ [47] (The Quran, *Saba’:* 47)

Payment is what one receives in exchange for work. It was this same expression that every one of the Messengers used. Indeed Allah *Glorified is He* taught each of them to say to his people: ‘And I do not ask you for it any

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= *And in some versions of this Hadith, it is said that they said first, ‘That is our master and the son of our master, and the most knowledgeable of us and the son of the most knowledgeable of us.’ And in another version: ‘The best of us and the son of the best of us, and our master and the son of our master.’*

payment. My payment is only from the Lord of the worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109) If one reads between the lines of this statement, it is as if he were saying, 'If what I have done for you were to have been valued justly, I would deserve a wage for bringing you the message and calling you to religion, for by guiding you I have brought you immense benefit - not some worthless bargain in this transient world but an everlasting benefit in that realm that goes on forever and never fades. But the reality is that I do not demand any payment from you. No, instead, I take it from Allah *Glorified is He* since the work I have done for you is so great that you are incapable of evaluating it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is the One Who evaluates my work, and I am confident that He will give me the wage it merits: 'My payment is only from Allah.' As for the Words: 'it is yours,' they mean, 'If I were to have taken payment from you, then I would have used that payment to work on your behalf, or the reward for it would have come straight back to you.'

We previously said that this expression was used by all the Messengers except for two, for this expression never appeared in the course of anything they said. Those two Messengers were Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. This indicates that this matter is based upon a deep and profound wisdom.

But why, out of all the Messengers, were Ibrahim and Musa the ones not to say this? Because, they say, when Ibrahim *peace be upon him* confronted those who opposed him, the first person he confronted was his own paternal uncle (1). When his paternal uncle opposed him and refused to accept his call, he separated himself from him and made do with calling him to Allah *Glorified is He*. As it would have been unreasonable for him to have expected a wage from his paternal uncle, this matter of payment never came up in the words with which he spoke to them.

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(1) The Sheikh here has adopted the position that Azar was the paternal uncle of Abraham and not his father. There is a difference of opinion regarding the name of Abraham's father, for some of the genealogists and exegetists say that his name was Tarih, while others said that it was Tarikh. Still, others said that they were both names of his, just like many other people who have two names. For example, Jacob was also known as Israel. Others say that Tarih was his proper name and Azar was his nickname. It is also said that Azar was the name of the idol that they used to worship. Look at the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi (2/2544); the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir (2/149); Qisas Al-Anbiya' of Ibn Kathir (p. 104); Lisan Al-'Arab (Subject matter: *(azara)*); and Qisas Al-Anbiya' of 'Abd Al-Wahhab An-Najjar (pp. 93-96).

The same was true with Musa, for the first person he called to Allah *Glorified is He* was Pharaoh, who had said to him: ‘Did we not raise you among us as a child, and you remained among us for years of your life?’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 18) This meant that even if he were to have deserved a wage for calling Pharaoh to Allah *Glorified is He* still he would have been too embarrassed to have asked for it, given that he had been raised in his house under his care.

There are two possible meanings for the expression: ‘Say “Whatever payment I might have asked of you,’ it either means, I took a wage for it and gave it to you.’ Or ‘From the very beginning, I never asked you for a wage.’ Then the verse concludes with the Words: ‘and He is, over all things, Witness.’ It means He sees all of us, knows the hardships that I faced in calling you to the truth and knows the stubborn and obstinate way that you acted towards me. He will raise my wage based on the level of suffering I have endured in the course of guiding you along the way, and take you all by the hand into His court.

If human beings generally only do actions when there is some benefit or advantage in it for them, then know that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is not asking you to give him any payment for the work he is doing. So what is there left for you of which to accuse him?

After that, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to clarify for us a matter that is strongly connected to the truth brought by the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* for the objections of the disbelievers had mainly been based around who the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was, as is proven by their statement: ‘Has the message been revealed to him out of [all of] us?’ (*Sad:* 8) And: ‘they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

They acknowledged the Quran and knew that it was a reminder and absolutely incontrovertible, but had a problem with the fact that it had been sent down to this man in particular, and not sent down to one of the great men of the people? It is why Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make it clear that Allah’s Guidance is only sent down to the earth through the medium of those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen, not those whom creation has chosen.

There is no sense to their words: ‘Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?’ It is why Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them with a decisive proof: ‘Do they distribute the mercy of your Lord? It is We Who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) He also says: ‘Allah is most knowing of where He places His message.’ (*al-An‘am:* 124)

Allah’s Mercy is that which brings benefit to people in this world — and that mercy encompasses believers and disbelievers, or in the hereafter, and that mercy is only for believers, not disbelievers. That hereafter mercy is eternal, for they will be in a bliss that never runs out or fades away. If I allotted to you your provision and livelihood in this world, how could I leave in your hands the choice of who is going to show you mercy in the Hereafter? Should I allot temporary mercy for you, and then leave you without eternal mercy?

Then the Quran takes them off in a different direction after having counselled and befriended them. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلۡ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَقۡذِفُ بِٱلۡحَقِّ عَلَّٰمُ ٱلۡغُيُوبِ ﴿٤٨﴾
قُلۡ جَآءَ ٱلۡحَقُّ وَمَا يُبۡدِئُ ٱلۡبَٰطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ ﴿٤٩﴾

Say, ‘My Lord hurls the Truth down [before you].
He has full knowledge of all that is unseen.’ [48]
Say, ‘The Truth has come; falsehood is powerless’ [49]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 48 - 49)

You will take note of the sharpness and vehemence of the style employed here, as opposed to the previous verses which exalted them and curried their friendship. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to them, ‘Do not think that we will continuously try to win your friendship, or that you are the ones whose ships will be kept afloat. No, for Allah *Glorified is He* will give victory to His religion despite your stubbornness, and the truth will be raised high despite your disbelief.’

He says in response to them: ‘Indeed, my Lord projects the truth.’ So, after having given you the opportunity and after your rebellion has gone on for a long time, my Lord is now going to hurl the truth against falsehood, as

He says in another part of the Quran: ‘Rather, We hurl the truth upon falsehood, and it destroys it, and thereupon it departs. And for you is destruction from that which you describe.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 18)

To hurl is to throw something with force. It is a word that is suggestive of violence and strength when it is used in conjunction with a human being, so how do you think it is when the one doing the throwing is Allah *Glorified is He*? The thing that is hurled by Allah *Glorified is He* here is the truth, and as we have said before, the truth is that which is firmly established and does not change.

Hurling must be done with an aim and a purpose, for anyone who wants to throw something must first define the distance to his target and see whether it is near or far. If he is throwing at something that is nearby, then it is seldom that the thrower misses the target, but if he is throwing at something that is far away, then the chances of his missing the target increase. The further away the target is, the more and more likely it becomes for him to miss. It is because the action of hurling requires that you set a target that you hope your thrown object will hit.

When that target is nearby, the changes that can befall it are few since it takes the thrown object such a short period of time to reach it, but when the target is far away, it becomes increasingly susceptible to significant change. For example, the angle at which it faces may be altered as a result of its being blown around by the wind, a hurricane, or something else entirely.

It is why, in circumstances such as those, we need precise equipment and instruments to measure the exact distance to the target, the strength with which the object is being thrown and the strength of the wind with which it comes into conflict, as well as many other instruments to measure speed and the passing of time. Take someone who hunts birds, for example: before firing, he must change the point at which he is aiming to take into account the movement, direction and speed at which the bird is flying.

And there is no one more capable of carrying this procedure than the One Who has full knowledge of the Unseen, the One Whom not one atom’s weight of whatever there is in the heavens or on earth escapes His knowledge. It is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* uses correspondingly fine language to describe this procedure, saying: ‘Say, “Indeed, my Lord projects the truth. Knower of the unseen"' First, He hurls the truth, and then makes clear that what He hurls does not miss the target because He has full knowledge of the Unseen.

The truth that Allah *Glorified is He* hurls is the Divine guidance that He sent down to us from heavens, and the reason for Him doing the hurling is to get the message to where He wants it to be, for as He Himself says: 'Allah is most knowing of where He places His message.' (*al-An'am:* 124)

So, the hurler is Allah, and the hurled object is the truth, that thing that is firmly established and does not change. And the reason for the hurling is so that the message can reach those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen for it. And this is a process that never goes awry since the One doing the hurling knows every unseen thing that might affect the path of the hurled object. So, the truth will always inevitably reach the one who has been chosen to bear it and no one else.

This verse is a rebuttal and a refutation of those who say, 'The message and the revelation were a mistake - they were revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instead of being revealed to the one to whom they should have been revealed.'(1) Such a view is no more than baseless fumbling around in the dark.

The Words: 'Knower of the unseen,' here refers to the many different things that might obstruct the object that has been hurled from reaching its target. These influencing factors are known by none but Allah *Glorified is He*.

If you were to say, 'The fact that the verb 'hurl' appears in the imperfect, a tense that refers to either the present or the future, shows that it is Allah's job to hurl truth to His Messengers. But did He hurl that truth to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*?' The reply to this question comes in what Allah *Glorified is He* says in the very next verse: 'Say, "The truth has come,' meaning He actually did hurl it down in the shape of the Quran which was sent down to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the one whom Allah *Glorified is He* had chosen to carry His message and pass on His Divine guidance to creation so that their lives might be put back in order. And if the clear and incontrovertible truth has come, and the one who hurled it is He who has full knowledge of the Unseen, then what must be the position of the opposing falsehood? There is no doubt that it must retreat, for there is no way that it can stand firm when faced with the strength of the truth.

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(1) *Among those who say this are one of factions of the Shi'a, namely the followers of Al-'Alba' ibn Dhira' Ad-Dusi, who preferred 'Ali may Allah be pleased with him to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him claiming that Muhammad was sent to guide people to 'Ali, but instead called people to himself (Al-Milal wa An-Nihal of Ash-Shahrastani 2/175).*

‘And falsehood can neither begin [anything] nor repeat [it].’ it cannot bring anything into being in the first world nor bring anything back in the next world. In other words, it is neither here nor there - it can neither bring in nor drive away. That is if falsehood actually has some form of existence. But in truth, falsehood is no more than a distant imagining in the heads of those who dream it up, and has no existence.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a physical representation of truth and falsehood when He says: ‘He sends down from the sky, rain, and valleys flow according to their capacity’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17), i.e. every riverbed fills with water according to its breadth and capacity: ‘and the torrent carries a rising foam.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17) Foam is the straws and crumbs that are carried by the water, things that are commonplace and totally without benefit. Then the wind comes along and blows them here and there, leaving the surface of the water clean so that people can benefit from it. This indicates that falsehood is totally without benefit and does not last, no matter how high up it goes, and that it exists only in the same way that scum exists, a life without use or value.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ إِن ضَلَلْتُ فَإِنَّمَآ أَضِلُّ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِي ۖ وَإِنِ ٱهْتَدَيْتُ
فَبِمَا يُوحِيٓ إِلَيَّ رَبِّيٓ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

Say, ‘If I go astray, that is my loss, and if I am rightly guided, it is through what my Lord has revealed to me. He is all hearing, and ever near [50] (The Quran, *Saba’:* 50)

We notice here that He *peace and blessings be upon him* ascribes misguidance, when it occurs, to himself, but ascribes guidance to Allah *Glorified is He* and to the Revelation that was sent down to him. It is because when Allah *Glorified is He* sends down guidance to a human being who has free choice — and the arena for free choice is when there are alternatives between which his intellect can choose, — since the intellect has no role to play when confronted by a single matter for which no alternative exists. For example, let us say you wanted to travel to a specific destination, but you could only find a single way to get there. In such circumstances, the intellect has no job to do and there is no scope for free choice. But then let us say that you wanted to travel to Alexandria and found two possible ways of getting there: a dirt track, the characteristics and distinguishing features of which are such-and-such, or a desert road, the characteristics and distinguishing features of which are such-and-such.

Allah *Glorified is He* created the whole of existence with free will, except when it comes to matters decided by fate and destiny. Those matters are ones for which human beings are given no choice because if they were to interfere in them they would spoil them.

Do not think that you are the only one in existence with free choice, for the reality is that everything around you in the heavens and the earth also had the freedom of choice. The only difference is that the heaven, the earth, and the mountains made their choice on one occasion and then extended that all-inclusive choice to cover all the individual details that came later. For proof of that, read Allah’s words: ‘Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

So, the inanimate objects of this world chose in the beginning of the affair to be compelled by the Will of Allah *Glorified is He* and refused to bear that trust. But as for man, he bore it and said, ‘By means of my mind, I am able to choose between the alternative paths.’ But it escaped his notice that he was only taking into account the time of taking on the trust and not the time of paying it back. Neither was he taking into account all the accidents that would befall him as well as all the appetites, whisperings of Satan (Iblis) and so on. It is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes man as being most wrongdoing and most ignorant - i.e. doing the most wrong towards himself and being the most ignorant of the consequences.

The guidance which the True Lord *Glorified is He* laid out for man was general, one which was laid out for believers and disbelievers alike. Allah

Glorified is He guided everyone to the path of good and left everyone with the freedom to choose. Some of them chose their base appetites in this world, seeking maximum thrill and excitement now and damn the consequences later, while others reflected carefully upon this guidance and found it to be backed by a miracle. That miracle broke the basic laws of existence. So it was a guidance that had come from an All Knowing, All-Powerful being - it was Allah *Glorified is He* Most-High who chose this guidance for the good of creation.

Man, generally speaking, likes what is best for himself. But people differ when it comes to their understanding of what is best. It is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And man supplicates for evil as he supplicates for good, and man is ever hasty.’ (*al-Isra’:* 11) And why He says: ‘I will show you My signs, so do not impatiently urge Me.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 37)

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to man, ‘Do not be impatient for your supplication to come true, but rather be content with what I have chosen for you. For your judgement and understanding of what is best for you is limited by your knowledge of what is best, and I have more knowledge than you - I know how you will receive that good and what effect it will have on you.’

It is why we say, ‘We hear many people say, ‘I pray and live my life according to Allah’s Guidance, but despite that He does not answer my supplications’. To those people we say, ‘That is because you asked for good according to what you understand is good, but your Lord knows better than you what is best for you. It is why He did not answer you.’

We also often hear mothers supplicate against their only children in moments of anger, saying, ‘My Allah, let him taste your Fire. My Allah will bring me news of your fate.’ By Allah, were Allah *Glorified is He* to answer her supplication, what would she then say about her Lord? So, Allah *Glorified is He* not giving you that which you ask for is sometimes the very thing that is best for you since He knows how foolish your supplication actually is. Allah *Glorified is He* is not a Lord Who is content for you to suffer the effects of that foolishness, and so He puts right the mistake that you made.

Another related matter is that a supplication may be for something which is actually good, but the one who asks may not have been compelled when he made his supplication, but rather still had other means at his disposal. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* promises to answer the compelled when he calls on Him, saying: 'Rather, who is it that responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him' (*an-Naml:* 62)? So if you were truly distressed, He *Glorified is He* would give you what you ask because the distressed is one who exhausts all the means granted to him by Allah *Glorified is He* and whose strength proves insufficient to the task, so he takes refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* the Primary Cause. Most of us, however, call on Allah without being forced into a position where we are compelled to do so.

Now, let us return to our discussion of the guidance which Allah *Glorified is He* put in place to guide all of mankind. We say, 'Allah *Glorified is He* helps those who believe in this guidance and are rightly guided by it, and increases them, as He *Glorified is He* himself says in the Quran, "And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness." (*Muhammad:* 17) But as for those who deviate from it and go astray, Allah *Glorified is He* increases them in misguidance and puts a seal on their hearts so that no belief can get in and no disbelief can get out. He *Glorified is He* is a Lord Who helps His servants to do what they want and increases them in the direction they choose.'

So, as long as there is freedom of choice when it comes to accepting or rejecting the guidance, there must be both right guidance and misguidance. The guidance attracts what is good and brings reward, while the misguidance attracts what is bad and brings punishment. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes it clear to us that misguidance is ascribed to oneself while guidance is ascribed to one's Lord and His guidance. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has said elsewhere in the Quran: 'What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil, [O man], is from yourself.' (*an-Nisa':* 79)

Before that, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "All is from Allah."' (*an-Nisa':* 78) Why? Because He *Glorified is He* created two paths and then guided everyone. When you look at any action of yours, know that it is Allah *Glorified is He* who gives you the ability to do it, as He *Glorified is He* Himself says: 'To each [category] We extend - to these and to those - from the gift of your Lord. And never has the gift of your Lord been restricted.' (*al-Isra':* 20)

So, for example, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who gives you the either tongue with which you utter the doctrine of monotheism or utter words that reject Allah *Glorified is He* - and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from ever doing that. So, the tongue did not disobey you when it said this or said that. Who is the one who gives you that freedom of choice? Allah *Glorified is He* of course. It is why we say, ‘Disbelievers do not disbelieve because they have been compelled to do so by Allah *Glorified is He*.’ As for Him not being pleased of disbelief, that is another matter entirely.

As for Allah’s words: ‘Say If I should err, I would only err against myself,’ they mean, ’You and I are the same in every respect, for misguidance comes about as a result of the wrong actions that the self commits - that is the source of all misguidance. As for right guidance that comes from Allah *Glorified is He*, it comes about as a result of following His Divine Guidance

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is just like his community when it comes to ascribing misguidance to the self, but differs from them when it comes to guidance: ‘But if I am guided, it is by what my Lord reveals to me.’ For the guidance came to him from Allah *Glorified is He* directly before Allah *Glorified is He* sent him a messenger bearing the message and before Allah *Glorified is He* revealed revelation from heaven to him. But as for the guidance of his community, it came about through the medium of the Messenger who conveyed Allah’s Guidance to them and brought the miracle.

The guidance of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* happened first when Allah *Glorified is He* chose him to be a messenger, and then Allah *Glorified is He* revealed His guidance to him so that he could guide the community.

‘For Indeed, He is Hearing and near.’ Hearing means that what is wanted of me and what hears my every breath. In addition to the fact that He *Glorified is He* hears me, He is also close by and does not take long to answer my supplications. It is obvious that Allah’s actions do not need to go through a process and nor does He *Glorified is He* need to apply Himself. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* simply says ‘Be’ and it is!

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* returns to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to console him, saying:

وَلَوۡ تَرَىٰٓ إِذۡ فَزِعُواْ فَلَا فَوۡتَ وَأُخِذُواْ مِن مَّكَانٖ قَرِيبٖ ﴿٥١﴾

[Prophet], if you could only see their terror!
There will be no escape when they are seized
from a nearby place [51] (The Quran, *Saba’:* 51)

As for Allah’s words: ‘And if you could see,’ the conditional clause is used many times in the Noble Quran, but many times you will notice that the answering-clause is left unsaid because of the context. The implied meaning here is, ‘If you, O Muhammad, could but see the disbelievers when they shrink in terror on the Day of Resurrection, you would see something immense, something incredible that would set your heart at rest. It would be a fitting revenge for the way they denied you and stubbornly refused your message. This same message is also expressed in Allah’s words: ‘Have the disbelievers [not] been rewarded [this Day] for what they used to do?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36)

Those who oppressed and tyrannised others in this world and fought against the word of Truth, those haughty tyrants and their ilk, you will see them in the Hereafter, when they are overcome by their fear, as cats, kittens and rabbits.

As for Allah’s words: ‘but there is no escape,’ they have no way of saving themselves, because it is possible for people to fear something and yet still be able to escape from it, or maybe for someone else to rescue them. But as for these people, they will shrink in terror without any possibility of rescue and without any escape or way out. So, let that heal your heart and the hearts of the believers who suffered harm along with you in the course of propagating the call of truth.

Just as they stood in the way of the call to Allah *Glorified is He,* so too, will they stand on the Day of Resurrection humiliated and degraded. Reflect on Allah’s words: ‘shall be made to stand before their Lord,’ (*Saba’:* 31) ‘when they will be made to stand before the fire,’ (*al-An‘am:* 27) and ‘when they shall be made to stand before their Lord.’ (*al-An‘am:* 30) They will have to wait for permission to be granted them so that they can see what their intercessors whom they worshipped apart from Allah *Glorified is He* will say. But instead, they will be surprised by seeing their intercessors and leaders preceding them to the hellfire and the punishment, just as they preceded them to misguidance.

It is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then We will surely extract from every sect those of them who were worst against the Most Merciful in insolence.’ (*Maryam:* 69) And it is why He *Glorified is He* says about Pharaoh: ‘He will precede his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them into the Fire; and wretched is the place to which they are led.’ (*Hud:* 98)

In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* causes them to despair of being rescued because they were waiting for those intercessors and leaders to defend them, and yet there they are, preceding them to the punishment!

Each one of those places we have mentioned the disbelievers as standing in on the Day of Resurrection brings them humiliation and each one of them brings them terror. Indeed, every one of those places is itself a form of punishment. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘If you were to see the places in which they stand and the terror they feel, your thirst for revenge would be quenched and you would know that We are fully capable of recompensing them in the way that they deserve.

The meaning of: ‘and they will be seized’ is ‘made to perish: ‘from a place nearby,’ i.e. from the place they will stand in on the Day of Resurrection for the Reckoning. In other words, the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not leave them in ease and comfort, but rather took them from the Reckoning to the fire.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِهِۦ وَأَنَّىٰ لَهُمُ ٱلتَّنَاوُشُ مِن مَّكَانِۭ بَعِيدٖ ﴿٥٢﴾

They will say, ‘Now we believe in it,’ but how can they reach it from such a distant place [52] (The Quran, *Saba’:* 52)

Glory be to Allah! After what they did to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers, and after feeling great terror and being encompassed by the punishment, they then announce their belief, saying: ‘“We do [now] believe in him!’ This is almost exactly like the belief of Pharaoh, when he was on the point of drowning: ‘I believe that there is no deity except that in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of the Muslims.’ (*Yunus:* 90) And Allah *Glorified is He* responds by saying: ‘Now?

And you had disobeyed [Him] before and were of the corrupters?' (*Yunus:* 91) This is a time when belief will not be of benefit to you.'

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* rejects their belief, saying: 'but how for them will be the taking [of faith] from a place far away?' How could they have belief now, when they are in the place of death or the place of resurrection?' Belief was close to them in this world, but as for now it is as far away from them as it possibly could be.

The phrase 'but how' has two meanings; one which indicates amazement as in it is astonishing and very strange that they should say this; and another that indicates the meaning of 'where', as in Zechariah's question to Mary: 'Every time Zechariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, "O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?"' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) 'Where did this provision of yours come from?'

The master of a house should learn from this verse that when he sees one of the people of his house with something with which he did not provide them, he should ask them where it came from and how it made its way into his home. And that is a necessary precaution because that thing may be a sign of slipping towards disobedience.

So, Mary responded to this question: 'It is from Allah.' (*Al-'Imran:* 37) In reply to that question, Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* said: '… Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills' (*Al-'Imran:* 37). She drew the attention of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) that when it comes to Allah's sustenance, things should not be measured by our limited powers. It is astonishing that some would have summer fruits in winter or winter fruits in summer. However, considering Allah's Might, nothing is impossible.

It was as if her answer reminded Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) of something he almost forgot. The moment he heard her answer, he thought to himself, 'Why, then, should I not ask Allah to give me a son even though I have grown old and my wife has always been barren. 'There and then Zakaryya prayed to his Lord, saying, "Lord, from Your grace grant me virtuous offspring: You hear every prayer"' (*Al-'Imran:* 38). The answer he received from Maryam served as a reminder to him. Allah answered his call and gave him a son. He sent down angels to give him the good news and confirmed it by telling him the name of the son he was to be given: ‘Then the angels called to him as he stood praying in the sanctuary: That Allah gives you the good news of Yahya verifying a Word from Allah, and honorable and chaste and a prophet from among the good ones’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 39).

Thus did Allah foretell him the future event he was to expect? The same happened with Companion Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*. Before he died, he told the Mother of the Believers, 'Aisha concerning the particulars of those who would inherit him, ‘There are your two sisters and your two brothers’. At that time, she only had two brothers, Abd Al-Rahman and Mohammad, and one sister, Asma’ *Allah be pleased with her*. After Abu Bakr died, his wife, Bint Kharija,(1) gave birth to a daughter, making true the news told by As-Siddiq. He was not someone who knew the Unseen. Rather he was taught that news and made to speak those words by Allah Almighty; since the One Who knows what is inside wombs is Allah.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said to *Al-Ansar*, Medinan Muslims, ‘My life is with you, and my death is with you’(2). This clearly tells where he would die, but Allah says: ‘... and no one knows in what land he will die...’ (*Luqman:* 34). The Messenger of Allah did not know the Unseen, but he was informed of it by the Knower of the Unseen Who reveals it to whoever He wills.

Allah gives this privilege to His devout servants. He would teach them news of the Unseen, whether of the past or the future. They would be given good news yet to come. Allah teaches those whom He chooses for that very special knowledge.

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(1) *That was Habiba bint Kharija ibn Zayd Al-Khazrajiyya, the wife of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him. She was the mother of Umm Kulthum Allah be pleased with her the daughter with whom she was pregnant when Abu Bakr died. He said, ‘I do not think the womb of Bint Kharija is carrying anything but a female’ and indeed it was so. She married Isaf ibn ‘Utba ibn ‘Amr after the death of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him. [See: Al-‘Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (8/48).]*

(2) *It is cited by Muslim in his Sahih (1780), Hadith no. 86, chapter: Fighting in the Cause of Allah and Biographies, that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to Al-Ansar in a long Hadith, ‘I am Muhammad, the servant and Messenger of Allah. I have emigrated to you for His Cause. My life is with you and my death is with you.’*

When people name their children, they choose names that bear good omens. Arabs would name a boy *Sa'id* (happy) or *Dhakyy* (intelligent), for example, in the hope that the child would indeed be happy or intelligent. However, no one has the power to make the name a reflection of the character of the person given that name. No parent is able to make his child exactly the way he wants him to be. When the one who gives the name is Allah, He alone does have the power to make the name a true reflection of the one who is named.

When Allah gave Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) a son and called him *Yahya* (Living), it was meant to foretell the fact that he would not taste death, for he would be martyred and thus his worldly life and Afterlife would be joined. Not many people paid attention to this meaning. If his murderers understood this fact, they would not have killed him. This meaning is reflected in the following poetic verses about Hamza ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib *Allah be pleased with him*:

O Hamza, uncle of the Chosen One!

Master of all martyrs, excepting none!

Let martyrdom to you amply suffice!

It has spared you death and made you live twice!

So it is a fundamental fact about faith that Allah provides limitlessly for whomever He wills, a fact from which Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) benefited when he asked Allah for a son. So did Maryam (Mary); she too benefited from it when she later became pregnant without having been touched by a man. She remembered that fact and her heart found rest.

In the verse we are considering, the particle *anna* is used, which does not only mean ‘how’ but it also denotes surprise, for the thing wondered about is so far from possible. ‘They will say, “Now we believe in it,” but *anna* (how) can they reach it from such a distant place?’ (*Saba’:* 52) When she was given the news of ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* Maryam (Mary) said: ‘... *anna* (how) can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?…’ (*Maryam:* 20) Another example is found in the verse: ‘... *anna* (how) could Allah bring all this back to life after its death?’ (*al-Baqara:* 259) Bringing a dead land into life can barely be visualized, but requires to be seen by the eyes for the mind to grasp. Have we not read the words of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*:

‘...“My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead,” He said: “Have you not believed, then?” “Yes,” said Ibrahim [Abraham], “but just to put my heart at rest.”…’ (*al-Baqara:* 260)?

Orientalists have attacked the aforementioned verse quoting Prophet Ibrahim's words to Allah. They wonder how Allah addresses the Father of Prophets with such a question: ‘… Have you not believed, then?…’ and how Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) replied: ‘... yes,… but just to put my heart at rest…’. Is faith anything but the heart being put at rest based on beliefs already established in it? In response to this, I say Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) certainly had faith that Allah can bring the dead back to life. He did not ask, for example, 'Does Allah have the power to bring things back to life?’ He only wanted to be granted knowledge of the manner of doing that. This is why Allah showed him a practical sign and made him witness an actual physical experience of the process through the slain birds.

So Allah rebukes the disbelievers for professing faith at the last moment after they wasted numerous opportunities to accept faith at leisure and prove their sincerity. They wanted faith without responsibility, and how could they have that? This statement of theirs is just like that of their fellow disbelievers who said: ‘They will cry out loud in Hell, “Lord, let us out, and we will do righteous deeds, not what we did before!”…’ (*Fatir:* 37)

Then, Allah says:

وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا۟ بِهِۦ مِن قَبْلُ ۖ وَيَقْذِفُونَ بِٱلْغَيْبِ مِن مَّكَانٍۭ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾

They denied it all in the past, and threw conjecture from a far-off place – when a barrier has been placed between them and what they desire, just as was done with their kind before? They were deep in doubt and suspicion [53]
(The Quran, *Saba’:* 53)

When faith was presented to them during their lives in this world, they rejected it. This world is the place for embracing faith and undertaking its responsibilities by committing oneself to divine commands and avoiding prohibitions. When death comes- let alone the Day of Resurrection- faith will avail nothing those who have disavowed it in their worldly lives. The disbelievers made conjectures about matters of faith they had no knowledge of, hoping to arrive at their goal of being spared punishment. However, they were fruitless attempts made at the wrong time.

Whereas the disbelievers made false conjectures about faith, Allah has always made clear the truth: 'Say, "My Lord hurls the Truth down [before you]. He has full knowledge of all that is unseen."' (*Saba':* 48) People's conjectures lead to misjudgements, which takes them away from the ultimate goal. Furthermore, we have no knowledge of the Unseen. We cannot predict the outcomes. As for Allah *the Exalted,* He has Omnipotent Knowledge and nothing whatsoever escapes Him.

Allah concludes the chapter by saying:

وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِم
مِّن قَبْلُ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مُّرِيبٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

And a barrier shall be placed between them and
that which they desire, as was done with the likes
of them before: surely they are in a disquieting
doubt [54] (The Quran, *Saba':* 54)

What is it that the disbelievers desire? They desire to block the way of the truth before people, to abolish the call to faith, but Allah never gives them the power to do that as He says: 'They try to extinguish Allah's light with their mouths, but Allah insists on bringing His light to its fullness, even if the disbelievers hate it' (*at-Tawba:* 32). He also says: 'It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to show that it is above all [other] religions, even though the idolaters hate it' (*as-Saff:* 9). They wished to continue to enslave the weak, usurp their rights and claim superiority over them. They feared Allah's Law would be an obstacle in their way, so they fought against the spread of His Message.

We have pointed out before that the first enemy of a person is his own self, even before Satan. A proof of this can be found in the following Hadith where Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When *Ramadan* comes, the Gates of Paradise are opened; the Gates of the fire are closed; and the devils are chained up.'(1) Still, people commit crimes and misdeeds in *Ramadan*. If not Satan, what then incites one to do evil? Nothing but himself, It is as though Allah wants to expose wrongdoers who accuse Satan of insinuating every mischief. They claim he only leads them astray and is accountable for every wrong they do.

We have previously explained how one may differentiate between a wrong action insinuated by Satan and another insinuated by the self. If a desire to do a particular sin persists, it means the self is behind it. Craving a particular pleasure and not being able to dissuade yourself from it is a reflection that the self longs to attain it. When the self desires something, it is not contented with anything else. As for Satan, if he finds it difficult to push you to any particular act of disobedience, then he will try another. It does not matter to him what the sin you do is. His aim is to make you disobey Allah, regardless of the manner in which you do that.

In the verse under discussion Allah says: 'And a barrier shall be placed between them and that which they desire' (*Saba':* 54). The word 'desire' indicates that whatever they wished of abolishing the call of Islam was a matter of personal desire, an appetite of the self, and Satan had nothing to do with it. Satan was already done with them after they shunned faith and declared disbelief. His mission was thus accomplished and he wanted nothing else from them. Whatever they did apart from that was insinuated by their own self. Their fighting to abolish the call and humiliate the believers stemmed from a desire to prevent the progress of their mission. They wanted to make the believers an example to deter anyone who probably thought of embracing faith. However, Allah set a barrier between them and what they desired, and whatever they did never impeded the progress of the call. All of those believers who were humiliated and tortured became even firmer in faith. Oppression never prevented anyone from embracing Islam. What the earliest believers suffered never frightened anyone who wanted to become a Muslim.

Some might wonder why Allah let the earliest Muslims suffer torture and humiliation by the disbelievers. Why did Allah allow His enemies to oppress

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(1) *Cited by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (2/257), and Muslim in his Sahih (1079), on the authority of Abu Hurayrah*

His devout servants and force them out of their homes? The answer is simple: Allah wanted to purify the earliest community of Muslims from hypocrisy. He did that for the higher aim is to differentiate those who truly believed from those who did not by testing their patience and perseverance. That early group of Muslims would have to bear the burden of delivering Allah's Message, so they had to be prepared for the hard mission. Allah chose for carrying the burden of the call those of His servants who would willingly sacrifice everything for His cause. That is why the earliest believers were sorely tested and deeply shaken. That was the purpose behind many of the early events, including the Night Journey and the trip to Tai'f. All were tests to purify the believers.

Seeing his Companions suffer, Prophet Muhammad thought of a way by which their lives and religion would both be safe. The only place he could find was Abyssinia, so he said to his Companions, 'Go to Abyssinia, for there is a king there who never wrongs anyone staying in his land.'(1)

King Negus was exactly as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had described him. He honoured the emigrant believers and refused to hand them over to the delegation who came from Quraysh to take them back. Prophet Muhammad rewarded him by entrusting him mediation to marry Him off to Umm Habiba *Allah be pleased with her*.(2) Umm Habiba had emigrated to Abyssinia with her husband, but he converted to Christianity there. She, however, remained firm in her faith, which proved her sincerity and that she had not emigrated on account of her husband, but rather for the cause of Allah alone. Prophet Muhammad recompensed her by marrying her.

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(1) *Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her narrated, 'Mecca became too constricted for us, and the Companions were severely tortured; their religion was in danger due to the trials and tribulations they faced. The Messenger of Allah was under the protection of his people and his uncle, yet he was unable to protect his Companions, so he told them, 'In the land of Abyssinia is a king who wrongs no one in his land, so go to his land and stay there until Allah gives you relief and a way out of the situation you find yourselves in.' This is part of a long Hadith cited by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/301), and Ibn Hisham in his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (1/321).*

(2) *She is Ramla bint Abu Sufyan, one of the wives of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. She was the daughter of Mu'awiya Allah be pleased with him and one of the most eloquent women of Quraysh. She was remarkable for her good sense and sound judgment. The Messenger of Allah married her after her husband became Christian in 7 AH after they emigrated to Abyssinia. She died in Medina in 44 AH at the age of 69, 24 years after the death of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. [Cited by Az-Zirikli in his Al-'A'lam 3/33]*

So the disbelievers wanted to inflict harm on the Messenger of Allah and the believers, but the outcomes of their plots were always unwelcome to them. They conspired against Prophet Muhammad to kill him, but: '...They schemed and so did Allah: He is the best of schemers' (*al-Anfal:* 30). Allah made all their efforts come to nothing, and His Messenger walked out right through the men who were waiting outside his home to kill him, scattering dust in their faces and saying, 'May the faces be disfigured.'(1) Allah also says: '…then We have covered them over so that they do not see' (*Ya Sin:* 9).

In this way, Allah set a barrier between the disbelievers and their desires. He rendered all their plotting against His Messenger futile. They even tried to use magic against him. They secretly asked Labid ibn Al-A'sam(2) to cast a spell of black magic on him, by the aid of jinn he used. Allah also made their attempts with magic come to nothing, and they proved unable to cause any real harm to the Messenger of Allah or stop the progress of the divine Message. It was like a message telling them, 'Spare yourselves the effort. The Messenger of Allah is protected by Allah', which is clear through these words Allah addresses to His Messenger: '... Allah will protect you from people…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67).

In the verse we are considering, Allah says: 'And a barrier shall be placed between them and that which they desire, as was done with the likes of them before…' (*Saba':* 54). So that punishment was not specifically for the disbelievers of Mecca. The disbelievers of the previous nations also faced the same destiny.

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(1) *This statement of the Messenger of Allah is narrated in the Hadith about his emigration narrated on the authority of Ibn Abbas and cited by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/368). Muslim also cited it in his Sahih in the Hadith about the Battle of Hunayn, narrated by Iyas ibn Salamah on the authority of his father =(1777). It is also cited by Ahmad in his Musnad on the authority of Abu 'Abd Ar- Rahman Al-Fihri (1/286), and is cited by Ad-Darimi in his Sunnan (2/219).*

(2) *Labid ibn Al-A'sam was a Jew from Banu Zurayq. He was a hypocrite who professed faith. He was a magician. Some Jews went to him and said, 'O Ibn Al-A'sam, you are the most skilful of us in magic. We have tried to bewitch Muhammad, but we have failed. We will pay you to cast a spell on him that will wound him', and they gave him three dinars. [See Fath Al-Bari by Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani (10/226).]*

The disbelievers at the time of Prophet Muhammad were taken by the same punishment that was administered to those of the previous nations, yet only in a different manner. As for the disbelieving peoples of the previous Messengers, Allah punished them directly sometimes by earthquakes, being swallowed up by the earth, destroyed by a blast, transformed into animals, etc.

Thus did Allah grant victory to His previous Messengers and those who believed with them? They were not entrusted to defend Allah's religion with their swords. As for Muslims, however, they were trusted by Allah to carry out this task, so they were the ones who fought for His cause. That is why Allah honoured this community. They were commanded to fight and defend their religion by themselves, so their enemies have not been punished in the same way as those who disbelieved before them. None of them was made to be swallowed by the earth or transformed into an animal, but they had to face the believers in direct confrontations.

When Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* despaired of winning the hearts of his people, he made a supplication against them: 'And Noah said, "Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth– if you leave them, they will lead Your servants astray and beget only sinners and disbelievers' (*Nuh:* 26-27).

Contrarily, when an angel went down to Prophet Muhammad, offering to take revenge on those who denied his message, he said, 'No, I hope Allah will cause to spring from their loins people who say, 'There is no God but Allah'. Indeed, many of them did become believers, like Khalid ibn Al-Walid, 'Amr ibn Al-'As and 'Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl *Allah be pleased with them all*. They had been among the fiercest enemies of Islam, but later became its victorious leaders.

It hurt Muslims that some of the disbelievers were let without punishment, for they did not know then that Allah had another plan for them: He was actually preparing them for carrying the burden of the Message. Khalid ibn Al-Walid became 'the unsheathed sword of Allah' and 'Amr ibn Al-'As one of the greatest leaders who conquered huge lands and presented Islam to their peoples. Let it suffice as a testimony in favour of 'Ikrimah(1) that he was the son of Abu Jahl, who was one of the sworn enemies of Islam. When he was struck by a fierce blow during the Battle of Yarmuk, Khalid held him to his chest as he was dying, and 'Ikrimah said, ‘O Khalid, is this a death that Allah and His Messenger will be pleased with?’

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(1) *He is 'Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl ibn Hisham Al-Makhzumi Al-Qurashi, one of the leaders of Quraysh both before and after he embraced Islam. Both he and his father were among the harshest enemies of Prophet Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him. *'Ikrima=*

Even those who remained disbelievers actually served a good purpose in proving the truthfulness of the message of Islam. Take Abu Lahab, for example. He was the uncle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When the Prophet gathered Quraysh to announce the Message among them in public, Abu Lahab said to him, ‘May you meet your ruin! Is that why you have gathered us?!’ When the son of Prophet Muhammad died, Abu Lahab gloated over his misfortune, saying, 'Muhammad's line was cut off!'(1) He still had daughters, but the sons of his daughters would be attributed to their fathers, not to him, as a poet (2) once said:

Mothers give birth to their children,
But only fathers give them names. (3)

= *became Muslim after the Conquest of Mecca. He took part in several battles and was one of the governors appointed by Caliph Abu Bakr. He was martyred at the Battle of Yarmuk in the year 13 AH when he was 62 years old [Al-’A‘lam by Az-Zirikli 4/244]. According to Ibn Sa‘d in his At-Tabaqat (9/408), ‘He was martyred on the day of Ajnadin.’*

(1) ‘Ata’ said about Allah's words: 'It is the one who hates you who has been cut off' (*al-Kawthar:* 3), ‘It speaks about Abu Lahab and was revealed when a son of Prophet Muhammad died and Abu Lahab said, "Muhammad has been cut off tonight!" *[Ibn Kathir 4/559]* That son was not Ibrahim, for Mariya begot him the latter in Medina, not in Mecca. Most probably that son who died on that occasion was Al-Qasim.

(2) He is Mohammad ibn Harun Ar-Rashid Al-Abbasi. He was given the title Al-Amin Al-‘Abbasi and was one of the Abbasid caliphs. He was born in Baghdad in the year 170 AH. He was pledged as caliph after the death of his father (193 AH) at the bequest of his father. His brother Al-Ma’mun came to power two years after him. He was a courageous and well-educated man who wrote fine poetry. However, he was extravagant and a poor planner. He was criticized for wasting so much money on leisure and sitting around with drunk companions. He died in the year 198 AH *[Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-Shi‘riyya].*

(3) These lines are part of a poem written by Al-Amin Al-‘Abbasi, in which he says:
Do not belittle men who belong by birth
to Roman mothers or non-Arab black maids.
Mothers give birth to their children,
But only fathers give them names.
An Arab woman may be barren
And fertility may belong to a black woman.

It is amazing how Abu Lahab himself contributed to the prevalence of Islam almost as did Khalid or ‘Amr! How was that? When he said to Prophet Muhammad, ‘May you meet your ruin’, Allah responded by the verses: ‘May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: he will burn in the Flaming Fire— and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a palm-fibre rope around her neck’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5) Allah thus made it clear, while Abu Lahab was still living, that he would never embrace faith and is doomed to the Fire. Abu Lahab could have professed faith to prove that verse wrong. He had the freewill to do that, but he just did not do it. By that, he proved the truthfulness of the Quran and that it is indeed the Word of Allah.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘… surely they are in a disquieting doubt’ (*Saba’:* 54). They doubted that Prophet Muhammad would finally gain victory and that his Lord would never abandon him. They entertained that doubt even though they were in constant contact with the people of the Scripture who recited their Books to those disbelievers and. They even held their Scripture as evidence against the disbelievers and prayed for victory against them to be attained when the final Messenger- told of in their Scripture- came. The disbelievers declared enmity against Prophet Muhammad even though they had learnt that all the battles that were waged throughout history between Allah's Messengers and those who denied the truth always ended in favour of the Messengers. Allah would never have sent a Messenger only to abandon him and let his opponents defeat him.

This fundamental matter of faith has been mentioned in all the previous Books, just as it is mentioned in the Quran. Even though the previous Books have been distorted, the Quran is the remaining Book of Allah that He has guaranteed to preserve. It will be recited in the same way in which it was revealed until the Day of Resurrection. Allah says: ‘We support Our messengers and the believers, in the present life and on the Day when witnesses arise’ (*Ghafir:* 51). He also says: ‘Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173).

That is why we have said previously if Muslims are defeated, it means they have not met the prerequisite of victory; namely, total submission to

Allah and commitment to His Law. Allah would not grant victory to the believers so long as they disobey His Commands, or else Islam would not be truly established in the hearts and lands. What would be the use of obedience if Muslims were granted victory anyway? This is the lesson that we learnt at the Battle of Uhud. The archers did not heed the command of Prophet Muhammad and went down the mountain seeking the spoils. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had commanded them, 'Do not leave your positions whatever happens.'(1) Then, when they left their positions, the disbelievers rallied against them and almost defeated them.

Even though the disbelievers did not really gain victory at the Battle of Uhud, but neither did Muslims. If Muslims had been victorious despite going against the direct commands of the Messenger of Allah, they would have thought ever after that the commands of the Messenger of Allah were of little importance. They would have thought, 'We went against his commands at Uhud and still won'. Thus we cannot say that Islam was defeated then, but Muslims were when they abandoned its laws. As for Islam, it was victorious.

The archers were sure true believers, but they were in doubts about what would the outcomes be when they disobeyed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Undoubtedly, they believed in Allah, that He is the Creator of all things and that Muhammad was His Messenger: 'If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, "Allah"…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87).

Speech can be divided into six categories with respect to which of the different levels of certainly it represents. One of those levels is 'doubt'. Speech among humans started when Allah taught all the names to Adam *peace be upon him*. For communication to be made through speech, addressees have to be familiar with the language used by a speaker so they can get the meaning he intends to convey.

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(1) *Ibn Hisham mentioned in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (3/10) that Prophet Muhammad put 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr in command of the archers, a group that comprised of fifty men, and said to them, 'Use your arrows to keep their cavalry at bay so that they cannot attack our lines from behind. Whether we come closer to victory or defeat, hold your positions to ensure that we are not attacked from your direction.' Still, they went against the command of the Messenger of Allah when they saw that the disbelievers of Quraysh were being routed. They went down from their positions to collect the spoils of war. Khalid ibn Al-Walid, who was then a leader in the army of the disbelievers, noticed that, so he attacked Muslims and pierced their lines, safe from the arrows of the archers.*

Speech must have a message, a complete thought. It must convey a meaning. If one says, ‘Mohammad’, for example, this is meaningless, whereas ‘Mohammad is generous’ is meaningful. This statement, ascribing generosity to Mohammad, is based on a conviction of the speaker. If reality corroborates this statement, then we have a piece of information as well as evidence for it. This is 'certainty'. If this information is not certain, it therefore falls under the category of 'doubt'. Doubt implies neither affirmation nor negation, but it gives equal weight to both possibilities. If the possibility of its being true is greater, this is 'assumption'. In case the possibility of its being false is greater, this is 'illusion'.

So there are 'doubt', 'assumption' and 'illusion', and all three categories are subsumed under 'uncertainty'. As for the levels of certainty, they are three too. If it is a thing that corresponds to reality and can be proved, this is 'knowledge'. If it is held to be true or acceptable, yet cannot be proved, this is 'imitation'. To hold something to be true whereas neither reality corroborates nor a proof of it can be obtained, this is ignorance. So here are the other three categories: knowledge, imitation, and ignorance.

So the disbelievers were certain that Allah is the Lord and Creator of all things, but they had doubts with regard to Prophet Muhammad and whether what he delivered for them was truly the Message of Allah. That doubt was where their anxiety originated: ‘… surely they are in a disquieting doubt’ (*Saba’:* 54).

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المجلد (20)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد [20]

the chapter of

Fatir

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Fatir*(1):

ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ جَاعِلِ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُوْلِيٓ أَجۡنِحَةٖ
مَّثۡنَىٰ وَثُلَٰثَ وَرُبَٰعَۚ يَزِيدُ فِي ٱلۡخَلۡقِ مَا يَشَآءُۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ١

Praise be to God, Creator of the heavens and earth, who made angels messengers with two, three, four [pairs of] wings. He adds to creation as He will: God has power over everything [1] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 1)

We have previously commented on the Quranic chapters that begin with 'All praise is due to Allah', namely, *al-An'am*, *al-Kahf*, *Saba'* and this one, *Fatir*. In each of them, the sentence has a significant meaning. Man has been created from nothing. The world has been made for him with all the means necessary to sustain his life. Then, there will be resurrection, and the Afterlife with all that is promised in there. All that is the work of Allah Who has made it all from nothing

The chapter of *al-Kahf* starts with praising Allah for sending down guidance to humankind: 'All praise is due to Allah, Who revealed the Book to His servant…' (*al-Kahf:* 1). Prosperity of humankind on earth is dependent on divine guidance without which we would not know right from wrong and creation would annihilate itself. As for the chapter of *Saba'*, it starts with praising Allah for His blessings in this world and the Hereafter. In the chapter of *Fatir* we are considering, the opening verse says: ‘All praise is due to Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth; the Maker of the angels, apostles flying on wings...’ (*Fatir:* 1). Praise is due to Him for all that He has created in the heavens and earth- that which we know and that which we do not- for the purpose of preserving and sustaining our lives.

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(1) *Fatir* is a Meccan chapter according to the majority of scholars. Al-Qurtubi said so in his Quran Exegesis (8/5590) and it is the 35th chapter in the order of the Noble Quran. It contains 45 verses and it was revealed after the chapter of *al-Furqan* and before the chapter of *Maryam*, and is therefore the 42nd Quranic chapter to be revealed. It is also called the chapter of *al-Mala'ika* due to the angels being mentioned in it.

All praise belongs to Allah. Even when you thank a human being, you thank them for a service he has done you. It would never be in his power to offer you that were it not for the abilities Allah has granted him, so even when you praise him, praise actually goes ultimately to Allah. None of us is actually in possession of whatever he gives to others or enjoys himself. Everything belongs to Him, and all praise is due to Him.

In the opening verse of the chapter of *Fatir*, praise is ascribed to Allah for His creation of the heavens and earth, that miraculous creation that started from nothing. They were not created based on any formerly produced examples of creation. Allah originated them and perfected them by His Might. Allah has honoured humankind by making them vicegerents on earth. He has made them superior to all other creatures and has distinguished them by the power of the mind by which they can choose between alternatives.

The creation of man is a miracle. However, the creation of the heavens and earth is greater and more tremendous. For this reason, Allah mentions them particularly. The word 'heavens' refers to everything that is above you. It includes, for example, the clouds from which rain comes down, as He says: ‘And so We caused the gates of heaven to open with water pouring down in torrents’ (*al-Qamar:* 11). This does not refer to the sky that directly faces the earth.

Allah says regarding the creation of the seven heavens: ‘…who has created seven heavens in full harmony with one another…’ (*al-Mulk:* 3). They are perfectly made, not a hole or a crack may ever be found in them, but how then do the angels descend through them? How do they come down to the earth? Allah says: ‘… the angels and the Spirit [the Angel Gabriel] descend again and again with their Lord's permission on every task’ (*al-Qadr:* 4).

Allah makes it plain that the missions and duties assigned to angels require ascending and descending from the heavens. Now, how do they pass through the sky when it does not contain any holes or cracks? The answer is this: they pass through, for their diaphanous nature as angels allows them to do so.

Man, for example, is created from clay, and clay has a mass and a volume, which does not allow it to pass through anything. As for jinn, Allah has created them from fire, and fire also has a mass and a volume, but it is more delicate and more translucent than clay, and for that reason the jinn can pass through material things. An apple behind your wall would hardly send its aroma, let alone its dimensions, through to you. You would not be able to smell it, let alone see it. However, when a fire is ignited behind the wall, it would not be long before you feel its heat from the other side. Jinn have this light nature.

As for the angels, they are superior creatures and the highest of all of them, for Allah has created them from light and it is more delicate and more diaphanous even than fire. For this reason light does not need passageways. Have you seen, for example, the rays that penetrate the body and give us a complete accurate image of the organs inside? In such a manner the angels pass through the heavens and nothing prevents them.

Allah says about the angels: ‘And they say, “The Lord of Mercy has taken offspring for Himself [the angels].” May He be exalted! No! They are only His honoured servants’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 26-27). Some of the angels have been created solely for glorifying Allah. They are completely absorbed in devotion and do nothing but worship. These do not know anything about the universe and have no connection to it in any way. Other angels, the ones who were commanded to prostrate to Adam, have been created to do tasks in connection with humankind. Allah says about some of them: ‘Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah’s command…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 11). Allah sends angels and gives them commands to protect His servants. They do their duty by the Will of Allah, so they cannot protect anyone from a thing Allah has decreed for him. A popular Egyptian proverb says, ‘The eye has a guard over it’ which alludes to the guardian angels. Some people experience accidents, but they survive as if by a miracle. Simply, Allah has willed that they would be rescued, so they survive those accidents with no injury.

Among the angels are also: ‘… those who regulate the affair’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 5). They are the ones who manage the affairs of the creation by the command of

Allah. Some angels are responsible for recording deeds: ‘watchers, noble recorders…’ (*al-Infitar:* 11).

Some angels are message-bearers. Some of them were sent down either to Allah's Messengers to reveal to them divine messages they were chosen to deliver to people. Others have missions related to the service of humankind in general.

Allah then describes the angels by saying: ‘…flying on wings, two, and three, and four…’ (*Fatir:* 1). This description corresponds to the missions angels are assigned that require ascending and descending between the heavens and earth. Not only two, three, or four, but: ‘… He increases in creation what He pleases…’ (*Fatir:* 1). We have only seen birds with just two wings, but we should not be amazed, for this is the creation of Allah Who increases in creation what He pleases. He is the One Who has absolute power. No limits or moulds govern the works of the Almighty Lord. Rather, His absolute power to create anything has been manifest ever since he made the father of humankind, Adam *peace be upon him*. The norm is that reproduction requires a male and a female, and from this natural process have the great mass of humankind emerged. However, Allah Who is the Creator of norms have showed us signs that display His Absolute Power that knows no limits and is not bound by the abilities that the human mind can comprehend. Allah has created Adam without a father or a mother, created Eve from a father without a mother, and He created 'Isa (Jesus) from a mother without a father.

So long as Allah is the One Who creates, then do not be amazed or suspicious when you hear this Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘I saw Gabriel and he had six hundred wings.’(1) So long as this is what the Messenger of Allah has said, there is no room for doubt. When Companion Abu Bakr As-Siddiq was told about the miraculous Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad, ‘Your companion has said such and such…!’ He only replied, ‘If he truly said that, then it is true.'(1) So long as the source is verified, so long as we know those are the revelations of Allah sent down to His Messenger, then it is true. So long as a command is from Allah, it is for our good and we have to obey it, regardless of whether or not we understand the wisdom behind it.

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(1) *This Hadith is cited by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/412, 460) on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud when he interpreted the words of Allah: 'And, indeed, he saw it descend a second time by the lote-tree of the farthest limit' (an-Najm: 13-14). He said, 'The Messenger of Allah said, "I saw Gabriel and he had six hundred wings from which embellishments, pearls, and rubies spread.' In his exegesis, Ibn Kathir deems its chain of narrations authentic (4/251).*

Some give themselves a hard time trying to discover the wisdom behind every act of worship and every command of Allah. For example, they would say that if Allah enjoins *sawm* (Fasting) so the wealthy can understand the pain of the hungry and have sympathy for the poor. Based on this logic, then the poor should not fast! However, this is a narrow-minded view, and when Allah ordains fasting for the poor and rich alike, we must comply, trusting the Wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He*. A patient would not ask a doctor why he prescribes for him a particular medicine. He would only follow the prescription, trusting that the doctor knows what he has to do. Only another doctor would discuss with him why he has prescribed certain medication. To Allah belongs the Highest Similitude; is there an equal to Him that can probably be fit for asking: why have You made such-and-such obligatory for us?!

Allah says: '… He increases in creation what He pleases…' (*Fatir:* 1), which means nothing is beyond His Power. His absolute Power is evident in the endless varieties of creatures this vast universe is rich in. The creation of man is so full of wonders. He has created us quite different in physical features, character, and abilities. There is the tall, short, smart, awkward, blond, dark, etc. Every human being is a miracle walking on earth.

Allah shows us signs of His Power through His creation. A baby may be born with two heads or a hand with six fingers. An animal may have five legs. He has made some people handsome, with distinct fine features and delicate figures. Others are not really handsome, with irregularities in their features or defects in their physical forms. He has created the brave and the cowardly, the eloquent and the clumsy. Every bit of creation spells His Might and Majesty. Allah says: 'And among his wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours...' (*ar-Rum:* 22).

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(1) *It is cited by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis (5/4012), and the full version tells, 'Do you believe what he said before you hear it from him?' He said: 'Where are your minds? I believe that he receives news from heaven, so is it hard to believe that he went to Jerusalem? Heaven is much farther!'*

From His Absolute Power also ‘He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills], and causes to be barren whomever He wills...’ (*ash-Shura:* 49-50).

Another amazing manifestation of His Power is the harmony He has made in nature. Ponder the relationship between crocodiles and birds. Despite viciousness of the former and vulnerability of the latter, common benefits bring them together. A crocodile would go to the riverbank and open its mouth. Then birds would clean its teeth by picking up the remnants of the crocodile’s food, meanwhile feeding themselves. If the birds sense a hunter approaching, they make a noise to warn the crocodile, which rushes back into the water. Glory is to Allah Who has created everything in the best form and guided everyone to the best path! Look at the neck of a giraffe or camel in contrast with that of a bear, for example. Each of them has that which is most suitable to them.

We have frequently mentioned the five senses and pointed out that scientists call them 'the five known senses'. This is to allow for more discoveries that unveil new senses the human body is endowed with. We know that there are other senses besides those well-known five, such as the sense by which we discern the thickness of a material, and that by which we determine the weight of things.

Allah has created in us all the same organs and systems in our bodies, each assigned a specific function. All of us see with the eyes, hear with the ears, smell with a nose and so forth. Still, the sharpness of each of the senses differs from one person to another. Have you not ever heard of a person who can hear the creeping of ants? History tells us of people who could see over unusually long distances.(1) Indeed, Allah increases in creation whatever He pleases and chooses for His bestowals whoever He wills. A poet says:

Glory is to Him Who divides gifts among His servants!

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(1) Zarqa’ was a woman from the tribe of Jadis in Al-Yamama. She was an example of unique eyesight. They say she could see an object from a distance that needed three days to be covered! It is narrated that Hasan ibn Tabaʿ Al-Hamiri moved to invade Jadis. Zarqa’ saw them as they set out from their land and warned Jadis, but they did not believe her. Hasan annihilated them, as a result. [*Al-Aʿalam* by Az-Zirikli 3/44].

He is the Lord and none can question His governance!
He has made some dim-sighted and some sightless
And gave Zarqa Al-Yamama eyes with such sharpness!

Zarqa᾽ of Yamama had exemplary sharp eyesight. Another example of sharpness can be found in the following verses (1):

What sound judgement a girl of a tribe showed
when she looked at a flock of doves and hoped,(2)
'If only I had what equals their number and its half,
this would be a hundred doves with the one I have!'
They counted the doves to verify her accurateness
and found them exactly sixty six, not more or less!

She counted the doves as they flew on high and was right about their number which bears testimony to her strong vision and precision.

As much can be said about the sense of smell, we have a good example in dogs which can be trained to detect smells with absolute accuracy. All of us can tell whether a perfume smells pleasant or otherwise, but only few can detect whether it is made of rose or jasmine, or a mixture of both.

Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* was able to distinguished the smell of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) from an exceptionally far distance. We know he was tested by the loss of his son Yusuf *peace be upon him* when his brothers threw him into the bottom of a well. He was overwhelmed with grief that he cried so much until he lost his eyesight. As the story is told in the Quran, we know that Yusuf was saved and attained to power, as he came to be in charge of all the treasure houses of Egypt. When shortages struck their land, the brothers of Yusuf went to him and asked for provisions. After some events, Yusuf recognized his brothers and gave them his shirt to put it on his father's face so he would be able to see again. What is amazing here is that when the caravan departed Egypt, just as it was leaving the populated areas where smells could hardly be told from one another, to the emptiness of the desert, Ya'qub said, while he was so far away in Palestine: ‘I can smell Yusuf (Joseph)’ (*Yusuf:* 94). He detected the smell of Yusuf that his shirt contained.

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(1) This poet is An-Nabigha Adh-Dhibyani, poet of the highest calibre, from the people of Hijaz. A dome of red leather was established for him in the Market of 'Ukazh, where poets used to appear and present their poems to him. He was a source of inspiration to An-Nuʿman ibn Al-Mundhir. He lived a long life and died eighteen years before *Hijra*. [*Al-Mawsuʿah Ash-Shiʿriyyah*].

(2) This verse is from a poem of An-Nabigha Adh-Dhibyani.

We know that smell is the strongest indication of a person, as distinct his voice of fingerprint. Smell is the last trace of someone that is able to remain in a place.

Likewise, some people have really amazing sense of taste, like professional tasters of food. The gifts Allah has endowed people with are endless. A cashier at a bank, by only touching the money with his fingers, is able to know whether it is genuine counterfeit, and so on. All these are manifestations of Allah's words: ‘... He increases in creation what He wills...’ (*Fatir:* 1).

Allah concludes the verse with a statement that explains what has been said before. He says: ‘... surely Allah has power over all things’ (*Fatir:* 1). Do not be too surprised, therefore, for the Power of Allah is limitless. It encompasses all things, from the atom to the galaxy. He is the One Who says to a thing ‘Be!’ and it is. Only a word from Him brings a thing from nothingness to existence.

Some have interpreted the Arabic structure of the verse quite differently. The Arabic for ‘creation’ is *khalq* which in another recitation is pronounced as *halq* which literally means ‘throat’. Those who hold this view have interpreted ‘… He increases in *halq* what He wills…’ as a reference to beauty and sweetness of the voice (1), for the voice is the means of transferring the thoughts of the speaker to the listener. A fine voice is also a gift from Allah that He bestows to whomever He wills.

So long as we are talking about gifts and talents, let me tell you one of the strangest stories the history of Arabs(2) has ever recorded. It is about Nazar ibn Maʿad ibn ʻAdnan. He had four sons: Mudar, from whose line Prophet Muhammad descended, Rabi'a, 'Iyad, and Anmar. When Nazar felt that his time was coming, he gathered his four sons and said to them: ‘I want to tell you what I am bequeathing to you before I die: the red dome is for Mudar. The black horse and the black tent are for Rabi'a, the grey-haired woman is for 'Iyad and the people’s council are for Anmar. If you fail to interpret my will, seek out Al-Af'a Al-Jurhami in Najran and he will explain to you what I am saying.'

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(1) *Az-Zuhri and Ibn Jarih said, ‘It is the beauty of the voice.’ Qatada said, ‘This refers to elegance in the eyes, beauty in the nose and sweetness in the mouth.’ [Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (8/5591)]. Ibn Abbas also said this in what has been narrated from him by Ibn Mundhir. [Ad-Durr Al-Manthur Li-As-Suyuti (7/4)] The most sound view is that He increases in the creation of the angels what He wills, respecting the wings and other aspects.*

(2) *Imam ibn Al-Jawzi has mentioned this story in full in his book Al-Adhkiya` [p.174] and Ibn Hujja Al-`Humawi in Thamarat Al-Awraq fi Al-Muhadarat [1/249].*

Failing indeed to understand the will of their late father, the four sons travelled to Al-Af’a Al-Jurhami. On their way to Najran, in old Yemen, Muaar saw a pasture where a camel were grazing, and on the other side there was a more beautiful pasture that had not been touched. He said, ‘Indeed the camel that has been grazing here must be one-eyed.’ Rabi'a said, ‘It must be also cripple.' Anmar said, ‘that camel's tail must have been cut off.' Iyad said: ‘It must be a muddled camel.’

While they were thus talking, they met a man who was looking for his lost camel. He said, ‘Have you seen a straying camel?’ Muadar said, ‘Is it one-eyed?’ He said, ‘Yes’. ‘And cripple?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Is its tail cut off?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Is it muddled?’ The man said, ‘Yes, and you must have stolen him!’ They sought Al-Af'a Al-Jurhami, for they were close to Najran, to resolve the case, and they denied having stolen the camel.

Al-Af'a said, ‘Then how did you describe it to its owner with such precision?’ Mudar said, ‘It had been grazing on one side of the pasture and leaving the other better side of it, so I knew it was one-eyed.’ Rabi'a said, ‘I noticed the prints of its right hoof were clear whereas those of the left hoof were unclear, so I knew it was crippling.’ Iyad said, ‘I saw its dung gathered in one spot, so I knew its tail was cut off. If it had had a tail, its dung would have been dispersed here and there.’ Anmar said, ‘I saw it had been eating from different places, so I knew it was muddled.' Al-Afʿa Al-Jarhami said, 'Let them go, for this sharpness is a gift Allah grants to whomever He wills.'

Al-Af'a then asked them, ‘Who are you?’ They said, ‘We are the sons of Nazar ibn Maʿd ibn ʿAdnan. Our late father advised us to seek judgement from you respecting the interpretation of His will.’ They related to him what their father had said. He said, ‘The red dome for Mudar means red dinars and red she-camels.’ For this reason, the tribe of Mudar was called Al-Hamraʾ (The Red [Tribe]).

He said, ‘The black horse and the black tent mean every property that is black. As for the grey-haired woman, this means the least precious of wealth and sheep. As for Anmar, he shall have the white silver and the council.'

Having thus explained to them the will of their father, Al-Af'a wanted to honour them as guests, so he ordered his servant to slaughter an animal and prepare a banquet for them. They sat at the dining table and began speaking, as he was reflecting on their minute observation. Rabi'a said, ‘I have not seen anything better than this meat, only if it had not been fed a bitch’s milk.’ Mudar said, ‘This is a good drink, except that its grape vine grew over a grave.’ Then Anmar said, ‘This man is a superior leader and a master, except that he is not his father’s son.’ 'Iyad said, ‘Indeed we have not seen any speech more beautiful than the speech we have among ourselves!'

Al-Afʿa Al-Jurhami summoned the shepherd that had slaughtered the sheep for them and asked him about it, so the shepherd said, ‘Its mother died after it was born, and we did not have any other sheep to feed it, so we resorted to the milk of a bitch to feed it.’ He then asked his servant about the drink and received this reply, ‘It is from the grapes that you planted on the grave of your father.’ There was nothing left for him to do but ask about his family lineage, so he went to his mother and asked her, ‘O my mother, tell me who I am and who my father is’; the mother suspected that he had heard the news, so she thought it useless to deny the truth. She said to him, ‘Your father was a king who possessed sovereignty and wealth, except that he did not sire a child. I feared that his dominion and wealth would go to someone else, so I had to do what I did!'

When he returned to his guests, he said to them: ‘You are not in need of me anymore, but indeed it is only that all people are becoming in need of you.’ If you were to ask now: ‘How did these people know all this?’ We say: ‘they knew it through deep insight and detailed observation that is referred to in the verse: ‘He adds to creation what He wills’ (*Fatir:* 1).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّا يَفْتَحِ ٱللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِن رَّحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا ۖ وَمَا يُمْسِكْ
فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهُۥ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ٢

**No one can withhold the blessing God opens up for people,
nor can anyone but Him release whatever He withholds: He
is the Almighty, the All-Wise [2] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 2)**

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator, then this necessitates that He provide for people all that they are in need of. First of all, people are in dire need that Allah provides for them that which helps them survive in this world, so Allah sends down rain through which the earth is revitalised with vegetation so that man can cultivate and eat and drink. This is the basic requirements of man's material life. Then Allah provides man with the requirements of his spiritual life; He reveals for him that which preserves his values and governs his good relationships with others. This is Allah's Grace about which He says: ‘Are they the ones who share out your Lord’s Grace?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32)

If Allah wants to be Merciful to any of His slaves, then ‘No one can withhold the blessing Allah opens up for people, nor can anyone but Him release whatever He withholds…’ (*Fatir:* 2).

When we reflect on the Quranic style in this verse, we find that Allah says, ‘...the blessing Allah opens up for people...’ The opposite of 'to open' is 'to close', but Allah *Glorified is He* does not say: ‘and whatever He closes’. Allah instead says: ‘... nor can anyone but Him release whatever He withholds...’ (*Fatir:* 2). Then why does Allah use ‘withhold’ instead of ‘close’? Scholars say that this is because something, which is closed, may be opened with a device or strength. On the contrary, no one is capable of obtaining anything that Allah has withheld.

The mercy that Allah opens to people includes the Message that Allah bestowed upon our Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is why the disbelievers said, as the Quran relates to us: ‘...Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

In another chapter, the Quran mentions that they also said: ‘What! Upon him alone from among all of us should a [divine] reminder have been bestowed from on high?' (*Sad:* 8) Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them: '... Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace? We are the ones who give them their share of livelihood in this world...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). This verse means that people should be well mannered when addressing Allah, for He *Glorified is He* is the One Who shares out all the affairs of this life among people. Should He leave it to you, according to your own whims, to assign who is worthy to receive the divine revelation?

Fath (opening) signifies the removal of a barrier between two things. It is of two categories: First, palpable such as opening a door or a suitcase, for example, Allah says: 'Thereupon, when they opened their packs, they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them...' (*Yusuf:* 65). Second, impalpable, the opening can also be something immaterial, such as an opening the doors to goodness or mercy such as the revelation that Allah sent down to Prophet Muhammad. An example of this is the reference to the revelation that exists in the Torah regarding the description of the Prophet as about which Allah says: '...Do you inform them of what Allah has disclosed to you...' (*al-Baqara:* 76) .

Fath may also signify settlement of disputes which may arise among people as Allah says: '... Our Lord, decide between us and our people in truth, and You are the best of those who give decision.' (*al-A'raf:* 89)

The rationale behind Allah's saying: 'No one can withhold the blessing Allah opens up for people...' (*Fatir:* 2) is that Allah is One and He has no partner. There is no other god besides Him. If there had been another god beside him, the other god would have had another opinion and, thus, there would have been disagreement. Yet, as Allah *Glorified is He* is the One and Only God, He disposes His dominion as He wills. Had there been another god beside Allah, how can He then ensure that He commands something to 'Be!' and it responds to His Command?

Allah *Glorified is He* issues commands and He is fully certain that all creatures shall obey, as there is no one other one who can orders them otherwise. For this reason, Allah is the first to testify to His Divinity and Sole Unity. He testifies to this Himself when He says: 'Allah testifies that there is no deity save Him...' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). This is testimony of the Only worthy God, Allah, for

Himself. Accordingly, when he orders anything to ‘Be’, there is no other alternative for it but to obey and fulfil the command.

In this regard, Allah says: 'When the sky is split asunder, obeying its Sustainer, as in truth it must' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2). The meaning here is that the sky heard the Command from Allah and obeyed it because there is not another god, beside Allah, which may oppose it when it obeys Allah's Command.

After Allah *Glorified is He* has testified to Himself that He is the Only God worthy to be worshipped, the angels also testified to this pure truth as they witnessed it themselves. Then those who have been given knowledge testified also to this fact as they proved it through their knowledge. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah testifies – and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18).

Then the verse under discussion concludes ‘...He is the Almighty, the All Wise.’ (*Fatir:* 2). Indeed, as long as He is the Only One God without any partner, He sends His mercy to whomever He wills and He withholds it from whomever He wills, then He is *the Almighty*. *The Almighty* is the One Who cannot be overwhelmed or resisted. However, this does not mean that He acquired such Might and Triumph through tyranny, oppression or coercion. Yet, Might only originate from His Wisdom as He is Wise in His giving as well as in his withholding. Wisdom, as we have said, is to put things in their proper place. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ ۚ هَلْ مِنْ خَٰلِقٍ غَيْرُ ٱللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُم
مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ فَأَنَّىٰ تُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٣﴾

People, remember God’s grace towards you. Is there any creator other than God to give you sustenance from the heavens and earth? There is no god but Him. How can you be so deluded? [3] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 3)

Allah *Glorified is He* bestows blessing upon His slaves and reminds them of His favours to them. He mentions the first of these favours; the favour of bringing the creation into existence from nothing. Allah wanted to present this fact to them in a way that let they themselves admit it. Therefore, He did not state it as an informative sentence such as: 'I created you.' Rather, it is stated in the form of a rhetorical question: '... Is there any creator other than Allah to give you sustenance from the heavens and earth?' (*Fatir:* 3) It is known that when you put information in the form of a declarative sentence, it can be denied, but when you state the same in the form of a rhetorical question, it cannot be denied. One will not make a rhetorical question unless one is confident that the answer will come in accordance with what you want. When someone, for example, disavows a favour you have done to him, then do not say to him: 'I did such and such for you.' because he may deny you. Rather, you should instead say: 'Did I not do such and such on such and such a day?' At that point, he has no choice but to admit your favour and answer your question in the affirmative.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* makes them acknowledge His favours so that their acknowledgement shall be a proof against them. Although He *Glorified is He* Knows everything very well, He asks them: '...Is there any creator other than Allah to give you sustenance from the heavens and earth?...' (*Fatir:* 3) As they had nothing to do but to remain silent as they had not dared to deny it, Allah Himself answered the question: '...There is no god but Him....' (*Fatir:* 3). It was logical for them to believe as He *Glorified is He* is the Sole Creator and the Provider. Yet, they did not. Allah *Glorified is He* stated this fact in the form of a third person: '...There is no god but Him...' (*Fatir:* 3) instead of saying, 'There is no god but Me'. It is as if He *Glorified is He* is bearing witness to a matter of the unseen.

His saying: 'How can you be so deluded?' means that after all this: how can you turn away from His Oneness and from believing in Him? The Arabic word *ifk* means to take something out of its place and put it where it does not belong. Of this word another word is derived which is *Al-Muʾtafika* (mentioned in *an-Najm:* 53) which refers to the villages that Allah destroyed by turning them upside down.

'Ifk means also to lie because the one who lies distorts the truth. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to them: 'How can you invert that which is true and how can you attribute the creation of Allah and the provision he bestows on all creatures to other than Him *Glorified is He*? Tell us the logic behind your argument, if there is any.

After Allah *Glorified is He* talks about His sole Unity and His Divinity; He wants to talk about the prophet whom the Only One God sent to the creation.

He *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَتْ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ ۚ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ ٱلْأُمُورُ ﴿٤﴾

If they call you a liar [Prophet], many messengers before you were also called liars: it is to God that all things will be returned [4] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 4)

This is a consolation for our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Such an address is repeated in other verses in the Quran such as Allah's saying: ‘ Say, “I am nothing new among Allah’s messengers”’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 9). Allah tells His Prophet Muhammad that he was not the first messenger to be denied by his people, as those who came before him were denied, too. This is something natural because Allah does not send a messenger except when corruption prevails and the people become corrupt without any deterrent that prevents them from evil, either at the individual or collective levels.

I have said before that indeed the Creator has placed in the human soul an inherent deterrent which holds one back when he deviates from the way of his Lord. This is the *An-Nafs Al-Lawama* (the reproachful soul). When one's soul becomes no longer reproachful and turns to be *nafs ammara bi-as-su’* (the soul that is a persistent enjoiner of evil), here comes the role of the society, i.e. people at large should enjoin good and forbid evil. However, if the society becomes corrupt, then a new messenger must come with a new miracle to renew for people what they had become heedless of from the religion of Allah.

As Allah destined that the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the last message and that no messenger shall come after him, then this is a testimony to the followers of Prophet Muhammad that there shall be always good people among them and that they shall preserve the religion of Allah.

His saying: ‘...it is to Allah that all things will be returned’ (*Fatir:* 4) means that all matters shall be settled in the Hereafter, so whoever has denied you from amongst your people Allah will either punish him in this worldly life as He *Glorified is He* punished those who denied from the previous nations, or He will postpone his punishment until the Hereafter.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* talks about the third element of legislation. After talking about His Divinity and His Sole Unity and the Messenger Muhammad, He talks about the third element about which disbelievers differed with Prophet Muhammad that is the resurrection, the gathering and the reckoning.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقّٞۖ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنۡيَاۖ وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِٱللَّهِ ٱلۡغَرُورُ ﴿٥﴾

People! God's promise is true, so do not let the present life deceive you. Do not let the Deceiver deceive you about Allah [5] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 5)

This verse asserts to people that Allah's Promise that they shall return to Allah in the Hereafter and He will take them to account and reward you; those who do good for their goodness and those who do evil for their evildoing. This is a well-established and applied principle in all societies, even the most primitive of them. Even atheists apply this principle; the diligent are rewarded and the neglectful are punished. Indeed, some people put in place criminal laws that are harsher and more severe than the punishments set by Allah, such as the laws of capital punishment, hanging, the confiscation of wealth, etc.

Society cannot function properly without the sound application of this principle. If it is violated, corruption prevails in society, individuals become frustrated, and chaos becomes widespread. This is a natural conclusion in this case as those who do goodness are not rewarded for their goodness and criminals are not punished for their crimes. Therefore, we must instil in people a desire for goodness and a fear of evil, so those who do goodness can increase their goodness and those who do evil may be deterred from doing evil.

How is it that this principle is not accepted in a world full of injustices, transgressions, oppression, and tyranny? In addition, how is it disbelieved that a time shall come where everyone is given what they deserve?

For that reason, I always mention a conversation I had with some communists, who reject resurrection and reckoning. I was saying to them: 'You have taken your enemies and killed them, confiscated their wealth and did other horrible things to them because -according to your view- they had changed the scales of giving. Then, what about those who committed such acts of oppression and transgression and, yet, got away from you and you could not punish them?! Further, what about the oppressors who had gone before you and those who will come after you? Is it not more correct to say that there shall come a time where all these people shall be gathered all together for reckoning, when every one of them will be given their reward? Will this reward not please you and gladden your hearts when you see the oppressor being punished for his oppression? Therefore, you must believe in this Day. You must not reject it and disbelieve in it, and it is based on the same principle to which you call.

We thus notice that the call here is directed to all of mankind: ‘O People! Allah’s promise is true...’ (*Fatir:* 5). Here, Allah tells all people that He promises that there shall be a day for judgment, resurrection and reckoning. The promise of Allah is true because the veracity of a promise is based on who makes it and his power to fulfil it. Is there anyone more powerful than Allah? We therefore should believe in the fulfilment of any promise if it comes from Allah *Glorified is He* exactly as we disbelieve in any promise made by someone who does not have inherent power to fulfil it.

I have clarified before that when one makes a promise, he has the intention, at the time of making the promise, to fulfil it. However, one may not be able to fulfil it due to an extraordinary. For that reason our Lord teaches us to have high etiquette in this regard in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: ‘And never say about anything, “Behold, I shall do this tomorrow” without [adding], “if Allah so wills”’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24). Connecting your action to the Will of Allah protects you from being accusing lying in case you are incapable of fulfilling the promise. You can then say: ‘I intended to fulfil it, but Allah did not will it.’ Therefore the true promise is only Allah’s promise because He *Glorified is He* alone possesses all the means for fulfilling His promise and nothing can hinder Him from fulfilling the promise, neither does anyone can resist him.

As long as the promise of Allah is true, then ‘... so do not let the present life deceive you....’ (*Fatir:* 5). Therefore, do not let life deceive you because people are of different dispositions; some people become deluded when others praise them and some other people become deluded because of their own whims and desires, and a third group of people may be deceived by the temptations of the life of this world as this enable them to live without obligations and duties exactly as what the disbelievers did when they worshipped stones because they were gods without any commandments.

This is why our Lord warns us not to be deceived by the life of this world to ignore what is very much better than it, the Hereafter. It suffices as a disparagement for this worldly life that Allah has called it *Ad-dunya* **(**the lowest**)** whose opposite is a higher life which is the Hereafter. The meaning here is thus that you, people, do not let the life of this world distract you from fulfilling the obligations Allah demands from you, which –if you preserve them, will qualify you to enjoy a higher life.

I have already clarified that the life of this world, in relation to man, is the period of his remaining in it, not the entire duration of the life of this world from the beginning of creation to its end. Your life span in the life of this world, despite how short it is, is a presumed life span. Your blessings in it are according to your activity in it. As for your life span in the Hereafter, it is certain and your blessings in it are according to the Power of Allah. You, whenever you achieve a blessing of the life of this world you feel annoyed that you shall surely leave it; either you will leave it when you die or you will always fear worried of losing it and hence you continue your life sleepless, preoccupied and scared of losing your blessing. As for the Hereafter, the blessings remain forever; they are not cut off or withheld. So, if you are deluded by the life of this world, then consider this comparison.

Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* talks about this life, he describes it as *dunya* (the lower), and when He talks about the Hereafter He says: '...the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life: if they but knew this!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) *Al-hayawan* (true life) signifies the true everlasting life that is not limited by death or destruction. You must therefore be vigilante and choose the option that is superior and more beneficial for you. For this reason we say to those who depend on Allah and live under His protection and according to His guidance that they know how to make use of their lives; they follow the shortest path, i.e. the path of Allah. Those people are good planners.

In another verse of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us the snares and temptations of this worldly life as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Alluring to man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, and horses of high mark, and cattle, and lands. All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world – but the most beauteous of all goals is with Allah.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 14)

Allah's saying: ‘Do not let the Deceiver deceive you about Allah’ (*Fatir:* 5) refers to the Satan. The act of deceiving and delusion can be from one's own soul, without any external influence, or it could be promoted by the Satan who deceives and tempts people. Therefore, you face two enemies: the life of this world and its enjoyments and the Satan and his prodding and insinuations. Our Lord *Glorified is He* already warned us about the Satan as He said: ‘And if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs you up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah: behold, He is all-hearing, all knowing.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 200) The Meaning here is that man shall be aware of this enemy and be on his guard with him. Satan's animosity towards you is deep-rooted since the time of our father 'Adam and his hatred towards us is crystal clear. You should therefore take up a position against him, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

إِنَّ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَٱتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا ۚ إِنَّمَا يَدْعُوا۟ حِزْبَهُۥ لِيَكُونُوا۟ مِنْ أَصْحَٰبِ ٱلسَّعِيرِ ٦

Satan is your enemy – so treat him as an enemy – and
invites his followers only to enter the blazing fire [6]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 6)

As long as he is an open enemy to you, then it is not permissible for you to make a truce with him, have peace with him, or obey him because when you obey him, he enjoys his enmity towards you. Therefore, you must take him as an enemy and duly resist him. The weakest of faith is that you do not obey him. If you want to be stronger than Satan is, then seek revenge from him and infuriate him by doing the opposite of what he asks you to do. As he enjoins evil, then you should do that which is good and as he commands you to do that which is bad, be diligent in doing good as if you are mocking at him and teaching him a lesson after which he has nothing to do but to get away from you. This is because, as such, you make use of his enmity to your advantage and benefit from it. This is what infuriates him.

You can use the same principle with any other enemy, whether it is a devil from among humankind or jinn. You are able to make, out of his enmity towards you, something that will spur you for goodness and to love everything that is beautiful. The intelligent person is the one who benefits more from his enemy than from his friend.

How truthful is the description of a poet(1) who once said:

My enemies always do me favours and graces
May the Most Merciful not prevent me from all adversaries?
They look for my mistake and therefore I avoid it
And they compete with me and, as a result, I attain nobility

The true believer is able to benefit from the enmity of his enemy in many ways. He may, for example, work and strive to overcome his enemy instead of being lazy until his enemy attains a superior position or rank. In addition, He avoids vices and evil actions so that he does not give his enemy any opportunity to rejoice at his misfortune etc.

Furthermore, I see that indeed some of the blameworthy qualities of people have aspects of goodness, if only we reflected on them. The miser, for example, is despised by all people, but when you consider this situation from another angle, you find that he is the one who helps the generous man to continue in his generosity. We may see the following example happen in many places: a generous man whose income does not help him to fulfil the requirements of this generosity and its responsibilities, such as magnanimity, spending, giving, and courtesy etc. Every now and then, he becomes forced to sell a piece of his land to spend out from it. Now consider that such a stingy miser is not available to buy the land, and then to whom can the generous man sell his land? It is as if the miser is helping the generous man to continue in his generosity.

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(1) These verses of poetry are attributed to Abu Hayyan Al-Andalusi. His full name is Muhammad ibn Yusuf ibn ʿAli. He was born in 654 AH. He heard Hadith in Andalusia, Africa, Alexandria, Cairo, and the Hijaz from about 450 scholars. He was strictly truthful, well-established scholar and of pure faith, free from innovation. He died in Cairo in 745 AH at the age of 90. These two verses of poetry are from a poem which is included in his *Diwan* (collection of poetry). He lived during the Mamluki era.

If the generous man captivates you with his generosity and you become indebted to him for his favour, then the miser has no favour over you and you are not indebted to him in any way. This is why a poet expressed this meaning saying:

May a miser is rewarded on my behalf a good action
As he did not overburden me

It means that he does not have a favour over me that would make me a slave to his beneficence.

The meaning of '...so treat him as an enemy...' (*Fatir:* 6) is that you employ all your abilities and talents to instil in yourself the necessary immunity against his evil temptations and whisperings. If you want to increase your power to resist him, then do more good actions that he hates. If he comes to you during the prayer in order to spoil it, then infuriate him by having devotion and humility therein and work on improving it.

Then the verse concludes: '...and invites his followers only to enter the blazing fire.' (*Fatir:* 6) This verse signifies that the Satan has a group which he is trying to expand and make bigger. This is why Allah says in another Quranic verse: 'Satan (Iblis) has gained mastery over them, and has caused them to remain oblivious of the remembrance of Allah. Such as these are *hizb* (partisans) of Satan: oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Satan, who will truly be the losers!' (*al-Mujadala:* 19) The meaning of *hizb* is a group that fanatically support an idea and work hard for its realization, in opposition to another group that counter them and strive for the realization of another idea which serves its interests.

The reason why he invites people to his deviant path is to make a large group and, thus, those who go astray from the way of Allah become much more than those who believe in and obey Allah.

As for His saying: '... only to enter the blazing fire' (*Fatir:* 6), the letter *lam* stated in the Arabic text is called *lam Al-'Aqibah* (it is used for showing the consequence). Accordingly, the meaning is that one wants something for a certain reason, but he ends up at a conclusion other than that for which he aspired.

The Arabic word *ashab* (owners or companions) mentioned in this verse signifies that there is an intimacy between them and the fire; it urgently waits for them exactly as friends are very attached to one another.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ ۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟
ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧﴾

Those who disbelieve will be punished severely; those who believe and do good deeds will be forgiven, and richly rewarded [7] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 7)

After Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the party of Satan, he mentions the judgement against him. He decrees that those who disbelieve will be punished severely, and on the contrary, those who believe and do good deeds will be forgiven, and richly rewarded.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَمَن زُيِّنَ لَهُۥ سُوٓءُ عَمَلِهِۦ فَرَءَاهُ حَسَنًا ۖ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَن يَشَآءُ وَيَهْدِى
مَن يَشَآءُ ۖ فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسَرَٰتٍ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٨﴾

What about those whose evil deeds are made alluring to them so that they think they are good? Allah leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will. [Prophet], do not waste your soul away with regret for them: Allah knows exactly what they do [8] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 8)

This verse begins with an interrogative style ‘What about those whose evil deeds are made alluring to them so that they think they are good?’ However, the opposite is not mentioned here and the implied meaning is: is this person equal to the person whose evil deeds are not alluring to him? Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention the answer because it is obvious and well known. The only thing anyone can say is that they are not equal. Amongst people are those who do evil and admit that it is an act of evildoing. On the other hand, there is another category of people who do evil deeds and claim that they are good. This is much greater sin because they commit a crime when they do an evil deed and they commit another crime when they claim that it is good. This is the meaning of: '... are made alluring to them …' (*Fatir:* 8). This is a distorted way of seeing things and deviation from truth. This is why He *Glorified is He* says after that: '... Allah leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will....' (*Fatir:* 8) Concerning this verse, many people argue: 'If Allah is the One Who guides or misguides people, then why is man taken to account?' If we are to clarify this issue, then we must explain the meaning of 'He guides' and 'He misguides'. The meaning of 'He guides' is: He indicates to someone the path of goodness and guides him to it. The guidance is from Allah to all of mankind. Whoever seeks and follows this guidance arrives at the path of goodness and, hence, Allah aides him and increases him in guidance, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in Allah-consciousness.' (*Muhammad:* 17)

As for the one who closes his ears, then he does not hear and he is not guided and thus strays from the straight path. Allah helps him as well to achieve his goal and increases him in misguidance. He seals his heart so that it can be for what he wants; faith does not enter his heart and disbelief does not exit from it. These are the people about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'In their hearts is disease and so Allah lets their disease increase; and grievous suffering awaits them because of their persistent lying.' (*al-Baqara:* 10) This is why He *Glorified is He* says also about the people of Thamud: 'And as for [the tribe of] Thamud, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance...' (*Fussilat:* 17). The meaning of '...offered them guidance...' here is that we showed them and guided them to the path of goodness, but they rejected this guidance, opposed Allah, and therefore became misguided. Further, He *Glorified is He* let them increase in misguidance.

To elucidate this issue, I said before: Imagine that you want to go to some place and you arrive at a fork in the road, but you do not know which way will lead you to your destination. You go to the traffic conductor, ask him which way you should follow, he shows you and therefore you thank him and gratefully acknowledge his favour. When He sees you obeying Him and thanking Him for his favour, he says to you, ‘But in front of you on this path is an obstacle and I will accompany you until you pass it.' This is how Allah *Glorified is He* treats those who are willing to be guided: ‘just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in Allah-consciousness.’ (*Muhammad:* 17)

Allah *Glorified is He* addressed His Prophet Muhammad saying: ‘Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like’ (*al-Qasas:* 56) and: ‘And indeed, [O Muhammad], you guide to a straight path’ (*ash-Shura:* 52). In these two verses, Allah affirms that Prophet Muhammad indicates and shows people the way to guidance, but he negated for him the ability to force people to become guided, for the one who really guides is Allah.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* does not leave the matter there, but goes on to explain who is guided and who is misguided as He says: ‘Indeed, Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 67) and He says: ‘... And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people.’ (*as-Saff:* 5) Does the one who disbelieves in Allah, deviates from His way, spreads corruption in the land and oppresses people, deserve to be guided? In His saying: ‘So do not let yourself perish over them in regret’ (*Fatir:* 8), Allah tells His Prophet Muhammad, ‘Do not destroy yourself with sorrow because of their lack of faith.’ This meaning is elucidated by Allah *Glorified is He* saying: ‘Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.’ (*al-Kahf:* 6)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was keen for his people to be guided and he felt immense pain when one of them turned away from the path of faith. This is why He *Glorified is He* said about His prophet Muhammad: ‘Indeed, there has come to you [O mankind] a messenger from among yourselves: heavily weighs upon him [the thought] that you might suffer [in the life to come]; full of concern for you [is he, and] full of compassion and mercy towards the believers’ (*at-Tawba:* 128).

Then He *Glorified is He* says, to console His Messenger Muhammad: ‘...Allah knows exactly what they do.’ (*Fatir:* 8) This means that no secret action of theirs is hidden from Him and He will inflict on them the punishment they deserve according to the disdain and disbelief that they showed.

After that Allah *Glorified is He* directs our attention to some of the universal signs that refer to His blessing towards the creation, He says:

وَٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ ٱلرِّيَٰحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَسُقْنَٰهُ إِلَىٰ بَلَدٍ
مَّيِّتٍ فَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ ٱلنُّشُورُ ٩

It is Allah who sends forth the winds; they raise up the clouds; We drive them to a dead land and with them revive the earth after its death: such will be the Resurrection [9]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 9)

The meaning of ‘sent forth the winds’ is that He moves them and all goodness in creation is due to the movement of the winds. Have you not seen that when the air is still, man becomes frustrated and his respiration becomes slow? Therefore, one tries to move air around oneself, either by his hand or using a fan. This is because one's respiration is not possible without the moving of air; carbon dioxide being replaced by oxygen. That is why it is said: ‘If air does not pass over you then you pass over it’, i.e. you move it.

A result of the moving of the winds is the raising up of the clouds: ‘...they raise up the clouds...’ (*Fatir:* 9). The meaning of rising up the clouds is to propel them from their places until they gather together and fall down in the places where Allah destined them to fall down. Accordingly, we know that the movement of the clouds is not automatic, but rather, they follow the movement of the wind. This matter helps us understand Allah's saying: ‘And you see the mountains, thinking them rigid, while they will pass as the passing of clouds’ (*an-Naml:* 88).

Although we think that they are solid and rigid, the mountains are in reality passing away and moving exactly like the clouds. As the clouds do not pass away by themselves, but rather by the movement of the wind, the mountains too do not pass away by themselves but rather as a result of the movement of the earth; the mountains are fixed upon the earth like pegs and so they move with its movement. This is the ‘... work of Allah, who has ordered all things to perfection...’ (*an-Naml:* 88)!

Some people mistakenly understand the movement of the earth that is followed by the movement of the mountains, referred to in Allah's saying: ‘...[and they] pass away as clouds pass away...’ (*an-Naml:* 88) that this will take place in the Hereafter. However, will there be mountains in the Hereafter?! Allah *Glorified is He* says about them: ‘and the mountains will be like tufts of wool’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 9). Moreover, how does Allah show us his blessings upon us and His favour towards us with His perfect creation of the movement of the mountains in the Hereafter, where there is no obligation or a room for attracting people's hearts to believe in Allah?!

This all has to do with the movement of the wind. As for its stillness, Allah says: ‘if He so wills, He stills the wind, and then they lie motionless on the sea’s surface...’ (*ash-Shura:* 33). The word 'they' in this verse refers to the ships that are propelled by the wind. However, one may say: ‘Is there any significance of this verse after the developments that have occurred with regards to ships, as sails have been done away with and replaced by engines that propel the ships without any need for the movement of the air?!’ In response to this we say: ‘Yes indeed, this verse shall have significance till the end of time because modern inventions do not come as a surprise to their Creator. Moreover, who argues that the word *Ar-Rih*, mentioned in the verse, refers only to air? Rather, it signifies power, regardless of its form. This meaning is referred to in Allah's saying: ‘...and do not [allow yourselves to] be at variance with one another, lest you lose heart and your strength desert you...’ (*al-Anfal:* 46). The word 'your strength' here signifies all forms of power; power of air, electric power, steam power, or engines, etc.

In this verse, we notice that the verb ‘...He sent...' (*Fatir:* 9) is in the past tense, but ‘they raise’ is in the present tense. This signifies that the command to the winds is already settled, whereas the propulsion and movement of clouds is being renewed and continued at every moment, and therefore, it is stated in the present form which refers to both the present and the future times.

Stating the verb in the past form may also be because the discourse here is about a matter of the unseen as the speech is in the third person. The discourse then moves from the third person in ‘...sent the wind...’ (*Fatir:* 9) to the position of first person and says ‘...We drive it...’ (*Fatir:* 9). It is as if Allah is turning our attention from the reference to the third person, Allah, to His Presence. When you realise that it is Allah doing all this, you become worthy of Allah speaking to you. Another example of turning from third person to first person style is the chapter of *al-Fatiha:* 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Mercy-Giving [1] All praise is due to Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds, [2] The Most Merciful, the Mercy-Giving, [3] Lord of the Day of Judgment [4]' (*al-Fatiha:* 1-4). All of this is in the third person until the speech turns to the second person: 'You alone do we worship; and to You alone do we turn for aid.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5)

He did not say: 'He alone we worship' so that He could turn you from the third person to the second person; to directly address Your Lord because you have become worthy of addressing Him and of Him addressing you after you have believed in Him as 'the Lord of all the worlds, [2] The Most Merciful, the Mercy-Giving, [3] Lord of the Day of Judgment! [4]' (*al-Fatiha:* 1-4)

The meaning of '...We drive them to a dead land...' (*Fatir:* 9) is that Allah drove the cloud or the water, after it descended into the streams and rivers, towards the land that had no vegetation on it and from which could be benefitted. This indicates the power of Allah. Consider, for example, the water of the Nile that irrigates the Sudan and Egypt. From where does it originate? This is evidence that your sustenance comes to you regardless of how far you are from its source.

Allah states that when water does fall down to the earth, the result is that: '… [We, Allah] thereby give life to the earth after it had been lifeless...' (*Fatir:* 9). This means that He revives it with vegetation. Allah *Glorified is He* makes the blessings of reviving the dead earth an evidence for another blessing that is relevant to the Hereafter. Allah says: '...even thus shall resurrection be!' (*Fatir:* 9) This refers to the resurrection in the Day of Judgement and the bringing of the dead back to life from their graves.

So, you, human being, shall take the revival of the dead land, which is something you clearly see with your own eyes, as evidence on the veracity of what is hidden from you, for as water descends upon the dead earth and it comes to life, this is how it will be when the spirit descends upon the human matter buried in the earth to bring it back to life, resurrect it and seep life into it.

I have said previously that when scientists analysed the human body, they found that it is comprised of sixteen elements. The first of these is oxygen and the last is manganese. These themselves are the same elements constituting dust, which is the environment of vegetation.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ ٱلۡعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ ٱلۡعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًاۚ إِلَيۡهِ يَصۡعَدُ ٱلۡكَلِمُ ٱلطَّيِّبُ وَٱلۡعَمَلُ ٱلصَّٰلِحُ
يَرۡفَعُهُۥۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ يَمۡكُرُونَ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٞ شَدِيدٞۖ وَمَكۡرُ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُوَ يَبُورُ ١٠

If anyone desires power, all power belongs to Allah; good words rise up to Him and He lifts up the righteous deed, but a severe torment awaits those who plot evil and their plotting will come to nothing [10] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 10)

The one who rejects the divine messages is rejecting the idea that a believer should be bound to follow and submit to the commands and injunctions given by another. Although the Messenger sent by Allah did only come to say to us: ‘Do this!’ and ‘Do not do that!’ some people consider their obedience to such commands a threat to their honour and dignity. Such people want to be the highest person who is not commanded or forbidden to do anything by anyone. These are the people about which this verse is talking. They want might and glory for themselves.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* presents to those people the correct meaning of might and glory and shows them how foolish are they. He says: ‘If anyone desires might and glory, all Might and Glory belongs to Allah…’ (*Fatir:* 10). True might and glory means that you should not be overcome or defeated by anyone. This does not exist except when one returns to Allah, for whatever power and might one may acquire in this life, one, by necessity, shall be defeated, and overcome by death. Therefore, if you really desire might and glory that does not cease, then you will find it only with Allah. For this reason, Allah teaches us to be wise, as He says: ‘And rely upon the Ever-Living who does not die…’ (*al-Furqan:* 58). Allah addresses us in this verse saying: ‘I know you, I know your weakness and I know that you are in need of someone to rely on with regard to matters that are beyond your capacity, so beware of taking refuge in other than Me, for I am the Ever-Lasting One Who does not die. When you rely on a weak person like yourself, perhaps he may die before he fulfils your need. Therefore, whoever wants might and glory then let him turns to Allah; to rely on His Power and Glory. Whoever relies on Allah, He bestows upon him his grandeur and showers him with blessings.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be on him* gave us this lesson when he, along with Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, were in the cave. As-Siddiq said: ‘O Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be on him*! If one of them looks under his feet, he will see us. Relying on Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be on him* replied: ‘O Abu Bakr, what do you think about two people and Allah is the third of them?’(1) The Quran relates what he said: ‘...“do not grieve; verily, Allah is with us.’ (*at-Tawba:* 40)

The tranquillity that filled the heart of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be on him* was the result of Allah accompanying him and his companion, and this company means that Allah grants them assurance. As Allah *Glorified is He* is not seen, then whoever is in His Company will also not be seen.

The words *izzah* (Might and Glory) mentioned in Allah's saying: ‘…all Might and Glory belongs to Allah [alone]...’ (*Fatir:* 10) includes all kinds of might and glory. Some orientalists raise a misconception concerning this issue, arguing that there is a contradiction in the Quran as here Allah says: ‘…all Might and Glory belongs to Allah [alone]...’ (*Fatir:* 10) and in another verse, he says: ‘...However, all might and glory belongs to Allah, and [thus] to His Messenger and those who believe [in Allah]...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8).

The fact of the matter is that there is no contradiction between the two verses because all might and glory originally belong to Allah and the might and glory of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is from his attachment to the Almighty, and the might and glory of the believers is from their attachment to the beloved of the Almighty, i.e. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Accordingly, who is entitled to might and glory is the one who attaches himself to Allah and the first one who attached himself to Allah was His Messenger Muhammad and then those who believed in him.

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith which is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [4662] and Muslim in his Sahih [3381] on the authority of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, with another wording communicating the same meaning*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… Good words rise up to Him...' (*Fatir:* 10). When we refer to Allah, we always refer to the sky, although He *Glorified is He* is everywhere and he does not have a fixed place. This is why some people argue: 'If Allah does not have a fixed place, then why did Allah lift our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the seventh heaven, when He wanted to speak to Him?' We say that the ascension was to the place where the one who was going to see, i.e. Prophet Muhammad, can see, not the place of the one being seen. He, Prophet Muhammad, cannot see except from this place. For example, if we hear a noise right now coming from outside the mosque(1) and this window that looks down at the noise is high up, what will you do if you want to know what is going on outside? You will have no choice but to climb to that height to see what is happening. In this case, events are as they are, but the place from which one sees is different.

'…Good words…' (*Fatir:* 10) is a general description that encompasses all speech that guides people to the path of goodness. In another verse, the Quran gives us an example of 'good words'. Allah says: 'Have you not considered how Allah presents an example, [making] a good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed and its branches [high] in the sky? It produces its fruit all the time, by permission of its Lord.' (*Ibrahim:* 24-25)

Scholars have tried to define what is meant by this (good word). They said: 'The (good word) is 'there is no god but Allah, Glory be to Allah, All Praise is for Allah, and there is no strength except with Allah.' Nevertheless, restricting the meaning of the (good word) to signify these meanings, only narrows down the wide scope of the meaning intended by Allah *Glorified is He*. It is more correct for us to say that the good word is any speech that leads to goodness.

After Allah has talked about the ascension of good words to Him, he talks about raising good work up as Allah says: '…and He lifts up the righteous deed...' (*Fatir:* 10). This is because man may speak good words without performing that which they call for or without putting them into action. In the same vein, One may say it out of hypocrisy, like those who say 'there is no god but

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(1) This exegesis of the Quran was originally delivered orally in mosques.

Allah' out of hypocrisy and fear of being killed. Although it is said out of hypocrisy, it ascends to Allah and Allah says that he is to be protected by this pronunciation of this word in the life of this world. Nevertheless, one will not be rewarded for it in the Hereafter because one gets reward only when one acts in accordance with that of which he speaks. Then what is more important is to do righteousness, not only to speak well. It is the righteous work that which is raised up and which protects one in this life and the life to come.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the opposite: '…but a severe torment awaits those who plot evil and their plotting will come to nothing.' (*Fatir:* 10) The verb *makara* (to cunningly devise) is sometimes used as a transitive verb, but followed by a preposition. At some other times, it is used as a transitive verb without a preposition as Allah says: '...cunningly devise evil deeds...' (*Fatir:* 10). Its usage in this context is like of the usage of the verb *amilu* (do) in the following verse: 'yet those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds...' (*an-Nisa':* 122). Accordingly, the meaning of the verse under discussion is 'those who do evil deeds'.

Then, He *Glorified is He* explains the reward of evil scheming as He says: '... but a severe torment awaits those who plot evil...' (*Fatir:* 10). This is because when you cunningly devise, as if you want to steal something from Allah and you think that He does not know about you. You ignore that although you do your utmost to secretly devise something, He *Glorified is He* knows what you conceal. Moreover, when you cunningly devise or plot, you plot to the best of your ability, but your Lord, likewise, devises and plots according to His Ultimate Power and Strength as Allah says: '…thus have they [always] schemed: but Allah brought their scheming to nought – for Allah is above all schemers.' (*al-Anfal:* 30)

That is why such scheming fails and comes to nothing as He has said: '…and their plotting will come to nothing"' (*Fatir:* 10). It is an uncultivated plan, like wasteland that does not grow or produce anything. This applies to His saying: 'Have you not considered those who exchanged the favour of Allah for disbelief and settled their people [in] the home of ruin?' (*Ibrahim:* 28)

The scheming that one thinks that it can benefit him, give him a privilege over his enemy and give him a higher status over him, will come to nought. It will not come to any avail. Moreover, it will turn back on him and drag him to a severe punishment.

In '… but a severe torment awaits those who plot evil …' (*Fatir:* 10) the letter *lam* used in the Arabic statement here indicates possession. Accordingly, this means that they deserved punishment, i.e. they deserve it, and it is as if the punishment is covetous over them in the same way that man is covetous over that which he owns. It is a punishment that will stick to them and never be separated from them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱللَّهُ خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٖ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطۡفَةٖ ثُمَّ جَعَلَكُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗاۚ وَمَا تَحۡمِلُ مِنۡ أُنثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا
بِعِلۡمِهِۦۚ وَمَا يُعَمَّرُ مِن مُّعَمَّرٖ وَلَا يُنقَصُ مِنۡ عُمُرِهِۦٓ إِلَّا فِي كِتَٰبٍۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرٞ ﴿١١﴾

It is Allah who created you from dust and later from a drop
of fluid; then He made you into two sexes; no female
conceives or gives birth without His knowledge; no person
grows old or has his life cut short, except in accordance with
a Record: all this is easy for Allah [11] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 11)

This verse discusses the issue of the first creation of man, as vicegerent (*khalifah*). Creation had phases. The first man, Adam, was created at first from the earth; the dust that is mixed with water and thus it becomes clay. This clay went through numerous stages. If you leave clay until it decays and comes to have a smell, then this is stinking mud and if you leave it until and it becomes dry and sticks together then this is argillaceous earth. Therefore, these are the phases of one substance from which Allah fashioned Adam and then blew into him from His spirit. This is the first creation from which Allah created Eve and from both of them we have procreation and offspring.

In this Quranic chapter, before Allah *Glorified is He* talks about the creation of man, He has talked about what Allah created for people before they came into existence; He *Glorified is He* has talked about the creation of the heavens and the earth: 'Praise be to Allah, Creator of the heavens and earth' (*Fatir:* 1). He then has talked about the angels who descend with the revelation and deliver it to Allah's Messengers who are chosen from amongst human beings and about the water that falls from the sky and causes vegetation to grow.

These things are essentials for the life of man. Allah brought them into existence before he brought man into existence and guaranteed for him the essentials of his material, mental and spiritual life. The material needs include the nourishment of food, drink, and air. The spiritual need is the way of the Quran. Therefore He *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Most Gracious has imparted this Quran [to man]. He has created man’ (*ar-Rahman:* 1-3).

Man was created for a purpose, exactly in the same way a manufacturer defines the purpose of the thing he is going to manufacture. For example, the person who made the television or the refrigerator did not make it and then say: ‘Take these items and see how they should be used.’ Instead, they had already determined its purpose and defined its objective before making them. Likewise, before the creation of man, Allah *Glorified is He* defined the purpose of his creation and, therefore, He sets for him in the Quran the way he should follow. As such, the creation of man came after the development of the way he should follow for attaining happiness.

Speaking of the creation of man, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…It is Allah who created you from dust…’ (*Fatir:* 11). The speech here comes in the third person style as if He is talking about another one. Allah did not say ‘I created you from dust’. It is as if it is we who say: ‘Allah created man from dust.’ This is because speech comes in three styles: the first-person style ‘I’, the second person style ‘you’ and the third person style ‘he’.

When one talks in the first style and says: ‘I did such and such’, it is conceivable that he could be lying. If he it is stated in the second style, second person, such as: ‘You did this’, it may be said out of hypocrisy towards the one addressed. But when speech comes in the third person style such as: ‘He did such and such', then we cannot be accused of lying as is the first case, nor can we be accused of hypocrisy as in the second case.

When we say: ‘He created such and such’, it means that none other than Him created. As I have said previously that the pronoun of the third person ‘he’ does not apply to other than Allah *Glorified is He* in this context.

If you review all the verses that discuss the creation in the Glorious Quran, you find that they are stated in the third person style. These verses which discuss this issue are one hundred and seven verses, starting with Allah saying in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘He it is who has created for you all that is on earth...’ (*al-Baqara:* 29) and ending with His saying: ‘Say: I seek refuge with the Sustainer of the rising dawn, from the evil of aught that He has created’ (*al-Falaq:* 1-2).

The issue of creation is stated in the first-person style in seventy-six verses, such as: ‘...We [Allah] have created you all out of a male and a female...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 13). The same issue is stated in the second person style in four occurrences. They are: ‘... Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 191); His saying: ‘...“you created me from fire and created him from clay”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 12) and His saying: ‘...“Shall I prostrate myself before one whom You have created out of clay?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 61)

Upon investigation, we find that the third person style is the most predominant of these the three styles because speech stated in this style is free of claims, free of showing any hypocrisy towards the one addressed, or any fabrication of the part of the speaker himself.

Yet, what is the meaning of creation? Scholars say that creation is the bringing of something into existence from nothing for an underlying reason or for a prior objective, not just bringing something into existence without any purpose. This may be illustrated as follows: if you take a large piece of dry clay and throw it on the ground, it will break up into various pieces of different shapes; a crescent, a star, a human or animal face, etc.

In this case, this is considered bringing something into existence, but it is not considered creation because creation is an intentional process of bringing something into existence for an intended purpose and for certain wisdom. This process is done by the Creator *Glorified is He* alone.

One may argue: ‘how do you claim this, although Allah Himself affirms that we may create as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 14)? In reply, I say: ‘Indeed the Creator acknowledges the efforts of human beings and He does not deprive them of their rights.

Therefore, Allah affirms that they may also create things, although there is a clear and big difference between the creation of Allah and the creation of others. When man is described as being a creator, then Allah is the best of creators because He *Glorified is He* creates out of nothing and man creates using materials which already exist. Your creation, human beings, takes one shape and fixed state. As for the creation of Allah, it develops, and life comes into it, i.e. it eats, grows, and reproduces and so forth.

I have told you previously an example of this. When one wants to manufacture glass, one takes the sand that Allah has created and then he processes it in a specific way in order to transform it into glass. This process is in fact a creation as this drinking glass did not exist before and he brought it into existence. However, you have manufactured using materials, the intellect and fire, which all are created by Allah.

Moreover, you are not able to grant this drinking glass the attribute of life so that it can grow up or reproduce, for example. Therefore, although Allah affirms that man may create thing, He *Glorified is He* is the best of all creators.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says to us: '… It is Allah who created you from dust [*turab*]...' (*Fatir:* 11); in another occurrence in the Quran, He says: '...from clay [*tin*]...' (*al-An'am:* 2); in a third occurrence, He says: '...of black mud altered [*hama' masnun*]' (*al-Hijr:* 26) and, in another occurrence, He says: '...of clay like the potter's [*salsal*].' (*ar-Rahman:* 14) Although all these variations, there is no contradiction between these statements because they describe different phases of the same substance, exactly as the example I have given before about the clothes we wear. One may say, 'This garment is made of cotton, from spinning thread or from knitting' as these all are phases that one material goes through until it becomes a piece of cloth.

There is no inconsistency in these phases. The inconsistency can only be if something has one process, and then you make it several processes. This issue is only the phases of one process, like a baby becoming a boy, then a youth, then a man, then an old man and so forth. These are all stages of one man.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has decreed in His universe certain things, and He has forbidden the intellect from venturing to think about them. He says: 'I created for you the universe and I have secured for you the essentials of your life. Therefore, if you wish to elevate yourself, then engage your intellect in the matter that Allah has created, and derive what you can from it to the best of your ability. But do not concern yourself with two matters, as there is no benefit in thinking about them; these two matters are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of mankind. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken those who misguide as assistants.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

The creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of man are a matter that not a single one of you witnessed, and there was no assistant with Allah *Glorified is He* who can inform you as to what happened. But be warned that in the future there will be misguiders who will mislead you regarding this matter, and they will say to you – as the misguiders are saying now – that the heavens and the earth were one burning piece, and then such and such happened to it, or that the origin of man is a monkey that developed into a man. Be wary of these people, and don not take your information except from the one who witnessed it and the one who knows it, and He is the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

But the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the intellect as an instrument for thinking, and He made outlets for it through which the truth can be arrived at, and conclusions can be made from what it sees regarding things that it does not see, and it is upon the intellect to reflect on what it sees and use it to judge regarding what it does not see.

We did not witness the process of creation, but we have witnessed the process of death and death is the reverse of creation, in the same way that demolition is the reverse of building. This is a philosophical issue for the intellect and it contains phases. When you want to build a tower, for example, and it consists of ten floors, you begin with the first floor. But if you want to demolish it you begin with the tenth floor. Demolition is the opposite of building, as death is the opposite of life.

Allah has informed us that which we have not witnessed from the process of creation in His Book, and He said: 'I created you from dust that became clay, and then the clay became stinking mud, and then the stinking mud became dry potter's clay that was shaped in the form of a man. Then Allah breathed into it from His spirit and life entered into it.

We have witnessed death and we have seen that its process is the opposite of creation. The first part of death is the spirit leaving from the body. Then the body stiffens until it becomes like dry potter's clay. Then it decays, and its smell changes as if it is stinking mud and then the earth soaks up whatever sap is left so that it can return to dust and morsels that are mixed in with the dust of the earth, and it returns to its mother from which it originally came.

Therefore, take what you have witnessed as an evidence of the veracity of what Allah has told you regarding what you have not witnessed.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about two phases when He talks about creation. The first is the creation of the first man, Adam *peace be upon him* from clay, and in order for the multiplying and populating of the earth to take place there is the second phase, in which his spouse was created for him. He said: 'Who did create you from a single soul, and therefrom did make his mate' (*al-A'raf:* 189).

There is a lot of conjecture regarding this issue, but it is true that He *Glorified is He* took a piece from Adam *peace be upon him* and made Eve from it, so it is true that this piece was also made of clay. And from Adam and Eve the descendants were brought forth, and vicegerents were appointed to be on earth.

In order to avoid getting lost in the issue we say, His saying: 'and out of it created its mate,' (*an-Nisa':* 1) meaning from the same species, the species that He created; as He *Glorified is He* said: 'Indeed, there has come unto you [O mankind] a messenger from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128) meaning: from your species.

But did Allah *Glorified is He* create this creation, and appoint His vicegerent to be on Earth, but then leave him without providing him with a method by which he could judge the proceedings of his life? No. There has to be a method because the meaning of there being a vicegerent requires that there be a method.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* puts His vicegerent in possession of things that are of use to him, he may become deluded by this very possession, so He says to him: 'Remember that you are not the first. You are a vicegerent.' So whenever you bear in mind that you are a vicegerent, you will not transgress, and you are made to transgress if you think that you are the first in the universe. The first in the universe is the one who preserves what is in his possession. He is the one who does not become sick and does not die, and there is no one who is stronger than he is. Therefore, remember that you have been chosen to succeed, and as long as you are chosen to succeed then you must implement the commands of the one who has chosen you to succeed.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about the first of creation from dust, and the creation of his wife, he tells us about the general creation from which all human beings have come after Adam and Eve, and by marrying one another creation in completed by means of a drop of sperm. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘then from a sperm-drop; then He made you mates.’ (*Fatir:* 11) And in another place, He sets forth the phases of the drop of sperm, and He says: ‘O People, if you should be in doubt about the Resurrection, then [consider that] indeed, We created you from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clinging clot, and then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed.’ (*al-Hajj:* 5)

The first marriage was made between the children of Adam *peace be upon him* and then by inter-distance. The son of this womb marries his sister from another womb, and this is how the inter-distance was dependant on the progeny being increased as far as possible. This issue of inter-distance is what led to the first crime of murder amongst humanity, and it is the issue of Qabeel (Cain) and Habeel (Abel). When the life of this world was expanded and mankind multiplied, it became forbidden to marry one’s sister, or maternal or paternal aunt.

Modern science has affirmed the importance of inter-distance in marriage, and that marriage between close relatives produces children that are weaker than children from parents who are not closely related. This is even the case in agriculture, as they have affirmed that cultivating seeds that are extracted from the same land produces a smaller harvest, and that’ is why in agriculture they have resorted to the process of hybridization.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* encouraged this inter-distance, for he said: ‘Go further, and do not weaken.’(1) This means: Do not marry those who are closely related to you because relatives have the same characteristics in their make-up and they have the same blood. As for those who are not related, they have different characteristics and different blood, so the progeny is stronger. This is what an Arab poet understood of this matter when he said(1):

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(1) What is related in this regard is what has been mentioned by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in his *(Ihya’)* [2/41]: ‘Do not marry close relatives, for indeed the child is born scrawny.’ Al-Hafizh Al-‘Iraqi says in his extraction of the Hadiths in the *(Ihya’)*: ‘Ibn As-Salah says: ‘I did not find a reliable source for it.’ I said: ‘It is only known from a saying of=

Be wary of the one who has many worries
Sons marrying the daughters of the paternal uncle
There is no escape from weakness and illness
By the father, even if you feed it, it will not grow

They had indeed noticed the weakness of progeny in families that married their children to close relatives, and they commended inter-distance. The poet said:

A boy was not born of a close daughter of an uncle
So that he is scrawny and may make the descendants of the relatives scrawny(2)

The other distances himself from his uncle's daughter with regards to marriage, despite his love for her, and he says:

I have gone beyond the uncle's daughter although she is beloved
Fearing that because of me her descendants would be scrawny

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And no female conceives nor does she give birth except with His knowledge.' (*Fussilat:* 47) The process of the female becoming pregnant is done by means of the male and female coming together under the shade of the law and the way of Allah. The scholars have spoken at length on the issue of women being pregnant. Is it her responsibility or the man's? We have recently heard from studies that have taken place that the man is the one who is responsible for the male or female chromosome. As for the woman, she only carries the egg that will become either one or the other.

= ʿUmar *may Allah be pleased with him* that he said to the people of Saʾib: "You have weakened, so marry distinguished people.'' *Related by Ibrahim Al-Harbi in (Gharib Al-Hadith)*. Ash-Shawkani says in (*(Al-Fawaʾid Al-Majmuʿah)* p.131): 'It is not traceable in ascending order of narrators back to the Prophet [*(marfuʿ)*].

(1) These were mentioned by Abu Hayyan At-Tawhidi in his book *(Al-Imtaʿ Al-Muʿanisah)*, and he did not attribute them to anyone. Also see *(Muhadarat Al-Adbaʾi)*, by Ar-Raghib Al-Asfahani.

(2) This verse belongs to An-Nabigha Adh-Dhubyani.

It is amazing that ancient Arab women were aware of what modern science is discovering today, and that they had insight and understanding with regards to this issue. Husbands would get angry with Arab women that only gave birth to daughters, and they would leave and marry someone else so that she could produce a son. The first wife would be abandoned, and she would say the following lines of poetry (1):

Why does the father of Hamza not come to us
Angry because we only give birth to daughters
By Allah, this matter is not in our hands
We are like the earth for the one who plants the seeds
We give them the like of which we are given.

It is amazing that the Bedouins spoke about what modern science is arriving at in the twentieth century, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* desired to affirm for us a sound disposition that is far removed from passion and may therefore attain the realities of the universe. The correct opinion does not join together with the desire of the ego. This is why they say that the plague of opinion is desire. With regards to this, we have what has been narrated from 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* that the Quran would be revealed in accordance with his opinion, and that is only because of the soundness of his disposition.

Allah says a woman does not: 'give birth except with His knowledge.' (*Fussilat:* 47) These are the stages that the woman goes through. First of all, she gets married and becomes pregnant. Then she gives birth. These are all stages in a healthy woman. He *Glorified is He* did not mention what happens when something goes wrong during pregnancy. A mother may get pregnant but then have a miscarriage.

One of the miraculous things that accompanies the process of birth is that the blood that usually comes out during menstruation changes, when the woman becomes pregnant, to nourishment for the embryo, as if this blood is not from her provision but rather from the provision of her child if she is able to get pregnant. If she is not able to get pregnant, it continues to come out without anyone benefitting from it.

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(1) These verses are mentioned with a different wording by Ibn ʿAbd Rabihi Al-Andalusi in *(Al-ʿAqd Al-Farid)*, in the chapter on what they say regarding rarities and anecdotes:
Why does the father of Hamza not come to us
Under the shelter of the house in which he keeps us
He is angry that we only give birth to daughters
But we only take what we are given

It is amazing that this blood is sufficient for one embryo, and it is also sufficient for two or three, and even more. We just heard recently of a woman who gave birth to seven; despite that, she was in good health (i.e. her weight did not decrease at all). It is as if the Creator is reminding us not to worry about food and provisions. Look at what he did for you when you when you were in the wombs of your mothers. Each one of you had your provision. He did not overlook it and He did not make a mistake.

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he said: 'The food of one person is enough for two, and the food of two people is enough for three.'(1)

Despite the advancement of science, they are still not able to decisively determine the time of birth, and this exact moment is to remain in the knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He*. Why? Because we know the duration of the pregnancy, but we do not exactly know when the zygote clings on to the womb. This is why obstetricians always say that the birth will take place between these days and these days.

Therefore, the moment of birth resembles, in terms of its secrecy, the moment of death. No one but Allah knows it. The meaning of 'knows it' is that He knows all the events and phenomena that surround it.

After giving birth the woman becomes both a wet nurse and a dry nurse, and the Creator *Glorified is He* causes the sustenance of her child to flow from her without taking anything away from her sustenance because Allah continues to provide for her, and something is deficient if it is taken from without any maintenance.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'And no aged person is granted [additional] life nor is his life span lessened but that it is in a register.' (*Fatir:* 11)

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) (2/407) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra, and related by Muslim in his (Sahih) (2059) in the Book of Drinks, and Ibn Majah in his (Sunnan) (3254) from the Hadith of Jabir ibn ʿAbdullah*

This is one of the topics that the orientalists object to because of their ignorance of the Arabic language and its methods. They say: ‘How can one’s life actually be prolonged, for one hundred years, for example, but then his life span is decreased?’ We say that they are excused because they don not know that in the language a pronoun can refer back to the pronoun.

You say, for example: ‘I met so-and-so and I honoured him’. ‘Him’ refers to this so-and-so. You say: ‘I gave charity with a *dirham* and a half of it.’ Does this mean that you gave charity with one *dirham*, and then went back a second time and halved it? No. The meaning is that you gave charity with a *dirham* and half a *dirham* like it. Sometimes the pronoun refers back to the thing itself, and sometimes it refers back to something like it, as in: ‘I gave charity with a *dirham* and a half of it’.

Man has an essence and he has attributes. His essence is the body of his creation, and his attributes are the descriptions that happen to the essence. Him having his life prolonged means that he will reach old age, and as such the pronoun refers back to something like the first thing, or part of something like the first thing. The reference of the pronoun in ‘nor is his life span lessened,’ is correct. If someone lives to be one hundred years old then we ca not kill him when he is twenty years old, for example.

Hence, you must return the pronoun back to the essence and not the attribute, and none that is long-lived has his days lengthened; neither his life span is lessened. Longevity of life cannot be affirmed for the essence unless it is by the permission of Allah. The meaning is similar to: ‘I gave charity with a *dirham* and a half of it’.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* told us about longevity when he spoke about the Jews: ‘And they claim, “None shall ever enter paradise unless he be a Jew” – or, “a Christian.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 111) And they say: ‘The fire will most certainly not touch us for more than a limited number of days.’ (*al-Baqara:* 80)

Allah has refuted them: If you have guaranteed for yourselves the paradise, and no-one is going to take it from you, then desire death which will lead you to it: ‘Say, [O Muhammad], “If the home of the Hereafter with Allah is for you alone and not the [other] people, then wish for death, if you should be truthful.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 94) Then Allah *Glorified is He* judges against them:

'But they will never wish for it, ever, because of what their hands have put forth. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers. And you will surely find them the greediest of people for life - [even] more than those who associate others with Allah. One of them wishes that he could be granted life a thousand years, but it would not remove him in the least from the [coming] punishment that he should be granted life. And Allah is seeing of what they do.' (*al-Baqara:* 95-96)

His saying: 'but that it is in a register' means the Preserved Tablet because everything that happens, every increase, and decrease in our lifetimes and in the periods of pregnancy and childbirth are recorded in the Preserved Tablet.

'Indeed, that for Allah is easy.' Everything that is hard for you to understand is simple and easy for Allah *Glorified is He*. Have you not seen how Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* called on Allah to grant him a righteous son who would inherit prophethood after him, despite the fact that he was too old in years and his wife was barren? Any progeny that comes at that age is special if the wife is barren, but if it is by Allah's laws then the matter is easy and facilitated.

Read: 'And indeed, I fear the successors after me, and my wife has been barren, so give me from Yourself an heir Who will inherit me and inherit from the family of Ya'qub (Jacob). And make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You]." [He was told], "O Zakaryya, indeed We give you good tidings of a boy whose name will be John. We have not assigned to any before [this] name." He said, "My Lord, how will I have a boy when my wife has been barren and I have reached extreme old age?" [An angel] said, "Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, for I created you before, while you were nothing.'"' (*Maryam:* 5-9)

Therefore, do not compare the issue to our capabilities and our human laws because this action is attributed to Allah and not to human beings.

Likewise, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when Pharaoh and his army pursued him until they had surrounded him and tightened their grip on him such that the followers of Musa said: 'Behold, we are to be overtaken' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). And why not are they overtaken, with the sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind them? Musa *peace be upon him* spoke as one who trusts in his Lord and His Unlimited Power: 'He replied: "No, indeed!"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) He meant: They will not overtake us. He said this because of the sum of trust he had in Allah: 'with me is my Lord; He will guide me.'

(*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) Then the relief came instantly: ‘Then We inspired to Musa, “Strike with your staff the sea,” and it parted, and each portion was like a great towering mountain.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63)

Musa *peace be upon him* saw a dry path splitting the sea, and he and his people crossed until they reached the other side. He wanted to strike the sea another time so that it would return to its fluid state, and prevent Pharaoh from crossing, but His Lord forbade him, as the miracle had not yet been completed and there was still something left. Allah *Glorified is He* is able to save and destroy with the same thing, and the dry path remained dry so that Pharaoh would be deceived by it. He began to cross it in order to catch up with Musa. When the last of Pharaoh’s army treaded on the path, Allah covered them with water, returned (the sea) to its fluidity and Pharaoh and his army were drowned. This is His Absolute Power that has no limits, and it is not subjected to causes.

Likewise, by reflecting on the issue of creation and multiplication, you find that the mankind has come from a male and a female, but logical and rational distribution in this matter do not prevent Allah’s Power from bringing about creation at any stage. The Creator *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* without a father and without a mother. He then created Eve from a father but not a mother, and he created ‘Isa *peace be upon him* from a mother but not a father. Therefore, we say that the matter is easy and simple for Allah, even though you may think it is difficult.

وَمَا يَسۡتَوِى ٱلۡبَحۡرَانِ هَٰذَا عَذۡبٞ فُرَاتٞ سَآئِغٞ شَرَابُهُۥ وَهَٰذَا مِلۡحٌ أُجَاجٞۖ وَمِن
كُلّٖ تَأۡكُلُونَ لَحۡمٗا طَرِيّٗا وَتَسۡتَخۡرِجُونَ حِلۡيَةٗ تَلۡبَسُونَهَاۖ وَتَرَى ٱلۡفُلۡكَ
فِيهِ مَوَاخِرَ لِتَبۡتَغُواْ مِن فَضۡلِهِۦ وَلَعَلَّكُمۡ تَشۡكُرُونَ ١٢

The two bodies of water are not alike – one is palatable, sweet,
and pleasant to drink, the other salty and bitter – yet from each
you eat fresh fish and extract ornaments to wear, and in each
you see the ships ploughing their course so that you may seek
Allah’s bounty and be grateful [12] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 12)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to make it easy for us to understand this issue rationally and in a value-related sense, so He presents it to us in a palpable, imaginable way: ‘And not alike are the two bodies of water.’ Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us: as there are palpable things that are not like other things in terms of their palpability, there are also value-related things that are unlike anything else.

The sea is known; it is the vast expanse composed of salty water, and rivers can also be called Sea in most cases. The river contains fresh water, so they are different and not alike. ‘One is fresh and sweet’ and ‘one is salty and bitter.’ This one is fresh and that one is salty and ‘fresh’ is described as being: ‘sweet, palatable for drinking,’ and passes through the throat easily and comfortably. ‘Salty’ is described as ‘salty and bitter.’

Between the fresh and the salty are some of the wonders of creation, for we find in both of them, for example, fish that we eat, and we don not distinguish between freshwater fish and saltwater fish. This is because Allah has prepared the living being to take his life’s essentials from the water, and leave aside what he does not want. Another example is a tree that you plant. It takes from the earth the necessary elements and discards what it does not need.

In the same soil, you can grow, for example, capsicum tree and sugar cane; both plants are nourished by the same elements and irrigated by the same water, but the food that they each produce is completely different. As He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And within the land are neighbouring plots and gardens of grapevines and crops and palm trees, [growing] several from a root or otherwise, watered with one water; but We make some of them exceed others in [quality of] fruit.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 4)

This is a natural disposition and characteristic that Allah has made in all living beings; that they only take the nourishment that they need. When the scientists want to make it easier for us to understand the process by which plants are nourished they say: ‘they rely on the particularity of the small hair-like tubes, and the small root hairs absorb the water and the food from the soil; this particularity transmits it to the trunk and the leaves. But they have not realized that the hair-like tubes absorb the water without discrimination and without differentiation from one element to another, and without selecting one substance over another. Thus, it is not the particularity of the small hairs but only the divine and natural characteristic that Allah has placed in living beings.

Natural issues happen to man, as do emotional and mental issues. Legislation has no say regarding emotional issues such as love and hate because man has no control over them. Love whom you will and hate whom you will, but on the condition that love and hatred do not push you beyond being just and toward oppression and transgression, as He *Glorified is He* said: ‘and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 8)

Legislation also has no say regarding natural issues, as hunger and thirst, for example, are natural impulses that a person knows by himself and from experience. You do not teach your child hunger and thirst. He knows it himself when he feels hungry and when he feels thirsty.

For this reason, it is strange that we hear people calling for boys and girls to be educated in schools about sexual matters, and that they want to have a new subject called ‘sex Education’ that can be taught to children from a young age. We say: Glory be to Allah that He allowed small children to learn natural impulses. Natural impulses are not taught, but man comes to know them at their appropriate time.

It is from the wonders of creation that freshwater does not mix with saltwater, as He *Glorified is He* said: ‘Between them is a barrier [so] neither of them transgresses.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 20) This is an evidence of a miracle because we always find that the level of saltwater in the seas and large oceans is less than the level of water in the rivers, and if the opposite were the case the saltwater would cover the rivers and the dry land.

This means that the plants would die and the soil would be ruined. This is why the Creator’s wisdom willed for the level of water in the rivers to be higher, and that (the rivers) would have outlets into the sea so that the surplus water can be disposed of.

The Creator *Glorified is He* has wisdom behind the freshwater being suitable for drinking, watering plants and quenching thirst. As for saltwater, Allah is preserving it according to its salt content so that it does not spoil or putrefy. This is because the seas and oceans are the storehouses for fresh water and from them the rainwater evaporates which the rivers flow with, and you notice that the level of salt differs according to the nature of a place. For example, you find that water in the Baltic Sea has the lowest salt content because it is an outlet for a number of rivers and it is located in a region where there is a lot of rain. All of this contributes to the low salt content.

As for the Dead Sea, for example, it has the highest salt content of any sea, so much so that fish do not live in it. The reason is that no rivers flow into it, and it is located in a dry region that receives little rain. Thus, a lot of water evaporates from it. As for the remaining water that gathers in the seas and oceans, it has almost the same level of saltiness.

We have already mentioned the wisdom behind the surface area of the saltwater being so vast in the seas and oceans, and we said: the vastness of the surface of the water increases the rate of evaporation so there can be an abundance of suitable freshwater for irrigation and drinking. Our example of this process is that if you leave a glass of water on a desk for a month you would return and find that it is more or less how you left it. However, if you spilled it on the floor of the room it would dry before you leave. Why? Because you have expanded the surface area that is necessary for evaporation.

Allah has expanded the surface of saltwater in order to give us enough rain to continue our lives. Also, saltwater is not mixed when it comes into contact with fresh water because it is the source of its existence. This is why a poet (1) said in praise:

I am guided to His noble gathering and I am

Only guided to it because of what I have gained from His blessings

Like the sea that is rained upon by the clouds and it (the sea) sea has

No preference over them (the clouds) because it is from their water

It is known that water has a recognized cycle in existence. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding it: ‘By those [winds] scattering [dust] dispersing. And those [clouds] carrying a load [of water] And those [ships] sailing with ease.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1-3)

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(1) These two verses are from the saying of Hibat Allah Al-Astarlabi, and they were mentioned to him by Ibn Maʿsum in his book *(Salafat al-ʿAsr fi Mahasin Ash-Shuʿaraʿ bi kuli Misr)*

The water that Allah has created in the universe is as it is and it does not increase or decrease. Whatever waterman consumes, for example, exits from him in the form of excrement, urine, sweat etc., and the proportion of water in his body remains at 90% of his weight, and it is absorbed by the earth after he dies. The same can be said of plants and animals, as there is a recognized and witnessed cycle. Life is also a cycle, for when we say to you: ‘Indeed, Allah is able to repeat it’ then take that which you witness as evidence for the veracity of that which is absent.

His saying: ‘And from each,’ is referring to the freshwater and the saltwater. ‘You eat tender meat’ refers to fish which is found in freshwater as it is found in saltwater. It is the same food, and you will not find, for example, that the fish in saltwater is salty like the flathead mullet, for example, or sardines. This is because living things only absorb what they need, and they leave the other elements alone.

The term: ‘tender meat’ is an indication that fish should be eaten whilst fresh and tender. If it becomes dry and its freshness dissipates then do not eat it. Jerked meat has become popular amongst the Arabs, in which they dry the meat of livestock in the sun and then cut it into strips so that is lasts longer. This is one of the ways of preserving meat that is suited to the meat of livestock. As for the meat of fish, it is ruined if is no longer: ‘tender meat.’

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions another blessing that comes from the sea: ‘and extract ornaments which you wear.’ Ornaments are what one uses to beautify oneself, such as pearls and corals and other gems that come from the sea. This is ornamentation applies to both men and women, as opposed to the ornamentation of gold which is impermissible for men. Men can ornament themselves with what they want from the sea, as nothing from it has been made impermissible for them. Even the ornamentation of gold for women, for who does a woman ornament herself for? She does so for the husband.

‘And you see the ships ploughing through [them].’ Ships they split the sea on fishing trips and other travels. Here is one of the aspects of the miraculous nature of the Quran. The Quran first of all addresses the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then it addresses his nation by means of his speech, although the Prophet Muhammad had neither travelled by sea nor seen one.

When the Quran says: ‘And to Him belong the ships [with sails] elevated in the sea like mountains.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 24) We say: ‘And when did these huge ocean liners appear that can be described in such a manner? They have only appeared in modern times. Before modern times there were only the normal, primitive ships. Who informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this current advancement that is taking place in the manufacturing of ships, such that you are made to imagine that it is a city moving on the waves of the sea.’

His saying ‘that you might seek of His bounty’ means: so that you may seek Allah’s provision and His bounty in the movement of the ships, whether it is fishing or travelling. ‘And perhaps you will be grateful.’ The meaning is that perhaps, after all these blessings, you will receive them with gratitude, and this is an indication that only a minority are grateful.

After this, the verses move to address another phenomenon of the universe:

يُولِجُ ٱلَّيۡلَ فِي ٱلنَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فِي ٱلَّيۡلِ وَسَخَّرَ ٱلشَّمۡسَ وَٱلۡقَمَرَ
كُلّٞ يَجۡرِي لِأَجَلٖ مُّسَمّٗىۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّكُمۡ لَهُ ٱلۡمُلۡكُۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ
تَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦ مَا يَمۡلِكُونَ مِن قِطۡمِيرٍ ١٣

He makes the night merge into the day and the day into the night; He has subjected the sun and the moon – each runs for an appointed term. Such is Allah your Lord: all control belongs to Him. Those you invoke beside Him do not even control the skin of a date stone [13] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 13)

It is true that the day and the night are sometimes of equal length, but the night is longer in the winter and it takes a portion away from the day. The day is longer in the summer and it takes a portion away from the night. In short, an increase in either of them leads to a decrease in the other, and this is the meaning of ‘He causes the night to enter the day, and He causes the day to enter the night.’ The phenomenon of the night being inserted into the day and the day being inserted into the night is the result of the earth being tilted on its axis. The True Lord *Glorified is He* as He has distributed water and preserved it in the vast seas, has also distributed temperature. If the earth was not tilting on its axis then the sun would burn the side of the earth that was facing it, whilst the other side would freeze.

One of the wonders of creation is that whether man lives at the North Pole or the South Pole his body temperature is 37 degrees, just as it would be if he were living at the equator. This is because the human body has been constructed in such a way so as to maintain its normal temperature regardless of where it is. Indeed, each organ maintains its own normal temperature despite all the organs being in the same body, and the heat spreads and reaches everywhere.

It is amazing that the liver can only carry out its natural function at a temperature of 40 degrees, and the temperature of the eye never goes above 7 degrees. Who prevents the liver's heat from spreading to the rest of the body, and reaching the eye, for example? Indeed, He is the Creator: 'Who created and proportioned. And who destined and [then] guided.' (*al-A'la:* 2-3)

And His saying: 'and has subjected the sun and the moon,' (*Fatir:* 13) means that He has subdued them for the benefit of man, and made them serve him without him having any power over them and without any volition from him. The sun and the moon are two signs in the general structure of the universe, and he can do nothing about them. If he was able to, they would be ruined and in chaos. Allah *Glorified is He* spoke the truth when He said: 'But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens, and the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71)

If you said: 'Man ruining the earth is something possible, so how would he ruin the heavens?' They said: 'did people not desire for the sky to fall on them by saying: 'Or you make the heaven fall upon us in fragments as you have claimed.' (*al-Isra':* 92) If the truth followed the desires of these people the life of this world would have been ruined.

This issue was debated by the philosophical school in Germany with another school. It had two contradicting opinions despite being in the same era. Each one of them took their opinion to be an evidence for atheism and stating that there was no God, and this is strange. One of them says: 'There are no irregularities in the world. It functions according to regular laws that are similar to mechanics. If there was a creator, a God for this universe, the creation would be at variance and there would be irregularities in it.' The other says: 'The universe does not function according to a fixed order. There are irregularities in creation, based on the evidence that some people are born handicapped, and if the world had a God, the creation would be one and equal with no variance in it.'

Glory be to Allah! Either way they desire atheism and their natural disposition is to reject the existence of Allah.

We say to these people: 'Come and we will lead you to that which is correct and to a common word. O you who desire irregularity in things as evidence for the existence of an all-powerful god, then you have your evidence. O you who desire stability in things as evidence for the existence of a wise God, then you have your evidence. But they have a distorted way of looking at things. How?

The fixed order that has no irregularity in it is found in the upper universe which functions monotonously and orderly without ever becoming unbalanced. The entire movement of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the other celestial bodies function according to one system that does not become disordered, and now we are able, for example, to determine the moment of a solar eclipse and a lunar eclipse, and we actually witness them at their exact time.

Therefore, if you desire stability as evidence then take it from the higher celestial bodies because they must be established upon a fixed order that has no irregularities in it. If not, the entire universe would be in chaos.

If you desire irregularities then you can see them in the particulars because the irregularities of the particulars do not affect the general order of the universe. That is why you see that this person is in perfect health, this person is blind, this person is one-eyed and so forth. Stability is in its place for wisdom and irregularities are in their place for wisdom. This and that are two evidences for the existence of the God Who is the Creator and the fully Capable.

His saying 'each running [its course] for a specified term,' (*Fatir:* 13) means that both the sun and the moon are circulating until a known time in which they will be destroyed and come to an end. 'That is Allah, your Lord; to Him belongs sovereignty,' (*Fatir:* 13) referring to the sensory world that is witnessed by you. As for that which you do not see from the kingdom, then that is the world of the supreme, unseen by you and your senses cannot comprehend it.

This is why, when Abraham *peace be upon him* was successful in his test, as Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And [mention, O Muhammad], when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them.’ (*al-Baqara:* 124) He gave him a great rank and He showed him the ‘world of the supreme’ that had not been seen by anyone else, and He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And thus did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth.’ (*al-Anʿam:* 75) What comes from the world of the witnessed kingdom has its origin in the world of the world of the supreme which we do not comprehend.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* points out this world in His saying: ‘O you who have believed, if you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion.’ (*al-Anfal:* 29) How can this be when we are not conscious of Allah unless we use the standard by which to discern the true from the false, and it is the Quran? So what is the meaning of ‘He will grant you a criterion’? They say: ‘It is that Allah will show you the world of the supreme of the heavens and the earth.

And His saying: ‘And those whom you invoke other than Him do not possess [as much as] the membrane of a date seed’ (*Fatir:* 15) means that if it was the True Lord who created this and that for you and subjugated the sun and the moon for you, then your claimed, alleged gods ‘do not possess [as much as] the membrane of a date seed’ but what is the membrane of a date seed?

The one who reflects on the Quran will find that it pays a great deal of attention to the date palm, and the first people it addresses are the Arabs; they are the first to be presented with Islam and to be called to it, and the Quran addresses them in a manner that is appropriate to them. It mentions to them examples from their own environment, and the date palm is well known in the Arab environment and it has a rank in our religion, so much so that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is related to have said: ‘Honour your paternal aunt, the date palm.’(1)

This statement, even if it cannot be authentically traced back to the Messenger of Allah, was not made by someone out of a vacuum. There is no doubt that this statement has an origin and that there is a connection between man and the date palm.

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(1) The completion of the Hadith is: “for indeed it was created from the leftover clay of your father Adam.” Related by As-Suyuti in *(Ad-Durar Al-Muntathira)* (p.107) Hadith (97) who attributed it to Abu Yaʿla and Abu Naʿim from Ibn ʿAbbas, and he said it was weak. Ibn Al-Qayyim says in *(Zad Al-Maʿad)* (2/194): ‘In its chain of narrations there is some difference of opinion. Also see (*Kashf Al-Khafa’* 1/195).

There is an authentic statement from the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said to His companions: 'Indeed there is a tree whose leaves do not fall.'(1)

When 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them* heard this he said to his father: 'It has occurred to me that it is the date palm because its leaves do not fall and it resembles the believer because everything in it is beneficial.' 'Umar made haste to the prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, indeed my son 'Abdullah says that the tree you mention is the date palm.' He said: 'He has spoken the truth.' 'Umar said: 'By Allah, I could not be happier if I had red camels,' meaning that he rejoiced because his son(2) had understood what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had said.

The scholars have tried to make it easier for us to understand this reality and establish the link between man and the date palm. Maybe it is the case that it was created from the leftover clay of Adam. They said: 'The pollen of the date palm, through which the pollination takes place, has the same smell as man's semen', and this gives weight to the veracity of whoever said that the (date palm) is our paternal aunt.

There are many wonders and secrets in the date palm being created this way, but it suffices to mention that everything in it is beneficial and nothing from it is discarded. Allah has made it to be used as an example and a lesson. When Allah addressed the Arabs about the crescent, He said: 'And the moon - We have determined for it phases, until it returns [appearing] like the old date stalk.' (*Ya Sin:* 39)

The date stalk is the cluster that carries the dates when they dry and become curved and bent, so they (Arabs) are made to understand that which is high above by mentioning that which is below and known to them.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (61) and its completion is: "and it is like the Muslim. Tell me what it is.' The people thought about the trees of the desert. 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with them said: 'It occurred to me that it was the date palm but I felt shy.' The people said; 'Tell us what it is O Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him.' He said: 'It is the date palm."*

(2) *This narration is found in the Sahih of Al-Bukhari (121) and it adds that Ibn 'Umar said: 'I told my father what had occurred to me and he said: "If you had said it, this would have been dearer to me than possessing this or that."*

Take the example of the date stone. It is the most insignificant thing there is, except for the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* ennobled it when He mentioned three parts of it as examples for clarification. He mentioned the husk of the date stone in the verse that we have here: ‘do not possess [as much as] the membrane of a date seed’ and it is the thin membrane that covers the stone. Something similar would be the white substance that is between an egg and its shell.

The tiny spot on the date pit is mentioned in His saying: ‘those will enter paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 124) This speck is a small hollow, or a tiny spot on the surface of the stone.

The wick (*fatil*) is mentioned in His saying: ‘Say, The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for he who fears Allah. And injustice will not be done to you, [even] as much as a thread [inside a date seed].’ (*an-Nisa’:* 77) These three parts are used as examples for that which is simple and absolutely tiny.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِن تَدۡعُوهُمۡ لَا يَسۡمَعُواْ دُعَآءَكُمۡ وَلَوۡ سَمِعُواْ مَا ٱسۡتَجَابُواْ لَكُمۡۖ
وَيَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ يَكۡفُرُونَ بِشِرۡكِكُمۡۚ وَلَا يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثۡلُ خَبِيرٖ ﴿١٤﴾

If you call them they cannot hear you; if they could hear, they could not answer you; on the Day of Resurrection they will disown your idolatry. None can inform you [Prophet] like the One who is all aware [14] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 14)

His saying ‘If you invoke them’ refers to worship because each of them would stand in front of their own idol and invoke it, beseech it and talk to it etc. But this is so ridiculous because this rock does not hear, so invoking it is pointless, let alone being an act of disbelief. The meaning of ‘they do not hear your supplication’ is the deities that do not comprehend or hear, like trees, rocks and so forth.

But why do the disbelievers worship idols, for example, when they know that they are rocks they chiselled with their own hands, and they can see a gust of wind knocking over their object of worship; tossing it on the ground and breaking its arms. Then they need to repair it. It is very strange to see idols worshipped instead of Allah but the reason is the innate disposition towards religion that is found in the human soul.

Every human being, by nature, loves religiosity, and the bane of religiosity is that it has requirements, so what will prevent man from going towards some form of religiosity in order to satisfy this innate disposition, despite the fact that there are no requirements? This is how idols are worshipped, and stars and trees are worshipped and taken as gods.

The meaning of worship is that the worshipper obeys the command of the one he worships, and refrains from that which he has prohibited. If there is no command and no prohibition then the worship is disreputable and false because you cannot worship a deity without a method. If that is not the case, then what has this deity commanded them and what has it forbade them? What has it prepared for the one who worships it? What has it prepared for the one who disbelieves in it?

His saying: ‘and if they heard.’ Supposing that they were worshipping a human being that could hear them ‘they would not respond to you,’ (*Fatir:* 14) meaning: they would not agree to you worshipping them and they would refuse to be a deity. An example would be those who worship Jesus *peace be upon him* instead of Allah.

A poet dealt with this matter when he imagined the cave of Thawr being jealous of the cave of Hiraʾ because the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had made it a place for seclusion and devotion and in it the first revelation came down. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* dismounted in the cave of Thawr during his migration, Thawr rejoiced, as now things were even. Hiraʾ was for the mission of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and Thawr was for his migration, which was the start of the call.

A poet(1) says:

How we envied Hiraʾ when you saw

The Trustworthy Spirit coming to you with lights

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(1) From the poetry of Ash-Sh'arawi, *may God be pleased with him*.

Thus Hira᾽ and Thawr became equal
With them I shall intercede for the nation of stones
They worshipped us and we are more devoted to Allah
Than those who stand in the early hours of the morning
They took our silence as evidence against us
Take us to them as fuel for the Fire
You harvested ignorance as you harvested it
Against the Son of Mary and the disciples
For the excesses that are its reward and the excesses that are in it
Can be saved by the mercy of the All-Forgiving

The stone itself refuses to be worshipped instead of Allah. It knows the reality of the oneness of Allah, and it falls down in glorification of Him. What does that make you think of human beings?

This is why, when we stand on the Day of Resurrection, amongst the wonders we will see will be the arguments and disputes between the worshipper and the worshipped, the follower and the followed. He says: ‘[And they should consider that] when those who have been followed disassociate themselves from those who followed [them], and they [all] see the punishment, and cut off from them are the ties [of relationship].’ (*al-Baqara:* 166) He quotes those who have gone astray: ‘And those who disbelieved will [then] say, “Our Lord, show us those who misled us of the jinn and men [so] we may put them under our feet that they will be among the lowest.”’ (*Fussilat:* 29)

Here He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And on the Day of Resurrection they will deny your association.’ (*Fatir:* 14) Those that you have turned to in worship and taken as gods will declare themselves innocent of you and your idolatry. ‘And none can inform you like [one] Acquainted [with all matters].’ That is, the knower of the secrets of things, as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to you: ‘I am informing you of what will happen in the future, so take from My truthfulness regarding what has already happened as proof of My truthfulness regarding what is yet to come. Take from My truthfulness regarding what you see as proof of my truthfulness regarding what you don not see.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ أَنتُمُ ٱلۡفُقَرَآءُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِۖ وَٱللَّهُ هُوَ ٱلۡغَنِيُّ ٱلۡحَمِيدُ ﴿١٥﴾
إِن يَشَأۡ يُذۡهِبۡكُمۡ وَيَأۡتِ بِخَلۡقٖ جَدِيدٖ ﴿١٦﴾ وَمَا ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ بِعَزِيزٖ ﴿١٧﴾

People, it is you who stand in need of Allah – Allah needs nothing and is worthy of all praise [15] If He wills, He can do away with you and bring in a new creation [16] That is not difficult for Allah [17] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 15 - 17)

The address in ‘O mankind!’ is a general address for all of mankind, the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the disobedient. ‘you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy.’ This is the reality that Allah uses to humiliate arrogant people who refuse to believe in Him and rebel against Allah’s way. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to them: ‘As long as you accustom yourselves to rebellion then rebel against poverty if I impoverish you, or against sickness if it strikes you. Rebel against death when your time has come’ you are therefore subjugated to the Lordship of Allah and you cannot escape from it.

‘While Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy,’ He stands in an absolute self-sufficiency, and the meaning of ‘Praiseworthy’ is the One who is praised much. A wealthy person is not praised unless he gives, and his giving is abundant. The wealthy person who is miserly is not praised but in fact he is rebuked.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds them of another reality that is hidden from them: ‘If He wills, He can do away with you and bring forth a new creation.’ As he said in another place: ‘And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people; then they will not be the likes of you.’ (*Muhammad:* 38) Recreating mankind or coming with a new creation is something easy for Allah: ‘nor is this difficult for Allah.’ (*Fatir:* 17) But the True Lord *Glorified is He* does want to come with a creation that is obedient, and that believes in Him even though they are able to disbelieve and they have absolute choice. This choice is a point of greatness in Allah’s religion.

Bringing about a new creation is something that is easy and effortless for Allah; *Glorified is He* because He does not create according to a procedure. He just creates with ‘“Be!” and it is’. This is from Allah *Glorified is He* and it does not take time.

If you wanted to reflect deeply into the meaning of His statement: ‘His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, “Be,” and it is,” (*Ya Sin:* 82) you will find that a thing in reality is in fact present, but in the world of the unseen and the command (‘Be!’ and it is) it is for Him to make it manifest to us in the material world. This is why, when a knowledgeable person was asked, he said: ‘He reveals some things and He hides other things.’

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۚ وَإِن تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلَىٰ حِمْلِهَا لَا يُحْمَلْ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ
كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰٓ ۗ إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِٱلْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ ۚ
وَمَن تَزَكَّىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّىٰ لِنَفْسِهِۦ ۚ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٨﴾

No burdened soul will bear the burden of another: even if a heavily laden soul should cry for help, none of its load will be carried, not even by a close relative. But you [Prophet] can only warn those who fear their Lord, though they cannot see Him, and keep up the prayer – whoever purifies himself does so for his own benefit — everything returns to Allah [18]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 18)

The meaning of ‘And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another’ is that no soul shall carry the sins of another soul. This is because it is weighed down with its own burden. The burden is a heavy load that does not manifest itself, and we have His saying regarding the matter of revelation: ‘And We removed from you your burden. Which had weighed upon your back’ (*ash-Sharh:* 2-3) which means that the meeting between the angelic realm and the human realm tired you.

This is why the Prophet’s forehead used to sweat after meeting Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. He said by way of illustrating this meeting: ‘He pressed me until I could no longer bear it,’(1) and he returned to his family saying: ‘Wrap me up! Wrap me up! Cover me! Cover me!’ Despite this, during cessation of the divine revelation, he missed it and longed for it to return because he had tasted its sweetness. The sweetness of something makes you forget whatever difficulty you have had to endure in order to achieve it.

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(1) *It was narrated in a long Hadith by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (vol. 3) in the Book of Bid’ Al-Wahy (Beginning of Revelation) on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her.*

The meaning of no soul taking on the burdens and sins of another soul has been explained to us by the True Lord in His saying: ‘On a Day when everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, and from his mother and father, and from his spouse and his children; on that Day, to every one of them will his own state be of sufficient concern.’ (*‘Abasa:* 34-37) Everyone shall be wholly absorbed in their own concerns, confined within their own actions. There is no time for courtesy. The father will say to his son: ‘My dear son! My burden is heavy. Relieve me of some of it.’ And the son will say: ‘my burden is enough, O father.’

It is likewise here: ‘And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another...’ (*Fatir:* 18). A soul weighed down with misdeeds will ask another soul to carry some of its sins, but this is impossible: ‘...nothing of it will be carried, even if he should be a close relative...’ (*Fatir:* 18). Even if this plea were to be made to the people closest to this soul, they would not answer and they would not carry anything. How can a burdened soul carry the burden of another soul when it is preoccupied with its own load?

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* refutes the assertion of the disbelievers that they would carry the misdeeds of their followers. He *the Exalted* says: ‘And those who disbelieve say to those who believe, “Follow our way, and we will carry your sins.” But they will not carry anything of their sins. Indeed, they are liars. But they will surely carry their [own] burdens and [other] burdens along with their burdens, and they will surely be questioned on the Day of Resurrection about what they used to invent.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 12-13) This issue is clear. Every soul (on that Day) shall be engrossed in its own concerns: ‘[On the Day of Judgment] every soul is held in pledge for its deeds.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 38) the human in the life of this world is bound either by a family relationship that entails obligation, or by acquaintances and friends, or by a source of assistance that he seeks help from if he does not have any relatives or friends. But on the Day of Resurrection all these bonds shall be broken because the situation on that day will not allow for any courtesies and sacrifices.

When the Mother of the Believers, `Aishah *Allah be pleased with her* heard our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* telling people about the Day of Resurrection and warning how the sun would draw close to the heads, and the people would be standing naked, she became upset and asked the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘How can the people be standing naked, looking at one another?’ The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* responded to her by saying that every person would be too engrossed in his own affairs, and the situation on that Day would be too grave to allow any looking at the nakedness of others.(1)

Then Allah says addressing His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘…You can only warn those who fear their Lord unseen...’ (*Fatir:* 18), meaning: Your warning them, O Muhammad, and your admonishing them will only benefit those who fear their Lord although they cannot see Him and He is beyond their perception. As for the others, they have oppressed their own souls by depriving them from the abundant goodness that Allah has intended for them. They have wronged their own souls when they allowed the life of this world to delude them with its fleeting joys and to distract them from the eternal bliss of the Hereafter.

The Arabic word *indhar* means an early warning of evil to be able to protect oneself from it. The opportunity is favourable before it suddenly attacks. For example, when you want to encourage your child to study and to warn him about carelessness that will lead to failure, you do not say this to him the night before the exam. You only do so when there is enough time for him to put things in order, and rectify whatever carelessness or laziness he has.

Warning and evoking fear are of no use unless it is with someone who believes in that which you are telling him to fear and be in awe of. When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was warning about the punishment of the Hereafter, such warnings only benefited those who believed in Allah and the Resurrection.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 2, p. 53) on the authority of `A’ishah Allah be pleased with her that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘You will be assembled on the Day of Resurrection barefooted, naked, and uncircumcised.’ (`Aisha) said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, will the men and women look at one another?’ He replied, ‘O `Aisha, the situation will be too hard for them to pay attention to that.’*

The meaning of *khashya* in '…those who fear their Lord unseen...' (*Fatir:* 18) is reverential fear accompanied with love, not antipathy. For example, you fear the aggression of a tyrant or an oppressor; you fear him reluctantly and with aversion. But your fear of Allah is a kind of fear emanating from awe and love. That is the reason why this fear is accompanied by hope and desire for His Mercy. You are travelling the journey of your life on two wings: fear of punishment and hope for mercy.

A human should not focus on the action in and of itself, but rather look at both the action and the receiver of that action. The action may be one and the same but has different receivers. For example, when the Quran was heard by a group of men (1) who were with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah described their response in these words: 'And among them, [O Muhammad], are those who listen to you, until when they depart from you, they say to those who were given knowledge, "What has he said just now?" Those are the ones of whom Allah has sealed over their hearts and who have followed their [own] desires.' (*Muhammad:* 16)

But another person(2) who heard the Quran reacted with a different response; he said: 'By Allah, indeed it has sweetness and there is grace upon it. The highest part of it is fruitful and the lowest part of it is gushing forth with bounty. It is highest, nothing can be above it.

'Umar's heart softened and opened up to embrace Islam when he heard the Quran being recited. The Quran is one, but there is a difference between the one who hears it reluctantly and so shuts himself off from its guidance;

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(1) *That is, the hypocrites. It was narrated by As-Suyuti in Asbab An-Nuzul (p.154) and Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (vol. 4, p. 177).*

(2) The man in question was Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughirah. A group of the Quraysh had gathered with him to agree on what to say about the Quran. They wanted to settle on one opinion so that they would not voice different opinions regarding it in front of the people who would come to them during the *Hajj* season. One of them said: 'Shall we say he is a soothsayer?' Al-Walid said: 'He is not a soothsayer. I have seen soothsayers. He does not have the tone or rhymed prose of a soothsayer.' Another one of them said: 'We will say he is a madman.' Al-Walid said: 'He is not a madman. We have seen madness and know what it is like - it does not throttle him, engage him, or whisper to him.' Another one of them said: 'So we will say he is a poet.' Al-Walid said: 'He is not a poet. We know poetry in all its forms; its meters [rajaz and hazaj], rhymes and rhythms, and it is not poetry.' Then he said: 'By Allah, the speech he says is very sweet; the first part is fruitful and the last part is abundant. *[Narrated by Ibn Hisham in As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah, vol. 1. pp. 281-282]*

and the one who hears it with a heedful heart open to receive the spiritual radiance and revelation contained in it.

Have you not seen that iron will respond to you if you strike it while it is hot? It becomes like dough in your hands. If you strike it while it is cold, it will not interact with you. Likewise, we say, as an example, that on a cold day you blow into your hands so that you can feel the warmth. You also blow into a cup of tea to cool it down. How can one action combine opposite purposes? We say that although the actor is one, the receiver of the action is different.

Likewise, Allah's Warning was the same to all, but it was received with humility and desire for guidance by one group of people, so they believed; and it was received with stubbornness and persistence in error by another group of people, so they benefited nothing from it and obtained no fruit at all.

Allah's saying: '…those who fear their Lord unseen...' (*Fatir:* 18) indicates that faith within the souls of these people has reached a perfect level at which the seen and the unseen are viewed as equal. This is exemplified by what `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'Even if the veil were lifted off from me, it would not increase my certainty.'

Also, when our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Abu Dhar *Allah be pleased with him* 'How are you this morning, O Abu Dhar?' He said: 'A true believer.' He said: 'Indeed, every truth has a reality, so what is the reality of your belief?' He replied: 'My soul has lost interest in this world so much that its gold and mud have become of the same value for me. And it is as if I can see the people of Paradise enjoying its bounties and the people of the Fire being punished.' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: 'You have known, so hold fast.'(1)

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* mentions another attribute of those who respond to the warning of the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He* and are benefited by it: '…and have established prayer…' (*Fatir:* 18). For they have a fear of Allah; a fear that makes them have the same level of faith whether they see

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Haythami in Majma' Az-Zawa'id (vol. 1, p. 57) and he attributed it to At-Tabarani in his book Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir based on the Hadith of Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari, and not Abu Dhar. Ibn Hajar Al-`Asqalani attributed the Hadith to Ibn Mubarak in Az-Zuhd, in his book: Al-Isaba Fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (Accuracy in Distinguishing the Companions)'*

Allah or not. They also establish prayer. They perform it in the most perfect manner. Prayer (*Salat*), as we have mentioned, is the one act of worship that every accountable has no excuse for omitting. There may be certain circumstances that excuse you from obligatory charity (*zakat*) or from fasting (*sawm*) or from pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) so that all that is left is the testimony that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah. It is enough for you to say it, even if it is only for one time.

As for the prayer, it is the one act of worship that is practiced every day throughout the life of the Muslim because the prayer, in essence, is a constant devotion to Allah *the Exalted*. Your Lord is inviting you to meet Him five times each day and night. He is calling you so that the created comes before its Creator. What do you think of a made thing being shown to its maker five times in the day and night? Can any damage occur to it after this?

On the other hand, if you want to meet an important official in the life of this world, you have to go through barriers, gates, security guards, appointments and strict procedures. You do not have control over any of the elements of this meeting. Rather, the time, the topic, and even what you should say are set for you. You ask permission at the beginning of this meeting and you do not decide when to leave.

Your meeting with your Lord is totally different. You control all the elements of the meeting. You begin when you want to and you finish when you want to. You can talk privately to your Lord about whatever you desire. You let Him know your complaints. You present to Him your needs, and He hears and responds.

After the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* mentions this ongoing worship, He confirms the following reality: ‘and whoever purifies himself only purifies himself for [the benefit of] his soul’ (*Fatir:* 18) which means that your worship is for your own good. Allah *the Most High* does not benefit in the least from it. He does not benefit by the obedience of those who obey Him, nor is He harmed by the disobedience of those who disobey Him.

He *Glorified is He* is absolutely Self-Sufficient and in no way dependent on or in need of any of His creatures. Our worshipping of Allah does not add a new attribute of perfection to His already Perfect Nature. Because with all the attributes of perfection eternally present in Him, He created us; and with all the attributes of perfection eternally present in Him, He commissioned us.

Therefore, the Qudsi Hadith says: ‘O My slaves, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, those of you who are present and those of you who are absent had the heart of the most pious person among you, this would not increase My Kingdom in anything. And were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, those of you who are present and those of you who are absent had the heart of the most wicked person among you, this would not decrease My Kingdom in anything. That is because I am the Magnanimous, the Glorious, and the All-Rich (the Independent). My Giving is speech and My Punishment is speech. My only Command for something if I want it to be is that I say ‘Be’ and it is.’(1)

We are Allah’s workmanship, and we have not seen a craftsman who demolishes or spoils his handiwork. Rather, he repairs and takes care of it. Therefore, if you are ever afflicted with ruin or suffering, know that in the end it is for you benefit.

‘…And to Allah is the [final] destination’ (*Fatir:* 18) means the final return of all and the final destination of all on the Day of Resurrection is to Allah so that He can arbitrate between adversaries, and everyone gets what they deserve. So whoever has escaped punishment in the life of this world, there is a final destination to which he must return.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا يَسۡتَوِي ٱلۡأَعۡمَىٰ وَٱلۡبَصِيرُ ﴿١٩﴾ وَلَا ٱلظُّلُمَٰتُ وَلَا ٱلنُّورُ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَلَا ٱلظِّلُّ وَلَا ٱلۡحَرُورُ ﴿٢١﴾
وَمَا يَسۡتَوِي ٱلۡأَحۡيَآءُ وَلَا ٱلۡأَمۡوَٰتُۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُسۡمِعُ مَن يَشَآءُۖ وَمَآ أَنتَ بِمُسۡمِعٖ مَّن فِي ٱلۡقُبُورِ ﴿٢٢﴾

The blind and the seeing are not alike [19] nor are darkness and light [20] Shade and heat are not alike [21] nor are the living and the dead. Allah makes anyone He wills hear [His message]: you cannot make those in their graves hear [22] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 19 - 22)

These are realities that the True Lord *the Exalted* has established; two mutually contradictory things are not equal. The blind person does not know the locations of things while he is moving, but a seeing person can. The seeing person can watch the locations of things and avoid danger. As for the blind person, he must have a companion who volunteers, as a friend, to help him navigate his surroundings and make up by his healthy eyes for the absence of his sight. This is the reason why we say: ‘If the blind person gives blindness its right, he begins to see. How? Because he is not too arrogant to seek help from someone who can see, and when he calls on someone to hold his hand, all eyes around him compete to help him. But if he is arrogant, he will trip and fall on his face very quickly.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2495) on the authority of Abu Dhar Allah be pleased with him. He classed the Hadith as hasan (good authenticity). It was also narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 5, pp. 77, 154) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4257).*

Blindness and sight are sensations that clarify the abstract, for what is meant is that the ignorant and the knowledgeable are not equal. The movement of life is divided into a material movement that comes and goes, grows and declines etc., and a moral, immaterial movement, such as spiritualties and high moralities, which include faith, truthfulness, fidelity, justice and mercy, etc.

If it is the case that material, physical movement requires a sensory light to guide you so that you do not collide into something stronger than you, which could break you, or something weaker than you, in which case you would break it. The same applies to immaterial, spiritual movement. It also needs a moral light that guides your steps so that you do not go astray. This moral light is the law and way that Allah *Glorified is He* describes saying: ‘Indeed, there has come to you from Allah a light and a plain Book (this Quran) wherewith Allah guides all those who seek His Good Pleasure to ways of peace, and He brings them out of darkness by His Will unto light and guides them to a Straight Way.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 15-16)

Just as the sun is the physical light, the Quran is the spiritual light; and, therefore, we say concerning Allah’s saying: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth...’ (*an-Nur:* 35) that it means: He irradiates them with both kinds of light.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has already mentioned to us the contrary nature of freshwater and saltwater. Regarding them, He says: ‘and the two seas (kinds of water) are not alike, this fresh sweet, and pleasant to drink, and that salty and bitter...’ (*Fatir:* 12). Yes, they are not equal; but rather, the relation between them is that of contrast, like the night and the day, not contradiction like the blind and the seeing. The evidence is that Allah *the Most High* has combined them together in one statement: '...And from them both you eat fresh tender meat (fish), and derive the ornaments that you wear...' (*Fatir:* 12). Contrasts are different, as each one of them has a task to perform; so they are mutually supportive and not mutually opposed.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* states that the blind and the seeing are not equal, He says: '…nor are (alike) the darknesses and the light…' (*Fatir:* 20) because light is the source of seeing, and even the one endowed with sight cannot see anything in darkness.

This is with respect to physical blindness and sight. As for values and morals, they have another standard. This is why Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says: '…verily, it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts which are in the breasts that grow blind.' (*al-Hajj:* 46) So you can have a seeing person who is blind of insight. The one who is blind to morals is the one who is ignorant of the law that guides him to the sphere of the truth in all values. The seeing person is the one who knows these principles.

When you consider the style of these two glorious verses, you find in them the powerful features of the inimitability of Allah's speech. The first is: 'Not alike are the blind and the seeing…' (*Fatir:* 19) where the conjunction *waw al-`atf* (and) connects the two nouns. As for the part saying: '…nor are (alike) the darknesses and the light…' (*Fatir:* 20), the negative particle *la* (translated as nor) is used which emphasizes the lack of equality. The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not express it in the same way as the first, using *ma-yastawi* (not alike or equal). Why? Scholars opined that blindness and sight are two attributes that may both exist in one person. As someone may be blind today and see tomorrow or someone may be ignorant and then learn, or be a disbeliever and then believe. So the two attributes apply to him. Therefore, the meaning of the lack of equality is not emphasised. As for the darkness and light, they are opposites and mutually exclusive.

Likewise, we notice the precision of the Quranic diction; indeed because the Speaker is the True Lord Himself. He says: '…nor are (alike) the darknesses and the light…' (*Fatir:* 20). The darkness here is stated in the plural (*zhulumat*), whereas light is in the singular because erroneous beliefs are manifold; some worship the stars, some worship idols, some worship the angels etc. But the light is one, which is Allah's Law as revealed in His Book.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to teach his Companions this lesson, so he drew before them a straight line, and around it several twisting lines, and then he read: 'And verily, this is my Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His Path.' (*al-An'am:* 153)

Then He *the Exalted* says: '…nor are (alike) the shade and the sun's heat…' (*Fatir:* 21) and these two are also opposites and mutually exclusive. Likewise '…nor are (alike) the living and the dead...' (*Fatir:* 22). We notice here that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has again mentioned the negation of the verb '...nor are alike...' (*Fatir:* 22) to emphasize the lack of equality between the living and the dead

Likewise, Allah has mentioned the negative particle *la* (translated as nor) which indicates emphasis because 'the living' refers, in this context, to the true believers, who deserve eternal and everlasting life continuous with their transient worldly life. As for the dead, they are the disbelievers who have rejected Allah's way. We can also say that the living are those who have known that true life is to live according to their Lord's Way, and this will lead them to the true and everlasting life of which Allah *the Most High* says: 'The life of this world is merely an amusement and a diversion; the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64)

This is the life that is meant in Allah's saying: 'O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life.' (*al-Anfal:* 24) How can this be addressing them if they are actually alive? The meaning, therefore, is that they will be given true life that does not end in death, and without losing any of its gifts.

Also pertinent to this subject is Allah's saying: 'Is he who was dead and We gave him life and set for him a light (of Belief) whereby he can walk among people, like him who is in the darkness from which he can never come out?...' (*al-An'am:* 122)

One of the meanings that we can understand from the lack of parity between the living and the dead is that Allah has created the living being and provided it with physical apparatuses, such as an intellect, nerves, muscles, ears, eyes etc. Each of these organs has significance and a function. It is the duty of the living being to use these blessings in a way that makes them a means for obtaining other blessings. A human must realize that he is on the journey of his life and he will most certainly die. But his Lord *Glorified is He* has obscured from him his appointed time of death and that amounts to disclosure in itself, so that it can remain as a reminder to him throughout his life and he can expect it at every moment. Your lifetime is being counted down, and the arrow of death has already been fired in your direction. How long you have to live depend on how long it takes to reach you.

After the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* talks about the state of being accountable, He says that the one who is blind and ignorant of the principles of his religion is not like the one who sees and has knowledge of them, and the light of faith and guidance is not equal to the darkness of misguidance. He *the Most High* talks about the final outcome, He says: '…nor are alike the shade and the sun's heat…' (*Fatir:* 21). This shade is an allusion to the bliss of the Paradise. In another place in the Quran, He says: '…We (Allah) shall admit them to shades wide and ever deepening (Paradise).' (*an-Nisa':* 57) The word *al-harur* (translated as the intense heat of the sun) is an allusion to torture in Hell and the severity of its heat.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in consolation: '...verily, Allah makes whom He will hear, but you cannot make hear those who are in graves.' (*Fatir:* 22) The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* confronted disbelief and ignorance from his people, and his call was to bring them out of blindness and ignorance to that which would enlighten their understandings, and take them out of the darkness of misguidance into the light of faith.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was very keen for his people to be guided, so much so that he almost destroyed himself in the course of calling them. Therefore, His Lord addressed him, saying: 'Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.' (*al-Kahf:* 6)

Likewise here, Allah addresses him, saying: '...verily, Allah makes whom He will hear...' (*Fatir:* 22), That is, attentive hearing of guidance and acceptance of it; otherwise, they all hear. There is receptive and unreceptive hearing of Allah's Word. There are those who respond, believe, and are affected by Allah's Speech; and there are also those who hear and then reject and turn away from what they have heard. This is the reason why Allah says about them: 'Had Allah known of any good in them, He would indeed have made them listen, and even if He had made them listen, they would but have turned away, averse (to the truth).' (*al-Anfal:* 23)

Therefore, O Muhammad, you have done what you have been commanded to do regarding them, and you have called them to guidance. You have given them gentle guidance, and also straightforward admonition, full of warning and threatening: '...but you cannot make hear those who are in graves' (*Fatir:* 22) because they refused to listen, Allah has likened them to the dead. Such being the case, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did, indeed, address the dead disbelievers at the well of Badr (where their corpses were thrown). He stood at it and called them by their names: 'O `Utbah bin Rabi'a! O Shaybah ibn Rabi'a! O Abu Jahl! Have you found what your Lord has promised you to be true? Indeed, we have found what our Lord has promised us to be true.'

When 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* heard this, he said: 'Are you talking to people who have rotted?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'By Allah, you do not hear what I am saying better than they, but they cannot reply.'(1) The meaning is that you cannot make them hear in a way that makes them accept guidance, just as you cannot make those in the graves hear because the time for hearing and accepting guidance ends with death.

But if Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not able to make those in the graves hear what, then, was his mission? Allah *the Exalted* afterwards says:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2874) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. According to this Hadith, `Umar Allah be pleased with him said: 'O Messenger of Allah, how can they hear and respond to you when they are rotting corpses?' He peace and blessings be upon him said: 'By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, you do not hear what I say any better than they do, but they cannot reply.' He then commanded that they be dragged away and thrown into the well of Badr.*

إِنۡ أَنتَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

You are only here to warn them [23]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 23)

The meaning here is: You are no more than a warner; that is, you warn people against sin and subsequent punishment. As if Allah *the Exalted* wanted to makes things easy for His Messenger so He specified to him his only mission. It was not for him to go beyond it and bring hardship upon himself to the extent of almost destroying himself. If Allah wanted all mankind to be believers, they would have come obediently and submissively, like all other creatures. ‘Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the heaven a sign for which their necks would remain humbled.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3-4)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ بَشِيرٗا وَنَذِيرٗاۚ وَإِن مِّنۡ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٞ ﴿٢٤﴾

We have sent you with the Truth as a bearer of
good news and warning – every community has
been sent a warner [24] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 24)

The truth is that which is firmly established and does not change. Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a perceptible example to clarify the difference between truth and falsehood, saying: ‘He sends water from the sky that fills riverbed to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools: in this way Allah illustrates truth and falsehood— the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to mankind remains in the earth— this is how Allah makes illustrations.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17)

We have already explained the relationship between truth and falsehood in a way that is relevant to our time, and we said: Right is right. Even if falsehood takes on the appearance of truth for some time, it is like froth that is quickly blown away by the wind to reveal the truth underneath and the obvious reality.

Allah’s saying to His Prophet: ‘Indeed, We have sent you with the truth…’ (*Fatir:* 24) is an indication that he is the Last of all the Messengers and

Prophets after whom there will be no prophet. No part of the guidance he brought will be changed. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come with the firmly established, unalterable truth. No one can come and amend anything after him. The bane of humanity now is that they rule their era and the developing circumstances of reign and authority based on infringements against Islamic law. So when we come across a law infringing on the principles of Islam, we hear them say that it is an inevitable evolution. These people are the advocates of modernizing the religion, meaning the subjugation of the religion to suit the age.

This means that the changing times are the legislator, when in fact it should be the age that receives the legislation of the heavens, and the progress of the age should be based on its light and guidance. Certainly, progress that is based on the guidance of the heavens is the superior progress, being provided by the Lord *the Most High* Who truly knows what, is good for you, and He will never be corrected. As for what a man, like you, legislates for you, even when he views it as good for you, it is good as far as his own point of view is concerned and according to the limit of his knowledge. So it will inevitably be deficient and lacking. There will always be someone who will come along afterwards to abrogate it and correct it.

This is why we have seen how even non-Muslims find it necessary, due to issues in their own lives, to seek recourse in adopting Islamic solutions in order to overcome their problems. Of course, they do not adopt the Islamic rulings because they love them. They only do so because they cannot find a solution elsewhere. One of these issues is that of divorce, which they often surround it with doubts and use it to criticize Islam. In Italy now they are establishing divorce, not because Islam legislated it, but because their problems cannot be solved without it.

This issue clarifies for us the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘It is He Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religions – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe partners to Allah.’ (*at-Tawba:* 33)

We were asked during some of our travels about how the Quran says: ‘...to make it prevail over all religions – however hateful this may be to those who ascribe partners to Allah...’ (*at-Tawba:* 33) and in another verse: ‘...but

Allah will perfect His Light – however hateful this may be to the disbelievers' (*as-Saff:* 8), so how is Allah's Light spread in all its fullness while there are many other religions besides Islam, and they still exist, and most of them have greater numbers of followers than Islam and are more powerful? These people have understood '...but Allah will perfect His Light...' (*as-Saff:* 8) to mean that all people will become Muslims. But if that was the case, then Allah *the Exalted* would not have said: '...however hateful this may be to the disbelievers' (*as-Saff:* 8) and '...however hateful this may be to those who ascribe partners to Allah' (*as-Saff:* 9) accordingly, the True Lord *the Most High* is affirming the presence of *Shirk* (associating others with Allah in His Divinity or worship) and disbelief alongside Islam. The intended meaning is that Allah will spread His Light in all its fullness, despite people's disbelief and *Shirk* throughout history, yet still no people will ever be able to put out this light. It will remain, and it will triumph and prevail over their laws such that they will not find solutions to their issues except in this light (religion).

Allah says: '...as a bearer of good tidings and a warner...' (*Fatir:* 24). A bearer of good tidings (*bashir*) is the person who gives good news of good things before they take place. A warner (*nadhir*) warns against evil before it takes place. '...And there was no nation but that there had passed within it a warner.' (*Fatir:* 24) Again we have the meaning of negation and exception, as in 'You are only a warner' (*Fatir:* 23). The meaning is that there was never a community that has not had a warner who came to it and passed away.

A community (*ummah*; literally a nation) is a group of people united by a common land, customs, or creed. One of the meanings of the word (*ummah*) is also found in Allah's saying: 'Verily, Ibrahim (Abraham) was an *Ummah* (a leader having all the good righteous qualities) (*an-Nahl:* 120) meaning although Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was but one individual, yet he was described as a 'nation' by uniting in his person all virtues and attributes of goodness such that if all the good qualities of one community were gathered together, you would find them all in Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him*.

Since all the previous communities had a warner sent to them, Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon him* is the last warner. Why? Because the situation of the world in the past was that people were dispersed and cut off from one another due to the difficulties of communication. Communities lived in isolation and there was no contact between them. So every environment had its own frailties, shortcomings and traditions, and then a messenger would come to treat the maladies of his people only. Our master Nuh (Noah *peace be upon him*) came to guide a people who were worshipping a number of idols: *Wudd, Suwa`, Yaghuth, Ya`uq* and *Nasr*. Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* came to treat the social ill of homosexuality among his people, and so forth.

As for our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he came at a time in which people from all over the world were coming into contact with one another, civilizations and societies were crossing paths, and thus a flaw in one community would become a flaw in all other communities. This intermingling has increased to such an extent that today we can see and hear what is happening in the far corners of the earth in a second. We can learn about the weaknesses and deficiencies of other people; as though they are the same as those in our own country. Therefore, all maladies and defects have converged into common problems, and the entire world has become one global environment (with global solutions). This is why the message of Islam is a global message, and our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sent to all of mankind.

Then the True Lord *the Exalted* says:

وَإِن يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ جَآءَتْهُمْ
رُسُلُهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَبِٱلزُّبُرِ وَبِٱلْكِتَٰبِ ٱلْمُنِيرِ ٢٥

If they call you a liar, their predecessors did the same: messengers came to them with clear signs, scriptures, and enlightening revelation [25] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 25)

Here the meaning is: O Muhammad, take an example for yourself from your brothers, the previous messengers. They were all denied and rejected. This has been a habitual attitude. You, O Muhammad, are not a new kind of messenger. Earlier, we have explained that Allah *Glorified is He* does not send a messenger unless corruption is widespread and the treatment for it is lacking. The people there are no longer the souls who are self-reproaching (*al-nafs al-lawwama*), which holds one back from disobedience and sin. And the society is no longer a place that enjoins the right and forbids the wrong. This means that there is nothing restraining the individual or the society from evil; both are not immune. The society itself has turned corrupt in total, and its people have agreed upon error and misguidance. At this point the heavens must intervene with a new messenger who comes with a miraculous supporting sign that is appropriate to the age he is living in.

Allah says: 'And if they belie you, those before them also belied…' (*Fatir:* 25). A messenger only comes to confront corruption in a society, and it is natural that he will face people who are astray, or are transgressors, or tyrants and oppressors who benefit from this corruption. If they deny him, then Allah explains this fact saying: 'And thus We have placed within every city the greatest of its criminals to conspire therein…' (*al-An'am:* 123).

The word *bayyinat* (clear incontestable signs) in Allah's saying: '…their Messengers came to them with clear signs...' (*Fatir:* 25) signifies obvious concrete proofs that attest to the veracity of the speaker and his mission of conveying his Lord's Message to mankind. This constitutes *mu`jizah* (a miracle or extraordinary occurrence). A messenger comes with a miracle so that it can be evidence of the veracity of his mission as a prophet and messenger of Allah. Miracles are not the objective of the message. The objective of the message is only to convey the divine laws and doctrine.

The meaning of: '...and with the Scriptures (*the Zubur*, pl. of *Zabur*)...' (*Fatir:* 25) is the heavenly books that have been sent down, such as the *Suhuf* (Scrolls) of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the Torah of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the Injil (Gospel) of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. However, the heavenly books specified here in this verse are the Zabur (the Psalms) and the Quran '…the Scriptures (the Zubur), and the book giving light (the Quran)…' because the Zabur, which was the Book revealed to Prophet Dawud *peace be upon him* was distinguished by the fact that it was inscribed in clear prominent letters. This is why it was firmly established; it was not written in ink, which would have allowed it to be erased, for example. It resembles the engraving of stones, and it is what they call *(al-awima)*.(1)

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(1) *Az-Zabidi said in Al-Basa'ir: 'The book of Dawud (David) peace be upon him was called Zabur because it descended from the heavens in a written form. It was also said that it=*

The light-giving Book is the Noble Quran because it provides the moral light that illuminates for humanity the path of life and directs and guides their movement. If the sun is the physical light that guides your physical movement, the Quran is the spiritual light that guides whoever believes in it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْۖ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٢٦﴾

And afterwards I seized the disbelievers – how terrible My punishment was! [26] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 26)

This is Allah's constant Way of dealing with the messengers; that He punishes those who disbelieve in them and oppose them. Have you ever seen a prophet that Allah surrendered or allowed to be defeated in the face of his own people who were opposing him? Allah has promised His messengers victory and support, as He *Glorified is He* has said: 'Verily, We (Allah) will indeed make victorious Our Messengers and those who believe in this world's life…' (*Ghafir:* 51).

Allah *the Most High* also says: 'and that Our hosts, they verily would be the victors' (*as-Saffat:* 173). For this reason, if you see a soldier of Allah being defeated in some areas and not being victorious, know that one of the requirements of being a soldier is missing. The first requirement of being Allah's soldier is obedience. If a soldier disobeys Allah's Commands, he must be defeated. This is why we say the Muslims were victorious at the Battle of Badr even though they were a small group: '…How often a small group overcame a mighty host by Allah's Leave' (*al-Baqara:* 249).

Less than a year after Badr the battle of Uhud took place, and while it is true that the Muslims were not defeated, they were not victorious either. This is because they lost control of the battle when the archers went against the command of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by abandoning their positions and descending in order to gather the spoils. Allah wanted to discipline His sincere servants so it was necessary to give them this severe shock, and thus they saw the result of their disobedience.

= *was the name of a book that was confined to rational wisdom and contained no legal rulings. It can be called a (kitab; book) when it contains rulings.' See the book of Taj Al-`Arus by Az-Zabidi, under the root (za-ba-ra).*

This is why we say that Islam was victorious at Uhud, even though the Muslims were not victorious because if they had been victorious in spite of disobeying Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* afterwards the Muslims would have slighted the importance of the Messenger of Allah's Commands. They would have said: 'We disobeyed his commands, but we were victorious at Uhud.' There is no doubt that this unsettled result was to let the Muslims know the importance of obeying the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and taking him as an example.

Likewise, in the Battle of Hunayn, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* saw the great number of Muslims and said: 'We will not be defeated today for lack of numbers,' and they were ten thousand fighters. Allah wanted to shatter this arrogant illusion of the Muslims, and thus the disbelievers had the upper hand from the beginning of the battle until the Muslims were surrounded. But Allah's Mercy did not forsake them and once again encompassed them, as if He only wanted to correct this mistake on their part and did not want them to be struck with defeat.

When we reflect on the meaning of 'Then I seized the ones who disbelieved…' (*Fatir:* 26), we find that the verb *akhadh* (seize or take) indicates the strength behind taking and pulling by force which grips the entire entity that is being seized or taken. When talking about human beings, the phrase 'he took so and so' means 'he drove him' or 'he dragged him,' for example, by his clothes, and kept him in his grip. But if you say, 'Allah seized him,' then learn that Allah's seizing of wrongdoers is severe; He is Almighty, All-Capable. Therefore, Allah says next: '...and how [terrible] was My Reproach (*nakir*)!' (*Fatir:* 26) that is to say: My Reproach and rejection of what they have done. The word *(nakir)* expresses something that evokes your condemnation and anger.

So what do you think about a people whose ways have been condemned by Allah and He becomes angry with them? He will most certainly seize them in a way that satisfies His devoted servants and those who believe in Him.

Allah's saying: '...and how [terrible] was My Reproach' (*Fatir:* 26) means: 'Tell me, O Muhammad, have I punished them with what they deserve'. This meaning is also clear in His saying: 'Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. And when they passed by them, they would exchange derisive glances. And when they returned to their people, they would return jesting. And when they saw them, they would say, “Indeed, those are truly lost.” But they had not been sent as guardians over them. So today those who believed are laughing at the disbelievers, on adorned couches, observing. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid [this Day] for what they used to do?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36)

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِۦ ثَمَرَٰتٍ مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَٰنُهَا ۚ
وَمِنَ ٱلْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌۢ بِيضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَٰنُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

Have you [Prophet] not considered how Allah sends water down from the sky and that We produce with it fruits of varied colours; that there are in the mountains layers of white and red of various hues, and jet black [27]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 27)

We notice that the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* is reminding us of some of His Blessings upon us, and he then He states some of the requirements. This is how He puts your heart at ease with beneficence towards you so that you respond to His requirements. The True Lord *the Exalted* is reminding His servants through this cosmic sign; the sign of water being sent down from the sky, after He has made it clear to His Prophet that He will severely seize the disbelievers. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* is saying to His Messenger: Put aside the issue of these disbelievers, as I am able to punish them. Instead, reflect on this cosmic sign: ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky...’ (*Fatir:* 27).

His saying: ‘Do you not see that Allah…’ (*Fatir:* 27) means have you not watched or witnessed because everyone can see the water descending from above and the sky is everything that is above you, sheltering you. ‘Have you not seen how your Lord…’ (*al-Fil:* 1) means: Have you not known? This was regarding the issues that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not witness, as in Allah’s saying: ‘Have you (O Muhammad) not seen how your Lord dealt with the Owners of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1)

It is known that our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see the Event of the Elephant, but his Lord addressed him with ‘Have you not seen how your Lord…' (*al-Fil:* 1) to indicate that whatever Allah informs him of is more reliable and truthful than that which is witnessed by the eye.

Water being sent down from the sky means coming from its direction; otherwise the sky is something else because rain only comes down from the clouds that are close to the earth. We say: The issue of water being sent down from the direction of the sky appears to be a natural matter, as water vapour collects itself in the sky in the form of clouds that are saturated with water. The water has a weight which causes it to descend due to the gravitational pull of the earth. This is why Allah *the Exalted* mentions the descent of rain and immediately after the bringing forth of vegetation '...and We produce thereby fruits of varying colours...' (*Fatir:* 27). But if you said that the descent of rain from the sky is a natural phenomenon, there could be doubt that it is an act of nature; if so, is the bringing of the earth back to life and the bringing forth of plants that have different fruits and colours also an act of nature?

The phrase '...sends down...' (*Fatir:* 27) indicate the highness of what is being sent down and the lowness of where it is going; even if the opposite is the 'sending down' process is from a lower place to a higher place, as in Allah's saying: '...And We sent down iron, wherein is mighty power (in matters of war) and benefits for the people...' (*al-Hadid:* 25). Iron is actually extracted from the depths of the earth, but Allah has called it 'sending down' (*inzal*) because what is intended is the bringing forth of something from on high to that which is below regardless of whether the direction is from above or below.

We witness the process of water being sent down from the sky, but we do not witness the evaporation process that takes place on the surface of the water on earth. It then ascends to the stratums of the upper atmosphere where clouds are formed by way of condensation. Mankind knew nothing about these processes before the advancement of science, but we learned about the process of water filtration.

As for the process of bringing forth plants and fruits that have different colours, this is something that is clear and witnessed in gardens and fields. We all see the amazing and wonderful colours and different shapes that are limitless in number and variety because the colours of the spectrum, if they are the original colours, can produce an unlimited number of colours. If you take the colour black, for example, and add to it a drop of brown, for example, you will have another colour. If you add two drops, you will have a third colour; this is how colours are unlimited. We can see this now in the manufacturing of fabrics. Their colours have become so numerous, with endless shades and patterns. Therefore, we say that colours are limitless entities.

It is for you to reflect upon the intersecting of colours and their harmony in a flower or rose in a garden, and you will see in their colours a dazzling wonder. The seed is one and the same, the earth is one and the same, the water is one and the same, but from all of this there emerge these splendid shapes and harmonious colours. This is because a phenomenon bears the fingerings of the one who authored it. If the author is of limited power, the traces of his power are also limited. And if the Author possesses unlimited power, the traces of His Power are also unlimited. The True Lord possesses Absolute and Infinite Power, and so are His Traces and Fingerprints in creation.

You will notice in the context of this glorious verse that when the True Lord *the Exalted* speaks about sending down rain from the sky, He says: '...[He] sends down rain from the sky...' (*Fatir:* 27) using the third person pronoun. But when He talks about the bringing forth of fruits, He says: '…We produce thereby fruits of varying colours...' (*Fatir:* 27). So, He shifts to the first person plural pronoun Arabic word *nahnu* (Royal, used by Allah in the Quran to indicate majesty and power) to indicate grandeur and majesty. Why? Because sending down water from the sky is not the objective in and of itself; it is not what is important. Evidence for this is that rain may descend on marshland areas where it is of no benefit. As for the process of bringing forth fruits, this is the important process for which Allah sends down rain. This is the reason why He mentions it using the first person plural pronoun – royal 'We' – that emphasizes majesty and sublimity because the True Lord wants to exalt Himself in reference to this act, as in His saying: 'We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We ourselves will guard it.' (*al-Hijr:* 9)

We know from convention that events differ if the producer is different. If the event is brought about by a single individual, it will be according to the ability of this single individual. If a group of people support one another, it will be according to the level of this mutual support. Thus, when we hear a king or ruler issuing laws that govern people, he says, ‘We the President of the Republic’ or ‘We the King of Egypt’ or ‘We the Sultan of such and such...’ because issuing laws is not an individual matter that is established by the ruler or king alone, and it is not pronounced in his name. His subjects participate with him in this, and it is pronounced in the name of all of them.

Therefore, we find the True Lord *Glorified is He* using the first person plural pronoun when talking to us about one of His Actions. But when He talks about His Essence, He uses the singular pronoun, such as: ‘Verily, I – I alone – am God; there is no god save Me. Hence, worship Me alone, and be constant in prayer, so as to remember Me!’ (*Ta Ha:* 14)

The sending down of rain is a process that has one form, but bringing forth of vegetation encompasses wide varieties of forms. The water that is sent down from the sky is one and the same, yet the effects of the water are numerous. This fruit is yellow, this is white, this is red etc. Therefore, this process of bringing forth deserves an appropriate exaltation.

However, is the bringing forth of fruits happens directly or involves first the bringing forth of the plants that bear the fruit? The answer is that there is first the bringing forth of the plants that bear fruit. The True Lord *the Exaltd* defines for us a thing in terms of its ultimate purpose, which is the fruit. This fruit comes in different colours despite having one environment and being irrigated by the same water. When you reflect on the various colours of fruits, you see in them Allah’s Absolute Creative Power. These colours are not just for the sake of outward appearance and ornamentation, but rather, there is wisdom that the Creator *Glorified is He* intended for them. One of them is that these colours attract fertilizing insects.

If you contemplate these colours, you will find that they are varied even within one colour. Have you not noticed that the white of snow is not like the white of clothes, or the white of lime? This is why people describe colours by saying ‘bright white,’ ‘brilliant yellow,’ ‘blood-red,’ and ‘dark green.’

After talking to us about one of His signs in plants, the True Lord *the Exalted* talks to us about inanimate bodies: ‘…And in the mountains, are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] raven-black.’ (*Fatir:* 27) In inanimate bodies we can also see colours; for example, when we split rock formations to extract what is in the earth. You can see granite, marble, and carnelian in different colours as well.

The word ‘...tracts...’ (*Fatir:* 27) is the plural of *juda* (narrow tract or streak), and it is a dividing line between two things. You must have seen a striped wild donkey and the extent to which these streaks are symmetrical. You can also see an example of this in the strata of mountains as they have different shades of red and white.

The meaning of ‘...raven-black…’ (*Fatir:* 27) is extremely black. The word *gharbib* (raven-black) is used to describe very dark black colour and is ascribed to the raven due to its intense blackness.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of the categories of plants and inanimate objects, He reminds us that these differences are also found in mankind and animals, and these present the categories of existence. He *the Most High* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَٱلدَّوَآبِّ وَٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَٰنُهُۥ كَذَٰلِكَ ۗ إِنَّمَا
يَخْشَى ٱللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ ٱلْعُلَمَٰٓؤُا۟ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

That there are various colours among human beings,
wild animals, and livestock too? It is those of His
servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe
of Allah. Allah is almighty, most forgiving [28]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 28)

Therefore, difference is found in all categories because the creation is based on Allah’s Absolute Power. All humans, despite their multiplicity, are different. This wondrous marvel indicates Allah’s Absolute Power. Creation is not based on one mould from which copies are made. When you look at a man you might say that he resembles so and so, but at a closer look, you are bound to notice some differences. Thus we can see that Allah’s Absolute Power necessitates that there be variation in all the categories of existence: inanimate objects, plants, animals, and humans.

The meaning of *dawab* (moving living creatures) is every creature that moves on the earth aside from mankind and cattle which includes cows, sheep, camels, and goats.

Allah says: '...It is those of His servants who have knowledge who stand in true awe of Allah...' (*Fatir:* 28). Awe (*khashya*) is fear that is combined with hope. It is one of the actions of the hearts within the souls of those who possess true knowledge of Allah. You may fear your enemy, for example, but you have no hope in him. Allah is the only One Who, when you fear Him, you also hope in Him, while feeling love for Him. For this reason, they said: There is no refuge from Allah except in Him.

Knowledge can refer to Islamic legal knowledge, which is the knowledge of Islamic rulings: the permissible, the impermissible, the obligatory, the supererogatory, the recommended etc. Or else it can refer to cosmic knowledge. This verse is stated within the context of discussing signs in the cosmos, and nothing regarding legal rulings is mentioned prior to it. We therefore say that what is meant by *`ulama'* (scholars or knowledgeable people) here is cosmic and natural phenomena researchers and scientists. It is apt that these people, more than anyone else, should fear Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* because they are most aware of the signs in nature, as found in inanimate objects, plants, animals, and humans. Of all people, they are the most capable of discovering the secrets that Allah has embedded in these signs of creation.

The cosmic phenomena of the universe are evidence of the One Who necessarily exists. It is the beginning of finding the Creator *the Most High* and believing in Him. For this reason, we find in the Quran numerous verses such as the following: 'And of His Signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking of His Bounty. Indeed in that are signs for a people who listen.' (*ar-Rum:* 23)

If knowledge is decisive and evidence-based with respect to the field of Islamic legal knowledge, which the True Lord *the Exalted* has sent down to us in the form of the Islamic law and defined for us its limits, without us having in say in it because Allah has perfected it and protected it against distortion. This is because people's likes and dislikes differ, and the True Lord points this out when He says: 'But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the heavens and the earth and whoever is in them would have been ruined…'

(*al-Mu'minun:* 71). As for knowledge of the cosmos, the Creator *the Exalted* has left it open to the intellects to research into it, derive conclusions, and compete excel in it. Some countries even steal such knowledge from one another.

The bane of the modern age is that the scholars of Islamic law poke their noses into natural phenomena, or the scholars of natural phenomena poke their noses into legal rulings. We have already witnessed an example of this. When some scientists said that the earth was round and that it revolved around the sun, some Islamic legal scholars rushed to accuse them of disbelief. This is a serious error. They should have considered the rule that the True Lord *the Exalted* has set down to protect against professing views according to personal opinions and whims because the shape of the earth and its movement is a cosmic matter that has nothing to do with the permissible and the impermissible.

In this regard, the True Lord *Glorifierd is He* says: 'Ask those who have knowledge if you do not know.' (*an-Nahl:* 43) The people of knowledge in the sciences of Islamic law and jurisprudence are different from the people of knowledge in the natural sciences. They must both respect the specialist knowledge that each of them has in their respective fields. The scholars of the Islamic law must not forget that it is the scholars of natural science who are uncovering for us Allah's secrets in creation, They are the ones who engender in our hearts the certainty in the proofs for belief in the One Who necessarily exists, the One from Whom the rulings of the permissible and the impermissible are issued.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* created the universe in a pristine state. If you were to enter an untouched wilderness – that no one had yet entered and it was still as it was when Allah created it – you would not find any filthiness or unpleasant smells and there would be no litter or broken twigs and so forth. You would see it in perfect tidiness, order, and harmony. Any residues from it would be food for other animals, so it is self-cleaning.

I remember that we saw in the valley of Fatimah in Saudi Arabia a spring of water irrigating the valley around it, and in one of the little streams we saw some small fish, all of the same size like tiny ears of corn. So I asked the owner of the garden: 'Does this fish grow?' He said: 'No. It stays like this, and it only comes after we have thrown some leftover food in the water. It appears to feed on it and then vanishes.' It is as if it has the specific task of cleaning the water. When we went back to Egypt, we found the same fish at the Marine Life Museum performing the same task: cleaning the fish tanks of waste.

That is why we say that there is no corruption in nature until man interferes, based on the evidence that created things untouched by man continue to follow a strict and controlled system that has no imbalance. For this reason, when you see a food crisis, know that it is the result of human error, or the result of negligence in extracting the earth's resources.

Therefore, the scholars of law must not involve themselves in natural sciences, and the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this when he forbade them from pollinating the date palm, and the date palm did not bear fruit. When the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw this, he took it upon himself and said: 'You know best about the affairs of your world.'(1) This means that the issues of natural science as well as laboratory and empirical issues are matters in which legal rulings have no say, but the bane of scholars today is that they do not stick to what they specialise in.

That is why Allah specifically means the scholars of the natural sciences here because they are the ones who are most capable of closely examining Allah's secrets. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made His universe replete with secrets that suit the development of the age and the passing of time. The secrets that man knew in the Stone Age, for example, are not the ones that are known in the modern age. Allah's wisdom wanted to set a date for each of His secrets to manifest itself such that the secrets would not be manifested all at one time and leave man facing the rest of time without anything new.

When you reflect on this matter, you find that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has made the essentials of man's life manifest, and He then left the self-evident matters that people know for them to make progress in them. Man, for example, makes use intuitively of the fact that water flows downwards, and this intuition developed such that man began to receive water in his house via taps, after he had been transferring water from wells and rivers, undergoing difficulty in the process. However, when he puts his intellect to use, regarding the self-evident truths of the universe, he advances and reaps the rewards of this advancement. That is why we find that the most difficult scientific and electronic theories are taken, in the beginning, from self-evident truths. We say in the science of engineering that you prove the veracity of the one-hundredth theorems by using the ninety-ninth theorem, and so on until you reach the first theorem. It is based on the self-evident truths of the universe over which there is no difference of opinion.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2363) from the Hadith of Anas ibn-Malik Allah be pleased with him that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him passed by a people who were pollinating and said: 'If you did not do this, it would flourish.' He said the result was shisa (bad dates) and he passed by them and asked, 'What happened to your date palm?' They said: 'You said such and such.' He said: 'You know best the about the affairs of your world.'*

That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* is always calling us to think, reflect, and ponder, etc. What human beings have achieved today of appliances and modern equipment, such as the washing machine, the refrigerator, the television and so forth, are nothing other than the results of thinking, which promoted self-evident truths until they arrived at where they are now. Whoever wants to stop and think about this advancement will see Allah's Power in the continuing growth of industries and their development from decade to decade, so let one go to Detroit and see Henry Ford's exhibition which shows the development of industry from the sewing needle to the rocket.

The universe therefore contains secrets that are discovered by man, and every secret has a date on which it will appear, either by way of man's research or even by chance. It is from Allah's Grace that atheists, when they discover some of the secrets of the universe, say, 'We discovered', and none of them say 'We invented'. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* turned them away and diverted them from using the word 'invent' and distorted their tongues so that they would not have audacity before Allah. Gravity, for example, has existed since the creation of the heavens and the earth and the role of man is that he discovered this secret. That is why we say to the one who says, 'I invented': 'This is a lie. What is correct is to say that you discovered'.

In His saying: '...verily Allah is Almighty, Much-Forgiving' (*Fatir:* 28), 'Almighty' means that He is not overcome, and He is Much-Forgiving towards you if you avoid neglect and deficiency whilst extracting Allah's secrets in the universe. He will forgive you if you make a mistake in one of your experiments, as someone will come afterwards and correct it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَتۡلُونَ كِتَٰبَ ٱللَّهِ وَأَقَامُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنفَقُواْ مِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡ
سِرّٗا وَعَلَانِيَةٗ يَرۡجُونَ تِجَٰرَةٗ لَّن تَبُورَ ٢٩ لِيُوَفِّيَهُمۡ أُجُورَهُمۡ
وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضۡلِهِۦٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ غَفُورٞ شَكُورٞ ٣٠

Those who recite Allah's scripture, keep up the prayer, give secretly and openly from what We have provided for them, may hope for a trade that will never decline [29] He will repay them in full, and give them extra from His bounty. He is most forgiving, most appreciative [30] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 29 - 30)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the natural sciences, and that it is a means of acquiring awe of Allah and knowing His secrets in the universe, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to divert our attention and warn us: You who are being tried with the natural sciences! It is making you forget your duty to take from Allah what will please you. Allah *Glorified is He* then talks about the way: '[It is] they who [truly] follow Allah's revelation...' (*Fatir:* 29), and this is referring to legal knowledge and the reminder that protects people from their contradicting likes and dislikes.

The meaning of '[truly] follow Allah's revelation' (*Fatir:* 29) is that they articulate it with their tongues and they follow it with their hearts; 'and are constant in prayer' (*Fatir:* 29) which means worship that involves all the limbs, and 'and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them as sustenance...' (*Fatir:* 29) means spending on others and especially financially as this is an evidence of the generosity of the soul in what it gives out, and its love for spending and giving secretly and openly. By spending on others, the soul is perfecting the attributes of goodness, and the actions of the heart and the actions of the limbs are coming together to obey Allah.

His saying: 'out of what We provide for them as sustenance' (*Fatir:* 29) means that spending on others is not from your private wealth, but rather, it is from Allah Who has provided you, and made you appoint someone else over it. Your expenditure is nothing but a means and the means in existence are veiled by the Hand of Allah in giving.

Those who spend on others from what Allah has provided them, secretly and openly '...it is they who may look forward to a bargain that can never fail.' (*Fatir:* 29) Spending on others for Allah's sake is commerce with Allah '...that can never fail.' (*Fatir:* 29) That is, it will never result in loss, but it is only gain. You, when you spend on the needy and when you feed the hungry, you are only endearing Allah to His creation. Have you seen that if one of the kings in the like of this world has slaves, is he not responsible for feeding them and satisfying their needs? This is from the characteristics of greatness in him. Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the Creator of these poor people, and He is the One Who summoned them to exist, and Allah *Glorified is He* is responsible for providing for them.

Therefore, when you feed them you are carrying out Allah's duty, and you are endearing Allah's creation to Allah. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* causes a created being to have affection for another created being, it is as if He is saying, 'My slave was assisting Me with regards to My creation' because Allah *the Exalted* summoned the creation to exist, and He took it upon Himself to make them free of want. When a wealthy servant of His assists a poor person, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying: 'My servant was helping his brother out of his own capacity, so I must help him out of My capacity', and the servant will never be more generous than his Creator. How can the servant show compassion when he has not created anything, and he has not summoned anyone to exist, and the Creator *Glorified is He* does not show compassion?

If you ask, 'Since the True Lord has summoned the creation to existence, then why does He not guarantee for them a noble life in which they will not need compassion from someone else'? We say: 'The True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to distribute the seeds of love and mutual compassion amongst His creation. He wanted a Muslim community based on love, co-operation, and solidarity. Then Allah *Glorified is He* promised the generous and giving that He would deal with them according to His Generosity and Giving'.

This is the trade which will never fail with Allah. Failure is ruin, i.e. corruption, and it can afflict trade in one of two ways; either corruption in profit, in the case that your trade tires you and you do not make any profit, or corruption in profit and in the foundation, meaning that you lose the foundation of the trade. As we know, man does not trade except with the intention of making profit. That is why the people of knowledge and the people who trade with Allah say, ‘If you want to establish trade, then trade with the Generous One Who will grant you what you can be generous with, and after that He will reward you for it’.

That is why one of the righteous people was smiling in the face of a supplicant, and he was being friendly when he said to him: ‘Welcome to the one who has come to carry my provision to the Hereafter without charging a fee’.

`Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was once asked (1): ‘O Abu Al-Hassan! I want to know myself. Am I from the people of the life of this world, or am I of the people of the Hereafter?’ He said: ‘If you smile at the one who gives you more than the one who takes from you, then you are from the people of the life of this world because man loves the one who builds what he loves’.

One of the Companions *Allah be pleased with him* told Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘I hate death.’ The Messenger *peace be upon him* asked him: ‘Do you have wealth?’ The Companion said: ‘Yes.’ The Messenger *peace be upon him* asked: ‘Do you give out from it in charity?’ The Companion said: ‘No.’ Prophet Muhammad said: ‘Indeed wealth loves its owner, and if you love it in the Hereafter then you will love to die for the Hereafter. And if you love it in the life of this world then you will love to remain with it in the life of this world.’(2)

The use of the tool of negation *(lan)* (will not) requires comment. *Lan* negates the present and the future. Because man may die before realizing the good fruits of giving, and before seeing the result of his charity His Lord puts him at ease that this trade will never fail, and its reward will wait for him in the Hereafter. His saying: ‘secretly and openly’ (*Fatir:* 29) means to do so in any case. As for giving out in secret, the wisdom behind this is that it distances the one doing it from ostentation and boastfulness, and it also hides the shame of the one receiving it. That is why some wealthy people who wanted to show compassion to a poor or needy person, would devise a strategy to preserve the honour of this person such as hiring him to do some simple work and then giving him money as his wage for the work, not as charity. Some of them would be very polite and give to the needy in the form of a loan, all the while intending charity, and maybe this meaning is affirmed, and he said to his companion: 'Our Lord is helping you discharge this payment but you (are consuming it).'

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(1) The story of the question of a man to one of the pious people: ‘Am I among the dwellers of heaven or hell?’” and the response of `Ali *Allah be pleased with him*.

(2) *Mentioned by Abu-Hamid Al-Ghazali in Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din (2/232) that a man said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, why do I not love death? He said: ‘Do you have wealth?’ He said: ‘Yes, O Messenger of Allah.’ He said: ‘Send your wealth forward, for indeed the heart of the believer is with his wealth. If he sends it forward he will love to be with it, and if he leaves it behind he will love to stay behind with it.’ Al-Hafizh Al-Iraqi said: ‘I do not stand by it.’*

Some of them would give charity in the form of a trust, but say to the recipient: 'If this amount becomes easy for you and becomes something surplus to your requirements, then give it to someone who needs it, and tell him to give it in turn to whomever needs it after him, and this is how the charity increases and reaches whomever Allah wills from those who need it.

This is about charity in secret. As for giving openly, the wisdom behind it is that it represents an impediment to one such that they are not miserly or stingy with what they have. Likewise, it safeguards the one doing it from the tongues of people and safeguards his honour in case people engross themselves with his affairs and say: 'He is miserly even though he is wealthy'. Also, giving out openly can be considered a model and example for others to give.

The scholars say: What is intended by secret charity is that which is supererogatory, and it is better for this to be veiled. By 'openly' they mean obligatory charity (*zakat*) because to do things openly is what is desired in worship, as is the case with prayer, for example. The one who reflects will find that *(zakat)* is more manifest than prayer because it is easy to perform the prayer at its designated times. As for *(zakat)*, you may be capable, but you are miserly and stingy in giving.

And when you spend on others who do you spend on? Do you spend on the needy who is powerless or the one who is unsuccessful? Who is the one who made him unsuccessful? Allah did, and therefore you are charged with the task of spending on the one that He has made unsuccessful, and helping him, primarily so that he does not harbour ill feelings towards you and hopes for more goodness from you because your goodness will help him. That is why we see the people in the countryside, for example, grieving and crying when the cow of so-and-so or the buffalo of so-and-so dies. Why? This is because it was providing milk for the poor and cultivating the land of the needy.

The second wisdom is more exalted than the first, and it is that spending on the powerless makes him stay firm in his opinion of his Lord and safeguards him from opposing the preordainment of Allah, Who withholds from him and gives to others, and constricts his affair while expanding that of others.

Spending on the powerless makes him feel that he is more fortunate than the one who is wealthy, and why not when it is He who takes care of his sustenance without any exertion from him and without any fatigue? And the wealthy one comes to his door to give his right regarding Allah's wealth, and therefore the scholars say: 'The poor person is a condition for the wealthy person's faith, but the wealthy person is not a condition for the poor person's faith'. It was for this reason that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us by saying: '...a man who gives in charity and he conceals it such that his left hand does not know what his right hand is doing.'(1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* when He talks about those who do good and take it upon themselves to do more than what Allah has required them to do, and more of what Allah *Glorified is He* has specifically required them to do, says, '[But,] behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past: they would lie asleep during but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19)

The 'due share' (*haqq*) is not known and it is the voluntary charity. As for the obligatory *zakat* which is the right of the poor from the wealth of the rich, this is mentioned in the descriptions of the believers found in the chapter of *Sa`ala*[1] (*al-Ma`arij*), as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and in whose possessions there is a due share, acknowledged [by them], for such as ask [for help] and such as are deprived [of what is good in life]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 24-25).

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1031) from the Hadith of Abu-Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The full Hadith is as follows: 'Seven people are shaded by Allah's shade on the Day when there is no shade but His: The just ruler, the youth who is raised in the worship of Allah, a man whose heart is attached to the mosques, two men who love each other for the sake of Allah and they meet for His sake and they part for His sake, a man who was beckoned by a woman of beauty and rank and said "'I fear Allah."', a man who gives in charity and he conceals it such that his left hand does not know what his right hand is doing and a man who remembered Allah in private and his eyes overflowed with tears.'*

So, for this reason *zakat* is not hidden but given openly because fulfilling a right that the poor have over you such that some of the jurists of Andalusia *may Allah be pleased with them* said: ‘If I were in charge of an affair over the believers, and I saw someone denying the poor person his right according to the payable amount that I had stipulated for him, I would cut his hand off.’ Consider this legal reasoning, and how they equated withholding the right of the poor with theft.

Regardless of whether the spending on others is done secretly or openly, it must be performed with a sincere intention, as our Lord teaches us in the Qudsi Hadith: ‘Sincerity is a secret from My secrets. I place it in the hearts of the slaves that I love. It does not appear to any angel so that he can write it down and neither to Satan so that he can corrupt it.’[2]

By giving, you are working with Allah, and Allah is free of need, Glorified and Bountiful is He. He does not diminish your right and your trade with Him *Glorified is He*; without a doubt, He will always be lucrative. That is why He says afterwards: ‘...look forward to a bargain that can never fail.’ (*Fatir:* 29)

Likewise, our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us about ostentation that can nullify our deeds, and corrupt them and prevent the one doing them from having any reward on the Day of Resurrection, and it is said to him: ‘You did it so that they would say this and that about you.’

Our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us against our deeds becoming like those of the disbelievers, of whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a

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(1) *This is the chapter of al-Ma`arij, and has been called the chapter of Sa`ala (he asked) because it begins with His words: “‘One who is minded to ask, might ask about the suffering which [in the hereafter] is bound to befall those who deny the truth. [Know, then, that] nothing can ward it off”’ (al-Ma’arij: 1-2).*

(2) *Mentioned by Imam Al-Ghazali in Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din (4/271) from the Hadith of Al-Hassan Al-Basri, and it is mursal (discontinued). It was declared weak by Al-Hafizh Al-Iraqi and Al-Hafizh ibn-Hajar Al-`Asqalani.*

mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39) Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'since He will grant them their just rewards, and give them yet more out of His Bounty...' (*Fatir:* 30), i.e. they will take the reward of their deeds and their giving as compensation from Allah, and then He will increase them graciously from His Bounty. They say this increase is that their intercession of whom they love is accepted, and if they intercede for one of their loved ones Allah accepts their intercession. Why? Because they had previously helped the poor and needy from amongst Allah's servants, and Allah honours them because of this and favours them as they had favoured His servants.

'...He is Much-Forgiving, Exceedingly Grateful.' (*Fatir:* 30). You may ask: 'Why does this verse end with Allah's Name the Much-Forgiving when it is discussing righteous actions such as reciting the Book of Allah, establishing the prayer, and spending on others for Allah's sake. Which of these actions would require forgiveness'? They say: 'Forgiveness is mentioned here because when the servant does one of these good actions some snobbery or conceit may come in to it and this would tarnish the righteous action, so Allah forgives him for it so that he can take the full reward for it'. We have the Hadith in which our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O Allah! I seek refuge in you from an action with which I sought Your Face but it contained that which does not befit you.'(1) And His saying: 'Exceedingly Grateful' (*Fatir:* 30).

Shakur is the hyperbolic form of *shakir* (grateful), and Allah *the Exalted* in His Exaltedness is grateful to His slave, and indeed He goes to great lengths in His Gratitude because the servant, if we look at the apparent picture, is assisting his Lord by providing for those whom Allah has been asked to provide for. That is why Allah thanks him and does not diminish his right, even though in reality it is Allah who is helping him.

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(1) *Included by Ibn-Rajab Al-Hanbali in his book, Jami` Al-`Ulum Wa Al-Hikam (p.27), from the supplication of Matraf ibn-`Abdullah, saying: 'O Allah! I seek Your forgiveness for that which I repented to You for, and then returned to it. I seek Your forgiveness for that which I made for You upon myself, and then I did not fulfil it. And I seek Your forgiveness for that which I claimed I had done seeking Your Face but my heart mixed in with it that which I did not know.'*

When you read: ‘...He is Much-Forgiving, Exceedingly Grateful’ (*Fatir:* 30), you know that Allah *the Exalted* is thanking you and all you can do is thank Him *Glorified is He* and then He will give you more of His blessings. We are therefore standing before everlasting gratitude that will never be cut off and giving that will never be depleted

وَٱلَّذِىٓ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ مِنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ هُوَ ٱلۡحَقُّ مُصَدِّقٗا لِّمَا
بَيۡنَ يَدَيۡهِۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِعِبَادِهِۦ لَخَبِيرُۢ بَصِيرٞ ﴿٣١﴾

The Scripture We have revealed to you [Prophet] is the Truth and confirms the scriptures that preceded it. Allah is well informed about His servants, He sees everything [31]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 31)

Wahi (Inspiration) in its general meaning is to state something secretly. If it is done outwardly and openly it is not considered inspiration. If you, for example, had a group of guests at your house you could merely look at your servant and he would understand what you want without anyone noticing you. This is considered *wahi*. Likewise, the *wahi*, meaning the revelation, does not come openly. It is a concealed matter between Allah *the Exalted* and His Messenger *peace be upon him*.

Wahi is different depending on who is giving it, whom it is being given to and what is being given. Allah gives *wahi* to inanimate objects, as He did to the earth: ‘as you Lord will have inspired her to do’ (*az-Zalzala:* 5), and He gave *wahi* to the bee: ‘and [consider how] you Lord has inspired the bee: “Prepare for yourself dwellings in mountains...’ (*an-Nahl:* 68). He also gave *wahi* to human beings without messengers: ‘...We inspired [thus] the mother of Musa (Moses): “Suckle him...”’ (*al-Qasas:* 7), as He gave *wahi* to the disciples of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

As for the revelation *wahi* that has to do with commandments, this is *wahi* from Allah and it is addressed to the messengers along with a method for them to communicate it from Allah. It is not just an idea or an inspiration like the aforementioned *wahi*.

Wahi also includes that which the devils give to their associates. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘...and, verily, the devils whisper unto those who have made them their own that they should involve you in argument [as to what is and what is not a sin]; and if you pay heed unto them, lo! You will become [like] those who ascribe divinity to other beings or forces beside Allah' (*al-An'am:* 121), and His saying: 'and [know that] all of the Book with which We have inspired you...' (*Fatir:* 31), i.e. from the Quran, or from the Preserved Tablet is '...the very truth...' (*Fatir:* 31), i.e. the Quran is the epitome of truth. We already know from our grammar lessons that the subject is always definite because you are going to give it a predicate. You ca not give a predicate to something that is unknown. For example, you say, 'Zayd is diligent'. Zayd is known to you and you have given him the predicate of being diligent. Therefore, the predicate is that which is not known and that is why it is always indefinite. If you said: 'Zayd is the diligent one', this would mean that he has acquired diligence to such an extent that the attribute of diligence can only be applied to him.

Likewise, in His saying: '...the very truth...' (*Fatir:* 31), i.e. the attribute of truth can only be applied to it, and it is the epitome of truth. The truth is that which is firmly established and does not change and neither is it inconsistent. In case someone misunderstands and thinks that as long as the Quran is the truth all of the previous books must be false, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations...' (*Fatir:* 31). For the Quran is true and it confirms the divine books that preceded it, as they are also true because the Quran confirms them and does not contradict them.

In another place Allah *the Exalted* says, '...determining what is true therein...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is giving the Quran the force of being the final seal for the perfection of humanity, for if we have a ruling from the previous books and then a ruling from the Quran is revealed, we take the latter because it has abrogated the former for a benefit that is required by the age and the nature of the commandments that are gradated according to the states of nations.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* was distinguishing His Messenger *peace be upon him* with a distinction that was not fulfilled for any of the other messengers, and it is that the previous messengers were conveying to their nations what had been revealed to them, but Allah allowed Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* to convey from Allah and authorised him to legislate for his people. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Apostle gives you [thereof], and refrain from what he forbids you...' (*al-Hashr:* 7). This verse is a refutation of those who say that you should follow the Quran but not the *Sunna*. This ancient and modern falsehood that we hear people calling to from time to time; these people do not know that the text of the Quran forces them to follow the *Sunna* and respect it since it clarifies the Quran and explains it, and elucidates what it contains. If not, then what do they have to say about His words: '...Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Apostle gives you [thereof], and refrain from [demanding] anything that he withholds from you...' (*al-Hashr:* 7)?

If I were to ask you: 'Is there an article in our constitution that stipulates the dismissal of an employee if he is absent from work for fifteen days'? This article is not in the constitution, but it is a law that was set by a group of specialists who were authorised to do so such that a committee was formed for civil servants and those who work in the government so that laws could be set by authorisation, and likewise the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was authorised by His Lord *the Exalted* to legislate for his nation and make things clear for them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...for, behold, of [the needs of] His servants Allah is Fully Aware, All Seeing.' (*Fatir:* 31) The Fully Aware refers to the One Who knows the secrets of all things as they really are. The All Seeing refers to the One from Whom nothing is hidden and not even a mustard seed is concealed from him, for you may know something but not see it. The True Lord *Glorified is He* brings the Fully Aware and the All Seeing together many times in the Quran, as in this verse(1), or the Subtle and the Aware[1] because awareness requires sight, and sight requires subtlety. The Subtle, as we have said, is the one who Penetrates deeply into things and no one prevents him. That is why we say: 'Indeed, the most violent and destructive of things are the subtle tiny things that can' not be seen by just the eye and for some time now we have been calling them microbes'. Now we have the virus, and I believe it is more subtle and tinier than the microbe, and it is more destructive.

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(1) Likewise, His statement: 'And how many a generation have We [thus] destroyed after [the time of] Nuh (Noah)! For none has the like of you Lord's Awareness and Insight into His creatures' sins.' (*al-Isra':* 17), and His statement: 'Behold, your Lord grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, unto whomever He wills: verily, Fully Aware is He of [the needs of] His creatures, and sees them all.' (*al-Isra':* 30) and His statement: 'Say, "None can bear witness between me and you as Allah does: verily, Fully Aware is He of His creatures, and He Sees all [that is in their hearts]."' (*al-Isra':* 96).

We have clarified this matter by using the example of someone who builds a house and he wants to keep harmful animals and insects out, so he puts iron netting, for example, on the windows. However, this netting must be made to suit the subtlety of the thing that you fear. That which keeps out a wolf will not keep out rats, and that which keeps out rats will not keep out flies and mosquitoes, etc.

Therefore, the tinier something is the harder it is to catch and the more cautious one has to be because it penetrates deeply into the most constricted of things and reaches you without you noticing it.

We understand from His saying: '...for, behold, of [the needs of] His servants Allah is Fully Aware, All Seeing' (*Fatir:* 31), that it is only Allah *the Exalted* who is capable of legislating for His servants what is appropriate for them in every time and place. That is why there were various divine books for differing maladies, but when people of the world began to make contact and communicate with one another the Quran came to determine the truth of what remains in those books.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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[1] The Subtle and the All Seeing are found together many times in the Quran: 'No human vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all human vision: for He alone is Unfathomable, All Aware.' (*al-An'am:* 103); 'are you not aware that it is Allah who sends down water from the skies, whereupon the earth becomes green? Verily, Allah is Unfathomable [in His wisdom], All Aware.' (*al-Hajj:* 63); '"O my dear son"(continued *Luqman*), "verily, though there be aught of but the weight of a mustard-seed, and though it be [hidden] in a rock, or in the skies, or in the earth, Allah will bring it to light: for, behold, Allah is Unfathomable [in His wisdom], All Aware."' (*Luqman* 16) and 'How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Yes! He alone is Unfathomable [in His wisdom], All Aware!' (*al-Mulk:* 14)

ثُمَّ أَوۡرَثۡنَا ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱصۡطَفَيۡنَا مِنۡ عِبَادِنَاۖ فَمِنۡهُمۡ ظَالِمٞ لِّنَفۡسِهِۦ وَمِنۡهُم
مُّقۡتَصِدٞ وَمِنۡهُمۡ سَابِقُۢ بِٱلۡخَيۡرَٰتِ بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَضۡلُ ٱلۡكَبِيرُ ٣٢

We gave the Scripture as a heritage to Our chosen servants: some of them wronged their own souls, some stayed between [right and wrong], and some, by Allah's leave, were foremost in good deeds. That is the greatest favour [32]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 32)

The 'Book' is the Quran. Therefore, this inheritance was after our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and it is evidence that the phase after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is the phase of inheriting the Book and the *Sunnah*. The scholars inherit it from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'The scholars are the inheritors of the prophets, and the scholars do not leave *dinars* and *dirhams* as inheritance, but rather, they leave knowledge, and whoever takes it has taken much good.'(1)

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was the one conveying and teaching during his life, but after his death Allah passed this duty on to the scholars. The meaning of '...We have bestowed...as a heritage...' (*Fatir:* 32) is that we asked them to do with it what someone would do if they had inherited money because the one who inherits money will put it towards something of general benefit, and this is also the objective of the Message. Allah *the Exalted* says, 'And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you...' (*al-Baqara:* 143); so we are the inheritors of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and whoever learns a ruling from him must convey it, for the Messenger *peace be upon him* is a witness to whoever it is conveyed to and likewise his nation will be witnesses to the people that they convey it to.

The meaning of '...We chose...' (*Fatir:* 32) is that Allah selected and preferred over all the other nations. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* divides these people into three categories: '...and among them are some who sin against themselves...' (*Fatir:* 32). They sin against themselves by neglecting their duty towards the book that they have inherited, and they don not act with it as they should act. Indeed, they may commit enormities, and we seek refuge with Allah from such a thing.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/196), Ibn-Majah in his Sunnan (232) and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (2641) from the Hadith of Abu-Darda` Allah be pleased with him.*

This category wrongs itself, because it denies itself reward. Every commandment requires that you do something easy, and you are rewarded abundantly in return, so when you are neglectful regarding something that is easy to do then you are, without a doubt, wronging yourself.

And '...some who keep halfway [between right and wrong] ...' (*Fatir:* 32) mean is that they act some of the time, so they mix righteous acts with others that are sinful.

And '...some who, by Allah's leave, are foremost in deeds of goodness...' (*Fatir:* 32). May Allah make us from amongst them. The word *sabiq* (foremost) indicates that there is a contest and a competition, i.e. those who compete to arrive at an objective before anyone else, and the people of this category are competing in good deeds.

His saying '...We chose...' (*Fatir:* 32) indicates that proclaiming Allah's Oneness (*tawhid*) has a price, belief in Allah's Messenger *peace be upon him* has a price and acting in accordance with what Allah's Messenger *peace be upon him* has a price. And if there are amongst these chosen people some who oppress themselves due to negligence or indeed by committing sins, they are still considered to be amongst the chosen ones because they say that there is no god but Allah, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not equate between those who accept this word and those who reject it. 'There is no god but Allah' is my fortress. Whoever says it enters my fortress.'(1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions that these believers who have inherited the book have two attributes: '...of Our servants as We chose...' (*Fatir:* 32); he describes them as being chosen and as being His servants.

Therefore, the Book was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his nation inherited the book after him, and it is the spreading of his message. That is why Allah has entrusted this nation with conveying the way of Allah to all of mankind until the Hour is established, and no one other than us has been entrusted with this.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn`Asakir in what is mentioned by his Encyclopaedia of Sections of the Hadith (2/82), Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has indeed taken it upon Himself to preserve this Book, and he did not entrust anyone else to preserve it as is the case with the books that preceded the Quran, and as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Verily, it is We who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the prophets, who had surrendered themselves unto Allah, deliver judgment unto those who followed the Jewish faith; and so did the [early] men of Allah and the rabbis, inasmuch as some of Allah's scripture had been entrusted to their care; and they [all] bore witness to its truth. Therefore, [O Children of Israel,] hold not men in awe, but stand in awe of Me...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44).

The meaning of '...entrusted to their care...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44) is that they were asked to preserve it, but they were negligent and forgot some of the verses, changed some of them and concealed others. Indeed, some of them came up with their own words and claimed that they were from Allah, but because the Quran is the final Book Allah is preserving it Himself, and He has not entrusted anyone else to preserve it.

If you ask: 'How can the one who wrongs himself be from the chosen ones when he is committing sins and possibly major sins'? We say: 'By the simple fact that the servant says, "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger," so he is chosen, and with these words Allah has chosen him over the disbelievers, even if he disobeys after that'.

When The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions a sin and makes it a crime he decrees a punishment for it, and it is an indication that such a thing will take place. For example, Allah has declared theft to be a crime and He has decreed a legal punishment for it. He has declared fornication to be a crime and He decreed a legal punishment for it. This indicates that such things do take place in a Muslim society. As for lying, for example, there is no legal punishment and no penalty. We find in a Hadith that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked: 'Does a believer fornicate, O Messenger of Allah?' He said 'Yes'.

‘Does a believer steal, O Messenger of Allah?’ He said ‘Yes’. ‘Does a believer lie, O Messenger of Allah?’ He said ‘No’.(1)

It is as if fornication and stealing are to be expected from the believer, but lying is not expected from him. It is the furthest attribute from a believer. Why? They say: Because lying contradicts and goes against reality, and the believer does not lie because he says that there is no god but Allah. If he is a liar then how do we know that he is truthful when he says these words? It is as if lying destroys faith at its foundation. That is why Allah has not decreed a punishment for it because it is not conceived as an act of a believer.

Those who keep halfway are those whose good deeds equal their bad deeds, and mix righteous acts with other acts that are sinful. In another place Allah *the Exalted* says regarding this category: ‘and [there are] others – [people who] have become conscious of their sinning after having done righteous deeds side by side with evil ones; [and] it may well be that Allah will accept their repentance: for, verily, Allah is Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy.’ (*at-Tawba:* 102) The grammarians say that the word *`asa* (perhaps) indicates hope, and hope is mostly expectation and the possibility of something happening, as opposed to *laita* (if only) which is used for a wish. A wish is for something that is farfetched or impossible, and it is only an expression of love for the thing for which it is wished. It does not indicate hope.We have the words of the poet:

If only youth would return one day
so that I would inform it of what old age does(2)

We have already said that ‘perhaps’ indicates hope that something will be done, except that hope has levels and degrees some of which are more reliable than others. For example, if you had hope in a human being like you and you said: ‘Perhaps he will give me’. This is hope at a specific level in terms of the possibility of it being realised. If you said: ‘Perhaps I will give you’ in the first person, this is stronger and more reliable than the first. If you said: ‘Perhaps Allah will give you’ then this is the most reliable because it is hope in Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘... [and] it may well be that Allah will accept their repentance...’ (*at-Tawba:* 102). ‘Perhaps’ here is for hope that is realised. Therefore, this is one of the most hopeful verses that those who keep halfway and are negligent in their duty to Allah wait for.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Malik in his Muwatta` from the Hadith of Safwan ibn-Salim and classified as mursal*

(2) Most sources agree that this verse comes from Abu Al-`Atahiyah, and it is attributed to him by Al-Hafizh in *Al-Bayan Wa At-Tabyin Kitab Al-`Asa*, and also Abu-Hilal Al-`Askari in his book, *Diwan Al-Ma`ani* in the chapter on Youth and Old age and Ar-Raghib Al-Asfahani in *Muhadarat Al-Udaba`*, but Az-Zuzani attributed it to Hatim At-Ta`i in *Hamasat Ath-Zhurafa`*, in the chapter on Old Age and Seniority.

As for the one who competes in good deeds, he is the one who carries out a command and completes it, and does it in the most perfect of ways. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘...let all such aspire as [are willing to] aspire to things of high account.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26)

Consider, for example, what Allah *the Exalted* says regarding Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘and [remember this:] when his Lord tried Ibrahim (Abraham) by [His] commandments and the latter fulfilled them...’ (*al-Baqara:* 124).

This means that he fulfilled the commands primarily with conventional strength and then with mental strength and force. When Allah commanded him, for example, to raise the foundations of the House: ‘and when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the House...’ (*al-Baqara:* 127), what did He ask from him? What did he do? He told him to raise the foundations of the House, and in obeying this command, it would have been sufficient for him to build the foundations as high as his hands could reach, but he went beyond that and used his mental capacity. After he had fulfilled the command and carried it out he wanted to do more, and beautify the act beyond what had been required from him, so he brought a huge stone to use as a scaffold and he stood on it so that he could raise the building as high as the stone would allow him, and his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was helping him.

Likewise, in his youth, when he was tested with being burned, he was patient and trusted in Allah. When Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came and offered help, and he is the mediator between him and his Lord, he refused and said, ‘as for you, no’ meaning, ‘You connect me to Allah but you are not considered a mediator between me and my Lord’.

This is something amazing; a high level of faith and trust in Allah that leaves no room for any doubt or misgiving. That is why Allah saved him and suspended the norm for him. For his sake the law that fire burns was nullified: ‘…O fire! Be you cool, and [a source of] inner peace for Ibrahim (Abraham)!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69)

Consider the caution from the Lord of the command: ‘…O fire! Be you cool, and [a source of] inner peace...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69). That is why the scholars say that had the command been ‘be cold’ only, then it would have become lethally cold for him, possibly more severe than fire.

It should also be considered that this test happened to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* himself when he was still young, before he had children, he only had to worry about his own wellbeing. When he is blessed with a son, his main concern becomes the wellbeing of his son, and he loves him more than he loves himself, and he desires to give to his son what he could not do for himself. That is why they say that man does not like to have anyone preferred over him except for his son. Therefore, man’s devotion in loving his son is more than his devotion to himself.

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* after succeeding in his own personal test, Allah tested him with his son, and you know that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was given a son by Allah when he was old and had given up on having children. Then Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* came after long yearning from Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. The boy became a young man and reached the age at which he was old enough to assist his father, and then the command came from Allah that he should slaughter him. This command came in a dream, and dreams are open to interpretation, but Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not interpret and took it literally.

This test actually consists of four tests. The first is that he is to slaughter the son that came in old age and after a long wait. The second is that he is not being slaughtered by someone else such that this person would become an enemy to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. The third is that he is to slaughter him with his own hands. The fourth is that his son is to participate with him in this test and he cannot take him by surprise.

When Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was concerned with carrying out what he had been commanded to do he refused to take his son by surprise for a number of reasons. The first is so that he would not be accused of being harsh and hard-hearted. The second is so that his son does not have a different opinion of his father and accuse him of something that does not befit him. The third is so that his son can participate with him in the test and share in the reward, and in being pleased with Allah's judgement. That' is why he said to him: '...O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you: consider, then, what would be your view!...' (*as-Saffat:* 102)

It is as if he was seeking his opinion in the matter: '...O my father! Do as you are commanded...' (*as-Saffat:* 102). He did not say, for example 'Do what you want' because this is submission and obedience to the command of Allah *Glorified is He*: '...you will find me, if Allah so wills, among those who are patient in adversity.' (*as-Saffat:* 102)

This is how the two of them shared in the (Divine) pleasure, and in patience and in the reward. Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* grabbed victory in this test at the last moment, and this is why Allah *the Exalted* says, 'But as soon as the two had surrendered themselves...' (*as-Saffat:* 103), the son and his father '...and [Ibrahim (Abraham)] had laid him down on his face' (*as-Saffat:* 103) meaning that he intended to slaughter him, or he was about to do it: 'We called out to him: "O Ibrahim (Abraham)! You hast already fulfilled [the purpose of] that dream-vision!" Thus, verily, do We reward the doers of good: for, behold, all this was indeed a trial, clear in itself. And We ransomed him with a tremendous sacrifice.' (*as-Saffat:* 104 – 107)

When you reflect on this story, you find that The True Lord *Glorified is He* received these four tests with four gifts: He saved Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* from being slaughtered. He redeemed him with a tremendous sacrifice. Then He gave Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the glad tidings of Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* and from Ishaq (Isaac) came Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* and then He made all of them prophets as a bounty from Allah.

Allah says '... [and] this, indeed, is a merit most high!' (*Fatir:* 32) Yes, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is treating us with great virtue and He is giving us examples to make us love the religion. A good deed with Him is rewarded tenfold, or He increases it to seven hundred times, multiplying it over and over again, but a bad deed is treated like for like.

If one's good deeds outweigh one's bad deeds, then paradise is hoped for him, and if one's bad deeds outweigh one's good deeds, then he waits for the command of Allah. If He wills He will punish him out of His justice and make paradise his final destination and if He wills He will forgive him out of His Grace, and if he rushes to make sincere and heartfelt repentance, Allah will turn his bad deeds into good deeds.

We even have some witty people who say: 'If only I were of the people who commit major sins'. The knowers of Allah supplicate: 'O Allah! Treat us with grace and not with justice. Treat us with beneficence and not with the scale, and treat us with a smaller test and not with reckoning'.

Our Lord treats us with grace as is evidenced by the fact that He includes the one who wrongs himself and the one who keeps halfway amongst those of His servants that are chosen.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies for us this great virtue by saying:

جَنَّٰتُ عَدۡنٖ يَدۡخُلُونَهَا يُحَلَّوۡنَ فِيهَا مِنۡ أَسَاوِرَ
مِن ذَهَبٖ وَلُؤۡلُؤٗاۖ وَلِبَاسُهُمۡ فِيهَا حَرِيرٞ ﴿٣٣﴾

They will enter lasting Gardens where they will
be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls,
where they will wear silk garments [33]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 33)

You notice that '...gardens...' (*Fatir:* 33) is plural because there are numerous gardens, not just one. Gardens (of perpetual bliss) mean that they are permanently established and never-ending. These gardens are described with permanence because Adam *peace be upon him* had previously been admitted into the garden, but he left(1). As for the gardens of the Hereafter, they are permanent and everlasting and whoever enters paradise will never leave.

In His saying: '...will they enter, therein to be adorned with many bracelets of gold and pearls...' (*Fatir:* 33), you notice that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has mentioned the embellishments and adornments before the necessities, and this means that the necessities have already been taken care of. In the Hereafter, this embellishing will be of gold and silk, and this is prohibited for men in the life of this world, but in the Hereafter, it is something else.

The word bracelets is a broken plural that indicates more than ten and you will be adorned, if Allah so wills, in paradise with several bracelets that will cover your arm from the wrist all the way to the shoulder. It is known that a bracelet is used to adorn the wrist and women in the life of this world wear it to beautify themselves. Everything is according to what is possible such that some wealthy women wear expensive bracelets on their upper arm called *dumluk* (bangles) because of their extravagance.

It is amazing that we see some men receiving the ornamentation of the Hereafter ahead of its time but by other than the proper means. They wear bracelets; what are now called *al-insiyal*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has mentioned bracelets of gold as ornamentation because ancient kings used to wear them and adorn themselves with them. Khosrau had two bracelets, which have a story(2) in history. When Suraqa ibn Malik(3) became Muslim, he was very thin and his arms were like a goat's legs(4), and some of the Companions used to make fun of him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and*

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *may Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

(2) *The story of Suraqa ibn-Malik with Khosrau's bracelets.*

(3) *He is Suraqa ibn-Malik ibn-Ja`shim Al-Madlaji Al-Kinani, Abu-Sufyan, a Companion and was a tracker of footprints before Islam. Abu-Sufyan sent him out to track the traces of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him when he left for the cave with Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him. He became Muslim after the siege of At-Ta`if in the year 8 A.H. Nineteen Hadiths are attributed to him in the books of Hadith and he died in the year 24 A.H. Al-`Alam by Az-Zirikli, 2/80*

(4) *Abu`Abdullah Al-Husairi mentions in his book, Ar-Rawd Al-Mi`tar Fi Akhbar Al-Aqtar), whilst relating this incident, that Suraqa was a man who had a lot of hair on his forearms.*

blessings be upon him forbade them and said something the meaning of which would only be known afterwards: ‘How, when these – Suraqa’s arms – will be wearing Khosrau’s bracelets?’

The Muslims conquered Persia and gathered the spoils from Khosrau’s palaces and wealth and when the spoils were distributed the two bracelets were given to Suraqa. When 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* saw them in his hands he said: ‘The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke truthfully.’(1) These bracelets are ‘...of gold and pearls...’ (*Fatir:* 33), and we know that gold comes from mountains, whilst pearls are from the finery of the oceans.

Consider the precision of the Quranic rendition. When it talks about bracelets it employs the plural form that indicates more than ten, but when it talks about clothes it says: ‘...and therein to be clad in raiment of silk.’ (*Fatir:* 33) employing the singular form. Why? Because you do not need several clothes unless you have to protect yourself from cold or heat, and there is none of this in paradise, and they will say:

وَقَالُواْ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا ٱلْحَزَنَ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

They will say, ‘Praise be to Allah, who has
separated us from all sorrow! Our Lord is truly
most forgiving, most appreciative [34]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 34)

This is what the believers say when they are enjoying the blessings of paradise, for they do not forget the Giver of blessings *Glorified is He*. They praise Him, first because He legislated for them the way and brought them to this blessing. They praise Him because He granted them salvation, saved them from disbelief, and guided them to faith. Therefore, this praise is manifold.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala`il An-Nubuwwa (6/325) from the Hadith of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him that the fur of Khosrau was brought to him and placed in front of him and Suraqa ibn-Malik was amongst the people and he said ‘Give him the bracelets of Khosrau ibn-Hormazd and he put them on his hands and they reached his shoulders. When he saw them on the hands of Suraqa he said, ‘Praise be to Allah, the bracelets of Khosrau ibn-Hormazd are in the hand of Suraqa ibn-Malik.’. Ash-Shafi`i said Suraqa only wore them because the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said ‘Suraqa’ and looked at his arms: ‘It is as if I am seeing you wearing the bracelets of Khosrau.’*

The phrase '…all praise is due to Allah...' (*Fatir:* 34) is the last thing that those who are blessed will say in the Hereafter, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and their call will close with [the words] "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!"' (*Yunus:* 10)

It is from Allah's subtlety and affection towards His slaves that He teaches them how to praise Him *Glorified is He* and He teaches them this concise phrase that consists of a subject and a predicate: all praise is due to Allah. This is because people differ in their capacity for rhetoric and eloquence. Some people are very eloquent and well spoken, and can beautify their speech, whilst others are not able to do so at all. That is why Allah has taught us how to praise Him, with an utterance that is easy and simple for all.

This is also why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when conversing intimately with his Lord, would say: '...I cannot enumerate praise upon You. You are as You have praised Yourself.'(1)

We say that the phrase 'All praise is due to Allah' necessitates a never-ending sequence of praise. When you say, 'all praise is due to Allah' for a blessing the praise itself is a blessing that necessitates further praise, and it deserves praise, and this how the True Lord *Glorified is He* continues to be praised and the slave continues to praise, endlessly.

His saying: '...who has caused all sorrow to leave us...' (*Fatir:* 34) refers to the third blessing that deserves praise, for praise, primarily, is for blessings. Secondly, it is because you have praised Allah for His blessings and thirdly it is because Allah has removed sadness from you. *Huzn* (sadness) is everything that grieves or distresses you, or it is the persistence of man's sadness.

Man is happy and joyous about the blessings in the life of this world, but he is worried because he is scared of losing them. He lives in an anxious and distressed state, fearing that the blessings will desert him or that he will desert them by way of death. In the Hereafter people don not think about these things at all. Thoughts like this disappear when the life of this world disappears, as the reward in the Hereafter is permanent and everlasting. It will not desert you and you will not desert it.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (486) from the Hadith of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said: 'One night I realised that Allah's Messenger peace be upon him was not in bed, so I looked for him and my hand fell upon the soles of his feet whilst he was in prostration, and they were raised. He said: "O Allah! I seek refuge in Your pleasure from your wrath, and in Your pardon from Your punishment, and I seek refuge in You from You. I cannot enumerate praise upon you. You are as you have praised yourself."'*

And their saying: ‘...our Lord is indeed Much-Forgiving, Exceedingly Grateful’ (*Fatir:* 34) is as if they are accusing themselves of inadequacy; they have not given Allah His right as is befitting to Him. The blessings that they have are only because their Lord is Much Forgiving and He overlooks their inadequacy, and He is Grateful; He thanks them for their righteous action even though He helped them and enabled them to do it.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions their being established in the blessing that He has granted them. He says:

ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ ٱلْمُقَامَةِ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

He has, in His bounty, settled us in the everlasting
Home where no toil or fatigue will touch us [35]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 35)

The phrase ‘...has made us alight...’ (*Fatir:* 35) means that He has admitted us and made it a dwelling for us. It is an ‘...abode of life enduring...’ (*Fatir:* 35), i.e. the everlasting abode, which is paradise. Paradise is the everlasting abode. As for the life of this world, it is merely a bridge to the Hereafter, so it is not considered an enduring abode. This paradise that Allah has made as a dwelling for them is not because of their deeds. Rather, it is only out of Allah’s Bounty and Kindness. If you have any righteous action it is only because Allah decreed it for you, so all of it goes back to Allah’s Bounty.

Their saying: ‘...wherein no struggle can assail us...’ (*Fatir:* 35) means that in paradise, there will be no difficulty or discomfort. ‘...and wherein no weariness can touch us’ (*Fatir:* 35) refers to the fatigue and lassitude they experience from the moving of equipment. Man suffers in his efforts for the life of this world and is exposed to a lot of difficulties such that we say, ‘he strikes the earth’ which means that he strives as if it is an exhausting and burdensome process from which man returns exhausted and tired. This is weariness until one finds rest from it and relaxes. Then your strength and energy comes back to you and you can work again.

Another example of this meaning is His words: ‘and [who knows that] We have indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, and [that] no weariness could ever touch Us.’ (*Qaf:* 38)

Some of them say that *nasab* (struggle) is the tiredness of the limbs, while *lughub* (weariness) is the tiredness of the hearts, and what they mean by this is the anxiety that occupies man’s mind. The poet Shawqi *Allah rest his soul* said the following about this meaning:

a burden is not what the back can bear
a burden is only what is in the heart

When(1) `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked about the strongest of Allah’s soldiers on earth. He replied: ‘Distress, for indeed it takes hold of man, makes him anxious and deprives him of sleep.’ That is why they said: ‘anxiety overcomes sleep, because it is stronger than it’(2), and this anxiety persists until man becomes gaunt after being corpulent, as Al-Mutanabbi(3) said:

Anxiety seizes (4) the corpulent and makes him gaunt
And it makes the youth’s head go grey, and makes him decrepit

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(1) *The story of asking `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him about the strongest soldiers of Allah*

(2) *Mentioned by Abu-`Ali Al-Qali in Dhayl Al-Amali Wa An-Nawadir (2: 193) that `Ali ibn-Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him said: ‘The strongest of your Lord’s soldiers are ten: the unshakable mountains, the iron that cuts the mountains, the fire that melts the iron, the water that puts out the fire, the clouds placed between the sky and the earth that bring water, the wind that cuts through the clouds, and the son of Adam overcomes the wind by covering himself with a garment or something else and he carries out his need, intoxication overcomes the son of Adam and sleep overcomes intoxication, and anxiety overcomes sleep, so the strongest of Allah’s creation is anxiety.’*

(3) Al-Mutanabbi is Ahmad ibn Al-Hussain ibn Al-Hassan Al-Kindi, also known as Abu At-Tayyib, born in *Kufa* in 303 A.H. He wise poet whose lineage goes back to *Kinda* in *Al*-Kufa. He was raised in Greater Syria. He recited poetry as a boy and he claimed prophecy in the desert of Samawa and this is why he is called Al-Mutanabbi (the one who claims prophecy), but he repented and rejected being called this. He wrote poetry in praise of Kafur Al-Ikshidi in Egypt and then wrote poetry lampooning him. He also wrote poetry in praise of `Adu Ad-Dawla ibn-Buwayh in Shiraz. He was murdered in 354 A.H.

(4) The actual wording is ‘anxiety destroys’ as it is in the *Diwan* of Al-Mutanabbi from a poem he has in a complete metre *Bahr Al-Kamil* which consists of 26 verses, and the most famous verses in this poem are:
The possessor of intellect is miserable, even in paradise, by his intellect and his ignorant brother in distress lives carefree

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* has told us about the people of faith who are chosen from His servants, their reward in the gardens of perpetual bliss in which the soul rejoices and the glad tidings of the pious; Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the opposite, i.e. the warnings for the foolish. Mentioning the opposite makes the meaning clearer and it is one of the features of Quranic discourse. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire.' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14), and: 'Let them, then, laugh a little – for they will weep a lot in return for what they have earned.' (*at-Tawba:* 82)

Allah says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَهُمۡ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يُقۡضَىٰ عَلَيۡهِمۡ فَيَمُوتُواْ وَلَا يُخَفَّفُ
عَنۡهُم مِّنۡ عَذَابِهَاۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِي كُلَّ كَفُورٖ ٣٦

But those who reject the truth will stay in Hellfire, where they will neither be finished off by death, nor be relieved from Hell's torment: this is how We reward hardened disbelievers [36] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 36)

His saying '...the fire of Hell awaits them...' (*Fatir:* 36) means that they own it and it is their jurisdiction. For example, when we say that so and so has such and such, as if they are attached to it, and it is attached to them in a relationship of owner and owned. The moment they enter it, and we seek refuge in Allah, they will wish they could get out of it, even by way of death, as the poet said:

It suffices you as a malady that you see death as a cure
What agony can be harder than wishing for death?(1)

Yes, they desire liberation, even by way of death, but this is completely out of the question. This understanding is clear in another verse: 'and they will cry: "O you [angel] who rules [over hell]! Let you Lord put an end to us!" – [whereupon] he will reply: "Verily, you must live on [in this state]"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 77) because death is not a punishment, but rather for them, it is relief from a punishment that is more severe and longer lasting.

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(1) This is also a verse of Al-Mutanabbi and it is the opening line of a poem in his *Diwan*; part of a long metre, that consists of 47 verses.

I want to mention that some justices claim that the Book of Allah does not contain any evidence for stoning a free married woman who commits fornication, and they infer this from His saying regarding slave girls: '...they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable...' (*an-Nisa':* 25). They say that because the act of stoning is not divisible; there cannot be a half of stoning, so as long as stoning is indivisible then stoning cannot be. Our Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* inspired us and we said, 'all praise is for Allah'. We must first define what punishment is. Punishment means to cause pain to a living thing. If we gather together the verses in the Quran that deal with this issue then we have a clearer picture and a fuller understanding. In the story of Sulaiman's (Solomon's) hoopoe, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '[If so,] I will punish him most severely or kill him...' (*an-Naml:* 21). Therefore death, slaughter, or killing is not a punishment. Stoning is a means of causing death, and to cause death is to terminate punishment.

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to make something clear to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by way of this verse, and He distinguished between a ruling that is based on a text and a ruling that is based on the legislator's practical application because you can interpret a text, but you cannot interpret the Prophet's practical application, and it has been established that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did practice stoning.

And if the case was as the justice claims then the verse would be: 'they shall be liable to half of that which free married women are liable' without any punishment being mentioned. His saying: '...the penalty...' (*an-Nisa':* 25) means that it cannot be anything else. It is a clarification of what the half refers to, and it is a half of the punishment, but stoning is not punishment but rather a termination of punishment.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* told us about the state of the people of the fire: '...nor shall any of the suffering caused by that (fire) be lightened for them' (*Fatir:* 36). It is a permanent punishment that will not cease or be mitigated. We seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from such punishments, but a man may be tested in the life of this world by being arrested and beaten. He may become accustomed to the pain, to an extent, that his body may become numb. At that point, he may start feeling less pain with the same painful stimuli. People who are daily whipped with a lash, or many lashes, may feel the pain dwindling as more time passes. An Arab poet described this phenomenon truthfully when he said:

‘Whoever is insignificant finds shame bearable,
Wounding a corpse does not cause any pain.’(1)

Another poet also said:

‘I was struck with many arrows,
While arrowheads broke the other arrowheads’ (2)

Therefore, punishment may be mitigated in the life of this world. This is a result of a process known as habituation, which is the inability to feel repetitive and chronic stimuli, such as pain. This resembles the skin losing its connection to the brain. However, the punishment of the Hereafter will not be mitigated for the disbelievers, regardless of its period. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘For, verily, We shall cause those who denied the truth of Our messages to endure fire: (and) every time their skins are burnt off, We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste the suffering (in full). Verily, Allah is Almighty and Wise.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56) Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِخُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَآ أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَـٰلِحًا غَيْرَ ٱلَّذِى كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ ۚ أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم
مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَن تَذَكَّرَ وَجَآءَكُمُ ٱلنَّذِيرُ ۖ فَذُوقُوا۟ فَمَا لِلظَّـٰلِمِينَ مِن نَّصِيرٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

They will cry out loud in Hell, ‘Lord, let us out, and we will do righteous deeds, not what we did before!’ –‘ Did We not give you a life long enough to take warning if you were going to? The warner came to you, now taste the punishment.’ The evildoers will have nobody to help them [37] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 37)

The meaning of the words: ‘...they will cry aloud (*yastirikhoon*)’ (*Fatir:* 37) is that they will scream and shout while calling for help. The word *yastirikhoon* is the plural verb derived from the noun *surakh* (cry). This is when a person shouts while asking someone else to save them from a predicament, crisis, or punishment. An example of this is what we hear when a fire breaks out, Allah, forbid these fires from harming our loved ones, and the people find themselves shouting while crying for help.

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(1) This verse is also by Al-Mutanabbi. It is from a poem which starts with the verse: ‘There is no pride except for the one who is not wronged. Intelligent or belligerent, he does not sleep.’ And it is in his *Diwan*, which is of the light metre, *Bahr Al-Khafeef*, and it consists of 42 verses.

(2) Al-Mutanabbi has also used a similar verse in another poem of his *Diwan*, which is based on the abundant poetic metre *Bahr Al-Wafir*. This poem consists of 45 verses, and it precedes the meaning in this wording.

These disbelievers will cry aloud: ‘in that (hell-fire)’ (*Fatir:* 37). They will say, ‘O our Lord! Cause us to come out (of this suffering)! We shall (henceforth) do good deeds, not such as we were turned to do (before this time)!’ (*Fatir:* 37)

First, it is noticeable that they will use the words, ‘Our Lord’, while they are suffering in the hell-fire. They had rejected the concept of Allah’s Divinity and Lordship in their lives of this world. Indeed, they will acknowledge it in the hell-fire, but it will be too late. At that point, they will affirm, against themselves, that their worldly actions were not righteous. Their confessions will only be used as arguments against them, and their punishment will be continued without mitigation. If Allah *Glorified is He* were to respond to their request and return them to this worldly life again, would they act righteously according to their promises? Allah *Glorified is He* knows very well that they are lying, as He says, ‘And if they were sent back, they would return unto that which they are forbidden. Lo! They are liars.’ (*al-An‘am:* 28)

Therefore, it is just something that they say because of the difficulty in which they are. If they were to be sent back to this world, they will only resume their regular disbelieving ways. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* will respond to them: ‘Did We not grant you a life that was long enough, so that whoever was willing to take thought could bethink himself?’ (*Fatir:* 37) Allah *Glorified is He* has prolonged their lives in this world, and they had enough time and an ample opportunity to reflect upon their choices.

‘...And (withal,) a warning messenger had been sent to you!’ (*Fatir:* 37) This is the messenger who admonished and warned them against the consequences of their actions. Despite that, they did not take the matter seriously and did not correct themselves in due time. ‘Taste, then, (the fruit of your evil deeds): for evildoers shall have none to succour them.’ (*Fatir:* 37) They will only taste the punishment, and they will have: ‘...no supporter (*naseer*) to succour them’ (*Fatir:* 37). A *naseer* (supporter) is the one who is prepared to go into battles to defend you. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...no protecting friend nor any helper' (*ash-Shura:* 31). A *wali* (protecting friend) is a person who is close to you and defends you with hope, affection and compassion. The disbelievers in the hell-fire will have no protecting friend or helper in their situation. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَـٰلِمُ غَيْبِ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٣٨﴾

Allah knows all that is hidden in the heavens and earth;
He knows the thoughts contained in the heart [38]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 38)

This verse comes as an explanation of the verses that preceded it. Allah *Glorified is He* knows everything that is concealed in the heavens and the earth. He also knows the secrets of the hearts, as well as their hidden contents and intentions. He knew the intentions of the people of the fire, and He knew that if they were sent back to the life of this world, they would have resumed their evil ways. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* will leave them in that severe situation and will not send them back to this life, as this worldly life will not be repeated. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَـٰٓئِفَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ فَمَن كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُۥ ۖ وَلَا يَزِيدُ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ
كُفْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا ۖ وَلَا يَزِيدُ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٣٩﴾

It is He who made you [people] successors to the land. Those
who deny the truth will bear the consequences: their denial
will only make them more odious to their Lord, and add
only to their loss [39] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 39)

The meaning of the word *khala`if* (inheriting successors) is that Allah *Glorified is He* created human beings as successive generations that inherit one another. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'I am about to place a successor in the earth' (*al-Baqara:* 30) referring to Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*. That is why we said that Allah *Glorified is He* has granted us some of His attributes so that we can carry out our duties on this earth. Our power to act is from Allah's Power. If we have wisdom in our behaviour, then it is from Allah's Wisdom, and so forth. This is the meaning of the concept of *khilafah* (succession) because a human being will find that everything which he can essentially do has been granted to him by his Creator. None of his power or nature is intrinsic.

We previously stated that, when you stand up from your seat, you are able to perform that action without knowing what took place in your organs and muscles, and how the commands were issued to these muscles to move. In reality, this is one of the attributes of the Creator and He has granted you a portion of it. The evidence is that He has already deprived other people of this ability, to make it clear to you that your power is not intrinsic in your body. Therefore, do not be deluded by it.

Scientists have imitated human movements to make robots and bulldozers. A single mechanical movement from the machine requires several commands and movements by their driver, who needs to press on a specific button for each movement. You do not have to do anything like this to move the various parts of your body. If you want to carry out a movement, you simply will it and your organs and limbs cooperate with you. They obey your commands without you having to contemplate the involved processes. If one of Allah's creatures can carry out such movements without commanding any limb or organ of their body, what do you perceive about the Creator's Absolute Might *Glorified is He*? Do you deny that He can say to anything 'Be!' and it exists, following his Will?

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'His command alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be!", and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) When you want to move, you do not command any of your organs because you do not know which ones to command. In addition, you do not know what happens inside these interconnected organs, muscles and limbs to carry out this movement. That is why the Creator has arranged you in a way such that your limbs act merely according to your will. When Allah *Glorified is He* commands things with the word, 'Be', He knows the precise mechanisms and instruments that are going to move.

The Creator did not give you complete command over any of your limbs. He only subjected them to you and subjugated them to your will, but you cannot guarantee that they will obey your commands. In some diseases, the person orders his limbs to move and they disobey his orders. On the other hand, everything obeys the Creator's command.

Before summoning a human being into existence, Allah *Glorified is He* created their subsistence on earth before actually creating them. Additionally, Allah guaranteed that these essential forms of sustenance will be sufficient until the Day of Resurrection. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* left their intellects to work and discover what is necessary for life to be luxurious and comfortable.

Therefore, a vicegerent of Allah *Glorified is He* on earth has no choice but to receive Allah's Commandments with obedience and compliance. If they disbelieve after these blessings, they should know that: '…denial will fall back upon those who disbelieve' (*Fatir:* 39). Disbelief (*kufr*) means that a person did not obey Allah's Commandments. The Arabic word *kufr* means to cover something, so disbelieving in Allah *Glorified is He* is to cover and deny His Existence. That is why we previously said that disbelief is an indicator of the existence of faith because if faith in Allah *Glorified is He* never existed, there would not have been any disbelief.

In addition to disbelief in Allah *Glorified is He* there is also disbelief in the bounties and responsibilities that He has granted us. Some people disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* by forgetting Him the One Who provided these blessings for them. They may have also been idle and indolent by setting aside the exploration and extraction of these blessings from the depths of the earth. This leaves the blessings in places where people cannot benefit from them. Disbelief in these blessings also includes not fulfilling Allah's rights regarding them, and concealing such bounties from the deprived people who direly need them.

The famines and food crises that the world is suffering from today are natural consequences of disbelieving in Allah's blessings, either by being lazy and refraining from exploring them, or by extracting them from the earth while being miserly and stingy towards the poorer people. For instance, we lived for a long time in a narrow river valley without trying to explore the resources of the desert. Even when we started to farm the desert lands, we cultivated luxurious cash crops instead of cultivating the essential sources of our food. Now, we find our markets full of oranges, bananas, grapes, cantaloupes and strawberries, while we beg for a loaf of bread and beseech others for the actual necessities of our lives.

Therefore, the punishment here follows the poor nature of the work. ‘Denial will fall back upon those who disbelieve’ (*Fatir:* 39). The penalty of the disbelievers in Allah *Glorified is He* will be punishment in the Hereafter. The penalty of the disbelievers in Allah’s blessings will be hunger and humiliation at the hands of other people. If a man is humiliated by someone else, he will never fulfil a divine command or prohibition, and he will never be concerned with any religion or way. May Allah *Glorified is He* have mercy upon our grandparents who said, ‘The more you consume food that comes from your axe, the more you speak from your head’.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, clarifying the end result of disbelief: ‘…for (persistent) denial of this truth only adds to the disbelievers’ loathsomeness in their Lord’s sight, and thus, their denial of this truth does but add to the disbelievers’ loss’ (*Fatir:* 39). Yes, disbelief will increase Allah’s contempt for the disbelievers because they denied their Lord, Creator, Provider, and the One Who granted their blessings. Any disbelief in one of these attributes will lead to hatred and contempt from Allah *Glorified is He* and this contempt will increase as the person persists in their disbelief. Then, that person will be at a ‘loss’ (*Fatir:* 39), and what loss is more than disbelieving in Allah *Glorified is He*? The loss here is massive because it involves the destruction and loss of all good in the life of this world and the Hereafter. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says,

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ شُرَكَآءَكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَرُونِى مَاذَا خَلَقُوا۟ مِنَ
ٱلْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ أَمْ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُمْ كِتَٰبًا فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَتٍ مِّنْهُ ۚ
بَلْ إِن يَعِدُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ بَعْضُهُم بَعْضًا إِلَّا غُرُورًا ﴿٤٠﴾

Say, ‘Consider those “partners” of yours that you call upon beside Allah. Show me! What part of the earth did they create? What share of the heavens do they possess?’ Have We given them a book that contains clear evidence? No indeed! The idolaters promise each other only delusion [40]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 40)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was told to ask the disbelievers: ‘Have you seen (and considered) those beings and forces to whom you ascribe a share in Allah’s divinity, (and) whom you invoke beside

Allah?' (*Fatir:* 40) This question is intended to order the disbelievers, 'Tell me about these partners you worship besides Allah'. It is not intended as a simple question asking whether they have seen their false deities. Instead, the verse is demanding any credible information that these disbelievers had, which forced them to worship the false deities that they were accustomed to worship besides Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted them to judge their dimness in this matter.

The words 'Show me what it is that they have created on Earth' (*Fatir:* 40) mean, 'Tell me about anything they have created on this earth'. '...or do (you claim that) they have a share in (governing) the heavens?' (*Fatir:* 40) means, 'Did they assist Allah in creating the heavens?' and 'Have We ever revealed them a divine book on which they could rely as evidence (in support of their views)?' (*Fatir:* 40), means, 'Is there a book that permits idolatry for you, as polytheists, and is an argument that supports your polytheism'?

Allah *Glorified is He* explained this matter to us in another verse in the Quran, where He says, 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves; and neither do I (have any need to) take as My helpers those (beings) that lead (men) astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) Allah *Glorified is He* does not only negate their partaking with Him in the creation, but He negates their mere witnessing of their creation. They have no knowledge of creation, nor do they have any connection to it. They are not able to describe how the skies and the earth were created, nor how they, themselves, were made.

Then He says, 'Nay' (*Fatir:* 40), which is a word that negates what was said before it and confirms the judgement that is made after it. '(the hope which) the evildoers hold out to one another (is) nothing but a delusion' (*Fatir:* 40); what the evildoers hope of one another is nothing but a delusion. A deluder is an impostor who fashions falsehood in the form of truth, in order to attract people to it, and he embellishes it in order to delude them with it.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* also says in another verse: 'O man! What is it that lures you away from your Bountiful (*kareem*) Lord?' (*al-Infitar:* 6) This verse means: 'What has deluded you into disobeying Him? What encouraged you to go against His commands'? It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is teaching us the answer in the same words of the question. He used the word *kareem* (bountiful) because it is His Bounty and Generosity that has lured us away from Him.

The meaning of the word ‘Nay’ establishes that all these disbelievers’ concepts that were mentioned are false. Their false deities and idols have not participated in the creation of anything. In addition, no divine revelation has come to these polytheists to act as a proof in their favour. Their disbelief is the result of their own deceptive ornamentation, and the reality is that they are deluding and deceiving one another with these false concepts. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُمْسِكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ أَن تَزُولَا ۚ وَلَئِن زَالَتَآ إِنْ
أَمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنۢ بَعْدِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا ﴿٤١﴾

Allah keeps the heavens and earth from vanishing; if they did vanish, no one else could stop them. Allah is most forbearing, most forgiving [41] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 41)

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* alone is the One Who keeps the skies from collapsing. He keeps the heavens and the earth from ceasing to be. If the Creator were to leave them, no one else would be able to hold them from wreaking disorder. The words: ‘...after He (Allah *Glorified is He*) will have ceased to do so’ (*Fatir:* 41) confirmed that this matter belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* alone. He has no partner or adversary in this universe. This concept arises from the essence of the verse: ‘Say, “He Allah, the One.”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1)

This is because Allah *Glorified is He* created the skies and the earth without any visible pillars or supports to carry them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘(He) created the skies without any supports that you could see’ (*Luqman:* 10). There is no one besides Allah *Glorified is He* who raised this blue dome in this way without pillars. Indeed, the utmost progress that humans have achieved in construction was the building of bridges that are several metres long without any pillars in the middle. To do that, they use supports that are stronger at the ends, and this is called a suspension bridge. The construction of these bridges is not even close to the magnificence of the sky. The sky, as we have previously said, is everything that is above you. Allah *Glorified is He* is holding the sky and everything that is in it, such as the stars, moons, celestial bodies, and constellations. He also keeps the earth from shaking with its inhabitants and troubling them.

Scientists tell us that gravity holds these bodies together, but if there is a gravitational force that pulls us towards the earth, divine power has still maintained other objects in their orbits away from colliding and destroying the earth during our lives. The system of the universe is perfect. Everything in the skies and the earth has what it needs to preserve its equilibrium and prevent it from escaping its path.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…for if they should ever deviate, none could uphold them after He will have ceased to do so' (*Fatir:* 41). These words carry the meaning of negation, as in Allah's saying: '...none are their mothers except those who gave them birth' (*al-Mujadala:* 2). The verse is concluded with Allah's saying: '(But) verily, He is Ever-Forbearing, Much-Forgiving.' (*Fatir:* 41) What is the relationship between these attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* (Ever-Forbearing and Much-Forgiving) and the cosmic issue of upholding the heavens and the earth? Scholars said that Allah mentions these attributes in this verse because a lot of debate has surrounded the issue of cosmic creation. Many people transgressed in their arguments against Allah's Divine Power. They ignorantly refuted that the skies and the earth are upheld by supports because they did not notice any pillars when they walked the earth or flew airplanes in the atmosphere.

It suffices that the Creator *Glorified is He* informed us of it by saying: 'He has created the skies without any supports that you could see' (*Luqman:* 10). This means that they do not really have pillars or do have pillars which we cannot see. Both understandings are valid and we must not refute them without knowledge.

Allah *Glorified is He* is Ever Forbearing and does not punish those who show audacity towards Him or those who occupy themselves with what is His right. Indeed, He does not even hasten to punish those who deny His Existence. Without this forbearance, He would have collapsed His creation upon our heads.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘The earth said, “O Lord! Allow me to swallow up the children of Adam, for they enjoy the good that You have given them, but they do not thank You.” The sky said, “O Lord! Allow me to send down darkness upon the children of Adam, for they enjoy the good that You have given them, but they do not thank You.” The mountains said, “O Lord! Allow us to fall upon the children of Adam, for they enjoy the good that you have given them, but they do not thank You.” The seas said, “O Lord! Allow us to drown the children of Adam, for they enjoy the good that You have given them, but they do not thank You.”’ Allah, responds: ‘Leave Me and My creation. If you had created them, you would have had mercy upon them. If they repent, then I am their beloved, and if they do not repent, then I am their source of cure.’[1] Therefore, if it was not for Allah’s Forbearance towards us and His Forgiveness for our sins, He would not uphold the skies and the earth, and this universe would collapse upon itself. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَقۡسَمُواْ بِٱللَّهِ جَهۡدَ أَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡ لَئِن جَآءَهُمۡ نَذِيرٞ لَّيَكُونُنَّ أَهۡدَىٰ
مِنۡ إِحۡدَى ٱلۡأُمَمِۖ فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمۡ نَذِيرٞ مَّا زَادَهُمۡ إِلَّا نُفُورًا ﴿٤٢﴾

[The idolaters] swore their most solemn oath that, if someone came to warn them, they would be more rightly guided than any [other] community, but when someone did come they turned yet further away [42] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 42)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that they swore: ‘...their most solemn oaths’ (*Fatir:* 42). They strived in their oaths to the greatest extent possible, ‘that if a warning messenger should ever come to them, they would follow his guidance better’ and they would be better in action, ‘...than any of the (older)

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(1) Included by Al-Ghazali in his *Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din* (4/52) from the Hadith of some of the first three generations of Muslims, the wording is: ‘There is not a slave that disobeys (Allah) except that the space he occupies on the earth asks permission to swallow him up, and what is above him in the sky asks permission to send darkness upon him. Allah said to the sky and the earth: ‘Leave my slave alone and give him respite, for indeed you two did not create him. Had you created him, you would show him mercy. He may turn to Me in repentance, and if so I will forgive him, and he may change and act righteously, and if so I will turn his bad deeds into good ones.’

communities' (*Fatir:* 42). Therefore, they claimed that they would have been better than the previous nations.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this meaning in another verse, as He says, 'And, indeed, they (who deny the truth) have always said, "If only we had a Scripture (to this effect) from our forefathers, we would certainly be true servants of Allah."' (*as-Saffat:* 167-169) They said these words with their mouths, and Allah knew that they were lying. However, He loosened the reins for them and did not disclose their lies. Indeed, they should not have worried or concerned themselves about those nations of ancient times because the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the reminder sent to guide their own nation.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...but now that a warning messenger (Prophet Muhammad) has been sent to them, (his call) but increased their aversion' (*Fatir:* 42). They avoided the truth and distanced themselves from its guidance, because the message came through Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They claimed that if it had come through the way of a leading tribesman, they would have certainly accepted it. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And they say, "Why was not this Quran bestowed on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them by saying: 'Is it they who distribute your Lord's Grace? (Nay, as) it is We who distribute their means of livelihood among them in the life of this world, and raise some of them by degrees above others.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) It is amazing that they want Allah's Mercy to be distributed according to their desires and the choice of Allah's Messenger to be made as they wish. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah knows best upon whom to bestow His Message' (*al-An'am:* 124).

Allah *Glorified is He* distributed amongst them the simplest affairs of their life in this world. He made some people rich, some people poor, some people strong, and some people weak. The disbeliever's words are evidence that they have no objections regarding the Quran itself. They did not deny it because it was a form of magic, sorcery, or poetry as they had previously claimed. They only rejected it because it was revealed to none other than Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* explains the reasons behind their aversion:

ٱسۡتِكۡبَارٗا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَكۡرَ ٱلسَّيِّيِٕۚ وَلَا يَحِيقُ ٱلۡمَكۡرُ ٱلسَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهۡلِهِۦۚ فَهَلۡ يَنظُرُونَ
إِلَّا سُنَّتَ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَۚ فَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ ٱللَّهِ تَبۡدِيلٗاۖ وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ ٱللَّهِ تَحۡوِيلًا ﴿٤٣﴾

Became more arrogant in the land, and intensified their plotting of evil – the plotting of evil only rebounds on those who plot. Do they expect anything but what happened to earlier people? You will never find any change in Allah's practice; you will never find any deviation there [43]
(The Quran, *Fatir:* 43)

They were arrogant towards the truth and did not accept it because this truth affected their positions of power and leadership. It only allowed them a position of servitude and equality with all the other beings in creation. They were used to authority and control, so it was difficult for them to be equal to their slaves. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was responding to them, 'O you who are too arrogant to accept the truth because of the authority you have! Does it not befit you to swallow your pride and ask yourselves where your leadership came from'?

By Allah, if Allah had enabled Abraha to destroy the *Ka'ba* during the event of the elephant, the people of the peninsula would have flocked to another *Ka`ba* in the Yemeni city of Sana'a. If that had happened, would the Quraysh polytheists have had any leadership? Would they have any dignity or mention amongst the people? They used to forbid people from walking around the *Ka`ba* unless they were naked, so that the pilgrims would buy clothes from them! Therefore, they should have used their intellects and thought about the source of their dignity. Where did their provisions come from?

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Are you not aware how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not utterly confound their artful planning? Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying creatures, which smote them with stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained, and caused them to become like a field of grain that has been eaten down to its roots.' (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

Why did Allah *Glorified is He* do this to the Army of the Elephant? Allah *Glorified is He* gives the answer in the chapter of Quraysh which comes immediately after the chapter of *al-Fil*: ‘So that Quraysh might remain habitually secure, in their winter and summer journeys. Let them, therefore, worship the Lord of this House, who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger.’ (*Quraysh:* 1-4)

Allah *Glorified is He* punished the Army of the Elephant for the sake of Quraysh. This was to prolong their positions of leadership and augment their nourishment and security. Despite all of this, they arrogantly rejected Allah’s way and then stubbornly resisted His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while plotting against him.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘(It was due to) their arrogant behaviour on earth, and their devising of evil (arguments against Allah’s messages)’ (*Fatir:* 43). They devised their evil plots against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with him, in order to make them stop their call to Islam. If they had known the cause of their arrogance, this arrogance would have guided them to believe in the One Who made them powerful.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* affirms this reality in the words: ‘...Yet (in the end,) such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors’ (*Fatir:* 43), for they schemed and plotted against Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and conspired against him, and they wronged the believers and tortured them. However, Allah *Glorified is He* made their plans futile, as He mentioned in another verse: ‘And (remember, O Prophet,) how those who were bent on denying the truth were scheming against you.’ (*al-Anfal:* 30) They wanted to imprison Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, regarding their schemes to stop Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Or to slay you, or to drive you away: thus, have they (always) schemed: but Allah brought their scheming to nothing – for Allah is above all schemers.’ (*al-Anfal:* 30)

They had resorted to all kinds of tactics and tricks to put an end to the call of Islam, but they were unsuccessful. Even when they made plans to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* thwarted their efforts and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* escaped while they were sleeping, as he scattered dust on their heads. Then, when they despaired of putting an end to him with different tactics, they turned to the jinn. They asked them to bewitch Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but Allah *Glorified is He* saved him from them, and they still tried to place poison into his food.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to them, ‘Save your efforts. You will not put out Allah’s Light, and you will not prevent Muhammad from His call. You will not be able to do that with all your mockery, derisions, harm, conspiracies, plots or magic’. ‘Yet (in the end,) such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors’ (*Fatir:* 43), which means that their schemes will descend upon them and encompass them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Can they expect anything but the traditional outcome (and punishment) of those (sinners) of older times?’ (*Fatir:* 43) This means that they should not expect any other outcome than the same *Sunna* (outcome or tradition) of those older nations regarding the previous messengers. A *Sunna* is a way or custom that is traditionally followed. So, did they find that Allah *Glorified is He* had abandoned any of the previous messengers he had sent to the previous nations, or found any enemies and deniers whom Allah did not destroy when they harmed His messengers? Supporting the messengers is a followed divine practice, as Allah say, ‘…and that, verily, Our hosts – they indeed – would (in the end) be victorious’ (*as-Saffat:* 173).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* emphasizes this meaning by saying: ‘Thus (it is): no change will you ever find in Allah’s way.’ (*Fatir:* 43) Why does Allah’s way never change or alter? Allah *Glorified is He* does not have a *bida`*, and the meaning of a *bida`* is any primary draft that may be subject to alteration or improvement. Allah *Glorified is He* does not have a *bida`* because there is no way that is better than Allah’s way. Secondly, it is because Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only True Deity. There are no partners to His Divinity, and there is no one to change what He does.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَـٰقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَكَانُوٓا۟ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً ۚ وَمَا
كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيُعْجِزَهُۥ مِن شَىْءٍ فِى ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَلَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ عَلِيمًا قَدِيرًا ﴿٤٤﴾

Have they not travelled in the land and seen how those before them met their end, although they were superior to them in strength? Allah is not to be frustrated by anything in the heavens or on the earth: He is all knowing, all powerful [44] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 44)

The question in: ‘Have they never walked through the land and beheld’ (*Fatir:* 44) is a question expressing astonishment ‘Have they never walked through the land and beheld what happened to those (deniers of the truth) who lived before their time’ (*Fatir:* 44)? This is a reference to the disbelievers who were punished by Allah *Glorified is He* ‘and were greater in power than they are?’ (*Fatir:* 44) These previous nations had more power than Quraysh’s polytheists.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘And, verily, (to this day) you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time, and by night. Will you not, then, use your reasoning?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) In their travels and movements, they did pass by the towns of `Ad and Thamud, as well as the people of Lut (Lot) and Saleh (Shelah). Although these previous nations had civilizations, as well as great monuments and palaces that were unmatched, the polytheists saw their ruins and the destruction and annihilation that befell them after denying their messengers.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: ‘Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with (the tribe of) `Ad, (the people of) Iram who had many pillars, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? And with (the tribe of) Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the (many) monuments? (It was they) who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, and brought about great corruption therein: and therefore, your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of suffering: for, verily, your Lord is ever observation!’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-14) It is startling that the people who had these civilizations, and whom everyone had heard of, were unable to do anything to protect themselves from falling into oblivion.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Have they never walked through the land…’ (*Fatir:* 44). We used to think that walking in the earth meant travelling upon its land because we travel on the earth and not in it. However, the chief form of sustenance upon the earth is its atmosphere of air. You can survive without water for several days, and you can survive longer without food, but you cannot survive without air except for a short time.

This atmosphere of air is part of the earth, and that is why it turns around with the globe and is attached to it. According to this meaning, we do not travel upon the earth, but rather, travel in it. Even a plane that flies in the upper strata of the atmosphere is travelling in the earth because this air is part of the earth itself and a main source of its sustenance needed for breathing and nourishment.

To convince you that this air is a chief force of the earth’s sustenance, try this experiment. Take a flowerpot or a barrel and put in it some agricultural soil of a specific weight. Then, plant in it a fruit-bearing tree, like bananas for example. After some time, weigh the fruits that you have taken from the tree and weigh what has been subtracted from the soil. You will find that a significant portion of the weight of the fruit came from the atmosphere, as its carbon was formed from the carbon dioxide molecules in the air.

Air is the essential nutrient for plants, and that is why we say that it is the source of their nourishment, we used to believe that the soil was the main source needed for their nourishment. That is why the Quran pointed out this matter saying: ‘And if they would but truly observe the Torah and the Gospel and all (the revelation) that has been bestowed upon them from their Lord, they would indeed be nourished from above them and from below them.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 66) Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the nourishment coming from above them before mentioning the nourishment coming from below them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: ‘Have they never walked through the land and beheld what happened to those (deniers of the truth)…’ (*Fatir:* 44)? Allah *Glorified is He* wants the disbelievers to look at the realities of their lives. He wants them to avoid looking at the believers’ speech, but rather, observe the reality of their own lives. He says, ‘Have they never walked…’ (*Fatir:* 44) because they did indeed, travel in the earth. These people traded in the North of the Arabian Peninsula in the summer and in the South of the peninsula in the winter. So, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* was not commanding them to start travelling, but rather, He wanted them to remember the reality of their past journeys.

On these journeys, they saw many of the traces of those disbelieving nations who preceded them. Indeed, they did not see amongst the previous nations a messenger who had been defeated by those who denied him. Allah *Glorified is He* defeated the deniers and disbelievers and decreed victory for the true believers. Those nations who were punished have had greater powers than the polytheists had. However, this created power was not a match to counteract the Power of Allah *Glorified is He*. So, do not look at the Messenger’s power, but look at the Power of the One Who sent him. Allah *Glorified is He* also took it upon Himself to protect and support His Messenger.

Therefore, this futile opposition was directed from the creation to their Creator. Did they really think that they would be able to incapacitate Allah? That is why Allah *Glorified is He* negated two concepts. The first concept He annulled was their ability to incapacitate or overcome their Creator. He also negated their ability to merely confront or compete with their Lord.

Allah *Glorified is He* was dictating to them and inspiring them, while giving them victory in some excursions, so that they could enjoy the full extents of their powers and exhaust all their forces. Therefore, this showed them that their strength and any help they were able to seek from other people would not able to incapacitate Allah *Glorified is He* because Allah is not incapacitated by anything. He does not have a partner or rival that could assist them against Allah, as Allah is the One Who helps the believers and gives them victory. Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed the stronger disbelievers before them, and indeed, was able to destroy their powers.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wants to emphasize some Quranic matters, He often informs us of an event that outlined the concept by using words such as: ‘You travelled in the earth, and you saw such and such’. However, in this verse, He did not state the concept, but rather placed it as a question that asked: ‘Did they not travel in the earth’? The certain and undeniable answer to this divine question was that they, indeed, travelled. This emphasised the statement because it had a greater effect on the listener, just as negative questioning has a greater effect on the listener as affirmative questioning.

The topic of travelling in the earth takes up a large portion of the Noble Quran, because Allah *Glorified is He* wants people to look at the signs that exist in the universe. That is why He commanded us in one verse by saying: 'Say, "Walk in the Earth and behold' (*an-Naml:* 69). Allah *Glorified is He* also says in another verse: 'Say, "Walk in the Earth, and then behold' (*al-An'am:* 11). What is the difference between the two expressions? Travelling in the Earth either is done for studying it and contemplating its signs, or is done for gaining particular benefits.

In the first expression, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and behold' (*an-Naml:* 69). This is a reference to a journey done mainly to consider and reflect upon the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* and His amazing architecture of the universe.

In the second expression, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and then behold' (*al-An'am:* 11). This expression referred to journeys that are conducted for the purpose of work, taking benefits and seeking provisions. Even if you visit the different lands of the earth seeking provision and benefit, do not forget to reflect and contemplate the signs of Allah's vast dominion, especially if you are in an environment different from your traditional environment.

If you travel in a rural, desert environment, such as the Hijaz area, for example, you will almost never see a trace of the colour green. On the other hand, in Indonesia, we went to places that were clothed in green. There was not a spot on the ground that did not have vegetation. There are treasures in both environments that distinguish them from each other, and that is why they say by way of parable, 'The more you live the more you see, and if you walk you see more'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And (do they not see that the will of) Allah can never be foiled by anything in the heavens or on earth, since, verily, He is All Knowing, Infinite in His power?' (*Fatir:* 44) We already spoke about the concept of incapacitation. This verse is not just stating that nothing in the heavens or the earth will ever incapacitate Allah *Glorified is He* but furthermore, that such a concept can never even be imagined.

In the words, '...anything', the word 'any' indicated generality. For instance, when you say, 'I do not have money', you could have a small inconsiderable amount of money. But if you said, ‘I do not have anything called money’, then you have negated the presence of the most inconsiderable amounts of money.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...He is All Knowing, Infinite in His Power’ (*Fatir:* 44). This clarified why Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be incapacitated by anything, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the All Knowing Who has the Encompassing Knowledge from which nothing can escape. If the disbelievers want to plot anything, Allah *Glorified is He* knows it and He knows its place. He is Infinite in His power and Knowledge of all things, and knowledge and power are the two elements of victory. If you truly know something, you will be able to repel it.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلنَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا۟ مَا تَرَكَ عَلَىٰ ظَهْرِهَا مِن دَآبَّةٍ وَلَٰكِن
يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۖ فَإِذَا جَآءَ أَجَلُهُمْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِۦ بَصِيرًۢا ﴿٤٥﴾

If Allah were to punish people [at once] for the wrong they have done, there would not be a single creature left on the surface of the earth. He gives them respite for a stated time and, whenever their time comes, Allah has been watching His servants [45] (The Quran, *Fatir:* 45)

Allah *Glorified is He* is full of Mercy and is constantly dispensing His Blessings to His servants. He grants these blessings even to those who do not believe in Him and those who disobey His commands. If Allah *Glorified is He* were to punish them for their grave acts of transgression, He would not leave a single one of them on this earth. So, why does Allah *Glorified is He* deal with us in this way and grant us this relief? This is because Allah *Glorified is He* is our Lord and Creator. He knows that men are weak in the face of their desires and demons. That is why His Forbearance takes precedence over His Anger, and His Pardon takes precedence over His punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...although He pardons many of them’ (*ash-Shura:* 30).

There is a Hadith narrated that Allah *Glorified is He* addressed us with the following words: ‘If you did not sin, I would create another creation besides you that would sin, and they would seek my forgiveness and I would forgive them.'(1) Or else, how could Allah *Glorified is He* be described as the All-Forgiving. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to affirm that He possesses all the Attributes of Perfection. The first of these attributes is the attribute of Necessary Existence. The second attribute is Life. All the other attributes are subsequent to these two.

These attributes of Allah *Glorified is He* can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of the Divine attributes that have an opposite, and they are the attributes of action done by Allah *Glorified is He*. These include the bringing of beings into life, which is the opposite of causing beings to die, and the Exalter, which is the opposite of the Humiliator.

On the other hand, the attributes that do not have an opposite are Allah's Essential attributes, such as that He is The Ever-Living, the Almighty, the All-Dominant, and the Ever-Forbearing. All these attributes have no opposing actions.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not punish people for the transgressions and oppressions that they have earned because Allah *Glorified is He* created man, and He created his desires and natural impulses. All the religious commandments came to overcome these desires and rise above these natural impulses, not to wipe them out. They came to refine them, and not to terminate them. Otherwise, had Allah *Glorified is He* willed for these transgressions and oppression not to occur, He would not have made these natural impulses in the first place.

For example, Allah *Glorified is He* created the natural impulse of sexual attraction so that the world would be populated. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted mankind to rise above this natural impulse, by making it lawful and within the bounds of legislation. We have already clarified the difference between lawful and unlawful sexual relationships. When these relations are born in the public light and within the bounds of Allah's legislation, we rejoice in its ceremonies, announce it, and are proud of it. However, when it is done in secrecy, far from what Allah *Glorified is He* has legislated, we try to hide it and rid ourselves of its yield. If it is then disclosed to the people, it is a stark disgrace that will never be rubbed out.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/309) and also by Muslim in his Sahih (3749) in the Book of Repentance, Its wording is: 'By the One in whose hand is my soul, if you did not sin, Allah will remove you and bring about a people who did sin. They would seek Allah's forgiveness and He would forgive them.'*

A Hadith narrated that a Companion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was known to be overly protective over his daughters. When a man proposed to marry one of the Companion's daughters, the father informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* smiled and said to him, 'The lawful bond cuts off the nose of jealousy.'(1) This means that the same concept which the Companion had once refused to accept became a matter of rejoicing, and he even called the people to witness his daughter's marital agreement. This is because it has been brought about lawfully in a way that Allah has permitted. The word of truth during the marriage agreement made these hidden sensual feelings manifests, and transformed a concealed sensational action into a lawful permissible event of happiness.

The natural impulse of sexual gratification in animals was made for a divine wisdom. A young child, for example, needs a parent to raise him and provide for him. He remains dependant on his father for a difficult period of fifteen years. If Allah *Glorified is He* had not based procreation on the sexual act, and placed within it such pleasures, many people would abstain from having children. Likewise, the mother bears great difficulty in pregnancy, childbirth; breastfeeding and so forth to the extent that she may even vow to avoid having another child. However, after the pain of delivery ceases and the child grows up, she longs to have another one, and this is how life continues.

Likewise, the natural impulse to be curious and love exploration exists in man so that he can reflect upon the universe around him and look for Allah's secrets therein. Allah *Glorified is He* did not make it so that people could act stealthily towards one another and track each other's disgraces and honours. Likewise, eating and drinking are natural impulses that Allah *Glorified is He* has made because they constitute the essential sources of life. They should only be consumed within these limits that preserve life, so that they do not turn into gluttony, greed or fullness and indigestion.

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(1) *Abu Hilal Al-`Askari mentioned in As-Sana`atain in the chapter on analogy and metaphor, that He saw `Ali with Fatima in a room, so he closed the door for them, and said: 'The lawful cuts off the nose of jealousy.' Al-Maidani said, in Majma` Al-Amthal, that this took place on the wedding night of `Ali and Fatima, and he said that this Hadith was related from Al-Hajaj ibn Minhal, who classed it as 'marfu'. You can also look at Abu Mansur At-Th`alabi in Al-`Ijaz Wa Al-`Ijaz, in the chapter on his analogy, and Ibn Hamdun in At-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyyah, on what comes in gentleness and firmness.*

When you consider the matter of natural impulses, you will find that the Creator has instilled natural impulses in man, along with their opposite impulses. So, you may see a man being merciful during some events and bad-tempered in other instances. He might appear mighty in one instance and show humility and modesty in other occasions. These two natural impulses are naturally not found at the same instance. Belief dictates that a believer must act mightily and strongly in some cases, while acting with humility during other times.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...Allah will in time bring forth (instead of you) people whom He loves and who love Him – humble towards the believers, proud towards all who deny the truth.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54) He also says, 'Muhammad is Allah's Apostle; and those who are (truly) with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, (yet) full of mercy towards one another.' (*al-Fath:* 29) Therefore, the Creator has placed opposing natural impulses in you and He has not repressed any of them, so you can use each natural impulse at its appropriate time.

The meaning of the words: 'If Allah were to hold men (at once) to account' (*Fatir:* 45) refers to punishing them '...for whatever (wrong) they earn (*kasabu*) (on Earth)' (*Fatir:* 45). The word *kasabu* used here is the plural verb of the word *kasaba*. It indicates the earning or acquisition of a natural profit that is additional to the capital investment. On the other hand, the word *iktasaba* follows the lexical pattern of the word *ifta`ala* which indicates an earning that is fabricated or that resulted from unnatural or unlawful actions.

For that reason, the Quran generally used the word *kasaba* for acts of goodness and used the word *iktasaba* for acts of evil. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '...in its favour shall be whatever good it does (*kasabat*), and against it whatever evil it does (*iktasabat*)' (*al-Baqara:* 286). This is because righteousness comes naturally without any fabrication, while acts of evil require stealthy efforts and cautious plots. Therefore, we say that the burden of obedience on man is insignificant compared to the burden of disobedience.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding evil deeds: ‘Indeed, those who earn (*kasaba*) evil and by their sinfulness are engulfed are destined for the Fire’ (*al-Baqara:* 81). The Quran used the word *kasaba* in this verse regarding evil deeds because it is talking about those who have sinned excessively, to the extent that they have come to love and adore disobedience. They talk about their sins and declare them openly as if disobedience comes naturally for them. In their transgression, they have started to disobey Allah *Glorified is He* without any dissimilation or caution. So, their earnings are a *kasb* and not an *iktisab*, as they rejoice with their sins as if they were lawful gains, and do not censure, blame themselves or feel regret for their disobedience.

The verse we are discussing here has the same meaning. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If Allah were to hold men (at once) to account for whatever (wrong) they earn (*kasaba*) (on earth), He would not leave a single living creature upon its back’ (*Fatir:* 45). This means that these people adore their disobedience and transgressions, while rejoicing in the process as if it was a profit.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* gave the outcome of this conditional sentence: ‘If Allah were to hold men (at once) to account, He would not leave a single living (stepping) creature (*daabba*) on its back’ (*Fatir:* 45). The meaning of the word *daabba* includes everything that steps on the earth or crawls on its surface gently, but it is mostly used for that which is ridden or carries a load. That is why an Arab once said to another Arab, ‘You had tired me when you were a young man (*shabban*) (walking swiftly) and still exhaust me as an old man (*dabba*) (stepping gently)’.

What sin have these creatures committed to bear the consequence of man’s oppression? The scholars said that the connection here is that the creature is created and subjugated to the service of man and his comfort. So, the creatures may get destroyed so that man’s comfort is withheld. The rain is withheld and the earth becomes dry. Thus, at that point, man will not find any nourishment, either from the flesh of animals or from the vegetation of the earth. This will be a humiliation for mankind, as they see their means of livelihood and causes of comfort being taken from them, while they can do nothing.

If you cross-reference the verses of the Quran, you will find that two verses talk about this meaning. The first verse is in the chapter of *an-Nahl*, in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If Allah were to hold men (at once) to account for all the evil transgression that they do (on earth), He would not leave a single living creature upon it. However, He grants them respite until a term set (by Him): but when the end of their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it.’ (*an-Nahl:* 61)

The second verse is here in the chapter of *Fatir:* ‘If Allah were to hold men (at once) to account for the (wrong) they earn (on earth), He would not leave a single living creature upon its back. However, He grants them respite for a term set (by Him): but when their term comes to an end – then, verily, (they will come to know that) Allah sees all that is in (the hearts of) His servants.’ (*Fatir:* 45)

Some people may see repetition in these two verses, but Allah *Glorified is He* forbade that there be any futile repetition in His speech. If you reflected upon the verses, you would find a distinct meaning in each of these verses. The first verse talked about the transgressions of people, while the second verse talked about the evil deeds that they earned. Each of the two expressions gives you a different meaning because a person may act with transgression, but then may feel remorse for their sins, and not rejoice at it or persist in it. However, if it becomes a habit for the person and he starts to adore it, then it is *iktisab* and unnatural as we have already mentioned.

The first verse says, ‘...He would not leave a single living creature upon its back,’ (*Fatir:* 45) while the second verse says, ‘...He would not leave a single living creature upon it’ (*an-Nahl:* 61). We find that, in the first verse, Allah *Glorified is He* talked about time and the set term that will not be hastened and will not be delayed. In the second verse, He talked about the reward awaiting His servants’ actions, and that Allah sees all the actions of His servants. Nothing from them is hidden from him. Therefore, the two verses are complementary and there is no repetition in them at all.

In the words: ‘...He would not leave a single living creature upon its back’ (*Fatir:* 45) and the words: ‘...He would not leave a single living creature upon it’ (*an-Nahl:* 61), the pronoun ‘it’ is attached to the verse preceding it, in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...And (do they not see that the will of) Allah can never be foiled by anything in the heavens or on earth’ (*Fatir:* 44)? The pronoun referred to the closest noun mentioned, which is the earth. This reference is also understood by looking at the context logically because the meaning applies to it.

This verse also has a story(1). When we were children in the Quranic school of Sheikh Hasan *Allah rest his soul* the Sheikh used to normally assign a prefect from the students to correct the tablets for us. There was a day in which Sheikh Hasan sat and corrected our tablets by himself. However, on this day, I had not corrected my tablet at all, and I was waiting to be punished. The Sheikh said to me, ‘Listen to me, as I will teach you how to read this verse without confusing it with the verse in the chapter of *an-Nahl.* Do not gather between the two *dha* words or between the two *seen* phrases. If you say *bi zhulmihim* (for all the evil transgression), do not then say *`ala zhahriha* (upon its back) (as both phrases contain the *dha* sounds) and if you say *bima kasabu* (the (wrong) they earn), do not then say *la yasta`khiruna sa`ah* (can neither delay it by a single moment) (because both phrases had the *seen* sound).’

This is how our Sheikh taught us to live with the Quran and to interact with it, and Allah *Glorified is He* the Most Great, speaks the truth saying: ‘Hence, indeed, We made this Quran easy to bear in mind: who, then, is willing to take it to heart?’ (*al-Qamar:* 22)

I also have another story about him that I still remember, concerning the chapter *ash-Shura*. The Sheikh sat and was correcting the tablets for us while we had run away and not done any correction. When I sat in front of the Sheikh, I had to recite the verse, *‘`Ain. Seen. Qaf.’* (*ash-Shura:* 2), but incorrectly pronounced them as one single word, ‘*`asq*’! The Sheikh punished me, until he realized that I had not corrected my tablet. So, he said, ‘Say these letters as ‘*‘ain. seen. qaf.*’ This story has stayed with me until now. Allah have mercy and be pleased with all of these scholars.

The meaning of the word *ajal* (term) in the words: ‘...but when their term (*`ajal*) comes to an end’ (*Fatir:* 45) refers to the time of their final resurrection and reckoning on the Day of Judgment, or to a time when they will be destroyed by an annihilating punishment.

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(1) The story of Ash-Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi with the teaching school of Sheikh Hasan *Allah rest their souls*

We know that annihilating punishments such as a screaming storm, earthquake or being swallowed up by the earth, are only sent down when the guidance of a people is despaired of. This is when all hope has been lost of them being guided, as we have seen in the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: ‘O my Lord! Leave not on Earth any of those who deny the truth. And then, on Resurrection Day, He will cover them (all) with humiliation, and will say, “Where, now, are those beings to whom you ascribed a share in My Divinity, (and) for whose sake you cut yourselves off (from My guidance)?” (Whereupon) those who (in their lifetime) were endowed with knowledge will say, “Verily, disgrace and misery (have fallen) this day upon those who have been denying the truth.”’ (*Nuh:* 26-27) However, if there is still hope that some of the people will believe in Allah’s call, punishments like these do not descend upon them.

The word *ajal* (term) here could be referring to the period assigned to a particular nation, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘For every nation of people, a term has been set’ (*Yunus:* 49). Thus, we can deduce that there are three types of terms. These are: the term of the life of this world and its end, the term of each individual that ends with his own life and the term of an entire nation if an annihilating punishment removes them completely.

Ajal here may also indicate that every nation has a time at which it is made victorious and triumphant despite the presence of stubborn deniers and disbelievers, as what happened to Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Muslims were made victorious at the Battle of Badr. The nation of disbelief and oppression had a term that was ended with Islam and the power of the Muslims, though the hope, for the Muslims, had been, then, only a glimmer of light to the extent that despair had overcome hope.

Even 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said when: ‘Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.’ (*al-Qamar:* 45), was revealed: ‘what hosts are these when we are incapable of protecting ourselves?’ When the Battle of Badr took place and the Muslims were victorious, He said: ‘Allah spoke the truth.’(1):

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(1) *Included by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir and he attributed it to Ibn Abu Hatim (an-Nisa’: 366) from `Ikrima Allah be pleased with him who said: ‘When ‘(Yet) the hosts (of those who deny the truth) shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs (in flight)!’ (al-Qamar: 45)=*

'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar:* 45) The might of Islam had indeed intensified, as had the forces of the Muslims, and the nation of disbelief was declared finished. The term of the oppressive, disbelieving nation came to an end and the term of the believing nation had begun.

That is why when we reflect on Allah's words: 'Not equal are the blind and the seeing, nor are the darkness and the light, nor are the shade and the heat and not equal are the living and the dead. Indeed, Allah causes to hear whom He wills, but you cannot make those in the graves hear' (*Fatir:* 19-22), we find four opposites: the first two correspond to Prophet Muhammad's situation with regards to his nation before the spread of Islam, when pre-Islamic paganism was dominant over Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers in Mecca. 'The blind' are those who are ignorant of the ruling. 'The seeing' are those who know the ruling. The 'darkness' means misguidance and disbelief, while 'light' is faith because they were blind and Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make them see. They were in the deep darkness of ignorance and misguidance and Allah *Glorified is He* brought them out of it and into the light of faith.

As for the two other opposites, they correspond to Prophet Muhammad's situation with regards to his nation after the foundations of Islam had been firmly anchored and the souls of the believers had been strengthened. '…nor are the darkness and the light, nor are the shade and the heat and not equal are the living and the dead. Indeed, Allah causes to hear whom He wills, but you cannot make those in the graves hear.' (*Fatir:* 21-22) You will see that it begins with a positive attribute, as it did not say 'scorching heat and no shade' as in '...the blind and the seeing' (*Fatir:* 19). Why? Because what is being discussed here is the nation of victory and the nation of faith, so it was appropriate to begin this pair of opposites with the goodness that is appropriate for this new nation.

= *was revealed `Umar Allah be pleased with him said: 'What hosts are these that shall be routed?' i.e. what hosts will be defeated? `Umar Allah be pleased with him said: 'On the day of Badr, I saw the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him jumping in his armour and saying: "(Hence, too,) behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves in (a paradise of) gardens and running waters" (al-Qamar: 45), and on that day, I realised what it meant.'*

In this meaning, there is a subtle indication that the ‘age of Ignorance’ (of the guidance from Allah) coming to an end and along with it its darkness and blindness, as well as the declaration of the beginning of a new age for the nation of faith that is to remain an oasis of faith, and this is after Allah *Glorified is He* brings them to life with faith after they had been dead in disbelief, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘Is a dead person brought back to life by Us, and given light with which to walk among people, comparable to someone trapped in deep darkness who cannot escape? ...’ (*al-An‘am:* 122)

We already clarified the difference between *mayt* and *mayyit*. *Mayyit* refers to someone who, sooner or later, is going to die, even though he is alive now. An example of this is when the True Lord addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘you [Prophet] will certainly die, and so will they…’ (*az-Zumar:* 30) meaning that, eventually, you are going to die. As for *mayt* this is the one who is already dead.

We can therefore say that His words: ‘...whenever their time comes...’ (*Fatir:* 45) refer to the victory of faith over disbelief. ‘...Allah has been watching His servants.’ (*Fatir:* 45) The words '*ibad* and '*abid* are both plurals of '*abd* (slave) and even though they are both plurals for one singular noun, their meanings differ. This is because a human slave is the property of his master, and as long as he is his property, he obeys his commands. The human believer has a choice, for Allah *Glorified is He* addresses him and he chooses to obey or disobey, whereas a slave, for a human, does not disobey his master.

Yes, he may go against Allah’s Command, but he will not go against his human master’s command. How is this so? They say: because Allah *Glorified is He* is the Forbearing, the All-Forgiving. As for the human master, he can never be absolutely devoid of tyranny, transgression, despotism, or autocracy.

The difference between the obedience of the slave who can choose to disobey and the slave who is compelled to obey has been clarified in an example that we gave earlier, in which we have the two slaves: Sa'id and Sa'ad. Sa'id is chained to his master and is unable to break free while Sa'ad is free and unchained. When the master summons them, which of the two is more obedient? There is no doubt that Sa'ad is more obedient than Sa'id because he responds to his master even though he can choose not to. As for Sa'id, he has no choice but to respond because if he disobeys, his master will pull him back with the chain.

This is how the True Lord created us: with the ability to choose; and given them this precept: ‘...let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so...’ (*al-Kahf:* 29). That is: whoever wants to obey can do so and whoever wants to disobey can do so. This is how the servants of Allah behave with their Master. If the slave were to say: ‘My Lord! You are the One Who created me, gave me sustenance, and provided me with limbs, and you have given me the ability to choose. I am one of Your slaves *'abid*, and for that reason I relinquish my choice in favour of Your choice, and what I desire in favour of what You desire’, then this slave has chosen to be forced and subjugated by his Lord in the same way that the skies and the earth are subjugated.

These people are real *'ibad* slaves (servants of Allah). They are the elite of creation because they prefer what Allah *Glorified is He* desires over what they desire. That is why the True Lord talks about them and gives us an image of them: ‘The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth...’ (*al-Furqan:* 63). That is to say: they are humble and not arrogant and how can one be arrogant when: ‘...Indeed, you will never tear the earth [apart], and you will never reach the mountains in height.’ (*al-Isra’:* 37)

The True Lord continues describing the servants of the Lord of Mercy: ‘...and who, when the foolish address them, reply, “Peace”; those who spend the night bowed down or standing, worshipping their Lord, who plead, “Our Lord, turn away from us the suffering of Hell, for it is a dreadful torment to suffer! It is an evil home, a foul resting place!” They are those who are neither wasteful nor stingy when they spend, but keep to a just balance; those who never invoke any other deity beside Allah, nor take a life, which Allah has made sacred, except in the pursuit of justice, nor commit adultery.’ (*al-Furqan:* 63 - 68)

These are eight attributes that give us a complete picture of those who deserve to be called the slaves (servants) of Allah. That is why their Lord addresses them in another place: ‘Say, “[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah’s Mercy. Allah Forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.”’ (*az-Zumar:* 53)

It is due to His Mercy towards His slaves that a good deed wipes out an evil deed, as He *Glorified is He* says, '[Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during parts of the night, for good things drive bad away— this is a reminder for those who are aware.' (*Hud:* 114)

What is even greater is that Allah's Mercy is not restricted to the wiping out of evil deeds: after repentance, bad deeds can, in fact, become good deeds: 'Except those who repent, believe and do good deeds: Allah will change the evil deeds of such people into good ones. He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (*al-Furqan:* 70)

Regarding the meanings of *'ibad* (servants of Allah who choose to prefer what Allah desires over what they desire), and *'abid* (slaves who serve humans and are compelled to obey them) that we have clarified, we have heard those who object and say: there is a contradiction in the Quran concerning this meaning, for Allah says on the Day of Resurrection, addressing the leaders and other personalities who have misguided people and made disbelief pleasing to them: '...Was it you who led astray these My servants, or did they themselves go astray from the path?' (*al-Furqan:* 17) Here, He says: '*ibadi*' (My servants). We say: there is no contradiction between these verses as you say because the discussion here concerns the Hereafter, and in the Hereafter, there is no choice. Thus, there is no difference between *'ibad* and *'abid* in the Hereafter.

In His saying: 'Allah has been watching His servants.' (*Fatir:* 45) He mentions the attribute of seeing because it is the strongest means of obtaining knowledge and realisation. Obtaining knowledge has various means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions in His saying: 'It is Allah who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

Hearing is the primary means of realization, and in the case of the newborns, it is the first organ to sense and carry out its task. The proof is that if you put your finger, for example, in front of his eye, he would not blink. However, if you shouted in his ear he would be roused and he would respond to the sound. Furthermore, hearing is the one sense that is not inactive during sleep because it is the only sense by which one can be summoned. Hearing is the primary means of acquiring values and ideals, and with it one receives the way of Allah *Glorified is He*.

As for seeing, even if its rank is secondary, it is greater and stronger than hearing. This is because you could hear of something but not pay attention to it. If you move from hearing to seeing you arrive at full realization that has no doubt about it. That is why they say: 'with the eye you do not ask: "where?"' The thing that you hear could be false, but the thing that you see can be nothing but true.

That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* when He wants to emphasise a piece of information, He says, 'Have you not seen...' (*az-Zumar:* 21). This is because what you see with the eye is certain. When Abu Ja`far said to Muqatil, 'Admonish me Muqatil', he said to him 'Should I admonish you with what I have heard or with what I have seen?'—By Allah, you tell me which one? (Ash-Sha'rawi is addressing the audience)—Abu Ja`far said, 'Admonish me with what you have seen.'

Indeed, this is true because what you hear may be false, but what you see with the eye is the truth.

the chapter of

Ya Sin

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Ya Sin*(1):

يسٓ ۝١ وَٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ ٱلۡحَكِيمِ ۝٢

***Ya Sin* [1] By the wise Quran [2]**
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 1 - 2)

It is correct that *Ya Sin* are amongst the disjointed letters*,* such as *Alif, Lam, Mim* and *Ta Ha* and it is also correct that they are disjointed letters that can be a name. That is why *Ta Ha* and *Ya Sin* are included in Prophet Muhammad's names *peace and blessings be upon him*. There is nothing to stop a name from being composed of two letters, or even just one letter, such as the Arabic letter *nun* in His saying: *'Nun.* By the pen! By all they write!' (*al-Qalam:* 1) 'Nun' was made a proper name for Dhun Nun(2) *peace be upon him*. Likewise, *qaf* became a proper name for Mount *Qaf.* So, these are disjointed letters and they can become proper nouns and be used as names.(1)

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(1) The chapter of *Ya Sin* is number 36 according to the order of the Quran and it consists of 83 verses. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-Jinn*, and it is also said that it was revealed before the chapter of *al-Furqan*. It is the 40th chapter according to the order of revelation. Al-Qurtubi has related in his *Tafsir* (8/5635) the consensus that it is a Meccan chapter, but he says: 'Except that there is one group that says, 'Indeed His words: "...and We shall record whatever (deeds) they have sent ahead, and the traces (of good and evil) which they have left behind…" (*Ya Sin:* 12), were revealed with regard to the Bani Salma from the *Ansar* (Helpers) when they wanted to leave their houses and move in order to live close to Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.' Ibn Kathir has included this narration in his *Tafsir* (The Quran, 3/566) from Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri but said: 'What has been mentioned regarding the revelation of this verse is strange because the entire chapter is Meccan and Allah *Glorified is He* knows best.

(2) *'An-Nun':* The whale, and Dhu An-Nun *peace be upon him* is an epithet given to Yunus (Jonah) Ibn Matta *peace be upon him*. Allah called him Dhu An-Nun *peace be upon him* because he held him inside the whale that had swallowed him (The Quran, *Lisan Al-Arab* – under the article on [*nun*]). As for '*noon*', it is in the chapter of *al-Qalam*. There are a few statements regarding it, including the statement that it is the whale and another that=

We often talk about the disjointed letters at the beginning of chapters. Every time we come across disjointed letters we have to talk about any possible meanings they may have. What is established in the mind is that a letter has a name and a named thing. The name of the letter is only known to the one who is learned. As for the letter's named thing, it is known by both the learned and the illiterate. For example, the illiterate knows the verb *akala* (ate) and he can say: 'I ate' but he cannot tell you the letters of the alphabet that make up the verb because he only knows the named thing of the letter. As for the one who is learned, he knows the name of each letter and can say: *akala* consists of the Arabic letters *alif, kaf,* and *lam*. Then, how did Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* know the names of these letters and articulate them as he was unlettered and did not know how to read or write? The answer is that he was taught them by his Lord

The Quran was sent as a miracle to challenge the people in what distinguished them. The Arabs were known for their eloquence and rhetoric. It suffices to say that they held fairs and markets for the sake of speech, as we now spend time in showrooms of prominent industries. Examples for those fairs and

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= it is the inkwell. See the narration regarding these statements in the *Tafsir* of Ibn Kathir (The Quran, 4/400, 401). Al-Azhari says: ''Nun' (*al-Qalam*: 1), cannot be other than a letter of the alphabet. Have you not seen that the Quranic scribes have always written it as the letter *(nun)* and if the inkwell or the whale were meant by it they would have written as the word *(nun)*?' *Lisan Al-Arab* – under the article on *(nun)*)

(1) There are a few opinions regarding the interpretation of *'Ya Sin.'* (*Ya Sin:* 1):
-It is one of the names of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and this is the opinion of Sa`id ibn Jubayr and his evidence is 'verily, thou art indeed one of Allah's message-bearers,' (*Ya Sin:* 3) and what follows it.
-It means 'O master of humanity!' and this is the opinion of Abu Bakr Al-Warraq.
-It means 'O man!' and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is who is intended, and this is the opinion of Ibn `Abbas.
There is another opinion that Al-Qurtubi mentions in his *Tafsir* (The Quran, 8/5638), in addition to what has already been stated, and it is related from Imam Malik that *(Ya Sin)* is one of Allah's names, such that he declared it *makruh* (reprehensible) to use it as a name. Ibn Al-Arabi said: That which is permissible to use as a name is *Ya Sin* with this spelling, and Allah knows best.

markets were the ‘Ukazh, Al-Murbid and Al-Majna markets, etc. which were known amongst the Arabs.

Their concern with speech and rhetorical style was at such a level that their famous poems were hung upon the *Ka`ba*. These poems were called ‘*al-mu`alaqat*’ (the hanging odes) and they were the most famous of what is known as ‘*jahiliyy*’ (pre-Islamic) poetry.

The fact that the Quran challenges them is a testimony to their pre-eminence because it is the strong and not the weak that are challenged. It is just like when records are being broken in various fields, nowadays.

The Quran challenges the Arabs in eloquence and rhetoric in the same way that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* challenged magicians and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* challenged the doctors. Therefore, this is a practice that is followed with all nations. The True Lord *Glorified is He* challenges them in what distinguishes them. Likewise, the Quran came in the language of the Arabs and the letters and words that they use to articulate. Despite all of this, they were unable to produce anything like the Quran. How can this be when the fabric of the speech is one and the same? It has been said: ‘Because the one speaking the Quran is the True Lord’.

We have already clarified this matter by way of similitude— and Allah has the most exalted similitude—and said: if you want to test a group of textile workers to see which one of them is the most skilful, you should not give one of them silk, for example, give another cotton and give a third wool because the raw material, thus, would be different. You must give all of them the same fabric and then see the textile that each of them produces. The same goes for the Quran and the language of the Arabs. The fabric is one and the same, but the speaker in poems is the Arabs, and the speaker in the Quran is the True Lord.

When you consider the letters of the Arabic language you find that there are twenty-eight of them, and the disjointed letters in the Quran are fourteen. Therefore, they are half of the letters of the alphabet. Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi (1) has a marvellous table that arranges these letters, and he explains that they were placed as such for a reason, and they were placed according to a measure and calculation. These fourteen letters are divided as follows:

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(1) He is Muhammad ibn 'Umar Abu Abdullah Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi, Qurayshi of lineage who originated from Tabaristan. He was born in Rayy (modern-day Teheran) in the=

The total number of letters in the language is twenty-eight. The first nine letters, from *alif* through *dhal*, contain only two of the disjointed letters: the *alif* and the *ha`a*. The remaining seven letters are left. As for the last nine letters, from *fa`a* to the end, there are seven of the disjointed letters and they are: *qaf*, *kaf*, *lam*, *mim*, *nun*, *ha`a* and *ya`a* while *fa`a* and *waw* are left. The last nine are therefore the opposite of the first nine.

As for the ten letters in the middle, from *ra`a* through to *ghayn*, they have another arrangement such that the disjointed letters from amongst them do not have diacritical marks. They are *ra`a*, *sin*, *sad*, *ta`a*, and *`ain*, leaving us with *zay*, *sheen*, *dad*, *dha`a* and *ghayn.*

Likewise, when we consider, for example, the letters of the throat you find that *kha`a* is in the first group and is not included in the disjointed letters. *Mim* is included in the last group.

In this manner, we see that these letters were not placed as such haphazardly or accidentally. Rather, they were placed according to a measure and system that has wisdom, and behind it there are secrets. They were placed according to an intended systemization like the cutting of a key. Allah *Glorified is He* opens them to whomever He wills. It is due to His Wisdom that He has not given all the secrets of these letters to one generation. Indeed, He has spread out the revealing of these secrets over time so that every generation can receive Allah's Speech and discover some of its secrets, and so that the Quran can remain a light that illuminates what is hidden in the life of this world until the establishment of the Hour. He says, 'We shall show them Our signs in every

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= year 544 A.H. and this accounts for his name Ar-Razi. He was an Imam and Quranic commentator and the unique one of his age in the rational, transmitted, and ancient sciences. It was said about it: 'Where is the speaker of Ray?' The people devoted themselves to his books during his lifetime and studied them amongst themselves. He was also a master of Persian. His various works include *(Mafatih Al-Ghayb* and *Mahhsal Afkar Al-Mutaqadimin Wa Al-Muta`akhirin)*. He died in the year 606 at the age of 62. (Az-Zirikli, *(Al-A`lam)* 6/313) region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth…' (*Fussilat:* 53).

The letter *sin*, at the beginning of the word *sanurihim* (we shall show them) indicates the future and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pronounced it and said '...We shall show them...' (*Fussilat:* 53). In his time, many secrets were manifested. The generations that followed also articulated it and many secrets were uncovered to them and we will continue to pronounce them. Many of its secrets will continue appearing to us until the coming of the Hour, when the greatest sign is manifested which is the Day of Resurrection. Therefore, the Quran is continuously giving without any interruption.

That is why, when we discussed with some orientalists in San Francisco the subject of inventors and explorers who had served and benefited humanity with their inventions and discoveries, one of them said: 'We are astonished at the Muslims. Why do these explorers who have brought joy to humanity not enter Paradise'? We clarified that they had indeed served humanity, but they did not have Allah in mind when they discovered what they discovered (they did not exert that effort for the sake of Allah). Rather, what they were concerned with was fame, glory, and being mentioned amongst people. Thus, they have achieved what they sought, and we have immortalized their memory, erected statues in their honour and so forth. The Hadith describes them as such: 'You worked so that it might be said [of you] such and such, and so it was said.'(1)

Thus, these scientists who have served humanity and brought joy to it while not believing in Allah *Glorified is He* are nothing other than servants that Allah has subjugated for the service of humanity. They are like the sun and the moon and other creations that Allah *Glorified is He* has subjugated for the benefit and prosperity of man. They are nothing other than soldiers from amongst Allah's soldiers that are included in the meaning of this letter *sin* in '...We shall show them...' (*Fussilat:* 53) so that the Quran continues to give throughout the passing of time and into the future.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (The Quran, 1905), Ahmad in his Musnad (2/322) and An-Nasa`i in his Sunnan (6/23, 24) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

These scientists who do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* are like a servant that works for another human. When the later asks him to lift a stone, for example, he tells him that it is too heavy and he cannot lift it. The master, then, suggests that the servant gets someone who can help him, but he says that he cannot find anyone. However, when the master tells him that if he lifts it, he will find some treasure underneath which he can have for himself, he lifts it by himself. Has he lifted it out of respect for his master's command or has he lifted it because he wanted the treasure?

Likewise, with the advancement of science, people have discovered wine to be of harmful effect on the liver, and many people have abstained from drinking it because they fear its harms, i.e. they have done so for a reason. As for the believer, he abstains from it before knowing anything about this reality, and he abstains from it because his Lord has forbidden him from drinking it. He desists it because he trusts in the Wisdom of his Lord and respects His Command, even if he does not know the reason.

Being the heart of the Quran, as established in the Hadith, reading the chapter of *Ya Sin* should be preceded by *isti`adhah* (seeking refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan) and *basmalah* (in the name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful), as we did with the chapters preceding it. The True Lord is the one who has revealed the Quran as a miracle and a book of guidance to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that the believers can regulate their lives according to it. He says, '[Prophet], when you recite the Quran, seek Allah's protection from the outcast, Satan. He has no power over those who believe and trust in their Lord.' (*an-Nahl:* 98)

We said before that the reason behind this command from the Most Exalted is that Satan, when he disobeyed his Lord by refusing to prostrate to Adam *peace be upon him* a conversation started between him and his Lord when he said: 'I swear by Your Might! I will tempt all.' (*Sad:* 82) That is to say: 'I will tempt Adam and his progeny until they do not differ from me in terms of disobedience'. He proceeds: 'Except your servants from among them, the purified ones' (*Sad:* 83). His saying '...I will tempt all' (*Sad:* 82) means that they will take a path other than the path that Allah *Glorified is He* has made for them. The path that Allah *Glorified is He* has made for them is the straight path of which Satan said: '...I will lie in wait for them all on Your straight path.' (*al-A'raf:* 16)

Yes indeed, for Satan does not visit people to tempt them at taverns, casinos and other places of disobedience. Instead, he meddles in the affairs of the obedient in order to corrupt their obedience. The straight path, here, is the way of Allah *Glorified is He* that He has laid down for the contentment of humanity. So, Satan, instead of waiting to see what a human's limbs do in accordance with Allah's way, either through obedience or disobedience, he targets the foundations from which these limbs base their movements, so if you read the Quran he comes to corrupt your reading.

That is why your Lord teaches you to seek refuge in Him, primarily to block this path of Satan's because he will not wait until you read and the benefits of this reading manifest in the way you live your life. Indeed, he targets the Quran itself in order to ruin it for you from the outset, so if you want to overcome him, then seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from him.

When you seek refuge from him in Allah, you are seeking refuge in a powerful support and a protective shield, which nothing of Satan's whispering; his goading or his beckoning can penetrate. That is why Satan was fully aware of this when he said: 'Except your servants from among them, the purified ones.' (*Sad:* 83) So, the purified ones are the ones who are protected from Satan in the protection of their Lord and Creator.

As for His words 'In the name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful', the True Lord created man and made him the master of this universe. Moreover, He subjugated everything for him, and from that which He has subjugated, are its parts for him to use as he pleases. For example, he subjugated man's tongue for him to use as he pleases, that if he is a believer he says: 'Allah is One'. If he is not, he says, for example: 'Allah is the third of three'. Likewise, He has subjugated the eye so that it can look at what is permissible and at what is impermissible; and the same applies to the feet. Allah *Glorified is He* has subjugated all your limbs to your will, and so if you seek obedience they will behave accordingly, and if you want disobedience, they will behave accordingly, too. The will is that which dictates what you want, and the limbs can do nothing but carry out acts of obedience or disobedience because they are subjugated.

Previously, we gave the example of the commander of the army when he sends, for example, the subordinate commander to be the head of a regiment on some mission. The regiment must obey the commands of this immediate commander with blind obedience even if these commands go against what is good for them. They cannot protest against him or even go back to the commander and complain to him about their immediate commander. It is in this way that the limbs obey man's will in this worldly life.

By contrast, in the Hereafter, man's command over his limbs will be stripped from him, and these limbs will bear witness against their owner in front of the True Lord. This is because in the Hereafter no one has authority except Allah *Glorified is He*: '...Who has control today? Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16) He also says, 'On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet shall bear witness against them as to what they did.' (*an-Nur:* 24) Allah also says, 'They will say to their skins, "Why did you testify against us?" and their skins will reply, "Allah, who gave speech to everything..."' (*Fussilat:* 21).

If you want to do some action then this action requires from you, first, the rational and mental capacity to delineate it. Then it requires strength from the limbs in order to do it. Who created for you a mind that thinks? Who gave your limbs the strength and capacity to do things? Do they carry out your commands and do as you ask because of some inherent strength within you; or is it because of Allah's Power over them?

Therefore, you must approach every act, thinking, planning, implementing, and doing, by saying 'In the Name of Allah'. When you say it, this is as if you are saying to your limbs: 'I am not making demands of you with my own strength, but by the strength of "In the Name of Allah", and in Allah's Name I act, not by my power'.

If Allah *Glorified is He* wants to strip man of his movement, ability, and thinking, then the limbs will be paralysed and the thought processes will also be paralysed. This is proof that you must approach every action of yours with 'In the Name of Allah', as He is the One helping you to do them.

Moreover, your actions require wisdom, power, knowledge, and so forth. Who is the one who combines all these attributes? Indeed, it is Allah *Glorified is He* so say ‘In the Name of Allah’: the One Who combines all the attributes of perfection and grants them to His creation. He is the All Knowing who provides you with knowledge; the fully Capable Who provides you with capability; the Wise Who provides you with wisdom *the Almighty* Who provides you with might; the All-Dominant Who provides you with the ability to dominate and so forth.

Have we not heard what the judge says when he sits for a verdict? He says, ‘In the name of the people…’ because he is not giving the verdict by himself. He only gives the verdict by the power of the people. Likewise, the believer says, ‘In the Name of Allah’ with every act, meaning ‘O limbs! Obey me as part of your obedience to Allah’!

The True Lord describes Himself by saying: ‘...The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful’ (*al-Fatiha:* 1) because the True Lord created His creation with the ability to choose, so amongst them are the believer and the disbeliever; the obedient and the disobedient. Maybe man is heedless of Allah’s way so he commits minor sins and even major sins. How, then, can he approach his actions with ‘In the Name of Allah’? How can he seek help from Him when he has disobeyed Him?

That is why his Lord says to him: ‘Do not be ashamed to say, ‘In the Name of Allah’ because I am Most Merciful and I dispense mercy. I forgive you and I overlook what you have done, and I will not abandon you. Therefore, have courage and do not leave seeking help in My Name, regardless of whatever sins you have committed, and rely on the fact that I am Most Merciful and I dispense mercy’.

It is related (1) that Al-Asma`i (2) heard a man saying, while he was making circumambulation around the *Ka`ba,* ‘O Allah! I disobey you and I am ashamed to ask of you, but from whom can I ask when there is no one in the universe besides you?' Al-Asma`i said to him 'O you! Indeed, your Lord has answered you because of the beauty of the way you have stated your supplication to Him.'

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(1) *The story of Al-Asma`i with the man making circumambulation around the Ka`ba while piously praying.*

(2) *Al-Asma`i is Abd Al- Malik Qurayb Al-Bahili Abu Sa`id, the narrator of the Arabs and one of the chief scholars of language and poetry as well as countries. His name goes back to his grandfather, Asma`a. He was born in Basra in the year 132 A.H. and he spent a lot of time travelling in the desert. Many stories are attributed to him. He was the most proficient of people in language and the most knowledgeable of them in poetry. His works include Al-Addad and Khalq Al-Ansan ... Al-Ibl. He died in Basra in the year 216 A.H. at the age of 94. Az-Zirikli, Al-A`lam 4/162)*

When the True Lord wants to enumerate His blessing that He has bestowed upon His servants He says '...If you tried to count Allah's favour you could never calculate it...' (*Ibrahim:* 34). Yes, because when you count something you are expected to arrive at some statistic. Despite the advancement of science and the fact that various universities and institutes are specialised in statistics, no one has ever tried to count Allah's blessings. That is why He did not say 'and if you try to count Allah's *ni`am* (favours)' but rather, one *ni`mah* (favour) because a single favour covers so many favours that we cannot perceive.

You will notice that this verse is found in two places, but each one of them has its own supplement. The first is: '...If you tried to count Allah's favour you could never calculate it...' (*Ibrahim:* 34), and the other is: 'And if you should count the favour of Allah, you could not enumerate it. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 18)

It is as if the True Lord is saying to us: 'You, O man, are blessed, even though you receive Allah's favours with wrongdoing and ingratitude. Your Lord is the One Who bestows favours and He receives your wrongdoing and ingratitude towards His favours by extending these favours, because He is much forgiving and the Ever-Merciful.

The scholars have different sayings regarding *'Ya Sin'*. Some of them say: The *ya`* is vocative and the *sin* is one of Prophet Muhammad's names because it was normal for the Arabs to omit some of the letters of a word and leave the letter that is distinguished by its strong sound. For example, in the word *insan* (a human) it is the *sin* that is the strongest letter. That is why, in another example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'The sword is a sufficient *sha`*'(1), and what he meant was *shahidan* (witness). In the same vein, the poet said:

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(1) *From Salma ibn Al-Mahhbuq who said: 'It was said to Abu Thabit, Sa`ad ibn `Iyada, when the verse of prescribed punishments was revealed and a man was very jealous: "Have you not considered what you would do if you found a man with your wife?" He said: "I would strike them with my sword. Would I wait until I brought four people? Until that time, he had done what he needed to do and left. Or I say: 'I have seen such-=*

O Fatim! Take it easy with this coquettishness
And if you are resolved to leave me then say it once and for all (1)
And what is meant is Fatima.

In our daily speech, we also abridge some letters, so when we say, for example: 'O Ahmad', some of us do not say the *dal* (d), especially in the dialect of Damietta. Therefore, the omission of some letters and leaving the others that have a strong sound is something normal in the language of the Arabs.

Others say: *Ya Sin* is Muhammad's name and he is being addressed while the vocative *ya`a* is omitted.

The True Lord taught man the names of all things, which means that he taught him the speech that is required for conversation. While human beings speak and converse, they devise new names and terms. For example, people now know the word 'television' and they are familiar with it. Did Allah *Glorified is He* teach Adam *peace be upon him* the word 'television'? No, but it is a word that people have devised based on what Allah *Glorified is He* had taught them.

'The names of all things' in the statement: 'And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things...' (*al-Baqara:* 31) refer to those which are suitable for conversing then (at the time when Adam lived on earth), in a primitive environment. It was Adam's duty to develop his language and devise names for this and that.

We know that letters fall into two categories. The first category consists of the 'building' letters. Their function is to form or build the word, without them having any other meaning. An example would be *kataba*: the *kaf*, the *ta`a* and

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= *and-such, so let me be struck with a punishment and never accept testimony from me.' He said: "This was mentioned to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and he said: 'The sword suffices as a witness.'" Narrated by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2606) and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (4417) The conclusion of the Hadith is: He then said: "I fear that a furious man and a jealous man may follow this course."'*

(1) *This is from an ode of Imru` Al-Qays from the Tawil metre and it consists of 77 verses. It is his renowned 'suspended ode' which begins thus: 'Halt and let us weep in remembrance of a beloved and an encampment As-Saram): a severance or break of relations. The meaning of the meter is:*
'O Fatima! Leave aside some of your flirtation and make up your mind regarding separating from me. Tell me once and for all and leave me.'

the *ba`a* are the letters from which the word is built without giving another meaning in addition to the meaning of the verb that these letters have produced.

The second category consists of the letters of meaning, and they are the letters that have a meaning that independently signifies them, as in *katabtu* (I wrote). The final *ta`a* has a meaning that is different from the meaning of writing. This is because it indicates a first-person subject. If it has a *fatha;* i.e. *katabta* (you wrote) then it indicates a second person subject and if it has a *kasra* i.e. *katabti* (you, female, wrote) it indicates a second person female subject.

We have stated that the name of a letter can be the proper name of something, as in the example of *sin*, which is the name of a known river (Seine). *`Ain* is an unintelligible letter, yet, many things are called by it, such as: *`ain* (the seeing eye/s); *`ain* (a spring of water); *`ain* (a spy) and having an eye; and *`ain* (precious things like gold and silver).

In His saying: 'By the wise Quran' (*Ya Sin:* 2), this letter *waw (by)* is called the *waw* of swearing as it is used in making oaths. However, is that which the speaker wants from the addressee coming by way of oath or by way of evidence? It is coming by way of evidence because an oath can contain an indication of a desired purpose. For example, your companion says to you: 'O brother! You do not appreciate me. I was in a crisis and you did not stand by my side'. You respond to him (in Egyptian dialect): 'By the life of the cheque that I wrote for you on such-and-such day; by the life of the gift that you accepted from me on such-and-such day!' So, you swear to him by the evidence of your truthfulness.

Likewise, here, the True Lord is saying to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'you have been sent and I swear by the Quran because it is a proof that you are a true messenger'.

The word Quran is the verbal noun of the verb *qara`a* (past form of read), and if there is an addition to the original root letters, then there must be an increase in meaning. We say *Quranan* to distinguish between the reading of the Quran and the reading of anything else. It also indicates that it is a book that is recited. In other times, it is called 'The Book' because it is written down. Thus, the Quran is recited from the hearts and written down in lines.

The Quran is also called *Adh-Dhikr* (The Remembrance) because it reminds us of the primordial covenant in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, '[Prophet], when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness." So, you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were not aware of this."' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

This reminder of the first covenant is out of Allah's Mercy towards us. It is from His Mercy towards us that He reminds us when we forget or become heedless, from the time that He created Adam *peace be upon him* until now. The True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds His servants, just as a father instructs his son regarding his life, and the first thing he teaches him is the applications of this religion. This instruction and reminding must continue and be passed on from one generation to the next because it is the nature of human beings to be heedless and forgetful, and thus fall into disobedience.

That is why those who said: 'We saw our fathers following this scripture; we are guided by their footsteps' (*az-Zukhruf:* 22) were lying when they said it because Adam *peace be upon him* and his nation were upon guidance in the beginning, so why have you not followed them? Therefore, you have followed your forefathers who were astray, not guided.

Likewise, when you consider how the Quran was compiled you find that those who compiled the Quran used to investigate the verse before recording it in order to be written down. This was done first on a sheet of paper, or pieces of cloth and bones upon which the Quran was first recorded, and then two reciters would testify to its authenticity. Why? They said: 'Because a sheet of paper does not has desires such that it would change what is written on it. As for the man who memorises, he is liable to make mistakes, forget, and be heedless. So, there must be someone else with him to remind him, in accordance with Allah's saying: "...so that if one of the two women should forget, the other can remind her..." (*al-Baqara:* 282).

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the Quran with wisdom, and wisdom is to put things in their proper place so that they can carry out their duties. All religious meanings are derived from sensory perception, before the religion. For example, a man rides a horse in order to get to his destination, but if your intention behind riding the horse is to roam around the fields, then your journey is very slow like that of a carriage, for example. By contrast, if you want to traverse a long distance, then it will take you like the wind.

That is why they have made a bridle for the horse that is placed on its palate to check its speed and control it. This bridle is called a *hakamah*(1), and from this word is derived the word *hikma* (wisdom) that checks the defiance of desires so that they do not break free, and so that all matters are in their proper place. Indeed, man has desires towards which he inclines, deviate from the main path. The Quran comes with the clear truth that puts this inclination straight and rectifies it. In reality, the Quran is wise because it is perfect and from the Wise, the Most Exalted. Thus, the Quran is speech from the Wise, and with regards to man it is like the horse's bridle.

It is due to the wisdom of the Quran that it has certain distinctions and it is not treated the way other books are treated. I can read a normal book at any time and in any state, even if I am in a state of minor or major ritual impurity. As for the Quran, no one touches it except those who are pure(2) because with the Quran you are devoting yourself to something sacred and precious. Beware of handling it whilst being impure, as the True Lord(3) says, 'that this is truly a noble Quran, in a protected Record that only the purified can touch.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 77-79) The True Lord has placed these spiritual rules for you so that you know that you are approaching a book that has a distinction over all other books.

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(1) *Hakamat Al-Lijam*: what encompasses the palates of the riding beast, and it goes around the mouth of the riding beast. *Al-Hakama* is a piece of iron on the bridle that goes over the nose of the horse and its palate to prevent it from disobeying the one riding it. And in the Hadith: 'There is not a single human being except that he has a bridle (*hakama*) on his head.' In another narration: 'On the head of every slave is a bridle (*hakama*) such that when he intends an evil deed Allah, if He wants to, can restrain him with it. (*Lissan Al-`Arab)* – under the entry on *hakama*.

(2) *All the Imams have agreed and none of the Companions disputed the prohibition of touching the Quran and carrying it whilst in a state of major ritual impurity. As for minor ritual impurity, Ibn `Abbas, Ash-Sha`bi, Ad-Dahhak, Zaid ibn `Ali, Ibn Hazem and others are of the position that it is permissible for a person in this state to touch the Quran. As for reading it without touching it, this is permissible without any argument. Mentioned by Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq in Fiqh As-Sunna 1: 43 and what follows:*

(3) *There are two statements regarding this verse:*
The first: The 'pure' here are the angels. This was stated by Ibn `Abbas, Mujahid, 'Ikrima, Sa`id ibn Jubair and others. Based on this statement the verse does not refer to reading the Quran with ablution or without ablution.
The second: The 'pure' are those who have purified themselves from both major and minor ritual impurity. What is meant by 'Quran' here is the mushhaf. At-Tabarani and Ibn Marduwayh have narrated from Ibn `Umar that he said: 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: 'No one touches the Quran except the pure.'

Likewise, the Quran has certain distinctions in its letters, and letters are that which words are comprised of as they are an expression of vocal tones. Each one of them has a place in the organs of speech. For example, the letters that are articulated from the throat and chest are: *Hamza*, *`ain* and *ha`a*. The two that do not have diacritical marks are *ghayn* and *fa`a.*

If we move on from the throat area, we find the tongue letters, i.e. those that are articulated from the tongue, beginning from the oropharynx to the middle and then the tip. For example, the letter *qaf* is articulated from the farthest part of the tongue, the *sheen* and *jeem* from the middle, while the *dad*, *lam* and *ra`a* are from the tip. There are also letters that are articulated from the lips, such as the *fa`a* which comes from the inside of the lower lip, the *ba`a* which comes from the inside of both lips and the *waw* which is also articulated from both lips.

To ensure that we read the Quran correctly, we must stick to these vocal places of articulation, which is unlike reading any other book, as no other book stipulates this condition. That is why we say: 'Indeed the perfection of the Quran cannot be violated as long as there is a specific way and a precise tone which must be observed'.

For example, if you were giving a normal speech, you would say: 'Gentlemen! May Allah's Peace, Mercy, and Blessings be upon you! I have been invited by so-and-so to meet him in such-and-such place. ...' If you were to say these words in the tone and style of the Quran it would be unacceptable, but if you apply this tone to the words of the Quran, then it is beautiful and appropriate.

Therefore, the perfection of the Quran is never violated, even in its articulation because it is something that is specific to it and different from all other kinds of speech. If you applied the particularities of the Quran to any other kind of speech it would be seen as absurd and thus be rejected.

I remember when we were young and they used to advise us to read books of literature such as the books of Al-Manfaluti like *Al-`Ibarat* or *An-Nazharat,* so that we would learn how to write in an elegant style. In fact, our style improved and progressed by reading books of literature, and we learned new expressions from them. If you went to someone who had memorised the Quran and can recite it in the ten variant readings, or the fourteen, and you read a word from a book to him or even an article, his style of reading the Quran would not be affected. Why? This is because the perfection of the Quran is never surpassed.

Thus, we understand that the wisdom of the Quran came from this distinctiveness. There is wisdom in its letters; in its words; in its tone; its recitation and its style that cannot be matched or applied to anything else.

Then, the True Lord says:

إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ٣

You [Muhammad] are truly one of the messengers sent [3] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 3)

This is the response of the oath in the preceding verse that we have discussed. The True Lord is responding to the disbelievers of Mecca and swearing an oath to them: ‘Indeed you, O Muhammad, are from the messengers sent’. When the one speaking sees that the one he is speaking to is merely unfamiliar with what he is talking about, he speaks to him normally without any emphasis. However, if this person is doubtful of what is being said to him, or he rejects it, then the one speaking emphasises what he is saying to an extent that is commensurate with the doubt or rejection.

That is why the True Lord is emphasising His speech with more than one means of emphasis. ‘You [Muhammad] are truly one of the messengers sent.’ (*Ya Sin:* 3) For emphasis, the True Lord uses `*inna* (truly) and *lam* (indeed), and this is preceded by an oath because the disbelievers were rejecting Prophet Muhammad’s message, and the emphasis of the speech is commensurate with the rejection.

In this regard, you may also consider His words: ‘We sent two messengers, but they rejected both. Then We reinforced them with a third. They said, “Truly, we are messengers to you.”’ (*Ya Sin:* 14) The result was rejection:

'but they answered, "You are only men like ourselves. The Lord of Mercy has sent nothing; you are just lying."' (*Ya Sin:* 15) That is why they emphasise their speech with more than one means of emphasis: 'They said, "Our Lord knows that we have been sent to you."' (*Ya Sin:* 16)

We have said that this verse came as a proof and evidence in the form of an oath, as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying: 'The one who reads the Quran must believe that you, O Muhammad, are a messenger sent by Allah'. Why? It is because they are a nation known by its skill in arts of speech and its high taste for eloquence. No nation, even contemporary ones, ever established exhibitions for speech. As for the Arabs, in their *jahiliyyah* (Pre-Islamic ignorance), established markets and exhibitions for speech in which poets and orators vied with one another every year; such as Al-Murbid, 'Ukazh, Dhu Al-Majana(1) and others.

Their concern for poetry was to such an extent that they hung their most eloquent poems on the curtains of the *Ka`ba*. As long as the Arabs were a nation noted for speech they had to receive the Quran with this talent of theirs. Its inimitability was not hidden from them, but they rejected it and said that it was magic; that it was poetry; that it was falsehood, and when they had become tired of employing various schemes and plots, from which they had achieved nothing, they said: 'Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) This means that there was no objection to the Quran other than the fact that it was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This was their problem with it. Their rhetorical talent could not oppose the Quran or reject it.

That is why, despite their disbelief, they loved listening to the Quran. One of them would conceal his identity and secretly listen to the Quran being read at night by Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Two of them would accidentally meet outside the chambers of Messenger, Muhammad

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(1) Abu Bakr Al-Azdi said, in what has been mentioned by Al-Marzuqi in his book, *Al-Azmina Wa Al-Amkina*, in the chapter in the markets of the Arabs: 'In *(jahiliyyah)* the large markets of the Arabs were thirteen in number, and the first to be built was the market of Dumat Al-Jandal, then Sahhar, then Daba, then Shahhr, then Rabiya Hadramawt, then Dhu Al-Majar, then Natat Khababar, then Al-Mushqir, then Hajr Bil-Yamama, then Mata, then `Ukazh, then `Adan then San`a`.'

peace and blessings be upon him and one of them would ask the other: ‘What are you doing here, O so-and-so?’ and he would have to say, ‘I came to visit my sick aunt’; the other would say ‘I came for such-and-such’. This was hardly successful, for one’s state reveals the truth of one’s words.(1) In this regard, a poet said:

Look at them, everyone has infiltrated
After the gathering of nighttime conversation had ended
Secretly he heads for the chamber of Taha (a name of Prophet Muhammad)
To hear the revelation in the early hours
Excuse them for its beauty. When they see one another
They seek to justify it with the lamest of excuses

That is why when one of them heard the Quran from Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and then returned to his people, they would say: ‘So-and-so has returned with a face other than the one he went with.’

Then, the True Lord says:

عَلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ٤

On a straight path [4]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 4)

As-sirat is the Straight Path, and it has another meaning on the Day of Resurrection. It is the path that is taken over hell and is traversed by the righteous and the wicked, the believer and the disbeliever. Those traversing it will differ according to their deeds in the life of this world. Some will traverse it like a flash of lightning even though it is sharper than a sword and thinner than a hair. Others will traverse it faster than racehorses, and still others will traverse it crawling. Then, there will be others who will fall into hell(1)—we seek refuge in Allah from that.

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(1) Ibn Hisham has mentioned in his, *As-Sira An-Nabawwiyah*, (The Quran, 1: 227 in the Dar At-Turath edition), that Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, Abu Jahl and Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq went out one night to listen to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was praying at night in his house. Each one of them found a spot in which to sit and listen and none of them knew where the others were sitting. They would listen to him until the break of dawn and then leave, and then they would bump into each other on the way home. At this point they would start rebuking one another. They would say to each other: ‘Do not go back, for if some of your fools saw you, you would put ideas in his head.’ Then they left (and this was repeated for three consecutive nights) until on the third night they said to each other: ‘We are not leaving until we pledge to one another not to return.’ Thus, they pledged to one another and then they departed. In the story there is a position that they changed their minds about what they had heard.

When you traverse the *sirat,* you will not have a stick with which to keep your balance, like a tightrope walker in the circus, for example. That which balances your movement on the *sirat* is the Quran that you clung to in the life of this world. When the believer traverses the *sirat,* his balancing is not from below but from above, from the direction of the Quran; for he will be like a suspension bridge that is not supported by anything from underneath but is strengthened from above by what is holding it and keeping its balance. This is how the believer will be on the *sirat*.

The *sirat* in its general meaning is the straight path that takes you to your destination in the quickest and easiest way, but in the Quran's expression: 'On a straight path.' (*Ya Sin:* 4), there is an indication that the *sirat* has a duty, and it is to take you to the intended destination. Thus, the *sirat* (path) serves you.

We have an example of this where Allah says: 'Such people are following their Lord's guidance...' (*al-Baqara:* 5). Some people understand that guidance requires responsibilities and restriction of movement, and that there is difficulty and hardship in following the guidance, but the wording of the verse has the opposite meaning. The meaning of 'Such people are following their Lord's guidance...' (*al-Baqara:* 5) is that you are upon guidance, and it is like a riding animal that is taking you to your glorious destination. Thus, it is carrying you. You are not carrying it.

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(1) *Ahmad narrates from `Aisha Allah be pleased with her that she said: 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: "Hell has a bridge over it that is thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword and there are hooks on it and spikes that take whomever Allah wills. The people cross it in the blink of an eye, or like lightning, or like racehorses and riders, and the angels say: 'Lord, grant him safety! Lord, grant him safety!', and a saved person is safe and a shamed person is safe, and another is rolled up and thrown into the Fire on his face."' Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (6: 110) and included by Al-Haithami in his Majma` Az-Zawaa`id [10: 359] and he said: 'It includes Ibn Lahima and he is weak but has been relied upon.'*

The *sirat* is described as being straight, for we know from the basics of engineering that the straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Thus, when you want to move from one place to another 'from' indicates the starting point and 'to' indicates the desired destination. As long as you are only concerned with the starting point and the destination, then facilitation requires that you take the quickest and shortest of ways, which is the straight line. This is because every starting point in the road or curve will constitute a two-sided triangle in the line of travel and the straight path is the third side.

It is known that the total of any two sides of a triangle is longer than the third. Therefore, the path is longer for you. That is why the Quran talks to us about *al-sirat al-mustaqim* (the straight path); and about *sawa`a as-sabil* (the even path): *sawa`a* means that its right side is equal to its left side.

Why is the path of the believers a straight path? Because Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who has ordained it as a way for His creation and because it is sent down from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, the True Lord says:

تَنزِيلَ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ﴿٥﴾

With a revelation from the Almighty, the
Lord of Mercy [5] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 5)

When you hear the word *tanzil* (a revelation sent down) (*Ya Sin:* 5), you know that it is from an upper direction, even if that which is sent down is in the depths of the earth because it been sent from above, as Allah says: '...We also sent down iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind...' (*al-Hadid:* 25). Iron is only found in the earth, but you should look at the highness of its Creator. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has given it two attributes: a worldly attribute and a religious attribute. '…We also sent down iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind...' (*al-Hadid:* 25). The mighty strength is for the enemies of Allah *Glorified is He*. '...so that Allah could mark out those who would help Him and His messengers though they cannot see Him...' (*al-Hadid:* 25), and this is for the Hereafter. It also contains benefits for man i.e. in the life of this world. That is why we find that it is a metal that is widely benefitted from and it is the strongest and most firm.

In Allah’s saying: ‘...the Almighty, the Lord of Mercy’ (*Ya Sin:* 5), He is mentioning here the Attribute of Might and the Attribute of Mercy because that which is being bestowed from on high is a way that restricts man’s movement by telling him to ‘do such-and-such’ and ‘do not do such-and-such’. You have the choice to obey or disobey. The True Lord who has ordained this way for you, wants good for you, because He is not increased in the slightest by your obedience and He is not harmed by your disobedience.

Thus, it is you who are intended in this matter because Allah *Glorified is He* is Almighty over His creation and Gracious towards them. Thus, if you see someone who is disobedient and contravening Allah’s way, know that Allah *Glorified is He* is Almighty and capable of exacting revenge. No one is able to save a human from His grasp. On the other hand, if you look at the one who is obedient, know that Allah *Glorified is He* is Merciful.

Then, the True Lord says:

لِتُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّآ أُنذِرَ ءَابَآؤُهُمْ فَهُمْ غَٰفِلُونَ ﴿٦﴾

To warn a people whose forefathers were not warned,
and so they are unaware [6] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 6)

`Indhar (warning) is to induce fear of something that is lethal and destructive. It is a condition that the warning comes before something happens so that the warning can fulfil its task of preventing man from doing wrong; so that he does not fall into that which will destroy him, and thus he is able to protect and save himself.

The meaning of ‘...whose forefathers were not warned...’ (*Ya Sin:* 6) is as follows: whenever you hear the particle *ma* you assume that it indicates negation, and this is what the Quranic commentators have said. They have said: ‘because they—the forefathers—were people of heedlessness, and lived in a time when there were no messengers and so they did not have a messenger to warn them’. Additionally, if we say: ‘Indeed Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a warner for all of mankind, including the Jews and the Christians’, they say: ‘He is not a warner unto us because warners have already come to us before him. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came to us and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* came to us.

The solution to this problem is to say: ‘Yes, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did indeed warn his people, and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* did indeed warn his people, but many years have elapsed since then and the people have differed amongst themselves and gone astray, and no warner has come to bring them back from their misguidance. So, a warner did come to you, but you failed to continue paying heed to his warning, and here is Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who has come to you as a new warner.

Ma, here may have the meaning of a relative pronoun, i.e. to warn a people with what their forefathers had been warned before them, meaning: you are not the first of the messengers.

In His saying: ‘...and so they are unaware’ (*Ya Sin:* 6), *ghafla* (heedlessness) indicates that something occurs to your mind, but then your heart is not attached to it, so eventually it is forgotten. Thus, you do not remember it until someone comes and draws your attention to it, and reminds you of it. Forgetfulness is not a function of the heart but of the intellect and the memory; for if the heart is attached to something, then, whenever heedless occurs this attachment of the heart blocks it, and thus it remains in the memory and you do not become heedless of it.

لَقَدۡ حَقَّ ٱلۡقَوۡلُ عَلَىٰٓ أَكۡثَرِهِمۡ فَهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٧﴾

The verdict has been passed against most of them,
for they refuse to believe [7] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 7)

The True Lord recorded in pre-eternity every response of those who receive any kind of religious call; the believers and the disbelievers, but He granted mankind the freedom of choice. He records what will be done by mankind. Then, the events happen according to what has been recorded. This means that what he said in pre-eternity is the truth.

The Quran says at one point: ‘...The verdict has been passed…’ (*Ya Sin:* 7), and at another time ‘…the sentence has already been passed…’ (*Hud:* 40), and in another place ‘…When the verdict is given against them…’ (*an-Naml:* 82). All these verses indicate that what Allah *Glorified is He* already knew regarding those who have the choice, and thus choose guidance or misguidance, is recorded with Him. It is true just as Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us, and if it were the case that the slave could not choose we would say: 'Indeed Allah has compelled him to do as He has willed', but in fact, he has the choice.

The True Lord has Absolute Power and Absolute Knowledge, and His Knowledge of whatever will be is recorded and written down. We already clarified this matter when we spoke about Abu Lahab: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too.' (*al-Masad:* 1) When he heard this verse, Abu Lahab could have declared himself to be a believer, even if he did not mean it, and then accuse the Quran of lying, but he did not do this— even though he had the choice — and remained in his state of disbelief until Allah's information regarding him came true.

Likewise, in His words: '...and say inwardly, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?"' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) It is something amazing on their part, after the Quran had disgraced and had informed them of what they say inwardly, that they did not believe in it or ask themselves: who had informed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about their thoughts? Had it been the case that they did not say this inwardly, then they would have confronted Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said: 'We did not do such thing'.

They denied the mission of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* although he informed them of some invisible matters unknown to human minds. After denying his message, they wanted to affirm that he was above a human messenger— a God. However, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* told them, 'I am a messenger, not God. The prior word expresses what happened to those people; they did not believe and rejected stubbornly, 'Indeed, the word [of Allah's condemnation] is bound to come true against most of them, for they will not believe' (*Ya Sin:* 7). They even said that angels sometimes wonder when something happens in the universe in conformity with information they have in the Book. The angels then exclaim, 'How Knowledgeable and Powerful our Lord is'! Everything happens just as He said! However, human beings have absolute freedom of choice.

Philosophers attempted to explain the verse: 'Indeed, the word [of Allah's condemnation] is bound to come true against most of them: for they will not believe' (*Ya Sin:* 7) saying, 'the Lord allows human beings freewill. Simply, they accepted to assume the responsibility of free choice. Unlike heaven, earth and the mountains among other things that refused free choice and, instead, are completely subject to Allah and His will.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most ignorant’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

The Lord *the Exalted* allowed them choice. The heavens, earth, and mountains refused, but man, deluded by intellect, intelligence, and independence, accepted the choice. Allah declared that man was wicked and ignorant. Man is wicked because of wronging himself with bearing that great responsibility. He is ignorant because he declared responsible but failed to carry out his duty. An intelligent person envisages the time of fulfilment before taking duties on. A friend may come to you to deposit an amount of money as trust. You think it easy for you to accept it in determination to give it back when requested. However, you cannot be certain that your own circumstances will not change. You may need the money or face spiritual change! Here, human ignorance lies in human carelessness about the time of fulfilment. As such, man wrongs himself by bearing duties beyond his abilities. Simply, human desires are very strong and may lead him to sins.

They said that two matters judge the entire world; the seen and the unseen. It is amazing that the seen is evidence of the unseen; what you see tells of what you do not see. To teach people how to believe in Allah, encourage them to look at the creation of skies and earth: ‘Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon: [hence,] adore not the sun or the moon, but prostrate yourselves in adoration before Allah, who has created them – if it is Him whom you [really] worship’ (*Fussilat:* 37).

‘For among His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate – and lo! When We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life]! Verily, He who brings it to life can surely give life to the dead [of heart as well]: for, behold, He has the power to will anything’ (*Fussilat:* 39).

After you have reflected on Allah’s kingdom and His signs in the universe, and thus believe in Him, he gives you other issues that your mind cannot comprehend. Why? Because Allah *Glorified is He* wants faith in Him to be based on two aspects: that you believe in what can be seen, and that you accept, when you have come to believe in what can be seen, the existence of truth, and He is the Lord who exists by necessity, and you hear Him. Thus, if He informs you of something that your intellect cannot comprehend you must accept it as part of your faith in Him.

If He says to you that the *sirat*, for example, is thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword you do not reject it, even though your intellect cannot comprehend it. This is because Allah, the legislator, is the one saying it. You are therefore taking that which can be seen as evidence for that which is unseen, and it is Allah. From the evidence of the unseen, which is Allah, you have taken your faith in the things that your intellect cannot comprehend, so it is as if the seen and the unseen are the axis upon which faith and other things revolve.

The requirements of professing the religion are either necessary for the heart or limbs and tongue. What is required of the heart is the creed that one believes in the One who exists by necessity, and that He is One. One must also believe that He must have conveyed a way for me to conduct my life because He is the One Who created me and I am His making. The maker is the one who determines the principles of maintenance for what has been made, and the principles of maintenance have to be conveyed.

The Lord *the Exalted* does not talk to His creation one at a time, but rather, He chooses for the task – the task of conveying from Him – whomever He wishes from the angels and from human beings. The one chosen from the angels conveys to the one chosen from the human beings. The one chosen from the human beings conveys to the rest of the people. That is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* developed an Islamic nation in twenty-three years, and had it been the case that each individual waited for Allah to speak to him individually the development of the nation would have taken a lot more time.

Therefore, conveying from Allah necessarily follows His Existence. If not, it would be the case that Allah did exist but you would not know that Allah *Glorified is He* is One and has no partner. You cannot know these things by yourself. There must be a messenger to inform you about the Lord and His Names, Attributes and instructions needed from you.

It is easy to refute the worship of the sun, moon, trees, or rocks based on the following: What is worship? Worship is the worshipper's obedience of the one worshipped in commands and proscriptions. We go on to say, what are commands and proscriptions of the sun? What rewards has it prepared for worshippers? What has it prepared for those who disobey it? This is therefore a deity without any method (for conducting your life) and without any commandments, so it is false and rejected.

For further clarification, if someone came and knocked on the door, we all without doubts think of a person who wants to come in. None of us knows who is there, why he comes, where he comes from, or whether he brings glad tidings or warning. We will certainly differ in these matters.

We must stop at the point upon which we all agree: there is someone knocking on the door. We leave it to this person to explain who he is. We say, 'who are you'? He says, 'I am so-and-so and I come for such-and-such'. Likewise, the creation of this miraculous universe is sufficient to indicate that the Lord is All Knowing, All-Powerful, and All-Wise. His are all Attributes of Perfection. When it comes to the question: Who is He? What does He want from you? The Messenger's mission is to convey that from Allah.

Philosophers failed to stop at understanding the One Who exists by necessity and wanted to imagine Him. This is their mistake. Had they limited themselves to what they understand, it would have been sufficient. You ask: Who are you? What do you want from me? What have you prepared for me if I obey you? What will you do to me if I disobey you? He then sends messengers to answer all these questions. Sincere followers of religions should adopt this way. We believe that Allah does exist by necessity; He is One and Unique. He sends truthful messengers, backed by miracles, to convey from Him. This is clear and rational. After you have come to believe in these clear, rational, and visible matters, He informs you of unseen things that have no evidence, e.g., paradise and its joys, good food and a need-free life there. These matters are beyond human intellect, but who is informing you of them? It is Allah, the Truthful Speaker. You already believe in Him and trust in His words.

We are incessantly in need to be in real contact with the Lord in whom we believe. As such, the five prayers are prescribed to have a devotional constant access. They are five prayers in performance and fifty in reward. The fifty prayers meant to cover the twenty-four hours. It is from Allah's Mercy that He made them five in terms of action and fifty in terms of reward. However, people are still impatient with them.

I remember when we were in Mecca, at the Sacred Mosque, that the calls to prayers followed one another giving us no enough opportunity to sit in the Mosque and reflect on our surroundings. Sheikh Ahmad *Allah rest his soul* often said, 'Stand up and pray!' In response, we said to him, 'O Sheikh Ahmad! We came here for *Hajj* and did not come for prayers.'

Evidently, prayers are five to encompass the entire day and night and you establish constant devotion to Allah. Once in prayers, you find one has two units, one has three, and one has four units without being aware of the wisdom behind these numbers. It suffices for you to say that it is Allah Who prescribes them as such. You do not live in society by yourself, but with other people; some are weak, poor, or needy. These people must live just as you must live, so you are obliged to help them with obligatory and voluntary charities. Allah also legislates fasting for you as a form of worship. It distances you from going against the Divine commands until uprightness becomes deeply rooted in you. Allah loves enthusiastic worshippers who obey His commandments persistently. He permits in *Sha`ban* what He forbids in *Ramadan.*

The tongue articulates words, some Quranic words you understand and others are beyond your intellect. The introductory beginnings of some Quranic chapters, for example, are beyond the abilities of our intellects, whereas other parts are perceivable to human intellects. There is difference between the one who accepts something because he comprehends it and the one accepting something without comprehension. Simply, the Lord wants it. We already gave an example of a master who has workers in his house. He commands one of them to move a stone from a place to another. However, he replies 'I cannot do it myself; I am going to ask a colleague to help me'. The master then says, 'There is some money underneath it that you can have'! Hearing this, he moves the stone himself. Therefore, did he move it for a reason or because of a command? He did it for a reason. Faith is not like that. Faith is not for a reason; faith is sheer obedience.

‘Indeed, the word [of Allah’s condemnation] is bound to come true’ (*Ya Sin:* 7) means that His word comes just as decreed and recorded. His saying ‘…against most of them…’ (*Ya Sin:* 7) proves that some of them would believe, even if it is just one man. Allah’s saying, ‘For they will not believe’ (*Ya Sin:* 7) indicates most of them will never accept faith. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا جَعَلۡنَا فِيٓ أَعۡنَٰقِهِمۡ أَغۡلَٰلٗا فَهِيَ إِلَى ٱلۡأَذۡقَانِ فَهُم مُّقۡمَحُونَ ٨

[It is as if] We had placed [iron] collars around
their necks, right up to their chins so that their
heads are forced up [8] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 8)

In this verse, the Lord *the Exalted* gives an image of the state of the disbelievers, who are opposed to following the truth. He says, ‘Behold, around their necks We have put shackles, reaching up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up’ (*Ya Sin:* 8). *Aghlal* is a plural and its singular is *ghul* (i.e. shackle). It is a piece of iron that grips the hands and ties it under the chin. When the hands are tied under the chin, the head is forced up; one is forced to look up as well, making it almost impossible to see where one is going and where their feet are. This image is also clear in the meaning of the word ‘heads are forced up (*muqmahun*)’ (*Ya Sin:* 8). *Muqmih* is taken from camel’s moving its head high. It does so when it drinks water; it sips it and then it raises its head.(1) Some said, ‘Indeed this is an image that the Lord *the Exalted* has drawn of the one who shackles his hands from giving in charity and spending on others. Likewise, his hands are chained to the neck on the Day of Resurrection; the way you chose to live this life affects you in the coming life. The Lord *the Exalted* always creates a balance between what the one deserving the reward has done and the reward itself; the reward is equal to one’s actions. For example, Allah says: ‘But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah’s cause, Give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come] on the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told:] “These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures!”’ (*at-Tawba:* 34-35): (i. e. the reward).

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(1) Al-Jawhari says, ‘The camel raises its head (*qamaha*) and is *qamih* when it has raised its head from the pond and it has finished drinking, so it is a *qamih* camel. *Lisan Al-`Arab* – under the entry *qamaha*

These three human places: foreheads, sides, and backs come in this sequence in order to correspond completely with what the possessor of wealth did, i.e. hoarding his wealth and withholding it from the poor. The poor person came to him and he would turn his forehead away from them and give them his side. Then he would turn his back to them and walk away. Their punishment is according to what they did. The Lord *the Exalted* says:

وَجَعَلۡنَا مِنۢ بَيۡنِ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ سَدّٗا وَمِنۡ خَلۡفِهِمۡ سَدّٗا فَأَغۡشَيۡنَٰهُمۡ فَهُمۡ لَا يُبۡصِرُونَ ٩

And set barriers before and behind them, blocking their vision: they cannot see [9] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 9)

Does this mean that Allah *Glorified is He* will help them in disbelief? They said, ‘Yes, because when I call my slave and he refuses to respond to me and disobey me, I assist him in disbelief. Simply, I am a Lord that has no need of any. If he loves disbelief and adores it and there is no hope for him to restore guidance, I seal his heart. Faith will not enter it and disbelief will not exit from it. No one disbelieves in defiance of Allah, but rather, he disbelieves because of the freewill divinely embedded in man’. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord and Creator of all. He assists all to fulfil their intents, be they believers or disbelievers. That is why Allah *the Exalted* has sealed the hearts of disbelievers. He says, ‘We have set a barrier before them’ (*Ya Sin:* 9), i.e. placed in front of them an obstruction and an impediment ‘and a barrier behind them’ (*Ya Sin:* 9). It is a material barrier that is outside the creation of man ‘We have enshrouded them’ (*Ya Sin:* 9), i.e. We have put over their eyes a shroud and a veil. They are hindered from the truth of things. In themselves we have shrouded their eyes so that they do not see and they are not guided. From their inside, they themselves have not remembered the primordial covenant they made with Allah. As to the outside, they do not pay attention to the method in front of them or behind them. There is an obstacle preventing them. Had they remembered what was awaiting them, they would have abstained from transgression. Had they considered what had befallen the past denies and the divine punishment that snatched them, they would have gone back.

A barrier in front of them prevents them from knowing what was awaiting them and another behind so as not to reflect on the destiny of past peoples about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘For every one of them did We take to task for his sin: Upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm wind. Some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast. Some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some of them We caused to drown(1)’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40).

They are surrounded by obstacles and have no hope to return to the way of truth. It is correct that the meaning of ‘We have set a barrier before them and a barrier behind them’ (*Ya Sin:* 9) is an impediment that prevents them from reflecting on the rational evident proofs in front of them. The ‘barrier behind them’ prevents them from being aware of the primordial state of belief instilled in them. (2) The Lord *the Exalted* says:

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(1) These are the four categories of punishment:

a. ‘...upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm-wind’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40): they are the people of `Ad. *Hasib* is a wind that is bitterly cold and blows very violently and strongly, carrying over them the pebbles of the earth and its sand and stone.

b. ‘Some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40): they are the people of Thamud. A blast or shout came to them which subdued all their sounds and movements.

c. ‘Some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40): this is Qarun. Allah caused him and his house to be swallowed by the earth.

d. Some of them We caused to drown’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40): this is Pharaoh, his minister Haman and their armies who were drowned entirely in one morning

(2) In his commentary of this verse (3/564) Ibn Kathir relates from Muhammad ibn Ka`ab Al-Qurtubi, that Abu Jahl said to the leaders of the Quraysh while they were sitting: ‘Indeed Muhammad claims that if you follow him, you will be kings and that when you die you will be resurrected and you will have gardens that are better than the gardens of Jordan. If you go against him, you will be killed and then resurrected after your death and then you will have a fire in which you will be punished.’ At that point, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came out to them and in his hand had a handful of dust. Allah had shrouded him from their eyes so he proceeded to scatter it on their heads while reading, “O you human being! Consider this Quran full of wisdom.” (*Ya Sin:* 1-2) until he finished at His saying, “Verily, We shall indeed bring the dead back to life; and We shall record whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead, and the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind: for of all things do We take account in a record clear” (*Ya Sin:* 9). The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings*=

وَسَوَآءٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ ءَأَنذَرۡتَهُمۡ أَمۡ لَمۡ تُنذِرۡهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١٠

It is all the same to them whether you warn them or not: they will not believe [10] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 10)

Parity here is in reference to them, not in reference to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Prophet's duty is only to convey the message. As long as he has conveyed it to them, he has done his job. Allah simply says to them, 'Relax and do not grieve, for whether you warn them or not, it is the same'. Indeed, warning them establishes evidence against them. They previously vowed, 'As it is, they [who are averse to the truth often] swear by Allah with their most solemn oaths that if a warner should ever come to them, they would follow his guidance better than any of the communities [of old had followed the warner sent to them]. Yet, when a warner has come unto them, [his call] but increases their aversion' (*Fatir:* 42).

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ مَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ ٱلذِّكۡرَ وَخَشِيَ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنَ بِٱلۡغَيۡبِۖ
فَبَشِّرۡهُ بِمَغۡفِرَةٖ وَأَجۡرٖ كَرِيمٍ ١١

You can warn only those who will follow the Quran and hold the Merciful One in awe, though they cannot see Him: give such people the glad news of forgiveness and a noble reward [11] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 11)

In other words, your warning, O Muhammad, benefits those who remember Allah and fear Him; they believe in Him and in His ability to resurrect the dead and call them to account. Contrary to this category, there are the deniers who get no benefit from warnings.

= *be upon him* went off to do what he needed to do, while they spent the night watching his door. He confronted them afterwards, coming out of the house, and asked: "What is with you?" They said: "We are waiting for Muhammad." He said: "He has left and he did not leave a single man from amongst you except that he put some dust on his head and then went to do what he needed to do." Thus each man from amongst them began to shake the dust off his head.' This has also been mentioned by As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (7/43) and he attributed it to Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Mandhur, Ibn Abu Hatim and Abu Na`im in *Ad-Dala`il.*

Khashya (awe) refers to the fear mixed with reverence. You fear Allah and you revere Him. Likewise, you have hope in Him. Fearing others than Allah is fear with antipathy because it is fear of tyranny. That is why the attribute of Mercy comes after awe 'who stands in awe of the Most Gracious' (*Ya Sin:* 11). You fear the one described with affection and tenderness. This is more conducive; it makes you love and have affection for the one you fear. Your awe of Him is coupled with reverence, respect, and hope. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'who stands in awe of the Most Gracious' (*Ya Sin:* 11) so that you do not shun the one you fear.

This believer's awe of the Lord manifests when he is absent from people by himself. Indeed, he fears Allah, not people, and needs no one to watch him. A human being watching a human being is of no benefit; whatever deceit and deception works for the observed and the observer alike. When you make the observer do a surprise investigation there is no room for deception.

We gave an example of a traffic man. A car driver must fulfil some conditions to have a driving permit ensuring the safety of the car and the driver's ability to drive the car after passing the necessary tests in this regard. Despite this, there are those of us who adhere to the traffic laws and those that do not. We place a traffic man to observe and regulate the flow of traffic in streets and he has someone who observes him. However, when they discover that the traffic man could engage in fraud such that he revokes the permit of someone who breaks the traffic laws but then pretends to be unaware of someone else, they introduce observation equipment, such as radar in order to be more exact. Now, who uses this equipment? Human beings, of course use it. So, what works for them works for others.

When the observer and the observed are the same, the observation process is useless. If we want to place an observer for each one, we would need an army of security guards. What about observing the entire world! Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with a perfect message unrestricted to times or places. The time and place delineate events because they are the vessels of events. If the event does not exist, there is no time and no place. That is why it is not correct to speak of 'where?' and 'when?' about Allah. Simply, 'where' and 'when' are created by Allah. The time and place both govern the event, but the place is a fixed vessel while time is changing, dawn, noon, etc. We say this is before such-and-such or after such-and-such.

The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* came with a universal Message in time and place to remain until the Final Hour. He came with a method to preserve humanity throughout the world in different environments, peculiarities, and eras. How can this preservation and observation come true? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with a way that governs the entire world in time and place. It is not sound to place an observer, who is of the same species over every single person. The best way is to instil the fear of Allah in souls and hearts of humankind openly and secretly. This constant observer never lies about you or leaves you for a moment. Once(1) a woman was seduced by a man into a deserted place where no one could see them. He said to her, ‘What is keeping you from me? No-one can see us except the celestial bodies.’ She responded, ‘You fool! Where is the Creator of the celestial bodies?’ This is the awe of the Most Gracious when one is away from people.

It is related(2) that during the time of 'Adud Ad-Dawlah, a Buyhid governor under the Abbasid nominal caliphate—noted for intelligence and justice, a man went to the Baghdad market to sell a precious necklace so he could perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), but he found no buyers for his precious necklace. The man then passed by a respected old man with signs of righteousness and said, ‘This is a trustworthy man and I will entrust him to hold onto the necklace until I return from *Hajj*.’ When he returned from *Hajj*, he asked the old man to give him the necklace, but the old man denied all knowledge of it. All attempts to retrieve the necklace failed. Someone walking past them said, ‘O you! Indeed, this man is a crook and a liar. Go to 'Adud Ad-Dawlah. He will get the necklace for you with his intelligence and subterfuge. The man followed the advice and told 'Adud Ad-Dawlah his story. He replied, ‘Go tomorrow and sit next to this man. I will pass by you with my retinue. Do not stand up for me. If I speak to you, then respond while sitting. Leave it me to sort out this matter.’ The following day 'Adud Ad-Dawlah passed by with guards and retinue, surrounded by members of his court with his elaborate sceptre and much wealth and grandeur. He looked at the owner of the necklace and said, ‘O so-and-so! How long have you been here? Why did you not inform me of your presence to receive you and give you your right? The old man heard this speech and thought that the man was an acquaintance of the ruler. He was terribly afraid and approached the owner of the necklace saying, ‘Please, do not mention the story of the necklace to the king.’ He then brought the necklace to the owner. The man went with the necklace to 'Adud Ad-Dawlah with a smile on face. 'Adud Ad-Dawlah said, ‘Wait for me tomorrow in the same place.’ 'Adud Ad-Dawlah did indeed come, but this time he brought a gibbet to the front of this crook’s shop and commanded that man to be hanged. He remarked, ‘Such is the punishment of those whose faith appears in the presence of people and fades when they are alone.(1) As such, Allah places hypocrites in the lowest part of hellfire even though they were the first to rush to prayers and occupied the first row behind the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, they contradict themselves and their tongues oppose their hearts.

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(1) The story of the man who told the woman ‘The moon sees us save the planets in the wilderness and her answer to him

(2) The story of Al-Mu`tadid with a man selling a valuable necklace in the market of Baghdad

G*hayb* (i.e. the unseen) refers to what is beyond the reach of human perception (*Ya Sin:* 11). Allah informs of the Hereafter, resurrection, gathering and reckoning. This awe of Allah implies the belief in the unseen. We believe in Allah *Glorified is He* even though we cannot see Him. The invisible, unknown, or hidden world is *ghayb*. There is no physical way or preliminary step in the universe to it. For example, in engineering and theoretical exercises, the premises given and preliminary steps take you to conclusions and may help you discover the unknown. You find that the invisible world has two categories:

- The unseen that is exclusive to Allah and only He knows of it, except if He releases to one of His messengers. This category has no preliminary steps leading to or indicative of it.
- Some parts of the unseen have preliminary indicative steps. If you use them, you can reach what was unseen yesterday. You should use the unseen that becomes visible to verify the unseen

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(1) Imam ibn Al-Jawzi, *Al-Azkiyas*, chapter 11. This event took place in Baghdad. The merchant who denied the trust was a perfume vendor. The other man was Khurasan. The perfume vendor was punished by hanging by the necklace and was crucified on the door of the shop.

> hidden from you. You have no means of sight. What you can see should prompt you to believe in what you do not see. We said that this category of the unseen is the unseen has preliminary steps leading to it. It has a birthdate in which it appears. If this birthdate coincides with some research on the part of man, it appears. If not, Allah may cause it to appear unexpectedly as is the case with many discoveries that now serve human beings. The birthday of the unseen may have come, but your search for it may not.

The believer's faith in the unseen increases when using what is manifest to infer what is hidden. Some gifted scholars explain to you the unseen whose time has not come yet by use of what already exists. For example, it is related (1) that the Romans asked the Commander of the Believers to send them a scholar to make them understand matters of religion, so he sent Ash-Sha`bi.(2) They began asking him about religious matters hidden to them. For example, they asked how man is blessed in paradise by eating without any need to relieve himself. In response, Ash-Sha`bi wonderfully answered that 'have you seen the foetus in the mother's womb; it is fed and grows without relieving itself. If it did relieve itself in the placenta, it would be burned. Likewise, man in paradise eats but does not relieve himself because he is fed by Allah and Allah feeds him in such a way that nothing remains to excrete. Here, we eat our own food and eat much beyond our needs. Thus, we have to excrete'.

They then asked him, 'You have said that you can take from paradise whatever you want without diminishing what is therein at all. How can that be?' He said, 'Because something diminishes when it is consumed if it is not being replenished by something else. If it has replenishment, it does not diminish. The replenishment in paradise is from Allah, so how can there be any diminishing? One more thing: If you went to a lamp and took a flame from it, or even a thousand flames, would you diminish the brightness of the lamp at all?' This was Ash-Sha`bi's answer. People were amazed. They wrote a letter for him and he took it to the Commander of the Believers. They envied the Commander of the Believers that he had such an intelligent and gifted person in his service. The letter reads, 'We wonder how could people who have the like of Ash-Sha`bi make someone else their commander?'

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(1) The story of Ash-Sha`bi with the Roman king and their envy to him

(2) Ibn Hamdun in *Al-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyyah* states that the man is Khalid ibn Yazid Al-Qurashi. He met with deacons and monks who asked him these questions. Salah Ad-Deen As-Safadi mentions in *Al-Wafi Bil-Wafayat* that the man is Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi and the questioner is a monk in a cell. The same was said by Al-Qadi At-Tanukhi in *Nashwar Al-Muhadira*.

When Ash-Sha`bi went and handed over the letter, the Commander of the Believers read it and said to Ash-Sha`bi 'Do you know what is in this letter' He said: 'No, O Commander of the Believers.' He said, 'Read!' So Ash-Sha`bi read the statement and said, 'Yes, O Commander of the Believers, but this is because he did not see you. If they saw you, they will change their opinion.' The one who reflects on the matter of warning will find that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* has two warnings: a general one for all of creation, and it is the warning that is conveyed from Allah to everyone, the believer, and the disbeliever. It is that of which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner' (*Fatir:* 24) because those who believe in Allah benefit from being warned, and those who do not believe do not benefit from it at all.

The other warning is that which is specific to the one who fears Allah, whilst alone, and it is the warning for those who have already accepted. The one who fears Allah whilst alone benefits from it because those who do not fear their Lord have already been warned but the warning has been conveyed and they have not benefitted from it. That is why they are not included in the specific warning.

'...unto such, then, give the glad tiding of [Allah's] Forgiveness and of a most excellent reward!' (*Ya Sin:* 11) We said: 'Indeed glad tidings (*bishara*) is to give news of something good before it happens so that one is prompted towards the means of goodness and strives for it. You notice here that forgiveness comes before the reward. Why? This is because the Lord *the Exalted* before giving you a blessing, diverts punishment from you first because something must be emptied before it can be filled. Thus, forgiveness is always the return for believing in Allah, but the reward is the return for acting according to Allah's way. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, Allah does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills...' (*an-Nisa': 48*). Whoever believes in Allah is safe from punishment and wins forgiveness. Whoever wants the reward must act righteously.

The reward is described as being bountiful (*karim*), even though the Bountiful is the Giver *the Most High*, so the meaning is that the Giver is being bountiful, beyond giving. The giving has become bountiful, as if it is eager for its owner, as a man is eager to give. That is why we have said: 'Indeed, the blessing with which Allah blesses His creation loves its owner and it strives for him and despises anyone who envies him because of it, or resents him because of it'. That is why it does not go to the resentful envier, and he never obtains any good from it.

Evidently, it is as if the Giver of Graces is saying, 'As long as you hate to see others have blessings, then you will never obtain anything from them because you are claiming that Allah is mistaken in His giving and you have exposed yourself to His judgement, so how can His blessings come to you? However, if you love to see others have blessings, then they will come to you and knock on your door'.

This matter has many evidences in our life. I remember one of them, when a man(1) from our town, Mit Ghamr, came to me and complained about how his rich uncle was harsh towards him. Despite his wealth, he was stingy with him. He employed strangers and left him without work among other things he mentioned. My wife was sitting with me. She said to him, 'My son! You are always reviling your uncle and engrossing yourself in his business.' He said, 'Yes, because he never asks about me.'

I said to him: 'I am going to ask you a question and I want you to promise not to lie!' When he saw that I was going to take solemn oath by the Quran, he backed off. I said to him, 'Do you like to see your uncle have blessings?' He said: 'No. How can I like it when I do not get anything from it?' I said: 'If you love for your uncle to have blessings and desire goodness for him, the blessings would come knocking on your door.' He said, 'I implore you to speak to my uncle and advise him regarding me.'

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(1) The story of a man with his harsh hearted uncle and the reply of Sheikh Ash- Sha`rawi to him

It appears that the man really tried to reform himself. Allah did rectify what was between him and his uncle. After the dawn prayer, he came to me and knocked on the door. He was crying and said: ‘O Sheikh! Let me tell you a story stranger than dreams.’ I said, ‘What is it?’ He said: ‘One hour before dawn someone came and knocked on the door really hard. I got up and opened the door. To my surprise, he was my uncle scolding me and saying: ‘How can you leave me with strangers who plunder my wealth while you just mess around. Take the keys and in the morning go open the shops and take care of my interests by yourself.’

I said: ‘Yes, because you have come to love for your uncle to have blessings and you have changed what was in your heart towards him.’ Therefore, whoever wants to possess the blessings of people shall love that others have the blessings also.

إِنَّا نَحۡنُ نُحۡيِ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰ وَنَكۡتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُواْ
وَءَاثَٰرَهُمۡۚ وَكُلَّ شَيۡءٍ أَحۡصَيۡنَٰهُ فِيٓ إِمَامٖ مُّبِينٖ ﴿١٢﴾

We shall certainly bring the dead back to life, and We record what they send ahead of them as well as what they leave behind: We keep an account of everything in a clear Record [12] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 12)

His saying in the previous verse: ‘unto such, then, give the glad tiding of [Allah’s] Forgiveness and of a most excellent reward’ (*Ya Sin:* 11) has a place here because it is appropriate in terms of forgiveness and the excellent reward in the Hereafter, the Lord *the Exalted* tells us about something visible therein: ‘Verily, We shall indeed bring the dead back to life’ (*Ya Sin:* 12).

- *Inna nahnu*, i.e. ‘lit. We, indeed We’ (*Ya Sin:* 12) has two first-person pronouns used for exaltation. The syntax rule states that a thing is distinguished when it is common. If it is not, there is no need to distinguish. For example, if someone knocks on your door and you said, ‘Who is it?’ He says ‘Muhammad’ and you know many people with this name. So, you ask ‘Which Muhammad are you?’ He says, ‘Muhammad Ahmad’ but again you know many people who share this name. You ask, 'Muhammad Ahmad who?' He says, 'Muhammad Ahmad Mahmud.' At that point, you know him because the first and second names are very common.

- When the Lord *the Exalted* says, *Inna nahnu*, i.e. 'verily We' (*Ya Sin:* 12), i.e. there is no one else; it is as if He is saying 'Indeed We, indeed We': 'There is no one other than Me and no one is equal to Me. We explained that when Allah speaks about Himself, it may be in the form of the plural, e.g., 'Behold, from above We have bestowed this [divine book] on the Night of Destiny' (*al-Qadr:* 1). Allah also says, 'Behold, it is We Ourselves who have bestowed from above, step by step, this reminder. Behold, it is We who shall truly guard it [from all corruption]' (*al-Hijr:* 9).

You notice that the pronoun here is for exaltation. This is the case in all verses that speak of the Divine Actions and Blessings. Each of His Actions requires many attributes such as Knowledge, Wisdom, Power, and so forth. All these attributes are embedded in 'We' as embodiment of perfection and exalted beautiful names. When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about His unique essence, the first-person singular pronoun is used,; e.g., 'Verily, I – I alone – am Allah' (*Ta Ha:* 14). He does not say, for example, 'Verily We, We are Allah' because 'verily we' and 'we' indicate plurality, while the speech is about oneness, so it must be in the singular form. That is why the Lord *the Exalted* stresses this oneness in a number of ways when Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, I – I alone – am Allah; there is no deity save Me. Hence, worship Me alone, and be constant in prayer, so as to remember Me!' (*Ta Ha:* 14)

Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'Worship Us and establish the prayer for Our remembrance' but rather, 'Hence, worship Me alone, and be constant in prayer, so as to remember Me!' (*Ta Ha:* 14) This is because worship is for Allah alone. The process of resurrection and bringing the dead back to life belongs to Allah alone and no one else. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Verily, We shall indeed bring the dead back to life' (*Ya Sin:* 12), before 'We shall record whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead, and the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind' (*Ya Sin:* 12) even though recording comes before the revival of the dead.

Recording takes place in this world, while bringing the dead back to life is in the Hereafter. Why is this? First, you must bear in mind that this speech is not our speech. It is Allah's Speech. Use your intellect to understand what Allah means. The Lord's style is composed of words that befit His Perfection, while your speech is composed of what suits your perfection. We said before that the Quran has certain qualities that distinguish it from other books. You treat it in a way that you would not treat any other book. You must read it in a state of purity after doing ablution. Whilst reading it, you should observe the places of articulation as well as the rules and etiquettes of recitation.

It also has another distinctive feature in its articulation. It is distinct in writing. For example, the word *ism* is written with an *alif* as in:

- 'Hallowed be your Lord's name *(ismu rabbika)*, full of Majesty and Glory!' (*ar-Rahman:* 78)
- 'Extol the Limitless Glory of your Lord's name *(ismu rabbika)*: [the Glory of] The All-Highest' (*al-A'la:* 1).

However, in the *basmala* (in the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful) at the beginning of the Quranic chapters, it is written without the *alif.* We have *bismilahi irahman-iraheem*. We say, do we write the Quran according to the human rules of dictation? No, because it is divinely written.

What is the wisdom behind 'Verily, We shall indeed bring the dead back to life' (*Ya Sin:* 12) coming before 'We shall record whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead, and the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind' (*Ya Sin:* 12)?

What is the benefit of recording? Recording the deeds is for the sake of rewards and punishments. If there is no revival of the dead or reckoning and return, then what is the point of recording? Why bringing the dead back to life comes before recording the deeds? Bringing the dead back to life is greater than recording, so it is befitting to come first.

'Whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead' (*Ya Sin:* 12): The deeds may be profitable beyond death such as the on-going charity. For example, if a man digs a well and people drink from it after he dies. Another example is a person who leaves behind beneficial knowledge. These good deeds are written down before. His words ‘the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind’ (*Ya Sin:* 12) refer to these deeds.

The traces of practices left behind. They follow it after death, be they good or evil. They are recorded in a book inclusive of all deeds, minor or major, after the person dies. For example, if a person writes down an unjust bequest which denies someone his due right, the one who inherits his estate carries all the consequences that result from this injustice. This is because he has not just deprived the direct inheritor, but he has also denied his descendants who would have benefited from this estate. That is why its sin remains with him until the Day of Resurrection.

The same goes for whoever introduces a tyrannical law for people. This person bears the sin of this tyrannical law that he imposed. The sin is borne by whoever judges according to this law after him. An example of this would be the issue of the public sector introduced by whoever introduced it, and then its traces caused such tribulation amongst the people that they all protested and the rulers themselves asked to amend it.

This issue clarifies for us the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Whoever introduces a good practice has the reward of it and the reward of whoever does it until the Day of Resurrection. Yet, whoever introduces an evil practice has its sin and the sin of whoever does it until the Day of Resurrection.’(1)

Have you seen an old man planting a date palm whose fruits might not benefit him, but those after him will? These will be his traces left after him and Allah writes them for him and credits them to his account. Some scholars say that the meaning of ‘We shall record whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead, and the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind’ (*Ya Sin:* 12) is ‘We write down the intention that precedes the action and the action itself, which is the trace of this intention’. When you intend to do a good deed, you get the reward of the intention and if you do it, you get the reward of the deed.

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(1) Ahmad, *Musnad,* 4/361-362; Muslim, *Sahih,* (Hadith: 1017); Ibn Majah, *Sunnan,* (*Hadith:* 207); and At-Tirmidhi, *Sunnan,* (*Hadith:* 2675) from Jarir ibn 'Abdullah Al-Bajli. At-Tirmidhi said, ‘It is a good and authentic Hadith.’

This clarifies the Noble Hadith: ‘Whoever intends a good deed but does not do it has a reward written in his favour. Whoever intends it and then does it has ten rewards written in his favour.’(1) This shows us the importance of making an intention before commencing an action so that man can be rewarded for it. The believer does not perform actions aimlessly.

For ‘…of all things do We take account in a record clear’ (*Ya Sin:* 12). There is a difference between writing and counting. Writing means that you write something, but you do not join everything that has been written, so you need someone to count it and calculate it. The Lord *the Exalted* records all our deeds by writing them first and then counts and calculates them, and the counting and the calculating are also in a recorded book that contains everything ‘... in a record clear’ (*Ya Sin:* 12). The record (*imam*) is that which leads, and what is meant here is the Preserved Tablet from which the angels take their duties regarding the running of the universe. The Lord *the Exalted* then says:

وَٱضۡرِبۡ لَهُم مَّثَلًا أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلۡقَرۡيَةِ إِذۡ جَآءَهَا ٱلۡمُرۡسَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾ إِذۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَآ
إِلَيۡهِمُ ٱثۡنَيۡنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزۡنَا بِثَالِثٖ فَقَالُوٓاْ إِنَّآ إِلَيۡكُم مُّرۡسَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

Give them the example of the people to whose town
messengers came [13] We sent two messengers but they
rejected both. Then We reinforced them with a third[14]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 13 - 14)

First, notice that this verse is the one that will explain to us how *‘Ya Sin’* is the ‘heart’ of the Quran. Allah says, ‘Set forth unto them a parable’ (*Ya Sin:* 13). The word *darab* (strike) refers to the bodily contact with another body with force such that striking body affects the body struck and causes pain. The one striking must be stronger than the one being struck. If they are equal or the one struck is stronger, the act is futile and fruitless. Note the words of Ar-Rafi`i(2) addressing the one who mocks the Divine Power:

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(1) *Muslim, Sahih, (Hadith: 206), Book of Faith from Abu Hurayra; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, in different wordings (Hadith: 6491) from Ibn `Abbas.*

(2) Mustafa Sadiq `Abd Ar-Razzaq Ar-Rafi`i is a scholar of literature and poetry; he is a great writer. His forefathers are from Tripoli in Lebanon, but he was born in Bahteem=

O you who mocks the decrees, it is your soul that you mock, not the decrees

O you who strike a rock with a stick, do you strike the stick or the rock

The *dareeb* means some who is similar to another. If two people dispute something, mention to them a similitude for explanation and say, 'this likes that.' The noblest similitude in the Quran is the one that Allah gives to explain His illumination of the universe, not His own light as some people think. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is [enclosed] in glass, the glass [shining] like a radiant star: [a lamp] lit from a blessed tree – an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west – the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light' (*an-Nur:* 35).

This is a similitude of Allah's enlightening of the universe. It is not a similitude of Allah's Light. Allah's Light is perfect and unrestricted. It bears no resemblance to the light in this world, which is also dependant on His Light. Evidence is found in the fact that on the Day of Resurrection there will not be any shining sun or radiating moon. There only 'The earth will shine bright with her Lord's Light' (*az-Zumar:* 69). Allah says, 'Will know therein neither [burning] sun nor cold severe' (*al-Insan:* 13).

We live in this world with the means that Allah has created. However, in the Hereafter we will live by direct means from the One Who creates all means. In the life of this world, Allah gives you an intellect to think, limbs to act, earth to produce vegetation, and water for irrigation. These means are divinely given to help human life. Man may think that human life belongs to this world and may suffer delusions on account of the Divine Graces. Allah makes these means insufficient at times and they become scarce so that we turn back to Him. He says to us, 'Do not be deluded by the means and do not be heedless of the One Who creates the means.

When the means are insufficient, people suffer drought and famine that may persist until people and animals are on the brink of annihilation. The

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= in the house of his mother's father in 1881 C.E. He died in Tanta in 1937 at the age of 56. He wrote treatises in literature and politics. He has three-volume bookof poetry. His books include *Wahi Al-Qalam* and *Al-Ma`raka*, which was a refutation of Taha Husain.

drought prayer is legislated for people to rush back to Allah along with their women, children, and even animals. They even change their clothes and attire to draw closer to Allah imploring Him for rains. Allah sometimes makes the means insufficient to remind us of Him and teach us that this matter is not mechanical. Behind the means of this matter is the Creator of means who can hold them back.

Again, human limbs are divinely subjugated to human will. Man may even be deluded by them and think that he owns them and that they are subject to his instruction. The reality is that they are a gift from Allah and if He so wills, he can leave them or strip them, e.g. cutting the electric current between the brain and the limbs. The hand thus drops and it does not move. One tries to raise it, but he cannot. For example, we see America distributing aids to countries around the world. It is the most advanced and prosperous country. However, it experiences sudden natural disasters, such as floods in which water covers houses. Likewise, Japan is an earthquake-prone country. The Japanese know it and say: ‘Our country is a land of earthquakes’. They take all necessary steps and precautions. However, massive and destructive earthquakes afflict them, such as what happened in Hokkaido. All these precautions and preparations were of little benefit.

The Lord *the Exalted* makes these matters insufficient so that we do not become deluded by the means and forget the Creator of means. Allah speaks the truth when He says, ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7). The Lord *the Exalted* teaches us how to call Him and how to seek refuge in Him alone when our means are scarce. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Yet when the misfortune decreed by Us befell them, they did not humble themselves’ (*al-An‘am:* 43). Allah teaches us how to endear Him to us when we say, ‘O Allah! Relieve us from the state we are in!’

Giving examples is part of the rhetorical style of Arabic. It is used to clarify matters and make them convincing. The noblest example that the Lord *the Exalted* gives is that of His enlightening as said. Simply, Allah’s Light has no likeness. His saying ‘The parable of His Light is’ (*an-Nur:* 35), i.e. His enlightening ‘as it were, that of a niche’ (*an-Nur:* 35). Many people think that *mishkah* (the niche) is the lamp, but *mishkah* is the window located on a wall. It is an expression referring to a window that is open from one side and it is called a niche as found in farmers' houses built with unburned bricks. This niche acts upon all the light such that it is not scattered here and there.

This *mishkah*: 'containing a lamp; the lamp is [enclosed] in glass, the glass [shining] like a radiant star [a lamp] lit from a blessed tree – an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west – the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it' (*an-Nur:* 35).

It is for you to contemplate how distinct this light is that it issues forth from the *mishkah* (niche) that gathers the radiance. There is also the lamp, which is in a glass that sifts its radiance and purifies it such that no smoke emanates from it. The glass only allows as much air as the lamp needs. Like a twinkling star, this glass is self-radiant.

Then this lamp is fuelled by oil that is of the finest quality, which is olive oil. This olive is not of the East, such that it is hot, and it is not from the West, such that it is cold. It is balanced in its constitution and purity, such that its oil radiates even if it isn not touched by fire.

Therefore, it is from its own qualities that it almost radiates itself, and that is why the similitude is completed by His saying: 'Light upon light' (*an-Nur:* 35). Allah, therefore, illuminates this vast universe just as this lamp illuminates this tiny niche.

But why does Allah *Glorified is He* use this similitude as an example? They reply it is because when Allah created man and enabled him to walk the paths of life, he needed a physical light to guide his physical movement and a spiritual light to guide his spiritual movement. We take physical light from the sun during the day and from the moon during the night. If we did not have access to this light, we could manufacture it, and everyone uses what he can afford of means of sustenance. Someone might light his way with a candle, while someone else might use a number five lamp, whereas others will use neon and fluorescent lamps, for example. Thus, if Allah's light, the sun, shined upon earth, spreading its rays everywhere, people would give up using their artificial means of light for His endless natural source. Everyone then becomes equal in basking in His radiance.

As long as Allah's Light is manifest, no one has the ability to shed it except for Him. The same goes for our attitude towards Allah's divine orders. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us that we cannot comply with any other than Him. This command is evident in the following verse where Allah says, 'Light upon light. Allah guides to His Light whom He wills' (*an-Nur:* 35).

Every example has a place in which it is given, in which it is appropriate to be said. Accordingly, when one of them saw a poet being very exhaustive in praising that which he praised, he said, 'Indeed he is miserly, for he needs all of this praise in order to feel tenderness towards the one praising him so that he would give him what he is asking for!' And he said regarding this:(1)

If a person praises another person for his favour

And he is exhaustive in it then he has prolonged his ridiculing

Had he not been able to do so because of the depth of the well

From which he drinks, he would not have elongated his well rope.(2)

This is because the depth of the water level in a well necessitates a long rope, and this is the well rope that has a bucket attached to it.

One of the examples in the Noble Quran that clarifies the issue of associating partners with Allah is when He *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah presents an example: a slave owned by quarrelling partners and another belonging exclusively to one man - are they equal in comparison?' (*az-Zumar:* 29)

This means when they are astonished that they are being called to Allah's Oneness, and they differ in this matter, give them this example, and encompass them with it. In other words, how can you be astonished by worshiping Allah alone, Who has no partner, when in your daily lives, you have a live example of this? Do you consider a slave with more than one master controlling him equal to another who has only one master? ‘Are they equal in comparison?’ (*az-Zumar:* 29)

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(1) He is Abu Al-Hasan Ali ibn Abbas ibn Jurayj, also known as Ibn Ar-Rumi, of European origin. He was born in Baghdad in the year 221 A.H. and grew up there and died there due to poisoning. Al-Marzibani said, 'I do not know any ruler or subordinate that he praised except that he went back to him and ridiculed him and this was a cause of his death.'

(2) These two verses are from a poem written by Ibn Ar-Rumi from the *Kamil Metre*. It consists of four verses, beginning with:
Every person who praises another person for his favour
And he is exhaustive in it, seeks to ridicule him.

Likewise, when you worship other than Allah, how can you go and worship various gods and abandon the One True Lord? Therefore, the True Lord conveys this example to the disbelievers so that this matter which their intellects cannot comprehend is made clear for them.

In our literature, an Arabic proverb always has a story behind it and a place where it is said; the event in which the proverb was first said and an event that resembles the original one. It is as if the original event leads to a firm truth that we must preserve and repeat in a situation that resembles it. For example, when you see a student neglecting his studies throughout the year and right before the exam’s time he starts revising his lessons, at this point you can say: ‘Before you are hit by a misfortune, prepare for it’.(1) This proverb can be said to someone who does not prepare for something before it happens.

If a man challenges you, for example, and he claims that he is stronger than you then you can say, ‘If you are a wind then you have met a hurricane’.(2)

A proverb is said just as it is without alteration. For example, if you sent a male messenger to bring you some news, on his return you would ask him, ‘What did you bring of news, `Isam?’(3) The proverb must remain in the singular feminine form because when it was first said it was said to a woman whose name was `Isam. We have to maintain its original wording without changing it, so we should not say, ‘What did you two bring of news?’ or ‘What did you all bring of news?’ That is how it should be said, short and light on the tongue.

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(1) This proverb is said in preparation for disasters before they descend. It has been mentioned by Abu Hilal Al-`Askari in *Jamhara Al-Amthal* and Al-Maydani in *Majma` Al-Amthal* and Ibn `Abd Rabih in *Al-`Iqd Al-Farid Kitab Al-Jawhara Fi Al-Amthal.*

(2) This means you have met someone stronger than you. This has been mentioned by Abu Manṣur Ath-Tha`alabi in his book *At-Tamthil Wa Al-Muhadara* and Az-Zamakhshari in *Al-Mustaqsa Fi Amthal Al-'Arab*.

(3) Abu `Abid said: ‘One of their parables when they ask questions is: ‘What did you bring of news, `Isam?’ It is said that the speaker is An-Nabigha Adh-Dhubyani and he said it to `Isam ibn Shahir Al-Jarmi, the chamberlain of An-Nu`man, when he was sick. An-Nabigha asked `Isam about An-Nu`man. This has been mentioned by Abu `Abid ibn Salam in *Al-Amthal.* Abu Hilal Al-`Askari mentioned in *Jamhara Al-Amthal* that `Isam was a woman that was sent by Al-Harith ibn `Amr Al-Kindi to the daughter of `Awf Al-Kindi. When she came back to him, he said to her, ‘What did you bring of news, `Isam?’ and she described her to him.

Another proverb is said when someone is suddenly confronted with a punishment that has been prepared for him, ‘A camel may break wind when the hot iron is on the fire’(1). When a camel sees hot iron, it immediately learns that it is going to be branded with it. This is an observed method for treating mange(2) amongst the Arabs. When a camel sees it, its stomach starts rumbling, such that it breaks wind and has diarrhoea.

Allah *Glorified is He* sets an example for those who oppose Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the following verse when he says: ‘And present to them an example: the people of the city, when the messengers came to it’ (*Ya Sin:* 13). In other words, Allah addresses his Prophet by telling him to narrate to those who disbelieve in him, deny him, stubbornly oppose, and harm him the parable of the people of the city. It was said that the city referred to in this verse was Antioch, a town in the district of *Iskenderun* (The Sanjak of Alexandretta) in Turkey. Prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* sent two messengers to the town so that its people would be guided. When they went, the people denied them, so `Isa (Jesus) *peace and blessings be upon him* supported and strengthened them by sending a third one for their aid. However, this only increased their rejection and opposition. To their relief, amongst the people came a man who heard from them and instantly believed in what they brought from guidance. When he heard that the people wanted to punish these messengers, he rushed to stand in the position of truth alongside the messengers and against the people of the city.

The meaning of, ‘… when the messengers came to it’ (*Ya Sin:* 13) is messengers from Allah because `Isa’s (Jesus’s) sending them is part of Allah’s decree. And in the following verse, ‘When We sent to them two but they denied them, so we strengthened them with a third, and they said, “Indeed, we are messengers to you.”’ (*Ya Sin:* 14), Allah *Glorified is He* reinforced him with them. In other words, He reinforced the truth that they were carrying, so sending the third was not just to assist the first two themselves but also to affirm the truth. The evidence is that Allah did not say, ‘We strengthened the two’ and this is part of the Quran’s subtlety and rhetoric. If the truth were on the tongue of other than these two, we would also assist it. Therefore, the expression here is not for individuals but for the truth that they have come with.

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(1) This has been mentioned by `Abd Al Qadir Al-Baghdadi in *Khizanat Al-Adab Wa Lub Lubab Lissan Al-`Arab*.

(2) An infectious disease in animals that have hair, such as dogs and cats that makes hair fall out and causes areas of rough skin. This has been mentioned by Ibn Qutayba Al-Dinawari in *Adab Al-Katib*. Al-Jahiz mentioned in his *Kitab Al-Hayawan* (Book of Animals), that the Arabs used to brand their afflicted animals with hot iron, but they ended up harming the healthy before curing the diseased.

Similarly, in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* Allah says, ‘We will strengthen your arm through your brother’ (*Fatir:* 28). It is as if Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* came to strengthen Musa (Moses) himself and not the truth that he was sent with as in the previous story. This is because there is a difference between the two situations. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is the one who asked his Lord to strengthen his arm, and for this he chose his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* so Musa (Moses), the chosen one, is admitting that he needs help and he asks for help and assistance by way of his brother. He loves the truth and wants it to be supported, even if this support came from other than him.

We have already said that speech is the mediation between the speaker and the one being addressed. The speaker conveys his thoughts and desires to the one being addressed and if the one being addressed is unfamiliar with the matter the speech is conveyed to him without any emphasis. If the subject matter is familiar to him and he has doubt about it, or he rejects it and denies it, then you must emphasise what you are saying to the degree that is necessary for the matter to be accepted. If he is merely doubtful, then one tool of emphasis should suffice. However, if he is rejecting the matter altogether, then you will need more tools of emphasis, as Allah, says, ‘Indeed, we are messengers to you’ (*Ya Sin:* 14).

The first two messengers had to say to the people, ‘We are messengers that have been sent to you on behalf of `Isa (Jesus)’, but the people still rejected. When the third came, they had to make their speech more emphatic, and so they said, ‘Indeed, we are messengers to you’ (*Ya Sin:* 14); they emphasised their speech with more than one tool of emphasis, and despite this they denied again.

قَالُوا۟ مَآ أَنتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا وَمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱلرَّحْمَـٰنُ مِن شَىْءٍ إِنْ أَنتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ ﴿١٥﴾
قَالُوا۟ رَبُّنَا يَعْلَمُ إِنَّآ إِلَيْكُمْ لَمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾ وَمَا عَلَيْنَآ إِلَّا ٱلْبَلَـٰغُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿١٧﴾

They said, 'Truly, we are messengers to you' [15] But they answered, 'You are only men like ourselves. The Lord of Mercy has sent nothing; you are just lying.' They said, 'Our Lord knows that we have been sent to you [16] Our duty is only to deliver the message to you [17] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 15 - 17)

When they denied and rejected for the second time, they had to emphasise their speech in the following way: 'Our Lord knows that we are messengers to you' (*Ya Sin:* 16). Every word in this expression has some emphasis. Firstly, there is *inna* (indeed). Then, there is the method of restriction which is to put the preposition and the object of the preposition at the beginning of the sentence. After that, there is the letter *lam* (l) - preceding the words 'messengers to you'- for emphasis. The emphasis, therefore, corresponds to the degree of rejection and these people denied the message from several angles beginning with: 'They said, "You are not but human beings like us"' (*Ya Sin:* 15), followed by: 'and the Most Merciful has not revealed a thing (*Ya Sin:* 15), and then: 'You are only telling lies' (*Ya Sin:* 15).

In their saying, 'You are only telling lies' (*Ya Sin:* 15), they are assuming that the messengers being human beings is a flaw in the divine message. But how could the message be realised if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were not a human being?

Similarly, elsewhere in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* discusses this matter with them, where He says, 'And what prevented the people from believing when guidance came to them except that they said, "Has Allah sent a human messenger?" Say, "If there were upon the earth angels walking securely, We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel [as a] messenger"' (*al-Isra':* 94-95). This is the first supporting argument as proof to their refutation; those who walk on earth are human beings, not angels.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrates to us why He chose to send a human being with His message instead of an angel, when He says, 'And if We had made him an angel, We would have made him [appear as] a man, and We would have covered them with that in which they cover themselves' (*al-An'am:* 9). If it were otherwise, how would you see him? How would you learn from him if he were in his angelic form? Therefore, a messenger must be of the same species as those to whom he is being sent so that he can set an example for them. How can an angelic messenger be an example when he cannot disobey Allah by his very nature? The messenger is responsible for conveying Allah's Message and implementing it within himself. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'There has certainly been for you, in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example' (*al-Ahzab:* 21) which means that he implements the way that he has come with before conveying it to the people.

Their saying, 'You are not but human beings like us, and the Most Merciful has not revealed a thing. You are only telling lies' (*Ya Sin:* 15) indicate their foolishness in truly comprehending what their prophet has come with. It is astonishing how they recognize Allah having the attribute of Mercy, but at the same time they do not believe in Him. It is one of the requirements of this mercy that He sends them a messenger to show them the right path by following what is good for them, and protects them from evil by staying away from what is harmful for them. They, therefore, acknowledge the aspect that convicts them, and then they go further and accuse the messengers of lying, 'You are only telling lies' (*Ya Sin:* 15).

When the messengers emphasise their message, they say, 'Our Lord knows that we are messengers to you' (*Ya Sin:* 16); it is in the place of an oath because they are calling on Allah as a witness to the veracity of their message. When Arabs use an oath in their statements it is to affirm something upon which it is refuted. As long as the messengers have said, 'Our Lord knows' (*Ya Sin:* 16), then the matter is either true or not true. If it is not true, then they have lied about Allah.

The Arabs believed that an unequivocal lie is enough reason to bring about the destruction of houses. And there is a Hadith which indicates that lying turns houses into a wasteland, (*balaqi'*)(1). He was asked, 'Does the believer steal?' He said, ‘Yes’.’ ‘Does the believer fornicate?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Does the believer lie?’ He said, ‘No.’(1)

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(1) *Balaqi`* which is the plural of *balqa`*... It is impoverished land that does not grow anything. Al-Bayhaqi narrated in *As-Sunnan Al-Kubra,* in the book of Faith, in the chapter on ominous oaths, Hadith no. 19655 from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* that Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There is=

Lying is, henceforth, a foul trait and prohibited, even amongst those who do not belong to a religion. That is why the disbelievers of Mecca did not utter the words of Allah’s Oneness (There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah) and had they thought that it was merely a phrase that was said, without any reference to His Oneness, they would have said it. However, they knew what it referred to and what it meant. They knew it meant that worship is for none other than Allah; any command for or against something is from Him only and there is no sovereignty for none other than Him. That is why they refused to say it because they knew to what it referred.

These disbelievers, in their denial of the messengers, believed that by doing so they were being protective of Allah and that they were going to seek revenge from the messengers who were lying about Him. The following verse continues:

قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا تَطَيَّرۡنَا بِكُمۡۖ لَئِن لَّمۡ تَنتَهُواْ لَنَرۡجُمَنَّكُمۡ وَلَيَمَسَّنَّكُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ١٨

But they answered, ‘We think you are an evil omen.
If you do not stop, we shall stone you, and inflict a
painful torment on you’ [18] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 18)

It is as if they were saying to the messengers, ‘As long as you have lied about Allah and said, “Our Lord knows” (*Ya Sin:* 16) in matters in which we think you are lying, then we augur evil from you’. In other words, ‘we see you as an evil omen’. *Tatayyur* (to augur evil) comes from the word *tira* (an evil omen). This was something known amongst the Arabs. When one of them wanted to do something, he would approach a bird and drive it away, and then see the

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= nothing in which I obey Allah that is swifter in reward than keeping the ties of kinship, and there is nothing swifter in retribution than injustice and cutting the ties of kinship and a false oath turns the houses into wasteland.’

(1) *Mentioned with this wording by Al-Mutaqi Al-Hindi in Muntakhab Al-Kanz (1/215) on the margin of Ahmad’s Musnad, from the Hadith of `Abdullah ibn Jarad and he attributed it to Ibn `Asakir...He also relates that Abu Darda` asked the Prophet Muhammad, ‘O Messenger of Allah! Does the believer lie?’ He said, ‘The one who lies when he speaks does not believe in Allah and the Last Day.’ He attributed it to Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi in Al-Muttafaq.*

direction of its flight. If it flew towards the right, he would carry out what he had intended. If the bird flew to the left, he would see it as an evil omen and refrain from it. Islam has declared this practice unlawful and prohibited.

Their saying, ‘If you do not desist’ (*Ya Sin:* 18) - from saying that you have been sent with a message- ‘we will surely stone you, and there will surely touch you, from us, a painful punishment.’ (*Ya Sin:* 18) In doing so, they have gathered to stone them and give them a grievous punishment. Note that the acts of stoning and incurring punishment differ in nature. Stoning is not a punishment. It is to throw stones until death, so it is the ceasing of punishment, whereas, a punishment is to cause pain to a living being; similarly, someone who has died cannot be punished. That is why the Arabs said, ‘It does not harm a sheep to be skinned after it has been slaughtered’.

That is why, when one of the judges claimed that there was no text in the Quran that indicates stoning, we replied that this is true. There is no verse in the Quran that clearly mentions stoning, but which of the two is stronger in legislation, speech, or action? Which of the two is considered a proof? There is no doubt that action is the stronger proof because speech can be interpreted into different meanings. Action, on the other hand, is not open to interpretation, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did resort to stoning in the case of Ma`iz and Al-Ghamidiyah.

Therefore, the justification here is not based on a spoken text but rather on an action of Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* whom Allah authorised to legislate and commanded us to obey. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from’ (*al-Hashr:* 7). Allah *Glorified is He* would not have enjoined this upon us unless He had left some matters for His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to legislate.

This is one of his distinct qualities that distinguish him from other messengers, as each one of them only had to convey the ruling as it had been ordained by Allah. As for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he was commanded to convey some matters from Allah, while others were left for him in which he was authorised to legislate. That is why the following verse was revealed: ‘And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from’ (*al-Hashr:* 7).

Furthermore, when you examine the verses of obedience, you will find that the Quran says at one time: ‘And obey Allah and obey the Messenger’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 92). In another verse, Allah says, ‘and obey Allah and the Messenger’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 132). He also says, ‘… and obey the Messenger’ (*an-Nisa’:* 59). The repetition of the verb ‘obey’ indicates that the aspect is split into two; Allah *Glorified is He* has a command and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* has a command, i.e. obey Allah in the legislation that is general and comprehensive and obey the Messenger in the specifics of that which is general. For example, we have the general command to perform *zakat* (obligatory charity), but Allah *Glorified is He* did not determine the minimum amount at which wealth becomes taxable. This minimum amount was clarified by the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* so Allah has a command in this and the Messenger has another.

On the other hand, if the command to obey is only mentioned once and the Messenger of Allah is mentioned in addition to Allah by way of a conjunction, also the command to obey is not repeated for whomever it is to be obeyed, then you should know that the command is one; Allah said it and the Messenger of Allah said it. Obedience to the latter is thus considered part of the obedience to the first. When Allah says, ‘O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you’ (*an-Nisa’:* 59), he did not say, ‘Obey those in authority among you’ because obedience to those in authority is included in obedience to Allah and obedience to the Messenger of Allah. They do not have a separate independent obedience, but rather obedience to them is in the shadow of obedience to Allah and obedience His Messenger.

Therefore, to base one’s proof on action is stronger than that which is based on words, so if someone said, ‘We want to hear what Allah has said regarding this matter’, we would reply, ‘Yes, there is speech in the form of a text and speech in the form of an action’. When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about female slaves in this matter, He says, ‘…if they should commit adultery, then for them is half the punishment for free [unmarried] women’ (*an-Nisa’:* 25).

Punishment is as we have previously mentioned is to cause pain to a living being, whereas stoning is the ceasing of punishment. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified that the half refers to the punishment, and this excludes stoning because stoning cannot be halved. Therefore, the command to halve is not absolute, but rather is specific to punishment. This means that they can be stoned too in a complete sense, not in half.

Similarly, in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the hoopoe where Allah says, '[If so,] I will punish him most severely or will kill him' (*an-Naml:* 21). Therefore, punishment is not slaughter and is not killing.

With regards to what the disbelievers said in the following verse, 'we will surely stone you' (*Ya Sin:* 18), *rajm* (stoning) could refer to verbal abuse. It could also mean stoning in its literal sense, either with severe stoning until death or clemency. What is intended is the infliction of pain.

قَالُواْ طَٰٓئِرُكُم مَّعَكُمۡۚ أَئِن ذُكِّرۡتُمۚ بَلۡ أَنتُمۡ قَوۡمٞ مُّسۡرِفُونَ ١٩

The messengers said, 'The evil omen is within yourselves.
Why do you take it as an evil omen when you are
reminded of the Truth? You are going too far!' [19]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 19)

The meaning of 'your evil omen' (*Ya Sin:* 19) is your pessimism and 'is with yourselves' (*Ya Sin:* 19), i.e. it is attached to you. What is meant here is disbelief. The first *hamzah*(1) in 'Is it because you were reminded?' (*Ya Sin:* 19), is for asking a question and *in* (if) is introducing a conditional clause whose resultant clause is elided, which means, 'Is it the case that if you are reminded of Allah and the way of your Creator, and of what pleases you in your life of this world, the result is that you threaten the one who reminds you with stoning and grievous suffering, instead of being pleased with him and helping him and following what he has brought to you'?!

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(1) *Hamzah* is a letter in the Arabic alphabet, representing the glottal stop [ʔ]. *Hamzah* is not one of the 28 'full' letters, and owes its existence to historical inconsistencies in the standard writing system.

‘Nay, but ye are a people transgressing all bounds!’ (*Ya Sin:* 19); in other words, people who transgress the bounds because the matter between you and us, the messengers, has not been other than a spoken exchange; we have not transgressed the bounds of rhetoric by saying more than that we are messengers that have been sent to you. And the result was that you have responded to this spoken exchange with harsh and excessive action that oversteps the bounds such that you have gathered against us for the purpose of stoning and a grievous suffering. Allah *the Exalted* continues their story:

وَجَآءَ مِنۡ أَقۡصَا ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٞ يَسۡعَىٰ قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ ٱتَّبِعُواْ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ٢٠
ٱتَّبِعُواْ مَن لَّا يَسۡـَٔلُكُمۡ أَجۡرٗا وَهُم مُّهۡتَدُونَ ٢١
وَمَا لِىَ لَآ أَعۡبُدُ ٱلَّذِى فَطَرَنِى وَإِلَيۡهِ تُرۡجَعُونَ ٢٢

Then, from the furthest part of the city, a man came running. He said, ‘My people, follow the messengers [20] Follow them: they are not asking you to reward them and they are rightly guided [21] Why should I not worship the One who created me? It is to Him that you will be returned [22]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 20 - 22)

When Allah *Glorified is He* tells us ‘And there came from the farthest end of the city a man, running. He said, “O my people, follow the messengers”’ (*Ya Sin:* 20), it indicates that the first two messengers whom the people had denied had supporters who believed in them and verified the truth of their call. When the third one came and the people denied him as well, the believers wanted to defend the truth with all their power, and amongst them was this man who had come from the farthest end of the city striving to give victory to the truth and exalt its word. It has been said that his name was Habib An-Najjar.(1)

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said, ‘He is Habib ibn Mara and he was a carpenter.’ It is also said that he was a shoemaker and others say he was a dyer. Ibn `Abbas, Mujahid and Muqatil said, ‘He is Habib ibn Isra`il An-Najjar and he used to sculpture idols.’ Wahb said, ‘Habib was a leper and his house was by the farthest gate of all the gates of the city. He was devoted to the worship of idols and for seventy years he supplicated to them so that perhaps they would show him mercy and relieve him of harm, but they did not respond=*

The first thing you notice in this verse is when Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…from the farthest end of the city' (*Ya Sin:* 20) that he was not close to where this debate was taking place, so he underwent difficulty for the sake of giving victory to the truth. This is an evidence of this man's strong faith and that the previous two messengers had conveyed their message to the farthest end of the city. Allah *Glorified is He* distinctly refers to him as being a 'man', and not as someone. He mentioned the attribute that is obvious in his creation, being a man.

What identifies a man of being manly is how he perceives the world around him. For example, a man who wants life for himself only and wants everyone to serve him sees everything for himself and does not see himself for anyone. This man's homeland is his ego and his self. A man whose homeland is his family and his dependants work on benefitting them, and a man whose homeland is the entire world is like the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* as he is the quintessence of what it means to be a man.

Therefore, how men perceive the world around them is what determines their homelands and their stations, and the highest of these stations is a man whose homeland is the entire world because all of creation is dependent on Allah. Whoever loves goodness for them and works for what benefits them has indeed been entrusted by Allah to provide for the slaves.

To clarify this, imagine if you have children, and one of them uses his pocket money to fulfil his own pleasures and desires which are of no benefit, while the other uses his pocket money to buy sweets which he would distribute among his younger siblings. Which one of them would you prefer after that? Which one of them to whom would you give more? The same goes for the hand that takes from Allah and serves His creation. It is as if Allah is saying

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= *to him. When he saw the messengers calling him to worship Allah, he asked, 'Do you have a sign?' They said, 'We will supplicate our Lord, the Fully Capable, and He will relieve you from whatever you are in.' He said, 'Indeed this is amazing to me. I have been supplicating to these gods for seventy years to relieve me and they have not been able to. How can your Lord relieve someone in one morning?' They said, 'Yes, our Lord is fully capable to do whatever He wills, whereas these gods can not benefit or harm anything.' He then believed and they supplicated to their Lord and Allah relieved him of what he suffered. It was as if he had never been in any hardship. Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (8/5653)* to him: ‘You have been entrusted with My blessing, and entrusted with My creation’. In this regard, a poet once said,

Indeed I am a person, my dirhams (money) do not settle
In the hand except rarely, as if they were a passer-by’

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions ‘running’ (*Ya Sin:* 20) which means that he was running quickly. And ‘He said, “O my people, follow the messengers”’ (*Ya Sin:* 20); the man was clearly using a softening tone to approach the one being called, as if he is saying: ‘O my family, O my kinsfolk, O my children’, which is an indication of the bonds of love and mercy that existed between him and them.

His saying: ‘… follow the messengers…’ (*Ya Sin:* 20), indicates that the man is helping his people by mentioning the primary reason for following them, being the messengers. Then he gives them another reason by saying, ‘Follow those who do not ask of you [any] payment, and they are [rightly] guided’ (*Ya Sin:* 21). In other words, they did not ask for any price in return for their call to the message of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The phrase ‘who do not ask of you [any] payment’ (*Ya Sin:* 21) is not said unless the work that one is doing requires a wage, and a messenger does not come except to benefit those to whom he is sent. However, it is only logical for a messenger to ask to get paid for doing his job, in this case though, who is the only one capable of paying him in return for his services? No one can pay him back except Allah because the benefit of the messenger goes beyond the benefits of the life of this world to the benefits of the Hereafter, so who among the human beings can give the messenger what he truly deserves?

That is why all the messengers say, ‘My reward is only from Allah…’ (*Yunus:* 72). In other words, you people do not possess the extent of my reward and you cannot possibly estimate it. The only one who can give me my reward is the One for whom I work. Every messenger said these words except for two of them, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*. Did you know why?

It was said that Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) first call was made to his father Azar, so it would not have been appropriate of him to ask him for a reward for calling him to the truth. Likewise, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* called Pharaoh who had raised him in his own house and had been gracious towards him. So how could he ask him for a reward?

A third consideration with regards to following the messengers is explained in the following verse when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and they are [rightly] guided' (*Ya Sin:* 21). They were sent by Allah, the One Who sends who is guided upon the straight path that leads to Him. These messengers are guided in and of themselves, and so they can guide others. Therefore, the command and its rationale is clarified; these messengers did not ask for a reward and they did not call to misguidance, but rather to guidance.

Then this man turns to himself and addresses the people, 'I am not commanding you to do something that I do not do myself, and if I was cheating you I would not cheat myself'. 'And why should I not worship He who created me…' (*Ya Sin:* 22), i.e. the one who created me from nothing the one who should be worshiped? He is the one who made me and brought me into existence from non-existence and provided for me when I had nothing, and He continues to bestow his blessings upon me. Therefore, what is going to prevent me from worshipping Him when he is the One Who should be worshipped? Even if my worship of Him is nothing other than me repaying Him for His blessings, without seeking a reward, then worshipping Him is obligatory.

This is not the speech of a messenger. It is the speech of a man who is an obedient believer and whose heart is rejoicing in faith. He thus wants to purify his faith and pass his guidance on to others in line with what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you shall become a true believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.'(1)

First, Allah *Glorified is He* created His creation. Then He entrusted the messengers with His Message for their guidance. The messengers, in turn, conveyed it to their companions, and whoever has something conveyed to them becomes responsible for it just like the messenger. That is why the Messenger of

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (13) and Muslim in his Sahih (45) in the Book of Faith from Anas ibn Malik* Allah be pleased with him *with the following wording, 'By the One in Whose hand is my soul, a slave does not truly believe until he loves for his neighbour' – or he said, 'for his brother' – 'what he loves for himself.'*

Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘May Allah freshen the affairs of a person who hears something from us and communicates it to others exactly as he has heard it (i.e., both the meaning and the words), for it may be that the recipient of knowledge understands it better than the one who has heard it’ (1).

Therefore, the responsibility of calling people to Allah is first, borne by the messengers and then those who believe in them, who received their guidance. This bearing is not a courtesy but a commandment from Allah. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you’ (*al-Baqara:* 143). Accordingly, when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* testified that he has conveyed the message to you, it will be obligatory for you to testify against mankind that you conveyed the message to them because those who believe in the message are an extension for the Messenger.

As we have seen before, the believing man, who came from the farthest end of the city, striving to exalt the word of truth and assist the messengers, was not a messenger and no one gave him that responsibility- he acted voluntarily. This is because his strong faith prompted him to do so.

He took it upon himself to advise himself first when he said, ‘And why should I not worship He who created me? …’ (*Ya Sin:* 22) This is politeness in presenting the call and making it more appropriate for it to be accepted. His saying, ‘And why should I not…’ (*Ya Sin:* 22), is as if he would be amazed at himself if he did not believe in the one who brought him into being, and amazement at oneself is the sincerest form of expression. It is as if one is not arguing and not cheating, but rather saying what is in one’s heart, as Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said, ‘Why do I not see the hoopoe…?’ (*an-Naml:* 20)

The answer is not going to come from anyone else. It can only come from him, as if he is saying, ‘The hoopoe must be here, but I cannot see it’. The rule is that one uses the whole and the whole is present, and the amazement is on my part; why do I not see him? Then he repeats, ‘...or is he among the absent?' (*an-Naml:* 20), which means that either the impediment is on his part or because of it- as if he is casting doubt in the former- then he scrutinises the matter and finds that it is the hoopoe's fault.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/437) and At-Tirmidhi in his (Sunnan) (2657, 2658) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan and Al-Hamidi (1/47) from the Hadith of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him.*

Therefore, His saying: 'And why should I not worship He who created me and to whom you will be returned?' (*Ya Sin:* 22) indicates that the matter of bringing into existence and creation necessitates that you worship the one who brought all things into existence, and to do otherwise demands astonishment.

That is why, in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *Glorified is He* dictates to us how to address the disbelievers: 'How can you disbelieve in Allah when you were lifeless and He brought you to life…' (*al-Baqara:* 28), which means, 'How can you disbelieve in Allah Who has created you and provided for you'? This is not rational or logical, so tell us about how you have disbelieved.

The Arabic noun *fatr* (creation) is the amazing act of creating something that nothing precedes it in form, colour, or resemblance. That is why when Allah *Glorified is He* talks about Himself, He says: 'Originator of the heavens and the earth' (*al-Baqara:* 2117) which means that He created the heavens and the earth without there being any previous example that He imitated whilst creating.

Another meaning of 'He who created me' (*Ya Sin:* 22) is having faith in Him, the faith of one's *fitra* (primitive nature). Therefore, one's faith in Allah is either of gratitude towards the One Who created him and brought him into existence, for which there was no previous example, or the faith of one's primitive nature upon which Allah Has brought mankind into existence.

When we reflect on the task of this man, we find that what was in his heart resembled what was in the rest of his bodily organs, i.e. the development of the stages of faith. How? The body consists of various limbs, and every limb has a task and a function. In order for this body to survive, it requires means of sustenance such as food, drink, and air.

After the process of taking in the food and the various blessings therein, such as teeth that cut, molars that crush, saliva that helps in the process of swallowing, digestive fluids, etc. the food is then absorbed into the blood. Next, the heart receives it and takes what it needs primarily so that it has the capacity to pump the blood to the remaining organs and each one of them can carry out their tasks.

The same applies to this man and how his faith grew stronger. After believing and having faith settle in his heart, he wanted to pass on this faith to his people and spread among them the guidance that his heart has absorbed. He, therefore, represents the heart of the messages. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Indeed, for everything there is a heart, and the Quran’s heart is *Ya Sin*.’(1) It came in the last phase of the voluntary messages that serve the obligatory message.

As long as the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* informs us that *Ya Sin* is the heart of the Quran, then the believer must accept all of its benefits that have been authentically related to us from him. It is not necessary that we stop at the rationale behind everything because faith, as we have said, is both unseen and witnessed. From the truthfulness of what he has witnessed, the believer takes evidence for the existence of what he has not seen.

Therefore, let us take these Hadiths with pleasure such that if you read The Quran and you do not find any Hadiths regarding it, the fact that you are reading Allah’s words is of enough benefit to you. That is why we have seen some of them writing down the Hadiths that encourage the reading of the Quran.

It was narrated in a Hadith that if the Quran was read in the presence of a sick person, rows of angels would come to him to the extent that every letter is worth ten thousand angels. They do not leave him until he dies. Then they watch him being washed and carried to his final resting place, and they watch people praying for him and burying him.(2)

In another narration, ‘Whoever has *Ya Sin* read in their presence whilst sick, or he reads it himself, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* will come to him with a cup of water. He will thus drink from it and never thirst again, and he will not need the pools of the Prophets.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/26) from the Hadith of Ma`qal ibn Yassar that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Ya Sin is the heart of the Quran. No man reads it desiring Allah’s pleasure and the abode of the Hereafter except that He forgives him, and you should read it over your deceased.’*

(2) *Some Hadiths regarding the virtue of Ya Sin are authentic, but what is mentioned here is not one of them. At-Tirmidhi, Ad-Darimi and Al-Bayhaqi in Shua`b Al-Iman narrated that Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him said, ‘The Messenger of Allah said, “Everything has a heart, and the heart of the Quran is Ya Sin. Whoever reads Ya Sin once, Allah writes for him that he recited Quran ten times”’. This has also been mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Dur Al-Manthur (7/27).*

In the following verse: '…and to whom you will be returned?' (*Ya Sin:* 22), the man explains: do not think that you can escape from Allah because you are in His Grasp. You came into existence by His command and you were witnesses to this creation. Likewise, you will be brought back to Him in the end. If you cannot appreciate the blessing of being brought into existence, then appreciate the result of going back.

We notice in this verse that the believing man is speaking about himself in the singular form, 'And why should I not worship He who created me…' (*Ya Sin:* 22), and then he turns from the singular to addressing the plural and the denying people, '…and to whom you will be returned?' (*Ya Sin:* 22) He did not say, '…and to whom I will be returned'? Why? The answer is simple, it was said because obedience is the foundation of worship and it only comes in three stages:

The first stage, you obey the one in whom you find a perfect example that deserves to be obeyed and to be praised for his perfection, even if do not gain any benefit from him. For example, when you look at a wonderful and expressive poem and you are amazed at the one who said it, you praise him even though none of it brings any advantage to you. However, you are able to appreciate the poet for who he is.

The second stage, you obey a man and appreciate him because of a benefit that goes back to you, We very often see people serving a cowardly man who does not deserve to be served, and the people do not serve him except out of greed for what he has.

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(1) *The closest meaning I found to this is what Al-Bayhaqi narrated in Shua`b Al-Iman from Abu Qalaba based on, 'Whoever reads Ya Sin is forgiven. Whoever reads it in the presence of a small amount of food it becomes sufficient. Whoever reads it in the presence of a deceased person will make it a source of ease for him. Whoever reads it in the presence of a woman who is experiencing a difficult labour will find ease thereafter. Whoever reads it, it is as if he has read the entire Quran eleven times.' Al-Bayhaqi said, 'This is how it has been narrated to us from Abu Qalaba and he is one of the great followers.' He is not saying this because it is authentic but merely to inform.*

The third stage, you obey an individual or you respect simply because you are afraid of him and you fear his evil.

Indeed the man who ran from the farthest end of the city affirmed the first two stages when he said, ‘And why should I not worship He who created me’ (*Ya Sin:* 22), i.e. I worship Him because His perfection means that He deserves to be worshipped. I also worship Him because of His continuous blessings. As for the third stage, he applies it to the deniers from among his people by saying, ‘…and to whom you will be returned?’ (*Ya Sin:* 22) In other words, wake up people! If you have not appreciated Allah for His attributes of perfection, and for which He is loved and you have not appreciated Allah for His continuous blessings towards you, then know that you will go back to Him, and the end and final destination belongs to Him. He has power over you and no one escapes from His Grasp.

Then the man emphasises the matter of worshipping Allah alone, and he continues:

ءَأَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ ءَالِهَةً إِن يُرِدۡنِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ بِضُرّٖ لَّا تُغۡنِ عَنِّي
شَفَٰعَتُهُمۡ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَا يُنقِذُونِ ﴿٢٣﴾ إِنِّيٓ إِذٗا لَّفِي ضَلَٰلٖ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾
إِنِّيٓ ءَامَنتُ بِرَبِّكُمۡ فَٱسۡمَعُونِ ﴿٢٥﴾

How could I take besides Him any other gods, whose intercession will not help me and who would not be able to save me if the Lord of Mercy wished to harm me? [23] Then I would clearly be in the wrong [24] I believe in your Lord, so listen to me [25] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 23 - 25)

The questioning in ‘Should I take…’ (*Ya Sin:* 23) carries the meaning of both astonishment and denying; how can he take a god besides Allah when Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who created him. When you consider the meaning of the verb ‘I take’, you will find that those false deities do not exist in the first place, so the meaning of ‘taking a god’ means that it is not a god in reality and it does not deserve to be a god. However, you have propped it up and made it a god. An example of this is attributing false children to Allah, as in the following verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Allah has not taken any son, nor has there ever been with Him any deity. [If there had been], then each deity would have taken what it created, and some of them would have sought to overcome others. Exalted is Allah above what they describe [concerning Him].' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91)

Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that He does not have a son, and if you say that Allah has taken a son, this would mean that a son had come to Him and He had adopted him. Indeed, Allah is Greatly Exalted above such a thing. Likewise, you can say that you have taken a son, meaning that a son came to you and you did not give birth to him, but rather, you adopted him.

Therefore, as long as those gods are taken, it means that they never existed originally. It is as if the man is fixing the people's concept of worship.

If you ponder on the following verse, '…if the Most Merciful intends for me some adversity…', you will notice an expression that contains a subtle transition which should be considered because the attribute of mercy in 'The Most Gracious' contradicts harm, so how can the context incorporate the two?

If you interpret what happens to you or befalls you from Allah's decree to be harm, then you will reason that it is from the Most Merciful. So, whatever happens to you must be what the Most Merciful Has decreed. That is why we say, 'My Lord, I praise You for all that You have decreed and all that You have destined, praise of submission to Your judgment and certainty in Your wisdom'.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is teaching you how to submit to His will: 'Wake up and realise that not everything you see according to your own flawed judgment and lack of knowledge is of harm to you. This is because the one causing it to happen is the Most Merciful, and hidden within this harm is great benefit, just like the loving father who brings his son to the doctor so that he can undergo some painful surgery, or amputate a limb so that the rest of the body can be healed, for this is harm in an outward sense but in reality there is mercy in it'.

That is why we previously said that if your son came to you and he was bleeding, you would not welcome this with pleasure nor with anger until after you had asked who had done it to him. If it were an enemy, you would be angry and if it were someone close to you, you would accept what happened with contentment and trust, and you would say to your son, 'Your uncle must have seen you doing something wrong and therefore he punished you'.

Likewise, do not judge what Allah has willed to happen to you as anything other than that which has come from the Most Merciful Lord who is more merciful to you than a mother to her child. You are His creation and His making. For example, if you look at those who have taken their statues for gods, you will find that they take really good care of it. They look after it and work on beautifying it. It is like when you see a carpenter, for example, chiselling wood. Would you say that he is harming what he has made? No. He is improving it and beautifying it. That is why Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith(1): 'O son of Adam! I am beloved to you so I have a right over you that you be beloved to Me.'(2) After this show of affection from the Creator to the creation, can anything happen to them that will harm them?

In our daily lives, we see many testimonies to this matter. For example, you often miss a train or a bus and then you have to take the next one, on the way you find that the train or bus was involved in some sort of accident. So, you change your viewpoint, which was anger at missing the train, and it becomes gratitude to Allah because He saved you. Your attitude was different. Therefore, you should look at the one who makes destiny happen to you. Do not look at superficial benefits because Allah has wisdom in what He causes to happen, whether you understand it or not.

We also often see one of our children, for example, failing an exam, even though he had revised, worked hard, acquired much knowledge, etc. However, something happened to him, a sickness, or other, and he was not successful. A superficial glance at the matter would make you think that it is something evil and a great loss, causing you to be angry. But if you look carefully and reflectively, you will see that Allah Has a wisdom behind this failure.

In such a situation, a rational father will say to his son, 'My son, I praise Allah because you are always successful, and maybe if you had been successful this year you would have felt prey to people's envy of you. This is a golden opportunity to improve your score next time so that you can join your dream college'.

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(1) Qudsi Hadiths are attributed to Allah *the Most High* and related from Him. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would receive the meaning from Allah, by way of inspiration or dream, and then he would inform his community of this in his own words. This is contrary to the remaining Hadiths, as the Messenger of Allah would not attribute them to His Lord, nor relate them from Him.

(2) Included by Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in *Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din* (4/296) and he said, 'In some books: "My slave! It is your right that I am beloved to you, and My right over your is that you are beloved to me."'

This is how the father strengthens his son's relationship with Allah and increases his faith in his Lord, and at the same time distancing him from anger and lack of contentment in Allah's decree. This is a matter with which fathers should be concerned.

Therefore, the issue that we want to stop at and examine in this verse is that if the Most Merciful does something that appears to be harmful and contradictory to this attribute, then this is due to your lack of judgment. In the greater scheme of things it is not contradictory, but rather, it is merciful.

His saying: '...their intercession will not avail me at all…' (*Ya Sin:* 23) means that the intercession of those gods, if they do have an intercession, is of no benefit because they have been put forward as partners and equals to Allah. So how can their intercession be accepted in His presence? A condition of intercession is that the one interceding is beloved to the one who is interceded for. Those gods, supposing that they had an intercession, would be unacceptable according to Allah even though they, in and of themselves, are excused because they never sinned. They never claimed that they were gods, but human beings claimed they were.

We have already mentioned that those gods are excused from being worshipped besides Allah. Indeed, the poet who wrote the following lines of poetry was able to articulate this meaning as if those gods themselves were talking. He said,

They worship us and we are more worshipful of Allah
Than those who stand in the late hours of the night
They have committed an act of ignorance as
They committed it against the Son of Maryam (Mary) and the disciples
They mistook our silence as evidence against us
And we became fuel for fire because of them
Indeed, we are all sinful except for the one
Who will be saved by the Mercy of the All-Forgiving

His saying: ‘nor can they save me’ means that when the intercessor is given his intercession, he can save the one interceded for from those who are with him. As for those gods, their intercession will not be accepted and they will not be able to save whoever asks them to intercede for him.

We have already clarified the meaning of intercession, and it comes from asking for pardon or forgiveness. In other words, if a man has a problem that he is not able to solve himself, he asks someone else to help him. This person joins him to strengthen him in solving this matter, so after being one he, with the help of another, becomes a pair, *shafʿ*, meaning ‘two’.

When Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to make this matter clear to us, He tells us in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all, nor will intercession be accepted from it, nor will compensation be taken from it, nor will they be aided’ (*al-Baqara:* 48).

He also says in another verse of the same chapter: ‘And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all, and no compensation will be accepted from it, nor will any intercession benefit it, nor will they be aided’ (*al-Baqara:* 123). You will notice that the beginning of each of these two verses is the same but the endings are different. Why? It is because what the pronoun refers to is different; we have here a soul that is compensating and a soul that is being compensated for. If you make the pronoun refer to the one being compensated for, the one being compensated for cannot intercede for himself, but rather, he will try to make up for whatever harm he has caused so that he can pay his dues. If righteousness is not accepted from him, he looks for someone who will intercede for him. Therefore, the meaning is that uprightness will not be accepted from this soul and it will not be benefitted by anyone else’s intercession.

If you make the pronoun refer to the soul that is compensating, i.e. the one that intercedes, for the intercessor steps forward to intercede at first, and if his intercession is not accepted, he presents righteousness and bears the expenses of the redemption.

Therefore, those gods – supposing that they have an intercession – will be unable to save whoever should seek refuge in them from the grip of Allah as it is an intercession that is rejected and not accepted. They are not suited for intercession or saving, and this meaning is clear in His saying: ‘O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued’ (*al-Hajj:* 73).

So, when the man, says, ‘Indeed, I would then be in manifest error’ (*Ya Sin:* 24), he means, ‘If I did that and went to worship those gods, I would be in error ‘manifest error’, i.e. clear. His saying: ‘Indeed, I would then be in manifest error’ is as if the error would surround him and encompass him from all directions, such that he would not be able to be saved from it.

Then this believing man says, ‘Indeed, I have believed in your Lord, so listen to me’ (*Ya Sin:* 25). It would be correct to say that this speech was addressed to the messengers whom the man had come to assist in their call and support them, for he looked at them and said, ‘Indeed, I have believed in your Lord...’ (*Ya Sin:* 25), and the meaning of ‘…so listen to me’ is; hear what I am saying in order to support you, and bear witness that I am acting voluntarily with this faithful support. No one has commanded me to do so.

It would also be correct to say that this speech is directed towards the denying people, as he says to them, ‘Indeed, I have believed in your Lord’ (*Ya Sin:* 25) which means that Allah is your Lord in spite of you even though you disbelieve in Him, I respect His Lordship over you and I believe in it so I can be included in the greatness of this Lordship, ‘…so listen to me’, i.e. listen to what I have said so that I can say that I have carried out what I am obliged to do in your regard. I have conveyed the message to you and I have not cheated you or deceived you.(1)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *In the first time, he was addressing the messengers, according to Ibn Mas`ud’s narration which was mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (8/5654) and As-Suyuti narrated it in Ad-Dur Al-Manthur (7/52). As for the second time, he was addressing his people, Al-Qurtubi narrated it in his Tafsir from Ka`ab Al-Ahbar and Wahb ibn Munnabih. The verse follows both interpretations.*

قِيلَ ٱدْخُلِ ٱلْجَنَّةَ ۖ قَالَ يَٰلَيْتَ قَوْمِى يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾
بِمَا غَفَرَ لِى رَبِّى وَجَعَلَنِى مِنَ ٱلْمُكْرَمِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

He was told, ‘Enter the Garden,’ so he said, ‘If only my people knew [26] how my Lord has forgiven me and set me among the highly honoured [27] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 26 - 27)

Using the passive verb ‘it was said’ is for the sake of generalisation because who said to him ‘enter Paradise’ and when? You can find the answer to this question in the following verse, ‘Indeed, those who have said, “Our Lord is Allah” and then remained on a right course - the angels will descend upon them, [saying], “Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.”’ (*Fussilat:* 30) Accordingly, the man who adopted this position of faith voluntarily from the farthest end of the city came and rushing to support the messengers in a matter that he had not been burdened with in the first place. He came to the people with proofs and evidences that the messengers themselves had not brought. This way, he deserves the angels to descend upon him and give him glad tidings of paradise. Or Allah is using the past tense form, ‘It was said…’ to inform us of what He will tell him after his death when he enters paradise, which is how Allah shows appreciation and esteem to the man.

One of this man’s qualifications for entering paradise is that he did not look at his own faith, but he also looked for that of his brothers, to such an extent that he was given the glad tidings of paradise and after entering it, this did not stop him from thinking about his people, but rather, he said, ‘I wish my people could know…’ (*Ya Sin:* 26). In other words, the blessings that I am now in and the result of faith and obedience, if they knew what I know, they would attain what I have attained. If they knew, they would flock towards faith and engage in obedience more than they did so in disbelief and disobedience.

In His saying: ‘Of how my Lord has forgiven me and placed me among the honoured’ (*Ya Sin:* 27), you will notice that forgiveness precedes honour, and this matter is called emptying and filling. We already gave an example of this which was a garment that you want to iron, for example. Are you going to use the iron to clean it? No. You are going to clean it first and then you are going to beautify it by ironing it.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* and He is above all kinds of examples, cleanses His slave of his sins before he enters paradise. He purifies him of what is attached to him, the emptying, and then He honours him with paradise, the filling. This meaning is clear in His saying: 'So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained [his desire]' (*Al-'Imran:* 185).

Allah *Glorified is He* bestows blessing upon us by moving us away from hell with the forgiveness of sins and then honouring us by admitting us into paradise out of His Generosity and Bounty.

Then *the Almighty* says:

وَمَآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِۦ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦ مِن جُندٖ مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَمَا كُنَّا مُنزِلِينَ ٢٨
إِن كَانَتۡ إِلَّا صَيۡحَةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ فَإِذَا هُمۡ خَٰمِدُونَ ٢٩

After him We did not send any army from heaven
against his people, nor were We about to [28]
There was just one blast, and they fell down
lifeless [29] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 28 - 29)

We know from the context of these two verses that the denying people killed this volunteering man, or that he died of natural causes.(1) It is expected that Allah will punish them for their denial of the three messengers first and then for their denial of this man who came from the farthest end of the city, rushing to advise them. So, what did Allah do to them?

He says, what can be interpreted as; 'Indeed, the matter of these deniers is more worthless than sending a host from the sky to destroy them'. One blast was merely enough to wipe them out. The meaning of, 'And We did not send down upon his people after him…' (*Ya Sin:* 28) is that after the sincere advice, the exhortations and the proofs that were voluntarily given, ‘nor would We have done so’ (*Ya Sin:* 28). In other words, we did not send any and it was not appropriate for us to send a host from the sky because the matter is much more trivial than that. ‘It was not but one shout’ (*Ya Sin:* 29) i.e. it was only a single blast, ‘…and immediately they were extinguished’ (*Ya Sin:* 29). The phrase ‘…and immediately they were extinguished’ indicates that they were so fanatical in their disbelief that they were like a blazing fire of anger against the messengers, first, and secondly against the man who volunteered. So Allah extinguished it.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir says in his Tafsir (3/568), 'Ibn Ishaq said, conveying from Ibn `Abbas, Ka`ab and Wahb, that when the man said that, his people jumped on him and killed him. While Qatada narrated that they stoned him to death, and the man said- while they were stoning him- 'May Allah have mercy on my people for they do not know.' In another interpretation, Al-Qurtubi mentioned a few narrations in his Tafsir (7/5654), one of which is Ibn Mas`ud's where he said that they killed him by stepping on his stomach with their feet, and then threw him down the well of Rass. That is why they were referred to as the People of the Well or the People of Ar-Rass in the Quran.*

After saying these words, which can be said by every believer who sees the destruction of the disobedient and the outcome of the disbelievers to whom death has reached before they themselves reached faith, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰحَسۡرَةً عَلَى ٱلۡعِبَادِۚ مَا يَأۡتِيهِم مِّن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا كَانُواْ بِهِۦ يَسۡتَهۡزِءُونَ (٣٠)

Alas for human beings! Whenever a messenger
comes to them they ridicule him [30]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 30)

This word ‘regret’ is often used when someone we love misses out on some goodness. Regret here is for the servants who denied Allah’s messengers and mocked them. This is a matter that must be regretted by every believer because Allah *Glorified is He* created you and created things for you before He summoned you into existence.

He created for you the essentials of your material life and He maintained your material well-being by placing in earth all the nourishment, the necessities and the luxuries that you will ever need. Does it make sense to provide all of this for the body and leave the spirit with nothing even though it is more important than the body?

The spirit must be given something. It must be given some nourishment and values. Values are what Allah demands of His servant because you are going to be a worshipper of Allah; you are going to obey His commands and refrain from what He has prohibited. This is the way that He assigned you: 'Do this and do not do that'.

That is why you find that material sustenance and the essentials of physical life are provided for all, the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the disobedient. Allah *Glorified is He* is the one who summons them all into existence, and that is why He takes it upon himself to provide for them in the same way that you would invite, for example, a guest to your house. You would prepare for him food and drink and a sleeping area for him to stay with you. All of mankind has been given this gift.

As for the giving of values and the spirit, some of them have taken it and some of them have left it. This is because the gift of material sustenance empowers the passions of one's ego, but values restrict these passions and restrain them from certain things. Whenever values restrict the desires of the ego, one abandons them and slips away from them.

The way of values has come from one who loves you and is concerned for your benefit, as we have already mentioned in the Qudsi Hadith that the Lord of Might says, 'You are beloved to me, and it is My right over you that I am beloved to you.' You are the one who benefits from this way because Allah *Glorified is He* created you with all His attributes of perfection. If you obey Him, this does not increase Him in perfection, and if you disobey Him, this does not decrease Him at all in terms of His attributes, and nothing harms Him.

That is why Allah made from His servants the rich and the poor, even though Allah *Glorified is He* is fully capable of making all of us rich such that none of us would have need of someone else. If the poor person reflected on the wisdom behind his poverty, he would praise Allah and he would know that his poverty is a condition for the faith of the rich person, while the rich person is not a condition for the faith of the poor person. The rich person needs me before I need him. The rich person strives and becomes tired and must deal with the means of provision, trade and suffer the causes of profit and loss. Then he comes to my door and gives me Allah's right regarding his wealth, while I am free of concern.

The rich person is obliged to perform *hajj*, and if he does not, he is liable to be punished. If he does perform *hajj*, it may be accepted or it may be rejected.

If his *hajj* is not accepted, then the obligation remains. This is the difference between one who is obliged to perform a pillar and one who is not obliged to do anything.

Therefore, the one who reflects will see that the poor person is more fortunate than the rich person is; the one who is unable is more fortunate than the one who is able.

We were with some brothers, and we wanted to perform the sunset prayer in the Hussayn Mosque. When we stood up to pray (a man named) Sayyid Jalal caught our attention and said: ‘Wait two minutes because I have sent Sulaiman (some boy) to change ten pounds for me.’ One of those present said: ‘I have some new pounds on me so here is ten pounds that I can change for you.’ Sayyid said: ‘No, because the man I am intending to give it to will only accept the big pound from before’, so he refused this new currency.

I said to myself: ‘Glory be to Allah! This insane man that is sitting at the gate of the Hussayn Mosque, and he is such-and-such, is making the greatest economist in Egypt, Sayyid Jalal, subservient to him, and he had with him the minister, Ahmad Ta`ima, to help him provide the money that this man liked.

It was amazing that from amongst these people was one sitting at the gate of the Hussayn Mosque and he was crossing his legs, and the retinue of the minister and ministers passed by him and he did not pay any attention to them. He was not concerned with the retinue, and the guards and the world around him. What does this mean, then? It means that he was preoccupied with something greater than all of this, and that Allah had manifested to him that which had made him unaware of this life and what was around him.

That is why one of them saw the retinue of one of these ministers and said to the other: ‘By Allah, we are in bliss, and if these people knew about it, they would fight us with swords’. Are these people not masters? Are they not noble?

Therefore, every believer who sees the final end of the deniers and the destruction of the disbelievers in this story and those that resemble it must say these words ‘How regretful for the servants.’ Why? It is because it is from the perfection of one’s faith that the believer feels regret for the one who does not taste the flavour of virtue and the bliss of obedience. He is wretched and thus deserving of someone who will sympathise with him and be grieved by his state. Also, the believer loves for his brother what he loves for himself, and indeed he loves goodness for all of humanity. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا۟ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُم مِّنَ ٱلْقُرُونِ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾
وَإِن كُلٌّ لَّمَّا جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Do they not see how many generations We have destroyed
before them, none of whom will ever come back to them? [31]
[Yet] all of them will be brought before Us [32]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 31-32)

It suffices these deniers to look at the outcome of deniers before them and the punishment that befell them; Allah destroyed them with no one left out. The verb ‘seen’ refers to both knowing and seeing. You can say ‘I saw the scene’ and this is referring to seeing, and you can say ‘I see this opinion’ and this means that you come to know it. Seeing limits your information to what your eyes encounter, whilst knowing gives what your eyes and your other limbs encounter, so knowing is broader than seeing. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing His Prophet: ‘Have you not seen, [O Muhammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1)

It is known that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the Year of the Elephant, and possibly after this event. Therefore, he did not physically see any of it, but despite that his Lord addresses him with ‘Have you not seen’, meaning ‘Do you not know?’ either by being told the story by his people or by Allah *Glorified is He* informing him of it.

Physically seeing events is the most reliable means of realisation because it is as they say, ‘With the eye you do not say “Where?’’ But why is the context changed from ‘Do you not know?’ to ‘Have you not seen’? It is said: ‘The True Lord *Glorified is He* indicates to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Indeed My revelation to you of something is more reliable than you seeing it with your own eyes’.

His saying ‘Have you not seen’ means that amongst these people were those who had actually seen the destruction of the deniers, and on their travels and trade journeys in the winter and summer had passed by their houses that were completely devastated. The meaning of ‘how many’ is that there were many, and it is a matter that is beyond calculation. It is similar to you saying to someone who denies your courtesy: ‘How good have I been to you’! It is as if you are saying to him: ‘I trust your judgement and I am asking you for an answer’; by this mean, your statement has become an affirmation voiced by him.

Regarding the meaning of ‘generations’, it is a period of time that lasts one hundred years, His saying ‘that they to them will not return?’ could have more than one meaning according to what the pronouns ‘they’ and ‘them’ refer to. This is because the verse is talking about the previous generations that have perished while addressing those who are denying at present. If the plural third person pronoun ‘they’ refers to the generations that have perished, then the meaning is: Indeed, they will not return, and we have not see any of them come back after their destruction. If the pronoun refers to those being addressed at present, then the meaning is: Indeed, you who are being addressed! Your lineage does not go back to those whom Allah has destroyed because Allah *Glorified is He* annihilated them such that no individual and no progeny were left.

In summary, the verse means that the destruction of the disbelievers and the deniers is not something new, but rather, it is a practice that has been followed throughout time. The Quran relates to us what happened to `Ad, Thamud, and Pharaoh. Allah *Glorified is He* has left traces to prove the veracity of what Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us, and here we see America, for example. America is the superpower of modern civilization and at the forefront of ingenuity, inventing and exploring space, but despite this, they come to Egypt, for example, to see the remnants of the Pharaohs that were built thousands of years before `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and despite their scientific progress, they are amazed at how the pyramids were built.

This practice – the practice of destroying the disbelievers – has evidence that can be seen in the modern age. Russia, which committed suicide, look at what it did in Chechnya, this small Islamic country, at a time when we were inadequate in our support, or our support for them would not have matched the power and tyranny of these transgressors. That is why Allah responded to the enemies of His religion and avenged them in the earthquake of Sakhalil.

His saying in the following verse: ‘And indeed, all of them will yet be brought present before Us’ comes after His saying: ‘that they to them will not return?’ to clarify that there is no returning in this life; and if not, had they not any return in this life or the Hereafter, then death would have been a relief for these deniers. This is as Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi (1) has said that the meaning is: ‘They are not returning in this life. As for the Hereafter, they have to return for the reckoning, for every major and minor act.’

The phrase ‘all of them’ refers to every single individual from amongst them. It is also not conditional that they are gathered together, but rather, each individual comes on his own so that they can see the humiliation and debasement of the people who have wasted themselves and the disbelievers who have made from amongst themselves a god that is to be obeyed.

The phrase ‘be brought present before Us’ indicates that one is forced and compelled to be gathered, against one’s wishes.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the issue of resurrection in ‘And indeed, all of them will yet be brought present before Us’, He relates evidence for the veracity of this matter because resurrection is one of those matters that many people deny. One poet has said (2):

The doctor and the astrologer both claimed

That the bodies will not be gathered, so I said to the two of them

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(1) Muhammad ibn `Umar Abu `Abdullah Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi, Qurayshi of lineage, originated from Tabaristan… He was born in Rayy (modern-day Teheran) in the year 544 A.H. and this accounts for his name Ar-Razi. He was an Imam and Quranic commentator and the unique one of his age in the rational, transmitted, and ancient sciences. It was said: ‘Where is the speaker of Rayy?’ The people devoted themselves to his books during his lifetime and studied them amongst themselves. He was also a master of Persian. His various works include *Mafatih Al-Ghaib* and *Mahsal Afkar Al-Mutaqadimin Wa Al-Muta`akhirin*. He died in the year 606 at the age of 62. Az-Zirikli, *Al-A`lam* (6/313).

(2) Abu Al-`Ala`, Ahmad ibn `Abdullah, At-Tanukhi, born in the year 362 A.H. in *Ma`ra Nu`man* and died there in the year 449 at the age of 86. He was a poet and philosopher. He was afflicted with smallpox as a child and became blind at the age of 4. He started composing poetry at the age of 11 and he used to wear coarse clothes. He also used to forbid causing pain to animals. His writings include *Risalat Al-Fuqran*, *Lazum Ma La Yulzam)* and others.

If what you are saying is true I have not lost anything
But if what I am saying is true then you are truly in loss (1)

One advisor might say to you: ‘If you go along the path of such-and-such then be careful and take precautions because there are wolves, predatory animals and brigand’s. What if you take all these precautions but do not find anything? Of what was he making you scared? Likewise, there is my belief in resurrection, that if it does not benefit me, it has not harmed me, and your belief that if it does not harm you, it has not benefitted you.

The strongest argument that the philosophers have regarding resurrection is that they said: ‘Imagine that a man dies and is buried, and his body disintegrates. Then a tree grows on his grave and nourishes itself from his remains. Then it comes to bear fruit and another man eats its fruits, thus causing the elements of the first man to reach him. So, when the resurrection takes place, how will these elements be resurrected, either from the first or from the last?

The proponents of this argument understood that the elements, when they are created, have a specific identity in creation, but did not understand that they have a generic identity as well. We say: Imagine a man that is afflicted with an illness which causes him to lose twenty kilos in weight. Then Allah guides a doctor to diagnose his sickness and prescribe some medicine for him. Then the man is cured and he nourishes himself until his body returns to its original weight. Where did the original elements that made up his weight before go? Are they the same elements that have come back to him after he has been cured?

Therefore, the matter is not the specificity of elements but the quantity of elements, and the immensity of trying to count the quantity of elements of every human being. If all the elements that exist in me, Muhammad Ash-Sha`rawi, were gathered together because the elements of all human beings are the same, they are the sixteen known elements that begin with, as we have mentioned, oxygen, then carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and so forth. However, individuals differ in the amounts of these elements that each of us has. You all have oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen, but I may have more oxygen and you may have more carbon, and so on.

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(1) These lines are from the poem of Abu Al-`Ala` Al-Ma`ri and they are from the *Kamil Metre*. It consists of seven verses beginning with ‘he said’ instead of ‘he claimed’. See his *Diwan* and *Al-Mawsu`ah Ash-Shi`riyyah*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is teaching us that the issue is not the specific identity of the elements, or their specificity, but rather, it is the quantity of elements, for Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *Qaf*: 'We know what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a retaining record.' (*Qaf:* 4) This means that He preserves the amounts and calculates them according to their scales. Thus, if Allah *Glorified is He* wants to resurrect, He gathers a proportion of this and a proportion of that and gives it to so-and-so, and a proportion of this and a proportion of that is given to so-and-so and so forth. The matter does not stop at Him knowing these proportions, but rather, Allah preserves them and records them in a preserved book.

In another place, the True Lord refutes those who deny the resurrection and He says to them: 'Why do you act arrogantly towards resurrection, when it is the restoration of something that did actually exist and its elements were separated? What is more amazing is that I brought it into existence from non-existence, so resurrection is easier than restoration: 'And it is He who begins creation; then He repeats it, and that is [even] easier for Him.' (*ar-Rum:* 27) This is if we agree with you in your understanding of things and follow your norms of thinking.

We have already clarified that the elements that Allah has created in the universe are as they are. They do not increase at all and they do not decrease at all. Water, for example, has always been the same since Allah created the earth, but it passes through its well-known cycle. Man, for example, drinks about a ton of water in his lifetime. Does he retain all of it? No, it comes out in the form of urine and its residue. After he dies, whatever fluid is left over evaporates and the earth absorbs it to start a new water cycle. This is how the elements of man take part in this cycle. And here the True Lord *Glorified is He* shows to these deniers the evidence:

وَءَايَةٌ لَّهُمُ ٱلْأَرْضُ ٱلْمَيْتَةُ أَحْيَيْنَٰهَا وَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾
وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا جَنَّٰتٍ مِّن نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَٰبٍ وَفَجَّرْنَا فِيهَا مِنَ ٱلْعُيُونِ ﴿٣٤﴾
لِيَأْكُلُوا۟ مِن ثَمَرِهِۦ وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ أَيْدِيهِمْ ۖ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

There is a sign for them in the lifeless earth: We give it life and We produce grain from it for them to eat [33] We have put gardens of date palms and grapes in the earth, and We have made springs of water gush out of it [34] So that they could eat its fruit. It was not their own hands that made all this. How can they not give thanks? [35] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 33 - 35)

This evidence is something that is witnessed and seen by everybody. No one can possibly deny it. We see the dry, desolate dead earth; when the rain comes, it turns green and life starts in it; it moves and produces. It is upon man to take evidence from what he witnesses for that which he does not witness.

In His saying ‘And a sign for them’ a sign is something amazing within its own category, like when you say, ‘So-and-so is a sign of nobility’, or ‘a sign of beauty’. This sign is for them, meaning only the disbelievers because the believer has no need of this sign. The believer says, ‘But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

Seeking evidence for something is the first evidence of its existence. I would not exhaust myself looking for evidence unless I was convinced that this thing existed. Seeking evidence is the essence of evidence, and the believer only seeks evidence so that he can use it to debate with the one who does not believe, and thus show him Allah’s signs.

Regarding this sign, either you take it as a cosmic sign that indicates the power of Allah *Glorified is He* or you take it evidence that He, if He sends down rain on the dead earth, it moves and produces vegetation from every splendid pair.

The one who reflects on the earth finds that it is a sign in and of itself, and one of the greatest of Allah’s blessings, even if it was a rock that did not produce anything. It suffices as our temporary abode; upon it we dwell and in it we seek shelter, so what do you think about the fact that Allah gives it a shade of life when it thrives with plants and then transforms into a wonderful colour green?

The revival of the earth is in stages. It is the revival of plants that are not rich in nutritional value such as grass, weeds, and shrubs. It suffices that this type clothes the face of the earth in beauty and splendour, while it settles the sand and establishes it on the face of the earth so that the wind does not blow it in our eyes. It is one of the phenomena of life on earth, and one of Allah's blessings. The other stage is that the earth grows plants that we nourish ourselves with, and they are of two types: the necessary seeds essentials for your life and the foundation of nourishment, the most important of them being wheat.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* indicates its importance when He says, 'And grain is having husks and scented plants.' (*ar-Rahman:* 12) It turns our attention towards the importance of bran which, until recently, we did not think were important and thus used it as fodder for livestock. It is narrated that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* whom Allah gave a kingdom unattained for anyone after him, that he ate nothing but grits, i.e. coarsely ground grain.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And a sign for them is the dead earth. We have brought it to life.' This is the first stage, followed by 'and brought forth from it grain, and from it they eat.' These are the necessities.

Then 'And We placed therein gardens of palm trees and grapevines.' The date palm and the vines are specified because dates and grapes are the most important of fruits, and the nearest of them are from the necessities of nourishment, as they are nourishment for some and fruits for others. That is why the poet Shawqi said the following about dates:

The poor man's food is the rich man's desert

And the provision of the traveller and the stranger(1)

We stop here at the tremendousness of the Quranic rendition because the speech is the Lord's speech, and it is upon us to unveil the aspects of immensity therein. The scholars have noticed, may Allah reward them, that when the Quran talks about fruits, it says: ‘of palm trees and grapevines’ so the tree of the date-palm is mentioned, and the grape is mentioned, but the fruit of the date-palm, which is dates, and the tree of the grape are not mentioned.

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(1) This verse is from a poem of Ahmad Shawqi, the 'Prince of Poets', from the *Mutaqarib Metre*, and the number of its verses are 21 beginning with:
I see a tree in the sky hiding itself
The cloud traversed an amazing sight.

When the scholars looked into the matter they found that Quran mentioned the date palm because it has a lot of benefits and it is always giving. Its benefit is not limited to its fruit. Indeed, what is contains is beneficial and profitable. It is enough for us to know that nothing ever falls from it but has a function and task: the trunk, the stalks, and the interior. Even the fibres can be used to make the most splendid of things. As for the grapevines, after you take its fruits nothing remains except a bunch of bent twigs that are of no benefit whatsoever.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and caused to burst forth therefrom some springs’ because the agricultural land that gives us this gift is irrigated by either rivers or rain, and if it is not supplied adequately by these two sources it is irrigated by springs; and they are the underground waters that flow in the depths of the earth, originally produced by rain water. This is as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky and makes it flow as springs [and rivers] in the earth.’ (*az-Zumar:* 21)

These springs are one of the phenomena of Allah’s Power; there are those that we look for and drill and there are those that flow by themselves, naturally, with Allah’s Power. It is as if the Lord *Glorified is He* is reassuring you of His Giving, so if you are in a land that does not receive rain and there is not a valley in which rivers flow then be reassured because in the depths of the earth there are springs that burst forth with fresh water suitable for drinking and irrigating land. We recently became aware of the necessity of cultivating the desert and reclaiming it, and we were assisted in this by the wells and underground water therein. All we had to do was look for them.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains the rationale behind causing the springs to pour forth. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘That they may eat the fruit thereof. And their hands have not produced it, so will they not be grateful?’

About His saying ‘fruit thereof’, they say that the fruits are seeds, dates, grapes and so forth, or from the fruits of causing the springs to pour forth. Some of them said: ‘The fruits should be attributed to their source, so the meaning is: from the fruits of the power that is in ‘Be!’ and what is not meant are the fruits nearby’.

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to take you out of tribulation with means, and turn your attention towards the First Causer. That is why He commands us, when water becomes scarce and the means do not help us, to seek refuge in the Causer *Glorified is He* by way of the drought prayer. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* is the final recourse in this issue. When you seek water, do not seek water by yourself but with that which is weaker than you are. If you are disobedient and ungrateful, you will seek water from the one who has not committed disobedience.

That is why, in the drought prayer, we have been commanded to take women, children and livestock, as if we are using some of them as a means to Allah and to purify them from disobedience. It is as if we are saying to our Lord: ‘O Lord! Indeed, we have disobeyed you and we do not deserve rain, so give us rain for the sake of these’.

Indeed, He commanded us in the drought prayer that we go out to Him and we do not wear our normal clothes, but rather we manifest humiliation and brokenness before Allah *Glorified is He*.(1)

Now, after what has happened in the development of the use of water such that we have come to receive it in reservoirs and tanks, the connection between the Giver of the water and those benefitting from it has become distant. When the water is cut off, you do not think about the drought prayer, and you are not reminded of the one who gives the water. Rather, you think about what could have caused the water to be cut off so you ask about the tanks and the motor, etc. The means themselves have made you distant from the Creator of the means.

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/226), Ibn Majah, (1268) in his Sunnan and Al-Bayhaqi in his Sunnan, from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said: ‘Allah’s Prophet peace and blessings be upon him went out one day for the drought prayer and he prayed two units with us without a call to prayer or call to commence the prayer. Then he addressed us and supplicated to Allah, and he turned his face towards Mecca and raised his hands. Then he turned his cloak and put the right on the left and the left on the right.’ Ibn Hajar said in Fath Al-Bari (3/499): ‘The wisdom of this turning over has been differed over.’ Al-Mahlab was certain that it was done out of optimism; that the situation would change for the better. Ibn Al-`Arabi followed him up by saying that one of the conditions of being optimistic is that you do not intend it. He said: ‘The turning over was a sign between him and his Lord. It was said to him ‘Turn over your cloak so that your situation turns for the better.’*

His saying: ‘and their hands have not produced it’ takes into consideration the role of man and his action. Some fruits are made ready to eat such as peaches, oranges, and cucumbers, while other fruits need to be treated and prepared before they can be eaten. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is determining your role for you, giving you your right, and reminding you of your work, regardless of how easy it is.

This matter is made clear when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And have you seen that [seed] which you sow? Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 63-64).

The Lord *Glorified is He* determines your work in ploughing the earth and preparing it for cultivation. This is your role. As for bringing forth vegetation, this belongs to Allah alone and we have no say in it.

Likewise, your Lord respects your work when you bring something into existence that did not exist, and He calls you a ‘creator’ accordingly, even if this thing that you created is made from known things already in existence. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 14)

If your Lord has respected you for creating something that did not exist, then you should respect Him for being the best of creators. You are a creator and you Lord is the best of creators. You are able to treat sand, for example, and make glass from it. This is a type of creation but the glass remains as it is. It is fixed upon the state in which it was created. You cannot give this glass the attribute of life. As for what Allah creates, He gives it the attribute of life and it grows, develops, procreates and so forth.

His saying: ‘so will they not be grateful?’, comes after mentioning the previous blessings which deem it necessary that you thank Allah for them, but this is not a command here. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us: ‘Answer this. I am asking you for an answer’. But Allah *Glorified is He* already knows that the answer cannot possibly be other than the affirmation of gratitude for His blessings.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

سُبۡحَٰنَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلۡأَزۡوَٰجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنۢبِتُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ
وَمِنۡ أَنفُسِهِمۡ وَمِمَّا لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ (٣٦)

Glory be to Him who created all the pairs of
things that the earth produces, as well as
themselves and other things they do not know
about [36] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 36)

The phrase: 'Exalted is He' means absolute transcendence for the One Who exists by necessity, the Most Exalted above being governed by the laws of existence itself. That is why it is said with regards to every amazing matter, such as in the story of the Night Journey and the Ascension, for the Quran begins the story of the Night Journey with His words: 'Exalted is He who took His servant by night.' (*al-Isra':* 1) The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was made to travel by night from Mecca to Jerusalem. Then he was made to ascend to the seventh sky within a portion of the night, and this is considered something amazing. We should not measure this in relation to our own power, but to the power of the one doing it. This is because the action must be compared to the power of the one doing it, in terms of strength and weakness.

We clarified this matter previously when we said: 'It is as if I said I climbed to the top of Everest with my young son, for example. You would say to me: 'How can your small son climb to the top of Everest'?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* in His words 'Exalted is He who took His Servant by night' says in other words, 'Do not be astonished by this matter because Muhammad did not say, "I went by night" but rather, "I was taken by night", for indeed I am the one who took him by night and I am transcendent above time, place and power. If every action has its time measured in relation to the power of the one doing it, then compare the time to the doer who is the Most Exalted, and at that point you will find no time'.

That is why you find that the word 'exalted' is not said and has never been said before, except for Allah, despite the abundance of tyrants on the earth and despite there being those who claim divinity, and even the one who said: ‘I am your Lord, Most Exalted’. Despite this, it is not said except for Allah. When we remember Allah that is why we say: ‘Glory be to You’ and we do not say ‘except You’. Why? Because the meaning is absolute transcendence, and it can only be for Allah

For Allah is lory and transcendence before the existence of anyone who can make Him transcendent, for He is transcendent in His Essence before the existence of anyone who can say ‘Glory be to Allah’. This is the same as Him being a Creator before He creates and a provider before providing for anyone. Allah *Glorified is He* possesses the attribute before its effect appears in existence. It is similar to you saying, ‘So-and-so is a poet’. Is he a poet because he recites a wonderful poem or is he a poet before he recites it? He is a poet before he recites the poem because if he did not have the gift of poetry, he would not have said it.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is glorified before He creates the creation. Then, when He created the creation all created things glorified Him, and they still glorify Him and they will continue to glorify Him. Thus, as long as the universe is in a state of glorification, you should do likewise and glorify with them: ‘Exalt the name of your Lord, the Most High.’ (*al-A‘la:* 1)

The absolute transcendence of the True Lord *Glorified is He* has three stations:

The first: That His Essence is transcendent above all essences.

The second: That His Attributes are transcendent above all attributes because you can be described with wealth, but your wealth is not like the True Lord’s wealth. You exist and Allah exists, but is your existence like His existence, etc.?

The third: That His Actions are transcendent above being compared to our actions. If it was said: ‘Allah did such and such’ beware of measuring His actions in relation to your actions. That is why we said regarding ‘Exalted is He who took His Servant by night’ that you should judge it according to the Power of the One doing it, not your own power.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* brings about something, the ones who are addressed first know it. They do not close the storehouses of His bounty but rather, they leave behind some reserves for everything that is to be found afterwards, as a result of development and the coming together of pairs, for Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.’ Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘from that which they do not know.’ It is not known to those who are addressed first, but it will be made known afterwards. The most prominent Quranic verse that indicates this matter is His saying: ‘And [He created] the horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment. And He creates that which you do not know.’ (*an-Nahl:* 8)

His saying ‘and He creates that which you do not know’ comes as a reserve for the means of transportation and communication that will come into existence afterwards such as cars, planes, rockets etc.

If you were to say: ‘Why are these things that will come into existence later presented in a general way?’ We say, ‘It is because the intellect was incapable of conceptualizing them at the time of the initial address’. It had not seen anything like this, but when this thing was brought into existence, it will be seen clearly. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says in a general way because every day He will bring us something new and other amazing things that we have never seen before, the latest of these things that we have seen is the rocket. Who knows? Maybe it w ill not be long before we see something more amazing than that. We can thus include all these things under the banner of ‘and He creates that which you do not know.’ (*an-Nahl:* 8)

Likewise, here in His saying ‘and from that which they do not know’ we know the opposites in ‘what the earth grows’ and we have seen this, for example, in the pollination of the date palm and other crops. We know that from amongst them are crops that are both male and female, such as the date palm and the sycamore. However, there are other crops in which we know of no male or female, and the wind pollinates these kinds by Allah’s Power, as He says: ‘And We have sent the fertilizing winds.’ (*al-Hijr:* 22)

In some crops, the Creator *Glorified is He* has made femininity and masculinity in one stalk, and it is the dominant view that this is the case with crops that are necessary for nourishment, such as corn and wheat, as these crops do not have a male stalk and a female stalk. Instead, they are in one stalk. In the corn stalk, for example, we find at the top of the stock a spike that carries the male seeds of pollination and underneath it there is the corncob from which the corn emerges that represents the crop's femininity. Then it comes into contact with the pollination seeds that have been scattered from above by the wind. That is why, if this corn does not emerge and protrude from the cob it is not producing a cob, and on the inside, it does not have any corn seeds. Why? Because it has not come into contact with the male seeds

It is amazing that you find the seeds of the corn gradually becoming bigger as you move from the upper part of the cob to the lower part because every corn is attached to one of the seeds of the cob. This corn represents the tube by which the pollen is transferred to the seed. However, the corns that descend to the lower part of the cob protrude out of it short and dispersed. Because of this they have the opportunity to come into contact with the largest amount of pollen, as opposed to corns on the top, because they are long and they accumulate together. That is why they do not get enough pollen, and thus their seeds are smaller in size such that the cob is thinner at the top and it dwindles.

All of us witness the veracity of His words 'And We have sent the fertilizing winds' when we look, for example, at the mountains, and they are desolate and dry, and then they turn green when the rain falls on them, so who puts these seeds in them?

In His saying: 'Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.' The True Lord is reassuring us regarding the extent of the blessings and the extent of the one being blessed. By bringing opposites together, the type of crop remains and multiplies, and pairing is found in everything. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And in everything have We created pairs.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49)

If you look at all of existence with the eye of knowledge; examining, testing and scrutinizing, you will find that everything in existence is in pairs so that the kind can be continued. We are aware of the issue of pairing in some of these things, and in others we are not aware. As long as the pair gathers in order to multiply, then one must pollinate the other, so what tells us the appointed time for this multiplication?

It is said: 'It is that which man has no say regarding it, for Allah knows its appointed time, and He causes everything to multiply according to what is appropriate'. However, the problem for you, O man, is that if you had precise measurements, you would know that there are chemical changes in your body that require a very exact observation from you. These are the changes that indicate to you the appointed time for procreation.

Now they have invented a thermometer which a woman can use after menstruation, and she can use it to observe the temperature of her body. If it goes above 37 degrees, this means that there is a chemical change in the body. It indicates that the ovule has gone down. That is why we see that for many couples the process of giving birth is delayed, and this is because the woman does not have the means of exact observation that would allow her to know the time of ovulation that leads to the birth.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions pairing in 'from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.' He did not mention animals. Why? It was because Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the highest creature which is man, the speaking mammal. The others are like him, and they are subordinate to him.

The meaning of 'and from that which they do not know' is that in the universe there are many things about which we are not aware of the procedure of pairing, but we might know about them in the future with the advancement of empirical science, as is the case with electricity, for example. We knew that it was a positive and a negative, but we do not benefit from electricity unless the negative and the positive make contact. As for matching a negative with a negative or a positive with a positive, the result is the opposite. The negative and the positive here are another example of pairing, as is the case with corn and other things that have been discovered by modern science.

Therefore, the phrase 'and from that which they do not know' has meanings that have occurred, and Allah informed of them before we discovered them so that we would know that the unseen that Allah informs us of comes as a preliminary step for another unseen matter that we will know in the future. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is drawing our attention and saying: 'Just as the material world confirms what I have informed you of the unseen, you should confirm what I have informed you of regarding the unseen of the Hereafter'.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about place, which is the earth, He talks about time because the life of man is nothing but a series of events and an event needs a time and a place. Thus, after the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about the earth and what is on it, as it is the place, He tells us about time. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَءَايَةٌ لَّهُمُ ٱلَّيْلُ نَسْلَخُ مِنْهُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُم مُّظْلِمُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

The night is also a sign for them: We strip the daylight from it, and – lo and behold! – they are in darkness [37] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 37)

His saying 'And a sign for them', means specifically for them. It is not a sign for everyone because the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believed due to his natural disposition. He did not need a proof in order to believe. Likewise, the believer does not look for proof unless it is to refute the one who denies.

And 'is the night' is the partner of daytime because the day consists of night and daytime so it is not quite correct to say that the night and the day are opposites; because the day consists of night and daytime. Both make up a day. However, some people look at His saying 'for seven nights and eight days in succession' (*al-Haqqa:* 7), and designate the day to be the opposite of the night, as opposed to the daytime.

The night is darkness, and in it is a serenity that resembles the sleep that we have in the night, and sleep resembles death. The night is a pair of the daytime, but it does not oppose it or act against it as some people think. There is integration between them because each of them has a duty in life. The night allows us to rest and recuperate from the movement of the daytime so that we can start the new day with energy. The daytime is for working and striving; during it we benefit from our rest in the night.

They are acting in co-operation, not in opposition. Everything has a pair, but beware of taking it as an opponent. Rather, you should see it as something necessary that must exist. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* turns our attention towards time in this matter, as He says, 'Say, "Have you considered if Allah should make for you the night continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you light? Then will you not hear?" Say, "Have you considered if Allah should make for you the day continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you a night in which you may rest? Then will you not see?"' (*al-Qasas:* 71-72) Each of them has a duty, and neither is independent of the other. It is from the subtle rendering of the Quran that He says about the night, 'Then will you not hear?' And about the daytime, 'will you not see?' It is because the night is darkness and one must use ears to be summoned. As for the daytime, it is light and in it we see.

Therefore, it is not correct for us to regard every pair of opposites as a pair of antagonists. Integration is not contradiction. Allah *Glorified is He* willed, with this issue, to solve a problem that has been disputed throughout the ages and until now, and it is the problem of male and female being opposites, or man and woman. Nowadays we hear those who say that the woman is like the man. How can this be when each of them has a specific task? They are complementary, just like the night and daytime.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* pointed out this complementary relationship: 'By the night when it covers. And [by] the day when it appears. And [by] He who created the male and female. Indeed, your efforts are diverse.' (*al-Layl:* 1-4) The meaning of 'Indeed, your efforts are diverse' is that it is different, and each has a task that they carry out in life. Those who now call for equality between men and women are only oppressing women because they want women to occupy the role of men in the proceedings of life. After that, they leave women to do the tasks that only they can do. Women have taken on the duties of men but men have not taken on the duties of women. Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* created opposites so that they could be complementary and not mutually opposed, so that they would support one another and not act against one another, for it is a matter carefully measured.

In His saying 'W We remove from it [the light of] day,' the Arabic equivalent to the verb 'remove' means to skin a sheep, so what is the connection between this issue and the light of the night and daytime? The original state is one of darkness, and darkness is not apparent unless there is a sudden light source. Then the light of daytime comes and covers this darkness. It is as if the daytime, when it comes to cover the darkness, is like the skin that covers the flesh of a sheep. The True Lord *Glorified is He* wills that for the darkness to come and remove the light just as we remove the skin from the flesh of a sheep. Therefore, the night comes naturally because it is the original state. Darkness is the absence of light. As for light, it is a furnishing, and it requires a new means. If night was to be left as it is, it would remain dark. If there was no means of lightening, it would remain as night. Therefore, light has means. As for darkness, it does not have means that act when the darkness comes. Or you can say that the matter of darkness is non-existent, while the matter of light is existent. Thus, if it is said ‘we remove from it the light of day’ then the light that covers the darkness resembles the skin that covers the flesh of a sheep. The meaning is that we remove the cover of light that covers the day, and thus the darkness is released, i.e. it is manifested naturally and of its own accord. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلشَّمۡسُ تَجۡرِي لِمُسۡتَقَرّٖ لَّهَاۚ ذَٰلِكَ تَقۡدِيرُ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡعَلِيمِ ٣٨

The sun, too, runs its determined course laid down
for it by the Almighty, the All Knowing [38]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 38)

The sun is the means of light that We remove from the night. The one who tracks the movement of the sun will find that it has a general place where it appears, the east; and this general place is divided into several places based on the number of days in a year. The places where the sun appears differ. That is why we have seen that the ancient Egyptians, in their temples, realized this cosmic reality and they calculated it exactly. They put 365 windows in their temple and the sun would rise from one of them every day, in order, until it reached the last of them at the end of the year.

Man, already knew that the sun has a group of celestial bodies that orbit around it, and he called it the solar system, which is comprised of seven planets: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus. These seven have duped some scholars, such as Sheikh Al-Maraghi and Sheikh Muhammad `Abdu into saying that they are the seven skies. However, scientists discovered other planets such as Neptune and Pluto. The solar system came to be comprised of nine planets, all of them in the lowest sky, so there is no connection between them and the seven skies. Nonetheless the two sheikhs tried to make religious matters easier to understand.

Each of these planets in the solar system rotates on its own and orbits around the sun. By rotating on their own, the day comes into existence, and the year comes into existence by their orbiting around the sun. The two cycles are different in terms of speed. If a planet's rotation by itself was faster than its orbiting around the sun, its day would be longer than its year.

That is why one of the puzzling things in geography is: what is the longest day of the year? A day on Venus is longer than its year because when they calculated the movement of Venus in relation to a day on Earth, they found that a year on Venus is equivalent to 225 days on earth and a day on Venus is equivalent to 244 days on earth. This is because it rotates by itself at a speed that is greater than the speed at which it orbits around the sun.

The meaning of 'And the sun runs [on course] toward its stopping point' is the sun with its system, and the planets that orbit around it run to a star that the astronomers call Vega and the Arabs call it the *(Eagle)*. The sun runs with its system at a speed of 12 miles per second. The sun moves and the planets that revolve around it moves. This is similar to a man riding some vessel. How do we calculate his movement and his speed?

If he is stationary, then his speed equals the speed of the vessel. If he is going in the same direction as the vessel then his speed equals his own speed plus the speed of the vessel. If he is moving in the opposite direction of the vessel, then his speed is equal to the speed of the vessel minus his own speed.

The meaning of 'toward its stopping point' is that an orbit can either be at the end of the year followed by the beginning of a new year, and it rises from it first place of appearance, or the orbit is the last part of its life and its end, when it is finished and it rolls up into a ball and expires. But what is it that moves this solar system? How does it run at this speed? We know that movement requires a force that fuels it, so what is this force that moves this system in this way and this persistence?

They said: 'It runs because Allah created it in a state of motion and flux. That is why it runs and nothing stops it, and it will continue running for as long as Allah wills'. Therefore, He does not attach any force to it that moves it, and an example of this is His saying: 'Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him.' (*Fatir:* 41)

In the science of motion, there is a law called the law of inertia, and it states that every moving object continues to move until something stops it, and every stationary object remains stationary until something moves it. This law explains for us the movement of satellites and spaceships that remain moving for long periods of time.

We ask one another: What is the interval of time that moves them for the duration of this period? It is moving because it was placed in its domain in a state of motion. It remains moving, and nothing stops it because it is outside the range of gravity. Therefore, all that these tools need in terms of power is rocket power that can take it beyond the earth's gravitational pull. As for the satellites and spaceships, they keep revolving without any force and without any fuel.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of His Grace represented by this motion; He says, '(And) that' (*Ya Sin:* 38), i.e. the previously mentioned movement of the night and the daytime and the running of the sun; this '…is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All Knowing' (*Ya Sin:* 38); that is all of this running and all of this motion have been laid down by the Will of Allah. 'The Almighty' here is completely appropriate because the meaning is that the Almighty is the One Who is not subject to laws, because Allah *Glorified is He* is the creator of laws.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلْقَمَرَ قَدَّرْنَٰهُ مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَٱلْعُرْجُونِ ٱلْقَدِيمِ ﴿٣٩﴾

We have determined phases for the moon until finally it becomes like an old date-stalk [39]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 39)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about the sun, which is the instrument of illumination; He talks about the moon because it has a task that it carries out when the sun is absent. It is as if the moon has borrowed some of the sun’s light in order to lighten up the night for those who only work at night, such as patrol officers[1], security guards, bakery workers, etc. The moon, as you know, is not illuminated by itself, but rather, it reflects some of the sun’s illumination. Thus, its illumination comes calmly, and that is why it is called the mild illumination; it does not send any rays or any heat.

That is why, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* enumerates some of His blessings and favours, He says, ‘and among His wonders is your sleep, at night or in daytime, as well as your (ability to go about in) quest of some of His bounties…’ (*ar-Rum:* 23).

If sleep was restricted to the night, then what would people, who have to work at night and rest and sleep in the daytime, do? Thus, this verse is an example of the Quran’s precise style; it states that the night is the normal time for sleep and rest for most people, there is nothing preventing a minority, who work at night, from sleeping during the daytime.

The meaning of ‘...for which We have determined phases (which it must traverse)…’ (*Ya Sin:* 39) is that we have determined the moon’s trajectory in phases and distances. We witness these phases every month in the movement of the moon: the first lunar quarter, the second lunar quarter, and then a full moon. The moon is faster than the sun because it completes its orbit in a month while the sun completes its orbit in a year.

You may reflect on the Quran’s precise performance that is based on high-level engineering in Allah’s words: ‘...till it becomes like an old date-stalk, dried-up and curved’ (*Ya Sin:* 39). This is a clarifying image of the moon’s phases taken from the Arab environment. The ‘date-stalk’ is the translation for the Arabic word *`arjun* which is the cluster of the date palm that carries the fruits, and we call it *subata*. It is made from a number of thin stalks. However, its base, where it is attached to the trunk of the date palm, is broad and flattened. This cluster dries and becomes lean whenever it loses its green colour and it bends and tightens whenever its moisture dries up. This image perfectly explains the movement of the moon when it becomes lean and narrow until finally it disappears at the end of the month.

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(1) *Al-`Asas* is the plural of *`as* which is the subject of the verb *`asa* (past) and *ya`assu* (present) which means to make the rounds at night in order to protect the people. See Az-Zabidi in *Taj Al-`Arus* under the entry on *`asasa*.

Here, the Quran compares the moon to an old date stalk. Some Arabs compare it to a nail clipping, such as an Arab poet who went out to observe the illumination of the moon until it disappeared and he creeped to his beloved:

> The light of the moon disappeared and I was watching it
> Like nail clippings that had been cut off(1)

It is appropriate to compare the high moon that we cannot fully perceive to something low that we can totally conceive; so we can say: ‘that is like this’ in order to make things clear.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* gathers the sun with the moon, and the night with the daytime:

لَا ٱلشَّمۡسُ يَنۢبَغِي لَهَآ أَن تُدۡرِكَ ٱلۡقَمَرَ وَلَا ٱلَّيۡلُ
سَابِقُ ٱلنَّهَارِۚ وَكُلّٞ فِي فَلَكٖ يَسۡبَحُونَ ٤٠

The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day: each floats in [its own] orbit [40] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 40)

It cannot be said that someone does not overtake another unless the latter is preceding the former. Likewise, the sun does not overtake the moon because, as we said before, the moon is faster than the sun because the former completes its orbit in a month while the latter completes its orbit in a year.

Likewise, ‘...nor can the night usurp the time of day…’ (*Ya Sin:* 40); the night and the daytime represent the time resulting from the movement of the sun and the moon. The daytime is the son of the sun, while the night is the son of the moon. In this verse, there are two negations; the negation that the sun overtakes and precedes the moon, and the negation that the night precedes the daytime. If the sun is not overtaking the moon, this does not mean that the night, the son of the moon, precedes the daytime, the son of the sun.

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(1) Mentioned by Ibn `Abd Al-Mun`im Al-Humairi in *Ar-Rawd Al-Mi`tar Fi Khabar Al-Aqtar* in *Ad-Diyarat Fi Wasf Diyar `Abdun*, and he attributed it to Ibn Al-Mu`taz from a poem that begins with:
The peninsula of trees and shade has been irrigated
And in the home of `Abdun it is pouring down with rain
Its wording is ‘the light of the crescent disappeared’ not ‘the light of the moon disappeared’ and the verse is from the *Basit* metre.

Therefore, you should not say that the night comes before the daytime because these cosmic signs are intended by the True Lord *Glorified is He*; when He talks about a matter that intellects cannot grasp, He uses imagery so that a rational person, who can think, study, examine and analyse styles, will grasp Allah's objective therein. The others who lack this capability pass by these matters and do not grasp any of it.

Regarding this cosmic matter, we say that, indeed, it is true that the moon precedes the sun, but the night does not precede the daytime. Consider how the style addresses this issue when Allah says: '...nor can the night usurp the time of day…' (*Ya Sin:* 40); Allah *Glorified is He* is not saying this unless there is someone who believes that the night usurps the day. Thus, He wanted to correct this belief of theirs and negated the possibility of the night usurping the daytime. This means that there is a precedent cause which is that the day does not usurp the night.

Thus, the conclusion is that the night does not usurp the daytime and the daytime does not usurp the night; that is the issue that they affirmed, Allah wanted to negate, and the issue that they negated, He kept it as it was.

But how did this understanding come to them? They said: they thought that the night preceded the daytime, because the day is affirmed by the night and not by the daytime. For example, in fasting the days of the month of *Ramadan*, the beginning of the day is affirmed by seeing the crescent of the month which is confirmed by sight at night. Since this was the case, they thought the night preceded the day. Therefore, they have a matter that is decided, which is that the day does not precede the night. This is not objected to by the Quran, which leaves it as it is. As for the matter that contradicts the cosmic sign, it is corrected for them: '...nor can the night usurp the time of day…' (*Ya Sin:* 40).

Then, we are facing a conundrum which says: 'The night does not precede the daytime and the daytime does not precede the night'. How? They said: 'If Allah had created the earth flat and facing the sun, then daytime would have been first. Then, the sun would disappear and night would fall. On the other hand, had the earth been facing away from the sun, then night would have been first followed by the daytime'. However, the reality is that Allah *Glorified is He* created the earth in a spherical shape; thus, the night does not precede the daytime nor does the daytime precede the night because they were brought into existence together at the same moment. This is because the earth is round. The side that faces the sun experiences daytime, and when it turns away from the sun night falls. Thus, this verse has solved for us the long-disputed problem, which is the spherical nature of the earth.

His saying '...since all of them float through space (in accordance with Our laws).' (*Ya Sin:* 40) *Yasbahun* (Floating) is from the verb *sabah* (to swim), which is to cut a distance over smooth water, and it is a streamlined movement therein, not like the movement of feet on the ground. This is a similitude for the movement of orbits. This swimming movement is broken down into portions of time.

We do not have scales by which we can measure this movement. We only know it in terms of the sum of time along with the sum of movement. For example, if you had a child and you sat with him in order to observe and watch his growth, you would not notice this growth. A child never grows directly in the eyes of his father. Why? It is because the growth does not happen in one leap that would allow for it to be noticed. Rather, the growth is distributed over time. However, if you were absent from your child for several months or years, you would notice his growth upon returning and seeing him. This is because you are seeing the sum of growth that took place while you were away from him.

Thus, the meaning of '...since all of them float through space (in accordance with Our laws).' (*Ya Sin:* 40) is that they travel in a streamlined successive fashion that is distributed over time.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَءَايَةٌ لَّهُمْ أَنَّا حَمَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ فِى ٱلْفُلْكِ ٱلْمَشْحُونِ ﴿٤١﴾ وَخَلَقْنَا لَهُم مِّن مِّثْلِهِۦ مَا يَرْكَبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾
وَإِن نَّشَأْ نُغْرِقْهُمْ فَلَا صَرِيخَ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنقَذُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِّنَّا وَمَتَٰعًا إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

Another sign for them is that We carried their seed in the laden Ark, [41] and We have made similar things for them to ride in. [42] If We wished, We could drown them, and there would be no one to help them: they could not be saved. [43] Only by Our mercy could they be reprieved to enjoy life for a while [44] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 41- 44)

His saying 'and (it ought to be) a sign for them…' means it is a sign for us and for them. It is a sign for us to use it as proof to convince them. On the other hand, it is a sign calling them to believe in Allah. That is why `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* when he was asked 'Do you know your Lord by Muhammad or Muhammad by you Lord?' he said: 'I know my Lord by my Lord, and Muhammad has come to inform me of what my Lord wants from me.'(1)

The meaning of '... laden ships.' (*Ya Sin:* 41) is the ark of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. Allah revealed to Nuh (Noah) that he should build the ark and showed him how he should build it. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Thereupon We inspired him thus: "Build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration..."' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27).

Ships themselves are signs of Allah because if Allah *Glorified is He* had not revealed to Nuh (Noah) to build the ark, how could we travel by water which is a majority of the earth's surface? This is a sign that Allah brought about on the hand of Nuh (Noah) so that all of mankind would know how to build ships. Then, afterwards, intelligent people can develop them and enhance their construction, as we see nowadays with these ocean liners that are the latest of their kind. Sails were replaced with steam and electrical equipment, and iron and metal replaced wood and nails, and so forth.

Despite this development, and after dispensing with wind power for the propulsion of ships, ships still travel in the Name of Allah and by His Power, even if steam or electricity is used. This is because ‘wind’ does not just mean the air that propels the ships but rather ‘wind’ refers to power, in whatever form it is. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and do not (allow yourselves to) be at variance with one another, lest you lose heart and your moral strength desert you...’ (*al-Anfal:* 46).

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(1) *The story of the man who asked `Ali: 'Did you recognize Muhammad through your Lord or did you recognize your Lord through Muhammad?'*

As well, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If He so wills, He stills the wind, and then they lie motionless on the sea’s surface ...’ (*ash-Shura:* 33).

There is something worth noting in the words: ‘...We bear their offspring (over the seas) in laden ships’ (*Ya Sin:* 41); the verse is talking about the Arabs whom the Quran is primarily addressing. The ones who were carried in the ship are their fathers, not their offspring. How can this be?

The Quran says ‘...We bear their offspring…’ meaning their fathers because the word *dhuriyyah* (offspring) can also mean the father because the children (*dharari;* plural of *dhuriyyah*) come from him. Or it is because those who were saved in the ship are the original source for those who are present and being addressed by the Quran. They were enclosed within their ancestors.

That is why we said previously that each of us, right up to the time that we are in now, contains a living part of our father Adam *peace be upon him* that has never died. If you traced my ancestors and traced my lineage you would say that I am from a living chromosome that came from my father, and my father was from a living chromosome that came from his father, and so forth until our father Adam. If this chromosome had been dead I would not have been here.

Therefore, within each of us is an original genetic particle from our father Adam *peace be upon him* that has never changed, and it is this particle that carries the natural disposition towards faith in every person.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes the ship as being laden, meaning full, because Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* did not only take aboard the believers in order to rescue them from drowning, but also to provide them with means of livelihood after being rescued. Otherwise, how could mankind live on earth with nothing else: no plants, no animals, and no birds?

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* saying: ‘...Place on board of this (ark) one pair of each (kind of animal) of either sex...' (*Hud:* 40), 'and (that) We create for them things of a similar kind, on which they may embark (in their travels)' (*Ya Sin:* 42).

People took the ark as a model, and they built others like it and developed its construction. They have produced ships, vessels, boats and other things with which they can embark on the sea. Or the meaning is that we created for them vehicles or other creatures which resembled ships so that they could ride on land and in the deserts. For example, the camel is called the ship of the desert.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* warns us against being deluded by these vessels on the basis that they are a means of rescue. If Allah *Glorified is He* wants to destroy something, He does. How many times have we seen ocean liners equipped with all the means of safety and protection, swallowed by the waves along with all those on board?

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the truth in His saying: 'and (that,) if such be Our will, We may cause them to drown, with none to respond to their cry for help: and (then) they cannot be saved' (*Ya Sin:* 43). So, beware when you are given a blessing that saves you from destruction, that this blessing deludes you into thinking that you are safe and secure; you will never escape from Allah's Grasp. No one will save you and nothing will protect you, if He wills destruction for you. Do you hold something in your hand that will save you when a storm blows, or when a wave towers over your ship like a mountain? Therefore, your tools and your means will not save you from My power.

With '...none to respond to their cry for help…' (*Ya Sin:* 43), they will find none to save them when they cry out, looking for someone to help and get them out of whatever predicament they are in. A wonderful remark of faith that the people with illumination said is: 'Man cries out and seeks help from the one who is closest to him, like his father, his mother, his servant, his neighbour etc. If he does not find any of these people he says "O Allah!" That is why we hear some of them saying, when in a critical situation: "YHWH!" which means "O He!" (O Allah!) This is because there is no one else who can save or rescue but Allah'.

One of the subjects that include the theme of crying out is Allah's words regarding Satan: '...It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine...' (*Ibrahim:* 22); the 'responder to your cries' is the translation of the Arabic word *musrikh* which is the one who puts an end to the crying out, which means that he helps you and relieves you of your distress.

Allah's saying, '...and (then) they cannot be saved' (*Ya Sin:* 43) means that that they are denied someone who will hear their call. They are also denied someone who will voluntarily rescue them. This is a cutting off of any hope that they will be saved. If Allah wills destruction, then there is absolutely no way for them to be saved, unless it is by Allah's permission and Mercy.

Allah says in the following verse: 'unless it be by an act of mercy from Us…' (*Ya Sin:* 44), i.e. an act of mercy that saves from drowning; the meaning of '…and a grant of life for a (further span of) time' (*Ya Sin:* 44) is that this saving is not a contract of permanent security and perpetual existence. This saving is only a grant of life until an appointed time, at which point death will come to you. You are, thus, saved from the fate of death so that the fate of death can come again, and there is no escaping it.

This is similar to what Fakhr Ar-Razi said in his poem:

If we were to die and find rest

Then death would be a comfort for every living thing

But when we die and we are resurrected

We will be asked afterwards about everything (1)

The word 'time' means a period of time according to what it is being compared. For example, in the verse: 'Extol, then, Allah's Limitless Glory when you enter upon the evening hours, and when you rise at Morn' (*ar-Rum:* 17); *Heen* (when) means a day and a night. In the verse: '...yielding its fruit at all times...' (*Ibrahim:* 25), *hin* (at all times) means a year. And in the verse: 'Has there not been over Man a long period of time, when he was nothing - (not even) mentioned' (*al-Ma'arij:* 1), it means a defined amount of time.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) These two verses are from `Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* from the *Wafir* metre, with a slight difference: 'find rest' (*istarahna*) is replaced with 'are left alone' (*turikna*). Al-Mubarrad has mentioned both in his *Al-Fadil Fi Al-Lugha Wal Adab*, in the chapter on the virtue of poetry.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱتَّقُواْ مَا بَيۡنَ أَيۡدِيكُمۡ وَمَا خَلۡفَكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُرۡحَمُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

Yet when they are told, ‘Beware of what lies before and behind you, so that you may be given mercy’ [45] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 45)

You know that *idha* (when) is a conditional particle that indicates realization, while *inna* (if) indicates doubt. The meaning of ‘they are’ is the disbelievers, and then the verb ‘told’ is in the passive form to indicate generality; as if it is an obligation upon every believer to say, to advise and to take others by the hand onto Allah’s way.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses the believers in this verse: ‘O My slaves! O you who have believed in Me and believed in My Messenger! Do not assume that I am pleased with you just because you have believed in Me and believed in My Messenger. Rather, I love to see you spare no effort in trying to rescue My creation from My anger towards them, when they persist in disbelief and remain in that state’.

This is a type of expectation that the believers will take the disbelievers by the hand and rescue them from the causes of Allah’s anger towards them. This meaning is included within the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: ‘No one of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.’(1)

The meaning of ‘...all that lies open before you…’ (*Ya Sin:* 45) is that which is in front of you, and that which awaits you, such as the resurrection, the gathering, the questioning and the reckoning and then the fire. And ‘…all that is hidden from you…’ (*Ya Sin:* 45) means those who came before you and were also deniers; what was the result of their disbelief? ‘...so that you might be graced with His Mercy…’ (*Ya Sin:* 45), i.e. is hoping that Allah may have mercy on you.

Therefore, every believer should be concerned with paving the way for the disbeliever to be shown mercy and to exert effort in trying to rescue him, and to show him compassion. He should not adopt a position of hostility and enmity towards them, which is of no benefit whatsoever.

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(1) *`Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (13) and Muslim in his Sahih (45) in the Book of Faith from Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him with the wording: ‘By the One in whose hand in my soul, no slave truly believes until he loves for his neighbour (or he said, ‘for his brother’) what he loves for himself.’*

وَمَا تَأۡتِيهِم مِّنۡ ءَايَةٖ مِّنۡ ءَايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمۡ إِلَّا كَانُواْ عَنۡهَا مُعۡرِضِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

They ignore every single sign that comes to them from their Lord [46] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 46)

This is the very dispute and stubborn rejection because the signs are clearly in front of them. They are turning away from them and abandoning consideration of them. This is because those who disbelieve in Allah, deny His messengers, and reject Allah’s way that has come to maintain soundness of His vicegerent on Earth, are the ones who benefit from corruption; they benefit from rejecting Allah’s way, so it is only natural that they see in every messenger and in every rectifier, someone who has come to cut off their provision, to ruin their lives and to confront them and get in their face.

This verse is explained by what Allah says in another verse: ‘and in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth...’ (*an-Naml:* 14).

One may argue that if you are keen to get these disbelievers to have mercy from Allah, why do not you keep presenting new signs to them until they believe, and then Allah will show them mercy? We say: ‘Whatever signs you bring, the result will be what the Quran has confirmed in the verse: “and no message of their Sustainer’s messages ever reaches them without their turning away from it.” (*Ya Sin:* 46)

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمۡ أَنفِقُواْ مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ
أَنُطۡعِمُ مَن لَّوۡ يَشَآءُ ٱللَّهُ أَطۡعَمَهُۥٓ إِنۡ أَنتُمۡ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَٰلٖ مُّبِينٖ ﴿٤٧﴾

And when they are told, ‘Give to others out of what God has provided for you,’ the disbelievers say to the believers, ‘Why should we feed those that God could feed if He wanted? You must be deeply misguided’ [47] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 47)

This is another aspect of their stubborn rejection and turning truth into lie. When a sincere advisor says to them: ‘...spend on others out of what Allah has provided for you as sustenance…’, i.e. from that which has Allah bestowed you and made you the owner of it and it was not yours; their response is: '…Shall we feed anyone whom, if (your) Allah had so willed, He could have fed (Himself)…?' This is how the disbeliever inverts the reality into falsehood and vaunts it.

'…Shall we feed anyone whom, if (your) Allah had so willed, He could have fed (Himself)…?' (*Ya Sin:* 47) means: 'We are not miserly. In fact, we love to spend on others and carry out Allah's orders, and He wants to withhold sustenance from these people. Then, how can we give them sustenance ourselves? If we spent on them we would be opposing and resisting the rulings of Allah; if He wants, He can feed them'.

Their stubborn opposition did not stop at this point, but rather, they persisted in their vaunt and accused the believers of being lost in error 'Clearly, you', meaning you are not '…but lost in error!' How strange these people are! They accuse the believers of opposing Allah's order by feeding those whom Allah has deprived from enough sustenance and, thus, committing an outrage against Him.

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the Lord of all, and He gives sustenance to all. He feeds us and quenches our thirst. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to see the compassion of His servants towards one another to facilitate their progression through life without hatred and without rancour. When the poor receive some goodness from the rich, the former will not despise or envy the latter envy him. Rather, the poor will hope for the blessing of the rich to perpetuate. The states of wealth and poverty are accidental; they come and go, and reality bears witness to this fact.

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا ٱلْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾ مَا يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَٰحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ
وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ تَوْصِيَةً وَلَآ إِلَىٰٓ أَهْلِهِمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

And they say, 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say is true?' [48] But all they are waiting for is a single blast that will overtake them while they are still arguing with each other [49] They will have no time to make bequests, nor will they have the chance to return to their own people [50] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 48 - 50)

Their asking: 'When is this promise?' refers to the promise of the Hereafter; the word *wa`d* (promise) indicates glad tidings, as opposed to the word *wa`eed* which is a warning against evil. It is amazing that they are denying the promise, while it is for their benefit, and their prosperity lies in the *wa`d* and not in the *wa`eed.*

This questioning of theirs is actually a denial that there will be no Hereafter, reckoning or reward. The sane one among them acknowledges the Hereafter but says like the owner of the garden who said: ‘And neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if (it should come, and) I am brought before my Sustainer, I will surely find something even better than this as (my last) resort!’ (*al-Kahf:* 36) If ‘…you are men of truth!’ (*Ya Sin:* 48) in claiming that there is a resurrection and a reckoning, it is clear that their denial of the Resurrection bears connotations of challenge, stubbornness, and a hastening of the Resurrection. It is as though they are saying: 'Where is the Resurrection that you are talking about? Bring it about now if you are speaking the truth’. Moreover, they keep on this argument until the Resurrection descends upon them suddenly.

‘And they are unaware that nothing awaits them beyond a single blast (of Allah’s punishment), which will overtake them while they are still arguing (against resurrection)’ (*Ya Sin:* 49); that is the Resurrection may strike them suddenly while they are having this argument. What could prevent such a thing since it is no more than a single blast from Allah that would overtake them and annihilate all of them?

This is an admonition for the heedless people who are heedless of the Resurrection, the Gathering, and the Reckoning. They are so preoccupied by this worldly life, with its trade, cultivation and its daily problems, such that they wasted their lives in taking and returning, arguing and debating until the Resurrection descends upon them suddenly. A poet said: ‘You should not argue about something that was in your hand, and then someone else took it from you.’

My soul that owns things is fleeting
So how can I grieve over something that is fleeting?

The meaning of ‘...which will overtake them while they are still arguing (against resurrection)’ (*Ya Sin:* 49) is that it will take them by surprise while they are arguing and debating. The meaning of ‘arguing’ is quarrelling; the word in Arabic *yakhissimun* is in a format used for the purpose of hyperbole. ‘Overtaking’ indicates severity as in the other verse saying: ‘…as only the Almighty, who determines all things, can take to task.’ (*al-Qamar:* 42)

Allah’s saying: ‘and so (sudden will be their end that) no testament will they be able to make…’ (*Ya Sin:* 50) means that the blast and the Resurrection will take them so suddenly that they will not be able to make their own testament. A *wasiya* (testament or will) is well known; it is when a person advises his wife and his children regarding what is important in their lives. For example, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* when he was on his farewell pilgrimage and felt he was close to death, made his testament to the Muslims in his comprehensive sermon about the core of the religion and its foundation. Likewise, whoever is approaching their death and they sense their demise should advise their beloved ones regarding important matters.

Thus, these people, in this position, are not granted any time to advise one another ‘...nor to their own people will they return!’ (*Ya Sin:* 50) They will not even be able to do this. Therefore, no one should find that they have to wait a long time for the resurrection because it comes suddenly. That is why Allah has hidden it. The date of resurrection is only known to Allah alone. It is in order that man constantly remembers it, and waits for it at every moment. The Resurrection in relation to man does not necessarily mean the Hereafter, but rather, it is when he dies that the Resurrection has been established in his regard. Once dead, man cannot take any action, repent or redress.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَنُفِخَ فِي ٱلصُّورِ فَإِذَا هُم مِّنَ ٱلْأَجْدَاثِ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَنسِلُونَ ﴿٥١﴾
قَالُوا۟ يَٰوَيْلَنَا مَنۢ بَعَثَنَا مِن مَّرْقَدِنَا ۜ ۗ هَٰذَا مَا وَعَدَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ وَصَدَقَ ٱلْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾
إِن كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَٰحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

The Trumpet will be sounded and – lo and behold! – they will rush out to their Lord from their graves [51] They will say, ‘Alas for us! Who has resurrected us from our resting places?’ [They will be told], ‘This is what the Lord of Mercy promised, and the messengers told the truth.’[52] It was just one single blast and then – lo and behold! – they were all brought before Us [53] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 51 - 53)

The words: ‘And (then) the trumpet (of resurrection) will be blown…’ refer to the horn that the angel Israfil will blow into; this is the blow of resurrection.

It is preceded by the blow of thunder (*sa`q*) that will kill them and subdue them. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '…And then it will sound again – and lo! Standing (before the Seat of Judgment), they will begin to see (the truth)!' (*az-Zumar:* 68)

If you said that it is one blow, then how can the first one kill and the second one revive? We say that the blow in the horn is nothing other than a sign of the event. As for the actual doer, it is Allah *Glorified is He*. He is the One Who kills with the first and revives with the second.

The meaning of '... out of their graves towards their Sustainer will they all rush forth!' (*Ya Sin:* 51) is that they will hurry. 'Rush forth' is the translation of the Arabic word *yansilun* which originally means the unravelling of threads from one another. We say that a garment unravels, which means that its threads come out of place from the weft or the couch. That is why we say to a tailor: '*Kaffif* (Hem) the garment', i.e. prevent unravelling by holding the threads together, and thus they do not slip away.

Thus, when they come out of the graves and see the reality that they frequently denied, they will say: '...Oh, woe unto us! Who has roused us from our sleep (of death) …?' (*Ya Sin:* 52) They are the ones speaking and declaring that they themselves are ruined and destroyed. No one is saying to them: 'Woe unto you!' Rather they are saying it about themselves. It is an expression of grief over what has escaped them. The meaning is: 'Woe unto us! Come! This is your time because the matter is beyond our capacity. We cannot avoid it'. When man suddenly discovers his misjudgement, he turns on himself with reproach, or even he disciplines and punishes himself.

It is amazing that they are now saying: '...Who has roused us from our sleep (of death) …?' because they are acknowledging that death was only a period of sleep; after sleep one must wake up. At that point, Allah responds to them: 'This', i.e. what you are seeing of the Resurrection, '...is what the Most Gracious has promised! And His message-bearers spoke the truth!' (*Ya Sin:* 52) It is also valid that the demonstrative 'This' refers to '…our sleep of death)…' in '…Who has roused us from our sleep of death?' (*Ya Sin:* 52)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has advised that He will gather mankind on a day in which there is no doubt, and whoever has escaped the punishments of the life of this world and the agony of the life that they live, then he will have a punishment that is more severe. This is because those who first preached Islam in the very beginning were persecuted and harmed, some of them died in the course of their persecution before seeing the victory of Islam and the triumph of the Muslims, and before seeing Allah take revenge from His enemies. Then, Allah must show these believers the final outcome of the disbelievers and the punishment that befalls them.

There is a *wa`d* (promise) here even though it is an admonition of a calamity that is awaiting the disbelievers; but in relation to them, it is called a *wa`d* (promise) and not a *wa`eed* (threat). Why? Because being warned about a calamity before it happens is a great blessing, as in the saying of Allah in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36)

Allah *the Exalted* made the fire and the flames to be from amongst Allah’s blessings because with them, He causes people to have fear, and He warns them about the hell fire. He did not punish them with fire all of a sudden while they were healthy, hearing and seeing and able to return to Allah and repent to Him. They are in the time of respite and making amends; just as you would warn and threaten your child about failing if they neglect their studies. Thus, the threat here is the very blessing, and that is why it is called *wa`d* (promise) and not a *wa`eed (threat)*.

The meaning of ‘...And His message-bearers spoke the truth!’ (*Ya Sin:* 52) is that they conveyed it from Allah. ‘Nothing will there have been…’ (*Ya Sin:* 52), i.e. the blow was nothing ‘but one single blast’ and it will not be repeated because it is human acts that are repeated. If an action is repeated, it means that when it was done for the first time it was insufficient and did not fulfil its objective, but here the doer is Allah *Glorified is He*.

‘Nothing will there have been but one single blast – and lo! Before Us will all of them be arraigned (and be told)’ (*Ya Sin:* 53). The tone of this verse expresses the suddenness; once the blast takes place, they will all be arraigned despite them and without having a choice. The word *muhdar* (arraigned) is the passive participle from the verb *ahdara* (brought, arraigned) which means to be forced to be present and appear before Allah to be reckoned.

In the previous verse ‘and (that) all of them, all together, will (in the end) before Us be arraigned?’ (*Ya Sin:* 32), the word *kull* (all) is added to indicate the generality of individuals. The generality of individuals could be in succession, one group following another; but here all the groups are gathered at the same time so that those who are the followers in this life will see those who are the leaders, and the misguided can see the one who misguided them, etc. That is why the day of judgement is called ‘*al-fadeeha*’ (the disclosing).

فَٱلْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

Today, no soul will be wronged in the least: you
will only be repaid for your deeds [54]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 54)

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is assuaging the people of faith and righteous action, meaning: do not be scared of the horror of the Resurrection because We do not oppress anyone, and reward from Us is in accordance with action. And ‘…nor shall you be requited for aught but what you were doing (on earth).’ (*Ya Sin:* 54) This verse is reassurance for those who do righteousness and it instils fear in those who do evil.

‘Today’ is the Day of Resurrection, and the scales on that day will be in the hand of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. This means that if you were in the life of this world, and the strong was oppressing the weak and you did not establish the scales with justice, then the scale on the Day of Resurrection will be a just scale; no one will be oppressed. This is because the one who will establish the scale is the True Lord *Glorified is He*: ‘...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir:* 16).

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about the reward for the people of Paradise. He says:

إِنَّ أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ فِي شُغُلٖ فَٰكِهُونَ ٥٥ هُمۡ وَأَزۡوَٰجُهُمۡ فِي ظِلَٰلٍ عَلَى ٱلۡأَرَآئِكِ
مُتَّكِـُٔونَ ٥٦ لَهُمۡ فِيهَا فَٰكِهَةٞ وَلَهُم مَّا يَدَّعُونَ ٥٧ سَلَٰمٞ قَوۡلٗا مِّن رَّبّٖ رَّحِيمٖ ٥٨

The people of Paradise today are happily occupied [55] they and their spouses – seated on couches in the shade [56] There they have fruit and whatever they ask for[57] "Peace," a word from the Lord of Mercy [58] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 55 - 58)

In the verse 'Behold, those who are destined for paradise…': the phrase 'those who are destined' is the translation of the Arabic word *sahib* which here means the one who you select and choose from amongst your species to accompany you and not to separate from you. It is as if paradise was personified and became a person who accompany other people and are accompanied by them. This is because paradise was in their thoughts and minds, and they were attached to it and preoccupied with it. Thus, they will have the companionship of paradise, and paradise will have their companionship. Whenever they set out to do goodness they remember paradise and they desire it, and whenever they set out to do evil they remember the fire and they flee from it. The other meaning of *sahib* is the owner of something, as if paradise belongs to them. They own it and they hold its keys because of the righteous actions that they have done.

The meaning of 'Today…' is the Day of Resurrection. '…in whatever they do.' (*Ya Sin:* 55) It refers to the blessings that will preoccupy them from anything else; or it will preoccupy them from friends and relatives who will have entered the Fire; we seek refuge in Allah. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and stand in awe of the Day on which no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child will in the least avail his parent...' (*Luqman:* 33). Thus, they are in blessings that preoccupy them from all these people, as if they do not know them.

The words 'has joy' (*Ya Sin:* 55) are the translation for the Arabic word *fakihun*; There are two forms for the word: *fakih* and *fakiha*. *Fakih* (gleeful) means to be pleased and living in luxury. The word *fakiha* (fruit) is also derived from the same meaning which is something that is not essential, but rather for pleasure and luxury.

As for ‘in happiness will they and their spouses on couches recline;’ (*Ya Sin:* 56) I remember when I read this verse to some brothers, one of them hit himself on the chest, however he was a respected elder, violently and with agitation. He said: alas! So-and-so (his wife) will come to me again. He saw some bad traits in his wife which chased him away from her, and he was amazed that she would accompany him even in the Hereafter and paradise. We said to him: ‘O Sheikh! You may hate certain things about your wife, but she has good actions that will make her worthy of paradise, and her righteous deeds will cancel out her evil actions with you. Maybe you were bad tempered or covetous; Allah *Glorified is He* says about married life: “And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind, so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you…” (*ar-Rum:* 21).

The beginning of married life is characterized by harmony and rest such that spouses find comfort in one another and they enjoy being in each other’s arms. Then, if the circumstances change and one of them abstains from the other, or one of them manifests qualities that push the other away, they should consider the love they have exchanged for some time. If they are afflicted with old age and incapacity, they, then, should show mercy to one another because of the tenderness and mercy that Allah has put between them. Married life in this state is a life of mutual compassion before anything else.

Moreover, this wife in whom you despise certain qualities, and whose behaviour puts you off, will not be the same person in the Hereafter. Rather, she will be a new person, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and spouses pure’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 15); thus, Allah will purify her from that which you were holding against her.

The meaning of ‘in the shade’ (*Ya Sin:* 56) is that there is no sun there, and no heat that could harm them. Shade is known and all people are familiar with it. In it, they take shelter from the sun’s heat. In the Hereafter, there will be shades which the believers will enjoy with, or they will enjoy the shade of Allah as mentioned in a Noble Hadith: ‘Allah will shade seven people in His shade on the day when there is no shade but His shade....’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1021) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him: ‘Allah will shade seven people in His shade on the day when there is no shade but=*

Al-`Ara`ik (Couches) is the plural of *`arika*, and it is a bed that has a curtained canopy(1) or it is a pillow that is reclined on. The meaning of 'recline' (*Ya Sin:* 56) is reclining is a position of the human being; he is either standing, sitting or reclining. Reclining is the most comfortable of these positions because the one standing stands up to do work, and the one sitting sits to think about something important, so he is not able to stand and work and he is not able to recline and relax. Thus, saying 'recline' means that they have complete relaxation.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...will there be for them…' (*Ya Sin:* 57), i.e. in Paradise '… (Only) delight…' (*Ya Sin:* 57). The word *fakiha* (delight) is from delight and pleasure. We know that the food that man eats is either for nourishment, and they are the essentials, or for pleasure and luxury. Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is only mentioning the luxuries because in paradise we only eat for the sake of pleasure and enjoyment not because of need or hunger.

And '...theirs shall be all that they could ask for.' (*Ya Sin:* 57), i.e. whatever they ask for and whatever occurs to them, they will find it in front of them. Some scholars said that 'all that they could ask for' means that Allah will not let them ask for anything because Allah *Glorified is He* will give to them before they ask.(2)

= *His shade: the righteous ruler, the youth who grew up worshipping Allah, the man whose heart is attached to the mosques, two men who love each other for Allah's sake and they meet for His sake and they part for His sake, a man who is invited (to commit adultery) by a woman of position and beauty and says "Indeed I fear God", a man who gives in charity and he conceals it such that his right hand does not know what his left hand gives, and a man whose eyes overflow with tears when he is alone and remembers Allah.'*

(1) *Al-Hajla* (curtained canopy) is like a dome according to the linguistic meaning. *Taj Al-`Arus* is a house that is decorated with cloth, beds, and curtains, and it has large tassels. See *Lisan Al-`Arab* under the entry *hajala*.

(2) In his *Tafsir*, Al-Qurtubi mentions a number of explanations regarding this phrase (8/5682):
- Whoever asks for something, it is given to him; so the meaning of 'what they ask for' is 'whatever they wish', and this is the position of Abu Ubayda
- Whoever claims something, then it is his.
- 'What they ask for': what they desire, and this is the position of Yahya ibn Salam
- 'What they ask for' (*yas`aluna*), and this is the position of Ibn `Abbas.

Then Al-Qurtubi said: 'The meanings are close.'

After that the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about an objective that He wanted for His creation in the life of this world to be a result of their travelling upon His way and His straight path. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘peace and fulfilment through the word of a Sustainer who dispenses all grace.’ (*Ya Sin:* 58)

Thus, the fruit of Islam is that all of them submit their reins to the hand of their Creator and that they are brothers worshipping one deity and that they live in safety, tranquillity, and peace.

Therefore, safety and peace are the objective of Allah’s way, and they are the completion of the blessing. Otherwise, if man was granted all blessings but lost safety and peace, then all his blessings would be made loathsome to him. He would have no calmness in life and enjoy no pleasure. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* favoured and reminded the tribe Quraysh of His favour in the holy verse saying: ‘who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger.’ (*Quraysh:* 4)

Peace comes from you when you approach someone else and say, ‘peace be upon you’, meaning: ‘I approach you in peace’. He, then responds to you: ‘peace be upon you too’; the meaning is: ‘I am not harming you and you are not harming me’. Everyone gives peace according to what they are capable of. If the peace is from Allah, then, it is absolute peace. It is peace that protects you from all sides and nothing will be able to penetrate and harm you.

The meaning of ‘peace and fulfilment through the…’ (*Ya Sin:* 58) is that greeting is said by Allah *Glorified is He*; it is not delivered through the angels. For example, He does not say to the angels: ‘Give my greetings of peace to so-and-so’. The meaning is that peace is a greeting that is said by the Sustainer who dispenses all grace. It is not conveyed by anyone from Allah. The word ‘Sustainer’ has been chosen here to indicate that the Sustainer loves the one being sustained. So, what do you think about the Sustainer who is described with mercy: ‘...of a Sustainer who dispenses all grace.’ (*Ya Sin:* 58)

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us about the believers and the blessings that await them, he tells us about those who are lost in sin.

وَٱمْتَٰزُوا۟ ٱلْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ٥٩

But step aside today, you guilty ones [59]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 59)

The meaning of ‘But stand aside…’ is: ‘O you lost in sin! Separate yourselves from the believers and keep far away from them. Gather yourselves on one side so that you can see the believers enter paradise. Remain there so that you can increase in your grief’.

The Wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* necessitated that the believers and the disbelievers be distinguished from one another meaning that each of them is clearly separated from the other. This is what happened in the expedition of Al-Hudaybiyyah, for when the Muslims were prevented from entering Mecca while being positioned on the city’s outlying hills, they became very sad, to such an extent that some of the most senior companions like 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: ‘Why do we accept something disgraceful in our religion?’(1)

The Muslims were about to go against the command of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such that he said to his wife Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her*: ‘The people are to be destroyed Umm Salama. I have commanded them and they have not obeyed.’ She said, ‘O Messenger of Allah. They are distressed, and this is because they have been prevented from entering the Sacred Mosque while being so close to it. This is a difficult matter for their souls to bear.’ She then advised the Messenger of Allah, saying, ‘O Messenger of Allah. Proceed with what Allah has commanded you and do it, and do not speak to anyone. Indeed, if they saw you determined they would submit.’ The Messenger of Allah indeed took the advice of Umm Salama and the problem was solved.(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/225) from the Hadith of Al-Masur ibn Makhrima and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam in a long Hadith of Al-Hudaybiyyah. It mentions that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him when the Treaty of Al-Hudaybiyyah had been completed and nothing was left but the document, he jumped up and went to Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him and said: ‘O Abu Bakr! Is he not the Messenger of Allah? Are we not Muslims? Are they not idolaters?’ He said: ‘Indeed.’ He said: ‘Then why were we being given humiliation in our religion?’ Abu Bakr said: ‘O `Umar! Hang on to the leather stirrup wherever it is!’ The Hadith is in its full length.*

Before they returned to Medina, Allah *Glorified is He* explained to them the wisdom and rationale behind the treaty of Al-Hudaybiyyah, and why Muhammad *peace be upon him* had accepted its conditions. The rationale was that amongst the disbelievers of Mecca, there were believers who were hiding their faith, and no one knew them. Had the Muslims entered Mecca at that time there would have been clashes between the two sides, and those believers who were hiding their faith would have been harmed and unable to openly declare it. Thus, innocent Muslim people would have been oppressed by either party.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said regarding this story in the chapter *al-Fath*: ‘It was not for your enemies’ sake that He stayed your hands from them: for it was they who were bent on denying the truth, and who debarred you from the Inviolable House of Worship and prevented your offering from reaching its destination. And had it not been for the believing men and believing women (in Mecca), whom you might have unwittingly trampled underfoot, and on whose account you might have become guilty, without knowing it, of a grievous wrong – (had it not been for this, you would have been allowed to fight your way into the city: but you were forbidden to fight) so that (in time) Allah might admit to His Grace whomever He wills. Had they (who deserve Our Mercy and they whom We have condemned) been clearly discernible (to you), We would indeed have imposed grievous suffering (at your hands) on such of them as were bent on denying the truth.’ (*al-Fath:* 25)

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(1) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/225) from the Hadith of Al-Masur ibn Makhrima and Marwan ibn A-Hakam and it mentions that the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him said: ‘O people! Slaughter an animal and cut your hair!’ but no one did anything. Then he repeated it again and not a single man stood up. He repeated it a third time and again not a single man stood up. He, then, went back to Umm Salama and said: ‘O Umm Salama! What is wrong with people?’ She said: ‘O Messenger of Allah! You have seen what has happened to them, so do not speak to any of them, and find your animal wherever it is. Slaughter your animal and cut your hair, for if you had done that the people would have done likewise. Thus, He went out and he didn not speak to anyone until his animal came. He slaughtered it and then sat and cut his hair. Thus, the people rose, slaughtered, and cut their hair until they were half-way between Mecca and Medina when the chapter al-Fath was revealed.*

The meaning of '...Had they (who deserve Our mercy and they whom We have condemned) been clearly discernible (to you)...' (*al-Fath:* 25) is: had the believers been distinguished from the disbelievers.

Or the meaning of 'But stand aside today, O you who were lost in sin' (*Ya Sin:* 59) is: Be distinguished by signs appropriate to your conditions, which are signs attached to you constantly so that your disgrace is not only in front of us now, but rather, you will have traits that you are known by. These signs are anger and blackness of the face; we seek refuge in Allah! In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* has said about the believers: '... (but) thou canst recognize them by their special mark...' (*al-Baqara:* 273).

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَٰبَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ أَن لَّا تَعْبُدُواْ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنَۖ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمْ
عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦٠﴾ وَأَنِ ٱعْبُدُونِيۚ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٦١﴾

Children of Adam, did I not command you not to serve Satan, for he was your sworn enemy [60] But to serve Me? This is the straight path [61] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 60 - 61)

It is as if someone was asking: 'Do the disbelievers deserve all of this punishment and all of this anger from Allah?' The True Lord responds: 'Yes, they deserve it.' This is because Allah has cautioned them and warned them, but they have not responded; thus, Allah says, 'Did I not enjoin on you, O you children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan…' (*Ya Sin:* 60)?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not take you in a state of inattentiveness, but rather, He cautioned you and explained to you Satan's places of entrance and his tricks and artifices. This is because Satan, desperately, disclosed all his devices against the believers in front of Allah. Thus, Allah has warned us about them and explained to us his enmity towards us and his prior enmity towards Adam *peace be upon him* when Satan was commanded to prostrate to Adam but refused.

Satan's affair did not end when he did not prostrate. Rather, he wanted to entice Adam and he wanted to take revenge from him and from his progeny after him. Indeed, he swore that he would do so in front of His Creator *Glorified is He* and he said, with the power of enticing, as the Quran relates: '...Then (I swear) by

Thy very Might: I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error – ...' (*Sad:* 82), but he remembered his true position as a slave of the True Lord, and said: '(all) save such of them as are truly Thy servants!' (*Sad:* 83) Satan says: 'I have no way of deceiving these people. That is the animosity is not between me and You, but rather, it is between me and the children of Adam'. Satan swore in a way that affirmed his ability to carry out what he was threatening. For example, Pharaoh's magicians swore saying: '...By Pharaoh's might, behold, it is we indeed who have prevailed!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 44)

As for Satan, he knows very well how to make an oath, for he said '...Then (I swear) by Thy very Might...' (*Sad:* 82) which means: 'By Your independence from your creation. Whoever wants to will believe and whoever wants to will disbelieve; this is the door which I will enter to get through to them. As for the one who desires you O Lord, I am unable to get close to him.

The meaning of 'Did I not enjoin on you…' (*Ya Sin:* 60) is: 'I have already commanded you', as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And, indeed, long ago did We impose Our commandment on Adam; but he forgot it, and We found no firmness of purpose in him.' (*Ta Ha:* 115) That is Allah *Glorified is He* is saying: 'O Children of Adam! Did I not command you to beware of Satan's schemes, to be alert regarding his ways of getting through to you and his traps and intentions? Did he himself not say, "...I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straight way." (*al-A'raf:* 16)'? Then, since you have taken the protective serum (represented by Allah's warning and alerting you), you should have a necessary immunity with which to face this enemy, especially that he has unveiled his face and made clear his intention. He is waiting for you on the straight path and he exploits ways of obedience, not ways of disobedience, to spoil you. Satan does not come to the people of iniquity and the owners of taverns, but rather, he comes to the people of obedience to corrupt them. The poet was truthful who said about the one who is excessive in disobedience:

I was a person in the army of Satan and I was promoted
Because of my state until Satan came to be from my army (1)

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(1) This verse is mentioned in *Al-Mawsu`ah Ash-Shi`riyyah* from the poetry of two poets, the first of whom is Al-Khubz Arza (d.317 AH/969 AD) and his name is Nasr ibn Ahmad.=

The meaning of '...that you should not worship Satan…' (*Ya Sin:* 60) is to worship Satan is to obey his insinuations and whisperings. The rationale not to worship him is: '…since, verily, he is your open foe.' (*Ya Sin:* 60); he is an enemy who has openly declared his enmity, and he is familiar with the means of deceiving his enemies.

After our Lord *Glorified is He* forbids us from worshipping Satan, he directs us towards true worship: 'and that you should worship Me (alone)? This would have been a straight way!' (*Ya Sin:* 61) When we reflect on these two verses we find that the rationale behind forbidding the worship of Satan is '...since, verily, he is your open foe.' Hence, the following verse should read: 'and that you worship Me because I am your beloved', as stated in the Qudsi Hadith: 'O son of Adam! You are beloved to me, so My right over you is that you make Me beloved to you.(1)

However, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has not justified His being worshipped because of love, but rather, He is calling them to the straight path that benefits them and brings order to their lives. This is the basis for worshipping Allah. As for the matter of love, it indeed exists and I love you. However, whether I love or I do not love you, you should still follow this straight path because you will benefit from it. In this regard, the scholars have made a note on the following verses: 'Guide us the straight way.' (*al-Fatiha:* 6), 'And that you should worship Me (alone). This would have been a straight way!' (*Ya Sin:* 61) and 'And (know) that this is the way leading straight unto Me: follow it' (*al-An'am:* 153).

They said that the straight path is the even path that has no crookedness in it. It represents the nearest path and the shortest distance between two points.

= He was originally from Basra and moved to Baghdad. His narrations have many channels. The text of the verse that he has is part of a poem from the *Tawil Metre* and it consists of 46 verses

I was a youth in the army of Satan (Iblis) and I was promoted
Because of my state until Satan (Iblis) came to be from my army
Al-Amir As-San`ani (d.1182 AH/1768 AD) took this verse and said:
I was a youth in the army of Satan (Iblis) and I was promoted
Because of time until Satan (Iblis) came to be from my army
And it is from the *Tawil* metre from a poem that consists of 15 verses.

(1) Mentioned by Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in *Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din* (4/296). He said: 'In some books (meaning *Al-Ilahiyah*): 'My slave. Your right over Me is that I love you, and My right over you is that you love Me.'

Whenever you hear the word ‘path’ you know that it has a beginning and an end, i.e. it starts from …and ends to…; there is a subtle indication of which the believer should be aware. It is that the life of this world in relation to you is nothing other than a path along which you are travelling. It has a beginning and it has an end. Therefore, it is not an abode of establishment and permanent residence. Rather, it is a transit point.

When man resides in a place and he does not find repose therein, he leaves it for another place; had the first place been convenient for him, he would not have left it. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves, (the angels) will ask, “What was wrong with you?” They will answer: “We were too weak on Earth.” (The angels) will ask, “Was, then, Allah’s Earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil…?”’ (*an-Nisa’:* 97)

This emigration also requires a path upon which I emigrate, from and to; so, it is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to you: ‘In the life of this world, you are crossing a road to an end that is greater and nobler, so travel towards it along the nearest path that takes you to it. If you have seen with your own eyes the ‘starting point’ in this life, then indeed Allah *Glorified is He* has informed you of the ‘destination’ towards which you are travelling.

In this worldly life, you live according to the means that Allah has created, and are provided to you in the earth upon which you live, the water that you drink, the air that you breathe, the brain that you think with and so forth. However, it is your Lord who has provided you with these means, and He fears that you will be deluded by these means: ‘Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening, whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7)

That is why He makes these means differ sometimes so that you can be attached to the Causer *Glorified is He* to remain in a state of remembering Him, to keep praying to Him and seek refuge in Him. Allah *Glorified is He* loves to hear the supplications and voices of some people. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* may test these people so that they call upon Him in supplication. On the other hand, there are other people whom Allah *Glorified is He* hates to hear their call, so He commands the angels to fulfil their needs so that they do not call upon him regularly.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* narrated to us the history of Satan *may the curse of Allah be upon him* with the children of Adam. We must always bear these events in mind. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

He has led great numbers of you astray. Did you not use your reason? [62] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 62)

The Arabic word *jibbil* is used to describe the strongest and most powerful people. It is derived from the root *jabala* which indicates power, strength, establishment, and eminence. *Jabal*, the Arabic word for mountain, is used as such because it indicates their monumental establishment. We also say that a particular person was *jubila* (moulded) to have a particular character and behaviour which means that it is a deep-rooted quality established in their personality. We also describe a wise person as being a mountain because they are firm and unaffected by adverse events. Thus, there is a correlation in the meanings of all these words. In this regard, we can remind ourselves of the words of an Arab poet, who recited a eulogy in the funeral of one of the Caliphs as the people were carrying him to his grave.(1) The poet said: As if (you are) the Radwa Mountain, being moved by the hands of men.(2) Radwa is a well-known mountain in the Arabian Peninsula.(3)

The meaning of Allah's words: 'And indeed, he (Satan) had led astray many of your strongest (*jibbil*) people, could you not, then, use your reason?' (*Ya Sin:* 62) is that you are not the first to be led astray by Satan. He has led many people astray before you, and indeed, they were stronger than you are. Indeed, he fooled them and made them a tool for misguidance. Thus, he did not just stop at misguiding them, but he made them misguide others. They became soldiers in his army, as we have previously mentioned.

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(1) Al-Mutanabbi Ahmad ibn Al-Hussain Abu At-Tayyib (born in *Kufa* in 302 and died in 354 A.H.). He is one of the great figures of Arabic poetry. He claimed prophecy, but later retracted his claim. He was killed by a brigand called Fatik ibn Abu Jahl Al-Asadi.

(2) The full verse is as mentioned in *Al-Mawsu`ah Ash-Shi`riyyah*:
I never thought that I would see your coffin,
As if (you are) the Radwa Mountain, being moved by the hands of men

(3) Mount Radwa is an inaccessible mountain between Mecca and Medina. It is called the *Juhayna* Mountain, and is close to *Yanbu`*.

Modern civilization of the twentieth century, which is characterized with remarkable scientific invention and progress, still stands overwhelmed by the establishments of ancient civilizations. Indeed, modern scientists are incapable of comprehending all the ancients' secrets. At the head of these great and ancient civilizations was the civilization of the Pharaohs.

What did Satan do to Pharaoh? He enticed Pharaoh and led him astray, to such an extent that Pharaoh said to his people: 'I am your Lord All-Highest.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 24) The Quran describes Pharaoh in the following verse: 'Thus, he (condescendingly) incited his people to levity, and they obeyed him: for, behold, they were immoral people' (*az-Zukhruf:* 54). Thus, many strong individuals, like Pharaoh, could not confront Satan or save themselves from his schemes. Satan swayed by using their impulsive passions. He made obedience difficult for them and pulled them towards waywardness.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* reprimands these disobedient people: 'Could you not, then, use your reason?' (*Ya Sin:* 62) Where were their intellects when they lined up behind him, after Allah *Glorified is He* had warned them from his plots and ploys? Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to use our reasoning and intellect because the result of using our minds in contemplating Allah's signs in the universe leads us to understanding of what he wants from us.

Generally, you would not command someone to use their intellect unless you were confident that the results would be in accordance with what you wanted from them. For example, let us consider an honest merchant who is selling a good commodity. Such merchants may eagerly invite you to examine the quality of their merchandise carefully. A wool merchant, for example, might light a match and burn a thread from its fabric to affirm its superior texture. He would not do that if he was not confident of his products' value. This merchant's confidence will easily convince you of the product's excellence and will make you more eager to buy it. However, if the merchant was a fraudster, he will try to convince you with speculative talk that is packed with lies and deceit. He may even distract you from examining the product carefully because the result will not be for their benefit.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Could you not, then, use your reason?' (*Ya Sin:* 62) to emphasize the truth of this message. If you use your own reasonable minds, you will be certainly convinced of its certainty. This meant that if the disbelievers had used their intellects, they would have understood the truth and chosen its straight path, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذِهِۦ جَهَنَّمُ ٱلَّتِى كُنتُمۡ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾ ٱصۡلَوۡهَا ٱلۡيَوۡمَ بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَكۡفُرُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾
ٱلۡيَوۡمَ نَخۡتِمُ عَلَىٰٓ أَفۡوَٰهِهِمۡ وَتُكَلِّمُنَآ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَتَشۡهَدُ أَرۡجُلُهُم بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكۡسِبُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

So this is the Fire that you were warned against [63] Enter it today, because you went on ignoring [my commands] [64] On that Day We shall seal up their mouths, but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet bear witness to everything they have done [65] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 63 - 65)

Here too, Allah *Glorified is He* warns us from the hell-fire by using a lexical promise (*wa`d*) instead of using a lexical threat (*wa`eed*). We already know that, lexically, the Arabic word *wa`d* (promise) is used to refer to the good forthcoming events and the word *wa`eed* (ominous threat) is used to refer to the coming punishments. In this regard, an Arab poet (1) once said:

> O time! You have surely fulfilled your threats *(wa`eed)*,
>
> and broken your hopeful promises *(wa`d)*!(2)

However, if you are warned against a calamity before it actually befalls you, this warning is not actually an ominous threat. Allah's words regarding the hell-fire, despite being a threat, cannot hide the caring nature of His Lordship. His divine warning was issued so that the disbelievers will rectify their ways and correct their mistakes before the real punishment occurs. This is the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* referred to His threats of punishment as a *wa`d* (promise) instead of a *wa`eed* (ominous threat).

Allah *Glorified is He* also tells the disbelievers who will enter the hell-fire: 'Burn in it (*islawha*)' (*Ya Sin:* 64). The word *islawha* combines the meanings of the sentence, ‘Enter the hell-fire and be burned by its flames’. The word ‘today’ (*Ya Sin:* 64) refers to the Day of Judgment in which they will meet their recompense and reckoning.

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(1) Abu Al-`Ala` Al-Ma`ri. He was a poet and a philosopher, born in 449 A.H. and died in his birthplace in Ma`rat An-Nu`man. He went blind at the age of four, and began composing poetry at the age of 11. He used to wear coarse clothing and he did not eat meat for 45 years.

(2) The verse is from the poem of Abu Al-`Ala` Al-Ma`ri from the *Saree`* poetic metre and it consists of 10 verses.

On their day of punishment, the days of their sinful pleasures in the former world will have passed. They will recognize that their past worldly pleasures brought them to the punishment of an eternal hell-Fire. On that day, the pleasures will have gone, but their consequent punishment in the fire will remain as an outcome of their: ‘…persistent denial of the truth’ (*Ya Sin:* 64). Indeed, their punishment in this fire is not an oppressive injustice, but rather, is a just recompense for their continuous denial of Allah’s blessings.

Some people may receive your generosity and bounties with insults and miserliness towards you. If you choose to punish such people later, they may find it easier to tolerate any physical punishment, rather than meet or confront their benefactor. This is because the sense of a person’s shame may exceed the severity of any physical punishment they may have to endure.

Due to that, during the physical punishment of the disbelievers in the fire, they will be told: ‘Burn in it (*islawha*) today as an outcome of your persistent denial of the truth!’ Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* will remind these disbelievers that the physical fiery punishment is only a direct result of their denial of His blessings. At that point, their feelings of shame will, indeed, be more severe than the physical pain of the fire.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* described this future punishment, and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from this destiny. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘On that Day, We shall set a seal on their mouths, but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to whatever they have earned (in their lives).’ (*Ya Sin:* 65) His saying ‘On that Day...’ (*Ya Sin:* 65) is a reference to the Day of Resurrection, when we will all be assembled and gathered to meet our Creator. The words: ‘We shall set a seal on their mouths’ (*Ya Sin:* 65) mean that Allah will stop their mouths from speaking.

In this world, these disbelievers had shown pride and denial, and thus, Allah *Glorified is He* had sealed their hearts from further messages of guidance. Thus, faith did not enter their hearts and disbelief was rooted in them.

Similarly, in the future of the Hereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* will seal their mouths, and prevent them from issuing empty apologies or pleas for forgiveness. This is because the Hereafter is a place of reckoning and reward and not an abode of actions. Therefore, the disbelievers' search for forgiveness will be futile and their pleas will have no benefit in the Last Day. The times for speech and woven articulations will end in this world, and the tongue will have no role after Resurrection. The mouths will be closed and the tongues will be tied, so that the limbs can speak freely about their previous lives.

Consider the following words: '...but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to what they have earned (in their lives)' (*Ya Sin:* 65). Allah *Glorified is He* does not say that He will make the hands and feet bear witness to their actions by force. On the contrary, their hands will speak and their feet will bear witness voluntarily.

These limbs will volunteer to testify to the person's actions, even though these were the same limbs that carried out the sins in the life of this world. They will not bear witness against themselves, but rather, they will bear witness against the conscious soul to which Allah *Glorified is He* had subjugated them to act. Allah *Glorified is He* had commanded them to do as the soul desired, and they were subject to its instructions in the life of this world. Then, in the Hereafter, these limbs will be freed from following the conscious soul. Indeed, the absolute sovereignty and authority belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* alone. Thus, the limbs will speak as they want, and will bear witness in front of the Lord *the Most High.*

We previously gave an example of this matter. If an army squadron is sent by the supreme commander for a particular mission, the squadron has to obey the orders of its immediate commander, even if the orders are wrong. Then, when it returns to the supreme commander, it is given a chance to complain about the immediate commander's mistakes. Likewise, the limbs will witness to their soul's commands on the Day of Resurrection.

Some people asked, 'Why will the hands speak while the legs only bear witness to the person's actions'? It is because the multitude of a person's actions is usually attributed to the hands, even if walking is the means of the action. As the hands speak about their individual's actions, they will be making a claim that needs a witness. Therefore, the feet will corroborate the hand's testimonial and bear witness to it.

Some people asked, 'How can the hands speak'? The One Creator, Allah *Glorified is He* who made the tongue speak, when it is only a mere piece of flesh and blood, is able to make all the other organs speak as well. As long as the action is willed by Allah *Glorified is He* there is no need to ask about the Creator's methods. Furthermore, we can already see in this world, that the hands can perform movements as fine as the organs of speech.

Allah *Glorified is He* then said that these testimonies will narrate: '...what they have earned (*kasaba*) (in their lives)' (*Ya Sin:* 65). He did not say '…what they did in their lives'. What is the difference between earnings and actions? Generally, there are two types of disobedience. Firstly, there are misdeeds that a sinner perceives as joyful earnings. This is when a sinner feels delight in committing the sin. They may even talk nonchalantly about these sins with other people and boast about committing them. On the other hand, there are people who commit acts of disobedience with shame. They blame themselves for these sins and constantly seek repentance from them.

In this verse, the word *kasaba* is being used in its most basic linguistic form. In this form, it is defined as the process in which a person makes a profit from buying or selling goods. Thus, the word describes a normal and traditional transaction in which people accomplish earnings without burden or fraud. In this form, the word *kasaba* can also be used to refer to the lawful acts of righteousness.

On the other hand, there is another form of the word when we add a *hamza* to it. The resultant word, *iktasaba,* indicates the earning of unnatural profits that are burdened with fraud. This form of the word can be used to describe the joyful sins we talked about.

When a man does acts of righteousness, they come to him naturally and spontaneously. However, when he commits unlawful actions, he must execute more effort to carry them out stealthily. This is because goodness is simple, gentle and pleasing, whereas evil is tiresome and difficult. For example, a man can sit with his wife and daughters without any burden or difficulty because it is a natural and acceptable occurrence. However, if he sits with a woman he is forbidden from looking at, he may unlawfully and stealthily steal his glances so that no one can be aware of his shortcomings. Therefore, the word *kasaba* indicates the earnings of a natural profit, whereas the word *iktasaba* indicates an unlawful and unnatural earning.

Now, in this verse, why did Allah *Glorified is He* use the word *kasaba* when referring to the sins of the disbelievers? This is because people who regularly engage in unnatural sins become used to these acts of disobedience and assimilate these sins in their habits. At that point, they start committing these sins naturally without feeling any shame, and may even declare them openly. So, for this malevolent person, the act of *iktisab* (unnatural earning) has become an act of *kasb* (natural earning). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: '…and their feet will bear witness to what they have earned (*kasaba*) (in life)' (*Ya Sin:* 65).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ نَشَآءُ لَطَمَسْنَا عَلَىٰٓ أَعْيُنِهِمْ فَٱسْتَبَقُوا۟ ٱلصِّرَٰطَ فَأَنَّىٰ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

If it had been Our will, We could have taken away their sight. They would have struggled to find the way, but how could they have seen it? [66] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 66)

Allah *Glorified is He* will seal their mouths and prevent them from speaking, and if Allah wants, He could also blot out their eyes by locking them shut and flattening them with no trace. If Allah *Glorified is He* blots out their eyes, they will lose their sights, so how will they guide themselves while they are racing for the straight path of the *sirat* to reach paradise?

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ نَشَآءُ لَمَسَخْنَٰهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِهِمْ فَمَا
ٱسْتَطَٰعُوا۟ مُضِيًّا وَلَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

If it had been Our will, We could have paralysed them where they stood, so that they could not move forward or backward [67] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 67)

Someone might say, 'If they lose their sight on the *sirat*, they could have alternatives and devices to help guide them. Maybe, they could feel the path with a stick, for example, or someone could hold their hand and guide them through it'.

This will not be the case because Allah *Glorified is He* will encompass them from all sides, and will cut off all their hopes of salvation. Thus, the matter does not end with their eyes being blotted out. There is an outcome that is more severe which is that Allah *Glorified is He* can paralyze them in their places.

The word *masakhnahum* is derived from the Arabic word *maskh* which may refer to the transformation of a body into a statue-like structure that does not move. It could also indicate that they may be transformed into hideous forms, in order to degrade and humiliate them.

The first meaning is more valid (1) because Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards: 'Then, in no way could they move forward or turn back' (*Ya Sin:* 67). This means that they will be fixed in their places while being unable to move in any direction. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَن نُّعَمِّرۡهُ نُنَكِّسۡهُ فِي ٱلۡخَلۡقِۚ أَفَلَا يَعۡقِلُونَ ٦٨

If We extend anyone's life, We reverse his
development. Do they not use their reason? [68]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 68)

Allah *Glorified is He* clearly warns them in this world. He tells them: 'Do not worship Satan'! He made Satan's enmity clear to them. He also says, 'Worship me and travel along My straight path'. Therefore, they do not have any excuses if they choose to disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* and obey Satan or worship him.

However, some of them may excuse themselves from another perspective. Some of these disbelievers might say, 'O our Lord! If we had lived longer lives, we would have been guided and returned to the straight path'. Allah responds to them in another verse: 'And did We not give you a long (life), enough to remind anyone who would remind himself? And the constant warner came to you.' (*Fatir:* 37)

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(1) *This is the position of Al-Hasan Al-Basri. He said, 'This means "We could restrain them so that they are unable to move, either forwards or go back to where they came from, just like an inanimate object that does not move forwards or backwards."' As for the second meaning of the word al-maskh which indicates the transformation of a constitution, some scholars said that they may transformed into beasts of burden or other creatures. This was the position of As-Suddi, as has been mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (3/578).*

Allah *Glorified is He* allows them to live a long life which was enough for anyone to think and go back to Allah's righteous path. However, these disbelievers did not go back. Indeed, a long life makes one weak and feeble, and lacking the ability to move properly. In the beginning of your life, you possess youth and strength. You will be active, in body and mind. However, with old age, you will become weak in your physical constitution as your muscular and mental strength gradually decrease. Then, man returns to the weakness that he began with as a young child.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes man in the later senile stage in life by the following words: 'And of you is he who will be turned back to the most decrepit age, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well.' (*an-Nahl:* 70)

Therefore, if you do not return to Allah's path and take heed when you have physical strength and intellectual soundness, are you going to return when you are senile, weak, and forgetful? That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And (let them know that) to whomever We give a long life, We also cause him to decline (*nunakis-hu*) in his body' (*Ya Sin:* 67). *Al-Intikas* means the return to the formal and primitive constitution. Thus, prolonging the life of a man will take him back to his childhood phase. It is a relapse for him when he becomes a senile old man who cannot move or speak. His memory will become weak and he will include a lot of drivel in his speech. He will resemble a child who needs someone to carry him, feed him, and remove harm from his way. Is he going to return to Allah's path in this state? Would it benefit him to think and reflect at that stage of his life?

'Will they not, then, use their reason?' (*Ya Sin:* 68) Allah *Glorified is He* states this verse in the form of a question. He does not merely state it as fact because if they answer this question, they will confirm against themselves that they lack proper minds.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا عَلَّمْنَٰهُ ٱلشِّعْرَ وَمَا يَنۢبَغِى لَهُۥٓ ۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْءَانٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦٩﴾
لِّيُنذِرَ مَن كَانَ حَيًّا وَيَحِقَّ ٱلْقَوْلُ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

We have not taught the Prophet poetry, nor could he ever
have been a poet [69] This is a revelation, an illuminating
Quran to warn anyone who is truly alive, so that God's
verdict may be passed against the disbelievers [70]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 69 - 70)

In this verse, there is an apparent shift from the context of the previous verses. What is the connection between the Hereafter's punishment to the disbelievers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him?*

We know that the foundational principle of religion is monotheism, which involves accepting the Oneness of Allah. The meaning of Allah's Oneness is that you should bear witness that He is the Only (*Wahid*) and the One (*Ahad*) Deity in Existence. Each of the words, *Wahid* and *Ahad*, has its exclusive meaning, and each of their descriptions also affirms the other attribute.

The meaning of the word *Wahid* (The Only Deity) means that there is no other deity with Him in existence. On the other hand, the word *Ahad* (The One) means that He only has One Essence *Glorified is He*. This means that He is not comprised of constituent parts, and that He is not made from a number of things put together. His Essence does not rely on anything else *Glorified is He*.

For example, if you have one chair, the chair can be described as the only chair you have (*wahid*). However, it is not a single entity (*ahad*) because it has been made from a number of things, such as wood, nails, glue, as well as paint. Thus, it is a *wahid* but is not an *ahad*. As for Allah *Glorified is He* He must be described simultaneously with both descriptions. Thus, we say that He is '*Al-Wahid Al-Ahad*', because each of them has a distinct meaning.

The matter of Allah's Oneness is built on a rational argument. Allah *Glorified is He* has declared that He is the True and Only Deity, and that He has no partners. He is the sole Creator and Provider, and He alone is the One who deserves to be worshipped. No other deities exist that oppose this claim. Logically, the claim can be affirmed for the one who made it until someone else makes an opposing argument. We have not seen anyone claim to be the sole Creator except Allah *Glorified is He*.

If Allah *Glorified is He* had any other partners with Him, where are they? Why did they not demand their rights in divinity? Are they quiet about it or have they not become aware of it? In any of these cases, it is not valid for them to be gods. That is why the Quran has already discussed this matter with a logical argument: 'Say, "If there had been (other) gods with Him as they (the polytheist idolaters) claim, lo, indeed they would have constantly sought a way to The Owner of the Throne."' (*al-Isra':* 42)

Therefore, believing in Allah's oneness is the basic foundation of religion. However, human beings do not know naturally know what Allah *Glorified is He* wants from them by natural intellect. A messenger must be sent to inform them about their obligations. Therefore, there must be a messenger. This is the second principle of religion.

When Allah *Glorified is He* the Absolute and Perfect Power, addresses His imperfect creation, there must be a medium that enables the message to be delivered from His Absolute Perfection to those who are less than perfect. Thus, the matter was gradated as Allah *Glorified is He* addressed the angels, the angels addressed the messengers, and the messengers addressed mankind.

Therefore, believing in the concept of a message is the second objective of religion. The messenger is the medium between the Creator and the creation. The messenger does not merely convey the commandments, but is also an exemplar of conduct and application. Allah *Glorified is He* describes Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* in the following verse: 'Verily, in the Apostle of Allah you have a good example.' (*al-Ahzab:* 21) If the messenger had been an angel, he would not have been able to fulfil the role of an exemplar. A messenger can only carry out his duties if he is from the same species as those to whom he is being sent. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this matter by saying: 'Yet, whenever (Allah's) guidance came to them (through a prophet,) nothing prevented mankind from believing as the guidance came to them, except that they said, "Has Allah sent forth a mortal being as a Messenger?"' (*al-Isra':* 94). Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* to refute their argument by saying: 'If angels were walking about on earth as their natural abode, We would indeed have sent down unto them an angel from the heaven as Our apostle.' (*al-Isra': 95*)

If an angel had been sent down in its natural luminous form, human beings would not have been able to see it. It would have to come to them in the form of a human being, and their suspicions would still remain intact. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And (even) if We had appointed an angel as Our message-bearer, We would certainly have made him (appear as) a man – and thus We would only have confounded them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves.' (*al-An'am:* 9) Therefore, there must be a means to convey the message that resembles an electrical transformer which transforms electricity from the stronger power supply to a weaker instrument without burning it.

The third principle of religion is that people will be gathered to a final day of reckoning. This is because the Message came to convey certain commandments and prohibitions. Some people will obey these commandments and refrain from the forbidden prohibitions. Other people will abandon these commandments, or indeed go against it. Therefore, there must be a point of final return, in which the obedient people are rewarded and the transgressors are punished.

Allah *Glorified is He* talks about monotheism in the following verse: 'Did I not instruct you, O you descendants of Adam, that you should not worship Satan, as surely he is an evident enemy for you, and that you should worship Me (alone)? This is a straight way.' (*Ya Sin:* 60-61)

Allah *Glorified is He* also informed us that He will assemble people on the Day of Reckoning when He: 'This, then, is the hell-fire of which you were repeatedly warned. Burn in it today as an outcome of your persistent denial of the truth.' (*Ya Sin:* 63-64)

Allah *Glorified is He* also describes the principle of revelation, when He talks about Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him*: 'And in no way did We teach him (Prophet Muhammad) poetry; and in no way would poetry have suited him.' (*Ya Sin:* 69) Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was not taught poetry by Allah or even by the society and the environment in which he lived. Thus, it was an honour for Allah's Messenger to be unlettered because if he had been literate, his refined teachings would have been attributed to his environment. In actuality, his refinement and his knowledge were from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, it is an honour for Prophet Muhammad's *ummah* that he was unlettered. If his *ummah* had prior treasures of human knowledge, the events that later happened on the Arabian Peninsula would have only been described as a leap of civilization. For instance, when Allah *Glorified is He* gave us victory in the War of *Ramadan,* some people still said, 'It was a victory for our civilization'.

Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed that the source of this knowledge was divine: 'And in no way did We teach him (Prophet Muhammad) poetry' (*Ya Sin:* 69). Prophet Muhammad's revelation was only taught by his Lord, Allah *Glorified is He*.

Poetry needs a linguistic culture and knowledge of measures and rhymes. One must have fine taste, a musical ear, and other tools that poets need. Some people may assume that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* did not say poetry because he did not possess these tools. Allah *Glorified is He* refuted this conjecture: 'And in no way would poetry have suited him' (*Ya Sin:* 69).

This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* did not lack the abilities necessary for a poet. Indeed, had he wanted to say poetry, he would have said the best of its verses. However, his message was not suited for poetry. This was because the mission of a messenger is different from the mission of a poet. Most poetry contains lies and descriptions of sin, and when it entails goodness, it becomes weak and soft. This is because poetry is a craft of weaving fantasy, and a poet could say whatever pleases him irrespective of the objectives. That is why they say that the most pleasant of poetry is the most untruthful.

We often see poets who have sublime values and morals finding it difficult to combine between their faith and their gifts of poetry. They have no choice but to restrict themselves to the verses of virtue, and have to keep their distance from the poetry of ridicule and seduction.

An Arab poet from *Mahjar* was known for piety and righteousness. He once tried to combine between his piety and the gift of poetry that he had. He said:

My Lord (Allah), indeed I have disobeyed you on purpose,
But I know that you are the most beautiful in forgiveness.
Indeed, I have committed the greatest of sins,
As I did not want your forgiveness to be limited

Thus, he did well in the first verse, but was not successful in illustrating the second verse appropriately.

Hasan ibn Thabit *Allah be pleased with him* was a proficient poet before Islam. When he embraced Islam, they said to him, 'Your poetry has become soft, O Abu Al-Hussam!' He responded, 'Poetry is laborious and is strengthened by sin.(1) If it contains goodness, it becomes weak and soft.'

Thus, Allah's saying: 'And in no way would poetry have suited him' (*Ya Sin:* 69) was revealed to defend Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* from the accusation that he does not have a fine sense, or that his ear was not musical. How can the one who is taught by Allah *Glorified is He* be accused of this, when his ear receives revelation directly?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* once recited a particular verse of poetry without following its poetic measure. Thus when he recited(2), 'The days will reveal what you had been ignorant about, and your carrier of news will not need payment,' he changed the wording into, 'And the one you have not paid will carry the news to you.'(3)

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(1) *Ibn Qutaiba Ad-Dinawari, in Ash-Shi`r Wa Ash-Shu`ara`, mentioned this remarks from the sayings of Al-Asma`i. He then mentioned Hassan ibn Thabit and said, 'This was Hassan ibn Thabit who was an outstanding poet before Islam. Then, when Islam came, his poetry came to an end.'*

(2) *`Aisha Allah be pleased with her was once asked, 'Did the Prophet ever quote any poetry?' She said, 'He used to quote the poetry of Ibn Ruwaha, and quoted poet who said, 'And your carrier of news will not need payment.' This was narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2848) and Ahmad in his Musnad (6/151).*

(3) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to quote this verse, but he did not follow the original poetic measure. The verse is by Tarfa ibn Al-`Abd. Abu Ubayd said in Al-Amthal, 'We have related in a Hadith marfu` (traceable in ascending order back to Prophet Muhammad) that he quoted a verse that said: 'And he will come to you the one who has not been paid with bits of news.'*

It is also related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said(1), 'The most truthful words of poetry were said by Labeed: 'Indeed everything besides Allah is falsehood, and every joy comes to an end without doubt.' The original wording of this verse was: 'Indeed everything besides Allah is falsehood, and every joy, without doubt, comes to an end.'

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* used to break the poetic measure of the verse so that it could not be said that he recited poetry. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And in no way did We teach him (Prophet Muhammad) poetry; and in no way would poetry have suited him.' (*Ya Sin:* 69) However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not forbid Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* from reciting it. The Prophet was only cautious regarding this matter.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* did not recite the poetry of other poets exactly as they said it. As for him formulating verses of poetry by himself, some scholars are of the opinion that He said a verse of poetry in the Battle of Hunayn (2). He is narrated to have said, 'I am the Prophet, without a lie. I am the son of `Abd Al-Muttalib.'

This Prophetic saying did comply with a poetic measure that is known as *rajaz*. However, this is only a saying that coincidentally fitted a poetic measure. There is a difference between complete excerpts of speech that are regulated and subjected to a poetic measure and rhyme, and a single sentence of speech that coincidentally fits a measure without intention.

In fact, there are distinct verses in the Quran itself that coincidentally fit a poetic measure. We still do not say that they are verses of poetry. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '(But as for you, O believers,) never shall you attain to true piety unless you spend on others out of what you cherish yourselves.' (*Al-'Imran:* 92)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6147) and Muslim in his Sahih (3256) in the Book of Poetry (Hadiths 2-6) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (1776) in the Book of Jihad and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3217) from the Hadith of Al-Bara` ibn `Azib, which is that a man asked him: 'Did you flee from Allah's Messenger on the day of Hunayn?' Al-Bara` said: 'Allah's Messenger did not flee. On that day, Hawazin took part in the battle as archers. When we attacked them, they retreated and we fell upon the spoils. They advanced towards us with arrows. I then saw Prophet Muhammad on his white mule and Abu Sufyan ibn Al-Harith was holding its bridle. He was saying: "I am the Prophet, without a lie. I am the son of `Abd Al-Muttalib."'*

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'This, then, is he about whom you have been blaming me.' (*Yusuf:* 32) He also says, 'Tell My servants that I alone am truly forgiving, and the True Giver of grace' (*al-Hijr:* 49).

These verses coincidentally fit a poetic measure, but they are not called poetry because poetry is a measured saying that is intentionally rhymed.

The disbelievers accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* of being a magician and a poet. They also claimed that he was a fortune-teller. The Quran refuted their claims regarding poetry: 'And in no way did We teach him poetry; and in no way would poetry have suited him.' (*Ya Sin:* 69)

On the other hand, the Quran did not negate the claim of magic. This is because the Quran has a sublime style of argumentation. The closest thing to the Quranic verses is poetry, and this is why the Quran negated the claim that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was a poet. Magic, on the other hand, involves the usage of cryptic characters and meaningless speech. Therefore, the Quran did not say, 'We have not taught him magic' because the claim was intrinsically fragile. The refutation of this claim was much simpler.

If Prophet Muhammad had been a magician, and those who believed in him had been bewitched by him, then why was he unable to bewitch the disbelievers as well. Therefore, their denial and disbelief in him were the strongest evidence that he was not a magician because a bewitched person does not have any resistance against magic.

Allah *Glorified is He* also refuted the claim that he was a fortuneteller. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...and it is not the word of a foreteller' (*al-Haqqa:* 42). This is because fortune-tellers speak using inane rhymed prose. The Quran is the complete opposite of this. The Arabs were a people of eloquence and rhetoric. They were the most knowledgeable of people in the issue of linguistic styles and distinguishing between them. They were perfectly capable of distinguishing between the Quran and other types of speech, and they even set markets and exhibitions for the sake of poetry and eloquence.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the rationale behind Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not saying poetry: 'Indeed (this revelation) is nothing (else) except a reminder and a divine Quran' (*Ya Sin:* 69).

Lexically, this verse is in the form of a negation. This method of negation is used to emphasize that the Quran is nothing other than a reminder for the people who use their intellect. It is only a divine discourse that is conveyed by a clear recitation. It may have a tune that is more pleasant in the righteous ears than the music of poetry, and some people transcend into a sublime world of meanings when they hear the Quran. However, the Quran is not a book of poetry.

The reason for this transcendental beauty is that Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who revealed these verses to His creation. He revealed the speech that has the most profound effect on His created beings and that will cause them to incline towards Him. This inclination will occur easily if the heart still possesses the natural disposition with which mankind was originally created. However, if people depart from this natural disposition, the Quran will not have the same effect on them. The source of revelation is certainly the same, but the dispositions of the listeners may vary.

Allah *Glorified is He* explains this matter for us: 'And among them are (the ones) who listen to you (O Muhammad), until, when they go out of your presence, they say to the knowledgeable ones (amongst them), "What did he say just now?"' (*Muhammad:* 16). So, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* to respond to them by saying: 'To the ones who have believed it (the Quran), it is a guidance and a cure; and the ones who do not believe, in their ears is an obstruction, and for them it is a blindness.' (*Fussilat:* 44)

We previously illustrated the importance of the listener's perception and disposition. We said that you may have to exhale over a hot cup of tea in order to cool it down, but in the winter, you probably exhale on your hands to warm them up. The action is the same, but its receiver is different. The same goes for people when they listen to the Quran. Some people receive Allah's Speech with a sound natural disposition. They understand it and are affected by it. Others receive Allah's Speech while they are busy with other engagements, so they are prevented from understanding it. Thus, they will not be transcendentally affected by Allah's speech.

Some people who do not speak a word of Arabic, but are profoundly affected when they hear or read Allah's speech, that their eyes may fill with tears. Why is this? There must be a factor in their natural disposition that allows them to be affected by its style.

Allah *Glorified is He* gave inspiration to inanimate objects, and they were affected by His speech. He also gave inspiration to animals and they understood it from Him. Thus, it is reasonable that He revealed a speech to rational men that coincides with their nature and affects them greatly.

Then, in the verse we are studying, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies the mission of this clear Quran. He says, '…that he may warn whomever has a living (heart)' (*Ya Sin:* 70). Allah *Glorified is He* describes them as being alive. However, the material life will end in death. There is another form of life that is being stated in this verse. This is the life of intellect, thought and spiritual values. The rewards of these attributes will not be made completely manifest until after death.

All of mankind take part in a material life. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon them an element known as the *ruh* (spirit). This element gives the material existence a spiritual life, and the spirit's existence is part of Allah's Divine Knowledge and Command. After giving them the spirits with which material matter comes to life, He gave them the moral spirit with which their moral dispositions can be elevated. It is this moral spirit that elevates their real value in the Hereafter. It is true that these morals will give them peace of mind, rectitude, and stability in the life of this world, but nevertheless, the real reward will mostly appear in the Hereafter.

If Allah *Glorified is He* wills, he may give man a continuous life, just as Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* was given a continuous life. Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* asked his Lord: 'O my Lord! Surely the bones within me have become feeble, and my head is turned white with flaming white hair, and I have not been unanswered in invoking you, Lord! And surely, I fear what my kinsfolk would do after me, and my wife is barren. So bestow upon me, from Your close Grace, a constant patron, who will be my heir and also inherit the house of Ya`qub (Jacob) and make him, Lord, a pleasant (servant).' (*Maryam:* 4-6) Allah *Glorified is He* answered him: 'Thereupon the angels called out unto him: 'O Zakaryya (Zechariah)! We bring you the glad tiding of (the birth of) a son whose name shall be Yahya (John). And Allah said, "Never have We given this name to anyone before him."' (*Maryam:* 7) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* gave him the glad tidings of a boy, and gave him the name Yahya, which indicated that He was going to have a long life. When you name your child *Dhaki* (intelligent), for example, you are optimistic that he will be intelligent. If you name him *Nabeel* (noble), you are optimistic that he will be noble. However, is it within your power to accomplish this hope of yours? That is why an Arab poet once said, in grief about his deceased son:

I called my son Yahya so that he would live longer,
but there is no way of stopping Allah's decree.

You may name the child according to an attribute you wanted to see in them, but Allah is the Only Giver of life and its bounties. Allah *Glorified is He* named him Yahya (John), because He has the Power to give him a continuous life. That is why Yahya (John) died as a martyr, and therefore, his life in this world became connected to the life of the Hereafter and Allah's Will was observed.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…that he may warn whomever has a living heart and that the true word (of punishment) will fall upon the disbelievers.' (*Ya Sin:* 70) Indeed, these disbelievers will deserve punishment because they did not benefit from the warnings.

Then, after that, Allah *Glorified is He* stated some of His signs in the universe. He says:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُم مِّمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَآ أَنْعَـٰمًا فَهُمْ لَهَا مَـٰلِكُونَ ﴿٧١﴾ وَذَلَّلْنَـٰهَا
لَهُمْ فَمِنْهَا رَكُوبُهُمْ وَمِنْهَا يَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مَنَـٰفِعُ وَمَشَـٰرِبُ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

Can they not see how, among the things made by Our hands, We have created livestock they control [71] And made them obedient, so that some can be used for riding, some for food [72] Some for other benefits, and some for drink? Will they not give thanks? [73] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 71-73)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* turned their attention towards the material world that they cannot deny. We previously said that the verb *yaraw* used in such verses could be referring to scientific awareness, or is a reference to the actual practice of seeing these signs with the organs of sight.

Allah says, '…that it is for them that We have created, among all the things which Our hands have made, the farm animals' (*Ya Sin:* 71). The words: '…which Our hands have made' (*Ya Sin:* 71) negated that any other creator was a partner with Allah *Glorified is He* in His creation. Rather, these living beings were created by Allah *Glorified is He* alone.

The phrase '…farm animals (*an`am*)' (*Ya Sin:* 71) refers to the domestic animals that are mentioned in the chapter of *al-An`am*, in a verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'His followers would have it that, in certain cases, any of these four kinds of cattle of either sex (is unlawful to man): either of the two sexes of sheep and of goats. Ask (them): "Is it the two males that He has forbidden, or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females may contain? Tell me what you know in this respect, if what you say is true." And (likewise they declare as unlawful) either of the two sexes of camels and of bovine cattle. Ask (them): "Is it the two males that He has forbidden, or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females may contain? Were you (yourselves) witnesses when Allah enjoined (all) this upon you?" And who could be more wicked than he who, without any (real) knowledge, attributes his own lying inventions to Allah, and thus leads people astray? Behold, Allah does not grace (such) evildoing folk with His guidance.' (*al-An'am:* 143-144)

These cattle, camels, sheep and goats are called *an`am* (blessings) because they are having manifest bounties in numerous ways. We benefit from them in our lives, and from them we take wool, fur, leather, and different kinds of meat and milk. We also use them for carrying loads. All these are obvious blessings in the Arab culture.

Then, indeed the creation of these animals is a blessing in itself. His saying '...of which they are (now) masters' (*Ya Sin:* 71) is another blessing because there are other animals that are wild and cannot be controlled by hunting or force. These wild animals are of little benefit when compared to the tame animals that man uses by herding, riding, and milking.

Then, there is another blessing, which is that Allah *Glorified is He* subjugated these animals for us. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and that We have subjected them to men's will' (*Ya Sin:* 72). If Allah *Glorified is He* had not subjected them to mankind's control, we would have been unable to benefit from them easily.

A camel, for example, can be herded by a child easily despite its massive size and strength. The child can make it kneel before riding it. How can this be? It is because Allah *Glorified is He* subjugated it to our use. On the other hand, a smaller snake scares us away because Allah *Glorified is He* has not subjected it for us. Indeed, a flea in the bed can disturb you and make you anxious, and you have no real power over it.

Therefore, the creation of these farm animals is a blessing in itself, and our control over them is another blessing. These are bounties granted for both the believers and the disbelievers because they are a gift of Allah's Lordship. Therefore, it is incumbent upon people to respect these blessings, and to ask themselves, 'How can we disbelieve in Allah when He is the One Who constantly bestows all these blessings upon us'? Unfortunately, some disbelievers did not stop at their own disbelief, but furthermore, prevented the messengers from spreading their religious call.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...so that some of them they may use for their riding (*rakubuhum*)' (*Ya Sin:* 72). This refers to the beasts of burden. The words: '…and of some they may eat' (*Ya Sin:* 72) is a reference to the foods we can produce from their milk while they are alive, which includes such food items as cheese, butter and so forth. Allah also says, '…and may have (yet other) benefits from them, and (milk) (*masharib*) to drink' (*Ya Sin:* 73). The Arabic word *masharib* is the plural of *mashrab* (a drink). Here, it refers to the water-skins that are made from the leather of these animals which the Arabs used to use as drinking utensils. The word *masharib* could also be a reference to the milk itself that we can consume after the female animals deliver their newly born offspring.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concluded these blessings with His saying: 'Will they not, then, be grateful?' (*Ya Sin:* 73) This phrase is placed in the form of a question so that the disbelievers can answer it themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* did not simply command these disbelievers, 'Be grateful to Me for these blessings'! Rather, He asked them, 'Are these blessings worthy of gratitude'? If they show gratitude, they will surely be showered with more blessings, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'If you are grateful (to Me), I shall most certainly give you more bounties' (*Ibrahim:* 7).

Therefore, it is obligatory upon them to thank Allah *Glorified is He* for His blessings, as these blessings are inviting them to have faith in this Creator Who constantly bestowed His blessings upon them. When a man receives a monthly wage from his employer, he directs respect and gratitude towards him. Does the One Creator Who bestowed all these blessings not deserve to be worshipped and thanked?

However, the matter did not end at their lack of gratitude. The Quran told us more about them, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ءَالِهَةً لَّعَلَّهُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾
لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُمْ جُندٌ مُّحْضَرُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

Yet they have taken other gods besides God to help them[74]
Though these could not do so even if they called a whole
army of them together! [75] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 74 -75)

The Quran stated this fact about them after Allah *Glorified is He* had explained the signs that confirm His Exalted Existence and Oneness. Men find signs for Allah's Existence in the horizons that surround them and also find such signs within themselves. If a person abandons the first set of universal signs and is heedless towards them, how can they be heedless to the signs within their non-detachable essence? That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'In time We shall make them fully understand Our messages (through what they perceive) in the utmost horizons (of the universe) and within themselves, so that it will become clear unto them that this (revelation) is indeed the truth.' (*Fussilat:* 53)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But (nay,) they worshipped deities other than Allah (hoping) to be succoured (by them)' (*Ya Sin:* 74). It is true that man may worship a higher being to succour him when he is in difficulty. However, how can he worship an idol that, instead, is in need of man to recover it when the wind topples it over or when it gets swept away by accident? If it falls, he has to put it back up, and if its arm breaks, he has to fix its parts. If a flood washes the idol away, it gets thrown in the mud. Therefore, how can he worship this idol as a partner with Allah *Glorified is He*?

You know that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* destroyed the idols of his people. They asked him: '… "have you done this to our gods, O Ibrahim?" He answered, "Nay, it was this one, the biggest of them, that did it: but ask them (yourselves) – provided they can speak."' (*al-Anbiya':* 62-63)

This is how Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* made them aware of the undeniable word of truth. They were only worshipping dumb inanimate objects that do not speak. 'And so they turned upon one another, saying, "Behold, it is you who are doing wrong."' (*al-Anbiya':* 64) However, they quickly realised the danger of this admission, and they returned to their usual stubbornness and obstinacy. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But then they relapsed into their former way of thinking and said, "You know very well that these (idols) cannot speak."' (*al-Anbiya':* 65)

At that point, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* confronted them with this reality that they were trying to turn away from. He told them: 'Do you then worship, instead of Allah something that cannot benefit you in any way, nor harm you? Fie upon you and upon all that you worship instead of Allah! Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*al-Anbiya':* 66-67) That is why Allah *Glorified is He* refutes their ignorant ways: 'But (nay,) they worshipped deities other than Allah (hoping) to be succoured (by them)' (*Ya Sin:* 74). This was because these idols did not have the ability to give succour to those idolaters who worshipped them. Rather, it is the worshippers themselves that supported the idols.

On the Day of Resurrection Allah *Glorified is He* will gather them altogether. The worshipper will be gathered with that which he worshipped, so that they can confront one another. If the idol worshipper was resurrected by himself, he may probably wait for his false idols to help and defend him. Thus, they will be gathered altogether, as Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'How is it that (now) you cannot succour one another? Nay, but on that Day, they would willingly surrender (to Allah).' (*as-Saffat:* 25-26) Allah also says, 'And Allah will thus command: "Assemble all those who were bent on evildoing, together with others of their ilk and (with) all that they worshipped (besides Allah)."'

(*as-Saffat:* 22) They will be placed altogether in the fire, the idol worshipper and the worshipped idol. These idols will be fuel for the fire that will punish their ignorant worshippers.

After that, the context was then directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* who the disbelievers stubbornly and obstinately denied. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا نَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

So [Prophet] do not be distressed at what they say: We know what they conceal and what they reveal [76] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 76)

Allah *Glorified is He* consoled His Messenger to put his mind at ease. Any consolation must have a consoler and a person being consoled. In this case, the consoler is Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who sent the messenger being consoled. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* was comforting Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* in his times of difficulty. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* never left His messengers without support, and the trials and tribulations the believers experienced were only placed to purify their souls and elevate their creed. Thus, only the true believers carried the responsibility of the message and defended it.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him:* ‘However, be not grieved (*yahzunka*) by the sayings of those (who deny the truth)’ (*Ya Sin:* 76). The Arabic word *yahzunka* (grieved you) is derived from the word *huzn* (sadness). This is the soul’s regret when a person does not accomplish what they were hoping for, and when their objectives are apparently failing. If Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was sad and his soul was dispirited, who was going to console and remove his grief? Allah *Glorified is He* the one who sent him, consoled him because He knows what they keep secret and what they declare openly.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Verily, We know all that they keep secret as well as all that they bring into the open’ (*Ya Sin:* 76). What were these people keeping secret? Those that confronted Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* fell into two categories. The first category confronted him with courage. They declared on their tongues what was in their hearts, which was that they did not believe in him. These people were the disbelievers. The other categories were those who believed in him with their tongues, but concealed their disbelief in their hearts. These people were the hypocrites. The meaning of the words: '...all that they keep secret' (*Ya Sin:* 76) could be referring to their intrinsic hypocrisy, while the words: '…as well as all that they bring into the open,' (*Ya Sin:* 76) could be a reference to their disbelief.

On the other hand, the meaning of the words: 'all that they keep secret' could, in fact, be referring to their knowledge that he was a trustworthy and genuine prophet, while the words: '…as well as all that they bring into the open' could be referring to their acts of disbelief. The evidence of their knowledge that Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was truthful can be found in Allah's words: 'And in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth' (*an-Naml:* 14).

Some of these disbelievers did not even deny the Quran or object to it. Their only objection was that it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad himself, and that is why, as the Quran states, these disbelievers said: 'Why was this Quran not bestowed on some great man of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Some disbelievers also entrusted Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* with their precious property. All of this was proof that they believed his trustworthiness. However, despite this, they openly declared words of disbelief. This disbelief in Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* was out of fear for their worldly authority along with their position of leadership and power. Prophet Muhammad's teachings came to decrease their transgressions and superiority, and to put an end to their mastery over the weak and impoverished people. Therefore, they stood against Prophet Muhammad's call with all their might despite their belief in his honesty.

The people in Medina were preparing to choose a king before the migration of Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* to their land.(1) When

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(1) *Ibn Hisham mentioned in As-Sira An-Nabawyyah (3/216) that the people of Ibn Abu Ubay had arranged pearls in order to crown him and make him their ruler. Then,=*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* entered the city, the people gathered around him and the kingdom was dissolved before it was born. Thus, the worldly authority of the disbelievers disappeared. It also disappeared from the hands of the Jews, who were people of knowledge, wealth, and combat. All of this disappeared on the day the word of Islam was exalted.

The meaning of the words: '...all that they keep secret as well as all that they bring into the open' could also be a description that the actions of man have two main elements. The first element is the intention which is a secret that is conspired inside his heart. This is the basic belief that pushes the person to act. If it is translated into action, it thus comes out into the open. According to this meaning, Allah *Glorified is He* was informing Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* that He has the Absolute Knowledge of their corrupt concealed intentions as well as the shameful acts that these disbelievers and hypocrites declared. However, the matter will not just end with Allah's Knowledge. The consequence of this divine knowledge will be that Allah *Glorified is He* will punish the disobedient disbelievers and reward the obedient believers.

Therefore, this verse was instructing them to think deeply about their own affairs with Allah *Glorified is He*. It was a warning from the effects of this divine knowledge. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And be not grieved by the sayings of those (who deny the truth). Behold, all Might and Glory belong to Allah alone.' (*Yunus:* 65)

After Allah *Glorified is He* stated His signs in the universe such as those signs in the earth, the sun, the moon, the orbits, the beasts and farm animals, He also mentions His signs in man himself. If the signs in the horizons surrounding them were not enough for them to turn to Allah *Glorified is He* then there were also signs within themselves that will not leave them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

= *Prophet Muhammad arrived at Medina while they were doing this. Ibn Abu Ubay's heart was thus filled with hatred and enmity towards Prophet Muhammad. He entered Islam reluctantly and maliciously as a hypocrite.*

أَوَلَمۡ يَرَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ أَنَّا خَلَقۡنَٰهُ مِن نُّطۡفَةٖ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿٧٧﴾

Can man not see that We created him from a drop of fluid? Yet – lo and behold! – he disputes openly [77] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 77)

Allah's saying: 'Did man, then, not see' means, 'Does he not know'. This is because man did not literally see how he was created. Some people may ask, 'Who is the one who informed man that he was created by Allah'? Indeed, man knows this reality because no one in the entire universe has ever claimed to create him except Allah *Glorified is He*. Then, messengers came to us, including Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* who informed us that Allah *Glorified is He* created us. No reasonable person ever objected to this concept. Even the polytheists did not dispute it, and despite the many things that man claimed for himself, no man ever claimed that they created mankind.

The basic logical rule is that a claim can be confirmed for the one who makes it as long as there is no objection, otherwise, if this claim is not submitted to Allah *Glorified is He* then who is the creator of this world? If there was another creator, why has he not objected to the concept of Allah's divinity? Why has the other creator not demanded their rights concerning this creation? If that creator has become scared of confrontation or has not been made aware of this claim, he does not deserve to be a god.

We may notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says in the previous verses: 'Are they, then, not aware that it is for them that We have created, among all the things which Our hands have made, the domestic animals of which they are (now) masters.' (*Ya Sin:* 71), and in this verse, He says, 'Did man, then, not see (and become aware)' (*Ya Sin:* 77). In the former verse, he addressed the wider group of people in mankind, while in the latter verse he addressed an individual person.

Some scholars said that this verse was revealed concerning Ubay ibn Khalaf(1). He held on to the bone of an animal, crushed it into small bits in front of

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(1) *There are several narrations regarding the circumstances in which this verse was revealed and those are as follows:*

- *Revealed regarding Ubay ibn Khalaf, and this is the position of Mujahid, `Ikrima, `Urwah ibn Az-Zubayr, As-Suddi and Qatada.* =

Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* and said, ‘Do you claim that your Lord will bring this to life again?’

Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said, ‘Yes. He will bring you back to life and He will put you in the Fire.’ This verse could also be directed to mankind in the absolute sense, or for every denier of the concept of Resurrection, like Ubay ibn Khalaf.

Regarding His saying: ‘...from a [mere] sperm-drop…’ (*Ya Sin:* 77), empirical science didn not discover anything of this matter until only recently, trying, modestly, to reveal some of the secrets of the beginning and development of human life, that we did not know anything about before. The drop of sperm is the substance, the microbe, or the effective seed that brings about fertilization when it makes contact with the egg. The drop of sperm swims in a fluid: the semen that it lives in. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 37)

Modern empirical science has confirmed that the drop of sperm is responsible for determining whether the child will be a male or a female. The egg is nothing other than a vessel. Therefore, the woman has no say in this matter, and the evidence is in Allah’s statement: ‘Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm, which became a clinging form, which Allah shaped in due proportion, fashioning from it the two sexes, male and female?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 37-39), i.e. the two sexes are from the drop of sperm. We said before: it is amazing that the ancient Arab women understood this reality that science only arrived at in modern times.

As for the Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in this matter, it says that,: ‘If the man’s fluid *ghalaba* (prevails) over the woman’s fluid, the child will incline towards his father, and if the woman’s fluid

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= - *Revealed regarding Al-`As ibn Wa`il, and this is a position of Ibn `Abbas.*
- *Revealed regarding `Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Sulul, and it is another position of Ibn `Abbas. In his Tafsir, (3/581) Ibn Kathir said about the latter position: ‘This is rejected because the chapter is Meccan and `Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Sulul was only in Medina. When everything is taken into equal consideration, these verses were revealed regarding either Ubay ibn Khalaf or Al-`As ibn Wa`il, or both, and in general, they apply to anyone who denies the Resurrection.*

prevails the child, will incline towards his mother.'(1) They understood from this Hadith that determining whether a child is male or female depends on the fluid that comes first. However, when we consider the actual wording, the word *ghalaba* indicates predominance and precedence, and precedence can only be for the components that come from one drop of sperm, and are released in one direction. Therefore, they do not meet, and the meaning of *yaghlib* is that it comes first.

We said previously that now they are aware that when the egg comes out from the woman it causes a chemical change in her constitution, causing her body temperature to increase as well as change in her condition and heart rate. That is why they invented a thermometer to measure these changes, and with it the woman can know the time in which the egg goes down.

The drop of sperm is a microbe that is finite in its smallness. It can only be seen with a microscope. Allah have mercy on Al-'Aqqad(2) who described this smallness in a very precise manner. He said: 'Indeed the procreation of the entire world – meaning the drops of sperm that bring them all into existence – can be placed in half of a tailor's thimble. Thus, glory be to the Creator Who brings out of this tiny, finite drop of sperm a complete human being. From it He brings out solid bones and muscles that are partially solid and partially supple. From it we have cartilage, nerves, flowing blood, the brain and so forth.

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(1) *This Hadith is the response of Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him to a question from 'Abdullah ibn Salam: 'Why does a child resemble its mother or its father?' He peace and blessings be upon him said: 'As for the child, if a man has sexual intercourse with his wife and gets discharge first, the child will resemble the father, and if the woman gets discharge first, the child will resemble her.' Ibn Salam then said: 'I bear witness that there is no Allah but Him and that you are the Messenger of Allah.' It has been narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2938) from the Hadith of Anas and from Muslim in his Sahih (211) in the Book of Menstruation from the Hadith of Umm Salim: 'Indeed the man's fluid is thick and white, while the woman's fluid is thin and yellow. Whichever of them prevails and takes precedence then the child will come to resemble.'*

(2) Abbas Mahmoud Al-Aqqad, a scholar of literature who produced several written works who originated from Dumiat. His ancestors moved to Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra and one of them was working in *Aqada al-Harir*, and thus he came to be known as Al-Aqqad. His mother was Kurdish. He was born in 1889 AD in Aswan and died in Cairo in 1963 at the age of 76. He is buried in Aswan. *Az-Zirikli, Al-A`lam* 2/366.

This is what happens in the material body. What is more amazing is that this body also contains an intellect that comprehends, a tongue that speaks and tastes, eyes that see, a hand that grasps, a nose that smells, fingertips that touch and legs with feet that take steps. All of this is from a drop of sperm, this microbe that cannot be seen by the naked eye, this drop of sperm that the Quran describes as being vile fluid, vile because it comes out from the same place as urine. It is discarded in the sewage system along with contaminants, and if it gets on your clothes you must wash it off. Yet, from this vile fluid man is created, and indeed he reaches the highest levels of transgression and tyranny. How?

They said: ‘It is because man has inherent good qualities and talents that he loves to display. When he is with those he loves, he is impressed with his beautiful appearance, his wealth or his intelligence and so forth. Thus, he tries to display these talents to them. If he is shown enmity then he has other talents for his enemies. With the enemy, he exerts all his talents to conquer his enemies. These are gifts and talents that are useful in situations of anger, animosity, and argumentation’.

That is why one of them said: ‘How many of Allah’s blessings are within me that I have praised him for which He gathers within me as three talents. The first is for me, the second is for my loved ones and companions and the third is for my enemy.

All of this is the meaning of ‘...then at once he is a clear adversary?’ (*Ya Sin:* 77) which means that after man was created from this drop of sperm and from this vile fluid; suddenly, he becomes ‘a clear adversary’ (*Ya Sin:* 77) meaning a fierce enemy. The adjective *mubin* ‘clear’ (*Ya Sin:* 77) means that he clearly displays the talents of enmity that he has. Man cannot be *mubin* for anyone else unless the feature is clear within him; for, as the proverb says, ‘he who lacks something, cannot give it’. A bad teacher is the one who cannot explain a piece of information to his student. This is because this piece of information is not clear for him in the first place. If the piece of information had been clear in his mind, he would have been able to explain it by any means.

Therefore, the meaning of ‘a clear adversary’ (*Ya Sin:* 77) is that he can display what is within himself very well. That is why you say: ‘I clarified it for you because it is clear for me’; ‘I was able to make it known for you because it has been made known to me' and 'I made you understand because I have understood'. They are, thus, two types of talents. In situations of enmity the talents of man are accomplished; and he exerts all of them; and he does not spare any of them. For in enmity he displays whatever he has: wealth, courage, tricks and so forth.

It is amazing that all of this is implicit within a drop of sperm. It is also amazing that man shifts this enmity within himself and his enmity towards his enemies to enmity towards His Lord and Creator.

That is why the True Lord illustrates this enmity, not just that of Ubay, the cause of revelation, but of everyone who is like Ubay:

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُۥ ۖ قَالَ مَن يُحْيِ ٱلْعِظَٰمَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ ﴿٧٨﴾
قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنشَأَهَآ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٩﴾

producing arguments against Us, forgetting his own creation. He says, 'Who can give life back to bones after they have decayed?' [78] Say, 'He who created them in the first place will give them life again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation [79] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 78 - 79)

We have discussed, before, the matter of striking a likeness and we said that *darb* (striking) is when one object is violently brought down into contact with another object. A condition therein is that the one striking is stronger than the one being struck. If not, then, the result will be the opposite. Ar-Rafi`i(1) *Allah rest his soul* said in this regard:

O he who mocks the misfortunes of fate
You are harsh with yourself, not with fate
O he who strikes the boulder with a stick
Have you struck the stick or have you struck the rock?

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(1) Mustafa Sadiq Ar-Rafi`i, was a scholar of literature and a poet. He is originally from Tripoli in modern-day Lebanon. He was born in Bahtim in his maternal grandmother's house in 1881 AD and he died in Tanta in 1927 AD. His poetry was mostly introductory verses or lines, but his prose was first-class. His writings include *Wahi Al-Qalam*, *Diwan Sh`ir* and *Ta`rikh Adab Al-'Arab*.

Likewise, the striking of a likeness is the bringing into existence of something that comes into contact with something else, in order to clarify for you the real, decisive effect. When you doubt something, for example, it is clarified for you by way of an example or a likeness that cannot be doubted, and thus your mind understands. In this regard, we have His saying when He wants to clarify for us the falsity of idolatry, and the difference between it and monotheism. Allah says, ‘Allah puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to Allah, though most of them do not know.’ (*az-Zumar:* 29)

Yes, a slave who has for his masters several disputing partners and a slave owned by one master are not equal, and likewise idolatry and monotheism are not equal. His saying: ‘And he strikes out a likeness for us…’ (*Ya Sin:* 78) is referring to Ubay ibn Khalaf, and the likeness that he struck was that he took a bone that had decayed, and he began to crush it in front of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Do you claim, O Muhammad, that your Lord will bring this back to life after it turns to what you have seen’? Even if the verses were revealed regarding Ubay, they are certainly not restricted to him. Rather, they apply to anyone who denies the resurrection and refuses to believe in this matter.

The meaning of, ‘...and forgets his own creation…’ (*Ya Sin: 78*) is that if he reflected on himself and remembered his own creation, he would find the proof for what he is denying. Allah *Glorified is He* created you, man, from nothing, and thus you are brought into existence. When you die these remnants from you remain disintegrate and scattered in the earth. It is known, according to what our minds can perceive, that bringing into existence from that which already exists is easier than bringing into existence from nothing: ‘He is the One who originates creation and will do it again—this is even easier for Him…’ (*ar-Rum:* 27). The True Lord is addressing us in this verse according to our intellectual capacity and our logic, otherwise, it would not be said that something is easy and easier for Him. This can only be said with regards to human beings.

As for His words, ‘He says, “who can give life back to bones after they have decayed?”’ (*Ya Sin:* 78), they indicate that when this question is presented to the disbelievers who deny the resurrection they say: no one can bring the dead back to life. Why? It is because they are measuring the matter according to the incapacity of human beings, and not according to the absoluteness of the Creator's Power.

It is amazing that Allah *Glorified is He* has affirmed for man the attribute of creation. He says, '…Glory be to Allah, the best of creators' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14), while man rejects and denies Allah's ability to create. If your Lord does not refrain from granting the ability to create, do not begrudge Him for being the best of creators.

We said, before, that if you find an attribute of Allah *Glorified is He* being used to describe human beings, then, you must understand it within the framework of His being: 'There is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11) because Allah *Glorified is He* has a *wajh* (a face) but not like the faces we know; He has a *yadd* (a hand) but not like the hands we know and so forth. Allah *Glorified is He* is One and Unique in His Essence; One and Unique in His Attributes; and One and Unique in His actions. Allah *Glorified is He* exists and you exist, but your existence is not like His Existence. Allah *Glorified is He* is wealthy and you are wealthy, but your wealth is not like Allah's wealth. His wealth is inherent and is never separated from Him, while your wealth is given to you.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator and you are a creator, but there is a difference between your creation and Allah's creation. You create from that which already exists while He creates from nothingness. Your creation is inanimate, without life, whereas Allah's creation has life: it grows, nourishes itself, multiplies and so forth. Thus, you are a creator, but your Lord is the best of creators. Your Lord has attributes of absolute perfection, and from them He pours forth over His creation and gives them some of His attributes, but He still has Absolute Power.

The meaning of 'having been in a state of decay' (*ramim*)' (*Ya Sin:* 78) is the state of the bones when they are old, decayed and disintegrated.

Then, the True Lord responds to this denier and his ilk: 'Say, "He who created them in the first place…"' (*Ya Sin:* 79). 'Created them (*`Ansha`aha*)…' (*Ya Sin:* 79), mean He created them from nothing, and He is going to bring them into being again from that which He initially created. His saying: '…in the first place…' (*Ya Sin:* 79) in response to this denier reveals that there is another instance, and another bringing to life other than the first. His words: '…He has full knowledge of every act of creation' (*Ya Sin:* 79) refer to the first creation and the second creation. Knowledge of the first creation indicates granting man attributes and talents within his essence, settling him in the earth and providing him with the Way that regulates his life therein.

With this way, He guides him to the path of goodness, warns him about the paths of evil, and clarifies for him the subsequent reward for each. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* has Full Knowledge of the other creation in the Hereafter, i.e. He knows how to reward man according to all that he put forward (in the life of this world). Therefore, the meaning of '…He has full knowledge of every act of creation' (*Ya Sin:* 79) is that He has Full Knowledge of how to assign duties to him and how to reward him. The reward is commensurate with the duties assigned.

Muslim philosophers wanted to clarify this meaning for us. They said: 'When Allah wanted to create from nothingness, and before the sky and the earth existed, He said: 'O sky! Come out and be sky!', and thus it was. The same goes for the earth. Therefore, it is His Powerfulness that did, and it is the powerlessness of things that was done. So, what is the outcome of these two components? Indeed, both are existent and continuing; the powerfulness of the doer and the powerlessness of things'.

ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلشَّجَرِ ٱلۡأَخۡضَرِ نَارٗا فَإِذَآ أَنتُم مِّنۡهُ تُوقِدُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

It is He who produces fire for you out of the green
tree – lo and behold! – and from this you kindle fire [80]
(The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 80)

The True Lord is putting forth to them another evidence of His Absolute Power: 'if you are in denial of the resurrection then look at this material sign that you witness'. The one who brings decayed bones back to life is also the one who produces from the green tree fire that you kindle. Thus, the green twig turns into flames. Greenness is proof of wetness and moisture. How does fire come from water? This sign is seen every day in Arab environments. It is known that firewood is the first fuel known to man and used by him properly because it is the purest of fuels. It is also healthy. It doesn not pollute the environment or harm it. It is for you to compare between firewood and petrol, for example. Then, you will realise the difference.

أَوَلَيْسَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بِقَٰدِرٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُم ۚ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ ٱلْخَلَّٰقُ
ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٨١﴾ إِنَّمَآ أَمْرُهُۥٓ إِذَآ أَرَادَ شَيْـًٔا أَن يَقُولَ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٨٢﴾

Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the likes of these people? Of course He is! He is the All Knowing Creator [81] When He wills something to be, His way is to say, "Be"– and it is! [82] (The Quran, *Ya Sin:* 81- 82)

This is advancement in evidence. After He mentions the sign of producing fire from the green tree He puts forward stronger evidence which is the creation of the skies and the earth. The skies are evidence of something high and fixed that does not change. The earth is tangible evidence for us; we witness it and we come into direct contact with it. The standpoint of this verse comes in another verse where the True Lord says, 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though most people do not know it.' (*Ghafir:* 57)

If one of you said: 'Explain to us how the creation of the skies and the earth—despite the fact that they do not feel, speak or have knowledge and so forth—are greater than the creation of mankind', we say: 'Indeed, the creation of the skies and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind because from the time that Allah *Glorified is He* created them originally they have not changed, and they will remain as such until the Hour is established'. As for you, O man, you die. You die when you are a child, and you even die when you are an embryo in your mother's womb. You die in your youth and you die when you are are a decrepit old man. The utmost that man can reach if his life is lengthened in the life of this world is one hundred years or maybe a few years more. Then, how does your life span compare to the life span of the sun, the moon, or the earth? Have you ever seen a servant who has a longer life span than the one he serves?

We succeed one another in this universe as individuals, nations, and states; all disappear and come to an end, while the skies and the earth remain as they are, proud and mighty. No change happens to them. They never exit from the law of subjugation, in anything. From the time that Allah *Glorified is He* created this universe we have not seen a celestial body go out of its orbit, fail to comply with its appointed times or be prevented from carrying out its task.

This is the state of the inanimate objects in the skies and the earth, so what is your state, you who possess intellects? If we were to talk about material substance, it remains while you die. These inanimate objects support one another in meanings and values, while you differ amongst yourselves and fight with one another, so in what way are you better and greater creatures? That is why the True Lord responds in the form of a negative question: 'Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the likes of these people?' (*Ya Sin:* 81)

Then He says, '*bala* (yes), indeed He is able,' and '…He is the All Knowing Creator.' (*Ya Sin:* 81) The word *khallaq* (creator) is a hyperbolic form of the word *khaliq*. This is in order to stress the matter for the one who denies it. Furthermore, He is 'The All Knowing' (*Ya Sin:* 81). He is the All Knowing of who He created.

Then, He says, 'Verily, when He wills something to be, His way is to say to it, 'Be'—and it is!' (*Ya Sin:* 82) This is a subtle indication from the True Lord for everyone who denies the Resurrection. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to them: 'O you who deny Allah's Power to resurrect bones that have decayed, do you think that Allah creates by means of practice, in the same way that you create'? Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator and He creates without practice. Rather he creates with the word 'Be!', or indeed He creates merely as He wills. If He wills something it is, without Him saying or commanding anything. The word 'Be!' is only to help us understand the matter.

We clarified the process before, by way of example—and for Allah is the highest similitude. We said: 'How can you, O man, deny Allah's Power when He has given you something that is similar within yourself? When you, for example, want to stand up from your seat what do you do? Do you command your muscles to move? Do you know which muscles will make you stand up, and what nerves govern this process'?

You simply stand because of your will to stand, and you have no say in the matter. The evidence is that a small child who does not know anything about the formation of his body stands up if he wants to stand. So, if things move for you—O man—without you telling them to do so; is it appropriate for you to deny this with respect to your Lord and Creator?

If you said: 'Why do I not command my limbs, and say to them 'Do this and that...' We say: 'The True Lord says 'Be!' to something because He knows that things will carry out His command. They will not act against what He wills. As for you, O man, are you confident that they will carry out your command if you command them? Indeed, you are not confident of this matter, based on the proof that when Allah *Glorified is He* strips you off this power your limbs no longer obey you. Thus, if you want to stand you cannot. The limbs are paralysed and cannot move anymore’.

So, we say that if a created being can control his limbs simply by his will, are we going to deem it as far-fetched that the Creator, the Most Exalted, controls this universe that has been created by Him?

The word ‘Be!’ is said by Allah *Glorified is He* to make it easier for us to understand this matter. He says it because things never miss to obey Him and compliance with His command. As for you, if you said the same word (Be) nothing would respond to you. That is why the True Lord says, explaining how the earth responds to His command: ‘Obeying its Lord as it rightly must.’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 5) It is appropriate for the earth to listen and obey.

In His words, ‘...to say to it…’ (*Ya Sin:* 82), ‘it refers to the thing that has not come into existence yet. So, how does He address it when it is still non-existent? They said: ‘The Creator created everything in pre-eternity in a world called ‘*Alam Al-Mithal*’ (the world of analogies). So, the things do actually exist, but they await the command to become manifest and go out into the world of existence. That is why one of the knowers of Allah said: ‘they are matters that He reveals, but does not start’ (They do not have a start or an end). Allah *the Exalted* then says:

فَسُبْحَٰنَ ٱلَّذِى بِيَدِهِۦ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

So glory be to Him in whose Hand lies control over all things. It is to Him that you will all be brought back [83]
(The Quran, Ya Sin: 83)

We know from the previous verse that when the True Lord says ‘Be!’ things respond and obey Him. On the other hand, if man says the same word, nothing will respond to him. We said that if you find an attribute of Allah *Glorified is He* being used to describe human beings, then you must understand it within the framework of '...There is nothing like Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11). Thus, it is natural for all these verses and chapters to be concluded with 'So Glory be to Him in Whose hands is the dominion of all things…' (*Ya Sin:* 83). That is to say: transcendent is He above resembling anyone in His Essence, in His Attributes, and in His Actions.

The word *malakut* (the dominion) (*Ya Sin:* 83) is from *mulk* (dominion) and the three radical letters *mim*, *lam* and *kaf* are used for four meanings. The first is *maalik* (owner) and he is the one who owns something, regardless of how insignificant it is. Even if the only thing he owns is the clothes on his back he is still called *maalik*. The second is *malik* (king), and he is the one who dominates the one who owns, i.e. he is in a position to administer him and his behaviour. The third is *mulk* (dominion) and it is when a king ascends in outward matters that the people acknowledge. The fourth is *malakut* which means concealed and not manifest *mulk* (dominion). It is stronger and more general than *mulk*.

Something could be from the world of *al-malakutk,* but then it moves to the world of *al-mulk*, such as things that were concealed and man discovered them or invented them, and thus they became witnessed. There are other things that always remain in the world of *al-malakut* and we do not know anything about them except in the Hereafter. This is the type that disbelievers deny. In this regard, we have His saying about the affair of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'In this way We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth...' (*al-An'am:* 75).

Yes, Allah *Glorified is He* showed Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the world of *al-malakut* because when He showed him the world of *al-mulk* and tested him, he passed the test with excellence, and he was successful in every stage of his life. He was successful when he was an old man and was commanded to slaughter his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*. He was successful when he was thrown in the fire. For this reason, he became worthy of being shown the secrets of the universe, and the world of *al-malakut*. It's is just as if you have amongst your children one righteous child in whom you see signs of superiority; you will distinguish him in a way which gives him preference over the rest of your children. Likewise, whoever becomes very good at his worship of Allah, Allah perfects His giving to him.

In this regard we also have the story that the Quran relates to us in the chapter of *al-Kahf* of the righteous slave whom Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* accompanied and learned from; the one of whom Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and found one of Our servants—a man to whom We had granted Our Mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own.’ (*al-Kahf:* 65)

This righteous servant was not a prophet, nor was revelation given to him, but despite that the Prophet learned from him. Why? It is because he took what the messenger had come with and applied it to himself. When Allah *Glorified is He* saw from him that he could be trusted with His methods and secrets He increased his knowledge and granted him from His own knowledge, and unveiled to him the secrets of *al-malakut*.

Have you not noticed that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* got angry at him when he made the hole in the ship and purposely made it defective, while it belonged to poor impoverished people? This is the world of *al-mulk* that the righteous servant knew about. As for his knowledge of the world of *al-malakut*, it is in His saying ‘...I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force.’ (*al-Kahf:* 79) Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to the righteous servant part of the world of *al-malakut* as he revealed to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the *malakut* of the heavens.

The word *malakut* carries the meaning of hyperbole, such as *rahamut* (great mercy), *jabarut* (exercise of absolute power) and *rahabut* (great fear), so there is thus hyperbole in *mulk*; but we notice amongst the scholars of Quranic recitation that one of them says, ‘*malik yawm ad-din*’ ‘Master of the Day of Judgement’ (*al-Fatiha:* 4), instead of *malik* (without any hyperbole). They said: ‘It is because the Day of Judgement is being discussed, and on this day, all of the *mulk* is for Allah *Glorified is He* and no one owns anything, not even the clothes that they wear’. In this regard, we also have the words we say in the call to prayer: ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ (Allah is the Greatest); the attribute *Akbar* is mentioned without any hyperbole, and not His name *Al-Kabir* (the Ever-Great) is not mentioned. How can this then, be the starting supplication of the prayer, which is the pillar of the faith, instead of the name? They said: ‘It is because the call to prayer takes people away from their work so that they can respond to the call of their Lord, and work has its consideration in Islam because it is man's duty in life. With it he achieves obedience to Allah and that is why the religion appreciates work and does depreciate it.

Allahu Akbar indicates that work is great and important, but Allah *Glorified is He* is Greater and the call for your Lord is, thus, more important. As for *Al-Kabir* (the Ever-Great), it is one of Allah's Names, and it means that everything other than Him is small. That is why the call to prayer contains the description and not the name.

His word *malakut* in His statement: 'So Glory be to Him in Whose hands is the dominion of all things…' (*Ya Sin:* 83) means what you see and what you do not see of *al-mulk*—what is hidden from you, then you reached and discovered by knowledge; that which we don not see until Allah *Glorified is He* informs one of us, His servants, of: 'He is the One who knows what is hidden. He does not disclose it except to a messenger of His choosing.' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27)

The truth is that the divine secrets and hidden things of the universe are not discovered by man but rather, they are unveiled for him. Indeed, for every secret in the universe that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to manifest there is a lifetime and a birthdate. If its birthdate coincides with your searching then it appears on your hands, and if not then Allah *Glorified is He* makes it manifest for you coincidentally at its appointed time, if you have not been looking for it. That is why they say, 'Indeed seventy-seven percent of life's discoveries have come about coincidentally'.

Allah says in the verse of *Al-Kursi* (the verse of The Throne): '...He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His Knowledge except what He wills...' (*al-Baqara:* 255). Thus, man only encompasses knowledge of a small portion of Allah's Knowledge, and he does not encompass this simple knowledge except by Allah's Knowledge and permission, and only when He gives permission for the birth and appearance of this thing.

His saying, '...and unto Him you all will be brought back!' (*Ya Sin:* 83) refers to the Day of Judgment. So, make sure you remember this reality. Whoever does not believe in the blessing of creation let him be instilled with fear of returning and going back. You were not created in vain and you will not be left without any purpose.

the chapter of

as Saffat

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *as Saffat*(1) (Those Who Set the Ranks):

وَٱلصَّٰٓفَّٰتِ صَفّٗا ﴿١﴾ فَٱلزَّٰجِرَٰتِ زَجۡرٗا ﴿٢﴾
فَٱلتَّٰلِيَٰتِ ذِكۡرًا ﴿٣﴾ إِنَّ إِلَٰهَكُمۡ لَوَٰحِدٞ ﴿٤﴾

By those [angels] ranged in rows [1] Who rebuke reproachfully [2] And recite Allah's word [3] Truly your Lord is One [4] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 1-4)

The rhetorical device that Allah *Glorified is He* uses here is that of an oath. Allah *Glorified is He* is swearing upon the fact that, ‘Truly your Lord is One’ (*as-Saffat:* 4). The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of Allah’s Will regarding oaths. It is Allah’s wish that if we are to swear that we swear by Him alone. Nevertheless, we have seen in our studies that when the True Lord swears, He does so by one of His creations; sometimes He swears by His angels, sometimes by animals, sometimes by the mountains or the dawn and so on

The scholars said that this is because Allah *Glorified is He* may swear by whatever he wills to whomever He chooses. As for you and me we should swear only by Allah *Glorified is He*. To swear by something is a form of exalting that thing, and it is not appropriate for the believer to exalt any except Allah *Glorified is He*. It is incorrect to say, ‘by the life of so-and-so’ or ‘by so-and-so’s head’. If you want to swear you must swear by Allah *Glorified is He* as it has come to us in the Noble Hadith: ‘Whosoever swears, let him swear by Allah.’(1)

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(1) This is the 37th chapter in the Noble Quran and has 182 verses. It is unanimously agreed that it is a Meccan chapter, as stated by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis (8/5699). As-Suyuti mentions in Al-Itqan (1/27) on the authority of Ibn Ad-Daris in the chapter of Fada`il Al-Quran that the chapter of *as-Saffat* was revealed after the chapter of *al-An`am* and before the chapter of *Luqman*. On this basis, the chapter of *as-Saffat* would be the 55th chapter to be revealed.

If it happens that an oath has apparently been sworn by other than Allah *Glorified is He* know that this is not considered to be an oath, especially if it came from a scholar, or when the statement reveals an expectation that is based on certainty, such as one says, for instance, ‘by your father’s life, O so-and-so, do such-and-such’. This is not an oath; this is a *musa`alah* (a way of requesting). An oath is when you swear on something whether it happened or not. When one seeks the occurrence of something, however, it is called a request. Similarly, the True Lord says, ‘...be mindful of Allah, in whose name you make requests of one another and the wombs...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1). He says, *tasa`alun* (make requests), and *al-arham* (the wombs). This means: ‘you request one another also by virtue of these ties of kinship caused by the wombs’. According to another way of recitation it is read *bil-arham* (by the wombs), in the genitive case (*majrur*) (‘bi’ which means by, causes the verb to be read as *bil-arhami*).

The True Lord swears by what He wills to whom He wills, whereas, you swear only by Allah *Glorified is He*. It may be that a thing is insignificant in your eyes, yet, its creator deems great, and has a role that you are unaware of. When Allah *Glorified is He* swears by such a thing He draws your attention towards its role and its importance. For example, when the revelation upon the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* paused for a while, the disbelievers did not look to the wisdom in that. The wisdom therein was that the process of revelation was hard upon the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* such that it would take all his strength, making his forehead perspire profusely(1). If revelation came down upon him while he was riding an animal it would groan and lay down (2) due to the weight of the revelation. As Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Surely, We will send down to you a weighty Message.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 5)

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(1) *This was related by Muslim in his Sahih (1646) in the chapter Kitab Al-Iman in the third Hadith on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn ‘Umar who related that the Messenger of Allah* peace and blessings be upon him *found ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab on his mount swearing by his father, so the Messenger of Allah* peace and blessings be upon him *called them and said, ‘Truly Allah has forbidden you from swearing by your fathers; so whosoever swears oaths, let him swear by Allah or remain silent.*’

The period when the revelation paused was a mercy for the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* a lightening of his burdens and a time for him to regain his composure. In addition, it caused him to long for the revelation, and so it resumed once again. The disbelievers however took no heed of this and said, ‘Surely Muhammad’s Lord *qalah* (has scorned him).’(3) *Qalah* means ‘He has been callous to him and abandoned him’. The self-contradiction that this statement contains is obvious; when called to faith they deny Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Lord, but when an intermission in the revelation comes they say that his Lord has left him, thereby admitting that he does have a Lord!

For this reason, the True Lord chose to clarify this matter for them, manifesting their foolishness with the following oath which was revealed very appropriately at this time. It also contains a subtle indication of the link between the things sworn by and the issues sworn to. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘By the morning brightness and by the night when it grows still, your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate you, and the future will be better for you than the past; your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied.' (*ad-Duha:* 1-5)

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(1) *`Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, ‘I saw the Revelation come down upon him peace and blessings be upon him on an extremely cold day and when it had passed his brow was indeed perspiring profusely.’ i.e., the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him was perspiring a great deal on a day that was unusually cold. Al-Bukhari related this Hadith in his Sahih (2, Kitab Bad` Al-Wahi).*

(2) *Al-Bukhari related it in his Sahih (4592) with a connected chain of transmission (mawsula) from the Hadith of Zayd ibn Thabit Allah be pleased with him that, ‘The verse, “Such of the believers as remain passive – other than the disabled – cannot be deemed equal to those who strive hard in Allah’s cause with their possessions and their lives...” (an-Nisa': 95), was revealed to the Messenger of Allah while his thigh was upon mine. It became so heavy for me that I feared that my thigh would be crushed.’*

(3) *Ibn Kathir relates in his Tafsir (4/532) on the authority of Jundub ibn 'Abdullah Allah be pleased with him who said, ‘Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him was a long time coming to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and the polytheists began to say, “Muhammad’s Lord has left him.” So Allah revealed, “By the bright morning hours and the night when it grows still and dark. Thy Sustainer has not forsaken you, nor does He scorn you.” (ad-Duha: 1-3), to him.*

The meaning of this is, 'You were worn out O Muhammad by the revelation and it was necessary for you take a rest so that your soul would come to desire and long for it. After you have rested your struggle to receive the revelation will be lightened and you will taste its sweetness once again and it will become easier for you'. The True Lord chose here to swear by something that is clear and present, with which no one could ever argue.

The disbelievers, surely, knew: '...the morning brightness' (*ad-Duha:* 1), when the sun is rising and sheds light on the world. Moreover, they were well acquainted with: '...the night when it grows still' (*ad-Duha:* 2), i.e. it becomes silent and tranquil. The point here is that when the bright morning hours come and the tranquil night follows it, are we to infer that the morning, with its brightness, will not return once again? No! Indeed, the morning will come again after you have rested from the tiredness caused by the day's work and have replenished your energy for another day.

The meaning of, '…and the future will be better for you than the past…' (*ad-Duha:* 4) is that when the revelation resumes it will be sweeter than the first time, lighter and easier to bear.

So, as we said, the True Lord swears by whatever He wills of His creation to teach us that these are magnificent things in the eyes of their creator, and that we have become heedless of aspects of their importance. He also swears by whatever He wishes of His creation to help us understand things unknown by means of things known to us.

In the first verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'By those [angels] ranged in rows' (*as-Saffat:* 1). The letter *waw* at the beginning of this verse is called *waw al-qasm* (the *waw* for oaths), like the letters *ta`a* and *ba`a* which are also used for oaths. We can swear an oath by saying *wa Allah* (by Allah), *bi Allah* or *ta Allah*. We can also identify a *qassam* (an oath)—without these 'letters for oaths'—by the *lam* at the beginning of *jawab al-qassam* (the thing sworn to); as in: '*innak la min al-mursalin*', 'you [Muhammad] are truly one of the messengers sent' (*Ya Sin:* 3), which followed the oath: 'By the wise Quran' (*Ya Sin:* 3).

You do not swear about something initially, rather you make an oath if the person you are talking to denies what you say. So, you swear to emphasize the information. The strength of the oath and the emphasis you use depends on the strength of the denial. The True Lord says, for example, 'By the Day of Resurrection…' (*al-Qiyama:* 1) or 'I swear by this city, and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city. [I swear] by parent and offspring, that We have created man or toil and trial.' (*al-Balad:* 1-4) Also in: 'Nay, I swear by the positions of the stars, a mighty oath, if you only knew that this is truly a noble Quran.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 75-76)

There are oaths in these last verses, as evidenced by the existence of *jawab al-qassam* (the thing sworn to), but why does the Quran put these oaths in the negative saying *la* (Nay) before the word '*uqsim*' (I swear). The scholars say that the use of the negative, here, makes the meaning stronger than using the positive, for the oath comes only to emphasise the thing sworn to, and the meaning of 'Nay' is that this matter is clear, there is no need for an oath because an oath is to emphasise something that is doubted or denied. As for this matter, it is clear and despite this I will swear for you.

Regarding the meaning of, 'By those [angels] ranged in rows, who rebuke reproachfully and recite Allah's word' (*as-Saffat:* 1-3), the scholars say that 'those ranged in ranks' are the angels ranged in rows. *As-Saff* is the ordering of a group in such a way that there is no distinction between one individual and another. *As-Saff* does not merely refer to a group; it refers to a group that is disciplined and harmonious. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to straighten the rows when he was inspecting his forces before a battle. When he saw a man breaking rank and not standing in line, he poked him in the stomach so that he would set himself straight in the row. This man had deep love for the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, he said, 'You hurt me, O Messenger of Allah.' To which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'Here is my stomach, take vengeance from it.' So, the man came forward and kissed the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'O Messenger of Allah, by Allah, I desire to be martyred and I would love my last contact in this life to be that of my body to have touched your noble body.'

The formation of ranks is an indication of orderliness, commitment, and preparedness to receive orders. Thus, the angels are arranged in ranks, awaiting orders so that each one may fulfil his role and duty.

When we consider the words derived from the root *sad, fa`a* and *fa`a* in the Quran, we find that they revolve around this meaning. Examples of this are evident in Allah's words: 'Therefore settle your plan, then come standing in ranks...' (*Ta Ha:* 64). *Saffa* means: grouped together and united. He also says: 'And your Lord has come and the angels, rank upon rank.' (*al-Fajr:* 22) The words '*saffan saffa*' mean (rank upon rank).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says, 'Have they not seen the birds above them expanding (their wings) and contracting (them)? What is it that withholds them save the Most Merciful...' (*al-Mulk:* 19)? *Saffatin*, here, means: expanding their wings. How true this is! You see a bird in the sky spreading its wings and not moving them, and despite this, it does not fall. Similarly, you see it draw in its wings and it remains in its place. So, what is it that prevents it from falling? It is the Most Merciful who holds it up. It is as though there is in this upholding of the bird which we see and witness a proof of the truthfulness of His statement: 'Verily, it is Allah alone who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate from their orbits) – for if they should ever deviate, there is none that could uphold them after He will have ceased to do so. But, verily, He is Ever-Forbearing, Much-Forgiving!' (*Fatir:* 41)

So, His upholding of the bird is an example of how He upholds the heavens, except that the former is short term while the latter is long term.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says about the angels in general, 'we are ranged in ranks.' (*as-Saffat:* 165), i.e. we wait, disciplined, waiting for commands. Here *as-saff* indicates order and that no individual seeks to outrank another. It also gives an indication of the awe in which they hold the One before Whom they are arranged. Another example is His statement about the bliss of paradise: 'cushions set in rows.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 15)

Some of the scholars are of the opinion that *as-saffat* has a wider meaning than this and that what is intended by it is the proclamation of Islam, the spreading of its message, its defence, the protection of the freedom for people to choose Islam and of fighting. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah truly loves those who fight in solid lines for His cause, like a well-compacted wall.' (*as-Saff:* 4). The word *saffan* means: 'in solid lines.' The meaning of, '... in His cause...' (*as-Saff:* 4) is: in order to proclaim His religion and to defend it in the face of enemies. The proclamation of the religion is the role of the scholars and its defence is the role of the soldiers on the battlefield. Both groups should be as one body, like a '…like a well-compacted wall' (*as-Saff:* 4). For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...out of each community, a group should go out to gain understanding of the religion, so that they can teach their people when they return and so that they can guard themselves against evil.' (*at-Tawba:* 122)

Thus, a scholar does not go out to fight because his role is that of undertaking the propagation of the faith. The warrior on the other hand sacrifices his life and dies for the sake of the call to Islam, and it is this sacrifice that proves the truthfulness of the call because had it not been truly in the believer's soul, he would not have sacrificed himself for its sake. On top of this, his willingness to sacrifice his life is a proof of his belief in his going to a better place.

We are all familiar with the story of the companion of Prophet Muhammad who, while chewing a date, was listening to what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had to say regarding the reward of the martyr. He said to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Is there nothing between me and paradise except that I should fight these people and be killed by them?' 'Yes, Indeed.' Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied at which he threw away the date, considering chewing it to be too tardy, and rushed off to the battlefield.(1)

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(1) *On the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah Allah be pleased with him who said, 'A man asked the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him on the day of Uhud, 'If I were to be killed, where would I be?' 'In Paradise', he peace and blessings be upon him replied. At this, he threw away some dates that were in his hand and went and fought until he was killed.' This was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4046). Ibn Hajar said, 'I did not come across the name of the man. Ibn Bashkawal, however, claimed that it was `Umayr ibn Al-Hammam and sought to prove it through the Hadith of Anas related by Muslim that mentions `Umayr ibn Al-Hammam. It is clear in the Hadith of Anas Allah be pleased with him however that what is mentioned therein occurred on the day of Badr, so it appears that they are two different stories that happened to two separate people, and Allah Glorified is He knows best.'*

Thus, fighting in Allah’s Cause is either with one’s tongue or one’s spear, but it must be known that the one who fights with a sword does not carry it so that he can force non-believers to believe, for there can be no compulsion in religion. Rather, he does so to protect his freedom and his ability to choose this religion. The proof of this is that many countries were conquered by Islam and yet the peoples stuck to their beliefs and religions.

The unity of the ranks mentioned in these verses does not apply only to the fighters on the battlefield, but it is just as applicable to those who carry the message. These scholars must also be as one body in their call to Islam, undivided by difference of opinion. They must hold fast to that which is *muhkam* (decisive) of Allah’s words, and they must not accuse each other of disbelief regarding that of it which is *mutashabih* (susceptible of different interpretations).

As for Allah’s words: ‘who rebuke reproachfully’ (*as-Saffat:* 2), the scholars say that this is the job of the angels. They drive back the devils who try to eavesdrop. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘we used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him.’ (*al-Jinn:* 9)

Before the advent of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the devils used to go up to the heavens to eavesdrop for news. Allah *Glorified is He* allowed them to pick up some bits of information which they conveyed to their associates among mankind, yet, they added falsities to the information they had and then told people of these things pretending to know the unseen. When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, they were prevented from eavesdropping, and Allah *Glorified is He* made them subject to shooting stars which would strike and burn them.

If one were to ask, ‘How can this be when we see the many stars stay as they are, not falling from the sky’? We say, ‘Among the stars, there are those that beautify the sky and those that strike the devils. The proof of this is in Allah’s words: ‘We have adorned the lowest heaven with stars, and made them a safeguard against every rebellious devil: they cannot eavesdrop on the Higher Assembly, pelted from every side, driven away, they will have perpetual torment.’ (*as-Saffat:* 6-9)

As for Allah’s words, ‘and those who recite Allah’s word’ (*as-Saffat:* 3), the scholars said that this refers to the angels that brought the revelation down to the messengers *peace be upon them* for they recite it to them after they have brought it down from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Other scholars understood a different meaning from, ‘By those [angels] ranged in rows’ (*as-Saffat:* 1), from which other meanings for ‘who rebuke reproachfully, and those who recite Allah’s word’ (*as-Saffat:* 2-3) can be derived. They said that ‘By those [angels] ranged in rows’ (*as-Saffat:* 1) refers to the believers and the rows they form in their prayers, for they are the foundation of the religion and a symbol of social cohesion and unity.

That is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Straighten your rows, for indeed, straightening the rows is from the perfection of the prayer.’(1) He *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, ‘Indeed, Allah does not look at the crooked row.’(2) Lining up in rows in the prayer prevent break away from others and indicate discipline, submission to Allah and standing humbled in front of the True Lord. So, just as the angels are arranged in rows, so you, O believers are also arranged; and for each one there are forms of worship and a form of prayer.

So, once we have straightened our rows and are standing ready for Allah *Glorified is He* we start our prayer by saying, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan’, in a way of driving Satan away. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘By those [angels] ranged in rows, who rebuke reproachfully’ (*as-Saffat:* 1-2). The meaning of ‘and those who recite Allah’s word’ (*as-Saffat:* 3) is what we recite after of Allah’s words: ‘Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.’ (*al-Fatiha:* 3-2)

What we have discussed so far was the oath; so what is that is being sworn to? The oath has been taken regarding Allah’s words: ‘truly your Lord is One’

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(1) *Al-Bukhari related it in his Sahih (723) and Muslim in his Sahih (433) in the chapter of Kitab As-Salat – Bab Taswiyat As-Sufuf (28). Both of them related it on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *Among the Hadiths that have been related along these lines is the Hadith that Ahmad related in his Musnad (2/97) and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (1/178) on the authority of Abdullah ibn ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Straighten the lines and bring the shoulders together, fill the gaps and go easy on the arms of your brothers, and do not leave any spaces for the Devil.’*

(*as-Saffat:* 4). In addition to the fact that this statement is *jawab al-qassam* (the answer to the thing sworn to), Allah *Glorified is He* has emphasised it further by adding the word truly. He, then, emphasised it even further by adding the letter lam: *la wahid* (is One). This is because this affirmation is the basis of the religion and the essence of belief. The true Allah *Glorified is He* is One and the Guardian of all of this. We have said earlier that *wahid* (One) is not the same as *ahad* (singular), for *Wahid* means that there is no other like Him, whereas *Ahad* means that He is not composed of parts; He is One in His Essence.

Then, the True Lord says:

رَّبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَرَبُّ ٱلْمَشَٰرِقِ ﴿٥﴾

Lord of the heavens and earth and everything between them, Lord of every sunrise [5] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 5)

In another verse Allah says, ‘Everything in the heavens and on Earth, everything between them, everything beneath the soil, belongs to Him.’ (*Ta Ha:* 6) That which is ‘beneath the soil’ is what we need to search for in order to discover, moving it, as we said before, from the concealed world to the seen world.

Here Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…Lord of the sunrises’ (*as-Saffat:* 5). In another place He says, ‘...by the Lord of the sunrises and sunsets...’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 40). Thus, the True Lord leaves some space for the use of terms that are actually intimations leading to the gain of an intellectual grasp. So, as long as there are sunrises there must be sunsets per contra. This is because the sun does not rise on a people except that it sets on another. Thus, we call this inseparableness.

When we explore these two words in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* we find that sometimes they are used in the singular *al-mashriq* and *al-maghrib*, ‘He is Lord of the east and west...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 9), sometimes in the dual, *al-mashriqayn* and *al-maghribayn,* ‘[He is] Lord of the two sunrises and Lord of the two sunsets’ (*ar-Rahman:* 17) and sometimes in the plural, *al-mashariq* and *al-magharib*, ‘...the Lord of the sunrises and sunsets...’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 40). This is because when Allah *Glorified is He* is addressing one person in one place he says *al-mashriq* and *al-maghrib* because one place has one east and one west. If there are several places then there are several *mashariq* (sunrises) and *magharib* (sunsets). We can see that within one country, for example, the sunset in Cairo is not the same as the sunset in Alexandria. If we then look to the whole globe, we realise that there are an infinite number of points of sunrise and sunset; in every half of a degree there is a new point of sunrise and a new point of sunset.

Due to the wisdom of the Creator in making the earth turn upon itself, and around the sun, is that it spreads the necessities of life all over the planet. Were the sun to stay facing just one place that place would be scorched, and if it were to remain absent from any sun that place would freeze up. The result of this movement is that the True Lord is worshipped in every way always. We have stated previously that at any given time, there are people praying the dawn prayer, people praying the noon prayer, others praying the afternoon prayer, the evening prayer, and the night prayer. So, the prayer continues throughout the day and the night.

As for His words: '[He is] Lord of the two sunrises and Lord of the two sunsets.' (*ar-Rahman:* 17), the scholars say that *al-mashriqayn* to the east and the west or to the sunrise in summer and the sunrise in winter.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّا زَيَّنَّا ٱلسَّمَآءَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا بِزِينَةٍ ٱلۡكَوَاكِبِ (٦) وَحِفۡظٗا مِّن كُلِّ شَيۡطَٰنٖ مَّارِدٖ (٧)
لَّا يَسَّمَّعُونَ إِلَى ٱلۡمَلَإِ ٱلۡأَعۡلَىٰ وَيُقۡذَفُونَ مِن كُلِّ جَانِبٖ (٨) دُحُورٗاۖ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٞ وَاصِبٌ (٩)

We have adorned the lowest heaven with stars [6] and made them a safeguard against every rebellious devil [7] they cannot eavesdrop on the Higher Assembly – pelted from every side [8] driven away, they will have perpetual torment [9]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 6 - 9)

How true this is! When we look at the sky at night we find it adorned with glittering stars. In these stars are secrets and wonders that the illiterate Bedouin was aware of. He knew the star, its name, its place, and its movement. Moreover, he used it to guide him in his travels through the desert. It is as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and landmarks. And by the stars they find the right way.’ (*an-Nahl:* 16)

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(1) *On the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him who said, 'The sun has a place of rising in the winter and a place of setting in the winter, and it has a place of rising in the summer and a place of setting in the summer, distinct from its place of rising in the winter and distinct from its place of setting in the winter.' It was related by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (7/695) and he attributed it to Sa`id ibn Mansur, Abd ibn Humayd, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim.*

When we reflect upon these stars in the sky we see that Allah *Glorified is He* desired to have mercy upon us by protecting us from the heat of the sun, while leaving some light that guides us at night; for these stars radiate light in the same fashion as the sun.

The stars have another role, ‘and made them a safeguard against every rebellious devil:’ (*as-Saffat:* 7). That is to say, these stars protect us from the devils because they come down upon them and burn them. This type of stars is called *nayazik* (meteors). As for the stars that ornament the sky, they remain as they are, for they have no role to play in this matter. The stellar bodies that have been set aside for the rebellious devils will however decrease in number.

Al-Marid (rebel) refers to the one who turns against the path of his Lord following in the footsteps of Satan. Among his offspring are those who take the same stances that Satan took in regard to Adam *peace be upon him*. If someone were to ask, ‘Allah wants his path to encompass the whole world so that peace, safety, and tranquillity may encompass it also, then why did he create Satan to rebel against Him’? We say that He did it to strengthen the believer’s faith in the face of opposition. If there were no opposition, what distinction would there be if all creation are believers and all are obedient? Hence, the reason behind this is to purify the people of faith and to put them to the test. By such means we will know those who are steadfast; for it is they who will carry the message of Islam so that it might endure until the Last Hour. Such a message can only be carried by people of resolution.

The True Lord says, ‘they cannot eavesdrop on the Higher Assembly, pelted from every side’ (*as-Saffat:* 8). Let us consider that these verses come after Allah’s oath by the angles ‘who rebuke reproachfully’ (*as-Saffat:* 1). We said that one of the meanings of *az-zajirati zajra* is: the angels who drive the devils back from eavesdropping on the highest council from where they used to take some pieces of information and pass them on to their associates among the soothsayers, who would add many untruths to it in order to lead people astray.

Incidents of eavesdropping were numerous before the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but when he was sent, Allah *Glorified is He* prevented them from it and subjected them to shooting stars that would come down upon them and drive them back. As the Quran tells us, ‘We used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him’ (*al-Jinn:* 9). This was to ennoble the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and prevent the devils from introducing any falsifications that might corrupt people’s beliefs. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘who rebuke reproachfully’ (*as-Saffat:* 1).

One of the strange things about the word *az-zajr* (driving back) is that it has two meanings. The sentence *zajartu insan* means ‘I prevented a man’ from doing something. *Zajartu ad-da*’ means ‘I drove the animal onwards’. An example of the latter is the poet’s saying:

Woe to us, two intimates, a promise between us,
But this one has his nest, and that one another,
But when my yearning for reunion became too pressing,
I drove my horses to fly and not canter.

An example of the former would be the verses:

There remains not between us any room for love,
I forbade you from obscenities and you forbade me to advice.

In short, the meaning is that these devils have been prevented from listening to any news from above since the advent of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* yet they try, but the angels prevent them and send down shooting stars upon them.

In Allah’s saying, ‘And are pelted from every side’ pelting refers to being assailed with meteors such that each shot is accurate. ‘Repelled’ means they are reprehensible, rejected, and scorned. ‘And for them is a constant punishment’ it will be enduring and unchanging. He has described the suffering as being lasting because it comes between him and the execution of his goal of eavesdropping on, and gleaning news from above.

إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ ٱلْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُۥ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ ﴿١٠﴾

If any [of them] stealthily snatches away a fragment, he will be pursued by a piercing flame [10] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 10)

Thus, some of these rebels will indeed manage to snatch some news; they will not however be able to escape with it nor convey it to their associates. Snatching is a type of taking possession without right. Each one of us has property and possession of it, and nothing negates that possession except if someone takes it away from us through some sort of transgression or oppression. Transgression and oppression have many means such as snatching, which is to take something away from someone very quickly, such that they see you but are unable to stop you because the thing is distant; like a small child snatching something from a shop and running off. If the owner is present and able to grab the offender but the latter fights and overcomes him and takes the thing, then this is called wringing. If the offender takes the thing without the owner's knowledge it is called robbery. If he has been put in charge of the wealth and he takes some of it is called embezzling. These are all ways of taking possession of wealth without right. Thus, the devils snatch some news and try to flee with it but how wrong they are; 'pursued by a burning flame' will come down upon them. The meaning of 'piercing' is that it will penetrate the atmosphere until it reaches its target as quickly as possible. (1)

If one were to say, 'Why are they not prevented from eavesdropping in the first place'? The scholars said there is a difference between someone being prevented from something in the first place, and being permitted to get his hands on it but not fulfil his goal or benefit from it. Allah allows them to actually hear some news but then the angels and the meteors instantly bear down upon them from every direction. In this way, their affliction is greater. They are afflicted by the trouble to eavesdrop, the attempt to flee and the resulting exhaustion, in addition to the failure to benefit from what was heard.

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(1) *It is related on the authority of Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'Indeed a Jinni will come to eavesdrop. If he manages to overhear something he is assailed by meteors. He says to the one following him, "It was such and such."' This was related by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (al-A'raf: 80) and he attributed it to Ibn Jarir and Ibn Mundhir.*

فَٱسۡتَفۡتِهِمۡ أَهُمۡ أَشَدُّ خَلۡقًا أَم مَّنۡ خَلَقۡنَآۚ إِنَّا خَلَقۡنَٰهُم مِّن طِينٖ لَّازِبِۭ ﴿١١﴾

So [Prophet], ask the disbelievers: is it harder to create them than other beings We have created? We created them from sticky clay [11] (The Quran*, as-Saffat:* 11)

Allah's saying, 'inquire of them' is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When a man is setting out to do something and is ready to embark upon a course of action yet he does not know how to go by it, he goes to someone who is more knowledgeable than he is and seeks his opinion and the strength to carry out the job. So, it is as though he was weak and desired to strengthen himself with another's opinion. So, it is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* has trusted them to give their opinion and provide the answer. For Allah *Glorified is He* knows that the opponents will find nothing but the truth to reply with. Allah *Glorified is He* does not state the answer Himself for this reason; rather, He has them provide it by way of confirmation. A statement is something that can be believed or denied whereas confirmation cannot be denied by anyone. For this reason, it is said, 'confirmation is the master of proofs'.

The question, 'Then inquire of them, [O Muhammad], "Are they a stronger [or more difficult] creation or those [others] We have created?"' means, 'was their creation a greater affair than that of the heavens and earth'? Allah does not provide the answer because it is so obvious. It could only be that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater and mightier than their creation. Because of this, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind, but most of the people do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57) If one needs proof in this matter, then ponder the creation of oneself and the creation of the heavens and the earth. Even though the heavens and the earth are at your disposal, they are older than you and will outlast you. Since Allah first created them, they have remained unflinching. As for man, he may die in childhood, in youth or in senility. He dies and he leaves his legacy behind for the coming generations to inherit. Heaven and earth on the other hand are greater and mightier because they are enduring creations and they are subjugated by choice. They said, 'We have come willingly.' (*Fussilat:* 11)

Hence, they chose to be subservient. Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 72) There is a difference between the ability of a person to take responsibility upon himself and his ability to fulfil it. One may take a responsibility upon oneself and intend to fulfil it but cannot guarantee that one will do so, for perhaps circumstances might change, or something might overtake you that comes between you and its completion. That is why the heavens and the earth held back from accepting the aforementioned trust, abandoning what they wanted for what their Lord wanted, and were thus subservient. So, they, too, were given a choice, the difference being that they made their choice with one word which extended to all time. Man, however, chose to always be choosing to do, or not to do. Moreover, the heavens and the earth and in-between of creatures, planets, bodies, and constellations move in a well-planned, precise order, never differing or deviating. ‘The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation. And the stars and trees prostrate.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5-6) ‘It is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming.’ (*Ya Sin:* 40) As for man, he stumbles in his life and opposes the way of his Lord, turning away from the path that has been laid out for him. So, which of these creations is more magnificent, greater in its formation, and more correct in its performance? These disbelievers are unable despite their disbelief, to say other than, ‘the heavens and the earth are greater and mightier than the creation of man’.

Another example of this is: ‘And if you asked them who created them, they would surely say, “Allah.”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87), and…, if you asked them who created the heavens and earth, they would surely say, “Allah.”’ (*az-Zumar:* 38) These are all realities that cannot be denied, even by the disbelievers. Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives them another example of the truth of this matter saying, ‘Indeed, We created men from sticky clay.’ This is their origin, so where do they stand in comparison to the heavens and the earth?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling us here about the first creation of man, ‘Then inquire of them, [O Muhammad], “Are they a stronger [or more difficult] creation or those [others] We have created?” Indeed, We created men from sticky clay.' Adam *peace be upon him* was created out of clay and Eve was created after him. The Quran tells us the story of the creation of Adam, but Allah *Glorified is He* suffices with saying, 'and of it created its mate' (*an-Nisa':* 1) when describing the creation of Eve.

The scholars said that 'and of it' means 'of the same sort of creation', so it is possible that Eve was created out of clay as was Adam or was created from one of his ribs. In any case, we return to an origin of clay. Allah *Glorified is He* creates whatsoever He wills.

So, the first man, Adam *peace be upon him* was created from clay, and of his sort was his wife created. Then came Adam's offspring after he moved on from his earthen nature and became human. So we, even though we come from a human lineage, still have our origin in clay. If one were to ask, 'Where is his earthen nature'? He has taken a different form that bears no resemblance to earth; for if he washes with water he does not dissolve and disintegrate as clay does?'

We would say it is necessary that man, be he the first man or his offspring, return back to his original source, which is clay. Man bears children and multiplies by means of the sperm of the male and the egg of the female, but where did these two come from? From blood; and blood is produced from food; and food comes from the earth and clay. Thus, whatever the case, we are created from clay. The only difference is that in one case there is an intermediary and in the other there is not. The True Lord *Glorified is He* alerted us to this matter in His saying, 'We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.' (*Fussilat:* 53)

We did not witness the process of creation; we were only informed of it by Allah. Thus, we know that man was created from clay that underwent these stages, until Allah breathed into it the spirit and filled it with life.

Then there is another thing; when the body of man, created from clay and nourished by food that comes from clay, was analysed by scientists, they found that it is composed of 16 amino acids, the first of them is oxygen, then carbon, then hydrogen, then nitrogen etc. These are the same elements that agricultural soil which gives us our food is composed of. So here is another proof of Allah's Truthfulness.

بَلۡ عَجِبۡتَ وَيَسۡخَرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ وَإِذَا ذُكِّرُواْ لَا يَذۡكُرُونَ ﴿١٣﴾
وَإِذَا رَأَوۡاْ ءَايَةٗ يَسۡتَسۡخِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

You marvel as they scoff [12] take no heed when they are warned [13] and resort to ridicule when they see a sign [14] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 12-14)

What was it that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* wondered about? He was surprised by their rejection and disbelief despite the clarity of the cogent proofs of the truthfulness of the case for faith. We furnished them proof upon proof, but they still disbelieved. That is why Allah says in another place, addressing His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘And if you are astonished, [O Muhammad] - then astonishing is their saying.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* is confirming Muhammad’s astonishment. The meaning is therefore, ‘If you are astonished Muhammad, it is because what they said was indeed astonishing’. But who considers this astonishing? It is possible that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was astonished and it is possible that Allah *Glorified is He* was too. So, does Allah *Glorified is He* gets astonished as we do? The scholars maintained it is true, and the proof of which is that this verse has another reading that affirms the speaker is Allah *Glorified is He*. Further proof of this can be found in the Hadith, ‘Your Lord is amazed by the young man who has no sensual passion.(1)’ Why? Because he has gone against general human nature, or has overpowered his lower self and controlled it, such that he does not do what other young men do. This is something extraordinary. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is astonished by this behaviour and He rewards it with an extraordinary reward.

We have already said that if we find an attribute that is shared between ourselves and the True Lord *Glorified is He* then we must look at it in the light of the verse, ‘there is nothing like unto Him’ (*ash-Shura:* 11). Of this sort is

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(1) *On the authority of `Uqba ibn `Amir who said, ‘The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, “Truly Allah is amazed at the young man who has no sensual passion.”’ It was related by Ahmad in his Musnad (4: 151) and Ibn Abu `Asim in As-Sunna (1: 250) Al-Haytami mentioned it in Majma` Az-Zawa`id (10: 270) and attributed it to Ahmad, Abu Ya`la and At-Tabarani and said that, ‘its chain of narration is good.’*

His saying, ‘Indeed, the hypocrites [think to] deceive Allah, but He is deceiving them.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 142) And His saying, ‘But they scheme, and Allah schemes. And Allah is the best of schemers.’ (*al-Anfal:* 30) Beware therefore of saying, ‘Allah is deceptive’ or ‘Allah is a schemer’ because there is a difference between Allah’s names and the actions that Allah has attributed to Himself. Scheming, for instance, is a human action by which cheating, deception and enmity are intended so that one might get to the end of one’s desires. Such scheming is then met with other scheming that seeks to obscure it or be even more devious than it. Scheming is full of convolutions and artifices to cover one’s evil deeds from one’s enemy. This is human’s scheming for one another. If, however, Allah schemes against you, then nothing can save you from His design. That is why Allah says *Glorified is He*, ‘And Allah is the best of schemers.’

As for Allah’s saying, ‘while they mock’ the meaning is that: you are astonished by their denial and disbelief despite the clarity of the proofs, and they mock both you and your astonishment.

‘And when they are reminded’ with more signs and proofs to guide them, ‘they remember not’ they do not look to them but instead turn away and persist in their denial. ‘And when they see a sign’ a new proof, ‘they ridicule’, i.e. they go to extremes in their mockery. In the verse before this one, Allah says, ‘they mock’ but in this one, He says, ‘they ridicule’. This is evidence that among these disbelievers are people whose hearts are affected by Allah’s signs and proofs. When their hearts are softened, their plots against Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are lessened. They suffice themselves with denial instead of mockery because rejection has different levels. One person will refuse to do what you tell him but another will refuse you and then mock you. Those mentioned in the latter verse do not suffice themselves with mocking the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; ‘they ridicule’ means that they want to make those who are not mocking mock. There is a difference between one who mocks and one who seeks to induce mockery. We do not say as some of the orientalists do that this is repetition in Allah’s speech.

وَقَالُوٓاْ إِنۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحۡرٞ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٥﴾

Saying, ‘This is no more than blatant sorcery [15]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 15)

Magic as we said is to create an illusion about reality; the magician makes it appear to you that something is real. Magic does not change the reality of the thing; only the one looking at it is affected. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding Pharaoh’s sorcerers: ‘they cast a spell upon the people’s eyes.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 116) And, ‘their [magic] ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly.’ (*Ta Ha:* 66)

So we ask how then is Muhammad’s preaching or the faith that He calls people to magic? The rebuttal of this calumny is clear and easy. If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to cast spells on people to make them believe in his message, and did so on those who believed in him, why then did he not cast a spell on you? Thus, we can see that this is a false accusation that has no substance.

Then they go back to asking about the issue of the resurrection, trying to throw doubt on it. It is however one of the basis of religion without which faith cannot subsist.

أَءِذَا مِتۡنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابٗا وَعِظَٰمًا أَءِنَّا لَمَبۡعُوثُونَ ﴿١٦﴾
أَوَءَابَآؤُنَا ٱلۡأَوَّلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ قُلۡ نَعَمۡ وَأَنتُمۡ دَٰخِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

‘What! After we have died and become dust and
bones, shall we really be raised up again [16] along
with our forefathers? [17] Say, ‘Yes indeed, and you
will be humiliated’ [18] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 16-18)

It is strange that they should deny the resurrection after all the proofs we have given them. Even if they rejected our proofs and disbelieved in them, have they not heard from past nations and previous revelations that the resurrection is true? We can see this is just arrogance and obstinacy in accepting the truth. For this reason, the Quran strikes a parable for them and evidence of the truthfulness of this information about the resurrection. He puts this story in the context of the previous nations: ‘Or [consider such an example] as the one who passed by a township which had fallen into ruin. He said, “How will Allah bring this to life after its death?” So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years; then He revived him. He said, “How long have you remained?” The man said, “I have remained a day or part of a day.” He said, “Rather, you have remained one hundred years. Look at your food and your drink; it has not changed with time. And look at your donkey; and We will make you a sign for the people. And look at the bones [of this donkey] - how We raise them and then We cover them with flesh.” And when it became clear to him, he said, “I know that Allah is over all things competent.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 259)

This is a true story as the Quran has told us of it, and it relates to the previous nations so that it might be a proof of Allah’s Power to raise the dead. It is the story of a man searching for the truth. Allah made him an example for himself first and foremost, and then for those that came after him. When he passed the village and it was in this decrepit state, it seemed unlikely to him that it and its people could be brought back to life once again. Allah *Glorified is He* made him die so that He could show him how He brings the dead to life. When the man said, ‘I have remained a day or part of a day’ he told the truth, and when Allah said: ‘Rather, you have remained one hundred years’ He told the truth. How? Because the bones of the donkey which had turned to dust showed it had been a hundred years, whereas his food which remained unchanged showed that it had only been a day or less. This is not strange, so long as the doer is Allah, the One Who contracts and the One Who expands. He is the Only One Who could bring together these seeming opposites. He can shorten time for one person and yet stretch it for another. Did He not order Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to strike the sea with his staff such that the water on each side became like a huge mountain. He also ordered him to strike the rock with his staff such that twelve springs burst forth from it. This is raw power. It is also strange that they should ask about their ancestors even though there is but one resurrection. Their asking, ‘And our forefathers [as well]?’ is a proof of their confusion. Perhaps they thought that those who had died recently were ‘fresh’ so to speak, and that it would be they who would be raised, but that it would be impossible for those who had died a long time ago to be resurrected.

Allah replies to them saying, ‘Say!’ i.e., tell them Muhammad at the top of your voice, ‘Yes! They will be raised’. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* speaks as a trusted person, for he has been commanded to do so by Allah, who is completely capable of resurrecting the creation. ‘Yes, and you will be [rendered] contemptible.’

You will be small, humbled, and humiliated in recompense for your arrogance, obstinacy, and disputation regarding the truth in this life. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place, ‘But they, that Day, are in surrender.’ (*as-Saffat:* 26)

فَإِنَّمَا هِىَ زَجۡرَةٞ وَٰحِدَةٞ فَإِذَا هُمۡ يَنظُرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾ وَقَالُواْ يَٰوَيۡلَنَا هَٰذَا يَوۡمُ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٢٠﴾
هَٰذَا يَوۡمُ ٱلۡفَصۡلِ ٱلَّذِى كُنتُم بِهِۦ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Just one blast and — lo and behold! — they will look [19]
and say, ‘Woe to us! This is the Day of Judgement’ [20]
[It will be said], ‘This is the Day of Decision, which
you used to deny [21] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 19 - 21)

Regarding the verse ‘But they, that Day, are in surrender’, it refers to resurrection. ‘Only one shout’ means one blast enough to wake them from their graves, ‘And at once they will be observing’ because We will go to each one and wake him saying, ‘wake up so-and-so’. The resurrection that you deny is easy for us; it will be no trouble at all. The shout by itself will not resurrect the dead; rather, it is permission for the angel to go and do his job. It is like the bell that announces the start of work. After it, ‘at once they will be observing’, that is, instantly. As soon as they stand up out of their graves, they will look here and there, for they will see amazing things, the likes of which they have not known and will be suddenly faced by the things they denied in this world. The Quran says in another verse, ‘O our Lord! We have seen, and we have heard’ (*as-Sajda:* 12); this is the first verse in the Quran to mention sight before hearing. The first thing to hit them will be the unprecedented sights and so they will stare at them. So they will see this spectacle, ‘They will say, “O woe to us! This is the Day of Recompense.” [They will be told], “This is the Day of Judgement which you used to deny.”’

It is they who will say this, lamenting and wailing over themselves. It is not something we will say, it will be them. The realities have now been revealed to them and the corruption of their thought and lies have been exposed, as well as the vehemence and obstinacy they displayed in this world. The first thing that will become clear to someone then will be the corrupt nature of his thought and the evil of his deeds. The first person he will blame will be himself, and he will lament over it. ‘This is the Day of Recompense.’ This is the recompense that they did not accept in this world but now they must acknowledge it.

Alternatively, this could mean that, ‘this is the day that religion benefits one’, as one might say to one’s child when going to an examination, ‘This is the day you have been revising for; the day in which nothing will benefit you except the revision you have done. Then they say, ‘This is the Day of Judgment which you used to deny.’

Judgment can only happen when there is some kind of dispute. The dispute in this case is between the messengers and those of their people who belied and opposed them. Disputation such as this is not solved by argumentation, because these disbelievers are steeped in obstinacy and vehemence. The use of the sword may also fail to end it in that the oppressor may die and yet justice has not been done. So, there must come a day of retribution and distinction in these quarrels. It is for this reason that a certain man said, ‘By Allah, an oppressor will not die until Allah takes His revenge from him’. Someone replied to him, ‘How could this be? So-and-so commits a great deal of oppression but we do not see anything happen to him’. ‘By Allah’, he replied, ‘after this abode is another in which he who excels will be rewarded for his excellence and he who does wrong will be repaid for his evil’. So, yes indeed, such a day is necessary, for otherwise a lot of the oppressor would be better than that of the oppressed.

ٱحْشُرُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ وَأَزْوَٰجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ
فَٱهْدُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطِ ٱلْجَحِيمِ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَقِفُوهُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُم مَّسْـُٔولُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

[Angels], gather together those who did wrong, and others like them, as well as what-ever they worshipped [22] beside God, lead them all to the path of Hell [23] and halt them for questioning [24] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 22-24)

That is, gather all those together in the fire, ‘those who committed wrong, their kinds, and what they used to worship other than Allah.’ Thus, the assembled are of three types: those bent on evil doing (as a recompense); others like them and the things that they worshipped in place of Allah. Here the word ‘kinds’ means their partners in this life, like the wife who assists her husband in his oppression. An example of this would be the wife of Abu Lahab. An alternative meaning could be those like them and their companions who misguided them and lead them astray.

‘And what they used to worship other than Allah’ refers to the idols that they worshipped in place of Allah. They, too, will be gathered in the Fire so that the disbelievers might see the false gods they attached themselves to and worshipped precede them into the fire. Their hopes of salvation will be shattered. It will also expose the corruption of their ideas, in that they worshipped idols that could neither harm nor benefit them; this will be further clarification for them.

This clarification is expanded harshly in Allah’s saying: ‘and guide them to the path of Hellfire.’ Can being thrown into the fire be termed ‘guidance’? The meaning is ‘Show them the way to Hell’, mocking and deriding them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned’, i.e. stop them for interrogation and accounting. This questioning, however, shall be individual, not collective. Each one of them will be questioned and interrogated alone. The scholars say regarding the questioning that people come to rebuke themselves before Allah comes to rebuke them; as soon as they see the resurrection and the place of accounting, they reproach themselves and start to regret at the time when regret no longer benefits.

مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنَاصَرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ بَلْ هُمُ الْيَوْمَ مُسْتَسْلِمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

“Why do you not support each other now?” [25] no indeed!
They will be in complete submission on that Day [26]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 25-26)

This question is also by way of mockery and ridicule. That is to say, ‘What is the matter with you now? Can you not help each other like you did in the world’?

The masses following their leaders and the leaders organising their followers, how similar they are in this situation to the proverb which says, ‘birds of a feather flock together' or the saying, 'The miserable and the hopeless will be united'. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says after this, 'But they, that Day, are in surrender'; they are humbled, disgraced and humiliated. People say, 'he raised the white flag', meaning he had no strength left to defend himself, no logic or evidence. He is now submissive, small and humbled, awaiting Allah's Judgement upon him.

وَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَسَآءَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّكُمْ كُنتُمْ تَأْتُونَنَا عَنِ ٱلْيَمِينِ ﴿٢٨﴾ قَالُواْ بَل
لَّمْ تَكُونُواْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾ وَمَا كَانَ لَنَا عَلَيْكُم مِّن سُلْطَٰنٍۭ بَلْ كُنتُمْ قَوْمًا طَٰغِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

And they will turn on one another accusingly [27] They will say,
'You came to us from a position of power' [28] They will say,
'No! It was you who would not believe [29] we had no power
over you – and you were already exceeding all limits [30]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 27-30)

One should reflect upon this dialogue between the followers and their leaders. After their collective failure has become apparent and the realities that they denied for so long in the world have been revealed, they now attempt to shift the burden of responsibility on each other and start to argue about it. 'They will say', i.e. the followers, 'Indeed, you used to come at us from the right.' The right-hand side is the direction of goodness; this is why the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered us to prefer the right-hand side(1) in all things. We greet, eat, work, and write with it, because it is respected and honoured. Even the Arabs of old used to take good omens from the right-hand side if a bird flew in that direction.

The right is also the side of strength. Most people use their right-hand side, and are stronger with it. One time we were asked about people who use their left hands, should we prohibit them from that? We said that whether one uses one's right or left hand is not merely a case of what one is used to, rather, it is also an aspect of one's genetic makeup. There is a centre in the body which is responsible for distributing strength. Some people's strength is distributed more to the right, and so his right is stronger than his left, some people are the opposite, and in some people their strength is distributed evenly, they can work just as well with their right or left. These people are known as ambidextrous, and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was one of them. All these meanings are present in the meaning of this verse. ‘They will say, “Indeed, you used to come at us from the right’, i.e. from the direction of truth and goodness so that you might divert us from it; or by way of strength and power to force us to do things; or through oaths, meaning that you would swear to us that that was the right way, none other.

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(1) *It was related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [168, 426, 538] on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said, 'The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him used to begin with his right with his sandals, when dismounting, in his ablutions and in all his affairs.'*

The leaders then respond to the followers, ‘Rather, you [yourselves] were not believers’ meaning we did not ruin your faith and lead you to disbelief, rather, you were already, by nature, disbelievers. All we had to do was point the way and you were following us, ‘And we had over you no authority.’ Authority can either be through strength and force of action or it can be the power of argument to convince somebody to disbelieve. So, they are saying, ‘we had neither physical power over you nor a powerful argument to convince you, ‘but you were’ by your very nature, ‘a transgressing people’ overstepping the boundaries in misguidance and disbelief. This is the lesson Satan teaches to his followers in the next world when he disowns them and give up responsibility. Allah tells us, ‘And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, “Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves.”’ (*Ibrahim:* 22)

فَحَقَّ عَلَيْنَا قَوْلُ رَبِّنَآ إِنَّا لَذَآئِقُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ فَأَغْوَيْنَٰكُمْ إِنَّا كُنَّا غَٰوِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾
فَإِنَّهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ فِى ٱلْعَذَابِ مُشْتَرِكُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Our Lord’s sentence on us is just and we must all taste the punishment [31] We led you astray as we ourselves were astray [32] On that Day they will all share the torment [33] this is how We deal with the guilty [34] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 31-34)

Allah’s saying, ‘has come into effect’ means it has come to pass; ‘upon us’, i.e. the leaders and their followers; the punishment has become necessary for all of them.

One should reflect upon their saying, ‘indeed, we will taste [punishment].’ They did not say ‘we are being punished’ or ‘we are being burnt’. Punishment or burning can end at any time, while tasting continues and lasts. This meaning is made clear in Allah’s saying, ‘Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56) It has been discovered in these times that the skin is the locus of pain, not the brain. The proof of this is that if one takes an injection for instance, one feels pain as the needle punctures the skin but after that, no more. This is a reality that Allah *Glorified is He* has outlined for us in His saying, ‘Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins.’ Why? ‘So they may taste the punishment’ because pain is experienced by the skin.

Regarding their saying, ‘And we led you to deviation’, it means, ‘we showed you the ways of error and misguidance’. The one in error is the one who strays from the path of truth and good. ‘Indeed, we were deviators’, means ‘If we ourselves were lost and misguided, why should we leave you to have faith and guidance. You too must drink from the same cup as us’. This is the logic of their teacher, Satan. When he disobeyed Allah and was cast out from His Mercy, he swore that he would misguide the offspring of Adam *peace be upon him* along with himself so that they might be like him in loss and misguidance. Then Allah *Glorified is He* brings this confrontation between the people of falsehood to a close and confirms the reality that, ‘So indeed they, that Day’, i.e. the Day of Judgement, ‘will be sharing in the punishment.’ This is our way with the people of misguidance, ‘Indeed, that is how We deal with the criminals.’ Those are who deny the primary basis of faith, Divine unity. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes them in the following verse saying:

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوٓا۟ إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَيَقُولُونَ أَئِنَّا
لَتَارِكُوٓا۟ ءَالِهَتِنَا لِشَاعِرٍ مَّجْنُونٍۭ ﴿٣٦﴾ بَلْ جَآءَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَصَدَّقَ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Whenever it was said to them, ‘There is no deity but God,’ they became arrogant [35] and said, ‘Are we to forsake our gods for a mad poet?’ [36] ‘No: he brought the truth and confirmed the earlier messengers [37] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 35 - 37)

‘They,’ i.e., the disbelievers whom Allah *Glorified is He* described as criminals, ‘when it was said to them, “There is no deity [worthy of worship] but Allah” were arrogant', i.e. they would refuse to believe or accept it out of arrogance. 'And were saying, "Are we to leave our gods for a mad poet?" We would give up worshipping them for the sake of a mad poet or because he called us to do so. It is very strange that the Arabs, given that they were an oral nation, giving great value and appreciation to even a single word, when they know fully well the meaning of the word and the meaning of worship. Deity refers to something that is worshipped, but by what right are these idols worshipped? What did they order you to do? From what did they prohibit you? Where is the guidance that they brought you? Indeed, they knew that these were dead objects that could neither harm nor benefit them. They worshipped them because of the natural inclination towards religion that man has. Man, by his nature, is religious; he desires to draw closer to a power greater than himself to which he can flee when trouble strikes, a power that will help him to be patient and endure events. They found these deities to be ones that imposed no responsibilities and made no demands and thus they worshipped them instead of Allah. It is also strange that, given they were an oral nation, they failed to differentiate between Allah's Speech in the Quran and poetry, for they were the most knowledgeable of people regarding its rhymes and metres. How can poetry compare to Allah's Speech in the Quran?

Similarly, incomprehensible is how they could accuse the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being insane, when they were fully acquainted with him, his attributes, his character, and his life among them before he was elected to prophethood. How distant insanity is from the one who has embodied all the finest qualities and most gracious characteristics. Madness is that a person acts in ways that are unintelligible. The crazy man does not differentiate between things; he does not know what is beneficial or what is harmful.

It is for this same reason that Allah *Glorified is He* says here, 'Rather', a word that is for contradiction of the preceding speech. 'The Prophet has come with the truth', i.e. that which is firm and unchanging; 'and confirmed the [previous] messengers' regarding the path of Allah.

Allah says:

إِنَّكُمْ لَذَآئِقُوا۟ ٱلْعَذَابِ ٱلْأَلِيمِ ﴿٣٨﴾ وَمَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

You will taste the painful torment [38] and be repaid only according to your deeds [39] (The Quran, ***as-Saffat:*** **38 - 39)**

In the preceding verses, Allah *Glorified is He* related the speech of the leaders of the oppressors to their followers but emphasis this meaning here except that here the type of tasting is specified, 'Will be tasters of the painful punishment.' This grievous suffering is not oppression or transgression, rather, it is the recompense for what they did previously, 'although you shall not be requited for aught but what you were wont to do' (*as-Saffat:* 39), and 'And you will not be recompensed except for what you used to do.' After this description of the people of disbelief and enmity, the obstinate, criminals and the clarification of their outcome and what awaits them of recompense, the True Lord *Glorified is He* follows this with a description of the believers who were sincere in their worship of Allah. This coupling of two opposites is one of the styles of the Quran, as for instance, in Allah's saying, 'Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure. And indeed, the wicked will be in Hellfire.' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14) It is through their opposites that things become clear. When one mentions something after its opposite, its good qualities become apparent, as in the saying of the poet (1) describing his beloved:

The face like the dawn is white,
The hair black like the night,
Two opposites improved when brought together,
For each shows up the good in its other (2)

That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of what He has promised the true believers after what He has mentioned of the recompense of the oppressors and deniers, so as to generate remorse in them, that it may be an extra punishment added to their suffering in the fire.

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(1) Abu Ash-Shis Al-Khuza`i, Muhammad ibn `Ali ibn `Abdullah, a poet of quick wits and fine style… He was born in 130 A.H. in Kufa. He was less famous than his contemporaries Sari` Al-Ghawani and Abu Nawwas and was the cousin of Da`bl Al-Khuza`i. He went blind at the end of his life and was killed in the year 196 A.H. by a servant for keeping him in servitude. Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`ryya

(2) These two couplets are from a poem by Abu Ash-Shis Al-Khuza`i from Bahr Al-Kamil that has 66 couplets.

إِلَّا عِبَادَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡمُخۡلَصِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ رِزۡقٞ مَّعۡلُومٞ ﴿٤١﴾ فَوَٰكِهُۖ وَهُم مُّكۡرَمُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾
فِي جَنَّٰتِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ﴿٤٣﴾ عَلَىٰ سُرُرٖ مُّتَقَٰبِلِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾ يُطَافُ عَلَيۡهِم بِكَأۡسٖ مِّن مَّعِينِۭ ﴿٤٥﴾
بَيۡضَآءَ لَذَّةٖ لِّلشَّٰرِبِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ لَا فِيهَا غَوۡلٞ وَلَا هُمۡ عَنۡهَا يُنزَفُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Not so God's true servants [40] They will have familiar provisions [41] fruits – and will be honoured [42] in gardens of delight [43] seated on couches, facing one another [44] A drink will be passed round among them from a flowing spring [45] white, delicious to those who taste it [46] causing no headiness or intoxication [47] (The Quran*, as-Saffat:* 40 - 47)

What preceded this was a discussion of the recompense of the disbelievers, but this is an exception; 'But not the chosen servants of Allah', those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has made true and chosen to obey and worship Him. 'Those will have a provision determined' i.e., in the hereafter because the sustenance of this world is unknown. A person may strive and tire himself out in this world and yet be deprived of the fruits of his labour; his crops may fail and he may come out at a loss in his trade. We have an apportioned sustenance in this world, but we do not know what it is. In the next world, however, one's sustenance is specified and known, is unaltered by circumstances and never fails to materialise. This is the hereafter and one is with the Ultimate Cause *Glorified is He*. We defined sustenance earlier as being 'everything that one benefits from', even something prohibited that one partakes of is considered part of one's sustenance. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you.' (*al-Baqara:* 172)

The subject then moves to some of the wonderful details of this sustenance. The most important part of one's sustenance is the essential nutrition by which one's life is maintained, after that come the luxuries that make one's life easier. Here, however, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not mention the necessities, He only speaks of the luxuries above, and beyond them; 'Fruits;

and they will be honoured.' Even though in several other places He mentioned the necessities and then followed them with the fruits and luxuries, such as His saying, 'That they may eat of His fruit. And their hands have not produced it...' (*Ya Sin:* 35). So why did Allah suffice Himself with mentioning only the fruits here? The scholars say that it is because the speech here refers to the hereafter. Eating in the hereafter is not out of need for food, it is only for the pleasure and luxury of eating.

Alternatively, it could be said that, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed the luxuries for you, it goes without saying that He has guaranteed one's essential nutrition. As for Allah's saying, 'and they will be honoured' it means that the food will not just be thrown down before them as hay is thrown down for animals, for we have no intention to honour animals when feeding them. Rather, the sustenance of the believers will be provided in such a way that '…they will be honoured' in 'gardens of pleasure' because this is the provision of a lover for His beloved.

They are 'On thrones facing one another.' They will not be burdened with the troubles of visiting one another. The thrones that they sit on will be facing one another such that if one desired to visit his brother he would immediately find him in front of him without needing to go anywhere. This is something which has been guaranteed. 'There will be circulated among them a cup [of wine] from a flowing spring.' In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* has further described those who will carry these cups, 'There will circulate among them young boys made eternal. With vessels, pitchers and a cup [of wine] from a flowing spring.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 17-18) This cup could refer to the wine or to the goblet into which the wine (from a flowing spring) is placed. This wine is then described as being 'clear' (*as-Saffat:* 46), and clear wine was considered to be the best type among the Arabs. It is 'White and delicious to the drinkers.' Allah did not say here delightful; rather, He said 'delicious', i.e. it is, in and of itself, delicious. It is as though deliciousness has been embodied in this drink. Allah *Glorified is He* described the wine of the hereafter as, 'delicious to the drinkers, so as to differentiate between it and the wine of this world. We see in films that the alcoholic beverages of this world are not drunk for pleasure, for the people put a tiny bit in a cup and then they consume it in one go, drinking it reluctantly because of its awful taste. If, however, the alcoholic beverages of this world are not drunk for the pleasure of consuming them, why do people do so? They drink because of the effect it has of impairing the intellect, the guarding of one’s actions, etc. They want to break out and be free of this guardian. For this reason, the best types of alcohol in their reckoning, and we seek refuge with Allah, are those that render one careless among other things. As for the wine of the hereafter, the only thing it has in common with that of this world is the name. The wine of the hereafter is delicious, you feel it when you drink it, and you take it slowly, sip by sip, so that you can savour its sweetness. It does not corrupt one’s intellect; ‘no bad effect is there in it, nor from it will they be intoxicated.’ It will not distort one’s mind. Effect ‘…is there in it, nor from it will they be intoxicated.’ Among the types of alcohol is that which is purgative when swallowed, such that it will cause the contents of the stomach to be expelled. As for the wine of the hereafter, it does not cause such sickness. An alternative meaning of ‘nor from it will they be intoxicated’ could be that their intellects are not sapped by it and they do not get intoxicated by it as they do on the wine of this world.(1) Allah then says:

وَعِندَهُمۡ قَٰصِرَٰتُ ٱلطَّرۡفِ عِينٞ ﴿٤٨﴾ كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيۡضٞ مَّكۡنُونٞ ﴿٤٩﴾

With them will be spouses – modest of gaze and
beautiful of eye [48] like protected eggs [49]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 48 - 49)

This is a description of the women in paradise. They will be: ‘...modest of gaze...’ (*as-Saffat:* 48). This means that these women look at none but their husbands. We have previously said that a man may give the most expensive things he possesses as a gift to another, such as a car, house, or clothes. As for one’s wife, none accepts that any other person looks at her due to her high status as a person attached to his wife. Similarly, a man does not like his wife to look at other men. This is one of the traits of the women in paradise; they are ‘...modest of gaze...’ (*as-Saffat:* 48). In another verse, wives are described as: '...Fair ones reserved in pavilions.' (*ar-Rahman:* 72) This means that they are chaste and reserved only for their husbands. Allah guards the beauty of women and ensures that society will nurture chaste women so that people's lineages may be preserved and noble. These are the standard traits for believing women in the worldly life and will be the same in the Hereafter. Allah comforts husbands regarding this peculiarity, as no one will share him his wife in the Hereafter, even by a glance.

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(1) *Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him said that it means ‘they will not get intoxicated.’ Mujahid said it meant, ‘It will not cause any deficiency in their intellects.’ This was related by Hunad, `Abd ibn Hamid and Ibn Abu Hatim. It is also related on the authority of Sa`id ibn Jabir that it means, ‘there is no harm in it nor anything unpleasant.’ This was related by `Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim, As-Suyuti mentioned these narrations in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur [7: 88].*

The Arabic word *'in* is the plural of the word *`ayna* (having wide beautiful eyes), and the Arabs consider wide and beautiful eyes and small mouths as features of beautiful women.

The phrase: 'With them...' (*as-Saffat:* 48) means 'in their possession', as they are from the pleasures of paradise. If one needs anything from them, he gains it; if not then he may leave them, yet they will remain waiting for him. Allah describes them saying: 'like protected eggs.' (*as-Saffat:* 49) The word *bayd* is the plural of the word *baydah* (an egg) which refers to an ostrich egg[1] because they are the biggest eggs which have the best colour. It is said that the person who shelters beauty in his tribe that he shelters its egg. Therefore, eggs here are described as being so protected that no one has touched it.

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَسَآءَلُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾ قَالَ قَآئِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ إِنِّى كَانَ لِى قَرِينٌ ﴿٥١﴾
يَقُولُ أَءِنَّكَ لَمِنَ ٱلْمُصَدِّقِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾ أَءِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَٰمًا أَءِنَّا لَمَدِينُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

They will turn to one another with questions [50] One will say, 'I had a close companion on earth [51] who used to ask me, "Do you really believe that [52] after we die and become dust and bone, we shall be brought for judgement?" [53] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 50 - 53)

We have known the argument that runs between the disbelievers in the fire. In these verses, Allah tells us about the dialogue that takes place between the people of paradise. They ask each other about what happened to the oppressors and deluded people and where they are.

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[1] *Al-Hasan and Ibn Zayd said, 'They are like ostrich eggs. The ostriches protect them with feathers from the wind and the dust. They are yellowish white, which is the best colour for women's complexion.' This was narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis [8/5719] and As-Suyuti mentioned it in Ad- Durr Al-Manthur (7/89) attributing it to Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of Zayd ibn Aslam.*

‘One of the people of Paradise will say: “I had a close companion on earth who used to ask me, ‘Do you really believe that after we die and become dust and bone, we shall be brought for judgement?’”” (*as-Saffat:* 50-53) The question which was asked by the believer’s companion indicates belying and denial of resurrection and judgement.

قَالَ هَلۡ أَنتُم مُّطَّلِعُونَ (٥٤) فَٱطَّلَعَ فَرَءَاهُ فِي سَوَآءِ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ (٥٥) قَالَ تَٱللَّهِ
إِن كِدتَّ لَتُرۡدِينِ (٥٦) وَلَوۡلَا نِعۡمَةُ رَبِّي لَكُنتُ مِنَ ٱلۡمُحۡضَرِينَ (٥٧)

Then he will say, ‘Shall we look for him?’ [54] He will look down and see him in the midst of the fire [55] and say to him, ‘By God, you almost brought me to ruin! [56] Had it not been for the grace of my Lord, I too would have been taken to Hell [57] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 54-57)

The Quran creates such an image of this scenario that one can almost see and hear. While the people of paradise are busy asking each other about the misguided ones that they knew in the world, one of them looks and sees an acquaintance that denied the resurrection and judgement and tried to mislead him amongst the people of the fire. Therefore, he asks his Companions to look at such-and-such who is in the fire. ‘He will look down and see him in the midst of the fire.’ (*as-Saffat:* 55) The person seen in the fire has not hope to be saved. Upon seeing this, the believer remembers the blessing which Allah has bestowed on him, as He has saved him from the abyss of misguidance, to which his companion wanted to lead him. He addresses him, saying: ‘...By Allah, you almost brought me to ruin...’ (*as-Saffat:* 56) along with yourself, ‘Had it not been for the grace of my Lord...’ (*as-Saffat:* 57) the grace of saving me. ‘...I too would have been taken to Hell.’ (*as-Saffat:* 57) This means that he would have been among those whom the angels have gathered for punishment. At this point, the believers’, joy due to their faith increases as well as their gratitude and recognition of Allah’s blessings. Nothing can disturb their joy except the fear that they will eventually die and lose this bliss. So they say:

أَفَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَيِّتِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾ إِلَّا مَوْتَتَنَا ٱلْأُولَىٰ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾
إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿٦٠﴾ لِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ ٱلْعَٰمِلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

Then he will say [to his blessed companions], 'Are we never to die again after our earlier death? [58] Shall we never suffer? [59] This truly is the supreme triumph! [60] Everyone should strive to attain this [61] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 58 - 61)

Thus, they are apprehensive about losing this bliss asking each other, 'Are we never to die again after our earlier death?' (*as-Saffat:* 59) They wonder whether they will die again or not; 'Shall we never suffer?' (*as-Saffat:* 59) They ask whether there will be anything else for which they will be called to account or punished. His hope is to remain in this state of bliss so that he does not miss it either by death or by any other change for the worse. 'This truly is…' (*as-Saffat:* 60) continuous and everlasting bliss, which will not be followed by reckoning or punishment. That is '...the supreme triumph.' (*as-Saffat:* 60) There can be no doubt that this is a goal that everyone should strive to attain. 'Everyone should strive to attain this.' (*as-Saffat:* 61) Allah gives us an account of these events that will take place in the afterlife in order to clarify for the effect of faith and the result of good deeds. He describes for us the events that will take place in the Hereafter so that we may take a lesson from them. Any deed that leads to such a blissful end can easily be done no matter how troublesome or tiring, as this will incur no loss.

أَذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ نُّزُلًا أَمْ شَجَرَةُ ٱلزَّقُّومِ ﴿٦٢﴾ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَٰهَا فِتْنَةً لِّلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٦٣﴾
إِنَّهَا شَجَرَةٌ تَخْرُجُ فِىٓ أَصْلِ ٱلْجَحِيمِ ﴿٦٤﴾ طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُۥ رُءُوسُ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينِ ﴿٦٥﴾

Is this the better welcome, or the tree of *Zaqqum* [62] which we have made a test for the evildoers? [63] This tree grows in the heart of the blazing fire [64] and its fruits are like devils' heads [65] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 62 - 65)

These verses state the bliss of paradise and the punishment of the fire. It states again the description of hell and its punishments: 'Is this...' (*as-Saffat:* 62) the bliss of paradise stated above '...the better welcome...' (*as-Saffat:* 62), as a place of stay and hosting. *An-Nuzul* is the place that is prepared for an unexpected guest which has all the necessities of life such as food, drink, etc. Therefore, a hotel is called a *nuzul*. Hotels with all the facilities for relaxation are prepared by people for other people, so how could one imagine what Allah could prepare for people. Hospitality depends on the abilities of the host.

'...or the tree of *Zaqqum*' (*as-Saffat*: 62); what is the tree of *Zaqqum*? Allah describes it, saying: 'which we have made a test for the evildoers' (*as-Saffat:* 63). The Arabic word *fitnah* means tribulation and punishment. 'This tree grows in the heart of the blazing fire.' (*as-Saffat:* 64) This tree shows Allah's Absolute Power, so one should not ask about how the tree grows in the middle of the fire because the One Who has created it is Allah *Glorified is He*. This should be viewed in the framework of Allah's transcendence above the rules of creation.

Its fruits seem to be the heads of the devils. However, we have not seen the heads of devils. Therefore, some orientalists who try to find fault with the Quran wonder that Allah likens something unknown to us with something also unknown. We have not seen either the *Zaqqum* tree or the heads of the devils. Comparisons are made to clarify one thing by means of another. What is the benefit of comparing something unknown with another unknown thing? We say in reply that the human brain has the faculties of memory, recall, and imagination. A person first sees something, and then it is recorded in his memory at the part of consciousness. Then, he can recall that thing. As for imagination, it can take fragments of reality and create a new image that does not exist in reality. In the case of this verse: they 'are like devils' heads' (*as-Saffat:* 65), though you have not seen a devil's head, your imagination can create so horrible image for it that will be quite satisfactory to clarify the difference between the welcome that Allah has prepared for the believers in paradise and this tree the fruits of which resemble the devils' heads. Allah has intended to compare between these two images and to give you the warning during the time when recompense is witnessed, not the time when denial is possible.

The tree of *Zaqqum* is a malignant tree that can be found in the region of Tuhama. Its odour is rank and its taste bitter. Allah has mentioned it as a likeness for the tree that grows in the heart of hell. Scholars say that this tree is a chastisement for those being punished because they used to deny the resurrection and life after death, so Allah has made this grow in the midst of hell and carry their food, as their food is only its fruits. Trees imply water and greenery, and it is obvious that water and fire cannot be combined. This is a glimpse about the Absolute Power that they deny in the worldly life. Therefore, the presence of this tree in the midst of hell and the disbelievers' subsistence on its fruits and need for it is chastisement for them due to their denial of the resurrection. This reminds us of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he was thrown into the fire, yet Allah made it cool and safe for him, as Allah stopped the fire's feature of burning.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make sure that people understand the repulsive nature of this tree, even though the Arabs already know a tree by this name. They know its rank nature, foul smell, and evil taste. They know its paltry fruit, but no one has seen a fruit that is like the devils' heads. Thus, the objective is to reveal its evil nature and give people's imagination every opportunity to envisage its foul character. The fruit of any tree is the most beautiful part of the tree. As for this fruit, it is like devils' heads. A person can imagine how ugly, offensive, and repulsive it is. It is well known that the Arabs believed that the devils have the ugliest appearance, while the angels have the finest and most beautiful appearance. An example that explains this point is what the women said about Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: '...Perfect is Allah! This is not a man; this is none but a noble angel.' (*Yusuf:* 31) The Quran took the beliefs of the Arabs into account in this metaphor; it uses an unknown image, but it is something that all people can imagine according to their standards of ugliness. If it used a specific example whose ugliness is known to all people, it would be likely that while some people would consider it to be ugly, others would not. Allah *Glorified is He* desired to create an image that would be considered ugly by everybody, as no one considers the devil as beautiful. If we bring all the caricaturists in the world and ask them to draw a picture of the devil, each one will draw the ugly image he has in his mind. You will not find two pictures that exactly resemble each other. Therefore, the fruit of the tree of *Zaqqum* is compared to the devils' heads in order to implant the idea of ugliness in everybody's mind. This image can make this tree repulsive to anyone.

The word *al-tal`* originally refers to the calyx that envelops the fruit in its beginning. It also refers to the sheath that encloses the fruit of the palm and its like. When the stalks come out and the shape of the fruit becomes plain, these fruits are called *balah* (dates) so long as they are green.

Dates have three stages: The first relates to their size; when they reach their final size, their colour is neutral, then they become red or yellow. During this stage, it is said the dates have become *`affar* or *zahw* (white or shiny). The second stage is when the dates become red or yellow, they are now known as *busr*. The third stage is relevant to their consistency, whether they become tender or dry, according to the environment. If it is hot and dry, the *busr* will be dry and will be called *tamr* (dates). If the environment is cool and humid, the dates will remain moist and are named *rutab*.

Then Allah says:

فَإِنَّهُمۡ لَأٓكِلُونَ مِنۡهَا فَمَالِـُٔونَ مِنۡهَا ٱلۡبُطُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ لَهُمۡ عَلَيۡهَا
لَشَوۡبٗا مِّنۡ حَمِيمٖ ﴿٦٧﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ مَرۡجِعَهُمۡ لَإِلَى ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ﴿٦٨﴾

They will fill their bellies eating from it [66] then drink scalding water on top of it [67] then return to the blazing fire [68] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 66 - 68)

Necessity will force them to have recourse to something so grievous and hateful to them because they will have no other food. ‘They will fill their bellies eating from it...’ (*as-Saffat:* 66). When they have filled their bellies with it, the fire therein will increase, so they will want a drink to extinguish this fire, but their drink will be boiling water (we seek refuge with Allah). ‘Then drink scalding water on top of it.’ (*as-Saffat:* 67). The Arabic word *`ash-shawb* means something mixed or blended, and *hamim* is boiling water. In another verse, their drink is called *ghislin.*(1) When they eat and drink, they will return to their punishment. ‘Then return to the blazing fire.’ (*as-Saffat:* 67) Allah clarifies the reason for this punishment and painful end, as this is only recompense for what they did.

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(1) *Allah Glorified is He says: ‘nor any food except from the discharge of wounds.’ (al-Haqqa: 36) The word ghislin means the suppuration of the people of the fire. At-Tafsir Al-Muyassar*

إِنَّهُمۡ أَلۡفَوۡاْ ءَابَآءَهُمۡ ضَآلِّينَ ﴿٦٩﴾ فَهُمۡ عَلَىٰٓ ءَاثَٰرِهِمۡ يُهۡرَعُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

They found their forefathers astray [69]
and rushed to follow in their footsteps – before the
disbelievers [70] [of Mecca] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 69 - 70)

Their forefathers were misguided and they imitated them and hurried to follow their footsteps. '…and rushed to follow in their footsteps…' (*as-Saffat:* 70). The word *yuhra`un* is in the passive tense, as its subject is not mentioned. Had this haste to follow their fathers been on their part, Allah would have said *yahra`un.* This shows that something is driving them to imitate their forefathers, and Allah does this to show us how aggressive evil is, as it involves no responsibility for a person and no barriers against his passions. Therefore, people rush into it and seek it. As for the path of truth and guidance, people do not tend to rush toward it because it restrains their passions and limits them to the framework that Allah has laid down. Thus, they imitate their fathers, even though they know they are astray, so that they may flee from legal responsibility. Allah let them take upon themselves: 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware." Or [lest] you say, "It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?" (*al-A'raf*: 172-173) The Quran states their acknowledgement in many verses.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when it is said to them, "Follow what Allah has revealed," they say, "Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing...."' (*al-Baqara:* 170) But Allah *Glorified is He* refutes them saying: '...Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they guided?' (*al-Baqara:* 170)

Allah *Glorified is He* reveals that they are lying concerning these claims. If they followed their ancestors in general, they would follow the path of their forefather Adam *peace be upon him*. If they had done so, their offspring would have imitated them, and people would have continued to follow Allah’s religion. However, those people were only controlled by their passions and were conquered by their desires which diverted them from the path of their Lord and Creator. Is there not a person amongst them who is aware of this misguidance, refuses to follow it and searches for guidance?

وَلَقَدۡ ضَلَّ قَبۡلَهُمۡ أَكۡثَرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٧١﴾ وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا فِيهِم مُّنذِرِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾
فَٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡمُنذَرِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾ إِلَّا عِبَادَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡمُخۡلَصِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

Most men in the past went astray [71] even though We sent
messengers to warn them [72] See how those who were warned
met their end! [73] Not so the true servants of Allah [74]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 71-74)

Allah’s saying: ‘Most men in the past went astray’ (*as-Saffat:* 71) means that these people were not the first misguided people, as many of their predecessors went astray. This indicates that only a minority were believers while the majority were misguided. ‘Even though We sent messengers to warn them.’ (*as-Saffat:* 72) This means that Allah did not leave them in heedlessness, as He sent them messengers to warn them. There is immunity in the human soul that protects man from errors and sin, even if he is separated from people. If this immunity becomes weak and he goes against Allah’s path, then the self-reproaching soul will call him to account and reprimand him until he repents. If he becomes used to sin and his self-reproaching soul becomes weak, he is no longer able to deter himself, and then society deters him by enjoining righteousness upon him and forbidding him from evil. The society that offers counsel through its members is described by Allah’s saying: ‘...advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.’ (*al-’Asr:* 3) There is a difference between the Arabic words *wassu* and *tawasu*. The later means that the members of the society advise one another. Even a religious and believing society has members who differ in their uprightness and application of Allah’s religion. There will always be people who become weak and go astray or become heedless, so they must find those in the society who will deter them and remind them so that they may return to the right way. If a society loses its deterrents and corruption becomes widespread, Allah sends a new messenger with a new revelation. We know that messengers bring both glad tidings and warnings, but in the following verse, Allah mentions the warning: ‘Even though We sent messengers to warn them.’ (*as-Saffat:* 72) Scholars say that warding off harm is prioritised over bringing benefits. To clarify this issue, if someone throws an apple at you while another throws a rock at you, there is no doubt that you would defend yourself against the rock before taking the apple. Allah’s saying: ‘See how those who were warned met their end.’ (*as-Saffat:* 73) means that Allah urges those people to reflect upon the consequences of this warning; the messengers of Allah warned everyone, but did all people benefit from the warning? No, rather, some benefited from this warning and others turned away. Allah brings the following exception after this verse: ‘Not so the true servants of Allah.’ (*as-Saffat:* 74) The people whom Allah chose and purified to worship and obey Him benefit from the warning. After Allah tackled the prophets in general, saying, ‘Even though We sent messengers to warn them.’ (*as-Saffat:* 72), Allah mentioned them in some detail, saying:

وَلَقَدْ نَادَىٰنَا نُوحٌ فَلَنِعْمَ ٱلْمُجِيبُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ وَنَجَّيْنَٰهُ وَأَهْلَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلْكَرْبِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٦﴾
وَجَعَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُۥ هُمُ ٱلْبَاقِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾ وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَىٰ نُوحٍ فِى ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾
إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾ إِنَّهُۥ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨١﴾ ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا ٱلْءَاخَرِينَ ﴿٨٢﴾

Noah cried to Us, and how excellent was Our response! [75] We saved him and his people from great distress [76] We let his offspring remain on the earth [77] We let him be praised by later generations [78] ‘Peace be upon Noah among all the nations!’ [79] This is how We reward those who do good [80] he was truly one of Our faithful servants [81] We drowned the rest [82] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 75 - 82)

However, why does Allah begin with Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*? Scholars said that his call to Allah was similar to that of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) - to establish the religion and not be divided therein...' (*ash-Shura:* 13). Allah *Glorified is He* enjoined the instructions of religion upon Nuh (Noah) and other prophets. Some of these prophets were higher than him in rank, yet Allah has mentioned Nuh (Noah) first then the other prophets. The scholars said that Nuh (Noah) had some peculiarity in terms of the environment he found himself in and the people who believed in him. Those who believed in him were saved in the Ark, and were the only ones who existed in the whole world at that time. Therefore, it is as though his message was for all people because of these specific circumstances. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other hand brought a message for all people but in non-specific circumstances.

In Allah's saying: 'Nuh (Noah) cried to Us …' (*as-Saffat:* 75), the word *nadana* (cried to us) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse indicates that Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* used every possible means to call his people, yet he did not succeed. This is proved by his saying in another verse: 'And Nuh (Noah) said, "My Lord, do not leave upon the earth from among the disbelievers an inhabitant. Indeed, if You leave them, they will mislead Your servants and not beget except [every] wicked one and [confirmed] disbeliever."' (*Nuh:* 26-27) Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* made this supplication against his people after despairing of them, and finding that the means that he may use to persuade his people to believe were insufficient. Therefore, he turned to Allah because He was the Only One capable of saving him from them. Therefore, he called Allah, Who sent him as a messenger, to help him and not to forsake him. This is the natural response of anyone seeking help; when a person faces danger which he cannot ward off by himself, he seeks help from the closest people to him. If he does not find anyone close to him, he will seek the help of someone distant. If he does not find anyone to help him, he asks Allah to help and save him. Then the response to this call comes: '…and how excellent was Our response!' (*as-Saffat:* 75) As Nuh (Noah) made an excellent supplication, he received an excellent response. Allah did not say: 'and how excellent was my response' because Allah answered Nuh (Noah) with His forces in the universe: the air, water, and angels. '...And none knows the forces of your Lord except Him...' (*al-Muddaththir*: 31). The result of this response was: 'We saved him and his people from great distress' (*as-Saffat:* 76). The orientalists wondered about this point as Allah caused

Nuh's (Noah's) son to die. In another verse, the story of Nuh (Noah) and his son, who disobeyed him and drowned with the other disbelievers. Nuh's (Noah's) intercession for him did not work: '...My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true; and You are the most just of judges.' (*Hud:* 45)

This confusion is a result of the fact that many people forget that the real son ship with regard to prophets is not that of blood, but that which is relevant to faith. Therefore, Allah replied to Nuh (Noah) saying: '...O Nuh (Noah), indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous...' (*Hud:* 46).

The criteria with regard to the prophets' sons are belief and faith, not blood and lineage. Thus, if one studies this verse closely, he will see that Allah does not reject him personally, rather, He rejects his deeds: '…he is [one whose] work was other than righteous...' (*Hud:* 46). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said in this regard, 'People will not come to me with their deeds, while you come to me with your ancestry and noble lineage.'(1) The phrase, '…from great distress' (*as-Saffat:* 76) refers to drowning. The Arabic word *karb* is something hateful that one cannot repel by oneself or with the help of those around him. If one has some kind of plan to get himself out of trouble, this is not called a *karb*. The calamity in this verse is furthermore described as being 'great', as no one is able to repel it. Water was pouring down and burst forth from beneath the ground until it covered the mountain peaks. Therefore, there was no way out.

It is well known that water is the mainstay of all living things and one of Allah's greatest blessings upon us, but if Allah wills, He can make water a punishment and a means of punishment. We have seen in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) how Allah saved Musa (Moses) by means of water and destroyed Pharaoh with the very same water. Then, Allah's saying: '…We let his offspring remain on the earth' (*as-Saffat:* 77) refers to those who were with him on the Ark, and had believed in him. Allah's saying, 'We let him be praised by later generations.' (*as-Saffat:* 78) means that he was praised by all people coming after him.[1] 'Peace be upon Nuh (Noah) among all the nations.' (*as-Saffat:* 79)

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'O Fatima, rescue thyself from the fire, for I have no power (to protect you) from Allah in anything except this that I would sustain relationship with you.' Related by Muslim in his Sahih (204), Book of Faith*

When we listen to the story of this prophet who bore many difficulties for the sake of calling to Allah, and spent a long time doing so, far beyond the lives of normal people, all people should invoke peace upon him. This means that we ask Allah to grant him peace and safety. 'This is how We reward those who do good.' (*as-Saffat:* 80) Allah's way with His prophets is that He makes them victorious and let people praise them after their death. 'He was truly one of Our faithful servants.' (*as-Saffat:* 81) Then, Allah says: '…We drowned the rest.' (*as-Saffat:* 82), which refers to the disbelievers; the word 'rest' indicates contempt and disdain for them.

وَإِنَّ مِن شِيعَتِهِۦ لَإِبۡرَٰهِيمَ ﴿٨٣﴾ إِذۡ جَآءَ رَبَّهُۥ بِقَلۡبٖ سَلِيمٍ ﴿٨٤﴾ إِذۡ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوۡمِهِۦ
مَاذَا تَعۡبُدُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾ أَئِفۡكًا ءَالِهَةٗ دُونَ ٱللَّهِ تُرِيدُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾ فَمَا ظَنُّكُم بِرَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

Abraham was of the same faith [83] he came to his Lord with a devoted heart [84] He said to his father and his people, 'What are you worshipping? [85] How can you choose false gods instead of the true God? [86] So what is your opinion about the Lord of all the Worlds? [87] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 83 - 87)

Allah's says, 'Ibrahim (Abraham) was of the same faith.' (*as-Saffat:* 83) Ibrahim (Abraham) was of the same faith of Nuh (Noah) and one of his followers who followed his footsteps. The word *shi`a* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to people who follow and believe in a person's ideas; they try to carry his message to everyone else, and are willing to bear harm for this sake. The name of the sect '*Shi`a*' derived its name from this meaning. The difference between the *Shi'a* and s*hiu`iyyah* (communism) is very obvious.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his exegesis of this verse (8/5729) that Allah caused him to be praised in each nation, as he is beloved to all. Even among the Magians there are those who say he was Afridun.' It was related that the word means 'strifer' or the like.*

Why does Allah *Glorified is He* start the line of prophets with Nuh (Noah) then Ibrahim (Abraham)?

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…he came to his Lord with a devoted heart.' (*as-Saffat:* 84) The reason is the devotion of his heart, as this is the basis of belief and religion. The natural disposition upon which Allah created people is based on righteousness and purity. If some corruption afflicts this natural disposition, then it is done by man. Therefore, Allah has praised Ibrahim (Abraham) for his devoted and pure heart, as Allah says, '…he came to his Lord with a devoted heart.' (*as-Saffat:* 84) His heart remained unchanged since it was first created. As he maintained the devotion and purity of his heart during the worldly life, he will be rewarded in the Hereafter, 'The Day when there will not benefit [anyone] wealth or children. But only one who comes to Allah with a sound heart.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 88-89) He maintained this initial state of the purity and devotion of heart by adhering to Allah's path. Thus, he will meet Allah with a pure heart in the afterlife. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* described Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* with the best possible description. Allah's saying: 'he came to his Lord…' (*as-Saffat:* 84), implies that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) did not wait for a messenger to come and invite him, rather he drew close to Allah, reflected on the heavens and earth until he was guided to Allah. When Allah introduced Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) to the believers, he said: 'Indeed, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a [comprehensive] leader, devoutly obedient to Allah...' (*an-Nahl:* 120). We know that Allah created a variety of gifts and distributed them amongst people, so that everybody has some special gift. Accordingly, necessity will bind people with one another. As for Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* he had the talents of a complete nation. Therefore, he deserved to be shown Allah's mighty dominion of the heavens and the earth. All people are satisfied with the material world, but Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* surpassed this world to the Realm of Dominion because he had stripped himself of certainty in anyone but Allah. The proof is that when he was thrown into the fire and the angel came to offer him help saying, 'Do you need anything?' Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) replied out of faith and certainty, 'Nothing from you', although it was in a time of difficulty and suffering. Allah's saying: 'He said to his father and his people, "What are you worshipping?"' (*as-Saffat:* 85) indicates Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) purity and devotion of heart. He had something he was pleased with and loved, so he desired to transfer it to other people, especially his relatives, as they are the most deserving of one’s goodness. Therefore, the first people Ibrahim (Abraham) called to Allah were his father and his people. ‘He said to his father and his people, “What are you worshipping?”’ (*as-Saffat:* 85) The phrase *li`abih* is mentioned ten times in the Quran, one of which is relevant to Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* in Allah’s saying: ‘[Of these stories mention] when Joseph (Joseph) said to his father, “O my father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me.”’ (*Yusuf:* 4) The other nine are relevant to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* starting from the chapter of *al-An`am* to the chapter of *al-Mumtahanah*. One of these nine instances combines the name with the description, saying: ‘And [mention, O Muhammad], when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father Azar, “Do you take idols as deities? Indeed, I see you and your people to be in manifest error.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 74)

In the other eight, the word *li`abih* (to his father) is mentioned without the name Azar. Thus, the name ‘Azar’ mentioned in this verse to indicate that if one qualifies a description with a name, then that description must be shared with another one with a different name. For example, imagine you desired to ask about somebody and you met his son in the street, you would say, ‘Is your father around’? This is because his real father could possibly be meant by this question. However, if one asks, ‘Is your father Muhammad around’? In this case, no doubt that you intend his uncle because you gave him a name to remove any confusion between the two examples

Therefore, Azar was not Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) real father; rather, he was his uncle. There is nothing strange about this because the Quran refers to the uncle as a father, as in Allah’s saying: ‘Or were you witnesses when death approached Ya`qub (Jacob), when he said to his sons, “What will you worship after me?” They said, “We will worship your Allah and the Allah of your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) - one Allah. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 133) It is well known that Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) was Ishaq’s (Isaac) brother, yet Allah described him as a father to Prophet Ya`qub (Jacob).

When calling his uncle and his people, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* asked them: '...What do you worship?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 70) And in another verse: '…What are you worshipping?' (*as-Saffat:* 85) And, '...What are these statues to which you are devoted?' (*al-Anbiya':* 52) The questions in the verses under discussion: '…What are you worshipping? How can you choose false gods instead of the true Allah?' (*as-Saffat:* 85-86) are incredulous questions which are more effective than statements because while a statement can be denied outright, a question forces the opponent to acknowledge the issue. The word *al-ifk* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means the worst type of lies, as there are various levels of lies.

The scholars say that we must consider the object of the lie. If it concerns the most sublime truth relevant to the Divine Entity, it is considered the worst type of lie; as what is done by a person who claims that Allah has a partner. If the lie concerns a human being, its seriousness depends upon to the person the lie is relevant to. Thus, when `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was falsely accused and slandered, Allah called this incident '*ifk*' because of the repulsive nature of the accusations and the lofty rank of the person to whom this lie is relevant. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, those who came with falsehood are a group among you...' (*an-Nur:* 11). One of the meanings of *ifk* is to reverse its reality. For example, Allah says, 'And the overturned towns He hurled down.' (*an-Najm:* 53) The meaning of the verse under study is: Do you want false gods instead of Allah? 'So, what is your opinion about the Lord of all the Worlds?' (*as-Saffat:* 87) He asks them what they think about Allah. What aspect of His Divinity is it that displeases them? How do they deceive themselves and turn away from Him when He is the Lord of the worlds? Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O mankind, what has deceived you concerning your Lord, the Generous.' (*al-Infitar:* 6) Someone once said that it is as though Allah has dictated the reply to people: What has deceived people regarding their Lord is His Graciousness. In this regard, there is a story of a man who saw another praying in haste. He said to him, 'By Allah, if you owed somebody five *dirhams,* would it be okay to give them to him all worn out'? The man replied, 'By Allah, if he is gracious, he will accept them without considering whether they are worn out or not'. Allah *Glorified is He* is surprised by those people who ascribe partners to Him although they are given clear evidence that such a claim is false. Something can only be surprising when it contradicts with the way it should be. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘How can you disbelieve in Allah when you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you [back] to life, and then to Him you will be returned.’ (*al-Baqara:* 28) Their attitude is surprising and incomprehensible.

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* started to actualise Allah’s saying: ‘And thus did We show Ibrahim (Abraham) the realm of the heavens and the earth...’ (*al-An‘am:* 75). We have previously clarified the difference between the Arabic words *milk*, *mulk* and *malakut*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَنَظَرَ نَظْرَةً فِي ٱلنُّجُومِ ﴿٨٨﴾ فَقَالَ إِنِّي سَقِيمٌ ﴿٨٩﴾ فَتَوَلَّوْا۟ عَنْهُ مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾ فَرَاغَ إِلَىٰٓ
ءَالِهَتِهِمْ فَقَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٩١﴾ مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنطِقُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾ فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ ضَرْبًۢا بِٱلْيَمِينِ ﴿٩٣﴾
فَأَقْبَلُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِ يَزِفُّونَ ﴿٩٤﴾ قَالَ أَتَعْبُدُونَ مَا تَنْحِتُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾ وَٱللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

Then he looked up to the stars [88] He said, ‘I am sick,’ [89] so [his people] turned away from him and left [90] He turned to their gods and said [91] ‘Do you not eat? Why do you not speak?’ [92] then he turned and struck them with his right arm [93] His people hurried towards him [94] but he said, ‘How can you worship things you carve with your own hands [95] when it is Allah who has created you and all your handiwork? [96] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 88 - 96)

Allah’s saying about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘Then he looked up to the stars.’ (*as-Saffat:* 88) refers to the first step Ibrahim (Abraham) took towards the Realm of Dominion. The look he took was not just a fast glance; rather, it was a thoughtful, examining gaze. The verb *nadhar* here carries the meaning of close and careful examination. For example, the saying, ‘*mas`ala fiha nazhar*’ (This issue needs reflection). The singular of the word *nujum (*stars) is *najm* which refers to anybody in the sky that emits light and does not reflect the light of the sun. Accordingly, the sun is a star. Allah’s saying: ‘Then he looked up to the stars.’ (*as-Saffat:* 88) indicates that it was a long and reflective look, as it included the planets, the moon and the sun. Thus, Allah expanded upon this look in another verse in the Quran, saying: ‘And thus did We show Ibrahim (Abraham) the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]. So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said, “I like not those that disappear. And when he saw the moon rising, he said, “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said, “Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray. And when he saw the sun rising, he said, “This is my lord; this is greater.” But when it set, he said, “O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah. Indeed, I have turned my face toward He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward truth, and I am not of those who associate others with Allah.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 75-79) Thus, Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) look at the stars was long and deliberative because it lasted from the rising of the planet until its setting, then from the rising of the moon until its setting, and from the rising of the sun until its setting. When Ibrahim (Abraham) saw that these things should not be worshipped, he said: ‘…I am sick…’ (*as-Saffat:* 89). Some scholars regard this as one of the artifices that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* practised upon his people, telling them that he was sick. They considered this illness to be physical,(1) but what he meant was that he was psychologically sick, as he was preoccupied with the unbearable burden of his people’s denial of Allah as a god. This issue exhausted him and gave him sleepless nights. This is the sickness that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is mentally exhausted from over the people’s denial of Allah’s Divinity. Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) was not looking at the stars searching for evidence to convince himself, rather he was looking for concrete proofs to convince his people.

What caused him to say to his people: ‘…I am sick’ (*as-Saffat:* 89)? Scholars said that this day was a festival in which Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) people gathered and he said that in order to find a chance to demolish the idols. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘so [his people] turned away from him and left.’ (*as-Saffat:* 90) They left him. ‘He turned to their gods and said, “Do you not eat?”’ (*as-Saffat:* 91) The Arabic word *ragh*, means ‘went quietly’ so that no one would see him or ‘slip away’ like someone who wants to leave a gathering without being noticed. He took two steps then stopped. He hid behind something, and then he went away.

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(1) *They believed that his saying: ‘I am sick’ (as-Saffat: 89) meant that he was afflicted with the plague. Therefore, Allah said after this verse: ‘so [his people] turned away from him and left.’ (as-Saffat: 90) Ibn Abu Hatim related that Sufyan said regarding the verse: ‘I am sick’ (as-Saffat: 89) means afflicted with plague; people used to flee from those afflicted with the plague.’ Ad-Dur Al-Manthur by As-Suyuti, [7: 100]*

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* slipped away in order to destroy their idols. Before he did so, he mocked them: ‘…Do you not eat? Why do you not speak?’ (*as-Saffat:* 91) But they did not answer, so he said: ‘Why do you not speak?’ (*as-Saffat:* 92) ridiculing them.

Then, he struck them: ‘then he turned and struck them with his right arm.’ (*as-Saffat:* 93) We mentioned previously that the right is the side of strength, as Allah says: ‘They will say, “Indeed, you used to come at us from the right.”’ (*as-Saffat:* 28) from the direction of power and compulsion. This means that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* started to smash them with all his strength. This breakage made a loud noise that some of the people heard it: ‘people hurried towards him.’ (*as-Saffat:* 94)

When he saw them: ‘But he said, “How can you worship things you carve with your own hands?”’ (*as-Saffat:* 95-96) His question here indicates amazement and disbelief. He asked them how they worship a god that they have carved from stone with your very own hands. Surely, they know better than anyone else about this. When they saw an idol falling, they placed it back up in its place; when it was broken, they fixed it, and when the rain swept it away and it rolled in the mud, they pulled it out. How can such an idol be worshipped instead of Allah the True Lord, Who created them and all that they knew?

Certainly, they had no answer to this question, nor any way to refute Ibrahim (Abraham) except by force. They had no logic or proof which they could use to defend their gods.

قَالُوا۟ ٱبْنُوا۟ لَهُۥ بُنْيَـٰنًا فَأَلْقُوهُ فِى ٱلْجَحِيمِ ﴿٩٧﴾
فَأَرَادُوا۟ بِهِۦ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَـٰهُمُ ٱلْأَسْفَلِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

They said, ‘Build a pyre and throw him into the blazing fire.’ [97] They wanted to harm him, but We humiliated them [98] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 97 - 98)

We all know the story of the fire into which they lit and threw Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. This was their plan to deal with Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). However, Allah would not abandon Ibrahim (Abraham), so He saved him from this plan. ‘Indeed, they are planning a plan. But I am planning a plan.’ (*at-Tariq:* 15-16)

Allah’s saying: ‘…but We humiliated them’ (*as-Saffat:* 97-98) does not mean that they were humiliated because they were disbelievers, but because they sought to overtop Ibrahim (Abraham) and were able to throw him into a blazing fire. Therefore, they thought that they overtopped him.

The reality of the situation was revealed to them shortly, as Allah’s major sign happened. If Allah willed, He would not let them catch Ibrahim (Abraham), or let rainfall in order to put the fire out, but Allah wanted to refute their arguments. Had Ibrahim (Abraham) fled from them, they would think that he would have been burnt if he had been caught. Had it rained they would have thought that it was a natural phenomenon out of their control. However, Ibrahim (Abraham) was thrown into the fire but he was saved because of Allah’s Command to the fire: ‘Allah said, “O fire, be coolness and safety upon Ibrahim (Abraham).”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69)

It is Allah’s Command to the fire in its natural state and with its normal attributes to be cool and safe upon Ibrahim (Abraham) only. Allah said, ‘O fire, be coolness and safety upon Ibrahim (Abraham).’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69) What happened to the fire is similar to the tree of *Zaqqum* which appeared to be a green tree but, in fact, it was a burning fire.

This is how Allah *Glorified is He* humiliated them and made their scheme ineffective. They schemed and Allah schemed but a scheme is merited on the basis of its architect.

وَقَالَ إِنِّي ذَاهِبٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ ﴿٩٩﴾ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١٠٠﴾
فَبَشَّرْنَٰهُ بِغُلَٰمٍ حَلِيمٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

He said, ‘I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me [99]
Lord, grant me a righteous son [100] So We gave him the
good news that he would have a patient son [101]
(The Quran*, as-Saffat:* 99 - 101)

When Ibrahim (Abraham) found that there was no benefit in calling his people to believe in Allah, he said: ‘…I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me.’ (*as-Saffat:* 99) The meaning here is that he is going to advocate Allah’s religion, as his Lord is always with him and omnipresent. It can also mean that he was emigrating for the sake of Allah to another place where he would find people that respond to his call. As long as he was emigrating for the sake of his Lord, He would guide him to a good and appropriate place for his calling to Allah.

Then Ibrahim (Abraham) supplicated his Lord saying: ‘…Lord, grant me a righteous son.’ (*as-Saffat:* 101) This means that he supplicates his Lord to give his righteous offspring. When a prophet desired to have offspring, he did not merely want it as an extension of his lineage, or to have someone to leave inheritance for him. A prophet desired children to continue his calling to Allah after his death. Thus, Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said: ‘Who will inherit me and inherit from the family of Ya`qub (Jacob). And make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You].’ (*Maryam:* 6)

It seems that it was difficult for Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to accept that his life would not be long enough to continue calling to Allah’s religion, so he asked Allah to satisfy his desire by giving him a son to bear the responsibilities of prophethood after his death.

He said: ‘…Lord, grant me a righteous son.’ (*as-Saffat:* 100) What Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) said indicates that he wanted his offspring as well as other people’s offspring to be righteous. Therefore, his Lord answered his supplication: ‘So We gave him the good news that he would have a patient son.’ (*as-Saffat:* 101) The Arabic word *halim* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to the person who is not provoked by anger and remains patient as much as he can. *Hilm* (forbearance) can also mean leaving stubbornness and dispute even when one is right.

It was related that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I guarantee a house in paradise for one who gives up arguing, even if he is in the right....'(1) This person will have a palace in the outskirts of paradise and another in its middle, why? Because he believes that his Lord is Ever-Living and the Sustainer of [all] existence, neither drowsiness nor sleep overtakes Him. Therefore, He will judge between all people in all disputes and will give the oppressed his due right from the oppressor. People always resort to a powerful person to judge in their disputes. In the Egyptian dialect we say, 'The one who has a father should have no worries', so what about the one who resorts to his Lord? Thus, it is out of Allah's Mercy that He enables His slaves to sleep to the extent that makes them feel relaxed, so that they become energetic for their work. He also asks them not to worry about anything, as their Lord does not sleep.

Regarding Allah's saying: 'so We gave him the good news that he would have a patient son' (*as-Saffat:* 101), good news of something is usually given before this thing comes into existence. Allah describes him as a patient during his childhood. Forbearance is usually found in rational adults who can assess things properly. Thus, the distinction here is that this boy will be forbearing even while he is still a boy.

This forbearance was indeed manifested in the first major test that he faced, when his father said to him: '...Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?"' (*as-Saffat:* 102) The boy's response at the time when his father said these words needs contemplation. The boy said: ‘Father, do as you are commanded and, Allah willing, you will find me steadfast.’ (*as-Saffat:* 102) This is forbearance manifesting at this young age.

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(1) *It was related by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (4800) on the authority of Abu `Umama Allah be pleased with him who said that Messenger Muhammad said: 'I guarantee a house in paradise for one who gives up arguing, even if he is in the right; and I guarantee a home in the middle of paradise for one who abandons lying even for the sake of fun; and I guarantee a house in the highest part of paradise for one who has good manners.' Rabd Al-Jannah, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the Hadith, refers to the area around the edge of paradise like, for example, the buildings that lie around a city under its walls. It is also said that it means the middle of paradise. Lisan Al-'Arab under the root rabada*

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ ٱلسَّعْىَ قَالَ يَٰبُنَىَّ إِنِّىٓ أَرَىٰ فِى ٱلْمَنَامِ أَنِّىٓ أَذْبَحُكَ فَٱنظُرْ مَاذَا
تَرَىٰ ۚ قَالَ يَٰٓأَبَتِ ٱفْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ ۖ سَتَجِدُنِىٓ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ فَلَمَّآ
أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُۥ لِلْجَبِينِ ﴿١٠٣﴾ وَنَٰدَيْنَٰهُ أَن يَٰٓإِبْرَٰهِيمُ ﴿١٠٤﴾ قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ ٱلرُّءْيَآ ۚ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ
نَجْزِى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٠٥﴾ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ ٱلْبَلَٰٓؤُا۟ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿١٠٦﴾ وَفَدَيْنَٰهُ بِذِبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٠٧﴾

When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham said, ‘My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you(1) in a dream. What do you think?’ He said, ‘Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing, you will find me steadfast [102] When they had both submitted to God, and he had laid his son down on the side of his face [103] We called out to him, ‘Abraham [104] you have fulfilled the dream.’ This is how We reward those who do good [105] it was a test to prove [their true characters] [106] We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice [107] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 102 - 107)

The sequence here does not deal with Hajar *peace be upon her* nor her bearing of Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* rather, it moves directly to his reaching the stage of being able to share in his father’s endeavours. Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘And [one day,] when [the child] had become old enough to share in his [father's] endeavours…' (*as-Saffat:* 102), because it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who is speaking and narrating.

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(1) *There is some question as to who the one to be slaughtered was, Ismail (Ishmael) or Ishaq (Isaac) peace be upon them and there has been considerable disagreement regarding it. Al-Qurtubi mentions in his exegesis [8/5739-5741] three different positions the third of which, that of Az-Zajjaj, was that Allah is the one Who knows best who it was, but he was inclined to believe it was Ishaq (Isaac) peace be upon him. Ibn-Kathir, on the other hand, mentions in his exegesis [4/14-19] the proofs of each party. He proceeds to refute the proofs of those who claim it was Ishaq (Isaac) peace be upon him and insists that the true and correct position is that it was Ismail (Ishmael) peace be upon him. It is even in the Torah that Ismail (Ishmael) peace be upon him was 13 years older than Ishaq (Isaac) peace be upon him and that Ibrahim (Abraham) was ordered to sacrifice his only virgin son. He also rejected the sayings that were attributed to the Companions. Whoever desires the details can look them up in their place. `Adil Abu Al--Ma`ati.*

One of the aspects of rhetoric is to elide what is known of the sequence and this is one of the characteristic features of the Quran. In the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the Hoopoe, Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Go with this my letter and convey it to them; and thereafter withdraw from them and see what [answer] they return.' (*an-Naml:* 28) He then removes much from the sequence of events and says, '[When the Queen had read Sulaiman's (Solomon's) letter,] she said: "O you nobles! A truly distinguished letter has been conveyed unto me."' (*an-Naml:* 29) He does not undertake to describe the journey of the Hoopoe, nor the way in which the address was sent to the queen.

Similarly here, 'Whereupon We gave him the glad tiding of a boy-child gentle [like himself] And [one day,] when [the child] had become old enough to share in his [father's] endeavours' (*as-Saffat:* 101-102). The fact that he has become old enough to share in his father's endeavours is evidence of his being the answer to Ibrahim's (Abraham's) prayer *peace be upon him*. The child was born and became old enough to help his father in his affairs. There is a difference between saying 'he reached the age of work', generally and 'he became old enough to share in his father's endeavours', because a boy is not given work to do except in accordance with his abilities, his strength, health, and capacity. At this time, Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* became old enough to share in just his father's endeavours because his father would be gentle and not task him with more than he could bear of good deeds and chores. The boy would do what he could and would leave what he could not to his father. Had he been with someone else he may well have charged him with more than he could handle.

So, when the boy reached this stage, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said, 'O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you…' (*as-Saffat:* 102). The meaning here is that, 'I saw in a dream that I am required to sacrifice you', not that the sacrifice was accomplished in the dream and that the matter is finished. The evidence for this is Ismail's (Ishmael's) reply, '… [Ismail (Ishmael)] answered: "O my father! Do as you are bidden. You will find me, if Allah so wills, among those who are patient in adversity!"' (*as-Saffat:* 102)

We should pause to reflect upon this manifestation of pure forbearance, and the eminence of his reply in this awesome test. '[Ismail (Ishmael)] answered: "O my father! Do as you are bidden…"' (*as-Saffat:* 102), he did not say, 'do as you like'; because his obedience to his father here is subsumed under his obedience to Allah *the Exalted*. He understands full well that his father is taking his orders from Allah, even if this order did come in the form of a vision. Hence, he knows, despite his youth, that the visions of the prophets are true revelation.

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* calls his son, '…O my dear son (*ya bunayy*) …' (*as-Saffat:* 102), in the diminutive (*at-tasghir*); the Arabic word *bunayy* (dear son) is the diminutive of *ibn* (son); he did not merely say '*ya ibni*; (my son). In this way, he reassured him of his paternal affection. He presented this test to his son while full of love and compassion for him, for his was still small. It is well known that the tenderness of a parent is in direct proportion to the needs of the child. That is why the Arabic woman said, when asked which of her children were most beloved to her she replied, 'The sick one until he gets better, the absent one until he returns and the smallest one until he gets bigger.'(1)

Thus, his saying, 'O my dear son (*ya bunayy*)' (*as-Saffat:* 102) means 'I am not treating you here as an equal but as a child who needs his father's affection, so take these orders in conjunction to my heartfelt paternal compassion'.

Ibrahim's (Abraham's) saying, 'consider, then' (*as-Saffat:* 102), means think and reflect, 'what would be your view' (*as-Saffat:* 102), i.e. about your vision. It thus appears that there are two things sought of this child; one relating to his father and one relating to his father's Lord. So, in: 'O my father, do as you are bidden…' (*as-Saffat:* 102). 'Do' relates to his obedience to his father, and: 'as you are bidden' (*as-Saffat:* 102) relates to his obedience to his father's Lord.

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(1) *This is attributed to Hudha ibn-`Ali Al-Hanafi to Khosrou in Al-`Iqd Al-Farid by Ibn-`Abd Rabbu, Al-Kamil by Al-Mubarrad, Al-Mustaqsa Fi Amthal Al-`Arab by Az-Zamakhshari, and in Majma` Al-Amthal by Al-Maydani. It is also attributed to Ghaylan ibn-Salama Ath-Thaqafi in Al-Aghani by Ab Al-Faraj Al-Asfahani and in Muhadarat Al-`Udaba` by Ar-Raghib Al-Asbahani.*

Then Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* confirms that, despite his youth, he understands the circumstances of this test saying, '…you will find me, if Allah so wills, among those who are patient…' (*as-Saffat:* 102), i.e. in the face of this tribulation, Allah's saying, 'But as soon as the two had surrendered themselves…' (*as-Saffat:* 103) refers to Allah's Commandment; each one had submitted his reins, as it were, to Allah. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was ready to sacrifice, and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was ready to yield, saying to his father, '…you will find me, if Allah so wills, among those who are patient…' (*as-Saffat:* 102).

Ibrahim's (Abraham's) tribulation is multiplied this time. He was tested when he was a youth, when he was thrown into the fire, and he passed the test. This time he is being tested as an old man; he now has a child in his old age, he is more beloved to him than his own self, and he has been ordered to kill him.

It was possible for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to kill him while he was unaware, without telling him about the whole affair but he wanted him to share in the reward, for otherwise he would be sacrificing him for no reason and it would torment his heart.

Allah's saying, 'and Ibrahim (Abraham) had laid him down on his face' (*as-Saffat:* 103) means that he put him down on his forehead, or face down. The scholars say that this was the result of consultation with his son, so that his father would not see his son's face while he was slaughtering him, and thus be overcome by compassion and not fulfil the sacrifice. Thus, it was that the boy helped his father to fulfil his duty and fully manifested his submission.

So, the boy is lain out on the earth and his father has a knife in his hand and is actually trying to sacrifice his son; and which son is this? It is his only son whom he was given in old age.

The tribulation here is not so much that his son would die but that his father was to slaughter him with his very own hand; it would not be at the hand of some other person. Further that he was sacrificing him based upon a vision, not a clear order. That is why we said his tribulation was multiplied, for it had many aspects. Yet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son *peace be upon them* passed the test successfully and thus deserved to have Allah say of him, 'Verily, Ibrahim (Abraham) was a man who combined within himself all virtues…' (*an-Nahl:* 120).

So, when Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son *peace be upon them* reached this degree of submission: ‘We called out to him: ‘O Ibrahim (Abraham)!”’ (*as-Saffat:* 104) It is as though Allah was monitoring the submission of these two slaves who had been truthful to Him. Hence reprieve came to them from Him. ‘We called out to him: “O *Ibrahim* (Abraham)! You have already fulfilled [the purpose of] that dream-vision!” Thus, verily, do We reward the doers of good; for, behold, all this was indeed a trial, clear in itself.’ (*as-Saffat:* 104-106), i.e. ‘Restrain your hand, O Ibrahim (Abraham), from sacrificing your only son’. This was nothing but a trial; clearly severe upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son *peace be upon them* yet illuminating because it manifested the strength of Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) belief when taking orders from Allah, even though they may be difficult and harsh, and his yielding and obedience to those orders. The tribulation of his son who had to submit and obey was the same.

Then the ransom came: ‘And We ransomed him with a tremendous sacrifice’ (*as-Saffat:* 107). The word *dhibh* (sacrifice) here refers to the thing sacrificed (*madhbuh*), and that was the ram that Allah *Glorified is He* sent down as a replacement for Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*.

وَتَرَكۡنَا عَلَيۡهِ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَىٰٓ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ ﴿١٠٩﴾
كَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِي ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿١١٠﴾ إِنَّهُۥ مِنۡ عِبَادِنَا ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

And We let him be praised by succeeding generations [108]
‘Peace be upon Abraham!’ [109] This is how We reward
those who do good [110] truly he was one of Our faithful
servants [111] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 108 - 111)

Thus, did Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* earn this rank among all the nations who came after him; that all should pray for him *peace be upon him* whenever he is mentioned saying, ‘Peace be upon Ibrahim (Abraham)!’ (*as-Saffat:* 109) Had Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* actually sacrificed his son it would have become an example for those who came after him, and people would have sought to draw closer to Allah by sacrificing their sons. But because Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was patient and submitted to the command of his Lord, Allah gave him reprieve. He and his son were relieved of this tribulation and consequently we too were all relieved of this matter. Hence, every time he is mentioned we say, ‘peace be upon him’.

Allah’s saying, ‘Thus do We reward the doers of good (*al-muhsinin*)’ (*as-Saffat:* 110) means that just as we treated Ibrahim (Abraham) we treat every *muhsin* (doer of good). The *muhsin* is the one who does not stop at what has been made obligatory for him but goes beyond that to add more of the same. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made five prayers obligatory upon us through the course of the day and the night, whoever adds to that has a portion of *ihsan* (excellence). Similarly, Allah has made *zakat* obligatory upon us, whoever gives wealth over and above this has a portion of *ihsan* (excellence). Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*, ‘[But] behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Lord will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16), i.e. they gave more than was obligatory upon them of the same kind.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* mentions some of the ways to perform such excellence: ‘They would lie asleep during but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness before the dawn and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19) The ‘doer of good’ earns this reward because by giving more than was sought of him he has shown that he loves what he has been tasked with, and that he knows that Allah has tasked him with less than he deserves and so he has given more.

وَبَشَّرْنَٰهُ بِإِسْحَٰقَ نَبِيًّا مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١١٢﴾ وَبَٰرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَىٰٓ
إِسْحَٰقَ ۚ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا مُحْسِنٌ وَظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِۦ مُبِينٌ ﴿١١٣﴾

We gave Abraham the good news of Isaac – a prophet and a righteous man [112] and blessed him and Isaac too: some of their offspring were good, but some clearly wronged themselves [113] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 112 - 113)

All these gifts are the consequence of the surrender mentioned in the verse: ‘But as soon as the two had surrendered themselves to [what they thought to be] the will of Allah, and Ibrahim (Abraham) had laid him down on his face' (*as-Saffat:* 103). The trial that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* underwent was composed of three points: losing the son which had come to him in old age, that he was to kill him with his own hand and that he should kill his son based upon a vision. The reward that came to him thus came in proportion to the difficulties that he faced in these tests.

'And We ransomed him with a tremendous sacrifice' (*as-Saffat:* 107). The ransom mentioned here was Ismail's (Ishmael's) ransom; such that he might live and not be sacrificed. After this Allah *Glorified is He* gave Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* more in the form of Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him*; 'And [in time] We gave him the glad tiding of Ishaq (Isaac), [who, too, would be] a prophet, one of the righteous' (*as-Saffat:* 112). Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* was also a prophet. In another verse Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and, after Ishaq (Isaac), of [his son] Ya`qub (Jacob)' (*Hud:* 71). Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* was also a prophet. All this good then was the result of his submission to Allah *the Exalted* and contentment with His judgement. The poet(1) spoke the truth when he said:

Submit to your Lord in His judgement, He judges with wisdom,
And so you may be safe and benefit.
Remember the Friend of Allah, sacrificing his son,
When his Creator said, 'And when they had submitted'.

Allah increases His gifts saying, 'and We blessed him and Ishaq (Isaac)…' (*as-Saffat:* 113). When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of their descendants however He says, '…but among the offspring of these two there were [destined] to be both doers of good and such as would glaringly sin against themselves' (*as-Saffat:* 113), i.e. there would be good and evil sorts among his descendants.

In these verses, the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is related to us in brief such that not everything has been mentioned. We should mention here the conflict between the religions regarding the person who was to be sacrificed. The Muslims believe that it was Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* and the non-Muslims say it was Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him*. This latter opinion however is to be rejected for a number of reasons:

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(1) This poetry is by Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul*.

Firstly, had it been Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* the sacrifice, ransom and what relates to them of ceremonial rights would be those of the locale which in the case of Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* was the Levant. Yet they were those of the Arabian Peninsula where Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was born and raised. This is a location-based proof that the one to be sacrificed was Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*.

Secondly, we have a proof from the Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said, ‘I am the son of the two to be sacrificed’. These ‘two to be sacrificed’ means the two who were ransomed from sacrifice. The first of these was `Abdullah, the father of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. His father ransomed him with a sacrifice of a hundred camels. As for the second, it was Ismail’s (Ishmael’s) Lord who ransomed him with a ram.

If others reject these proofs because they do not believe in them then we must give them proof from their own books, for people will only trust that which they have faith in. If a Muslim were to swear to a non-Muslim by *al-Lat* and *al-`Uzza* (Pre-Islamic idols that were worshiped), the latter would not believe him because he knows that Muslims do not believe in them and people only swear by things they esteem. However, if you said, ‘by Allah!’ then he would believe you.

That is why we have the following proof from the Torah for the non-Muslims, because that is what they believe in. Allah has preserved for us in the previous books some things which support that which has come in the Quran. These things are still present today; it is as if Allah blinded them to them so that there would remain in their own books proofs to the reality which they deny.

They should read Genesis 2: 22, ‘Then He said to Ibrahim (Abraham) “Take now your only son, and go to the Mount of Moriah, and present him there as a burnt offering to me.”’ When was Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* an only son, given that he was born when Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was 14 years old? In chapter 24 of Genesis we read, ‘Ismail (Ishmael) was 14 years old when Ishaq (Isaac) was born.’

وَلَقَدۡ مَنَنَّا عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَٰرُونَ ﴿١١٤﴾ وَنَجَّيۡنَٰهُمَا وَقَوۡمَهُمَا مِنَ ٱلۡكَرۡبِ
ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ﴿١١٥﴾ وَنَصَرۡنَٰهُمۡ فَكَانُواْ هُمُ ٱلۡغَٰلِبِينَ ﴿١١٦﴾ وَءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمَا ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ
ٱلۡمُسۡتَبِينَ ﴿١١٧﴾ وَهَدَيۡنَٰهُمَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمَ ﴿١١٨﴾ وَتَرَكۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمَا فِي
ٱلۡأٓخِرِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَٰرُونَ ﴿١٢٠﴾ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ
نَجۡزِي ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿١٢١﴾ إِنَّهُمَا مِنۡ عِبَادِنَا ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

We also bestowed Our favour on Moses and Aaron [114]
We saved them and their people from great distress [115]
We helped them, so they were the ones to succeed [116]
We gave them the Scripture that makes things clear [117]
We guided them to the right path [118] We let them be praised
by succeeding generations [119] Peace be upon Moses and
Aaron! [120] This is how We reward those who do good [121]
truly they were among Our faithful servants [122]
(The Quran*, as-Saffat:* 114 - 122)

This is the succession of the 'Resolute' among the messengers. Having told us of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the Quran now tells us of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. 'Thus, indeed, did We bestow Our favour upon Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)' (*as-Saffat:* 114). Allah *Glorified is He* gave Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* a great gift whereby he made the pair of them messengers to the children of Israel; He also gave them the gift of victory when He made them triumphant over Pharaoh and his armies.

'And We saved them and their people from the awesome calamity' (*as-Saffat:* 115), i.e. Pharaoh himself. Allah described him as 'the awesome calamity' because Pharaoh was a man who did not reign over his people like a king, but rather as if he were a god. He formed schemes against Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and against his people in Egypt, such that he used them as servants, labourers and magicians.

The word pharaoh is used to describe the kings of ancient Egypt; each of them was called a pharaoh. Despite this in the chapter of *Yusuf* the ruler of Egypt is referred to as *Al-`Aziz*. Why? The scholars say that after the Rosetta stone was deciphered we learnt that when the Hyksos invaded Egypt there were kings there, not pharaohs. When the Pharaohs took over the children of Israel fell into the service of Pharaoh because they have previously been aligned with the Hyksos, so Pharaoh and his helpers persecuted them.

'And We saved them and their people from the awesome calamity' (*as-Saffat:* 115), i.e. Pharaoh, and also The Exodus, when they set out with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and Pharaoh and his army caught up with them and surrounded them by the sea, such that the sea was in front of them and Pharaoh's army was behind them. This situation was very similar to the situation of Tariq ibn-Ziyad during the conquest of Andalucia when he said, 'Verily the sea is in front of you and the enemy is behind.'

When this happened the children of Israel felt certain that Pharaoh would get them and said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* '…Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) because all available evidence pointed to this conclusion. According to the laws of nature they were done for, yet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his Lord worked according to a different law. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* began to say at the top of his voice, 'No!' meaning, 'no we are not done for'. He said it on the basis of his trust in his Lord and his storehouse of faith: 'He replied: "Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62), and indeed relief came at that very instant. His Lord ordered him to strike the sea with his stick, and the rest of the story is well known.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And succoured them, so that [in the end] it was they who achieved victory.' (*as-Saffat:* 116); what a victory it was! There is a considerable difference between beating one's enemy and yet he remains alive and well, and beating him in such a way that he is wiped off of the face of the earth. In the events between Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh Allah *Glorified is He* passed an irrevocable judgement on Pharaoh and his army.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And We gave them the Book that made [right and wrong] distinct (*mustabin*)' (*as-Saffat:* 117). The Arabic word *mustabin* in this verse means that which reaches the acme of clarification. The 'Book' referred to is the Torah. The True Lord *Glorified is He* described the Torah in another place saying, 'And, indeed, We vouchsafed unto Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) [Our revelation as] the standard by which to discern the true from the false, and as a [guiding] light and a reminder for the Allah-conscious.' (*al-Anbiya':* 48)

Allah's saying, 'and guided them the straightway' (*as-Saffat:* 118) means the path of uprightness that leads to Allah *Glorified is He* via the shortest possible route. 'And left them thus to be remembered among later generations: Peace be upon *Musa* (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!' (*as-Saffat:* 119-120), i.e. we caused them to be remembered well by those who came after them such that all those who hear the story of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* their trials and their steadfastness upon the truth pray for peace upon them. 'Thus do We reward the doers of good '(*as-Saffat:* 121), i.e. Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*.

It is well known that Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* became a prophet by means of Musa's (Moses's) request when he said to his Lord, 'And my brother Harun (Aaron) – he is far better in speech than I am. Send him with me, therefore, as a helper, so that he might [more eloquently] bear witness to my speaking the truth: for I fear indeed that they will give me the lie.' (*al-Qasas:* 34) Allah *Glorified is He* answered Musa's (Moses's) prayer and aided him by means of his brother *Harun* (Aaron), making the two of them as one messenger to the children of Israel. The Quran clarifies this issue for us that they were indeed as one messenger. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And Musa (Moses) prayed: "O our Lord! Verily, You have granted splendour and riches, in the life of this world, unto Pharaoh and his great ones – with the result, O our Lord, that they are leading [others] astray from your path! O our Lord! Wipe out their riches, and harden their hearts, so that they may not attain to faith ere they see the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!"' (*Yunus:* 88) The True Lord *Glorified is He* replies to them saying, 'Accepted is your prayer…' (*Yunus:* 89), even though it was Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* alone who prayed to Allah. [Allah] answered: 'Accepted is your prayer…' (*Yunus:* 89), i.e. Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* because in the realm of prophethood they are one; neither can be separated(1) from the other; the prayer of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is the prayer of Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him*.

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(1) *This is according to Ibn-Kathir in his Tafsir, was the opinion of Abu Al- `Aliya, Abu-Saleh, `Ikrima, Muhammad ibn Ka`b Al-Qarzi, and Ar-Rabi` ibn Anas. [2/429]*

Some scholars sought to make this matter easier to understand, explaining it by saying that Allah *Glorified is He* answered Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saying, ‘Accepted is your prayer’ (*Yunus:* 89) because while Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* prayed Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* said ‘Amen’ and the one who says amen is in reality one of those praying. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* ‘for those two were truly among Our believing servants.’ (*as-Saffat:* 122)

The Quran then moves to speak about another prophet, Prophet Elijah *peace be upon him*:

وَإِنَّ إِلۡيَاسَ لَمِنَ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ﴿١٢٣﴾ إِذۡ قَالَ لِقَوۡمِهِۦٓ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٢٤﴾ أَتَدۡعُونَ بَعۡلٗا
وَتَذَرُونَ أَحۡسَنَ ٱلۡخَٰلِقِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾ ٱللَّهَ رَبَّكُمۡ وَرَبَّ ءَابَآئِكُمُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٢٦﴾

Elijah too was one of the messengers [123] He said to his people, ‘Have you no fear of God? [124] How can you invoke Baal and forsake the Most Gracious Creator [125] Allah, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers? [126]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 123 - 126)

The name Ilyas (Elijah) *peace be upon him* is generally written with a *sin* at the end, but it can also be written using the actual name of the letter *sin* at the end instead; it thus becomes Ilyasin. Thus, there are two names for this one noble prophet; we can refer to him as Ilyas or Ilyasin. He is not however to be confused with Alyasa *peace be upon him*.

These verses clarify that Ilyas came to renew the belief in Allah, not to bring a Divine Law. He came to rectify the pinnacle of belief which is faith in the necessarily existent Allah; the One Who alone is to be supplicated. Indeed, the whole procession of Divine Messages since Adam *peace be upon him* came to correct this relationship between the creation and their Creator.

To this end He reminds you that He is the Creator and the All-Provider; that He is the All Knowing, the All-Powerful, the Wise, the Almighty etc. It is

He who has created you and bestowed His blessing upon you so that you might accept His commands gladly and turn to Him in tranquillity. If your worship of Him is not the result of the blessings He has given you and prepared for you before your existence, then it will not be out of fear of His punishment when you return to Him.

In Allah's saying, '…Will you not (*ala*) remain conscious of Allah?' (*as-Saffat:* 124), the Arabic word (*ala*) will you not is used to encourage and incite people to piety. It can also be used to make offers, as when one says, 'Would you like such-and-such'? Allah's saying, 'Will you invoke *Baal*…' (*as-Saffat:* 125), refers to an idol named *Baal*, 'and forsake' (*as-Saffat:* 125), i.e. neglect, '…the best of artisans" (*as-Saffat:* 125).

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* describes Himself as: '…the best of creators' (*as-Saffat:* 125), it means that He *Glorified is He* does not begrudge his slaves the attribute of being creators. Hence the person who reflects on creation and invents something beneficial for society is a creator because he made something new that did not previously exist. While he is a creator, Allah is the best of creators because He creates things out of pure nothingness; we however can only create things using pre-existent materials. Allah's creation contains life, growth and movement, etc. whereas our creations are immotile and stuck in a fixed state and we have previously differentiated between these two.

We may pause to reflect here: The True Lord *Glorified is He* upbraids them for worshipping idols and leaving the worship of Allah, but He did not say, 'and forsake Allah', rather, He said, '…and forsake the best of creators' (*as-Saffat:* 125). He mentioned an attribute that arouses adoration and proves His right *Glorified is He* to be worshipped. Allah *Glorified is He* continues as if they had asked, 'and who is the best of creators?' saying, 'Allah, your Lord and the Lord of your forebears of old?"' (*as-Saffat:* 126) 'I am the best of creators, I am your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers, the One Who deserves to be worshipped'. But what was their answer?

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَإِنَّهُمۡ لَمُحۡضَرُونَ ١٢٧ إِلَّا عِبَادَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡمُخۡلَصِينَ ١٢٨
وَتَرَكۡنَا عَلَيۡهِ فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرِينَ ١٢٩ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَىٰٓ إِلۡ يَاسِينَ ١٣٠
إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجۡزِي ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ١٣١ إِنَّهُۥ مِنۡ عِبَادِنَا ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ١٣٢

But they rejected him. They will be brought to punishment
as a consequence [127] not so the true servants of God [128]
We let him be praised by succeeding generations [129]
Peace be to Elijah! [130] This is how We reward those who
do good [131] truly he was one of Our faithful servants [132]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 127 - 132)

Allah says, ‘But they gave him the lie…’ (*as-Saffat:* 127), like all the peoples unto whom messengers came, seeking to take them from darkness to light. It is inevitable that messengers should be rejected; the corrupt and those who benefit from corruption reject them, and the leaders of the people and their dignitaries reject them so that their leadership, power, and exploitation of the weak may continue. ‘But they gave him the lie: and therefore they will most surely be arraigned [on Judgment Day]’ (*as-Saffat:* 127), i.e. on the Day of Judgement the angels of punishment will gather them together. The meaning then is: ‘Do not think that you will escape Our grasp because you will be brought back to Us’. Allah *Glorified is He* also says in this vein, ‘Did you, then, think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not have to return to Us’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 115). Allah’s saying, ‘excepting only [those who were] Allah’s true servants’ (*as-Saffat:* 128) refers to those whom He chose to obey and worship Him.

This brief story about this noble prophet is then brought to a close in the same way as those that preceded it: ‘and him We left thus to be remembered among later generations. Peace be upon Ilyas (Elijah) and his followers! Verily, thus do We reward the doers of good for he was truly one of Our believing servants!’ (*as-Saffat:* 129-132) We understand from these closing verses that *ihsan* (doing good) is an offshoot of faith, meaning that nobody can be a *muhsin* (a doer of good) without having faith first.

This is how the Quran has summarised the story of this prophet for us and clarified that he came, not with a legal system, but to rectify people’s belief.

He came to correct the foundation upon which life is based. Indeed, this was the task of all messengers since Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah created Adam *peace be upon him* the father of mankind, as His vicegerent on earth. Man being Allah's vicegerent on earth means that he performs duties on earth for the True Lord *Glorified is He*. In order that he might carry out these duties, Allah granted him certain attributes similar to His. Yet these attributes are gifts that have been granted; they are not fundamental attributes of the vicegerent; this is why the Creator can take them away at any time. Allah *the Exalted,* however, is the Necessarily Existent, the Most High and it is His Quintessence that is characterised by these attributes. Allah is Powerful and extends power to you from His Power; He is Wise and grants you wisdom from His Wisdom so that you may use it in your daily interactions. Allah is Over-Powering and He grants people authority to discipline those who are under their command so that their affairs may run correctly. He also grants people mercy so that they might be gentle with the weak and the needy.

Another of the attributes that the necessarily existent True Lord gives us is existence from His Existence. Indeed, He grants existence to innumerable individuals in their innumerable variations. Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an incidental existence from His fundamental existence. If one looks to the defects that afflict people in their limbs or senses, one will see that, be it in their outward appearances or their inner dispositions, they were put there by Allah *the Exalted*. Why? Because as man's creator has informed us, 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be Self-Sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7). An example of this would be a child with his father. If the father gives his son a monthly allowance, one will notice that the boy is only desirous to see his father once a month. If, however, he gives him it day by day the boy will come and loiter unduly around his father every day. He will present himself regularly so as to get the money for which he hopes. One may see him in the morning come to his father and say, 'Father, Iam going to school'. It is need that has brought him to love his father.

It seems necessary to explain here the philosophy behind these needs which demand a solution. It is these needs which cause one to turn to one's Lord. Reality confirms this. We see that much of the time people do not turn to their Lord and do not rectify their relationship with their Creator except when something goes wrong and circumstances become difficult. When someone finds no help but His Lord then he cries out, ‘O Lord!’, ‘O Allah’!

So, the Creator grants the vicegerent some of His attributes but these attributes remain temporal, impermanent gifts. That is why human beings die unborn or as children, as young, middle-aged or old men. This subject helps us to understand the Noble Hadith: ‘Allah created Adam in his image; his height was 60 cubits’(1). It is possible for the first pronoun ‘his’ to refer to Allah. The meaning would thus be that Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* in His image but not His reality. An image is that which captures a moment in a certain pose that one is then fixed in. Thus, the creation mentioned in this Hadith does not mean that Adam *peace be upon him* received any of Allah’s true attributes; rather, he received an image, as it were, of them. The reality is everlasting but the attributes of Adam *peace be upon him* were not.

It is also possible that the pronoun ‘his’ refers to Adam. The meaning would thus be, ‘Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* in Adam’s image’, for Allah *the Exalted* did not create Adam *peace be upon him* as a foetus that was subsequently born and grew into a child and then a young man; rather, his initial creation was in the form of a fully-grown man. Thus, we see that both interpretations are possible.

There is also a significant difference between one who creates and one who creates one who creates. To clarify this, imagine a small child who cannot move a table from its place. A strong man could easily move it, yet he cannot transfer his strength to a weak person so that the latter can do it on his own. He can only transfer the effect of his attribute, he took his burden from him and carried it but the child remained weak and unable to lift it.

One of the amazing aspects of Allah’s creation and His gifts is that He *Glorified is He* creates from His Power another power and gives it to us, so that we ourselves are able to work with our own hands. Creation can volunteer and help the weak one and act on his behalf, but he remains weak. As for the Creator *Glorified is He* he gives the weak one strength to act on his own.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari relates this Hadith in his Sahih [Kitab Al-Isti`dhan 5873] and Muslim in his Sahih [3741]. An-Nawawi said in his explanation of this Hadith, ‘The obvious interpretation of this narration is that the pronoun in the words ‘suratih’ (his image) refers to Adam peace be upon him and that the intended meaning is that Adam peace be upon him was first created in the image that he had while upon the earth and that he died upon. That image was that he was 60 cubits tall, and that he did not develop by stages as his descendants do. His image in paradise was the same as his image on earth, he did not change.’*

We should not forget though, that these attributes are granted to us, they are not part of our fundamental nature. Our existence is not inceptive, rather, we are vicegerents and by necessity we must remain in the care of the One Who appointed us such. Woe be to the one who tries to deviate from his Master, for He will strip him of the factors of his appointment.

One should know, when seeing those who have been afflicted or disabled in some way, by blindness or lameness, etc. that the Creator *Glorified is He* wants you to notice them so that you remember that your existence is not inceptive, only appointed. You are only something so long as the One who appointed you is with you. If He were to abandon you, you would cease to exist. One of the blemishes of man is that he considers himself to be inceptive. Were he to remember his place and the reality of his existence his affairs would be rectified.

Some people look at these afflictions as if they were deformities and see therein no wisdom. The reality is that they were created for some purpose that Allah *the Exalted* desires. They are a means of showing people that they should not be deluded just because they have healthy limbs, and that they should uphold the remembrance of Allah, the Creator. As we said, it is need that drives one.

We see that the traffic police will take a newly destroyed car and then put it in a prominent place so that everyone can see it, and thus be deterred from driving at foolish speeds. This car is an example and a means of clarification placed just so for a reason. It is quite comprehensible that they would destroy a car intentionally, given the trade-off between destroying one car and saving millions of lives.

When one sees a person with a defect one should say, ‘All praise is for Allah Who made me healthy in regard to your affliction’(1), and look to Allah’s blessings upon one, of which one is so often heedless.

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(1) *It is related by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [3421], and Ibn-Majah in his Sunnan [2892] on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with them that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Whoever sees someone with an affliction and says, “All=*

Someone may ask what the sin of such a person was that Allah should make him a reminder for others. We would say that if they knew what he was given to substitute it then they would desire to be like him. We should remember that Allah gives people with defects other characteristics to substitute for their loss. We have a proverb, 'The disabled man is a force to be reckoned with'. Perhaps you have seen a man with no arms thread a needle with his feet or a blind child memorise the entire Quran at the age of six. Allah took away his sight but gave him insight. These are things that normal people cannot accomplish.

We said previously that if a man crippled in one hand were to hit you with that hand you find it to be a lethal blow. This arm is always resting and does no work so it has more strength than a healthy one. If it comes into action all his strength would be in this arm.

Of our brothers whom Allah has tested by removing their sight we can only say that they are potential storehouses of knowledge! Why? They can achieve levels of knowledge of which the sighted are incapable. This is because the visual distractions around us distract those who can see. As for the blind, he has nothing to distract him, so his faculties of perception are always free and ready to receive. On top of that he is unable to read so he jumps at the opportunity to have someone read to him and listens avidly. He listens so keenly to what he hears that he doesn not need to hear it again. That is why one of them(1) said,

I was blinded a babe, and in blindness is acumen,
Insightful became I, of knowledge a depot,
The light left my eye, contributing to my hearts
Knowledge, and what people wasted I got.(2)

= *praise is for Allah Who made me healthy in regard to your affliction, and preferred me over many of those he created a great deal" will be saved from that affliction as long as he lives, whatever happens.'*

(1) He was Bashshar ibn-Burd Al-`Uqayli. Born in 95 A.H. he was originally from Turkistan and was blind. He grew up in Basra and went on to Baghdad and lived during both the Umayyad and `Abbasid caliphates. He was accused of being a heretic and died while being lashed in 167 A.H. He was buried in Basra. *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya.*

(2) These two couplets are from *Bahr (meter) Al-Wafir* that has four couplets in total. They are as follows:
I was blinded a baby, and in blindness is acumen, =

When we see people who are disabled or otherwise afflicted we tend to look at our completeness instead of the gifts they have been given as substitutes, but as we previously said, the person who composed the world-famous symphonies was deaf(1) and Tamerlane (Timur the Lame) as well, who conquered much of the world and won many famous battles, was lame.

When the true believer sees others whom Allah has tested, he does not arrogate himself above them or judge them by means of his own health; instead he humbles himself before them. He knows that this deficiency is compensated for by something else, so he asks himself, ‘I wonder in what way he distinguishes himself and is better than me’? By means of this stance all people become equal.

So, man should always remember the reality that he is not inceptive in creation but Allah’s vicegerent. How similar this is to deputation, i.e. when you choose another to represent you in something specific. If he then thinks that he is your representative in everything then he will misrepresent you. That is why sensible people, when choosing representatives, do so in accordance with necessity so that the representative does not infringe upon or abuse their rights.

The rectification of the world and of people’s affairs is predicated upon this principle of vicegerency. The original state of man is that he is a vicegerent who is in need of the One Who appointed him. Feelings of independence usually lead us to forget this. But need drives and disposes us towards the One Who placed us here.

When Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* to be His vicegerent on earth, did He send him down into the world to carry out his duties in populating the earth and uncovering Allah’s secrets in the universe without preparing him for this mission? How could this be possible when we

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= Insightful became I, in knowledge perceptive,
From eye to heart the light passed, combined
With it, and what people wasted I did find.

(1) Beethoven, the German composer. He was the most pre-eminent musician in the development of classical music. He presented his first piece when he was eight years old. He began to lose his hearing in his thirties, but this did not affect his production which in fact increased in this period and was marked by an increase in creativity.

ourselves take, for instance, a sports player who we teach, prepare, and train just so that he can play a game? We spend money on him and correct his errors until he reaches the level required of him. What do you think would be the case then when it comes to the duty of populating the earth?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* prepared Adam *peace be upon him* for his duties. He placed him in a garden containing anything he might desire: 'And We said: "O Adam, dwell you and your wife in this garden, and eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish; but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers."' (*al-Baqara:* 35) This is how the Creator defined Adam's way of living in paradise. He made it permissible for him to eat of whatever he willed, with the exception of one tree. Thus, we can see that what is permissible is plentiful, indeed uncountable, while what is forbidden is limited. This is Allah's way in life. The legal basis for things is permissibility with the exception of those things for which a clear ruling exists prohibiting them and it is confined to those particular things.

Let us pause here to reflect upon the legal caution advised in Allah's saying, '...but do not approach...' (*al-Baqara:* 35). Allah did not say, 'Do not eat....' The thing that was prohibited here was approaching the tree because one's closeness to the prohibited tempts you until you fall into it. This is why we find the Quran articulates commandments in the following manner: '... These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, transgress them...' (*al-Baqara:* 229). As for prohibitions they articulated in a manner like the following: '...These are the bounds set by Allah: do not, then, approach them...' (*al-Baqara:* 187). When wine was forbidden in Islam it was not just its drinking that was forbidden, rather, everything that is related to it was prohibited, be it buying, selling, transport or production, even being in the same place as it. Why? To block the means that leads to and tempts one into it.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies the lawful and the forbidden for us, His commands and His prohibitions, He turns our attention to an important issue. It is as though He says to us: 'If you stand firm on this way your life will be safe and sound, free of troubles and hardships; but if you overstep the bounds then you will see the emergence of defects in society, be they behavioural, economical, societal, or whatever'.

In the story of Adam *peace be upon him* eating from the tree there is an indication of this matter. How? When Adam *peace be upon him* stood firm upon his Lord’s way and kept His commandments he lived a healthy life with no defects, but when he strayed and listened to Satan’s whispers, and ate from the tree he was forbidden from, his nakedness was revealed to him for the first time. This is because when he was obedient he was eating from the menu of his Lord, a menu that was tuned to the needs of his body such that nothing would remain of faeces to pass out of it. But when passion came into the matter and he obeyed Satan, he corrupted the diet that had been prepared for him; faeces formed in his digestive system and he felt something strange in his body for the first time. He was then shocked to find an opening in his body from which a foul, evil-smelling substance passed out. Hence Adam *peace be upon him* perceived that this was nakedness and should be covered. So, he took some leaves off a tree to cover his nakedness and conceal his private parts. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘...But as soon as the two had tasted [the fruit] of the tree, they became conscious of their nakedness; and they began to cover themselves with pieced-together leaves from the garden. And their Lord called unto them: “Did I not forbid that tree unto you and tell you, that verily, Satan is your open foe?”’ (*al-A'raf:* 22)

We have witnessed during the wars that a soldier can survive on a small loaf of bread and that this will provide him with a sufficient meal. It does not however produce a significant amount of faecal matter. This thus reduces the amount of time the soldier needs to spend eating and going to the toilet.

The story of Adam *peace be upon him* and his eating from the tree is representational of Allah’s laws; as long as they are upheld, the state of the country and its inhabitants will be upright and defects and evil deeds will not manifest in society. If therefore we see a defect emerge in society, be it in regard to knowledge, economics, society, behaviour etc. we can be certain that some article of Allah’s Law has been abandoned. This being the case, we must then search out the problem and, if it is within our capacity, try to remedy it on our own first. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘...Verily, Allah does not change men’s condition unless they change their inner selves...’ (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

Adam *peace be upon him* fell into disobedience after Allah had clarified for him what He had permitted and forbidden for him. He explained Satan’s enmity toward him and that this enmity had existed since Allah commanded him to prostrate and he refused. Despite all this however, Adam *peace be upon him* listened to Satan's whispers. He should have used the intellect he was gifted with and thought about what Satan (Iblis), his enemy, intended when he said, '...Your Lord has but forbidden you this tree lest you two become [as] angels, or lest you live forever' (*al-A'raf:* 20). So if whoever eats from this tree will live forever and never die, why then do you not eat from it Satan? Did you not say to Allah *the Exalted* '...Grant me a respite till the Day when all shall be raised from the dead' (*al-A'raf:* 14)? In this we find a hint at the obligation to reflect upon the devil's whispers and to refuse to submit to them.

So, Adam's time in paradise was a period of preparation to be a vicegerent. When his disobedience occurred, Allah wanted to move him out of paradise and send him down to an earthly life to perform the duties of his vicegerency in light of his previous experience.

It is as though Allah said to him, 'Take what you will of the permissible, and distance yourself from the prohibited. Be wary of Satan for he is still your enemy and will continue to whisper to you in an effort to lead you into disobedience as he did the first time. Do not therefore listen to him, for he is your enemy and he will lead you from a blessed life to an unhappy one, just as he took you from the paradise of maintaining My commandments and prohibitions.' 'And thereupon We said: "O Adam! Verily, this is a foe unto you and your wife: so let him not drive the two of you out of this garden and render you unhappy."' (*Ta Ha:* 117) Notice that Allah did not say, 'and render you (both) unhappy'.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* put a sign in these verses from the very beginning of creation so that it might solve a problem that the world still discusses until now and will continue to do so. This is the issue of women going out to work and being equal with men, of women wanting to assert themselves, etc.

It is a strange thing that women should seek extra responsibilities and take on the duties of men, at a time when men are not taking any of their duties or burdens. Men do not get pregnant, give birth, or nurse children. So, women take on the duties of men and add them to their own specific duties that men are unable to undertake; this is a form of oppression of women.

Allah's saying to Adam *peace be upon him* '...and render you unhappy' (*Ta Ha:* 117) reveals that since the beginning of creation unhappiness, toil, trouble, work and the burden of responsibility have been the lot of man, while the woman is the mistress of her house, respected and honoured. This situation has been passed down through generations of our society without deception or obscurity. Even now when a young man wants to propose to a girl, her guardian will stipulate upon him, 'Will you make her a lady and not a labourer?', i.e. will you make her safe, the mistress of her household, or do you intend to make her go out and work?

Some people say, 'How could Adam *peace be upon him* be disobedient given that he was a Prophet? That would make him like Satan! For both then disobeyed Allah'! To this we say that Adam *peace be upon him* was disobedient during this period of preparation, a period during which mistakes are not punished, but rather corrected. In school the teacher corrects the pupil's mistake with red ink without taking him to account for it. This continues until the end of year examinations, and it is then that he is called to account for any errors he makes. So, when Adam *peace be upon him* made his mistake, he was in a period of preparation, and Allah corrected his error.

Secondly, Adam *peace be upon him* was not a prophet at this time. Adam *peace be upon him* was created to be the father of the human race, and they were to be divided into two sorts: Those who were chosen, i.e. the messengers, and those who were not chosen, i.e. the peoples of the messengers. Thus, in the beginning Adam *peace be upon him* represented both sorts. His experience came to exemplify both the disobedience of mankind and the sinless nature of the prophets. He made a mistake and Allah corrected him. Then he repented and Allah relented towards him and elected him. This reflects the general state of mankind. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...And [thus] did Adam disobey his Lord, and thus did he fall into grievous error' (*Ta Ha:* 121). This is an indication of what will happen among mankind. 'Thereafter, [however,] his Lord elected him [for His Grace], and accepted his repentance, and bestowed His guidance upon him' (*Ta Ha:* 122). Hence, the election and divine protection from sin came after the initial incident because Adam *peace be upon him* was to characterise all mankind. He exemplified the disobedience of man and he exemplified the sinless nature of the prophets.

This vicegerent came into a world that was created for him before he existed. It was not that Allah *Glorified is He* created it and then looked to see whether it lacked anything, and thus created Adam *peace be upon him* in a way that suited the task that he was to perform of populating the earth. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'He brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon...' (*Hud:* 61).

Further, the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not make the basic acts of worship, i.e. the pillars of Islam, the entirety of life; rather, he made them like recharging stations that help in one's daily business. To whoever would say that Islam is these pillars; we perform them and that is it, we would say, no! It is by means of these pillars that one is to take strength from Allah so that one may be productive in one's daily business. Islam is far broader than these five pillars. The proof of this is in Allah's saying in the chapter of *al-Jumu`a*, 'O you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hastens to the remembrance of Allah, and leaves all sales: this is for your own good, if you but knew it.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) So, He has called them and taken them from their work, the acme of their daily business. This is their selling. Selling is obviously connected to buying except that the former is stronger, that it why it is mentioned alone. Why did Allah tell us to leave buying and selling? The scholars say it is because Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of human nature and He knows that people when initiating a purchase are not so keen. They are keen however when it comes to selling and they put great effort into it. That is why when someone in the family asks you to buy something for them you may sometimes procrastinate and delay it, and when you go and find the shop shut you are quietly happy. If, however you were trying to sell something, then you are ever so eager to sell it off. Why? Because the buyer is paying and the seller is receiving. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned selling because it is the fruit of one's business.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah's bounty' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). So, He took you from your work to pray and, when the prayer was done, He returned you to your work and endeavour.

When we reflect upon the phrasing of the Hadith, ‘Islam is built upon five pillars’(1), we see that these five are the supporting edifice upon which Islam stands; the building is not the same as the thing it is built upon. Are the buildings that we live in made of foundations and pillars alone? Thus, Islam is not the five pillars, Islam is more than that. These pillars are the charging station that your Lord summons you to. From your interaction with Allah you take the spiritual sustenance to help you to perform your daily business. An example of this is a battery when you take it to the recharger. We do not benefit from it while it is in the recharger, but we charge it so that we can use it after that.

It is from the wonders of Allah’s Mercy that He made visiting these ‘human rechargers’ a legal responsibility that must be performed. It is as though Allah *the Exalted* is saying to us, ‘You must come to Me five times throughout the day and the night because you are My creation and the Creator knows best what is good for his creation’. Imagine a creation that turns away from its creator five times every day and night, could it be in any more perdition? This is if the creator is a human, so what then would be the case if he were the Creator and Lord of mankind *Glorified is He*.

The human artisan fixes his creations with something material like a nail or a piece of bandage. The Creator *Glorified is He* however fixes His creation without recourse to materials. This is because the engineer and his works are material things and hence need to be fixed with materials. The Creator *Glorified is He* on the other hand is unseen and so when He fixes some defect in you He does so in an unseen way so that you neither see it nor feel it.

So, we must understand the religion as it really is and realise that we all have a role to play. If Allah puts someone above you, you should realise that He did so for your benefit. His being over you means that he must render you some service, while at the same time he will not benefit from you.

The one who does a job well will undoubtedly benefit himself and benefit others, as opposed to the one who does nothing well. In this vein, there is a saying amongst farmers that says, ‘the carpenter’s door is off its hinges’. The carpenter shows his skill when he is working for others because he gets paid for it, but when it comes to himself he lowers his standards. Thus, when you see one who is above you, you should not envy or hate him, rather hope for an increase for him and wish him well. Some of that good will assuredly returns upon you, and his elevation will come back to you in the form of services he renders you.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari relates in his Sahih [8] and Muslim in his Sahih [16] on the authority of Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with them who said, ‘The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, “Islam is built upon five things: Testifying that there is nothing worthy of worship other than Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the establishment of the prayer, the giving of zakat (obligatory charity), Hajj and fasting during Ramadan.”’*

When I was with the farmers, if one of our cows or buffalos died everyone would be saddened to the extent that once we saw a group crying over a calf that had died. We were very surprised at this, for people may cry if one of their own dies, but over an animal?! We later learned that this calf was the one that turned the water wheel and irrigated the ground that everybody ate from, and brought out the good therein. This was in the countryside; we would not buy cucumbers, Jew’s mallow (an herb), okra and many other things, rather things were given as gifts, and not sold.

A gift given to creation returns its benefits upon all creation. When you see someone who has more wealth than you, wish an increase for him because the good of his wealth will inevitably come back upon you. When you see someone who performs work better than you can, do not hate him because you will need him to improve your work, even if such is hateful to you. Or, despite your differences with him you may try to get him to work for you because you know the quality of his work. Thus, you go to him out of your own self-interest. In this way, the desired balance in society is achieved and the affairs of creation are established on the basis of need.

If one reflects upon oneself as Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘just as [there are signs thereof] within your own selves: can you not, then, see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) One will see that this balance exists between one’s limbs. The right hand for instance takes care of certain duties that are appropriate to it, while the left hand takes care of other duties that are more appropriate to it. The right hand is for honourable and respectable deeds, while the left hand is for those that are not. Usually the right hand is stronger than the left, more agile and more precise.

Look for instance at when you want to cut your fingernails. You cut the fingernails of your left hand with your right and they come out nice and trim, as opposed to the fingernails of the right hand cut by the left. Thus, we can see, the talents of the right hand came back to benefit the left, while the weakness of the left hand affected the right. This helps us see that completion and perfection is achieved in creation through the assistance of others.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* created man as His vicegerent, he gave him a form that suits his purpose. The first aspect of this form is the senses with which he perceives things. They are named the five manifest senses. They are said to be ‘manifest’ out of caution, for one will find that there are other senses that science will identify.

It has in fact been discovered that men have senses other than these five, such as the sense by which one knows one is hungry, the sense of perspective by which one perceives the distance between two objects, and the muscular sense by means of which one knows the weight of something.

When we reflect upon the five well-known senses we find that legal responsibility comes according to the nature of these senses. Each sense in man and each limb have its own work, meaning the performance of its role. The heart works by making intentions, the tongue by speaking, the ears by listening, the nose by smelling, the hand by touching and the eye by seeing. These things are their work.

We need to differentiate between the work and the doing. When we say ‘doing’ we mean as opposed of speaking, which is the work of the tongue. Allah, says, ‘O you who have attained to faith! Why do you say one thing and do another?’ (*as-Saff:* 2) So speech, the work of the tongue, has a division all its own, while the rest of the senses share a division. Speech is with tongue while ‘doing’ is with the other senses. Why does the tongue alone take half while the other half is divided between all the other senses? The scholars say it is because speech is how the messengers convey what is sought from us so that we may do it. It is also how we convey our desires to others so that they may fulfil them. Thus, all actions or ‘doings’ are in the service of speech. Allah’s way did not come to us except by means of speech, for it is this that carries the commandment to the senses so that they may enact it.

Work is not necessarily the work of muscles; it may well be spiritual in nature, such as the work of the heart which is forming intentions as we said. It is the Sacred Law which presides over these senses and defines the framework within which they may work considering what is permissible and impermissible.

The role of the senses is to perceive the world around and then present that information to the intellect which then compares and filters the information. It knows that this is good for such-and-such, while that is good for something else. After this filtering, it passes the information to the heart so that it might form a belief about it. The word *`aqida* means something that has been tied up so that it does not come undone; it is not open to argument by the intellect after having been settled upon. Imagine a small child who is taken in by the beautiful appearance of fire. He tries to touch it and he gets burnt. He feels real heat for the first time and he forms a conclusion or a belief that fire burns, so he does not go near it again. He lives the rest of his life upon this principle or belief. He does not need to try it again to be sure. At the very time this belief takes root in the heart it starts to pump it with the blood until it travels through the whole body and permeates every limb and saturates it. This explains the Noble Hadith, '...if it is sound, the whole body is sound, but if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart.'(1)

After creating the limbs and the senses for man the True Lord *Glorified is He* created the desires. These are an essential part of you. They are a permanent and indispensable part of your being. Despite this, a desire may harass you until it takes you beyond its purpose. This is when the Sacred Law must intervene to limit its recalcitrance and return it to the balance for which Allah created it.

The Sacred Law intervenes in order to refine and elevate the desire, not to repress it and eradicate it. The desire to eat for instance maintains one's life. In this case, what is sufficient was described by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said, 'A few morsels are enough to keep the son of Adam's back straight.'(2)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari relates it in his Sahih [52] and Muslim in his Sahih [1599] on the authority of An-Nu`man ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *This was related by Ahmad in his Musnad [4/133] and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2380] on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn-Ma`di Yakrib. The wording of the Hadith is, 'The human being fills no container worse than his stomach. A few morsels are enough to keep the*=

One should not go beyond this for it will lead to Luttony and indigestion. The love of discovery is a desire that Allah created so we might reflect upon creation and search for the secrets He has placed throughout it. If one leaves this framework and starts to seek out others' faults and to spy then the desire has gone beyond its role. This is where the Sacred Law comes in to elevate it and return it to its proper balance.

The most vicious of man's desires is the sexual one, especially in youth. This is a desire that Allah placed in man to sustain progeny and preserve the species. This is why the desire for sex was created. The Sacred Law seeks to preserve this desire in combination with its Creator's methodology so that things stay decent. This is because offspring is the prime treasure to be preserved if lineage is to remain pure and honourable.

We have previously differentiated between legitimate offspring that are attributed to the parents and illegitimate offspring. We explained how the former is received with kindness, joy, love, and care whereas the latter is met unenthusiastically and with distaste. The mother may well think of getting rid of the child, even abandoning it in the street.

For this reason, the religion encourages families to be built in a sound fashion, with pride and dignity; to be built in the shade of Allah's word and methodology, as this will ensure the soundness of one's progeny. Thus, one's offspring comes forth and one has no doubts over its origin. One cares for it and raises it in the best possible way. This is the goal of the Sacred Law.

We also talked previously about the difference between the lawful and the prohibited in this realm, and we mentioned the Noble Hadith, 'The permissible has cut off the nose of jealousy.'

So, this desire was created in the human soul for a purpose and it is to remain within the framework for which it was created. What happens however is that many people take it beyond its purpose. It is surprising that people oppress animals in this regard when they say openly, 'this is animal passion'. Such a saying indicates a lack of understanding of the nature of animals, for animals

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= *son of Adam's back straight. If he really must do so, then a third for his food, a third for his drink and a third for air.' At-Tirmidhi said it is a good sound Hadith.*

do not take their desires beyond the limits that Allah has created. This is why we do not see a female animal get pregnant and then let another male have her again. Similarly, the male smells her and when he realises she is pregnant he turns away from her. Is this the animal passion that we mean by this phrase? No. It is a human affair. You can compare between animal nature and human nature and you will see it is quite amazing the way man deviates in this matter from his intended path.

It is from the wisdom of the Creator *Glorified is He* that He bound the desire for sex and procreation with pleasure. Offspring brings responsibility, consequences, and other demands and, were there not pleasure to encourage men, they would feel no need for it and would turn away.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* presents the believer with a single methodology which comprises paired opposites such as pride and humility. The believer is not always proud by nature, nor always humble. Rather, it is circumstances that dictate to him whether to be proud or humble. Humility and lowliness are for his Muslim brothers, while pride and arrogance are to be shown to those who are obstinate among the disbelievers. As Allah *the Exalted* said in his description of the Prophet *peace be upon him* and the believers, ‘Muhammad is Allah’s Apostle; and those who are [truly] with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another...’ (*al-Fath:* 29). Thus, they are firm and unyielding and yet full of mercy at the same time, and in this is a proof that the believer is not content with his own desires unless they fulfil the criterion of the Creator of desires.

Among the other characteristics of the human constitution in addition to the senses and the desires is that Allah created in him emotions. Emotions are feelings the causes of which are unknown. That is why you meet one person and you feel at ease with him, while another you dislike, just like that, even though you do not know him. Why do you like one and not the other? That is because of emotions. This is why someone loves his son even if he is an idiot; he loves him because of his emotions. If your enemy has an intelligent son, you may love him by means of your intellect. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not make the emotions an area of legal responsibility. Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* clarified this when he said to his companions, and among them was 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* ‘None of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his mother, his father and his own self.’(1) 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was struck by this and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, you are more beloved to me than my mother and father, my son and my wealth, but my own self O Messenger of Allah?’ So the Prophet *peace be upon him* repeated it another time until 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* realised that it was a matter of resolution, and that the Prophet *peace be upon him* must mean another sort of love, other than the one 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* meant, i.e. intellectual love. At this, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Now, O Messenger of Allah’, meaning, now you have become more beloved to me than my mother and father, more beloved to me than my son and my wealth, and more beloved to me than my very own self.’

So, what is intended by love of the Prophet *peace be upon him* is intellectual love, because had it not been for him *peace be upon him* we would not have sought guidance or reached it, and had it not been for him we would have been destroyed. So, you love Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as you love bitter medicine. You do not love it through your emotions but through your intellect. That is why 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* understood that the love that was legally binding was intellectual. If after that it turns into emotion and personal love then this is another level, higher than the first.

The Quran teaches us this in Allah’s saying, ‘...and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being Allah-conscious...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 8), i.e. you must not let hatred for a people lead you to be unjust towards them or oppress them. Hence hatred is not something forbidden because it is an emotional matter. So, love that you will and hate whom you will, but woe to you if you let your love or hatred carry you to be unfair such that you overstep the bounds with the ones you love or oppress the ones you hate.

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(1) *On the authority of the grandfather of Zahra ibn-Mu`bid, who said, ‘We were with the Prophet peace be upon him when he took the hand of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him who said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I swear by Allah that you are more beloved to me than everything except my own self.’ The Prophet peace be upon him said, ‘By Him in whose hand is my soul, none of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his own self.’ `Umar replied, ‘By Allah, you are now more beloved to me than my own self.’ To which the Prophet peace be upon him replied, ‘Now `Umar!’ It was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad [4/236].*

Emotions in this form are essentially uncontrollable, and are therefore outside the sphere of legal responsibility because you do not know why your emotions lead you to love or hate something.

When we examine the senses, the desires and the emotions we find that the senses are obvious and well known; the eyes see, the ears hear, etc. Similarly, the desires are manifested in their causes and effects; when you get hungry you look for food, and when you want your family you draw close to them. Emotions however are out of sight and hidden. That is why the Quran illustrates them with a parable not of men, nor yet of animals or plants but rather of inanimate objects. Read Allah's saying regarding the outcome of the disbelievers of Pharaoh's people, 'and neither sky nor the earth shed tears over them...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29). It is obvious that shedding tears is a manifestation of emotion. Can the sky cry? Can the earth cry? Yes, they are sensitive and can cry. It is as though they say to these disbelievers, 'Go! For no-one is sorry on your behalf'. Had this not been so, Allah would not have negated crying on their behalf. Why do we consider such to be unlikely when the earth and the sky are two of Allah's creations, ready to do His bidding? Did the True Lord *Glorified is He* not say, '...and there is not a single thing but extols His Limitless Glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him...' (*al-Isra':* 44)?

Thus, there is nothing too amazing in the fact that inanimate objects should rejoice when they find someone who joins them in their glorification and thus unites with the rest of creation in doing so. Neither is it too amazing that they should be sad, and that they should cry when people go astray from the correct order of things. In this way, we see that to say that the heavens and the earth did not cry over the destruction of Pharaoh's people is entirely possible, as it would be to say that they were filled with joy at the guidance of Pharaoh's wife, Asiya. So, we repeat, the heavens and the earth have emotions and sensitivities, they love and hate, and they cry and rejoice.

`Ali *Allah be pleased with him* made this matter clear for us when he said, 'When the believer dies, two places cry for him, a place in the sky and a place on earth. As for the place in the sky, it is the place to which his good works would be raised, and it cries because now it is deprived of receiving good speech and works. As for the place on earth, it is his place of prayer.'(1)

This was a necessary introduction to the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* upon which we now embark with Allah's saying:

وَإِنَّ لُوطًا لَّمِنَ ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾ إِذۡ نَجَّيۡنَٰهُ وَأَهۡلَهُۥٓ أَجۡمَعِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾ إِلَّا عَجُوزٗا فِي ٱلۡغَٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٣٥﴾
ثُمَّ دَمَّرۡنَا ٱلۡأٓخَرِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾ وَإِنَّكُمۡ لَتَمُرُّونَ عَلَيۡهِم مُّصۡبِحِينَ ﴿١٣٧﴾ وَبِٱلَّيۡلِۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

Lot was also one of the messengers [133] We saved him and all his family [134] except for an old woman who stayed behind [135] and We destroyed the rest [136] You [people] pass by their ruins morning [137] and night: will you not take heed? [138] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 133 - 138)

The task of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* when calling his people was indeed most taxing. For this reason, he is mentioned seventeen times in the Quran in the nominative and genitive cases and a further ten times in the accusative case. His task was taxing because he *peace and blessings be upon him* came to rectify the most violent of desires in the human being, the desire for sex.

Would that this desire had taken its natural course with these people, namely men desiring women, but this were a deviant sexual desire, with men desiring men, for which there was no precedent. No one had ever committed this newly invented and heinous crime before them. As Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says on the tongue of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* '...Will you commit abominations such as none in all the world has ever done before you?' (*al-A'raf:* 80)

We have said previously that every man has freedom regarding his own particular self. This freedom however has limits when we involve others. So, I have freedom regarding myself, I have freedom regarding my family and I have freedom with the people in the street generally, but each has his limits and his duties. When a man shuts the door of his room upon himself, his freedom is broader because there is no one with him to limit his freedom. If he leaves his room and goes to the sitting room, though, his freedom becomes somewhat narrower due to the presence of his wife and children. If he goes out into the street with the general people, then his freedom is even more restricted because everyone that he interacts with in the street has freedom too, and the freedom of others restricts his freedom. Hence if you go, for example, to an informal assembly where your friends and brothers are, you do not go all dressed up and exercise the best manners. This is how the people of Lut (Lot) began to boast of their obscenities, and it got worse until it reached the point that they would actually do them in their assemblies. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, '... you commit these shameful deeds in your [open] assemblies ...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 29), i.e. things that one should not do even in secret, they did openly in their assemblies. This is forbidden by the Sacred Law, even if it is with your wife who is permissible for you, for one is not to approach his wife except in the home.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir relates in his Tafsir [4/142] that a man asked `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him 'Do the heavens and earth cry over anybody? 'He replied to him, 'You have asked me something that no-one has ever asked me before. There is no slave of Allah except that he has a place of prayer on earth and a place where his good works go up in the heavens.'*

Thus, when some people claimed that a man is free to seek pleasure with his wife wherever he wills, taking this understanding from Allah's saying, 'Your wives are your tilth; go, then, unto your tilth as you may desire ...' (*al-Baqara:* 223). We would say to them, 'You have been heedless of the meaning of the word "tilth" *harth* in this verse. *Al-Harth* refers to land that is ready to be sown with seed. Similarly, one's wife is to be approached in the place where the child is to be born. If it is another place where a child is not brought from, then this is unlawful. So, if Islam prohibits such a deed with one's wife, what is one to imagine about doing it with another man?!'

Similarly, just as Islam has prohibited the deeds of the people of Lut (Lot), a man approaching a man, it has prohibited a woman to be with a woman, and this is known as lesbianism, and we seek refuge with Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* from this. This prohibition is based upon an analogy with men.

Thus, the Sacred Law corrects the deviant desires that can manifest in relationships between two men, two women or a marital relationship between a man and his wife, and He puts down deterrent laws for this matter. Why is this? This is due because this deviancy harms the youth and the civilisation of the world; Allah *the Exalted* wants his vicegerent on earth to be clean and noble so that they might be qualified for this vicegerency.

Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* was mentioned 27 times in the Quran because of the weight of the duty he was given, while Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* despite his importance in the procession of messengers and despite his wondrous creation, is mentioned only 25 times.

I personally have taken many scholars and writers to task over the fact that in Arabic language they call this disgusting deed *Al-luwat* and its perpetrator a *luti,* linguistically ascribing this crime and its perpetrator to the Prophet of Allah Lut (Lot). It is a grave error and a repulsive thing to ascribe this ugly and obscene deed to a Prophet of Allah who came to eradicate it and rectify the behaviour of these people. They say in defence that they are only following the rules of Arabic speech for ascription, as a poet (1) said,

Mention one, ascribing him to a group,
Even if he does not resemble one of them, through coinage (2)

That is to say, they are the people of Lut (Lot) by ascription, yet there is in language a phenomenon known as ‘coinage' (*An-naht*). We can coin from Lut's (Lot’s) name another word that will refer to these people as the perpetrators of this action, yet distinctly removed from Prophet Lut (Lot) himself. Nevertheless, it is a repulsive thing to make such a word a title for this obscenity.

These verses that we are now dealing with recall the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and his people. They cover a fragment from the latter parts and end of his story, where Allah *Glorified is He* saves the believers and destroys the disbelievers, along with its beginning where Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* meets his uncle Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘Thereupon [his brother’s son] Lut (Lot) came to believe in him and said, "Verily, I [too] shall forsake the domain of evil [and turn] to my Sustainer, for verily, He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise!"' (*al-'Ankabut:* 26)

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(1) He was Abu ‘Abdullah Jamal Ad-Din ibn Malik, the author of *Al-Alfiyya fī An-Nahw*, one of the leading scholars in the field of Arabic language. He was born in Jayan in Andalusia in the year 600 AH. He moved to Damascus and died there in the year 672 AH at the age of 72. He authored many books relating to Arabic language.

(2) This is line 878 in Al-Alfiyya. It is from *Bahr (meter) Ar-Rajz* and it comprises 1002 lines.

This is a portion of the story and not merely repetition as some people claim. The stories in the Quran are not told in one fell swoop, rather, they come in various snapshots, each one mentioned at the time appropriate to it.

Again and again a number of superficial people take issue with the story of Musa's (Moses') staff and charge the Quran with repetition, but this is only the result of their limited understanding of Allah's Book. The first time he threw it was to familiarise himself with it as Allah *the Almighty* wanted to try it out just between himself and his Lord. The proof of this is Allah's question to him, 'Now, what is this in your right hand, O, Musa (Moses)?' (*Ta Ha:* 17) Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* knew full well what was in his right hand, yet He wanted to acquaint him with it. This is why Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* gave such a long reply. 'He answered, "It is my staff. I lean on it, and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep. Also, [many] other uses have I for it."' (*Ta Ha:* 18) Then Allah *Glorified is He* told him to cast it down, 'He said, "Throw it down, O, Musa (Moses)!' So, he threw it—and lo, it was a snake, moving rapidly. He said, "Take hold of it and fear not. We shall restore it to its former state."' (*Ta Ha:* 19-21)

So, Allah *the Exalted* desired to train Musa (Moses) so that when the time came to throw the staff down in front of Pharaoh, he would see it turn into a real snake and would thus be ready for it and not be frightened. The other time he was commanded to throw the staff down was in front of Pharaoh and his sorcerers. So, the former was one time, and the latter was another time.

Had Allah *the Almighty* willed, He could have told the whole story as He did with Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* perhaps to perfect the weaving of the narrative, as literary critics say, and perhaps because the admonition and message of the story would be deficient if it were not told in its entirety. Stories in the Quran are not a historical account as such, nor are they for our entertainment; rather, they deliver messages and admonitions. For Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they were a consolation. The task of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when faced with the obstinacy, enmity, stubbornness and disbelief of his people, necessitated that

Allah *the Exalted* strengthened him constantly. Every time he needed strengthening, verses would be revealed to him, bringing an appropriate gleaning from the procession of messages. Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* would console His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by reminding him that because he was the master and Seal of the Messengers sent to all peoples until the end of time, it was inevitable that he would face increased troubles from his people.

We have previously given an example of this when we said that in July 1952 we witnessed a revolution. We still celebrate it every year and listen to the story of what happened, yet each year we realise something new regarding these events and learn new lessons.

Thus the stories in the Quran came in snapshots at the appropriate times to strengthen Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; Allah says, '... [It has been revealed] in this manner so that We might strengthen thy heart thereby, for We have so arranged its component parts that they form one consistent whole.' (*al-Furqan:* 32)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding Lut (Lot): 'And, behold, Lut (Lot) was indeed one of Our message-bearers; [and so,] when [We decreed the doom of his sinful town] We saved him and his household *ahlahu*, except an old woman who was amongst those who stayed behind, and then We utterly destroyed the others.' (*as-Saffat:* 133-136); He did so by pelting them with stones.

Regarding the word *ahlahu* (his household), *Al-ahl* can be used to refer to a man's close relatives, or it can be used to refer to his wife. Allah *the Almighty* informs us in this verse that He saved Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and his entire family, but he makes an exception of his wife: 'except an old woman who was amongst those who stayed behind' (*as-Saffat:* 135). In another verse, He says: '... all but your wife. She will indeed be amongst those that stay behind.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 33) The word *ghabirin* (those who stay behind) is the plural of *ghabir*, and this word can be used to refer to two opposite meanings. It can mean something that has passed or finished, and it can mean something which remains. In reference to Lut's (Lot's) wife it carries both meanings; she was of the *ghabirin* in the sense that she was amongst those who were left behind to be destroyed, and she was of the *ghabirin* in the sense that she was amongst those who remained waiting for the punishment to come.

Then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* reminds us that the stories in the Quran are not narrated for our entertainment but so that we might take a lesson and an admonition from them. Allah says: ‘And, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings …’ (*as-Saffat:* 137); this is in reference to Sodom: ‘…at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) Indeed, Arabs used to pass by them on their journeys and trading expeditions during the summer and winter and see the remains of their houses.

This was a brief gleaning, like an urgent telegraph of the story of Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* and his people. Similar to this is the story of Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him*.

وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾ إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى ٱلْفُلْكِ ٱلْمَشْحُونِ ﴿١٤٠﴾
فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُدْحَضِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾ فَٱلْتَقَمَهُ ٱلْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ ﴿١٤٢﴾
فَلَوْلَآ أَنَّهُۥ كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُسَبِّحِينَ ﴿١٤٣﴾ لَلَبِثَ فِى بَطْنِهِۦٓ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

Jonah too was one of the messengers [139] He fled to the overloaded ship [140] They cast lots, he suffered defeat [141] and a great fish swallowed him, for he had committed blameworthy acts [142] If he had not been one of those who glorified God [143] he would have stayed in its belly until the Day when all are raised up [144] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 139 - 144)

The first thing to notice in this verse is that Allah *the Exalted* affirms in these verses that Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* was a messenger: ‘And, behold, Yunus (Jonah) was indeed one of Our message-bearers’ (*as-Saffat:* 139). Let us take and consider this fact before delving into his story in order to understand it in light of it and so that, even if nothing happened that was unbecoming of a messenger in your eyes, you would know that these events do not detract from his status as a messenger. The One Who sent him bore witness to his being a messenger and did not strip him of his rank after what happened, so when you hear his story, do not say to yourself that what he did was unbecoming of a messenger because you are not more jealous on behalf of Allah's religion than Allah Himself.

Look at Allah's saying: 'when he fled like a runaway slave onto a laden ship' (*as-Saffat:* 140). The word *abaq* means he ran away, not in an absolute sense, but as a slave running away from his master. It was not as someone running away from a man who had hired him, or as a son running away from his father, for these are not considered to be fleeing *ubuq*. The word *abaq* has connotations of complete slavery to the highest master. Hence, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* was his Master, and he was His slave because a slave is a property; he actually belongs to his master when he takes him captive. Yes, this is indeed the truth because the life of a slave is spared by means of this ownership. Instead of being killed in battle, he was taken prisoner and became a slave. He does not become a slave until he is taken captive and, so long as he has been taken captive and is under his captor's power, he could be killed. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* made him a possession in order to spare his life.

There is no need, therefore, to compare freedom and slavery. If you want a comparison, compare slavery with death. If you gave a slave a choice between living with and serving his master and being killed, he would choose slavery. Hence, slavery is not a fault in Islam; rather, it is a favour that Islam has rendered to these people.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come to establish slavery or to increase the number of slaves; he came to place rules upon slavery and to reduce its sources. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came when slavery was widespread in society, to the extent that there were 23 different sources that slavery sprang from. So what did Islam do? It put a stop to all these sources and left behind only one, the captive of a war endorsed by the Sacred Law. Then, it started to count the cost of slavery and clear the way for the liberation of slaves as we see in expiations and supererogatory acts. If, however, one has committed no sin which necessitates expiation through the freeing of a slave, then he is not obligated to free a slave and may keep any that he has and treat them kindly.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* laid down the regulations for us when it comes to dealing with slaves when he said, 'They are your brothers.

Allah has put them in your power. So, whomever Allah has put of a brother in his power let him feed him from what he eats, dress him as he dresses, and not give him more work than he can cope with. If he should give him more than he can cope with, then let him help him with it.'(1)

This is the decree of Islam regarding slaves. Islam maintained in bondage those taken in a war sanctioned by the Sacred Law because they are our enemies, surrounding us and fighting us, and would happily take our children from us, so it is necessary to respond kindly. They take some of us captives, and we take some of them captives; they ransom their captives so we ransom our captives; they free them so we free them, etc. Therefore, if one reflects on this matter, he will find that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come to institutionalise slavery; rather, he came to institutionalise the freeing of slaves.

Allah's saying regarding Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* 'when he fled …' (*as-Saffat:* 140), is not finding fault with him because the word *abaq* means that he recognised that he was a slave of his Lord. This is but a snapshot of the story, and the full details are not related in this verse; instead, they come in another chapter so that we might realise that this is not some mechanical exercise. These snapshots are chosen for their appropriateness, and each comes in its place for a reason. Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* has a whole chapter named after him, yet his name is mentioned in it only once, whereas his whole history is related in other chapters that are not named after him.

The meaning of *abaq* is that he fled from his Master or that he left his people without his Lord's permission. This matter is detailed in Allah's saying, 'And [remember] him of the great fish...' (*al-Anbiya':* 87), which refers to Prophet Yunus (Jonah), '...when he went off in wrath *mughadib...*' (*al-Anbiya':* 87). The word used in this verse, *mughadib*, has a different meaning to the word *ghadib*. *Mughadib* implies reciprocation; he is angry and his antagonist is angry, too. It is like saying, 'Muhammad participated with 'Ali'; it is the same as saying, ''Ali participated with Muhammad.' As for the word *ghadib*, it means he was angry on his own.

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(1) *This is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [6050] on the authority of Abu Dharr and also by Muslim in his Sahih [1661] in the chapter Kitab Al-Iman—Bab It'am Al-Mamluk Mimma Ya'kul.*

However, with whom was he angry? The other party in this verse is the people who belied and harmed him in ways he could not bear. He was not angry with his Lord; rather, he was angry with his people and at the same time hoped that his Lord would pardon him in this matter. This is why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says after this: '... did he think that We had no power over him (*lan naqdir 'alayhi*) ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 87). Some people(1) understood Allah's saying '*lan naqdir*' (we had no power) to be related to Allah's Power, but God forbid that a Prophet of Allah could think that Allah *the Exalted* did not have power over him or that he would not return him to his people. Rather, the meaning of *lan naqdir* in this verse is 'we would not constrain his affair'(2) as in Allah's saying: '... and let him whose means of subsistence are scanty (*qudir 'alayhi rizquhu*) spend in accordance with what Allah has given him ...' (*at-Talaq:* 7). This was thus a belief in the mercy of the One Who sent him and that He *the Most High* would not restrain him from expressing his emotions when he left his people without permission from his Lord.

The ship was fully laden, and this indicates to us that this boat had a specific capacity which was not to be exceeded, for otherwise, it would be in danger of sinking according to Archimedes' rule that explains how things float. It is upon this principle that submarines are designed. The word submarine means something that goes under the water because its weight is greater than that of the water it displaces. This is why they say, 'Lighten it and it will float.'

Since the boat was fully loaded and the number of passengers was more than the boat could carry, the captain decided to throw one of the passengers overboard to lighten the load. They drew lots and it fell to Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* so they threw him into the sea, and a fish subsequently came and swallowed him. This is the meaning of, 'And then they cast lots…' (*as-Saffat:* 141), which means that he entered into the ballot with them: '… and he was the one who lost (*min al-mudhadin*)' (*as-Saffat:* 141). The *mudhad* is the one who loses in a deal, the deal in this case being the ballot, where he came to be the one to be cast into the sea.

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(1) *This was related by 'Awf from Al-Hasan Al-Basri. The implied meaning is 'thinking we had no power over him?' Ibn Al-Jawzi said in Zad Al-Masir when explaining this verse, 'So, looking at it this way, it is a question in which the letter (alif) has been elided, and it does refer to power. It could be conceived of as referring to power except as a question, and I know of no other explanation except it being an incredulous question (istifham inkar).'*

(2) *This was the opinion of 'Ata' according to what Ibn Al-Jawzi mentioned in Zad Al-Masir.*

The casting of lots is a way of making choices that frees a captain of a ship from being accused of prejudice or favouritism. The drawing of lots is a matter of pure destiny; there is no way for desires to interfere, and it is proves the impartiality of a particular judgment. This is why we often have recourse to this method with small children. We let a child choose, for example, from several pieces of paper. Why is this? Because he cannot differentiate between them, thus his choice is made by destiny, free of volition.

Allah's saying, 'And then they cast lots…' (*as-Saffat:* 141) gives us a principle for society that helps us to avoid grudges and frees us of constrained situations. If there is something that will not suffice all the people seeking it, it is not right for the person in charge of it to discriminate between them; due to the fact that when someone else makes the decision, it can give rise to turbulence in people's hearts. When casting lots, however, the choice falls to destiny and no one has any say in it.(1)

This is a method that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had recourse to when he entered Medina, and the people crowded round him, each one wanting to take the reins of his camel so that he could take him to his house. What was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to do when he did not wish to hurt anyone's feelings? He decided the matter by saying of the camel, 'Leave it, for it is under orders.' Thus, he freed himself from the decision and left the matter to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and His decree. The camel then kept walking until it knelt down in front of the house of Banu Najjar.(2)

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentions an important point in regard to this verse in his exegesis [8/5765] and that is that it is not permissible to use this verse as a proof of the permissibility of drawing lots to throw a human being into the sea. He said, 'This was specific to Yunus (Jonah) and his time as a preparation for the realisation of his proof as well as increasing his faith. It is certainly impermissible to kill someone who has been disobedient or to throw him in the sea or in a fire. Rather, he may only be reprimanded or suffer the capital punishments of the Sacred Law (Al-hudud) in accordance with his crime.' Abu Bakr Aj-Jassas also stated explicitly that this ruling was specific to Yunus (Jonah) peace be upon him in the book Ahkam Al-Quran printed by Dar Al-kutub Al-'Ilmiyya [3/497].*

(2) *It is related by Ibn Hisham in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya [2/112, 113] that each of Banu 'Awf, Banu Bayada, Banu Sa'ida and Banu Al-Harith wanted to take the reins of* =

Someone might ask if a boat would really sink or float because of just one person making it lighter or heavier. To which we would reply, 'Yes.' Have you not heard of ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’? When you load a camel, you do so, on the basis of what it can carry. If you put one stick too many on it, it will have to kneel down because of the weight. The reality is that it is not actually the single stick or straw that breaks the back of the camel, but the whole load of sticks. The last straw is just the thing that tipped the scales and took it to the point where it became unbearable. Prophet Yunus' (Jonah’s) ship was just the same, such that avoiding sinking meant throwing someone overboard. The death of one is preferable to the death of everyone.

We learn from this case in point that when danger threatens a group, it is permissible for one of them to repel it, and it is casting lots which decides who will be the one.

Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘…whereupon the great fish swallowed him, for he had been blameworthy.’ (*as-Saffat:* 142) Blame is a form of criticism. There is a difference between something deserving blame and something deserving punishment. Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* did something for which he was criticised by his Lord. It is as though Allah *the Exalted* said to him, ‘Indeed, you were hasty when you grew tired of your people and left them because of the initial harm that came to you from them. You should have been patient and endured the harm for the sake of your mission.’ So blame is a form of criticism, but it does not reach the level of punishment.

Usually criticism does not arise between lovers because they want to preserve the affection between them; this is why a poet said,

As for reproach between lovers, it is nothing,
For love can be healthy and true despite reproach.(1)

It is obvious that people reproach only the ones that they care for in order to maintain their companionship.

= *Prophet Muhammad’s camel. He said to them, ‘Get out of its way, for it is under orders.’ It went until it knelt on the land of Banu ‘Adiyy ibn An-Najjar.*

(1) This line is from a poem by poet laureate, Ahmad Shawqi. He died in 1932 at the age of 66. This is the beginning of a poem with twelve lines, in the meter of *(Bahr Al-Kamil)*. [Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-Shi‘riyya]

So, to recap, there are numerous things here that prove our point about Prophet Yunus (Jonah): the first of them is Allah's saying, 'when he fled like a runaway slave...' (*as-Saffat:* 140) which means a slave of Allah. Then, '...thinking that We had no power over him...' (*al-Anbiya':* 87) means that we would not restrain him; this was his optimistic opinion of Allah. Then, '…for he had been blameworthy' (*as-Saffat:* 142); Allah *the Almighty* found fault with him only for something he did that was not correct for a prophet, and this is evidence of affection.

Concerning Allah's saying, 'And had he not been of those who [even in the deep darkness of their distress are able to] extol Allah's limitless Glory (*Al-musabbihin*), he would indeed have remained in its belly till the Day when all shall be raised from the dead' (*as-Saffat:* 143-144). The word *At-tasbih* (extolling Allah's Glory) means to declare Allah to be absolutely above everything (*At-tanzih Al-mutlaq*). So his being from amongst those who extol Allah's limitless Glory means that although he was being scolded, he was not punished or harmed. Had it not been for his faith and glorification, he would have remained in the fish's stomach until the Day of Resurrection.

This issue of the Prophet Yunus (Jonah) being upbraided by Allah *the Almighty* for leaving and abandoning his people just because they belied him and were stubborn reminds us of Allah's custom with His messengers, i.e. aiding them and succouring them: 'Behold, We shall indeed succour Our apostles and those who have attained to faith, [both] in this world's life and on the Day when all the witnesses shall stand up.' (*Ghafir:* 51) This victory, however, can be delayed, even though Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is perfectly capable of granting them victory from the very first. Allah *the Most High* however desires two things from this: The first is that corruption worsens and becomes widespread so that people will feel constrained and consequently look for the truth and for goodness and that they will work towards it. The second is that Allah *the Exalted* can put those who believe in the messengers to test and distinguish those of them who are steadfast and capable of bearing the troubles of the mission thereafter. Thus, the postponement of victory is not a setback for messengers or an abandonment of them, for Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* would not send a messenger only to abandon him.

فَنَبَذْنَٰهُ بِٱلْعَرَآءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ ﴿١٤٥﴾ وَأَنۢبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِّن يَقْطِينٍ ﴿١٤٦﴾
وَأَرْسَلْنَٰهُ إِلَىٰ مِاْئَةِ أَلْفٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ ﴿١٤٧﴾ فَـَٔامَنُوا۟ فَمَتَّعْنَٰهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١٤٨﴾

But We cast him out, sick, on to a barren shore [145] And made a gourd tree grow above him [146] We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more [147] They believed, so We let them live out their lives [148] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 145 - 148)

Let us note at the onset that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, '…whereupon the great fish swallowed him …' (*as-Saffat:* 142), attributing the action to the fish, but in this verse when talking of Yunus' (Jonah's) salvation, the action is attributed to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* . He says, 'But We caused him to be cast…' (*as-Saffat:* 145) which means he was thrown out '…on a desert shore…' (*as-Saffat:* 145), i.e. on a vast area of empty ground '…sick [at heart] as he was' (*as-Saffat:* 145); this means that he was sick or worn out from the troubles he encountered in the fish's stomach. Alternatively, it could mean he was sick from thinking about what happened between his people and himself. Thus, it could mean either physical sickness or spiritual sickness.

His Lord however did not leave him alone on this piece of deserted land after he had been regurgitated by the fish and was in this unhealthy state. In many ways, he was like a newly born baby. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* caused a creeping plant (*shajarat al-yaqtin*) to grow for him: 'and caused a creeping plant to grow over him [out of the barren soil].' (*as-Saffat:* 146) This is a plant with broad leaves which the scholars identify as being a pumpkin (*Al-qar'*). It covered and sheltered him, protecting him from flies and insects, for he had come out surrounded by substances from the fish's stomach which made him all sticky, impeding his skin from breathing and impeding his health. This is why when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about *shajarat al-yaqtin*,(1) he said, 'It is the plant of my brother Yunus (Jonah).'(2)

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(1) *Any plant that does not stand on a trunk, such as the gourd, the melon or the colocynth is called yaqtin by Arabs [Ibn Jarir At-Tabari in his exegesis of this verse, vol. 22]. Az-Zujaj said, 'The derivation of the word Al-yaqtin is from the word qutun by virtue of place, which means it grows there and is thus on the pattern of yaf'il. It is also said that it is a foreign word. [Fath Al-Qadir, vol. 6 by Ash-Shawkani in his exegesis of verse 136 of the chapter of as-Saffat].*

(2) *Ibn Hajar said in Fath Al-Bari in the chapter Kitab Al-At'ima, Hadith 5064 that Muslim related this Hadith with the following wording, 'and he used to like pumpkin'.*=

The pronoun ‘him’ in the words *‘alaih* over him refers to Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* and means that this plant grew after the fish had thrown him onto the land and was not present there before that.

So, the fish swallowing Prophet Yunus (Jonah) was a Mercy from Allah to him, compared to him being lost in the vast sea, thrown about by waves, along with no one knowing what had become of him. As for the fish, it had a will of its own, could keep him safe, and cast him out onto the land. Thus, this series of events was a Mercy from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* to Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him*.

Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘And [then] We sent him [once again] to [his people,] a hundred thousand [souls] or more, and [this time] they believed [in him]–and so We allowed them to enjoy their life during the time allotted to them’ (*as-Saffat:* 147-148). It is as though Allah *the Almighty* is telling us, ‘Beware of thinking that what happened with Yunus (Jonah) detracted from his Message or made us change our mind about him as a messenger, for he was sent to ‘… a hundred thousand [souls] or more’ (*as-Saffat:* 147). The words ‘a hundred thousand' in this verse could be a broad expression meaning a huge number since during times gone by one thousand was the largest number that people knew.

When, after she fell captive, the Muslims wanted to ransom the daughter of Khosrau,(1) Azin; they offered the one into whose lot she had fallen so many thousands, and he agreed. His companions asked him after the deal was done, ‘Why did you not ask for more than that? They could have paid a huge sum for her.’ He replied, ‘By Allah, if I knew of a number greater than a thousand, I would have said it.’

As for Allah’s saying, ‘… or more’ (*as-Saffat:* 147), are we to infer that the Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* did not know the exact number of people there?

= *An-Nasa’i related it as follows, ‘He used to like pumpkin and would say, “Indeed, it is the plant of my brother Yunus (Jonah).”' Ibn Juzay said, ‘He chose to mention the pumpkin because it has large leaves and cool shade, and flies do not go near it. Yunus' (Jonah’s) skin was in such a state when he came out of the sea that it could not tolerate flies. This was part of Allah’s gentleness and His plan.’*

(1) The story of paying the ransom for the daughter of Khosrau

No, of course He knew it, and had He wished, He would have stated it precisely, but His saying, '… or more' (*as-Saffat:* 147) is not to indicate an increase as such; rather, it is to confirm the number of the preceding one hundred thousand. It is like the one who says, 'I gave so-and-so his due and more.' He is not talking so much about the increase as he is confirming the base number, and that it was not deficient. This is because the number 'a thousand' can be used to refer to a number that is nearly a thousand, like nine hundred and ninety-nine. Thus, to reiterate, the increase in this verse is a confirmation of the full number.

Then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'and [this time] they believed [in him], and so We allowed them to enjoy their life during the time allotted to them' (*as-Saffat:* 148). As long as any form of enjoyment is restricted in time, in Allah's eyes, it ends, for it is but the pleasure of this world. When the enjoyment of this world ends for a believer, however, he moves on to that which is better than it. Thus, one should not say, 'Allah ends the believer's pleasure' because the end of the pleasure of this world takes him to the delights of the next world. One's enjoyment in this world is limited to the length of his life in it as well as his abilities and opportunities. As for the delights of the Afterlife, they are ongoing and are granted in accordance with the abilities of the Bestower. This particular one is taken straight from the pleasures of this world to the delights of the next is pure munificence. Thus, Allah's saying, '…during the time allotted to them' (*as-Saffat:* 148), is to be understood as a kindness from Him.

After this Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* moves on to another matter.

فَٱسۡتَفۡتِهِمۡ أَلِرَبِّكَ ٱلۡبَنَاتُ وَلَهُمُ ٱلۡبَنُونَ ﴿١٤٩﴾ أَمۡ خَلَقۡنَا ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ إِنَٰثٗا وَهُمۡ
شَٰهِدُونَ ﴿١٥٠﴾ أَلَآ إِنَّهُم مِّنۡ إِفۡكِهِمۡ لَيَقُولُونَ ﴿١٥١﴾ وَلَدَ ٱللَّهُ وَإِنَّهُمۡ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

Now [Muhammad], ask the disbelievers: is it true that your Lord has daughters, while they choose sons for themselves? [149] Did We create the angels as females while they were watching? [150] No indeed! It is one of their lies when they say [151] 'God has begotten.' How they lie! [152]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 149 - 152)

In Allah's saying, 'And now ask them to enlighten you (*fa 'staftihim*) …' (*as-Saffat:* 149), the word *istafta* means to seek an opinion like the word *futya*. The word *Al-futya* literally means ‘the limit of strength’, and from this are derived the words *Al-fata* (a youth) and *Al-futuwwa* (chivalry). The word *istafta* means to seek that which will strengthen one’s ability to have an opinion (*fatwa*). If someone does not know the religious ruling in a particular case, he asks about it and seeks a *fatwa*, i.e. having been weak in an area of the religion, he seeks to become strong in that matter. Other examples of words derived from this root can be seen in Allah’s saying: ‘Said some [of them]: "We heard a youth (*fata*) speak of these [gods with scorn]. He is called Ibrahim (Abraham)."’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 60) Also, regarding the people of the cave, He says, ‘... Behold, they were young men (*fitya*) who had adhered to faith in their Sustainer ...’ (*al-Kahf:* 13) which means that they were not old men. It is remarkable that they should have full faith in the prime and vigour of their youth, for this is a time when strong desires and passions are to be expected. This is why it is narrated in a Hadith, ‘Your Lord wonders at the youth who has no passion.’

Allah *the Almighty* has clarified for us in standards by which we judge societies that there are twelve types of people: six of them are beloved, and six are hateful, and we seek refuge with Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. Of the beloved are those who are loved and those who are loved more, and amongst the hateful are those who are hated and those who are hated more. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'I love three, and My love for three is greater: I love the obedient old man, yet my love for the obedient young man is greater; I love the generous rich man, yet my love for the generous poor man is greater; I love the humble poor man, yet my love for the humble rich man is greater.' These six types are those beloved to Allah, and you can deduce from their opposites those who are those hated by Allah, and we seek refuge with Him.

So, the obedient young man is more beloved to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* because he has lustful urges, along with their excuses and their vigour, but he nevertheless conquers them and treads a path of piety. This is opposed to the old man whose lusts have passed away, and his urges have weakened. The generous rich man and the humble poor man are similar to this. These three types represent the pinnacle of progress in a society, and the pinnacle of Allah’s vicegerency on earth. Imagine a society where the youth are obedient, the poor are generous and the rich are humble! The next level down is a society where the old men are obedient, and the rich are humble and generous. The next level down is a society that is hateful to Allah, and with Him we seek refuge.

So, 'And now ask them to enlighten you (*fa 'staftihim*)…' (*as-Saffat:* 149), means, 'Ask them for their opinion, for it will strengthen your argument.' This is why we say to the *Mufti* whom the people like to take *fatwa* from, 'The people want you to strengthen them with your opinion, so do not take them down the easy road, since, by doing so, you will encourage them to take dispensations, and by that you will not strengthen them but weaken them. Rather give them the correct ruling, for in that they will find true strength.'

Why does Allah *the Exalted* tell Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to seek the opinion of his people? The scholars say that it is because when a matter is ever so clear to a speaker, he says to himself, 'I need not judge this matter. Rather, I will let my opponent judge.' Why is this? Since he is certain that, if his opponent thinks about the matter, he will find that there is only one answer. It is like when someone denies some good, you have done for them and you say to them, 'I'll settle for your judgement. Tell me, did I not stand by your side on such-and-such a day?' Thus, you frame the issue as a question because you know the answer he must give. If, however, you just state the matter plainly, it can be accepted or denied.

This is why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* used a question in His argument of this case: 'And now ask them to enlighten you. Has your Sustainer daughters, whereas they would have [only] sons?' (*as-Saffat:* 149) This is an incredulous question, i.e. 'How could you say this?' Because they said that the angels are Allah's daughters, and then they said that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has a son. How could this be since when one of them is given the good news of a daughter, his face turns dark and his is angry, and he retreats from people because of the bad news he has been given? Then, he thinks, 'avoiding all the people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received. [And debating within himself:] Shall he keep this [child] despite the disgrace (*Al-hun*) [which he feels over it], or shall he bury it in the dust? O, evil indeed is whatever they decide!' (*an-Nahl:* 59)

Allah's saying, '... shall he bury it in the dust ...' (*an-Nahl:* 59) refers to one being alive since the emotions of parenthood mean that a parent cannot bear to strangle his child with his own hands or to see it die. This is why they would get rid of them by burying them in the ground so they could not see them.

In another place Allah *the Exalted* says, 'Yet, [as to themselves] when one of them is given the news [of the birth of a female child], the like of which [sex] he ascribes to the Most Gracious [Allah], his face becomes gloomy, and he is choked with inward grief. [Is he your god] who is brought up in the midst of ornaments and who is unable to make a clear expression [to an argument] and a plain speech in disputation [and discussions].' (*az-Zukhruf:* 17-18) This means that: do you ascribe to Allah *the Almighty* those who are raised in luxury and adornment, namely daughters, yet you would take sons for yourselves who can work, strive, and bear hardship? This is why Allah judged this matter to be an outrageous and unfair distribution. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, 'Why for yourselves [you would choose only] male offspring, whereas to Him [you assign] female. That, lo and behold, is an unfair division (*qisma diza*)!' (*an-Najm:* 21-22) Let us look at this word (*diza)* unfair in this verse. By Allah, had it come in other than the Quran, it would have been heavy on the tongue and unpalatable, yet in its context in Allah's speech it is natural and fluid. Why is this so? Thus it is so because it has been put there to express this astonishing and unjust judgement, something that could only be properly articulated by means of this strange word which rings like a bell in one's ear.

Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, 'Or is it that We have created the angels female, and they [who believe them to be divine] have witnessed [that act of creation]?' (*as-Saffat:* 150) So, you are wrong. Indeed, in both cases, this is the most idiotic folly. The first is that you say the angels are female, and the second is that you desire males for yourselves, leaving Allah with daughters. Who was it who told you that the angels were female? Sons and daughters only come from marriage and procreation, but angels do not get married nor do they procreate or be described as male or female.

Moreover, whoever wishes to say that angels are female should have knowledge of their creation. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [yet] they claim that the angels, who in themselves are but beings created by the Most Gracious, are females. [But] did they witness their creation? This false claim of theirs will be recorded, and they will be called to account [for it on Judgment Day]!' (*az-Zukhruf*: 19) He also says in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves, and neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) It is Allah Who is informing us of this reality. '... And neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) This is referring to 'assistants' in the process of creation, and this exposes those who want to come and talk about creation as if they witnessed it, saying that the angels are female, that men are descended from primates and all their other assertions.

Allah *Glorified is He* warns us of them to give us a natural immunity to their views. It is sufficient for us to know that this matter is from the unseen, and they can have no knowledge of it, except that which comes from the Creator. Nevertheless, He *the Almighty* has put signs in the universe that clarify the truth of the events we did not witness.

Allah *the Exalted* negates their prattle with His saying: 'And in everything have We created opposites, so that you might bear in mind [that Allah alone is one].' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49) Each species stands on its own, and nothing evolves from anything else. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* also says, 'Limitless in His Glory is He Who has created opposites ...' (*Ya Sin:* 36).

As for angels, they have a special constitution to which duality is inappropriate; they are neither male nor female, and they do not eat, drink, or sleep, etc. If someone thinks that this is irrational then just put it with the other things which we believe in of the unseen that are irrational and we have been informed of by our Lord. These unseen matters of which Allah has informed us are evidence of our faith in the One Who informed us of them.

Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* moves to another case by saying: 'O, verily, it is out of their own [inclination to] falsehood that some people assert, "Allah has begotten [a son]", and verily, they are lying [too, when they say]' (*as-Saffat:* 151-152). So, their insolence towards Allah *the Almighty* does not stop at them describing the angels as female, nor at their ascribing daughters to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* but they go on to insult Him by saying, 'Allah has begotten [a son] …' (*as-Saffat:* 152). It is though Allah *Glorified is He* is loosening the reins on these arrogant people and giving them space until He says something that will expose their lies. Since they say, '... Allah has taken unto Himself a son ...' (*al-Baqara:* 116) and yet now they say, 'Allah has begotten a son'; there is a big difference between these two statements. 'Allah has begotten a son' attributes a child directly to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* whereas, 'Allah has taken into Himself a son' means that He did not give birth, but He adopted a son. He did not have a child, and then He took one. Allah *the Exalted* refutes their saying, 'Allah has begotten a son' in His statement: 'Say: He is the One God. God, the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Who Exists. He begets not, and neither is He begotten, and there is nothing that could be compared with Him' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4). Furthermore, He refutes their saying, '... Allah has taken unto Himself a son ...' (*al-Baqara:* 116), when He says, '... no consort has He ever taken unto Himself, nor a son!' (*al-Jinn:* 3)

Let us look at this matter of adopting children in view of our own reality. Why do people want or strive for a son? Why are we sad when we fail to produce offspring and anxious when the child is late? The scholars say it is because a child is an extension of his father and his posterity. This is why a man rejoices at his son. He rejoices even more at his grandson because while the son guarantees his posterity for another generation, his grandson guarantees it for two. What a strange place the world is! How we wrangle over it and cling on to it, even just to be remembered. If the world does not last for you, then how will you benefit from other peoples' worldly matters?

The poet Shawqi *may Allah have mercy on him* spoke of this issue when he had a grandson and rejoicing in the matter, said,

Guarantee for yourself after death your memory,
For to be recalled is another life for man

There can be no doubt that Shawqi does not intend a son by 'memory', rather, he means righteous works and a beneficial influence that immortalise the remembrance of the one who performs them.

So, a man needs a son because when he dies, his son will carry his name and memory. As for Allah *the Exalted* He is everlasting, undying. 'Abd Al-Muttalib found that none of his sons were surviving, so he pledged to Allah that if He gave him some sons he would sacrifice one of them to Him as an offering. Men need children so that they can have descendants. There are some who say, ‘If I die, who will mourn over me?’ Glory be to Allah! All you have guaranteed is that you will be mourned and that your son after you will be mourned; it is just one dying after another.

Yes, indeed, these are the reasons why we need sons and why we strive for them. As for Allah *the Almighty* though, He is Ever living and never dies, so how would a son benefit Him, and why would He adopt one when the dominion of the heavens and the earth belong to Him?

This is why Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* replies to them, ‘Had Allah willed to take unto Himself a son, He could have chosen anyone that He wanted out of whatever He has created ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 4). Had He so willed, He would have elected whoever He wanted; He would choose, not you. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* however was decorous in his worship of his Lord, and this is why he said, ‘Say [O, Prophet]: "If the Most Gracious [truly] had a son, I would be the first to worship him!"’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 81) This means that if the Most Merciful were to have a son, and He informed us of such, then I (Prophet Muhammad) would be the first to believe in him.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says as an answer to them: ‘Although it is inconceivable that the Most Gracious should take unto Himself a son!’ (*Maryam:* 92) So Allah *the Most High* has not adopted a son. It is not appropriate for Him to do so, and it never will be. There can be no concept of parenthood or childhood in relation to Him. He is everlasting and never dies such that He would need a son to perpetuate His memory. He is free of all need of His creation, and the heavens and the earth belong to Him. All people are His created beings and His dependants; He does not need descendants as you do.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘... no consort has He ever taken unto Himself, nor a son!’ (*al-Jinn:* 3) This means that He has no spouse such that He could have children. So these are all fabrications and lies against Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* which is why He ascribed falsehood to them, and then lies in an emphatic form in His saying: ‘O, verily, it is out of their own [inclination to] falsehood that some people assert, "Allah has begotten [a son]", and verily, they are lying' (*as-Saffat:* 151-152).

However, why is one described as falsehood and the other as lying? The scholars say it was to preserve the temporary authority that they had before Islam for themselves, the temporary authority that gave them leadership and grandeur. It is well known that the Jews in Medina had a considerable status when it came to money, knowledge and war and that they awaited victory over the disbelievers through Prophet Muhammad, but '... whenever there came unto them something which they recognised [as the truth], they would deny it...' (*al-Baqara:* 89). Why was that so? That was due to them realising that he would take away their authority.

Allah *the Exalted* named their lies (*ifk)* falsehood because this word refers to intentional one. Inventing lies intentionally is called *ifk* because it is an inversion of reality. Similarly, *Al-Mu'tafika* was a village that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* turned upside down, along with its inhabitants, and on account of this it was given this name.

Intentionally lying inverts reality because if a man states a case, this case is said to be a linguistic association. If this is preceded by an actual association that agrees with a certain given speech, then the speech is true. If its relationship to the speech is non-existent, then it is a lie. Lies come in degrees. The biggest and worst of them are falsehoods told of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* in matters that are unambiguous, or in the basic tenets of belief in Him. Telling lies in this case is no small matter; it is not like telling a lie about a few pounds, for example; rather, lies in this field are at the very pinnacle of belief.

'O, verily, it is out of their own [inclination to] falsehood that some people assert Allah has begotten [a son]' (*as-Saffat:* 152). So they actually attributed a son directly to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* not just the adoption of a son. This is why He judges them by saying: '… and, verily, they are lying [too, when they say]' (*as-Saffat:* 151-152). Yet, this is a statement, and while there is no doubt that a statement from Allah *the Most High* is truthful, intellectually a statement is open to confirmation or denial. For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* grasps them with another rhetorical device from which they will find no escape. He confirms His speech in the minds of the reciters and those listening and forces them to admit it. He says,

أَصْطَفَى ٱلْبَنَاتِ عَلَى ٱلْبَنِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾ مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ ﴿١٥٤﴾ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٥٥﴾

Did He truly choose daughters in preference to sons? [153]
What is the matter with you? How do you form your
judgment? [154] Do you not reflect? [155]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 153 - 155)

The letter *hamza* at the beginning of the verb 'He has chosen (*astafa*)...' (*as-Saffat:* 153) is the one that makes a sentence into a question (*hamzat al-istifham*). This is an incredulous question because Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of sons and daughters. Why would He choose the weaker of the two sexes when He created them both?

These claims are rationally unacceptable and the case is clear. This is why Allah *the Almighty* then poses another two questions in wonder at their speech, 'What is amiss with you and your judgment? Will you not then take heed? (*as-Saffat:* 154-155) In other words, why not use your intellects? The case is clear-cut. We have already outlined how Allah *the Exalted* instead of using a statement, asks them questions so that they might provide the answers themselves by way of confirmation, and confirmation is the master of proofs, as they say. A statement, however, can be either believed or denied on an intellectual level. Thus, this is rational evidence that voids their claims. The problem is that minds may differ about rational evidence. This is why Allah now takes us to evidence from revelation. Perhaps, they have a Book they study that clarifies this issue:

أَمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَٰنٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٥٦﴾ فَأْتُوا۟ بِكِتَٰبِكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

Do you perhaps have clear authority? [156]
Bring your scriptures, if you are telling the truth [157]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 156 - 157)

Having refuted their claims with rational evidence, Allah *the Most High* now refutes them with proof relating to revelation. The word *sultan* (evidence) in this verse could mean either an authoritative proof or authority in terms of power and strength. The difference between the two is that the former convinces an opponent, and he yields willingly. As for the latter, he is forced and yields against his will. Thus, the meaning is that they have no authority, neither proof nor power. Similar to this is Allah's saying, quoting Satan (Iblis) on the Day of Judgement, '...Yet, I had no power (*sultan*) at all over you. I but called you, and you responded to me...' (*Ibrahim:* 22); in other words, I (Satan) could not to force you to obey me, nor did I have any proof to convince you with; rather, you already had an inclination to misguidance and disobedience.

Allah's saying, 'Produce, then, that divine writ of yours, if you are speaking the truth!' (*as-Saffat:* 157) means that if you have some authority for what you say, then bring your Book, namely, one which has been revealed to you by Allah that informs you of these things.

وَجَعَلُواْ بَيْنَهُۥ وَبَيْنَ ٱلْجِنَّةِ نَسَبًا ۚ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ ٱلْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ ﴿١٥٨﴾
سُبْحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

They claim that He has kinship with the jinn, yet the jinn
them- selves know that they will be brought before Him [158]
God is far above what they attribute to Him [159]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 158 - 159)

The word *Al-jinna* (hidden forces) has a *kasra* on the letter *jim*. The word *Al-janna* is similar to this but has a *fatha* on the *jim*. These words, along with the words *jinn* and *majnun*, are all derived from the root *jann*, which means to be hidden. The 'hidden forces' referred to in this verse are the angels and are so named because they are hidden from our sight. Similarly the word *Al-janna* (garden) is named thus because its plants and trees hide the one who enters it. Alternatively, it could be said to be because it protects the one who enters it by providing for all his needs, such that he does not need to leave it for anything. The *majnun* (insane person) is so named because his intellect is obscured.

The meaning in this verse is that they asserted a relationship between Allah *the Almighty* and the angels when they said angels were Allah's daughters: '…although [even] these invisible forces know well that, verily, they [who thus blaspheme against Allah] shall indeed be arraigned…' (*as-Saffat:* 158); what this means is that angels know that polytheists will be summoned to punishment.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* replies to them, declaring His transcendence above resembling His creation by saying, ‘Limitless is Allah in His Glory, above anything that men may devise by way of definition!’ (*as-Saffat:* 159) The phrase, *subhan Allah* (limitless is Allah in His Glory) is something we think of all the time regarding anything that might lead us to imagine that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* resembles His creation. Allah’s transcendence is something that was present before there was anyone to declare it. The word *subhan* refers to the absolute transcendence of Allah, before He created anyone to declare such. Then when He created the creation, it glorified Him. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols Allah’s limitless Glory, for He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise.’ (*al-Hashr:* 1) and ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols Allah’s limitless Glory...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 1); in other words, they are constantly glorifying Him in the present and into the future until the Day of Judgment, and so long as this transcendence of Allah *the Almighty* is affirmed before creation and after it, on a continual basis from the past, in the present and into the future, then be warned, O, most noble of created beings, for whom the whole creation was made, against not also being of those who glorify Him or of deviating from this harmonious creation in its glorification: ‘Extol the limitless Glory of your Sustainer’s name, [the glory of] the All-Highest’ (*al-A‘la:* 1). Thus, the meaning of ‘Limitless is Allah in His Glory, above anything that men may devise by way of definition!’ (*as-Saffat:* 159) is that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is transcendent above the lies and assertions of these polytheists and that He is transcendent above having any kind of relationship with the angels.

إِلَّا عِبَادَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ١٦٠ فَإِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ ١٦١
مَآ أَنتُمْ عَلَيْهِ بِفَٰتِنِينَ ١٦٢ إِلَّا مَنْ هُوَ صَالِ ٱلْجَحِيمِ ١٦٣

The true servants of God do not do such things [160] and
neither you nor what you worship [161] can lure away from
God any [162] except those who will burn in Hell [163]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 160 - 163)

The exception in Allah’s saying, ‘Not thus, however, [behave] Allah’s true servants’ (*as-Saffat:* 160) is from those mentioned in His saying: ‘…verily, they [who thus blaspheme against Allah] shall indeed be arraigned…' (*as-Saffat:* 158). Allah *the Exalted* has exempted His true servants from being associated with those who are summoned for punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'for verily, neither you [blasphemers] nor the objects of your worship' (*as-Saffat:* 161); this means that those other than Allah 'can cause anyone to fall prey to your temptation' (*as-Saffat:* 162). Furthermore, neither you nor the deities you worship in place of Me can seduce any of My creation away from Me; you cannot pervert Allah's creation. It is said, 'So-and-so seduced so-and-so's wife', which means he corrupted her. Thus, the meaning of the verse is that you are unable to corrupt the state of affairs between Myself and My angels.

How could it be otherwise when angels were only created so that they might love and worship Me? 'They extol His limitless Glory by night and by day, never flagging [therein].' (*al-Anbiya':* 20) How could you corrupt them when they are free of you and your worship of them and when they in fact curse you? How could you possibly seduce them away from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* ?

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* refutes their arguments by saying: 'Those whom they call upon [apart from Him, thinking them to be a means of gaining nearness to Allah] themselves seek nearness to their Lord and solicit His favour (even) those of them who are nearest [to Allah are still competing to be closer to Him] and hope for His mercy ….' (*al-Isra':* 57) This verse indicates that those whom they worship besides Allah *the Almighty* desire for themselves to get closer to Him. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: 'If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of power.' (*al-Isra':* 42)

You cannot, then, seduce those whom you worship away from their Lord because they are sincere in their worship of Him and compete with one another to get closer to Him.

Allah's saying: 'unless it be such as rushes towards the blazing fire [of his own accord]!' (*as-Saffat:* 163) means that they can only seduce those of mankind who are content with their worship and who will, therefore, end in hellfire. To reproach idol worshippers, Allah *the Exalted* informs them that they will not be punished in the hellfire except with the very stones they used to worship, which they will find with them in it. It may be asked, ‘What is wrong with such stones that they worshipped to be brought with them in the Hellfire?' In response, Allah *Glorified is He* states in the following verses:

وَمَا مِنَّآ إِلَّا لَهُۥ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ ﴿١٦٤﴾ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ ٱلصَّآفُّونَ ﴿١٦٥﴾ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ ٱلْمُسَبِّحُونَ ﴿١٦٦﴾

[The angels say], ‘Every single one of us has his appointed
place [164] we are ranged in ranks [165] We glorify God [166]
(The Quran*, as-Saffat:* 164 - 166)

When such stones are heated up to be used as a punishment for polytheists, they are not treated as such as a punishment for a misdeed they did, but due to that being their assigned place and they execute Allah’s Commandments against these rebels: 'And there is none of us but has an assigned place' (*as-Saffat:* 164). ‘An assigned place’ mentioned in the verse means a rank and a status. The angels are of different ranks and levels; the least of them is not envious of the highest, and the highest have no contempt for the lowest because such places were assigned to them by Allah’s Decree which they revere. This is a lesson for us to learn; that everyone should respect the rank and status of others. Respecting people of senior ranks alludes to the fact of honouring Allah’s Decree Who placed them in a higher position, even if they happened to be once in a lower one. The world, as I mentioned earlier, is not mechanically determined; rather, everything is created according to Allah’s Decree and Wisdom.

It is as though the angels say, ‘How could we be Allah’s daughters? How could we be worshipped besides Allah when we ourselves have been made subservient to His worship? We are His forces, lined up awaiting His orders: ‘and most surely we are they who draw themselves out in ranks’ (*as-Saffat:* 165); this means that we stand in ordered rows. Standing in rows are an indication of orderliness and an expression of discipline and commitment. To this effect, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was narrated to have said, ‘Indeed, Allah does not look to the crooked row.’(1) This is because you are standing in front of Allah *the Almighty* and thus, you should show Him proof of your commitment, cohesion, and equality.

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(1) It is recommended for the Imam (who leads prayer) to order the rows to be straightened and the gaps to be filled before starting to pray. Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him*=

This is also the case in war. Allah says: 'Surely, Allah loves those who fight in His Way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall.' (*as-Saff:* 4) This simile is instructive because ‘a firm and compact wall’ is one in which the bricks are not coming loose since they are held in place by the building of which they are part. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was inspecting the rows in preparation for one of his battles, he saw one of the soldiers sticking out of line so he indicated to him with his stick to stand with the straight line.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states that the angels say: ‘And we are most surely they who declare the Glory [of Allah].’ (*as-Saffat:* 166) The angels wonder how they could be content to be worshipped besides Allah *the Most High* when they were only created to glorify Him.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَإِن كَانُوا۟ لَيَقُولُونَ ﴿١٦٧﴾ لَوْ أَنَّ عِندَنَا ذِكْرًا مِّنَ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٦٨﴾
لَكُنَّا عِبَادَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿١٦٩﴾ فَكَفَرُوا۟ بِهِۦ ۖ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

[The disbelievers] used to say [167] If only we had a scripture like previous people [168] we would be true servants of God [169] yet now they reject [the Quran]. They will soon realize [170] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 167 - 170)

‘A reminder’, as stated in the verse, refers to scriptures, ‘…like previous people,’ meaning those that were similar to that which were revealed to previous prophets. Then, Allah says that they say, ‘we would be true servants of Allah.’ How strange it is that they should seek to justify their polytheism on this basis,

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= narrated, ‘Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would turn to face us before making his (takbir) and say, "Come close together and straighten up." This was narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim. They also narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "Straighten your lines, for straightening the lines is a part of the perfection of prayer."'

although Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent down to all of them. Earlier prophets, who came before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were sent to a specific people for a specific time and were all committed to delivering Allah's legislations to His creation. As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he was the only prophet deputised by Allah to make laws for people because his Message is universal in terms of time and place until the Day of Judgment.

How is it, then, that they wanted a revelation from their forefathers when they had the last of all prophets with them? He was given general commands by Allah and then he clarified, expounded, and set them out in detail.

Allah's saying, 'Yet, now they reject …' (*as-Saffat:* 170) means that when the prophet they were asking for was sent down to them, they disbelieved in him. Therefore, this is only a matter of arrogance, disputation, and obstinacy in refusing to accept the truth and following it.

In Arabic, the letter *sin* and the word *sawf* both mean 'will' and indicate the future tense, but *sawf* refers to a more distant time than *sin.* Hence, in the Quranic verse, '…They will soon realise' (*as-Saffat:* 170), there is a very inclusive time phrase. The verb, '…realise' (*as-Saffat:* 170) is in the present case which is used for the present and the immediate future, while the word *sawf* denotes the distant future. Accordingly, *sawf* is used in this verse because amongst those who lived at the time of the revelation were those who would die before witnessing the recompense of the polytheists or the victory of Islam. Regarding the disbelievers who died before witnessing such events, they will know of which in the Hereafter when they see the punishment. A believer, on the other hand, has no need of this knowledge because he already believes in Allah's revelation. An example of such belief is the saying of 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* 'Were the veil [of the Unseen] to be removed from me, I would not increase in certainty.'

When Muslims were in tight circumstances and distress, before the opening of Mecca, Allah revealed the verse: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].' (*al-Qamar:* 45) In the verse, the letter *sin* is used to denote the near future, which surprised 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* the one whose opinion was in accordance with that which the Quran would soon reveal on many occasions. He said, ‘What assemblies are those which will be defeated when we are unable to protect ourselves or our families?’ When it happened, though, and Muslims entered Mecca as triumphant warriors, he said,(1) ‘Allah *Glorified is He* spoke the truth: “[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].”’ (*al-Qamar:* 45)

A believer ardently believes in what Allah *the Almighty* tells to happen, for it is a thing preordained in His Knowledge and so long as it was destined in pre-eternity, and given that there is no force that can oppose what Allah *Glorified is He*, has destined, and that He does not become incapacitated in any way that prevents Him from implementing His decrees, thus, it must necessarily come to pass.

A case in point here is the Quranic verse: ‘Allah's Commandment came, therefore do not desire to hasten it.’ (*an-Nahl:* 1) In Arabic, a past tense verb, as maintained by grammarians, describes an action in the past, whereas a present tense verb describes an action in the present or the future. However, how can one resolve the conflict between the past tense in ‘… came …’ and the prohibition to hasten it in ‘do not desire to hasten it’, which denotes that this will happen in the future? The answer is that the one speaking in this verse is Allah *the Almighty* not any of us. He is not bound by time and when He tells of something, then it will happen, and nothing can stop it, for it has been destined in pre-eternity. Thus, Allah’s Judgment has been issued in pre-eternity, so do not seek to hurry its occurrence.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

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(1) *'Ikrima Allah be pleased with him said, ‘When the verse, “[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat]” (al-Qamar: 45) was revealed, ‘Umar said, “Which assembly is to be defeated?!” ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him said, "On the day of the battle of Badr, I saw Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him seizing his chainmail and saying, '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat]' (al-Qamar: 45), and so that day I understood the interpretation of the verse."’ This was narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Exegesis [4/226] and he ascribed it to Ibn Abu Hatim.*

وَلَقَدۡ سَبَقَتۡ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ﴿١٧١﴾ إِنَّهُمۡ لَهُمُ ٱلۡمَنصُورُونَ ﴿١٧٢﴾
وَإِنَّ جُندَنَا لَهُمُ ٱلۡغَٰلِبُونَ ﴿١٧٣﴾

Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers [171] it is they who will be helped [172] and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners [173] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 171-173)

The Quranic phrase, '…Our Word has already gone forth (*sabaqat kalimatuna*)…' (*as-Saffat:* 171) means that Allah *Glorified is He* decreed these things before the universe existed. There are a few phrases that are synonymous to this one; one could say *sabaqat kalimatuna*, *waqaat kalimatuna* or *haqqat kalimatuna*. *Sabaqat* means the matter was delineated before it happened; *waqaat* (meaning 'it happened') relates to the time of its occurrence, while *haqqat* means that it is Allah's sole right to judge in accordance with His Power, and it is absolutely true that His judgment shall occur according to His Will. Thus, these meanings come together and complete each other.

Now, what is this 'Word' that has gone forth from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messengers? It is the Quranic verses: 'Most surely they shall be the assisted ones, and most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones.' (*as-Saffat:* 172-173)

These two points that the messengers will inevitably be supported and that the hosts will undoubtedly be victorious refer to the 'Word that has gone forth' and the decree that cannot be repealed.

On account of this, Muslim scholars have inferred from these verses that for an army to earn victory certain prerequisites need to be fulfilled, but when neglected, defeat will surely happen.

Looking at the outcome of a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, it can be found that when Muslims were victorious, they were fulfilling these prerequisites, but when they were defeated, it was due to failure to meet such conditions, and they should have turned to themselves and search for the cause of their shortcoming. Had they maintained such prerequisites, Allah *Glorified is He* would have delivered His promise of victory to them.

This matter can be clearly inferred from the battles of Badr and Uhud. In the Battle of Badr, Muslims were victorious because they did not break the laws set by Allah *the Most High* relating to attaining victory. In the Battle of Uhud, however, they were not victorious even though they had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in their midst. This was natural and should not come as a surprise. They disobeyed the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so how could they be granted victory despite their disobedience? I swear by Allah, had He given them victory on that occasion, the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have become negligible in their eyes. They would have said, 'On such-and-such a day, we were disobedient but were still victorious.' Consequently, the final result of the Battle of Uhud was the defeat of the failed Muslims, whereas Islam was victorious and its laws and principles were held high.

As for the messengers, they have full trust in Allah's promise of victory. To them, this matter is not open to discussion. This is proven in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. When he, along with the children of Israel, left Egypt, Pharaoh and his troops followed them until they almost caught up with Musa (Moses) and his people at the edge of the sea. Thereupon, Prophet Musa's (Moses') people said that they were most surely being overtaken. (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) In response, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: '… By no means, surely my Lord is with me. He will show me a way out.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) He said it with full confidence, denying an event that seemed but a moment away; the sea was in front of them and the enemy was behind them, yet he said, '…By no means, surely my Lord is with me. He will show me a way out.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) This is out of full belief in Allah's statement: 'Most surely they shall be the assisted ones' (*as-Saffat:* 172).

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١٧٤﴾ وَأَبْصِرْهُمْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧٥﴾
أَفَبِعَذَابِنَا يَسْتَعْجِلُونَ ﴿١٧٦﴾ فَإِذَا نَزَلَ بِسَاحَتِهِمْ فَسَآءَ صَبَاحُ ٱلْمُنذَرِينَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

So [Prophet] turn away from the disbelievers for a while [174] a Watch them: they will soon see [175] Do they really wish to hasten Our punishment? [176] When it descends on their courtyards, how terrible that morning will be for those who were warned! [177] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 174 - 177)

Allah’s saying, ‘Therefore, turn away from them…’ (*as-Saffat:* 174) means leave them to their falsehood and turn aside from them. Why should that be the case, when Allah *the Exalted* is able to aid His religion from the very beginning? Muslim scholars maintain that it is because Allah wants falsehood to worsen, prevailing until people feel constricted and tormented by it and, therefore, come to hate it. Another reason is to train the people of truth to overcome trials and tribulations so they may get stronger in their belief.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [then] see them, so they too shall see’ (*as-Saffat:* 175); this verse is an order to Prophet Muhammad to look at their state and their eventual outcome. They will also come to see this outcome as well as the punishments they hasten that will befall them: ‘What! Would they then hasten on Our chastisement?’ (*as-Saffat:* 176) In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states that the disbelievers used to say to their Prophets: ‘… bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the truthful.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 22) This is idiocy on their part, for this punishment that they deny and seek to hasten is going to happen inevitably: ‘But when it shall descend in their court (*fa idha nazal bi sahatihim*), evil shall then be the morning of the warned ones.’ (*as-Saffat:* 177) The Arabic word *saha* (court) refers to a wide-open place or the space that people seek for fresh air. The word *nazal* in this verse also means ‘comes upon them and surprises them’.

Allah's saying, ‘… evil shall then be the morning of the warned ones’, means their awakening (*sabah*) will be horrific and evil. Morning (*As-Subh*) is the best time for battle so that one might surprise the enemy before it is prepared. Alternatively, it could refer to the punishment coming on them all of a sudden in broad daylight, such that they are unable to hide their disgrace. The word *mundharin* in this verse alludes to those whom Allah has admonished and warned.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١٧٨﴾ وَأَبْصِرْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧٩﴾

[Prophet], turn away from the disbelievers for a while [178] Watch them: they will soon see [179] (The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 178 - 179)

The earlier verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* states, ‘Therefore turn away from them till a time,’ (*as-Saffat:* 174) refers to turning aside from them in this worldly life. Similarly, the Quranic verse, ‘and [then] see them …’ (*as-Saffat:* 175) has also to do with seeing in this world and so does the verse: ‘… for they too shall see.’ (*as-Saffat:* 175)

‘Time’ as mentioned in the verse, may signify punishment in this world or in the Hereafter, as can be inferred from the verse, ‘… So should We make you see part of what We threaten them with …’ which means in this world, ‘… or should We cause you to die, to Us shall they be returned’ (*Ghafir:* 77) which means in the Hereafter.

However, ‘time’ mentioned in this verse, ‘And turn away from them till a time’ (*as-Saffat:* 178) refers to the Hereafter, for it is not a repetition of the previous verse. The same is the case with the verse, ‘and [then] see, for they too shall see,’ (*as-Saffat:* 179) which alludes to the punishment, overtaking them all of a sudden in the Hereafter, that they once denied and rejected, and they will then say, ‘Our Lord! We have seen and we have heard’ (*as-Sajda:* 12).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

سُبۡحَٰنَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ ٱلۡعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿١٨٠﴾ وَسَلَٰمٌ عَلَى ٱلۡمُرۡسَلِينَ ﴿١٨١﴾
وَٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٨٢﴾

Your Lord, the Lord of Glory, is far above what they attribute to Him [180] Peace be upon the messengers [181] and praise be to God the Lord of all the Worlds [182]
(The Quran, *as-Saffat:* 180 - 182)

Allah *the Almighty* concludes this chapter with a glorification confirming His transcendence and affirming His attributes and actions to be beyond similarity and similitude. People's attributes and actions are totally different from those of Allah *the Almighty*; we should understand the Divine Attributes and Actions in the light of His saying, '…there is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

The meaning of the verse, 'Glory be to your Lord …' (*as-Saffat:* 180) is that Allah is transcendent above and beyond any shortcoming or any similarity to creation. Creation comprises essences *dhawat*, but they are not like unto Allah's Essence/*dhat*. They exist but their existence is not like unto His. They have independence, but it is not like His independence; they have wisdom but not like unto His, etc.

In the Quranic phrase, '… the Lord of Honour' (*as-Saffat:* 180), the word 'Lord' *Rabb* signifies nurture *tarbiyya* and implies nurturing the one being nourished in order to successfully achieve the goal appointed to him. To prepare the one being nourished, one doing the nourishing needs to first know the end for which this one being nourished is created. Subsequently, one doing the nourishing must have the wisdom to lay out the way which enables the one being nourished to attain that end.

So, who determines the end of man's existence? As previously stated, the manufacturer of something is the one who determines the purpose of its creation first and foremost, even before he embarks upon it. Did the inventor of the television set, for example, invent it and then say, 'It is for you to find out the uses of this set?' Of course not, he defined the purpose of manufacturing it first. Similarly, none but Allah, the Creator of man, is to determine the purpose of man's creation. Furthermore, products are maintained by their manufacturers, and so is man's behaviour which cannot be reformed except with Allah's Guidance.

This is why we assert that this world only becomes corrupt when man leaves this framework, starts to set for himself the purpose of his existence, lays down his own guidance for life and puts his Creator and His Guidance aside. The path that the Creator has laid down for his created beings is akin to a manual, by means of which a product is maintained and any arising damage can be rectified. The one who lays down such a manual must necessarily be precise and wise so that nothing escapes him, and nothing needs to be changed or corrected. The Creator *Glorified is He* is more knowledgeable about His slaves and His creation, and He knows better what is best for them in this world and the Hereafter: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.' (*al-Mulk:* 14)

If this were not the case, why would the Creator invite us to come to Him five times through prayer during the day and the night and make the prayers obligatory upon us under all circumstances? This is why *Salat Al-Safar* (travel prayer) and *Salat Al-Marid* (the sick prayer) have been legislated. Even if one's illness is severe, he must pray, even with his glance or thoughts.

As already stated in this regard, when one desires to see the president or some dignitary, then one must get an appointment and follow certain procedures. Furthermore, the issue to be discussed shall be specified, and then it is that dignitary who ends the meeting at his own will. As for meeting with your Lord, it is a meeting of a beloved who allows His admirer to specify the time, place and subject of the meeting. He may begin and ends it whenever he likes. If you want to meet your Lord, you only need to get prepared for it and say *Allah akbar* (Allah is the Greatest), a phrase that brings you directly into the presence of your Lord *Glorified is He*.

Imagine that a product is checked by its manufacturer five times a day, could there remain any problems or defects with it?! For this reason, whenever Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* found himself troubled by some matter, he would rush to pray. He *peace and blessings be upon him* would also say, 'Give us rest by it (i.e. prayer), O, Bilal.'(1) Indeed, give us rest by it, not from it!

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(1) *This was narrated by the Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad [5/364] and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [4985] on the authority of a man from amongst the Companions.*

At the end of this chapter, Allah *the Exalted* mentions His glorification, then His Lordship with which He nurtures and prepares one for the task assigned to him. Nonetheless, why do you need such nurture? You need it so that you may be honoured by Allah: '… the Lord of Honour (*Al-izza*)…' (*as-Saffat:* 180). *Al-izza* (honour, power, and glory) implies defeating others but not getting defeated by anyone.

Thus, we set forth the parable, and indeed Allah is beyond all similitudes; for example, when a small boy goes out in the street alone, other boys may wind him up, pick a fight with him or beat him. If, however, his father takes him by the hand and goes out with him, no one will dare approach him out of fear of his father. Likewise, a Muslim should always put himself in the care of his Lord and be with Him, for only then no one will dare to offend him.

Hence, the *izza* (honour) is one of Allah's Attributes, by virtue of which He *the Most High* bestows upon His slaves the victory that cannot be suppressed, along with the power that renders one in no need of others. Another type of *izza* (honour) is pride in sin, of which Allah says: 'and when it is said to him to guard against (the punishment of) Allah, pride carries him off to sin. Therefore, hell is sufficient for him, and certainly, it is an evil resting place.' (*al-Baqara:* 206) This type of *'izza* (honour) represents baseless arrogance.

Another example of this type is the statement of the hypocrites, as mentioned in the Quranic verse: '...If we return to Medina, the more honoured (*Al-a'azz*) will surely drive out the meaner therefrom ...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). Indeed, they spoke the truth, but who was really the 'the more honoured' and who was the 'meaner'?

The Quranic verse, '… above what they describe' (*as-Saffat:* 180) refers to Allah's transcendence above their lies and attributions. Allah says: 'and peace be on the prophets' (*as-Saffat:* 181); this means on all of them because despite the fact that sometimes they burdened us with difficult things, they took us by the hand to safety and success. Thus, we ask Allah to grant them peace and to confer His blessings upon them whenever they are mentioned.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.' (*as-Saffat:* 182), for He is the One Who guided and helped us to follow the right path through His messengers. All praise is also due to Allah *the Almighty* for the reward, bliss, and gardens that He has prepared for us in the next world. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… and the last of their calls shall be, "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds."' (*Yunus:* 10) It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever wants to be given the fullest measure of reward on the Day of Judgment should finish his gatherings by saying, "Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Honour, above what they describe and peace be on the prophets, and all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds. (182)"' (*as-Saffat:* 181-182)

the chapter of

Sad

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Sad* (2):

صٓ ۚ وَٱلْقُرْءَانِ ذِى ٱلذِّكْرِ ١

Sad, By the Quran with its reminding [1]
(The Quran, _Sad:_ 1)

We have previously discussed the disjoined letters (*Al-huruf Al-muqattaa*) in the beginnings of Quranic chapters. We clarified that Allah *Glorified is He* opens some chapters with a single disconnected letter like *sad*, *nun* and *qaf*, others with two letters like *ta sin* and *ha mim*, others with four letters like *alif lam mim sad* and yet others with five letters like *kaf ha ya'ayn sad* and *ha mim ayn sin qaf*.

We also explained that letters are of two types, one of which is those that are components of words. The component letters are those from which words are formed. For instance, the verb *Katab* (he wrote) is composed of the letters:

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) The chapter of *Sad* is Meccan according to the consensus of the scholars. It contains 88 verses, and it is the 38th chapter according to the order of the *Mushaf* and is located in the 23rd *juz'* (1/30 parts of the Quran). It was revealed after chapter *al-Qamar* and before chapter *al-A'raf* and thereby it was the 37th chapter to be revealed. *See Al-Itqan fi Ulum Al-Quran 1/27*.

kaf, *ta* and *ba*. The letter *kaf* or *ta* on its own has no meaning. The second type of letters is the ones which have meaning in themselves such as the letter *ta* that is added to the end of a verb and acts as its subject. In the verb *katabtu* (I wrote), *ta* refers to a first person subject 'I', whereas in *katabta* (you wrote), it refers to a second person subject 'you', and in *katabti* (you wrote), it refers to a female in the second person.

We also mentioned that there are 28 letters in the Arabic alphabet, 14 of which appear at the beginning of some chapters. The best viewpoint in this regard is that such letters constitute the fabric of the Quranic words and the bricks of its construction. Even though the Arabs know and speak these letters, they are incapable of imitating the Quran or producing the like of it despite the fact that language was their skill, forte and genius. The letters are the same letters and so are the words, but as the Quran is the word of Allah, they necessarily fell short.

The Quranic verse: *'Sad.* I swear by the Quran, full *Dhi Adh-Dhikr* (of admonition).' (*Sad:* 1) is an indication of inimitability and its aspect. The letter *Sad* is one of the letters used in the Quran. The Quran is miraculous because the Arabs failed to produce the like of it, not even a single verse like its verses in spite of being the nation of rhetoric and eloquence. They were the only nation to hold open forums and markets for language and oratory such as that of 'Ukazh, Al-Mirbad and Dhi Al-Majanna. Their reverence for speech and eloquence was such that they hung the best pieces on the walls of the *Ka'ba*. Accordingly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was supported by a miracle of the same nature at which his people excelled.

The intended meaning here is that the letter *Sad*, mentioned in the verse in question, is one of their alphabets.(1) Then Allah says, '...I swear by the Quran...' (*Sad:* 1). This means the Quran which they were incapable of imitating. Being written, the Quran is sometimes referred to as ‘the Book’, and it is sometimes referred to as ‘the Quran’ (the Recital) because it is recited. It is written down in books, recited, and memorised.

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(1) Some scholars attempted to interpret the word *Sad*. Ad-Dahhak said that it means, 'Allah spoke the truth (*sadaqa Allah*), that it is an oath which Allah swore and that it is one of His Names. Muhammad ibn Ka'b Al-Qurazi said it is the opening letter of Allah's Names. Samad, Sani' Al-masnua't, Sadiq Al-wa'd and Qatada said it is one of the names of the Quran. Al-Qurtubi mentioned these views in his exegesis [8/5784] and then said, 'And it is argued that the interpretation of such letters is only known by Allah alone.'

The Quranic phrase, ‘...(*dhi adh-dhikr*) full of admonition’ (*Sad:* 1) signifies the reminder the Quran contains. The word *adh-dhikr* (admonition) may allude to many things just as the Arabic word *‘ayn* refers to a spring of water, an eye, silver and gold, a spy or a distinguished person. It is left then to the listener's intelligence and the context to determine the meaning. These meanings have a common name combining them, and this is one of the merits of languages.

In the same way, the word *An-najm* may refer to a star in the sky or a plant that has no stalk. An example of this is the Quranic verse: ‘And *An-Najm* (the herbs) and the trees prostrate.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 6) It is also used in this sense by a poet:

In my travels toward you, the najm (star) I heed,
In the desert upon it grazes my steed.

The word *Adh-dhikr* may refer to the Noble Quran as in the verse: ‘And they say: "O, you to whom the Reminder *(Adh-dhikr)* has been revealed! You are most surely insane!"’ (*al-Hijr:* 6) The word *Adh-dhikr* may also refer to the Scriptures of previous messengers as in the Quranic verse: ‘so ask the people of the [earlier] Message [*ahl adh-dhikr*] if you do not know’ (*an-Nahl:* 43).

It may also signify reputation and prestige, as in the verse: ‘and verily, this [the Quran] is indeed a Reminder (*dhikr*) for you and your people, and you all will be questioned.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 44) This meaning is also used in the verse: ‘We have certainly sent down to you a Book in which is your mention (*fihi dhikrukum*)…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 10). The Arabs and their language would never have come into prominence had their language not been that of the Quran.

The word *Adh-dhikr* is also used to refer to remembrance as in the Quranic verse, '... But Satan caused him to forget to mention [Yusuf (Joseph)] to his lord ...' (*Yusuf:* 42), and it is also used to the glorification of Allah as in the verse: ‘…there glorify Him therein in the mornings and the evenings. Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah…’ (*an-Nur:* 36-37).

The word *Adh-dhikr* may also denote another meaning: a handsome gift from Allah *the Most High* or an act of obedience by a worshipper to Him. Hence, the word *Adh-dhikr* in the Quran resembles a diamond glittering in one's hand; each way you turn it, it sparkles. All of such meanings apply to the verse: '*Sad.* I swear by the Quran, full of admonition.' (*Sad:* 1)

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

بَلِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ فِى عِزَّةٍ وَشِقَاقٍ ﴿٢﴾

Yet the disbelievers are steeped in arrogance
and hostility [2] (The Quran, *Sad:* 2)

It is known that the Arabic article *bal* (but nay) is used for negation of what precedes it and affirming what follows it. In this verse, *bal* affirms that disbelievers are lost in false pride and opposition, but what is the preceding sentence that it negates? It is preceded by the verse: '*Sad.* I swear by the Quran, full of admonition.' (*Sad:* 1) The Quran is the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and they were required to believe in and be content with it, but they disbelieved. The meaning is thus, 'but nay, the disbelievers rejected it, indeed they were in self-exaltation and opposition.'

Some scholars are under the opinion that the verse, '*Sad.* I swear by the Quran, full of admonition' (*Sad:* 1) is an oath, the complement of which comes at the end of this chapter in the verse: 'that most surely is the truth: the contending one with another of the inmates of the fire.' (*Sad:* 64) Though, it is not correct to infer an oath and then search for an appropriate complement for it.

The words, '(*fi izza*) in self-exaltation ...' (*Sad:* 2) refer to sinful pride, namely arrogance and wilful rejection of the truth. This is a baseless pride: '...and opposition (*shiqaq*).' The word *shiqaq* is derived from the root word *shiqq* which signifies a barrier between two things. There are many ways of expressing this meaning in the Arabic language. We can say, '*hadha fi shiqq wa hadha fi shiqq'* which means 'these two things do not come together'. It is similar to the word *adw* (enemy) because two enemies do not proceed to come together. The origin of the word *adw* developed from the Arabic language and environment where there were many valleys. A valley has two ends, and each end is called an *udwa*. An example of the usage of this origin is the Quranic verse: ‘[Remember that day] when you were at the near end(1) of the valley [of Badr], and they were at its farthest end...’ (*al-Anfal:* 42); thus, the word *adw* is derived from the word *udwa* meaning that each one is off in his own direction. Similar to this is the word *janib* (to put to one side) and also the word *hadd*, as mentioned in the verse: 'Verily, those who contend (*yuhaddun*) against Allah and His Messenger...' (*al-Mujadala:* 5). Furthermore, another example of this is the word *inharaf* (to deviate) meaning one went to one edge (*harf*), and the other went to another, i.e. one went to an extreme, and the other went to another extreme. This is clear in the verse: ‘and amongst mankind is he who worships Allah as it were, upon the very edge (i.e. in doubt) (*harf*)...’ (*al-Hajj:* 11). All such words refer to a lack of union as stated in the verse under discussion: ‘Nay! Those who disbelieve are in self-exaltation and opposition.’ (*Sad:* 2) Their pride is false and sinful. The word *shiqaq* means ‘dissention that is unlikely to be resolved’. The intended meaning of the verse, however, is that they failed to take heed of what happened between previous nations and their prophets. For this reason, it is not intended that the Quran narrates to them the events of history in the verse: ‘and, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning time and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason? (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) Rather, it is only to remind them of those incidents of which they are heedless.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

كَمۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِهِم مِّن قَرۡنٖ فَنَادَواْ وَّلَاتَ حِينَ مَنَاصٖ ۝٣

How many generations We have destroyed before them!
They all cried out, once it was too late, for escape [3]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 3)

The word *kam* (how many) at the beginning of this verse is predicative and thus indicates a large number. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* left it up to the listener to imagine the number and define the amount. One does not use such an expression unless he is certain of how great the number involved is. One may, for instance, say to another who has denied his favours, ‘How much I have given you!’ or ‘How patient I have been with you!’ meaning a great many times.

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(1) *Al-Udwa* means a side or direction. Al-Farra said, ‘*Al-udwa* means the end of the valley, the near end being closer to Medina and the far end being closer to Mecca.' *See Lisan Al-'Arab, the root word (ada).*

The word *qarn* means a generation or a period of time characterised by a single factor such as prophethood or something else, as we find, for instance, in the phrase, ‘the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*', or ‘the people of Hud *peace be upon him*'. The word *qarn* may also be used to signify a century, and it is named as such because its years are relatively close together (*mutaqarina*).

Allah's saying, ‘... before them ...’ (*Sad:* 3) is wonderfully precise because after the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah did not destroy a group of people entirely as He did before his coming. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘But Allah was not going to chastise them while you were amongst them…’ (*al-Anfal:* 33). Thus, Allah's saying, ‘...before them...’ (*Sad:* 3) means that this issue happened formerly and will not be repeated in the ummah of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We find a similar example of this in the Quranic verse: ‘...Why, then, did you kill Allah’s prophets before...?’ (*al-Baqara:* 91) Had Allah *the Almighty* not said, ‘before them', Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have thought that his people would plan to kill him as previous prophets were killed, but Allah *Glorified is He* reassured his heart saying: ‘...before...’ (*al-Baqara:* 91); this means that he should be reassured, for this will not happen again. In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* strengthens the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Quranic verse, ‘...then they cried...’ (*Sad:* 3) suggests that when the punishment was inflicted upon them and their general destruction was at hand, they called out to anyone who might hear them to save and rescue them. Yet, whom were they calling? The Quran does not specify whom they were calling to show the state of terror overwhelming them. Calling out in desperation for help has degrees which differ according to the level of danger. If someone throws a stone at you, for instance, you will react internally; you will seek help from yourself, thereby raising your hand or your foot, for example, to ward off the harm.

If the danger is beyond your capacity such that you cannot repel it yourself, you call out to the nearest person to you: your father, mother, brother, neighbour, someone passing by in the street, etc. If none of them can help you, you cry out *(ya huwa)* which means ‘O, Allah, I have none but You to turn to and call upon.’

When the disbelievers were overwhelmed by destruction, they cried at the top of their lungs to whoever could save or rescue them, but that was impossible, for who is it that could save them from Allah’s punishment?! So their calls were of no avail. The word *lat* in the verse, ‘…then they cried while the time of escaping had passed them by’ (*Sad:* 3) is composed of two letters: *la* (no) used for negation and the letter *ta* which is added to the end. The letter *la* denotes negation generally; it, however, may be used to negate something situated somewhere as in the saying, *la rajul fi ad-dar* (there is no man in the house), and it may negate the place itself as in the saying, *la dar askunuha* (I have no house to live in). If the letter *ta* is added to it, it negates time specifically and therefore it is followed by the word *hin* meaning ‘time'. Similar to it are the words *thamma* and *thummat* (both mean ‘then’), as one poet(1) said,

Then we rose to our steeds, blazed,
Their manes kerchiefs unto our hands (2)

The word (*manas)* means a retreat or an escape. Thus, the meaning of *wa lat hin manas* is ‘and this was not the time for retreating or escaping'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

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(1) The name of the poet is Abda ibn Yazid At-Tabib, from the tribe of Tamim. He is one of the poets who spanned the period before and after the coming of Islam. He was black and very courageous. He took part in numerous battles including fighting against the Persians with Al-Muthanna ibn Haritha. He passed away in the year 25 AH. He composed 18 poems totalling 156 couplets.

(2) This couplet is cited from a poem of 81 lines, based on the extended metre *(Al-basit)*, the first of which is:
Is the bond of Khawla still tied aft her exit,
Or do you live distant, from her distracted

وَعَجِبُوٓاْ أَن جَآءَهُم مُّنذِرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡۖ وَقَالَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ هَٰذَا سَٰحِرٞ كَذَّابٌ ﴿٤﴾
أَجَعَلَ ٱلۡأٓلِهَةَ إِلَٰهٗا وَٰحِدًاۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَشَيۡءٌ عُجَابٞ ﴿٥﴾

The disbelievers think it strange that a prophet of their own people has come to warn them: they say, ‘He is just a lying sorcerer [4] How can he claim that all the gods are but one God? What an astonishing thing [to claim]! [5] (The Quran, *Sad:* 4-5)

What in fact is stranger is their surprise. They deem it strange, when their situation is actually more astonishing. They are surprised that, ‘...there has come to them a warner from st themselves, and the disbelievers say, "This is an enchanter, a liar."’ (*Sad:* 4) Yet, what causes real surprise is to send down to them a messenger of some other species. This is why Allah *the Most High* says in another verse: ‘And nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said, "What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?"’ (*al-Isra’:* 94)

They wanted an angel to be their messenger. Had an angel come to them, it would have come in the form of a man, and had it proceeded as such, the doubt would still remain. In response, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say: "Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a messenger."’ (*al-Isra’:* 95) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘And if We had made him angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and We would certainly have caused confusion to them what they had confused.’ (*al-An‘am:* 9)

As such, a messenger must be of the same nature as those to whom he is sent, for he carries guidance which he himself is to implement, in addition to being an example and a role model for his people. How could human beings follow in the footsteps of an angel? Surely, had an angel come to them, they would have turned away arguing that angels are infallible and capable of things they cannot afford. Furthermore, they would have said that angels do not have any passions or lusts as we do, etc.

Thus, what is strange is that they should be surprised that a messenger is one amongst their own kind. The fact that a messenger is one of their own kind represents a part of the evidence against them. In addition, it is only in this way that a messenger can act as a role model for people. Reminding the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of His favours, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, there has come unto you [O, mankind] a messenger from amongst yourselves ...' (*at-Tawba:* 128); this means of your own kind, not a stranger. This is a merit for you and your wonder is out of place.

Not only is he of their own kind, namely mankind, but he is also of the same race, namely an Arab. Furthermore, he is from a noble Arab tribe, Quraysh. They knew his lineage and knew his morals even before he was sent as a messenger to them. Hence, Allah *the Exalted* refutes their ideas by saying: ‘and when Our clear communications are recited to them, those who hope not for Our meeting say, "Bring a Quran other than this or change it." Say: "It does not beseem me that I should change it of myself. I follow naught but what is revealed to me. Surely, I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a mighty day." Say: "If Allah had desired [otherwise], I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have taught it to you. Indeed, I have lived a lifetime amongst you before it. Do you not then understand?"’ (*Yunus:* 15-16)

Undoubtedly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lived amongst his people for 40 years before his mission, and they knew everything about him. In this way, it is the other way round of what they deem strange which is surprising.

Mentioning what they used to say, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘...and the disbelievers say, "This is an enchanter, a liar."’ (*Sad:* 4) The word *sahir* (enchanter) signifies someone who conjures up illusions in order to deceive people into seeing things in other than their true reality, in spite of not changing their reality. *Sihr* (magic) does not affect the reality of things. It only affects people’s eyes as stated in the verse: ‘... they deceived the people’s eyes...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 116).

It should be noted that there is a difference between magic and the miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. His miracle resembled magic because he was challenged by magicians. When Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threw down his staff and the magicians saw it devouring their magic, they said, ‘We believe in The Lord of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*’ because they knew for certain that what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did was not magic. This is because they knew magic and the tricks of magicians well and what Musa (Moses) did was not of such kind.

They saw the staff turning into a snake and swallowing up their trickery, for magicians can see things as they really are. They see the ropes as ropes even when people see them as snakes moving and writhing. On this basis, the magicians knew that what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* did in front of them was not magic.

In reply to those who accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a magician, we would say that if we granted that such had been the case, and he would have enchanted those who believed in him; how was it then that you remained disbelievers? Why did he not put a spell on you as he did with those who believed in him and thereby calling a halt to your enmity and disbelief?

Then, they say, as stated in the verse: ‘What! He makes the gods a single deity [Allah]? A strange thing is this, to be sure!’ (*Sad:* 5) They found it strange and rejected the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to Divine unity; namely to the worship of Allah alone without associates. They used to worship many gods, and therefore, there were many idols around the *Ka’ba.* There were those amongst them who worshipped the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars, the angels, etc. However, why did they have this misconception? It arose from their belief in the immensity and greatness of the universe. It is such a perfect and wondrous universe that has the earth with its rivers, mountains, fields, fruits, and its heavens with their stars, constellations, the sun, the moon, the planets, etc. From their perspective, this vast universe is too much to be created by a lone individual; there must surely have been many who shared in its creation.

It was the greatness of the universe which led them to believe in many gods, but we maintain that the reverse is true in this regard. The perfection and magnificence of the creation prove that there must be a Creator Who is the One and only. Had there been many creators, the universe could not have been in such order and harmony. Had there been many creators, it would have been as Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies in the verse: '... [If there had been], then each deity would surely have stood apart [from the others] in whatever it had created, and they would surely have [tried to] overcome one another ...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91).

Their argument, as stated in the Quran, 'What! He makes the gods a single deity [Allah]?' (*Sad:* 5) is fallacious in two ways: First, their assumption that the immensity of a creation is proof of its having many creators, while it is in fact a proof that there is only one creator; Second, they state that there are many gods. Yet, the very existence of a god means that He is worshipped and obeyed in its commandments and prohibitions. So tell us, what have these gods ordered you to do and from what have they prohibited you? What have they prepared for those who obey them of reward and what they have prepared for those who disobey them?

In effect, your attributing divinity to such gods is a lie. It is vain talk for which Allah has given no authority. Had, you, disbelievers, understood the meaning of the word 'god', the meaning of 'worship' and that the one being worshipped must have guidance for his worshippers to follow, you would not have advocated a multiplicity of gods.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* sets forth a parable for them by saying: 'Allah sets forth an example. There is a slave belonging to several partners contending with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition? ...' (*az-Zumar:* 29) That is to say, does the one who is a slave to one master render the same level of service as one who serves several masters? Would that they are agreed, but they are at loggerheads, differing amongst themselves. Similarly, the one who worships Allah *Glorified is He* alone and the one who worships many gods are not the same.

It can be observed that in the Quranic verse: '... A strange thing is this, to be sure,' (*Sad:* 5); the word '*ujab* (strange) is used, whereas the word '*ajibu* (they wonder) is employed in the previous verse: 'And they wonder…' (*Sad:* 4). The word '*ajibu* is derived from the verb '*ajab*, the verbal noun of which is '*ajaba*, whereas the word '*ujab* denotes an exaggerated form used to emphasise amazement and wonder. The root letters of the verbal noun constitute the word in addition to the extra letters which indicate the emphatic form, in the same manner as we say, *tawil* (tall) and *tuwal* (extremely tall) or *(gharib)* (strange) and *ghurab* (extremely strange).(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَٱنطَلَقَ ٱلۡمَلَأُ مِنۡهُمۡ أَنِ ٱمۡشُواْ وَٱصۡبِرُواْ عَلَىٰٓ ءَالِهَتِكُمۡۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَشَيۡءٞ يُرَادُ ٦
مَا سَمِعۡنَا بِهَٰذَا فِي ٱلۡمِلَّةِ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ إِنۡ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا ٱخۡتِلَٰقٌ ٧

Their leaders depart, saying, 'Walk away! Stay faithful to your gods! That is what you must do [6] We did not hear any such claim in the last religion: it is all an invention [7] (The Quran, *Sad:* 6 - 7)

The word *mala* (the chief persons) refers to awe-inspiring, neat, and well-dressed people, who take the forefront during gatherings. The chief persons, as mentioned in the verse, allude to the leaders and the prominent disbelievers of Quraysh, at the head of which were Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, Abu Jahl, Ubayy ibn Khalaf, Umayya ibn Khalaf, Utba ibn Rabia, his brother Shayba and An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith. Allah *the Almighty* specifically mentioned those chiefs because they were the leaders and the call of Prophet Muhammad

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(1) The occasion of the revelation of these verses is mentioned by Al-Wahidi in Asbab An-Nuzul [p. 209]. He says, 'The scholars say that when 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab embraced Islam, the believers rejoiced, but it was unbearable for the Quraysh. Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira told the leaders and notables of Quraysh, 'Go to Abu Taleb.' So, they went to him and said, 'You are our elder and chief. You know what these fools are doing. We have come to you so that you might arbitrate between us and your nephew.' He sent for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and invited him to talk. He said, 'O, my nephew, your people have a question to ask you, so do not be too hard on them.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'And what do they ask?' Abu Taleb said, 'They said, "Leave us alone and leave our gods alone and we will leave you and your god alone."' To that, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Will you give me one word, by which you will rule the Arabs and the non-Arabs will yield before you?' To which Abu Jahl replied, 'By Allah! We will give it you and ten more like it.' Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Say, "There is none worthy of worship except Allah."' They were repulsed by that, stood up and said, 'What! He makes the gods a single deity [Allah]? ... (*Sad:* 5). 'How could one god encompass the entire creation?' Then, on this incident, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the verse: 'The people of Nuh (Noah) and Ad, and Fir'on (Pharaoh), the lord of spikes, rejected (messengers) before them.' (*Sad:* 12)

peace and blessings be upon him would pull the rug from under their feet. Thus, it was they who stood to lose out because of his call.

A story is related in this regard. These leaders went to Abu Taleb, uncle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, ‘If your nephew wants dominion, we will make him our king. If he wants wealth, we will gather wealth for him until he becomes the richest of us ...’, and so they continued. So, Abu Taleb spoke to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O my nephew, spare yourself and spare me. Do not put a greater burden on me than I can bear. Your people came to me and said such-and-such.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied with his famous answer, ‘By Allah, O, my uncle, were they to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on condition that I leave this matter, I would not leave it until Allah manifests it or I perish beforehand.’(1)

When their efforts came to nothing and they realised that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not call a truce with them over their gods and that he would not accept their offers and bargaining, they hurried back to the people to urge them to stick fast to their gods and to be patient therein. Allah relates what they did: ‘And the chief persons of them break forth by saying, "Go and steadily adhere to your gods..."’ (*Sad:* 6). This means that those chief persons went to their people and urged them to keep worshipping their gods and to be careful so that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should not lead them away from them.

They continued their statements: '...This is most surely a thing sought after (*shay' yurad*).’ (*Sad:* 6) They told their people that this was something that had serious consequences and had been well thought out. If you disbelieved in your gods, they would become angry with you and you would be afflicted with drought and famine. The Quranic phrase *shay' yurad* may suggest that they thought this was a plot against them as leaders so that they would become lowly after having been privileged, and they would be made equal with the rest of the people.

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(1) *Al-Bayhaqi narrates in Dala’il An-Nubuwwa [2/187] through the narration of Ibn Ishaq that Abu Taleb said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him ‘O, my nephew, your people came to me and said that you harm them in their gathering place and their place of worship. Spare yourself and spare me. Do not impose on me a burden greater than what I can bear, neither can you. Waive for your people what they dislike of your speech.’ Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, ‘O, my uncle, if the sun was placed in my right hand and the moon in my left, I would not leave this matter until Allah manifests it or I perish seeking it.’ Abu Taleb could not but say, ‘Keep going in your affair and do what you please, for by Allah, I will never turn away from you, come what may.’*

As for their statement, ‘We never heard of this in the former faith…’ (*Sad:* 7), it means ‘we have not heard that Allah is just One.’ The ‘former faith’ mentioned in this verse refers to the most recent of the faiths to Islam, namely Judaism and Christianity. Surely, Judaism and Christianity were originally revealed from heaven in a monotheistic form, but what encouraged the disbelievers to accuse them of polytheism was the claim of the Jews that Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him* was the son of God and the claim of the Christians that 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was the Messiah, the son of God, and their claim that God was the third of three. Accordingly, the disbelievers of Mecca said that they had not heard of pure monotheism in the earlier faiths. ‘... This is nothing but a forgery’ (*Sad:* 7) means that this is only fabrications and lies. The word *ikhtilaq* (forgery) refers to something invented with no basis in reality. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

أَءُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ ٱلذِّكْرُ مِنۢ بَيْنِنَاۚ بَلْ هُمْ فِى شَكٍّ مِّن ذِكْرِىۖ بَل لَّمَّا يَذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابِ ﴿٨﴾

Was the message sent only to him out of all of us?
In fact they doubt My warning; in fact they have not
tasted My punishment yet [8] (The Quran, *Sad:* 8)

This is another turn in their argument and denial of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Earlier, they were taking issue with the humanity of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and demanding that he should be an angel. In this stage, they have abandoned this stance and moved to a personal level. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and they say, "Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?"’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

This means ‘Why should it be Muhammad specifically, when we have great people and leaders amongst us who are more deserving of bearing this Message.’ At this point, they say: ‘Has the reminder been revealed to him from amongst us? ...’ (*Sad:* 8). Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* replies to them by saying: ‘Will they distribute the Mercy of your Lord?...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) In this way, Allah *the Exalted* regards prophethood of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a mercy to them. Allah says in another Quranic verse: ‘...We distribute amongst them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We have exalted some of them above others in degrees, that some of them may take others in subjection...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

In this verse, Allah says to them, 'How can you expect to have a say in a matter as important as this? Do you want to apportion Allah’s Mercy? It is Allah Who has apportioned the lowly matters of this world amongst you and made some of you leaders and others slaves, some rich and some poor, etc. If it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who organises the simplest matters of your lives, how can you desire to apportion His Bounty and Mercy? Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... Allah knows best upon whom to bestow His Message...’ (*al-An‘am:* 124); this is Allah’s bounty which He bestows upon whomsoever He wills.

The word *dhikr* (reminder) in the Quranic verse: ‘Nay! They are in doubt as to My reminder…’ (*Sad:* 8) refers to the Quran. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is consoling Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with this verse and putting his mind at ease, for He addresses him in another verse by saying: ‘We know indeed that what they say certainly grieves you, but surely they do not call you a liar; however, the unjust deny the communications of Allah.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33) The meaning is thus: 'Do not be troubled, O, Muhammad, for it is not you that your people are denying, but it is what you have brought to them of this Reminder. You are considered by them to be truthful, trustworthy and beyond reproach. This matter has nothing to do with you and is not some personal matter; rather, it is about Me. This is to reassure, console and relieve the pain Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* suffered at the hands of his people.

Allah says: ‘... Nay! They have not yet tasted My chastisement!’ (*Sad:* 8) This is a type of threat. It is to say: 'They will not remain in this state of safety and security. Indeed, their punishment is coming.' This is because the Arabic word *lamma* (not yet) denote a negation of an event in the past while affirming its occurrence in the future. When one says, '*fulan lam ya*'*ti*

(So-and-so did not come), it negates his coming in the past, but he may or may not come in the present or the future. However, when one says, *'fulan lamma ya'ti* (So-and-so has not come yet), it means that he did not come in the past, but he will come presently or in the future. Thus, the meaning of the verse '... Nay! They have not yet tasted My chastisement,' (*Sad:* 8) is 'until now Allah's punishment has not come to them, but it will inevitably come.'

أَمْ عِندَهُمْ خَزَآئِنُ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّكَ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْوَهَّابِ ﴿٩﴾ أَمْ لَهُم مُّلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ
وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا ۖ فَلْيَرْتَقُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَسْبَٰبِ ﴿١٠﴾ جُندٌ مَّا هُنَالِكَ مَهْزُومٌ مِّنَ ٱلْأَحْزَابِ ﴿١١﴾

Do they possess the treasures of your Lord's bounty, the Mighty, the All-Giving? [9] Do they control the heavens and earth and everything between? Let them climb their ropes[10] their armed alliance is weak and will be crushed [11]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 9 - 11)

Having negated their ability to apportion His Mercy, Allah, in this verse, negates that the keys to the treasures of His bounty are in their hands. The Arabic question word 'Am', translated as 'Do', clearly indicates their total inability to do any of the matters mentioned in the verse being discussed, which really means 'Do they distribute the Mercy of your Lord?! Or do they possess His bountiful treasures?! 'They have neither this nor that because prophethood is a mercy. The treasures of Mercy are only owned by Allah, the Giver and the Lord of Mercy. No one has any part in this because Allah *the Almighty* did not give the keys to His treasuries to anyone, even to the closest pious saints of Allah who were granted illuminating glimpses of the unseen to strengthen their certain footsteps on the Right Path. He only gives them what He wills from His bounty and any miracle for which they wish. However, the keys to His treasuries remain in His hand: 'He has the keys to the unseen; no one knows them but He...' (*al-An'am:* 59). Therefore, this verse ends with Allah's Names: '... the Almighty, the All-Giving' (*Sad:* 9). The Almighty is He Who always conquers and never overpowered in His affairs, or else, how could they take the treasuries of mercy from Him? He is also, '...The All-Giving' (*Sad:* 9), Who gives His generosity and magnanimity to any chosen person.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Do they control the heavens and earth and everything between? Let them climb their ropes’ (*Sad:* 10). This means that if they have dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, let them ascend into the heavens so that they might manage the affairs of creation. Allah *the Exalted* clarifies this matter in other verse: ‘Jinn and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so. You will not pass without Our authority’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33).

Hence, when man reached and walked on the surface of the moon, some of the philosophically inclined sophists said that he reached due to the power of knowledge, but how could this be whereas Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards: ‘A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you, and no one will come to your aid’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35). Thus, this refers to the Power of Allah, the Creator, Who grants and denies authority to and from whom He wills. Had this verse not been revealed, those who deny the night ascension of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have been correct.

Allah’s saying, ‘Their armed alliance is weak and will be crushed’ (*Sad:* 11) refers to the disbelievers of Mecca who will be defeated whatever happens, just as their preceding deniers of the Messengers who were defeated.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* consoles Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by restating him how the previous nations denied their prophets. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* reminds Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he is not the first one who encountered this matter. Allah begins telling the story of the longest mission of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says:

كَذَّبَتۡ قَبۡلَهُمۡ قَوۡمُ نُوحٖ وَعَادٞ وَفِرۡعَوۡنُ ذُو ٱلۡأَوۡتَادِ ﴿١٢﴾ وَثَمُودُ وَقَوۡمُ لُوطٖ وَأَصۡحَٰبُ لۡـَٔيۡكَةِۚ
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلۡأَحۡزَابُ ﴿١٣﴾ إِن كُلٌّ إِلَّا كَذَّبَ ٱلرُّسُلَ فَحَقَّ عِقَابِ ﴿١٤﴾

The people of Noah, 'Ad, and firmly supported Pharaoh rejected their prophets before them [12] Thamud, the people of Lot, and the Forest-Dwellers each formed opposition [against theirs] [13] They all rejected the messengers and they were deservedly struck by My punishment [14] (The Quran, *Sad:* 12 - 14)

The phrase, ‘... The firmly supported’ (*Sad:* 12) either refers to things that are firmly fixed in the ground that are thought to be the pyramids, or it could refer to poles with which he tortured his enemies. ‘The Forest’ refers to the garden with intertwining trees and entwined branches. ‘The Forest-Dwellers’ were the people of Shu’aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*. ‘...each formed opposition [against theirs]’ (*Sad:* 13) means that those mentioned disbelievers opposed, resisted and joined together against their messengers. ‘They all rejected the messengers ...’ (*Sad:* 14) which means that each of them denied his messenger. The phrase, ‘...and they were deservedly struck by My punishment’ (*Sad:* 14) means that it became incumbent for them to be punished for their denial. Therefore, they should not be left without punishment for taking this stance against Prophet Muhammad. They could not evade Allah’s punishment such as those who had been deservedly stricken by it.

وَمَا يَنظُرُ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِلَّا صَيۡحَةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ مَّا لَهَا مِن فَوَاقٖ ﴿١٥﴾

All the disbelievers here are waiting for is
a single blast that cannot be postponed [15]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 15)

The punishment of disbelievers is a trivial matter for Allah *the Exalted*; it will be just one blow on the Trumpet. The scholars conceive that this refers to the second blast on the Trumpet, upon which the creation will be resurrected. Allah’s saying, ‘... that cannot be postponed’ (*Sad:* 15) means that there will be no respite for them after it.

وَقَالُواْ رَبَّنَا عَجِّل لَّنَا قِطَّنَا قَبۡلَ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡحِسَابِ ﴿١٦﴾

They say, ‘Our Lord! Advance us our share of
punishment before the Day of Reckoning!’ [16]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 16)

The phrase, ‘...our share of punishment...’ (*Sad:* 16) means the share of the disbelievers from requital. The Arabic word *qittana* (punishment) is derived from *Al-qit‘a*, the piece on which someone’s requital is recorded. This means that they, admittedly being sinful, wish to have their share from punishment hastily in this life before the Day of Judgment. However, the punishment in this world is an insufficient requital for their disbelief because it is as terminable as this world is. Yet, Allah postpones it until the Hereafter, the abode of eternity, the infinite residence. In fact, the blast will not be their punishment, but it is like the alarm announcing the advent of this Day.

Allah *Glorified is He* expounds upon this in His saying: ‘They also said, “Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones upon us from the heavens or send us some other painful punishment”’ (*al-Anfal:* 32). This is an evidence of their foolishness because there is no rational person who would ask Allah for such a strange request. Allah *the Almighty* shows that their stubborn refusal of the Message is against their own interest; instead of asking Allah for guidance, they say, ‘... “Then rain stones upon us from the heavens or send us some other painful punishment”’ (*al-Anfal:* 32).

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* expresses their incredulity at hastily asking of the punishment: ‘Do they really wish to hasten Our punishment? When it descends upon their courtyards, how terrible that morning will be for those who were warned! (*as-Saffat:* 176-177)

It is strange that the disbelievers of Mecca said, ‘Before the Day of Reckoning!’ (*Sad:* 16) Thus, this implies that they believe in this Day as they speak of it, acknowledging its existence to the extent that it is manifested in the lapses of their tongues. The scholars assume that this refers to the presence of a remaining pure natural disposition before having a devious mind. A disbeliever misuses his mind in denial, but he must still be aware, for his lies have no basis in reality. Accordingly, a liar often tells a lie on one day and then forgets and tells a contradictory one on the next. The speech of the truthful person does not change because he describes reality; however, a liar narrates the feigned non-existent things. Therefore, it is said, ‘If you are an accomplished liar, then have an excellent memory’; for example, a liar once unbearably said that he went out to the city on the night of *Eid Al-Fitr* (Lesser *Eid* which habitually comes at the beginning of *Shawwal*, the tenth lunar *Hijri* month), and the moon was high in the sky. How could this be? It is an inconsistent lie!

It is only the professional interrogator who is able to discriminate between truthful speech and false ones; the truthful person describes reality which is manifested, even if an interrogator asks him a thousand times, his speech will be consistent. However, a liar relates fantasies; his speech necessarily contradicts itself, and his forgeries become apparent. As falsehood is the product of fictions and lies, so a person cannot precisely detect the lies as he is drawn into a web of tangled imaginary scenarios weaved by a liar.

Thus, their saying: ‘Before the Day of Reckoning!’ (*Sad:* 16) came as a slip of their tongues, revealing that they really believe in this Day inside themselves. Similarly, the saying of the hypocrites came as such, ‘... “Give nothing to those who follow Allah’s Messenger until they abandon him”...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). They made their standard profitable because everything is materialistic and has its price. They presumed that the followers of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will evade him when he does not pay for them.

When the revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was delayed, the disbelievers alleged, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him.’(1) This refers to the remaining natural disposition that spontaneously overwhelms them, when their natural disposition is manifested in the slip of their tongues.

Alternatively, they may have said, ‘They say, “Our Lord! Advance us our share of punishment before the Day of Reckoning”’ (*Sad:* 16) by way of mockery of the punishment imposed by Allah. They do not believe in the occurrence of punishment; thus, their hastening for it is a form of mockery. However, this sarcasm does not accord with their saying: ‘... Our Lord ...’ (*Sad:* 16).

ٱصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَٱذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا دَاوُۥدَ ذَا ٱلْأَيْدِ ۖ إِنَّهُۥٓ أَوَّابٌ ﴿١٧﴾ إِنَّا سَخَّرْنَا
ٱلْجِبَالَ مَعَهُۥ يُسَبِّحْنَ بِٱلْعَشِىِّ وَٱلْإِشْرَاقِ ﴿١٨﴾ وَٱلطَّيْرَ مَحْشُورَةً ۖ كُلٌّ لَّهُۥٓ أَوَّابٌ ﴿١٩﴾
وَشَدَدْنَا مُلْكَهُۥ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ ٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَفَصْلَ ٱلْخِطَابِ ﴿٢٠﴾

Bear their words patiently [Prophet]. Remember Our servant David, a man of strength who always turned to Us [17] We made the mountains join him in glorifying Us at sunset and

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(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned in his Tafsir [4/523] from Sufyan ibn ‘Uyaynah that it has been narrated on the authority of Al-Aswad ibn Qays who heard Jundub saying that Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him delayed his visit to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him the polytheists began to say that Muhammad has been forsaken. At this Allah the Glorious and Exalted revealed: ‘By the morning brightness and by the night when it grows still, your Lord has not forsaken you [O, Prophet], nor does He hate you.’ (ad-Duha: 1-3)*

sunrise [18] And the birds, too, in flocks, all echoed his praise [19] We strengthened his kingdom; We gave him wisdom and a decisive way of speaking [20] (The Quran, *Sad:* 17 - 20)

Patience means raising the forbearance of the self above events so that they do not sap its strength. The person afflicted by troubles needs additional strength to his natural one, so he should not let hardships or afflictions undermine his strength.

A human being should be especially aware of doubling an initial affliction; when he is weak in the face of adversities, the affliction and the weakness will be together against him. As for believers, afflictions are of two sorts; the first is the events that have stricken him in which man has no hand such as the careless student who fails in his exam, whose failure is a result of his laxity and negligence. This person should blame and discipline his own self, rectify his mistakes and remedy his vice. This is the real strength, namely to face reality and to bear responsibility. The second affliction is the forbearance with events in which man has no hand. This kind is the predestined affliction imposed by Allah upon people, where He sets nothing but good of people, even if it is seemingly evil.

Likewise, the man may pray for something superficially good according to his perspective, but as he has no answer, he becomes desperate. However, he has forgotten that his Lord knows better where goodness lies; thus, He does not answer him. His Wise answer to man's call is not to respond to his request. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches believers to reply to those who rejoice at their misfortunes: 'Say, "Only what Allah has decreed will happen to us..."' (*at-Tawba:* 51). Indeed, Allah has never imposed afflictions on people against their interests; afflictions bring nothing but good to believers. They are either to test or to raise the rank of believers or else to show disbelievers the endurance and the unshaken strength of believers in the face of adversity.

From another perspective, an afflicted person may have an adversary. If he has an adversary, he requires greater strength, patience, and endurance because every time he faces him, the depths of his soul urges for revenge, whereas if he does not have an adversary in the decreed affliction imposed by Allah, this is easier to be endured because it is from Allah *the Almighty*. A person can do nothing in the face of illness or death, except to say, ‘There is neither strength nor power except with Allah’; he says this, to reflect his patience and to look forward to his reward.

Accordingly, Allah *the Exalted* says on the affliction, in which there is an adversary: ‘Though if a person is patient and forgives, this is one of the greatest things’ (*ash-Shura:* 43). A person needs perseverance to assist him either in being patient or in forgiveness. As for the predestined affliction in which there is no adversary, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘... Bear anything that happens to you steadfastly; these are things to be aspired to’ (*Luqman:* 17). The verse in chapter *Luqman* refers to an affliction with no adversary, so it does not have ‘*Lam’* the emphatic letter in Arabic, whereas the verse in chapter *ash-Shu'ara'* refers to an affliction with an adversary and contains ‘*Lam’*, the Arabic emphatic letter.

Allah *Glorified is He* consoles Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and alleviates the troubles caused by his people. Their accusations to the Messenger of being a magician, liar, crazy, and other unbearable allegations, saddened and hurt him. Many verses consoles him such as Allah’s saying: ‘We know well that what they say grieves you [O, Prophet]. It is not you they disbelieve; the evildoers reject Allah’s revelation’ (*al-An‘am:* 33). Moreover, Allah soothes him: ‘[But] bear you with patience whatever they may say...’ (*Sad:* 17); then He gives him an example from previous revelations: ‘...Remember Our servant Dawud (David) ...’ (*Sad:* 17). However, why does Allah mention Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* specifically at this point?

The scholars conceive that Dawud’s (David’s) people accused him with more atrocious allegations than those charges fabricated against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The disbelievers of Mecca trumped up that he was a magician, a soothsayer and a liar, but Dawud’s (David’s) people violated his honour, chastity, and purity as they falsely claimed that he sent one of his generals to a distant war, hoping that this general would be killed so as to take his wife. Despite this Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was patient.

Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient just like Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. Even though Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet and Allah conferred upon him the merit of laying down the Islamic laws for his nation, yet He tells him to be patient just like Dawud (David) and the other messengers *peace be upon them*. Consequently, it is noticed that all messengers and their people of revelation are one whole; each of them received the appropriate Message from Allah. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says: '... Remember Our servant Dawud (David) ...' (*Sad:* 17). Afterwards, He mentions a number of messengers to show that they are all united under one mission, so there is no distinction between them. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Nuh (Noah), which We have revealed to you [O, Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus): "Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it"...' (*ash-Shura:* 13).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'Do not favour me above Yunus (Jonah), the son of Matta.'(1) People do not know the criteria for preferring one to another; they should leave preference to Allah, as He *the Exalted* says: 'We favoured some of these messengers above others...' (*al-Baqara:* 253).

Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* attained a great honour when Allah *the Almighty* says: '... Remember Our servant Dawud (David) ...' (*Sad:* 17). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* attained this honour at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra'*: 'Glory to Him Who made His servant travel by night...' (*al-Isra':* 1). The night journey was unremarkable due to the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a sincere slave who worshipped Allah earnestly; thereby, he deserved this great honour. Therefore, when the people of Taif shunned, cursed, and abused him, consolation came from Allah to tell him that if the earth does not greet him cheerfully, heaven will.

Allah's saying, '... a man of strength...' (*Sad:* 17) means that he is very strong in worship. Indeed, faith requires strength to help a person to be obedient, to dissuade him from disobedience, and to curb the defiance of the self. As for obedience, it requires strength, as it usually involves heavy acts upon the self, requiring an innate strength. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* says: '... Though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble' (*al-Baqara:* 45).

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(1) *Al-Bukhari's narration is excerpted from the Hadith of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud [3412]: 'None of you should say that I am better than Yunus (Jonah) the son of Matta'. Similarly, it is narrated by Ibn 'Abbas [3413] that: 'It is inappropriate for a slave to say that I am better than Yunus (Jonah) the son of Matta'.*

As for disobedience, it is attractive and pleasurable and it satisfies desires beseeching the self, so it needs determination and strength to restrain a given person. Thus, strength is often mentioned in the Quran, as Allah said about Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* '... a man of strength...' (*Sad:* 17), and on Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*: '…O, Yahya (John), hold on to the Scripture firmly…' (*Maryam* 12).

A believer should have strong will and impetus to perform acts of obedience, as he is inclined to be lazy in performing them. Furthermore, he should have strength to restrain himself from disobedience because he is inclined towards it. Yet, man is only lazy when he detaches his actions from their consequences and requital. If he brings the rewards to mind, obedience will be easy for him as well as disobedience will be proscribed; he will flee from it as he flees from a lion.

Illustratively, if a young man is oppressed by his sexual lusts—the most violent of all human passions—and he is told that he could spend the night with a beautiful girl, but in the morning he would be put inside a blazing oven for an hour, he would refuse the deal. Thus, calling the punishment of a particular act of disobedience to mind prevents a person from it. Similarly, remembering the rewards for obedience drives him towards it.

In the Himalayas on Mount Everest, many people who tried to reach its peak have been found; victims died upon their way up. What drove them to take such dangers and troubles upon themselves was the desire to conquer the highest peak in the world, along with the love of being renowned and to be remembered forever in the halls of fame. To reach this target, they disregarded the dangers.

What makes a man abstinent in performing acts of obedience is that he does not bring the rewards to mind. Were he to remember their rewards, these deeds would have been easy for him. As a poet(1) said:

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(1) He was Abu Firas Al-Hamadani, a poet laureate, the nephew of Sayf Ad-Dawlah. He was born in 320 AH, passed away at the age of 37 in 357 AH. Sayf Ad-Dawlah used to=

Achieving impossibly attainable targets is easy for us,
Whoever seeks the beauty finds the dowry inexpensive (1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this matter in his saying: 'No one who commits illegal sexual intercourse is a believer at the moment when he is committing this. No one who steals is a believer at the moment when he is stealing, and no one who drinks wine is a believer at the moment when he is drinking it.' This means that a person at the time of committing these sins is not in a state of faith, for he has been heedless of Allah *Glorified is He* and heedless of the penalties. Had he brought Allah to mind, he would not have been sinned.

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* describes Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*: '... who always turned to Us' (*Sad:* 17). The Arabic word *awwab* (always repenting) is an emphatic word form that means that he is frequently turning and repenting to Allah. This word indicates that man is not infallible; he is liable to fall into disobedience and that he is liable to return to sin many times after repentance. Yet, what is important is that he renews his repentance and does not resolve to repeat his sin.

Thus, one of Allah's Names is the Most Forgiving, as He says: 'Yet I am the Most Forgiving towards those who repent, believe, do righteous deeds and stay on the right path' (*Ta Ha:* 82). Allah *the Almighty* does not merely say 'forgiving' because a human being is prone to heedlessness and his disobedience is repetitive; thus repeated disobedience needs repeated forgiveness. Accordingly, Allah's Mercy on people entails that he is Most Forgiving. Allah's description of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* '... who always turned to Us' (*Sad:* 17), further explained the verse that comes later: '... He asked his Lord for forgiveness, fell down on his knees and repented' (*Sad:* 24).

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We made the mountains join him in glorifying Us at sunset and sunrise' (*Sad:* 18). At '...sunset...' (*Sad:* 18) refers to the time

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= love him dearly and to accompany him in his battles. He went out to a battle against the Romans who took him as a prisoner for some years until Sayf Ad-Dawlah paid him the ransom. He was killed by the men of his maternal uncle, Sa'd Ad-Dawlah. He wrote 284 poems with 2776 couplets during the 'Abbasid period..

(1) These lines are excerpted from a 54-couplet long-metre (At-Taweel) poem..

between noon and sunset, whereas: '... and sunrise' (*Sad:* 18) refers to the ascension of the sun to the sky, namely mid-morning. It is known that the mountains are inanimate, which is the lowest creation. However, a human being is the master of this universe, the highest of species, followed by animals, then plants and finally the inanimate creations.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells people that even though man considers inanimate creations to be dead and devoid of life, yet they glorify Him during their life. Indeed, they have a different sort of life although they are immovably static. Nevertheless, each species has a sort of life appropriate for itself. A human being has two lives: one in his awakening and another during his sleeping. The nature of life when he is sleeping differs from that when he is awakened. During sleep with his eyes closed, he can see people and things; he can distinguish between colours, live out long stories, and understand their details. Furthermore, there is a life which follows his death and another one which follows the resurrection.

To establish the evidence that everything in the universe has its appropriate form of life, read Allah's saying: '…There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44). To evade discrepancies, some scholars conceived that glorification in this verse refers to indication; meaning that inanimate creations identify their Creator and that the glorification here is not that form of articulation. Nonetheless, had the glorification in this verse referred to indication, Allah *the Exalted* would not have said afterwards: '…Though you do not understand their praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44). People can understand glorification by virtue of indication, yet there should be a different form of glorification unknown to them.

Similarly, Allah *the Exalted* mentions birds: '... As do the birds with wings outstretched? Each knows its [own way] of prayer and glorification...' (*an-Nur:* 41). It is not the task of man to search for the way that birds pray; each species knows how to perform its prayers to Allah, the Creator. Likewise, an ant unquestionably saw Sulaiman's (Solomon's) soldiers and rush to warn its colony: '... "Ants! Go into your homes, in case Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts unwittingly crush you"' (*an-Naml:* 18). Allah's precision and justice is clear in the ant's speech: '...unwittingly…' (*an-Naml:* 18). This means that they are neither tyrants nor oppressors, yet if they pass over the ant colony, they will crush it inattentively.

The hoopoe of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was irrefutably aware of the concept of monotheism. It was the means to the guidance of the people who had gone astray and worshipped the sun instead of Allah. When it came back to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* it said: '…I have learnt something you did not know. I come to you from Sheba with firm news. I found a woman ruling over the people who have been given a share of everything. She has a magnificent throne.' (*an-Naml:* 22-23)

The hoopoe was affected and enraged as it saw them prostrating to the sun instead of Allah: '[but] I found that she and her people worshipped the sun instead of Allah. Satan has made their deeds seem alluring to them, and diverted them from the right path. They cannot find the right path. Should they not worship Allah Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and earth and knows both what you people conceal and what you declare? [25]' (*an-Naml:* 24-25) The hoopoe fully and excellently perceived the whole issue of creed better than many competent people who failed to duly acknowledge this matter.

Furthermore, a human being who has discovered farfetched boundaries in the universe, using his understanding and intellect, was taught by a raven how to cover the corpse and nakedness of his brother: 'Allah sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse ...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 31).

Thus, each creature has its distinctive way of life, own language, unique prayer and acts of humility to Allah *the Most High*. So, it is impossible to forcibly accredit only one method for glorifying Allah while excluding others. This is illustrated in Allah's saying: '…So that those who were to die might die after seeing a clear proof and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof…' (*al-Anfal:* 42). This implies that they have a life because death (mentioned in the verse) is the opposite of life. Moreover, this is also illustrated in Allah's saying: '…Everything will perish except His Face…' (*al-Qasas:* 88). By relating the two verses together, it is found that everything has a distinctive way of life, even though it is not known to the people, yet it exists as evidenced by the fact that everything will die. Scientists have recently taken to recording the languages of birds and animals as well as trying to decode the basics of these languages.

Amongst the miraculous things showing Allah's Power in creation is that when they wanted to send the 110-ton rocket 'Discovery' out into the space, they found a problem that prevented its departure. They found that a 4-gram woodpecker had made 42 holes in the insulation wall of the fuel chamber, the matter that prevented the rocket from taking off. Amazingly, the 4-gram bird was subjugated to build its nest in this enormous rocket and to prevent it from blasting off.

Assumingly, the birds wanted to take vengeance when they saw that man challenges them in the world of flight. In the same respect, he has found that the biggest threat to planes is the world of birds and that bird flocks obstruct aeroplanes and swarm around airports. It seems that there is some kind of enmity between birds and the inventions that compete with them in the world of flight.

Thus, scientists have looked for ways to repel birds from airports; they have come across the idea of recorded sounds that emit electronic birdcalls as a warning to other birds when there is some kind of danger. They broadcast such sounds around the airports, but birds have not been fooled by this deception; so these sounds no longer bother them. Hence, they had to have recourse to another method; they made plastic models of hawks and hung them up because birds are afraid of them. However, the birds perceived the deception and even mocked them when some of them built their nests on the wings of these hawks. As birds have their own world, dominion and secrets, as people know only a few of these mysteries.

Thus, the verse about Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*, ‘We made the mountains join him in glorifying Us at sunset and sunrise’ (*Sad:* 18) means that mountains actually glorify Allah; yet their glorification is known only by Allah. However, the miracle granted for Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* is that mountains were glorifying Allah along with him in one voice.

In the same respect, it is wrong to say, ‘The pebbles glorified Allah in the hands of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*’ because pebbles would glorify Allah even in the hands of Abu Jahl. However, it would be more correct and miraculous to say, ‘Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the glorification of the pebbles in his hands.’

Some of the great scholars have taken this verse, ‘... at sunset and sunrise’ (*Sad:* 18), as evidence of the legality of performing the *Duha* (mid-morning) prayer that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to pray. It is also called the *Ishraq* prayer.(1) However, what are 'sunset' (the period between noon and sunset) and 'sunrise' (the period of the ascension of the sun in the sky) prayers referred to? Since they basically depend on the time, thus every place has its 'sunset' and 'sunrise' that differs from others.

They are related to time so they always exist due to the rotation of time. It has been previously clarified that a given ritual prayer is always performed unceasingly all over the clock. In one place, for example, people are performing the dawn prayer; in another, they are performing the noon prayer, whereas in a third they are performing the afternoon prayer, etc. By this rotation of time, Allah sets His Will to be worshipped interminably in all times. The Prophet said, 'Indeed, Allah stretches His Hand during the night so that those who commit sins by day may repent, and He stretches His Hand in the day so that those who commit sins by night may repent.'(2) There is always nighttime or daytime, thus Allah's hand is permanently extended.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the birds, too, in flocks, all echoed his praise' (*Sad:* 19). The birds assembled around Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* because he had the most beautiful voice in reciting the *Mazamir* (Psalms). The birds gathered, in flocks, around him and echoed his glorification. Thus, there is an orchestra of faith comprising of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* the mountains, and the birds; all glorified Allah *the Almighty* as one whole chorus.

Hence, the scholars explained Allah's Words: '... all echoed his praise ...' (*Sad:* 19) to mean that Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him,* the mountains and the birds were all continuously repenting and returning humbly to Allah.(3)

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(1) *It is narrated by Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'I used to pass over the verse, '... at sunset and sunrise' (Sad: 18), and did not know to what it referred until Umm Hani Allah be pleased with her told me that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him entered upon her and asked for water with which to perform his ablutions. He then prayed Duha (mid-morning) and said, "O, Umm Hani, this is called the Ishraq prayer."' This was related in Tafsir Al-Qurtubi [8/5800] and As-Suyuti ascribed it in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur [7/150] to At-Tabarani in his book Al-Awsat and Ibn Mardaweyh from Ibn 'Abbas.*

(2) *It was related by Muslim in his Sahih [2759], and Ahmad* in his Musnad [4/395, 404] on the authority of *Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari Allah be pleased with him.*

(3) *This viewpoint conceives that Dawud (David) peace be upon him the mountains and the birds obey and glorify Allah the Exalted whereas, the other viewpoint conceives that the=*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘We strengthened his kingdom; ...’ (*Sad:* 20). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* strengthened him with victory and endued him with awe, which is one of the greatest means to power. If Allah wills to weaken a king, He takes his awe-inspiring from people’s hearts; accordingly, people no longer fear him, and they gain courage to go against him.

As for Allah’s saying,‘...We gave him wisdom and a decisive way of speaking’ (*Sad:* 20), wisdom means the act of putting things in their appropriate places; thus, this will bring the desired fruits shortly and easily. Allah chooses the most appropriate word in the language; the word *hikma* (wisdom) is derived from the Arabic word *hakama* meaning the rein of a horse. This rein is used to easily guide and control a horse; it is loosened to let the horse go faster or is tightened to slow it down or cause it to halt.

Some scholars said that the adjective ‘wisdom’ means here prophethood and sober judgement. Both Prophets Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them* were distinguished by dominion and prophethood endued by Allah *the Almighty*. Hence, their opponents were obliterated because absolute power eradicated the severity of the opposition.

The phrase ‘...We gave him wisdom and a decisive way of speaking’ (*Sad:* 20) refers to arbitration between disputants; each of them has his argument, and a judge should arbitrate between them to validate truth and invalidate falsehood. However, Dawud’s (David’s) enjoyment of sober judgment is destabilised on the grounds that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* altered one of his father’s judgements. Nevertheless, this alteration is also to be accredited to Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* because his son, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* is the person who judged justly. A person does not like anyone to outperform him except his own son; Hence, Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was happy by this.

= *mountains and the birds obey and return to Dawud (David) peace be upon him to glorify Allah with him. This was the viewpoint of Qatada, mentioned by Ibn Kathir [4/30] and in Tafsir Al-Qurtubi [8/5802] as well as by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur [7/153] on the authority of ‘Abd Ar-Razzaq, ‘Abd ibn Hamid and Ibn Jarir.*

وَهَلْ أَتَىٰكَ نَبَؤُا۟ ٱلْخَصْمِ إِذْ تَسَوَّرُوا۟ ٱلْمِحْرَابَ ﴿٢١﴾ إِذْ دَخَلُوا۟ عَلَىٰ دَاوُۥدَ
فَفَزِعَ مِنْهُمْ ۖ قَالُوا۟ لَا تَخَفْ ۖ خَصْمَانِ بَغَىٰ بَعْضُنَا عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ فَٱحْكُم بَيْنَنَا
بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلَا تُشْطِطْ وَٱهْدِنَآ إِلَىٰ سَوَآءِ ٱلصِّرَٰطِ ﴿٢٢﴾

Have you heard the story of the two litigants who climbed into his private quarters? [21] When they reached David, he took fright, but they said, 'Do not be afraid. We are two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other: judge between us fairly – do not be unjust – and guide us to the right path [22]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 21-22)

When Allah *the Almighty* asks, 'Have you heard...?' (*Sad:* 21), this question emphasises that the person should have been aware of the asked matter. For example, if someone asks, 'Has not this happened to you?' this means that it has indeed happened. Similarly, Allah's saying, 'Was there not a period of time when man was nothing to speak of?' (*al-Insan:* 1) means that there was a time when man was not yet thought of. This rhetorical question urges the listener to provide the answer by himself; thus, he will affirm it. This affirmative style approves the answer in contrary to normal statement that can be believed or denied. Alternatively, this rhetorical device leads the listener to wish for tidings. Tidings are not exactly the same as normal statements; rather, they refer to important information that should be highlighted and should raise concern. Daily pieces of information are not tidings, yet the Day of Resurrection mentioned by Allah *the Exalted* is a 'tiding', as He *the Exalted* says: 'What are they asking about? The momentous tidings about which they differ.' (*an-Naba':* 1-3)

Allah's saying, '…climbed into…' (*Sad:* 21) means that they did not enter through the door, but from above the wall. This is a proof that these litigants are not earthly creatures; rather, they were a group of angels who came from the heaven in the shape of human beings. The 'sanctuary' refers to the sacred place where a worshipper sits alone and talks to his Lord. It is also mentioned in Allah's saying about Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her*: '…Whenever Zakaryya (Zechariah) went in to see her in her sanctuary, he found her supplied with provisions…' (*Al-'Imran:* 37). Nowadays, a sanctuary is the *qibla* (the place indicating direction to the *Ka'ba*).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘When they reached Dawud (David), he became frightened...’ (*Sad:* 22). The question that arises is why would Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* shrink in fear from seeing them while he was in the presence of Allah by praying, glorifying and worshipping Him?

The scholars say that fear is of two kinds: that which moves one’s heart to uneasiness, while he seems apparently to be calm and unaffected, whereas there is another kind of fear which leaks from the heart to the external appearance. The fear of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was of the second type because, as the scholars say, when the angels saw him in this state they said: ‘... Do not be afraid ...’ (*Sad:* 22). They would not have said this unless his external appearance indicated fear. Allah’s saying also implies that they were not amongst his subjects nor even human beings because the subject would not dare to say to the king, ‘Fear not.’

As for their saying: ‘...We are two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other...’ (*Sad:* 22), it shows that they are harmonious despite their dispute, for they spoke together in one breath, perhaps in turn, or perhaps, one of them spoke and the others confirmed his. Anyway, their speaking in this harmonious way indicates that there was no dispute between them, and neither of them wanted to get the best of the other. So, they must have had some other goal. The meaning of ‘has wronged’ is that someone tried to overbear or oppress the other.

Then Allah says: ‘...Judge between us fairly. Do not be unjust...’ (*Sad:* 22). This also shows their boldness, indicating that they are from angels. The phrase, ‘... Do not be unjust ...’ (*Sad:* 22) means ‘Do not stray from the truth or commit any wrong.’

Allah *the Almighty* mentions their saying: ‘...and guide us to the Right Path’ (*Sad:* 22). They pray for both of them, without any differentiation, despite of being litigants. Also, they do not mention who is the oppressor or the oppressed. The Right Path refers to the truth itself. Afterwards, they went on explaining their case:

إِنَّ هَٰذَآ أَخِى لَهُۥ تِسۡعٌ وَتِسۡعُونَ نَعۡجَةً وَلِىَ نَعۡجَةٌ وَٰحِدَةٌ
فَقَالَ أَكۡفِلۡنِيهَا وَعَزَّنِى فِى ٱلۡخِطَابِ ٢٣

This is my brother. He had ninety-nine ewes and I just the one, and he said, "Let me take charge of her," and overpowered me with his words' [23]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 23)

Their words 'my brother' gives an impression of affection; despite their dispute, nevertheless, they are brothers. Similarly, Allah says: 'Their brother Nuh (Noah) said to them, "Will you not be mindful of Allah?"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 106) Regarding the strongest sort of enmity, namely vengeance, Allah *the Almighty* says:'…But if the culprit is pardoned by his aggrieved brother…' (*al-Baqara:* 178). This kind of affection may soften the heart of a blood avenger over a killer.

So the case is 'This is my brother. He had ninety-nine ewes and I just had one ...' (*Sad:* 23). The word 'ewe' has three meanings in Arabic; it may refer to a female sheep, to a mountain sheep or to a wild cow. Allah's saying, '... and he said, "Let me take charge of her"...' (*Sad:* 23) means that a litigant explained the case that he gave the ewe to his brother and that he will take care of it with his many sheep, without additional burdens or workloads.

Allah's saying, '... and overpowered me with his words' (*Sad:* 23) means that he dominated him with arguments and evidence. It is known that a judge passes his decision based upon evidence and proof as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Verily, I am only a human, and claimants bring to me (their disputes). Perhaps, some of them are more eloquent than others. I judge according to what I hear from them. So, if I pass a judgment in favor of one of you that detracts from his brother's rights, then he should not take it as I in fact give him a portion of (hell) Fire'.(1)

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(1) *It was narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari [2458] and in Sahih Muslim [1713], on the authority of Umm Salama that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him heard a dispute outside his door, so he went out to them and said, 'Verily, I am only a human, and claimants bring to me (their disputes). Perhaps, some of them are more eloquent than others. I judge according to what I hear from them. So, if I pass a judgment in favour of one of you that detracts from his brother's rights, then he should not take it, as I in fact give him a portion of (hell) fire, he may burden himself with it or abandon it.'*

So, the litigant means that his brother has beaten him by his speech and the strength of his argument, yet he is not content because he has been oppressed. Thus, he has come to bring his case to Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* to judge it.

Therefore, Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* listened to the claim of the first party but did not listen to the other; this is a mistake of the judge. To this end, the expert judge says that if a claimant comes with his eye has been put out, he should not judge in his favour until he hears from the other party; perhaps, both of his eyes have been put out.

However, Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* gave his judgment directly, as Allah says:

قَالَ لَقَدْ ظَلَمَكَ بِسُؤَالِ نَعْجَتِكَ إِلَىٰ نِعَاجِهِۦ ۖ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ ٱلْخُلَطَآءِ لَيَبْغِى بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ
إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ وَقَلِيلٌ مَّا هُمْ ۗ وَظَنَّ دَاوُۥدُ أَنَّمَا فَتَنَّـٰهُ فَٱسْتَغْفَرَ رَبَّهُۥ
وَخَرَّ رَاكِعًا وَأَنَابَ ﴿٢٤﴾ فَغَفَرْنَا لَهُۥ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ وَإِنَّ لَهُۥ عِندَنَا لَزُلْفَىٰ وَحُسْنَ مَـَٔابٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

David said, ‘He has done you wrong by demanding to add your ewe to his flock. Many partners treat each other unfairly. Those who sincerely believe and do good deeds do not do this, but these are very few.’ [Then] David realized that We had been testing him, so he asked his Lord for forgiveness, fell down on his knees, and repented [24] We forgave him [his misdeed]. His reward will be nearness to Us, a good place to return to [25] (The Quran, *Sad:* 24 - 25)

By his saying: ‘... He has done you wrong ...’ (*Sad:* 24), Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* attributed oppression to one of them. He included an irrelevant clue to be a part of the argument of the judgment. Had not a litigant had ninety-nine sheep, would it have been permissible to ask his brother to give him his ewe? This has no relevance to the case; so, Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* hastily judged before hearing out the other party and then included an irrelevant clue to the case. Perhaps, he was envious of having ninety-nine ewes.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘... Many partners treat each other unfairly. Those who sincerely believe and do good deeds do not do this ...’ (*Sad:* 24).

This means that this is not a unique case but a widespread and frequent one between partners; one of them often transgresses against the other. Even though they only entered into the partnership through mutual understanding, agreement, and friendship, yet, all this does not prevent him from inclining to oppression. This is similar to the gamblers who, apparently, seem to be good friends; meanwhile, each one of them is set upon taking the money from the others' pockets.

Then Allah *the Almighty* turns our attention to the fact that this matter is not, generally speaking, absolute; there are other partners who are not oppressors. They are the people whom Allah *Glorified is He* described in His saying: '...Those who sincerely believe and do good deeds do not do this...' (*Sad:* 24); yet they are very few or rare: '... but these are very few ...' (*Sad:* 24).

In a Qudsi Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* narrates from his Lord: 'Allah *the Most High* says: "I make a third with two partners as long as each of them does not cheat the other, but when he cheats him, I depart from their bond."'(1) This means that if treachery and oppression creep into the partnership, Allah *Glorified is He* leaves the bond to be voided of blessings, ruined and lost.

Then Allah *the Exalted* says, clarifying the state of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* after the case had passed: '... [Then] Dawud (David) realised that We had been testing him ...' (*Sad:* 24); he realised that Allah had tested him. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* taught and tested Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* the rules and principles of judging him with this case. Consequently, it was a necessary lesson for three reasons; the first was that he was scared in the presence of his Lord from similar human beings, thinking that they would kill him. The second mistake was that he judged in favour of the first litigant without listening to the other, whereas the third error was that he included an irrelevant clue to the case.

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(1) *It is narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [3381], Kitab Al-Buyu' (Book of Commercial Transactions), chapter on Partnerships, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. Shams Al-Haqq says in his Commentary ['Awn Al-Ma'bood 9/170], 'Allah's partnership with them is a metaphor. He equated the blessings, virtue, and profit with the shared wealth and made Himself the third partner.' It is also narrated by Ad-Daraqutni in his Sunnan [Kitab Al-Buyu', Hadith No.139] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. In the version of Abu Hayyan At-Tayami [140], he says, 'The hand of Allah is over two partners so long as one does not betray his companion. If one of them betrays the other, He raises it from them.'*

Allah's saying, '... We had been testing him ...' (*Sad:* 24) comes from the Arabic phrase *fatan adh-dhahab* meaning that gold is heated with fire to be refined from any impurities.

When Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* realised this, he did not fall into denial or conceitedness; rather, he sought forgiveness from his Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... so he asked his Lord for forgiveness, fell down on his knees ...' (*Sad:* 24); this means that he fell down on the floor unintentionally in prostration on the floor to Allah. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…[they]… fall down upon their faces [in prostration]…' (*al-Isra':* 107). Thus, the verb 'fall down' has two meanings; the first is that he fell down from his bowing into prostration. The second meaning is that revealed in Allah's saying: '... and repented ...' (*Sad:* 24); this means that he returned to Allah in repentance.

In conclusion, the result comes as Allah says: 'We forgave him [his misdeed]...' (*Sad:* 25). Allah *Glorified is He* promises him with closeness and high rank: '... His reward will be nearness to Us ...' (*Sad:* 25). It is appropriate to his esteem that the mountains and the birds glorified Allah with him. Moreover, Allah promises him with: '... A good place to return to' (*Sad:* 25).

يَٰدَاوُۥدُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَٰكَ خَلِيفَةً فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱحْكُم بَيْنَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ ٱلْهَوَىٰ فَيُضِلَّكَ
عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌۢ بِمَا نَسُوا۟ يَوْمَ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٦﴾

'David, We have given you mastery over the land. Judge fairly between people. Do not follow your desires, lest they divert you from God's path: those who wander from His path will have a painful torment because they ignore the Day of Reckoning' [26] (The Quran, *Sad:* 26)

The word 'mastery' (*Sad:* 26) either refers to Dawud (David) as vicegerent of Allah on earth in the general sense, for all men are vicegerents; yet Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was the mainstay of this mastery. Or else, it could mean that he is vicegerent of the prophets in carrying their Messages to mankind. As long as he is the vicegerent, then he is employed; if he does his job well, he will keep it, otherwise it will be taken away from him.

The cause of corruption is that if circumstances meet the human's desires, he imagines that he has become autonomous on other creation; he forgets that he is a vicegerent and not self-sufficient. Only if he remembers that his vicegerency can be taken off at any moment, he will remain well-mannered with his Lord Who made him a vicegerent in the first place, as Allah says: 'But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7). Allah says: '... Judge fairly between people ...' (*Sad:* 26); so, as long as a human being is Allah's vicegerent on earth, he should inhabit it, establishing regulations and truth therein. Allah *the Almighty* gives valuable advice to whoever has to judge between people: '... Judge fairly between people. Do not follow your desires ...' (*Sad:* 26). Allah guides the person to the truth which is in front of him, so he should put in it in its right place and should not follow his desires because they would distort his judgment.

In this respect, some scholars have studied Allah's saying concerning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'He does not speak from his own desire The Quran is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him.' (*an-Najm:* 3-4) They roused the question that if this is a Divine revelation, so why does Allah reprove him, as in His sayings: 'Allah forgives you [O, Prophet]! Why did you give them permission ...' (*at-Tawba:* 43), 'O Prophet, why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you ...' (*at-Tahrim:* 1) and 'He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him' (*'Abasa:* 1-2)?

The scholars say that Allah *Glorified is He* is not correcting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He is simply saying that the Messenger has no personal desires deviating him from the right judgment, whether the matter is decreed by Allah or other matters left to be legislated by him.

When Allah *the Exalted* outlined the task of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he defined the role of the Quran as a miraculous Book, which carries only the principal guidelines of the methodology. It is the guardian of the previous Books, for Allah has confirmed that preceding Books have been taken out of context and altered and that those who believed in them had not been trustworthy. As Allah says: '... In accordance with that part of Allah's Scripture which they were entrusted to preserve...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 44).

The preservation of their revealed Books was a legal responsibility which was liable to being obeyed or disobeyed. However, these people disobeyed the responsibility entrusted upon them, as Allah says: '…They have forgotten some of what they were told to remember…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). Allah *the Exalted* also mentions those who did not forget but took it out of context: '…They distort the meaning of [revealed] words…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 13). Moreover, there are some of them who brought their own speech and inserted it into Allah's speech: 'There are some who twist the Scripture with their tongues to make you [people] think that what they say is part of the Scripture when it is not; they say it is from Allah when it is not. They attribute lies to Allah, and they know it' (*Al-'Imran:* 78).

Therefore, those people cannot be trusted with preserving the Book of Allah through experience. This is why Allah *the Exalted* did not entrust the preservation of the Quran to those who believe in it; rather, He took responsibility for the preservation of the Quran. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it even before you [O, Prophet]' (*al-Hijr:* 9).

The True Lord *the Exalted* gave this position to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; to clarify it, the Prophet said, 'The parable of myself and the prophets who came before me is that of a man who has built a house and made it good and beautiful, except for a place of one brick in a corner. People would go round it, appreciating the building, but saying, "Why has this brick not been laid here?" I am that brick and I am the Last of the prophets.'(1)

The True Lord *the Most High* clarifies the role of His Messenger in the completion of religion by saying, '…This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My Favour upon you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). This is not all, indeed Allah entrusted him with another role, and that is the protection of this religion, through him and scholars who come after him. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…that you be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger (Muhammad) be a witness over you…' (*al-Baqara:* 143).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [3535] and Muslim in his Sahih [2286] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* testifies that he has delivered the message to us, and it is upon us to convey and extend his teachings so that we can testify that we have delivered it to the generations who came after him. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us of a group to come who would disbelieve in his *Sunnah* (way of life/teachings) by saying, 'We are only responsible for following the Book of Allah. What we find in it to be permissible, we will treat it as permissible; and what we find in it to be impermissible, we will treat as impermissible.'

Tracing the word *ta`ah* (obedience*)* in the Quran, one finds that it comes in many forms. One time Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger [Muhammad]…' (*at-Taghabun:* 12), in which the commandment to obey is repeated. Another time He says, 'And obey Allah and the Messenger [Muhammad]…' (*Al-'Imran:* 132) without repeating the commandment to obey. Also in another place He says: '…Obey Allah and His Messenger…' (*al-Anfal:* 20).

So, the repetition of the command to obey twice, once for Allah and once for His Messenger, emphasizes that when it is for Allah, it is a command regarding a matter in its totality, such as prayer, and when it is for the Messenger of Allah, it is a command regarding the details of how to pray. If, however, a command from the Messenger of Allah came consecutive and identical to that of Allah, the command is stated once without repetition. If the command is just from the Messenger of Allah, and nothing has come from Allah regarding a specific matter, then Allah says: 'Obey the Messenger (Muhammad).'

Hence, we can perceive the excellence of expression in Allah's saying: 'O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger [Muhammad] and those of you who are in authority…' (*an-Nisa':* 59). Allah has not said regarding those in authority: 'and *(obey)* those of you who are in authority.' Why is this? This is due to His wanting to draw our attention that our obedience to those entrusted with authority emanates from our obedience to Allah and to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. There is no obedience specific to them because there is not any obedience to the creation once it involves disobedience to the Creator.

So, Allah's saying, '...Judge fairly between people....' (*Sad:* 26), is a command to the generality of mankind, and not particularly to His Messenger. It is appropriate here to mention Allah's saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse: 'We [Allah] have sent down the Scripture to you [O, Muhammad] with the truth so that you may judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust.' (*an-Nisa':* 105)

The previously mentioned verse has a story behind it. It was revealed regarding the following men: Zayd ibn As-Samin*,* who was a trustworthy man despite being a Jewish, Qatadah ibn An-Nu`man and Tu`mah ibn Ubairiq. Qatadah had armour which Ibn Ubairiq had stolen from him. Ibn As-Samin, the Jew, was unjustly accused of this theft. After a careful investigation, they found the armour with Ibn Ubairiq,(1) the Muslim, and the Jew was proved innocent.

Upon this the people rushed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he might not pronounce judgment upon the Muslim, as it would be a disgrace for the Muslims in front of the Jews. The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* hesitated over this matter and so Allah revealed to him: 'We (Allah) have sent down the Scripture to you [O, Muhammad] with the truth so that you may judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you… (*an-Nisa':* 105). This means all the people, be they Jews, Christians or Muslims. In fact, the Messenger of Allah did pass sentence upon the Muslim and cleared the Jew of the charge. Such considerations of judging in favour of a Jew over a Muslim did not carry any weight with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the Muslims because the truth is more important and more cherished than this or that.

When some Jews witnessed how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* judged in favour of a Jew man and condemned a Muslim man, they turned towards Islam, and many of them embraced it. Mukhayriq (2) *Allah*

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(1) *His name was mentioned by Ibn Hajar Al-`Asqalani in his biographical dictionary of the companions, Al-Isabah fī Tamyiz As-Sahabah [Biography no. 4238]: Tu`mah ibn Ubairiq ibn `Amr Al-Ansari. He was also narrated by Abu Ishaq Al-Mustamli amongst the names of the Companions. He said, 'He participated in all the battles except Badr.' Abu Musa (whose surname, as I assume, is Al-Madini) said, 'There has been some talk about the faith of Tu`mah.'*

(2) *His name was Mukhayriq An-Nadari Al-Isra'ili, from the tribe of Banu An-Nadr. It was also said that he was from Banu Qainuqa. He was a learned scholar who entered Islam and was martyred at Uhud. He left, by will, all his wealth to the Prophet* peace=

be pleased with him was at the head of them. He openly announced his Islam and gave away all his wealth to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. He then set out to join a battle with the Muslims as soon as he heard the call to mobilise—even before offering a single *rak`a* (unit of prayer) to Allah. Mukhayriq *Allah be pleased with him* was martyred during this battle. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said of him, 'What a good man Mukhayriq was. He entered paradise without having prayed a single *rak`a*.' This is what the verse means: '...Judge fairly between people...' (*Sad:* 26).

The word '...mastery (or successor, *khalifa*)...' (*Sad:* 26) refers to the fact that Allah has placed us all in charge of the earth. Then over His vicegerents, He has appointed a leader to take care of their affairs and judge between them in any issues of disagreement in accordance with the Law of the One Who has assigned them as vicegerents on earth. The word *khalifa* could also mean the status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a successor to all the prophets who preceded him. He would alert people to that which had been erased from the true messages of previous prophets through the course of history. Judgment between people only occurs when they disagree, for, had they not disagreed, they would not have taken the case to a judge. Moreover, it is not for a judge to intervene in those matters over which people agree, except if they conflict with the True Lord *the Most High*. When this happens, it is incumbent upon him to intervene.

The word *Al-haqq* '... fairly [or in truth] (*bi Al-haqq*)...' (*Sad:* 26) refers to something fixed and unalterable, which is an attribute that can only apply to Allah *the Exalted*. As for humans, their affairs are in constant change, and their conditions are temporal and unstable. They can never remain the same. Their lives are full of vicissitudes. However, all the laws and principals that govern human life are from Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, they are constant and immutable. Since Allah *the Exalted* has completed His Blessings upon us, perfected His religion, and has chosen for us Islam as our religion, and then no

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= *and blessings be upon him who gave it away in charity. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said of him, 'Mukhayriq is the forerunner of the Jews, Salman is the forerunner of the Persians, and Bilal is the forerunner of the Ethiopians.' See Tamyiz As-Sahabah by Ibn Hajar [Biography no. 7843].*

one should emend anything in it. Any amendments would be an assault on Allah’s thorough and perfect knowledge of the wisdom behind each and every ruling.

The opposite of *Al-haqq* (truth) is *Al-batil* (falsehood). Sometimes falsehood predominates, but the truth is the truth and ultimately will be dominant. Sometimes the True Lord *Glorified is He* allows falsehood to predominate for a reason so that people may be bitten and burned by its fire, with which the sweetness of truth becomes evident. It is only when the bitterness of falsehood bites and hurts that people will flee in pursuit of the truth.

So, even if falsehood lifts its head up for a while, it is still truth that is uppermost. The True Lord *the Most High* gives us an example to illustrate this issue by saying: ‘He [Allah] sends water from the sky which fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The stream carries on its surface a growing layer of froth, like the froth that appears when people melt metals in the fire to make ornaments and tools. In this way, Allah illustrates truth and falsehood—the froth disappears, but what is of benefit to mankind remains in the earth—this is how Allah makes illustrations.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17)

The truth is absolute and unchangeable. Furthermore, it is this changelessness that makes us realise that Divine Laws have not come to make the Word of Allah uppermost; rather, it is to put down the word of disbelievers. This meaning is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘... and [He] made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while the word of Allah that is the highest...’ (*at-Tawba:* 40). Allah *the Exalted* did not conjoin the second phrase to the first. He did not say ‘and made Allah’s Words the highest', for Allah’s Cause does not need to be made supreme. It is an unalterable reality; it is the eternal truth.

Allah then says, addressing our master Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*: ‘... Do not follow your desires, lest they divert you from Allah’s Path…’ (*Sad:* 26). The word *Al-hawa* (a vain desire or inclination*)* refers to the inclination of the soul to something it desires without looking to the principles that govern that thing. Inclinations differ as people differ. Even close friends differ in their food, drink and tastes; when they buy something, each buy different sorts and different things. Indeed, there is a common factor binding them, which is their friendship, but still their desires are different. If your desires differ from mine, we must have recourse to a source of uncontested opinion. If that unanimous source is a higher authority above us, there is no objection. Objections arise when one becomes subject to one's equal and lets him rule over his affairs and he follows his opinion.

The True Lord *the Exalted* decides this issue by saying: 'But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin ...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 71). We can understand how conflicting desires could ruin life on earth, but how could it ruin the heavens? Furthermore, why did Allah mention the heavens before the earth?

The scholars say that this is indeed so. Ruination would spread beyond the earth and corrupt the heavens as well, meaning that it would corrupt Allah's Law which He has sent down from heaven. If it would corrupt Allah's heavenly revealed laws which constitute the truth for mankind, then this corruption exceeds the corruption of what is on the earth. When some disbelievers said, 'Or you [Muhammad] make the heaven fall upon us in fragments as you have claimed...' (*al-Isra':* 92), this was *hawa* (vain desire). Had Allah answered their request, the heavens and the earth would indeed have been ruined. It is from Allah's Mercy that He restrained their desires in the speculative systems that treat people justly in the issues of difference. As for those matters that involve no difference of opinion, Allah *the Almighty* has left them open for people to do with them as they please.

If someone were to ask, 'Why has Allah left the matters in which there can be no difference of opinion open?' The answer is that people will arrive to one truth upon which they will agree, and this is just what we see in empirical science, for example. It is a field which is open to all, Russians as well as Americans. Indeed, we see them place strong protective measures for their research so that it may not reach anyone else nor allow anyone to steal or plagiarise what others have achieved.

So heaven does not interfere in matters over which we will agree. This is a question that our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* decisively settled, giving us the example himself in the context of the pollination of date palms. When he suggested to some date growers that they should not pollinate them manually, it was subsequently a bad harvest year and the date palms did not produce fruit. So Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'You know better about the affairs of your world.'(1)

Why is this so? The reason for this is by experimentation you will reach one conclusion upon which you will all agree and take it from others. As for inclinations and desires, they differ from one person to another, and from which conflicts—serious or minor—may stem.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies the reason for the prohibition of following one's desires by saying: '... lest they divert you from Allah's Path ...' (*Sad:* 26). That is, do not follow your desires because they will lead you astray from Allah's Way. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this matter for us when he drew a straight line for the Companions along with numerous other lines around it, and then he recited the noble verse: 'And verily, this is my Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His Path…' (*al-An'am:* 153).

No matter how small they are, differences cause the divergence of paths. One millimetre can make paths diverge. If two lines were drawn from one point and one of them diverged from the other by just one millimetre, the result would be that the farther one went from the original point, the greater the divergence would be. Have you seen, for example, what the train controller who controls and changes the directions of the trains does? He moves the end of a lever which moves no more than five millimetres, and because of this movement, the train is directed away from Alexandria to Aswan. This is how paths diverge. A huge difference can arise from a tiny move. A miniscule difference at the point of origin results in a bigger and bigger difference the farther away from it one moves.

Similarly, just as various paths diverge, so does a single path when it is broad and has room for divergence. The desert path to Alexandria, for instance, is a wide dual-direction highway. One can travel on one of the two routes in a winding manner, going right and left, the consequence of which is a lengthened journey. Therefore, people choose the ‘middle way', which means that you keep the two sides of the road at an equal distance from yourself.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2362) on the authority of Rafi` ibn Khadij that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, when the palm trees did not bear fruits, 'I am only a human being. When I tell you to do something with regard to your religion, and then follow it, but if I tell you to do something based on my own opinion, I am only a human being.' Also according to the Hadith narrated by Anas [2363], he said, 'You know better about your worldly affairs.'*

The True Lord *the Exalted* then clarifies the outcome of deviation from the main path by saying: ‘...Those who wander from His Path will have a painful torment because they ignore the Day of Reckoning’ (*Sad:* 26). Heedlessness of this Day and forgetting the final end is what causes people to fall into intense punishment. If a human keeps in the forefront of his mind the recompense for bad deeds, he will not do them. Likewise, if he recalls the reward of good deeds, he will be neither careless nor lazy about performing them.

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَآءَ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَٰطِلًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ
ظَنُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ۚ فَوَيْلٌ لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٢٧﴾

It was not without purpose that We created the heavens and the earth and everything in between. That may be what the disbelievers assume – how they will suffer from the Fire! [27] (The Quran, *Sad:* 27)

The meaning of the verse is that Allah has not created the heaven and the earth and all that is between them without meaning and purpose; rather, He created them with exact wisdom. This is why you find them constant and unchanging. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outstrip the day. They all float, each in an orbit.’ (*Ya Sin:* 40) Had the creation been ordered otherwise, there would be collisions every moment between the celestial bodies and the constellations.

‘... That is the assumption of those who disbelieve...’ (*Sad:* 27) means that disbelievers think that they have been created in vain, to no end, to no purpose. This is their conjecture, and it is no more than conjecture. Had the creation happened randomly as they imagined, it would not have been a creation. Since a created being must have a purpose in the mind of its creator before he makes it. As we said, the person who invented the washing machine or the refrigerator defined its purpose before making it. He did not make it and then say, ‘Think over and try to find some use for this machine.’

It is the one who makes something who defines its role. He lays down the principles for the upkeep of his creation. For this reason, we say that all the deviation in the world stems from the desire of its inhabitants themselves to lay down the purpose of Allah's creation. They want to lay down the principles for the upkeep of Allah's creation and ignore those that Allah *the Almighty* has laid down. They feign ignorance of what Allah has decreed and appointed and do not refer the matter to its proper and relevant authority as one should in worldly affairs. Each manufacturer knows best what is good for his product.

Then comes the threat: '…so woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire.' (*Sad:* 27) The Creator *the Exalted* often warns and threatens His created beings with punishment in the Fire. Some people see in this a kind of cruelty, yet, actually, this is a form of mercy, not cruelty. It is out of Allah's Mercy towards us that He stresses the enormity of sin and clearly states the punishment for it. It is out of His Mercy that He tells us of the subsequent retribution before a particular sin is committed. On recalling the prospect of punishment, a person recoils and refrains from a particular sin. So, great wisdom underlies such warnings and threats.

أَمْ نَجْعَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ كَٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ
فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ أَمْ نَجْعَلُ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ كَٱلْفُجَّارِ ﴿٢٨﴾

But would We treat those who believe and do good deeds
and those who spread corruption on earth as equal?
Would We treat those who are aware of God and those
who recklessly break all bounds in the same way? [28]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 28)

After having mentioned the requital of disbelievers in the fire, the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to state its opposite; it is through opposites that things become distinct. Allah *the Almighty* chose to compare for us disbelievers and believers. Believers are the people who have lived righteously by the standards of Allah's Law, followed the Straight Path, held their hands and tongues from harming others and have been a source of peace and happiness. How could we put such people on an equal footing with corrupt disbelievers?

This is a hint from the True Lord *the Exalted*. It is as though He is telling us to be wary of equating these with those. Beware not to be overcome by mercy for the oppressors and those who spread corruption on the earth. For if you have mercy on them, you have indeed put them on an equal footing with believers.

Therefore, we used to refute the communists by saying to them, 'You have certainly taken your revenge on your enemies, the capitalists and the feudalists, and you perpetrated horrors upon them, but what about those of them who died before you could get to them and extract your revenge? Undoubtedly, they oppressed people and still went unpunished.' So you have to admit to the existence of another life in which vengeance will be exacted on evildoers who escaped it in this world. Otherwise, the doers of good will be equated with evildoers.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to '... those who spread corruption in the earth...' (*Sad:* 28) since He created the earth in a state of well-being. If one is unable to contribute to its well-being, by helping people and making them happy, then one should at least preserve it as it is and not corrupt it. There are many facets to well-being on earth. To explain this idea, we previously used the example of a well. One either leaves it is as it is so that people can benefit from it or one can improve upon it by building a wall around it to protect it, or adding some equipment to it to help lift the water, etc. One could also throw rubbish into it, and this would be an example of corruption.

We also said that if a person entered a garden that no one had entered before, he would find it in its original, natural state. He would see no broken trees nor smell any foul odours, despite the presence of insects, animals, dung, etc. However, as soon as people would start frequenting it, it would become damaged and spoiled. Why is this? This is so because it is no longer in its original state of well-being in which Allah has created it. People have not interacted with it according to Allah's Way. Had they done so, everything would have proceeded in a rightly manner.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* emphasises this principle by saying, '…or shall We treat the pious as the wicked?' (*Sad:* 28) *Al-fajir* (the wicked) is the one who departs or quits (*yafsuq*) the way and law that protects him and his society, just as the fresh, ripe date detaches itself from its peel (*tafsuq*). Before protecting society from a wicked individual, the True Lord *the Exalted* protects an individual from the society even though the individual is but one person, while society is a multitude. Accordingly, it is the individual who benefits and gains most from Allah's Way.

Likewise, sooner or later, when a person is confronted with an issue of private concern or interest, he turns to the truth out of necessity since he cannot find protection except through it. We have previously given an example of university students. The story of the three adolescent young men that we have previously mentioned is a case in point. These three persons followed their own evil whims and caprice. They remained on this bad condition for a long period of time until one of them showed repentance to Allah, which is why the other two bitterly mocked him and stigmatized him with the worst characteristics. But the question to be asked now is "If one of these two men had a sister, would he allow her to get married to his companion who repented or to the one who was still committing evil?!" It goes without saying that he will allow her to get married to the righteous one, not the evil-doing one. Certainly, he will prefer the latter companion because he is confident about him and trusts him. Thus, the truth stays the truth, virtue remains virtue and the righteous, and the wicked cannot be regarded as equal.

The True Lord *the Most High* then gave His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* some words of assurance to comfort and solace him. The stories in the Quran mainly came as a source of comfort and strength to his heart.

كِتَٰبٌ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ إِلَيۡكَ مُبَٰرَكٞ لِّيَدَّبَّرُوٓاْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ٢٩

This is a blessed Scripture which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to think about its messages, and for those with understanding to take heed [29] (The Quran, *Sad:* 29)

The 'Divine Book' referred to here is the Noble Quran. The word *Mubarak* (blessed) signifies something that gives benefit and goodness above that which is expected of it. As when we say of something that, 'we take from it, yet it does not decrease', we call it 'blessed'. Similarly, a man who lives on a moderate income, and yet we see him raising his children in the best way and living amongst people as though he was rich. So people say of him, ‘Indeed, he is a blessed man,’ and, ‘Surely, Allah blesses his small wage so it becomes plentiful.’ How is it, though, that Allah puts blessings in small things of life?

The scholars say that first Allah bestows contentment upon the small portion, so its owner feels content with it. Then Allah *the Almighty* protects him from extra expenses so that all his expenses go towards useful and necessary things. People imagine that *rizq* (one’s provision or sustenance) is synonymous with wealth. They do not know that protection from expenses is a form of *rizq*. We say that *rizq* can be positive in the sense of gaining income, and it can be negative in the sense of minimising expenses.

An example of this is a man who lives off of lawful earnings. When his son gets sick, a cup of tea and an aspirin are sufficient as a cure for him. As for the one who lives on ill-gotten money and accumulates fortunes, when his son gets sick, he must take him to the best doctors and spend many times what the first one has spent.

The Quran is indeed blessed and its verses are blessed as well in terms of the apparent rulings since it trains one to be upright. This uprightness, if looked at from an economical perspective, costs one nothing. Indeed, it costs one nothing to be upright; it is deviance that costs one dearly. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘A believer eats in one intestine (is satisfied with a little food), while a disbeliever eats in seven.’(1)

Indeed, a disbeliever will eat a lot to feel satiated, but a few morsels suffice a believer and keep his body nourished. A believer does not eat until he is hungry, and when he gets hungry, any food becomes tasty to him, even if it is just some dried bread and salt. A wise Arab said, ‘The food of the hungry is (always) delicious.’ Nowadays, however, we see people preparing salads, appetisers and hors d'oeuvres before their food. Why is this so? It is to encourage people to eat a lot, almost to the point of surfeit, and then after that they need to take digestive aids, laxatives and other medications.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih [2060] [184] in the Book of Al-Ashribah (drinks) on the authority of Jabir and Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with them both. An-Nawawi said, in his commentary on Sahih Muslim: ‘According to another narration, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said this after he had entertained a disbeliever as a guest. He drank the milk of seven goats. On the next morning, after he embraced Islam, he drank the milk of one goat and could not finish the second goat’s milk.’ The point of the Hadith is to content oneself with little worldly provisions and to urge oneself to practice Zuhd (renunciation) and satisfaction (with whatever Allah has ordained).’*

These are not the characteristics of a believer. Our master, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* laid down a method for healthy eating. He said *peace and blessings be upon him* 'We are a people who do not eat until we are hungry; and when we eat, we do not eat to our fill.'(1) This method takes care of the economical side and achieves welfare in all aspects – economically, socially, politically and security-wise, without incurring costs.

The Quran is blessed from another perspective. When you interact positively with its doctrine and apply it lovingly and appropriately, the True Lord reveals special secrets to you that arouse the wonder of others and opens up for you marvellous spiritual doors. Was not Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* a prophet of Allah, amazed by the deeds of a righteous slave of Allah? This righteous slave worshipped Allah according to Musa's Law, yet despite this, Allah commanded Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to follow and learn from him with sincerity and zeal. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* followed him with sincerity and love, he learnt tremendous lessons from him. This is related in Allah's saying: 'O, you who believe! If you obey and fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion (to tell right from wrong), will expiate for you your sins and forgive you, and Allah is the Owner of the Great Bounty.' (*al-Anfal:* 29)

The word *furqan* (the criterion or discriminator between true and false) used in this verse does not refer to the Quran; rather, it is a criterion specific to those who follow the primary *Furqan*, namely the Quran. Furthermore, by means of it, they reach the level of *taqwa* (God-fearing piety). The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives them a special criterion because they have followed the Quran with sincerity and ardent love.

The meaning of *tadabbur* (pondering or reflection) in '... that they may ponder over its verses...' (*Sad:* 29) is not to take a superficial look at matters;

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 4, p. 132) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2380) on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn Mu`id Yakrib that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The son of Adam fills no vessel worse than his stomach. Sufficient for the son of Adam are a few morsels to keep his back straight. If he must eat more, it should be one-third for his food, one-third for his liquids, and one-third for his breath.'*

rather, it is to look contemplatively into their consequences or end results. We should look at the background issues and consequences so that we may extract the lessons they teach. It was for this reason that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* objected when Al-Khidr (a righteous servant of Allah) put a hole in the boat; he looked at the surface of this matter and its outward logic. Logic says that a sound boat is better than a faulty one, yet this righteous servant of Allah had another criterion. He did not compare a sound boat with a holed one; rather, he compared between a holed boat and no boat at all. Which is better? There was an oppressor who was taking people's boats if they were sound. So this hole saved the boat from this oppressor, and it remained the property of its owners. This is knowledge of the hidden realms and the Unseen that Allah bestows upon whomever He wills of those of His slaves who have been sincere to Him.

Allah continues: '... and that people of understanding may remember.' (*Sad:* 29); this means people with attentive and heedful minds. Pay attention here that the True Lord *the Exalted* extorts us to use our intellect and understanding to reflect upon His signs within the universe. A person who is equal to you or someone with whom you have some business will not draw your attention to some item unless he is sure that you will become interested in it; otherwise, he will avoid it or conceal its defects. An example of this is someone who is selling you a good piece of merchandise; you will see him explaining its merits and invite you to test it yourself and check its quality. He will also tell you about other not as obvious, or subtle, features.

As for the one selling poor merchandise, he distracts you from its faults and busies your mind with other things so that you will not notice the defects in the goods. For instance, one enters a shop to buy shoes. If they are too tight, the seller says to you, 'They stretch with wear.' However, if they are too big, he will say, 'They look a little small for you.' As far as he is concerned, the important thing is to engage your mind until you buy it.

The True Lord *the Most High* invites us to reflect upon His signs, ponder them and search thoroughly and carefully into them because He knows that when we look and reflect on them, we will be convinced by them and that through them we will arrive at the truth. Despite this, we hear some people who take a stance on some religious questions, say, ‘This matter is beyond research. There is no role for the intellect in it.’ We answer this by saying that we have been ordered to carefully consider and reflect upon the universe, so there is nothing wrong with looking into them.

After this, the sequence of the Quran brings us back once again to our master Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* not to tell us his story, but because he was the father of another prophet, our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them*:

وَوَهَبۡنَا لِدَاوُۥدَ سُلَيۡمَٰنَۚ نِعۡمَ ٱلۡعَبۡدُ إِنَّهُۥٓ أَوَّابٌ ﴿٣٠﴾ إِذۡ عُرِضَ عَلَيۡهِ بِٱلۡعَشِيِّ
ٱلصَّٰفِنَٰتُ ٱلۡجِيَادُ ﴿٣١﴾ فَقَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَحۡبَبۡتُ حُبَّ ٱلۡخَيۡرِ عَن ذِكۡرِ رَبِّي حَتَّىٰ
تَوَارَتۡ بِٱلۡحِجَابِ ﴿٣٢﴾ رُدُّوهَا عَلَيَّۖ فَطَفِقَ مَسۡحَۢا بِٱلسُّوقِ وَٱلۡأَعۡنَاقِ ﴿٣٣﴾

We gave David Solomon. He was an excellent servant who always turned to God [30] When well-bred light-footed horses were paraded before him near the close of day [31] He kept saying, ‘My love of fine things is part of my remembering my Lord!’ until [the horses] disappeared from sight [32] ‘Bring them back!’ [he said] and started to stroke their legs and necks [33] (The Quran, *Sad:* 30 - 33)

One of the wonders of the Quranic order regarding the mention of Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them* is a common aspect found in verses related to both. The first mentioning of our master Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* occurs in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in Allah’s saying, ‘So they defeated them by permission of Allah, and Dawud (David) killed Jalut (Goliath)…’ (*al-Baqara:* 251), and the last mentioning of him is in the chapter of *Sad:* ‘And to Dawud (David) We gave Sulaiman (Solomon)…’ (*Sad:* 30). Similarly, the first mentioning of our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* occurs in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in Allah’s saying, ‘And they followed [instead] what the devils had recited during the reign of Sulaiman (Solomon)...’ (*al-Baqara:* 102), while the last mentioning of him is in Allah’s saying: ‘And We certainly tried Sulaiman (Solomon) and placed on his throne a body; then, he returned…’ (*Sad:* 34).

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘And to Dawud (David) We gave (*wahabna*) Sulaiman (Solomon)...’ (*Sad:* 30). The verb *wahab* means to give without return. If someone commented saying that all granting of children is a bestowment from Allah without return, we would say, 'Yes.' However, the Creator *Glorified is He* endows each human being with a self, then He provides that self with other gifts, which are the special personal traits and attributes of his character, such as leadership, wisdom, etc. For this reason, those who ask for a specific gift while being undeserving or unqualified for it, request it by way of gift such as in the verse saying: ‘...he [Sulaiman (Solomon)] said, "My Lord, forgive me, and bestow upon me a kingdom such as shall not belong to any other after me."’ (*Sad:* 35) Likewise, Allah says: ‘So give me [Zakaryya (Zechariah)] from Yourself an heir who shall inherit me and inherit (also) the posterity of Ya`qub (Jacob). And make him, my Lord, one with whom You are well-pleased!’ (*Maryam:* 5-6)

Our master Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was a very old man when he asked Allah for a son. His wife was also barren, so all the means for having children were unfavourable and unsound. So Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* asked Allah *the Almighty* to bestow upon him a child by way of gift from Him. Furthermore, even though all means are, in essence, a gift from Allah, yet they are a general gift. It is only those particular qualities with which a person is endowed that are considered a special gift.

Allah *the Exalted* then says: ‘... How excellent a slave! (*ni`ma l-`abdu*) ...’ (*Sad:* 30). We know that the word *ni`ma* (how excellent!) is used in Arabic for praise. The praise in this context is for a creedal characteristic, that is, *`ubudiyyah* (worshipful servitude, devotion, and obedience to Allah). We mentioned previously that people detest the words *`abd* (a slave) and *`ubudiyyah* (slavery—when not related to Allah), and they are right to detest them. In relation to humans, slavery is enforced exploitation and dispossession of the assets of a person by his master. However, regarding slavery to Allah, it is the slave who profits and benefits from his master. This is the proper form of slavery that is considered an elevation in rank and dignity for a slave.

Therefore, when the True Lord *the Exalted* conferred the blessing of the *Isra'* (Night Journey) and *Mi`raj* (Ascension to Heaven) upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He proclaimed it by saying: ‘*Glorified is He*

[Allah] Who took His slave [Muhammad] for a journey by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* [at Mecca] to the Farthest Mosque [in Jerusalem] ...' (*al-Isra':* 1). It is as though his servitude to his Lord is what brought him to this level.

Just to give an example from ordinary life—and indeed Allah is beyond comparison—think about a master craftsman who has apprentices. He will draw near to himself the good learner, who is sincere, efficient, and obedient and renders good service. Due to these qualities, he will single him out to teach him special skills. He will not keep back from him the finer points and secrets of his craft. He will impart some of the subtleties of his craft to him which he does not grant to other apprentices.

So, even though Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was a king, his Lord praised him for the attribute of servitude: '... How excellent a slave!' (*Sad:* 30). Then Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies for us the basis of praising him for servitude by saying: '... Verily, he was ever oft-returning in repentance (to Us)!' (*Sad:* 30) This means that he was consistently repenting and turning back to Allah. Whenever he slipped up, even in the slightest way, he would reproach himself for it, turn back to his Lord, and repent to Him. Allah *the Most High* describes repentance by saying: 'The repentance accepted by Allah is only for those who do wrong in ignorance [or carelessness] and then repent soon after ...' (*an-Nisa':* 17).

The phrase, '... in ignorance [or carelessness] (*bi-jahalah*)...' (*an-Nisa':* 17) means that they do not commit wrongdoings intentionally or by design. Furthermore, if they fall into sin, they do not feel pleased with it and do not brag about it; rather, they are saddened and they blame themselves: '…it is those to whom Allah will turn in forgiveness, and Allah is Ever-Knowing and Wise. But repentance is not [accepted] of those who [continue to] do evil deeds up until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "Indeed, I have repented now" or of those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We (Allah) have prepared a painful punishment.' (*an-Nisa':* 17-18)

We can illustrate the difference between these two types of people using the example of a group of students who travelled on scholarship to France, for example. Amongst them was an upright man, committed to Allah's Path.

One night, he was surprised by a dissolute woman who presented herself to him and kept seducing him until he finally gave in and committed adultery with her. This person sinned ignorantly (*bi-jahalah*), that is, without intention or planning. This is opposed to the one who would go out looking for debauchery and collecting the addresses of those who commit indecencies. This is the one who wilfully pursues and commits sins.

The word *awwab* means one who constantly turns to Allah in repentance. It is an intensive form *mubalaghah* and means ‘someone who repeatedly returns to the truth'. Such a person does not rejoice in sin but regrets it at once, redresses the wrong done, and gets himself back to the right path. The proof of this is Allah’s saying after it: ‘When there were displayed before him, in the afternoon, nobly bred, swift-footed steeds [for fighting in Allah’s Cause]. And he said, "Alas! ..."’ (*Sad:* 31)

The word *Al-`ashiyi* signifies the time period after the mid-noon till sunset. The horses were ‘displayed before him', as in a military parade in which the leader inspects his troops and forces. The word ‘...nobly bred steeds (*Al-safinat*)...’ (*Sad:* 31) is the plural of the word *safin*. It is used to refer to a horse that is of noble lineage. One can recognise a highborn horse by its gait and stature. It does not stand on four feet but gracefully upon three, as though in a state of complete readiness. The word ‘...swift-footed steeds (*Al-jiyad*) ...’ (*Sad:* 31) is the plural of the word *jawad* and means strong and fast horses.

So, when these nobly bred and swift-footed steeds and military forces were paraded before our master Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* he said, ‘"Alas! I did love the good [these horses] instead of remembering my Lord’ until [the sun] had hidden in the veil [of night].’ (*Sad:* 32) The scholars said that the word ‘good’ (*khayr*) is used here to refer to the horses based on the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that stated, ‘Goodness (*khayr*) is tied to the forelocks of horses until the Day of Resurrection.’(1)

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(1) Agreed upon Hadith narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih* [987] in the Book of *Zakat* [Hadith no. 26] on the authority of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Goodness is in the forelocks of horses until the Day of Resurrection', or he said 'tied to the *forelocks of horses until the Day of Resurrection.’ Al-Bukhari narrated it in his Sahih [2850] on the authority of `Urwah ibn Al-Ja`d.*

He *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, ‘The best thing you can raise is a horse whose reins you hold, and once you hear any shout [of battle] you fly towards it.’(1)

Therefore, our Lord when commanding us to prepare for the enemies of His Law and Religion, He said: ‘And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy ...’ (*al-Anfal:* 60). What this means is a general force and more specifically horses.

So, when the horses were displayed before Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* he said, ‘... I did love the good [these horses] instead of remembering my Lord’ until [the sun] had hidden in the veil [of night].’ (*Sad:* 32) This means that the love felt for horses was not out of boasting or pride, like those who breed horses for show, racing, and fame. My love for them only springs from the remembrance of my Lord and His Way. He has ordered the preparation of power and instruments of power by which His Way can be established on earth.

The subject of the verb *tawarat* (became concealed or disappeared) in the part of the verse saying, ‘... until [the sun] had hidden in the veil [of night] ...’ (*Sad:* 32) is *mustatir* (implicit or hidden pronoun, referring to the sun setting). So when the subject is not directly stated, it is implied or understood from a previous mention such as in one’s saying, ‘A man came to me and I honoured (him)’, that is, I honoured the man previously mentioned.

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Amongst the best lives one can lead is that of a man who holds the reins of his horse in Allah’s Cause. He flies on its back every time he hears a shout or commotion (of battle). He flies on his horse, seeking the places where he can expect martyrdom or death (in Allah’s Cause). Or that of a person who tends sheep at the top of one of these peaks or in the bottom of one of these valleys, establishing the prayer, paying the charity, and worshipping his Lord until the certainty (death) comes to him. He has no concern with the affairs of people except the doing of good.’ It was related by Muslim in his Sahih [1889] in the Book of Al-Imarah (Government) in the chapter of the merit of Jihad (Striving) and Ribat (guarding the Muslim frontiers in Allah’s Cause) [125]. Ibn Majah also narrated a similar version in his Sunnan [3977] in the Book of Al-Fitan (Trials) in the chapter of seclusion.*

Allah’s saying, ‘... until [the sun] had hidden in the veil [of night] ...’ is a common sight of the sun until it sets. Accordingly, the meaning is ‘until the sun went down and disappeared from view'.

Some scholars(1) held the opinion that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* missed the *`isha’* (night prayer) because of his preoccupation with the display of horses, and when this happened, he said, ‘Bring them back to me ...’ (*Sad:* 33), meaning the horses, ‘... then he began to pass his hand over their legs and their necks.’ (*Sad:* 33) His stroking of their shanks and necks was out of courtesy and care for them. The legs and necks of the horses are mentioned specifically because they are its noblest parts. The neck carries the mane, while the legs are the instruments of lifting and running. Thus, the meaning is that he was pleased with them and so he caringly stroked their necks and legs.

However, some of the exegetes (2) had another opinion. They said that what was meant by the word *mash* in this verse is that he wanted to slaughter and kill them because they distracted him from his prayer. This opinion is closer to the *isra’iliyyat* (unreliable narratives originating from Jewish and Christian narrations) because it was not the horses that busied him in such a way. Rather, it was he who busied them and everyone else around him. So, why place the guilt on the horses?

What is astonishing about the *isra’iliyyat* is that they contain so many narratives that cast vile aspersions of the prophets of the children of Israel.

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(1) *This was the opinion of Al-Hasan Al-Basri, Al-Kalbi and Muqatil. Al-Qushayri said that at that time there were no noon (zhuhr) or afternoon (`asr) prayers. Rather this was a supererogatory prayer from which he was distracted. [This opinion was also mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis (vol. 8, p. 5837).] Ibn Jarir and Ibn Mundhir narrated that `Ali Allah be pleased with him. said, ‘The prayer which Sulaiman (Solomon) peace be upon him missed was the afternoon (‘asr) prayer.' [It was mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (vol. 7, p. 177).]*

(2) *Two opinions are held regarding this issue:*

1. *He started to stroke their manes and hamstrings. This opinion was attributed to Ibn `Abbas and was narrated by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari, Ibn Mundhir, and Ibn Abu Hatim.*
2. *He cut their throats and legs with a sword. This opinion was attributed to Ubay ibn Ka`b and was narrated by At-Tabarani in his book Al-Awsat and by Al-Isma`ili in his Mu`jam and Ibn Mardawayh through a good chain of narrators.*

We often see them accusing their own prophets of things that totally do not befit such a station. The underlying reason behind these false accusations was their own indulgence in sins; those who transgress the bounds of right while following a religion try to find a shortcoming in the one who has brought him this religion to justify their own excesses. It was due to this that they fabricated derogatory and slanderous accusations against their Prophets.

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا سُلَيْمَٰنَ وَأَلْقَيْنَا عَلَىٰ كُرْسِيِّهِۦ جَسَدًا ثُمَّ أَنَابَ ﴿٣٤﴾

We certainly tested Solomon, reducing him to a mere skeleton on his throne [34] (The Quran, *Sad:* 34)

The word *Fitnah* (trial or test from which derives the verb *fatana*) means to test. *Fitnah* is not unpleasant in itself; it is to fail in it and to be unable to go through it—this is the unpleasant element to tests. What is the problem if you face a test, and you pass it successfully? The origin of the word *fitnah* comes from the phrase '*fitnat adh-dhahab*' which means the burning of the gold to purify it. Some gold is mixed with other substances; if we want pure gold, what should we do? We smelt the gold until it is free of all impurities. This is exactly the effect of tests and trials on people. They are put to the test to sort the good from the bad. Allah *the Almighty* thus tested Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* just as He tested his father Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* before him at the sanctuary.

Allah *the Exalted* then says: '... and placed on his throne *(kursi)* a body *(jasad)* ...' (*Sad:* 34). The word *kursi* refers to the throne that a king sits on, while the word *jasad* refers to the *qalib* (mould) of a living being. This exterior form is called a *jasad* when it becomes devoid of a soul.

Scholars hold numerous opinions regarding the interpretation of this verse. Some of them said that our master Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* had another son other than Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. However, that other son was corrupt, like the case of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* who also had a bad son. This son planned and executed an overthrow against Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. He usurped his father's throne and remained the king for a long time. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* willed to reinstate Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) to his throne, He rendered the body of this wicked son inert and lifeless upon the throne. This way after being a powerful king, who was listened to and obeyed by everyone, he became powerless, even over his own self and body. Soon after this, his people revolted against and killed him. Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* then reassumed his throne.

Some of the scholars said in explanation of this verse that our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* had many slave-girls and one night he said, ‘Tonight I will visit seventy slave women, each of whom will bear a son who will be a knight, riding his horse in Allah’s Cause.'(1) So the matter was all well intentioned and for Allah’s sake, except that he forgot to say, ‘If Allah so wills.’ The result was that only one of them gave birth to a lifeless body unable to move or act. This was because a believer is required to mention Allah’s Will first, when he decides to do something in the future, as Allah *the Exalted* instructs by saying: ‘And never say of anything, "I shall do such and such thing tomorrow", except [with the saying], "If Allah wills!"…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 24)

For when a person says, ‘I will do such-and-such tomorrow', he is determining an action over which one has not the slightest bit of control. You cannot guarantee that you will still be alive to do it. You cannot guarantee that the means or circumstances will not change. Thus, when you state that the matter is dependent upon Allah’s Will, you are preserving your dignity and clearing yourself from telling a lie, for you may will something to happen, and Allah wills otherwise.

Perhaps that sovereignty lured Sulaiman (Solomon) and a trace of pride had entered him, for he ruled the worlds of mankind, jinns, animals, and birds. He was obeyed throughout the world around him. This is why he did not say, ‘If Allah so wills', and Allah requited him for this.

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(1) *Narrated by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (vol. 7, p. 182) that Ibn Sa`d said, ‘Al-Waqidi narrated to us from Ma`shar, from Al-Maqbari that Sulaiman (Solomon), the son of Dawud (David) peace be upon them said, ‘Tonight I will visit a hundred of my wives, each of whom will give birth to a knight who will struggle in Allah’s Cause', but he did not say, ‘if Allah wills.’ Had he made the matter conditional on Allah’s Will, it would have happened. He visited a hundred wives, but none of them became pregnant except for one who gave birth to a half-formed child.*

Other scholars(1) said that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* begot a child and that some jinn bore ill will towards his son. They feared that he would do to them as Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* did to them and so they desired to kill his son. To prevent this, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* raised him above the clouds to nurse from the water therein. It is as though he *peace be upon him* wanted to flee Allah's Decree.

There are other scholars(2) who are under the opinion that the body was that of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. It is Allah's Will that He has given normal human beings control over their limbs. So, when they want to stand, they stand, and when they want to move, they move, without them knowing what is happening in their limbs, muscles, and joints to make them stand and move. It is as though Allah is illustrating this by means of a similitude found in the human's own self to better approximate the truth and help humans attain a deeper understanding of the issues that are dependent upon His Power in light of His saying: '... there is nothing like unto Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

So, if you, O, created being of Allah, do as you want, and your limbs obey you and move merely by willing it, without commanding your body to do anything. Will you, then, regard such ability as too far or difficult for the Creator *the Exalted* Who says: 'Verily, His Command, when He wills a thing, is only that He says to it, "Be!" and it is.' (*Ya Sin:* 82) Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to a thing, 'Be!', but you do not say, 'Be!' Allah has not burdened you with it. He has made your limbs obey you without any commands from you. Even were you to command them, they would not respond to you. In fact, they are responding to the Creator *the Most High*. Thus, whenever Allah *the Exalted* wants, He can divest you of this capacity; then, you would want to move your hand, but you would be unable to. This is to show you that this capacity is a gift from Him, not something intrinsic to yourself.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned this opinion in his exegesis (vol. 8, p. 5843) and attributed it to Ash-Sha`bi. The upshot of it was that when a son was born to Sulaiman (Solomon)* peace be upon him *the devils gathered and said, 'If a son of his lives, we will never be free from the affliction and subjugation we are in. Come, let us kill him or drive him insane.' On learning this, Sulaiman (Solomon)* peace be upon him *ordered the wind to carry his child up to the clouds. He sought to nourish his son from the clouds out of fear of the harm which the devils might inflict upon him. Allah punished him for his fear of the devils; unawares, the body fell dead upon his throne.*

(2) *This opinion was mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis (vol. 8, p. 5844) without attributing it to anyone. It was also opined that the body was that of Sulaiman (Solomon) himself. He had fallen gravely ill until he became, merely, a body. A sick and emaciated person can be described by saying, 'He looks like a discarded body.'*

The True Lord, Blessed is He, endowed our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* with the ability to control his limbs (just like any normal human being). Then, He *the Most High* increased and extended his capacity to the control of others of his own kind and of different species as well. Allah *the Almighty* granted him control over the whole world; it would be influenced by him and respond to his authority. So, it was a matter of superiority in dominion and control over Allah’s forces.

It seems that some of that feeling found its way to Sulaiman’s (Solomon's) soul, and the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to alert him to the fact that such power was not intrinsic to him; rather, it was a gift from Him, which He could take away whenever He chose. Then he would not be able to control his own body or control others. Thus, Allah cast him like a corpse on his throne, unable to do anything or issue any command.

Since this blessing was a gift conferred by Allah, Who gave you a kingdom the like of which shall never be granted to anyone after you, then you must maintain a firm grip on His Rope, always turning to the One Who gave you this power.

In this respect, it was related that Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* once rode upon a carpet, and the wind carried him wherever he wished. Suddenly, however, the carpet inclined one way, and it nearly made him fall off. So he ordered it to level out for him, at which the carpet said to him, ‘We were commanded to obey you as you obey Allah.’

So Allah tested him because He granted him a kingdom that would not belong to any other being after him. He did not want him to transgress or become proud. Therefore, indeed, Allah speaks the truth when He says: ‘No! [But] indeed, man transgresses because he sees himself self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7)

After all, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was a human. The True Lord *the Exalted* wanted to show us that although a human has control over his own body and can control those around him, and even control species other than his own, yet none of this power is inherent in him, but it is a gift to him. The proof of this was that Allah *the Almighty* deprived him of his dominion in a single moment and cast him like a corpse upon his throne, unable to command or forbid, with no authority over anything.

When Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* understood the situation, he turned and repented, '... then he returned.' (*Sad:* 34) That is, he returned to the state he was in before going through this trial. Or else it could mean that he returned to the body, containing his soul or that he turned to Allah *the Almighty* with repentance and acknowledgment of the cause of this test. Therefore, '...then he returned...' has two possible meanings in this context: he returned and repented, in recognition of the cause, or he returned and repented to the One Who causes all things (Allah).

The word *jasad* (corpse) is used to refer to the external bulk and structure, without a soul in it. Concerning it, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'So, when I have fashioned him completely ...' (*al-Hijr:* 29) this is referring to the body. Allah *the Most High* also says in the story of As-Samiri (the Samaritan): 'So he brought forth for them [out of the fire] a calf, a [mere] body, which had a mooing sound...' (*Ta Ha:* 88). This means the external shape and appearance of a calf, but without a soul.

If someone were to ask if such things could happen to messengers, could they make mistakes and be corrected, then the answer is 'Yes.' It is only blameworthy, however, when one is corrected by someone at his own level. It is not blameworthy to be corrected by someone at a higher level. So, what is the problem if the One correcting Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was his Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* Himself—and not just anyone? Surely, it was an honour for Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* to be corrected by Allah *the Almighty*. For this reason, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* corrected the judgment of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He said: 'O Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you, seeking the approval of your wives? ...' (*at-Tahrim:* 1) Allah *Glorified is He* also said: 'He frowned and turned away because there came to him the blind man.' (*'Abasa:* 1-2) Did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* feel too proud to be corrected by his Lord? No, never did he feel this way, and the clear proof of this fact is that he was the one who conveyed this correction to us and informed us of it. A person would not tell people something about himself unless there is honour in it for himself.

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱغۡفِرۡ لِي وَهَبۡ لِي مُلۡكٗا لَّا يَنۢبَغِي لِأَحَدٖ مِّنۢ بَعۡدِيٓۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلۡوَهَّابُ ٣٥

He turned to Us and prayed: 'Lord forgive me! Grant me such power as no one after me will have – You are the Most Generous Provider' [35] (The Quran, *Sad:* 35)

This noble verse gives us a glimpse into the story of our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Each glimpse into his life provides a distinct lesson, an admonition and an honourable stance taken by our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* in the course of his mission. The first glimpse into his story is of his father Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* when he passed judgment in the case of the crop of a field (into which some sheep strayed by night and grazed). The field with its crop belonged to a certain man, but along came the livestock of another man and ate the former's crop. The True Lord *the Most High* related the story of the judgment that Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* had passed and what the final judgment was after his son Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* corrected it on the basis of his viewpoint. Then Allah affirmed the soundness of the two judges, saying: 'And [remember] Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) [how it was] when both of them gave judgment concerning the field into which some people's sheep had strayed by night and pastured therein, and [how] We bore witness to their judgment, for [though] We made Sulaiman (Solomon) understand the case [more profoundly], yet We vouchsafed unto both of them sound judgment and knowledge [of right and wrong] ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 78-79). The words, '...had strayed by night and pastured therein ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 78) mean that the sheep spread out in the field and ate the harvest.

When the case was presented to Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* he judged that the owner of the crop should take possession of the herd. However, on hearing this judgment, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* rejected it and said, 'Rather, give the field to the owner of the sheep for him to cultivate until it is restored to the way it has been before the sheep grazed and give the sheep to the owner of the field for him to benefit from them.' Once the field was good again, it should be given back to its owner, and the sheep should be given back to their owner. It is as though Allah *the Most High* inspired Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* to give this sound judgment to amend that of his father, Dawud (David). See how the sanctity of the word of heaven as it applies itself to the word of the inhabitants of the earth? After this, Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* affirmed the soundness of both judges, saying: '... yet We vouchsafed unto both of them sound judgment and knowledge [of right and wrong] ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 79).

So, for a definitive authority passing judgment to correct an authority that previously passed judgment is not indicative of a fault in the original. It is just that this one understood some aspects of the case from a certain perspective and judged accordingly, while the other understood the issue from another perceptive and judged in accordance with it. Therefore, we find within the courts a preliminary verdict and then an appeal. Even after these procedures, a judgment can be repealed. Does the appealed ruling disgrace the preliminary verdict or the repeal disgrace the appeal? No, because the higher ruling takes into account certain factors that have been missed by the lower ruling, and thus, there is no problem.

When we examine this story, we find that scholars do not propound for us the grounds upon which Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* based his ruling, nor do they inform us of the grounds of the judgment that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* pronounced. Having examined this, we say that during the past agriculture did not take place on land that was owned and monopolised by certain people; rather, the earth was a public property. Wherever a person sowed his seeds and the sky watered them until they bore fruit, he could harvest it without having to own the land. In other words, whoever came first would cultivate the land.

Ownership was restricted only to the crop, not to the land. Upon this principle the judgment of our master Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was formed. So long as the land was not the possession of the farmer the issue revolved around the crop and the herd. As for our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* he saw that the crop represented, as we say, a claim staked on the land, and laying claim to a land makes ownership permissible. So, he affirmed that the owner owned the land and judged that the landowner should take the sheep and benefit from them, while the owner of the sheep should take the land and cultivate it until it returned to its former good state. Then each one should take back his own property. Each of them had his viewpoint and based his judgment upon it. Allah says regarding them both: '... yet We vouchsafed unto both of them sound judgment and knowledge [of right and wrong] ...' (*al-Anbiya':* 79).

The other glimpse we get of the life of our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* is the trial that befell him. We said that the origin of the word *fitnah* comes from the melting and burning of a metal to separate the gangue materials and impurities from it so that it becomes purer and harder. The word *fitnah* has been generally applied to any kind of testing that differentiated the good from the bad amongst humanity. So, in this verse it refers to an affliction.

By going deeper into the meaning of *fitnah* (testing*)*, we will find it widespread throughout Allah's entire creation on earth. Each created being is at once a test for others and tested himself. In plainer words, the poor people are a trial for the rich people, and the rich people are a trial for the poor. A rich person is tested through the poor people; will he selfishly withhold Allah's Blessings from them or will he give away from what he possesses? Will he treat the poor with contempt because of their poverty or will he respect Allah's Decree regarding them? Similarly, a poor person is tested by means of the rich people. Will he envy them because of their riches and object to Allah's Decree that he should be poor, or will he be patient and wish abundance for others. The same applies to the strong and the weak, and the healthy and the sick, the ignorant and the learned, and so on. Thus, each of us is a test to others and is himself tested. What is important, however, is who will be successful in this test.

This is a reality that the True Lord, Blessed is He, has clarified in His saying: '... And We have made some of you [people] as trial for others. Will you have patience? ...' (*al-Furqan:* 20) The scholars say that the word *ba`d* (some*)* does not specify a certain individual; rather, it refers to equal parts of a whole that are left indistinct, such as in Allah's saying: '... and We have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service ...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

So who has been raised and who has been outranked? Scholars say that each of us is raised in something and outranked in something else. Consequently, all people are equal. You have your field in which you are proficient and excel others, and so your rank is above them in this area. You also have other domains at which you are not good and know nothing about. So others are ranked above you in them since they surpass you in those areas at which you are not good.

This results from the distribution of gifts and blessings amongst creation, for they are all Allah's created beings. None of them is Allah's son or is descended from or has some kind of relationship with Him. The True Lord, Blessed is He, has scattered His Bounties amongst all His slaves, giving them gifts in equal measure. Had Allah caused every human to combine in his person all the virtues and good qualities, people would not need one another. Rather, Allah wants His created beings to join hands and help one another in their daily lives.

The strong need the weak, and the weak need the strong. The learned need the ignorant, and the ignorant need the learned. This is how people are bound together by need, and not superiority.

We previously shed light on this issue through the example of a Pasha or a VIP who returns from his work and finds the plumbing of his house to be blocked and releases an awful stench. He will rush to find a plumber to clear the blockages. He may well get in his car and go directly to the plumber's place of work and implore him to come back with him. In this situation, the plumber is raised above the Pasha.

I remember one time in Mayt Ghamr in Bursa, a cafe named Babah. The workers there were staging a revolt. They said, 'It is not right for the workers to serve others! It is not right that they should clean peoples' shoes!' When they were asked why they said this, they replied, 'Because it is degrading and humiliating.'

We said to them, 'In that case, we will do it for ourselves.' Thus, indeed, we did to show them. We went on strike, and we each bought our very own shoe polish and polished our shoes. After a while, these people came to the café and complained of unemployment and poverty, pleading with the people to return to the previous set-up. We subsequently discussed this with them, and one of us said to one of them, ‘Tell me, by Allah, when you ask me a question and I answer you, do I make you pay a fee for the answer?' ‘No,’ he answered. ‘If you knew,’ he replied, ‘how much this answer cost me of my life, effort and diligence, along with the trouble my family went through in my upbringing, you would realise that in those days I was subservient to you as you are now subservient to me. Yet, you have only considered us in our times of rest, while you looked at yourselves in your times of toil. The distribution is equal. Each is subservient to the other. It is not a matter of humiliation but mutual integration in daily life.’

This is why the True Lord says: ‘will you have patience’? (*al-Furqan:* 20) This means will we have patience with our mutual trials of each other? Even messengers *peace and blessings be upon them* were tested by means of disbelievers who would persecute and harm them, and disbelievers were tested by means of messengers *peace be upon them*.

Thus, it is from Allah’s blessings that He distributed His gifts and bounties throughout all creation, and He tells us ‘But those who were favoured would not hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess so they would be equal to them therein’ (*an-Nahl:* 71).

Now we return to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and say, ‘Could it be that both prophethood and kingship appealed to Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and he found traces of their love in his heart, so Allah chose to correct his innermost thoughts for him?’ Allah *the Almighty* certainly wants him for greater duties than he was currently involved. This is why he was tested with this, finding himself on his throne like a mere skeleton.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was always well mannered with his Lord and creation. He said, 'O, Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness from every deed by which I sought Your countenance, but it is mixed up with something done not for you.'(1)

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(1) *This was mentioned by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in his book Jawami’ Al-’Ulum wa Al-Hukm on page 27 from the prayer of Mutraf ibn ‘Abdullah. He used to say, ‘O, Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for those things which I have repented to You of but then returned to them. I seek Your forgiveness for those things which I placed upon myself for You but then did not fulfil. I seek Your forgiveness for the things which I claimed were done for the sake of Your Countenance but which became mixed up in my heart with that which You know.’*

This means that things can befall the prophets, and they can be afflicted. Yet, who is this affliction from? It is from Allah, the One Who sent them. The test is something to correct the course of the one tested; it is not out of dislike for him, Allah forbid! So, this is why Allah *the Exalted* afflicted Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. He was preparing him for something greater than being a king of the mundane; his Lord wanted to prepare him for something of the unseen realms (*Al-malakut*).

When Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* returned and repented to his Lord, he said, '... My Lord, forgive me, and bestow upon me a kingdom such as shall not belong to any other after me. Verily, You are the Bestower.' (*Sad:* 35) This means that he repented to his Lord from the illusions that he had. It is as though he said, 'O, Lord, you tested me with kingship and prophethood. This happened to no one before me, and I became deluded by it, so grant me a dominion greater than this that will be appropriate to none after me, and this time I will be faithful and not deceived. O, Lord, give me another chance. Try me.' After Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* made this prayer, his Lord answered him and gave him what he sought.

On account of this, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* respected the prayer of his brother Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. It has been narrated in a Hadith that a devil manifested itself to Prophet Muhammad while he was praying so as to distract him from his prayer. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* grabbed it and was going to tie it to the pillar in the mosque such that the children of Medina might amuse themselves at its expense, but then he remembered the prayer of his brother Sulaiman (Solomon), '... My Lord, forgive me, and bestow upon me a kingdom such as shall not belong to any other after me....' (*Sad:* 35). Thus, he did not do it out of respect for Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*(1).

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (541), in Bab Al-Masajid (chapter 8 Hadith 39), on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who said that Prophet Muhammad said, 'Indeed an 'ifrit from the jinn started to assault me yesterday to distract me from my prayer. Allah gave me power over him, so I repelled him fiercely. I was going to bind him to the side of one of the pillars of the mosque such that you would all wake up and see him, but then I remembered the words of my brother Sulaiman (Solomon), "O, my Sustainer! Forgive me my sins, and bestow upon me the gift of a kingdom which may not suit anyone after me." So, Allah drove him away in disgrace.'*

The word (*Al-wahhab*) ‘the Bestower’ (*Sad:* 35) is a hyperbole (*sighat al-mubalagha*), and it indicates a great deal of giving. We said previously that *Al-hiba* is a grant that has no recompense. Hence, no one can achieve kingship by means of his own skill or effort but only as a gift from Allah *the Exalted*. It is Allah Who grants dominion, and He did so even to the disbeliever who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* about his Lord. Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Have you not considered the one who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship?’ (*al-Baqara:* 258) He also says: ‘Say, "O, Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will"’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26).

فَسَخَّرۡنَا لَهُ ٱلرِّيحَ تَجۡرِي بِأَمۡرِهِۦ رُخَآءً حَيۡثُ أَصَابَ (٣٦) وَٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ كُلَّ بَنَّآءٖ وَغَوَّاصٖ (٣٧)
وَءَاخَرِينَ مُقَرَّنِينَ فِي ٱلۡأَصۡفَادِ (٣٨) هَٰذَا عَطَآؤُنَا فَٱمۡنُنۡ أَوۡ أَمۡسِكۡ بِغَيۡرِ حِسَابٖ (٣٩)

So, We gave him power over the wind, which at his request ran gently wherever he willed [36] and the jinns, every kind of builder and diver [37] and others chained in fetters [38] This is Our gift, so give or withhold as you wish without account [39] (The Quran, *Sad:* 36-39)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So, We gave him power over the wind...’ (*Sad:* 36); the subjugation of the wind to Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was the first power that was added to his previous dominion. The word (*rukha'a*) ‘gently’ (*Sad:* 36) means softly and delicately, like a horse that carries its rider smoothly without jerking him or causing him to fall. Some of the scholars, however, said that the word ‘gently’ in this verse contradicts with the concept of ‘... the stormy wind ...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 81). To this we say that it was indeed stormy, but that was in another situation. The word *rih* (wind) has several different uses in the story. If the wind bore him in leisure, then it was soft and gentle, and if it was carrying things for him, then it was vigorous. Thus, it is used to describe different things.

We have said previously that if the word *rih* comes like this in the singular, then it is indicative of punishment as in the verses that describe the punishment of the tribe of 'Ad, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And in 'Ad [was a sign], when We sent against them the barren wind, it left nothing of what it came upon but that it made it like disintegrated ruins' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41-42). If it comes in the plural, however, it depicts bearing goodness, like when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have sent the fertilising winds and sent down water from the sky and given you drink from it' (*al-Hijr:* 22).

It is well known that air pressure is what keeps things in equilibrium. So, if we vacuumed all the air from one side of a building, for example, it would collapse in the same direction because air pressure is what supports it and keeps it in equilibrium. If Allah *the Almighty* decides to destroy something by means of the wind, then He causes it to blow from one direction. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying that the wind should only bring adversity and punishment, but He subjugated it to Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* such that in his hands it brought only good: 'So, We gave him power over the wind, which at his request ran gently wherever he willed…' (*Sad:* 36).

Allah's saying, '... wherever he willed' means that wherever he wanted it to go it went. This means that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* would address the wind, which speaks no language. Nevertheless, Allah *the Exalted* made it understand. It is as though he was the commander, and the wind was his subject. The True Lord gave each species its own language through which it could communicate. If Allah causes a human to understand one of these languages, he would indeed understand it and could address any species with it. Another example of this is when Sulaiman said, 'O, people, we have been taught the language of birds' (*an-Naml:* 16).

We were once told about the crocodiles of the Upper Nile and of the symbiosis between them and the birds that feed on the remnants left between their teeth. The crocodile, after eating its food, comes ashore and opens its mouth. The birds then come and pick the remnants from between the crocodile's teeth to clean them. If the birds sense the presence of hunters, they would make a special noise that crocodiles recognise. Upon hearing it, a crocodile would immediately take to the water to save itself from the hunters. This is how crocodiles support the survival of birds, and birds support the survival of crocodiles. So, ponder how such ample exchange of benefit is present in the world of birds and animals.

Nobody can reach the level of understanding animals or the birds except someone to whom Allah has given this ability. Allah *the Most High* gave this special gift to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and thus he understood the birds and the ants. Allah tells us that when Sulaiman (Solomon) and his soldiers came to the Valley of the Ants, one ant said, 'Ants! Go into your homes, in case Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts unwittingly crush you.' Sulaiman (Solomon) smiled broadly at its words and said, 'Lord, inspire me to be thankful for the blessings You have granted me and my parents, and to do good deeds that please You; admit me by Your grace into the ranks of Your righteous servants.' (*an-Naml:* 18-19) So, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* understood them and perceived that Allah *the Exalted* had bestowed this blessing upon him and that this called for gratitude.

Similarly, he understood the hoopoe, spoke to it and had a conversation with it. The story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the hoopoe shows us that anyone who takes responsibility for a matter must follow it up closely to be able to tell the attentive from the inattentive.

Had Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* not been checking for the hoopoe, he would not have realised that it was not present. He wondered where the hoopoe was. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and he took attendance of the birds and said, "Why do I not see the hoopoe, or is he amongst the absent?’ (*an-Naml:* 20) This indicates that he thought the hoopoe was maybe present, but he could not see it. This is why he ‘wondered’ if the hoopoe was absent because he had looked but did not find it. Then, the hoopoe came, and Allah narrates his story: ‘But the hoopoe stayed not long and said, "I have encompassed [in knowledge] that which you have not encompassed, and I have come to you from Sheba with certain news. Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne."’ (*an-Naml:* 22-23)

The thing that bothered it was that the Queen and her people were worshipping the sun instead of Allah *the Most High*. The hoopoe said, ‘…and Satan has made their deeds pleasing to them and averted them from [His] Way, so they are not guided.’ (*an-Naml:* 24)

This glimpse of the story teaches us that when you assign someone to some duty, you must not turn away from this person when he consults with him;

rather, you should hear his side, respect his opinion, and not bear down on him. We also learn that the hoopoe was aware of the cause of monotheism and faith.

The hoopoe teaches us that every person must preserve his means of subsistence and keep them always in mind if he wants to live a noble life, that is, because one's means of subsistence are a priority, before setting goals and planning. We understand this from the hoopoe's questions when he wondered '[And] so they do not prostrate to Allah Who brings forth what is hidden within the heavens and the earth and knows what you conceal and what you declare.' (*an-Naml:* 25) However, why does he specify *Al-khab'* – (what is hidden or concealed), which means things that are hidden under the earth? Scholars say it is because the majority of the hoopoe's food comes from under the ground. This is why Allah gave it a long beak, so it can peck the earth and extract its food.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'and the jinns, every kind of builder and diver' (*Sad:* 37) which means we also subjected jinns to him. Of these are the 'builders' who populate the land and work and strive thereon, and of them are the 'divers' who work in the sea and extract its treasures. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and others ...' (*Sad:* 38), which refers to the jinns '... chained in fetters.' (*Sad:* 38) This means that they were tied and shackled with chains. The word *asfad* (fetters) is the plural of *safd*, and it means a chain. So, these ones in chains are not free like the builders and the divers. However, why has Allah *the Exalted* kept these ones chained up and left others free? Scholars say it is because there are obedient and righteous jinns, and there are disobedient ones who refuse Allah's Way. The ones who were bound in chains could also be those who rebelled against Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Thus, it seems that the righteous ones served him by virtue of their faith, and the wicked ones served him by virtue of their fetters and chains; the former was out of desire, and the latter was out of fear.

Then Allah says, '(And We told him,) "This is Our gift ..."' (*Sad:* 39), and this gift fits the request Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* made when he asked Allah for a dominion that would not be fitting to any other than him. He said, '...Verily, You are the Bestower!' (*Sad:* 35), and Allah *Glorified is He* answered him by saying, '... This is Our gift ...' (*Sad:* 39); given that We have granted you this, We will have you do with it as you will, for We trust you:

‘... so give or withhold as you wish without account!’ (*Sad:* 39) This means that you are free to give or withhold.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* only granted Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* free reign because he trusted him to be just and righteous since he did promise Allah to be just and righteous when he asked Him for this gift. It is related that he used only to eat the grits and bran of the grains and leave the best part for the public and slaves. Hence, it turned out he did not seek this broad dominion and blessing so that he might indulge or boast thereof. He did so only so that he could put it into the service of Allah's Cause and because he was destined to face the greatest power of that time. It is sufficient that Allah *the Exalted* described this power as having a magnificent throne.

In this confrontation the value of dominion and power becomes manifest. When Bilqis tried to tempt him with wealth, he rebuked her for offering him wealth and said, ‘Do you provide me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. Rather, it is you who rejoice in your gift.’ (*an-Naml:* 36)

This is where the wisdom manifests; when Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* sought a dominion that would not be fitting to anyone who would come after him, he sought it so that no one may be more distinguished than him and so that no one would try to tempt, bribe or otherwise make him incline to wealth as Bilqis tried with her vast kingdom in the highlands of Yemen during those times.

What shows the shrewdness of Bilqis in this situation is that she consulted with the nobles and wisest of her people who were her counsellors. She said, ‘O, eminent ones, indeed, to me has been delivered a noble letter. Indeed, it is from Sulaiman (Solomon), and indeed, it reads: "In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful."’ (*an-Naml:* 29-30)

We may first ask, ‘How did she know it was a "gracious letter"?' Scholars say that she referred to it as such because she found it on her pillow without it being brought by a messenger or anyone, nor did anyone seek permission to see her and was refused by the guards. This is how she knew it came from a higher authority. The affair of the letter’s owner must necessarily be elevated above hers since the letter reached her by such means. This is why she consulted her people. She said, ‘O, eminent ones, advise me in my affair. I would not decide a matter except when you are present with me [to advise].' (*an-Naml:* 32) The story ends up with her saying that she has wronged herself, and so she decided to devote herself, with Sulaiman (Solomon), to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. Allah says: 'and I [Bilqis] submit with Sulaiman (Solomon) to Allah, Lord of the worlds.' (*an-Naml:* 44)

So, Allah's saying, '...This is Our gift, so give or withhold as you wish without account.' (*Sad:* 39), shows that His gift to prophets is not for boasting or pride, but a gift to serve Allah's Cause. This is why we see that those who have been granted glimpses of the Unseen do not use their knowledge for personal gain. Perhaps, sometimes miracles appear at their hands or on their tongues, and they do not realise it. They break the laws of nature without even realising it. This is because Allah *the Exalted* gifted them some of his secrets, and they do not seek to use them for raising themselves above others but to increase and deepen their servitude to Allah so that they could be role models for all beings, thus guiding them to the path of the truth.

In this respect, it is related(1) that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* prayed for rain once when it had ceased to fall and the ground had dried up. He made the weak children, elders, women and even the animals go out as well. It is as though he were saying, 'O, Lord, if You have withheld the rain from us because of our sins then give us water for the sake of these.' Despite this, it did not rain, and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* decided to leave. While he was heading home, he came across a slave standing amongst some boulders raising his hands and gazing toward the heavens. 'Umar said afterwards, 'By Allah, he had not put his hands down before the rain began pouring like water from a water skin.' 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was surprised at this; how was it that his prayers were not answered and yet this slave's were! He watched the slave closely until he studied his face, and then he went to the slave trader and said to him, 'Show me your slaves.' The slave trader thought that he wanted to buy one and thus showed him the best he had, those with sound postures and fit muscles, but 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* did not give any of these a second glance. The man said to him, 'By Allah, I only have this other slave who is tiresome (*kall*) to his master, whatever he is turned to, he brings no good.’

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(1) The story of '*Umar ibn Al-Khattab* with the slave during the prayer to Allah to make the rain fall

When the said slave came, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* recognised him and said to him, ‘Is it you?’ The slave looked at him, raised his eyes to the sky and said, ‘O, Allah, even as you have exposed me amongst your created beings, take me without testing me.’ Thus, he passed away then and there. This is the state of one upon whom sainthood and miracles manifest. He is not happy with them and he does not want to be made known to the people. He does not desire miracles but is content with the affection that Allah shows to him by means of them.

وَإِنَّ لَهُۥ عِندَنَا لَزُلْفَىٰ وَحُسْنَ مَـَٔابٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

His reward will be nearness to Us, and a good place to return to [40] (The Quran, *Sad:* 40)

The word *zulfa* means nearness or a state of proximity. That Allah gave him a dominion unfitting for any who would come after him, to do with it as he saw fit, is proof of this closeness.

He could give to whomever He willed and hold back from whomever He willed. Allah *Glorified is He* gave him this gift because He knew that Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* would not use it in tyranny or oppression; rather, he would use it in the way that Allah wanted. He was entrusted with Allah’s gift.

The phrase, ‘and a good place to return to’ (*Sad:* 40) refers to an excellent welcome with Allah *the Exalted* on the Day of Judgment.

The sequence of the Quran then takes us to the story of another prophet, Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him*:

وَٱذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَآ أَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنِّى مَسَّنِىَ ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنُ بِنُصْبٍ وَعَذَابٍ ﴿٤١﴾

Bring to mind Our servant Job who cried to his Lord, ‘Satan has afflicted me with weariness and suffering’ [41] (The Quran, *Sad:* 41)

Allah says, ‘Bring to mind’ (*Sad:* 41), which means remember with praise, ‘Our servant Ayyub (Job)’ (*Sad:* 41). That Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* is described in this verse as being a slave is an honour for him, for it is an indication of the affection that the Lord has for His slaves. We said previously that slavery is a hateful word to mankind because the slavery of people is repressive and abusive since the master takes the best fruits of his slave's labour. As for slavery to Allah, it is praiseworthy and beloved because in it the slave gets the best of his Master.

For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* when He bestowed His gift upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during the Night Journey, He attributed it to his servitude to Him and said that He transported 'His servant' by night. (*al-Isra':* 1) When the hospitality of the earth got so miserly, particularly after the Ta'if incident, His Lord wanted to show him the hospitality of the heavens! The characteristic that raised Muhammad to this level was the sincerity of his servitude to his Lord.

Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* says, '...Satan has afflicted me with weariness and suffering.' (*Sad:* 41) The word *Al-mass* literally means feather-like, gentle contact. It refers to a lighter degree of contact than that meant by the Arabic word *Al-lams* (touch). Scholars say that he said this because he had fallen very ill with a disease that affected his skin. It is as though *Shaytan* (Satan) was hovering around him insinuating evil thoughts, saying to him, 'How could Allah have done this to you when you are a messenger? How could He leave you like this and not cure you?'

This is how body suffering, pain and *Shaytan's* insinuations were combined against Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him*. This is why He said, '…weariness and suffering' (*Sad:* 41). The word *nusb* with a *damma* on the letter *nun* is just like the words *nasab* with a *fatha* and *nassab,* and they all mean weariness. Like the words *bukhl* and *bakhal*, both having the same meaning: stinginess.

Scholars say that '*Shaytan's* touch' in reality is an action of Allah's. It is Allah Who 'does' since *Shaytan* and his insinuations are a cause, while Allah is the Creator of causes (the One Who originates causes). '*Shaytan's* touch' (*mass Ash-Shaytan*) refers to his insinuations which occupied Prophet Ayyub's mind. It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* to wake up to the fact that it was not correct for these insinuations to be in his mind.

When sickness and the insinuations of the *Shaytan* combined afflicted Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* he weakened and turned to his Lord. He prayed to Him to cut off *Shaytan's* whispers since warding them off needs a strong power, and his strength was dwindled by his sickness. This is why he prayed to Allah, so that he would not be further weakened by the insinuations of *Shaytan*. When he prayed to Allah, He *the Most High* answered him:

ٱرۡكُضۡ بِرِجۡلِكَۖ هَٰذَا مُغۡتَسَلُۢ بَارِدٞ وَشَرَابٞ ﴿٤٢﴾

Stamp your foot! Here is cool water for you to wash in and drink [42] (The Quran, *Sad:* 42)

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to him, 'I am not afflicting you out of dislike for you or to make things difficult for you. I only wish to hear from you that you hate the one who is occupying your mind with something that distances you from Me.' 'Stamp your foot!...' (*Sad:* 42) means that the cure is very easy for Allah. As if Allah *the Almighty* is saying, 'The cure is right at your very feet.' The word *rakd* literally means to thrust with speed and force. One says '*rakadat Al-faras*' which means, 'I spurred the horse with my feet so it would go faster.' The sequence of events then moves from stamping the feet directly to the result: '... Here is cool water for you to wash in and drink!' (*Sad:* 42) Allah did not say, 'so he stamped the ground, and the water came out… etc., He summed it up and sufficed with the command *urkud* (stamp).

The disease which afflicted Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* appears to have been a skin infection of some kind that caused abscesses to erupt on his skin. Nowadays, we see dermatologists sometimes curing skin diseases with topical ointments that treat the symptoms without curing the real cause of the disease.

It was part of Allah's Mercy to Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* that He made his ultimate cure both internal and external through a single stamp that released the water wherein he could wash himself with the cool water to treat the external symptoms and drink it to cure the internal causes of the disease.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then goes on to speak of some of His blessings upon Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* His Prophet:

وَوَهَبۡنَا لَهُۥٓ أَهۡلَهُۥ وَمِثۡلَهُم مَّعَهُمۡ رَحۡمَةٗ مِّنَّا وَذِكۡرَىٰ لِأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ﴿٤٣﴾

And We restored his family to him, with many more like them: a sign of Our mercy and a lesson to all who understand [43] (The Quran, *Sad:* 43)

From Allah's saying, 'We restored his family to him ...' (*Sad:* 43), it appears that some of his family had distanced themselves from him when the illness afflicted him. When Allah cured him, they came back to him. '... with many more like them...' (*Sad:* 43) means that Allah gave him the likes of his family in offspring and followers. '... a sign of Our mercy and a lesson to all who understand.' (*Sad:* 43); the word *dhikra* (sign) refers to a thought that comes to one and turns him towards the object of the reminder, particularly when one is in the process of moving away from that object.

The point of the reminder in this verse is that when he was ill, relief came to him from Allah *the Most High*. His body returned to a state of soundness after it had healed from the disease and its cause. Then his family returned to him and more like them out of concern for his feelings. This is what is meant by Allah's saying: '... a sign of Our mercy ...' (*Sad:* 43). These numerous gifts came as the fruit of his patience and his contentment with Allah's Decree.

So, the reminder that we take from this story is that when difficulties afflict someone, he should turn to Allah and seek refuge with Him from his distress; indeed, who would respond to the distressed or who would remove the illness but Allah? (*an-Naml:* 62)

Allah *Glorified is He* loves to see His slaves seek refuge with Him and that is why He afflicts them. It has been narrated that the angels say, 'O, Lord, Your slave has cried out in prayer to You, and You have not answered him.' So, Allah *the Exalted* replies to them, 'Amongst My slaves are those whose prayers I love. I afflict them so I can hear their voices.'

وَخُذْ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْثًا فَٱضْرِب بِّهِۦ وَلَا تَحْنَثْ ۗ إِنَّا وَجَدْنَٰهُ صَابِرًا ۚ نِّعْمَ ٱلْعَبْدُ ۖ إِنَّهُۥٓ أَوَّابٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

‘Take a small bunch of grass in your hand, and strike [her] with that so as not to break your oath.’ We found him patient in adversity; an excellent servant! He, too, always turned to Allah [44] (The Quran, *Sad:* 44)

The word *dighth* refers to a bunch of grass or of date stalks. The phrase, ‘... so as not to break your oath ...’ (*Sad:* 44) shows us that a vow was made that Allah did not want Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* to break. This verse brings us to a story that is narrated in the *Sunnah.* It was(1) said(2) that the *Shaytan* went to one of Prophet Ayyub’s (Job's) wives and said to her, ‘Ask Ayyub to seek refuge in me, and I will heal him immediately on condition that he says, "Verily, the one who healed me was Shaytan!"' Since she was keen to see him get better, she said to him, ‘By Allah, such-and-such thought came to me.’

Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* said to her, ‘This is *Shaytan*. You listened to him and now you want me to obey him! By Allah, beside Whom there is no other deity, I will whip you 100 times.’ This was the oath that Allah *Glorified is He* did not want Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* to break, so He said to him, ‘Take a small bunch of grass in your hand, and strike (her) with that so as not to break your oath ...’ (*Sad:* 44).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did something similar to this when a man with a big belly (*ahban*) came to him. The word *ahban* comes from the root *habana*, and it means ‘with a big belly’ or with oedema in his stomach. He had committed fornication with a sick and skinny woman, and when he admitted his crime, Prophet Muhammad was afraid that he would die if he performed the prescribed punishment upon him so he ordered them to whip him once with a bunch of hundred date stalks or grass.(1)

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(1) *It was related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his book Az-Zuhdas well as ‘Abd ibn Hamid and Ibn Abu Hatim, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas who said, ‘Once Satan (Iblis) sat in the street with a chest and began dispensing medicines to people. Ayyub’s (Job's) wife said to him, "O, slave of Allah, there is someone here who is afflicted with such-and-such. Can you give him some medicine?" "Yes," he replied, "on the condition that if I cure him he says to me, ‘You cured me.’ I do not want any reward from him other than this." She went to Ayyub (Job) and told him of this, to which he said, "Woe to you! That was Iblis. By Allah, it is upon me to lash you a hundred times if Allah cures me." When Allah cured Ayyub (Job), He commanded him to take a bunch of stalks, so He took a raceme with one hundred stalks on it and struck her once with it.’*

(2) *The story of Ayyub (Job) peace be upon him with Shaytan.*

Allah’s saying, ‘...and strike [her] with that...’ (*Sad:* 44) means ‘since you have promised to whip her then do it this way: "... so as not to break your oath. We found him patient in adversity..."’ (*Sad:* 44). Easing his circumstances was a reward for his patience and his turning to his Lord. Amongst that, Allah *the Almighty* also included any pain that he had to bring down on others since he vowed to whip his wife. So, Allah ordered him to whip her so as not to break his vow, but He reduced the burden so as not to hurt him through his family.

وَٱذۡكُرۡ عِبَٰدَنَآ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسۡحَٰقَ وَيَعۡقُوبَ أُوْلِي ٱلۡأَيۡدِي وَٱلۡأَبۡصَٰرِ ﴿٤٥﴾ إِنَّآ أَخۡلَصۡنَٰهُم
بِخَالِصَةٖ ذِكۡرَى ٱلدَّارِ ﴿٤٦﴾ وَإِنَّهُمۡ عِندَنَا لَمِنَ ٱلۡمُصۡطَفَيۡنَ ٱلۡأَخۡيَارِ ﴿٤٧﴾

Remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all men of strength and vision [45] We caused them to be devoted to Us through their sincere remembrance of the Final Home [46] With Us they will be among the elect, the truly good [47] (The Quran, *Sad:* 45 - 47)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Remember (*udhkur*) ...’ (*Sad:* 45) which means ‘with praise’. He also says: ‘...Our servants...’ (*Sad:* 45); the word *‘ibad* (servants) is the plural of *‘abd*. We have said before that slavery is hateful amongst men, but slavery to Allah is an honour and a source of dignity.

‘... Ibrahim (Abraham) ...’ (*Sad:* 45) was the father of the prophets, and Allah *Glorified is He* granted him ‘...Ishaq (Isaac)...’ (*Sad:* 45) after he submitted to His judgment when He commanded him to sacrifice his son Ismail

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(1) *It is related that Sa’id ibn Sa’d ibn ‘Ubada said, ‘There was a man amongst our houses who was weak and deformed (mukhdaj). He took no notice of the people of the household except for one of the slave-girls with whom he fornicated, even though he was a Muslim. Sa’d raised the matter to the Messenger of Allah who said, "Give him the physical punishment prescribed for him." They said, "O, Messenger of Allah, he is too weak for it. If we lashed him a hundred times, we would kill him." ‘Then take a raceme with one hundred stalks on it and strike him once with it, then let him go," he replied.’ It was related by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/222) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (2574).*

(Ishmael) *peace be upon him*. '...Ya'qub (Jacob) ...' (*Sad:* 45) was the son of Ishaq (Issac) *peace be upon him*. We have already taken a look at the story of these prophets when we explained Allah's saying [on the tongue of Ibrahim (Abraham) to his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*] that he saw in a dream that he was slaying him for sacrifice to Allah, and he asked his advice. (*as-Saffat:* 102) Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not want to go ahead with sacrificing his son until he had clarified for him the command that had been directed towards him. Since he cared greatly for him, he did not want to take him unaware because this could have made him hate his father if he did not know the command beyond his father's action.

He also wanted to share with his son the honour of submitting to Allah *the Exalted* so his son would not be deprived of its rewards. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead' (*as-Saffat:* 103), and then Ibrahim (Abraham) laid Ismail (Ishmael) down on his face, and at this Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We called to him, "O, Ibrahim (Abraham), You have fulfilled the vision." Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good' (*as-Saffat:* 103-105). Both of them have submitted themselves to Allah *the Almighty* so He commanded Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to lift his hand off his son's throat, and Allah gave him a ram to sacrifice and conveyed to us the story as a reminder to all coming generations. This is how Allah *the Exalted* rewards the good-doers, as Ibrahim (Abraham) was a true believing servant of Allah. Then in time, Allah *the Almighty* gave him the glad tiding of Ishaq (Issac) *peace be upon him* who would be a prophet and one of the righteous. So, Ishaq (Issac) came, and Ya'qub (Jacob) came after him as a result of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) submission and obedience to his Lord's Commandment to sacrifice Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*. Allah thus preserved Ismail (Ishmael) and granted Ishaq (Issac) and Ya'qub (Jacob) to Ibrahim (Abraham) from His bounty. For the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not wish to torture people when testing them.

This is why we say that every Muslim has a debt of gratitude to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Why is this? This is due to the fact that had this sacrifice actually happened to Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* it would have become a tribulation from Allah for men that they should seek closeness to Allah through sacrificing their own sons. Prophet Ibrahim

(Abraham) *peace be upon him* however because of his faith and submission of the matter to Allah, carried this burden for us and lifted this matter from us. Otherwise, it would have become an obligatory act of worship for every believer who came after him. He spoke the truth, the one who said:

Submit to your Lord in His judgment, with wisdom,
He judges, and so you may be safe and gain advantage.
Remember the friend of Allah, sacrificing his son,
When his Creator said, ‘And when they had submitted themselves.’

We learn from this that any event or matter which harms man outwardly, tires him or afflicts him should not be looked at without reference to its doer; rather, we must understand any event within the context of the one who did it and link it to him.

We previously clarified this issue saying that imagine, for example, your son came to you with blood covering his face. The first question you would keep asking him is, ‘Who did this to you?’; you would expect him to give you a name. If your son said to you, ‘My uncle hit me’, you would calm down a bit thinking that maybe he has done something to make his uncle hit him. However, if he gave you the name of a person who is your enemy, you will get furious. Thus, one cannot judge an action except within the context of its doer since depending upon the relationship between the action and its doer the degree of good or evil therein is decided.

As for the phrase (*ulil-aydi wa al-absar*), ' men of strength and vision’ (*Sad:* 45), the first part means ‘those who have *aydi*’. *Aydi* (hands) is the plural of *yad* (hand), but it can also be used to refer to actions performed by the hand. One might say, ‘So-and-so has a hand over me’ which means in Arabic that he has done something good for me. Since most actions are undertaken by the hands, thus, acts of charity that are done by the hand are given the name of the limb that performs them. This is why a poet said:

Abounding favours over me, he has done,
Them I could not count, but of them I am one

There is a difference between an act that is accomplished and stands on its own, and another which necessitates a response from another party. When, for example, we want to spend and give, he who has wealth can give by his very hand. As for the one who has nothing, he cannot give anything, but he can advise those who have wealth to give out from it.

Allah *the Almighty* tells us that there is no blame on the weak, the sick or those who have no means to equip themselves, provided that they are sincere towards Allah and His Prophet: ‘here is not upon the doers of good any cause [for blame]’ (*at-Tawba:* 91).

When you advise someone to give out charity, this action is not of the hand but of the tongue. Nevertheless, because the hand is the instrument by which most actions are done, we attribute all goodness to the hands. Allah *Glorified is He* also reminds us and says: ‘Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you [O, Muhammad] are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. The hand of Allah is over their hands’ (*al-Fath:* 10).

If a man finds he has no wealth and is unable to give verbal advice, then Allah *the Exalted* will certainly not prevent him from performing good actions relating to spending. It suffices him to be happy with those who spend and to be pleased by the gifts given to others.

An example(1) of this is the man who was heard praying at the *Ka’ba* and saying, ‘O, Allah, You know that I disobey you, yet I love those who obey You.' *Al-Asma’i* heard a man praying at the *Multazam* door saying, ‘O, Lord, I know that I disobey you, and I am ashamed to ask of You when I am disobedient, but there is no Allah but You, so to whom should I go?’ *Al-Asma’i* said to him, ‘You there! Indeed, your Lord has forgiven you because you have placed your request in a befitting manner.’

It is well known that a believer should put great effort into his supplications, especially at the *Multazam* door, and should try to make his supplications and requests befitting to this honourable place.

Another level that Allah *the Exalted* has provided for the one who has nothing to give, to not be deprived of the reward of giving, is to be sad about having nothing to spend. Allah *the Almighty* says that there is no blame to those[1] who, when they came to the Prophet seeking mounts, were told by him, ‘I cannot find any mounts for you’, so they turned away, their eyes overflowing with tears out of sorrow that they had no means to spend on the mounts to be able to accompany the prophet in his battle’ (*at-Tawba:* 92). Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not deprive a believer of having a share in spending, even if he had nothing.

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(1) *The story of Al-Asma’i with the man who was praying at the door of the Ka’ba*

Amongst the other meanings of the word *yad* is ‘strength’ as when Allah says that His Hand is over their hands. Thus, the meaning of *ulil-aydi* is ‘those endowed with strength’ which means those strong in their obedience to Allah.

Wa Al-absar (and vision) refers to insight in faith, wisdom and knowledge. As for the vision relevant to the sense of sight, both believers and disbelievers have it. So, in this verse, *absar* means seeing and beyond, insight upon insight.

Sight on its own is not enough because Allah’s signs in creation are a ‘given’ factor as we say in mathematics. These signs need penetrating insight to be able to reach the objective, which believes in the One Who granted us these givens.

When eyes look at the universe and see Allah’s signs within it, but then neither intellect nor feelings are engaged nor do they lead to realising the Designer and Creator, then there is no value in these eyes. Thus, *absar* in this verse refers to those who have inner sight that has engaged their intellect and feelings with the signs they see and those who know that this universe could only be attributable to a manifest, capable and dominating power that has no likeness unto him. Had there been a partner, his effect would have manifested,

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(1) *Muhammad ibn Ka’b Al-Qurtubi said, ‘They were seven of them: Salim ibn ‘Awf of Banu ‘Amr ibn ‘Awf, Harmi Ibn ‘Amr of BanuWaqif, ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Ka’b and Yakni Abu Layla of Banu Mazin ibn Najjar, Fadlullah of Banu Al-Mu’alla and ‘Amr ibn ‘Utba and ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr Al-Muzani of Banu Salama. (Tafsir ibn Kathir 2/381). As-Suyuti mentions in his book Asbab aN-Nuzul that Ibn Abu Hatim relates via Al-’Awfi on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas that he said, 'Prophet Muhammad commanded the people to set forth for battle with him. A group of companions came to him, amongst them was ‘Abdullah ibn Mu’qal Al-Muzani who said, "O, Messenger of Allah, carry us with you." "By Allah," he replied, "I find nothing on which to carry you." So, they turned away and wept. It was hard for them to be held back from the jihad, and they had neither transport nor money. So, Allah revealed regarding them the verse: “Nor there is blame on those who, when they came to you [O, Prophet] with the request to provide them with mounts ...” (at-Tawba: 92).*

and he would have defended his rights to sovereignty. So long as this opponent does not manifest, and no one claims to have created anything, then it is simply a matter of submitting to the One Who claims it.

This is why Allah says: ‘[O, Muhammad], "If there had been with Him [other] gods, as they say, then they [each] would have sought a way to the Owner of the Throne."’ (*al-Isra’:* 42)

Allah *the Almighty* mentions the hands before the eyes because the work of the hands is the outcome of vision. One sees Allah’s signs in creation and realises that He is the Lord of all, the Creator of all and the Provider of all. The result of this is that our hearts soften towards the needy, and we give charity to them because maybe one day we will be in their same position and need someone to give us. We do not envy the rich when we are needy because the goodness of the rich will return to us anyway.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* commands those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children and says: ‘and let those [executors and guardians] fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice’ (*an-Nisa’:* 9). Allah *Glorified is He* also tells us of the orphans whose father was a righteous man and says: ‘and their father had been righteous’ (*al-Kahf:* 82).

Allah then says, ‘We caused them to be devoted to us’ (*Sad:* 46). *Akhlasnahum* means ‘what We gave them was purely for them’. This thing that they have been given is something which constantly turns their minds towards the Hereafter, the abode of recompense. By means of this remembrance, a person remains constantly aware of the reward of obedience and the recompense of disobedience, and since he keeps these outcomes in mind, he becomes obedient and distances himself from disobedience.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in clarifying this issue, 'When the fornicator is committing fornication, he is not a believer! When the thief if stealing, he is not a believer! When the drunkard is drinking, he is not a believer!'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim. Al-Bukhari relates it in his Sahih (2475) and Muslim in his Sahih (57) in the chapter Kitab Al-iman on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Why did He negate belief for these cases? The scholars say that it is because they are heedless of the outcome of their actions and heedless of the recompense. Heedlessness makes us lazy about the acts of obedience, makes us fall into disobedience, and deludes us. If men were always mindful of the recompense of disobedience, they would not fall into it.

We have previously given a parable for this: imagine a young man with an evil lust, and we told him that we will give him what he wants, but when the night is over, we will take him to a burning oven and put him inside it for one hour. What do you think this young man will do? Of course, he will abstain from his sin and flee from it. Why is this so? This is due to him seeing the consequences and visualising the punishment!

Similar to this is the student who studies hard, to the extent that he forgets to eat or drink. Why does he do this? This is due to him thinking of the sweetness of success, the nobility of excellence and the high status he will have amongst his family and friends. Contrary to the negligent student, he acts so because he is heedless of the consequences of his neglect and the humiliation of failure once the results come out.

The phrase *dhikra ad-dar* (the remembrance of the final Home) means he remembers it constantly; he bears in mind the reward for obedience and embarks upon it, along with bearing in mind the punishment for sin and fleeing from it.

Allah's saying, '…With Us, they will be amongst the elect, the truly good' (*Sad:* 47) means they are of those whom Allah has chosen. Allah *the Most High* selects from amongst His creation; He selects particular times and particular places as He wills. Amongst the places He selected are the *Ka'ba* and *Bayt Al-Maqdis;* amongst the times He selected Ramadan; amongst mankind He selected the messengers, and amongst the angels He selected messengers. This selection is not out of favouritism for the one chosen; rather, it is a trust placed upon the one chosen to spread goodness amongst his kind. Messengers are not selected out of indulgence; rather, it is a great burden pertaining to themselves, their families, and their wealth.

Similarly, selecting *Ramadan* is not just for obeying and worshipping Allah during *Ramadan* but for spreading obedience throughout all our times; after all, we take from *Ramadan* the energy needed for the whole year. Thus, selecting times, places, people, or angels are not for fun but for spreading goodness throughout all of the creation.

The word (*Al-akhyar*) 'the truly good' (*Sad:* 47) is the plural of *khayyir*, and it means that Allah chose them because of the goodness in them. This is what qualified them for the selection.

وَٱذۡكُرۡ إِسۡمَٰعِيلَ وَٱلۡيَسَعَ وَذَا ٱلۡكِفۡلِۖ وَكُلّٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَخۡيَارِ ﴿٤٨﴾

And remember Our servants Ishmael, Elisha,
and Dhul-Kifl, each of them truly good [48]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 48)

Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* is well known to us through his story with his father, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*. The difference of opinion amongst scholars here surrounds Prophet Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) *peace be upon him* because there are some people whom Allah mentioned in the context of the messengers, yet He mentioned only their names and descriptions. In this verse, Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) *peace be upon him* is mentioned with this description: 'With Us, they will be amongst the elect, the truly good.' (*Sad:* 47)

Elyas (Elijah) *peace be upon him* is unknown to us except in name. The Quran does not tell us who he was or when or to whom he was sent, and there is no mention of the teachings he brought. Similarly, the Quran mentions only Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) and describes him in this verse as being of 'the elect, the truly good'. In the chapter of *al-Anbiya'*, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'and [mention] Ismail (Ishmael) and Idris (Enoch) and Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel); all were of the patient' (*al-Anbiya':* 85-86).

He is described once as being 'from the truly righteous', once as 'from the steadfast' and once as 'from the truly good, and for this Allah admitted him into the domain of His Mercy. It is because of this that the scholars have differed about him; was he a messenger or not? The majority of scholars(1) say that he was, the proof being that Allah included him amongst these other messengers.

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(1) *Some scholars believed that he was not a prophet but one of the righteous men of the children of Israel. Ibn Kathir considered the evidence for his being a prophet to be stronger because Allah associated him with the prophets. He said in the chapter of al-Anbiya': 'And=*

Amongst the things that are said of Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel)(1) is that he lived in the time of Elyas (Elijah) *peace be upon him* and was one of his followers. Elyas (Elijah) *peace be upon him* desired to appoint someone as his successor and wanted to see, in the last days of his life, how this person would act around the people. Elyas (Elijah) was so devoted to the cause of Allah, that when he no longer had the strength to fulfil his role, he wanted to test the person he would choose and see what he would do. So, he sat amongst his people and asked, 'Who will accept three things from me (*'man yataqabbal minni bi thalath'*)?' The letter *bi* usually precedes a price, as when one says, 'I bought such-and-such for such-and-such (*ishtaraytu kadha bi kadha*).' So, his question means that whoever takes responsibility for three things I will appoint him as my successor. Then he said, counting these three things: '... he fasts during the day, stands in vigil prayer during the night, and does not lose his temper.' A man of unremarkable countenance stood up and said, 'Me.'

So, Elyas (Elijah) asked him, 'You will fast the day, stand in prayer at night and will not lose your temper?' 'Yes,' he answered, but Elyas (Elijah) still rejected him. The next day Elyas (Elijah) *peace be upon him* sat in his gathering and made the same proposition to the people. The same man stood up and said, 'Me.' So, Elyas (Elijah) knew that the man had conviction and was resolved to carry out this duty so he appointed him as his successor over the people.(2)

The scholars have discussed these three conditions that Prophet Elyas (Elijah) *peace be upon him* instituted as tenets for appointing a successor. They

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= *remember Ismail (Ishmael), Idris (Enoch), and Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel); they were all steadfast. We admitted them to Our Mercy. They were truly righteous.' (al-Anbiya': 85-86) Ibn Kathir said in Al-Bidaya wa An-Nihaya (1/227), 'It seems obvious from his being mentioned and praised in the Gracious Quran alongside prophets that he is a prophet may his Lord send peace and blessings upon him. This is the well-known position (Al-mashhur).*

(1) *The story of Elyas (Elijah) and Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) peace be upon them when Elyas (Elijah) wanted someone to succeed him.*

(2) *As-Suyuti relates this hadith about the prophets of Allah Elyas (Elijah) and Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) peace be upon them in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (5/661) and ascribes it to ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of Mujahid (5/663). He also ascribes it to 'Abd ibn Hamid and Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya in Dhamm Al-Ghadab and to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Al-Harith (5/663). Kitab Al-Qudahhe ascribes it to Ibn Sa`id An-Naqqash on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas.*

said that the one who fasts by day refrains from that which Allah *the Most High* has made lawful when not fasting, and by means of this, he has insured to keep his distance from the unlawful. The one who prays at night has abandoned rest and comfort so as to get closer to his Lord, and so he would not take up such a position for luxury or comfort but to fulfil its charges. Had he desired comfort, he would have slept to his heart's content.

As for controlling temper, it is a trait that must be present in whoever would lead his charge or take part in judging between people. It is obvious that the masses are diverse regarding their character and traits, so it is necessary for anyone who is taking responsibility for them to be forbearing and hard to anger. This is because anger clouds the intellect and hinders the natural process to the right choices or right judgments. This is why a judge is told 'restrain yourself' when he gets angry, i.e. because no one is fit for the position of judgment when he is angry.

Thus, he requested someone in control of his temper because anger impedes rationality, aptitude, and impartiality which will result in unsound judgments.

Scholars say of Dhul-Kifl's (Ezekiel's) pledge not to lose his temper that Shaytan was unable to make any progress regarding his fasting during the day or his praying at night so he decided to make him angry. He sent some of his progeny to him to make him angry, but Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) *peace be upon him* was unperturbed, so he said to them, 'Leave him to me. I will take care of this matter myself.'

Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) *peace be upon him*(1) would sleep only once a day, a short nap, and this would be all the sleep he got by day or night. He would order his servant not to allow anyone to interrupt him during this short time, and this was when Shaytan (Satan) lay in wait for him. He knocked on Dhul-Kifl's (Ezekiel's) door and made a racket saying, 'I am a man who has been wronged by his people. They did such-and-such to me, and I want you to give me justice.' Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) *peace be upon him* replied, 'Did you not know that this is the time during which I rest. Go and come back at the time when I sit to judge between people, and I will judge your affair.'

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(1) The story of Dhul Kifl (Job) with the devil

The next day Shaytan came and did as the day before. When he came on the third day, he found the door locked, but he found his way in to Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) *peace be upon him* by means of his secret passage. Scholars say he entered by means of a small window while the guard was distracted and knocked on the door of Dhul-Kifl's (Ezekiel's) bedroom.

When he saw him, he said, 'How did you get in?' At which Shaytan hesitated, so he continued, 'So, it is you then!' (i.e. Shaytan). At this, he replied, 'By Allah, I have schemed so much to get you angry but have been unsuccessful' Then, he (Satan) departed.(1)

As for the difference of opinion between the scholars about the prophethood of Dhul-Kifl (Ezekiel) *peace be upon him* I wish to extricate the scholars from their differences by coming to a point upon which we can agree. They say that the word *kifl* is derived from the word *takafful*, as when Allah said that he placed Maryam (Mary) in the care of Zakaryya (Zechariah); *kaffalaha* means a protector and supporter. Those who said he was a messenger sought to prove their case by means of two points: The first is that Allah mentioned him amongst the messengers, and the second is that Elyas (Elijah) appointed him as his successor; the True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* accepted this and did not change it. This indicates Allah's consent to the matter, just as He approved the request of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he asked his Lord to boost him by means of his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* who was better in speaking skills, so Musa (Moses) asked Allah to send him with him as a helper.(2)

The others say that he was rather just calling people to Allah *the Exalted*. The people were corrupt during his time, and he saw that this corruption could not be removed except by means of a man who was impartial when judging between people and whose verdicts were just. He found himself to have these gifts, so he presented himself to his people as one who would take responsibility for their affairs justly; thus, they elected him. Therefore, in the opinion of these scholars, he was not a messenger but a man who had a methodology similar to those of the messengers.

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(1) As-Suyuti relates this story in his book *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (5/661) on the authority of Mujahid and ascribes it to Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abu Hatim.

(2) The word *Ar-rid'* means a helper and supporter. (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/260).

هَٰذَا ذِكْرٌ ۚ وَإِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ لَحُسْنَ مَـَٔابٍ ﴿٤٩﴾ جَنَّٰتِ عَدْنٍ مُّفَتَّحَةً لَّهُمُ ٱلْأَبْوَٰبُ ﴿٥٠﴾
مُتَّكِـِٔينَ فِيهَا يَدْعُونَ فِيهَا بِفَٰكِهَةٍ كَثِيرَةٍ وَشَرَابٍ ﴿٥١﴾

This is a lesson. The devout will have a good place to return to [49] Gardens of lasting bliss with gates wide open [50] They will be comfortably seated; they will call for abundant fruit and drink [51] (The Quran, *Sad:* 49 - 51)

Allah's saying, 'This' (*Sad:* 49) refers to what was mentioned previously about prophets. The word (*dhikr*) 'is a lesson' (*Sad:* 49) which refers to something to make one remember as when Allah says that if one of the two witnesses should make a mistake, the other one could remind her. (*al-Baqara:* 282) So, Allah says in this verse that He reminds him of the line of messengers and the stances their nations took towards them, how they withstood the stupidity of their people, along with their people's lack of respect for them that included verbal and physical abuse. Allah *the Almighty* reminds Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this, for he suffered harm from his people, so that he should know that he is not the first of the messengers and that what happened to his brethren, the other messengers, will happen to him. If we are to measure the affliction by the immensity of the message, we will realise that Muhammad's share of hurt was greater than that of all the other messengers.

So, Allah's saying, 'This is a lesson' (*Sad:* 49) comes as a consolation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* that he may know that he is not alone in this and that his greatness lies in withstanding the ignorance of his people. This is because when people pretend they do not know their messenger, it indicates that they are benefitting from the prevalent corruption. In this case, the messenger will be an adversary for his people because the more he blocks their corruption, the greater their mockery, harm and enmity towards him will be, and the more they will accuse him of magic, madness, lies, etc.

Such is Allah's Way with anyone who takes up the Message and confronts corruption in the society; he will necessarily find those who will transgress against him and accuse him of falsehood, they will try to discredit him and cast doubts upon his intentions. This is a natural reaction, for it shows that he has impacted their corrupt way of life which indicates the success of his mission.

Allah then says, ‘... and the devout will have a good place to return to:…’ (*Sad:* 49) which means an excellent place on Judgment Day. Thus, this verse is speaking of the Afterlife and the excellent reward that awaits Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this verse, there are two gifts for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him*:

The first is the consolation from Allah’s saying, ‘This is a lesson...’ (*Sad:* 49); secondly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... and the devout will have a good place to return to:…’ (*Sad:* 49). It is as if Allah is saying that this is a reminder to console him, and more importantly, it is the magnificent reward that awaits him in the Hereafter. The Arabic conjunction *wa* (and*)* comes to join the two phrases, ‘This is a lesson ...’ (*Sad:* 49) and ‘... the devout will have a good place to return to’ (*Sad:* 49).

The Arabic word *muttaqun* (pious people) is derived from the root *waqa*, which means to protect an object from any harm that might disrupt it. We use the phrase *ittaqa ash-shay’* to refer to a person using a cover to protect themselves from an imminent harm.

If we look at this lexical root in the Quran, we will find that Allah *Glorified is He* obligated human beings to have *taqwa* (piety) to ward off evil. He made man responsible for protecting (*yaqi*) himself from any evil that may come his way. This root comes in several forms in the Quran. For instance, Allah *the Almighty* uses the phrase: 'Protect yourselves from (the anger of) Allah (*ittaqu-Allah*).' In other instances, He says, 'Protect yourselves from your Lord *(ittaqu Rabbakum)*,' and says: 'Protect yourselves from Me (*ittaquni*).' He also used this word in the phrase, 'Protect yourselves from the Fire (*ittaqu-n-Nar)*', and the phrase, 'Protect yourselves from the captivations of sedition *(ittaqu-l-fitna)*.'

These phrases all share a common meaning because, as we have said, Allah *Glorified is He* has attributes of Majesty and attributes of Beauty. The meaning of the phrase, 'Protect yourself from Allah *Glorified is He*' is, 'Place a barrier between yourself and Allah’s attributes of Majesty such as the Attribute of Retribution (*Al-Muntaqim*), the Attribute of Dominance (*Al-Qahhar*) and the Attribute of Compulsion (*Al-Jabbar*).'

People who want to deviate from Allah’s Way should fear these Divine attributes and restrain themselves from sins. Indeed, we should protect ourselves from Allah’s attributes of Majesty, for the Almighty Allah *Glorified is He* is able to strike sinners suddenly, and they would be unable to endure His vengeance.

We can understand the same meaning from the phrase, 'Protect yourself from the Fire.' Certainly, hellfire is one of Allah’s forces and an effect of His attributes of Majesty and Power.

The Quran uses the word *taqwa* in one instance without specifying from what we should protect ourselves. In this instance, it indicates the complete and comprehensive nature of *taqwa* (protection), whereby a person should protect himself from Allah’s Wrath, whether it be in the form of the fire or the world’s tribulations.

The descriptive words (*husn ma’ab*) '... a good place to return to,' (*Sad:* 49) refer to the most pleasant abode prepared for righteous people. Some scholars claimed that this phrase was referring to the souls returning to their matching bodies on the Day of Judgment, but this opinion is baseless. The valid opinion is that the phrase 'a good place to return to' is referring to the reward prepared for believers in paradise. Therefore, these words are referring to the Gardens of Eden.

We can understand this by looking at the story of the beginning of creation. Before Allah *the Almighty* made the universe, He took a covenant from His created beings in a previous phase that is known as *marhalat adh-dharr* (the phase of spirits). Allah *Glorified is He* described that covenant in the following verses, 'And [remember] as your Lord took from the seeds of Adam, from their backs, their offspring and made them bear witness concerning themselves. [Allah asked,] "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, indeed, we bear witness [that You are our Lord]."' (*al-A‘raf:* 172)

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '[That covenant was made so] that you do not say on the Day of the Resurrection, "Surely, we were heedless of this (faith)", and [so] that you do not say, "Surely, it is our ancient fathers who associated others in worship with Allah, and we were [their] subsequent offspring [who were misguided by them and followed polytheism on their footsteps]. Would You [Allah] punish us for what [previous] wrongdoers performed?"' (*al-A'raf:* 173)

Therefore, the natural disposition of faith was rooted in our hearts in our previous lives before this world (*'alam adh-dharr*). In that previous realm, our spirits had testified that Allah *the Exalted* is the Lord, the Creator and the Educator (*Al-Murabbi*) of all things. This means that our final abode will be to Allah *the Most High* where we will be held accountable for all our actions, regarding their concordance with our primordial pledge.

In this world, whoever fulfils the old covenant (*al-'ahd al-qadeem*) and carries it through to the new covenant (*al-'ahd al-jadeed*) will succeed and have a good abode of return in the Hereafter (*husn ma'ab*). On the other hand, there are people who oppress themselves and break the promise that they had pledged during this phase of spirituality. These disbelievers will lose and fail (on the Day of Judgment), and they will have an evil place of return (*ma'ab ash-sharr*) in the Hereafter.

Now, as the phrase, 'a good place to return to', is a general term, Allah *Glorified is He* chose to clarify and explain it to us with more details. He described it as '… gardens of lasting bliss (*jannat 'Adn*) with gates wide open' (*Sad:* 50). The phrase *jannat 'Adn* ('gardens of Eden' or the 'gardens of lasting bliss') is synonymous (lexically, a *badal*) with the phrase *husn ma'ab* (a good place to return to). In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* has affirmed that the 'good place to return to' is *jannat 'Adn* alone, as if no other place can be justly described as a good place of return.

The word *jannat* is the plural of the word *janna* (garden), and it refers to any place with intertwining leaves that shade the underlying passers. This name also means that the garden (*janna*) hides (*tajin*) any person who walks inside it by preventing their need to leave for anything else. This is also the meaning of the word *janna* (garden) in this world. Allah *Glorified is He* said, describing one of the earth's gardens (*jannat*): 'And recite to them the parable of two men, upon one of whom We had bestowed two vineyards (*jannatayn*) of grapes' (*al-Kahf:* 32).

Another example of a *janna* is the garden in which Allah *Glorified is He* tested Prophet Adam's response to Divine commands and prohibitions. Some people say that Allah placed Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* in heavenly paradise (of the Hereafter) and that He forced him out of these heavenly gardens into this world when he ate from the tree. This opinion is not valid because the first thing that Allah *the Almighty* said about Prophet Adam was: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon Earth one who shall inherit it' (*al-Baqara:* 30). Therefore, Prophet Adam was not created in the heavenly paradise, but here, on earth.

Then, Allah placed Adam in a garden from this world because when you want to train a person for a particular mission, you must take responsibility for their residence and expenses. You have to sustain your trainees with the necessities of life that allow them to concentrate on their training tasks.

Allah *the Almighty* provided this sustenance to Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* in an earthly garden. However, when Prophet Adam forgot Allah’s Command and followed the devil, his nature changed, and he was no longer fit to remain in that garden. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But as soon as the two [Adam and *Hawwa* (Eve)] had tasted [the fruit] of the tree, they became conscious of their nakedness.' (*al-A‘raf:* 22)

Consequently, the first time in which Prophet Adam became aware of the concept of exposure and nudity was a result of his disobedience of his Lord’s Command. Therefore, if you see the exposure of any faults in this world, you should know that they are the result of transgressions against Allah’s creation or abandonment’s of His laws.

Due to that sin, the private parts of the body became symbols of shame and nakedness (*‘awra*) for Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*. Apparently, these parts were not different from any other part of the body, such as the mouth, for example. They became shameful signs of nakedness because waste products were excreted from them when Prophet Adam ate from the prohibited tree. It appears that his body did not produce waste excrements when he had previously eaten from the lawful trees in accordance with Allah’s Commandments. At this point, he was only eating for sustenance and keeping himself alive, just as soldiers are given types of food that leave little waste. However, when Adam disobeyed Allah’s Command and ate from the forbidden tree, waste products were eventually formed, and their filthy nature became apparent on the body.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and they began to cover themselves with pieced-together leaves from the garden' (*al-A'raf:* 22). He wanted to cover this nakedness and hide it momentarily. However, this was to become a necessary practice for mankind onwards. It stayed as a reminder of the sin that could not be removed. Thus, it was through disobedience that the concept of our nakedness was born.

Had Adam *peace be upon him* been aware of Satan's (Shaytan's) whispers, he would not have listened to him or eaten from the tree. However, Satan deceived them by saying, 'Your Lord has but forbidden you [from consuming] this tree lest you two become [as] angels or lest you live forever' (*al-A'raf:* 20). Satan did not sincerely believe that the tree could grant them immortality. In fact, he had previously asked Allah *Glorified is He* to grant him life until the Day of Resurrection, as He narrated in the following verse: '[Satan said,] "Then, O, my Lord, grant me a respite till the Day when all shall be raised from the dead"' (*Sad:* 79). If Satan had really believed that this tree would grant Adam immortality, he would have eaten from it himself. Thus, the Devil was lying, but Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* did not realise it at the time. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And, indeed, long ago did We impose Our commandment on Adam, but he forgot it, and We found no firmness of purpose in him.' (*Ta Ha:* 115)

Why did Adam *peace be upon him* not succeed in his first test? Scholars said that Adam *peace be upon him* was to be the father of all humanity. His offspring were to be of two types. Some of them will be infallible, such as prophets and messengers, while most of mankind will be fallible. Thus, it was appropriate for Adam to represent both of these types concerning his children in his life.

This disobedience happened when his responsibility was being tested. Yet, Adam's early disobedience does not negate the infallibility of prophets because Adam *peace be upon him* was only selected as a prophet after this test. In addition, he repented from that sin and Allah *the Almighty* accepted his atonement, as He *the Most High* says: 'Thereupon Adam received words [of guidance] from his Lord, and He [Allah] accepted his repentance' (*al-Baqara:* 37). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Thereafter, [however,] his Lord elected him [for His grace], accepted his repentance, and bestowed His guidance upon him' (*Ta Ha:* 122).

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* selected Adam to be an infallible prophet after that first test he had undergone. The Quranic phrase, 'Thereafter, [however,] his Lord elected him' (*Ta Ha:* 122) indicates a succession of events and a period of time between his disobedience and his election.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'gardens of lasting bliss ('Adn)' (*Sad:* 50); this refers to the final reward of the Afterlife. The word *'Adn* means that these gardens will be an everlasting residence. This is in contrast with the gardens of this world, which can only provide temporary benefit before inevitable loss or destruction.

For instance, these worldly gardens may be struck by drought, as in the Quranic narration regarding the people of the garden, where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, We [but] try them as We tried the owners of a certain garden who vowed that they would surely harvest its fruit on the morning [without distributing the alms to the poor]. They made no allowance [for the Will of Allah]. Thereupon, a storm [*ta'if*](1) from your Lord came upon that [garden] while they were asleep, so that by the morning, it became barren and bleak' (*al-Qalam:* 17-20).

Thus, in some cases, disasters may claim gardens of this world. In other cases, the owners of a garden may die and leave it to their heirs. For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* wanted to reassure believers that their heavenly rewards in the Gardens of paradise will be everlasting and unchangeable. Paradise's sustenance will not run out for these believers, nor will believers perish in its gardens.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...with gates wide open (*mufattaha*)' (*Sad:* 50). The Arabic word *mufattaha* (wide open) is a passive participle (*ism maf'ul*) that lexically denotes the great intensiveness of any particular action and that the action was performed by an unidentified subject. This means that these doors will be opened to their utmost width by a force that was not identified in the verse.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed the garden with a storm. The word *ta'if*, in this verse, refers to an overwhelming punishment. (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/409)

It could be that the guardians of paradise will open these gates when they see the people of the Garden approaching them as a welcoming gesture to believers. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… until they reach it, and its gates are widely opened, and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you! You have done well. Enter, then, this [Paradise] herein to abide forever."' (*az-Zumar:* 73)

The gates may even open automatically at the sight of incomers, or furthermore, slide at the mere will of every believer who wishes to enter. This may be similar to the sight we currently see in some major hotels, where a doorman opens the gates of the lobby to designated visitors as a sign of hospitality. Furthermore, many hotels have sliding doors that open automatically whenever someone approaches them, and then close automatically after a person enters the building.

This example of prolific advancement of mankind in designing sliding doors increases our recognition of Divine bounties and rewards mentioned in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* say regarding another adornment and luxuries: 'And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people would become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] disbelieve in the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses and [silver] stairways on which they ascend.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 33) We have now seen lavish elevators and escalators that ascend vertically inside buildings. This Quranic description of luxurious buildings was revealed more than fourteen centuries ago amongst an illiterate, Bedouin nation who knew nothing about the abundant crafts of construction as they were living in tents and abodes made of wool and animal fur.

Such verses in the Quran gave us glimpses of the potential constructions of the world of men, and indeed, technological progress will continue to produce remarkable devices. These devices support the Quranic descriptions of paradise after disbelievers had previously found them arduous to believe. If mankind's limited knowledge is able to produce such generous technological implementations, it is more plausible that the Creator of human beings, Allah *the Exalted* can provide more sublime constructions to reward His creation in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in his description of the people of paradise: '…They will be comfortably seated (*muttaki'in fiha*)' (*Sad:* 51). A *muttaki'* is someone who is in a position between lying and sitting down (*qa'id*), or between lying and sitting up (*jalis*). There is a difference between sitting down and sitting up, even though they share a common meaning. Sitting down *(qu'ood)* refers to someone who was standing and then sat down, whereas sitting up *(juloos)* refers to someone who was lying and then sat up.

When a man is standing, he carries his whole weight upon his feet. If he gets tired of standing, he may sit down, thereby shifting his weight to his posterior. Then, if he still gets tired of sitting down, he may recline on his side, a position between sitting and lying flat on the ground. In this state, the weight of his body is more evenly distributed and is thus the most restful position for him. This is why Allah *the Almighty* chose this position for the people of paradise.

Zulaykha, the wife of Al-'Aziz chose this resting state for her guests, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and prepared for them a sumptuous repast (*muttaka'a*)' (*Yusuf:* 31). The Arabic word *muttaka'* indicates that the gathering was not in a bored state. The reclining position is the most comfortable resting position for a person.

Allah *Glorified is He* says of the people of paradise: '…reclining upon carpets lined with rich brocade,(1) and the fruit of both these gardens will be within easy reach' (*ar-Rahman:* 54). He also says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: '… reclining upon green foldings (*rafraf*) and carpets (*'abqary*)(2) rich in beauty' (*ar-Rahman:* 76).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says in reference to the resting state of the people of Paradise: '… wherein upon couches (*ara'ik*) they will recline' (*al-Kahf:* 31). So, the people of paradise will recline on couches filled with *istabraq* (brocade), which is the thick and heavy form of satin silk. If the stuffing and the inside of the beds will be made of brocade, imagine what their external textures will be made of.

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(1) *Al-istabraq* refers to heavy, natural silk embroidery. It is suitable for outdoor clothing and winter because it is warm. (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/18)

(2) *'Abqari*: The Arabs believed that the jinns lived in a place known as 'Abqar because various wondrous stories were attributed to it. It is also said that it is a place in Yemen where embroidered carpets were made and that anything good and well made was attributed to it. (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 5/2)

The word *rafraf* refers to the folds that we find on curtains. The word *ara'ik* is the plural of the word *areeka*, and it refers to a couch with ornaments and covers that are similar to mosquito nets. The people of paradise will be reclining upon these fabrics.

There must be further comforts in terms of food and drink after believers recline on these lavish couches. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... they will call for abundant fruit and drink' (*Sad:* 51). Therefore, the welcome that is extended to each of them will be of the specific nature that a person desires. Nothing is placed before them that they do not want. Thus, this reception is not obligatory upon everybody since part of the service may not agree with their inclinations.

Allah *the Most High* mentions the fruits first, even though they are a luxury that traditionally comes after a main meal. Scholars said that the presence of fruits or desserts indicates that a main meal is unquestionably present.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and drink' (*Sad:* 51). Scholars said that the drink intended in this verse is grape juice. Fruits and grape juice are mentioned specifically because they were not abundantly present in the environment in which the Quran was revealed. Thus, they were highly valued by the Arabs, whose foods mostly consisted of dates, wheat, and barley. So, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the foods that they desired the most at that time. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '… and with fruit of any kind that they may choose and with the meat of any bird that they may desire' (*al-Waqi'a:* 20-21).

In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies that the fruits of the Hereafter will only share the names, the colours and the shapes of this world's fruits, but they will have a different and a more sublime taste. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Whenever they are granted fruits as their appointed sustenance, they will say, "We were granted that sustenance in our older days!" However, they will only be given similar fruits with which they will recall that [past sustenance]. And there, shall they have spouses pure, and there, shall they abide [for eternity].' (*al-Baqara:* 25)

So, the fruits of paradise will resemble the fruits we recognise in this world. An apple there will look like an apple here such that a person would say, 'This is like the apples I ate in the (past) world.' However, the reality of the fruits of paradise will be completely different as these fruits came forth by the pure Power of Allah *the Almighty*.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* described the gatherings of the people of paradise. For instance, in describing their divans and couches, He says: '[And in it] there will be beds [of comfort] raised high, cups placed ready, pillows (*namariq*) ranged and carpets (*zarabiyy*) spread out' (*al-Ghashiya:* 13-16). The word *namariq* is the plural form of the word *namraqa*, which is a pillow upon which one rests. The word *zarabiyy* is the plural of the word *zarbiya*, which is a decorated rug. As for drinking vessels, Allah described them in this verse as *akwab*. In other verses in the Quran, He described them as *abareeq* or *ku'oos*. These are all drinking vessels, but each of these words has a slightly different meaning. A *koob* (cup) is the singular form of the plural *akwab*, and this is an empty vessel that has neither an *'urwa* (handle) nor a *khurtoom* (spout). However, if a vessel contains something to drink, it is called a *ka's*. If a cup has a handle or a spout, it is called an *ibreeq* (which is the singular form of the plural *abareeq*).

One of the habits of the Arabs was allowing a small quantity of liquid to remain in their cups after drinking, which they would proceed to pour on the ground. The drinker did this to indicate his contentment and lack of greed. A poet(1) spoke of this when he said: 'For the earth has a share of the noble man's cup.'(2)

Another Arabic tradition was that they used to avoid filling any cup to its top rim. This allowed them to see the fluid level more clearly, so that they can distinguish between an empty cup and a cup that is full of drink. This also indicated the clearness of the liquid and the cleanliness of the utensil.

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(1) The poet is `Abd Al-Ghani An-Nabulsi. He was a scholar of Islam and literature and was a Sufi. He was born in Damascus in 1641 CE and grew up there. Then, he travelled to Baghdad, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt and the Hijaz area. He passed away in Damascus in 1730 CE at the age of 89. He wrote many great works of which *Ta`teer Al-Anam fi Ta`beer Al-Manam* was one.

(2) The full couplet is the following:
We drank and spilt a mouthful on the ground,
For the earth has a share of the noble man's cup
It is from a poem in the *bahr at-tawil* that has three couplets.

A poet once described this concept by saying: 'Were the cup not half-full, one could think that, in the palm of its drinker it stood alone.' He meant to say that if a cup was filled with fluid until its rim, the viewer might think that the cup was empty if they are unable to distinguish the liquid’s meniscus from the cup’s rim.

A few years ago, we also had a noble tradition related to food in our country. We used to eat a light meal called *tabaq al-karama* (the plate of dignity) in our own homes before attending a feast at another person’s house. The feast’s guests did that in order to avoid a strong appetite before approaching the host’s food. This allowed them to enjoy the feast with a higher degree of decorum.

We can now return back to the verse we are studying. After the blessings of reclining, eating, and drinking, a person’s mind will naturally turn to the concealed company of a beautiful mate. This is what Allah *the Exalted* promises righteous people in the following verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَعِندَهُمْ قَٰصِرَٰتُ ٱلطَّرْفِ أَتْرَابٌ ﴿٥٢﴾ هَٰذَا مَا تُوعَدُونَ لِيَوْمِ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٥٣﴾
إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَرِزْقُنَا مَا لَهُۥ مِن نَّفَادٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

They will have well-matched [wives] with modest gaze [52]
‘This is what you are promised for the Day of Reckoning [53]
Our provision for you will never end [54] (The Quran, *Sad:* 52-54)

The words '... mates with a modest gaze,' mean that each one of them only gazes at her designated companion. This also means that no other man will desire the companion of his brother because each female companion only desires her own mate.

We know that, in this respect, indeed, the eye and the glance have an unambiguous effect as they have a speech and a language of their own. An example of this is what Allah *Glorified is He* says in the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: '… And when the women saw him, they were greatly amazed at his beauty, and [so flustered were they that] they cut their hands [with their knives], exclaiming, "Allah save us! This is no mortal man!

This is nought but a noble angel."' (*Yusuf:* 31) Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) said, 'O, my Lord! Prison is more desirable to me than [compliance with] what these women invite me to do, for, unless You turn away their guile from me, I might yet yield to their allure and become one of those who are unaware [of right and wrong].' (*Yusuf:* 33) The first verse described the plan of one woman, the wife of Al-'Aziz*,* to lure Prophet Yusuf (Joseph). Then, why did Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) use the words 'what these women invite me to do' as well as 'their guile' and 'I might yet yield to their allure' (*Yusuf:* 33) all in the plural form? These women must have all looked at him in an alluring way, and he understood that each one of them desired him.

Thus, the glance has a language that carries meanings and expresses the soul of its owner. This is why Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) referred to the group of women, and not to the wife of Al-'Aziz alone, although she was the chief plotter. Additionally, years later, when her husband, Al-'Aziz, wanted to summon Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) from prison, Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) said, 'Ask him [first to find out the truth] about those women who cut their hands.' (*Yusuf:* 50)

There are other stories of the language of the eyes in Arabic literature. This includes the story of Abu Dulama(1) when he entered the court of the caliph(2) who was surrounded by his notables. The caliph wanted to tease Abu Dulama*,* so he jokingly said to him, 'O, Abu Dulama*.* You have to ridicule one of us, or I will have you killed.'

All the people present were looking at Abu Dulama, each one saying with his gaze, 'Do not lampoon me, and I will give you whatever you wish.' Some of their eyes pleaded with him, while others threatened him with their frowns. Eventually, Abu Dulama decided to please all the attendants and lampooned none other but himself, hoping to gain the gifts that awaited him from the notables. Everyone was surprised by him when he said(1):

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(1) Abu Dulama was Zand Ibn Al-Jawn Al-Asadi. He was a talented poet, given to light-heartedness and joviality. He was dark, heavily built and handsome. His father was a slave to a man from the Asad tribe, and the man freed him. He grew up in Kufa and attached himself to the caliphs of Banu Al-ʻAbbas. They liked him and would shower him with gifts, and he praised some of them in poetry. He was accused of heresy because of his impudence, and there are many differing tales about him. He died in the year 161 AH.

(2) He was the Caliph al-Mahdi Al-ʿAbbasi, Muhammad Ibn `Abdullah Abu `Abdullah Al-Mahdi Billah. He was born in 127 AH and died in 169 AH at the age of 42. He was a caliph for 10 years, led a praiseworthy life, and was of seemly appearance and character. He was generous and built Jamiʿ Ar-Rasafa. This was mentioned in *Al-A'lam* by Az-Zirikli.

'Shall I not tell you of Abu Dulama,
He is neither highly born nor dignified.
If he wears a turban, he is a monkey,
And if he takes off his turban, he is a pig.'

The notable people around the caliph generously rewarded Abu Dulama for these verses of poetry, and he became a wealthy man for his quickly thought out verses.

Therefore, the words, '...well-matched mates with a modest gaze' (*Sad:* 52) mean that each of these female companions in paradise will lower her gaze from all people except her man, and this is a desirable characteristic in any woman. Additionally, any generous man may give away anything he owns in his life except his wife. This is because he cannot allow anyone to look at her with any desire. This is a characteristic of the faithful people in this world and in the Hereafter.

Thus, one of the virtues and wondrous aspects of faith was that it dislocated false beliefs from the hearts and inherent choices from the minds. Faith also redirected people’s traditional affections. We can see this in the stories of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* namely the Emigrants (*Al-muhajireen*) and the Helpers (*Al-ansar*). Faith removed disbelief from their hearts and erased stubbornness from their minds. Then, it overcame the strongest of their emotions, which is the affection of a man towards his wife. A man from the Helpers said to his brother from the Emigrants, who came without his family, 'Look at my two wives. I will divorce whichever you like so that you may marry her.'(2) Nevertheless, the Emigrant refused the generous offer and said, 'May Allah bless your family and your wealth. Show me where the marketplace is.' This is the degree to which faith impacted the earliest believers.

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(1) These two couplets are from a poem in the meter called *bahr al-wafir* that has a total of four couplets. They were mentioned by Abu Al-Faraj Al-Asfahani in *Al-Aghani*, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih in *Al-`Aqd Al-Farid* and An-Nuwayri in Nihayat *Al-'Arab fi Funun Al-Adab*.

(2) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him paired the Emigrants with the Helpers as brothers after the Emigration to Medina. It appears that he paired ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn* =

Now, we can return to the verse we are studying. Allah *Glorified is He* describes these wives as '... well-matched (*atrab*),' (*Sad:* 52). The word *atrab* could mean that all these women are equal in appearance or age, such that one of them is not distinguished over the other. They are all beautiful, of one age and one stature. This will ensure that each man's eyes will be kept to their own woman and that no one will desire the female companion of another man. If all the women are of one standard appearance, every man will only look to his wife as well. Another meaning of the word *atrab* is that every woman will be appropriate to her man and that she has the ability to take the appearance that he likes.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'This is what you are promised for the Day of Reckoning,' (*Sad:* 53). Thus, these are the rewards promised for believers on the Last Day. It was Allah *Glorified is He* Who made that promise, and He is well capable of fulfilling His promises. Indeed, He is the fully Capable (*Al-Qadir*) the Almighty (*Al-'Aziz*) and the Ever-Triumphant (*Al-Ghalib*). There is no power that can object to His wishes and no force that can oppose Him.

As a created being, you may make a promise and intend to fulfil it sincerely. However, you cannot guarantee, with certainty, that your circumstances will allow you to keep your promise. An obstacle may arise and prevent you from

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= *`Awf with Sa`d ibn Ar-Rabi` Al-Ansari Allah be pleased with them. Sa`d said to him, 'My brother, I have the most wealth amongst the people of Medina, so look to half my wealth and take it, and I have two wives, so look which of them is most pleasing to you so that I may divorce her for you.' 'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf refused the offer and replied to him, 'May Allah bless your family and your wealth. Show me where the market place is.' They showed him where the marketplace was, and he bought, sold, and made a profit, so he thus came back with some butter and cheese. After some time, he came one day wearing clothes dyed with saffron. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked him, 'How are you?' Abd Ar-Rahman replied, 'O, Messenger of Allah. I married a lady.' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked, 'What did you give her as a dowry?' He replied, 'The weight of a date stone in gold.' Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'A sheep would have been enough.' 'Abd Ar-Rahman Allah be pleased with him later related, '(I was blessed to the extent that) every time I lifted a rock, I would expect to find some gold or silver underneath it.' This was related by Ibn Sa`d in At-Tabaqat Al-Kabir (3/116,117), and Adh-Dhahabi in Siyar A`lam An-Nubala' (1/92).*

doing so. Indeed, the promises of Allah are not your promises. Allah’s promises are true because His Power is unrestrained.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '... for the Day of Reckoning' (*Sad:* 53). This refers to the reckoning of the pious people because everyone will be held accountable for their actions on the Day of Judgment, including the faithful obedient and the faithless sinful. So, the rewards mentioned in this verse were referring to the reckoning of the faithful people as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and the devout will have a good place (*husn ma’ab*) to return to' (*Sad:* 49).

Allah *Glorified is He* then said: '…this, verily, shall be Our provision [for you] with no end to it' (*Sad:* 54). Allah *the Exalted* does not say, '… this shall be your provision,' but He says: '... Our provision,' (*Sad:* 54). Indeed, the speech of believers in paradise will constantly confirm the perpetuity of Divine blessings and the truth of Allah’s promise.

After Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the righteous and pious people, He then mentions evildoers to illustrate their contrasting destiny.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذَا ۚ وَإِنَّ لِلطَّاغِينَ لَشَرَّ مَآبٍ ﴿٥٥﴾ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَوْنَهَا فَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ﴿٥٦﴾
هَٰذَا فَلْيَذُوقُوهُ حَمِيمٌ وَغَسَّاقٌ ﴿٥٧﴾ وَآخَرُ مِن شَكْلِهِ أَزْوَاجٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

But the evildoers will have the worst place to return to [55] Hell to burn in, an evil place to stay [56] all this will be theirs: let them taste it–a scalding, dark, foul fluid [57] and other such torments [58] (The Quran, *Sad:* 55 - 58)

The words, 'All this ...' (*Sad:* 55) refer to the rewards prepared for the pious people in paradise. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... but verily, the most evil of all abodes (*sharra ma’ab*) awaits those who transgress the bounds of what is right' (*Sad:* 55). The Arabic words *sharra ma’ab* means 'the worst destination, place of return and outcome'. The word *ma’ab* in this verse has the same meaning as it had previously. It refers to the return of all people to Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who took the covenant from them and gave them an innate disposition (*fitra*) to believe in Him.

Every child is born with this innate disposition. However, sinful disbelievers did not fulfil the covenant they took upon themselves. Instead, they went against their previous testimony when Allah *the Almighty* had asked them in the primordial phase of spirits, 'Am I not your Lord?' They answered: 'Indeed, we do bear witness thereto!' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

Just as Allah *the Exalted* elucidates 'the most beautiful of abodes' in the previous verses, He elucidates 'the most evil of abodes' in the verses that followed. He says: 'Hellfire they will have to endure,' (*Sad:* 56). They will roast in its fires, '...and how vile a resting place (*al-mihad*) it will be' (*Sad:* 56). The word *Al-mihad* (resting place) refers to the bed of a child that has been set out for him to have peaceful sleep. A child has no part in preparing a resting place since he depends on a guardian to prepare it for him. The case is similar with these transgressors as they will have no say regarding the 'resting place' into which Allah *the Almighty* will cast them. Therefore, the word *Al-mihad* was used in this verse to mock and ridicule disbelievers, as indeed, their abode in the Hellfire is far from a resting place.

'This, then, is prepared for them, so let them taste it, scorching fire (*hameem*) and molten pus (*ghassaaq*)' (*Sad:* 57). Thus, disbelievers will taste the most severe of punishments. The word *hameem* refers to a fire that is at its highest possible temperature, and the word *ghassaaq* refers to the pus that seeps from the burning skins of those inflicted with this punishment. We pray that Allah *Glorified is He* protect us from such a destiny. The Arabic word *ghasaqat* is used to describe the flowing nature of a substance. For instance, Arabs used the words *ghasaqat 'aynuhu* to refer to a person whose tears flowed from his eyes.

The punishment does not end with the *hameem* and *ghassaaq* mentioned in this verse, for there are other forms of punishment that will await them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… and coupled with it, further [suffering] of a similar nature' (*Sad:* 58). For example, there will be punishments with molten metal (*muhl*). In addition, there will be a tree known as *zaqqum* which produces fruits that resemble the heads of devils. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* has prepared other forms of punishment for transgressors, which He did not mention in the verse we are studying, but has mentioned them in other verses of the Quran.

After Allah *Glorified is He* gave us this comparison between the reward of pious people and the brutal outcome of evildoers, He illustrated the striking difference between these two groups of people. Indeed, good company assists a person’s obedience and good deeds, whereas bad company pulls its friends into evil and draws them into disobedience.

For instance, a student in school is more likely to succeed if a hardworking friend assists his studies. They may revise together and remind each other of the consequences of negligence on the final result. On the other hand, a student is more likely to fail if he joins a turbulent group of friends. Bad company may persuade an outstanding student to skip their studies or lessons, and he may even learn crooked and corrupting habits.

Consequently, at the end of the year, a successful student may find that his good friend was a major cause for his own accomplishment, while a failing student may blame his bad company for many wasted opportunities.

Due to the importance of this concept, Allah *the Exalted* chose to illustrate this matter in the following verses.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذَا فَوْجٌ مُّقْتَحِمٌ مَّعَكُمْ ۖ لَا مَرْحَبًۢا بِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ صَالُوا۟ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٥٩﴾
قَالُوا۟ بَلْ أَنتُمْ لَا مَرْحَبًۢا بِكُمْ ۖ أَنتُمْ قَدَّمْتُمُوهُ لَنَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ ٱلْقَرَارُ ﴿٦٠﴾
قَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَا مَن قَدَّمَ لَنَا هَٰذَا فَزِدْهُ عَذَابًا ضِعْفًا فِى ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٦١﴾

[It will be said], ‘Here is another crowd of people rushing headlong to join you.’ [The response will be], ‘They are not welcome! They will burn in the Fire [59] They will say to them, ‘You are not welcome! It was you who brought this on us, an evil place to stay [60] adding, ‘Our Lord, give double punishment to those who brought this upon us’ [61] (The Quran, *Sad:* 59 - 61)

These verses illustrate one of the main encounters that will occur on the Day of Judgment between two groups of people who were each other's companions for evil pursuits. One of these groups will be the leading disbelievers, and the other group will be their followers in disbelief. The dialogue itself will be between three groups or parties. These groups will be the angels who guard the fire, the leaders of the disbelievers who will go first into hellfire, and then the followers whom these leaders had misguided in this world.

The angels will direct the first words to the leaders of disbelief who have already been residing in the fire for some time: '[Prepare yourselves as] there is a crowd (*fawj*) [of your followers] who will rush [into the Fire] (*muqtahimmun*) with you [soon].' (*Sad:* 59) Thus, the angels will alert the people of hellfire that a group of their followers will be joining them. The Arabic word *muqtahim* is used when a person is making a rushing entrance. This means that this late group of disbelievers will enter the fire quickly and forcefully.

Why would people rush as they are entering hellfire? Scholars said that these disbelievers will not be moving by their own free will but, instead, will be forced and pushed into it violently, as Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: '… on the Day when they shall be thrust into the fire with [an irresistible] thrust' (*at-Tur:* 13).

The Arabic word *fawj* (crowd) is used to refer to a group of people, just as we use the words *fawj al-hujjaj* in our reference to a group of pilgrims or *fawj al-musafireen* in our reference to a group of travellers.

When angels inform them of newcomers, the leaders of disbelievers in Hellfire will say, 'There is no welcome (*la marhaban*) for them. Surely, they will be roasting in the Fire [as well]' (*Sad:* 60). The words *la marhaban* (no welcome) mean that there will not be any salutations or greetings for these new residents. Generally, this is the behavioural pattern followed by evil friends. In the end, their friendships easily turn into enmity, and they start cursing each other.

In this example, leaders will curse their followers, and followers will curse their leaders. In this verse, we have leaders saying that their followers are not welcome with them. This is because these followers were not entering hellfire to save their leaders or to lighten the punishment for them. They have only entered the fire to be roasted in its flames as well.

The crowd of disbelieving followers who will hurtle into the fire will respond to their leaders, 'No indeed, it is you who has no welcome. You have prepared it for us' (*Sad:* 60). Indeed, leaders of disbelief had forwarded the messages of misguidance and disbelief to their followers and, thus, brought them to this evil end: '… and how vile a destiny it will be' (*al-Mujadala:* 8).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They will say, "Our Lord, doubly increase the torment of the ones who have prepared [this destiny] for us in the Fire' (*Sad:* 61). In another verse, the Quran describes this situation, quoting disbelievers as saying, 'And they will say, "O, our Lord, we obeyed our leaders and our great men, and it is they who have led us astray from the right path! Our Lord, bring them torment twofold and banish them utterly from Your Mercy."' (*Fatir:* 67-68) They will ask Allah *the Almighty* to increase the punishment of their leaders because their leaders did not go astray alone but led them astray as well. There is a dual nature to their crime, and each of these sins deserves a punishment of its own. Thus, leaders must receive a more brutal punishment than their followers. Indeed, Allah *the Exalted* will not punish his servants with a torment that is more than they deserve.

The words of the followers to their leaders, 'You prepared it for us' (*Sad:* 60), mean that they have lead them through temptation, embellishments and glamorised misguidance. They facilitated disobedience for them.

In another verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed that those who were friends in evil will disassociate themselves from one another on that Day. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers, and the latter shall see the suffering [that awaits them], with all their hopes cut to pieces! And then those followers shall say, "Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could disown them [our leaders] as they have disowned us!" Thus, will Allah show them their works in a manner that will cause them bitter regrets, but they will not come out of the Fire.' (*al-Baqara:* 166-167)

This situation resembles Satan's disownment of his followers on the Day of Judgment. Satan will say, 'Behold, Allah promised you the true promise! I, too, held out [all manner of] promises to you, but I deceived you. Yet, I had no power at all over you. I but called you, and you responded to me. Hence, do not blame me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine.' (*Ibrahim:* 22)

Therefore, this is the end of those who are friends in evil actions. Indeed, their friendship will end in enmity and mutual cursing. As for those who are friends in righteousness, they will be associates in this world and in the next.

This is clear in Allah's saying: 'On that Day, all friends (*al-akhilla'*) will be enemies to one another except the righteous [friends]' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). The word *akhilla'* (friends) is the plural of the word *khaleel*. This *khulla* (friendship) means that they love each other for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He*. They met upon this agreement and separated upon it. Their friendship transcends mere meetings and empty gestures; instead, it causes their minds to merge as if the very atoms of their bodies have become intermingled.

This is what Isma'il Sabri,(1) *may Allah have mercy upon him*, articulated when he said:

'And when we met, our yearning reached its limit,
Two companions melting in ardour after blames,
As though a friend in the qualities of his friend,
Flowed into an embrace, becoming the same.'(2)

How can the leaders of disbelief embellish misguidance and seduce their followers by using falsehood? Scholars said that the heavenly way must necessarily conflict with the soul's lusts and caprices and that when these lusts and caprices overcome man, he directs his worship to a false deity that sets no commandments or prohibitions. This is how people go astray and come to worship idols and inanimate objects. This worship gives them the religious feelings that they are naturally inclined to possess but without religious obligations. They are liberating themselves from Divine commandments of Allah’s true Path by inventing their own deities.

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(1) He was Isma'il Sabri Basha, one of the best poets of the modern era. He distinguished himself by the beauty of his verses and the sweetness of his style. He studied law in France and rose through the ranks of judgeship in Egypt. He used to write his poetry in the margins of books and magazines, and his friends would spread it furtively. He rejected a meeting with Lord Cromer, saying, 'I will never be a prime minister if I must abandon my conscience.' He was born in 1854 CE and passed away in 1923 CE at the age of 69.

(2) These two couplets are in the meter of *bahr at-tawil*.

We previously said that worship (*Al-'ibada*) is the obedience of the devotee to their deity’s commandments and prohibitions. The sun or the moon did not issue any commandments or prohibitions to the people who worshipped them and did not offer them any rewards or warn them from any punishments. Thus, these are false deities because the true deity, Allah *the Exalted* has a defined path and a specific set of orders and bans. He also offers paradise as a reward for those who obey His commandments and will punish the people who defy these orders.

The people of the fire then made another observation. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُوا۟ مَا لَنَا لَا نَرَىٰ رِجَالًا كُنَّا نَعُدُّهُم مِّنَ ٱلْأَشْرَارِ ﴿٦٢﴾ أَتَّخَذْنَٰهُمْ سِخْرِيًّا
أَمْ زَاغَتْ عَنْهُمُ ٱلْأَبْصَٰرُ ﴿٦٣﴾ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَحَقٌّ تَخَاصُمُ أَهْلِ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٦٤﴾

They will say, ‘Why do we not see those we thought were bad’ [62] and took as a laughing-stock? Have our eyes missed them? [63] This is how it will really be: the inhabitants of the Fire will blame one another in this way [64] (The Quran, *Sad:* 62 - 64)

The people of the fire will wonder about the destiny of the people they had considered as evil in the past life, namely the believers in Allah. This means that the disbelievers of Quraysh will wonder about the place of Prophet Muhammad’s Companions whom they had assumed were misguided (for not worshipping their idols) in this world.

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* heard the same sayings from the disbelievers at his time. They said, 'We do not see in you anything but a mortal man like ourselves, and we do not see that any people follow you except those who are quite obviously the most inferior among us, and we do not see that you could be in any way superior to us. On the contrary, we think that you are liars.' (*Hud:* 27) The disbelievers of Mecca directed similar descriptions to the early Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as Bilal and Khabbab *Allah be pleased with them.*

So, leaders of disbelievers will be looking around in the fire and will not be able to find these ‘wicked’ men with them. They will ask, surprisingly, 'How is it that we do not see [here any of the] men whom we considered wicked?' (*Sad:* 62) Then, they will return to themselves and wonder if they were mistaken to have made believers the targets of their worldly mockery and derision: 'Were we incorrect in making them a target of our derision (*sikhriyya*)?' Indeed, in this past life, they described them as wicked when they were actually righteous men. Thus, they will find that their destination was not the same as the people of the fire. The word *sikhriyya* which is used in this verse means ridicule and mockery. However, the word *sukhriyya* with a *damma* refers to the exploitation of a person in a form of labour.

Then, disbelievers will ask further questions: '... Or is it that [they are here, and] our eyes have missed them?' (*Sad:* 63) They will wonder if the believers in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were, perhaps, in the fire, but that their eyes had been averted from seeing the believers’ presence. This, too, was not true as these believers will be in paradise.

Indeed, the verse started by mentioning the sayings of the disbelievers with the phrase: '... How is it that we do not see?' (*Sad:* 62) This is very similar to the words spoken by Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* in the story of the hoopoe when he said: 'How is it that I do not see the hoopoe' (*an-Naml:* 20). He meant to say that the hoopoe must surely be present although not being visible to him. Then, he amended his statement by saying: '... or could he be absent from this gathering?' (*an-Naml:* 20)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Indeed, such will be the [confusion and] mutual wrangling of the people of Hellfire’ (*Sad:* 64). The mutual enmity of the people of the fire is inevitable, for they will be misguided or have been misguiding to others. Therefore, each group will cast the blame on the other after seeing the outcome of their actions.

On top of that, it is the Quran which has informed us of their future enmity, and the Quran does not make statements that contradict reality. You can see this fact in the Quranic references to society, from the time of Prophet Muhammad until the present day. Allah *the Most High* did not inform us of anything that contradicted reality. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '… Thus, (it is that) no change will you ever find in Allah's Way' (*Fatir:* 43).

For example, the believers were victorious over the disbelievers in the battle of Badr and took some of the disbelievers as captives. A year later, the battle of Uhud followed, and the disbelievers came from Mecca to a place close to Medina. The indicators were pointing to a victory for the Muslims, but they contravened Allah's Way by disobeying Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had ordered the archers not to leave their posts for any reason. However, when the archers saw that the Muslims had the upper hand and that victory was imminent, they rushed to the battlefield to gather the war spoils and abandoned their posts. The disbelievers seized the opportunity and flanked the Muslims. Thus, the initial victory of the Muslims was dispersed and, although they were not defeated in this battle, they were not triumphant. This happened after Allah *the Almighty* had promised victory to Prophet Muhammad's troops. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For, long ago has Our Word gone forth unto Our servants, the messengers, that, verily, they indeed would be aided and that, verily, Our hosts would [in the end] be victorious,' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173).

Despite this, the lack of victory at Uhud was beneficial for the faith of Islam, for had the Muslims been victorious in spite of their disobedience to Prophet Muhammad's commands, his commandments would have become less significant in their future. They would have said, 'We were disobedient in the battle of Uhud and were still victorious.' Thus, if you see a soldier of Islam defeated, know that he has gone against Allah's orders in some form by disobeying the directions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the directions of the commander put in authority by Prophet Muhammad.

So, Allah's traditions regarding victory are constant, but the believer's discipline in following Allah's orders might deviate. This is why we say that

Muslims were not victorious in the battle of Uhud, but Islam was victorious as were the commandments of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Similarly, Allah *the Exalted* has warned us about self-delusion and pride in our strength and numbers because victory does not necessarily come from large numbers. Victory only comes when we follow Allah's Decrees. This was a lesson we learnt at the battle of Hunayn. It was Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* himself who was afflicted by this illusion of numbers. It was claimed that when he saw the number of Muslims compared to the number of disbelievers, he said, 'We will not be defeated today for lack of numbers.'(1) Allah *Glorified is He* taught the Muslims an unforgettable lesson on that day. The disbelievers were almost victorious, but Allah's Mercy was eventually bestowed upon the believers. Then, with Allah's grace, the battle ended in the favour of the Muslims.

Pride and self-delusion are incompatible with the principles of discipline, and victory is neither by numbers nor by technology. Victory only comes from following Allah's Commandments as He says: 'Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands will bring disgrace upon them and will aid you against them, and He will soothe the hearts of those who believe.' (*at-Tawba:* 14) He also says: '… and it was not you who cast, when you did cast it, but it was Allah Who cast [the winning strike]' (*al-Anfal:* 17).

Allah *the Exalted* told us that the people of the fire will fight amongst themselves. Therefore, we have faith that these events will happen as He told them to us.

Allah *the Almighty* then chose to give Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* evidence by saying:

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* said, "Indeed, Allah has aided you on many battlefields [when you were few]. and [He did so, too,] on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers they proved of no avail whatsoever to you …" (*at-Tawba:* 25). Ibn Hisham said in *As-Sira An-Nabawiyya* (4/73) that Muhammad ibn Ishaq said, 'Some of the people of Mecca informed me that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said when leaving Mecca for Hunayn, seeing the large number of troops he had with him, 'We will not be defeated today for lack of numbers.' Some people, however, claim that it was a man from the tribe of Bani Bakr who said this phrase.

قُلْ إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ مُنذِرٌۖ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ ٱلْوَٰحِدُ ٱلْقَهَّارُ ﴿٦٥﴾
رَبُّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْغَفَّٰرُ ﴿٦٦﴾

[Prophet] say, ‘I am only here to give warning. There is no god but God the One, the All Powerful [65] Lord of the heavens and earth and everything between, the Almighty, the Most Forgiving [66] (The Quran, *Sad:* 65-66)

We understand these verses in light of what the Quran narrated to us at the beginning of the chapter, regarding the disbelievers’ denial of Prophet Muhammad’s message. In the first verses of the chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Now these (people) deem it strange that a warner should have come unto them from their own midst, and [so] the deniers of the truth are saying, "A [mere] spellbinder is he, a liar! Does he claim that all the deities are [but] one god [Allah]? Verily, a most strange thing [monotheism} is,'' (*Sad:* 4-5) until they said, '"Has the reminding revelation been revealed to him [Muhammad] from amongst all of us?" Nay, but it is My Own reminder that they distrust! Nay, they have not yet tasted my punishment.' (*Sad:* 8)

So, the verses at the beginning of the chapter show us that these people have misunderstandings regarding two issues. The first is the issue of Divine unity as in their words, 'Does he claim that all the deities are [but] one god,' (*Sad:* 5) and the second is prophethood as in their words: 'Has the reminding [book] been revealed to him [Muhammad] from amongst all of us?' (*Sad:* 8)

Thus, Allah revealed verses that aimed to correct these misunderstandings. Allah *Glorified is He* says in this instance: 'Say [O, Muhammad]: I am only a warner' (*Sad:* 65). Allah *the Exalted* chose to mention the warning in this verse, even though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came as both a bearer of glad tidings and a warner because this speech is aimed at disbelievers.

Regarding the other matter, namely Allah’s Oneness, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'There is no deity except Allah, the One, Who holds absolute control over all that exists, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them *the Almighty* the All-Forgiving!' (*Sad:* 65-66)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ هُوَ نَبَؤٌا۟ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٦٧﴾ أَنتُمْ عَنْهُ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ مَا كَانَ لِىَ مِنْ عِلْمٍۭ
بِٱلْمَلَإِ ٱلْأَعْلَىٰٓ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ إِن يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَىَّ إِلَّآ أَنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

Say, This message is a mighty one [67] yet you ignore it [68]
I have no knowledge of what those on high discuss [69]
it is only revealed to me that I am here to give clear warning[70]
(The Quran, *Sad:* 67-70)

The word *naba'* (message) refers to any important piece of information that is backed up by facts that are in accordance with reality. Allah *Glorified is He* said in the chapter of *an-Naba'*: 'About what do they (most often) ask one another? About the notable tiding (*an-naba'*) [of resurrection]' (*an-Naba':* 1-2). He described it as 'notable' because the matters of this world and the Hereafter are dependent upon it. If a person follows their sinful passions in this world, then in the next world, they will roast in a fire that has no end.

It is incumbent upon every person to clarify his goals in life. The real goal is that which has no more phases after it. Goals which are followed by other needs are not true goals but are only stages that take a person to a further endeavour. If a student passes an admission exam to a school, this success takes them only to primary school. Success in this stage will allow the student to enter secondary school, and then to university, and so on.

Even if that person obtains a doctorate, he will still move on to continuous stages until he dies. Death is not the ultimate end, for Paradise or the Hellfire come after it. These are the goals after which there are no others because they are ever lasting. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* brought these goals to our attention.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is a notable tiding (*naba*'), from which you [the disbelievers] are veering away (*mu'ridoon*).' The word *mu'rid* means 'a person who turns away'. This idiom describes a common form of behaviour when people are called to spend charitably or perform some other good deeds. Some of them turn away, and they may do so in stages. Firstly, they may look away, and then turn their heads and sides before walking away as they give us their backs.

The Quran has painted this picture for us. Allah *Glorified is He* describes the destiny of those who refuse to spend their money in the way of Allah in the following verse: '… But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah, give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come]. [This will happen] on the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith.' (*at-Tawba:* 35)

Thus, the reward is from the same breed as the deed. They will be burnt in the same order of their veering away in this world: 'These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures.' (*at-Tawba:* 35) So, the limbs which participated in turning away are the very ones which will be punished, and the amount of punishment will be in accordance to the amount of turning away that they did.

Then, Allah *the Most High* told us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not know the Unseen Knowledge (*Ghayb*). Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Say, O Muhammad:] … 'In no way did I have any knowledge of the most exalted chiefs [of the Angels] as they took adversary stands [amongst themselves].' (*Sad:* 69)

Allah *Glorified is He* previously spoke of the argumentation of the people of the fire by saying, 'Indeed, such will be the [confusion and] mutual wrangling of the people of Hellfire' (*Sad:* 64). Allah *the Almighty* describes the argument presented by the angels at the time of the creation of Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*: 'Will You place on it beings that will spread corruption thereon and shed blood, whereas it is we who extol Your limitless Glory, praise you and hallow your name?' (*al-Baqara:* 30) This was the 'argument' presented by the angels. It was not a traditional argument as it is unlike the stubborn arguments presented by human beings against Allah's Orders. Allah *Glorified is He* describes these angels: 'Nay, [they are] honoured servants. They speak not until He has spoken unto them, and [whenever they act,] they act at His orders.' (*al-Anbiya':* 26-27)

Therefore, the conversation that took place between Allah and the angels was merely named an argumentation, although it seemed that the angels were only in dismay that He was going to create yet another set of created beings who would disobey Him and spread corruption in the earth, just as the jinn had done before them.

Then, Allah *the Exalted* told us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not know the Unseen Knowledge by himself. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* informs him of this knowledge through revelation: 'Decidedly, nothing is revealed to me except that surely I am only an evident constant warner.' (*Sad:* 70)

Thus, the One Who taught human beings these concepts will teach them about things to come, and this is a high level in the knowledge of the Unseen. Indeed, the Unseen is veiled from us. Similarly, the past and future times are also veiled. The past is veiled because the events of ancient times, for example, were not recorded. Even the records laid by human beings are spurious because they have only stated a man's opinion about a particular event. Similarly, the future hides what is yet to happen. As for the present time that we live in, most of it occurs in other places that are veiled from us.

The objective of this verse is to confirm that disbelievers will argue together in hellfire. This is because the one who informed us that the angels argued with Allah *Glorified is He* has also informed us that the disbelievers will argue with each other.

Allah *Glorified is He* also said: '... evident constant warner' (*Sad:* 70). These words were not addressed to righteous people. Rather, they were being addressed to disobedient people. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّى خَٰلِقٌۢ بَشَرًا مِّن طِينٍ ﴿٧١﴾ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُۥ
وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِى فَقَعُوا۟ لَهُۥ سَٰجِدِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾ فَسَجَدَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ
كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾ إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ ٱسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

Your Lord said to the angels, 'I will create a man from clay [71] When I have shaped him and breathed from My Spirit into him, bow down before him [72] The angels all bowed down together [73] but not Iblis, who was too proud. He became a rebel [74] (The Quran, *Sad:* 71-74)

This speech from Allah *the Most High* was to inform the angels that He will create Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*. Yet, the angels assumed that

Allah *the Almighty* was consulting them regarding the creation of man, and this is why they pointed out their fears. They should have realised that the matter was settled, that the case was closed and that Allah was informing them by saying, 'Behold, indeed, I will create (*inni khaliq*) ...' (*Sad:* 71), which is in an emphatic lexical tone.

Thus, we should mention that some people point out Allah's speech regarding the creation of man from clay. They say that the Quran said in one verse that He created Adam 'from water'. In another verse, He said that Adam was created from mud (*teen*). In another verse, the Quran stated that Adam was created from dark slime (*hama' masnun*). Still another verse stated that He was created from sounding clay (*salsal*).

The fact, however, is that these are various stages of one creation, and not different starting points for His creation. When earth is mixed with water, it becomes clay. If clay is left until it starts to decay and its smell changes, it will be 'dark slime' (*hama' masnun*), and if it dries and becomes hard, then it will be sounding clay (*salsal*) like pottery.

When Allah *the Almighty* created man, He did so from a type of clay that contains all of the elements of soil. Scientists have discovered that soil like this is that which is suitable for agriculture because if clay or soil is too cohesive, the water remains around the roots and the plants become unstable and wilt. If it is too sandy, the water leaks away before the roots can absorb it. Thus, we need a form of soil that is between the two types such that it holds enough water for the plants to benefit from and absorb the nutrients while allowing the excess water to drain away without harming the roots.

Scientists have discovered that the human body is composed of sixteen elements, starting with oxygen which comprises 67%, the highest percentage of all, and ending with manganese. These sixteen elements have been also found to be the ingredients of clay which confirms the truth that Allah has created man from clay.

Allah says: '… and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down before him in prostration' (*Sad:* 72). Allah *the Almighty* thus commanded the angels that, when the creation of Adam has been completed, both his form and his soul, they should bow down before him. That was not meant as worship of Adam but as obedience of the One Who has given the command to bow down. This act of prostration was not meant to ascribe any divinity to the new created being or hold him sacred, but the angels obeyed it solely in submission to the Lord and Creator Who has thus ordered them. For example, we prostrate ourselves in the direction of the *Ka'ba*. Is this meant to idolise it? No, rather, it is showing obedience to Allah Who has made it obligatory for us to observe *salat* (prayer) in its direction.

So when Allah *the Exalted* gave His command: 'The angels prostrated themselves, all of them together except Satan. He found glory in his arrogance and [thus] became one of the disbelievers.' (*Sad:* 73-74)

Allah *Glorified is He* asked Iblis (Satan):

قَالَ يَٰٓإِبۡلِيسُ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَن تَسۡجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقۡتُ بِيَدَيَّۖ
أَسۡتَكۡبَرۡتَ أَمۡ كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلۡعَالِينَ ٧٥

God said, 'Iblis, what prevents you from bowing down to the man I have made with My own hands? Are you too high and mighty?' [75] (The Quran, *Sad:* 75)

Allah tells this story of Iblis' disobedience in seven chapters of the Quran, each time with a different emphasis. In one verse, for example, He says about Iblis (Satan), '… he refused ...' (*al-Hijr:* 31) and in another, '… [He] refused and gloried in his arrogance …' (*al-Baqara:* 34).

It is worth mentioning, before proceeding with our reflections on the story, that we highlight that the garden (*janna*) from which Adam was driven to the earth was not the same eternal Garden of Paradise. Adam *peace be upon him* was not created for paradise but later was dismissed from it as a punishment because of his disobedience. Rather, Adam was created to be a vicegerent on earth. This is the first information Allah *the Most High* gives about the creation of Adam: '… I am putting a successor on earth …' (*al-Baqara:* 30). Thus, Adam was originally created to live on earth. Humankind is two categories: infallible, namely the messengers, and fallible, namely the generality of mankind. Since

Adam is the father of all humankind, it was necessary that he should embody the characteristics of both categories. In the beginning, Adam forgot his Lord's Command, so he disobeyed it. Then, Allah *the Exalted* turned to him with Mercy accepted his repentance and made him an infallible messenger who would teach His guidance to his offspring: humankind. Thus, Adam *peace be upon him* did not disobey Allah while he was a prophet, but before he was chosen for the mission of prophethood.

This was the purpose of creating Adam, then, as Allah announced to the angels even before creating him. However, out of His Mercy and Justice, Allah did not want to put Adam to the real test once created. He did not want to send him down to the earth and order him to make it prosperous according to His guidance, thus charge him with a huge responsibility for which he was unprepared. This is why Allah put Adam first in that garden that contained all the necessities and luxuries of life he needed. He gave him simple commands to abide by in it so as to prepare and train him for the ultimate mission.

Allah *the Almighty* permitted Adam to eat from anything in the garden except for one tree, from which he was forbidden even to approach, let alone eat. This was intended to train Adam for the Divine ordinance that necessarily includes obligations and prohibitions. Then, He told Adam that Iblis (Satan) was his sworn enemy and cautioned him against his evil insinuations.

Iblis (Satan) did attempt to lead Adam astray and succeeded in that. Adam ate from the prohibited tree, which was the sin that caused his nakedness to be exposed for the first time. This was meant to symbolise that what causes people to be exposed and their weaknesses to be subject to censure is violation of Allah's Law.

Reflect upon these Words of Allah: '...but do not approach this one tree...' (*al-Baqara:* 35). Allah did not tell Adam: ‘Do not eat from this one tree’, but He prohibited them from even coming close to it because whoever approaches the forbidden limits is on the brink of trespassing them. This is why when Allah explains to us in the Quran the limits of what He has made permissible for us, He says: '... These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, *transgress* them ...' (*al-Baqara:* 229). When He explains the limits of what He has forbidden, He says: '... These are the bounds set by Allah: do not, then, approach them ...' (*al-Baqara:* 187).

In the verse we are reflecting upon, Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing Iblis (Satan): '... what prevents you from bowing down ...' (*Sad:* 75). In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, He says: '... What has kept you that you do not bow down?...' (*al-A'raf:* 12) Both structures mean the same. The slight difference between the original two structures in Arabic is that the first is meant to ask Iblis (Satan) why he refused to bow down before Adam. The second means 'did something prevent him from bowing down despite himself?

Allah *the Exalted* says, describing Adam *peace be upon him*: '... the man I have made with My own Hands ...' (*Sad:* 75). This is to honour Adam and show his elevated status before Allah. Let it indeed suffice as an honour to Adam that Allah associates his creation directly with Himself in the aforementioned verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues, addressing Iblis (Satan): '... Are you too high and mighty?' (*Sad:* 75) The words 'high' and 'mighty' are used in this verse as far less eloquent equivalents to two separate descriptions in the Arabic structure of the verse. The first word, 'too high', denotes 'arrogance'; what this means is whether it was arrogance that prevented *Iblis* (Satan) from bowing down before Adam in the first place. The second word, 'mighty', is used in this verse as a translation for the Arabic word used in the original structure of the verse: *al-'alin*.

Scholars have differed concerning the interpretation of the word *'alin*. Some of them(1) said it denotes arrogance, so the meaning is the following: 'O, Iblis, has arrogance driven you to reject Allah's Command?' An example of this word being used to denote the meaning of 'arrogant' is found in this verse about Pharaoh: '… for, verily, Pharaoh *'ala* (was mighty) on earth ...' (*Yunus:* 83).

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said in his exegesis that al-'alin means those who are too proud that they see themselves above obedience to Allah [8/5871]. Ibn Al-Jawzi said in Zad Al-Masir, it means Satan was too arrogant that he refused to comply with Allah's Command. At-Tabari said in his commentary on the verse, 'It means 'Did you, Satan, deem yourself too great to bow down to Adam, and thus did not bow down before him out of arrogance, even though you were not proud and arrogant before that? Or have you already thought yourself above your Lord even before the creation of Adam?'*

Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'As for that [happy] life in the Hereafter, We grant it [only] to those who do not seek *'uluwwan* (exalting themselves on earth)…' (*al-Qasas:* 83). Both *'ala* and *'uluwwan* are derived from the same root as *'alin* and have the same meaning.

Other scholars said that the word *'alin* in the verse we are considering refers to the group of angels who were not included in the command to bow down before Adam *peace be upon him*. The angels who were ordered to bow down before Adam were those whose duties pertain to the life of humankind. These angels are '… those who regulate the affair' (*an-Nazi'at:* 5), and those who protect human beings: 'Each person has guardian angels before him and behind, watching over him by Allah's command …' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). These are the ones who were ordered to bow down before Adam. As for the *'alin*, they are the angels who have no work to do other than glorifying Allah and praising His Name. This is the only mission for which they are created. They have no relation to this universe and know nothing of it.

Thus, when Allah *the Exalted* asked Iblis (Satan) if what prevented him from bowing down was that he thought himself from *al-'alin*, the word was meant to refer to the angels who were not included in the command. Considering the word means 'arrogant' is inaccurate, for this meaning is already expressed in the word *istakbarta* (denoting 'high') that precedes it.

Now, let us review the different opinions(1) of scholars concerning the nature of Iblis (Satan). Some of them said he was an angel, and others said he was a jinni. Those who hold the first opinion seek evidence in the Words of Allah: 'Your Lord said unto the angels, "Behold, indeed, I will create a human being out of clay, and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down before him in prostration!"' (*Sad:* 71-72) They say that Iblis (Satan) must therefore be an angel because the order was given to them as the verse shows. Were he not from the angels, he would not have been punished for his rebellion and refusal to bow down before Adam. This view, however, can be decisively refuted. Analogy and reasoning are used to infer rulings in Islam in case there is no clear text in the Quran or *Sunnah* that directly explains that ruling. In the chapter of *al-Kahf*, there is an unequivocal textual proof that Iblis was never an angel, for Allah says: 'We said to the angels, "Bow down before Adam," and they all bowed down, but not Iblis; he was one of the jinns, and he disobeyed his Lord's command …' (*al-Kahf:* 50). How then can we say Iblis was an angel, while Allah explicitly states that he was a jinni?

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(1) In his exegesis of verse no. 50 of the chapter of *al-Kahf*, At-Tabari mentions the various views of scholars concerning the nature of Iblis (Satan). Some hold the view that he was from a tribe known as Al-Jinn; others said that he was one of the gatekeepers of paradise. Other scholars say that he was referred to as a jinn because he was *istajann* (hidden) from the eyes of humankind.

Some might inquire: 'Why then did Allah punish him for not bowing down before Adam?' To answer this, we need to know that the angels have no free will to choose to obey Allah or defy Him. It is their natural disposition to be totally submissive to Him, as Allah says: '... angels who never disobey Allah's Commands to them, but do as they are ordered' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). Unlike angels, humankind and jinns are given the freedom of choice between faith and disbelief, obedience and disobedience. Thus, if one of them commits himself to obedience, he is better than the angels, for the angels do not have the power to disobey Allah. As for people and jinn, they can disobey Him, but the devout amongst them choose not to do so.

Allah bestowed upon Iblis (Satan) a distinctive status amongst the angels, for he took it upon himself to obey His Lord by his own will and choice. It was said that he was called 'The Pride of the Angels' because of his virtue over them. Therefore, when Allah gave the angels the command to bow down before Adam, Iblis was also included. Since he had always chosen to be devout to his Lord, which earned him that honourable status amongst the angels, it befitted him then to obey this command of his Lord.

Even considering the view that he was below the angels, a command that was given to his superiors and whom they obeyed must necessarily have included him as well, being inferior to them, and he should have obeyed it, too. Suppose a president of a state entered a room, and his ministers all stood up as a token of respect. It would be then even more incumbent on undersecretaries, being their inferiors, to stand up for the president. No need, therefore, to dispute over this point with no avail.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Thereupon the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together except Satan. He found glory in his arrogance and [thus] became one of the disbelievers.' (*Sad:* 73-74) Accordingly, Iblis (Satan) had the free will to choose, and since he chose to disobey Allah, he deserved to be punished.

In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* tells the reason on which basis Iblis disobeyed the command to bow down to Adam:

قَالَ أَنَا۠ خَيْرٌ مِّنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِى مِن نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُۥ مِن طِينٍ ٧٦

Iblis said, 'I am better than him: You made me from fire, and him from clay' [76] (The Quran, *Sad:* 76)

Indeed Adam *peace be upon him* was made from clay and Iblis (Satan) was made from fire, but based on what argument can one claim that clay is inferior to fire? Anything in creation does not derive its worth from its kind or composition, but from its Creator. So one species is not better than another, for Allah has created them all and given each of them a purpose in life. All humankind and jinns are equal before Allah, and superiority is solely on the basis of devoutness. This is what makes believers and disbelievers receive their provisions alike from Allah *the Most High*. What Allah gives specially to believers is the gift of being His true worshippers, for they have chosen to embrace faith while others have chosen to defy their Lord and Creator. So, when Iblis (Satan) rebelled against Allah's Command, claiming superiority over Adam, Allah told him:

قَالَ فَٱخْرُجْ مِنْهَا فَإِنَّكَ رَجِيمٌ ٧٧ وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكَ لَعْنَتِىٓ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلدِّينِ ٧٨

**Get out of here! You are rejected [77]
My rejection will follow you till the Day of
Judgement! [78] (The Quran, *Sad:* 77-78)**

Since his disobedience stemmed from arrogant defiance of his Lord, Allah punished Iblis (Satan) by eternal expulsion from His Mercy. The verse which says, 'My rejection will follow you till the Day of Judgment!' (*Sad:* 78) comes as emphasis of the decree issued against Iblis and stated in the preceding verse: '… You are rejected.' (*Sad:* 77)

Having been turned out of Allah's Mercy, Iblis (Satan) replies:

قَالَ رَبِّ فَأَنظِرۡنِيٓ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ يُبۡعَثُونَ ٧٩ قَالَ فَإِنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُنظَرِينَ ٨٠
إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡوَقۡتِ ٱلۡمَعۡلُومِ ٨١

But Iblis said, 'My Lord, grant me respite until the Day when they are raised from the dead' [79] So He said, 'You have respite [80] till the Appointed Day [81] (The Quran, *Sad:* 79-81)

In reply to his Lord's decree against him, Iblis entreats Him to delay his death until the Final Day. This proves that he believes everyone has an appointed day when his life in this world must inevitably come to an end. This also exposes his falsehood and malice when he said to Adam *peace be upon him* trying to tempt him to eat from the forbidden tree: '... shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that never decays?' (*Ta Ha:* 120) Had there been a tree that could give one eternity, why had he not eaten from it himself, instead of asking his Lord to give him respite till the Final Day? This also shows the heedlessness of Adam, for had he been mindful then of this plain truth, that this life must certainly end, he would not have eaten from the tree.

It is also worthy to note that Iblis (Satan) himself undertook the plot against Adam *peace be upon him*. He did not leave this task of tempting the father of humankind to any one of his offspring. Scholars say Adam was honoured by his Lord so much that he was granted the ranks of the angels. It was not appropriate, therefore, to assign the job of tempting him to any but the very worst of all devils: Iblis (Satan) himself.

Thus, Allah granted Iblis what he asked and delayed his end till the Day when creatures are resurrected for reckoning. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغۡوِيَنَّهُمۡ أَجۡمَعِينَ ٨٢ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنۡهُمُ ٱلۡمُخۡلَصِينَ ٨٣

Iblis said, "I swear by Your might! I will tempt all [82] but Your true servants" [83] (The Quran, *Sad:* 82 - 83)

This verse indicates that the enmity Iblis (Satan) harboured was not against his Lord, but Adam and his offspring. Iblis (Satan) knew how to make an oath, when he said: '... I swear by Your Might ...' (*Sad:* 82). He knew Allah is *the Almighty*; he knew He is far Exalted above any need for them, their faith or their worship. Indeed we do not benefit Allah by our worship, do we harm Him by our disobedience. It is own for our own good, so let each do what he likes and bear the consequences then: '…"Now the truth has come from your Lord. Let those who wish to believe in it do so and let those who wish to reject it do so." We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers ...' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Fully mindful of this ultimate truth, Iblis (Satan) has decided to tempt all humankind into sinfulness. Nevertheless, he knows with certainty that he can have no power over those servants of Allah who are truly devoted to Him, so he says: '… I will tempt all but Your true servants' (*Sad:* 82-83). Iblis (Satan) knows Allah is Independent of any need of His servants or their worship, so he decided to avenge on the offspring of Adam by leading them astray.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

قَالَ فَٱلۡحَقُّ وَٱلۡحَقَّ أَقُولُ (٨٤)
لَأَمۡلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنكَ وَمِمَّن تَبِعَكَ مِنۡهُمۡ أَجۡمَعِينَ (٨٥)

Allah said, "This is the truth – I speak only the truth [84] I will fill Hell with you and all those that follow you" [85] (The Quran, *Sad:* 84 - 85)

Allah *the Exalted* speaks only the truth and whatever He does is done with truth, so He tells Iblis (Satan) that what He has done to him, the punishment He inflicted on him, has certainly been done with truth, for He is the Lord of truth. Allah declares that He will fill hellfire with Iblis and whoever follows his way of people and jinns, his offspring and Adam's offspring. This is a deserved punishment. Allah *the Almighty* is never unjust to any creature.

Some would wonder if this declaration Allah makes to Iblis bear proof that He has already preordained Hell or Paradise for whomever He wills of His servants. Does it mean they have no choice, and Allah has already decided their destinies even before they were created? To answer this, we must know that there is no compulsion in the case. The truth is that Allah, Who is the Creator of all humankind and jinn, knows well what He has created. His omnipotent

Knowledge has already encompassed all about the choices His servants would make. Based on that Knowledge, he has decided the final destiny of each. He does not force anyone to make a certain choice or another. To Allah belongs the Highest Similitude, yet there is no harm of using comparisons for the purpose of illustration. A teacher, based on expert knowledge of his students, can well predict their results. He would tell who would pass, who would fail and who would excel. Does he exercise any interference, let alone compulsion, with his students? No, but he can pass judgements based on his knowledge of them, and each student certainly has full power and freedom to study or not and write whatever they choose in their exams.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter with the following verses:

قُلْ مَآ أَسْـَٔلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلْمُتَكَلِّفِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾
إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾ وَلَتَعْلَمُنَّ نَبَأَهُۥ بَعْدَ حِينٍۭ ﴿٨٨﴾

[Prophet], say, 'I ask no reward from you for this, nor do I claim to be what I am not [86] This is only a warning for all people [87] In time you will certainly come to know its truth' [88] (The Quran, *Sad:* 86 - 88)

The first verse begins with an order to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The original Arabic text of the verse literally translates as the following: '… I do not ask any reward from you. …' The use of 'any' is for the sake of emphasis. Were it, '… I do not ask reward from you …', without using 'any', it would be correct and would convey the same meaning. Still, the emphasis added to the structure is meant to tell that Prophet Muhammad does not seek by his call anything that can possibly be called 'reward', not even the most trifling thing that can be given by way of reward. Is it exactly the same to say, 'I do not have money,' or 'I do not have any money'? The latter structure adds more emphasis to the meaning. It means the speaker does not have even a penny.

In this verse, Allah orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell his people that he was after no reward from them. This bears a message that what the Prophet was sent with is for the good of people in everything pertaining to this worldly life and the Afterlife. Therefore, he certainly deserves a reward, but he never asked people for it, for no human being could ever pay him his due for the service he has rendered to humanity by guiding them to the true religion. Only Allah *the Most High* can reward him for that; He alone is Capable of recompensing His Messenger for the great good he has done. It is not that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want a reward at all. Rather, he wanted to have it from the One Who has sent him with the Message.

All the messengers of Allah have said as such to their people. They all declared that even though they reserved to be rewarded they wanted no reward from their people. The only exceptions from this were Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*. Why is this so? Scholars say that the first person Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) called to faith was his uncle Azar, and it would not have been appropriate to ask an uncle for a reward. Likewise, the first Prophet Musa (Moses) called to faith was Pharaoh who had brought him up and been good to him, so it would not have been fitting for him to mention anything about a reward to a person who acted like a father to him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then commands Prophet Muhammad to say: '…nor do I claim to be what I am not' (*Sad:* 86). The Arabic word used in the original structure of the verse is *mutakallif* which denotes pretence or affecting what is beyond one's capacity. This word can be found in the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Do not *tatakallafu* (overburden yourselves by showing too much hospitality) to your guests such that you end up disliking to receive guests.'(1) It means do not offer more than you can afford. Some would borrow money to buy foods and refreshments for their guests. Guests leave and debts remain. This may lead one to hate to receive guests and find it odious that a guest should ever enter his house. Be natural and host your guests according to your means. Do not claim to have what you do not.

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(1) This Hadith is cited by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in his *Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din* [2/12]. Al-Hafizh Al-`Iraqi said about it, ‘It was narrated by Abu Bakr ibn Lal in *Makarim Al-Akhlaq* on the authority of Salman, saying, "Let none of you take upon himself more than he is able to for the sake of his guest."' In the chain of narrators, there is Mohammad ibn Al-Faraj Al-Azraq concerning whose authenticity doubts have been raised amongst the scholars of Hadith. Adh-Dhahabi said about him in *Mizan Al-I'tidal* [8051], ‘He is well known and truthful.' Al-Hakim expressed doubts concerning him only because he accompanied Al-Hussayn Al-Karabisi, and that was rather scrupulous. Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi said about him [3/159], ‘His narrations are authentic. I know nothing blameworthy about him.’

When Prophet Muhammad said, as Allah commanded him, '… nor do I claim to be what I am not' (*Sad:* 86), he meant that he did not need to resort to pretence to confer importance upon the Message he has come with. What he has come with does not require excessive persuasion, for it already accords with the natural disposition of humankind. Anyone who examines the rulings of Islam would find that they are in perfect harmony with nature. Islam forbids lying and cheating. Are they not truly harmful behaviours that should be stopped? Islam forbids drinking alcohol. Do we not all agree that it corrupts the mind, the very special gift with which Allah has honoured humankind? The answers are clear and do not require excessive persuasion for one to be satisfied with them, for they are in harmony with human disposition.

Allah says in the following verse: 'This is only a *dhikr* (reminder; warning) for all people.' (*Sad:* 87) The Quran does not bring to people anything new to them, but it is only a reminder. The purpose of a reminder is to bring back to mind what has been forgotten. The Quran is meant to remind us of the first covenant we made with Allah when we were still in the realm of the Unseen, still only seeds in the loins of our father, Adam, and have not yet been brought to existence. Back then, Allah *Glorified is He* asked us all: '... Am I not your Lord? ...' (*al-A'raf:* 172) We all concurred: '... Yes, indeed ...' (*al-A'raf:* 172). Then Allah *the Exalted* told everyone to remember this covenant: '... [Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this." Or lest you say, "Verily, it was but our forefathers who, in times gone by, began to ascribe divinity to other beings beside Allah, and we were but their late offspring ...' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173). Thus, Allah *the Most High* has not compelled us to make this covenant upon us, but we have made it willingly. We have accepted responsibility while we were but seeds in the loins of our father Adam *peace be upon him* when we did not have any desires or caprices yet to drag us into falsehood.

Therefore, what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches is not something new. The doctrine of monotheism and the obligations that faith entails are an ancient message that all humankind have already known and accepted, and the Quran is only a reminder of that first covenant.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter by the verse: 'In time you will certainly come to know its truth.' (*Sad:* 88) Those who deny the Quran will come to know the results of their denial. They will know that its revelations were true. Scholars say that, 'In time …' in this verse refers to the time when Islam becomes victorious over disbelief, which started from the Battle of Badr until the time when it was said, ‘It is astounding how that unlettered man conquered half the world in half a century!’ It was indeed amazing, and it still is until today. Those who denied Islam witnessed its victory and the collapse of disbelief in the face of the true religion. They witnessed the retreat of the borders of the territories of disbelief and the expansion of the territories of Islam. Allah *the Almighty* refers to this in the verse: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders?...' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41) Despite that, they did not heed the lesson.

Other scholars said that 'In time…' (*Sad:* 88) may also refer to the Day of Judgment when disbelievers enter hellfire. Then they will know the truth of the revelations Allah had sent down in the Quran.

The word *naba’* used in the Arabic text of the verse to refer to the message of the Quran denotes 'important news', as Allah says: 'Say, "It is a notable tiding from which you are veering away."' (*Sad:* 67-68) What do you think of a message that Allah described as mighty? The importance of any news is determined by the amount of good that it brings to one. The news of passing an admission test to school or college is not like that of being nominated a minister, for example. How, then, about the news that determines your destiny and happiness both in this life and the Hereafter? Such happiness can only be attained by heeding the Message of Allah and fulfilling one's duty to Him. What news can have more importance or greatness than the news brought from the Lord in His Glorious Book? May Allah make us of the believers who will find the truth of what has been told in the Quran on the Day of Judgment! Amen!

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (21)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (21)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (21)

the chapter of

az-Zumar

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *az-Zumar*(2):

تَنزِيلُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡحَكِيمِ ١

This Scripture is sent down from God the Mighty, the Wise [1] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 1)

Several words in the Arabic language denote 'sending down'. One of them is *nuzul* which denotes bringing something from somewhere high to somewhere down. Another is *inzal* which denotes that the one who sent the stated thing down is higher in status than the one to whom it is sent. There is also *tanzil*, the one used in the verse we are considering, which denotes sending something down in parts over a period of time according to circumstance.

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (Who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) The chapter of *az-Zumar* is the 39th in the order of the chapters in the Glorious Quran. It contains 75 verses and is said to be a Meccan chapter (revealed in Mecca before the Immigration of Prophet Muhammad) according to the view of Al-Hasan, 'Ikrima, 'Ata' and Jabir ibn Zayd. Ibn Abbas said, 'It is Meccan except for two verses which were revealed in Medina, one of which is 'Allah has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings...' (*az-Zumar:* 23), and the other verse is 'Say, [Allah says], "My servants who have harmed themselves by your own excess…"' (*az-Zumar:* 53). [See Quran Exegesis of Al-Qurtubi (8/5875).] The chapter of *az-Zumar* is also called the chapter of *al-Ghuraf* because Allah says in one of its verses: 'But those who are mindful of their Lord will have lofty *ghuraf* [dwellings] built for them, one above the other, graced with flowing streams …' (*az-Zumar:* 20).

For example, Allah says: 'We *anzalnahu* (sent it down) on the Night of Glory' (*al-Qadr:* 1). This refers to the act of sending down the Quran all at once from the Preserved Tablet at the beginning of Prophet Muhammad's prophethood. Then, it was sent down to the Prophet in parts on different occasions

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'We *anzalnahu* (sent down the Quran) with the truth, and with the truth it *nazal* (has come down) …' (*al-Isra':* 105). Allah sent it down with the truth at the beginning, and it remained upon the truth. No one was able to alter it or twist its words because it is the truth.

The root of these words, *nazala*, *nazzala* and *anzala*, denotes the highness of the one who sends down the stated thing and the lower status of the one to whom it is sent. The value of what is sent down is determined by the status of the sender. Sending down Divine guidance proves that Allah *the Most High* wants to honour His servants and guide them to the Straight Path. So, *inzal* indicates the high status of the one who sends down as well as the honour of what is sent. It is also an honour to those Allah has chosen for receiving that greater good. This is why Allah says about Muslims: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110).

When we track the derivatives of the root *nazala* in the Glorious Quran, we find that every time they are used, they denote bringing something from on high, except in a small number of verses, as the following one in the chapter of *al-Hadid* where Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… We also *anzalna* (sent) iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). Iron has not been sent down from on high, but it is extracted from under the ground, so why does Allah use the word *anzalna* in the aforementioned verse? Some say that even though iron is extracted from the earth, Allah is the Creator Who made it and put it there. Thus, it is a bestowal granted to humankind from the One in Heaven, hence the use of the word *anzalna* which denotes 'sending down'. Thus, this word does not necessarily refer to the direction of sending; rather, it refers to status of the sender.

It may be worthy of mentioning that sending iron has indeed been a necessary part of the mission assigned to messengers and those who believed with them. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says in the same verse immediately after mentioning iron: '... so that Allah could mark out those who would help

Him and His Messengers …' (*al-Hadid:* 25). It is from iron that weapons have been made to fight against disbelievers in the cause of Allah.

Another verse where one of the aforementioned derivatives is mentioned yet does not denote 'sending down' is this one: '... He *anzala* (gave you) four kinds of livestock in pairs …' (*az-Zumar:* 6). The same can be also found in the verse: 'Children of Adam, We have *anzalna* (given) you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you ...' (*al-A'raf:* 26).

We notice a beautiful stylistic gesture employed by the Glorious Quran with respect to the preposition it uses before the indirect object of the verb *anzala* and how the prepositions used with it correspond perfectly to the meaning intended in every instance. For example, when Allah addresses Prophet Muhammad, He says: 'Step by step, He *nazzala* (has sent) the Scripture *'alayka* [down to you (Prophet)] with the Truth...' (*Al-'Imran:* 3). Allah *the Almighty* addresses His Messenger using the singular second person pronoun 'you' despite the fact that the Quran has been sent down to all people: 'This is a blessed Scripture which We sent down to you [Muhammad], for people to think about its messages …' (*Sad:* 29). Nevertheless, Allah addresses the one who directly receives His revelations. When Allah speaks about the blessings that He grants to humankind directly without any intermediaries, He uses the plural second person pronoun. Thus, He uses the singular form *'alayka* in addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in the following verse, He uses the plural *lakum* when He addresses all people: '...He *anzala lakum* (gave you) four kinds of livestock in pairs …' (*az-Zumar:* 6). Let us also consider the preposition used with the pronoun in each case. In the verse about garments, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'We have *anzalna 'alaykum* (given you) garments to cover your nakedness...' (*al-A'raf:* 26). The preposition *'ala* denotes 'putting something above or on another', so it is used with garments that are put on the body to cover it. In the verse about livestock, Allah *the Most High* says: '... He *anzala lakum* (gave you) four kinds of livestock in pairs…' (*az-Zumar:* 6). The preposition *l* denotes 'giving something to someone', hence its usage with livestock.

Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who has created all being and bestows His blessings upon them. He has created Adam and His offspring and sent down to them His guidance to set their lives aright. Some scholars hold the view that Allah has made Adam *peace be upon him* His vicegerent on the earth in the sense that he is the one whom He has entrusted to carry out His Will on it. Allah *the Exalted* has placed man on the earth and created the means and resources required to preserve his life. Still, and even though everything belongs originally to Allah, He respects property rights of His servants. This is why He says, encouraging the wealthy to give charity to the poor: 'Who will give Allah a good loan, which He will increase for him many times over?...' (*al-Baqara:* 245) He *the Exalted* calls charity a 'loan' despite the fact that He is the Giver of that wealth. Since Allah is the Creator Who has brought humankind into existence and guaranteed their provisions, He considered wealth to be the right of His servants, who own it, hence His calling charity a 'loan' they give to Him when they offer it to the poor. Let me use an example to illustrate this. Suppose a man who gave his child pocket money suddenly found himself in need of that money. He borrowed the money from his child who saved it and promised to pay the child back. Even though the money originally belonged to the father, he respected the property rights of his child, and to Allah belongs the Highest Similitude.

Back to the verse we are considering; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'This *kitab* (Scripture) is sent down from Allah …' (*az-Zumar:* 1). When the word *kitab* is used with a definite article and without any modification that describes it, it refers to the Glorious Quran. The Arabic words *kitab* and *Quran* are both used to refer to the Glorious Book of Allah. The former means 'something which is written down', while the latter means 'something which is read'. Both are true of the Glorious Quran: it is recorded in books, preserved in the hearts and will forever be recited. Allah *the Almighty* has made it so to make it as evidence against those who have been addressed by it.

The companions of Prophet Muhammad have demonstrated exemplary caution when they started compiling the Glorious Quran in a book. They did not write down a single verse unless they heard it from at least two of those who memorised the Quran. Then, they would only write it down when at least two others of those who memorised the Quran bore witness to its authenticity. Such were the men Allah entrusted with His Book, for He says in it: 'We have sent down the Quran Ourself, and We Ourself will guard it' (*al-Hijr:* 9).

Thus, the Quran was sent down '…from Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 1). Allah does not say, for example, '…from the Lord…'. This takes us to the difference between the words *Allah* and *Rab* (Lord) in the Arabic language. The word *Rab* is derived from a stem that denotes 'increase', so it refers to material bestowals. Thus, He is the *Rab* in the sense that He has created all beings and provides for everyone, be they believers or disbelievers. Thus, when it comes to material gifts offered by the *Rab* (the Lord), all people are equal. The word *Allah*, on the other hand, is derived from a stem that means 'deity'. Therefore, when it comes to speaking about issues related to faith and worship, the word *Allah* is used. This is why when Allah speaks about the Quran, He says: '…from Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 1), not '… from the *Rab* (Lord) …'.

The word *Allah* is a name used uniquely to describe Him, the True God, the Lord and Creator of all things. Allah *the Exalted* has Names and Attributes that belong to Him as He says: 'The Most Excellent Names belong to Allah…' (*al-A'raf:* 180). Allah has commanded us to use those Names to call upon Him, yet by calling Him with His unique Name, *Allah*, it is as if we called Him by His Names all at once, for this Name encompasses all of them. This is why we should begin work with saying, ‘In the Name of Allah’, for when one says so, he has thus called upon Allah by all His Attributes that one needs to accomplish his work. He has thus called upon Him by His Might, Knowledge, Wisdom, and so on. Instead of saying, ‘In the Name of *the Almighty* One, the All Knowing, the All-Wise, etc., it suffices to say, 'In the Name of Allah’. This Majestic Name of God encompasses all of His Attributes of Perfection, both those that have been revealed to us and those that He has confined to His Knowledge. Even if you are disobedient, do not be ashamed of your Lord or too embarrassed to start any job in His Name. Do not think it impossible that Allah *the Almighty* would still grant you His aid despite your sins, for your Lord is the All-Merciful, and He commands His servants to remember His Name and use it to call upon Him.

Allah *the Exalted* concludes the verse by these Attributes of Him: '… *Al-'Aziz* (the Mighty), *Al-Hakim* (the Wise)' (*az-Zumar:* 1). The word *Al-Aziz* means He Who has no need whatsoever of His creation—neither does their obedience benefit Him, nor does their disobedience harm Him. Allah mentions this

Attribute after mentioning the Book He has sent down to us with His guidance for a reason. Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that it is a favour from Him that He has sent down to us His guidance. He is in no need of our obedience, but He has showed us the Straight Path for us to be prosperous both in this worldly life and in the Afterlife.

Since Allah is in no need of us, He does not accept worship unless it is solely devoted to Him, the One Who has no partners. He says: 'Allah does not forgive the joining of partners with Him; anything less than that He forgives to whoever He wills …' (*an-Nisa':* 48). He also says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'I am absolutely in no need of partners or partnerships. If anyone does a deed in which he associates others with Me, I leave him to those he associated with Me [to reward him for it].'(1) Why should Allah *the Exalted* accept to have partners falsely ascribed to Him? Does He have any need for our worship to compromise?! Exalted is He above every need! It is not Allah Who benefits from His servants' obedience, but the entire benefit goes back to them. Thus, your Lord has created you and sent down to you that which is for your own good. If you obey Him, He will reward you. Whoever believes in Allah and acts in accordance with his comprehension of and faith in His Most Excellent Names and Attributes will be rewarded by Him, out of His Bounty and Mercy.

The meaning of Allah's Name *Al-'Aziz* is also expressed in this Qudsi Hadith: 'My servants, the earliest and latest, humankind and jinns, were to all have hearts as mindful of Allah as that of the most devout one amongst you, that would not increase My kingdom one iota. Were the earliest and latest humankind and jinns, to have hearts as evil as that of the most wicked one amongst you, that would not decrease My kingdom one iota. My servants, were they the earliest and latest humankind and jinns, to all come together in a single place and each make a supplication to Me, and were I to give each what he has asked, that would not decrease what I have one bit, not even so much as a needle would decrease the sea when it is dipped into it. This is because I am the Generous and the Magnificent Who has the Power to bring anything into existence. Just by a word from Me, I can bestow blessings and inflict punishments. When I want something, I only say to it, "Be!" and it is.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is cited by Muslim in his Sahih (2985) and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4202), and this narration is that of Muslim, narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

Allah is the Mighty God Who is free of any need of His servants. He has Power over all things, and none has any power over Him. He confers of His Attributes on those who believe in Him, so believers who have might possess as such out of the Might of Allah. As for disbelievers, they seek might and sovereignty through their arrogant defiance of Allah, and how far they are from attaining what they aspire to! The hypocrites at the time of Prophet Muhammad said, as the Quran mentions them saying: '… "Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak"…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). Indeed, they have spoken the truth, for the powerful will drive out the weak, but who are the powerful and who are the weak? Allah *the Exalted* responds to this by saying: '… power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger and to the believers …' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). Allah bestows of His Power on His Messenger and the believers; thus, the weak party that would be driven out of Medina were the hypocrites, and so were they.

Besides being *Al-'Aziz* (the Mighty) Who is free of all need, Allah is also *Al-Hakim* (the Wise) Who puts everything in place. One of the countless manifestations of this Wisdom is that He has not made the natural disposition of the believers moulded into one fixed mode of character. He has not created in them mercy only or severity only. Rather, He has made them capable of demonstrating both characteristics based on the occasion. Allah *Glorified is He* says describing believers: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who follow him are harsh towards disbelievers and compassionate towards each other ...' (*al-Fath:* 29). He also says about them: '... humble towards believers, hard on disbelievers …' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). Allah has created this variation in the natural disposition of His servants and meanwhile guided them to the fundamentals based on which they can choose to demonstrate the right characteristic on the right occasion. Thus, a believer should show mercy where the situation so requires and severity where the need arises. This is one of the manifestations of the Wisdom of Allah Who has made every bit of creation exactly corresponding to the mission and role assigned to each one of them.

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(1) *This Hadith is cited by Ahmad in his Musnad (5/104 & 177) on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi cited it in his Sunnan (2495) and classified it as hasan (literally 'good': or authentic but less in degree than Hadiths classified as sahih (literally 'sound' or 'authentic'). Ibn Majah also cited it in his Sunnan (4275).*

It may be worth mentioning that the word *hikma* (wisdom) is derived from *hakama* which refers to a ‘bit’ that is placed in a horse’s mouth. Just as a bit is a tool by which a horse is controlled, *hikma* (wisdom) is the characteristic by which life is governed, and its affairs are managed.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards:

إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ فَٱعۡبُدِ ٱللَّهَ مُخۡلِصٗا لَّهُ ٱلدِّينَ ﴿٢﴾ أَلَا لِلَّهِ ٱلدِّينُ ٱلۡخَالِصُۚ
وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ أَوۡلِيَآءَ مَا نَعۡبُدُهُمۡ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ زُلۡفَىٰٓ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَحۡكُمُ
بَيۡنَهُمۡ فِي مَا هُمۡ فِيهِ يَخۡتَلِفُونَۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِي مَنۡ هُوَ كَٰذِبٞ كَفَّارٞ ﴿٣﴾

It is We who sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the Truth, so worship God with your total devotion. [2] True devotion is due to God alone. [As for] those who choose other protectors beside Him, saying, ‘We only worship them because they bring us nearer to God,’ God Himself will judge between them regarding their differences. God does not guide any ungrateful liar [3] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 2-3)

Truth means a fixed matter that is not affected or abrogated by the changes of life or passage of time. Since the truth is so firm, we should not be deceived by how high falsehood can seem to reach at certain times, for the prevalence of falsehood paves the way for the truth to shine. When falsehood gains predominance, it brings misery and torment upon people, so they look out for the truth and long for its victory. This way, falsehood is actually one of the servants of truth, and disbelief is one of the servants of faith. Allah *the Exalted* never abandons the truth, but He allows falsehood to prevail over it for some time to test people's eagerness for the truth and readiness to defend it. If they turn out to be careless about the truth and reluctant to support it, Allah takes it upon Himself to support it and make it victorious.

Since Allah *the Most High* has sent down the Book, the Quran, with truth, we must take heed then. We must abide by the commands and prohibitions revealed in it and undertake the responsibilities we are assigned by Him. Obedience necessarily entails that we believe in the One Who commands us to obey Him.

When a complicated matter twists your mind, you seek consultation and assistance of someone you know to possess knowledge and sound judgment, someone who can help you make a decision. One entrusts his affairs and issues with those he trusts to have wisdom. Such are the ones from whom we take advice. Faith is the most important of one's affairs in life. Therefore, we must believe in and trust the One Who has revealed faith to us so we can willingly commit ourselves to His ordinance. Belief has to come before action. Islam is about firm faith ingrained in the heart and manifested through action. Faith without action is only a claim, and action without faith is fruitless, for Allah *the Almighty* rewards those who devote their deeds and worship solely to Him. He says: 'The desert Arabs say, "We have faith." [O, Prophet] tell them, "You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, 'We have submitted', for faith has not yet entered your hearts."…' (*al-Hujurat:* 14)

In the verse we are considering, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...worship Allah with your total devotion' (*az-Zumar:* 2). Total devotion to Allah means sincerity; this is the prerequisite based on which worship is accepted or otherwise. What is the meaning of worship? It is a servant's obedience to the ordinance of his Lord. It is to commit oneself to His Commands and Prohibitions. This definition for worship shows the pointlessness of worshipping anything other than Allah, for those who worship the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, rocks, etc. offer their devotion to false deities that have sent no guidance to them nor made incumbent upon them any duties. Claiming that such things are gods and are worthy of worship is a flagrant mistake, for what guidance have those so-called gods revealed to their worshippers? What do they command or forbid? What reward have they promised the obedient or punishment for the disobedient? Since the answer for all those questions is 'None', on what grounds are they claimed to be gods, then?

As for those who alleged, 'We only worship them since they bring us nearer to Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 3), Allah refutes their allegation; He has willed that no intermediaries should interfere between Him and His servants respecting faith and devotion.

Furthermore, Allah calls us to ponder the magnificence of creation. The universe is full of endless wonders that bear testimony to the Majesty of the Creator. With what perfect precision has everything been made and managed! Look at life and how every bit of it is governed with Absolute Wisdom. Who but Allah has made all that? Has anyone else claimed to be the Creator of this mighty universe? Despite the fact that countless people reject faith and deny the existence of Allah, no such claim has ever been made by anyone. This absence of any rivals or opponents is itself evidence of the truth that Allah is the One God and Creator of everything. So long as Allah alone is the Lord and Creator, He is the only One Who is worthy of worship. There is no God but Him *Glorified is He*. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Say, "If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne"' (*al-Isra': 42*). Were there gods besides Allah, they would go to Him and dispute with Him for claiming creation to be entirely His own work.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us: '... worship Allah with your total devotion' (*az-Zumar:* 2). Direct your intention to pleasing Allah alone and do not seek by your good deeds to gain people's praise or admiration. Allowing people a share in your good deeds makes them entirely fruitless, for Allah would not accept those deeds, nor can people ever reward you for them. Those who give to charity only to be called 'generous' actually waste their money, for they give it away to others who benefit from it and meanwhile receive no reward for such action from Allah.

The Arabic for 'sincerity' is *ikhlas*. Amongst the derivatives of this word are *mukhlis*, which is mentioned in the verse we are reflecting on, and *mukhlas*. The latter denotes 'purified' or 'chosen', so it refers to those Allah has chosen for His worship and sincere devotion to Him, like the messengers. Thus, their righteousness is the result of Allah's choice of them. As for the other derivative *mukhlis*, it means he who exerts himself in sincere devotion to Allah, so Allah *the Exalted* accepts him and makes him of the righteous. Thus, Allah's acceptance of him is the result of his sincere devotion. They persevere in worship and constantly knock the door of Allah until it is opened for them.

An example comes to mind of those Allah has chosen for His path purely out of His favour upon them. This example is Al-Qadi ‘Iyad(1) who was a highwayman. One day, he went out as normal to practise his job of robbing travellers, and he heard them say, ‘Do not go that way, for ‘Iyad would find us.’ Those words hit ‘Iyad like a thunderbolt as if he had never before realised how much people must have been afraid of him. Guilt pricked his conscience, and he made a firm intention to repent, ‘My Lord, forgive me and let those people feel safe.’ Allah *the Almighty* forgave him and made him of the devout.(2) Seeing how he changed from a robber to a devout Islamic scholar, people asked 'Iyad about the secret that restored him to the Straight Path. He replied, ‘I certainly know the reason for that. One day, I passed by a watermelon market. I think it was in Baghdad. I found a paper torn out of a Quran book. It was thrown on the ground and trampled underfoot by passers-by. I picked it up, cleaned all the dirt from it and used my last *dirham* to buy some perfume and adorn that paper with its scent. Then I placed it into a high crevice.’ ‘Iyad continued, ‘I swear by the One Who holds my soul in His Hand that, after doing this, I heard a voice call out, "I will make your name amongst the pure just as you purified and perfumed [the paper that contained] My Name."'(3)

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(1) This is ‘Iyad ibn Musa Abul-Fadl, the renowned Islamic scholar of Morocco and the imam of the scholars of Hadith at his time. He was born in Ceuta in the year 476 AH and died from poison in Marrakech in the year 544 AH at the age of 68. He was appointed as a judge in Ceuta and later in Granada. He wrote many books, the most famous of which is *Ash-Shifa fi Ta‘rif Huquq Al-Mustafa*. [*Al-A‘lam* by Az-Zirikli (5/99)]

(2) Ibn Khalkan mentioned it in *Wafiyyat Al-A'yan* in his biography of ‘Iyad. He said, ‘He was a highwayman who robbed people on the road between Abyurd and Sarakhs. Prior to his conversion, he was in love with a woman. As he was climbing up a wall to reach for her, he heard someone reciting Allah’s Words: "Is it not time for believers to humble their hearts to the remembrance of Allah ..." (*al-Hadid:* 16). 'Iyad was moved, so he said, "O, my Lord, the time has come!" So he wandered under the cover of darkness until he arrived at some ruins. There he saw a company of people and heard some of them say, "Let us leave now" and others say, "No, let us wait till morning, for 'Iyad will be on the road, stopping travellers and robbing them." It was then that 'Iyad decided to repent. He left them in safety.'

(3) This story is said to belong to Bishr Al Hafi, not Al-Qadi 'Iyad, as mentioned in the following books: *Wafiyyat Al-A'yan* by Ibn Khalkan, *Al-Wafi bil-Wafiyyat* by As-Safadi, *Tabaqat Al-'Awliya'* by Ibn Al-Mulaqqen and *Mer'at Al-Jenan* by Al-Yafi'i. However, we must point out that 'Iyad was a companion of Bishr at the time.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been narrated as saying, 'Allah hides three things in three: He hides His Good Pleasure in His servant's obedience to Him...', so do not ever look on any act of obedience as trivial or unworthy. Know that Allah *the Exalted* forgave a man simply because he gave water to a dog that was gasping from thirst.(1) This act indicates the man's love of obedience to his Lord, or what would a man gain from quenching a dog's thirst? Is it possible that he was showing off? Needless to say, there was no room whatever for that. That good deed could only have been out of his love to obey Allah.

The Hadith continues, '… and He hides His Wrath in His servant's disobedience to Him …', so do not ever take any act of disobedience lightly. A woman entered Hellfire because of a cat which she locked up since she neither gave it any food or water nor allowed it to eat from the earth's insects.(2)

The third thing is '… and He hides His secrets in His creation', such as the secret that did its work in 'Iyad and changed him from a transgressor into a devout servant of Allah.

After addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the command: '…so worship Allah with your total devotion…' (*az-Zumar:* 2), Allah *the Exalted* alerts people's hearts and minds to this fundamental fact: 'True devotion is due to Allah alone…' (*az-Zumar:* 3). The original Arabic text of this verse starts with the particle *'ala* that is used to call attention. A speaker would use such particles to alert his addressee to what he would say is worth listening.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him as saying, 'A man was walking along a road and became overcome with thirst. He found a well and stopped to drink from it. He did, then, see a dog that was gasping and almost eating the earth's soil due to intense thirst. The man said, "This dog is suffering intense thirst as that which was afflicting me!" He went back to the well, filled his leather sock with water and made the dog drink from it. Allah appreciated what he did and forgave him his sins.' [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6009)]*

(2) *This Hadith is cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, The Book of The Beginning of Creation, the chapter of The Description of Hellfire– Hadith no. (3140), narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar. It is also cited by Muslim in his Sahih, The Book of Repentance- Chapter of Encouraging Repentance– Hadith no. (2619), narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

It is also worthy to note that the prepositional phrase '…to Allah …' that is part of the predicate comes in the Arabic text of the verse at the beginning of the sentence, so it literally translates: 'To Allah alone true devotion is due…' (*az-Zumar:* 3). This reversal of the subject and predicate in the Arabic style is meant to add more emphasis to the point that this predicate is strictly confined to the subject with which it is associated. Thus, the verse means that true devotion is solely and strictly due to Allah alone.

Now, why is true devotion due to Allah alone? What are the grounds based on which Allah is the One God and the only One Worthy of being worshipped? Religion is the Law of Allah which He has ordained for us. This guidance is from Him, and both reward and punishment are in His Hands alone. Who else then has any claim to be worshipped by that Law and that guidance? Allah *the Most High* has guided us to the Straight Path for our prosperity in this life and the Hereafter. Therefore, none is worthy of our devotion but Him *the Exlated*.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the polar opposite of sincere worship of Allah by saying: '[As for] those who choose other protectors beside Him...' (*az-Zumar:* 3); they say—in order to justify their position when you make it clear to them that worshipping other than Allah is a lie, when you, O, Muhammad, tell them that those gods cannot see or hear nor benefit or harm and when you tighten the grip around them—they say: '…'We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3).

If you want to get close to Allah, you should do so through His Law which He approved for you and to which the false gods which you worship besides Him *the Almighty* do not belong. Rather, they are made by you, carved using your own hands. If the wind knocks it over, you put it up again in its place, and if its arms are broken, you yourselves repair them.

So, your worship of them is futile and pointless, and it is actually a lie: '...Allah Himself will judge between them regarding their differences …' (*az-Zumar:* 3). The word 'judgment', when it belongs to Allah *the Almighty* is alarming since His judgment is the truth that shows no favouritism to anyone. However, when a believer hears this, he feels peace of heart because a day will come when the judgment will be only Allah's as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... judgment is only Allah's ...' (*al-An'am:* 57); this means that it will be only His and no one else's. This is why you do not say to your opponent, 'May Allah judge between us!' unless you are absolutely certain that you are in the right.

For this reason, some people become angry if you say to them, 'Allah is the Best Disposer of affairs (between us).' If he were in the right, he would have no fear of anything and would say, 'I am content with His making the decision, and I accept it.' Getting angry when you try to suggest Allah as a judge between the two of you indicates that he is frightened of that judgment because he is in the wrong. Then, there is the fact that Allah's judgment will come at a time when there is no other judgment but His: '... judgment is only Allah's ...' (*al-An'am:* 57).

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says: '… Allah does not guide any ungrateful liar.' (*az-Zumar:* 3) Yes, indeed. Allah *the Almighty* does not guide an ungrateful liar because he is unworthy of being given the gift of guidance. Another reason for this is that Allah guides everyone in the sense of pointing out to them the right way to go. Then, if anyone amongst them believes, He increases him by giving him the guidance of success and support, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path and given them their awareness [of Him].' (*Muhammad:* 17)

A good example to illustrate this is one we previously had given when we said to take a traffic policeman who stands at an intersection directing traffic and pointing out to people the way to go. If you ask him the way to Alexandria, for example, he says to you, 'It is that way' and you turn in the direction he points out to you. Then, before you leave him, you say, 'May Allah reward you! I almost got lost. I would have gone some other way if Allah had not facilitated things so that I had met you!' He replies, 'By Allah, you are a good man and deserve every good that comes your way, but there is a dangerous region through which this road passes. So, I will ride with you to help you pass by it safely.' Thus, when you obeyed him by accepting the first guidance that he gave you, he increased that by offering you aid and assistance. The same is true of the True Lord *the Most High* if anyone accepts the first level of guidance by which Allah points out the right path to him and believes in that, He will increase the level of guidance, along with granting him the guidance of success and support. An ungrateful liar is the one whose ingratitude is so strong that he does not benefit at all from guidance or from the right way being pointed out to him.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

لَّوۡ أَرَادَ ٱللَّهُ أَن يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدٗا لَّٱصۡطَفَىٰ مِمَّا يَخۡلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُۚ
سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥۖ هُوَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡوَٰحِدُ ٱلۡقَهَّارُ (٤)

God could have chosen any of His creation He willed
for offspring, but He is far above this! He is the One,
the Almighty [4] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 4)

This verse informs us of another type of *shirk* (associating others with Allah). These people did not worship idols, nor worship the sun or the moon. Instead, they chose other things that they deemed connected to Allah. They thought that this was somehow better and more reasonable than worshipping idols.

These people were like those who said that Ezra *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah, or those who said that the Messiah *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah or those who said the angels were the daughters of Allah, etc. Allah *Glorified is He* answers them with His Words: ‘If Allah had willed for offspring, He could have chosen any of His creation ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 4); this also means that this is a matter of which you have no say and about which you have no choice. It is not for you to choose a son for Allah. If—supposedly—Allah *the Almighty* had wanted that, He would have chosen whomsoever He willed from His creation, and it would not have been for you to make the choice for Him.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* addresses His Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Words, ‘Say [O, Prophet], "If the Lord of Mercy [truly] had offspring …"’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 81), which means ‘that Allah had chosen and whom He had informed us about "... I would be the first to worship [them] …"’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 81); this also means ‘I would be the first to affirm him and believe in him, and I would do so gladly.’ However, this is not something which Allah informed us of but was something of which He Himself disapproved.

It has been mentioned in a Hadith: ‘All creatures are dependants of Allah, and the most beloved of creatures to Allah is the one who is best to his dependants.’(1) Thus, filiation does not extend to Allah *the Exalted* even when it comes to the filiation to messengers *peace be upon them*. Allah *Glorified is He* did not make it filiation of blood nor bodies; rather, He made it filiation of religion. The clearest example of this is the story of our master, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his son.

When Nuh's (Noah’s) son refused to go and disobeyed the command of his father, Nuh (Noah) knew, for certain, that he would be amongst those destroyed. He, then, called on Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘… Nuh (Noah) called out to his Lord, saying, "My Lord, my son was one of my family, though your promise is true, and You are the most just of all judges."’ (*Hud:* 45) However, the True Lord *the Most High* set him straight regarding filiation by saying: ‘Allah said, "Nuh (Noah), he was not one of your family. What he did was not right."...’ (*Hud:* 46) Our master, Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* thought that filiation is that of blood, but in reality, filiation to prophets is a filiation that is based on accepting their call and following them.

The particle *law* in Allah’s Words, ‘If Allah had willed for offspring …’ (*az-Zumar:* 4) is a conditional particle that introduces *imtina’a li imtina’a* (impossibility for impossibility) because either the impossibility of the condition causes the impossibility of the consequence or the impossibility of the consequence causes the impossibility of the condition. Allah *the Exalted* did not take a son because He did not want to. If He had wanted to, what He willed would have come to pass.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* argues with those who propagate this lie, using the voice of logic: ‘... How could He have children when He has no spouse? ...’ (*al-An‘am:* 101) Why is offspring produced? It is to carry on the name of the father and keep it alive after his death. The True Lord *the Most High* is the Self-Sufficient and Exalted in Might and above any need of His creation, and He is the Eternal and the Everlasting. Then, why would he have offspring? Those who ascribe a son to Allah *Glorified is He* in the latter stages of the history of religion, such as those who say that the Messiah *peace be upon him* was His son, do they think that He has been without a son since the time that He created creation until ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* came to take him as a son?

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(1) Abu Ya’la narrated it in his Musnad 6/ *Hadith* 3315 from Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* with the wording, ‘All of creation are Allah's dependants, and those who are most beloved to him are those who bring the most benefit to their own dependants.’ Likewise, Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi in Tarikh Al-Baghdad 6/332 from ‘Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud *Allah be pleased with him* with another wording, ‘All of creation are Allah’s dependants, and those people who are most beloved to him are those who act best towards their own dependants.’

Then, what about when the time came after He took ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* out of existence, did Allah remain thus, as we say in Egypt, ‘conquered and cut off from the tree’ (lonely) by being without a son? How can this claim make sense to you? This is a matter that can never be the case with respect to Allah *the Almighty* for He does not have any need for someone to carry on His Name, nor does He need the support of a son. This is due to the fact that He created the entire creation, from the first one to the last. He created them all with His perfect Power and by His Attributes of perfection. They (creation) have not increased one bit nor have they given Him a single attribute that He had not had before.

Therefore, some of the people who went far with their interpretation of the Quran said that this verse, ‘If Allah had willed for offspring, He could have chosen any of His creation ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 4) means ‘If the All-Merciful were to have a son, I would have more right to be that son since I am the first of His worshippers.’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse with what declares Him to be above such lies: ‘…Glory be to Him! He is Allah, the One and the Almighty.’ (*az-Zumar:* 4); this means to glorify Him and declare Him to be transcendent and exalted above a matter such as this since it does not befit Him. Moreover, declare Him transcendent above resembling any of His creation, even if you were to come upon a matter that your intellect could not comprehend, still say ‘Glory be to Allah!’, just as He says: ‘Limitless in His glory is He Who has created opposites...’ (*Ya Sin:* 36). He also says: ‘Therefore, glorify Allah when you enter upon the time of the evening and when you enter upon the time of the morning.’ (*ar-Rum:* 17) He also says: ‘Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night ...’ (*al-Isra’:* 1).

Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that, in matters such as this, we should disassociate Him from them and declare Him exalted above them. This is because the intellect is totally bewildered when it comes upon events such as these. The events here are attributed to Allah *the Exalted* so there is nothing astonishing about them since the time an event takes place has an inverse relationship to the power that brought it about: the greater the power, the less time it takes. Thus, if you attribute the action to the Power of all powers, you will find that it takes no time at all.

Therefore, disassociate anyone in worship with Allah and declare Him exalted above having a son since '...He is Allah...' (*az-Zumar:* 4) Who has all of the Attributes of Perfection, '...the One...' (*az-Zumar:* 4), and the One with Whom there is no one else: '...the Almighty.' That is to say that He is the One Who has no need of anyone to carry on His Name or of anyone to help Him.

خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ يُكَوِّرُ ٱلَّيۡلَ عَلَى ٱلنَّهَارِ وَيُكَوِّرُ ٱلنَّهَارَ عَلَى ٱلَّيۡلِۖ
وَسَخَّرَ ٱلشَّمۡسَ وَٱلۡقَمَرَۖ كُلّٞ يَجۡرِي لِأَجَلٖ مُّسَمًّىۗ أَلَا هُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡغَفَّٰرُ ٥

He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose; He wraps the night around the day and the day around the night; He has subjected the sun and moon to run their courses for an appointed time; He is truly the Mighty, the Forgiving [5] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose ...' (*az-Zumar:* 5); this means that He did not create them frivolously; rather, He created them *bil haqq* (for a true purpose). As we said before, *Al-haqq* (truth) is that fixed matter that does not change, as the True Lord *the Most High* said in another verse: 'When We created the heavens and earth and everything in between, We were not playing a pointless game.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 38) On the contrary, Allah *Glorified is He* created them with truth, wisdom, precise calculation, and marvellous construction to perform the task that He, the Creator, wanted from them. The proof of this is that they still perform their task and have done so from the moment they were created without any disorder or any of their components working against each other.

As for Allah’s Words ‘... He wraps the night around the day and the day around the night ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 5), I say that *kawwaratu al-immama* (a man's headdress of cotton or silk wound round the head) means that I have wrapped my turban around my head, for it has become round like a ball. When a turban is wrapped around, each layer is covered in turn by the layer that comes after it. The same is true of the night and day—a part of the night covers a part of the day, and the night increases until it prevails, or a part of the day covers a part of the night, and the day increases until it prevails.

This is the reality of the night and day. However, do the night and day divide up the twenty-four hours between themselves equally, with each of them being twelve hours long? No! Instead, the night becomes longer, and the day becomes shorter in winter, while the night becomes shorter, and the day becomes longer in summer. This indicates that the cosmos is not governed by rigid mechanical laws as scientists claim but is governed by the Power and the Wisdom of the Creator.

If you were to reflect on how long the night is in winter and how short it is in summer, you would find that things in creation do not happen in a random and haphazard manner; rather, there is wisdom behind every single movement. When the day is short in wintertime, workers must work harder to finish their work in the shorter amount of time available to them, and so they exhaust themselves.

Out of Allah’s Wisdom, He gives them a longer period of time to rest from the exhaustions of their day. It is necessary that the period of rest correspond to the period of effort exerted.

As for summertime, the day is long and so the work can be distributed over this greater period of time. So, a person can fulfil his task with less effort, add to this the fact that he can even rest siesta little during the day. So, he does not need a long night to rest. This is why summer nights are short. Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* makes the night wrap around the day, and the day wrap around the night, for a wisdom connected to the activities of day-to-day life.

This meaning is expressed in another place in the Quran when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He makes the night merge into the day and the day into the night ...' (*Fatir:* 13); this means that He makes each go into the other, and this is why the night and the day are not equal in length except for a very short period in the year that is made necessary by the interchangeable move.

Another thing we understand from the word *yukawwiru* which Allah uses in this verse is that the earth is a ball since the night and day are phenomena that appear on the surface of the earth. Indeed, scientists have proven this fact by the photographs that they have taken of the earth from space. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks, truthfully when He says: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth ...' (*Fussilat:* 53).

In Allah's words in this verse,'... He has subjected the sun and moon to run their courses for an appointed time ...' (*az-Zumar:* 5), the word *Al-ajal*, (appointed time) means the Day of Judgment. The True Lord *the Most High* is reassuring people that the sun and moon are both signs from Allah, and they will remain for as long as this world remains. Furthermore, they will come to an end along with it. In spite of this, each of them is self-sustaining, powered by the Power of the Creator and having no need of 'fuel', 'maintenance' or 'spare parts', etc.

As for Allah's Words, '...He is truly the Mighty, the Forgiving.' (*az-Zumar:* 5), we have said that *ala* is an introductory particle whose function is to alert the listener to what comes after. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were saying, 'I have created this perfect marvellous creation for you and have provided for you the basic ingredients of life. I am the One Who has no need of you, the Mighty Who overcomes and cannot be overcome and has no need of anyone.' However, why is 'the Forgiving' mentioned in the verse at hand?

Scholars said that it is used because Allah *the Almighty* has graciously bestowed these signs—the sun and the moon, and the night and the day—upon His creation and given them the basic ingredients they need for life. Despite this, He does not look at their wrong deeds or the fact that they fall short with respect to what is His due since He is the Forgiving and pardons much.

This particular point is made clear by Allah elsewhere, and when we reflect upon what He says, we find it amazing. This is when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... If you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them...' (*Ibrahim:* 34). The beginning of this statement appears identically in two verses in the Quran, though the second part is different. For in One place, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... If you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them. Man is truly unjust and ungrateful.' (*Ibrahim:* 34) In another place, He says: 'If you tried to count Allah's favours, you could never calculate them. He is truly Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 18)

First, we notice, in these verses, concerning the counting of the favours of Allah *the Exalted* the use of the particle *in* (if), which indicates doubt. This is due to the fact that the counting of the favours of Allah is something that will never happen since one only takes it upon himself to count something when he has the ability to do so. Concerning the favours of Allah, despite the advances made in the field of statistics and despite its being used in many different disciplines, the blessings of Allah are still so numerous that man would not even dream of trying to count them, just as he would not think of counting the number of grains of sand in the desert. The Words '... If you tried to count ...' (*Ibrahim:* 34) mean that suppose you were to attempt to count them: '... you could never calculate them …' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

Second, we notice that the verse uses the singular form of the word *ni'ma* (favour), even though it is only things that are in the plural and can be divided into parts that can be counted; for example, you can say, 'one, two, three, four,' etc. Then, how can a single favour be counted? Scholars said that indeed, it is a seemingly single blessing, but when you reflect on it, you will see that there are many other blessings included within it. Take an apple, for example. On the surface, it seems to be a single blessing, but when you analyse it, you will find that it has colour, shape, taste, elements from which it is made, along with many other nutritional qualities. Each of those things is a favour from Allah.

Third, when you reflect on the concluding part of the two verses—and it is about that we wish to speak—you will find the first verse saying: '…man is truly unjust and ungrateful' (*Ibrahim:* 34); what this means is that he rejects and denies the favours of Allah and is heedless of them, failing to show due gratitude for receiving them. Thus, it talks about the state of those who receive the favours with respect to the Bestower of the favours and how they accept them with ingratitude. If the Bestower of favours had recompensed them in the way that they deserved, He would have withheld His favours from them. However, the concluding part of the other verse says: '... He is truly most forgiving and most merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 18) This means that He forgives you for your ingratitude and denial of His favour. Then, after forgiveness, He shows you mercy.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفۡسٖ وَٰحِدَةٖ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنۡهَا زَوۡجَهَا وَأَنزَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ
ثَمَٰنِيَةَ أَزۡوَٰجٖۚ يَخۡلُقُكُمۡ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَٰتِكُمۡ خَلۡقٗا مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ خَلۡقٖ فِي ظُلُمَٰتٖ
ثَلَٰثٖۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّكُمۡ لَهُ ٱلۡمُلۡكُۖ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَۖ فَأَنَّىٰ تُصۡرَفُونَ ٦

He created you all from a single being, from which He made its mate; He gave you four kinds of livestock in pairs; He creates you in your mothers' wombs, in one stage after another, in threefold depths of darkness. Such is God, your Lord; He holds control, there is no god but Him. How can you turn away? [6] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 6)

The verse makes clear the nature of the human being whom Allah *the Almighty* wanted to be His vicegerent upon the earth, for He says: 'He created you all from a single being…' (*az-Zumar:* 6); this is referring to Adam *peace be upon him* '... from which He made his mate…' (*az-Zumar:* 6) which is Hawwa (Eve) *Allah be pleased with her*. From both of them came the offspring, and thus, reproduction started.

Given the fact that Allah *the Exalted* created this being to be a vicegerent who builds the earth and harnesses its resources, it is incumbent that all vicegerents be from the same species so that they can live in intimacy and harmony with one another and can be joined together by the rigours of everyday life.

If it were not so and were these vicegerents from many different species, a group made up, for example, of a man, a jinn and an animal, life would not have been right, and their day-to-day living would not have been of help to one another. By contrast, a single species has within its members the intimacy, love and harmonious relationships that are needed. This is because each species has its own rules, system, and laws of interaction and social interplay. Were the vicegerents to be made of lots of different species, it would prove almost impossible for them to unite, work together, or live together.

The True Lord *the Most High* also created mankind from a single species so that everybody could come into life on an equal footing, with no one starting out with an advantage over anyone else due to his being created from a higher species. The only basis for one person being superior to another is how closely they follow Allah's Way. This matter is one that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* made abundantly clear in the Hadith: 'There is no virtue of an Arab over a foreigner, and nor a foreigner over an Arab except by *taqwa* (being mindful of Allah).'(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... In Allah's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him ...' (*al-Hujurat:* 13); another way of saying this is 'None of you can claim superiority to any other except if it be on the basis of how well he acts with respect to what he has received from His Lord.'

The different colours and shapes that people have are to match the different environments in which they live. So, people who live in hot environments tend to be darker, while people who live in cold environments tend to be lighter. The languages that people speak also vary according to their environments. However, in terms of our origin, we all go back to Adam *peace be upon him* and Adam *peace be upon him* was created from clay, and his descendants after him were created through procreation.

Even when it comes to the Message, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A messenger has come to you from amongst yourselves ...' (*at-Tawba:* 128); in other words, he is not alien to you, nor is he from another species. He was not an angel, for example, for although that is a higher form of species, an angelic messenger would not be someone whose example people could follow, nor was he Persian or Roman or spoke a language that was different to your own; rather, he was an Arab from the noblest of you and the greatest of your tribes.

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(1) In the midst of the days of *tashriq* (the days immediately following *Eid Al-Adha*), the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered a *khutba* (sermon) to the people, saying, 'People, your Lord is One, and your forefather is one. No Arab is superior to any non-Arab, nor any non-Arab superior to any Arab. No white man is superior to any black man, nor any black man superior to any white man, except on the basis of taqwa.' The Hadith is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 5/411 from one who heard it from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. In Hilyat Al-Awliya' 3/100, it is mentioned that the man was Jabir ibn 'Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him*.

Thus, the entire human race comes from a single being, and that being is Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Exalted* has made it clear to us how He created Adam *peace be upon him* in his known form by saying: ‘When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, bow down before him’ (*al-Hijr:* 29).

However, He does not mention anything about how Hawwa (Eve) was created. Some of the people of knowledge, however, have said that He created her in the same way as Adam *peace be upon him* while others said that He created her from one of Adam’s ribs, so she was embedded within Adam *peace be upon him* when he was created. This indicates that women are subsequent to men, concealed within them, even when it comes to how they were created.

Those who hold this opinion rely upon the meaning of the words: ‘... from which He made his mate (*wa ja’ala minha*) …’ (*az-Zumar:* 6). For in them, *minha* means from a part of him or from his species. This is because the verb *ja’ala* contains no indication of being of a different race as in Allah’s Words: ‘He gave you hearing, sight, and minds. How seldom you are grateful (*wa ja’ala lakum*)’ (*as-Sajda:* 9); what this means is that from a piece of us is formed our hearing, from a piece of us is formed our sight and from another is formed our hearts.

Similarly, when the Quran talks about action, the woman is kept concealed within the man, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, exhort one another to the truth and exhort one another to steadfastness.’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3) In many places, He says: ‘O, you who believe, be mindful of Allah...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 35); He does not address women directly except when the matter is one that relates specifically to them.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says, enumerating some of the favours He has bestowed upon His creation: ‘... and He produced for you from the grazing livestock eight mates ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 6). We previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that when it comes to the word *inzal* (sending down), one does not just look to its being sent down from on high, as in the sending down of the Divine Program and values, but also to the One Who sends down. *Inzal* has the meaning of ‘bringing into existence’. Grazing livestock is amongst the favours that are existent on the earth, but who brought them into existence? It is Allah *Glorified is He*. So, it is as if He sent them down. The *inzal*, in this case requires the use of the corresponding preposition in *lakum* (for you) and not *alaykum* (upon you) since cattle are something that is separate from man.

These eight types of cattle are detailed more fully in the chapter of *al-An’am*. Despite the fact that Allah’s favours granted to us are plentiful in number, He singles out cattle because they are the species that are most closely related to human beings in terms of their physical make-up. Then comes plants and finally comes the inanimate minerals. Some people claim that the word *zawj* means two together, but this is a mistake, for *zawj* actually means one that has another like it with it. An example of this is found in His Words: ‘and We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49). Another word that is just like *zawj* (one of a pair) is *taw’am* (twin).

As for the Words, 'He creates you in your mothers’ wombs, a creation after a creation, in threefold depths of darkness...’ (*az-Zumar:* 6), He specifically mentions, ‘...a creation after a creation...’ (*az-Zumar:* 6) which is a clarification of the different stages of creation through what an embryo passes while it is inside its mother. First, it wriggles around inside her, surrounded by base fluid; then, it settles as a drop in her womb. Then, it becomes a clot, then a lump, then its bones are formed and then those bones are clothed (covered) in flesh. These are the stages of creation to which Allah *Glorified is He* is referring when He says: ‘... a creation after a creation ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 6).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We created man from an essence of clay, then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a safe place, then We made that drop into a clinging form, and We made that form into a lump of flesh, and We made that lump into bones, and We clothed those bones with flesh, and later We made him into other forms. Glory be to Allah, the best of creators!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 12-14)

These are the stages through which the human being passes after arriving at the womb of his mother. This means that there must be a stage that comes before these stages. This is the particular stage at which the male element encounters the female element, or, to put it another way, when the sperm encounters the egg and impregnates it, for the only thing that reaches the womb is the impregnated egg into which the male microbe has entered.

In the chapter of *al-Hajj*, The True Lord *the Most High* makes it clear that a *mudghah* (embryonic lump) can be either *mukhallaqa* (shaped) or *ghayr mukhallaqa* (unshaped): ‘People, [remember,] if you doubt the Resurrection, that We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped, We mean to make Our Power clear to you. Whatever We choose We cause to remain in the womb for an appointed time ...’ (*al-Hajj:* 5).

A *mudgha mukhallaqa* is that lump from which the limbs and organs are created, while a *mudgha ghayr mukhallaqa* is the lump which settles into the body without having a form, so it remains as reserve for the body. It is as if it were a reserve or a pharmacy for preservation. So, if anything goes wrong in the body, that unformed lump is what repairs it, just as we see when it comes to wounds, for after a time wounds heal up, tissues are rebuilt, and skin goes back to how it formerly was. Where do these tissues come from? They come from the unshaped lump.

What is really amazing is that when you leave the body to its own devices and do not interfere with it by placing chemical substances over the wound, it heals itself and goes back to how it was, leaving no mark or scar. It is only when we interfere by using remedies and introducing chemical substances that of a necessity affect the cells and tissues of the body, thus, a mark or scar is left.

This is why science has been able to prove that there are two stores of nutrients within a human body: one store contains one's daily nutrients, while another is kept in reserve from which he takes nutrients when those in the first store run out. This is because a person eats in proportion to the energy his body requires. Then, he eats a bit more. This additional amount that he eats is transformed into fat in the body. Then, when a person starves or suffers from acute thirst, he extracts the nutrients he needs from the fat that exists in his body. It is quite astonishing that that fat transforms into whatever substance the body requires.

Because of the existence of this storehouse of nutrients in the human body, we see men who are able to survive without food for a whole month, while at the same time not being able to survive without water for more than ten days. Why is this? Because when someone starves and can find no food to eat, food is extracted from the reserves stored in his body.

As for Allah's Words,'…He creates you in your mothers' wombs...' (*az-Zumar:* 6), they refer to the second creation, for the first creation was the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* from clay. This particular creation was one that Allah *the Exalted* tells us about, for none of us was there to see it, as He Himself makes clear:

'I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

If someone appears amongst us who thinks that humans were originated from apes that evolved into human beings, we know that he is one of those people Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about in the verse above, who lead men astray. Know for sure that he is a liar. It is easy to refute such nonsense, for if humans really had evolved from apes, why did all the other apes not also evolve? Why, over the course of all the centuries we have been here, have we not seen a single ape evolve into something resembling a human being?

Thus, it is no more than falsehood and lies, for the Creator created all species and made each of them in pairs so that they could procreate, propagate and be sorted. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49)

Concerning His Words, '...in threefold depths of darkness...' (*az-Zumar:* 6), they are to clarify the secure receptacle into which a human being settles inside the womb of his mother. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Which We housed in a safe lodging for a determined period?' (*al-Mursalat:* 21-22) *Makin* means settled into a place. So, a mother's womb is the place, and the embryo is securely settled inside of it.

When the people of knowledge speak about what is meant by these three types of darkness, they say that they are the darkness of the abdomen, the darkness of the womb and the darkness of the placenta. There are a number of things that can be understood from the word *dhulmah* (darkness):

Firstly, darkness means lack of light, and that is inextricably linked with the night.

Secondly, the night is cooler than the day since during the day there is heat generated by the sun, and heat generated by the fast breathing that stems from movement and hard work. As for people's breathing at night, it is slow and measured since its only purpose is to ensure the preservation of life, and it does not stem from hard work or expended effort.

Thirdly, there is calm and stillness in darkness and that is not available in the day.

So, in darkness there is coolness, stillness and a lack of light—and these three things are essential for an embryo to grow, for its limbs and organs to form while it is in its mother's womb. This is because, while it is in the womb, its constitution is weak, and its limbs and organs are incomplete. Moreover, it is unable to cope with heat, light or disturbing sounds. Therefore, the Creator has created insulators to protect it from those things, which is why He says: '... in threefold depths of darkness ...' (*az-Zumar:* 6).

However, the most correct view is that these three types of darkness are all in the womb, and the darkness of the abdomen is not included in them since the True Lord *the Most High* is informing us in this verse of the secure receptacle that is specific to the embryo. As for His Words, '... in your mothers' wombs (*fi butun ummahatikum*) …' (*az-Zumar:* 6), they simply clarify to us that the general receptacle, *botun* (literally abdomen) is that in which the specific receptacle (the womb) lies. The abdomen is a large receptacle which contains the womb, the intestines, the stomach, the liver, the kidneys, the pancreas, etc. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the receptacle that is specific to the embryo immediately afterwards by saying: '...in threefold depths of darkness ...' (*az-Zumar:* 6). Thus, '… the threefold depths of darkness …' (*az-Zumar:* 6) is simply a way of describing the three levels of insulation that surround and protect the child—and all three of them are inside of the womb. When a man is grown up and fully mature, he can be bothered and disturbed by sounds, and such sounds can even cause his eardrum to burst. Very bright lights can cause him harm, so that sometimes he cannot even look directly at them. Then, how could a child whose organs have not yet fully developed be expected to cope with such things?

It is well known that children are born with skin that is so delicate it cannot bear heat and that they are born with some organs and limbs that are not yet fully formed. The nervous system, for example, does not become fully developed until after a number of years; the mental faculty does not fully mature until after puberty, while the eye does not become capable of seeing properly until after three days.

Thus, the embryo is in dire need of protection and that Allah *the Almighty* caused it to be inside an enveloping layer inside an enveloping layer inside an enveloping layer. It is similar, for example, to when you put your most important document inside a file, that file is put inside a safe, and that safe is inside a strong room. The preposition *fi* (in) proves the great care that is taken over this creation and indicates that it has been provided with the enveloping layers that suit it best.

Concerning His Words, '...Such is Allah, your Lord; to Him belongs dominion...' (*az-Zumar:* 6), the word *dhalikum* is a compound of the demonstrative pronoun *dha* and the second person plural pronoun. The demonstrative pronoun points to the True Lord. If you were addressing a single person, you would say *dhalika*; if you were addressing two, you would say *dhalikuma* as in His Words: '... this is part of what my Lord has taught me ...' (*Yusuf:* 37); if you were addressing a group of males, you would say *dhalikum*, and if you were addressing a group of females, you would say *dhalikunna*, as in the following: '... This is the one you blamed me for ...' (*Yusuf:* 32).

This demonstrative pronoun pointing to Allah *the Exalted* comes immediately after He talks about some of His secrets relating to the creation of the human being and about the three levels of darkness in the mother's womb. All these things relate to creation, rearing and initial shaping of human beings. Such matters relate most closely to Allah's attribute of Lordship through which He attends to rearing and creation, for the Lord is the Creator and the One Who rears and raises. As for the word,'… Allah …' (*az-Zumar:* 6), it is related to His Divinity. Divinity is holding man responsible of performing religious duties. This is because the word 'Allah' means the One Who is worshipped by His Commands being obeyed and His prohibitions being avoided. An embryo in the belly of its mother is far removed from having any responsibility for its actions, so why does the True Lord choose in this verse concerning this particular matter to use the word indicating Divinity, when He says, '... Such is Allah, your Lord...' (*az-Zumar:* 6) and does not say, 'Such is your Lord, Allah' as some of the orientalists say?

Scholars said He does that in order for us to understand that Allah does not create us and raise us up for us to be like cattle; instead, He creates us and raises us up for a purpose: to follow His Way in which one is held responsible for his actions. This is so that we get on intimate terms with the word 'Allah' before the word 'Lord'. Moreover, there is an indication in that this is the goal behind us being made responsible for what we do, for it is for the wellness of society and in order for us to become righteous. The True Lord *the Most High* did not create us on a whim and did not leave us to our own devices, lost and wandering around aimlessly.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* makes it clear to us in the beginning of the chapter of *ar-Rahman* that the Way was taught before creation was formed and that creation may only be considered a blessing when it is completed in the shade of the Way of the Creator, for a craftsman must always define what it is he wants to make before making it. He says: 'It is the Lord of Mercy Who taught the Quran. He created man and taught him to communicate.' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-4)

Concerning His Words,'... to Him belongs dominion ...' (*az-Zumar:* 6), they stem from the root letters *malaka* in whichh the words *mulk*, *milk* and *malakut* are derived: *milk* is what you own or possess, even if it is but something small, while *mulk* is to possess or own those who own. Both, these two, *mulk* and *milk*, apply to the Seen World, but as for *malakut*, it is that of Allah's dominion that we do not see. The only ones to whom Allah *Glorified is He* shows His *malakut* are those He has chosen from amongst His Prophets, Messengers and righteous people of obedience whose nature and belief are pure and to whom He has granted the right type of receptors that can receive from Allah. Such are the people to whom Allah *the Almighty* reveals some of His *malakut*. This is why Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he fulfilled his duty and complied fully with the Command of his Lord, Allah showed him this *malakut*: 'In this way We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) [Allah's] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth ...' (*al-An'am:* 75).

Just like *mulk* and *malakut*, we say *rahma* and *rahamut*, and *rahba* and *rahabut*.

'... to Him belongs dominion ...' (*az-Zumar:* 6) means 'if you have seen an expansive kingdom before you, know that it belongs to the One Who created you.' It is amazing that this kingdom is created for you, humans, and Allah *the Exalted* created it for you even before creating you. This is clearly the case, for the first human being came upon a world ready to receive him and equipped with all the necessary ingredients for life from the very first moment he stepped upon it, such as the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, right down to the very smallest things in existence.

What follows are Allah's Words, '...there is no deity but He…' (*az-Zumar:* 6), which mean that this amazing creation belongs solely to Allah, and there is no one else there to lay claim to it. Since no one else claims it for himself, no one else may claim to have set up a programme showing mankind how to live in the world, for the One Who created is the One Who sets up the programme, and the One Who makes something is the One Who makes up the rules by which His making is maintained.

Then, there are the Words: '... How can you turn away?' (*az-Zumar:* 6) They mean, 'How did you turn from worshipping Allah, the Creator, to worshipping others apart from Him who played no part whatsoever in creation? How did you turn aside from a Lord who created you and taught you and still does so, not leaving you alone for a moment; neither does He hand over any part of the creation process to anyone else, nor is He ready to ever hand it over to anyone else.

إِن تَكۡفُرُواْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنكُمۡۖ وَلَا يَرۡضَىٰ لِعِبَادِهِ ٱلۡكُفۡرَۖ وَإِن تَشۡكُرُواْ
يَرۡضَهُ لَكُمۡۗ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٞ وِزۡرَ أُخۡرَىٰۗ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُم مَّرۡجِعُكُمۡ
فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيمُۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٧﴾

If you are ungrateful, remember God has no need of you, yet He is not pleased by ingratitude in His servants; if you are grateful, He is pleased [to see] it in you. No soul will bear another's burden. You will return to your Lord in the end and He will inform you of what you have done: He knows well what is in the depths of [your] hearts[7] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 7)

After showing His compassion for His creation, He mentions the Lordship by means of which He created, taught and commanded, and He mentions the Divinity by which the well-being of the land and the servants is guaranteed. Allah *Glorified is He* then makes it clear that He is the One Who is totally without need of His creation by saying: 'If you are ungrateful, remember Allah has no need of you ...' (*az-Zumar:* 7); this means that He has no need of your belief and does not benefit from you obeying Him.

He set the obligations for our own good, not so He can derive some benefit from them. You are His creation and of His making, and He, in His role as Creator, wants to see what he has created in the best possible state. He wants to see believing servants living in believing societies in which people work together and not against each other, living in harmony and not in conflict. Allah *the Exalted* does not want to see His creation in conflict: one building, while the other destroys.

So, this is the purpose of creation and the purpose of the Divine Programme. Thus, by the Attributes of Perfection that He possesses, Allah created the creation, and yet that creation did not increase Him by so much as a single attribute that He did not already have. He has no need of you. You are of His making, and for whom He wishes good. This is why when Allah *the Almighty* offered the trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up, for, verily, he has always been unjust and ignorant.

The refusal of the heavens, earth, and mountains was not a refusal of Allah nor was it an act of opposition against Him; rather, it was an act of submission, for Allah *the Almighty* had given them the choice, and they chose not to have free will.

However, man accepted it, and so He described them as being unjust and ignorant. How can someone who accepts the Words of Allah be unjust and ignorant?

Scholars said that he is described as such because he wronged himself and was ignorant of the consequences of his decision, for the fact that he has been granted free choice means that he is free to believe and free to disbelieve, free to obey and free to disobey. When the trust was offered to him, he accepted it because it was Allah *the Most High* Who had given him that choice, and he felt confident in himself that he would be able to carry out what would be required of him. Actually, he was ignorant of the incidents that would befall him and the whims and desires that would overtake him. Thus, he wronged himself by taking on that burden. He was also ignorant of the time when he would have to pay it back. He hurried to take it on at the time of accepting it, but he should have reckoned on the cost of carrying it out and paying it back.

With respect to the trust, there is a difference between taking it on and giving it back. This is because entrusting something to someone depends basically on his consciousness. However, if a receipt is written for it or there are witnesses, then it is not called a trust. When people take on a trust, they generally have the intention of holding on to it and giving it back, such as, for example, when you give a friend of yours a sum of money to look after for you until you get back from your travels, and he welcomes it and accepts it. However, circumstances may arise whereby your friend finds himself in need of that money and so helps himself to it. So, when you come back from your travels, you do not find your money; rather, you find yourself greeted by either denial or temporising.

So, man wronged himself, was ignorant of the time of giving the trust back, and was ignorant of the fact that he is subject to vicissitudes, so much so that even his heart is subject to change. As for the heavens, earth and mountains, when they were given the choice, they chose to not have free will, having nothing whatsoever to do with the matter, or in essence, wiping their hands free from it.

The meaning of Allah's Words 'If you are ungrateful, remember Allah has no need of you ...' (*az-Zumar:* 7) is clearly expressed in a Qudsi Hadith 'O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in anything, and were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My kingdom in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I have, any more than a needle decreases the sea if put into it. This is because I am the Most Generous, Majestic. I give with a word. When I will something, all I do is say to it "Be!" – and it is.'(1)

His Words, '...He is not pleased by ingratitude in His servants…' (*az-Zumar:* 7) act as evidence of His Love for His creation. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying, 'I have no need of you, but still I do not like for you to be ungrateful since I want to boast of you to those angels of Mine who said about you: "...Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood? …"' (*al-Baqara:* 30)

It has been narrated that the True Lord *the Most High* said to His angels, 'Do you know that My servants obeyed Me?' Thus, they replied, 'They obeyed You for the blessings You had bestowed upon them.' The True Lord *the Most High* said, 'Even if I were to take My blessings away, they would have obeyed Me still.'

This is why He makes them ill, and they obey Him; He makes them poor, and they obey Him; He causes them to be defeated, and they obey Him; He grants them victory, and they obey Him. So, 'My slaves obey Me because of

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(1) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 5/154 & 177; At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2495; and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan 4275 in a Hadith from Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him. And At-Tirmidhi said, 'This is a hasan Hadith.'*

Who I am and because I deserve to be loved and obeyed regardless of whether I bestow blessings upon them or not.'

Allah *the Exalted* says, rebuking those of His creation who worship Him out of fear of the Hellfire or desire for Paradise, 'If I had not created Heaven and Hell, would I not have been worthy of being worshipped?'

A good example of this is the one we gave of a man who had a servant who worked for him and served him in exchange for a hundred pounds every month. Then, one month, the man's circumstances became so constrained that he found himself unable to pay the servant that amount, so he said to him, 'By Allah, I am no longer able to pay you this amount. I can give you no more than fifty pounds, so take care of yourself and go and see if you can find another job.' In spite of this, the servant replies, 'I agree to work for fifty pounds.' Then, the man's circumstances continued to get worse until he is no longer able to pay the servant more than twenty pounds. Yet, the servant was content with that. Then, it went down to ten, but the servant was content and even said to him, 'By Allah, the way you treat me makes you worthy of being served, even if that were to be for no wage whatsoever.' This is how Allah wants us to be connected to Him.

Thus, the True Lord *the Most High* is not pleased with ingratitude in His servants because they are His creation, and He desires only what is best for them; He desires for them to be believers so that their affairs can be set in order and so that His favours can extend from being given to them in this world to also being given to them in the Hereafter. Just as He bestows temporal favours upon them in this world, He also wants to bestow favours upon them in the Hereafter. The favours of the Hereafter are eternal and lasting.

Therefore, it has been narrated in a Qudsi Hadith: 'The earth keeps saying, "My Lord, grant me permission to swallow up the sons of Adam, for they have eaten from your good and have neglected to thank You." Also, the sky keeps saying, "My Lord, grant me permission to make the sky fall upon the sons of Adam in lumps, for they have eaten the good things You have given them and have neglected to thank You." Thus, the True Lord says to those things in creation that express their zealous concern for their Lord, "Leave Me and My creation be! If you were to have created them, you would have shown them mercy. If they repent and come back to Me, I am their beloved, and if they do not repent, then I am their doctor."'(1)

Allah says '... if you are grateful, He is pleased [to see] it in you ...' (*az-Zumar:* 7); this means that if you are thankful, He will be content with that thankfulness of yours, for He is pleased with you for it. He loves to find it in you and rewards you for it with good. The only reason that it pleases Him to find gratitude in you is due to the fact that gratitude is the cause of your being happy in this world and the Hereafter as He says: '...If you are thankful, I will give you more...' (*Ibrahim:* 7). Thus, being thankful for a favour actually gives us more of that blessing—we thank Him for it, and He gives us more. By means of this, the gratitude remains forever, and the favour remains forever.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... No soul will bear another's burden ...' (*az-Zumar:* 7); in other words, it is like He is saying, 'No wrong-acting soul will carry the burden of another's wrong action.' Or in other words, 'I will be just by not burdening anyone with another's wrong actions. Everyone will be held accountable for their own actions.'

A number of orientalists have raised objections to this verse, saying that there is a contradiction between this verse and Allah's Words: 'They will bear their own burdens and others besides ...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 13). Yes, it is true that the two verses seemingly contradict each other, but they have not understood the reason behind the wrong action.

The general rule is that no one carries the burden of another's sins; these people carry their own sins and those of other people because the verse is talking about the chiefs of misguidance, the leaders of disbelief, who were misguided in themselves, and at the same time misguided others. So, the first sin is the sin of them being misguided, while the other sins are those of the people whom they misguided, led astray and made misguidance seem fine to them. Thus, the meaning of this verse is different.

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(1) It is transmitted by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum Ad-Din* 4/52 as a statement of one of the men of the right-acting early generations with the wording, Whenever any slave disobeys Me, his place on the earth seeks permission from Me to swallow him up while the portion of the sky that is immediately above him seeks permission from Me to fall down upon him in lumps. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says to the earth and sky, 'Keep away from My slaves and give them respite, for it was not you who created them. If you had created them, then you would have shown them mercy. It is possible that he will repent and come to back to Me so that I can forgive him, and it is possible that he will do a right action in exchange, so that I can change it into good actions.'

Allah *the Almighty* says: '...You will return to your Lord in the end ...' (*az-Zumar:* 7); this is like He is saying, 'If I have started My creation of you by honouring you, and you have met My honouring of you with rejection and not given it its due by believing in Me and following My Way, then know that you will come back to Me in the end and will not escape My grasp.' '... and He will inform you of what you have done…' (*az-Zumar:* 7); this means He will inform you of all that you have done. '... He knows well what is in the depths of [your] hearts.' (*az-Zumar:* 7); what this means is that always remember this matter and take yourself to account before it is too late.

This verse is a warning to us from the True Lord and a clarification of the issue of punishment in order to deter people from doing wrong action, in which case punishment does not happen at all. This is out of the Mercy of the Creator towards His creation, for He wants only good for them and wants them to enjoy His favours in the Hereafter, just as they enjoy His favours in this world.

وَإِذَا مَسَّ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُۥ مُنِيبًا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلَهُۥ نِعْمَةً مِّنْهُ
نَسِىَ مَا كَانَ يَدْعُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِ مِن قَبْلُ وَجَعَلَ لِلَّهِ أَندَادًا لِّيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦ ۚ
قُلْ تَمَتَّعْ بِكُفْرِكَ قَلِيلًا ۖ إِنَّكَ مِنْ أَصْحَٰبِ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٨﴾

When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him, but once he has been granted a favour from God, he forgets the One he had been praying to and sets up rivals to God, to make others stray from His path. Say, 'Enjoy your ingratitude for a little while: you will be one of the inhabitants of the Fire' [8] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 8)

'Affliction' (*durr*) is the harm that undermines safety and security of a person, his family or property. When harm afflicts man, it reduces extremely his feeling of pride and arrogance (*'antaza*); this is so because man knows that he cannot relieve himself nor removes that harm simply by himself; rather, he needs Allah's help. So, he seeks Allah's support and stops deceiving himself.

We have made this matter abundantly clear by making reference to the barber-surgeon who once lived in our village and who used to have a similar role amongst us as that of a doctor. Then, when education became more widespread and a few doctors began to graduate from the college of medicine, this man became frightened about his livelihood, fearing that one of those doctors would pull the rug from under his feet. Thus, the barber began to belittle the doctor who had been appointed to our village by saying, ‘He (the physician) does not know anything whatsoever!’ He said this wanting to prevent people from going to see him. However when his own son became ill, what did he do? Did he deceive himself as well? No, rather, that barber wrapped his son up in a piece of cloth at night and took him to the doctor about whom he had been speaking disparagingly for so long by telling people how inept he was. Yet, now, because the ill person was his own son, he comes back to the truth and stops deceiving himself.

Similarly, when man is touched by harm and things become difficult for him, he takes refuge in none but his Lord. This is after losing the basis of arrogance as revealed in the verse: 'Nay, verily, man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient.' (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) This is after his mask of superiority and self-importance has fallen away.

We have said this is something that it is possible for each one of us to notice in himself; for you might, for example, give your son his daily allowance every day before he goes to school, but then one day you forget to give it to him. What would he do? He would present himself to you and try to pass backwards and forwards in front of you, as if he were trying to remind you of what you had forgotten. Then, he would greet you or say something like, ‘I am off to school, Dad!’ However, if you were to give him his allowance once a month, he would not behave in such a manner throughout the other twenty-nine days. Yes, indeed, it is true: 'Nay! [It is not at all as these people think;] this human being does indeed indulge in transgression because he thinks himself to be independent [of Allah].' (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7)

When men are afflicted by harm and know that no one can remove it except for Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, they will not turn to anyone but Him because they unconsciously believe that Allah is the only

One capable of taking that harm away. Even though a person does not believe in Allah, but when he is afflicted by harm, he seeks salvation from Him, and he calls out, ‘O, my Lord, save me!’ Strangely enough is that Allah responds and helps them and does not ignore them: '... Who is it that responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him and Who removes the ill [that caused the distress] …' (*an-Naml:* 62).

Is it not enough that you can find no one to help you but Allah? Furthermore, you cannot help saying, ‘O, my Allah!’ Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those [powers] that you are wont to invoke forsake you, [and nothing remains for you] save Him ...' (*al-Isra’:* 67); that is if you call on anyone other than Allah, he will not be able to reach you and will get lost on the way. The only One Who will respond to you is Allah.

The meaning of '... turning unto Him [for help] …' (*az-Zumar:* 8) is coming back to Him. '... but as soon as He has bestowed upon him a boon by His Grace ...' (*az-Zumar:* 8) means that as soon as He *the Most High* has given welfare to the human being: '... he forgets that which he invoked before …' (*az-Zumar:* 8). Scholars have raised a great controversy about the relative pronoun *ma* (which) that is used in this verse; they said that, assuming *ma* is referring to Allah, why did He not say, ‘he forgets the One Whom...’, using the relative pronoun *man* (whom)? For in Arabic, *man* is the relative pronoun that is used for beings who possess the ability to reason, while *ma* is the one that is used for beings that do not possess the ability to reason, including the non-living.’

Our answer is that the Quran has a different point of view. You can read the holy verses: 'Say: "O, you who deny the truth! I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship."' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-3) In these verses, *ma* refers to Allah. So, *ma* is used in its correct sense here, even if the wisdom behind that is hidden to you. Yes, it is true that *man* is used for those with intellects, while *ma* is for those without intellects; however, the True Lord *the Most High* does not describe Himself as having intellect. Rather, intellect is one of your attributes, so the True Lord describes Himself in a way that does prohibit the non-existence of intellect. If the True Lord *Glorified is He* were to have said *man*, He would have been including

Himself amongst those who have intellects, and He does not describe Himself as being intellectual but as being knowledgeable and All Knowing.

It is also possible to avoid this problem completely by interpreting *ma* in a different way so that the verse means ‘he forgets the harm that was the cause of him turning back to Allah’ instead of meaning ‘he forgets the One Who saved him and took the harm away’. If we interpret it this way, then *ma* can be used in its ordinary linguistic sense of referring to something non-sentient

As for Allah’s Words, '… claims that there are other powers that could rival Allah and thus leads [others] astray from His Path ...' (*az-Zumar:* 8), *andad* (rival powers) is the plural of the word *nid*, which means a peer, equal or counterpart. These disbelievers ascribed rival powers to Allah despite them knowing that He is the True deity, Allah, and despite them knowing that all those who call on other than He are astray. They did so in order to gratify the natural stirrings of belief present in themselves, for they desired to have a deity to worship, but a deity that suits their own whims and desires, a deity who did not obligate them to do anything and whose worship did not entail any difficulty. They wanted a deity that had no programme, one that did not tell them what to do and what not to do.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and thus leads [others] astray from His Path...' (*az-Zumar:* 8); some reciters recited it *yadilla* with a *fatha*(1) on the *ya'*; that is the phrase 'leads [others] astray' is read 'leads [himself] astray'. However, we say that a person would not lead others astray unless he is already astray himself. Thus, it is more appropriate to recite it *yudilla* with a *damma* on the *ya'* which means 'leads others astray'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... Say ...' (*az-Zumar:* 8); this means for Muhammad to respond to them and say: '… enjoy yourself for a while in this your denial of the truth. [Yet,] verily, you are of those who are destined for the Fire!' (*az-Zumar:* 8) Truly, where can enjoyment be found in disbelief? We said that their enjoyment lies in worshipping a deity who has no system and does not demand anything from them, a deity who does not prevent them from drinking alcohol and does not put a leash on their appetites, a deity who does not order them to be truthful nor to be trustworthy, etc., but who instead leaves them to go about the earth and enjoy themselves in any way they wish.

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(1) This recitation of a *fatha* on the *ya'* is the narration of Ad-Duri from Abu ‘Amr. As for the narration of Hafs from ‘Asim, it has a *damma* on the *ya'*.

He says, '... for a while ...' (*az-Zumar:* 8) because the enjoyment of this world is temporary and lasts only as long as we remain in it. We also said that this world lasts, in relation to any particular human being, for only as long as he remains in it. The rest of the time it has been here, from the creation of Adam to the coming of the Hour, is totally irrelevant to him.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... of those who are destined for the Fire!' (*az-Zumar:* 8) The phrase 'destined for the fire' is the translation for the phrase *'ashab an-nar'*, which literally means ‘companions of the fire’; it bears an indication of acquaintance and intimacy between hellfire and its inhabitants. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, when addressing the Fire: 'On that Day We will ask Hell, "Are you filled?" And it will answer, "[Nay,] is there yet more [for me]?"' (*Qaf:* 30); it is as if the fire says, ‘Bring me my lovers and companions. I want more of them!’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says (1):

أَمَّنۡ هُوَ قَٰنِتٌ ءَانَآءَ ٱلَّيۡلِ سَاجِدٗا وَقَآئِمٗا يَحۡذَرُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَ وَيَرۡجُواْ رَحۡمَةَ رَبِّهِۦۗ قُلۡ
هَلۡ يَسۡتَوِي ٱلَّذِينَ يَعۡلَمُونَ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَۗ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ٩

What about someone who worships devoutly during the night, bowing down, standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, hoping for his Lord’s mercy? Say, ‘How can those who know be equal to those who do not know?’ Only those who have understanding will take heed [9] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 9)

The word *amm* (or) indicates that there is a choice between two things. You say, ‘This or (*amm*) that.’ The word indicates that there must be a counterpart to the choice presented to us; so what is counterpart of 'one who devoutly worships [Allah] throughout the night ...' (*az-Zumar:* 9)? The bad equivalent is mentioned in in Allah's Words immediately before it: 'Now [thus it is] when affliction befalls man, he is likely to cry out to his Lord, turning unto Him [for help], but as soon as He has bestowed upon him a boon by His Grace, he forgets Him Whom he invoked before, claims that there are other powers that could rival Allah and thus leads [others] astray from His Path ...' (*az-Zumar:* 8).

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(1) Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi says in *Asbab An-Nuzul* (p.210), ‘Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said according to the narration of ‘Ata’, ‘This verse was revealed about Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him.*’ Also, Ibn ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘It was revealed about ’Uthman ibn ‘Affan *Allah be pleased with him.*’ Furthermore, Muqatil said, ‘It was revealed about ʿAmmar ibn Yasir *Allah be pleased with him.*’ As-Suyuti mentioned this in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (7/214) with a number of different narrations.

Thus, the meaning is 'Which is better: one who entreats Allah when he is afflicted by harm but then ascribes partners to Him once the harm is removed, or one who spends the night hours in prayer, prostrating and standing, mindful of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord?'

'…One who devoutly worships …' is the translation for Arabic word *qanit*, meaning a person who is constant in his humility to and worship of Allah. The Arabic word *ana'* (throughout) is the plural of *inw*, like *himl,* (singular for load) and its plural *ahmal*. The word *inw* means a portion of night, and its plural, morphologically-speaking, would be *a'naw*, but the *hamza* is changed to a long vowel, and the *waw* is changed to a *hamza* because it comes immediately after an additional *alif*, so the word becomes *ana'*.

As for '... ever-mindful of the life to come ...' (*az-Zumar:* 9), this means a believer who is fearful of the Hereafter, along with implying the constraint he may be subjected to in order to get there. '... and hoping for his Lord's Grace...' (*az-Zumar:* 9) means His mercy precedes His anger, for He does not say here 'feeling safe about receiving his Lord's Grace', which would have been the opposite of being 'ever-mindful of'. Instead, He first mentioned the frightening things of the Hereafter that await people if they disobey; what is meant in this verse is 'being wary of the fire in the hereafter'. Then, Allah talks directly about His Mercy by saying, '... and hoping for his Lord's Grace...', and not saying, 'hoping for paradise'.

When a believer places his hopes in his Lord, he does not reckon upon his deeds and actions in this world; instead, he hopes for and awaits the Mercy of Allah. This is because it is not a believer's actions that save them; indeed, every person, when called to account meticulously for his actions in this life, will inevitably be found guilty.

So, the first and utmost bail and means of salvation for us all is the Mercy of Allah; this is mentioned in the Noble Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘There is not one of you who will enter paradise by his actions.’ They (his companions) asked, ‘Not even you, Messenger of Allah?’ He *peace and blessing be upon him* replied, ‘Not even me, except if Allah encompasses me with His Mercy.’(1)

Therefore, you should take care not to be filled with self-conceit concerning your actions; all the religious assignments (*takaleef*) primarily benefit you, and they are no favour to Allah. When He rewards you for such deeds in the Hereafter, it is from His Grace and Bounty.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?"…' (*az-Zumar:* 9) After having made a comparison between a person who calls on his Lord and turns back to Him when he is afflicted by harm but then forgets Allah's favour when he is granted a blessing by Him, and a person who spends the night hours in prayer, prostrating and standing, both being mindful of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord. Allah *the Almighty* wants to emphasise this point and makes it clear to us that those who have real knowledge are not the same as those who have false information: '...Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?" …' (*az-Zumar:* 9). So, the one who returns to disbelief after Allah has removed the harm from him is lacking real knowledge; if he had real knowledge, he would not have returned to disbelief. Furthermore, had he weighed fairly the duties required from them in this world against the reward prepared for them in the Hereafter, surely he would see these duties such a less and slight work.

However, as for the one who spends the night hours in prayer, prostrating, and standing, being mindful of the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord, he does have real knowledge. Most certainly, spending the night hours in prayer has many benefits. First, it keeps a worshipper far removed from showing off or gaining fame. Second, it means that all limbs and organs of a worshipper are devoted to the meeting of his Lord; the eye, for example, in the darkness of night is relieved from having to look at all those things that distract man's attention in the daytime. The reason for this is that everything appears to your eyes takes a portion of your thinking. You note it to yourself when someone goes out, someone comes in or someone says something, etc.

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(1) *An agreed upon prophetic Hadith (saying) that is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6463) and Muslim in his Sahih (2816) from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

However, at night, there is stillness and nothing to distract you; so all the limbs and organs are directed purely towards Allah, free of the distractions of extraneous sights and sounds. This type of atmosphere allows you to stand before your Lord in true sincerity and humility.

When you stand for a long time in prayer, you leave behind sleep and deny yourself its rest in order to stand before your Lord and prostrate to Him. This is why a poet says:

I dedicated myself to My Lord and felt rapture on account of my closeness to Him
And felt so light that it was as if I had no body.
There I recited the Book of Allah, O, what a wondrous thing,
I have been given in exchange for the blessing of sleep!
I wished that my night could grow longer so that I could reach
The sin of wa'n-nas and connect it to the ba' of bi-smi.

This is the state of the people of devoted worship who spend their nights in intimate conversation with their Lord. This is the state of those who make their journey through the Book of Allah; no sooner do they reach, in their recitation of the Quran, the letter *sin* of the word *wa'n-nas* which is the last in order of the Quran verses, than they resume recitation right back to *bi-smi-llahi'r-rahmani'r-rahim*, which is the beginning of the Holy Book. We said previously that the Quran in its entirety is based upon connected recitation, and not upon stopping.

Is the person who experiences such a state equal to one who disbelieves in Allah? The former has gained knowledge and turned it into action, while the latter has no knowledge at all or he has knowledge but does not use it in a way that benefits him. Then, there is the fact that when a person puts his knowledge into action, Allah *the Exalted* elevates his level of perception to the level of unveiling (*mukashafa*) and the emanation of knowledge (*faid*) as an act of Mercy and Grace from Him. We see an example of that in the story of the righteous man whom Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* accompanied and about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... on whom We had bestowed Grace from Ourselves and unto whom We had imparted knowledge [issuing] from Ourselves.' (*al-Kahf:* 65) Likewise, the Grace mentioned in Allah’s Words, '...and hoping for his Lord’s Grace ...' (*az-Zumar:* 9), refers to the special emanations from Allah to those who dedicate themselves to Him. A clear example of this in our life is when you have a friend who accompanies you everywhere; you inevitably single him out for special favour and treatment. So, how do you think it must be for one who always stays close to his Lord? Would Allah *the Almighty* reward him without singling him out for any special favour? Would He treat you the same as someone who only does the obligatory acts and nothing else?

Therefore, Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'The best devotion My servant submits to Me is performing the obligatory duties I decreed for him. My servant continues to get closer to me by means of supererogatory acts until I love him. When I love him, I become the hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his legs with which he walks, and if he were to ask anything of Me, I would give it to him.'(1)

Thus, a dedicated believer enters into the state of being a devoted man of Allah such that he is granted the ability which says to something ‘Be!’ and it will be. This is one of the emanations that are granted to those who keep prostrating and praying to Allah, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of their Lord. They worship Allah without simulation or seeking reputation and deny themselves sleep and rest because they have become intimate with their Lord; they find rest in being near to Him.

Allah’s Words, '..."Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?"…' (*az-Zumar:* 9) prove that there is a type of knowledge called the knowledge of unveiling which Allah *the Exalted* grants to those whom He wills from amongst His righteous slaves, those who are deserving of such a position. Thus, a pious man who was a companion of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* worshipped Allah according to the Way brought by Musa (Moses), and he was not a messenger. However, despite that, he, in some aspect excelled a messenger because Musa (Moses) guided him to his Lord, and he became closer and closer to him until he became one of the people of unveiling, achieved a direct connection to Allah and was shown things by Him that He had not even shown His Prophet Musa (Moses).

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(1) It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6502); and Abu Nu‘aym in *Hilyat Al-Awliya’* (1/4) in a hadith from Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him*. The beginning of the Hadith proceeds as follows: 'Allah says, "If anyone shows enmity to one of a devoted worshipper of Mine, I will declare war on him (the aggressor) ...’ It has also been narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (6/256) in a Hadith from 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* and in her version it begins, ‘If anyone humiliates one of My devoted worshippers, it becomes lawful for Me to wage war upon him ...’

Therefore, at the end of the period he spent with Musa (Moses), this pious man said, '... And I did not do [any of] this of my own accord ...' (*al-Kahf:* 82). So, the task of a messenger is to connect creation with the Creator. Then, when they do connect with Allah, the line that links them to Him becomes more direct; each worshipper is rewarded according to the degree of his devotion to Allah.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... [But] only they who are endowed with insight keep this in mind!' (*az-Zumar:* 9) This means that those who have thinking intellects that examine the world around them and reflect on Allah's signs know this truth. In other words, people have senses by means of which they perceive and an intellect by means of which they weigh their perceptions up and make choices. They use hearing in processing sounds, sight for visions and nose for smells, etc.; then they put those things before their intellect which examines them to weigh advantages and disadvantages. If the intellect is sound, then it falls on the side of what is good and chooses what is the most useful and most beneficial.

قُلْ يَٰعِبَادِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ رَبَّكُمْ ۚ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا۟ فِى هَٰذِهِ ٱلدُّنْيَا
حَسَنَةٌ ۗ وَأَرْضُ ٱللَّهِ وَٰسِعَةٌ ۗ إِنَّمَا يُوَفَّى ٱلصَّٰبِرُونَ أَجْرَهُم بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Say, '[God says], believing servants, be mindful of your Lord! Those who do good in this world will have a good reward – God's earth is wide — and those who persevere patiently will be given a full and unstinting reward'[10]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 10)

Being conscious of Allah (*taqwa*) is guarding oneself against doing acts of disobedience, putting a barrier between yourself and Allah's Attributes of

Majesty. Allah is the Compelling, the Subjugating, and the Vengeful; so, put a barrier between yourself and those Attributes as a form of protection.

'… who have attained to faith' (*az-Zumar:* 10) refers to those who believe in the Doctrines of Faith; '... Be conscious of your Lord!’ (*az-Zumar:* 10) This is in reference to the assignments, or orders, He requires from you. '...Ultimate good awaits those who persevere in doing the good in this world...' (*az-Zumar:* 10) means the good in the Hereafter awaits them, for Allah *the Almighty* does not say, ‘Good in this world awaits those who preserve in doing good'. This is because even disbelievers enjoy a great many good things in this world such as wealth, fame, information, etc.

If we interpreted the word ‘good’ as meaning ‘bliss’, that bliss that causes a person to turn away from his Lord cannot be considered a good thing but must instead be considered a bad thing. Thus, the good that is referred to in this verse must be that which awaits us in the Hereafter. '... And [remember] wide is Allah’s earth …' (*az-Zumar:* 10). However, what is the connection between '... And [remember] wide is Allah’s earth …' and '... Be conscious of your Lord', which precedes it?

Scholars say that if you encounter hardships regarding your devotion to Allah in the land where you live, Allah’s earth is wide, so search for the means to protect yourself and your faith in a different land; Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And he who forsakes the domain of evil for the sake of Allah shall find on earth many a lonely road, as well as life abundant ...' (*an-Nisa’:* 100).

In the same respect, He also says: 'Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves, [the angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer, "We were too weak on earth." [The angels] will say, "Was, then, Allah’s earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?"…' (*an-Nisa’:* 97).

So, when you feel caged and extremely oppressed in your own land, go and look for another land in which you can feel safe regarding yourself and your religion, and with respect to putting Allah’s programme into practice without anyone objecting.

If you were to have paid full notice to a verse in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, you would have found in it the solution to all the problems of the modern world. This verse is the following, 'And the earth has He spread out for all living beings' (*ar-Rahman:* 10) which means that Allah *the Almighty* has placed the earth, that is to say the entire earth without restriction, at the disposal of all living beings, again without restriction. Thus, every human being has a share in Allah's earth. Therefore, if one place becomes too narrow for a person, he has the right to go elsewhere. However, the laws and interests of the human race has changed this picture, putting obstacles, impediments and complicated procedures in the way, which block the path of this freedom that the True Lord *the Most High* guarantees us of being able to move about the earth.

Furthermore, this is why we find that the world's big economic problem is the existence of large swathes of land without people and many people without land. If we were to leave the land to Allah in the way that He created it for His slaves and if we were to place the whole of the earth at the disposal of all living beings, we would bring an end to the problems of this world.

Look, for example, at Sudan, our neighbour to the south; it is a country that contains millions of acres that no one benefits from, while we here in Egypt have millions of idle labour force. If it were not for the borders that we ourselves put in place, Sudan alone could have solved the problem of food for the entire Arab world. Instead, we make things even more wretched and bitter for ourselves by disputing and jostling amongst ourselves concerning where those borders should fall, even if it is by as much as a single inch. Indeed, this matter has been the cause of great crises and even led to the outbreak of wars between different nations. Thus, this is the natural result of going against the Command of Allah and His order in creation.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[and] verily, they who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond all reckoning!' (*az-Zumar:* 10) The fact that Allah *the Exalted* encourages us to have patience after saying, '…And [remember] wide is Allah's earth, [and] verily, they who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond all reckoning!' (*az-Zumar:* 10), indicates that there must be difficulties, problems and hardships that demand our patience. A poet once said:

By your life, no land has ever become too narrow for its people,

Rather, it is the manners of its men that have become too narrow for it.(1)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants us to take on the burden of Allah's Way and put it into practice in order to bring ourselves happiness, and then to practice sublimation in our faith in order to bring happiness to others. This is the way to make welfare prevail evenly in society. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* says: 'May Allah illuminate the man who hears my speech and pays heed to it, and then conveys it to someone else who did not hear it, for it is possible that the one who is told of it will pay more heed to it than the one who heard it.'

Thus, passing on good to others is also useful for you, and it will bring you benefit since if you concealed the knowledge of what is good from someone else, you would leave that person embroiled in evil. Furthermore, that evil would inevitably have impacted upon you and worn you down. So, it is in your best interests that good things spread to others, enabling others to become good people, and not being ones stealing, cursing, cheating, or infringing upon the rights of others. Thus, the actual act of passing on knowledge of what is good is a source of benefit to the one who passes it on since at the very least it stops evil people from harming him.

A patient person (*sabir*) is the one who is patient and steadfast in the face of those trials and hardships that negatively impact his health, wealth, or family. This patient person is the one who is confident of the fact that the pain and harm he suffers will be the source of more good for him than the comfort and bliss he enjoyed before that pain and harm arrived since Allah says: '[and] verily, they who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond all reckoning!' (*az-Zumar:* 10)

Allah *the Almighty* has designated certain amounts of rewards for performance of all the obligations that which He charges us; for the prayer, we will be rewarded with a certain amount of blessings and the same is true for *zakat*, etc. Concerning patience, it is something whose reward is not accounted for. In other words, its reward is unknown. Some have even said that when people are shown their stations in paradise, there will be some who are not known to have done a great deal of right action but still have lofty stations in paradise. When people ask who they are, they will be told that they are those who had patience in times of difficulty, trial and adversity; therefore, they obtained those lofty stations as a result of such.

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(1) The line is from a poem written by Ibn Ar-Rumi and is in the *(tawil)* metre and is composed of four lines. Ibn Ar-Rumi is 'Ali ibn Al-'Abbas ibn Jurayj, a major poet from the same generation as Bashshar ibn Bard and Al-Mutanabbi. He was born in Baghdad in the year 221 AH; he grew up and died there, killed by poison in the year 283 AH at the age of 62.

Patience means negation of doubt in the Mercy of Allah, as well as not objecting to His Judgment and Decree. However, this is not the case with certain people whom, for example, we see at the time of *Hajj* presenting their lesions and woes to others. Some of these people go to perform *Hajj,* and then they reveal their tribulations to society at large by showing people a crippled leg or a crippled arm, for example, and as a result, begging them on account of their injury. It is as if they were complaining about the Creator to creation. However, if they were to conceal their tribulation instead, along with being content with Allah's Decree, boon of Allah would come to their doors, and He would give them what they needed without any effort on their behalf.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said: 'If you are tested, then conceal it.'(1) If a person reveals his complaint to creation, it is as if exposing the Creator and saying to people: 'Look at what Allah did to me.'

In the stories that are related about the Companions of Prophet Muhammad and the first generations of this *ummah* (followers of Islam), we are told about a woman who did not find it acceptable for her husband to complain of poverty to Prophet Muhammad, despite the fact all they only owned a single garment that was used by the two of them. The man put the garment on and then goes to the mosque to perform the prayer with Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of pray time. Then, as soon as the prayer finished, he would hurry back home so that his wife could put the garment on and offer her own prayer.

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-'Ajluni in Kashf Al-Khafa' (Hadith) 211 with this wording, and Al-Hakim narrated in Al-Mustadrak (4/244) from Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah after stoning Al-Aslama and said, 'Keep away from this filth from which Allah prohibits you. If you do any of them, however, then keep them hidden with the veil of Allah and make repentance to Allah. For if anyone reveals their page to us, we will implement (the punishment decreed in) the Book of Allah upon him.' Furthermore, he said that the Hadith was correct (sahih) according to the preconditions of the two sheikhs, although neither of them narrated it.*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* noticed(1) the fact that the man always came at the beginning of the prayer but did not see him afterwards. The Prophet waited for the prayer to end and then quickly turned in the direction of the man, only to see him in the process of leaving the mosque. So, he called out to that man, saying, ‘I always see you at the beginning of the prayer but then never see you afterwards. Is it that you do not like sitting with us?’ He replied, ‘No, Messenger of Allah, it is simply that my wife is waiting for this cloak of mine in order to offer her prayer in it.’ So, Prophet Muhammad asked Allah for good for the man.

Then, when the man went home, his wife said to him, ‘You are late by the amount of a single set of prayer beads’, for that was how they measured time. He replied, ‘The Messenger of Allah stopped me and asked me about my affair, and I was compelled to tell him that I had a wife at home waiting for this cloak of mine to pray in.’ So, she said, ‘What is the matter with you! Do you complain about your Lord to Muhammad?’ This was the level to which the Companions demonstrated patience, patience free of anxiety, complaint, or objection to the Decree of Allah.

Therefore, knowing the reward that the patient will receive in the Hereafter, some of the righteous people say, ‘If people were to know the reward that the people of patience receive, they would wish that they could come back to this world and have their bodies cut so that they could obtain that position.’

قُلْ إِنِّيٓ أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ ٱللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَّهُ ٱلدِّينَ ﴿١١﴾ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ ٱلْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

Say, ‘I have been commanded to serve God, dedicating my worship entirely to Him [11] and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto God [12]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 11-12)

We notice in these two verses that the verb *umirtu* (I am bidden) is repeated. This indicates that we are being given two commands; each of them is separate and independent from the other. The first command is 'Say [O Muhammad]: "Behold, I am bidden to worship Allah, making my faith sincerely to Him alone, and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Allah."' (*az-Zumar:* 11-12) This is a command to have certainty in our faith and certainty in our worship, meaning that we do them solely and sincerely for the sake of Allah.

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(1) The story of the woman who told her husband, 'Do you complain to the Prophet Muhammad from poverty?'

There are different degrees of true sincerity to Allah; a person may worship Allah in expectation of a reward and out of a desire for paradise, another may worship Him out of fear of the fire and a third one might worship Allah for they believe He deserves to be worshipped and loved.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says at the end of the chapter of *al-Kahf*: '... whoever looks forward [with hope and awe] to meeting his Lord [on Judgment Day] …' (*al-Kahf:* 110); this does not mean the paradise of his Lord or His reward; it means that he only wants to meet Him and be close to Him. His heart is not preoccupied with the blessings. Rather, it is only preoccupied with being in close proximity to the Bestower of blessings: '... let him do righteous deeds, and let him not ascribe unto anyone or anything a share in the worship due to his Lord!' (*al-Kahf:* 110) Paradise is one of those things.

Thus, the first command is specifically to belief. As for the second command, 'and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Allah.' (*az-Zumar:* 12) It is related to the Islamic assignments and the duties Allah commands us to do and not to do. Therefore, how come Prophet Muhammad says: 'and I am bidden to be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 12)? Is he not already the foremost amongst them? He says as such because the first time anything was made obligatory in Islam was when the revelation was first sent down to him, and that was before he had conveyed any part of it to his Companions. So, there was a period of time when he was the first to surrender to Allah and the first to submit fully to the Order of Allah, before he conveyed that order to anyone else. That is it, referring to first, or 'foremost', in the true literal sense of the word.

However, there is also another interpretation for first, or 'foremost', in this verse; it is that Muhammad is the first to put the rulings of Allah into practice in front of the people after having conveyed the Divine Order to them. He did this so that they can know that the Message was simply not something to corroborate messengers; rather, it was to make those messengers the perfect examples for people to follow. Thus, by putting the Order of Allah into action, messengers taught all of mankind that that order was good for them. This is proven by the fact that they imposed its implementation upon themselves before they imposed it on anyone else and, thus, realising the saying, ‘I will not command you to do anything that I do not do myself.’

Another thing is that Allah denies the Messenger and his family something that He grants to the rest of the Muslims. When a person dies, his family inherits from him. However, when it came to Prophet Muhammad, none of his family was permitted to inherit from him. Moreover, the poor amongst the Muslims may receive charity and *zakat*, but the poor amongst the family of the Prophet are not allowed to receive charity or *zakat*.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad endured great hardship in delivering the Message and was not coddled or granted a comfortable life on account of it. Furthermore, his family also endured a degree of the same hardship alongside him. If it had not been for their being certain about Allah's reward which gave them trust and hope of paradise, a certainty of trust that made it seem to them as if they were actually physically looking upon the people of paradise being blessed and the people of the fire being punished, if it had not been for that, they would not have been able to endure hardships and difficulties with such patience.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the wives of Prophet Muhammad by saying: 'O, wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the [other] women...' (*al-Ahzab:* 32). This is due to them being the wives of Prophet Muhammad, and so they must be the first ones to put his order into practice so that they can become living examples of it. This way, people can come to know that the Messenger did not come as a tyrant, commanding them to do things while not doing them himself, and forbidding them to do things while doing them himself. On the contrary, he was the first amongst them to put the Divine Orders into practice. He and his family led the way so that people might learn from their example. Thus, he really was the first of Muslims.

Scholars have deeply examined the issue of 'being the first of Muslims' because the Quran also mentions Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saying the same phrase: '... and I shall [always] be foremost amongst those who surrender themselves unto Him.' (*al-An'am:* 163); this means that he was the first of Muslims of his time, but as for Prophet Muhammad, he was the first of Muslims during his time and the times of others. In order to make this matter more comprehensible, we say, that first, or 'foremost' is a first, or 'foremost', in the sense of surpassing everyone else and being superior. This superiority can be relative like when we say that so-and-so was the first in the College of Law this year. In this instance, his superiority is specifically linked to the year in reference, but in other years there be other students who surpass him and get even higher grades. Furthermore, superiority can be universal like when we say that so-and-so is first in the College of Law from the day it was established until today.

Thus, there is a first, or 'foremost', that relates to a specific period, and there is another first, or 'foremost', based on comparison between different time periods with each other. If one of the messengers said, ‘I am the first of Muslims’, he meant the first of Muslims during his time period, but when Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘I am the first of Muslims’, he meant the first of all Muslims, from the time of Adam until the coming of the Day of Judgment. This is despite the fact that Muhammad came at the end of time, and he was the first in terms of the rank at the time of receiving assignment of the mission. Each of the other messengers were sent to a specific place at a specific time, but Muhammad has been sent to entire mankind, wherever and whenever they live. Then, there is the fact that he is the Seal of Messengers, for no Message will come after his, and no messenger will come after him. These are all factors as to why Prophet Muhammad is the first, and they are factors that are patently true, and that none can deny.

Therefore, we find this first is always repeated on the tongue of Prophet Muhammad as in the verse: 'Say [O, Prophet]: "If the Most Gracious [truly] had a son, I would be the first to worship him!"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 81) This means that I will be the first to affirm that.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ إِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّى عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾ قُلِ ٱللَّهَ أَعْبُدُ مُخْلِصًا لَّهُۥ
دِينِى ﴿١٤﴾ فَٱعْبُدُوا۟ مَا شِئْتُم مِّن دُونِهِۦ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْخَـٰسِرِينَ ٱلَّذِينَ خَسِرُوٓا۟
أَنفُسَهُمْ وَأَهْلِيهِمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ ۗ أَلَا ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْخُسْرَانُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿١٥﴾

Say, ‘I fear the torment of a terrible Day if I disobey my Lord.’ [13] Say: Say, ‘It is God I serve, dedicating my worship entirely to Him [14] you may serve whatever you please beside Him.’ Say, ‘The true losers are the ones who will lose themselves and their people on the Day of Resurrection: that is the most obvious loss [15] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 13-15)

Is it not strange that Prophet Muhammad said, '..."Behold, I would dread, were I to rebel against my Lord, the suffering [which would befall me] on that awesome Day [of Judgment]"' (*az-Zumar:* 13)? It is as if he were saying, ‘I have not attained to this station simply because I am an honoured prophet. On the contrary, I am just like the rest of you. If I disobey my Lord, I will also be subjected to punishment. The fact that Allah has made me the first and chosen me above everyone else will not mean anything if I commit acts of disobedience.’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, addressing His Messenger: 'Say: "Allah alone do I worship, making my faith sincerely to Him alone' (*az-Zumar:* 14). This verse is also related to faith and the certainty of belief. Previously, Allah said, 'Say [O, Muhammad]: "Behold, I am bidden to worship Allah, making my faith sincerely to Him alone,"' (*az-Zumar:* 11) whereas in this verse He says: 'Say: "Allah alone do I worship ..."' (*az-Zumar:* 14). What is the difference between ‘Allah alone do I worship’ and ‘I am bidden to worship Allah’?

'I am bidden to worship Allah' is in the normal structure for sentences in Arabic: verb, followed by the subject, followed by an object. When a sentence follows this order, however, it presents no impediment to another object being conjoined to the first. For example, if you were to say, ‘Obey So-and-so’, there is nothing to prevent you from adding ‘… and So-and-so’. However, if we were to place the object in front of the verb, as in 'Say: "Allah alone do I worship ..."', that act of placing the object before the verb gives us the sense of confinement and restriction. In other words, the word order restricts worship to Allah alone, such as when you say, ‘To Allah, I complain’ meaning you complain only to Him and no one else.

The first verse follows the normal order for sentences, while the second verse makes use of the linguistic device of confinement. It is as if he is saying, ‘I do not worship any other than Allah. But you, you worship whatever you want: '… "and [it is up to you, O sinners, to] worship whatever you please instead of Him!"' (*az-Zumar:* 15)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* makes clear to us what the outcome of associating others with Him is when He says: '... Say: "Behold, the [true] losers will be they who shall have lost their own selves and their kith and kin on Resurrection Day, for is not this the [most] obvious loss"' (*az-Zumar:* 15).

We understand from this that idolaters will have lost themselves on the Day of Judgment, and that is due to them wronging themselves by not believing in Allah and associating others with Him. However, how come they also lose their families? Scholars say that their families mean their children and descendants, and these children either become believers or remain in disbelief just like their ancestors. If they remain in disbelief, they are losers just like their ancestors, but if they believe, they will not be with those ancestors and will be prevented from seeing them since they will be in paradise while those others will be in the fire. So, whatever the case with their ancestors, they will be in loss.

Allah *Glorified is He* emphasises the word ‘loss’ by making use of the cognate accusative *maf‘ul mutlaq*: '... for is not this the [most] obvious loss?' (*az-Zumar:* 15) Then, He describes that loss as being obvious which means that it is clear and all encompassing, for when is a trader considered to be a loser? He is considered a loser when his capital is returned to him without any profit, for in such an instance he is a loser because all the effort and hard work he put into trading was for nothing or when the loss also eats into his capital, so he loses because all the effort and hard work he put in came to nothing and he loses a portion of his capital. This latter type of loss is the obvious loss, or in other words, the comprehensive loss. Thus, Allah’s Words, '... for is not this the [most] obvious loss?' (*az-Zumar:* 15) mean the comprehensive loss that encompasses his family, wealth and efforts.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَهُم مِّن فَوۡقِهِمۡ ظُلَلٞ مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ وَمِن تَحۡتِهِمۡ ظُلَلٞۚ ذَٰلِكَ
يُخَوِّفُ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦ عِبَادَهُۥۚ يَٰعِبَادِ فَٱتَّقُونِ ﴿١٦﴾

They will have layers of Fire above them and below.' This is how God puts fear into His servants: My servants, beware of Me [16] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 16)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* makes clear to us what the outcome will be for disbelievers when He says: 'Clouds of fire will they have above them and [similar] clouds beneath them ...' (*az-Zumar:* 16). The word *thulal* (clouds) is the plural of *thulla*, which literally means a canopy or sunshade that provides a person with shade and protects him from the heat of the sun. Normally, it is in shade that a person looks for rest and fresh air. However, as for these people, they have clouds above them, not just a cloud but clouds that are made of fire. Indeed, fire can never provide shade.

So, this is an irony by which Allah is mocking disbelievers. Even more, these clouds will not afflict them from one direction but from above and beneath. Usually, when something bad approaches from one direction, people get away from it by going in the opposite direction, In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hell will be their resting place and their covering as well(1)…' (*al-A'raf:* 41).

Then, the fire surrounds them on all sides, and they have no way of escaping from it. '... In this way Allah imbues His servants with fear. O, you, servants of Mine! Be, then, conscious of Me.' (*az-Zumar:* 16) Reflect on the Mercy Allah shows His slaves, even in those situations where He mentions punishment and hellfire. For the fire is not there to punish creation, but it is there to frighten and rebuke them so that they do not adopt such a position or open themselves up to such a punishment. One only warns those whom they love, such as when you make your son afraid of failing his exams, you make it clear to him what the outcome of neglecting his studies will be; you warn him of the humiliation, scorn, and disdain to which he will be exposed if he fails his course.

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(1) *As-Suyuti said in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (3/457), 'Ibn Al-Mundhir narrated that Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him said about the Words, 'Hell will be their resting place...' (al-A'raf: 41), 'a carpet ', and about the Words, '... and their covering as well...' (al-A'raf: 41) 'a shroud'. Similar has also been narrated by Hannad, Ibn Jarir and Abu Ash-Sheikh from Muhammad ibn Ka'b Al-Qurazi.*

Thus, Allah’s purpose in mentioning the fire is to put fear in people’s hearts so that they avoid doing any of those things that lead to it. A prudent person takes heed of warning, and he is deterred when rebuked. Therefore, the act of frightening must be considered one of Allah’s greatest blessings.

This matter is made clear in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*. Those who try to emend the Words of Allah say: ‘It is consistent that verses mentioning blessings conclude with Allah’s Words: "Which, then, of your Lord’s powers can you disavow?" (*ar-Rahman:* 13) This is the case in the verses: "He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. Which, then, of your Lord’s powers can you disavow?" (*ar-Rahman:* 14-16) However, where is the blessing that we should not deny in Allah’s Words: 'A flash of fire and smoke will be let loose upon you, and you will be left without aid" (*ar-Rahman:* 35)?

Scholars reply that this torture is not actually taking place, but it is only mentioned to make us afraid. It means, ‘If you do such-and-such, then Allah will let loose upon you a flash of fire and smoke, and you will be left without aid.'

By terrifying us and making us afraid of the punishment before it takes place, Allah *the Almighty* creates a barrier that prevents us from doing such things that will bring that punishment upon us, and as a result, this causes us to be fearful and conscious of Him. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says after that: '... O, you, servants of Mine! Be, then, conscious of Me' (*az-Zumar:* 16); this means to consider this frightening a mercy, not a cause for terror. If a person weighs things carefully and compares the state of the inhabitants of paradise with that of the inhabitants of the fire, he would almost certainly be deterred and return to the straight path, at which he would become worthy of the Mercy and Forgiveness of Allah. Thus, it is one of Allah’s blessings to us that He frightens us and warns about evil before it happens. If He had not warned us, then He would have taken us unawares or left us in heedlessness.

وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱجۡتَنَبُواْ ٱلطَّٰغُوتَ أَن يَعۡبُدُوهَا وَأَنَابُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ لَهُمُ ٱلۡبُشۡرَىٰۚ فَبَشِّرۡ عِبَادِ ﴿١٧﴾
ٱلَّذِينَ يَسۡتَمِعُونَ ٱلۡقَوۡلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحۡسَنَهُۥٓۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَدَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُۖ
وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمۡ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ﴿١٨﴾

There is good news for those who shun the worship of false gods and turn to God, so [Prophet] give good news to My servants [17] who listen to what is said and follow what is best. These are the ones God has guided; these are the people of understanding [18] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 17-18)

'The powers of evil' is the translation for the Arabic word *taghut*, which is the hyperbolic form of the word *taghin*. A *taghut* is a tyrant who increases in tyranny the more respect people show him, and increases in arrogance and conceit the more they fear him. *Taghut* must have a directive order and an aspect of supremacy.

Therefore, idols are not called *taghut*; they do not have a supreme characteristic or a directive order. Rather, such stone idols gain supremacy from the people worshipping them. So, it is only human beings who can be *taghut*, even if they were simply governors. Otherwise, how do idols become tyrannical? Idols can neither speak nor oppress.

There is a proverb that people say in the countryside, and it goes as follows: ‘O, Pharaoh, what has made you Pharaonic (tyrannical)?’ He replied, ‘I never met anyone who stopped me.’ In other words, if people had challenged his claim of divinity when he made himself a deity, he would have stopped.

May Allah have mercy on Ahmad Az-Zayn(1)(2)*;* when Egypt was still a monarchy, they wanted a national union that brought all the various parties and factions together to meet with the king to think about a way of resolving all of the country’s problems. One of those who was invited was Mustafa

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(1) Ahmad Az-Zayn was an Egyptian poet who was blind. He was called the ‘narrator’ because of the huge amount of things he had memorised. He was born in the 1900 AD, studied in the Azhar and took a job as a lawyer. Then he worked as an employee of the Dar Al-Kutub for around twenty years. He has a work of poetry called *Al-Qutuf Ad-Daniya* and a work done in the rajaz meter called *Qala’id Al-Hikma*. He died in 1947 at the age of 47. (Al-A‘lam 1/129) He wrote 84 poems comprising a total of 2292 lines.

(2) The story of Ahmad Az-Zayn with Mustafa An-Nahaas and the king

An-Nahaas,(1) but he did not attend. When his followers asked him why he did not go to the meeting, he replied, ‘Because I will be in the minority there’; this refers to the large amount of people who would have been there. Ahmad Az-Zayn took this position and wrote a poem about it, mocking the king. He said (2):

All of them glorify their religion with personal whim,
A thousand issuing legal opinions while Malik is in Medina!
How many presidents, if not for the laws protecting...
his ignorance, would be exiled by his own laws.
He is insane, and is even more insane...
to think that any rational person would follow his madness.

A *Taghut* only ever becomes a *Taghut* because people fear him and are not prepared to reject his oppression and stand up against him. Instead, they act like sycophants and voice their agreement of everything he does.

Some scholars think that *Taghut* refers to everything that is worshipped other than Allah, but a *Taghut* is not just that but also one who is content to be worshipped. So, based on that definition, not idols, ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* nor the saints of Allah cannot be considered to be *Taghut* as some people have claimed. This is due to the fact that people have been wrongly affected by them, and no blame can be attached to the idols, ‘Isa (Jesus) or the saints for that.

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(1) Mustafa An-Nahaas was an Egyptian leader and was born in Samanud in 1879 AD. He studied there and in Cairo; he graduated from the School of Law in 1900 AD. He worked as a lawyer until he was appointed as a judge, and he affiliated himself with the delegation of Sa‘d Zaghlul, and was one of the leading members of the ’Youth for Independence’ movement. He was arrested alongside Sa‘d. He took up the office of prime minister on five occasions and was placed under house arrest after the revolution of 1952 AD until he died in 1965 AD at the age of 86 (*Al-A‘lam* of *Az-Zirikli,* volume 7).

(2) These lines are taken from a poem of Ahmad Az-Zayn composed in the khafif meter; the total length of which was 51 lines. The first line of the poem goes as follows:
All of them embellish their religion with personal whim,
A thousand issuing legal opinions while Malik is in Medina!
As for the final two lines quoted here, they are, according to *Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-Shi‘riyya*, lines 44 and 45 of the poem.

'... and turn unto Allah instead ...' (*az-Zumar:* 17); what is meant is ‘go back to worshipping Him alone without partners'. '... there is the glad tiding [of happiness in the life to come]…' (*az-Zumar:* 17); what this means is the promise to live in paradise because of the fact that they challenged tyranny and refused to accept oppression, Allah *the Almighty* wants a Muslim society to stand up in the face of every tyrant and despot, correct the behaviour of every deviant, and isolate the corrupt few, cut them from society and stop them interacting with the general populace.

An example of that is a bully who carries weapons and threatens people’s lives, possessions, and dignity. He even dares to challenge law, state order, and powers. He would never have reached such a level if society had not abandoned its job of opposing the people who turn to evil and putting them right.

Before I start today’s lecture,(1) I want to mention that I received a letter today from one of the brothers, asking me first about the poem that was written about praying in the night. I will not say who it was who wrote it. Instead, I will refer the asker to a man who is an authority on matters of this sort. This man is Doctor Muhammad ‘Abd Al-Mun‘im Khafaja, the former dean of the College of the Arabic language and the foremost authority on literature in the whole of Egypt. He also asked me about the disagreement of scientists with respect to defining the limits of the day and night, some excluding some of the night from the day and others excluding some of the day from the night. I will say, in response, and all success comes from Allah, ‘The difference of opinion that exists with respect to the day and the night is one that rages between jurists and astronomers, for jurists consider the night to begin at sunset and finish at dawn, while astronomers consider the night to begin at sunset and finish at sunrise.’

Thus, there is a period of time over which they differ, namely the time between dawn and sunrise. Those who consider it not to be part of the night are the jurists, for they want to take precautions when it comes to fasting and make sure the correct time limit of the night is preserved and no part of the day is included within it. This is why they take precautions to ensure that does not happen.

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(1) The story of the man who sent a letter to Sheikh Ash-Sha‘rawi *Allah rest his soul* to ask him about the late night prayer.

The jurists' precaution is based on seeing the light that is visible in the sky at dawn and not considering the cause of that light, which is the sun. We see light before the sun rises.

As for astronomers, they consider presence of light and say that the light in question is a sign of the night. However, jurists responded that this is not right for there is a difference between light appearance and the source of light; since the light that exists between dawn and sunrise is a light where we cannot see the sun, that light is connected to the setting and the rising of the sun. It is normally said of the night to be 'dark night', or *laylun alyalu, or a laylatun layla'* that means that it is a very dark one where the moon is in a period of waning. *Laylatun layla'* can also mean a night of great hardship and difficulty.

Lovers often make the night something that is mentioned in their poetry, for when they are with their lovers, they want it to go on for a long time, and when they are separated from their lovers, they want it to be over quickly.

An example of that are the words of a poet (1):

We have gone long into the night and I have not slept,
for slumber has been denied me by a visiting spectre.(2)

Another poet said when he was reunited with the one he loved:

O, night, go on and on! O, sleep, go away!
O, dawn, stay where you are and do not appear!

Yet, another combines both states; I think it was Al-Buhturi(3) when he said:

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(1) The poet is Bashar ibn Barad Al-‘Uqayli Abu Mu‘adh, the most poetic man born without exception. He was born in 95 AH and was originally from Takharistan on the banks of the river Jayhun. He was blind, grew up in Basra and moved to Baghdad. His life coincided with both the Umayyad and the Abbasid eras. He was accused of heresy and died from the whipping he received. He was buried in Basra in the year 167 AH at the age of 72.

(2) This line is from a poem of seven lines composed in the *ramal* meter. In *Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-Shi‘riyya* the line appears in the following form:
My night was not long, but still I did not sleep,
for slumber was denied me by a visiting spectre.

(3) Rather, he is Ibn Zaydun Ahmad Ibn ‘Abdullah Al-Andalusi Abu Al-Walid. He was born in 394 AH and was a vizier, a writer, a poet and one of the people of Cordoba.=

A lover bade goodbye to patience, and it bade goodbye to you,
Divulging the secrets which were entrusted to you,
Grinding his teeth that he did not spend longer
Taking footsteps in your company.
O, sister of the moon in brightness and splendour,
May Allah protect the time that gives rise to you.
If ever a night went on for a long time after you, how often
I spent those nights complaining of the shortness of my nights with you.(1)

The night finds its opposite in the day, and this is why Allah says: 'Say: "Have you ever considered [this]: If Allah had willed that there should always be night about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection, is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you light? Will you not, then, listen [to the truth]?" Say: "Have you ever considered [this]. If Allah had willed that there should always be daylight about you, without break, until the Day of Resurrection, is there any deity other than Allah that could bring you [the darkness of] night, wherein you might rest? Will you not, then, see [the truth]?"' (*al-Qasas:* 71-72)

So, He makes the night the opposite of the day. You will notice here the precision and fineness of the expression used by the Quran, for the one doing the speaking here is the Lord and the linguistic expression is a Divine one. Also, this is shown by the fact that when He speaks about the night, he concludes what He says with the Words: '...Will you not, then, listen [to the truth]?' When He speaks about the day, He concludes what He says with the Words: '...Will you not, then, see [the truth]?' Hearing is the means by which one perceives at night since you cannot see anything, while during the day it is seeing.

= There are some who have nicknamed him Al-Buhturi of the West. He devoted much of his poetry to Ibn Juhur, one of the kings of one of the city-states of Al-Andalus. He has letters that he wrote to him to win his friendship, and he wrote a story about the birth of Bint Al-Mustakfi. He died in 463 AH at the age of 69.

(1) This is a poem of Ibn Zaydun composed of four lines written in the *ramal* meter (*Al-Mawsu'a Ash-shi'riyya*).

Some of the people of knowledge had to research the relationship of the word *yawm* (day) to *layl* (night) and *nahar* (daytime), and said, ‘The True Lord says: ‘... Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day!’ (*Saba’:* 18); Allah makes *yawm* the equivalent of *nahar*. However, astronomers consider the day to be something else; they consider it to be measured as the period between one time and the equivalent time of the following day. Thus, if you begin at ‘*Asr*, you will have completed a day when you reach *‘Asr* on the following day. Likewise, when they talk about time, they say ‘in the morning’ and ‘in the evening’. So, if I were to have woken up for my pre-dawn meal two hours after midnight, I would say that I had eaten my pre-dawn meal at two o’clock in the morning, despite the fact that I was still experiencing nighttime. Furthermore, the opposite is the case in the daytime, for I would say, ‘five o’clock in the evening’, despite the fact that I was still experiencing daytime. These are all examples of the way the jurists differ from astronomers.

Yet, *yawm* (the day) does refer to many different things in many different places in the Quran, for the True Lord says in His Book, ‘This day (*Al-yawm*) I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 3), and uses *yawm* to refer to any moment in time.

Also, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘... and remind them of the Days of Allah!’ (*Ibrahim:* 5) The ‘Days of Allah’ are those days upon which events are attributed, regardless of whether these events are blessings or disasters. We would say, for example, ‘The day of Badr’, for Badr was a blessing for the believers and a disaster for the disbelievers. Thus, with that we end our answer to the question the brother posed to me.

Therefore, let us now return to the verse that we were in the process of discussing: Allah’s Words: ‘seeing that for those who shun the powers of evil lest they [be tempted to] worship them ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 17). We have said that the *taghut* is the one who tyrannises and whose tyranny is sanctioned by the people since they are not standing up against it. The word *taghut* is in the feminine form in this verse, as is proven by the feminine pronoun *hiya* (her) in Allah’s Words: ‘... lest they [be tempted to] worship them [in Arabic "her" *(hiya)*]...’ (*az-Zumar:* 17). However, the word comes in the masculine form in another place of the Quran in Allah’s Words: ‘[and yet] are willing to defer to the rule of the powers of evil – although they were bidden to deny it ["him" in Arabic] …’ (*an-Nisa’:* 60).

The word *Taghut* is one of those words that can be used to refer to singular, dual or plural and masculine or feminine. So, we would say, ‘This man is a *Taghut*’, ‘this woman is a *Taghut*’, ‘these two are *Taghut*’ and ‘These are *Taghut*.’ In this verse, it is being used to refer to the plural as is proven by Allah’s Words: ‘... lest they [be tempted to] worship them ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 17).

A *Taghut*, as we said, must be one who issues instructions. This is why the word is ever used for only tyrants from amongst mankind or from amongst jinns. As for angels, they do not approve of being worshipped instead of Allah. In the same respect, unjust oppressors are called *Taghut*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘... and turn unto Allah instead...’ (*az-Zumar:* 17) which means ‘go back to Him’. We understand from these Words that they were with Allah in the first place, but then turned away. How can that be? This can be due to it being said that every single human being in their original natural state was a believer when Allah *the Exalted* made His covenant with all of mankind, saying to them: ‘... Am I not your Lord?’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172) Then, some of them kept to their covenant and remained in their natural state, while others deviated and forgot their covenant.

Also, this is why the Quran always says, ‘Remind’, which means for them to remember that first covenant. Therefore, ‘...and turn unto Allah instead...’ means ‘they returned back to the natural state of belief and the first covenant they made’, or it means ‘they returned back to Allah for account on the Day of Rising’.

Concerning Allah’s Words, ‘... there is the glad tiding (*bushra*) [of happiness in the life to come] …’ (*az-Zumar:* 17), a *bushra* is a happy piece of news we tell others of something that has yet to happen. There are two types of glad tidings: one that tells of some injury or pain being removed and one that tells of some aim or objective being realised. Both of these things await those who shun the powers of evil, refusing to worship them and return back to Allah, for first they are kept out of the fire and not subjected to its torments, and second their aim of entering paradise is realised, just as Allah says:

‘...whereupon he who shall be drawn away from the Fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph ...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185). This is why He says after that, ‘... Give, then, this glad tiding to [those of] My servants’ (*az-Zumar:* 17); this means ‘Give this good news to My slaves’ "who listen [closely] to all that is said, and follow the best of it…"’ (*az-Zumar:* 18). If there is something said, then there must be someone who says it. Thus, when they hear someone saying things, they follow the best of what is said; the best things are said by the best speaker, and the best speaker is none other than Allah *the Almighty* So, when Allah issues a judgment and commands us to obey it, they follow it because Allah’s Words are the best of Words, and Allah’s command is the most beneficial of commands.

The True Lord *the Most High* does not benefit from the commands to you, nor is he harmed by your disobedience; rather, it is you who benefits from that programme and gains from putting it into action.

Then, there is the fact that you are His living beings created by Him, and He does not like to see these living beings deviate and be punished as a result.

Then, there is the fact that Allah *the Exalted* wants His programme for you and His Laws to be the means for bestowing His gifts upon you on a continual basis and for the blessings of this world to be resumed in the Hereafter. Furthermore, this is why He says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'If you were to have created them, you would have shown them mercy.'(1)

The best of what is said may also refer to Islam. For when Islam came, it found people of all kinds: disbelievers who did not believe in any deity or Allah, idolaters who believed in other deities alongside Allah and followers of other religions that had Divine Scriptures and to whom previous messengers were sent, such as Jews and Christians. Those who lived contemporaneously with Islam listened to words that were spoken, either from this group or from that. They listened to the disbelievers, the atheists, the idolaters, and the people of previous Books.

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(1) It is mentioned by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya’ ‘Ulum Ad-Din* (4/52) as a statement of one of the men of the right-acting early generations with the wording, 'Whenever any slave disobeys Me, his place on the earth seeks permission from Me to swallow him up while the portion of the sky that is immediately above him seeks permission from Me to fall down upon him in clumps.' So, Allah says to the earth and sky, ’Keep away from My slaves and give them respite, for it was not you who created them. If you had created them, then you would have shown them mercy. It is possible that he will repent and come to back to Me so that I can forgive him, and it is possible that he will do a right action in exchange, so that I can change it into a good action.’

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were saying, 'Use your intellect to examine all that is said by all the various groups, and then choose the best of them. Furthermore, do not cling fanatically to what one group says without first researching what others say and comparing them. If you do that, while being objective, then you will find that the best things are said by Islam, and that it is the most worthy of being followed, for it is the religion that gathers people to all that is good and distances them from all that is evil.

It is the religion that confirms and has authority over the religions that came before it, and its Book is the book that confirms and having authority over the Books that came before it. Islam is the universal religion that came for everyone, at every time and at every place. This is why it is the final religion after which no other religions will come; it came with the final Book after which no Books will come, and the final messenger after which no messengers will come.

Such a religion must also fulfil all of the preconditions of perfection as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Today have I perfected your religious law for you, have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). Therefore, Islam is the best of religions; it says the best things and is the best thing we can follow.

Then, the verses continue their description of believers who shun the worship of *Taghut*, who return back to Allah, who listen to what is said and who follow the best of it by saying: '...[for] it is they whom Allah has graced with His guidance (*hadahum*), and it is they who are [truly] endowed with insight!' (*az-Zumar:* 18) By *hadahum*, Allah *the Exalted* means point out the way to them and guides them towards it. When they follow such directions and have no objection to doing so in their hearts, He then grants them the guidance of success and belief, leading to their believing in Him.

We have said before that guidance is of two types: the guidance of pointing out the way and the guidance of providing aid and assistance. Thus, we clarified what this meant before by using the example of the traffic policeman whom you find at a crossroads giving people directions. If he points out the way to you, and you follow his directions and thank him for the service he has done for you, he does even more for you by accompanying you so that you are not harmed by any of the obstacles along the way. He did as such because he found you worthy of being helped, and so he helped you.

In the same respect, it is Allah Who is the highest example. The True Lord gives His slaves the guidance of pointing out the right way, giving that guidance to believers and disbelievers alike. Then, whoever follows the first form of guidance will be granted the second, which is the guidance of aid and assistance. This will only be given to believers and not disbelievers. It is as if Allah *the Exalted* says to His believing slave, 'You have believed in Me, heard My Words and obeyed Me, so I will help you to obey and make it easier for you to do so, and I will make disobedience hard for you.'

It is one of the greatest blessings Allah bestows upon His slave that He makes obedience easy for him and helps him overcome its difficulties, while at the same time locking the doors to disobedience and the things that lead to it. Likewise, this is the meaning of Allah's Words: 'just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes their piety to grow.' (*Muhammad:* 17) 'He causes their piety to grow' means 'He assists them in belief'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... and it is they who are [truly] endowed with insight!' (*az-Zumar:* 18); this means that those who possess intellects capable of reflection and discernment are the ones who spread out all of the different things that are said in front of them, then weigh them out, compare and choose the best one which will bring about happiness and welfare for them, along with bringing harmony to their lives and their everyday routines. Indeed, acting in a way that is straight, along with cooperating and supporting others, keeps people's hearts pure of rancour, spite, and envy and prevents them from taking the path of deviation, whether the means be through stealing, cheating, bribing, usurpation, etc.

Who would oppose a programme such as this? Who would refuse to live by it? It is the straight way to which no healthy intellect could fail to submit and the path that none could fail to follow. Therefore, this is why Allah calls ones who choose this way those '...who are [truly] endowed with insight!' (*az-Zumar:* 18) This means those who possess intellects. Furthermore, the role of intellect is to keep one's thoughts tied down so that they do not stray; instead, one's intellect looks over the different options and choosing the one that best fits him. However, the bane of thought is caprice, for it is caprice that turns you from what is said by the intellect to what is said by one's whims, opinions, and desires.

There is another view of what is meant by Allah's Words: 'who listen [closely] to all that is said, and follow the best of it…' (*az-Zumar:* 18); this refers specifically to those who listen to the different things Islam has to say and then follows the best of them. This is why Allah *the Almighty* makes use of the comparative form *ahsan* (better): it is as if Islam says things that are good as well as things that are better. So, this opinion does not consider the verse to have a general meaning but considers it to be limited to what Islam has to say. Everything that Islam says is good, but some of what it says is good, and some of what it says is better. Those with discerning intellects choose what is better.

A good example of this is that Islam legislates for a person to take the life of a killer as a form of retribution, but it also legislates for him to take blood money instead or to pardon the killer entirely. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness, and restitution to his fellow-man shall be made in a goodly manner ...' (*al-Baqara:* 178). Thus, those who take the option of retribution or blood money take the position that is good, while those who rise above that and pardon him take the position that is better.

Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If you do deeds of charity openly, it is well, but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you…' (*al-Baqara:* 271). By giving charity openly you are not perpetrating a wrong; rather, you are doing something good, but it is better to give it secretly.

Another example is found in Allah's Words: 'But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil. Hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah, for verily, He does not love evildoers.' (*ash-Shura:* 40)

In each of these places, we find the True Lord encouraging His slaves to take the path of pardoning and forgiveness. However, pardoning is only an option on those matters for which you alone bear the price, and if they result in harm, then that harm affects you alone. If it is matter which brings harm upon a community and society at large, then pardon is not an option.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has taught us this lesson, for he never once became angry on his own account but only became angry when one of the commands of Allah was violated. Thus, pardon when a matter is one that is connected to you, but if a matter is one that is connected to Muslims in general, no one has the right to pardon.

The True Lord *the Most High* directs our attention to the fact that choosing the best option is always the thing that is best for us personally, for in the story of the slander against 'A'isha *Allah be pleased with her*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... [For] do you not desire that Allah should forgive you your sins?...' (*an-Nur:* 22) What this means is 'Do not be sad that you have forgiven those who do you wrong, for Allah will treat you in the same way and forgive you if you do wrong, and who does not want for Allah to forgive him?' Therefore, as long as you want to be forgiven yourself, you should forgive your companions but only on the condition that it does not bring harm or trouble to society.

أَفَمَنۡ حَقَّ عَلَيۡهِ كَلِمَةُ ٱلۡعَذَابِ أَفَأَنتَ تُنقِذُ مَن فِي ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٩﴾

What about the one who has been sentenced to punishment?
Can you [Prophet] rescue those already in the Fire? [19]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 19)

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* loved his people and was determined upon guiding them and taking them by the hand. As a result, this caused him great pain to see even a single one of them not following the right path or actively oppose it. The Quran states that on more than one occasion, for Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *ash-Shu'ara'*: 'Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death [with grief] because they [who live around you] refuse to believe [in it]?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) Also, Allah says in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: 'But would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf:* 6)

Furthermore, Allah says in the chapter of *Fatir:* '... Hence, do not waste yourself in sorrowing over them …' (*Fatir:* 8). So, the True Lord *the Most High* reassures His Messenger and consoles him by saying, 'O, Muhammad, do not be sad on account of these people, for they fully deserve their punishment, and Allah has passed judgment that they will be punished: 'could one on whom [Allah's] sentence of suffering has been passed (*haqqa*)…' (*az-Zumar:* 19). *Haqqa* in this verse means 'to be established with Allah' as in Allah's Words: '... that word of Mine has come true: "Most certainly will I fill Hell with jinns as well as with humans, all together!"' (*as-Sajda:* 13)

Thus, given the fact that their punishment is something that is firmly established with Allah, why are you sad: '...Could you, perchance, save one who is [already, as it were,] in the Fire?' However, the fact that Allah's decree of punishment will come to pass does not mean that He compels His slaves to take that course of action; rather, He knows that they will do so. Allah *the Almighty* knows everything that they are going to do and has written it down in their accounts. This truth is not a necessary truth of existence willed by Allah but simply means that He knew beforehand the options they were going to choose.

We previously dealt with this issue when we discussed Allah's Words: 'Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him and all what he has gained? [In the life to come] he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing.' (*al-Masad:* 1-3) This is Allah passing judgment on Abu Lahab that he will be burnt in the fire. This judgment was revealed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and he conveyed it to the people. Furthermore, Abu Lahab heard it while he was yet alive. But could Muhammad feel safe that Abu Lahab would not stand up in an assembly of people and say, 'I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'? Could he be sure that he would not utter those words, even without sincerity, pretending to be a believer when he was with them and thereby showing Allah's Words to be untrue?

Abu Lahab was a disbeliever, in the same way that Khalid, 'Amr and 'Ikrimah were, and it was possible for him to become a believer just as they did, but Allah *Glorified is He* knew that he would never believe, even after being told of his fate in a miraculous Quran that is memorised by those who read it and will be recited until the Day of Rising. Therefore, this verse proves that Allah knew beforehand that he would not believe and did not compel him to disbelieve.

Allah *the Exalted* says to His Messenger that he should not to waste himself in sorrowing over them because He has judged them based on the knowledge He has of what they are going to do. He knows that they will be people of the fire. Therefore, how can you save someone over whom Allah has passed a judgment such as that?

You will notice when you look at the construction of the verse ‘On the other hand, could one on whom [Allah’s] sentence of suffering has been passed ...’ that the verb *haqqa* does not have the female ending attached to the end of it despite the fact that its subject, *kalimah* (word) is feminine. This is because, they say, the female ending pertaining to this particular use of the word is not actual feminine, and so it is permissible to leave off the female ending from the verb.

The question that is asked by the Words, ‘... could one on whom [Allah’s] sentence of suffering has been passed...’ requires an answering clause with the implied meaning being, ‘As for those upon whom Allah’s decree of punishment has been passed, do you want to save them or protect them from it by begging them to believe? Do you want to save them from the fire when Allah has passed judgment that they will be amongst its inhabitants?’

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَٰكِنِ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوۡاْ رَبَّهُمۡ لَهُمۡ غُرَفٞ مِّن فَوۡقِهَا غُرَفٞ مَّبۡنِيَّةٞ تَجۡرِي
مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُۖ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِۖ لَا يُخۡلِفُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡمِيعَادَ ﴿٢٠﴾

But those who are mindful of their Lord will have lofty dwellings built for them, one above the other, graced with flowing streams. This is a promise from God: God does not break His promise [20] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 20)

We have said that one of the characteristics of the linguistic style of the Quran is that it often mentions opposites side by side, for something’s excellence is often indicated by its opposite. An example of this is found in Allah's Words: 'Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire.' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14)

Therefore, after mentioning the disbelievers upon whom Allah's decree of punishment has been passed, the True Lord then mentions their opposite, the God-fearing people of piety (*taqwa*): 'But for those who take their Lord as a shield, there awaits them lofty mansions, storey upon storey with streams running beneath them.' (*az-Zumar:* 20) This combination of opposites puts the self in a better state of readiness to be able to see how horrible the bad side is and how beautiful the good side is.

*Ghuraf (*mansions) is the plural of the word *ghurfa (*mansion) which means a stand-alone private space within a house, but it is derived from a word meaning a scoop of water. '...there awaits them lofty mansions, storey upon storey ...'. Then, he describes those that are above as being *mabniyya* (built), for it is usual when building to take special care of the lower rooms and their foundations since it is they that will have to bear the weight of all the other floors. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wants to draw our attention to the fact that the upper levels have had as much care devoted to them and that they are just as well built. They do not lack any of the features of the lower rooms. Each room, whether it be on the lower levels or the upper levels, is as distinguished as any other.

Then, you must reflect on the miraculous nature of Allah's Words: '…with streams running beneath them ...' for which of them do they flow beneath? They flow beneath both of them, the upper, and the lower rooms. If you were to ask, 'How?', we would reply, 'Read what the Prophet says when describing paradise': 'It contains what no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard. What is in it has never even crossed the mind of any human being.'(1)

In another part of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... beneath which running waters flow...' (*at-Tawba:* 100). There is a difference between saying

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(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2824); Ahmad in his Musnad (2/466); and Abu Nu'aym in Al-Hilya (2/263) in a (Hadith) from Abu Hurayra. The complete version says, 'I have set aside for My slaves what no eye has seen nor ear has heard, and what has never even crossed the mind of any human being.'*

tahtaha, (beneath it) and *min tahtiha* (from beneath it), for if we were to say that rivers flowed under it, that would mean that those rivers came from somewhere else and passed by it; in such circumstances, it would be possible for those who lived on the higher ground to block the water from reaching those on the lower ground.

However, as for when they flow from under it as in Allah’s Words, ‘...with streams running beneath them ...’, that means that springs from which the water comes flow beneath those rooms, meaning that their waters are an intrinsic part of them and is not something that is provided to them from outside. Their waters are self-produced.

You are amazed by this because you measure things according to your own capacity for engineering, but your Lord’s capacity for engineering is something entirely different, something you are not even able to imagine since it is something no eye has seen nor ear has heard, nor has the thought of it even crossed the mind of any human being. No words exist in any language to indicate it, for the concept and sense of what something is must be there before any words can be coined describing that thing. If the concept does not exist, then from where can we get the words to describe it?

Today, for example, we know the word ‘television’, and we know what it is, but before it was invented, did any of us know what it was or even the name for it? Of course not, and this is why I said before that when people say that Allah is non-existent – may Allah protect us from saying that. We say to them in response,

‘What you have said is refuted by your own words, for the word ‘Allah’ is the subject of the sentence you uttered and ‘non-existent’ is its predicate. So, how could you have known to use the word ‘Allah’ if Allah were non-existent? Thus, the fact that you said, ‘Allah is non-existent’ proves that He does exist, for things that do not exist do not have words to describe them. Things that no eye has seen, no ear has heard of and no mind has dreamt about do not have names.’

This is why our Lord says when He describes paradise to us: ‘[And can] the parable of the Paradise which the God-conscious are promised...’

(*Muhammad:* 15); what this means is that He does not describe it to us but only its likeness. The reason for this is because our language does not possess the words necessary to give expression to what truly lies within paradise. However, despite that, even when He merely describes its likeness to us, He describes things in it that go against what we know of those things in this world. For example, when He *Glorified is He* describes the wine of the Hereafter, He says: 'no headiness will be in it, and they will not get drunk thereon.' (*as-Saffat:* 47) This means that it will not affect the intellect nor cover it up in the manner that the wine of this world does. Every human being possesses a gland that is responsible for maintaining his equilibrium, but when he drinks alcohol, that alcohol overpowers that gland, causing him to lose his equilibrium, along with interfering with his intellect causing him to sway backwards and forwards and speak words that are garbled and meaningless.

However, the wine of the Hereafter is not like that. The wine of the Hereafter gives you happiness and pleasure without affecting the intellect: '...and they will not get drunk thereon (*Yanzifun*).' (*as-Saffat:* 47) *Nazf* and *nazh* both have the same meaning; you would say, 'I did the action of *naz* to the well' which means that you took the water that was in it out of it, while *nazf* is taking what is inside something out. When a person is of a healthy and sound constitution, his body performs a process that is called excretion, whereby it excretes substances such as earwax, sweat and urine. Also, it is by this excretion that the health and soundness of the human body is maintained.

Yet, there are other kinds of excretion that is not healthy for it, such as, for example, when you eat something and then vomit up what you have eaten. Likewise, sometimes, one even vomits up blood from internal wounds—may Allah protect us from that. Furthermore, sometimes urine can come out of the body on a constant basis, such as when someone suffers from incontinence. Yet, another example of that is the *nazf* (excretion) that happens to the drunk person when he regurgitates the contents of his belly.

Similarly, there is water in this world and water in the Hereafter, and there is milk in this world and milk in the Hereafter, but there is a great difference between the water of this world and that of the Hereafter, and the milk of this world and that of the Hereafter. Allah says in clarification: '[And can] the parable of Paradise which the God-conscious are promised—[a Paradise] wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters, rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed and the enjoyment of all the fruits…' (*Muhammad:* 15).

One of the amazing things about these rivers are that they are rivers without banks and flow alongside each other with their contents of water, milk, wine and honey and yet never mix with each other. This is something so amazing that we must place under the category of those things that no eye has seen nor ear has heard nor has it passed through the mind of any human being.

So, when The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a simile for the Garden, He takes some of those things that are in this world and negates the harms that affect it in this world. The curse of water in this world is that it becomes brackish, meaning that it changes in such a way that makes it no longer fit to drink. However, as for the water of the Hereafter, it never changes because it is water that flows in a river, and when water is flowing, it is protected from ever becoming brackish, and the same with the milk. As for the honey, it is described as being purified because the honey of this world is never free of contaminants.

As for the wine of the Hereafter, it is a delight for those who drink it. It is so pleasurable to drink that those who drink it sip it slowly because of how amazing it tastes. As for the wine in this world—and May Allah protect us from it—people drink glasses of it in a single gulp since it tastes and smells horrible.

Another example of that is when Allah describes the comforts and blessings of paradise by saying: '[They, too, will find themselves] amidst thornless fruit-laden lote-trees …' (*al-Waqi'a:* 28). The lote tree is a tree that is well known amongst Arabs, and its fruits were considered by them to be one of the most precious commodities around, but the problem with them was that their thorns harmed those who tried to eat them. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* removes that problem from the fruits of that tree in the Hereafter by saying: '[They, too, will find themselves] amidst thornless fruit-laden lote-trees' (*al-Waqi'a:* 28); this means with its thorns cut off or plucked out so that they are no longer there to harm those who partake of its fruits.

So, the True Lord, when He describes paradise, says: ‘But for those who take their Lord as a shield, there awaits them lofty mansions, storey upon storey with streams running beneath them. [This is] the promise of Allah; [and] Allah will never fail in [His] promise.’ (*az-Zumar:* 20) So, do not be astonished by how rooms can have other rooms built on them with water flowing underneath, for Allah is able to engineer things in special ways that no eye has seen nor ear has heard nor human being has even dreamt of. They are things that our languages do not even have the words to describe.

However, there are other things that are no different, such as the jugs, cups, glasses, cushions, rugs, and couches. These are all blessings bestowed to us by Allah in paradise that also exist in this world, but there is one vital difference; the ones in this life are fashioned by man for man, while the ones in the Hereafter are fashioned by the Creator of man for man.

This is why, when we went to San Francisco, saw a magnificent hotel there built on the top of a hill and found inside of it all manner of devices for our comfort and convenience, capturing the hearts of all who entered it, we said to them, ‘If you are amazed by this, something that man has created for man, then what do you think of what the True Lord has created for His creation?!’

Things such as this turn our attention and direct it towards the blessings of the Hereafter. So, when you see the blessings of this world and see something splendid and beautiful, do not feel envy or spite towards the one who owns it but, instead, remember the blessings that Allah has set aside for His slaves in the Hereafter. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* were using the blessings of this world to encourage us to seek the blessings of the Hereafter.

Furthermore, what we have mentioned in this verse concerning the reward awaiting the God-fearing people of (*taqwa*): ‘...[This is] the promise (*wa'd*) of Allah; [and] Allah will never fail in [His] promise (*wa'd*).’ (*az-Zumar:* 20). A *wa‘d* (promise) is giving someone some happy joyous news of something that is yet to happen. Furthermore, by telling of something good before its time, you motivate and encourage people to do the things that lead to that promise coming true. The opposite of *wa‘d* (promise) is *wa‘id* (threat) which is threatening of something bad or painful that is yet to happen, aiming at warning people against doing any of things that lead to that coming true. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* makes promises and threats to fill His creation with longing for the rewards, warn them about the punishments and make wrong actions and the punishments that await those who do them seem so horrible that we do not do them.

Allah never breaks a promise; His Promise is true and will come to pass because He has all the means of fulfilling it. No one can stand against Him nor prevent Him from fulfilling His Promise. This is because those who break promises are exposed to things that take away their capacity to fulfil them. Humans are fickle beings, constantly changing, and things often happen to man that prevent him from fulfilling what he has promised to do. However, as for Allah *Glorified is He* He is the Truth that never changes, and nothing is difficult for Him. He is capable of doing anything and has Absolute Power.

The True Lord shows us how His promises in this world always come true so that we can acknowledge the truth of what He promises us in the Hereafter. For example, Allah has made a promise to the believers by saying: ‘and that, verily, Our hosts, they indeed, would [in the end] be victorious!’ (*as-Saffat:* 173)

He also says: ‘... And Allah will most certainly succour him who succours His cause …’ (*al-Hajj:* 40). Thus, Allah’s Promise to the believers came true, and they were victorious, even though they had been persecuted and oppressed in the beginning of the affair. Furthermore, the fact that this promise came true makes even more confident and certain about the promise of the Hereafter whose time is yet to come.

This is why, when ‘Umar heard Allah’s Words, ‘[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!’ (*al-Qamar:* 45), he said, ‘Which host is that? We are scarcely able to defend ourselves!’ Then, when Badr came and the Muslims proved victorious, he said, ‘Allah has spoken the truth: "[Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]!"' (*al-Qamar:* 45)

So, The True Lord has fulfilled His promises whose times became due so that we can be more confident that His promises whose times have yet to come will also come true. Another example of that is what Allah says about disbelievers: ‘Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? And Allah decides; there is no adjuster of His decision. And He is swift in account.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41); in other words, it is like Allah is saying, ‘O disbelievers of Quraysh! O, you who stubbornly oppose Muhammad and stand against him! Have you not seen that your broad stretch of earth is getting smaller gradually and that Islam is taking a bit more of it from you every single day?’ So, the meaning is that We are decreasing the size of the lands of disbelief and increasing the size of the lands of Islam. We have got to say that Allah has spoken truly with respect to the first promise, so He must also be speaking truly with respect to the second promise, namely the Day of Rising.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* teaches us to always make our promises conditioned by the Will of Allah. In other words, we must say, ‘If Allah wills’ when we promise something: ‘And never say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow, without [adding], "If Allah so wills."… ’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24) For if it proves impossible for you to fulfil what you promised, you can say, ‘I willed it, but Allah *the Exalted* did not will it.’ It is as if Allah releases you from this burden and says, ‘The slave willed it, but I did not will it.’ In this way, Allah *Glorified is He* spares you from finding yourself in an embarrassing situation and protects you from being a liar. The True Lord assumes our burdens just as He assumed the burdens of His Messenger when He says to him, ‘We do know that what such people say grieves you indeed…’ (*al-An‘am:* 33) which means when they say that you are a magician or a soothsayer or a liar or a madman.'... yet, behold, it is not you to whom they give the lie ...’ (*al-An‘am:* 33) because you have always been truthful and trustworthy in their eyes: ‘...but Allah’s Messages do these evildoers deny.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33)

Therefore, He made the whole matter to do with Him and took upon Himself the burdens of His Messenger.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَسَلَكَهُۥ يَنَٰبِيعَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ
يُخْرِجُ بِهِۦ زَرْعًا مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَٰنُهُۥ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَىٰهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُۥ
حُطَٰمًا ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَذِكْرَىٰ لِأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿٢١﴾

Have you not considered that God sends water down from the sky, guides it along to form springs in the earth, and then, with it, brings forth vegetation of various colours, which later withers, turns yellow before your eyes, and is crumbled to dust at His command? There is truly a reminder in this for those who have understanding [21]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 21)

When Allah *the Almighty* tells us of the good things with which He provides us, whether such good things are connected to the basic needs of life in this world or the blessings that are set aside for us in the Hereafter, He always speaks of them as being sent down. This word *anzala* (sent down) indicates coming down from high and that these gifts come from someone higher, even if they come from inside of the earth as is in Allah’s Words: ‘... and We bestowed [upon you] from on high iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man …’ (*al-Hadid:* 25).

So, a blessing comes from one who is higher than you not one who is your equal. In the course of your life or the course of your work when you come upon an issue that you are not physically or mentally capable of resolving on your own, you go to someone who is higher up than you in your field, one whom you trust and whose counsel you value, and ask him to help you resolve it. Furthermore, you do so willingly since you have handed your affair to one in whose abilities you trust.

So, when the True Lord *the Most High* says *anzala*, He means, ‘Take My judgements on the basis that they come down from one higher than you and are the best thing for you, for they come from your Creator who knows what is best for you.’

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: ‘Do you not see that it is Allah Who sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs? …’ (*az-Zumar:* 21)

When Allah says, ‘from the skies’, He means from the direction of the sky, for the storehouses of water are all on earth: in seas and oceans. This water is prepared chemically in such a way that preserves water and prevents it from changing, becoming brackish or becoming a breeding-ground for bacteria.

This is why we find the percentage of salt in seas protects and preserves it. Thus, when dead bodies and other contaminants are thrown into it, the waves expel them out and the water remains clean. It is the water of the seas that is taken up by the process of evaporation to form the clouds, which then release rain that provides water to human beings, animals, and plants.

Rainwater is the purest form of water that exists. The process of evaporation is very much like the process of distillation that we carry out in our laboratories in order to obtain purified water. Reflect on how much it costs to distil a single bottle of water, so how much do you think it would be for all the rain that pours from the sky?

This is why Allah, out of His wisdom, has made water three quarters of the earth and only one quarter as land, so that the area from which water may be evaporated can be as extensive as possible so that there can be enough rain to provide the earth with all the fresh water it needs. Previously, we clarified the difference between water that is deep with a small surface area and water that is shallow with a large surface area, for the amount that can be evaporated depends upon the extent of the surface area of water—the greater the area is, the more water evaporates. Likewise, the example we gave was a glass of water. If you were to leave that glass of water and then come back to it a month later, you would find it nearly as it was, with the amount of water in it only having decreased by a tiny amount. However, if you were to have poured that water on the floor of the room, it would have dried out and evaporated almost before you stepped out the door.

The True Lord wants the salt water to evaporate in order for it to be purified of its saltiness, and then to come back down to earth as fresh water that is good to drink. This process of evaporation happens without any of us noticing that. It is one of the signs of Allah and one of the greatest blessings He has bestowed upon us.

When water comes down from the sky, it does not come down everywhere but only falls in places that are cold.(1) The evaporated water that is gathered together in the form of clouds thickens and becomes condensed when it passes over an area that is cold in the same way that we condense distilled water. Take the water that comes to Egypt in the form of the river Nile: where does the water that forms it fall? It falls on the mountains of Abyssinia, and is carried to us by the rivers, while some of it leaks inside the earth where Allah creates passages for it flow along.

This is the meaning of Allah's Words: '... and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs' (*az-Zumar:* 21). Thus, He creates special passageways for it to travel along so that it does not mix with the salt water. It is possible, for example, for there to be a fresh water spring in the midst of an area of salt water, but despite that it still does not become intermingled with it. It is as if the fresh water were flowing along special pipes similar to the arteries and veins of a human body.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see ...'. As long as a matter is one that Allah has granted you the possibility of seeing, if you do see it, you will know that His Words are true, like when I see rain falling from the sky. Likewise, if you do not see it, you must affirm what Allah tells you just as you would affirm what you see with your own two eyes, for Allah's Words are truer than anything your eyes can see.

An example of that is what Allah says, addressing His Messenger: 'Do you not see how your Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) It is well-known that our master, the Messenger of Allah, was born in the year of the Elephant, meaning that he did not actually see that event. Thus, it is the meaning of 'Do you not see' or 'Do you not know by means of a knowledge from Me that is superior to the knowledge obtained by seeing it with your own eyes?'

Then He *Glorified is He* says: '... And then He brings forth thereby plants (*zar'*) of various hues …' (*az-Zumar:* 21). *Zar'* (plants) is what is grown in a single plot of earth and watered by a single source of water. Yet, despite that, fruits come from it in all different colours, shapes, and flavours.

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(1) Inaccurate information. From linguist: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

When people of knowledge talk about this matter, they say that plants have a peculiar property known as 'selective absorption', whereby these plants use their roots to absorb the necessary elements and nutrients they need from the soil. However, if we were to bring a container full of water, put a variety of colours into it, and then put in the narrow hair-like pipes by means of which water flows upwards on account of this property, we would find such pipes sucking up the water in a general way, not differentiating one colour from another.

However, that is not how plants absorb the necessary elements and nutrients from the soil, for they only suck up the substances that they need and that correspond to their nature. The hair-like follicles in their roots absorb purposefully, taking one element from the soil and leaving another. The soil is the same, and the water is the same, but despite that, the plants that grow in it have different flavours, shapes, colours, and smells.

Thus, this is not the selection to which the scientists refer; rather, it is a divine selection based upon the natural capacity that Allah places in the seeds from which plants grow. If you were, for example, to grow chilli peppers next to sugar cane and next to pomegranate, you would find the one to be hot, the other to be sweet, and the other to be sweet and sour.

Then, plants move into a different stage, which the True Lord describes with His Words: '... and then it withers. You can see it turn yellow, and in the end He causes it to crumble to dust ...' (*az-Zumar:* 21). The word *yahij* means to dry out, break apart, and crumble into pieces. In other words, it does not remain green and ripe forever. It is as if Allah were using what happens to these plants as a way of teaching mankind an important lesson. For plants are living things, just like human beings, thus, human beings will pass through that stage where they wither up and crumble to pieces in exactly the same way as they.

Allah *the Almighty* strikes this metaphor for us so that we do not become deceived by our own bodies, along with the strength, intelligence, and thinking we find therein, nor by the power, wealth or fame we acquire. Our Lord encourages us to look at our mother, the earth, and the crops that come out of it; what is it that happens to them in the end? Well, the same will happen to you, for you are also subject to change, so do not fall prey to self-delusion.

This is why they say, ‘Do not get angry or sad if your circumstances change, for you are subject to change. Hence, what do you expect to happen when you get to the top of the mountain? Do you really expect to stay there? How could you when you are given to change?’ No, it is inevitable that you will come back down. So, when you receive a blessing, always be ready for it to be taken away. It is just as a poet said:

When something reaches completion, its diminishment begins,
So expect its removal when people say it is complete!(1)

Therefore, if you see yourself as being well-endowed with knowledge, strength or any other manifestation of Allah’s blessing, know that tomorrow you will become older and weaker, until you eventually become like a child, crawling along the ground and needing others to assist and support you, just as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... just as many a one of you is reduced in old age to a most abject state, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well...’ (*al-Hajj:* 5). Therefore, learn this lesson well, both from what you see in your mother, the earth, and what you see in yourself.

‘... Verily, in [all] this...’ means what you yourself have witnessed of all the things we have mentioned in this verse; ‘...there is indeed a reminder...’ means a reminder and a lesson ‘... to those who are endowed with insight!’ (*az-Zumar:* 21), or to those who have discerning intellects capable of reflection.

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(1) This line was composed by ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* as is mentioned in *Al-Mawsu‘a Ash-Shi‘riyya* and is taken from a poem written in the mutarib meter, containing eleven lines. The wording of the line is as follows:
When a matter reaches completion, its diminishment begins,
So long for its removal when people say it is complete.

أَفَمَن شَرَحَ ٱللَّهُ صَدْرَهُۥ لِلْإِسْلَٰمِ فَهُوَ عَلَىٰ نُورٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ ۚ فَوَيْلٌ لِّلْقَٰسِيَةِ
قُلُوبُهُم مِّن ذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

What about the one whose heart God has opened in devotion to Him, so that he walks in light from his Lord? Alas for those whose hearts harden at the mention of God! They have clearly lost their way [22] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 22)

The implied meaning in this verse is ‘Could, then, one whose bosom Allah has opened wide with willingness towards self-surrenders unto Him ...’ be like those whose breasts have been tightened up so that Islam cannot get in? So, it is necessary for the opposite to be mentioned since the two are not alike and not the same: ‘...Woe, then, unto those whose hearts are hardened against all remembrance of Allah! …’ Their hearts hardness is a reason for its being tightened up. Thus, when someone’s heart is too constricted to admit Islam, it is because his heart is hardened.

This is much like when Allah says: ‘Or [do you deem yourself equal to] one who devoutly worships [Allah] throughout the night, prostrating himself or standing [in prayer], ever-mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord’s Grace? Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?"…’ (*az-Zumar:* 9). The meaning is, in other words, ’Is this person the same as one who does not stand the night in prayer?’ Then it is upon you to answer the question: ‘Is he whose breast is opened to Islam and who therefore is illuminated by his Lord like he whose heart is hardened and whose breast is too constricted to let in Allah’s guidance and religion?’

The meaning of ‘... whose bosom Allah has opened wide ...’ is ‘has made wide what was narrow’. You might say to a companion of yours, ‘Open your heart ’, which means ‘Make it wide enough to encompass all the sides of the argument’. Another meaning of opening the heart is not filling it with idle tales nor packing it will lies and falsehoods till it becomes accustomed to. Therefore, when it is filled with such idle garbage, that idle garbage forces out the truth as we said previously when we talked about a single space. For a single space can contain no more than one single thing at one time. Water, for example, displaces and expels the air from a bottle when that bottle is filled with water.

One consequence of one’s breast being opened and expanded is that it allows you to be fair and impartial when you choose between different alternatives. First, you must purify your heart and expel from it all that preoccupies and distracts it, and then consider carefully all of the options presented before you. Then, you must put whatever you find suitable into your heart so that it takes root and becomes a firm doctrine of belief that cannot be argued about ever again.

Thus, this is because Allah *the Almighty* has created for us senses by means of which we perceive, such as the eyes that see, the ears that hear and the tongue that speaks.

Therefore it is by means of these senses that we gather information. Then, we present that information to the intellect so that it can look into it and choose between it. Then, whatever the intellect finds wholesome and sound, it sends it down to the heart. That, in turn, becomes a belief that takes root in the heart not to be analysed again. This is why you must beware of the rust that forms around the heart until it closes it off completely and leaves no place for the truth to enter. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us some indication of this matter in a Hadith of Abu Dharr. He mentioned that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Tribulations come over the heart like a reed mat, reed by reed (in another version, it reads ‘we seek Allah's protection from them'). Any heart that takes them in starts to develop a black spot, and any heart that rejects them starts to develop a white spot. Thus, this continues until they develop into two separate hearts: one that is white like a smooth polished rock and will not be harmed by tribulation for as long as the heavens and earth shall remain and the other which is black and clouded over with ash, and to whom Allah refers when He says: "Nay, but their hearts are corroded by all [the evil] that they were wont to do!" (*al-Mutaffifin:* 14) It is like an upturned cup, not recognising what is right and not rejecting what is wrong.'(1)

The tribulations he refers to in this prophetic saying (Hadith) are doubtful matters with which people are presented in Islam. The Messenger *peace and*

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(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (144); and Ahmad in his Musnad (5/386 & 405) in a Hadith from Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman.*

blessings be upon him compares them with a reed mat, a mat that is made by tying one reed next to another reed next to another reed until enough of them are tied together to form the mats upon which we sit. Or he said *'awdhan*, which means 'We seek refuge in Allah from these tribulations', or *'awdan* which means time after time.

Therefore, if you want to look into the matters of belief first expand your breast and open your heart so that you can expel from it all the (false) beliefs that clog it up. This is the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Could, then, one whose bosom Allah has opened wide with willingness towards self-surrender unto Him so that he is illumined by a light [that flows] from his Lord, [be likened to the blind and deaf of heart]? …' (*az-Zumar:* 22) Light has a number of different sources: it can be physical, such as the light that comes from the sun, moon, and stars, besides the light sources that man has discovered in recent times. Or it can be metaphysical, which is the type of light that is being referred to in this verse. Thus, by that, we mean the light of values and the light of the Divine Programme '... so that he is illumined by a light [that flows] from his Lord...' (*az-Zumar:* 22); this means the light of guidance which the Noble Quran has in mind when it says: 'In the houses [of worship] which Allah has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there [are such as] extol His limitless Glory at morn and evening. People whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert from the remembrance of Allah …' (*an-Nur:* 36-37).

In these houses in which Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned and in which Allah is glorified is a place where one can receive outpourings of light directly from Allah and where His blessings and mercies descend. That is proven by the fact that the verses that immediately preceded these ones were talking about the light of Allah and provided a metaphor for the way He illuminates the heavens and the earth: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light.' (*an-Nur:* 35)

Allah *Glorified is He* does not strike a metaphor for us of His Light, but rather strikes a metaphor of the way He illuminates: 'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth,' (*an-Nur:* 35) i.e. He is The One Who illuminated the heavens and the earth by creating them. A niche is a limited source of energy that does not penetrate through walls. It is limited in size and narrow, and does not go all the way through, which is why light is collected in it and is not dispersed. This means that there is no space left for darkness within that niche.

And then there is the fact that the lamp is not a normal one, but rather one that is encased in glass for there are lamps that are not encased in glass and which we ourselves call 'torches'. Such lamps have blackened flames because of the fact that the wind and the air tickle it from every side and direction. But when there is glass, it cleans and purifies the flame since it stops any air reaching it except for the amount necessary to keep the flame alight. This allows the flame to be pure and smokeless, which is the first step of its purification.

Then there is the fact that the glass itself is not an ordinary type of glass, but rather is one that is so clear, 'as if it were a pearly [white] star' (*an-Nur:* 35), reflecting light in every direction.

Then there is the fact that this lamp is not fuelled by ordinary oil, but rather, it is: 'lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire.' (*an-Nur:* 35) It is an oil that has special characteristics and that has been blended in a perfect way.

It is by means of something like this that Allah *Glorified is He* sends light to the heavens and the earth. So, the metaphor is of how He illuminates, not of His Light. This light to which Allah is referring is a physical form of light. It is only when you read these verses that you find what He really means by 'light' in His Words: '[Such niches are] in mosques which Allah has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned therein.' (*an-Nur:* 36) It is that light to which He refers to as: ' … and he is upon a light from his Lord." (*az-Zumar:* 22)

So Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down upon you physical light that helps you in carrying out your day-to-day tasks so that people can see where their feet are treading and not to bump into things or crush them. Likewise, He has illuminated your souls and values by (moral) light.

When Allah *Glorified is He* strikes this metaphor for us and shows us that the lamp does not ever leave any darkness whatsoever in the niche, He gives us an indication that His metaphysical light also does not come into contact with any flaw or imperfection except that it fixes it. Light comes to you to guide you and save you.

When Allah says: ‘Then woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah. Those are in manifest error,’ (*az-Zumar:* 22) He means that there is woe for them because of the hardness of their hearts, which has created a barrier between them and belief. The woe comes to them in the moment they learn that they do have a Lord whom they rejected, and that reality that they denied for so long will come as a surprise to them.

The Noble Qurann tackles this matter when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The example of those who disbelieve in their Lord is [that] their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day; they are unable [to keep] from what they earned a [single] thing.’ (*Ibrahim:* 18)

The meaning is that all their deeds will turn to nothing and all their efforts will be met with failure.

Allah also says: ‘But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account.’ (*an-Nur:* 39)

The woe comes upon them in the moment they learn that they had rejected Allah and that their hearts had been constricted and closed in such a way that the light of belief could find no way to enter. The woe had come upon them before the punishment arrived.

In another verse, Allah says: ‘Those are in manifest error,’ (*az-Zumar:* 22) i.e. clear and plain. That error (wandering) is the lack of guidance to find a clear path to travel along, like a traveller in the desert who strays from the path. His wandering started by him deviating from the right path, even if he only deviated from it by mere centimetres for even that will end up causing you to stray away from the path.

Have you seen railway semaphores and how they switch a train going, for example, to Port Said, Ismailiyya or Ṭanṭa and direct it elsewhere? Simply by moving a rail point a matter of millimetres, the train is redirected from going from one place to another a long way away from it. So the meaning of: ‘Those are in manifest error,’ (*az-Zumar:* 22) is that they will never be guided to anything.

ٱللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحۡسَنَ ٱلۡحَدِيثِ كِتَٰبٗا مُّتَشَٰبِهٗا مَّثَانِيَ تَقۡشَعِرُّ مِنۡهُ جُلُودُ ٱلَّذِينَ
يَخۡشَوۡنَ رَبَّهُمۡ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمۡ وَقُلُوبُهُمۡ إِلَىٰ ذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُدَى
ٱللَّهِ يَهۡدِى بِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَمَن يُضۡلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِنۡ هَادٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

God has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings: a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons; that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to shiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God’s guidance. He guides with it whoever He will; no one can guide those God leaves to stray [23]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 23)

Allah *Glorified is He* means to say that since you have decided to follow and choose what is best, I will reveal the best speech to you. Indeed, it is the best of speech because it is the speech of Allah, and His speech is one of His attributes, perfect, complete, and absolute. Allah made it a miracle and took it upon Himself to preserve, not leaving that task to creation.

It is part of human nature that people only memorise and preserve things when they are a proof for them, not a proof against them. Whereas Allah *Glorified is He* preserves the Quran, which is a proof for His creation against Him. This is because everything that is mentioned in the Quran, Allah guarantees that it will come to pass in exactly the way He says it will as He is the One Who sends it down and preserves it.

So, what is meant by the best of speech is the Noble Quran? As for: ‘…a consistent Book…’ (*az-Zumar:* 23 it means different parts of it are like each other in terms of the beauty and eloquence of their composition and in terms of their subject matter. So, beware of saying that this verse is more eloquent than that one, since every verse deals with its subject matter in the most eloquent way.

If we were to take, for example, being similar in terms of subject matter, we would read in one place concerning the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘And the family of Pharaoh picked him up [out of the river] so that he would become to them an enemy and a [cause of] grief,’(1) (*al-Qasas:* 8) and we would read in another place: ‘[Saying], “Cast him into the chest and cast it into the river, and the river will throw it onto the bank; there will take him an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.” And I bestowed upon you love from Me that you would be brought up under My eye.’ (*Ta Ha:* 39)

Some might think that this was repetition, but anyone who reflects deeply on the respective meanings of the two verses will find that each verse tells us things that the other does not. For example, in: ‘…so that he would become to them an enemy and a [cause of] grief,’ (*al-Qasas:* 8) it is Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who is to display enmity to Pharaoh’s household, whereas in: ‘…there will take him an enemy to Me and an enemy to him,’ (*Ta Ha:* 39) it is Pharaoh who is to show enmity to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. No battle is fought fiercely when there is only enmity from one side, for the other side might pardon the other, or surrender to it. But when there is enmity on both sides, the battle gets brutal.

We said previously that the orientalists raised an objection to Allah’s words in the following verses: ‘…and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.’ (*Luqman:* 17) And in‘…indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination,’ (*ash-Shura:* 43) saying, ‘Which of these two is more eloquent than the other? And if one is eloquent, then the other one is not’.

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(1) In his Zad Al-Masir, Ibn Al-Jawzi, while commenting on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And Pharaoh’s family took him up that he might be an enemy and a grief for them…’ (*al-Qasas:* 8) said that Allah *the Almighty* caused the family of Pharaoh to take Prophet Moses so that this result of being an enemy and grief for them would be eventually achieved. This meaning is deduced from the use of the Arabic particle *Lam Al-‘Aqibah*, which tells about the consequences of an act. As for the other exegetes of the Quran, some of them believe that the meaning is that (the family of Pharaoh, by the Will of Allah, took Moses) so that the goal of being an enemy to their religion and a grief for them will be obtained; while others opine that the meaning is that Moses will be their enemy who will cause their men to be drowned, and that Moses *peace be upon him* will be a grief for their men and women by enslaving them.’

Misconceptions of this sort result from a lack of understanding of the linguistic style of the Quran, and a lack of linguistic ability on their part. Every verse is eloquent in its own context and in a manner that best befits the meaning that is expressed within it. In this regard, the first verse talks about afflictions that strike no one else but you, and in such instances it is easy to be patient.

It is perfectly normal, for example, for you to endure illness with patience since there is no rival against you in such circumstances. But if the affliction is caused by another party, that other party makes you angry, and sets light to the fire of malice, and makes you seek revenge. So, it is fitting for the *lam* of emphasis meaning ‘indeed’ to be used in the other verse: ‘…indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.’ (*ash-Shura:* 43)

The orientalists also raised objections to Allah’s words: ‘We will provide for you and them’ (*al-An‘am:* 151), and His Words: ‘We provide for them and for you,’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) saying, ‘What is the difference between the two verses?’ We say, ‘If you were to look at the beginning of each of the two verses, you would find that the endings fit perfectly with them, as there are two reasons people kill their children for: the first of those is poverty, for a poor person is needy and not even able to provide for himself, let alone his children. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘… and do not kill your children out of poverty (1)’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). Because poverty is already there, ‘We will provide for you and them,’ (*al-An‘am:* 151) and He mentions the parents before the children because the first thing they are preoccupied with is providing for themselves.

The second cause is when someone has enough for himself but fears that poverty would strike if he were to have children. To these people, Allah says: ‘And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you,’ (*al-Isra’:* 31) and mentions the children before the parents. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* will provide sustenance for those children on whose account you fear poverty before He provides for you. So each verse is completed with the words that fit it best.

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(1) "The Arabic word *Imlaq* means ‘to turn from richness to poverty.’ Arabs use the expression ‘*Amlaqa Ar-Rajulu’* to indicate that he turned poor after being rich. The verbal noun *Imlaq* originally means ‘to unwisely squander money to the extent that the person becomes poor as a result.’ See *Ibn Manthur, Lisan Al-‘Arab*, the root M-a-l-q.

Similarly, we talked about the matter of hearing and seeing when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the night continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you light? Then will you not hear?”’ (*al-Qasas:* 71) Here, Allah mentions hearing because it is the means of meeting in the darkness of the night, and it is by it that a man is summoned when he is sleeping.

But as for the verse that deals with the day, Allah says: ‘Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the day continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you a night in which you may rest? Then will you not see?”’ (*al-Qasas:* 72) Seeing cannot happen except in the light of day.

And as for: ‘reiteration,’ (*az-Zumar:* 23) i.e. once, twice or three times, or it means to do something twice in the prayer, for we recite the chapter of *al-Fatiha* (The Opener) and a short verse in the first *rak‘a*(1), and then recite the same in the second.

When Allah says: ‘The skins shiver therefrom of those who fear their Lord,’ (*az-Zumar:* 23) it is a description of the slave who fears his Lord, watches out for Him and takes into account the fact that He sees him. This is because he places his behaviour before his Lord and then if he sees that it goes against His teachings, he goes back to what He says and remembers His threat. His skin then starts to shiver as a result of his fear of his Lord, and that shivering to which we refer to is when the skin dries up and rattles and the body starts to shiver as a result of his fear of punishment and Allah’s displeasure. Then he comes back and remembers the mercy of his Lord that precedes His anger, and His pardon that comes before His punishment, and so he goes back to his initial state: ‘…then their skins and their hearts relax at the remembrance of Allah.’ (*az-Zumar:* 23)

So, a believer combines both fear and hope, and his heart fluctuates between these two states. When he recalls the punishment that results from going against Allah’s Commands, his skin shivers with fear, and when he recalls

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(1) *Rak’a* consists of the prescribed movements and words followed by Muslims while offering prayers to God. It also refers to a single unit of Islamic prayers.

Allah’s mercy, his skin becomes soft and his heart becomes calm. And why should it not be so when His Lord has said: ‘Say, “O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.”’ (*az-Zumar:* 53)

‘That is’ (*az-Zumar:* 23) – and this is what happens to believers –‘… the guidance of Allah by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom Allah leaves astray - for him there is no guide.’ (*az-Zumar:* 23)

Many have raised objections to this verse, saying, ‘If Allah is the one who leads people astray, then why does He punish those who go astray?’ We say that: ‘And one whom Allah leaves astray…’ (*az-Zumar:* 23) means that Allah *Glorified is He* knows them to be astray, and knows that they will not listen to His Words nor follow His way. Allah created us with free will, able to believe or disbelieve if we so wanted. So, non-believers are not forced by Allah to disbelieve nor does Allah approve of them doing that.

As to: ‘…for him there is no guide,’ (*az-Zumar:* 23) it means, ‘Beware of seeking to emend Allah’s words by human laws that are created for you by intellects that are too proud to follow Allah's orders. As long as something is said by Allah, it is, and you cannot by any means oppose it, since it is not possible for anyone to find guidance better than Allah’s guidance.

It is necessary at the very least to understand that one who legislates laws with the purpose of governing people’s affairs must himself derive no benefit from those laws, so that he can be impartial and objective. This is because if he were to derive benefit from those laws, it is inevitable that his heart would incline towards doing that and he would make the laws that bring the most benefit to him.

For example, if workers were to make the laws, they would choose socialism, and if capitalists were to make the laws, they would choose capitalism. This is why it is a precondition for those who make the laws that they do not benefit from the laws themselves. And that condition can only truly be fulfilled when the One who makes the laws is Allah *Glorified is He*.

And that is why Allah causes certain cases to arise in existence–even among those who disbelieve in Him–that prove that Allah’s Law is the best.

People often come across problems for which they can find no solution to in their own laws, so they are forced to resort to Allah’s religious laws. They do not do that because they believe in Him, but rather because some problems they come across in their lives can only be resolved this way.

أَفَمَن يَتَّقِي بِوَجۡهِهِۦ سُوٓءَ ٱلۡعَذَابِ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۚ
وَقِيلَ لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ ذُوقُواْ مَا كُنتُمۡ تَكۡسِبُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

What about the one who will only have his bare face to protect him from his terrible suffering on the Day of Resurrection? It will be said to the evildoers, ‘Taste what you have earned’ [24] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 24)

The question that is asked in: ‘Then is he who…’ (*az-Zumar:* 24) is much like the one asked prior to it in: ‘so is one whose breast Allah has expanded to [accept] Islam…’ (*az-Zumar:* 22), so it is necessary here as well to understand the contrast in meaning. Thus, the meaning in: ‘Then is he who will shield with his face the worst of the punishment on the Day of Resurrection…’ (*az-Zumar:* 24) is like the one who will not be punished. Or we could say, ‘like the one who is blessed.’ That is for you to decide.

Consider also the meaning in: ‘the worst of the punishment,’ (*az-Zumar:* 24) where Allah means the severe and terrible punishment. And reflect on: ‘… is he who will shield with his face the worst of the punishment.’ (*az-Zumar:* 24) It is well known that the face is the noblest part of the human body, and it is by it that a person’s mood and expressions can be identified. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...their marks are on their faces...’ (*al-Fath:* 29).

If it were not for facial features, all the bodies would appear alike, and it would not be possible to tell them apart. This is why people take great care of their faces by protecting them first before any other part of their body. For example, imagine there was a man walking along the road when a car passed by him and splattered him with mud; what is the first thing from which he seeks to clean and remove the muck? The first thing he wipes is, of course, his face. Then and only then does he move on to his clothes, and the reason why is that the face is the noblest and most noteworthy part of the body, and the one that is protected first before all the other parts.

So, how bad do you think a punishment has to be for a human being to find nothing to protect himself from but his face?! Yes, he wards it off with his face because his hands are shackled and his feet are manacled. There is no escape from the punishment and no deliverance. He has no alternative but to use the most valuable thing he possesses to ward it off and protect himself. He has no alternative but to use the noblest part of his body: his face.

'And it will be said to the wrongdoers, "Taste what you used to earn."' (*az-Zumar:* 24) Allah tells them to 'Taste' the punishment in order to mock them, and for that purpose He chooses 'taste' which is the function of the tongue, one of the organs of the human body that carries out a specific task just like the eyes and the ears. The only reason He specifically chooses taste is because it is the sense that is inseparable from a human being. It is the sense by means of which he maintains his life, for it is by the sense of taste that we put food and drink into our bodies, enjoying a pleasure that supersedes all other pleasures.

As for the eyes and ears, by means of them you might see or hear something you do not like, whereas with taste, you choose what you like and what gives you pleasure. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to indicate that the action of tasting encompasses the entire body. In other words, the whole body tastes punishment.

We have previously mentioned that the tongue is the organ of taste in all stages and that the area surrounding it tastes and distinguishes between flavours.

So unless food goes beyond that area, one will not be able to taste anything. Consequently, the manufacturers of medicine coat their bitter medicines in a substance that is palatable and easy to swallow, in order to help the medicine pass by the area of taste without us sensing its bitterness.

If you were to look at all the organs, you would find that they have some connection to others. For example, I can hear, see, touch or feel others as well as parts of myself. Whereas taste's connection is to the person himself, for no one can taste anyone else. This is why Allah chose this organ to show us the severity and painfulness of the punishment, saying: 'Taste' (*az-Zumar:* 24) once in the plural form and 'Taste' (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) in the singular form. He does not use sight, hearing, smell or touch, but rather uses taste, the sense that relates solely to the individual who has it. So, it is as if every one of us is going to have a sense of taste that corresponds to the punishment he will receive.

If taste had a specific area in the body, it would be the tongue in all its aspects and the area surrounding it. In other words, it will not be just the area of taste that tastes the punishment, but rather the entire body. This is proven when Allah says: 'Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment.' (*an-Nisa':* 56) So, their capacity to taste spreads beyond the area of tasting to encompass the entire body.

If we were to look in this regard at the town that was secure and at ease but still refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings, about whom Allah says: 'So Allah made it taste the envelopment of hunger and fear…' (*an-Nahl:* 112), it is as if the tasting encloses and surrounds them from every side.

Poets usually exaggerate a thing by causing it to go beyond the usual area for sensation until it encompasses every area. And it is customary for poets to talk about the heart and its being the place where love resides. An example of this is what the poet(1) said:

A caller called out when we were in the area of Mina,
and caused the griefs of the heart to well up, and what would you know,
he called out to another using the name of Layla, and it was as if,
'Layla' woke up a bird that resided in my chest.(2)

And another (3):

It is as if the heart were a night,

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(1) The poet is Mohammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn Namir Ath-Thaqafi An-Namiri, a love poet who ranked among the poets of the Umayyad age. He was born, brought up and died in At-Ta'if. He died in 90 AH and has a collection of poetry that is published.

(2) These two lines are from a poem of an-Namiri made up of seven lines and composed in the tawil metre. In *(Al-Mawsu'a ash-Shi'riyya)*, it has 'anguishes of the heart' instead of, 'griefs of the heart'. An-Numiri Used to write love poetry about the sister of Al-Hajjaj ibn Yasuf Ath-Thaqafi, but Al-Hajjaj threatened him and so he fled to Yemen where he lived for a number of years in Aden *(Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya).*

(3) The poet is Tawbah ibn Al-Humayr Al-Khafiji Abu Harb, a well-known great Arab love poet. He used to love Layla Al-Akhiliyya and asked for her hand in marriage. But her father rejected him and so he married another. And so he used to rhapsodise and celebrate her in verse. He was killed by the Banu 'Awf ibn 'Aqil in the year 85 AH *(Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya).*

told to come and go at the mention of Layla Al-‘Amiriyya
a sandgrouse caught in a trap so it spends the night,
struggling with its wing having become caught up in it.(1)

But as for the poet who wanted to exaggerate this matter, he said(2):

The passing thoughts that recall you to me stir up my love,
and I feel as if it were flowing out of my heart,
leaving no part of my body except that it fills it,
as if all my limbs and organs were made of hearts.(3)

So, for him, love went beyond its area until it came to encompass all of his limbs and organs. In the same way, taste goes beyond the area of tasting to encompass the entire body.

And this is why when Allah says: ‘Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment,’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56) it must be considered one of the greatest scientific miracles in the Noble Quran, to say nothing of the miraculous nature of its language, eloquence and literary style. That is a miracle only Arab-speakers can appreciate. So, for non-Arabs, Allah provides another miracle that befits them, telling them of matters and scientific facts that had not even occurred to people at the time the Quran was revealed and was not known to science for centuries after that.

Today, after more than 14 centuries have passed since the Quran was revealed, contemporary science has proven what Allah told us about in the

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(1) The two verses are from a poem made up of four lines and composed in the wafir metre. In the encyclopaedia, it has, ‘fumbling around’ instead of ‘struggling’. The wording, ‘struggling’ is transmitted by Al-Asfahani in ‘*(Al-Aghani)*’, as well as by Abu‘Ali Al-Qali in his Amali and Abu Hilal Al-‘Askari in ‘*(Diwan Al-Ma‘ani)*’.

(2) He is Abu Al-Ma‘ali ibn Abu Ja‘far Al-Wa‘izh, one of the people of Hurat. He had knowledge of the sciences of tafsir and literature and was skilled in preaching as well as having memorised a great deal. He was born in the year 490 AH and died in the year 560 AH at the age of 70.

(3) These verses are mentioned by Salah Ad-Din As-Safadi in ‘*(Al-Wafi ibn Al-wafiyat)*’, and by Ibn Shakir Al-Kutabi in ‘*(Fawat Al-wafiyat)*’. As for Ibn Khalkan in ‘*(Wafiyat Al-A‘yan)*’, he attributed the two verses to Prince Shams Al-Ma‘ali Abu Al-Hasan Qabus ibn Abu Tahir.

Quran to be true, and that He knows what choices will be made by His slaves in the universe He created.

We have mentioned that when the First World War came to an end and Germany was defeated, one of their economic experts, a man called Schacht, came with the aim of putting his country back on its feet and helping it to recover after its defeat. As he was not able to serve in the army because he was cripple, he put his intellect to use in the service of his country, and promoted scientific research with such success that it was their scientists who invented the cylinder for splitting the single molecule, the thing that philosophers had called the indivisible part, by which they meant the atom.

As soon as they succeeded in splitting the atom and dividing it into smaller parts, some of the enemies of Islam took that as an opportunity to cast aspersions on the truthfulness of the Noble Quran, saying, ‘Allah used the example of the atom when He said: “So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it.” (*az-Zalzala:* 7) “And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.” (*az-Zalzala:* 8) and yet here we find that science has discovered something smaller than the atom!’

But the people of sound knowledge quickly refute the words of these scientists and tell them to slow down and read the whole Quran before making such comments and not to take from it what appears to back up their attack on it. For Allah says in another verse: ‘And not absent(1) from your Lord is any [part] of an atom’s weight (2) within the earth or within the heaven or [anything] smaller than that or greater but that it is in a clear register.’ (*Yunus:* 61) So, the Quran makes provision for this matter and does not say, ‘small,’ but rather says, ‘smaller than small’ regardless of the number of times they split it, the Quran has made provision for that.

In such a manner is the miraculous nature of the Quran for non-Arabs–the way it describes these scientific phenomena before mankind discovered them.

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(1) Absent: When something becomes absent, it is away and not present. Absent from means went away. Allah has made him absent means he made him go away. [*Lisan Al-‘Arab* (The language of Arabs)]

(2) An atom’s weight: The way the Quran uses the word ‘atom’ synonymous with ‘weight’ is indeed one of its miracles. This is accurately used in the chemical expression ‘atomic mass’.

Another example is the sensory loci in the body. First they said that the brain was the sensory locus. Then others said that it was the spinal cord, proven by the fact that human beings can feel things even without touching their bodies, such as when you put your finger in front of someone’s eye and an automatic reflex causes him to close his eye.

Then, when they reflected on the needle or injection that is given to someone who is ill, they noticed that he felt no pain except in the moment that the needle penetrated the skin, and so they said that the skin was the sensory locus of the body. This is proven in the Quran when Allah says: ‘Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56)

Allah says: ‘…what you used to earn.’ (*az-Zumar:* 24) The root *kasaba* (gained), as we have said before, appears in the Noble Quran in two distinct forms: *kasaba* (gained) and *iktasaba* (earned), and Allah makes it clear to what each of them refers to when He says: ‘It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned.’ (*al-Baqara:* 286) So, (*kasaba*) is used for good and (*iktasaba*) is used for evil, and this is because (*kasaba*) has the form *fa‘ala* (did) and good is something that a person does naturally, without affection or artifice. As for (*iktasaba*), it has the form *ifta‘ala* (made) which suggests the presence of falseness and artifice, and artifice is only present in evil. For when you do good, you have no need to use artifice or fabrication, but rather, unlike evil, it comes to you naturally. This matter is clearly shown by the fact that when a man sits with his wife and daughters, he looks upon their beauty naturally, without caution or fear of the consequences. However, if that same man were to look at a beautiful woman in the street, he would do so stealthily and surreptitiously. This is what we mean by artifice.

The Noble Quran itself goes against this rule in a number of places, including this verse we are currently discussing: ‘And it will be said to the wrongdoers, “Taste what you used to earn.”’ (*az-Zumar:* 24) It does not say *taktasibun* (to earn) as might be expected. Instead, it uses (*kasaba*) for evil. And it does the same in another place when Allah says: ‘Yes, whoever earns evil and his sin has encompassed him - those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.’ (*al-Baqara:* 81)

Why does the Quran turn aside from using *iktasaba* and use *kasaba* instead? Because, they say, a person can become accustomed to doing acts of disobedience and going against the commands of Allah that it becomes second nature for him and so natural almost as if he were doing an act of obedience. We call such people unscrupulous and totally lacking in morals because of the fact that they have become so accustomed to committing wrong actions and taking such delight in it. The Quran uses the word (*kasaba*) that is normally used for good, and moves (*iktasaba*) to the place that is normally reserved for (*kasaba*). This is why the Quran differentiates between those who premeditate wrong actions and do them intentionally and those who fall into wrong actions without prior planning or preparation in the following verses: ‘The repentance accepted by Allah is only for those who do wrong in ignorance [or carelessness] and then repent soon after. It is those to whom Allah will turn in forgiveness, and Allah is ever Knowing and Wise,’ (*an-Nisa’:* 17) ‘But repentance is not [accepted] of those who [continue to] do evil deeds up until, when death comes to one of them, he says, “Indeed, I have repented now,” or of those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful punishment.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 18) The meaning of: ‘…in ignorance…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 17) is without intention, preparation or forethought. And if they do a wrong action, they do not delight in it, but instead experience pain and regret. As for the other type of people, they do wrong actions intentionally and are not bothered in the slightest. In fact, they might even take delight in them and boast about them.

كَذَّبَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَىٰهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ٢٥
فَأَذَاقَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْخِزْىَ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْلَمُونَ ٢٦

Others before them also disbelieved, and the punishment fell on them unawares [25] God gave them the punishment of disgrace in this world to taste; the punishment will be even harder in the Hereafter, if only they knew [26] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 25-26)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Those before them denied…’ (*az-Zumar:* 25), i.e. from previous peoples: ‘… and punishment came upon them,’ (*az-Zumar:* 25) i.e. their suffering and punishment in this world by them being defeated and the religion they had fought against and opposed being victorious. And that is also what happened to the non-believers when Allah gave victory to Islam and made its principles and rulings win out over those of disbelief. And that is, in itself, a type of punishment in this world. So, when they return to Allah in the Hereafter, there is another punishment awaiting them, one that is more painful and severe. They closely resemble those who came before them from among the rejecters, and this is why Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: ‘[Theirs is] like the custom of the people of Pharaoh…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 11).

And so in the following verses: ‘Those before them denied…’ (*az-Zumar:* 25) and: ‘[Theirs is] like the custom of the people of Pharaoh…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 11), the Quran highlights for us something important, i.e. preservation and memorisation of the Quran should not be in the hands of the scholars, especially those whose speciality is language and rhetoric. And the reason why is that when a scholar is stopped by a word or phrase, it is possible that he might make use of his linguistic knowledge and complete his recitation. As such, when he recites: ‘O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 6), he might say *tathabbatu* (get proof) or *tahaqqaqu* (to verify) instead of *tabayyanu* (investigate). It is possible that the meaning might be correct, but Allah intends to use a specific word to give a specific meaning, and it is not permissible for us to substitute it for another. Whereas, those who specialise in the memorisation of the Quran without having that level of linguistic ability, when they stop in their recitation or forget what comes next, they stop completely. In other words, they are not able to go on by substituting something similar in meaning. That is exactly what is required of memorisers of the Quran, and that is an example of its grandeur.

And that is why we have said that the perfection of the Quran does not extend beyond it. How so? If we were to ask a person to improve his linguistic style and strengthen his creativity, we would advise him to read the great works of literature, such as those of Al-Minfaluti, Ar-Rafi‘i and others. Then after he has read a great deal of those works, we begin to notice an improvement in his style and composition.

But if you were to ask someone who had memorised the Quran well to write an essay, you would find that he would not be able to write it eloquently. Why is that? This is because the perfection of the Quran does not extend beyond it, but rather it is only the eloquence of people that can extend to other people.

Consider also the meaning in: ‘and punishment came upon them from where they did not perceive,’ (*az-Zumar:* 25) i.e. it comes from where they do not expect. In other words, they are seized by a punishment that they did not expect and that did not cross their mind, like when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allah is swift in account,’ (*an-Nur:* 39) i.e. they were taken by surprise by it, for they had reckoned something else. And that is because they rejected the resurrection and the reckoning in this world, and so they are now surprised to find the Reckoning that they rejected happening to them.

Then Allah says: ‘So Allah made them taste disgrace in worldly life.’ (*az-Zumar:* 26) Here, He takes the word ‘taste’ away from its original physical sense and uses it in a metaphorical sense. Ignominy and humiliation are forms of punishment, and the pain they cause is worse than physical pain. There are people who are not pained by being hit but are pained by harsh words that detract from their honour and good name.

But why does Allah make them taste ignominy in this world before the punishment of the Hereafter? He makes them taste ignominy because they acted haughtily and arrogantly against the truth, came with all their strength and might to the Battle of Badr to fight Islam, and thought that they were courageous heroes and that it was their fight. Thus, the meaning is that the heads of Quraysh and the leaders of disbelief, like ‘Utba, Shayba, Al-Walid and others, came well prepared and in large numbers, while the Muslims only went out to raid the caravan. Despite that, Allah strengthened His army and humiliated His enemy, so that those of them who were killed were killed and those of them who were captured were captured and humiliated. For these people, humiliation was a worse fate than death.

So, they had humiliation in this world while in the Hereafter, they will have another punishment there: ‘But the punishment of the Hereafter is greater, if they only knew.’ (*az-Zumar:* 26) Yes, the punishment of the Hereafter is greater and more severe than the ignominy of this world. ‘… if they only knew’ (*az-Zumar:* 26) because those who did know that reality, stopped what they were doing and became believers, while the others obstinately opposed it, denied it and rejected it.

وَلَقَدۡ ضَرَبۡنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِى هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٖ لَّعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾
قُرۡءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا غَيۡرَ ذِى عِوَجٖ لَّعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

In this Quran, We have put forward all kinds of illustration
for people, so that they may take heed [27] an Arabic Quran,
free from any distortion – so that people may be mindful [28]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 27-28)

When we analyse the way the root *madhala* (humiliation) is used in the Noble Quran, we find that sometimes it comes in the form of *mithl* (like), which is used to draw a comparison between one thing and another, such as when you say, ‘In terms of his courage, Zayd is like a lion’, or ‘In terms of generosity, the man is like rain.’ An example of that is found in the following verse: ‘… then produce a surah the like thereof.’ (*al-Baqara:* 23)

As for *mathal* (the example of), it is used to compare an image made up of a number of separate elements with another image made up of a number of elements. In other words, it compares one state with another. An example of this sort of comparison in the Noble Quran is the example that Allah draws of this world when He *Glorified Is He* says: ‘And present to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allah is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability.’ (*al-Kahf:* 45)

The life of this world does not resemble water alone, but rather resembles the process by which water falls from the sky, mixes with the soil, from which grows plants, which all too quickly wither, turn yellow, dry out and disintegrate so that they turn into dry stubble which is blown here and there by the wind. That is the life of every person in this world; his life blossoms and thrives but then ultimately ends up in death. This image is one that compares a number of elements with a number of other elements. As long as this world is like this, you must beware of it, not rely on it and not be deceived by it.

Other similes involving the comparison of one image made up of a number of elements with another include what Allah says about who were given the Torah to bear, but did not themselves benefit from it: ‘The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books].’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 5) These people are not like donkeys alone, but rather like donkeys that carry books on their back without understanding their contents. It is not the task of donkeys to understand, however, their task is to carry. As for these people, they are asked to both carry and understand what they carry - that is how they distinguish themselves from donkeys.

Another example of this type of simile is found in: ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah, and [His] pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration. That is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is as a plant which produces its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers - so that Allah may enrage by them the disbelievers. Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds among them forgiveness and a great reward.’ (*al-Fath:* 29)

Reflect upon this simile and you will find that Allah compares Muhammad and his Companions to something spiritual and metaphysical in the Torah because the Jewish mindset is dominated by materialism, and He compares them to something material in the Gospel because the Gospel only talks of spiritual matters. So, because the Jews have gone to excess in materialism, He provides them with a metaphysical metaphor, and because the Christians have gone to excess in spiritual matters, He provides them with a material metaphor. Because of this, it was essential that Islam strike a balance between materialism and spiritualism.

Similarly, Allah says: ‘And We have certainly presented…’ (*az-Zumar:* 27). The word *darb* (to hit), as we have said, is bringing something down upon something else with strength and force so that it leaves a mark. An example of this is incurring *darb* upon the earth, meaning, ploughing it and taking care of it in such a way that it gives forth what is good in it. As for setting an example *(darb)* of a parable, we use the word because on the surface it is something strange, so we say, ‘Do not be astonished by this for it is like such-and-such.’ So the statement becomes clear and surprise is removed. A simile compares something that is disagreed upon with something that is agreed upon, as in the previously mentioned simile: ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him.’ (*al-Fath:* 29)

The root *mathala* (example) appears 41 times in the Quran in the form *mathal (the example of)*, 22 times in the form *mathalan* (for example) and 3 times in the form *mathaluhum* (their example is of).

A very fine example of an extended metaphor is the description a poet gives of a hunchbacked man, creating a mental image of him for you as if you could see him with your own eyes:

Short of neck with skull sunken

as if he were expecting to be slapped.

And it was as if he had been already slapped on the nape once,

and was expecting a second slap so he scrunched his neck down.(1)

Allah’s words: ‘…from every [kind of] example… (*az-Zumar:* 27) indicate that the meaning is general. In other words, ‘We have drawn these parables for them to make the principles of Islam clear to them by means of the material things they see about them: ‘…that they might remember.’ (*az-Zumar:* 27) In other words, so that they might reflect upon these parables and place each parable opposite those like it so that they might find in what they see in the Seen world a proof for the Unseen, and in what is agreed upon a proof upon which is disagreed

Then Allah says: ‘[It is] an Arabic Quran…’ (*az-Zumar:* 28). That is, these parables came in the form of a clear explanatory Arabic Quran with no distortion in it. It is a book that is read, written, and recited repeatedly in acts of worship. And it is preserved so that its words can never be perverted or altered. The One Who preserves it is the One Who spoke its words. In this way, these parables will remain so long as the Quran remains, and since it will last forever, they will last forever. They will remain there before you so that you will always be able to benefit from them, and every time you find yourself confronted by a problem in your lives, you will find its solution there.

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(1) These two verses are mentioned by ‘Abd Ar-Rahim Al-‘Abbasi in ‘Ma‘ahid At-tansis’ and by Shihabu-Din in ‘Rayhanat Al-Alba’ as being from a poem written by ‘Abdullah Ibn An-Nattah. Al-‘Imad Al-Asfahani named him in ‘Kharida Al-qasr’ (Abu Muhammad ‘Abdullah Ibn At-Tabbakh Al-Katib), and in it, it says, 'It was as if he had tasted the first slap'.

As for His words: '…without any deviance...' (*az-Zumar:* 28), they mean that this Book is not biased, does not prefer something to another, but rather follows the Straight Path. This is because the true legislation comes from Allah Who does not side with anyone or favour anyone, not even His Messengers. As proof of that, read the verse with which Allah addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the best of His Messengers: 'Then [if you had], We would have made you taste double [punishment in] life and double [after] death. Then you would not find for yourself against Us a helper.' (*al-Isra':* 75) And in the chapter of *al-Kahf* (The Cave), Allah describes the Quran, saying: '[All] praise is [due] to Allah, who has sent down upon His Servant the Book and has not made therein any deviance. [He has made it] straight…' (*al-Kahf:* 1-2).

The phrase '… that they might become righteous' (*az-Zumar:* 28) means so that they might guard themselves against Allah's Attributes of Majesty and the various types of punishment that might come about as a result.

ضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَّجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَآءُ مُتَشَٰكِسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِّرَجُلٍ
هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًا ۚ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

God puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to God, though most of them do not know[29]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 29)

This is a metaphor that Allah sets forth in order to bring clarity to the matter of His Oneness, i.e. monotheism. Through it, Allah *Glorified is He* aims to clarify the difference between the slave who has a single master and the slave who has many masters. The image in this metaphor is composed of a number of elements. The man is owned by several partners, who are in disagreement with one another, with each one commanding him to do something different. So, if he satisfies one, he enrages another, and if he obeys one, he disobeys another. How can he divide himself up? And how can he rest when he is always in a state of confusion regarding what he should do?

As for the other, he is slave to one master and he receives his commands from one source. He is inextricably linked to his master and he serves him alone.

'...Are they equal in comparison?' (*az-Zumar:* 29) Allah asks the question and leaves it up to you to answer. When He says: '...are they equal in comparison?' (*az-Zumar:* 29) we have no alternative but to reply that they are not and can never be equal; we have no option but to affirm this reality. So Allah's intention in posing this question is that we ourselves affirm it, instead of Him telling us directly. What we have said here is what any sane person would say and what no sane person could deny.

The slave who is owned by a single master is like someone who believes in Allah and devotes his worship to Him alone, while the slave who is shared by many partners, who are at variance with one another, is like the slave who associates others with Allah when he worships Him, so take heed.

When Allah says: 'Praise be to Allah!' (*az-Zumar:* 29) He means praise is due to Him for setting forth parables for us and making things clear for us by allowing us to grasp metaphysical matters through seeing material things. So the one who worships Allah alone without a partner lives with an untroubled mind, a peaceful soul and a tranquil heart, unlike the one who worships numerous gods. This is because he has a troubled mind and an unsettled soul, since if he were to obey one master, he would anger another. He does not have the necessary strength to help him satisfy everyone. He is most like the servant who says, 'Woe, should I cut myself?'

Praise be to Allah who sends down the Quran in Arabic with no distortion in it! Praise be to Allah who clarifies parables that make matters, which normally baffle the mind, accessible by comparing them with matters that are easy to understand!

‘But most of them do not know,’ (*az-Zumar:* 29) i.e. they do not know this thing. They do not know that believing in the One True Lord and worshipping Him alone with sincerity is the path to true happiness and tranquillity, or that worshipping various gods is the path to misery and weariness. They do not know this reality because they did not put proper research into the matter of believing in Lordship, but instead took it without reflecting on it at all. The most important thing for them is for the god they worship to not have any commands or prohibitions, for the god they worship to not have a doctrine and to not have any demands. What kind of a god is it that satisfies your ego, whims and desires?!

Allah’s words: ‘But most of them do not know’ (*az-Zumar:* 29) set the hearts of the people of true belief and Oneness of Allah at rest. Despite the fact that they were few in number, they were still there, and the world will never be without good, no matter how little of it remains, as indicated by Allah: ‘A [large] company of the former peoples’, ‘And a few of the later peoples …’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 13-14).

He says about the people of the right(1) in another verse: ‘A company of the former peoples’, ‘And a company of the later peoples’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 39-40), so there will always be good in this community.

إِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ وَإِنَّهُم مَّيِّتُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ عِندَ رَبِّكُمۡ تَخۡتَصِمُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

You [Prophet] will certainly die, and so will they [30] and, on the Day of Resurrection, you will dispute with one another in the presence of your Lord [31] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 30 - 31)

Whenever something bad happened to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or he was afflicted by illness or hardship, like what happened to him at the Battle of Uhud, the non-believers of Mecca would rejoice. So how do you think it would have been if the Messenger of Allah had died? That is why the Quran affirms this reality for the Messenger of Allah: ‘Indeed, you are to die, and indeed, they are to die.’ (*az-Zumar:* 30) So what are they rejoicing about when that will be everyone's fate? As Allah indicates in another place in the Quran: 'And We did not grant to any man before you eternity [on earth]; so if you die - would they be eternal?' (*al-Anbiya':* 34)

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(1) People of the right: They are the believers who will receive their book of deeds with their right hands on the Day of Judgment.

But the affair does not end there, for after death there is another life, during which there is reckoning, recompense, and standing in front of Allah. During that time, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will enjoy the highest station. But as for you, you will occupy the station of those who are opposed to Allah, so what are you going to say when you are there? This is the meaning of Allah's words: 'Then indeed you, on the Day of Resurrection, before your Lord, will dispute.' (*az-Zumar:* 31)

In: 'Indeed, you are to die,' (*az-Zumar:* 30) the word *mayyit* (dead) appears here with the *shadda*(1) on the *ya'* and means, moving towards death and ending up dead. There is a difference between *mayyit* with a *shadda* on the *ya'* and *mayt* with a *sukun* (2) on the *ya'*. *Mayyit* means (is going to die) or (is going to end up dead), and can be used to describe someone even when they are still alive. This is proven by the fact that Allah addresses His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the word when he was still living. As for *mayt*, it describes one who is already dead.

An example of this is found in the words of the poet:

All of God's creatures will sooner or later die,

Whereas the dead is simply the one who is carried to the grave.

Allah's words: 'Indeed, you are to die, and indeed, they are to die' (*az-Zumar:* 30) reassure and comfort the Messenger of Allah Muhammad just like when He addresses him with: ‘And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned.’ (*Ghafir:* 77)

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(1) *Shadda*: The Arabic script has numerous diacritics, including *i'jam* (i'jam, consonant pointing), and *tashkil* (*tashkil,* supplementary diacritics). The latter include the *harakat* (vowel marks; singular: *harakah*). The Arabic script is an impure abjad, where short consonants and long vowels are represented by letters, but short vowels and consonant length are not generally indicated in writing. *Tashkil* is optional to represent missing vowels and consonant length. The *shadda* or *shaddah*, or (*tashdid*), is a diacritic shaped like a small written Latin "w."
It is used to indicate gemination (consonant doubling or extra length), which is phonemic in Arabic. It is written above the consonant which is to be doubled.

(2) The sukun is a circle-shaped diacritic placed above a letter. It indicates that the consonant to which it is attached is not followed by a vowel. It is a necessary symbol for writing consonant-vowel-consonant syllables, which are very common in Arabic.

As for here, He says: ‘Then indeed you, on the Day of Resurrection, before your Lord, will dispute,’ (*az-Zumar:* 31) which means either you will see Allah wreak His vengeance upon them in this world, or it will happen in the Hereafter. So, it is in your best interests to move to the highest level so we can compress the distances and you can see with your own eyes the places in which the obstinate disbelievers will meet their ends. You will not be weakened or humiliated because you are going to end up with Allah, from whom you will receive your recompense and they too will receive theirs.

When Allah *Glorified is He* talks about death in the chapter of *al-Mulk* (The Sovereignty), He says: ‘Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion, and He is over all things competent - [He] who created death and life…’ (*al-Mulk:* 1-2) Reflect on the words: ‘...created death and life...’ (*al-Mulk:* 2) and how He places death first despite the fact that it comes after life. He does that because life will cause you to become self-deluded when you see your limbs and organs responding to your commands as well as the means of your subsistence. Also, because of the fact that this world gives you on demand, you inevitably fall prey to delusion. Allah *Glorified is He* however, wants us to not meet this world with delusion, but rather with an awareness of the reality that is the very opposite of life, namely death.

The rational person is the one who understands that he is heading towards death, and spends his life’s journey remembering that this will be his ultimate fate.

Then He says: ‘Then indeed you, on the Day of Resurrection, before your Lord, will dispute.’ (*az-Zumar:* 31) The first dispute that will arise between the Prophets and those who rejected them will be as to whether they conveyed their message. The Prophets will bear witness that they conveyed The Message of Allah to their people, whereupon they will make their excuses, saying, ‘We thought it was magic!’, ‘We thought it was lies!’, ‘We thought it was fantasy!’ But they did not realise that Allah had emphasised that with His words: ‘And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 143)

So, Allah *the Exlated* favoured the people of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by allowing them to also carry the Message of their messenger, something that had never happened with any of the messages of the previous messengers. And that is why He *the Exlated* says: '…you are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind...' (*Al-'Imran:* 110). The proof that this community carries this Message is that no messenger came after the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as if Allah *the Exlated* trusted the nation of Muhammad to carry His Message. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness that He *the Exlated* conveyed it to his nation, and they must bear witness that they conveyed to the rest of the people.

This is one of the meanings of the middle way about which Allah *the Exlated* says: 'And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way,' (*al-Baqara:* 143) even if they sometimes extend to other things, and that is because they take the middle way in everything. We have seen those among other peoples who denied Allah *the Exlated* completely and others who believed in numerous gods, both of which are extreme beliefs. So Islam came and called on people to worship a single God *the Exlated* and not to ascribe any partners to Him, thereby choosing the middle way and resolving that dispute.

That is why our Lord addresses us with the words: 'And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way…' (*al-Baqara:* 143), i.e. you choose the path of balance and moderation. So, if you hear one person calling for communism and another calling for capitalism, or see someone else holding fanatically to his *madhhab* (doctrine), say to them, 'We are a middlemost community, and have left capitalism to profit from its endeavour and aspiration, for not everyone has that endeavour. And when capitalism profits from its endeavour, it inevitably comes to serve society. See how many workers are working and how many homes are being built.

'And just like communism, we assign the part of their wealth that they do not spend to those who are unable to work. So we have taken the best part of one and the best part of the other, as is proven by the fact that the wickedness of the two systems that have had control over the world during recent times has begun to lessen. For the capitalists have started to take the edge off of capitalism, and have started to take the workers into consideration and give them rights, benefits, trade unions and so on. And similarly the communists say, "There must be a class of people in society who are able to balance things up in society by means of their endeavours, and give the works the opportunities to work in them." But in the end, communism came to an end. Praise be to Allah *the Exlated* that it did.' So, the Muslim community is a community in the middle that takes the best of both systems.

We say that in the Hereafter, the first dispute will be the Prophets and those who rejected them, but there will also be a dispute between the heads of the unbelievers and those who followed them, having been misguided and led astray by them, between those people who left their mark on the foolish and caused them to follow them in unbelief.

The Quran paints us a picture of the dispute they have in that place when it says: '[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored shall disown their followers, and the latter shall see the suffering [that awaits them], with all their hopes cut to pieces! [166] And then those followers shall say: "Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could disown them as they have disowned us!"' Thus will Allah show them their works [in a manner that will cause them] bitter regrets; but they will not come out of the fire. [167]' (*al-Baqara:* 166-167) And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the Allah-conscious.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)

So, it is inevitable that they will differ with one another on that day, curse each other and claim that they were simply following the others. That is why Allah *the Exlated* says: '…and halt them [there]! [And then,] behold, they shall be asked, "How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?" Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to Allah]; but [since it will be too late,] they will turn upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins]. Some [of them] will say: "Behold; you were wont to approach us [deceptively] from the right!" [To which] the others will reply: "Nay, you yourselves were bereft of all faith!"' (*as-Saffat:* 24-29)

In this way, the followers and those who are followed argue with one another and split apart, no longer aiding one another in the way they aided one another to unbelief in this world.

The Quran also paints another picture of the unbelievers describing how their leaders are taken to the fire first, and how their followers come and find that their leaders have preceded them: Allah *the Exlated* says: ‘All this [for the righteous]: but, verily, the most evil of all goals awaits those who are wont to transgress the bounds of what is right: hell will they have to endure – and how vile a resting-place! This, [then, for them –] so let them taste it: burning despair and ice-cold darkness and, coupled with it, further [suffering] of a similar nature. [And they will say to one another: Do you see] this crowd of people who rushed headlong [into sin] with you? No welcome to them! Verily, they [too] shall have to endure the fire! [And] they [who had been seduced] will exclaim: “Nay, but it is you! No welcome to you! It is you who have prepared this for us: and how vile a state to abide in!”’ (*Sad:* 55-60)

The fact that the leaders precede their followers to the fire indicates that their wrong action is worse than that of their followers, since they were themselves misguided but also led others astray. But it also dashes the hopes of the followers that they will be saved or freed from the fire, for they see those that they thought would save them, their leaders and bosses, having preceded them to it.

On the other hand, Allah *the Exlated* lays out the conversation that takes place between the believers while they reside in paradise: ‘One of them speaks thus: “Behold, I had [on earth] a close companion.”’ (*as-Saffat:* 51) That is, I had a companion who was an unbeliever: ‘…who was wont to ask [me], “Why – are you really one of those who believe it to be true [that] after we have died and become mere dust and bones we shall, forsooth, be brought to judgment?” [And] he adds: “Would you like to look [and see him]?” and then he looks and sees that [companion of his] in the midst of the blazing fire,’ (*as-Saffat:* 52-55) i.e. he looks over the wall and lo, there is his companion in the midst of the blazing fire, i.e. in the middle of it, so he says: ‘… “By Allah! Verily, you have almost destroyed me [too, O my erstwhile companion],”’ (*as-Saffat:* 56] i.e. destroyed me with you: ‘…for had it not been for my Lord's favour, I would surely be [now] among those who are given over [to suffering](1)!' (*as-Saffat:* 57)

The conversation might also occur without any element of dispute, as in Allah's words: 'On the Day when their faces shall be tossed about in the fire, they will exclaim, "Oh, would that we had paid heed unto Allah, and paid heed unto the Apostle!" And they will say: "O our Lord! Behold, we paid heed unto our leaders and our great men, and it is they who have led us astray from the right path! O our Lord! Give them double suffering, and banish them utterly from your grace!"' (*al-Ahzab:* 66-68) Allah then says:

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن كَذَبَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ وَكَذَّبَ بِٱلصِّدْقِ إِذْ جَآءَهُۥٓ ۚ أَلَيْسَ
فِى جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِّلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَٱلَّذِى جَآءَ بِٱلصِّدْقِ وَصَدَّقَ بِهِۦٓ ۙ
أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

So who could be more wrong than the person who invents a lie about God and rejects the truth when it comes to him? Is there not ample punishment for the disbelievers in Hell? [32] It is the one who brings the truth and the one who accepts it as true who are mindful of God [33] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 32-33)

The question that is asked in: 'And who could be more wicked...' (*az-Zumar:* 32) is a question whose purpose is to indicate astonishment and disapproval. Its meaning is, 'There is no one who is wicked more than this person who invents lies about Allah!' If he were to have invented lies about someone other than Allah *the Exlated* that would have been reprehensible, so how much worse must it be to invent lies about Allah *the Exlated*, who knows everything that happens in the heavens and on the earth and knows the true reality of things, both what they keep secret and what they reveal openly? So, lying against Allah *the Exlated* is doomed to failure. If you must lie, then lie against another human being like yourself, for he is also predisposed to lying.

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(1) *Were it not for Allah's favour to me, I would have been like you in the midst of the fire, undergoing the punishment with you. But He, exalted is He, favoured me and granted me mercy, and so guided me to believing in Him and affirming His Oneness. (Tafsir of Ibn-Kathir: Surat as-Saffat)*

And that is why the phrase: '...more wicked...' (*az-Zumar:* 32) appears in the superlative form (*af'al*), for the worst and most serious type of wrong-doing is to tell lies against Allah *the Exlated*. But who has he wronged? Has he wronged the one he has lied against or has he wronged himself? The answer is that it is himself that he has wronged.

But that was not the end of the matter as far as that person is concerned, for him also: '...gives the lie to the truth as soon as it has been placed before him...' (*az-Zumar:* 32) for declaring what is true to be a lie flips matters on their head. A true statement is one that cannot be met with the response, 'You have lied', for it is simply giving the news of actual events that are confirmed by what really happens. We said previously that if what is referenced in speech corresponds to reality, then that speech is truthful, but if it differs from reality, then it is a lie.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks a question that He *the Exlated* knows the answer to: '...Is hell not the [proper] abode for all who deny the truth?' (*az-Zumar:* 32) meaning 'What do those who tell lies against Allah *the Exlated* and declare what is true to be a lie think is going to happen? Do they not know this reality–that hell is the abode for all unbelievers who deny the truth?' If they had taken this reality into account, they would not have dared to lie against Allah *the Exlated*. But instead they are liars who say what conflicts with reality and do not believe in Him.

After that He *the Exlated* moves on to a description of the quality of the truthful one, saying: 'But he who brings the truth…' (*az-Zumar:* 33). That truthful one is Muhammad who received the message from his Lord and conveyed it to his people. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has emphasised the truthfulness of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in many places, including the time when He *the Exlated* says: 'Now if he [whom We have entrusted with it] had dared to attribute some [of his own] sayings unto Us, We would indeed have seized him by his right hand, and would indeed have cut his life-vein, and none of you could have saved him!' (*al-Haqqa:* 44-47)

So, the matter of lying against Allah *the Exlated* is one that Allah *the Exlated* does not approve of in anyone, not even His Messengers. And that is why what the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* transmitted from

Allah *the Exlated* was so precise. He did not convey the sense of what Allah *the Exlated* said but rather conveyed what He *the Exlated* said word for word. Read Allah's words: 'Say: "He is The One Allah"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1): It was well within his capacity to say to his people, 'He is One Allah', and if he had done that he would have conveyed the sense of the verse, but instead he conveyed it exactly as it had come down to him from his Lord: 'Say: "He is The One Allah"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1) mentioning the command: 'Say'.

It is astonishing that there has appeared amongst us those who say that this word, 'Say', should be omitted, taking as their proof the fact that [they say] it adds nothing new to the meaning. We say in response, 'This is not the speech of a human being, but rather is the speech of Allah *the Exlated* and His Quran. And Allah *the Exlated* has Himself preserved it. And His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed it to us in exactly the way he *peace and blessings be upon him* received it from his Lord.'

Suppose you were to send your son to convey a message from you to someone else, saying to him, 'Go to so-and-so and say such-and-such to him.' It is possible for your son to convey the sense of that message, but when he says, 'My father said to me, "Go to so-and-so and say such-and-such to him', that means that he is emphasising the message and taking care to pass on the message exactly as he received it. So, if the word 'Say' were to be omitted, a word of the Quran would have been omitted, not some word that was additional to it.

As for the words: '...and he who wholeheartedly accepts it as true...' (*az-Zumar:* 33), they mean, 'he affirms the truth that he brought'. In other words, he affirmed it first and did not wait for any of us to affirm it or bear witness to its being true. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took it from his Lord that He *the Exlated* was one God, without a partner, and bore witness to that and affirmed that first.

In the same way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not wait for His slaves to bear witness to His Oneness, but rather first bears witness to that Himself when He *the Exlated* says: 'Allah [Himself] proffers evidence – and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him...' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). After Allah *the Exlated* bore witness Himself to His

Oneness, it also became necessary for the Messenger to bear witness that Muhammad is the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. So he brought the true Word and himself affirmed it. And he said about himself, ‘I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’ Similarly, the angels bore witness to this Oneness. And those who are endowed with knowledge bore witness to it with their testimony based on the proofs and evidences in front of them.

Some say (1) that: ‘But he who brings the truth…’ (*az-Zumar:* 33) is the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while: ‘...and he who wholeheartedly accepts it as true...’ (*az-Zumar:* 33) refers to those who affirmed as true the first message the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed from his Lord, regardless of whether it was Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* or Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her*. For there is a difference of opinion as to whether the first person to believe was Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* or Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her*. But it is not necessary for there to be a dispute about this, for if someone were to ask you who the first man to become Muslim was, you would say Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* and if someone were to ask you who the first woman to become Muslim was, you would say Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her*.

The reality is that Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* believed in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and affirmed the truth of what he brought right in the beginning of the affair, and perhaps even before Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* had been told about it. You know the stance she took towards the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the revelation came to him, and that she took him to see her cousin,

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(1) *The people of tafsir differ with one another with regard to who the one who brings the truth and who the one who wholeheartedly accepts it as true is. There are a number of different opinions: (1) The one who brings the truth is the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and the one who accepts it as true is Abu-Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him. This is what ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, may Allah honour him, said; (2) The one who brings the truth is the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and the one who accepts it as true is ‘Ali. This is what Mujahid said; (3) The one who brings the truth is Gabriel peace be upon him and the one who accepts it as true is Muhammad peace be upon him. This is what As-Suddi said; and (4) The one who brings the truth is the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and the one who accepts it as true are the believers. This is what Ibn Zayd, Muqatil and Qatada said. You can see all of these opinions in the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi (8/5901).*

Waraqa ibn-Nawfal(1), who said, 'He is the Prophet of this community.' And, in order to emphasise this for her, he said, 'And if your day comes when I am still alive, I will give you my most vigorous support. If only I might live to see the day your people cast you out!' Muhammad *peace be upon him* asked, 'Are they going to cast me out then?' He replied, 'No one has ever brought the like of what you have brought without being subjected to harm and abuse. You will be cast out!'(2)

As for Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* when they told him, 'Your companion claims that he is a Messenger', he replied, 'If he has said that then he is telling the truth.'(3) How could Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* affirm the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he had never seen any miracle from him proving his Message?

They reply, 'Miracles are not something that people cannot believe without. Rather, they are only there for those who stubbornly refuse to affirm and believe. And that is why the miracle of the Quran came as a challenge to the unbelievers and obstinate rejecters. As for those who believed in the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the beginning, they had no need of a miracle, for what miracle could have caused Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* to affirm the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so quickly?

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(1) *He is Waraqa ibn-Nawfal ibn-Asad from the tribe of Quraysh, a pre-Islamic wise man. He kept away from idols before Islam, refusing to eat what was sacrificed to them, and became Christian. He used to write the Arabic language in Hebrew script. He was the cousin of the mother of the believers, Khadija may Allah be pleased with her. He died in the year 12 BH.*

(2) Al-Bayhaqi narrated it in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/139 & 140) in a *(Hadith)* from Muhammad ibn an-Nu'man ibn Al-Bashir, and Ibn-Hisham narrated it in as-Sira an-Nabawiyya (1/256), and in his version Waraqa says, 'By the One who holds my soul in His hand, you are the Prophet of this community. The great Namus that came to Moses *peace be upon him* has come to you. You will most certainly be rejected, abused, cast out and fought against. If I am still living on that day, I will support Allah *the Exalted* with a support He knows.'

(3) Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his Tafsir (5/4012) and they go on to say, 'Do you believe him before you even hear it from him?' He replied, 'Where are your brains? I believe what he tells me as coming from heaven, so how can I not believe what he tells about Jerusalem? Heaven is much further away.'

It was because, they said, he had never ever heard the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tell a lie. And if he was truthful when it came to matters relating to people, then why would he tell lies against Allah *the Exlated*? So, Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* took his miracle from his prior history with and experience of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. And the same was true of Khadija *may Allah be pleased with her* as is proven by the fact that it was she who encouraged him and supported him and said, ‘By Allah, Allah will never humiliate you, for you maintain your ties of kinship, receive your guests with hospitality, take on others’ burdens and help those afflicted by calamity.’(1) So the miracle of Muhammad for those who believed in him from the beginning was their history with him and their experience of him.

You know the (Hadith)(2) of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Khuzayma(3) *may Allah be pleased with him* in which he said, ‘That Khuzayma bears witness for someone is enough for him.’(4) The number of witnesses required to give testimony is well-known, so how could the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* make Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* equal that number on his own? And what was it that made him merit such a station?

Because, they say, he obtained that level of worthiness by affirming the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* borrowed a sum of money from a Jew and then paid it back to him at the appointed time. But that

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3) and in six other places in the Sahih. It is also transmitted by Muslim in his Sahih (160) in a (Hadith) from 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her.*

(2) The story of the testimony of Khuzayma in favour of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

(3) He is Khuzayma Ibn Thabit Ibn Al-Fakih ibn Tha‘laba Al-Ansari, Abu-‘Amara, a Companion and one of the noblemen of Aws in the time of ignorance before Islam and in the time of Islam. He lived until the Caliphate of ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb, *may Allah honour him,* and was present at the battle of Siffin, where he was killed in the year 37 AH. (Al-A‘lam of Az-Zirikli)

(4) *It is narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (2/18); and At-Tabarani in his Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir (4/101) in a (Hadith) from Khuzayma Ibn-Thabit. And Al-Haythami said in Al-Mujma’ (9/320), ‘All of its narrators are trustworthy.’*

Jew came forward claiming that he had not received the money he had lent to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and went to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said in front of the people, ‘O Muhammad’ - or he said, ‘O Abu Al-Qasim! Give me the money I lent you back.’ the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘I have already given it to you,’ so the Jew said, ‘Who will bear witness to that?’ So Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* got up and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, I will testify that you have given him the money back.’

And so, because of the fact that the Jew’s claim was a lie, he believed Khuzayma’s testimony to be true and said to himself, ‘Perhaps he was present at the transaction and I did not see him.’ And that was because the Jew took the money he had loaned the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* back from him when no one else was present. So the Jew withdrew and left, whereupon the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* summoned Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* and said to him, ‘Khuzayma, no one was with me when I gave him his due, so how could you bear witness that you saw me give it to him?’ Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* laughed and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, should I believe you when you transmit revelation from Heaven and not believe you concerning a few *dirhams?*’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was pleased with Khuzayma’s reasoning, considered it to be a fine use of judgement and so said about him, {That Khuzayma bears witness for someone is enough for him.}

The matter had nothing to do with the dirhams of the Jew, but rather had another reality altogether. For when they wanted to gather together the Quran, they took the greatest levels of care possible. So, the compilers did not write a single word into the master copy until they saw it written down somewhere and had heard two witnesses testify to it. They did that so that they could be sure of its truth, both in the hearts of men and the lines they had written down. This continued until the scribe came upon a verse that was written down but had only been testified to by a single witness, so he held back. But as soon as he saw that that witness was Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* he remembered the statement of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘That Khuzayma bears witness for someone is enough for him,’ and so he wrote it down.

Another of the occasions marked by affirmation of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was what Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* said when they told him about the Night Journey and Ascent of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When they said to him, ‘Your companion claims that he went to Jerusalem and was taken up to Heaven in a single night,’ he did not research the matter or dispute what they said, but instead affirmed it as true from the very first. He said, ‘If he said that then he has spoken the truth.’ For him, the real measure of truth was simply whether it had been said by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or not.

Then Allah *the Exlated* says: ‘...it is they who are [truly] conscious of Him!’ (*az-Zumar:* 33) That is, those who take the small things into consideration and place a barrier between themselves and Allah’s Attributes of Majesty.

لَهُم مَّا يَشَآءُونَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡۚ ذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ (٣٤) لِيُكَفِّرَ ٱللَّهُ عَنۡهُمۡ
أَسۡوَأَ ٱلَّذِى عَمِلُواْ وَيَجۡزِيَهُمۡ أَجۡرَهُم بِأَحۡسَنِ ٱلَّذِى كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ (٣٥)

They will have everything they wish for with their Lord.
Such is the reward of those who do good. [34] God will
absolve them even of their worst deeds and will reward them
according to their best [35] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 34 - 35)

Allah *the Exlated* says: ‘All that they have ever yearned for awaits them...’ (*az-Zumar:* 34) i.e. ‘Everything they want will be provided in ample amounts for them and awaits them.’ But with whom? ‘...with their Lord…’ (*az-Zumar:* 34) when there is no one left to be with except for Allah *the Exlated*. It is this ‘withness’ that is meant by Allah’s words: ‘...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day?’ (*Ghafir:* 16)

This ‘withness’, this being *at* someone’s place can be used for people in this world. For example, we say, ‘This is an employee *at* this person’s company’ or ‘this is a servant *at* that person’s house.’ But as for the Hereafter, the only One *at* whose place people will be is with Allah *the Exlated*. And through this ‘withness’, believers obtain in the Hereafter what they desired but were never able to get in this world, for Allah *the Exlated* says: ‘All that they have ever yearned for awaits them with their Lord…’ (*az-Zumar:* 34), and does not say, ‘They will have all that they yearn for’, but rather, ‘They will have all that they yearn when they are with Me.’ In other words, they will get it directly and not through any outside mediums or secondary causes, for secondary causes only exist in this world. And those things that you want in this world through those secondary causes may or may not come about for you, even when you hold them in your hand. And that is because Allah *the Exlated* brings His sovereignty about through the medium of His viceregents upon the earth, making one the cause of provision for the other, with the one helping the other. But those causes might fail to materialise. As for the Hereafter, there are no secondary causes. Rather, everything is given by Allah *the Exlated* directly without cause.

In the life stories of many of the great Messengers, there are events that clarify for us this ‘being with Allah’. When our master Abraham *peace be upon him* first came to call people to Allah *the Exlated* he called on his uncle Azar and entered into a debate with him regarding the worship of idols. Then when he saw that he was going to persist in his obstinate rejection, he said to him: ‘…Peace be upon you!…’ (*Maryam:* 47)

The word (*salam*) here is not the (*salam*) of peace and security nor the (*salam*) of greeting, but rather is the (*salam*) of saying goodbye. And that is because they had totally different viewpoints, and there can be no arguing with someone who is so obstinate and stubborn. All arguing for longer would do is to create more enmity and make things even more complicated. In such situations, it is better for the person in the right to withdraw and not let the fire of disagreement flare up even more. It is like when you say to your companion in situations of this sort, ‘Uncle, peace be upon you!’, thus bringing the matter to a close. So, ‘Peace be upon you!’ here means, ‘If I were not to have left this situation with you, there would never have been peace.’ Indeed, the message of peace can be conveyed by people who are not able to ensure that that peace will be implemented.

And that is why true peace only comes from Allah *the Exlated* as in Allah’s words: ‘Peace and fulfilment through the word of a Lord who dispenses all grace.’ (*Ya Sin:* 58)

The evidence here points to the fact that Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him* wanted to ask forgiveness for his paternal uncle, but Allah *the Exlated* did not answer that request. He wanted something in this world but Allah *the Exlated* did not want it. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to ask forgiveness for his paternal uncle, Abu Taleb, after having called him to Islam and after him having not accepted. Instead, he remained upon the religion of his forefathers. So when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked for forgiveness for him, Allah *the Exlated* revealed the following verse to him: ‘It does not behove the Prophet and those who have attained to faith to pray that they who ascribed divinity to aught beside Allah be forgiven [by Him] – even though they happened to be [their] near of kin...’ (*at-Tawba:* 113).

Muhammad wanted forgiveness for his paternal uncle, but Allah *the Exlated* did not grant him that. And that was because what he wanted was something in this world, not with Allah *the Exlated* but what he desired with Allah *the Exlated* in the Hereafter will be answered and will come to pass. That is the meaning of: ‘All that they have ever yearned for awaits them with their Lord…’ (*az-Zumar:* 34).

And even if believers do have desires that are not fulfilled in this world, they will be stored for him in the Hereafter, when they are with their Lord. Those desires which do not come about here are covered by one thing, and that is that the noblest thing you can desire from Allah *the Exlated* is that Allah *the Exlated* grant victory to His religion, and that desire has been fulfilled.

So, the desires that are not fulfilled are those which relate solely to yourself. As for those desires that conform to belief in Allah’s programme, they will most definitely come about, just as they came about, for example, at Badr.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us who believe in Him and affirm His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to not yearn for things outside of Islam, since it is possible for those things that one wishes for outside of Islam to be in the hands of other people, meaning that those wishes will not be fulfilled. It is possible also that a believer will die before seeing the fulfilment of his wish that Allah’s religion be victorious. If that happens, then that wish will be stored up for him in the Hereafter.

So, the important thing is for his wish to be solely for the victory of Allah’s religion over those who deny and oppose it, for such a wish will come true, as is proven by Allah's words: '…and that, verily, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 173)

As for Allah's words: '...such will be the reward of the doers of good' (*az-Zumar:* 34), it is the case that there is action and there is bounteous grace. And the fact that we are recompensed and rewarded for our actions is part of that grace since whenever our Lord rewards me for something that itself already brought me benefit, that reward is considered a bonus, for it would have been perfectly within His rights for Him to say, 'You have already taken your reward in the form of the benefit you derived from the work you did.' For your Creator has given you all the means as well as the limbs and organs to make use of them. He *the Exlated* has given you land, money, air, water and food, so if He *the Exlated* rewards you for your work as well, that is part of His grace and bounty.

The (*muhsin*), 'the doer of good', is at a higher level above the believer, for the believer takes the things Allah *the Exlated* has made obligatory for him and puts them into practice without doing anything extra. But as for the (*muhsin*), he puts into practice all that Allah *the Exlated* has made obligatory for him as well as doing extra actions of the same type as those things that Allah *the Exlated* made obligatory on him.

So, for example, he prays the five prayers and, on top of them, does extra supererogatory such as the night prayer, as Allah *the Exlated* himself says about the (*muhsinin*): 'They would lie asleep during but a small part of the night, and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts; and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19)

Allah *the Exlated* does not say here, 'a known due share' because the known due share is *zakat*. But in the case referred to here, the believer pays the *zakat* on his wealth and then, in addition to that, gives as much voluntary alms and charity as he wills. Those additional alms are not demanded of you by your Lord; rather, you only give them out of love for Him and in order to draw nearer to Him.

So, the word (*ihsan*) has the same meaning when it is related to Allah *the Exlated* as it does when it is related to people. You say, 'I act with (*ihsan*) towards so-and-so' when you give with more than is his due. And so, when Allah *the Exlated* rewards a (*muhsin*), He *the Exlated* gives that reward for his (*ihsan*). If a servant acts with (*ihsan*), Allah *the Exlated* is more generous and more worthy of doing the same.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a physical example of how this (*ihsan*) works by means of the earth and the fruits that it gives forth. You might, for example, plant a seed of wheat in it, and that seed then gives you in exchange 70 seeds. If that is what is given by the earth that is created by Allah *the Exlated* then what do you think will be given by its Creator? So, the reason: 'All that they have ever yearned for awaits them with their Lord…' (*az-Zumar:* 34) is because they were (*muhsinin*), and that is the reward for (*ihsan*). As for the Words: 'And to this end, Allah will efface from their record the worst that they ever did...' (*az-Zumar:* 35), they also indicate part of the reward that is specific to the station of (*ihsan*).

The word 'worst' is in the superlative form, so the word 'bad' is lesser than it. You can have a bad action and one that is worse than it. There is no doubt that 'bad action' refers to minor wrong actions, while 'worse' refers to major wrong actions. So, it is as if those who have arrived at the station of (*ihsan*) have been given the guarantee that that station of (*ihsan*) defrays the costs of those wrong actions and causes them to be removed. And it does not just do that to the minor wrong actions, but also to the major wrong actions since if the worst of their wrong actions are effaced, then so too will their actions which are merely bad. And all of that because you have placed yourself in a station that was not required of you - it was only love of Him that caused you to enter it.

And there is even a gift awaiting you that is even greater than that, for the matter does not end with your sins and wrong actions being effaced. Rather, they are also transformed into good actions, just as Allah *the Exlated* Himself says: '...for it is they whose [erstwhile] bad deeds Allah will transform into good ones...' (*al-Furqan:* 70).

Reflect on the various degrees of gifts that Allah *the Exlated* bestows upon us! True profit can only be obtained by engaging in trade with Him! And by the same generosity, bounty and favour, Allah *the Exlated* rewards the (*muhsinin*) for their good actions: '...and give them their reward in accordance with the best that they were doing [in life].' (*az-Zumar:* 35) Just as He *the Exlated* forgives them for the worst they have done, He *the Exlated* also rewards them for the best they have done, that is to say, for the best actions they did. These gifts from Allah *the Exlated* this generosity and favour that He *the Exlated* showers on His servants, encourage those who have strayed from belief to return to the embrace of belief. For, as long as the door to repentance remains open, there is no barrier between him and his Lord and there are no stumbling blocks in the way, no matter how numerous his wrong actions.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* prescribed repentance for disobedient wrongdoers, He *the Exlated* legislated it to save them from the wickedness of disobedience. For if we were to tell the disobedient that there was no way to repent, what would they then do? They would lose all their scruples. When we say, 'So-and-so is unscrupulous,' we mean that he has despaired of ever reforming, and so he persists in wrongdoing and slips further and further astray. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want that for His slaves, and so He *the Exlated* opens up to them the door of repentance so that their passion for Allah's religion can return and so that disobedience and deviancy do not increase and become more widespread in society.

After the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his people about this divine program for rewarding people, the obstinate rejecters said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'We are afraid for you, Muhammad. We are afraid that our gods are going to visit some harm upon you because you have angered them.' It is quite astonishing that they would say this, given that they knew that their gods were stones that could neither bring benefit nor harm. And so whenever they were touched by harm, they could find no one to take any refuge in except for Allah *the Exlated*. That is why Allah *the Exlated* reveals the verses:

أَلَيْسَ ٱللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُۥ ۖ وَيُخَوِّفُونَكَ بِٱلَّذِينَ مِن دُونِهِۦ ۚ وَمَن يُضْلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا
لَهُۥ مِنْ هَادٍ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَمَن يَهْدِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِن مُّضِلٍّ ۗ أَلَيْسَ ٱللَّهُ بِعَزِيزٍ ذِى ٱنتِقَامٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

Is God not enough for His servant? Yet they threaten you [Prophet] with those they worship other than Him. If God allows someone to stray he has no one to guide him [36] if God guides some- one no one can lead him astray. Is God not mighty and capable of retribution? [37] (The Quran? *az-Zumar:* 36 - 37)

This means, ‘O Muhammad, do not worry about this meaningless prattle, for Allah *the Exlated* is enough for you and will suffice you.’ And that is proven by the fact that some of the believers used to guard him for fear that the idolaters might do some harm to him. But they were surprised one day by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* coming out to them and releasing them from duties, forbidding them from guarding him and dismissing them from their posts.

If the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had not been certain that the One Who commanded him to dismiss his guards was Himself going to guarantee his safety and protection, he would not have done that to himself. And that is why a Danish woman, when she read in the account of the life of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was the greatest of all those people who have left their mark on history and when she came upon this event and read: ‘Is Allah not enough for His servant?…’ (*az-Zumar:* 36) and: ‘...Allah will protect you from [unbelieving] men…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 67) she said, ‘By Allah, Muhammad would not have done that unless he had absolute certainty in the fact that his Lord would protect him. Even were he to have deceived everyone, he could not have deceived himself.’ And so, on account of that one thing, she became a believer.

It pleases some people to say that the meaning of: ‘Is Allah not enough for His servant?…’ (*az-Zumar:* 36) is simply, ‘Is Allah not enough for His servant?’ considering the (*ba’*) to be superfluous, but that is not correct for there are no superfluous letters in the Speech of Allah *the Exlated*. As for the (*hamza*) here, it is indicative of a denying question, and denial indicates negation. And after that, the word (*laysa*) also indicates negation, and a double negative indicates a positive. So the meaning is, 'We deny that Allah *the Exlated* is not enough for His slave', and if we deny that Allah *the Exlated* is not enough for His servant, we are saying as a result that Allah *the Exlated* is enough for His servants.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has a name which is 'Allah' and has attributes which we know as 'The Beautiful Names'. One of those Beautiful Names is (*al-Kafi*), 'The One Who is Enough'. So the meaning is then, 'Does Allah *the Exlated* not have the attribute of being Enough for His servant?' So how can we then say that the (*ba'*) is superfluous? Saying that the (*ba'*) is superfluous here is contrary to the eloquent nature of the Quran. It is not correct for us to say that there is a superfluous letter in the Quran. Some display courtesy towards the Quran and said that it is a letter of connection, while others say that it is a letter whose purpose is to link to existence. But the truth is that we have no need of any of these interpretations.

And we made this matter perfectly clear earlier. If I were to say, for example, 'I do not have money,' the word (*ma*) negates the existence of a significant amount of money, but does not deny the existence of money altogether - it does not deny me from having a pound or two. But if I were to say, 'I do not have any money', and use the preposition (*min*) before the word for money, that would mean that I did not have anything that could be called money, not even a single penny. Thus, the preposition that is used here is not superfluous at all, but rather is essential to the meaning. As for those who say that the (*ba'*) is superfluous in: '...enough for...' (*az-Zumar:* 36), they consider (*laysa*) to be one of the sister verbs of (*kana*), a category of verb that makes the subject (*marfu'*) and makes the predicate (*mansub*). So the majestic name, its subject, is (*marfu'*) and (*kafin*) 'enough' is its predicate. So the implied wording is, 'Is Allah not (*kafiyan*) His slave.' However, this interpretation runs contrary to the majesty and eloquence of the Quran.

Then Allah *the Exlated* says: '...And yet, they would frighten you with those [imaginary divine powers which they worship] beside Him!…' (*az-Zumar:* 36) i.e. with their idols: '...But he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide,' (*az-Zumar:* 36) meaning, 'Let them say what they say, for Allah has led them astray, so who is there that can guide them?' '…whereas he whom Allah guides aright can never be led astray...' (*az-Zumar:* 37). This is the opposite case - if Allah *the Exlated* guides us to the path, then no one will be able to lead us astray. '...Is Allah Almighty, not an avenger of evil?' (*az-Zumar:* 37) means, 'Is Allah *the Exlated* not described with might?' The (*ba'*) here is like the one that came in the previous verse.

The Almighty is the One Who overcomes and is not overcome. And since Allah *the Exlated* is the One Who overcomes and is not overcome, you must beware of His vengeance, since He *the Exlated* is also: '...an avenger of evil' (*az-Zumar:* 37). So no matter how much evil forethought, planning and plotting you do, you will never overcome Him.

It is amazing that the unbelievers sought to frighten the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with idols when they themselves knew their true nature. And as for their statement: '…We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 3), it is totally false linguistically since worship is the worshipper obeying the worshipped in all his commands and prohibitions, and what commands or prohibitions come from inanimate idols? So their statement is totally nonsensical and baseless. And that is why Khalid ibn Al-Walid *may Allah be pleased with him* said(1), after Allah *the Exlated* had softened his heart to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent him to destroy al-'Uzza, and after he had gone up to the idol with his axe in his hand to break it:

O 'Uzza, may you be profaned and not glorified,
 for certainly I see that Allah has abased you.

If it was truly a god then it would have frightened him and protected itself.

Some of the orientalists have raised an objection to Allah's words: '...And yet, they would frighten you with those [imaginary divine powers which they worship] beside Him,' (*az-Zumar:* 36) saying, 'This refers to the idols, and those idols– al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat–all have feminine names. So how is it that the Quran uses the masculine word (*al-ladhina*) to refer to them and not the feminine word (*al-lati*)?' We reply, 'There is a difference between the name that is used for an idol and the thing that it names. In other words, it is a (s*anam*), an 'idol', and that idol is then named either al-Lat or al-'Uzza. So, if we take into account the fact that it is a (s*anam*), its plural is going to be masculine, whereas if we take into account the name it has been given, its plural is going to be feminine. So, (*al-ladhina*) takes into account what they are, i.e. the fact that they are idols, and (*al-lati*) takes into account the names they have been given.'

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(1) *This is narrated by Al-Marzuqi in his book, Al-Azmina wa Al-Amkina, in chapter 60. It is also narrated by Al-Kalbi in the book, Al-Asnam, and by Al-Jahiz in the book, Al-Hayawan, in the section entitled, 'the Fire of Artifice'.*

We shall stop here to look at this opposite pairing in Allah's words: '...But he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide, whereas he whom Allah guides aright can never be led astray. Is Allah Almighty, not an avenger of evil?' (*az-Zumar:* 36-37): A (*dall*) is one who is not guided towards his goal, like someone who loses his way and does not know in which direction to go. He is one who is astray without intending to be astray, since he simply does not know the way.

The word (*dall*) can also be used to mean hesitant and bewildered, such as when Allah *the Exlated* addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'And found you lost on your way, and guided you?' (*ad-Duha:* 7) And that came about because the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw his people doing things that he did not like, but at the time he still did not know the correct things they should be doing. So, it means that he did not know the truth, not that he knew but still turned aside from it, for there is a great difference between the two states. So, the (*dalal*), the 'misguidedness', here is something that was not intended. The word (*dalal*) can also be used to convey the meaning of forgetting, as in Allah's words: '...so that if one of them should make a mistake, the other could remind her...' (*al-Baqara:* 282).

And another aspect of that (*dalal*) is our forgetting that ancient natural covenant that Allah *the Exlated* made with us and which is referred to in His Words: 'And whenever your Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?' – to which they answer: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!"…' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

The opposite of (*dalal*) is (*hidayah*), 'guidance', a word that also has a number of different meanings. But those who seek to raise objections to the

Word of Allah *the Exlated* and damage its credibility take it to only have one meaning, applying that meaning to the word wherever they find it in the Quran. But that is not correct.

The word (*hidayah*) refers to guidance of pointing out the way in an absolute sense. In other words, He *the Exlated* guides you and then you are free to either follow that guidance or ignore it. The example we gave of this was that of a traffic policeman who guides you and points out the way to you, after which you are free to either take the path he has pointed to you or not to take it. If you do take the path he pointed out to you and thank him for the good turn he has done you, saying to him, ‘May Allah increase you in goodness! If it were not for you, I would have lost my way,’ he looks at you again and sees that you are worthy of being given even more good. So he says to you, ‘By Allah, you are a good man, so I will travel with you until you pass out of this area, for it is full of danger!’ This is called assistance. So the one who believes in The One Who guides is worthy of being assisted and being granted the success of having a greater level of guidance.

This is the meaning of Allah’s words: ‘…just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in God-consciousness,’ (*Muhammad:* 17) meaning, ‘He increases them by granting them aid and assistance, lightening for them the burden and hardship of obedience and turning aside from them the things that lead to evil. So, the first type of (*hidayah*) is guidance in the absolute sense of pointing out the way, while the second type of (*hidayah*) is guidance in the providing assistance and success.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies these two types of (*hidayah*) when He *the Exlated* addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: He *the Exlated* says about the first: ‘...and, verily, [on the strength thereof] you, too, shall guide [men] onto the straight way,’ (*ash-Shura:* 52) and He *the Exlated* says about the second: ‘Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love: but it is Allah Who guides him that wills [to be guided]…’ (*al-Qasas:* 56). How can Allah *the Exlated* affirm the act of guidance to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in one verse and yet negate it from him in another, for the words used in both verses are the same and the subject of the verb in both verses is the same? They say, in each of the places the word is being used in a different sense: the guidance that is negated is not the same as the guidance that is affirmed. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘You are but a guide who conveys My Message, not one who lays the way and makes the Law.'

You do not have the power necessary to force people to believe. Your only task is to convey, for it is by means of that conveying that Allah *the Exlated* guides people. It is not your job to insert belief into people’s hearts.

This is similar to what Allah *the Exlated* says in a single verse: ‘...but most people know [it] not: they know but the outer surface of this world’s life…’ (*ar-Rum:* 6-7). Thus, He *the Exlated* affirms knowledge to them and negates it in the same verse. Why? Because they refer to different things: the knowledge that is affirmed is not the same as the knowledge that is negated.

Allah *the Exlated* says: ‘...But he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide.’ (*az-Zumar:* 36) When Allah *the Exlated* says (*yudlil*), He *the Exlated* is ascribing misguidance to them, saying, ‘This one is misguided,’ meaning that he is not on the path that I laid out for him. And anyone whom Allah *the Exlated* has described as being astray, no right-thinking person can then describe him as being right-guided, since as soon as he compares that person’s actions with what Allah *the Exlated* actually requires of him, his intellect will naturally cause him to conclude that he is astray and not guided.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* for example, tells us to tell the truth and not tell lies. What does the right-thinking person say when he compares truthfulness and lying? It is inevitable that he will say that truthfulness is guidance and lying is misguidance, for it is not possible for him to say anything else. And that is especially true if he were to apply the matter to himself and say, ‘Would you like people to tell you the truth or to lie to you?’

So, if Allah *the Exlated* misguides someone and rules him as being astray after having first clearly shown him the right path, no one can then come along and describe that person as being guided. And that is because Allah’s guidance is something upon which all healthy natural minds agree, especially when you yourself are affected by some negative consequence of that misguidance and burned by its flames. That is why you find that liars love those who are truthful and evil men loves those who are noble and good. The story of the three adolescent young men that we have previously mentioned is a case in point. These three persons followed their own evil whims and desires. They remained as such for a long period of time until one of them showed repentance to Allah, which is why the other two bitterly mocked him and stigmatized him with the worst characteristics. But the question to be asked now is: ‘If one of these two men had a sister, would he allow her to get married to his companion who repented or to the one who was still committing evil?!’ It is thus clear that even though evil may entice people, the good eventually will prevail and win a point which is proved by the saying of Allah, *the Almighty*: ‘...Is Allah Almighty, not an avenger of evil?’ (*az-Zumar:* 37)

وَلَئِن سَأَلۡتَهُم مَّنۡ خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ ٱللَّهُۚ قُلۡ أَفَرَءَيۡتُم مَّا تَدۡعُونَ مِن
دُونِ ٱللَّهِ إِنۡ أَرَادَنِيَ ٱللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ هَلۡ هُنَّ كَٰشِفَٰتُ ضُرِّهِۦٓ أَوۡ أَرَادَنِي بِرَحۡمَةٍ هَلۡ هُنَّ
مُمۡسِكَٰتُ رَحۡمَتِهِۦۚ قُلۡ حَسۡبِيَ ٱللَّهُۖ عَلَيۡهِ يَتَوَكَّلُ ٱلۡمُتَوَكِّلُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

If you [Prophet] ask them, ‘Who created the heavens and earth?’ they are sure to answer, ‘God,’ so say, ‘Consider those you invoke beside Him: if God wished to harm me, could they undo that harm? If God wished to show me mercy, could they withhold that mercy?’ Say, ‘God is enough for me: all those who trust should put their trust in Him’ [38] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 38)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to show them how foolish it is to worship idols, and He wants to give them the evidence and proof that such worship is totally futile. And He *the Exlated* wants them to admit that proof, not simply for him to inform them of it. And as we have said before, a ruling is established either by a statement from you or a confession from your opponent. And confession, as we said before, is ‘the lord of all proofs’. And you do not leave it to your opponent to make the ruling unless you are absolutely sure that he is going to say what you want him to say. It is just like when you say to someone who shows no gratitude for a good turn you did him, ‘Did I not do such-and-such for you on such-and-such a day?’ And you only say it because you are sure that he will not be able to deny that fact.

And that is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* asks them here about the main support of existence in creation and the highest and widest envelope that contains all created beings, that is to say, the heavens and earth. The universe was created for man before man was ever created, so he came upon an earth already containing crops, plants, water, air and wholesome earth, and he came upon a sky already containing plants, stars, and a sun and a moon.

So Allah *the Exlated* says: '…and thus it is [with most people]: if you ask them, 'Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?' – They will surely answer, 'Allah.' (*az-Zumar:* 38) And they had no option but to say, 'Allah' and 'Allah alone', for when they turned their thoughts to the matter, they could not find anyone else who claimed that this was his creation. Indeed, it has never even occurred to any of the unbelievers, opponents or deniers of Allah's existence to make such a claim.

If we were to track the creation of man from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* and his immediate descendants, we would find that they came upon this world with its heavens and earth already in place. So if we were to have asked him, 'Did you create the heavens and earth', he would not be able to say, 'Yes, I did create them.'

So, Muhammad, ask them that question: '... "Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?"…' (*az-Zumar:* 38) and they will have no option but to say, 'Allah', since no being has ever spent a single moment of existence without the heavens and earth being present so that he could say that he was creating them for those yet to come. Rather, everybody came to find the heavens and the earth already there.

This is exactly like Allah's words: 'Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, 'Allah'…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) since no one can say to the first being to be created and brought into existence, 'I created you', nor can he himself say, 'I created myself.'

The fact that they said, 'Allah' in response directs our attention to another matter. And that is that the word, 'Allah' is one that everyone uses and one that everyone understands to whom it refers. If that were not the case, then they would not use it. And that is because the first thing that comes into existence is a meaning or a concept and then a word is coined to denote it. A good example of that is the television, for before it was invented we did not know such a word. It was not until after it had been brought into existence that we assigned this name. So, how did the word ‘Allah’ come into the language of man?

So, the majestic name must have something or someone to which it refers. That someone is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who existed before this word came into existence. And that is why we say to those who deny the existence of Allah *the Exlated* ‘That is a contradiction in terms. Saying, ‘Allah is non-existent’ does not make any sense, for the word ‘Allah’ is a subject which you are passing judgment on, while ‘non-existent’ is the predicate with which you are passing judgment. So, how can you say He *the Exlated* is non-existent when the concept exists before the word used to denote it?

The word ‘Allah’ could not exist in language unless He Himself existed. He *the Exlated* must have existed before the name did and we could not have known of the name without its owner having told us it. And that is because the job of the intellect, when it comes to belief, is to show us that this creation must have had a Creator to bring it into being. But what is that power? And what does that power want from creation? It is not the job of the intellect to answer questions such as these, for the intellect could never arrive at an answer. The only way we can know the answers to these questions is by being told them by that Creator Himself.

You will remember the example we gave to illustrate this: We said, ‘Let us say we are sitting at home and the doorbell rings. In the moment that the doorbell rings, we all agree that there is someone at the door because for everything that happens there must be someone or something to make it happen, but who is it? And what does he or she want? We cannot know the answer to those questions unless he or she tells us directly, saying, ‘I am so-and-so and I want such-and-such.’

So, the intellect cannot tell us what any of the features or traits of the Highest Existence are; all it can do is believe and know that He *the Exlated* exists and uncover the proofs of that. As for His Name, attributes, programme and instructions to us, it is Allah *the Exlated* Himself who transmits and conveys them to us. But that transmission must come from a person of consequence for us to accept it as true.

One of the failures of the philosophers, when it comes to investigating matters, is that they want to use the intellect not to just know what is intellectually knowable, but also to imagine the form that that intellectually knowable thing takes. But such conjecture is not the job of the intellect, for you will never be able to imagine the form that that thing takes. You can only know intellectually that it exists. Then you must leave it to that thing to speak for itself. Therefore, we find it odd when these philosophers talk about physical sciences and the science of what lies behind those physical things, which they refer to as metaphysics. However, why is it said that something lies behind physical matters? Because something cannot exist unless there is something from which we know about that thing. If nothing else comes along to set it right, then it establishes it.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He is the One who created this creation, as this existence could not exist if the Creator did not bring it into existence. In addition, no one objected to what Allah has said, so it is established so long as no one brings forth a counter claim.

Therefore, we said previously that the word of *kufr* (disbelief) is a proof of belief, since the original meaning of '*kufr*' is to cover up, and only things that exist can be covered up. This means that the innate state is that of belief, but *kufr* (disbelief) emerged thereafter in order to cover it up.

After they acknowledged the first proof that Allah is the Creator of the heavens and earth, He says to them: '... Say, "Then have you considered what you invoke besides Allah"' (*az-Zumar:* 38) This means that Allah tells them to describe those who they worshipped other than Allah (the idols): '...if Allah intended me harm, are they removers of His harm...' (*az-Zumar:* 38)? The verse refers to the idols, and the answer to the question is certainly in the negative, as the idols cannot hear the beseeching of those who supplicate them and cannot realise what the disbelievers ask for, so how can they fulfil people's requests to remove harm from them?

On the other hand: '...if He intended me mercy, are they withholders of His mercy?' (*az-Zumar:* 38) Their answer is certainly in the negative. Therefore, they acknowledge that Allah is the One Who brings benefit and that their gods are false and useless. If they stammer after that and do not reply because their answer will constitute a proof against them, then: '...Say, "Sufficient for me is Allah…"' (*az-Zumar:* 38) as He brings into existence beneficial creatures in the heavens and earth, and He is sufficient to ward off any harm

This is the meaning of Allah's saying in the previous verse: 'Is Allah not sufficient for His Servant [Prophet Muhammad]?' (*az-Zumar:* 36) This means that He bestowed bounties upon His Servant by granting him the bounty of existence, then the bounty of preserving one's life and then the bounty of preserving one's species. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* removes harm from His servant when it afflicts him. In fact, whenever a person suffers from an affliction, he never resorts to a false god, as he will not deceive himself or lie to himself. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him...' (*al-Isra':* 67).

Allah's saying: '...all those who trust should put their trust in Him…' (*az-Zumar:* 38) makes use of the linguistic style of restriction, as trust is restricted to Allah alone. This is true trust and reliance since the one who relies on something strengthens himself via this reliance when his own strength fails. The sensible person only relies on the one who can help him, on one whom when he needs him, he finds him there. As we said before, anyone who relies on someone just like himself will fail since you rely on him and hope that he fulfils your needs, but it occurs that you read his obituary in the newspapers a few days later. Thus, our Lord teaches us how and upon whom we should place our trust, saying: 'Rely upon the Ever-Living who does not die...' (*al-Furqan:* 58).

There is a difference between the Arabic words *'tawakkul*' and '*tawakul*', as Allah has provided the living beings with the means for their survival and the means for the preservation of their life, such as food and drink. In addition, He has provided them with the means for the preservation of species by mating.

As Allah has provided us with all these means, He has also assigned us a role. For example, the earth that lies beneath us, the sun that shines on the earth, the wind that blows over it and the rain that brings water to it. People should exploit and take advantage of these means by tilling it, planting the seeds, and taking care of them. You do not just stay at home and expect those means to bring you your food while doing nothing. No, your Lord has created you and has given you limbs that you can control. You can use your hand to hit someone or to pat the head of an orphan; you can use your tongue to utter the testimony of faith or say things that contradict it.

However, you must remember that those limbs are only subservient to your will in this worldly life, but in the Hereafter, you will not have control over them since they will be under the control of the One Who created them. On this day, Allah *Glorified is He* will say: '...To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day?…' (*Ghafir:* 16) In addition, your limbs will be freed from your control and will bear witness against you: 'On a Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against' (*an-Nur:* 24) them.

Allah created these limbs to make use of them, not to neglect using them. If you are able to work and still ask others to support you, that is called '*tawakul*': neglecting the means that Allah has bestowed on you and paying no heed to the talents and abilities that He has placed at your disposal. Allah *Glorified is He* has given you this honour, so how do you demean yourself by relying on other people? Why do you refuse making use of the bounties which Allah has granted you?

If you take advantage of the means and limbs which Allah has given you, then this is called '*tawakkul*', as it means making use of the limbs while putting one's trust in Allah. You should also expect that some trials may afflict you, such as when you work hard and take advantage of the means, but you do not gain anything. For example, when you till the soil and plant your crops, then the crops are destroyed completely. Allah then says:

قُلْ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱعْمَلُوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّى عَٰمِلٌ ۖ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾
مَن يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيْهِ عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Say, 'My people, do whatever is in your power – and so will I.
You will find out [39] who will suffer humiliation, and on whom a
lasting torment will descend'[40] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 39 - 40)

Reflect on the vocative case in this verse: 'O my people…' (*az-Zumar:* 39). Even after the people's stubborn rejection of Islam, their insistence on falsehood and their refusal to accept the proofs and evidence presented to them, still Allah *Glorified is He* treats them kindly and commands His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to address them in such a kind and lovely manner. This vocative form indicates that he was not alien to them, as they were his family and people among whom he lived.

When Messenger Muhammad called them to Islam, they did not respond to his call. In addition, none of the proofs and evidence he brought, showing them the futility of worshipping idols, were successful in convincing them. His Lord commanded him to say to them: ‘O my people do whatever is in your power – and so will I…’ (*az-Zumar:* 39). This means that Prophet Muhammad told them to do whatever they want with him because he had full trust in his Lord and his Lord was sufficient for him. He did not say these words out of recklessness or arrogance, but because Allah has said: ‘Is Allah not sufficient for His Servant [Prophet Muhammad]?…’ (*az-Zumar:* 36)

The Arabic word *‘makanatikum’* refers to the space occupied by an object, while the word ‘makin’ refers to the object that occupies a space. Therefore, a glass is the space occupied by an object while the water in it is the object which occupies a space. You have a place that you occupy: if someone persecutes and expels you from your place, he will let you go to another place.

If you become settled in a place to the extent that you have authority over it, this is what is called ‘*makanah*’. Those with high standing and sovereignty have ‘*makanah*’. The additional letter ‘*ta*’’ in the word ‘*makanatikum*’ is for the sake of exaggeration. When we refer to knowledgeable people, we may say ‘*’alim*’, ‘*’allam*’ and ‘’*allamah*’, the last of which refers to the one who has reached the pinnacle of knowledge and has learnt so much that there is nothing hidden from him.

As for the question: Why does Allah describe Himself ‘*’Allam*’ and not as ‘*’Allamah*’? It is because Allah’s knowledge is not divided up into different levels. There are not things He only has general knowledge about and others about which He has partial knowledge. Therefore, Allah cannot be described with this attribute.

The word ‘*makanah*’ is used in Allah’s saying regarding the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph): ‘We established Joseph in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events…' (*Yusuf:* 56) Allah did not give him just a 'makan' (place), but He gave him power and authority that enabled him to move wherever he wished. A person can have a place, and then he gains power and influence in that place, as what happened in the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph). On the other hand, a person may have a place and he is removed from it, just like when a person is arrested and placed in a cell.

We said previously that there is a '*hamzah*' in the Arabic language which is called '*hamzat al-izalah*'. When it is prefixed to a verb, it reverses its meaning. For example, the phrase: '*a'jama al-kalam*' (a person clarified the meaning of a speech), and the Prophet Muhammad's saying when addressing his Lord, 'I will try to please You until you become content.'(1) The word '*al-'utba*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the Hadith means 'removing the source of blame.' The whole saying means, 'If I have done something that stirs Your Anger, I will try to remove the source of blame and please you.' Within the context of lovers, ''*atb*' means blaming for something.

Another example of the word '*makanah'* is found in the Arabic text of Allah's saying: 'But if they intend to betray you - then they have already betrayed Allah before, and He empowered [you] over them. And Allah is Knowing and Wise.' (*al-Anfal:* 71) The words '*amkana minhum*' means 'took away their place from them'. The words '*amakana min*' means removing authority from someone and having power over them.

The word '*makanah*' includes the sovereignty and influence a person has that enables him to obtain what he wants. The word '*makanah*' is an exaggerated form of the word '*makan*' and the Arabic letter '*ta'*' is used for giving emphasis. Term is also used for the sort of high esteem that inspires such awe extending beyond your personal domain. That is why when Malik was killed(1), some people said, ‘Malik used to guard the places where the clouds pass causing rain to fall.’ Malik guarded these places in such a way that no one could encroach upon it because of the status he held amongst his people. Therefore, he was able to guard the places where rain fell outside his own country.

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(1) *It is narrated by Ibn Hisham in 'As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah' when he was tackling the trip Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him made to Tai'f to call its people to Islam. However, they acted ignorantly and caused his feet to bleed. When he had taken refuge in one of the orchards there, he raised his hands to heaven and said, 'O Allah, to You I complain of my weakness, lack of artifice and my disgrace at the hands of these people. O Most Merciful of all merciful, you are the Lord of the weak and you are my Lord, to whom do You leave me? To someone distant who frowns at me? Or to an enemy to whom You have given authority over me?...'*

Allah’s saying: ‘...and so will I…’ (*az-Zumar:* 39) is described by Prophet Muhammad when he says, ‘Do whatever you can with regard to obstinate refusal, persecution and abuse, and I will do whatever I can to call you to Islam, offer you advice and guide you. This is my Message and I will never abandon it. I will make greater efforts to promulgate it and I will patiently bear the persecution from which my Companions and I suffer. Nothing will keep me from what I want.’

Then Allah says: ‘...You will find out who will suffer humiliation.’ (*az-Zumar:* 40) They will suffer this humiliation in the worldly life. ‘...and on whom a lasting torment will descend.’ (*az-Zumar:* 40) They will suffer this lasting torment in the Hereafter. The word ‘*sawfa*’ indicates the future; Allah did not say that this is going to happen now because Islam started strange and only spread amongst the weak and slaves who were persecuted, abused, expelled from their wealth and homes, and died in the cause of Truth.

Allah willed to test the believers who supported this *Da’wah* (calling to Allah), sort out those who had weak faith, and remove from them the weak and hypocrites who are not suitable for supporting this Message. Therefore, the Revelation would come to Messenger Muhammad at intervals bringing with him a new difficult matter. Whenever one of those matters is revealed, some of them were removed from the ranks of the believers until the only people who remained around Messenger Muhammad were people with strong and sound faith.

In this verse, Messenger Muhammad warns the people who denied events which were going to happen. This warning indicates his certainty and trust that the One Who revealed to him this warning is able to make it happen in the way

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated in ‘Al-‘Iqd Al-Farid’ by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbuh, ‘Khizanat Al-Adab’ by ‘Abd Al-Qadir Al-Baghdadi, and 'Nihayat Al-'Irab' by An-Nuwayri. All of them mentioned that it was Kulayb ibn Rabi'a.*

He described. If that were not so, then Messenger Muhammad would not say it, since the reality of this warning would be revealed by the passage of time.

The same case applies with respect to the promises that Messenger Muhammad conveyed to the people before they took place. The following is one of them: '[Their] assembly will be defeated, and they will turn their backs [in retreat].' (*al-Qamar:* 45) This promise was made by Allah to the believers during very tough circumstances, as they were persecuted and were not able to defend themselves. When this verse was revealed, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Which assembly we are going to defeat when we are not even able to defend ourselves?' When he saw what happened at the Battle of Badr, he said, 'My Lord spoke the truth and His Messenger spoke the truth!' This promise did not discredit the *Da'wah* (call to Allah), but it sought to confirm it. It is thus clear that this aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Qamar* clearly indicates that the Divine Promises and Threats will undoubtedly be fulfilled.

We said before that the truthfulness of the Messenger Muhammad with respect to matters relevant to his *ummah* is different from his truthfulness with respect to matters relevant to himself, as his truthfulness with respect to matters relevant to himself is even more emphatic. We mentioned earlier the story of the woman who converted to Islam when she read the interpretation of Allah's saying to His Messenger: '...Allah will protect you from the people...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 67) when Allah revealed that He would protect him and people would not be able to assassinate him, so he sent away his guards because of this promise.(1) This woman reflected on the matter rationally and realised that if he were to deceive everyone, he would not deceive himself. Therefore, this verse reveals Messenger Muhammad's trust in Allah's promise.

In Allah's saying: '...You will find out...' (*az-Zumar:* 39), Allah uses the Arabic word '*ta'lamun*' instead of '*tarun*' (see) or '*tanzhurun*' (observe) because knowledge is more comprehensive than sight, and the events that were going to happen might happen outside the range of your eyesight. They may happen in places where some people will see them while others will not. As for knowledge, it conveys things that your own limbs as well as others' limbs come upon.

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(1) *At-Tabari narrated in his interpretation of verse 67 of the chapter of Al-Ma'ida from the narration of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her that Prophet Muhammad used to be guarded until the following verse was revealed: '...Allah will protect you from the people...' (al-Ma'ida: 67) She said, 'So Messenger Muhammad poked his head out of the dome and said, "O people, you may go away as Allah has protected me."' [Hadith no. 9661]*

Therefore, by means of knowledge, you can gain access to what others know. When you see something and discern it, you are guided to its ruling by what is pictured in your mind. However, by knowledge, you are able to benefit from that which is discerned and comprehended by others. Therefore, knowledge encompasses more than what is grasped by your intellect, organs and limbs.

Then, Allah says: '...and upon whom long-lasting suffering shall alight [in the life to come]!' (*az-Zumar:* 40) The word '*muqim*' is mentioned in this verse to rebut what they said previously, as their wars used to continue for a very long time, even in some cases for as long as 40 years. Victory was shared by turns among them. Perhaps they thought the torment would only last for a limited period, so Allah emphasises to them the torment will not be temporary, but it will be constant and lasting.

إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ لِلنَّاسِ بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ فَمَنِ ٱهۡتَدَىٰ فَلِنَفۡسِهِۦۖ
وَمَن ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيۡهَاۖ وَمَآ أَنتَ عَلَيۡهِم بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿٤١﴾

We have sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth for people. Whoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit, whoever strays away from it does so at his own peril: you are not in charge of them [41] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 41)

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about Himself sometimes using the plural first person pronoun '*inna*', and sometimes with the singular first person pronoun '*inni*' or '*innani*'. When Allah talks about His Oneness, He uses the singular pronoun, such as His saying to Prophet Musa (Moses): 'Indeed, I am Allah…' (*Ta Ha:* 14) In this verse, Allah emphasises that He is One God with no partner. When He talks about a matter in which He has a role and His viceregents on earth also have roles, He uses the plural pronoun, as in the following verse: 'We have sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth for people…' (*az-Zumar:* 41).

Reflect on the prepositions in the Arabic words ''*alayka*' (to you) and '*linnas*' (for people), as prepositions in Arabic have a wide range of meanings.

The word '*'alayka*' indicates that Allah assigns to His Prophet the responsibility, but the preposition 'lam' in '*linnas*' indicates that people will gain benefits. It is like when we say in bookkeeping '*lahu*' (credit) and '*'alayhi*' (debit); '*lahu*' (credit) entails benefit while '*'alayhi*' (debit) entails responsibility.

Allah informs people to whom Muhammad's call is directed that it is for their best interests and brings benefits for them. Allah sent down a heavy burden on him that would tire him and his family out and would subject them to ridicule conspiracy and abuse...etc.

The Book was sent down to Muhammad with its burdens and responsibilities, so Allah wanted him to bear them and be resolute like the resolute Messengers who came before him. They were sent for a limited portion of time and space, but Messenger Muhammad was sent for an unlimited portion of time and space. Therefore, the difficulties he endured in the course of calling people to Islam would be greater than those endured by the other Messengers because of the universality of his Message.

Thus, the goodness and benefits of the call of Islam is for people, while its hardships were born by Messenger Muhammad. Allah's saying: 'We have sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth for people…' (*az-Zumar:* 41) means that this Message carries benefits for people.

We will reflect on the use of prepositions in the verses. For example, in Allah's saying in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord.' (*al-Baqara:* 5)

The believers are '*'ala*' (upon) guidance. The word '*'ala*' gives the sense of being above or at the top of something. Therefore, it is as if guidance were a riding beast that carries them, allows them to rest, does not tire them out and helps them to reach their destination. The purpose of guidance is to soothe people and to achieve the people's noblest objectives. Therefore, they should cling to it, as it will not burden them with things they are not able to bear, but it will benefit them.

The word '*bilhaq*' (with Truth) indicates that it is something firmly established and does not change. Truth also means putting something in its rightful place. If you moved it from its rightful place, you come upon it in that state; the Truth will inevitably return to its rightful place.

The trials test the soldiers of Allah so that they will become worthy of carrying the call of Islam until the coming of the Final Hour.

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us that if falsehood prevails, we should take a lesson from those physical things that happen under your gaze with respect to the source of life: water. Water falls from the sky upon the mountaintops, from which it takes straw, debris and stones that it carries down into the valleys forming a layer of scummy froth atop the water which is of value. When wind blows, it scatters that scum, leaving the surface of the water clear and pure. In the same way, the prevalence of falsehood is temporary, as the truth returns to its rightful place. Allah lets falsehood rise up only to show people the special nature of the Truth. When falsehood causes pain to people, they become fed up with it and long for the Truth. Thus, falsehood is one of the soldiers of Truth.

Allah says: '...Whoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit...' (*az-Zumar:* 41). This means that following guidance is in one's best interests because the Lawmaker Who made His Laws, sent Messengers and sent down the Book does not benefit from our obedience and suffers no harm from our disobedience. This is because He brought us into existence by His attributes of Absolute Perfection and brought everything that we need before creating us. It is like when you say, 'So-and-so is a poet; this means that he was a poet before you heard him recite poetry, as he could not compose poetry unless he was already a poet.

Allah does not benefit in any way from people worshipping Him, as only people receive these benefits, as they have been created by Him. The one who makes something wants his product to be well and in the best possible state from its start to its end.

As the Divine Law has come for the benefit of mankind, whoever is guided does so for his own good, and whoever is misguided does so at his own peril: '...Whoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit, whoever strays away from it does so at his own peril...' (*az-Zumar:* 41). The prepositions used in this verse '*falinafsih*' and '*'alayha*' indicate that people will gain the benefit of guidance and the harm of disobedience.

Allah says: '...and you are not in charge of them.' (*az-Zumar:* 41) The word '*wakil*', which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means the person who is responsible for those over whom he has been appointed, so he can force them to do what he wants.

Allah did not want His Prophet to do this, as He says in another verse: '...and you are not to compel them…' (*Qaf:* 45). Rather, He wanted him to call to His way with wisdom so that the people would respond to his call out of their own free will. If Allah willed, He would create them like angels and make them obedient by nature.

Therefore, parts of the universe are wise and attentive, as they have been content to follow Allah's Commands without having any choice, as the one who takes a burden upon himself may be able to guarantee doing so when he takes it up, but cannot guarantee doing so at the time of implementation. People are caused to follow different paths in life as they had different levels of perception of their responsibility at the moment they took up the responsibility and the moment of implementation. All corruption that infects people's transactions with one another ultimately stems from this point.

We previously gave an example of a trust a person leaves with you until he returns from his travels and takes it back. However, when he returns and does not find it with you, then some circumstances arose that led you to make use of it. In the following verse, the wisdom of the inanimate elements of creation in refusing to take up the burden of the trust becomes apparent: 'Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

Allah's saying: '...you are not in charge of them...' (*az-Zumar:* 41) also reassures and consoles Messenger Muhammad, as He asks Messenger Muhammad not to burden himself in a manner that exceeded his ability. His only duty is to convey the Message. In addition, any harm he suffered would not lessen his standing amongst them, for they considered him to be truthful and trustworthy and knew that he was right. He had a great stature amongst them. Allah instructed him not to be sad because they said about him that he was a poet, a magician and a lunatic: 'We know that you, [O Muhammad], are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33)

Allah freed His Messenger of any responsibility and the wrongdoers rejected him only because they denied His signs.

ٱللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى ٱلۡأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوۡتِهَا وَٱلَّتِي لَمۡ تَمُتۡ فِي مَنَامِهَاۖ
فَيُمۡسِكُ ٱلَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيۡهَا ٱلۡمَوۡتَ وَيُرۡسِلُ ٱلۡأُخۡرَىٰٓ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ
مُّسَمًّىۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

God takes the souls of the dead and the souls of the living while they sleep – He keeps hold of those whose death He has ordained and sends the others back until their appointed time – there truly are signs in this for those who reflect [42]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 42)

We said previously that no one witnessed the process of creation since the Creator did not seek anyone’s help to do it, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken the misguiders as assistants.’ (*al-Kahf:* 51)

Therefore, the way that creation was brought into being is not known by anyone, unless the Creator had informed us of it, it would have remained hidden and unknown. If you want to know how creation took place, you must look to the reports of the One Who created the creation. If anyone claims to have knowledge through some means other than that, then they are from among those beings who lead men astray and whom Allah informs us about.

Allah *Glorified is He* names them misguided even before they came into existence. No misguidance could be greater than saying that man originated from apes that evolved.

Allah gave His created beings the immunisation that protects them from misguided people, as He tells us about them beforehand and warns us about them. In other words, He warns the believers against the misguided people who were in the guise of scientists or philosophers telling lies about how humans are created. Allah instructs the believers not to believe those misguided people because they did not witness the process of creation.

When Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* presents to us a complicated matter of which our intellects are only capable of grasping certain aspects, He completes our understanding of that matter by means of hearing from elsewhere. However, who do you hear from? From the one in whom you believe with your intellect. Therefore, it is not necessary for your mind to be convinced of everything; certain matters are left that you are convinced by, not by yourself, but rather by hearing about it from one whom you trust.

Therefore, we said at the beginning of the chapter of *Ya Sin* that matters fall into one of three categories: creeds, spoken matters, or rulings. An element of each of these can be grasped by the intellect, while another element remains unseen. However, the indications for those unseen matters lie in what can be grasped by the intellect.

When Allah tells us how the universe took place, He says man was created from earth mixed with water which then became clay. When clay dried, it became like pottery. Then Allah blew His spirit in him, and life pervaded him and he started to move.

None of us has ever seen these stages of creation about which the Creator informs us, but He brought into existence other physical things which we can perceive and which indicate to us the truth of what He has informed us with respect to these stages. We should derive proofs of the truthfulness of unseen matters from things we perceive.

As the Creator created life, He also created death. When He told us about them, He mentioned death first, saying: ‘[He] who created death and life...’ (*al-Mulk:* 2) He has mentioned death first so that we would not handle life with arrogance or delusion but would handle it while knowing that each of us will inevitably die. We should know that with respect to each individual human being, the span of this worldly life does not last from the time of Adam until the coming of the Final Hour, but it only lasts for the length of time he himself spends. One is not sure when his life will end, since there are people who are born and die an instant later, while others die after only a month and others die after the passage of many years.

One of the righteous people once said, ‘I have known that my life will end with death, so I have prepared myself for it. I have known that I could not escape Allah’s gaze for even the blinking of an eye, so I felt too embarrassed to disobey Him, and I have known that I will receive a certain provision that I will never miss and which Allah has guaranteed for me, so I feel content with it. This should be our attitude in life, for you will live for a limited time.’ Therefore, knowledgeable people say, ‘Thank the One Who bestows on you bounties permanently, obey the One Whom you cannot do without even for the blinking of an eye, submit to the One Whose kingdom and sovereignty you can never leave. These are basic rules we should live by and principles to which we should all hold firmly. As we said, death is the opposite of life; although we have never seen the stages of creation, we have seen the stages of death. Therefore, take from the later a proof of the former.

You know that the demolition of any building happens in an opposite way to the way it was built. For example, if we want to destroy a ten-storey building, we will start by destroying the tenth storey and finish by destroying the first storey, in the exact opposite manner to the order in which we built it. The same is the case with death; the process starts with the soul leaving the body which is the last stage in the process of creation. Then the body becomes hard and rigid so that it resembles sounding clay, then it rots and decays so that its smell changes, just like dark fetid mud, then it breaks and disintegrates, turning back into clay and dust.

Therefore, even if the process of creation is something unseen and hidden from us, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves…’ (*al-Kahf:* 51). We have witnessed the process of death.

Allah says: ‘Allah takes the souls of the dead...’ (*az-Zumar:* 42) The Arabic word ‘*anfus*’ is the plural of the word ‘*nafs*’ which is formed when the body combines with the soul and causes different states for the limbs. The physical body only is not called a ‘*nafs*’ and the soul on its own is not called a ‘*nafs*’.

The meaning of ‘*yatawaffal al-anfus’* is (take the souls) which occurs in two stages: sleep and death. During sleep, a person loses his consciousness and capacity to perceive, but his soul remains in his body to keep its vital functions running and keep him alive. When a person wakes up, his consciousness, awareness, and perception come back. However, as for death, Allah stops a person's consciousness, perception, and the source of life: the combination of body and soul. During sleep, the body does not engage in any action: even the brain, which must constantly remain working, only works every seven seconds.

When the body functions stop, the body's temperature drops and it requires to be warmed. Therefore, people are advised to cover up while sleeping, since the movement that normally keeps the body warm is missing and it is necessary for us to maintain the body's temperature. Some people think that the blanket warms up the sleeper, but the opposite is true, as the heat of the body warms up the blanket. The role of the blanket is to maintain the body's heat and prevent it from dissipating. The proof is that when you first go to bed you find it cold, but when you wake up in the morning you find it warm.

We have said that a person passes through different states in the course of his existence: wakefulness, sleep, death and resurrection, and each of these stages has its own set of rules which should not be mixed up with one another. For example, when one of us is asleep, he loses his consciousness and ability to distinguish things. However, when he wakes up, he still remembers his dreams and the shapes, people, and colours contained in his dreams and can distinguish between them in the same way as if he were awake. How can he perceive these things and distinguish between them when his eyes are closed?

Scientists said that the sleeper has faculties and a form of consciousness different than what he has when he is awake, as he sees but not with his eyes. Therefore, during sleep, a person has another form of consciousness. Some people are astonished that a single grave could contain two bodies, one of which is honoured and the other is punished, although they do not find this astonishing during sleep. When you sleep with another in a single bed, he may dream that he is on an enjoyable journey that includes all bounties, while you dream that you are being beaten or undergoing a painful experience and neither of you knows what the other is seeing.

Allah's saying: '...He keeps hold of those whose death He has ordained...' (*az-Zumar:* 42) means that the soul does not return to the body. The phrase

‘...sends the others back...’ (*az-Zumar:* 42) means that during sleep, consciousness and perception come back to you. And ‘... until their appointed time…’ (*az-Zumar:* 42) means until the time that Allah has decreed for your death and recorded in the Preserved Slate. So, ‘...there truly are signs in this for those who reflect.’ (*az-Zumar:* 42)

When you find one who tells you something that awakens your faculties of perception, such as the intellect and the abilities to think, remember and reflect, enabling you to distinguish between different statements, be sure that he has good advice for you and is not seeking to deceive you. This is because those who seek to cheat you try to rush you, so that you do not have an opportunity to reflect on matters.

We previously gave the cloth trader as an example. When he is truthful and knows that his goods are of good quality, he tests it for you, taking a tuft of wool, and burning it in front of you so that you can see that it is genuine wool. However, as for the cheating trader, he tries to use every trick he has to deceive you so that you do not discover how poor his goods are. The first trader is certain of the quality of his goods and that whatever you do you will eventually arrive at his desired aim.

When Allah says, ‘Then will you not reason?’, ‘Will you not remember?’ or ‘Will you not think?’ you should know that Allah urges your faculties of research, reflection and selection from different alternatives. He would not do that if He were not confident that were you to use those faculties you could come to no conclusion except for that which He desires of you.

أَمِ ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ شُفَعَآءَۚ قُلۡ أَوَلَوۡ كَانُواْ لَا يَمۡلِكُونَ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَا يَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
قُل لِّلَّهِ ٱلشَّفَٰعَةُ جَمِيعٗاۖ لَّهُۥ مُلۡكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ ثُمَّ إِلَيۡهِ تُرۡجَعُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Yet they take intercessors besides God! Say, ‘Even though these have no power or understanding?’[43] Say, ‘All intercession belongs to God alone; He holds control of the heavens and the earth; in the end you will all return to Him’[44] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 43 - 44)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Yet they take intercessors besides Allah…’ (*az-Zumar:* 43). The style used here expresses disapproval. In other words, it is not right for them to take others as intercessors alongside Allah. Allah rebukes them after they were shown the proofs and pieces of evidence; they take others as intercessors alongside Allah. However, why do they take intercessors besides Allah? Because those who take them imagine that they do so because they are devoutly religious. Religious devotion is part of human nature since Allah made His covenant with them, saying: '…Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

Messengers came as reminders that remind us of that first promise we made and which we have forgotten about. Read Allah's saying: 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware." Or [lest] you say, "It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?"' (*al-A'raf:* 171-173) Allah *Glorified is He* rebukes them for taking others as intercessors alongside Allah and calls them to leave that sorry matter behind since taking others as intercessors alongside Allah is contradictory, for who will they be interceding with? They would be interceding with Allah, as they themselves said: '…We who sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the Truth…' (*az-Zumar:* 3). Therefore, they take intercessors to intercede for them with Allah. However, why do they not worship Allah directly without any medium?

In addition, no intercession is accepted unless certain preconditions are met; not all people's intercessions are accepted, as it does not follow one's desires. However, Allah gives permission to the intercessor to intercede, and should be pleased with the one on whose behalf intercession is made, and this person should affirm the Oneness of Allah. Therefore, the intercession they hope for is futile and will not be accepted by Allah.

Why do they not worship Allah directly instead of having an intermediary? Some people said that worshipping Allah requires one to undertake certain responsibilities that are difficult and cumbersome and following Allah's religion requires one to submit to the restrictions of religious commands and prohibitions.

They wanted religiosity without responsibility, and gods who do not enjoin commands. In fact, they worshipped idols according to their whims, but whenever anything bad happened to them or they found themselves in difficult circumstances, they took refuge in Allah, the True Lord. Therefore, return to Allah before the time when returning to Him no longer benefits.

The word '*shafa'a*' includes '*shaf'*' and '*witr';* the former includes two '*witrs*', i.e. a pair.

We have said that the orientalists raised objections to two verses in the Book of Allah with regard to intercession, in an attempt to cast doubt on the level of eloquence of the Quran. Those two verses: 'Fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all, or will intercession be accepted from it, nor will compensation be taken from it, nor will they be aided.' (*al-Baqara:* 48) Allah also says: 'And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all and no compensation will be accepted from it, nor will any intercession benefit it, nor will they be aided.' (*al-Baqara:* 123)

The orientalists said, 'Which verse is more eloquent than the other? If one of them is eloquent then the other one is not eloquent. What is the wisdom behind bringing some words forward and others backward when they have the same meaning?' All these questions resulted from their misunderstanding of the Arabic language and lack of the necessary faculties to understand Allah's saying properly.

They have disregarded the first parts of the two verses: 'And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all…' (*al-Baqara:* 48). There are two types of souls: one who seeks to avail the other and intercede, and another for who is availed and interceded. Which of them is the intercessor and which is the one on whose behalf intercession is made? If you want to describe the one on whose behalf intercession is made, he is the one who puts the ransom forward first; if it is not accepted, he asks someone to make intercession for him. Allah says: '...no compensation will be accepted from it...' (*al-Baqara:* 123).

If you want to describe the intercessor, he is the one who first comes forward with his intercession and if it is not accepted, he puts forward the ransom on behalf of someone. Thus, both verses are equally eloquent, each according to the meaning it seeks.

The following verse: ‘Yet they take intercessors besides Allah …’ (*az-Zumar:* 43) begins with the word ‘*am*’ which connects the word that precedes it with the word that follows it. The meaning of the verse is: ‘Was that the case or did they take others as intercessors...?’ The words that precede ‘am’ (yet) are: ‘Allah takes the souls of the dead...’ (*az-Zumar:* 42). If you lost your life force and your ability to move around and make use of the means, you should know that Allah gives you an example for the death that awaits you in the shape of sleep which you experience daily.

Death is one thing and sleeping is something else; the One Who is able to take away life in the sense of taking away your consciousness and your ability to distinguish and interact with the outside world (i.e. interact with others) is able to take it away completely. This is because sleep takes away your consciousness and ability to distinguish the outside world, even if your body parts are able to move such as the beating of your heart and movement of the lungs and intestines...etc. If Allah is capable of letting you experience this partial death, then He is also capable of letting you experience real death.

This verse means: ‘Are you safe from that? If you are not safe from it, and you are going to die and meet Allah, then why do you take others as intercessors? What has urged you to do that? Did you take intercessors?’

We have said that the word ‘*shafi*’’ is derived from ‘*shaf*’’, which is joining one thing to another so that they form a pair after having been solitary. Allah wants to bring an end to this practice and clarifies that it is futile, so He informs them that those whom they call besides Allah do not have the capacity to intercede. Even if they have the capacity to intercede, like calling on the angels, Jesus or ‘Uzayr, they will refuse to intercede on your behalf.

If the intercessors are inanimate things, they are closer to Allah than you are, and have more knowledge of the bases of intercession, and so they will inevitably refuse and despise you if you own them and derive benefit from them. This is because these inanimate things are in perfect harmony with the universe and constantly glorify their Creator. Therefore, they refuse to accept anyone except the one who also glorifies Allah. These inanimate objects submit to your will because Allah has subjected them to you and given you a will by which you control them according to the Will and Command of Allah, just as you control your own limbs. You have controlled your tongue and used it to declare your disbelief, and you have controlled your hands and used them to strike down and tyrannise others...etc.

No one of them will consent to intercede on your behalf because you followed a different way to them. They hate you due to this, so how could they intercede for you? Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the heavens and the earth wept not for them...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29).

He ascribes to the heavens and earth the action of crying. If they will not cry for those who went against them, they will undoubtedly cry for those who shared the same belief and religious instructions. Therefore, the heavens, the earth, and other inanimate objects have the ability to differentiate. If not, they would not weep for obedient people and disobedient people.

There is a literary expression that says, 'The land does not agree with so-and-so' which means that it dislikes him staying on it. This is because he has rebelled against Allah and gone against His path while it glorifies Allah constantly and submits to Him. Therefore, it does not cry for him when he dies, but it is pleased that Allah has relieved it and His slaves from him.

Imam 'Ali explained this matter, saying, 'When a believer dies, two places weep for him: one place in the sky and one place on the earth. The place that weeps for him in the sky is the place where his good acts are raised up, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: "...and righteous work raises it..." (*Fatir:* 10). As for the place on the earth, it is the place on which he prays.'(1)

What made them confident and not fear death was the fact that they had taken others as intercessors and thought that those intercessors would defend them. However, their hopes would be dashed because the acceptance of an intercession does not lie in the hands of the intercessor, but it lies in the hands of the one to whom the intercession is made. Allah is the One Who gives permission to the intercessor and becomes pleased with the one on whose behalf the intercession is made. Do those with whom Allah is pleased require intercession?

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(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned in his Tafsir (4: 142) on the authority of Ibn Abu Hatim that 'Ubad ibn 'Andullah said that a man asked 'Ali Allah be pleased with him: 'Do the heavens and earth cry for anyone?' 'Ali replied, 'You have asked me something that no one else has ever asked. Every slave has a prayer place on the earth and a place through which his actions rise up in the sky. However, the people of Pharaoh did not have any good actions on the earth nor had they any actions that rose up through the sky.' Then 'Ali recited Allah's saying: 'And the heavens and the earth wept not for them, nor were they reprieved.' (ad-Dukhan: 29)*

Some people say that a person may have few good points, but if they fulfil the precondition of sincerity, Allah may let them grow and become more fruitful, and fix one's shortcomings by letting one of those whom He loves to intercede on his behalf. Allah would not legislate such a form of intercession unless He willed to accept it and relieve a person.

Thus, it was said, 'Beware of belittling any good action, no matter how small it may appear, as this action may be the cause of your salvation.'

It was narrated that Messenger Muhammad said, 'Allah conceals three things in three things: He conceals His pleasure in obedience to Him, so do not belittle any act of obedience, as Allah forgave a man who quenched the thirst of a dog that was gasping from thirst when he exerted effort to quench his thirst by taking off his leather sock and filling it with water.'(1) If this man had given water to another human being, we would have said that he had given it to him for a certain motive in mind, or because he had done him a favour. This proves that the action was sincere, for he did not benefit in any way from the dog nor did he expect to benefit. He loved to do favour regardless of the one who was receiving the favour. It was part of the man's nature to do good and not to be concerned with the person for whom the favour was done.

The second: 'Allah conceals His Anger in disobedience to Him. A woman entered the fire for a cat which she confined. She had neither provided the cat with food nor drink, nor set her free so that she might eat the insects of the earth.'(1) Therefore, just as you must not belittle any act of obedience, since it might be the cause of your salvation, you should not belittle any act of disobedience, since it may be the cause of your destruction.

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'While a man was walking along the road, he became very thirsty and saw a well to which he went down and drank his fill. Then when he went, he came across a dog which was so thirsty that it was gasping and eating the soil. Thus, the man said to himself, "This dog is as thirsty as I was earlier." So he descended to the well, filled his leather sock with water, took hold of it with his mouth, and gave water to the dog. Thus, Allah was thankful for him and forgave him.' They said, 'O Messenger of Allah, do we get a reward for what we do with animals?' He replied, 'There is a reward for serving any animate.' It is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (10/438), (Hadith no. 6009); Muslim in his Book on Greetings, chapter on the virtues of giving food and water to animals unlawful to eat (411/ Hadith (153/2244)).*

The third: 'He conceals His secrets in His creation, so do not belittle any creature.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Even though these have no power or understanding...' (*az-Zumar:* 43). The word 'these' refers to the intercessors, so how can they ask for their intercession when they are like this? This is because intercession cannot happen except by Allah's permission, as He allows the intercessor to intercede and gets pleased with the one for whom the intercession is made. Intercession belongs to Allah, since: '...He holds control of the heavens and the earth; in the end you will all return to Him.' (*az-Zumar:* 44) Those who are arrogant and refuse to follow Allah's Path will return to Him.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ ٱللَّهُ وَحۡدَهُ ٱشۡمَأَزَّتۡ قُلُوبُ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۖ
وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ إِذَا هُمۡ يَسۡتَبۡشِرُونَ ٤٥

Whenever God is mentioned on His own, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with aversion, but they rejoice when gods other than Him are mentioned [45]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 45)

The word *ishma'azzat* means to recoil and have aversion. When a person hears something he does not like, he *yashma'izzu*, meaning, that an expression of annoyance appears on his face, and he displays aversion and shudders gloomily, then, he moves away from that thing. This is similar to the state of those whose selves feel aversion when they hear Allah *Glorified is He* being mentioned alone, and shut themselves off from affirming The Oneness of

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(1) *It is related by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/261, 269 & 457); and Muslim in his Sahih (2619) in the Book on virtue and enjoining good manners from the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him and the wording of Muslim, 'A woman was punished in Hell because of a cat which she had confined until it died. She did not give it anything to eat or to drink when it was confined, nor did she free it so that it might eat the vermin of the earth, so it died from weakness.'*

Allah *Glorified is He*. Why is this? Scholars said because you have reminded them of the one whom they are certain has the capacity to bring them harm, or benefit. If that was not the case and they did not have that certainty, then the mentioning of Allah *Glorified is He* would have had no effect on them whatsoever. So, their hearts recoiled and shuddered because they were afraid of something. In the moment that they heard the mention of Allah *Glorified is He* they were reminded of His majesty, power, and immensity, and they were reminded that they were heading towards Him and would stand before Him, yet, they had not done anything to prepare themselves for that standing.

The Word: '...alone...' (*az-Zumar:* 45) indicates their inclination towards assigning Him partners. What this means is this: if those partner gods were to be mentioned, their hearts would not have recoiled in aversion. The recoiling of the heart in aversion is something that cannot be seen but which leaves its mark upon the face; for a pained expression appears upon the face as a result of it. The verse does not mention why their hearts recoiled, and that is one of the things that indicate that the heart is the motor that influences the rest of the limbs of the body and brings about a physical response in them. For example, when you meet one person, you find yourself happy, and when you meet another, you find yourself concerned and recoiling. What causes these responses? It is the heart.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...but when those besides Him are mentioned...' (*az-Zumar:* 45), i.e. the partner gods they associate with Him, '...they rejoice.' (*az-Zumar:* 45), i.e. they are delighted. Why? Because they think that they will intercede on their behalf. In fact, they will be disappointed in both, this life and the Hereafter. Allah then says:

قُلِ ٱللَّهُمَّ فَاطِرَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ عَٰلِمَ ٱلْغَيْبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ أَنتَ
تَحْكُمُ بَيْنَ عِبَادِكَ فِى مَا كَانُوا۟ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Say, 'God! Creator of the heavens and earth! Knower of all that is hidden and all that is open, You will judge between Your servants regarding their differences'[46] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 46)

This is a command from Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after mentioning His promise to the people of good and His threat to the people of evil—and indeed both groups received, in full, what had been promised them. Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, after you have conveyed My promise and threat, there is nothing more for you to do than to take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He*. He alone is The One Who will judge between you and them, for you have exhausted all the avenues of calling them to Islam in the best way and conveying the message beautifully. As long as they remain insistent upon unbelief, let them be until the Day of Judgement when Allah *Glorified is He* will judge between you and them.

‘Do not be sad, Muhammad, for Allah *Glorified is He* judges only according to the truth. You can be certain that He is The One Who chose you for the Message and that He will aid you and give victory to your religion. You will witness that victory in this world before the Hereafter.’ Indeed, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did see that victory come to pass before his death.

Read Allah’s words: ‘Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders,’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41) i.e. ‘We will decrease the size of the land of disbelief.’ A decrease in the land of disbelief means an increase in the size of the land of belief. This was a sign they witnessed with their own eyes for Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do they not see...’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41)? So they should have paid heed, taken a lesson from it, stopped their stubborn opposition, and known that Allah *Glorified is He* indeed gives victory to His religion and fulfils His Commands. Every day that passed, the land of belief was expanding and the land of disbelief was shrinking, and the freedmen, slaves, and poor people were all going over to Muhammad. Then, after them came the leaders, notables and nobility.(1)

The True Lord teaches His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and teaches us how to call on Him, saying: ‘Say…’ (*az-Zumar:* 46)

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(1) *This is the position adopted by the majority of the commentators of the Quran. Ibn ‘Abbas may Allah be pleased with him said, ‘Have they not seen that We have opened up land after land to Muhammad.’ Ibn Kathir mentioned a number of opinions in his Tafsir 2/520 including a decrease in the land’s inhabitants and its blessing, meaning a decrease in its people and fruits by the land becoming barren, and death, meaning the death of its people of knowledge, jurists and people of good.’ Then he said, ‘The first opinion is the best one, and that is that it refers to Islam overcoming unbelief village by village.’*

O Muhammad: *'Allahumma'* '…Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 46) Sa'id ibn Al-Musayyib(1) said: I have not found a verse in the Quran which gives the one who supplicates more hope than Allah's words: 'Say, "Allah! Creator of the heavens and earth"…' (*az-Zumar:* 46). Allah *Glorified is He* would not have taught Him to make that supplication unless He had predetermined that He was going to answer that supplication. So, the True Lord did not leave His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make supplications using his own words. Rather, He taught him the wording with which to supplicate for He must have ordained the acceptance for those supplications. Similarly, if a man were to give you the key to a place that means that he did not mind your getting into the place.

Here, we should take some time to look and reflect on the magnificence of the rhetorical composition and the immensity of the supplication found in the word *Allahumma* which basically is the Majestic Name *Allah* with a doubled *mim* attached to the end of it, in order to make it vocative. We know that a vocative or a call is in order to request the person addressed to appear in the presence of the speaker, and that there are well-known particles which are used in the vocative according to how near or how far away the person addressed is from the speaker. For example, when the person addressed is close by, we say: '*AMohammed'*; when he is far away, we say, *'ya Mohammed'*; and when he is very far away, we say, *'Aya Mohammed'*...etc.

So, the vocative particle itself defines the place where the one called on is. So, is it then permissible to use these particles when calling on the True Lord, saying, for example, '*ya* Allah!' It is good manners with Allah *Glorified is He* not to call on Him as we call on others since He is closer to us than our jugular veins. It would not be appropriate to say, '*ya* Allah!' or '*aya* Allah!', for these are degrees of being far away and Allah *Glorified is He* is close by.

Therefore, you will never find the Quran using these vocative particles in supplications, but instead only using *allahumma*, to teach us to use it in our supplications. The doubled *mim* (mm) at the end of *allahumma* takes the place of the vocative particles that appear before the addressee, meaning that the *mim* is a substitute for the deleted vocative particle. The doubled *mim* indicates that it is a vocative and indicates your humbleness while requesting.

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(1) *What is mentioned in the Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi 8/5910 is that the one who made this statement was Said ibn Jubayr and the wording of it was, 'Truly I know a verse which no one has ever recited and then asked Allah Glorified is He for something except that Allah Glorified is He has answered his request.'*

If we make a thorough investigation of the Noble Quran, we find that the word *Allah* appears 985 times in the *marfu'* case, and it is not used for supplication except in the form *allahumma* in five places. Those places are: this verse that we are currently commenting on; then, the verse in which Allah says: 'Say: 'Allahumma, holder of all control. You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will...' (*Al-'Imran:* 26). Then, Allah's words: 'Jesus, son of Mary, said, "Allahumma, send down to us a feast from heaven so that we can have a festival—the first and last of us—and a sign from You. Provide for us: You are the best provider.'' (*al-Ma'ida:* 114) Also in another verse Allah says: 'They also said, "Allahumma, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment."' (*al-Anfal:* 32)

And finally, Allah's words: 'Their prayer in them will be, "Glory be to You, Allahumma!" their greeting, "Peace," and the last part of their prayer, "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds."' (*Yunus:* 10)

By contrast, when He is called upon by His attribute of Lordship, we do say, '*ya rabb'* (O Lord!). Thus, there is a difference between calling on Him by means of His majestic name, 'Allah,' and calling on Him by the word indicating Lordship, 'Lord', for Divinity implies responsibility, while Lordship implies giving and withholding. So long as the Lord is the Bestower of blessings, we say when we address Him, '*ya rabb'* (O Lord!), since Lordship implies bringing something that does not exist into existence and providing nurturing and aid. You, human, are the beneficiary when it comes to the gifts of Lordship. But as for Divinity, it is making you responsible for doing things by the commands through 'Do' and 'Do not do'.

As for the word *Fatir*, it means the Creator, Originator, and the Bringer into existence what did not exist in a manner that had never previously been done. In other words, a new and original creation was created. If someone creates something following a previously existing pattern, i.e. creating a replica, then he is not called a *Fatir*.

As for the words: '...the heavens and the earth…' (*az-Zumar:* 46), He chose the heavens and the earth since they are things in existence that are not hidden from any human being: the earth bears him and the sky shades him. Both are with him constantly at every moment of his life. There are other blessings that might be hidden from people at various different times, such as water, for example.

In '...Knower of all that is hidden and all that is open…' (*az-Zumar:* 46), Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us of His knowledge of the unseen, but how can He remind us of His knowledge of the seen when that is something that is known to all people by sight?

Scholars said: because Allah is *ghayb* (unseen). We might understand from the word *al-ghayb* (the unseen) that it is just like what is *al-ghayb* (the unseen) with respect to us. We can see those who are with us in our homes, but do not see those who are outside. So, what is outside is *ghayb* to us. By contrast, the True Lord knows the *al-ghayb* (the unseen), knows those seen things that are unseen by you and knows those things that are seen by you as well as others.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...You will judge between Your servants regarding their differences.' (*az-Zumar:* 46) This is a reference to the final court which will settle the dispute between truth and falsehood: the Day of Victory which these people are waiting for and telling you to bring quickly. Indeed, they speak mockingly about it, as is shown by the words the True Lord mentions them saying: '...bring us the punishment you threaten.' (*al-A'raf:* 70)

They also said: 'And they say, "When will this Decision be, if you are telling the truth?"' (*as-Sajda:* 28) So the True Lord replies to them, saying: 'Say, "On the Day of Decision it will be no use for the disbelievers to believe; they will be granted no respite,"' (*as-Sajda:* 29) meaning: 'When that day does come, you will never be able to come back here again to find belief or repent.'

We notice, here, that the Quran uses the word *ibad* (servants) to refer to both groups: the believers and unbelievers. This word, *ibad* (servants) is normally only used for those who are obedient and hold firm to Allah's Program, as in Allah's words: 'The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, "Peace",' (*al-Furqan:* 63) so can the unbelievers and the disobedient also be called 'servants'?

Scholars said: Yes, because a human being has two sets of positions with respect to his Lord. In one of those he has freedom of choice, i.e. the capacity to choose which Allah *Glorified is He* created in the human being such that he can do what he wants, even to do what his Lord does not want him to do. In the other, he does not have freedom of choice, and that is in all those things which are compelling and about which the servant has no choice.

If a human being, for example, were to rebel against his Lord's Way, oppose it or deviate from it, we would say to him: 'If it is your custom to rebel, then rebel against everything. Rebel against illness, rebel against death... etc.' However, he will not be able to do so, since those are matters that are compelled upon him and about which he has no choice. In this condition of his, he is controlled by his servant-hood since he is compelled, and he cannot get away from being a servant of Allah *Glorified is He* even when he is an unbeliever. When we call the unbelievers 'servants,' it is because in one aspect of their conduct they cannot reject Allah's will, owing to their being compelled.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about them in the Hereafter: '...Was it you [false gods] who led these creatures of mine astray, or did they go astray from the path by themselves?' (*al-Furqan:* 17)

These words are addressed to those who lead others astray, and in it those who are astray are referred to as 'servants'. Why is that? Because this statement is made in the Hereafter when all are equal, for every single person there is obedient, right acting and a believer. In the Hereafter they are all '*ibad* (those who are given the ability to choose and they choose to obey Allah) and *'abid* (those who are compelled to accept Allah's will), whereas here, in this world, everyone is '*abid,* while only some are '*ibad*.

وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ مَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُۥ مَعَهُۥ لَٱفْتَدَوْا۟ بِهِۦ مِن سُوٓءِ
ٱلْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ ۚ وَبَدَا لَهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يَكُونُوا۟ يَحْتَسِبُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

If the evildoers possessed the earth's assets twice over they would offer them to ransom themselves from the terrible suffering on the Day of Resurrection: God will show them something they had not reckoned with [47] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 47)

You remember that we said—when we were talking about intercession—that wrongdoers who turn aside from their Lord try to pay a ransom so that they will be forgiven, but that ransom is not accepted from them? Then, they bring someone forth to intercede on their behalf, but their intercession is not accepted. Let us suppose that one of these guys possessed the world in its entirety and presented it to Allah *Glorified is He* as a ransom in exchange for his wrong actions. No, let us suppose that he had even more than that, that he possessed the world with everything in it: '...and the like of it with it...' (*az-Zumar:* 47). We know that no person will ever have such a thing, but just supposing that a disobedient person did have such a thing and were to put it all forward in order to ransom himself from the punishment of the Day of Judgement, it would not be accepted from him.

Allah's words: '...they would [attempt to] ransom themselves thereby from the terrible punishment on the Day of Resurrection...' (*az-Zumar:* 47) indicate that before a person seeks to guarantee himself eternal bliss, he first tries to save himself from the punishment – that is the most important thing to him. That is why the conceited man who owned two gardens, mentioned in the chapter of *al-Kahf,* when he became dazzled by his work and thought it was righteous, said: '...even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there,' (*al-Kahf:* 36) meaning, 'He will give me, then, that which is even better than what I had.' That is the very height of vanity, and we take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that.

Therefore, rich people say when they are afflicted by serious illness—and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that—'Take everything I own and bring me my good health back!' The first thing he wants to do is rid himself of illness, just like the people of disobedience in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... from terrible punishment ...' (*az-Zumar:* 47) meaning from the bad punishment: '... on the Day of Resurrection ...' (*az-Zumar:* 47). Then, He surprises them with something they had not reckoned on: '...And there will appear to them from Allah that which they had not taken into account' (*az-Zumar:* 47). The word *bada* means 'appeared to them', and that is because no matter how broad a person's imagination is in this world, it will never be broad enough to encompass what Allah *Glorified is He* will bring forth in the Hereafter.

Muhammad ibn Al-Munkadir(1) (a prominent *tabi'i* and reciter of the Quran, transmitted a number of Hadith) said, 'This verse has filled me with fear because I am afraid that when I die, there will appear to me that which I have not reckoned on.'(2) That is because people often commit wrong actions without being aware that they have done so, or without knowing that they are wrong actions. They might, also, do them and then forget about them, which is what Allah *Glorified is He* refers to when He says: '...Allah has taken account of it all, though they may have forgotten...' (*al-Mujadala:* 6).

Satan might embellish your wrong actions and make them seem good to you when there is nothing good about them. All of these are things with which you might be taken by surprise in the Hereafter.

The first thing that surprises the unbelievers on the Day of Rising is that they do not find, there, the gods whom they worshipped apart from Allah *Glorified is He* and nor will there be anyone to intercede on their behalf. Even their leaders and masters who led them astray will wash their hands of them: 'When those who have been followed disown their followers, when they all see the suffering, when all bonds between them are severed.' (*al-Baqara:* 166)

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(1) *He is Abu Abdullah Al-Qurashi Al-Madani Muhammad ibn Al-Munkadir ibn 'Abdullah, one of the well-springs of truthfulness around whom the right-acting people gathered. He was a hafizh and the lord of the reciters, and there was a consensus regarding him being trustworthy and one of the foremost scholars and men of action. He died in the year 130 AH Tadhkirat Al-Hufazh 1/127 & 128.*

(2) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned this statement in his Tafsir 8/5911 and said that Muhammad ibn Al-Munkadir became very anxious as he was approaching death so that was why he was so anxious. He replied, 'I fear a verse from the Book of Allah Glorified is He: "...for something with which they had not reckoned before will (by then) have been made obvious to them by Allah Glorified is He." (az-Zumar: 47) I am afraid that there will appear to me that which I have not reckoned on.' This was also mentioned by Adh-Dhahabi in Tadhkirat Al-Hufadh 1/127.*

More than that, those leaders who led them astray will precede them to the fire, as is mentioned in the Quran: '[It will be said], "Here is another crowd of people rushing headlong to join you." [The response will be], "They are not welcome! They will burn in the Fire."* They will say to them, "You are not welcome! It was you who brought this on us, an evil place to stay,"* adding, "Our Lord, give double punishment to those who brought this upon us."' (*Sad:* 59-61)

If the follower were to have gone into the fire before his master, his thoughts would immediately have fixed on to him and he would have thought that he was going to come and save him. Instead, he will enter the fire and find that he preceded him there, thereby dashing his hopes and making his sorrow and regret all the more complete.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَبَدَا لَهُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا۟ وَحَاقَ بِهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

**The evil of their deeds will become plain to them,
and they will be overwhelmed by that at which
they used to laugh [48] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 48)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and there will become plain to them...' (*az-Zumar:* 48), i.e their *sayyi'at* (the evil of their deeds) will appear and become clear to them, but is what appears to them in the Hereafter their wrong deeds or the punishment for those deeds?

Scholars said: 'That which they will see in the Hereafter is the consequences and the punishment for their wrong deeds. The True Lord says: '…and there will become plain to them the evil of their deeds…' (*az-Zumar:* 48) because the punishment they will receive will be of the same kind as their wrong deeds. The punishment will also be in the form of wrong deeds, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: 'And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it...' (*ash-Shura:* 40) since the meaning of *sayyi'ah* is any matter which grieves. So, just as he did evil things in this world, We will do what will grieve him in the Hereafter.

As for the words: *'ma iktasabu'* (literally: that which they earned), '...their deeds…' (*az-Zumar:* 48), we previously clarified this matter, saying that the Quran uses the form *kasaba* for good deeds and *iktasaba* for bad deeds, since good deeds come naturally to the human being and do not require any artifice or affectation on his part. That' is why the morphological form *fa'ala* (did) is used. As for evil, it necessitates that the one who does it to engage in artifice, simulation, and covering things up and that is why they use a form for it that expresses fabrication, namely *iktasaba* upon the morphological form *ifta'ala* (fabricated).

The example we gave for that was that of a man who looks upon women of his household or unmarriageable kin, who might be really beautiful, yet, when he looks upon them, he looks at them naturally, not seeking to conceal his look and fearing nothing from them. By contrast, if he were to want to look at a beautiful woman outside of his family circle, he would do so surreptitiously, using all his wiles and artifice.

Why then does the Quran use the word *kasaba* here when it is wrong deeds that are being referred to, and as we clarified earlier, *iktasaba* is the word that is normally used for them? Another similar usage is found in Allah's words: '…those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins...' (*al-Baqara:* 81).

Scholars said, 'The Quran uses the word *kasaba* for wrong deeds when the one who does them has become so accustomed to doing them that they have become second nature to him: they have become a habit and everyday custom. Not just that, but he has become so skilled at them that he boasts about them—and we take refuge in Allah from that. Such people do wrong deeds without constraint and without feeling the need to cover them up. So, for them it is *kasb* (did) and not *iktisab* (did by the use of artifice). They are much like the criminals who become so accustomed to crime that it becomes their profession. For them, doing crime is a natural everyday process. When, a wrongdoer does a wrong deed, it is considered a gain by him.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and they will be overwhelmed...' (*az-Zumar:* 48). That is it will descend upon them: '…by that at which they used to laugh.' (*az-Zumar:* 48) The meaning of this is made clear by the True Lord elsewhere when He says: 'The wicked used to laugh at the believers—they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them, joke about them when they got back to their own people, and say, when they saw them, "These people are misguided," though they were not sent to be their keepers—so today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?'" (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36)

Yes, we often see and hear the mocking and ridicule that the people of falsehood direct at the people of truth and the jokes they make of them, until in the end they even accuse them of being astray—Glory be to Allah! However, the people of truth take comfort in the fact that this ridicule is something that happens to them in this transient world and that, if they bear it with patience, they will be rewarded, and will return that ridicule and mockery in the everlasting Hereafter. The people of truth will mock the people of falsehood and laugh at them. Even more, the True Lord will address the people of truth to reassure them, saying: 'Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36) This means: 'Have We been able to fully recompense them in the manner that they deserve?'

Scholars said that evil people mock and ridicule good people in order to gain revenge for them being good—it is only because they are unable and are incapable of being like them that they ridicule and mock them, with the intention of causing them to leave their goodness behind and come over to evil. Those with intellects understand this matter and know that this ridicule is simply a manifestation of rancour, spite, and envy. So, they bear it with patience, knowing that for every time they are mocked or ridiculed they will attain to a new station with Allah *Glorified is He* and will be compensated.

فَإِذَا مَسَّ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلْنَٰهُ نِعْمَةً مِّنَّا قَالَ إِنَّمَآ أُوتِيتُهُۥ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍۭ ۚ بَلْ هِىَ فِتْنَةٌ
وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾ قَدْ قَالَهَا ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَمَآ أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

When man suffers some affliction, he cries out to Us, but when We favour him with Our blessing, he says, 'All this has been given to me because of my knowledge'– it is only a test, though most of them do not know it [49] Those who lived before them said the same. What they did was of no use to them [50] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 49 - 50)

We have seen the polytheists, who took others as gods alongside Allah *Glorified is He* and said: 'We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us closer to Allah...', yet, when something difficult happens to them in their lives and they find themselves unable to cope with it, they do not take refuge in their idols nor in their gods that they worship instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. Instead, they take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* and beg Him to relieve them of their difficulties and take away their afflictions. Why is that? This is due to the fact that this is the wholesome, natural disposition Allah instilled in mankind, and that is the covenant that Allah *Glorified is He* made with us when we were in the world of atomic potential when Allah *Glorified is He* said to us: '… "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness."…' (*al-A'raf:* 172). A human being does not deceive himself or give himself up. So when he is beset by evil and hardship that he does not have the means at his disposal to ward off, he says, 'O my Lord!', and for that moment forgets his arrogance, stubborn opposition and rejection of the Messengers. In that moment, he finds no one but his Lord and Creator, the sole Divinity that he worships.

Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truly when He says: 'When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him desert you, but when He brings you back safe to land you turn away: man is ever ungrateful.' (*al-Isra':* 67)

We notice also that when a human being finds himself in a predicament from which he is not able to extricate himself on his own, he calls on those around him to help. Then, if no one responds to his cry for help, he says, '*ya hu*', which means, *'ya huwa'* 'O He! O the One Who there is no deity but Him!' Of course, by that he means Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...but when We favor him...' (*az-Zumar:* 49), i.e. We give him: '...with Our blessing, he says, "All this has been given to me because of my knowledge"…' (*az-Zumar:* 49), meaning: if We grant him a blessing, after this pain and affliction has befallen him, he will all too quickly forget and return to being conceited and deluded by life. This is because he fears that the removal of the affliction will bring him close to his Lord whom he called upon and that this favour, which caused him to take refuge in his Lord, will bring him back to the Straight Path, and thus propel him to go straight.

Straightness brings with it obligations and responsibilities that he hates, and he does not want to restrict himself in this way, since obligations would entail self-restraint and depriving the self from its vain desires, as well as propel one's self to bear the burdens of obedience. He is afraid that this will captivate him or limit his freedom of indulging his desires. It is for this reason that the True Lord says about prayer: '...this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble.' (*al-Baqara:* 45)

As for the statement: '…all this has been given to me because of my knowledge…' (*az-Zumar:* 49), there are two interpretations to it. Either, what he says means: 'It is because I know from Allah that I deserve this blessing for, if not, He would not have given it to me'—this if he believes that Allah is the One Who gives—or what he says means: 'It is because of the knowledge I possess, for I possess the necessary skill and acumen to deal with things, and I have experience and knowledge and I am the kind of person who studies the consequences and results.'

Then, his Lord corrects him saying: '...it is only a test…' (*az-Zumar:* 49) meaning: 'this blessing is a trial from Allah *Glorified is He* and is not because of Allah knowing that you deserve it nor because of your own knowledge and skill. It '...is only a test…' (*az-Zumar:* 49) meaning a test and a trial.' It is just as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...And We test you with evil and with good as trial…' (*al-Anbiya':* 35) meaning: 'We test with the bad in order to see who has patience, and We test with the good in order to see who will be thankful and who will transgress.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and We have made some of you a trial for others; will you bear patiently? And your Lord is ever seeing.' (*al-Furqan:* 20) This means that each group of us is a trial for another: the rich is a test for the poor; the strong is a test for the weak, and the reverse is also true. The True Lord does this in order to test His creation and sees who will endure patiently and who will feel anxiety and despair; who will be grateful and who will be ungrateful; and who will be content and who will feel indignant.

So, every human being should move in his life in whatever condition Allah puts him in for everything that Allah chooses for him is good. So, if you see someone else with a blessing that you do not have, you should know that although Allah *Glorified is He* has favoured that person over you, still by bearing patiently what Allah *Glorified is He* has inscribed for you and not holding rancour in your heart towards your brother, you can become even better than him.

The verse is concluded with Allah's words: '...though most of them do not know it,' (*az-Zumar:* 49) i.e. these realities that are mentioned here are something of which the vast majority are unaware. In other words, only very few people know them.

Then, the True Lord makes it clear that this is not something theoretical, but rather something factual–a thing that has a historical basis and has actually happened to previous peoples: 'Those who lived before them said the same. What they did was of no use to them.' (*az-Zumar:* 50) Yes, indeed, for Qarun said it: '… "this [wealth] was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess"…' (*al-Qasas:* 78).

We say: 'As long as you have been given it by virtue of knowledge, regardless of whether that was Allah's knowledge of your being worthy of that blessing, or your own personal knowledge and expertise when it comes to work and handling things, then the blessing lies at your disposal. All you have to do is look after it and preserve it. As we all know, looking after something you already have is easier than bringing it into existence from nothing. Can you preserve it? That is to say: 'We are not speaking theoretically, but rather I am telling you of something that is a fact backed up by history. Qarun, in his self-delusion, said it. Then We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling.'

This gives rise to another matter: if you had truly been given on the virtue of your knowledge, then use that knowledge to preserve and hold on to it. If the small matter of holding on to it proves impossible for you, as is the case, then you will have even less capacity to bring it into being.

Yes, indeed! ''Those who lived before them said the same. What they did was of no use to them.' (*az-Zumar:* 50) Allah *Glorified is He* caused the earth to swallow Qarun and his dwelling, too. So, it was not just the blessing and wealth that left him, but the vengeance even extended to the place within which he lived, spent his nights, and rested.

فَأَصَابَهُمۡ سَيِّـَٔاتُ مَا كَسَبُواْۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ مِنۡ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ
سَيُصِيبُهُمۡ سَيِّـَٔاتُ مَا كَسَبُواْ وَمَا هُم بِمُعۡجِزِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

They suffered its evil effects. Today's wrongdoers will also suffer the evil effects of their deeds: they will not escape [51] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 51)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They suffered its evil effects...' (*az-Zumar:* 51), i.e. all those who preceded them in saying these words suffered the evil effects of their wrong deeds. In other words, they brought that upon themselves. We did not wrong them in any way, but rather, it was they who wronged themselves. '...Today's wrongdoers...' (*az-Zumar:* 51), i.e. contemporaries: '...will also suffer the evil effects of their deeds: they will not escape.' (*az-Zumar:* 51)

The *mu'jiz* is one who does something by which he challenges you, and you prove unable of doing something similar. That is why we call any sign—that proves that the Messengers are truly conveying what Allah revealed to them—a *mu'jiza*, (miracle). It is called *mu'jiza* because it confounds those who reject the Messengers since they are unable to do the same. As for those who believe simply upon hearing the Message and affirming it as being true there and then, they do not require any miracles. One of the conditions of a miracle is that it be accompanied by a challenge. Why is this? Scholars said: because when you challenge him, and tell him that you are going to do something that he is unable to do, you provoke his talents and faculties to prepare for the confrontation. Only then you can establish a proof against him. By contrast, if you take him by surprise with the challenge, he, then, has the right to say to you: 'By Allah, if I were to contemplate on the matter or give it much attention, I could have been able to do it.' Thus, *mu'jiz* means that it makes an opponent feel incapable of keeping up with the challenge.

We have said before about a *mu'jizah* (miracle) that it has to match the field of excellence of those to whom the message was sent, as well as the age in which the challenge is laid down. Surely, if you were to challenge a people to do something which they had no knowledge of or experience in, they could easily respond by saying: 'If we had had knowledge of this matter, we could have done it ourselves.' Otherwise, the challenge would not make any sense.

The Noble Quran gives us a perfect example of how a challenge should be when it challenges the Arabs—a people who excelled in the fine use of language and its rhetorical devices—to produce something like the Quran. When we reflect on this challenge, we find that it lowers the bar bit by bit. Each time it lowers the bar, the degree of miraculousness increases. First, it challenged them to produce something like the Quran. Then, it challenged them to produce ten chapters like it. Finally, it challenged them to produce only a single chapter like it.

It did not end there, for the challenge extended beyond men to the jinn. Despite the fact that the Arabs were a nation of eloquence and fine words, still they attributed an even greater command of language and degree of eloquence to the jinn. Proof of this is evident in their response whenever a poet became prominent or excelled in the profession, for they used to say, 'The jinn have inspired him and revealed those meanings to him.' They believed that those jinn lived in the valley of Abqar.(1)

Therefore, the Quran extends the challenge outside the circle of man to include the circle of jinn, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other."' (*al-Isra':* 88) *Zhahiran* means: helping and supporting each other.

That is why the miracle of Moses *peace be upon him* was in the form of magic, since it was in that field that his people excelled. Likewise, the miracle of Jesus *peace be upon him* was to heal the blind and the leper by the permission of Allah *Glorified is He* since it was in the field of medicine in which his people excelled.

Allah's words: *'wama hum bimu'jizin'* '...they will not escape,' (*az-Zumar:* 51) mean: 'they will not be able to run away or escape the punishment, since they had done things that merited punishment, and when we take them to be punished, they will not be able to make Us incapable. In other words, they will not be able to escape from Us.’ As a human, when your opponent is in the same place with you and at your disposal, he can still escape from you and go somewhere else. By contrast, when it comes to the True Lord, He is in every place. If that is not so, then show me a place in which the True Lord is not there! Then how can there be any escape from Him? Where can you go? If you stay there with Him, He will not be unable to take you, and if you flee from Him, He will not be unable to bring you to Him.

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(1) *Ibn Al-Athir said, 'Abqar is, according to what they claimed, a village in which the jinn lived. So whenever they saw someone do something strange or which was very difficult or which required a lot of expertise and precision or something they saw as being incredible, they attributed it to that place and called that person 'Abqari. Then the word came into wider usage and every master or great person came to be called it.' Narrated by Ibn Manzur in Lisan Al-'Arab - subject matter Abqara.*

أَوَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ
إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Do they not know that God provides abundantly
for anyone He will and gives sparingly to anyone
He will? There truly are signs in this for those
who believe [52] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 52)

Because Qarun was so deluded by his wealth and fame and by the great riches and wealth he had among his people that he said: ‘…this [wealth] was given to me on account of the knowledge I possess.’ (*al-Qasas:* 78) The True Lord wants to set the picture straight for him and those like him, so He says: ‘Do they not know that Allah extends provision for whom He wills and restricts [it]?’ (*az-Zumar:* 52) *Yabsut* means that He gives abundantly to whomsoever He wills, while *yaqdur* means that He restricts and straitens the provision of whomsoever He wills. It is just as we say, ‘He gives provision to those who are without resources so that those who have resources may be amazed.’ So provision does not come to you on the basis of your expertise or skill at acquiring things, but rather, it is something that has been decreed for you by the Provider Himself.

It has been narrated in a Qudsi Hadith that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O son of Adam..., O son of Adam! I created you to worship Me. So do not play. I have already set your share of sustenance, so do not make yourself tired (tire your heart with worry). If you are content with what I have allocated for you, I will bring comfort (peace) to your heart and body. And you will be praised by Me. On the other hand, if you are not content with what I have allocated for you, I swear with My Glory and Might I will set the world loose on you, where you will run just like the animals run in the wild. And you will still not get more than what I originally allocated for you, and you will be censured by Me.'(1)

It is the Provider Who assigns provision–no degree of expertise, no superior intellect, nor is good planning required. That is why Abu Al- 'Atahiyya(2) said:

The fool may be given abundant provision,
While you see a smart man impoverished and in difficulty (3)

The True Lord gives provision to man from where he least expects it. Therefore, the story is told of a shepherd who was walking along the road when he tripped over a stone. Under that stone, he found a well. He began to feel around in the well to discover what was in it. He found something that made a rattling noise like the noise of gold or silver moving around it. So, he looked into it and found a sack full of gold and silver, and he took from it as much as would fit into his pockets and as much as he could carry in his arms. He left the rest in a place that he knew well so that he could come back and take from it whenever he had the need.

After a period of time had passed, the sum that he had taken ran out, so he went back to the same place to take more of the money, but found that someone else had come before him and took everything that remained. Then, when he saw him carrying the money on his back, he looked at him. So the man said, 'Allah bestowed on me as provision that which you thought was yours, but in fact it is mine.'

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(1) I found something similar to this in the Musnad of Ahmad 5/24, for he transmitted in a Hadith from Arfaja Ibn Asad that Allah *Glorified is He* tests His slave by means of what He gives to him. If someone is content with what Allah *Glorified is He* assigns him, then Allah *Glorified is He* will bless him in his provision and expand it, but if someone is not content, then he will not bless him.

(2) He is Isma'il ibn Al-Qasim Abu Ishaq, better known as Abu Al-'Atahiyya, a prolific, quick-witted poet who displayed great creativity in his poetry. He used to compose 150 lines in a day. He was born in the year 130 AH in 'Ayn At-Tamar near Kufa, and grew up in Kufa. Then he lived in Baghdad. He is considered one of the foremost producers of poetry and was from the same generation as Bishar and Abu Nuwas. He died in Baghdad in the year 211 AH at the age of 81. Al-'A'lam of Az-Zirikli (*may Allah honour him*) 1/321.

(3) This verse of Abu 'Al-Atahiyya's is from a poem made up of 12 verses composed in the *raml* metre. The beginning of the poem goes Al-Mawsua' Ash-shi'riyya:
I have not seen anyone whose life,
is entirely free of hardship, trouble and pain.
So take full advantage of what you have put forward early,
and never put off today's work till the morrow.

We notice that when it comes to provision, many people make the mistake of limiting provision to wealth and money only. Such people think that provision means riches and great wealth, but that is not correct. Rather, we say that provision is everything that is useful and from which you can derive benefit. According to this definition, knowledge is provision, forbearance is provision, trustworthiness is provision, good health is provision...etc.

Therefore, rich people who have been granted huge sums of wealth should always ask themselves when they see someone who is poor, 'I wonder what the provision of this poor person is? In what ways has he been favoured over me?' His provision might lie in his intellect, his fine conduct, his forbearance, in the fine reputation he enjoys among people or in his good health.

We said previously that the total sum of talents that one person has is the same as the total sum of talents possessed by another - one person might have ten out of ten for wealth, but zero out of ten for children not having been blessed with a child, and so on. That is because all of mankind are Allah's dependents, and there is not one of them who is a son of Allah *Glorified is He* or has any family connection with Him.

So, what is there to make one person favoured over another? We say that provision needs many different directions in which to go. That is why the True Lord distributes the means among people. Life would not be right if all people were rich or all people were intelligent or all people were knowledgeable. That is because a single intellect requires more than one limb to serve its thoughts. When an architect, for example, draws up the plans for a residential building, he is but one architect, but he needs all the builders to do the work and bring those architectural plans to fruition. The simple worker who digs a hole in the ground to place the foundation has certain talents that the architect does not have. In this way, talents are divided up and provision is distributed.

Rizq (provision) can be by an increase in one's income, or, conversely, by a decrease in one's expenditure. We might, for example, find one man whose monthly salary is only 100 pounds. People get amazed that he can live on such an amount, but they forget that the important thing with respect to provision is that it should come via lawful means, and when it comes by lawful means, Allah *Glorified is He* blesses the small amount so that it takes the place of the large amount. You might find, for example, that when this man's son falls ill, an aspirin tablet proves sufficient along with a cup of tea brewed by the mother, and with the permission of Allah *Glorified is He* the boy is healed.

On the other hand, another man may be earning many times that amount, but he does not take care to ensure that his earnings are all lawful. When his son falls ill, he goes to the doctor, runs a series of tests, and convinces himself that the illness is serious, and so spends a huge sum of money to save the boy from his illness.

It has been narrated in a Noble Hadith 'Whoever earns money through unlawful means, Allah will make it all go to waste and be spent in unlawful ways.'(1)

Thus, positive provision is when your income increases, while negative provision is when your expenditure decreases. That is why we notice, for example, one employee on a high salary going with a friend who only has a middling salary to the market. When they get there, the former buys turkey or fish that costs 10 pounds for the kilo, while the latter buys a plain kind of fish that costs only 4 pounds for a kilo. Then, both go back to their homes and each of them eats a fish, but the former spent many times more than the latter spent. It might well be that both achieve the same result, for both may be content with what they bought and satisfied with what they ate. This is what we refer to as, 'negative provision'.

A believer should always be thinking about being economical when it comes to his expenditure and should know that 'negative provision' is ampler than 'positive provision', since negative provision protects you against pain, while positive provision might well bring you pain.

Allah's words: '...There truly are signs in this for those who believe,' (*az-Zumar:* 52) refer to those who believe in the Provider who named Himself the Expander (of provision) and who named Himself the Constrictor (of provision). If the True Lord names Himself with these two names, then there must be beings that are affected and impacted by these attributes. There must be among His creation those whose provision Allah expands and there must be others whose provision He constricts and straitens. Both cases are controlled by Allah's Wisdom and Decree.

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(1) *Al-'Ajaluni narrated it in Kashf Al-khafa' 2/313, and he attributed it to Al-Qadai from Abu Salama Al-Humsi from the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. But this Abu Salama is weak and was not a Companion. At-Taqi As-Subki said, 'It is not sahih.'*

Those people whose provision Allah *Glorified is He* expands and makes abundant must be grateful and thankful, while those whose provision He constricts and makes little must be patient and content. Moreover, he must make his way through life according to the level and type of provision he has been given, and must never resort to begging. Whoever is content with the amount of wealth that Allah inscribed for him, Allah will give him according to His Worth and Capacity. That is why if you were to look at many of the great people of this world–the influential and famous–if you were to look at them in the early parts of their lives, you would find them to be content with what Allah *Glorified is He* had decreed for them, and you would have found them living in a way that corresponded with their incomes at the time. Therefore, Allah's words come true, 'Whoever is content with My Decree, I will give him according to My Own worth.'

Then, the True Lord says (1):

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(1) *The cause of the revelation of the verse: A number of narrations have been passed down regarding the reason for this verse being revealed, including the following:*
Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him said, 'This verse was sent on account of the people of Mecca who said, 'Muhammad claims that those who worship idols and kill those whose lives Allah Glorified is He has made inviolate will not be forgiven, so how can we emigrate and become Muslims when we have been worshipping others alongside Allah Glorified is He and have killed people whose lives Allah Glorified is He has made inviolate?' So Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse.
Ibn 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him said, 'This verse was sent concerning 'Ayyash ibn Rab'ia, Al-Wali may Allah honour him and ibn Al-Wali (may Allah honour him) and a group of Muslims who had entered into Islam, but then were tortured and tested and were seduced away from Islam. We used to say Allah Glorified is He will never accept any payment or ransom from them for they are a people who became Muslim and then left their religion simply because of being tortured.' So Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse.
And Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him and Ata' narrated that it was sent down concerning Wahshi, the killer of Hamza may Allah be pleased with him, since he thought that Allah Glorified is He would never accept Islam from him. Wahshi came to the=

قُلۡ يَٰعِبَادِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسۡرَفُواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ لَا تَقۡنَطُواْ مِن رَّحۡمَةِ ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ يَغۡفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًاۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلۡغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ٥٣

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful [53] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 53)

Israf is exceeding the limits. We say that so-and-so is a *musrif* when he exceeds the limits by spending money in a manner that does not correspond to his income. The verse says that these people did *israf* against themselves, not for themselves. The fact that they did it against themselves indicates that *israf* brought them harm and negative consequences, for it was them exceeding the limits in disobedience and wrong action—and we seek refuge in Allah from that.

We said that *israf* is exceeding the limits. If those limits are established as the result of a command, then do not exceed them. If those limits are established as the result of a prohibition, then do not even go near them. It is for that reason that Allah *Glorified is He* says referring to His commands: '...These are the bounds set by Allah: do not overstep them....' (*al-Baqara:* 229) meaning: 'Stop at them and go no further.' As for the case when He refers to His prohibitions, He says: '...these are the bounds set by Allah, so do not go near them...' (*al-Baqara:* 187) since being near something entices you to go beyond it, as is made clear in a Noble Hadith: 'Whoever hovers around a private preserve, he is likely to enter into it.'(1)

= *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'O Muhammad, I came to you asking for refuge so grant me refuge so that I can hear the Word of Allah Glorified is He.' So the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him replied, 'I used to wish to see you from afar.'*

(1) *Al-Bukhari transmitted in his Sahih 2051 in a Hadith from An-Nu'man ibn Bashir may Allah be pleased with him that the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The halal is clear and the haram is clear. But between the two there are doubtful matters. Someone who does not do an action whose wrongness he is unsure about is more likely not to do those actions that are clearly wrong, whereas someone who risks doing an action whose wrongness he is unsure about is more likely to do an action that is clearly wrong. Acts of disobedience are the private preserve of Allah Glorified is He and anyone who pastures his animals around a private preserve is on the verge of entering it.' It is also narrated by Muslim in his Sahih 1599.*

For that very reason, when the True Lord forbade Adam *peace be upon him* from eating from the tree, He did not say, ‘Do not eat from it’, but rather said: ‘...but do not approach this tree…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 19).

That is the reason the word *ijtinab* (eschewal) is stronger than the word *tahrim*, (prohibition). It is quite amazing that we hear those who transgress against themselves saying, ‘There is no word, in the Book of Allah which indicates the prohibition of wine.’ We reply: ‘How can you say that Allah *Glorified is He* uses an even stronger word than *tahrim*, namely *ijtinab*, when He says: ‘O you who believe! Intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an uncleanness, the Satan’s work; eschew it, that ye may prosper.’ Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 90-91)

The meaning of: ‘...eschew it…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 90) is: avoid it completely–keep away from the places it is drunk, keep away from those who drink, keep away from those who sell it, keep away from those who transport it...etc.’ This is clearer and more eloquent than forbidding it by saying, ‘Do not drink alcohol’, as is proven by the fact that the Quran also uses the word *ijtinab* in matters relating to the very pinnacle of belief for Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words.’ (*al-Hajj:* 30)

When we consider the *israf* (wastefulness and extravagance) in relation to spending, we find that the True Lord wants life to go on in the believing society in a balanced, consistent and moderate path, meaning that you know the limits of your income and the provision Allah has brought your way, and to live according to your means. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want you to keep hold of that provision and not spend it, nor does He want you to spend it all or be wasteful. Rather, He wants you to take the middle path, as He Himself makes clear when He says: ‘They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance.’ (*al-Furqan:* 67) Wastefulness and niggardliness are both censured and forbidden. Anyone who follows any path other than that of moderation harms both himself and society at large, since by holding on to his money, he reduces the buying power and selling power of the markets and that, in turn, leads to economic and productive stagnation, the ruination of wares and a slump in the markets.

If he spends his money wastefully and extravagantly, spending his entire income, he cannot then find any money to save in order to improve the quality of his life and move up to a higher standard of living. Then, he starts to blame himself when he sees others moving upwards to a higher, more luxurious standard of living and he cannot do the same.

This matter is made abundantly clear by the True Lord when He says: ‘Do not be tight-fisted, or so open-handed that you end up blamed and overwhelmed with regret,’ (*al-Isra’:* 29) i.e. you will be blamed when you hold back your money and act in a niggardly fashion, and you will be destitute and grieved when you spend everything you have wastefully. This is because he will find the people of moderation living the life of happiness, without blame or grief. The sensible person is the one who makes his expenditure subject to his income, not his income subject to his expenditure. When you make your income subject to your expenditure, you will inevitably be forced to ask other people for loans, and that will wear you out and make things very difficult for you. You will find yourself at wit’s end and people will avoid your company and come to look upon you with disdain. Your life will become one long misery.

So, *israf* is exceeding the limits by doing things that will bring you pain and harm. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...have harmed yourselves by your own excess...’ (*az-Zumar:* 53). As for *israf* that brings you good, it is *israf* for yourself not against yourself. An example of this is the one who pays *zakat* as 10% instead of the obligatory 2.5%, because he is certain that the additional amount he pays will be written for him and stored with Allah *Glorified is He*. So, there is a person who works only for this world, while the other works for both this world and the Hereafter.

Therefore, when Imam ‘Ali *may Allah honour him* was asked (1), ‘O Imam, I want to know if I am one of the people of this world or one of the people of the Hereafter. (Can you tell me?)’ He replied: ‘I do not have an answer to this question, for it is within you that the answer lies.’ ‘How is that,’ asked the man. Imam ‘Ali *may Allah honour him* replied: ‘If two people come to you, one bearing a gift and the other wanting help and asking for alms, see which of them you greet with a smile and welcome. If you extend your welcome to the man bearing the gift, then know that you are one of the people of this world, since that indicates that you love what brings you prosperity in this world, and if it is to the other that you extend your welcome, then you are one of the people of the Hereafter, since you love what brings you prosperity in the Hereafter.'

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(1) *The story of the question of a man to ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah honor him: ‘Am I among the dwellers of heaven or hell?’ and the response of Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah honor him.*

You know the story (1) of the sheep that was given to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, and which A'isha *may Allah be pleased with her* gave away as *sadaqa* (charity) except for one of its shoulders. 'Then when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked her what happened to the sheep, she replied, 'It has all gone except for its shoulder,' and the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to love the shoulder more than any other part of the sheep. So the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Rather, all of it remains except for its shoulder.'(2)

So, the part that remains is the part that is given as a charity, while the part that is gone is the part we ate ourselves. This is further supported by Prophet Muhammad's *peace and blessings be upon him* statement, 'O Son of Adam, you have no wealth except for what you have eaten so that it gets used up, worn so that it becomes worn out or given as charity so that it remains.'(3)

But then Allah *Glorified is He* opens the door of hope to those who have transgressed against themselves, saying to them: '...Do not Despair of Allah's mercy…' (*az-Zumar:* 53). But how is it they come to despair of the mercy of Allah? Scholars say that this is because they transgressed against themselves, went to excess in disobeying Allah *Glorified is He* and kept on doing that.

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(1) *The story of the goat that was offered to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her gave it away to the poor.*

(2) *A sahih Hadith… It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 6/50; and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2470, who said that it was a sahih Hadith. It is also narrated by Abu Nu'aym in Al-Hilya 5/23, and the wording of the Hadith, as narrated by 'Aisha may Allah be pleased with her is that they slaughtered a sheep. Then the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked, 'What remains of it?' She replied, 'Nothing remains of it except for its shoulder.' So he said, 'All of it remains except for its shoulder.'*

(3) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/24 & 26); Muslim in his Sahih (2958); and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2342) and he declared it to be Sahih (authentic).*

Then, when one of these people returns to the straight and narrow, he blames and rebukes himself and sees the wrong he committed as being great and unforgivable. He does not view himself as being worthy of forgiveness or mercy and so despair takes hold of him. We seek refuge in Allah from that happening to us.

When one reflects on this matter, one finds that this self-blaming and this despair of Allah's Mercy is, from another angle, a sign that a person's belief is good, for the fact that this transgressor sees his wrongs as being serious and does not think himself worthy of mercy indicates that his belief is sound and that he fears his Lord.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...behold Allah forgives all sins – for, verily, He alone is much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy!' (*az-Zumar:* 53)

Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said about this verse that it is the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* since it gives hope to every wrongdoer, no matter how great his wrongs. If it were not for the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* followed this verse with His saying: 'Hence, turn towards your Sustainer [alone] and surrender yourselves unto Him...,' (*az-Zumar:* 54) it would have caused people to think little of it and caused people to have such high hopes of Allah's mercy that they would have forgotten His vengeance and punishment. The believer alternates in the course of his life between fear and hope, and he is in need of both of them.

Indeed, your Lord is forgiving and merciful, but in order to be entitled to Allah's mercy and forgiveness, you must return in repentance to Allah *Glorified is He*. However, you should be honest and truly sincere in your repentance. This is because when one commits sins and then repents, then sins and then repents is like someone who is mocking his Lord. We seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from ever doing that.

When Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said about this verse that it is the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* one of those sitting with him said, 'I am of the opinion that the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* is Allah's saying: '…Now, behold, thy Sustainer is full of forgiveness unto men for all their evildoing…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6).

I am critical of those scholars who interpret: '...for all their evildoing…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6) as 'despite all their evildoing', for that cannot be its correct meaning when we are saying that the verse is the most hope-inducing verse in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He*. We notice here that the Arabic word (*ma'a*) has two letters while (*'ala*) has three letters, so the meaning conveyed by (*'ala*) cannot be conveyed by (*ma'a*). To apply this to this specific verse, we find that this verse refers to forgiveness for wrong action and wrong action requires Allah's attributes of being the Mighty Subduer and Avenger. However, Allah's forgiveness erases the wrong action. In Arabic, that is a meaning that (*ma'a*) cannot convey.(1)

As they are trying all the time to cast doubt about the Quran, some orientalists argue that there is a contradiction in the Quranic verses as Allah *Glorified is He* says here: '...God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful,' (*az-Zumar:* 53) while He *Glorified is He* says in another Quranic verse: 'Verily, Allah does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him.…' (*an-Nisa':* 48)

We say to these people, 'It is your ignorance of the Arabic language and its stylistic devices that has caused you to make this mistake, for *dhanb* means committing an action which Allah *Glorified is He* has forbidden and for which set a punishment. Accordingly, associating others with Allah *Glorified is He* is not a (*dhanb*) since associating others with Allah *Glorified is He* takes one outside of the religion completely. And so, based on this interpretation, there is no contradiction between the two verses as you claim.'

Some scholars(2) say, 'This verse: 'Say, "[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy..."'

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(1) *Among those who said that ('ala) had the meaning of (ma'a) was Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (2/501). He said, 'This means that He Glorified is He is the One Who effaces, pardons and covers up for people despite the fact that they sin and do wrong day and night.' Ibn Hisham mentioned in 'Mughni Al-labib' (1/126) that ('ala) here has the meaning of accompaniment, and he quoted this verse in support of his opinion.*

(2) *This was the position of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him and 'Ata'. Al-Qurtubi said so in his Tafsir (8/5914), and Al-Wahidi an-Nisaburi said in Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 212), 'It is narrated that the verse came down concerning Wahshi, the killer of Hamza Allah be pleased with him', and he mentioned the narration with its isnad back to Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him (p. 193).*

(*az-Zumar:* 53) came down concerning Wahshi, the one who killed Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* at the battle of Uhud and afterwards Hind took the liver of Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* and chewed on it.

We say, ‘Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* was killed at Uhud and Wahshi did not become Muslim immediately afterwards, but rather after a long period of time had passed. Trying to reconcile the different statements in this regard, some scholars say, ‘Perhaps when Wahshi killed Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* and then remembered his standing in Islam and that he was the Lion of Allah *Glorified is He* he despaired of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* and that despair could have led him to greater levels of evil and iniquity. Then a righteous person met him and told him, ‘Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* for Allah *Glorified is He* has said: ‘Say, “[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah’s mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.”’ (*az-Zumar:* 53)

When Wahshi heard these words, he became Muslim, for the only thing that had stopped him from becoming Muslim before that was the fear he felt on account of what he had done. But if Allah’s forgiveness was like this and his Lord had guaranteed to him that he would be forgiven, then why should he not become Muslim? The verse had been revealed prior to this story, so it was not sent down specifically about him, but rather was sent down beforehand. But it was quoted to him and recited to him, so it was the cause of his becoming Muslim.

Allah’s saying: ‘...He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.’ (*az-Zumar:* 53) confines the giving of mercy and forgiveness to Allah *Glorified is He* since every sin that is committed infringes one of Allah’s rights and as long as they are Allah’s rights that are being infringed, He *Glorified is He* alone possesses the right to forgive and have mercy on the guilty party, and He *Glorified is He* alone has the right to take him to task and punish him. That is because Allah’s power is absolute and there is no other god alongside Him to oppose Him.

This meaning is clear in the story of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as related in the Quranic verses: ‘And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, “O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’ He will say, ‘Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen. “I said not to them except what You commanded me - to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness. If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them - indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.””' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116-118)

We notice here that He *Glorified is He* does not say at the conclusion of this verse, ‘indeed it is You who is the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful,’ which would seem to correspond more closely with forgiveness, but instead He says: ‘...indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 118) The fact that Jesus *peace be upon him* said: ‘the Exalted in Might, the Wise,’ indicates that he personally thought that they ought to be recompensed and punished for the lie they had told, but Allah *Glorified is He* is The One Who has the Absolute Power to decide whether He *Glorified is He* wants to punish or forgive them. If Allah *Glorified is He* had a partner with whom He *Glorified is He* shared power, then Jesus *peace be upon him* would not have said that. Allah *Glorified is* He is the Almighty, All Wise, and no one can change anything that He *Glorified is He* has done. He *Glorified is He* forgives them in this case, not out of His capacity as the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful Allah, but out of His capacity as ‘the Exalted in Might, the Wise’, for they fully deserve to be punished.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنِيبُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا۟ لَهُۥ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

Turn to your Lord. Submit to Him before the punishment
overtakes you and you can no longer be helped [54]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 54)

The Arabic word (*Inaba*) means repenting and going back to believing in Allah *Glorified is He* as the Only One God with no partner, while Islam is putting into practice what Allah *Glorified is He* demands of you, obeying His commands and abstaining from His prohibitions.

Accordingly, does this (*inaba*) mean that they were with Allah *Glorified is He* in the first place and then left him and went over to unbelief, so that then it could be demanded of them to return to belief once again? We say, ‘No, that is not the intended meaning here. Rather, (*inaba*) here refers to them going back to that first covenant that Allah *Glorified is He* made with all His slaves when they were still in the realm of atomic potential and were still in the loins of Adam *peace be upon him*. About this covenant, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.” [This] - Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were of this unaware.” (*al-A‘raf:* 172)

So the meaning of: ‘Turn to your Lord,’ (*az-Zumar:* 54) is: ‘Go back to believing in Him with that natural belief that He *Glorified is He* made a covenant with you about.’ This natural belief is a person’s constant companion and it is what makes his conscience wake up after he has done an act of disobedience causing him to repent, or after disbelieving, causing him to believe. This natural belief that resides in the depths of the human soul is that which brings him back to his senses after he has been heedless and forgetful. It was this belief that roused Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As *Allah be pleased with him* and others from their slumber of disbelief, and they all became believers after having gone back to the first covenant and rediscovered the natural belief that lay within them.

Allah says, ‘...before the punishment overtakes you and you can no longer be helped.’ (*az-Zumar:* 54) Then, what does *Al-Nusra* (help) mean here in this context of talking about the Hereafter? It means that the people of falsehood will not be able to offer any help or succour to each other or defend themselves in any way, regardless of whether they be followers or those who are followed, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says in another Quranic verse: ‘How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?’ Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to Allah]; but [since it will be too late,] they will turn upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins]. Some [of them] will say: ‘Behold; you were wont to approach us [deceptively] from the right!’ [To which] the others will reply: ‘Nay, you yourselves were bereft of all faith! Moreover, we had no power at all over you: nay, you were people filled with overweening arrogance!’ (*as-Saffat:* 25-30)

Yes, they will not be able to provide one another succour because the situation they will be in will be one of blame and dispute, since each of them will seek to lay the responsibility for his predicament at the door of the other and each of them will declare himself innocent of the other. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the Allah-conscious.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)

Allah then says:

وَٱتَّبِعُوٓا۟ أَحْسَنَ مَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُم مِّن قَبْلِ أَن
يَأْتِيَكُمُ ٱلْعَذَابُ بَغْتَةً وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

Follow the best teaching sent down to you from your Lord,
before the punishment suddenly takes you, unawares [55]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 55)

The Arabic word (*ahsan*) is in the superlative form (*af‘al*) that indicates exaggerated levels of good. From this, we understand that a lesser amount of goodness is *hasan* (good). We say, ‘This is good and that is better than it.’ The command that is given here is to follow what is best. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* sends down certain rulings that gratify the human self so that it does not feel anger or hatred towards other people, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you...’ (*an-Nahl:* 126) This is a warning to us: ‘If you want to retaliate, and then beware of doing so in a manner worse than what was done to you. If you are capable of responding in a like manner, then that is good. But it would be better for you to pardon and forgive, as Allah *Glorified is He* indicates: ‘...And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness, and restitution to his fellow man shall be made in a goodly manner...' (*al-Baqara:* 178), and when He *Glorified is He* says: 'But if one is patient in adversity and forgives – this, behold, is indeed something to set one's heart upon!' (*ash-Shura:* 43) This is the best settlement of affairs in this regard.

Another example of this is found in Allah's words concerning adoption: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). You know the story of Prophet Muhammad's adoption of Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* and that when Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* was given a choice between his family and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he chose to remain with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'I would never choose anyone over the Messenger of Allah!' For that reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rewarded him by ascribing paternity to himself, calling him Zayd ibn Muhammad.(1)

When Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to forbid adoption and sent down the verse: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) He *Glorified is He* treated Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* justly and declared what he had done to be good, but what Allah *Glorified is He* wanted was better; what the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* did was just and equitable, but what Allah *Glorified is He* chose was more just: '...this is more equitable in the sight of Allah...' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). The wisdom behind: '[As for your adopted children,] call them by their [real] fathers' names…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5) is so that people do not come to view the immediate cause of their existence, i.e. their fathers, as being unimportant. And that is because viewing the immediate cause of your existence as being unimportant encourages you to deny The Highest Cause of Existence.

We can also say that the meaning of: 'Follow the best teaching sent down to you from your Lord' (*az-Zumar:* 55) is that at the time when the Quran was revealed, there were two religions practised by the people: Judaism with its

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(1) *It is narrated by At-Tirmidhi (3815) that Jabala ibn Haritha, the brother of Zayd said, 'I came to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and said to him, 'Messenger of Allah, send my brother Zayd with me.' He replied, 'He is yours. If he wants to go with you, I will not prevent him.' Zayd Allah be pleased with him said, 'Messenger of Allah, by Allah, I will never choose anyone over you.' [Jabala] said, 'I saw that my brother's opinion was better than my own.' At-Tirmidhi classified this as a (hasan gharib Hadith).*

Book, the Torah; and Christianity with its Book, the Bible. When these Books and others were revealed, there were people who believed in them and others who rejected them and associated partners with Allah *Glorified are He*. Moreover, there were even atheist people.

The command 'Follow' is directed to everyone. It is as if Allah is saying, 'O you who believe in Moses *peace be upon him* and O you who believe in Jesus *peace be upon him* the religion you are following was good in its own time, but now Islam, the final religion that supersedes all others, has come, and it is the best religion that you shall follow.

Sometimes the comparative form (*af'al*) is used to describe the reality of the situation. But in this case, we do not consider its opposite, i.e. worse, but rather, we consider the same attribute of goodness, but to a lesser degree. This applies to all cases except for one case that we have noticed relating to one of the Sublime names (attributes) of Allah *Glorified is He*. One of His Names is *Al-Kabir* (the Great), not *Al-Akbar* (The Greatest), although the standard is that we should call Him *Al-Akbar* since that is the superlative form of *Al-Kabir*. So why is He *Glorified is He* not called *Al-Akbar*?

We say, 'The word *Akbar* does appear in a form that makes it seem as if it is an attribute of Allah *Glorified is He* for we hear it every day in every *adhan* (call to prayer) and every *Iqama* for every prayer. The prayer is a form of worship that has a special status in Islam, for it is that act of worship that is repeated five times every day, and it is the act of worship that never under any circumstances ceases to be obligatory for the believer as long as he remains alive. It is the only act of worship that was not made obligatory by revelation, unlike all the other acts of worship, but instead was made obligatory directly during *Al-Mi'raj* (the Night Journey to the Heavens). When we call people to come to do this act of worship, we say, 'Allah is *akbar*' and not, 'Allah is *kabir*.'

Here, in this particular place, the word *akbar* is more apt than *kabir* and expresses the intended meaning better. This is because we are not only required to perform prayer, fasting, making the pilgrimage and so on, but we are also required to do all actions that benefit and help us to perfect our performance of religious duties. This is why it is stated that one of the *shar'i* maxims is: 'Anything that an obligatory act cannot be completed without is itself obligatory.'

If we take prayer, as an example, we find that there are many requirements that shall be met so that one can perform this obligation. These requirements include, for example, covering up of one's private area. In order to cover your private area you need clothes to wear, but from where are you going to get those clothes? You need a tailor to tailor them, a retailer to sell the cloth from which they are tailored, a wholesaler, a factory for spinning, textile and dyeing, the farmers who grow the cotton and harvest it, and so on.

All of these processes require tools, machines, and workers. The same is the case with respect to the food that you must have in order to have the power that enables you to carry out the obligatory acts of worship. All these processes are there for your sake, to serve and help you. So, these everyday acts without which one cannot carry out his religious duties are themselves obligatory and should not be viewed with disdain. Rather, they should be venerated and closely adhered to, since they have the status of being obligatory.

So when your Lord calls you to prayer, while you are busy with any of these works, He *Glorified is He* does not take you from an act that is trivial, insignificant and valueless, but rather takes you from an act that is, in itself, an act of worship. So, for that reason, such works are *kabir* (great). Yet, The One Who calls you to the prayer is *akbar* (greater) than all of that. In the Quran, Allah does not call believers to a prayer except for the *Jumu'a* prayer as He *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave all worldly commerce…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9).

Out of all worldly activities, He *Glorified is He* singles out selling because it is the fruit of all the remaining activities, such as trade, agriculture and manufacturing. This is because humans are more eager and greedy to sell than they are to buy since selling is the transaction that brings immediate profit. That is why we find people so eager to sell, unlike those who buy, for when a buyer does not find the particular commodity he wants, he says, 'Leave it!' since it is from his pocket that he has to pay. But as for sellers, they gain money and profit.

Then, when the prayer is finished, your Lord allows you to return back to the worldly work from which He *Glorified is He* summoned you. He says:

‘…and when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah’s bounty...’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10).

Accordingly, you should not think little of worldly actions or think that they are not part of religion, for instead they are a part of it. Moreover, anything that an obligatory act cannot be completed without is itself obligatory, and those who disobey Allah with regard to worldly actions will inevitably also disobey in religious matters. So when we say in the call to prayer, ‘Allah is the Greatest’, it reminds us that things other than Him are also great and should not be belittled, but at the same time it tells us that The One Who grants us the energy is greater than those great things, so do not let your preoccupation with the great take you away from The One Who is greater.

As such, you come to know the wisdom that Allah *Glorified is He* calls Himself *Al-Kabir* (The Great), not *Al-Akbar*. When we say Allah is Great, this means that everything other than Him is small, but if we were to say Allah is *akbar* (Greater), that would mean everything other than Him was great.

So, when you hear His *Glorified is He* revelation and find that there is good and there is better, then follow the better of what He *Glorified is He* sent down: ‘...Follow the best teaching sent down to you from your Lord.’ (*az-Zumar:* 55)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…before the punishment suddenly takes you, unawares.’ (*az-Zumar:* 55) Punishment does not suddenly take anyone except for the oblivious and heedless person whom punishment never crosses his mind in this world. Had it crossed his mind, he would have avoided it and steered clear of the things that lead to it. And then, when it came, it would not have taken him by surprise.

But how can the punishment take someone by surprise? We say, ‘What is it that differentiates one person who is living his life in this world and one who is meeting his punishment? It is death, of course, for it is simply by dying and his soul leaving his body that a person is transported from the ease of this world to the punishment of the Hereafter if he is one of those destined to be punished. We seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that destination.

It is well known that no one knows the moment that his soul will depart his body, for it is possible for one to take a breath, but cannot exhale it. This is something that every believer must always be aware of and never forget.

أَن تَقُولَ نَفْسٌ يَٰحَسْرَتَىٰ عَلَىٰ مَا فَرَّطتُ فِى جَنۢبِ
ٱللَّهِ وَإِن كُنتُ لَمِنَ ٱلسَّٰخِرِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

And your soul says, “Woe is me for having neglected what is due to God, and having been one of those who scoffed!” [56]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 56)

This is an example of the self when it becomes sorrowful and starts to blame itself. ‘Why have you allowed yourself to come to such a point when we have asked you to repent to Allah *Glorified is He* submit to His rulings and follow the best of what He *Glorified is He* sent down to you, thereby lifting all hardship and difficulty from it and keeping blame well away from it? We asked you not to adopt such a stance, but you did not comply.

The words (*ya hasrata*) are in the vocative form, but what is it that the slave is calling out to? He is calling out to sorrow, grief, and sadness, saying, ‘O my sorrow, come here to me for this is your time.’ He feels sorry for himself after the opportunity for feeling sorry has already passed him by. It is well known that it is only possible to use the vocative to call on something that is of benefit to you, but here he finds himself in a position of sorrow and regret. And the word for sorrow (*hasra*) has the first person attached pronoun, (*ya*) added to the end of it as well as the (*alif*) of absoluteness.

The meaning of: ‘...for having been remiss in what is due to Allah...’ (*az-Zumar:* 56) is ‘for having fallen short with respect to the obedience that is Allah’s by right.’(1) (*tafreet*) is neglecting to do what should have been done before, for when an opportunity has passed, it cannot be recovered. It is like the student who neglects his studies, but then takes an interest in them the night before his exam. We say to him, ‘My dear boy, before a shot can be fired the barrels must be filled.'(1) This is a proverb that is struck for those who neglect to prepare for things before their time, for when a hunter goes out to hunt, he prepares his tools in advance so that when he comes across his prey, he can take it out before it runs away. For a gazelle, for example, does not sit there waiting for the hunter until he has filled up his gun barrels or prepared his arrows.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned many opinions for what was meant by (janb Allah) in his Tafsir (8/5916), including that it means:*
- a) *Obedience to Allah Glorified is He. This was what Al-Hasan said.*
- b) *Remembrance of Allah Glorified is He. This was what Ad-Dahhak said.*
- c) *Reward from Allah Glorified is He. This was what Abu ‘Ubayda said.*
- d) *Seeking closeness to Allah Glorified is He meaning Paradise. This was what Al-Farra’ said.*
- e) *The Path of Allah Glorified is He to which He Glorified is He calls us. This is what Az-Zajjaj said.*

So, you feel sorry for yourself and blame yourself because of the fact that you did not take advantage of the opportunities you were given, and neglected to do so until they passed you by. Such opportunities can never be brought back, so you have no option left but to feel sorry for yourself and bite your fingers in regret. It is as if the two commands that preceded this verse, namely: 'Hence, turn towards your Sustainer [alone] and surrender yourselves unto Him...' (*az-Zumar:* 54) and '...follow the most goodly [teaching] that has been revealed unto you by your Sustainer,' (*az-Zumar:* 55) it is as if they should have acted upon these commands in order to protect themselves from saying as soon as they see the punishment: '...Alas for me for having been remiss in what is due to Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 56). It is because of the mercy and compassion He *Glorified is He* has for His slaves that He *Glorified is He* does not like for them to say these words. Allah *Glorified is He* does not want His slaves to end up in a situation where they feel sorry for themselves and are not content with that for them. So when He *Glorified is He* says to us, 'Do not despair of the mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* turn towards Him, surrender yourselves to Him, and seek the best of what has been revealed to you. He *Glorified is He* wants by that to wake up the heedless, warn those who are thinking of rejecting Him and remind them of the consequences of their actions and the sorrow they will feel when they see the punishment.

Hasra is the sadness and regret one feels for those good things that have passed you by and can never be brought back. An unbeliever does not just feel one sorrow, but rather constantly feels many sorrows, since each time he sees the punishment which is his lot he feels sorrow, and each time he sees the believers living in bliss he feels sorrow, and each time he is reminded of this world he feels sorrow.

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(1) *This proverb was mentioned by Abu Hilal Al-'Askari in Jumhurat Al-Amthal, and he said, 'This is a proverb used for being prepared for misfortune and calamity before it happens. It is also mentioned by Az-Zamakhshari in Al-Mustaqsa fi Amthal Al-'Arab.*

Allah words: '...and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!' (*az-Zumar:* 56) mean 'Their crime is not just one of being remiss and falling short with respect to what is due to Allah *Glorified is He* but goes beyond that, for they also scoff at those who fulfil what is due to Allah *Glorified is He*.' So their wrong action is multiplied. We previously mentioned the example of the people of falsehood mocking and ridiculing the people of truth that is mentioned in the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin*: 'Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin are wont to laugh at such as have attained to faith; and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another [derisively]; and whenever they return to people of their own kind, they return full of jests; and whenever they see those [who believe,] they say, 'Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!' And, withal, they have no call to watch over [the beliefs of] others.… But on the Day [of Judgment], they who had attained to faith will [be able to] laugh at the [erstwhile] deniers of the truth: [for, resting in paradise] on couches, they will look on [and say to themselves]: 'Are these deniers of the truth being [thus] requited for [aught but] what they were wont to do?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36)

We often hear the people of falsehood mocking the people of truth, saying: 'This guy is *(sulala)*' 'My uncle, take us over to your side'...etc. But it is enough for the people of belief that Allah *Glorified is He* is The One Who will give them their rights in the Abode of Permanence. So if they mock you in this impermanent world, you will mock them in the everlasting and permanent abode, if they laugh at you for a limited period of time here, you will laugh at them forever.

There is a point of interest in this verse: '...and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!' (*az-Zumar:* 56) When we look at the word (*nafs*) in the Quran, we find that it always appears in the feminine, such as in Allah's, words: '…and yet, I am not trying to absolve myself: for, verily, man's inner self does incite [him] to evil...' (*Yusuf:* 53) and in His words: 'Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of Allah!' (*ash-Shams:* 7-8)

But as for here, its quality of masculinity wins out, for He *Glorified is He* says, quoting the words of the self: '...and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!' (*az-Zumar:* 56) '...and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!' (*az-Zumar:* 56) saying (*sakhirin*) and not (*sakhirat*) Why is that? Because, they say, although the word (*nafs*) is feminine, when it is used to mean 'human being', it is masculine.

After having warned us of the position in the Hereafter where we will feel regrets and feel sorry for ourselves, Allah then warns us of another thing that will occur to the self when it sees the punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَوۡ تَقُولَ لَوۡ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هَدَىٰنِي لَكُنتُ مِنَ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾ أَوۡ تَقُولَ حِينَ
تَرَى ٱلۡعَذَابَ لَوۡ أَنَّ لِي كَرَّةٗ فَأَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

Or it says, "If God had guided me, I would have joined the righteous!" [57] Or, faced by punishment, it says, "If only I could have another chance, I would join those who do good!" [58]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 57 - 58)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…or lest he should say,' (*az-Zumar:* 57) i.e. lest the self should say: '...If Allah had but guided me...' (*az-Zumar:* 57), i.e. in this world: '...I would surely have been among those who are conscious of Him!' (*az-Zumar:* 57) This is astonishing! It is astonishing that the self will even deny Allah *Glorified is He* in the Hereafter, for the fact that he said: '...If Allah had but guided me...' (*az-Zumar:* 57) meaning that Allah *Glorified is He* did not guide him, and that is a lie.

Man says in defence of himself, 'The fact that I was not among the ranks of the believers means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not guide me.' That is a lie, for Allah *Glorified is He* guided you and pointed out to you the way to goodness. He *Glorified is He* clearly defined for you what was lawful and what was unlawful, but you did not travel His path nor did you follow His program: '…or lest he should say, when he becomes aware of the suffering [that awaits him], "Would that I had a second chance [in life]"…' (*az-Zumar:* 58) meaning, 'Would that I could go back to the world and live my life again.'

It is just like what Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '[As for those who will not believe in the life to come, they go on lying to themselves] until, when death approaches any of them, he prays: "O my Sustainer! Let me return, let me return [to life].'" (*al-Mu'minun:* 99) These are all empty and false hopes, so do not believe what they say. If they truly were to return, they would simply go back to doing what they were doing before and just as they lied in the first verse when they said: '...If Allah had but guided me...' (*az-Zumar:* 57) they also lied in the second verse when they said: '...so that I could be among the doers of good!' (*az-Zumar:* 58)

It is quite possible to conceive of people lying in this world, but astonishing that they could lie in the Hereafter, when they are standing in front of their Lord. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says after that: 'And on the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied about Allah [with] their faces blackened. Is there not in Hell a residence for the arrogant?' (*az-Zumar:* 60)

The most obvious explanation is that lying stuck to them and they became so accustomed to doing it that they even took it with them into the Hereafter.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* responds to these lies, saying:

بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَآءَتْكَ ءَايَٰتِى فَكَذَّبْتَ بِهَا وَٱسْتَكْبَرْتَ وَكُنتَ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

No indeed! My messages came to you and you
rejected them: you were arrogant and rejected the
truth [59] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 59)

The word (*bala*) is a particle of response that only ever comes as a response to a negative statement, and reaffirms the meaning that was negated in that previous statement.

Like when Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… am I not your Sustainer?' (*al-A'raf:* 172), and the response comes, using the particle (*bala*): '...to which they answer: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto"…' (*al-A'raf:* 172) meaning, 'No, you are our Lord', since the rule is that the negative of a negative is a positive. Another verse like this is: 'Is Allah not the most just of judges?' (*at-Tin:* 8) and anyone who hears this verse should respond by saying, '(*bala*), O my Lord', meaning, 'No, you are the most just of judges.'

So, where then is the preceding negative to Allah's words here: '...Yea, indeed! My messages did come unto thee…'? (*az-Zumar:* 59) They reply, 'Because of the fact that he denied that guidance had come to him by saying:

'...If Allah had but guided me...' (*az-Zumar:* 57) the word (*bala*) appears in the response.' In other words, 'Rather He did guide: '...My messages did come unto thee…' (*az-Zumar:* 59). (*Ayat*) is the plural of (verse) which is something amazing that captivates people's gazes and impels their intellects and inner sights to reflect.

These verses (*ayat*) as we mentioned before, are of three types: existential signs that indicate the power of the Creator such as in Allah's words: 'Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon…' (*Fussilat:* 37).

And Allah's words: '…and among His wonders is your sleep, at night or in daytime, as well as your [ability to go about in] quest of some of His bounties...' (*ar-Rum:* 23).

These existential signs which direct our attention to The Creator *the Most High* are the first means by which a person comes to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and that is why, every time the scientists discover something new or invent something new, we find the root of that thing in the Book of Allah *Glorified is He*. Words spoken by Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* more than 14 centuries ago.

Allah *Glorified is He* sometimes even shows us these existential signs through the medium of the unbelievers, which is why He *Glorified is He* warns our jurists and religious scholars against meddling in the worldly sciences since those sciences have their scholars who have specialised in those areas, and those people will serve Islam and the matter of believing in Allah *Glorified is He* as well as showing us the proofs and evidences that oblige us to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* The Owner and Creator of this universe.

So, those scholars went to great pains in researching and reflecting upon the existential sciences in order to serve those who believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and serve Islam. They are, even if they themselves disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* one of the armies of Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* speaks the truth when He *Glorified is He* says: 'In time We shall make them fully understand Our messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth....' (*Fussilat:* 53)

The most astonishing thing is that they deprive themselves of the rewards for all that effort they expend, for they did what they did and obtained whatever knowledge they obtained without ever thinking about Allah *Glorified is He*. All they thought about was serving humankind. So it is from humankind that they receive their payment, and indeed humankind has indeed afforded them great honour, building statues of them and celebrating their works. And that is why they will have no portion for what they have done in the Hereafter.

It is to them that Allah's words apply: '…for We shall have turned towards all the [supposedly good] deeds they ever wrought, and shall have transformed them into scattered dust.' (*al-Furqan:* 23) and Allah's *Glorified is He* words: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39) meaning, 'They will be taken by surprise by the fact that the universe has an Allah and Creator, as well as by the fact that there is a Reckoning and Recompense, for none of those occurred to them in this world.

The second type of verses (*ayat*) are the miracles that accompany the Messages from on high, and whose purpose is to prove that the Messengers are being truthful in terms of what they convey from their Lord. An example of this type of sign is found in Allah's words: 'And, indeed, We gave unto Moses nine clear messages.' (*al-Isra':* 101)

As for the final type, they are the Quranic verses (*ayat*) that carry within them the judgements and rulings of Islam, and they are those verses (*ayat*) that Allah *Glorified is He* refers to here: '[But Allah will reply:] "Yea, indeed! My messages did come unto you; but you denied them, and you were filled with false pride, and you were among those who deny the truth!"' (*az-Zumar:* 59)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and you were filled with false pride...' (*az-Zumar:* 59): the verb (*istakbara*) means 'to seek to be big or great'. In other words, not only did he view himself as great, but strived for and sought after greatness. However, that was not granted him, for one who is arrogant deems himself as great and must have no need of the one to whom he displays arrogance. And if you are in the kingdom of Allah *Glorified is He* and under His sovereignty, if you eat from what He *Glorified is He* provides you and live from the good He *Glorified is He* sends your way, then how can you display arrogance towards Him?

Then there is the fact that the only time a person should feel pride or arrogance is when he possesses some intrinsic quality that cannot be taken away. Therefore, all those who display arrogance in this world are doing is contending with Allah *Glorified is He* in terms of one of His attributes, since their arrogance is not backed up by anything, for who among creation possesses anything that is truly intrinsically his and cannot be taken away? And that is why we see those who are arrogant on account of their might being humiliated by Allah *Glorified is He* those who are arrogant on account of their wealth being impoverished by Allah *Glorified is He* and those who are arrogant on account of their good health and well-being being made ill by Allah *Glorified is He*.

So, the true and acceptable form of arrogance is for you to be arrogant on account of something you possess and which cannot be taken away from you. The very worst form of arrogance is to act arrogantly towards your Lord and Creator, The One Who is able to take absolutely everything away from you. As for those who act arrogantly towards creation, they are heedless of the greatness and immensity of their Lord, since if he had been aware of the greatness and immensity of their Lord, they would have been too ashamed and embarrassed to be arrogant, thereby disputing with Allah *Glorified is He* for an attribute that is His by right.

وَيَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ تَرَى ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَبُواْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ وُجُوهُهُم
مُّسۡوَدَّةٌۚ أَلَيۡسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثۡوٗى لِّلۡمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ٦٠

**On the Day of Resurrection, you [Prophet] will see
those who told lies against God, their faces darkened.
Is there not ample punishment for the arrogant in
Hell? [60] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 60)**

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... all who invented lies about Allah ...' (*az-Zumar:* 60), i.e. by saying, 'If Allah had but guided me' (*az-Zumar:* 57) and other such statements, for Allah *Glorified is He* did in fact guide you and point out the way to you when He *Glorified is He* sent Messengers to you, backed up by miracles, and when He *Glorified is He* sent down Books and clarified the lawful from the unlawful. They also told lies about other things, like those who said: '…Behold, Allah is poor while we are rich…' (*Al-'Imran:* 181) and like those who said: '…Allah's hand is shackled!…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 64) And just as these were those who claimed that there were other gods alongside Allah *Glorified is He*.

All of these told lies against Allah *Glorified is He* which is why they will come forth on the Day of Rising: '...[with] their faces darkened [by grief and ignominy]…' (*az-Zumar:* 60). Yes, they will be blackened because then they are face to face with Allah *Glorified is He* against whom they lied. And so their faces will inevitably be blackened, covered in dust, and overcast with gloom on account of what they did.

This is not to disparage blackness in and of itself, since blackness is one of Allah's creations, and there is nothing inherently blameworthy about it. You could well see a man who is white, but whose countenance carries an air of darkness and gloom so that his face appears dark, and from that we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He*. That darkness is the mark that is left on the face by acts of disobedience and wrong actions in this world before the Hereafter.

Then you could see a slave, whose face is like a raisin, and yet there is an air of light and brightness about him, and in his face you find the markings of right action. It is as if his face is shining with light and you never tire of looking at it. And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, laughing, rejoicing at glad tidings. And some faces will on that Day with dust be covered, with darkness overspread: these, these will be the ones who denied the truth and were immersed in iniquity!' (*'Abasa:* 38-42)

So, the quality is not in itself praised or disparaged, and the blackness and whiteness that are referred to here are not the blackness and whiteness that we know in this world. This whitening or blackening is a relative thing with some having it more than others. One of the right-acting people I saw had so much light that it was as if a bright torch were shining out from his face. And whenever joy appeared on his face, it was as if the light of certainty and the delight of belief had spread beyond his interior and spilled out on to his face so that it glowed with radiance and light. That man had black skin like ebony.

We find something similar to this in Allah's words: '...the ugliest of all voices is the [loud] voice of asses,' (*Luqman:* 19) for is the sound of a donkey blameworthy when it is the donkey making that noise? No, because The Creator created it in that form, and there is a wisdom behind a donkey having such a high-pitched voice, since if it were to become lost or hidden behind a mountain or large hill, the only thing that helps its owner to find it is its loud voice. But when that loud sound emanates from a human being, it is blameworthy, for the most disapproved of noise that can emerge from the mouth of a human being is that which resembles a donkey's voice.

And the same is true of Allah's words: 'The parable of those who were graced with the burden of the Torah, and thereafter failed to bear this burden, is that of an ass that carries a load of books...' (*al-Jumu'a:* 5) for the purpose of this verse is not to disparage donkeys, since when donkeys carry loads on their backs they are fulfilling their role which is only to carry things. Donkeys carry their loads without objection or discontent. But it is blameworthy for human beings to imitate donkeys and be content to simply carry things without being aware of or understanding what it is they are carrying, and without putting into practice what they know.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Is not hell the [proper] abode for all who are given to false pride?' (*az-Zumar:* 60) This is a negative form of question to which we must respond by saying, '(*bala*), my Lord!' meaning, 'No, rather, they do have an abode in Hell.' The meaning here is, 'What do they think? Do they think that there is not a place set aside for them there? Their place there is already prepared. It has the names of all who will be there and is waiting for them. It longs for them to come - there is no housing crisis in hell.

Allah *Glorified is He* created creation in the time before time, assigning to every person a place in paradise on the basis that all of creation was going to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and assigning to each person a place in the fire on the basis that all of creation was going to deny Allah *Glorified is He*. Then when the inhabitants of paradise enter paradise and the inhabitants of hellfire enter hellfire, the places in paradise that were assigned to the inhabitants of hellfire were they to have believed in Allah *Glorified is He* are distributed among the inhabitants of paradise, as is mentioned in Allah’s *Glorified is He* words: ‘for such will be the paradise which you shall have inherited by virtue of your past deeds.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 72)

The meaning of (*mathwa*) is a permanent dwelling place, and it will be: ‘...for all who are given to false pride’ (*az-Zumar:* 60).

وَيُنَجِّي ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوۡاْ بِمَفَازَتِهِمۡ لَا يَمَسُّهُمُ ٱلسُّوٓءُ وَلَا هُمۡ يَحۡزَنُونَ ٦١

But God will deliver those who took heed of Him to their place
of safety: no harm will touch them, nor will they grieve [61]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 61)

Here Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the opposite, for although the permanent abode of the unbelievers will be in hell, the believers will be saved by their Lord: ‘...by virtue of their [inner] triumphs…’ (*az-Zumar:* 61). That is, by them triumphing and obtaining what they wanted. The bliss of the Hereafter is obtained in one of two ways: either by a believer entering paradise straight away, or by him initially being one of the inhabitants of Hellfire, but then being encompassed by the mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* and removed from it and taken to paradise as when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...whereupon he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185). Yes, his triumph is of the highest form. It is for that very reason that they call the desert (*mafaza*) despite the fact that it is destructive and causes travellers to become isolated: they call it (*mafaza*) in the optimistic hope that those who travel through it will stay safe. It is similar to the way they call the sting of a scorpion or a snake (*salim*), in the hope that they will be unharmed by its sting.

When Allah *Glorified is He* saves them and decrees triumph for them, they are safe from even being touched by the punishment: ‘...no evil shall ever touch them, and neither shall they grieve’ (*az-Zumar:* 61) since every sight that they do see will fill them with delight, and nothing will ever make them sad, just as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says in another verse: ‘The supreme awesomeness [of the Day of Resurrection] will cause them no grief since the angels will receive them with the greeting, “This is your Day [of triumph – the Day] which you were promised!”’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 103)

ٱللَّهُ خَٰلِقُ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ وَكِيلٞ ﴿٦٢﴾

God is the Creator of all things; He has charge of everything [62] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 62)

After having mentioned His promise and His threat, and after having mentioned where the unbelievers and the believers are going to end up, Allah *Glorified is He* goes back to discussing another matter relating to belief, the fact that: ‘Allah is The Creator of all things...’ (*az-Zumar:* 62). It is as if He *Glorified is He* were saying, ‘What is it that has turned them away from believing in Allah *Glorified is He* The True Deity, when He *Glorified is He* is The One Who created everything?’

Some of them take this verse: ‘Allah is The Creator of all things ...’ (*az-Zumar:* 62) and assign every single act to Allah *Glorified is He*: in their view, Allah *Glorified is He* is The Creator of everything - The Creator of belief and The Creator of disbelief, The Creator of obedience and The Creator of disobedience. And, following on from that, they say, ‘So why does He *Glorified is He* punish those who do [wrong action]?’

We say, ‘There are some who firmly believe that everything occurs by Allah’s Omnipotence, saying that everything is by His Power; while there are others who cling fanatically to His attribute of Justice, saying that man is the one who acts and strives for himself, and that is why he is rewarded for obedience and punished for disobedience.’ This is the very opposite of what should be passing between the scholars since obedience and disobedience are both forms of action. But what is action?

Action is what happens when one of the limbs or organs of the body carries out its task. So the eye sees, but The Creator has set rules for what the eye should look at, and limits what it should see. So the eye sees what it is lawful for it to see, and lowers its gaze from what is unlawful for it to see.

And the same is true of the ear, the hand, the foot, the tongue...etc. When your action corresponds to what the Law commands, that is obedience, and when it goes against what the Law commands, that is disobedience.

Take, for example, a man who raises his hand to another and strikes him: by Allah, is it he who makes his limb do that action or does he simply direct that limb in a direction that is in its best interest? The answer is that he is simply the one who puts that limb in a particular direction, for he was certainly not the one who created the action that it does. And that is proven by the fact that he has no knowledge of the individual muscles that moved or nerves that were involved in that strike.

So, we say that the action is one thing while putting the limb in the direction of doing the action is something else. Every aspect of the action itself is created by Allah - He *Glorified is He* is The One Who gave the hands the capacity to strike, and He *Glorified is He* is The One Who gives them the capacity to do good to others. Allah *Glorified is He* is The One Who gives the tongue of the believer the capacity to say, 'There is no Allah but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', and gives the tongue of the unbeliever the capacity to voice the statement of unbelief, and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from that. It is within your capacity to look with the eye towards what is lawful, and it is within your capacity to look with it at what is unlawful.

So, Allah *the Most High* gives every limb and organ the capacity to fulfil the function for which it was created. If that function corresponds to the Law, then that is obedience, but if it does not correspond to the Law, then that is disobedience. So, based on this, we say that Allah is The Creator of action in the real sense of the word. So, what does a slave do when he disobeys that merits him being punished?' And what does he do when he obeys that merits him being rewarded?

The action of the slave here and his role in the affair is that he directs the capacity that Allah *Glorified is He* created in him in a particular direction. That capacity that Allah *Glorified is He* created in him is suitable for being used for one thing and its opposite. So, the capacity and power to act does not come from you, it comes from Allah *Glorified is He*. But what is up to you is putting that active force in a particular direction.

So, if you look at it from the point of view of action, the entire process of acting belongs to Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Allah is The Creator of all things...' (*az-Zumar:* 62). And if you look at it from the point of view of channelling and choosing, that is the role of the slave. And that is why we say that a disobedient person does not disobey Allah *Glorified is He* because he is compelled by Him, and that when an unbeliever rejects Allah *Glorified is He* he is far-removed from what Allah *Glorified is He* knows and wants. If Allah wanted, He could have made all of mankind into a single nation who all believed and were all obedient, but instead He *Glorified is He* left the choice to them and allowed them to channel their actions in the directions they wanted in order to see which of them would come to Him of their own free will - and Allah *Glorified is He* knows best what His slaves will do.

Reflect on Allah's words: 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) It would be a mistake for us to say that man alone is the one who has freedom of choice, for the reality is that the whole of existence has the freedom to choose. But the difference between the freedom of choice enjoyed by the heavens and the earth and the freedom of choice enjoyed by man is that when the heavens and earth were offered the choice, they chose to forego their own wants in favour of what their Creator wanted. They indeed made a choice, but their choice was not to have the freedom of choice and to be compelled to follow the Will of their Lord. But as for man, he accepted the trust and chose to have the freedom to choose between the myriad choices that would be presented to mankind.

We previously clarified the difference between taking on the burden of the trust and paying that trust back. We made it clear that although the slave can guarantee himself when he takes it on, he cannot guarantee himself when it comes to carrying it out and giving it back. Thus, the trust is a heavy matter, which is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes man as being wrongdoing and foolish for taking on the trust and exposing himself to it.

So, beware of entering into a maze and understanding Allah's words: 'Allah is The Creator of all things...' (*az-Zumar:* 62) in a way in which it is not meant to be understood, and saying, 'If Allah is The Creator of the unbelief of the unbeliever or of the disobedience of the disobedient person, then why does He *Glorified is He* punish them?'

Allah will punish these disbelievers because they chose to use the energy that Allah *Glorified is He* had placed within them in a direction that opposes Allah's rulings. Similarly, Allah will punish disobedient people for directing their capacities in a course that is contrary to Allah's Commandments.

Allah says: 'Allah is the Creator of all things.' (*az-Zumar:* 62) Some people claimed that the word 'all' in this verse does not refer to everything in creation. They said that this verse is similar to Allah's words when He narrated the story of Bilqees. Allah says in the story of Bilqees: '...and she has been given (abundance) from all (good) things.' (*an-Naml:* 23)

The word *kul* (all) in the story of Bilqees does not mean that she had been given everything in existence. This is because Allah used the preposition *min* (from), which indicates that she had been given bounties 'from' every form, but does not indicate that she had been given everything in existence.

Therefore, these scholars were mistaken to use the wording in the Quranic story of Bilqees to infer a limited meaning in Allah's words: 'Allah is the Creator of all things.' Saying that Allah did not create everything is not a correct inference because while Allah used a limiting preposition *min* (from) alongside the word *kul* (all) in the story of Bilqees, He did not use the same limiting preposition in our verse.

Yet, despite this limited interpretation being wrong, the verse: 'Allah is the Creator of all things,' (*az-Zumar:* 62) still has different possible interpretations. The polytheists who disbelieved in Allah's Oneness (at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) accepted that Allah was the Creator of everything. Allah says regarding these polytheists: 'Now if you ask those (who worship partners besides Allah) as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah."' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) Allah also says: 'If you ask them, "Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?" – they will surely answer, "Allah."' (*Luqman:* 25) So, Allah created the elements of containment, place, and time, and Allah *Glorified is He* conveyed this information to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who then conveyed this information to us.

Although these polytheists denied Allah's Oneness by worshipping their own false deities; none of them ever claimed that they or their idols had created the universe. Man came into this universe and found it in the same form as it is today, with a sky and an earth. So, how can he claim that he was its creator when it is older than he is? Indeed its creation is greater than his own creation, as Allah says: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth: yet most men do not understand (what this implies).’ (*Ghafir:* 57)

Indeed, the Arabs knew that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a truthful person. He told us that this universe has a Creator and then described the Creator to us. Thus, we should listen attentively as he explains the solution to this riddle of creation.

We previously illustrated this concept in the example of a man who is stranded in a barren desert, waiting for death to approach him. If that man suddenly sees a table in front of him, laden with the best forms of food and drink, it is inevitable for him to ask: ‘How did this table of food come to exist in the middle of the desert?’

Similarly, we can find many proofs that Allah is the Creator of all things in the world around us. Indeed, as we said, even the polytheists of Quraysh accepted that Allah is the Creator of the world. However, they denied His Oneness because they wanted to deny His Laws and commandments, as His rulings placed restrictions upon their appetites. Belief in Allah is followed with responsibilities and obligations. It informs us that there will be a reward for the good deeds on the Day of Reckoning, and a punishment for the grave sins.

This responsibility is the reason behind the polytheists’ rejection of Allah’s Oneness. Indeed, they worshipped their false deities because idols did not require any actions from them. Therefore, this worship satisfied their natural urges to be religious, but without imposing any obligations on them. The polytheists said: ‘We only worship them (*na’buduhum*) because they bring us closer to Allah.’ (*az-Zumar:* 3) Their usage of the word ‘worship’ was wrong because a worshipper should obey the commands and prohibitions of the worshipped deity, and these idols gave the polytheists no orders.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and He alone has the power and (is the) authority (*wakeel*) to determine the fate of all things.’ (*az-Zumar:* 62) A *wakeel* is the person who you authorize and entrust to carry out the actions that you are not able to do on your own. For instance, in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* his people said to him: ‘Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken (and defeated by Pharaoh’s army).’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 61) That was the moment when the sea was in front of them and Pharaoh and his army were behind them. All the indications backed up their expectations that they will be defeated on that day. However, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had another viewpoint and a different nature to theirs, for he was directly connected to his Lord, was reliant on Him and had total trust in Him. He knew with absolute certainty that Allah *Glorified is He* was his supporter. That is why Prophet Moses responded to them by saying: ‘Nay, indeed.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62) These words of trust were the result of his great reserves of belief in his Lord. He continued: ‘My Lord is with me, (and) He will guide me!’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 62) In this case, Prophet Moses considered Allah to be his *wakeel.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says about those who rely upon Him: ‘Nay – who is it that responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him, and who removes the evil (that caused the distress).’ (*an-Naml:* 62) He also says: ‘And whenever danger befalls you at sea, all those (powers) that you (had previously and mistakenly) invoked will forsake you.’ (*al-Isra’:* 67) So, Allah *Glorified is He* is the guardian and supporter of all His servants, including those servants who do not believe in Him. Those who disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* call out, ‘O my Lord!’ when things become difficult for them. They may fool others by their disbelief, but they can never fool or deceive themselves.

Allah told us that: ‘Allah is the Creator of all things,’ (*az-Zumar:* 62) and that: ‘He alone has the power to determine the fate of all things.’ (*az-Zumar:* 62) Sometimes farmers plant crops to thrive and flourish, but these crops are struck down by a disaster or are consumed by an epidemic that wipes them out. This calamity may even happen just before the crops are harvested. Indeed, any calamity is decreed by Allah *Glorified is He* as a sign that you should invoke Him alone, and not depend on the worldly laws! Indeed, He is The Creator and the Guardian over everything. His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. This is why Allah says immediately afterwards:

لَّهُۥ مَقَالِيدُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِۗ وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟
بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

The keys of the heavens and earth are His. Those who have rejected the revelations of God will be the losers [63]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 63)

The Quran was revealed in the language and the dialects that the Arabs used at the time of its revelation, but despite that, there are Persian, Ethiopian and Roman(1) words that still appear within it. These words do not negate the Arabic nature of the Quran because they had entered the Arabic glossary before the Quran was revealed and the Arabs used them knowingly. So, these words become part of their language.

One of those words is the word *maqaleed*, for to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs: '...the reigns *(maqaleed)* (to the mysteries) of the heavens and the earth.' (*az-Zumar:* 63) The word *maqaleed* is either the plural of the word *miqlad*, a word which has the same morphological form as *miftah*, or is the plural of the word *miqleed*. Another Arabic dialect uses the word *aqaleed* which is the plural of *iqleed*.

The word refers to Allah's right of possession over everything and the right of disposal of anything as He wills. It also refers to Allah's power of protection and preservation. So, this verse means that Allah has Absolute Kingship over the heavens and earth, as well as the absolute freedom to do as He wills within them. He also preserves them while continuously governing and directing all their affairs.

This is the divine attribute by which Allah is the *Qayum* (Superb Sustainer) of everything in existence. Allah *Glorified is He* created everything in this world. Then, He provided and sustained these creatures so that they remain able to fulfil the functions for which they were created. To that objective, He set down laws that control them and revealed commandments that they are obliged to follow. Some people claim that Allah left these laws to control His creation without His presence, but this is a false claim. On the contrary, Allah supports and sustains His creatures at all times, without any moment of disregard.

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(1) *As-Suyuti included a section in his book, 'Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum Al-Quran,' and mentioned the words that appear in the Quran in a language other than that of the Arabs (pp. 105 - 120). Examples of Persian words include (ibriq), (jahannam) and (dinar); examples of Ethiopian words include (sinin), (shatr) and (taghut); and examples of Roman words include (qist), (qustas) and (tafaq).*

Read Allah’s words: ‘Verily, it is Allah (alone) who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate (from their orbits) – for if they should ever deviate, there is none that could uphold them after He will have ceased to do so.’ (*Fatir:* 41)

Some philosophers claim that Allah left rules and laws to govern the universe and that these laws are uniform. If this concept was true, things would settle into one particular course and would not change. For instance, the healthy systems would remain endlessly healthy, the mighty would remain mighty, and the rich would remain rich. However, this is not the way things are, because Allah *Glorified is He* acts freely within His creation and sustains His creatures according to His will.

It is narrated (in a weak Hadith) that ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan *may Allah be pleased with him* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the *maqaleed* (reigns) of the heavens and the earth. This Hadith has a weak chain of narration, but in it, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: ‘O son of ‘Affan. Nobody before you has ever asked me about them. The *maqaleed* of the heavens and earth are, ‘*La ilaha illa-Allah* (There is no god but Allah)’, ‘*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest [than everything]),’ ‘*Subhana’llahi wa bi-hamdihi* (Glory and praise belong to Allah)’, ‘*Astaghfiru’llaha’l-‘azheem* (I ask forgiveness from Allah, the Immensely Great)’, ‘*La hawla wa la quwwata illa bi-llahi’l-‘aliyyi’l-‘azheem* (There is no power and no strength except from Allah, the High, the Immense)’, ‘*Huwa-l-awwalu wal-akhiru waz-zhahiru wal-batin, bi-yadihil-khayru yuhyi wa yumeet* (He is the First and Last, and the Inward and the Outward. Good lies in His hands and He brings life and death)’. These are the *maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth.’(1)

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(1) *This narration was transmitted by Al-‘Uqayli in ‘The Book of Weak Hadiths’ (Ad-Du‘afa’u Al-kabir) (4/231) in the biography of Mikhlad Abu Al-Hudhayl (1825),* =

Therefore, one of the interpretations of the phrase: '*maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth,' is that they are the phrases which we should use in the pious remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He*. If this Hadith was authentic, it means that the entirety of existence was based upon particular concepts, which have been summarized in these phrases connected to belief in Allah *Glorified is He*.

The phrase: '*La ilaha illa-Allah* (There is no god but Allah)' means that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Only Deity and that He has no partners in Creation. Whenever He decides upon a matter, there is no force that can oppose Him or object to His decrees. If He gives bounties, there is no being that can hold back His gifts, and if He withholds His gifts, none can then give them away. That is why Allah said: 'Behold, (you will find that) those beings whom you invoke instead of Allah cannot create (as much as) a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end.' (*al-Hajj:* 73) Indeed, more than that, these false deities are unable to perform even simpler tasks than the task of creation. Allah says: '...And if a fly takes anything from them, they cannot retrieve it.' (*al-Hajj:* 73) They cannot even retrieve the slightest amount of honey that a fly takes when it falls upon it. Allah says: 'Weak indeed is the seeker, and (weak) is the (false deity being) sought.' (*al-Hajj:* 73)

The phrase: '*La ilaha illa-Allah* (There is no god but Allah),' is a primary principle that has been set by Allah *Glorified is He* Himself. Allah informed us of it as the ultimate testimony of His Essence. This testimony means that nothing in creation can ever refuse Allah's orders. If He orders anything to come into existence, it will comply as He wishes. Thereafter, the angels testified to this principle because they witnessed it in action. Later on, the people of knowledge also paid witness to it, as they inferred it from the material forms of evidence and proofs they discovered in the Universe. Allah *Glorified is He*

= *and he said, 'There is great speculation regarding its chain of narrators, and it is only corroborated by a path of narrations that is almost identical to it.' Al-Kinani also mentioned it in Tanzih Ash-shari'a Al-Marfu'a (1/192), mentioning the difference of opinion regarding this narration being a fabrication, even though there was agreement that it was munkar (denied from being authentic). Ibn Hajar said, 'In my view, it is munkar (denied) with respect to all its chains of narration. But as for definitively declaring it to be fabricated, I will not go that far, for I have not seen anyone in its chain of narration who may be described as being a liar.'*

says: ‘Allah (Himself) proffers evidence – and (so do) the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity except Him, The Upholder of Equity: there is no deity except Him, The Almighty, The Truly Wise.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18) Thus, the underlying concept of this is one of Allah’s reigns in creation.

Similarly, the phrase: ‘*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest)’ is one of the *maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth. We previously explained that this is the phrase which we use to call people to prayer. It is important to note that the word *Akbar* is not one of Allah’s Names. Rather, it is the word *Al-Kabeer* which is one of His Names. So, why did Allah not use His Name, *Al-Kabeer* (The Great), when summoning people to prayer, but instead used the attribute *Akbar* (The Greatest) for this call?

The answer is that we are comparing two concepts in this call to prayer. Indeed, we are comparing the concept of Allah’s worship to the concept of worldly tasks we may be engaged in at the time of prayer. Thus, the word *Akbar* (The Greatest) is the appropriate linguistic form to be used, because we use it when making relative comparisons between two concepts. It means that when the time of prayer is due, Allah should be Greater in our eyes than the appreciably important tasks of livelihood and sustenance. Hence, since the tasks of livelihood are themselves important, Allah described Himself using the word ‘The Greatest’ (*Akbar*) instead of the word ‘Great’ *(Kabeer)*. It is true that these tasks of livelihood are still great endeavours. Certainly, they place our worldly affairs in order, and give us the strength and capacity to uphold the affairs of our religion. However, despite the greatness of these worldly tasks, Allah is Greater. Therefore, in the call, ‘Allah is The Greatest,’ Allah implies that these actions were still great. However, you are obliged as a servant to leave these great elective tasks that you are doing when obligatory prayers are being called to. If Allah had used the Name *Al-Kabeer* (Great) instead of the word *Akbar* (The Greatest) in the call to prayer, this would have indicated that the tasks of sustenance are small and trivial, which was not the message intended.

The phrase: ‘*Subhanallahi wa bi-hamdihi* (Glory and praise belong to Allah),’ is also one of the defining concepts of the heavens and the earth. This is because you will be exposed to wondrous concepts and matters in the universe that are beyond comprehension and understanding. Whenever an extraordinary action is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He* a believer should say, '*Subhanallah* (Glory be to Allah).' This is a matter we clarified when we narrated the story of the Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As we know, the Quranic account of this journey begins with the phrase: 'Limitless in His Glory (*Subhan*) is He (Allah) who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship (at Mecca) to the Remote House of Worship (at Jerusalem).' (*al-Isra': *1)

There is nothing strange about this event since the action was ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Muhammad did not say, 'I travelled from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night,' but rather, he said, 'I was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem (by Allah) in one night.'(1) It is well-known that a verb corresponds to its subject in terms of its strength and time, but when the subject of the verb is Allah *Glorified is He* there is no time to speak of.

We previously gave an illustration of that concept. If you were planning a journey to Alexandria, you may probably use a horse. Alternatively, you may want to use a car, buy an airplane ticket, or even build a rocket to get there faster. Your journey will not take the same time with each of these modes of transportation because the length of time it takes depends on the speed and strength of the mode you use to travel. The more powerful the means of your travel is, the shorter the time of your journey. So, if the Power that transported Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Night Journey was the Omnipotent Power of Allah *Glorified is He* then there is no doubt that this journey would need no time to be accomplished.

We can find another proof of Allah's extraordinary might in the blood that flows in our veins. This blood must have a specific degree of liquidity in order to flow. If its liquidity decreases inside the blood vessels, the blood starts to clot and may cause fatal emboli to shower the bloodstream. However, in contrast, when that same blood flows out of the body, it normally clots up to seal the wound through which it is flowing. Therefore, the same blood observes two different behaviours to suite its specific function.

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(1) From Jabir ibn 'Abdullah *may Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad said, 'When Quraysh called me a liar when I was transported by night to Jerusalem, I stood in the *Hijr* and Allah made the Sacred House at Jerusalem appear to me. So I started to describe its signs to them while I was looking upon it.' It was transmitted by Ahmad in his Musnad (3/377), Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4710) and by Muslim (170). Prophet Muhammad described the Sacred House at Jerusalem to them, gate by gate, window by window, as well as its pillars and the road that leads to it. Such a detailed description could not conceivably result from a dream, no matter how true that dream was, for dreams do not contain such details.

Reflect upon the temperature of the human body. You will find that its natural temperature is 37 degrees. Regardless of whether you live in the land of the Eskimos or at the equator, your temperature remains fixed at 37 degrees. Despite that, there are organs within the human body that have slightly different temperatures, even though they are part of a single body. A well-known quality of heat or cold is that of temperature homeostasis. Adjacent objects tend towards a single level of temperature. So, why does the heat and coldness inside the body not equalise at one specific degree? These are all matters to which we must say, '*Subhanallah* (Glory be to Allah), the One Who created this capacity.'

The Quran teaches us to utter this phrase and remember its underlying concept whenever we are confronted by any act that only Allah *Glorified is He* is capable of doing. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Limitless in His Glory is He (Allah) who transported His servant by night,' (*al-Isra':* 1) and He says: 'Limitless in His Glory is He who has created opposites in whatever the earth produces, and in men's own selves, and in that of which (as yet) they have no knowledge.' (*Ya Sin:* 36)

The phrase: '(*Subhanallah* (Glory is to Allah…)' should always be followed by the phrase '*Wa Bi-hamdihi* (…and praise is to Him)'. This additional phrase means that you are praising Allah because He is exalted and transcendent above His creation. We should praise Allah *Glorified is He* because He does not resemble His creation in any way. There is no one like Him, and He has no peer or equal. This is also because the fruits of His transcendence will come back to the believers in the form of divine remarkable bounties.

The phrase: '*Astaghfiru'llaha'l-'azheem* (I ask forgiveness from Allah, the Immence),' is also one of the governing concepts of the heavens and the earth. If a servant forgets Allah's orders, it is one of Allah's bounties to forgive that servant and allow them to repent and return to Allah's path. In this world, this forgiveness will remove one's sins and wipe his slate clean, and is one of the main manifestations of Allah's mercy towards us. However, if Allah *Glorified is He* did not allow the repentance of His servants, their disobedience will become worse and they would continue to transgress against others. So, the institution of repentance spares people from the evils of other people.

The phrase: '*La hawla wa la quwwata illa bi-llahi'l-'aliyyi'l-'azheem* (There is no power and no strength except from Allah, the High, the Immense),' is also one of the *maqaleed* of the heavens and the earth. When you are performing any action, do not consider these actions to be the result of your power or strength, since there is no power or strength except by Allah's will. Indeed, Allah is capable of taking away all your power. For instance, you can move your hands whichever way you want, smoothly and easily, and they obey your commands and comply with your intentions. However, you know nothing of the individual muscles and nerves that participate in their movements. This is the ability that Allah has placed inside your body, and if Allah wills to take that power from you, He can easily stop the nerve impulses that flow from your brain to your limbs. If that happens, these limbs will not respond to you, and you will be unable to even lift them at will. So, keep aware of this matter whenever you approach any action, and know that it does not happen by your power, but rather by the Power of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The phrase: '*Huwa-l-awwalu wal-akhiru wazh-zhahiru wal-batin* (He is the First and Last, and the outward and the inward,' is also one of the defining concepts of the heavens and the earth. Allah is the First being in existence as He is without a beginning. He is also the Last being, which means that He is without an end. It is like we say in the supplication during *Ramadan*, '(O' Allah), you are the First who is not before a Last, and (O' Allah), you are the Last who is not after a First, but that leads to that, so stop, O intellect, at the limit of what you can grasp!'

The word *Azh-zhahir* (the Outward) refers to the visible and outwardly signs in the kingdom of Allah *Glorified is He* that the eyes can perceive. On the other hand, the word *Al-batin* (the Inward) refers to the hidden aspects of Allah's kingdom that the eye cannot see. So Allah *Glorified is He* has a visible *mulk* (kingdom) and an invisible *malakut* (realm) that no one may see, except those of His servants whom He wills at the time that He wills.

The phrase: '*Biyadihil-khayru* (Good lies in His hands)' is also one of the *maqaleed*. Some of the scholars(1) have wrongly said, 'Both good and evil lie in Allah's hands.' They claimed that the proof for their opinion is found in Allah's words: 'Say: "O Allah, Lord of all dominion! You grant your dominion unto whom You will, and take away dominion from whom You will; and You exalt whom You will, and abase whom You will. In Your hand is all-good. Verily, You have the power to will anything."' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) They said that the verse brought forth several forms of opposites, and thus, these scholars felt emboldened to claim that both good and evil lie in Allah's hands. However, their opinion is wrong and not permissible. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* only said, 'The Good lies in His hands.' This was an exaltation of Allah, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not ascribe evil to Allah *Glorified is He*. Similarly, we must never ascribe evil to Allah, and that is why, since 1928, I have been objecting to the supplication many people repeat, 'Spare us the evil of what You have decreed.'(2) I used to say that this supplication must be amended! Then, Allah guided me to another meaning from this supplication, which is that the real evil we are seeking refuge from is not being content with Allah's Decrees, and not that the divine decrees are evil in any way.

If we were to reflect on the wording of the phrase: '*Biyadihil-khayru* (Good lies in His hands),' as well as the verse: '...In Your hand is all good,' (*Al-'Imran:* 26) we would notice that the good here is absolute. Thus, all of the decrees of Allah are good, and the evil only ever comes from the creation. Read Allah's words: 'Whatever good happens to you is from Allah; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.' (*an-Nisa':* 79) Someone might ask, 'How can we understand the verse in which Allah says: '…all is from Allah'? (*an-Nisa':* 78) We previously explained that everything is from Allah *Glorified is He* in the sense that Allah is The Creator of all energy and power. Indeed, He is The Creator of the force and capacity to act. However, it is you who will channel that force and direct it either towards good or towards evil. So, based on that, we can say that good is from Allah *Glorified is He* and evil is from us.

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(1) *Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him said, according to what is narrated by Ibn Al-Jawzi in Zad Al-Masir in his Tafsir of verse 26 of the chapter of 'Al 'Imran, 'Both good and evil lie in Your hands, but ask for one of them, since it is the one that is to be desired.'*

(2) *This Hadith was narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (2/63 – (Hadith) no. 1425) in the chapter on the qunut in Witr, and was also narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (1/199 & 200) in a Hadith from Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb may Allah be pleased with him.*

The phrase: '*Yuhyee wa yumeet* (He brings life and death)' is also one of the *maqaleed*. Allah created life and created death, as the essential aspects of human existence. He says: 'It is He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test (and thus show) which of you is best in conduct, and (make you realize that) He alone is Almighty and truly forgiving.' (*al-Mulk:* 2)

Allah mentioned death first so that we not approach life in the deluded belief that we are going to live forever, but rather, we should approach it with the awareness that death is inevitable. This awareness will help us to act in preparation for that end. The words: '...He has the power over anything!' (*ar-Rum:* 50) mean that He does what you are unable to do because His power is absolute and there is no force that can resist His will. Therefore, when you ask your Lord for a particular provision, you should ask Him to give you blessings that you do not expect, for Allah *Glorified is He* can provide for you in ways that exceed your expectations. That is why the people of higher spiritual knowledge said, 'The material means are the outward cover of Allah's divine decrees.'

Thus, the verse in which Allah says: 'His are the reigns (*maqaleed*) of the heavens and the earth' (*az-Zumar:* 63) was a reference to His creative power and everlasting sustenance of His creation.

Then, Allah says: 'And those who disbelieved in Allah's messages…' (*az-Zumar:* 63). These messages could be the universal signs in existence or the miracles of the Messengers. They could also be the verses of the Quran that inform us of Allah's Commandments. Their disbelief is their refusal to put these divine commandments into practice. Allah says: '...it is they who are the losing folk.' (*az-Zumar:* 63). This means that they have made a losing bargain by denying Allah's messages. This is because they preferred their immediate appetites to the everlasting bliss of paradise. Then Allah says(1):

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(1) *The reason for the revelation of the verse: Ibn Kathir mentioned in his tafsir (4/61) that Ibn Abu Hatim and others narrated from Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him that=*

قُلْ أَفَغَيْرَ ٱللَّهِ تَأْمُرُوٓنِّيٓ أَعْبُدُ أَيُّهَا ٱلْجَٰهِلُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Say, ‘Do you order me to worship someone other than God, you foolish people?’ [64]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 64)

You may remember how the disbelievers acted when they stubbornly opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and refused to accept Allah’s religion. However, despite their efforts, Islam spread widely and its followers increased in number. So, the disbelievers tried to have an agreement with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, ‘O Muhammad, if you worship our gods for a year, we will worship your Allah for a year.’(1) So Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them: ‘Say (O Muhammad to these polytheists), “Are you ordering me (*ta’murunani*) to worship (*a’budu*) a deity other than Allah, O folk who are ignorant (of right and wrong)?”’ (*az-Zumar:* 64)

The question that is asked here is a question of disapproval and astonishment. Did they really want the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whom Allah entrusted to convey His Message and revelation, to worship someone other than Him? The Arabic word *ta’murunani* means, ‘Are you ordering me?’ It can be recited in a number of different ways(2)

= *the idolaters, in their ignorance, called on Prophet Muhammad to worship their gods, and if he did that, they would then worship his God Glorified is He.*

(1) *Al-Wahidi mentioned in Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 261) that the chapter of al-Kafirun (The Disbelievers) was revealed because a group of disbelievers from Quraysh said, ‘O Muhammad, follow our religion and we will follow your religion. Worship our gods for a year and we will worship your God for a year. Then if what you have is better than what we have, we have shared in it with you and taken our portion of it, and if what we have is better than what you have, you have shared in it with us and taken your portion of it.’ Prophet Muhammad said, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from associating any partners with Him!’ Then Allah revealed the verse: Say, ‘O you who deny the truth…’ (al-Kafirun: 1)*

(2) *A number of different ways of reciting this have been narrated, including:*
(a) *(ṭamuruniya) with a single undoubled (nun) and with a (fatha) on the (ya’). This was the recitation of Nafi‘.*
(b) *(ta’murunani) with two undoubled (nuns) in the form that would be expected. This was the recitation of Abu ‘Amir.*
(c) *(ta’murunni) with a single doubled (nun) because of the two (nuns) merging into each other. This was the recitation of the remainder of the reciters and was chosen by Abu*=

including: *ta'murunni* (with a doubled *nun*), *ta'murunani* (where the first *nun* is a preventative letter, which prevents a verb from taking the *kasra*) or it can also be pronounced as *ta'muruni* (with a single *nun*).

The word *a'budu* (to worship) indicates that worshipping their idols is a futile practice that has no intellectual basis, since the worshipper is obliged to obey the commandments of the worshipped deity, and these idols have issued no rules to be obeyed or disobeyed. That is why Allah described those who worship these idols as being ignorant, addressing them with the words: '...O folk who are ignorant (of right and wrong).' (*az-Zumar:* 64)

Here it becomes incumbent upon us to differentiate between people who are illiterate and people who are ignorant. The person who is illiterate is better than an ignorant because his mind is a blank slate that does not hold any particular theories or viewpoints. Therefore, it is easier for them to be convinced of the true facts. The ignorant's mind is not a blank slate, but holds a firm mistaken view of the world. That is why it takes more effort to convince an ignorant person of anything. Firstly, you must convince them of the error of their mistakes before convincing them of the correct facts. Thus, Allah says: 'Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body.' (*al-Ahzab:* 4)

We previously talked about the matter of confined space, and said that any point in space can only contain one body of matter. For instance, we notice that when we fill a jug with water, the bubbles of air have to come out first before the water can find its way in. The same is true of those unsound positions that reside in the heart of the ignorant. Their ignorant or corrupt concepts must leave their place so that the heart can be convinced of the truth. It is even harder to extract incorrect beliefs or positions that satisfy a person's own appetites and whims.

This concept of the capacity of a single space is one that is instinctually understood by most people, be they philosophers, young children, or illiterate individuals. Do you not see that if a young boy is sitting next to his father, and his older brother wants to sit in his place, the younger child would get up to

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= *'Ubayd and Abu Hatim, because the word appeared in the original copy of 'Uthman may Allah be pleased with him with a single (nun) (The Tafsir of Al-Qurtubi 8/5922).*

give his seat to the brother? This is because the young child understands the intrinsic concept that any one space can only naturally contain one solid body.

The disbelievers are described as being ignorant because they hold on firmly to a mistaken belief in their hearts. They mistakenly think that Allah *Glorified is He* has partners in divinity, and there is no greater ignorance than worshipping idols. Then, Allah says:

وَلَقَدۡ أُوحِيَ إِلَيۡكَ وَإِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكَ لَئِنۡ أَشۡرَكۡتَ
لَيَحۡبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلۡخَٰسِرِينَ ٦٥

It has already been revealed to you [Prophet] and to those before you: 'If you ascribe any partner to God, all your work will come to nothing: you will be one if the losers [65]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 65)

This verse clarified the reason for the question of amazement in the last verse, when the disbelievers had asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to believe in their idols in order for them to believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. How can they tell him to do that when he was the Messenger whom Allah entrusted with His religion and revelation? Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to those who came before him, that anyone who ascribes divinity to any deities besides Allah shall be among the losing people. That is why Allah has described them as an ignorant folk in the last verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are studying: '...it has already been revealed to you, as well as to those who lived before you.' (*az-Zumar:* 65) Those people who received revelation before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were the previous Messengers, for every one of them encountered this same problem.

Is it conceivable for Messengers to ascribe partners to Allah *Glorified is He*? The scholars said that this phrase was a mere supposition. The verse was declaring the punishment that will await anyone who chose to worship deities besides Allah. So, if the threat was directed to the noble Messengers themselves, then this threat surely included any less righteous member of the general populace.

Some of the scholars have said that this verse was speaking about the infallibility of the Messengers, but this infallibility is by Allah's decree and no one has any say over Allah's decree. Did one of the Messengers not say: 'We should be guilty of blaspheming against Allah were we to return to your ways after Allah has saved us from them! It is not conceivable that we should return to them – unless Allah, our Lord, so wills. All things does our Lord embrace within His knowledge' (*al-A'raf:* 89)? So, the meaning here is that Allah's power and commands have no limits, and that Allah can do what He wills, even if a particular divine choice was never made.

The underlying message of what has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who came before him was: '...if you ever ascribe divine powers to anyone but Allah, all your work shall most certainly be in vain.' (*az-Zumar:* 65) The verse narrated part of the revelation to the previous Messengers, and directed part of the revelation in the singular form to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* singled out Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and addresses him alone with the phrase: '...if you ever ascribe divine powers to anyone but Allah, all your work shall most certainly be in vain.' (*az-Zumar:* 65) However, the fact is that if this message was directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this means that the statement was also directed to all the previous Messengers. The meaning of the verse: '...all your work shall most certainly be in vain' (*az-Zumar:* 65) is that all the righteous actions that lack the correct faith in Allah's Oneness will be corrupt and worthless on the Day of Reckoning. Allah says: '…for (in the life to come) you shall most certainly be among the losing people.' (*az-Zumar:* 65) We know that in the language of commerce, a loss is when a person's actual capital decreases. So, when a trader does not obtain any profit on top of his capital, he is not considered to be a loser, so long as his capital remains intact. The same is true of the believer whose capital with Allah *Glorified is He* consists of his belief and righteous actions. Your Lord created you and provided for you out of nothing, then sent Messengers and revealed Books to guide you. Through such messages, Allah has set up a transaction for you with Him that is profitable. So it is up to you, O believer, to take advantage of this opportunity and earn its potential profits. Indeed, the amounts of actions you can do in this world are limited by your life span. On the other hand, the potential reward for this limited life span will be the everlasting bliss of paradise. It is here that the special merit of the trade with Allah *Glorified is He* lies hidden. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said in another chapter: '…for, (if they did, they would know that) the life of this world is nothing but a passing delight and a playful enjoyment –whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only (true) life: if they but knew this.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

بَلِ ٱللَّهَ فَٱعْبُدْ وَكُن مِّنَ ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ٦٦

No! Worship God alone and be one of those who are grateful to Him [66] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 66)

The Arabic word *bal* is a particle that turns the discussion around, by negating its preceding context and affirming its following sentence. So, the meaning of this verse is, 'O Muhammad. Shun the invitation these polytheists offered you to worship their gods, and beware of being convinced by their invitations. Instead, Allah (alone) should you worship.'

In order to emphasise the Oneness of Allah, the verse used the linguistic style of placing the object in front of the verb. This particular linguistic style is called confinement. This style confined and restricted every form of worship to Allah *Glorified is He* alone and no one else, just as we say in prayer: 'You alone do we worship.' (*al-Fatiha:* 5) Placing the pronoun that refers to Allah *Glorified is He* before the verb, '…we worship,' gives the meaning, 'We only worship You and no one else.' If the verse said, 'We worship you,' by placing the verb before the object, it would allow the possibility of adding more objects of worship which is not permissible.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and be among those who are grateful (to Him).' (*az-Zumar:* 66) We should be among those who give thanks to Allah *Glorified is He* for guiding us and granting us success. We can do that by worshipping Him alone and thanking Him for the blessings that He has bestowed upon us. Those blessings are only a limited form of the eternal bliss that awaits the obedient believers in the Hereafter.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Allah's kindness towards us is that His rulings are in our own best interests in this world. Yet, Allah will still reward us in the Hereafter for obeying these commandments. Thus, His Commandments are a form of His kindness towards us. Certainly, He does not derive any benefit from our obedience, and indeed, our disobedience does not harm Him *Glorified is He*.

Read the Qudsi Hadith in which Allah says: 'My servants. Were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to all have hearts as pious as that of the most righteous servant among you, that would not increase the wealth of My kingdom in any way. And were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to have hearts as wicked as that of the most wicked servant among you, that would not decrease the wealth of My kingdom in any way, not even so much as a needle takes from the sea when it is put into it.'(1) We should know, as servants, that our Lord, Allah, loves us and wants us to obtain success and salvation. We are His creatures, and every creator wants his creation to be in the best possible state. Then, Allah says:

وَمَا قَدَرُواْ ٱللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدۡرِهِۦ وَٱلۡأَرۡضُ جَمِيعٗا قَبۡضَتُهُۥ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ
وَٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ مَطۡوِيَّٰتُۢ بِيَمِينِهِۦۚ سُبۡحَٰنَهُۥ وَتَعَٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشۡرِكُونَ ٦٧

These people have no grasp of God's true measure. On the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be in His grip. The heavens will be rolled up in His right hand – Glory be to Him! He is far above the partners they ascribe to Him! [67]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 67)

Allah's words: '(And) they have not honoured Allah with the honour that is due to Him,' (*az-Zumar:* 67) mean that the disbelievers did not contemplate and extol Allah's Glory and Power in the way that He should be exalted. That is why they associated others with Him in worship. The reality of the matter is that: '...the whole earth will be in His grasp on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His Right Hand.' (*az-Zumar:* 67) How did they forget about this reality of Allah's Omnipotent Power? Indeed, they will see the consequences of their disbelief in the Hereafter.

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(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (4/1994) in Kitab A-Birr wa As-Sila (Hadith 2577) in the chapter on prohibiting injustice, in a (Hadith) from Abu Dharr may Allah be pleased with him.*

Allah says: '...and the whole earth will be in His grasp on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His Right Hand.' (*az-Zumar:* 67) When a person says, 'The matter is in my hands,' it means that he has total control over it. Thus, this verse does not mean that Allah *Glorified is He* actually has a hand or a fist. Rather, it is a metaphor for His omnipotent strength and mastery.

We previously said that when the Quranic verses describe Allah *Glorified is He* in a way that has its counterpart in creation, we must understand that description in the light of Allah's words: '...there is nothing like Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) Examples of such attributes include Him being described as having hearing, sight, a hand, or knowledge.

Allah's words: '...and the whole earth,' (*az-Zumar:* 67) refer to this earth of ours upon which we live and breathe, as well as any other earths like it since Allah has said: '...He who has created seven heavens, and of the earth the same number.' (*at-Talaq:* 12) This includes the planets in our own solar system, let alone all the other solar systems and galaxies which may contain millions of planets just like our own. Allah says: '...He has (also) the power to gather them (unto Himself) whenever He wills.' (*ash-Shura:* 29)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and the heavens will be folded in His Right Hand.' (*az-Zumar:* 67) In the Arabic language, the right hand is used as a metaphor of a person's strength. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: 'Some (of them) will say, "Behold; you used to approach us (deceptively) from the right."' (*as-Saffat:* 28) This means that they were approached from their direction of strength.

Allah says in another place in the Quran: 'On that Day, We shall roll up the skies as written scrolls are rolled up; (and) as We brought into being the first creation, so We shall bring it forth anew.' (*al-Anbiya':* 104)

Which earth is meant by Allah's words: '...and the whole earth will be in His grasp on the Day of Resurrection'? (*az-Zumar:* 67) The scholars said that this earth will be different from the earth that we currently live upon. The earth will be altered in the Hereafter, as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself says: '(His promise will be fulfilled) on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens.' (*Ibrahim:* 48) That is because the earth of this world is an earth of means and secondary causes. We live upon it, eat its fruits, and pursue the course of our lives. On the other hand, our lives in the Hereafter will be directly connected to the Primary Causer, Allah *Glorified is He*.

There will be no planting or cultivation in the earth of the Hereafter. Instead, we will simply wish for food or drink and it will come to us. You will be granted anything that comes to your mind without any need for secondary causes. This is because it will come to you directly by the power of Allah *Glorified is He* without secondary means.

Similarly, the sky of this world is a sky of means and secondary causes. For instance, the rain has to descend from its clouds. In the Hereafter, there will be no rain, no sun, or moon in the sky. That earth of the Hereafter will be illuminated solely by the light of its Lord.

Allah *Glorified is He* concluded this verse with the words: 'Limitless is He in His Glory, and sublimely exalted above anything to which they may ascribe a share in His divinity.' (*az-Zumar:* 67) This is a command for us to say, '*Subhana'llah* (Glory be to Allah),' and to disassociate Him from being like His creation with respect to having a hand or folding up the sky, for His folding of it here is nothing like the folding that we know. We must understand all these descriptions in the light of Allah's words: '...there is nothing like Him.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) So, disassociate Allah *Glorified is He* from what the idolaters say. Then, Allah says:

وَنُفِخَ فِي ٱلصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَن فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَن
شَآءَ ٱللَّهُۖ ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٞ يَنظُرُونَ ٦٨

The Trumpet will be sounded, and everyone in the heavens and earth will fall down senseless except those God spares. It will be sounded once again and they will be on their feet, looking on [68] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 68)

After speaking about the doctrines of belief and mentioning His promise to those who are obedient and His threat against those who are disobedient, Allah started describing the Hereafter. This is the abode where we will all be recompensed for the actions we did in this world. This world contains creatures that are dead and creatures that are alive. The Final Hour will not come until every creature is dead before the phase of Resurrection. Allah spoke to us here about the sounding of the trumpet, for that sounding of the trumpet is what will kill everything that is living at that time.

The verb *nufikha* appears here in the passive case, which is the case where the subject of the verb is left unmentioned. The Prophetic Hadith has made it clear for us that the angel that will sound the trumpet (*soor*) will be Angel Israfeel *peace be upon him*.

The *soor* is a trumpet much like a bagpipe. Angel Israfeel *peace be upon him* will initiate a first blow that will kill off everything that is living. Everything will have to die first before they could be resurrected, just like all those who died before them right back to the time of Prophet Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah says: ‘Every human being is bound to taste death.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 57)

Is it the first sound of the trumpet itself that kills everyone, or does the second sound of the trumpet itself bring the dead back to life? We say that it is not the sound of the trumpet itself that gives life or brings death, but the trumpet is the announcement from Allah, The One in whose hands the entire affair resides, that the act has begun: ‘...and all (creatures) that are in the heavens and all that are on earth will fall down senseless (*sa’iqa*).’ (*az-Zumar:* 68)

The verb *sa‘iqa* has two different meanings. The first definition has the meaning of perishing, such as in Allah’s words: ‘Hence, leave them alone until they face that promised day of their (death), when they will be struck down (*yus’aqoon*),’ (*at-Tur:* 45) which means that they will perish.

The word *sa’iqa* also appears with the meaning of fainting and losing consciousness, like what happened to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when his Lord made Himself manifest to the mountain. When Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* called on his Lord, he said: ‘O my Lord! Show (Thyself) to me, so that I might behold Thee!’ (Allah) said, ‘Never canst thou see Me.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 143)

Allah *Glorified is He* is not saying here, ‘I cannot be seen,’ but rather, He is saying, ‘Your current physical form will not allow you to see Me. Yet, circumstances could change in such a way that would make it possible for you to see Me.' Humankind has arrived at ways, means, and tools that enable them to see things that they would not normally be able to see. For example, we have all seen the power of devices such as spectacles, magnifying glasses, and telescopes. So, Allah *Glorified is He* is more capable of enabling you, one day, to see the things that you could not previously see.

Then, Allah says, completing the story of Prophet Musa (Moses): 'However, behold this mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then – only then – wilt thou see Me.' (*al-A'raf:* 143) Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to emphasise this matter to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* not only with words, but also through an active event: '...And as soon as his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Musa (Moses) fell down in a swoon (*sa'iqa*).' (*al-A'raf:* 143)

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*, 'If you lost consciousness simply by seeing the mountain to which the manifestation happened, then what would have happened to you if you saw The One Who manifests Himself.'

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse we are studying: '...unless they are from those whom Allah wills (to exempt).' (*az-Zumar:* 68) Allah may prevent some of His creatures from falling down senseless at the sound of the trumpet. This may be for a limited period of time, since whoever is not killed by the first sounding of the trumpet will inevitably die later. The last creature to die will be the Angel of Death, when Allah *Glorified is He* will command him, 'Die, O Angel of Death!' Thereafter, life will become everlasting without end.

They say that Allah *Glorified is He* will exempt certain angels from falling down senseless, as these are the angels who are entrusted with the affairs of this world: Gabriel, Mika'il, 'Azra'il and Israfeel *peace be upon them*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will be one of those exempted from falling down senseless at the sound of the trumpet. It has been narrated in a Prophetic Hadith(1) that the sounding of the trumpet will take place and everyone will perish, and that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be the first to be resurrected. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will find Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* awake clinging to the Throne. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not know whether Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had died along with everyone else but was resurrected beforehand, or whether Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had not fallen at all.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, 'Do not say that I am better than Prophet Musa (Moses) peace be upon him for when everyone falls unconscious on the Day of*=

Therefore, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* could be among those whom Allah *Glorified is He* exempted in the verse: '…unless they are from those whom Allah wills (to exempt).' (*az-Zumar:* 68) Alternatively, he may have fallen but had been resurrected before everyone else.

Some of the scholars have explained that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* may be exempted because he had already fallen senseless in this world when Allah made Himself manifest to the mountain. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted that period of time he was senseless to be taken into account and made the time he was senseless on the Day of Rising shorter.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '... And then it will sound again.' (*az-Zumar:* 68) The trumpet will sound again for the resurrection. The first sound will kill off all living creatures, while the second sound will resurrect them and bring them out of their graves. Allah says: '…and (then) the trumpet (of resurrection) will be blown – and lo! Out of their graves towards their Lord will they all rush forth (*yansiloon*).' (*Ya Sin:* 51) This is the image that Allah *Glorified is He* illustrated of the concept of resurrection. He said: '...And then it will sound again – and lo! Standing (before the Seat of Judgment), they will begin to see (the truth).' (*az-Zumar:* 68)

The Arabic word *yansiloon* refers to the process of these bodies going apart after being together. This is like when we say to a tailor that the thread of a particular piece of fabric has unravelled, after having been closely knit together. This is a precise image and eloquent expression. It portrays the

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= *Rising, I will be the first to be aware. And lo, there is Prophet Musa (Moses) standing beside the Throne. And I do not know whether Prophet Musa (Moses) was among those who fell unconscious but became aware before me, or whether he was among those whom Allah had exempted.' It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6517) in Kitab Ar-Riqaq.*

circumstances in the grave when the dead are compacted under the earth together, after their quarrels and disputes when they were alive. An Arabic poet(1) expressed a similar concept when he said:

Perhaps a grave could become a grave many times over,
laughing at the crowding together of many opposites.(2)

When these people died, the earth closed upon them and cancelled the enmity and spite that existed between them. It purified their elements in a way that allowed them to merge together.

It is as if they were joyful at this reunion and this close association since it replaced the differences that had existed between them in this world. Then, when the trumpet is sounded for a second time, their meeting will break up and everyone will take a separate way once more. That is the meaning of the word *yansiloon* in the phrase: '...will they all rush forth (*yansiloon*).' (*Ya Sin:* 51) Every single soul will be on its own, just as the tailor unravels a thread and removes it from its place in the fabric. This is because the Reckoning is a personal matter, with each person only taken to task for what they have done.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...they will begin to see (the truth).' (*az-Zumar:* 68) They will have to wait and see what will happen to them, viewing all of the surrounding horrors with wide eyes. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse, mentioning what they will say: 'O our Lord! (Now) we have seen, and we have heard!' (*as-Sajda:* 12)

The scholars said that this is the only verse in the Quran in which sight is mentioned before hearing. This is because when the people will be resurrected from their graves, they will be surrounded on every side by horrors and torments. In such circumstances, their sights will grasp the horrors before the hearing.

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(1) He is Abu Al-'Ala' Al-Ma'arri, Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah ibn Sulayman, a poet and philosopher who was born in 363 AH and died in 449 AH in Ma'arrat An-Nu'man at the age of 86. He started composing poetry when he was a lad of only 11 years. When he died, 84 poets stood by his graveside eulogizing him. He used to prohibit the hurting of animals and the eating of meat. He has a book titled *Luzum ma la yalzam* and *Siqt Az-Zanad*. (Al-Mawsu'a Ash-shi'riyya).

(2) The verse is from a poem by Abu Al-'Ala' Al-Ma'arri, made up of 16 verses and composed in the *al-khafeef* metre. The poem starts with the verse:
They are not noble in my religion and my belief,
those who cry and wail at the grave, nor should any singer chant.

The horrors of the Day of Judgment will start with the sounding of the trumpet. The torments of the disbelievers will be more severe, and they will start to tremble and shake. Then, the first stages of Allah's Promise and Threat will be revealed to them, and they will know that everything they denied and rejected will be true as well. Those people had for so long denied the Resurrection and said: 'Shall we, indeed, be raised from the dead? And perhaps our forefathers of old (will be resurrected as well)?' (*as-Saffat:* 16-17)

Therefore, when they see that Allah *Glorified is He* spoke truthfully about the events of the Resurrection, they will realize that the Reckoning and its following punishment will also be true. 'So, woe to you, you disbelievers and deniers of the Reckoning. Then, Allah says:

وَأَشۡرَقَتِ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبُ وَجِاْيٓءَ بِٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ وَٱلشُّهَدَآءِ وَقُضِيَ بَيۡنَهُم
بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَهُمۡ لَا يُظۡلَمُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ وَوُفِّيَتۡ كُلُّ نَفۡسٖ مَّا عَمِلَتۡ وَهُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا يَفۡعَلُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

The earth will shine with the light of its Lord; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; the prophets and wit-nesses will be brought in. Fair judgement will be given between them: they will not be wronged [69] and every soul will be repaid in full for what it has done. He knows best what they do [70]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 69 - 70)

These verses transport us to the world of the Hereafter, in which the earth shall be changed into another earth and the heavens into another heaven. In this world, we used to be illuminated by the light of the sun. However, when we will be transported to the Hereafter, the earth itself will shine with Allah's Light, as Allah says: 'And the earth will shine bright with its Lord's light.' (*az-Zumar:* 69) It is as if this light were an intrinsic part of it. There will be no sun to shine down upon it, but it will shine forth with its own luminance.

The Hereafter will be a world that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no mind has ever dreamt of. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and (they) will know therein neither (a burning) sun nor severe cold.' (*al-Insan:* 13) That is because this world works through means and secondary causes, as the sun shines to light up the earth by day and the moon shines to light up the earth by night. However, in the Hereafter, we do not live through such means, but rather by a direct link to the Primary Causer, Allah *Glorified is He*. Everything will come to us directly without us having to work for it. We have no need there for a sun to give us light in the day or to cultivate the soil. We do not need a moon to give us light in the night.

Just as the earth is changed into another earth and the sky into another sky, we too will be changed into another form that is in harmony with the Hereafter. So you will eat without producing waste and will continue to live without growing old. When the earth shines brightly with the light of its Lord, you will see an ambient light with an undetected source. We have seen such lighting methods in modern times in this world, where lights are placed in a way that keeps the source of the light hidden, thus preventing the light from harming the eyes directly.

Allah has provided us with a metaphor for His illumination of the heavens and the earth in the chapter of *an-Nur*, when He says: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.’ (*an-Nur:* 35) This means that He illuminates them. In order to convey this meaning, Allah illustrated the example which we have all seen in our lives. He says: ‘...The parable of His light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp.’ (*an-Nur:* 35) This verse does not describe how Allah’s actual light is. It is only a metaphor that is used to convey how Allah *Glorified is He* gives light to His creation, for none of us will be able to perceive the reality of His actual light.

A (*mishkat*) or niche is an opening in a wall that does not go all the way through; it is also called a (*kuwwa*). It still exists today in ancient traditional buildings. This niche is where a torch is placed. Some less educated people think that a (*mishkat*) is itself the lamp. The special thing about a niche is that it does not go all the way through the wall, and the amount of space inside of it is limited which means that the light of the lamp concentrates, masses inside of it and does not dissipate, thereby ensuring that all of the light goes to lighting up the room in which that niche is situated.

Then, that lamp is described as not simply being an ordinary lamp, but rather: ‘...the lamp is [enclosed] in glass...’ (*an-Nur:* 35). The glass purifies the light of the lamp, and by preventing additional air from reaching it, it stops the creation of smoke which sullies the purity and clarity of the light.

Moreover, that glass is not of some ordinary type of glass, but rather: '...the glass [shining] like a radiant star...' (*an-Nur:* 35). A 'radiant star' is one which illuminates itself, which indicates that the light of this lamp is doubly bright.

Then, there is the fact that the oil with which the lamp is fuelled is not just any ordinary sort of oil, but rather, it is oil taken from a tree of moderate nature: '...[a lamp] lit from a blessed tree – an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west – the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light!...' (*an-Nur:* 35)

Some people object to this metaphor being used, saying, 'How can Allah use a niche containing a lamp to draw a metaphor for His light?' We say that the metaphor here is not a metaphor for Allah's light but rather a metaphor for the way He lights up the universe. The poet Abu Tamam(1) expressed this meaning when he said in praise of someone:

The bravery of 'Amr with the generosity of Hatim,
The forbearance of Ahnaf and the cleverness of Iyyas.(2)

Whereupon one of those who was sitting with the person praised objected, saying, 'How can you place the emir at the same level as these uncivilised Arabs? The emir is greater than you have described him.'

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(1) Abu Tamam is Habib ibn Aws ibn Al-Harith, one of the princes of eloquence. He was born in Jasim, one of the villages of Hawaran in Syria in the year 188 AH, and then travelled to Egypt. He was tall and dark-skinned, eloquent and soft-spoken. He memorised 41 thousand (*rajaz*) poems, let alone all the other poems. His poetry was both strong and pure and he composed books including Fuhul Ash-Shu'ara' and Diwan Al-Hamasa. (Al-Mawsu'a Ash-shi'riyya).

(2) As-Suli mentioned these verses in his book, 'Akhbar Abu Tamam' in the section on his relations with Ahmad Ibn Al-Mu'tasim. He was reciting this poem until when he reached this verse, Al-Kindi who was present at the time and wanted to criticize him, said, 'The emir is greater than you have described him. So he paused for a moment and then added the two verses that are coming up shortly.

After pausing for a short while, Abu Tamam responded, saying:

Do not disapprove of me using those less than him,
to strike a stray metaphor for his courage and generosity.
for Allah uses for His light the least of things,
as a metaphor mentioning a niche and a lamp.(1)

In this way, the True Lord provides mankind with the tangible light that protects their physical forms and preserves their abilities to work and move through life unhindered. If people move without light, they will bump into things around them. Bumping into things means that the strong one will crush the weak one underfoot (because they do not see or notice them). Therefore, we use dimmed lights over our walkways in the night to avoid clashing when we move around.

Since the True Lord has provided us with physical light to protect our physical forms from crushing other things or being crushed by them, then, He must also have provided us with spiritual light to protect our values, so that we do not crush others with injustice and so that we are not crushed through persecution. This light is the light of revelation and the Divine Law that brings the hearts to life and puts their spiritual movements in order as they make their way through life.

Just as the True Lord makes clear for us what physical light is, He also makes it clear for us what spiritual light is. He has advised us to get this light from the Houses of Allah. He says: ‘In the houses [of worship] which Allah has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there [are such as] extol His limitless glory at morn and evening people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert from the remembrance of Allah, and from constancy in prayer, and from charity: [people] who are filled with fear [at the thought] of the Day on which all hearts and eyes will be convulsed.’ (*an-Nur:* 36-37)

So, we should take the spiritual light from the houses of Allah where we meet our Lord *Glorified is He*. It is in those meetings that Allah grants you a light from His light that fills up your heart, guides your limbs, and puts them right. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has explained to us that the light of values is higher than material light; this is proven by the fact that when a man is blind he can still walk and still do jobs in this world. But those who are lacking inner light or having blind hearts, as generally said, they cannot be guided to a correct path. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says at the conclusion of the verse: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth...’ (*an-Nur:* 35) ‘...light upon light! Allah guides unto His light him that wills [to be guided]…’ (*an-Nur:* 35).

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(1) These verses are from a poem of Abu Tamam made up of 24 verses composed in the (*Al-kamil*) metre and written in praise of the caliph, Al-Mu‘tasim.

Then, after the earth shines brightly with the light of its Lord, ‘...the record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid bare...’ (*az-Zumar:* 69). Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* explains what this means and gives us more details, saying: ‘And the record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid open; and thou wilt behold the guilty filled with dread at what [they see] therein; and they will exclaim: “Oh, woe unto us! What a record is this! It leaves out nothing, be it small or great, but takes everything into account!” For they will find all that they ever wrought [now] facing them, and [will know that] thy Lord does not wrong anyone.’ (*al-Kahf:* 49)

This way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us the details of what He mentions in general terms when He says: ‘...the record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid bare...’ (*az-Zumar:* 69). It is well known that the meaning of many verses of the Quran is explained in other verses of the Quran. The book or record that is described here is the book of actions that is specific to each individual human being and which a person does not share with anyone else; it is also mentioned in the verse: ‘And [for] every person We have imposed his fate upon his neck, and We will produce for him on the Day of Resurrection a record which he will encounter spread open [It will be said], “Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 13-14)

This book that enumerates all of your actions is a truthful record, since the one who writes it down is the angel that is assigned to you: ‘…noble, recording, aware of whatever you do!’ (*al-Infitar:* 11-12) Allah also says: ‘…not even a word can he utter but there is a watcher with him, ever present.’ (*Qaf:* 18)

This book is not just a verbal knowledge of Allah, since Allah's knowledge is His Speech, but rather, it is also a book that it is written down and read out. It is read out to its owner and shown to him so that one can see all of his good actions and bad actions laid out before him. It is for that reason that when the evildoers see their books, they start to tremble out of fear since all their wrong actions are counted out for them, with no major or minor wrong actions being left out. In that moment, they have no option but to wail and burst into loud laments.

Then, after everyone has taken hold of their books, Allah will bring forth the Messengers: '... and all the Prophets will be brought forward, and all [other] witnesses…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 69). He brings them forth so that each Messenger can bear witness that he has conveyed the Message to his people, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the day when Allah shall assemble all the apostles and shall ask, "What response did you receive?"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109)

Then, after the Messengers have borne witness, the witnesses bear witness. These witnesses are those who held on to the divine knowledge after the Messengers had gone. This is mentioned in the prophetic Hadith: 'This knowledge will be borne in every generation by its most just and trustworthy people: they will keep away from it the distortions of the people of excess, the presumptions of those who speak idly and the interpretations of the ignorant.'(1)

These scholars also bear witness that they conveyed it to others. It is for that reason that the ummah of Muhammad is characterised by its scholars, for it is they who carry forward Muhammad's Message. That is why we have the advantage over other people when it comes to this matter.

The martyrs who were killed in wars in the way of Allah also bear witness(2) thanks to the position that Allah has granted them. They obtained such a rank based on martyrdom. It is enough for a martyr that he enters the battle knowing that he will be killed if he is defeated. He fights for either victory or martyrdom. He knows his life is the price, so if he had not had full confidence that the reward promised to him by Allah will come about, he would not have gone out to war.

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Bazzar in his Musnad. See Kashf Al-Astar 'Az- Zawa'id Al-Bazzar of Al-Haythami (1/86) Hadith (143). Al-Bazzar said: 'The Hadiths of Khalid ibn 'Amr are munkar, for he used to narrate Hadiths that were not corroborated and this is one such Hadith.' Al-Haythami mentioned it in Mujma' Az-Zawa'id (1/140) and said: 'It contains Khalid ibn 'Amr Al-Qurashi who was classed as a liar by Yahya ibn Mu'in and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. This Hadith is ascribed to Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him and Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him, although Al-'Uqayli narrated it in Ad-Du'afa' Al-Kabir (1/9) in his introduction to it as being a Hadith of Abu Umama Allah be pleased with him.'*

(2) *The fact that the Sheikh said 'also' here indicates his perspicacity and great knowledge, for there are scholars of Tafsir who when it comes to interpreting the word 'witnesses',* =

That is why Allah says about martyrs: ‘But do not think of those that have been slain in Allah’s cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Lord have they their sustenance.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169) It is astonishing that some people say in disbelief, ‘Does that mean that if we were to take a martyr out of his grave, we would find him alive?!’ We say, ‘Read the verse and reflect on its meaning: Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...they are alive! With their Lord...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169) not ‘alive with you;’ this is proven by the fact that, Allah mentions the substance with which life is preserved, saying: ‘...have they their sustenance...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169). That is because when the martyr sacrifices his life, his Lord guarantees him another life which is better, greater and more lasting than the one he had in this world. Thus, a poet (1) said concerning Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* the lord of all the martyrs:

O Hamza, uncle of the chosen one, you are master
of all the martyrs of the earth, every last one of them.

= *confine themselves to saying that they are the angels who record each person’s actions, like Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (4/64); and there are scholars of tafsir who mention a number of different opinions, like Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (8/5928) who mentioned three different contradictory opinions:*

(a) That they are those who bore witness to other nations from the nation of Muhammad (*peace and blessing be upon him*). Allah says: ‘And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind…’ (*al-Baqara:* 143).

(b) That they are those who were martyred in the way of Allah, and then on the Day of Judgment, they will bear witness on behalf of those who defended Allah’s religion. This is what As-Suddi said.

(c) They are the recording angels who bear witness to the actions people have done. As for Sheikh Ash-Sha‘rawi, he took the position that all of these groups bear witness, thereby seeing the different opinions as supporting each other and not contradictory (‘Adil Abu Al-Ma‘ati).

(1) This verse is composed by Sheikh Ash-Sha‘rawi himself.

That martyrdom is itself enough for you as a defence
Against death, since it links one life immediately to another.

The meaning is that you gave your life and sacrificed it, and by means of that protected yourself from death, since immediately after dying you became alive, thereby linking your life in this world directly to your life in the Hereafter. By giving your life, your life became continuous.

This is not the end point of the testimony against a human being on the Day of Judgement. After the angels have born witness against you by means of the book they have written down, and after the Prophets and other witnesses have given their testimony, the testimony moves over to you and your own body. There is a gradual progression at testimony here: from the angels, which are of a separate species, to the prophets and martyrs, who are of your own species, to your own limbs and organs, which are parts of yourself: 'On that Day We shall set a seal on their mouths – but their hands will speak unto Us, and their feet will bear witness to whatever they have earned [in life].' (*Ya Sin:* 65) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '…on the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did!' (*an-Nur:* 24) As well, Allah says: '…till, when they come close to it, their hearing and their sight and their [very] skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing [on earth]. And they will ask their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" – [and] these will reply: "Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]: for He [it is who] has created you in the first instance – and unto Him you are [now] brought back."' (*Fussilat:* 20-21)

But, how can one's limbs and organs bear witness against their owner, while they were the instruments by which the actions were done in this world? The tongue was speaking, the hand was hitting, the foot was walking...etc. Scholars say that is because Allah *Glorified is He* created those organs and limbs for a human being and made them subject to his will, commanding them to obey him and do everything he requires. So, the tongue is compelled to serve its owner; if he wants to say, 'There is no deity but Allah', it says it, and if it wants to utter the words of unbelief it utters them. The same is true of all the other limbs and organs.

So, during the lifetime of a person in this world, the limbs are under the authority of the human being who has been granted the freedom of choice, and they follow his will completely. Then, when we are resurrected and presented before The Creator, this will is dissolved and taken away, for there will be no one who has will except for Allah: '...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, The One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16) On that day, the organs and limbs will be released and take on their role of being truthful witnesses.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and judgment will be passed on them all in justice. And they will not be wronged,' (*az-Zumar:* 69) i.e. Allah judges between the people, all those present and all created beings. The One Who judges is Allah. Then, it is a judgement based on truth and justice, with no one being treated unjustly. For no one on that day has any will, nor does anyone have any judgement or caprice. The entire affair is in Allah's hand and Allah alone. It is up to Him to allow the wronged to retaliate against those who wronged them, or to satisfy the wronged and have them pardon those who wronged them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for every human being will be repaid in full for whatever [good or evil] he has done: and He is fully aware of all that they do.' (*az-Zumar:* 70) That is, He will recompense them fairly for their actions: whoever does good will be abundantly rewarded, and whoever does evil will be severely punished.

When they came upon this verse, the orientalists raised objections to it, accusing it of having inconsistent context. They claimed that, in their view, the verse should use the word (*ya'malun*) and not (*yaf'alun*) for 'all that they do' since 'he has done' used the verb (*'amilat*). But they only say that because they do not understand the difference between (*fi'l*) and (*'amal*). A (*fi'l*), 'a deed', is the opposite of speech, and it is only the tongue that has the function of saying words, all of the other limbs and organs act: the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand strikes, the foot walks...etc.

Every limb or organ has its function and each of those functions is called a (*fi'l*). But as for the word (*'amal*), it encompasses both saying and doing, each of them may be termed as an (*‘amal*). And that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Why do you say one thing and do another?’ (*as-Saff:* 2)

But why is the verb pertaining to tongue action (*ya‘malun*) mentioned in half of the verse while the other half of the verb used the verb (*yaf‘alun*) pertaining to deeds of limbs and organs? Because, scholars say, speech is the means for conveying the message and preaching; thus, the tongue is considered the master of all the other limbs.

Then, what is the result of this repayment in full for actions? The result of this repayment in full for actions is that every self will get exactly what is merited by its actions in this world. That is why, after this repayment will have been made in full and the reckoning will have been completed, the people of belief will be driven to paradise and the people of disbelief will be driven to the fire.

وَسِيقَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءُوهَا فُتِحَتْ أَبْوَٰبُهَا وَقَالَ
لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَآ أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَٰتِ رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ
لِقَآءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا ۚ قَالُوا۟ بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِنْ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ ٱلْعَذَابِ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

Those who rejected the Truth will be led to Hell in their throngs. When they arrive, its gates will open and its keepers will say to them, ‘Were you not sent your own messengers to recite the revelations of your Lord to you and warn you that you would meet this Day?’ and they will say, ‘Yes indeed we were.’ But the sentence of punishment will have been passed against those who rejected the truth [71] (The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 71)

We notice here that the verb (*seeqa*) ‘…will be urged on...’ is in the passive voice, while in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And every soul cometh, along with it a driver and a witness.’ (*Qaf:* 21) Who is the (*sa’iq*), the ‘driver’, in this verse? Scholars reply that it is the angels, driving the people of the fire to hell; we seek refuge in Allah. The (*sa’iq*) is the one who urges on those who are driven in order to make them go faster, like a horse rider who scolds and urges on his horse to go more quickly. The angels do exactly the same thing to the evildoers, driving them hard and urging them on in order to get them to get to hell faster.

This indicates that the angels are furious with them, hate them, and are seriously annoyed with how they acted and what they did when they were in this world. Therefore, these angels are pushing them towards their just repayment in hell, without leniency or mercy. Have you seen what police officers do when they get their hands on a criminal? They beat him, punish him, and treat him with contempt because he is a bad egg in society and everyone wants to be rid of him. It is well known that the angels are honoured slaves who do not disobey Allah in any of His commands and do what they are commanded to do.

The Quran also depicts these events in another verse. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…on the Day when they shall be thrust into the fire with [an irresistible] thrust, [and will be told:]' (*at-Tur:* 13) that is, they drive them towards fire and push them into it against their will.

As for the word (*zumar*) (throngs), it means 'groups'; those who go against the orders of Allah will be sorted into groups based on their type of disobedience: one group will be those who abandon the prayer, another will be those who refuse to pay *zakat* (alms due), another will be those who partake in usury. Similarly, tyrants, (those who deal in) bribes, thieves, fornicators and embezzlers will be set in groups. Each wrongdoer will be grouped together with those guilty of the same crimes as him, with their leaders and instigators going into the fire first. Allah indicates that when He says: 'One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imams:…' (*al-Isra':* 71) '…and thereupon We shall, indeed, draw forth from every group [of sinners] the ones that had been most determined in their disdainful rebellion against The Most Gracious.' (*Maryam:* 69) As well, Allah *Glorified is He* says with regard to Pharaoh: '[And so] he shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, having led them [in this world] towards the fire [of the life to come]; and vile was the destination towards which they were led.' (*Hud:* 98)

The fact that the leaders of misguidance and the worst of the unbelievers precede their followers in entering into the fire is to remove any last vestiges of hope the followers might have of being rescued. If followers enter into the hellfire and do not find their leaders there, they may find hope that those leaders would come and save them. But what actually happens is that they go in and find those they followed and took as their example in misguidance having already preceded them into the hellfire.

Then, when they come to the gates of hellfire, the gates are opened up for them: '...till, when they reach it, its gates will be opened…' (*az-Zumar:* 71). That is because the gate of anger is not kept open (like the doors of a hotel), but rather is kept locked and is only opened for emergencies, unlike the gate of mercy which is always left open. This is part of Allah's mercy since His mercy always precedes His anger.(1)

This ending for the inhabitants of the fire has been written for them; Allah *Glorified is He* has known about it from the very beginning of life. Read, if you will, Allah's words: 'When that Day comes, not a soul will speak, unless it be by His leave; and of those [that are gathered together], some will be wretched and some, happy. Now as for those who [by their deeds] will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, [they shall live] in the fire, where they will have [nothing but] moans and sobs [to relieve their pain], therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise: for, verily, thy Lord is a sovereign doer of whatever He wills. But as for those who [by virtue of their past deeds] will have been blest with happiness, [they shall live] in paradise, therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure – unless thy Lord wills it otherwise – as a gift unceasing.' (*Hud:* 105-108)

Firstly, in order to understand this verse, you must first understand what is meant by (*khulud*) (eternal staying). (*Khulud*) is a long stay, and this stay is called (*khulud*) because it has a beginning but does not have an end. The verses here are speaking about those who are happy, namely the inhabitants of paradise, and those who are wretched, namely the inhabitants of the fire. But the True Lord *Glorified is He* excludes some people from each group; those excluded will have the period of their stays reduced. How is that?

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(1) From Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When Allah decreed creation, He wrote in His Book that is with Him above the Throne, "My mercy overcomes My anger."' It is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3194, 7404 & 7422); and by Muslim in his Sahih (2751) in Kitab At-Tawba.

After an unbeliever has been judged and driven to the fire, its gates are thrown open to admit him, and he remains there for a full eternity, from the beginning of that life endlessly. Similarly, a believer who is a recipient of Allah's mercy, after he has been judged, is driven to paradise and remains therein for a full eternity, from the beginning of that life endlessly.

But as for those who are excluded, they are disobedient believers who never repent for their wrong actions or who repent, but their repentance is not accepted. Such people must inevitably be repaid for those wrong actions and be subjected to the scorching flames of the fire; we seek refuge in Allah. That is what happens in the beginning; they enter the fire for as long as Allah wills them to be there, then they will be taken out of the fire and entered into paradise. Thereby, the period of eternity they spend in paradise is shorter than that of their fellow believers. Here, the reduction is in the beginning. Likewise, their period of eternity in the fire is also shorter than that of the inhabitants of the fire who are due to be there forever.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and its keepers will ask them …' (*az-Zumar:* 71), i.e. the keepers of the fire will say to them in order to chastise and rebuke them: '...Have there not come to you apostles from among yourselves, who conveyed to you your Lord's messages and warned you of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]?…' (*az-Zumar:* 71) This question establishes the proof against them and silences all their arguments. Their Lord did not take them unawares, but rather sent messengers to warn them. The messengers were '...from among yourselves...' (*az-Zumar:* 71). They were from your own species, from among the best of you and the closest to you so that it would be easy for you to follow them.

Moreover, these messengers were supported with proof and evidence, and brought forward promises and threats. Therefore, the disbelievers will be unable to deny that: '...They will answer: "Yea, indeed!"…' (*az-Zumar:* 71) It means: 'That indeed happened.' They will themselves admit to their lack of evidence and that Allah did send them messengers who warned them about the coming of this Day.

So, the warnings which come to people in their lifetimes, about the affairs of this worldly life and affairs that will take place in the hereafter are signs of the perfect and complete mercy of Allah to His creation. Do you not see that when you help show your son what the consequences of negligence will be and make him afraid of failing at the end of the school year, you are in fact helping him to revise and work hard to avoid such a bad outcome which might afflict him all of a sudden?

In this regard, orientalists have raised objections to Allah's words in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*. They say, 'The blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* mentions in the verses: 'He has created man out of sounding clay, like pottery, whereas the invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? [He is] the Lord of the two farthest points of sunrise, and the Lord of the two farthest points of sunset. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they might meet: [yet] between them is a barrier which they may not transgress. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? Out of these two [bodies of water] come forth pearls, both great and small. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow? And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas. Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 14-25) Are all blessings that merit Allah saying about them: 'Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 25) But what blessing is there to be found in Allah's Words: 'A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour! Which, then, of your Lord's powers can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36)

Indeed, warning about some evil before it comes about and telling people about it before taking place is a blessing. Quietly, it is one of the greatest blessings man can hope for in order to keep his affairs in order. The only reason for threats, warnings, raising awareness, and making afraid is so that we can take care to avoid the frightening thing and not become involved in it.

Then, Allah says: '...But the sentence of suffering will [already] have fallen due upon the deniers of the truth,' (*az-Zumar:* 71) i.e. it is due for them despite all the warnings and threats they received. The sentence that will come true is Allah’s words: ‘…most certainly will I fill hell with invisible beings as well as with humans, all together!’ (*as-Sajda:* 13) Then, what are you expecting to happen after that? It is quite astonishing that by our own failed choices, we do nothing more than help destiny and pave the way for it to come to pass.

A *kalima* (literally word, term, sentence, or speech) is a single utterance that conveys only the intrinsic meaning of the word used and not a meaning linked to any other word. So, for example, if you say, ‘the sky’, that does not convey a complete meaning that it would be appropriate to stop at. But when you say, ‘The sky is clear’, you express a complete meaning that is appropriate to stop at. However, scholars also say that a single word can sometimes convey a meaning. For example, if someone asks you who is with you and you replied, ‘Zayd,’ this single word conveys the meaning, ‘Zayd is with me.’ But if the words ‘is with me’ were not intrinsically understood, the single word ‘Zayd’ would not convey the complete meaning. So, a word does not convey a complete meaning where it would be appropriate to stop at unless it is linked to other words.

Arab grammarians made this point clear when they divided words up into three types: nouns, verbs and particles, and called each of them a ‘word’. The difference between them is that a noun indicates an independent meaning that can be understood on its own; a verb also can indicate a meaning of its own, but it is connected to a time or time is part of it. For instance, the verb *akala* (ate) means that an action of eating took place in the past; the same is true for ‘eats’ in the present, and the imperative ‘Eat!’ in the future. As for particles, they do not convey an independent meaning that can be understood on its own, but they must always be linked to another word for their meaning to be understood.

Moreover, the word *kalima* also means a speech or a talk. For example, you can say, ‘I gave a '*kalima*' at the party’ meaning that you gave a talk. The Quran uses the word *kalima* (word) with that meaning when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...Nay, it is indeed but a [meaningless] word that he utters...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 100) for the meaning of ‘word’ here is: ‘...O my Lord! Let me return, let me return [to life], so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed [a foretime]!…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 99-100)

Similarly, in the verse in question: '...But the sentence of suffering will [already] have fallen due upon the deniers of the truth,' (*az-Zumar:* 71) with the 'sentence' (translated here for the word *Kalima* (word)) being: '…Most certainly will I fill hell with invisible beings as well as with humans, all together!' (*as-Sajda:* 13)

قِيلَ ٱدۡخُلُوٓاْ أَبۡوَٰبَ جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۖ فَبِئۡسَ مَثۡوَى ٱلۡمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ٧٢

It will be said, 'Enter the gates of Hell: there you will remain. How evil is the abode of the arrogant!' [72]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 72)

The word (*bi'sa*) (how vile) is used for expressing censure against something, which, here, is: '...an abode for those who were given to false pride!' (*az-Zumar:* 72) That is, their place of residence and final destination. They are described, in particular, as being arrogant here, since they would not have come to such a despised end if it had not been for their arrogance. But who did they act arrogantly towards? They acted arrogantly towards their Lord and Creator. It is quite astonishing that the first arrogance displayed by the human being is against his Creator, the One Who created him from nothing and provided sustenance for him from nothing.

We notice in this verse one of the manifestations of Allah's mercy even towards the unbelievers. It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is opening a door of hope for them, giving them the hope of salvation, and indicating that they still had the possibility of repenting. No matter what they do, this door remains open. We understand that from Allah's words: '...therein to abide!…' (*az-Zumar:* 72) Allah *Glorified is He* did not say, 'forever' here, as He did, for example, in the verse: '...Now as for him who rebels against Allah and His Apostle – verily, the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide beyond the count of time.' (*al-Jinn:* 23)

When the scholars counted the number of times the word indicating eternal abide (*abadan*) is used in connection to the unbelievers, they found it only in two verses: one is the verse (65) in the chapter of *al-'Ahzab* and the second is the verse 23 in the chapter of *al-Jinn*. So, the word (*abadan*) is mentioned in some verses and left out in others. This entices those who have not yet reached the truth that will save them so that they will change, save themselves and return to the Straight Path. But when the True Lord *Glorified is He* talks about paradise, we find the words ‘therein to abide’ are usually linked with the word (*abadan*), ‘forever’.

We also notice that Allah says: ‘...enter the gates of hell...’ (*az-Zumar:* 72) and did not say, ‘Enter hell!’ What is the difference between the two expressions? ‘...enter the gates of hell...’ (*az-Zumar:* 72) indicates that the punishment rushes to meet them as soon as they enter; it is waiting to receive them at the gates.

After that, the context moves to the other party, the inhabitants of paradise. But why did Allah start with the inhabitants of the fire, saying: ‘And those who were bent on denying the truth will be urged on in throngs towards hell...’ (*az-Zumar:* 71).

Scholars say that unbelievers are mentioned first because they reject and deny the Resurrection and Reckoning. Therefore, they are pushed first to suffer punishment and distress in a state of surprise. On the contrary, the Allah-fearing believers have been certain about that Day, and believe in the Reckoning and Judgement that will take place there. Moreover, the conclusion with the promise and good news gives feeling of rejoicing and it is a happy conclusion.

Then Allah says:

وَسِيقَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوْا۟ رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى ٱلْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ
أَبْوَٰبُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَـٰمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَٱدْخُلُوهَا خَـٰلِدِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

Those who were mindful of their Lord will be led in throngs to the Garden. When they arrive, they will find its gates wide open, and its keepers will say to them, ‘Peace be upon you. You have been good. Come in: you are here to stay’ [73]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 73)

Here also, the angels drive the believers forward. But there is a difference between the way the unbelievers are driven and the way the Allah-fearing are driven, for the unbelievers are driven harshly and forcibly by the angels in order to hurry them to the punishment. But as for the Allah-fearing, they are driven in the manner that a lover drives his beloved on in order to help them get to the blessings of paradise all the more quickly.

The word *zumar* (throngs) means ‘groups’. The believers are also sorted into independent groups: a group of the ascetics, another of the scholars, a third of the Mujahedeen and fourth of the honest. ‘...till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide-open…’ (*az-Zumar:* 73). In the previous verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...till, when they reach it, its gates will be opened’ (*futihat*), whereas here He says: ‘...till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide-open…’ (*wa futihat*). Scholars say that, with respect to the inhabitants of the fire, (*futihat*) is the main clause (result) of the conditional (when they reach it) (here ‘when’ is used in place of ‘if’), whereas (*wa futihat*) is not the main clause (result) of a conditional clause; the result clause comes later when the blessings are mentioned. That is because the goal is not the opening of the gates, but rather, it is the blessings that follow.

The letter *waw* (equals the particle ‘and’) here is a particle of conjunction, and the phrase: ‘...its gates wide-open...’ (*az-Zumar:* 73) is conjoined to the sentence: ‘... till, when they reach it…’ (*az-Zumar:* 73). That is because the believers did not doubt that this Day was to come. But as for the unbelievers, they did have doubts about it. Therefore, ‘...its gates will be opened...’ (*az-Zumar:* 71) is made the result clause for the conditional clause that came before it.

But as for the Allah-fearing, the result clause of their conditional clause is something more exalted than the gates simply being opened for them; for them, opening the paradise gates is just the beginning of the mercy entries that are to be mentioned later and their elements that make them up, as well as how they gradually increase, starting with the angels greeting them: ‘...and its keepers will say unto them, “Peace be upon you! You have done well,”’ (*az-Zumar:* 73) since you purified yourselves from the dirt of wrong action and associating other idols with Allah: ‘...enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide!’ (*az-Zumar:* 73) This continues to the end of the chapter, whereby they see the angels circling the Throne. That is the result clause of the conditional that befits them.

Another group of scholars[1] said that (*wa futihat*) is the result clause of the conditional clause and that the letter *waw* here is one that is called a '*waw* of eight'. But what is meant by a '*waw* of eight'? The Arabs considered the number (seven) to be the upper limit for numbers; whenever a number came that was above seven, they consider it to be the start of a new sentence and place the conjunction letter *waw* (and) before it. An example of that is found in the verses in the chapter of *al-Kahf*: '[And in times to come] some will say, "[They were] three, the fourth of them being their dog," while others will say, "Five, with their dog as the sixth of them" – idly guessing at something of which they can have no knowledge – and [so on, until] some will say, "[They were] seven, the eighth of them being their dog."…' (*al-Kahf:* 22) Thus, the letter *waw* is added before the number eight.

Another example of that is found in Allah's words: '[It is a triumph of] those who turn [unto Allah] in repentance [whenever they have sinned], and who worship and praise [Him], and go on and on [seeking His goodly acceptance], and bow down [before Him] and prostrate themselves in adoration, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and keep to the bounds set by Allah. And give thou [O Prophet] the glad tiding [of Allah's promise] to all believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 112) The word (*an-nahun*), 'forbid the doing of what is wrong', is the eighth word in order of these types of the righteous men, and so is preceded by the letter (*waw*).

Some scholars also say that another example of that is found in Allah's words in the chapter of *at-Tahrim*: '[O wives of the Prophet!] Were he to divorce

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(1) *This was said by Abu Bakr ibn 'Iyyash according to what has been narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (8/5931). Then Al-Qurtubi said, 'Those who said that there are eight gates to paradise used this as proof, mentioning the Hadith of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him who said that the Messenger Muhammad said: whoever performs ablution, doing it thoroughly, and then says, 'I bear witness that there is no Allah but Allah and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger', shall have the eight gates to paradise opened up for him, with him being able to enter from whichever gate he wishes.' It is narrated by Muslim and others. At-Tirmidhi also narrated this Hadith of 'Umar Allah be pleased with him with the wording, 'of the gates of paradise, eight will be opened up for him on the Day of Rising', with the addition of the particle (min), which indicates that the gates of paradise number more than eight. We have mentioned that in the book, 'At-Tadhkira' with the total number of gates reaching thirteen.*

[any of] you, his Lord might well give him in your stead spouses better than you – women who surrender themselves unto Allah, who truly believe, devoutly obey His will, turn [unto Him] in repentance [whenever they have sinned], worship [Him alone], and go on and on [seeking His goodly acceptance] – be they women previously married or virgins.' (*at-Tahrim:* 5)

Yes, the word (*abkaran*), 'virgins', here is the eighth word, but the letter *waw* here is used to separate between these two types of women, for previously married women can never be virgins. So, this verse may not be used as a proof for this matter. It is only the verses in the chapter of *al-Kahf* and the chapter of *at-Tawba* that may be used as proof that seven is the upper limit for numbers among the Arabs. The same is true with respect to the number 'a thousand'.

Therefore, when the daughter of Khosrau (1) was taken prisoner and went to ransom herself, the people asked the one in whose portion of the booty she fell, 'How much do you want for her?' He replied, 'A thousand dinars.' They said to him, 'But she is the daughter of Khosrau!' meaning that it was possible for him to ask for more than that amount of money. So, he said, 'By Allah, if I had known of a number greater than one thousand, I would have said it!'

But, we ourselves do not suggest this view, for the phrase (*wa futihat*) is not the result clause of the conditional clause here; the result clause with respect to the believers who are Allah-fearing is something far more exalted than the gates being opened for them, far more exalted than the angels saying to them: '...Peace be upon you...' (*az-Zumar:* 73) and far more exalted than saying to them: '...Well have you done: enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide' (*az-Zumar:* 73) for the True Lord *Glorified is He* says after that: 'And thou wilt see the angels surrounding the throne of [Allah's] Almightiness, extolling their Lord's Glory and Praise...' (*az-Zumar:* 75). His mentioning the Throne and the angels circling around it glorifying their Lord and singing His praises indicate the ultimate blessings that the Allah-fearing believers will receive. They will see the True Lord who is on the Throne and that is the supreme goal that merits being a result clause to the conditional clause mentioned earlier.

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(1) *The story of paying the ransom for the daughter of Khosrau*

But why does Allah conceal the result clause for the conditional this way? Because, scholars say, if He said here: ‘(their blessing is) what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what has never crossed anyone’s mind’(1), it would have been something that our ears had heard. But Allah *Glorified is He* wants it to come as a surprise for us by being something that none of us had ever conceived. In other words, it is something that had never once crossed our minds. For example, when it comes to the fruits of paradise, the fruits I knew in this world, such as the apple or mango, are brought about to me; if I were to be given some new fruit that I did not know about in this world, I could have said, ‘Were these fruits to have been in the world, it would have looked and tasted just like this.’ That is why the fruits in paradise will be in the superficial form of the fruits that I know about in this world, but with different characteristics, which conform to the description: no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived.

So, its superiority comes from their being in paradise. Then, when the fruits which no eye had seen, no ear had heard, and no mind had thought of, come to me once, how about when it comes to me the second time? For, on the second occasion, I would have inevitably seen it before and thought of it before. When I see a mango, for example, I might say, ‘I ate that before!’

But that is not the case, scholars say, for when it comes to you the second time, it will come to you in a different form with another colour and another taste different to the one you ate the first time. Thus, it will come true that all the blessings that come to you in paradise will be blessings that no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no mind has thought of.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Whenever they are granted fruits therefrom as their appointed sustenance, they will say, “It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!” – for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]…' (*al-Baqara:* 25).

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(1) *It is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (2824); Ahmad in his Musnad (2/466); and Abu Nu‘aym in Al-Hilya (2/262) in a Hadith by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

وَقَالُوا۟ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُۥ وَأَوْرَثَنَا ٱلْأَرْضَ نَتَبَوَّأُ
مِنَ ٱلْجَنَّةِ حَيْثُ نَشَآءُ ۖ فَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ ٱلْعَـٰمِلِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

And they will say, 'Praise be to God who has kept His promise to us and given us this land as our own. Now we may live wherever we please in the Garden.' How excellent is the reward of those who labour! [74]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 74)

Their saying: '…All praise is due to Allah...,' (*az-Zumar:* 74) is it praise to Allah because He made His promise come true, or is it because Allah gave you the success to affirm as true the promise He made to you? The meaning is, 'Praise be to Allah who made us worthy of having His promise made true so that we could then affirm it as true.' Otherwise, Allah's promise is always true and truthful.

In '...and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion…' (*az-Zumar:* 74), the word *irth* (literally means inheritance, translated as 'portion') here has a different meaning to the one we all know for it of inheriting from someone after their death. For the thing that is inherited here is paradise, as clarified by Allah in another verse: '...And [a voice] will call out unto them: "This is the paradise which you have inherited by virtue of your past deeds!"' (*al-A'raf:* 43)

That is clearly shown, as we said before, by the fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed in the time before time that He was going to create creation, leaving them to make their own choices in certain things while compelling them in other matters so that they would always remain, despite themselves, in one aspect of their lives slaves to Him, and in another aspect of their lives slaves to the choices they make.

If they take Allah's side and give preference to what He wants over the free choices He assigned them, they are victorious and obtain the position of servitude to Allah (*'ubudiyya*); when they do that, they become better than the angels, since the angels are obedient by nature, while mankind is given free choice and then chooses to either obey or disobey. If man obeys Allah, he has the right to rise up even above the angels.

That is why Satan (Iblis) rose up above the angels before he disobeyed Allah. He used to be called the peacock of the angels (i.e. the best of them) since he was a being created with freedom of choice, in addition that he obeyed Allah just as the angels obeyed. Therefore, he had a quality that made him superior to them, until of course he finally slipped up and was expelled and cast out from the mercy of Allah.

We say that since Allah created the human beings and granted them with the free will either to obey or to disobey, He *Glorified is He* prepared a place of reward for each of them in paradise on the basis that they may all be believers and obey His orders. Likewise, He prepared a place in the fire for each of them in case they all may disobey. So, when the inhabitants of the fire enter into the fire, their places in paradise are left empty. Then, what about those places? They are taken by the inhabitants of paradise, or, in other words, they will inherit these places, just as the Quran says.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!…' (*az-Zumar:* 74) We say that the meaning of *tabawwa'a* (translated in this verse as 'dwell') in a place is to settle in it. An example of the word being used in that way is found in the story of Joseph *peace be upon him*: 'And thus We established Joseph securely in the land [of Egypt]: he had full mastery over it, [doing] whatever he willed...' (*Yusuf:* 56). The meaning is to settle in and live in, but it is not something that is done with force with everyone going wherever they want to go, nor is there any transgression against anyone else's rights. No, the meaning is that each of us will dwell and live in his own garden, not in someone else's garden. There is a proof here that in fact each person's personal paradise is a wide expanse. '...And how excellent a reward will it be for those who laboured [in Allah's way]!' (*az-Zumar:* 74): the word *ni'ma* (how excellent) is used for things that are praiseworthy, referring to the huge compensation they get in exchange for all their right actions.

وَتَرَى ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ حَآفِّينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ ٱلْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ
وَقُضِىَ بَيْنَهُم بِٱلْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

You [Prophet] will see the angels surrounding the Throne,
glorifying their Lord with praise. True judgement will
have been passed between them, and it will be said,
'Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds' [75]
(The Quran, *az-Zumar:* 75)

His saying: '... surrounding the throne of [Allah's] almightiness …' (*az-Zumar:* 75) means that they circle around it: '...extolling their Lord's glory and praise...' (*az-Zumar:* 75). They have no job but to glorify their Lord and sing His praises. '...And judgment will have been passed in justice on all [who had lived and died]…' (*az-Zumar:* 75) i.e. Allah will judge between them. But who are those that Allah will judge between? They are the angels, for there are different categories of them: there are the high class angels who are besotted with the mightiness of the True Lord *Glorified is He* and they know nothing about our world nor about Adam and his descendants. There are also angels who are charged with serving mankind; they are called the guardian angels about whom Allah says: '...he has hosts of helpers – both such as can be perceived by him and such as are hidden from him – that could preserve him from whatever Allah may have willed...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11). It is these angels whom Allah commanded to prostrate to Adam, not all of the angels. It is as if this prostration was an indication of their subjugation and obedience to this created being whom they were going to serve.

Then, there are the noble recording angels: 'and yet, verily, there are ever-watchful forces over you, noble, recording, aware of whatever you do!' (*al-Infitar:* 10-12)

The meaning of: '...And judgment will have been passed in justice on all [who had lived and died]…' (*az-Zumar:* 75) is that each of them will get the place and the reward he deserves.

And '...the word will be spoken: "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of All the worlds!"' (*az-Zumar:* 75) Who is it who says this? Some scholars say(1) that it is the believers from among the human race who say this; others say(2) that it is all of creation who says this; and others say that it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who says this, being an example of Allah praising Himself, just as He bears witness to Himself when He says: '...that there is no deity save Him...' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* praises Himself being the Lord of all the worlds. Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said in a Hadith: '...We pay you the countless praise that is duly dedicated to you: The due praise You are worthy of is known and is estimated by none but yourself.'(3) This is praise paid to Allah by Himself. O Allah, make us always be among those who say, 'Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.'

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi said this in his Tafsir (8/5933), saying, 'That is to say, the believers say, "Praise be to Allah for all the blessings He has rewarded us with, the kindness He has shown us and the victory He has given us over those who maltreated us." It is also said that the statement is made by the angels, and we take that view, then this is them praising Him for His justice and true judgement.'*

(2) *Ibn Kathir said this in his Tafsir (4/69), saying, 'That is to say, the whole of existence utter these words, those who have been granted the gift of speech and dumb animals alike, all saying that praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds for His perfect judgement and His justice. And that is the reason the statement is not ascribed to any particular speaker but rather is left general and unspecified. That indicates that all of creation bore witness to the fact that praise is due to Him.'*

(3) *It is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (6/58 & 120); as well as by Muslim in his Sahih (486): in a Hadith from 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her in which she said, 'I noticed the Messenger of Allah was absent from the bed one night so I looked around for him and my hand fell on the bottom of his feet which were both upright as he was in prostration, saying, 'O Allah, I seek refuge in Your pleasure from Your displeasure, and in Your pardon from Your punishment. I seek refuge in You from You. I pay you the countless praise that is duly dedicated to you: The due praise You are worthy of is known and is estimated by none but yourself.'*

the chapter of

Ghafir

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Ghafir*[1] (The Believer):

حمٓ ﴿١﴾

***Ha Mim* [1] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 1)**

This is the first of the chapters named collectively *(al-Hawamim)* meaning 'those chapters which begin with Allah's saying: '*Ha Mim*'. *(Hawamim)* is the plural of *Ha Mim*. It is, however, not formed in accordance to the rules for plurals, and it would be more correct to say '*al HaMim*'. The letters *Ha Mim* are from the isolated letters (*al-huruf al-muqatta'a*) that are found at the

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(1) The chapter of *Ghafir* is also known as the chapter of *al-Mu'min* in honour of the believer of the people of Pharaoh mentioned in Allah's saying: 'At that, a believing man of Pharaoh's family, who [until then] had concealed his faith, exclaimed…' (*Ghafir:* 28). It is also called the chapter of *at-Tawl* from Allah's saying: '…forgiving sins and accepting repentance, severe in retribution, limitless in His bounty (*dhi at-Tawl*)...' (*Ghafir:* 3) i.e. the possessor of riches, plenty and blessings. It is a Meccan chapter according to Al-Hasan, `Ata', `Ikrima, and Jabir. It is related that Al-Hasan said it was Meccan up to Allah's saying: '…and extol thy Sustainer's glory and praise by night and by day' (*Ghafir:* 55) because the prayers were only prescribed in Medina, Ibn `Abbas and Qatada said that it was all Meccan apart from two verses that were revealed in Medina: 'Behold, as for those who call Allah's messages in question without having any evidence therefor – in their hearts is nothing but overweening self-conceit, which they will never be able to satisfy: seek thou, then, refuge with Allah – for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing! Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth: yet most men do not understand [what this implies].' (*Ghafir:* 56-57) It has 85 verses and is the 40th chapter in the final compilation of the Quran, but it was the 59th chapter to be revealed. It was revealed after the chapter of *az-Zumar*, and is placed as such in the final compilation, and after the chapter of *as-Sajda*. [See Tafsir Al-Qrtubi 8/5935 and Al-Itqan fi `Ulum Al-Quran by As-Suyuti 1/27].

beginning of several chapters. We have spoken of them already more than once. In fact, we are just trying to peruse some of their meanings that we are capable of deriving and understanding; after all, everyone must say of them, ‘Allah knows best what they mean’ because their meanings cannot be certainly encompassed

We said previously that each letter has a name and a sound of its own. The letter (أ) (A) is named *(alif)*, and the letter (ب) (B) is named *(ba’)*. To clarify the letter sounds, we give an example of the word (كتب) (wrote); you do not pronounce it *(kaf ta’ ba’)* in accordance with the names of the letters, rather you pronounce it *(kataba)* because these are the sounds indicated by its letters. The sound of the letter *(kaf)* is “ka”, the sound of the letter *(ta’)* is “ta” and the sound of the letter *(ba’)* is “ba”. So, when we speak we use the sounds indicated by the letters, not the letters themselves.

Nevertheless, when we pronounce the verse *'Ha Mim',* we say the names of the letters, *(ha)* and *(mim)*. Were we to pronounce their sounds as if they were a word we would say *(hamm)*. From this, we can see the importance of oral transmission when learning to recite the Quran. It is through listening that we know that the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* is recited: *‘Alif Lam Mim’,* while the same letters at the beginning of the chapter of *ash-Sharh* are recited (*alam)*: ‘Have We not (*alam*) opened up thy heart.’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1) Had it not been for oral narration by listening, we would not have known this pronunciation.

Some scholars who took to examining the meanings of the letters at the beginnings of the chapters said that the Quran came as an inimitable miracle to the Arab peoples. As the Arabs surpassed in rhetoric and eloquence, this miracle came in the field within which they excelled so that its inimitable nature may be manifested. There are no other people on earth who made markets and exhibitions for the spoken word as the Arabs did in the markets of ‘Ukaz, Marbad, Dhu Al-majaz(1) and other places. The challenge of the

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(1) `Ukazh was a marketplace where the Arabs would contend in boasting about their forefathers, lineage, and greatness. It is near Mecca. The Arabs would go there once a year, staying for a month. Dhu Al-majaz is a place at Minawhere there was a marketplace in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance. [See Lisan Al-`Arab under *(`akaza)* and *(jawaza)*.]

Quran to them was the very testimony to their superiority in this field, and that they were authorities therein.

But what are the bases of the incapacitating nature of the Quran? How does it excel the speech of the Arabs, while the letters and words are the very same?

The scholars say that some of the letters from which language is composed are known as 'letters of building' *(huruf mabni)*, i.e., they are the building blocks of words and have no meaning by themselves. Other letters are known as 'letters of meaning' (*huruf ma'na*), and these have meaning by themselves. For example, if we look at the letter *(kaf) (k)* in the word *(kataba)* (he wrote), we see it is used as a building block in the word. If we took the *(kaf)* out of *(katab)* it would not have any meaning on its own. But, the letter *(kaf)* in a sentence like *(al-jundi kal-asad)* (the soldier is like a lion), it is a letter of meaning. It has meaning on its own, that of similarity, i.e., 'like', and it has no place in the construction of the word *(al-asad)* (lion). Similarly, the letter *(ba')* in the word *(kataba)* is a building block, but in the phrase *(billah)* (By Allah!), it is a letter of meaning and denotes the swearing of an oath.

From the letters, in general, words are made, and from words sentences and phrases are made. Good style and distinguished rhetoric are composed of sentences which attract listeners and impact the soul. By abiding by the correct rules of Arabic composition, eloquence is achieved. So, if the Arabic letters and words are the same in the Quran, how can it be distinguished from the normal speech of the Arabs? The scholars say that it is distinguished by means of its special composition and style, and that the Quran is the words spoken by Allah.

We previously said that if we want to test the skills of a group of weavers, it is not proper if we give one of them woollen thread, another cotton and yet another silk; if the raw materials are different, how can we judge who is best? Rather, they must all use the same raw material so that results can be distinguished properly.

So, the meaning of: *'Ha. Mim.* The bestowal from on high of this divine writ issues from Allah, *The Almighty*, The All Knowing,' (*Ghafir:* 1-2) or: *'Ha. Mim.* Consider this Divine Writ, clear in itself and clearly showing the truth!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 1-2) or: ‘Alif. Lam. Mim. This Divine Writ – let there be no doubt about it...’ (*al-Baqara:* 1-2) is that, from these letters, the Quran is composed and given the secrets of its inimitable style and the challenge it poses because it is Allah who spoke it and conveyed it to his Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* who knew neither how to read nor write.

Thus, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* recited the Quran just as it was revealed to him, not changing even a single letter. Illiteracy is a defect in everyone except the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* for him, it was a distinction and an honour. It is as though he were saying: I did not learn anything from any man; rather, my education is all from my Lord.

Similarly, the whole Arab nation was a Bedouin and unlettered people. They knew little of civilization, and they had no widespread legal system to rule them. Had the Arab peoples at the time of the revelation been a civilized nation, the unbelievers would have said that Islam was a civilization on the rise. On the contrary, Islam appeared in the Arabian Peninsula, while the Arab was a Bedouin people, with no constitution and no law to govern them except the tribal law and its fanaticism. The ruler was the sheikh of the tribe. Their houses were portable with them on the backs of their camels. Wherever they found pasture, they stopped and pitched their tents, and wherever they found water they stayed in its neighbourhood. They were not bound to any homeland or place.

Moreover, there were conflicts and wars that erupted among the Arab tribes for the smallest of reasons. You know, for instance, about the war called Dahis and the Ghubara’ which continued between two of the Arab tribes for 40 years. Thus, when the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* wanted to form an army for the emerging Islamic State, he did not open a school to teach people the arts of fighting and war because they were a people who had already practised these arts perfectly. The Arab person is by nature always prepared for war; whenever he hears a battle cry(1) he flies toward it.

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(1) *(al-Hay`a)* refers to a sound which shakes you and you fear to hear from the enemy. It can also refer to any harsh sound [Lisan Al-`Arab under *(haya`a)*]. The word can be found in the Hadith of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*:=

Then, how can such a nation with these conditions become the leader of the entire world and conquest its countries?

It seems that Allah has willed to prepare them for travelling throughout the world bearing and presenting Allah's guidance to mankind. They were not inclined to anything. Then, Allah sent to them His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* who turned the slaves into masters and made the sheepherder leaders and pioneers for all nations. Thus, the Arab nation was qualified by its language, illiteracy and Bedouin life to lead the civilized world so that all should know that the Mission of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is not a human one, but quietly a divine one. So how could such a nation lead the world, when this was its description?

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to prepare them to travel through the world, spreading His guidance to His creation unshackled by anything. Then, He brought forth the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from their midst and hence, the slaves became the masters and the shepherds became the leaders, as well as the beacons for the entire world. In this way was the Arab nation prepared, in terms of spoken language, illiteracy and Bedouin nature to lead the civilised world so that all might know that what Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought was not from humans, but from Allah *Glorified is He*.

We return now to the disjointed letters. These letters may come in ones, as in *Qaf* and *Sad;* in twos, as in *Ta Sin* and *Ha Mim;* in threes, as in *Ta Sin Mim* and *Alif Lam Mim;* and they may come in fives as in *Kaf Ha Ya 'Ayn Sad*. So, they do not come in just one format.

When we consider the total number of these letters, we find that they are 14—half the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet. That they are exactly half indicates that this is something intentional and not a mere coincidence. It is a proof that these 14 letters occur in such a way as to reveal that they have purpose and wisdom and were not just chosen randomly. From the first nine

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= 'The best of people is a man who grips the reins of his horse in the path of Allah, every time he hears a battle cry *(al-Hay`a)*, he flies towards it'. It was related by Muslim in his Sahih [1889] in the chapter Kitab Al-Imara, and by Ahmad in his Musnad [2/443] on the authority of Abu Hurayra with a different wording.

of the 28 letters of the alphabet—from *alif* to *dhal*, only two appear among the isolated letters, *alif* and *ha'*. The remaining seven are not used. If we then look to the last nine letters of the alphabet, we find that the True Lord used seven of them and left two, the opposite of the beginning of the alphabet. He used *qaf*, *kaf*, *lam*, *mim*, *nun*, *ha'* and *ya'* and left *fa'* and *waw*.

So far, we have seen 18 letters, there remain ten more in the middle of the alphabet, beginning with *ra'* and ending with *ghayn*. When we look at these we notice that Allah *Glorified is He* has used all the letters which do not have dots on and left the ones which do. He used *ra'* and left *zay;* he used *sin* and left *shin;* he used *sad* and left *dad;* He used *ta'* and left *za'*; and He used *Ayn* and left *ghayn*.

So, this arrangement found in the disjointed letters indicates that they are not uniform, and that there is some wisdom behind them. Since they were not chosen at random, it is our responsibility to derive these wisdoms and understand the indications, each of us in accordance with his ability. Even today, we still, nowadays, examine these letters in order to discover their meanings.

To search for the wisdom therein is a praiseworthy *ijtihad* (independent reasoning: the exercise of critical thinking and independent judgment). Alternatively, you can rest your mind and take them as they are from Allah *Glorified is He* as one would take a key from someone who made a padlock. You do not care if it has one, two, three, or four teeth on it, as long as it opens the lock. Still, the secret of the key will remain with the one who made it.

Yet, the human mind likes to discover things. How? The scholars said that the True Lord wants three things concerning His religion: beliefs, laws and a medium to convey the beliefs and laws, i.e., His speech in the Quran. Each of these three has aspects which are unseen and aspects which are manifest.

As for beliefs, the first of them is faith in Allah *Glorified is He* who is unseen; nevertheless, one can infer His existence from what is manifest in His creation: its greatness and His construction of the visible world. There is no one who claims to have created this marvellous universe, attributing it to himself; for it solely belongs to Allah. Thus, we believe in this unseen Entity because of the things we can see. As for the unseen that has no visible manifestation, like the True Lord's Attributes, these we believe in based on what we hear of His speech.

Similarly, amongst the obligations and laws are things that are seen and others that are unseen. Take, for example, prayer, poor-due, *hajj* (pilgrimage) and fasting: They are all visible acts, yet within them are unseen aspects, the wisdom of which remains unknown to us to this day. The submission and yielding of servant-hood lays within prayer, fasting develops incessant conscientiousness (*taklif*), *zakat* disperses wealth within society, and *hajj* proclaims one's allegiance to the *Ka'ba*—the House of Allah *Glorified is He*. These are things that we are able to understand with our intellects, but what, for instance, is the wisdom in making the Morning Prayer consist of two *rak'as* (units of prayer); the Noon Prayer four *rak'as*; the Afternoon Prayer four, the Sunset Prayer three and the Evening Prayer four. These are things we do not know.

Thus, with each unseen aspect there is a manifest aspect, and vice versa. Similarly, Allah's speech contains the seen and the unseen. The seen aspects include the speech that we listen to, read and write, and its exegesis and meanings that we understand. The unseen aspects include these disjointed letters, *Alif, Lam, Mim*, *Nun*, *Qaf*, *Sad*, etc.

Each aspect of the unseen is accompanied by something manifest that facilitates to us the belief in the unseen. Had everything been manifest and visible, there would have been no room for faith. You and I are now sitting in the Mosque of Sheikh Sulaiman – do we have faith in its existence? No, because we can see it. The unseen is the domain of faith. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…who believe in the unseen…' (*al-Baqara:* 3).

Yet, the unseen must have manifest evidences that corroborate them in the visible world—something to lead us toward them. Think for instance of Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension. This was unseen by anyone except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Night Journey was a terrestrial one and the Ascension a heavenly one. People saw the signs that were present on the earth, but they did not witness anything in the heavens.

That is why, when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desired to introduce a proof of his truthfulness, he described for them some distinctive features he had seen on earth. He described *Bayt Al-Maqdis* to them and the group he saw travelling and when they would arrive; that they had a camel of such-and-such a description. Thus, it was a terrestrial journey that was possible to prove.

By means of the truthful description he gave of the things he saw on earth, this journey became effectively visible and a means of proving the credibility of the sights—that were beyond the scope of natural laws—he witnessed. So, if he informs you that he ascended into the heavens, believe him, and take from his truthfulness in the manifest world a proof of his truthfulness about the hidden world; for, as we said, every unseen aspect is complemented by a manifest aspect.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

تَنزِيلُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡعَلِيمِ ٢

This Scripture is sent down from God, the Almighty,
the All Knowing [2] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 2)

The Arabic root *na za la* (literally: descend) comes in the Quran in numerous forms: *anzalna* (we sent down), *nazzalna* (we sent down), *tanzil* (a message sent down) and *nuzzila* (was sent down). Each of these denotes the lofty status of the thing that was sent down. This attribute of loftiness indicates that the thing that has been sent down is not of human origin. It indicates the station of the thing and its greatness, even if it is something earthly and not heavenly, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Hadid*: '...We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind...' (*al-Hadid:* 25).

It is well known that iron is mined from the ground and does not descend from the heaven. Thus, the meaning of *'tanzil'*, here, is that it was sent as a gift from One on-high to those below. The One on high must surely be greater than those below. We say this, too, when we wish to make new laws and legal rulings.

We say: do not leave the laws of the One on-high and take those below because the Higher Legislator *Glorified is He* is different from the human legislator; for whatever knowledge or wisdom he may have, he will never be free from desires or bias. If he is rich, he will make laws that benefit the capitalists, and if he is from the poor, he will make laws that will benefit the communists.

This is why it is necessary for the one who makes laws to be free from bias, and that he should, by no means, benefit from the laws he makes. He must have knowledge of all matters upon which he judges. Thus, no one would correct him, or there would be a chance that he neglects any of the details of the matter at hand. These conditions are only present in the True Lord. This is why it is not permissible for us to leave Allah's Law and adopt man-made laws.

It is for this reason that Islam is exposed to criticisms and negative campaigns by the non-Muslims. The most recent of these was the uproar that they caused in the Vatican over divorce in Islam. They made their own laws against divorce, whereas, in Islam divorce is legislated by Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, it is the right law, and all other laws are wrong. There is no way you can prolong a relationship indefinitely between spouses who hate each other, when their relationship should be one of mutual responsibility to provide a sense of security to each other. How can they force a man to live with a woman who does not attract him?!

So, divorce is legal in Islam for a reason. The Legislator *Glorified is He* knows best of the nature of His creatures. With the passing of time the problems of society and the cases thrown up by daily life made them recourse to legalising divorce, too. They did not legalise it because Islam permits it, nor out of love of Allah's religion or out of faith in Allah's law, but because life forced cases upon them that could only be solved through divorce.

It was with this argument that we answered when asked in San Francisco about Allah's statement: 'They wish to put His light out with their mouths. But He will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers hate it,' (*as-Saff:* 8) and: 'It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to show that it is above all [other] religions, however much the idolaters may hate this.' (*at-Tawba:* 33)

They said that Islam has been around for 14 centuries, yet most people are still not Muslims and Islam is not the dominant religion, rather, it is being fought and is under threat. To this we replied that had they reflected upon this verse, they would have realised that the ‘manifestation of religion’ does not mean that everybody will believe in it, rather, its law will dominate the other laws and that non-Muslims will find themselves compelled to take from Islam to solve their problems. That Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...however much the idolaters may hate this,’ (*at-Tawba:* 33) and: ‘...even if the disbelievers hate it,’ (*at-Tawba:* 32) is proof that the polytheists and disbelievers will still be in spite of the presence of Islam.

The word *al-Kitab* (Divine Writ) refers to the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* named it a Writ because it is written, and He named it a Quran (recital) because it is recited. Alternatively, it could be said that He named it a *Kitab* so as to grant permission for it to be written, and He named it a Quran so as to grant permission for it to be recited. Recitation can be either from written text or from what has been memorised by heart. It is also named *Wahi* (revelation) because it was *uhiya* (revealed) to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. ‘The Quran is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him.’ (*an-Najm:* 4) Thus, each name has a specific wisdom behind it.

When they wanted to compile the Quran, they stated a condition: that what people had memorised would match with what was written. They did not record any verse unless they found it written down and they found two upright people to bear witness to its correctness. May Allah have mercy on Sheikh Muhammad 'Abdullah Darraz(1) who compared this matter to Allah’s saying: ‘...so that if one of the two women should forget the other can remind her....’ (*al-Baqara:* 282)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘…from Allah *the Almighty* the All Knowing.’ (*Ghafir:* 2) That is to say, this Book is revealed from Allah *Glorified is He* who is characterized by the attributes of total perfection. To Him belong absolute power, absolute wisdom, absolute mercy and absolute compassion.

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(1) Muhammad `Abdullah Darraz was a scholar of Sacred Law and literature *Faqih Muta a'ddib* from Al-Azhar University in Egypt. He was a member of the group of major scholars at Al-Azhar Hay’a kubbar Al-Ulama’ bi Al-Azhar. Among his books is Ad-Din – Dirasa Tamhidiyya li Tarikh Al-Islam. He passed away in 1958 CE. (from Al-A`lam by Az-Zirikli 6/236)

So long as the Book has come from one whose attributes are thus, no one can correct it, and as long as it cannot be corrected, then one should have complete faith in the verse: '...This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3)

It is because of this that we wonder at those who call for the modernisation of Islam. To them we say: instead of modernising Islam, let us religionize the modern age.

The Name of Allah, *Al-'Aziz* (the Almighty) means, 'the One Who conquers and cannot be conquered.' If this Book has been revealed by The Almighty, then it cannot be conquered. It must necessarily rise up, be spread and be heard by people. None will defeat it because it comes from The Almighty. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* would not send a Messenger and then abandon him. So, no matter how much they resist, and no matter how stubborn or arrogant they are, this Quran will dominate and will never be defeated in any sphere whatsoever.

It is as though the True Lord is telling the disbelievers and the idol-worshippers to take admonition from the reality around them, for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers, after they had been besieged and persecuted, now grew day after day. The lands of Islam were increasing, and an increase in the lands of Islam was a decrease in the lands of disbelief: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders? Allah decides—no one can reverse His decision—and He is swift in reckoning.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) The True Lord also says: 'Anyone who thinks that Allah will not support him in this world and the next should stretch a rope up to the sky, climb all the way up it, and see whether this strategy removes the cause of his anger.' (*al-Hajj:* 15) That is to say, whoever doubts in assistance and victory from Allah *Glorified is He* then let him try to find another way. Let him bring a rope and hang it from the sky, put his neck in it and cut it off, then let him see if his struggle will take away that at which he is enraged. Allah *Glorified is He* says clarifying His custom of giving victory to His Messengers *peace be upon them*, as well as His righteous servants: 'Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers:

it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

So, the True Lord will not stifle His religion; He will not let down his Messengers *peace be upon them*; and he will not abandon succouring His chosen friends.

As for Allah's statement: '…the All Knowing,' (*Ghafir:* 2), it means that His Might is not imposed or without basis, rather, it is backed up by knowledge. It is a Might with wisdom, with mercy and compassion, for He has all the attributes of absolute perfection.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

غَافِرِ ٱلذَّنۢبِ وَقَابِلِ ٱلتَّوۡبِ شَدِيدِ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ذِي ٱلطَّوۡلِۖ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَۖ إِلَيۡهِ ٱلۡمَصِيرُ ٣

Forgiver of sins and Accepter of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no god but Him; to Him is the ultimate return [3] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 3)

The True Lord does not want His creation to be separated from Him, no matter how much they have been conquered by their passions or how many sins they have committed. He wants to attract them to Him by His Kindness, and encompass them with His grace. That is why He has left the door of repentance and forgiveness open for them, and extended the hand of clemency and pardon. After introducing the first part of this carrot-and-stick approach, He warned them against the stick of punishment so that they would not become deluded. Allah's Way benefits society as a whole and the individual in particular, for if the sinner knew that his sin would not be forgiven, he would persist in it, do it more frequently, become openly contentious, and spread corruption in the world. With this he will be a trouble to society and especially to the people of faith.

This is one of the most hope-inspiring verses in the Quran, like Allah's saying towards the end of the chapter of *az-Zumar* (The Troops/throngs): 'Say, "[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful."' (*az-Zumar:* 53)

We said previously that these verses and the like of them do not contradict Allah's statement: 'Allah does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that He forgives to whoever He will,' (*an-Nisa': *48) because disbelief is not a *dhanb* (sin). A sin is when one goes against something that has been made obligatory or forbidden by The Lawgiver on high. *Shirk* (ascribing of divinity to other than Allah), however, is a departure from faith altogether, so it is not considered a sin.

The True Lord repeatedly reminds His servants of His acceptance of repentance and His forgiveness so that no one will despair of His mercy. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy…' (*az-Zumar:* 53). There are those who have transgressed against themselves, then, consequently, despaired of the mercy of their Lord. They have sinned so much that they thought that they could never be forgiven

Among these was Wahshi*,* the killer of Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him*. After he killed Hamza, he perceived the enormity of his sin and the crime he had committed. He felt certain he was doomed and that Allah *Glorified is He* would never forgive him. Some have said that he went to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask him about this matter…etc. Actually, he was in Mecca and this verse was revealed in Medina. It was then recited to him and, when he heard it, he believed and embraced Islam.

It is related(1) that Wahshi met Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said to him: 'I did not want to see you unless you came to seek protection; for my Lord says: 'If any one of the idolaters should seek your protection [Prophet], grant it to him so that he may hear the word of Allah, then take him to a place safe for him...' (*at-Tawba:* 6).

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(1) *Ibn Jurayj relates from `Ata' on the authority of Ibn `Abbas who said, 'Wahshi came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, "O Muhammad, I come to seek your protection, so shelter me that I might hear Allah's speech." 'The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to him, "Indeed, I did not wish to see you in my neighbourhood, but if you have come to seek my protection then under my protection you shall be until you have heard Allah's speech." "But I have been a polytheist, killed a soul forbidden by Allah Glorified is He and committed fornication (zina). Will Allah Glorified is He accept repentance from me?" 'The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him remained silent until Allah Glorified is He revealed the verse: "...and who never invoke any (imaginary) deity side by side with Allah Glorified is He and do not take any human=*

So, Wahshi said: 'I seek your protection so that I might hear Allah's speech.' The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited to him: 'Say, "[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful."' (*az-Zumar:* 53)

Wahshi said: 'But Allah says: "Except those who repent, believe and do good deeds..." (*al-Furqan:* 70) and I cannot guarantee that I will be able to do righteous deeds.' So, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the following verse to him: 'Forgiver of sins and Accepter of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty…' (*Ghafir:* 3).

Another one of those who succumbed to despair of Allah's mercy was 'Ayyash ibn Abu Rabiʿa(1). It is related that when 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* wanted to emigrate, he agreed with 'Ayyash(2) and Hisham ibn Al-'As ibn Wa'il

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= *being's life – (the life) which Allah Glorified is He has willed to be sacred – otherwise than in (the pursuit of) justice, and do not commit adultery. And (know that) he who commits aught thereof shall (not only) meet with a full requital," (al-Furqan: 68) which He, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him then recited it to him.' "I see there is a condition attached; perhaps I will not be able to do righteous deeds. I seek your protection until I hear Allah's speech." The verse: 'Verily, Allah Glorified is He does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills...' (an-Nisa': 48) was subsequently revealed so the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him called for him and recited it to him. "Perhaps I am amongst those for whom He does not will (forgiveness). I seek your protection until I hear the speech of Allah Glorified is He."*
The verse: 'Say: "(Thus speaks Allah Glorified is He): O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against your own selves, Despair not of Allah's mercy...' (az-Zumar: 53) was then revealed, to which he said, 'Yes, now I do not see any conditions', and so he entered Islam. It was related by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis (8/5914).

(1) *The story of 'Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi'a with 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him and Hisham ibn Al-'As during the immigration.*

(2) *His name was `Amr and his nickname was Dhu Ar-Rumhayn may Allah be pleased with him. His paternal uncle was Khalid ibn Al-Walid may Allah be pleased with him and he was among the very first Muslims. He emigrated both times, but Abu Jahl tricked him into returning from Medina to Mecca and captured him, and the Prophet Muhammad peace=*

As-Sahmi(1) that they should emigrate together. They would meet at the *Bi'r* (the well) of Ghaffar. If one of them was detained, the others would wait for him. However, when the time came, 'Ayyash did not. He had been prevented from emigrating by his family. He was tricked by them and fell for their trick. Thus, he did not emigrate with his two companions, and this caused him to despair of Allah's mercy.(2)

When the verse: 'Say, "[Allah says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of Allah's mercy. Allah forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful"' (*az-Zumar:* 53) was revealed, 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* remembered his Companion, 'Ayyash, who had been tricked by his family. He remembered that there was a time when they met upon faith that he had intended to emigrate. His heart softened, and he sent a message to him with this verse so that he might find peace and return to faith.

Allah's words: 'The Forgiver of sins…' (*Ghafir:* 3) refers to past sins. The '…Accepter of repentance...' (*Ghafir:* 3) refers to the disobedience that was received by the One Who is '…Severe in retribution…' (*Ghafir:* 3). The True Lord associates forgiveness with punishment for wisdom so that people do not become overly secure, or become deluded by Allah's mercy. Thus, faith is based on both hope and fear. They are like the two wings for a bird: both of them are, together, essential. His words: '…infinite in bounty…'

= *and blessings be upon him would pray for him in the qunut prayer. He died in the year 15AH in Sham during the caliphate of 'Umar may Allah be pleased with him. It has also been said that he was martyred at the battle of Yamama and others said at the battle of Yarmuk. (Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba 5/47)*

(1) *Hisham ibn Al-`As may Allah be pleased with him was nicknamed Abu Al-`As. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him nicknamed him Abu Muti`. He was one of the early Muslims and emigrated to Ethiopia. The biographical scholars state that he was martyred at Ajnadin. Al-Waqidi mentions that Hisham was a righteous man and that at the battle of Ajnadin he saw some of the Muslims retreating, so he threw the helmet from his head and started to advance toward the heart of the enemy shouting, 'O Muslims! Upon me! Upon me! I am Hisham ibn Al-`As! Is it from paradise that you flee?' until he was killed may Allah be pleased with him (see Al-Isaba 6/286).*

(2) *Ibn Hajar Al-`Asqalani mentioned this in Al-Isaba (6/286). He said, it was related by Ibn As-Sakan with a sound chain of narrators on the authority of 'Umar that...' and he continued to narrate the story.*

(*Ghafir:* 3) are just like what we say in Egypt: *'idu taylah'* (he is capable of doing whatever He wishes). So, Allah *Glorified is He* is *dhu at-tawl* (infinite in bounty): He gives whatever He wishes to whomever He chooses, and no one can refuse His gifts. That is why it is said in the supplication, 'None can give what You withhold, and none can withhold what You give.'

When the True Lord says: 'This Scripture is sent down from Allah *the Almighty* the All Knowing,' (*Ghafir:* 2) we understand from the word *tanzil* the lofty status of the One who sends down, the thing sent down, and the one unto whom it was sent, so that it might be a method that guides them in their lives. This loftiness only emerged because the thing sent is a Book from Allah *Glorified is He* Who is necessarily Existent, and to Whom belong all attributes of absolute perfection, as evidenced by our saying: *'la ilah illa Allah'* (there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah) and *Allahu Akbar min kull shay'* (Allah is greater than everything). These sayings we explained when speaking about His saying: 'To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth...' (*az-Zumar:* 63).

'There is nothing worthy of worship but Allah' is a key; 'Allah is the Greatest' is a key; 'Glory be to Allah' is a key; 'His is the praise' is a key; 'I seek forgiveness from Allah' is a key; and 'there is neither power nor strength except by Allah' is a key. 'He is the First' is a key, and 'He is the Last' is a key. 'He is the Outward' is a key, and 'He is the Inward' is a key. 'In His hand is all goodness' is a key, and 'He has power over all things' is a key. You will never find anything in the world that is outside the realm of these keys; everything in it is under Allah's power, as He says: 'He has the keys to the unseen: no one knows them but Him...' (*al-An'am:* 59).

After that, the True Lord goes on to say: '…the Almighty…' (*Ghafir:* 2) i.e., He has no need of His creation. The Almighty *Al-'Aziz* is the one who overcomes and is never defeated. In this is an indication that if Allah *Glorified is He* reveals a Book to a Messenger, then there will not be anybody who is able to stand up to it because it will overcome and will never be overcome. His words: '…the All Knowing' (*Ghafir:* 2) means that He puts things in their correct places according to His knowledge of how they fulfil their roles in the best possible way.

After that He comforts those of His creation who have transgressed against themselves in some points, and mentions the way out: ‘The Forgiver of sins, Accepter of repentance...’ (*Ghafir:* 3). Yet, alongside His forgiveness and acceptance of repentance He is: ‘…severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no Allah but Him; to Him is the ultimate return.’ (*Ghafir:* 3) Thus, He gathers, in this verse, all His attributes of majesty and all His attributes of beauty.

We understand from: ‘…There is no deity but Him...’ (*Ghafir:* 3) that no one can correct what He says. His words: ‘…to Him is the ultimate return’ (*Ghafir:* 3) mean that there is no return but to Him.

Then, He says to His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*:

مَا يُجَٰدِلُ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَلَا يَغۡرُرۡكَ تَقَلُّبُهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡبِلَٰدِ ٤

It is only the disbelievers who dispute God’s revelations.
[Prophet], do not be dazzled by their movements back and
forth across the land [4] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 4)

The Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by Allah *Glorified is He* with that which brings people out of ignorance into knowledge. By this, their daily lives are purified from anything that would cause inconsistency or opposition in the world so that everyone may become cooperative and mutually supportive, and so that if one builds there would be no one else who destroys. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘None dispute Allah’s revelations except the disbelievers…’ (*Ghafir:* 4).

Al-jadal means: to conclude a matter so that it is completely settled and cannot be undone. It is like when people in the countryside make a rope. A man takes hemp fibres and he twists them together until they become interwoven and tightly bound. That is why the rope becomes strong and enduring.

Mira’a is commonly called *jadal* (argumentation or dispute) because each of the parties involved wants to establish his proof and his reasoning in order to overcome the other. Each of them argues for himself. The one in the right argues to prove it so, and the one in the wrong argues to establish his falsehood as the truth.

Is argumentation blameworthy in and of itself though? No, because argumentation is judged according to the intention behind it. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[Believers], argue only in the best way with the People of the Book...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 46). This shows that there is *hasan* (good) arguing and *ahsan* (better arguing). Good argumentation is that one tries to prove that the truth is true and that falsehood is false.(1) If the opposite is the case, then it is blameworthy argumentation.

Thus, we understand that Allah’s words: ‘None dispute Allah’s revelations except the disbelievers…’ (*Ghafir:* 4) refer to blameworthy argumentation. In Arabic, we can say *jadal Ann ash-shayy’* or, *jadal fi ash-shayy’*. If we say *jadal Ann,* it means he argued for something, to defend it, establish its truthfulness and to manifest such. If we say *jadal fi,* it means he argued against something, and tried to cast doubt on it and refute it.

We said previously that *ayat* from Allah are of three types, and it is these that argumentation may occur over: His *ayat* (signs) in creation, i.e., the *ayat* (signs) that bear witness to the presence of the Creator On-high; the signs of clarification, i.e., the miracles of the Messengers *peace be upon them* that establish their truthfulness in their claim to speak on behalf of their Lord; and the Quranic *ayat* (verses) that bear His Sacred Law.

The signs in creation that establish the power of Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator On-high, are those that we witness in the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind and the water… etc. The Creator made these signs in the best state. He created them according to fixed laws that do not change, and there is no way for man to interfere with them.

We said previously that when corruption befalls the universe, it is because of man’s interference – his interfering with Allah’s creatures in ways that do not accord with His laws. If man were to interact with the world in harmony with laws of the Creator, we would not see the corruption that now encompasses it. The True Lord alerts us to this issue by His words:

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi says in his exegesis (The Quran, 8/5939), as for one’s saying jidal fi, it refers to elucidating the unclear, solving difficulties, discussion between scholars in figuring out meanings, and defending against people with deviant ideas and refuting them, and this is the greatest jihad in the way of Allah Glorified is He.*

‘…do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 56). This means the True Lord created the earth in the best state. So, beware of corrupting it. This is why the True Lord attributes any corruption that appears on earth to man. He says: ‘Corruption has flourished on land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned...’ (*ar-Rum:* 41).

Indeed, we have polluted the waters and thrown rubbish and scrap into them until the fish died and diseases appeared. We have polluted the air, and we have polluted the soil, and so on, and so on. This is because we have interfered with Allah’s creation without paying heed to His laws and the way He ordained to set the world right.

So, which of these three types of *ayat* do about which the disbelievers argue? Naturally, they do not argue about the *ayat* in creation, nor do they object to them, primarily because they benefit from them. They also see therein a precise and perfect system with no irregularities or contradictions, so there is no room for argumentation. Rather, they argue about His other *ayat*, the miracles, and the *ayat* of the Book that contain the Sacred Law, trying to cast doubt upon them.

As for the miracles: ‘...and they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?”’(1) (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Here, they are not objecting to the Quran itself, but rather to the one unto whom it was revealed. In their view, there would be nothing wrong with the Quran had it not been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Yet, their denial results in their arguments being contradictory. They say: ‘...They also said, “Allahumma, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment.”’ (*al-Anfal:* 32)

Rationally, they should have said: ‘Guide us to it.’ This is proof of their doubt over the Quran and their incredulity at what it brought. That is why the Quran quotes them as saying: ‘The disbelievers say, “Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk”...’ (*Fussilat:* 26).

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(1) *There is some difference of opinion about the man upon whom they wanted the revelation to descend. It is said Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and 'Urwa ibn Mas`id Ath-Thaqafi, and it is said 'Umayr ibn ‘Amr ibn Mas`ud Ath-Thaqafi. It is also said ‘Utba ibn Rabi`a and Habib ibn `Amr Ath-Thaqafi. As for the two cities, they were Mecca and Ta’if. Ibn Kathir says in his exegesis (4/127), ‘They apparently wanted a great man, whichever of the two cities he came from.’*

Ponder for a moment their prohibition of even listening to the Quran. Why? Because they were Arabs: they had a natural inclination and talent for language and rhetoric. If they listened to the Quran it was bound to affect them. Anyone who listens to the Quran with a heart free of opposition must surely be contented by it. If not, why did they prohibit people from listening to it?

Yet, they were not satisfied with preventing people from hearing the Quran, but they took it upon themselves to obscure it so that whoever wanted to listen to it would fail to do so: ‘...drown it in frivolous talk...’ (*Fussilat:* 26). This is a proof that if the Quran is left to reach the ears, it will permeate to the heart, fill it and turn it towards the truth; if the mind is free of falsehood that is. If the heart is busy with antagonistic beliefs, however, it will not be affected by the Quran, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, “What was that he just said?”...’ (*Muhammad:* 16)

Of those who are affected by listening to the Quran Allah says: ‘When a *surah* is revealed, some [hypocrites] say, “Have any of you been strengthened in faith by it?” It certainly does strengthen the faith of those who believe and they rejoice.’ (*at-Tawba:* 124)

If one were to ask, ‘How can one thing have two opposite effects?’ We would say it is because the recipient is different. We clarified this issue previously when we mentioned the example of blowing in one’s hands to warm them up in the cold, and blowing on a cup of hot tea to cool it down. The breath is one, but its recipient is different. There is no doubt that the heat of one’s breath is less than that of the cup of tea and greater than that of one’s hands in the winter. In a similar manner, the effect of the Quran differs according to the one listening.

For this reason, while reading the Quran, there should not be anything that might prevent it from reaching one’s heart. The True Lord forbids the clamour of crowds when it comes to arguments concerned with the art of rhetoric because in the chaos voices become mixed up, and one man’s faults become hidden by the others. This happens in demonstrations for instance, where one cannot work out who said what. This matter sheds some light for us on the wisdom behind Allah's words: '*innahu ya'lamu al-jahra min al-qawli wa ya'lamu ma taktumun*'; 'He knows what you reveal and conceal.' (*al-Anbiya':* 110)

The orientalists take issue with this verse saying: 'What is so special about knowledge of *ilm al-jahr* (the audible) when everyone knows it? Why does Allah tell us of His knowledge of this?' To this we reply that Allah's words: '...and conceal' (*al-Anbiya':* 110) indicate that *al-jahr* (the audible), too, addresses a group of people, i.e., as if He says: '*wa ya'lamu ma tajharoon*' (He knows what you say out loud). Thus, the True Lord knows every sound and from whom it issues. He distinguishes every voice and attributes it to its originator, and to do this is actually harder than knowing the inaudible.

Among their arguments regarding Allah's *ayat* (verses) is their saying that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a soothsayer or a sorcerer, or that he was a poet…etc. Such sayings are false, rejected and easily refuted. Were Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a sorcerer who cast a spell on those who believed in him, why did he not cast spells on them as well? Thus, their failure to change is a proof that their accusation is a lie. As for their saying that he was a soothsayer, they had never seen anything of this sort from him before, nor had they heard from him anything that resembled the speech of soothsayers.

Even stranger than this is that they accused him of being a poet, and that what he brought was poetry. These were a people completely given over to poetry. The knights of the field, so to speak, were the most knowledgeable of people about this matter. In fact, anybody with the least familiarity with language can distinguish between poetry and prose. He can recognise both and easily sense when a move has been made from poetry to prose, or prose to poetry.(1)

Take for example, this piece of prose written by ibn Zaydun: 'The consequences of this blame are desirable, and this unfriendliness is but an adversity that will clear up. I will not be suspicious if my master's clouds are delayed, or, far from being miserly, he misdirected his giving; for the fullest buckets are the most delayed; and the heaviest and slowest clouds are the most promising. For every day there will be tomorrow, and for everything there is a time prescribed. If he has done one bad deed, He did thousands of things that pleased.'

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(1) Here, Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi cited several Arabic proverbs to elucidate his point.

So, we have to differentiate between prose and poetry. Then, what of them, a people devoted to eloquence and rhetoric; a people who created marketplaces and exhibitions for wisdom? Yet, somehow they failed to differentiate between the Quran and poetry.

The Quran is not poetry, but a unique type of composition. Read, for instance, Allah's words: 'So when she heard of their sly talk she sent for them and prepared for them a repast, and gave each of them a knife, and said (to *Yusuf*): Come forth to them. So when they saw him, they deemed him great, and cut their hands (in amazement), and said: Remote is Allah (from imperfection); this is not a mortal; this is but a noble angel.' She said: This is he with respect to whom you blamed me, and certainly I sought his yielding himself (to me), but he abstained...' (*Yusuf:* 31-32). Such is prose; you do not perceive the least bit of poetry in it. Despite this, if you take, for example, the Arabic words, '*fa dhalika alladhi lumtunnani fihi,*'; '...This is he with respect to whom you blamed me...' (*Yusuf:* 32) you will find that they fit one of the meters of Arabic poetry. Similarly, Allah's words: '*nabbi' ibadi anni Ana al-Ghafur ar-Rahim,*'*;* '…tell My servants that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful.' (*al-Hijr:* 49) If you replaced the Arabic words with the pattern *taf'il*, you would find it gives you one of the meters of Arabic poetry. Yet, you would never sense that you had moved from poetry to prose or prose to poetry. That is because, as we said, the Quran is a unique composition.

Furthermore, the perfect style of the Quran cannot be imparted to other works. If one takes a scholar who has memorised the Quran and knows the seven recitations well, one may find that he still cannot produce speeches. We advise students to read books of literature, the books of Al-Manfaluti, for instance, or Al-Aqqad, to improve their writing, expression, and style. This is because the Quran does not impart its style to others. While books of literature will improve one's style, the perfection of the Quran remains intransitive.

One of their arguments concerning Allah's *ayat* (verses) is that they said of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...It is a man who teaches him...' (*an-Nahl:* 103). They even specified a particular individual,(1) but the Quran refuted them, saying in effect: 'if you are going to lie, then make sure you have a good memory': '...but the language of the person they allude to is foreign, while this revelation is in clear Arabic.' (*an-Nahl:* 103)

They subsequently said that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was crazy. It was strange for them to make such an accusation when they were well aware of his exemplary character and manners before he was declared a Prophet. There is no way someone with exceptional character can be crazy, yet such are the doubts of the intellectually bankrupt: people who could find no real arguments to find fault with the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. What else could they say besides these clumsy remarks? This argumentation is all attacking the person of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They would call him ibn Abu Kabsha, but there is no way such insults would discredit the person of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

They also argued about Allah's laws. They ask for an example of why Allah *Glorified is He* forbade eating from *al-mayta* (dead animals). How could it be that the ones that died on their own, or in other words Allah *Glorified is He* caused them to die, be forbidden, while the ones that you cause to die through slaughtering are permissible? In their view all death is the same; why make this one permissible and forbid that one?

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(1) *The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to teach a blacksmith in Mecca by the name of Bal'am. He spoke a foreign language and the polytheists would see the Messenger of Allah Glorified is He Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him come in and out of his home. This led them to say that Bal'am was teaching Him, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him so Allah Glorified is He revealed the verse: 'And, indeed, full well do We know that they say, "It is but a human being that imparts (all) this to him!" – (notwithstanding that) the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear (in itself) and clearly showing the truth (of its source)' (16: 103). Ibn Kathir related it in his Exegesis on the authority of Ibn `Abbas may Allah be pleased with him (2/586).*

They objected to the Sacred Law because it was applied to all; it did not differentiate between the leaders and the slaves. There was one law for all, but they had become over-familiar with their authority.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...except the disbelievers...' (*Ghafir:* 4) i.e., they concealed their knowledge of the Necessarily Existent, the Most High who created them and the whole universe around them, as evidenced by their own admission about Allah's signs in creation: 'If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, "Allah"...' (*Luqman:* 25). So, even though they believe in the signs in the universe, they nevertheless deny their Creator. They conceal the Necessarily Existent, the Most High who put the laws of nature in order for all His creation, and did so in such a way that they support and do not contradict each other, so that the world may be populated as the Creator wishes.

We have previously described how the word *kufr* (disbelief) is in itself a proof of faith. The word *kufr* means to cover and hide, and if hiding is taking place, then something is being hidden. Thus the thing being hidden exists before its concealment does. So, if they are hiding their awareness of Allah's existence through disbelief, then it must exist in the first place.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...do not be dazzled by their movements back and forth across the land,' (*Ghafir:* 4) i.e., do not be fooled by their authority, loftiness and reverence, such that no one can oppose their travels by summer or winter, or their strutting from place to place.

If they knew the reality of this status they are granted–Who put them there–they would not take such a stance towards you, O Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They achieved this status and respect by means of their custody of the House of Allah *Glorified is He* and it is Allah *Glorified is He* who has sent you to them. Hence, it is their responsibility to believe you and have faith in you.

The word *taqallubuhum* (movements back and forth) indicates their ability to move from place to place, and it also indicates physical strength. This is why the other Arab tribes respected them. This status came to Quraysh because of the *Hajj* where all the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula would come during that time and be under the protection of Quraysh. Because of this, they could travel without fear. They should have been heedful of this blessing, but they denied it and thus they proved Allah's words concerning them to be true: '[Prophet], do you not see those who, in exchange for Allah's favour, offer only ingratitude and make their people end up in the home of ruin, Hell?' (*Ibrahim:* 28)

How could such be? Read Allah's words: 'Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? Did He not utterly confound their plans? He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay: He made them [like] cropped stubble.' (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

We know the story of how Abraha came to destroy the *Ka'ba* to turn people away from the House of Allah *Glorified is He* so he could build another *ka'ba* in San'a, for the people to make pilgrimage to. We know what the affair of this army was and how Allah *Glorified is He* repelled it. It is said that the huge elephant that was leading the army stopped moving towards the *Ka'ba*, while at the same time it would go in any other direction, until one of them approached the elephant and said to it, 'Kneel, Mahmud, and return as a guide, for you are in Allah's sacred land.(1)' After Allah *Glorified is He* rained down stones of *sijjil* (pellets of hard-baked clay) upon them, they turned away, defeated by the power of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The point here, however, is what Allah *Glorified is He* says straight after this chapter: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure: secure in their winter and summer journeys.' (*Quraysh:* 1-2) It is as though the preservation of the *Ka'ba* was the preservation of Quraysh's leadership and their safety and security amongst the Arab tribes and by means of this, Allah *Glorified is He* enabled them to continue their summer and winter journeys.

Thus, the reason for: 'He made them [like] cropped stubble' (*al-Fil:* 5) is revealed in the verse: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure' (*Quraysh:* 1) Otherwise, one would have to wonder about the beginning of the chapter: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure,' (*Quraysh:* 1) and ask why is this?

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(1) *Ibn Kathir mentions in his Exegesis (4/550) that Nufayl ibn Habib approached the elephant until he stood at its side. He then took its ear and said to it, 'Kneel Mahmud, and return as a guide to the place from whence you came, for you are in Allah's sacred land.' He then let go of its ear and the elephant sat down on the spot.*

We have previously clarified that the chapters of the Quran are connected. Thus, one can recite it saying: ‘He made them [like] cropped stubble’ (*al-Fil:* 5) in the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy: ‘[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure.’ (*Quraysh:* 1)

Someone might ask: why were all the verses of the Quran not just put into one chapter? Why would the cause come in one chapter and the effect in another? The scholars, however, say that a thing may be separated from its cause so that each one may have its own ruling.

So, ‘they were made like cropped stubble’, so that the *Ka’ba* would not be destroyed, for if the *Ka’ba* were destroyed, the position and status of Quraysh would disintegrate. Allah *Glorified is He* maintained their position so that they could travel to the north and south and no one would dare to oppose them. Upon that their sustenance would be based, and they would be free from hunger and fear. He fed them through their trade and their commercial trips, and made them secure so that no one would attempt to harm them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then clarifies the reason for this, saying: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.’ (*Quraysh:* 3-4) Thus, they were immersed in Allah’s blessings, and it was inappropriate for them to deny it.

Returning to Allah’s words: ‘...do not be dazzled by their movements back and forth across the land.’ (*Ghafir:* 4) We see that Allah *Glorified is He* did not neglect them, but rather gave them respite. Someone may ask what the wisdom was in giving them respite, i.e., given that Allah *Glorified is He* has not ignored them, why did He not just take them to account from the first?

The scholars said that it is because Allah *Glorified is He* sent His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: the Seal of the Messengers, to them. He made his religion the final religion and the guardian over all times and places. There would be no Prophets after him. There comes a time, however, when the Messenger’s role is fulfilled and he passes on to the heavenly company. It is then upon the soldiers of truth, those who have proven themselves through tribulations, to carry his message.

For this reason, we said: the leaders of disbelief who persecuted the first Muslims and tortured them, later, became soldiers for Islam. Why? Because it was this persecution and torture that purified the Muslims and distanced those whose faith or aspiration was weak, those who were put off by persecution, or terrorised by torture such that only the strong remained in the circle of faith; those who were worthy to carry this message and bear its troubles; for this was to be an enduring and ongoing message for every time and place.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not ignore the disbelievers, but He gave them respite for a reason: so that they could partake in the development of the generation that would carry the call to Allah *Glorified is He*: '[and with all] those who deliver Allah's messages and fear only Him and no other...' (*al-Ahzab:* 39).

This was the Muhammadan generation that carried the banner of Islam and journeyed with it to every region. They did not expect payment up front; they only wanted their reward from Allah *Glorified is He* in the next life.

This is the difference between the call for truth and the call for falsehood. The people of truth do not expect any reward up front; the people of falsehood, however, want to be paid before they have even begun work. That is why each of the Messengers of Allah *peace be upon them* said to his people: 'And I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109) Indeed, their reward is only with Allah because it was too costly and no one would be able to furnish it except Allah. No one could recompense a Messenger for his accomplishing his mission of guiding his people, even if they gave him all the riches in the world.

'*Al-taqallubuhum fi al-bilad*' indicates that moving back and forth across the land does not occur except after several things are available: physical health, so that they can withstand the stresses of travel; freedom from fear on the road; and sufficient provision in the places where they would camp on the way. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: 'Do they then who plan evil (deeds) feel secure (of this) that Allah will not cause the earth to swallow them or that punishment may not overtake them from whence they do not perceive? Or that He may not seize them in the course of their journeys, then shall they not escape?' (*an-Nahl:* 45-46)

That is to say: at the peak of their strength and ability to move around freely that Allah *Glorified is He* should bring his punishment down upon them. This is one way that they could be called to account. Another way would be: ‘Or that He may not seize them by causing them to suffer gradual loss...’ (*an-Nahl:* 47) i.e., He puts them into a state of fear and terror before taking them. An example of this would be those who were befallen by the lightning strike. He scared them before the actual punishment struck. These are two ways in which Allah *Glorified is He* takes the disbelievers to account.

Then, the True Lord says:

كَذَّبَتۡ قَبۡلَهُمۡ قَوۡمُ نُوحٖ وَٱلۡأَحۡزَابُ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡۖ وَهَمَّتۡ كُلُّ أُمَّةِۭ بِرَسُولِهِمۡ
لِيَأۡخُذُوهُۖ وَجَٰدَلُواْ بِٱلۡبَٰطِلِ لِيُدۡحِضُواْ بِهِ ٱلۡحَقَّ فَأَخَذۡتُهُمۡۖ فَكَيۡفَ كَانَ عِقَابِ ﴿٥﴾

Before them the people of Noah rejected the truth and so did those who formed opposition after them: every community schemed to destroy its messenger and strove to refute truth with falsehood; but it was I who destroyed them. How terrible My punishment was! [5] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 5)

This means that they are not the first people to exist and you are not the first Messenger, O Muhammad. Many were your brethren among the Messengers who preceded you, and they denied them as they deny you. Yet, what was the result of their denial? Did Allah send a Messenger, give him up and abandon him? No! By Allah! Verily the way of Allah *Glorified is He* is to give victory to His Messengers *peace be upon them* and forsake the enemies of his message. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: it is they who will be helped, and the ones who support Our cause will be the winners.’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

This is not just theoretical speech to console you, O Muhammad; it is a reality of which there are previous examples in the succession of Prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* says of the deniers: ‘…and We punished each one of them for their sins...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) i.e., a wind that blasted them with burning stones. ‘...some We struck with a violent storm...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) i.e., these are the people of Thamud. ‘…some We made the earth swallow…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) i.e., as was Qarun Korah. ‘...some We drowned...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) as He did with the people of Noah *peace be upon him* and the people of Pharaoh.

Thus, Allah’s way is that He gives victory to His Messengers *peace be upon them* while routing their enemies. It is because of this that we say that if you see the peoples of Islam defeated in a battle, you can rest assured that one of the conditions of being a soldier of Allah is missing, and that had they fulfilled Allah’s conditions that should be found in His soldiers, they would never have been defeated.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Before them the people of Noah rejected…’ (*Ghafir:* 5), i.e., before your people who disbelieve in you were the people of Noah *peace be upon him* who also rejected. This is a consolation to the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and an easing of his burden; for the denial of the message is nothing new. Allah *Glorified is He* chose to mention Noah *peace be upon him* specifically because his mission was the longest of missions, such that he called his people for a thousand years minus fifty. All this long life did they argue with the Messenger of Allah Noah *peace be upon him* refusing and denying him. This is why he despaired of their guidance and prayed against them saying: ‘And Noah said, “Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth—if you leave them they will lead Your servants astray and beget only sinners and disbelievers.”’ (*Nuh:* 26-27)

As for the few who had faith with him, he prayed for them, beginning with himself: ‘Lord, forgive me...’ (*Nuh:* 28) and then his parents, ‘...my parents...’ (*Nuh:* 28) because they were the cause of his existence, ‘…and whoever enters my house as a believer...’ (*Nuh:* 28), i.e., those with whom he had some kind of relationship, and finally the majority of the believing men and women, ‘...Forgive believing men and women...’ (*Nuh:* 28). Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the people of Noah *peace be upon him* specifically because they were a prime example of this issue, the clearest example and the most aggressive. No doubt, you are aware of the mockery, denial and harm that Noah *peace be upon him* had to put up with while he was constructing the Ark.(1)

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(1) *Allah Glorified is He says of this: ‘And (so Noah) set himself to building the ark; and every time the great ones of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him...’ (Hud: 38) They would say to him, ‘Have you become a carpenter? Why are you making a boat in a land that has no water? Are you going to sail on dry land?’ and other similar expressions of mockery and ridicule.*

Allah’s words: ‘… and so did those who formed opposition after them…’ (*Ghafir:* 5) refer to Ad, the people of Prophet Hud *peace be upon him*, and Thamud, the people of Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him*. This was not hypothetical speech; it was a reality that they witnessed, for they actually saw their ruined buildings: ‘You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night: will you not take heed?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138)

They would pass the Al-Ahqaf in their travels, as well as mada’in (the towns) of Aalih *peace be upon him*. In Egypt, we have the remnants of the Pharaohs, all of which bear witness to the truth of what Allah *Glorified is He* informed us about. Now, there is the most sophisticated and advanced of the world countries, yet it stands helpless in the face of the civilisation of Pharaoh. See how they reached this level of progress more than seven thousand years ago? Despite this, their civilisation perished, because they could not reach the level that would result in protecting it from such an end.

Read, if you will, Allah’s words: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of Ad, of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land, and the Thamud/ who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excesses in their lands, and spread corruption there: your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them. Your Lord is always watchful.’ (*al-Fajr*: 6-14) i.e., this matter did not end with Ad, Thamud and the people of Pharaoh. Indeed, it is general for any and all who deny: ‘Your Lord is always watchful.’ (*al-Fajr*: 14)

Al-ahzab (those who were leagued together) refers to those who join together for a common cause. In this case, they are those who united against guidance and the call to Allah *Glorified is He*. This is why they were called *hizb ash-shaytan* (the party of the Devil)—the opposite of this being *hizb Allah* (the party of Allah): those who aid the Messengers *peace be upon them* and support the call to truth.

‘*Wa hammat kullu ummatin bi rasulihim liya’khudhuh,*’ ‘…every community schemed to destroy its messenger…’ (*Ghafir:* 5), i.e., to kill him. This matter is explained further in Allah’s words: ‘Remember [Prophet] when the disbelievers plotted to take you captive...’ (*al-Anfal:* 30) i.e., to imprison you or chain you up so that you would not be able to move here and there, '...kill, or expel you. They schemed and so did Allah: He is the best of schemers.' (*al-Anfal:* 30) These words indicate that they wanted to do these things, but they were unable. The word *hammu* (literally: were about to) refers to an inclination, or a desire that was not actualised.

Another example of this can be found in Allah's words regarding the two parties at the battle of Uhud: '*idh hammat ta'ifatayn minkum an tafshala,*' 'Remember when two groups of you were about to lose heart...' (*Al-'Imran:* 122), but they did not lose heart. *Al-Hamm* is the heart's engrossment with doing something that eventually does not come about. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*wa hammu bima la yanalu,*' '...they tried to do something/ though they did not achieve it...' (*at-Tawba:* 74).

An exception to this is the action *(hamm*; desire*)* on the part of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* because, in the situation referred to, the issue was related to the infallibility of the Prophets. Allah *the Exalted* says: 'And indeed she did desire him and he would have inclined to her desire...' (*Yusuf:* 24). Some people, when interpreting this verse, add inappropriate meanings that are quite unbefitting to the infallibility of Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* and ask how he could have desired her when he was a Prophet?

As we said, *(hamm)* signifies the attachment of the mind to the performance of an action or the attachment of a sense organ to responding to a certain action, but what is important is whether or not one's limbs will respond to the desire. This verse speaks of two different types of (*hamm*; tending to do something): 'And indeed she did desire him...' (*Yusuf:* 24); there is a pause, then: '... and he would have inclined to her desire...' (*Yusuf:* 24). Notice that she got nothing out of her desire, and that is why she is mentioned in the Quran as saying: 'I did seek to seduce him, but he firmly refused. And now if he refuses to obey my order, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and will be one of those who are disgraced.' (*Yusuf:* 32)

This proves that her desire came to nothing. So how could desire (*hamm*) be fruitless in her case, despite being bent on disobedience, but be fruitful in the case of Yusuf *peace be upon him*? Thus, she desired him, but nothing happened despite her wanting it to, and he could have almost inclined to her, but nothing happened because he did not want it to happen.

Ponder the precision of the Quranic diction in using the heavy *(nun)* of emphasis on the verb in: '...he shall certainly be cast into prison (*la yusjananna*)...' (*Yusuf:* 32), and the light *(nun)* of emphasis on the verb in: '...and will be one of those who are disgraced (*wa la yukunan min as-saaghirin*).' (*Yusuf:* 32) Prison was a matter over which the Egyptian Governor's wife had control and Yusuf *peace be upon him* could be imprisoned at her command, so the heavy *(nun)* of emphasis was used to indicate her ability to execute the action. As for reducing him to one of those despised, this was something beyond her control, for perhaps the guards would admire him and be kind to him. So the light *(nun)* of emphasis was used here to demonstrate her inability to execute this action.

Finally, the answer with which we conclusively put an end to the implication of the word *(hamm)* in this story, and clear Yusuf *peace be upon him* of the false accusations forged against him, is that we say, yes, she desired him, but did she fulfil her desire or not? She did not, and the proof of this is her saying: '...And now if he refuses to obey my order...' (*Yusuf:* 32). Also: '...and he would have inclined to her desire...' (*Yusuf:* 24). Yes, he, at some point, could have had a desire, but he did not do anything, as evidenced by the previous verse. So why are they so keen to attribute this accusation to the Prophet of Allah *peace be upon him* when nothing resulted from either his or her desire?

Furthermore, the desire mentioned here is a completely natural occurrence because it is a natural disposition of human beings to be drawn into such an act. That is, it is something which is possible for him as a human being because he is by nature capable of this action. Otherwise, we would have said that he was congenitally celibate and incapable of such deeds. But no, he was capable of it; so what then prevented him from it? It was as Allah says: '...had he not seen [in this temptation] the evidence of his Lord...' (*Yusuf:* 24). That is, of this being prohibited. It is as one says, 'I would have visited you, if so-and-so were not with you,' which evidently means that I had not visited you. Therefore, '...he would have inclined to her desire, had he not seen the evidence of his Lord. Thus it was, that We might turn away from him evil and immorality. Surely, he was one of Our chosen, guided slaves.' (*Yusuf:* 24) So (*hamm*) means that the desire occurred to him, but he did not act upon it. So, the judgement here mentioned declares the innocence of Yusuf *peace be upon him* even of desire.

We return to Allah's saying: '…and every (disbelieving) nation plotted against their Messenger to seize him…' (*Ghafir:* 5). So, although this happened, they could not accomplish their evil plan and lay their hands on him. '…And they disputed by means of falsehood to refute therewith the truth…' (*Ghafir:* 5). That is, they wanted to defeat and erase the truth by means of falsehood, but what was the result? '…So I seized them (with punishment)…' (*Ghafir:* 5). That is, I (Allah) destroyed them, not just in the realm of desire, like them, but in reality, and this is what becomes the Supreme Power. '…And how (terrible) was My Punishment.' (*Ghafir:* 5) Did you know it? Were We (Allah) able to punish them?

It is similar to Allah's saying: 'Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. And when they passed by them, they would exchange derisive glances. And when they returned to their people, they would return jesting. And when they saw them, they would say, "Indeed, those are truly lost." But they had not been sent as guardians over them. So today those who believed are laughing at the disbelievers, on adorned couches, gazing. Have the disbelievers [not] been paid [this Day] for what they used to do?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-36)

That is, have We (Allah) not ably requited them for their deeds and crimes? It is as though the True Lord *the Exalted* wants to alert the people of faith and reassure them of His Justice *Glorified is He*. These people will not escape the punishment, and there can be no doubt that the people of faith find relief in knowing that the disbelievers and criminals are to be punished.

Reflect here for a moment on the precision of the Quranic diction in Allah's saying: '…and every (disbelieving) nation plotted against their Messenger (*rasulihim*) to seize him…' (*Ghafir:* 5). Allah has not said: '…and every (disbelieving) nation plotted against its Messenger (*rasuliha*)…' on the basis that a community is a singular entity; rather, He says: '…plotted against their Messenger (*rasulihim*)…' (*Ghafir:* 5). Allah attributed the Messenger to a group in the masculine plural because the confrontation between Islam and disbelief was between men. Women did not take part in this confrontation. The proof of this is that when they plotted against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* on the night of his emigration (from Mecca to Medina) they were all men. There was not one woman among them.

The same applies to Allah’s saying: ‘…and they (masc.) disputed by means of falsehood to refute therewith the truth…’ (*Ghafir:* 5). These were confrontations involving no women.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ حَقَّتۡ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَنَّهُمۡ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٦﴾

In this way your Lord’s sentence was passed against
the disbelievers that they would be the inhabitants of
the Fire [6] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 6)

The word *haqqat* (has become incumbent) in this verse means that punishment has become necessary, justified and certain regarding them, and nothing will happen that can revoke it. Why? Because the One Who has uttered it knows what is going to happen afterwards. Especially that these people, who are perpetrating such actions, still have a choice to behave or refrain from behaving in certain ways.

So Allah *the Exalted* has declared and passed down this sentence on them while they are still alive in this world, and it is still possible for them to make choices, yet, despite this, they do not contradict it and act differently. This is one of the grand aspects of Allah’s Speech. He challenges you in something in which you have a choice, and yet, despite that, you do not depart from that which He has decreed.

We stated the same thing concerning Allah’s saying about Abu Lahab and his wife: ‘Perish the two hands of Abu Lahab, and perish he! His wealth and his children (etc.) will not benefit him! He will be burnt in a Fire of blazing flames! And his wife [as well] - the carrier of firewood, Around her neck is a rope of [twisted] fibre.’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* decreed that they shall be disbelievers and that they shall end up in the hellfire, even though belief and disbelief are matters which Allah has left free for His slaves to choose which to follow.

This is evidenced by the fact that disbelieving men of Mecca, who were like Abu Lahab, entered Islam, such as Khalid ibn Al-Walid, `Amr ibn Al-`As, `Ikrima and other men *may Allah be pleased with them all*. Abu Lahab could have, after the revelation of this Quranic chapter, testified that there was no god but Allah and that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was His Messenger. Abu Lahab could even have said so just out of hypocrisy, yet it did not happen and Allah's Word regarding him proved true.

This is an issue that the True Lord *the Exalted* has explained in His saying: '...and know that Allah intervenes between a person and his heart...' (*al-Anfal:* 24). So although his heart may tell him to do something, Divine Grandeur prevents him from it.

Therefore, Allah *the Most High* said to Musa's mother: '...suckle him [Musa (Moses)], but when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve...' (*al-Qasas:* 7). Such a solution is unacceptable, as judged by human logic. How could any reasonable person say that if a woman fears for her child she should throw him into the sea? Yet Musa's mother did not listen to the voice of reason and was not swayed by her emotions toward her child. She listened to her Lord – to this ultimate, supreme inspiration that could not be opposed by any base satanic thoughts. She had no hesitation about casting her child into the sea because Allah *Glorified is He* intervened between her and her emotions.

The same can be found in the story of Musa *peace be upon him* with Pharaoh. The soothsayers had told Pharaoh that he would lose his kingdom at the hands of a youth from the children of Israel; so what did Pharaoh do? This allows us to understand the mentality of those who claim divinity, and how Allah comes between a person and his heart. What did Pharaoh do? He started searching out all the children and killed them. He did not know that Allah had stored up this child for him and that he would come to him and knock on his door – in his cradle as you know – and that he would even feel safe toward him and take him as his own son. His wife said: '...A joy to the eye [could this child be] for me and you...' (*al-Qasas:* 9). So, he took him and raised him in his own house. This is the meaning of Allah's saying: '...and know that Allah intervenes between a person and his heart...' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

Allah’s saying: ‘Thus has the Word of your Lord been justified against those who disbelieved, that they will be the dwellers of the Fire,’ (*Ghafir:* 6) signifies that punishment has not been imposed on them through compulsion or oppression, but rather by their own choice. The True Lord *Glorified is He* knows the choices they will make through His Eternal Knowledge, and so He has passed sentences concerning them by His Foreknowledge (of their choices). It is impossible that something could happen that contradicts this decree because it is Allah Who has pronounced it.

We have previously clarified that the Arabic word *kalimah* (word*)* can be applied to a single utterance or it can be applied to speech in general. An example of this is Allah’s saying: ‘...No! It is but a word that he speaks...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 100) .Regarding those who say: ‘...Allah has taken to Him a son...’ (*Yunus:* 68). He says: ‘...dreadful is this saying (*kalimah*) that comes out of their mouths [and] nothing but falsehood do they utter!’ (*al-Kahf:* 5) We also call a long speech a *(kalimah).*

The word which has become justified and incumbent in the verse under study is not just any word; it is: ‘…the Word of your Lord...’ (*Ghafir:* 6). Allah’s Word must necessarily come true. It is not possible that Allah *the Exalted* could say something and then events prove otherwise. The word that has come true in this case is that the disbelievers: ‘…will be the dwellers of the Fire.’ (*Ghafir:* 6)

ٱلَّذِينَ يَحۡمِلُونَ ٱلۡعَرۡشَ وَمَنۡ حَوۡلَهُۥ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمۡدِ رَبِّهِمۡ وَيُؤۡمِنُونَ بِهِۦ
وَيَسۡتَغۡفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ رَبَّنَا وَسِعۡتَ كُلَّ شَيۡءٖ رَّحۡمَةٗ وَعِلۡمٗا
فَٱغۡفِرۡ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُواْ وَٱتَّبَعُواْ سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمۡ عَذَابَ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ٧

Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those who
surround it celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith
in Him. They beg forgiveness for the believers: ‘Our Lord,
You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive
those who turn to You and follow Your path. Save them
from the pains of Hell [7] (The Quran, *Ghafir*: 7)

These are the angels whom Allah has created to praise Him *Glorified and Exalted is He*. They have no work except praising Allah. These angels are the

Carriers of the Throne and those around it. We have previously said that glorification of Allah is part of the keys of creation. Allah's saying: '…glorify the praises of their Lord…' (*Ghafir:* 7) means that they declare His Transcendence above any resemblance to His creation, whether it is respect to His Names, Attributes or Actions.

That is why we said that if the True Lord *the Most High* shares some aspect with His creation, we must look at it through the frame of: '...there is nothing like unto Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11). Allah has actions and you have actions. We cannot compare your actions to those of your Lord. We clarified this matter in our explanation of the beginning of the chapter of *al-Isra'*. The events mentioned in the beginning of this chapter were extraordinary; therefore, Allah *the Exalted* started it by declaring His Transcendence: 'Exalted is He who took His servant by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* to *Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa*...' (*al-Isra':* 1) Allah stated this at the beginning so that we might not compare His Actions with human actions, or His Abilities with our abilities. Allah has His own Actions and you have your own actions. Allah's Actions are not like yours, so beware of seeing this event as unlikely based on the factors of time or distance.

The term *(subhan Allah)* refers to Allah's Transcendence above anything that resembles humanity. That is why it is said: 'anything that occurs to your mind (regarding Allah's Appearance), Allah is other than that.' Allah's Transcendence is not contingent upon the existence of somebody who would declare His Elevation beyond any similarity to His creatures, but rather, it is pre-eternal, existing before Allah created anyone to proclaim it. He is Transcendent in and of Himself and has been so before the existence of any creature who affirms this.

Thus, after the creation of the heavens and the earth, He *the Most High* proclaimed: 'Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah...' (*al-Hadid:* 1) That is, at the very time they were created, they celebrated His Glories, saying: 'Glory be to Allah, the Creator, the Most Great,' and they are still extolling His Majesty, as Allah says: 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols the Glory of Allah...' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1). This glorification is continuous and perpetual. Since the whole universe glorifies

Allah and continues to glorify Him, and since the universe has been created for you, O humankind, you should all the more glorify Him. Therefore, Allah says: 'Exalt the Name of your Lord, the Most High.' (*al-A'la*: 1)

The glorification of Allah is the declaration of the transcendence of Allah's Attributes and Actions. When, for example, you think of the process of creation, and you find that Allah has created the human of clay, could you take some clay, fashion it into the shape of a human and breathe a soul into it? This is an act that none but the Creator *Glorified is He* can accomplish.

When Allah wanted to give `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* a miraculous sign relating to creation, He instructed him to say: 'Indeed I have come to you with a sign from your Lord in that I design for you from clay [that which is] like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by Permission of Allah...' (*Al-'Imran:* 49) Concerning breathing the soul into the form, `Isa empathically clarified that it would happen: '...by Permission of Allah...' (*Al-'Imran:* 49). By his nature alone, he could not accomplish this. As for fashioning a statue in the shape of a man or a bird, this was something easy.

So, O human being, whom Allah has ennobled, it is your duty to glorify your Lord. All animate and inanimate beings and the whole universe that Allah has created for you glorified Him and continue to do so.

Allah's saying: 'Those (angels) who bear the Throne (of Allah)…' (*Ghafir:* 7) refers to the angels who carry Allah's Throne. Thus, the Throne is borne by angels. Even the number of the Throne Bearers is inimitable. The True Lord *the Exalted* has informed us that they are eight in number: '...and eight angels will, that Day, bear the Throne of your Lord above them.' (*al-Haqqa:* 17) Why has Allah not made them four, as we are used to, in that most buildings have four corners? Why are they not five even? There must be some wisdom and something miraculous in this specific number.

The miraculous aspect of these numbers is also evident in Allah's saying: 'Over it(1) are nineteen...' (*al-Muddaththir*: 30). Why nineteen specifically?

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(1) *'Over it', i.e., the Fire. It refers to the gatekeepers of hell. They are nineteen in number and in the hand of each angel is an iron rod which has two prongs. One blow from it=*

Why has He not made them twenty? This is evidence that there must be some wisdom behind this number. Allah *the Exalted* has also informed us that this number has been fixed to nineteen as a trial: 'And We have not made the keepers of the Fire except angels. And We have not made their number except as a trial for those who disbelieve...' (*al- Muddaththir*: 31).

Faith requires that one believe in what the True Lord *the Exalted* has informed us of, and that we do not argue such matters, whether it has been said or not, and whether it has happened or not. What did Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* say when they informed him that his Companion (Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) claimed to be a Messenger? He asked, 'Has he said so?' 'Yes,' they replied. 'He has spoken the truth,' answered Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*. He did not investigate the matter further.

The same goes for us every time we face a matter that brings the intellect to a standstill; so long as the information has come to us from Allah, we should accept it and have faith in it: '...and whose word could be truer than Allah's?' (*an-Nisa':* 87)

Whether your intellect can encompass this information or not is another matter because there is a difference between the existence of something and how it exists. Something may exist, but you do not know how it exists.

Reflect for a moment on the story of the father of the Prophets, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he said: 'And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." [Allah] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [let me see it] that my heart may be satisfied."' (*al-Baqara:* 260)

You will find that people who have a superficial understanding of Allah will accuse the Quran of being self-contradictory in this issue. How so? They say that the word (*bala)* means 'Yes, indeed (I have faith),' and faith requires

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= *causes the one struck to keep descending in the fire for seventy thousand years. [Narrated by Al-Qurtubi in At-Tadhkirah, p. 455] At-Tirmidhi related on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah Allah be pleased with him that the Jews asked the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him: 'How many are the gatekeepers of the fire?' So the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him put both his palms on the ground, once with ten fingers extended and once with nine extended and a thumb pulled in. 'Yes,' they said.*

that one’s heart is tranquil in its beliefs; so why does he say afterwards: ‘...but [let me see it] that my heart may be satisfied’ (*al-Baqara:* 260)?

We would reply to them that they are excused because they did not understand the meaning of the question. Had they understood the question, they would not have made these accusations against the Quran. Did Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* say to his Lord, ‘Do you give life?’ or did he say, ‘...show me how You give life to the dead...’ (*al-Baqara:* 260)? So he did not ask about the possibility of the action; he had no doubt about Allah’s Power. Rather, he was asking how it was done: ‘...show me how You give life to the dead...’ (*al-Baqara:* 260). Giving life to the dead was, therefore, a previously established matter of fact, what Abraham *peace be upon him* was asking about was the manner with which it was done. If I ask you, ‘How did you build that house?’ it means that the house is already actually standing.

So, his saying, ‘Yes,’ meant, ‘I believe, O Lord, that you resurrect the dead.’ After that, he sought peace of mind about how it was done. When it comes to the matter of creation and bringing into existence, it is necessary to ask about the manner of it because this is an affair that cannot be spoken of. Allah’s actions do not consist of a process like human’s actions do.

If I asked you how you built your house, you would say that you dug the foundation, brought the steel and the cement and that you did such-and-such. That so-and-so designed the house, and that so-and-so supervised the work, and so-and-so carried out the construction while so-and-so poured the cement mixture, etc. You could tell me how you did it such that I could do the same if I wanted to, and there would be no difference between the two outcomes. If, however, we want to show how the dead are brought to life, how could we do that?

This is a matter that could not be explained with words. It requires the actual carrying out of it. We contemplate here that Allah wanted Abraham *peace be upon him* to perform this deed himself, not that it be done for him. He himself should undertake it. There is a considerable difference between imparting your power to another person in a way that causes things to be done for him, and imparting your power to another person such that he himself can do the action. You might, for example, be incapable of carrying something and so I carry it for you, and this would be quite ordinary. What would be great is when I make you able to carry it yourself.

This is what the True Lord *Glorified is He* did with His Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him*. '...He said: "Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you..."' (*al-Baqara:* 260) that is, keep them close to you and study their characteristics. '...Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them...' (*al-Baqara:* 260) that is, slaughter them and distribute the cut pieces over the hills. '...Then call them, they will come [flying] to you in haste...' (*al-Baqara:* 260).

It was Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him* who slaughtered the birds, cut them into pieces, distributed them, and he himself who summoned them to him, and they assembled together by Allah's Power and flew to him as they were previously. So if I can make somebody able to do something that they could not do alone, am I not able to do it Myself?

The word *al-`arsh* (the throne) is a mark of the firm establishment of sovereignty and rule and total mastery over it. It is not necessary that a person actually sits on the throne. That is why when the hoopoe spoke of the Queen of Sheba, he said: '...she has been given of everything, and she possesses a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 23) A sovereign only sits on his throne when matters are under control and his lands obey him. If there is a region that is resisting or in rebellion against the king, then he will not sit on his throne until they yield to him and his dominion is re-established.

When the True Lord *the Exalted* spoke of His *Istiwa'* (Allah's rising over the Throne in a manner that befits Him), He said: 'Say, "Do you indeed disbelieve in He Who created the earth in two days and attribute to Him equals? That is the Lord of the worlds." And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance in four days without distinction - for [the information] of those who ask. Then He *Istawa* (rose over) towards the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth, "Come both of you willingly or unwillingly." They both said, "We come, willingly." And He completed them as seven heavens within two days and inspired in each heaven its command.’ (*Fussilat:* 9-12) Thus, His establishment on the Throne came after He had completed the creation and exercised absolute dominion.

So, Allah’s saying: ‘Those (angels) who bear the Throne (of Allah)…’ (*Ghafir:* 7) signify the eight angels who carry His Throne. Whereas, His saying: ‘…and those around it glorify the praises of their Lord, and believe in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who believe…’ (*Ghafir:* 7) refers to another type of angels known as *(Al-Kurubiyyun)* who have no other task than to glorify Allah. They have no concern for this world at all, nor do they know anything about it. They only: ‘…glorify the praises of their Lord …’ (*Ghafir:* 7).

Do these angels, who surround the Throne and glorify Allah and have no other occupation than that, see Allah on His Throne? The scholars *may Allah have mercy upon them* say that despite their status, they do not see Allah *the Exalted*. The clearest of their scholarly positions in this regard is that of Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi(1) *may Allah have mercy upon him* when he discussed the verse: ‘Those (angels) who bear the Throne (of Allah) and those around it glorify the praises of their Lord, and believe in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who believe…’ (*Ghafir:* 7) he inclined towards the position of the author of Al-Kashshaf(2) who preceded him. He said that: ‘…and believe in Him …’ (*Ghafir:* 7) means that they do not see Him because there can be no belief or disbelief when it comes to visible things. Faith is reserved for the unseen. Had they seen Allah upon the Throne, He would not have said regarding them: '…and believe in Him …' (*Ghafir:* 7). Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi(1) then added that had this great scholar, the author of Al-Kashshaf, said nothing else but this observation, it would have sufficed him all his life,(2) This was his viewpoint, despite the difference of opinion that existed between these two Imams.

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(1) He was Muhammad ibn `Umar Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi. He was born in Ray (now Teheran) in the year 544 A.H. He was an Imam and an exegete. He was also known as the Preacher of the City of Ray. Among his works are *Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, an exegetical book, and *Muhassal Afkar Al-Mutaqaddimin wa Al-Muta’akhkhirin* besides many others. He also wrote poetry in Arabic and Farsi and was thoroughly proficient as a preacher in both languages. He died in Herat in the year 606 A.H. at the age of sixty-three. [Al-A`lam by Az-Zirikli, vol. 6, p. 313]

(2) The author of the Exegetical book, Al-Kashshaf. His name was Az-Zamakhshari Mahmud ibn `Umar Jar Allah Abu Al-Qasim. He was born in Zamakhshar, one of the villages of Khwarizm in the year 467 A.H. He travelled to Mecca and stayed there some time, and was consequently nicknamed Jar Allah (Allah’s Neighbour). He was one of the great scholars in the fields of religion, exegesis, language, and literature. He died in Al-Jurjaniyya (Khwarizm) in the year 538 A.H. Among his other books was Asas Al-Balaghah. He openly subscribed to the School of the Mu`tazila and was a harsh critic of the Sufis. [Al-A`lam vol.7]

So, we should not understand from the closeness of these angels to the Owner of Majesty and Honour *the Exalted* that they see Him. Certainty not; for them Allah is Unseen. This is emphasised by Allah's saying: '…and believe in Him …' (*Ghafir:* 7). Now, in this gathering, you would not, for example, say, 'I have faith that Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi is sitting surrounded by his friends, and he is talking about such-and-such a subject' because what we are doing now is visible; there is no role for faith to play in it. Faith only relates to things unseen, and this is its distinguishing feature. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* often repeats the phrase: '…who believe in the Unseen.' (*al-Baqara:* 3)

We previously gave an example of this when we asked you to imagine that I am afraid of thieves, so I take the money that I fear for to the far end of the garden and put it under a heavy rock. The time comes when I want my money, so I call the gardener and ask him to lift the rock. He replies that he cannot do it alone because it is too heavy, so I ask him, 'Do you know what is under that rock? Beneath it is the money from which I will pay you your wages.' Hearing this he goes to the rock and lifts it up. So what is important is not one's obedience to a command the benefit of which is apparent to one, but one's obedience to a command the benefit of which is hidden.

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(1) Tafsir Ar-Razi

(2) In his exegesis Al-Kashshaf, the exact wording of Az-Zamakhshari's opinion regarding Allah's saying: '…and believe in Him…' (*Ghafir:* 7) is as follows: 'This brings our attention to the fact that had the matter been as the anthropomorphists claim, the Throne Bearers and the angels around it would see Allah, and consequently they would not have been described as having belief. Belief only relates to things absent. Since it is attributed to them by way of praise, it is thus known that their belief, and the belief of all the inhabitants of the earth and all who are absent from such a situation, is the same with respect to being attained by way of deduction and inference and none other. There is no way to know Him except this. He is transcendent above the characteristics of bodies.' Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi praised this opinion in his exegesis of this verse in *Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, saying: 'The author of *Al-Kashshaf* gave an excellent viewpoint on it. Had he achieved nothing else in his book, this note would have been sufficient distinction and pride for him.'

Allah's saying: '…glorify the praises of their Lord (*yusabbihun bi hamd rabbihim*)…' (*Ghafir:* 7) means that their glorification is accompanied by praise. The term *tasbih (*glorification) denotes a form of praising Allah, while *hamd* (thankful praise) is gratitude to Allah for the previous blessings He has bestowed. One of the greatest of Allah's Blessings is that He *the Most High* does not resemble anything. Had anything resembled Him, there would have been much conflict and confusion in the universe: '…(if there had been any god along with Him), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have tried to overcome others!...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 91) For Allah is the One and Only God to be worshipped, and He is the Only One Who deserves to be praised.

Then after that Allah says: '…and ask forgiveness for those who believe…' (*Ghafir:* 7). That is, one of the jobs of these angels is that they seek forgiveness for the believers. The Quran relates their words: 'Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who repent and follow Your Way, and save them from the torment of the blazing Fire.' (*Ghafir:* 7)

This is one of the supplications of the angels for the believers. Usually, when saying *(Rabbana*; our Lord) at the beginning of a supplication, the vocative particle *(ya*; O!*)* is elided. One does not say *(ya Rabbana)* because the vocative particle *(ya)* indicates that the person being addressed is at a far distance. If the addressee is even further away, one employs *(ayya)*. And if the addressee is near, one uses a letter *(hamzah)* as in *(a Muhammad)*.

As for the True Lord *Glorified is He* He is so close that we do not use any of the vocative particles when calling on Him. He has described Himself as nearer to the human beings than their jugular vein. That is why we invoke Allah directly saying, *(Rabbana)*. You can study the whole Quran, but you will not find one instance of Allah being called on with a vocative particle.

Even when the disbelievers called on the True Lord, they said: 'O Allah (*Allahumm*), if this should be the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment.' (*al-Anfal:* 32) It is well known that the letter *(mim)* at the end of Allah’s Name here replaces the vocative *(ya)*. They did not say *(ya Allah)*. Instead they said, ‘*Allahumm*.’

The True Lord continues narrating the supplication of the angels for the believers, saying:

رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّٰتِ عَدْنٍ ٱلَّتِى وَعَدتَّهُمْ وَمَن صَلَحَ مِنْ ءَابَآئِهِمْ
وَأَزْوَٰجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّٰتِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٨﴾

And admit them, Lord, to the lasting Gardens You have promised to them, together with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and offspring: You alone are the Almighty, the All Wise [8] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 8)

‘…Gardens of perpetual residence…’ (*Ghafir:* 8) that is, everlasting gardens for permanent residence in paradise. Reflect here on the fruits of faith in Allah, the fruits of the declaration of the Oneness of God: ‘There is no true god worthy of worship except Allah.’ As long as there is belief, disobedience will not harm the person. The angels in the highest heavens speak of you, O believer, and concern themselves with you. They supplicate for you because you believe in Allah.

This is a solace for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and his followers who bore the hardship of calling people to Allah, and those who come after them until the Day of Judgement. Thus, O Muhammad, if the disbelievers of Mecca adopted an obstinate stance against you and your followers, do not grieve. It suffices you that the angels should seek forgiveness for you and your worldwide community. And what category of angels are these? They are the Throne Bearers and the angels that surround it.

Upon reading this supplication, one finds hints and points that deserve reflection. The first of them is that you, O believer, are talked of by the Throne Bearers. You are the subject of their concern, despite their lofty status and your lowly status. These angels have no other task but to exalt Allah with praise and seek forgiveness for the believers.

Ponder how their supplication includes the two stages of *takhliyah* (purifying the soul from bad traits) and subsequent *tahliyah* (adorning the soul with beautiful virtues). They say: '…forgive those who repent and follow Your Way, and save them from the torment of the blazing Fire.' (*Ghafir:* 7) First must come the removal of the causes of distress and then comes the adornment of the soul with the blessings that bring happiness, as expressed in Allah's statement: 'Our Lord, and admit them to the Gardens of perpetual residence which You have promised them…' (*Ghafir:* 8). This is because ridding one's soul of evil and saving it from the causes of punishment is a higher priority than getting blessings. The principle here is that warding off evil takes precedence over bringing benefits. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and whoever is removed away from the Fire and admitted to paradise, he indeed is successful...' (*Al-'Imran:* 185).

Further, we can see that their supplication is not only for the believers, but also includes their whole families: '…and whoever was righteous among their fathers, their spouses and their offspring…' (*Ghafir:* 8). Thus, they have mentioned the whole family tree; for the parents are made happy by the presence of their offspring, so Allah does not deprive them of this bounty.

In another verse, Allah states the grounds behind this favour, saying: 'And those who believe and whose offspring follow them in faith, to them shall We join their offspring...' (*at-Tur:* 21). The factor here is belief. Joining one group to the other indicates that one of them is perfect while the other is less perfect. Had they been equal in deeds, Allah would have accepted both with open arms.

Allah's saying: '...to them shall We join their offspring...' (*at-Tur:* 21) does not mean taking the average of their deeds; that is, adding the deeds of the fathers to those of the offspring and then dividing the outcome by two, no: '...and We shall not decrease the reward of their deeds in anything...' (*at-Tur:* 21). That is, Allah does not reduce their rewards in the slightest. Bringing them together is a favour from the True Lord *Glorified is He* to please the parents through their children, but the condition is belief. Why? It is because the parents would dislike their company if they were not believers.

If someone were to say that this would mean that some people would get for which they did not work. In other words, they would get the fruits of other people's labour, we would say no, because they have believed and belief is part of one's deeds. It is true that: '…man will only have what he has worked towards; that his labour will be seen and that in the end he will be repaid in full for it,' (*an-Najm:* 39) but we should not look at their deeds alone, but rather, expand the circle and look at who has made them perform these righteous deeds. It is the result of a good upbringing. Therefore, it is said in a noble Hadith: 'When the son of Adam dies, his deeds come to an end, apart from three things...' one of which is, '...a righteous child who supplicates for him.'(1) The word 'righteous' here is the result of whose efforts? It is the result of the parents' efforts.

So, when the parents receive reward for the good supplications of their offspring, they are only being given what they deserve and the fruit of their labour for this child. If the father is righteous, he will be careful to provide for his child from lawful earnings. His keenness to seek what is lawful often means that his expenses have to be constrained. On the other hand, there are some wealthy people who do not care to have lawful sources of income and work. They buy extravagant food, clothes, cars and other material possessions for their children because they have gathered their wealth from unlawful means.

A righteous father, however, will distance himself and his children from ill-gotten gains. That is why a righteous man may well suffer because of his righteousness in this world. He is patient in hardship and deprivation, and all this is credited to him as good deeds.

It was for this reason that we found many people arguing with us about Allah's saying: '…man will only have what he has worked towards.' (*an-Najm:* 39) They wanted to know how a person could benefit from the work of others. To answer this, we gave them an example: We are commanded to pray over the deceased. Does this prayer benefit the deceased or not? It is pointless if it does not benefit him; and if it does benefit him, then has he not benefited from the work of others?

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad [vol. 2, p. 372], At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [1376], and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [2880] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The Hadith in full is as follows: 'When the son of Adam dies, his deeds come to an end, apart from three: Ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, or a righteous son who supplicates for him.'*

Surely, he benefits from the supplications of the living for him at his funeral prayer, yet this prayer in and of itself will be considered from the deeds of the deceased. It is one of the fruits of his faith in Allah. Had he not been a believer, we would not have prayed over him. When one prays over the deceased, one is not praying over all dead people, but only over those who have believed in their Lord *Glorified is He*. The beliefs of a dead person are part of his deeds, and so your prayer for him is also one of his deeds.

Alternatively, we could also say concerning Allah's saying: '…man will only have what he has worked towards' (*an-Najm:* 39), that it means that the human being has no further right than that. Accordingly, this verse precludes justice, but not Allah's Favour and Bounty. There is a difference between justice and bounty. For example, a person may have a worker with whom he has an agreement to pay him 50 pounds, but that does not mean that he cannot pay him 70.

The verse ends with Allah's saying: '…indeed, it is You Who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.' (*Ghafir:* 8) But the angels have not said, for example, 'Indeed, You are the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful,' so that it would fit with the rest of the supplication.

This is similar to Allah's saying in the story of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, "O `Isa, Son of Maryam (Mary), did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as gods besides Allah?' He will say, 'Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the Unseen. I said not to them except what You commanded me - to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness. If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them - indeed it is You Who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.'"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 118)

`Isa *peace be upon him* has not said: 'Indeed, it is You Who is the Much-Forgiving, the Merciful.' Why? Because they deserve to be punished, yet if You forgive them, no one will dare to revoke your forgiveness. For no one can put back Allah’s Judgement or repel His favour. So, O Lord, it is through Your Power and Wisdom that You forgive them, O Lord, even though they deserve to be punished. Thus the forgiveness does not emanate here from Allah’s Attributes of Pardon and Compassion; rather, it comes from His being the Almighty, the Wise. The Divine Attribute of *Al-`Aziz* (Almighty) means the One Who Conquers all and cannot be conquered or opposed.

That is why we said that Satan (Iblis) was truthful when he said: ‘...By Your Might, then I will surely mislead them all.’ (*Sad:* 82) The meaning of the oath *bi`izzatik* (by Your Might) is: ‘By Your independence of Your creation, and Your complete lack of need for them; so whoever desires may believe, and whoever desires may disbelieve. By means of this might and self-sufficiency shall I misguide them. Had You wanted them all to be believers, I would not have interfered with them nor dared to tempt them.’ This is evident from the exception which Satan then made: ‘Except Your chosen servants among them.’ (*Sad:* 83) I have no power over such servants and cannot seduce them. Thus the issue is not between Satan and his Lord, rather, it is between Satan and mankind.

The True Lord *the Exalted* then states more of the angels’ supplications for the believers:

وَقِهِمُ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ ۚ وَمَن تَقِ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ
رَحِمْتَهُۥ ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

Protect them from all evil deeds: those You protect on that Day from [the punishment for] evil deeds will receive Your mercy – that is the supreme triumph [9] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 9)

The verbal form *waqihim* (guard them) here is imperative, or supplicatory, and is derived from the verb *waqa*. It means to say: O Lord, turn them away from sin. It is also correct to say that it means: Protect them from the consequences of sin or protect them from sin itself. True mercy is that Allah averts sins and all evil from you. Therefore, Allah says: ‘...whomsoever You guard against evil deeds on that Day, on him You have had mercy...’ (*Ghafir:* 9).

This is similar to Allah’s saying regarding the Bounteous Quran: ‘And We send down from the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe...’ (*al-Isra’:* 82) The healing effect consists in removing the sickness that already exists in the human soul; for example, the Quran treats illnesses such as miserliness, cowardice, dishonesty, etc. As for the aspect of mercy, it is that one is not afflicted by sickness in the first place. There can be no doubt that avoiding a sickness is better than curing it. Prevention, as they say, is better than cure. ‘...And that is indeed the supreme triumph.’ (*Ghafir:* 9). Yes, indeed, what triumph could be greater than being protected by Allah from falling into sin? The word *fawz* (triumph) denotes success and prosperity. It is described as being supreme because in this world one can have success with children, wealth, or status, and this is a triumph. But the supreme triumph is in the afterlife, because it is a permanent and eternal triumph. Any triumph in this world will eventually end.

The True Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ يُنَادَوْنَ لَمَقْتُ ٱللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ مِن مَّقْتِكُمْ
أَنفُسَكُمْ إِذْ تُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى ٱلْإِيمَـٰنِ فَتَكْفُرُونَ ١٠

But those who disbelieved will be told, ‘When you were called to the faith and rejected it, God’s disgust with you was even greater then than the self-disgust you feel [today]’ [10] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 10)

If we look at this subject from the beginning, we see that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has called mankind to believe in Him by means of His Messengers and His Law. Among them are those who answered and believed, and among them are those who disbelieved: ‘...when you were invited to faith, but you refused.’ (*Ghafir:* 10) Those who did not answer the summons of the True Lord *the Exalted* did not want to be bound by Allah’s Principles of right and wrong – ‘do this and do not do that.’ They did not want to constrict themselves by adhering to a principled path, but rather desired to live their lives as they pleased. This is what drew them to disbelief.

On seeing the punishment in the next world, the disbelievers will be filled with regret at a time when regret will be of no avail. They will hate themselves most severely for not taking the path of faith. This is the meaning of Allah's saying: 'Indeed, those who disbelieve will be addressed, "The hatred of Allah for you was [even] greater than your hatred of yourselves [this Day in Hell] when you were invited to faith, but you refused."' (*Ghafir:* 10)

The word *maqt* (loathing) refers to the most intense hatred. The True Lord *the Exalted* is saying to them, if you detest yourselves to the worst degree because you have not believed in Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and the message of truth that he brought, you should know that Allah's loathing of you and your disbelief in Him is greater and more intense than your own self-hatred. You detest yourselves because you deprived yourselves of good and brought evil upon yourselves by disbelieving in Allah. The True Lord, however, loathes you because you have distanced yourselves from the sphere of His Goodness. You have put yourselves outside His Mercy and Care. This is because the Lord *Glorified is He* becomes enraged when His slave removes himself from His Care and deprives himself of His Goodness.

This denotes that your Lord loves you and loves that goodness comes to you. He wants you by His side and in His company. He is protectively jealous when you break away or deviate from His Path, for you are His handiwork and His servant. Thus, it appears that Allah's loathing of the disbeliever is actually borne of His Mercy and protective jealousy for him. Therefore, Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Had you created them, you would have had mercy on them.'(1) So, the True Lord *Glorified is He* first clarifies that the disbelievers detest themselves and that His detesting of them is greater than their own.

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(1) This Hadith was related by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' `Ulum Ad-Din* [vol. 4, p. 52] on the authority of some of the (*salaf*; the pious predecessors). The exact wording is: 'There is no slave who disobeys except that his place on earth seeks permission to swallow him up, and the sky above him seeks permission to fall upon him in fragments. Allah then says to the earth and the sky, "Leave my slave be and give him respite, for you did not create him. Had you created him you would have had mercy upon him. Perhaps he will repent to Me and I will forgive him, or perhaps he will become righteous and I will change his deeds to good ones."'

قَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَآ أَمَتَّنَا ٱثْنَتَيْنِ وَأَحْيَيْتَنَا ٱثْنَتَيْنِ فَٱعْتَرَفْنَا
بِذُنُوبِنَا فَهَلْ إِلَىٰ خُرُوجٍ مِّن سَبِيلٍ ﴿١١﴾

They will say, ‘Our Lord, twice You have caused us to be lifeless and twice You have brought us to life. Now we recognize our sins. Is there any way out?’ [11]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 11)

In order for us to understand the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘...twice You have caused us to be lifeless and twice You have brought us to life...’ (*Ghafir:* 11), we need first to understand what death is. Death is the elimination of life after it has been previously present. If death shall occur, it is, therefore, evidence that there has been life before it. Death also refers to a complete non-existence that has not been preceded by life at all.

Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘How can you disbelieve in Allah?...’ (*al-Baqara:* 28) This is an incredulous question, meaning, ‘tell us how on earth you can disbelieve,’ ‘...Seeing that you were dead and He gave you life...’ (*al-Baqara:* 28). That is, you were non-existent and He gave you life. ‘...Then He will cause you to die...’ (*al-Baqara:* 28) that is, He will take away the life that you have, ‘...then He will bring you [back] to life...’ (*al-Baqara:* 28) that is, in the Hereafter.

So there are two deaths and two lives to be experienced by mankind. The difference of opinion in this matter is whether death must come after life, or whether it can refer to the nothingness that precedes life.

We say that death refers to complete non-existence, whether or not it is preceded by life. For example, when a person sees a small mosquito and a huge elephant, he says, ‘Glory be to the One Who made the elephant big and the mosquito small!’ Were the mosquitoes once big and then Allah caused them to become small, or were they created like that? Thus, it is not necessary that life should precede death. It is sufficient that something has been lifeless. After that Allah brought us to life, we spend our time in this world, and then death comes.

So this verse contains both meanings: first is absolute lifelessness or non-existence which is not preceded by life; and second is death, which is the removal of existing life. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...twice You have caused us to be lifeless and twice You have brought us to life...' (*Ghafir:* 11).

Some scholars(1) believe that the first death designates the removal of life after a human's appointed time on earth is over. The human is then brought to life in the grave for questioning after which he dies again. Finally, the human is resurrected on the Day of Judgement. But the first opinion(2) that we have chosen is more appropriate.

Allah then says: '...Now we confess our sins. Is there any way out?' (*Ghafir:* 11) The question stated here is wishful thinking, but it will never happen. Even if they were returned to life, they would go back to their previous bad ways. There is no benefit in repeating the experience. The True Lord *the Exalted* clarified this issue in His saying: '...No! It is but a word that he speaks...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 100).

If they were returned to life, they would revert to their bad nature and they would continue to disbelieve. When they say 'way out,' they mean a way 'from this predicament that we are in, and from the punishment that we now suffer.' '…Is there any way out?' (*Ghafir:* 11) In other words, any means to escape and be saved.

What we have mentioned here relates solely to the life and death of the bodies. As for the life of the hearts and souls, this is another issue. The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of it in His saying: 'O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...' (*al-Anfal:* 24). There is no doubt that Allah is addressing them while they are living their material lives, so there must be some other form of life that He is inviting them to. It is the spiritual life after which there is no death, and that is life in paradise.

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(1) This was the opinion of As-Suddi as narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his exegesis [vol. 8, p. 5945]. Al-Qurtubi said, 'They only arrived at this opinion because the word "dead" is not applied in classical usage to reproductive fluids, and the scholars used this as evidence to prove the questioning in the grave.'

(2) The first opinion intended by Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi is that they were dead in the loins of their fathers and then they were brought to life. Then they died the death that all must die in this world and were subsequently resurrected for the Gathering and the Judgement, and this totals two deaths and two lives. This was the opinion of Ibn Mas`ud, Ibn `Abbas, Qatadah and Ad-Dahhak. [See Tafsir *Al-Qurtubi* vol. 8, p. 5945].

So, there is the material life in which we live, eat, drink and move, and there is the spiritual life with which we enter Paradise, the place of never-ending blessings and life without death. The material life has a spirit that is appropriate to it, and it is a kind of life that ends in death. As for the spiritual and moral life, it must have a loftier spirit that is attained through adherence to the path of ‘do this and do not do that.’ That is why Allah calls His Book a *(ruh)* in His saying: ‘And thus We have revealed to you (O Muhammad) a *Ruh* (spirit) of Our Command...’ (*ash-Shura:* 52). He also calls the one who delivers it a *(ruh)*: ‘The Trustworthy Spirit (*Ruh* – Angel Gabriel) has brought it down.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193)

Each of these two lives lasts in a way appropriate to it. The first has an appointed end, while the other is extended and ever lasting. This is why we say of the martyr who has sacrificed himself and ended his life striving in Allah’s Path that Allah rewards him for that by safeguarding him from any further death after that.

ذَٰلِكُم بِأَنَّهُۥٓ إِذَا دُعِيَ ٱللَّهُ وَحۡدَهُۥ كَفَرۡتُمۡ وَإِن يُشۡرَكۡ
بِهِۦ تُؤۡمِنُواْۚ فَٱلۡحُكۡمُ لِلَّهِ ٱلۡعَلِيِّ ٱلۡكَبِيرِ ١٢

[They will be told], ‘This is all because when God alone was invoked you rejected this, yet when others were associated with Him you believed [in them].’ Judgement belongs to God the Most High, the Most Great [12] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 12)

When the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* informs us of the beliefs required of us and supports them with miraculous signs, it is our duty to accept His Laws willingly and with pleasure. Allah *the Most High* has obligated us to act in accordance with the principles of right and wrong only after He gave us the foundations for having ultimate belief in the Supreme God. Then, some people chose to believe, while others choose not to believe, despite all the benefits that we gain through organising our lives according to Allah’s Law.

If He gives you a certain rule, you must obey it, but if some opposition persists in your mind after that, then your reality affirms that you have not believed with your hearts. '...That is because...' (*Ghafir:* 12) that is, your opposition to the call to Allah, and your taking an adverse stance against it is the result of: '...when Allah was called upon alone, you disbelieved...' (*Ghafir:* 12).

In another place in the Quran, Allah says: 'and when Allah is mentioned alone, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with aversion, but when those [worshipped] other than Him are mentioned, immediately they rejoice.' (*az-Zumar:* 45) That is, they manifest resentment and irritation when they hear Allah's Speech. Why? Because they have not realized the meaning of faith and the subsequent responsibility of applying the law of 'do this and do not do that.' They know that this law will restrict their desires and forbid them from certain things they love. It will also demand from them other duties that lie heavy upon the soul. That is why they become resentful when reminded of Allah and the path of faith, while if they hear of their false gods: '...immediately they rejoice…' (*az-Zumar:* 45) and feel glad. Why? This is so because these idols and false gods, which they worship besides Allah, make no demands of them. They do not require them to 'do this, and not do that.' So in their worship, they are left to the dictates of their desires and the evil of their selves. This is the meaning of their rejoicing and the significance of: '...but if others were associated with Him, you believed...' (*Ghafir:* 12).

Yet, there remains a reality that should not be forgotten: '...So the judgement is with Allah, the Most High and the Grand.' (*Ghafir:* 12) So rejoice in your alleged gods as you like. My Decree will rule over you against your will. I will make you ill as I wish, and I will cause you to die when I wish. I will make you rich and I will make you poor, and so on. You can never withdraw yourself from My Dominion, except in those things in which I have given you a choice.

You have been given a choice between belief and disbelief; so whoever wishes may believe and whoever wishes may disbelieve. Whoever wishes may obey and whoever wishes may disobey. Yet, your obedience is of no benefit to Me and your disobedience cannot harm Me. No matter how much you rebel in those matters in which you have been given a choice, in the end you will come back to Me.

‘...So the judgement is with Allah the Most High the Grand.’ (*Ghafir:* 12) Indeed, His Decree cannot be rebelled against. So, even if you are accustomed to rebelling in matters of belief and obedience, show me how you are going to rebel against Allah in those matters in which you have no choice.

The True Lord *the Exalted* then goes on to mention aspects of His Magnificence and Exaltedness.

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُرِيكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ وَيُنَزِّلُ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ رِزْقًا ۚ
وَمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ إِلَّا مَن يُنِيبُ ﴿١٣﴾

It is He who shows you [people] His signs and sends water down from the sky to sustain you, though only those who turn to God will take heed [13] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 13)

The word (*ayat)* is the plural of *aya* and, as we have mentioned, it is of three types: cosmic signs that demonstrate the enormous power and superior wisdom of the One True God Who is the Possessor of Majesty and Glory; the miraculous signs with which Allah strengthens His Messengers and affirms the truthfulness of their mission of delivering the message on His behalf; and, finally, the revelations and verses of the Quran that carry Allah’s Rulings.

Allah says: ‘It is He who shows you His *Ayat...*’ (*Ghafir:* 13) that is, His cosmic signs so that you may believe in the Supreme God. He also shows you miracles through the hands of His Messengers. After that He reveals to you the verses of the Quran that contain His Rulings, which protect your faith and religion. Because just as I have protected your bodies with the water I have sent down from the sky and brought forth your provisions by means of it, by which you are nourished and sustained, you should also accept this other thing that I have made to sustain your religion. They are the rulings that will protect your beliefs in the legal domain of ‘do this and do not do that.’

Thus, Allah’s saying: ‘It is He who shows you His *Ayat* (signs, proofs, verses of the Quran or revelations) and sends down to you from the sky, provision…’ (*Ghafir:* 13) covers both matters together, neglecting neither of them for the sake of the other.

‘…But none will remember except he who turns back [in repentance].’ (*Ghafir:* 13) That is, the one who repentantly returns to Allah and divests himself of the arrogance of denying Him. He shakes the dust of heedlessness from himself so that he may return to his primordial, natural state of belief, of which Allah spoke in His saying: '...Am I not your Lord' (*al-A'raf:* 172) The response of course was that all replied, 'Yes, indeed, You are our True Lord.'

فَٱدْعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ ٱلدِّينَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

So call upon God and dedicate your religion to Him alone,
however hateful this may be to the disbelievers [14]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 14)

The word *du`a'* (supplication) is the manifestation of humility and submission to Allah *the Exalted*. Why? Because among mankind are those who rebel against Allah *the Most High* and are too arrogant to obey Him and too proud to manifest any humility before Him. So when you show lowliness and humility to Allah and sincerity in worship, it becomes clear to them that this rebellion is not the fundamental nature of mankind, rather, it is born of their own caprice (*hawa*). The proof of this is that some people do show humility and submission and that some people do call on their Lord, obey Him and demonstrate sincerity.

So, rebellion is not an essential characteristic of mankind, rather, it is a characteristic of the rebel alone. When the human preserves his primordial nature, he will necessarily seek help and refuge from Allah. That is why you should invoke Allah with sincere devotion to Him, even if the disbelievers hate you praying like this.

We have mentioned regarding the virtues of *du`a'* (supplication) that it is: 'The marrow (essence) of worship.'(1) Supplication is essentially the humility of the worshipper before the Might of his Lord. It is simply a manifestation of humility, regardless of the results of one's supplication, for the True Lord *the Exalted* has already given to you before you ask Him. He has created many things for you before your existence. That is why it is not necessary for Allah to grant every person his request. It is as though Allah is saying to us, do not forget that there are those among you who supplicate to me, but I do not answer them. For when I leave them unanswered, I am in fact giving them a greater gift. One’s supplication for good may in fact bring evil, as a person may pray for something and not realize that his destruction lies in it.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [Hadith no. 3371] as Hadith Marfu` from the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi said, 'It is (gharib; strange to come) from this route of narration. We only know it from the Hadith of Ibn Lahi`ah.' It was also narrated by Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad on the authority of An-Nu`man ibn Bashir with the wording: 'Supplication is worship.' [See Kashf Al-Khafa' by Al-`Ajluni, vol. 1, p. 485]*

We have previously given the example of a mother overcome by anger who invokes Allah saying, ‘Oh Allah! Punish my son by your fire’. What will be the state of this mother if Allah *Glorified is He* were to answer her prayer? Allah *Glorified is He* knows that her prayer is foolish and that she prayed for evil thinking it to be good, and for this reason He corrects her prayer. That is why we say in praise of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘Glory be to the one who corrects the error of the supplicants by not answering them’. By that He protects us from harm, for how often does a man request something harmful although he thinks he is praying for good?!

This verse: ‘Invoke, then, Allah, with devotion to Him alone, however hateful this may be to those who deny the Truth!’ (*Ghafir:* 14) It incites us to vex the disbelievers and enrage them by manifesting our lowliness and humility to Allah *Glorified is He.* This vexes them because it manifests the Might and the Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* Whom they were too proud to obey, Who they wrongly placed themselves above and in Whom they disbelieved. For this reason one should continually supplicate in front of them, being very humble before Allah *Glorified is He*:

رَفِيعُ ٱلدَّرَجَٰتِ ذُو ٱلْعَرْشِ يُلْقِى ٱلرُّوحَ مِنْ أَمْرِهِۦ عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ لِيُنذِرَ يَوْمَ ٱلتَّلَاقِ ﴿١٥﴾
يَوْمَ هُم بَٰرِزُونَ ۖ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ مِنْهُمْ شَىْءٌ ۚ لِّمَنِ ٱلْمُلْكُ ٱلْيَوْمَ ۖ لِلَّهِ ٱلْوَٰحِدِ ٱلْقَهَّارِ ﴿١٦﴾

He is exalted in rank, the Lord of the Throne. He sends revelations with His teachings to whichever of His servants He will, in order to warn of the Day of Meeting [15] The Day when they will come out and nothing about them will be concealed from God. ‘Who has control today?’ ‘God, the One, the All Powerful [16] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 15 - 16)

The word *rafi'* (high above) means that Allah *Glorified is He* raises others, as when He *Glorified is He* raises some of His creatures above others. It can also have the meaning of the passive participle, in that He is elevated in and of Himself. In fact, the one who raises others cannot raise them unless He himself is elevated. That is, *'rafi''* here means that He is elevated above everything, as we say 'Allah is greater' or 'higher' or 'more majestic'.

Allah's Existence is elevated because it is pre-eternal and not preceded by non-existence. Our existence on the other hand is preceded by non-existence. His existence is never-ending while ours is finite. His existence *Glorified is He* is a basic and essential reality, while ours is only by means of Him. Thus He *Glorified is He* is the ultimate pinnacle of existence, yes indeed He is.

Allah *Glorified is He* is elevated in the way He upholds and sustains all (*qayyumiyyatuhu*). We work and become tired, and then we sleep in order to rest. As for Allah *Glorified is He* He is not tired by work nor does He sleep to rest. That is why He says, 'Allah–there is no deity save Him–The Ever-Living, The Self-Subsisting by Whom all subsist (*Al-Qayyum*). Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep' (*al-Baqara:* 255). It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us, sleep to your heart's content because neither sleep nor slumber affect me, wanting thereby to make us feel at peace knowing that He is looking after us.

By means of His All-Supporting, All-Sustaining Nature, Allah *Glorified is He* raises whomever He wills. And through His Absolute Power He keeps whomever He wills raised and he lowers whomever He wills. He says: 'Say, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom You will and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, over all things You have power' (*Al-'Imran:* 26).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'High above ranks...' (*Ghafir:* 15) because being high necessitates one being above another; these are the *darajat* (ranks), that is, the difference between one level and another. The word *darajat* (ranks) refers to movement in an upward direction, as for going down, these are called *darakat* (depths).

Allah *Glorified is He* raises whatever He wills of His creation over whatever He wills. With regard to times, He elevated *Ramadan* over the other months, and of places He raised the Holy Sanctuary (*Ka'ba)* and *Bayt Al-Maqdis* in Jerusalem. He raises some of the angels as He says on their tongue:

‘...Among us, too, there is none but has a place assigned to it [by Him]’ (*as-Saffat:* 164). With regard to the Messengers, He raised ‘The Resolute Ones’ *ulu al-'azm*, as He, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Some of these Messengers We have endowed with more [gifts] than others...’ (*al-Baqara:* 253). Allah *Glorified is He* also raises some of the masses: ‘...Allah will exalt by [many] degrees those of you who have attained to faith and [above all] such as have been vouchsafed [true] knowledge...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 11). And just as He *Glorified is He* has raised those who have been given knowledge, He also raises those who are active but do not have knowledge. They only have the energy to act on this knowledge, apply it and realise its goals in this life. The application of knowledge requires active hands–artisans, manufacturers and workers. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘For, He it is who has made you inherit the earth and has raised some of you by degrees above others...’ (*al-An‘am:* 165).

That is, we have times that have been elevated, places that have been elevated, angels that are elevated, prophets that have been elevated, believers that are elevated, scholars that are elevated and finally the masses on earth that are elevated.

Ponder over the Divine Justice in raising some above others. Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention who was raised, nor over whom they were raised, for Him *Glorified is He* to show us that each is raised in one area but others are raised over him in another area. Thus the rich man is not higher or better than the poor man, nor is the handsome man higher than the ugly, nor is the intelligent better than the dull-witted. Each is only raised in accordance with his actions, as we are told in Allah’s saying: ‘O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, Allah is All Knowing, All-Aware’ (*al-Hujurat:* 13).

We see that all the creation, apart from those whom we have already mentioned as being elevated by Allah, are raised in some aspects, but others are raised over them in others. Hence, the carpenter who makes a desk for me is elevated above me in this area and is better than me therein because he knows this craft and is a master of it, while I do not know it.

When this worker comes and asks me about a matter, I am raised above him in that because I know it and he does not. We have said previously that Allah *Glorified is He* choses the daily life of his creatures to be based upon needs, not graces. Each one of us is in need of others; and without this reciprocal need, society will not be complete.

If society were based upon grace and being given blessings, most of the good things will cease to be and life will collapse. Imagine if all of us graduated from university and became scholars, who will do the other jobs for us? Who will clean the streets? Who will work in the sewers? Who will sell in the marketplace? And so on. This is what the poet (1) spoke of who said:

People for people, be they nomads or city-folk,
Are one to another, even if unaware, servants (2).

None of us are totally subservient; rather, each of us is subservient in one thing and serve others in another. Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us this lesson in His saying: ‘O you who have attained to faith! No men shall deride [other] men: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. And no women [shall deride other] women: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

For this reason, no one should look at one job as being better than another; rather, some workers are better than others. The best one is he who does his job best. The worker who does a job which is considered less respectable but does it excellently is better than one who does a more respected job poorly.(3)

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(1) He was *Abu Al-`Ala’ Al-Mu`arri Ahmad ibn `Abdullah*, a poet and a philosopher. He was born in 363 AH and died in 449 AH in Mu`arrat An-Nu`man. He went blind at the age of four and began to compose poetry at the age of eleven. He prohibited cruelty to animals, did not eat meat for 45 years and wore coarse clothes. He authored *Luzum ma la Yalzam* and *Saqt Az-Zand* (*Al-Mawsu`ah Ash-Shi`riyya*).

(2) The couplet is from a poem by Abu Al-`Ala’ Al-Mu`arri written with the rhyme of *Bahr Al-Basit*. It has five couplets, and the line as quoted in *Al-Mawsu`ah Ash-Shi`riyya* is:
People for people, of the city or the countryside,
Are one to another, even if unaware, servants.

(3) Al-`Ajluni related in *Kashf Al-Khafa’* [1/285], ‘Indeed, Allah loves that when one of you performs his work (*al-`aml*) he perfects it’. In another narration the word ‘work’ is indefinite. He said, ’It was narrated by Abu Ya`laand Al-`Askari on the authority of 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her*’. Al-`Askari also related it *(marfu`: elevated to Prophet*=

To this end Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘The value of each individual is in that which he does well’(1). Therefore, whoever wants greatness, let him perfect his work, no matter how lowly his work may be in the eyes of some, for there is no lowly work in Islam; there is only a lowly worker, and he is the careless one who does not perfect what he does or does it with sincerity.

We previously drew an example from something that happened (2) in France at a debate at the Council of French Youth. They were presenting us with some important arguments in these debates. Among these was that the workers’ union leader used to make many demands on their behalf and spend extravagantly on these, but the minister in charge of authorising these requests used to overrule his budget.

Time passed and the workers’ leader became the minister. The new leader stopped him and said to him, ‘I ask nothing from you except what you yourself used to seek, but still you overrule my budgets’. Then he added, ‘Do not forget that there was a time when you used to polish shoes’, in the hope of arousing his compassion, or perhaps of making him feel ashamed. The minister was unperturbed by what he said. He replied to him plainly, ‘Yes indeed’, he said, ‘But I used to do a good job’.

Clearly, greatness does not lie in the work itself, but in its quality. That is why we say, if a worker who does his work carefully and is sincere, knows that his employer is absent; he will still do his job to the best of his ability for the sake of Allah.

If such a worker really knew what he had done to strengthen people’s faith in Allah *Glorified is He* he will brag about this work among the scholars.

= *Muhammad)* with the wording, ‘he masters it’. The practise of the great scholars dictates favouring them (that is, these narrations and others).

(1) *Ibn Ash-Shajari related in his book Al-Amali Ash-Shajariyya on the authority of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him that he said, ‘I will tell you four things that Allah Glorified is He confirmed in His Book’, and he mentioned among them, ‘The value (or he said worth) of each person is in that which he does well’. ‘Ali continued, ‘And Allah the Glorified and Exalted subsequently revealed in the story of Talut: “Behold, Allah has exalted him above you, and endowed him abundantly with knowledge and bodily perfection...” (al-Baqara: 247)*’.

(2) The story of the French leader of the workers' union who became a minister

How is that? What does a worker do to strengthen people's faith, someone might ask? We answer that it is because whoever sees his excellent work will explain, 'O Allah!' Thus, it is excellent work that spreads Allah's Good Name throughout creation and leads people to remember Allah–and the rewards involved in such are not hidden from anyone.

Allah's saying: '...in almightiness enthroned...' (*Ghafir:* 15) means, 'the one who owns creation, and this creation submitted to Him without any opposition'. In His Absolute Power and Divinity, He is immovable. It is not for a king to sit and be firmly established on the throne of authority until matters are under his control. However, there is a great difference between Allah being 'seated' and 'firmly established' on His Throne and the sitting of the kings of this world on their thrones. We believe that Allah is 'seated and firmly established' upon His Throne in a way that cannot be likened to creation or can be explained. As long as His Existence is completely unlike our existence, then His being 'seated' is completely unlike our sitting. We have said previously that these matters are to be seen through the lens of: 'There is nothing like unto Him...' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Allah subjugated the universe *Glorified is He* without any difficulty; the proof of which is Allah's saying: 'And He [it is Who] turned to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke; and He [it is Who] said to them and to the earth, "Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly!"–To which both responded, "We do come in obedience"' (*Fussilat:* 11).

Also, because He *Glorified is He* is 'high above ranks', and He *Glorified is He* is 'in almightiness enthroned', He wanted to grant those who believe in Him something of His Elevation, thereby raising them over others and not leaving them neglected and abandoned without a Message to follow. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* sent revelation to them: 'By His Own Will does He bestow inspiration upon whomever He wills of His slaves...' (*Ghafir:* 15). Allah *Glorified is He* did not take the creation as His slaves and then abandon them; He sent down a clear Message of 'do this and do not do that' to govern their daily lives for them. This is the law that results in prosperity, elevation, and exaltation of mankind. But He made this Message optional–whoever wants can believe and whoever wants can disbelieve, and whoever wants can obey and whoever wants can disobey–so that in the next world the believer will see how Allah elevated him when He makes him enter paradise, the abode of eternal pleasure, where blessings never end and there is no death.

This Message came to us in the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It sets our daily lives in order for our actions to be consistent with one another and not contradictory. When you see that the Sacred Law has restricted your actions in some field, you should realise that it has restricted the lives of millions for your sake. When, for example, it forbids you as an individual from stealing, it restricts your actions. It forbids you from extending your hand to that which is not yours, but at the same time it has restricted a million other hands from taking what is yours. When it commands you to lower your gaze and honour the sanctity of the forbidden, it has also commanded the rest of creation to lower their gaze from members of your family, and so on. Reflect upon whom it is who really benefits from the application of this Divine Message.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He bestow[s] inspiration (*ar-ruh*)...' (*Ghafir:* 15). The word *ar-ruh* has many meanings. What springs to mind is that it refers to the spirit which enters material objects and gives them life and motion. This is the *ruh* (spirit) that the Creator cast into Adam *peace be upon him* for him to be able to move and for his limbs, having previously been mere clay, to fulfil their roles.

Allah *Glorified is He* then wanted to restrain the actions of such material objects for them not to follow their base passions, therefore He sent down another *ruh* from Himself: the system of values contained in the Glorious Quran. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the Call of Allah and the Messenger [Mohammad] whenever He calls you to that which will give you life...' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

But how can He bring them to life when they are already alive, as is mentioned in this speech? Yes, they are alive in a material sense, in that the spirit has entered their bodies and they move by means of it, but what is referred to here is a type of life higher than the material one–the spiritual life that elevates man's actions and makes them always for the good of those around him and for himself. Just as the material life has a spirit, the spiritual life has a spirit as well.

That is why the Quran is called a *ruh*, and the angel who brought it is also called a *ruh*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And thus, too, [O Muhammad] have We revealed to you a life-giving Message (*ruh*), [coming] at Our behest...’ (*ash-Shura:* 52), and: ‘A trustworthy spirit (*ruh*) has brought it down’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193).

This is the spiritual life, the life of lofty ideals, the life that qualifies one for another eternal, never-ending life. You can be the judge between a life that qualifies you only for this perishing world and a life that qualifies you for the eternal life in next world. You can only come to the conclusion that the latter is greater than and preferable to the former.

It is sufficient a distinction between them that the first spirit, the material one, exists in the believer and the disbeliever. By means of this spirit the disbelief of the disbeliever and the sin of the sinner exist. As for the spirit that gives us true values, that is the Message, it exists only in the believer, and it moves him only towards goodness, in a balanced way that makes him and those around him happy in this world before the next.

Thus Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Behold, the life in the Hereafter is indeed the only [true] life *(hayawan)*: if they but knew!’ (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) The word *hayawan* (only true life) means ‘the true eternal life whose pleasures never end or perish’. In this world, the pleasure of man is governed by his activity and his opportunities, but the pleasure of the next world is governed by the Bestower *Glorified is He*.

On top of this, you live in the world and you are continually exposed to death, threatened by it in every moment. It may come upon you suddenly. It has no set time or age, and there is no way to know it. Some die after one year, some after a hundred years, and some in their mother’s womb. Death does not differentiate between the old and the young or between the sick and the healthy. Allah *Glorified is He* has obscured it. Why? This is for us to always remember it, waiting for it to pounce on us. Thus, it is as though its obscurity is clarity itself.

Allah *Glorified is He* alerts us to this matter in His saying: ‘Blessed is He in Whose Hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything: He who has created death as well as life so that He might put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct...' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2). Ponder over Allah's Words: '...He who has created death as well as life...' (*al-Mulk:* 2). He began with death, putting it before life. It is as though He *Glorified is He* is saying to us: do not face life except with death on your mind. Why? Because the remembrance of death prevents one from becoming deluded by the world or inclining towards it. It checks man's behaviour for him to not do anything except good deeds, for he is constantly keeping account of the punishments that are in store for him.

Allah's saying: '...upon whomever He wills of His slaves...' (*Ghafir:* 15), means, 'those whom He chooses and elects for this station'. This is like His saying: 'Allah chooses Messengers from among the angels as well as from among men...' (*al-Hajj:* 75), and: 'Allah knows best upon whom to bestow His Message...' (*al-An'am:* 124).

Allah *Glorified is He* then clarifies the reasoning behind His saying: 'By His Own Will does He bestow inspiration upon whomever He wills of His slaves...' (*Ghafir:* 15). Why? He explains: '...So as to warn [all human beings of the coming] of the Day when they shall meet Him' (*Ghafir:* 15). That is to say, beware of thinking that this matter will end with the end of the life in this world, that the sinners will get away with their sins and the oppressors with their oppression. No! They will be returned to Allah in whom they disbelieved, or whose prohibitions they disobeyed and dared to violate. Remember this reality no matter how averse you feel in your denial or how distant you feel from your Lord. You will be returned to Him in spite of yourself and made to stand before Him. There can be no escaping Him in the slightest.

We mentioned previously that 'warning' means to frighten somebody about some evil in the future for them to prepare for it and thus avoid what results in the matter that is feared in order to be safe from it. There can be no warning if the event is already at hand. It must be before the event by a margin that allows one to take account of the situation and take steps to prevent it from happening.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...the Day when they shall meet (*at-talaq*)' (*Ghafir:* 15). But the word *at-talaq* means *at-talaqi* (meeting) which cannot happen unless there is now some distance between the things that will meet in the future. What, then, are the things that will meet? The scholars say that what is intended here is the Day of Judgement, and the meeting will take numerous forms. In the next world you will see the angels in whom you had faith in this world, and you will meet them clearly.

In the next world you will see your relatives and your extended family, from Adam *peace be upon him* right down until the last child in this world. You will meet all of them, even until Adam. You will see the relatives who you used to shun in this world. This amazing huge tree with all its intertwining branches will be manifest before you and you will say, ‘How did I cut these intertwining branches by not keeping contact with my relatives? How did I shun these relatives, regardless of having a reason or not? You used to think that you are from a special race and others are lower than you are. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘You are all from Adam, and Adam was from dust’ (1).

Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘I am the Most-Merciful (*Ar-Rahman*) and this is the womb (*Ar-rahim*); I have derived a name for it from My name. Whoever upholds its connections, I will uphold his connection, and whoever breaks its connections, I will break his connection’.(2)

One day(3) the doorman of Muʿawiya ibn Abu Sufyan (4) came to him and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, there is a man at the door who says he is your brother’.‘Do you not know my brothers?’ he asked. ‘That is what the man says’, he replied. ‘Bring him in’, said Muʿawiya. When he entered he said to him, ‘Which of my brothers are you?’ ‘I am your brother from Adam’, answered the man. Muʿawiya laughed and said, ‘A relative (*rahim*) who has been cut off! By Allah, I will be the first to re-establish the connection’. Consequently, he brought him close to him and gave him what he wanted.(1)

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(1) *Ahmad related this in his Musnad [2/361] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him with the wording, ‘People are the children of Adam, and Adam was from dust’.*

(2) *It was related by Ahmad in his Musnad [1/191-194] and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [1907], who said it is a good/sound Hadith. Abu Dawud also related it in his Sunnan [1694], and they all related it on the authority of `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Awf Allah be pleased with him.*

(3) The story of the man who claimed to be Mu‘awiya's brother

(4) Muʿawiya ibn Abu Sufyan was Sakhr ibn Harb ibn Umayya, the founder of the Ummayad dynasty in *Sham* and a shrewd man. He was born in Mecca 20 years before the emigration and entered Islam on the day that Mecca was liberated. He died in the year 60 AH at the age of 80. His conquests reached the Atlantic Ocean and he was the first Muslim to take to the sea to fight the Romans (*Al-A`lam* by *Az-Zirikli* Vol. 7).

Among the meetings that will take place on the Day of Judgement are those between the victim and his oppressor and between one adversary and another. Indeed, the enemies will be gathered with Allah; therefore, it is upon the intelligent person to hold himself to account a thousand times in preparation for this meeting. And whoever ponders the consequences deeply will be saved.

Another meeting that will take place that Day is the meeting of a man with the record of his actions, wherein every deed, big and small, is recorded: ‘...Allah will have taken [all of] it into account, even though they [themselves] may have forgotten it...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 6), and: ‘On the Day when every human being will find himself faced with all the good that he has done and with all the evil that he has done; [many a one] will wish that there was a long span of time between himself and that [Day]...’ (*Al-ʻImran:* 30), the Day when your Lord will say to you: ‘[It will be said], “Read your record. Sufficient is your soul this Day to make an account against you”’ (*al-Isra’:* 14).

Then the meetings will reach an apex; the believers will meet with their Lord *Glorified is He* when He *Glorified is He* manifests Himself to them, and they will then see Him. This is the greatest pleasure, granted from Allah’s Generosity and Bounty. Read: ‘Some faces on that Day will be bright with happiness, looking up to their Lord; and some faces on that Day will be overcast with despair, knowing that a crushing calamity is about to befall them' (*al-Qiyam*a: 22-25).

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(1) Nur Ad-Din Al-Yusi (1102 AH) mentioned in his book *Al-Muhadarat fi Al-Adab wa Al-Lugha* that a man emtered upon Mu`awiya and said to him, ‘I ask you by the relation (*ar-rahim*) between you and I that you help me’ So he asked him, ‘Are you from the tribe of `Abd Munaf?’ ‘No’, he replied. ‘Are you from Quraysh?’ ‘No’. ‘Are you an Arab?’ ‘No’. ‘Then, what is the connection between you and I?’ he asked. ‘Adam’, he answered. So Mu`awiya *Allah be pleased with him* said to him, ‘A relation which has been spurned! Verily, I will be the first to re-establish our relationship’, and he gave him [what he wanted].
This was mentioned by Al-Abshihi in his book *Al-Mustatraf fi kull Fann Mustazhraf*, and he attributed it to Abu `Ali Al-Qali in his book *Al-Amali*.

While the vision of Allah is the greatest blessing for the believers, it is the worst type of punishment for the disbelievers because they are denied it: 'Nay, verily, from [the grace of] their Lord shall they on that Day be debarred' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 15). That day their sadness and regret will become even worse: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the Truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water–until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full–for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39) He finds Allah *Glorified is He* in whom he disbelieved in this world, and he finds the punishment of which we spent such a long time warning and reminding him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'The Day when they shall come forth [from death], with nothing of themselves hidden from Allah' (*Ghafir:* 16), that is, on this day, the Day of Meetings, they will come openly and publicly after they and their evil deeds were hidden in this world. That day their covers will be removed and their affairs will be disclosed: '...with nothing of themselves hidden from Allah' (*Ghafir:* 16). All will be gathered, the kings and their subjects, the masters and their slaves, the presidents and their peoples, all in a state of slavery.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* will call out: 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day?' (*Ghafir:* 16) Allah *Glorified is He* will say this because in this world He made some of us kings. In the next world, however, there will be no dominion for anyone except Allah *Glorified is He* alone. Thus, the believer and the disbeliever will all reply to this question saying: '...with Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16) Yes, because there is no object that deserves worship but Him and no true king but Him.

Allah's saying: 'With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day' (*Ghafir:* 16) means that on that day dominion will belong to Allah *Glorified is He* just as it did before it. But this is a reality that the disbelievers denied in the world, while the believers who were happy to have Allah as their Lord affirmed it. He gives dominion to whomever He wills, and He strips dominion from whomever He wills. He elevates whoever He wills and He abases whomever He wills.

The words: ‘...that Day...’ (*Ghafir:* 16) are directed here at the disbelievers who denied this reality in the world. In the Hereafter, however, they will recognise and affirm it: ‘...with Allah, the One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!’ (*Ghafir:* 16)

ٱلۡيَوۡمَ تُجۡزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفۡسِۭ بِمَا كَسَبَتۡۚ لَا ظُلۡمَ
ٱلۡيَوۡمَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلۡحِسَابِ ﴿١٧﴾

Today each soul will be rewarded for whatever it has done; today no injustice will be done. God is swift in reckoning [17] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 17)

Allah says: ‘On that Day...’ (*Ghafir:* 17), that is, the Day of Judgement: ‘...will be requited...’ (*Ghafir:* 17), that is, brought to account: ‘...every human being... for what he has earned (*kasabat*)...’ (*Ghafir:* 17). We mentioned previously that the verb *kasaba* (earned) is used for good, while the verb *iktasaba* (earned) is used for evil. The scholars of the Arabic language say that every letter added to the base root of a word adds more meaning to the base root. That is why the words *kasab* and *iktasab* are different. The word *kasaba* has the pattern *(fa'ala)* meaning that the action happens naturally, without trouble. The word *iktasaba,* however, has the pattern *(ifta'ala)* indicating that it is contrived and requires effort.

Doing good does not require one to tire oneself out, as opposed to evil which necessitates troubles, weariness, and stealth. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘In his favour shall be whatever good he does (*kasabat*), and against him whatever evil he does (*iktasabat*)...’ (*al-Baqara:* 286). We explained this matter with the example of a man who sits amongst his family and sees beautiful faces: his wife, his daughters, his aunts, etc. and he may look at this beauty without trouble or shame. As for those outside his immediate family, he steals glances to enjoy their looks, yet he must try not to be seen by anyone. Similarly, we see this matter in the difference between a woman who becomes pregnant in a permissible manner and one who becomes pregnant in an impermissible way. See how the first displays her pregnancy and is proud of it, while the other tries her up most to conceal and rid herself of it. The happiness of the former and the grief of the latter is the difference between the permissible and the impermissible.

Another example is a man who takes something from his house; he takes it openly without any trouble or without needing to work out any scheme. If, however, he wants to steal from someone else's house, he must scheme and plot. Hence, we say that the permissible does not trouble a person, while it is the impermissible which causes everyone trouble.

As for Allah's saying: 'Nay! Those who earn (*kasab*) evil...' (*al-Baqara:* 81), the word *kasab* (earn) has been used here in reference to evil. How is this case? The scholars say it is because when an evil deed becomes a familiar habit for someone, he does it without any trouble, as if it were a good deed. Thus, because he has grown used to it, it has become *kasab* for him, and not *iktisab*. Such a person is said to be dissolute (*faqid*), that is, someone who has delved into the impermissible and grown so used to disobedience that it has become second nature for him. Allah *Glorified is He* gave an example of this in His saying: '[For] He is aware of the treacherous glance...' (*Ghafir:* 19). That is, there are treacherous glances and there are trustworthy glances. Trustworthy glances are those that look at the permissible and treacherous ones are those that look at the prohibited.

Even from the standpoint of economics, the philosophy that rules the people these days and according to which the progress of nations and their development is judged, we say that the permissible costs nothing, while it is the impermissible that is costly. This is from the standpoint of economics because the basis for the permissible is: 'Eat and drink [freely], but do not waste...' (*al-A'raf:* 31). It is also stated in a Hadith that, 'We are a people who do not eat until we get hungry, and when we eat we do not fill ourselves up'.(1) If we lived upon this basis we will make do with little. You can try this for yourself. Do not eat until you are hungry and you will find that a morsel is delicious, even if only with salt. It is as though following Allah's Religion gives you rest; it does not trouble you in your daily life, it does not require much work and it does not require much money. In the same way, when we eat we do not eat until we are full. You have seen people who eat until they get indigestion and need medicine to aid their digestion. Yet he has only given himself trouble, exhausting himself eating and spending on food.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn Mu`id Yakrib that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The son of Adam does not fill a vessel worse than his stomach. A few morsels are enough for the son of Adam to keep his back straight, yet if he absolutely must, then a third for his food, a third for his drink and a third for air'. It is related by Ahmad in his Musnad [4/132], At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2380], and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [3349].*

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'No oppression (*zhulm*) [will be done] on that Day...' (*Ghafir:* 17). Yes indeed, because the judge on that day will be Allah *Glorified is He* the Absolutely Just. It is as though Allah is saying to us; injustice and oppression (*zhulm*) one of your features, O mankind. We gave you respite in the world, and you dwelled therein in oppression. The strong oppressed the weak, the rich oppressed the poor, and the ruler oppressed his charge. But today: 'No oppression [will be done]...' (*Ghafir:* 17).

In the world, injustice and oppression reached their limit in that you ascribed partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with Him] is a great injustice' (*Luqman:* 13). Indeed, it is clear, manifest oppression because injustice is that you take someone else's right for yourself, or you take somebody's right and give it someone who has no right to it. This is what happened when they associated partners with Allah *Glorified is He*. They took His Divinity and gave it to the idols.

Injustice can come about from a number of angles; it could be that you do a good deed and are not rewarded good for it. It could be that you do a good deed for which you deserve ten but you are only given five rewards. It could be that you do a bad deed and are not held to account for it, or that you are held to account for a bad deed you did not do.

That is, any upset in the balance of property and benefits derived from work done is considered an injustice. Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, 'O my slaves, I have forbidden oppression for Myself, so do not oppress one another'.(1)

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(1) It is related by *Muslim* in his *Sahih* [2577], *Ahmad* in his *Musnad* [5/ 160], *Al-Bayhaqi* in his As-*Sunnan Al-Kubra* [6/93], and *Al-Bukhari* in *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* [pg. 172,=

That is in this world, as for the Day of Judgement you will be before the unbiased Judge, in the court of the Absolutely Just, Who shows no favouritism to one over another. He has no son or spouse that might make Him swerve from the Truth.

It is for this reason that we said that the jinn were more truthful in their response when they said: ‘For [we know] that sublimely exalted is the Majesty of our Lord(1): no consort has He ever taken unto Himself nor son’ (*al-Jinn:* 3) because the majority of oppression comes from these two: the spouse and the child.

Allah’s saying: ‘Verily, Allah is swift in reckoning’ (*Ghafir:* 17) hints at His Absolute Power to judge between people and repay them for their deeds. It is as though He is saying to us: beware of thinking that judging you will be difficult or that it will take a long time. No! For Our affair is something entirely different. Allah’s judgement of our cases is not prolonged nor is it delayed.

‘Verily, Allah is swift in reckoning’ (*Ghafir:* 17) because Allah’s Deeds are achieved through Divine Command–not by means of a process, like your deeds. The proof of this is that in the world there are hundreds of thousands of judges judging among people in hundreds of thousands of towns and cities at the same time in different courts and different lands, yet the truth by which they judge does not differ from one to the next; rather, it is something that affects them all, a brush that has painted all their judgements.

Clearly, if one of Allah’s creations, in this case the truth, can overcome all the judges in the world at one time, then the One Who created this truth is more capable of judging between all His creatures at one time. Thus, when Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was asked how all people will be judged at once despite their numbers, he replied, ‘Just as Allah provides for them all at once’.(2)

= 490], on the authority of *Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him*. Its wording is, ‘O My slaves, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another’.

(1) Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: ‘For [we know] that sublimely exalted is the Majesty of our Lord...’ (*al-Jinn*: 3), that is, the Greatness of our Lord is Exalted, and the Majesty of our Lord is Exalted (*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim* 1/118).

(2) *Ibn `Abd Al-Barr Al-Qurtubi mentions in his book Bahjat Al-Majalis that it was said to `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him ‘How does Allah judge so many people?’ To which he replied, ‘Just as He apportioned their provision between them’.*

وَأَنذِرۡهُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡأٓزِفَةِ إِذِ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ لَدَى ٱلۡحَنَاجِرِ كَٰظِمِينَۚ
مَا لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ مِنۡ حَمِيمٖ وَلَا شَفِيعٖ يُطَاعُ ﴿١٨﴾

Warn them [Prophet] of the ever-approaching Day, when hearts are at throats, choking them. The evildoer will have no friends, nor any intercessor to be heeded [18]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 18)

We mentioned previously that the phrase: '…that Day that is [ever] drawing nearer' is a warning meant to inform and warn of evil before it arrives. The coming day is death because it comes all of a sudden; no one knows when it will strike. It could also refer to the Day of Judgement, and this is also close because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah's Commandment has come; therefore do not desire to hasten it…' (*an-Nahl:* 1). He *Glorified is He* uses the verb *'has come'* in the past tense to indicate certainty and the nearness of its occurrence, for all that is impending is near.

On this day, the Day that is ever drawing nearer: '...the hearts will come up to the throats, choking them as they restrain their agony and anger (*kazhimeen*)...' (*Ghafir:* 18). Imagine the heart coming away from its place in the chest, moving out of its confines until it reaches the throat and blocks one's breath because of the intense fear and distress. It is as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '...and when [your] eyes became dim and [your] hearts came up to [your] throats, and [when] most conflicting thoughts about Allah passed through your minds' (*al-Ahzab:* 10).

Allah *Glorified is He* says *'kazhimeen'* (those who restrain their anger). The verb *'kazhm'* (to restrain) means that one tries to hide something in something else. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And who restrain anger (*kazhimeen*) and who pardon the people–and Allah loves the doers of good' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

These are levels of progress in the ranks of good deeds. The first of them is restraining one's anger. Better than that is removing anger by pardoning and better than that is *ihsan* (doing good): '...Allah loves the doers of good (*muhsineen*)' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...no loving friend will the evildoers have, or any intercessor who will be heeded' (*Ghafir:* 18). This is the time when Allah *Glorified is He* gathers the evildoers together in hell–we seek refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* from this. These people joined together in this world to disobey Allah *Glorified is He* and meandered through life following his desires, but now in the Afterlife they flee from each other, and the one who had followers will flee from them. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On a Day when everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, and from his mother and father, and from his spouse and his children: on that Day, each one of them will have enough concern [of his own] to make him indifferent to the others’ (*‘Abasa:* 34-37). Similarly, they will not find anyone who can intercede for them or defend them. Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified that the leaders of the people, the leaders of disbelief and these so-called intercessors, will precede their followers into Hell. When they enter they will find that their leaders had arrived there first, and this will further cut off their hope of being saved and will increase their woes. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says of Pharaoh: ‘[And so] he shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, having led them [in this world] towards the fire [of the life to come]; and vile was the destination towards which they were led’ (*Hud:* 98).

In the next world, the evildoer will not find any friends or anyone who can intercede for him. Their friends fled from them because in this world they came together to disobey Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On that Day, [past] friends will be foes to one another–[all] save the righteous’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67), that is, on the Day of Judgement each one will renounce the other, blame him and hate him.

Then Allah says: ‘...nor any intercessor who will be heeded’ (*Ghafir:* 18), that is, even if someone stood up to intercede for one of these evildoers, he will be ignored because there are conditions for intercession in the next world: Allah must give permission to the intercessor to intercede and Allah *Glorified is He* must be content with the one for whom the intercessor wants to intercede. Allah *Glorified is He* will not be content with the intercession for an evildoer and He will not grant permission for this. That is why intercession such as this will not be accepted, and the prospective intercessor will be ignored, for he is asking Allah *Glorified is He* in Whose Hand is the punishment, to give him what he is asking and pardon the one for whom he wishes to intercede, and how could Allah *Glorified is He* become subservient to His slave?

يَعۡلَمُ خَآئِنَةَ ٱلۡأَعۡيُنِ وَمَا تُخۡفِي ٱلصُّدُورُ ﴿١٩﴾

God is aware of the most furtive of glances,
and of all that hearts conceal [19]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 19)

This means that we should know that Allah's Knowledge is All-Inclusive; He is not unaware of anything, no matter how small it may be. Thus, even if you deceived Allah's creatures in this world and you stole glances at things that were not permissible for you, you should realise that you are not hidden from Him. If the believer were to have full certainty of Allah's All-Inclusive Knowledge of him, his eyes will not be treacherous in this way.

We once(1) saw a judge presiding over a case, being careful to be just in his judgement. He sensed that the witnesses were lying but what could he do given that everything they said agreed with each other? No matter how much he cross-examined them and turned things around to uncover their lies, he found they spoke with one tongue. Perhaps this was because the lawyer had made them memorise the answers. What did he do, then? He became jealous for the truth by which he was to judge; he became furious and said something that shook all the witnesses and made them tell the truth. He said, 'By Allah, even if you deceive all the judges of the world, you will not deceive the Judge of heaven'. They were words that were inspired by Allah, and it shook them to their depths, brought them back to their senses, and made them return to the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '...and of all that the hearts conceal' (*Ghafir:* 19), that is, He *Glorified is He* knows the secrets hidden in the hearts, and this is something Allah alone knows.

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(1) The story of the astute judge with the false witnesses

وَٱللَّهُ يَقۡضِي بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ يَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦ لَا
يَقۡضُونَ بِشَيۡءٍۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡبَصِيرُ ٢٠

God will judge with truth, while those they invoke besides Him will not judge at all. God is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing [20] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 20)

The word *yaqdi* means (He will judge with truth). Allah continues: '...whereas those [beings] whom they invoke beside Him' (*Ghafir:* 20), that is, the idols and the other things they worshipped instead of Allah: '...will not [be in a position to] judge at all...' (*Ghafir:* 20), that is, they are not qualified and have no ability to judge. They will not be able to even judge in error.

Allah then says: 'For verily, Allah alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing' (*Ghafir:* 20). He hears every word that deviates from His Way, and knows every deed that disagrees with His Path. He witnesses everything. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Witness, Judge, Jury, and Executioner. The authorities on earth are many, but the authority in the next world is Allah's alone, there is nobody with Him.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* asks what is wrong with these disbelievers who resist the call and oppose the Messenger [Muhammad] whom Allah *Glorified is He* has sent to them as a mercy. Have they not looked to their predecessors among the nations who refused the Message and the punishment and destruction that befell them, the remains of which they can see?

Allah *Glorified is He* made a record of His Promise when He said: 'For, long ago has our word gone forth unto Our slaves, the Messengers, that, verily, they will certainly be assisted' (*as-Saffat:* 171-172). We know that man remembers things that are in his favour but forgets things that are against him. Allah *Glorified is He* however, remembers and records His Promises: 'Behold, it is We Ourselves Who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this Reminder: and, behold, it is We Who shall truly guard it [from all corruption]' (*al-Hijr:* 9). Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed aid and victory for His Messengers, and He *Glorified is He* will not say anything and then let reality contradict it. Clearly, victory for the Messengers is the normal way Allah *Glorified is He* deals with creation. He says:

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَانُوا۟ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ كَانُوا۟ هُمْ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَءَاثَارًا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَاقٍ ﴿٢١﴾

Have they not travelled through the land and seen how those who lived before them met their end? They were stronger than them and made a more impressive mark on the land, yet God destroyed them for their sins – they had no one to defend them against Him [21] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 21)

This asks, 'Did they not stop to take a look at the ruins of those nations who preceded them, even though they pass by them in their summer and winter journeys?' Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And, verily [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your mind?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) Did they not see the remnants of the people of Saleh (Shelah), 'Ad, Thamud(1) and others of those who denied the Messengers?

The ruins show how Allah *Glorified is He* took them to account and the extent of the punishment that befell them in order for us to learn a lesson from them. Know that your end will be as theirs, and that there is no way for you to prevent Allah *Glorified is He* from such, for these nations whom Allah *Glorified is He* took to account were more powerful than you and had a greater impact on earth. Are you greater than Iram, the town of pillars, or Pharaoh with his poles? Where are they now? Were they able, with their civilisations, to protect themselves? Their civilisations and their power did not help them one bit before Allah *Glorified is He*; Allah's punishment came down on them in this world before the punishment of the next, and He gave them no respite.

Allah *Glorified is He* said to Prophet Muhammad: 'And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to

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(1) The title '*Mada'in Saleh'* is the name given to the buildings that were the houses of *Thamud*. It is as mentioned in the Gracious Quran: 'And [likewise] indeed, the people of al-Hijr gave the lie to [Our] Messengers' (*al-Hijr:* 80). They are to be found 25 km to the north of the City of Medina. They consist of huge boulders of varying sizes that have had palaces carved into them with great precision. There are about 80 of them. Some, however, consider these to the dwellings of the Nabateans and the people of Dad, and not the people of Thamud.

Us they will be returned' (*Ghafir:* 77), that is, if you do not see what We have promised them of punishment in this world because you died before it happened, you will see their punishment in the next life. It is as Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'And we will surely let them taste the lighter punishment before the greater punishment, that perhaps they will repent' (*as-Sajda:* 21).

Allah *Glorified is He* wants two things from us when we travel through the land: that we reflect and take admonition, and that we profit and benefit. Thus, travelling through the land is something desirable from the standpoint of faith. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says of travel for the sake of reflection: 'Have they, then, never journeyed through the earth, and beheld what happened in the end to those [deniers of the Truth] who lived before their time...' (*Ghafir:* 21). Of travel for the sake of profit, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say, "Go all over the earth and behold how [wondrously] He [Allah] has created [man] in the first instance..."' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20), and: 'Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves. [The angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer, "We were too weak on earth." [The angels] will say, "Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?"...' (*an-Nisa':* 97).

Clearly, there is nothing wrong with combining travelling for reflection and travelling for profit and benefit when one journeys across the world. One need not deprive oneself of reflecting upon what is new in Allah's creation, yet one should not be distracted from this by trade and profit.

There is a point to be made here regarding Allah's saying *'fi al-ard'* (literally 'in the earth') which we have drawn from contemporary science. The scholars used to explain this saying as meaning 'on the earth', that is, on the ground upon which we walk. Now we realise that the earth is encompassed by its atmosphere. This air that covers the ground is an essential and necessary element for life on earth. Without it there could not be life on earth, for man cannot do without it for even one breath. Hence, we travel literally 'in the earth', as stated by the Quran which preceded modern science in stating this reality.

When one travels through Allah's earth to reflect upon his creatures one sees great variety one never knew of before: innumerable people, places, crops, and cattle. One sees that the Creator has given each a place appropriate for it.

Each environment has food appropriate for it, which is why you find different crops grow better in some places than others. In one climate bananas proliferate, in another it is potatoes, and in yet another it is wheat.

It is from this that some people have said that when there are many diseases being transmitted from place to place it is a result of people living off food that is not native to their region. The inhabitants of hot climates import food from cold climates and vice versa, and it is from this mixing that diseases spread.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[See] what happened in the end to those [deniers of the Truth] who lived before their time...' (*Ghafir:* 21), that is, what was the outcome of their denial of the Messengers, their standing in the way of the call to Allah, and their attempts to extinguish His light with their speech? Allah *Glorified is He* took them, and their power and influence on earth were unable to protect them from Him. Allah explains: 'And they had none to defend them against Allah' (*Ghafir:* 21), that is, there was no protector who could protect them from Allah, and no guardian to guard them. Their civilisation did not help them in the slightest because when they founded this civilisation, they did not establish laws that protected them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then tells us why He took them to task as only the Almighty, Who determines all things, can take to task:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ كَانَت تَّأۡتِيهِمۡ رُسُلُهُم بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ فَكَفَرُواْ
فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱللَّهُۚ إِنَّهُۥ قَوِيّٞ شَدِيدُ ٱلۡعِقَابِ ﴿٢٢﴾

Because messengers repeatedly came to them with clear signs and still they rejected them. God destroyed them: He is truly full of strength, severe in punishment [22] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 22)

Allah says: 'with clear evidence of the Truth...' (*Ghafir:* 22), that is, with clear signs and dazzling miracles to indicate the truthfulness of the Messengers. These signs that they were incapable of imitating despite the fact that they fell within their field of their expertise were sufficient proof for them to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Messenger that He sent to them with guidance. Yet they disbelieved: '...and so Allah took them to task' (*Ghafir:* 22). The verb *akhadhahum* ([He] took them to task) indicates that this was done forcefully: '...for verily, He is Powerful, severe in punishment!' (*Ghafir:* 22)

There can be no doubt that the taking or seizure here is in proportion to the strength of the one who is seizing. When a child seizes something it is not the same as when a youth seizes, and this is not the same as when a man seizes. What, then, do you think if the one seizing is Allah, the Strong, the severe in punishment? If the one seizing is Allah *Glorified is He* then the one being seized will have no power to be obstinate or resist.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place: '...We took them to task as only the Almighty, Who determines all things, can take to task' (*al-Qamar:* 42). This is the greatest power. The Almighty is the One Who conquers all and cannot be conquered, and the Omnipotent (*Al-Muqtadir*) is the One Who can do anything, for whom nothing is too difficult.

Allah tells us some of the stories of the Messengers who were refused and harmed. First, He narrates to us part of the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا وَسُلْطَـٰنٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٣﴾ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَـٰمَـٰنَ وَقَـٰرُونَ
فَقَالُوا۟ سَـٰحِرٌ كَذَّابٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُم بِٱلْحَقِّ مِنْ عِندِنَا قَالُوا۟ ٱقْتُلُوٓا۟ أَبْنَآءَ ٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا۟ مَعَهُۥ وَٱسْتَحْيُوا۟ نِسَآءَهُمْ ۚ وَمَا كَيْدُ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ إِلَّا فِى ضَلَـٰلٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

**We sent Moses with Our signs and clear authority [23]
To Pharaoh, Haman, and Korah and they said, 'Sorcerer!
Liar! [24] When he brought the truth to them from Us, they
said, 'Kill the sons of those who believe with him; spare only
their women'– the scheming of those who reject the truth
can only go wrong [25] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 23 - 25)**

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the story of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* here because it is different from the stories of the other prophets by virtue of the fact that while the other prophets came to cure the people of some defects in their beliefs and to take them out of ignorant systems of law, returning them to the straight path, Prophet Musa came to confront a man who claimed divinity and who became very arrogant and tyrannous. Thus, Musa had a more troublesome task. That is why his story is told the most in the Gracious Quran.

Allah's saying: '...Our signs...' (*Ghafir:* 23), refers to the nine clear signs that Musa *peace be upon him* was given to assist him in proving the truthfulness of His Message. The first of these was his staff. The staff has a long history and plays important roles in the story of Musa *peace be upon him*. With it he struck the sea for it to part and for the water to come to a standstill, each side becoming like a huge mountain. With the same staff he struck the mountain from which twelve springs burst forth. Clearly, this was not a question of water and mountains; rather, it is a miracle from the Creator of the water and the Creator of the mountain Who only says to a thing, 'Be!', and it is.

It is because of this that the orientalists have made an issue with the story of Musa. They noted that it occupies the greatest portion among the stories of the prophets and that the Quran went into it in great detail-repeating it, as they claim–especially regarding the staff which is mentioned three times. In reality, however, there is no repetition, only different glimpses of one common event.

In the beginning when Allah *Glorified is He* gives Musa *peace be upon him* the staff as a miracle, He asks him about it: '…"Now, what is this in your right hand, O Moses?" He answered, "It is my staff; I lean on it and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep, and [many] other uses have I for it"' (*Ta Ha:* 17-18).

We mentioned previously that Musa *peace be upon him* did not reply to the question keeping the reply as short as he was asked because He was being asked by his Lord and he therefore wanted to prolong his speech with Him. He did not just say, 'It is a staff,' or, 'my staff'. When he sensed, however, that he had talked for too long, he gave a summary and said, '...and [many] other uses have I for it' (*Ta Ha:* 18).

The second time the staff is mentioned is when Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to train Musa *peace be upon him* in its usage and let him test it out for himself in order for him to have experience and be ready when the time came to face Pharaoh, the claimant to divinity. Allah says: 'He [Allah] said, "Throw it down, O Musa (Moses)!" So he threw it–and lo! it was a snake, moving rapidly. He said, "Take hold of it and fear not: We shall restore it to its former state"' (*Ta Ha:* 19-21). This was the purpose of having this trial run for Musa *peace be upon him* for him not to be afraid of it after seeing it in front of him, alive. In fact, had it remained a staff as it was Musa will not have been frightened of it, and his Lord will not have said to him: '...and fear not...' (*Ta Ha:* 21).

The final situation was when Musa *peace be upon him* met with Pharaoh and his sorcerers to confront their sorcery with his staff. He cast it down and it devoured their contrivances, and of this meeting Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'They [the sorcerers] said, "O Musa (Moses)! Either you throw [your staff first], or we shall be the first to throw". He answered, 'Nay, you throw [first]". And lo! by virtue of their sorcery, their [magic] ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly: and Musa (Moses) conceived (*awjas*) in his heart a fear(1). [But] We said, "Fear not! Verily, it is you who shall prevail!' (*Ta Ha:* 65-68).

Clearly, there is no repetition in the story of Moses; rather, these are different situations and various instances of the one common occurrence.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and a manifest authority (*sultan*)' (*Ghafir:* 23). The word *sultan* can mean 'a clear proof' or it can mean 'strength', that is, either the power of proof or the power to prevail. This is what it means when Iblis (Satan) uses it on the Day of Judgement: 'And when everything will have been decided, Iblis (Satan) will say, 'Behold, Allah promised you something that was bound to come true! I, too, made [all manner of] promises to you–but I deceived you. Yet I had no power (*sultan*) at all over you: I but called you–and you responded to me' (*Ibrahim:* 22). That is, I had no strong proof to convince you and neither did I have the strength to force you to disobey Allah; rather, you had a choice, I only had to call you and you responded. Allah continues to relate what *Iblis* said: '...Hence, blame me not, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine...' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

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(1) The word *'awjas'* means that he became afraid inside himself when he saw the works of the sorcerers. Allah the Glorified and Exalted also says in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'He conceived a fear (*awjas*) of them...' (*adh-Dhariyat*: 28), that is, he was shocked and frightened (Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/321).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…to Pharaoh, Haman and Qarun (Korah)...' (*Ghafir:* 24). Indeed, it was Pharaoh who claimed divinity and who was the prime source of trouble, yet Allah *Glorified is He* mentions Haman, his minister and aide, and Qarun (Korah), the owner of great riches, along with him. The three of them were partners and that is why they also shared in levelling accusations against Musa *peace be upon him*: '...but they [only] said, "A sorcerer is he, a liar!"' (*Ghafir:* 24)

Allah then says: 'Now [as for Pharaoh and his followers] when he [Musa] came to them, setting forth the Truth from Us...' (*Ghafir:* 25), that is, with clear signs: '...they said, "Slay the sons of those who share his beliefs"' (*Ghafir:* 25). The killing of sons happened twice under Pharaoh; the first time was when Musa (Moses) was a baby and Pharaoh had learnt from his astrologers that his kingdom will be undone at the hands of one of the Children of Israel. Consequently, he took to killing all the small children out of fear of this child who was to be born and who will bring down his dominion.

What is strange about this is that we see the stupidity and heedlessness of Pharaoh in killing the sons of the children of Israel and his keenness to make sure that none of them escaped, to the extent that his men used to search the houses looking for young children.

This situation manifested Pharaoh's stupidity in two ways: first, he killed all these small children although the prophecy said that his kingdom will be undone at the hands of only one of them. Second, when a boy came to him in a strange way, brought to his door inside a basket floating in the water, he inclined towards it, took it in and raised that very child up, completely heedless of its significance.

This situation exemplifies for us Allah's saying: '...and know that Allah intervenes(1) between man and [the desires of] his heart' (*al-Anfal:* 24). Yes indeed, the hearts are between the two fingers of the All-Merciful, He turns them as He wishes.

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(1) *Ibn `Abbas said this means, 'He intervenes between the believer and the disbeliever, and between the disbeliever and faith'. As-Suddi said, 'He intervenes between a man and his heart so that he is unable to believe or disbelieve except by His Permission' (Tafsir Ibn Kathir 2/298).*

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* then says, '...and spare [only] their women...' (*Ghafir:* 25) which means kill the boys because they are the cause of apprehension; it is among them that rebels will appear, and among them is he who will bring down Pharaoh's kingdom. As for the women, keep them alive for them to serve us.

This explains to us why the Arabs used to take their women with them if they went out to war–so that they will all have the same end. If they won they all returned home safely, and if they were killed then they will all be killed, and their women will not be left behind to be taken captive and made subservient.

Allah *the Most High* says: 'But the guile of those deniers of the Truth could not lead to aught but failure' (*Ghafir:* 25). Yes indeed, this was guile on the part of Pharaoh and his helpers, but did he pull off his plan for the children of Israel? No, instead Allah turned his scheme back upon him and it brought him nothing but failure and loss.

Allah *the Most High* then says:

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ ذَرُونِىٓ أَقْتُلْ مُوسَىٰ وَلْيَدْعُ رَبَّهُۥٓ ۖ إِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ أَن
يُبَدِّلَ دِينَكُمْ أَوْ أَن يُظْهِرَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ٱلْفَسَادَ ﴿٢٦﴾

And Pharaoh said, 'Leave me to kill Moses – let him call upon his Lord! – for I fear he may cause you to change your religion, or spread disorder in the land' [26] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 26)

Pharaoh said: 'Leave me to slay Musa (Moses)...' that is, let me kill him, indicating that there were some people who did not want him to kill Musa *peace be upon him*. If this was not the case, why did he say *dharuni* (let me, in the plural). Who were these people? They were probably followers of Pharaoh who believed in Musa and what he brought. They wanted to defend Musa in a way that did not arouse Pharaoh's suspicion, and therefore they had to be astute.

This is proof that righteous people can trick people given to evil in order to make good prevail, and that Allah *the Most High* will help them in that.

They came to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘If you kill Musa, the people will say that you were unable to refute his proofs; that he was right and thus you killed him to gain respite from him. And then they will stand against you’. Among those who defended Musa was a believer from the people of Pharaoh who hid his faith out of fear of Pharaoh’s punishment, but he forwarded a strong defence for Musa, arguing that: ‘If he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him; but if he is a man of Truth, something [of the punishment] whereof he warns you is bound to befall you...’ (*Ghafir:* 28).

Let us pause here to ponder on Pharaoh’s mockery of Musa*:* ‘And let him invoke his [alleged] Lord...’ (*Ghafir:* 26) referring to his Lord to whom he prays, for Him to save him. Had he not been ridiculing him he will have said, ‘and let him invoke our Lord’. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Behold, I fear lest he causes you to change your religion, or lest he causes corruption to prevail in the land!’ (*Ghafir:* 26) Glory be to Allah! Look how the people of falsehood invert reality. Pharaoh was afraid that Musa will change the religion of his people, that is, their belief in Pharaoh being their god and worshipping him instead of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...Or lest he causes corruption to prevail in the land’ (*Ghafir:* 26). From what will this corruption spring? From having two parties in the society, one party believing Pharaoh to be a god and another party having faith in Musa and his Lord, the True Lord. Therefore, the people will be divided and at odds with one another. The people in the centre of power who benefit from the ‘godhood’ of Pharaoh were not going to keep silent. There is no doubt that there will be a tribulation that, in Pharaoh’s view, will bring about corruption. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰٓ إِنِّي عُذْتُ بِرَبِّي وَرَبِّكُم مِّن كُلِّ مُتَكَبِّرٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُ بِيَوْمِ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٧﴾

Moses said, ‘I seek refuge with my Lord and yours
from every tyrant who refuses to believe in the Day
of Reckoning’ [27] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 27)

Here Musa *peace be upon him* reaffirms the Lordship of the True Lord after Pharaoh threatened to kill him: ‘Leave me to slay Musa (Moses)...’ (*Ghafir:* 26), and mocked his Lord: ‘And let him invoke his [alleged] Lord...’

(*Ghafir:* 26). Consequently, Musa replied to him saying, *inni* (indeed), which is a form of emphasis. The phrase: ‘With my Lord… have I indeed found refuge’ is also an affirmation of his servitude to the Might of the Lord Who Pharaoh is mocking. Thus, he did not say, ‘I seek refuge with Allah from your actions’, but he emphasised that Allah is his Lord, and indeed, ‘...your Lord...’ as well.

The phrase: ‘...I [have] found refuge...’ means ‘I have sought shelter with Him and He is fully capable of protecting me and giving me victory’. His saying: ‘...With my Lord ... have I indeed found refuge...’ shows us the importance of seeking refuge with Allah, for when one seeks refuge with Allah *the Most High* from something that one is not strong enough to deal with he has done the right and most appropriate thing because he has brought to deal with this one who has harmed him, and whom he is unable to repel, One Who is capable of repelling him. That is why Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Whenever you read this Quran, seek refuge with Allah from Iblis (Satan), the accursed’ (*an-Nahl:* 98).

Why? Because when you recite the Quran, you interact with it. You are with it in Allah’s Presence. He is speaking to you and you are listening. When you interact with the Quran and ponder over its meanings, you obtain new understandings and new feelings, and this enrages Satan (Iblis), and for this reason he hastens to turn you away from your recitation. This is similar to what happens in prayer, for example; many are those who complain of being distracted in their prayers by the whisperings of the devil.

One will not be surprised by this if he looks at what Allah *Glorified is He* narrates to us of Satan’s stance towards us: ‘I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along your straight way’ (*al-A‘raf:* 16). Indeed, this is the case. And what path is straighter than that of prayer and the recitation of the Quran? This is why we have said, Satan (Iblis) does not need to go to the wine bars, for example, he only needs to go to the mosque to ruin our prayers and distract us from the path of guidance. This is why Allah has ordered us to seek refuge from him in order for this refuge to be a protection and a fortress for us.

Here Musa *peace be upon him* says, ‘I seek refuge with Allah from you, O Pharaoh, for Allah is stronger than you and capable of protecting me from your schemes. He is my Lord, that is, the One Who created me and took care of my upbringing, and I rely on Him. He created me by His Power and He protects me by His All-Sustaining Power. Do you not see that every creator preserves his creation and guarantees its maintenance?' Is it not more likely that my Creator will guarantee for me my life that He created? Indeed, this is the case. It is on condition that one says, 'I seek refuge in my Lord'. It was sufficient for Musa to say: 'With my Lord ... have I indeed found refuge ....' This makes us ask why he said: '...as well as your Lord...' (*Ghafir:* 27). The scholars say it was to emphasise the Lordship of his Lord, and to emphasise his contentment with this Lordship–that is, He is my Lord *the Most High* and the Lord of others, indeed the Lord of all of you–so that they might say with him, 'Indeed, we have sought refuge with our Lord from Pharaoh and his deeds'. It is as though he wants to gather the forces of faith and goodness, to strengthen himself with a group of believers, so that his supplications will more likely be accepted.

This matter shows us the importance of unity and its spirit in Islam. In our prayers, for instance, we recite from the chapter of *al-Fatiha*: 'You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for aid' (*al-Fatiha:* 5), using the plural. Why did Allah *the Most High* not say, 'You alone do I worship; and to You alone do I turn for aid'? It is because the prayer of the group is stronger. Being in a group makes you be present among the righteous. If you are not righteous, you should keep their company in the hope that what came to them of acceptance and reward will come to you. For this reason you should be wary of showing contempt for the pious and the righteous, for perhaps your deeds will be accepted along with them, out of sheer grace.

So the prayer of the group is more likely to be accepted than the prayer of the individual. That is why the Congregational Prayer is better than the prayer of an individual by 27 times (1).

A merchant, for example, sells goods, some of which are good and some are bad. If you take him to task and say that you will not accept a flawed item, he will say to you, ‘It is one deal, with all its good and bad items’. Similarly, in the Congregational Prayer, we hide the flawed amongst the good out of hope that the whole batch will be accepted as one unit.

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(1) *It is related on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Umar that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The Congregational Prayer is better than the prayer of the individual by 27 degrees'. It was related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [645] and Muslim in his Sahih [650].*

But from what did our master Musa seek refuge? It was: ‘From everyone who, immersed in false pride, does not believe in [the coming of] the Day of Reckoning!’ (*Ghafir:* 27) Note that this is in the plural, and that there is a description: ‘...from everyone ... immersed in false pride...’ (*Ghafir:* 27). Nevertheless, he did not name his enemy: Pharaoh, the person in question, the claimant of divinity who threatened to kill him. Why is this? The scholars say that Pharaoh is not mentioned here for two reasons: The first is in order not to place Pharaoh opposite Allah by saying, ‘I seek refuge in Allah from Pharaoh’. Moreover, Pharaoh was not alone, there were others like him with him, and by saying this Musa included them all as he used words that encompass every arrogant person. The second reason is that Musa was taking care here to give his upbringing its due, and not to disrespect the good that Pharaoh had done for him. Thus, he did not name him personally. It is sufficient that he falls under the rubric of this description: ‘...from everyone who, immersed in false pride, does not believe in [the coming of] the Day of Reckoning!’ (*Ghafir:* 27)

We find that the Gracious Quran treats upbringing like the sibling of birth meaning the son through upbringing is like the son through blood. Allah *the Most High* says: ‘We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents...’ (*Luqman:* 14). He then mentions the mother and the reason why man should be good to her: ‘His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain...’ (*Luqman:* 14). Why does the Quran mention the reason for the mother here?

The scholars say it is because when he is small, a child does not grasp these things; however, at the same time he grasps his father’s merits. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the virtue of the mother because he did not witness it. Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘And say, “O my Lord! Bestow Your Grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!”’ (*al-Isra’:* 24) The reasoning behind the supplication here is his upbringing, whether it is for his mother who bore him or his mother who raised him. Whoever raises children other than his own, is entitled to be prayed for with this supplication: ‘And say, “O my Lord! Bestow Thy Grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!”’ (*al-Isra’:* 24)

To continue we say, Allah’s saying: ‘...from everyone who, immersed in false pride, does not believe in [the coming of] the Day of Reckoning’ (*Ghafir:* 27), mentions two evil characteristics. Firstly, he is arrogant, that is, hard-hearted, and if he is hard-hearted, he will not refrain from coercion and tyranny. Next, he does not believe in the Reckoning; he does not fear retribution and does not keep count of the consequences of his actions. There is no hope of rectifying someone like this.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

وَقَالَ رَجُلٞ مُّؤۡمِنٞ مِّنۡ ءَالِ فِرۡعَوۡنَ يَكۡتُمُ إِيمَٰنَهُۥٓ أَتَقۡتُلُونَ رَجُلًا أَن يَقُولَ رَبِّيَ
ٱللَّهُ وَقَدۡ جَآءَكُم بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ مِن رَّبِّكُمۡۖ وَإِن يَكُ كَٰذِبٗا فَعَلَيۡهِ كَذِبُهُۥۖ وَإِن يَكُ
صَٰدِقٗا يُصِبۡكُم بَعۡضُ ٱلَّذِي يَعِدُكُمۡۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِي مَنۡ هُوَ مُسۡرِفٞ كَذَّابٞ ٢٨

A secret believer from Pharaoh’s family said, ‘How can you kill a man just for saying, “My Lord is God”? He has brought you clear signs from your Lord – if he is a liar, on his own head be it – and if he is truthful, then at least some of what he has threatened will happen to you. God does not guide any rebellious, outrageous liar [28] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 28)

When Musa *peace be upon him* sought refuge in his Lord *the Most High* saying: ‘With my Lord ... have I indeed found refuge...’ (*Ghafir:* 27), Allah *Glorified is He* answered his supplication and granted him a safe haven, not by means of a Messenger, a king, or any of his believing followers, but rather by means of a believer among the people of Pharaoh who was hiding his faith out of fear of Pharaoh’s punishment. He stood up to defend Musa, and because of this his argument was clearer and more effective.

But why had this man, ‘concealed his faith’ if he was a believer? The scholars say that such people hid their faith because they did not have the power to defend themselves from tyranny. Their faith stayed in their hearts until they found an opportunity to manifest and declare it. Here we see it manifesting itself on the tongue of a believer, announcing his faith in front of Pharaoh and his tyranny. He is making a request very similar to that of a Messenger, and speaking about Allah's Path as if he himself were a Messenger.

The practice of concealing one's faith has a history and a place in Islam. The meaning of hiding one's faith is that faith manifests itself in one's actions, but one does not actually declare it. It is a desire to keep one's faith a secret between oneself and one's Lord in order for one to speak the Truth openly in front of the people, apparently as a non-believer and thus avoid being harmed.

Faith is an act of the heart that has an effect on all the limbs of the human body. You will find the believer is humble; he responds to the Truth and submits to it. The believer is compassionate, generous, forbearing, and merciful. We see his faith in his behaviour, yet he tries to hide it until the time comes when he can declare his Islam openly and vigorously.

This is why they say that faith is an act of the heart, a secret between the slave and his Lord. There is also an aspect of it which is manifested between the person and the people. And there may be a conflict between these two affairs, his secrecy and his openness, between him and his Lord and between him and the people. One may be a believer between oneself and one's Lord, yet among the people he may or may not show his faith because there is more to faith than just declaring it openly. This is something the Messenger established. How was this?

In the battle of Al-Ahzab (the Confederates), the tribes of Quraysh*,* Ghatafan(1) and the Jews joined forces. In this way, the Jews drew both Quraysh and Ghatafan into war with them against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* because they wanted to take revenge against the Prophet after he defeated them in the battle of Banu Qaynuqa'.(2)

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(1) Ghatafan was a large tribe who were descended from Ghatafan ibn Sa`d ibn Qays `Aylan, and from him back to `Adnan. In both the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods, they formed an important bloc among the tribes of Qays whose rule spread throughout the outlying areas of the Arabs. Many of the tribes of Ghatafan moved to Egypt and concentrated in Libya. Some also went to Palestine into the mountains of Nablus and some to Iraq (Wikipedia).

(2) *Banu Qaynaqa` were the first of the Jews to break their agreement with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. They declared war on him in the period between the battles of Badr and Uhud, and consequently Prophet Muhammad besieged them until they agreed to his terms (Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 3/174). After that, but before=*

When Huyay(1) went with Salam ibn Mashkam(2) to Mecca to rouse Quraysh and Ghatfan against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* they said to them, ‘We must stand together, as one block, against Muhammad, because if we leave him he will humiliate us as well as you. You must bolster us with your strength’. Quraysh, knowing that the Jews were people of the Book, said to them, ‘We want to ask you first, is it Muhammad who is on the Truth or us?’

They knew what the stance of the Jews regarding Prophet Muhammad was previously, as they used to wait for a victory against the disbelievers, saying, ‘A prophet is coming, his time is due, and when he comes we will follow him and kill you, just as `Ad and Iram(3) were killed’.

Nevertheless, the Jews said to them, ‘Indeed, you are on the Truth and Muhammad is on falsehood’. They did indeed unite to fight the Messenger

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= *Uhud, came the conflict with Banu Nadir. They refused to make a treaty with Prophet Muhammad, and therefore he fought them until they agreed to leave their houses, taking with them whatever their camels could carry of possessions, even the doors and wood from their houses (Dala’il An-Nubuwwa 3/179).*

(1) *He was Huyay ibn Akhttab An-Nadari, a fierce and arrogant man from the pre-Islamic period who was known as ‘The master of the city dwellers and the country folk’. He lived into the time of Islam and used to harm the Muslims. They captured him on the day of Qurayza and killed him. He died in 5 AH (626 CE) (A-A`lam by Az-Zirikli 2/292).*

(2) *Salam ibn Mashkam Al-Qurazi was a Jewish poet who was known as Aba Ghanam. He was the leader of Banu Nadir in his time and the caretaker of their treasures. He was one of those who said that `Uzayr (Ezra) was the son of Allah, and his wife, the Jewess Zaynab bint Al-Harith, was the one who tried to poison Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.*

(3) *Allah Glorified is He says: ‘And whenever there came to them a [new] revelation from Allah, confirming the Truth already in their possession–and [bear in mind that] before then they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the Truth–whenever there came to them something which they recognized [as the Truth], they used to deny it. And Allah’s Curse is on all who deny the Truth’ (al-Baqara: 89). Abu Nu`aym Al-Asbahani related in Dala’il An-Nubuwwa [1/52] on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas that the Jews were awaiting a victory over the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj by means of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him before he was sent as a prophet. But when Allah sent the Prophet from among the Arabs, they disbelieved in him and denied what they previously used to say. Consequently, Mu`adh ibn Jabal and Bishr ibn Al-Bara’ said to them, ‘O Jews, fear Allah and enter Islam. You used to await a victory over us by means of Muhammad when we were polytheists. You used to tell us that he was coming and used to describe him as he actually is’. But Salam ibn Mashkam replied, ‘He is not the one we used to tell you about. We know nothing of what he brings’. Hence, Allah Glorified is He revealed the aforementioned verse.*

of Allah *peace and blessing be upon him* and this was the battle of which Allah *the Most High* said regarding the believers: ‘...and so shaken were they that the Messenger [Muhammad] and the believers with him exclaimed, “When will Allah’s Help come?” Oh, verily, Allah’s Help is [always] near!’ (*al-Baqara:* 214)

This battle was called the battle of Al-Ahzab (the Confederates), or the battle of Al-Khandaq (the Trench). During it, one of Allah’s soldiers became manifested: ‘...And none can comprehend Your Lord’s soldiers save Him alone...’ *(al-Muddaththir:* 31). He came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, my heart has become filled with faith, but no-one knows of it, and I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah’.

The man was Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud Al-Ashja`yy(1). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* replied to him, ‘You are one man, what can a single man do? Yet, conceal your faith and be a double agent for us’ (2). This is the first instance a person’s faith was concealed, and we see from it that hiding one’s beliefs is permissible and that it has a role to play. The man said, ‘But, O Prophet Muhammad, I will have to speak other than the truth!’ (that is, lie).‘Do as you like’, he *peace and blessing be upon him* replied. (Lying is permissible in Islam only in very limited occasions, like war).

Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud then went to Quraysh and Ghatafan and said to them, ‘You know how close we are and my fondness for you. I bring you advice for me to discharge my duty of fidelity to you. The Jews regret making an enemy of Muhammad and want to give up, but they will not do this without something that will help them when making a treaty with Muhammad. You want to fight against Muhammad with them and believe for sure that they are not going to betray you, Yet, I tell you that they will ask you for seventy men from Quraysh and Ghatafan as hostage, out of fear that you will return to your lands if the war becomes too difficult and leave them to face Muhammad as his enemy'.

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(1) He was Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud ibn `Amir Al-Ashja`i, a Companion of considerable intelligence. He came to Prophet Muhammad secretly during the days of *Khandaq* and the gathering of the Confederates, and hid his Islam. He stirred up trouble between the tribes of Qurayzha, Ghatafan and Quraysh. He lived in Medina and passed away during the caliphate of `Uthman. It is also said that he died on the day of Jumal before `Ali came to Basra. He died around 30 AH (*Al-A`lam by Az-Zirikli* 8/41).

(2) Al-Abshihi related in his book *Al-Mustatraf fi kull Fann Mustazhraf* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘Deceive them for us, for indeed war is deception’. It was narrated by At-Tabari in *Tahdhib Al-Athar* [4/175] and Abu Nu`aym Al-Asbahani in *Ma`rifat As-Sahaba* (Hadith 5797).

He then went to the Jews and said to them, 'You know how close we are and my fondness for you. I tell you, these people (that is, Quraysh and Ghatafan) are not from your lands and they have a high status in their own lands; they have their own wealth and families. If they sense trouble, they will flee and leave you to face Muhammad. Why do you not request seventy of their men as hostage for you to be sure of them?' When Abu Sufyan came, he said, 'The situation has become unbearable. We have waited too long and the feet and the hooves are all tired; come, O Jews, let us get ready for our task'. They replied, 'This is the Sabbath and we do not fight on the Sabbath. Indeed, we will not fight this man unless you guarantee that you will stay with us until the battle is done. Give us seventy of your men as hostage'. Upon hearing this Abu Sufyan became certain that what Nu`aym had said was true, and he said, 'The only thing for us to do is to return to our lands'. Then he said, 'O people, let each of you look to who is on his right and his left for we are about to say something important'.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* had already sent Hudhayfa into their midst and he was between their ranks, and therefore he turned quickly to the person on his right and asked him, 'Who are you?' and to the one on his left and asked him, 'Who are you?' This was an astute and incisive thing to do on his part, as like this no-one will ask him and thus his true identity will not be uncovered(1).

After that, Abu Sufyan said, 'There remains nothing before us but departure. Let us not get caught in the talons of the Jews. Come, hurry!', and he struck his mount to stand up. It was, however, still tied up, so it broke its cord.

The point here is that Nu`aym ibn Mas`ud concealed his faith from the people for him to be able to say the things he said, even though they were untrue. Yet he did not do this without first seeking permission from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is proof that hiding one’s faith is permissible and that it has a role to play.

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(1) *It was related by As-Suhayli in his book Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf [3/433] in the story of the Confederates and their gathering to raid Medina.*

Similarly, there can be no doubt that Al-'Abbas had believed in Prophet Muhammad, although at the time they took the covenant(1) with the Messenger of Allah he had not yet announced his Islam. He went and said, ‘Here is Muhammad being embargoed by his people–if you want to accept him then give him your covenant over such-and-such, but if not, then leave him’. But how could he support the covenant with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* if he was still on the religion of Quraysh?

Thus, he must have been hiding his faith in order for Quraysh not to even dare harm Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* out of deference to his uncle Al-'Abbas. This is why he hid his faith. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘As for anyone who denies Allah after having once believed–and this, to be sure, does not apply to one who does it under duress while his heart remains true to his faith, but [only to] him who willingly opens up his heart to disbelief: upon all of these [falls] Allah’s Condemnation, and a tremendous suffering awaits them’ (*an-Nahl:* 106).

At the battle of Khaybar, a Jew named Al-Hajjaj ibn `Allat As-Sulamyi(2) came to Prophet Muhammad and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, Allah has opened my heart to Islam. I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah. I am going now to Mecca to collect some wealth I have there and to return some trusts. They will question me, and therefore permit me to speak(1) (deceitfully)'. 'Say whatever you wish', Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* replied.

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(1) *Al-Bayhaqi related in Dala’il An-Nubuwwa [2/446] on the authority of Ka`b ibn Malik in a long Hadith, ‘At the beginning of the night when we gave our oaths to Prophet Muhammad at Mina, we were with our people. When they were sleeping heavily we snuck away from Quraysh like sand grouses, finally meeting at `Aqaba. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him came to us with his uncle Al-`Abbas and no-one else. He wanted to attend the affair of his nephew and he was the first to speak. He said, ‘O people of Khazraj, indeed Muhammad has the status with us that you know of. His people and his city are protecting him. We have forbidden him from those who have similar views to ours, and he has chosen to be cut off in favour of you and to what you have called him. If you believe that you will be true to him in your claims, it is up to you to bear the burdens you have taken upon yourselves. But if you fear that you will forsake him, leave him now with his people. Indeed, he is protected by his family and in his own place’.*

(2) *His full name was Al-Hajjaj ibn `Allat ibn Khalid ibn Thuwayra and he was a Companion. According to his lineage, he was a Salami and then a Fihri, and was known as Abu Kilab. He came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him while he was at Khaybar and entered Islam. He settled in Medina and built a house and a mosque there (Al-Isaba fi ma`rifat As-Sahaba 1/212).*

Consequently, Al-Hajjaj *Allah be pleased with him* went to Quraysh, who said to themselves, 'He must surely have some news'. They asked him, 'Has the disrupter gone to Khaybar?' This refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* for they accused him of breaking up families and tribes after becoming a prophet. 'Yes', he replied, 'he was defeated most heinously and his companions were killed. The Jews will take him prisoner and bring him to you for them to do a favour for you which you should remember for the rest of your lives. I have come to collect the money I have left with the people in order to go and buy some captives before they are all sold'. Therefore, they helped him to gather his wealth and assisted him in his tasks.

This news subsequently reached Al-'Abbas, who came to him and asked, 'O Al-Hajjaj, what is this you are saying? 'It is as you have heard', he replied. 'Is it really true?' said Al-'Abbas. 'Will you keep my secret?' said Al-Hajjaj. 'By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, I will, indeed', replied Al-'Abbas. 'Then leave me alone until the people leave', said Al-Hajjaj. He sat for a while longer and then went to him and said, 'By Allah, nothing of the news that has reached you from me came to pass. Verily, I left Muhammad victorious at Khaybar and the groom of Safiyya bint Huyay ibn Akhttab*,* yet I needed a scheme to restore my money from these people. Keep my secret for three days until I escape them and am beyond their reach, then spread it as much as you like'.

After three days, Al-'Abbas took his staff, put on his perfume and went to walk around the *Ka'ba*. He met one of the people of Quraysh who said to him, 'By Allah, O Abu Fadl*,* this is indeed great forbearance', referring to what had supposedly happened to his nephew.

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(1) *That is, to say what he needed to in order to deceive the polytheists into letting him take his wealth that he had left with his wife. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him granted him permission to deceive them.*

Consequently, Al-'Abbas said to the man, ‘By the One Whom you swore by, this is not forbearance, it is due to the reality of the matter; what your companion told you was the opposite of what really happened. My nephew was victorious over his enemies and he is now the groom of Bint Huyay ibn Akhttab at Khaybar’. ‘Could it be true?’ ‘It is as I said’. ‘That scum has escaped us now, woe to him’.(1)

Clearly, we see that these people concealed their faith for them to give victory to the religion and be among its soldiers. Islam has different types of forces; it has soldiers who are openly visible, soldiers who are hidden, and soldiers for spying on its enemies.

Some of the exegetes(2) said that Allah’s saying: ‘...[he] concealed his faith...’ (*Ghafir:* 28) meant from Pharaoh’s people, but this is incorrect. The proof of this is that he will speak and let his faith be known, going into details as though he were a Messenger. Were he hiding his faith from Pharaoh’s people, Allah will have said, ‘He concealed *(yaktum)* his faith from the people of Pharaoh’ because the verb *katama* (conceal) can take two objects, as in Allah’s saying: ‘...but they shall not [be able to] conceal (*la yaktumoon*) from Allah anything that has happened’ (*an-Nisa’:* 42).

What did this believer say, then? He said, ‘...Will you slay a man because he says, “Allah is my Lord”...’ (*Ghafir:* 28)? Look at the courage of this believer for the sake of the Truth, positing this incredulous question, ‘...Will you slay a man...’, openly in front of Pharaoh: ‘...because he says, “Allah is my Lord”...’, and has committed no offense other than this? He is saying this plainly in the presence of Pharaoh. And do you know who Pharaoh was? He was the one who claimed divinity for himself. He said to his people: ‘I did not know that you could have any deity other than myself...’ (*al-Qasas:* 38). There can be no doubt that this man’s words, ‘Allah is my Lord’, will enrage him, undermining, as they did, the very foundations of the divinity he claimed.

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(1) *It was related in the Musnad of Ahmad from the collection of Anas ibn Malik. Al-Bayhaqi also related it in As-Sunnan Al-Kubra [9/151], `Abd Ar-Razzaq in his Musannaf [5/466, Hadith 9771] and Ibn Sa`d in his Tabaqat Al-Kubra [2/108].*

(2) *This is the opinion that Ibn Kathir inclined towards in this matter*

The believer goes on to say: '...when he has indeed brought you clear signs of this Truth from your Lord?...' (*Ghafir:* 28) That is, he has brought you clear signs and then you want to kill him?! Let us suppose that he is a liar; even then his lies will not harm you because he will be lying about Allah *the Most High* and he will bear the consequences of these lies: 'And if he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him; but if he is a man of Truth, there will strike you some of what he promises you...' (*Ghafir:* 28). This means that if he is truthful, you will not be deprived of his good and some of it will come to you. In such a case, why will you kill him? All in all, it will be more cautious not to have him killed.

Does that mean, however, that we should leave any heretic to say whatsoever he likes and speak about matters of religion, not preventing him therefrom relying upon the verse: 'And if he be a liar, his lie will fall back on him...'? No, this is not the case; rather, we should infer a sentence here. We should say, prevent him from speaking but do not kill him. We hear much of heretics these days who delve into matters of Allah's Religion. What are we to do? Do we leave them and say, 'Their lies will fall back on them'? No, this is not possible; rather, it is incumbent upon us to oppose and prevent them from this foolish talk and restrain them in order that they do not say things that harm Allah's Religion.

Similarly, this believer from Pharaoh's people defended Musa *peace be upon him*. It is as though he wants to preserve the proof of the Truth, as perhaps there will be those who will come later and listen to him, and give him victory.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then affirms the following reality: '... for verily, Allah will not grace with His Guidance one who has wasted his own self by lying [about Him]' (*Ghafir:* 28). This speech is insinuating and could be considered to be an insult to Pharaoh. The Lord *the Most High* does not let anybody lie about Him without exposing his lies. Why? It is because not burying these lies will result in things that Allah did not reveal being included in the Divine Revelation; but the Divine Revelation is too pure for that. That is why we see that whenever someone claims prophethood, his affair is exposed and the people will come to know of his lies. This is because it is not right for a liar to claim prophethood and Allah does not expose him. This is understood from Allah's Promise: ‘Behold, We shall indeed help Our Messengers and those who have believed ... in the life of this world...’ (*Ghafir:* 51), and: ‘… that, verily, Our hosts–they indeed–will [in the end] be victorious!’ (*as-Saffat:* 173)

يَٰقَوۡمِ لَكُمُ ٱلۡمُلۡكُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ ظَٰهِرِينَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَمَن يَنصُرُنَا مِنۢ بَأۡسِ ٱللَّهِ إِن
جَآءَنَاۚ قَالَ فِرۡعَوۡنُ مَآ أُرِيكُمۡ إِلَّا مَآ أَرَىٰ وَمَآ أَهۡدِيكُمۡ إِلَّا سَبِيلَ ٱلرَّشَادِ ٢٩

My people, as masters in the land you have the power today,
but who will help us against God’s might if it comes upon us?’
But Pharaoh said, ‘I have told you what I think; I am guiding
you along the right path’ [29] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 29)

Allah’s saying: ‘O my people! Yours is the dominion today...’ is quoting the believer who is advising his people. Indeed, they did have the dominion–the dominion of Pharaoh, his tyranny, his whips (different signs of strength) and his claims to divinity, etc. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Most eminent are you on earth...’ which means victorious and empowered over others; but beware because this situation is temporary, it will not last–it is restricted temporally: ‘Yours is the dominion today...’.

It is as though he is saying to them, ‘Beware of letting this dominion slip from your grasp’, for perhaps this man, that is, Musa, is truthful, and will gather helpers and followers around him and put an end to your dominion. Seek to prolong it then, even if it is just the misguidance that you are currently upon, and do not enter into a conflict the outcome of which you cannot guarantee: ‘But who will rescue us from Allah’s punishment, once it befalls us?’ No one will because Allah’s revenge and punishment when aiding His Messengers is a punishment that cannot be averted. It will necessarily destroy any opponents, so be warned. This is how the believer speaks with words of faith that are firm in his heart. He tells his people nothing but the total Truth.

Here, Pharaoh must stand up and try to take control of matters for his own ends: ‘Pharaoh said, “I just want to make you see what I myself see; and I will never make you follow any path but that of rectitude!’’ (*Ghafir:* 29) Notice how obsessive he is when he speaks, saying: ‘I just want to make you see what I myself see...', and the lie in his saying: '...and I will never make you follow any path but that of rectitude!'

Yet Pharaoh's interjection does not stop the man from advising his people, nor from continuing his summons.

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِىٓ ءَامَنَ يَٰقَوْمِ إِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُم مِّثْلَ يَوْمِ ٱلْأَحْزَابِ ﴿٣٠﴾
مِثْلَ دَأْبِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِمْ ۚ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِّلْعِبَادِ ﴿٣١﴾

The believer said, 'My people, I fear your fate will be the fate of those others who opposed [their prophets]: [30] the fate of the people of Noah, 'Ad, Thamud, and those who came after them – God never wills injustice on His creatures [31] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 30 - 31)

Here, the believer continues his advice to his people; Pharaoh's interjection has neither frightened him nor prevented him from his call. He says: '...O my people! Verily, I fear for you the like of the day that befell those others who were leagued together [against Allah's Truth] (*yawm al-ahzab*)' (*Ghafir:* 30) meaning even if you are in eminence upon the earth and dominion is yours, you are not more eminent than those who preceded you in the line of prophets, starting from Nuh , then 'Ad, Thamud and the others who came after them: 'The like of what happened to Nuh's (Noah's) people, and to [the tribes of] *'Ad* and *Thamud* and those who came after them! But Allah does not will any wrong for His creatures' (*Ghafir:* 31).

Allah *Glorified is He* has shown us amazing things regarding those who denied the Messengers: 'For every one of them did We take to task for his sin. And so, upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm wind; and some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast; and some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some of them We caused to drown. And it was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who had wronged themselves' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

Therefore, it is upon you to take a lesson from those who preceded you in denial, especially considering the fact that you can see their ruins which show you that they were more powerful than you and more influential on earth. Yet despite that, their power did not benefit them, and their influence did not avert Allah's punishment when it came upon them. Allah *Glorified is He* did not preserve these ruins except that they might be a reminder for those who came after them: 'And verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time, and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138)

Had their ruins been completely obliterated there will not have been any actual proof. The persistence of these ruins until today shows us that the people who built these civilisations and left these ruins were unable to protect them despite the fact that they were stronger than you, more influential on earth, and reigned over more of it than you. Therefore, given that this actually happened and you can see it with your own eyes, accept what the Messenger says and the reality in front of you in the world.

We notice that the word *yawm* (day) comes in the singular here, and that the word *al-ahzab* (those who were leagued together) is in the plural. Allah *Glorified is He* did not say '*ayyam al-ahzab'* (the days of those who were leagued together). The word *'hizb'* is singular for '*ahzab',* and refers to a group who deny and oppose a Messenger. Hence, there was a group who opposed Nuh, a group who opposed Hud (Eber) a group who opposed Saleh (Shelah), etc.

Clearly, the days spoken of here are numerous, but despite this Allah *the Most High* says: 'The like of the day that befell those others who were leagued together [against Allah's Truth]' (*Ghafir:* 30). Allah spoke of one day yet made the groups that were leagued together plural. How is this the case? It is because what happens is effectively one thing, the same for all even if there are numerous leagues and numerous Messengers, it is still *'yawm al-ahzab'* in the singular, not in the plural. This is because if we were to say it in the plural, it will mean that one day had one reason for the punishment, while another day had another reason, etc. But the reason was the same in all instances–their denial of the Lord's Creed and Law for creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to expand upon what was summarised in the word '*al-ahzab'* (those who were leagued together): 'the like of what happened to Nuh's (Noah's) people and to [the tribes of] 'Ad and Thamud and those who came after them! But Allah does not will any wrong for His creatures' (*Ghafir:* 31). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not take them to task as He did out of oppression. He calls them His 'creatures', that is to say, how could He oppress them when they are His creation and His slaves? He merely recompensed them in proportion to their deeds and their denial of their Messengers for them to be an enduring warning in the world for anyone who opposes the Path of the Lord *Glorified is He*.

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ يَوۡمَ ٱلتَّنَادِ ﴿٣٢﴾
يَوۡمَ تُوَلُّونَ مُدۡبِرِينَ مَا لَكُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ مِنۡ عَاصِمٖۗ وَمَن يُضۡلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِنۡ هَادٖ ﴿٣٣﴾

My people, I fear for you on the Day you will cry out to one another [32] The Day you will turn tail and flee with no one to defend you from God! Whoever God leaves to stray will have no one to guide him [33] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 32 - 33)

The '*yawm al-ahzab'* (the day that befell those who were leagued together) was in this world the '*yawm at-tanad'* (the day of calling to one another), however, is the Day of Judgement. As such, it seems that this believer first warned them by means of *'yawm al-ahzab'* of the troubles that may come upon them in this world, and then he warned them of the day of recompense, the Day of Judgement, saying: 'And, O my people, I fear for you [the coming of] that Day of [Judgment–the Day when you will be] calling to one another [in distress]' (Ghafir: 32). The word *'tanad'* signifies give-and-take, meaning, you call me and I call you. This mutual calling on the Day of Judgement will take a number of forms. Allah *the Most High* says, '[But] one Day We shall summon all human beings [and judge them] according to the conscious disposition which governed their deeds [in life]...' (*al-Isra':* 71). This is the first call. It will be said, 'O people of Muhammad, O people of 'Isa (Jesus), O people of Musa (Moses)...etc., or perhaps they will call out to each other.

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentions several instances of people calling out. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And the inmates of paradise will call out to the inmates of the fire, "Now we have found that what our Lord promised us has come true; have you, too, found that what your Lord promised you has come true”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 44) And: ‘And the inmates of the fire will call out to the inmates of paradise, “Pour some water upon us, or some of the sustenance [of paradise] which Allah has provided for you!”...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 50). And: ‘…they who [in life] had possessed this faculty of discernment (*ashab al-a`raf*) will call out to those whom they recognize by their marks...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 48). The *‘ashab al-a`raf’* are a group of people whose good deeds and bad deeds were equal and did not enter paradise, yet nevertheless they gloat over the disbelievers.

On the other hand, the word *at-tanad* may not refer to people calling each other but may be derived from the verb *nadda*, meaning ‘to run away and flee’. Hence, *‘yawm at-tanad’* means the day when you will flee from me and I will flee from you. This is like Allah’s saying: ‘On a Day when everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, and from his mother and father, and from his spouse and his children’ (*‘Abasa:* 34-36). The meaning here is that he flees from them and they flee from him. Each one flees from the other because he is worried about himself.

But what did this believer intend with this speech? He wanted to tell them that even if you help one another in falsehood in this world, you should realise that in the Afterlife you will flee from each other: ‘the Day when you will [wish to] turn your backs and flee...’ (*Ghafir:* 33).

Consider the great style of the structure of the Quranic phrase here. The Quran sometimes uses a word that could have more than one meaning. When the Quran uses a word that refers to two different meanings at the same time, these two meanings are appropriate for the verses in which the word is mentioned. Here, for example, ‘*yawm at-tanad’* gives the meaning of ‘calling to one another’, and ‘the Day when you will [wish to] turn your backs and flee' gives the meaning of fleeing from one another, which is another meaning of ‘*at-tanad’*. Hence, the two meanings of the word *‘at-tanad’* are mentioned.

Another example of this is found in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* in Allah’s saying: ‘[At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses; [before Him] prostrate the stars (*an-najm*) and the trees’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5-6). The sun and the moon are heavenly creations while the tree is earthly creation; but between the two is the word *‘an-najm’* which has two meanings.

One, the first that springs to mind, is that it refers to a heavenly body (a star) like the sun and the moon. The other meaning is that it refers to a plant that has no stem, and thus it is similar to a tree.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* then says in the verse under discussion: '...having none to defend you against Allah: for he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide' (*Ghafir:* 33). This means that no one can protect you from Allah or stave off His punishment if it should come upon you. And: '...For he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide' (*Ghafir:* 33) means no one can guide someone whom Allah has judged to be misguided. Why? Because Allah *Glorified is He* will assist him and establish him in his misguidance

For the same reason, we say that if the slave of Allah loves something, Allah *the Most High* will say to his slave, 'Do you love it my slave? Then I shall test you by it'. An example of this is one who has a loved one who has died and as a result he went into deep mourning, taking it to extremes and wallowing in it. For that reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says to him, 'Do you enjoy the sorrow and revel in it? Then I will give you more of it–whenever it wanes I will renew it for you'.

That is why the people of knowledge say, 'Close the gates of sorrow with the nails of contentment'. If you befriend sorrow and revel in it, Allah will prolong it for you. This is because He is your Lord and the one in charge of your affairs. He gives everyone what he desires. Even the disbeliever who loves disbelief, Allah *the Most High* has promised him that He will help him in it. That is why He seals his heart in order for no faith to enter it and for denial to not leave it.

The believer from the people of Pharaoh continues to advise his people, saying(1):

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(1) Al-Qurtubi says in his Exegesis [8/5961] that this speech is that of Musa to his people, but he also says, 'And it is said that it is a continuation of the admonition of the believer from the people of Pharaoh, speaking of their long-standing recalcitrance in the face of the prophets'.

وَلَقَدْ جَآءَكُمْ يُوسُفُ مِن قَبْلُ بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ فَمَا زِلْتُمْ فِى شَكٍّ مِّمَّا
جَآءَكُم بِهِۦ ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا هَلَكَ قُلْتُمْ لَن يَبْعَثَ ٱللَّهُ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ
رَسُولًا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُضِلُّ ٱللَّهُ مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ مُّرْتَابٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

Joseph came to you before with clear signs, but you never ceased to doubt the message he brought you. When he died, you said, “God will not send another messenger.”’ In this way God leaves the doubting rebels to stray [34]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 34)

When Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* came there was no pharaoh in Egypt, rather, there was a king known as *Al-`Aziz*. That is why when you read the story of Yusuf (Joseph), you find no mention of Pharaoh, as opposed to the story of Musa. When the successive events of history were uncovered and scholars managed to align certain events with the times in which they occurred, they discovered that Yusuf (Joseph) lived in the time of the shepherd kings, the Hyksos. When these came to Egypt, they defeated the pharaohs, removed them from power, and made themselves kings. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in the story of Yusuf: ‘And the King said...’ (*Yusuf:* 43)–He did not say, ‘Pharaoh’. When the pharaohs restored the rule of Egypt, they took to oppressing the children of Israel because they used to support the kings and fight for them.

Allah *the Most High* mentions the believer saying: ‘...with all evidence of the Truth...’ (*Ghafir:* 34) which refers to clear signs indicating the truthfulness of his being a Messenger of Allah. Allah then says: ‘...But you never ceased to throw doubt on [the Message] that he brought you...’ (*Ghafir:* 34). This means you were not convinced of his being a Messenger(1): ‘...so much so that when he died, you said, “Allah will never send any Messenger after him!”...’ (*Ghafir:* 34). They said this because they denied the prophecy of Yusuf and were hypocrites. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘In this way Allah lets go astray such as waste their own selves...’ that is, by overstepping the boundaries: ‘...by throwing suspicion [on His revelations]’ (*Ghafir:* 34) which means doubting and denying the Messengers and their Messages.

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(1) Ibn Kathir mentioned a sidenote in his Exegesis [4/79] that the Egyptians remained doubtful of the revelation that Yusuf brought them. He said, ‘Yusuf was a Messenger who used to call his people to Allah to uphold justice, but they only obeyed him because he was a minister and had worldly authority’.

ٱلَّذِينَ يُجَٰدِلُونَ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ بِغَيۡرِ سُلۡطَٰنٍ أَتَىٰهُمۡۖ كَبُرَ مَقۡتًا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ
وَعِندَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَطۡبَعُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ قَلۡبِ مُتَكَبِّرٖ جَبَّارٖ ﴿٣٥﴾

Those who dispute God’s messages, with no authority given to them, are doing something that is loathed by God and by those who believe. In this way God seals up the heart of every arrogant tyrant [35] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 35)

Is there some dispute about Allah that has evidence ‘*sultan*’ to support it? The scholars say that yes there is. The dispute in question here is about Allah (*fi Allah*), which means about Allah’s Commandments to us to do things or the opposite, not do to things. We have said previously that Allah’s signs are of three kinds: signs in creation that show the Absolute Power of The Creator, and signs that affirm the truthfulness of the Messengers in their conveying from Allah, referring to their miracles, and the verses of the Quran that bear Allah’s Rulings. We can ask about which of these types they were disputing.

First, they disputed about the miracles saying that they were sorcery. The refutation of this claim is simple. We will say to them, if he cast a spell on those who believed in him, why did he not cast a spell on you too in order for you to believe in him and then the matter will be finished?

Similarly, they disputed about the verses bearing Allah’s Rulings. Why? Because every ruling that Allah *Glorified is He* reveals to His slaves forbids the oppression of one generation by another or one individual by another, and this contradicts with the interests of the people who have earthly power and cause tyranny. Allah *the Most High* explains: ‘As for that [happy] life in the hereafter, We grant it [only] to those who do not seek to exalt themselves on earth, nor yet to spread corruption: for the future belongs to the Allah-conscious’ (*al-Qasas:* 83).

As for the signs in creation which affirm the Power of the Creator, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, and others, there is no room for dispute here. That is why they did not dispute about them.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues by saying: '...exceedingly loathsome...'; this arguing over Allah's signs without right is repulsive and Allah hates it most vigorously. Similarly, the believers themselves who care for Allah's Religion and want to make faith strong hate this type of arguing.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...It is in this way that Allah sets a seal (*yatba'*) on every arrogant, self-exalting heart' (*Ghafir:* 35). The word '*yatba`*' means He seals the heart. The word 'arrogant' refers to anyone who considers himself great and claims such for himself without having the necessary requirements to be great. He considers himself great but he lacks the proof required for greatness. There is a Qudsi Hadith that clarifies this matter; the society of believers is divided into twelve types: six of them are loved: three at a high level and three at a lower level and six are detestable: three more and three less. Let us look and see in which group the arrogant falls:

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the Qudsi Hadith, 'I love three, yet My love for three others is greater: I love the poor humble man, yet My love for the rich humble man is greater. I love the obedient old man, yet My love for the obedient young man is greater. And I love the generous rich man, yet My love for the generous poor man is greater. Moreover, I loathe three, yet My loathing for three others is greater: I loathe the rich arrogant man, yet My loathing for the poor arrogant man is greater. I loathe the disobedient young man, yet my loathing for the disobedient old man is greater. And I loathe the miserly poor man, yet my loathing for the miserly rich man is greater'.(1)

Thus, we see in light of this Hadith that in the society of the believers the rich man should be humble, the poor man generous, and the youth obedient.

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(1) *Abu Layth As-Samarqandi related something similar to this in his book Tanbih Al-Ghafileen in the nineteenth chapter which deals with envy and its prohibition (page 58 of the Azhari manuscript, No. 307071). He related it using the word 'yuqal' (it is said), indicating the weakness of the Hadith, and he does not mention a chain of narrators or any authority for it. Its wording is, 'Indeed, Allah loathes three, yet His loathing for three others is greater: He loathes the sinner, yet His loathing for the elderly sinner is greater. He loathes the miserly man, yet His loathing for the miserly rich man is greater. And He loathes the arrogant man, yet His loathing for the arrogant poor man is greater. Moreover, He loves three, yet His love for three others is greater: He loves the pious, yet His love for the pious youth is greater. He loves the generous man, yet His love for the generous poor man is greater. And He loves the humble, yet His love for the humble rich man is greater'.*

This is how the best and most noble society should be. After that, the next level in society is that the poor man is humble, the rich man generous and the elders obedient.

To continue, we said that the arrogant man is the one who considers himself great but without basis. But what if he has a basis for his claims? To this we will reply that if he does have a basis for considering himself great he is still lacking in that he prides himself on something that is not basically his– something that can be taken away from him. Someone may pride themselves on their health, yet Allah may take it away for it is an incidental quality that can be removed. Furthermore, when the arrogant man sees someone who is greater than him, his arrogance diminishes. And were he to see the Greatness of his Lord *the Most High* with his inner sight, he will not consider himself great at all.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَٰهَٰمَٰنُ ٱبْنِ لِى صَرْحًا لَّعَلِّىٓ أَبْلُغُ ٱلْأَسْبَٰبَ ﴿٣٦﴾ أَسْبَٰبَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
فَأَطَّلِعَ إِلَىٰٓ إِلَٰهِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِنِّى لَأَظُنُّهُۥ كَٰذِبًا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِفِرْعَوْنَ سُوٓءُ عَمَلِهِۦ
وَصُدَّ عَنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ۚ وَمَا كَيْدُ فِرْعَوْنَ إِلَّا فِى تَبَابٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

Pharaoh said, 'Haman, build me a tall tower so that I may reach the ropes that lead [36] To the heavens to look for this God of Moses. I am convinced that he is lying.' In this way the evil of Pharaoh's deed was made alluring to him and he was barred from the right path – his scheming led only to ruin [37] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 36 - 37)

Pharaoh is commanding his minister and helper Haman to build a tall building for him to go up it and perhaps see the God to Whom Musa calls in his worship. Clearly, he seems to think that this tower will help him to see Allah, but by Allah, the god whom one can see from a tower is no god at all. Then Allah says: '...And thus was made alluring in Pharaoh's eyes the evil of his own deeds, and so he was barred from the path [of Truth]: and Pharaoh's guile did not lead to aught but ruin' (*Ghafir:* 37), referring to misguidance and loss. He did not remain as he was, but continued to raise himself up until Allah *the Most High* laid bare his case on the day he was drowned.

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِىٓ ءَامَنَ يَٰقَوْمِ ٱتَّبِعُونِ أَهْدِكُمْ سَبِيلَ ٱلرَّشَادِ ﴿٣٨﴾
يَٰقَوْمِ إِنَّمَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا مَتَٰعٌ وَإِنَّ ٱلْءَاخِرَةَ هِىَ دَارُ ٱلْقَرَارِ ﴿٣٩﴾

The believer said, ‘My people, follow me! I will guide you to the right path [38] My people, the life of this world is only a brief enjoyment; it is the Hereafter that is the lasting home [39]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 38 - 39)

This is the speech of the believer from among the people of Pharaoh. He is preaching his people as if he were a prophet. What kept him silent regarding Pharaoh until, in his misguidance, Pharaoh reached the point of claiming divinity? This falls under the rubric of the saying, ‘The Truth is victorious, yet there is a time appropriate for it’. The Lord *the Most High* has quoted the words of this believer, so it is as if the Lord *the Most High* Himself is speaking. That is why no one objected, because no one objects to the inspiration of the Most Merciful; only the speech of men can be challenged.

This is why, when the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And so, [when he was born] We inspired to the mother of Musa (Moses), ‘Suckle him [for a time] and then, when you have cause to fear for him, cast him into the river and have no fear and do not grieve...’ (*al-Qasas:* 7), she did not oppose this idea. Who could say to a woman that if she fears for her child she (1) should cast him into the river? By Allah, if someone other than the Lord *Glorified is He* were to say this, she will refuse, but she accepted and did not decline. This is because the inspiration of the Most Merciful is not to be refused and not to be challenged. Had this not been the case, she will have said, ‘Should I save him from a probable death to have a certain death?’

Similarly, it is no wonder that this believer should say this speech openly within ear of Pharaoh, and yet despite this the believer was not opposed.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues to relate what the believer said: ‘O my people! This worldly life is but a brief enjoyment, whereas, behold, the life to come is the home abiding’ (*Ghafir:* 39). This verse directs us to the fact that every man must have a purpose. The condition of this purpose is not to be followed by another purpose; if it has another purpose after it, then it is not a true purpose–rather, it is a stage on the way to the ultimate goal. An example of this is a child whom one teaches for him to go to preparatory school. Is preparatory school his ultimate goal? No, it is just a stage to take him to the next level which is secondary school. Similarly, secondary school is a stage taking one on to what follows it. Therefore, as long as there is something after one objective, this objective is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is that which is not followed by anything else. This is why the believer is saying to them, 'Verily, this world and all that is in it is a provision, a mere provision. It is not the ultimate goal–the real goal is the Afterlife'.

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(1) She is Musa’s mother.

If one reflects, he will see that man has an expected life span in this world, but his end is not known; Allah *the Most High* has kept it obscure. But this uncertainty in this reality results in it being very clear because by hiding the time and place of death, Allah *the Most High* has forced us to always be wary of it, waiting for it at any moment and in any place. For this reason, one of the scholars (1) said, 'Death is an arrow that has been thrown; it is on its way to you, and your life is only as long as its [i.e. the arrow's] journey to you'.

When you reflect upon the creation around you, you find that the Creator has made a harmonious world to serve you: the sun, the moon, the stars, the air, the water, the plants, etc. Look, O you for whom all these things were created, how you disappear and they remain. You die but the sun stays as it is; the moon, the stars, the air, the water, nothing changes. Even the water that one imagines to be used up, it is as it was since Allah *Glorified is He* created the world, it neither increases nor decreases.

The water that you take from creation during your life span passes out of you once again as sweat and excretions. Even that which remains in us after death will be sucked out by the earth. The same is true of a rose, for example, and all other things. This means the world is a changing yet united phenomenon.

Still, is it reasonable that the life of the servant is longer than that of the one it is serving? That I die and that the sun that was created for my sake and is there for my service remains? Yes, in order for you to realise that your servant has a longer life than you do in this world, even though you are ennobled and served. Hence, there must be some other life for me that is appropriate to this ennoblement, a life that continues after these creations have faded away; when the sun, moon and stars are all gone, yet I remain. And this can only be the Afterlife: '...on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens, and when [all men] shall appear before Allah, The One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists' (*Ibrahim:* 48).

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(1) This is one of the sayings of `Abdullah ibn Al-Mu`tazz. It was ascribed to him by Al-Husari Al-Qayrawani in his book *Zahr Al-Adab wa Thamr Al-Albab*, and Abu Mansur Ath-Tha`alabi in *Al-I`jaz wa Al-Ijaz*. Its wording is, 'Death is an arrow flying towards you. Your life is as long as its [i. e. the arrow's] journey towards you'.

The believer, however, must acknowledge this day and believe in it for him to be actually ennobled and be the one that lives longer. Even death will die and you will remain in the Afterlife, everlasting. No blessing will pass you by, and death will never come to you again.

This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to look to this goal, he does not want us to look under our feet and live only for the moment we are in now. The ultimate goal for every believer is the Afterlife. This is because there is nothing that comes after it: 'Behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life (*al-hayawan*): if they but knew this!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64) The word '*al-hayawan'* is an emphatic form of the word '*hayah'* meaning life; that is, it is the true life.

In this verse, the believer says: 'My people, the life of this world is only a brief enjoyment; it is the Hereafter that is the lasting home' (*Ghafir:* 39). It is the residence from which one will not be turned out, and therefore we should be prepared for it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

مَنْ عَمِلَ سَيِّئَةً فَلَا يُجْزَىٰٓ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا ۖ وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ
وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ يُرْزَقُونَ فِيهَا بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

Whoever does evil will be repaid with its like; whoever does good and believes, be it a man or a woman, will enter Paradise and be provided for without measure[40]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 40)

As long as the Afterlife is the place of permanent residence, the return must be to Allah for each one to be rewarded according to his deeds. He is not a tyrant, rather, He is merciful; He rewards an evil deed with its like or forgives it, and He multiplies the reward of good deeds many times.

We should reflect on Allah’s saying: ‘...and believes...’ (*Ghafir:* 40). This condition does not prevent a non-Muslim from doing good deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this matter in His saying: ‘Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter–We increase for him in his harvest. And whoever desires the harvest of this world–We give him thereof, but he has no share in the Hereafter’ (*ash-Shura:* 20).

When the disbeliever does a good deed, he takes his reward for it in this world and he has no reward for it in the Hereafter. In this worldly life, he gains repute, renown, and prestige among men, and gains his reward in the form of respect and honour, as statues of them are made to perpetuate their memory.

They receive their reward in this worldly life, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But those who disbelieved–their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing; but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due. And Allah is swift in taking account’ (*an-Nur:* 39).

Reflect on Allah’s saying: ‘…finds Allah before Him...’ (*an-Nur:* 39). He is surprised because it did not occur to him in this worldly life, and he did nothing for his Lord at all. It is well known that a person takes his pay from the one for whom he works.

We were asked about this point in San Francisco, ‘Does the disbeliever lose the reward for any good he does in this world?’ I asked in return, ‘Did he do this good for Allah or for humanity and its progress?’ They said, ‘He did it to serve humanity and better it’. Hence, I replied, ‘Then let him take his reward from people, as he gains fame, renown and the perpetuation of his name’. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We will regard what they have done of deeds and make them as dust, dispersed’ (*al-Furqan*: 23).

We benefit from the work of the disbelievers who have strove to improve the society with their works, discoveries, and inventions. In fact, we harness them in serving faith and calling people to Allah. For example, the microphone and recorder are the fruits of their work, but they will not receive any share from their reward. They will not receive rewards in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to people like this, saying: ‘We will show them Our signs in the horizons...’ (*Fussilat:* 53). They live a difficult and ascetic life that makes them dedicate themselves to research and study in order to discover Allah’s Secrets and Signs in the universe. At the end, people benefit from their works, but they are deprived of their rewards.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘...will enter Paradise and be provided for (*yurzaqoon*) without measure’ (*Ghafir:* 40). The word ‘*rizq*’ (provision, which comes from ‘*yurzaqoon*’) refers to everything that a man benefits from. It is not just wealth as some people think; health, safety, knowledge, and forbearance are types of provision. Everything that one benefits from is part of his provision. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...without measure (*min ghayri hisab*)’ (*Ghafir:* 40). The word ‘*hisab*’ (measure) means that one is credited with things according to their worth. In the Afterlife, however, provision is without measure because the Provider is Allah. When Allah *Glorified is He* gives provision to you, He does not give you in strict accordance with your deeds, but He gives you according to His own measure.

When good comes to a person unexpectedly, he says to himself that he has not prepared himself (*ghayri hisab*) for this. Allah’s saying: ‘...without measure (*min ghayri hisab*)’ (*Ghafir:* 40) refers to the fact that Allah gives without limit, and that He gives to people without measure and without the people deserving it. Thus, this giving includes many different aspects of open-handedness.

Scholars say that in paradise you eat without defecating(1) because you will eat from the food of Allah. Allah, the Creator, will give you nutrition in accordance with the needs of your body, without excess. Consequently, how will there be any excrement?! But why do some people deny this or find it hard to understand when it happens in this worldly life despite our limited possibilities?

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(1) *It was related that Zayd ibn Arqam said, ‘A man from the people of the Book came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, “O Abu Al-Qasim, do you claim that the people of Paradise eat and drink?” “Yes”, he said, “By the One in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, any one of them will be given the strength of a hundred men in terms of food, drink, intercourse and passions”. “But the one who eats and drinks will have a need to fulfil, but there can be no filth in Paradise.” “Their excretions will be perspiration that will come out of their skin like the diffusion of musk, and with it their bodies will lose weight”’. It was related by Ahmad in his Musnad and An-Nasa’i in his Sunnan with a sound chain of narrators according to the conditions of Al-Bukhari (See: Hadi Al-Arwah by Ibn Al-Qayyim, pg. 177).*

For example, the soldiers in war are given special pills that act as their nutrition, giving them the necessary energy without any excess and leaving nothing in the body to excrete. But if the created being can do this, what do you think of the Creator?

One may eat in paradise without any need for food, only for the pleasure of eating. In fact, one may not need any food at all. Therefore, the scholars said that the highest level of paradise with regard to bounties is *`Illiyyin*. This is because it does not contain anything of the worldly pleasures, as one sees his Lord *the Most High* which is a sufficient bounty. In His Presence, one does not need these other bounties.

Ash-Sha'bi went to the Emperor of Rome, who asked him, 'You claim that you eat in paradise but do not defecate. How can it be?' He replied, 'What is strange about that? Do you not see that the child in his mother's womb is fed and grows? Does he defecate in her womb? He does not; if he were to do that, then the placenta will be damaged. Similarly, the believer in paradise will not defecate'. Then the king said to him, 'You claim that you eat in paradise, yet the food does not decrease. Anything that is taken from must decrease'. He replied, 'Indeed, it does decrease if there is no supply to replace what has been taken. Please bring me a candle'. Therefore, a candle was brought to him. He lit it and said to those present at the gathering, 'Let everyone get a candle and light it from this one'. They did this, and then he said to them, 'Has the light of my candle been lessened at all? Similarly, Allah's Bounties to the people of paradise do not run out or decrease'.

Among the wonders of paradise is that it contains rivers: a river of milk, a river of honey, a river of wine and a river of water. These rivers have no banks or barriers as they are intertwined, but they do not mix. We should believe that, and should not be surprised because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* informed us about that, 'In paradise, [there is what] no eye [has ever] seen, no ear has [ever] heard and no human heart has ever perceived'.(1) Therefore, why should anybody be surprised?

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his Sahih (2824), Ahmad in his Musnad (2/366), and Abu Na'im in Hilyat Al-Awliya' [2/262] from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra*

However, when Allah *the Most High* describes paradise, He informs us that He is not describing paradise itself, but He only gives us parables. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The example of paradise, which the righteous have been promised...’ (*Muhammad:* 15).

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us this parable in order to make it easier for us to understand, and He negates some of the defects that we have in this worldly life. He says: ‘…is the description of paradise which the righteous are promised, wherein are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey...’ (*Muhammad:* 15).

The water of paradise is not prone to stagnation; it never changes, unlike the water of this worldly life. Wine in the Hereafter brings one pleasure, but it does not intoxicate, while wine in this worldly life intoxicates. Honey in the Hereafter is purified of all blemishes unlike the honey of this worldly life.

The believer from the people of Pharaoh goes on to say:

وَيَٰقَوۡمِ مَا لِيٓ أَدۡعُوكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلنَّجَوٰةِ وَتَدۡعُونَنِيٓ إِلَى ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٤١﴾
تَدۡعُونَنِي لِأَكۡفُرَ بِٱللَّهِ وَأُشۡرِكَ بِهِۦ مَا لَيۡسَ لِي بِهِۦ عِلۡمٞ
وَأَنَا۠ أَدۡعُوكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡغَفَّٰرِ ﴿٤٢﴾

My people, why do I call you to salvation when you call me
to the Fire? [41] You call me to disbelieve in God and to
associate with Him things of which I have no knowledge;
I call you to the Mighty, the Forgiving One [42]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 41- 42)

This is what the believer from the people of Pharaoh said, yet it looks like the speech of prophets. Until now, I cannot find a convincing reason why Pharaoh did not react severely to what the believer said. This shows that Allah *the Most High* is capable of bringing together things that contradict each other; the believer openly talks of matters of faith, yet Allah lets Pharaoh hear the believer’s speech as something else. If this was not the case, Pharaoh will not have kept quiet and permitted him to speak in such a way that refutes the divinity he claimed. Or perhaps, as we said earlier, it is because the inspiration of the Most Merciful cannot be disputed.

Allah's saying: '...how is it for me to...' (*Ghafir:* 41) includes a question–how strange is it for me to call you to salvation and you call me to the fire? The scholars say that what seems good is not really good unless you love it for other people. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, 'None among you (truly) believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.'(1)

Then the Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies the meaning of the verse: '...how is it for me to call you to salvation while you call me to the Fire?...' (*Ghafir:* 41) saying: 'You call me to disbelieve in Allah and to associate with Him things of which I have no knowledge' (*Ghafir:* 42). You encourage me to disbelieve in Allah *the Most High* and attribute partners to Him, while I encourage you to believe in him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّمَا تَدۡعُونَنِيٓ إِلَيۡهِ لَيۡسَ لَهُۥ دَعۡوَةٞ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَلَا فِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ
وَأَنَّ مَرَدَّنَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَأَنَّ ٱلۡمُسۡرِفِينَ هُمۡ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٤٣﴾

There is no doubt that what you call me to serve is not fit to be invoked either in this world or the Hereafter: our return is to God alone, and it will be the rebels who will inhabit the Fire [43] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 43)

The phrase starting with *'la jarama'* (there is no doubt) means that the one that you call me to worship instead of Allah cannot answer supplications because it cannot hear prayers, and even if it could, it will not answer them. Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '…our return is to Allah alone...' (*Ghafir:* 43); our final return is: '...to Allah and it will be the transgressors (*al-musrifeen*) who will inhabit the Fire' (*Ghafir:* 43). Those who deserve it are those who dwell in it.

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon. It is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (13), Muslim in his Sahih (45) in the Book on Faith on the authority of Anas ibn Malik with the wording, 'None among you (truly) believes until he loves for his brother–or he said "for his neighbour"–that which he loves for himself'.*

The word '*al-musrifeen'* (transgressors) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to those who have transgressed and surpassed the limits with regard to oppression and disbelief. The worst of them is he who has transgressed against his own self and has exceeded the bounds when he should have stopped at the limits. Such bounds and limits could be either commandments or prohibitions.

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies this matter in His saying: 'These are the limits of Allah, so do not transgress them...' (*al-Baqara:* 229). This is regarding commandments. As for prohibitions, He says: '...These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them...' (*al-Baqara:* 187).

When it comes to commandments, one must take care not to transgress them. As for prohibitions, the Lord *Glorified is He* does not enjoin us to just not do them; rather, He instructs us not to approach them or the means that lead to them. It is just like if someone grazes (his animals) around [the edge of] a sanctuary, he will soon wind up inside it(1). The believer must respect this caution on the part of his Lord, for He is his Creator, and He knows him better than himself.

When the believer from the people of Pharaoh ended his warning to his people with the words: '...and it will be the transgressors who will inhabit the Fire' (*Ghafir:* 43), he was confronting Pharaoh, who had reached the pinnacle of transgressing against himself. Transgression in religion means turning away from the Call of Allah, ignoring His commandments and opposing His prohibitions. It may also include rejecting belief in Allah completely. But Pharaoh's transgression was greater than all of these forms of transgression, as he claimed to be a god, saying to his people: 'And [Pharaoh] said, "I am your most exalted lord"' (*an-Nazi'at:* 24).

This is the greatest form of transgression.

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(1) *This is part of a Hadith narrated by An-Nu`man ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him. The full Hadith is, 'The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between them are matters that are doubtful (not clear); many of the people do not know whether they are lawful or unlawful. So whoever leaves them to protect his religion and his honour, he will be safe, and whoever falls into something from them, he will soon fall into the unlawful. Just like if someone grazes (his animals) around a sanctuary, he will soon wind up inside it. Indeed, for every king is a sanctuary (pasture), and indeed, Allah's Sanctuary is what He made unlawful' (related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [2051] and Muslim in his Sahih [1599]).*

فَسَتَذْكُرُونَ مَآ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ ۚ وَأُفَوِّضُ أَمْرِىٓ
إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بَصِيرٌۢ بِٱلْعِبَادِ ﴿٤٤﴾

[One Day] you will remember what I am saying to you now, so I commit my case to God: God is well aware of His servants [44] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 44)

Allah *the Most High* continues to relate what the believer said: '[One Day] you will remember what I am saying to you now...' (*Ghafir:* 44). This part of the verse means if they chose to deny him when he was admonishing them, when he wanted to stop them from worshipping Pharaoh, they will remember his advice later, either in this worldly life or in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '...so I commit my case to Allah...' (*Ghafir:* 44). This means that he will resort to Allah *the Most High* Who will protect him. This indicates that his speech will make Pharaoh angry, and will cause Pharaoh to take revenge from him, but without any direct confrontation in order not to stir the people against him (Pharaoh). Thus, the believer said what is mentioned in this verse. The verse also means that if he experienced any trouble because of his explanation of Allah's Religion and defending his Prophet Musa (Moses), he hoped that Allah will reward him for his deeds with that which will benefit him in the Hereafter. The verse ends with: '...Allah is well aware of His slaves' (*Ghafir:* 44).

The result of committing himself to Allah was:

فَوَقَىٰهُ ٱللَّهُ سَيِّـَٔاتِ مَا مَكَرُوا۟ ۖ وَحَاقَ بِـَٔالِ فِرْعَوْنَ سُوٓءُ ٱلْعَذَابِ ﴿٤٥﴾
ٱلنَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا وَعَشِيًّا ۖ وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوٓا۟ ءَالَ
فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ ٱلْعَذَابِ ﴿٤٦﴾

So God saved him from the harm they planned. A terrible punishment engulfed Pharaoh's people [45] They will be brought before the Fire morning and evening. On the Day the Hour comes, it will be said, 'Throw Pharaoh's people into the worst torment' [46] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 45 - 46)

The Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...' (*Ghafir:* 45). This means that he was safe, which is a matter that makes one amazed because this man had actually confronted Pharaoh. However, no ill consequences happened to him and Pharaoh's attempts to take revenge did him no harm. This is because Allah *the Most High* protected him: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...' (*Ghafir:* 45). This is because an action should be considered in relation to the one who performed it, as it should be judged, whether good or bad, according to the one who performs it.

Imagine that your child came in with blood dripping from his face. The first question you will ask him is: 'Who did this to you?' You will not be as worried about the blood as you will be about the one who caused this to happen to him. If he said to you, 'Uncle so-and-so hit me', you will say to him, 'You must have done something that deserves punishment, and that is why he hit you'. However, if he said, 'So-and-so's son hit me', you may say, 'Indeed, he dislikes us…etc.' and cause a great commotion.

Therefore, every action is judged in accordance with who does it, and your reaction depends on your knowledge of the one who did it. This understanding clears up an issue relevant to the Night Journey and Ascension to Heaven and explains Allah's saying: 'Exalted is He Who took His slave by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* to *Al-Masjid Al- Aqsa*, whose surroundings We have blessed...' (*al-Isra':* 1). As long as the one who took His slave on the Night Journey was Allah, there is nothing strange about this, because the deed is appropriate to the one who performs it. The Lord *Glorified is He* is far above time, place, and any similarity to the created beings. If Allah had said, 'Muhammad journeyed' there will have been much debate about this matter. But as Allah *the Most High* took him on the night journey, there is nothing amazing about this. If one said, 'I climbed to the top of the Himalaya with my baby son', will someone ask you, 'How did your son climb to the top of the Himalaya?'

If a person is protected by the Lord, then no tyrant or oppressor can harm him. This protection came as an answer and response to his committing his case to Allah. The believer said: '...so I commit my case to Allah...' (*Ghafir:* 44), and the response came immediately: 'So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...' (*Ghafir:* 45).

Imam Ja`far As-Sadiq[1] derived some subtle points and wisdoms from this verse. He said: ‘I wonder at the one who becomes afraid yet does not resort to Allah’s saying: ‘...so I commit my case to Allah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 173), as Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says after it: ‘So Allah saved him from the harm they planned...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 174)’. ‘I wonder at the one who seeks worldly pleasures and does not resort to Allah’s saying: ‘...What Allah willed [has occurred]; there is no power except in Allah...’ (*al-Kahf:* 39), as Allah *Glorified is He* says after it: ‘Then may be my Lord will give me [something] better than your garden...’ (*al-Kahf:* 40).

‘I wonder at the one who becomes grieved and does not resort to what Yunus (Jonah) said, which Allah relates: ‘...There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I was one of those who did wrong’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 87) as Allah *the Most High* says after it: ‘So We responded to him and saved him from the distress. And thus do We save the believers’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 88) which means this was not limited to Yunus (Jonah) alone’.

These are some of the subtle points of the Book of Allah. Whoever reads it habitually will not be afflicted by any harm, and Allah will save and protect him from fear, conspiracies, poverty, and sorrow.

Allah *Glorified is He* responded to this believer by not just protecting him from his enemy, but by reversing the roles for the troubles to afflict the believer’s enemy. Reflect on Allah’s saying: ‘So Allah saved him from the harm they planned. But a terrible punishment engulfed Pharaoh’s people’ (*Ghafir:* 45), that is, they were afflicted with torment during the worldly life before being punished in the Hereafter. Man has three stages in his life: the worldly life that we are living right now, the life after death until we are resurrected on the Day of Judgement, and life after the Resurrection.

Allah the Glorified and Exalted says: ‘...A terrible punishment engulfed Pharaoh’s people’ (*Ghafir:* 45). The punishment will be inflicted on them in

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(1) *He was Ja’far ibn Muhammad Al-Baqir ibn `Ali Zayn Al-‘Abidin ibn Al-Hasan ibn bint Rasul Allah Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi, Abu ‘Abdullah, known as As-Sadiq. He was one of the greatest Tabi’un (Followers, the generation after the Companions of the Prophet). He was born in 80 AH and passed away in Medina in 148 AH. Both Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik learnt knowledge from him. He was very courageous in the face of the Abbasid caliphs (Al-A’lam by Az-Zirikli 2/126).*

this worldly life, before the Afterlife and the Judgement. Allah's saying: 'They will be brought before the Fire morning and evening' (*Ghafir:* 46). Bringing people before the hellfire is before the Judgement because Allah *the Most High* says after it: '...And on the Day the Hour comes, it will be said, "Throw Pharaoh's people into the worst torment"' (*Ghafir:* 46).

Are people brought before the hellfire in the worldly life or in the life after death? Given that they do not see the hellfire during this worldly life, what is referred to here is seeing it in the life after death, which is called the 'punishment of the grave'. Then, they are put into the hellfire after the Resurrection and Judgement.

Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* has combined for the transgressors punishment in this worldly life with punishment in the life after death, and a more severe and grievous punishment in the Hereafter.

Allah's saying: '...terrible punishment…' (*Ghafir:* 46) also refers to the punishment of the grave, as it contains severe suffering, yet the suffering of the Hellfire is more severe; Allah protect us all from this suffering.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَإِذْ يَتَحَآجُّونَ فِى ٱلنَّارِ فَيَقُولُ ٱلضُّعَفَٰٓؤُاْ لِلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَكْبَرُوٓاْ إِنَّا كُنَّا
لَكُمْ تَبَعًا فَهَلْ أَنتُم مُّغْنُونَ عَنَّا نَصِيبًا مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٤٧﴾ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱسْتَكْبَرُوٓاْ إِنَّا كُلٌّ فِيهَآ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَدْ حَكَمَ بَيْنَ ٱلْعِبَادِ ﴿٤٨﴾

In the Fire they will quarrel with one another: the weak will say to the haughty, 'We were your followers, so can you now relieve us from some share of the Fire?' [47] But they will say, 'We are all in this together. God has judged between His creatures'[48] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 47 - 48)

The Arabic word '*yatahajoon*' means that they will quarrel with one another, each trying to cast the responsibility on the other. The weak will tell their leaders that they imitated and followed their footsteps, so: '...can you now relieve us from some share of the Fire?' (*Ghafir:* 47) which means will you not defend us, protect us from the punishment of the hellfire, or bear the burden of our sins?

The Quran gives us many examples of the contentions and arguments that will take place on the Day of Judgement; arguments between the believers and the disbelievers and between the strong leaders and their weak followers. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Here they are–those who [you] argue on their behalf in [this] worldly life. But who will argue with Allah for them on the Day of Resurrection, or who will [then] represent them?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 109)

Those who were followed will then reply: ‘...Those who had been arrogant will say, "Indeed, all [of us] are in it. Indeed, Allah has judged between the slaves"’ (*Ghafir:* 48). As Allah *the Most High* has judged between his creatures, then the matter is settled and no one can repel His Judgement.

How could they possibly defend them when they were admitted into the hellfire first? The Lord *Glorified is He* said in another verse: ‘Then, We will surely extract from every sect those of them who were worst against the Most Merciful in insolence’ (*Maryam:* 69). Allah *Glorified is He* said about Pharaoh: ‘He will precede his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them into the Fire; and wretched is the place to which they are led’ (*Hud:* 98).

Allah’s saying: ‘He will precede his people...’ (*Hud:* 98) means that he precedes them to the hellfire in order to destroy any hope of salvation they may have. If they were admitted to the hellfire first, they will believe that their leader will come and save them from this punishment. However, as their leaders preceded them to the hellfire, they will despair. Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ فِي ٱلنَّارِ لِخَزَنَةِ جَهَنَّمَ ٱدۡعُواْ رَبَّكُمۡ يُخَفِّفۡ عَنَّا يَوۡمٗا
مِّنَ ٱلۡعَذَابِ ﴿٤٩﴾ قَالُوٓاْ أَوَلَمۡ تَكُ تَأۡتِيكُمۡ رُسُلُكُم بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِۖ
قَالُواْ بَلَىٰۚ قَالُواْ فَٱدۡعُواْۗ وَمَا دُعَٰٓؤُاْ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَٰلٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

Those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, ‘Ask your Lord to lessen our suffering for one day’ [49] But they will say, ‘Did your messengers not come to you with clear evidence of the truth?’ They will say, ‘Yes they did,’ and the keeper will say, ‘You can plead, then, but the pleas of disbelievers will always be in vain’ [50] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 49 - 50)

We understand from Allah’s saying concerning the disbelievers: ‘...Ask your Lord to lessen our suffering for one day’ (*Ghafir:* 49) that they understood that they are not worthy to supplicate Allah or call on Him directly. Hence, they call the angels, who replied: ‘Did your Messengers not come to you with clear evidence of the Truth?...’ (*Ghafir:* 50) This means that Messengers came to them with proofs that confirmed their truthfulness. The Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘They will say, “Yes”...’ (*Ghafir:* 50). This means that they will confirm that Messengers came to them with proofs. Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...You can plead, then, but the pleas of disbelievers will always be in vain’ (*Ghafir:* 50). Their pleas are useless and will not benefit them. This verse contains rebuke and ridicule of the disbelievers.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

قَالُوٓا۟ أَوَلَمْ تَكُ تَأْتِيكُمْ رُسُلُكُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتِ ۖ قَالُوا۟ بَلَىٰ ۚ قَالُوا۟ فَٱدْعُوا۟ ۗ وَمَا دُعَـٰٓؤُا۟
ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ إِلَّا فِى ضَلَـٰلٍ ﴿٥٠﴾ إِنَّا لَنَنصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ
يَقُومُ ٱلْأَشْهَـٰدُ ﴿٥١﴾ يَوْمَ لَا يَنفَعُ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ مَعْذِرَتُهُمْ ۖ وَلَهُمُ ٱللَّعْنَةُ وَلَهُمْ سُوٓءُ ٱلدَّارِ ﴿٥٢﴾

We support Our messengers and the believers, in the present life and on the Day when witnesses arise [51] On the Day when excuses will not profit the evildoers, their fate will be rejection and they will have the worst of homes [52]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 51-52)

This is Allah’s Promise to support His Messengers and the believers. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And Our Word has already preceded for Our slaves, the Messengers. [That] indeed, they will be those who are given victory, And [that] indeed, Our soldiers will be those who overcome’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173). This is why we say that if you see that some Muslims are defeated, you should know that they have not fulfilled the conditions for victory. Consequently, they should suffer from the results of their action in the worldly life because Allah’s Way of dealing with His slaves never changes.

Allah’s saying: ‘We support Our Messengers and the believers, in the present life and on the Day when witnesses arise’ (*Ghafir:* 51) comes after the believer from the people of Pharaoh defended Musa (Moses), calling the people to believe in Allah, and after he spoke the Truth openly in front of Pharaoh. The meaning of this verse is that Allah *the Most High* did not send a Messenger with a new revelation to guide the deluded people and then forsake him.

Nevertheless, Allah *Glorified is He* may leave the call to Truth to be resisted and opposed by some people at its beginnings in order to test those who call to His Path, for only the strong and the brave people stand firm. This is because they will undertake this mission in order to call others towards Allah throughout the whole world, and for this reason it is not strange that they should be tested and that their faith and perseverance upon the principles of religion should be tested.

This meaning applies to the earlier believers who carried the banner of Islam with Prophet Muhammad; they emigrated to Ethiopia and then to Medina. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried (*yoftanoon*)?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 2) The Arabic word '*fitnah*', from which '*yoftanoon*' comes from, means exposing people to troubles and tribulations which can only be borne by people with strong belief who put their trust in Allah and are sure that the Truth will overcome and gain victory. The true believer is the one who sees that reward and punishment in the Afterlife is something obvious, with no doubt. This is because even if a man may cheat others, he will never cheat himself.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* asked Hudhayfa(1), 'How are you this morning, Hudhayfa', he replied, 'I woke up a true believer in Allah'. (The word 'true' here is of great import, as Prophet Muhammad asked him about it). The Prophet asked, 'And what is true about your faith?' He said, 'My soul has renounced this world, and now gold and earth have become equal to me. It is as if I am looking at the people of paradise rejoicing and the people of the hellfire suffering'. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* replied, 'You have realised the Truth, so adhere to it'.(2)

Allah's saying: '...in the present life...' (*Ghafir:* 51) means that He will give the believers victory in the present life by making the Truth victorious over the falsehood of their enemies. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned' (*Ghafir:* 77).

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(1) *He was Hudhayfa ibn Hasl Al-Yaman ibn Jabir Al-`Absi, a Companion who was a courageous and victorious governor. He knew Prophet Muhammad's opinion about the hypocrites. He passed away in Al-Mada'in 36 AH. He related 225 Hadiths which are mentioned in the books of Hadith (Al-A'lam by Az-Zirikli 2/171).*

(2) *Al-Haythami mentioned it in Majma' Az-Zawa'id (1/57) and he ascribes it to At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir on the authority of Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari, not Hudhayfa. Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalany attributed it to Ibn Al-Mubarak in Az-Zuhd (see: Al-Isaba fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba [1/343]).*

Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that there will be numerous witnesses against man in the Hereafter: '...when witnesses (*ash-had*) arise' (*Ghafir:* 51). The word '*ash-had'* is the plural of *'shuhud'* (which is already plural in Arabic). This means there will be a great number of witnesses on that Day.

The prophets and Messengers will bear witness: '[Be warned of] the Day when Allah will assemble the Messengers and say, "What was the response you received?" They will say, "We have no knowledge. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 109). The believers will bear witness that they delivered the Message to those who came after them: '...in this [revelation], that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people....' (*al-Hajj:* 78). In addition, man's limbs will bear witness against him.

Similarly, each man's guardian angels will bear witness against him. The martyrs who fought until they were killed will bear witness. This is because if life has deceived man, he keeps working for a comfortable life and does not want to die. But a martyr wants death to take him to what is better than what he will leave behind; for this reason, the Lord *the Most High* rewards him.

If a man volunteers to fight in the cause of Allah, knowing that he will die, Allah *the Most High* will reward him by letting him be alive with Him because he has died in His cause. Hence, we said regarding the philosophy of martyrdom when we spoke of Hamza ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib(1) that martyrdom protects one from death, as when anyone gives precedence to death over life and becomes a martyr, they will be alive with Allah. Your worldly life will be joined with your life with Allah and then your life after the Resurrection. This indicates that the martyr never really dies.

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(1) *He was Hamza ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib, Prophet Muhammad's uncle. He was born 54 years before the Hijra and was martyred at the Battle of Uhud in 3 AH at the age of 57. He immigrated to Medina and fought at the Battles of Badr and Uhud (Al-A'lam 2/278).*

O Hamza, uncle of the elected Messenger, you are the master,
Of all martyrs on earth, all without exception,
It is enough that martyrdom protects you,
From death, by linking the two lives with the other life after Resurrection

Thus, it seems that whoever sacrifices his life for Allah has presented it as a gift to Allah and in order to boost His Religion. For this reason, Allah *the Most High* will reward him by protecting him from death due to his martyrdom.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘On the Day when excuses will not profit the evildoers...’ (*Ghafir:* 52). This means that if they apologise, their apologies will not be accepted from them. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Nor will it be permitted for them to make an excuse’ (*al-Mursalat:* 36). It seems that there are different situations; in one verse they apologise saying: ‘...O our Lord! Take us out; we will do good deeds other than those which we used to do...’ (*Fatir:* 37). In another verse, they are not permitted to apologise: ‘...their fate will be rejection and they will have the worst of homes’ (*Ghafir:* 52).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the progression of Musa’s (Moses) Message:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْهُدَىٰ وَأَوْرَثْنَا بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ ﴿٥٣﴾
هُدًى وَذِكْرَىٰ لِأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿٥٤﴾

We gave Moses guidance and passed down the Scripture to the Children of Israel [53] as a guide and a reminder to people of understanding [54] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 53 - 54)

The word ‘*al-huda’* (guide) means showing someone the path that leads to a beneficial goal, as Allah *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are the successful...’ (*al-Baqara:* 5). The goal of religion is not to put burdens upon you or to make things difficult for you. Rather, it has come as a mercy and guidance that benefits you.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...We caused the children of Israel to inherit the Scripture (*al-kitab*)’ (*Ghafir:* 53). The word ‘*al-kitab’* (Scripture) refers to the Torah, the Psalms and the Injil (Bible).

All of these Scriptures are: '…a guide and a reminder (*dhikra*) to people of understanding' (*Ghafir:* 54). The word '*dhikra*' means a reminder to a person because if he sticks to his innate nature without any corrupting influences affecting him, the protection he gained from the old covenant (1): 'Am I not your Lord?...' (*al-A'raf:* 172) will persist. However, he has forgotten the covenant and deviated from the straight path, as man is forgetful by nature. Thus, the objective behind sending Messengers is to remind people of the= primordial covenant. The word '*al-albab*' (people of understanding) refers to reflective intellects.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَٱصۡبِرۡ إِنَّ وَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقّٞ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡ لِذَنۢبِكَ
وَسَبِّحۡ بِحَمۡدِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلۡعَشِيِّ وَٱلۡإِبۡكَٰرِ ٥٥

So be patient, Prophet, for what God has promised is sure to come. Ask forgiveness for your sins; praise your Lord morning and evening [55] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 55)

The phrase: 'So be patient...' (*Ghafir:* 55) indicates that Allah addressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* with this phrase during hard times, about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and were shaken until [even their] Messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the help of Allah?" Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near' (*al-Baqara:* 214).

Allah *the Most High* then says: '...the promise (*wa'd*) of Allah is sure to happen...' (*Ghafir:* 55). The word *'wa`d'* (promise) means promising something good before it takes place; and Allah's Promise is true and sure to happen. If you promise somebody, you give them glad tidings of happiness, blessings, and good, but are you able to guarantee that you will fulfil your promise? No, perhaps you will die before you fulfil your promise, or perhaps your ability to fulfil it will be weakened and you will find yourself unable to fulfil your promise. But if the promise comes from Allah, the Self-Subsisting and the Everlasting, it is a true promise that will certainly come true.

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(1) This is the first covenant which Allah took from the children of Adam. He *Glorified is He* says about it: 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness against themselves [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified". [This] lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware"' (*al-A'raf:* 172). Allah *the Most High* made them bear witness against themselves that Allah is their Lord and there is no god except Him, a fact which they should be convinced of innately.

For this reason, Allah *the Most High* teaches us not to confirm promises decisively because our circumstances change just as that of all created beings change. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow", except [when adding], "If Allah wills"’ (*al-Kahf:* 24).

Making your fulfilment of the promise conditional upon His Will frees you from being accused of lying if you do not fulfil your promise. If you promise decisively to do something, are you sure that you will be able to fulfil your promise? Do you control time or the ability to fulfil your promise? You cannot guarantee the continued existence of any of the means. Therefore say, ‘If Allah wills’, to free yourself from being accused of lying if you cannot fulfil your promise.

Allah’s saying: ‘...Ask forgiveness for your sins...’ (*Ghafir:* 55) means seek pardon from Allah. Does the phrase, ‘...for your sins...’ (*Ghafir:* 55) mean that Prophet Muhammad has committed some sins? Scholars said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was a human being who received Revelation. As a human being, he gave opinions regarding matters about which he had received no Revelation from Allah. Even if his opinion was correct, Allah’s saying is more correct.

Thus, Allah corrects him, saying: ‘...Ask forgiveness for your sins...’ (*Ghafir:* 55). From what was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* commanded to seek forgiveness? He was commanded to seek forgiveness from finding Allah slow, which is referred to in Allah’s saying: ‘...until [even their] Messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the Help of Allah?..."’ (*al-Baqara:* 214) The help was coming, and that is why they should not have been in a hurry.

Some verses in the Quran affirm that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did things for which he was blamed, and Allah corrected what he did. How was Prophet Muhammad blamed? Ponder on Allah’s saying: ‘May

Allah pardon you, [O Muhammad]; why did you give them permission [to remain behind]?...' (*at-Tawba:* 43) The Lord *the Most High* says He has pardoned Prophet Muhammad before He talked about blaming him(1).

Why did Prophet Muhammad give permission to those people? Scholars said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* thought that if the person seeking permission was truthful, then there is no problem with pardoning him as he was excused; but if this person was untruthful regarding his excuses, then his absence is better than his presence with the Muslims. Allah says: 'Had they gone forth with you, they will not have increased you except in confusion, and they will have been active among you...' (*at-Tawba:* 47).

We know that Allah blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in the following verse: 'Why did you give them permission [to remain behind]?...' (*at-Tawba:* 43) from Prophet Muhammad himself. Had the Prophet not informed us, we will not have known of it. He found no problem with being blamed by Allah or his choice being corrected by Allah.

We have clarified this point when discussing the issue of the adoption of a child that took place when Prophet Muhammad adopted Zayd ibn Haritha. When Allah willed to abolish the custom of the adoption of children, He took Prophet Muhammad's adoption of Zayd ibn Haritha as an example for this new ruling.

Zayd was Khadija's slave whom she gave to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When Zayd's family found out that he was in Mecca with Prophet Muhammad, they came to seek Prophet Muhammad's permission to take him. At that time, the Prophet told Zayd to choose between staying with him or going with his family, but Zayd chose to stay with him. Consequently, Prophet Muhammad wanted to honour Zayd for standing by him and preferring to stay in his company, and this is why he adopted him. Since that day, Zayd was known as Zayd ibn Muhammad.

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(1) *Ibn Abu Hatim related this with his chain of narration from Mis'ar from 'Awn who said, 'Have you heard blame more gentle than this? It entails pardoning before blaming.' Muwarraq Al-'Ajali and others mentioned the same meaning (Tafsir Ibn Kathir 2/360). Mujahid said, 'This verse was revealed concerning some people who sought permission from Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to stay behind and not go to perform Jihad (striving for the cause of Allah). They held the view in their minds that whether Prophet Muhammad gave them permission or not, they will stay behind'. This means that they will not join them in Jihad (striving in the Cause of Allah) in any case. Allah blamed Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for giving them permission, as he should have waited until the truthful one became distinct from the liar.*

However, Allah wanted to abolish this practice and prohibit the adoption of children, and for this reason He revealed: ‘Call them by [the names of] their fathers; it is more just in the sight of Allah. But if you do not know their fathers, then they are [still] your brothers in religion and those entrusted to you...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 5).

His saying: ‘...more just in the sight of Allah...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 5) means that what the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did was just, but Allah’s Judgement is more just. Did this correction anger Prophet Muhammad? No, it did not. The proof is that he *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is the one who informed us of this situation. Had Prophet Muhammad hidden it, we will never have known about it.

Another example when Allah blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* is His saying about the captives taken after the Battle of Badr: ‘It is not for a prophet to have captives [of war] until he inflicts a massacre [upon Allah's enemies] in the land...’ (*al-Anfal:* 67), when they differed(1) about taking ransoms for the captives. Allah blamed His Messenger [Muhammad] with this verse, but did the ruling change after it? No, it remained the same. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘If not for a previous decree from Allah, you will have been touched for what you took by a great punishment' (*al-Anfal:* 68).

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(1) *This happened on the Day of Badr. Ibn Mas’ud said that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘What is your opinion about these captives?’ Abu Bakr said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they are your people and your family, keep them alive and ask them to repent, perhaps Allah will forgive them’. ‘Umar said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, they belied you and caused you to leave Mecca; let me cut their heads off’. Ibn Rawaha said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, you are in a valley that contains much firewood. Therefore, set it on fire and throw them into it’. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him remained silent and did not reply at all. He went into his room and then came out to them and said, ‘Allah may soften men’s hearts until they become softer than milk, and He may harden men’s hearts until they become harder than rocks... ’. Then he said, ‘You are needy, so not one of them will be freed without a ransom, or their heads will be cut off’. Then Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse reproaching Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him for accepting ransoms.*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* could have denied this matter, especially when the ruling did not change. However, we know that Allah reproached Prophet Mohammad only through the Prophet himself. The one who reflects on how Allah reproached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* will find that either He does this for Prophet Muhammad's interest or because the Prophet's judgment was not correct, which is the case of the above-mentioned verse.

An example of blaming Prophet Muhammad for his own interest is Allah's saying: 'O Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you, seeking the approval of your wives?' (*at-Tahrim:* 1) An example from life with the same meaning is when a father blames his son for studying too much or over-exerting himself. In this verse, Allah blames His Messenger [Muhammad] because he has put himself into difficulties and oppressed himself in order to please his wives.

Allah also blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* regarding the blind man(1), as Allah says: 'The Prophet frowned and turned away, Because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting]. But what will make you perceive [O Muhammad], that perhaps he might be purified. Or be reminded and the remembrance will benefit him? As for he who thinks himself without need, to him you give attention, Though there is upon you [no blame] if he will not be purified. But as for he who came to you striving [for knowledge], While he fears [Allah]; From him you are distracted' (*'Abasa:* 1-10).

The blame in these verses is because he has hurt himself by leaving a blind man and turning away from him because he was a believer, going instead to the leaders of the disbelievers to call them to Allah, for he felt that calling them to Allah should be given precedence.

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(1) *He was 'Amr ibn Al-Qays ibn Za'idah ibn Al-Asam (known as Ibn Umm Maktum), a blind yet courageous Companion. He embraced Islam in Mecca and emigrated to Medina after the Battle of Badr. He used to announce the call to prayer in Medina along with Bilal. He attended the Battle of Qadisiyya, in which he carried a black flag and fought, despite being blind. Afterwards, he returned to Medina and died there shortly before the death of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab in 22 AH (Al-A'lam by Az-Zirikli 5/83).*

Some scholars(1) have taken Allah’s saying: ‘...Ask forgiveness for your sins...’ (*Ghafir:* 55) as a proof that the prophets are not infallible. Others said that the good deeds of the righteous are the bad deeds of the elect. It was related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said in his supplications, ‘O Allah, I seek refuge in You from every deed I did for Your sake but was mixed with something that was not for Your sake’.(2)

Some scholars have another view concerning the following verse: ‘...Ask forgiveness for your sins...’ (*Ghafir:* 55). They said that it does not necessarily mean that Prophet Muhammad actually sinned, but it means: ‘If you sin, then seek forgiveness’. This meaning is indicated by the Lord’s saying: ‘O Prophet, fear Allah...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 1). Does this mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did not fear Allah? No, it is a command for him to persist in fearing Allah. It does not mean that he deviated from the instructions of Allah and this is why Allah ordered him to fear Him. It is not like advising a deviant person to fear Allah, and stop deviating from Allah’s Religious Instructions and in this way protect himself from Allah’s Wrath.

It has become clear that the command in Allah’s saying: ‘...Ask forgiveness for your sins...’ (*Ghafir:* 55) is a command pertaining to acts of worship, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Our Lord, and grant us what You promised us through Your Messengers...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 194). This is a commandment requiring unqualified obedience because we say, ‘Grant us’ even though He *Glorified is He* has promised His Messengers this. That is, it is going to happen anyway.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentioned in his Exegesis several meanings regarding Allah’s saying, ‘...Ask forgiveness for your sins...’ (Ghafir: 55):*
- *Seek forgiveness for the sins of your people–the ‘mudaf’ (people) was elided and the ‘mudaf ilaih’ (sins) was put in its place.*
- *Seek forgiveness for your own sins–according to those who consider it possible for Prophets to commit minor sins.*
- *Those who do not consider it possible for Prophets to commit even minor sins say that this is a command involving worshipping Allah by supplicating Him.*
- *Seek forgiveness for any sins that you committed before prophethood.*

(2) *This was mentioned by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in his book ‘Jami’ Al-‘Ulum wal Hikam’ (pg. 27) as the supplication of Mutraf ibn ‘Abdullah. He said, ‘O Allah, I seek Your forgiveness for what I have repented from but then returned to. I seek Your forgiveness from that which I took upon myself for Your sake but then have not fulfilled, and I seek forgiveness from that which I claimed that it is for Your sake but my heart (intention) became mixed with what You know’.*

We will ask those who maintain that the Messengers may sin, ‘Did Allah strip them of their Prophecy because they fell into sin, or did he keep them as Messengers? Of course, He kept them as Messengers. Moreover, what about the fact that the Messenger did not act differently from the Message he brought?’

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Praise your Lord evening (*al-‘ashiy*) and morning (*‘al-ibkar*)’ (*Ghafir:* 55). The word *‘al-‘ashiy’* (evening), which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, refers to the time between noon and the end of the day, whereas *‘al-ibkar’* (morning) refers to the time between the dawn and mid-morning. Thus, it means that Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to praise his Lord *the Most High* on an ongoing basis. While this command is for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and the believers who are with him in the morning and afternoon, it is also a command for all people, in all times and places because of the all-encompassing nature of his Message.

Thus, morning and afternoon here spread through all times and places. Morning and afternoon is appropriate to each one’s time and place. Clearly, if we take into account the differences in time from one place to another, we will find that Allah will be glorified during all times and places, continuously.

Allah’s saying: ‘...praise your Lord evening and morning...’ (*Ghafir:* 55) means glorification and praise together. Glorification involves regarding Allah to be too great and exalted to have any errors; and as Allah is too exalted to have any errors, you should praise the One you believe in for being the Lord Who is free from any faults.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُجَٰدِلُونَ فِىٓ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَٰنٍ أَتَىٰهُمْ ۙ إِن فِى صُدُورِهِمْ إِلَّا
كِبْرٌ مَّا هُم بِبَٰلِغِيهِ ۚ فَٱسْتَعِذْ بِٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْبَصِيرُ ﴿٥٦﴾

As for those who, with no authority to do so, dispute God’s messages, there is nothing in their hearts but a thirst for a greatness they will never attain. Seek refuge in God, for He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing [56] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 56)

The word *‘al-jadal’* means argument, discussion, and refutation. This meaning is derived from the phrase *‘jadl al-habal’* meaning to twist a rope or to twist threads together for them to intertwine with each other to make a rope. Thus, the word *'al-jadl'* involves strengthening one opinion with another.

There are different types of arguments: constructive arguments that aim at reaching the Truth, and negative arguments that have no benefit. Constructive arguments use authoritative proofs and evidences, while negative arguments are based on falsehood, without any authoritative proof. Authority can involve physical strength that forces somebody to do something or it can involve proofs and persuasion. Subjugation involves forcing people to do something unwillingly, whereas authoritative proofs make one do things willingly.

Thus, the enemy of Allah, Satan, will say: '...when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves...' (*Ibrahim:* 22). This means that Satan had no coercive authority to force people to disobey Allah, and had no persuasive proof either to persuade them to disobey.

In fact, we notice that in the verse relevant to the prostration to Adam, Allah asks: '...what prevented you from prostrating...' (*Sad:* 75), but in another verse, Allah *the Most High* asks Satan: '...What has kept you from not prostrating...' (*al-A'raf:* 12)? One verse is in the positive and the other in the negative. It means, 'Did you intend to prostrate but some external power prevented you from prostrating, or did someone convince you not to prostrate, and hence you did not prostrate out of conviction?'

To continue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...the signs of Allah...' (*Ghafir:* 56). We said before that the signs of Allah are divided into three types:

First: the signs that prove the existence and marvellous creation of Allah, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, air, water, etc.

Second: the miracles that Allah *the Most High* grants to His Messengers to prove their truthfulness in conveying Messages from Allah.

Third: the verses of the Gracious Quran that bear Allah's Rulings and Religious Instructions for man.

About which of these types are they arguing? The scholars said that these people argued about Allah's Miracles and Rulings, but that there is no scope for arguing about Allah's signs in creation.

Next, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...with no authority to do so...' (*Ghafir:* 56). Does it mean that there are arguments against Allah's signs based on evidence? Scholars said that this is not the case, but the meaning is that there can be no arguing about Allah's signs. The issue is that: '...there is nothing in their hearts but a thirst for greatness...' (*Ghafir:* 56). This is the cause and source of their arguing over Allah's signs. Their arrogance prevents them from accepting the Truth and from following a man from amongst them who was inferior to them, as they thought.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies in some verses that they believed in the Quran, but their opposition was to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as an individual conveying Allah's Message. This is because he was one of the common folk, not one of the leaders or the wealthy people. Allah mentions the disbelievers saying: '… "Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) In another verse, they deny everything: 'And [remember] when they said, "O Allah , if this should be the Truth from You, then rain down on us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment"' (*al-Anfal:* 32). The sound logic dictates that they should say, 'Then guide us to it'. Their saying indicates that they hated the religion as a whole because their hearts were busy with an opposing matter: ascribing divinity to others beside Allah and worshipping idols, the worship which they inherited and were accustomed to. If a person is preoccupied with falsehood, he cannot be guided to the Truth until the falsehood is extricated from his heart.

For this reason, Allah *the Most High* clarifies that matters of belief should not be discussed in public; rather, one should reflect upon them on his own. If participation is necessary, then one may discuss them with only one person because when you sit on your own or with one person the discussion can be fruitful and the disagreement does not become severe. Accordingly, you are more likely to arrive at the Truth. If one is defeated, he is not defeated in front of a crowd and as a result he will not be stubborn or arrogant, and he will come back to the Truth without trouble.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, "I only advise you of one [thing]–that you stand for Allah, [seeking Truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought; there is no madness in your companion...’ (*Saba’:* 46). This means: do not discuss matters of belief collectively because there is hardly any control over discussions among a group of people, and collective thinking leads to chaos and confusion. In fact, a person should think about matters of belief on his own, not to be affected by passions.

Allah’s saying: ‘There is nothing in their hearts but conceit...’ (*Ghafir:* 56) means that their hearts are arrogant towards the Truth that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* brought. It prevented them from listening to Prophet Muhammad, and led them to consider themselves superior to him. This is because they were the leaders of their society, and if they listened to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and obeyed him, it will make them his followers.

It is well known that Quraysh was the dominant tribe amongst the Arabs, and it was this position that made them able to travel every summer and winter for trade without being opposed by anyone. This is because all the Arab tribes came to Quraysh in Mecca during the pilgrimage season and they were all under their protection as their guests. It was the Sacred House and pilgrimage that gave Quraysh their special standing and status. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘For the accustomed security of the Quraysh. Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer, Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them [saving them] from hunger and made them safe [saving them] from fear’ (*Quraysh:* 1-4). Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Have they not seen that We made [Mecca] a safe sanctuary, while people are being taken away all around them?...’ (*al-Qasas:* 67)

The proof is that when they saw that their idols gave them no commandments and charged them with no responsibilities, they were satisfied with them and worshipped them instead of Allah. When they wanted a place to honour these idols, they found nowhere better than around the *Ka’ba*. As a result, they considered the *Ka’ba* as sacred despite their disbelief in Allah.

This thirst for greatness which prevented them from accepting the Truth is the very thirst which Allah *Glorified is He* assures: ‘...they will never attain’ (*Ghafir:* 56). This means that they do not have the prerequisites to claim greatness. Their greatness is not authentic, since authentic greatness means having some subjectively inherent characteristics, rather than ephemeral ones that come and go. Hence, it is a false façade, just as the one who sees himself great because of his health, wealth, or power.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Seek refuge in Allah...’ (*Ghafir:* 56) because when you seek refuge in Allah when you confront something beyond your material power, you do not confront it with empty hands; rather, you turn to your Lord *the Most High* and say to Him that this issue has overwhelmed you and surpassed your abilities, and you ask Him to lift it off your shoulders. That is why Allah *the Most High* tells us He is the One: ‘Who responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him’ (*an-Naml:* 62).

Therefore, when your power runs down you should turn to the Ultimate Causer: ‘...for He is the All Hearing, the All-Seeing’ (*Ghafir:* 56). Hearing and seeing are two Perfect Attributes of Allah. Every movement, every limb of man performs deeds; the tongue, the hands and the feet. These deeds are divided into two types: actions and words. Our words, which are an act of the tongue, constitute part of any deed, while the deeds of the rest of the limbs are called actions.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do’ (*as-Saff:* 2) mentioning both words and actions, which together form our deeds. Hearing is applicable for what words are said and seeing is applicable for what action is done. The Lord *the Most High* clarifies the need to seek refuge: ‘Seek refuge in Allah...’ (*Ghafir:* 56) to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* because Allah’s Hearing covers everything spoken, and His Seeing covers everything done.

لَخَلْقُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ
ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ٥٧

The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by
far than the creation of mankind, though most
people do not know it [57] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 57)

The letter *‘lam’* (indeed) in this verse is indicative of an oath which is being sworn. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* says that by His Might and Power: Indeed, the creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind' (*Ghafir:* 57). How is this so? The scholars say that in this world people have lives of different lengths, one lives for a moment, another for an hour, and yet another for a hundred years, or even as long as Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*.

But, how does our short life compare to the lifetime of the sun even though it was created for us? Can the life of the servant be longer than the one it serves? Thus, we must have another life that lasts even longer than that of the sun and Allah's other creations that serve us, and this can only be in the Afterlife. Scholars say that one's life has a length which is known only to Allah, and it has a width which may outdistance its length. Similarly, it has a size and a depth, yet its width can extend to be the largest dimension. This means that we can broaden the circle of our actions to benefit the society and ourselves; leaving a legacy after our death. That way, we will be adding lives and lives to our short life!

That is also why it is said that people's worlds are bound by their aspirations. For one man his world is his own self–he wants everything for himself and he helps no one and this is selfishness. For another man his world may be his family, for another his tribe, his country, or yet the whole world. The greater the aspiration, the greater the scope of the world and the more our lot increases.

When we say that the sun lives longer than we do, we also take note of the fact that man is a living, eating, drinking being; the sun however is inanimate, it neither eats nor drinks. We need maintenance and are vulnerable to sickness and other things because we undergo constant change; the sun, on the other hand, has none of these attributes. It needs no maintenance and it is not vulnerable to the things that we are. It has been this way since Allah created it; it works without stopping, without maintenance and without fault. Any instrument that has these qualities shows you the Power and Greatness of its Creator.

This is why we say that if we look at the creation of the heavens and the earth we will indeed find them to be greater than the creation of man: '...though most people do not know' (*Ghafir:* 57). But what does 'do not know' mean? The creation is right in front of us, we see it with our eyes. And upon seeing this creation and its wonders, we should reflect on it, on its magnitude, the precision of its laws and its perfection and its faultlessness.

Are we not able to predict the time of an eclipse to the precise second? It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* has enlisted even the non-Muslims to manifest the truth of His signs in creation and how they are so precise and well organised that no one can disrupt them. This is why we say, if you see something wrong in the world you can be sure that it was the hand of man, through his choices, interfering with it. What we leave alone without disrupting will never go wrong.

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَا يَسۡتَوِي ٱلۡأَعۡمَىٰ وَٱلۡبَصِيرُ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ
ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَلَا ٱلۡمُسِيٓءُۚ قَلِيلٗا مَّا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

The blind and the sighted are not equal, just as those who believe and do good works and those who do evil are not equal: how seldom you reflect! [58] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 58)

Indeed, those who neglect Allah's signs and fail to reflect upon them are not equal to those who delve deeply into them and are guided by them. Thus, the one who does not reflect upon these signs is like a blind man because he does not see the signs that are greater than the creation of man himself. How can one miss a sign greater than the creation of man except if he were blind? From these signs it is possible to find proof of the Necessarily Existent *the Most High* and of His Absolute Power and Marvellous Creativity.

Just as the blind and the seeing are not equal in Allah's sight, similarly neither are those who believe and do righteous acts equal to those who do bad deeds. This is a manifestation of His Justice. Allah *the Most High* says: '...little [of you and little] do you reflect!' (*Ghafir:* 58), which means how few of you keep this in mind!

إِنَّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ لَأٓتِيَةٌ لَّا رَيۡبَ فِيهَا وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

The Final Hour is sure to come, without doubt, but most people do not believe[59] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 59)

The Lord *Glorified is He* reminds us of this reality which is very often absent from our minds, yet it is something we should not be heedless of. This does not just refer to realising the truth of the hour using our minds, but to being ready for what will transpire at that time. Allah *the Most High* continues: ‘The Last Hour is sure to come...’ (*Ghafir:* 59), that is, the Judgement Day: ‘...without doubt...’ (*Ghafir:* 59), and as long as this is the case, we must prepare for it. Had you been created and left free by Allah, you could have done what you liked. But since you are returning to your Creator and Lord and will be held accountable for what you do, what should you do? There is no way out but to take heed for your Afterlife, for it is the ultimate goal after which there is no other.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...but most people do not believe’ (*Ghafir:* 59) which means they do not know of these realities or they are heedless of them. This is despite the fact that by only viewing matters rationally will surely guide one to believe in the existence of a final hour, judgement, and recompense. Why? This is because when you look at the creation, you see that the one who abides by the ‘dos and do nots’ and acts in accordance with them is respectful of the creation around him and does not spread corruption or transgression. On the other hand, the carefree and unrestrained ones are a source of trouble and corruption in the world around them. Tell me, are these two equal? Are the righteous and the wicked equal? One of them harms Allah’s creation and troubles the whole world, while the other sets things straight, helps people and makes them happy. Are the two equal?

Furthermore, in the process of teaching, do we not give our students examinations at the end of the year and we see that some succeed, while others fail? Do we not in this world have rules for punishment and reward, to repay the doers of good and punish the doers of evil?

But why do some people deny accountability on the Judgement Day, the day when all will be repaid for what they did? Even those who do not believe in the Judgement Day believe in the principles of reward and punishment. They have punishments for crimes against the society, to discipline those who defy the law. They criminalize certain deeds and make them worthy of punishment, to keep their daily lives in order. But why do they deny the same principle when it comes to Allah and the Afterlife? Is it comprehensible that all the people in this life from the start to the end should be left without accountability or without rewards for the good and punishments for the bad?

By Allah, if the matter was as they claim, the criminals, and deviants will have succeeded and the outlaws of society and religion will have profited by doing what they do and oppressing others! They will have gotten away with their crimes, but the believers and the upright who kept adhering to a spiritual path, in vain, will have lost everything.

Yet, Allah's saying: '...but most people do not believe' (*Ghafir:* 59) shows that this matter does not depend on rational thinking; rather, it depends on our faith. If it was left to rational thinking alone, we will say what we just said above, but the whole issue is talking about belief and faith. The one who does not want faith and wants to escape its tethers, and does not want his life to be bound by a methodology of 'dos and do nots', wants to be free to live his life according to his desires.

This is why we say that those who worship trees and rocks do this because their deities have no methodology and give them no responsibilities. Such worship is by definition false because worship means obeying the deity being worshipped. What have these so-called deities commanded them to do? From what have they forbidden them? What have they prepared for those who worship them? And what have they prepared for those who reject them?

Clearly, they only chose these deities in order for them to live life without restrictions or responsibility, with no methodology and nothing to restrain their passions.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ٱدْعُونِىٓ أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ
عَنْ عِبَادَتِى سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

Your Lord says, ‘Call on Me and I will answer you;
those who are too proud to serve Me will enter Hell
humiliated’ [60] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 60)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Your Lord...’ (*Ghafir:* 60). In Arabic, the word ‘*Rabukum*’ (your Lord) is derived from ‘*tarbiyya*’ which means upbringing. Your Lord brings you out of non-existence and keeps you from annihilation. As long as He is my Lord, I am His charge; He guarantees my provision and sustenance, and before that He gave me limbs with which to work and live. He is my Lord and my Creator, Who brought me into the world and provided me with the means of life.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* created the systems of the world, He created them to be inter-dependable and integrative. He made one thing strong and the other weak, one healthy and the other sick.

The strong one lives his life to the full, having more than his needs. He should give what is above his needs to the weak one who is not able to do that much. The Creator could make all people strong, but He wants His creation to be connected in their daily affairs through need, and not through favours. Being connected will not have been possible if each one had all his needs because relying only favours can never connect people together as they will not really need each other.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘...Call on Me and I will answer you...’ (*Ghafir:* 60), that is, regarding those things in which you lack the means, you are unable to achieve, or do not find anyone around you to help you. When you find no option but to turn and supplicate Me, I will answer you, for it is Me (Allah): ‘Who responds to the distressed when he calls out to Him and relieves the suffering’ (*an-Naml:* 62). He is our Lord and Creator; He brought us into existence and provided us with limbs and means and He established us upon earth, and we have no refuge beside Him to go to if the means become too difficult for us.

If the means are there before you and each person is fulfilling his role, do not ignore the means and call Allah to help you; you must use the means at your disposal first. Use them first and, if you have no success, then go to the Ultimate Cause.

We notice here that Allah *the Exalted* has commanded us to supplicate Him and has promised us that He will answer us. Yet despite this there are those among us who supplicate Allah and are not answered; how can this be? The scholars say it is because the person calling is not in real distress; if he was in a state of real distress, he will be answered.

Imagine someone living in a nice house asking Allah for a villa or a palace. When Allah *the Most High* gives him a palace, he then says that he needs another house for him to rent out to pay for the upkeep of the palace! This is a supplication for luxury, not out of distress. Being answered is conditional upon being truly in need.

Concerning our relationship between each other, the Lord *Glorified is He* does not excuse His slaves from the responsibility of bringing benefit to His creatures. The scholars say that the one who has plenty should spend, and the one who does not have plenty should give sincere advice to the one who does. If the advice does not bear fruit, this is not the end and there is still more left for us to do. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: ‘There is no blame on the weak, or the sick, or those who have no means to spend [for the sake of Allah], as long as they provide sincere advice for the sake of Allah and His Messenger. And there is no reason to reproach those who do good. Allah is Most Forgiving, Most merciful’ (*at-Tawba:* 91).

When do we do this? The scholars say that if you have no wealth then you must: ‘…provide sincere advice for the sake of Allah and His Messenger’ (*at-Tawba:* 91). If you do give advice but the person does not respond, the scholars say you should look at yourself and your reaction. Why is this? Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that there is no blame attached to those who came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* seeking mounts and he said to them, 'I cannot find a mount for you', and as a result: ‘They turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief since they had nothing they could contribute’ (*at-Tawba:* 92).

Clearly, no one is excused! You either spend from your wealth or give good advice, and if you are not able to do either you should feel grieved because you had nothing to contribute. Feeling bad is not sufficient here; rather, one should feel emotional pain accompanied by weeping–weeping because one did not find anything to spend in the way of Allah.

Thus, the main point is to bring benefit to Allah's creatures. If everyone were to do this, nobody will be left needy. After this we may ask, 'Is this person poor because he is incapable or is he pretending? If he is just pretending and using begging as a profession, no attention is to be paid to him. But if he is poor because he is incapable for some reason, he can sit in his house in dignity and honour as in this case the rich man comes to him and gives him his portion. In this way the capable are at the service of the incapable.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...those who are too proud to serve Me will enter Hell humiliated' (*Ghafir:* 60). His saying: '...those who are too proud to serve Me...' (*Ghafir:* 60) means those who are too proud to humble themselves to Allah and supplicate Him, and too proud to confess their neediness for Allah. This is why the people of true knowledge say, 'Do not let the target of your supplication be to have it answered, rather, let it be the humility of the needy before the One Who has plenty'. This is the true essence of worship.

This is why our Lord *Glorified is He* corrects the mistakes we do when calling Him, for man often supplicates for bad things thinking he is supplicating for something good. Allah *Glorified is He* says this is because: 'Man is prone to be hasty' (*al-Isra':* 11).

One may ask for evil things for himself thinking they are good, and part of Allah's Mercy towards us is that He does not answer us. This is why we say in praise of Allah, 'Glory be to the One Who corrects the errors of the supplicants by not answering them'. By this He protects us from harm, for how often does a man supplicate for evil thinking it to be good!

We said previously that a woman may sometimes chide her naughty son by saying things like, 'May Allah punish you and let me see it!', but it is due to Allah's Mercy towards her that he does not answer her. In such a case, His depriving her is a gift.

But why will they: ‘...enter Hell humiliated’ (*Ghafir:* 60)? Why will they be so shamed and disgraced? Because when we call Allah *the Most High* we intend to obey Him, since supplication and worship are correlated. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘Every matter that does not start with the Name of Allah is maimed’,(1) that is, there is no blessing in it.

We know that we should say, ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate’, and that we should start any action with the Name of Allah in order to recall His Blessings in that action. But why do we invoke, ‘The Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate’? The scholars say that perhaps we might commit an act of disobedience, and for this reason we invoke Allah by His Attributes of Mercy, for He never abandons His slave even if he has been disobedient.

To sum up, those mentioned in this verse will enter the fire abased and humiliated because they disdained to call upon Allah and were too proud to worship Him. The fire is the reward for arrogance.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا۟ فِيهِ وَٱلنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

It is God who has given you the night in which to rest and the day in which to see. God is truly bountiful to people, but most people do not give thanks [61] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 61)

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentions here two of His signs in creation: night and day. We know what night is: the time between sunset and sunrise. Similarly, we know that the day is the time between sunrise and sunset. These are two periods of time, which mean they contain events. And given that periods of time contain events, every event must happen at a particular time.

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(1) *This was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/359) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him: Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Any speech or matter of any significance that does not start with the remembrance of Allah is maimed (abtar)–or he said (‘aqta`’--cut off)’.*

Events that require work take up a specified time. When you work in the daytime you tire out your limbs and need a time for rest. The Creator has given you the night for rest and the day for work. You rest at night to replenish your strength and energy for the work of the coming day.

If circumstances prevent you from getting your rest at night, how will you be during the day? You will be tired and too drained to do anything. Thus, it seems that Allah *the Most High* wishes to teach us that the creation contains dualities. But it is part of man's heedlessness to assume that these dualities are at odds, rather than being in harmony.

In one of the chapters of the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* swears: 'By the enshrouding night, by the radiant day, by His creation of male and female, truly [the ends] you strive towards are diverse' (*al-Layl:* 1-4). This means that the night has a role, the day has a role, the male has a role and the female has a role. Do not think that the night and the day are at odds with each other, or that the male and the female are at odds with each other. Each one compliments the other. They are paired together, not opposed, as some people think.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in one of the verses of the Quran: 'Say, "Ponder and think; if Allah were to cast perpetual (*sarmada*) night over you until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Him could bring us light? Will you not then listen?" Say, "Ponder and think; if Allah were to cast perpetual (*sarmada*) day over you until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Him could give you night in which to rest? Will you not then see?"' (*al-Qasas:* 71-72)

In the above verses, one question ends with urging us to 'listen', while the second ends with urging us to 'see', because during the night the faculty of the sense of sight is greatly reduced, while the sense of hearing is very effective for it is what is used to alert us at night. As for the day, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Will you not then see' (*al-Qasas:* 72) because sight is very effective during the daytime.

Regarding the word *'sarmada'* (perpetual), some of the exegetes said the night is not perpetual, and similarly the day, in that they are not continuous and never-ending. Yet, if we look at the motion of the earth and the perpetuality of night and day, we find that they are without break–because when the night leaves us it goes on to others.

Thus, they are both perpetual and without any break, but the perpetuality is invalid pertaining to every single place. This means they are perpetual in and of themselves but not pertaining to each place since their existence in one place is limited as they keep moving to another place.

This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘It is He who causes the night and the day to succeed one another (*khilfa*), for those who wish to be mindful or to show [their] gratitude’ (*al-Furqan:* 62). The word *‘khilfa’* (to succeed one another) means each one follows the other. The night follows the day and the day follows the night. This is clear for us nowadays, as a sign in creation.

What about the beginning of creation, though? Which came first? The scholars say that Allah *the Most High* created both of them at the same time because the sun was created facing the earth and thus the part of the earth which was facing the sun was in daytime and that which was hidden from it was in nighttime. Then, as the earth rotated in its orbit, the night and the day followed each other. This is a proof of the spherical nature of the world, even though it appears flat.

It is amazing that Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and the day in which to see (*mubsira*)...’ (*Ghafir:* 61) which means things become visible during it. In the past, they used to think that rays came out of the eye and fell on the object we are looking at. This was the case until the Muslim scholar Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham(1) came along and proved that the opposite was the case. He proved that light rays come from the object to the eye and thus we can see it.

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(1) *Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham’s* full name was *Mohammad ibn Al-Hasan ibn Al-Haytham Abu `Ali.* He was an engineer from *Basra* and was dubbed ‘Ptolemy the Second’. He authored several works on engineering and news of his good work reached the *Fatimid* ruler of the time. He sent a message to the ruler, saying that, ‘If I was in Egypt I will build on the Nile something that will bring benefit in both its times of excess and recess’. Consequently, the ruler called him to Egypt and he went to the south of Aswan, where he wanted to build a dam, but he was unable to complete it. He wrote many books, in excess of seventy, one of which is *Al-Manazir*. He was born in 354 AH and died around 430 AH (*Al-A`lam* by *Az-Zirikli* 6/83).

The proof to this is that we cannot see anything in the dark, while we can see what is in the light because the rays are reflected by the object we are looking at. According to this interpretation, the day itself makes you see (*mubsir*).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Allah is truly bountiful to people...’ (*Ghafir:* 61). Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is most generous to all of mankind because He gives to them although they have no rights they can demand from Him. He is generous to them as He created them from nothing. He is generous to them as He keeps them from annihilation, and He is generous to them as He has given them responsibilities. Yes indeed, even in giving them responsibilities, He is generous. How is this?

The scholars say this is because when He made you responsible, He laid down responsibilities concerning things that benefit you greatly. He Himself does not benefit from them in any way, and yet He rewards you for them. Hence, Allah is doubly generous to you by giving you responsibilities.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: ‘But most people do not give thanks’ (*Ghafir:* 61). This means that a small portion of mankind is grateful. Gratitude can be known through a resulting increase in blessings since gratitude and blessings are concurrent. The Lord *the Most High* has promised that: ‘If you are grateful, I will most certainly give you more and more’ (*Ibrahim:* 7).

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ خَٰلِقُ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ فَأَنَّىٰ تُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾
كَذَٰلِكَ يُؤْفَكُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَانُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Such is God your Lord, the Creator of all things: there is no God but Him. How can you be so deluded? [62] This is how deluded those who deny God’s messages are [63]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 62 - 63)

The word, ‘Such...’ (*Ghafir:* 62) refers to Allah *Glorified is He* meaning the One Who has done these things for you and been generous to you is Allah, your Lord: ‘The Creator of all things...’ (*Ghafir:* 62), and this is something that no one has denied and no-one has claimed for himself.

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘There is no god but Him...’ (*Ghafir:* 62). This is how the Lord *Glorified is He* has judged Himself, that there is nothing worthy of worship but Him. This means you have faith in Allah and Allah *Glorified is He* has faith in Himself and bears witness to Himself. He bore witness Himself that there is nothing worthy of worship save Himself before anybody else bore witness to this. This is why He uses the word ‘Be!’ He knows that this word is effective because it is His Word, which has no rival. There is no other god to stop, divert, or protest against Him.

Allah *the Exalted* tells us: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no deity but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge. He upholds justice. There is no deity but Him *the Almighty* the All-Wise’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). The scholars say that Allah *Glorified is He* bore witness to Himself. He bears witness to Himself by Himself, while the angels bear witness according to what they see, and the people of knowledge bear witness based on their deductions.

When the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Creator of all things...’ (*Ghafir:* 62), this phrase is both general and specific. Such a phrase could be either true or–Allah forbid–otherwise. If it is true then the evidence holds, but if it is otherwise then *where is* the creator of everything? Where is the creator of the universe if Allah is not its creator? Who is it? Why has he kept quiet and not revealed himself? If he does not know about the existence of Allah *the Most High* then he is a heedless and a sleepy deity, unfit for Divinity, and if he knows about Allah giving us this information and he has not opposed it, then he is weak, and an object of worship should never be weak. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, emphasising the soundness of this we are discussing: ‘Say, “If there were other deities along with Him, as they say there are, they will have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne”’ (*al-Isra’:* 42), which means each will have gone to the True Deity to dispute with Him over why He took their creations and claimed them for Himself. But this has not happened.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘How can you be so deluded?’ (*Ghafir:* 62), that is, how do you deviate from the Truth to which reason bears witness, which is established by evidence and proofs and the world we see before us? The Truth of this matter is clear. This claim has been made openly and absolutely, yet no-one has stood up to oppose it and no-one has claimed this for himself–and it is well known that a claim is to be judged in favour of the one who makes it as long as no-one stands to oppose it.

We have previously clarified this matter when we mentioned the following scenario: imagine a group of people sitting in a place and when they leave the owner of the place finds a wallet. He tells his servant, ‘Go and find the owner of this wallet’, and his servant goes and rings each of them, one by one. But none of them says that the wallet is his. After that, one of them knocks on the door and says, ‘By Allah, I left my wallet here’. Whose will it be then? It will be for the one who claimed it until another claimant appears!

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘This is how deluded (*yu’fak*) those who deny Allah's Messages are’ (*Ghafir:* 63) which means this is how they deviate from the clear manifest Truth. The phrase: ‘Those who deny Allah’s Messages’ means they deny them out of obstinacy and arrogance. They do not deny them based on proof or logic; rather, they deny them because they are Allah’s signs and they do not want Allah or His Path.

They fear this path that will discipline their actions in life and restrain their caprices. They just want to continue oppressing people in life with the viciousness of their power and unrestrained caprices. Their denial of the signs is the cause of their deviation from the Truth; as if it is something unnatural for them.

This is why we see that the disbelievers of Quraysh were too proud to accept the Truth and were stubborn in the face of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They never bore witness that ‘there is no deity worthy of worship besides Allah’; they did not even say the phrase. Why? Because they knew full well what these words meant and what they implied. If they thought they were mere words to be spoken, they will have said them; but they were Arabs and this was their language, and they knew what the phrase ‘there is no deity except Allah’ meant: That there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah, there is no leadership and no opinion except that of Allah, there is no judgement but Allah’s and there is no submission except to Allah. How were they to accept this when they had gotten used to their leadership over the Arab tribes?

The word *'yu'fak'* (deluded) is derived from the word *'ifk'* which means lying and inverting realities. To lie is to make a statement that does not accord with reality; as though one is inverting reality upside down. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And He [Allah] brought down the overthrown (*al-mu'tafika*) cities' (*an-Najm:* 53). The word used in this case to describe the overthrown cities is *'al-mu'tafika'* which is derived from the word '*yu'fak*' and literally means the towns (1) that Allah turned upside down. This is what lying does to reality, it denies what exists and affirms what does not.

Next, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'How can you be so deluded?' (*Ghafir:* 62), meaning, how are you turned away from the clear Truth? Man can realise Allah just by his innate nature, and it is not for man to oppose this matter because it is evident and clear. All the teachings of religion are intrinsic to man's innate nature, more than anything; it is only the caprices of the baser-self, the heedlessness, and vicissitudes of time, that cloud this disposition.

All the teachings of the creed and its evidences can be deduced and reached by the pure innate nature of man. The proof to this is that there are people who did not believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* but still thought about these matters, reflected upon the signs of creation and concluded that the Creator exists.

The philosophers who did not like the idea of having Messengers said, 'We are guided by our natures. We have no need for Messengers'. This is what Socrates(2) said, but his student Aristotle(1) debated with him and presented him with signs and questions, exactly as religion does.

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(1) The word *'al-mu'tafika'* (overthrown) refers to the towns of the people of Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* that Allah turned upside down and bombarded with stones of hardened clay (*sijjil mandud*). This is why Allah said: 'And then covered them from sight forever' (*an-Najm:* 54), that is, with stones that He rained down upon them (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir* 4/259). *Ibn Manzhur* said in *Lisan Al-`Arab* under *'afaka'*, 'The word *'al-i'tifak',* as understood by the scholars of the Arabic language, means 'inversion', as in the towns of the people of Lut which, along with their people, were turned upside down'.

(2) Socrates was a Greek philosopher and teacher. He was born in 469 BC and lived in Athens. He was known to have been humble in his clothes, food and drink, and he used to teach the people in the streets, markets and stadiums by asking questions to his listeners. He was accused of corrupting the youth against the rulers and was sentenced to death by being forced to drink poison. He died in 399 BC at the age of 71 (Wikipedia).

He said to him, ‘Look at yourself and your formation. Reflect upon your abilities. I am not telling you to look at the signs in the universe around you, rather look to yourself and your abilities. Do you not have senses?’ ‘Of course’, he replied. ‘Identify them’, he said. ‘I have eyes to see, ears to hear, a tongue to speak, a hand to touch etc.’ ‘Why have you been created with two eyes, two ears and one tongue?’ he asked, ‘Is there not some wisdom behind this? Reflect upon the wisdom of being created in this manner. You have been given two eyes for you to see things from over here and over there, and two ears for you to hear things from over here and over there’.

‘As for the tongue, one is sufficient to fulfil its role of speaking and articulating. With it, you can also taste food. Despite its small size, the tongue can differentiate between hot, cold, sweet and sour. If you like what you taste, you swallow it, and if not, you spit it out. It is as through it is a guardian over what you eat. Moreover, the sense of taste encourages us to eat, and in this way it keeps us alive and strong in order to be able to fulfil what our Deity seeks from us’.

‘In addition to this, do you not see the wisdom in placing the entrance for food near the nose which smells and the eye which sees? The Creator has created them in this outstanding manner for you to be able to see and smell your food before eating it. As for the exit, where is it? It is far away from the eyes and far away from the nose in order not to be harmed by your excretions’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Can you not see the signs within yourselves?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21). Reflect upon the eye. It has an eyelid that opens and closes at one’s behest. Above the eye is the eyebrow that prevents sweat from dripping into the eye. Under that come the eyelashes that defend the eye against harmful things like dirt and dust, and if something manages to

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(1) Aristotle is more commonly known as Plato (a name derived from his large body) and he is the most famous of the Greek philosophers. He was born in Athens to an aristocratic family and lived between the years 427 and 347 BC. He joined his teacher Socrates at the age of twenty and was deeply affected by the unjust execution of his teacher. His philosophy was based upon how the politics of the state should be conducted in accordance with philosophy. He wrote his book ‘The Republic of Plato’ (See *Qamus Natan Al-Falsafi* by *Jirar Duruzawi* and *Andrverse Rasil*, translated into Arabic by *Akram Antaki*).

escape into the eye, the tears wash it out and clean it, like the windshield wiper in a car.

Then there is the nose with which we smell the pleasant scents of nature and by which we can distinguish things. These days they employ the dogs' sense of smell to uncover crimes and criminals.

These are all concepts that a man with a pure heart will reach by his natural disposition, arriving at the Truth with the minimum of reflection.

As for Allah's saying: 'How can you be so deluded?' (*Ghafir:* 62), it carries the meaning of amazement at people's deviation from the Truth, since it is something that should not happen. People of intellect should not stray from the Truth when it is so clear.

Allah *Glorified is He* wonders in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'How can you refuse to acknowledge Allah!' (*al-Baqara:* 28). This is an exclamatory question which means, 'Tell us how on earth can you disbelieve when all these clear signs indicating the Power of Allah *the Exalted* are present in front of you?'

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَٱلسَّمَآءَ بِنَآءً
وَصَوَّرَكُمْ فَأَحْسَنَ صُوَرَكُمْ وَرَزَقَكُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
رَبُّكُمْ ۖ فَتَبَارَكَ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ٦٤

It is God who has given you the earth for a dwelling place and the heavens for a canopy. He shaped you, formed you well, and provided you with good things. Such is God your Lord, so glory be to Him, the Lord of the Worlds [64]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 64)

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'It is Allah who has made the earth a dwelling place (*qarar*) for you...' (*Ghafir:* 64). This means it is a place for you to settle and live. The words 'for you' mean 'for all Allah's slaves'; this is explained in Allah's saying in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures' (*ar-Rahman:* 10). But which land and which living beings are meant here? He does not specify.

Therefore, all the earth is for all the creatures. But is this really the case in our world? No, it is not. And the corruption that has taken hold of the world, the crises that have befallen people and the constraints on their livelihoods have only come about because this principle has not been applied.

In the world these days, there are lands without people, while in other places there are people without land. The cause of this is the presence of barriers that men have placed to come between the slaves of Allah and the land.

Allah *the Most High* tells us: ‘When the angels take the souls of those who have wronged themselves, they ask them, “What circumstances were you in?” They reply, “We were oppressed in this land”, and the angels say, “But was Allah's earth not spacious enough for you to migrate to, away [from evil]? (*an-Nisa’:* 97) But O Lord, how are we to emigrate when they have set up borders, placed barriers on the gates, and enacted laws for entry for which Allah has given no authority?

Look at a map and see the borders of the different countries, you will find them to be complex and entangled! In some regions you will find the borders to be unclear or disputed, while in others you find them to be the cause of international conflicts.

If this shows anything, it is that the earth is just one and that it is for everyone. When man came to it, he divided it up and placed borders. Allah *the Exalted* created it as one wide and open area because if your sustenance becomes constrained in one place you can go to another. If this Divine Principle is not applied, the problems will not be solved and crises will continue to take a heavy toll on the people.

Being settled (*al-istiqrar*) on earth takes two forms: being settled in one’s daily life and work and being settled by finding rest and tranquillity. One takes place in the house in which we live and take shelter. It is man’s place of stay, rest, and sleep (*mabeet*). This is why it is called in Arabic *‘al-bayt’* (house).

A man will also have a place where he works and seeks his provision. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* mentions Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as saying: ‘O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Allah's sanctified House' (*Ibrahim:* 37), and he asked Allah: 'My Lord, make this city secure' (*al-Baqara:* 126). The first verse relates to a place of sleep and rest, while the second relates to a place of work and toil.

You will notice that the place of sleep and rest is for you alone whereas the place of work is shared with others. Also, the earth is not just a resting place for you in your life in this world, it is also your resting place after you die because Allah *the Most High* says: 'From it (this earth), did We create you, and into it We shall return you' (*Ta Ha:* 55).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'And the heavens a canopy (*bina'a*)...' (*Ghafir:* 64), that is, it is built perfectly with no faults in it. It is well known that a building (*al-bina'*) stands upon a supporting structure that bears its weight. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: 'Allah is He Who raised the heavens without any supports that you can see' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2); this means either there are no supports at all or there are invisible supports which our senses cannot perceive. This means the sky is supported by Allah's Power! Certainly, the earth upon which we live is but a sphere floating in space! But why does it not fall despite its weight? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving' (*Fatir:* 41) meaning, that no one can hold them if Allah let them go.

The Lord *the Most High* gives us a palpable example to help us understand His Power in holding the heavens and earth. He tells us to ponder on the physical things and to extract evidence for that which is hidden from us. He tells us: 'Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading and closing their wings? None can uphold them except the Lord of Mercy' (*al-Mulk:* 19). Yes indeed, we see the birds up in the air hovering without moving their wings, yet despite that they do not fall. So, who is holding them? Their Lord *Glorified is He* is the One holding them with His Power, and similarly He holds the heavens and the earth with His Power.

Then He says: 'He shaped you, formed you well...' (*Ghafir:* 64). Having spoken of the things in the universe that are outside ourselves: the night and day and the heavens and earth, Allah speaks of something within in ourselves.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Soon We shall show them Our signs in the [furthest] regions [of the earth] and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth' (*Fussilat:* 53).

Consequently, He says: 'He shaped you...' (*Ghafir:* 64) which means he has given you different forms by which each one can be distinguished from others. After that, He has given you different names to differentiate between the individuals in order for people to be known properly; in order for no one to do something and pretend to be someone else. Hence, the differences between people are important to attribute the actions to their rightful doers.

Next, Allah *the Most High* says: 'Formed you well...' (*Ghafir:* 64) meaning that He has given us the best form among all His creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* could have formed man in any shape He wished. He could have made him walk on four legs for example like an animal; but he honoured us, gave us an excellent form, and made us walk straight and upright.

Allah *the Exalted* says: 'O man, what has lured you away from your Generous Lord Who created you, shaped you, and proportioned you in whatever form He chose!' (*al-Infitar:* 6-8) This means He made us in the best, most well-proportioned and most beautiful form.

After that He says: 'And provided you with good things....' (*Ghafir:* 64). These things provide nutrition to maintain our life, yet here Allah did not mention procreation, which maintains our kind. He says one thing and leaves the other for another time to have no place in His Book free of the miracles of His creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* continues: '...Such is Allah your Lord, so glory be to Him, the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir:* 64) meaning, He is transcendent and sanctified.

All blessings, bounties, and sustenance come from Him. The word *'tabarak'* (glory be to Him) takes up its fair share in the Book of Allah. We find it used in connection with material things and we find it used in connection with spiritual things and the path that Allah has laid down for the uprightness of our daily lives. Allah *the Exalted* has given you a material body and he has given you a soul by means of which your body thrives.

هُوَ ٱلۡحَيُّ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَٱدۡعُوهُ مُخۡلِصِينَ لَهُ ٱلدِّينَۗ ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٦٥

He is the Living One and there is no God but Him, so call on Him, and dedicate your religion entirely to Him. Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds [65] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 65)

Allah *the Most High* says: ‘He is the Ever-Living...’ (*Ghafir:* 65). It is as though the basis for all the attributes of perfection is the presence of life, for power cannot be present without life, hearing cannot be present without life, and sight cannot be present without life. The attribute ‘the Ever-Living’ means that Allah is not from those things that change. We have existence and a life which is bound to that existence. The Lord, however, is Ever Living in His Essence (*dhat*). ‘The Ever-Living’ (*Al-Hayy*) is an attribute of His Essence, while ‘the One Who grants life’ (*Al-Muhyiyy*) is a description of His Actions. Given that ‘the Ever-Living’ is an attribute of His Essence, He can never perish. It means that He does not die, yet His attribute of being ‘the One Who grants life’ has an opposite, which is ‘the One Who grants death (*Al-Mumit*). He grants one life while He grants another death.

Scholars say that the Divine Attribute that has an opposite describes one of His Actions, while the attribute that has no opposite is an attribute of His Essence. Hence, when you call upon Him, saying, ‘O Ever-Living’, this is an attribute of His Essence, while when you say, ‘O You Who grants life’, this describes His Actions. That which concerns His Essence persists unchanged, and that which concerns His Actions results in Him giving or taking (life etc.).

Clearly, as long as Allah is the Ever-Living and there is nothing worthy of worship but Him: ‘So call on Him...’ (*Ghafir:* 65), with the condition that you, ‘Dedicate your religion entirely to Him...’ (*Ghafir:* 65), that is, when you call on Him let nothing else be on your mind, for if there is nothing else on your mind when you call Him, He will be with you and will answer you. Yes indeed: ‘So call on Him...’ (*Ghafir:* 65), for He is the One Who supports all. He tells you to sleep and rest because He, your Lord, is: ‘The One Who supports all; slumber does not overtake Him or sleep’ (*al-Baqara:* 255). It is as though He is coddling the faithful. Allah tells us: ‘So call on Him, and dedicate your religion entirely to Him...’ (*Ghafir:* 65). Beware of saying, ‘I have put my trust in Allah and you', or 'I have put my trust in Allah and then you' because this is false. Suffice yourself with Allah alone; and sufficient is He as a guardian.

When you call on Him and are sincere in your faith to Him, you have put your affair into the Hand of the One Lord, and it is He Who is capable of doing what you ask Him. You are not left to the pity of one who is incapable. But notice that your supplication was answered by Allah *Glorified is He* and your request was granted before you even supplicated, before you even knew how to supplicate; in fact, before you even existed. In fact, all He wants from you is for you to manifest the humility of slavery to the Majesty of His Lordship.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says: '...Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir:* 65) which means praise Allah Who has been so gracious to you with all these blessings, from the very beginning of your creation. He created you from nothing and kept you from annihilation until the whole matter will end with you, Allah willing, going to paradise. Then when we enter paradise we will say, as Allah *the Most High* tells us: 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds!' (*Yunus:* 10)

Next, Allah *the Most High* says:

قُلۡ إِنِّي نُهِيتُ أَنۡ أَعۡبُدَ ٱلَّذِينَ تَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ لَمَّا جَآءَنِيَ
ٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتُ مِن رَّبِّي وَأُمِرۡتُ أَنۡ أُسۡلِمَ لِرَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٦٦

Say [Prophet], 'Since clear evidence has come to me
from my Lord I am forbidden to serve those you call
upon besides God: I am commanded to submit to the
Lord of the Worlds' [66] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 66)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say', addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...I have been forbidden to serve those you call on besides Allah' (*Ghafir:* 66). Clearly, this is not a command from me, this command is from Allah and it has come to me in a clear and manifest verse. The Lord *the Exalted* then says: '...And I have been commanded to submit to the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir:* 66). I have been commanded to submit my affairs to the Lord of the Worlds.

Yes indeed, because even in this life when one of us is not good at something and things do not go in his favour, he turns to one who can help him with his needs. An example of this is when we go to a lawyer to look into a case, or to a doctor for a diagnosis, etc., you surely cannot defend yourself in front of a judge or diagnose yourself! When you go to a specialist, you surrender your affair to him and let him do what he thinks is best without arguing with him or rejecting his commands.

Therefore: '...submit to the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir:* 66) is a command for the incapable to submit himself to the One Who is capable. If your Lord *the Most High* orders you to do something, you accept it because of your faith in Him. You should do what you do with the doctor when he prescribes the right medicine for your condition. You do not argue with him or say, 'Why did you write such-and-such and leave out such-and-such?' Even when we are asked about the medicine, we say, 'By Allah, the doctor prescribed it for me'; we put the whole responsibility upon the doctor's shoulders.

Hence, if you surrender yourself to a doctor who is a human like yourself and who can be right or wrong, because you see he has knowledge and wisdom which you lack, how can you not surrender to Allah Who is All Knowing, Wise, and Fully Capable?

When your Lord *Glorified is He* orders you to do something, obey His orders and carry them out without disputing, protesting, or showing discontent against what He has judged for you. The Lord teaches us a lesson in submission to Him in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and how he surrendered himself and his affair to his Lord *Glorified is He* when Allah commanded him to sacrifice his son Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* whom he was 'granted despite his old age' (1) and after he had despaired of having a child. This is why he praised Allah, saying: 'Praise be to Allah

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(1) *It is mentioned in Genesis in the Old Testament that Ibrahim was 86 years old when Ismail was born (Genesis 16: 16), that there were 14 years between Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), and that Ibrahim was 100 years old at the time he had Ishaq (Genesis 5: 21).*

Who has granted me in old age Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac). Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplications' (*Ibrahim:* 39).

But why did Allah use the word '*'ala al-kibar*' (lit. 'over old age') and not '*ma' al-kibar*'[1] (with old age) in this verse. To make this easier to understand, some of the exegetes said that there is a difference between a two–letter word and three-letter word; the Quran does not use a two–letter word and use a three-letter word instead except for a reason dictated by the meaning. The exegetes said that '*'ala al-kibar'* (despite old age) is an assumption that he is not able to father children, but Allah's Intent and Will will overrule this assumption; Allah's Will is 'over and above old age'.

Similarly, in the story of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'My Lord, how will I have a boy when my wife is barren and I have reached extreme old age?' (*Maryam:* 8) But the angels answered: 'Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, "It is easy for Me (*'alaya*), for I created you before while you were nothing"' (*Maryam:* 9).

The word *'`ala'* here, from which *'alaya'* is derived, means that old age dictates his inability to father children, yet Allah's Intent is 'over and above old age'. We also understand this meaning from Allah's saying: 'And indeed, your Lord is full of forgiveness for the people despite (*'ala*) their wrongdoing, and indeed, your Lord is severe in penalty' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6). Some scholars said that the word *'`ala'* here means 'with' (*ma`*), but this is not correct; rather, it means 'over and above all their evildoing'. The Lord *the Most High* is saying, 'Although evildoings demand punishment, Allah's Forgiveness is transcendent above evildoings and above punishing the evildoer for his evil'.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells him to say: '...I have been forbidden to serve those you call on besides Allah...' (*Ghafir:* 66) prohibiting him because He loves him. That is why He tells him to direct his worship to the One Who is able to do things for him. An advice like this only comes from one who

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(1) *Jamalud-Din ibn Hisham Al-Ansari mentioned nine possible meanings for the word ''ala', one of which is 'with', as in Allah's saying: '...who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it (`ala hubbihi, lit. 'with cherishing it')...' (al-Baqara: 177), and another is: 'And indeed, your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite ('`ala', lit. 'over and above') their wrongdoing..." (al-Ra'd: 6).*

cares for you. This is just like you advising a friend and showing him what is good; had you not cared for him, you will not have advised him.

Next, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...I have been commanded to submit to the Lord of the Worlds' (*Ghafir:* 66) which means I have been commanded to submit my reins to my Lord; I do what he has ordered me to do, and I abstain from what He has prohibited me from. If there is something to which Allah *the Most High* has said neither 'do' nor 'do not', then I treat it as permissible, even if it is something that a normal person may consider distasteful. Even if Allah *the Exalted* gives you a command in which you see clear hardship for yourself, you should realise that He wants good for you in a way that you may not understand, as we mentioned in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

We know that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was tested by His Lord with many things that contained a great deal of hardship. Allah *the Most High* tells us: 'Ibrahim (Abraham) was tested by his Lord with certain commandments, which he fulfilled' (*al-Baqara:* 124), and when he had fulfilled them, Allah *Glorified is He* said to him: 'I will make you a leader of people' (*al-Baqara:* 124). As a young man he was tested by being cast into the fire, and at his old age he was tested by being commanded to sacrifice his son at a time when his son was dearer to him than his own self. It was very difficult for him because when a man becomes old and approaches the end of his life and the next life, he wants to be succeeded by his children.

Thus, he was tested at the beginning of his life by the fire and he was tested in his old age by being commanded to kill his son. This latter test was extreme, for were his son to die a normal death this will have been enough of a calamity for him; imagine how difficult it was for him when he was told to slaughter his son with his very own hands! Furthermore, this test did not come by means of a direct command, rather by a vision in his sleep that was open to interpretation. Yet, despite this, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* yielded to a mere vision because he knew that it was from Allah.

But, how did Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* fulfil this command? Did he take his son unawares? No, he preferred to include him in the test in order not to deprive him of the reward of submitting to Allah. He said to him: 'I have seen in a dream that I should offer you as a sacrifice; see what your view of this is' (*as-Saffat:* 102). He said it was 'a dream' to give Ismail (Ishmael) an opportunity to say, 'Father, how could you kill me based on a dream?' As in such a case, Ismail needed to submit to Allah in order for him not to refuse. In fact, Ismail replied: 'Father! Do as you are commanded' (*as-Saffat:* 102).

Imagine if Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* had taken his son unawares, throwing him on the ground and holding a knife ready to slaughter him! What will have been the feelings of the son towards the father? He will have hated him and he will have been enraged by his action. This will consequently deny him the reward of the test. Moreover, reflect upon what Ismail *peace be upon him* said to his father: 'Father! Do as you are commanded' (*as-Saffat:* 102). He reminded him that this is a command. That is to say, 'O father, as long as this is an order from above, then do it'. We have said previously that one should not be happy or angry about an action until one knows who did it. If you know that it was your Lord *the Most High* who did it, the matter is closed and no room is left except for submission.

This is how we see that both of them submitted! Allah *Glorified is He* tells us clearly: 'So when the two had both surrendered [to Allah]' (*as-Saffat:* 103); the word 'both' is used in describing the incident: 'And he (Ibrahim) laid his son down on his face' (*as-Saffat:* 103), and he began to actually carry out the command, his Lord *Glorified is He* told him to raise his hand because he had passed the test. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us: 'We called out to him, "Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the dream". This is how We reward those who do good; it was a clear test [to prove their true characters], and We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice' (*as-Saffat:* 104-107).

This is how tribulation is lifted. An affliction is not lifted until it is met with acceptance. The ruling of death for Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was lifted and his ransom was revealed. His Lord replaced any disquiet that had afflicted him and gave him glad tidings of another child(1): 'And [in time] We gave him the glad tiding of Ishaq (Isaac), [who, too, will be] a prophet and one of the righteous' (*as-Saffat:* 112) meaning that We were going to take Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* but when you showed contentment with our decision regarding him, We decreed for you another son. Furthermore, We made both of them prophets, and of their offspring prophets. Reflect upon what submitting to Allah's Decree and being contented with it will bring you. In your submission to Allah, you do not look just at the deed itself, but at the context of the One Who is commanding you to do it.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* gave Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* glad tidings of Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* when Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* was 13 years old. *Sa`id ibn Al-Musayyib* said, 'Allah gave Ibrahim the glad tidings that his son will be a prophet after this affair as a reward for his obedience and patience' (see the chapter of *As-Saffat* in *Zad Al-Masir* by *Ibn Al-Jawzi*).

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُكُمْ
طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوٓا۟ أَشُدَّكُمْ ثُمَّ لِتَكُونُوا۟ شُيُوخًا ۚ وَمِنكُم
مَّن يُتَوَفَّىٰ مِن قَبْلُ ۖ وَلِتَبْلُغُوٓا۟ أَجَلًا مُّسَمًّى وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

It is He who created you from dust, then from a drop of
fluid, then from a tiny, clinging form, then He brought you
forth as infants, then He allowed you to reach maturity, then
He let you grow old – though some of you die sooner – and
reach your appointed term so that you may reflect [67]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 67)

The Lord *Glorified is He* takes us back once again to the matter of our first creation: 'It is He who creates you out of dust...' (*Ghafir:* 67). It is obvious that we have been created twice, so to speak: once from dust when Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam and Eve *peace be upon them* and the other by means of procreation leading back to them both

Notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...out of dust...' (*Ghafir:* 67), and also: '...out of clay...' (*al-An'am:* 2), and: '...out of dark slime transmuted' (*al-Hijr:* 26), as well as: '...out of dry clay, like pottery' (*ar-Rahman:* 14). These are different stages of one process. When we mix water with dust it becomes clay. If we leave it for a while it putrefies and its odour changes; this is 'dark slime transmuted'. And if we then leave it to dry, it becomes 'dry clay'.

Allah's saying: 'It is He who creates you out of dust...' (*Ghafir:* 67), does not refer to Adam alone *peace be upon him*. Indeed, we are all made from dust, even those who are the result of marriage and procreation. How is this? The sperm of the man and the ovum of the woman are made only of the food that we eat, and this food comes from either animals or plants, and both of these grow from the earth.

For this reason, we see that when they run a chemical analysis of the components of the human body they find they are the same elements that are found in soil–sixteen well-known elements. That is, there is material evidence known to us nowadays that supports the fact that man is created from dust; it shows we are all created from dust, even though we were produced by procreation. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘You are all from Adam, and Adam was from dust’.(1)

Moreover, when the Lord *Glorified is He* spoke of the creation, He said: ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves...’ (*al-Kahf:* 51) because the heavens and the earth were created before man; man is new to them. And when Adam *peace be upon him* was being created he was not aware in order to know how he was created. Allah *Glorified is He* then says something to incapacitate and silence the stubborn: ‘...and neither do I ... take as My helpers those [beings] that lead [men] astray’ (*al-Kahf:* 51) which means, ‘I do not seek their help either now or when I made the creation’. The phrase: ‘Those that lead men astray’ (*al-Kahf:* 51) are those who present falsehood as the Truth, and what is meant here by this specifically are those who mislead men regarding the creation, as we find some of them saying nowadays that man was first a primate and then evolved into a human being, as Darwin(2) posited.

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(1) *At-Tirmidhi related in his Sunnan that Ibn `Umar peace be upon him and his father, said, ‘Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him addressed the people on the Day of Victory in Mecca, saying, ‘O people, Indeed Allah has ridden you of the disgrace of the pre-Islamic period of ignorance and the arrogance of its forefathers. People are of two types: a righteous, Allah-fearing man, who is valued in the sight of Allah, and a wicked, wretched man, who is of little worth in the sight of Allah. Mankind are the children of Adam, and Allah created Adam from dust’ (Sunnan At-Tirmidhi, Hadith 3270).*

(2) Darwin was an English zoologist who became famous because of his theory of the evolution of man. He was born in England on the 12th of February 1809 and died on the 19th of April 1882 at the age of 73. He studied medicine and theology and was the author of the books, ‘The Origin of Species’, ‘The Descent of Man’, and ‘The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Actions of Worms, with Observations on Their Habits’.

In fact, the Lord *Glorified is He* cuts off their path of misguidance by telling them that they did not witness the creation in order to be able to inform people of it, and that He alone is the Creator and that no one was with Him to know what happened. And for this reason, if you want to know how the creation happened, listen to Him and He will tell you, and indeed He has done this in many verses of his Book.

And if someone were to say that Allah has informed us of this, but we have not actually witnessed it, we will tell them to reflect upon the reality of life around them because it shows the Truth of what Allah has told us. You did not see the creation, but you do see its opposite–death. The destruction of something happens in the opposite way to its construction. When you build a house with four stories, for example, you begin with the first, and if you want to destroy such a building you begin with the fourth.

Death is similar to this. It begins with the soul exiting the body and this relates to the last stage in the creation of man. After the soul leaves the body it becomes stiff and it starts to decay and decompose; this is called a corpse. Then the water evaporates from it and the remains turn into dust. Thus death confirms what is hidden from you of the beginning of creation.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is He who creates you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a germ-cell; and then He brings you forth as children; then [He ordains] that you reach maturity, and then, that you grow old’ (*Ghafir:* 67). These are the stages of creation. Allah *the Most High* continues: ‘...And then He brings you forth as children’ (*Ghafir:* 67). The scholars say that one is a child as long as one is growing. Once a person has taken his final form, he has reached the stage of puberty in which he becomes capable of reproduction because his reproductive organs will have reached maturity.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Yet, when the children among you attain puberty, let them ask leave of you [at all times], even as those [who have reached maturity] before them have been enjoined to ask it...’ (*an-Nur:* 59). We see that childhood is the stage of growth and puberty is the stage of becoming strong. Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and then [He ordains] that you reach maturity...’ (*Ghafir:* 67), referring to full strength: ‘...and then, that you grow old...' (*Ghafir:* 67) meaning you decline from strength into old age and a state of weakness once again, and this is when the body becomes emaciated.

Clearly, when the stages of growth and maturation are completed, the stages of weakness and emaciation begin. In the stage of growth you will find that a man consumes more than he excretes, and thus he grows. In the stage of old age, however, he excretes more and therefore he shrinks and becomes emaciated. His strength declines and his muscles weaken until decline reaches the final storehouse of the body, his bones, which become brittle and break easily because of what they are losing. This is why Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* said: '...O my Lord! Infirm indeed are my bones, and [the hair on] my head glistens with grey hair...' (*Maryam:* 4) mentioning the weakness of the bones in the last stages of old age.

These stages are from the perspective of the material body. As for the memory and intellectual matters, man becomes forgetful, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well...' (*al-Hajj:* 5). His forgetfulness reaches such a level that it is as if he never knew anything. Then we see him moving very slowly, to the extent that he needs to be supported like a child: 'But [let them always remember that] if We lengthen a human being's days, We also cause him to decline in his powers [when he grows old]: will they not, then, use their reason?' (*Ya Sin:* 68)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...though some of you [He causes to] die earlier...' (*Ghafir:* 67), and they do not reach these stages. How many people are there who die in the womb of their mothers, after birth or in childhood? Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...and [all this He ordains] so that you might reach a term set [by Him]...' (*Ghafir:* 67). This means our terms differ and are pre-established by Allah. Some of us live for a moment, some for a few minutes, some for a few hours, some for a few days or months, and there are some who do not live past the first stages of creation, dying as it were in the early stages of embryonic development.

Next the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...and that you might [learn to] use your reason' (*Ghafir:* 67) to understand that when Allah brings you to maturity and you reach the stage of full strength, it is not your essential nature; rather, it is something granted to you, as are all your blessings, and can be taken away from you at any time. And if you know it is a gift which can be withdrawn at any moment, be well mannered with the One Who bestows these blessings on you.

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُحۡىِۦ وَيُمِيتُۖ فَإِذَا قَضَىٰٓ أَمۡرٗا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ٦٨

It is He who gives life and death, and when He
ordains a thing, He says only ‘Be’ and it is [68]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 68)

We know that man passes through stages in his creation, and that his life is uncertain which means he may die at any one of these stages. How are we, then, to understand Allah’s saying: ‘...‘Be’–and it is’ (*Ghafir:* 68) in regard to the one whose life is only a moment or who dies in the womb of his mother?

The scholars say that the word ‘Be!’ here is addressed to whatever state that person is in at that time, be it an embryo or whatever. It is as though He says to it, ‘Come to life’, and then He takes its life in a way and time appropriate to it which only He knows.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يُجَٰدِلُونَ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ أَنَّىٰ يُصۡرَفُونَ ٦٩
ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَبِمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا بِهِۦ رُسُلَنَاۖ فَسَوۡفَ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٧٠

[Prophet], do you see how deluded those who dispute
God’s messages are [69] those who reject the Scripture
and the messages We have sent through Our messengers?
They will find out [70] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 69 - 70)

As we said previously, Allah’s signs are of three types: signs of creation, such as the sun and the moon; miracles that accompany the Messengers; and the verses of the Quran that bear Allah’s Rulings. We heard how they disputed the miracles and called them trickery and sorcery, and how they disputed Allah’s Rulings and said that they were inappropriate, but Allah’s signs in creation are not open to question.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘... how [far] they ... have lost sight of the Truth?’ (*Ghafir:* 69) meaning, how have they been diverted from it when it is so clear? Where are their intellects?

The Lord *the Most High* says: ‘Those who reject this Book and [thus] all [the Messages] which We sent Our Messengers [of old]? But in time they will come to know...’ (*Ghafir:* 70). Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Those who reject...’ (*Ghafir:* 70), using the past tense, yet when he talks of the recompense he says: ‘But in time they will come to know...’ (*Ghafir:* 70) using the future tense. The scholars said that this is because the recompense does not necessarily come at the same time they reject the book or while they are still in the life of this world. There is no problem with it being delayed until the Afterlife.

The word *‘sawfa’* (will) in this verse indicates the future, whether it be the near future in this world or the distant future in the next. If the punishment does not come upon them in this world, it is waiting for them in the next, as Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the Truth], or whether We cause you to die [before that retribution takes place–know that, in the end], it is to Us that they will be brought back’ (*Ghafir:* 77).

The Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to be connected to Him always in such a way that we never think of anything else. A connection such as this prevents you from imagining that things that come to you are by your doing; rather, you see them as gifts granted to you and remember that the One Who gave them may take them back.

This is why He *Glorified is He* alerts us by saying: ‘Nay, but man does transgress all bounds, in that he believes himself to be self-sufficient’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7), and then: ‘For behold, to your Lord all must return’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 8), Which means, remember, you will be returned to Him and made to stand before Him.

To continue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...this Book...’ (*Ghafir:* 70) meaning, what Allah has revealed bearing His Path: ‘...and... all [the Messages] which We sent Our Messengers [of old]...’ (*Ghafir:* 70), that is, the things that they said. If someone were to say that it is Allah’s Books that are being spoken of here, we will say no; there is a difference. The Book contains the path, but the Messenger bears the path in himself, he delivers it and is a living example of its application. It is as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Verily, in [Muhammad] the Messenger of Allah you have a good example...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 21).

إِذِ ٱلْأَغْلَٰلُ فِىٓ أَعْنَٰقِهِمْ وَٱلسَّلَٰسِلُ يُسْحَبُونَ ﴿٧١﴾
فِى ٱلْحَمِيمِ ثُمَّ فِى ٱلنَّارِ يُسْجَرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

When, with iron collars and chains around their necks,
they are dragged [71] Into scalding water, and then
burned in the Fire[72] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 71-72)

But: '...in time they will come to know' (*Ghafir:* 70). When? This is on the Day of Judgement: 'When they shall have to carry the shackles (*aghlal*) and chains (*salasil*) [of their own making] around their necks, and are dragged' (*Ghafir:* 71). Consider the extent of the humiliation they are in: 'Into boiling water (*al-hamim*), and in the end they will become fuel for the fire [of hell]' (*Ghafir:* 72).

The word *'aghlal'* (shackles) is the plural of *'ghull'* and it refers to shackles that bind one's hands to one's neck. The word *'salasil'* (chains) refer to iron chains that are used to bind men. See how humiliating it is!

Moreover, the word *'al-hamim'* refers to boiling water, meaning water at its highest temperature. Then after this they are put into the fire to stoke it and be its fuel. Allah *Glorified is He* continues:

ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ قَالُوا۟ ضَلُّوا۟ عَنَّا
بَل لَّمْ نَكُن نَّدْعُوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ شَيْـًٔا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُضِلُّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

And asked, 'Where now are those you called upon [73]
besides God?' They will say, 'They have abandoned us:
those we called upon before were really nothing at all.'
'This is how God lets disbelievers go astray [74]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 73 - 74)

Contemplate the censure of the polytheists in this terrible situation, 'Where are your gods to whom you attributed divinity besides Allah? Call on them and ask them to protect you from this punishment'. By Allah, if they used to worship people like themselves, they will see them in front of their eyes because they will have arrived to the hellfire before them. And if they worshipped rocks, they will see them in front of them as the fuel of the hellfire.

Hence, it is they who will say: '...They have forsaken us...' (*Ghafir:* 74) which means they do not know where we are or how to get to us. At that time they will see that the situation is beyond their gods, and consequently they will deny them, saying: '...or rather, we did not used to call on anything [real] before!'' (*Ghafir:* 74) Glory be to Allah! They lie even in this situation just as they swore by Allah in another verse that they did not ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah: '...By Allah, our Lord, we did not ascribe divinity to anything beside Him' (*al-An'am:* 23).

This is why Allah *the Exalted* describes these liars, saying: 'and [they] will persist in heinous wickedness' (*al-Waqi'a*: 46). That is, they have become so used to lying that even the Day of Judgement does not discourage them from it. They will say: '...we did not used to call on anything before!' (*Ghafir:* 74) meaning we did not ascribe divinity to other than Allah. It is possible that they could be telling the Truth here if they knew these gods could not benefit or harm them but they rather worshipped them only to quench their desire for a religion, although that religion entailed no path and no responsibility.

Allah *the Most High* continues: 'This is how Allah lets the deniers of the Truth go astray' (*Ghafir:* 74). Indeed, Allah does not let anybody go astray except the disbelievers. If someone disbelieves, how will Allah guide him? We previously gave a parable for this–but of course Allah is beyond any comparison. We said: imagine a traffic warden whom you ask for directions. If you refuse his directions, mock them or ignore them, and tell him he does not know the area, he will leave you alone and stop helping you. If, however, you listen to his instructions and thank him for his help, he may say something like, 'But I swear there is a difficult road or a diversion in front of you after some kilometres. I will come with you until you move past it'. That is, first he guided him to the way, and then, when you thanked him for his guidance, you earned even more help.

Similarly the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'But to those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] Guidance and causes them to grow in piety' (*Muhammad:* 17). But in the verse we are discussing: 'This is how Allah lets the deniers of the Truth go astray' (*Ghafir:* 74) referring to those who do not deserve guidance. This is why we said that whoever craves disbelief, inclines towards it or chooses it for himself, Allah will say to him, 'I am a Lord Who will give you whatever you want. If you love disbelief, then I will help you in that. I will seal your heart in order for faith not to enter it and disbelief not to leave it'.

ذَٰلِكُم بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَفۡرَحُونَ فِى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ بِغَيۡرِ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَبِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَمۡرَحُونَ ٧٥

This is a result of your having arrogantly rejoiced on earth without any [concern for what is] right, and of your being so insolent! [75] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 75)

Allah's saying: 'This...' (*Ghafir:* 75) referring to the punishment, shackles, chains and fire: '...is a result of your having arrogantly rejoiced (*tafrahoon*) on earth without any [concern for what is] right, and of your being so insolent!' (*Ghafir:* 75).

The word *'al-farah'* (rejoicing) which is derived from '*tafrahoon*' (rejoiced), refers to one's breast being expanded by what makes one happy. But true happiness is to be happy with what will help one towards one's original goal. This means that a person can rejoice over anything, even disobedience, and a person can rejoice over the Truth, which is rejoicing over what will help a person reach his ultimate goal. As for something that does not help one reach the goal, but rather blocks the path, it is but a fleeting pleasure that will be followed by sadness that will probably far outweigh the pleasure that one gained from it.

Read here an example of rejoicing over the Truth. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But do not think of those that have been slain in Allah's Cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Lord they have their sustenance, rejoicing over that [martyrdom] which Allah has bestowed on them out of His Bounty...' (*Al-'Imran*: 169-170).

Yes indeed, this is rejoicing over the Truth; and, in fact, it may spill over to others: '...And they rejoice in the Bounty provided by Allah: And rejoice for the sake of those [of their brethren] who have been left behind (not yet martyred) and have not yet joined them, that they have no fear and do not [have cause to] grieve' (*Al-'Imran:* 170). This rejoicing which has spread from you to others is true rejoicing because it helps one to realise one's original goal in this world.

Another example of this is found in Allah's saying: 'Say, "In [this] Bounty of Allah and in His Grace–in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!"' (*Yunus:* 58) This is rejoicing over Allah's Bounty and Mercy, not one's deeds. This is the rejoicing enjoined by the Sacred Law.

Another type of rejoicing ordained by the Sacred Law is mentioned in Allah's saying: 'Hence, they to whom We have given this Revelation rejoice at all that has been bestowed on you [O Prophet Muhammad] from on high...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 36) because it confirmed what they already had and strengthened their understanding of the Truth. They rejoiced at this because it helped them to reach the true goal of their existence.

Allah *the Exalted* also says: '*Alif. Lam. Mim.* The Romans have been defeated, in the lands close-by; but it is they who, after this defeat of theirs, shall soon be victorious, within a few years: [for] the decision of the matter, in the past and in the future, is only with Allah. And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice in the Help of Allah: [for] He gives help to whomever He wills, since He alone is the Almighty, the Most Merciful' (*ar-Rum:* 1-5).

Clearly, there are many types of rejoicing ordained by the Sacred Law. There is the rejoicing of the martyrs at Allah's Bounty and Mercy. There is the rejoicing of those who have been given the Revelation through Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and there is the rejoicing of the believers at the victory of a religion that has its roots in the heavens over one that has its roots in the earth.

However, that rejoicing which is not ordained by the Sacred Law is the rejoicing of the fool. An example of this is found in Allah's saying about the disbelievers: 'Should good fortune alight on you [O Prophet Muhammad], it will grieve them; and should misfortune befall you, they will say [to themselves], "We have already taken our precautions beforehand!" And they turn away rejoicing. Say, "Never can anything befall us save what Allah has decreed!..."' (*at-Tawba:* 50-51), which means, whatever afflicts us from Allah is something that will be accounted in our favour, not against us. And His saying: 'If good fortune comes to you, it grieves them; and if evil befalls you, they rejoice in it. But if you are patient in adversity and conscious of Allah, their guile cannot harm you at all: for verily, Allah encompasses [with His Might] all that they do' (*Al-'Imran:* 120). Allah *Glorified is He* also said regarding the rejoicing of fools: 'Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been reminded of, We threw open to them the gates of all [pleasurable] things, until–even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted–We suddenly took them to task...' (*al-An'am:* 44). He *the Exalted* also says: 'Think not that those who rejoice in what they have thus contrived...' (*Al-'Imran:* 188), that is, they rejoice because they have mocked the believers and harmed them: '...and who love to be praised for what they have not done–think not that they will escape suffering: for grievous suffering awaits them [in the life to come]' (*Al-'Imran:* 188).

And He says: 'And thus it is: if We let man taste some of Our Grace but then take it away from him–behold, he is in despair and ungrateful [for Our past Favours]. And thus it is: if We let him taste ease and plenty after hardship has visited him, he is sure to say, "Gone is all affliction from me!" For behold, he is given to vain rejoicing and pride' (*Hud:* 9-10). And: 'But they [who claim to follow you] have torn their affair [of unity] into pieces, each group rejoicing in that which they themselves possess [by way of tenets]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 53). As long as there are a number of groups, and each one rejoices in what it has, then this is rejoicing that is false and not approved by the Sacred Law.

Furthermore, the Lord *the Most High* says: '[Now] Behold, Qarun (Korah) was one of the people of Musa (Moses), but he arrogantly exalted himself above them–simply because We had granted him such riches that his treasure-chests alone will surely have been too heavy a burden for a troop of ten strong men or even more. When [they perceived his arrogance], his people said unto him, "Rejoice not [in your wealth], for verily, Allah does not love those who rejoice [in vain things]!"' (*al-Qasas:* 76)

To sum up, we have four instances of rejoicing which is approved by the Sacred Law and nine instances where it is blameworthy and not approved.

Continuing with the verse under discussion, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'This is a result of your having arrogantly rejoiced on earth without any [concern for what is] right...' (*Ghafir:* 75). This is proof that there is rejoicing with and without right: '...And of your being so insolent (*al-marah*)' (*Ghafir:* 75). The word *'al-marah'* (insolent) is an excessive form of the word *'farah'* (rejoicing), and it means to swagger about, boasting and being conceited.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

ٱدْخُلُوٓا۟ أَبْوَٰبَ جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ مَثْوَى ٱلْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

Enter the gates of Hell, there to remain – an evil home for the arrogant [76] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 76)

The word *'mathwa'* (abode) means a place to return to and stay in. The word *'al-mutakabbireen'* (those who are given to false pride) refers to those who assume they are above Allah, the One Who gave them life, and yet despite this they still do not believe in Him. These people assumed they were above Allah and did not believe in Him. They assumed they were above the Messengers and did not believe them. They assumed they were above His Religion and did not practise it. They chose their desires and submitted to their leadership instead of submitting to Allah.

After this, Allah turns to address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* telling him that he will face many troubles that will require patience because this mission is hard, and that he will be harmed in every way possible.

فَٱصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقٌّ ۚ فَإِمَّا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ ٱلَّذِى
نَعِدُهُمْ أَوْ نَتَوَفَّيَنَّكَ فَإِلَيْنَا يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

So be patient [Prophet], for God's promise is sure: whether we show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned [77] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 77)

Yes: 'Verily, Allah's Promise always comes true ...' (*Ghafir:* 77) referring to Allah's Promise of victory to His Messengers. This is because He *the Exalted* is fully capable of fulfilling His Promises. We have already elucidated the difference between our promises and Allah's Promises. Our promises are not 'true' because we do not possess the means to fulfil promises and cannot guarantee them. However, the Lord *Glorified is He* has all the attributes of perfection, and nothing can prevent Him from fulfilling His Promise.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the Truth]...'

(*Ghafir:* 77), that is, of punishment in this world: '...or whether We cause you to die...' (*Ghafir:* 77) before you see a sign in them: '...it is to Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir:* 77) in the next life, where they will be unable to escape the punishment. This is why Allah *the Exalted* says: 'However, before [We condemn them to] that supreme suffering, We shall most certainly let them taste a suffering closer at hand so that they might [repent and] mend their ways' (*as-Sajda:* 21).

The 'closer' suffering is that which befalls them in this world, while the 'supreme' suffering is that which befalls them on the Day of Judgement which none of them can escape.

Then He *Glorified is He* clarifies for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* the reality of prophethood. He says to him, 'Know, O Muhammad, that you are not the first of the Messengers, and you are not the first to be harmed while bearing His Message. All of your brothers in the line of prophethood have been harmed, each to a degree relative to the importance of their Message, and this is why you are suffering the most; this is because you [Muhammad] are the prophet for the end of time, and your Message is general for all people, all times and all places. Consequently, your tribulation will necessarily be more severe than that of those who preceded you.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُم مَّن قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُم مَّن لَّمْ
نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَن يَأْتِيَ بِـَٔايَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَإِذَا جَآءَ
أَمْرُ ٱللَّهِ قُضِيَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ ٱلْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

We have sent other messengers before you – some We have mentioned to you and some We have not – and no messenger could bring about a sign except with God's permission. When [the Day] God ordained comes, just judgement will be passed between them: there and then, those who followed falsehood will be lost [78] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 78)

The Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned the names of some of the Messengers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* and there are 25 mentioned in the Quran. A poet said,

In that is our proof, and of them are eight,
Coming after ten. Seven remain and they are:
Idris (Enoch) then Hud (Eber), Shu'aib (Jethro) and Saleh (Shelah),
Dhu Al-Kifl (Ezekiel), Adam, and the Chosen One, their seal.

Nevertheless, the Lord *Glorified is He* states in another verse: 'For there never was any community but a warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst' (*Fatir:* 24), and this means that the number of Messengers who have not been mentioned is a very large number.

Next, the Lord *the Most High* says: '...And it was not given to any Messenger to produce a miracle save by Allah's Leave...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 38). Why is this verse appropriate here? The scholars say it is because they used to suggest signs to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And so they say, "[O Muhammad], we shall not believe you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or have a garden of date palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush"' (*al-Isra':* 90-91), in order for it to be a permanent garden: '"Or cause the skies to fall down on us in fragments, as you have threatened, or [till] you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us, or have a house [made] of gold, or ascend to heaven–but nay, we will not [even] believe in your ascension unless you bring down to us [from heaven] a writing which we [ourselves] can read!"...' (*al-Isra':* 92-93) But what was Prophet Muhammad's reply: 'Glory to my Lord! Am I nothing but a mortal man, a Messenger?' (*al-Isra':* 93) meaning I am but a Messenger from Allah, delivering what I am sent with.

The Lord *Glorified is He* by refusing to respond to their demands for signs, has clarified for us that they were not satisfied or content with what they already had. In fact, to seek more signs than they had been given is considered to be an insult to the earlier signs. This is one point. Another point is that there were people before them who asked for signs and Allah granted them, but after that they disbelieved. Therefore, for Allah to keep up with their demand for signs is a waste of time. That is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'And nothing has prevented Us from sending [this Message, like the earlier ones] with miraculous signs [in its wake] save [Our knowledge] that the people of old times [only too often] gave the lie to them...' (*al-Isra':* 59) referring to the signs they were demanding.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Yet, when Allah's Command becomes manifest, judgment will [already] have been passed in all truth and justice, and lost, then and there, will be all who stood on falsehoods' (*Ghafir:* 78). He says: '...judgment will [already] have been passed in all truth and justice...' (*Ghafir:* 78), and as long as the judgement is passed in truth, the believers who believe in the Truth will be successful: '...and lost, then and there...' (*Ghafir:* 78) in the Afterlife: '...will be all who stood on falsehoods' (*Ghafir:* 78), referring to the disbelievers and the people of falsehood who disbelieved in the Path of Truth; and this is their natural end, for the reward is appropriate for their deed.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَنْعَٰمَ لِتَرْكَبُوا۟ مِنْهَا وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا
مَنَٰفِعُ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا۟ عَلَيْهَا حَاجَةً فِى صُدُورِكُمْ وَعَلَيْهَا وَعَلَى ٱلْفُلْكِ تُحْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

It is God who provides livestock for you, some for riding and
some for your food [79] You have other benefits in them too.
You can reach any destination you wish on them: they carry
you, as ships carry you [on the sea] [80]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 79-80)

The word *'al-an`am'* (livestock) refers to camels, cows, sheep and goats. These have roles and they are: '...so that on some of them you may ride...' (*Ghafir:* 79) which means on a camel, for you do not ride sheep, for example: 'And from some derive your food' (*Ghafir:* 79), that is, meat, 'and find benefits in them...' (*Ghafir:* 80) referring to benefits other than riding them or eating them, such as benefitting from their skins, their wool and their fur, for they used to make clothes, blankets, beds, tents and other things from them.

Reflect here upon the greatness of the Quranic linguistic style: For riding, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...so that on some of them you may ride (*li tarkabu minha*)...' (*Ghafir:* 79) with the letter '*lam*' before '*tarkabu*' (you may ride), while for eating He said: '…And from some derive your food (*wa minha ta'kulun*)' (*Ghafir:* 79) with no '*lam*' in front of '*ta'kulun*' (derive your food). The scholars said this is because eating is something which is just permissible, whereas riding is something which is necessary.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...and that through them you may attain any need in your hearts...' (*Ghafir:* 80) which means they help you achieve your needs, be it travelling to *Hajj,* for example, travelling for trade or carrying burdens.

The Lord *the Most High* continues: '...For on them, as on (*'alayha*) ships, you are carried [through life]' (*Ghafir:* 80), literally on them, because we ride them and put our burdens on them. As for: '...on ships...' (*Ghafir:* 80) meaning boats, it is obvious that we ride in (*fi*) them, as Allah *the Exalted* says about the Ark of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: 'We said [to Nuh (Noah)], "Place in this (*fiha*) [ark]...' (*Hud:* 40). He did not say *''alayha'* (on it). Why are the two verses different? The scholars said it is as if the Lord *Glorified is He* is showing us the stages of the development of boats and how they will be used. The Ark of Nuh *peace be upon him* was the first ship and it was built very simply, such that a person used to be actually inside it. This is why '*fi*' (in) is used when talking about the ark of Nuh. But in the verse we are discussing, the Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to teach us that the building of ships will develop, and that they will come to have different levels such that we could ride on top of them.

It was because of this that when we were in San Francisco we asked them when the huge ships they have were first built. They did not know the exact year, but one of them said that he thought it was probably about one century ago. 'Yes', I said, 'And in the Glorious Quran we are given a precise description of them. They are wide at the bottom and become narrower and narrower at each level towards the top, like a mountain. One sees them like giants on the water, just like mountains. The Lord *Glorified is He* says in His Quran when he enumerates His Blessings in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: "And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas" (*ar-Rahman:* 24). But it is well known that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* did not sail on the sea, and he did not see these huge ships. This is why this is a proof of the truthfulness of Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in delivering the Message from his Lord'. 'And tell me', I asked, 'When were these elevators and escalators invented?' 'About fifty years ago', they said.

'The Lord *Glorified is He* tells us in the Glorious Quran: "And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people will become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways (*ma`arij*) whereon to ascend" (*az-Zukhruf:* 33). The Arabic word *'ma`arij'* means an escalator, such as the ones you have had for the last fifty years. Allah informed us of them over 14 centuries ago'.

These are all glimpses from the Book of Allah. They are things that the Lord *Glorified is He* mentioned to us in order for them to be a proof of its miraculous nature: 'In time We shall make them fully understand Our Messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves so that it will become clear to them that this [Revelation] is indeed the Truth...' (*Fussilat:* 53).

Allah *the Exalted* then says:

وَيُرِيكُمْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦ فَأَىَّ ءَايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ تُنكِرُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

He shows you His signs: which of God's signs do you still ignore? [81] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 81)

There are His signs in His creatures and His signs in the sea when you sail in boats and see other worlds–and its signs are greater than those we see on land. Nowadays, with the technological progression that has come about, we see they have made boats with glass windows under the water's surface. They make transparent boats that allow a person to see into the depths and what they contain of Allah's wondrous creations and signs indicating His Immense Power. The sight makes one say, 'Glory be to Allah! How can the faithless disbelieve after seeing such things?'

Similarly, if one rides a camel over a long distance, one will see many of Allah's signs in His creation. One will see them in the camel one is riding, in the desert, in the mountains one passes and in everything around the person. This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* asks us to travel through the earth. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “Go all over the earth and behold (*fanzhuru*)...’’ (*an-Naml:* 69), and in another verse: ‘Say, “Go all over the earth, and then behold (*thumma unzhuru*)...”’ (*al-An‘am:* 11). It is well known among grammarians that the letter *‘fa’’* indicates a sequence which happens after a short period of time, whereas the particle *‘thumma’* indicates sequence after a delay. It seems that travelling around is for one of two reasons: to travel to reflect and ‘behold’, indicated by ‘*fa unzhuru*’ (and behold), or to travel for trade and profit and then reflect, indicated by ‘*thumma unzuru*’ (and then behold). Allah told us to travel through the earth and seek our provision and profit, but at the same time, we need not deprive ourselves of the pleasure of reflecting on Allah’s wonderful creation. He says: ‘Say, “Go all over the earth, and then (*thumma*) behold...”’ (*al-An‘am:* 11)(1).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...then which of the signs of Allah will you still deny?’ (*Ghafir:* 81) meaning which of these signs which you can see do you reject, and how can you reject them when they so clearly show the Power of Allah? Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘Then which of your Lord’s Blessings will you deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 13) The Lord *Glorified is He* repeats this verse after each of the blessings he enumerates. This means that these are signs that are not to be dismissed or denied. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said to his Companions *Allah be pleased with them* ‘I recited the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to your brothers among the Jinn and they had a better response to it than you did. When I recited:

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(1) In actual fact, the Lord *Glorified is He* uses the letter *‘fa’’* in three verses referring to traveling through the earth to reflect on the final end of the disbelievers, criminals and those who came earlier: the chapter of *an-Nahl* verse 36, the chapter of *an-Naml* verse 69, and the chapter of *ar-Rum* verse 42. He uses *‘thumma’* to express the same meaning in one verse, and that is Allah’s saying: ‘Go all over the earth and then (*thumma*) behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the Truth’ (*al- An‘am*: 11). He also used the letter *‘fa’’* to express the other meaning, that being to reflect upon Allah’s wondrous creation, in the verse: ‘…Say, "Go all over the earth and (*fa’*) behold how [wondrously] He has created ... in the first instance...”’ (*al-'Ankabut*: 20). Allah does not use the word *‘thumma’* as the Sheikh, Allah have mercy on him, stated here. The one verse in which *‘thumma’* comes specifically to reflect relates to the end of the disbelievers, as we already mentioned.

"Then which of your Lord's Blessings will you deny?" (*ar-Rahman:* 13), they all replied together, "Not one of your blessings do we deny, Our Lord"'.(1)

In the verse under study, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *'ayy'* (which) in the masculine–he did not say *'ayyat'* in the feminine–despite the fact that the word '*ayat'* (signs) is feminine. The scholars said that this is because the word '*ayat*' (signs) does not represent something which is actually feminine, and therefore it is permissible to treat it as masculine. Another example of this is found in Allah's saying: 'Then, when he beheld the sun rising, he said, "This (*hadha*) is my Lord..."...' (*al-An'am:* 78). Allah *Glorified is He* used the word *'hadha'* for 'this' in the masculine, when the sun is feminine.

Next Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَـٰقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن
قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ كَانُوٓا۟ أَكْثَرَ مِنْهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ قُوَّةً وَءَاثَارًا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَمَآ
أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

Have they not travelled through the land and seen how those who lived before them met their end? They were more numerous than them, stronger than them, and made a more impressive mark on the land, yet what they achieved was of no use to them at all [82] (The Quran, *Ghafir:* 82)

This travel is, as we said, for reflection. The reflection here is upon those nations who preceded them. The Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies that their predecessors among the nations of the world were more numerous and stronger than they were, and left a greater mark on the earth. The word *'athar'* (the impact which they left) refers to things like the pyramids that the pharaohs left behind and Allah preserved as a witness to their presence.

There are other ruins that we do not see because they are buried, yet Allah has informed us of them, as in His saying: 'Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] ʿAd, [the people of] *Iram*, with lofty pillars, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land?' (*al-Fajr:* 6-8) And the following refers to ruins that still exist: 'And verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time and by night. Will you not understand?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138)

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(1) *This has been related by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur [7/690] and he ascribed it to At-Tirmidhi, Ibn-Mundhir, Al-Hakim, Ibn-Mardawiyya, Abu Ash-Sheikh in Al-`Azhama and Al-Bayhaqi in Ad-Dala'il on the authority of Jabir ibn-`Abdullah Allah be pleased with him.*

Therefore, where are you, O Arabs, in comparison to these faded civilisations? You should have understood the lesson from those who preceded you in denying and opposing the Messengers; they were more powerful than you yet Allah took them to task and gave victory to His Messengers and His Religion. You are less than these and will not be able to confound Allah; indeed, it will be easier to deal with you.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...but all that they achieved was of no avail to them' (*Ghafir:* 82), referring to these civilisations and their buildings, the secrets of which have still not been fully grasped (although they are not impossible to understand) did not profit their people.

Let us speak of their ruins in Egypt, as an example. We have the ruins of the pharaohs, pyramids, and temples. We see colours on the wall just as they used to be, as if they were painted in recent times. We have found seeds just as they used to be, and scientists say that they could be grown even after these thousands of years since the time of the pharaohs. It is well known that there are many secrets hidden in the building of the pyramids that we still have not unravelled. Despite all this progress on the part of the pharaohs, they were not able to protect themselves or prolong their civilisation. They were not even able to leave behind what can explain their civilisation to us. Had Champollion(1) not deciphered the Rosetta Stone, we will not have been able to understand their history or uncover it.

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(1) He was Jean-François Champollion, a French scholar who was born in 1790 CE and died in 1832 at the age of 42. He was a boy of 8 when he came to Egypt with the French campaign in 1798 CE. He spent three years studying oriental and Coptic languages at the hands of some of the greatest scholars of his time. He worked as a teacher and chair of the department of Egyptian Antiquities in the College de France.

فَلَمَّا جَآءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ فَرِحُوا۟ بِمَا عِندَهُم مِّنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ
وَحَاقَ بِهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

When messengers came to them with clear signs, they
revelled in the knowledge they had, and so they were
engulfed by the very punishment they mocked [83]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 83)

Their Messengers brought them clear signs and miracles, but they said, ‘We do not need Messengers’ just as the philosopher Socrates himself had said a long time ago, ‘We are a people who are already guided. We have no need for Messengers’, and yet despite claiming that he was guided and had good manners, they saw he was bad and sentenced him to death. On the other hand, if he was truly guided and their judgement on him was unjust, he was in need of someone to defend him; a neutral party to check what was for and what was against him. That is, in both situations he needed the help of others.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...they kept proudly rejoicing(1) in whatever knowledge they [already] possessed...’ (*Ghafir:* 83). This is a type of rejoicing that we have already discussed, saying that it is not ordained by the Sacred Law and is the rejoicing of fools.

What is intended here is that they rejoiced in that knowledge by means of which they disputed with the Quran, such as their saying: ‘...There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die and we live, and nothing but time destroys us...’ (*al-Jathiya:* 24). This is what the atheists say. And similarly: ‘...Had Allah so willed, we will not have ascribed divinity to anything but Him...’ (*al-An‘am:* 148). Whenever a matter is presented to them that they wanted to refuse, they refute it in a way that satisfies them, even though it may false, and they consider this to be a type of knowledge.

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(1) *Ibn Al-Jawzi said regarding this verse in Zad Al-Masir, ‘There are two opinions about those who are being spoken of here. The first is that they are the nations who denied their prophets, and this is what the majority said. As to the meaning of what they said, there are also two opinions: One is that they said, ‘We are more knowledgeable than them; we will not be resurrected or held to account’, and this was the opinion of Mujahid. The other is that they rejoiced in what they had, believing it to be knowledge. This was the opinion of As-Suddi. The second opinion about who is being spoken of here is that they are the Messengers; Abu Sulaiman, among many others, believed that Messengers rejoiced at the destruction of the deniers of the Truth because this meant that they themselves and the true believers with them were saved. In addition, they, by the destruction of these disbelievers, became totally assured of the truthfulness of the Divine Knowledge revealed to them.*

Alternatively, it could mean that they were contented with the knowledge they had of the outward aspects of this world and the civilisations that established it. They said that they had no need for Messengers because what they had of material knowledge was sufficient. We will tell them that they have looked only at the surface of matters and at those things by which they feel they can justify their beliefs. But they also said: '...Had Allah so willed, we will not have ascribed divinity to anything but Him...' (*al-An'am:* 148), that is, blaming Allah, and this shows that they were just disagreeing with everything that was said.

Some scholars said that: '...they kept proudly rejoicing...' (*Ghafir:* 83) refers to the Messengers rejoicing that Allah had guided them and made them sources of guidance, yet this opinion does not take into account the dictates of the context of this verse and contradicts its latter half where Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and [so, in the end] they were overwhelmed by the very thing which they used to deride (*yastahzi'oon*)' (*Ghafir:* 83) which means as a result of their derision.

An example of such derision is found in Allah's saying: 'He [Pharaoh] said, "If you have come with a sign, produce it–if you are a man of Truth!"' (*al-A'raf:* 106), and: '…Have you come to us [with the demand] that we worship Allah alone, and give up all that our forefathers used to worship? Bring about, then, that [punishment] with which you have threatened us, if you are a man of Truth!' (*al-A'raf:* 70) The word *'yastahzi'oon'* (they used to deride) is derived from the phrase *'huz' al-batil min al-haqq'* meaning 'falsehood sneering at the Truth'. Why does falsehood do this? The scholars say that it is because when falsehood sees the Truth repelling it, it must try to undermine the strength of those who believe in it; this is because if it does not try to undermine those who believe, it will be drawn towards the Truth. This is why we have heard them say: '...Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk at random in the middle of its [reading](1) so that you might gain the upper hand' (*Fussilat:* 26).

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(1) *As-Samarqandi in Bahr Al-`Ulum in his Exegesis of this verse said, 'This verse was revealed about Abu Jahl and his companions. He said, "If Muhammad recites the Quran,=*

By Allah, had they not known the sweetness of the Quran, how it takes hold of its listeners, and overcomes their hearing and their hearts, and had they not feared that the Quran will strip them of their authority, they will not have said these things. They will not have warned people from listening to it had it been normal speech and they will not have taken this stance towards it. Thus they understood that the Quran was true and that those who listened to it will surely be guided by it, and when we say listened to it, we mean listened with his heart.

We have heard much of the story of the conversion(1) of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him*. He was stubborn, tyrannical, and hard-hearted before entering Islam, but what happened to him after he heard the Quran? He first heard it from his sister and flew into a fit of rage, striking her on her face thereby making it bleed. When he saw her bleeding, his feelings for his sister were stirred; and when this happened, his feelings overcame the vehemence of his enmity to Islam and allowed the Quran to penetrate to his heart without impediment, and thus he was affected and entered faith.

In another verse, the Quran has painted a picture for us of the way the people of falsehood mock the people of Truth. Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin used to laugh at the believers; and whenever they pass by them, they used to wink at one another [derisively]; and whenever they return to their own people, they used to return jesting; and whenever they see those [who believe], they used to say, “Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!” But they had not been sent to watch over [the beliefs of] others’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-33).

= *raise your voices while reading poetry and speech in front of them in order to confuse them”. This is what Allah Glorified is He spoke of in His saying: “...but rather talk at random in the middle of its [reading]...” (Fussilat : 26) meaning, make a lot of noise’.*

(1) *The conversion of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him happened in Dhul-Hijja, six years after Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him first received the Revelation. According to what Ibn-Sa`d related from Ibn-Musayyib, he was then 26 years old. Abu-Na`im said, ‘He entered Islam three days after Hamza Allah be pleased with him’. Ibn-Ishaq said, ‘There were approximately forty Muslim men and women [at this time]’ (See Subul Al-Huda wa Ar-Rashad, chapter 17, concerning the conversion of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him).*

The Lord *Glorified is He* then tells us the result of this mockery and who will have the last word in this discussion between the believers and sinners: ‘But on the Day [of Judgment], the believers will [be able to] laugh at the deniers of the Truth: [resting in paradise] on couches, they will gaze [at their condition and that of the disbelievers in Hell]’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-35). Then our Lord asks us: ‘Are these deniers of the Truth being [thus] requited for [anything but] what they used to do?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36) which means, are We not able to repay them as they deserve?

Next Allah *the Most High* says:

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا قَالُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَحْدَهُۥ وَكَفَرْنَا بِمَا كُنَّا بِهِۦ
مُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾ فَلَمْ يَكُ يَنفَعُهُمْ إِيمَـٰنُهُمْ لَمَّا رَأَوْا۟ بَأْسَنَا ۖ سُنَّتَ ٱللَّهِ
ٱلَّتِى قَدْ خَلَتْ فِى عِبَادِهِۦ ۖ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ ٱلْكَـٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

When they saw Our punishment, they said, ‘We believe in God alone; we reject any partner we ascribed to Him,’ [84] But believing after seeing Our punishment did not benefit them at all – this has always been God’s way of dealing with His creatures – there and then the disbelievers were lost [85]
(The Quran, *Ghafir:* 84 - 85)

This verse portrays for us the same situation that happened with Pharaoh when he was about to drown: ‘…[Pharaoh] exclaimed, “I [now] believe that there is no deity except Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender themselves to Him!’’ (*Yunus:* 90) But Allah replied to him, ‘Now?–but a little while before this you used to rebel [against us], and used to be among those who spread corruption?’ (*Yunus:* 91) This means faith will not benefit you now. This means that there is a time where one cannot turn back from disbelief to faith, and it is the time when death takes its hold. Faith is only accepted when one’s options are still open and one can believe or disbelieve. Similarly, Allah says about those in the verse under discussion: ‘...when they [clearly] beheld Our Punishment...’ (*Ghafir:* 84) come down on them in this world: ‘...they said, ‘We [now] believe in Allah, [and] only Him, and we have renounced our belief in those we used to associate [with Him]!’’ (*Ghafir:* 84)

But is this a time when faith is going to be accepted? The Lord *Glorified is He* repeats: ‘But believing after they had beheld Our Punishment could not possibly benefit them [at all]...’ (*Ghafir:* 85). Clearly, it does not make sense that their faith should benefit them now, and this is not the Way Allah deals with His creation. How could it be now that they have no strength or tricks to oppose Allah’s Way, they want to believe? It is not at all appropriate that they should benefit from such faith–their imagined faith–it is false, rejected, and devoid of meaning because it has come at the wrong time.

This is: ‘...the Way that Allah has always followed...’ (*Ghafir:* 85); it has always been the way: ‘...with His creatures...’ (*Ghafir:* 85). We can see Allah’s Ways in the annals of history. Just as he took other peoples to task for their sins and rejected their faith at the moment of death or when His punishment came upon them, he will not accept yours. This way will never change, for it is fixed: ‘...and never will you find any change in the Way that Allah follows!’ (*al-Ahzab:* 62) And it will remain in force for all of creation: ‘...And so, then and there, those who had denied the Truth were lost’ (*Ghafir:* 85). This is the normal and expected outcome and ending they deserved.

the chapter of

Fussilat

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Fussilat*(1) :

حمٓ ﴿١﴾ تَنزِيلٌ مِّنَ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

Ha Mim **[1] A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [2] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 1-2)**

We say that *Ha Mim* belong to the group of disconnected letters, and scholars have debated endlessly about what these letters mean – all such attempts being made merely to satisfy the intellect's passion for inquiry. Belief, however, has a different approach. It takes the matter as something given: as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has said it, there the question ends

Therefore, when our master Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was told: 'Your associate claims that he did such and such,' he immediately responded, 'Was it Allah's Messenger, Muhammad that said it?' When they replied 'yes', he said: 'So he has spoken the truth'(2) – that is, this question is beyond discussion, and there is no space here for applying reason; for it possesses such veracity as to put it beyond discussion

We have already mentioned the gist of the subject of these disjointed letters. These letters are those the names of which Allah has mentioned, for each letter has a name and a referent. For example, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet is called '*Alif*' and its *musamma al-harf* (the sound which the name of the letter refers to) is 'a,' 'u,' and 'i.' Now only a teacher uses its name, while an illiterate person knows nothing of the names of the letters, *Alif, Ba' Ta'*, but still uses their sounds when he speaks.

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(1) *The chapter of Fussilat is chapter number 41 according to the order of the Holy Book, revealed after the chapter of Fatir; it consists of 54 verses. In his commentary, Al-Qurtubi states that this chapter Fussilat is Meccan according to all authorities (IX, 6001). Fussilat means clarified or explained, that is, according to Qatada, the permitted is distinguished from the forbidden and obedience is distinguished from rebellion.*

(2) *Al-Qurtubi quotes this in his commentary (V, 4012). It continues with them asking him, 'You believe him before hearing from him directly?' To which he replied, 'Where is your reason? I believe him when he speaks of heaven, so how should I not believe him when he speaks of Jerusalem, since heaven is far above it!'*

Thus, the illiterate person uses *musamma al-harf* (the sound which the name of the letter refers to) without knowing its name. This is shown by the fact that when we teach children we tell them, 'Spell this word,' to which they respond, 'w', 'r', 'i', 't', 'e'. An illiterate person, on the other hand, simply says 'write' without knowing the letters that compose the word or its spelling. We can all agree on this point.

Recall then, that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, so what made him realise that the (Arabic) letter 'h' is called *Ha'* and the letter 'm' is called *Mim*, given that you read at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow) *Alif, Lam, Mim*, whereas at the beginning of the chapter of *ash-Sharh* (the Opening Forth) you say *Alam nashrah laka sadrak*, that is: 'Did We not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast?' (*ash-Sharh:* 1). Why do you read it one way in the chapter of *al-Baqara* (the Cow), and another way in the chapter of *ash-Sharh* (the Opening Forth)?

In the chapter of *al-Baqara,* you read the name of the letters, whereas in the chapter of *ash-Sharh* you read the *musamma* of the letters. Only a literate person can tell the difference. So who taught Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* this, since in both cases – in the chapter of *al-Baqara* and the chapter of *ash-Sharh* – the letters are identical and in the same order?

There is something else here: the disjointed letters in the Quran represent half of the letters of the alphabet. It is well known that the letters of the alphabet are 28 in number, and the disjointed letters represent only 14 of them, and are distributed in a most mysterious way such that the scholars are all still at a loss to explain their significance.

As for the first nine letters of the alphabet, only two of them occur: *Alif* and *Ha'*. Of the last nine letters of the alphabet, only seven occur, leaving aside two – the mirror image of the first. Of the middle ten letters, only those without diacritical points are used, leaving aside those with diacritical points:

thus, *Sin* is used but not *Shin*, *Sad* but not *Dad*, *Ta'* but not *Zha'*, '*Ayn* but not *Ghayn*. The matter, though not regular, thus shows a fine organisation; these letters are not monotonously arranged, but are arranged according to a higher wisdom, and with intended accuracy, much like the teeth on a key.

Sometimes, the True Lord puts a single letter, at the beginning of a chapter, like *'Sad'* or *'Qaf'*, and other times He puts two letters like *'Ha Mim'*; sometimes He puts three letters like *'Alif Lam Mim'*; sometimes he puts four letters like *'Alif Lam Mim Ra'*; sometimes He puts five letters like *'Ha Mim 'Ayn Sin Qaf'* or *'Kaf Ha Ya 'Ayn Sad'*. So the matter is intentionally arranged according to a certain wisdom, and for a purpose – a purpose that is based on the difference between these letters and the rest of the words in the chapter; yet, in which way? Scholars said that you are to pronounce the names of the disjointed letters in pausal form, not saying for example '*Alifun Lamun Mimun'*, that is, using the connective vowels, but rather, you must say *Alif* – and stop, *Lam* – and stop and *Mim* – and stop. The Quran itself is of course generally based on a reading that includes all connective vowels. Thus, you say, in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* (The Most Gracious): *'Mudhammatani',* '…Both inclining to blackness...' (*ar-Rahman:* 64), that is, with the connective vowel *kasrah* (here: 'i' at the end of the word) so as to connect it with the following words, '*Fa-bi-ayyi ala'i rabbikuma tukadhdhibani',* 'Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 65).

This is the case even with the very last letter of the Quran, in the chapter of *an-Nas* (Mankind). You say, '*Mina l-jinnati wa-n-nasi'*, 'From among the jinn and the men' (*an-Nas:* 6) so as to start again at the beginning immediately after, and connect it to '*Bi-sm Allah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim. Al-hamd li-Allah rabb al-'alamin.',* 'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds' (*al-Fatiha:* 1-2).

The disjointed letters, however, are based on pausal reading; therefore Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I do not say *'Alif Lam Mim'* is one letter, but *Alif* is a letter, *Lam* is a letter and *Mim* is a letter.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him who said, 'the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said ''Whoever reads a single letter of Allah's Book, it is accounted to him as a good deed ten=*

Thus, the disjointed letters comprise certain wisdom and specific purposes, the least part of which the scholars are still trying to understand, each to the extent Allah *Glorified is He* allows him to penetrate. The disjointed letters themselves are an eternal treasure trove that cannot be exhausted, and the True Lord gives of it to each of us according to our capacity.

They say: the Quran has come to us as an inimitable miracle of stylistic eloquence; the Arab nation was famed as a people of eloquence and rhetorical finesse, yet they were unable to produce anything comparable to the Quran nor imitate it at all; this despite the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* couched it in their own language and used their own writing system and their expressions, thereby challenging them – and they were unable to meet that challenge, being unable to produce even a single verse like it.

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to them: ‘You have the same letters and the same words, so why have not you woven from them what I have woven?’ Thus, the aspect of inimitability seen here is due to the fact that He is the Speaker in the Quran. It is He Who created it and speaks through it.

Moreover – and this is the point that should be emphasised in all this – the True Lord *Glorified is He* revealed to us certain articles of faith and prescriptive rulings that issue from the very One in Whom you believe, and the Quran, itself, that demonstrates this. These are three: the articles of faith, that is, belief in the Highest Existent, the Necessary Existent, and that He possesses certain qualities which represent His absolute perfection for example, the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward, and so on; for, rational proofs can be brought to bear here.

This marvellous, flawless universe must necessarily have been created by an All-Powerful, All Knowing, All-Wise Creator and so on and so forth. So, reason supports and establishes such articles of belief, but not all articles of belief can be so supported; there are also things that no rational proof can be based on because they deal with the invisible (unseen), as for example when you say that paradise is, looks such and such, describing it in specific terms.

= *times the value of other good deeds. Thus I do not say ‘a’‘l’ ‘m’ as a single unit, but Alif alone, and Lam alone, and Mim alone’’’ At-Tirmidhi, (Sunnan), 2910, identified by him as a sound Hadith.*

Likewise, all descriptions of the punishment in the grave – these pertain to the unseen realm and also admit of no rational proof, although they are guaranteed by those articles of faith that are supported by reason. So, as long as you believe in this Deity, Allah *Glorified is He*, and your reason leads you to Him, take what He has told you without disputing it – simply accept it as you hear it.

This applies also for the prescriptive rulings such as the ritual prayer, the purpose of which is to perpetuate one's devotion to Allah *Glorified is He* the Obligatory Alms, the purpose of which is financial and economic participation in society and the pilgrimage to Allah's inviolable house, and so on. These rulings have both a rational aspect and an audible aspect. Prayer, for example, may be rationally seen as worship of Allah *Glorified is He* and a proof of one's devotion to Him, while the specifics of how to perform it, such as the number of prostrations, is purely a matter of revelation we take as given to us without dispute. This applies for all acts of worship.

The prescriptive rulings comprise an aspect that may be understood rationally and an aspect that must be accepted undisputedly. If you ask, how can we simply keep within limits when it comes to certain issues of religion that cannot be disputed? We say, yes, such keeping within limits when it comes to the unseen realm is an indication of the level of our belief in Allah *Glorified is He*; for, all people are equal when it comes to intellectual matters.

We said before that if, for example, you have some money you fear might be stolen, you hide it underneath a rock in the garden. When the end of the month rolls around and you want to pay your servant his wages from this money, you tell him to lift this rock and take what is under it. He responds that he is not able to lift it alone, so he will wait for someone else to help him lift it. You respond that he should know that under the rock is a purse containing the money from which he is to take his wages – he immediately, heads to the rock and lifts it by himself without any help from anybody!

If however you were to tell another person to lift the rock and he did so without caring for a reason, would you consider both individuals equal in obedience to you? This also applies to the articles of faith – there is a difference between the one who believes in tangible things and the one who believes in unseen matters of which you inform him.

This then is the situation with the articles of faith, the prescriptive rulings, and the Quran – they all comprise an aspect that can be understood rationally and an aspect that must be accepted undisputedly. It is your responsibility to accept the unseen matters based upon your knowledge of the intellectual matters. The Holy Quran – the subject of our discussion here – contains both speech that may be understood rationally, and disjointed letters whose meaning is obscure beyond the basic fact that Allah *Glorified is He* spoke them. So, to sum up our view on the subject we say: Allah *Glorified is He* knows best what He means by them.

As for His saying: ‘Ha Mim. ‘Sending down [of this revelation] from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*Fussilat:* 1-2), we say that it is precisely *‘Ha Mim’* that Allah *Glorified is He* is referring to as ‘[This is] A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy’ (*Fussilat:* 2). Given this, these letters represent a revelation from the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy. Beware lest you get stuck on this point, asking what they mean or complaining that they are obscure. No, rather stop there and take them as they are with the understanding that Allah *Glorified is He* knows best what He means by them.

Know that He then says: ‘A Scripture whose verses are made distinct...’ (*Fussilat:* 3). There are then two elements in the Quran: those things which must be accepted undisputedly, without exceeding the boundaries, like the case of *‘Ha Mim’*. Such things which belong to the world of the unseen represent the arena where belief is tried. Yet, the Quran also provides matters which may be understood rationally – and these the Quran thoroughly expounds.

The word *tanzil*, ‘Sending down [of this revelation]...’ (*Fussilat:* 2) derives from the word *nuzul* (the action of descent). Descent involves movement from a high place to a lower place or a higher rank to a lower rank. This term occurs frequently and refers to the descent of the Quran and the Path from on high, and occurs in all its various derivations: *tanzil, nazala, nunazzilu, nazzalnahu, anzalna*. The True Lord says: ‘And with the truth We have sent the Quran down, and with the truth it has descended...’ (*al-Isra’:* 105). He also says: ‘The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter’ (*al-Qadr:* 4).

Therefore, the moment you hear the word *tanzil* you know that what has come to you is from a higher station than yours, though it may reside with you now, or even be under your feet – as He says in the chapter of *al-Hadid* (the Iron): '...And We sent down iron, wherein is mighty strength and benefits for the people…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). It is obvious that iron comes from the ground with respect to its formation, but it comes down from on high with respect to its Creator: The One Who gives it to you.

Thus, all of these derivations from the root *n-z-l* refer to the sublimity of that which is sent down. From whom then is it sent down? '…From the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' (*Fussilat:* 2). It is incumbent upon you to receive that which is sent down to you with absolute submission and acceptance. For this reason, when they told our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* that his associate was claiming to have been taken on a journey, by night, to Jerusalem and then taken up to heaven, he did not dispute the matter from a rational standpoint but simply said to them: 'If he said it, then he spoke the truth.'

Thus, he made Muhammad's statement the foundation – if the statement issues from him it must be true since he is truthful – and ever since that day Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* has been called As-Siddiq 'the absolutely believing'. The fact of Muhammad's being taken on a night journey, actually, constitutes an earthly sign and has a rational aspect to it since the distance was known to them, as was the nature of the trip to Jerusalem in terms of time and place; yet Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* did not dispute it. As for the ascension, it is an unseen matter. It is as though He made believing Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in terms of familiar earthly things a means whereby the people could believe him in heavenly things they knew nothing of.

We also understand from Allah's words: 'Sending down [of this revelation] from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy;' (*Fussilat:* 2) that the imposition of obligations He revealed to you is not for the purpose of burdening you; for He is the One Who is all-merciful towards you, infinite in His mercy – His mercy encompasses all things, believer and disbeliever alike.

Now *Ar-Rahim* means (perpetually merciful), for His mercy extends and lasts even in the Hereafter. If then you see in the revelation an obligation that you think is onerous to you, do not think that it is from one who is harsh towards you – but rather comes from the All-Merciful towards you and the Dispenser of mercy.

He is the All-Merciful towards you, for He directs you to that which will felicitate your earthly existence and your life in the Hereafter. When He imposes upon us certain obligations that might be onerous to a typical soul, it is not that He profits in any way by this; it is all the same to Him whether you believe or disbelieve, pray or do not pray. He exists in His Omnipotence regardless of whether you disbelieve in Him or you do not pray.

Your actions therefore bear no relation to Allah *Glorified is He* with respect to the benefit they may have, but are simply for your own good. It is just as you might say to your child, for example, ‘If you do well this year I will buy you such and such’. Then, the True Lord says:

كِتَٰبٌ فُصِّلَتْ ءَايَٰتُهُۥ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ٣

A Scripture whose verses are made distinct as a
Quran in Arabic for people who understand [3]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 3)

He calls it: ‘…a book…’ (*Fussilat:* 3) since *kitab* (book) signifies a collection (is plural), just as *katibah* (battalion) is *jam’a* (a collection) of troops. *Kitab*, thus, is a word that *tajma’* (gathers) words together. *Al-Kitab* means that things are gathered within it. In the Quran is collected all the good in this life and the Hereafter. It is also *kitab* (a book) in the sense that it is *maktub* (written) and inscribed such that you can read it.

Therefore, when they wished to codify the Quran, the one responsible for its codification laid down the criterion that they should not accept a verse unless they could find it actually written on a scrap or bone or some other writing surface used at that time; its authenticity then had to be testified to by two reciters. So, it is *kitab* (a book) in that it is written down, and a Quran because it is *maqru’* (recited) and memorised by heart.

According to the late Sheikh Mohammad 'Abdullah Darraz,(1) (using a verse from the Quran as a metaphor) the True Lord intends thereby that ‘…the second of the two may remind the other…’ (*al-Baqara:* 282), that is, the written record assisted the recited form in inscribing the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* with great precision admitting no doubt.

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(1) *Mohammad ‘Abdullah Darraz*, the learned Egyptian Azharite jurist, among the leading scholars of Azhar. His books include *Ad-Din*, an introductory study of the history of Islam. He died in 1958. (Taken from *Az- Zirikli’s Al-A‘lam*).

This is demonstrated by the following incident: when the codifier of the Quran found a particular written verse and called for two witnesses but could only find one to testify to its authenticity, he refrained from transcribing it. The witness in question was our master Hudhayfa(1) *Allah be pleased with him*. Then there approached the codifier an individual who reminded him of the Hadith of our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concerning Khuzayma of whom Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'To whomever Khuzayma testifies, his testimony is sufficient.' Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* made Khuzayma's testimony worth that of two men. So, the codifier accepted the verse and wrote it down.

There is a story about this: they say that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took a loan from a Jew, then, repaid him without the presence of a witness. Later the Jew came again demanding payment, whereupon the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I have repaid you.' The man denied this, but Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* repeated: 'I have repaid you.' The man said, 'Bring me a witness,' whereupon one of the Companions arose and said, 'Messenger of Allah! I was a witness to that' – so the Jew desisted, for he was lying. Afterwards the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called the Companion over and asked him, 'How could you have witnessed our transaction when no one was there with us?' He replied: 'Messenger of Allah, how could I believe you when you speak of heaven yet disbelieve you about a few *dirhams*?'

Yes: we call this an excellent example of inference. It is for this reason that he was worthy of such a dignified standing with the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'To whomever Khuzayma testifies, his testimony is sufficient.'

As for His words: '*fussilat ayatuhu'*, '…whose verses are made distinct…' (*Fussilat:* 3): they call this form of the verb passive, that is, one for which the subject is not identified. The reason it is so here is because Allah *Glorified is He* first *fassalaha* (made its verses distinct) such that they, accordingly, became *mufassalah* (distinct). When the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* communicated them to the people, they became *mufassilah* (clarifying in detail) with respect to their affairs and the rulings they should abide by.

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(1) *The testimony of Khuzayma in favour of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him*

Furthermore, '…whose verses are made distinct…' (*Fussilat:* 3) signifies that the Quran was partitioned or divided *mufassal* into chapters, each chapter standing alone in its own right, and within the chapters there are verses; each verse again standing alone in its own right. There are both long and short chapters, and likewise there are some verses that are only one word long and others that are several lines long. He also made the words distinct with respect to their subject matter. Moreover He made distinct the *halal* (allowed) and *haram* (forbidden); He made distinct acts of obedience and acts of disobedience. Has He not made distinct His promise and His threat, His reward and His punishment? The Quran, then, made all these issues distinct, or rather, all the *ayat* (signs) in the universe have been made distinct therein as they shall be until the last hour. Therefore, they said: 'Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* delivered a sermon to us most eloquently without failing to mention anything, or failing to mention every single leaf that had fallen until the last hour comes – those who remember will remember and those who forget will forget.'(1)

Yes, it is just as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…We have missed nothing out of the Record…' (*al-An'am:* 38), that is, everything that happens in the world is here for you in this Book.

That is why when we were asked,(2) on one of our trips to Europe by a certain orientalist: 'You have in the Quran: "It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to show that it is above all [other] religions…" (*as-Saff:* 9). Also: "they wish to put His light out with their mouths. But He will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers hate it" (*as-Saff:* 8). Nevertheless, though fourteen centuries have passed since the appearance of Islam, Jews, Christians, apostates and idolaters still exist without Islam prevailing over them.'

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him who stated: 'Allah's Messenger, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him addressed us from afternoon to sunset; those of us remember it who remember it and those of us who have forgotten have forgotten. But – praise be to Allah – he spoke of what shall be until the Day of Resurrection' [Ahmad, (Musnad), 3/19].*

(2) The story of the orientalist who asked sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *Allah rest his soul* about the meaning of the verse 'He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with [the task of] spreading guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He makes it prevail over all [false] religion…' (*as-Saff:* 9)

Our answer which Allah *Glorified is He* granted us to respond with was: Islam has in fact prevailed over them despite their continued existence, for what is meant here by prevail is the making of a conclusive argument. So, Islam has prevailed over them with an argument that its enemies cannot counter.

There is a difference between an argument being made by one who believes it, and it being made by one who does not. How? Scholars said: certain situations shall come into the world that are created by mankind and have no solution except through recourse to the dictates of the Quran. Thus, the Quran prevailed over them, over their ideas, norms, and civilisation – otherwise they would not have referred to it.

We then used the example of divorce in Islam, one of the most high-profile issues whose treatment in Islam they used to object to and criticise. Yet, afterwards, the Vatican itself was forced to allow divorce as well. This is part of Islam's prevailing, not by them converting to Islam, but simply by its arguments prevailing among them and those who do not believe in it still vouch for its efficiency.

He says: '…as a discourse in the Arabic tongue…' (*Fussilat:* 3) that is: in the Arabic language and for an Arabic-speaking nation. Yet, how could that be so when it is a universal message for all mankind, whatever language they speak? Why was not it revealed in every language? They said that this is because there was not yet Esperanto; thus, the Quran was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his Arabic-speaking community, for Allah *Glorified is He* wished to reveal this religion to an illiterate nation by the tongue of an illiterate Messenger – Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* – so that none could say that the Quran is merely a product of civilisation.

The Arabs were a nation that ruled no state of their own, unorganised and without a system of law, being only a group of different tribes each with its own law and every man for himself. Despite this, a nation of such modest standing was able to unite the entire world and its sophisticated states, from the Persian Empire in the east to the Byzantine Empire in the west.

How could this nation bring such a thing about? They were obliged to understand that the law of heaven came from above – they would never have played this role were it not for the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So there is no way we can say that Islam is a product of civilisation. Thus, when the True Lord wished to advance His religion, He caused Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim it in Mecca. Why Mecca specifically? Because the people of Quraysh were settled there; it was the seat of authority for the entire peninsula, and valiant men were there whom no one dared to face.

It was among these people that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proclaimed Islam. Yet it was not these chiefs and leaders that succoured the faith, but rather, the slaves and the oppressed of the city. As we have said, there is a reason for this – it was so that no one could say that tribal partisanship in support of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was what created belief in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but rather that belief in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was what inspired partisanship towards him.

So, the Quran is in Arabic, for the Arabs were the standard-bearers for the call to Islam, spreading the faith into all the regions of the world. The Arabs were a nation accustomed to nomadism; they had no houses, they did not live in villas or buildings, but had only their tents which they carried with them wherever they went. Their homeland, therefore, was the whole world, with their homes on the backs of their camels. They were likewise a tribal nation, each person loyal only to his own tribe, and thus were frequently at war with each other; some of these wars even lasted forty years.

These wars trained them to fight and planted in them courage and self-sacrifice for the sake of their principles. Thus, when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wished to prepare an army, he did not have to open a military school, for he found a whole generation of men prepared and ready to fight and well versed in the art of war – men who would rush off to fight whenever they heard of any commotion.

These are the men that would receive the faith from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and would spread his message. Thus, the Quran must necessarily have been given in their language, and the call made in their language, that they might be able to bear it.

For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* says in another place: ‘We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people’s language to make things clear for them…’ (*Ibrahim:* 4). Yes, because they were the ones to hear it from him first.

Yet, what about the universality of the faith! They said that when his people heard him they believed in him and then carried his call to mankind not as a body of words but as a path and code of behaviour and a model for emulation. It is well known that such codes of behaviour are the same across languages. Therefore, the Muslims conquered the whole world not with the Quran and its verses directly but rather with the principles and the way of life inculcated by the Quran.

Thus, the Quran was revealed in the Arabic language because the Arabs were ready for this undertaking, capable of seeing it through and taking it all over the world; given their status as a nomadic nation residing in no fixed place, as well as a nation of fighters, and an illiterate nation we cannot possibly accuse them of fabricating such a religion as this, or say that it is simply a product of civilisation.

His words: ‘…for people who understand,’ (*Fussilat:* 3) mean: with knowledge of the ways of the Arabic language, or rather, are absolutely fluent in them and at the peak of eloquence and rhetorical finesse such that you cannot find a nation on earth comparable to the Arabs in their production of literary and verbal excellence, as demonstrated in the markets of 'Ukazh, Al-Marbad, Dhu al-Majaz and Al-Majanna. There, they used to perform and critique their literary productions, and what was deemed most excellent they would honour by placing it on the curtains of the *Ka‘ba*.

Thus, ‘…for people who understand,’ (*Fussilat:* 3) refers to the Arabic language in which they excel to the extent that the inimitable Quran was revealed in their language. Inimitability is meaningless with respect to those who do not excel in the field this inimitability challenges. You may not say to one who is ignorant of a thing, ‘I excel you in this thing.’ The claim of inimitability is only valid with respect to one who also excels in the skill in which one claims to be superior since the ignorant can always say to you: ‘By Allah, had I known such a thing I would have beaten you in it. It is in this sense then that Allah *Glorified is He* challenged the Arabs with the Quran.

Therefore, the True Lord does not reveal a sign through which a messenger’s call is proved valid except when it fits the skill in which his people excel. Thus, the miracle of our master *Isa* (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was expressed in terms of medicine: he healed *al-akmah* (the blind) and *al-abras* (the leprous) by Allah’s leave. The miracle of our master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was expressed through his staff because his people excelled in magic. Likewise, the miracle of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was expressed in terms of rhetorical finesse and eloquence of expression; challenging his people with the Quran. In this way inimitability is realised.

We hear some say that the Arabs were beaten by the Quran. This is incorrect – the Arabs were not beaten, but rather vindicated by the Quran. How? Because those whom Allah *Glorified is He* challenges in this sense are strong themselves, so Allah’s challenge to them is simply proof that they were strong, they had power with respect to eloquence of expression, they had total command of their language.

بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا فَأَعْرَضَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Giving good news and warning. Yet most of them turn away and so do not hear [4] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 4)

He says: ‘giving good news and warning…’ (*Fussilat:* 4). This is the first element in the process of distinguishing between things; as we said, it distinguishes between truth and falsehood, between permitted and forbidden – here, between *bashiran* (giving good news) and *nadhiran* (giving warning). ‘…Yet most of them turn away and so do not hear’ (*Fussilat:* 4) – this turning away of the majority indicates that it is the minority that believed: the oppressed minority. The majority, however, were people of authority and power who did not accept the new call that would make them equal with such weaklings and slaves.

Our master Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* having assumed the caliphate, a group of leaders sought his audience, when a group of the poor who had been the first embracers of Islam were already with him. He delayed meeting with the important men until he had finished with the others. This irritated them, and they found themselves thinking: why has Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* given slaves and weaklings precedence over us? Abu Bakr As-Siddiq said: 'What is upsetting them? Each one is angry that I have given so-and-so precedence over him. I wonder how they will react when Allah *Glorified is He* gives the others precedence over them in paradise on the Day of Resurrection.'

Then, what is the reason of their turning away, according to His statement: '…Yet most of them turn away…' (*Fussilat:* 4)? Scholars said that the reason of their turning away is their understanding the goal of the new religion. It asks them to say: 'There is no deity but Allah.'

They understood that authority would now only belong to this phrase, that control would now only belong to this statement, and that all men would be equal before it. How, then, could they bring themselves to say: 'There is no deity but Allah,' knowing as they did its import? They did not say it. Had it been merely a word to be uttered, they would have uttered it, but they knew its meaning and accordingly refused.

He says: '…and so do not hear' (*Fussilat:* 4). That is, they cannot hear it in such a way as to profit from it, being aware and accepting its message. Therefore, as He says: '…Yet most of them turn away…' (*Fussilat:* 4) indicating that they hear the call of Allah's Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but hear only with their ears and do not profit thereby. Therefore, the True Lord says of them: 'Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, "What was that he just said?"…' (*Muhammad:* 16)

Thus, people differ in the way they receive the Quran. One may hear it and be moved, and accordingly prostrates for the majesty of the Quran; another may hear it and says in mockery and derision: 'What was that he said?' This is because he does not hear with the ear of respect and consideration. Why? Because the portals of his heart are locked by his mind in reaction to what the faith wants of him. Being accustomed to authority, then, they turned away the instant they heard that which opposed their temporal authority and power.

We mentioned in recounting the story of Umar's embracing Islam that when he first heard the Quran he opposed it and rebelled against it, for his heart was not ready to properly receive it. Then, when he struck his sister and caused her to bleed, his heart softened and became pliant, and the locks fell away. Then, when he heard the Quran, he was much moved by it and believed.

وَقَالُوا۟ قُلُوبُنَا فِىٓ أَكِنَّةٍ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَآ إِلَيْهِ وَفِىٓ ءَاذَانِنَا وَقْرٌ
وَمِنۢ بَيْنِنَا وَبَيْنِكَ حِجَابٌ فَٱعْمَلْ إِنَّنَا عَـٰمِلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

They say, 'Our hearts are encased against [the faith] you call us to; our ears are heavy; there is a barrier between us and you. So you do whatever you want, and so shall we' [5]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 5)

The meaning of '*fi akinnah'* is 'encased' that is, under a covering which is the plural of *kinan* (covering). A covering is wrapped around a thing such that light cannot penetrate it. In another verse He says: 'We have put covers over their hearts, so they cannot understand the Quran…' (*al-Kahf:* 57). In one case these covers are put there by Allah *Glorified is He* and in the other case they themselves put them there. Whose action precedes then? Does Allah *Glorified is He* first put covers upon their hearts, upon which they are stricken with heedlessness, or is it their turning away from the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* that puts these covers upon their hearts?

We said that when a man is comfortable in and attached to his disbelief, Allah *Glorified is He* lets it increase in him and puts a seal on his heart such that belief cannot enter it nor can disbelief leave.

Thus, disbelief comes from them initially, after which Allah *Glorified is He* puts a seal on their hearts. It is the same with the issue of these covers – it originates from the disbelievers initially, after which Allah *Glorified is He* multiplies the covers in them. He puts covers upon their hearts, giving them disease upon their disease.

Thus, what is meant by *al-akinnah* (the coverings) is that they prevent them from understanding and contemplating what they hear and what is recited to them. They said: *'wa fi adhanina waqr'*, '…our ears are heavy…' (*Fussilat:* 5). *Waqr* means: a deafness that obstructs hearing. In the chapter of *al-Baqara* Allah says: 'Deaf, dumb (and) blind…' (*al-Baqara:* 18).

It is well known that dumbness originates from deafness, for how can a deaf person speak when he cannot hear? This is because language is a social phenomenon, and it is the product of imitation – what the ear hears the tongue speaks. So, if the ear hears nothing, the tongue can say nothing. Language is not a stand-alone skill, but is subsequent to hearing and imitating. Thus, one can put an English little boy or girl in an Arabic-speaking environment and, after a while, they will speak Arabic.

A deaf person is capable of speaking since he makes various unintelligible sounds similar to those we might hear from a mute person, for example. Even a perfectly healthy and articulate person cannot say a word he does not know from his own language. How does he learn it? He learns by hearing it first.

We have taken from this issue material proofs of the existence of The Most Exalted Creator. We ask someone, how do you know how to speak? He says, I can speak because I heard my parents and everyone around me talking, so I began to speak like them. Thus, language is only established through hearing.

The same was the case with our ancestors. Trace this line back to Adam *peace be upon him and* ask how he was able to speak when there was no one before him whom he could hear? He definitely heard, but whom did he hear? He heard from Allah *Glorified is He* when He taught him all the names.

Thoughts are communicated to us through our ears and are expressed through our tongues. Because these people (mentioned in the verse) were deaf and could not hear, they did not take in any of what was said to them. Thus, they did not produce anything in response. That is why Allah says clarifying what they said: '…"Our hearts are encased"…' (*Fussilat:* 5) that is, covered over and prevented from benefitting, and '…our ears are heavy…' (*Fussilat:* 5). Why is no mention made here of their tongues? Because they would not speak of faith since they had not heard what was said to them about it. The fact that the True Lord does not refer to speech here indicates that they will not hear and so will not speak. Consider how precise the verse is here, for it is the speech of Him: the Lord.

They said in the verse: '…there is a barrier between us and you…' (*Fussilat:* 5). That is: a thick screen veils you. When you and your companion sit conversing with each other, you hear him and he hears you, you see him and he sees you, sociable and comfortable in each other's company and so on. By contrast, were there to be a barrier between you two, it would prevent any such interaction.

This barrier may be a spiritual one. We say (in Arabic), for example: 'there is a disagreement between two people – that is, a small misunderstanding that may be quickly resolved. If we say: 'there is a disagreement *bayna* (between) so-and-so and *bayna* (between) so-and-so', that is repeating the word 'between,' this indicates that it is a serious disagreement that will not be easily resolved.

They say likewise: *'wa min baynina wa baynika hijab'*, '…there is a barrier between us and you…' (*Fussilat:* 5). That is, a thick and heavy barrier that hides everything and prevents communication, filling in the whole space between us. They said: when our master, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to speak to the people and introduce Allah's religion to them, Abu Jahl would take his robe and put it over his face so as not to see the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

So, as long as there remains a barrier between us and you, we will never come to agreement, both of us on a separate path; and as long as we are on separate paths: '…So you do whatever you want, and so shall we' (*Fussilat:* 5). The True Lord has clarified this matter in the chapter of *al-Kafirun* (the Disbelievers): 'Say [Prophet], "Disbelievers: I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship: you have your religion and I have mine"' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-6). This is the natural result of this barrier between them.

When some people read this chapter they think that it contains repetition. This is not repetition; rather, this chapter speaks about cutting off relations. Such a cutting off of relations is determined by place and time. Consider two countries that have cut off relations with one another, and then the air cleared between them; their relations are restored and even become better than before. Diplomatically, there is a difference between the past and the present.

However, with respect to belief and disbelief it is different, for they are absolutely opposed to each other and cannot ever meet halfway, no matter what happens in the future, and so their relations cannot be restored. That is why He says: '…I do not worship what you worship; you do not worship what I worship…' (*al-Kafirun:* 2-3) – that is, now in the present. '…I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship,' (*al-Kafirun:* 4-5) – that is, in the future. So, do not imagine that relations between us will ever improve, that our relation shall ever be restored – no: we shall never have common ground, not in the present nor in the future.

This is the cutting off of relations: as long as there remains a barrier and a wall between us, we will each go our own way, 'everyone has their own horse to ride'.

'…So you do whatever you want, and so shall we' (*Fussilat:* 5). Do whatever makes you happy and whatever you get from your Allah and your Islam, and we will proceed according to our gods, our religion and our way of worshipping. Work for your Deity Who sent you and we will work for our gods that we worship. Work for your Hereafter and we will work for our present life. In short, what we have here is insistence on the part of the Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and enmity on their part, until such time as Allah wills and Allah *Glorified is He* will not but bring His light to perfection.

Thus, we see how Islam grew and spread slowly. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded his followers to immigrate to Ethiopia and then to Medina, leading them progressively until they became powerful. It began weakly with the weak, then, grew strong such that the powerful joined; it started out confined to Mecca, then, its sphere widened, increasing every day as the lands of Islam grew and those of disbelief shrank.

When Khalid ibn Al-Walid and 'Amr ibn Al-‘As *Allah be pleased with them* saw how Islam was spreading in this manner, Khalid *Allah be pleased with him* said to ‘Amr *Allah be pleased with him* ‘*wa Allah, laqad istaqam al-maysam’*, meaning: ‘By Allah, the path has become clear’ – that is, this religion is doing well, so let us embrace Islam.(1)

Even the leading disbelievers began to re-examine their position and embrace Allah’s religion. Among them was ‘Ikrima ibn Abi Jahl *Allah be pleased with him* who led the opposition in the battle for Mecca’s conquest, known as the battle of Al-Khan amah;(2) he subsequently became Muslim and proved himself brave in the cause of Islam such that he died in one of the battles. Just before he died, he said: ‘Will such a death make Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pleased with me?’

Then, the True Lord says:

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(1) *In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Hisham relates the story of the conversion of ‘Amr ibn ‘Al-‘As Allah be pleased with him and Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him. It begins with An-Najashi convincing him that Muhammad was speaking the truth, saying to him: ‘Woe to you, ‘Amr! Obey me and go follow him, for by Allah he speaks the truth, and he shall triumph over those who oppose him just as Musa (Moses) peace be upon him triumphed over Pharaoh and his army.’ So I [‘Amr] said, ‘Will you accept in his stead my pledge of allegiance to Islam?’ An-Najashi responded that yes, he would, and opened his hand; so I pledged to him my allegiance to Islam, and my companions kept my conversion secret. I then left him to seek out the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to become Muslim [at his hand]. I met Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him coming from Mecca – this was shortly before its conquest – and I asked him, ‘Where are you going, Abu Sulaiman?’ He said, ‘By Allah, the brand has become clear – I am going to the Prophet, by Allah, to become Muslim. How long Will you do so too?’ I said, ‘By Allah, I also have come for no other purpose.’ So we came to the Prophet in Medina. Khalid ibn Al-Walid Allah be pleased with him approached him first and pledged his allegiance, after which I drew near and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, I pledge allegiance to you on the condition that my previous sins be forgiven, nor do I mention the most recent.’ Said the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him ‘Make your pledge, ‘Amr, for Islam cuts off what went before it, and emigration cuts off what went before it.’*

(2) *Al-Khandama*: a mountain from which Mecca was built [*Az-Zamakhshari*, *(Al-Amkina wa-l-miyah)*]. It is one of the mountains around Mecca, rising above Mount *Abu Qubays* from the east and composed of red rock. On it there is a great white stone that appears to be suspended [*Ibn ‘Abd Al-Mun‘im Al-Himyari, (Ar-Rawd Al-mi‘tar fi khabar Al-'atar)*].

قُلْ إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَىَّ أَنَّمَآ إِلَـٰهُكُمْ إِلَـٰهٌ وَٰحِدٌ
فَٱسْتَقِيمُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِ وَٱسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ۗ وَوَيْلٌ لِّلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٦﴾
ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْتُونَ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَهُم بِٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ هُمْ كَـٰفِرُونَ ﴿٧﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘I am only a mortal like you, [but] it has been revealed to me that your God is One. Take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness. Woe to the idolaters [6] who do not pay the prescribed alms and refuse to believe in the world to come!’ [7] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 6 -7)

‘Say…’ – that is, in responding to what they said: ‘…“I am only a mortal like you, [but] it has been revealed to me that your Allah is One Allah”…’ (*Fussilat:* 6) – that is, why are you taking such a hostile position towards me and my call? Why do you put these barriers between us, when I am one of you, an Arab like you, someone whose trustworthiness and history you knew well when I lived among you previously? It is an instance of Allah’s mercy that He has sent me to you as a man like yourselves, rather than sending an angel. ‘Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger, We would still have sent him in the form of a man, so increasing their confusion’ (*al-An‘am:* 9). That is, you know how he behaved among you before – with honesty, integrity and virtue. So had he come to you as an angel, would you have been able to emulate him in his angelic state? For an angel is not the proper model for human beings.

So learn courtesy and humility from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his saying: ‘…“I am only a mortal like you”…’ (*Fussilat:* 6) that is, without any sense of pride or superiority – He singled me out from among you simply in that ‘…it has been revealed to me…’ (*Fussilat:* 6), and the purport of this revelation is ‘…your Allah is One Allah…’ (*Fussilat:* 6). As long as it is revealed to me I am simply its transmitter, and not guilty of any sin you might blame me for. I am but a human being like you and am one of you. I have no distinction above you except insofar as Allah *Glorified is He* has distinguished me with His revelation.

That is why the True Lord often corrected His Messenger, adjusted his judgments, and even rebuked him – it is Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself who has told us of this. Such is the proof that he was faithful in conveying from his Lord. The True Lord says: ‘if [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us, We would certainly have seized his right hand. And cut off his lifeblood’ (*al-Haqqa:* 44-46). He says also: ‘…Your Allah…’ (*Fussilat:* 6). He did not say ‘your Lord’ because they believe in the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator and All-Sustainer. The problem with them concerns Allah Who is to be worshipped, for that Allah has certain commands and prohibitions that demand obedience. So, they are Muslims with respect to His Lordship, but idolaters with respect to His Divinity. He wished to clarify the matter for them: ‘…your Allah is One Allah…’ (*Fussilat:* 6) not multiple. Sometimes Allah says: *‘ilahun wahid’*, ‘…is one Allah…’ (*Fussilat:* 6), while in the chapter of *al-Ikhlas* (Sincerity) He says: *‘Qul howa Allahu Ahad’*, ‘Say: He, Allah, is One’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). *Wahid* means He has no second, and *ahad* means one in His essence, not composed of different parts; His essence admits of no division.

The disbelievers had taken multiple gods in order to satisfy a religious impulse in their souls, and to have an object of worship that placed no demands on them in terms of responsibilities and conduct. For this reason, we say that part of our religion’s policy of *wasatiyya* (moderation) is its insistence on believing in one Deity (Allah) since on the one hand some people believe in multiple gods, and on the other some people deny the existence of any deity. Thus, the Islamic religion came and made it clear that Allah *Glorified is He* is one.

Given that He is one Allah, ‘…Take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness...’ (*Fussilat:* 6). *Istaqimu* (take the straight path) means: go directly and uprightly without swerving here and there. Scholars said(1) that there was a man of the Tayyi’ tribe; His name was Ibn Baar; He saw a young man taking a circuitous route back to his house rather than going directly: going around by all the village’s roads.

Ibn Bandar knew by this that the young man in his roundaboutness intended something suspicious, so he said to him: ‘You there – go to your house directly!’– that is, go there by a direct route. Right then the young man knew that the man had seen through him and understood his dishonourable plan, and was thus deterred.

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(1) The story of a man from Tayyi’ tribe with a youth called Ibn Bandar

Likewise, His statement, '…Take the straight path to Him…' (*Fussilat:* 6), means make for Him by the path of uprightness, whose path is called the straight path. Science has demonstrated that the shortest route between any two points is a straight line. Furthermore, the straight path may either be narrow, forcing you to walk uprightly, or may be wide, permitting you to swerve to the right or left, like highways.

Yet, even if it is wide, go directly on it anyway so as to shorten the distance of your trip and arrive more quickly; for when you deviate from this the distance increases. That is why He calls it: '…the straight path…' (*al-Baqara:* 108), that is, the middle of the path without deviation, such that what is on your right and left sides is equal. Sometimes He says: 'Guide us to the straight path' (*al-Fatiha:* 6), and sometimes '…the right path' (*al-Baqara:* 108).

So His words: '…Take the straight path to Him…' (*Fussilat:* 6) mean: to begin with, and if you are then distracted from the proper path and commit any sin, '…seek His forgiveness…' (*Fussilat:* 6), that is, ask forgiveness from Him.

'…Woe to the idolaters Who do not pay the prescribed alms…' (*Fussilat:* 6-7); for seeking forgiveness involves a request that a previous act be effaced. The legal principle here states that preventing corruption takes precedence over acting in the public good. An example of this is a situation in which someone wants to throw you an apple, while someone else wants to throw a stone at you. What should be done first in this case? It is a priority to avoid the stone. Then, He says: '…seek His forgiveness…' (*Fussilat:* 6) that your sins may be effaced and that you may initiate a new relationship with Allah *Glorified is He* based on obedience and uprightness.

The word *wayl* '…Woe…' (*Fussilat:* 6) means perdition '…to the idolaters, who do not pay the prescribed alms…' (*Fussilat:* 6-7). Was the payment of alms prescribed to idolaters? Alms payment was not even prescribed to the believers at that time. Scholars said that what is meant by alms payment here is the purification of one's income in case it is increasing. The idolaters used to do that in fact, but they did so, on the basis of generosity and to acquire a good reputation, not out of any consideration of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Thus, it was related that Al-Mut’im ibn 'Adi(1) had a pot with which he used to provide food to anyone who needed it such that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘I used to take refuge from the sun’s blaze in the shade of the pot of Al-Mut’im ibn 'Adi.’(2)

Other examples include Hatim At-Ta’i(3) and his like from among the Arabs, who were famous for their generosity. The True Lord says: ‘who do not pay the prescribed alms…’ (*Fussilat:* 7); for man typically loves his money. The True Lord says: ‘…And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul…’ (*al-Hashr:* 9), for a man has many needs and demands in this life.

Buying and selling, at that time, was a form of exchange, meaning: you give me a commodity and I give you another commodity in return. When there was yet no money in use, a person would give another person some wheat, for example, and in exchange the latter would give the first some dates. Thus, each thing was a commodity as well as a price: wheat was considered by one a commodity, while dates were considered the price. Thus, every one of us is a buyer and seller.

The True Lord says, speaking of the story of our master Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘And the one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife, “Make his residence comfortable”…’ (*Yusuf:* 21). He says, *ishtarah* meaning: he bought him and took him home. Of the others He says: ‘And they sold him for a small price, a few pieces of silver, and they showed no desire for him' (*Yusuf:* 20), that is, they sold him. This, then, is exchange, both individuals acting as buyer and seller at once.

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(1) *Al-Mut‘im ibn 'Adi ibn Nawfal, of the Quraysh, was the chief of the Banu Nawfal tribe in the Jahiliyya (period of ignorance before the Prophet came) and leader in the battle of Fijar in the year 33 BH. It was he who protected the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him after his mistreatment at the hands of the people of At-Ta’if, and he also was among those who did away with the Quraysh’s boycott against the Banu Hashim despite his being a disbeliever. He died before the battle of Badr, ninety-some years of age, in 2 AH [Az-Zirikli, (Al-A‘lam)].*

(2) *What I have found on this subject is that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘I used to seek refuge in the shade of ‘Abdullah ibn Jud‘an’s bowl at midday’, also with the phrase ‘at ‘Umayy’s high noon’ [that is, in the most intense heat of the day]’ [Ibn Kathir, (As-Sira An-Nabawiyya), 1/117; As-Suhayli, (Ar-Rawd Al-unuf), 1/244].*

(3) *Abu ‘Adu Hatim ibn ‘Abdullah at-Ta’i Al-Qahtani, of Najd, was a horseman and poet of the Jahiliyya; his generosity is proverbial. He went to Syria and married Mawiya bint Hajar Al-Ghassaniyya. He died in the mountains of the Tayyi’ region in the year 46 AH. Much diverse material is related about him in works of literature and history [Az-Zirikli, (Al-A‘lam), 2/151].*

The True Lord says: 'who do not pay the prescribed alms and refuse to believe in the world to come!' (*Fussilat:* 7) This might be a general statement, and thus indicates that it is through their idolatry that they fail to apply Allah's ruling concerning almsgiving, and, consequently, their environment and their communities were not improved through them. For Allah *Glorified is He* intends that belief should propagate a servantly (being servants to Allah) attitude among human beings aimed at seeking a better way such that the strong should help the weak, and the healthy the sick, the rich the poor, the learned the ignorant.

The most important aspect of life is its preservation through nourishment. Nourishment requires money, and so when the True Lord speaks about this point concerning *al-mu'alafti qulubuhum* (the new converts to Islam whose hearts and allegiance to the Muslims need to be won over or retained through the provision of material incentives), He clarifies that they are people for whom we wish to cause a softening in their hearts towards the religion of Allah *Glorified is He* and to attract them to it, so they may study it closely and make an informed decision – not that we simply buy them for the religion, as some claim.

Among the ways to achieve this goal is to treat them kindly. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* has included them among those who are to receive Obligatory Alms. Being given from Allah's money, their hearts become softened.

When you do good towards another person, what is it you are doing to him? First, you are diffusing any hate he might have, and as long as you are doing so he will not be averse to you or spiteful towards you; he will, at the very least, listen to you. This is what happened in the case of *al-mu'alafti qulubuhum*.

After the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* died, a number of Arabs apostatised from the faith – why? The initial reason for their apostasy was the imposition of paying the Obligatory Alms; this provoked the *Ridda* wars. Thus, we heard about *Sajah*,(1) the imposter prophetess, as well as Musaylima. The first issue they mentioned in their calls was: We will abolish the Obligatory Alms. They said this in order to induce acceptance of their assertions of prophethood, seeking to lighten the obligations that are onerous for the soul.

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(1) She is *Sajah bint Al-Harith ibn Suwayd Al-Tamimiyya* of the *Banu Yarbu',* known as *Umm Sadir*, the well-known false prophetess. She claimed prophet hood after the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and she knew how to write,=

Others – among those who claimed to be prophets – said: We will abolish half of the Prayer. Everything that lightens the rulings of Allah is invalid and harmful because it fell from being among the rulings of Allah's Path to being among the rulings of the method of lightening and making things easy. When Allah *Glorified is He* intends to make things easier He will do so Himself – Allah's Path is not to be, in any way, corrected.

There are many rulings, in Allah's law, that signify just such an easing, like the rulings concerning the fasting of the sick or the traveller, the prayer of the sick or the traveller, and many other such provisions in the law. Allah *Glorified is He* – the One Who legislates for you – is the only One Who may stipulate terms of easement, not you since He knows best the level of hardship which necessitates a legal easement.

We hear of those who say: 'We want to renew Islam.' We say: Glory be to Allah. O people who fear Allah, how can we renew Islam? How can we claim to correct Allah's rulings? We say: renew as much as you want, but Muslims will not don (embrace) whatever new things with which you come up. The reason for this is that the garment of piety comes from The Creator; He does not create just so that one of His creatures renews this garment – so spare yourselves the trouble.

Why has Allah made some people rich and others poor and needy? Why did He not make them all equal, thus obviating the need for Obligatory Alms? Scholars said: it is because Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to spread compassion and loving kindness among His creatures. So, when a rich man comes across a poor man, he is not to tower above him by reason of his wealth, but rather is to approach him and volunteer his services, and give him his due from Allah's

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= having learned from the Christians of the *Banu Tahglib*. A number of her clansmen followed her including some of the leading men of the *Banu Tamim*. She camped in the *Yamama* region and *Musaylima* there approached her with a group from his tribe and married her, upon which she departed. She died in 55 AH [*Az-Zirkili*, *(Al-A'lam)*].

money, upon which the poor man will love the rich man and love the fact that he is rich, without wishing him ill or hoping that he loses his wealth.

Thus, when you give you remove anger and resentment from people's hearts, thereby making your money a site of increase. The True Lord is fully capable of making everybody rich; however, wisdom dictates that there should be rich and poor, and that this situation should be general and persist – though the rich do not always remain so, likewise the poor, for everyone's state is constantly liable to change; so that people may be attached to one another through the bond of love and affection. The bond here is not one of graciousness but rather one of necessity.

Were we all to be college graduates, who would sweep the streets, who would drive the taxis, who would manufacture x and y? You say, perhaps we could agree that each person would do a specific task on a specific day.

We reply: fine – but this would make it a matter of graciousness, and graciousness is compulsory on no one – only necessity is. Allah *Glorified is He* wills to tie human welfare to necessity. Thus, you see a man with a difficult job, possibly even a painful one that you would be incapable of doing, perhaps you consider it wretched work, – so what makes him endure it? Necessity makes him endure it, the demands of life force him to endure it – daily bread and family responsibilities, raising children – otherwise he would not demean himself thus.

By Allah *Glorified is He* I have seen a cobbler living in the same house with his brother, a perfumer: just think how each of them smells all day.

Our teacher Sheikh Musa *Allah be pleased with him* often used to supplicate saying, 'O Allah, impoverish the craftsmen and enrich the scholars'. I used to get upset at this supplication and say to him, Master, what are you saying? How can you say that? He would reply: Were Allah to impoverish the scholars their ability to adjudicate would be compromised, and were Allah to enrich the craftsmen none of us would profit from them at all.

Yes: we have in fact seen a craftsman who refuses to work as long as he has ten pounds in his pocket and will do nothing till he has spent it all. Therefore, necessity must be the motivation to take care of matters of human welfare.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has made the infusion of money into society the most important matter in Islam, and has therefore included it among the Pillars of the Faith. The True Lord has not exempted anyone from the duty to extend economic support to others: one must give if one has enough money, and if one does not have money one is to find encouraging words to give to those who have.

The True Lord says: ‘but there is no blame attached to the weak, the sick, and those who have no means to spend, provided they give advice in the cause of Allah and His Messenger – there is no reason to reproach those who do good…’ (*at-Tawba:* 91).

If a person has neither money nor words that soften the heart, he may, at least, do so within his own heart: ‘And there is no blame attached to those who came to you [Prophet] for riding animals and to whom you said, “I cannot find a mount for you”: they turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears of grief that they had nothing they could contribute’ (*at-Tawba:* 92).

So if one has money, he should spend out of it in the cause of Allah. If not, let him then encourage those who have it to spend out of it. When a believer can do neither, sorrow brims his heart to the extent that he sheds tears, for there is nothing he can give in the cause of Allah. Islam shows great care regarding monetary matters, for money is one of the main sources of provision in society.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘…and refuse to believe in the world to come’ (*Fussilat:* 7). They disbelieve in the Oneness of Allah by associating partners with Him, and they also deny the Hereafter.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٨﴾

Those who believe and do good deeds will have a reward that never fails [8] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 8)

One of the stylistic features of the Quran is explaining things through contrast. After mentioning the polytheists, Allah mentions those who believe and do good deeds. He does not present one side without presenting the other for each to be quite clear in the minds of the addressees. Examples of this are numerous in the Quran, like the following verses: ‘The good will live in bliss and the wicked will burn in the Fire’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14). Here is another example: ‘Let them, then, laugh a little – for they will weep a lot…’ (*at-Tawba:* 82). Such comparisons serve a good purpose in adding vividness to the cases and situations being compared, for the mind to absorb them and the heart to feel them.

Now, the verse tells that the reward of those who believe and do good will never be cut off. What does that mean? Some say it simply means that it will be given to them generously, as Allah says in another verse: ‘You will have a never-ending reward’ (*al-Qalam:* 3). Others say it means that their reward for good deeds will still be continuous even when they are prevented by their circumstances from continuing to do them. When someone is prevented from an act of devotion by a force out of his control – like illness or poverty – Allah continues to reward him for what he used to do. His reward continues even after his death and until the Day of Resurrection.

قُلۡ أَئِنَّكُمۡ لَتَكۡفُرُونَ بِٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ فِي يَوۡمَيۡنِ
وَتَجۡعَلُونَ لَهُۥٓ أَندَادٗاۚ ذَٰلِكَ رَبُّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٩

Say, ‘How can you disregard the One who
created the earth in two Days? How can you set
up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all
the worlds!’ [9] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 9)

The verse is meant to direct attention to the signs of the universe, for they are the proofs that if we ponder must lead us to faith in Him Who has created everything. The universe is wondrous and incredibly precise in its construction and organisation. It operates according to a system that never breaks down, nor is it susceptible to anything that might affect its precision. All that spells the Majesty of the Creator since man never interfered in the creation of this amazing world. This is why the Quran often addresses people with the signs of creation to attract their attention to the One Who has made them. Numerous verses of the Quran start with: ‘Among His signs are.…’

In the verse we are considering, Allah speaks about the origin of creation and the emergence of the earth: ‘How can you disregard the One who created the earth in two Days? …' (*Fussilat:* 9). The interrogation here denotes condemnation. Allah reproaches them for their manifest error of denying the Creator Who has made this spectacular universe. They not only deny Him, but also '… set up other gods as His equals…' (*Fussilat:* 9). They dare make such allegations about Allah even though they know well He is the One God and Creator of all things, as Allah exposes them in several verses of the Quran. An example is this verse: 'If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, "Allah," so why are they so deluded?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). Allah also says: 'If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, "Allah." Say, "Praise belongs to Allah," but most of them do not understand' (*Luqman:* 25). This is a truth they believe and cannot but acknowledge, but they persist in their stubborn denial.

His saying '…in two days…' (*Fussilat:* 9) refers to the normal day familiar to us, the definite period of time comprising the day and night. Allah speaks to us based on what we know.

Having condemned them for associating partners with the Lord of the worlds – Whom they acknowledge to be the Creator – Allah says afterwards:

وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَٰسِيَ مِن فَوۡقِهَا وَبَٰرَكَ فِيهَا وَقَدَّرَ فِيهَآ أَقۡوَٰتَهَا فِيٓ أَرۡبَعَةِ أَيَّامٖ سَوَآءٗ لِّلسَّآئِلِينَ ﴿١٠﴾
ثُمَّ ٱسۡتَوَىٰٓ إِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٞ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلۡأَرۡضِ ٱئۡتِيَا طَوۡعًا أَوۡ كَرۡهٗا قَالَتَآ أَتَيۡنَا طَآئِعِينَ ﴿١١﴾

He placed solid mountains on it, blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them — all in four Days [10] Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke — He said to it and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not,' and they said, 'We come willingly' [11] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 10 - 11)

Allah speaks here about the creation of the earth, informing us that He created it in two days. That does not mean creation itself was a process that took Him two days to perform. The case is quite different, and let me illustrate this by an example. What does it take to make yoghurt? It takes the simple process of adding a certain kind of bacteria to some milk then leaving it at a specified temperature for a specified length of time, say a few hours, after which the yoghurt will be ready. Does this mean that the process of making it took hours? No, only the minutes you spent adding the bacteria and storing it. You may go to a tailor to have a shirt made, and he will tell you to come back in a week to pick it up. Does it take him a week of constant work to make the shirt?

After Allah had created the earth, He placed firm mountains on it to preserve its stability, as He says: 'Did We not make the earth smooth, and make the mountains to keep it stable?' (*an-Naba':* 6-7) Were the earth naturally stable, it would not need mountains, but the earth spins and needs what makes it stable.

The verse then says: '… blessed it, measured out its varied provisions…' (*Fussilat:* 10). Blessing something means increasing it so that it yields more benefit than is reasonably expected. When food that normally suffices only five people is found to be sufficient for ten, we say Allah has blessed that food.

This translation of the verse tells us that Allah here speaks about the earth. The pronouns 'it' and 'its' refer to the earth. However, the pronouns used in the original Arabic text can refer to either the earth or the mountains, so which of the two is meant as the referent of these pronouns the earth which was mentioned first or the mountains as the more immediate referent? I am of the view that they refer to the mountains.

Science has proved that mountains are the main source of the elements required for fertility of the soil and producing food. Nutritious elements in the soil get depleted and need to be renewed from time to time. Rains fall on mountains and break their top layers. They are then carried by the flow of water and spread over the flat lands around. Fertile soil comes with the stream of the Nile from its springs in mountaintops. The water of the Nile used to be a little thick with the fertile soil it carried and remained like that up to where it emptied into the Mediterranean. The Nile delta was formed through alluvial build-up.

The same applies to the valleys around mountains: the top layers of the mountains are washed down into the valleys, thereby renewing the soil and increasing its fertility. It is indeed as though mountains are the storehouses of the earth's sustenance. This is why I believe the verse means: '…blessed them [the mountains], measured out their varied provisions…' (*Fussilat:* 10). The ways mountains and valleys are formed are wondrous. It is as if mountains provide valleys with an increase of elements in the course of time that corresponds to the increase of populations and demand for the requirements of life.

Allah has blessed the earth with resources that renew themselves to cope with the increase in human needs. There is no need to be apprehensive about the future; rest assured, for Allah has guaranteed your daily sustenance. This is why He then says: '…measured out their varied provisions…' (*Fussilat:* 10).

So Allah: '…placed solid mountains on it, blessed them, measured out their varied provisions for all who seek them – all in four Days…' (*Fussilat:* 10). The word *sawa'* used in the original Arabic text of the verse can be interpreted in several ways. It may mean 'equal'; that is, these four days were of equal length. The word may also denote 'completed'. That means the creation of the earth was complete in four days. Now, when we add these four days to the two days mentioned in the previous verse, it gives us six days as the total period for the creation of the heavens and the earth, as Allah says in another verse: '… who has created the heavens and the earth in six days…' (*al-A'raf:* 54).

He then speaks in more detail about the creation of the heavens, saying: 'Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke – He said to it and the earth, "Come into being, willingly or not," and they said, "We come willingly"' (*Fussilat:* 11). The verb *istawa* (here roughly translated as 'turned to') has caused a heated debate among scholars. They have counted the instances of its occurrence in the Quran and found that the word has been used twelve times, seven of which are associated with the Throne, and twice with the heavens and earth as in the verse we are considering. 'Then He *istawa* turned to the sky, which was smoke…' (*Fussilat:* 11). In a verse in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, He says: 'It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then *istawa* (turned to) the sky and made the seven heavens…' (*al-Baqara:* 29).

Besides those nine instances, the verb *estawa* is mentioned in relation to the revelation in the verse where Allah says about Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*: 'It was taught to him by [an angel] with mighty powers and great strength, who *istawa* (stood on) the highest horizon' (*an-Najm:* 5-7).

Another instance where the verb *estawa* is used is in the following verse that refers to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'And when he (Musa) attained his maturity and *estawa* (became full grown), We granted him wisdom and knowledge; and thus do We reward those who do good (to others)' (*al-Qasas:* 14).

The last instance occurs in connection with the depiction of Muslims in the Gospel, in the verse where Allah says: '… their description in the Injeel (Gospel); like a seed-produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and *istawa* (stands firmly) on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

It is worthy of mention that the same verse also states the depiction of Muslims in the Taurat (Torah): '…firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Taurat (Torah)…' (*al-Fath:* 29). All these things are spiritual values that include nothing material, for the Jews had grown extremely immersed in materialism to the point that they dealt with Allah in a materialistic way when they said to Prophet Musa (Moses): '… "Make us see Allah face to face"…' (*an-Nisa':* 153).

As for their parable in the Injeel (Gospel), it is a material image, void of spirituality – why? Christianity entirely focused on spiritual matters and had nothing to do with the necessary laws required to deal with the materiality which is inevitably part of our life on earth. For example, when Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) was asked about the issue of inheritance, he replied, 'I was not sent to divide inheritances'. For this reason the parable of the final Prophet's nation in the Injeel (Gospel) was directly material. Allah addressed both the Jews and Christians based on what was lacking among them. The former went to an extreme with regard to materialism and the latter with regard to spirituality, so Islam came to combine both elements into one religion and restore humankind to moderation.

Those are the twelve instances where the verb *istawa* is used in the Quran. As we said, in seven of those instances, the verb is mentioned in relation to Allah's sitting on the Throne. The seven chapters of the Quran where these seven instances occur are mentioned in the following lines:

It is mentioned in *al-A'raf* then in *Yunus*,
ar-Ra'd as well as *Ta Ha* – this is the count; remember it!
It comes in *al-Furqan*, then *as-Sajda*
and finally *al-Hadid* – let those who believe reflect!

So the verb *istawa* denotes 'to sit'. It is used to refer to the act of Allah's sitting on the Throne. Some try to describe this Divine act of sitting in terms of the way, for example, creatures sit on chairs. This is anthropomorphism, which is prohibited in Islam. The verb *istawa* is also used in relation to the heavens. It means He turned His purpose and His Attention towards the heavens.

The word 'throne' denotes power and domination. If a ruler faces dissension among his subjects, it means he is not firmly stationed on the throne nor does he possess authority in an orderly fashion. To say that a ruler *istawa* on the throne means all his subjects surrender themselves to him. The Quran speaks about Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba(1): '… and hers is a mighty throne' (*an-Naml:* 23). It means power was firmly in her hands. So the phrase 'He *istawa* (sat down) upon the Throne' indicates that the entire universe is at His service and does His Bidding and none is out of His Control. This is why He says here about the heavens and earth: '… He said to it and the earth, "Come into being, willingly or not," and they said, "We come willingly"' (*Fussilat:* 11).

So scholars have a number of different opinions concerning the meaning of *istawa*, some of which have been summed up in the following lines:

They hold four views on the word istawa
that have been explained for those of acuity:
To be steadfast; to be elevated; similarly,
to rise; and to ascend – such are four.

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(1) *Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, was discovered by the hoopoe of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon). The Prophet sent the hoopoe with a message exhorting her to embrace monotheism, for Bilqis and her people worshipped the sun. She was of the Banu Ya'far ibn Saksak of Himayr, a Yemenite from Ma'rib; she was buried in Palmyra [Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam 2/73].*

The verse we are reflecting on says: ‘Then He *istawa* (turned to) the sky…’ (*Fussilat:* 11). It means Allah turned His Purpose towards them and directed His Will to them. As for *istawa* on the Throne, it means His Command became established, for everything in existence is subject to His Will and Control.

Allah says to anything, ‘Be!’ and it is, for He knows everything is completely under His Control. Nothing can escape His Will and Decree. He says about the sky: ‘obeying its Lord as it rightly must’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2). It has but to hear the summons and it immediately responds. Allah has testified to Himself of this fact that He is the One Lord and everything in under His Control: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). Since He is the One God, He says to anything, ‘Be!’ and it is. The angels provide a corroborating testimony, as do those who are endowed with knowledge.

Allah says about the sky: ‘... which was smoke…’ (*Fussilat:* 11). The sky was in the form of smoke that resembled mist. The universe then was in a gaseous state, and the earth and its rocks and mountains were formed from smoke. After the heavens and earth were completed, the Creator commanded them to come into being, and they responded: ‘... “We come willingly”…’ (*Fussilat:* 11). This response spells the complete submission and obedience of the universe to its Creator. It is as if they meant: do we have any choice but to obey? Why should we come unwillingly? They show total deference and obedience to their Creator and have no desire or whim that can mislead them or cause them to stray; Allah says: ‘... and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him...’ (*al-Isra’:* 44).

As for man, however, each person has different desires. This is why Prophet Muhammad said, ‘None of you has attained true faith until his personal desires conform to what [the divine revelation] I have delivered to you.’(1) When we all comply with what Allah has revealed and ordained, where will conflict and disagreement emerge? However, people will still differ, yet the universe does not follow their desires, as Allah says: ‘But if the truth were in accord with their own likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 71).

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(1) *This Hadith is cited by Ibn Abu ‘Asem in his Kitab As-Sunnah (1/12) on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr. It is also cited by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali in his Jami‘ Al-‘Ulum wa Al-Hikam (460) he classified it as da’if (literally ‘weak’; a Hadith whose chain of narrations has a certain defect).*

It is worthy of note that the Arabic word used in the original text of the verse to mean ‘willingly’ is an adjective. Adjectives in Arabic take plural, dual or singular and masculine or feminine forms. Dual adjectives are used when the number of the modified things/people is two. Now, the words for ‘sky’ and ‘earth’ are feminine in Arabic. This means the adjective should have been feminine and in the dual form, for the modified things are two: the sky and the earth. However, the adjective comes in the masculine and plural form instead of the feminine and dual form. Why? This is because both nouns can be considered collective nouns in the sense that the word itself is singular and feminine, but it includes many creatures, which makes its adjective plural and masculine. In other words, the adjective includes the sky, the earth, and all that is in them.

Another example of this use of adjectives is found in the following verse: ‘Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9). Verbs in Arabic come in the singular, dual or plural forms, too. The subject in the aforementioned verse is the noun phrase ‘two groups of believers’, which means the verb should be in the dual form, yet the verb here translated as ‘fall to fighting’ is in the plural form in the original Arabic text of the verse. That is because when two groups fight, they are no longer ‘two’ distinct groups, but with all engaging in the fight, they become many rather than two. When it comes to making peace, the pronoun in ‘…make peace between *them*…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9) is in the dual form, for then the two groups are clearly distinct when their leaders sit together with an arbitrator to resolve the conflict and make peace.

Allah says afterwards:

فَقَضَىٰهُنَّ سَبۡعَ سَمَٰوَاتٖ فِي يَوۡمَيۡنِ وَأَوۡحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ سَمَآءٍ أَمۡرَهَاۚ وَزَيَّنَّا
ٱلسَّمَآءَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا بِمَصَٰبِيحَ وَحِفۡظٗاۚ ذَٰلِكَ تَقۡدِيرُ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡعَلِيمِ ١٢

And in two Days He formed seven heavens, and assigned an order to each. We have made the nearest one beautifully illuminated and secure. Such is the design of the Almighty, the All Knowing [12] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 12)

Allah has made them seven skies over a period of two days. Some would wonder: adding these two to the days mentioned previously in the aforementioned verses, it means the creation of the heavens and earth took eight days, not six as stated in other verses of the Quran. There is no contradiction. We just need to clarify one point. Allah says He created the earth in two days after which He set within it firm mountains, blessed them and measured out their means of subsistence – all in four days. In other words, the two days mentioned earlier are part of the four days mentioned later. So, all the creation of the earth took four days. If we then add two days for the creation of the sky, the total comes to: '... six days...' (*al-A'raf:* 54).

After creating the skies, Allah '... assigned an order to each...' (*Fussilat:* 12). This means Allah has decreed the distinct function of each sky, the messenger who shall be in it, and the role it shall have in guiding the motion of life.

Then Allah says: '...We have made the nearest one beautifully illuminated...' (*Fussilat:* 12). This refers to the planets and stars that illuminate the sky like lamps, including the sun and the moon. The sun's light is different from the moon's light. The former is associated with heat, whereas the moon sends only light, gentle light that involves no heat. Allah says: 'It is He who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light...' (*Yunus:* 5). He also says: '... a [radiant] lamp and a light-giving moon' (*al-Furqan:* 61). Allah has thus adorned the nearest sky, the one directly above the earth, which we can see.

Allah is the One Who has created all and knows best what is good for His servants. He has created the night for rest, since He knows we need this to resume the movements and activities of our lives. One is able to do effort when he has had adequate sleep.

Nevertheless, some activities must be done at night, not during the day. For this purpose, He made the moon and the stars to send light amid the stillness of the night. He says about the stars: '… and stars to guide people' (*an-Nahl:* 16). Allah has created Adam and made him and his offspring vicegerents on earth in order to worship Him and work for the earth's prosperity. He has endowed us with the power of the mind and the body and created resources in the earth so we can employ all to accomplish the mission for which we have been created. This is how Allah has secured the wellbeing of the universe and the precision of its system.

The stars have had another purpose of old.

Allah says in the verse that He has made the sky secure, and in anther verse He says: 'and have made them secure against every rebellious, satanic force' (*as-Saffat:* 7). The jinn used to eavesdrop on the assembly of angels in heaven and would take some piece of information about the affairs of the world they heard from the angels and reveal it to soothsayers, by which the latter deceived people into believing they knew the unseen. Soothsayers are imposters, and even though they seek such help from the jinn, much of what they tell people is false.(1)

That was before the advent of Islam. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent as a Messenger, Allah made the heavens secure from such eavesdropping; He says: 'We used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him' (*al-Jinn:* 9).

Arabs used to have recourse to soothsayers to ask their judgements, and they trusted what they told them. It has been narrated that Hind,(2) the wife of

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her 'Some people asked the Messenger of Allah about soothsayers, to which he replied, "What they say is nothing." They said, "Messenger of Allah, sometimes they tell us things which turn out to be true." The Messenger of Allah said, "The jinn throw in their ears a word of truth they have eavesdropped to snatch from heaven then soothsayers mix it with a hundred lies"'. [Cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, section on soothsaying (kahana)]*

(2) *Hind bint 'Utaba: a Companion from Quraysh, of Banu 'Abd-Shams. She became Muslim in the 8th year AH, following the Conquest of Mecca. She was the wife of Abu Sufyan and the mother of Mu'awiya Allah be pleased with him. She spent the first part of=*

Abu Sufyan, was married to another man previously, Al-Fakeh ibn Al-Mughira,(1) one of the leaders of Quraysh. His home was open to all the tribe and everyone in need of something would go to him. People would say, 'Go to Al-Fakeh', as his home was like the tribe's clubhouse. One day Hind came home to do her household chores when she found a man sleeping in the vestibule, so she withdrew. At that very moment, however, Al-Fakeh went in and saw the man sleeping, so he suspected his wife of misconduct. He told her to go to her father's, 'Utaba ibn Rabi'a, so she did. It became widely known among people that Al-Fakeh accused his wife of such-and-such. Her father 'Utaba said to him, 'O Fakeh, my daughter has been accused, so I see no recourse but that we seek a verdict from a soothsayer to resolve this matter. Assemble whomever of your people you wish, and I will bring my daughter, and let us go to a soothsayer and ask him.' Hind was a sensible woman, so she said 'Father, you are going to consult a mortal who misses his mark as often as he hits it; he may accuse me of something I have not done, and disgrace would remain to me and you.' He replied, 'Do not worry. Your father is not so foolish. I will not present your case to him unless he is first able to tell me what I have hidden for him to detect [as a test].' Before he arrived at the soothsayer, he dismounted from his colt in a deserted place. He whistled to it, opened the colt's water bag and placed inside a single grain of wheat, then rode on to the soothsayer.

He said to him, 'I will not present my case to you until you have told me what I have hidden.' The soothsayer said to him, 'A grain of wheat in the colt's bag.' 'Utaba said, 'Be more specific,' so he said, 'A wheat nut in a belt.' So 'Utaba told him the situation of his daughter who was sitting before them among the women. The soothsayer passed by the women clutching at their heads one after the other until he reached Hind. He stopped by her, said

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= *her life conspiring to kill Prophet Muhammad, and it was she that incited Wahshi to murder Hamza, the uncle of Prophet Muhammad. She died in the 14th year AH during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab.*

(1) *Al-Fakeh ibn Al-Mughira: one of the most eloquent men of Quraysh in the pre-Islamic era of ignorance. He was a Companion to 'Awf ibn Abd 'Awf Al-Zuhri ('Abu 'Abd AR-Rahman), the uncle of Khalid ibn Al-Walid. He was listed by Ibn Habib in his Ashraf Al-'Umyan. It was said that he was killed at Al-Ghumaysa'.*

nothing to the other women, and then told her: ‘Get up, you are non-ugly, non-adulteress: you will bear a king called Mu‘awiya.’(1)

Such news proved to be true, but it all originated from the jinn’s eavesdropping; they do not prove in any way that a soothsayer possesses knowledge of the unseen. When Hind was cleared of the accusation and was able to hold her head up among the tribe, Al-Fakeh tried to coax her to forgive him and return home. She refused and said, ‘Indeed the news of Mu‘awiya and his kingdom has tempted you! I will beget him from another man! Get away from me!’ Afterwards she married Abu Sufyan and Mu‘awiya was born to him.

Allah prevented the jinn from that since the advent of Islam in order not to allow the jinn a chance to eavesdrop and get news of His revelations to His Messenger. This is why Allah says: ‘We used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him’ (*al-Jinn:* 9). Allah thus protected His Message from the caprices of the devils.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘... Such is the design of the Almighty, The All Knowing’ (*Fussilat:* 12). Allah is *the Almighty* Lord Who has protected His revelations from the devils so none can eavesdrop and snatch news of the Divine Message, for He is the All Knowing Lord Who knows what is best for His servants.

Allah says in the following verse:

فَإِنۡ أَعۡرَضُواْ فَقُلۡ أَنذَرۡتُكُمۡ صَٰعِقَةٗ مِّثۡلَ صَٰعِقَةِ عَادٖ وَثَمُودَ ١٣

If they turn away, say, ‘I have warned you about a
blast like the one which struck Ad and Thamud [13]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 13)

This is a warning to them if they continued to disbelieve after they have been shown all those signs. They themselves have testified that Allah is their

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(1) *Abu Al-Faraj Al-Isfahani mentions this story in his Al-Aghani in the chapter on Musafir ibn Abu ‘Amr and his family lineage, there is a section on Hind’s divorce from Al-Fakeh. Ibn Hamdun also mentioned it in his At-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyya, chapter 36 on soothsaying. In his version, the soothsayer says to Hind, ‘Rise, you non-base, non-adulteress and give you birth to a king called Mu‘awiya.’*

Creator and the Creator of the heavens and earth. None claimed that dominion for himself. None claimed to be the creator of the world, and Allah Himself testifies that He is the Lord and Creator, so who can deny that? He says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). Allah declared it and none contradicted Him, so how can anyone turn away from this? No one who has understanding would do so.

‘If they turn away...’ (*Fussilat:* 13), after these clear signs, ‘... say, “I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck ‘Ad and Thamud”’ (*Fussilat:* 13). A warning comes before an alarming event to caution people against it. Its purpose is to let people take the appropriate measures to avoid what they are warned against. This is just like the good news that announces a delightful event before it happens that we may be expectant of it.

So Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to say to the disbelievers who deny Allah’s signs: ‘... “I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck ‘Ad and Thamud”’ (*Fussilat:* 13). Allah is *The Almighty* Who cannot be overcome, and when He warns people about something, it will certainly come to pass. Allah mentions ‘Ad and Thamud as proofs. So they should have heeded the warning, for the Quraysh knew the news of those nations and the punishments that were sent down on them and they saw the ruins of their homes.

When ‘Umar, Hamza and Al-‘Abbas converted to Islam, the Quraysh feared that Prophet Muhammad’s call was spreading and his influence was growing. They decided to choose one from among them who was knowledgeable in poetry, soothsaying, and sorcery – an expert in those things of which they were accusing Prophet Muhammad.

At that time, ‘Utaba ibn Rabi’a was one of the leading men of Quraysh, so he said, ‘I am the most experienced of men in all these areas, so let me go to Muhammad.’ When he went to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, ‘Muhammad, who is better, you or your forefather Hashim? Who is better, you or your forefather Qusay? Who is better, you or your forefather ‘Abd Al-Muttalib? They did not disgrace us for our religion. Are you better than them that you call us to a new religion different from that of our forefathers? Muhammad, if you want money, we will gather money for you. If you want power, we will make you ruler and master over us. If you want marriage, we will marry you off to the best of our women. Only stop calling people to this matter and stop cursing our gods.' Prophet Muhammad said to him, 'Will you listen?' He said yes; so the Messenger of Allah started reciting the chapter of *Fussilat* – the one we are reflecting on. He reached the verse: '... say, "I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck 'Ad and Thamud"' (*Fussilat:* 13). At this point, 'Utaba rose and put his hand over the mouth of Allah's Messenger and said, 'I beseech you not to complete your recitation!'(1) He knew that what Prophet Muhammad said must take place, so he feared for his people. Afterwards 'Utaba isolated himself from his tribe such that they suspected that he had forsaken their religion. 'Utaba heard this talk but did not respond. Later he said to his people, 'No, I have not forsaken my religion, but I feared for my tribe that they may be struck with a thunderbolt of punishment like that which struck 'Ad and Thamud, for I know that everything Muhammad says must come to pass. I wanted to save you from this by stopping him from completing that verse.' Still, Prophet Muhammad continued reciting the chapter of *Fussilat* until he reached the verse of the prostration (verse number 38).

When Allah speaks of matters of the unseen, He supports them with actual examples. The Quraysh knew the stories of 'Ad and Thamud. The Arabic word *sa'iqa* (translated in the verse as 'blast') means a power that destroys that upon which it is sent. It may be fierce wind, sometimes accompanied by fire.

Allah says in the following verse:

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(1) *Al-Baghawi cites this Hadith in his exegesis on the authority of Mohammad ibn Fudayl. He classifies as da'if (literally, weak) part of the narration on the authority of Adh-Dhayal ibn Harmala he reported on the authority of Jabir. He cites the Hadith as, '... He reached the verse: '... say, "I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck 'Ad and Thamud."' (Fussilat: 13). At this point, 'Utaba rose and put his hand over the mouth of Allah's Messenger and said, "I beseech you not to complete your recitation!"' Al-Qurtubi cites it in his commentary on the verse, as does As-Samarqandi in his Bahr Al-'Ulum, chapter 13.*

إِذْ جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلرُّسُلُ مِنۢ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوٓا۟ إِلَّا
ٱللَّهَ ۖ قَالُوا۟ لَوْ شَآءَ رَبُّنَا لَأَنزَلَ مَلَٰٓئِكَةً فَإِنَّا بِمَآ أُرْسِلْتُم بِهِۦ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

When their messengers came to them, from all angles, saying, “Serve no one but God,” they said, “If our Lord had wished, He would have sent down angels. We do not believe in the message with which you have been sent” [14]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 14)

Like adjectives, verbs, pronouns, and nouns also come in the singular, dual, or plural forms in the Arabic language. This verse speaks about the two tribes of ‘Ad and Thamud. The word used in the original Arabic text of the verse for ‘Messengers’ comes in the plural, not the dual form, even though there were two Messengers that were sent to them. Why? Every Messenger was commanded by Allah to call his people to believe in the previous Messengers as well as the news of the Messengers yet to come. Had ‘Ad and Thamud believed in the two Messengers who were sent to them, it would have meant they believed in all the Messengers of Allah. Another interpretation says the word ‘Messengers’ comes in the plural because the two tribes lived in different places and each group received a different Messenger.

‘... “Serve no one but Allah”…’ (*Fussilat:* 14) is the essence of all the calls of the Messengers. The people of ‘Ad and Thamud responded: ‘… If our Lord had wished, He would have sent down angels…’ (*Fussilat:* 14). They claimed that if Allah had willed to send Messengers, He would have assigned that mission to His angels. Such a claim is itself a striking proof of their foolishness. A Messenger of Allah is assigned two missions: delivering His Message and offering an example for people to follow. Were a Messenger to be an angel, he could not serve as a model to be emulated, nor would he be in a position to command his people to do what he himself does. His people would simply object, ‘How can we act like you? You are an angel and we are only human beings!’ Thus, the Messenger had to be a human being like us. Even if Allah had sent angels, they would come to us in human form, for we cannot see them or receive any messages from them when they are in his angelic form. Thus Allah says: ‘Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger, We would still have sent him in the form of a man, so increasing their confusion' (*al-An'am:* 9). They would have remained doubtful anyway.

The disbelievers of 'Ad and Thamud then said, as the verse quotes them: '... "…We do not believe in the message with which you have been sent"' (*Fussilat:* 14). The verse shows that they acknowledge the mission of the Messengers and the fact that 'they have been sent with a Message'. How strange it is that after acknowledging that they were truly Messengers, the disbelievers persisted in denying the Message with which they were sent. Another interpretation says that they did not mean to acknowledge that they were truly the Messengers of Allah, but they were only mocking them by those words that apparently implied an acknowledgement: '… the message with which you have been sent' (*Fussilat:* 14). This is like what the hypocrites said about Prophet Muhammad and the believers: '... Give nothing to those who follow Allah's Messenger...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). Did they truly believe he was 'Allah's Messenger'? Pharaoh said the same: '... "This Messenger who has been sent to you is truly possessed"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 27). Possessed! Indeed Pharaoh was the one who lost his reason! He said Musa (Moses) was a Messenger who was sent to them, yet he insisted on disbelief! Such was the case with the disbelievers: they knew the Truth but stubbornly denied it and defied their Lord and Creator. Such is madness. It is disbelief that is madness itself.

Allah then gives more detail concerning 'Ad and Thamud:

فَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ فِى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ بِغَيۡرِ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَقَالُواْ مَنۡ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةًۖ أَوَلَمۡ يَرَوۡاْ
أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَهُمۡ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنۡهُمۡ قُوَّةٗۖ وَكَانُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا يَجۡحَدُونَ ١٥

**The people of ′Ad behaved arrogantly throughout the land
without any right, saying, "Who could be stronger than us?"
Did they not realize that God, who created them, was
stronger than them?' They continued to reject Our
message[15] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 15)**

According to the verse, the people of 'Ad: '… *istakbaru* (behaved arrogantly) throughout the land without any right…' (*Fussilat:* 15). Does this mean that one may behave arrogantly while having the right to? Logically, this is implausible, for the word 'arrogant' has only a negative connotation, so no one can have the right to be arrogant. The problem arises due to the difference in the connotative meaning between the English 'arrogance' and the Arabic *istikbar*. The latter literally means 'arrogance', yet it can also mean 'sovereignty'. A person has the right to *istikbar* if he does that to attain the power to establish justice among people. Any group or nation must have a sovereign who exercises control to deter transgressors, restore rights to the oppressed and set things to rights. This is 'rightful' *istikbar*, for it is necessary to prevent anyone from overstepping their limits. A poet (1) said:

People do not prosper unless a wise leader rules.
Fools gaining sovereignty bring nations to ruins.(2)

This is rightful *istikbar,* not arrogance or oppression, but power and control. The wise must attain power to protect the weak and helpless and deter wrongdoers. What is blameworthy is when power is used to oppress others and serve personal interests.

They were so arrogant that they said: '... Who could be stronger than us?...' (*Fussilat:* 15). They were liars in this claim as well, and their ignorance became manifest, for they denied the truth that Allah is stronger than them and all creatures. This is why Allah says in reply to their falsehood: '… Did they not realise that Allah, who created them, was stronger than them?...' (*Fussilat:* 15) Their question is a rhetorical one. They did not wait for an answer. They held it as truth that they were the mightiest on earth and no others were in a position to compel them to obey. Perhaps none among people could defeat them, but they forgot the plain truth that Allah Who created them is the Almighty and All-Powerful. Was that not enough to make them obey

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(1) *These lines belong to Abu Al-Aswad Ad-Du'alI, Zalem ibn 'Amr Ad-Du'ali, a Muslim of the second generation (the one following that of the Companions). He was a grammarian, a man of the nobility, a shrewd poet and knight. He was born in 1 BH and died in 69 AH. In Subh Al-A'sha, it is stated that Abu Al-Aswad founded the branch of Arabic grammar that has to do with vocalisation. Most narrations say that he was the first to write the Quranic text with diacritic marks. He died in Basra [Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya].*

(2) This verse is from a poem by Abu Al-Aswad Al-Du'ali. It is composed based on the simple meter and comprises three verses.

Him? Reason should have therefore called them to submit to those whom Allah sent to them and to follow them in obedience of the One Who sent them. Indeed, it does not befit the strong to submit to and obey the weak one, but here is a question worth asking: who is stronger, they or Allah? They already acknowledged that He created everything, so why did they oppose His Messengers? It is true they had power over part of creation, but they were weak and helpless before Him Who created all of creation.

They persisted in their stubbornness and '… continued to reject Our message' (*Fussilat:* 15). They obstinately denied the Truth for which there were many evidences, as Allah says: 'They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true…' (*an-Naml:* 14). They knew the Truth, but they were doomed to stubborn denial of it. What was their punishment for this?

فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِىٓ أَيَّامٍ نَّحِسَاتٍ لِّنُذِيقَهُمْ عَذَابَ ٱلْخِزْىِ
فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ أَخْزَىٰ ۖ وَهُمْ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

So We let a roaring wind loose on them for a few disastrous days to make them taste the punishment of shame in this world; more shameful still will be the punishment of the life to come, and they will not be helped [16] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 16)

The Arabic word used to describe the wind in the original text of the verse is *sarsar* which is derived from the same stem as *sirr*, yet the former is made up of two syllables to add more emphasis to the meaning. The word denotes 'violent' or 'severe'. It denotes a powerful, destructive wind that is extremely cold; due to its heavy humidity, one of the effects of this wind is to dry things out to the point of combustion. Farmers know this as a familiar winter phenomenon, when severe cold dries things out till fields catch fire.

In this way, Allah *the Almighty* uses water to afflict the disbelievers from among the people of 'Ad with the same kind of punishment caused by fire. He has not created the universe to operate statically and mechanically, but rather, He has created it with His Might that can reverse norms and work miracles. He commanded Prophet Musa (Moses) to strike the water with his staff, and then the water was made into two halves, each like a great mountain. Likewise, when he supplicated to Allah for drinking water, He commanded him to strike the mountain and twelve springs sprang from it. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was thrown in the fire, but Allah suspended its power and made it cool and safe for him.

So *sirr* is a powerful and destructive wind, but it strikes only once. The wind that struck the people of *'*Ad was *sarsar,* in the sense that it struck repeatedly, not just once. That wind continued to strike them for '... a few disastrous days...' (*Fussilat:* 16). The wind was decisive. It exterminated them all and left none of them. So pointed was the confrontation between the Messengers and their arrogant opponents.

The word *sirr* reminds me of the Arab poet (1) who said:

Light a good fire, for the night is freezing
and the wind, my boy, is severe and howling (sirr)!
Maybe a traveller will notice the fire and come;
if you attract a guest, you get your freedom!(2)

Allah then says: '… to make them taste the punishment of shame in this world…' (*Fussilat:* 16). Some punishments are painful and some are shameful. Some punishments cause physical torture and some cause humiliation and debase pride. Such was a just punishment for their groundless arrogance. They could have endured pain, so Allah made their punishment of such a kind that humiliated and dishonoured them in order to destroy their arrogance.

That humiliation and debasement was not only in the life of this world, but '… more shameful still will be the punishment of the life to come...'

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(1) These lines belong to Abu 'Adi Hatem ibn Abdullah At-Ta'i Al-Qahtani, a poet of the pre-Islamic era of ignorance and a model of chivalry and generosity. His generosity is exemplary. He was from *Najd* and moved to Syria where he married Mawiya bint Hajar Al-Ghassaniyya. He died in 46 BH at *'Awarid* (a mountain in the Tayy region) [*Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya*].

(2) The lines comprise a poem by Hatem At-Ta'i, based on the *rajaz* meter. In *Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya*. The lines are attributed to *Al-Afwah Al-Awdi* by *Ibn Hamdun* in his *At-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyya* and *Ath-Tha'alebi* in his *At-Tamthil wa Al-Muhadara*.

(*Fussilat:* 16). Shame and humiliation in this life must come to an end, but in the Hereafter, suffering and disgrace will persist forever, '… and they will not be helped' (*Fussilat:* 16). They will not be saved from suffering in any way. They will have no hope of help or rescue.

On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will gather all people together at once. It will not be like a queue, for example, with everyone waiting their turn, but rather, they will all be gathered together – oppressors and those they oppressed, leaders and their followers. There will be no hope of salvation for the disbelievers. Perhaps they will expect their leaders to save them, but the case will be just as Allah said about Pharaoh, '… he shall go before his people...' (*Hud:* 98). He will lead them to hellfire.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَهَدَيۡنَٰهُمۡ فَٱسۡتَحَبُّواْ ٱلۡعَمَىٰ عَلَى ٱلۡهُدَىٰ فَأَخَذَتۡهُمۡ
صَٰعِقَةُ ٱلۡعَذَابِ ٱلۡهُونِ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكۡسِبُونَ ١٧

As for Thamud, We gave them guidance but they preferred blindness, so they were struck by a blast of humiliating punishment for their misdeeds [17] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 17)

Here is a point that scholars of Islamic theology have reflected on. Allah says: 'As for Thamud, We gave them guidance...' (*Fussilat:* 17). Guidance means showing the right way. When you show people the way, some of them will listen to you and follow your directions, and others will not; to those who listen you will give additional guidance to help them more. As for those who pay no attention, you will not care about them. Allah says: 'and (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil)' (*Muhammad:* 17). Those who willingly accept the Right Path are given an increase in guidance: Allah provides them with assistance and support; He inspires them to do good and shun evil. Therefore, guidance is of two kinds: showing the Right Path, which is granted to all humankind, and assistance to follow it, which is granted only to those who accept faith. If someone asks you about the way to some place, you guide him there. If he accepts your guidance, you give him further directions and warn him about any difficulties that may arise. If he does not listen to you from the first, you will give him no further guidance.

Allah points out to everyone the way to goodness. Whoever follows this guidance is worthy of more guidance, and is also worthy of assistance in following that guidance; whoever rejects this guidance is unworthy of any assistance.

Allah gave guidance to Thamud, but '...they preferred blindness...' (*Fussilat:* 17). Why did they prefer blindness to guidance? They wanted to evade responsibility and obligation under Allah's Law. This is why they worshiped idols even though they knew they were helpless objects they made with their own hands. They worshiped them to have the satisfaction of having a god to worship, but they wanted a 'god' that imposed no obligations or way of conduct through commands and prohibitions. Their rejection of Allah's Message originated from a desire to be free of obligations, and their worship of false idols was only to satisfy an innate need in human beings to believe in a certain deity. This natural need stems from the covenant Allah has made with us while we were still seeds in the loins of our father, Adam: 'When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness"…' (*al-A'raf:* 172). Thus, religious belief has been instilled into every human since that covenant. What people differ in is their acceptance of obligations and codes of conduct. Some see Allah's laws as a shackle to their carnal desires, and therefore do not accept it. They resort to fake manmade religions that are free of what they consider to be confinement, just like those in the verse who preferred blindness to guidance. Others accept Divine Guidance and obey their Lord willingly. They know what Allah ordains is not meant to confine them but to set their life to rights, so they eagerly accept His Law and devote themselves to Him.

Something in the Arabic text of the verse is particularly worth commenting on. Allah says: '... they *istahabbu* blindness...' (*Fussilat:* 17). The word *istahabba* (here translated as 'preferred') is derived from the same stem as *ahabba* which means 'loved'. The former has a different connotation from the latter in that it denotes pretence or affectation. *Istahabba* does not denote 'natural love' like the derivative *ahabba*. Rather, it means to get oneself, to persuade oneself, to love something that is not naturally loved or lovable. This is just plausible. Who would naturally love blindness? One must deceive himself into such a preference, for blindness is not something to be loved or preferred to Divine Guidance. Even those who think they love sins are wrong. Would you like to be the victim of any sin? Would you like anyone to rob you, for example? No, which means sins are naturally hateful, but many people follow their own desires and whims.

Another textual aspect is particularly worth highlighting too. Allah says in another verse: ‘They are *‘ala* (true) guidance from their Lord...’ (*al-Baqara:* 5). The preposition *‘ala* (usually translated as ‘on’ or ‘upon’) denotes the state of being ‘above’ or ‘elevated’. So the verse portrays true guidance as something that elevates those who embrace it. It has not been sent down to cause hardship for people, but rather to elevate them to the status of righteousness and elevation before their Lord. Just as it elevates those who accept it and abide by it, true guidance also debases those who – out of faulty understanding – reject it and consider it a confinement.

When we trace the usage of the preposition *‘ala* in the Glorious Quran, we will find that it conveys the meanings of ‘superiority’, ‘elevation’, ‘power’ or ‘excellence’. For example, Allah says: ‘They give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, *‘ala hubbihi*’ (*al-Insan:* 8). The word *hubb* means ‘love’. Some exegetes(1) say that the prepositional phrase *‘ala hubbihi* means ‘despite their own love of it [food]’, but this is not quite accurate. A person does not love food except when he is hungry, or else he would not care about food. The preposition *‘ala* here has a wider meaning than just this. It means they need food themselves, but they transcend this need; they elevate themselves above the love of food and the desire for it and give it to others. Why? They are mindful of the reward that awaits them for their altruism.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir* says in his exegesis of the verse [4/454]: ‘The words *‘ala hubbihi* are said to mean “out of their love of Allah”, thus considering that the pronoun in *hubbihi* refers to Allah, which they think is supported by the context. However, it sounds more correct that the pronoun refers to food; that is, they give food while they need it and desire it.’ Such is the opinion of Mujahid, Muqatil and Ibn Jarir, who find this verse similar to: ‘... who give away some of their wealth, *‘ala hubbihi* (however much they cherish it)...’ (*al-Baqara:* 177).

When one prefers Allah’s reward to satiating his own need for food, it means he has triumphed over his need and desire. Allah says in praise of those who do so: ‘... They give them preference over themselves, even if they too are poor...’ (*al-Hashr:* 9).

Another example of the use of the preposition *‘ala* is found in this verse quoting Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham): ‘Praise be to Allah, Who has given me ‘ala old age *Ismail* and *Ishaq…*’ (*Ibrahim:* 39). The word *ʿala* here does not mean – as many would think – ‘despite my being old and unable to beget children’. Rather, the meaning here is that Allah’s Might was above obstacles, above old age and everything. Even though elderliness is a state of weakness in which reproduction is not possible, Allah’s Grace is higher than weakness and elderliness, just as He granted a son to Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) – Prophet Yahya (John) – despite his old age.

Here is another example. Allah says: ‘... your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, *‘ala* their wrongdoing...’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 6). It means that even though wrongdoing makes people deserving of punishment, Allah’s Forgiveness is higher and greater than people’s sins.

Back to the verse we are reflecting on; Allah concludes it by saying: ‘... so they were struck by a blast of humiliating punishment for their misdeeds’ (*Fussilat:* 17). Shameful suffering and destruction was a just punishment for them as a result of their disbelief. ‘Blast’ here is a translation of *sa’iqah* which refers to a destructive wind, fire, or sound. They faced that destiny as a just recompense, not through injustice or enmity.

Allah says in the following verse:

وَنَجَّيْنَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَكَانُوا۟ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

We saved those who believed and were
mindful of God [18] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 18)

Quite often in the Quran things are made clearer through presenting their contrasts. For example, Allah says: ‘The good will live in bliss and the wicked will burn in the Fire’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14). Likewise, in the verses we are reflecting on here, Allah speaks about the recompense of the disbelievers and follows this with a verse about the reward of the believers.

Allah says afterwards:

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُ أَعْدَآءُ ٱللَّهِ إِلَى ٱلنَّارِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿١٩﴾
حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا مَا جَآءُوهَا شَهِدَ عَلَيْهِمْ سَمْعُهُمْ وَأَبْصَٰرُهُمْ وَجُلُودُهُم بِمَا كَانُواْ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

On the Day when God's enemies are gathered up for the Fire
and driven onward [19] their ears, eyes, and skins will, when
they reach it, testify against them for their misdeeds [20]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 19 - 20)

On the Day of the Gathering, all creatures will be brought together. People will all be gathered, followers and leaders, those who were misguided and those who misguided them. Allah will bring them together all in the same place, and the disbelievers will be packed together with their leaders. Allah says: 'We shall seize out of each group those who were most disobedient towards the Lord of Mercy' (*Maryam:* 69). Those who mislead people will precede them to the fire. They will be the first to be punished so their followers will know they have no hope of being saved.

On that Day, even beasts will be gathered: 'And when all beasts are gathered together' (*at-Takwir:* 5). Allah has created beasts along with domestic animals to let us understand that were it not for His Might, we would not be able to benefit from any creatures. Allah has subjected them to our powers; otherwise, they would all be wild. He has made the camel – despite its hugeness – surrender to the will of people, whereas a small snake may be out of control. These are manifestations of the Might and Bounty of Allah *the Exalted*. He says: 'Can they not see how, among the things made by Our Hands, We have created livestock they control, and made them obedient so that some can be used for riding, some for food...?' (*Ya Sin:* 71-72)

By Allah, had Allah not subjected these creatures to us we would not have been able to use them at all, and so we say of those creatures that have not been subjected to us that they are wild animals. Consider how the infant or a small child leads the huge camel around, makes it carry loads, kneel down, or drives it wherever he pleases, yet the tiny flea in your bed prevents you from sleeping. This is a message from The Creator *Glorified is He* that such subjection is done only by Allah. 'Hence, [warn all men of] the Day when the enemies of Allah shall be gathered together before the fire, and then shall be driven onward' (*Fussilat:* 19). In the world, wild animals flee from people, and we flee from wild animals; in the Resurrection, however, Allah will gather everyone and everything together in one place. How? Because no one will have the power to move: '...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, The One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16) So when sovereignty is Allah's there will not remain to us any power to assert ourselves.

His saying, '...and then shall be driven onward' (*Fussilat:* 19), that is, they will be driven forward as a group into the fire, from first to last 'till, when they come close to it, their hearing and their sight and their [very] skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing [on earth]' (*Fussilat:* 20).

Now hearing is the function of the ear; sight is the function of the eye; smell the function of the nose and touch the function of the hand – each member of the body has its importance in life. Yet the True Lord *Glorified is He* only mentioned three of them here: hearing, sight, and skin, but not mentioning hand and nose. They say that this is because legal responsibility with respect to the nose is extremely limited, as when for example you smell the odour of wine and take refuge in Allah, or smell the scent of a perfumed woman. Thus the smell has a limited role. The hearing, however, is the most important of the senses, for it is through it that you respond to the summons to Allah, and sight is what allows you to see Allah's signs and marvels in His Creation.

As for skin, it has to do with hearing and sight and indeed all the senses, as though it were the most universal of things to the senses. Thus when they looked into the function of the bodily members to determine the importance of each to a person, they found that the most important one is the skin because it is the means for sensing pain in particular at the surface of the body. Consider for example how when you get a shot with a needle you feel pain when it enters your body, piercing the skin; it causes pain to the extent it penetrates the skin. The skin being the site of sensation, then, it comprises all the senses.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...[and] every time their skins are burnt off We shall replace them with new skins so that they may taste suffering [in full]...' (*an-Nisa':* 56). Thus the skin is the site of tasting suffering – we take refuge with Allah! – And it comprises all the senses.

وَقَالُوا۟ لِجُلُودِهِمْ لِمَ شَهِدتُّمْ عَلَيْنَا ۖ قَالُوٓا۟ أَنطَقَنَا ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنطَقَ
كُلَّ شَىْءٍ وَهُوَ خَلَقَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

They will say to their skins, 'Why did you testify against us?' and their skins will reply, 'God, who gave speech to everything, has given us speech – it was He who created you the first time and to Him you have been returned [21]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 21)

They are amazed at how their own skins – a part of them – testify against them. Now the question here should be as to how this is – how can you testify against us? – Rather than as to the cause. The question however does not come in this form in order to indicate a contradiction in speech. The answer comes: '..."Allah...has given speech to us"...' (*Fussilat:* 21). Now the question is about one thing, but the response is about another. Had they answered the question, 'Why did you testify against us?' they would have answered, we testified against you because we are your staunchest guardian at every moment. '..."Allah, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us"...' (*Fussilat:* 21), that is, the matter is not in our own power; we did not testify of our own volition – the True Lord made us speak the truth, and we had no way of avoiding this.

The meaning of '..."who gives speech to all things"...' (*Fussilat:* 21) is that everything in existence has a language peculiar to it by which it speaks and by which it may be understood, as we have seen in the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* when the ant spoke to warn its people, saying: '..."Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]!"' (*an-Naml:* 18)

The ant's speech indicates that the ants have a language they understand among themselves, that they have awareness, and that they have a sense of justice, given that the ant said: '..."without [even] being aware [of you]!"' (*an-Naml:* 18)

Likewise, the speech of the hoopoe in the same story, when it said: '..."I have encompassed [with my knowledge] something that you have never yet encompassed [with yours] – for I have come to you from Bilqis (Sheba) with a tiding sure!"' (*an-Naml:* 22). It then proceeded to speak of the central point of the creed: 'And I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah' (*an-Naml:* 24). Thus, the hoopoe does not simply speak a language, but also understands the most important article of faith and Allah's oneness.

Thus, everything has a language, but only one whom Allah has taught it can understand it; this is a grace Allah gives to whomever He chooses. Therefore, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said: '..."We have been taught the speech of birds"...' (*an-Naml:* 16) – had Allah not taught him he would not have been able to understand the hoopoe.

Inanimate objects also have a language, as He says: '[and for this,] behold, We caused the mountains to join him in extolling Our limitless glory at eventide and at sunrise' (*Sad:* 18).

Therefore, He *the Exalted* says in general reference to this point: '...and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!...' (*al-Isra':* 44)

It is related that pebbles glorified Allah (1) in the hand of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* though it should be said that this is one of His miracles. We said in clarification of this issue that the pebbles were glorifying Allah in the hand of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* just as they were in the hand of Abu-Jahl, but it is more reflective of the miraculous nature of the event to say that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the pebbles' glorification of Allah while in his hand – we should put it thus.

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(1) *Al-Isbahani quotes this in his Dala'il An-Nubuwwa [1/47, (fasl fi tasbih al-hasa fi yadihi)]. It is narrated that Abu Dharr, Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman Allah be pleased with them were alone together with the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and the Prophet took seven (or nine) pebbles; they began glorifying Allah such that a buzzing was to be heard like the buzzing of bees. He put them down and they fell silent, then took them up again and placed them in the hand of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him whereupon they began glorifying Allah again with the same buzzing sound. He put them down and they fell silent. [The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him] took them up again and placed them in the hand of 'Umar Allah be pleased with him and the same thing happened, and the process was repeated with 'Uthman Allah be pleased with him. Then he put them down and they fell silent once more.*

Some scholars say of this glorification of Allah that it is simply an indication of the pebbles' Creator, not an actual act of glorification in reality. This opinion, however, contradicts the text of the Holy Quran, since if it was simply as you say then you are able to understand it, whereas Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!...' (*al-Isra':* 44) Thus the pebbles were glorifying Allah in reality, glorifying Him in a language no one knows but their Creator and those whom Allah has taught it through a special act of grace.

The amazing thing in the story of the hoopoe is that it only mentions one reason that might impel faith in Allah *the Exalted* and His oneness. He says, '[for they have come to believe] that they ought not to adore Allah – [although it is He] who brings forth all that is hidden in the heavens and on earth, and knows all that you would conceal as well as all that you bring into the open' (*an-Naml:* 25), thus mentioning the action peculiar to Allah, that is His bringing forth the hidden things of the earth. It is of course well known that the hoopoe has a long beak with which it extracts worms from underneath the surface of the soil in order to eat them.

His saying, '...for He [it is who] has created you in the first instance – and unto Him you are [now] brought back' (*Fussilat:* 21) – that is, do not suppose that Allah simply created you to leave you to your own devices, but rather, He created you for a term – you must return to Him, and stand before Him to be judged for even the minutest of your deeds (those as small as the mark on a date pit or its pellicle) as well as the greatest, and He will reward you for your works. You will not be able to escape Him *Glorified is He* but will stand in His presence and He will enumerate His acts of grace towards you, to see who gives Him thanks and who denies.

وَمَا كُنتُمۡ تَسۡتَتِرُونَ أَن يَشۡهَدَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ سَمۡعُكُمۡ وَلَآ أَبۡصَٰرُكُمۡ وَلَا
جُلُودُكُمۡ وَلَٰكِن ظَنَنتُمۡ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَعۡلَمُ كَثِيرٗا مِّمَّا تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

Yet you did not try to hide yourselves from your ears, eyes, and skin to prevent them from testifying against you. You thought that God did not know about much of what you were doing [22] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 22)

That is, you neglected and were not aware of something important, which is that you used to hide your disobedience from people but forgot that Allah was watching over you and could see your actions, even what you used to hide from yourselves and your bodily members, forgetting that your bodily members will testify against you on the Day of Resurrection.

So the hand with which you did things, the leg with which you walked, your tongue, your ear, your eye, all your members will testify against you on the Day of Resurrection – these same members which Allah commanded to follow your desires in this world and obey you in all that you wished will on that day be freed from this restriction and you will no longer have power over them when they testify against you.

So they obey you in your acts of disobedience in this world, since Allah subjected them to you, but they obey you unwillingly and are innocent of responsibility. But when everything returns to Allah, and all dominion is His – '...With Whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, The One who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16) – it is no wonder that your members will testify against you, and will be your adversary before their Creator *Glorified is He*.

We previously compared this matter to a captain of a battalion in the army, who commands his troops and they do as they are commanded, carrying out his orders even if they are bad. When the troops come to the general, however, they complain to him of their captain's arbitrariness and misconduct, saying that he used us for such and such.

Likewise a person's bodily members, Allah commanded them to obey even in acts of disobedience, and to respond to the person's desires. Thus your members obey you in everything you wish, whether for good or for ill.

As to His saying, '...but you thought that Allah did not know much of what you were doing' (*Fussilat:* 22), the True Lord *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'My servants, if you think that I do not see you then your faith is faulty, and if you think that I see you then why do you consider Me the least of your observers?'(1) If you are unable to do something to a man like yourself that he will find bad when he sees it or hears of it, then how can you do so with Allah *the Exalted*?'

وَذَٰلِكُمْ ظَنُّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى ظَنَنتُم بِرَبِّكُمْ أَرْدَىٰكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم مِّنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

So it was the thoughts you entertained about your
Lord that led to your ruin, and you became losers [23]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 23)

His saying, 'and that very thing...' – that is, the deeds you have committed – '... [is the] thing which you thought about your Lord...' – that is, you have thought that He *Glorified is He* does not know what you do – '...has brought you to perdition...' – that is, this thought has destroyed you, '...and so now you find yourselves among the lost' (*Fussilat:* 23).

فَإِن يَصْبِرُوا۟ فَٱلنَّارُ مَثْوًى لَّهُمْ ۖ وَإِن يَسْتَعْتِبُوا۟ فَمَا هُم مِّنَ ٱلْمُعْتَبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

The Fire will still be their home, even if they resign
themselves to patience, and if they pray to be allowed to
make amends, they will not be given permission to do so[24]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 24)

That is, if they endure patiently in their former manner and persist in their disbelief and their wrangling with the Messengers, what will happen? '...The fire will still be their abode; and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so' (*Fussilat:* 24). Here there are two options:

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(1) *Reference to books of Hadith does not turn up any sound version with this wording, but only a phrase from it as found in the works of certain Sufis. In the Hilyat Al-Awliya' [8/142] it is narrated that a man says to Wuhayb ibn Al-Ward, 'advise me', to which he responds, 'Fear Allah properly lest you consider Him but the least of your observers'. In the book Jami' Al-'Ulum wa Al-Hikam [1/36] the saying is attributed to a certain Sufi: 'Fear Allah properly lest you consider Him the least of your observers'.*

when a man contravenes his Creator's commands and a messenger comes to him and says do not do that, he will be fine if he desists, but if he persists then the fire will be his abode.

The meaning of '...they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so' (*Fussilat:* 24): to pray to be allowed to make amends is to seek pardon. They say, he rebuked so-and-so, that is, blamed him for failing to do something expected of him. One might say, for example, I fell sick and you did not visit me – this is a rebuke. The other person might respond, please pardon me, I was busy doing such and such. As soon as it becomes apparent that he is truly begging pardon, you pardon him, that is, cease rebuking him. This will not be the case in the Hereafter – when they seek rebuke they will not be rebuked. Thus it is narrated in the Hadith of the Messenger *peace be upon him* that he was returning from At-Ta'if after being driven out by its residents, and He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, confiding in his Lord: 'You have the right to rebuke until You are satisfied' (1) – that is, if anything that I do makes you angry, I will cease it and acknowledge that I am weak and accept Your rebuke. For this reason a poet (2) said:

As for rebuke, it is more fitting for friends
for love is restored and made sincere through rebuke(3)

Therefore you are not rebuked unless you are beloved to the one who is rebuking you, concerned to protect your relationship with him. We say, I was rebuked but he pardoned me, that is, ceased rebuking me. As for those in the Hereafter, Allah will not accept from them their pleas for pardon nor will He remove His censure. (The initial *hamza* in the term *i'tab* (rebuke) is called the *hamza* of removal; such 'removal' may either be through the use of a *hamza* or through the doubling of a consonant: *tamrid* means to remove someone's sickness (*marad*), *taqshir* means to peel a fruit's rind (*qishra*).)

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn-Hisham in his biography of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him (2/419-20) and Al-Bayhaqi in his Dala'il An-Nubuwwa (2/415).*

(2) The poet is *Ahmad Shawqi*, poet laureate, who was born in Cairo and died there in 1932. He grew up under the care of the royal family in Egypt, and the Khedive Tawfiq sent him to France in 1887. His preferred poetic genres include panegyric, lyric, elegiac and descriptive [*(Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya)*].

(3) The verse is by Ahmad Shawqi, from a 12-verse poem of the meter *Al-Kamil*.

وَقَيَّضۡنَا لَهُمۡ قُرَنَآءَ فَزَيَّنُواْ لَهُم مَّا بَيۡنَ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَمَا خَلۡفَهُمۡ وَحَقَّ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡقَوۡلُ
فِيٓ أُمَمٖ قَدۡ خَلَتۡ مِن قَبۡلِهِم مِّنَ ٱلۡجِنِّ وَٱلۡإِنسِۖ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ خَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

We have appointed, for the disbelievers, companions who make their past and present seem fair and right to them, but the sentence has already been passed on them, along with generations of jinn and men before them: they were losers[25] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 25)

The sense of '...We have appointed for them...' means 'We enumerated for them and prepared for them' '...comrades...' as close and constant companions. Now the original sense of the term exchange (*muqayada*) is in the context of buying and selling, where you pay a price and get a commodity, for Allah *the Exalted* desires that His servant travel on the path of good which He has laid down for him; so the path of good is delineated for you by Allah, Who desires by this to confirm your sincerity in your attentiveness toward Him. So He brings you peers who object to your path and attempt to turn you aside from it.

Now if you follow these peers, you will swerve because of them and miss your way that Allah has chosen for you. But if you refuse them, you are saved, and the wiles of Iblis (Satan) fail, those things he has made appear attractive to you, and whether it be human devils or devils of the jinn.

It is as though Iblis (Satan) comes only to test the faith of a believer. He whispers his temptations to everyone, and makes evil appear attractive to everyone, but those who are strong of faith consider these temptations and know their source, and so do not obey him. But the weak of faith are drawn in by him and fall into disobedience. Were it not for Iblis (Satan) everyone's faith would seem the same without anything to challenge it, but there is a challenger, and despite this those who believe have their faith confirmed by it.

His saying, '...made fair seeming to them what is before them and what is behind them...' (*Fussilat:* 25). 'What is before them': an emotional affect prompted by the passions? 'What is behind them,' that is, that which awaits them in terms of the Day of Resurrection and Judgement. '…And the word proved true against them – among the nations of the jinn and the men that have passed away before them – that they shall surely be losers' (*Fussilat:* 25).

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَا تَسْمَعُوا۟ لِهَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانِ وَٱلْغَوْا۟ فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَغْلِبُونَ ٢٦

The disbelievers say, 'Do not listen to this Quran; drown it in frivolous talk: you may gain the upper hand' [26] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 26)

The Arabs of old were characterised by an innately Arab disposition that revels in language and excels at its technical and stylistic arts. This may be seen in the fact that they held congresses and market displays for the spoken word – when the other nations held market displays for promoting their goods, the Arabs had no goods other than speech and eloquence. Thus they had presentations in which the best specimens of their poetry were recited and judged to determine the most superior of all, which were then hung on the curtains of the *Ka'ba*, the noblest place on earth. This did not happen in any other nation.

For this reason the True Lord *Glorified is He* chose the Arab nation to receive His directive. Thus His summons reached His creation, His Quran came down to them for they were the only nation that would understand His language and revel in it.

Thus the Quran came down to a nation with a gift for language and expression to serve as a challenge. Given that they were defeated by the challenge of the Quran, it is obvious that this applies to other nations even more so; for Allah did not give the Arab nation precedence in anything except in language and expression. Thus the key of religion and the miracle of the Prophetic mission would come to be the Quran.

Had this nation been a nation of progress and civilisation in any other field apart from language, they would have said that Islam represented a cultural revolution. But no, it is not a civilised nation but an unlettered nation, and its messengers were also unlettered.

On this basis, then, the illiteracy of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* served to ennoble and distinguish him, but it is not ennobling for us because the illiteracy of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* meant that he did not receive knowledge by way of man – for all knowledge is from Allah. So who cultivated him, who educated him, who taught him? It is Allah *the Almighty*.

So if this nation was unlettered, and its messengers were unlettered, this indicates that everything good about this nation does not come through the agency of man.

This nation was also distinguished by its not having a homeland. The Arab's place of residence is his tent, which he stakes wherever water and grazing may be found, and carries it on the back of his camel somewhere else when the water there dries up or the grazing runs out. He has no homeland or any house dear to him that would prevent him from leaving it, for his house is on the back of his camel. For this reason He *the Exalted* said: '...dwellings out of the skins of animals – easy for you to handle when you travel and when you camp...' (*an-Nahl:* 80).

There is another, more important element to this which is that the Arabs were always in a state of war, with a single war between the tribes sometimes lasting up to forty years. These wars made them all experts in the arts of fighting and battle. Thus when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* needed forces to spread his call, no one had to train for battle – troops were already at the ready. Thus there were no army schools for training in war. So when we consider that the Arabs had no attachment to place and were expert in the art of war, we see that it was easy to raise an army at a moment's notice, and to send groups of people here or there bearing the banner of Islam. And indeed, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* sent them to Persia and to Byzantium and to Ethiopia and so on, and it was easy for them.

For this reason the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not have a formal army reserved for fighting since he had no need of such an army. Whenever he needed to fight he had only to give the summons 'come to war!' and the Companions would rally around him – the young men among them would especially compete among themselves for the privilege of going out to fight with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* such that The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had to choose among them, saying, 'This one goes and this one stays'. Whoever did not get chosen by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* would become upset and perhaps even cry because he would not get to go to war along with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Thus this nation had a number of characteristics that qualified it to serve as a locus for the Path of Allah and the spreading of His Message. First, they were a nation of eloquence and fine speech. Second, they were a nomadic nation with no settled homeland. Third, they were expert in the art of war and fighting and needed no training in army camps, but were ready to fight at a moment's notice; whenever they heard the call to war they would fly toward it. On this basis, then, they were inherently prepared to carry out this mission.

His saying in relating about the disbelievers of the Quraysh: 'Now those who are bent on denying the truth say [unto one another]: "Do not listen to this Quran"...' (*Fussilat:* 26) – this comes in response to the Arabs' proficiency and discernment with respect to language, and their understanding of its subtleties; had they let the people listen to Muhammad when he was reciting the Quran, they would not have been able to help being affected by it and being attracted to it. So what was the solution?

For them the solution was '..."Do not listen to this Quran"...' (*Fussilat:* 26) since they knew for certain that were they to listen to it, the Quran would take them in with its beauty of style, its grandness of meaning and its forcefulness – had they thought otherwise they would not have forbidden their people from listening to it.

Now, they did not stop simply with forbidding them to listen to it, but encouraged them to try to fluster him when he would recite: '..."but rather talk frivolously about it, so that you might gain the upper hand!"' (*Fussilat:* 26) Thus their strategy for defeating him was to not listen to the Quran, and to disturb him while he was reciting it so as not to give the opportunity for those who were listening to dwell on it properly. Their saying '..."so that you might"...' indicates the possibility that they might win if they carried out this strategy, not that it was certain to work.

The evidence for this is that they believed in the eloquence of the Quran and its inimitability, and in the end when all their stratagems had failed they said of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that he was possessed. Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them, saying to His Messenger: 'for, behold, you keep indeed to a sublime way of life' (*al-Qalam:* 4) – does a crazy person have any kind of proper behaviour, much less sublime behaviour?

They said that while knowing of the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Allah's Messenger *peace be upon him* and his admirable comportment among them – they called him a sorcerer. Now to answer that charge is easy: if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had simply entranced those who believed in him, then why did he not entrance them as he had entranced others and be done with the matter? And they called him a poet, lying in this as well, for they were a nation of rhetoric and expression, and knew very well what constituted poetry; but they had never heard poetry from Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Finally they had to acknowledge the veracity of the Quran and its eloquence and inimitability, but refused to believe that it had actually been revealed to Muhammad himself, saying, 'And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Now the problem was not with the Quran itself since it is obviously what it is said to be, but rather with its revelation to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a poor man among the common people of the tribe, not a leading man of its notables, such men as 'Utba, Shayba and others. In this they confirmed and testified to the Quran, that it was indeed a perfect Book comprising all goodness and perfect morals necessary for one's welfare in this world and in the Afterlife. So their objection was only to the person of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* himself, not to the Quran per se.

However, they did not realise that, from the Prophet's point of view, it was much preferable that they testify to the Quran and confirm its inimitability rather than testifying to him; for those who believe in Allah and believe in His revelation are closer to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* than those who deny Him.

Now the Byzantines did not believe Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but they believed in a Book and in revelation and in messengers; the Persians did not have this belief that the Byzantines had. Thus the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers inclined in their hearts toward the Byzantines, since they were people of the Book and believed in Allah. This is because the partisanship of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* towards his Lord was greater than his partisanship toward himself. Consider how the Muslims were saddened at the defeat of Byzantium and rejoiced at its subsequent victory

فَلَنُذِيقَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَسْوَأَ ٱلَّذِى كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

We shall certainly give the disbelievers a
taste of severe punishment. We shall repay
them according to their worst deeds [27]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 27)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has not reserved the punishment of sins solely for the Hereafter, so as not to let vain people deteriorate further in their vanity – rather, Allah hastens for the vain some part of their punishment in this world before that of the next; and the punishment of the Hereafter is far more severe. Thus He *the Exalted* said, addressing His Messenger: '…whether We show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned' (*Ghafir:* 77).

The True Lord says:

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ أَعْدَآءِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلنَّارُ ۖ لَهُمْ فِيهَا دَارُ ٱلْخُلْدِ ۖ جَزَآءًۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

That is the reward of the enemies of God – the
Fire will be their lasting home, a payment for
their rejection of Our revelations [28]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 28)

'That'–meaning what was mentioned previously about punishment; 'knowingly rejected,' that is, forcefully denied. So when those who disbelieve understand their position relative to Islam, and the untruthfulness of those who called them to error becomes apparent to them, they will then seek vengeance not against the believers but against those disbelievers who led them astray and removed them from belief. On the Day of Resurrection they will search out such people to revenge them, and to trample them under their feet. At that time a battle and controversy will ensue between two parties, followers, and leaders.

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ رَبَّنَآ أَرِنَا ٱلَّذَيْنِ أَضَلَّانَا مِنَ ٱلْجِنِّ وَٱلْإِنسِ
نَجْعَلْهُمَا تَحْتَ أَقْدَامِنَا لِيَكُونَا مِنَ ٱلْأَسْفَلِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

The disbelievers will say, 'Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misled us and we shall trample them underfoot, so that they may be among the lowest of the low' [29] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 29)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* in more than one place in the Quran describes for us this battle of words which will ensue between those who led others into error and those who are so led, and how representatives of the two groups will cast blame on each other and divest themselves of responsibility.

For this reason, Iblis (Satan) will have the upper hand over those whom he led into error, and will have the more convincing argument. As Allah *the Exalted* says in relating about him: '...Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine...' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

That is, not on the basis of an argument that swayed you, nor on the basis of some power to convince you to act. How strange it is that the disbelievers will say on the Day of Resurrection 'O our Lord, Show us those of the invisible beings and humans that have led us astray...' (*Fussilat:* 29) – Now they call Him their Lord and acknowledge His Lordship. And the meaning of '...we shall trample them underfoot, so that they shall be the lowest of all' (*Fussilat:* 29) is, we will ourselves punish them first before You, O Lord, punish them. 'Underfoot' – that is, punishment by humiliation, not by inflicting pain. Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوا۟ رَبُّنَا ٱللَّهُ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَقَٰمُوا۟ تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ أَلَّا
تَخَافُوا۟ وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا۟ وَأَبْشِرُوا۟ بِٱلْجَنَّةِ ٱلَّتِى كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

As for those who say, 'Our Lord is God,' and take the straight path towards Him, the angels come down to them and say, 'Have no fear or grief, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised [30] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 30)

They say Our Lord is Allah; here there are two terms, Lord and Allah. Now each term has a certain semantic range: a Lord is one who raises, trains and takes it upon himself to show us excellence and good; we say, ‘We took care of him’, meaning that we gave him what he needed. Now Allah is a Lord Who created creatures in need and helped those who were non-existent, and still takes care of us with tender concern until such time as we become strong and our limbs firm, whereupon He gives us certain responsibilities in His capacity as God.

Therefore, the gift that comes from His being Lord is universal and encompasses both believer and disbeliever, obedient and rebellious. Allah is the Lord of all, and His Grace reaches to all His creation. He created you, and created all the basics you would need for your life before He created you, and gave you a mind with which to discern and choose between alternatives. If you use your mind well with respect to what He gave you in the basics of life, then you will be able to reap their fruits, but if you do not use it well, then you will lose. Thus, the gift of the Lord is for all, and the necessities of life are granted to all and given to those who deserve them, even if they are disbelievers.

For this reason you find in the story(1) of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that episode where he said: ‘...“O my Lord! Make this a land secure, and grant its people fruitful sustenance – such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day”...’ (*al-Baqara:* 126), thus making a request for daily sustenance only for those who believe. Allah *Glorified is He* corrected him on the matter, and said, ‘and whoever shall deny the truth...’ (*al-Baqara:* 126), for my sustenance is for all of my creatures, whether or not they believe because they are My creation and of My fashioning. I am The One Who called them into being, and so it is My duty to provide their sustenance and their basics of life – this is the gift of The Lord.

Now someone knocked on Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham) door one night seeking to stay the night with him; he first asked him his religion, and when he learned that he was not a believer he locked the door in his face, and the man went away. Allah *Glorified is He* reprimanded His prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), saying to him, Ibrahim (Abraham), he belongs to My dominion, and I have not withheld from him My sustenance despite his lack of belief in Me – yet you want to change his religion on a night you invite him to be your guest.

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(1) *The story of the guest of Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him with his disbelieving guest*

So Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* went running after the man until he had caught up with him, and took him in as a guest. The man was surprised and said, ‘I came to you and you rebuffed me!’ Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* replied, ‘Yes, but my Lord reprimanded me for doing that to you’. The man said, ‘Your Lord reprimanded you on my account?’ ‘Yes’, said Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. He said, ‘how wonderful a Lord Who reprimands His prophets for the sake of His enemies.’ He then said, ‘I witness that there is no god but Allah, and that you are the Messenger of Allah.’

Therefore, we often wonder at how Allah’s gift encompasses unbelievers, and they possess all the goods of this world and its glories, while the believer is deprived. Yet this is not strange, for this is the gift of the Lord, and those people used their resources wisely and reaped the benefit – were you to similarly use your resources wisely you would achieve the same.

Now read Allah’s saying: ‘And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people would become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways whereon to ascend, [33] and [silver] doors for their houses, and [silver] couches whereon to recline, [34] and gold [beyond count]...[35]’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 33-35).

Consider what these ascending stairways might be: they are those escalators which we have only come to know in the twentieth century. The Quran is here informing us about them fourteen centuries before their time, one of the miracles of the Quran which it divulges to us from time to time.

And His saying, ‘[But] behold, as for those who say “Our Lord is Allah”...’ (*Fussilat:* 30) – that is, they acknowledge Him *Glorified is He* that it is His Nature to sustain, and confirm that He *Glorified is He* is The One Who created us and nurtured us and gives us good things. It is amazing that He does not give us responsibilities until we become strong adults, that is, He left me playing in the world and enjoying its good things for fifteen years without requiring anything of me. Why?

Because He does not impose responsibility on you until after your formation is complete and your powers are at their full, for were He to impose such responsibility on you and then you suddenly found yourself changing and some of your limbs becoming larger, you would say to Him, O my Lord, You imposed this responsibility on me, but then these changes happened to me, and I am no longer able to fulfil that responsibility.

And when do you reach maturity? They say that you are an adult when you become capable of producing another human being like yourself, at which point your nature is complete and your manhood in place. We see the same thing happening with fruits: the ripe fruit gives its seed, and if this is placed in the soil it produces a tree. Take a melon, for example – before it is ripe you find that its pulp is whitish and its taste is watery and bland. Why? Because it is not yet ripe, and if you were to plant its seeds they would not produce anything.

It is as though Allah is protecting the fruit so its seeds can ripen and become capable of producing a new tree. We call this perpetuation of the species, without which it would go extinct. Were a melon to ripen and become sweet before its seeds ripened, we would eat it without paying attention to the seeds and their inability to create a new tree, and the species would die out.

Thus if you ignore the fruit until it has matured on its stalk and do not pick it, it falls for you on the ground of its own accord. It is as though it is saying to you, take me, since it will both give you the pleasure of its taste and will produce a new tree of the same species.

Now creation is of two kinds: original creation, and secondary creation. Original creation is when the fundamental properties of things were created; secondary creation is when everything that derives from these fundamental properties is created. Therefore, when Yusuf (Joseph) the carpenter said to Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* after it became apparent that she was pregnant, ‘Maryam (Mary), does a tree emerge without a seed?’ she answered, ‘Yes, that tree which produced the first seed.’ This then is the original creation, like the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* who was first created and then all mankind descended from him.

Therefore, the imposition of responsibility does not occur until after one attains to maturity and manhood, and the One Who so assigns us responsibility is Allah. The Lord creates and provides and nurtures, while Allah assigns responsibility and commands us to worship – thus Allah is our object of worship, that is, the One Whose commands and interdictions are obeyed. But before His commands and interdictions are obeyed, He gives to you as the Lord. It is as though He first gives you good before He commands you to worship Him; in view of this good it is the least you can do to obey the One Who has nurtured you.

For this reason He assigned a special status to parents, and commanded us to honour them and forbade us from disrespecting them – indeed, He has made disrespect of one's parents one of the major sins. Why? They say that it is because He wanted to teach you to honour those who were the direct cause of your coming into existence. This in turn should lead you to honour the One Who is the indirect cause of your coming into existence, that is, Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus He said, 'And worship Allah [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do good unto your parents...' (*an-Nisa':* 36).

Now when the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded us to honour our parents, He was training us to acknowledge Allah's right. Allah brought the original creation into being, while one's parents were responsible for one's secondary creation. Honouring the latter then becomes a means for honouring the former.

Thus we associate gifting with Allah's status as Lord, and the imposition of responsibility with His status as God. But He first gives you responsibility because you are in the world, and one's lifetime in the world is that part of one's existence in it. You have no say in how long your lifetime will be in the span of history between Adam *peace be upon him* and the Hour of Resurrection, for this whole time period does not concern you. Allah decides how long each person will live: this one lives ten years that one lives fifty years, another one lives a hundred – no one has any say in how long they will live.

After the True Lord *Glorified is He* alludes to the rebellious nations which reject their Messengers and the punishment they will receive, He *Glorified is He* proceeds to touch on their counterparts, people who do believe and who tread the Straight Path. He *the Exalted* says: '[But,] behold, as for those who say, "Our Lord is Allah," and then steadfastly pursue the right way...' (*Fussilat:* 30). Now we say that actions comprise both word and deed: words are the actions of the tongue and correspond to other deeds, the actions of the rest of the bodily members: the eye sees, the ears hear, the hands touch, the feet walk and so on. So all words and deeds are called actions

But what is the action of the heart? From the physical point of view it is the vessel responsible for the circulation of the blood, pumping life to all the other parts of the body. It is also the vessel of faith and belief; if it is built up through certainty and faith they will spread throughout every cell of the body. For this reason we say that the heart's action is belief. An item of belief is something that is so tied together that it cannot be dissolved, something that is established in the heart such that it cannot be exposed to the intellect's quibbles anymore.

We have said that thought is first presented to the intellect to be evaluated and criticised, and if it finds it to be sound it passes it on to the heart to be established as a firm item of belief. Thus the heart only accepts proven items of belief, and these beliefs serve you as the basis for all the actions of your life.

From this we know the importance and danger of the tongue's role. It is responsible for fully half of one's actions, with the rest being apportioned to the other members of the body. This is because it is what expresses who you are, reveals eloquently what you have inside you. All the members must interact in a positive sense with the universe – the ear hears, the eye sees, the nose smells, the hand touches – and by so doing they give me a basis for thought; through them the believer arrives at the signs of Allah in the universe, through them he recognises what is helpful and what is harmful, taking what is helpful and avoiding what is harmful. The ear hears everything, but it is up to you to focus it on hearing what is good and avoid hearing what is bad: '...and [who], whenever they pass by [people engaged in] frivolity, pass on with dignity' (*al-Furqan:* 72).

You see with your eye the wondrousness of Allah's handiwork in His creation, and lower your gaze lest you look on what is forbidden. Behold the universe is laid open before you like a book – all that you are to do is to read the signs and miracles that are in it. The heavens and everything in them, sun, moon, stars, celestial bodies, galaxies, they all move according to a minutely specified order; the earth and everything on it, the various elements and the good things they give rise to.

Now when the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to us about these good things and bestows upon us these bounties, He is reminding us of His Power to abolish and do away with them, and how if He *Glorified is He* wished He could deprive us of them – indeed, He could even replace them with His Wrath, Allah forbid. Thus we pause to consider His statement about farming: ‘is it you who cause it to grow – or are We the cause of its growth?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 64) Yes, we plough the field and irrigate and tend it, but who causes the growth of plants? He *Glorified is He* then reminds us of His Power to do away with this bounty: ‘[For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff, and you would be left to wonder [and to lament]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65).

He then speaks to us of the bounty of water, and how He could do away with it: ‘Have you ever considered the water which you drink? [68] Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds – or are We the cause of its coming down? [69] [It comes down sweet – but] were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks [unto Us]? [70]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 69-70)

But when He *Glorified is He* speaks to us about the bounty of fire, He simply mentions it without stating what does away with it: ‘Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle? [71] Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel – or are We the cause of its coming into being? [72]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 71-72)

Thus it is without any mention of what does away with it, unlike the previous instances – why? They say that it is because it is the type of fire that is beneficial for us and does not cause us harm, the fire we light to use; every other kind of fire is harmful. For this reason the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not say, for example, had We wished We would have made it embers, in order that fire may remain a reminder of the fire of the Hereafter.

Now you should observe the greatness of the Quranic method and the subtlety of its expression. When it speaks of farming it says, ‘[For] were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff...’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65), using the particle of emphasis – why? In order to affirm His Power to destroy it, whatever it is. Now man has a role in this and must intervene – he ploughs and irrigates and tends. It is only when it speaks of man's creation and of water that it does not have this particle of emphasis; this is because man has no role in creation or in the raining down of water from heaven.

Now the signs in Allah's universe are many; scholars have classified them according to three categories:

Signs in the universe: these establish the Power of The Creator *Glorified is He* for example, night and day, sun and moon. Signs and wonders: these accompanied the Messengers of Allah in order to confirm their veracity in their message from Allah. Finally, signs of the law: these are the signs of the Holy Quran which express Allah's path for mankind. All of these serve to make us certain and believe firmly in Allah.

If a man partakes of the creed of faith he proclaims it joyfully with his tongue. Here may be seen the role of the tongue in expressing what is in the heart, thus leading the other bodily members. For this reason it comes in the Hadith that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Not a day goes by but the members call out to the tongue saying, Fear Allah for our sakes, for we are dependent on you: if you go rightly we do too, and if you swerve from the straight path so do we.'(1)

His saying, '[But,] behold, as for those who say, "Our Lord is Allah"…' (*Fussilat:* 30) makes reference to the saying of believers in whose hearts belief is firmly rooted, their tongues expressing saying that '..."Our Lord is Allah"...' – our Creator, our Nurturer, Who created us from nothing and supplied us in our deprivation, giving to us safety and security, for He is The One Who says [of Himself], '...Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep...' (*al-Baqara:* 255).

Now when a man wishes to guard something he hires a guard, but what use is the guard if he sleeps? As for you, believer, you are in the guardianship of Allah, so sleep at peace in your heart, for your guard is not overtaken by slumber or by sleep.

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(1) *Ahmad, (Musnad) [3/96]. In his Sunnan, At-Tirmidhi gives the same Hadith as from Abu-Sa'id Al-Khudri, 'When a man wakes in the morning his members take his tongue to task, saying, "Fear Allah for our sakes, for we are dependent on you: if you go rightly we do too, and if you swerve from the straight path so do we"'.*

Now when a believer takes account of all this bounty, and when he sees everything he needs for his life in easy reach, whether food and drink, safety and peace, air to breathe and earth to give him everything he desires, he delights in the gift of Allah to him and can only say ‘Our Lord is Allah’ because it is a belief that has become established in his heart.

Given that your Lord is Allah, do not grieve or worry over the matters of this life – Allah will take care of your affairs. Consider how the child does not have a care during the lifetime of his father, and does not think about how expensive things might be, nor of daily sustenance and goods and clothes, and so on, for his father is there. How much more so if Allah is the One Who takes care of you? By Allah, the true believer should be ashamed to worry about daily sustenance, given that he knows that his Lord is Allah.

Given that ‘...“Our Lord is Allah”...’ no harm will befall you. Your Lord will still take care of your affairs, and keep evil away from you, and provide you sufficiency in all that concerns you.

You recall the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* with Pharaoh. When Pharaoh followed him with his troops, ‘...the followers of Musa (Moses) exclaimed: “Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!”’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) since this is what seemed to be inevitable: in front of them was the sea and behind them were Pharaoh’s troops, with no escape. But what did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* say? He said, ‘…“Nay indeed!”...’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62), that is, they will not overtake us nor catch any of us. He said this from the point of view of his belief and his trust in his Lord and His protection of him. Allah never sent one of His Messengers and then abandoned him to his enemy.

‘He replied: “Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!”’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) And thus relief came to him from his Lord immediately: ‘thereupon We inspired Musa (Moses) thus: “Strike the sea with your staff!” – whereupon it parted, and each part appeared like a mountain vast’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63).

Consider here Allah's protection of His allies, consider this miracle, and consider such sustaining. No sooner had Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said this with sincerity of faith but that he received an answer; Allah took away from the water its liquidity and it became solid on either side, each like a great mountain, and between them an entirely dry path by which Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his troops passed. Once he had reached the opposite shore, he wanted to strike the sea again to make it return to its fluidity, thus closing off the path in the face of Pharaoh. But his Lord guided him and corrected him in this – and Allah's is the ultimate control – for the time was not yet right. Allah *Glorified is He* said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'and leave the sea becalmed [between you and Pharaoh's men]: for, verily, they are a host destined to be drowned!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24)

After Allah *Glorified is He* had saved Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his tribe and had brought them to the desert, He gave to Musa's (Moses) staff another function: 'And [remember] when Musa (Moses) prayed for water for his people and We replied, "Strike the rock with your staff!" – whereupon twelve springs gushed forth from it...' (*al-Baqara:* 60). Now the staff was the same staff with which he had struck the water to make it a mountain, and now he struck the mountain and made it water; the effect was in each case different for The Actor was Allah, The fully Capable.

His saying, '..."Our Lord is Allah"...' (*Fussilat:* 30) – This gives us a general idea of the Lord's giving on the plane of the physical and of values. Now your Lord is the One Who supplies all your material needs, so why would he leave you without your spiritual needs? Just as you accept His provision in terms of food and drink and housing, so too accept His provision with respect to religious obligation, for it is through such obligation that He instils values within your spirit.

Here we must contemplate for example His saying: 'O Children of Adam! Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from on high [the knowledge of making] garments to cover your nakedness, and as a thing of beauty: but the garment of Allah-consciousness is the best of all. Herein lies a message from Allah, so that man might take it to heart' (*al-A'raf:* 26).

Now Allah *the Exalted* has given you what is necessary in terms of clothing, which is what covers your nakedness, and has also given you certain luxuries in your dress – ornamentation and such – on account of which people pride themselves over their neighbours.

Thus we say ‘so-and-so is overly elegant.’ But do not forget that the garment of Allah-consciousness is better. That is superior to the first kind of clothing. Material clothing covers your nakedness in this world, but the garment of God-consciousness covers you both in this world and in the next.

Therefore it represents an eternal and perpetual gift in the Hereafter, and is thus the best clothing for all those who are intelligent and understanding. In His capacity as our Lord, He has given us what elevates our material life and makes happy our time in this world; nor has He *Glorified is He* deprived our hearts of those spiritual elements that will make us happy in the Hereafter.

Now read if you will His saying: ‘Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, and horses of high mark, and cattle, and lands. All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world – but the most beauteous of all goals is with Allah’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 14). Now what exists with Allah in the Hereafter is eternal, whereas all that is material perishes and passes away. This world in its entirety is simply a staging point to prepare for the eternal Hereafter, and Allah gives you the true gift that will remain in perpetuity. Consider how we teach a small child in various stages (elementary, preparatory, high school, college) – why all this work? Because we hope that it will make him a productive member of society. Likewise in this world we work towards a higher goal, the Hereafter, wherein is the eternal good which nothing can spoil.

Now consider this assertion on the part of the believers when they say ‘…“Our Lord is Allah”…’ (*Fussilat:* 30). It is an assertion which combines both an acknowledgement of the gift of the Lord and that of Allah.

Allah is Himself both the God Who gives and the God Who requires of us obedience. Now whoever receives from his Lord the Lord’s gift, accepting His provision as Creator out of nothingness and Supplier of what we lack, it does not befit him, that he then shirks the obligations He lays upon him, especially as these obligations are for the sake of a person's happiness in this world and in the Hereafter, not to cause him any hardship.

Now the gift of the Lord is present also in what He gives in His capacity as Allah. It is well known that obligation is couched in the form 'Do this, do not do that,' and that it is incumbent upon you to carry out what you are commanded and to refrain from what you are told to avoid. As for anything that the text of revelation does not mention, you are free to do or not do as you like.

He *the Exalted* then relates what happens with those believers who after they say 'Our Lord is Allah' and affirm both Allah's divinity and His Lordship, this creed becoming firmly rooted with them: '…and then steadfastly pursue the right way…' (*Fussilat:* 30) – That is, action follows words.

Consider here the conjunctive particle 'then': in grammar it is used to sequentially order statements. There is a specific reason why He *Glorified is He* did not simply say '…and so they steadfastly pursue the right way…' (*Fussilat:* 30) which is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* wished to give you an opportunity to stop and contemplate this creed so that you might gladly believe in it and act according to it fully convinced, such that you might develop such a love for it that it brings you to the point of passion for uprightness, for the pursuit of the right way.

Now the meaning of uprightness is taking something as it is meant to be taken; it demands that one proceed along a straight line, which Allah has called the Straight Path. Allah wants you, O believer, to use as a means to the goal obedience to the dictates of your obligation, the path from which you will not deviate by even a hair's breadth.

Now when you travel along a very wide road you might go here and there, and indeed this is quite possible on a road like that, but do not forget that this will lengthen the distance of your journey and make it harder. For this reason Allah *Glorified is He* called His path that brings one to His paradise '...the Straight Path...' (*al-Fatiha:* 6), and in another place He calls it '...the right path...' (*al-Baqara:* 108) – that is, right in the middle of the path, without swerving to either side.

Now if the goal is far off, it is necessary to make haste in order to reach your destination. So what about those whose goal is paradise? They will undoubtedly hurry towards it without sparing any effort on the route that leads in the correct direction.

For this reason we say that a believer does not need to hate death since it is what will bring him to his goal. Rather, he should only hate death if his deeds are not righteous – yes, in that case he will shirk from meeting Allah in such a state. With the result of their efforts in sight, for example, you ardent seekers hurrying towards it – why? Because they find peace and satisfaction there, whereas you see the lazy ambling along slowly and carelessly

Therefore, our Lord *the Exalted* teaches us: 'and vie with one another to attain to your Lord's forgiveness and to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious' (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

He also says in describing the believers: '…these [three] would vie with one another in doing good works…' (*al-Anbiya':* 90). In other words, beware of allowing this life to preoccupy you – let all your steps be towards the Hereafter, compete with each other in running in that direction, for you do not know how much of the path you will be able to travel before death overtakes you.

It is an example of His justness toward His servant that He keeps for Himself the length of His servant's life, yet leaves to him two other dimensions, breadth, and depth. How so? They say that with respect to duration, no one but Allah knows how long your life will be, and Allah only controls its end; but He leaves it up to you to expand your life in terms of breadth as you will. Thus you may take advantage of the moment you have and make the most good you can out of it; by so doing the breadth of your life will be greater than its length. For the important thing is not the length of life, but the amount of good you are able to do in it.

Now there are those who accomplish amazing things in a short lifetime, things that someone who lives much longer than them never accomplishes. For this reason, when Allah describes paradise for us He says: 'and vie with one another to attain to your Lord's forgiveness and to a paradise as vast(1) as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious' (*Al-'Imran:* 133).

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(1) *Al-Bazzaz* related from *Abu-Hurayra* that a man came to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Have you seen His saying, "…a paradise as vast as the heavens and earth…" (*Al-'Imran:* 133) – but where is the hellfire? He replied, have you seen how=

The verse mentions the breadth of paradise. When the breadth is equal to the heavens and the earth, then, how long is its length? Also, Allah mentions another dimension which is the depth or the span. The believer gains more depth and increases his life span, (in terms of the good deeds which determine how much reward a person will be given) after death and when their work in this world comes to an end, by the good effects of their actions that keep running throughout time even after their death.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* commanded us to journey along the straightway, and to hurry to do good, He intended by this that we should proceed along the easiest and most direct of routes that will bring us to the noblest of destinations with the least amount of effort. It is well known to engineers that a straight line is the shortest path between any two points.

Indeed, Allah does not want us to take the long road and walk it in vain. Meanwhile, He commands us to vie with each other in order to maintain the vigour necessary to reach our goal. Therefore, Allah says at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Kahf* (the Cave): 'All praise is due to Allah who has bestowed this Divine scripture from on high upon His servant, and has not allowed any deviousness to obscure its meaning: [1] [a Divine scripture] unerringly straight...[2]' (*al-Kahf:* 1-2).

The uprightness that Allah wants of us has certain basic principles that have been elucidated by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

= when the night descends it covers all – where then is the day? The man said, "Wherever Allah wills". He replied, so it is with the hellfire – it is wherever Allah wills it to be.' In his commentary [1/404] *Ibn-Kathir* says: 'This can have two meanings. The first: When the day comes and we do not see the night, it does not follow that it does not exist anywhere, even if we do not know where; likewise with hellfire, it exists wherever Allah wills. This is the more straightforward meaning. The second meaning: When the day covers one face of the earth, night covers the other face; likewise with paradise: it exists at the highest level of existence, above the heavens and under the Throne, with its dimensions as described by Allah, while hellfire exists at the lowest level of existence. This setup does not prevent hellfire from existing even though paradise encompasses the heavens and the earth.'

in his Hadith: ‘Islam is founded on five (Pillars): the Testimony that there is no Allah but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the prayer, obligatory alms (*zakat*), fasting the month of *Ramadan*, and Pilgrimage to the *Ka‘ba* for those who are able to make the journey.’(1)

One should not suppose that the religion consists only of these five things and nothing more; no, these are simply the foundations upon which the edifice of the religion is erected. The comprehensive religion of Islam covers every movement and detail of our life.

This issue is clarified by the noble Hadith: ‘Belief consists of some and sixty (or some and seventy) branches, the highest of which is the statement “There is no Allah but Allah,” and the least of which is to remove an obstacle from the road; modesty is also a branch of belief.’(2)

So, these basic Pillars are not the entirety of Islam; rather, they are the bases and foundations of Islam. The two Testimonies affirm Allah’s Divinity, obedience to Him *Glorified is He* and believing in His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prayer, which is performed five times a day, is the declaration of a Muslim’s constant devotion to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Giving Alms is a moral training for the human soul to get accustomed to giving, cooperation and caring about the poor that is, those who are actually poor because of incapacitation, not those practising the profession of the poor, which is beggary. Moreover, *zakat* (obligatory alms) is a demonstration of solidarity among members of society. Today, you happen to be strong and in a position to give; then you may become weak and incapacitated, in which case you will find someone in society who is stretching out his hand to help you.

As well, *zakat* (obligatory alms) cures the society from social diseases such as resentfulness, envy and jealousy. How can a poor man envy a rich man or be resentful towards him when the latter gives the former part of the fruit of his effort and a share in his wealth? Therefore, *zakat* (obligatory alms) is the best kind of insurance a believing individual can have.

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(1) *A sound Hadith related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [8] and Muslim in his Sahih [16], on the authority of a statement by ‘Umar’s son Allah be pleased with them: The Messenger of God said: ‘Islam is founded on five things: the Testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, prayer, obligatory alms, the Pilgrimage, and the fast of Ramadan.’*

(2) *A sound Hadith related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [9] and Muslim in his Sahih [35], on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Thus, we have said, regarding the issue of a faith-based society, that an individual does not take pains in work only as much as is necessary to secure their needs; rather, they work as much as they can. This way, a person can satisfy their own needs, and if there is a surplus in their resources, they give it out as charity to the weak and poor ones. Give charity, go directly yourself to the house of a poor man to give to him, since this way you will preserve his dignity, and relieve him of the humiliation of having to ask you; in this way you will gain such a rank.

Then, comes the pilgrimage to add to these aspects another feature of faith: your Lord, Who created you, provided your needs and granted you power and capability, does not He deserve from you that you visit the house He has chosen to be attributed to Himself, if only once in your lifetime?

This visiting does not depend on the will of the visitor, but rather on the invitation of the host. Thus, when you go to the house of your Lord in fulfilling this religious duty, you present yourself for another gift, one without bounds. In the pilgrimage are further benefits pertaining to both this life and the next, as is obvious to the thoughtful people.

As for the fast, it gives you another dimension for obedience; before dawn you may eat and drink, but after dawn you are not permitted to do so. It is a moment that parts between what is permitted and what is forbidden. When you fast, you fast from something that Allah has permitted for you before fasting. So, you are fasting from something completely permissible, rather than from those things like wine for example, which Islam declares totally forbidden.

Praise to Allah, we do not drink wine, nor ever contemplate drinking it, such that this attitude becomes second nature to us. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to dislodge us from the things we are familiar with and instil in His servant a sense of the sweetness of the duties imposed by Allah, with respect to something which is perfectly permissible one moment and forbidden the next. Thus, the True Lord *Glorified is He* replaces our ordinary habits with the honour of worship.

As for that permanent pillar of Islam which always applies to a believer except in the case of madness, it is the ritual *salat* (prayer). It involves five separate prayers per day whose purpose is to make for one's constant presence with Allah; in its constancy and frequency it differs from the other religious duties. The *zakat* (obligatory alms) is dependent on one's annual income, the fast is dependent on a single month in the year (*Ramadan*), and the pilgrimage needs only be done once in a lifetime, based on the ability to afford the requirements.

The fact that the ritual prayer is performed five times a day is a mercy from Allah to His servants. You, the creation of Allah, are summoned by Him to His moral presence five times a day to set right what has gone awry in you; how good would the status be of a product which is examined by its manufacturer five times every day?

An engineer, for example, fixes a machine with replacement wires or parts; likewise your Lord fixes the trouble with you. But whereas the engineer uses material things to fix something material, Allah is immaterial and fixes your immaterial part. Therefore, do not tire yourself attempting to delve into this matter; just leave it to Allah. Your responsibility is only to present yourself to Him in the five prayers at their appointed times, and to perform properly their bowings, prostrations and other requirements.

Certainly, you will observe an improvement in yourself, in your spirit and in your physical being, in your finances and in your family. You will feel that prayer has a distinct effect on your life and eases your body. For this reason, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Bilal *Allah be pleased with him*: 'O, Bilal, put us at ease by it!'(1) Make us comfortable through prayer, not put us at ease away from prayer!

Due to its importance in the life of a Muslim, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called it the very fountainhead of righteousness as well as its banner. Read if you will Allah's words: '...for, behold, prayer restrains [man] from loathsome deeds and from all that runs counter to reason...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45).

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(1) *This Hadith is given by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad [5/364] and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [4985] as referencing one of the Companions.*

And in the Noble Hadith, 'The first thing the servant will be judged for on the Day of Resurrection is his performance of the prayer, for if it be done properly, all his other acts will be good, and if it be done improperly, so too will his other acts.'(1)

Prayer, therefore, has a special status. You see that the poor man is not obligated to give alms or perform the pilgrimage, and the sick man is not obligated to fast. On the contrary, prayer is incumbent upon the Muslim both in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth, in travel and at home; only the insane are excused from the obligation to perform prayer.

Thus, it is the pillar that is always incumbent upon you. Hence, prayer has a special quality in its status as a religious duty; all the acts of worship are enjoined by revelation, except prayer, which was imparted to our Prophet Muhammad directly during his night journey and ascent. This indicates its exceptional importance among the acts of worship. We previously explained this by comparing it to the behaviour of your boss at work: he may send you a memo or call you on the phone to inform you about some task, but for more important or sensitive tasks, he will call you into his office to tell you directly. This was the case with prayer; it takes its value from the directness with which it was imparted as an obligation.

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(1) *This Hadith is given in many different versions and wordings, including:*

- As related by Abu Hurayra, 'I heard the Messenger of God say: "The first of a servant's acts that he will be judged for on the day of resurrection is his performance of the prayer, for if it be done properly he will have succeeded, and if it be done improperly he will have lost out."' At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [378] states that this is a good but irregular Hadith, as does An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan [461].

- Another as related by Abu Hurayra, 'The first thing the servant will be judged for on the day of resurrection is his performance of the prayer, for if it be found to be perfect, his record will be judged as perfect, but if it be lacking in any way, He will say (to angels): "Look to see whether you can find other instances of his obedience that will make up for his lack of obedience in this duty" – so will all his other acts be judged.' Thus, in An-Nasa'i's Sunnan [462, 463], Ibn Majah's Sunnan [1415], and Ahmad in his Musnad [9130].

- The wording as it is given by Ash-Sha'rawi is given by At-Tabarani in his Al-Mu'jam Al-awsat, Hadith [1929], related by Anas ibn Malik via Al-Qasim ibn 'Uthman. Al-Bukhari states that he has Hadiths that are not agreed upon. So too Isma'il ibn 'Isa, identified as weak by Al-Azdi. It is a weak method according to Al-Albani, but after enumerating all the Hadith methods, he says that it is a sound Hadith according to all methods.

Moreover, prayer is a pillar that comprises all the other pillars of Islam. It includes the two Testimonies of Faith; it suffices that these two Testimonies, representing the pinnacle of faith and creed, be said once by a Muslim. However, in prayer it is said several times. It also entails a kind of fasting, one more extensive than the fast of *Ramadan*; in *Ramadan*, you abstain from food, drink and certain natural functions, whereas in prayer you fast from more than this; you fast from movement and from speech.

It also includes a type of pilgrimage; to perform prayer, you must orient your face towards the direction of the holy house of Allah, visualizing it in front of you, as though you were gazing upon it. Prayer also includes almsgiving, since, in prayer, you sacrifice what is more precious than money; you sacrifice time.

Therefore, the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified the difference between the believer and the disbeliever as being the act of prayer, saying: ‘the covenant that distinguishes between us and them is the *salat* (prayer); whoever abandons it has committed disbelief.’(1) So, if your Lord summons you to prayer and you do not respond, you are in a state of rebellion. What do you think would happen if your boss at work called you into his office and you ignored him?

Part of the greatness of this religious duty is its nature as a meeting with Allah. You, despite being a servant of Allah, have total freedom and possess all the necessary elements to hold this meeting; you set the time and place of meeting, you decide what you will talk about during it, and when to finish it. The case is that you hear the call to prayer, upon which you go and perform the ablution, then raise your hands to heaven saying: *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest). You are then in the presence of your Lord and your Creator; you are with Him via a 'direct line,' and there is no doorman or guard or any other mediator between you and Him. For this reason a pious man said:

Iam amazed at myself – I am but a servant
Who is received graciously by my Lord whenever I choose

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his Musnad [5/346], Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [1079] (the section on prayer), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2621] from the Hadith of Abu Musa Al-Ash‘ari; he states that this Hadith is good and sound but irregular.*

He in His most exalted holiness, yet
He meets me where and when I say

Now, your Lord does not wait for you to come to Him, but calls you to visit Him; He approaches you before you approach Him. Indeed, He said in the Qudsi Hadith: ‘Whoever remembers Me inwardly, I remember him inwardly; whoever remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in better assembly. Whoever comes to Me walking, I come to him running; whoever draws near to Me by a foot, I draw near to him by a fathom.’(1) Thus, the control is in your own hands. How wonderful a Lord Who treats His servants in such a way and showers such kindness upon them.

Part of His generosity is His rewarding His servant for every act of good done in his life, for such acts are requirements of belief. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says in the chapter *al-Jumu‘a* (The day of congregation): ‘O you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave all worldly commerce...’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9).

As for after prayer, He says: ‘And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah’s bounty...’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10). So, He takes you away from work and then restores you to it; work is in itself a form of obedience to Allah; the believer must take part in life in order to have a positive and constructive impact.

Islam is, thus, not limited to these five pillars of faith, but extends to every act one does in life. For example, when you build a house, first you erect it on pillars, and then you divide it into a bedroom, a dining room, a living room, a kitchen and so on.

Islam aims for a healthy equilibrium in life and the absence of tension and conflict; it strives to bolster social life, not set it at odds (with religious obligations). It does not want one person to build and another to demolish; rather, it wants all of us to build and no one to tear down. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has given to us this universe in which we live in good condition, characterised by beauty and harmony, and has commanded us to preserve it and indeed to increase its goodness, or at least to leave it as it is without damaging it.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [7405, 7505, 7537], Ahmad in his Musnad [2/251, 354, 405], At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [3603] as a Hadith of Abu Hurayra; At-Tirmidhi identifies it as a good and sound Hadith.*

He taught us that when we try to improve things we should do so with a view to the consequence of our actions, and that we should not involve ourselves in something whose outcome we cannot guess, and that we should not let the appearance of things deceive us. These are the characteristics of rational people who act according to wisdom, who weigh good and bad in order to use what is good and avoid what is bad.

We may cite an example from the present age; that is the cotton worm that destroyed most of Egypt's important cotton crop. It took some time until scientists invented a pesticide called DDT, and everyone rushed to use it, thinking that it would get rid of the worms permanently and solve the problem for good. But after a few years the worms developed a resistance to this pesticide and returned to their full strength. Along with the worms, there remained terrible side effects afflicting water, crops, and the soil. Everything in our life had become polluted; we are still suffering greatly because of these pesticides. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* warns us against thoughtlessness in invention and being misled by apparent benefits without considering the consequences. So, beware lest you become involved in a trouble you will not be able to fix later. Consider Allah's saying when reminding His servants of His graces in the verse: 'And [it is He who creates] horses and mules and asses for you to ride, as well as for [their] beauty: and He will yet create things of which [today] you have no knowledge' (*an-Nahl:* 8).

Indeed, we used not to know any means of transportation besides horses, mules and donkeys, but then man created what he had not known previously such as cars, planes, and rockets. There is no doubt that such means serve mankind and make life easier, but they also have bad and destructive effects that were not anticipated by their creators.

Back when cars first appeared, we used to go to Damietta by car, and the roads were not paved then as they are now. The driver would drive at high speed on the dirt road and raise a large cloud of dust in his wake; this dust caused harm to the pedestrians and the fields, not to mention the exhaust fumes and the respiratory problems the cars cause.

Then, there began to be many accidents and collisions resulting in the death and injury of people, thus filling society with tragedies. As well, when a car runs out of gas it stops wherever it is and will not move.

So, when you compare this means of transport with the natural means that Allah created, we find that Allah's creation is better and safer. Camels or donkeys get you where you need to go and carry your things without having these destructive effects, and their waste is a fertiliser for the soil, and when they are hungry they do not stop but carry you to your destination. Moreover, have you ever seen two camels get into an accident? Therefore it is our responsibility to consider the consequences of something before we create it, and whether its benefits outweigh its detriments.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then, explains what the reward is for those believers who say: '..."Our Sustainer is Allah," and then steadfastly pursue the right way...' (*Fussilat:* 30). What is their reward? '...Upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not and grieve not..."' (*Fussilat:* 30). The angels of Allah who are in heaven, created from light and have no work but to glorify Allah; they do not disobey Allah whatever the command is and actually do what they are commanded. So, when a believer is afflicted by tribulation or suffers discomfort, these angels descend upon him to strengthen him so that he can keep the patient endurance that he must have in such situations. Such a believer would say, 'There is no worry ever while I am believing in You, my Lord; my Lord is *the Almighty* who will relieve my cares and my distress.'

Such is the state of a believer when afflicted by misfortune: he takes refuge in The Causer *Glorified is He* and there comes to him an inspiration from Allah in the words he reminds himself with: 'Endure it patiently and resign yourself to the disposition of Allah. The affliction may be a test from Allah, or expiation for sins that I committed and for which Allah is punishing me now in order to forgive me in the Hereafter. This is a sign of Allah's love for His servant exposing him to punishment in this world so as to forgive him in the Hereafter.'

For this reason, the disbelievers used to rejoice when the believers were stricken with some affliction. But Allah *Glorified is He* taught His Prophet to say: ‘Say: “Never can anything befall us save what Allah has decreed!”...’ (*at-Tawba:* 51) So, you (disbelievers) rejoice when we are struck with affliction, and we also rejoice since it is from Allah. Affliction for the believer indicates either that Allah is covering over his errors or that He is raising him up a corresponding measure in rank.

How strange it is to see someone who is afflicted by a calamity or going through something unpleasant not addressing the reasons for it or thinking how to avoid it in the future, but rather, he takes refuge in forgetfulness and goes to drink some intoxicating beverage that will help him forget.

This is a grave error. Forgetting will not solve the problem, only thinking about its causes and how to address them will. Drugs and intoxicants do away with your reason and corrupt it precisely at the moment you need it most. When one of us experiences a problem he needs to think hard. Why would you get rid of your reason at a time when you need it most? Do you not usually seek other people’s help and advice to solve your problems when circumstances are difficult?

Therefore, consider what caused your affliction; if you have a part in it and it is simply a result of bad behaviour on your part, in which case you are to blame and must rectify your behaviour and consider its consequences. This is the first step on the path of improvement. This is like the student who goes to find out his grade at the end of the year and is told that he failed; the blow awakens him, and he cries out at the top of his voice with the cry of understanding, ‘I am the cause of this, I am lazy, I deserve it!’

But, if the affliction is beyond your control like the student who memorises his lessons and labours hard, yet when the exam time comes he freezes up or forgets and thereby fails. Then, this is simply Allah’s decree and is so for a good reason. This is an evil in which good lies hidden. We must be content when suffering comes from Allah, and ascribe to Him wisdom in afflicting us.

So, we always circle around the question seeking out the Divine wisdom behind our circumstances, whether or not we arrive at an answer. Say, perhaps I was conceited and Allah wished to break my conceit, or perhaps, if

I succeeded, I would have become envied, or perhaps I could not get the mark for which I hoped. All of these are examples happening in real life.

An action cannot be dealt with by itself but must be considered in conjunction with the doer; we must ask: who is the doer? For instance, when your child comes to you with a cut bleeding in some part of his body, you are not concerned so much with the blood as with who caused the bleeding. Indeed, you ask first: who did this to you? If he says, for example, that his uncle did it, you will calm down and tell him, you must have done something wrong to deserve it. But if he tells you someone else did it, you will get furious and not let things alone until you get to the bottom of it.

We say, therefore, consider the action in conjunction with the doer of the action. If it is from Allah, be content and look for His reason in doing it; you will certainly find it and will praise Allah accordingly. Be like a molar tooth firmly rooted in its place, which chews without being pained by sweet food or bitter. If the suffering is in yourself, be trained by it, and if it happens to someone else, learn from it. Allah certainly has His reasons.

You have heard the story(1) of the Chinese man who used to contemplate events to see the wisdom behind them. They say that this man loved to raise horses and had a horse farm. One day one of his best horses escaped, a stallion, and was lost in the fields. People came to him to console him for his loss, but he said to them, ‘Do not you understand that perhaps there is a good thing in this, and I find relief that I am not the cause for the loss of this horse?’

After several days, the horse returned to the farm accompanied by a herd of horses. His neighbours came to congratulate him on this, but he said to them, ‘What makes you think that this is a blessing?’ A short while later his son went to ride this horse as he was quite attached to it, and the horse threw him to the ground, breaking his leg. The people came to console the man, but he said to them, ‘Perhaps there is a good thing in this.’ Immediately after this an army recruiter came for the young man, but found that he had broken his leg and, therefore, left him. Therefore, we should understand that Allah makes His dispositions wisely and fairly enough. Some of us may understand the reasons, and others may not. Therefore, we say, take heed not to force things, since you do not know what is best for you, and remember always: '... and it may well be that you love [a thing the while it is bad for you]... (*al-Baqara:* 216) and '...it may well be that you hate [a thing the while it is good for you]...' (*al-Baqara:* 216). Thus, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this lesson, saying: 'Seek matters out with self-respect, for they go according to certain measures.'(1)

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(1) The story of the Chinese man who bread horses

A holy man says to Allah in his private prayers: 'I praise You for everything You order and the beauty of Your disposition; it is a praise coupled with contentment about Your rule and certainty about Your wisdom.' Thus, a person soothes himself and soothes the world around him. All of this guidance is from the angels' descents as referred to in Allah's saying: '[But,] behold, as for those who say, "Our Sustainer is Allah," and then steadfastly pursue the right way – upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not and grieve not"...' (*Fussilat:* 30).

Another kind of angelic descent occurs when the believer enters the hour of his death and is fearful and sorrowful, for he is leaving the comfort of the world. The angels descend upon him and reassure him by giving him tidings of another, perpetual kind of comfort in the Hereafter, which does not vanish like the comfort of this world.

'...Upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not"...' about those things you are approaching in the Hereafter, even if your works are lacking, for you are approaching a forgiving and merciful Lord; so do not fear nor grieve, '...but receive the glad tiding of that paradise which has been promised to you!' (*Fussilat:* 30)

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(1) *Al-'Ajluni mentions this in his Kashf Al-khafa' (Hadith 399) with the wording: 'Seek things out with self-respect, for matters go according to certain measures.' He says that it is related by Tamam and Ibn 'Asakir with a weak transmission from 'Abdallah ibn Bisr but is strengthened by what is related by At-Tabarni and Abu Nu'aym from the Hadith of Abu Amama: 'The holy spirit inspired my mind: A soul shall not die until its sustenance be completed; so fear God and seek with propriety.' This is also related by Al-Bazzar from Hudhayfa. In the section via Jabir it is thus as given in the Musnad Al-Firdaws of Al-Hafizh ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani.*

We said that good tiding is good news told before something actually takes place. So, who is giving you glad tidings of paradise? By Allah, if it were simply a man like yourself, you would doubt his authenticity; but given that the one who is giving you glad tidings is Allah Himself, trust in what you have been told. Indeed, the One Who promises paradise is alone capable of true faithfulness, since there is no power that can interfere with His ability to make good on His tiding.

نَحۡنُ أَوۡلِيَآؤُكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَفِي ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِۖ وَلَكُمۡ فِيهَا مَا
تَشۡتَهِيٓ أَنفُسُكُمۡ وَلَكُمۡ فِيهَا مَا تَدَّعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

We are your allies in this world and in the world to come, where you will have everything you desire and ask for [31] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 31)

That is, we are your close supporter, advocating for you in this worldly life and the Hereafter. Some scholars said that angels have been created innately disposed to obedience; for this reason when Adam was created they said: '...They said: "Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood – whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?"...' (*al-Baqara:* 30). Allah responded to them: '[Allah] answered: "Verily, I know that which you do not know" ' (*al-Baqara:* 30).

That is, I created the angels innately disposed to obedience, '...who do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). Those whom I wish to be obedient cannot disobey; but I wish for another creature, one that will come to Me without being forced to do so. Rather, they will come to me in obedience and approach near to Me through love while having the ability to disobey; they will come to Me by choice, not by compulsion or force.

Previously, I gave an example of a person having two servants, one of whom is chained and directed by his master with that chain and the other is free. When you summon them and they come running to you, which of them will be more obedient?

Now, His saying, ‘We are close unto you...’ (*Fussilat:* 31), that is, we come to you in times of hardship to assist you and in distress to help you attain perseverance and patience.

It is related in the Hadith that one of the Companions(1) of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sitting and reciting the Quran, and a horse was nearby. He suddenly heard it emit a strange cry like a growl and move about in an unusual way, and saw above its head a light. He went to our master the Messenger Muhammad and told him about this. The Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘those were the angels come to listen to your recitation; by Allah, had you but waited a while longer they would have greeted you.’(2)

This is part of the angels’ guardianship over us in this world; and in the Hereafter they will also be close to us, for they will be charged by Allah with the work on the Day of Resurrection and judgment, and with receiving the people of paradise with a greeting of peace, as the True Lord *Glorified is He* states: ‘...“Peace be upon you! Well have you done: enter, then, this [Paradise], herein to abide”’ (*az-Zumar:* 73).

He says also: ‘Peace be upon you, because you have persevered! How excellent, then, this fulfilment in the Hereafter!’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 24) This is the greeting of the angels, and Allah will then greet them likewise, as is stated in the chapter of *Ya Sin*: ‘Peace and fulfilment through the word of a Sustainer who dispenses all grace’ (*Ya Sin:* 58).

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(1) *He is Usayd ibn Hudayr, one of the patricians among the Ansars (Supporters). The Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said of him: what a good man is Usayd ibn Hudayr. It is related by Anas that Usayd and ‘Abbad ibn Bishr were with the Prophet on a dark night; when they departed from him one of their staves illumined the way and they walked in its light, and when they parted ways, both of their staves lit up [Ad-Dhahabi, Siyar A‘lam An-Nubala’, 1/299].*

(2) *Usayd Ibn Hudayr said that once he was reciting at night from the chapter of al-Baqara, with his horse tied next to him. Suddenly, the horse began to get restless and so he stopped reciting, upon which the horse calmed down; he resumed reciting and again his horse grew restless; he stopped and it calmed down again. Thus, when he resumed reciting again and the horse grew restless he desisted and left. When morning had come he told the Prophet, who replied, 'Recite, O Ibn Hudayr!' I turned my face toward heaven and lo, something like a canopy in which there were things like lamps; they then departed till I could see them no longer. The Messenger of God said, 'Do you know what that was?' He said, 'No.' 'Those were angels that drew near at the sound of your voice; had you kept reading they would have become visible to everyone' the Prophet replied [Al-Bukhari, Sahih, chapter on the descent of the Sakina and the angels; Muslim, Sahih, 1327, Hadith of Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudri].*

‘...and in that [life to come] you shall have all that your souls may desire, and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for’ (*Fussilat:* 31). Scholars say that whatever thing a person's soul desires will immediately appear before him, simply by thinking about it. What luxury! I have been to many countries and have stayed in the best hotels there, and the most they can give you is that you can press a certain button and it will give you coffee, for example, or on another button and it will give you tea. Is there anything greater than what Allah has prepared for you in paradise? You have only to think about something and it will appear before you. Paradise also includes other luxuries: ‘what the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has occurred to the heart of man.’(1)

Therefore, when Allah *Glorified is He* wished to create a picture of paradise for us, He did not describe it literally; He only said: ‘...the parable of the paradise which the Allah-conscious are promised...’ (*Muhammad:* 15); its parable, not paradise itself, why? Scholars say that it is because expressions in a language apply to certain meanings and objects; there must first be a meaning which is then given an expression that references it. But that which does not exist has no expression that references it. ‘Television,’ for example, what was its name before they invented it? It had no name because it did not yet exist.

Likewise, the pleasures of paradise; the language does not currently have expressions that refer to them, for we do not know them nor do we know the names of these things. They are things which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and which have not occurred to the heart of man. How, then, could there be expressions to indicate them?

His saying, ‘....and in that...’ that is, in paradise, ‘...you shall have all that your souls may desire...’ (*Fussilat:* 31). What is meant here is souls filled with faith which proceed uprightly on the path of Allah. Now, in paradise there is nothing that is forbidden, and in paradise there is no one who desires forbidden things. The soul desires what is permissible; even when the forbidden things of this life appear in the Hereafter, they will be different, being purified from qualities that make them forbidden.

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(1) *Given by Muslim in his Sahih [2824], Ahmad in his Musnad [2/466], and Abu Nu‘aym in his Hilyat Al-Awliya’ [2/262] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Wine in this world is well known for disturbing one’s reason and for not being enjoyable to drink; as for the wine in the Hereafter, Allah says of it: ‘...and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it...’ (*Muhammad:* 15).

For example, you see how they drink in films? They pour it into their mouths all in one go. Why? Because its taste is unpleasant and they want to get it passed their tongues quickly. But, those who drink a cup of mango juice, for example, you see them savour every mouthful because it tastes pleasant and has a pleasant smell.

Likewise, with every pleasure in paradise that has one similar in this world, the True Lord *Glorified is He* purifies it from any deleterious qualities and removes any harmful effects as we know them in this world. Consider His saying about the water in the Hereafter: ‘...rivers of water which time does not corrupt...’ (*Muhammad:* 15), that is, it does not change or become putrid like the water in this world. Of milk, He says, ‘...and rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters...’ (*Muhammad:* 15), and of honey, He says, ‘...and rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed...’ (*Muhammad:* 15).

Therefore, do not say that wine is like the earthly wine, nor water like earthly water, nor milk like the milk you drink now. No, these are pleasures of another type which The Creator *Glorified is He* has purified of their flaws.

‘...and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for’ (*Fussilat:* 31), that is, in paradise you will have all that you ever hoped for or desired.

نُزُلًا مِّنْ غَفُورٍ رَّحِيمٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

As a welcoming gift from the Most Forgiving, Most Merciful One [32] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 32)

The Arabic word *‘Nuzulan’* is translated into ‘ready welcome’; the Arabic word means a place which is prepared for a guest’s lodging. It is necessary that such a place be prepared so that one’s guest finds there everything he needs. It is a place of hospitality. For this reason, we use this term for hotels, a type of ready and welcoming lodging that human beings prepare for other human beings. But paradise is a type of welcoming lodging that the Lord and

Creator of mankind has prepared for them; it is the lodging prepared by the Much-Forgiving and the Dispenser of Mercy towards them.

Therefore, I have said that when I went to San Francisco, I found there extremely tall and luxurious hotels and saw that my colleagues were quite impressed with them. I wanted to make this a lesson about faith, so I said to them: you are impressed by what you see, but consider it meditatively: this is what men have prepared for other men, so how much greater will be what Allah, the Lord of mankind, has prepared for men?

With such a point of view, a person may prevent himself from falling into envy, covetousness or objection. Every fine thing that you see and every beautiful thing your eye falls upon should remind you of the pleasures of the Hereafter.

Often, when we see, for example, a large building or beautiful villa, we ask ourselves where all this property comes from? We are gripped by a certain amount of envy towards its owner, or envy the owner for the blessing they are granted by Allah. But, if we were to consider the subject from a different point of view, we would see that Allah *Glorified is He* has subjected this man and subjected his wealth to the service of society as a whole: he wearies himself making money and accumulating property then disburses it to workers, craftsmen and other tradesmen from all the different walks of society.

Thus, this person participates in building up society, and participates in its movement. For this reason, our Lord *Glorified is He* has taught us that when we see something that we like we should say: '..."Whatever Allah wills [shall come to pass, for] there is no power save with Allah!"...' (*al-Kahf:* 39)

That is, this is the gift and the grace of Allah that He gives to whomever He wills of His servants. When you are happy for a blessing that is given to someone else and are glad he received it, the blessing itself will love you; for the blessing loves the one whom it is bestowed upon more than the latter loves it. But, if you begrudge other people because of their blessing, the blessing will itself begrudge you, saying: by Allah, a blessing for which you begrudge other people will certainly not come to you.

Moreover, blessings are preordained, and it is the believer's duty to be content with Allah's decree and not to object to it; he must be aware that every preordained thing contains in it a purpose that is construable through faith.

Allah's saying, 'As a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy!' (*Fussilat:* 32) indicates that this 'ready welcome' and this pleasure is not attained by the servant through his own works, but rather through the forgiveness and mercy of Allah towards him. This explicates for us the Noble Hadith, 'None will enter paradise through his works.' They asked him, 'Not even you, Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'Not even me except that Allah has encompassed me(1) with His mercy.(2)'

However, the term 'ready welcome' may also have a sarcastic sense; it can mean a hotel, but it can also mean a prison. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter *al-Kahf:* '...Verily, We have readied hell to welcome all who [thus] deny the truth!' (*al-Kahf:* 102).

وَمَنۡ أَحۡسَنُ قَوۡلٗا مِّمَّن دَعَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحٗا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ٣٣

Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am one of those devoted to God'? [33] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 33)

After The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the essential perfection of the believer who has perfected his faith and declares: 'My Lord is Allah', and then walks uprightly on the way, He then says that, after a believer has welcomed faith and tasted its sweetness in his heart, the good effects of this faith will overflow to other people. This is one of the concerns of the believer: to transmit his faith to others and bring good to them.

The believer wants for his brother what he wants for himself,(3) and seeks to guard the welfare of society around him; he does not simply look out for himself, nor is he ever selfish.

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(1) The phrase 'encompassed him with His mercy' means covered and inserted him in it and inundated him with it. Abu 'Ubayd says 'encompassed me' means covered or wrapped me [(Lisan Al-'Arab), s.v. (root).

(2) *A trusted Hadith given by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [6463] and likewise Muslim in his Sahih [2816] on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(3) *A sound Hadith given by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [13] as well as Muslim in his Sahih [45] (the book on belief as narrated by Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him with the wording: 'By He in Whose hand is my soul, a servant is not a believer until he wants for his neighbour (or, for his brother) what he wants for himself.'*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* praises the practice of calling others to Allah (*Da'wah*), calling it the best of speech: 'and who(1) could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow-men] unto Allah...' (*Fussilat:* 33).

Thus, the noblest work that one whose heart is saturated with faith can do is to communicate and represent that faith to others. A believer, thereby, does good both for himself and for other people; an individual must be affected by the actions of people around him whether they are good actions or bad ones.

Therefore, it is in the interest of a believer that everyone believes. It is in the interest of you who travel uprightly on the path, that everyone travel uprightly too. For this reason, Allah entrusted the charge of *Da'wah* to every believer because He wishes belief to be transferred from those who have tasted it to those who have not yet tasted it, so the compass of belief may be expanded and good extended to all.

The first element of calling people to Allah's (*Da'wah*) is that we first call them to the creed and to belief in Allah; we say: our Lord is Allah, acknowledging and announcing this sincerely and categorically. We, then, are to direct their attention to Allah's signs in the universe, such signs as they might not have considered, and to the signs constituted by the miracles accompanying the Messengers such as they might not know, and to the verses of the Quran which explain Allah's path, consisting of commands and prohibitions.

Consider Allah's saying: 'And who could be better of speech...' (*Fussilat:* 33). The True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to show us how high is the position of

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(1) *In his Commentary, Al-Qurtubi refers to a number of different opinions as to who is meant in this verse: 1) It is the Messenger of God: this is an opinion held by Ibn Sirin, Al-Sudayy, Ibn Zayd, and Al-Hasan Al-Basri. The last named used to say whenever he recited this verse: 'This is the Messenger of God, the beloved of God, the friend of God, the most sincere to God, the best to God, the most beloved to God of all the denizens of the earth, whose prayer God answers and who calls mankind to what he has given.' 2) It was revealed in reference to the mue'dhdhins, an opinion held by 'Aisha, 'Ikrima, Qays ibn Abu Hazim and Mujahid. Ibn Al-'Arabi says: The former opinion is more correct, since this is a Meccan verse and the call to prayer was revealed in Medina; it only seems to correspond to a development of the later period, but this was not the intent of the original statement. 3) The verse refers generally to all those who call people to God, an opinion held by Al-Hasan and Qays ibn Abu Hazim. Al-Qurtubi says that this last opinion is the preferable one [Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, 9/6026].*

Da'awa to Allah and the excellence of those who practise it. Yet, He did not say this in a straightforward way, but rather expressed it in the form of a rhetorical question, ‘And who could be better of speech...’, communicating His negative intent, that is, that there is no one better than he who calls to Allah, and there is no better speech than his.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* said it this way in the form of a question because He knows that there is no answer for it but that we say: there is no one who speaks better than he who calls to Allah; this makes us declare and affirm the truth ourselves, and affirmation is the foremost mode of demonstration.

The first summoner to Allah is our master the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and every summoner after him draws of his spring and travels in his footsteps. Given the fact that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the last of the Prophets, he has bequeathed to his *ummah* this mission, the mission of summoning people to Allah with wisdom and good counsel. The goodness of the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not cut off, but extends after him through his *ummah*, such that every summoner after him takes station from Muhammad's station.

Part of Allah’s mercy to this *ummah* is that He gave it an internal check, which is a group of people in it that remain committed to the truth, their job being to straighten the crooked ones, command what is good and forbid what is evil. This group will remain until the Day of Resurrection. For this reason, our master the Messenger Muhammad said, ‘There shall remain among my *ummah* a group that adhere to the truth, who shall not be afflicted by those who oppose them until the command of Allah comes and finds them thus.’(1)

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in Allah...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 110).

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(1) *Given by Muslim in his Sahih [1920], (Book of Imara), from a Hadith of Thawban Allah be pleased with him as well as by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [7311], and likewise in Muslim [1921] from a Hadith of Al-Mughira Ibn Shu‘ba.*

This is the defining characteristic by which Allah singled out the community of Muhammad, inasmuch as he is the seal of the Messengers. For this reason, evil will not overcome this community, nor will it be overwhelmed by corruption; it is inherently protected. The previous nations became overrun with corruption, and had none commanding good and forbidding evil. Thus, it was necessary that a new messenger be sent to return the people to the Straight Path.

As for the community of Muhammad, no new messenger will come to it. Therefore, Allah instilled in it this protection and made it the vicegerent of the Messenger of Allah in summoning people to Allah, making it faithful in this mission. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Good is in me and in my community until the day of resurrection.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* explicated that the Messenger Muhammad will testify that he communicated this Divine mission to his community, and that this community will testify that it communicated the summons of its Messenger to all the nations. He says: ‘And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that The Apostle might bear witness to it before you...’ (*al-Baqara:* 143).

Thus, our witnessing to the nations is a proof that goodness remains in us and will never be cut off.

Our Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* urges and encourages us to assume and maintain this trust when he says: ‘Allah flourishes(2) a man who hears my speech and understands it, and then communicates it to those who did not hear it. Maybe the recipient of knowledge understands it better than the one who has heard it!’(3)

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(1) *Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalani states that he does not know this Hadith, but its sense is sound... Al-Qari mentions it in his Al-Asrar Al-marfu‘a) [457], as does As-Suyuti in his Ad-Durar Al-Muntathira [220] and Al-‘Ajluni in his Kashf Al-khafa’ [1/476].*

(2) *(Nadra): bounty, wealth, pleasant life. The phrase ‘God flourished his face’ means that it became handsome and bright. Al-Hasan Al-Mu’addib states: this does not come from handsomeness in the face, but rather, it means that God beautified a person's face through the goodness of their manners, that is in majesty and power [(Lisan Al-‘Arab), (root).*

(3) *Given by Ahmad in his Musnad [1/437], At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2657, 2658], Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [232], and Al-Humaydi in his Musnad [1/47] from a Hadith of ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud Allah be pleased with him.*

Da'wah (calling people) to Allah is a task of great scope, involving words, deeds, and being a noble example. It is practised through explaining items of doctrine, the rites of worship and the Divine rulings to people in an attractive and interesting manner that does not put them off, nor cause them to despair of the mercy of Allah.

Da'wah to Allah is an art. Read Allah's saying in which He addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '...for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee...' (*Al-'Imran:* 159).

How do our summoners compare to Allah's statement: 'Call thou [all mankind] unto thy Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner...' (*an-Nahl:* 125).

We must know that summoning to Allah is not simply the concern of only the specialist scholars of religion, but rather the concern of every Muslim in every age and in every place. Everyone can be a summoner at his workplace; yes, a summoner through his actions, discipline, dedication, and sincerity.

The scholars of the community are of a consensus that Islam did not spread by the sword or through force with nearly the same effectiveness as by the good example of Muslims endowed with tolerance and love for others; they are a model for us.

Calling people to Allah is the concern of every Muslim who has tasted the sweetness of belief and the religious duties and who wants for others the good things he wants for himself, and, therefore, is keen to bring about good to them. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* charged us with good tasks, He did not leave aside anyone or debar anyone from taking part in that good. For example, we now find an economic problem, war on the economy, fighting over bread and water; how do we solve these problems from an Islamic point of view?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* constantly prompts the rich to be gracious towards the poor. After imposing the obligation of alms for the rich to the poor, He left the door open for the generosity of the rich and their love of giving, making charity a supererogatory act for those who have tasted the sweetness of religious duty.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and in whose possessions there is a due share, acknowledged [by them], [24] for such as ask [for help] and such as are deprived [of what is good in life] [25]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 24-25). ‘a due share’ here means the prescribed obligatory alms. He says in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*: ‘and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) using the same word ‘a due share’, without the word ‘acknowledged’ which means here the non-obligatory charity beyond the obligatory alms. These are supererogatory acts: whoever does them receives their reward, whoever does not do them is not penalised.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat* by way of explicating for us the high rank of doing good excellently: ‘[But,] behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, [15] enjoying all that their Sustainer will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past [16]’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16). He did not say here ‘they were believers’; so what is the rank of doing good deeds? They say that the excellent doer of good (*muhsin*) is the one who abides by doing something which is not required of him but which is similar to that which is required of him by Allah. Thus, the rank of doing good excellently is higher than the level of belief. The obligatory ritual prayer is five prayers, but the excellent doer of good performs these five and then performs more beyond them; or if the requisite percent of alms from one’s income is 2.5%, he will give 5%; and so on with respect to all types of good.

In the verses of the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*, there is an explanation of what this extra is which excellent doers of good impose on themselves.

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘[But,] behold, the Allah-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, [15] enjoying all that their Sustainer will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past: [16] they would lie asleep during but a small part of the night [17]’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-17). Does Allah obligate you to keep praying at night and only sleep a small part of it? No, you may pray the evening prayer and sleep until dawn.

As for the excellent doer of good, he has another kind of business with the night. He has tasted the sweetness of staying awake and praying for Allah; he feels waves of spiritual inspiration coming down upon him, and the mercy of Allah covers him; passion for worship and ecstasy therein is his delight and his comfort. Likewise, ‘and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts; [18] and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation [19]’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 18-19). He did not say here ‘...a due share, acknowledged [by them]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 24) since the latter refers to the obligatory alms, whereas the former is the general voluntary charity which is based on people’s varying degrees of love for giving and generosity.

When a believer loves worshipping he prefers it to anything else. Thus, if you were to tally up those who go on pilgrimage to Mecca, you would find that the number of returnees is three to one the number of first-time pilgrims. This is simply due to the fact that people love performing this religious duty.

Therefore, Allah instituted among His servants an incitement to do good, each according to his level. The Holy Quran gives us a picture of the believer who loves to give even though he does not have money. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[But] no blame shall attach to the weak, nor to the sick, nor to those who have no means [to equip themselves], provided that they are sincere towards Allah and His Apostle: there is no cause to reproach the doers of good, for Allah is much-forgiving, a dispenser of mercy. [91] Nor [shall blame attach] to those (1) who, when they came unto thee [O Prophet, with the request] that thou provide them with mounts, were told by thee, “I cannot find anything whereon to mount you” – [whereupon] they turned away, their eyes overflowing with tears out of sorrow that they had no means to spend [on their equipment] [92]’ (*at-Tawba:* 91-92).

This verse makes it clear that Allah *Glorified is He* has distributed good among all mankind; the rich are obliged to give, and the poor may advise the rich and encourage them to give. If the poor person is unable to do either, it is enough for him that they love giving charity and long to do it; indeed, they weep that they are not given the opportunity to do so. For these, their charity is their longing to give and their weeping for being unable to give. This way, the Creator *Glorified is He* has not excluded anyone from His good, nor has He locked the door in anyone's face.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi says: It is said that this verse was revealed in reference to ‘Arbad ibn Sariya. It is also said that it was revealed in reference to ‘A’idh ibn ‘Amr. Or, as most commentators hold, in reference to the Banu Muqarrin, seven brothers who were Companions to the Prophet. There are many other opinions on this subject which Al-Qurtubi mentions in his Commentary [4/3153].*

There is a certain issue that appertains to summoning people to Allah; that is there could be a Muslim person who may be disobedient to his Lord in a certain respect where he commits some kind of sin. Does this disobedience prevent him from being a summoner to Allah? Scholars say that disobedience is not a reason to prevent a Muslim from summoning people to Allah. Perhaps a person whom you call to Allah will do what you yourself have not done, and this may be some way of setting right your omission.

A story (1) is told of a man who was circumambulating the *Ka'ba* when he heard someone else saying, 'O Allah, You know that I am disobedient to you, but I love those who are obedient to You. O Allah, make my love for those who obey You an intercessor in the matter of my disobedience.'

They say that even with those who neglect the ritual prayer out of laziness, this does not prevent them from calling others to prayer, for it is a good that he spreads to others; he will still receive his reward for this. All those who spread good, will have their 'commission' (reward) from Allah. Thus, not a single creature exists but that it has its share in the vast grace of Allah, and no creature exists but that it has this quality of goodness for itself or for another. In fact, this spreading of good is in itself a way of summoning to Allah.

His saying: '...and does what is just and right... (*Fussilat:* 33), that is, calls people to Allah first with speech and then with deeds. The Quran always draws this connection between speech and deed. We know that giving a practical example has a stronger impression on people than talking about an example. It is not right, moreover, that you call someone to do something which you yourself avoid doing. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you bid other people to be pious, the while you forget your own selves – and yet you recite the Divine book? Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*al-Baqara:* 44).

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(1) The story of a man who circumambulated the *Ka'ba* regularly

He also says in the chapter of *al-'Asr*: 'Consider the flight of time! [1] Verily, man is bound to lose himself [2] unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity [3]' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3).

Admonition is a kind of interaction between people; each one should admonish his fellow; the obedient should admonish the disobedient. Every one of us may be an admonisher in one situation, and be admonished in another. The emotional reaction towards obedience or disobedience is not constant; when you are inclined to obedience, you may admonish the disobedient, and when you are inclined to disobedience, you will find someone to admonish you in turn, and so on. This is because the soul does not experience a constant flow of any emotion. Thus, each of us is in a position to put right the inclinations of his fellow human beings. This is the meaning of 'enjoin upon one another', that is, between yourselves '...the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity' (*al-'Asr:* 3).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* swears here by the time of afternoon which is an estimated period of time. But He swears by what? 'Verily, man is bound to lose himself' (*al-'Asr:* 2), that is, the human species as a whole is in a state of loss and error, from which state none is exempt 'unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity' (*al-'Asr:* 3).

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to us: examine time and consider history, investigate the civilisations that passed away in ancient times; where are they? What remains of them? Take for example the civilisation of the Pharaohs in Egypt and everything they achieved in terms of scientific progress; we still have not penetrated their secrets until now, even though we are in an age of scientific progress; even the Americans are incapable of penetrating their secrets.

Despite this, all of these ancient sciences vanished because their practitioners did not find a way of preserving them and guaranteeing their survival. The tyranny of this people was the cause of their destruction: 'and with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles? [10] [It was they] who transgressed all bounds of equity all over their lands, [11] and brought about great corruption therein: [12] and therefore thy Sustainer let loose upon them a scourge of suffering: [13] for, verily, thy Sustainer is ever on the watch! [14]' (*al-Fajr:* 10-14)

There are in fact civilisations even greater than the civilisation of the Pharaohs, but they too are buried under the dirt; we know nothing about them. Even when the Quran tells us about them, it gives us only a general picture to express their greatness: 'Art thou not aware of how thy Sustainer has dealt with [the tribe of] 'Ad, [6] [the people of] Iram the many-pillared,(1) [7] the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? [8]' (*al-Fajr:* 6-8).

Yes, these were civilisations that once upon a time were the greatest on earth and talked about by everyone, yet they did not possess the means whereby they could guarantee their survival despite the progress they achieved. Thus, it is enough that Allah says of them: 'the like of whom has never been reared in all the land' (*al-Fajr:* 8). So how were they then? Ahmad Shawqi speaks accurately when he says,

If knowledge is not ennobled by good character
it becomes but a tool for failure(2)

Therefore, when your work is erected upon everlasting bases, it is constant and everlasting; when you build it on perishable elements, it perishes.

The remaining bases are the Divine values; just as we take Allah's gift in material things, we must take His gift on the level of values, for it is that which will preserve our works and make them eternal, giving them meaning and value.

'..."Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to Allah" ' (*Fussilat:* 33); this is a declaration and boasting by a Muslim, a badge on his chest that says: I am Muslim, and my Islam is the point of departure for every action in my life. This in itself is a calling to Allah and a way of spreading His religion and a means of aggrandising the word of Allah; that is true when you are not preoccupied with yourself but rather with your religion.

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(1) *Most commentators say that Iram was one of the great cities of 'Ad located in Yemen. Mohammad b. Ka'b says that it is Alexandria, while Ibn Al-Musayyib says that it is Damascus [Ibn 'Abd Al-Mun'im Al-Himyari, (Ar-Rawd Al-mi'tar fi khabar Al-aqtar)].*

(2) The verse is by *Hafizh Ibrahim*, not *Ahmad Shawqi*, from a *qasida (poem)* in the meter *Al-Kamil*, 46 verses(also lines) in length; this is the 13th verse. *Hafizh* was born in 1871 in Dayrut, Egypt, and grew up in Cairo as an orphan. He would compose verse during his studies, and graduated from the *Harbiyya* (Military) school. When he was put on provisional retirement, he started work as an editor at the *Al-Ahram* newspaper. He was called 'the poet of the Nile'. He died in 1932 *(Al-Mawsu'a Ash-Shi'riyya).*

So, when you accomplish a piece of work that you attribute to your observance of Allah's religion; you say: I did it because Allah has so commanded me. Thus, you raise up Allah's religion among the people without being concerned with yourself as the actor; and when you raise up Allah's religion, be sure that it will exalt you with it.

Therefore, it is one of the believer's characteristics that he attributes his good and his righteousness to his religion and his Islam.

For this reason we often dwell on the saying of Qarun (Korah) in response to Allah's giving him wealth, glory, and power. Allah reported his saying: '..."This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!"...' (*al-Qasas:* 78) But Allah answered him: given that you were given it through the knowledge that you have, keep it with that knowledge! But the result was: 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling...' (*al-Qasas:* 81). So, when you attain some breakthrough, invention or something good in this world, consider it as deriving from a religious way of life and attribute it to your religion.

Recall the Noble Hadith: 'Whoever makes the Hereafter his goal, Allah makes his heart rich, and organises his affairs, and the world comes to him whether it wants to or not.'(1)

For this reason I am always surprised when I hear high-sounding names for charitable associations and groups led by prominent figures in society. Yes, we see them offering assistance and doing much charity, yet when you ask them about their point of departure in doing what they do, you hear different terms like 'Masonry'.

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(1) *Given by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2465] from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik, with the wording: 'Whoever makes the Hereafter his goal, Allah makes his heart rich, and organises his affairs, and the world comes to him whether it wants to or not. And whoever makes the world his goal, Allah puts his poverty right before his eyes, and disorganises his affairs, and the world does not come to him, except what has been decreed for him.'*

Then, when they discover that Masonry has Jewish roots, they call it 'Rotary'; one of them says: I do this because I am a Rotarian. Say instead, for Allah's sake: because I am Muslim, my Islam compels me to do this. Why do you not elevate yourself through the nobility of your religion? Why do you throw away the reward of your efforts in the Hereafter? We say, good deeds can be done either for Allah's sake or for people's sake. Good deeds done for Allah's sake have a condition of their own which is that the intent must be sincere, and you will be given your reward by Allah in the Hereafter. As for good deeds done for people's sake, these will give you a high standing and prestige in people's eyes; this is your reward, you have already taken it in this life and will have none for it in the Hereafter. After all, a man seeks his wage from the one he works for.

For this reason, when we are asked about those scientists who serve humanity with their ideas and inventions, whether they will have a share in the Hereafter? We respond: no, they will not have a reward in the Hereafter, since they work for the good of people and of humanity in general and for the progress of society, and take their reward through public acknowledgement, fame, perpetual remembrance of their achievements and so on.

As for Allah, they never have a thought of Him when they do all of these things. Read His saying in reference to such individuals: 'for We shall have turned towards all the [supposedly good] deeds they ever wrought, and shall have transformed them into scattered dust' (*al-Furqan:* 23). In another verse, as well, He says: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39)

The good deeds of the disbelievers will be in the Hereafter like a mirage: you think it is something, but when you go towards it you find nothing there. If only they could stop there! But no, they are startled by the truth which they always used to deny in this life: 'but finds Allah before Him' (*an-Nur:* 39). Yes, Allah, Whom he denied or disbelieved in. He *Glorified is He* will make him stand before Him and reckon his account: you did such and such, and you have no reward with Me; there remains to you only the reward of your denial and obstinacy.

Therefore, we say that the moment you declare that you do the good deeds and invent what you invent because of your Islam, the moment you say I have done this because I am a Muslim; you elevate the goals of Islam and turn non-Muslims to the beauty of this religion. Such actions call people to Allah and you will be on the path of your Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you encounter some difficulties, be patient, for your Messenger suffered in the course of carrying out his mission and was patient nevertheless.

The one who takes up this trust of calling people to Allah and announces it by saying, ‘I am a Muslim,’ and my Islam regulates all of my actions in life – when he is afflicted with something bad he knows that he is simply participating in the Prophetic legacy. There has never been a prophet but that he suffered and had enemies. Those who bear this responsibility will necessarily have enemies who will abuse, vilify and heap accusations on them. This is only to be expected in the course of calling people to Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And thus We have made for every prophet an enemy – devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion’ (*al-An‘am:* 112).This means that those who call to Allah who remain safe from such suffering are missing out on a part of the Prophetic legacy. Therefore, be patient – is any follower of Muhammad better than Muhammad himself that he should be saved from suffering?

If you do not encounter enemies in the course of calling to Allah, know that you are not following the path laid out for you, and that you must reevaluate your position.

I am speaking here about calling people to Allah with truth, directness, sincerity and about the profession of faith that should be uttered on such a path, not in the quest for fame or power or some remuneration with worldly goods that perish. Calling people to Allah should never be simply a means to some other end. For this reason, we say, what is it that protects those who call to Allah today, given that we talk very loudly and write in every media outlet? Allah – He is the One Who protects us. Praise be to Allah that we are not arrested or imprisoned, and that no one can object to us. There are many scholars of religion who declare the word of truth free of any self-interest. Sometimes the ruler gives them his ear and they tell him things which make him tremble; yet despite this we hear of the suppression of men of religion.

We say, if a man of religion is suppressed, it must be because he used forbidden means of communication in calling people to Allah, like those who prefer to solve problems through killing and spilling blood. Say you are in disagreement with a government minister, for example – do you try to shoot him? Is this the solution? What is the fault of the guards whose blood you spill and whose children you orphan?

Your tool is the word. Say what you wish and repair through good words; make them hear what they do not like. I myself previously talked to them in a way that no one used to be able to do, for the courage that is born of faith in calling people to Allah is not a word of truth spoken to just any authority, but only to an unjust authority – yes, spoken to his face.

This is the practical application of the statement of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘The greatest *jihad* [struggle] is speaking the word of truth to an unjust authority.’(1)

We do not trade in this word, but only confront with it every oppressive ruler. We say to him we do not object to you personally nor do we want what you rule over, but we love you and wish to help you fulfill your objectives; we simply wish of you that you rule us by the standards of Islam. I wish to be ruled by Islam, not to be subjected to Islam as an excuse.

وَلَا تَسۡتَوِى ٱلۡحَسَنَةُ وَلَا ٱلسَّيِّئَةُۚ ٱدۡفَعۡ بِٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحۡسَنُ
فَإِذَا ٱلَّذِى بَيۡنَكَ وَبَيۡنَهُۥ عَدَٰوَةٞ كَأَنَّهُۥ وَلِىٌّ حَمِيمٞ ٣٤

Good and evil cannot be equal. [Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend [34] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 34)

After Allah *Glorified is He* spoke to us about the objective of calling people to Allah, and that it is a Prophetic legacy bestowed on us after the Prophet. He then informs us here of one technique and one model example of carrying this out. It is that you respond to evil with good: ‘And not equal are the good deed and the bad.’ Indeed, no one thinks good and evil to be equivalent, as the intellect itself states. Go to the thief who steals the property of others, who steals the fruit of the sweat of their brows, and say to him, would you like for others to steal from you? He will say, ‘No.’ I say, so, do not wish for them what you do not wish for yourself. But he will say, ‘You are limiting my freedom – I am free.’

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(1) *Related by Ahmad in his (Musnad) [3/19, 61], At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2174] (who deems it reliable), and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [4344] from the Hadith of Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudri. In At-Tirmidhi the wording is as follows, ‘Pertaining to the greatest jihad is speaking the word of justice to an unjust authority.’*

I then say to him, do not forget that Allah Himself has limited your freedom in stealing from others, and you are only a single individual. He has also limited the movement of the entire world from stealing from you. So, who benefits from this? Likewise, with every other matter in the Divine law in which Allah has forbidden you from trespassing on the rights of others; He has also forbidden them from trespassing on your rights. He responds, do not look at what Allah has made forbidden for you with desire. He has commanded all mankind not to look upon your *maharim* (women who other men are allowed to marry from, while you cannot).

The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us a model of wisdom in making this summons, when a sincerely believing young man came to him who was nevertheless beset by a certain matter he was unable to renounce; that is, cupidity in looking at and desiring women. He came to the Messenger of Allah and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, I am afraid I will commit fornication.’

Consider here the Prophet’s wisdom in responding to this. He responded to the young man without scolding him or being harsh with him, but rather smiling at him and reassuring him that he is confronting a sickness for which there is a cure. This of course assumes that the young man was sincere in his faith in coming to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for his cure, without deceiving the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* or himself. For this reason, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* described for him the cure which would tear out this sickness from its roots. The young man then left and fortified that which would make fornication distasteful to him.

What the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him was this, ‘Would you like such a thing to happen to your mother?’ He said, 'No, Messenger of Allah.' He said, 'Would you like this for your sister?' He said, 'No, Messenger of Allah.' He said, 'Would you like this for your wife?' He said, 'No, Messenger of Allah.' He said, 'Would you like this for your daughter?' He said, 'No, Messenger of Allah.' He continued to mention to him various female relatives until he came to the paternal and maternal aunt, and the young man said: 'No, Messenger of Allah, may I be made your ransom!' The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Likewise without everyone else, brother of the Arabs – they do not want this for their mothers or their sisters.'(1)

Whereupon the young man said, 'Now when I want to look at anything I remember my mother, my sister, my wife, my daughter.'

Therefore, the religion requires that one summon people to it with gentleness, wisdom and good counsel so that what you say will be accepted, since the person you are advising in a religious matter, whether he is of a different religion or of the same religion as you but accustomed to disobedience and finds obedience burdensome, it is incumbent upon you to help him out of such a state in a manner that will not be repugnant to him, so that you do not make it seem too difficult to him when you divest from him what he loves, without speaking to him in a harsh or blunt manner. It suffices that you help him disavow what he loves in a way that is not repugnant to him. By such means, you leave him no justification for ill-tempered debate or strong and belligerent opposition.

Likewise, with your treatment of people – you are to counter what is evil with what is good: 'Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better;' that is, respond with gentleness and good treatment, ‘and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend’ (*Fussilat:* 34). Destructive enmity is that which exists between two enemies, each hates the other. In such a situation, enmity becomes entrenched and we cannot find any solution. But what if the sharpness of such enmity could be dulled? Its sharpness is dulled when it comes from only one of the two parties – the enemy on the one hand and the tolerant person on the other side who does not return evil for evil, but rather pardons and forgives. In this situation, the soul of the enemy grows quiet and finds no purchase for his enmity. This is the first step in effecting reconciliation – you bring your enemy over to your side. For this reason, they say, you can counterbalance the one who disobeys Allah with respect to you by obeying Allah with respect to him. By this method, the enemy may be transformed into ‘a devoted friend;’ how? Do not ask how – for it is through the power of Allah, the Creator of all these souls and the Transformer of all these hearts.

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(1) *A Hadith narrated by Abu Umama has it that a man came to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and said: 'I am afraid that I will commit fornication. Now someone who was nearby the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him became indignant and insisted that he be punished, but the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, "Let him speak." He then said to the young man, "Would you like for someone to do this to your sister?" He said, "No." He said, "Your daughter?" He said, "No." He continued in this vein mentioning different examples, to all of which the young man responded, "No." The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him then said, "So* hate *what Allah hates and desire for your brother what you desire for yourself."' The Hadith is quoted by Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in his (Muntakhab Al-Kanz) [2/397]; he traces it to Ibn Jarir At-Tabari.*

A man once came to me complaining about the harshness of one of his relatives. I told him, dear sir, be patient with him and respond to him gently, and treat him with affection – perhaps Allah will reconcile between you. Sometime later, he came back to me and said, ‘I responded to him gently, but he only became meaner and harsher than he was before.’ I told him to search himself, for the word of Allah is entirely trustworthy; look for the cause of it in you. You may have thought that you responded gently, whereas in reality you did not. Or perhaps you wanted to test Allah – and Allah *Glorified is He* is not to be tested, for it means that you doubt Him. Had you trusted Allah, He would have trusted you. How lovely is the poet’s (1) verse in this regard,

You who are bothered by others’ actions whether this or that
respond (may I be your ransom) with what [is better] till you [him
become a true friend]

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(1) The verse is by Ash-Sha‘rawi himself.

وَمَا يُلَقَّىٰهَآ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُواْ وَمَا يُلَقَّىٰهَآ إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

But only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness [35] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 35)

That is, this characteristic and this status, that of responding with something that is better, is not attained except by those who are patient in suffering. It is only attained by those 'having a great portion [of good],' that is, an overflowing share of giving. Why? Because he restrains himself from responding in kind, and when he restrains himself for the sake of Allah, Allah makes it turn out well for him in the end, and gives to him lavishly.

We observe here the Quranic technique of repeating a phrase: 'none is granted it.' It is suggested that this phrase is repeated because the context is different; the first is given for patience in adversity, the second given as a reward. Orientalists and perceptive people generally, often focus on such instances of repetition in the Book of Allah in an attempt to search out the reason for it – for Allah's Book is perfect and exact, without a single unnecessary word or slip.

Those who are patient when suffering harm, they are patient in self-restraint, they are patient in standing up to Satan who tempts them with the pleasure of revenge and makes attractive to them the prospect of repaying them with the like. And the end result of patience is a reward and abundant good fortune.

We must not be heedless of Satan's role in this matter – his concern is to ignite the fires of enmity between people and to drum up discord so as to turn them aside from Allah's objectives. He whispers to you insinuatingly, 'Why be forbearing with him when he treated you so badly? Why do you accept humiliation? Is he better than you?'

This is because ever since the devil was commanded to prostrate to Adam and he refused, with the result that he became cursed and cast out from the mercy of Allah from that time, he has been in a state of enmity with the human race. He will not leave them be until he has brought them to a position like his own.

For this reason he swore: '[*Iblis* (Satan)] said, 'By Your might, I will surely mislead them all. Except, among them, Your chosen servants' (*Sad:* 82-83).

That is, O Lord, I have rebelled against You only in the matter of the seed of Adam. The one whom You wish to be obedient I cannot beguile, for I have no power over Your true servants. Part of the devil's failure is that he divulges his secret and discloses the means whereby he beguiles the sons of Adam. Now it is obvious that someone with a plot or devising a conspiracy would keep the details of his plan to himself, but the devil has divulged his details – thereby Allah secured for us the upper hand.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, relating the devil's statement: 'I will surely sit in wait for them on Your Straight Path' (*al-A'raf:* 16), that is, along the path of uprightness and doing good so as to distract them from it and to make it seem useless to them. For this reason, we say that Satan does not go to the pub, for example, but rather goes to the mosque.

In another instance, Satan continues: 'Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left' (*al-A'raf:* 17).

Allah says:

وَإِمَّا يَنزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ نَزۡغٞ فَٱسۡتَعِذۡ بِٱللَّهِۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٣٦

If a prompting from Satan should stir you, seek refuge
with God: He is the All Hearing and the All Knowing [36]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 36)

Part of Allah's Mercy towards us is that He *Glorified is He* has not left us as spoils to this enemy who lies in wait to catch us, but has instead given us a defence where we may take refuge. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if there comes to you from Satan an evil suggestion, then seek refuge in Allah;' remind him of Allah, the All-Powerful. If you find yourself weak before him seek help against him from, the All-Powerful, Allah. The moment he sees you by the side of Allah, he will not dare to make an attempt on you, because you are thereby included among those whom he has exempted: 'except Your sincere servants among them' (*Sad:* 83).

Beware of the fact that he will not come to you except when you are on the straightway, so as to corrupt it for you. He comes to you during your prayer, and reminds you of something about which you were not thinking. So, it is with the most important matters of yours in this life – the only thing he cares about is obstructing you from the Hereafter at any price.

If you find in yourself any hint of this prodding and insinuating, say, 'I take refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from Satan, the accursed.' Say this every time the devil comes to you while you are performing the prayer, or while you are reciting the Quran, or while you are carrying out any other act of worship.

You must speak this phrase! It will not by any means void your act of worship. When you persist in saying this, he will despair of you and stay away; and he will know that you are firm and resolute, strong with power extended to you by Allah. He will turn away from you – why not, since you know his games and have discovered his tricks?

But the problem is that many of us are drawn after Satan and surrender our reins to him. What Satan does is that he pulls them in the direction he wants and then lets them continue by themselves without any effort or trouble on his part; they are those whom Satan debases and subjugates, those who form his retinue unthinkingly and uncomprehendingly.

Say that a thief comes to your house and circles it. You make a sound that he can hear to indicate to him that you are there and are awake; he will leave. Perhaps he considers that it was simply a coincidence, so he comes back another time; but you make a sound again so he realises it was not a coincidence. You are observing him and perfectly awake. He therefore leaves without coming back again. It is likewise with Satan.

We say that it comes from the devil's foolishness and heedlessness that he announces his plans to us to entice people as well as the means by which he will do so. Yet, how much greater the foolishness of those who know these plans and these means but still allows themselves to be drawn after them without taking precautions.

Now when we contemplate the devil's statement: 'Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left,' (*al-A'raf:* 17) you see that he left out two directions he will not approach you from them; from above and from below. Why? They say that it is because the top is the direction towards Allah, the direction of the dignity of lordship, and the bottom represents the humility of being a servant as when you prostrate to Allah in humility to Him. Thus, Satan does not come from these two directions.

His saying: ‘Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing’ (*Fussilat:* 36) is the One from Whose Hearing nothing escapes; thus He Hears and Knows what Satan whispers to you.

After the Quran elucidates this for us, it returns again to describing certain signs of Allah in the universe by which we may extrapolate the existence of the Creator and His Power, such that even if they are revealed by disbelieving scientists, we profit by them. By Allah, how impoverished are those scientists from whose work all mankind benefits yet they themselves do not benefit, for (as we have said) they do not have faith in Allah *Glorified is He* as their point of departure in creating all of these things. They are like pack animals by whom people benefit but they do not benefit at all – except that the goods of this life are perishable.

The Lord says:

وَمِنۡ ءَايَٰتِهِ ٱلَّيۡلُ وَٱلنَّهَارُ وَٱلشَّمۡسُ وَٱلۡقَمَرُۚ لَا تَسۡجُدُواْ لِلشَّمۡسِ وَلَا لِلۡقَمَرِ
وَٱسۡجُدُواْۤ لِلَّهِۤ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَهُنَّ إِن كُنتُمۡ إِيَّاهُ تَعۡبُدُونَ ٣٧

The night, the day, the sun, the moon, are only a few of His signs. Do not bow down in worship to the sun or the moon, but bow down to God who created them, if it is truly Him that you worship [37] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 37)

His saying: ‘And of His signs,’ here we see a particularisation, that is, these are certain of His signs in the universe, given that they are many and indeed infinite. An awe-inspiring sign is in its makeup which speaks of the Power and Wisdom of Allah and the wonderfulness of His Fashioning.

‘Night and day’ are two of Allah’s signs in the universe, and they together constitute a full day as we know, a full rotation of the clock. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Which Allah imposed upon them for seven nights and eight days in succession’ (*al-Haqqa:* 7).

These signs of the universe mentioned here ‘night and day and the sun and moon,’ enjoy a large share in the procession of prophetic missions and in creedal beliefs. In the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he was searching for the truth while looking at the universe around him, when he saw a star, he said: ‘So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said, “I like not those that disappear.” And when he saw the moon rising, he said, “This is my lord.” But when it set, he said, “Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray.” And when he saw the sun rising, he said, “This is my lord; this is greater.” But when it set, he said, “O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah”’ (*al-An‘am:* 76-78).

The sun and moon are linked to day and night and have a part to play in introducing one to belief in Allah. This thing is rendered an indicator to believe in a matter about which the Arabs were still in doubt when the Quran was revealed to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. These signs in the universe are in the first place an introduction to belief in Allah, and in the second place an indicator that inspiration was not cut off from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

You know the story of the descent of inspiration to the Messenger of Allah for the first time in the cave of Hira’, and that He *peace and blessings be upon him* was suffering from his meeting with the angel given the difference between human and angelic natures. He *peace and blessings be upon him* would then go to his people sometimes saying ‘Enwrap me, enwrap me’ and other times, ‘Cover me, cover me’ because of the change that had been effected in his nature. In the beginning, the inspiration weighed heavily on the Messenger of Allah; as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, We will cast upon you a heavy word’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 5).

The Companions relate that the Prophet’s brow used to drip with sweat at what the angel revealed to him, and the companion who was sitting next to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and resting his leg against him found that when the inspiration descended, it was so heavy he could not bear it.(1)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari relates in his (Sahih) [(Kitab As-Salat, bab ma yudhkar fi al-fakhidh), 12] the statement of Zayd ibn (Thabit): ‘Once Allah revealed to His Messenger when his=*

For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* wished to lessen the suffering of His Prophet and stopped the inspiration for a period of six months so that the Messenger of Allah could rest and the weariness of the first encounter could be relieved, so that he would long to meet with the angel once again and to hear the words of Allah which had been cut off from him; doubtless it is this longing which gave him the capacity to bear the inspiration and the summons thereafter.

Now, the disbelievers in Mecca saw an opportunity in the inspiration ceasing to come to the Messenger of Allah, so they said, 'The Lord of Muhammad has gone off him;'(1) that is, has abandoned and left him. They did not know that the abatement of the inspiration was not abandonment, but rather the farewell of a lover for his beloved until the next, longer meeting. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed: 'By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness, Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]' (*ad-Duha:* 1-3).

This is the proof in that the Lord *Glorified is He* swore to them by the bright morning hours, (that is, day) and by the night when its darkness comes, thus making of these two signs an indication that the inspiration had not been cut off, but that Allah simply wished to allow His Messenger to rest from his labour and renew his strength to once more receive inspiration, just as you labour and grow tired during the day and rest at night.

It is well known that the bright morning hours belong to the sun and the night belongs to the moon. Thus, the period during which the inspiration abated from the Messenger of Allah was intended to lighten his burden, as He says: 'Did We not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast? And We removed from you your burden. Which had weighed upon your back' (*ash-Sharh:* 1-3).

This means, We have opened up your heart for the revelation of the Quran and you long for it, and have the capacity to receive it. It is as though the Quran takes them from the sensible signs in the universe to their underlying

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= *leg was upon mine, and it became extremely heavy upon me such that I feared my leg would be crushed' [(Fath Al-bari), 1/478].*

(1) *It is related from Jundab ibn 'Abdullah Al-Bajali that he said: 'Jibril (Gabriel) kept the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him waiting, and the polytheists said, "Muhammad's Lord has bid him farewell."' [Ibn Kathir, (Tafsir), 4/522]*

meanings, making what they see a proof of what they deny. Given that in your daily activity you need the night in which to be still and rest from the toil of the day, likewise the Messenger of Allah needs this period to rest from the labour and burden of inspiration so as to renew his energy and cause him to long again for the meeting with the angel. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life];’ (*ad-Duha:* 4) for the return of the inspiration will be greater and better than what it was at first since its return will be longer and more powerful.

Just as the signs in the cosmos – night and day, sun and moon – are held to be relevant in the creedal statement in the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) and in the inspiration revealed to the Messenger of Allah, so too are they relevant in solving a certain problem in social issues with which Islam is concerned such as the issue of equality between men and women.

This issue is quite controversial, and biased persons use it as leverage to attack Islam, although Islam is the religion most concerned with doing justice to women and giving them their rights, and requiring society to respect them. Islam views men and women as two types of a single species.

They must necessarily share a measure in common. But when they were divided into two parts, male and female, each developed its distinctive feature. Thus, in order to clarify for us the Quranic context of this issue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘By the night when it covers. And [by] the day when it appears, And [by] He who created the male and female. Indeed, your efforts are diverse’ (*al-Layl:* 1-4). Just as the day and night complete each other and cooperate with each other and do not oppose one another, each having their proper purpose in life, the one for work and the other for rest; likewise it is with man and woman; they are two elements of a single thing, they complete each other and cooperate with each other and do not oppose one another, just like the day and night. When you observe men and women, you do not see them as two different types within a species that might be at cross-purposes with each other, since they are of a single species, and a single kind does not clash with itself. It has a single mission. All members participate in carrying this mission out, each according to his or her capacity as created by Allah and with the powers and abilities given by Allah.

Now this is a controversial issue, especially among the unbelievers who look at the species but not at the underlying genders of male and female; despite the differences between the two types, they want them both to have the same purpose, thus removing any difference between man and woman. For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* gives us this explanatory example of the day and night: is the purpose of the night like that of the day? To each is its own purpose and nature, and whoever opposes this nature wearies themselves in life. Likewise, the man was created for work, power and toil, while the woman for kindness, affection and the care and rearing of children – keeping in mind that the infancy and childhood of the human being is the longest of its kind in nature; only women are capable of such upbringing, not men.

The Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us by this example to refer what we differ on back to that on which we agree. Just as we do not differ as to what the purpose of the day or the night is, likewise we should not differ as to what the purpose of man or of woman is, nor simply repeat the word ‘equality’ without understanding the respective natures of man and woman and the roles Allah created them for.

In another place, the Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us the wisdom expressed in the creation of day and night. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the night continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you light? Then will you not hear?” Say, “Have you considered: if Allah should make for you the day continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allah could bring you a night in which you may rest? Then will you not see?” ’ (*al-Qasas:* 71-72)

After this, He *Glorified is He* made further categorisations of time beyond day and night: periods of time such as hours, minutes, and seconds, with which time is regulated. Now the hour which regulates your time would not serve this purpose unless it itself is totally regular. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* made the sun and moon serve another purpose, the regulation of time, making them dependably regular in their movements.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation;’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5) that is, according to a precise and sure measure that never changes or alters. From the movement of the sun and moon, we calculate time, especially religious affairs which we cannot determine except by this movement.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘that you may know the number of years and account [of time]’ (*Yunus:* 5). From the movement of the sun, we know day and night, and from the movement of the moon, we know the beginning and end of months. Therefore, from the movement of the sun and moon and from day and night, we are able to determine exactly the movements whereby to discharge the obligation of ritual prayer at its different appointed times, the times which perpetually testify to faithfulness to Allah *Glorified is He* at all times and in every place; and which result from the different times of sunset and sunrise in a given 24-hour period.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then gives us another perspective on the sun and moon, since they are among the greatest created things, and are associated with stability and precision and grandeur in the creation, to the extent that some people have worshipped the sun or the moon. The Lord *Glorified is He* here wishes to turn the attention of His creation to the grandeur of the Creator Who is more deserving of worship than His creations.

But he made the sun and moon subject to a change such as solar and lunar eclipses. Whatever the sun is, and whatever the moon is, they are still mutable creations, which means they cannot ever be worshipped. He *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are discussing here: ‘Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship’ (*Fussilat:* 37).

This grand creation must be honoured through Allah’s own honouring of it, but it is not permitted to transgress beyond such honouring to the point of worship, to the point of prostrating oneself to a created thing however great, for it is created and therefore mutable. Allah does not change because of His servants – His servants change because of Him. This matter explicates for us the issue of the angels’ prostration to Adam *peace be upon him* which was not a prostration of worship, but simply in obedience to Allah Who commanded them to prostrate to Adam. But why did Allah *Glorified is He* make them prostrate to Adam? They say that it is because Adam would descend to earth to build it up, and the angels were to be his help and would assist him in carrying out his purpose on earth. The angels were entrusted with the affairs of men and made administrators of them, as Allah *Glorified is He* described them: 'For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

Now the angels which were commanded to prostrate did not include all angels, but only those who would have some connection to mankind. It is as though the Lord *Glorified is He* was acquainting them with this new creature in whose service they were destined to be; so they were made to prostrate to him as a display of humility and obedience, to know that they are in his service and administrators of his affairs.

For this reason, there is the following Hadith,(1) 'Angels come to you in succession by day and night, gathering together during the dawn prayer and the afternoon prayer. Those who have passed the night with you ascend to Him and He asks them (though He knows you well), how did you leave My servants? They reply, "When we came to them they were praying, and when we left them they were praying." '

There is another type of angel that has nothing to do with human beings and no connection to them. They know nothing of this world of ours. They are the exalted ones of which Allah speaks in talking of the devil: 'Are you too proud (to fall prostrate to Adam) or are you one of the high exalted?' (*Sad:* 75)

Thus, when our ancestors honoured the sun and moon to the point of prostrating to them, they were made aware that their Creator is more deserving of such prostration: 'Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship' (*Fussilat:* 37). That is, if you heed His command.

We may note something else about the sun which gives us to understand a strange feature we were unaware of previously. In the chapter of *al-Kahf*, the Quran tells us the story of Dhul-Qarnayn (the two-horned one); Allah *Glorified*

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(1) *Related by Muslim in his (Sahih) [632] and Al-Bukhari in his (Sahih) [555] on the authority of Abu Hurayra... An-Nawawi says in his commentary on Muslim's, 'Their being gathered together at dawn and in the afternoon is part of Allah's graciousness and kindness to [His servants]. He has the angels gather with them and leave them precisely at their prayer times when they are obeying their Lord, and [the angels] testify of the good they have witnessed.' (Sahih) [3/139, Beirut, Dar Al-Qalam edn]*

is He says: ‘And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about Dhu Al-Qarnayn. Say, “I will recite to you about him a report.” Indeed, We established him upon the earth, and We gave him to everything a way. So, he followed a way. Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it [as if] setting in a spring of dark mud, and he found near it a people. Allah said, “O Dhu Al-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness”’ (*al-Kahf:* 83-86).

That is, the setting of the sun is simply so in the eye’s perspective, for if you were to arrive at that dark, turbid, sea you would find that the sun is still far off: ‘and he found near it a people. Allah said, “O Dhu Al-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness.”’ This is because he was a powerful man on the earth, of great rank and authority.

Now the purpose of powerful men is to enforce the balance of justice and standards of right and punishment, for the actions of people in this world do not proceed aright except if the good-doer is rewarded and the evildoer is punished.

‘He said, “As for one who wrongs, we will punish him. Then he will be returned to his Lord, and He will punish him with a terrible punishment. But as for one who believes and does righteousness, he will have a reward of Paradise, and we will speak to him from our command with ease” ’ (*al-Kahf:* 87-88).

He then speaks of the point of sunrise, and says: ‘Until, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had not made against it any shield’ (*al-Kahf:* 90). He says nothing further about the sunrise, unlike with what He mentions in the previous lesson taken from the sunset. It has a function and role with respect to those who do good and those who do evil. As for the sunrise, He simply says, ‘We had not made against it any shield,’ and nothing more. It is as though the point here is that we understand that Dhu Al-Qarnayn had arrived at a place whose day was very long and the sun was not hidden at any point.

After scientists discovered the longitudinal and latitudinal lines, we know that certain places around the poles experience long days that may last up to three months or even six months – this being a small example of the scientific inimitability of the Quran.

You may ask how one lives in such places; how can one pray or past properly? We say that in this case, one should measure out a normal day and a normal night and then divide the time into a normal day and night, and likewise when the night lasts three or six months.

Another observation may be made with respect to the wording of the verse and its evident rhetorical precision. The Lord *Glorified is He* begins the verse by mentioning the night and then the day, and then begins the next phrase with the sun followed by the moon. Assumingly, it would have been more fitting to link the moon with night and the sun with day.

But the wording of the Quran has its own wisdom and rhetorical precision. The Lord *Glorified is He* begins with that which is more important for daily life; the night is for rest while the day is for work, for The Creator *Glorified is He* created mankind to build up the earth and to strive in its territories. Now there is no cultivation on earth without action, and action requires two phases of time: a time for rest, and a time for work.

He thus mentioned night first because you will not produce anything unless you first get enough rest. It is as though rest is the basis on which work can be carried out – a weary, exhausted person cannot produce anything. Likewise, He mentions the sun before the moon because it is greater and more important, and from it all the stars and planets derive their light.

As long as we are talking about night and day, someone will certainly ask us which of them was created first. Some say that night was first, given that we determine, for example, the arrival of *Ramadan* in its first night, not its first day; when we see its crescent, we announce *Ramadan* is tomorrow. Those who hold that night was created first are supported in their position, namely that day does not usurp the night.

The Lord *Glorified is He* resolves this issue, for He *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming’ (*Ya Sin:* 40).

We thus arrive at the cosmic reality that the Lord *Glorified is He* has established the day does not usurp the night, nor does the night usurp the day, for as we have explained they were created together at the beginning of creation simultaneously, and thereafter each cycles together with the other.

فَإِنِ ٱسۡتَكۡبَرُواْ فَٱلَّذِينَ عِندَ رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُۥ
بِٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ وَهُمۡ لَا يَسۡـَٔمُونَ ۩ ﴿٣٨﴾

If the disbelievers are too arrogant, [remember, Prophet, that] those who are with your Lord glorify Him tirelessly night and day [38] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 38)

His saying, 'But if they are arrogant,' that is, too proud to obey Allah's command and prohibition given in the previous verse: 'Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship' (*Fussilat:* 37). The concept of being too proud here indicates a lack of belief in Allah, the Commander and the Prohibiter, because they prostrate to the sun and prostrate to the moon as an act of worship, and worship connotes the obedience of a worshipper to the worshipped. But the sun and the moon do not give orders or issue prohibitions, and so to worship them is futile, and indicates only the ignorance of those who worship them and their dishonesty in worshipping them, as they do not reward those who obey them nor punish those who rebel against them.

We have said that the word worship as used here is a misnomer and is false, a delusion; that is, such people only want to have an object of worship to satisfy their desire to be religious, and nothing is simpler than for someone to take as a god that which does not impose any requirements or obligations. For this reason, when they say: 'We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3), we respond: the term 'worship' here is falsely used because you would not seek refuge in any of them but only with Allah: 'And when adversity touches you at sea, lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him' (*al-Isra':* 67). He says also: 'And when adversity touches the people, they call upon their Lord, turning in repentance to Him' (*ar-Rum:* 33).

Now His saying: 'But if they are arrogant – then those who are near your Lord exalt Him by night and by day, and they do not become weary' (*Fussilat:* 38). The meaning here is that the Lord *Glorified is He* is not in need of the obedience of those who are too proud to worship Him, just as He is not in need of His servants. He *Glorified is He* has angels that glorify Him, and they do not disobey what Allah commands them and they do as they are told, praising Him day and night without cease; indeed, they have no other work but to praise Him, and never grow weary of it nor bored.

About the word ‘near’ as used here in ‘then those who are near your Lord’, they say that it denotes the ‘nearness of standing’, not that of place. It is the kind of nearness of ennoblement and honour. As He *Glorified is He* says of the martyrs: ‘And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive near their Lord, receiving provision’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169). He *Glorified is He* says also: ‘Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and rivers. In a seat of honour near a Sovereign, Perfect in Ability’ (*al-Qamar:* 54-55).

Now these angels are not with Allah in a single place, nor do they sit with Him, but rather, they are just like us in that they cannot see Allah, and just like us they believe in Him without seeing Him; Allah is invisible to them. Some commentaries hold (and I subscribe to this view) that Allah *Glorified is He* does not have a (specific) location because He is everywhere, and every place is with Him. For this reason, read the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Then why, when the soul at death reaches the throat. And you are at that time looking on. And Our angels are nearer to him than you, but you do not see’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 83-85). Some say that the ‘nearness’ referred to here is that of knowledge. But if this were the case, then He would not have said, ‘but you do not see’. Given that He said so, it refers to an absolute kind of nearness that pervades every place.

وَمِنۡ ءَايَٰتِهِۦٓ أَنَّكَ تَرَى ٱلۡأَرۡضَ خَٰشِعَةٗ فَإِذَآ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡهَا ٱلۡمَآءَ ٱهۡتَزَّتۡ
وَرَبَتۡۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَحۡيَاهَا لَمُحۡيِ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate, but when We send water down on to it, it stirs and grows. He who gives it life will certainly give life to the dead. He has power over everything [39] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 39)

The Quranic context continues to deal with signs in the universe which prove the Power of the Creator *Glorified is He*. ‘And of His signs’ used here to indicate items in a larger series, that is, these are some of the signs of Allah in the universe which indicate His Power. These signs being things which are astounding and that point to the marvelousness of their fashioning, 'You see the earth stilled,' that is, fallow and packed down without any growth upon it, for earth was created to provide ground for plants. It is as though earth without any growth upon it is sorrowful and humiliated, quiet and motionless because it has not yielded plants; in this it perhaps resembles a woman who is barren. 'But when We send down upon it rain, it quivers and grows.' It stirs, swells and puffs up. You see a bean, for example, which appears dry and unchanging, but when you sprinkle some water on it swells in size and puffs up. What is meant here is that the ground stirs and moves with the plants growing out of it. 'Indeed, He who has given it life,' that is, He brings this dormant earth to life with plants, changing its terrain to a verdant expanse – 'is the Giver of Life to the dead'. Therefore, take this sensible and visible sign as a proof of what is hidden to you, as through it Allah is informing you of the resurrection of the dead. Those who deny the resurrection of the dead do not understand the lesson of the resurrection of the desolate and barren earth with plants.

'Indeed, He is over all things competent.' Allah's power is absolute, for He *Glorified is He* is not incapable of anything, and the One Who created everything out of nothing is certainly able to restore it; for to resurrect a dead person is to deal with something that exists, and this is easier – if indeed we may speak of 'easy' and 'easier' with respect to Allah, though we understand what is meant here. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Did We fail in the first creation? But they are in confusion over a new creation' (*Qaf:* 15).

The Lord *Glorified is He* informs us how He created man – and the one who built something knows how to destroy it since, as we say, it is the opposite of building. What is first built is destroyed in the end. Now the last thing to happen in building is the first thing to happen in destruction, and here is where spirit comes in.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُلۡحِدُونَ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا لَا يَخۡفَوۡنَ عَلَيۡنَآۗ أَفَمَن يُلۡقَىٰ فِي ٱلنَّارِ خَيۡرٌ أَم مَّن
يَأۡتِيٓ ءَامِنٗا يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۚ ٱعۡمَلُواْ مَا شِئۡتُمۡ إِنَّهُۥ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ٤٠

Those who distort the meaning of Our message are not hidden from Us. Is he who is hurled into the Fire better, or he who comes through safely on the Day of Resurrection? Do whatever you want, God certainly sees everything you do [40]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 40)

They divert the signs of Allah away from their true meaning to a false meaning they themselves think is right, or interpret the signs in accordance with their desires. For the signs of Allah have many meanings, but they distort those meanings. It is in this sense that we hide the dead person underground, someone who used to walk on top of it. So they hide such realities to satisfy their disbelief and their desires.

Part of this act of hiding or distorting Allah’s signs is certain people’s falling into the mistake of over identifying Allah’s Names and Attributes with human attributes. When they understand by one of Allah’s attributes something that exists in human beings, they likened Him to us. But Allah’s hearing is not like our hearing, and His hand is not like our hands, and His sight is not like our sight. Thus, we should not take these attributes as applying generally to all His signs: ‘there is nothing like unto Him’ (*ash-Shura:* 11).

This includes their saying that Prophet Musa’s (Moses) miracles with Pharaoh were only instances of magic. The difference between a miracle and a magical act is that miracles are actual physical transformations in reality, whereas magic is a visual illusion. It is true that Prophet Musa’s (Moses) miracles appeared to resemble the magicians’ acts, but these miracles were not visual illusions.

When the Pharaoh’s sorcerers’ threw their ropes, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* saw these ropes as snakes. However, the sorcerers themselves still saw them as ropes. Magic gives you the illusion that a particular item resembles another object, although this illusion is only a figment of your imagination. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...their ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly,' (*Ta Ha:* 66). They were an illusion, and not elements of reality.

When Prophet Musa (Moses) threw down his staff, it was transformed into a real serpent, as Allah says: 'And in his heart, Musa (Moses) became apprehensive,' (*Ta Ha:* 67). Prophet Musa (Moses) could not have been afraid of his own staff if it had remained a staff. Thus, we know from this that the staff transformed into a real snake and Prophet Musa (Moses) saw it as such. Additionally, Pharaoh's sorcerers, who were experienced in the various magical techniques, were able to distinguish between their magical illusions and the reality of the staff's transformation. That is why they surrendered to Prophet Musa (Moses) and believed in him, after they witnessed his miracle. Had Prophet Musa (Moses) effected an illusion, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have said to him: 'Said He (Allah), "Take hold of it (the staff), and fear not: We shall restore it to its former state,"' (*Ta Ha:* 21).

Just as the earlier disbelievers described Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as a sorcerer, the later disbelievers also described Prophet Muhammad as a magician. Had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* been a sorcerer who put a spell on those who believed in him, why did he not put a spell on the ones who disbelieved in his message?

The disbelievers tried to distort Allah's signs by claiming that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was possessed. They made these claims although they had never experienced any misconduct from him. Indeed, they knew that he was honest, trustworthy and of noble character. Those who have good morals cannot be possessed. Allah *Glorified is He* responded to their claims by saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You (O Muhammad) are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman' (*al-Qalam:* 2).

The disbelievers also tried to distort and hide the true nature of the Quran by claiming that it was formed of poetry. This was a strange claim to come from them because they clearly knew the styles of poetic diction and expression. They also knew that the Quran was inimitable and that it was unlike anything else of that kind. Nevertheless, they denied its true status, and this was their distortion.

Part of the greatness of the noble Quran is its inimitable style and special literary taste. The Prophetic Hadiths had their own literary taste and the Qudsi Hadiths also had a literary flavour of their own. Thus, comparatively, each of these styles gives a different effect than the other styles. Allah *Glorified is He* responded to the disbelievers' false accusations in the verse in which He says: '…and (the Quran) is not the word of a poet – little do you believe' (*al-Haqqa:* 41).

One of their malicious methods of disbelief was changing the words of Allah's revelation. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Among those of the Jewish faith there are some who distort the meaning of the (revealed) words, taking them out of their context and saying (as it were,) "We have heard, but we disobey," and "Hear (the revelation) without paying attention," and, "Listen to us (without being heedless) (*ra'ina*), (O Muhammad)" – thus making a play with their tongues, and implying that the (true) Faith is false,' (*an-Nisa':* 46).

The Jews of Medina used the word *ra'ina* when talking to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This word has two different meanings in the Arabic usage. The first meaning of the word is, 'listen to us,' but this was not the meaning these people intended. The second meaning of the word *ra'ina* comes from the word *ru'oona* (heedlessness), and thus, they used it as a play on words to insult the status of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* forbade the believers from using this word of disrespect when talking to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'O you who have believed! Do not say (to the Prophet), "Listen to us (without being heedless) (*ra'ina*)," but rather say, "Have patience with us," and listen (to him), since grievous suffering awaits those who deny the truth,' (*al-Baqara:* 104).

Another form of their distortion of the truth was their manner of greeting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Instead of saying, 'peace (*salam*) be upon you,' they used to say, 'death (*sam*) be upon you.' Therefore, they employed many ways to distort Allah's words. Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that they had forgotten a portion of what they were taught. Even those of them who did not forget their knowledge actually distorted it, and those who did not change it concealed its reality. Their brazenness against Allah *Glorified is He* reached such an extent that they dared to fabricate the verses in the scripture with their own hands. Thereafter, they claimed that their fabrications were revelations from Allah *Glorified is He*. These were their many methods of changing the truth.

Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that: ‘Verily, they who distort the meaning of Our messages are not hidden from Us,’ (*Fussilat:* 40). Indeed, the literal meaning of this verse, which is that they are not hidden from Allah’s encompassing knowledge, is a commonly known concept. However, this verse has an additional meaning. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the previous verses to inform these disbelievers of their crime before punishing them and taking them to task for it. This is because a crime and its punishment are two distinct entities. The legists say that a crime should be defined before its punishment can be rightful and that there is no crime without a prior legal text.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Hence, which (of the two) will be in a better state – he that is (destined to be) cast into the fire, or he that shall come secure (before Us) on Resurrection Day?’ (*Fussilat:* 40) Allah *Glorified is He* knows that our answer to this question will be as He wishes, and that all sane people will want security on the Day of Resurrection. Through this question, Allah *Glorified is He* is ordering us to strive in carrying out His commands, and to avoid those actions which are forbidden. This is the path of safety and salvation from the hellfire.

The previous verses discussed how the disbelievers tried to distort Allah’s words. Then, this question was posed to signify that anyone who distorts the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* will be cast in the fire on the Day of Resurrection. On the other hand, those who believe in Allah’s verses will be granted a safe return. Indeed, after this comparison, it is a form of sheer idiocy for a person to disbelieve in Allah’s words in order to achieve temporary power or a transitory status in this world, after which they will find an agonizing fate in an eternal fire.

A person may be enjoying the greatest levels of luxury in this life, in the form of extended wealth or extreme power, authority and dignity. However, a major factor that disturbs their enjoyment of these luxuries is that these pleasures will not last. Indeed, wealth and power may desert them while they are still alive, or they may themselves die and leave the world itself behind them.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of the eternal fate of those disbelievers who enjoy their temporary luxuries in this life. He said: 'One of them (the disbelievers) will be dipped a single time in the fire. The angels will ask him, "Did you ever see luxury in the previous world?" He will reply, "No, by Allah *Glorified is He* I never saw any luxury there!" '(1)

No sane person would choose to abandon an eternal and everlasting pleasure in the Hereafter for an adulterated and transitory pleasure in this world. You experience pleasure in this world based on the extent of your own abilities and capacities, but in the Hereafter, you will experience pleasure in accordance with Allah's power and generosity. The garden will contain things which no eye has seen, nor ear heard of, nor has occurred to the mind of man.

We are thus confronted with two very contrasting options, and although the correct choice is clear, we are still free to choose for ourselves. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do what you will: verily, He sees all that you do' (*Fussilat:* 40). Here, Allah warned us and provided a caution for the people. They can do what they please in this world, but Allah *Glorified is He* sees them and observes all their actions. Afterwards, He is able to reward or punish them accordingly. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and the blessings be upon him said: 'On the Day of Resurrection, the most opulent individual from among the disbelievers will be brought forward, and it will be said, "Dip him in the fire a single time." He is dipped in the fire, and then asked, "Have you ever experienced any luxury?" He will say, "No, I never experienced pleasure." And a believer who suffered the most pain and harm will be brought forward, and it will be said, "Dip him in paradise a single time." He is dipped in paradise, and then asked, "Have you ever experienced pain or harm?" He will say, "I never experienced pain or harm."' This Hadith was narrated by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (Hadith 4312).*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِٱلذِّكْرِ لَمَّا جَآءَهُمْ ۖ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَكِتَٰبٌ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤١﴾ لَّا يَأْتِيهِ
ٱلْبَٰطِلُ مِنۢ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِۦ ۖ تَنزِيلٌ مِّنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

Those who reject the Quran when it comes to them – though it is an unassailable Scripture [41] which falsehood cannot touch from any angle, a Revelation sent down from the Wise One, Worthy of All Praise [42] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 41 - 42)

The literal meaning of the word *kafaru* (disbelieved) means 'those who covered'. These disbelievers have covered their belief in the Necessary Existent Deity. A cover implies that something has been concealed. In this case, the concept that these people have concealed is the concept of faith in Allah *Glorified is He*. This means that belief in Allah *Glorified is He* is an innate concept in the minds of people, while disbelief is an emergent fabrication that conceals the true nature of the pure heart. Therefore, in this regard, the lexical connotation of the word *kufr* (disbelief) is a reference to the truth of faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

The word 'reminder (*dhikr*)' is a reference to the Quran which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad's heart. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, it is We Ourselves who have revealed, step by step, this reminder (*dhikr*): and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it (from all corruption)' (*al-Hijr:* 9). The word *dhikr* is also used to describe the previous scriptures that were revealed before the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and if you have not (yet) realised this, ask the followers of the (earlier) reminder (*dhikr*)' (*an-Nahl:* 43).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'and, indeed, We vouchsafed (Our revelation) unto Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) (as) the standard by which to discern the truth from the falsehood, and as a (guiding) light and a reminder for the pious (people),' (*al-Anbiya':* 48). The word *dhikr* (reminder) also connotes reputation and high standing. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And, verily, this (revelation) shall indeed become a reminder for you and your people' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44). He also says: '(O men!) We have now bestowed upon you a Divine book containing all that you ought to bear in mind (in remembrance for you (*dhikrukum*))' (*al-Anbiya':* 10).

The word *dhikr* also applies to the praise of Allah *Glorified is He* as Allah says: ‘By means of intoxicants and games of chance (gambling), Satan (Iblis) seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among you, and to turn you away from the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah and from Prayer’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 91). The word *dhikr* is also used to mean our remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* through our obedience, and the remembrance of Allah’s graces and forgiveness to His servants, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So remember Me, and I shall remember you’ (*al-Baqara:* 152).

Allah *Glorified is He* described the Quran by saying: ‘...for, behold, it is a sublime (*'aziz*) book’ (*Fussilat:* 41). The word *'aziz* (sublime) has a number of meanings. The first meaning is ‘a valuable rare object.’ The second meaning is ‘a person who has absolute authority, and who cannot be vanquished.’ For instance, the second meaning can be found in Allah’s words: ‘…for Allah is Almighty (*'Aziz*), an avenger of evil’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 4).

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* described the Quran as being a victorious and a supreme book that takes hold of hearts and achieves dominance over them. This refutes the hopes of the disbelievers who say:(1) ‘Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it, so that you might gain the upper hand’ (*Fussilat:* 26). Indeed, those who listen to the words of the Quran with pure hearts and a tender sensitivity will necessarily be amazed by it.

We have seen this effect in the story(2) of our master ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him*. He was one of the staunchest opponents of Islam until the day in which he learned that his sister and her husband(3) had become Muslims. He immediately went to her house and beat her until blood ran down her face. It was this blood that induced tenderness in his heart, and this newfound tenderness overcame his ignorance. He started listening to her recitation of the

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(1) *That is, the disbelievers of Mecca. Abu Jahl said, ‘When Muhammad reads (the Quran), shout in his face to make him lose his place.’ (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, 9/6021)*

(2) *The story of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab’s conversion to Islam*

(3) *Her husband was Khabbab ibn Al-Aratt ibn Jandala ibn Sa‘d, from the Tamim tribe, known as Abu Yahya At-Tamimi. He is one of his esteemed earlier companions, and he participated in Badr. It is said that he died during the caliphate of ‘Umar Allah be pleased with them who performed his funeral prayer. However, he actually died in Kufa in 37 A.H. and ‘Ali performed his funeral prayer. It is also said that he lived 73 years [Az-Zirikli, (Al-A‘lam), 2/323].*

Quran, but this time, he heard the verses with a pure heart-felt attitude. This had an overwhelming effect on him, and he embraced Islam that day.

Therefore, the Quran is a powerful and victorious book. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once said, ‘This religion is strong. So, pursue it ardently but with gentleness, for the traveller who pushes his camel beyond its capacity, in his haste to arrive to his destination, will not reach his destination nor will he keep his camel (healthy and alive).’(1) He also said, ‘Anyone who shall pull vehemently upon this religion will be vanquished.’(2)

If you want to make a choice between two options, you must allow your mind to be clear and your heart to be devoid of whims. Then, you should make the choice with a balanced logical approach. If you feel relieved with one of these options, then pursue it. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body’ (*al-Ahzab:* 4). Therefore, if ‘Umar had evil in his heart, he would not have approached faith and good deeds. Thus, it is necessary to primarily expel evil from our hearts before it accepts the good, as the evil will prevent the reception of the good.

Allah *Glorified is He* described how the hypocrites and disbelievers received the Quran. He says: ‘now among those (hapless sinners) are those who (pretend to) listen to you, (O Muhammad,) and then, as soon as they leave your presence, say (with scorn) to those who have knowledge (of your message): “what is it that he has said just now?” ’ (*Muhammad:* 16) They are not affected by the Quran and do not understand it, due to their pride and obstinacy. Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them by saying, ‘Say: it is a guidance and a source of health to the believers; but as for those who will not believe – in their ears is deafness, and so it remains obscure to them' (*Fussilat:* 44).

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(1) *Given by Al-Bayhaqi in his Sunnan Al-Kubra [3/18] from narration of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘This religion is strong... So, pursue it ardently but with gentleness, and do not make the worship of Allah Glorified is He hated by yourself. The traveller who pushes his mount beyond its capacity, in his haste to arrive to his destination, will not reach his destination, or keep his mount.’ Al-Bayhaqi also narrates it in the section on the people of faith [3728] from the narration of ‘Aisha, and [3729] from the narration of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As.*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [38] from the narration of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad peace and the blessings be upon him said, ’This religion is that of ease, and anyone who shall pull vehemently upon this religion will be vanquished; therefore focus on your goal, draw near and rejoice.’ It was also narrated by An-Nasa’i in his Sunnan [4948].*

Indeed, the same Quran has different effects according to the receptive ability of the listener. It is a book of guidance and healing to the believers, but the people of disbelief and hypocrisy will be blinded by its truth. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted us to choose logically and fairly between the two options presented in the verse. If fairness is employed in this judgement, the Quran will necessarily triumph, as nothing can compete or contest with it if it is properly received. At that point, a healthy sentiment can easily comprehend what the mind cannot understand. For this reason, we said that the influence of the Most Merciful cannot be deflected by the influence of Satan (Iblis). The mother of Prophet Musa (Moses) did not protest against the message of the Most Merciful when He said to her: '…and then, when you have cause to fear for him (Musa), cast him into the river, and have no fear and do not grieve...' (*al-Qasas:* 7). Pure reason does not comprehend this action, but a pure instinct can accept it. Thus, those who hear the Quran but are not affected by it are occupied with concepts that oppose its healthy reception.

Therefore, we are in need of justice in order to make our free choices, just as we are in need of protection and security after we make the choice. Some people claim that Islam spread with the sword, but this is not true because in the history of Islam, the sword was not used to impose a dogma, but rather to protect the peoples' freedom of choice. It also protected the freedom of the religion to proclaim itself. Freedom of belief is an obligation in Islam, and this was evident as many people remained as disbelievers in Muslim territories. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

Islam's launching point was the concept of freedom of belief. It has made the choice of religion a personal choice. Some people have used the issue of the legally prescribed punishment against apostasy(1) in their attempts to defame Allah's religion. They claimed that Islam is at odds with the freedom of belief and forces people to accept it. However, this is a false accusation. Those who consider the matter more closely will find that Islam declares, to any person thinking of embracing Islam, that apostasy is punished in this way. Thus, anyone who wants to embrace Islam should think and contemplate their choice carefully before announcing it because the legally prescribed punishment will be executed if they publicly denounce it later. So, in fact, this ruling aims to place obstacles in the path of a disbeliever wanting to embrace Islam, as Islam wants their conviction to be solid and firmly established in their hearts before they embrace it. Thus the penalty of execution for apostasy does not interfere with their right of free choice. It only warns them to avoid embracing this religion before adherently and sincerely acknowledging it as the truth.

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(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and the blessings be upon him said: 'Execute whoever changes his religion.' This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [2794, 6411], Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [3787] and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [1378]. At-Tirmidhi mentioned it as a sound narration and this ruling is issued by the scholars regarding=*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'No falsehood can ever attain to it openly, and neither in a stealthy manner' (*Fussilat:* 42). This means that no falsehood will ever overcome it from any direction. For instance, some orientalists made the preposterous attempt to seek out what they thought were defects in the Quranic verses. They pointed out the similarity between two verses in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the first: '...and do not kill your children due to poverty – (for) it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them...,' (*al-An'am:* 151) and then He says in another verse: 'Hence, do not kill your children for fear of poverty: it is We who shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you...' (*al-Isra':* 31).

Some orientalists observed this repetition in the two verses, and claimed that if one of them is eloquent, then the other one cannot be so. They considered that one of the two verses is futile. Unfortunately, these orientalists did not have the basic faculty that would help them to understand the words of Allah *Glorified is He* and receive His Gift properly. Were they to observe the context surrounding each of the two verses, they would have found that each verse is

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= *apostates. Likewise, it was narrated by An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan [3991, 3992, 3993, 3994, 3995], Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [2526] and Ahmad in his Musnad [1775, 2420, 2421, 2813, 21007]. This narration is sound, and the majority opinion is that the apostate is to be asked to repent over a period of three days, and some hold the opinion that he is given a period of a month, to give him ample opportunity to contemplate his choice. Therefore, each apostate has his specific state upon which basis he is to be judged.*

particularly suitable to its context. Each verse is eloquent in expressing the issue it is discussing.

In the first verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and do not kill your children due to poverty – (for) it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them' (*al-An'am:* 151). The person this verse is talking to is a person living in poverty, and so, is occupied with supporting himself before thinking about supporting his children. It is for this reason that the verse ended with Allah's statement, '...it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them' (*al-An'am:* 151).

As for the second verse, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the term: '...for fear of poverty,' (*al-Isra':* 31) instead of the phrase, 'due to poverty.' This second verse is directed to a person who is not afflicted by poverty, but they fear that it will afflict them when a child comes in their lives. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures this person that the child will come along with its appointed sustenance. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...it is We who shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you' (*al-Isra':* 31). Therefore, every verse is eloquent in its proper place.

Likewise, these orientalists pointed out the similarity between two verses in the chapter of *al-Baqara*. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the first verse: 'And remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom be taken from them, and none shall be succoured' (*al-Baqara:* 48). Then, in another part of the chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says in an apparently similar verse: 'And remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them, and none shall be succoured' (*al-Baqara:* 123).

A hasty glance will not detect a great difference between the two verses, but people with a higher linguistic ability who consider their meanings more closely will be able to observe the difference. Each verse is describing a different type of soul on the Day of Judgment. The first verse is speaking of a righteous soul that has the ability to intercede for the souls of sinners. On the other hand, the second verse is describing the soul of the sinner waiting for a righteous person's intercession in order to avail itself.

On the Day of Judgment, the soul of the sinner will acknowledge its crimes and offer a ransom to escape the punishment. However, the verse mentions that a ransom will not be accepted on that day. Therefore, the sinner will search for a better soul to intercede on its behalf, after the ransom has been refused.

The better soul that will try to intercede for the sinner and will stand before Allah *Glorified is He* and say: 'O Lord. I intercede for this sinner. If my intercession is not accepted, then take the ransom from me.' Therefore, each verse is eloquent in its proper place.

Unfortunately, some people do not understand what Allah *Glorified is He* intended in His Revelation and do not receive His Words with a good heart. In fact, they accuse the Quran of having faults and say, 'We do not understand the verses that your Lord said.' Indeed, He is our Lord, praise be to Allah *Glorified is He* and we wish that they see Him as their Lord as well.

Another verse they point out is the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They aim to extinguish Allah's light with their utterances: but Allah has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth' (*as-Saff:* 8). The orientalists rejected this verse because they said that Islam did not prevail over all religions, as after fourteen centuries there are still Jews, Christians, atheists and adherents of other religions in the world. This statement also indicates their lack of comprehension of the holy Quran's methods and meanings.

The verse: '...that He (Allah will) make it prevail over all (false) religions,' (*as-Saff:* 9) does not mean that all the people will become Muslims because the word 'prevail' here is only referring to the strength of the Islamic argument over all the other religions. So, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* was declaring the power of His Revelation's argument, after which the people have the freedom to believe or deny the truth.

Additionally, if the person who rejected this verse read the Quran with some insight, they would have noticed that the precise Quranic words actually pointed out that the other religions of polytheism and disbelief will continue to exist in the presence of Islam. Allah *Glorified is He* says that the Islamic argument will prevail: '...however hateful the polytheists may be' (*as-Saff:* 9) and '...however hateful the disbelievers may be' (*as-Saff:* 8). Therefore, these two classes of disbelievers will still be present alongside the believers in Islam.(1)

Islam may even prevail over the other religions through the widespread acceptance of its judgements and rulings even if those who accept these rulings are not Muslims. Their life circumstances may compel them to take refuge in the rulings of Islam to find solutions for their problems. This is another great way in which Islam will prevail.

For instance, the Vatican used, for a long time, to reject the possibility of divorce, and divorce is a concept that Islam put forward as a lawful solution to marital problems. However, with the passage of time and the multitude of problems they encountered, the Vatican was forced to accept this approach as a solution to their issues as well. Thus, they adopted the ruling of Islam even though they were not Muslims. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks truthfully when He says: '...Had it been issued from any source but Allah, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction' (*an-Nisa':* 82).

These and other verses indicate the integrity of the words of Allah *Glorified is He* and that they are not afflicted with falsehood or contradiction, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'No falsehood can ever attain to it openly, and neither in a stealthy manner,' (*Fussilat:* 42) for falsehood can only occur if the speaker is not truthful, and who is more truthful than Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who revealed the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '...(since it is) sent down by the One Who is truly wise (*hakim*), and the One Who is ever to be praised (*hamid*)' (*Fussilat:* 42). The Arabic adjectives *hakim* (wise) and *hamid* (ever to be praised) indicate the intensified forms of wisdom and praise. Wisdom entails the placement of effort in its proper place, and praise means that Allah *Glorified is He* is praised for all of His Acts, Decrees, and Power. The phrase, 'Praise be to Allah *Glorified is He*' combines all of these meanings together. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All praise is due to Allah alone, The Lord of all the worlds' (*al-Fatiha:* 2).

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(1) Islam will not eradicate them, and they will not all become Muslims.

We previously said that part of Allah's mercy toward us is that He taught us the form in which we are to praise Him for His Favours towards us. This praise is lexically formed of a subject and a predicate: 'Praise is to Allah.' If Allah *Glorified is He* did not set down for His servants the form in which they are to glorify Him, they would differ as to the correct way to do so, and people would contend in this matter. The articulate litterateur would then praise Allah *Glorified is He* in a way of which an illiterate person or a simple shepherd would be incapable. Had the matter been left to the differing aptitudes of people, there would not have been any sort of equivalence in people's praising of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, it is from His Mercy to us that He has commanded us, to raise our hands and praise Him in this manner. He has prescribed this for us so that all people will praise and glorify Him in an equivalent way. Everyone is to utter the same phrase: 'All praise is due to Allah alone.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to praise Allah *Glorified is He* with the following saying, 'Glory be to You (Allah)! We cannot count your blessings. You are as You have praised Yourself.'(1)

It is incumbent upon the one who has been taught and guided to the correct manner of praising Allah *Glorified is He* using the phrase, 'All praise is due to Allah alone,' to praise Him in this way without fail. In this way, the servant will keep praising his Lord countless times.

Then, in the verse we are studying, Allah used the word '…sent down (*tanzil*)' (*Fussilat:* 42). When you hear the word *tanzil* (sending down), you should understand that it refers to an object sent down from above, even if that term refers to material objects descending upon the earth. For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Hadid:* '...and We sent down (upon you) iron, in which there is awesome power as well as (a source of) benefits for man' (*al-Hadid:* 25). Thus, even though iron is extracted from the ground, Allah *Glorified is He* told us that He sent it down from the skies, for the service of mankind upon the earth.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad [6/58, 120], and likewise Muslim in his Sahih [486], from a Hadith of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her who said, 'One night I noticed the absence of the Messenger of Allah from the bed, so I went to look for him until my foot came into contact with the soles of his feet. He was praying in the mosque and his feet were propped up. He was saying, "O Allah, I take refuge from Your Wrath in Your Good Pleasure, and from Your Punishment in Your Forgiveness; I take refuge from You in You. I cannot recount Your Praise, You are as You have praised Yourself.'"*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّا يُقَالُ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ قِيلَ لِلرُّسُلِ مِن قَبْلِكَۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو
مَغْفِرَةٍ وَذُو عِقَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٤٣﴾

[should remember that] you [Prophet] are not told
anything that the previous messengers were not told:
your Lord is a Lord of forgiveness, but also of
painful punishment [43] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 43)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* consoled His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and lightened his sorrows. These sorrows were the result of the polytheists' denial of the truth and their resistance to Allah's revelation. Allah *Glorified is He* told Prophet Muhammad that he was the master of all the messengers, and that all the messengers before him had encountered trouble and harm. If the level of harm were to correspond to the level of the messenger in Allah's sight, then indeed, the people's attacks on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would simply be more severe than the attacks suffered by the previous messengers.

Now, the phrase, '…nothing is being said to you,' in this verse could have one of two meanings.

The first meaning of this phrase is that no new words of consolation were said to Prophet Muhammad. This is because similar consolations were also revealed to the messengers before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient in the face of the adversaries and harm directed by the disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'For, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts would (in the end) be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 171-73) Since Prophet Muhammad was one of those messengers, therefore, in this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* sent him glad tidings of timely victory with his army and followers.

The second meaning of this phrase could be that no new words of disbelief were uttered by the enemies and opponents of Prophet Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him* as they were only repeating what the previous disbelievers had said to their messengers. In other words, this was also an order directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to be discouraged by the disbelievers' actions, for this is the customary attitude of disbelievers towards those who deliver Allah's messages to them. According to this meaning, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was being told not to bear a burden that is heavier than his mere responsibility of delivering the message, irrespective of the consequences.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'and whether We show you (in this world) something of what We hold in store for those (deniers of the truth), or whether We cause you to die (before that retribution takes place – know that, in the end), it is unto Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir:* 77).

Another cause of sorrow in Prophet Muhammad's heart was that he had tasted the sweetness of belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and he wanted the same blessing for everyone. He wanted to guide all the people to Allah's way without failure. For this reason, he used to push himself beyond the limits of his obligation, and his Lord often blamed him for doing so in the way one might blame his beloved. Allah blamed him for overburdening himself in the following verse: 'But (why) would you (Muhammad), perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf:* 6) Allah *Glorified is He* also says to him: '...but no more is an apostle bound to do than clearly deliver the message (entrusted to him)' (*al-'Ankabut:* 18).

We often find that the Noble Quran has stories of the previous prophets and messengers to reassure Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of the strength of his message and to lighten his burden.

For instance, Allah told him the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah), who called his people to Allah *Glorified is He* over the course of nearly 950 years. Yet, only a small number of people believed in him. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(And after a time, Nuh (Noah) said, "O my Lord! Verily, I have been calling unto my people night and day, but my call has only caused them to flee farther and farther away (from You). And, behold, whenever I called unto them with a view to You granting them forgiveness, they put their fingers into their ears, and wrapped themselves up in their garments (of sin), and grew obstinate, and became (yet more) arrogant in their false pride"' (*Nuh:* 5-7).

Prophet Nuh's (Noah) saying, '..."they put their fingers into their ears,"…' (*Nuh:* 7) is lexically meant to emphasise the strength of their rejection and indicate that they went to full lengths to stop their ears from hearing his call. They did not simply want to put their fingertips into their ears, but figuratively wanted to use their whole fingers to block the delivery of the message. Furthermore, they '..."wrapped themselves up in their garments"' (*Nuh:* 7). This means that they covered their faces with them, thereby blocking every aperture of comprehension and understanding, as though they did not want to hear or even see the truth. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was also told to be patient, as he was not the first to experience either this trouble or this kind of obstinacy and rejection.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, your Lord is indeed full of forgiveness – but He has also the power to punish (the disbelievers) most grievously' (*Fussilat:* 43). Upon contemplation, this statement appears to be a 'diplomatic statement'. The scholars call this a statement combining an incentive with a punishment. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the different states of those who opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so addresses them in a manner appropriate to any of their possible reactions. For those who return to Allah *Glorified is He* and to the Straight Path, the gate of repentance is always open, but for those who persist in their opposition, Allah *Glorified is He* has the power to punish them severely.

You can observe that the promise of forgiveness in this verse preceded the threat of punishment. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* promises those who truly believe that He will forgive their sins and even graciously give them good deeds instead of their evil deeds. This is as an expression of His Graciousness and Magnanimity, as though Allah *Glorified is He* is trying to put His servants at ease even though He is in no need of them.

The history of Islam is full of people who viewed Islam and its call with hostility and opposed Prophet Muhammad and the believers with him. They were indeed its grimmest of enemies at one point, but then, subsequently, they became its partisans and supporters and gave their lives to the way of Allah.

Had the door been shut in their faces, such individuals would never have embraced Allah's religion. This has occurred in the famous stories of the conversion of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Hamza, ‘Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl, Khalid ibn Al-Walid and ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As *Allah be pleased with all of them* as well as others who were champions of disbelief.

The Quran even justly described the Jews and Christians who upheld Allah's Commandments and considered them a part of their religion, instead of a mere temporal authority. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the righteous people of the Book: ‘And among the followers of earlier revelations there are people who, if you entrust one of them with a treasure, will (faithfully) restore it to you; and there are among them many who, if you entrust them with a tiny gold coin, will not restore it to you unless you keep standing over them’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 75).

The Quran then told Prophet Muhammad that certain disbelievers will never be guided to the true faith, even though they were still in the expanse of this world and in their period of free choice. These people did remain in their disbelief refusing to pay the slightest testimonies to this religion, even if hypocritically to distort the Quranic truth.

These people included Abu Lahab, the uncle of Prophet Muhammad, who used to walk behind the Messenger of Allah and falsely describe him as a liar. Allah *Glorified is He* therefore passed His Judgement against him that he will die in his disbelief, and that his fate will be the hellfire (we take refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* from it). The following chapter was revealed about him: ‘Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and that entire he has gained? (In the life to come) he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing, together with his wife, that carrier of evil tales, (who bears) around her neck a rope of twisted strands!’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5).

Abu Lahab heard about the revelation of this chapter. It was within his power to stand in front of the people's assembly and proclaim with a hypocritical loud voice, ‘I testify that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,’ if he wanted to prove the chapter as false. However, he did not do so because Allah *Glorified is He* had passed the judgement against him that he would never testify to faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* is thus '...full of forgiveness...' (*Fussilat:* 43) for every disbeliever, denier and opponent who returns to the right path and repents. However, He also has '...the power to punish most grievously' (*Fussilat:* 43) those who persist in their disbelief, opposition and hostility to the call of Allah *Glorified is He*.

It is obvious that the juxtaposition of a meaning with its opposite in one place is one of the features of the Quranic style because referring to opposites clarifies each term in the pair. All things are distinguished by their opposites. Therefore, your Lord informed you of the gravity of the situation and left it up to you to choose for yourself, whether to opt for forgiveness or look forward for punishment, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَٰهُ قُرْءَانًا أَعْجَمِيًّا لَّقَالُوا۟ لَوْلَا فُصِّلَتْ ءَايَٰتُهُۥٓ ۖ ءَا۬عْجَمِىٌّ وَعَرَبِىٌّ ۗ قُلْ هُوَ
لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ هُدًى وَشِفَآءٌ ۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ فِىٓ ءَاذَانِهِمْ وَقْرٌ
وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَمًى ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ يُنَادَوْنَ مِن مَّكَانٍۭ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

If We had made it a foreign Quran, they would have said, 'If only its verses were clear! What? Foreign speech to an Arab?' Say, 'It is guidance and healing for those who have faith, but the ears of the disbelievers are heavy, they are blind to it, it is as if they are being called from a distant place' [44] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 44)

Allah *Glorified is He* started this verse with the words: 'If We had willed this (Divine book)…' (*Fussilat:* 44). This Divine book is the Quran which is called as such because it is meant to be read, as *Qara'a* is the Arabic word for 'read'. Then Allah *Glorified is He* continued: if He had '(willed this Divine book) to be a discourse in a non-Arabic tongue ('*Ajamiyun*)' (*Fussilat:* 44), '...they (who now reject it) would surely have said, "Why is it that its messages have not been spelled out clearly?"' (*Fussilat:* 44) The disbelievers would have still wondered about it and asked, 'Why was it not revealed in Arabic?' For instance, the Taurat (Torah) was revealed in Hebrew, which is the language and origin of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Some of the disbelievers asked why the Quran was not in the Hebrew language, like the Taurat (Torah). The answer was that Prophet Muhammad was an Arab by origin and by language. Therefore, it was fitting for the Quran to be revealed to him in his people's language. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* made it clear that had the Quran been revealed in a non-Arabic language, they would have demanded and wished it to be in Arabic.

Additionally, aside from the language in which it was revealed, the Quran is in its essence a guidance and a source of health, as Allah *Glorified is He* described it: 'Say (O Muhammad): "This (Divine book) is a guidance and a source of health to all who have believed; but as for those who will not believe – in their ears is deafness" ' (*Fussilat:* 44). That is, the ears of those who do not believe in it are impaired, and so, they cannot hear what is beneficial and fruitful for them. '…and so it remains obscure to them' (*Fussilat:* 44). To them, the Quran is a dark and suspicious text in which they become lost.

Thus, the Quran is one, but the fruits of its reading vary, for the way the Quran is received varies according to the intention of the one who receives it. The one who listens to it with a conscious ear and a pure unbiased heart, unoccupied by its opposing concepts, will find in it guidance and a source of health.

On the other hand, those who are blind to its truth will be lost, not knowing where they are headed. This person reads or hears the Quran without understanding it and without becoming affected by it. Allah *Glorified is He* described these people in another verse: 'now among those (hapless sinners) are those who (pretend to) listen to you, (O Muhammad,) and then, as soon as they leave your presence, say (with scorn) to those who have knowledge (of your message): "what is it that he has said just now?'' ' (*Muhammad:* 16)

We have previously explained the idea of the active subject and the object. When the active subject does an action, the object will become affected by the actions in accordance with its nature. For example, the difference between a peasant striking the soil with an axe, and striking a rock with the same axe, is that the soil becomes affected by the axe and gives its fruits, whereas the hardened rock does not comply with the active axe and does not become affected by it.

Therefore, do not make judgments regarding the active subject except after looking at the receiving object. You have to observe this interaction between both elements. We previously gave an example concerning a cup of hot tea. Blowing air upon the hot cup cools it down, whereas if you are in a freezing cold environment, blowing air upon your hands will warm them. Thus, the act of blowing air is one, but the effect is different because of the difference between the objects.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the inattentive disbelievers: '…and so it (the Quranic message) remains obscure to them: they are (like people who are) being called from a distant place' (*Fussilat:* 44). They have heard the Quran and have not been affected by it, and so Allah *Glorified is He* compared them to a person being called from a distant place and so cannot hear the call clearly, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَٰبَ فَٱخْتُلِفَ فِيهِ ۗ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ
مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقُضِىَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

We gave the Scripture to Moses but disputes arose about it – if it were not for a decree that had already been issued from your Lord, they would already have been judged – and still they are doubtful and suspicious of it [45] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 45)

This verse narrated to Prophet Muhammad the events that occurred to the revelation bestowed upon Prophet Musa (Moses). This verse is still describing what has been mentioned in a previous verse as, '…nothing is being said to you but what was said to all (of Allah's) apostles before your time,' (*Fussilat:* 43).

Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was among those prophets who endured his people's cruelty and obstinacy. His story is thus a consolation for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Thus, too, have We previously bestowed revelation upon Musa (Moses),' (*Fussilat:* 45). This previous revelation was the Taurat (Torah), '...and thereupon disputes arose about it,' (*Fussilat:* 45). This means that the people disagreed upon the message of Prophet Musa (Moses). Some of them altered it, while others forgot parts of it. Some of them even wrote parts of it by themselves, claiming that these verses had been sent by Allah *Glorified is He*.

‘Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord’ (*Fussilat:* 45). This Divine decree and decision refers to the eradicating punishment that annihilated some previous nations of disbelievers such as the extermination of the people of ‘Ad and Thamud, as well as the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) and the people of Prophet Lut (Lot). Allah’s Decree was different for the following nations, as He did not subject their disbelievers to such tortures in this world, leaving their punishment until the Day of Resurrection. ‘Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord, all would indeed have been decided between them (from the outset)’ (*Fussilat:* 45). Were it not for this different decree, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have given them time until the Hereafter. He would have punished them in this world from the outset of their disbelief, just as He has done with the preceding nations who called their Prophets liars.

Allah *Glorified is He* then described the people of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as being in: ‘...grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it (the message) entails’ (*Fussilat:* 45). This means that their indecision made them worried and uncertain.

Doubt is one of several ways of dealing with occurrences and events. The first of these ways is the way of knowledge. This is when you have certitude about the event and are able to bring evidence in support of it.

The second way is relying upon another person’s authority, or emulating that person. This is when you know that an event happened in reality and are convinced by it, but you are unable to bring an argument to support it. This is like the case of small children who are taught by their parents that Allah *Glorified is He* is one. The children will emulate and believe that concept not because they understand it, but because they trust their parents or teachers, knowing that their parents wish them good. The parent, however, is unable to bring an argument that would prove the Oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* to the immature mind of the child. Therefore, in this case, the child will be emulating the parent or teacher.

The third scenario is the case of ignorance. This is when a person falsely believes that an event has occurred. Thus, the event did not coincide with reality, but that person is wrongly convinced that it is true. That is why we previously pointed out that it is more difficult to teach an ignorant person than an unaware illiterate person. This is because an ignorant person believes in something which is untrue, and may require an increased effort to correct their thoughts. Firstly, we need to free their minds from the wrong information, and secondly, we still need to teach them the truth of the matter. On the other hand, an unaware illiterate person has an open and a free mind that does not defend any positions. That is why you will find them obedient, and able to accept much of what is taught to them without wrongful disputes.

The fourth and final scenario is that of doubt, which is when you have a real case in which your belief equals your disbelief, leaving you undecided. When your confidence and conviction prevail, this is called a suspicion, but when doubt prevails over certainty, this is known as a delusion.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘As it is, behold, they (who will not believe in this Divine book) are in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it entails’ (*Fussilat:* 45). This means that they have not reached the degree of faith, or the degree of relying on authority, or the degree of ignorance. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَّنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَنْ أَسَآءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۗ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّٰمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿٤٦﴾

Whoever does good does it for his own soul and whoever does evil does it against his own soul: your Lord is never unjust to His creatures [46] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 46)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* affirms an existing truth which He wants His servants to believe in and wants this concept to be firmly established in their minds. This concept is that when each one of them does something, they are only benefiting themselves. Their belief and obedience does not benefit Allah in any way.

Similarly, the disobedience of the sinners and the denial of the disbelievers do not harm Allah *Glorified is He* for He had all the qualities of Magnificence, Beauty, and Perfection before He created this world. It is the servants who will be harmed by their evil deeds.

Therefore, the legal obligations are expressions of Allah’s care for His creation. Every maker wants his creation to be in the best form, and thus, guards it from corruption and from causes of failure.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘O My servants, if the first of you and the last of you, the human among you and the jinn among you, those of you present and those absent, were as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, this would not add anything to My Kingdom. If the first of you and the last of you, the human among you and the jinn among you, those of you present and those absent, were as immoral as the heart of the most immoral man of you, that would not decrease My Kingdom more than a needle decreases the sea when placed therein. For I am generous and praiseworthy, I give by uttering a word and I make you suffer by uttering a word. When I will a thing to be, I but say unto it, “Be” – and it is.’(1)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* affirmed the concept that everybody is free to believe or disbelieve because every person will be rewarded or punished according to his or her deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good’ (*Fussilat:* 46). Allah *Glorified is He* does not earn anything from them. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘...and whoever does evil, does so to his own hurt’ (*Fussilat:* 46). Surprisingly, even after knowing this, human beings still commit acts that may lead to their own demise. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* has described most of mankind as wicked and foolish.(2)

When Allah *Glorified is He* warns us from His Punishments, He does not want to punish us, but wants to divert us from these harmful sins that will bring these punishments upon us. He wants to frighten us from these crimes due to their dangers. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is free from any injustice: '...and Allah is not a transgressor against His servants' (*Fussilat:* 46). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* frightened you to protect you! Indeed, when He says: 'Whoever kills shall be killed,' He does not want to kill people, but wants to prevent bloodshed. Whoever contemplates murder, then, will have a greater fear that they will be killed for it!

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(1) *At-Tirmidhi quotes the Hadith in his Sunnan [2495] from Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him stating that it is sound. It is also quoted by Ahmad in his Musnad [154, 5/77] and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [4257].*

(2) *Allah Glorified is He said in the chapter of al-Ahzab: ‘Verily, We did offer the trust (of reason and volition) to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish’ (al-Ahzab: 72). Ibn ‘Abbas said, ‘Trust means obedience, and religious duties.’ Zayd ibn Aslam said, ‘Trust means three things: prayer, fasting, and ablution after ritual impurity.’ Ibn Qatada said, ‘Trust means “religion,” “religious duties,” and “limits”.’ Ibn Kathir has said in his Tafsir [3/522], after quoting these previous explanations: ‘There is no contradiction between any of these words. They agree with one another and refer to the acceptance of commandments and prohibitions, with the condition that if one fulfils them he will be rewarded and if he abandons them he will be punished. Man has accepted them with the help of Allah Glorified is He despite his weakness, ignorance, and transgression.’*

The Quran says about military power: 'Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster so that you might terrify thereby the enemies of Allah, who are your enemies as well' (*al-Anfal:* 60). It is bizarre that Islam's enemies use this verse as an argument for proving that Islam advocates terrorism just because the Quran mentions the word 'terrify.' This is a mistaken interpretation of the Quranic style. Preparing a force that terrifies enemies means that I do not want battle and do not want confrontation. When my enemy learns that I am prepared to fight, he will refrain from combat.

On the issue of military force, it is said that the balance of power preserves peace in the international community of nations. In the days when there were two equal powers, namely the Soviet Union and the United States of America, there was military peace. Each of them feared the other's power, so the war between them was called a 'Cold War'. However, the Soviet power collapsed and America became dominant. So, now, there is only one great military power, and it does whatever it pleases without any deterrent from another force.

Thus, we say that when Allah *Glorified is He* commanded us to prepare military force, this does not mean that He pushed us towards the battlefield, but rather, He wanted to preserve peace between us and our opponents. Clearly, you never attack someone who is stronger than you. The verse thus wants peace, and not terror as is claimed by those who reject this verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and Allah is not a transgressor (*zhallam*) against His servants' (*Fussilat:* 46). The word *zhallam* (transgressor) follows the *fa'al* lexical pattern. This means that it is the intensified active form of the word *zhulm* (wrongdoing), just as the word *qattaal* (fighter) is the intense active form of the word *qatil* (killer).

The Arabic language deals with sentences of affirmation in a different pattern than sentences of negation. In the case of affirmation, mentioning the intense quality implies the less intense quality still exists. For instance, when you say that a person is *allaam* (a very knowledgeable scholar), you are intrinsically implying that he has the basic attribute of being *'alim* (a scholar). Traditionally, however, in the case of negation, negating the intense quality does not automatically imply the negation of the lesser basic form of the quality.(1)

Now, does this mean that the verse we are studying only negated that Allah *Glorified is He* has the intense quality of transgression (*zhallam*), while not negating the basic attribute of transgression (*zhalim*)? Indeed, the answer is no, as Allah *Glorified is He* is glorified above any wrongdoing. The explanation is that, in the verse, Allah says: '...against His servants' (*Fussilat:* 46). The verse used the plural word 'servants' instead of the word 'servant'. Therefore, the verse negated that Allah *Glorified is He* is a transgressor (*zhallam*) against all his servants, so using the intensified word *zhallam* is suitable with using the plural word 'servants'. So, the rejection of this meaning of *zhallam* (transgressor) still implies the negation of any form of wrongdoing by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good; and whoever does evil, does so to his own harm' (*Fussilat:* 46). Therefore, Allah is a just judge between us and our own selves. This means that we are not opponents to Him, as He will issue rulings with or against every soul according to a just scale. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِلَيۡهِ يُرَدُّ عِلۡمُ ٱلسَّاعَةِۚ وَمَا تَخۡرُجُ مِن ثَمَرَٰتٖ مِّنۡ أَكۡمَامِهَا وَمَا تَحۡمِلُ مِنۡ أُنثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ
إِلَّا بِعِلۡمِهِۦۚ وَيَوۡمَ يُنَادِيهِمۡ أَيۡنَ شُرَكَآءِي قَالُوٓاْ ءَاذَنَّٰكَ مَا مِنَّا مِن شَهِيدٖ ﴿٤٧﴾

Knowledge of the Hour belongs solely to Him and no crop comes out of its sheath, nor does any female conceive or give birth, without His knowledge. On the Day He asks them, 'Where are My partners?' they will answer, 'We admit to You that none of us can see [them]' [47] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 47)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'To Him alone returns the knowledge of the Hour,' and this means that only Allah *Glorified is He* knows of the time of the Hour. The

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(1) For instance, negating that a person is a very knowledgeable scholar (*allaam*) does not negate that he is still a scholar (*'alim*).

Hour is the Day of Resurrection, and His Knowledge is the knowledge of when it will happen. This is one of the examples of the knowledge that Allah *Glorified is He* has reserved for Himself and has not disclosed to anyone. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: '…"None but He (Allah) will reveal it in its time. Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; (and) it will only fall upon you suddenly." They will ask you – as if you could gain insight into its (mystery) by dint of persistent inquiry!(1) Say: "Knowledge thereof rests with my Lord alone; but (of this) most people are unaware" ' (*al-A'raf:* 187).

There are great wisdoms in the concealment of the Last Hour. The most important objective is to prevent people from becoming careless, and to prevent the deceitful, the whimsical and the lustful people from persisting in their lust. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* prepares everybody for it so that everybody hurries to do good deeds. Indeed, no one is assured of the time he will leave the abode of deeds in this worldly life, to enter the Abode of Reckoning in the Hereafter. In fact, a person's reckoning and resurrection start when he dies.(1)

This is why we have said that fulfilling religious obligations is connected to a specific time span. For example, the noon prayer is performed from the moment the sun is at its zenith to the moment when the shadows are twice as long as their objects. So, whoever prays during this period, will have fulfilled his duty. Why is it then preferable to perform these prayers as early as possible? This is because a person is not guaranteed to live until the end of the given period of prayer. If a person dies a second after the period begins, without intending to hurry for prayer, they will have sinned. This is why, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the most virtuous action, he replied, 'Prayer in its time.' Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'Verily, for all believers, Prayer is indeed a sacred duty linked to particular times (of day)' (*an-Nisa':* 103).

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(1) *This Hadith has been narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik may Allah be pleased with him in 'Ajluni's book Kashf Al-khafa', under the number 2618. Its full version is, 'Remember death frequently, for if you remember it in prosperity, its remembrance will make you loathe the prosperity, and if you remember it in poverty, it will ease the poverty for you. Death is Resurrection; when someone dies, his Resurrection comes.' Ad-Daylami has narrated this Hadith on the authority of Anas in Musnad Al-firdaws [1117] with the following wording, 'When one of you dies, his Resurrection comes; so worship Allah Glorified is He as if you were seeing Him, and repent before Him every hour.'*

(2) *Muslim, in the Kitab Al-Iman of his Sahih (no. 85) has rnarrated the following Hadith, from 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: 'I asked the Prophet Muhammad peace and the blessings be upon him about the most virtuous action. He said: "Prayer in its time".'*

The same concept is true for pilgrimage. Sometimes you may see a man who is affluent and is able to spend on the expenses of pilgrimage, yet he does not perform it, wishfully delaying it to a later time. Is that person sure of living until that time?

Allah *Glorified is He* has concealed the time of the Hour and the time of each person's death. He kept this knowledge concealed from all of His creation for a wise purpose. Resurrection and death are a reality. Death is like an arrow that is imminently destined to hit you, and your life will last for as long as the arrow travels and until the time it reaches you.

Therefore, the concealment of the knowledge of the Hour is the clearest of demonstrations of this world's fragility. Announcing that it might come at any time will make you prepared for it. Thus, you should anticipate it and expect it in every instant. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Blessed is He (Allah) in whose hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything: It is He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test (and thus show) which of you is best in conduct,' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2).

He has made death more important for His creatures than life, although life comes first. This is because it will always reside in every person's mind and thoughts. Therefore, you must accept life with caution and not be deceived by it. Expect death to arrive at any moment. It is out of Allah's Mercy for His servants that He has made great and small signs that indicate that the Hour is drawing near. This will frighten people and awaken them from their ignorance of the Resurrection.

Allah *Glorified is He* then continued in the verse we are studying: 'And no fruit bursts forth from its calyx,' (*Fussilat:* 47). The word 'calyx' denotes the green cover that envelops the fruit. Then it gradually splits until the fruit emerges from it. For example, you may see a rose hidden in a green sheath before blossoming, as if keeping its eyes closed before finally opening its lids and emerging from its cover.

‘And no female ever conceives, nor ever gives birth, except with His knowledge’ (*Fussilat:* 47) – these are all things which are hidden from people but are not hidden from Allah *Glorified is He*. Female conception is a well-known phenomenon, where a female’s ovum is fertilised with a male spermatozoon, and this meeting results in conception, which is Allah’s gift in any case. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills’ (*ash-Shura:* 49).

Even barrenness and infertility may constitute a Divine gift in the eyes of a person who ponders and seeks wisdom. When you look at a child who has killed one of his parents, or a child who has brought so much shame upon his family that they wish that death frees them from him, or when you look at the disobedience of some children, you should understand that infertility itself can be a blessing and a gift from Allah *Glorified is He* that requires gratitude. Thus, a servant should be grateful if they are infertile, just as another servant is grateful for the birth of children.

You may observe that the Quran puts the female first in this verse. This is because Arabs in ancient times did not desire female daughters. This is why the Quran has assigned a lofty reward for the man who raises daughters and treats them well, and for those who respect Allah’s preordainment to bear daughters. It is as if a voice from Allah *Glorified is He* were calling to him, ‘My servant, for as long as you accept My gift, blessing, greatness and majesty, I shall bestow upon each of your daughters a husband who will fulfil your hopes in her, and will be more faithful to you than your own sons.’

We have seen wonders in the issue of bearing children that illustrate and affirm Allah’s absolute Power. We have seen married couples who are unable to conceive, and were then separated by divorce. Then, the man married another woman and had children with her, and the woman married another man and conceived from him. Thus, conception was impossible between these two individuals in particular.

Contemplating the phenomenon of conception from a rational point of view, it can be found that Allah’s Omnipotence has encompassed it in its four ways. The natural conception occurs between a male and a female. However, Allah *Glorified is He* with His Absolute Omnipotence, created Adam *peace be upon him* without a husband or a wife. *Hawwa'* (Eve) was created from a father but had no mother; whereas 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* had a mother but was fatherless. At times, there may be a husband and wife and yet the conception does not occur. All such cases affirm the Absolute Omnipotence of Allah *Glorified is He* as regards the creation of beings.

In the Quranic verse: '...On the Day He asks them, "Where are My partners?"...' (*Fussilat:* 47) It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who says: '...My partners...' which refers to those false deities ascribed to Him. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...whom you imagined...' (*al-An'am:* 22), to which they reply: '...We confess to You...' (*Fussilat:* 47) that is, we have told and informed You. The Arabic word *'adhannaka* (told and informed you) is derived from the word *udhun* (ear) which is the organ of hearing, which receives speech signals and through which knowledge is acquired, thereby it is deemed as the first means of acquiring knowledge.

Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the earth: 'obeying its Sustainer, as in truth it must' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2) that is, it listened to the commands. '...[T]hey will answer, "We admit to You"…' (*Fussilat:* 47) that is, we informed You: '...that none of us can see [them]' (*Fussilat:* 47), that is, none of us witnesses that You have partners. Instead of Allah *Glorified is He* declaring Himself far from having partners, He *Glorified is He* says: '...My partners...' (*Fussilat:* 47) leaving it to them to reject the existence of His partners. They only believe that Allah *Glorified is He* has no partners when it is too late, as though the word 'partner' has never crossed their minds.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَضَلَّ عَنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَدْعُونَ مِن قَبْلُ ۖ وَظَنُّوا۟ مَا لَهُم مِّن مَّحِيصٍ ﴿٤٨﴾

The gods they invoked before will have vanished away; they will know that there is no escape [48] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 48)

The Quranic phrase: '...will have vanished away...' (*Fussilat:* 48) indicates that they will turn away and get lost from them. 'The gods they invoked before...' (*Fussilat:* 48) alludes to the false deities whom they ascribed as partners to Allah *Glorified is He*. They will know for certain and be assured, as maintained in the verse: '...they will know…' (*Fussilat:* 48) that '...that there is no escape' (*Fussilat:* 48). They will find neither retreat nor flight that would save them from chastisement; one looks here and there but does not find a place of refuge or a hideout. After all, the disaster is imminent and there is no rescue from it. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

لَّا يَسْـَٔمُ ٱلْإِنسَـٰنُ مِن دُعَآءِ ٱلْخَيْرِ وَإِن مَّسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ فَيَـُٔوسٌ قَنُوطٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

Man never tires of asking for good, but if evil touches him he loses all hope and becomes despondent [49] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 49)

This verse clarifies that 'man,' which refers here to the disbeliever, is never weary of '…asking for good…' (*Fussilat:* 49). He keeps supplicating for good things for himself; such as obtaining wealth, children, and health. A person may ask Allah to help him have an apartment to live in, for instance. Yet, once he is granted the apartment, he prays for a small villa. Even as Allah *Glorified is He* fulfils his wish, he desires for a tower!

Man is created with a yearning for material wealth and is motivated by greed. 'Only dust can fill man's eyes, but Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive those who repent.'(1) Indeed, few are those who are satisfied with what they are given.

Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* was given abundant wealth. However, when one day, sitting on the roof of his house, he found a flock of golden locusts, he tucked his cloth and began to collect the locusts in it. Allah *Glorified is He* called to him and said, 'O Dawud (David), did I not give you enough?' He replied: 'Yes, Lord, but I cannot get enough of Your favours.'(2)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, The Book of Tendering Hearts, Hadith no. (6438), and by Abu Nuaym Al-Asbahani in Hilyatu-Awliya (1/337). Both mentioned the narration of Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr who said in his sermon given in Mecca, 'O people, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to say, "if man is given a valley filled with gold, he will wish for a second, and if he is given a second, he will wish for a third; only dust can fill man's stomach, and Allah will forgive those who repent."'*

(2) *peace be upon him. It was narrated by Imam Rafi'i in his book At-Tadwin fi Akhbar Qazwin, on the authority of Abu Hurayra, that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Once, when Ayyub (Job) was bathing naked, golden locusts fell on* =

If this were the condition of Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* how would it be then for the ordinary believer? On the other hand, how could it be for the disbelievers, and whoever has similar traits, about whom the following verse was revealed: 'And neither do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Sustainer, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!' (*al-Kahf:* 36) In another verse, they are mentioned to have said: '..."the ultimate good awaits me with Him"...' (*Fussilat:* 50).

Thus, 'man' here alludes to the unbeliever,(1) whereas for the believers they are required to be satisfied with what they are given. Guiding us to have contentment as one of our traits, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed his uncle Al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib*:* 'The little that makes you satisfied is better than the abundant that makes you restless.'(2)

In another Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'We are a people who do not eat until we feel hungry, and when we eat, we do not eat to our fill.'(3) Further, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'One third of it (one's stomach) is for eating, one third is for drinking, and one third should be left for breathing air.'(4)

= *him, so he began to collect them into his clothes. Allah Glorified is He called him and said, "Oh Ayyub (Job), did I not give you enough, more than what you see?" He said, "Yes, my Lord, but I cannot get enough of your goods."'*

(1) This is the opinion of As-Suddi. It is said that 'man' here refers to Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, or to 'Utba and Shayba, the sons of Rabi'a, and Umayya ibn Khalaf. (This is narrated by *Qurtubi* in his *Tafsir* [9/6039]). See also Ibn Al-Jawzi's interpretation of the verse in his *Zad Al-Masir*.

(2) Narrated by *At-Tabari* in his *Tahdhib Al-Athar* [5/478, *Hadith* no. 2494] on the authority of Abdullah ibn Bisr Al-Mazini, who said, 'Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his uncle *Al-Abbas*, "O uncle, the little that exhausts you is better than the abundant that makes you restless,"' that is, the little that tires you. Al-Bayhaqi, in his Dalai'l *An-Nubuwwa* [5/375], narrated on the authority of Abu Umama al-Bahili who narrated, 'Tha'laba ibn Hatib came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, "Oh Allah's Messenger, ask Allah to make me wealthy." Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, "woe on you, Tha'laba, the little that makes you grateful is better than the abundant which you cannot forbear."'

(3) This is a well-known saying, falsely attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but its meaning is correct.

(4) Miqdam ibn Ma'di Yakrib narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'man has never filled a container more evil than his own stomach. A few morsels=

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* in a Qudsi Hadith says: ‘I will provide – according to My measure – him who is content with what I have preordained for him.’(1)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us different ways of preventing many diseases, and gives us solutions for developing the economies of nations. In earlier times, physicians did not understand the relation between heavy breathing and the stomach. They believed that only the lungs were responsible for breathing, while food, which rests in the stomach, had no bearing on the rate of respiration. In modern times, nonetheless, they understand that both are intimately related, for if the stomach is filled with food, it exerts pressure upon the diaphragm, suppressing the lungs and weakening the heart.

However, their prior fallacious perception was corrected by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who taught us how to combine the various components of life such as food, water and air, guiding Muslims not to be voracious, ‘Man has never filled a container worse than his own stomach.’(2)

Returning home from work so hungry that you cannot wait until the food is ready, you may eat whatever leftovers you find, be it even a loaf of bread, some watercress and some cheese. Surprisingly, you find this simple food

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= that keep his back upright are sufficient for him. If, however, he cannot help doing it, let him keep one third of it for food, one third for drink, and one third for his breathing.’ This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad [4/132], At-Tirmidhi in his *Sunnan* [2380], and Ibn Majah in his *Sunnan* [3349].

(1) In his book *Ihya Ulum Ad-Din* [4/344], Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali recorded several Hadiths regarding contentment with Allah’s Decree and Predestination, some of which are the following: ‘When someone is content with a little provision from Allah, Allah *Glorified is He* will be content with little of his work.’ Another Hadith states, ‘If Allah loves one of His servants, He tries him; if the servant forbears, Allah chooses him, but if he is happy, Allah makes him one of the elect.” There is no firm proof, however, that the Hadith mentioned by the Sheikh is authentically attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* neither is it ever mentioned in the reliable books [Adil Abu Al-Maati].

(2) *This is the previously mentioned Hadith on the authority of Miqdam ibn Ma'di Yakrib. It was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad [4/132], At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan [2380], and by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan [3349].*

tasty because of eating while hungry, which makes you agreeably accept everything that you can eat.

Once an Arab man of healthy nature stated, ‘Hunger is a condiment.’(1) It is also said, ‘A hungry person’s food is wholesome and a tired person’s bed is cosy,’ that is, comfortable. Surely, a tired person falls into deep sleep, even if he is lying on pebbles or on a mat, whereas he who is not tired, rolls in his bed unable to fall asleep, even if he is lying on silk material. Therefore, pondering on the principles of Islam, one can find solutions for our economy’s difficulties and for our endless troubles.

Islam teaches one to be content with what one possesses and not to strive towards what is beyond one’s possibilities. Yet if one does, one will be like the one who drinks seawater, the more one drinks, the thirstier one becomes.

Reporting the other side of the disbeliever’s nature, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘...but if evil touches him he loses all hope and becomes despondent’ (2) (*Fussilat:* 49). If evil fortune befalls the disbeliever, ‘…he loses all hope…’ (*Fussilat:* 49). To reveal how much depression he feels, the exaggerated form of the word *ya’s* (despair) is used. It signifies the person who has lost all hope and optimism, and *ya’s* (despair) is a trait of the soul. Nonetheless, the word: ‘…despondent’ (*Fussilat:* 49) (*qanut*) represents an exaggerated form of the word *qanit*, but it is a quality of the body. This is because giving oneself up to *qunut* (despondence) is the outward expression of despair reflected on the body, especially on the face. Hence, a person dust-stained, sullen, and shivering is likely to be of the same condition as the despondent disbeliever mentioned in the verse. As for the believer, his face radiates wellness, light, and faith; and thus he is merry, joyous, openhearted, smiling, and happy.

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Asm'ai on the authority of 'Uthman Ash-Shahham, who narrated it from Abu Raja Al-Ataridi, who said, ‘When we heard that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him started killing, we ran away and grilled the leg of a hare by burying it. Then, we let our camels kneel down on the buried hare, and I will never forget that meal.’ Whenever Al-Asm'ai was reminded of this incident, he would say, ‘Yes, hunger is a condiment, and moderation is surely the slogan of Muslims.’ It was narrated by Al-Jahiz in his Al-Bukhala' [1/76].*

(2) *The word ‘evil’ (sharr) in the verse refers to poverty and sickness [(Tafsir Al-Qurtubi), 9/6039]. According to Ibn Kathir, it refers to trials and poverty [4/104].*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَلَئِنْ أَذَقْنَٰهُ رَحْمَةً مِّنَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ ضَرَّآءَ مَسَّتْهُ لَيَقُولَنَّ هَٰذَا لِى وَمَآ أَظُنُّ
ٱلسَّاعَةَ قَآئِمَةً وَلَئِن رُّجِعْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّىٓ إِنَّ لِى عِندَهُۥ لَلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ فَلَنُنَبِّئَنَّ
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِمَا عَمِلُوا۟ وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُم مِّنْ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

Whenever We let him taste some of Our mercy after he has been afflicted, he is sure to say, 'This is all my own doing: I do not think the Hour will ever come, but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, the best reward would await me with Him.' We shall most certainly inform the disbelievers of what they have done and give them a taste of severe torment [50] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 50)

The Quranic verse states: '…he is sure to say, "This is all my own doing"…' (*Fussilat:* 50), that is, 'this is my right, I have deserved it with my work and effort,' so, he denies Allah's Favour upon him. The same words were uttered by Qarun (Korah), as stated in the verse: '…"This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me"...' (*al-Qasas:* 78). In reply, it is as though Allah *Glorified is He* told him that if he were given it only by virtue of his knowledge, then let him keep it by virtue of that knowledge! As a consequence, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling…' (*al-Qasas:* 81).

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Nay, surely, man becomes grossly overweening[6] whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient'[7] (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

Gaining in arrogance, man will say, as stated in the Quran: '…but even if I were to be taken back to my Lord…' (*Fussilat:* 50) that is, in the Hereafter. It means, the disbeliever maintains that even with the assumption that there will be resurrection and recompense, '…"the best reward would await me with Him"...' (*Fussilat:* 50). He thinks that just as Allah *Glorified is He* granted him good things in this world, He will give him even more abundantly in the Hereafter.

Informing the wrongdoer of his evil deeds is the first stage of his torment, as stated in the verse: '…We shall most certainly inform the disbelievers of what they have done…' (*Fussilat:* 50). He will be reminded of his misdeeds, which will be counted, in preparation for his reckoning. In the meantime, he knows that there is no return to the worldly life to make amends to his Lord.

This is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran: '…he prays "O my Sustainer! Let me return, let me return [to life] [99] so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed [a foretime]!"[100]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 99-100), to which Allah *Glorified is He* replies: '…Nay, it is indeed but a [meaningless] word that he utters: for behind those [who leave the world] there is a barrier [of death] until the Day when all will be raised from the dead!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 100)

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '…and if they were brought back [to life], they would return to the very thing which was forbidden to them…' (*al-An'am:* 28).

The Quranic verse: '…and give them a taste of severe torment' (*Fussilat:* 50) refers to harsh punishment which is given various descriptions in the Quran. It is at times described as: '…grievous suffering…' (*al-Mulk:* 28), and at other times as: '…shameful suffering…' (*al-Mujadala:* 16), that is, suffering inflicting shame and humiliation. Thus, painful suffering fits the crime and nature of some of those punished, whereas for others, shameful suffering is more fitting, for it demolishes their arrogance, even without physical pain.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَآ أَنۡعَمۡنَا عَلَى ٱلۡإِنسَٰنِ أَعۡرَضَ وَنَـَٔا بِجَانِبِهِۦ
وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ فَذُو دُعَآءٍ عَرِيضٖ (٥١)

Whenever We are gracious to man, he goes away haughtily, but, as soon as evil touches him, he turns to prolonged prayer [51] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 51)

The Quranic verse: '…he goes away haughtily…' (*Fussilat:* 51) means, he turns away from Allah *Glorified is He* being granted what he asked for and no longer in need of Him. Many people possess this quality. Someone in need of your help regarding some issue or difficult situation may wait outside your door day and night. Once his need is fulfilled, he may forget to even say 'thank you'! The poet(1) has artistically put it:

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(1) These verses were composed by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *Allah rest his soul.*

Those who need you, follow you meekly,
But when they get what they need, they leave you and hasten away,
When someone reviles you, the best among them
Will stand still, not rejecting, but [also] not inventing lies [about you],
Do not abandon righteousness however much they hide,
For Allah's reward is greater and more abundant.

Remember that those who refuse to acknowledge your help are of most profit to you, for the one who rewards your charity is Allah *Glorified is He* Who gives rewards according to His measure, unlike people's gifts, which are according to theirs.

Hence, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to his people, as stated in the Quran: 'O my people! No reward do I ask of you for this [message]…' (*Hud:* 51). It means, I deserve to get rewarded for what I do, but I only want to be rewarded from my Lord, for He is the One Who can reward me and evaluate my work.

In the course of this verse, the action of turning away is gradual: '…he goes away…' (*Fussilat:* 51) meaning that he turned his face away, then turned his back '…haughtily …' (*Fussilat:* 51). Thus, he first turned his face away, and then turned his side and his back. The same order is observed in the Quranic verse: '…But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come]: [34] on the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told:] "These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures!"[35]' (*at-Tawba:* 34-35)

These verses are said to have been revealed regarding the one who turns away from the needy with his face first, then his side, and then turns his back towards him. Compensation, then, is paid according to one's deeds and branding is to be inflicted to the degree of one's hoarded wealth.

As the disbeliever is touched by evil, he recourses to prolonged supplication, as stated in the verse: '…but, as soon as evil touches him, he turns to prolonged prayer' (*Fussilat:* 51). His prayers are described as *'Arid* (prolonged and continuous),(1) as can be noticed in the verse, rather than 'long'. Everything has length and width, the former is known to be greater than the latter. Though, the Quran uses width to refer to greatness, as stated in the verse describing paradise: '…a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth…' (*Al-'Imran:* 133). If its width is as vast as the heavens and the earth – which is the greatest measure possible – how great its length is!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

قُلۡ أَرَءَيۡتُمۡ إِن كَانَ مِنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ كَفَرۡتُم بِهِۦ
مَنۡ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنۡ هُوَ فِي شِقَاقِۭ بَعِيدٖ ﴿٥٢﴾

Say [Prophet], 'Have you ever thought, what if this revelation really is from God and you still reject it? Who could be more astray than someone who cuts himself off so far [from God]?' [52] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 52)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is ordered in this verse to say to the disbelievers: '…Have you ever thought…' (*Fussilat:* 52). Think for yourselves and tell me: '…what if this revelation really is from God and you still reject it?' (*Fussilat:* 52) When you deny the Giver of bounty: '…Who could be more astray than someone who cuts himself off so far [from Allah]?' (*Fussilat:* 52) This is to say, no one is more astray than he who does not attribute Favours to the Bestower of Favours, thereby enjoying His Blessings and acting ungratefully towards Him. Hence, the 'who' clause, in the verse, stresses surprise and rejection, for bounty requires gratitude and praise to its Giver.

In other verses, Allah *Glorified is He* demonstrates favours bestowed upon us in a generous and graceful manner, saying: '…and should you try to count Allah's Blessing, you could never compute them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34).

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(1) *Ibn Manzur* in *Lisan Al-'Arab* on the stem of *'-r-d* states, '*'arid* means "abundant," but it is used instead of "abundant" because each of them denotes a different measure.' This view is also maintained by *Al-Qurtubi* in his *Tafsir* [9/6040]. *Ibn 'Abbas* upheld that the word *'arid* in the verse: '…he turns to prolonged prayer' (*Fussilat:* 51) alludes to supplication with humility and pleading.

In the verse, the Arabic word *in* (should) denotes doubt, for man never undertakes the calculation of anything unless it is possible to count. Even with the assumption that you would try to count Allah’s Blessings, you would never be able to compute them. Allah *Glorified is He* refers to His Blessings using the singular form of the word ‘blessing’ rather than the plural ‘blessings’ because when you contemplate just one of Allah’s blessings, you will find it encompassing many other hidden blessings.

This verse is mentioned twice but with different endings; one is: ‘… [And yet,] man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ungrateful!’ (*Ibrahim:* 34), and the other is: ‘…God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of Mercy’ (*an-Nahl:* 18).

Giving blessings has three elements: the blessing itself, its giver, and the one who receives it. The blessing is abundant and incalculable, its Giver *Glorified is He* is much forgiving, and a dispenser of mercy, and he who receives it is persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ungrateful.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is telling His servants not to despair of His Mercy and not to disincline to praying to Him, however much engaged in wrongdoing and stubbornly ungrateful they are, for He is much forgiving, a dispenser of mercy.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

سَنُرِيهِمۡ ءَايَٰتِنَا فِي ٱلۡأٓفَاقِ وَفِيٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمۡ أَنَّهُ
ٱلۡحَقُّۗ أَوَلَمۡ يَكۡفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything? [53] (The Quran, *Fussilat:* 53)

The Arabic particle *sin* ‘shall’ in the phrase: ‘…shall show them …’ (*Fussilat:* 53) denotes the future tense. Therefore, this saying remains truthful and in effect until the Day of Resurrection. In the verse, ‘…Our signs…’ (*Fussilat:* 53), this refers to the cosmic signs proving His Power and His marvellous creation. The word *afaq* '…In every region of the earth…' refers to the farthest place that could be seen with one's eyes.

In this verse, *afaq* (literally horizons) alludes to the heavens and the earth. Hence, the saying 'such and such has a broad horizon,' is used to mean he has deep insight into abstract matters; the wider one's view, the broader one's vision.

Does the Quranic verse: '…shall show them Our signs …' (*Fussilat:* 53) – by its reference to the future – mean that in the past Allah *Glorified is He* has not shown them His signs? No, He did in fact show them many signs, but they ignored and turned a blind eye to them. They were heedless of the verse: 'for, long ago has Our word gone forth to Our servants, the message-bearers, [171] that, they – they indeed – would be succoured, [172] and that, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious! [173]' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

This is the way Allah treats His servants, whom He sends as Messengers. He *Glorified is He* promises to grant them help and victory. Allah *Glorified is He* has neither partners nor opponents to come between Him and His promise.

This verse also teaches us the essentials of warfare and the conditions for victory. Fulfilling such conditions leads to victory, whereas violation of them results in defeat, as Allah's Way necessitates. Therefore, when Muslims lose a battle, it is as a consequence of violating these conditions. When they are vanquished, we do not say, 'Islam has been vanquished,' but rather, 'Muslims were defeated owing to violating the commands of their leader and the conditions of victory.' Defeat is necessary in order to give them a lesson and teach them to obey the commander's orders, for had they become victorious after violating the rules of warfare, they would be careless in executing the commands of their leader.

We learned this lesson in the Battle of Uhud, when the archers disobeyed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who told them to stay in their positions whatever the outcome of the battle is.(1) They craved for temporary material gain, and were allured by the booty when they saw the signs of victory; so they descended and left their positions. In turn, Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* had to simply turn around and encircle the Muslim army from behind, and thereby they were defeated, or at least did not win. Can we, then, say that Islam was defeated?

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(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him appointed 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr as the commander of the archers, who numbered fifty on that day. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him told him, 'Shoot arrows at the cavalry lest they could attack us from behind – whether they are for us or against us – and hold firm on to your place lest*=

Thus, we should correct our understanding of this issue. The army of the Muslims, among whom Prophet Muhammad is present, may be defeated, for it did not follow the means of victory. On such an occasion, we do not say that Islam was defeated, but Muslims disobeyed the orders and thereby deserved to be defeated. So, in case you, O Muslims, search for the reasons for your defeat and backwardness, you will reach the conclusion that your deviation from the Divine Way of Guidance is the main reason behind all of that. This is the true reason for defeat. It is well proven throughout history.

In the battle of Hunayn, some Muslims said, (1) 'we shall not be defeated today, not on account of our being few.' Who said this? Abu Bakr himself said it when he saw the numbers of Muslims reaching ten thousand. A bit vain with their great numbers, Allah taught them a lesson, so they were defeated in the beginning; but then Allah's Mercy descended upon them, reviving their morale, and giving them victory in the end.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers and they proved of no avail whatever to you – for the earth, despite all its vastness, became [too] narrow for you and

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= *they could approach us from your side.' [(Sirat Ibn Hisham) 3/10]. Al-Bayhaqi, in his Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa [3/229], narrated that the archers, after the defeat of the idolaters, left their positions to collect booty and Ibn Jubayr told them, 'Have you forgotten what Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him told you?' They replied, 'We shall go to take our share of booty.' The unbelievers then attacked the Muslims, so Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was left with only twelve men.*

(1) *In his Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa [5/123], Al-Bayhaqi narrated that Rabi ibn Anas said that on the day of Hunayn someone said, 'we shall not be defeated because of our small number' (they numbered twelve thousand). Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him being displeased with that, Allah revealed to him the verse: '...on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers…' (Al-'Imran: 25). This was also narrated by As-Suyuti in Asbab An-Nuzul [p. 138].*

you turned back, retreating: [25] whereupon God bestowed from on high His [gift of] inner peace upon His Apostle and upon the believers, and bestowed [upon you] from on high forces which you could not see, and chastised those who were bent on denying the truth: for such is the recompense of all who deny the truth! [26]' (*at-Tawba:* 25-26)

The defeat that Muslims almost experienced in this war was a lesson, not an expression of Allah's hatred toward His servants, as a poet (1) puts it:

He became harsh only to hold himself back; he who is decisive,
May he sometimes become harsh over him whom he pities.(2)

Therefore, we maintain that if Allah promises victory, He does not come short of fulfilling it, but it is the Muslims who fail to have His promise fulfilled by failing to follow the route to the victory with which they are promised.

However, why do the idolaters persist in their disbelief and obstinacy, closing their eyes to Allah's signs which are so clear? It is because they are masters with temporary power, of which Islam seeks to strip them, putting an end to their mastery and declaring all people equal like the teeth of a comb, where there is no supremacy of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, except in piety.(3)

Salman the Persian, Suhayb the Roman and Bilal the Abyssinian *Allah be pleased with them* were all first rank leaders in Islam, that Prophet Muhammad

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(1) *He is Abu Tammam Habib ibn Aws ibn Al-Harith At-Taai. He was born in Hawran in Syria in the year 188 AH, then he went to Egypt and settled there. Al-M'utasim brought him to Baghdad and made him a leading poet of his time. In his poetry is power and eloquence. The books he wrote include Fuhul Ash-Shu'ara and Diwan A-Hamasa. He died in Mawsil in the year 231 AH, forty three years of age.*

(2) *This is a line from Abu Tammam's poem composed in the kamil meter, consisting of six lines.*

(3) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad [5/411] from Abu Nadra, who heard it from one of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. It was also narrated by Abu Nuaym in his Hilyatul-Al-Awliya' [3/100] on the authority of Abu Nadra, who heard it from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah, who said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him gave a sermon in one of the Tashriq days (three days following the Feast of Sacrifice), saying, "Verily, your Lord is One, and your Father is one, and verily no Arab is privileged over a non-Arab, a non-Arab over an Arab, a red man over a black man, a black man over a red man, except in piety." '*

peace and blessings be upon him even said, ‘Salman is one of us, the people of (my) household.’(1)

Thus, kinship and lineage should be related to Islam. At the time when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declared Salman as one of the people of his House, Abu Lahab, his uncle, was banished from Allah’s mercy due to his disbelief!

We learned this lesson from the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* with his son. In spite of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* being eager for the salvation of this son and invoking Allah for him, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches him the lesson: ‘[God] answered: “O Nuh (Noah), he is not of your family, for, surely, he was not righteous in his conduct. Therefore, do not ask of Me that of which you have no knowledge: thus, do I admonish you lest you become one of those who are unaware [of what is right]”’ (*Hud:* 46).

It is clear in the verse that filiation and kinship are not based on family and blood ties, but on religion, guidance, and belief. Filiation is based on a mutual desire to do good and to follow the true path.

The group who attacked and fought against Islam were protecting their sovereignty and high position in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, they gathered and united against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers. This can be observed during the period of the siege which they imposed upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in *Shi‘b*, closing all the windows on him and his followers, cutting from them all sources of livelihood, until they were forced to eat carrion and tree leaves.(2)

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of ‘Amr ibn ‘Awf Al-Muzani who said, ‘Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him drew the trench in the year when the Battle of the Trench took place. It extended from Ajam As-Samar near the stationary place of Banu Harith to Midad. Being fit and strong, each of the Immigrants and the Helpers sought to claim Salman Al-Farisi [the Persian] as their own. Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, “Salman is one of us, the people of (my) Household.”’ This was rnarrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa [3/418], and Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak [3/598]. Adh-Dhahabi, nonetheless, deemed its chain of narrators as weak, having Kathir ibn ‘Abdullah as one of the narrators.*

(2) *Al-Bayhaqi narrated this story in his Dalai'l An-Nubuwwa [1/315], recounting the terrible suffering that befell them, saying, ‘... until one could hear the voices of their children screaming behind the Shi‘b from hunger.’*

Then they tried to kill him more than once and harshly persecuted him, his family, and his Companions. Yet, far were they from harming him when Allah watches over and protects him. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to tell them not to think that their efforts to hinder the call to Islam in the Arabian Peninsula would be fruitful! Surely, the call would spread not only over the Peninsula but also over all the horizons of the world! 'We shall show them Our signs in every region…' (*Fussilat:* 53).

The call to Islam was competent enough to prevail for several reasons. Most importantly, the Arabs by their nature were people of war and combat and did not need to be trained in the art of warfare. Accordingly, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to fight, he did not establish a military academy, nor did he train anyone in fighting. Instead, he found people who were already prepared to go to war, knowledgeable in its ways and methods. Whenever one of them heard a war cry, he would rush towards it; this is because Arab tribes were in perpetual war. One of their wars, for example, lasted for forty years.(1) Secondly, the Arabs were wandering nomadic people. They knew no homeland and no rest. An Arab's house was on his camel's back; he would pitch it wherever he stopped and anywhere water and grass could be found. Not connected to a homeland, the Arabs were ready to take Islam to all horizons of the earth and all regions of the world.

It is also not by chance that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* happened to be illiterate, born into an illiterate nation who did not know how to read and write and who were uncivilised and had no culture. Although these traits represent shortcomings for other nations, in the case of the Muslim *Ummah* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they are deemed as an honour and a distinction. Had the Arabs been a people of knowledge, culture, and civilisation, Islam would have been perceived as only a civilizational leap.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu 'Ubayda Muammar ibn Al-Muthanna in his Dibaj, stating, 'The war of the tribes of Baghid Abs and Dhubyan because of Dahis and Ghabra' lasted for about forty years.' It broke out on account of a horse race between two horses named Dahis and Ghabra'; the stakes were one hundred camels, according to Ibn Abd Rabbuh in Al-Aqd Al-Farid.*

These three things paved the way for the victory and prevalence of Islam over all horizons of the world. It is as if Allah were telling the disbelievers and those who opposed His religion, resisted His Messenger and ignored His words: ‘for, long ago has Our word gone forth to Our servants, the message-bearers, [171] that, they – they indeed – would be succoured, [172] and that, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious! [173]’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) Allah *Glorified is He* shall show them other signs which they will never forget and by virtue of which Islam will be victorious and will spread in the horizons of the world, east and west.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* depicts a situation which makes us laugh and enrages them. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘If anyone thinks that Allah will not succour him in this world and in the life to come, let him reach out to heaven by any [other] means and [thus try to] make headway: and then let him see whether this scheme of his will indeed do away with the cause of his anguish’ (*al-Hajj:* 15). The intended meaning is, let him bind himself to the sky with a rope, then cut the rope and come down like someone who has been hanged. Afterwards, let him see whether his fury will pass; the verse implies that he will die and perish, but his fury will not end.

Consider how Islam, in its beginning, started among the poor and slaves, to be followed by the powerful and the wealthy. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to preach among the people of Ta’if, they met him with oppression and mockery. No one protected him or stood by his side except Mut'am ibn ‘Adi,(1) who was a disbeliever. Nevertheless, Allah *Glorified is He* used him to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘And none can comprehend Your Sustainer’s forces save Him alone…’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). Similarly, during the *Hijra*, he took as his guide Abdullah ibn Urayqit,(2) who was also an unbeliever.

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(1) *Muta’m ibn ‘Adi was one of Quraysh’s allies and chiefs. It was he who sheltered Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when the latter returned from Ta’if, and rescued Sa‘d ibn 'Ubada from the hands of Quraysh after they had caught him when performing ‘Umra [Musa'b Az-Zubayri, (Nasab Quraysh)]. He also snatched and tore the document of the Quraysh related to the siege of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in Shi‘b and cutting him off from the rest of the world [An-Nuwayri, (Nihayat Al-Arab fi Funun Al-Adab)].*

(2) *He was the guide of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and Abu Bakr during their higra (migration) to Medina. He followed his people’s religion; I have not=*

Then He *Glorified is He* tells them to look at the land of Islam and the land of unbelief; Islam began from Mecca, the Mother of Villages, and its surroundings; now it is conquering the entire earth, east, and west. The land of Islam is growing, and the land of unbelief is shrinking. ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never yet seen how We visit the earth [with Our punishment], gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon? For, [when] God judges, there is no power that could repel His judgment…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41). Did they not learn a lesson from that: ‘…For, [when] God judges, there is no power that could repel His judgment...’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41).

Could there be any doubt that Allah helps His Religion? Did this illiterate nation not conquer the greatest civilisations on earth of the time – the Persian civilisation in the East and the Roman civilisation in the West – simultaneously and in a short period? Despite their military techniques and skills in warfare, which the Arabs did not have and did not master, they nevertheless became victorious!

It was narrated that elephants were used in their wars, of which the Arabs knew nothing. However, Allah inspired Sa‘d ibn Abu Waqqas to do a trick by which he would overcome the elephants. He learned that the elephant’s trunk is its weak point, so he ordered special swords to be made, with which warriors would strike the elephants’ trunks, thus bringing them down.(1)

It was only a matter of half a century before Islam entered all these countries, east, and west, finding in them supporters and followers. Some embraced Islam out of piety and conviction, whereas others – because they found in it what they had been looking for: justice and tolerance, as opposed to the oppression of the rulers, and the abundance of injustice and perversion.

= *seen his name mentioned among the Companions except in Dhahabi’s (Tajrid). 'Abd Al-Ghani Al-Muqaddasi stated in his Sira that he does not seem to have converted to Islam; An-Nawawi in his Tahdhib Al-Asmaa upheld the same view [(Al-Isaba fi Ma'rifati As-Sahaba) 2/100].*

(1) *In the section on the elephant’s trunk, in his Kitab Al-Hayawan, Al-Jahiz states, ‘On the day of Qadisiyya, Zuhara ibn Juya asked, “Is it impossible to kill this animal?” They told him that it was possible – by hitting its trunk. Therefore, he charged on them until he became close; then he approached an elephant, and each of them attacked the other. He then struck its trunk and it fell, and the enemy retreated.’*

All such signs can be inferred from the verse: ‘We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth…’ (*Fussilat:* 53). The Islamic conquest, which spread throughout the world, is the foremost of signs. You could not prevent this extensive spread because Allah *Glorified is He* promised it to the believers and the Messengers. Such promise was not made in secret, but it is declared in the Quran, to be recited and promulgated until the Day of Resurrection. Allah took it upon Himself to keep and fulfil His promise, even though people record their own rights on other people so that they will not forget them, they do not do the same concerning others’ rights on them. Being given by Allah *Glorified is He* such promise will be fulfilled come what may.

Another meaning inferred from the verse: ‘We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth…’ (*Fussilat:* 53) is that victory is in the offing. Muslims, in the beginning, were persecuted and were not yet allowed to fight back, that some of them had even died before Allah’s promise of victory was fulfilled. Nonetheless, once they read the verse in question, they knew that victory was coming even if they died before witnessing its fruition.

It is clear that Allah *Glorified is He* did not command Muslims to fight until belief and faith struck firm roots in their souls and hearts. One of Prophet Muhammad’s Companions asked him, ‘Is it true that what stands between me and Paradise is that I fight them and they kill me?’ To which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘Yes indeed!’ In turn, the man threw down the date which he had been chewing, and hurried to the battlefield, hastening to his martyrdom. It was because faith was deeply rooted in his heart, telling him that he would go to a better place, and that he was about to enter paradise, as wide as the sky and the earth.(1)

The Arabic future particle *sin* (shall) in the verse: ‘...We shall show them our signs...’ (*Fussilat:* 53) means He keeps bestowing upon us endless gifts until the Last Day, which will be the greatest sign. Allah *Glorified is He* shall show them His signs at all times, which will be in favour of this religion bringing about victory to its followers in every region of the earth. The Quranic phrase: '...in themselves...' (*Fussilat:* 53) signifies the signs found in oneself, one's person, flesh, blood, soul, limbs and organs; in every cell of one's body is a sign to contemplate.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [Hadith no. 3740] from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah who narrated, ‘A man once asked Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him on the day of Uhud, “Can you see where I will be if I am killed?” He replied, “In Paradise”. Thus, the man threw the dates in his hand and fought until he was killed.’ The same narration was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih [3518].*

Allah *Glorified is He* created man from clay, and then informed us of the stages of his creation. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not a scientist nor did he know anatomy, or embryology; he was Divinely informed about these. Modern science then came to affirm what Allah *Glorified is He* tells us regarding the creation of man from clay, procreation through humble fluid, and developmental stages from a blood clot, then a clinging substance, then a foetus, then bones, until the bones are covered with flesh.

Wonders and marvellous things in ourselves, of which we had no idea, are revealed to us every day by virtue of knowledge. Reading the latest discoveries of science on the human body, one finds in himself a wondrous world and a firmly and delicately built structure. Truthful is what the poet composes (1):

You think that you are but a small body,
But in you, a great world is hidden.(2)

Some wonders of creation were previously discussed, such as body temperature. It is normally thirty-seven degrees for those who live on the equator and who live near the two poles alike. Notwithstanding this fact, the temperature inside the body does not change, but even each organ is kept at the most convenient temperature. For instance, the liver's temperature is always forty degrees, while the eye's does not exceed nine. Although they are in the same body, their temperatures do not affect one another.

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(1) The poet is *'Abd Al-Latif ibn Ali Fath Allah*, a litterateur from Beirut. He worked as a judge and a mufti, and is known as *Al-Mufti Fath Allah*. He composed fine poetry, published in a *Diwan* (book containing a collection of poems), poetic stories, and a collection of poems in his own handwriting, composed in his youth in the year 1200 AH. He died in the year 1260 AH [*(Al-Mawsua Ash-Shi'riyya)*].

(2) The line is quoted from a poem written in the *Mutaqarib* meter, consisting of six lines.

Consider how blood, the liquid of life, preserves its degree of fluidity in the body, which, if it exceeds, causes haemorrhage; but if it fails to reach that degree, it may cause a clot or paralysis, Allah forbid!

Ponder over how mysterious, powerful, and wondrous the kidneys are. If one of them fails to function properly, the other takes over its task, making up for the lost one. Accordingly, one can live with one kidney if the other one is lost. On this basis, transplantation of kidneys from one person to another is forbidden. The Creator *Glorified is He* has given us two kidneys; each has one million cells, ready to function. Only a hundred thousand of them function, if they stop working, the other hundred thousand take over, and so on.

How do kidneys fail? The scientist explains that it happens when the one hundred thousand cells stop working, but the next hundred thousand do not function and substitute them. Therefore, taking a kidney from one person to another is a crime and a suicide, in my viewpoint. In such case, if the donor's other kidney stops working, he will die.

One of the wonders and Divine signs in man's creation is the skin and whatever it conceals of secrets revealed in the verse, speaking of the punishment of the unbelievers: '…every time their skins are burnt off We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering [in full]…' (*an-Nisa':* 56).

It is deduced from this verse that skin is the organ of feeling, if it burns, the sense of feeling gets lost. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* replaces their skins so that they taste the chastisement which never ceases. It was not until before the World War that this fact was known worldwide. The Germans discovered that the skin is the organ of feeling, based on the evidence that when you receive an injection, you only feel pain the moment your skin is pierced by the needle, and then you stop feeling it. The Quran told us about this wonder long before the whole world could know it.

Furthermore, one of Allah's wonders is the natural pharmacy in our bodies, which cures every emerging illness. This is inferred from the verse: '...out of an embryonic lump complete [in itself] and yet incomplete...' (*al-Hajj:* 5). *Al-Mudgha Al-Mukhallaqa* (the formed lump of flesh) is that from which man's internal and external body organs have been formed and is referred to as ‘complete’; whereas ‘incomplete’ refers to that which remains in the body as a substitute, making up for what it lacks and curing its illnesses. For example, one of the modern ways to cure wounds and ulcers is for them to be left to the natural healing ability of the body, without recourse to chemical substances that leave traces on the skin.

Observe one of your limbs, or any of your body’s systems. Consider how balanced and straight man is made, how balanced, and erect he becomes. Look at the palm of your hand, at its fingers, symmetry, regularity, and flexibility.

Ponder over the digestive or respiratory system. Reflect on how your heart, which is merely a muscle not exceeding the size of your fist, works unstoppably from birth to death. These signs, wonders, and mysteries show the Omnipotence and marvellous creation of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

Allah will keep showing His signs at all times as stated in the verse: ‘…We shall show them Our signs…’ (*Fussilat:* 53) so that every day we discover and contemplate more marvellous signs in His creation, in every region of the earth and in ourselves. On reading the Quran, one finds it encompassing past, present, and future: ‘Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never yet seen how We visit the earth [with Our punishment], gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon...’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41). With respect to the future, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth…’ (*Fussilat:* 53).

The Arabic particle *sawfa* (shall) is used in the Quran to signify the distant future, alluding to the incidents occurring in the Hereafter. This is clear in the verse: ‘But in time you will come to know who it is that [in this world] shall be visited by suffering which will cover him with disgrace, and upon whom long-lasting suffering shall fall [in the life to come]!’ (*Hud:* 39)

The future tense of a verb whose subject is Allah *Glorified is He* is different from one whose subject is man. For Allah *Glorified is He* Time whether past, present, or future – is one and the same. Look at the verse: ‘Allah’s judgment is [bound to] come: do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent...’ (*an-Nahl:* 1); it implies the Day of Resurrection despite the past tense in the Arabic text.

Some orientalists accused the Quran of being inconsistent, claiming that it uses the verb ‘come’ in the past tense, whereas the verb ‘...do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent!’ is used in the future tense. It should be noted that Allah *Glorified is He* to whom belongs time in its entirety, is the One speaking here. He *Glorified is He* uses the past form of the verb ‘come’ on account of His Omnipotence and Unity, given that no one can prevent Him from doing it. Hence, the Resurrection being undeniable truth, He *Glorified is He* uses the past tense to allude to it, as if it has already happened.

The Quranic verse: ‘...We shall show them Our signs...’ (*Fussilat:* 53) is true for all times, therefore each generation finds in the Quran a new gift. Thus, today we know of such Divine signs – in the universe and in humans – which were unknown to people in the Prophet’s time, although they existed and the Quran spoke about them.

I once asked some economists, ‘when was the lift invented?’ They replied, ‘In the year such and such,’ that is, in the twentieth century. Now, read the following verse: ‘And were it not that [with the prospect of boundless riches before them] all people would become one [evil] community, We might indeed have provided for those who [now] deny the Most Gracious roofs of silver for their houses, and [silver] stairways whereon to ascend’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 33). The word ‘stairways’ indicates what is known at present as the lift!

Likewise, the steamboats and the gigantic many-storied ships, which appear in the sea as if they are moving cities! Although they did not exist at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they are mentioned in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘And His are the lofty ships that sail like [floating] mountains through the seas’ (*ar-Rahman:* 24). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* created and He knows what will happen to His creation in the future.

A question may be raised as to why these signs did not appear at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. The answer is that had it happened, the Quran would have become depleted of its miracles and wonders in one century. In this way, the following centuries receiving the Quran will be left with no wondrous gifts or marvellous signs to dazzle and show them the Omnipotence of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants each new generation to receive the Quran in a new way, taking a share of its gifts so as to be assured that He *Glorified is He* Who sent it down in the past contained therein what will happen in the future. This is also to prove that Allah *Glorified is He* is One, with no partner to object to what He says.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth…' (*Fussilat:* 53) which means they will understand that the Quran is the Truth and that Allah is the Truth. Truth indicates something steady and unchangeable, the opposite of which is falsehood, which is unstable and untrue; truth glitters, falsehood falters.

Allah *Glorified is He* portrays truth and falsehood in a material, observable way, saying: '[Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17).

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Truth, and what He says is truthful. Some people see the reason for the truthfulness of His speech, while others doubt, as the signs are hidden from them for some time, until incidents show and prove, by actions and deeds, that it is the truth from Allah *Glorified is He*.

At some point, falsehood may prevail, but in the end, truth must triumph, hence the saying, falsehood rules for an hour, whereas truth rules until the last Hour. The believer who is knowledgeable and who firmly believes in Allah's help does not care if falsehood prevails, for he knows that its victory is transitory. He will patiently wait for the hour when truth prevails, and falsehood departs.

The believer knows that falsehood, when it rises, is one of truth's soldiers. Falsehood is a means of revealing truth to whoever does not know it, for it is through the contrast of opposites that goodness is perceived. Were it not for the suffering and disasters which falsehood inflicts on people, they would not know truth nor yearn for it.

Reflecting on the Quranic formulation: '…brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah's Cause remained supreme…' (*at-Tawba:* 40), one understands that truth is stable, being the foundation upon which all creation rests. Although the word of the unbelievers might rise high, it ends up being lowest, for Allah brings it down.

On the other hand, in the phrase: '...whereas God's Cause remained supreme…' (*at-Tawba:* 40), the word *kalamat* (God's cause) stands as the subject of the sentence, which means it is fundamentally supreme – rather than made as such. Unlike 'the cause of the disbelievers,' it is never the lowest. Thus, not only did Allah make His cause supreme, it is supreme by its nature. Falsehood rises, afflicting people with disasters, to remind and guide people to the truth.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?' (*Fussilat:* 53) Indeed, it is enough that He *Glorified is He* sees and knows, and that nothing can hide from Him. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were telling them that it is not befitting that you should wait for signs in order for you to believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. You should rather believe immediately because what he tells you is from Allah, Who is a witness over him, and no one can dispute with what He says, or overrule what He commands.

When asked as to why Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* was called (As-Siddiq), that is one who confirms the truth, we answer that it is because when he was told that his friend claims prophecy, he merely said without arguing, 'if he says so, then it is true.' Similarly, when he learned about Prophet Muhammad's heavenly ascension, he said the same thing, without waiting for the Quran to be revealed and reassure him of that.

The Quran was revealed to convince the adamant unbelievers and the doubters, but As-Siddiq has the highest degree of certainty and belief. It was enough for him to have known how truthful Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was throughout his earlier life, which stands as evidence of his truthfulness in the meantime.

The word 'witnesses' (*Fussilat:* 53) here alludes to a witness who affirms truth, a judge who judges with it, and an executive power enforcing rulings.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

أَلَآ إِنَّهُمۡ فِي مِرۡيَةٖ مِّن لِّقَآءِ رَبِّهِمۡۗ أَلَآ إِنَّهُۥ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٖ مُّحِيطُۢ ٥٤

Truly, they doubt that they will meet their Lord;
truly He encompasses everything [54]
(The Quran, *Fussilat:* 54)

The Arabic word *ala* (truly) is used to introduce a new idea. Not to surprise the listener, the speaker uses this linguistic device, alerting him to what he is going to tell, lest anything should escape him, as if he were saying, ‘be prepared, and listen to what I will tell you, for it is important!’

The important part then is: ‘...they doubt that they will meet their Lord…’ (*Fussilat:* 54), that is, the unbelievers doubt resurrection after death, thinking that Allah created them in this world, and with that it all ends! They doubt the return after death, punishment, and reward, and do not pay heed to the Day of Judgment. Why? It is because they did not send ahead good deeds for this meeting, therefore they act heedlessly towards it. Some of them, with false desire, think this meeting is a lie, thereby denying resurrection, punishment, and reward. Others – acknowledging the truth of this meeting – are full of haughtiness, claiming: ‘…if [it should come, and] I should indeed be brought back to my Sustainer, then, the ultimate good awaits me with Him...’ (*Fussilat:* 50). Yet others say: ‘…if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Sustainer, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!’ (*al-Kahf:* 36)

Thus, they are in ‘doubt’ about this day, that is, they are suspicious, distrustful, and uncertain. The Arabic root for the word *mirya* (doubt) implies dispute with false argument, stubbornness, and pride, directed against accepting and submitting to the truth. Therefore, the word *jadal* (dispute) signifies a discussion that brings two sides to an agreement, to a satisfactory outcome. On the other hand, the word *mira’* (quarrel) suggests a discussion where each side wins for itself, not caring whether it reaches truth or not.

Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us how to disagree, argue and dispute in the Quranic verse: ‘Say: “I counsel you one thing only:”...’ (*Saba’:* 46) – and what is that, Lord? '..."Be [ever-conscious of] standing before God, whether you are in the company of others or alone; and then ponder [within yourselves that] there is no madness in [this prophet,] your fellow-man"…' (*Saba':* 46). That is to say, do not decide on a matter collectively in front of the masses, rather do it alone or in pairs. The judgment of crowds is not disciplined, as every side there wants their view to prevail, unwilling to lose the dispute in front of others, thus persisting in their falsehood.

We have previously stated that the clamour of crowds drowns individual voices making them indistinct. For example, The poet Ahmad Shawqi depicts this situation in his play about Cleopatra, after she had been defeated in the battle of Actium(1):

Listen to people Dayun
How they inspire him!
They have filled the air with shouts
which demand the lives of his two murderers.
Lie has left its mark on him,
and falsehood has covered him.
Oh what a parrot,
whose intellect is in its ears!

It is shameful that they doubt, not paradise for instance, but: 'Truly, they doubt that they will meet their Lord…' (*Fussilat:* 54).

This is great shame and a disgrace! As the saying goes, the flesh of their faces falls off from shame before Allah *Glorified is He*. When they return to Allah, full of regret, they find themselves standing before Him, after having disbelieved, rejected and denied Him in the worldly life. This reality, then, takes them by surprise: '…he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39)

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(1) This battle took place in September, in the year 31 BC; here, Octavian defeated Julius Caesar's heir [Wikipedia].

Had they doubted their Lord’s bliss, it would have been acceptable because people vary as to the degrees and levels of the good deeds they accomplish. Some do good fearing the fire, while others do it out of longing for paradise. Yet others do good deeds out of love for Allah Who imposed upon them performing good deeds, seeking His pleasure. It is not fear of His fire nor longing for paradise that motivates them, it is rather Allah Himself.

Rabi’a Al-‘Adawiyya was reported to have said to Allah *Glorified is He* during one of her meditations, ‘O Lord, if I worship You in hope of paradise, deprive me of it. If I worship you for fear of hellfire, burn me in it. Nay, I love You because You deserve to be loved.’ Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…whoever looks forward [with hope and awe] to meeting his Sustainer [on Judgment Day], let him do righteous deeds, and let him not ascribe to anyone or anything a share in the worship due to his Sustainer!’ (*al-Kahf:* 110) In the verse, the word ‘anything’ encompasses paradise.

In the verse: ‘...truly, He encompasses everything’ (*Fussilat:* 54) another truth is affirmed by the introductory device *ala* (truly). It means that Allah’s knowledge completely encompasses everything and no one escapes from Him. Not even the weight of an atom becomes absent from Him in the heavens or on the earth. Encompassing indicates covering something from all sides.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (22)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (22)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (22)

the chapter of

ash-Shura

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *as-Shura*[1] (Consultation):

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

حمٓ ﴿١﴾ عٓسٓقٓ ﴿٢﴾

Ha Mim **[1] '*Ayn Sin Qaf*** **[2]**
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 1-2)

These opening letters are one of many instances in which individual, unconnected letters appear at the beginning of several chapters throughout the Noble Quran. Although such letters have already been discussed in several places, it is worth remembering here that the entire Quran is connected and unified – verses are connected to other verses, chapters to other chapters, all united from beginning to end. Thus we read, for example: 'from all [temptation to evil by] invisible forces as well as men' (*an-Nas:* 6), the last verse in the Quran, in which the final *kasra* (vowel) connects back to: 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy' (*al-Fatiha:* 1) in the chapter of *al-Fatiha.*

With regard to how to read letters such as these, they are each pronounced separately; in this particular chapter, they are read: '*Ha. Mim. 'Ayn. Sin. Qaf.*'

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(1) The chapter of *ash-Shura* comes forty-second (42) according to the order of chapters in the Noble Quran, having been revealed immediately after the chapter of *Fussilat*. It is a Meccan chapter, according to *Al-Hassan, 'Ikrama, 'Ata and Jabar*. *Ibn 'Abbas* and *Qatada* maintain that only four verses from it were revealed in Medina. They start with the verse: '…Say [O Prophet]: "No reward do I ask of you for this [message] other than [that you should] love your fellow-men"…' (*ash-Shura:* 23) up to and including the verse: 'and responds to all who attain to faith and do righteous deeds…' (*ash-Shura:* 26).

We read the individual letters: '*Alif. Lam. Mim.*' in the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, as well as the beginning of the chapter of *ash-Sharh*, in different ways in spite of the letters being the same. In the chapter of *ash-Sharh,* we read them as one word: *'Alm'* 'Have we not opened up your heart?' (*ash-Sharh:* 1) These and other separate letters show up in various chapters, in order for the reader to understand that the Quran is unlike any other book; and, moreover, to learn that its recitation depends on the fact that a person who recites it has heard it recited before. This is the intended meaning of the verse: 'Thus, when We recite it, follow its wording [with all thy mind]: [18] and then, surely, it will be for Us to make its meaning clear [19]' (*al-Qiyama:* 18-19).

Given such reflection on these letters, it becomes clear that there is wisdom in reciting the Quran with a mind to its overarching interconnectedness, while at the same time focusing on the separate pronunciation of individual letters. Indeed, it is individual letters which provide the building blocks for words, and, subsequently, broader linguistic constructs such as expressions and phrases. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* expounded the importance of pronouncing these letters from the Quran individually, 'I do not pronounce the letters *Alif-Lam-Mim* as one letter; rather, I pronounce *Alif* as one letter, and *Lam* as another letter, and *Mim* as another.'(1)

The letters which appear in a language can be divided into two major types. The first type involves letters utilised as building blocks to create broader linguistic constructs, such as words and phrases. For example, the word 'to write' (*kataba*) in Arabic is made up of three consonants – *Kaf, Ta,* and *Ba* – which only have meaning when grouped together and arranged to create words. The second type of letters entails those which carry meaning individually. A good example of this type is the Arabic letter *Kaf*, which may act as a preposition of comparison when placed at the beginning of words. In the phrase, 'the soldier is like a lion' (*al-jundi kal-asad*), the individual letter *Kaf* stands at the front of the word 'like a lion' (*kal-asad*) as a means of pointing out the similarity between a soldier and the feline predator. However, it is clear from this instance that even though letters of this second type carry meaning in and of themselves, they must still be attached to other words in order to create that meaning.

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(1) *'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He who recites a letter from the Book of Allah obtains a good deed therein, one good deed equals ten such good deeds. I do not pronounce the letters Alif-Lam-Mim as one letter; rather, I pronounce Alif as one letter, and Lam as another letter and Mim as another.' Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2910); he rated it as authentic.*

It should also be pointed out that language is a social phenomenon, shared by a community and by which every nation and people express desires and goals and cooperates with one another. Language is, as some scholars have put it, the daughter of imitation: that which the ears hear, the tongue will surely reproduce. By way of example, if a young boy were raised in an Arab society, he would speak Arabic; if he were brought up in an English-speaking country, he would of course speak English. This is so because language is not an inherent physical trait, such as blood type or physical gender; rather, it is a social phenomenon based on hearing the spoken language, then repeating it. A native speaker of a particular language might even not understand certain words from his own language when he encounters them for the first time despite the fact that they are fully of that language simply because he has never heard them before.

It was narrated that the grammarian Abu Aqlama(1) was infatuated with pure, classical Arabic, and would speak it all the time. He would frequently employ obscure, esoteric expressions which frustrated his servant boy no end, since he could not understand his master. One night, Abu Aqlama awoke from his slumber and asked the servant, 'Hey boy! asa'akat al-atarif?'(2) (These are strange, old Arabic words.) The servant boy had no idea what this meant, and he responded in a tone of annoyance: 'ziq faylam!' (These are words the servant fabricated.) This astounded Abu Aqlama, who asked him, 'What does 'ziq faylam!' mean?' His servant boy asked, 'Well, what does 'asa'akat al-atarif' mean?' Abu Aqlama responded: 'I meant to ask: "Have the cocks crowed?"' His servant said, 'Well, I meant to say, "No, they have not."'

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(1) The story of *Abu Aqlama* the grammarian with the maid

(2) This tale first appeared in the book *Dictionary of the Literati Mu'jam al-udaba*' from *Yaqut Al-Hamwi*, who quotes from *Abu Bakr Mohammad ibn Khalaf ibn Al-Marzuban* in the *Book of Weighty Matters Kitab ath-thuqala'*. Concerning the grammarian *Abu Aqlama*, also known as *An-Namiri, Yaqut al-Hamwi* states, 'He is of the people of *Wasit*.'

There is another story(1) from among various anecdotes about the vagaries of language that illustrates the point that even native speakers of a language are confounded by words which they have never heard before. A man went to the doctor, named A‘yun*,* who asked the man what was ailing him. The man said, ‘I have eaten the meat of these jawazi’, and I tasa’tu from it a tas’ah which has afflicted me with such pain that spread from al-wabilah to da’yat al-unuq. Since then, it has gotten worse, to the point that khalat al-halb, causing me pain in the sharasif,’ (all are incomprehensible words). The doctor said, ‘Would you please repeat that? I did not understand a word of what you said.’ The man repeated his complaint, after which the doctor said, ‘Take hurqufan, salqafan, sarqafan, zahraqah and zaqzaqah, then convulse it all together and dilute with dung water, then drink!’ In response, the man asked, ‘Would you please repeat that? I did not understand a word of what you said.’ The doctor exclaimed, ‘May Allah curse whichever of us is most responsible for these ludicrous misunderstandings!’(2)

As previously mentioned, these and other examples illustrate that language is the result of imitation, since all language learning is ultimately based on listening to what other people say, then repeating it ourselves. A small child learns to speak by first listening to what family members say around him; likewise, a deaf-mute person cannot speak because he is unable to hear. This is why *the Most High* says, ‘Deaf, dumb and blind…’ (*al-Baqara:* 18). Muteness follows deafness since the reason for muteness is that a deaf person cannot hear the sounds characteristic of a particular language. If we trace the chain of language learning back to its source, we find our father Adam *peace be upon him*:

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(1) The story of *A‘yun,* the medicine man with a patient

(2) This story also happens to be about the grammarian *Abu Aqlama*, and which story *Ibn Al-Jawzi* recalls in the reports of *Al-Hamqa and the Heedless Ones*, in the chapter ‘On the Lack of Desinential Inflection in the Swimmer’s Speech’ *Adam mukhatib Al-Awam bil-‘irab*. Here, the phrase ‘hump-backed ungulate’ *jawazim* means ‘camel,’ that is the man ate camel meat. ‘I was afflicted with dyspepsia’ *tasa’tu* means ‘I had indigestion,’ especially as a result of eating fatty foods. The man in the story is inflicted with indigestion, which causes discomfort from the heads of his femurs that is, the top of his thighbones all the way to his nape that is, the back of his neck and back. The pain continued to spread until it reached his ureters, which cover areas between the heart and the liver, causing him pain at the outer extremities of his ribs.

we learned language from our parents, and they learned from their parents, and so on, leading all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him* who was taught language by his Lord, Allah *Glorified is He*. We understand this to be the case when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And He taught Adam all the names…’ (*al-Baqara:* 31) meaning the names of all things found in creation. It is clear from this explanation that Allah *Glorified is He* is the original Teacher of language, and the source thereof.

There is another observation to be made about the disjointed letters found throughout the Quran, which is that, through such letters, we learn to exercise faith in the Unseen. The True Lord has imbued all creation with both visible and unseen aspects, and there are times in which He uses that which is seen to imply the Unseen. For example, one of the central tenets of the true religion, we believe in, is that there is a Creator for the universe; we can give evidence of this with Allah’s visible signs, in the universe.

However, this doctrine of The Creator also involves faith in things unseen that have no visible or tangible evidence, such as the existence of angels. Likewise, the creed also has unseen matters that cannot be physically observed: as long as there are acts of obedience and acts of disobedience, there must be a paradise and a hell, and the grave stage that precedes this, with its bliss or torment. In spite of this, we believe in these unseen aspects of creation because they are made known to us by that Allah *Glorified is He* in whom we have faith, and in whose saying on these matters we trust.

In sum, every outward, visible aspect of true doctrines carries with it an unseen aspect at the same time. It is belief in the Unseen which is the litmus test of faith, and of the strength of one’s belief in the true religion, for anyone can believe in what is seen.

By way of example, let us suppose that a man employs a servant, whom the man requests to remove a large stone from his garden. The servant complains: ‘But it is quite a heavy stone; I do not think I can lift it!’ His master responds: ‘Well, there is a sack of money hidden under the stone; when you remove the rock from on top of it, I will pay you your wages from the money in that sack.’ The servant then rushes to the stone and easily removes it from the garden! This is a clear example of faith in what is seen, rather than what is unseen: the servant was motivated to remove the stone only after receiving the promise of a tangible reward. As this example makes clear, everyone can believe in what is clearly visible; which is why belief in the Unseen is the true test of faith. Hence Allah's description of true believers as: 'Those who believe in the Unseen…' (*al-Baqara:* 3).

What we have just discussed regarding belief in the Unseen also applies to the word of the True Lord and His Noble Quran that include words and letters which carry meaning, as well as letters that do not carry meaning and whose interpretation is unclear to us; such as the disjointed letters which we believe in though unseen.

As discussed previously, the disjointed letters appearing throughout the Quran comprise half of the total Arabic alphabet, namely fourteen out of twenty-eight letters in all. Further reflection confirms that the letters have been selected in a way that is anything but random or haphazard. Let us divide the Arabic alphabet into three segments: two groups of nine letters apiece, comprising the first and last nine letters of the alphabet, with a third group consisting of the remaining ten letters in the middle of the alphabet. We notice that, of the fourteen Arabic letters that appear at the beginning of Quranic chapters, only two, *Alif* and *Ha'*, are taken from the first group, leaving behind seven others. Seven of the last nine letters appear disjointed throughout the Quran, leaving behind two from that group. Of the remaining ten letters from the middle of the alphabet, only those without diacritical marks appear as disjointed letters in the Quran, leaving behind those requiring such marks. From this, we see a method and a wise purpose in the selection of the disjointed letters in the Quran.

As we read the Quran, we strive to interpret what these letters mean; the mind might keep mulling over any number of explanations for their presence; sometimes it succeeds and sometimes it fails. However, we must eventually admit that only Allah *Glorified is He* knows their meaning for certain. Each scholar and learned man who attempts to understand them or to extract wisdom from them is deemed diligent, and he will be rewarded.

What is most important for us to remember, is that the True Lord desires for us to have faith in these letters and to accept them as they are, whether or not we fully understand them. They are like the grooves in a key, which have order and which fit perfectly inside a specific lock, even though they may look random to us. The person using the key only needs to understand its ultimate purpose and function and to trust that the locksmith understands the secrets of his trade.

It is true that we try to encompass the meaning of these letters with our understanding; as mentioned, such efforts may even bear fruit, in the form of interpretation or explanation. However, the Quran continues to be inimitable, just as these letters continue to offer us renewed, inexhaustible inspiration. When the Quran challenged the Arabs and made them stand helpless and unable to produce even one verse, some took this to mean that their prestige was diminished, since they were unable to produce such language themselves; but that challenge actually indicated their skill, eloquence, and command of the language; if not so, the Quran would not have challenged them. Thus, the challenge actually honoured and elevated them; for Allah *Glorified is He* set their skills as standards for language proficiency.

When the Quran came to the Arabs in its inimitability, it did not do so with words or letters unknown to Arabic before that point; the linguistic components of the Quran are the same found in the Arabic language generally. Despite this, however, the Word of the True Lord continues to be inimitable, and the Arabs who first received it were unable to come up with anything like it. It is inimitable because it is the Word of Allah *Glorified is He* who speaks matchless words through His own abundant Power; His incomparable words reflect His own inimitable Nature and Authority. Mortal words, by contrast, are not inimitable, since they come from us, humans, and therefore reflect our own weakness and inability.

The chapter of *ash-Shura* is one of several chapters known as the *hawamim*(1), which denote the fact that they begin with the individual letters *Ha Mim*.

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(1) *Hawamim* chapters, as noted, are those in which Allah *the Most High* begins by saying, '*Ha. Mim.*' There are seven total *Hawamim* in the Quran: *al-Mu'minun*, *Fussilat*, *ash-Shura*, *az-Zukhruf*, *ad-Dukhan*, *al-Jathiya* and *al-Ahqaf*. 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* describes them as the 'brides of the Quran'; Ibn 'Abbas calls them the 'quintessence of the Quran'. Ibn Mas'ud states that the *Hawamim* are the 'Quran's silk brocade' see *Al-'Iqd Al-farid* by Ibn Abd Rabbuh, in the section 'On their statements against the Quran'.

Quranic chapters begin with these and other such letters in any number of combinations. For example, there are some which begin with only one individual letter, such as *Nun*, *Qaf* or *Sad*. Others have two letters, such as *Ta Sin*. There are some which start with three-letter groupings, like *Alif Lam Mim* and *Ta Sin Mim*. Still, others have combinations of four letters, including *Alif Lam Mim Ra,* and *Alif Lam Mim Sad*. Finally, there are chapters beginning with five-letter groups, such as *Ha Mim 'Ayn Sin Qaf*,(1) and *Kaf Ha Ya ‘Ayn Sad*. As stated, we are unsure as to the meaning of such letters, but we believe them to come from the Unseen, in which we are commanded to have faith. As for attempts at explaining these letters, it is best to say that only Allah *Glorified is He* knows what they mean with any certainty.

Then, the True Lord says:

كَذَٰلِكَ يُوحِىٓ إِلَيۡكَ وَإِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ۝٣

This is how God, the Mighty, the Wise, sends revelation to you [Prophet] as He did to those before you [3] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 3)

The letter *Kaf* in the Arabic word for *kadhalika* (this is how) means ‘like’ or ‘as’, indicating similitude; the word *dhalika* is an indicative pronoun that refers back to the disjointed letters that preceded this verse: it is through such means as these letters that ‘…He Allah, the Mighty, the Wise, sends revelation to you [Prophet] as He did to those before you’ (*ash-Shura:* 3). The disjointed letters, along with that which comes afterward, are revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* to His prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) In his Quranic exegesis, *Al-Qurtubi* quotes from *Al-Hussayn ibn Fadl*, who put forth the question, ‘Why are some individual letters in the Quran connected or separated in the way that they are? For example, in the group of letters ‘*Ha-Mim ‘Ayn-Sin-Qaf*,’ why are the first two letters separated from the last three? This is in contrast to other five-letter groupings in the Quran, such as ‘*Kaf-Ha-Ya-‘Ayn-Sad*,’ which are all connected in one group. The answer is that the five-letter combination ‘*Ha-Mim*. ‘*Ayn-Sin-Qaf*’ appears among other chapters that begin with the ‘*Ha-Mim*’ combination. It therefore also starts with ‘*Ha-Mim*’ in the same fashion as those other chapters. But it is also set apart from them by the ‘*Ayn-Sin-Qaf*’ which follow, acting as if it were the predicate of ‘*Ha-Mim’* in a nominal sentence.

The concept of revelation involves surreptitious communication between a speaker and a listener, or the one who reveals and the one to whom something is revealed. If a nobleman invites a guest to his house for dinner, and that nobleman wishes to give an order to his servant without the guest knowing, he gives his servant a look or whispers to him in a way that the guest does not notice. It is as though the nobleman revealed the matter unto his servant, but not to the guest.

Thus, any instance of revealed communication requires one who reveals a message, a person to whom a message is revealed, and the revealed message itself. The True Lord informs us that He concedes His revelation to whichever of his creations He pleases. This includes revelation to angels, as in the verse: ‘Your Lord revealed to the angels: “I am with you: give the believers firmness”…’ (*al-Anfal:* 12). Allah *Glorified is He* also confers revelation upon His messengers, which we learn from the verse: ‘We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Nuh (Noah) and the prophets after him, to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya’qub (Jacob)…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 163). In addition, He makes His revelation known unto those servants who are truly righteous, as when he also confers revelation upon the disciples of ‘Isa (Jesus), the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* the ants and even inanimate objects such as the earth: ‘because your Lord will inspire it [to do so]’ (*az-Zalzala:* 5).

The True Lord has also informed us that devils reveal secrets to each other, as do devilish people. We read Allah’s *Glorified is He* statement that ‘…The evil ones incite their followers…’ (*al-An‘am:* 121), that is, their followers from among humans. He also says: ‘…They suggest alluring words to one another in order to deceive…’ (*al-An‘am:* 112). Thus, *wahy* (revelation), in general, is carried out surreptitiously. Moreover, the revelation may be of what is good or what is evil.

As for lawful revelation, it is that which Allah *Glorified is He* made known unto His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through the angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* who acted as an intermediary. Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘It is not granted to any mortal that Allah should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He will: He is exalted and wise’ (*ash-Shura:* 51).

In all, lawful revelation is that which Allah *Glorified is He* informs His chosen messengers *peace be upon them* of by such means as angelic declaration or personal inspiration. Regarding this point, it has been previously explained that what is received from Allah does not clash with what is received from Satan because what is received from Allah is far more powerful and is invincible.

In the story of the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* for example, Allah *Glorified is He* states: *'wa awhayna ila ummi* Musa*'*, 'We inspired Musa's (Moses') mother…' (*al-Qasas:* 7). Here, the word *awhayna* means that Allah *Glorified is He* inspired Musa's (Moses') mother to action, uttering His word to her soul. By conveying revelation to her mind, He thus made it known that she should: '…Suckle him, and then, when you fear for his safety, put him in the river…' (*al-Qasas:* 7). Even though this inspiration came to the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in a way which reason cannot explain, the fact that she was given Divine insight left no other choice for Musa's (Moses') *peace be upon him* mother but to submit to and carry out Allah's command, which she did immediately.

When the True Lord wanted to inform the Companions of His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of religious matters, He sent Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* and made him appear to the Companions in the form of a man. They marvelled as Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* began to question the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* about faith and submission to Allah *Glorified is He* and acts of charity, listening as he put forth queries and affirmed the Messenger's responses. When the questioning had ended, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Indeed, Jibril (Gabriel) came today in order to teach you about matters pertaining to your religion.'(1)

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(1) Quoting from '*Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him*: 'Meanwhile, we were tarrying in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when there appeared to us a man with an exceedingly white robe and dark hair. He showed no signs of fatigue from travel, even though he had only just come to us. Even though none of us knew who he was, he came over and sat down next to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rested his knees together, put his hands on his thighs and leaned forward, and inquired, "O Muhammad, speak to me of true religion *Al-Islam*." He, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "True=

In the verse under consideration, then, we gain insight into the nature of Allah’s role as the One Who reveals: ‘This is how He Allah, the Mighty, the Wise, sends revelation to you [Prophet] as He did to those before you’ (*ash-Shura:* 3). He does not use the phrase ‘your Lord’ here, and uses ‘Allah’ which places more emphasis on Allah’s Divinity, which emphasises His Divine role as the object of worship. This means that He has established the Path for us to follow, complete with accompanying obligations and commandments to those who follow the true religion. Thus, the bestowal of Divinity is that of obligation. As for the bestowal of Lordship, it includes such attributes as nurturance, protection, and the bestowal of gifts without remuneration.

In both of these bestowals of the Tue Lord, it is clear that He receives nothing in return from His servants when they follow Him. He does not benefit from their obedience to His commandments, nor is He harmed when rebellious souls struggle against Him. We therefore understand that He established the right Way and its necessary obligations for our sake alone. He gives us commands so that we might find happiness for ourselves, and peace in society. When He reveals His Will and Command to humankind, it is as if He were saying: ‘I wish for you to be happy in your association with other people. Establish a clean, pure society, free from malice or envy or hypocrisy, in which all might live in love and peace. Seek out virtue and shun vice. I give you my right Way because you are my servants and my creations, and every creator wants what is best for his creations, deeming them to deserve better than depravity and wickedness.’

= religion is this: to testify that there is no Allah but the one true Allah, and that Muhammad is His Messenger. It means supplicating the Lord in prayer, giving obligatory alms to the poor, fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, and performing the pilgrimage if one has the means.” The man affirmed the correctness of this response, then asked, “Speak to me of faith.” The Prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “Faith means believing in Allah, His angels, Writings and Messengers, and believing in the Day of Reckoning and the Final Judgment apportioned to every person, whether for good or ill.” The man again affirmed the correctness of this response, and then said, “Speak to me of doing good works.” The Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “This means serving Allah as if we could see Him. For even if we do not see Him, we know that He sees us and sees our works.’’’ *Al-Bukhari* extracted this account for its correctness, and later reaffirmed it as a correct saying.

That is why, we said: a wise man does not envy those who in any way are superior to him, and if he encounters an aggressor, he does not supplicate to Allah against that aggressor, but rather makes supplication for this aggressor. Moreover, if this wise man witnesses any kind of depravity, he acts to set it right, and if he meets non-Muslims, he wishes for them to become Muslims. Why? Because he is pleased when these non-Muslims become righteous, and he reaps the benefits of their following the right guidance, and enjoys the good that comes from this.

In sum, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah, the Mighty, the Wise…’ (*ash-Shura:* 3), it indicates that He is the one who reveals this message, the source of The Book, and the Giver of the Way; in other words, He is the One Who makes commands and obligations pertinent to the true religion.

The name for Allah *Glorified is He* Allah has been interpreted in several ways. Some believe it to be a proper name referring to the necessary existence of a deity as the object of worship. This makes sense if we take the root of the word Allah, *‘a-l-h* in another form, *ma’luh*, meaning ‘that which is deified’. In the original sense, that which is deified is an object of worship. However, others claim that the name ‘Allah’ is indicative not of Allah’s necessary existence as the object of worship, but of Allah’s perfect Nature and Being, and to him belongs all the attributes of perfection. Indeed, He is the Strong, the Almighty, The Powerful, the Tremendous, the Merciful, The Wise, the All-Forgiving, the Bestower, and the All-Compelling Subduer. These are just a few of the names for the True Lord, all of them adjectives that describe aspects of the perfection contained in the name Allah. Hence Allah’s statement ‘…Call on Allah, or on the Lord of Mercy – whatever names you call Him, the best names belong to Him’ (*al-Isra’:* 110).

By revealing these names, the True Lord has taught us how to call upon Him in various times of need. Those desirous of knowledge call upon the Omniscient; those who want strength seek after the Strong; those who need wisdom say, ‘O You, the Wise, would that You give me wisdom!’ Those who strive for day-to-day sustenance supplicate to the Munificent for their daily bread, and those who want all of these things call upon Allah *Glorified is He* by the name ‘Allah,’ which includes all attributes of perfection.

As to the specific names found in this verse, we understand '*Al-'Aziz* (The Mighty)' to mean that Allah *Glorified is He* is All-Powerful in the obligations which He imposes on us. 'The Mighty' is He Who conquers and is never conquered, and Who is characterised by power, might, eternal riches and is in no need of His creation.

Then, He is '*Al-Hakeem* (The Wise)', meaning that Allah's Commands and Obligations are given to us in wisdom and with Divine preordination. It is important to recognise this because the Quran contains obligations and commandments which some consider arduous to obey. However, if we consider such painful tasks alongside the fruits and rewards of carrying out religious obligations, we find that they are easy to bear: the benefit obtained from obedience to Allah's Commands outweighs any hardship therein.

Do you not see that you toil and exert effort, and then you reap the benefits of this hard work; do you not see that the preciousness of the outcome is commensurate with the effort exerted? In agriculture, for example, this idea is known as the law of the harvest. A farmer must grow radishes for many days before he is able to enjoy them with a meal; cucumbers must be cultivated for at least forty days before they can be picked and eaten; rice crops require several months before they can be utilised for food; and mango orchards take years to produce edible fruit.

Thus, if Allah *Glorified is He* requires something difficult of us, know that the fruits and results of obedience to Him will be commensurate with it.

Be sure that He who revealed these obligations to the Prophet is Mighty and Wise: what He requires of us is for our benefit alone, not His. He is truly the Wise, meaning his injunctions will lead us to a peaceful coexistence with our fellow men in society.

Satan understood this Divine might when he said: '…"I swear by Your might! I will tempt all [82] but Your true servants'' [83]' (*Sad:* 82-83). By 'Your might' Satan means to swear by His being free from need of His creatures, and by the fact that He has given us the choice whether to obey or disobey Him, and thus Allah says: '…let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so…' (*al-Kahf:* 29). Otherwise, those souls desired by You, Allah and partitioned off for Yourself, I ca not get near them: '…except Your devoted servants' (*al-Hijr:* 40).

From this, we understand that the struggle is not between the True Lord and Satan; rather, it is between Satan and mankind. It is a struggle which extends from the time of Allah's order to prostrate before Adam *peace be upon him* all the way to the Day of Resurrection. However, Satan's foolishness is manifest in his conversation with the True Lord, then the conversation between him and Adam *peace be upon him*; for when he said: '…"I will lie in wait for them all on Your straight path"' (*al-A'raf:* 16), he reveals his plan to tempt the progeny of Adam *peace be upon him*: by attempting to divert them from the correct Path in those areas where they are required to be obedient.

The True Lord taught us how to handle these temptations from our enemy, and how to reduce his guile: Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If Satan should prompt you to do something, seek refuge with Allah…' (*al-A'raf:* 200). As this verse indicates, we ward off the temptations of Satan by seeking refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* and in the mentioning of his name. Indeed, our enemy is known as *Al-Khannas* meaning the one who flees at the very mention of Allah's name. Let us not forget this characteristic of Satan, when we are beset by his temptations.

Satan's foolishness as well as his stultification are also made clear in his statement to Adam and Hawwa' (Eve) *peace be upon them* as they conversed in Paradise: '…"Your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you becoming angels or immortals" ' (*al-A'raf:* 20). If he had truly known that the tree spoken of was the tree of eternal life, he would have partaken of its fruit without hesitation, rather than asking whether Allah *Glorified is He* would delay eternal life until the resurrection. Adam *peace be upon him* also was heedless of this, hence Allah *Glorified is He* rightly says: 'We also commanded Adam before you, but he forgot and We found him lacking in constancy' (*Ta Ha:* 115). For this reason, we don not censure those who forget, since those entrusted with such commands are heedless by their very nature.

لَهُۥ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَلِىُّ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿٤﴾

All that is in the heavens and earth belongs to
Him: He is the Exalted, the Almighty [4]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 4)

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* possesses everything in heaven and earth by right, and that vicegerents have no authority to administer or control those things. Allah *Glorified is He* alone is their rightful owner, and it is forbidden for anyone other than Him to exercise authority over them. A vicegerent is only allowed to exercise his authority over other finite phenomena below this level.

When we explore the meaning of this verse and other verses like this which appear throughout the Quran, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* says at one point: 'To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth…' (*ash-Shura:* 4) – repeating *'wa ma fi'*, 'whatever is in' before the heavens and the earth – and at another point: 'And whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His…' (*an-Nahl:* 52). The key difference between these verses has to do with emphasis on what is or is not shared between heavenly and earthly creations. There are created beings present in both the heavens and the earth, such as angels. However, there are also creatures found only in heaven, such as the higher angels; and some found only on earth, such as humans and the jinn. Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth…' (*ash-Shura:* 4), He differentiates between celestial and terrestrial creatures; whereas when he says 'And whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His…' (*an-Nahl:* 52), He mentions the creatures who exist in both (the heavens and the earth).

From this, we gather that the universe in which we live is not, in truth, owned or controlled by any other than Allah. The right of ownership belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* alone. Thus, we may not be dazzled by our possessions. Those things over which we exercise temporary dominion ultimately belong to Allah *Glorified is He*. Man is but a vicegerent, and not an owner. All the earth is a field upon which we are mere players, and over which we have no final authority: 'To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is within them…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 120).

Scholars said that the letter *Lam* in *lahu* ‘To Him’ indicates possession, as in the sentence, *al-qalam lizayd* (the pen is Zayd’s). This letter is also used to show that a thing has been set aside or partitioned specifically for someone or something, or that it belongs to a specific realm or domain. In the sentence, ‘the rope is for the mare’ we do not mean that a mare owns the rope. Rather, the signification here is that the rope belongs to the keeper of the mare, but it is specified for the mare.

In Allah’s words: ‘To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth’ (*ash-Shura:* 4), the initial *Lam* takes both the sense of ownership, as well as the sense of something being specified for or exclusive to someone. The verse thus abridges its presentation of the predicate of this sentence: ‘whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth,’ which acts as the subject of the genitive possessive grammatical case; and ‘To him’ acting as the object of the genitive. The letter *Lam* here takes both of these meanings, thus clarifying the point that ownership belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* alone. In the sentence ‘To Zayd belongs the pen,’ the sense is only that the pen is for Zayd or is exclusively for his use; we might just as easily add: ‘and to ‘Umar’. However, *Ha* which is *damir al-gha’ib* (the pronoun of the hidden, absent or unseen) in *lahu* (to him) is a pronoun that refers to Allah *Glorified is He*. The absence, that the pronoun *Ha* indicates here, means not being seen or present to mortal senses. It is out of His Greatness that He is unseen that no vision can perceive him: ‘No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision. He is the All Subtle, the All Aware’ (*al-An‘am:* 103).

Thus, it is out of His Greatness that He is unseen. We use terms whose meanings we know but cannot identify in the physical world. For example, we use the word ‘truth’ and say ‘This is true!’ or ‘He is telling the truth’, yet what does truth look like? This applies to other abstract words and concepts, like justice or love. We utilise these terms and their meanings all the time, but we still do not know how to define them. If we cannot perceive such terms, how can we expect to perceive the True Lord *Glorified is He*?

In another instance, He states: ‘To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth…’ (*ash-Shura:* 49) meaning the heavens and earth belong to Allah *Glorified is He* and that they represent a vessel in which other things are contained: 'To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth…' (*ash-Shura:* 4).

It is worth mentioning that what is contained in the heavens is more precious than the heavens itself, just as those things found on the earth are more precious than the earth itself; so it goes with any vessel, which is generally less valuable than that which it contains.

As noted, then, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* and is profitable for use by His vicegerents, on earth. The True Lord created these things for our benefit even before He created us such that He might prepare a universe, complete with all of life's necessities, ready for our use. This point illustrates what was said previously about the bestowal of Allah's Lordship.

Your Lord instructs and leads you through the right Way he sent you from heaven by means of His messengers *peace be upon them*. In addition, He secured for you provisions which keep you alive: so, He provided you with water that comes from the sky, and created for you the earth that produces different kinds of food and sustenance. He created rivers and streams from which you can drink, an air that you can breathe.

The Lord created an earth which provides humans with the three major elements necessary to preserve life. Out of His Wisdom He made your need for food different from your need for water and different from your need for water your need for air. A human can survive without food for a month, but he cannot live without water for more than a few days; as for air, a person cannot last longer than a few breaths without it.

Therefore, Allah made some people possess and have control over food and the means of nourishment; and if he ordains that you cannot find what to eat, you survive depending on the stores in your own body, until you find a way to nourish yourself. Then, He made less people possess and have control over water because the time a human survives without water is less than the time he survives without food. As for air, He did not make it anyone's possession or under anyone's control. Imagine if air were possessed by somebody and that someone became angry with you! You would have certainly died before you had the chance to obtain his forgiveness.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* granted humans those higher refinements and luxuries which enhance and enrich their life. Hence the Lord's statement, in reference to the sea: '…and bring out jewellery to wear…' (*an-Nahl:* 14). He also states: 'We have given you garments to cover your nakedness and as adornment for you…' (*al-A'raf:* 26). In terms of clothing, the most pressing need is to cover nakedness and protect the body, and only after this does the Lord take care of appropriate adornments and embellishments for human vestments.

The verse continues: '…the garment of Allah-consciousness is the best of all garments…' (*al-A'raf:* 26). Garments of this worldly life cover your '*awrah* (parts of the body which nobody should see) and protect you in your mortal existence. By contrast, being conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* covers us up in this world and in the Hereafter, and it guarantees us a more lasting, eternal life.

All of these things which we have discussed – food sources, rivers, and the air we breathe, the ocean, and clothing – are things found on the earth, and which belong to Allah *Glorified is He*. If we look up, we find the air: a great blessing that contains various types of blessings within it. As we know, air is essential for sustaining life for all living species; but we also see that it provides a means for communication, as when pictures and sound move through it to create a television broadcast, for example.

Then, consider the sky and all that is in it: the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, and the galaxies. These phenomena all belong to Allah *Glorified is He* who is the only One who exercises dominion over them.

The end of the verse under consideration reads: '…He is the Exalted, the Almighty' (*ash-Shura:* 4). The attribute *Al-'Aliyy* (Most Exalted) means that Allah *Glorified is He* is not only spatially above all else, but also that His Nature is higher than everything else in existence. Likewise, the name *Al-'Azhim* (the Almighty) does not necessarily mean that He is largest in size, but that He is greatest in His self-sustainability, power, and His characteristics of perfection

تَكَادُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ يَتَفَطَّرۡنَ مِن فَوۡقِهِنَّۚ وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمۡدِ رَبِّهِمۡ
وَيَسۡتَغۡفِرُونَ لِمَن فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۗ أَلَآ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلۡغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ٥

The heavens are almost broken apart from above as the angels proclaim the praises of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth. God is indeed the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful [5] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 5)

Allah's words: *'takadu al-samawatu'*, 'The heavens are almost…' (*ash-Shura:* 5) mean, very close to experiencing something. The word *yatafattarna* '…broken apart…' (*ash-Shura:* 5) means: to split, either out of awe for His Almightiness, as it is mentioned in the Hadith: 'heaven has squeaked, and it has right to do so…'(1), or it can be a result of anger at the suggestion, put forth by some, that Allah *Glorified is He* took a son unto Himself.

His words: 'from above…' (*ash-Shura:* 5) may refer to that level of the skies which exists above the highest echelon of angels gathered in awe and exaltation of Allah *Glorified is He* or refer to those who are above the earth, where sinful humans who claimed that Allah has a son, reside; for the True Lord responds to this particular claim with the following: 'How terrible is this thing you assert' (*Maryam:* 89) meaning: something strange or abominable which reason cannot accept. Then, He says: 'it almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, the mountains to crumble to pieces' (*Maryam:* 90).

Having offspring is sought either for help when one is overtaken by weakness in old age, or for maintaining one's name. However, it is unlawful to attribute such things to Allah *Glorified is He*? Moreover, it does not befit Him because He is in no need of offspring. Hence Allah's statement '…It does not befit the Lord of Mercy [to have offspring]' (*Maryam:* 92). In other words, the True Lord could very well take a son unto Himself if He desires, since He is omnipotent and nothing would prevent Him from doing what He wills, but this does not befit His Majesty and Highness. Since it does not befit Him, this proves His Perfection.

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(1) *This Hadith was extracted by Imam Ahmad from his collection of traceable authorities Hadith 20539; by At-Tirmidhi, from his narrations of the sayings of The Prophet 2234; by Al-Bayhaqi, from his greater narrations of the sayings of The Prophet 52/7; and by Abd Ar-Razzaq from his compilation 440/9 – Hadith 17934. The rest of this Hadith is as follows: 'for in all the heavens, there is not a space even four fingers wide in which an angel does not bow his head in prostration before Allah Glorified is He.'*

Elsewhere in the Quran, we find a similar argument in reference to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And We have not taught him poetry, nor is it meet for him; it is nothing but a reminder and a plain Quran…' (*Ya Sin:* 69). This verse is a response to those disbelievers who accused the Prophet of being a mere poet rather than a messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*. The verse means that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not compose poetry not because he could not; for he had the capability and eloquence to do so, but it did not befit him to compose and say poetry, and it was not right for him to do so, because Allah *Glorified is He* was preparing him for a greater purpose than poetry.

This is evident in Allah's statement: '…It does not befit the Lord of Mercy [to have offspring]' (*Maryam:* 92) which confirms Allah's ability to have a son if he wished; but this is something that does not befit Him, since Allah *Glorified is He* is free from those earthly needs and is too Exalted for such matters. This is why He states elsewhere: 'Say [Prophet], "If the Lord of Mercy [truly] had offspring I would be the first to worship [them]"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 81); or in other words: 'suppose He had offspring, I would be the first to believe in them.'

Continuing with the verse under consideration, the Lord says: '…as the angels exalt [Allah] with praise of their Lord…' (*ash-Shura:* 5). Angels belong to the world of the Unseen, while the heavens and the earth are among tangible things (can be perceived by the senses). These tangible, visible creations are agitated and rent apart in response to that claim (of Allah having offspring). As for the angels, which are unseen, they exalt their Lord with praise and set Him above such a claim. Here, *tasbih* (the glorification of Allah) *Glorified is He* comes before *tahmid* (praise): it is first necessary to exalt Allah *Glorified is He* or to refute comparisons between Him and any other being, before praising Him for blessings and endowments. This is why the angels first exalt Allah, then, they offer Him praise.

Next, the verse reads: '…and ask forgiveness for those on earth…' (*ash-Shura:* 5). The angels do not ask for their own forgiveness, but rather forgiveness for earth's inhabitants. It is clear from this that the angels are sinless: if they were guilty of sin, they would ask for their own forgiveness from the very start. Moreover, the angels' request for the Lord to forgive those who inhabit the earth is an all-inclusive plea, rendered on behalf of everyone on the planet, including unbelievers.

Elsewhere in the Quran we read that the angels: '…beg forgiveness for the believers…' (*Ghafir:* 7), while, here, they ask forgiveness for '…those on earth…' (*ash-Shura:* 5), that is, for everyone, their plea comprises a request for forgiveness and guidance for non-believers and for Allah *Glorified is He* to inspire them to have faith in Him.

There is a particular Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which goes along with this point, 'There is never a day wherein the sun rises, but are not visited by two angels. One of them says: "O Allah! Compensate (more) to the person who gives (in charity)", while the other one says, "O Allah! Destroy the one who withholds (charity)."'(1)

Scholars said: this petition to Allah *Glorified is He* for the destruction of the one who withholds charity does not contradict the angels' plea for forgiveness for everyone on the earth. This is because the generous person who gives (in charity) is willing to give up his money and spends it in the cause of Allah; his love for Allah *Glorified is He* is therefore greater than his desire for riches. On the other hand, the one who withholds loves his money and is miserly. When the angelic herald in this Hadith wishes ill upon the miser in the form of destruction, it is because the angel wishes to free him from that which diverts the miser's attention from Allah *Glorified is He* namely wealth. The destruction of that wealth is therefore a blessing in the end, even though it may appear to be a major calamity. Thus, in both cases, the angelic supplication is an entreaty for that which is good.

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(1) *This is extracted for its established correctness 1010 as a Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra. Regarding the explanation thereof An-Nawawi states, 'The scholars note that here, "spending wealth" refers to riches spent while engaging in noble deeds of piety, as well as worthy, moral causes; such causes include almsgiving and freewill offerings, hospitable treatment of guests, and so on. A rich man spends his wealth on such activities so as not to be found guilty of withholding his riches from those in need, or from being called intemperate and wasteful. Likewise, the "miser" in this Hadith refers to one guilty of refusing to give of his means to the poor.'*

Continuing with the verse, we read: '…Allah is indeed the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful' (*ash-Shura:* 5). We said that the invocative *ala* is a rhetorical device used to open a statement, or to call attention to what one wishes to say. A speaker is free to speak whenever he wants, whereas, a listener is not free or is not as free; for he may miss a part of the speech. That is why the speaker must occasionally alert the listener to what he says, in case the listener is not following the speaker's points. This is true especially with regard to important statements that the speaker wishes to make, and which he wants the listener to understand in their entirety. Thus, a speaker says *ala* at the beginning of a statement or speech, as if to say, 'Pay attention', or 'listen to my words'. We see this in the following line of poetry from the pre-Islamic (*jahili*) poet (1):

'Wake up from your sleep, O wine maid, with your bowl, and Give us our morning drink

And do not spare the wines of Al-'Andarina (a village in the Levant).'(2)

Returning to the final part of this verse, we read: '…Allah is indeed the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful' (*ash-Shura:* 5). This is an appropriate note to end on, considering what we have discussed in terms of the angels' plea for forgiveness for those on the earth: it is as though Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us, 'Pay attention, for He from whom forgiveness is requested is All-Forgiving, and a dispenser of mercy.' He is the All-Forgiving, Who pardons faults and erases the effects thereof; and He is the Most Merciful, the One Who, after pardoning sins, bestows grace sufficient to help keep us from committing future sins.

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(1) *'Amr ibn Kulthum Abu Al-Aswad, member of the Banu Taghlab tribe and pre-Islamic poet (extraordinaire), he was born in the northern Arabian Peninsula, in one of the towns comprising the Rabi' area; he died on the Furat Peninsula in the year 39 BH. His people, the Banu Taghlab tribe, reigned among the desert tribes of the region when he was only a boy, and they flourished for many years. His most famous work of poetry is his hanging ode/ Mu'allaqa, the opening line of which is quoted here by Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi.*

(2) *This is the opening line of 'Amr ibn Kulthum's hanging ode, which is comprised of 125 lines in its entirety and written in the wafir (abundant) meter.*

Then, the True Lord says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ أَوۡلِيَآءَ ٱللَّهُ حَفِيظٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَمَآ أَنتَ عَلَيۡهِم بِوَكِيلٖ ٦

As for those who take protectors other than Him, God is watching them; you are not responsible for them [6] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 6)

His words: '…other than Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 6) indicate anything other than Allah *Glorified is He* which some choose to worship. The word *awliya'* (protectors) means: taking them as allies and worshipping them besides Allah. Some of them worshipped the sun, the moon, demons or angels. Next, the statement: '…Allah is watching them…' (*ash-Shura:* 6) means that He is the One taking their actions into account, and that He is responsible for meting out their final reward or punishment. To Him is the final return.

As such, do not be sad O Muhammad, or kill yourself out of grief over them; for it is not incumbent on you to make them walk on the right way, but rather to proclaim the message to them. Allah says: '…you are not responsible for them' (*ash-Shura:* 6). This means that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not *wakil* (responsible) for their actions. The word *wakil* in Arabic takes the noun form *fa'il*, which can signify either a subject, as in the word *rahim* (one who bestows mercy); or an object, like the word *qatil* (one who has been killed). In this verse, the word *wakil* acts in the latter sense. Only the delivery of the message is incumbent on you, O Muhammad, and upon Us is the account. Then, the True Lord says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ قُرۡءَانًا عَرَبِيّٗا لِّتُنذِرَ أُمَّ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ وَمَنۡ حَوۡلَهَا وَتُنذِرَ
يَوۡمَ ٱلۡجَمۡعِ لَا رَيۡبَ فِيهِۚ فَرِيقٞ فِي ٱلۡجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٞ فِي ٱلسَّعِيرِ ٧

So We have revealed an Arabic Quran to you, in order that you may warn the capital city and all who live nearby. And warn [especially] about the Day of Gathering, of which there is no doubt, when some shall be in the Garden and some in the blazing Flame [7] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 7)

This verse begins with Allah *Glorified is He* saying, *kadhalika* (so) or (in this way) referring to prior revelations given by Him – meaning: 'like these previous revelations, have We given you an Arabic Quran'. He says: '…We have revealed an Arabic Quran to you…' (*ash-Shura:* 7). It is called Quran because it is recited, and is also called *Al-Kitab* (the Book) because it was transmitted in lines organised into written form. The Quran is described here as being in the Arabic tongue because it was revealed through the language expounded by and belonging to the Arabs. As noted before, any language is a collection of terms through which the needs and desires of a people are expressed. We have also discussed how language is the 'daughter of imitation,' meaning that we learn to speak by imitating the sounds that we hear around us.

Language is not an inherent characteristic like blood type or physical gender, a point made clear by the fact an Arab child raised in a foreign land would speak the language of that land. This is so because language learning depends on imitating the sounds made by people around us when they speak a language. Even a native speaker encounters words which he does not know the meaning of; and the reason he does not know the meaning is that those words have never reached his ears before.

That is why we say: the best way to teach language is through *talqin* (the instructor says something and the student listens and imitates), a point which confirms the correctness of the following verse: 'And He taught Adam the names of all things…' (*al-Baqara:* 31). This shows that Allah *Glorified is He* is the original Teacher of mankind; otherwise, who would have instructed Adam *peace be upon him* in the letters and words of language, or in the names for all things?

Some orientalists have paused over the verse under consideration, pondering the description of the Quran as being in the Arabic tongue, when they know that it contains many words from other languages such as Latin, Persian and Ge'ez(1). In response, we say that the phrase: '…an Arabic Quran…' (*ash-Shura:* 7) means that the Quran was partly revealed in words which had circulated among the Arabs through interaction with various tongues and dialects, words which were in common usage before the revelation of the Quran. Because of this, a certain percentage of the words found in the Quran are not indigenous to the Arabic language of the time but which were nevertheless a part of the Arab people's lexicon. We may ask: how many are these words in comparison with the rest of the words of the Quran?

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(1) The language of Abyssinia

Thus, we can say that the Quran is an Arabic Quran, which goes along with Allah's statement: 'We have never sent a messenger who did not use his own people's language to make things clear for them…' (*Ibrahim:* 4). By this, He means that the message of a religion is sent to people in their own tongue so that they might receive it and understand it; otherwise, it would be impossible for Allah's message to be proclaimed.

If you raise the question: how is this when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all people of every time period and geographical location? We say: this is the responsibility of the *ummah* (the people) of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after he dies. It was and is incumbent upon that community to learn to speak other languages, and to bring the message of Islam to the peoples who speak those languages, in whatever corner of the globe they are to be found. Muhammad was the seal of the prophets and the last of Allah's messengers on the earth. As for taking the message of Islam to the nations of the earth, this responsibility necessarily has fallen upon the Islamic community.

The Quran was revealed in the Arabic language because Allah *Glorified is He* chose the Arabs to carry His message to all people. We have discussed this idea previously in terms of the wisdom of choosing an unlettered man from an illiterate society to be the Messenger of Allah *Glorified is He*. The Quran is inimitable among Arabs due to its sublime style and pronunciation; Arabs have the unique privilege of reading it in the original language, and they may thus appreciate its unrivalled linguistic magnificence. Likewise, it is inimitable among non-Arab peoples because of its transcendent meaning, even when translated into other tongues. In either case, it is one of Allah's unique signs and wonders which appear to humankind from time to time, and which inspire awe and reverence for Him.

If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were an educated man in a community of civilisation, what would the people of the world say, taking into consideration the multitude of infidels, obstinate people and atheists? By Allah, if this were the case, they would have said that Islam is a mere cultural leap forward, common to other nations. For this reason, we say: illiteracy is a defect in any person except for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it is actually an honour. Why? This is because it shows that the great learning and culture which rested upon the Prophet came from on high. It proves that wisdom and knowledge ultimately stem from that loftiest of sources, the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

What is astonishing is that there are enemies of Islam who claim that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in fact, a learned man. They also aver that it was he who wrote the Quran. Glory be to Allah! Are you (people who made this argument) more prejudiced in favour of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* than his followers? The Quran is clear in its refutation of this claim: 'You never recited any Scripture before We revealed this one to you; you never wrote one down with your hand. If you had done so, those who follow falsehood might have had cause to doubt' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48).

Thus, in spite of his illiteracy, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came bearing the news of the correct Path that subjugated all civilisations of the world, and to which the two greatest human civilisations, at that time, were subjugated: the Persian Empire in the East and the Roman Empire in the West. However, this was not forced obeisance, but rather a willing recognition of Islam's superior methods, supreme concepts, that provide a framework for daily life and organise the society as a whole, the striking manner in which it was presented, as well as the solutions it offers for those immoral and harmful behaviours which prevailed among their respective civilisations.

Continuing on with the verse under consideration, Allah *the Most High* says: '…in order that you may warn the mother of cities and all who live nearby…' (*ash-Shura:* 7). *Indhar* (to warn or to caution of something bad) means to tell someone about it before it happens, in order to give that person a chance to avoid it or to make necessary preparations for it.

The epithet 'the mother of cities' (*ash-Shura:* 7) refers to Mecca since it is *umm al-qura* (the mother of cities) or the root and foundation of all other cities and villages. This is because it is the location on earth in which *awwala bayt* (the first temple) was placed for people. Since Adam *peace be upon him* is a person among the people, then, *awwala bayt* was placed there before Adam *peace be upon him*. Thus, it is correct that the angels were the ones who placed the temple in Mecca.

His words: '…and all who live nearby…' (*ash-Shura:* 7) refer to those villages, tribes, and all other Arab peoples living within the vicinity of Mecca. Since Mecca is the mother and foundation of all cities, the tribe of Quraysh enjoyed special prominence among tribes on the Arabian Peninsula, since it had the distinct honour of service in and maintenance of the temple. Members of Quraysh were the established custodians of the temple, receiving people from other tribes as they came to Mecca during the season of the pilgrimage. It was their job to ensure security, safety and food stores. For this reason the caravans of Quraysh enjoyed protection and care in other parts of the Arabian Peninsula as they made their summer and winter journeys.

We see that service in the temple is what afforded Quraysh dignity and status among other Arabian tribes. Hence Allah's saying: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure [1] secure in their winter and summer journeys. [2] So let them worship the Lord of this House: [3] who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear [4]' (*Quraysh:* 1-4). Their supremacy was a result of their authority in administering the temple worship, their proximity to the temple itself and the services rendered by them when people came to the temple on the pilgrimage. As a corollary, if the temple had been destroyed, the special privileges enjoyed by Quraysh would have come to an end, and they would have lost this prestige and high status.

Returning to the verse, Allah *the Most High* states: '…And warn [especially] about the Day of Gathering, of which there is no doubt…' (*ash-Shura:* 7). In other words: to warn them of this final day, namely the Day of Resurrection. The gathering, on that day, has several aspects: that day unites body and spirit; brings together the angels of the higher part of heaven and human beings; brings together the oppressor and the oppressed, as well as those who follow and those who lead.

If we look more closely at the phrasing in this statement, '…And warn [especially] about the Day of Gathering…' (*ash-Shura:* 7), we find that the direct object of the Arabic verb *tundhira* (warn) is left unsaid. In fact, this verb takes two objects, as in the following verse: 'If they turn away, say, "I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck *'*Ad and Thamud"' (*Fussilat:* 13). He said: *'andhartukum sa'ikah'*, '…I have warned you about a blast…' (*Fussilat:* 13). Here, he mentions the direct object 'you' and the indirect object 'a blast'. In the verse under discussion, He mentions the danger warned against, in general, and does not mention the object of *andhir* (warn). Why? This is because it will be clarified elsewhere, as in another verse: 'Warn them [Prophet] of the ever-approaching Day…' (*Ghafir:* 18). Here, the pronoun 'them' refers to unbelievers, which group of people represents the direct object; and 'the ever-approaching,' or the Day of the Gathering, represents the indirect object.

The phrase '…of which there is no doubt…' (*ash-Shura:* 7) means that there is certainty about the coming of the Day of the Assembly, '…when a party will be in Paradise and a party in the blazing Fire (Hell)' (*ash-Shura:* 7). This last statement from the previous verse refers to the law of reward and punishment established by Allah. Where there is *taklif* (obligation), there is obedience and disobedience. Those who obey shall be rewarded, and those who disobey shall be punished. This same code of living applies even in the daily lives of human beings, who have established their own system of reward and punishment in their societies. Likewise, on the day that is sure to come – the Day of the Assembly, all people shall be divided into two groups, one in paradise and the other in the fires of hell.

Examining the style of this final statement, we find that the verse employs what is known as *al-ihtibak* (reciprocal ellipsis), which is a rhetorical device that omits predictable words through context clues, such as contrast. An example of this is Allah's statement: 'There has already been a sign for you in the two armies that met (in combat)…' (*Al-'Imran:* 13). In this verse, the righteous, or those who fight in Allah's Cause, are contrasted with those who fight for Satan (*Iblis*). Contemplating this Quranic style, we find that the word 'believers' is omitted because it is indicated by the phrase '…one was fighting in Allah's Cause…' (*Al-'Imran:* 13); and the description of the opposite army 'one was fighting in Satan's cause' is omitted because it is connoted by the phrase '…and as for the other (they) were disbelievers…' (*Al-'Imran:* 13). Each description serves, as it were, to cancel out that of its opposite. This technique, as noted, comprises the rhetorical device of reciprocal ellipsis.

Moreover, Allah's saying: '…when a party will be in Paradise and a party in the blazing Fire (Hell)' (*ash-Shura:* 7) exhibits an initial process of separating the righteous from the wicked, after gathering all souls on the Day of the Assembly. This separation after collection is another feature of the Quranic style which involves the assembly of souls on the Day of the Gathering, followed by a process of sifting believers from unbelievers, and ending with a final division and distribution of reward and punishment. We see this, for example, in the chapter of *Hud*, where Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'On the Day when it comes, no person shall speak except by His (Allah's) Leave. Some among them will be wretched and (others) blessed' (*Hud:* 105). The process of separation after collection is found in: 'Some among them will be wretched and (others) blessed' (*Hud:* 105). Then there is the process of division and the designation of groups: 'As for those who are wretched, they will be in the Fire, sighing in a high and low tone. They will dwell therein for all the time that the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills. Verily, your Lord is the doer of what He wills. And those who are blessed, they will be in Paradise, abiding therein for all the time that the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills, a gift without an end(1)' (*Hud:* 106-108).

However, why does this verse include such a description of sifting between believers and unbelievers in the statement: '…when a party will be in Paradise and a party in the blazing Fire (Hell)' (*ash-Shura:* 7)? The answer is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* fashioned His creatures and endowed them with free will after He offered them the trust (*amana*) of carrying moral responsibility. This is made clear in the following verse: 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he was unjust and ignorant (of its results)' (*al-Ahzab:* 72). The meaning here is that Allah offered the choice of carrying this trusted responsibility to all creation, which refused it in fright at the seriousness of the charge. Aspects of creation such as the heavens and earth, therefore, preferred to be non-free willed, to be acted upon in whatever way their Lord wills. All except humans and jinn took upon themselves the trusted responsibility, thus becoming agents, endowed with the power to will and to act.

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(1) The Arabic phrase *ghayra majdhudh* (unceasing, without being cut off) derives from the verb *jadhdha* (to cut off, break or divide). Therefore, Allah's saying: '…a gift without an end *(majdhudh)…*' (*Hud:* 108) means unceasing, never to be cut off (*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim*, vol. 1, p. 119).

Here, we also note the phrase '…verily, he was unjust and ignorant (of its results)…' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) meaning unjust to himself; while 'ignorant' means unaware of the consequences of the decision to carry the trusted responsibility of free will and reason. Clearly, one could be trustful of his ability at the time of undertaking the charge, but no longer so at the time of fulfilment as circumstance may come between the person and fulfilling the charge entrusted to him. Since humankind has chosen to take upon themselves the responsibility of free will, not fully aware of the implications of that choice, they must be asked about the charge entrusted to them and be held accountable for their actions. And depending on whether they have preserved or squandered the trust of having free will, a final reward or punishment has become necessary for them, dividing between those who deserve paradise and those who deserve hell.

وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَجَعَلَهُمْ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً وَلَٰكِن يُدْخِلُ مَن يَشَآءُ
فِى رَحْمَتِهِۦ ۚ وَٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ مَا لَهُم مِّن وَلِىٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿٨﴾

If God had so pleased, He could have made them a single community, but He admits to His mercy whoever He will; the evildoers will have no one to protect or help them [8] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 8)

The general meaning of this verse is that Allah's Will is measured by the same absolute standard for everyone and that we should not, therefore, be surprised at the final division between the righteous and the wicked. If Allah so wished, He could force all people to believe in Him, leaving no choice for anyone but to follow His Path. Rather, He distinguished between coerced and voluntary faith out of love. The True Lord *the Exalted* wants devoted, believing hearts, not a forced appearance of piety. We have already seen this point illustrated with the classic example of a man who employs two servants, one free to move as he pleases, and the other tied to his master with a rope. When the master orders his two servants to do something, which of the two carries out his command out of true obedience and love?

Thus, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* offered the trust of reason and free will to all creation, He confirmed two parallel ways of coming to Him: non-free willed out of power and free willed out of love. So Allah established His Power and Dominion over creation by making a part of it, which are the heavens, the earth and all created beings except mankind and jinn, faithful and obedient to His Command by their very nature. They surrendered their choice to the Will of Allah. Second, Allah established love for Him by granting humans and jinn the capability of choosing Him. Consequently, they believed in Allah out of love, although they were capable of refusing to believe.

The statement '…but He admits whom He wills into His Mercy…' (*ash-Shura:* 8) refers to the believers. They shall enter paradise through Allah's Grace and Mercy rather than their good works alone. Their good works are the necessary means for entry to paradise. Following this, we are given a vision of the opposite group: '…and the wrongdoers have not any protector or helper' (*ash-Shura:* 8). The meaning here is that evildoers, or unbelievers, will enter hell, for hell is the established consequence of evil deeds done on the earth.

Allah's saying '…has not any protector or helper…' (*ash-Shura:* 8) means there is no close friend or confidant to protect and defend them; '…or helper…' carries a similar meaning, which means complete lack of help or support even from far away. No one, on seeing them overpowered, shall sympathise with them and offer help.

In the next verse, the True Lord *the Most High* goes into further explanation as to why this punishment is meted out to the wrongdoers. They have rejected the worship of the One True Lord and sought protection in sources other than Allah. So, they have deserved abandonment.

أَمِ ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ أَوۡلِيَآءَۖ فَٱللَّهُ هُوَ ٱلۡوَلِيُّ وَهُوَ يُحۡيِ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ٩

How can they take protectors other than Him? God alone is the Protector; He gives life to the dead; He has power over all things [9] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 9)

After affirming that the wrongdoers have no protector or source of succour, the True Lord *the Exalted* puts forth the question: 'Or have they taken protectors [or allies] besides Him?...' (*ash-Shura:* 9) This is clearly an *istifham istinkari* (an interrogative that denotes disapproval and rebuke) where Allah asks, by way of censure, those wrongdoers if they have protectors that He does not know about! Since they cannot have protectors or guardians besides Allah, why have they not taken Him as their Protector? Or else the meaning could be that their taking refuge in other than Allah should have induced them to think over the matter and reconsider their position.

Indeed, as the rest of the verse confirms: '…But Allah – He is the Protector…' (*ash-Shura:* 9) meaning that He is the True Supporter Who can provide relief to whoever needs it. Then, He states: '…and it is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things' (*ash-Shura:* 9). This part of the verse mentions two exclusive Abilities of Allah: the ability to raise the dead and His Absolute Power over everything, neither of which applies to anything to which the wrongdoers resort for protection. These two characteristics describe Allah alone. Throughout the Quran we often find them accompanied by the personal pronoun of emphasis *huwa* (he) which is not required in Arabic for the meaning to be clear. This pronoun serves to emphasise that Allah uniquely possesses certain characteristics or powers. For this reason, the verse states: '…and it is He Who (*huwa*) gives life to the dead, and it is He Who (*huwa*) has power over all things' (*ash-Shura:* 9).

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'And that it is He Who makes [one] laugh and weep and that it is He who causes death and gives life' (*an-Najm:* 43-44). These actions – causing laughter and weeping, granting life and death – cannot be performed by anyone other than Allah. We understand '…it is He Who makes [one] laugh and weep…' to mean that Allah has placed within humans the instinct to laugh and cry. The fact that all people, from all nationalities and cultures, have these instincts is evidence that the impulse to laugh comes from Allah. Laughter is the same regardless of one's culture; an Arab laughs in the same way as an Indian or a Russian person does. The same can be said about weeping. So, it follows that it is an instinct placed in mankind by Allah. Life and death also belong to Allah alone, and no other than Allah has the power to give or take life.

In another context, life and death are stated by our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* among the blessings that Allah bestowed upon him:

‘…Who has created me, and it is He Who guides me. And it is He Who feeds me and gives me to drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me. And Who will cause me to die, and then will bring me to life (again)’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 78 - 81).

Throughout the Quran, the personal pronoun *huwa* (he) is added when discussing acts about which there could be doubt as to whether they are done exclusively by Allah; so the independent personal pronoun *huwa* (he) appears in order to emphasise that the act is exclusive to Allah, as in the statement ‘…it is He Who (*huwa*) guides me’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 78). The emphasis is placed here because guidance can come to a person through a human agent. Also, regarding the statement that Allah alone ‘…is He Who feeds me and gives me to drink...’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 79) since a father who provides food and drink to his children may read this and think it applies to him. It is the same with the next verse: ‘And when I am ill, it is He who cures me’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 80), as some may think that healing lies in the hands of doctors. For this reason, all these verses contain the personal pronoun of emphasis *huwa* (he) to underscore the fact that these actions, which are performed through humans, fall within Allah’s Power. As for statements referring to actions or powers belonging only to Allah, they do not contain the personal pronoun of emphasis, since only Allah, without partners or rivals, can carry out such deeds. As in Allah’s statement ‘And Who will cause me to die, and then will bring me to life (again)’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 81) in which the personal pronoun *huwa* does not appear.

Here, bringing the dead back to life refers to the resurrection in the Hereafter. For example, we read about this power in the story of 'Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him*(1) told in the Quran: ‘Or [consider such an example] as the one who passed by a township which had fallen into ruin. He said, “How will Allah bring this to life after its death?” So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years; then He revived him. He said, “How long have you remained?”

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(1) *Uzayr (Ezra) peace be upon him was a wise and faithful slave of Allah. In his book Qasas Al-Anbiya’ (Stories of the Prophets), Ibn Kathir states: ‘The most well-known opinion concerning ‘Uzair (Ezra) was that he was one of the Israelite prophets. He came at a time between Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon), and Zakaryya (Zechariah) and Yahya (John the Baptist). When there was no one left among the Jews who knew the Torah by heart, Allah revealed it to the mind of ‘Uzair (Ezra) peace be upon him who recited it to the Israelites from memory, having never studied it from a book. For this reason, the Jews claimed that 'Uzair (Ezra) was the son of Allah.’*

The man said, “I have remained a day or part of a day.” He said, “Rather, you have remained one hundred years. Look at your food and your drink; it has not changed with time. And look at your donkey; and We will make you a sign for the people. And look at the bones [of this donkey] - how We raise them and then We cover them with flesh.” And when it became clear to him, he said, “I know that Allah is Able to do all things”’ (*al-Baqara:* 259).

We humans feel the passage of time through events. Without events, we cease to feel that time has elapsed. For this reason, after being dead for a hundred years ‘Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him* replied on being brought to life, ‘I have remained a day or part of a day.’ So in order to show the correctness of his view that it was a day or part of a day, the True Lord *the Exalted* ordered ‘Uzair (Ezra) to look at the food he had with him. When he looked at it, he found that it had not rotted or changed with time. And in order to prove that ‘Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him* had actually been dead for one hundred years, Allah told ‘Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him* to look at his donkey that had died and rotted down to the bare bones, something which would only be possible after one hundred years.

Returning to the verse at hand, the Most High Allah states: ‘…and it is He Who has power over all things’ (*ash-Shura:* 9). This is a clear indication of the Absolute Power which Allah possesses, testified to by the presence of many cosmic signs in the heavens, the earth and living beings.

Indeed, Allah alone is powerful over everything. He has shown us examples of His Ability to bring the dead back to life on earth – such as the story of ‘Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him* whom Allah caused to be dead for one hundred years – as evidence of that same Power to resurrect the dead in the Hereafter.

Another example comes to us in the following verse: ‘Have you not considered those who left their homes in many thousands, fearing death? Allah said to them, “Die”; then He restored them to life. And Allah is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude’ (*al-Baqara:* 243).

It is because of the Lord’s Greatness and His Absolute Power over all things that He bestows a token of His Power upon His creatures. Hence, for example, the story of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who was granted the power of restoring life to the dead through Allah’s Will. In our scope as humans, when, for example, a strong person sees a weak person trying to lift a burden, he helps him and uses his strength to carry the weight for him. But in the end, the weak person he has helped will remain weak. On the other hand, when the True Lord *the Exalted* gives of His Strength to one of His servants, He makes him able to do what he wants himself. The difference, then, is that when Allah endows His creatures with aspects of His Power, those powers become subjective.

Let us take another example from the Quran to drive this point home. In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, we encounter in the story of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* his request for Allah to show him the process of raising the dead: '…"My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." [Allah] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied"' (*al-Baqara:* 260). That is, my Lord I am a confident believer, but I want to be more assured and bring myself to a higher level of faith. Some orientalist scholars have paused over this verse and wondered whether Ibrahim's (Abraham) entreaty for a sign from Allah to ease his heart does not reflect a lack of faith on Ibrahim's (Abraham) part; seeing that faith, by definition, includes being clear and tranquil in heart over things unseen or unknown.

But this is not the case. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* did not say, 'My Lord, can You raise the dead?' Rather, he said, 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead…' (*al-Baqara:* 260). Evidently, he was a believer in resurrection and in Allah's Ability to raise the dead, but he wanted to know how it happened. He wanted to reach certitude about the manner in how it was done, rather than to affirm this attribute to Allah *Glorified is He*. In the same way, were I to ask you: 'How did you build that mosque?' Am I doubting the fact that the mosque has been built? Of course not, since it is already there. I just want to know how it has been constructed.

The True Lord *the Exalted* gave a logical response to His Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* given that the act of raising the dead can best be explained by its practice, rather than discoursing on the subject. Allah *Glorified is He* allowed Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* to raise the dead himself, giving Ibrahim (Abraham) the chance to participate in the act of resurrection, and, moreover, to see it with his own eyes. '...He (Allah) said, "Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you”...’ (*al-Baqara:* 260). That is, inspect them closely for distinguishing marks, and then slaughter them; ‘...“then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them, they will come [flying] to you in haste”...’ (*al-Baqara:* 260). As noted, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* himself was thus permitted to perform the act of raising the dead himself which indicates the greatness of The Creator *Glorified is He*.

Accordingly, Allah’s saying: ‘...and it is He Who gives life to the dead...’ (*ash-Shura:* 9) means that the power of resurrection belongs solely to Allah. Even if He sometimes imparts that power to whichever of His servants He pleases, He is still the original and rightful Possessor of this ability. Likewise with the statement: ‘...and it is He Who has power over all things’ (*ash-Shura:* 9). Certain creatures possess certain abilities or powers, such as humans or angels, whom some people worshipped instead of Allah. However, we know that the abilities possessed by these angels, and indeed all other creatures, are limited, and that angelic power to do one thing will not suffice to carry out something else. This is not so with the True Lord *Glorified is He* Whose Power and Authority are absolute. There is nothing He cannot do. His Power over all things is absolute.

وَمَا ٱخۡتَلَفۡتُمۡ فِيهِ مِن شَيۡءٖ فَحُكۡمُهُۥٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِۚ
ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ رَبِّي عَلَيۡهِ تَوَكَّلۡتُ وَإِلَيۡهِ أُنِيبُ ١٠

Whatever you may differ about is for God to judge.
[Say], ‘Such is God, my Lord. In Him I trust and to
Him I turn [10] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 10)

Here, ‘to differ’ refers to a lack of harmony or disagreement of opinions on a particular matter, with those who hold those opinions being divided into two or more opposing groups, each in support of its own views and in opposition to the others. Such dispute or disagreement may show up in a serious and fruitful discussion in which all participants are interested in discovering the truth; or in a vain argument in which people resort to lying and obstinacy, leading to no benefit whatsoever.

For this reason, the True Lord *the Exalted* instructs us as to how to resolve differences of opinion when they arise; we should refer ourselves to

Allah's Judgment on the matter. Thus, when contention arose concerning the nature of the soul, those who held different views on the matter asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about it. So Allah *the Exalted* revealed the following instruction: 'And they ask you (O Muhammad) concerning the soul. Say, "The soul is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little"' (*al-Isra':* 85).

In this way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* taught us the proper recourse in situations where opinions differ. We are also told not to draw hasty conclusions, but to seek out the truth of the matter with all objectivity. Indeed, there are situations in which people with seemingly different viewpoints are actually in agreement, even though they might not be aware of it. Take the Battle of the Trench, for example, in which the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayzha laid siege to Yathrib (Medina). After the armies of Quraysh had returned to Mecca, and the Jews had gone back to their encampments, the True Lord made it known to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the Jews were responsible for starting the war and igniting this crisis. He also made it clear that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* should go to the Jews and not take off the mantle and duty of battle. For this reason, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* went to his army, who were freshly returned from fighting, and said to them: 'Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not offer *'Asr* (afternoon) Prayer except at Banu Qurayzha.'(1)

He meant by this to keep ready for the battle. The Companions, therefore, redirected themselves to the location where Banu Qurayzha had made camp. However, on their way to the Jewish encampment, there was contention as to the meaning of the Prophet's instructions. It was getting near the end of the time allotted for *'Asr* (afternoon) Prayer; therefore, a group of the Companions said that they should pray right then before its time was over. The other group of the Companions said that they should not offer it until they had reached

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(1) *An agreed upon Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (no. 4119) and Muslim in his Sahih in the Book of Al-Jihad wa As-Sayr (p. 69) from the Hadith of Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with them both that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said to them on the day the Jewish Confederates retreated: 'None of you should offer the Zhuhr (noon) Prayer except at Banu Qurayzha's place.' According to another* version, *he said 'Asr Prayer.*

Banu Qurayzha, as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had commanded. In this way, the Companions were divided in their opinion over how they understood the Prophet's command, where some held that the focus was on the timing of the prayer, and they therefore offered the *'Asr* Prayer on the way to Banu Qurayzha. The others insisted that the place where they were to perform the *'Asr* Prayer was the focus of the command, hence they waited and did not pray until they reached Banu Qurayzha. On meeting up with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they presented this difference of opinion to him. When he heard their disagreement, he affirmed that both views were correct, offering objection to neither group's opinions on the matter.

This is because the disagreement was in the letter of the law, rather than the spirit. The Companions did not realise that both groups were correct, and that they were in fact in agreement with one another. Thus, when differing opinions arise over issues, as we see in this example, we should refer matters back to Allah and His Messenger. We should seek an objective solution without blind insistence upon one viewpoint or another. This is with regards to disagreements among believers.

This also applies to the people of the Book, namely the Jews and Christians. Refer any disagreements with them to Allah. They believe in holy books, respectively, the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel). In fact, both of them contain affirmations pointing to Muhammad as the Last of the Messengers, as well as heralds of his coming, his characteristics, and marks of his prophethood. We see evidence of this when we consider, for example, the fact that many people of the Book believed in him after he was commissioned with prophethood. Therefore, you should refer your disagreements with them to Allah in order to keep from continuing down a path of stubborn argumentation and disputation.

Continuing with the verse, the statement '...the decision thereof is with Allah...' (*ash-Shura:* 10) also includes the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* since he represents Allah in making religious pronouncements. Allah gave him the right of passing rulings, as evinced by the following verse: '...and whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad) gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it)...' (*al-Hashr:* 7). This right was a distinction which had never been granted to any of Allah's Messengers before

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Their duty was only to convey the message. As for our master the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* he was given the special privilege of making rulings. Therefore, in response to disputants who demanded evidence that the morning prayer should be two *rak'as* (units of prayer), the noon prayer four, and the sunset prayer three, the following verse provides such an evidence: '...and whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad) gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it)...' (*al-Hashr:* 7).

So by referring controversial matters to the True Lord *the Exalted* and submitting them to what Allah and His Messenger have said, we can settle any disputes or contentions that may arise.

One can have no objection to seeking the arbitration of a Supreme Power that unites the hearts in serenity and satisfaction with Allah's Decision. Do you not see that sometimes you may refuse the judgment of a human like you, even if it is right? But when the judgment is from Allah, it is accepted without objections.

Continuing on, let us consider the statement: '…Such is Allah, my Lord in Whom I put my trust…' (*ash-Shura:* 10). The Arabic word *dhalikum* translated as 'such is' is a demonstrative pronoun used for glorification or aggrandisement. *Dha* is the determiner, indicating that which is being referred to; *li* or the letter *Lam* connotes the dimension or proportion of that reference; and *ku* or the letter *Kaf* is an element of address. You say: '…Such is Allah, my Lord…' with pride in the Power of Allah and glory in ascribing yourself to Him recognising that He is above anything and everything which the human mind can imagine. As noted, the word *Rabb* (Lord or Sustainer) denotes the role of provider and caretaker, and the one from whom all grace and blessings flow. For this reason, we trust Him in all things. Likewise with the statement '…and to Him I turn back' (*ash-Shura:* 10) which means returning to Him for the final accounting and reward in the Hereafter.

When I say: '…Such is Allah, my Lord…' (*ash-Shura:* 10), I am glorying in and boasting of *Rububiyyah* (Allah's Lordship) which provides direction and blessings. I am also glorying in and boasting of *Uluhiyyah* (state of being Allah/right of worship) which enjoins obligations and duties, which are, in fact, part and parcel of direction and care. The necessary requirement of any care and protection given to humans is that it provides them with all elements necessary for a happy existence. However, a happy existence cannot be fully attained in this world, which is temporary and eventually passes away. For this reason, true providence provides something lasting and enduring, namely the Hereafter, the reward of which is never-ending. The next life is enduring and everlasting. Its joys and delights never cease. They shall never become exhausted and I shall never die and leave them behind.

There are some who claim that providing care and direction is in terms of physical needs. While this is true, it also encompasses spiritual needs. Therefore, the Most High Allah says: ‘O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life…’ (*al-Anfal:* 24). Here, what does the phrase ‘…that which gives you life…’ signify, seeing as those being addressed are alive and capable of hearing? Obviously, the intended meaning is a life other than this earthly, material one. Indeed, the implication here is a life of spiritual and moral excellence, an eternal life which does not pass away and from which we will never depart by death.

For this reason, the righteous doctrine, which provides the means to obtaining this everlasting life, is called *ruh* (spirit). Hence the following verse, which appears later on in the chapter of *ash-Shura:* ‘And thus We have revealed to you a *Ruh* (spirit) of Our Command…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52). Yes indeed, a life-giving book that endows you with an eternal afterlife, whereas that first, mortal spirit which has been breathed into us can only provide temporal, earthly life. For this reason, the angel who came down with this vivifying doctrine is called *ruh*. ‘The Trustworthy *Ruh* (Spirit – Angel Jibril (Gabriel)) has brought it down’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193).

Thus we may say that the life that we ultimately seek is not the temporal, earthly existence we currently live in. Rather, the mortal realm is a stepping stone, a means by which to arrive at an existence higher than this terrestrial one. And in order to obtain that better, choicer existence, we must adhere to the Law provided by the One Who will ultimately bestow upon us eternal life.

To sum up, the section of this verse that states ‘…Such is Allah, my Lord…’ (*ash-Shura:* 10) connects two aspects of Allah’s Nature. On the one hand, it expresses His Role as the Sole God worthy of worship, providing commandments and religious obligations; and on the other hand, it emphasises His role as a Sustainer Who guides, educates, provides, and confers blessings on us.

It is interesting to consider the diction used by the Quran to describe the issue of *tawakkul* (putting one's trust in Allah). In the phrase, '…my Lord in Whom I put my trust (*`alayhi tawakkaltu*)…', we see a style that the grammarians call *qasr* (restriction) in which the propositional phrase 'in Whom' is placed before the verb, 'I put my trust' (*tawakkalt).* The restrictive clause limits the meaning of the subject clause. It here underscores the fact that Allah is the only One in Whom trust is placed. If the sentence instead was, 'I placed my trust in Him,' it would include other people or things on which we can rely. Therefore, this choice of style confines and restricts trust and reliance to Allah alone.

Some scholars have said, regarding putting complete trust in Allah, that it is the source of funds for those who have run out of means. It is when humans let go of their own power and strength and entrust themselves to the power and strength of their Lord and Creator. Allah *the Exalted* has placed ways and means for everything, which, when they become lacking, we should turn to the Causer of everything. The Quran says: 'Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil...?' (*an-Naml:* 62). In this verse the word 'desperate' refers to those who have exhausted all the available means. Rather than falling into despair and succumbing to the pressures of circumstances, such a distressed person instead reminds himself that he has a Lord and Provider who is above all means. He is the Originator of all things, and He will not forsake me when I resort to Him.

We have previously discussed the story of our master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when he was overtaken by Pharaoh and his soldiers, who surrounded Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his followers at the edge of the sea. There appeared to be no escape, to the point that those who were with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said to him: 'We are sure to be overtaken...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). As far as they could tell, the reality of the situation was that the sea was behind them, their enemies in front of them, and they had nowhere to flee. That was the limit of their vision; whereas Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had other expectations from his Lord. Hence the response to their fears: 'Nay, verily! With me is my Lord, He will guide me' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62).

Such is the reliance and confidence that comes from trust in Allah, the reliance shown by distressed people who have lost all means of help, and who have no other recourse than to seek refuge in Allah. Hence the True Lord's response to Musa came as a dazzling, eternal miracle: 'Then We inspired to Musa (Moses), "Strike with your staff the sea," and it parted, and each portion was like a great towering mountain. And We advanced thereto the pursuers. And We saved Musa (Moses) and those with him, all together. Then We drowned the others' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63-66).

The style of *qasr* (restriction) is also employed in Allah's statement: '…and to Him I turn back' (*ash-Shura:* 10) in which the prepositional phrase '…to Him…' is placed before the verb. This restricts the meaning to one destination only – Allah. We also note an interesting difference between these two sentences in that *tawakkul* (reliance) is in the past tense *tawakkalt*, while *inabah* (returning) is in the present. This perfect precision is due to the fact that the speaker is Allah Himself.

Naturally, it is expected to find such perfect accuracy in the language of the Quran. Placing trust in Allah is a basic doctrine, adhered to from the beginning. Even before we begin to discuss the notion of putting one's trust in Allah, we know that it initially exists and is foundational. Only after first relying on Allah can we then turn to Him in subsequent future events. For this reason, this verse mentions trust in Allah first, then turning to Him.

The next verse discusses another aspect of the power of Allah *the Most High*, and clarifies His Role as the True Protector and Supporter for all creation:

فَاطِرُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنۡ أَنفُسِكُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗا وَمِنَ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ أَزۡوَٰجٗاۖ
يَذۡرَؤُكُمۡ فِيهِۚ لَيۡسَ كَمِثۡلِهِۦ شَيۡءٞۖ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡبَصِيرُ ﴿١١﴾

The Creator of the heavens and earth.' He made mates for you from among yourselves — and for the animals too — so that you may multiply. There is nothing like Him: He is the All Hearing, the All Seeing [11] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 11)

Here, the emphasis is on Allah as the Originator of creation. This can also be found in the first verse of the chapter of *Fatir*: 'All the praises and thanks be to Allah, the (Only) Originator [or the (Only) Creator] of the heavens and the earth...' (*Fatir:* 1). The word *Fatir* (originator) means the One Who originates and materialises creation without a prior model. This has a parallel in the industrial world where the products of some industrially developed countries have been copied by industrially developing countries. Even though the second group of countries may enhance and add features to the industrial products, still they are not the first designers of the original models. Thus, the meaning of the phrase '…Originator of the heavens and the earth…' (*Fatir:* 1) is that Allah is the One Who Created the heavens and earth originally without a preceding pattern or design.

Continuing on, the phrase '…He has given you…' (*ash-Shura:* 11) means that all things have been created for the benefit of the children of Adam, whom Allah has selected as His vicegerents on the earth. Therefore, the Qudsi Hadith says: 'O son of Adam, I created all things for your sake, and I created you for My sake. So do not preoccupy yourself with that which already belongs to you and be distracted from that which you belong to (namely, worshipping Allah).'(1)

Continuing with the verse, we read: '…He has made for you from yourselves, mates…' (*ash-Shura:* 11). By 'mates,' Allah *the Most High* is referring specifically to the bifurcation of the human species into males and females. This idea appears elsewhere in the Quran, such as the following verse from the chapter of *Ya Sin*: 'Glory be to Him, Who has created all the pairs of that which the earth produces, as well as of their own (human) kind (male and female), and of that which they know not' (*Ya Sin:* 36).

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(1) *Ibn Kathir stated in his exegesis (vol. 4, p. 238): 'It was narrated in some religious books that Allah the Exalted said: "O son of Adam, I created you to worship Me, so do not play. I have already set your share of sustenance, so do not weary yourself. Seek Me, you will find Me. If you find Me, you will find everything else; and if you miss Me, you will miss everything else. Indeed, I am more beloved to you than anything else." ' Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (vol. 2, p. 358) as Hadith marfu` (a Hadith narrated from the Prophet with a connected or disconnected chain of narration) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who narrated from the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him that he said: 'Allah says: O son of Adam, free yourself for My worship, I will (in turn) fill your chest with satisfaction and remove your poverty. If you do not, I will fill your hands with distraction and will not remove your poverty.'*

The notion of duality has been discovered by modern science to be present in all things, even in inanimate objects. Such as the positive and negative poles of electricity and the tiny particles that make up matter. In former eras, people observed this phenomenon in living beings: humans, animals, and plants. Now, science has advanced to the point where we see such a division in all things created by Allah. This proves the truth of Allah's Words: '...and of that which they know not' (*Ya Sin:* 36).

One of the remarkable aspects in connection with duality in creation is the presence of certain plants which have male traits, and others which have female ones. For these plants, pollination occurs through intermediary means such as the wind or insects. Even more astonishing than this is the existence of hermaphroditic plants, possessing both male and female characteristics. Sycamore trees fall into this category, as do palms. Mangoes, on the other hand, are self-pollinating, requiring no cross-pollination. Wheat and corn are also like them. They self-pollinate, due to the presence of both male and female traits in the same plant.

In this context, the phrase, '…He has made for you from yourselves, mates…' (*ash-Shura:* 11), therefore, refers to opposites which exist within the same species or type. Nature causes these opposites of the same species, that is, the males and females, to be attracted to one another, leading to cohabitation and the instinct to have sexual relations. For humans, this instinct carries with it both the pleasurable aspect and the procreative function.

Animals only engage in sex for the latter reason, evinced by the fact that a male is only attracted sexually to a female of a particular species until the female becomes impregnated; after this, the male does not come to her for copulation again.(1) Despite this difference between animals and humans, however, both share the procreative instinct. Why, then, do some call this instinct a 'bestial desire' doing insult to animal creatures by insinuating the baseness of their sexual impulses, when it is in fact shared by humans and animals alike?

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of *Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi Allah rest his soul* and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

One of Allah's Boons to creation was the formation of mates within the same species, allowing concord and harmony to exist between its members, as well as the procreation and preservation of that species. For this reason, the True Lord *the Exalted* most graciously conferred a favour by sending to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a Messenger from among themselves, carrying to them Allah's Message: 'Verily, there has come unto you a Messenger (Muhammad) from among yourselves. It grieves him that you should receive any injury or difficulty. He is anxious over you, for the believers (he is) full of pity, kind and merciful' (*at-Tawba:* 128). From this statement, we understand the care that Islam gives to family life, and that love, harmony, and intimacy must prevail in that sort of life. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says: '...and He placed between you affection and mercy...' (*ar-Rum:* 21).

The term *azwaj* (mates) has the singular form *zawj* in Arabic, (which often refers to a couple, as in a marriage relationship). However, *zawj* in this context takes on the sense of an individual being or thing which is accompanied by its like, rather than connoting two such things at once. Likewise, the word *taw'am* (twin) refers not to two twins at once, but to one individual.

Continuing with the present verse, we read, '…and among the cattle, mates...' (*ash-Shura:* 11). This idea has appeared in previous chapters such as the chapter of *al-An`am*: 'Eight pairs; of the sheep two (male and female), and of the goats two (male and female). Say, "Has He forbidden the two males or the two females, or (the young) which the wombs of the two females enclose? Inform me with knowledge if you are truthful. And of the camels two (male and female), and of oxen two (male and female)"…' (*al-An'am:* 143-144). Here, eight types of mates are mentioned, coming from four different species of cattle which are each divided into male and female counterparts.

Moving on, the phrase '…He multiplies you thereby…' (*ash-Shura:* 11) means to increase or augment the people in number by means of the Lord's creation of mates. We note that Allah *the Most High* has not said *bihi* (with or by) the creation of mates, but rather 'thereby' (*fihi*) meaning 'through' or 'by means of'. The preposition *fi* used with this specific meaning also appears in the Noble Hadith: ‘A woman was sent to hell by reason of (*fi*) her imprisoning a cat.’[1]

Allah’s saying: ‘...there is nothing like unto Him...’ (*ash-Shura:* 11) is particularly appropriate here. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of how all things are divided into mates, male and female, He wants to distinguish Himself from everything else in terms of bifurcation into male and female counterparts. He *Glorified is He* therefore states: ‘…there is nothing like unto Him ...’ (*ash-Shura:* 11). It would be one thing to simply say: ‘He has no equal’ which would suffice to negate any similarity between Allah and everything else. However, here the Arabic puts extra emphasis on this point by using the word *kamithlihi* (like unto) the frequent usage of which in human discourse shows how much people like to speak using comparisons. We see this in everyday Arabic speech, in which the phrase ‘like’ or ‘as’ actually refers back, by implication, to the subject of comparison. For example, a person may say: ‘One such as yourself would not do that’ as an injunction against a particular behaviour. The meaning is: ‘You should not do that, because a good person (such as yourself) would not do such a thing.’ One may therefore say, for example, ‘One such as yourself would not exhibit cowardice on the battlefield.’ Granted, it would be much easier to simply say: ‘You should not be a coward in times of war,’ rather than inserting the phrase ‘one such as yourself’.

However, the language here is operating on a different level, namely the level of allegorical speech. If, for example, one were to use the simile, ‘Zayd is like a lion’ this does not mean that Zayd is in fact a lion. It is a figurative device used to underscore some of Zayd’s personality traits which resemble those of a lion, but to a lesser degree; the lion is obviously more lion-like than Zayd, whose characteristics only bear a resemblance to the lion. Doubtless, the

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(1) *Narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘A woman was punished in hell because of a cat which she had confined until it died. She did not give it to eat or to drink when it was confined, nor did she free it so that it might eat the* vermin *of the earth.’ It was related in Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3318). Ibn Hajar stated in his book titled Al-Fath (*vol. *6, p. 357): ‘The intended meaning of the phrase “the* vermin *of the earth” is the pests and rodents, such as mice and the like.’*

subject of comparison is worthier than the object with which the subject is compared. Therefore, we would not say that there exists something like the True Lord *Glorified is He* even when just assuming, since nothing would be truly like unto Him. Something 'like' Allah would not be Allah Himself, but rather, a creature or thing of a lower existence which, when compared to Allah, might resemble Him in some way. This is what the poet (1) means when he writes:

I did not mean by saying, 'One such as You,' except
Someone other than You, O Singular One without Like!(2)

Thus, in the phrase '…there is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11) the style of negating the existence of anything which compares to Allah goes beyond merely denying that there exists something which resembles Allah. Indeed, Allah affirms the fact that, even if such a thing existed, it still would not be 'like' Him, since comparison does not mean equation. The 'nothing' to which the verse refers encompasses any kind or sort of the various aspects of Allah's creation. So anything in creation that can be referred to as a 'thing' is entirely unlike Allah.

Continuing on, we read, '...and He is the Hearing, the Seeing' (*ash-Shura:* 11). This description of Allah involves two attributes which some of His creatures are endowed with. Allah sees and hears, and humans can see and hear. However, we must regard this description of Allah in the light of the phrase just discussed, which is that '…there is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11). Allah does not hear as humans do, nor does He see as they do. The description of Allah as 'the Hearing' means that He hears all sounds; and 'the Seeing' that He sees all visual things.

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(1) *Abu At-Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi Ahmad ibn Al-Husayn*, born in *Kufa* (303 A.H. /915 A.D.). He was a wise, learned man and a poet. He was raised in the region of Sham (the Levant). From there, he went on to live in the desert with the Bedouin, where he began his career as a poet while still a youth. While living with the tribes of *Samawa*, he advanced the claim that he was a new prophet. He was captured and imprisoned for this after which he repented and forsook his pretensions to prophethood. He was most famous for his praise poetry to *Sayf Ad-Dawla ibn Hamdan*, the governor of Aleppo. *Al-Mutanabbi* was killed in Baghdad in 354 A.H. /965 A.D. at the age of 51.

(2) This is the final line of a poem by *Al-Mutanabbi* composed in the *sari'* (fast) meter and comprising 35 lines in total.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* states: '...and Allah is Seeing of what they do' (*al-Ma'ida:* 71). In this, we see that hearing is counted as an action, as well as speech and sight. As explained in previous sections, a person's actions consist of words and deeds. Words are confined to that which is uttered by the tongue, and deeds comprise all acts carried out by the sense organs except for the tongue. Accordingly, the tongue takes over one-half of a person's actions because with it a person makes statements, proclaims his faith and expresses himself.

So this verse teaches us how to place Allah *the Most High* above any peers, counterparts or equals. We have also learned to view the attributes shared between Allah and His creation within the frame of this belief ['there is nothing like unto Him'].

And why not, when such characteristics and abilities differ even from one human being to another? Different houses offer a simple, yet clear example. The sentinel of a town may have a house with an outdoor stone bench for receiving guests. The chief of the town and the mayor may also have their own houses with such a bench or a sitting room, each according to his means. But the town commissioner may have a larger house than all three of these men, filled with luxuries that the others could not hope to possess. All of these people own houses, but they differ in the type and quality of those homes. This brief example serves to illustrate the differences in characteristics or qualities from one person to another. If such differences exist between humans, how much more so in the qualities shared between humans and our Lord *the Glorious and Exalted*?

لَهُۥ مَقَالِيدُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ يَبْسُطُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِمَن
يَشَآءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

The keys of the heavens and the earth are His; He provides abundantly or sparingly for whoever He will; He has full knowledge of all things [12] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 12)

When considering this verse, let us first note the usage of the style of *qasr* (restriction) in the part saying: 'To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth…' (*ash-Shura:* 12) in which the propositional phrase 'To Him' is placed before the verb, 'belong'. In Arabic, this style emphasises the fact that the keys of heaven and earth belong to no one other than Allah alone. They are exclusively His own, and no one has any share of that with Him.

The word 'keys' here refers to Allah's possession of the keys of all beneficial and good things for mankind, whether in the heavens or on the earth. Allah also says in another place in the Quran: 'And with Him are the keys of the Unseen, none knows them but He...' (*al-An'am:* 59). The Unseen is just one of several storehouses, locked up away from the reach of anyone. When Allah grants someone a key to one of these depositories, giving him access to some knowledge of the Unseen, He empowers him to speak knowledgeably as a special bounty and honour bestowed upon him. It is by the grace of the Most High Allah alone that such a thing comes to pass. However, this access into understanding that has been granted to him does not make him an expert on the Unseen, as if he were fit to open an office of the Unseen sciences! Rather, such a person should make good use of the knowledge that Allah has conferred upon him, and return the key to its proper Owner. 'And with Him are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them except Him...' (*al-An'am:* 59). Indeed, those who claim to have knowledge of the Unseen lack courtesy with Allah.

In our common language, we also employ the word *maqalid* (keys) in various everyday contexts, (often with a figurative meaning). For example, we may say that a person possesses the keys of rule, or control or dominion to describe being in a management position or other occupation in which power has been granted to him over decisions or policies. We say of such a person, 'he holds the keys of power…' meaning he is responsible for management choices or decisions or controls the business and knows its secrets.

Continuing with the verse, we read: 'He enlarges provision for whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills)...' (*ash-Shura:* 12). This goes along with the preceding discussion of the keys possessed by Allah, one of which is Providence, or the power to grant sustenance freely and easily to some people, or to give it meagrely or even withhold it from others, according to His Will. Allah expounds this idea elsewhere in the Quran: 'And there is not a thing but that with Us are its depositories, and We do not send it down except according to a known measure' (*al-Hijr:* 21). In other words, Allah bestows or withholds His Sustenance and Gifts according to his Knowledge and Wisdom and in Divine measure. Do not think that the distribution of wealth among people is random and haphazard. Indeed, the Distributor has full knowledge of His creatures and is perfectly aware of their secrets and their hidden needs and wants. He is the All-Wise Who puts everything in its proper place. Therefore, we should not be surprised to see a millionaire living in opulence and luxury, while his neighbour can barely find nourishment for the day. We should not be astonished to see some shop owners enjoying a healthy flow of commerce, with customers buying and selling all day long, while stores adjacent to theirs receive no customers at all. We should not be shocked by such discrepancies in wealth and sustenance because there is a higher wisdom behind such differences. Wisdom which some understand and others do not.

In this regard, it is sufficient to read Allah's saying: 'And there is not a thing but that with Us are its depositories, and We do not send it down except according to a known measure' (*al-Hijr:* 21). As a concluding explanation of this fact, the verse under consideration reads: '...verily! He is the Knower of everything' (*ash-Shura:* 12). He knows who to give to and who not to give. For this reason, our master, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said in explanation of the wisdom behind uneven distribution of sustenance that Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'Among my servants are those whom if I make rich, they will become corrupted; and those whom if I make poor, they will be set right.'(1) Elsewhere, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'No! [But] indeed, man transgresses. Because he sees himself self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7).

And so we understand that there is wisdom behind the poverty of the poor and the richness of the rich. You should not raise objections to this. Instead, contemplate the situation. Perhaps wealth in your hands becomes a tool for assault, oppression, or violence. Or perhaps riches induce you to disobey Allah or kindle in you an inclination to evil. Excess luxury leads to any number of evil acts, which is why, when Allah withholds riches from some people, He is actually protecting them through poverty. Where wealth is appropriate to some, it may not be to others. You may act more righteously when you have little and show contentment with what Allah has allotted to you. You live contently and avert your eyes from gazing at the worldly belongings and riches of those who are of a higher status (financially) than you.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in his book Al-Asma' wa As-Sifat (p. 121 - Egypt), and Al-Baghawi in his explanation of the Sunnah (*vol. *1, p. 142), and Abu Bakr Al-Kalabadhi in Miftah Al-Ma`any (190), and Al-Albani in As-Silsilah Ad-Da`ifah wa Al-Mawdu`ah (*vol. *4, p. 256). He commented saying. 'It is ranked as* very *weak.' It begins as follows: 'He who antagonises a wali (a good worshipper, a faithful obedient servant) of Mine, I declare war against him.'*

We often see how corrupt the children of rich people can become due to the vast wealth at their disposal. Meanwhile, the son of a poor man is often protected from such vice, a fact which quite possibly makes his life better than that of the rich man's son. Examples of this abound in our lives.

A believer is only required to live within his financial means. However, there are those who try to set up a certain lifestyle for themselves before they have the means to pay for it. Struggling under financial difficulties, such people who do not have a sufficient income to sustain a lavish lifestyle often resort to illegal practices such as deceit, theft, bribery, and other unlawful means of obtaining the money necessary to cover their expenses. In this regard, Allah states: 'Let a man of wealth spend from his wealth, and he whose provision is restricted – let him spend from what Allah has given him. Allah does not charge a soul except [according to] what He has given it. Allah will bring about, after hardship, ease' (*at-Talaq:* 7).

When a believer enters a marketplace, for example, he finds all kinds of delicious, appetising foods – turkey, beef, fish, and fruits. And he may even desire them greatly. But in the end, he contents himself with the food he can afford, according to his means. He buys a kilogram of green beans and half a kilogram of cheese, and takes them home and eats them with his wife and children, finding in them a deliciousness which a rich man may not experience. However, if he were to fix his gaze on kinds of food which are beyond his means to buy, he would go into debt to be able to eat as wealthy people do. This might even lead to excess buying and eating to the point where the man becomes a spendthrift, squandering his means. This can go on for some time until his creditor knocks on his door one day, seeking repayment of the debt he owes him. On that day, the sweetness of rich foods will be nothing compared to the shame suffered due to debt.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the son of Adam in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘O son of Adam, I have created you so that you would devote yourself to Me, therefore, do not deviate from this path of worship. And I gave you sustenance so that you might not suffer fatigue—not the fatigue that comes from bodily wounds, but from thought, concerns and mental preoccupation with your life’s sustenance. If you content yourself with that which I have provided you, I will bring peace to your heart and body, and you will be regarded as praiseworthy. But if you are not content with what I have given, by My Majesty and greatness I will give this world power over you, such that you race about it like a beast running amok in the wild; that you gather from it only that which I have allotted you and that you receive my rebuke. O son of Adam, I have created the heavens and the earth, and that was an effortless matter to Me. Do you not think, then, that giving you a loaf of bread is an easier task to me? O son of Adam, ask not for tomorrow’s sustenance just as I do not ask you for tomorrow’s obedience to My commands. O son of Adam, you are ever beloved of Me and it remains My right to ask you to be ever beloved to Me.’(1)

Therefore, if a poor person is content with that which the Lord has given him, and does not seek a lavish lifestyle beyond his means to pay for it, Allah will say to him: ‘You have been content with the small measure of sustenance which I have given you and now, I will bless you with an increased measure’. It is for this reason that we see numerous examples of successful, wealthy people who started from scratch and suffered meagre (2) conditions, and rose from the bottom of the social pyramid.

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(1) This was mentioned in Ibn Kathir’s *Tafsir* (426/7, from the Dar Ash-Sha`b Al-Muhaqqiqa edition), and noted that summarised versions of it are found in several of the sacred books. Ismail Haqqi mentioned it in his Quranic commentary, *Ruh Al-Bayan Fi Tafsir Al-Quran* (59/7), in his exposition of verse 71 from the chapter of *an-Nahl*: ‘And Allah has favoured some of you over others in provision’ (*an-Nahl:* 71).

(2) The Arabic word used here, *mudaqqa`*, derives from the word *ad-daq`a`* meaning the dust of the earth. Thus, the word ‘“meagre’,” (*mudaqqa*) refers to one who clings to the level of the very dust, as it were, due to his extreme poverty.

When pondering the question of the limited economic conditions some of Allah's creations live in, we see that He withholds sustenance from some for a wise purpose, not only in terms of individual spiritual gain, but also for society as a whole. The apparent discrepancy between people's means leads to a form of harmony among the elements of a community, whereby everyone must rely on everyone else. The poor relies on the wealthy for sustenance- this we know-likewise, the wealthy relies on the poor for certain basic labours essential to any society. Not everyone can be a CEO as the world needs people to work in such professions like industrial production, agriculture and other fundamental occupations. Neither type of employment is better or worse than another type; each provides wages for the employee. A businessman needs to make money to live, so he engages in commerce. A maid, on the other hand, needs to earn her living, so she polishes, sweeps and cleans in people's houses. Consequently, it is out of material necessity and benefit that social classes are connected.

Another aspect of this discussion has to do with the quality of labour performed solely for the sake of money. For example, it is worth noting that many wealthy businessmen and CEO complain about their employees, grumbling that they only do their jobs when they run out of cash. As long as they have money in their pockets, the workers do not perform at their full potential. Along these same lines, I remember something my old professor, Musa Sharif, was fond of saying. He would lament, 'Oh that I could make learned men rich and mere labourers poor!' When asked about this statement, he would explain that people of learning take pride in knowledge for its own sake and would undertake to learn and to teach even if they were not paid well for it. Whereas, mere labourers work only for financial gain and do not have the same love for their vocation like the scholar.

As noted previously, the amount of work a person performs now will determine the payoff later. If a person works for ten years and saves his money, he will be able to live comfortably for the rest of his life. However, if that same person were to labour for twenty years, putting away his income, he would be able to provide a comfortable lifestyle for himself and his children after him. And if he undertook thirty years of employment in order to set aside his money, his grandchildren would still be enjoying the fruits of his labours long after his passing away. As a final note, we should remember that, despite one's best efforts, temporal conditions are subject to change. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And these days [of varying conditions] We alternate among the people…' (*Al-'Imran:* 140). So, today a person might enjoy sustenance and material blessings, tomorrow those things might be taken from him.

شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِۦ نُوحًا وَٱلَّذِىٓ أَوۡحَيۡنَآ إِلَيۡكَ وَمَا وَصَّيۡنَا بِهِۦٓ
إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰٓۖ أَنۡ أَقِيمُواْ ٱلدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُواْ فِيهِۚ كَبُرَ عَلَى ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ مَا
تَدۡعُوهُمۡ إِلَيۡهِۚ ٱللَّهُ يَجۡتَبِىٓ إِلَيۡهِ مَن يَشَآءُ وَيَهۡدِىٓ إِلَيۡهِ مَن يُنِيبُ ﴿١٣﴾

In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: 'Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it' – what you [Prophet] call upon the idolaters to do is hard for them; God chooses whoever He pleases for Himself and guides towards Himself those who turn to Him [13] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 13)

This verse provides further explanation and insight into the third verse at the beginning of this chapter: 'Thus has He revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and to those before you - Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Wise' (*ash-Shura:* 3). We note here the employment of a summary early on, followed later by the elucidation of details; this rhetorical device is one distinguishing feature of the Quranic style. To begin, we read Allah's statement, 'He has ordained for you of religion…' (*ash-Shura:* 13) meaning He has established and clarified the matter. The Arabic word *shara`* (ordained) is the source of such words as *sharra`* to make laws and *sharia*, i.e. the clear path which is used to refer to the legal code of Islam. This part of the verse refers to divine providence with regard to spiritual matters. We know that humans are comprised of two aspects, a material and a spiritual, and just as Allah provides food and air for the sustenance of the physical body, so too, does He breathe life into the human's soul, a life filled with morals and values.

Those standards make up the right way of Allah, which He revealed to the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, it is by this way that He gives life to the hearts and spirits of people, just as He gives life to their bodies by providing food and water. This ordination of true faith is not something new, nor is the path established for humankind, but rather a law established by Allah for all those who have come before, according to that which was of most benefit to them.

It is for this reason that the next statement we read in the verse is '…what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah)…' (*ash-Shura:* 13) meaning those things which Allah *Glorified is He* had commanded Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to do, and the religious duties made incumbent upon him. Allah chose Nuh (Noah) for this because he was the first messenger to reveal Allah's words to people at large. Scholars point out that Nuh (Noah) was sent out primarily to call the people of his time to take refuge in the ark. This constitutes his particular mission as a messenger sent to give the commands of Allah to all people. Numerous prophets since Nuh (Noah) have had similar callings, in order to bring Allah's words to the masses. The final of these is, of course, the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a message intended for all nations and peoples found upon the earth.

Let us take a moment to reflect on the rhetorical style of this particular statement. The relative pronoun *ma* (that which), but with a more specific semantic intent. It would have been logical to use the word 'that which' in the next statement '…and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad]…' (*ash-Shura:* 13) except that this refers to revelation given to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* Therefore, the more general relative pronoun, which, is the principle relative pronoun by grammarians of Arabic, is used in this particular context, leaving the pronoun, that which, to be used in the other statements regarding revelation found in the verse. We also note the verb 'He has ordained', which appears in the first person singular form of the present perfect tense. This is different from the statement referring to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessing be upon him* in which we read, '…and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad]…' (*ash-Shura:* 13). Here, the verb appears in the second person plural form, which is often called the plural of majesty. Then, next clause returns to using the relative pronoun, that which, in another form, 'and what We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus)' (*ash-Shura:* 13). The fact that this verse employs a different relative pronoun- the principal one- when referring the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is evidence of his special status, being set apart from all the other messengers *peace be upon them*.

We read, then, that Allah *Glorified is He* has ordained something and set it apart. The clause which follows elaborates what this thing is, beginning with the word ‘that’, which introduces the subjunctive mood expressing a wish, and signals an explanation of what Allah Has ordained exactly and set apart, namely, ‘…to establish the religion and not be divided therein’ (*ash-Shura:* 13). This is similar to another verse where Allah says, ‘And We inspired to the mother of Musa (Moses), “Suckle him…”’ (*al-Qasas:* 17). In short, Allah ordained to these prophets that they establish true religion and that they do not allow discord or enmity to exist among them. Delving further into this point, to establish something means to cause it to stand, i.e. to be firm. When something stands, it is ultimately evidence of the power or ability to do something since no one exerts more energy than he has to spare. If a person gets tired of standing, he sits down and once he is tired of that, he lies down. And so, when Allah *Glorified is He* tells us to establish the true religion, He wishes for us to stand for religion, rather than to sit idly by or to lie down in the wake of trials. The idea of standing here is a metaphor for attention to the establishment of religion and its preservation thereof. Finally, the phrase ‘…and not be divided therein’ (*ash-Shura:* 13) means that you put an end to the differences and squabbles between you.

The Arabic word for ‘divided’, appears elsewhere in the Quran in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘And there entered the prison with him two young men. One of them said, “Indeed, I have seen myself [in a dream] pressing wine.” The other said, “Indeed, I have seen myself carrying upon my head [some] bread, from which the birds were eating. Inform us of its interpretation; indeed, we see you to be of those who do the good.”’ (*Yusuf:* 36)

The final statement ‘…indeed, we see you to be of those who do the good.’ (*Yusuf:* 36) refers to goodness, not just that which comes from those who do good, but also from those who commit acts of disobedience. However, the meaning here is that the degree or ability to do good deeds is not a gift from Allah, but rather, it depends on our adherence to Allah’s orders.

In the next verse, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* expounds this example, which has allowed him to exercise dream interpretation: '…Indeed, I have left the religion of a people who do not believe in Allah, and they, in the Hereafter, are disbelievers. And I have followed the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Isaac) and Ya`qub (Jacob). And it was not for us to associate anything with Allah. That is from the favour of Allah upon us and upon the people, but most of the people are not grateful.' (*Yusuf:* 37-38)

From this explanation, we understand that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* wished to portray the ease of obtaining divine gifts and the ability to use them. He, therefore, first expounds the way by which this is accomplished, instead of going right into his interpretation of the dreams of his prison cellmates. He saw that they had a more immediate need for spiritual direction, guidance, and counsel, rather than an explanation of the visions they were shown. For this reason, he took advantage of the fact that his companions were attentive to his words since they wanted him to interpret their dreams. For this reason, he engaged in this discussion with them about faith: 'You worship not besides Him except [mere] names you have named them, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. Legislation is not but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know.' (*Yusuf:* 40) In this verse, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* discusses true worship and the inadequacy of revering multiple gods. Only after having this conversation, in which he invites his prison companions to adhere to the true path of Allah, does he begin his interpretation of their dreams: 'O two companions of prison, as for one of you, he will give drink to his master of wine; but as for the other, he will be crucified, and the birds will eat from his head. The matter has been decreed about which you both inquire.' (*Yusuf:* 41)

If Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had given his interpretation of the two dreams first, then followed it with his counsel about following Allah's commands, his cellmates would not have listened to him with the same concentration. It is a fact of human nature that people do things primarily to satisfy their interests; Yusuf (Joseph) would have fulfilled his companions' needs right away if he had immediately told them the interpretation of their dreams, causing them to divert their attention away from his advice about faith which would follow. He, therefore, began with what he desired to pass on to them, leaving their needs aside until he has finished he intended to say. From this story, then, we learn that, if a person wishes to have full attention of another person who has approached him in need, the first person should postpone fulfilling the second person's need until he has said what he wishes to say.

Continuing with the verse, we read: '…to establish the religion and not be divided therein' (*ash-Shura:* 13). This means that the believers are not to take any but Allah as their Lord and only God. It is also a divine order against division into factions and parties, as Allah says elsewhere in the Quran: 'Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects - you, [O Muhammad], are not [associated] with them in anything.' (*al-An'am:* 159) In that moment in which people are separated into opposing groups, they have gone astray, since it is incumbent upon us to gather together around Allah, united in faith.

In the next part of the verse: 'Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them.' (*ash-Shura:* 13) The Arabic word *kabura* (difficult for those) means to be a burden or a trouble to someone; this differs from the word *kabara*, from the same tri-literal root, which means to increase in age. This statement uses the former because monotheism and sincerity of belief in the one true Lord are burdensome and painful to the disbelievers. It is troublesome for them to bear testimony that 'there is no god but Allah', knowing as they do what it really means. They realise it signifies a way to lead one's life, complete with obligations and requirements, rather than mere words which are spoken. Accordingly, their reluctance to say them, 'It is also a burden upon the disbelievers to think that all people should be equal, like the teeth of a comb, one neither greater nor lesser than another, except in matters of devotion to Allah and performing good deeds'. This is because they came historically from the elite and they had a difficult time dealing with a religion like Islam, which brought with it the idea that master and slave are equal as human beings. This idea is troublesome to them and a burden. For this reason, they disputed with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and took a stand against him. But Allah *Glorified is He* never left him to face them by himself and assured him by saying: 'Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]' (*ash-Shura:* 13). It is as if He is trying to say, 'Do not fret over their antagonistic attitude towards you or their rejection of your invitation to follow the true religion. It is only natural for them to approach you in this way because your message threatens to remove the power which they have enjoyed for so long. It will prevent them from spreading corruption in society and benefiting from it, as they have done in the past; and from subjecting the people to their whims, leaving them without power to escape. Their animosity towards you is evidence that you are in the right when you call them to repentance. Thus, their hostility is to be expected, since they follow their nature and you follow yours; they behave in a spirit of aggression and stubbornness and arrogance and you in a spirit of longsuffering'.

Therefore, Allah's statement 'Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]' (*ash-Shura:* 13) refers to those powerful leaders who stubbornly resist the call to true religion. It means that there will be those among them who decide to answer that call, who will uphold it and be like an ensign for it. Allah *Glorified is He* consequently comforts His Messenger, telling him not to be sad or to worry, since he will lead many disbelievers to the faith one by one. This is upheld by the acceptance of Islam by several of the Companions, such as `Umar and Khalid and `Amr and `Ikrima *Allah be pleased with them* and others. It should be noted that the Arabic word *yajtabi* (chooses) means that Allah selects and sets apart those of His slaves whom He wishes, in order for them to be protectors of His true religion. That setting apart is as if it were the first step, a preface to being able to receive His guidance. That is why He begins with the statement that He chooses whom He wills, following it with the affirmation that He: 'guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]' (*ash-Shura:* 13). He first calls and sets apart those whom He wills, softening their resistance to the call to true religion and making faith beloved to them, in order to prepare them to be guided by Him.

In historical accounts of wars and invasions, we read examples of how Allah *Glorified is He* preserved those disbelievers, whom He later converted to Islam. There are numerous stories of about the companions of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who would return home from war, feeling dejected after unsuccessful attempts to kill such then known to be disbelievers like Khalid, `Amr and `Ikrima *Allah be pleased with them* who were counted among the enemies and later converted to Islam. At the time, the Companions were unaware that Allah had set these men apart and preserved them, in order to prosper His true religion and exalt His word through them. Indeed, Allah safeguarded these men, calling them from among the disbelievers and choosing them to be later guided by accepting Islam so that they would carry its banner and spread its message to all peoples and nations.

Before leaving behind the thirteenth verse, let us consider two points of controversy among some orientalists concerning what Allah says, ‘He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus)…’ (*ash-Shura:* 13). The first point involves the question of revelation. If Islam were the same yesterday, today and forever, then why would Allah reveal different laws to different messengers in different times and places? This goes along with the second point of contention, which involves a seeming contradiction between this and other verses. We read elsewhere in the Quran: ‘To each of you We prescribed a law and a method’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 48). In other words, every prophet has his respective law and Muhammad had things revealed to him which were not revealed to those who came before him.

In answer to the first point, we know that Allah Has revealed certain truths and doctrines which are incumbent upon all people and for this reason He has made them known to all His messengers. The inspired revelations received by Allah’s messengers all agree concerning these fundamental principles, the foremost of which is the oneness of Allah and the absence of any god other than Him. After this first principle, come other basic doctrines such as faith in the holy books and in the messengers of Allah. These first truths are unchanging, divine revelations seen in the words of every prophet; they represent the cornerstone of true religion and they are what is intended when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what

We enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus)…' (*ash-Shura:* 13). The word, 'revealed', here refers to those necessary, unchanging principles common to all religions inspired by Allah's word. The truth behind Allah's Oneness is expressed by every righteous messenger; likewise, acts of worship such as prayer and almsgiving appear as obligatory practices in every religious law preceding Islam, making it impossible for any inspired message to neglect their importance.

For example, we see the importance of prayer illustrated in the story of our prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* who took his family to live in a parched valley which was a hardship for them due to the lack of food. He explains the reasoning behind this decision, which was made in the following verse: '…that they may establish prayer…' (*Ibrahim:* 37). In this same story, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And [mention, O Muhammad], when We designated(1) for Ibrahim (Abraham) the site of the House, [saying], "Do not associate anything with Me and purify My House for those who perform *Tawaf* and those who stand [in prayer] and those who bow and prostrate."' (*al-Hajj:* 26) We see this also in another story, that of prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*: 'They said, "O Shu`aib (Jethro), does your prayer command you that we should leave what our fathers worship…"' (*Hud:* 87)? And yet again, in the story of prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him*: 'So the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the chamber…' (*Al-'Imran:* 39).

Likewise, the practice of *zakat* is present in the inspired message of every prophet in every religion. For example, in the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* explains this concept: 'He has certainly succeeded who purifies himself. And mentions the name of his Lord and prays. But you prefer the worldly life, while the Hereafter is better and more enduring. Indeed, this is in the former scriptures, The scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses).' (*al-A'la:* 14-19) In this manner, all divinely inspired religions encourage believers to rid their bodies and souls of those sins and transgressions which harm both self and society; omission of sin is prerequisite to true submission to Allah. Every inspired religion enjoins personal purity upon its followers—from one's heart all the way to the soles of one's feet, a true believer cleanses himself from sin and error. Take the heart, for example as a symbol of one's thoughts and feelings; it is the foremost of human organs, exerting the most influence on one's overall disposition. That is why the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'However, there is in the body a morsel of flesh which, if made pure, will purify the entire body; and if corrupted, will corrupt the whole self. This morsel of flesh is the heart.'(1) There are a number of things which believers are asked to remove from their hearts, such as the thought that there are any gods other than Allah *Glorified is He* insistence on transgressing or rebelling against His law. They are also required not to have feelings of security from Allah's Wrath or lose hope in His Mercy.

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(1) Designated means facilitated for him a place. Similarly, Allah mentions in another verse: 'And [remember] when you, [O Muhammad], left your family in the morning to post the believers at their stations for the battle [of Uhud] …' (*Al-'Imran:* 121) which means that Allah placed them in the battle field- without leaving it- to fight. (Adapted from Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/88)

Likewise, followers of Islam are required to rid their tongues of impure speech since the tongue is the vanguard of expression and clarity. There are a number of things which believers should purge from their daily communication, including the telling of lies, slandering women of good repute, perjury and swearing the dipping oath.(2) Finally, true believers should rid themselves of spells which magicians pronounce.

As for the belly, we are obligated to cleanse it of alcohol, usury, and stealing from orphans' money. Believers are also to keep their hands clean, avoiding such acts as theft and murder. Likewise, the genitals are to be kept free from prostitution and those other sex acts prohibited by Allah. Even one's legs are to be prohibited from going to any place that displeases Allah, i.e. doing acts of harm.

Among other established principles of any religion, we find the principle of disobedience to parents, which all religions prohibit, but to which human nature is ever inclined. Allah *Glorified is He* forbids disobedience to one's parents because learning to comply with the demands of a parent is a training ground for obedience to Allah Himself. Parents are the direct means by which we live on earth, just as Allah is the indirect means thereof. Reverence for one's parents, therefore, helps us to follow Allah's Commands and we should respect our mothers and fathers, even if they worship something other than the True Lord, Allah *Glorified is He*. This is clearly stated in the following verse, where Allah says, 'But if they endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness…' (*Luqman:* 15).

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(1) *Al-Bukhari extracted it for its authenticity (52) and also Muslim, based on An-Na`man ibn Bashir's Hadith (1599).*

(2) It is called a dipping oath because it 'dips' the one swearing by it into the hellfire, as it is a reason why people lose their rights. Ibn-Mas`ud said regarding it, 'It is considered one of the major sins for a man to falsely swear an oath in order to cut from his brother's wages.' *Lisan Al-`Arab*

For this reason, Allah teaches us about the importance of respecting one's parents in every inspired message which He Has revealed. We see this, for example, in the story of prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Since a lack of obedience to parents was a possible chink in `Isa's (Jesus's) spiritual armour, through which Satan might have gotten hold of him, Allah commanded 'Isa (Jesus) to revere his mother. However, because `Isa (Jesus) was born of a mother and not a father, this injunction was for him to respect his mother alone, in order to fend off Satan's temptations: 'And [made me] dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched tyrant.' (*Maryam:* 32). Whereas in the story of prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* who was born of a mother and a father, the command is to obey both of his parents: 'And dutiful to his parents, and he was not a disobedient tyrant.' (*Maryam:* 14). We note that prophet `Isa's (Jesus's) statement, 'And [made me] dutiful to my mother…' (*Maryam:* 32), is a recognition of this difference. In the story of Yahya (John), it is Allah who tells us of his reverence for his parents, especially since his very birth was miraculous; his parents were both advanced in age and his mother was barren. The incredulous circumstances surrounding Yahya's (John's) birth represent a potential way for Satan to tempt Yahya (John) to disbelief, by making him question his existence, 'How would I come to being while my mother was barren and my father an old man'?

To conclude, we know that Allah wishes us to cleanse ourselves of all the sins and transgressions mentioned in this discussion. He desires that we rid our bodies of all spiritual filth, turning them into vessels for building society and mutual respect and love among all people. He wants us, through personal purity, to build our own communities in such a way as to help guarantee a good and happy life for all those with whom we coexist. This command, to cleanse ourselves so that we could help others, is a common denominator of all religions and it represents the intended meaning of Allah’s statement ‘He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nuh (Noah)…’ (*ash-Shura:* 13).

As for the verse which seems to contradict this one: ‘To each of you We prescribed a law and a method’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 48), the intended meaning of the phrase ‘a law and a method’ are those doctrines, laws and principles which are revealed for a particular community, society or environment, or which deal with those plagues and diseases which afflict people. These revealed laws are given to help treat such ailments, depending on the practices of those people, hence why do such laws differ from one religion to the next? Every civilisation has its own trials to undergo. Some have experienced corruption and transgression, while others have tried to scrimp what is in their weights and measures. There are those who worshipped cult images, e.g. objects and statues and others who worshipped planets or angels. We should not be surprised then to find differences in the laws revealed to them.

Accordingly, we see that the two points of contention raised by the orientalists concerning this verse, have no grounds, since each verse is revealed in a particular context and treats a particular subject.

وَمَا تَفَرَّقُوٓاْ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلۡعِلۡمُ بَغۡيَۢا بَيۡنَهُمۡۚ وَلَوۡلَا كَلِمَةٞ
سَبَقَتۡ مِن رَّبِّكَ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ مُّسَمّٗى لَّقُضِيَ بَيۡنَهُمۡۚ وَإِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ أُورِثُواْ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ لَفِي شَكّٖ مِّنۡهُ مُرِيبٖ ١٤

They divided, out of rivalry, only after knowledge had come to them, and, if it had not been for a decree already passed by your Lord to reprieve them until an appointed time, they would already have been judged. Those after them, who inherited the Scripture, are in disquieting doubt about it[14]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 14)

Regarding the historical context of this verse, there were disbelievers in Mecca who worshipped cult images. There were also people of the Book, both Jews and Christians, who contended with those disbelievers. The tension between these two groups prevailed for a long time; the people of the Book were greatly angered by the disbelievers, insomuch that they would say to them, ‘The time will soon come that a prophet will come out from among you. We will fight you tooth and nail, even unto death’.

Allah *Glorified is He* informs us about the state of the people of the Book: ‘And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognised…’- that is Prophet Muhammad- ‘they disbelieved in it’ (*al-Baqara:* 89).

Indeed, the holy books have testified of Prophet Muhammad’s coming, in the time and place in which he came. The people of the Book knew of him and had ample descriptions of him in their Scriptures. There were even many people of the Book, such as `Abdullah ibn As-Salam who understood that Muhammad would bring the complete truth with him and that he was a prophet sent from Allah.

Concerning these people and their knowledge of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons’ (*al-Baqara:* 146). For this reason, one notable figure(1) from among the people of the Book is said to have been aware of Prophet Muhammad’s coming just like his own son, or even that he was more familiar with Muhammad than his own son.(2) This is because statements describing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon*

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(1) *Referring to `Abdullah ibn As-Salam ibn Al-Harith Al-`Isra`ili Abu Yusuf. He was a Companion of the Prophet and accepted Islam after the arrival of the Prophet in Medina. At the time, his name was Al-Hasin, and the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him gave him the name `Abdullah. He, along with `Umar, oversaw the opening of the Holy Mosque, and he resided in Medina until his death in 43 A.H. Ensigns by Az-Zirikli, 90-94).*

(2) *In his Tafsir (1/194), Ibn-Kathir states, ‘Al-Qurtubi says, ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him relates that he once asked `Abdullah ibn As-Salam, “Did you know of Muhammad’s coming just like you know your own son?” He answered, “Yes, and even better than I know my son. Allah caused His upright servant to come to earth as His authorized representative thereupon. His messenger came according to the description present in the Scriptures and so I knew him when I saw him. As for my son, I did not know him before he came from his mother.”’*

him and his advent are repeated throughout their Scriptures. However, many of the people of the Book did not believe in the Prophet when he finally came.

So then, Allah states: ‘And they did not become divided until after knowledge had come to them…’ (*ash-Shura:* 14). Here, the word ‘knowledge’ refers to those statements in their Scriptures testifying to the coming of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. ‘And if not for a word that preceded from your Lord…’ (*ash-Shura:* 14), a decree which Allah had promised them by: ‘[postponing the penalty] until a specified time…’ (*ash-Shura:* 14) referring to the Day of Judgment, ‘it would have been concluded between them’ (*ash-Shura:* 14), i.e. the ultimate demise and rooting out of the disbelievers and the continued survival of the believers. Allah did not utterly destroy them, but rather postponed their demise since there were those among them who would later accept Islam and become warriors in Allah’s army.

In the following verse: ‘And indeed, those who were granted inheritance of the Scripture after them are, concerning it, in disquieting doubt’ (*ash-Shura:* 14), Allah refers to the Jews and Christians alive during the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by, ‘…those who were granted inheritance of the Scripture.’ (*ash-Shura:* 14) And that they are in ‘disquieting doubt’ (*ash-Shura:* 14) means that they were in doubt about the inspired writings they had previously received. This alludes to the doubt, hesitation, and confusion they felt regarding their Scriptures since they found a number of errors which led them to distrust those writings. They forgot what Allah had previously revealed about the Christians: ‘And from those who say, “We are Christians” We took their covenant; but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 14). Likewise, the Jews, whom He talks about in the verse before this one: ‘So for their breaking of the covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They distort words from their [proper] usages and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were reminded’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 13). Here, ‘and have forgotten’ indicates that forgetfulness is of the forgotten. So, if the Jews truly thought these sayings of the Scriptures were important, they would be constantly pondering on them, rather than neglecting them to the point of forgetting. Even when they did not forget certain statements in the Scriptures, they altered those things which they remembered. They had no excuse for their failure to remember inspired revelation; how much less of an excuse for perverting Allah's words?

After forgetting what Allah had revealed to them in the Scriptures, which they already had, they suppressed further revelation from their Lord: 'And [mention, O Muhammad], when Allah took a covenant from those who were given the Scripture, [saying], "You must make it clear to the people and not conceal it." But they threw it away behind their backs and exchanged it for a small price. And wretched is that which they purchased.' (*Al-'Imran:* 187)

If only they had ceased their distortion of the Scriptures at this point! But they continued to the point where they interjected their own vain statements into the inspired writings, taking them to be the words of Allah. Allah says to them: 'So woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn.' (*al-Baqara:* 79)

Allah says:

فَلِذَٰلِكَ فَٱدْعُ ۖ وَٱسْتَقِمْ كَمَآ أُمِرْتَ ۖ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَآءَهُمْ ۖ وَقُلْ ءَامَنتُ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ
ٱللَّهُ مِن كِتَٰبٍ ۖ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ بَيْنَكُمُ ۖ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ ۖ لَنَآ أَعْمَٰلُنَا وَلَكُمْ
أَعْمَٰلُكُمْ ۖ لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ ۖ ٱللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا ۖ وَإِلَيْهِ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ١٥

So [Prophet] call people to that faith and follow the straight path as you have been commanded. Do not go by what they desire, but say, 'I believe in whatever Scripture God has sent down. I am commanded to bring justice between you. God is our Lord and your Lord – to us our deeds and to you yours, so let there be no argument between us and you – God will gather us together, and to Him we shall return' [15]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 15)

The demonstrative phrase 'So…' in this verse, refers to the preceding discussion regarding the fact that the people broke up their unity; contended among themselves as to what was revealed in the Scriptures and suppressed the words of Allah, even going so far as to pervert it for their own purposes.

Allah gave His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* the special mission to correct what they have done, to restore balance and order to the lives of the people and to keep them from future corruption and perversion of Allah's message. We note here the link between words and actions: 'So to that [religion of Allah] invite, [O Muhammad], and remain on a right course as you are commanded' (*ash-Shura:* 15). In other words, Allah commands the Messenger's deeds to match his words as He states elsewhere: 'Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course…' (*Fussilat:* 30).

As noted in previous sections, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. So, when Allah gives the command 'and remain on a right course', He means for us to stay on the straight, main road, without veering into side streets. Hence, the names 'The Straight Path' and 'Soundness of the Way'(1) are both mentioned in the Quran since it guides us to our destination, namely Allah, along the shortest possible path—a straight one. Therefore, when Allah commands His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to do these things, it is as if He is saying: 'Pursue the right course because when you do that, your adherence to the Straight Path will help others accept true religion, listen to your words and believe that what you do is right'. Of course, it is well known that actions speak louder than words and so teaching people and counselling them through what we do is more effective for their conversion to true faith than mere talk. That is why one of the Companions came to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, say something definitive of true religion, such that I need not ask whether it be true. He replied, 'I found belief in Allah and now I continue pursuing the straight path.'(2) This is one of many of his sayings on the matter.

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(1) The description of the Quran as '*As-Sirat Al-Mustaqim*' (The Straight Path) appears in the opening chapter al-Fatiha 'Guide us to the straight path' (*al-Fatiha:* 6). The appellation '*Sawa` As-Sabil* (Soundness of the Way) appears in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'Or do you intend to ask your Messenger as Musa (Moses) was asked before? And whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has certainly strayed from the soundness of the way' (*al-Baqara:* 108). The phrase in Arabic for 'Soundness of the Way' refers to the middle portion of a path or road which is the straightest and which leads most quickly to one's destination. Calling the Quran by this name, therefore, represents counsel to be moderate in all things.

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Sufyan ibn `Abdullah Ath-Thiqafi, who extracted it for its authenticity. He related it as follows: 'I said, "O Messenger of Allah, say something=*

Then, after ordering His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to follow the Straight Path, Allah warns him not to adhere to what the world would have him do: ‘and do not follow their inclinations’ (*ash-Shura:* 15). Personal desires, likes and dislikes lead to contention and discord. One such worldly desire took its form in the peoples’ requests for the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to experiment with devotion to other deities, ‘Worship our gods, and we will worship your one God.’(1) It was because of this challenge to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah revealed the chapter of *al-Kafirun*. In the statement, ‘I have believed in what Allah has revealed…’ (*ash-Shura:* 15), the phrase ‘what Allah has revealed’ (literally book) is indefinite making the statement more inclusive. Indeed, Allah is referring to all those inspired writings revealed prior to this. It is as if Allah were asking the Jews and Christians why, if they believed in the Scriptures which had come before, they refused to believe in the message revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. His Message is like those which had come before and in which they believed, so, why cut their belief off and pretend that Islam is a lie which they did because there were groups of Muslims who contended among themselves over certain points of doctrine?

The people of the Book would say to Muhammad’s followers, for example, ‘Our religion and holy books are older than yours as are our messengers. Your Quran even testifies of our special relationship to Allah, “O Children of Israel, remember My favour which I have bestowed upon you and that I preferred you over the worlds” (*al-Baqara:* 122). We are, therefore, given precedence over other peoples by testimony of your own holy book’!

= *definitive of true religion, such that I need not ask whether it be true.” He replied, “I found belief in Allah and now I continue pursuing the straight path.”’ Ahmad also rated it as authentic in his Musnad (384-385) as well as Muslim (38).*

(1) *Al-Wahidi states in his Asbab An-Nuzul, on the circumstances surrounding the revelation of the verse of al-Kafirun, that a band of members from the tribe of Quraysh went up to Muhammad and said to him, ‘Come! Try our religion, and we will try yours; experiment with our gods, and we will attempt to worship your one God. If this new religion you bring is better than what we already have, we will freely participate in it and take our fair portion of it. If, however, our religion is better than the one which you bring, then have part of our faith and come worship with us.’ He said in response, “Allah forbid that I worship anything other than Him.”’. As part of the Prophet’s response, Allah revealed this verse, beginning with: ‘Say, “O disbelievers…”’ (al-Kafirun: 1).*

However, according to this argument, this precedence is not absolute, but rather a product of time and place. Otherwise, they would also take precedence over Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them* which they do not claim to be the case.

Allah's statement '…and I have been commanded to do justice among you…' (*ash-Shura:* 15) means restoring balance and fairness without contention such that each person may have his rights. This means not giving preference or priority to one person over another in your views or treatment of them. One must even distribute his glances evenly, as the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did when sitting amongst the Companions, showing no preference to one person to another. He did not want them to think that just because he had fixed his gaze longer on one or the other, that he thought that that person had more prestige or power or experience or strength. All were equal in his sight, which shows the Prophet's fair treatment and sense of justice with regard to his fellow human beings.

In the following verse, 'Allah is our Lord and your Lord.' (*ash-Shura:* 15) means that Allah *Glorified is He* is not the Lord of Muhammad's followers alone, but also of those who did not yet believe in Him. And as long as this is the case, His Lordship is over us all and His revealed path is one and final, made known to everyone. The next statement in the verse is one of many which indicate the perfect completeness of that lordship when Allah teaches us to: 'For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds' (*ash-Shura:* 15). This means, of course, that each person will have to answer for his or her actions alone, 'There is no [need for] argument between us and you' (*ash-Shura:* 15) meaning, no disagreement and discord which can lead only to dispute, stubbornness and enmity, and which do not lead back to the truth. In times of contention, each person will decide to follow his own path, rather than trying to come together.

Allah further takes up this subject in the chapter of *al-Kafirun*: 'Say, "O disbelievers! I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship. For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-6). Thus, there is no reason to argue here because the discord between belief and doubt is unequivocal and final. This is unlike other aspects of human society, such as international politics. At times, certain nations cut off relations with each other, only to be forced to reconcile again by extenuating circumstances. This is not the case with faith and disbelief which can never be reconciled. That is why, when we attend closely to the statements made in chapter of *al-Kafirun*, we find the negation of any such reconciliation, whether now or in the future: ‘I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship. (*al-Kafirun:* 2-3) referring to the present and ‘Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship’ (*al-Kafirun:* 4-5) referring to the future.

At the end of the verse, Allah says, ‘Allah will bring us together, and to Him is the [final] destination’ (*ash-Shura:* 15). This means that, even if we continue contending with one another here on earth, Allah will bring us together to account for our deeds on the Day of Judgment, each person answering for his own actions here on earth. On that day, He will give each person that which is deserved; everyone would do well to leave the judgment of their deeds to the Just, which will show they are confident in their deeds on earth and that they are in the right. Indeed, Allah’s Wisdom is sufficient, ‘…and to Him is the [final] destination.’ (*ash-Shura:* 15) It is to Him that we shall return.

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُحَآجُّونَ فِي ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا ٱسۡتُجِيبَ لَهُۥ حُجَّتُهُمۡ
دَاحِضَةٌ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡ وَعَلَيۡهِمۡ غَضَبٞ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٞ شَدِيدٌ ١٦

As for those who argue about God after He has been acknowledged, their argument has no weight with their Lord: anger will fall upon them and agonizing torment awaits them [16] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 16)

Allah’s statement: ‘And those who argue concerning Allah…’ (*ash-Shura:* 16) means that they still contend with each other over Allah’s religion. This statement refers to those who have already answered the call of the truth. And the statement: ‘…after He has been responded to…’ (*ash-Shura:* 16) means that those who argue over religion say to the believers, ‘Our religion and messengers are older than yours. Your very Quran testifies that we are the best people among those who have knowledge of divine religion’. Allah says about them: '…their argument is invalid with their Lord' (*ash-Shura:* 16). This means that their claims are futile and are not accepted by Allah and it is unwise to ever try to turn to them. The statement: 'and upon them is [His] wrath…' (*ash-Shura:* 16) refers to Allah's Anger and denunciation of them since they did not stop disbelieving, but sought to bring others down into similar disbelief. In this, the disbelievers bear responsibility for their burdens and those of the people whom they caused to go astray. They, therefore, deserve this fate, namely Allah's Wrath which is the first of many stages of His punishment. On that account, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned in a Qudsi Hadith (1) how He was displeased with a group of people. They were cast out of His Mercy for good. To further illustrate this progression, take for example an owner of a company with employees and workers. One employee commits an error and the boss instantly gets mad. However, his heart softens and once again he leaves the employee to his duties. However, the employee soon commits another error and so his boss says, 'I do not want to see you again' as though the boss wanted to create a barrier or a veil between himself and the employee. Later, the boss reprimands the employee by deciding to fire him, just like when Allah cast stubborn disbelievers out of His Mercy.

In the same manner, Allah *Glorified is He* grew angry with those who contend over religion, after which He distanced and created a veil between them and Him, finally condemning them and casting them out of His Mercy, 'and for them is a severe punishment' (*ash-Shura:* 16).

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَٱلْمِيزَانَ ۗ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ ٱلسَّاعَةَ قَرِيبٌ ﴿١٧﴾

It is God who has sent down the Scripture with Truth
and the Balance. How can you tell? The Last Hour
may well be near [17] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 17)

In the statement: '…in truth…' (*ash-Shura:* 17), 'the truth' refers to that which is fixed and does not change. It is certainly also that which remains victorious after all is said and done. Even if vain falsehood gets the better of truth from time to time, this is yet for a wise purpose, since falsehood nips at people's heels in order to repel them and cause them to inquire after truth and to seek refuge in its protection. The final victory, therefore, goes to the truth, no matter how long falsehood lasts or assails or roams freely. Accordingly, we previously said that falsehood is one of the soldiers in Allah's army.

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(1) A Qudsi Hadith is a narration, a Hadith which, from the perspective of its meaning, is from Allah *the Exalted* and from the perspective of its wording, from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Let us now draw from the imagery, which Allah uses, to clarify the relationship between truth and falsehood. Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'He sends down from the sky, rain, and valleys flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries rising foam. And from that [ore] which they heat in the fire, desiring adornments and utensils, is a foam like it. Thus, Allah presents [the example of] truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth. Thus, does Allah present examples' (*ar-Ra'd:* 17). Therefore, the truth is that which remains, whereas falsehood is that which fades and vanishes. Because of this, we see the attempts by those who fight against the Quran's message including efforts to criticize its rhetorical style. For example, they often disparage the following verse: '…and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while the word of Allah - that is the highest' (*at-Tawba:* 40) saying that this is an incorrect statement since the cause of those bent on denying the truth was already utterly low, without Allah doing anything to it, the same being true of Allah's cause being supreme from the beginning. This contradiction is the result of a lack of understanding of Allah and of their lack of understanding of linguistic style of the Quran. This verse means that Allah *Glorified is He* made their cause utterly low; it is the object of a change which Allah put into effect. As for Allah's Cause, however, it is not such an object, since His cause is supreme from the very beginning. It was not initially low and then somehow made high by Allah, which is evidenced by the fact that it is the subject of the sentence, rather than the object.

The statement '…and the balance…' (*ash-Shura:* 17) means that Allah brought something tangible for mankind, an instrument used to differentiate between truth and falsehood(1) by measuring proper weights. So, the issue is not random, but rather, there is an established, palpable measure for insuring justice and equality. The only difference in measuring weight is in the substance placed on the balances. A measure of wheat or potatoes, for example, is not worth the same as a measure of gold. We find certain goldsmiths who fashion balances with a glass casing around them, in order to block out more air, which might interfere with the measurement. In this way, they create their balances with the precision necessary for proper measurement. With the least amount of tilt due to this precision, measuring gold yields a different weight than when measuring potatoes, for example.

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(1) Falsehood; This is the contextual meaning of this word, which was mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his interpretation (9/6058). He mentioned a few definitions to it: =

In short, the word ‘balance’ means those laws which govern what lies between truth and falsehood. In the chapter of *al-Hadid*, Allah says: ‘We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice’ (*al-Hadid:* 25). In other words, justice and truth were the final goal of bestowing revelation on chosen apostles. Allah *Glorified is He* brought the balance of revelation in order to give every person that which he rightfully deserves and to mete out a just reward to those who should receive it. He also did this so that no one would take more than he deserves and that one person might not violate the rights of others by taking that which does not belong to him.

This verse: ‘And what will make you perceive? Perhaps the Hour is near.’ (*ash-Shura:* 17) refers to the fact that those who disbelieved in Allah’s message had previously asked His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring them word of the exact time of the Last Hour, as the Quran relates about them elsewhere: ‘And they ask, “When is this promise, if you should be

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= - balance= justice, according to Ibn `Abbas and the majority of interpreters
- balance= what was revealed to human beings from divine orders
- balance= justice in what was allowed for us to do and what were prohibited from, according to Qatada
- balance= Al-Qurtubi said, ‘These definitions are close in meaning.’
- balance= getting rewarded for doing good deeds and getting punished for sinning
- balance= of weights, which was sent down from Allah in order for people not to experience injustice if and when they misuse it, according to Mujahid

It was also said that this ‘balance’ is personified in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by which he judges between people through the teachings and orders of the Quran.

truthful?"' (*al-Anbiya':* 38) They sought out this knowledge out of sarcasm and ridiculing the idea of the Last Hour. We also note that the verb *yudrika* (perceive) appears in the present tense in the phrase, 'And what will make you perceive?' (*ash-Shura:* 17) In another context, it appears conjugated in the past tense: 'The Inevitable Reality. What is the Inevitable Reality? And what can make you know what the Inevitable Reality is?' (*al-Haqqa:* 1-3) Here, the fact that the verb in the phrase 'And what could make you know…' (*al-Haqqa:* 3) signifies that it is an eternal truth which was unknown before, but which is now acknowledged. As for the statement 'And what will make you perceive?' (*ash-Shura:* 17), it refers to the fact that none other but Allah will inform the disbelievers about the Last Hour. In another verse, Allah refers to revelation of this matter in terms of the future: 'None will reveal its time except Him.' (*al-A'raf:* 187), meaning, it will never come until Allah *Glorified is He* reveals it.

يَسۡتَعۡجِلُ بِهَا ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِهَاۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مُشۡفِقُونَ مِنۡهَا وَيَعۡلَمُونَ
أَنَّهَا ٱلۡحَقُّۗ أَلَآ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُمَارُونَ فِي ٱلسَّاعَةِ لَفِي ضَلَٰلِۭ بَعِيدٍ ﴿١٨﴾

Those who do not believe in it seek to hasten it, but the believers stand in awe of it. They know it to be the Truth; those who argue about the Hour are far, far astray [18]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 18)

In the affirmation that they 'are impatient for it' (*ash-Shura:* 18), 'it' refers to the Last Hour. This verse refers to the people as 'Those who do not believe in it…' (*ash-Shura:* 18), they do not know of the Last Hour and do not have faith that it will come, nor do they know what will happen when it comes. For this reason, they ask the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell them about it, saying things like, 'Give us word about the coming of this hour, for we wish to see it!' out of sarcasm and ridicule. If they truly knew what horrors awaited them at the Last Hour, they would not seek its coming so vehemently and in such sarcastic tones. This, then, is the state of disbelievers regarding the Day of Judgment.

Those who do believe in it, on the other hand, are in an entirely different state: 'but those who believe are fearful of it…' (*ash-Shura:* 18). In other words, they fear the horrors of the Last Hour when they realise that what has been said on the matter is true. They also fear the sharp precision of the final accounting of our lives at that hour and the torment which it will bring. In the phrase '…and know that it is the truth…' (*ash-Shura:* 18), Allah did not say, 'true' instead He said, 'the truth' so there is no use trying to make a lie of it, or even to doubt it in any way. For this reason, Allah describes those who contend over the matter of the Last Hour as being in extreme error: 'Unquestionably, those who dispute concerning the Hour are in extreme error' (*ash-Shura:* 18). Again, the idea of calling something into question, especially in this case, is only futile squabble which does not bring people nearer to the truth.

The description of these disbelievers as having gone far astray is appropriate, since even the simplest rational consideration of the matter confirms the coming of the Day of Judgment and the necessity of it as far as our mortal lives are concerned. This is because, if we contemplate the reality of our lives, we find that the acts we have committed in this world provide the starting point for our reward or punishment in the next. It is therefore imperative to furnish a reward to those good people who have done good, and a punishment to those who have committed acts of evil.

Over the course of the early years of life, people receive education as students at school, wherein teachers administer monthly tests to them, then mark the errors on those tests in red so that the student knows which mistakes he made and how to correct them. On the final exam, however, the errors are not marked in red; rather, the test is simply given a final grade, pass or fail, which represents a kind of final accounting, and a reward or punishment depending on how well the student did on the exam. If this is how people everywhere organise their evaluation of students, then we should not disbelieve the fact that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* does the same thing with our very lives. There are many different types of people who all respond to Allah's Message differently—the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the rebellious, the doer of good deeds and the doer of bad deeds, etc. How, then could we possibly evaluate each of these as equal to all the others?

Anyone with a sense of justice would say that no transgressor dies until Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* seeks His vengeance against that person, since reason says that it is not right for such a person to commit his crimes without then receiving a punishment. If any rational, thinking person was to see a transgressor die happily, without any ill will coming upon him, that thinking person would have to conclude that there is another life beyond this world, in which the transgressor is punished for his wickedness on earth. If this were not so, then criminals and transgressors would win and continue committing their crimes, and that punishment which they deserve in the Hereafter would be lost.

ٱللَّهُ لَطِيفُۢ بِعِبَادِهِۦ يَرۡزُقُ مَن يَشَآءُۖ وَهُوَ ٱلۡقَوِيُّ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ١٩

God is most subtle towards His creatures; He provides [bounti- fully] for whoever He will; He is the Powerful, the Almighty [19] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 19)

The meaning of the phrase 'Most-Kind' is that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is extremely compassionate to His slaves.

He forgives aplenty and does not chastise any of His faithful slaves the first time a crime is committed. We see this in a story(1) from the time of `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* in which a crowd of people brought forward a woman for judgment on claims that she was a thief. The woman said to him, 'By Allah, I have never stolen anything before now.' He *Allah be pleased with him* responded, 'You have said a lie for Allah would not uncover you for the first crime.'(2) Regarding this matter, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states, '…although He pardons much' (*ash-Shura:* 30) referring to those faults which will yet emerge; He does not chastise those who commit errors excepting those most apparent mistakes.

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(1) *The story of `Umar ibn Al- Khattab, with the woman whose son stole for the first time*

(2) *Al-Bayhaqi extracts this Hadith in his greater collection of Hadiths of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him (286-288), from a Hadith stating that `Umar brought forth a thief, who said, 'By Allah, I have never stolen before now.' `Umar responded: 'You have told a lie of that which Allah grants unto a faithful slave upon his first guilty act.' He then forbade the man from future theft. Ibn Dawud also extracts this Hadith in his Az-Zuhd (51-58); likewise, Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi, in his Treasure of the Workers, from the sayings attributed to `Umar (Hadith #13949). Ibn Hajar writes in the margins that Ibn Wahab related this Hadith from his mosque, being endowed with extraordinary knowledge of his Prophet as evidence of the correctness of this saying.*

Among other meanings of the phrase ‘Most-Kind’ is that of one who is precise, whose wisdom and forethought penetrate all things deeply. We have stated previously, regarding material objects, that nothing can withstand Him, no matter how miniscule or violent or recalcitrant. This has been portrayed to us in the example of someone who constructs a house in the woods, placing iron bars on the windows to keep wolves and beasts away and from coming inside. However, that person soon finds flies and mosquitoes present in the surrounding environment, and so he returns from his labours with a finer, tighter screen for preventing bugs from entering the house.

In the same way that the man in this example builds his house so that nothing, not even tiny bugs, gets past the exterior, one of the meanings of this description of The Most-High as ‘Most-Kind’ is that nothing gets past Him nor hides from Him, no matter how miniscule. This usage differs slightly from how we employ the word ‘kind’ when referring to a well-mannered person of good moral pith. In such a case, we say he is ‘kind’ to mean that he is gentle and mild in his treatment of others.

Thus, it is out of His Kindness for us that He provides, for example, a way for us to repent that is accepted by Him. He has also allotted seasons of worship wherein the worth of the good that we do multiplies and the evil of our bad deeds is diminished. These times are special occasions for obedience and for obtaining more value from good deeds in Allah’s sight. It is out of Allah’s Kindness that, in such special periods of devotion, He makes one good deed the worth of ten, up to seven hundred times; and as for a bad deed, He diminishes it to one.(1)

We then read Allah’s statement ‘…He provides sustenance for whomever He wills – for He alone is Powerful, Almighty!’ (*ash-Shura:* 19) This means that he sustains whomever He pleases because He is the Creator, and He is that one who calls His creations unto accountability for His blessing of them with sustenance. In this, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is also the Strong, since kindness does not come without strength. Indeed, He is the Almighty and the Subduer, whom nothing can restrain and whom nothing can conquer

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(1) *This Hadith is extracted in Kitab Al-`Iman, as well as by Ahmad in his Musnad (6898, 8957, 10061), from a Hadith quoted by Abu Hurayra: ‘For those who have not done a good deed, write “he has committed one good deed.” But if he has truly committed a good deed, then write “he has done ten good deeds.” And for those who do one bad deed, do not write “he has committed one bad deed.” But if he has truly committed that bad deed, then write “he has done one bad deed.”’*

مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ نَزِدْ لَهُۥ فِى حَرْثِهِۦ ۖ وَمَن كَانَ
يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ ٱلدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِۦ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُۥ فِى ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ مِن نَّصِيبٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

If anyone desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall increase it for him; if anyone desires a harvest in this world, We shall give him a share of it, but in the Hereafter he will have no share [20] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 20)

The literal meaning of the word *al-harth* (harvest) is the tilling of the earth with the stirrings of a plough for the purpose of sowing seeds therein. The tilling is necessary because small plants are not powerful enough to pierce through the hard soil themselves. For this reason, we break up the soil for them, so as to facilitate their growth. After breaking through the soil, small seedlings then need air; by turning the soil over through tilling, we allow this needed air to enter. Back when harvesting the ground was the reason fruits were produced by the earth, it became known by the name ‘harvest’ meaning those fruits of the earth which are expected to be gained through cultivation.

In the Quran, we see the figurative idea of sowing and harvesting, for example, in Allah’s statement ‘But whenever he prevails, he goes about the earth spreading corruption and destroying [man’s] tilth and progeny: and Allah does not love corruption.’ (*al-Baqara:* 205) We see it elsewhere as well, such as Allah’s following statement ‘and [remember] Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) – [how it was] when both gave judgment concerning the field into which some people’s sheep had strayed…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 78) referring in this instance to actual fields

Thus, the meaning of the phrase ‘To him who desires a harvest in the life to come…’ (*ash-Shura:* 20) is that the reward of the Hereafter is eternal and its blessings everlasting, in paradise. In this way, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* clarifies things pertaining to the true religion using images from the reality of our lives, in order to help our minds approximate them better. We read, for example, ‘Truly shall the believers have success’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 1). They have success, those who are able to gain their desired results from cultivation of the earth, almost being to the point of reaping the fruits of their labours: likewise, the believer, who gains an eternal reward and firmly established blessings.

In sum, the verse, ‘To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest…’ (*ash-Shura:* 20) means that such a person will find increase in the Hereafter, and that his reward will be more than he has been hoping for; it also means that the good things of this world will not be kept from him, either. In other words, a person’s efforts and tiresome toil to do good while in this world do not prevent him from obtaining the practical fruits of his labours: ‘…Verily, We do not fail to requite any who persevere in doing good’ (*al-Kahf:* 30). Then, we read ‘…whereas to him who desires [but] a harvest in this world, We [may] give something thereof…’ (*ash-Shura:* 20), namely, the fruits of this world. In like fashion as those who obtain a harvest in the next life, those who seek after what this world has to offer are not kept from enjoying the pleasures and delights thereof, but by rushing headlong after earthly rewards, they are prevented from securing such rewards in the Hereafter: ‘…but he will have no share in [the blessings of] the life to come.’ (*ash-Shura:* 20) In other words, he will have no good portion or reward in the Hereafter since he chased after glory and fame and wealth and riches in this world. As long as someone seeks after something for the right reasons, he shall obtain it, even if that person is a disbeliever. Likewise, if a believer is idle and neglectful in seeking good things, then he will not obtain them since he did not pursue them for the right cause.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* does not accept any actions except those dedicated especially to Him; and those who wish for a harvest in this world, do not have Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* on their minds at all. For this reason, many people ask about the fate of those scholars and inventors who did a service to humanity through their inventions and discoveries since their minds were preoccupied with things of this world. Theirs is a fate in hell since they did what they did for the sake of people and not Allah—they were in it for the fame, which they took as their reward from this world.

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَـٰٓؤُا۟ شَرَعُوا۟ لَهُم مِّنَ ٱلدِّينِ مَا لَمْ يَأْذَنۢ بِهِ ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَلَوْلَا
كَلِمَةُ ٱلْفَصْلِ لَقُضِىَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾

How can they believe in others who ordain for them things
which God has not sanctioned in the practice of their faith?
If it were not for God's decree concerning the final Decision,
judgement would already have been made between them.
The evildoers will have a grievous punishment [21]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 21)

The general question put forth by this verse is: Why did the disbelievers act as if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the message which he brought forth were lies? Do they believe in deities other than Allah, who gave law and a righteous Way for them to follow? Did those other deities bestow a religion upon them in which they profess a belief such that they therefore leave behind the religion of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? By the phrase '…deities who have ordained for them a religion to which Allah has not consented…' (*ash-Shura:* 21), the verse is referring to those things aside from Allah which the disbelievers would worship. For example, some would worship the sun, others the moon, trees, rocks or angels. This verse asks: Do these other gods invite people to follow a set of religious laws? Have they established prescriptions for certain actions, and proscriptions against others, so that we know how to live our lives?

Thus, it is in vain that people worship gods which do not provide a right Way or spiritual obligations. In fact, those who do worship such gods do so because of this fact. There is no moral path or duties, and thus people who worship these other gods are happy to follow those urges of superficial piety found within themselves; indeed, what is easier for a person than a religion without spiritual obligations? Religious devotion per se is nothing more than the obedience of the worshipper to the object of worship in terms of prescribed and proscribed behaviour, and a system of reward and punishment determining that which is returned unto those who are obedient and disobedient to the established law.

In sum, then, this verse points out the fact that the inanimate objects chosen by disbelievers as things to be worshipped did not give any word to their followers; neither commanding nor legislating anything to them in the way of religious duties. Rather, these disbelievers made such duties up for themselves, following their own whims in order to satisfy their own internal sentiments. Indeed, these multiple gods were created by the people's hands, or through their own faulty, mistaken thoughts. For this reason, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states: 'It was not Allah who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work: It is blasphemers who invent a lie against Allah. But most of them lack wisdom.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 103) He affirms that these people attributed lies to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and by their own volition created religious injunctions which were not revealed by Allah's Power. Where did the people get their superstitions like the rules regarding a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel put out to pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals or stallion-camels freed from work? These proscriptions did not come from Allah *the Glorified Exalted*; rather, the people invented them, making a lie against Him.

Take the slit-ear she-camel, a she-camel which has given birth five times. To them, such a she-camel was past her time, so they would slit her ear and leave her as a free-roaming she-camel, neither to be ridden nor to have her milk drunk, nor to be kept from drinking water or roaming the pasture as she pleased. These matters were not established by Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* who even permitted such a she-camel's meat to be used for its benefits, let alone her milk. Likewise, a she-camel let loose for free pasture (if one of the people complained of an ache or a mishap that befell him) it was believed that the situation would be rectified by letting the she-camel out to pasture, neither to be ridden nor to have her milk drunk, nor to be kept from drinking water or roaming the pasture as she pleased.

Idol sacrifices for twin-births involved prescriptions surrounding the delivery of newborn animals. If a sheep, for example, gave birth to a male lamb, they would slaughter it in sacrifice to their gods and give the meat to the servants and gatekeepers of the *Ka`ba*; if it birthed a female, they would keep it for the purposes of birthing future lambs. However, if the sheep gave birth to twins, one male and one female, they would preserve them both, since the female was related to her brother, the male lamb (which they would otherwise sacrifice to their gods).

Finally, the stallion-camel freed from work is a male camel whose back was protected from people riding on it by law after he had impregnated ten she-camels. His siring of ten calves was a sign to the people that he was past his time, neither to be ridden nor to be kept from drinking water or roaming the pasture as he pleased.

All these things which the people of that time prohibited unto themselves were permitted to them by Allah *the Glorified Exalted*. Thus, His statement to them in the chapter of *al-An`am*: '[His followers would have it that, in certain cases, any of these] four kinds of cattle of either sex [is unlawful to man]: either of the two sexes of sheep and of goats. Ask [them]: "Is it the two males that He has forbidden, or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females may contain? Tell me what you know in this respect, if what you say is true." And [likewise they declare as unlawful] either of the two sexes of camels and of bovine cattle. Ask [them]: "Is it the two males that He has forbidden, or the two females, or that which the wombs of the two females may contain? Is it, perchance, that you [yourselves] were witnesses when Allah enjoined [all] this upon you?" And who could be wicked than he who, without any [real] knowledge, attributes his own lying inventions to Allah, and thus leads people astray? Behold, Allah does not grace [such] evildoing folk with His guidance.' (*al-An'am:* 143-144) In this then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* asks them to tell Him who prohibited these things '…Is it, perchance, that you [yourselves] were witnesses when Allah enjoined [all] this upon you? ...' (*al-An'am:* 144). By 'this' in the phrase 'enjoined this', the verse is referring to those proscriptions which the people themselves put into place, making a lie of the fact that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* had allowed them certain actions and behaviours. Thus, the people made themselves receivers of Allah's law, into lawgivers, prescribing rules for themselves rather than trying to encounter such moral codes in Allah's true religion.

Next, we read in the verse under consideration: '…Now were it not for [Allah's] decree on the final judgment…' (*ash-Shura:* 21) meaning the decision against their destruction and delaying their punishment until the Hereafter,

‘…all would indeed have been decided between them [in this world]…’ (*ash-Shura:* 21) meaning a speedy punishment for them in this world.

When we look at those things which Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has permitted and prohibited, we find that such injunctions are based on a consideration of what is useful, and on protection from that which is harmful to people. That which is permitted is of benefit to human beings, and that which is prohibited is detrimental, which is why we see some Orientalists arguing over those things which Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* prohibited from the Israelites from eating, for example, even though they are not harmful and other peoples would eat them without any negative result.

Indeed, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* prohibited the Israelites from eating any type of cattle or camel with uncloven hooves, as well as animals of webbed feet, such as ducks, geese, and ostriches. He also prohibited them from eating the fat of animals: ‘…excepting that which is in their backs or entrails or that which is within the bone…’ (*al-An‘am:* 146). But all these things were permitted for people other than the Israelites to eat, and, moreover, they are not harmful when ingested. As to the reasoning behind these prohibitions, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states, ‘So, then, for the wickedness committed by those who followed the Jewish faith did We deny unto them certain of the good things of life which [a foretime] had been allowed to them…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 160). When the Israelites fell into wickedness, then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* chastised them so as to help them see their error, by prohibiting them from eating that of which other people were allowed to partake.

Moreover, we note how this verse expresses the futility which they brought forth by professing a religion which came from themselves: ‘Or have they other deities who have ordained for them a religion to which Allah has not consented?’ (*ash-Shura:* 21) Their vain inclination is figuratively called ‘religion’ because they have strong faith in albeit it oversteps the bounds of Allah’s decrees, as Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states: ‘For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.’ (*al-Kafirun:* 6) Their faith is dependent upon what they believe in, the term ‘religion’ meaning the beliefs professed by man.

The last part of this verse states: ‘…but verily, grievous suffering awaits the evildoers [in the life to come].’ (*ash-Shura:* 21) Transgressors either do evil to others or unto themselves, the latter being the most horrible of transgression. It is at least reasonable to expect people to do evil unto their enemies; but how does one commit evil unto oneself, the being underneath one's own skin? The answer is that people inflict evil upon themselves when they subject themselves to punishment and prevent themselves from obtaining a reward and a blessing in the Hereafter. That is why evil committed to the self, in terms of religious devotion and faith in Allah, is the harshest from of transgression: '…for, behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong!' (*Luqman:* 13)

تَرَى ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا۟ وَهُوَ وَاقِعٌۢ بِهِمْ ۗ
وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ فِى رَوْضَاتِ ٱلْجَنَّاتِ ۖ
لَهُم مَّا يَشَآءُونَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَضْلُ ٱلْكَبِيرُ ﴿٢٢﴾

You will see them fearful because of what they have done: punishment is bound to fall on them – but those who believe and do good deeds will be in the flowering meadows of the Gardens. They will have whatever they wish from their Lord: this is the great bounty [22] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 22)

'In this verse, the Arabic word for '[In that life to come,] you will see…' (*ash-Shura:* 22), '*tara*' refers to all that which we perceive by means of physical sight; the phrase 'full of fear' (*ash-Shura:* 22) means that the evildoers will be frightened and terrified, and this '…at [the thought of] what they have earned…' (*ash-Shura:* 22) meaning at the thought of the reward meted out to them for their evil deeds. As noted before, the Arabic verb for 'they have earned' (*kasaba*, *yaksabu*) refers literally to obtaining an increased amount of capital, i.e. profits or returns; in a figurative sense, this form of the verb is collocated with 'good', as in 'to earn a good reward'. Another version of the verb, with the same root but different form, 'to be possessed of' (*iktasaba*) gives the sense of intentional attempts to invent or do something, and is often collocated with 'evil'. However, in this verse, the verb 'to earn' (*kasaba*) is used to refer to evil deeds, rather than its normal, more positive connotation. We see this elsewhere in the Quran such as following statement by Allah: 'Yea! Those who earn [*kasaba*] evil and by their sinfulness are engulfed…'

(*al-Baqara:* 81). This form of the verb, which is normally employed in reference to positive gains, is used here because, for evildoers, their wicked deeds have become like good deeds in their eyes, something normal and natural, just as good deeds seem natural to the righteous. When an evildoer commits a bad deed or a crime, it does not wear him out because he has become accustomed to it and even intimate with it.

Moving on, the phrase '…full of fear at [the thought of] what they have earned…' (*ash-Shura:* 22) refers to how the evildoers fearfully imagine their state on the Day of Judgment since they were not afraid while living in this mortal world and did not give thought to this Final Day. The phrase '…for [now] it is bound to fall back upon them…' (*ash-Shura:* 22) means that there is no escape from the final accounting, which Allah, in His Wisdom, has promised and made known to all people. These statements might also refer to those evildoers who begin to fear their final judgment while they are yet in this world, which indicates knowledge of one's wrongs and a sense of compunction present in human beings. A person knows when he has committed a wicked deed, and he knows the nature of his crime. Likewise, he knows that he is accountable for such things, hence why he begins to fear and to feel the pangs of conscience.

In contrast to the state of evildoers, we read, '…And in the flowering meadows of the gardens [of paradise you will see] those who have attained to faith and done righteous deeds: all that they might desire shall they have with their Sustainer: [and] this, this is the great bounty.' (*ash-Shura:* 22) This is a true intimation from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* since the result of faith and good works is paradisiacal gardens meaning the refuge and rest of those most wonderful spaces to be found in paradise at the Day of Judgment; such places are even to be found on earth, albeit through imagination and longing for them. Therefore, the martyr who dies for Allah and who finds himself on the path of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* does not come to tread that path except for his trust in this ultimate reward. And he who is killed while striving for the cause of Allah will go to a life much better than this one.

We have previously recalled the story of one of the Companions to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who heard directly from

Allah's Messenger about the final reward for martyrs. He asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, is it not true that the only thing standing between me and paradise is that I fight those [disbelievers] until the death?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* answered, "yes." So the Companion, who had placed a date in his mouth while speaking with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* rushed off to die a martyr before he even had a chance to chew the date in his mouth.'(1) The reason is that he trusted the truthfulness of Allah's words regarding the final reward reserved for martyrs: 'But do not think of those that have been slain in Allah's Cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Sustainer have they their sustenance' (*Al-'Imran:* 169). Indeed, martyrs are alive, alive with their Lord, which is the peak of honour, strength, and blessing, a particularity which those other than martyrs do not obtain. This is because martyrdom facilitates movement from one life to the next, since they do not die, but rather resurrect with the rest of humanity and are made alive.

One poet(2) expressed this idea when he wrote the following lines concerning the foremost of martyrs, Hamza ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib *Allah be pleased with him* Prophet Muhammad's uncle:

O Hamza, uncle of the Chosen, you are without exception

Foremost among all the martyrs of the earth,

And protection is enough for you, choice among martyrs, protection

From that death connecting two worlds, this one and the next, one to the other.

Next, we read the statement '…And in the flowering meadows of the gardens [of paradise]…' (*ash-Shura:* 22). The phrase 'flowering meadows' refers to gardens full of greenery, flowers, blooms and fruits such that one would catch the wafting aroma of its fragrances if one entered it, watching the streams of water running past. Those who believe in Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and do good works in this life will be in the flowering meadows of the gardens of paradise meaning the most beautiful places therein found. Moreover, '…all that they might desire shall they have with their Sustainer…' (*ash-Shura:* 22), a state which is more honourable and grand than any other conceivable blessing since believers find themselves in the bounty of paradise and its refuge from the world. Going further, all this abundance is enjoyed in the presence of their Lord, hence how Allah concludes this verse: '…[and] this, this is the great bounty' (*ash-Shura:* 22), meaning Allah's favour and blessing upon them. Therefore, when a person contemplates this abiding, everlasting blessing which Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* gives unto His believing slaves, any hardship in worship of or obedience to Allah becomes easy. In this situation, a person sees that such hardships are easy when he connects them (in his mind) to the reward received for undertaking them.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari extracts this Hadith for its correctness (Hadith #374), quoting from Jabir ibn `Abdullah, who states: 'A man asked Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him "If you saw me killed while fighting for the true religion, where would I go?" Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him responded, "To paradise." The man, who had a date in his mouth, rushed off to combat the disbelievers until he was killed.' An-Nasa`i also extracts this Hadith, in his Sunnan (Hadith #3130), as well as Ahmad in his Musnad (Hadith #13794).*

(2) The poet is Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul.*

Humans become worn out by the world. They spend dozens of years seeking knowledge in school, or learning a trade or profession, carrying all the hardships and dangers that go along with this, in order to simply meet the needs of daily life. If they toil and sweat and expend more effort than this, they might even obtain a degree of opulence and luxury, perhaps employing servants to wait on them or cooks to prepare food for them. Such domestic employees work for people as a recompense for the hard work expended to get to the point where people can afford such luxuries. However, that recompense could be lost at any time if, for example, the servants and cooks became angry with their employer and decided to defy his orders.

People find a completely different situation if they strive for a reward in the Hereafter since following the injunctions of true religion is a straightforward matter, not requiring of humans all the toil and sweat and late nights and working during the day and preoccupation of mind. And even though adhering to Allah's Commandments is a painless effort, it carries with it a great and limitless reward which we cannot possibly imagine.

As noted, the most which humankind has achieved through scientific progress can be seen in somethings like hotels and travel services, where a person can press a button on a machine from which coffee or tea is produced and served. But this is a device, its motor could stall, impeding its ability to dispense the desired refreshments; the sought-after reward is not afforded in this case. However, in the Hereafter, the final reward is firmly established and everlasting and nothing can disturb or spoil it. It does not require any request or pushing of buttons or the summoning of a servant to provide it. In paradise, we only need to call up the desired objects in our minds and we will find it instantaneously in our hands. We see this in the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'The reward of the Hereafter contains that which eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor occurred to the mind of man.'(1)

We read of this in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, for example: 'But unto those who have attained to faith and do good works give the glad tiding that theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow. Whenever they are granted fruits therefrom as their appointed sustenance, they will say, "It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!" – for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]. And there shall they have spouses pure,(2) and there shall they abide.' (*al-Baqara:* 25) And, Allah willing, we will find in paradise those things which we used to eat here on earth. Or at least, this is how we now imagine them to be: '…they will say, "It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!…"' (*al-Baqara:* 25) However, when we actually taste such things in paradise, we will find that they differ completely from those culinary sensations experienced in mortality. This is because the blessings and pleasures of paradise do not run out or continue in one monotonous state; they are that much more desirable than what we are used to in the mortal realm.

In all, then, we behold in these verses the vision of an eternal reward which softens the trials which come as we follow Allah's Methodology. It would be enough even if the reward for obedience was only peace and happiness on earth for humans. It would suffice us to have peace of mind, tranquillity of soul and a sense of reassurance about the future, a point expressed by the poet(1) when he writes:

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(1) *Muslim extracts this for its correctness (2824), as does Ahmad in his Musnad (462-466), and Abu Na`im (262-263) in Al-Haliyya from a Hadith quoted by Abu Hurayra.*

(2) *At-Tabari states in his commentary (391-395): 'The term "mutahhara" (pure) means that the (female) spouses are purified of all pains and annoyances resulting from undesirable bodily functions and substances as experienced by women while on Earth. These include menstruation, childbirth, faeces, urine, mucus, spittle, semen and other physical annoyances, pains and unwanted substances such as these.'*

Said the astronomer and the doctor both,
‘Human bodies do not resurrect!’ I replied,
‘If what you say is true, then I lose nothing;
‘But if what I say is true, the loss is yours.’(2)

For this reason, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* when He wanted to describe paradise to us did not describe it as it is, since it is above human capacity to imagine what it would be like. Rather, Allah uses things we know and which are like unto paradise in order to portray it to us. Indeed, if the reward of the Hereafter contains that which the eye has not seen, nor ear heard nor occurred to the mind of man, then how can we expect it to be illustrated to us in its fullness? Humans cannot assign a word to something unless it is an object already known to them; as for those things which they know nothing about, it follows that they also cannot know the right word for them. Thus, there are no words in our language to describe the eternal reward of paradise, as we see in the following statement: ‘The parable of the paradise promised to those who are conscious of Allah [is that of a garden]…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 35), a garden in which certain things are found.

This poses the question, to whom is such a reward promised? The answer is that it is promised to those who believe in Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* while on earth, and who join their faith with good works. We see an injunction to bring together faith and good works in various places in the Quran, such as the following verse: ‘[But] behold, as for those who say, “Our Sustainer is

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(1) Abu Al-`Ala` Al-Ma`arri, Ahmad ibn `Abdullah, a poet and philosopher. He was born in *Ma`arra* in modern-day Syria in the year 363 A.H/ 973 CE, and he began composing poetry when he was only eleven years old. He travelled to Baghdad in 398 A.H to live there. Upon his passing, 84 poets stood at his grave to eulogize him. He famously abstained from eating meat. His works include *Luzum Ma La Yalzam, Suqt Az-Zand and Daw` As-Saqt*. He died in the year 449 A.H/ 1057 CE.

(2) These two lines come from one of Abu Al-`Ala` Al-Ma`arri’s poems written in the *Bahr* (meter) *Al-Kamil* and comprising seven total lines.

Allah", and then steadfastly pursue the right way – upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not and grieve not, but receive the glad tiding of that paradise which has been promised to you!"' (*Fussilat:* 30).

After this, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states:

ذَٰلِكَ ٱلَّذِى يُبَشِّرُ ٱللَّهُ عِبَادَهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ ۗ قُل لَّآ أَسْـَٔلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا
ٱلْمَوَدَّةَ فِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ ۗ وَمَن يَقْتَرِفْ حَسَنَةً نَّزِدْ لَهُۥ فِيهَا حُسْنًا ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

It is of this that God gives good news to His servants who believe and do good deeds. Say [Prophet], 'I ask no reward from you for this, only the affection due to kin.' If anyone does good, We shall increase it for him; God is most forgiving and most appreciative [23] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 23)

In this verse, the word 'that [bounty]' (*ash-Shura:* 23) refers to the reward in paradise discussed above. The phrase '…whereof Allah gives the glad tiding to such of His servants as attain to faith and do righteous deeds…' (*ash-Shura:* 23) indicates the 'glad tiding' of a good reward had in Allah's sight. After this statement, the context changes to address another topic, concerning Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: that of inviting others to come unto the true religion. '…Say [O Prophet]: "No reward do I ask of you for this [message]…"' (*ash-Shura:* 23) meaning Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say that he seeks no recompense for the invitation to true religion and the mission he has undertaken for their benefit. Moreover, he is never supposed to ask for such a repayment unless he does something truly extraordinary which does in fact deserve reward.

All of Allah's messengers *peace be upon them* have said similar things with regard to recompense for their mission as prophets, since people are accustomed to repaying those who render them a service or some good, or to one who hints at signs of his own misery. We therefore read prohibitions against repayment in the words of many prophets throughout the Quran: 'And, O my people, no benefit do I ask of you for this [message]: my reward rests with none but Allah…' (*Hud:* 29). The reason that a prophet's reward is with Allah is that he, as a messenger, performs a grand, unique, and honourable role, the value of which humankind cannot fully appreciate and the deserved reward of which humans cannot grant. Hence the affirmation that none but Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* who sent the prophets, can truly repay them.

As noted, all of Allah's messengers have enjoined the people against repayment. All but Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* that is, and Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. This is because, when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) began inviting others to the true religion, he first called upon his father Azar, from whom it would be illogical to expect repayment; he therefore did not tell his father not to reward him. So, it is with Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who first called upon Pharaoh when undertaking to invite people to the true religion. Since Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* already owed, a favour to Pharaoh, in Pharaoh's sight, as he was brought up in Pharaoh's house, and it would not make sense for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to have asked Pharaoh to abstain from repaying him.

In sum, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to tell the people not to reward him for that missionary endeavour which he has undertaken for their benefit. Likewise, he is to inform them that his reward lies with Allah, who sent him, and Who can fully appreciate the Prophet's mission. He is to ask the people for nothing '…other than [that you should] love your fellow men…' (*ash-Shura:* 23). Here he requests that the people have compassion on their neighbours, or the turning of their hearts to other people in love, and that they treat those around them with all due appreciation and generosity.

It is as though Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were saying to them: 'Verily was I sent (as a messenger) unto all people everywhere. And despite this, you received me with victimization, defied me in enmity, maltreated my family and friends, and forced me to seek refuge with those other than you—sometimes as an aimless itinerant, other times with the other tribes. Moreover, you compelled my friends and family to flee their homes and their lands. My ancestral line is spread out in the midst of Quraysh, even in Medina, wherein my maternal uncles from the Bani An-Najar tribe reside. You could therefore at the very least give me the right of my lineage, which right is that you not make a victim out of me; I do not force you to accept Islam, for example, nor do I attempt to victimize you. Likewise, it is from the right of my lineage that you not give me up unto my enemies. This is my right which you owe me'.

The meaning of the phrase '…other than [that you should] love your fellow men…' (*ash-Shura:* 23) might also refer to the Prophet's relatives and those living at home. This is because specific aspects of daily life were not permitted for the Prophet Muhammad's relatives, since they were not like the rest of the Muslims at the time. Money, for example, which poor people other than them had a right to receive, was prohibited to them. Their right, then, was for the people to treat them with all due beneficence and fairness, and to watch over them in the Prophet's stead.

For this reason, we find among The Hadiths of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* many injunctions to honour and tend to his family and those living at home such as the following: 'Whoever dies for love and care of the family of the Messenger of Allah's house dies as a martyr, having been forgiven his sins and being made alive again by the angels at his grave. He has died and gone to a grave with a door which leads to paradise. However, those who hate the house of Muhammad are cut off from Allah's Mercy.'(1)

They stated this because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said things to this effect: 'Love Allah when He nourishes you with blessings. Likewise, love me with that love of Allah, and love the people of my house with that love which you have for me.'(2) This is yet another possible meaning of the phrase, '…other than [that you should] love your fellow men…' (*ash-Shura:* 23).

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi quotes this Hadith in his commentary of the chapter of ash-Shura, verse (23) in the following form: 'He who dies for love of the family of Muhammad dies a martyr. Whosoever dies for love of the family of Muhammad, Allah causes the angels to visit his grave with mercy. And for those who die in hatred of Muhammad's family, the Day of Judgment will find them with the phrase "Cut off from Allah's Mercy" written between their eyes. Likewise, those who die in hatred of Muhammad's family will not enjoy the fragrances of paradise. Those who die in hatred of my house have no final share of my intercession for them.' Az-Zamakshari also quotes this Hadith in his commentary, Al-Kashaf (992); it is also recalled by Al-`Albany in his Silsaleh Ad-Da`ifa (4920), saying: 'The topic is false.'*

(2) *At-Tirmidhi extracts this Hadith in his collection of sayings of Prophet Muhammad (3722); likewise, Al-Hakim in his supplement (4699); At-Tabarani in the Great Lexicon=*

Yet a third meaning of '…other than [that you should] love your fellow men…' (*ash-Shura:* 23) might be that all those being addressed wished for their relatives to have their right according to lineage. Indeed, if any loving person who wishes to earn his keep were to give it to his relatives in order to provide them what is necessary to live and to help them attain a happier existence, then we would find no poor or needy people among us. This is because society is a series of interlocking communal circles, and if each of us were to provide for those needy members of our individual circle, the blessings of Allah would spread throughout all His creation.

There are other rights of possession had by relatives aside from *zakat*. If a rich man were to say that he gives of such monies to his brother, who is poor and in need, the appropriate thing for him to do would be to give his brother the clear majority, perhaps 97.5%, and to leave the other 2.5% to those poor people who are not related to him. Given this division of monies, leaving the 2.5% to give to other people aside from needy relatives, there are some who say they contribute their *zakat* funds to build schools, and others who contribute it to the building of hospitals or mosques. And by Allah, 2.5% of *zakat* offerings suffice for all these various causes. It is therefore necessary for those contributing to it, use it to maintain desirable conditions in society.

Thus, if we put *zakat* into proper usage as taught to us by the True Lord, i.e. to care for society and to protect those in need, we would not find anyone naked or hungry or sick, nor would we find heavy costs for treatment of such things. However, if we become lackadaisical about applying those principals which religious law enjoins upon us in this matter, these societal problems will continue to appear as we see them now.

Originally Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* distributed His bounty to all His creation; likewise, he engineered the societal economy in such a way that, if

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= *(2573, 10516); and Al-Bayhaqi in the Studies on Faith (437, 1368). All of them quote the Hadith from Ibn `Abba , from the word of Yahya ibn Mu`in attributing the Hadith to Ibn `Abbas. At-Tirmidhi states: 'This Hadith is good and remarkable, and we only know it as such.'*

we properly apply His teachings on this matter, the poor person will come to live at the same socio-economic level as the rich person. Among other examples of this just division and distribution of blessings among people, we find that of a rich man in the village which has been his hometown since birth. Despite this, however, he moves to another town, where he spends his life and distributes the surplus of his wealth to the people there. We learn by this simple illustration the point that the presence of this man in his hometown provides an excess surplus to those whose lives he has been blessing for years. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* therefore causes him to go to another place where the people are in need, in order for him to bless their lives there.

If everyone at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were doing this with their own relatives, then it makes sense that Prophet Muhammad would have charged the believers with taking care of his family, as well. He came close to doing this, because he knew that hard times would come upon those of his household, something to which history attests. We see, for example, how the Prophet's family members were scattered throughout other lands; and, moreover, how many of them were killed. In this, the love of the Egyptian people for the family of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is well known, as well as their love for Abu Bakr and `Umar *Allah be pleased with them* there being no *Shi`a* among them.

In its most fundamental sense, love for one's fellow man means love first and foremost of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. If this love were only given by us to those whom we wish, then it would have negative consequences: if you are mad with someone, you might overlook the fact that he is in need; if you are learned, you might not perceive the need of another for knowledge and so on. In another sense, love for one's fellow man also signifies reverence for one's parents. As noted, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* made respect for parents a sort of training grounds for increasing our faith in Allah. This is because our parents are the direct reason for our existence on earth, in similitude of Allah, who is our original Creator and therefore the higher source of our existence. Thus Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states, '…We have enjoined on man kindness to parents…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 8). In another verse, He makes a similar pronouncement: '…We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15).

Even in the case of our parents' rebelliousness in that highest of orders, that of belief in Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and in His Oneness, He commands us to revere and respect them: '…yet should they endeavour to make thee ascribe divinity, side by side with Me, to something which thy mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not; but [even then] bear them company in this world's life with kindness…' (*Luqman:* 15). The greater emphasis is placed upon the mother in Allah's statement '…We have enjoined on man kindness to parents…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 8). Here He mentions both, but never does he specifically stress reverence to one's father. However, there are numerous places where especial emphasis is given to respecting one's mother, such as the following verse: '…His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain…' (*Luqman:* 14). This is because her role has its greatest effect when children are small and unaware of the work performed by their mothers; it is therefore largely absent from their conscious memories. But when children grow up, they learn for themselves the role of their father by observing him. For this reason, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* specifically mentions mothers, of whose role they are less consciously aware.

Moving on, we find the Quran making provisions for all cases of parenthood, and it therefore considers the rearing of children, even if this is performed by those other than a child's biological parents: '…And say, "O my Sustainer! Bestow Your Grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!"' (*al-Isra':* 24) Whoever raises a child at home is to be treated as that child's parent, being given all due respect and reverence.

The next clause '…for if anyone gains [the merit of] a good deed…' (*ash-Shura:* 23) signifies obedience to Allah *the Glorified Exalted*. Then we read, '…we shall grant him through it an increase of good…' (*ash-Shura:* 23). The matter therefore does not stop merely at love for one's fellow men; we must also render them those good things which they need. Finally, the verse ends with the affirmation, '…And, verily, Allah is Much-Forgiving, ever responsive to gratitude' (*ash-Shura:* 23). Here, the terms '*ghafur*' (Much-Forgiving) and 'ever responsive to gratitude' (*shakur*) are based on the emphatic noun form *(fa`ul)* and are taken from the normal active participle forms ‘forgiving’ (*ghafir*) and ‘grateful’ (*shakir*). This form of the noun confirms that Allah’s forgiveness spreads wide and His thankfulness is much indeed; He forgives all those who come unto Him in repentance, and is grateful to all who obey Him. Whether on the side of gratitude or ingratitude on the part of His creations, there is an increase of reward or punishment, as He states elsewhere: ‘…‘But if you are ungrateful, verily, My chastisement will be severe indeed!’ (*Ibrahim:* 7)

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا ۖ فَإِن يَشَإِ ٱللَّهُ يَخْتِمْ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ ۗ وَيَمْحُ ٱللَّهُ
ٱلْبَٰطِلَ وَيُحِقُّ ٱلْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَٰتِهِۦٓ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٢٤﴾

How can they say, ‘He has invented a lie about God’? If God so willed, He could seal your heart and blot out lies: God confirms the Truth with His words. He has full knowledge of what is in the heart [24] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 24)

This verse refers to those disbelievers in Mecca, contemporary with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who accused Prophet Muhammad of lying about the divinity of the Quran and making it up himself, then attributing it to Allah. In the phrase ‘Or do they say…’ (*ash-Shura:* 24), ‘they’ refers to these disbelievers. Then, we read, ‘He has invented about Allah a lie’ (*ash-Shura:* 24). This statement means that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought them the Quran, and that the false attribution is on their part rather than his, since they were expert wordsmiths and composers of songs and orations. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who had lived among them, was not known by the people for having talents in this area. However, if the disbelievers were the experts in these arts of poetry and speech, why did they not bring forth something like that which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did, not even one chapter? If the false attribution were on Muhammad’s part, then the disbelievers were in the right; why, then, was it he who brought forth the Quran and not them? We read elsewhere how the Quran itself responds to these accusations with logic and fairness: ‘Do some, perchance, assert, [Muhammad] has invented this [story]? Say, [O Prophet]: "If I have invented it, upon me be this sin; but far be it from me to commit the sin of which you are guilty."' (*Hud:* 35)

For this reason, the verse shifts from the context of a discussion about the disbelievers and their accusations against the Messenger of Allah, to direct address of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself: '…But if Allah willed, He could seal over your heart…' (*ash-Shura:* 24).This means that, even if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had falsely attributed the Quran to Allah, having written it himself, Allah had the power to seal his heart causing the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to forget that which he had made up and written down in the Quran. However, this did not happen to Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; rather, the Quran continued to be published abroad in the depths of the night and in the expanse of the day, being taught unto all people.

In sum, then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not make up the Quran himself, nor did he attribute it falsely to Allah. Indeed, it is the disbelievers who are guilty of falsely attributing the Quran to Muhammad's capacities with language alone. In many verses, the Quran itself reveals this false attribution on the part of the disbelievers, and it responds with logic and reason. We read one verse, for example, which recounts how the disbelievers quarrel amongst each other on this matter: 'And, indeed, full well do We know that they say, "It is but a human being that imparts [all] this to him!…"' (*an-Nahl:* 103) In this instance, there were disbelievers who had accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of learning the Quran from a non-Arab person. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* responds to these claims by saying, '…[notwithstanding that] the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth [of its source].' (*an-Nahl:* 103) This verse makes clear the illogicality of the accusations levelled against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The disbelievers stated that Muhammad sought out a non-Arab man, who taught the Quran to the Prophet. However, the Quran is written in clear, fluent Arabic, making such claims false on the face of it. If disbelievers are intent on making accusations, they might at least try to make logically coherent ones so that their spurious falsehoods are not immediately revealed.

Elsewhere, the Quran recounts another instance of this wilful stubbornness: ‘And [thus it is:] whenever Our messages are conveyed unto them in all their clarity, those who do not believe that they are destined to meet Us [are wont to] say, “Bring us a discourse other than this, or alter this one.” Say [O Prophet]: “It is not conceivable that I should alter it of my own volition; I only follow what is revealed to me. Behold, I would dread, were I [thus] to rebel against my Sustainer, the suffering [which would befall me] on that awesome Day [of Judgment]!” Say, “Had Allah willed it [otherwise], I would not have conveyed this [divine writ] unto you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you ere this [revelation came unto me]: will you not, then, use your reason?”’ (*Yunus:* 15-16) Yes, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did bring forth the Quran only after he had reached forty years of age, and he was indeed among those disbelievers the entire time before he did so. Never in his life had he shown himself to be a poet or an orator—in other words, he was not known for his abilities with language before bringing forth the Quran.

Growing desperate, the disbelievers left these preceding arguments behind and launched a new attack: it was now the fact that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself was the one who had received the Quran which posed a problem for them. ‘And they say, too, “Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?”’(1) (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Then, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* lets on to their position and makes clear their ignorance and vehement quarrelling over falsehoods. This enmity on their part is nothing more or less than stubbornness and arrogance regarding acceptance of the truth, and for this reason Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says, ‘And, lo, they would say, “O Allah! If this be indeed the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!'" (*al-Anfal:* 32) Such talk clearly embodies hatred for Muhammad the man, rather than reasoned arguments against him.

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(1) *Qariya* is an urban centre, but one smaller than a large metropolis; it is also a place in which buildings have been erected. The meaning of the two cities is Mecca and Medina. [Al-*Qamus Al-Qawim* [112-115]]. Qatada recalls that the people were hoping for some great man not among their own, such as Al-Waid ibn Al-Mughira or `Arwa ibn Mas`ud Ath-Thaqafi. From Ibn `Abbas, we are told that they were hoping for someone like Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira or Habib ibn `Amr Ath-Thaqafi. Ibn Kathir states in his *Tafsir* (124-127): ‘It is apparent that they were looking for a great man from one of the two cities, whoever that man may have been.’

Next, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* states, '…For Allah blots out all falsehood, and by His words, proves the truth to be true. Verily, He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men].' (*ash-Shura:* 24) The verb *yamhu* (blots out) which normally contains the long vowel 'u' at the end has this vowel removed in this instance for purposes of acoustic diminution. As far as meaning is concerned, that which is blotted out is the falsehood spoken by the disbelievers, namely the accusation that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* falsely attributed the Quran to Allah; these are the things which Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* blots out. Then, in contrast, we read that '…[He] proves the truth to be true…' (*ash-Shura:* 24) establishing that which is correct and strengthening it '…by His words…' (*ash-Shura:* 24). In other words, through revelation to the heart of] Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the noble Quran. The phrase 'by His words' might also mean the command 'be!' since Allah is who He is, i.e. Allah.

Moving on, we read, '…Verily, He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men].' (*ash-Shura:* 24) This signifies that Allah is Knowledgeable of the secrets of men's hearts, those things which the human tongue cannot express, and this fact causes him to be silent about his hidden intentions. We read about this in the following verse: '[for] He is aware of the [most] stealthy glance, and of all that the hearts would conceal.' (*Ghafir:* 19)

Thus, those people continued to dispute with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring their hatred upon him, to resist his invitation to true religion, and to falsely accuse him. That is, until Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* revealed their falsehood and annihilated it, bringing about an end to the matter, be it with regard to true religion or their defeat or their inclusion in the forgiveness of Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* on the day he opened Mecca to them. It was on that day that he said: 'Do not think that I am an agent unto your cause.' The people said, 'That is fair, oh you kind brother, and son of a kind brother. He responded: 'Leave, you are free to go.'(1)

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(1) *Ibn Ishaq states: 'I have it on good narration from those in the know that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him gave a speech at the door of the Ka`ba. He=*

Thus, came the victory of Allah and the opening of the city, as He thwarted falsehood and confirmed the truth, coming out on top and prevailing amidst disbelievers. Indeed, it is illogical to think that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* would send a messenger in order to guide His creations, only to later submit that messenger to his enemies and to forsake him as he tries to confront these half-truths.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah states: 'For, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they – they indeed – would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

Finally, we note in the verse under consideration that the verb 'He blots out' is the predicate of 'He wishes', after the conditional 'if' (e.g. 'if He wished, he would blot out…'). However, this is incorrect, since the verb 'He blots out' starts a new, independent clause, as indicated by the repetition of the 'He' of majesty, as well as the indicative verb 'He proves' (*yahuqqu*). As mentioned, the verb 'blots out' (*yamhu*) which normally contains a long 'u' at the end has this long vowel removed for purposes of acoustic diminution, or for the avoidance of having two consonants next to each other.

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى يَقْبَلُ ٱلتَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَعْفُوا۟ عَنِ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

It is He who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons bad deeds – He knows everything you do [25]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 25)

It is out of Allah's kindness to His slaves and his Mercy towards them that He has established a way for them to repentance, leaving them an open door which will not shut upon them. Repentance is a hope which the sinner depends upon, and in which he finds a lifeline to pull him back so that his disposition can be improved and his behaviour made better, and so that

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= *said: 'There is no god but Allah alone, and no sharer of His Oneness. Believe in His promise and in the triumph of His slave, and in the defeat of all those who fight against His Oneness.' Then he said, 'Do not think that I am an agent unto your cause.' The people said, 'This is fair, oh you kind brother, and son of a kind brother.' He responded: 'Leave, you are free to go.' From the Autobiography of the Prophet by Ibn Hisham, 412-414]* society can benefit from his actions. If the door of repentance were closed to such a person, however, causing him to return back to his state of despair and continuing in a state of rebellion against Allah, both he and society would become distressed and miserable.

The word *at-tawba* (repentance) means the return of the sinner to Allah, a return which encompasses various phases. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* made repentance a spiritual law whose very legitimacy is a gift from Him to us: if a person sincerely turns back to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* in penitence, that repentance is accepted of Him. Hence Allah's statement, '…And thereupon He turned again unto them in His Mercy, so that they might repent…' (*at-Tawba:* 118). In this verse, the expression 'He turned again unto them' means that He provided a way for them to repent, and for that repentance to be acceptable to Him.

The repentance process is not just a word or phrase we say; we cannot expect true repentance just by exclaiming, 'May I be granted forgiveness by that Great Lord who is the only true God!' Rather, repentance is a path to be trod, as is made clear to us by the words of `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* when, as he was praying, heard a man say, 'May Allah grant me forgiveness! Allah is the greatest!' `Ali finished praying and said to the man, 'You were too quick to repent. In this, you need to repent of your repentance.'(1)

Thus, repentance is not just a word, but rather a path and a process which begins with feelings of sorrow for those sins or evil deeds committed in the past. Regret for such actions comes upon us as the first step of repentance, as we see in the Hadith which says, 'Regret is repentance.'(2)

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(1) *This Hadith is recalled by Ar-Razi in his commentary Keys to the Unseen (413-434), in his explanation of the sentence 'and it is He who accepts repentance of His servants…' (ash-Shura: 25). Jabir recounts that a man entered the mosque of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said: 'O Allah, may You grant me forgiveness as I repent unto You!' Then, when `Ali ibn Abu Taleb had finished saying prayers, he said to the man: 'O but this speed in asking His forgiveness is the repentance of liars! In this, you need to repent of your repentance.'*

(2) *This Hadith was extracted by Ibn Majah for its legitimacy (4242); Ahmad extracts it as traceable (3387, 3809, 3811, 3914); Al-Bayhaqi extracts it for its legitimacy (110-153), and Al-Hakim for its rectification (7720). Al-Bayhaqi quotes it in his Lessons on Faith (6771, 6770). All quote the Hadith from `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud.*

We also see this in the story of the sons of Adam: ‘But the other’s passion drove him to slaying his brother; and he slew him: and thus he became one of the lost.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 30) When the throes of evil and enmity had passed, he came to himself and repented of what he had done.

After feeling regret for our misdeeds, the next step is to remember those prayers which we may not have been saying and which need making up for, and we thus might engage ourselves in supererogatory prayer for this purpose. After doing this, it is necessary to provide redress to those who have been wronged, a condition whose fulfilment is absolutely essential. We add to these actions the final step of a return to doing good deeds, just as we had first fallen into doing bad deeds; it is necessary to once again taste the bitterness of the duty of obedience, just as we once tasted the saccharine nectar of rebellious behaviour.

Regarding the language of this verse, normal usage would call for the phrase: He accepts repentance, but here the True Lord says, ‘of His servants…’ (*ash-Shura:* 25). It is as if the True Lord keeps off their sins when He accepts their repentance. The result of this is the forgiveness of those sins which they have committed. However, the sins they have committed call for many of Allah’s attributes. These attributes are concerned with such sins and should be operationalized.

When one of His servants commits a sin, it calls for such attributes. Take, for example, His attributes *Al-Qahhar* (the Compeller), *Al-Jabbar* (the Conqueror) and *Al-Muntaqim* (the Avenger) indicate His Stern Majesty as well as imply punishment. There are other qualities that manifest His Beauty, such as *Al-Ghafur* (the All-Forgiving), *Ar-Rahim* (the Compassionate) and *At-Tawwab* (the Granter and Acceptor of repentance), and so on. For this reason, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* states in a Hadith about the last days of *Ramadan*: ‘The angels have interceded, the apostles have interceded and the believers have interceded, and no one remains (to grant pardon) but the Most Merciful of the merciful.’(1)

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(1) *Muslim extracts this Hadith for its correctness (269), and Ahmad extracts it as traceable (11463). Both quote it from Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri, who states that Allah said: ‘The angels intervened, as did the prophets and the believers, and only The Most Merciful remained. And so, He snatched up a handful of hellfire to extract from it a people who had never done good deeds. They returned as ash, and so He placed them in the river at the mouth of paradise.’ This is the Hadith in its entirety.*

If the believers, the prophets and the angels will all intercede on the part of those who commit sin, leaving only the intercession of the Most Merciful of the merciful, to whom does He intercede on their behalf? The answer is that He Himself is the source of their punishment and their forgiveness, since He possesses the attributes of Majesty and the attributes of Beauty. If the attributes of stern majesty start to lay hold on the rebellious sinner, the attributes of beauty come to plead his case before the cause of justice contained in Allah's qualities of sternness and exacting judgment. Thus, the statement 'It is He who accepts repentance of His servants…' (*ash-Shura:* 25) employs the word 'of' even though the repentance is really from them. In this instance, 'of' is used because Allah *Glorified is He* bears away their sins of them. We find such precise, meaningful use of words like this throughout the Noble Quran, with meaning which is given to certain words in a specific context. For example, we read in the following verse: '…'I shall certainly cut off your alternate hands and feet, then crucify you on the trunks of palm trees.'…' (*Ta Ha:* 71).

From this we understand that crucifixion binding someone to a tree. That is why some commentators said that it means *`ala* (on) trucks of palm trees. Why then does the Quran employs the word *fi* (in) instead of *`ala* (on) indicating that there is another meaning which *`ala* (on) would not suffice to give. We can thus infer that the meaning is: I shall most certainly crucify you harshly and severely, such that the parts of the body of the crucified will be impressed into the trunk on which he is crucified. For this reason, the verse states: '…in the trunks of palm trees.…' (*Ta Ha:* 71).

Likewise, in the following statement by Allah *the Exalted*: 'Praise be to Allah, who has granted me Ishmael and Isaac on my old age…' (*Ibrahim:* 39), some commentators note that the meaning here is *ma`a* (with, but here: despite) old age. However, the verse instead uses the *`ala* (on) old age. In this case, there is yet again a second, deeper meaning which justifies the use of *`ala* (on), a word which is useful for expressing things as being on a loftier level. In this instance, old age was preventing the bearing of children. However, the will and power of Allah *Glorified is He* superseded that barrier, showing that He exists on a higher level. Likewise, in the verse: '…your Lord is full of forgiveness for people, despite their wrongdoing…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6), Allah says: *`ala zhulmihim* (despite their wrongdoing). *`Ala*, literally means (on). The rebelliousness referred to in this instance was deserving of punishment. Yet, Allah’s Forgiveness and Mercy unto His slaves is higher and loftier than His punishment.

Moving on, we read that He: ‘pardons bad deeds’ (*ash-Shura:* 25), i.e. Allah blots them out. Then, He says: ‘…He knows everything you do.’ (*ash-Shura:* 25) This is so because Allah’s Knowledge is all encompassing and all-inclusive, which not even a speck of dust escapes it, whether in heaven or on the earth. Thus, if a person were to commit a sin which no other person knew about, Allah *Glorified is He* would still know, and it is necessary that we repent of it to Him. Even if the sin were only in one’s mind and not manifest as an action, it would still require repentance.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَيَسْتَجِيبُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَيَزِيدُهُم
مِّن فَضْلِهِۦ ۚ وَٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

He responds to those who believe and do good
deeds, and gives them more of His bounty;
agonizing torment awaits the disbelievers [26]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 26)

In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* responds to all those who believe in Him and who do good deeds. The verb *yastajeeb*, (responds) indicates the swiftness of the response; hence why He did not *yujeeb*. He says: ‘…and gives them more of His bounty’ (*ash-Shura:* 26) which indicates that Allah is the One Who responds to the believers. By contrast, ‘…agonizing torment awaits the disbelievers.’ (*ash-Shura:* 26) The agonizing torment referred to here comes eventually because they will, first, be faced with Allah’s Wrath, then they will be debarred from their Lord, then they will be cursed and cast away from His Mercy and finally, they will have the agonizing torment.

Then, the True Lord says(1):

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(1) *The context of the revelation of this verse is that it came forth among a people in Saffa who were possessed of great riches and the things of this world. Khabab ibn Al-Art states: ‘This verse was revealed unto us, and this, because we recklessly sought after gold and the riches of our panegyrics. Thus, Allah sent this verse down to us.’ The Contexts of Revelation by Al-Wahidi Al-Nisaburi, p. 213; Al-Maktaba Ath-Thiqafiyya, Beirut*

وَلَوْ بَسَطَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِۦ لَبَغَوْا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَـٰكِن
يُنَزِّلُ بِقَدَرٍ مَّا يَشَآءُ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ بِعِبَادِهِۦ خَبِيرٌۢ بَصِيرٌ ٢٧

If God were to grant His plentiful provision to [all] His creatures, they would act insolently on earth, but He sends down in due measure whatever He will, for He is well aware of His servants and watchful over them [27]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 27)

This verse states a quality of the human soul, as Allah *Glorified is He* states elsewhere in the Quran: 'But man exceeds all bounds, when he thinks he is self-sufficient.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7) This is because, when provision is extended and made easy for man, his will not be concerned with obtaining or pursuing it, nor will he exert effort. Instead, He will have time to occupy himself with other matters, such as acting insolently.

For this reason, when the Quran discusses Qarun (Korah), the clearest example of an insolent wealthy man, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Qarun was one of Musa's (Moses's) people, but he oppressed them…' (*al-Qasas:* 76). Thus, affluence and wealth might lead a person to be insolent and oppressive for no just reason. So, in this context, 'plentiful provision' means extending it and facilitating the means of obtaining it. In this sense, it is a sort of trial or test.

Moving on, we read: '…but He sends down in due measure whatever He will, for He is well aware of His servants and watchful over them.' (*ash-Shura:* 27) This statement means that Allah *Glorified is He* affords provision in a specific amount and measure, in accordance with His Knowledge and Wisdom in arranging the affairs of His creation. He thus gives them provision according to their needs, such that His servants reach the extent of tyranny and wrongness. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* knows best the nature of His servants, and He is aware of that which leads them to righteousness, hence the following statement from the Hadith: 'Indeed, there are among my servants those who, if I made them rich, would become corrupt; and there are those among them who, if I made them poor, would become righteous.'(1)

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(1) *Al-Albany quotes this Hadith in Al Silsilah Ad-Da`ifah (254-256) stating: 'Al-Bayhaqi extracts this Hadith (for its correctness) (in Al`Asma` Wa As- Siffat, p. 121, Egypt); Al-Baghwi=*

Islam has been concerned with the economic aspect in sustaining life. Therefore, it makes incumbent upon us the payment of *zakat*, in order for benefit to be distributed in society. We have learned previously to distinguish between the poor person who is truly in need and cannot work, and he who is a skilled in deceiving others into thinking that he is needy. The latter will not have a share of people's money, and it is not meet for us to aid them in their idleness and inaction.

However, as for the helpless, they deserve our charitable offerings, since he is unable to make a living himself. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* assigns such a person a portion from that money possessed by those capable of making a living; a portion that he receives in dignity, without losing face in order to obtain provision. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* preserves dignity unto such truly helpless people. Moreover, He brings those wealthier individuals, capable of making a living, to their very doors to give them their share; such that the helpless know that, even as Allah *Glorified is He* took away their ability to work, He subjugated the strength and ability of others to them.

Likewise, with the injunction to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, we see people feel sad for they are truly unable to fulfil this command, when in reality such people are more blessed by Allah than those who are capable of performing the pilgrimage. This is because the latter might perform the pilgrimage, yet Allah does not accept it; whereas, fundamentally, performing the pilgrimage is not obligatory on those incapable of performing it. It is said that ninety percent of people have never seen the Holy Mosque in Mecca. However, does this mean that Allah *Glorified is He* prohibits them from ever seeing it simply because they do not have the material means to go? No! In fact, they are apportioned a vision of it: 'There are those who circumambulate around the *Ka`ba*, and there are those around whom the *Ka`ba* circumambulates.'(1)

= *extracts it in his Explication of the Sunna (141-142); and Abu Bakr Al-Kalabadhi in his (Keys to the Meanings) (190).' He also states that the attribution of this Hadith is very weak, and quotes the beginning of the Hadith as follows: 'Whosoever purports to be my friend and condemns me, the same has come up unto me as if in battle.'*

(1) Here we might pause over a line of a poem from `Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jilani (d. 561 AH/ 1166 AD):

Every important religious person circumambulates the *Ka'ba* seven times;
As for me, the temple circumambulates around my tent."

Thereafter, we see that the state of poverty or helplessness does not continue forever because people's fortunes alternate, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…Such days (of varying fortunes) We give to men and men by turns.' (*Al-'Imran:* 140) It was previously clarified that there is wisdom in the existence of poverty in society, since it is impossible for the mobility of that society and the needs of people to be based purely on benefaction. Rather, they are based on necessity. When material needs are lacking, we work and do not shrink from hard or despicable duties; otherwise, who would do such things for us?

An illustrative example—and one which we have seen previously—is that of the labourer who accepts the fate Allah chose for him and performs his work devotedly. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* says to him: 'You have accepted my destiny (done your best according to that measure which I have given you); I will now give you blessings in accordance with My Worth.' Before long, such labourer will not be an employee; rather he will become employer or even an owner of a business, even though he was once a wage earner. This is because he was sincere and truthful with his employer and did not envy him, nor was he ungrateful for his pay (which was actually a blessing).

In all, The True Lord does not withhold provision nor sends it down in due measure except in cases of possible danger or harm. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* grans limited provision to those whom He knows would be made corrupt by overabundance of wealth in order to purify them through poverty. This is because, at root, Allah *Glorified is He* is generous and magnanimous and extends provision for His servants. For this reason, He states in the next verse:

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُنَزِّلُ ٱلْغَيْثَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا قَنَطُوا۟ وَيَنشُرُ
رَحْمَتَهُۥ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْوَلِىُّ ٱلْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٨﴾

It is He who sends relief through rain after they
have lost hope, and spreads His mercy far and wide.
He is the Protector, Worthy of All Praise [28]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 28)

The phrase 'relief through rain' (*ash-Shura:* 28) means rain which falls on earth after a drought providing water to people and saving them from parched fields, hunger and famine which had previously beset them. The phrase '…after they have lost hope…' (*ash-Shura:* 28) means that they had lost hope in the return of rainfall.

Next, He says, '…and spreads His Mercy far and wide…' (*ash-Shura:* 28) meaning, He bestows sustenance mercifully upon all His slaves. His words: '…He is the Protector…' (*ash-Shura:* 28) means the One in Whom His servants confide with regard to all their affairs and their benefactor. The final statement that Allah *Glorified is He is* is '…Worthy of All Praise' (*ash-Shura:* 28) means that He is to be honoured for those blessings which He has granted people bestowed upon them since Allah *Glorified is He* had blessed people even before they existed since He created the heavens, the earth and indeed the entire universe, subjugating it for their benefit and service. People have therefore been placed in a universe ready and prepared to receive them, and in which are found all things requisite for preserving their lives.

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ خَلْقُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَثَّ فِيهِمَا
مِن دَآبَّةٍ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ جَمْعِهِمْ إِذَا يَشَآءُ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and
all the living creatures He has scattered throughout them:
He has the power to gather them all together whenever
He will [29] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 29)

The phrase 'His signs' (*ash-Shura:* 29) the singular of which is *aya* (sign), referring to something miraculous which causes a person to wonder or ponder. We might also say: 'this person is an *aya* (a prodigy) when it comes to good manners or acquiring knowledge'. Further, as noted, the *ayat* (signs) which are described in the noble Quran are of three types: the first are natural signs which are evidence of His ability and the wondrousness of His creative power. These signs include phenomena such as the sun, the moon, the night, and daylight. The second category includes those miraculous signs which prove the truthfulness of Allah's messengers, in terms of their claims about Allah *Glorified is He*. Finally, there are those *ayat* (verses) which include specific dictates or pronouncements about religion; these are the verses of the noble Quran.

In the verse under consideration, the True Lord speaks about some of His natural signs: ‘Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth…’ (*ash-Shura:* 29). The heaven and the earth are both astonishing in their nature, and are proofs of the absoluteness of Allah’s Power, as well as His Wisdom. Elsewhere in the Quran, He states: ‘The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though most people do not know it.’ (*Ghafir:* 57)

Certainly, the creation of heaven and the earth is greater than the creation of man, since man comes to life by being born then dies. They perish as small children or as youth or even while still in their mother’s wombs. Even if a person lives for one hundred years, he will eventually die. So then, who is man alongside Allah who created the heavens and the earth and those natural signs found therein, signs which last as long as Allah *Glorified is He* wishes?

It is important for man to remember these truths, and to ask himself: can it be that these signs are older than man is when they were created and subjugated for his benefit? Then, there must be another term of existence which is more befitting to man’s station, and by which Allah *Glorified is He* has privileges him above these signs. We may thus say that we have another, more eternal and permanent life through we will exist and survive eternally when all these signs or other creations in the heaven and the earth perish.

The statement ‘…the heavens and earth…’ (*ash-Shura:* 29) means those things found therein, since the heavens and the earth are enveloped vessels containing countless creations. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states elsewhere: ‘To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth...’ (*al-Baqara:* 284).

Moving on, we read the words: ‘…and all the living creatures He has scattered…’ (*ash-Shura:* 29) meaning He spread ‘all the living creatures’ (*ash-Shura:* 29) throughout the heavens and the earth. *Daabah* (living creatures) is the noun and *yadubbu* on the earth is the verb which means: that which crawls on earth, referring to all humans and animals which walk upon its surface. As for *yadubb* in the heavens, it refers to the angels that live in them.

Next, we read: ‘…He has the power to gather them all together whenever He wills.’ (*ash-Shura:* 29) This sentence refers to the Day of Judgment. The statement ‘He has the power’ (*ash-Shura:* 29) means that He is capable of gathering them, as made clear elsewhere: ‘…the Day of Gathering, of which there is no doubt…’ (*ash-Shura:* 7).

Some scholars have gone so far as to assert the presence of other creations in the highest heights, being just as responsible as we are, and have obligations just like us. In our solar system, for example, there are other planets aside from earth such as Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and others. His greatness is manifested in gathering all these creatures.

Then, the true lord says:

وَمَآ أَصَٰبَكُم مِّن مُّصِيبَةٖ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتۡ أَيۡدِيكُمۡ وَيَعۡفُواْ عَن كَثِيرٖ ٣٠

Whatever misfortune befalls you [people], it is because of what your own hands have done – God forgives much [30]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 30)

The word *asaba* (befell) is taken from the idea of an arrow hitting a target. If an archer is skilled, he will hit the target without the arrow deviating from it in the slightest. In this verse, then, the calamities which beset people in this world are as if they were arrows that have already been shot toward us, which undoubtedly wound or befall those for whom they are intended. For this reason, it is said that a calamity does not begin the moment it befalls someone, but rather, it is predestined, an arrow that have already been shot, whose time is that period taken to travel the distance to the targeted person, as noted previously with regard to the calamity of death.

Thus, the issue of misfortunes sent our way is certain, written, recorded, predestined for and not a sudden accident. Indeed, the entire universe has a recorded mock-up in which all details are clarified. For this reason, Allah *the Exalted* states: ‘No misfortune can happen, either in the earth or in yourselves, that was not set down in writing before We brought it into being. That is easy for Allah.’ (*al-Hadid:* 22) In other words: there is no escaping or fleeing from those misfortunes which have already been determined for us; nor can we forestall such tragedies which are like an arrow that has already been shot and cannot be returned.

There are two types of misfortunes which befall humankind. The first is the type of problem or crisis which we have some measure of control or influence over; the second type is that over which we have no such control. For example, if a student fails his final exam because he has neglected his studies and did not make the necessary effort to study the material during the semester, then it is the sort of crisis which could have been avoided and over which the student has control. If we all wish to prevent this type of misfortune, we should do that which is necessary to succeed and set aside those things which cause us to fail. If we do this, then we will surely find success.

The other type of misfortune or crisis is that which we cannot prevent or control. Returning to the example of the student, this second type of misfortune would come about if the student works hard and memorizes his lessons, only to get dizzy or sick on the day of the exam, which he is thus unable to finish properly. This happens according to Allah's will, and therefore there must certainly be some wisdom therein. For this reason, we must be content when such a misfortune befalls us knowing that it is Allah's wish for it to happen. This knowledge makes such a misfortune easier to deal with when we know that it comes from Allah *Glorified is He* and no one else.

It was mentioned previously that examples from reality might help us understand this concept better. Suppose that a father is sitting in his house, and his son walks in with bruises on his face. The first question from the father would of course be, 'Who did this to you'? In this he is wise, for he does not judge the matter until after discovering who the doer of the deed is; for an incident cannot be pleasing or distressing until the doer of the action is known.

If the son says that it was Uncle So-and-So who hit him, the father would respond that the son probably did something to deserve the punishment that he got, since that uncle is a trusted, loving figure in the family. If, however, the son says that it was So-and-So from next door, the father would get extremely upset at the neighbour who did this terrible thing to his son.

We see from this example that, when something unpleasant is done to us by someone we love and trust, that we know there must be some benefit, and we therefore accept it. If, however, such an unpleasant deed is done to us by an enemy, then we fight against it, knowing that there is no benefit there from it.

The True Lord wants to teach us how to receive misfortunes, and to learn that each comes to us for a reason. If we understand that reason, then we know why the misfortune has happened, making it easier to accept. If we do not know the reason, then we accept it and say to ourselves that Allah *Glorified is He* must have some wise purpose for sending such misfortunes upon us. In this way, we pass through the door of contentment and submission, rather than discontent and objection.

So then, the student who gets sick and cannot complete his final test says to himself, 'Perhaps I was envious, and Allah wanted to chastise me for that. Or perhaps I would have gotten a worse grade than that for which I was hoping. Or perhaps Allah was defending me against the evil eye of envy'.

Did the True Lord not say regarding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'The disbelievers almost strike you down with their looks' (*al-Qalam:* 51). There is another instance, found in the chapter of *al-Kahf* in which the True Lord gives us an example for how to receive unpleasant incidents and accept misfortunes; as long as we have can never stop them, there must be some divine wisdom in our having to go through them. This idea appears in the story of the Righteous Servant(1) and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: for even though the righteous servant was not a prophet per se, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who was a prophet, nevertheless learned from him and asked to accompany him in his journey. Through this example, we learn that, when a servant of Allah *Glorified is He* rises in his relationship with his Lord, Allah *Glorified is He* opens insights and breakthroughs to that servant, and grants him knowledge intended especially for him.

The righteous servant worshipped Allah *Glorified is He* according to that path delineated by Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and yet, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* followed the righteous servant in order to learn from him. This is because the mission of a messenger is to bring to Allah *Glorified is He* those to whom the messenger has been sent. If that messenger does not do this, then he leaves behind those whom he is supposed to help, letting them try to find Allah *Glorified is He* themselves. Moreover, every messenger has his own adeptness in refining his relationship with Allah *the Exalted*. In this way, The righteous servant had grown closer to Allah *Glorified is He* and become intimate with Him, and accordingly Allah granted him special knowledge.

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(1) The righteous servant is Al-Khidr *peace be upon him* of whom numerous stories, tales and legends have been handed down, many of which attest that he was an actual historical figure, although there is no conclusive evidence of this. The most evident fact is that he is a prophet in Allah's statement, 'And I did not do [any of] this of my own accord' (*al-Kahf*: 82). The only correct facts known about him are those recounted in the Quran.

Let us now consider what Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* says to The Righteous Servant: 'Musa (Moses) said to him, "May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?"' The man said, "You will not be able to bear with me patiently."' (*al-Kahf:* 66-67)

This response from the righteous servant means that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* will soon behold events that he will not like or will he be able to infer the wisdom behind them. '…"How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?" Musa (Moses) said, "Allah willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way." The man said, "If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself."' (*al-Kahf:* 68-70)

After this, their journey begins, with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* accompanying the righteous servant. The first incident which occurs as they travel is that of the boat: 'They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, Musa (Moses) said, "How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!"' (*al-Kahf:* 71)

This is Musa's (Moses's) first protest against the rghteous servant's actions, which appear to be strange and deserving of outcry, 'He replied, "Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?" Musa (Moses) said, "Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you." And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Musa (Moses) said, "How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!"' (*al-Kahf:* 72-74) *Nukra* means terrible and deplorable.

Indeed, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was unable to be patient with him, looking on at this odd and reprehensible behaviour. 'He replied, "Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?" Musa (Moses) said, "From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company—you have put up with enough from me." And so they travelled on. Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down and the man repaired it. Musa (Moses) said, "But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that."' (*al-Kahf:* 75-77)

This is the third incident which occurs, and with that, the condition which Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had sworn unto himself materialized. So, the righteous servant decides to depart from Musa (Moses). However, before doing so, he told Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to come listen to him as he clarified that which Musa's (Moses's) patience was unable to bear: 'He said, "This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently: the boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force.' (*al-Kahf:* 78-79) In other words, the king takes every usable boat for himself.

There is no doubt that the damage done to this boat by the righteous servant seems to be a catastrophe for the boat's owners. However, there is wisdom in the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* permits this, since there is an oppressive king coming after the poor owners of the boat, taking all good boats and appropriating them unto himself. For this reason, the righteous servant desired to destroy the boat, so that the king could not steal it.

In this case, we do not compare the costs and benefits of having a good, usable boat and one which has been damaged. Rather, the choice is between a damaged boat and not having a boat at all: the damaging of the boat makes life easier for its owners, since they at least have the boat, which they can fix later, rather than having the whole thing taken from them by the king.

Next, we read: 'the young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, we wished that their Lord should give them another child—purer and more compassionate—in his place.' (*al-Kahf:* 80-81) Allah *the Exalted* knows that the young man would have become disobedient, creating strife for his parents, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Believers, even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies—beware of them...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14). There is thus wisdom in killing him.

One might reasonably ask what the boy’s crime was, such that his death at such a young age was warranted. The answer is that he was guilty of no such crime. However, the boy died in a stage of life where he had not tasted of the evils of this life, nor had he been saddled with responsibilities or held accountable for his good and bad deeds.

Being a young boy, his life was cut short. He was thus spared the chance of committing sins in this life, and died before reaching the age of being responsible of performing religious duties and held accountable for his deeds. Thus, his reward is that which is reserved for martyrs; his abode will be in paradise where he may stroll wherever he pleases and enter any place he desires. He may even enter unto the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. He becomes among the roamers of paradise. Thus, the boy’s death represents a form of mercy upon him.

Continuing with the story, we read: ‘The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.’ (*al-Kahf:* 82)

First, regarding this part of the story, we know that there were found in this town depraved people in whom was found not one shred of goodness, as evinced by the fact that they withheld food from Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the righteous servant. This indicates vileness and baseness, to be sure, since those who ask for food are unlike people who ask for money, which might be hoarded. Food spoils after time, however, and therefore those who ask for food cannot but ask out of a real and immediate need.

It is thus reasonable to believe the plea of those who beg for food. For this reason, it is a marvellous thing that the righteous servant rebuilt wall after they had refused him food. Why did he rebuild the wall? The wall belonged to two orphaned boys in that same town. He did this thanks to his ability to see through the wicked masses of the town and to perceive the plight of the two orphans, for what would have happened if news about the boys' treasure reached such people?

We learn from this situation that the righteousness of fathers is beneficial to their sons. We also understand the two young boys to be twins, as evinced by Allah's statement '…so your Lord intended them to reach maturity…' (*al-Kahf:* 82). If one had been older than the other, then he would have taken the treasure unto himself. The righteous servant built the wall in such a way that it was timed to stand only until the two boys had come of age (which would presumably be the same time since they were twins), after which it would crumble, revealing the treasure and allowing for the two boys to protect it against the ignoble people of the village. In this way, the building of the wall was also a form of punishment for those reprehensible misers and a chastisement for their stinginess since it prevented them from taking the riches of the treasure for themselves.

Finally, the righteous servant did not neglect to clarify to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* that those actions which he performed were not of his own accord, but rather by command of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…I did not do [these things] of my own accord…' (*al-Kahf:* 82). In sum, whenever an inescapable trial or hardship is placed before us, we must look for the wisdom to be found in going through that trial since it must necessarily contain some lesson to be learned which the hardship will lead us to discover.

In the verse at hand, we read: 'Whatever misfortune befalls you [people], it is because of what your own hands have done…' (*ash-Shura:* 30). This statement is addressed to all people generally, including both believers and disbelievers. It is addressed to disbelievers who perhaps entered a battle and lost, had their money stolen, or were killed for their disbelief, and to believers who might have committed transgressions or sins which admit of punishment or reprimand, such as adultery or consumption of alcohol.

The True Lord revealed unto His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should inform his *ummah* (people) and teach them how to handle trials such as these, hence the Hadith: 'No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that.'(1)

A knowledgeable man said: 'I do not know my status regarding my lord, from the temperament of my mount' meaning that when his riding animal is recalcitrant or stumbles along, he asks himself what he did to deserve to have his animal act stubbornly. `Asma`,(2) daughter of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* would suffer from chronic headaches, and she would put her hands to her head and say, 'It is the result of my sins, and surely Allah forgives much.'

By way of clarification, we had previously said that the True Lord created man and appointed him a purpose in this life. It is clear that man has a way which protects him and through which he can properly direct his life; and set for him the right way that regulates his way of life. If man deviates from that right way, this results in disorder. It is like machines produced by people and arranged into a catalogue outlining their proper care and usage: if one were to try to use these devices in a way which goes against such information, the machine would crash.

The True Lord wishes for us to be aware of this, in order to reassure the believer when trials beset him, such that he might be patient and not grow anxious or upset. It is at times like these that the believer can be assured of the wisdom of such hardships, looking inside himself and asking what he might have done to bring upon himself such catastrophe, since it must have come in order to cleanse him of some filth or transgression which he has committed.

This, then, is how self-aware believers handle crises and trials: they turn inward and hold themselves accountable, since they have learned the lesson, taught by Allah *Glorified is He* that this world is one reserved to work for our reward and not to receive that reward, which comes in the Hereafter: ‘Today each soul will be rewarded for whatever it has done…’ (*Ghafir:* 17). Thus, those hardships and trials which befall us in this world are not for our recompense. Rather, they are opportunities for us to be righteous, and to learn that violating Allah’s rulings must surely lead to punishment.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari extracts this Hadith for its correctness (5210); Ahmad cites it as being attributable (7684, 8070, 10714, 11024), quoting from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *`Asma`, daughter of Abu Bakr, born in the year 27 B.H. Her mother was Qatila, daughter of `Abd Al-`Azzi. She converted to Islam in Mecca after long acquaintance with the religion, and her conversion came after that of seventeen other individuals, when she was fifteen years of age. She had a major role in the pilgrimage to Medina, and she was known as 'She Who Has Two Girdles'. She married Zubair ibn Al-`Awwam, and recounted 58 Hadiths cited from the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. She died in the year 73 A.H. after pilgrims killed her son `Abdullah ibn Zubayr.*

We are aware of calamities that befall all kinds of people, including our friends as well as irreligious people, and even prophets; hence the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Those beset most fiercely by trial are the prophets, followed by the saints followed by the most exemplary of believers.’(1)

Those trials which come upon the prophets are not punishments for transgressions which they have committed, but rather, trials that test their commitment to Allah’s Commands. Prophet’s conduct during such times is meant to be an example for their people. In this way, these peoples can learn to be righteous and patient. Thus, when calamities befall us, we remember those calamities that befell the prophets *peace be upon them* and how the received them with patience, and consequently follow their example, correct our behaviour and be closer to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, we read the statement ‘…Allah forgives much.’ (*ash-Shura:* 30) This refers to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* forgives many of our sins and transgressions; if it were not for Allah’s forgiveness and mercy bestowed upon His creations, no one would be saved.

That is why we say to one who is afflictions with misfortunes, ‘Allah willing, there is an atonement’ meaning Allah *Glorified is He* has made recompense for your transgressions. We read in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘By my Might and my Majesty I do not cause my servant to leave this world having intended for him any good, until I repay him for the evils he committed in this life by means of illness in his body, loss of his wealth, or death of his child. And if (even after these sanctifying trials) there remains unto him any unpunished evil deed, I will heap upon him the agonies of death to the point (where he returns to the innocent state, purified of sin) in which his mother bore him. By my Might and Majesty, I do not cause my servant to go out of this world having intended for him any evil, until I repay him for the good deeds he committed in this life by means of (blessings as) health in his body, abundance of his riches, and safety of his children, until on the Day of Judgment, I do not owe him any reward for any good deed; for as I said: "We will not allow to be lost the reward of any who did well in deeds."'(1) Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* pours out blessings upon such a one in this worldly life since he has no share or portion in the Hereafter.

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(1) *Ahmad extracts this Hadith as being attributable (171-172), and At-Tirmidhi extracts it for its habitual grouping with other Hadiths (2398), as well as Ibn Majah (4023), from a Hadith recounted by Sa`ad ibn Abu Waqqas. At-Tirmidhi states, ‘This is a correct and proper Hadith. It states in its entirety: ‘A man is beset by trials according to his faithfulness. Hardships will continue to befall him until he walks sinless upon the earth.’*

Then, the True Lord says:

وَمَآ أَنتُم بِمُعۡجِزِينَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ وَمَا لَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِيّٖ وَلَا نَصِيرٖ ٣١

You cannot escape Him anywhere on earth: you
have no protector or helper other than God [31]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 31)

In this verse, the True Lord addresses those who opposed the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* resisted his call to true religion and argued with him. Here, the Lord states that they will not be exempt from His Justice, and that those who escape punishment in this world will surely have their just reward in the Hereafter, as the Lord says addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…whether We show you part of what We have promised them in this life or whether We take your soul back to Us first, it is to Us that they will be returned.' (*Ghafir:* 77)

In the verse under consideration, the Lord states: 'You cannot escape Him anywhere on Earth…' (*ash-Shura:* 31). *Mu`jiz* means that which describes me as being constantly unable. *Yu`jizuni* means that which makes something that

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(1) *Al-Albany rates this Hadith in his Da`if At-Targhib Wa At-Tarhib quoting from Anas, who quotes the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him as saying: 'The Lord says, I cause no one to leave this world, while at the same time desiring to forgive that person his sins in order that I might recompense his every sin on his conscience, through bodily illness and drying up of wealth.' Razin recounts this Hadith, and Al-Mundhari claims to have never heard it. Al-`Albany does not mention the degree of its weak attribution.*

I am incapable of doing. In this context, the True Lord says to the people that they are incapable of escaping Him; for wherever they go, He will find them.

We see the wisdom of the jinn regarding this point such as when they stated: 'We know we can never frustrate Allah on Earth; we can never escape Him.' (*al-Jinn:* 12). Indeed, the jinn are more capable of fleeing than humans. Despite this, they still recognize that they would be unable to escape or hide from Allah *Glorified is He*.

For this reason, Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* praised those jinn who were counted as believers as he recited the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to some of the Companions. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them: 'I recited this surah to the jinn, who understood it better than you did. Indeed, every time they heard the statement: "which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?" (*ar-Rahman:* 13), they would say, "There is nothing from Your Grace which we can deny, O Lord, and unto You is all praise due."'(1)

The True Lord grants the oppressor respite and gives him time, but when He seizes him, He will not then let him escape. The fact that Allah *Glorified is He* grants respite to such people does not mean He is incapable of seizing them since he is Mighty and possesses absolute power. He brings such people when he pleases. By contrast, a weak person takes advantage of the first opportunity to take vengeance since he knows that such an opportunity might not return, as the poet (2) said:

When a weak one is given the opportunity,
She kills; such is the capacity of the weak.(3)

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(1) *As-Suyuti cites this in Ad-Dur Al-Manthur (690-697); At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Al-Mandhar and Sheikh Al-Asfahani attribute the Hadith in Al-`Uzma Wa`Al-Akim); and Ibn Mardwayh and Al-Bayhaqi cite it in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa), quoting from Jabir ibn `Abdullah.*

(2) Abu Tammam, Habib ibn `Aus At-Ta`i, one of the princes of poetic eloquence… He was born in *Jasim*, in the village of Huran, Syria, in the year 803 A.D./188 A.H. His poetry exhibits much aesthetic power and purity of style, and he composed several literary works among which are *Fuhul Ash-Shu`ara`* and the *Amasa* collection of poetry. He went down to Egypt, from whence he was summoned to Baghdad by Al-Mu`tasim; he later acted as supervisor of the postal system in Mosul. However, not two years passed before he died at Mosul in the year 845 A.D./ 231 A.H. at age 44.

(3) This line is from a poem by Abu Tammam, written in the *Bahr (meter) Al-Kamil* and comprising 30 total lines.

Then, we read Allah's statement '…you have no protector or helper other than Allah.' (*ash-Shura:* 31) *Al-Waliyy* means a trusted relative or a close friend who is always near to you, and who is supposed to deflect trials or disasters from you before they occur. An-Nasir means the one who provides succour and aid when hardships beset you. By using these words, the True Lord teaches us to stick to the straight path of obeying His commands, and to have a direct connection to Him. Moreover, He teaches us that we should not think that we can escape Him, or that anyone of his creation can protect us and give us succour to achieve this. Then, the True Lord says:

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِ ٱلْجَوَارِ فِى ٱلْبَحْرِ كَٱلْأَعْلَٰمِ ﴿٣٢﴾

Among His signs are the ships, sailing like floating mountains [32] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 32)

The phrase 'the ships, sailing' refers to ships, i.e. those vessels that run along the surface of the water. In our own modern day, we see immense, colossal ships with massive tonnage which are carried along by the Grace of Allah *Glorified is He* across the waters. Likewise, we find freight cars and trucks of mighty weight which are carried along above the ground on wheels filled with air. The fact that light things carry heavy things is a one of Allah's miracles and signs.

In His words 'like floating mountains' (*ash-Shura:* 32), *Al-A`laam* which is the plural form of *`alam* means: a mountain. It is called *`alam* due to its height and being visible; hence the following line from Al-Khansa`(1), in lament for her brother, Sakhr:

He was like a mountain topped with fire.(2)

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(1) *Al-Khansa`, or Tumadir bint `Omru ibn Al-Harith), of the Bani Sulaym tribe, and the most famous of Arab poets from among the people of Najd... She lived most of her life during the Jahiliyyah period, but she came to understand the truthfulness of Islam and embraced it. Her poetic (oeuvre) survives today. She had four sons who witnessed the Battle of Qadisiyyah and were all martyred together.*

(2) *The line is from a poem by Al-Khansa`, written in Bahr (meter) Al-Basit) and comprising 36 total lines. The entirety of the line, as recorded in the poetic encyclopaedia, is as follows:*
And of Sakhr, to mourn him unto remission—
He was as though a mountain peak topped with fire.

This statement by Al-Khansa` about her brother, is a metaphor symbolic of the fact that he was well-known and famous to everyone. When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this line of poetry, he said: 'Damned woman! It was not enough for her to make him into a mountain; she had to put fire atop it as well.'(1)

In the verse under consideration, we therefore catch a glimpse of Allah's inimitability and His providing a sign to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: if we asked an economist or a man of industry when history first saw huge ships composed of several deck levels, being so large as to look like mountains moving across the sea, he would answer that such a phenomenon appeared for the first time in the eighteenth century. This means that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see such ships in his lifetime; but if that is the case, who informed him of such inventions, such that they might be compared to mountains in this verse? Moreover, how did he know that they would look like mountains? It is Allah *Glorified is He* giving us signs proving the truthfulness of His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Moreover, *al-jawari* (vessels(2) running across the sea) need energy or power to cause them to run. Where does such energy come from? The first ships were powered by the winds, or else by the pushing of the waters against the hull: if a ship were moving with the current, it was the power of that current that moved it; and if it were moving against the current, the people sailing the ship made it so by harnessing wind power via sails. If the winds died down, sailors would remain motionless on the ocean's surface.

We can therefore say that these ships moved and stood still according to Allah's command (since He commands the winds and currents). If a ship moved against the current in a river, its sailors and deckhands had to pull it along with ropes while they walked along the beach.

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(1) *Al-`Alusi cites this in his explanation of the verse under consideration (18/280): 'Damned woman! She was not content to compare him to a mountain, so she added fire on top, too.' Likewise, Ar-Razi cites this saying in his Mafatih Al-Ghayb (13/440).*

(2) *'Vessels' in this verse refers to ships continuously moving across the water. The Arabic word is jawari, sing. Jariya, an active participle meaning 'that which runs/flows.' These ships are called by this name because they move across the water. The term may also refer to a young (sexually mature) woman, indicating that the water of young men flows in her. Al-Qurtubi's Quranic commentary, 6076-6079).*

Then, the True Lord says:

إِن يَشَأۡ يُسۡكِنِ ٱلرِّيحَ فَيَظۡلَلۡنَ رَوَاكِدَ عَلَىٰ ظَهۡرِهِۦٓۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٖ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٖ شَكُورٍ ٣٣

If He willed, He could bring the wind to a standstill and they would lie motion- less on the surface of the sea – there truly are signs in this for anyone who is steadfast and thankful[33] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 33)

‘*Fayazhlalna rawakid*’ refers to the ships which ‘lie motionless on the surface of the sea’ (*ash-Shura:* 33). *Rawakid* means still, fixed, unmoving; perhaps a wave might move them out of their place, but they are not sailing across the water. The statement ‘…There truly are signs in this for anyone who is steadfast and thankful…’ (*ash-Shura:* 33) employs the emphatic participle *sabbar* (steadfast) a stronger form of the active participle *sabir* (patient). The stronger form *sabbar* is used here because the sailing of ships entails much effort and hardship, and such hardship must exude great patience.

Similarly, this verse uses the Arabic word *shukur* (thankful) which is the more emphatic form of the word *shakir.* Here, it is employed because the movement of ships across the water is one of Allah’s signs and wonders deserving of thanks.

This verse comes after Allah’s statement: ‘Whatever misfortune befalls you [people], it is because of what your own hands have done…’ (*ash-Shura:* 30). Such misfortunes also require patience and gratitude from us since hardships, when they do beset people, do not fall upon a person with such magnitude that they take everything away from a person all at once. In this, Allah *Glorified is He* might afflict us in one area of our lives, but He exempts us from affliction in all others. We therefore need patience regarding the aspect of our lives beset by troubles, and gratitude for those which are not.

Concerning this fact, it is recounted that(1) 'Abdullah ibn Ja`far(2) hurt his leg as he was travelling to Damascus, and he found no one to treat him for the entire length of his journey. His wound festered and became infected with gangrene, and they decided to amputate his leg. The others travelling with him sent for mandrake, an anaesthetic used at the time to deaden the pain in surgery. However, he refused to drink the drug, saying: 'By Allah, I should not be heedless of my lord for even one instant!' So, they truly cut off his leg without anaesthetic because he who takes joy in such closeness to Allah, as comes through full mental awareness untouched by drug—he will truly feel no pain, when he is thus accompanied by Allah.

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(1) *The story of amputating the leg of `Abdullah ibn Ja`far*

(2) *`Abdullah ibn Ja`far ibn `Abu Taleb. He was born in the land of Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) in the year 1 A.H. when his parents emigrated to that land. He is the first=*

It is this accompaniment through which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companion were protected in the cave, when he said to his Companion: 'Do not grieve, for Allah is with us.' Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'O Messenger of Allah, if any one of them (the disbelievers who chased them) looked under his feet, he would find us trampled there.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: 'What do you think of two, the third of whom is Allah?'(1) This is so because those two people gathered are in Allah's company, even though they cannot see Him. Likewise, whoever is found to be in Allah's company is granted a portion of this characteristic.

Thus, when `Abdullah ibn Ja`far said: 'By Allah, I should not be heedless of my lord for even one instant!' they cut off his leg as he was in this state of being in the company of Allah, thus preventing him from feeling any pain. When the others wanted to bury his leg, he grabbed hold of it and said: 'O Allah! I beseech you! If you tested me by afflicting one limb, you let the other parts of my body be sound.' This is truly the model of the patient, deeply grateful servant, who is longsuffering in trials and thankful for the blessings he receives.

Next, we read Allah's words: 'If He willed, He could bring the wind to a standstill…' (*ash-Shura:* 33), which exhibits another shade of the Quran's miraculous nature. In the old days, boats could only move along by wind power, which has since given way to the use of motors and electricity to

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= *Muslim to be born in Abyssinia, from whence he travelled to Basra, Kufah, and Damascus. He was one of the princes in the army at the Battle of Safin. He died in Medina in the year 80 A.H. / 700 A.D. [from Az-Zirikli's Signs, 74-76]*

(1) *This is a Hadith whose correctness has been verified. Al-Bukhari extracts it for its correctness (4663), as does Muslim (2381), quoting from a Hadith of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq Allah be pleased with him.*

power ships. However, the fact that ships no longer need wind to move across the sea does not mean that this verse does not continue to be relevant in our time. On the contrary, its significance is constant and everlasting unto the last hour before judgment since the word *rih* (wind) in this context means any kind of force or energy, not just air currents.

We see this elsewhere in the Quran such as Allah’s statement ‘And obey Allah and His Messenger and do not quarrel for then you will be weak in hearts and your power will depart…’ (*al-Anfal:* 46). ‘*Tadh-haba rihukum*’ means ‘your power will depart’ thus denoting power or capability of any kind, whether air, steam or other such sources of energy.

Then, we read the His words: ‘…there truly are signs in this for anyone who is steadfast and thankful.’ (*ash-Shura:* 33) The fact that this comes after the statement ‘…and they would lie motionless on the surface of the sea…’ (*ash-Shura:* 33) indicates a counsel given to the ship’s crew and passengers, who should not be sad if the winds become still and the ship stops moving. They are to accept this trial gracefully and with patience, and to give thanks that the crisis is not worse, such as a shipwreck, a hurricane, or some other catastrophe. In all, they should be patient in suffering, and grateful for those things which they still have.

Then, the True Lord says:

أَوۡ يُوبِقۡهُنَّ بِمَا كَسَبُواْ وَيَعۡفُ عَن كَثِيرٖ ٣٤

Or He could cause them to be wrecked on account
of what their passengers have done – God pardons
much [34] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 34)

‘*Yubiquhunna*’ (cause them to be wrecked) (*ash-Shura:* 34) means or they will be caused to drown. His words ‘…on account of what their passengers have done…’ (*ash-Shura:* 34) refer to those transgressions which the passengers had committed previously, such as drinking, gambling and so on. His words: ‘…Allah pardons much’ (*ash-Shura:* 34) mean that He forgives many of their sins and does not punish or chastise the people because of them.

Elsewhere, the True Lord clarifies this matter: ‘it is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are sailing on ships, and rejoicing in the favouring wind, a storm arrives: waves come at those on board from all sides and they feel there is no escape. Then they pray to Allah, professing sincere devotion to Him, "If You save us from this we shall be truly thankful." Yet no sooner does He save them than, back on land, they behave outrageously against all that is right…' (*Yunus:* 22-23).

Then, the True Lord says:

وَيَعۡلَمَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُجَٰدِلُونَ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِنَا مَا لَهُم مِّن مَّحِيصٖ (٣٥)

To let those who argue about Our messages know that
there is no escape for them [35] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 35)

This verse means: those who argue about Allah's messages have no refuge or escape from His punishment. Those who argue with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about Allah's messages and deny him, know the Power of Allah *Glorified is He* over them; since He could, if he so wished, smite them with a great and powerful blow.

Hasa (mentioned in the verse as *mahis*: escape) means: going here and there in a place without finding comfort or rest. Egyptian colloquial Arabic employs the active participle form of this verb in the expression: '*fulan hayis*' (So-and-so does not find a place to rest). He does not know where to go, and so he has no refuge or a place of safety.

Then, the True Lord says:

فَمَآ أُوتِيتُم مِّن شَيۡءٖ فَمَتَٰعُ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَاۖ وَمَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ خَيۡرٞ
وَأَبۡقَىٰ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمۡ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ (٣٦)

What you have been given is only the fleeting
enjoyment of this world. Far better and more lasting
is what God will give to those who believe and trust
in their Lord [36] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 36)

'*Min shay`in*' (Whatever thing…) (*ash-Shura:* 36) refer to all enjoyable things of this world such as material wealth, women, the joy of raising children, professional careers, good health, fame etc. All these are but pleasant aspects of this mortal existence which we enjoy while on the earth. Even though we know this world will last from the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Last Hour, an individual person does not experience it as such. An individual person's experience of this world is only that time which he and he alone remains on earth, since time cannot be added to his life from the lives of others; it is not the person who passes by the world, but rather, it is the world that passes by the person.

Thus, whatever pleasure one may experience in this life, it only lasts as long as one's lifetime on earth, and ultimately passes away. '…What is with Allah is better and more lasting for those who believe and rely on their Lord.' (*ash-Shura:* 36) In other words, that which is with Allah is better because the enjoyment we have on earth is commensurate with our own meagre efforts and abilities. In the Hereafter, however, the enjoyment corresponds to the True Lord's ability to bestow happiness. Moreover, earthly pleasures are fleeting, whereas joy in the Hereafter is everlasting.

In sum, when we compare the level of enjoyment we have on earth to that experience in the Hereafter, we learn that what is with Allah *Glorified is He* is far better and more enduring. When we realize this truth, it is incumbent upon us to strive for the fruits of the Hereafter, which show Allah's infinite beneficence. The eternality of joy in the Hereafter is placed upon all those who believe and trust in Allah *Glorified is He*. In this, there are two aspects: *aqida* (creed) of true religious principles, and exerting one's own efforts to live a good life.

We may note here the difference between a person who first does his part to be successful, then leaves the rest up to Allah *Glorified is He* and a person who says, 'I trust in Allah!', but does not do his part to accomplish his goals. The true believer trusts in Allah in his heart, and puts his faith into action.

This verse: 'Whatever thing you are given, is only the fleeting enjoyment of this world. What is with Allah is better and more lasting for those who believe and rely on their Lord' (*ash-Shura:* 36) was revealed in response to what a group of leaders of the tribe of Quraysh did. They (the most of which was Walid ibn Al-Mughira) envied the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* when Allah *Glorified is He* set him apart as a prophet. They said:

'…why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) They were referring to a person who had such and such riches. Allah *Glorified is He* responded by stating that all these are transient joys and pleasures of earth, i.e. worldly and transitory, and that the joy which is with Allah *Glorified is He* is far greater and more enduring.

وَٱلَّذِينَ يَجۡتَنِبُونَ كَبَٰٓئِرَ ٱلۡإِثۡمِ وَٱلۡفَوَٰحِشَ وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُواْ هُمۡ يَغۡفِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Who shun great sins and gross indecencies; who forgive when they are angry [37] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 37)

The meaning of the verb 'shun' is to remove oneself from those things which lead to '…the more heinous sins and abominations.…' 'More heinous sins' refer to those great transgressions which Allah has warned us not to commit, and for which He has allotted punishment. The Arabic word *al-fawahish* (abominations) means that which is most vile and repulsive in Allah's sight. Both heinous sins and abominations require setting our boundaries so as not to commit them.

We have said previously that the various messengers throughout the ages agreed that heinous sins are not permitted, and they have urged all humankind to avoid these shameful acts by all their body parts. The heart must be made free of worshipping any but Allah, the True Lord, of insisting on committing sins, feeling secure from the plan of Allah and giving up hope of His Mercy. Likewise, the tongue must be purged of bearing false witness, telling lies, defaming pure and chaste women, and the false oath, being that oath which plunges the one who says it into hellfire. The false oath is the act of lying about what has previously happened and swearing by that lie, an act for which there is no atonement. However, if a person swears to do something in the future, then found that there is something better to be done, Allah allows him to do what is better and to do a *kaffara* (fasting, feeding the needy or freeing a slave) for breaking his oath. Likewise, the stomach must be free of alcohol and the consumption of the orphan's sustenance or of that which is gained through usury, the private parts must be free of any unlawful relations, the hands of theft and killing, and the legs of fleeing from duty on the day that the army marches into battle. And above all, the whole self must be purified from disobedience to one's parents.

We then read Allah's statement, '…And who whenever they are moved to anger, readily forgive' (*ash-Shura:* 37). Anger is the boiling of rage at the thing which has angered or exhausted you; if that thing happens to be a person, a desire for vengeance might arise, or possibly hatred and envy. For this reason, the True Lord teaches us to forgive, to excuse others their faults, and to pardon; if we want Allah to forgive us, then we too must be willing to forgive others. If we consider the human condition, we note that the result of forgiveness and mercy is commendable, whereas the result of retaliation and vengeance is disastrous. Therefore, the True Lord counsels us to take the side of forgiveness and to be on guard against violent feelings of anger, and to not be carried away by them. He tells us not to overstep our rightful bounds when these feelings arise, even in the case of (lawful) reprisal: '…Just retribution is ordained for you in cases of killing…' (*al-Baqara:* 178). After setting the terms of legal revenge through retribution, He reminds us of that which is better to us, namely excusing others their sins: '…And if something [of his guilt] is remitted to a guilty person by his brother, this [remission] shall be adhered to with fairness, and restitution to his fellow-man shall be made in a goodly manner…' (*al-Baqara:* 178). Allah establishes the punishment so as to give the guilty person his due comeuppance after which He opens the door of forgiveness to that person.

We thus find that true religion prevents any person from intervening on behalf of a person to prevent lawful punishments established by Allah except in cases of murder which allow such intervention. This is so because, when the murder victim's surviving relatives forgive the killer, they spread undue amity in society; and the killer feels himself to be in their debt, knowing his soul is contingent upon that forgiveness.

Let us read another of Allah's statements on this matter: 'Repel [evil] with something that is better – and lo! He between whom and yourself was enmity [may then become] as though he had [always] been close [to you], a true friend! Yet [to achieve] this is not given to any but those who are to be patient in adversity: it is not given to any but those endowed with the greatest good fortune!' (*Fussilat:* 34-35) This is a truth which the Creator has put into place, for He knows His slaves well. In this context, we find some people who say, 'I swear I repelled evil with something better, but to no avail'! To such a person we must say, 'You should re-examine yourself and the sincerity of your behaviour. You think that you have repelled evil with something better, but this is not really the case. Rather, you are tempting Allah, and trying to tempt Allah indicates doubt. If you spoke the truth, then this verse would also be correct along with your words. He spoke truly who said:(1)

O you are vexed by the deeds of this and that
Repel your ransom with something better, in order to see he
[between whom and thyself was enmity a friend].

Next, we must ponder why this verse mentions the subject of the sentence in the statement '…[they] readily forgive' through inclusion of the subject pronoun *hum* (they) which is semantically unnecessary since Arabic verbs reflect their subjects through conjugation. Here, the pronoun *hum* is also included in order to emphasize that 'they' are the ones who have made the decision to forgive, not out of flattery or because they are forced to do so. For example, a person who has been wronged by a guilty party might very well send someone else to trial in their stead in order to intercede on the guilty person's behalf. In this case, however, the gratitude and good favour would be due to the person who intercedes, rather than the person who sent him. So, why would he not do the forgiving himself, thus collecting the reward of gratitude and favour himself?

وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡتَجَابُواْ لِرَبِّهِمۡ وَأَقَامُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَمۡرُهُمۡ شُورَىٰ بَيۡنَهُمۡ وَمِمَّا رَزَقۡنَٰهُمۡ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

Respond to their Lord; keep up the prayer; conduct their affairs by mutual consultation; give to others out of what We have provided for them [38] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 38)

Allah's statement 'and who respond to [the call of] their Lord…' means those who respond in faith, clearly exhibiting *`aqida*, internal conviction of true religious principles. The statement which follows shows the practical application of that conviction through action: 'And are constant in prayer; and whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation among themselves; and who spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance.' This verse is one of several which link prayer and *zakat* (tithes) since both of them are reasons for perfect Muslim individuals and society. *zakat* is money yielded up from us in order to help those in need; they are therefore a monetary sacrifice on the giver's part. In like fashion, prayer represents a greater *zakat* since people sacrifice time in order to pray, time which could otherwise be used to make money.

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(1) From the poetry of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul*.

What is different about this verse from those others which connect prayer and *zakat* is the injunction to call a *shura* (counsel). It is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who is speaking here, and we should thus pause and consider the wisdom in what is being said. In thinking about why *shura* (counsel meeting) is called for in this verse which links prayer and *zakat*, when so many other verses connect these two concepts without such a command. We might say that the phrase '[they] are in constant prayer' means praying to the fullest extent, which would be at gatherings in the mosque. In this sense, those praying together at mosque take the opportunity to gather in prayer, as though calling a counsel among themselves. We should also note that in this instance, the call for a counsel is not for discussing a commandment neither of Allah nor of His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Rather, it is for discussing an issue up for debate, being that no hard-and-fast stipulation was issued on this matter. The main point is that matter should be conducted in counsel by those who are specialized, as we see concerning the question of issuing of *fatwa*.(1) That is why we call for any *fatwa* to be agreed upon by several people, not just one. This is so because discussing a question or issue in a group must necessarily lead to the right answer. Moreover, a decision reached in counsel is more easily defended by an individual participant in that counsel, even if his opinions differ from those held by others.

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(1) *Among the various examples of shura (counselling), we find the consultation of `Umar with Al-Hurmuzan after the latter had embraced Islam. `Umar counselled with him regarding the military campaigns, and Al-Hurmuzan said to him: 'Those enemies of Muslims are like a bird with feathers, two wings, and two legs. If one wing breaks, the other wing will rise with the two legs and the head. If the second wing is broken, then the two legs will rise with the head. But if the head is crushed, then the wings and legs will perish. Verily, the head is Kisra, king of the Persians; one wing is Caesar, and the other is Faris. So, order the armies of Muslims to go toward Kisra.' Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, 6081-6089.*

Next, we read, '…And whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation among themselves…' (*ash-Shura:* 38). In this verse, the Arabic word used for 'counsel' is *shura*, the gathered group itself, rather than the word *tashawur*, which connotes the process of meeting and discussing. This is for emphasis: rather than highlight the process of discussing matters in counsel, the verse underscores the assemblage itself. In like fashion, we might say, 'He is a man of justice', rather than 'he is a just man'. In this example, the word 'justice' is more emphatic. On the matter of counsel, `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O Messenger of Allah, what of those matters on which we see no ruling issued by Allah, nor do we find any such ruling in the *Sunna* of His Prophet? What are we to do [on these matters]?' The Prophet said to him, 'Gather together the slaves (of Allah), and form a counsel, so that your decisions are not shaped by the opinion of one man alone.'(1)

وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَابَهُمُ ٱلۡبَغۡيُ هُمۡ يَنتَصِرُونَ ٣٩

And defend themselves when they are oppressed [39]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 39)

The phrase 'whenever tyranny afflicts them' indicates that they have been afflicted with oppression. The phrase '…defends themselves' means that they seek vengeance upon their oppressors in the same degree as they were attacked, no more. This verse shows one of Allah's decrees, namely that vengeance against an oppressor is permissible.(2) But the matter does not end here. Rather, the

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(1) *At-Tabarani quotes this in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (#11874), by Ibn `Abbas, who stated that `Ali ibn Abu Taleb said, 'O Messenger of Allah, hast you considered if an issue were to confront us for which no [legislative] verses have been revealed, nor any pronouncement from you?' He replied, 'Gather together the believing slaves (of Allah), and form a counsel, so that judgments are not passed according to special interest.' As-Suyuti attributes this to him in his Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, in his interpretation of the verse, 'When Allah's succour comes, and victory' (an-Nasr: 1). Al-Haythami states, `Abdullah ibn Kisaan is one of the narrators.' Al-Bukhari states, 'The Hadith of this man is not recognized as authentic.'*

(2) *There are two responses to an oppressor or dictator which were decreed by the judge Abu Bakr ibn Al-`Arabi, and which are quoted by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir. 'First: the oppressor is to show publicly his immorality, be a rude presence in society, harmful to all people great and small. In this situation, retribution is the most preferable course of=*

True Lord *Glorified is He* continues with another decree to complete the picture, and He states in the verse which follows:

وَجَزَٰٓؤُاْ سَيِّئَةٖ سَيِّئَةٞ مِّثۡلُهَاۖ فَمَنۡ عَفَا وَأَصۡلَحَ فَأَجۡرُهُۥ عَلَى ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٤٠

Let harm be requited by an equal harm, though anyone who forgives and puts things right will have his reward from God Himself — He does not like those who do wrong [40]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 40)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is Merciful and Kind to His slaves, and when He allowed them to return and requite the evil done to them in the same degree, He meant for this to assuage the resentment of those who have been wronged, to give them peace through retribution to their oppressors. However, He then narrows the door of vengeance and widens the door of pardon, as in the verse: ‘Hence, if you have to respond to an attack [in argument], respond only to the extent of the attack levelled against you; but to bear yourselves with patience is indeed far better for [you, since Allah is with] those who are patient in adversity.’ (*an-Nahl:* 126) Thus, when the True Lord states, ‘And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it’, it is to bring peace to one’s heart, to end the enmity and hatred between the wrongdoer and he who has been wronged. Indeed, is it possible to respond to wrongdoing in the same degree, with no escalation or increase of violent force? In a simple example, if one person strikes another person, or slaps a person, can the person who has been struck respond without increasing the amount of force he uses? And if the person who was struck, then strikes back harder, has that person not also become an attacker? Hence the injunction of forgiveness and pardoning one’s foe, which provides an escape from this, narrow cycle

There is a story(1) of a usurious man in Italy who lent money to another person, on the condition that if the debtor did not pay back the loan on the

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= *action. Second: his oppression or harm is recognized to be a lapse of judgment. The guilty party acknowledges his wrongdoing and asks forgiveness. In this case, pardon is the most preferable choice.’*

(1) This man is a Jew named Shylock, from the Shakespearean play *(The Merchant of Venice)*. Trans. Usain Ahmad Amin. Dar Ash-Shuruq, 1994.

appointed day, his creditor could take a pound of his flesh in repayment for the unpaid debt. When the appointed day came, the debtor could not pay what he owed, and his creditor took the case before a judge. The judge ruled in his favour and told him it was his right to take the pound of flesh, but that if he took more than that, the court would take anything over a pound from his [the creditor's] flesh. Thus, the usurious man relinquished his claims on the man's flesh.

For this reason, Allah says, '…Hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with Allah – for, verily, He does not love evildoers.' It is almost as though the person who deserves to be avenged will be led to do evil if he tries to requite that evil which has been done to him. In this same vein, we read a Hadith told by `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* that the prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'When the Day of Resurrection comes, a herald will proclaim, "Whosoever has his reward with Allah, let him enter paradise." No one responded (to the Prophet), so He said, 'Whosoever has his reward with Allah, let him enter paradise' (without reckoning). So they asked who it is that has his reward with Allah. The Prophet responded, 'He who pardons his foe.'(2)

It is also recounted that one day, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was sitting with his Companions when he suddenly burst out laughing. `Umar asked him, 'O Messenger of Allah, why are you laughing?' The Prophet said, 'I saw my Lord judging between two men. One of the two said, 'Lord, since this man has done me wrong, take away some of the good deeds attributed to him and give him back the same number of bad deeds.' The Lord said, 'He has no good deeds. But look!' The man looked, and suddenly he saw palaces and other marvellous things. He asked, 'To whom does all this belong, Lord?' The Lord replied, 'To he who forgives his brother.' The man said, 'I forgive him!' The Lord said, 'Then take the hand of your brother, and both of you enter paradise together.'(1) We can see how the Creator corrects the errors of his slaves in this manner, and what we must do is apply this abstract idea in our daily lives.

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(2) *At-Tabrani quotes this in Al-Mu`jam Al-`Awsat, from Anas ibn Malik, that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Then the herald will proclaim, "Let him be resurrected unto his reward from Allah and enter paradise." He then said this a second time, after which one man asked, 'Who is it that has his reward with Allah?' He answered, 'Those who forgive others.' Al-Qurtubi cites this in his Tafsir. He notes that Al-Mawardi (Alboacen in Latin) also refers to this Hadith*

(1) *Al-Hakim correctly renders this from `Anas ibn Malik: '`Umar asked, 'What makes you laugh O Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'Two men from my nation knelt before=*

As a final note, the word ‘evil’ in the statement ‘And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it’ (*ash-Shura:* 40) does not refer to sin or defiance of Allah, but rather something bad in word or deed which has been done to a person by another.

وَلَمَنِ ٱنتَصَرَ بَعْدَ ظُلْمِهِۦ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مَا عَلَيْهِم مِّن سَبِيلٍ ﴿٤١﴾ إِنَّمَا ٱلسَّبِيلُ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ
يَظْلِمُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ وَيَبْغُونَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ ٱلْحَقِّ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٢﴾

There is no cause to act against anyone who defends himself after being wronged [41] But there is cause to act against those who oppress people and transgress in the land against all justice – they will have an agonizing torment [42]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 41-42)

Allah’s statement ‘Yet indeed, as for any who defend themselves after having been wronged…’ means those who have avenged themselves against their oppressors. The statement ‘…No blame whatever attaches to them’ refers to the fact that there is no punishment reserved for them since they did not overstep the bounds of self-defence or vengeance for wrongs done to them.

‘Blame attaches but to those who oppress [other] people and behave outrageously on earth, offending against all right: for them there is grievous

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= *the Lord of Glory. One of these two men said, “Oh Lord, recompense the wrong done to me by this man by taking away from his blessings.” The Lord said to the man who made this request, “What would you have me do with this, your brother, since he has no good deeds from which to remove blessings from him?” The man replied, “Let him bear some of my crimes as his own.”’ At this point, the eyes of Allah’s Messenger filled with tears, and said, “The fact that that day will be great and terrible enough, without a person having to answer for the sins of another, requires people to carry their own crimes and sins.” Thus, Allah said to the man who demanded justice, “Lift up your eyes and gaze into the garden.” The man looked and said, “Lord, I see coffers of gold and golden palaces studded with pearls. Unto which prophet or martyr does all this belong?” The Lord said, “Unto he who pays the price.” The man asked, “Who possesses all of this?” The Lord said, “You do.” The man asked, “On what condition?” The Lord replied, “That you forgive this, your brother.” The man said, “I forgive him!” The Lord said, “Then take the hand of this, your brother, and both of you enter paradise together.”’ Al-Hakim states, ‘This is correct according to Al-Bukhari and Muslim.’*

suffering in store!’ The True Lord takes His slaves by the hand and leads them to a more peaceful path than revenge, and more fruitful in result.

Allah states:

وَلَمَن صَبَرَ وَغَفَرَ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمِنْ عَزْمِ ٱلْأُمُورِ ﴿٤٣﴾

Though if a person is patient and forgives,
this is one of the greatest things [43]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 43)

Elsewhere, Luqman gives counsel to his son: ‘O my dear son! Be constant in prayer, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and bear in patience whatever [ill] may befall you: this, behold, is something that requires determination’ (*Luqman:* 17). The difference is that in this verse, the *lam* of emphasis (translated as ‘indeed’) does not appear as it does in the statement ‘But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives – this, behold, is (*indeed*) something that requires determination’ (*ash-Shura:* 43). It is true that the general meaning of these two verses is one and the same, i.e. the call to patience in adversity. The difference is that the temptation to revenge is greater in a trial or hardship brought against a person by an adversary or enemy since interaction with that enemy incites the wronged party to anger and vengeance. For this reason, the verse under consideration includes the emphatic ‘indeed’; whereas Luqman’s advice to his son concerning a calamity which was not brought upon him by an opponent or adversary does not include such emphasis. As for having patience when one is tempted to seek revenge upon an enemy and return the evil done to him in kind, such one needs strength of will to exercise patience, and great reserves of energy capable of moving him out of the realm of self-defence into that of forgiveness and pardon. Hence the emphasis of this point twice in the same verse

Allah’s statement ‘But withal, if one is patient in adversity and forgives…’ refers to two stages: that of patience when someone harms us, and forgiveness of that harm. Many people remain patient in the face of adversity, but do not forgive the person who has done them wrong, since the stage of forgiveness requires the power of faith and resolve—as the verse states, ‘…This, behold, is indeed something to set one’s heart upon!’ Here, the statement refers to those important matters which require resolve, firmness of will, and strength necessary to extinguish the fires of hatred, loathing, and vengeance; in addition, they require the strength to forgive. Such attributes belong only to the believer who trusts that what is with Allah is better and more enduring, and that through forgiving others, he will receive by right that which he did not obtain through revenge.

We see, then, that the True Lord permits those who have been wronged to seek revenge after which He calls people to pardon their enemies. This raises the question of when vengeance is an appropriate response to wrongdoing, and when it is better to forgive. The learned men have said that forgiveness is better than revenge or self-defence, except in cases where the guilty party is devoid of conscience such that pardoning his crimes only results in his continued wrongdoing, or clemency toward him only results in his continued bloodlust. In such an instance, it is better to return the wrongdoer's evil to him in kind such that he does not continue to harm others.

Many Arab poets of the classical era attended to this truth such as Al-Mutanabbi(1):

It is clement to forget about clemency
If through clemency the paths leading to evil are enlarged.(2)

He also wrote:

If you show generosity to the generous, you will own him,
But if you did the same with cunning, he will be rebellious.
Replacing the sword with leniency
Is as harmful as replacing leniency with the sword(3)

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(1) Al-Mutanabbi, a wise poet born in Kufah in the year 303 A.H. / 915 A.D… He was raised in Ash-Sham and began to say poetry when he was just a boy. He made claims to prophet-hood while in the desert of Samaawah, and he was imprisoned until he repented of his crime. He was killed at the hands of Faatik ibn Abu Jahl Al-`Asadi in the year 354 A.H. / 965 A.D.

(2) This line is from an ode by Al-Mutanabbi, written in the long metre and comprising 36 total lines. *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya*

(3) These two lines come from a second ode by Al-Mutanabbi, also written in the long metre and comprising 42 total lines. *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya*

Another poet (1) writes:

There is no good in leniency if it does not encourage
    Impulses which protect it from being disturbed(2)

The history of the early Arab tribes also confirms this truth. Some tribes, such as the Beni Mazin, were powerful and ferocious, and out of self-defence would not accept harm done to them. Because of this, everyone came to fear them, and no one dared attack them. Then there were those tribes that forgiveness increased their evil deeds, such as the tribe of Beni Laqita from Beni Dhuhl. Then there were tribes like Tayy`, which was a peaceful tribe, forgiving and pardoning the wrong done to it by other tribes. For this reason, the Beni Dhuhl began to lust after their belongings, and they continuously attacked until the tribal poet of Tayy` burst out in condemnation of them after the attackers had invaded their land and made off with their livestock, his imagination fuelled with the results of forgiveness of those who do not warrant it. He said, in description of his tribe:

It is as though your Lord created none to fear Him
    Out of all mankind, except for them
They reward the wickedness of the wicked with pardon,
    And the evil of evildoers with charity(3)

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(1) The poet is An-Nabigha` Al Ja`di, Qays ibn `Abdullah Abu Laylal`-`Amari. He was born 54 years before the *Hijra* and died in the year 50 A.H. He lived to age 104. He was called An-Nabigha because he lived the first thirty years of his life without writing poetry, after which he excelled (*nabagha*) in its composition. He was among those who desisted from idol worship and alcohol consumption before the advent of Islam, which he embraced later and followed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

(2) This line is from a poem by An-Nabigha` Al Ja`di written in the Tawil meter and comprising 85 total lines (the line cited is line 80). *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya*

(3) Regarding these two lines: Ibn Dawud Al-Asfahani quotes them in *Az-Zahra* and attributes them to a man from the *Benu `Anbar* tribe, from a poem with the following first line: *If I were of the tribe of Benu Mazin, my camels would never travel / To the Benu Laqita tribe, of Dhuhl ibn Shaybana*. However, he switches around the order of the two cited lines. Likewise, Al-`Abidi in *At-Tadhkara As-Sa`diyya*, where he recounts the name ‘Qarit ibn `Anif.’ -Al-Jahiz cites only the first of the two lines, in his *Book of Animals*. He states, ‘Another man said this when his people justified their going to=

Still another poet (1) writes the lines, now famous in Arabic literature:

We pardoned Benu Dhuhl (2),
    And said, these people are our brothers!
If only the days would bring back
    This, our people, as it once was.
But when their evil spoke
    And became very clear,
We walked the walk of the lion
    That comes angrily,
With an attenuated blow,
    Enfeebled and frightening at once.
And a piercing attack, like the mouth of a drinking skin (3),
    Full and bulging

= battle out of piety.' Ibn `Abd Rabbihi Al-`Andalusi quotes these lines in his *Al-`Aqd Al-Farid*, and states: 'A man from among the Arabs said that his people were blameworthy and that the Benu Shayban had come and raided their camels. He appealed for help but to no avail. His people were weak, and he said this line in description of them. This is also the explanation given by `Abd Al-Qadir Al-Baghdadi in *Khazanat Al-`Adab*. Ibn Qutayba Al-Dinuri quotes these lines in *`Uyun Al-`Akhbar* under the caption: 'A poem by a man from the Benu `Anbar tribe, in which he praises the Benu Mazin and satirizes his own people, reviling them in comparison with other tribes.'

(1) The poet is Al-Fanad Az-Zamani, whose full name is Sahl ibn Shayban ibn Rabi`a, of Bakr ibn Wa`il. He was a poet of the pre-Islamic period; in his day, he was ruler, leader, and knight of the Bakr tribe. He fought and won the Bakr war, and lived to be one hundred years old. He was called 'Al-Fanad' because of the magnanimity of his personal character, which was like unto the height of a mountain, of which he was the peak. *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya*

(2) Dhuhl refers to a tribe. It can also refer to a son of Bakr. In both cases, the two Dhuhls stem from Rabi`a. One is Dhuhl ibn Shayban, and the other is Dhuhl ibn Tha`laba. *Lisan Al-`Arab*

(3) Drinking skin (*ziqq*), i.e. a receptacle for porting water. It was normally made of animal skin, and all other drinking vessels (e.g. cups, bowls) were filled from this receptacle. Abu Hanifa states, 'The drinking skin is that which all drink is transmitted by.'

At times, showing clemency to one’s foe,
is a form of submission to humiliation.
Evil sometimes carries deliverance
When charity delivers us not(1)

And on this topic, how beautiful are the words of `Ali *Allah be pleased with him*:

If I were in need of leniency,
At times, I still need to disregard that need.
I have one horse for dispensing clemency, bridled thereby,
And one horse to overlook it, saddled with disregard.
Those who seek my clemency will have it,
And those who expose themselves to my anger will have what they deserve.(2)

وَمَن يُضۡلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِن وَلِيّٖ مِّنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦۗ وَتَرَى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ لَمَّا رَأَوُاْ
ٱلۡعَذَابَ يَقُولُونَ هَلۡ إِلَىٰ مَرَدّٖ مِّن سَبِيلٖ ٤٤

Anyone God allows to stray will have no one else to protect him: you [Prophet] will see the wrongdoers, when they face the punishment, exclaiming, ‘Is there any way of going back?’ [44]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 44)

Allah’s statement ‘he whom Allah lets go astray’ means that Allah is the One Who decides on that person’s straying from the path. This is because guidance along the right path comes from Allah, and He has made clear to humankind the path of good and that of evil, by guidance to that which is good and the proscription against that which is evil. This guidance is what we call guidance by showing and conducting, and the True Lord has provided such guidance for the believer and disbeliever alike. Indeed, Allah guides all people. The believer takes such guidance and applies it in his life, walking along the path which Allah has laid out through proscription. Because of this, Allah increases the guidance given to such a one.

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(1) By Al-Fanad Az-Zamani, written in the divided abundant metre and comprising 26 total lines. We must also take into consideration the great difference between the version quoted by Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul* and alternate ones. In some versions, the line states, ‘We pardoned the tribe of Benu Dhuhl’, while in others it says, ‘We renounced the tribe of Benu Dhuhl.’

(2) These lines appear in *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya,* taken from two poets: Muhammad ibn Hazim Al-Bahili from Basra, who lived in Baghdad and died in the year 215 A.H. Muhammad ibn Wahib Al-Hamiri, also from Basra, who lived his life in Baghdad and passed away 225 A.H. However, it is believed that these two poets are the same person.

As for the disbeliever, he ignores this right guidance and does not apply it in his life. For this reason, Allah causes such a person to go increasingly astray, something which the disbeliever has chosen unto himself. Allah says, regarding the believers, ‘Just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in Allah-consciousness.’ (*Muhammad:* 17) As for the disbeliever, his lack of faith has been stamped onto his heart such that he cannot leave behind his disbelief and let the light of faith enter.

Next, the statement, ‘…Has henceforth no protector whatever…’ means no one to protect or support him. ‘Henceforth’ means, after Allah. Then, we read, ‘…And so you will see such evildoers [on Judgment Day, and will hear how] they exclaim as soon as they behold the suffering [that awaits them], “Is there any way of return?”’ These evildoers are asking if it is possible for them to come back to earth, repent, and to do good deeds. This is the question of a weak and feeble person who cannot fool himself since he has seen with his own eyes that punishment which he tried to ignore and cover up in this mortal world.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* exposes the lie behind this claim, as we see in another of His verses, addressing the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘If you could but see [them] when they will be made to stand before the fire and will say, “Oh, would that we were brought back [to life]: then we would not give the lie to our Lord’s messages, but would be among the believers!” But nay – [they will say this only because] the truth which they used to conceal [from themselves] in the past will have become obvious to them; and if they were brought back [to life], they would return to the very thing which was forbidden to them: for, behold, they are indeed liars!’ (*al-An‘am:* 27-28) And still elsewhere, He says in response to those who make a lie of the afterlife: ‘[As for those who will not believe in the life to come, they go on lying to themselves] until, when death approaches any of them, he prays: “O my Lord! Let me return, let me return [to life], so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed [a foretime]!” Nay, it is indeed but a [meaningless] word that he utters: for behind those [who leave the world] there is a barrier [of death] until the Day when all will be raised from the dead!’ (*al-Mu’minun*: 99-100) Allah then says:

وَتَرَىٰهُمْ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا خَٰشِعِينَ مِنَ ٱلذُّلِّ يَنظُرُونَ مِن طَرْفٍ
خَفِيٍّ ۗ وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِنَّ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ٱلَّذِينَ خَسِرُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ
وَأَهْلِيهِمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ أَلَآ إِنَّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ فِى عَذَابٍ مُّقِيمٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

You will see them exposed to the Fire, abject in humiliation, glancing furtively, while those who believed exclaim, ‘The losers are the ones who have lost themselves and their people on the Day of Resurrection.’ Truly the evildoers will remain in lasting torment[45] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 45)

In His statement ‘And you will see them…’, ‘them’ refers to disbelievers. The phrase ‘…exposed to that [doom]…’ means that they are exposed to the hellfire. ‘…Humbling themselves in abasement…’ means they are forced into submission out of great fear. For this reason, they are ‘…looking [around] with a furtive glance…’, i.e. stealing glances, but unable to look for too long since the shame heaped upon them hurts their eyes. Hence, a person says to someone who accuses him falsely, ‘look at my eyes’ since looking to each other’s’ eyes reveals what is true. A person who is right has a powerful eye, the strength of which is shored up by the power of truth which that person defends. As for the eye of someone in the wrong, it is weak and enfeebled by the rays of the light of truth that reveal his deception.

Moving on, we encounter the statement ‘…the while those who had attained to faith will say, “Verily, lost on [this] Day of Resurrection are they who have squandered their own and their followers’ selves!” Oh, verily, the evildoers will fall into long-lasting suffering.’ This is a declaration of the believer who has escaped punishment in the hereafter and won the reward of paradise. It is as if to say, the true loss is the state of evildoers who have lost everything. Finally, we read, '…Oh, verily, the evildoers will fall into long-lasting suffering' meaning endless suffering which is never cut off.

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُم مِّنْ أَوْلِيَآءَ يَنصُرُونَهُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَمَن يُضْلِلِ ٱللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِن سَبِيلٍ ﴿٤٦﴾

They will have no allies to help them against God.
There is no way [forward] for those God allows to
stray [46] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 46)

The discussion in this verse refers to the Day of Resurrection. The statement 'and will have no protector whatever to succour them against Allah…' means that no one will deflect from them their allotted punishment. In '…For he whom Allah lets go astray shall find no way [of escape]', the phrase 'whom Allah lets go astray' means that they have no path of guidance since it is Allah who guides along the straight path giving a perfect example of direction and the path to follow, We have clarified previously the two types of divine guidance: guidance by direction and conducting, and guidance by success and relief granted by Allah. It is because of this division into two types that we see some orientalists pausing over certain verses, in accusation of the Quran as self-contradictory. For example, Allah states, 'And as for [the tribe of] Thamud, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance…' (*Fussilat:* 17). In another place, He states, 'Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love…' (*al-Qasas*: 56); and yet elsewhere, He states, '…And, verily, [on the strength thereof] you, too, guide [men] onto the straightway' (*ash-Shura:* 52). It seems that Allah affirms guidance in one place and denies it in another. The addressee in the two verses is the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the objection of the orientalists results from their lack of understanding of Allah's word. The simultaneous affirmation and denial in these verses have to do with the fact that each verse deals with a separate aspect of guidance. Affirmation of guidance has one meaning, and denial thereof, another meaning. Regarding the difference, mentioned previously, between guidance by direction and guidance by aid and succour granted of Allah, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who guides by direction and conducting. Guidance by aid and succour belongs to Allah alone Who leads whomever He pleases along the straight path back to him. Thus, in the statement ‘Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love…’ the denial is of guidance by aid and succour which belong to Allah alone and which therefore a person cannot hope to provide. The verse which reads ‘…And, verily, [on the strength thereof] thou, too, shalt guide [men] onto the straight way’ has to do with guidance by direction and conducting. We therefore see that these two instances deal with two different types of guidance and do not contradict each other.

We also read verses such as the following, which addresses Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘…And it was not you who cast [terror into them, O Prophet], when you did cast it, but it was Allah who cast it…’ (*al-Anfal*: 17). Here, the deed is confirmed and denied all at once, since this verse is referring to two different aspects of the action, each with a separate meaning. In yet another of Allah’s statements, we read: ‘[This is] Allah’s promise. Never does Allah fail to fulfil His promise – but most people know [it] not: they know but the outer surface of this world’s life, whereas of the ultimate things they are utterly unaware.’ (*ar-Rum* 6-7) This means that most people do not understand the inner truth of things, but rather their outer appearance only.

We often use this simultaneous affirmation and denial of an action in everyday settings. For example, if a person sees his son open a book and peruse its pages, caught up therein, that person might ask his son in what he studied, but the son did not know the answers. His father could then say, ‘You studied but did not study’ meaning he read the words on paper, but he did not understand their meaning. Next, the True Lord states:

ٱسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِرَبِّكُم مِّن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِىَ يَوْمٌ لَّا مَرَدَّ لَهُۥ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ
مَا لَكُم مِّن مَّلْجَإٍ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَمَا لَكُم مِّن نَّكِيرٍ ﴿٤٧﴾

So [people] respond to your Lord before there comes a Day that cannot, against God’s will, be averted – you will have no refuge on that Day, and no possibility of denying [your sins]. If they still turn away [remember that] [47] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 47)

Here, the injunction is to respond to the Lord, namely He who created all things from nothing and provides for us as we were having nothing. It is He

Who undertook our being nurtured and insured against harm and favoured above all else; He is the Owner of the straight path, the Dispenser of our final reward, and the One with power over us. Unto Him alone do we return and seek refuge! Thus, He deserves to be obeyed, and has the right of complete obedience. Indeed, the one with sound intellect hurries in responding to Allah.

We should note here that the Quran states ‘respond’ rather than ‘answer’, since response is an aspect of a request or plea to a request. Hence, His statement ‘and responds unto all who attain to faith and do righteous deeds…’ means Allah responds to those who believe in Him and do acts of righteousness. For example, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* calls a person unto prayer, it is necessary that that person respond, since the call is for his or her benefit, providing a spiritual push to become closer to Allah’s company. The call to prayer: ‘Allah is the greatest! Come to prayer! Come to success!’ is as if Allah is saying, ‘Come unto me.’ It is the Lord, Allah, who calls us unto Him, welcoming us unto His House and His Company, and correcting the error of our ways. However, if people do not respond to Allah’s call, then they are guilty transgressors, rebels against Allah, and they deserve punishment. And Allah does not benefit from punishing them.

If we make a comparison between a meeting with Allah and one with a president or elected official, we will see a clear difference. In the latter case, it is we who request a meeting with the president or official. If this request is accepted, the time, place, and circumstances of the meeting are all chosen for us, leaving us with no control over the matter. However, in the case of Our Lord *Glorified is He* it is He Who requests a meeting with us, not just once, but five times each day and night (when we hear the call to prayer). He opens the door for us to say whatever it is that we need from Him, and we are the ones who choose when we end our meeting with Him. Such an encounter with Allah provides a spiritual boost that helps shore up our faith and creed; purify that which has become corrupted in our minds and hearts; forgive us our small transgressions; and make matters clear to our souls and calm our hearts.

Someone might very well ask how this all takes place. The answer is that Allah is unseen, and when He helps correct our errors, He does it far from our vision. When He gives good gifts unto us, He does it in His invisibility such that we cannot perceive or take note of it at first. Hence the fact that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed when a pressing matter befell him.(1) He used to say, regarding the matter of prayer, 'Rest us with the prayer, O Bilal.(2) We should do likewise: if harsh conditions weigh us down, or if concerns or pressures cause us anguish, we should make haste to pray.

Naturally, a person's response to Allah's call is limited to his life here on earth, which is the time allotted to perform our labours, whether for good or ill. That is why he said, '…before there comes, at Allah's behest, a Day on which there will be no turning back…', namely, that Day of Resurrection which no one can turn back from, and the time of which will not be delayed. Then we read the statement '… [for] on that Day you will have no place of refuge…' meaning there will be no place of sanctuary, where we can hide from our fate. Finally, the verse ends with '…and neither will you be able to deny aught [of the wrong that you have done].' There is no way to refute or disprove or set at naught one's punishment in the hereafter.

فَإِنۡ أَعۡرَضُواْ فَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ حَفِيظًاۖ إِنۡ عَلَيۡكَ إِلَّا ٱلۡبَلَٰغُۗ وَإِنَّآ إِذَآ أَذَقۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ
مِنَّا رَحۡمَةٗ فَرِحَ بِهَاۖ وَإِن تُصِبۡهُمۡ سَيِّئَةُۢ بِمَا قَدَّمَتۡ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ فَإِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ كَفُورٞ ﴿٤٨﴾

'We have not sent you [Prophet] to be their guardian: your only duty is to deliver the message. When We give man a taste of Our mercy, he rejoices in it, but if some harm befalls him on account of what he has done with his own hands, then he is ungrateful [48] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 48)

Allah's statement 'But if they turn away [from you, O Prophet…' means that they turn away from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in all these matters and leave him, departing from the way. Elsewhere, we read, 'for [it often happens that] when We bestow Our blessings upon man, he turns away and arrogantly keeps aloof [from any thought of Us].' (*al-Isra': 83*). If the people were to leave you O Muhammad behind, '…We have not sent you to be their keeper: you art not bound to do more than deliver the message [entrusted to you]. ...' This verse is a consolation for the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. He was always desirous that his people would allow themselves to be rightly guided, and their resistance to his message and turning away from Allah's guidance saddened him. He would become troubled with this matter to the point where he almost perished from the weight of it. For this reason, his Lord comforts him in more than one place in the Quran, making his burdens lighter and preventing him from taking on more than he had the energy for. In another place, we read Allah's statement, 'Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death [with grief] because they [who live around you] refuse to believe [in it]?' (*ash-Shu'ara': 3*) Or in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, where we read: 'But would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf: 6*) In the verse under consideration, Allah states, '…We have not sent you to be their keeper…' meaning it is not the Prophet's role to be constantly supervising people to see who believes and who disbelieves; rather, his role is to bring them the message of Islam: '…you are not bound to do more than deliver the message [entrusted to you]...'. It is not the Prophet's place to force religion upon anyone.

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(1) *Abu Dawud cites this as legally binding (1124); Ahmad cites it as well (22210); Al-Bayhaqi cites it in Dala`il An-Nubuwwa (1335), and Sha`b Al-Iman) (3032, 3031); Abu `Awana cites it as needing to be excised (5505); and Abu Na`im cites it in Ma`rifat As-Sahaba) (4216) as narrated by Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman.*

(2) *Abu Dawud cites this as legally binding (4333); Ahmad cites it as well (22009); Ibn Abu `Asim in his Sunnan attested only once or twice (2120); and At-Tabrani quotes this in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir) (6091), narrated by a man who embraced Islam.*

Next, the True Lord describes a reality which human nature inevitably follows: '…And, behold, [such as turn away from Our messages are but impelled by the weakness and inconstancy of human nature: thus] when We give man a taste of Our grace, he is prone to exult in it.…' It is logical that a person would exult in grace shown unto him. Here, exultation means to be proud of; the gender-specific 'man' refers to all humankind. '…But if misfortune befalls [any of] them in result of what their own hands have sent forth, then, behold, man shows how bereft he is of all gratitude!'

Note here how grace is not ascribed to people because it does not result from their actions. Misfortune, on the other hand, is indeed attributed to people, since it is the consequence of peoples' desires and actions. Thus, the calamities that befall us cannot be ascribed to Allah since they are the result of our own deeds; if we were indeed to blame such troubles on Allah, we would be ungrateful: '…Behold, man shows how bereft he is of all gratitude!' meaning, rejecting Allah's bounty, and one of the ways to be ungrateful is to ascribe disasters or hardships to Allah.

Ingratitude and lack of appreciation for Allah's blessings is part of human nature, except for those upon whom Allah has had great mercy. For example, a man might knock on another person's door, asking for intercession on his behalf. The second person whose help was sought might then stay by his side and help until his situation was made right. However, the reality of the situation in this example is that Allah is the one who helps and makes hardships easier to bear, not the person who helped the man. That person just happened to be in that place at the time the other man was in need; Allah would have helped the first man whether or not there was an intermediary agent.

In sum, when one person intercedes and helps another person in trouble, that intercession was not the reason that the calamitous situation was solved, but rather, it was by coincidence that another person happened to intercede at that time. The amazing thing about this is that we sometimes find arrogant people who attribute the solving of their problems to themselves, rather than to he whom such solutions rightly belong. Such a person claims, 'I did such and such, and I was prepared for such and such disaster'. We often see such haughtiness because being rescued from trials comes from the charitable acts of another, and such acts cause the person who has been rescued to be grateful to the person who helped him. Consider the following line of poetry:

Be good to others makes you enslave their hearts,
Since goodness subjugates man to his benefactor.(1)

A person who denies that the betterment of his circumstances is the result of someone else's help is trying to free himself of this humility and indebtedness to others. This is like Qarun (Korah)'s denial of those blessings which have come as a result of the actions of others: '…this [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!' (*al-Qasas:* 78)

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(1) Abu Al-Fatah Al-Basti `Ali ibn Muhammad, born in Bost, near Sijistan (present-day Sistan, the border region of eastern Iran and southwestern Afghanistan). He has a short collection of poetry. He died in the year 400 A.H. This line is from a famous poem of his, beginning with the line: *Man grows ever more inadequate in his world*. The poem is written in the simple metre and comprises 64 total lines. *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya*

In the past, people used to say, 'Beware of evil acts from he whom you have helped', since charity done unto others reminds them of their weaknesses and need for help. Hence the Lord's statement, '…Behold, man shows how bereft he is of all gratitude!' (*ash-Shura:* 48) namely, gratitude for the Lord's bounty upon us since people tend to attribute the bounty to their own actions, and purify them from any evil or bad deed. Both actions are considered a denial for Allah's graces over him.

When talking about His bounty towards man, the True Lord says, '…and should you try to count Allah's blessing, you could never compute them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34). We note first the use of 'and should you', which emphasizes the doubt that this would ever happen since Allah's blessings are so plentiful that one could never count them nor would anyone even try, since the only things that one would try to count are those things that could actually be counted. For example, no one would ask a person to try to count all the grains of sand in the world. In this way, Allah has blessed us beyond our ability to count and measure. Looking again at this statement, the singular phrase 'Allah's blessing' is used, rather than the plural since one blessing alone is immeasurable, let alone many blessings!

The statenent '…and should you try to count Allah's blessing, you could never compute them…' (*Ibrahim:* 34) was mentioned in two verses in the Quran. The first ended with Allah's statement '…[And yet,] behold, man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ingrate!' (*Ibrahim:* 34) And the second has ended with: '…Behold, Allah is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.' (*an-Nahl:* 18) The difference of both ends is significant: Allah's bounty contains several elements, including the Giver, who is Allah; the one who is blessed, being one of Allah's slaves; and the gift itself which cannot be counted or measured. The proper description of the Giver is of being generous, one who gives liberally unto His slaves and favours them above all others even if they are ungrateful and do not appreciate His bounty. For this reason, Allah states, '…Behold, Allah is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.' (*an-Nahl:* 18) The one who is blessed may therefore be described as ungrateful, one who does not recognize the gifts given to him by Allah, persisting in his ingratitude even unto wrongdoing. Hence this statement describes him, '… [And yet,] behold, man is indeed most persistent in wrongdoing, stubbornly ingrate!' (*Ibrahim:* 34)

لِّلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ ۚ يَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ إِنَٰثًا وَيَهَبُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ
ٱلذُّكُورَ ﴿٤٩﴾ أَوْ يُزَوِّجُهُمْ ذُكْرَانًا وَإِنَٰثًا ۖ وَيَجْعَلُ مَن يَشَآءُ عَقِيمًا ۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيمٌ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

God has control of the heavens and the earth; He creates whatever He will – He grants female offspring to whoever He will [49] male to whoever He will, or both male and female, and He makes whoever He will barren: He is all knowing and all powerful [50] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 49-50)

Here, the True Lord talks about His possession of the heavens and the earth as an envelope for all things. In the beginning of this chapter, He talks about His dominion over the heavens and the earth, saying, 'His is all that is in the heavens, and all that is on earth; and Most Exalted, Tremendous is He.' (*ash-Shura:* 4) Thus, the meaning is that Allah holds the heavens, the earth and all things contained therein. The Arabic style used in these two 'His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth…', and 'To Allah alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth…' is known as the style of restriction, where the Arabic preposition and the name that follows it are mentioned first, before the subject, to give the meaning of restriction. The sense given by this style is that Allah alone has possession of the heavens and earth and all things contained within them, and no one shares Him in this dominion.

The form of the word *mulk* (dominion), are the letters *mim lam kaf.* The word can be pronounced as *malk*, *milk* and *mulk.* When the word is pronounced with a *kasra*, making the word *milk*, it means all those items contained in your possession which you can use. When pronounced with a *ḍamma*, making the word *mulk* means one's authority and dominion over those *milk*, i.e. possessions (this is the system by which a kingdom generally functions). When said with a *fatha*, as in the verse '…We did not break our promise to thee of our own free will [*malkina*]…' (*Ta Ha:* 87), it means 'according to one's desire'.

The same word can also be pronounced with different movements on the middle letter. It can be pronounced as *malik* (king) or one who holds dominion over others and restrict their wills. Still another form of the word is *malak* (angel) the highest of beings created by Allah. Finally, the word *milak* means the core or essence of a thing.

Thus, as noted, Allah's statement 'To Allah alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth…' means that He is the owner and creator and the architect of them. One can possess that which one does not make, but this is not the case here.

Next, we read, '…He creates whatever He wills' meaning His creations come about according to His desire and whim. He has all-encompassing power with regard to creation; nothing is beyond His ability to fashion things as He pleases, and the elements cannot resist His creative force. Allah gives us evidence of this in our daily lives as a society for all to understand. We read, 'To Allah alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills: He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills; or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills], and causes to be barren whomever He wills: for, verily, He is All Knowing, Infinite in His Power.' We note first the matter of Allah's bounty: '…He bestows the gift.…' This means that begetting offspring is not an inalienable right for anyone, not even those who possess all the means to have children. Some people get married only to find that they cannot have children, and they pass through the trial of sterility, which is in fact another kind of gift from Allah. He who contents himself with this gift and believes it to be from Allah is recompensed for his hardships by the children of others, who obey and respect him in a way that their own parents might not enjoy. People without children may enjoy the respect and obedience of other peoples' children without the effort or fatigue of having to raise them. In reality, a child might come into the world and be a burden upon his parents.

After this, we note that the True Lord *Glorified is He* presents the female gender first, then the male: '…He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills.' He does this because the female gender was the more undesirable of the two sexes during the Pre-Islamic period. We read, for example, 'For whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger, avoiding all people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received, [and debating within himself]. Shall he keep this [child] despite the contempt [which he feels for it] – or shall he bury it in the dust? Oh, evil indeed is whatever they decide!' (*an-Nahl:* 58-59)

This hatred of young girls does not stop at mere loathing. Indeed, people would go so far as to commit infanticide, as He states: 'And when the girl-child that was buried alive is made to ask; for what crime she had been slain.' (*at-Takwir:* 8-9) Pre-Islamic peoples would do this because girls did not have the physical strength to work or to fight in the ongoing tribal wars, both of which were pressing needs in desert life at the time; moreover, they carry the responsibility of keeping her chastity. When true religion came to these people, this practice was changed completely. The status of women was raised, and they were made equal companions of men. For this reason, Allah puts the female before the male in this verse, '…He bestows the gift of female offspring on whomever He wills, and the gift of male offspring on whomever He wills.' In this, he softens the hearts of those coarse people with regard to women, causing them to love women and teaching them that women are the vessel from which they were born, and for this reason, females have a favour over all males.

He also teaches them that the status of women in society is not right in Allah's sight until we protect them, care for them and undertake to look after them since hatred of women is something that causes her to divert from the right path, and from her role in life. When a young girl's family loves her, treats her with honour and respect, she gets used to that love and respect and high self-esteem, and she does not accept insults from anyone. This is because she grew up with the thought that she has high self-worth and that she is much loved by her family, and therefore no one would try to attack her or come up against her, even only with words. This differs from a girl whose family insults her as she grows up, showing her disrespect and hatred. We see such a girl grow up hating herself, with no self-worth, thinking it too much if someone shows her respect or inclines toward her in love, even only in word.

In the next verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* goes a step further with what He gives to His slaves, saying, 'or He gives both male and female [to whomever He wills]…’. This means that He gathers both kinds for you, thus blessing them with male and female. Then, we read, ‘…and causes to be barren whomever He wills…’, meaning that He forbids the gift of bearing children according to His Wisdom and will. In order that one person thinks himself above others or puts himself above another. Our Lord teaches us that whether or not people can have children, has no bearing on Allah’s love for them. When He blesses people with sons or daughters or spouses, it does not necessarily mean He loves them more because of this; and when He prevents people from having children, it does not mean that He is angry with them. It is according to Allah’s law that He blesses some with sons and some with daughters, and that He makes barren whom He wills.

We see this law applied even among the most favoured among all of Allah’s creations, namely the prophets. Allah *Glorified is He* blessed Lut (Lot) and Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them* with daughters; He blessed Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* with a son; and He blessed Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with both, `Abdullah, Al-Qasim, Ibrahim, Zaynab, Ruqiyah, `Umm Kulthum, and Fatima. We thus have among the prophets several good examples of the principle of being blessed with children. Those who content themselves with Allah’s Wisdom in meeting out this blessing as He sees fit, setting up a foundation of faith and submission to His will, believing it to be a gift from Allah, and even looking at the inability to bear children as a divine gift—Allah recompenses such people. For example, if He has blessed a person with daughters but no sons, and that person undertakes to raise his daughters as best he can, the Lord will compensate him for not having sons by blessing him with sons-in-law, who might even be more respectful and obedient to him than if he had had sons himself.

Finally, this verse is sealed with the following statement: ‘…For, verily, He is All Knowing, Infinite in His Power.’ The All Knowing bestows according to His Knowledge of things, and of what is more suitable and useful to His slave. Only He knows what will and will not be good for people, according to their needs. The description of Him as ‘Infinite in His Power’ means that He has absolute power with respect to His creations. There is nothing of which He is incapable, and no earthly conditions limit His deeds.

In the next verse, the True Lord states :(1)

وَمَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَن يُكَلِّمَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا وَحۡيًا أَوۡ مِن وَرَآيِٕ حِجَابٍ أَوۡ يُرۡسِلَ
رَسُولٗا فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذۡنِهِۦ مَا يَشَآءُۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيٌّ حَكِيمٞ ٥١

It is not granted to any mortal that God should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He will: He is exalted and wise [51] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 51)

This verse outlines the three ways by which Allah might communicate with humankind, and of which one must always be present in order to ensure that communication. The reason is that human nature does not permit people to have direct contact with Allah Who is characterized by His Majesty and Perfection and Absolute Power. Allah cannot directly encounter lowly creatures such as humans without some sort of intermediary means including inspiration like the Book of Psalms which was revealed to Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. The psalms were not given to Dawud (David) *peace be upon him* through an apostle or messenger—as was the Quran, for example—but rather through inspiration which Allah placed into his heart.

So then, we read Allah's statement 'And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, or [by a voice, as it were,] from behind a Veil…' just as Allah spoke to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*; '…or by sending an apostle…' meaning that Allah sends a messenger with revelation. The apostle in this context is one from among the angels just as Allah has sent the angel Jibril (Gabriel) to reveal the Quran. But he was sent in a form of man, to be closer to peoples' understanding and more intimate to them.

Next, the verse states, '…Through sudden inspiration…', i.e. inspiration which Allah places into the hearts of whomever He pleases. Some might ask how to differentiate between inspiration given by Allah and the whisperings of Satan. The answer is that divine inspiration cannot be contradicted by other thoughts; rather, it enters us as an assured, indisputable knowledge. We have previously quoted the saying that the spiritual promptings of Allah can never be crowded out by the whisperings of Satan. We have also illustrated this point through Allah's saying in the story of Musa's (Moses's) mother: 'And so, [when he was born,] We inspired [thus] the mother of Musa's Moses: 'Suckle him [for a time], and then, when you hast cause to fear for him, cast him into the river, and have no fear and do not grieve – for We shall restore him to you, and shall make him one of Our message-bearers!'' (*al-Qasas:* 7)

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(1) *Al-Wahidi notes in Asbab An-Nuzul that the Jews said unto the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him 'If you were a prophet, would you not speak with Allah and look upon Him, just as Musa (Moses) did? We will not believe in you [as a prophet] until you do this.' He replied, 'Musa (Moses) did not look upon Allah.' Upon saying this, the verse was revealed. In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi also quotes this Hadith, saying, 'An-Naqash, Al-Wahidi, and Ath-Tha`alibi cite this Hadith.'*

This is an example of communication from Allah by means of inspiration. Because divine inspiration came to her as a given, incontestable truth, she did not debate or argue. Instead, she accepted the carrying out of her fate with contentment and a surety that came from Allah; for what train of logical thought would lead a mother to think to herself, 'When you have cause to fear for him, cast him into the river'?

It is worth remembering here the attempt of some scholars of the Near East to find fault with the Quran, noting the fact that it repeats itself on several points. For example, the True Lord *Glorified is He* states elsewhere: 'When We inspired thy mother with this inspiration: "Place him in a chest and throw it into the river, and thereupon the river will cast him ashore, [and] one who is an enemy unto Me and an enemy unto him will adopt him." And [thus early] I spread My Own love over you – and [this] in order that you might be formed under My eye.' (*Ta Ha:* 38-39) However, anyone considering these two instances of revelation to Musa's (Moses's) mother will note that the first verse mentioned states '…When you have cause to fear for him…' (*al-Qasas:* 7) referring to a future time. The second verse, on the other hand, states, 'Place him in a chest, and throw it into the river…' (*Ta Ha:* 39), which is a statement made at the very time of the act itself.

Thus, the statement '…Or [by a voice, as it was,] from behind a veil…' (*ash-Shura:* 51) can be seen, as noted, in how Allah spoke with Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Next, we read, '…Or by sending an apostle to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal]…' (*ash-Shura:* 51). Revelation in this instance is unlike the manner of inspiration already discussed. Rather, this second type of communication with Allah involves direct revelation by means of a messenger from the angels, as happened with the revelation of the Holy Quran to the heart of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* by means of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* a reputable intermediary sent by Allah to reveal the message. Indeed, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* would come directly to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and give him those parts of the Quran that Allah wished. However, Allah *the Exalted* wanted to confirm this matter to the people, and thus he sent Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* in the form of a man who, although he had come to them from far away, did not appear to show signs of fatigue, hunger, thirst or any other signs of weariness from a long journey. Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* then asked the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about matters of faith and affirmed that his answers were correct, in order that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* might teach the people about Islam. Then, after Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* had departed, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Indeed, [the angel] Jibril (Gabriel) came unto you to teach you of matters concerning your faith.'(1)

This saying of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* stands as a response to those who ask whether the Prophet was an angel. If he were an angel, he would have appeared in the form of a man with the sole purpose of strengthening the people as they learned from him. But the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* in addition to this, was also a model and example of good behaviour. Such an ideal could not be imparted by angels, who by definition, inhabit a higher plane and whom we, in our limited powers as humans, could not relate to if they commanded us to do something.

Thus, we can say that the Quran did not come to us by means of inspiration to one's heart, nor from a voice as if speaking from behind a veil. Rather, it came as direct revelation through an intermediary figure, namely the angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. Our Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* in his true form, as recounted elsewhere: ‘And, indeed, he saw it descend a second time by the lote-tree of the farthest limit.’ (*an-Najm:* 13-14)

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(1) *This Hadith of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him is correct and agreed upon. Al-Bukhari quotes it for its correctness (4404, 48), as well as Muslim (10-11), from a Hadith narrated by Abu-Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. Ahmad quotes this Hadith as being attributable to the Prophet (9137), from a Hadith of the Prophet narrated by Ibn ``Umar Allah be pleased with them. (352)*

The issue of revelation and learning inspired of the True Lord *Glorified is He* centres upon the notion of people being called and chosen as messengers: ‘[In His almightiness,] Allah chooses message-bearers from among the angels as well as from among men…’ (*al-Hajj:* 75). Indeed, not all angels are selected by Allah to play this role. He sets some of them apart, and then does the same with people who are often taught as messengers by those angels who have been selected to convey revelation. The messengers chosen from among angels and men might both be taught by Allah. As a means of illustrating the point that Allah must have intermediary means of communicating with people, we have talked before about transformers, i.e. devices attached to electrical appliances which allow only the appropriate type of electricity to pass into the appliance. Without transformers, too much electricity would flow into the appliance causing it to blow its circuits. In the same way, humans do not have the capacity for direct contact with Allah which would overwhelm them. Messengers act like transformers, allowing communication from Allah in a way that humans have the capacity to handle. For this reason, the verse under consideration is sealed with the phrase, ‘For, verily, He is Exalted, Wise’ (*ash-Shura:* 51). This means that Allah is so Exalted to address humankind directly. The word ‘Wise’ refers to the fact that there is wisdom in whom He chooses to be taught by Allah *Glorified is He* as messengers.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا ۚ مَا كُنتَ تَدْرِى مَا ٱلْكِتَٰبُ وَلَا ٱلْإِيمَٰنُ وَلَٰكِن
جَعَلْنَٰهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِى بِهِۦ مَن نَّشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ۚ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِىٓ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

So We have revealed a spirit to you [Prophet] by Our command: you knew neither the Scripture nor the faith, but we made it a light, guiding with it whoever We will of Our servants. You give guidance to the straight path [52]
(The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 52)

To begin with, the phrase ‘And thus, too…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52) refers to the three methods of revelation described in the preceding verse. ‘And thus, too, [O Muhammad,] have We revealed unto thee a life-giving message, [coming] at Our behest…' (*ash-Shura:* 52). Here, the Arabic word for 'life-giving message' (*ruh*) also refers to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* the bringer of revelation. Allah *Glorified is He* calls Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* a 'life-giving message' just as he called the Quran by the same name, comparing them both to that spirit which the True Lord *Glorified is He* bestows upon humans. He breathes life and energy into people, who were beforehand lifeless vessels of flesh. Indeed, we know that humans were created by Allah out of clay, after which He made man's progeny out of vile water. When a baby forms in its mother's womb, Allah sends down an angel to breathe the spirit of life into the child after 120 days of pregnancy, infusing it with life and causing its limbs to move about. In the same way that this breath or spirit represents life for the body, so too does the Quran represent life for the hearts of men, Hence why Allah *Glorified is He* calls both Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* and the Quran a 'life-giving message,' as we see in Allah's statement, 'O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the call of Allah and The Apostle whenever he calls you unto that which will give you life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). The True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses the people, who are already alive, in terms of the body and material things. Therefore, He is talking about those things which will give life to their hearts, i.e. values and principles.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* would not give unto His servants a spirit which causes his body parts to move, only to leave him without moral principles or values or a right way to follow. It is out of Allah's favour bestowed upon humankind that He permits us spiritual principles which enliven our hearts and moral compasses since the life of our bodies is temporal and mortal, ending with the final mortality of our physical selves. As for the life-giving principles and values of the right way, they are everlasting. They link our lives here on earth to the Hereafter. It is this life, i.e. the right way of Allah which is intended in the verse, 'O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the call of Allah and The Apostle whenever he calls you unto that which will give you the life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24).

Next, we read, '[Ere this message came unto thee,] you did not know what revelation is, and nor what faith [implies]' (*ash-Shura:* 52). This means that Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* did not know how to read or write, nor ‘what faith [implies]’ meaning the details of divine law. As previously noted, illiteracy is considered shameful except in the case of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and his nation, for whom it is an honour. If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been a learned man, possessed of the ability to read and write, the people would have claimed that he had written the Quran himself (rather than having it revealed to him). If his nation had been a people of advanced learning and culture, the other peoples would have claimed that Islam was merely a cultural advance (rather than true religion revealed by Allah), and one which Muhammad’s people would use to control the world.

However, this is not the case. We catch a glimpse of Muhammad’s greatness by what Allah says to him in this verse: ‘And thus, too, [O Muhammad,] have We revealed unto you a life-giving message, [coming] at Our behest. [Ere this message came unto thee,] you did not know what revelation is, and nor what faith [implies]’ (*ash-Shura:* 52). As another example, there is a story about Caliph Ma`mun(1) who said to a man in need of rebuke, ‘You are illiterate.’ The man said, ‘But sir, the Prophet was also illiterate!’ Ma`mun replied, ‘In his case it is an honour, but in your case, it is a shame.’(2)

Hence why, elsewhere in the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* orders His prophet to ‘Say, “Had Allah willed it [otherwise], I would not have conveyed this [divine writ] unto you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you ere this [revelation came unto me]: will you not, then, use your reason?"' (*Yunus:* 16) It is right that the verse should ask this, since Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lived among his people before bringing them the message of true religion. Those people with whom he grew up, knew that he was illiterate, knowing neither how to read nor how to write; nor had he produced any oration or poetry before. It is therefore out of foolishness and stubbornness that people accuse the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* of having been taught the Quran by some foreign man. The Quran itself exposes the faulty nature of such claims: '[Notwithstanding that] the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth [of its source].' (*an-Nahl:* 103) Thus, we can say that there was nothing new revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the way of language, nothing which did not already exist among humankind. We read, '… [Ere this message came unto you,] you did not know what revelation is, nor what faith [implies]: but [now] We have caused this [message] to be a light, whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants…' (*ash-Shura:* 52). The Arabic word *ja`alnahu* meaning '…We have caused this [message]…' refers to the Quran. The word 'A light' (*ash-Shura:* 52) means a radiance or brightness which casts aside the darkness of ignorance and attempts to deny the truth of Allah's Message. It is this light which guides whomever Allah wishes to the right way making it easier for humans to see the path and walk it, such that nothing could clash against one's efforts to be true to Allah. In this case, clashing or colliding means that loss or destruction come upon a person. If someone clashes with something stronger than him, then that thing destroys the person; if he collides with something weaker, then he destroys that thing.

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(1) Ma`mun also known as ’Abdullah ibn-Harun Ar-Rashid, the seventh of the ’Abbasid Caliphs in Iraq, and one of the greatest kings of his age in terms of his life, knowledge and vastness of his realm. He was born in the year 170 A.H. and died in 218 A.H. at the age of 49. ’Az-Zirikli’s *Great Figures*

(2) In *`Itab Al-Kitab*, Ibn Al-’Abar recounts that it was said by Al-Ma`mun that one of the greatest signs of Muhammad’s prophet hood, is that Allah revealed His Message to him, which he memorized even though he was illiterate. He knew neither how to write one line of Arabic nor how to read one letter of it, and neither did his family. However, this lack of learning is an honour upon him and his family, just as being learned is an honour for all others. Ma`mun, Commander of the Believers, has a special place alongside the Prophet in the history of Islam, as inheritor of Muhammad’s place and follower of that which he prescribed and proscribed. Because of this, similar solemnity as was given to the Prophet was also placed upon Ma`mun. However, he ignored such honorifics and humbled himself, saying, ‘Muhammad, you [in your eloquence] have left me behind. If I had the powers of speech which you possess, I would not be concerned about being able to read or write, even if I were illiterate.’

Hence what we have said before about leaving a nightlight on as we sleep, which helps us see where to walk if we get up in the middle of the night. This is an example of actual physical light which serves to guide our steps. How much more so with the light of heart and spirit, and the way which illumines our spiritual lives? This is that light which Allah refers to when He says, '…For he to whom Allah gives no light, no light whatever has he!' (*an-Nur:* 40)

As we have said before, people light their homes and workplaces according to their means. One person might light a candle, another person might use electricity, and so on. However, when the sun shines, it covers all other lights with its brightness, as though to say, ‘Put out your earthly lights, for the light of Allah has come to you’. Taking this example of physical light a step higher, we can apply it to spiritual light and say that when Allah blessed us with the righteous path, it was as though He were saying, ‘Put away your other ways and follow my way. A ruling has come from Allah, so put away your other rulings and opinions and suggestions. There is in the laws of Allah that which makes it so that you have no need of these, your former ways, in the same way that you have no need of lamplight in the noonday sun. You do not need any path other than that given by the True Lord which does away with all other ways and lifestyles’.

As we have mentioned, comparing the physical light which Allah has provided (i.e. the sun) to the light of man makes the difference between them very clear. For example, a person brings out a candle to light it and places a wick on it. That person then lights a match, which, if the wind were to blow, would be snuffed out. In like fashion, electric lamps require tools to build them, as well as transformers to allow the correct amount of electricity. After a month’s time, the light bulbs need to be changed; and if too much electric current runs through them, they burn out. In addition, lights created by humans only last as long as human lives. However, the sun lights the entire earth without any replaced parts or maintenance. Moreover, unlike the transient light of humans, sunlight lasts forever, lighting the whole world from before the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* all the way to the Last Hour.

Likewise, there is a difference between different types of spiritual light. We see the ways and laws of man, which are free neither from error nor from negative consequences. Even if a set of laws fits one segment of society, it does not fit with other ones, hence why people resort to changing their laws from time to time. This happens because such laws are temporal, according to the temporality of humankind.

As for divine ways and laws, they are complete and free of error. They take all conditions of human life into account, and serve to guide society in all times and places. This is because they come from Allah, who is wise as to the condition of His creations and expert in that which helps them and gives value to their lives. Thus, we may say that the True Lord *Glorified is He* would not give humans physical light without also providing them with spiritual light, which is more important and powerful in our lives than physical light. A blind person can still perceive his path with his other four senses, or be led by another person to his destination. However, we see someone who has lost the spiritual light from his life bumping up against life's twists and turns without any sense of direction; such a person ends up losing his way. Moreover, physical light is bound up with its own physicality, and is extinguished with the snuffing out of material existence. Divine light, on the other hand, remains forever, extending from this world into the hereafter, linking all things found on the earth.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains in the chapter of *an-Nur*: '…Light upon light! Allah guides unto His Light him that wills [to be guided]; and [to this end] Allah propounds parables unto men, since Allah [alone] has Full Knowledge of all things.' (*an-Nur:* 35) In this instance, the phrase '…Light upon light! ...' refers to that divine, guiding light, indicated and evinced by the physical light which aids sight and helps us find our way. Physical light keeps us from getting lost or straying from the path, and it eventually carries us to the peace of the hereafter. This concept of spiritual light as indicated by physical light goes along with the verse which states, '…And [to this end] Allah propounds parables unto men…' (*an-Nur:* 35), i.e. in order to clarify that which might remain hidden to human minds. In other words, physical light is evidence, or a parable, of spiritual light, and the true believer will take what he knows of physical light and apply it to spiritual light.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then clarifies to us the source of this light in the verse which follows: 'In the houses [of worship] which Allah has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there [are such as] extol His Limitless Glory at morn and evening' (*an-Nur:* 36). This verse commands those who want spiritual light to seek after it in houses of worship which are the sources of its rays. It also commands them to seek after it in prayer and remembrance of Allah, and in treading that righteous way which Allah has given us. We see, therefore, that the Quran is a light unto us, one which, when used properly, gives us another light, namely ways of being obedient and putting our religion into practice. The greatest source of this kind of light is, of course, the place of worship, i.e. the mosque. For this reason, when scholars originally sought out the gerundive subject and object of the phrase, ‘in the houses [of worship]…’ (*an-Nur:* 36), they reasoned that the subject must be the ‘light upon light!’ (*an-Nur:* 35) It is as if to say that there is light upon light in the houses raised unto Allah, namely mosques. It is in these houses of worship that praise to Allah in the morning is connected to praise of Him in the evening. Those who inhabit, or come to worship, at these buildings are described as ‘…people…’ (*an-Nur:* 37), and rightly so; for who would come to worship Allah therein other than people?

In sum, we may say that the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us spiritual light as represented by His Righteous Path which we receive through commands regarding what to do and what not to do. It is through this path, this way of conducting ourselves that the matters of our lives are kept on the straight and narrow. However, the moment we neglect or forget this path, or treat its precepts with any laxity, we begin to resist Allah and His commandments. When this happens, new problems and trials beset us according to the manner and degree of our laxity and those immoral actions we commit which are not in accordance with Allah’s way. For this reason, we see in the scripture how Allah’s messengers have come one after the other with messages that progress through the ages, each one appropriate to a specific time and place, and correcting those errors which existed in society at the time. This is as such, even though all the messages deal with faith and morality, as well as established aspects of religion such as prayer and tithes. After all these messengers came, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brought religious pronouncements specific to his people and which provided a remedy for their ills.

Anyone who considers the various messages which have been revealed through the ages will find that they develop according to the development of circumstances in life, as well as the ways in which people try to deal with the trials that confront them. In our day and age, for example, we find only small paths in the countryside, allowing for passage from one field to another. Or perhaps they are sufficient for a donkey to carry a load across several fields. However, if we wanted to create a path between two towns, we would need to widen it somewhat, in order for one car to be able to pass safely along it. And if we wanted a road between two big cities, it would need to be even larger.

In this manner, we have seen developments in the construction of roads which befit developing needs and circumstances of human society. We can see this, for example, in the Cairo-Alexandria desert road in Egypt, a wide highway which allows the passage of cars along it. It is a two-way road, allowing passage to and from either city, as well as rest stations along the way where travellers can recover from their journey.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks to us about this last matter in the following verse: ‘He it is who has made the earth a cradle for you, and has traced out for you ways [of livelihood] thereon…’ (*Ta Ha:* 53). When the people were desirous to plan out the city of Basra,(1) Caliph `Umar told them, ‘Make the path wide enough for two camels carrying packs to pass each other.’ This continues to be the way roads are constructed down to the present day. In the chapter of *Saba`*, Allah states: ‘Now [before their downfall,] We had placed between them and the cities which We had blessed [many] towns within sight of one another; and thus, We had made travelling easy [for them, as if to say]: “Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day!”’ (*Saba’:* 18) The towns within sight of one another are stations on the long road, rest areas in which people can recover from their journeys and gather whatever provisions they might need. Indeed, a long journey must be divided up into phases, in order for the trip to be relaxing and not too painful. Every time we have motivation and energy, we encounter such journeys, and we therefore find places of rest along the way in order to get proper recovery and breaks from travel.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about those who were harmed and oppressed by wealthy ship owners, to the point where they say, ‘Our Lord, lengthen the distance between our journeys…’ (*Saba’:* 19). Why would they say this when they know that travelling and the distance of travel causes fatigue? The answer is that they are oppressed by the owners of much wealth and many ships, which they do not distribute to others. These wealthy people do not want anyone but themselves to be able to travel, nor for anyone but the rich to have access to means of commercial exchange.

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(1) Basra is a city in Iraq, located in the most southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, with a population of more than 3.8 million people. It is the one port city which gives Iraq open access to the world via the ocean. In it, there are many different races and sects found among Christians, Syrians, Assyrians, Sabeans, and Muslims.

This case points to the fact that religious legal rulings continually progress through time, considering more and more challenges that best humankind. Every time new circumstances or trials appear, the Message of Allah cumulates from one messenger to the next, to the point when the final message, correct and appropriate for all times and places, came to humankind. It is this message that Allah speaks of in the following verse: '…Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3).

Moving on, we read Allah's statement '…But [now] We have caused this [message] to be a light, whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants: and, verily, [on the strength thereof] you, too, shall guide [men] onto the straight way.' (*ash-Shura:* 52) The message referred to in this part of the verse is the Quran, which Allah made a light to guide whichever of His servants He wishes. In this way, Allah established guidance through this radiant source of knowledge, revealed in the form of writing with definitive legal ramifications. Allah also established guidance by sending His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and charging him with the mission of making legal rulings regarding matters of religion. The following statement by Allah is evidence of this fact: '…Hence, accept [willingly] whatever The Apostle gives you [thereof], and refrain from [demanding] anything that he withholds from you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7). Guidance which comes from Allah is found in the roots and established matters of religion, as well as that which appears in signs sent to help to remember Allah. Guidance from the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is found in the branches [as opposed to the roots], namely the explanation and clarification of the root foundations of true religion. And if trials beset us, or if we are confronted by problems for which no official ruling has been given, neither in the Quran nor the *Sunna*, then we must gather ourselves together in counsel with one another to settle upon a group opinion, rather than one which has come only from one individual person. On this point, the following Hadith of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is relevant: ‘Let not my people gather together unto deviance from the path.’(1) In a similar vein, how beautiful are the words which the poet Shawqi (2) has written:

This land is not troubled by the opinion of the majority
Despite all the debate, but individual opinion that may trouble it.(3)

For this reason, the consensus of the scholars is the third source, after the Quran and *Sunna*, of legislation in matters of true religion. The verse under consideration establishes that Allah has given human beings guidance through The Holy Quran: ‘…But [now] We have caused this [message] to be a light, whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants…’ (*ash-Shura:* 52). This statement refers specifically to the root and foundation of true religion, appearing in texts containing the word of Allah. The verse goes on to establish guidance via the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in terms of the branches of religion, i.e. detailed clarification and explanation of that which was outlined in Allah’s holy books: ‘…And, verily, [on the strength thereof] you, too, shall guide [men] onto the straight way.’ (*ash-Shura:* 52) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was given the right to make religious rulings for the people, and for this reason his *Sunna* is the second source of such rulings, after the Quran.

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(1) Abu-Dawud cites this Hadith for its authenticity (3711). He writes, quoting from Abu-Malik Al-`Asha`ari: ‘The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: “Verily Allah protects you from three ills: That your Prophet not invite you to true religion, leaving you to perish; that those who pronounce lies not come upon those who tell the truth and that this people not be gathered together unto deviance from the path.”’ Ibn-Majah also cites this Hadith for its authenticity (3940), as narrated by `Anas ibn-Malik, who relates: ‘The Prophet *peace be upon him* said: “O may my people not be gathered together unto deviance from the path. And if I see them contending one with another, the greater darkness be upon them.”’

(2) This line was written by Hafizh Ibrahim and not Ahmad Shawqi. Hafizh Ibrahim was born in 1871 C.E and died in 1932 C.E. He grew up an orphan and began to compose poetry while still in school. He graduated from the Harbiyya Military School in 1891. He is known as the ‘Poet of the Nile’.

(3) This line is from a poem by Hafizh Ibrahim written in the Basit metre and comprising 8 total lines. The first line is as follows: O you who raise high the opinion of the council and defend it,
May the Lord bless and reward abundantly those in support of it!

We have said previously that the guidance which comes from the True Lord *Glorified is He* is the guidance of clarity, direction, and conducting along the right way. If we obey Allah, we will merit his guidance of help and success in our lives: ‘Just as for those who are [willing to be] guided, He increases their [ability to follow His] guidance and causes them to grow in Allah-consciousness.’ (*Muhammad:* 17) The guidance which comes from the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is that of clarity and conducting only, as we have previously discussed.

Moving on, we read, ‘…And, verily, [on the strength thereof] you, too, shall guide [men] onto the straight way.’ (*ash-Shura:* 52) In other words, the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* shall lead and conduct people along the straight path, that path which leads people to their intended destination the fastest and with the least amount of effort or pain. This is because every time a path becomes more askew or serpentine, it gets harder to traverse. The meaning of ‘straight’ in the phrase ‘straight path’ also signifies that it is narrow like a piece of straw or hair. This means that we must walk the path with all due diligence and discipline, straying neither to the left nor to the right. For this reason, Allah says elsewhere in the Quran ‘… (*sawa` at- tariq*) the right path’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 1) [the middle road or the middle of the path] meaning that we walk straight down the centre of the way. Thus, the intended meaning of the phrase ‘straight path’ is that way which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* brought. It is that way which accompanies us in this world and helps us to arrange the chaos of our lives. Eventually, if we follow it, this path will grant us our reward in the hereafter, hence why the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us of it, calling us to His way, saying: ‘Guide us the straightway, the way of those upon whom you have bestowed Your blessings.’ (*al-Fatiha:* 6-7) It is:

صِرَٰطِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِى لَهُۥ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِۗ
أَلَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ تَصِيرُ ٱلْأُمُورُ ﴿٥٣﴾

The path of God, to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and earth: truly everything will return to God [53] (The Quran, *ash-Shura:* 53)

In this verse, the phrase ‘the way that leads to Allah’ (*ash-Shura:* 53) means that path which Allah gives us since He is the original possessor and author of it, rather than people. In other words, Allah’s servants can in no way alter this path. And as long as it is from Allah, it is incumbent upon us to follow it and to take care not to stray from it. After this, the True Lord *Glorified is He* characterizes Himself using the following description: ‘…To whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs…’ (*ash-Shura:* 53). This means that the possessor of the straight path also possesses all things in the heavens and the earth, i.e. this mortal world. And it is He alone who causes events on earth to move forward to the next life.

Next, we read, ‘…Oh, verily, with Allah is the beginning and the end of all things!’ (*ash-Shura:* 53) This exemplifies what is known in Arabic as the style of brevity which here emphasizes the fact that only with Allah is the beginning and end of all things, and no one else other than him. The straight path, the way, is placed before us by Allah Who possesses this world and the world to come; and whosoever walks this Righteous Path will not be kept from receiving a great reward in the hereafter. Indeed, the whole world from its beginning is progressing toward a final end, being the hereafter. This end is to Allah alone, and therefore it is upon us to do the best that we can in this state between the beginning of the world and its final destiny in the hereafter. This is because we are all progressing toward the next world, to Allah, and the time we have to perform our labours on earth is limited. However, the period of reward or punishment in the hereafter is eternal. It is a realm in which both misery and joy are found, and things which neither eyes have seen nor ears have heard, nor which have occurred to the mind and heart of man. As the expression goes, whoever proposes to a beautiful woman does not think the value of the dowry is too much for her.

Consider the way in which this verse is sealed at its end: '…Oh, verily, with Allah is the beginning and the end of all things!' (*ash-Shura:* 53) The phrase 'Oh verily' (*`ala*) is a vocative tool, alerting the reader or listener to something important and worthy of attention, something we cannot ignore. As noted previously, a speaker knows the points he wants to make and therefore does not need his attention directed to his words. However, the addressee does not know what will be said, and therefore might need to be told to pay attention to important matters. In this instance, the important point worthy of attention is that, '…Oh, verily, with Allah is the beginning and the end of all things!' (*ash-Shura:* 53) This is a flash of insight at the end of a verse containing discussion on many topics. This is similar to how a person on his deathbed might give counsel to his children: he does not go into all the details of his life, but rather the most important lessons he has learned.

Thus, the statement '…Oh, verily, with Allah is the beginning and the end of all things!' (*ash-Shura:* 53) means that we must attend to the fact that the whole matter comes from Allah and returns to Allah. It comes from the way which He has outlined to us, and our fate and destiny will return to Him after this life. We must therefore look at our lives and make them fall in line with this path. We must also know our fate ultimately goes back to Allah's will, and that our lives are slowly leading back to Him. Allah *Glorified is He* did not create us accidentally, nor will He leave us in vain. This is a reality which should never be far from our thoughts.

the chapter of

az-Zukhruf

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *az-Zukhruf*(1):

حمٓ ﴿١﴾

Ha Mim **[1]**

(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 1)

We have previously discussed the singular letters at the beginning of some of the chapters of the Quran, and that there is a wisdom therein intended by the True Lord *Glorified is He* that we hover around before saying, ‘and Allah knows better what it means’.(2)

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(1) The chapter of *az-Zukhruf* is the 43rd chapter and consists of 89 verses. It is, by consensus, a Meccan chapter, as Al- Qurtubi stated in his *Tafsir*. *Zukhruf* means adornment. Ibn-Sayyidih said, ‘*Zukhruf* originally meant gold. The word was then applied to any type of adornment and was subsequently applied to anything plated with it or faked’.

(2) There is some difference of opinion between the different *Tafsirs* regarding the singular letters that are found at the beginning of some chapters. Of them are those who say that the knowledge of them is the province of Allah alone. Accordingly, they left the knowledge of them with Allah and did not attempt to explain them. This is what Al-Qurtubi narrated in his *Tafsir* of Abu-Bakr, ``'Umar, ``'Uthman, ``'Ali, and Ibn-Mas`ud. `Amir Sha`bi, Sufyan Ath-Thawri and Ar-Rabi`' ibn Khaytham also said it and it was the opinion of Abu-Hatim ibn Habban. There were those who interpreted them, and they differed as to their meaning. ``'Abd Ar-Rahman ibn-Zayd ibn Aslam said that they were the names of the chapters. It was also said that they are from amongst the names of Allah. Ibn-Kathir said in his *Tafsir*, ‘All of the letters that are mentioned at the beginnings of the chapters, not including the repetitions, total 14 letters: *alif*, *lam*, *mim*, *sad, ra, kaf, ha, ya, ``'ayn, ta, sin, ha*, *qaf* and *nun*. These all can be encompassed in: ‘*Nass hakim qati`` lahu sirr*.’ (1/37)

وَٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلۡمُبِينِ ۝٢

By the Scripture that makes things clear [2]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 2)

The word ‘and’ at the beginning of this verse is a conjunction and it means that ‘Ha. Mim.’ and ‘And the Clear Book’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 1-2) are as one. They are both Quran by which Allah is swearing, but He has separated them with a conjunction. This is because we read ‘Ha. Mim’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 1), and we have faith in it, but we do not know its meaning; rather, we relinquish such to its Speaker *Glorified is He*. ‘And the Clear Book’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 2), however, is clear, as it says, and thus we understand and know its meaning.

إِنَّا جَعَلۡنَٰهُ قُرۡءَٰنًا عَرَبِيّٗا لَّعَلَّكُمۡ تَعۡقِلُونَ ۝٣

We have made it a Quran in Arabic so that you [people]
may understand [3] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 3)

This is what is sworn to. The True Lord *Glorified is He* swears by these Arabic letters and by the divine writ made up from them that He has made it ‘...a discourse in the Arabic tongue, so that you might encompass it with your reason’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 3). He named it a ‘Book’ because it has been written down, and He named it a ‘discourse’ (*Quran*) because it is something spoken. He described it as Arabic to emphasise the fact that it has been revealed in the language of the people around The Messenger, just as Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘And never have We sent forth any apostle otherwise than [with a message] in his own people’s tongue…’ (*Ibrahim*: 4).

Thus, we can see that a messenger must speak the language of his people so that they can understand him and the delivery of the message may be fulfilled. If one were to say, ‘But how is it then that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all mankind with all their different languages?’, we say that he was sent with the language of the people who were his contemporaries, those who experienced his teachings first-hand. When they had understood, were satisfied with, and put faith in the truthfulness of them, they took them to the other nations, roaming the earth applying them in their works, actions and behaviour.

This is the meaning of being sent to all mankind. The miraculous thing about this is the standard of conduct and its practical application. History tells us that Islam spread through the lands with upright conduct that dazzled mankind and they consequently entered the religion of Allah in droves. Thus read, ‘And who could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow-men] unto Allah, and does what is just and right, and says, “Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to Allah?”’ (*Fussilat*: 33) And Allah *Glorified is He* says of this nation, ‘And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that The Apostle might bear witness to it before you...’ (*al-Baqara:* 143). This is how the successors were given the responsibility of carrying this message. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* testifies that he has delivered the message to us, and the other nations testify that we have delivered it to them.

So, by means of language this nation understood this methodology and they translated it into action. They were transformed from an ignorant, illiterate nation with no system or law into an exemplary nation that drew in the most sophisticated nations of the world such as the Persians in the east and the Byzantine Romans in the west. When they applied the teachings of the methodology brought by Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they shook the foundations of these two civilisations, and it was this that drew eyes to Islam.

If we look at the chapter of *Yusuf,* we find this same pattern of applied faith: ‘Now two young men happened to go to prison at the same time as Yusuf (Joseph). One of them said: “Behold, I saw myself [in a dream] pressing wine.” And the other said: “Behold, I saw myself [in a dream] carrying bread on my head, and birds were eating thereof.” [And both entreated Yusuf (Joseph):] “Let us know the real meaning of this! Verily, we see that you are one of those who have attained excellence.”’ (*Yusuf:* 36)

Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* had reached a rank such that he was trusted by these two questioners, but why? Because he had realised the state of excellence; the pinnacle in application of the methodology he brought. He proceeds to clarify the course of action that has brought him to the level of interpreting dreams. ‘[Yusuf (Joseph)] answered: “Ere there comes unto you the meal which you are [daily] fed, I shall have informed you of the real meaning of your dreams, [so that you might know what is to come] before it comes unto you: for this is [part] of the knowledge which my Lord has imparted to me. Behold, I have left behind me the ways of people who do not believe in Allah, and who persistently refuse to acknowledge the Hereafter; and I follow the creed of my forefathers Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Isaac), and Ya`qub (Jacob). It is not conceivable that we should [be allowed to] ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah: this is [an outcome] of Allah's bounty unto us and unto all mankind – but most people are ungrateful."' (*Yusuf:* 37-38) That is to say, 'if you do as I have, you will be able to understand and interpret dreams just as I do'.

This path of action is precisely what made Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* seize the opportunity to fulfil his duty of proselytising. Hence, before he gave the two questioners what they wanted, he first gave them what he desired in terms of calling them to Allah, for they were in need of it, at the time, to listen to every word that he would say. For this reason, we see him hasten with this conclusive parable of faith: 'O my companions in imprisonment! Which is more reasonable: [belief in the existence of numerous divine] lords, each of them different from the other – or [in] Allah, The One, The All-Dominant, who holds absolute sway over all that exists? All that you worship instead of Allah is nothing but [empty] names which you have invented – you and your forefathers – [and] for which Allah has bestowed no warrant from on high. Judgment [as to what is right and what is wrong] rests with Allah alone – [and] He has ordained that you should worship nought but Him: this is the [one] ever-true religion; but most people know it not.' (*Yusuf:* 39-40) It is only after this that he interprets the dream for them.

So, it was the behaviour of Yusuf (Joseph) which drew eyes toward him. And so, it is in every time and place, that true, upright behaviour draws eyes and attracts hearts towards one.

وَإِنَّهُۥ فِىٓ أُمِّ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلِىٌّ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

It is truly exalted in the Source of Scripture kept with Us,
and full of wisdom [4] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 4)

His saying, '...And, verily...it...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 4) refers to the Clear Book that was previously described, i.e. the Bounteous Quran. '...In the essence...of the Book' (*az-Zukhruf:* 4) refers to the Preserved Tablet or the original book from which all heavenly revelations come and in which all events are pre-recorded. ‘With Us’, i.e. with Allah. This means it has been given to no one else and is therefore protected and preserved.

‘...It is indeed sublime...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 4), that is, in and of itself. Sublimity is exaltedness. This is because it is the Book that completes all the revelations before it and is a guardian over them. The guardianship of the Quran over the other books is that it agrees with them in the fundamentals of belief, action, worship, and character, but it abrogates the parts of those revelations which are inappropriate to this age. It also dissociates from them the corruption that accrued to them of distortion, alteration, and substitution.

The Quran says of them that they forgot a portion of that which they had been reminded of, and that what they did not forget they concealed, and that what they did not conceal they altered. Indeed, they did more than even that, not stopping at the point of altering the text, they brought speech of their own and said, and ‘This is from Allah.’ Read His saying, ‘Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be of] the Book, and then say, “This is from Allah…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 79). This is how the Quran is the guardian of the books that preceded it, and is raised above them.

As for His saying, ‘...full of wisdom...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 4), the wise one is he who puts things in the right place at the right time so that you see everything in perfect order. The Quran is the Book which has completed the heavenly revelations and Muhammad *peace be upon him* is the Final Messenger.

If one were to say, ‘Why does The True Lord *Glorified is He* record His Speech in the Essence of the Book when Allah *Glorified is He* never forgets nor errs, has knowledge of all things and nothing is hidden from Him’? It would be said that Allah *the Exalted* has recorded His Speech in the Essences of the Book for the angels. When they look at the Preserved Tablet, they find therein ancient speech that corresponds to the events and situations of mankind in creation, and that current events occur just as the True Lord stated in His Speech. As a result, they increase in love for Allah and in regard for Him, and they judge that indeed Allah is the All Knowing, the Wise. This is the secret behind this writing because it happened that when the angels were asking about the creation of man, 'They asked: "Will You place on it [1] such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood – whereas it is we who extol Your Limitless Glory, and praise You, and hallow Your name?" [Allah] answered: "Verily, I know that which you do not know." (*al-Baqara:* 30)

Some of the scholars said in reference to '...The Essence... of the Book...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 4), that it is not the same as the Preserved Tablet because of His saying about the Quran: '...containing verses that are clear in and by themselves (*muhkamat*) – and these are the essence of the Book – as well as others that are allegorical (*mutashabihat*).' (*Al-'Imran:* 7)

So 'the essence of the Book' refers here to the clear verses of the Quran. Taking this meaning into consideration, there may be an indication to us that the chapter of *az-Zukhruf* is from amongst the clear verses and that not one allegorical verse is to be found within it.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified the rulings concerning the clear and the allegorical verses. He said, 'What you know of them, act according to it and what you do not know of them have faith in it.'[2]

Allah *the Exalted* said regarding the allegorical verses '...but none save Allah knows its final meaning...' (*Al-'Imran:* 7), [then we pause] then, '...Hence, those who are deeply rooted in knowledge say, "We believe in it..."' (*Al-'Imran:* 7). Hence we act according to the clear verses and we have faith in the allegorical ones.

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(1) Some non-Muslims who have fallen into the temptation of attacking the Quran say, 'How can the angels address Allah with such a question; disapproving of His creation of Adam and making him His vicegerent on Earth'? But the angels' question is not one of opposition, or out of envy for mankind. Allah has described them saying that their speech does not precede Him; they do not ask Him anything except that he has given them permission. Their question is rather one of inquiry and looking for the wisdom in this matter. `Adil Abu Al Ma`ati

(2) *Al-Harith relates in Al-Bughya (18 Hadiths) via `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As that the Prophet said, 'O people! Do not dispute with the Quran, for those who went before you only went astray through their argumentation. Indeed the Quran did not come down so that one part might contradict another; rather, it came down so that each part would confirm the other. Thus, that which is from its clear verses (muhkamihi) act according to it, and that which is from its allegorical verses (mutashabihihi) have faith in it.' It is also like this in Al-Ahad Wa Al-Mathani by Ibn Abu `Asim (749).*

أَفَنَضْرِبُ عَنكُمُ ٱلذِّكْرَ صَفْحًا أَن كُنتُمْ قَوْمًا مُّسْرِفِينَ ﴿٥﴾

Should We ignore you and turn this revelation
away from you because you are insolent people? [5]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 5)

The letter hamza at the beginning of this verse carries the meaning of an incredulous question. ‘Should We, perchance, withdraw...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 5): we say ‘*darabtu `an al-`amal*’ and ‘*`adrabtu `an al-`amal*’ meaning ‘I left the work’ or ‘I refrained from working’. We also say ‘*`adraba al-`ummal `an al-`amal*’ meaning ‘the workers went on strike’.

So, the True Lord is saying to them, ‘should we leave off reminding you and turn away from you and leave you as you are neglected, just because you neglected yourselves and denied the reminder and disbelieved in it? Certainly not! We shall continue to address and remind you, and We shall establish for you Our evidence and proof’.

If you belie to the evidence and disbelieve then the turn of conflict will come, then conquest and victory over you, until you believe. This is mercy from Allah because they are His creation and His slaves and he desires salvation for them. He is more merciful to them than a mother with her child, even though they disbelieve in Him.

If He left them to themselves, they would persist in their corruption and thus deserve punishment and destruction. Allah has mercy on the disbeliever when he comes to believe by means of his faith, and He has mercy on the society by relieving it of the corruption and evil that would have come from him had he maintained his disbelief. ‘The reminder’ here then is revelation and this is a mercy from Allah that bestows upon to His slaves out of compassion for them.

For this reason they say, ‘If you have an enemy, do not pray for his destruction, rather only pray for his guidance, for you do not benefit from his destruction, only from his behaviour and, if he is guided, his goodness will come back to you’. The fruits of goodness return upon the whole society, and it is because of this that Islam forbids us to conceal knowledge. When one conceals knowledge, he deprives society of its benefit, whereas when one teaches another, one benefits from his goodness, and is saved from his evil.

Thus, it is from Allah’s Mercy to them that He continues to send down the Quran to them despite their persistence in error, stubbornness, and disbelief. This was borne out when, with the continuity of revelation and the passing of time, notorious disbelievers entered Islam one after another, `Umar, `Amr, Khalid, `Ikrima *Allah be pleased with them* and many others.

The True Lord then says to the disbelievers, ‘You need to read history, take a lesson from the procession of revelations, and see the outcome of those who denied the Messengers’.’ The history of revelation affirms the victory of Allah’s messengers over those who deny them because this is Allah’s way regarding the messengers. He makes them victorious in the end, and the final outcome is in their favour while Allah deals with the disbelievers in accordance with their denial; ‘For every one of them did We take to task for his sin...’ (*al-Qasas*: 40).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* had previously addressed them with His saying, ‘And, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time, and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?’ (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) So this issue is not just hypothetical speech, it is a witnessed, lived reality. It is upon you to ponder it and learn its lesson so that the punishment might not befall you as it befell them.

وَكَمْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِن نَّبِيٍّ فِي ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٦﴾
وَمَا يَأْتِيهِم مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٧﴾

We have sent many a prophet to earlier people [6]
and they mocked every one of them [7]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 6 - 7)

‘How many’ (*kam*) here means that it was a large number.(1) ‘...To those of old...’ refers to those previous nations which belied the messengers and mocked them.

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(1) *Kam* has two possible meanings: one is predicative meaning ‘a great number’; the other is as a question meaning ‘what number?’ Here it is predicative and affords the meaning of a large number. Allah *the Exalted* says in the chapter of *an-Nisa`*, ‘And as [We inspired other] apostles whom We have mentioned to you ere this, as well as apostles whom We have not mentioned to you...’ (*an-Nisa’*: 164).

فَأَهْلَكْنَآ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُم بَطْشًا وَمَضَىٰ مَثَلُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ٨

So We have destroyed mightier people than [the disbelievers of Mecca] and their example has gone down in history[8] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 8)

This is saying, ‘O disbelievers of Quraysh! Take the admonition of the previous nations, and those whom Allah destroyed. They were more powerful than you were, but their strength did not protect them from Allah’s punishment. ‘...And the [very] image of those people of old became a thing of the past.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 8) That is, their story and what befell them since that was Allah’s promise to His messengers.

‘For, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the messengers, that, verily, they – they indeed – would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts – they indeed – would [in the end] be victorious!’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

So, you will necessarily meet the consequences of your disbelief. Either you will be routed in this world, or your punishment will be stored up for you in the Hereafter.

وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّنْ خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ خَلَقَهُنَّ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٩
ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ١٠

If you [Prophet] ask them, ‘Who created the heavens and earth?’ they are sure to say, ‘They were created by the Almighty, the All Knowing’ [9] It is He who smoothed out the earth for you and traced out routes on it for you to find your way [10] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 9 - 10)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to clarify for the disbelievers that they deny the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and oppose his message out of mere arrogance and obstinacy, not relying therein upon logic or wisdom. He confirms this reality from their own tongues, ‘Yet thus it is [with most people]: if you ask them, “Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?” – They will surely answer, “The Almighty, The All Knowing has created them.’’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 9), and in another place, ‘Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, “Allah.”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) Thus, they do not deny this reality, but rather openly admit it, because nobody would claim the affair of creation for himself and argue for it.

Firstly, it is very strange that, despite believing that Allah is the Creator and that He is the Almighty, the All Knowing, they take this obstinate stance regarding the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Next, why did they not say, for example, ‘Allah created them’, when no one would dispute this? Instead, they described the True Lord as ‘the Almighty, the All Knowing’. The scholars say this is because they followed the way of their forefathers, believing it to be superior, saying, ‘...Nay, we shall follow [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing...’ (*al-Baqara:* 170), and it was this that prevented them from adopting the truth.

‘...The Almighty...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 9) is the one who dominates all and cannot be dominated, and with this they have refuted their own selves; for no matter what they do, they must necessarily be defeated.

Their description of the True Lord *Glorified is He* as ‘...the Almighty, the All-Knowing...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 9) is possible because a speaker can always add from himself that which he was not told. For example, one could send an envoy with a message saying to him, ‘Go to so-and-so and tell him such-and-such’ just like that with no names or descriptions. Then when the messenger arrives he says, ‘By Allah, so-and-so said to me, “go to *sheikh* so-and-so, or professor so-and-so, and tell him such-and-such.”’ He has added a description of his own accord, and so it is that the disbelievers say, ‘...the Almighty, the All Knowing has created them’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 9) because they know that Allah is Almighty and All Knowing.

At this point Allah *Glorified is He* chooses to elaborate for them on His Power and Knowledge saying, ‘He it is who has made the earth a cradle for you...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 10); *al-mahd* (a cradle) is bed that has been *mumahhad* (spread) for a child to rest in, whether sitting or lying down. From the same root, we say ‘a paved road’ (*tariq mumahhad*), that is to say it has been levelled and prepared so that whoever travels upon it can do so with ease. The True Lord likens us here to children, for the child is unable to spread its own bed and, had Allah not spread out the earth for us, we would have been unable to do it.

‘...And has provided for you paths thereon...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 10), i.e. paths upon which you can travel from one place to another. This is because the needs of the creation require movement between their residences and their places of business. ‘...So that you might follow the right path’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 10), i.e. in your movements to your business

When The True Lord *Glorified is He* reminds them of some of His blessings upon them, it is only to soften their hearts and draw them towards Him so that they might believe in his message, have faith in Him and be guided to Him.

وَٱلَّذِى نَزَّلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءًۢ بِقَدَرٍ فَأَنشَرْنَا بِهِۦ بَلْدَةً مَّيْتًا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Who sends water down from the sky in due measure — We resurrect dead land with it, and likewise you will be resurrected from the grave [11] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 11)

As for His saying, ‘...from the sky...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 11), it means ‘from the direction of the sky’ ‘...in due measure...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 11), i.e. a limited amount and a certain quantity according to Allah’s decree. So He is saying, ‘We do this to benefit you with this water and give life to the earth without causing disruption’. This is because water can be a means of destruction as we saw in the story of Nuh (Noah). Thus, He qualified the sending of the water by His saying, ‘...in due measure...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 11), i.e. in accordance with your needs and what is good for you. In this vein, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to say during rain, ‘O Allah! Around us and not upon us! O Allah! On the hills and on the mountains, the roots and the knolls, in the valleys and the bases of the trees.’

The meaning of, ‘...and [as] We raise therewith dead land to life...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 11) is ‘We brought it to life with plants’, as Allah *Glorified is He* said in another place, ‘And [if, O man, you are still in doubt as to resurrection, consider this:] you can see the earth dry and lifeless – and [suddenly,] when We send down waters upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of lovely plant!’ (*al-Hajj:* 5) So, dead land is that which has no plant-life in it.

We find in the books of *fiqh* (law) ‘the chapter of bringing life to dead land’. In the Noble Hadith the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whosoever brings dead land to life, then it is his.’(1)

This is a principle which were the nations of the world to apply would eliminate poverty and spread abundance all over the world. We would not find a hand span’s worth of desert. We have, in Egypt, a clear example of this. When the government clamped down on the people and forbade them from spreading out into the desert, they crowded together in the Nile valley and delta. They were subsequently struck by poverty and were unable to achieve self-sufficiency from their harvests. But when the government permitted the cultivation of the desert and encouraged it, what happened? We saw the desert turn green and produce fine and delicious fruit and vegetables, and whoever goes along the desert roads will see the proof.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has explained that the water comes down from the sky and mankind benefits from it in their agriculture, and what is in excess of their needs, the earth absorbs it and streams form under the earth’s surface. Allah says, ‘Are you not aware that it is Allah who sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs...?’ (*az-Zumar*: 21)

The word ‘dead’ (*mayta*) is with a stop (*sukun*) on the letter *ya`* meaning ‘that which has physically died’. As for ‘insensible’ (*mayyit*), with a doubled *ya`*, this means ‘that which is considered to be dead’ even though it may only be on death’s door.

You ask me to explain the dead, the insensible,
    Another has expounded, if you can take it in:

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(1) *Abu-Dawud related it in his Sunnan [2672] on the authority of `Urwa who said, ‘I testify that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him ruled that the earth is Allah’s earth, the slaves are Allah’s slaves, and that whoever brings dead land to life, then it is his by right.’ The ones who brought us this from the Prophet are the same ones who brought us the prayer (saltwater). At-Tabarani related in Al-Mu`jam As-Saghir [15217] on the authority of Fadalah Ibn `Ubayd who said, ‘He peace be upon him said, ‘The earth is Allah’s earth, the slaves are Allah’s slaves, and whoever brings dead land to life, then it is his.’*

The one with a soul, that one is insensible,
But the dead one is taken away to his coffin.

Another example of this is Allah’s saying to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Yet, verily, you are bound to die, [O Muhammad,] and, verily, they, too, are bound to die’ (*az-Zumar*: 30).

Another poet (1) said in praise of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*:

Your brother `Isa (Jesus) hailed a dead man, who stood up for him,
But you, you brought generations to life from oblivion.(2)

As for His saying, ‘...even thus will you be brought forth [from the dead]’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 11), it means that ‘Just as We bring the dead earth to life, so we shall resurrect you from your graves. So, take what you can see on earth as an indication of what is hidden from you regarding the matters of the resurrection, and believe Us when We tell you that Allah will bring you back to life after your death’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلْأَزْوَٰجَ كُلَّهَا وَجَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلْفُلْكِ وَٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ مَا تَرْكَبُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

Who created every kind of thing, who gave you ships and animals to ride on [12] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 12)

The Arabic word *azwaj* (opposites) is the plural of the word *zawj*. We previously explained that a *zawj* is every member of a complementary pair such as each colour in the duality of white and black colours, each taste in the complementary pairs of sweet and sour tastes, the upward direction as opposed to the downward direction and the right side as opposed to the left side.

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(1) Ahmad Shawqi, the most famous poet of the modern age, a prince among poets. He was born and died in Cairo (1868-1932) and grew up under the care of the royal family. He was sent to France in 1887 to continue his study of law. He mastered most of the branches of poetry including: praise, adoration, eulogy, and description.

(2) This verse is from a poem by Ahmad Shawqi entitled *Nahj Al-Burdah,* following *Al-Bahr Al-Basit*. It has 190 verses of which this is number 116. It begins *rim `ala al-qa` bayn al-ban wa al-`alam*.

Allah *Glorified is He* informs us that He uses the concept of duality in the creation of everything. He says, ‘and in everything have We created opposites (*zawjayn*) so that you might bear in mind (that Allah alone is one)’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49). We need to notice that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word *kulaha* (all the opposites) in this verse. This reference to ‘everything’ includes all the objects in creation that we know about, as well as other objects that we do not know about. It is a reference to all the occurrences of opposites in nature, whether we have knowledge about them or are ignorant of their existence.

The people of contemplation and deep thought still find more wisdom in this verse, in which Allah *Glorified is He* describes His Gracious Bounty in creating the concept of duality. The concept of duality clearly demonstrates the contrasting concept of singularity, in which Allah *Glorified is He* is the only Unique Power, and no other power can be compared to Him or be complementary to His Power. A pair in a duality is represented by an even number that is evenly divisible or can be equally divided by the number two. Therefore, the production of a pair of complementary forces requires the presence of two distinct single forces first. In other words, the number two is dependent upon the number one, or the singularity identified by the number one, whereas the number one itself is independent of any other number.

Therefore, this concept can illustrate that Allah *Glorified is He* is the True One Deity, as He does not need any other power, and this attribute of singularity only truly belongs to Him. Allah *Glorified is He* says that He created all forms of duality and pairs, so, when all these pairs are in need of the singularity, the singularity is in no need of a partner. Therefore, as Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator of duality, He is the Singular Source of Power, who has no likeness in existence.

The one who reflects upon this concept will find that the two halves of a pair, such as the male and the female, are different in some attributes. Each member has its own features that distinguish it from its counterpart, which means that each member lacks important features, and thus, it needs these features in its counterpart. On the other hand, there are common features in both individuals of the pair, and this means that each of them has a likeness in creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* however, is Absolutely Complete. He does not have any deficiency and is Unique in that there is no Power like Him. Therefore, it is as though this verse illustrated the way in which Allah *Glorified is He* is the Unique Creator Who needs no other power. Whereas the members of all the pairs in existence show continuous need due to their complementary deficiencies with their counterparts, all the forms of creation ultimately show their need to Allah *Glorified is He* who is One.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and it is He Who has provided for you all those ships and animals which you can ride’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 12). The word *fulk* refers to boats. The animals which are ridden include, for instance, camels and other similar animals of burden. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: ‘And they carry your loads to (many) a place which (otherwise) you would be unable to reach without great hardship to yourselves’ (*an-Nahl:* 7).

Notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…which you ride (*ma tarkabun*)’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 12), instead of saying, ‘…you ride on them’ (*ma tarkabunaha*) in order to include the ships with the beasts of burden. This is because we do not ride boats (*tarkabuha*), but rather, ride in them (*tarkabu feeha*). For this reason, He called these ships: ‘…the ships filled with cargo (*al-fulk al-mashhoon*)’ (*as-Saffat:* 140). He also says, ‘and (behold what happens) when you go to sea in ships’ (*Yunus:* 22).

Thus, we ride on the backs of animals but we ride inside boats. Even the older ancient boats had sides and seats inside them. The meaning is made clearer when we look at the larger modern ships that are several storeys high and resemble houses. The Quran described them as being like mountains.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the beasts of burden first and then included the boats with them. There must be a reason for this preference, as every divine word is precisely chosen and perfectly placed. He gives preference to them saying, ‘which you can ride,’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 12) because, as we said, we ride beasts of burden but mostly ride within boats. Another reason is that the beasts of burden are Allah’s direct creation, whereas boats are made by men. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* was, at first, addressing the Arabs with this verse, and the Arabs did not frequently ride in boats and, thus, had no extensive experience with them. Their primary means with which they transported themselves and their burdens was animals, and this is what they had more knowledge about, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِتَسْتَوُۥا۟ عَلَىٰ ظُهُورِهِۦ ثُمَّ تَذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَةَ رَبِّكُمْ إِذَا ٱسْتَوَيْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ وَتَقُولُوا۟ سُبْحَٰنَ
ٱلَّذِى سَخَّرَ لَنَا هَٰذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لَهُۥ مُقْرِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ وَإِنَّآ إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا لَمُنقَلِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

So that you may remember your Lord's grace when you are seated on them and say, 'Glory be to Him who has given us control over this; we could not have done it by ourselves [13]
Truly it is to our Lord that we are returning [14]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 13-14)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in this verse: 'In order that you might gain mastery over them' (*az-Zukhruf:* 13). Mastery (*al-istiwa`*) implies gaining control over something while being at rest and at ease. Human beings used to undergo the troubles of travelling on foot, but now, they ride upon animals that are submissive to them. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to remember that this is from His blessings, and that these blessings necessitate gratitude and remembrance. He warned us from forgetting the One Who bestowed these blessings *Glorified is He*.

An animal carries its burdens on four legs and may kneel for you so that you can mount it easily. A boat needs three things to function properly: the body of the boat itself, the sea upon which to sail, and the wind to propel it forward. Therefore, when you start moving using either of them, you should remember all these blessings that have come together to take you where you desire. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* taught us the appropriate prayer of remembrance for this blessing. We should say, as it has come to us in the Quran: 'Limitless in His Glory is He who has made (all) this subservient to our use – since (but for Him,) we would not have been able to attain it.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 13)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us prayers for mounting such modes of transport and for travelling (1), just as he taught us to remember Allah *Glorified is He* every time we start a new action. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the story of the Ark, ‘In the name of Allah, be its movement and its settling’ (*Hud:* 41). The remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He* is the strength by which we seek sustenance and the power to travel or perform our duties.

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(1) *When he desired to travel, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him would say upon putting his foot in the stirrup, 'In the Name of Allah! O Allah, You are our travel companion and the One Who stays behind with our family. O Allah, contract the earth for us and ease our travel. O Allah, I seek refuge with You from the hardships of travel or distress upon arrival, and from a bad view of my family or wealth.' This was related by Malik in the Muwatta as an instruction.*

So, when you say the prayer for mounting a means of transport and declare that, ‘Limitless in His Glory is He who has made (all) this subservient to our use, since (without Him,) we would not have been able to attain it’ (1), you negate any delusion of strength in yourself. In this prayer, you are admitting that you do not mount this transport by your own power, but rather, by the power of Allah *Glorified is He* who has made it subservient to you.

Had Allah *Glorified is He* not done so, you would not have been able to control or mount it. Indeed, a boat could easily sink with everyone in it, while an animal could die in the middle of one's journey. Therefore, always remember the power of Allah *Glorified is He* and hasten to remember Him when mounting any means of transport.

Furthermore, these animals that you ride and burden with your loads do not owe you anything. Allah *Glorified is He* taught Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* how to build the Ark, and taught men how to build their boats. Otherwise, men would not have known it. ‘We carried him [Nuh (Noah)] on that (vessel) made of (mere) planks and nails’ (*al-Qamar:* 13). Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Nuh (Noah): ‘But build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the Ark’ (*Hud:* 37). Thus, the inspiration first came from Allah *Glorified is He*.

The horses you ride and the camels that bear your burdens are stronger than you. Indeed, if they were to resist (2) you, you would be unable to compel them. Allah *Glorified is He* says regarding these beasts: ‘Are they, then, not aware that it is for them that We have created, among all the things which Our hands have wrought, the domestic animals of which they are (now) masters?

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(1) *It was related by Muslim in his Sahih (2392), by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (2232), by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3369) and Ahmad in his Musnad (6029, 6086), all on the authority of Ibn `Umar.*

(2) *Harunat Ad-Daba Wa Hiya Harun.* This refers to the animal that refuses to move when prompted and it only applies to animals with hooves. As for camels, one says ‘*Al-Lijan*' or ‘*Al- Khila*’.

And that We have subjected them to men's will so that some of them they may use for riding and of some they may eat' (*Ya Sin:* 71-72). So, if Allah *Glorified is He* had not made them subservient to us, we would have been powerless to do so.

We have previously said that a small child can lead a camel, ride it, and make it kneel, and that a camel will obey it without resistance. Clear insight bids you to ponder the strength of Allah *Glorified is He* which has made this huge creature subservient to a small, powerless child. On the other hand, you may find that a mosquito, for example, can attack your bed and perturb you all night long, leaving you powerless and unable to do anything about it. This is because the Creator *Glorified is He* has made the stronger camel subservient to you, but did not create this insect to serve you. So reflect, and do not think that you ride these means of transport by some power of your own.

The saying: '…we would not have been able to attain it' (*az-Zukhruf:* 13) refers to power or dominance. It means that we have no power or control of our own. It was only Allah *Glorified is He* who made it subservient. 'Hence, verily, to our Lord we must always return' (*az-Zukhruf:* 14).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَعَلُوا۟ لَهُۥ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ جُزْءًا ۚ إِنَّ ٱلْإِنسَـٰنَ لَكَفُورٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٥﴾

Yet they assign some of His own servants to Him
as offspring! Man is clearly ungrateful! [15]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 15)

The 'part' (*juz`*) that some people attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* is a reference to those who attributed a child to Him such as those who claimed that Prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was the son of Allah, while indeed Allah is transcendentally Glorified above such claims. Allah *Glorified is He* says that these people attributed a 'part' (*juz`*) to him because a child is part of his father. Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said in a Noble Hadith, 'Fatima is a part of me.'(1)

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(1) *Al-Bukhari related in his Sahih (3437, 3450, 3483, 4829). Muslim related in his Sahih as well (4482, 4483). This Hadith has come in many* variants: *'Fatima is a piece of me,* =

Sometimes, these fabricators claimed that the part (child) was Allah's son, and at other times they claimed that the child was Allah *Glorified is He* Himself. Still, at other times they considered the son as the third of three deities. It is astounding that they made this error regarding Prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* who Allah *Glorified is He* had sent to guide them to true faith. They made `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* himself a means of associating partners with Allah *Glorified is He* and committing *shirk* (polytheism).

Some Arabs also claimed that a part of creation was a part of Allah *Glorified is He*. It is well known that the Arabs incorrectly held the male to be nobler and preferable than the female. The proof of this is Allah's saying, '…for whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of (the birth of) a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger, avoiding all people because of the tiding which he has received, (and debating within himself:) Shall he keep this (child) despite the contempt (which he feels for it) – or shall he bury it in the dust? Oh, evil indeed is whatever they decide!' (*an-Nahl:* 58-59)

Although they could have attributed either a male or a female as offspring to Allah *Glorified is He* and although they themselves preferred males than females, they still attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* female daughters.

Perhaps you have heard the story (1) of Abu Hamza. He was married to a woman who would not bear him a son, so he left her for another woman. She spoke her mind and said (2),

What is with Abu Hamza, he comes not to us,

Remaining in the house adjacent to ours,

Angry that we bear not for him boys,

By Allah, that matter is not of our choice,

= *so whosoever makes her angry, makes me angry'; 'Fatima is indeed a piece of me, and I hate anything to harm her' and 'Fatima! She is a piece of me, whatsoever troubles her troubles me, and it harms me that which harms her.'*

(1) *The story of Abu Hamza with his wife who only begot him daughters*

(2) *She was the wife of Abu Hamza Ad-Dabbi, an Abbasid poetess. Her husband left her after she bore him a daughter. One day, he was passing by her quarters when he heard some lines of poetry, at which he took pity on her and made up to her.*

We are like the earth to its farmer who sows,
We bear just what' is sowed within us.(1)

This Arabian lady of older times described what has been proven by modern science. Indeed, the woman is not accountable for the gender of the child, but rather, is a noble vessel and a caretaker. It is the man's gamete that determines the matter of gender in the zygote.

Allah says, 'And that it is He who created the two kinds - the male and the female - out of a (mere) drop of sperm as it is poured forth' (*an-Najm:* 45-46). The drop of fluid is the man's semen that penetrates the ovum and determines the gender.

The attribution of a child to Allah *Glorified is He* is a greatly heinous affair. Therefore, this verse we are studying is concluded by Allah's saying, 'Verily, most obviously bereft of all gratitude is man!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 15) We should reflect upon the precise articulation here, which reflects the loathsome nature of their assertion. The word: 'Verily (*Inna*)' is a particle of emphasis, and 'bereft of all gratitude (*la-kafur*)' is the emphatic form of *kafir* (ingrate disbeliever). The word 'most obviously (*mubeen*)' means that the disbelievers are clearly ungrateful and this ingratitude is hidden from no one.

أَمِ ٱتَّخَذَ مِمَّا يَخۡلُقُ بَنَاتٖ وَأَصۡفَىٰكُم بِٱلۡبَنِينَ ١٦

Has He taken daughters for Himself and favoured you with sons? [16] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 16)

Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them with this mocking question: 'or (do you think), perchance, that out of all His creation He has chosen for Himself daughters, and favoured you with sons?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 16) If they wrongly believed that females were lesser in status than males, is it conceivable, given that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator, to grant daughters for Himself, and grant sons for them.

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(1) *This verse is related in Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya as follows:*
We only take what he gave us, just like the earth for our planters,
We grow just what is planted in us.
These lines are from Bahr (meter) Ar-Rajz. It has four verses.

Allah *Glorified is He* also said in another chapter: ‘as it is, they ascribe to Allah something that they (themselves) dislike – and (all the while) their tongues utter the lie that (by doing so) they earn supreme merit! Truly, they earn but the fire, and will be left out (of Allah’s grace)!’ (*an-Nahl:* 62)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* informs us of the proof that their claims are lies and fabrications. He says:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِمَا ضَرَبَ لِلرَّحْمَٰنِ مَثَلًا ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُۥ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ١٧

When one of them is given news of the birth of a daughter,
such as he so readily ascribes to the Lord of Mercy, his
face grows dark and he is filled with gloom [17]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 17)

His saying: ‘(the birth of) what he so readily attributes to the Most Gracious’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 17) is a reference to the daughters which they attributed to Allah *Glorified is He*. In their attribution, they likened a part of Creation to Him because the child, as we said, is a part of his father and, therefore, he resembles him. Furthermore, even though they attributed daughters to Allah *Glorified is He* they themselves (ignorantly) detested having daughters and their faces turned dark if any of them was given tidings of a daughter. Allah described them in the words: ‘…and he is filled with suppressed anger’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 17). This means that any of them used to become filled with worry, sadness, and anger, on hearing that he became a father to a daughter. How could they attribute to Allah *Glorified is He* what they did not accept themselves?

Therefore, the Quran described their affair as an unjust distribution. Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *an-Najm*: ‘Why – for yourselves (you would choose only) male offspring, whereas to Him (you assign) females. That (division), lo and behold, is an unfair (*deeza)* division!’ (*an-Najm:* 21-22) Allah chose to use the unusual word *deeza* in this verse which only appeared once in the Quran, to emphasise the bizarre nature of their assertion.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned what they used to say on hearing the tidings of a daughter. The new father used to say:

أَوَمَن يُنَشَّؤُاْ فِي ٱلۡحِلۡيَةِ وَهُوَ فِي ٱلۡخِصَامِ غَيۡرُ مُبِينٖ ﴿١٨﴾

‘Someone who is brought up amongst trinkets,
who cannot put together a clear argument?’ [18]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 18)

This verse started with the Arabic interrogative particle, or *hamza* (glottal stop), and this indicates a sudden question. To these (pre-Islamic) Arabs, the female who was raised in embellishment was not equal to the male. The meaning of the phrase spoken by such fathers: ‘What! (Am I to have a daughter –) one who is to be reared in embellishment (and ornaments)’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 18) is a reference to the fact that daughters are brought up in luxury and decorative attire.

A girl, in our society for example, is an object of concern in her clothing and appearance. They are allowed to wear earrings, bracelets, and beautiful clothes that are not worn by the male children. In addition to that, they are generally weaker in elucidating their arguments in moments of dispute.

So, daughters, such as they ascribe to Allah *Glorified is He* are brought up in ease and luxury, wearing silk, gold and jewellery. These (pre-Islamic) Arabs saw that females were created to instil desire and were careful about the appearance of their daughters, beautifying them so that they may get married more easily.

However, such elements of jewellery and embellishment were resorted to when the natural beauty was insufficient. The Arabs used to call a beautiful woman *ghaniya* (independent) because her natural beauty rendered her needless of any adornment.

In contrast to that, to them, having a male birth means having a son who can help his father in the fields and the factory, in debate, quarrel and all kinds of troublesome work. Therefore, the Arabs did not view the daughters equal to the sons.

Of course, this is not a right rule for the sexes. Indeed, we find women whose judgement is clear and are more skilled in debate, surpassing their fellow men. Remember when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his companions *peace be upon them* were prevented from entering Mecca for the lesser pilgrimage (*‘umra*) when they were on the verge of it.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was compelled to settle for the Treaty of Hudaybiyya with the disbelievers of Mecca, in which he agreed to withdraw his pilgrimage that year and make *Hajj* the following year. Upon this agreement, the companions became angry and pained that they were prevented from reaching the *Ka`ba* when they were on the fringes of Mecca. Even `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* got riled and asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O Messenger of Allah! Are we not on the truth?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'Of course.' `Umar asked, 'Are they (the disbelievers) not upon falsehood?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'Of course.' `Umar thus asked, 'Then why are we being disgraced(1) (giving the *danniya*) in our religion.'

The people momentarily ceased to obey Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and did not want to follow the orders. Angry from their disobedience, he entered his tent where he found `Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her* who said to him, 'How is it that I see you angry, O Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'The people are on the brink of destruction. I gave them an order that they did not obey.' She said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Excuse them for they are confused. They came from Medina longing for the *Ka`ba*, and it is grievous for them that they should be prevented from it when they are on the fringes of Mecca. O Messenger of Allah, go to what Allah has ordered you and do it in front of them, for, if they were to see you do it, they would know that the matter is resolved and there can be no dispute about it.' So, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* cut his hair in front of them, they themselves did as he did, the problem was solved and they returned to Medina.(2)

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(1) Al-Bukhari related it in his *Sahih* (3529, 2945, 4466); Muslim in his *Sahih* (3238); and Ahmad in his *Musnad* (15408) from the Hadith of Sahl ibn Hunayf. *Ad-Daniyya* means an objectionable quality, i.e., weakness and depravity. *Lissan Al-`Arab* under *dana*.

(2) *The wording of Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2529) is that Prophet Muhammad said to his Companions: "Get up, perform your sacrifices and shave your heads." But by Allah, not one of them stood up, even after he had said it three times! When none of them got up, he went into Umm Salama's tent and told her what had happened with the people. Umm Salama said, "O Prophet of Allah, is this what you desire? Go out, but speak not a word to anyone until you have sacrificed your camel and summoned your barber so that he may shave your head. So he went out and spoke to no one until he had done that: sacrificed his camel and summoned his barber, who then shaved his head. When=*

Out of mercy for the Muslims' jealousy over their religion, revelation was sent down upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was on the road to Medina. These verses clarified to them the Divine wisdom in their withdrawal that year. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It was not for your enemies' sake that He stopped your hands from them, for, they are (the ones) who disbelieved and barred you from the Inviolable Mosque and (barred) the consecrated offering (also) from reaching its lawful destination. And had it not been for (some) believing men and (some) believing women whom you did not know, (for fear) that you should trample (kill them) them, and so dishonour would afflict you on their account without (your) knowing it, that Allah may cause whomever He decides to enter His Mercy. If they (believers and disbelievers) had been made clearly distinct, indeed We would have tormented the ones who disbelieved among them with a painful torment.' (*al-Fath:* 25)

So, the wisdom behind the withdrawal that year was that there were many Muslims in Mecca who had hidden their Islam. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* told the Muslims with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that if they had entered by force, fighting would have ensued between them and the disbelievers and some of their Muslim brothers would have been afflicted. In the end, they would have harmed them without knowing it. This is how they came to know the flawless nature of Prophet Muhammad's opinions and his truthfulness in every action. Thus, this advice by Umm Salama was a great example of the wisdom of women.

History is full of examples of women who outstripped men in debate, strength, and character because the Creator did not create things in a mechanical fashion, but rather with power and wisdom. Thus, it is not necessarily the case that all men are strong in debate, or that all women weaker in disputation. The rule necessarily has exceptions.

So, if the rule with women was as narrated in the verse, that they are only reared in embellishment (and ornaments), and are, in conflict, without (demonstrable) argument, the Limitless Power of Allah *Glorified is He* can create, despite this apparent weakness, strength that surpasses that of men.

= *they saw this, they promptly stood up, performed their sacrifices, and started shaving each other so fervently that they nearly shaved their heads off."*

For instance, we can see that many women were queens of their people. An example was the Queen of Saba` (Sheba), whose story was told in the Quran along with the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Did she arrive to royalty because there were no men? Of course not! Rather, she excelled in the position of authority because of her intelligence and her sound judgement such that the men accepted her and submitted to her rule. When we read her story in the chapter of *an-Naml*, we find proof of her superior intelligence, insight, diplomacy, and strength in negotiation.

The hoopoe described her saying: ‘Behold, I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given (abundance) of all (good) things, and hers is a mighty throne’ (*an-Naml:* 23). When the letter of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* reached her, she did not settle only for her own opinion. Rather, she consulted her council, as Allah *Glorified is He* describes: ‘(When the Queen had read Sulaiman’s (Solomon’s) letter,) she said: “O you nobles! A truly distinguished letter has been conveyed unto me”’ (*an-Naml:* 29). Therefore, she adopted the principle of consultation. ‘She added: “O you nobles! Give me your opinion on the problem with which I am now faced; I would never make a (weighty) decision unless you are present with me.”’ (*an-Naml:* 32)

Then, she tried to address the issue in an amicable fashion, far removed from violence and bloodshed because she knew the nature of Kings. ‘She said, “Verily, whenever kings enter a country they corrupt it, and turn the noblest of its people into the most abject. And this is the way they (always) behave. Hence, behold, I am going to send a gift to those (people), and await whatever (answer) the envoys bring back.”’ (*an-Naml:* 34-35)

Furthermore, look at the ingenuity and discretion in her reply when they disguised(1) her throne and asked her, ‘Is your throne like this? She answered,

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(1) *Nakkaru laha `arshaha (they disguised her throne); al-tankir here means changing, i.e. they changed her throne such that when she saw it she did not recognise it (Al-Fath Al-Qadir by Shawkani). Ibn Jawzi said in Zad Al-Masir, ‘The exegetes have six different opinions regarding this change:*

1. That parts were taken off and parts added. This was related from Ibn `Abbas.

2. That they put the gold plating in the place of the silver plating and vice-versa.

3. That they removed the jewels and precious stones from it.

These first three sayings are attributed to Ibn `Abbas. =

"It is as though it were the same (throne)!"' (*an-Naml:* 42) When the matter ended with her embracing Islam, she said, '…O my Lord! I have been sinning against myself (by worshipping aught but You): but (now) I have surrendered myself, with Sulaiman (Solomon), unto The Lord of all the Worlds' (*an-Naml:* 44). She did not enter Islam out of fear of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* nor to please him. Rather, she submitted with him to Allah *Glorified is He* as if to say, 'He and I are equal in our submission to Allah'.

In Egypt, there was a lady named 'Shajarat Ad-Dur' (The Tree of Pearls)(1), who was bestowed with worldly wisdom and penetrating insight that enabled her to overcome the political crisis after her husband died. She hid the news of his death and took the reins of power herself so that the strength of the army, at war in another land, would not wane. Shajarat Ad-Dur was the one who took us to the *Ka`ba*, and she was the one who cloaked it.

Of course, these examples are not restricted to the history of Islam. We also find, in the pre-Islamic age women of manifest wisdom who surpassed their male counterparts. It is narrated of `Umama(2) bint Al-Harith ibn `Umar that she married `Awf ibn Muhallim Ash-Shaybani(3) and bore him a daughter

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= *4. That they changed the red parts to green and vice-versa. This was the saying of Mujahid.*

5. That they turned it upside down, back to front, took parts off it and added parts to it. This was the opinion of Qatada.

6. That they added statues of fish to it. This was the opinion of Abu Salah.'

(1) She was Umm Khalil, the Queen of Egypt and her agnomen was `Ismat Ad-Din. She was originally one of the slave girls of the righteous King Najm Ad-Din Ayyub. He bought her during his father's reign and she won his favour. She bore him a son, Khalil, after which he freed her and married her. She resided with him in the Levant for a long time and then moved to Egypt where she would sometimes take care of matters of state. She was fully literate, intelligent, and prudent. She hid her husband's death and passed away herself in the year 655 A.H. Az-Zirikli, *Al-A`lam* 3/158.

(2) She was `Umama bint Al-Harith ibn `Umar with her husband `Awf ibn Muhallim Ash-Shaybani. She was an eloquent noble lady of the pre-Islamic times. *Al-A`lam* by Az-Zirikli 2/11).

(3) He was from the nobility of the Arabs in Pre-Islamic times. He was obeyed by his people. He died in the year 45 before the *Hijra,* 580 CE Az-Zirikli, *Al-A`lam* 5/96. No-one entered his shrine hungry except that they were fed or fearful except they were given security *Kitab Al-Muhabbir*.

named Umm `Unas. She was very attractive, so much so that the Arabs would tell tales of her eloquence and beauty. The Prince of Kinda, an Arab nobleman named `Amr ibn Hujr, desired to marry her. He asked his companion, Ibn Sinan, ‘Can you think, O Ibn Sinan, of any living Arab who would reject me were I to propose?’ Ibn Sinan said, ‘Yes. I know one who will turn you down.’ ‘Who?’ he asked. ‘`Awf ibn Muhallim’, he replied. The Prince of Kinda said, ‘Then, let us go to him.’

When they arrived at his house, `Awf said to them, ‘Welcome! Welcome `Amr! What has brought you to us?’ The Prince said, ‘I have come as a suitor.’ `Awf, the father, replied, ‘But that is not your place’, which meant that the prince was not a match for his daughter. `Awf’s wife overheard this conversation and exclaimed to him, ‘`Awf, who was that man who rode out to you but to whom you spoke only briefly?’ He said, ‘It was `Amr ibn Hujr, a nobleman from the Arabs.’ She said, ‘And why did you not be hospitable and take him in?’ ‘Because he disapproved of me,’ he said. ‘Why?’ she asked. ‘He came as a suitor’, he said. His wife said: ‘If he is a nobleman from the Arabs, and he came as a suitor, then who will marry your daughters if the noblemen of the Arabs cannot? Catch up with him and accept him.’ So, `Awf went and caught up with `Amr and his companion, Ibn Sinan, calling out to him, ‘O `Amr, come back with me for I have for you something you desire.’ `Amr and his friend turned around. `Awf continued, ‘You came to me while I was angry, and I said what I said, but now I have changed my mind.’ So, he took them back to his house.

Now, `Awf had three daughters: an elder, middle and a younger daughter. He went to the eldest and said to her, ‘My daughter. `Amr ibn Hujr has come to propose to you.’ ‘No, father,’ she said. ‘But why?’ he asked. She said, ‘Because I am an unattractive woman and my character is harsh. Harith is neither your neighbour nor am I his cousin, and I fear that, should something happen, he would divorce me and I would be disgraced.’ He said, ‘You may go. May Allah bless you.’ Then, he went to the next daughter and said to her what he said to her sister. She said, ‘No, father, for I am not pretty, nor am I good in housework, and I fear that were he to divorce me, I would be disgraced.’ He said to her, ‘You may go. May Allah bless you.’ Then, he went to the youngest daughter and said to her what he said to her sisters. She replied, ‘Yes, father, for my character is fair, my appearance is good and I am skilled with housework. So, if he would divorce me, then may Allah withhold His blessings from him and leave him no offspring.’

So, `Awf went to `Amr and said to him, ‘I allow you to marry my youngest daughter, willingly.’ He then prepared some quarters in his house so that `Amr might approach his bride there. But, when he approached her she said, ‘I did respect and love you, but now I have no need of you.’ Her groom asked, ‘But why?’ She answered, ‘Should we do this here, in the presence of my father and sisters? By Allah, it shall not happen!’ He said, ‘Then let us go to our home.’ So, he told his friend Ibn Sinan to ride with the caravan while he lagged behind at the side of the road, where he approached her once again. She said, ‘Is this how it is going to be done, as if I am a captive slave girl? By Allah, nothing will ever happen until you go to your neighbourhood, slaughter camels and cattle, feed the people and do as the likes of you should do for the likes of me.’

So, when they reached his district, he slaughtered animals and fed the people. Then he wanted to approach her and she said to him, ‘O `Amr. Are you thinking about women when there are two tribes of Arabs fighting? Go and make peace between them first, and you will find that you have missed nothing with your wife. So, `Amr went and made peace between the two fighting tribes, paying blood money for the dead soldiers on each side, with a total of 3,000 camels from his own wealth.

He then returned to his wife, who, when she saw what he had done, said, ‘Now, O Harith! Now!’(1) These are examples of women who had sound minds and arguments.

When `Amr wanted to propose to Umm Unas(2) bint `Awf, he invited a woman from Kinda named `Isam and said to her, ‘Go, so that you may discover the truth about `Awf's daughter for me.' So, the woman, `Isam, went to `Awf's house and was met by `Umama, who perceived the reason for her visit. She prepared a tent for her daughter and said to her, 'Wait in here, for `Isam wants to see you. Do not hide anything that she may wish to see of your face or being, and speak to her of that she desires, for she has come for that reason.'

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(1) This story is told in full by Abu Al-Farj Al-Asfahani in his *Kitab Al-Aghani* and by Ibn Hamdun in At-*Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyya* in the third chapter on ‘Nobility and Leadership’.

(2) Umm Unas bint `Awf, Her father wanted to bury her alive, but then he said, ‘Let her be, for maybe she will give birth to many people (*unas*)’. Thereafter she became known as Umm Unas (the mother of many people).

So `Isam entered upon Umm Unas and found her as she had hoped, with nothing hidden from her, and said, 'He has abandoned deception who reveals his cloak.'(1) This became a proverb among the Arabs until this very day.

When she returned to `Amr, he said to her, 'What happened, `Isam?'

She said, 'The butter has separated from the milk.' This meant that the results of the visit were promising. 'Tell me more', he said to her. 'I will tell you straight and true', she said. She then began to describe Umm Unas from head to toe, but we will suffice here with what is not prohibited.

She described her by saying, 'I saw a forehead like a burnished mirror, decorated by hair like the plaited tails of stallions. Were she to brush it, one would imagine it to be like pure flowing water, and were she to undo it, one would say it was like bunches of grapes glistening from the rain. Beneath it are two eyebrows, arched as if drawn with a pen or blackened with charcoal, over the wide(2) eyes of a gazelle that has neither been hunted by man(3) nor startled by a lion. Between them a nose like the blade of an unsheathed sword, neither too short, nor too long, flanked by two rosy cheeks, on skin as white as pearls. Upon her is a mouth like a ring, with an inviting smile, bright white teeth and an eloquent tongue, decorated with two red lips like a rose, moistened as though with honey. Beneath that is a neck like a vase of silver resting upon submissive shoulders', and so, she continued describing her in that manner.(1)

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(1) This story was mentioned by Ibn `Abd Rabbih in *Al-`Iqd Al-Farid*, by Zamakhshari in *Al-Mustaqsa Fi Amthal Al-`Arab*, by Abu Hatim As-Sijistani in *Al-Muhammarun Wal-Wasaya*, by Abu Hilal Al-`Askari in *Jamharat Al-Amthal* and by Al-Maydani in *Majma` Al-Amthal*.

(2) *Al-`Abhara* means 'full-bodied, combining beauty, body and form', *Lisan Al-`Arab,* and it also means a beautiful woman. *Khizanat Al-`Adab* by `Abd Al-Qadir Al-Baghdadi.

(3) *Al-Qanid* means a hunter, and *lam yar`aha qanid* means 'a hunter has never scared it'. Thus, the eye of the gazelle which has never been scared by a hunter is wide, calm, and peaceful, as was the eye of this woman.

Before Umm 'Unas left her father's house for her husband's house, her mother did not fail to give her daughter the following sound advice that would guarantee her a happy marriage if she should follow it. Listen to her words(2), as she said, 'My dear daughter, were advice to be left unsaid due to tact, it would be left for you, as you do not need advice. However, advice is a reminder for the heedless and a source of strength for the wise. Were a woman to have little want of a husband due to the wealth of her parents or because of their dire need for her, then none would need him less than you, but women were created for men, and men for women. My dear daughter, you are departing the environment from whence you came and abandoning the nest where you grew up, to an abode you know not, and a companion with whom you are unfamiliar. If you guard ten things, they will be a treasure for you. The first and second are that you should seek his good pleasure through being contented and that you should pay attention to his words and obey them. The third and fourth are that you should examine yourself regarding what he may see or smell. His eye must not fall upon something foul and his nose should never smell any but the finest odours. As for the fifth and sixth, you must be aware of the times of his sleep and his food, for repeated hunger is an inflammation and disturbed sleep is a source of vexation. The seventh and the eighth are that you should guard his wealth and be considerate of his family and his followers. The core principle in wealth is economising appropriately and the core principle with family is maintaining a good opinion. Finally, the ninth and the tenth are that you should disobey him in nothing and divulge not his secrets, for if you oppose his will, you will provoke his anger, and if you share his secret you are not safe from his departure. Apart from that I caution you against being joyful in his presence when he has worries, or depressed when he is joyful.'

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(1) Ibn `Abd Rabbih Al-Andalusi related it in *Al-`Iqd Al-Farid* in the section 'The Character and Characteristics of Women', Al-Muhibb Ad-Dimishqi (d. 1699AH) in *Khulasat Al-Athar Fi A`yan Al-Qarn Al-Hadi `Ashar*, *Al-Maydani in Majma `Al-Amthal* (under *ma wara`ak ya `Isam*) and An-Nuwayri in *Nihayat Al-Arab Fi Funun Al-Adab* under the letter *mim*, regarding the saying, *ma wara`ak ya `Isam.*

(2) Al-Asbahani mentioned this counsel in *Al-Mustatraf Fi Kul Fann Mustazhraf*, in the first section of the chapter 'Women and their Qualities'.

This is a template for women of sound mind and intelligence. Were the wives of the world to take this advice, we would be free of much of the evil of marital discord that we endure every day. Allah then says:

وَجَعَلُواْ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ ٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ عِبَٰدُ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ إِنَٰثًاۚ
أَشَهِدُواْ خَلۡقَهُمۡۚ سَتُكۡتَبُ شَهَٰدَتُهُمۡ وَيُسۡـَٔلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

They consider the angels – God's servants – to be female. Did they witness their creation? Their claim will be put on record and they will be questioned about it [19] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 19)

This is another of their claims and fabrications against Allah *Glorified is He*. This verse comes after the verse where they ascribe a son to Allah *Glorified is He*: 'They attribute to Him a part (*juz`*) (offspring) from among some of His servants! Verily, most obviously bereft of all gratitude is man!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 15) Then they ascribed daughters to Allah *Glorified is He* while preferring sons for themselves. Allah *Glorified is He* proceeded to shed a light on the corruption of their beliefs and refuted them with evidence and proof from their everyday lives.

Here they described the angels, who are the servants of the All-Merciful, as females, which in itself is another lie. Allah *Glorified is He* refuted their claim by saying, 'Did they witness their creation?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 19) How did they arrive at this conclusion? Did they see the creation of the angels such that they might assert this? Then He warned them by saying: 'This false claim of theirs will be recorded, and they will be called to account' (*az-Zukhruf:* 19). Therefore, their words will be written down and recorded, and on the Day of Judgement, they will be asked about it and taken to account for all their fabrications. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another chapter: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation; nor choose I misguided people as (My) helpers' (*al-Kahf:* 51).

We can see the truth of this verse in our daily lives, as we can see such deceptive characters, in every age, misguiding the people and diverting them away from the truth. At the forefront of these evil people are those who attribute sons or daughters to Allah *Glorified is He* or those who describe the angels as female, or those who say that man is descended from random chance in a particular fashion.

We ask all of these, ‘Did you see their creation’? Allah *Glorified is He* the Creator, says, ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation’ (*al-Kahf:* 51). So, do not lend credence to these people for they are deceptive liars. Allah *Glorified is He* has made them subservient to His creation, and made them a proof of the truthfulness of His Speech.

Among these deceptive persons are those who deny the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying, ‘We only accept what is in the Quran and do not recognise the *Sunnah* as an authority’. This group of people has come as a proof of the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who, fourteen centuries ago, prophesised that they will be present. Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* said: ‘The time is close when a man among you, lying on his couch, will say, ‘Between you and us is the Book of Allah *Glorified is He*. So, what we find in it to be permissible, we shall consider it permissible, and what we find in it to be forbidden, we shall treat it as forbidden.’

Indeed, what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said is just as Allah *Glorified is He* Himself said:(1)

وَقَالُوا۟ لَوْ شَآءَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ مَا عَبَدْنَٰهُم ۗ مَّا لَهُم بِذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ ۖ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

They say, ‘If the Lord of Mercy had willed it, we would not have worshipped them,’ but they do not know that – they are only guessing [20] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 20)

This is another of their false claims and fabrications against Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them that their speech is false and baseless, uttered without comprehension or knowledge, as He says, '…they do nothing but guess' (*az-Zukhruf:* 20). They are being dishonest in their claims.

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(1) *It was related on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn Ma`ddi Karrib that Prophet Muhammad said, ‘The time is close when a man, lying on his couch, will narrate my sayings and say, “between you and I is the Book of Allah. So, what we find within it to be permissible, let us treat it as permissible, and whatever we find in it to be forbidden, let us treat it as forbidden.” Indeed, what the Messenger of Allah has forbidden is the same as what Allah has forbidden.’ Ahmad narrated it in his Musnad (4/133), and At-Tirmidhi (2664), Ibn Majah (12) and Daraqutni (4/286) in their books, the Sunnan, and this wording is from Daraqutni.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَمْ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُمْ كِتَٰبًا مِّن قَبْلِهِۦ فَهُم بِهِۦ مُسْتَمْسِكُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Or have We perhaps given them a book before this one, to which they hold fast? [21] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 21)

Why did they claim these things? Did a messenger bring them a book that said these things they claimed or permitted them to worship idols: '…to which they are still holding fast' (*az-Zukhruf:* 21) devotedly, Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

بَلْ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا وَجَدْنَآ ءَابَآءَنَا عَلَىٰٓ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰٓ ءَاثَٰرِهِم مُّهْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

No indeed! They say, 'We saw our fathers following this tradition; we are guided by their footsteps' [22] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 22)

So, their case is a case of blind imitation of their forefathers, without deliberation or explanation. They said, 'Behold, We found our forefathers agreed on a way (*ummah*)' (*az-Zukhruf:* 22). Their forefathers were on a specific religion or belief system. The word *ummah* is derived from the verb *umm,* which means 'to intend a particular direction'. 'And, verily, it is in their footsteps' and their methods, '…that we find our guidance' (*az-Zukhruf:* 22). Their forefathers' method is the one that directs their actions and guides them.

The Bounteous Quran dealt with this subject in many other chapters. In one verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'But when they are told, "Follow what Allah has revealed", some (of them) answer, "Nay, we shall follow (only) that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing." Why (would they do that), even if their forefathers did not use their reason at all, and were devoid of all guidance?' (*al-Baqara:* 170) Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'For when they are told, "Come unto that which Allah has revealed, and unto the Apostle", – they answer, "Enough for us is that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing." Why (would they do that), even though their forefathers knew nothing, and were devoid of all guidance?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104)

Ponder the precision of the Quranic articulation in these two verses, and how each verse is concluded with an ending appropriate to it. To begin with, we see that the general meaning of the two verses is the same. However, in the first verse, they are mentioned saying, ‘Nay, we shall follow that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing’ (*al-Baqara:* 170). In the second verse, they are mentioned saying: ‘Enough for us is that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104), where they used the rhetorical devices of limitation (*qasr*) and restriction (*hasr*). They limited their worship to the way of their fathers. Therefore, their rejection in the second verse is stronger than the first verse, and we find that the ending of the verse is suited to this rejection.

In the first verse, Allah *Glorified is He* refuted their saying with a mocking question: ‘Why, even if their forefathers did not use their reason at all, and were devoid of all guidance?’ (*al-Baqara:* 170) Then, in the second verse: ‘Why, even though their forefathers knew nothing, and were devoid of all guidance?’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104) So, what is the difference between the phrase: ‘did not use their reason at all’ (*al-Baqara:* 170), and the phrase: ‘knew nothing’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104)? The former phrase refers to the one who is capable of deriving judgments on his own by virtue of his intellect. The second phrase, however, refers to the one who is incapable of such derivation, but rather relies upon that of other peoples’ directions. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ مَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ فِي قَرۡيَةٖ مِّن نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتۡرَفُوهَآ إِنَّا
وَجَدۡنَآ ءَابَآءَنَا عَلَىٰٓ أُمَّةٖ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰٓ ءَاثَٰرِهِم مُّقۡتَدُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Whenever We sent a messenger before you to warn a township, those corrupted by wealth said, in the same way, ‘We saw our fathers following this tradition; we are only following in their footsteps’ [23]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 23)

Allah’s saying: ‘a warner’ refers to every messenger sent to any of the various nations. Never was a messenger sent except that he was faced with such stubbornness and denial. ‘Its people who had lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) are *al-mutrafun,* or those who lived in ease and perpetually followed their passions. These people were often the leaders of disbelief and were at the forefront of those who denied the messengers.

The phrase: 'Our forefathers agreed on a way (*ummah*) (regarding what to believe)' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) means that they agreed upon a religion or a certain course of action. 'And, verily, it is but in their footsteps that we follow' (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) by doing the same things that the forefathers did. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَٰلَ أَوَلَوۡ جِئۡتُكُم بِأَهۡدَىٰ مِمَّا وَجَدتُّمۡ عَلَيۡهِ ءَابَآءَكُمۡۖ
قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا بِمَآ أُرۡسِلۡتُم بِهِۦ كَٰفِرُونَ ٢٤

The messenger said, 'Even though I bring you a truer religion than what you saw your fathers following?' and they replied, 'But we do not believe the message you bring' [24] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 24)

This is a clear evidence of their determination to dismiss the message and holding firm to the misguidance upon which they and their fathers were. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱنتَقَمۡنَا مِنۡهُمۡۖ فَٱنظُرۡ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلۡمُكَذِّبِينَ ٢٥

We punished them: think about how those who rejected the Truth met their end [25] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 25)

This was Allah's punishment to anyone who rejected the messengers. He said in another chapter: 'For, long ago has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they, indeed, would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts, indeed, would (in the end) be victorious' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173). Then, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions that which refutes these disbelievers' choice to blindly imitate their forefathers. The next verse nullifies their logic and Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies their lies as He says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِۦٓ إِنَّنِى بَرَآءٌ مِّمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Abraham said to his father and his people,
'I renounce what you worship [26]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 26)

Allah *Glorified is He* chose to expose their forgery and reveal the lies of the disbelievers when they said: 'Nay, we shall follow (only) that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing' (*al-Baqara:* 170). He gave them a real example from their everyday lives.

Look at Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* the 'Father of the Prophets'. Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* commanded the respect of all the Arabs to the point that they held him sacred and boasted that they descended from him. They used to exclaim, 'We are descended from Ibrahim (Abraham)!' However, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) did not follow the way of his uncle in worshiping idols. So, the question to the disbelievers was, 'Why do you follow your forefathers and not follow Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)'?

Therefore, through the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), Allah refutes their imitation logically and practically. If one were to seek out the first man, he would only seek the path of Adam *peace be upon him* and Adam followed certain commandments and applied them so that his children would also apply these rules after him. So, how did the deviation from this methodology occur?

With the passage of time, there must have been people who abandoned the commandments and turned them upside down so that they could follow their own whims. Therefore, some people started worshipping idols because they believed that they were not subject to the heavenly path, nor answerable to its commandments and prohibitions. They found that the worship of earthly idols placed no responsibility upon them, and thus, they ended up worshipping them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when Ibrahim spoke to his father' (*az-Zukhruf:* 26). This phrase has been the subject to much discussion amongst the scholars.(1) Was this his real father or was it his uncle, Azar?

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(1) Alusi said in his exegesis, *Ruh Al-Ma`ani* (Al-An`am 74), 'Ibn Abu Hatim related on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father was called Azar and his mother was called Muthla. The opinion of Mujahid was that Azar was not his name,=

Whoever researches the use of the phrase *abeeh* (his father) in the Quran will find that it is mentioned eight times, the first of which is in the chapter of *al-An`am,* in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And, lo, (thus) spoke Ibrahim (Abraham) unto his father, Azar’ (*al-An‘am:* 74). The last mention was in the chapter of *al-Mumtahanah.* Apart from that, the phrase was just mentioned once in the Quran in the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘Lo! Thus, spoke Yusuf (Joseph) unto his father’ (*Yusuf:* 4).

Thus, the name of Azar only came in the verse in the chapter of *a-An`am* which is the first mention of the word *abeeh*. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* has stopped the debate in this issue, choosing to show us that Azar was his uncle. This was clearly indicated by His saying: ‘unto his father, Azar’ (*al-An‘am:* 74). In all the other instances, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘to his father’ only. In this way, his father was the one we are already familiar with from the chapter of *al-An`am*. It is a common occurrence in our language that we refer to the uncle as a ‘father’. For example, when someone asks, ‘Is your father here?’ we understand that he is referring to our true father. However, if he says, ‘Is your father, Muhammad, here?’ this would mean your uncle because the caller has defined his intention by using the name after the description.

Furthermore, the Quran included the uncle in the word ‘fathers’ (*aba`*) in Allah’s saying: ‘Nay, but you (yourselves, O children of Israel,) bear witness that when death was approaching Ya`qub (Jacob), he said unto his sons, “Whom will you worship after I am gone?’ They answered, ‘We will worship your Lord (Allah), the Lord of your forefathers Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac), the One God; and unto Him will we surrender ourselves.”’ (*al-Baqara:* 133) Here, the word ‘forefathers’ (*aba`*) was plural, referring to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael) and Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon them*. If a group share in a predicate which is plural, then it is applied to each of them individually. Thus, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was a father to

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= and this was also the opinion of Sa`id ibn Musayyib and others. Those who discussed this point differed about it. Some said that Azar was a nickname for his father, while others said that it was the name of his grandfather, and others claimed that it was the name of his uncle, as both the grandfather and uncle can be metaphorically called ‘a father’. Still others said that it was the name of an idol, and some claimed that it was an adjective in their language that meant either erroneous, stooping or a frail old man.”

them, and Ismail (Ishmael) was a father and Ishaq (Isaac) was a father *peace be upon them*. Metaphorically, these three were all Ya`qub's (Jacob's) fathers (*aba`*). However, literally, we know that Ismail (Ishmael) was Ishaq's (Isaac's) brother, so if Ishaq (Isaac) was a father, then Ismail (Ishmael) could not, literally, be a father. Rather, Ismail (Ishmael) was an uncle. Thus, we see that an uncle can be named a father, according to the Quranic language.

For this reason, when Allah *Glorified is He* spoke about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* he said: 'unto his father, Azar' (*al-An'am:* 74), to clarify for us that Azar, who debated with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and argued with him about the oneness of Allah *Glorified is He* was not his true father. Ibrahim (Abraham) Rather, it was his uncle.

Ibrahim (Abraham) We also find proof for this in the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* where he said of his own origin: 'I continued to be transferred from the loins of the pure to the wombs of the pure. I am the elected from the elected.'(1) The Prophet's *peace and blessings be upon him* lineage stretches back to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), and thus Ibrahim's (Abraham's) father could not have been a disbeliever who worshipped idols.

As for Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) saying: 'Verily, I am innocent (*bara`*) from (the idols) which you worship' (*az-Zukhruf:* 26), the word *bara`* (innocent) follows a similar connotation to the Arabic word *baree`* which also indicates innocence and purity. The difference between the two Arabic words is that *bara`* can be said of one, two or more people, be they men or women. On the other hand, the word *baree`* has to be transformed into the dual or plural forms and has to be changed to mean the masculine or feminine meaning.

In another place in the Quran, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* described the idols as enemies, as he said: 'Verily, these are my enemies, (and none is my helper) except the Lord of all the Worlds' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 77).

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(1) *This Hadith has been mentioned in this form in most of the books of exegesis, but they did not mention its narrator, chain of narration or the person who related it, nor did any of them trace it back to any book. However, Ibn `Asakir has related in the Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq on the authority of Anas who said, 'Prophet Muhammad recited: "Indeed, there has come unto you (O mankind) an Apostle from among yourselves" (at-Tawba: 128), with a fatha on the letter fa`, and said, "I am the purest of you in lineage, marriage and descent. Since the time of Adam, there has not been one fornicator amongst my forefathers, we are all the offspring of marriages."' (1/278)*

Thus, he was telling them that he was disassociating himself with them, as long as they worship partners with Allah *Glorified is He* or continue to disbelieve in His Oneness.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, narrating the words of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham):

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِى فَطَرَنِى فَإِنَّهُۥ سَيَهْدِينِ ﴿٢٧﴾

I worship only Him who created me, and it is He who will guide me [27] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 27)

The meaning of the phrase: '…Him (Allah) who has brought me into being (*fatarani*)' (*az-Zukhruf:* 27) is that Allah *Glorified is He* created him and shaped him. Then, his saying: '…and, behold, indeed, (it is who) will guide me!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 27) shows us that life's path must be outlined by Allah *Glorified is He* the One Who created and guided all the bodies in existence.

It is not conceivable that, after Allah *Glorified is He* had created everything, people then choose their own way in life. We previously mentioned that the artisan puts together a manual for the maintenance of his product. It is he who is most knowledgeable about what is good for it. Notice also that Allah *Glorified is He* says here, narrating the words of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham): '…and, behold, indeed, (it is He who) will guide me (*sa-yahdeen*)!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 27) using the Arabic article *sa* before the verb *yahdeen*, to indicate the future.

In another place Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and (it is He) who guides me' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78), in the present tense. Thus, we can see that Allah's guidance is a matter of the present and the future.

Allah *Glorified is He* uses brevity in expression here to indicate that the path and guidance can only come from the Creator. He says, '…and, behold, indeed, (it is who) will guide me!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 27) On the other hand, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *ash-Shu`ara`*: 'Who has created me and He (*huwa*) [is the One] who guides me, and He (*huwa*) is the One who gives me to eat and to drink, and when I fall ill, He (*huwa*) is the One who restores me to health' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 78-80). Here Allah *Glorified is He* used the separated personal pronoun *huwa* in front of the main verbs or action in these verses, like the actions of guidance, feeding, and treatment, to indicate that these verbs are restricted to Allah *Glorified is He* alone, as some people might attribute them to powers besides Allah *Glorified is He*.

On the other hand, the Quranic verbs that no imagination can attribute to anyone but Allah *Glorified is He* came in an abbreviated form, without using the restrictive pronoun *huwa*. For instance, in Allah's words: 'and who will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 81), the word *huwa* is not used, as no imagination will attribute life or death to anyone but Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَعَلَهَا كَلِمَةًۢ بَاقِيَةً فِى عَقِبِهِۦ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

And he bequeathed these words to his descendants
so that they might return [to God] [28]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf*: 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'And he [Ibrahim (Abraham)] uttered this' (*az-Zukhruf:* 28). This refers to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) stating his innocence from their attribution of partners with Allah *Glorified is He* (polytheism or *shirk*). It could also be a reference to his statement of belief, as it is related in Allah's saying: 'And this very thing did Ibrahim bequeath unto his children, and (so did) Ya`qub (Jacob), "O my children! Behold, Allah has granted you the purest faith; so do not allow death to overtake you except after you have become Muslims (surrendered yourselves unto Him)"' (*al-Baqara:* 132).

He wanted this creed to be, 'destined to endure' (*az-Zukhruf:* 28), and lasting 'among those who would come after him' (*az-Zukhruf:* 28) of his descendants. Indeed, this statement will still be alive and circulating on people's tongues for a long time because of its purity. Allah *Glorified is He* has guaranteed the longevity of such pure statements in His saying: 'Are you not aware how Allah sets forth the parable of a good word? (It is) like a good tree, firmly rooted, (reaching out) with its branches towards the sky, yielding its fruit(1) at all times by its Lord's leave. And (thus it is that) Allah propounds parables unto men, so that they might bethink themselves (of the truth)' (*Ibrahim:* 25-25).

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(1) *Al-Akl* is what may be eaten or fruits that suitable for eating. *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim* 1/23). *Al-Akl* can be the fruit of palms or of trees, indeed, anything that can be eaten may be termed *akl*. *Lisan Al-`Arab* under *Akal*

He named it a *kalima* (word) because it is a part of speech (*kalam*) and because the word *kalima* in Arabic can be used to refer to a lot of speech. For instance, we say, 'That person gave a word (*kalima*) at the party'. This means that he gave a speech composed of many words. Ibn Malik said in his *Alfiyya*, 'And speech (kalam) can be intended by a word (kalima).' This means that we can use the word *kalima* to mean a great deal of speech.

بَلْ مَتَّعْتُ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ وَءَابَآءَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْحَقُّ وَرَسُولٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢٩﴾
وَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْحَقُّ قَالُوا۟ هَٰذَا سِحْرٌ وَإِنَّا بِهِۦ كَٰفِرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

I have let these people and their fathers enjoy long lives, and now I have given them the Truth and a messenger to make things clear [29] yet when the Truth came to them, they said, 'This is sorcery. We do not believe in it' [30] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 29 - 30)

As we have previously said, with the passage of time, the true path becomes obfuscated and people continue to turn away from it until necessity calls for a new prophet to bring them back to the correct way. Allah *Glorified is He* has created a natural immunity in the human soul because man is Allah's vicegerent on earth. Man is the one who will populate the world so he must be furnished with the means to act positively and behave uprightly.

It is because of this that we see that men of sound mind will immediately feel remorse and repent when, due to a moment of forgetfulness, he falls into disobedience. Uprightness is a seed in a man's soul. If he is afflicted in his soul and loses this immunity, then the immunity should be provided by the society that knows and understands its communal role in enjoining good and forbidding evil. If the society also loses its resilience, then this is the last straw and nothing remains except for heavenly intervention, when another messenger is sent with a new revelation.

So, this deviation from the path occurred after Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and Prophet Ismail's (Ishmael's) times, and therefore, the Message of Prophet

Muhammad *peace be upon him* was revealed. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) wanted this creed to remain amongst his descendants: '…so that they might return' (*az-Zukhruf:* 28) to Allah's way.

However, this did not happen, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I allowed them (the disbelievers) to enjoy their lives freely' (*az-Zukhruf:* 29), and: '…their forbearers' (*az-Zukhruf:* 29) by giving them luxury, safety, power and status. 'Are they, then, not aware that We have set up a sanctuary secure (for those who believe in Us), while, all around them, men are being carried away (by fear and despair)?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 67) He gave them rank and high status amongst the Arabs due to their proximity to the *Ka`ba*.

This continued to be the case: 'until the truth came to them' (*az-Zukhruf:* 29), found in the Quran, as well as: 'a clear (*mubeen*) apostle' (*az-Zukhruf:* 29) who is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The word *mubeen* in this verse means that the truth will be manifest at his hands and in everything about him.

However, they did not believe the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* or have faith in the truth. 'But now that the truth has come to them, they say, "All this is mere spellbinding eloquence – and, behold, we deny that there is any truth in it!"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 30) They considered the Quran to be a form of magic that puts anyone who heard it under its spell. At other times, they accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a sorcerer.

As we have previously said, it is very easy to refute this claim of theirs. If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been a sorcerer and the Quran was a magical spell on the believers, then why did he not just put a spell on them as well and accomplish his matter? Thus, the existence of disbelief is a confirmation of the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad, and that he is not a sorcerer, but a truthful prophet from Allah *Glorified is He*.

When this accusation failed, they said, 'It is but a human being that imparts (all) this to him!' (*an-Nahl:* 103) The disbelievers had claimed that a Persian man taught Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Quran.(1)

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(1) *In the explanation of* verse *103 of the chapter of an-Nahl in Zad Al-Masir, Ibn Al-Jawzi mentioned nine different opinions regarding the person who they claimed was teaching Prophet Muhammad. They claimed one of the following:* =

So, Allah *Glorified is He* tells them: ‘The tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is a foreign (non-Arabic) tongue, whereas this (The Quran) is a clear Arabic speech’ (*an-Nahl:* 103). Then they claimed that he was insane, to which Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad: ‘You (O Muhammad) are not, by your Lord’s grace, a madman! And, verily, to you shall be a reward never-ending, for, behold, you keep indeed an exemplary character’ (*al-Qalam:* 2-4). A crazy person cannot have exemplary character because it is a person’s character that controls his behaviour. So, after Allah *Glorified is He* had refuted their claims and accusations in such a way as to reveal their foolishness, they still continued their disbelief.

وَقَالُوا۟ لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانُ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ مِّنَ ٱلْقَرْيَتَيْنِ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٣١﴾

And they said, ‘Why was this Quran not sent down to
a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?’ [31]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 31)

This is effectively an acknowledgement that the Quran is true, and that they had no more objections to it. Rather, their problem was now with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself. They saw him as an average person, unlike the way they saw their dignitaries. They did not see him as one of the leaders from either of their two great cities, Mecca and

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= *1. A young man from Bani Al-Mughira called Ya`ish who studied the Torah. Some say he was Byzantine.*

2. A young Christian foreigner named Bal`am who was residing in Mecca.

3. That it was revealed to a scribe who wrote it out for Prophet Muhammad.

4. That it was a foreign youth, the servant of a lady of Quraysh called Jabir. Jabir was in the habit of visiting Prophet Muhammad to learn from him. This prompted the polytheists to say, ‘This is the one that Muhammad is learning from’.

5. That they meant Salman Al-Farisi. This however is very weak because Salman became Muslim in Medina whereas this verse is Meccan.

6. That it was a blacksmith called ‘Buhannas the Christian’.

7. That they meant a youth owned by `Amir ibn Al-Hadrami. He was a foreign Jew called Basar and his nickname was Abu Fakiha.

8. That it was a foreign boy called `Ayish who was the slave of Huwaytib and had entered Islam. This position was related by Al-Fara` and Az-Zujaj.

9. That there were two men, one whose name was Yasar and the other Jayr. They made swords in Mecca and they studied the book of the Christians.

Ta`if. For instance, in Ta'if, they considered `Urwa ibn Mas`ud Ath-Thaqafi as a great man, and in Mecca, they regarded Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira highly, along with others. Allah *Glorified is He* replied to them:

أَهُمۡ يَقۡسِمُونَ رَحۡمَتَ رَبِّكَۚ نَحۡنُ قَسَمۡنَا بَيۡنَهُم مَّعِيشَتَهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ
ٱلدُّنۡيَاۚ وَرَفَعۡنَا بَعۡضَهُمۡ فَوۡقَ بَعۡضٖ دَرَجَٰتٖ لِّيَتَّخِذَ بَعۡضُهُم بَعۡضٗا
سُخۡرِيّٗاۗ وَرَحۡمَتُ رَبِّكَ خَيۡرٞ مِّمَّا يَجۡمَعُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace? We are the ones who give them their share of livelihood in this world and We have raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service: your Lord's grace is better than anything they accumulate [32]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 32)

So, given that it is Allah who has allotted them the simplest of things, that being their livelihood in the world, do they then want to be the ones to distribute Allah's Grace and Mercy in accordance with their own passions? Rather, Allah dispenses His Mercy to whomsoever He pleases. The matter is entirely in His hands and no one can interfere with its distribution.

His saying: '...it is We who distribute their means of livelihood among them in the life of this world, and raise some of them by degrees above others...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) reveals the incapacity of man, and that life cannot be set straight except by adopting Allah's path.

Part of the wisdom of Allah's distribution of the means of livelihood is that He made some people rich and others poor, some leaders and others servants. Had it not been for this distribution, the organisation of society would not be possible and there would be nobody willing to do hard work or base jobs.

Previously, we explained that the organisation of society and its progression is not based upon giving charity, but upon need. It is the need of the poor man that drives him to work,

The grace indicated by the verse, '…But is it they who distribute thy Lord's Grace...?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32), is prophet hood. They wish they could make it a matter of choice between themselves; that is, they could elect their prophet from their own nobles and leaders. Allah corrects them, however, saying: 'How can you desire this when you are incapable of distributing even the most basic of things'?

Notice that the phrase, '...and raise some of them by degrees above others...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) is undefined. It means that everyone is both raised up and at the same time others are raised over him. In one aspect, one is elevated and in another aspect, someone else is above him. This is how creatures complement one another, mutual benefits are made and the needs of the society are fulfilled. As the poet said,

The people to the people, be they Bedouin or civilised,

Are one to another because of their ignorance, servants.

One is elevated as much as he is proficient at the job they are doing, and is surpassed in those things he knows little of. This is the meaning of His saying: '...that they might avail themselves of one another's help...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

What is meant by 'Lord's Grace' in His saying, '...and this Lord's grace is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) is the divine mission and the system which serves to guide creation in the way of truth. In reality, this grace is better than the transient goods over which people compete in the world because whatsoever man may attain of ease, comfort, and relaxation in this world, nevertheless, he will die and leave it all, and nothing will remain for him.

On the contrary, Allah's system gives you eternal triumph, pleases you in this world, and makes you succeed in the afterlife. Thus, Allah's system is better and remaining, more beneficial and more enduring. This system guarantees validity of one's worldly life, peace, and safety in the hereafter; therefore, it is '...better...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32), than the glittery things of this world

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about the disbelievers who own the world, and who adopt every type of embellishment, luxury, and finery; they interfere even with the provisions and development of the Muslims. He clarifies that this is just ornamentation and a transient external facade, while the final successful outcome must necessarily be in favour of the believers.

وَلَوۡلَآ أَن يَكُونَ ٱلنَّاسُ أُمَّةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ لَّجَعَلۡنَا لِمَن يَكۡفُرُ بِٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ لِبُيُوتِهِمۡ سُقُفٗا مِّن
فِضَّةٖ وَمَعَارِجَ عَلَيۡهَا يَظۡهَرُونَ ٣٣ وَلِبُيُوتِهِمۡ أَبۡوَٰبٗا وَسُرُرًا عَلَيۡهَا يَتَّكِـُٔونَ ٣٤
وَزُخۡرُفٗاۚ وَإِن كُلُّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمَّا مَتَٰعُ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنۡيَاۚ وَٱلۡأٓخِرَةُ عِندَ رَبِّكَ لِلۡمُتَّقِينَ ٣٥

If it were not that all mankind might have become a single nation [of disbelievers], We could have given all those who disbelieve in the Lord of Mercy houses with roofs of silver, sweeping staircases to ascend [33] massive gates, couches to sit on [34] and golden ornaments. All of these are mere enjoyments of this life; your Lord reserves the next life for those who take heed of Him [35] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 33-35)

The meaning of '...one [evil] community...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 33) is one community holding one creed of disbelief. So, had it not been for the fact that mankind, seeing the disbelievers luxuriating, would be tested by such a status, Allah would have given the disbeliever luxuries that no one could surpass because they would be but the luxuries of this world, transient and perishing, along with the world itself. Albeit, while the disbelievers get their share in this world, the believers get theirs in the afterlife

The Quran is also informing us here of the developments that have taken place fourteen centuries after its revelation. Al-Ma`arij (stairways) means elevators, ladders and things upon which one may go up. '...And [silver] stairways whereon to ascend' (*az-Zukhruf:* 33), i.e. mount and rise.

It seems that the True Lord is making light of the disbelievers' luxuries, indicating that there is no need for us to be deceived by them, nor to wish for the transient embellishments of which they partake.

After this, He explains that there comes a time upon these extravagant people when they desire to return to their original state of natural simplicity. Thus, you see them on the weekend, for example, going outdoors to wander freely in the bosom of nature, eating from what the earth puts forth and living on minimal provisions. Why? That is because they have become bored by their excessive urban, luxurious lifestyle and the defects and negative aspects that beset it.

وَمَن يَعْشُ عَن ذِكْرِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُۥ شَيْطَٰنًا فَهُوَ لَهُۥ قَرِينٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

We assign an evil one as a comrade for whoever turns away from the revelations of the Lord of Mercy [36] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 36)

'...Who chooses to remain blind to the remembrance of the Most Gracious...' means that he outright rejects it or neglects it, turning a blind eye, and because he has been heedless regarding something important wherein negligence is unacceptable, Allah punishes him: '...To him We assign an [enduring] evil impulse...'. That is, We prepare and designate a devil for him, '...to become his other self', i.e. that will stick with him, whispering to and misleading him.

As we mentioned previously, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is in no need of His creation. He is the Lord of the believers and the Lord of the disbelievers, and assists each according to their desire. Whosoever wants to be guided to faith, Allah helps them with it and increases their faith more and more, and whosoever prefers disbelief, He seals his heart such that faith cannot enter it and neither can the disbelief be taken out. Therefore, Allah describes Himself here as 'The Most Gracious'.

This also explains why the most common time for Satan to attack man is at the times of prayer, in order to corrupt the relationship between a believer and his Lord. We said that Satan attends the mosque, not the wine-shop. The Quran tells us that he said, '...I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straight way' (*al-A'raf:* 16).

We have previously mentioned the story (1) of the man who hid some money away but subsequently forgot where. He informed his friend of this issue; his friend told him: 'Go to Abu Hanifa (2), for he has an answer to every question. I sought his legal opinion over the divorce of my wife as I had said to her while she was on a ladder, ‘If you come down you are divorced and if you go up then you are divorced.’ To which he (Abu Hanifa) replied, ‘Tell her to jump off the ladder.’

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(1) The story of the man who asked Imam Abu Hanifa *Allah rest his soul* about the money he lost and the latter advised him to pray the night prayer

(2) *Abu Hanifa an-Nu`man ibn Thabit is the Imam of the Hanafis, an independent jurist of the highest level (faqih mujtahid muhaqqiq). He is one of the four Imams of Sunni Islam, and it is said he was Persian. He sold silk for a living and sought knowledge as a youth. He was born in 80 A.H. and passed away in Baghdad in the year 150 A.H. at the age of 71.*

So, the first man went to Abu Hanifa and said to him: ‘I put some money somewhere, but I ca not remember where. What can I do?’

Abu Hanifa said to him, ‘There is no branch of knowledge that deals with this, but I have a plan for you. When night time comes, go and pray two circuits of prayer for Allah, for the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* would hasten to pray(1) if some matter befell him.’

The man did as he had been told and while he was praying, Satan came to him and whispered to him, reminding him of the money’s location. In the morning, the man returned to Abu Hanifa and told him what happened. Abu Hanifa laughed and said: ‘By Allah, I knew he would not be able to leave you to finish the night alone with your Lord. I hope you will finish your prayer out of gratitude to Allah.’ The man said: ‘Allah willing, I shall.’

وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيَصُدُّونَهُمْ عَنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُم مُّهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Evil ones bar people from the right path, even though they may think they are well guided [37] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 37)

These are indeed evil companions since they ‘bar all such from the path [of truth] ...’, i.e. they obstruct them and turn them away from the truth and the straightway, ‘...making them think that they are guided aright!’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 37) Hence, Allah says in another verse: ‘And a Day on which the evildoer will bite his hands [in despair], exclaiming: “Oh, would that I had followed the path shown to me by the Apostle! Oh, woe is me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend! Indeed, he led me astray from the remembrance [of Allah] after it had come unto me!” For [thus it is:] Satan is ever a betrayer of man.’ (*al-Furqan:* 27-29)

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(1) *Imam Ahmad related it in his Musnad [5/388) and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan [1319) on the authority of Hudhayfa Allah rest his soul. The meaning is thus that if a serious matter befell Prophet Muhammad peace and blessing be upon him or if he became concerned he would pray.*

These evil companions are only companions in this world, but in the afterlife, they will be enemies, each one blaming the other: ‘On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the Allah-conscious.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67)

Similarly, Satan will deny his followers and abandon them in the afterlife: ‘...Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves...’ (*Ibrahim:* 22).

Our Lord has taught us how to protect ourselves from Satan; He said: ‘And if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs thee up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 200).

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَنَا قَالَ يَٰلَيۡتَ بَيۡنِي وَبَيۡنَكَ بُعۡدَ ٱلۡمَشۡرِقَيۡنِ فَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡقَرِينُ ﴿٣٨﴾

When such a person comes to Us, he will say [to his comrade], ‘If only you had been as far away from me as east is from west. What an evil comrade!’ [38]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 38)

As for Allah’s saying, ‘...the distance of east and west...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 38), it means the distance between east and west. This is a rhetorical device used in the Arabic language known as *taghlib* (giving precedence over). The east and west are opposites; when talking of two opposites, the Arabs often mention the term referring to one opposite of them, giving precedence to it over the other in wording. For example, when describing the two companions, Abu Bakr and `Umar *Allah be pleased with them* they sometimes say ‘*`Al-`Umarayn*’ (the two `Umars). Further, when we ponder on east and west from a geographic and astronomical perspective, we find that the east in a certain geographic area is the west in another area, and vice versa. Thus, they are both easts and they are both wests.

وَلَن يَنفَعَكُمُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ إِذ ظَّلَمۡتُمۡ أَنَّكُمۡ فِي ٱلۡعَذَابِ مُشۡتَرِكُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

[It will be said to them], ‘You have done wrong. Having partners in punishment will not console you today’ [39]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 39)

Indeed, it will be a widespread affliction affecting all of them. When a single man is afflicted from among many, it is harder for him to bear, as it is more tortuous to be grieving when others are rejoicing. When troubles beset a large number of people, however, it is easier to bear the burden due to the shared experience, even if it is grief that is being shared. This meaning was conveyed by Al-Khansa`(1) in her elegy on her brother Sakhr when she said,

Were it not for so many weeping around me,
Over their brothers, I would surely have killed me,
And though they weep not like my brother but,
Reassuring myself over him, I seek to console me(2)

Another poet said,

It eased the shock of afflictions upon me,
That though broken I am not in their bitterness lonely.

Indeed, if a distress is widespread, its bad impact on an individual is easier to bear than when it afflicts only that certain individual. This is restricted to worldly calamities. As for the crisis of the Hereafter, nothing eases nor lightens it: 'On that Day it will not profit you in the least...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 39), i.e. the Day of Judgment, '... [to know] that, since you have sinned [together], you are now to share your suffering [as well]'. (*az-Zukhruf:* 39)

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(1) Al-Khansa` is the nickname of the female Companion Tumadir bint `Amr ibn Al-Harith, from the tribe of Bani Salim of Najd. She lived most of her life in the pre-Islamic age of ignorance but reached the days of Islam and entered it and managed to visit the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Most her poetry and the best of it was her elegy about her brothers Sakhr and Mu`awiya. She had four sons who fought at the Battle of *Qadisiyya* (16 AH). She kept urging them to fight courageously for Allah's Cause till they were all killed, at which she said, 'All praise is for Allah who honoured me by their deaths.' She passed away in 24 A.H. Az-Zirikli, *Al-A'lam*.

(2) These two verses are from a 15-couplets poem of Al-Khansa` from the metre '*Al-Wafir*'. After she produced the first couplet, she imagined that someone said to her, 'You have equalled your brother to the dead brothers of common people. How can you show more concern over them than your brothers? Thus, she guarded against this by saying, 'And though they weep not like my brother but, reassuring myself over him, I seek to console me.'

أَفَأَنتَ تُسْمِعُ ٱلصُّمَّ أَوْ تَهْدِى ٱلْعُمْىَ وَمَن كَانَ فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

Can you [Prophet] make the deaf hear? Or guide
either the blind or those who are in gross error? [40]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 40)

This verse is addressed to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* it means: ‘O Muhammad, conserve your energy and do not fatigue yourself nor take excessive pains trying to guide these people’.

Allah described them as deaf and blind, while they could, in reality, see and hear. Nevertheless, they heard the truth but they did not follow it and they saw the straightway but they did not adopt it. Thus, they are like the deaf man who cannot hear and the blind man who cannot see. Therefore, Allah said of them in another verse, ‘...Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind – but blind have become the hearts that are in their breasts!’ (*al-Hajj:* 46) So, these people are stubborn and arrogant and denying the truth. This is the meaning of error in His saying ‘or he who is in clear error?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 40) Can there be an error clearer or more obvious than that of the one who sees the truth but does not follow it?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* would not address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in this way, had he not actually been overexerting himself such that he was on the verge of working himself to death in order to save them. For this reason, his Lord addresses him thus: ‘But would you, perhaps, torment thyself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) He also says, ‘...you are not bound to do more than deliver the message...’ (*ash-Shura:* 48). This was because of the deep love that the Messenger Muhammad had for the divine message, the prophetic methodology, and his *ummah* in its entirety. He wanted them to taste, as he did, the sweetness of faith, thus, applying to himself his saying: ‘…love for your brother what you love for yourself.’

فَإِمَّا نَذۡهَبَنَّ بِكَ فَإِنَّا مِنۡهُم مُّنتَقِمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾
أَوۡ نُرِيَنَّكَ ٱلَّذِى وَعَدۡنَٰهُمۡ فَإِنَّا عَلَيۡهِم مُّقۡتَدِرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Either We shall take you away and punish them – indeed We will [41] or We shall let you witness the punishment We threatened them with; We have full power over them [42] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 41- 42)

That is to say, 'Be at peace O Muhammad. For if you die, We shall show you Our revenge upon them and their punishment in the afterlife, and if you continue living you will see some of their punishment visited upon them in this world.

His saying: '...what We have promised them...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 42) refers to the punishment of this world, before the punishment of the Hereafter. The word *muqtadirun* (having full power) in His saying: '...verily, We have full power over them!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 42), is a form of hyperbole of the word *qadir* (powerful). Hence it means, 'We have complete control over them and are completely capable of inflicting punishment upon them. There shall be no escape for them'.

فَٱسۡتَمۡسِكۡ بِٱلَّذِىٓ أُوحِىَ إِلَيۡكَۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ﴿٤٣﴾

Hold fast to what has been revealed to you – you truly are on the right path [43] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 43)

This verse means to adhere rigorously to the revelation you receive, and to not be deceived by those who turn away from Allah's religion because you are upon truth, while they are upon falsehood. The meaning of '...behold, thou art on a straight way' (*az-Zukhruf:* 43) is the true and middle course

وَإِنَّهُۥ لَذِكۡرٞ لَّكَ وَلِقَوۡمِكَۖ وَسَوۡفَ تُسۡـَٔلُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

For it is a reminder for you and your people: you will all be questioned [44] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 44)

His saying, '...and, verily, this...' refers to the Holy Quran with which the Prophet Muhammad was sent. This Book contains a complete way of life and is a lasting miracle, enduring until the Day of Judgement. This Quran '...shall indeed become [a source of] eminence for thee and thy people...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44), i.e. an honour and a source of greatness and pride for both you and your people, the Arabs because it was revealed in Arabic. How many a people have been distinguished by a great language?(1) It is an honour for the Arabic language and an honour for every Arab that the Quran should be revealed in their language. Human beings by their nature incline to boasting, to the love of prestige and to the spread of their fame. It is not hidden from anyone nowadays that it was the Quran that has given the Arabic language its high position among the languages of the world. Had it not been for the Quran, Arabic would have drifted into oblivion as many languages before it. Moreover, we find that there are many people from other nations that take it upon themselves to learn and perfect their Arabic to help them memorise the Quran and study its meanings and exegesis

وَسۡـَٔلۡ مَنۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن قَبۡلِكَ مِن رُّسُلِنَآ أَجَعَلۡنَا مِن
دُونِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ءَالِهَةٗ يُعۡبَدُونَ ٤٥

Ask the prophets We sent before you: 'Did
We ever appoint any gods to be worshipped
besides the Lord of Mercy?' [45]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 45)

Let us now pause to reflect upon the verse: '...ask any of Our apostles whom We sent forth before thy time...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 45). How can Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* ask them when they have passed away? Why does his Lord *Glorified is He* tell him to do this? If the True Lord orders His Messenger to do something, then surely he can but obey.

Indeed, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* this opportunity when he went on the Night Journey and Ascension when he did meet with his brethren, the previous prophets. He led them in prayer in the Holy Mosque of Jerusalem, even though they had already died and he was alive.

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(1) Said by the poet Hafizh Ibrahim

It is well established that he spoke to some of them and they spoke back. He spoke to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and consulted him regarding the fifty prayers, the result of which was that Allah reduced them to five.(1)

If you are saying, ‘How can two opposites exist at the same time? How could, living and dead people talk and consult together’? We say that this is possible because of Allah’s Immeasurable Power. His Power is not limited by the normal laws of life and death. We have stated previously that in order to have peace of mind, we must attribute the action to the ‘true doer’. This is a matter of the Unseen world; we have faith in it and attribute its wondrous aspects to the One who created them.

You remember the story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when they threw him in the fire. What happened? The empirical law tells us that fire burns, but what if Allah wants it to be cool and safe even as it is alight? When Allah willed it, it became cool and peaceful for Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and its law of burning was stopped. Had Allah *Glorified is He* wished clouds to rain on this fire and put it out, indeed He could have done so. Also, He could have saved Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* from them in such a way that they never would have caught him. But in order to manifest this miracle, Allah allowed them to catch him and literally throw him in a burning fire, but it did not burn him. This is Allah’s Immeasurable Power.

We also witness this infinite power in the story of Musa’s (Moses’s) *peace be upon him* staff when he struck the sea with it and the sea parted. The water froze such that each side looked like a huge mountain. This was the same stick with which he struck the rock from which twelve streams sprang. The True Lord shows us glimpses of His Immense Power in these contraventions of the normal empirical rules so that we might carry that understanding further.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari related it in his Sahih [336] on the authority of Anas ibn Malik that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessing be upon him said: ‘Allah required of my ummah that they pray 50 times, so I returned with this until I met Musa (Moses) peace be upon him who said to me, “What did Allah oblige your ummah to do?” “He requires of them 50 prayers”, I replied. “Go back to your Lord”, he said, “for your ummah will not be able to bear it” ... and so the Hadith continues until Allah said: “...They are five and yet they are fifty. There will be no substitution of My speech.”’ This is also in Sahih Muslim [234].*

Some scholars have considered this unlikely, i.e. the meeting of the dead and the living; they interpret the events in such a way that agrees with their desires, saying that it means, ‘ask the followers of the messengers that preceded you’ because they took their religion from them. Those who think this way want to avoid the issue of the dead meeting the living and from the affirmation of a miracle that breaks the norms. Nevertheless, there is nothing strange about this nor is it too amazing because who is doing it? It is Allah.

Or, the question: ‘...ask any of Our apostles whom We sent forth before thy time...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 45) is not intended to express the direct literal meaning of a question that requires an answer, but rather, it is intended as a sermon and a call to consideration, such as the preacher says to the audience at the Friday Prayer for instance: ‘Ask the earth who made the rivers flow over it, who made the plants grow on it; ask the budding gardens; ask the flowing water?’ etc. The point here is not that we ask the earth, rather, we ask ourselves, we think and reflect. So, it is the case with His saying: ‘...ask any of Our apostles whom We sent forth before thy time...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 45).

Nevertheless, the question still arises, did Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* ask the other messengers who preceded him the question (1): ‘...whether We have ever allowed that deities other than the Most Gracious be worshipped’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 45) or not? The reality is that he did not ask. But why did he not? Because he had certainty that obviated any need for him to ask this question. Messenger Muhammad had no need of anyone to confirm for him that there are no other gods to be worshipped beside Allah.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi stated in his Tafsir [9/6142]: ‘The commentators have differed regarding the issue of the Prophet peace and blessing be upon him asking the previous prophets into two camps: The first is that he asked them and they replied, ‘We were sent proclaiming Divine unity.’ This was the position of Al-Waqidi. The second is that he did not ask them because of his certainty in Allah Glorified is He. Indeed, Ibn `Abbas and Ibn Zayd stated that the Messenger of Allah peace and blessing be upon him having finished praying with the prophets in the Holy Mosque of Jerusalem on the night of the Night Journey and Ascension was told by Jibril (Gabriel) peace be upon him: ‘Ask, O Muhammad, those we sent before you of the messengers if we set up any gods other than Allah to be worshipped.’ To which the Messenger of Allah replied: ‘I am content. I am not going to ask.’ This was mentioned by Ibn Al-Jawzi in Zad Al-Masir who said, ‘it was related by `Ata from Ibn `Abbas.’ This opinion was held by Sa`id ibn Jubayr, Az-Zuhri and Ibn Zayd.*

In this vein, it is related that `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘Were the veil to be lifted from my eyes, I would not increase in certainty.’ That is, ‘I have strong and unshakeable faith in the matters of the Unseen such that it is as though I see them. Were they to actually be revealed to me, my certainty would not increase one iota, because Allah’s informing His Messenger of something is more credible to us than our seeing it.’

Read Allah’s saying: ‘Did you not see how thy Sustainer dealt with the Army of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) It is well-known that the Messenger Muhammad was born in the Year of the Elephant, so he did not see it. Nevertheless, Allah says, ‘Did you not see...’ (*al-Fil:* 1) meaning ‘Did you not know’? How did you know it? Either by means of your own senses or by revelation from the Creator of your senses, hence, revelation from the True Lord is more credible and more certain than one’s own eyesight.

As for the question, inherent in: ‘...whether We have ever allowed that deities other than The Most Gracious be worshipped’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 45), it serves the purpose of negation and rebuttal. Worshipping others beside Allah is not something that the messengers did or taught others. So, it must have originated at the hands of men. They invented this to please themselves in that they might have something to worship but would agree with their desires, and that would not constrict their wishes or passions according to rules of ‘do this and do not do that’. This is how they came to worship idols, the sun, moon, planets, and other things. All these things were worshipped according to them, but Allah has not legislated this in any of the Divine Laws nor has He given any permission for such.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ
وَمَلَإِي۟هِۦ فَقَالَ إِنِّى رَسُولُ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

We sent Moses to Pharaoh and his courtiers and he said,
‘I am truly a messenger from the Lord of the Worlds’ [46]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 46)

We have said previously that the ‘messages’ (*ayat*) mentioned here are the miracles that prove the truthfulness of the messenger in his transmission from

Allah. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was, amongst all the messengers, bestowed with the most miracles, and from this we can infer that his people were the most stubborn and heedless amongst Allah's creation. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And, indeed, We gave unto Musa (Moses) nine clear messages' (*al-Isra':* 101).

Why did the Quran mention part of the story of Musa (Moses) at this point? The scholars say it is because the disbelievers of Mecca had consolidated their position in opposition to the invitation to Islam. They rejected that this invitation should come to them at the hands of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specifically. 'And they say, too, "Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) This meant the city of Mecca, in which there was Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, and the city of Ta'if, in which there was `Urwa ibn Mas`ud Ath-Thaqafi, along with other leaders of the people and the rich and respected. Thus, they were not objecting to the Quran; rather, they were objecting to the person to whom the Quran was revealed. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give an example from the life of the prophets: this is Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* he had no authority, and was not rich or high-ranking, but Allah sent him to people whose disbelief was worse than that of the people of Mecca and its leaders; he was sent to Pharaoh who not only rejected the invitation to Allah but actually said, 'I am a god!'

Thus, there is no astonishment that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent by Allah, even though he was from the public and the poor, to the rich leaders. Can it be said that Al-Walid and `Urwa and the others leaders of disbelief were worse than Pharaoh? Prophet hood is, thus, not something that requires the messenger to be wealthy, famous or powerful. This is Allah's Mercy; He apportions it as He pleases and He elects of His slaves whom He will.

Considering the history of the prophet hood of both Muhammad and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* one finds that Musa (Moses) spent less time living in his community than Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did. Musa (Moses) was brought up in Pharaoh's household until he was a young man and it was then that Musa (Moses) accidentally killed somebody. Then, a man came to him from the far side of the town to warn him saying: 'and [then and there] a man came running from the farthermost end of the city, and said:

"O Musa (Moses)! Behold, the great ones [of the kingdom] are deliberating upon thy case with a view to kill you! So leave, verily, I am of those who wish you well!" So he went forth from thence, looking fearfully about him, and prayed: "O my Sustainer! Save me from all evildoing folk!"' (*al-Qasas:* 20-21)

After that, Musa (Moses) went to Midyan where he found: 'Now when he arrived at the wells of Midyan(1), he found there a large group of men who were watering [their herds and flocks]; and at some distance from them he came upon two women who were keeping back their flock. He asked [them]: "What is the matter with you?" They answered: "We cannot water [our animals] until the herdsmen drive [theirs] home – for [we are weak and] our father is a very old man." So he watered [their flock] for them; and then he withdrew into the shade and prayed: "O my Sustainer! Verily, in dire need am I of any good which you may bestow upon me!"' (*al-Qasas:* 23-24).

The first thing we can draw from these events is the proper etiquette for interacting with Muslim women: when and how they should leave their homes. The reason these two ladies left their house was that their father was a very old man and there was nobody to fulfil their needs for them.

Thus, a woman should not leave her house unless it is a necessity. If she does go out, she covers herself and goes modestly, not mixing with men. After that, it is the responsibility of the believing community to safeguard a woman's rights and help her satisfy her needs because it is a society based on mercy and kinship among all the Muslims.

I remember (2) the first time we travelled to Mecca in 1950; we lived in the house of a wealthy man who would volunteer to take us to work in his private car. One time, while we were driving, we saw in front of one of the houses a wooden board used for the preparation of bread but the door of the house was closed. He stopped, got out of the car, took the board, and drove off. When I asked him about this, he said: 'By Allah, it is a custom of ours that when we see a closed door and there is something in front of it like that, we know that the man of the house is out and the family needs something, so we do it for them'. The result of this was that the man took the board, filled it with bread and some other stuff, and returned it to its owners.

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(1) Midyan was a city, also known as Bayala that was in the north-west of the Arabian Peninsula. Its people were traders and Allah sent the Prophet Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* to them to incite them to trade honestly.

(2) The story of the man from Mecca in Saudi Arabia with the dough of the woman

This is the meaning that we have learnt from this story of Musa (Moses): 'so he watered [their flock] for them...' (*al-Qasas:* 24).

Then, we go back to the story: '...and then he withdrew into the shade and prayed: "O my Lord! Verily, in dire need am I of any good which you may bestow upon me!"' (*al-Qasas:* 24) That is to say, Musa (Moses) was a poor man; he had no worldly possessions save his physical power. At that time, he was sitting in the shade of a tree with no home. Is there greater poverty or weakness than this? This shows us that he was a penniless man; he possessed nothing of this world. If we compare him to Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* we find that Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* lived longer amongst his people. He grew up among them since birth, he tended the sheep for them for a wage, and, when he grew older, he occupied himself with trading. He was the 'manager', so to speak, to Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* and he earned money.

So, despite this, Allah sent Musa (Moses), even though he was weaker than Muhammad, to Pharaoh who was stronger and more powerful than Al-Walid, `Urwa and the others. Now, we can see why Musa (Moses) has been mentioned here: 'Thus, indeed, have We sent Musa (Moses) with Our messages unto Pharaoh and his great ones...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 46).

There was vulnerability in Musa's (Moses's) message to Pharaoh; this was that he had been raised in Pharaoh's house. Hence, the True Lord *Glorified is He* taught him how to approach Pharaoh when inviting him to Islam because Pharaoh was reminding Musa (Moses) of this favour. '...Did we not bring thee up among us when you were a child? And didst thou not spend among us years of thy [later] life?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18) So, Allah told Musa (Moses) to speak gently to Pharaoh: 'But speak unto him in a mild manner, so that he might bethink himself or [at least] be filled with apprehension.' (*Ta Ha:* 44)

As for his saying, '...with Our messages...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 46), it refers to the open miracles that accompanied Musa's (Moses's) message to assist him and establish the truthfulness of his conveyance from Allah. We have mentioned previously that one of the conditions of a miracle is that it be a challenging such that none could have accomplished it and that it relates to matters that the people excel in, so that the challenge might be meaningful. For how could I challenge you regarding something you do not know or in which you have little competence.

Pharaoh's people were adept in magic; therefore, one of the miracles that Allah gave Musa (Moses) was that of his staff. Allah *Glorified is He* trained him to use it and taught him its secrets before he met Pharaoh. Read the verses: 'Now, what is this in thy right hand, O Musa (Moses)? He answered: "It is my staff; I lean on it; and with it I beat down leaves for my sheep; and [many] other uses have I for it." Allah said, "Throw it down, O Musa (Moses)!" So he threw it – and lo! it was a snake, moving rapidly.' (*Ta Ha:* 17-20) This situation was a training session for Musa (Moses) on the use of this miracle before Pharaoh. Thus, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* knew that, in addition to his own purposes of using his staff such as supporting himself and beating down leaves, Allah *Glorified is He* had designated it for other uses beside these normal ones.

We have heard some orientalists saying, 'The Quran repeats the story of Musa's (Moses's) staff in several places'. The reality, however, is that there is no repetition; rather, these are different situations regarding Musa's (Moses's) staff. The first time, as we said, was training for Musa (Moses) so that he would not be overawed by the transformation of the staff when he threw it before Pharaoh.

The second time was in front of Pharaoh alone, and the third time was when the sorcerers had been gathered by Pharaoh. Hence, there is no repetition: they are different instances of one action. The Quran, in revealing this story to us, has also shown us the difference between miracles and magic. Magic employs illusion and deception while a miracle is an actual occurrence. That is why Allah said of the staff: '...and lo! it was a snake, moving rapidly', i.e. really. When He spoke of the sorcerer's ropes however He said: '...[they] seemed to him to be moving rapidly' (*Ta Ha:* 66). Further proof of this is that when the sorcerers and those who practised these arts or had experience of them saw the staff turn instantaneously into a snake, they fell into prostration, believing in Musa (Moses) and that which he brought because they knew best about these affairs. '...(They] exclaimed: "We have come to believe in The Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron)!"' (*Ta Ha:* 70)

In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says: '...they cast a spell upon the people's eyes, and struck them with awe...' (*al-A'raf:* 116). The meaning of 'they cast a spell upon the people's eyes' is that this magic went no further than their eyes; it was merely an optical illusion.

Our daily life bears witness to this. I remember (1) when I was the head of a mission from the University of Al-Azhar to Algeria. There, I met the Saudi Ambassador Riyadh Al-Khatib, the son of the great poet Fu`ad Al-Khatib (2), and we became good friends. It came to pass that he was transferred from Algeria to Pakistan and sometime after this, I also travelled to Pakistan and visited him there.

One day, we were talking about magic and he said, 'I have something strange to show you. There is an Indian magician who does such-and-such and such-and-such.' To this I replied, 'By Allah, this is a good opportunity to see what this man does.' The next morning, we went to the village and they brought the Indian magician who sat down and began to put on his show. He brought some cotton and twisted it so that it looked like a piece of rope. He had with him a young boy whom he instructed to climb the rope which he made until all the people seated around could see the boy had actually climbed this rope.

On the following day, having checked the Quran verses about magic in the Book of Allah, I took a camera with me in order to photograph this spectacle. This I did and, when then the following day I had the photographs developed, I found them white, nothing to be seen. My friend asked me,

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(1) The story of Ash-Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi and Riyad Al-Khatib with the Indian sorcerer in Pakistan.

(2) Fu`ad ibn Hasan ibn Yusuf Al-Khatib, a poet with a pure elegant style and a master of rhetoric, a member of Al-Majma` Al `Ilmi Al `Arabi in Damascus. He was born in 1879 C.E. near Beirut. He finished his studies at the American University in the year 1904 C.E. and was known as 'the poet of the revolution of the Hijaz'. He passed away in his hometown of Shuheem in the year 1957 C.E. [his biography is given in detail in Az-Zirikli, *Al-A`lam*, 5/160].

‘How then do you interpret this illusion that we saw?’ I said, ‘By Allah, we know from the Quran that the jinn can take any form, and perhaps this magician is supported by the jinn. Allah says: ‘Yet [it has always happened] that certain kinds of humans would seek refuge with certain kinds of [such] jinn: but these only increased their confusion.’ (*al-Jinn:* 6). Thus, it is logically possible that this magician could have entered a pact with some *jinni* who assists him in this matter, taking whatever form he desires.

The Quran is explicit about the fact that the signs and miracles that Musa (Moses) was sent with were nine: ‘And, indeed, We gave unto Musa (Moses) nine clear signs…’ (*al-Isra’:* 101). In another verse, Allah says, ‘Although each sign that We showed them was weightier than the preceding one…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 48). This means that they must have been many clear and obvious signs.

Regarding His saying: ‘...unto Pharaoh and his great ones...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 46), ‘great ones’ (*al-mala`*) refers to the people but especially the notables and dignitaries amongst them. It comes from the saying, ‘*fulan mala`a al-`ayn*’ (so-and-so is pleasing). In another verse, Allah says, ‘and [thus, too, did We deal with] Qarun and Pharaoh, and Haman: to them had come Musa (Moses) with all evidence of the truth, but they behaved arrogantly on earth [and rejected him]; and withal, they could not escape [Us].’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 39)

As to Allah’s saying: ‘...and he said: “Behold, I am an apostle of the Lord of all the Worlds!”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 46), it is an abridgement of his message and a summary thereof.

فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُم بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ إِذَا هُم مِّنْهَا يَضْحَكُونَ (٤٧)

But when he presented Our signs to them, they laughed [47] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 47)

The previous verse in the chapter of *al-`Ankabut* clarified their reaction which is arrogance. Arrogance, here, means that they knew Musa (Moses) was truthful and a man of miracles, yet they were too proud to believe in him. Here, this verse clarifies another aspect of their arrogance: ‘...lo! they derided them’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 47). Either this laughter was out of astonishment at the miracle they saw, being a breaking of the norms and different from all they had seen from the sorcerers beforehand, or it was out of derision and mockery.

وَمَا نُرِيهِم مِّنْ ءَايَةٍ إِلَّا هِىَ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أُخْتِهَا ۖ
وَأَخَذْنَٰهُم بِٱلْعَذَابِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

Even though each sign We showed them was greater
than the previous one. We inflicted torment on them so
that they might return to the right path [48]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 48)

The meaning of '... each sign...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 48) here is a miracle. '...was weightier than the preceding one...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 48), i.e. each miracle was clearer and grander than its forerunner. This also means that the miraculous nature of these signs was clear in each instance because they were so numerous. Each sign or miracle was great in one way or another because the purpose of the signs was their miraculous incapacitating nature, doing something beyond the realms of human power or possibility; so long as a sign performed this duty, it must be considered great.

As for His saying: '...We took them to task over the Punishment through suffering...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 48), it means, 'We punished them over their rejection of the punishment of the next world. The True Lord *Glorified is He* has explained this punishment in another chapter saying: 'And most certainly did We overwhelm Pharaoh's people with drought and scarcity of fruits, so that they might take it to heart' (*al-A'raf:* 130).

Consider the endings of these two verses: the first: '...so that they might return [to Us]' (*az-Zukhruf:* 48), and the other: '...so that they might take it to heart.' (*al-A'raf:* 130) So, The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not punish His creation because He needs to; He only punishes them so that they may turn back to Him. Hence, we can see that even His punishment here is a mercy for them.

He was harsh so they would take heed, and whoever is judicious,
Let him sometimes be harsh on those he would show mercy.(1)

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(1) This couplet is from a poem by Abu Tammam in the *Kamil* metre. It has 60 couplets of which this is the 39th. Abu Tammam was Habib ibn Aws At-Ta`I, and he was born in Syria in188 AH. His poetry has a powerful and pure style. He wrote several books including, *Fuhul Ash-Shu`ara`*, *Diwan Al-Hamasa* and *Naqa`id Jarir Wa Al-Akhtal*. He passed away in the year 231 A.H. *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya*

His saying: '...so that they might return [to Us]' (*az-Zukhruf:* 48), i.e. return to us by getting rid of arrogance, false argumentation and the stubbornness. But did they turn back? Not at all, they persisted in their denial and disbelief, even after Allah afflicted them, for many years, by drought and famine, resulting in the loss of the fruits of their labour and suffering from a constrained livelihood. Then, after all of that: 'Thereupon We let loose upon them floods, and [plagues of] locusts, and lice(1), and frogs, and [water turning into] blood – distinct signs [all]: but they gloried in their arrogance, for they were people lost in sin' (*al-A'raf:* 133). These were clear and obvious signs. As a result, they found themselves most terribly constrained, emaciated, and extremely busy affording their daily provision. Therefore, they went to Musa (Moses) and said:

وَقَالُواْ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَ ٱلسَّاحِرُ ٱدۡعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ بِمَا عَهِدَ عِندَكَ إِنَّنَا لَمُهۡتَدُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

They said, 'Sorcerer, call on your Lord for us, by virtue of His pledge to you: we shall certainly accept guidance' [49] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 49)

The word sorcerer here does not only mean that they were admitting his superiority in the field of magic, but it also means a man who is proficient in all things; someone who is their superior in magic, knowledge and understanding of the affairs of this world; it means he was unique.

This reminds us of an occurrence in the life of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* Az-Zabraqan ibn Badr(2) and `Amr ibn

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(1) Ibn Jawzi said in *Zad Al-Masir* [Al-A`raf 133] that there are seven positions regarding *al-qumal* (lice):

1. That they were woodworms.
2. That they were nymphs, i.e. baby locusts. This was the position of Mujahid, `Ata` and Ibn `Abbas.
3. That they were small black insects.
4. That they were dung-beetles.
5. That they were lice.
6. That they were fleas.
7. That they were *hamnan*, a type of tick. This was the position of Abu `Ubayda.

(2) Az-Zabraqan ibn Badr At-Tamimi As-Sa`di was a companion and a leader among his people. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* put him in charge of=

Al-Ahtam(1), two of the leaders of the Arabs, came to him. The Prophet Muhammad said to `Amr ibn Al-Ahtam: ‘What do you say of Az-Zabraqan ibn Badr?’ `Amr ibn Al-Ahtam replied: ‘He is obeyed by his people, powerful, smart and prudent(2), and is capable of protecting his people.’ Az-Zabraqan added: ‘O Messenger of Allah, By Allah, he certainly knows more of me than he has given in this description, but he is envious of me.’ To this ‘Amr replied: ‘By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, he is a man of little virtue(3), weak-minded(4), his imagination is twisted and his forefathers were idiots.’

At this, the Messenger Muhammad said to `Amr ibn al-Ahtam, ‘What caused you to say the things you have just said?’ ‘O Messenger of Allah’, he said, ‘I was cheerful so I said the best things I knew about him. Then I became angry, so I said the worst things I knew about him.’ So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘Indeed some speech can be bewitching’ (*Inna min al-bayan lasihra*)(5).’

The relation here is that the word *sihr* (magic or bewitching) can carry the meaning of superiority generally in any aspect of life. Therefore, when they saw Musa’s actions, they humbled themselves before him and conceded that he was superior to them and, even though they did not believe in him, they conceded his pre-eminence. Indeed, because of the truthfulness of his call, they came to him and asked him to pray for them and to alleviate the afflictions they suffered in their livelihood.

= collecting the charity his people gave. He lost his sight at the end of his life and he passed away during the reign of Mu`awiya in the year 45 A.H. He was an eloquent poet but was somewhat coarse as the Bedouin Arabs tended to be. Az-Zirikli, *Al-A`lam* 3/41

(1) `Amr ibn Al-Ahtam’s full name was `Amr ibn Sinan At-Tamimi Al-Manqari Abu Rib`i. He was one of leaders, poets, and orators in the pre-Islamic era and in Islam. He was from Najd and came to visit the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* whereupon he entered Islam. His poetry is good. He passed away in the year 57 A.H. Az-Zirkili, *Al-A`lam* 5/78

(2) Possessing ability, perceptiveness, patience, and sound judgement

(3) i.e., it is little.

(4) i.e., Impatient and slow when under pressure

(5) It was related by Al-Hakim in *Al-Mustadrak* [6645, 6646] on the authority of Ibn `Abbas and Abu Bakra Al-Ansari, according to whom Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said, ‘Indeed, some oratory is bewitching, and some poetry contains wisdom.’ It was also related by At-Tabarani in *Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir* [1820] (part of a lost manuscript) and also in *Al-Mu`jam As-Saghir* [7886]

They said: '...O thou sorcerer! Pray for us to thy Sustainer...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 49). We can see, therefore, that they recognised he had a connection to his Lord. Nevertheless, they did not consider his Lord to be their Lord, the proof being their saying, '... Pray for us to thy Sustainer...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 49). They did not for example say, 'our Sustainer' '...On the strength of the covenant [of prophet hood] which He has made with thee...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 49) because your Lord consents to your wishes and does what you ask of Him, and He promised that He would remove the punishment from those who believe in you '...For, verily, we shall now follow the right way!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 49); i.e. if you relieve us of the punishment that afflicts us, we will be guided believe in you.

فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمُ ٱلْعَذَابَ إِذَا هُمْ يَنكُثُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

But as soon as We relieved their torment they broke their word [50] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 50)

So, their saying: '...for, verily, we shall now follow the right way!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 49), was just empty words, spoken in hypocrisy; they had no portion of the truthful reality. This is obvious because although, the True Lord *Glorified is He* relieved them of the punishment, they just went back to their old ways. The meaning of '...they would break their word' (*az-Zukhruf:* 50) is that they would return to what they were previously doing and break the oath they drew upon themselves that they would accept guidance.

وَنَادَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ فِى قَوْمِهِۦ قَالَ يَٰقَوْمِ أَلَيْسَ لِى مُلْكُ مِصْرَ
وَهَٰذِهِ ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِىٓ ۖ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

Pharaoh proclaimed to his people, 'My people, is the Kingdom of Egypt not mine? And these rivers that flow at my feet, are they not mine? Do you not see? [51] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 51)

Now Pharaoh's status amongst his people had become unstable and he sensed danger. When he saw the people looking to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* he felt that Musa (Moses) was pulling the rug from underneath his feet especially after the event when the sorcerers believed in the Lord of

Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses) without waiting for Pharaoh's permission. After the drought had befallen them and they turned in despair to Musa (Moses) and asked him to remove their affliction. For these reasons, we now see Pharaoh trying to re-establish himself and improve his image amongst his people.

'And Pharaoh issued a call to his people...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51); what did his crier call out? He cried out '... "O my people! Does the dominion over Egypt not belong to me since all these running waters(1) flow at my feet? Can you not, then, see?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51). That is, do not forget my status, my dominion and power over you, and do not concern yourselves with the affair of Musa (Moses) because I am still the king of Egypt, and the rivers run beneath me, i.e., I am the one who provides your blessings.

'...Can you not, then, see? (*az-Zukhruf:* 51) We notice that his announcement contains nothing of his claim to divinity; he did not say, 'I am your Lord Most High' because he has abandoned such slogans now that there is no place for them after what happened with Musa (Moses).

Look now to the phrasing of his announcement: '...Does the dominion over Egypt not belong to me...?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51) It is a rhetorical question confirming his status as King of Egypt, i.e. 'Tell me, am I not still your king'? He did not use, for instance, a plain statement such as, 'I am the king of Egypt', and we can see from this that Pharaoh is speaking from a position of weakness. This is clear because he was previously saying '...I am your Lord Most-High!' (*an-Nazi'at:* 24), and now he is saying, '...Does the dominion over Egypt not belong to me...?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51)

The word *mulk* (dominion) consists of the letters *mim*, *lam* and *kaf*. We see that sometimes this *mim* has a *kasra*, sometimes a *fatha* and others a

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(1) There have been many opinions expressed about the meaning of *al-anhar* (running waters), amongst them:

- That they were four branches of the Nile: Nahr Al-Malik, Nahr Tulun, Nahr Damietta and Nahr Tanis.
- That they were generals, leaders, and tyrants who marched under his banner. This was the opinion of Ad-Dahhak.
- That they were his treasures and he spoke of them as such because of their visibility and abundance [*Tafsir Al-Qurtubi* 9/6145)] Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *Allah rest his soul* has more to say about this verse that will soon follow.

damma. When it has a *kasra* it says *milk* meaning anything one possesses. Even the clothes one wears are termed *milk.* The word *mulk*, with a *damma* refers to authority and control over those who have possessions (*milk*). *Malk* with a *fatha*, however, means choice or will, as in the verse: '...We did not break our promise to thee of our own free will...' (*Ta Ha:* 87), that is, by our choice.

When we form an active participle (*ism al-fa`il*), we can say *maalik* or *malik*. *Malik* (owner) can be said of anyone, even if he only possesses his own clothes. As for *malik* (king), however, it is only said of one who rules and governs other owners.

When we read, for example, in the chapter of *al-Fatiha*: 'Lord of the Day of Judgment!' [*maliki yawm ad-din*] (*al-Fatiha:* 4), (it is translated into 'Lord' here, not 'owner') we do not say *malik.* It is true that this is one of the variant readings of the Quran(1), 'King of the Day of Judgement' (*maliki yawmi`-d-din*), but nevertheless, *malik* is the most common reading. What then is the wisdom in preferring a word of lesser meaning to a stronger one?

The scholars say that the True Lord *Glorified is He* chose the word *maalik* to establish that it is He Who owns the Day of Judgement, while others may possess the earth and what lies thereon in this life. So, His saying: 'Lord of the Day of Judgment!' (*maliki yawmi'-d-din*) (*al-Fatiha:* 4) means that none other than He holds ownership of this day. It is Allah's alone. For this reason, He said: '...With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With Allah, The One Who holds absolute sway over all that exists!' (*Ghafir:* 16); it is His alone, not other's. Hence, the word *maalik* is required here; it is the word that conveys the desired meaning. It is more indicative of the meaning, even though ownership is less than kingship.

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(1) The word *malik* can be recited in the chapter of *al-Fatiha* in several ways:
- *Malik* – related by `Asim, Al-Kasa`i, Khalaf and Ya`qub, *malik* with an *alif.*
- *Malika* – related by Ibn Samiqa` and Ibn Abu `Abla, as above except that the *kaf* is *mansub*.
- *Malki* – related by Abu Hurayra and `Asim Aj-Jahdari, with a *sukun* on the *lam*, no *alif* and a *kasra* on the *kaf.*
- *Malika* – related by Abu `Uthman An-Nahdi and Ash-Sha`bi, with a *kasra* on the *lam*, no *alif* and the *kaf mansub*.
- *Maliku* – related by Sa`d ibn Abu Waqqaș, `Aisha and Muwarraq Al-`Ajali, as above except that the *kaf* is *marfu`*.
- *Malik* – related by Abu Raja` Al-`Ataridi. [Ibn Al-Jawzi, *Zad Al-Masir* – the chapter of *al-Fatiha*]

As we mentioned previously, for example, concerning the words *kabir* (big) and *akbar* (bigger/biggest), *akbar* is a comparative adjective formed from *kabir* and its meaning is stronger. In the call to prayer, we say, '*Allahu akbar*', but *akbar* is not one of Allah's names, rather a name of His is *Al-Kabir* (the Great). Why then do we use *akbar* instead of *Al-Kabir*? The scholars say that there is wisdom behind why we say *Allahu Akbar* and that it is that the lesser word here finds its place. This is because when you are calling people to prayer you are asking them to leave their business. Legitimate work is the basis of people's lives. People's jobs and necessities are not insignificant things of no bearing in Allah's religion. Rather, they are matters which are ordained by the Sacred Law.

Thus, work is important and essential, but when the time for prayer comes, be sure that Allah is Greater, i.e. greater than working and striving to earn livings.

This issue has been clarified for us by the True Lord *Glorified is He* in the chapter of *al-Jumu`a*: 'O you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave all worldly commerce...' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). Then: 'And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah's bounty...' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).

So, Allah removes you from your work to pray and then He returns you back again because through work the earth is populated and the needs of creation are addressed. Then, we can see that the desired meaning is best articulated by the word *akbar* (Greater).

'And Pharaoh issued a call to his people...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51); it was not Pharaoh himself who called out, but rather, he ordered that this announcement should be made amongst the people, and hence, because the announcement was made on his orders, it was attributed to him.

His saying: '...Does the dominion over Egypt not belong to me...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51) refers to the whole country, not just the capital city as we say today when using the word *Misr* to refer to Cairo. *Misr* (Ancient Egypt) that Pharaoh ruled stretched from Alexandria to Aswan.

Misr is a proper name for this place; the word is comprised of three letters, the first of which bears a *kasra* and the middle one bears a *sukun*. A *sukun* makes the pronunciation of a word light and so this word is easy to utter. Furthermore, it has the simplest form that a noun can take in the language because the noun in Arabic can have no less than three letters, while the most is five letters if it is stripped of any ancillary letters.

Reflecting in this regard, we can see that Mecca, Allah's Sacred City and the place of his Sacred House, is mentioned in the Gracious Book twice: 'And He it is who, in the valley of Mecca, stayed their hands from you, and your hands from them...' (*al-Fath:* 24), and in His saying: 'Behold, the first house ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at *Bakka*: rich in blessing, and a [source of] guidance unto all the worlds' (*Al-'Imran:* 96), it comes by the name of *Bakka*.

As for *Misr (Egypt)*, it is mentioned by the True Lord *Glorified is He* in His Book five times: '...Does the dominion over Egypt not belong to me...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51), in: 'And the man from Egypt who bought him said...' (*Yusuf:* 21), in: '...Enter Egypt! If Allah so wills, you shall be secure [from all evil]!' (*Yusuf:* 99), in: 'and [thus] did We inspire Musa (Moses) and his brother: "Set aside(1) for your people some houses in the city..."' (*Yunus:* 87) and in: '...Go back in shame to Egypt, and then you can have what you are asking for...' (*al-Baqara:* 61).

In the last verse *Misr* is mentioned with a *fatha* at the end and a *tanwin* (*Misran*). Some of the exegetes say that this is because it means 'a city among others, inside it is that which you desire'. Even if we accept this interpretation, then Ancient Egypt is still included in it because it was a city among others.

'...all these running waters flow at my feet...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51): the words '...at my feet...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51) indicate authority and power. Indeed, his palaces were built directly on the Nile bank and the river was running beneath them. He used the plural of rivers even though we know that there is but one river in Egypt, the River Nile, and that it splits into two, the Damietta branch and the Rosetta branch. So, why did the verse say: '...all these running waters...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51)?

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(1) *Tabawwa`at al-manzil* means he took a house as his residence. The meaning of Allah's saying, 'And [thus] did We inspire Musa (Moses) and his brother: "Set aside for your people some houses in the city..."' (*Yunus:* 87), is 'go and take up residence there' [Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/88].

The scholars say that this is because in the days of the Pharaohs there were five rivers, that is, they created five branches from the river so that there would be more shores. Thus, they had ten shores on which they built their palaces.

I remember(1) here that we had an esteemed sheikh; Sheikh `Umar Al-`Amrusi from the city Tanta Al-Jazira. I used to sit with him and benefit from his knowledge, along with Sheikh Sayyid Sharaf and Dr Yasin `Abd Al-Ghaffar(2). One day he asked me, knowing that I was studying at Al-Azhar, 'O Sha`rawi, what do you know of the verse: "...all these running waters flow at my feet..." (*az-Zukhruf:* 51)? I replied, 'In history we read that during the days of the pharaohs there were five rivers, one river named Al-Malik (the king) because the king's palace was upon its shore, one named Dimyat and a river named Tannis.(3) But we found it strange that there was one river named Tulun, given that we know that Ahmad ibn Tulun(4) was in the ninth century CE, so how did it get that name? After researching, we found that it was Ibn

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(1) The story of Sheikh `Umar Al-`Amrusi and his asking Ash-Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *may Allah rest their souls* about the rivers

(2) Dr Yasin `Abd Al-Ghaffar established The Liver Institute (Ma`had Al-Kabid) in 1990 CE. He is from the governorate of Al-Manufiyya and was born on the 26th January 1917 CE and passed away in May 1999 CE at the age of 82. He received his degree in medicine and surgery in 1940 CE and membership of the Royal Society in London in 1944. He took his doctorate from Cairo University in 1945 and received an honorary doctorate from Alexandria University in 1991. He was given numerous positions and achieved many distinctions.

(3) Tannis is an ancient city. It is a word from Hieroglyphics referring to the making of silk. It is now the city Al-Manzila, one of the centres of governorate of Ad-Daqhaliyya in the north east of Egypt.

(4) Ahmad ibn Tulun Abu Al-`Abbas Al-Amir was well-known in Egypt, in the Levant and in the frontier outposts. His roots were Turkish, but he was Arabised. He was born in the year 220 A.H. and was courageous, lived a good life and was described as a fierce opponent. He built the well-known mosque in Cairo and Qala`a Yafa in Palestine. It is said against him that he was hot-tempered. He passed away in Egypt after being ill in the year 270 A.H. at the age of 51 Az-Zirikli *Al-A`lam* 1/140.

Tulun who filled this branch of the river in and so it was named after him. The fifth river was named Al-Khalij. They created extra branches from the main river so that they would have more space to extend the building along the river, and this, if it is an indication of anything, shows the luxurious nature of their lifestyles at that time.'

As for Sheikh `Umar, he had a different opinion about the meaning of this verse. 'Listen my sons', he said, 'the pharaohs organised Ancient Egypt in such a way as to imitate the organisation of paradise, thus they created four rivers. Listen to the Quran: '...The parable of the Paradise which the Allah-conscious are promised – [a paradise] wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed...' (*Muhammad:* 15).

The question is, where did the Pharaohs get this knowledge of paradise from, such that they could adapt it to the land of Egypt? The scholars say that they used to take their lead from their priests in their worldly affairs and politics. These soothsayers had some knowledge and studied the previous revelations. The scholars even say that the knowledge that the pharaohs had and used to build the pyramids, the sphinx, the temples that are still standing now, the secrets of the construction of which, despite all the advances in science, we still have not uncovered, the process of mummification and other secrets, they learnt it all from the soothsayers. That knowledge, so long as it came from the soothsayers, had its origin in revelation. The proof of this is that when the era of the soothsayers ended and they were no longer to be found, this knowledge disappeared, even until now.

I remember when, during the governance of the architect Hasbullah Al-Kafrawi(1), I suggested to him the re-digging of these rivers, such that all of them would meet at the Barrages so that we could increase the area of shores for ourselves. I suggested that, in order to solve the housing crisis, instead of building on arable land, we could build residences and government buildings over the branches of the waterways and canals because they occupy a considerably large area. Most of these waterways have paths on the right and left sides and we could build reinforced pillars upon the canals and build all the government institutions on them instead of cramming them together in the capital. He promised me that he would study these suggestions, but nothing ever came of it.

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(1) He was from the town of Kafr Sulaiman, in the governorate of Kafr Sa`d in the governorate of Damietta. He gained a degree in civil engineering from the University of Alexandria in the year 1950 CE. He was a former Minister of Housing for 16 years from 1977 to 1993. He was appointed the governor of Damietta in 1976, the Urban Communities Authority in 1980, and the syndic of the Engineering Syndicate in 1991.

Regarding the verse: '...all these running waters flow at my feet...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 51), the exegetes say that these rivers literally ran right under his palaces. They said that he even made a stream flow underneath the bed in which he slept.(1)

أَمۡ أَنَا۠ خَيۡرٞ مِّنۡ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى هُوَ مَهِينٞ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ ﴿٥٢﴾

Am I not better than this contemptible wretch
who can scarcely express himself? [52]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 52)

Pharaoh compares himself to Musa (Moses) trying to establish his superiority saying, 'Am I not better than this one' meaning Musa (Moses); Pharaoh referred to Musa (Moses) using the demonstrative 'this' out of contempt. *Mahin* (contemptible) means, weak and disdained because Musa (Moses) was neither able to protect himself, nor did he have an army to defend him.

'...who can scarcely express himself?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 52) It means that he cannot communicate and express himself, and speak eloquently or fluently because he had lisp. Thus, he asked his Lord to assist him in this matter by sending his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon him* with him. 'And my brother Harun (Aaron) is more fluent than me in tongue, so send him with me as support(2), verifying me. Indeed, I fear that they will deny me.' (*al-Qasas:* 34)

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(1) Al-Alusi mentioned it in *Ruh Al-Ma`ani*. He said, 'More than one has said that the rivers branched off from the Nile and flowed beneath his palace where he could watch them. It is also said that he had a huge raised bed under which streams branching off from the Nile flowed.

(2) *Ar-Rid`* means assistant or supporter [*Al-Qamus Al-Qawim,* 1/260]. The word *`arda`adu`* means that he helped him. *Tarada` `al-qawm* means that the people helped each other,=

It is related that the cause of this lisp was that when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was young, he made a bold remark against Pharaoh, which resulted in Pharaoh doubting and fearing Musa (Moses). His people said to him that Musa (Moses) was only a child who does not realise what he was saying. In order to prove their opinion, they brought Musa (Moses) a date and an ember, but he took the ember which burnt his tongue and resulted in this lisp.(1)

فَلَوْلَآ أُلْقِىَ عَلَيْهِ أَسْوِرَةٌ مِّن ذَهَبٍ أَوْ جَآءَ مَعَهُ
ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ مُقْتَرِنِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

Why has he not been given any gold bracelets?
Why have no angels come to accompany him? [53]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 53)

Pharaoh's materialistic conception of a messenger is that he comes clad in golden bracelets to prove his strength, power, and greatness, or that he should come accompanied by angels to affirm him and attest to his truthfulness.

فَٱسْتَخَفَّ قَوْمَهُۥ فَأَطَاعُوهُ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ قَوْمًا فَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

In this way he moved his people to accept and
they obeyed him – they were perverse people [54]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 54)

Al-Istikhfaf refers to haste, frivolity, and lack of reflection in one's affairs. Pharaoh moved his people to accept his speech and his people obeyed him and followed his misguidance. No one agrees to corruption except the one who benefits from it. In addition, it could mean that he found the people predisposed to frivolity, imprudence and a general lack of deliberation concerning their affairs, so he lied to them.

= and '*fulan rid` li fulan*' means that so-and-so assists so-and-so and supports him [*Lisan Al-`Arab* under *rada'*].

(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned it in his Tafsir of Allah's saying: 'And my brother Harun (Aaron) is more fluent than me in tongue...' (Saba': 52). Ibn Al-Mundhir related on the authority of Ibn `Abbas regarding Allah's saying: '...who can scarcely express himself?' (az-Zukhruf: 52), that Musa (Moses) had a lisp. Ash-Shawkani also mentioned it in Fath Al-Qadir and As-Suyuti in Ad-Dur Al-Manthur.*

فَلَمَّآ ءَاسَفُونَا ٱنتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ فَأَغْرَقْنَٰهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾
فَجَعَلْنَٰهُمْ سَلَفًا وَمَثَلًا لِّلْءَاخِرِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

When they provoked Us, We punished and drowned them all [55] We made them a lesson and an example for later people [56] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 55 - 56)

The word *asafuna* means 'provokes us', the result of which was: '...We punished...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 55); this punishment was inflicted by drowning them all. Thus, Allah made them an example and lesson for later people. *'`Ibra lil`akhirin'*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means an example for other disbelievers.

وَلَمَّا ضُرِبَ ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ مَثَلًا إِذَا قَوْمُكَ مِنْهُ يَصِدُّونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

When the son of Mary is cited as an example, your people [Prophet] laugh and jeer [57] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 57)

The verb in this verse, *duriba* (is cited as an example), is in the passive voice. Who cites the son of Maryam (Mary) as an example? It was Allah who cites the son of Maryam (Mary) as an example because he was born of with no father. He was formed by Allah blowing His Spirit into Maryam (Mary). Thus, the Christians attributed him to Allah, Who is too Exalted to have sons. Allah refuted them by saying that the creation of `Isa (Jesus) was like that of Adam *peace be upon them*.

'Indeed, the example of `Isa (Jesus) to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was.' (*Al-'Imran:* 59) `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* had no father, but Adam had neither father nor mother, and the one who can do a difficult action can of course make a less difficult one. Thus, they should be tempted by it.

After the revelation of Allah's saying: 'Indeed, you [disbelievers] and what you worship other than Allah are the firewood of hell. You will be coming to [enter] it.' (*al-Anbiya':* 98) It has become clear that anyone who worships others beside Allah has strayed, will be along with his god: '...the firewood of Hell...' (*al-Anbiya':* 98) that kindles it.

A man named `Abdullah ibn Az-Zab`ary came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before embracing Islam and said, ‘O Muhammad, are these verses just for us or for all created beings?’ He replied, ‘For all created beings.’ `Abdullah said, ‘How can this be when `Isa (Jesus), `Uzayr (Ezra) and the angels were worshipped besides Allah? Will they and their worshippers be admitted into the Fire?’(1) Then, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not reply to him until the revelation of Allah’s saying: ‘Indeed, those for whom the best [reward] has preceded from Us - they are from it far removed.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 101)

When `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was informed with this incident, he said that the Arabic word *ma* (that) is used in Arabic to refer to inanimate beings and animals, so it does not include `Isa (Jesus), `Uzayr (Ezra) or the angels. This reveals `Ali’s wisdom, as he was brought up and educated by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since he was young. He gained knowledge from the light of prophet hood. Thus, Prophet Muhammad said, ‘I am the city of knowledge whose gate is `Ali.’(2)

`Ali was one of the great jurists who derived legal rulings with deep insight, even in the company of the greatest Companions. Although a verse in the Quran was revealed corresponding to `Umar ibn Al-Khattab’s opinion, `Umar was puzzled concerning a certain matter which was settled by `Ali. When the issue of the woman who bore a child after only six months of pregnancy was brought to `Umar, he judged that the *had* (ordained punishment for violating Allah's Law) should be enforced, because it is well known that the term of pregnancy is nine months. However, `Ali said, 'O Commander of the Believers, there is no sin on her as Allah says: '...and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months...' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) and: 'Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period]...' (*al-Baqara:* 233). It is possible that the period of pregnancy could be six months.(1)

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(1) *Ar-Razi mentioned in his exegesis, Mafatih Al-Ghayb, when explaining the chapter of Al-Anbiya`, `Abdullah ibn Az-Zab`ari approached and saw the polytheists of Quraysh whispering to each other, so he asked them, ‘What are you discussing?’ Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira informed him of the Messenger of Allah’s saying, ‘... Indeed, you [disbelievers] and what you worship other than Allah are the firewood of Hell...’ (al-Anbiya’: 98). At this `Abdullah said, ‘Truly, if I come across him I would confront him, call him!’ Thus, Ibn Az-Za`bari said to Prophet Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him *‘Did you say this?’ Prophet Muhammad replied, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘By the Lord of the Ka`ba, I defy you. Do the Jews not worship `Uzair (Ezra), the Christians worship `Isa (Jesus) and Banu Malih worship the angels?’ At this point, there are two different narrations, one of which said that Messenger of Muhammad kept silent and did not answer, so the people laughed. In the other narration, it is said that he replied saying, ‘Rather they worship the devils who told them to do that.’*

(2) *It is related by Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak (4612), At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (10989), and At-Tabari in Tahdhib Al-Athar (1415). Al-Hakim said that the Hadith had an authentic chain of narrators, but was not related by Al-Bukhari or Muslim. The rest of the Hadith is ‘...so whoever desires the city let him come through the gate.’ In another narration, it is said, ‘...so whoever desires knowledge then let him approach it by its gate.’*

Another time he visited `Umar and found he had a whip with him with which he was planning to beat Hudhayfa. Therefore, he said to him, 'Why do I see you angry, O Commander of the Believers? He said, 'I asked Hudhayfa how he was this morning and he said, 'I find myself loving trial, hating the truth, praying without ablution and I have here on earth what Allah does not have above Heaven!' Thus, `Ali replied, 'By Allah, he told the truth, O Commander of the Believers.' `Umar said, 'Would you also say the same, Abu Al-Hasan?' He replied, 'as for trial, Allah says, 'Your wealth and your children are but a trial...' (*al-Anfal:* 28), the truth that he hates is death. He sends blessings and prayers upon Prophet Muhammad without ablution, and he has here on earth a wife and child, but Allah has neither a wife nor a child.' Then, `Umar said, 'It is evil to be in a place where Abu Al-Hasan is not present.'(2)

Among the subtleties related about `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* is that once he was passing by a group who were differing over which of Allah's created beings is the most powerful, so they asked him, 'Which of the forces of Allah is the strongest, Abu Al-Hasan?' It seems that he had some prior knowledge of the issue and that he would be asked this question, so he indicated the number ten before counting, and said, 'The towering mountains, but iron can cut the mountains, and fire can melt iron, yet water can put out fire. Nevertheless, the clouds can carry water and the wind drives the clouds, but the son of Adam can beat the wind, wearing heavy clothes and going about his business. Still, the son of Adam sometimes drinks intoxicants, which can be overcome by sleep, and anxiety can vanquish sleep. Thus, the most powerful of Allah's forces is anxiety.'

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(1) *Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir (4/157), 'The shortest period of pregnancy is six months and the inference of this ruling is correct and was accepted by `Uthman and others.'*

(2) *It is related by Ismail Haqqi in his exegesis. He said, 'It was narrated that a man came to `Umar and said, 'Truly I love trial, hate the truth, bear witness to what I have not seen.' Consequently, `Umar ordered to arrest him. The matter reached `Ali, who asked about the reason for arresting him. `Umar ibn Al-Khattab replied, 'Had it not been for `Ali, `Umar would have been destroyed.'*

On many occasions, some of our brothers asked us to narrate to them the speech that `Ali gave when Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, passed away. Whenever I finished the story, they would ask me to repeat it again.

When Fatimah passed away, she was buried next to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Companions. After the burial was over, some people said to `Ali, 'O `Ali, if we permit all of Messenger Muhammad's children to be buried next to him, the mosque will be too crowded for people.' He replied, 'Leave her in this place this day and I will move her at night so as to avoid trouble.' When night came, he moved her.

Among the things that `Ali said while he was burying Fatima by her father's side was, 'Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allah, from me and your daughter who now comes down by your side, so quick to join you. How little is my patience for the loss of your beloved, and my strength is weakened; however, I find some relief in consoling myself over this affliction. I lay you down in the niche of your grave, O Messenger of Allah, and my heart was overwhelmed. My nights are sleepless and my sorrow is endless, until Allah should choose to take me to the residence wherein you abide. Your daughter will inform you as to the state of your nation, so question her and seek news of the situation, even though your passing away was recent and your remembrance has not been abandoned.'

When he decided to depart, he said, 'Peace be upon you both, peace from the one who bids farewell, not out of weariness nor for rest, as if I turn away it is not out of boredom; if I stay standing here, it is not out of thinking bad of what Allah has promised the patient among His slaves.

The word *yasudun*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means that they raise their voices in laughter and mockery at Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

وَقَالُوٓاْ ءَأَٰلِهَتُنَا خَيۡرٌ أَمۡ هُوَۚ مَا ضَرَبُوهُ لَكَ إِلَّا جَدَلَۢاۚ بَلۡ هُمۡ قَوۡمٌ خَصِمُونَ ٥٨

Saying, 'Are our gods better or him?'– they cite him
only to challenge you: they are a contentious people [58]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 58)

The purpose of their talk about `Isa (Jesus), `Uzair (Ezra) and the angels, and their questions about whether they would go to hell with their worshippers, was nothing but dispraised argumentation. This is because they sought to justify their falsehood, and so this type of argumentation is forbidden. As for desirable argumentation, as prescribed by the Lawgiver, it is constructive argument that leads to the truth. Thus, Allah says about them, '...they are a contentious people.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 58) The word *khasim* refers to extreme antagonism and false argumentation, quarrel and obstinacy. We say, '*khasamany fulan fakhasamtuh*' meaning 'So-and-so was antagonistic towards me, so I sought to overcome him'.

إِنۡ هُوَ إِلَّا عَبۡدٌ أَنۡعَمۡنَا عَلَيۡهِ وَجَعَلۡنَٰهُ مَثَلٗا لِّبَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ ٥٩

But he is only a servant We favoured and made
an example for the Children of Israel [59]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 59)

'But he is only...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 59) refers to `Isa (Jesus) as a slave of Allah just like the rest of the created beings and not a god as they claimed. '...We bestowed favour, and We made him an example for the Children of Israel.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 59)

The word *mathala* means an example or an amazing wonder that will remain until the end of time. Was it not amazing that `Isa (Jesus) spoke while still in the cradle? For when his mother was asked about him, she did not want to speak because she knew her speech would not repel the people's accusations, so she pointed towards him and then they were surprised, '...How can we speak to one who is in the cradle a child?' (*Maryam:* 29) Then, `Isa (Jesus) spoke when he was still a baby, '...indeed, I am the servant of Allah...' (*Maryam:* 30). Thus, his very first words were to affirm that he is a slave of Allah, a matter that some Christians hide because it contradicts their beliefs about `Isa (Jesus). It is also strange that he said after that: '...He gave me the Scripture and made me a prophet' (*Maryam:* 30) using the past tense, even though he was still in the cradle. How did he say that even though Allah sent him as a prophet and revealed to him the Book after he grew up, reached the age of legal accountability, and was ready to convey Allah's Message? Whatever Allah wants will inevitably happen, and Allah informed him of these things while he was still a baby.

The word, '...servant...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 59) involves receiving Allah's Grace so long as one is sincere in his worship of Allah. This level of sincerity is what can raise the righteous slave (Al-Khidr) up to the point where even Musa (Moses) follows him to learn from him. Allah says about him: 'And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom we had given mercy from us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge.' (*al-Kahf:* 65)

In the chapter of *al-Isra`*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Exalted is He who took His Servant by night...' (*al-Isra':* 1). Thus, slavery entails receiving grace from Allah: and the grace of the Message and what lies beyond it. In this verse slavery also entailed receiving grace from Allah: '...We favoured...' him (*az-Zukhruf:* 59). Why did Allah favour him? Allah favoured him by electing him for conveying His Message, and by creating him in an unparalleled manner in which no one of the created being were created. Thus, Allah says: '...And We made the son of Maryam (Mary) and his mother a sign...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 50). It means a wondrous miracle showing Allah's Omnipotence.

In the verse under consideration, Allah says: '...and made an example for the Children of Israel.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 59) because they are a materialistic people who did not believe in matters of the Unseen. They always sought tangible things which they can experience with their senses. Did they not say to Musa (Moses): '...Show us Allah manifestly' (*an-Nisa':* 153), although Allah cannot be seen, 'Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted....' (*al-An'am:* 103). When Allah sent down manna and quails upon them, which are of the best types of food, they said: 'O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So, call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic(1), and its lentils and its onions. [Moses] said, “Would you exchange what is better for what is less?”’ (*al-Baqara:* 61)

وَلَوْ نَشَآءُ لَجَعَلْنَا مِنكُم مَّلَٰٓئِكَةً فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ يَخْلُفُونَ (٦٠)

If it had been Our will, We could have made you
angels, succeeding one another on earth [60]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 60)

Had Allah willed, He could have replaced the children of Israel with angels to inhabit the earth instead of them. This would only take place with the children of Israel’s destruction and annihilation. This is not difficult for Allah. This verse includes a proof of Allah’s Omnipotence, and that He does what He wills.

وَإِنَّهُۥ لَعِلْمٌ لِّلسَّاعَةِ فَلَا تَمْتَرُنَّ بِهَا وَٱتَّبِعُونِ ۚ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ (٦١)

This [Quran] gives knowledge of the Hour: do not
doubt it. Follow Me for this is the right path [61]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 61)

‘This…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 61), refers to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*, ‘...is a sign of the Hour...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 61). This means that the re-emergence of `Isa (Jesus) indicates the approach of the Hour. ‘...do not doubt it...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 61). This means that people should not doubt it or debate concerning its occurrence, as it is a true fact without doubt. ‘...Follow me...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 61) means ‘accept what I am saying and follow my footsteps, as I am role model for you regarding worship and aspects of life. ‘...for this...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 61), i.e. what I have brought to you ‘...is the right path.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 61)

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(1) Regarding the word *fum*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, there are three sayings:
That it is wheat, which is the opinion held by Ibn `Abbas and As-Suddi who related it from his sheikhs.
That it is garlic, which is the opinion held by `Abdullah and Ubayy, and was chosen by Al-Farra.’
That it is grains, which is the opinion mentioned by Ibn Qutayba and Az-Zajjaj. [from *Zad Al-Masir* by Ibn Al-Jawzy]

Allah *Glorified is He* has set clear signs which indicate the approach of the Hour because it lies in the Unseen and none but Allah can know it. All we know about the Hour are the signs that indicate its coming.

Regarding Prophet `Isa (Jesus), we believe that he is alive in the heavens, and that he will come back down to earth. In the Hadith pertaining to the Prophet's Night Journey, it is mentioned that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* prayed behind Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Even though he is alive in the heavens, he will return to earth, die and be buried. To those who object to this issue and ask how `Isa (Jesus) is alive in the heavens, we say that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was taken on the Night Journey and ascended the heavens where he stayed for a period of time, be it short or long. Therefore, as for `Isa (Jesus), the only difference is the period of time, as the one who can stay in the heavens for one or two hours can stay there longer.

وَلَا يَصُدَّنَّكُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

Do not let Satan hinder you, for he is your sworn enemy [62] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 62)

It means that people should not let Satan prevent them from the Truth and guidance because: 'he is your sworn enemy.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 62) This indicates that his enmity is plain, old and unwavering since the time of Adam *peace be upon him*. Thus, they should not give him any opportunity to prevent them from the Truth or to handle dubious affairs because he seeks disagreement and tries to cause them to fall into misguidance. Allah states what Satan says: '...I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) He seeks to spoil their acts of worship.

Allah has instructed us to defend ourselves against him: 'And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is Hearing and Knowing.' (*al-A'raf:* 200) Allah's Name will repel Satan's whispers and insinuations because Satan's insinuations cannot stand mentioning Allah's Name.

As we said previously, if a thief was prowling around your house and heard you speak, he would retreat and leave the place even if you were unaware of his presence when you spoke. Accordingly, when you feel Satan's insinuations encroaching upon you, you have only to remember Allah and seek refuge with Him from Satan's insinuations. You should say, 'I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Satan' out loud. Satan has admitted that he has no power over those who believe in Allah and are sincere to Him: '[Satan] said, "By Your Might, I will surely mislead them all, except, among them, Your chosen servants. (*Sad:* 82-83)

وَلَمَّا جَآءَ عِيسَىٰ بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ قَالَ قَدۡ جِئۡتُكُم بِٱلۡحِكۡمَةِ وَلِأُبَيِّنَ لَكُم
بَعۡضَ ٱلَّذِى تَخۡتَلِفُونَ فِيهِۖ فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ٦٣

When Jesus came with clear signs he said, 'I have brought you wisdom; I have come to clear up some of your differences for you. Be mindful of God and obey me [63] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 63)

The word *al-bayyinat* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to signs and miracles. '...he said, "I have brought you wisdom..."' (*az-Zukhruf:* 63). 'Wisdom' here refers to the Gospel and its rulings. '...I have come to clear up some of your differences for you...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 63). 'Differences' refers to that which they differed about before the coming of `Isa (Jesus) and after his transfer. They said about him that he is, 'the Son of Allah' and 'the third of three', and the Jews had more than this to say.

Allah says that He gave `Isa (Jesus) wisdom which refers to the Gospel. The word 'wisdom' means putting everything in its correct place. `Isa (Jesus) came after Judaism which was given completely to materialism, as I formed the starting point for everything. We mentioned previously that materialism led them to ask their messenger to see Allah, '...they said, "Show us Allah manifestly"...' (*an-Nisa':* 153). Accordingly, they have no room for matters of the unseen in their lives. Even regarding their food and drink, when Allah sent down the manna and quails upon them, they were not content with them, as they wanted food that they could prepare. Thus, Allah said to them: '...Enter a city(1) so you will have what you ask for...' (*al-Baqara:* 61).

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(1) Regarding '...Enter a city so you will have what you ask for...' (*al-Baqara:* 61), with nunnation on the word *Misr,* there are two sayings: =

In addition, we do not find the Last Day mentioned either in the Torah or in the Talmud, even though belief in the Last Day is a pillar of true faith. However, they do not believe in it because of their materialism. Thus, the Message that `Isa (Jesus) brought was overwhelmingly spiritual to compensate for the lack of spirituality in Judaism and to reset the balance in creation. In addition, we do not find social regulations in the Gospels. If they needed something like this, they had to take it from the Torah, despite the adversity that existed between the Christians and the Jews. Then, the matter ended up by combining the Torah with the Gospel into one book. Once `Isa (Jesus) was asked about inheritance and he replied, ‘I was not sent to leave an inheritance.’

When materialism prevailed, Allah repelled it with spirituality restoring the balance in life, as spirituality keeps materialism moving on. Thus, `Isa (Jesus) was sent with a Message to nurture religious emotions and raise the level of spirituality.

Life needs both materialism and spirituality; material undertakings deal with nature and the universe. There are things in the universe which give out without necessity to interact with them, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, water, and air. One merely receives their benefits. There are other things that will give you nothing unless you interact with them; the earth, for example, must be ploughed, sowed, and cultivated in order for it to give you crops.

As the Jews went to extremes in materialism, the Christians went to extremes in spirituality. Prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said, when he saw some people stoning a woman,(1) ‘Let he who is without sin stone her’. He also said (2), ‘If someone slaps you on the right cheek offer him your left cheek’. This is from the monasticism that Allah did not enjoin on them;

= It is the name of an unknown city. This opinion was held by Ibn Mas`ud and Ibn `Abbas, as they viewed that the children of Israel were ordered to go to a city because what they asked for was found in a city.
It is the country named *Misr* (Egypt). This opinion was held by Abu Al-`Aliyah and Ad-Dahhak. [Ibn Al-Jawzi, *Zad Al-Masir*]

(1) This is mentioned in the Gospel of John [7: 8]. The full text is, ‘Let he who is without sin throw the first stone.’

(2) This is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, 55: 39. The full text is, ‘Do not repel evil with evil, rather if someone slaps you on the right cheek, then offer him the other.’

rather, they themselves undertook it voluntarily as a means to get closer to Allah. The problem with this was that they did not give it its due. Allah says: ‘Then We sent following their footsteps Our messengers and followed [them] with `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), and gave him the Gospel. And We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy and monasticism, which they innovated; We did not prescribe it for them except [that they did so] seeking the approval of Allah. But they did not observe it with due observance. So, We gave the ones who believed among them their reward, but many of them are defiantly disobedient.’ (*al-Hadid:* 27) Thus, the reason for objection here is not their monasticism itself, but the fact that they did not give it its due observance. While Judaism went to extremes in materialism, Christianity was purely spirituality, with no rules for organizing the society. There was a necessity to reconcile the two extremes, and society needed renewal of religion and a new Message to bring the spiritual and material sides together, which is the message of Islam.

Reflect on the way the Quran presents an example for Prophet Muhammad and his nation once in the Torah and in the Gospel: ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration. That is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is as a plant which produces its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers - so that Allah may enrage by them the disbelievers...’ (*al-Fath:* 29).

This is how the Islamic *Ummah* joined between material and spirit. The Muslim is not excessively severe or merciful, rather, his disposition changes according to the circumstances. With whom is he severe and whom does he treat mercifully?

Reflect upon the precision of the Quranic expression when it gives an example of the Islamic nation in the Torah and the Gospel. It presents the spiritual side of Islam to the Jews, as they are materialistic people. ‘...You see them bowing and prostrating [in prayer], seeking bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure. Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration...’ (*al-Fath:* 29).

The Quran portrays the materialistic side of Islam in the Gospel: '...as a plant which produces its offshoots and strengthens them so they grow firm and stand upon their stalks, delighting the sowers - so that Allah may enrage by them the disbelievers...' (*al-Fath:* 29).

Thus, as Islam combines materialism with spirituality, it becomes the religion fit for leading life. Spirituality without materialism is unsustainable, as the worshipper cannot persevere in worshipping without having something to eat and wear. How will he get, for example, a loaf of bread? How can he get a garment to wear? The bread can be obtained when a farmer sows the seeds of wheat and harvests it, then the miller grinds them then the flour is baked in the bakery. Thus, a loaf of bread is produced with the help of many workers. The garment also needs work and material movement.

Thus, Allah has made the Quran a guardian over the previous books: '...a guardian over it...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). Allah also says: 'It is truly exalted in the Source of Scripture kept with Us and full of wisdom.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 4) This means that it is elevated above all the other Heavenly Books.

Allah's saying: '...I have come to clear up some of your differences for you...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 63), refers to certain things that were forbidden to the Jews, but which Allah made permissible for them, such as camels. Allah says, '…to make lawful for you some of what was forbidden to you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 50). Allah also says, 'And to those who are Jews We prohibited every animal of uncloven hoof; and of the cattle and the sheep We prohibited to them their fat, except what adheres to their backs or the entrails or what is joined with bone...' (*al-An'am:* 146).

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ رَبِّى وَرَبُّكُمۡ فَٱعۡبُدُوهُۚ هَٰذَا صِرَٰطٞ مُّسۡتَقِيمٞ ﴿٦٤﴾

God is my Lord and your Lord. Serve Him: this is the straight path [64] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 64)

Notice in this verse the use of the pronoun *huwa* (He) which emphasises that Allah alone is my Lord and yours. '...So worship Him...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 64) because what he was calling them to is the Truth. '...this is the straight path.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 64) with no crookedness therein.

We said previously that the straight path is the direct path that will lead you to your destination via the shortest distance with the least amount of trouble. The path to Allah takes you from religious duties enjoined by Allah to Allah's reward, as the final return is to Him alone.

فَٱخۡتَلَفَ ٱلۡأَحۡزَابُ مِنۢ بَيۡنِهِمۡۖ فَوَيۡلٞ لِّلَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُواْ مِنۡ عَذَابِ يَوۡمٍ أَلِيمٍ ٦٥

Yet still the different factions among them
disagreed – woe to the evildoers: they will
suffer the torment of a grievous day! [65]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 65)

The word *al-ahzab* (factions) which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse is the plural of *hizb* which refers to a group of people who share a common thought or belief. That these factions differed with each other is an indication that they were in error and were of satanic inspiration, as Allah's faction has one creed which derived from the Book of Allah. '...those are the party of Allah. Unquestionably, the party of Allah - they are the successful.' (*al-Mujadala:* 22)

'...woe to the evildoers: they will suffer the torment of a grievous day.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 65) The word *wayl* (woe) refers to ruin, inflicted on them by Allah. We said that an action is measured by the strength of its doer, so what about punishment inflicted by Allah?

Scholars say that *wayl* is the name of a valley in hell for: '...the evildoers...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 65). This means that they oppressed themselves by following their vain desires and indulging in acts of disobedience. Perhaps they oppressed other people as well.

'...they will suffer the torment of a grievous day.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 65) If the Day on which the torment will happen is a grievous day, then what about the torment itself? The punishment is permanent, endless, massive, and grievous. This torment is also described as humiliating for the one whom Allah wants to humiliate and disgrace. Thus, every sinner has a type of torments that suits him.

هَلْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا ٱلسَّاعَةَ أَن تَأْتِيَهُم بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

What are they waiting for but the Hour, which will come upon them suddenly and take them unawares? [66] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 66)

They are only waiting for the Hour, i.e. the Day of Judgement '...which will come upon them suddenly and take them unawares' (*az-Zukhruf:* 66). If one knows that it will come suddenly, he must prepare himself for it '...None will reveal its time except Him...' (*al-A'raf:* 187). We have already said that the obscurity of the time of the Day of Judgement and death entails elucidation and clarity. As their time is unknown, this gives a strong warning so that one must be prepared and waiting for it at any time. In addition, the obscurity of the cause or place of death serves the same objective. '…no one knows in which land he shall die...' (*Luqman:* 34). If there is no other cause of death, then death itself is the cause.

ٱلْأَخِلَّآءُ يَوْمَئِذٍۭ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ إِلَّا ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

On that Day, friends will become each other's enemies. Not so the righteous [67] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 67)

This is a reference to the Day of Judgement when the criterion of brotherhood and friendship will be turned upside down. The word *akhilla`* is the plural of *khalil* which refers to the friend whom you love so much to the extent that you have become one with his flesh and blood, as the poet(1) said:

And when we met yearning almost reached its limit,
Two friends melting together in ardour and reproof,
As though a friend melted and mixed with his friend,
During the embrace and disappeared (2)

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(1) He was Ismail Sabri Basha, one of the best poets of the modern era. He was distinguished by his beautiful poems and elegant style. He was born in 1854 CE and studied law in France. He used to write his poetry in the margins of books and magazines. He passed away in Cairo in 1923 CE at the age of 69. [*Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya*]

(2) These two lines of poetry were written by Ismail Sabri from a poem in the *Tawil* metre. In *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya,* there is a slight difference in the wording used; it contains,=

Friendship can be either in goodness or in evil. Friendship in goodness is that which helps you follow Allah's path, and the true friend is the one who helps you if you follow the upright path and advises you if you do not follow the upright path. Allah describes the believers as follows: 'Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 3) The true friends who do what is mentioned in this verse are referred to in Prophet Muhammad's saying, 'Seven are (the persons) whom Allah will give shade of His Thrown on the Day when there would be no shade other than His Throne's shade: Amongst them are two persons who love and meet each other and depart from each other for the sake of Allah.'(1) This is true and sincere friendship, which continues from the worldly life world to the Day of Judgement.

As for those who accompany each other in doing evil acts and breaching what Allah has made inviolable, their companionship in the Hereafter will turn to enmity and hatred, as each one will blame the other. The evil they used to do in the worldly life will destroy them in the Hereafter, and the acts of disobedience that combined them in the worldly life will cast them into everlasting torment. Each one will see the other as an enemy because he did not warn him or prevent him from evil. Therefore, Islam attaches importance to choosing good companions and friends and has taught us how to choose righteous companions.

The Hour of Recompense will disclose the spurious relationships; nothing will remain but the bonds of goodness which bind one a person to his fellow. The Gracious Quran has described in more than one verse what will happen between this type of friends in the worldly life who will turn into enemies in the Hereafter. Among these verses is Allah's saying, 'And those who disbelieved will [then] say, "Our Lord, show us those who misled us of the jinn and men [so] we may put them under our feet that they will be among the lowest.' (*Fussilat:* 29)

= '*two sad ones* overflowed' instead of '*Two friends melting together*', and '*As though a melted and mixed with his beloved'* instead of *'As though a friend melted and mixed with his friend*.

(1) *It is related by Muslim in his Sahih (1031) on the authority of Abu Hurayra. The first of the seven is a just leader. It is also related by Malik in his Muwatta` (1501) and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (620, 1334, 6308).*

Allah says:

يَٰعِبَادِ لَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ وَلَآ أَنتُمۡ تَحۡزَنُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

‘My servants, there is no fear for you today, nor shall you grieve’[68] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 68)

The plural of the word *`abd* (slave/servant) can be either *`abid* or *`ibad*, and each of them has its own meaning; the word *`abid* includes all types of people: the believer, the disbeliever, the obedient and the disobedient. They are all *`abeed (slaves)* because they are all subject to Allah in matters which they cannot escape, such as sickness, death, etc. Thus, people are all slaves in this sense.

However, the word *`ibad* refers to the elect who have worshipped Allah willingly sincerely, and have abandoned their desires for of the sake of doing what pleases their Lord, so they deserve this status. In Allah’s saying: ‘...My servants...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 68), He has attributed His slaves to Himself. The word *`ibad* does not come with a meaning other than the above except in one verse about the Day of Judgement where Allah says, ‘...did you mislead My servants...’ (*al-Furqan:* 17)? Allah has named them *`ibad (servants)* even though they are astray. The scholars said that this is because the subject in this verse is the Day of Judgement when no one has a choice whether to believe or disbelieve, and all people are obedient.

Allah honours us by addressing us with: ‘...My servants...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 68) because He ascribes us to Himself; as a poet (1) said:

Of the things that raised me in honour and dignity,

And caused me to almost set foot upon the stars,

My inclusion in Your saying, ‘O My slaves’,

And that you made Ahmad a Prophet for me.(2)

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(1) He is Muhammad Al-Hilali Al-Hamawi, one of the poets of the modern era, and the author of *Al-Manzhumat Al-Hilaliyya*. He was born in 1820 CE and passed away in 1894 CE at the age of 75. He wrote 308 poems with a total of 6059 lines of poetry [*Al-Mawsu’a Ash-Shi’riyya*].

(2) These two lines of poetry are from a poem in the *Wafir* metre which has six lines [*Al-Mawsu’a Ash-Shi’riyya*].

Allah says, '…there is no fear for you today, nor shall you grieve.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 68) How could there be any fear when we are Allah's slaves? How could fear afflict us when we cling to Allah? The believers say that no anguish will afflict them because Allah manages all affairs. His saying: '…there is no fear for you today, nor shall you grieve' (*az-Zukhruf:* 68) means that they shall not grieve over the bounties they did not receive in the worldly life because will obtain better bounties that will last more than the bounties of the worldly life.

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَكَانُواْ مُسۡلِمِينَ ٦٩

Those who believed in Our revelations and devoted
themselves to Us [69] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 69)

This verse shows us the difference between *iman* (faith) and *Islam* (devotion), the former is relevant to the heart whereas the later refers to putting Allah's religious instructions and commands into practice. Thus, we see that the hypocrites may be the first people to come to perform prayer even though faith does not settle in their hearts. Allah says, 'The Bedouins say, "We have believed." Say, "You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], "We have submitted..."' (*al-Hujurat:* 14). They used to pray in the front row to repel any accusations of hypocrisy.

It is amazing that hypocrisy manifested itself in Medina although it is the city of the *Ansar* (Helpers from Medina) and the place from which Islam spread, and did not manifest in Mecca, the stronghold of disbelief and idols and the city with the fiercest enmity towards Islam. After reflecting upon this phenomenon, we say that hypocrisy does not manifest itself except in front of a power that causes fear. In Medina, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* became a power to be feared and had supporters and an army. When he was in Mecca, he was in a position of weakness and was suffering persecution, so why would anyone dissemble to him?

Allah's saying: '...those who believed in Our revelations...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 69) means that their hearts were convinced with them. There are different degrees for conviction: '*`ilm al-yaqin*' (certainty of knowledge) when someone whom you trust informs you of something, '*`ayn al-yaqin*' (certainty of the eye) when you see something which causes you to be certain and ‘*haq al-yaqin*’ (true certainty) when you experience something with your own senses.

I remember when once I went to Indonesia, I saw bananas, one of which is half a metre long. I was astonished and decided to take some back with me to Egypt to show to my children. When I went back, I told them about these things I had seen in Indonesia. Actually, they too were surprised, as they know that I do not lie to them. This is an example of the certainty of knowledge. Then, I told them to open a certain bag. They opened it and found therein bananas just as I had described. This is the certainty of the eye. Finally, when they got them out, touched, and tasted them, they reached true certainty.

Does the one who believes with the certainty of knowledge carry out the instructions of his faith? The one who carries out these instructions is a true believer while the one who does not is a hypocrite because he does not act according to the instructions of his faith.

When the Bedouins heard this verse, they were filled with hope that they would attain faith in the future because they knew the meaning of the particle *lamma* (not yet), it negates the past and the present but not the future. Allah’s saying: ‘The Bedouins say, “We have believed.” Say, “You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], “We have submitted,” for faith has not yet entered your hearts’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14) means that faith will enter their hearts in the future.

ٱدۡخُلُواْ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ أَنتُمۡ وَأَزۡوَٰجُكُمۡ تُحۡبَرُونَ ٧٠

‘Enter Paradise, you and your spouses: you will be filled with joy’[70] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 70)

This is the reward of those who believed in and submitted to Allah. Allah will say to them on the Day of Judgement: ‘Enter Paradise, you and your spouses: you will be filled with joy!’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 70) Spouses are mentioned in this verse because with every pleasure a man gains, he becomes overwhelmed by the passions that accompany puberty, so he inclines towards gaining a spouse with whom he can share his joys and delights, and the same applies to women. The spouse then, be it a husband or a wife, is the first companion that is desired, and then the source of tranquillity, love and mercy. Tranquillity and love are well known between couples, but what about mercy? Mercy manifests between the spouses as they reach old age, when each of them is in need of compassion and kindness before all other feelings.

Allah says: '...you will be filled with joy.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 70) The word '*al-hubur'* refers to extreme happiness that overcomes someone when they experience such joy that nothing can spoil, as mentioned in Allah's saying: 'You will recognize in their faces the radiance of pleasure.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 24)

يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِم بِصِحَافٍ مِّن ذَهَبٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ ۖ وَفِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ
ٱلْأَنفُسُ وَتَلَذُّ ٱلْأَعْيُنُ ۖ وَأَنتُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

Dishes and goblets of gold will be passed around them with all that their souls desire and their eyes delight in. 'There you will remain [71] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 71)

The verse tackles the delights of paradise. The word *sihaf* is the plural of *safeeha* which means a large plate that a whole family can use while eating. The bigger plate is called *qas`a,* and *jafna`* is bigger than *qas`a.* In this regard, it is narrated on the authority of Ibn Jad`an(1) that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a large *jafna* (large dish) under which he shaded himself from the heat of the sun.(2)

It is also mentioned in the story of our Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* and the jinn that Allah placed in his service Allah says: 'They made for him what he willed of elevated chambers, statues, bowls like reservoirs, and stationary kettles....' (*Saba':* 13). In paradise, the dishes are made of gold.

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(1) *`Abdullah ibn Jad`an At-Tamimi Al-Qurashi, who was famous for his generosity in the pre-Islamic period, met Prophet Muhammad before his mission as a prophet. There are many narrations about him, some of which were related by Al-Asfahani and others. Al-Ya`qubi named him as one of the Arab leaders in the pre-Islamic period. [Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam 4/76]*

(2) Ismail Haqqi states in his exegesis, '`Abdullah ibn Jad`an, one of the leaders of Quraysh and `Aisha's cousin, had a *jafna* (large dish) under which he would seek shade. It was so big that a man riding a camel could take from it, and one time a child fell in it and drowned. He used to feed the poor every day from that dish.'

In '...and goblets of gold...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 71), the word *akwab* (goblets) is the plural of *kub* which refers to a drinking vessel that has no handle, However, the word *`abariq* is the plural of *`ibriq* which is a drinking vessel that is open at the top and has a handle, and the word *ka`s* refers to a *kub* (goblet) that it is full of a drink. There they have '...all that their soul's desire and their eyes delight in...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 71). This is a concise description for many things whose details would take a great deal of time to describe. What is served on these plates and in these cups is whatever the heart desires of food and drink, as far as taste is concerned.

In '...and their eyes delight in...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 71), the colour of these foods and drinks delight the eye; merely looking at them is an enjoyable experience, so what about their taste? When you host a guest who is dear to you, you ask him what he would like to eat in order to offer him what he wants and to fulfil his desire, not just to fill his belly. Notice also that Allah mentions dishes first then goblets because people usually eat first and then drinks. Thus, the verse includes order according to priority.

Allah mentions the pleasure of looking at food because one can find a pleasure in looking at food that sometimes surpasses that of eating. Thus, Allah says in another verse: '...Look at [each of] its fruit when it yields and [at] it is ripening...' (*al-An'am:* 99) combining the pleasure of the food and that of looking at it.

Allah says: '...There you will remain' (*az-Zukhruf:* 71) because it is an eternal dwelling with no death, and the blessings will never cease. This means that these blessings will never be disrupted, as Allah says, 'either limited [to season] or forbidden.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 33) This is a gift from Allah, so it will never cease.

وَتِلْكَ ٱلْجَنَّةُ ٱلَّتِىٓ أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

This is the Garden you are given as your own,
because of what you used to do [72]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 72)

His saying: '...which you have inherited...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 72) means that you have received it as an inheritance. Inheritance is only given after the death of its owner. For example, a person dies leaving his possessions and his legacy for his children and family. These people receive the departed person's possessions without holding a contract or paying a price, but from whom have they inherited?

Allah says in another verse: 'Those are the inheritors. Who will inherit *al-firdaus.* They will abide therein eternally.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 10-11) Scholars said that when Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* created everything, He knew the number of all things, and wrote all things in that ancient time. It is authentically related that the Pen dried after that.(1)

When Al-Ma`mun was asked, 'What does your Lord do when it is authentically related that the Pen has dried?' He said, 'There are affairs that He manifests and others He does not reveal, He elevates some peoples, and He lowers others.'(2)

Scholars also said, with regard to the aforementioned inheritance, that the believers will inherit disbelievers and will take their places in paradise. This is because Allah has reserved for each person a place in paradise and a place in the fire, so that even if all people were obedient believers, there would be sufficient space for them in paradise. If they all disbelieved, there would be enough places for them in Hell.

Thus, when the people of the hell will enter it, their places in paradise will be inherited by the believers, as Allah gives them these places out of His Generosity and Bounty. He will also admit them into paradise as a reward for their faith and good deeds in the worldly life.

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(1) *At-Tirmidhi relates in his Sunnan [3566] on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As who said that Messenger Muhammad said, 'Indeed Allah created His creation in darkness, then He cast His Light upon them, so whoever is touched by that light he is guided, and whoever is not, he goes astray. It is for this reason that I say that the pens have dried with Allah's Knowledge' At-Tirmidhi said that the Hadith is Hasan (good) and Ahmad related it in his Musnad (6356, 6559).*

(2) *Ash-Shawkani stated in Al-Fayd Al-Qadir (2/292) that `Abdullah ibn Tahir, the governor of Khorasan, asked Al-Ma`mun Al-Husayn ibn Fadl about Allah's saying: '...every day He is bringing about a matter.' (ar-Rahman: 29) He replied, 'They are affairs that He manifests and others He does not reveal.' Then, he stood up and kissed his head. Az-Zamakhshari also mentioned this in Al-Kashshaf and Al-Fawakih Ad-Dawani `Ala Risalit ibn Abu Zaid Al-Qayrawani. [1/156]*

Allah says, '...which you inherited because of what you used to do.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 72) Thus, good deeds are the main factor for entering paradise and inheriting the places that were reserved for the people will be admitted intoh.

We notice in the question of inheritance that possession of the inherited object is transferred from the one inheriting to the inheritor, and becomes lawful to him regardless of its source, whether lawful or unlawful. If a person earns money from unlawful means, he will bear alone its burden and sin on the Day of Judgement. When this wealth is transferred to the inheritor, it becomes lawful for him and there is no sin on him because the responsibility is not transferred. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* settled this issue when he said, 'The worst of you is he who dies with evil and yet leaves his family with plenty of wealth.'(1)

Thus, the inheritor should not inquire about the source of this wealth he has inherited. He is like the wife who need not ask her husband about the source of the money he spends on her. Similarly, the prepubescent child need not ask about the source of the money spent on him. When this child reaches puberty, and becomes able to earn his living, he is entitled to ask this question because he is able to earn a lawful living himself.

This is based on an analogy with the verse: 'and when the children among you reach puberty, let them ask permission [at all times] as those before them have done….' (*an-Nur:* 59) After the son reaches puberty, he is no longer entitled to receive expenditure from his father; yet if his father does, this will be out of his generosity.

The father's kindness in our society has had a negative effect upon our economy; the fathers' excessive affection towards their children has prolonged their period of childhood and extended it to the age of twenty-five or even thirty. All this time the child is dependent upon his father and expects his father to bring him a flat, furniture and all the necessities of marriage. Our youths have inclined towards relaxation and left the responsibilities to their fathers. This has led to the waste of much energy.

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(1) *It is related by Al-Qada`i in his Musnad (Ash-Shihab) [2/24] (304) from the Hadith narrated by Ibn `Umar with the following wording: 'Woe to he who leaves his family with plenty but goes on to his Lord with evil.' Al-`Ajaluni attributed it to Kashf Al-Khafa` by Ad-Daylamy [H 2977]. Al-Albany said that it is a fabricated Hadith in Silsilat Al-Ahadith Ad-Da`ifa Wal-Mawu`a (4/157).*

Thus, the West has overcome us in this field. At this age, their youths get engaged in life and work. Each one carries his own responsibility and becomes completely independent of his family. It is true that they have made mistakes in this field as have dealt with girls and boys on equal footings. Girls differ in this regard, as fathers take care of their daughters until they get married. Girls should only leave their fathers' houses to her husbands' houses.

لَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ كَثِيرَةٌ مِّنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

And there is abundant fruit in it for
you to eat [73] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 73)

Allah has mentioned the food and drink in paradise and that they are served on dishes and goblets which were well known to the Arabs. In this verse, Allah mentions that among the blessings of paradise are fruits with which the Arabs were not very familiar with and knew but few types. Therefore, fruits have been mentioned after the food and drink. Eating fruit after food and drink is evidence of indulgence and luxury. The word *`al-fakiha* (fruit) is derived from the word *`at-tafakkuh* (amusement), so it is not a necessity but rather a luxury.

Allah has provided us with the necessities of life: food, drink, and clothing and has given us things that make our lives easier. For example, Allah says, 'O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness - that is best...' (*al-A'raf:* 26). The clothes that cover people's private parts are a necessity but the adornment is for luxury. Allah draws our attention to that which is more important than material clothing: the spiritual clothing that protects one in the worldly life and the Hereafter, which is the clothing of righteousness.

Having given us a concise image of the people of paradise and the blessings it contains, Allah *Glorified is He* will show us its opposite so that the image becomes clearer, and this is one of the characteristics of the Quranic style. This is because when mentioning things that rejoice the soul, and then things that cause the soul to become gloomy, the difference between the two becomes clear. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure. And indeed, the wicked will be in Hellfire.’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14) In the chapter under discussion, Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ فِى عَذَابِ جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾
لَا يُفَتَّرُ عَنْهُمْ وَهُمْ فِيهِ مُبْلِسُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

But the evildoers will remain in Hell’s punishment [74]
from which there is no relief: they will remain in utter
despair [75] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 74-75)

Allah lays down three facts regarding the disbelievers: That they will stay in hell’s punishment eternally: ‘from which there is no relief...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 75) means that punishment will never be mitigated. ‘…they will remain in utter despair.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 75)

They will be sorrowful, without hope of salvation, despairing of any goodness and with no hope of getting out of hell. Thus, they will be encompassed by every type of pain, sorrow, despair, and hopelessness.

وَمَا ظَلَمْنَٰهُمْ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوا۟ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

We never wronged them; they were the ones who
did wrong [76] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 76)

The punishment they received is the recompense for their actions, not some form of oppression, as Allah has shown and clarified for them the paths of good and evil. ‘And have shown him the two paths?’ (*al-Balad*: 10) Allah also said, ‘and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness.’ (*ash-Shams*: 8) However, they oppressed themselves when they rushed to satisfy their vain and unlawful desires. Thus, Allah deprived them from the eternal and lawful pleasures of the afterlife. The worst oppression is the oppression of oneself, as it entails transgression and stupidity.

وَنَادَوْا۟ يَٰمَٰلِكُ لِيَقْضِ عَلَيْنَا رَبُّكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنَّكُم مَّٰكِثُونَ ٧٧
لَقَدْ جِئْنَٰكُم بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَكُمْ لِلْحَقِّ كَٰرِهُونَ ٧٨

They will cry, 'Malik, if only your Lord would finish us off' but he will answer, 'No! You are here to stay [77] We have brought you the Truth but most of you despise it [78]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 77-78)

In these verses, Allah speaks about the people of hell (we seek refuge with Allah), as they call upon Malik, the keeper of Hell, '...Malik, if only your Lord would finish us off...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 77). This means that they want to die so that they can rest from this endless punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment...' (*an-Nisa':* 56). Modern science has established that the skin is responsible for sensing. The proof is that if one is given an injection, pain is only experienced when the needle is penetrating the skin. The Quran has preceded all these sciences in clarifying this fact. Thus, the people of hell seek death so that they may be saved from this punishment.

We notice that the verb *liyaqdi*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, is in the form of an imperative, as it is preceded by '*lam al-amr*' (a letter indicating imperative case). Can Allah be ordered about, especially by the people of Hell? We say that if a request that comes from one of a higher rank to one of a lower, it is called an order; if it comes from one of the same rank then it is a request; if it comes from the lower to the higher it is a supplication. Thus, we do not order Allah; rather, we supplicate Him.

He will reply 'Indeed, you will remain,' (*az-Zukhruf:* 77) persisting in the fire, living eternally therein, for you have no excuse. 'We had certainly brought you the truth,' i.e., the true religion and the true way; 'but most of you despise it. (*az-Zukhruf:* 78) And this is the meaning of, 'And We did not wrong them, but it was they who were the wrongdoers.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 76)

After this, the subject of speech is directed towards the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Very often his Lord would address him to console him and lighten his burden, for he endured much obstinacy and affliction from his people. They hurt his body and soul when they incited the weak-minded among them to stone him until his feet bled.(1) They flung rubbish and camel entrails on his back while he was praying.(2) They hurt him spiritually when they called him a sorcerer, a soothsayer, a liar, a poet and a madman. The True Lord *Glorified is He* clarifies for him that he has come after an interlude in the line of messengers *peace be upon them* after the world has been corrupted and evil has spread far and wide. Behind this corruption are people who benefit from it and defend it; and it is only natural that they should oppose you and stand in the way of your mission, for they desire to maintain their positions and benefit from the vice.

The distaste of these people for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reached such a level that they planned his demise and an end to his mission. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and [remember, O Muhammad), when those who disbelieved plotted against you to restrain you or kill you or evict you [from Mecca] But they plan, and Allah plans. And Allah is the best of planners.' (*al-Anfal:* 30)

Here, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses His Messenger:(3)

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(1) *This was related by Ibn Al-Qayyim in his book Zad Al-Ma`ad [3/28]. He said, 'The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him went to Ta`if in the hope that they would aid and assist him against his people ... but they incited the weak-minded amongst them such that they stood in two rows, one on either side of him, and threw stones at him until his feet started bleeding.'*

(2) *This was related by the author of Subul Al-Huda Wa-Rashad in his book [2/436] and he attributed it to Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Bazzar and At-Tabarani on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him that he said, 'I saw the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him supplicate against Quraysh on more than one occasion. Once he was praying and there was a band of men from Quraysh seated nearby along with the innards of a camel that had been slaughtered the day before. Abu Jahl asked, "Who will take the entrails of this camel and put them on the shoulders of Muhammad when he prostrates?" So they sent the worst of them, `Uqba ibn Abu Mu`it, and he brought the innards and threw them onto his back, at which they fell over each other laughing. Meanwhile, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him did not so much as raise his head, but Fatima Allah be pleased with her came along, removed the mess from his back and prayed against whoever had done this.*

(3) *Al-Qurtubi mentions in his Tafsir [9/6166] in something he relates form Muqatil, 'This verse was revealed in response to their conspiracy against the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him in Dar An-Nadwa, when they decided to put into practice what=*

أَمۡ أَبۡرَمُوٓاْ أَمۡرٗا فَإِنَّا مُبۡرِمُونَ (٧٩)

Have these disbelievers thought up some scheme? We too have been scheming [79] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 79)

That is to say, they have conspired regarding you O Muhammad, and have formed a plan, but do not be concerned for we await them in ambush; 'We are devising [a plan]' We have a plan just as they have a plan, and while we know what they are thinking and none of it is hidden from us, yet they do not know what we have in store for them; so which of the two parties is the stronger?

أَمۡ يَحۡسَبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسۡمَعُ سِرَّهُمۡ وَنَجۡوَىٰهُمۚ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلُنَا لَدَيۡهِمۡ يَكۡتُبُونَ (٨٠)

Do they think We cannot hear their secret talk and their private counsel? Yes we can: Our messengers are at their sides, recording everything [80] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 80)

Do they think that we do not hear their decisions and the plans they are concluding to harm the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Or that we do not hear their hidden thoughts and private conversation? Allah hears their hidden thoughts and their whispers; none of their affair is hidden from Him. Indeed, there is more than that, 'and Our messengers are with them recording.' We hear them and are keeping count of all they say, for We have messengers and angels who write and record all they say and do.

If one were to ask, 'If the True Lord knows and hears all, and nothing of their affair is hidden from Him, then what is the point in writing down their hidden thoughts and whispers and recording them'? We say that this writing down benefits the angels, and it is for their sake. Thus, even if they did not see the events occur as they are recorded in the Preserved Tablet, they will know that Allah is Wise and Omniscient, and thus increase in certainty above and beyond their current certainty and faith on top of their faith.

= *Abu Jahl had suggested of selecting a man from each tribe to partake in the murder of the Prophet* peace and blessings be upon him *so that any requests for retribution would be weakened. Allah killed them all at the Battle of Badr.*

قُلْ إِن كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَٰنِ وَلَدٌ فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْعَابِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘If the Lord of Mercy [truly] had offspring I would be the first to worship [them], but [81] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 81)

This is an order to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘Say!’ O Muhammad to those who claim that the All-Merciful has a son. ‘Say’ by way of assumption, ‘if the Most Merciful had a son, then I would be the first of [his) worshippers.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 81) On the basis that the meaning of ‘if’ is conditional, then the meaning is:(1) ‘Were the All-Merciful to have a son, (and it is Allah who is informing me of this fact), then I would worship him before all others, for I take my orders and my understanding from Allah, not you’.

Some of the scholars,(2) however, said that the ‘if’ here is a particle of negation, which would mean, ‘Say, “the All-Merciful has no son. And I am the first to negate such for I am the foremost amongst His worshippers and the foremost among those who believe in the oneness of Allah’.

In the Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has described Himself with two adjectives. Some people imagine that these have a single meaning, but so long as two different words are used, then each word must have a meaning specific to it that the other does not afford. The True Lord has described Himself as being ‘One’ and as being ‘Singular’.

His being one means that He is alone, there is no other with Him, and thus it negates multiplicity, As for His being Singular, it means that He is One in and of Himself; He is not composed of parts. We see that when something that is comprised of parts, each part in it is in need of the other parts.

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(1) *This is merely posing a hypothetical situation for the purposes of argumentation alone, for it is impossible for Allah to have a son. It is as you might say to someone you are debating, ‘If what you say could be proven then I would be the first to believe it’; and this is way of expressing extreme incredulity. It is like saying, ‘there is no way anyone can believe this’.*

(2) *Among these were Ibn `Abbas, Al-Hasan and As-Suddi. Thus, it reads, ‘Say! The All-Merciful has no son’ and this is the end of a sentence. Then a new one starts, ‘I am the first of the worshippers’, meaning, the first of the monotheists among the people of Mecca, believing that Allah has no son.*

So, as long as Allah *Glorified is He* is Singular in and of Himself, He cannot have a son, for the son is a part of his father. We find in a Qudsi Hadith that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Fatima is a piece of me’(1), that is, a part of his spirit.

If we take this principle and trace the ancestry of each one of us, we will necessarily arrive at our forefather Adam *peace be upon him*. We would find that each of us has a portion or an atom that is from our forefather Adam, and it is this atom that witnessed that first covenant that Allah *Glorified is He* took from Adam’s offspring when they were in the atomic stage: ‘And [mention) when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them), “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.” [This) - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were of this unaware.” Or [lest) you say, “It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship) with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172-173)

This atom is the seed of goodness and the site of faith in a man and from it good works originate. Do you not see man filled with remorse over his sins and resolves to repent? It is a result of the effect this atom has on the human soul, for it was the first to hear Allah’s call and Allah’s message.

The Quran tells us that the jinn are more aware of Allah’s unity than men are. For while men have transgressed against the True Lord *Glorified is He* and attributed a son to Him, the jinn negated that and considered Allah above taking a son or a consort. Read Allah’s saying, ‘And [it teaches) that exalted is the nobleness of our Lord; He has not taken a wife or a son’ (*al-Jinn:* 3), that is to say that it is from His Magnificence that He has neither a wife nor son. The one who reflects will see that the taking of wives and children is one of the sources of corruption in the world. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have believed, indeed, among your wives and your children are enemies to you, so beware of them.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14)

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(1) *It was related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [3437, 3450 and 3483] and Muslim in his Sahih [4483] on the authority of Al-Musawwir ibn Makhrama. The wording in Muslim is, ‘Fatima is but a part of me, what harms her, harms me.’*

We, in our human customs, might say something like, ‘Marry a virgin so that she may bear you a son who will look after you in your old age.’ But does The True Lord *Glorified is He* take a son because He has a need such as ours? In addition to that, those who say that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is the son of Allah, what do they say about the time before `Isa (Jesus)? Did Allah not have a son at that time? And what about it after `Isa (Jesus)? Where has Allah’s ‘son’ gone? Thus, we see that all this is nothing but lies against Allah.

سُبۡحَٰنَ رَبِّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَرۡشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

Exalted be the Lord of the heavens and earth, the Lord of the Throne – He is far above their false descriptions [82]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 82)

It is appropriate that this verse should start with the phrase, ‘Exalted is the Lord of the heavens and the earth,’ after the subject of the previous verse which negated the possibility of Allah *Glorified is He* taking a son. The word ‘Exalted’ means that Allah *Glorified is He* is transcendent above anything that comes to one’s mind.

It is for this reason that the word comes only in the context of astonishing things that are beyond the human intellect, such as: ‘Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36), and, ‘Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa.’* (*al-Isra’:* 1)

Thus, when one’s intellect reaches its limit in questions such as these say, ‘Exalted is Allah’, and affirm Allah’s Transcendence above similarity to creation, and do not judge His Strength by your strength, nor His actions by your actions, nor His Power by your power, but declare Allah’s Transcendence in His names, attributes and actions.

After this, reflect upon how the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions in this verse those attributes which are appropriate to the negation of having a son. He says, ‘the Lord of the heavens and the earth.’ Does the One Who owns the heavens and the earth and that which lies within them need a son? In another verse, He says, ‘The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind, but most of the people do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57) Greater still than the heavens and the earth is the Throne, for He is Lord of the Throne. Thus, we see that Allah *Glorified is He* has absolutely no need of a son. As for Allah's saying, 'above what they describe,' it means by way of lies, or what they attribute to Allah in terms of Him taking a son.

We say that Allah's Transcendence is pre-eternal. Allah is transcendent and this is one of the attributes of His Essence. He was Transcendent before He created anyone to declare such, and when He brought the creation into existence it declared His Transcendence, 'Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth exalts Allah, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.' (*al-Hashr:* 1) This extolling of Allah's Glory is persistent throughout the present and into the future, 'Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him.' (*al-Hashr:* 24) So, as long as the creation is one system glorifying Allah, then do not deviate from this system yourself and glorify Him too; 'Exalt the name of your Lord, the Most-High.' (*al-A'la:* 1)

فَذَرْهُمْ يَخُوضُوا۟ وَيَلْعَبُوا۟ حَتَّىٰ يُلَـٰقُوا۟ يَوْمَهُمُ ٱلَّذِى يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

Leave them to wade in deeper and play about, until
they face the Day they have been promised [83]
(The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 83)

This is a command to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'So leave them', i.e. quit them and that which they busy themselves with of false speech. The word 'vainly' refers to those who venture into talking about that of which they have no knowledge. It is usually used to refer to false speech, and it has connotations of one walking and stumbling in areas unknown, not perceiving what dangers might face him therein. Such a person wrongs himself; one should get a good feel for something before he delves into it and one should be especially careful not to delve into falsehood.

As for Allah's saying, 'and amuse themselves,' Allah has commanded people to be serious about their lives but yet they mess about, Seriousness is the opposite of amusement. The difference between amusement and play is that play is when a person under the age of legal responsibility does something whose only purpose is distraction.

If, however, the person is legally responsible and he does something which has no benefit then this is called amusement. We see that Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘But when they saw a transaction or amusement, [O Muhammad], they rushed to it and left you standing.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11) Thus, amusement is one’s busying oneself with useless play instead of the obligations.

Regarding Allah’s saying, ‘until they meet their Day which they are promised,’ we see that Allah has promised them of this Day and has not created them in vain nor left them to their own devices. Indeed, He has shown them truth and falsehood and promised each a reward in accordance to what each deserves.

So, those who go to the fire have not been wronged by Allah and neither did He take them unawares; rather, He threatened and warned them of this outcome. The Quran is replete with such promises and threats; read for example, ‘As for he who gives and fears Allah and believes in the best [reward], We will ease him toward ease. But as for he who withholds and considers himself free of need and denies the best [reward), We will ease him toward difficulty.’ (*al-Layl*: 5-10)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* first mentions the good for His servant in His promises and His threats. Yes, indeed, even His threats contain goodness, for the one who warns you of evil before it afflicts you has paid you good service and deserves to be thanked. In this light, we can understand His saying in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* where He enumerates His blessings upon us, ‘There will be sent upon you a flame of fire and smoke, and you will not defend yourselves. So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) So can the fire, the flashes and smoke be considered as being from amongst the many blessing of Allah? Yes, they are from His blessings because He warns you against the things that would lead to your falling into them and thus distances you from them.

Returning to the verse, ‘So leave them to converse vainly and amuse themselves until they meet their Day which they are promised,’ we see that it is an invitation to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to lighten the load upon himself and not overburden himself on account of the obstinacy of his people and their persistence in error. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is consoling His Messenger and easing his burden. He addressed him in many other verses in similar fashion such as His saying, ‘So do not let yourself perish over them in regret. Indeed, Allah knows of what they do.’ (*Fatir:* 8)

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى فِى ٱلسَّمَآءِ إِلَٰهٌ وَفِى ٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَٰهٌ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٨٤﴾

It is He who is God in heaven and God on earth; He is the All Wise, the All Knowing [84] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 84)

Some people think that Allah *Glorified is He* is in the sky; if he calls on Him, he does so in a loud voice so that He may hear him, but Allah *Glorified is He* pervades all places and all times; there is no place that can enclose Him and no time that can contain Him, for He is the Creator of time and the Creator of space; and the created cannot encompass its Creator. It is for this reason that we do not say of Allah ‘when?’ or ‘where?’ So, Allah is everywhere(1). Divinity is one of His essential attributes, and one of the attributes of perfection; it cannot be separated from Him and never leaves Him, neither in the heavens, nor on earth.

Some orientalists take issue with this verse because of the repetition of the indefinite noun, ‘deity’. The word is repeated in the indefinite and the rule in grammar is that if a word is repeated in the indefinite, the second word refers to something other than the first, as one might say, ‘I met a man and was kind to a man’. The second man is different from the first. If, however, a definite noun is repeated, the second one is the same as the first. One might say, ‘I met the man and was kind to the man’. So, it is the same man. Thus, this rule of grammar poses a problem for us in relation to this verse, for who would say that there is one Allah in the heavens and one Allah on earth?

We find also in the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* evidence to support this rule, for when he read the verse, ‘And, behold, with every hardship comes ease. Verily, with every hardship comes ease!’ (*ash-Sharh:* 5-6), he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘One hardship cannot overcome two eases(1)’ because the word hardship is mentioned in the definite, while the word ease is mentioned in the indefinite.

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is per the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily confirm to the scientific facts and information proven true.

Moving on to Allah’s saying, ‘And He is the Wise, the Knowing.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 84) Wise refers to the one who puts things in their correct place with wisdom, and All Knowing refers to the one who knows what is best for His creation. He knows what will help them in their daily-lives and in preparing for their return to Him. For Allah *Glorified is He* would not give us material nourishment of food, drink, and air and then leave us without a methodology and without a set of values to nourish our souls as He nourished our bodies.

For this reason, this path is said to be spiritual, for it is to the heart what the spirit is to the body. The difference between the two is that the spirit has an appointed time of death, at which it will be separated from the body, whereas the spirituality of values and the path to Allah is everlasting; it accompanies the individual in this world and the next.

وَتَبَارَكَ ٱلَّذِى لَهُۥ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا
وَعِندَهُۥ عِلْمُ ٱلسَّاعَةِ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

Exalted is He who has control of the heavens and earth and everything between them; He has knowledge of the Hour; you will all be returned to Him [85] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 85)

‘The word ‘blessed’ means an increase in good such that a little gives you much more than you expected. His saying, ‘to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 85), and in another verse, ‘To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth’ (*al-Hajj:* 64) means that He possesses the container and its contents. In the chapter of *Ta Ha,* Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth and what is between them and what is under the soil.’ (*Ta Ha:* 6)

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(1) *Al-Hakim rated it as mursal in his Mustadrak [Hadith 3910] on the authority of Al-Hasan Al-Basri who said, ‘The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him went out one day happy and joyful, saying with a smile on his face, ‘one hardship will not overcome two eases, “And, behold, with every hardship comes ease: verily, with every hardship comes ease!” (ash-Sharh: 5-6) Al-Bayhaqi also related it like this in Shu'ab Al-`Iman [9657].*

We see that the verses encompass the entire universe and deem it all the property of Allah; the whole universe, its heavens and its earth, all that is in the heavens, all that is in the earth, all that is between the heavens and the earth, and what is under the earth; all of it is Allah's property.

At the end of the verse we find that there is a great deal of good buried beneath the ground; if Allah so wills He makes his servants aware of it in accordance with their technological development and progress. There is, as we speak, hidden under the earth water, petrol, minerals, precious stones, and other valuable things. It is as if the True Lord is alerting us, when he says, 'and all that is beneath the soil,' to concern ourselves with what lies underground and unearth it, and to explore it in order to extract the plenty that lies therein. For this reason, we see the geologists, archaeologists and petro-geologists roaming the world from one end to the other searching for these riches, even in the oceans which are included in the meaning of this verse because they are part of the earth they approximate to three quarters of the earth's surface.

Next comes Allah's saying, 'and with whom is knowledge of the Hour and to whom you will be returned.' In both phrases in this verse, Allah has used the rhetorical device of restriction, putting the prepositions and their objects at the beginning of each phrase to emphasise that this knowledge is restricted to Allah alone and none other. Similarly, when He said, 'and unto whom you all shall be brought back!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 85) It means Him alone and none other – you will not be returned except to Him. Thus, this is like a summarised message to mankind: remember your end and your afterlife, remember the reward after the work, and do not be deluded by your blessings for after them you will be called to account and given recompense. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'No! [But) indeed, man transgresses. Because he sees himself self-sufficient; Indeed, to your Lord is the return.' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-8) Hence, everything is both from Allah and is going back to Allah: from Allah in terms of creation, continuance and sustenance, and returning to Allah in terms of recourse and after death.

وَلَا يَمۡلِكُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَدۡعُونَ مِن دُونِهِ ٱلشَّفَٰعَةَ
إِلَّا مَن شَهِدَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَهُمۡ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٨٦

Those gods they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, unlike those who bore witness to the truth and recognized it [86] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 86)

Those they call upon instead of Allah, such as the sun, the moon, the stars and idols, all these objects of worship are false. The proof of this is that they are incapable of intercession for others and neither can they defend themselves from harm. They are incapable of intercession because the power of intercession is with whom? It is with Allah. How would Allah accept their intercession when they are the cause of the misguidance of those who ‘but only those who testify to the truth [can benefit], and they know’? This exception means that none will intercede with Allah except he who has borne witness to the truth.

وَلَئِن سَأَلۡتَهُم مَّنۡ خَلَقَهُمۡ لَيَقُولُنَّ ٱللَّهُۖ فَأَنَّىٰ يُؤۡفَكُونَ ٨٧

If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, ‘God,’ so why are they so deluded? [87] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 87)

So, these believe and admit that Allah is their creator. In another verse, ‘If you asked them, “who created the heavens and earth and subjected the sun and the moon?” they would surely say, “Allah.” Then how are they deluded?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 61) It is strange of them that after admitting this that they should not fully believe in Allah and His Messenger. Hence the end of this verse says, ‘how are they deluded?’ How could they be diverted from this truth when they admit and bear witness that Allah is their creator and the creator of the heavens and the earth. For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* expresses wonderment in the chapter of *al-Baqara* at their disbelief, for which there can be neither justification nor room for consideration. He *Glorified is He* says, ‘How can you disbelieve in Allah when you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you [back) to life, and then to Him you will be returned.’ (*al-Baqara:* 28)

Next, Allah says:

وَقِيلِهِۦ يَٰرَبِّ إِنَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ قَوۡمٞ لَّا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ٨٨
فَٱصۡفَحۡ عَنۡهُمۡ وَقُلۡ سَلَٰمٞۚ فَسَوۡفَ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٨٩

The Prophet has said, ‘My Lord, truly these are people who do not believe’ [88] but turn away from them and say, ‘Peace’: they will come to know [89] (The Quran, *az-Zukhruf:* 88 - 89)

Who is speaking? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is addressing his Lord, ‘O my Lord, indeed these are,’ that is, the disbelievers of Mecca, ‘are a people who do not believe.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 88)

Notice that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was harmed physically by these people and he was also harmed mentally and spiritually in that they accused him of magic and poetry, and of soothsaying and madness as well as harming his family. He was afflicted by them in both these ways, yet he mentioned none of this at all; all he was concerned about was the issue of their faith. He did not say, ‘O Lord, my people have harmed me and done such and such to me’; he only said, ‘O my Lord, indeed these are a people who do not believe.’ This is what burned in his soul and exasperated Him. It has been related in a sound Hadith that he never once sought revenge for Himself and never once was he angered on his own account. Rather, his jealousy and his anger were only for the sake of Allah and the truth that he brought and to which he called the people. Ahmad Shawqi expressed this in his poetry saying :(1)

If he was angered then ‘twas only anger,
for the truth, not from malice or rancour.

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(1) The wording of the verse in *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyya* is:
If he was angered then ‘twas only anger,
for the truth, not from malice or hatred.
It is from a poem by the prince of poets Ahmad Shawqi called *Nahj Al-Burda* in the metre known as *Al-Kamil*. The poem consists of 131 couplets, of which this is the 33rd.

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* when swearing on the saying of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O my Lord, indeed these are a people who do not believe’ is saying, ‘I swear by the truth of this statement’. The thing to which is being sworn is omitted due to its obvious nature and it is, ‘I will punish them in such a way that your heart will be put at rest regarding them. So, do not be perturbed by their lack of faith, for had I so willed, I would have compelled them to have faith, creating them in the likeness of the angels. All that is upon you, O Muhammad, is to bear with them’. ‘So turn aside from them and say, “Peace.”’ Your bearing with them will attract them towards faith in you, and there will arise from amongst them soldiers from the armies of Allah. This was in fact realised in Khalid ibn Al-Walid, `Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl, `Amr ibn Al-`As *Allah be pleased with them* and others. These were among the foremost of the disbelievers but were later to become leaders in the ranks of the Muslims.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘so forgive with gracious forgiveness,’ (*al-Hijr:* 85) because one may forgive someone who has harmed him and yet there remains inside him some remnants of hatred, anger or rage against the offending party. As for gracious forgiveness, it is that which is accompanied by tolerance which uproots any feelings of rage, anger, or hatred.

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*: bear with them gently and be not angry, for your anger affects you, and you have at your side a Lord who is angered on your behalf, so do not you become angry yourself. These are some of the refined etiquettes towards which Islam directs us.

It is well known that the Lawgiver is Wise and that He does not call us to account for the thoughts that occur to our hearts nor our sentiments so long as they are not translated into longing or action. After this, Allah raises you up and invites you to free yourself from just these thoughts if they are bad thoughts towards others.

These stages that we have learnt from Allah’s saying, ‘and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 134) are as follows: The first stage is to subdue one’s anger. The second stage is forgiveness, part of which is to rid oneself of all the bad thoughts such that one finds one's heart to be unpolluted, with no traces of rage, anger, or hatred remaining. The last stage is to show benevolence to the one who has wronged you and this is the stage of the elect who know well the pardoning nature of the revelation and look to what Allah has in store for them.

There are many people who find it very strange that a person should show benevolence towards someone who has done him harm; 'How could the revelation expect such of us?' they ask. We reply, 'imagine if one of your own children hit another and this one came crying and complaining, to whom would your heart go out and to whom would you incline? Of course, it would go to the one who was struck. Similarly, the True Lord *Glorified is He* takes the side of the weak one who pardons those who have done him wrong.

Al-Hasan Al-Basri was once informed that such-and such a man had backbitten him, at which he sent a plate of dates as a gift to the man. When he was asked about this, he said, 'because he donated his good deeds to me.'(1)

Returning to Allah's saying, 'and say, "Peace."' It is understood that the word 'peace' on its own, stripped of 'be upon you' is what is to be said to the one whom you find yourself at enmity with, and from whose company you would rather depart. In real life, when we have our differences with someone and are unable to reach an agreement, we say to him 'peace'. Thus, we see that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when he was debating his uncle, said to him, 'Peace be upon you! I shall ask my Lord to forgive you' (*Maryam:* 47) meaning 'the peace of farewell, not the peace one wishes another when greeting him.

Finally, regarding Allah's saying, 'But they are going to know,' it means that when you do this they will come to realise the outcome is as you said, and they will come to know how I will punish them on account of their disbelief in you.

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(1) Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in the *Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din* [2/154] relates that a man said to Al-Hasan, 'Of a surety, so and so was backbiting you.' So, he sent him a plate of dates and said, 'It has reached me that you have donated some of your good deeds to me, so I wanted to repay you for them, but forgive me for I am unable to pay you in full.'

the chapter of

ad-Dukhan

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *ad-Dukhan* (1) :

حمٓ ﴿١﴾ وَٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلۡمُبِينِ ﴿٢﴾

***Ha Mim* [1] By the Scripture that makes things clear[2] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 1-2)**

The chapter of *ad-Dukhan* is one of the *hawamim* chapters, i.e. it begins with the disjointed letters *ha mim*, and we have discussed these letters before, so there is no need for repetition here. The intellect has nothing to say about these letters beyond articulating them as they are, and as the Messenger of Allah articulated them. We do not ask ourselves about their meanings and there is nothing stopping the intellects from speculating in an attempt to derive some of their meanings. If we convince ourselves that something is correct regarding their meanings, we then say that Allah knows best what He means by them

This is because the religion has matters that are connected to creed and matters that are connected to rulings, as well as matters that are connected to the Quran, which expresses both creed and rulings.

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(1) The chapter of *ad-Dukhan* is a Meccan chapter by consensus except for His statement 'Indeed, We will remove the torment for a little.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 15) It consists of seventy-five verses. It is the 44th chapter in the order of the Quran. Regarding its virtues, it is mentioned that Abu Rafi` said: 'Whoever reads *ad-Dukhan* on the night of Friday wakes up forgiven, and he will marry from the pure companions who have the most beautiful eyes.' *Related by Ad-Darimi in his Musnad* .

In each of these three things, there is an unseen and a witnessed. Knowledge of the unseen is entrusted to Allah *Glorified is He* such that man remains incapable in front of Allah’s Knowledge and in front of matters that he does not understand. However, he believes in them simply because Allah has informed him of them in His Book or on the tongue of His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and he does not speak out of his own desire.

Amongst the creedal doctrines, for example, is the issue of faith in one God. This is unseen, but it is possible for the intellect to prove it because had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than Allah, both those realms would surely have fallen into ruin. If there had been numerous deities and each one was concerned with some aspect of the creation, then each one of them would be in need of the others, and thus it would not be right for them to be deities.

Therefore, with intellect it is possible for us to establish that Allah is one deity. However, amongst the creedal doctrines there are matters that the intellect cannot access, and it stops upon hearing them mentioned such as what happens in the grave, the reckoning and the Hereafter.

Likewise, in rulings there is that which is unseen and that which is witnessed. Prayer, in its outward, witnessed sense, brings about equality in worship in the world. When we hear ‘Allah is the Greatest’ we go to the mosques and we establish ourselves before our Lord, bowing and prostrating, and in this the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor the strong and the weak, are all equal. Everyone is submissive to Allah.

This is the aspect that is witnessed in prayer, and it also contains unseen elements that the intellect cannot access. The prayer, in terms of how many units (*raka’at/raka`as*) are to be performed in it, is something we cannot explain. Why does the dawn prayer consist of two units, the noon prayer four and the sunset prayer three? This is why asking about the number of units is futile.

The same goes for the Quran. It also contains unseen elements for which the intellect has no scope, and it is these disjointed letters the knowledge of which we assign to the One Who *Glorified is He* said them.

Allah’s statement: ‘By the clear Book’, i.e. manifest, clear and encompassing everything, represents that which is witnessed. In the beginning of this chapter, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has gathered between the unseen in (*ha mim*) and the witnessed in ‘By the clear Book.’ They are both from Allah, so there is no oath by this.

Or, the style here is the style of an oath; ‘I swear by *ha mim* and I swear by the clear, manifest Book that is understood by the intellects’. They are both from Allah and they are sworn by. Allah *the Exalted* then says:

إِنَّآ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ فِى لَيْلَةٍ مُّبَٰرَكَةٍ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنذِرِينَ ﴿٣﴾
فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾ أَمْرًا مِّنْ عِندِنَآ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ ﴿٥﴾

Truly We sent it down on a blessed night — We have always sent warnings [3] A night when every matter of wisdom was made distinct [4] At Our command — We have always sent messages to man[5]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 3-5)

The matter of bestowing from on high means that something is sent from above to below and it necessitates that there is someone sending it, something being sent, someone to whom the thing is being sent. As long as the One sending is Allah, then bestowing from on high is always from above regardless of the place because He said regarding iron: ‘And We sent down iron, wherein is great military might and benefits for the people,’ (*al-Hadid:* 25). Iron is found inside the earth, and bestowing from on high informs of the sublimity of the One sending. Then, the thing being sent is the Noble Quran to the one who is sent to mankind ‘on a blessed night,’ which is the Night of *Al-Qadr,* meaning the time when the Quran was sent down all at once.

He said ‘night’ because night is the time of stillness and calm such that there is no clamour, noise, or din that can disturb that which is being sent down. Likewise, man is motionless and his limbs are not occupied with anything. Therefore, at night the intellect has everything it needs to be alert and to comprehend and one’s soul is untroubled. This is why you read in the beginning of the chapter of *al-Muzzammil*: ‘O you who wraps himself [in clothing], Arise [to pray] the night, except for a little - Half of it - or subtract from it a little. Or add to it, and recite the Quran with measured recitation. Indeed, We will cast upon you a heavy word. Indeed, the hours of the night are more effective for concurrence [of heart and tongue] and more suitable for words.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-6)

Therefore, the Quran was sent down at night because it is the most appropriate time for it to be sent down, and it was sent down upon the heart of Allah's Messenger in Mecca. So, it is the night in Mecca and nowhere else, and Mecca is in the middle of the world(1) and its centre. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you.' (*al-Baqara:* 143)

Some people say that this night is the Night of *Al-Qadr* because of His statement: 'Verily! We have sent it (this Quran) down in the night of *Al-Qadr* (Decree).' (*al-Qadr:* 1) Others say that it is the fifteenth night of *Sha`ban,* and this issue requires some examination because it was sent down in one of them.

We say that the Quran, before it was sent down and carried out its task in existence, where was it? It was in the Preserved Tablet: 'Indeed, it is a noble Quran. In a Preserved Tablet; None touch it except the purified.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 77-79) And He said: 'And indeed it is, in the Mother of the Book with Us, exalted and full of wisdom.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 4)

The first sending down of the Quran was when it came down all at once from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest sky. However, is that which was recorded on the Preserved Tablet sent down or was it a copy? They said: 'It was a copy after it had been transcribed.'

Then, after that, it came down in instalments according to the circumstances and events, and it was sent down with the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* on the heart of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and each instalment has an occasion.

Therefore, we have three phases of the Quran being sent down: the first is when it was transcribed from the Preserved Tablet, and this had a time. Then it came down all at once to the lowest sky, and this also had a time. Then it came down in instalments according to the circumstances. This sending down happened over an extended period of time that included all the events and this took up several years.

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(1) Dr. Husayn Kamal Ad-Din, professor of surveying and spherical astronomy at King Sa'ud University, discovered that Ennobled Mecca is established in the heart of a circle that passes through parts of all seven continents which form the land. After the studies, he established that the farthest parts of land in Africa, Europe, and Asia are 8,000 kilometress from Mecca.

From these three phases it is possible to find a way out of this ambiguity; was it the Night of Decree or the fifteenth night of *Sha`ban*? There is no objection to the two nights sharing in this virtue of any one of these phases.

Then, the fifteenth night of *Sha`ban* has its own specific honour and nobility, which is the changing of the direction to which all Muslims pray all over the world. Then there is the fact that facing Jerusalem had a time and wisdom. Too, facing the *Ka`ba* also had a time and wisdom.

Thus, the comparison here is not between truth and falsehood, but rather, the difference between two wise matters. However, this one has a time and that one has a time. This is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* did not want to make the alteration of the direction to be at the beginning of the obligatory prayer. He wanted it to be during the obligatory prayer, so the command to change was divided into two parts. Thus, he prayed the first half of the prayer towards Jerusalem and the second half of the prayer towards the *Ka`ba*.(1) If this event proves anything, it proves that Jerusalem is a sanctified place for Muslims, just like the *Ka`ba*, and the event of the Night Journey to Jerusalem further confirms this.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted the prayer to be towards Jerusalem for some time and then to be towards the *Ka`ba*, and there is wisdom in both. The first is that Jerusalem is a sanctified place for Muslims. The second is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a deep affection for the prayer direction of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have certainly seen the turning of your face, [O Muhammad], toward the heaven, and We will surely turn you to a *qiblah* with which you will be pleased. So turn your face toward *Al-Masjid Al-Haram*.' (*al-Baqara:* 144)

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(1) *From Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him who said: ‘While the people were performing the dawn prayer in Quba` when someone came to them and said: ‘Indeed, the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him has been commanded on this night to face the Ka`ba, so turn towards it.’ Their faces were towards the Levant and then they turned and faced the Ka`ba.’ Related by Muslim in his Sahih (830) and Al-Bayhaqi in As-Sunnan Al-Kubra (2/2)*

The prayer was made obligatory for Allah's Messenger after his Ascension into heaven from Jerusalem, and this prayer was towards a direction and this direction must inevitably take both a legislative principle and a principle of continuation. Allah made it a test for the Muslims and the non-Muslims because when the direction of prayer was towards Jerusalem, they said: 'What has made him turn from the direction of Ibrahim (Abraham) to the direction of Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon)?' We said: It was in order for Jerusalem to be one of the sanctified places in Islam and so that the non-Muslims would not have exclusive possession over it.

The Jews received news of this matter and they used it to spread doubt. They said: 'If Muhammad is rejecting our religion then why does he pray in our direction?' Therefore, it was a test for both sides so that man could adhere to divine instructions without the intellect interfering.

They said regarding the blessed night that it is the night of 'being free', the night of the contract, and the night of mercy. The night of *bara`a* is taken from the *sakk* (receipt) that is given by the alms (*zakat*) worker to the taxpayer when he gives him Allah's right regarding his wealth, which is the *zakat*. The worker gives him a certificate of being free which proves that he has given his *zakat* and freed himself of his responsibility therein, and the word *sakk* carries the same meaning.

The night of mercy is because they said: 'It is mercy towards Allah's Messenger first and foremost because his soul was longing to face the direction of Ibrahim (Abraham).

Regarding Allah's statement: 'Indeed, We sent it down during a blessed night. Indeed, We were to warn [mankind],' after having mentioned sending down He mentions warning; and sending down is in order to warn because the legislative maxim is that averting harm takes precedence over bringing about benefit(1), so He mentioned warning before giving glad tidings.

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(1) One of the proofs of jurisprudence and its principles is the statement of the jurists: (Averting harms takes priority over bringing about benefit, and the greater harm must be averted first).=

We previously said: Imagine that someone throws you an apple, and at the same time, someone throws a stone at you. With which one are you going to be preoccupied? There is no doubt that you will be more concerned with protecting yourself from the stone than receiving the apple.

This is also the case with the Quranic style. The phrase ‘We were to warn’ indicates that warning was in the past and it is continuing in the present. This is because the True Lord *Glorified is He* is not governed by a specific time because He is the creator of time. Something created by Allah cannot hold sway over Allah, and as long as time is created by Allah, then this is the case.

The past, present and future apply to us human beings. As for Allah, all time is the same for Him. When you read, for example: ‘for Allah is indeed Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Mercy’ (*al-Ahzab:* 50), you say that He was, He still is and He will be in the future because as long as He exists since pre-eternity, and change does not happen to Him, then He is Much-Forgiving and a Dispenser of Mercy.

Regarding His statement: ‘On that night is made distinct every precise matter - [Every] matter [proceeding] from Us,’ it means that on this night ‘made distinct every precise matter.’ It is clarified, explained, and presented in detail. The difference here is not between truth and falsehood, but rather between matters that are both true and each has wisdom in its time.

Contemplate on the thing itself being described as (wise) because it is a thing belonging to Allah: ‘[Every] matter [proceeding] from Us,’ which means that there is no wisdom that reaches this thing that has come from The True Lord. ‘Indeed, We were to send [a messenger].’ This means: ‘We did not leave our creation to be neglected. Rather, We created them and we sent to them those who would take them by the hand to the straight path, show them guidance, and make it clear to them.

When the True Lord created the first creation He also sent the first messenger to guide them, and this is why Adam *peace be upon him* was the first

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= This means that if a matter is caught between averting harm and bringing about benefit, averting harm has priority over bringing about benefit. If the matter is caught between averting two harms then averting the greater harm takes priority over averting any other harm.

human being sent as a messenger because the Creator created man. Why? He created him to populate the earth: ‘He has produced you from the earth and settled you in it.’ (*Hud:* 61) This means that He asked you to populate it, and populating requires rightness, while corruption is held in check. The least that can be done, if we do not increase in rightness, is to leave alone that which is right.

We clarified this matter by using the example of a well in the desert. We said: If you are not going to build a wall around it to protect it from earth creeping towards it, or install a device that will help people extract the water, then the least you can do is leave it as it is and not destroy it.

The same goes for man in populating the earth; he must use his intellect with regards to self-evident truths so that with them he can arrive at theories that will improve his life. We have the example of wool, fur, and hair. Each one of them has specific qualities and that to which they are suited. Allah says, ‘and from their wool, fur, and hair is furnishing and enjoyment for a time.’ (*an-Nahl:* 80)

It is known that fur is taken from camels, wool is taken from sheep and hair is taken from goats, and each one of them has specific qualities that man uses as clothing and in his home. This is part of populating the earth such that if we were to look at the maxims of engineering and the theories we would find that they initially rely on something self-evident that is found in the universe.

Therefore, any advancement in the universe comes from something self-evident that has been granted by Allah, and intellects, being used with regards to self-evident truths, are part of the populating of the earth.

This is why, when you reflect on how the Quran addresses mankind, you find that it begins with simple matters that are far from anything intellectually complicated. It talks to them first about the way and what will make their lives upright and bring harmony to their daily lives. It speaks to intellects according to their intellectual advancement.

Whenever man’s intellect has matured and the methodology has become solid and manifested in people’s attitude and action, it (the Quran) then begins to talk to them about rational theories, and it says to them: indeed the earth is spherical and it revolves around the sun because the intellects have become prepared for research and investigation.

Look at roads, for example, how primitive they were; merely a trail in the desert wide enough for one camel. Look at how they have developed today and they have been supplied with means of rest, security, speed, and safety. Indeed, it is because the intellect has been used to make progress.

Did man not learn from the crow how to bury the dead? Did we not learn from dogs and do we not use them now, despite scientific developments in investigating clues and identifying criminals, by using their sense of smell? We have taken natural matters that Allah has granted us and built on them, and we have developed them in order to populate the earth.

Populating the earth cannot be done unless the way is straight first, as it is the foundation of advancement and the foundation of betterment because when the Creator *Glorified is He* created the creation, He laid down a way for it that would govern it and regulate its daily activities, by saying 'do such-and-such' and 'do not do such-and-such'.

If the creation is upright upon the way of its Lord and Creator, then its life is upright, and if it deviates and goes astray, the shame and nakedness of the community become clear and the symptoms of corruption emerge and come in between people.

We previously gave an example of this with the instruction manual that the manufacturer provides in order for the product to be protected and maintained. Likewise, if you travel along the way of your Creator, you will never be afflicted with ruin, and this is where the mission of the messengers comes in; they explain and confirm the way of (do such-and-such) and (do not do such-and-such). Even Adam, what happened when he contravened the way? Our Lord said to him: 'Eat whatever you want from Paradise except for this tree'(1), and they ate from it. What happened?

When he contravened he was afflicted with ruin. His nakedness became manifest when he ate from the tree and he was forced to do what Allah had not obliged him to do before such as release wind and excrement and have an upset stomach. He did not experience any of these things before he contravened Allah’s Command.

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(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And We said, "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers."' (*al-Baqara:* 35)

Allah’s statement: ‘[Every] matter [proceeding] from Us. Indeed, We were to send [a messenger]’ means that we have been sending messengers to those whom we have appointed as vicegerents on earth so that their daily activities can be safe from ruin and so that society can be safe from evil; people supporting one other and not going against one another.

رَحۡمَةٗ مِّن رَّبِّكَۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ٦

As a mercy [Prophet] from your Lord
who sees and knows all [6]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 6)

Sending is a mercy from Allah to His servants because it is a matter for us, you and me, from One Who is above us. We do not find any deficiency therein, as no one from amongst us looks down on anyone else. We receive our commands from Allah. This is why simple people like farmers say: ‘The finger that is hurt by the law does not bleed’ because everyone submits to Allah’s Commands and rulings and is pleased with them.

Therefore, our lives are upright when we travel along the way. This is why He called it ‘the straightway’ and He called it ‘the straight path’, i.e. in the middle; not inclining this way or that way. This is because He wants to save you effort and time, and all of this is from the fruits of the way and travelling along the straight path.

This is a mercy from Allah to us, and what a great mercy it is that He has not left us to experiment and disturb one another until we arrive at correctness, the truth, and the straight path. It is from His Mercy towards us that He has not left us to oppose one another and clash with one another. Rather, He has laid down laws for us and He has laid down a way for us to travel along from the very beginning.

There is a difference between a matter that makes you alter and straighten your course and a matter that is straight from the very beginning. It is from Allah’s Mercy towards us that He has made us travel in one direction, such that all activities are directed towards construction and all efforts are directed towards one objective. All individuals co-operate therein and all individuals support each other.

Otherwise, if activities had been allowed to conflict with one another they would have demolished and destroyed. What is the point of you building something if someone else is going to destroy it? As the poet said:

When will the building reach its completion, one day
If you are building it while someone else is destroying it

Reflect on the Quranic expression: ‘as mercy from your Lord.’ He did not say ‘as a mercy from Allah’, because The Lord is the one who is in charge of nurturing and taking care of you. We said previously that divinity is a responsibility and lordship is a gift. This mercy is a mercy from the Lord, the Merciful Caretaker; like a mother who nurtures her child, showing compassion.

As long as Allah *Glorified is He* is your Lord, your Nurturer and your Creator then it is obligatory upon you to obey Him and not exit from His way. ‘Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing.’ Allah is the All-Hearing with regards to all of mankind’s pains and grievances, if they proclaim them. He is the All Knowing with regards to their states and what their hearts possess if they conceal it within themselves even though the address here is in the singular form and directed at the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In the statement, ‘…as a mercy from your Lord’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 6), Allah is addressing Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is a special care bestowed by Allah upon His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and a manifestation of his rank with Allah. Allah’s Eye is watching over him, and he is so dear to Him that He will not allow him to be afflicted with any harm or pain on behalf of his people. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the most precious human being to Allah, and that is why He edified him in a way that makes him not only guided, within himself, but also guidance for mankind.

رَبِّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَآ إِن كُنتُم مُّوقِنِينَ ﴿٧﴾

Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between — if only you people were firm believers [7]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 7)

After Allah says: ‘as a mercy from your Lord...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 6), He confirms it with the statement: ‘Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 7), and then He attributes this to their conviction: ‘...if only you people were firm believers!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 7) As if Allah is sure that they, when asked, will say nothing but that they are firm believers! So, if they are certain that Allah is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, then why do you deny His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*?

Indeed, the universal signs clearly indicate the Creator, Exalted, and *Glorified is He*; this sky that shelters you, this earth that carries you and all the secrets and treasures in between. Indeed, all the riches that are in the earth are proof of Allah. If what you see in the earth and in the heavens is the realm of the *mulk* (the corporeal visible realm), then what do you think of the realm of the *malakut* (the spiritual invisible realm)?

You can know the realm of the *mulk* by means of your senses. As for the realm of the *malakut*, it is unseen. We know nothing of it apart from what Allah has told us, as when He said about prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘In this way, We showed Ibrahim (Abraham) Allah’s mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth…’ (*al-An‘am:* 75).

Hence, back to ‘...if only you people were firm believers!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 7) The term ‘firm believers’ means to embrace belief without doubt; not in knowledge, vision, or reality. We explained earlier about the certainty of knowledge, the certainty of vision, and the certainty of truth. Certainty, whether in knowledge, vision, or truth, is that firm belief which carries a judgment that does not swerve.

These three phases are mentioned in His saying: ‘No indeed! If only you knew for certain. You will most definitely see hellfire; you will see it with the eye of certainty. On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.’ (*at-Takathur:* 5-8)

And Allah says in the chapter of *al-Waqi`a*: ‘but if he is one of those who denied the truth and went astray, he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in hell. This is the certain truth: [Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord the Supreme.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 92-96)

However, were these people really certain that Allah is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them? The Quran says to them: ‘...if only you people were firm believers!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 7) ‘If’ here indicates doubt in their conviction because if they had been confident they would have believed in Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and accepted him as true. They acknowledge that Allah is their Creator and the Creator of the entire universe, but despite that they oppose Allah’s religion. Why? This is because religion restricts their activity and deprives them of their desires and prevents them from benefiting from the corruption that is present in their society! True religion will regulate their leadership and make masters and slaves equal. Therefore, they rejected the true religion because of the method it came with and they inclined toward a false religion because it does not have any method; commands or prohibitions.

لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِۦ وَيُمِيتُ رَبُّكُمْ وَرَبُّ ءَابَآئِكُمُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ٨

There is no god but Him: He gives life and death
— He is your Lord and the Lord of your
forefathers[8] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 8)

The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* wants our words to be applied to our actions. Regarding the phrase: ‘There is no deity...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 8), the deity is the true object of worship because when they worshipped the idols they called them deities. This is according to their claims and to how they imagined them! However, they are false deities and to call them so is also false because the deity is the true object of worship who has a method and this method is based on that proof.

As for their claims, they are without any proof. It is nothing but a form of worship that satisfies the inclination of the soul towards religiosity, even if the object of worship is an idol that has no commandments and no way.

Religiosity, as we have said, is a natural disposition within man, and actual events and experience confirm this. When someone's sustenance becomes constricted, even the disbeliever will say, 'O Lord!' He will seek refuge in the true object of worship and he will not deceive himself. He knows that the adversity that has afflicted him can only be removed by Allah.

That is why no one said, 'O Lat' or 'O `Uzza' (idols worshipped by Quraysh). However, unfortunately, when Allah removes their adversity and relieves them of their distress, they go back to their old ways, and the Quran talks about this a lot. Allah says: 'When trouble befalls man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble. In this way, the deeds of such heedless people are made attractive to them.' (*Yunus:* 12)

People keep forgetting that when religion restricts your activity in that which is impermissible, it also restricts the activity of everyone else for your sake. It tells you: 'As an individual in society; do not steal from the others'. It also tells everyone else not to steal from you. Hence, you are the first person to benefit from implementing Allah's method.

After Allah says: 'There is no deity but Him...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 8), He mentions the proof for it: '...He gives life and death...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 8) because the matter of giving life and death belongs to Allah alone, and He has no rival therein. Those who are enjoying life are disturbed by nothing other than the fact that they see death all around as it looms above them on the very verge of snatching them away.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* is mentioning here something that He loves because the One Who owns your life and owns your death is Allah, so it is not right for you to be heedless of Him, or to deviate from His way and His path in favour of another path.

So, the attribute: '...He gives life and death...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 8) surely befalls others, yet His attributes include Him being Ever-Living and Ever-Watchful, as in the verse of the Throne: 'Allah – there is no deity but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful....' (*al-Baqara:* 255) Some people say that

‘The Ever-Living’ is the greatest name of Allah because it is the foundation from which all other attributes stem.

They also said that ‘The Ever-Living’ is the greatest name pertaining to giving, while Allah is the greatest name pertaining to worship because the meaning of the word Allah, is the One Who is worshipped and obeyed in everything that He commands.

As long as He is obeyed in everything He commands, so when you call Allah, you say: ‘In the Name of Allah’ meaning: ‘In the name of Allah I embark upon this action’ because any action requires energy and perception to be initialized; it also requires wisdom.

These things are provided by whom? They are provided by Allah because He alone is the One Who encompasses all the attributes of perfection and from His attributes He gives you abundantly. Thus, it is obligatory to seek help from Him and to rely on Him. Whoever says that the greatest name is the (Ever-Living) has his eyes set on ‘giving’, while whoever says that it is (Allah) has his eyes set on ‘legal responsibility’.

As for the statement: ‘...He is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 8), Allah wants to debunk the disbelievers who oppose Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because they said: ‘...Behold, we found our forefathers agreed on what to believe – and, verily, it is but in their footsteps that we follow!’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) Thus, Allah wants to expose their lie in this statement because if they had been true followers of their forefathers, they would have pursued the path of Adam *peace be upon him*. However, they deviated from it and went astray from his guidance until the whole concept underlying faith got deformed, so Allah sent numerous messengers to guide them.

بَلْ هُمْ فِي شَكٍّ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿٩﴾

Yet in [their state of] doubt they take nothing seriously [9] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 9)

Here, the True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* is bringing together two attributes of theirs: 1) they are in doubt of Allah’s religion and, 2) they take nothing seriously. Only one of these attributes would suffice to describe their isolation from the realm of faith. As for'...in their state of doubt...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 9), to explain the meaning of doubt (*shakk*), we say that the logical variations are six, and they include knowing; which is to believe a thing that is supported by actual fact, ignorance; which is to believe a matter that contradicts actual fact, and imitation; which is to believe something that you are unable to prove, like a child imitating his parent and saying, 'Allah is One', but he can not establish any proof for it. Then there is doubt which is to have two matters of equal weight before you; neither has preference to the other. If you do prefer one of them to the other, then the thing which you preferred is a speculation and that which you dismissed is an illusion.

So, their 'doubt' is that they held disbelief and belief at the same rank. Not just that but they also '...take nothing seriously...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 9) because if they had only been in doubt and had been serious about researching and contemplating, they would have arrived at the truth. Instead, they were playing around and toying. They had no desire to arrive at the truth.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱرۡتَقِبۡ يَوۡمَ تَأۡتِي ٱلسَّمَآءُ بِدُخَانٖ مُّبِينٖ (١٠) يَغۡشَى ٱلنَّاسَۖ هَٰذَا عَذَابٌ
أَلِيمٞ (١١) رَّبَّنَا ٱكۡشِفۡ عَنَّا ٱلۡعَذَابَ إِنَّا مُؤۡمِنُونَ (١٢)

[Prophet], watch out for the Day when the sky brings forth clouds of smoke for all to see [10] It will envelop the people. They will cry, 'This is a terrible torment! [11] Lord relieve us from this torment! We believe! [12] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 10 - 12)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* is making it clear that He will not leave these denying doubters to His messengers, these people who play and toy around, will have a day in which Allah will exact revenge from them. He tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'watch out...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 10), or wait '...for the Day when the sky brings forth clouds of smoke for all to see.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 10)

Smoke is formed when gases blend together and fill the air, like the mist that we see in the morning, and when it gets so dense it impairs visibility. This is because the blend of tiny particles blocks the passage of sight. Then it causes the air to become constricted and the same thing happens to breathing. If lack of visibility combines with constricted breathing, our agony intensifies and becomes too much to withstand.

They say that the smoke here is an indication of the drought that afflicted the people and the famine that befell them because when they exaggerated in denying Allah's Messenger and they became severe in harming him and his companions, he supplicated against them saying: 'O Allah! Be severe with the tribe of Mudar! Inflict years of drought upon them like the years of drought of Prophet Joseph (Yusuf).'(1)

They were afflicted with famine and drought until they were compelled to eat carrion, dead dogs and *`ilhiz*, which is wool or fur mixed with dry blood, and until they raised a fuss with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him to supplicate to Allah for them and ask Him to lift what had befallen them.

Allah made their lie clear to Prophet Muhammad; if We were to lift their suffering they would go back to their disbelief and denial.

'It will envelop the people.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 11) means it will encompass and cover them. '...They will cry!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 11) because it deprives them of visibility and constricts their breathing, so they supplicated fervently: 'Lord relieve us from this torment! We believe!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 12) and Allah knows that they are lying when they say this.

Allah says afterwards:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (762, 951, 2715, 3124) and Muslim in his Sahih (1082, 1083) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

أَنَّىٰ لَهُمُ ٱلذِّكْرَىٰ وَقَدْ جَآءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٣﴾ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّوْا۟ عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا۟ مُعَلَّمٌ مَّجْنُونٌ ﴿١٤﴾

How will this [sudden] faith benefit them? When a prophet came to warn them plainly [13] they turned their backs on him, saying, ‘He is tutored! He is possessed!’ [14] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 13-14)

His statement: ‘How will this [sudden] faith benefit them?’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 13) means: from where did they take an admonition? From where did they get the faith which they claim? ‘...When a prophet came to warn them plainly’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 13) with signs that are greater than the smoke, with clear, established miracles such as this wise and inimitable Book, this ability that keeps the universe in motion in a unique way, this path that ensures the individual’s and the society’s wellbeing, the clear elucidation, the abundant goodness and benefits they are accustomed to, and yet they still averted and lied.

‘They turned their backs on him...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 14), i.e. they shunned him ‘...saying, “He is tutored! He is possessed!”’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 14) which mean they did not shun him and leave him to himself. Rather, they transgressed against him in speech, and accused him of being a liar; ‘...tutored...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 14) means that he was taught by someone else.

Likewise, Allah says in another place: ‘...It is a man who teaches him’...’ (*an-Nahl:* 103), and Allah refuted them and invalidated their accusation: ‘…but the language of the person they allude to is foreign, while this revelation is in clear Arabic.’ (*an-Nahl:* 103)

They said that he was frequenting a Persian man who was teaching him the Quran. Allah debunked their statement that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was a ‘...madman...’: ‘For this fellow-man of yours is not a madman’ (*at-Takwir:* 22), and ‘*Nun*. By the pen! By all they write! Your Lord’s Grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman: you will have a never-ending reward –truly you have a strong character.’ (*al-Qalam:* 1-4) Since he has a sublime character, then he does not go beyond the standards of virtue, and no actions come from him except via reflection, comprehension, and tact, so how far removed is this from madness?!

إِنَّا كَاشِفُواْ ٱلۡعَذَابِ قَلِيلًاۚ إِنَّكُمۡ عَآئِدُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

We shall hold the torment back for a while — you are sure to return [to Us] [15]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 15)

This means the suffering that has befallen them in this life, and what Allah calls ‘a nearer torment’: ‘We shall certainly make them taste a nearer torment [in this life] prior to the greater torment so that perhaps they may return [to the right path].’ (*as-Sajda:* 21) That is to say; We will lift the smoke punishment, as well as the famine and hunger that compelled them to eat carrion. We will lift it for a little while to affirm for them that they are liars even in front of themselves so that they can be convinced of this fact because those who believe in Allah know it and they bear witness to it. As for these people, they reject it.

Or, their lying will be revealed in front of the youth. Amongst them were those whom disbelief could not vanquish, and this disbanded their ranks. The disbelievers were shown for who they really are and their children, who follow these developments, did not imitate them. They could clearly see the lying of their parents and grandparents.

Indeed, we have seen the children of disbelievers who became Muslims and did very well in Islam, the likes of ‘Ikrima ibn Abu Jahl and others; those who realized the lying of their parents and their lack of faith.

Amongst these people was Mus`ab ibn `Umayr, a pampered youth of Quraysh; the wealthiest of the wealthy. He was enjoying all kinds of comforts and luxuries when he saw the contradictions that his people were upon, and he left disbelief for Islam. He left all the lures of luxury and comfort and was pleased with a primitive way of life.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* saw him in Medina after he had emigrated and he was wearing a sheepskin on his shoulder. He was astonished and said: ‘Look at your Companion. Look at what faith has done to him.’(1)

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(1) *From `Umar ibn Al-Khattab who said: ‘The Prophet looked at Mus`ab ibn `Umayr approaching, and he was wearing a ram hide. He was shocked and he said: “Look at=*

When Mus`ab died, they did not find anything to shroud him with.(1) These are the youth whom faith snatched from the jaws of disbelief.

His statement: '...while you are sure to return [to Us].' (*ad-Dukhan:* 15) means going back once again to their disbelief, their stubborn rejection, and their denial of Allah's Messenger.

يَوْمَ نَبْطِشُ ٱلْبَطْشَةَ ٱلْكُبْرَىٰٓ إِنَّا مُنتَقِمُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

And on the Day We seize [them] mightily We shall exact retribution [16] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 16)

Remember this day and do not be heedless of it 'And on the Day We seize [them] mightily...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 16). *Al-Batsh* ('...seize...') means taking someone by force and hitting him so hard till he cannot recognize which body part is being struck. When we say that someone *batasha* with someone else, it means he hit him so hard paying no attention to which body part got the blow. Allah describes His seizing as being '...mighty...' (*kubra*) to emphasise its sternness and severity on the disbelievers.

'...We shall exact retribution.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 16) Retribution indicates being even, so the act of seizing is not an aggression, but rather, a recompense for their denial and harm to Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Seizing is therefore a retribution of the same nature as the initial action, and if it were not for this seizing it would not have been fair or just for the believers to endure all this harm, adversity and oppression, while the disbelievers are left to act so oppressively and tyrannically.

= *this man whose heart Allah has enlightened. Indeed, I saw him with parents who were feeding him the best of food and drink, but the love of Allah and His Messenger called him to what you see before you."' Narrated by Abu Na`im in Hilyat Ul-Awliya` (1/108) and Al-`Iraqi, in his examination of the Hadiths in the Ihya` (4/295) said that its chain of transmission is good.*

(1) *Mus`ab ibn `Umayr was killed on the day of Uhud and he left nothing behind but a date. 'When we shrouded his head, his legs would show and when we shrouded his legs his head would show, so Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: "Cover his head and put some straw over his legs."' Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2788), Ahmad in his Musnad (20165,25956), Al-Bayhaqi in his Sunnan (4/7) and Mushkil Al-Athar by At-Tahawi (3419).*

The act of seizing had to happen to the disbelievers so that the believers could see the fruits of their faith and how Allah had saved them with it, till they rejoiced. The disbelievers also needed to see the fruits of their disbelief and their stubborn opposition, so they would grieve and feel remorse and pain.

In more than one place the Noble Quran relates to us a dialogue between the people of paradise and the people of the fire, which clearly describes the joy of the believers and the regret and remorse of the disbelievers: ‘The people of the fire will call to the people of paradise, “Give us some water, or any of the sustenance Allah has granted you!” and they will reply, “Allah has forbidden both to the disbelievers.”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 50)

His statement: ‘...We shall exact retribution!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 16) is an indication of the fairness of the heavens, as if Allah is saying to them: ‘Do not blame us for taking you to task like this; you are Our making. We are more compassionate towards you than a mother towards her children, but We must exact revenge in order to balance things and prevent any sedition.

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَجَآءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١٧﴾
أَنْ أَدُّوٓا۟ إِلَىَّ عِبَادَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنِّى لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٨﴾

We tested the people of Pharaoh before them: a
noble messenger was sent to them [17] saying,
‘Hand the servants of God over to me! I am a
faithful messenger who has been sent to you [18]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 17-18)

As if He is saying to them: ‘You are nothing new in this regard. You have been preceded by other nations that denied their messengers, so they were afflicted similar to the way you have been afflicted’. ‘We tested...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 17) meaning: We afflicted and We tested, and *fitna* (trying) is not blameworthy in itself. Rather, it is blameworthy because of its result, in the same way that an exam is not praised or blamed because for itself, but rather for its outcome or result.

You know the story of the people of Pharaoh ‘...a noble messenger was sent to them…’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 17); he is prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and he is noble in the eyes of Allah, who sent him. It is from his nobility that Allah spoke to him from behind a barrier, and this is because he would not be addressing moral or social corruption, but rather, ideological corruption.

So, Allah *the Exalted*, was preparing him for his meeting with the head of disbelief, i.e. Pharaoh, who had reached such a degree of misguidance that he had declared divinity. He said to the people: ‘I am your Lord All-Highest!’

It is because of this that Moses’s (Musa’s) mission was difficult and arduous, and that is why his Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* trained him to use signs and miracles before presenting himself to Pharaoh.

Read: ‘What is that in your right-hand O Musa (Moses)? “It is my staff,” he said, “I lean on it; restrain my sheep with it; I also have other uses for it.” Allah said, “Throw it down, O Musa (Moses).” He threw it down and- behold! It became a fast-moving snake.’ (*Ta Ha:* 17-20)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* informed Musa (Moses) of the staff’s mission in the ideological battle that he would have with Pharaoh and trained him on how to handle it, so that when Pharaoh confronts him he can be firm and reassured that Allah will help him and support him. We need to mention here that the orientalists have hunted down this story and accused the Quran of being redundant.

But, this only shows their lack of understanding for the verses within their context. The story of the staff is actually mentioned three times; one time between Musa (Moses) and his Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* when He was training him and preparing him for this ordeal; a second time when he faced Pharaoh and a third time when he faced Pharaoh’s magicians. Hence, each phase had its wisdom, and there is no redundancy in the matter; they are different situations and each one took place in its appointed time.

As for the verse: ‘Hand the servants of Allah over to me...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 18), when you hear ‘Hand…over to me...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 18), know that there is a trust that must be handed over, so what is the trust that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is asking his people to hand over? The ‘trust’ which Musa (Moses) requested from Pharaoh’s people was to let him take the Israelites and end their humiliating suffering at the hands of Pharaoh’s people, and this was Moses’s (Musa’s) first mission. As for him inviting Pharaoh, this was peripheral to the main mission. His discussion with Pharaoh was an accessory to his mission and to the legislation that he brought to the Israelites.

The reason behind Pharaoh's people oppressing the Israelites is that when the Hyksos entered Egypt they caused turmoil, and the Israelites supported the Hyksos and helped them. When the Hyksos left Egypt, the Egyptians had no enemy other than the Israelites, and that is why they oppressed them.

The Quran relates: '…slaughtering your sons and sparing (only) your women....' (*al-Baqara:* 49) Thus, Musa (Moses) came originally to save the Israelites from their suffering and to take them out of Egypt. The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* was kind to the Israelites because they were the believers at that time, while all other people were idolaters.

Therefore, the meaning of 'Hand the servants of Allah over to me...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 18) is: 'Give me the Israelites whom you have punished and leave me with their affair'.

It is from the inimitability of the Quran to address the ruler of Egypt as 'Pharaoh', while during the era of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* he is addressed as the 'King': 'And (one day) the King said: "Behold, I saw (in a dream) seven fat cows being devoured by seven gaunt ones..."' (*Yusuf:* 43).

It has been confirmed that while the Hyksos were in Egypt they changed the title from 'Pharaoh' to 'King', and they were in Egypt in the days of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph).

His statement: '…I am a faithful messenger who has been sent to you.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 18) means: I am entrusted with my message from Allah and I am carrying it out as it must be.

وَأَن لَّا تَعْلُوا۟ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنِّىٓ ءَاتِيكُم بِسُلْطَٰنٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٩﴾
وَإِنِّى عُذْتُ بِرَبِّى وَرَبِّكُمْ أَن تَرْجُمُونِ ﴿٢٠﴾

Do not consider yourselves to be above God! I come
to you with clear authority [19] I seek refuge in my
Lord and yours against your insults! [20]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 19-20)

His statement: 'Do not consider yourselves to be above Allah!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 19) takes the matter back to its true point of reference. He did not say 'do not consider yourselves to be above me', but rather, above Allah, i.e. the battle is not between you and me, but rather, between you and Allah, who has sent me. Thus, when you act haughtily and stubbornly you are not doing so against me, but rather, against Allah, who commanded me and sent me to you.

'...I come to you with clear authority' (*ad-Dukhan:* 19), i.e. with a clear proof and obvious sign, which is the staff. The staff is a sign which is of the same nature as the magic that Pharaoh's people had excelled in. However, it is not of the same kind because magic, in reality, is nothing more than a visual illusion, as Allah says: '...casting a spell on people's eyes, striking fear into them...' (*al-A'raf:* 116).

That is why, when the magicians saw the staff, they snatched what they had done and fell down in prostration to Musa (Moses), or rather his Lord, without waiting for permission from Pharaoh. Why? Because they saw something that was other than optical visual illusion! It was actual reality, and they knew more than anyone did what magic was.

His statement: 'Do not consider yourselves to be above Allah!' (*ad-Dukhan:* 19) means: I am not speaking on behalf of myself, but rather, because of a command from the heavens. This statement also contains an indication towards invalidating their claimed divinity, i.e. you know amongst yourselves that you are not gods and that this is a false claim. That is why it made them scared of The True Deity.

'I seek refuge in my Lord and yours against your stoning.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 20) means: I have sought refuge in Allah and with Him I have protected myself against your harm. When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said this, contemplate how he sought refuge and protection of the Stronghold who would rescue whoever sought refuge in Him.

What happened after he sought refuge in Allah? Allah sent him a man from Pharaoh's people who believed in Musa (Moses) and this man defended him.

His act of seeking refuge would also benefit him in the future during the incident of parting the sea, when Pharaoh and his army were catching up with them at the seashore, till the companions of Musa (Moses) said: 'Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken (and defeated)!' (*ash-Shu'ara': * 61) They were not hopeful of being saved!

As for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* he was so full of trust in his Lord. He said: 'No! My Lord is with me: He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara': * 62) He said this out of certainty because he had experienced it before and it was decisive.

Therefore, when the matter became serious and the means became constricted he sought refuge in Allah with certainty and reassurance. Then Allah revealed to Him: '…Strike the sea with your staff!'...' (*ash-Shu'ara': * 63), and Musa (Moses) did not deny the command and did not hesitate even though it was something unbelievable and beyond any perception. However, his trust in Allah had been established from the beginning and it encouraged him to obey the command and not hesitate.

'…Strike the sea with your staff!'...' (*ash-Shu'ara': * 63) It was a miracle to part the sea, and each part was like a vast mountain. Allah saved Musa (Moses) and those who were with him and He destroyed Pharaoh and his army. This is from His absolute power to destroy and save at the same time because things are not affected in and of themselves but because of Allah's Will.

The statement: '...against your stoning' (*ad-Dukhan: * 20) is proof that stoning existed amongst the previous nations who denied their messenger.

وَإِن لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا۟ لِى فَٱعْتَزِلُونِ ﴿٢١﴾ فَدَعَا رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ قَوْمٌ مُّجْرِمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

If you do not believe me, just let me be [21]
[Moses] cried to his Lord, 'These people are
evildoers!' [22] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 21-22)

It is as if Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is saying, 'If you do not believe me in what I am saying then the least you can do is leave me alone and not harm me'.

His statement: '[Musa (Moses)] cried to his Lord, "These people are evildoers!"' (*ad-Dukhan: * 22) contains an indication of his despair that they would ever become righteous, so he complained to Allah and asked to be freed from them.

فَأَسْرِ بِعِبَادِى لَيْلًا إِنَّكُم مُّتَّبَعُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَٱتْرُكِ ٱلْبَحْرَ رَهْوًا ۖ إِنَّهُمْ جُندٌ مُّغْرَقُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

[God replied], 'Escape in the night with My servants, for you are sure to be pursued [23] Leave the sea behind you parted and their army will be drowned [24] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 23-24)

The True Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* is looking after His friends and giving them the necessary protection. The command for Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was to leave with the Israelites at night, and Allah informed him of what Pharaoh and his people would do, and that they would follow them. He did not leave him to be surprised but instead gave him a preventive knowledge that would help and support him.

This is what gave him the courage to say: '"...No!" they will not catch up with us and defeat us. We are being helped by Allah, who commanded me to go forth with His slaves. He has told me what my enemy would do and He would never forsake me'.

Therefore, every glimpse in this story indicates Allah's Absolute Power which acts upon all things, and turns things into the opposite. When Allah commanded, 'Leave the sea behind you parted...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24), this command came after striking the sea with the staff, which came in another verse.

The glimpses that complement one another are spread over more than one place yet they all serve one idea, and give one structure to the story. In one place Allah says to him: '…Strike the sea with your staff!'...' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 63) and in another He says: 'Leave the sea behind you parted...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 24). The word *rahwan* '...parted...' is a gerund that comes from *raha* and *yarhu*, similar to *`ada*, *ya`du* and *`adwan*. *`Ada* means to run past a place, and it is the opposite is *raha* which means to stay in a place.

When Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* struck the sea the water solidified and stood still in its place in the form of two great cliffs, with dry land in between. Musa (Moses) saw this dry land as a ready path, and so he crossed it to the other side.

It would be natural to think that by striking the sea another time this would restore the sea to its previous state and prevent Pharaoh and his army from catching up with them, but Allah had another plan: ‘Leave the sea behind you parted...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 24), i.e. in its solid form

Moses’s (Musa’s) thinking was due to his human nature, but the True Lord commands out of His Wisdom, and there is no shame attached to Musa (Moses) in this because the One Who corrects him is his Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* and this is an immense honour for Musa (Moses).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who related this correction to us to show that messengers can make mistakes in matters in which there is no text; and Allah corrects them. Likewise, Allah corrects him in a similar occasion and says: ‘Prophet, why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you, in your desire to please your wives? Yet Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1) His Lord reproached him gently when: ‘May Allah pardon you (O Prophet)! Why did you grant them permission?’ (*at-Tawba:* 43) Who is the one who informed us of this reproach? Indeed, it is Prophet Muhammad’s truthfulness in conveying from his Lord.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* corrected prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and said to him: ‘Leave the sea behind you parted...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 24). This is because Allah wants to destroy Pharaoh and his army with the very same thing that He used to save Musa (Moses). This is from Allah’s Absolute Power because Pharaoh will inevitably be deceived by the dry path that he will see and will try to cross it in pursuit of Musa (Moses).

Indeed, when Musa (Moses) had reached the other side of the sea, Pharaoh was in the middle of it, and that is when Allah commanded the sea to return to its normal, fluid state, and it drowned Pharaoh and his army ‘...and their army will be drowned.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 24) Thus, with His Absolute Power, Allah saved and destroyed using the very same thing.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains to us what blessings these people were in, and the punishment and suffering that eventually befell them:

كَمۡ تَرَكُواْ مِن جَنَّٰتٖ وَعُيُونٖ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَزُرُوعٖ وَمَقَامٖ كَرِيمٖ ﴿٢٦﴾
وَنَعۡمَةٖ كَانُواْ فِيهَا فَٰكِهِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Many a garden and spring they left behind [25]
many a cornfield and noble building [26]
many a thing in which they had delighted [27]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 25 - 27)

After Allah had drowned them, they left behind this life of ease. *Kam* (how) indicates an abundance of ‘many a garden...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 25) blooming, verdant gardens ‘...and springs...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 25), i.e. freshwater springs which flew through these gardens ‘...and noble buildings.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 26) The word *maqam* (‘...buildings...’) with a *fatha* (a) over the *mim*, is a noun meaning the spot where we stand. The noun of the gerund *iqama* is *muqam* with a *damma* (u) over the *mim*, to indicate the place where someone resides. A *muqam* is not described as noble (*karim*) unless it provides means of rest and comfort to whoever resides in it. The *maqam* itself possesses nobility which means that it gathers all meanings of goodness for its owner when he stands and when he sits. As if goodness follows this person and obeys his commands which means he has followers, and these followers carry out his commands when he stands and when he sits.

When a man is sitting, or sleeping or reclining, what can make him stand up? Probably something occurs urging him to stand up. This thing would be one of two; either something good and that would make him happy, like a loved one or a friend returning after a long absence, or it would be something that saddens him or frightens him, and so he stands up because of it.

Likewise, the word *muqam*, with a *damma* (u) over the *mim* is found in the Quran and it means a place of residence in the verse: ‘It is an evil home, a foul resting place!’ (*al-Furqan:* 66), and the verse: ‘There they will stay, a happy home and resting place!’ (*al-Furqan:* 76)

As for the statement: ‘…many a thing in which they had delighted!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 27), the word *na`ma* (delighted) is also found with a *fatha* (a) above the *nun* two other times, like here, and it is found with a *kasra* (i) above the *nun*, as in ‘...Remember those blessings (*ni`ma*) of Mine with which I graced you...’ (*al-Baqara:* 40), in 34 places, either on its own or associated with Allah. Most of them are in the form of *ni`mati* (My blessings), *ni`matuka* (Your blessings), or *ni`matuhu* (His blessings).

The difference between the two is that *ni`ma*, with a *kasra*, is that which one enjoys, but we notice that whatever is enjoyed is outside oneself. Thus, sometimes there can be a blessing (*ni`ma*) and there can be the ability to enjoy it. Other times, the blessing can be there, but the ability to enjoy is not. As for the word *na`ma*, it means that the *ni`ma* is there as well as the ability to enjoy it.

In the statement: ‘...many a thing in which they had delighted!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 27), the word *fakih* (delighted!’) is from *tafakkuh* (delight) and *taladhdhudh* (enjoyment) which is taken from *fakiha* (fruits) meaning luxury and comfort because food includes things that are basic and necessary for the sustenance of life, and other foods that are for pleasure such as the fruits eaten after a meal.

These things that are eaten for pleasure can be done without because they are not necessities, and the proof is that many people do not eat fruits and they are still alive. Therefore, they had luxuries and comforts in life that were in addition to their necessities

كَذَٰلِكَۖ وَأَوۡرَثۡنَٰهَا قَوۡمًا ءَاخَرِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

We gave these to another people to inherit [28]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 28)

‘Thus...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 28) means ‘like this’; Allah stripped them of these blessings and gave them to other people. Had they only been taken from them it would have been tolerable, but they were taken from them and given to other people, and this is worse.

The reason why envy is abhorred is the fact that the envier wishes for someone else to lose his blessings, even if they will not end up with him. He only cares for the blessings to depart from the person he envies, because he hates the blessings to be with that person, and likewise the blessings hate him and never end up with him.

The opposite of envy is *ghibta* - felicity, which is loving the blessing that someone else has and wishing something similar for yourself. When you love a blessing, it loves you and it comes to you when you say: ‘O Allah! Bless him with it and bless me with something similar.’

But, who are these other people who inherited the life of ease after Pharaoh’s people? They are the Israelites, the people who were made to suffer, whose children they slaughtered and whose women they spared. Slaughtering on its own is humiliation and disgrace but what was done to the women after the men got slaughtered was even more atrocious. That is why, when the Arabs set out for war, they would bring their women with them so that they would not leave them behind for their enemies if they got defeated.

فَمَا بَكَتۡ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلسَّمَآءُ وَٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَمَا كَانُواْ مُنظَرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Neither heavens nor earth shed a tear for them,
nor were they given any time [29]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 29)

This verse affirms that inanimate objects have feelings, and that they love and hate, they weep and rejoice. Therefore, feelings are initiated in all created things when needed, but in man they are a constant. You see a man, for example, loving his son, even if his son was foolish or mischievous. His love for him continues, and his feelings towards him may be more than his feelings towards a normal, proper child.

That is why the Bedouin (1), when he was asked which of his children was most beloved to him, he said: ‘The youngest until he grows up, the absent until he returns and the sick until he recovers.’(2)

As for animals, their feelings are according to the need. So, you see animals having feelings for their young ones and defending them, but once they grow up, they leave them as if they never knew them at all. The feelings they were given were just to cover the need for nurturing their young enough so they could lead their own lives.

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(1) He is Ghilan ibn Salama (mentioned by Al-Asfahani in *Al-Aghani*), and he is Hudha ibn `Ali Al-Hanafi. *According to Al-Maydani in Majma’ Al-Amthal and Ibn `Abd Rabbuh in Al-`Iqd Al-Farid.*

(2) *This statement is mentioned by Al-Asfahani in Al-Aghani (2/477), under the transmissions of Ghilan.*

The same for inanimate objects! The True Lord *the Exalted* elevates them and gives them feelings, and it is from here that the sky and the earth do not shed any tears over these destroyed people because they went against Allah's way.

That is why Allah addresses inanimate objects and places them in the rank of those who possess inherent cognition, the enlightened people who understand and have intellect, and the proof is that Allah *the Exalted* gave the heavens, the earth and the mountains the ability to choose with regards to the matter of bearing the trust: 'We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it…' (*al-Ahzab:* 72).

This proves that they have the ability to choose and that they can rationalize. Some said that the heavens and earth are subjugated and forced to worship. I say: No! Everything in existence, with the exception of Allah, has been allowed to choose, and amongst the creation are those that relinquished their ability to choose in favour of their Lord's choice, and relinquished their will in favour of their Creator's will. Then, there are those who chose to keep the ability to choose, and this is man.

We said that there is a difference between the time of assuming a responsibility and the time of actually carrying it out. You are always certain and confident at the time of assuming, but you cannot guarantee carrying out. Therefore, inanimate objects were more objective than man was in this matter because they chose from the beginning to be compelled by their Lord. As for man, he chose to be allowed to choose, and when it came to carrying out the trust some of us believed and some of us disbelieved; some of us obeyed and some of us disobeyed.

If you were to ask: 'In what language do the heavens and earth speak'? My answer would be: 'Their Creator *the Exalted* addresses them and they understand, since He is the one who knows their language'. That is why the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us examples of the speech of created things and their glorification of Allah. He says: '...We made the mountains and the birds celebrate Our praises with Dawud (David). We did all these things.' (*al-Anbiya':* 79) He also says: '...There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra':* 44).

In the story of prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* the hoopoe said something that demonstrated his knowledge and impeccably amazing understanding of Allah's Oneness. Also, when the ant spoke, we saw that it had an understanding for the standards of truth and justice.

By Allah, we are astonished when we read this verse: 'Do you not realize [Prophet] that everything in the heavens and earth submits to Allah: the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the animals? So do many human beings, though for many others punishment is well deserved. Anyone disgraced by Allah will have no one to honour him: Allah does whatever He will.' (*al-Hajj:* 18)

All created beings glorify Allah, absolutely and without exception, except for man; the one and only creature that deviates from this order.

That is why we said that the other creatures, apart from man, were much wiser when they refused to be allowed to choose and relinquished their will in favour of their Lord's. Therefore, let man not be deluded! Let him know that the creatures around you have a role and a rank with Allah, and that they were created with understanding and feelings just the same as he was.

This matter is confirmed in an authentic Hadith by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said about Uhud: {Uhud is a mountain that loves us, just as we love it.}(1)

He also said, in another Hadith, that the mountain trembled as he and three of his Companions walked on it, and the Hadith goes as thus: 'Stand firm Uhud, for upon you are a Prophet, a Siddiq and two martyrs.'(2) He also said: ‘By Allah, indeed I know a stone in Mecca that used to give me peace greetings even before the revelation.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1287), the Hadith of Abu Hamid As-Saʿadi, and likewise Muslim in his Sahih (2466) and Al-Bayhaqi in Dalaʿil An-Nabuwwa (2020). Its wording is that Abu Hamid said: 'We set out with Prophet Muhammad from the battle of Tabuk until we were looking at Medina, and he said: {This is Taba and this is Uhud, a mountain that loves us and we love it.}*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2410,2299), Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (4032) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2630), and he said that it is a sound Hadith (one authentic transmission and one good narration), that Prophet Muhammad climbed Uhud with Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman, and it trembled with them. So, he said: 'Stand firm Uhud, for upon you are a prophet, a Siddiq and two martyrs.' The Prophet is the messenger, the Siddiq is Abu Bakr and the two martyrs are `Umar and `Uthman.*

It is also affirmed in the Hadith that the earth weeps at the death of a believer and rejoices at the death of a disbeliever. (2) The Arabs also have a saying that goes, ‘The household became sick of him’, i.e. it hated him.

This can only be because these inanimate objects have some form of understanding and rationalization, and they are in complete harmony with Allah’s way, as they are obedient and glorifying. That is why they love those who are like them from amongst the human beings and hate those who deviate from Allah’s way or reject His Oneness.

That is why, when `Ali was asked: ‘Do the sky and the earth weep?’ He said: ‘Yes. When a believer dies two places weep for him; a place on earth and a place in the sky. As for the place on earth, it is the place where he prostrated or prayed. As for the place in the sky, is it the place from where his deeds ascended.’(3) Hence, there is a kind of companionship between the place and the one in it; between the place and the believer.

With this we understand: ‘Neither heavens nor earth shed a tear for them....’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 29) So, why would the sky weep over the destruction of Allah’s enemy, Pharaoh, after he had challenged the True Lord *Glorified is He* and claimed that he was a deity besides Allah?

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4222), Ahmad in his Musnad (19912, 19988) and At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (2087, 1928, 1874) from the Hadith of Jabir ibn Samra.*

(2) *From Anas ibn Malik who said that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘There is no believer except that he has two portals in the sky, a portal from which his sustenance comes and a portal through which his speech and actions enter. When he dies, they miss him and they weep over him.’ Then he recited: ‘and neither sky nor earth shed tears over them…’ (ad-Dukhan: 29). Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2178) and he said: ‘This Hadith is gharib (a Hadith that is absolutely unique in its narration or unique by having something added to its text or to its chain of narrations).*

(3) *Mentioned by As-Samarqandi in his Quranic commentary Bahr Al-`Ulum (4/123) from the statement of Ibn `Abbas that he was asked: ‘Do the sky and earth weep over anyone?’ He said: ‘Yes. When a believer dies his place on earth in which he used to remember Allah and pray weeps over him, and his portal in the sky through which his deeds would rise also weeps over him.’ Mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (ad-Dukhan) from a number of chains coming from a number of Companions*

The statement: '...nor were they given any time…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 29) means they were not delayed beyond the appointed time, which Allah had decreed for their end, because when the term appointed by Allah comes, it can never be put back.

وَلَقَدْ نَجَّيْنَا بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ مِنَ ٱلْعَذَابِ ٱلْمُهِينِ ﴿٣٠﴾
مِن فِرْعَوْنَ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ عَالِيًا مِّنَ ٱلْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

We saved the Children of Israel from their
degrading suffering [30] at the hands of Pharaoh:
he was a tyrant who exceeded all bounds [31]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 30-31)

In the statement: '...from their degrading suffering' (*ad-Dukhan:* 31), suffering (*`adhab*) is to cause physical pain, and this could be with fire or something else such as cutting body part or skin, for example. But there is another form of non-physical suffering, like humiliation and disgrace, but it could be added to physical suffering. Some people can tolerate physical suffering, but they cannot bear to be humiliated with a word, and maybe it is even worse for them than physical suffering.

The Israelites were suffering from the slaughtering of their children and keeping their women alive. Women are a weak spot for men, and one's honour must be preserved. That is why transgressing against a man's woman is the greatest humiliation for him.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* was Incessantly Merciful with the Israelites and He saved them from the shameful suffering '…at the hands of Pharaoh...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 31). He '...was a tyrant who exceeded all bounds...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 31), i.e. in his transgression against the people, '...exceeded all bounds…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 31), meaning that he wasted their lives.

The one who exceeds limits (*musrif*) is the one who transgresses the bounds that Allah has set and goes beyond them; Pharaoh's arrogance was too extreme that he said to them: 'I am your Lord All-Highest!', and he deceived and deluded his people.

We stated previously that there is a difference between someone being misguided in himself and someone being misguided and misguiding others. Pharaoh was misguided and he misguided an entire nation and enslaved them. The one who said (1): ‘When did you enslave the people although they were born free?’ was indeed truthful.

وَلَقَدِ ٱخۡتَرۡنَٰهُمۡ عَلَىٰ عِلۡمٍ عَلَى ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

We chose them knowingly above others [32]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 32)

The speech here is about the Israelites, and they cling to this verse and use it to claim that they are Allah’s chosen people. They say to us: ‘Indeed Allah is the One Who created you and sent you a messenger and it is He Who chose us over all other people’.

This is a false claim because ‘...others’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 32) in this verse indicates the people contemporary to that time, such as Pharaoh’s people and others. These people were, by and large, idolaters, so Allah chose the Israelites because they believed in Allah and at that time they were the best of Allah’s entire creation.

However, they wanted to apply this verse to all of mankind and to all peoples at all times and places, and this is not possible. The proof is that when they contravened Allah’s way, He dispersed them throughout the earth in different communities and scattered them everywhere as a form of punishment.

This has gone to such an extent that in every city, you find a ghetto named after them, called ‘the Jewish Ghetto’, and you can see them gathering together and sticking to themselves and not mixing or integrating with the society around them.

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(1) *This statement is attributed to `Umar ibn Al-Khattab, and mentioned by the author of Al-Wilaya `Ala Al-Buldan. A son of `Amr ibn Al-`As beat a Coptic boy and relied on his father’s authority to do so. The Commander of the Believers wrote to him recalling him with his son and the Coptic boy. He then gave a whip to the Egyptian boy and commanded him to take his revenge from Ibn Al-`As’s son. Then he turned to them and said this above statement.*

The Quran even expressed this concept in the saying: ‘We dispersed them over the earth in separate communities...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 168). Thus, each group from amongst them, in its own place, represents an independent community because they do not integrate with other communities.

Their claim is debunked in the verse: ‘And then your Lord declared that, until the Day of Resurrection, He would send people against them to inflict terrible suffering on them. Your Lord is swift in punishment...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 167). This is what actually happens because from time to time Allah brings people against them who inflict terrible suffering on them.

Then, Allah says:

وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُم مِّنَ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ مَا فِيهِ بَلَٰٓؤٌا۟ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

We gave them revelations in which there was a clear test [33] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 33)

In His statement: ‘We gave them revelations in which there was a clear test.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 33), the revelations are the miracles that accompanied prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and with these signs Allah saved them from drowning and He saved them from Pharaoh’s people.

It is amazing that just after Allah had saved them from drowning and from Pharaoh, and just after they had gotten out safely, they saw some people worshipping their idols and they said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘...O Musa (Moses), set up for us a deity just as they have deities!...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 138) They associated partners with Allah, while their feet were still wet from crossing the sea!

While they were in the desert, Allah was generous with them, and He sent down to them manna and quails which are the best of foods and the most delicious to eat. This was given to them without having to toil or expend effort. However, because of their materialistic nature, they objected to the manna and quails.

They said to Musa (Moses): ‘...Musa (Moses), we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth’s produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions. He said, “Would you exchange better for worse?”...’ (*al-Baqara:* 61) They wanted something material which they can fetch, using their hands, from a source known to them. Indeed, they had reached such a degree of materialism that they told Musa (Moses): ‘...Make us see Allah face to face...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 153).

Some have even said that it is Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who encouraged them to this when he said: ‘...O my Sustainer! Show Yourself to me so that I might behold You!...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 143)

The word: ‘...a test’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 33) means a trial in order to know how you will react after seeing the signs or after seeing the blessings. We said before that tests are not blameworthy or praiseworthy in and of themselves, but rather according to their results and outcomes.

إِنَّ هَـٰٓؤُلَآءِ لَيَقُولُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ إِنْ هِىَ إِلَّا مَوْتَتُنَا ٱلْأُولَىٰ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُنشَرِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

These people here assert [34] There is nothing beyond
our one death: we will not be resurrected [35]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 34-35)

The indication in ‘These people here assert…’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 34) could mean the Israelites because if we looked in the Torah or the Talmud we would find no mention of the Last Day, even though it is one of the tenets of faith. Hence, they do not believe in this day.

The issue with them is as the Quran has related of their speech: ‘...The fire will most certainly not touch us for more than a limited number of days...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 24) meaning that the fire will be put out for them and this will be the end of the matter. In another verse, they said: ‘...We are Allah’s children and His beloved ones...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 18).

‘These people’ could also mean those who deny the resurrection in a general sense, whether they are the Israelites or others. When saying: ‘There is nothing beyond our first death...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 35), they mean by the first death the state of non-existence that they were in before they were created. They consider non-existence to be a state of death. Then Allah created Adam and from him came the rest of creation.

So, when Allah says: ‘...seeing that you were lifeless and He gave you the life...’ (*al-Baqara:* 28), they argue that this is the only death that will be followed by life, and that there is no other death followed by a resurrection or a reckoning. ‘...we will not be resurrected.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 35), i.e. we will not be resurrected after death.

فَأْتُوا۟ بِـَٔابَآئِنَآ إِن كُنتُمْ صَـٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Bring back our forefathers, if what you say is true [36] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 36)

We said before, that faith is founded on ‘unseen’ signs. Thus, you believe in Allah’s Existence and in paradise and the fire without seeing them. This is the essence of faith. As for signs that can be seen, there is no faith with regards to them. You do not say: ‘I believe that the sun is up’. However, these people because of the materialism that holds control over them, want an unseen sign that can be seen. Thus, they say: ‘Bring back our forefathers, if what you say is true.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 36)

They only believe in concrete things, and that is why they want their ancestors to be brought back from the dead so that they can believe that resurrection is true. We say to them: ‘If you want that, then you have the books of history and the divine messages that have been related to you. You have something similar to what you want in the story of 'Uzair (Ezra) *peace be upon him*:

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Or [are you, O man, of the same mind] as he who passed by a town (1) deserted by its people, with its roofs caved in, [and] said, “How could Allah bring all this back to life after its death?” Thereupon Allah caused him to be dead for a hundred years; after which He brought him back to life [and] said: “How long have you tarried?” He answered: “I have tarried a day, or part of a day.” Allah said: “Nay! You have tarried a hundred years; then look at your food and drink – untouched is it by the passing of years – and look at your ass; and [We did all this so] that We might make you a symbol unto men. And look at the bones – how We put them together and then clothe them with flesh!" And when [all this] became clear to him, he said: "I know [now] that Allah has the power over all things!"' (*al-Baqara:* 259)

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(1) *Ibn Kathir mentioned in his Tafsir (1/214) that the established opinion is that the town is Jerusalem. However, scholars differed as to he who passed by it. `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him said that it was Ezra, which is the generally accepted opinion. He was also said to have been Armiya ibn Halqiya, which is the opinion of Wahb ibn Munnabih. Hazqil ibn Bawar was also thought to be the man intended. Nonetheless, Mujahid ibn Jabr upheld that he was a man from the cildren of Israel (without specification).*

The same is found in the story of the People of the Cave. Brought back to life after three hundred and nine years, they said upon awakening from sleep or death, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: '...We have spent there a day, or part of a day...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 113). Being the normal sleep duration, they thought it to be the period they remained.

Such incidents as well as others occurred in the eras of the previous Prophets, whom they knew and believed in. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Are you not aware of those who left their homelands in their thousands for fear of death – whereupon Allah said unto them, "Die," and later brought them back to life? ...' (*al-Baqara:* 243)

Those people, whom Allah brought back to life after death, lived only to the extent that proved their miracle and then died. Therefore, the disbelievers have no plea in requesting their ancestors to be brought back to life, for Allah *Glorified is He* brought the dead back to life, as said by the messengers. All the same, they did not believe and even had Allah brought their ancestors back to life, they would not have believed.

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

أَهُمۡ خَيۡرٌ أَمۡ قَوۡمُ تُبَّعٖ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡۚ أَهۡلَكۡنَٰهُمۡۖ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ مُجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Are they better than the people of Tubba′ and
those who flourished before them? We destroyed
them all – they were guilty[37]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 37)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws a comparison between these people and the nations before them who denied the truth as they did. Allah tells them that they are not the first people to disbelieve and thereby not evading the punishment that befell those who denied before them.

‘They’ in the verse: ‘Are they better...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 37) refers to the children of Israel, whereas ‘...the people of *Tubba'...*’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 37) allude to Tubba' Al-Himayri who was one of the kings of Yemen. In the past, Yemen was called ‘The Green Land’ or ‘Joyous Yemen’ because of its abundance of treasures.

Tubba', who was a righteous man, was opposed and denied by his people, so Allah seized them with a Seizure of the All-Mighty, All-Capable, after destroying the dam that was supplying them with water for irrigation. With the destruction of the dam, their entire lives were destroyed.

This story reminds me of the days when I was in Algeria. The people of Algeria built a dam in order to reserve rainwater and they called it *Sadd Maarib* (Marib Dam). On the inauguration of the dam, when I was in the company of the Algerian President, someone stood up to give a speech. He said, ‘Now, the dam has been built and thus you can irrigate your land and cultivation, whether it rains or not.’

This statement caught my attention as I found it in contradiction, not only to religion but also to logic and reason. I said to the Foreign Minister of the host state, ‘Ask the speaker what the dam will reserve if it does not rain?’

In the Quranic verse: ‘...they were guilty’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 27), the word *mujrim* (guilty) is not used unless the person dubbed as such has went too far in disobedience and committing sins. The word *mujrim* signifies someone who commits an abominable crime. In the verse under discussion, the general meaning is given: ‘...and those who flourished before them? We destroyed them all...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 37).

In another verse, the nature of the destruction is explained in detail. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘For every one of them did We punish for his sin: and so, upon some of them(1) We let loose a deadly storm; and some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast; and some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some of them We caused to drown...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

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(1) They were destroyed by four different types of punishment:
The sending of *al-hasib* which is a severe storm wind that carries the pebbles of the earth throwing them upon the disbelievers and uprooting them… Then, it inverted them upon their heads. Such was the punishment of the people of 'Ad.
The blast, i.e. to be overtaken by a cry, which is a scream that stifles their sounds and movements, and that was the punishment of the people of Thamud, the killers of Prophet Saleh’s (Shelah’s) she-camel. =

Further, in the chapter of *al-Fajr*, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Are you not aware of how your Lord has dealt with [the tribe of] Ad, [the people of] Iram the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land? And with [the tribe of] Thamud, who hollowed out rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of the [many] tent-poles?' (*al-Fajr:* 6-10)

These nations had civilizations which they could not preserve or defend against coming to an end such that it is as if they never existed. Allah *Glorified is He* seized the disbelievers of the earlier nations with a seizure of the All-Mighty, All-Capable because previous messengers were not asked to fight, but only to convey Allah's Message.

It was Allah *Glorified is He* Who took charge of disciplining the deniers and exacting revenge on them. Only Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was permitted to fight, because he was entrusted with leading humanity under his guidance, as revealed to him from Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, he is not to be succeeded by messengers, which stands as proof of bearing witness to the goodness of his community that remains until the Day of Judgment.

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَٰعِبِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾
مَا خَلَقْنَٰهُمَآ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

We were not playing a pointless game when We
created the heavens and earth and everything in
between [38] We created them for a true purpose,
but most people do not comprehend [39]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 38-39)

To turn our attention towards a universal issue, incorporating time, in the past and in the present, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the firmness of the creation of

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= Being swallowed by the earth and this is what happened to Qarun, who transgressed and oppressed, so Allah caused the earth to swallow him.
Drowning which befell Pharaoh along with his minister, Haman, and their soldiers. They were all drowned in one morning.

the heavens and the earth. Ever since they were created, they have been following a perfectly firm system that does not fall behind, change, or alter.

Being created with truth and in truth is attested to by this firmness, as truth is firm whereas falsehood changes. For instance, a false witness standing before a judge inevitably gives conflicting statements which can be exposed by the examining magistrate who keeps asking and investigating him to find out his false statements that he is trying to present as truth.

His statements are contradictory, being merely some falsehood based on his own imagination. However, the one who bears witness and speaks the truth does not change his mind as long as he sticks to it. This is because truth is firm and real, thereby leaving no room for contradiction.

Examining magistrates have their ways and methods to expose lies and arrive at the truth. Hence, the saying goes, ‘a liar should have a good memory’. However, it is inevitable that at some point your memory will let you down so that truth prevails over falsehood.

I remember we had in Dakados(1) a braggart farmer. Once, on our way back from Mit Ghamr, the man was telling some of his stories. He said, ‘such and such incident happened on the night of the *Eid Al-Fitr* (After-*Ramadan* holiday) when the moon was bright.’ I wondered how the moon could be bright in such night. It is surely true what the common proverb provides, (a lie has no legs, i.e. one lie leads to another).

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 38). It is clear, then, that Allah *Glorified is He* created them decisively for a purpose, not in play, and with truth not falsehood. In the following verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We created them for a true purpose...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 39). This firmness is proof of the precision, providence, meticulousness, perfect engineering, and laws of the creation, which have never conflicted with each other since they were created and never will until the Last Day.

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(1) The village of Dakados is in *Mit Ghamr*, Daqahlia Governorate, Egypt. The house and mausoleum of Mohammed Mutawalli Ash-Sha`rawi are established there. (Wikipedia Arabic)

Contemplate, for example, on the rising and setting, movement and speed of the sun in relation to the earth. Reflect on the moon and its eclipse. All these signs occur with the utmost precision and with measures that never fall behind or conflict. A manmade device cannot keep working with such precision constantly.

Allah *Glorified is He* the One, created the heavens and the earth with an exact harmonious system for a purpose, which is one and the same since the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* until the end of the world.

The word *haqq* (truth), referred to in the verse as: '...for a purpose...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 39) denotes something firm that does not change. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And the skies has He raised high, and has devised [for all things] a measure so that you [too, O people,] might never transgress the measure [of what is right]: weigh, therefore, [your deeds] with equity, and cut not the measure short!' (*ar-Rahman:* 7-9)

This verse contains a subtle indication, as if Allah *Glorified is He* were to say: 'Look at the sky, the stars and celestial bodies that it contains. Have you seen any conflict or imbalance therein'? The answer is 'never' because they were created for a purpose and with measure and precision. Similarly, for the affairs of your life to be straight and upright, then the measure of truth should be adopted to the core. Only then will you find no conflict or contradiction in society.

Firm, truth is permanent and sublime. Thus, the saying goes, 'Truth glitters while falsehood stutters'. Truth is never obliterated, even if falsehood has the upper hand temporarily, as Allah *Glorified is He* allows falsehood to prevail at some point in order that people hold firm to and feel the importance of truth. It is as if falsehood itself is a soldier of truth and disbelief is a soldier of faith. Were it not for the onslaught and severity of falsehood, people would have never known the bliss of truth. Hence, when faith came, no one rushed to embrace it except for those who were suffering the most from disbelief.

The Quranic verse: '...but most people do not comprehend.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 39) indicates that most people do not understand these realities because they turn away from Allah's signs in the universe, and from contemplation, as Allah says: 'But [then] – how many a sign is there in the heavens and on earth which they pass by [unthinkingly], and on which they turn their backs!’ (*Yusuf:* 105)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ يَوْمَ ٱلْفَصْلِ مِيقَـٰتُهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ يَوْمَ لَا يُغْنِى مَوْلًى عَن مَّوْلًى شَيْـًٔا
وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤١﴾ إِلَّا مَن رَّحِمَ ٱللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٤٢﴾

The Day of Decision is the time appointed for all [40]
a Day when no friend can take another’s place [41]
No one will receive any help except for those to whom
God shows mercy: He is the Mighty, the Merciful Lord [42]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 40 - 42)

As they used to turn away from Allah’s signs in the worldly life, they will be presented before Him on the Day of Judgment: ‘Verily, the Day of Distinction [between the true and the false] is the term appointed for all of them.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 40) The Day of Resurrection is their appointed time in which Allah will gather all of them together; the follower and the followed, the believer and the disbeliever, the obedient and the disobedient, the deniers and the believers in the Messengers.

All will be gathered on: ‘the Day when no friend shall be of the least avail...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 41). A friend will be of no benefit ‘...to his friend…’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 41), and no relative will defend his relative.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘On that Day, friends will be foes unto one another – [all] save the righteous.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 67) Blood and friendship ties will be preserved among the righteous only. Nonetheless, friends for the sake of vanities and interests of the worldly life will be enemies on the Day of Resurrection. Each one of them will blame the other for not advising or warning him against falling into sins and disobedience.

The Quranic verse: ‘...No one will receive any help’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 41) suggests that they will find no one to help them besides Allah: ‘except for those to whom Allah shows mercy...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 41). The mercy bestowed upon those people encompasses mercy in the worldly life in the first place by saving them from disbelief and leading them to faith and belief in Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is of Allah's Mercy that they follow His Guidance and His straight path until they meet with Him. This mercy paves the way for the greatest mercy on the Day of Resurrection.

The word *mawla* (friend) extends to include children, relatives and friends, and even slaves and servants. It can also include one's followers and subordinates. The Quranic verse: '...no friend can take another's place...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 41) indicates that one will not protect another from harm or bear his burdens because each person will be preoccupied with himself and his own burden. This is the case with humanity. The same goes for the idols and anything worshipped besides Allah, which will never defend their worshippers.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says about Pharaoh: '[And so] he shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection...' (*Hud:* 98), i.e. he will precede his people to the fire.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

إِنَّ شَجَرَتَ ٱلزَّقُّومِ ﴿٤٣﴾ طَعَامُ ٱلْأَثِيمِ ﴿٤٤﴾
كَٱلْمُهْلِ يَغْلِي فِي ٱلْبُطُونِ ﴿٤٥﴾ كَغَلْيِ ٱلْحَمِيمِ ﴿٤٦﴾

The tree of *Zaqqum* [43] will be food for the
sinners [44] [hot] as molten metal, it boils in their
bellies [45] like seething water [46]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 43 - 46)

In these verses, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an idea about the food of the inmates of the fire, from which we seek refuge in Allah. In another verse, He depicts their drink in it because food and drink are the essentials of life. Their food is awful fruit from the *Zaqqum* tree, which is a small tree with a putrid smell and a bitter taste. Regarding its shape, Allah *Glorified is He* states in another verse: 'It is fruit [as repulsive] as the heads of devils.' (*as-Saffat:* 65) This is a simile precisely conveying how repulsive and ugly it is to eat or even at which to look.

Objecting to this simile, some orientalists contend that what is unknown cannot be compared to that which is also unknown, given that no one has seen the heads of the devils. The purpose of a simile, they argue, is to compare something unknown to something known for the sake of clarification. Their argument is based on lack of knowledge regarding the inimitability of the Quran and its way of rendering meaning. If we were to hold a competition between all the caricature artists in the world, asking them to draw a picture of the Devil, each one of them would portray him according to how ugly he imagines him to be. In this way, we will be left with numerous images, all of which are ugly despite being different from one another. Granted, ugliness has various types; something may be repulsive for some people but not as such for others. For instance, the standards of beauty are relative among people; some people see beauty in thin lips while others see it in thick lips.

As such, the standards of ugliness differ in the minds of people and the image that scares one person might not scare another. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* uses this simile to depict the ugliness and repulsiveness of its fruit in such a way as encompasses all aspects thereof according to every one's mind.

Accordingly, vagueness here is better because it allows for imaging ugliness in every possible way and thus we maintain that vagueness here is the utmost clarification and the essence of explanation. Therefore, it is a loathsome tree in its shape, taste and smell. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* further describes its taste as being: '[hot] as molten metal, it boils in their bellies.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 45) The Arabic word *al-muhl* (molten metal) signifies the melted metal that reaches the maximum temperature, or it may refer to boiling oil.

For example, the chef cooking *falafil* boils the oil for long periods until it turns into a black, toxic substance. This is what they call *al-muhl* if it comes from soft sources. It may also come from hard sources such as metals, for example: gold, iron and copper.

The meaning of: '…it boils in their bellies' (*ad-Dukhan:* 45) is that the temperature of the drink does not decrease after consuming it. For example, upon drinking hot tea one feels a burning sensation in his mouth. However, when it reaches the stomach, the temperature decreases. Food taken from the *zaqqum* tree, on the other hand, keeps boiling even after being settled in the bellies: 'like seething water.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 46) Such food is as hot and boiling as water that has reached its maximum temperature.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

خُذُوهُ فَٱعۡتِلُوهُ إِلَىٰ سَوَآءِ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ﴿٤٧﴾ ثُمَّ صُبُّواْ فَوۡقَ رَأۡسِهِۦ مِنۡ عَذَابِ
ٱلۡحَمِيمِ ﴿٤٨﴾ ذُقۡ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡكَرِيمُ ﴿٤٩﴾

Take him! Thrust him into the depths of Hell! [47]
Pour scalding water over his head as punishment! [48]
Taste this, you powerful, respected man! [49]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 47-49)

Contemplating the imperative verb: ‘Take him...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 47-49) given by Allah *Glorified is He* one finds it scaring and dreadful. Surely, were it to be said by a police officer to a criminal, he would be terrified. How fearsome should it be, then, when said by Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘...Thrust him...!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 47) That is to say, haul him severely and harshly, without mercy or clemency, but to where? ‘...into the depths of Hell!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 47) Allah *Glorified is He* does not merely say ‘to *jahim*’ (hell), but He says instead ‘into the depths of Hell’. Were that inhabitant of fire to be at its edges, he could possibly have hope of getting out, or maybe a breeze would come and mitigate his suffering. Rather, he is in the middle, with the fire all around him from every direction, surrounding him.

Further, another punishment is to be inflicted on him: ‘Pour scalding water over his head as a punishment!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 48) Thus, he suffers from boiling substances in his abdomen and over his head, after which he is to experience mental suffering, derision, and mockery.

‘Taste this, you powerful, respected man!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) Tasting, involving all parts of the body, is to be inflicted on him. ‘...you powerful respected man!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49), i.e., you were powerful and respected in the worldly life and thought the same would be the case in the Hereafter. The same goes for the one who said, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘...But even if [it should come, and] I am brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort!’ (*al-Kahf:* 36) His description, as given in the Quran: ‘...powerful, respected man’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) is intended for mocking and deriding him.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

إِنَّ هَٰذَا مَا كُنتُم بِهِۦ تَمۡتَرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

This is what you doubted [50]
(The Quran, *ad*-Dukhan*:* 50)

The referent of the Quranic phrase: ‘This is...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 50) is the suffering that is befalling them. The phrase: ‘...what you doubted’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 50) indicates that what the disbelievers used to doubt and reject is now an actual reality.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the opposite category, stating:

إِنَّ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ فِي مَقَامٍ أَمِينٖ ﴿٥١﴾ فِي جَنَّٰتٖ وَعُيُونٖ ﴿٥٢﴾ يَلۡبَسُونَ مِن سُندُسٖ
وَإِسۡتَبۡرَقٖ مُّتَقَٰبِلِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾ كَذَٰلِكَ وَزَوَّجۡنَٰهُم بِحُورٍ عِينٖ ﴿٥٤﴾

But those mindful of God will be in a safe place [51]
amid Gardens and springs [52] clothed in silk and
fine brocade, facing one another [53] so it will be. We
shall wed them to maidens with large, dark eyes [54]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 51-54)

Using complete opposites for the purpose of clarification is one of the Quranic linguistic styles, by way of which the meaning becomes clearer. Employing this linguistic style, the Arab poet puts it:

The face is like the white dawn
While the hair is like the black night
Two opposites, when brought together properly
One opposite manifests the beauty of the other

Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘[in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire.’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14) It is for one to make the comparison and choose. For this reason, after telling us about the final outcome of the criminals and the various kinds of punishment prepared for them, Allah mentions the final outcome of the righteous and the life of bliss prepared for them.

In the Quranic verse: ‘But those mindful of Allah will be in a safe place’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 51), the pious and righteous person is the one who places a protective barrier *between himself and* Allah’s Attributes of Majesty. *His* Attributes of Majesty include: *Al-Qahhar* (The All-Dominant), *Al-Jabbar* (The All-Compeller), *Al-Muntaqim* (The Avenger), and *Dhul-Batsh Ash-Shadid* (The One Who is severe in Punishment). Thus, believers should place a protective barrier between themselves and Allah’s Attributes of Majesty, the consequences of which cannot be faced by them.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘O you who believe! Remain conscious of Allah...’ (*al-Baqara:* 278). In another verse, Allah says, ‘...then be conscious of the fire whose fuel is human beings and stones which awaits all who deny the truth!’ (*al-Baqara:* 24) Fire is one of the means for implementing the implications of Allah’s Attributes of Dominance and Majesty, and thus both verses convey the same meaning.

Regarding the Quranic verse: ‘...in a safe place’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 51), the word *maqam* (place) denotes a place of residence or home in which one lives. Further, it has many parts, in which to stay, sleep, or practise other activities. However, one of the most important essentials of a home is security for oneself and one’s property.

Accordingly, when setting up a residential area, the first thing to think of is providing security to its residents. This entails being located far from the pastures of beasts and predatory animals. In addition, it has to be secure from thieves and treacherous people who watch over one trying to disturb his peace.

A safe place is the one wherein one feels secure from everything. Therefore, specific security is given precedence to general security. This is clear in the Quranic verse depicting Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as supplicating to Allah: ‘...O my Lord! Make this a land secure...’ (*al-Baqara:* 126), i.e. generally secure, as is a prerequisite for any land.

When given what he asked for, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* supplicated for specific security saying, as stated in the Quran: ‘...O my Lord! Make this land secure...’ (*Ibrahim:* 35). Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* granted him more superior security which is the sanctity of the Sacred House:

‘...and whoever enters it finds security...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 97) such that if a man meets his father’s killer therein he does not confront him because of the sanctity of the place.

When the incident of shooting and scaring the secured occurred in the Sacred House, some atheists seized this opportunity to cast doubt on the Quranic verse: ‘...and whoever enters it finds security...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 97) deeming what happened as contradictory to the verse.

To better understand this issue, we should distinguish between the various styles of rendering in the Quran. The Quranic verse: ‘...and whoever enters it finds security...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 97) does not intend to inform that whoever enters it is secure. Rather, Allah orders the believers, in the verse, to grant security to whoever enters it. Thus, it is a legislative command that can be obeyed by granting security to whoever enters it or disobeyed by frightening those entering it.

The verse contains a directive, not an informative sentence, which can be true or false, unlike a directive sentence, which can be neither true nor false.

For example, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘[In the nature of things,] corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men, for corrupt women – just as good women are for good men, and good men, for good women...’ (*an-Nur:* 26). Some people understand this verse to be informing that corrupt women are inevitably married to corrupt men. Looking at the reality of society, they come to have doubts on the veracity of the verse.

However, the meaning is rather legislative; give corrupt women to corrupt men, and give good women to good men. This is a legislative command that may be obeyed by some and disobeyed by others.

To follow Allah’s Commands is wise and sound in that compatibility between the couples and balance of the marital life are established. A good man marrying a corrupt woman would have his life spoiled by conflict and disagreement, or may rebuke and humiliate his wife for her past evil deeds. As for a corrupt man taking a corrupt woman in marriage, there will be agreement. If he blamed her for previous misdeeds, she would do the same.

On that account, Allah *Glorified is He* imposed certain universal matters that never change and are never contradicted by the reality of life. He also imposed legislative issues and left them for the choice of the legally responsible person. Thus, this verse and similar others do not represent universal but rather legislative matters. Allah *Glorified is He* orders those who believe in His legislative commands to observe them.

In the Quranic verse: ‘amid Gardens and springs’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 52), the word *jannat* (Gardens) signifies gardens and orchards, which are deemed by the Arabs as a beautiful gift and a great blessing. Even though security is a necessity, gardens and springs show luxury and an abundance of blessings.

Such gardens have springs, as stated in the verse: ‘...and springs’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 52), being indispensable for watering the plants and nourishing the fruits. After granting them security and luxuries of life, Allah *Glorified is He* then offers them beautiful clothing: ‘wearing [garments] of silk and brocade, facing one another’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 53).

The Arabic word *sundus* (silk) denotes fine silk, while the word *istabraq* (brocade) signifies thick, rough silk. This clothing indicates luxury, comfort, and bliss, because necessary clothes are those which cover one’s body, whereas luxurious clothes are embellished with feathers and particularly ostrich feathers. Hence is the saying, ‘a feathered man’, i.e. one who leads a luxurious life.

Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘O Children of Adam! Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from on high [the knowledge of making] garments to cover your nakedness, and as adornment (*risha*): but the garment of righteousness is the best of all...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 26).

In this way, there are three kinds of clothes: necessary clothes that screen one’s nakedness, luxurious and embellished clothes, and the clothes of righteousness, the last of which is the best and most excellent. This is because the full benefit driven from clothes is covering one’s body and showing elegance in the worldly life. This is temporal enjoyment, extending only to the span of one’s life. A baby may die immediately after birth and thereby getting no share of such enjoyment nor having naked parts to cover.

On the other hand, the clothes of righteousness represent embellishment in the worldly life and salvation in the Hereafter, the everlasting and eternal abode. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...but the garment of righteousness is the best of all...' (*al-A'raf:* 26).

After the punishment prepared for the disbelievers is expounded, Allah *Glorified is He* as can be observed mentions the reward prepared for those who believe in Him and His messengers. Allah *Glorified is He* appointed the Day of Resurrection to judge between them: 'Verily, the Day of Distinction [between the true and the false] is the term appointed for all of them' (*ad-Dukhan:* 40).

Distinction is to be made between two things that are united in one matter and different in another. Thus, both the believers and disbelievers are the same in regard to existence, the conferment of Lordship and Allah's blessings in the worldly life, for Allah *Glorified is He* provides the essentials of life such as water, air, and food, to everyone.

Thus, they are equal in this regard because Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord and the Creator of all of them. He is the One Who brought them into existence, so it is inevitable that He guarantees for them the necessities of life. However, these essentials are of varying degrees. For instance, when referring to clothes, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O Children of Adam...' (*al-A'raf:* 26), instead of mentioning the believers in particular because it is a gift of Lordship.

Then, the verse goes on: '...Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from on high [the knowledge of making] garments to cover your nakedness...' (*al-A'raf:* 26). This verse indicates that they are both entitled to the necessary clothes that conceal their nakedness and the luxurious clothes of beauty and ornament. Such are of the enjoyments of the life of this world, whereas to the clothes of righteousness preference is given, being the clothes of the people of faith.

Furthermore, even though we are all made equal with regards to Divine conferment, being all His slaves, on the Day of Judgement everyone will get what he deserves. It is all different in the Hereafter. The disbelievers will have their food from the *zaqqum* tree which boils in their bellies like seething water, while the righteous will be in gardens and springs in a safe place.

The words *sundus* and *istabraq* are of Persian origin that were later introduced into Arabic, and thereby used in the Quran as Arabic words, due to common usage by the Arabs. In turn, the orientalists raised objections against these words and other similar ones, such as the word *qistas* (balance) even though there is nothing wrong with a language using terms from another language.

Granted, these words were introduced into Arabic, used, and understood by Arabic speakers, and then what is wrong with using them as Arabic words? Nowadays, for example, we use the word ‘bank’, which is not Arabic, and may even find it smoother and easier than the Arabic word *masraf*.

The Quranic verse: ‘...facing one another’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 53) depicts the people of paradise and their residence therein. The phrase ‘facing one another’ indicates intimacy, as faces look at each other continuously and are close to one another. The opposite is *mutadabira* (to face in opposite directions) which only exists in case of dispute. The phrase: ‘...facing one another’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 53) suggests mutual intimacy, love and harmony between the dwellers of paradise.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So it will be...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 54) which indicates that they will enjoy these blessings and even more: ‘...We shall wed them to maidens with large, dark eyes.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 54) The verb *zawwaja* (wed) is transitive and collocates with the preposition *ba* (with). Thus, when one says, ‘I married such-and-such woman (to) him *(zawwajtuhu)*’, it means I gave her to him as a wife. This refers to the legal marriage.

However, when one says, ‘I paired him with so-and-so’, it signifies adding another similar pair, which is not necessary a female. Thus, in the Quranic verse: ‘...We shall wed them to maidens with large, dark eyes’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 54), the verb *zawwaja* is collocates with the letter *ba*.

This linguistic style implies that it is not the issue of marriage which is intended, but affability with the beauty of the maidens, representing the peak of pleasure. Having intimacy is not necessarily involved(1) because we will be resurrected as a new creation in the Hereafter, different from how we used to look in the worldly life, and the proof is that in paradise one eats but never defecates.

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(1) This issue refutes the argument of those who challenge Islam contending that paradise of the Muslims is cantered around sexual intercourse while being devoid of sublime or lofty spirituality. Thus, the statement of Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul* decisively clarifies the matter to be one of intimacy and companionship. The preposition *ba* indicates companionship and close union, and not sexual intercourse. *[‘Adil Abu Al-Ma’ati]*

On this basis, the intended meaning of the verse is pairing between couples, regardless of the gender because the pleasure here is that of looking, conversing and intimacy, but with values that are different from what we know now.

In the Quranic verse: '...to maidens with large, dark eyes' (*ad-Dukhan:* 54), the word *hur* (maidens) is the plural of *huraa*, and it refers to the women of paradise. *Al-Hawar* is an attribute of the eye when its white part is extremely white and its black part is extremely black. The word *in* (large eyed), the plural of *ainaa'* denotes wide beautiful eyes.

Looking at her mouth, one finds it two times smaller than her eye. Being an aspect of beauty, people usually describe a beautiful mouth to be as small as the ring of Solomon. Ah! What a beautiful sight!

Marriage, being one of the greatest pleasures of life pursed by men and women when they have come of age, Allah *Glorified is He* made it one of the pleasures of the Hereafter, but in a rather purer form, regardless of the act of intercourse itself. It is rather about intimacy in what was considered a blessing in the worldly life. In the Hereafter, the standards are different, as things are purified from the troubles of the worldly life.

For example, wine, honey and milk which are consumed in this life, will be present in the Hereafter, yet after being clarified from impurities. Thus, wine in the Hereafter is made delicious for those who drink, while wine in the worldly life is not delicious. The milk's taste never changes and the water does not alter.

Likewise, marriage is cleared of its problems and troubles such that the couples in this life, when gathered in paradise, the husband will find his wife in a different form because Allah *Glorified is He* will have purified and rid her of the defects that she used to have in the worldly life.

If she were, for example, not beautiful, he would find her to be the most beautiful of women. If she used to have a sharp tongue, he would find her most civilized because they will be produced in a new creation. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'for We shall have brought them into being in a life renewed, having resurrected them as virgins, full of love, well-matched with those who have attained to righteousness.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 35-38) Further, Allah says, '...and spouses pure...' (*Al-'Imran:* 15).

Therefore, the letter *ba* (with) in the Quranic verse: ‘...We shall wed them to maidens with large, dark eyes.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 54) implies that it is a kind of marriage completely unlike the relationship between a man and a woman, as known in the worldly life. It is surely far removed from the issue of sexuality because life in the Hereafter has other blessings and other standards.

The words *hur* in (maidens with large, dark eyes) draws attention towards the pleasure of looking and enjoying them, just as someone looks at his friend whom he loves. If he is satisfied and content with this blessing, then he is welcome, otherwise there is whatever the soul desires and what pleases the eyes. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

يَدْعُونَ فِيهَا بِكُلِّ فَٰكِهَةٍ ءَامِنِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾ لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا ٱلْمَوْتَ
إِلَّا ٱلْمَوْتَةَ ٱلْأُولَىٰ ۖ وَوَقَىٰهُمْ عَذَابَ ٱلْجَحِيمِ ﴿٥٦﴾

Secure and contented, they will call for every kind of fruit [55] After the one death they will taste death no more. God will guard them from the torment of Hell [56]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 55 - 56)

The meaning of the phrase: ‘...they will call for...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 55) is that they will request in paradise. It may be asked, ‘Why shall they request it when in Paradise things appear before one’s eyes merely by thinking of them’? The scholars maintain that it occurs after consuming the essential food, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘and with the flesh of any fowl that they may desire.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 21)

Thereupon, one wants fruits, which once he desires appear before him, even if they are: ‘...every kind of fruit...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 55), i.e. of all kinds and shapes. However affluent one may be, he would only eat one or two kinds of fruits after his basic meal. Nonetheless, in paradise, they request all kinds of fruit.

One may wonder as to how one’s abdomen could be large enough or as to how one could consume many types of similar things all at once. Surely, if it were to happen in this world, one would have troubles in their stomach, intestines, and others, but in paradise it is all different.

The verse affirms that they will feel: ‘Secure and contented...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 55). The word *aminin* (secured) is used to remove perplexity and astonishment, asserting that in paradise, you can eat anything you want, and everything your soul desires.

Moreover, food is secure from being spoiled by the factors known in the worldly life, and is prepared and clarified by Allah *Glorified is He* from ruin, decay and other defects. It is pure enough that one may eat as much as he can without defecation. Therefore, the blessings of paradise are clarified and purified of flaws and defects.

Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘After the first death, they will taste death no more...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 56) which means that in paradise there is no death. Why is it then, that there is the exception of: ‘After the first death...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 56)? In fact, the verse means that they will not taste death in paradise because they will have become immortal after the first death in the worldly life. In paradise, nevertheless, there is no death.

The word: ‘taste’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 56) implies that the sense of taste which is restricted to the tongue and its surrounding sensory area, covers the entire body, encompassing all the other senses.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* states regarding the suffering of the inmates of the fire: ‘Taste this, you powerful, respected man!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) They taste the suffering, not only with their tongues but also with all their body organs. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘...and therefore Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear in result of all [the evil] that its people had so persistently perpetrated.’ (*an-Nahl:* 112) Allah *Glorified is He* portrays the sense of taste as a garment that covers the whole body, and thus every part of the body tastes the suffering.

The Quranic verse: ‘...Allah will guard them from the torment of Hell’ (*ad-Dukhan*: 55-56) suggests that before these blessings are bestowed, Allah *Glorified is He* will protect them from the suffering of the blazing fire. Protection from chastisement precedes entering paradise since the rule provides, as previously stated, that cleaning the impurities precedes ornamentation. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘...whereupon he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَضۡلٗا مِّن رَّبِّكَۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ﴿٥٧﴾

A bounty from your Lord. That is the supreme triumph [57] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 57)

Surely, paradise, the blessings that it contains, and protection from suffering before all else are deemed as: ‘A bounty from your Lord...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 57). It is by Allah’s Grace and Favour that they are delivered from chastisement and admitted to paradise, not by virtue of their deeds.

This is a matter of disagreement between the scholars because Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘...Enter paradise by virtue of what you were doing [in life]!’ (*an-Nahl:* 32), and yet in another verse, Allah says, ‘Say, “In [this] bounty of Allah and in His Grace – in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!”’ (*Yunus:* 58)

Consequently, some verses highlight the issue of Divine Favour whereas other verses mention one’s deeds as the main reason for being admitted to paradise. Undoubtedly, the opponents of Islam pounce on these issues, trying to cast doubt on the Word of Allah, Lord of the worlds, and accusing it of contradiction. Far is it and high above what they say by great sublimity.

In order to clarify this matter, it is enough to consider that when you are concerned with your child, spend money and hire him a private tutor so that he excels, it is for his own benefit not yours. Further, if he does well, you give him a reward and encourage him to go on. Therefore, you burden yourself and spend your money, without gaining a benefit whatsoever, as the only one deriving benefit in this case is your child.

This is how Allah *Glorified is He* treats His creation; He created and provided for His creation. Then, He sent down guidance, adhering to which entitles one to a reward, and thereby getting upright character in the worldly life and being rewarded in the Hereafter.

Above need of the worlds, Allah *Glorified is He* confers His blessings and provides Guidance for His servants, even though to Him belong the Perfect

Attributes before He created the creation. Therefore, obedience does not benefit Him nor does disobedience harm Him.

Beware of thinking that your obedience and worship to Allah *Glorified is He* support His Lordship or add to His creation. You are the one who benefits first and last from His Guidance, to which one is honoured to belong and to be among Allah's servants.

This is affirmed in a Qudsi Hadith, (1) 'O My slaves! If the first and last of you, all the jinn and all the men among you possessed the heart of the most pious man among you, that would not increase My Dominion in any way. O My slaves! If the first and last of you, all the jinn and all the men among you possessed the heart of the most evil man among you, that would not decrease My Dominion in any way. O My slaves! If the first and last of you, all the jinn and all the men among you, were to stand in a single place and ask of Me, I could give to every man what he wants without decreasing My dominion any more than a needle when it enters the sea. This is because I am Generous, Glorious, and Existing. I give with a word and punish with a word. If I will something, all I do is say to it "Be!" and it is.'(2)

Therefore, the legal responsibility that Allah imposed upon us does not benefit Him in the slightest; it is rather for our own benefit. If we were to approach the matter rationally, we would find it more proper to pay for it, as the reward for obedience is therefore nothing more than Allah's favour, even His Legislation and Guidance are but one of His favours.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'A bounty from your Lord. That is the supreme triumph.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 57) following and adhering to Allah's Guidance is undoubtedly the supreme triumph, in that by virtue of which one gains benefit in this world and gets rewarded in the Hereafter.

As for the Quranic verse: '...Enter paradise by virtue of what you were doing [in life]' (*an-Nahl:* 32), the scholars argue that it means to enter paradise because of your righteous deeds, which are merely a reason entitling you to it, but not a price to deserve it. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this concept when he said, ‘None of you will enter paradise because of his deeds alone.’ They asked, ‘Not even you, O Messenger of Allah.’ He said, ‘Not even I, unless Allah covers me with His Mercy.’(1)

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(1) *Divine words, other than the Holy Quran, narrated on the authority of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him.*

(2) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2419), Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4247) and Ahmad in his Musnad (20560, 20405), on the authority of Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi graded this Hadith as hasan (good).*

Considering this Hadith we can understand the Quranic verse: ‘Say: “In [this] bounty of Allah and in His Grace – in this, then, let them rejoice: it is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass!”’ (*Yunus:* 58).

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَٰهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

We have made this Quran easy to understand –
in your own language [Prophet] – so that they
may take heed [58] (The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 58)

Addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* elucidates His blessings upon him, of which is making the Quran easy for him that he reads it in a clear, Arabic language. The pronoun ‘it’ in the Quranic phrase: ‘...We have made it [this Quran] easy to understand...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 58) refers to the Quran which can be inferred from the subsequent phrase: ‘...in your own language...’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 58). This is linguistic conformity since it was revealed in the Arabic language which is the language of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Furthermore, the conclusion of the verse: ‘...so that they may take heed’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 58) indicates that it is in the language of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and never have We sent forth any Prophet otherwise than [with a message] in his own people’s tongue...’ (*Ibrahim:* 4). Thus, in your language, it is conveyed and in theirs, it is received, accepted and even subsequently conveyed, for they are the ones entrusted with spreading the word after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5241) and Muslim in his Sahih (5037, 5038, 5040) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَٱرۡتَقِبۡ إِنَّهُم مُّرۡتَقِبُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

So wait; the disbelievers too are waiting [59]
(The Quran, *ad-Dukhan:* 59)

This verse directs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to wait, for the disbelievers too are waiting. However, what is it that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should be waiting for? And what are the disbelievers waiting for? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with a call and Guidance, a light with which to guide his people. Even as they oppose his call, declaring themselves as his enemies and seeking to put out Allah's Light, he is concerned over them, wishing for them to be guided despite their harm and ridicule such that he almost destroys himself for the sake of his call.

Hence, in many Quranic verses, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses him to console and lighten his burden. Allah informs him: '...you are not bound to do more than deliver the message [entrusted to you] ...' (*ash-Shura:* 48), and 'Will you, perhaps, torment yourself to death [with grief] because they [who live around you] refuse to believe [in it]?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses him, saying: 'Well do We know that what such people say grieves you indeed: yet, it is not you to whom they give the lie, but Allah's Messages do these evildoers deny.' (*al-An'am:* 33)

This is to tell Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not be sad because what they say about him, for they respect, appreciate and know his truthfulness and elevated rank. They deem him high above telling lies, but Allah's Messages and signs are what they deny.

The word *fartaqib* (So wait) appears twice in this chapter; in the verse under discussion (*ad-Dukhan:* 59), and in the Quranic verse: '[Prophet], watch out for the Day when the sky brings forth clouds of smoke for all to see.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 10) The latter is related to the supplication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O Allah! Be severe on the tribe of Mudar! Inflict upon them years of famine like the years of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph).'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (762, 951, 2715, 3124) and by Muslim in his Sahih (1082,1083) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

In turn, they were afflicted with famine and drought until they were forced to eat corpses and wool or fur mixed with dry blood. Unable to bear it anymore, they hastened to supplicate Allah to remove the punishment from them, but Allah knows that if He were to remove it from them they would return to their usual ways of denying His Messenger.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '...And whether We show you [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the truth], or whether We cause you to die [before that retribution takes place – know that, in the end], it is unto Us that they will be brought back.' (*Ghafir:* 77)

The meaning of: 'So wait...' (*ad-Dukhan:* 59) is to wait for the punishment that will befall them, as they wait for something to relieve and free them from your call. Teaching Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* how to debate with them, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "Are you, perhaps, hopefully waiting for something [bad] to happen to us – [while nothing can happen to us] save one of the two best things? But as far as you are concerned, we are hopefully waiting for Allah to inflict chastisement upon you, [either] from Himself or by our hands! Wait, then, hopefully; we shall hopefully wait with you!"' (*at-Tawba:* 52)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is ordered to inform the disbelievers that though they are waiting for the believers to be afflicted by an adversity, only one of the two best things can happen to them; either victory or dying as martyrs. If Muslims gain victory over them, Allah's Guidance is made supreme and predominant, and even if they die as martyrs, they will be alive with their Lord *Glorified is He*.

We, i.e. Muslims, are waiting for Allah to afflict you with a punishment from Him or at our hands. Therefore, we are waiting for evil to come to you, and you are waiting for goodness to come to us.

the chapter of

al-Jathiya

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter *al-Jathiya* (Kneeling) (1) :

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

حمٓ ﴿١﴾ تَنزِيلُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

***Ha Mim* [1] This Scripture is sent down**
from God, the Mighty, the Wise [2]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 1-2)

This is one of the chapters starting with the discrete letters: '*Ha Mim'* which appears in the beginning of some Quranic chapters. Although such letters have already been discussed, we are to shed light on them again, given that Allah *Glorified is He* repeats them in the beginning of this chapter, asking

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(1) The chapter of *al-Jathiya* is the 45th chapter according to the order of chapters in the Noble Quran. It is a Meccan chapter, all of which verses were revealed before hegira according to Al-Hasan, Jabir, and 'Ikrima. According to Ibn `Abbas and Qatadah, it is Meccan chapter except for the verse: 'Tell all who have attained to faith that they should forgive those who do not believe in the coming of the Days of Allah…' (*al-Jathiya:* 14). From their viewpoint, this verse was revealed concerning `Umar ibn Al- Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* as narrated by Al-Mawardi. However, Al-Mahdawi and An-Nuhas narrated on the authority of Ibn `Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* that it was revealed in Mecca about a man cursing `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* before *hegira,* and thus `Umar decided to strike him, whereupon the verse was revealed. The chapter has 37 verses, as mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir* (9/9207). Its order of revelation is the same as its order in the *Mushaf*: it was revealed after the chapter of *ad-Dukhan* and before the chapter of *al-Ahqaf*. It was the 64th chapter according to the order of revelation.

Allah for help in interpreting them. In this way, it is not considered, in reality, a kind of needless repetition.

Contemplating the world before us, one would find in it a dominion that is perceptible and a realm that is invisible. Everything that is not perceived by our senses is thus considered from the unseen realm which no one has knowledge of except Allah. For example, faith and acts of worship come under these two categories of dominion, the invisible, and the perceptible.

Thus, by means of reason, the Oneness and Existence of Allah and Him Being the Creator of the entire cosmos can be proven. Man was brought into this existence to find it as is: the sun, the moon and the stars; the sky and the earth, the water and the air. For this reason, no one claims himself to be the Creator of this vast universe. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and thus it is [with most people]: if you ask them, "Who is it that has created the Heavens and the earth?" – They will surely answer, "Allah"…' (*Luqman:* 25). Allah further states: 'Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah"…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87).

This cosmos is perceivable. On the other hand, other issues related to faith are of the unseen realm. We believe in them because of being reported by Allah *Glorified is He* such as incidents related to the Hereafter, the Resurrection, the Reckoning, paradise, and hell. Prayer, for example, is one of the acts of worship the wisdom behind which can be logically deciphered. As such, we know that Allah made the prayers obligatory upon us five times a day, in order for His servants to be frequently in the Presence of their Creator, to derive strength and aid from Him. In addition, in prayer, one enjoys the company of Allah as he meets with Him, and obtains from the superabundance of both His material gifts and spiritual illuminations that He confers upon those who establish prayer.

In prayer, all people are equal; the rich and the poor, the leader and the subordinates, all prostrate to Allah. This shows that the universe as a whole is in a state if worship. However, we do not know as to why the dawn prayer is made of two units, the noon prayer of four, and the sunset prayer of three. Such are of the unknown issues in which we believe as are, according to what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was entrusted with Allah's religion, informed us.

In the same manner, there are matters that are perceivable and understandable in the Noble Quran as well as in others, that is from the unseen realm, which is beyond the comprehension of our minds such as the separate letters, the meaning of which Allah has kept to Himself alone. The rest of the Quran, however, is evident and perceivable, clear of meaning and manifest of intent, for Allah wants us to devote our worship to Him alone by having us believe in the unseen and in that which is perceptible and understandable.

It is to the unseen realm that true faith pertains. As for the perceptible realm, there is no room for belief or disbelief. For example, it is not acceptable to say, 'I believe that the sun is rising'. However, you do say, 'I believe in The Hereafter'.

Thus, the letters: '*Ha Mim*' refer to the separated letters with which some chapters of the Quran begin. Their meanings are unknown to us, although in which we believe and leave their meaning to Allah *Glorified is He*.

The Quranic verse: 'This Scripture is sent down…' (*al-Jathiya*: 2), refers to the intelligible realm, whereas in the previous chapter, the verse: '*Ha Mim*,' alludes to the Unseen realm, followed by a verse whose meaning is also intelligible to us: 'By the Scripture that makes things clear' (*ad-Dukhan:* 2).

The chapter proceeds: 'truly We sent it down on a blessed night…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 3). This verse signifies that both the unseen and the perceptible realms have been sent down from Allah. Subsequently, both are to be believed in equally as a means of truly devoting oneself to Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, in the same way as you worship Him by believing in that which is clearly understood, you are required to believe to the same degree in the unseen realm which cannot be comprehended with one's intellect. We can encompass what we are allowed to know of both realms through our faith and worship, trying our best to glean some of its meanings and secrets.

It is for this reason that we say: The Quran is based on continuity between the verses and the chapters in its entirety such that the last word in the chapter of *an-Nas* is connected to the first word in the chapter of *al-Fatiha*. Thus, we recite, without stopping: 'From among the jinn and mankind. In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful [All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds.' Thus, we proceed in a continuous manner.

Also, for this reason, we call the reciter of the Quran ‘The one who is constantly in a state of moving forward. In other words, the reciter is the one who, on the point of finishing the Quran, continues such that he actually starts it again from the beginning.

As for the separated letters that appear at the beginnings of chapters, their pronunciation is based on the rule of stopping upon each one of them individually. Thus, you say, *‘Ha Mim,’* and you say, ‘*Alif Lam Mim*,’ whereas you do not utter these last three letters in such a manner in the following verse: ‘Have we not (*`A-lam*) opened up your heart’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1).

To conclude, every articulated sound in the Quran has intent behind it and contains secrets, and it resembles the teeth of a key with which you open something. There are keys that serve their functions with just one tooth, others that do so with two, and others only work with three.

In His statement concerning the Book: ‘is from Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Wise’ He chose the name ‘The Exalted’ to indicate to us that the Quran will be revealed from heaven, and that you will find from amongst people those who will deny its message. So, do not be distressed by their reactions, and do not let their denials delude you, for Allah is the Revealer of this Book, The Almighty, and none can defeat Him. Furthermore, this might not by means of compulsion; rather, it is manifested by means of wisdom, as He states: ‘The Wise.’ For the one who is wise is he who puts things in their proper place.

إِنَّ فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

There are signs in the heavens and the earth for
those who believe [3] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 3)

‘Allah indicates that He has made the Heavens and the Earth as a container and a vessel, and tells us: do not contemplate the Heavens and the earth in and of themselves; rather, contemplate the signs and secrets they contain, for they are replete with signs that Allah brings to light in due course of time.

It is for this reason that `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* said(1): ‘Contemplate the Quran deeply’; in other words, probe its meanings that you may take from its depths, like the earth when we plough it in order that we obtain its benefits. Similarly, everything is related to Allah, and within the Quran are innumerable treasures of bounty.

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(1) *Related by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (1/453); the Hadith is as follows: ‘Contemplate the Quran deeply, for it contains knowledge of those who came before you and those that=*

Now if the Heavens and the earth are receptacles that contain things within them, it behoves us to ask ourselves: which of the two is more valuable, the container, or the thing contained within it? Is the calling of people to faith - or the message - more valuable, or is the receptacle in which it is contained of greater value? Is the coffer of treasures itself more precious or what is put inside of it?

Likewise, the same goes for the Heavens and the earth despite their greatness and force. For the signs and the wonders that are within them are greater and more precious. Thus, you will recall that it is forbidden for us to place anything between the pages of the Quranic text. Why is this case? It is so in order that the Book of Allah *Glorified is He* is not used to hold or contain anything else, however precious or valuable it may be, for the Quran is more valuable and worth more than anything else, so do not use it to hold or contain anything.

In His statement: ‘are signs for the believers,’ the meaning is: Oh Believers! Be Mindful of Me concerning these signs, that you may use them to convince others from amongst the disbelievers and the atheists. For this reason, we as Muslims are most willing to sit down with them, engage with them constantly, and say to them: Contemplate this or that matter; think and ponder over the power of Allah concerning this or that matter.

This is our Message to which we have to address mankind. And how do we prove Allah’s Existence and Presence? We do so by means of the signs in the cosmos. It is due to this that our Lord *Glorified is He* teaches us how to prove these points to mankind by means of these signs, and states: ‘And of His signs are the night and day and the sun and moon. Do not prostrate to the

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= *will come after you.’ In another narration: ‘Whoever wishes to gain knowledge let him contemplate deeply the Quran.’ Something similar to this relation is found in Tafsir `Al-Lubab of Ibn Khazin (1/375) [in the commentary of the 71st verse of al-Baqara]. Ibn Mandhur in Lisan Al-`Arab, mentions the* same *Hadith ascribing it to Ibn Mas`ud. The author of Taj Al-`Arus Az-Zabidi and Ibn Al-`Athir also mention the Hadith.*

sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship.’ (*Fussilat:* 37)

In other words, do not let the greatness of these signs beguile you; for their Creator is Greater, and what is more adorned with grace than what is beautiful is the One Who Created beauty and excellence. So, beware of turning away from Him as a result of your being struck with wonder and amazement with the night and the day, and the sun and the moon, for He is most worthy of worship, not that which He Has Created in the cosmos. This also indicates that the Creator *Glorified is He* is firmly intent on manifesting the wondrousness of His creation, intently concerned with guiding humanity and saving them from what will destroy them.

It is as if the sign were to say to the believers: by Allah, Allah has placed these signs of the cosmos firstly to convince you of His Reality, and then for you to convince others of His Reality.

Thus, if we think about scholars of religion and the scientists of the natural sciences in the domains of the study of human beings, the animal and plant kingdoms, and inanimate creation, we find that the later precedes the former, for the scholars of religion clarify and make clear to people what is licit and what is illicit according to Islamic Law, and take as their starting point belief in Allah. The explanation of the legal rulings of Islam is derivative and thus secondary to Faith in Islam itself. Thus, contemplation of the signs of the cosmos and demonstrative proof of their Creator *Glorified is He* by means of them are more important and prior.

One of the wonders of creation in these planets is that we know that the day is less in length of time than the year because the day is 1/365th of a year. And We discovered Venus, the second celestial body in distance from the sun after Mercury. What is wondrous is that they discovered that the day of Venus is longer than its year. A day for us is a complete rotation of the earth around its own axis, and a year is one complete rotation of the earth around the sun. So, when they observed the length of the day of Venus, trying to reason analogically from the knowledge of an Earth day, they found that its day is longer than its year; for a day of Venus is equivalent to 244 Earth days, and its year is equivalent to 225 Earth days.

This phenomenon makes sense, for Venus does not follow a regular orbit. Thus, every celestial body has its own orbital path and motion, and a planet's orbit around its own axis can be faster than its rotation around the sun, and vice-versa. Here we can see the differences between the various planetary movements. Furthermore, there is nothing to prevent the possibility of a day of a planet being longer in length of time than a year. The last of these planets is Pluto, whose day is the equivalent of 2.5 Earth days, and its year equivalent to 268 Earth days.

From these natural phenomena, we are able to appreciate the power of the Creator *Glorified is He* and that the cosmos was created in precise detail and with perfectly orchestrated execution, not by chance, nor by some mode of creation that is not dynamic such as is the case with the shapes of inanimate objects. Rather, it is the facility with which the power of the Creator is manifested and His custodianship over the universe that sets this cosmos in motion and manages it with complete and perfect precision and execution.

After considering the cosmos, if the human being were to contemplate his own being, he would find another world replete with signs of Allah. Consider, for example, human beings in all of their variations of languages, dialects and tongues, their various forms of creation and their various characteristics: 'And of His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colours. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge.' (*ar-Rum:* 22)

If He had wished, He could have made us all from a single race, and speaking a single tongue, but through His wisdom in Creating the cosmos *Glorified is He* He has created like characteristics in creatures other than yourself, and then, at the same time, has distinguished you from the others in another aspect or characteristic completely.

In the past, we used to learn about the individual differences between the fingerprints of people. Now they have found voiceprints, jaw prints, and breath prints, all of which distinguish an individual human being from everyone else. They will never manifest in the same manner in another person, despite the immense numbers of human beings in existence. Is this not inimitable and miraculous about creation, calling us to belief in the Creator *Glorified is He*?

We note that from amongst the wonders of creation is that in the human body, there never occurs temperature variation within due to temperature variation outside of it, as is the case with other forms of matter. The body temperature of a person is usually 37 degrees, which you will find in a person both at the equator and the North Pole, for the body preserves this temperature inside of itself. Furthermore, you will find that every part of the body of a human being also has an internal temperature that is proper to it, in order that it may carry out its particular function.

You will be amazed to learn that the internal temperature of the eye never surpasses 9 degrees, whereas the internal temperature of the liver never goes below a temperature of 40 degrees, yet they are both parts of the same body. Despite all of this, the internal temperature within these parts of the body never varies with external temperature conditions, and thus never brings about a situation resulting in the internal temperature of the liver going below its normal internal temperature limit and reaching the internal temperature of the eye.

Thus, just as Islam concerns itself with the legislation of what is licit and illicit according to Islamic law and its explication to the people at large, it concerns itself, to an even greater degree, with the signs of Allah in the cosmos in every form of creation, human beings, animals, plants, and inanimate material.

To this end, read, if you would like, the following verses: ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby fruits of varying colours? And in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] extremely black. And among people and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colours similarly. Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving.’ (*Fatir:* 27-28)

Is there any mention here of a legal ruling of Islamic law concerning the prayers, the Pilgrimage to Mecca, or fasting? All these verses are an appeal to contemplation and reflection over the cosmos. The scientists of this realm are those of the natural sciences, not the scholars of religion, for the former are the most knowledgeable of humanity in terms of the verses of Allah, and thus, the most knowledgeable of Allah, and the most reverent of Allah as well. Why is this case?

This is so because they have arrived at knowledge of the signs of Allah by their own effort. For this reason, the Islamic way of life has never neglected any of the Islamic sciences, for knowledge in general serves the purposes of faith and Divine monotheism, and takes up issues that are related to them.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us all these examples in the Quran that we may discern proofs of His Existence and Presence, and His attributes of Compulsion, Wisdom, Might, Mercy, and many others as well. Beyond this, through the contemplation of the signs of Allah in the cosmos, we can find what we need to put our lives in order, and correct our notions and concepts of the realities of affairs in the cosmos.

Take, for example, the relationship between the genders. Some are of the opinion that men are opposed to women, and that both genders are diametrically opposed to each other. As a result, we continuously hear about women's advocates and men's advocates opposing each other, as if there were a battle taking place, whereas when we read the Quran, we find His statement *Glorified is He*: 'By the night when it covers. And [by] the day when it appears. And [by] He who created the male and female. Indeed, your efforts are diverse.' (*al-Layl:* 1-4)

Thus, the presence of elements of creation that are mutual and complementary does not mean that they are completely opposite to each other. So, beware of thinking that the night opposes or contradicts the day. Yes, it stands in contrast to it in the nature of things, but it does not actively oppose it or contradict it. For the night supports the day and assists it and the day likewise supports and assists the night. The two are complementary, forming a perfect, integrative whole, the night for rest and the day for work; each of the two are important for the other, and each has a special function in our lives and a specific role to play.

The condition of the male and the female is similarly complementary. This verse of the cosmos teaches us a lesson concerning our communal existence. Thus, there is no need for this clamour and fuss over gender relations. So, return to the Quran, for in it we can find a healing and a cure, and solutions to all our problems.

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* states:

وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُثُّ مِن دَآبَّةٍ ءَايَٰتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ (٤)

in the creation of you, in the creatures God scattered on earth, there are signs for people of sure faith[4] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 4)

The Quranic context here moves us from contemplation of the signs of Allah in the Heavens and the earth to contemplation of our own selves, as He has stated: ‘And (also) in yourselves. Can you then not see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

Thus, the proof of the Existence of the Supreme does not restrict itself to the signs of the Heavens and the Earth, for there are marvellous, wondrous signs in the atom, just as there are such signs in the galaxy. Furthermore, within the human body and its individual parts are signs and wonders as well. Expressing this point, the poet(1) has said:

You consider that you are an entity insignificant,
Yet within you is hidden the greatest universe (2)

The moment you hear the term ‘creation’ in the verse, you should understand from it the bringing about into existence of something from a state of non-existence; any existent entity was initially non-existent, whereupon Allah brought it about into existence. Furthermore, it is not applied to the event of creation, but rather, it is applied to the created beings themselves. It is for this reason that Allah states *Glorified is He*: ‘(All) this is Allah’s creation; show Me, then, what others than He may have created!’ (*Luqman:* 11)

Thus, the meaning refers to created beings. Yet, in another context, it refers to the event of creation, as in the same verse: ‘show Me, then, what others than He may have created!’ (*Luqman:* 11)

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(1) 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* the cousin of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the husband of the Prophet’s daughter Fatima, and the fourth of the Rightly Guided Caliphs of Islam.

(2) The text of the lines of poetry can be found in *Al-Mawsu’a Ash-Shi`riyya* from the ode of *Bahr* (meter) *Al-Mutaqarib,* consisting of four verses:
Do you claim that you are an entity insignificant?
Yet within of you is hidden the greatest universe
And there is also the saying of the Mufti Fathallah from an ode consisting of 6 verses from the meter of *Al-Mutaqarib* as well. The Mufti Fathallah passed away in the year 1260 of the *Hijri* calendar.

Thus, in His statement: ‘And in the creation of yourselves’, the meaning is that from amongst the signs of the cosmos is that He created you – humankind. The process by which mankind was created consists of various stages through which Adam *peace and blessings be upon him* passed. At one time, he was not existent, whereupon Allah brought him about into existence from a state of nothingness. At the beginning, he was formless, unmoulded clay, and then Allah shaped him in due proportion, and breathed into him his spirit, and thus, life started to permeate in him, and he became a human being. Thereafter, Allah made his progeny to spread far and wide through intermarriage between men and women.

Therefore, in the process of our own creation, there are two phases: the first phase of creation, of our father Adam *peace and blessings be upon him* and the following phase involving the propagation and spread of the human species. For this reason, He states in another verse: ‘O mankind, fear your Lord Who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1)

Thus, we human beings have the aspect of creation from nothingness, and the aspect of dissemination, or propagation. The spreading of the human species across the earth comes about through reproduction. As for the kingdom of non-human creatures, He did not mention anything concerning them except for the phase of dissemination: ‘and what He disperses of moving creatures.’

In other words, the verse refers to the spreading of the species; but where is there any mention of the stage of their creation? Allah brings forth a verse indicating creation in the first case, and leaves out mention of dissemination, and He brings forth a verse indicating dissemination in the second case, leaving out the mention of creation. Accordingly, it means that in your creation and what He spread from amongst you, and in the creation of animals and what He spread from amongst them.

Allah continues in the same verse: ‘are signs for people who are certain [in faith].’ Now, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has appraised us of the manner in which the first of creation came about from nonexistence through the creation of Adam. He then informed us of the various stages of this process of creation until Adam was established in existence as a full, perfect human being that moves on his own and proceeds along the earth. He did not make mention of the details of the rest of the creation of humanity in order that we may draw by analogy our own case based on the process that we have mentioned earlier.

Then, when He spoke of Eve, He stated: ‘who created you from one soul and created from it its mate.’ In other words, He Created her in the same manner in which He Created the first soul, that of Adam. Also, for the same reason, He did not mention anything about the creation of the animals, for their creation may be understood by analogy from the creation of Adam.

There is no doubt that the one who contemplates the creation of mankind and the animals will find many signs and miracles that indicate the facility with which the Power of the Creator is manifested. Thus, in the first of creation, this Power of the Creator is manifested, since He created it from nothing, without any previous model of creation. He brought Adam into existence without the presence of a father or a mother, and then created Eve from Adam, from a father and without a mother. He also created `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* from a mother and without a father, and He created the rest of creation from a father and a mother.

Therefore, the Power and Ability of Allah in creating humanity and the animal kingdom covers all the logical possibilities that could exist concerning this issue, even if He brings about this potentiality only once, in order that the proof of His Creative Power and His Inimitability be made manifest in creation, and that His Right over creation be confirmed: ‘But His command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says unto it: Be! And it is!’ (*Ya Sin:* 82)

Now, the One who possesses the power of bestowal and endowment also possesses the power of withholding and prevention although, sometimes, the causal relations that usually bring about creation and the begetting of offspring abound and are fully present, nothing takes place: ‘To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what he wills. He gives to whom He wills female [children], and He gives to whom He wills males. Or He makes them [both] males and females, and He renders whom He wills barren. Indeed, He is Knowing and Competent.’ (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

From the story of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* you know how he did not beget any children, until he grew infirm through old age, his wife being barren and how by then he had given up all hope of ever having a child. Yet when Allah wished that Zakaryya (Zechariah) beget a child, He made the ordinary rules of cause and effect subject to His command such that this was made possible, and gave glad tidings of a son, and named him as well.

All these are just some of the countless signs of creation spread out across the cosmos. At every stage of creation, one discovers miracles and the Power of Allah at work, beginning with the coming together of the man and woman, and the union of the animals, by means of the seminal fluid of the male reaching the ovum of the female. Then, if fertilization of the ovum takes place, pregnancy occurs, and the blood of the female transforms to serve as nourishment for the foetus, and serves as its means of provision until it is born. If pregnancy does not take place, the blood exits during the period of menstruation.

This means that when the Creator *Glorified is He* formed man, He created his means of provision alongside him. Thus, the foetus is not nourished by the nourishment that its mother takes herself, but rather, is nourished by a special type of food that is specific to it, and the proof of this is that the mother does not derive any benefit from the blood that nourishes the foetus if pregnancy does not take place.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘are signs for people who are certain [in faith].’ Certainty is true faith and firmly grounded belief that becomes embedded in the heart such that no doubt whatsoever is able to penetrate it, and in such a manner that this faith does not drift about in the mind, allowing the intellect to evaluate it and consider it for acceptance or rejection ever again. This is true belief, and this means that the heart is firmly fixed on it.

وَٱخۡتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ وَمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مِن رِّزۡقٖ فَأَحۡيَا
بِهِ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ بَعۡدَ مَوۡتِهَا وَتَصۡرِيفِ ٱلرِّيَٰحِ ءَايَٰتٞ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَعۡقِلُونَ ٥

in the alternation of night and day, in the rain
God provides, sending it down from the sky and
reviving the dead earth with it, and in His
shifting of the winds there are signs for those who
use their reason [5] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 5)

This verse indicates that from amongst His signs of the cosmos that are indicative of His Might *Glorified is He* is the alternation of the night and the day. In other signs, we came to learn that the night by itself is a sign, and that the day by itself is a sign as well. The wording here indicates the alternation of the night and the day. Thus, the mere phenomenon of their alternation in and of itself is a sign of Allah.

Now the night and the day are different in many respects. They are different in terms of the darkness of the night and the light of the day, and their length and shortness of time, their respective functions, though they are both phenomena of time in which events take place. Furthermore, at times the night may become longer, and the day may become shorter, or the day may become longer and the night shorter, after which there may be a period when their lengths of time are equal.

For example, we find the night becoming longer in the winter and shorter in the summer, and this is for a particular divine wisdom. Consequently, we work throughout the day of the winter when the moderateness(1) of the weather permits and assists us in our work. For this reason, we need a longer period for rest, and we find this in the long nights of the winter.

If you were then to consider the night and the day from a wider perspective — in their aspect of making up the whole of the spherical body of the earth — you would find that they overlap each other harmoniously. This is because the day in the place where you reside is the night for someone else, and the night where you reside is the day for someone else. Thus, the two of them are present together, but in separate and distant places on the earth.

In this manner, you will find that at every moment of time, the night begins and the day ends at some point on earth, and that the day begins and the night ends at some other point on earth. Therefore, it is a rotational movement which never ends and which takes place at different points in time throughout the entire process.

If we were to consider the call to prayer, for example, we would find that it revolves around the earth at every single moment of time, with all of its expressions. Thus, at the moment when you are saying ‘Allah is the Greatest!’ someone else is saying ‘I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of Worship except Allah!’ and another person is saying ‘I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah!’ and so forth.

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(1) This is the case in the warmer climates of the Arab world in places such as Egypt; the winter season is considered to be moderate, the summer to be more extreme, unlike countries in Europe or North America.

The same is true for the daily prayers. Thus, at the time when you are praying the noon prayer someone else is praying the late afternoon prayer another person is praying the evening prayer, and yet another person is praying the night prayer, all at the same moment in time. Therefore, we can affirm the existence of all the prayer times at every single instant of time, and that the True Lord *Glorified is He* is worshipped at every moment in time with every form of worship and supplication, and that the words of the call to prayer revolve around the earth and are heard by everyone across the entire planet.

All of this is due to the alternation of the night and day, in terms of the varying degrees of their lengths in time, whether longer or shorter, and arising from the movement of the sun, another matter which requires subtlety and depth of perception and notice. When the sun rises where you are, it vanishes where someone else is, and thus every sunrise for one nation is a sunset for another nation. This explains His statement to us *Glorified is He*: ‘Lord of the two Easts, and Lord of the two Wests!’ (*ar-Rahman:* 17) He stated ‘the two Easts’ and ‘the two Wests’ because the sunrise that you experience as the East is the sunset someone else experiences at the same instant of time as the West. Now if you were to consider the entire expanse of time in its divisions of time by the second, you would find many sunrises and sunsets, as He stated *Glorified is He*: ‘by the Lord of the rising-places and the setting- places.’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 40)

Thus, if you were to observe the earth at a specific point, you would find the occurrence of both a sunrise and a sunset. Furthermore, He has already stated *Glorified is He*: ‘Lord of the East and the West.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 9) Therefore, He is Truthful in everything of which He has informed us.

Also from amongst the signs of the night and day is the fact that Allah made them succeed one another. In other words, the night follows upon the day and the day follows upon the night. He stated *Glorified is He*: ‘And it is He who has made the night and the day in succession for whoever desires to remember or desires gratitude.’ (*al-Furqan:* 62)

We have understood (in our Islamic tradition) from this verse that the earth is spherical. This theory of knowledge that has been presented as something relatively recent is something confirmed by the Quran, and in fact, the Quran preceded it historically. The meaning, therefore, of the night and the day being successive of one another is that the earth is like a sphere, such that at the time of its first creation, it was created with one side facing the sun.

The side facing the sun is the day, and while night is at the opposite. The night and the day were created together, and were born together. Then, when the earth started to rotate, the night succeeded the day, and the day succeeded the night, and if it were not for the fact that the earth is spherical, this would never have happened.

This fact of existence has been confirmed by the True Lord *Glorified is He* in a clearer manner in His statement: ‘It is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming.’ (*Ya Sin:* 40)

This is so because the Arabs used to hold the belief that the night preceded the day. For this reason, they used to date their rites of ceremony by the rotation of the moon around the earth. Thus, we know the day from the movement of the sun, and we know the month from the movement of the moon and from the month comes knowledge of the year.

Similarly, the beginning of the month of *Ramadan* is confirmed by its first night, not by its day because it depends on the appearance of the new crescent. Again, it is for this reason that the Arabs believed that the night preceded the day, an erroneous view which the Quran put in balance. Allah says, ‘nor does the night overtake the day.’ Therefore, the two were created at the same point in time, something which would never have been possible except if the earth were spherical. There is no precedence of one over the other.

In His statement: ‘and [in] what Allah sends down from the sky of provision and gives life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness.’ (*al-Jathiya:* 5)

Allah indicates that He sends down many signs from the Heavens, some of which are material, others of which are spiritual. The spiritual sign is the Book that He revealed upon the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be* *upon him* for the guidance of creation. The material signs are those such as the rain, which Allah has named ‘provision’, for it is the source of provision when it descends to the earth and revives it with vegetation and fruits.

Every form of provision that comes from the direction of the Heavens of the Creator is something Divinely sent down, even if it be in the depths of the earth. For this reason, He said the following statement about iron: ‘and He revealed iron, wherein is mighty power and (many) uses for mankind.’ (*al-Hadid:* 25)

In this manner, Allah made iron a tool for man’s use, as an example to confirm His Power *Glorified is He* against those who stubbornly resist the call to faith; and stated at the end of the verse: ‘and so that Allah may make evident those who support Him and His messengers unseen.’ (*al-Hadid:* 25)

Concerning His statement: ‘from the sky’ it is well known that the sky is not the storehouse of water; rather, water is found in the clouds, which are within some parts and vicinities of the earth and follow it in its motion, as we have stated previously. As for the sky, it is something of an entirely different order of existence, and much more distant than whatever the mind can conceive. The intended meaning of the verse is: from the direction of the sky.

The one who ponders over the water cycles in nature will find that they are upon the earth in such a manner as to cover three fourths of the earth’s land mass, and most of it is salt water. This is so for a divine wisdom, in that the percentage of salt in the water preserves it from adverse change, stagnancy, and foulness. From the vapour that rises, the clouds are formed, and thereafter, rain falls carrying fresh water that is pure and suitable for drink and for the growth of agriculture, and beneficial for many other uses.

From the signs of Allah in the creation of water is that any particular stretch of salt water enlarges to allow for the enlargement of a mass of vapour clouds when the latter are formed. Consequently, the volume of evaporated fresh water that is enough to sustain the life of living organisms on earth thereafter increases. You will then find that the saltiness of the water in the seas and the oceans is of a suitable measure and proportion which preserves the water from stagnancy and foulness, and allows for the life of fish and all other forms of sea life to continue.

If the saltiness of the water were to increase beyond this limit, all forms of its sea life would perish, as we find in the Dead Sea, where the percentage of salt is much higher due to the sea being fully landlocked, without any tributaries of water coming to it to reduce the level of salt in the water.

In order for us to learn of the Power of Allah in His sending down of fresh water from the sky, this water from which there is enough for all of creation to drink, and for all of agricultural produce across the earth to derive benefit, consider how burdensome the production of a bottle of filtrated water is when you prepare it in a factory or filtration facility. Allah sends down this water, made fresh, clear and pure, and cold and refreshing, from the sky without any effort, nor any financial costs or expenses on your part.

This water in and of itself is one of the signs of Allah, for it is by means of it that life exists on earth. For this reason, the Quran calls it provision. Some commentators say: ‘this means that water is a means to bring about provision’; others say: ‘no, this is not so; rather, the water itself is provision’. It is true that it is a means for provision at the point when we use it to irrigate the land for agriculture, but it is a direct form of provision when we drink it or add it to food and the like.

Furthermore, in His statement: ‘and gives life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness’ is another sign. The reference to ‘the earth after its lifelessness’ is to that part of the earth that is arid, bleak, and without vegetation, which Allah easily brings back to life with vegetation thereafter, as He indicates in another verse: ‘And you see the earth barren, but when We send down upon it rain, it quivers and swells.’ (*al-Hajj:* 5) Then, in the main verse, He shifts our attention to another sign: ‘and [in His] directing of the winds.’

It means the changes of their direction from here to there, or the change of their states and conditions; for at times they come as a gentle, light breeze, and at times they rage violently; at times they are hot, and at other times cold; at times, they are fecundating and life-giving, and at times they are destructive and ruinous. All of these are states of the winds which the Creator changes from one to another in whatever manner He Wishes *Glorified is He* and none else is able to do likewise.

When you ponder over how the actual change of winds takes place, you find one of the truly wondrous phenomena that is present in existence due to The Creator. Turn your gaze to these towers and skyscrapers, and ask yourself: who brings about the conditions to allow these gigantic buildings to rise above the earth, and who supports them in such a manner that they do not bend, despite the blowing of violent winds against them?

The thing that supports them and props them up is the air that encircles them from every direction. If you were to evacuate the volume of air on any one side of the building, it would collapse on this side, vacated of the air that was once there.

Therefore, air itself is what preserves the equilibrium of the building. For this reason, the moment when you find the Quran using the term ‘wind’ in the plural, know that it is for the sustaining of life, and for what is good and beneficial, and whenever the term is in the singular, it is associated with destruction and ruination.

The single wind annihilates, and the winds as a group support and give life, for the former comes from one direction only, whereas the latter come from all directions and thus bring about the balance that is needed for life to continue and abound.

In the context of the discussion concerning the signs of Allah and the enumeration of His gifts, read here the following verse: ‘Rather, it is that for which you were impatient: a wind, within it a painful punishment, destroying everything by command of its Lord. And they became so that nothing was seen [of them] except their dwellings. Thus, do We recompense the criminal people.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25)

He also states: ‘And in `Ad [was a sign], when We sent against them the barren wind. It left nothing of what it came upon but that it made it like disintegrated ruins.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41-42)

In His statement: ‘are signs for a people who reason.’ He refers to the intellect, which encounters new events and phenomena, considers and examines them, and decides which of these that contends for its acceptance it should accept as truth. It then extracts and chooses the truth from amongst them, which it casts into the heart, becoming firmly grounded belief protected against doubt.

Allah Have Mercy upon Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi[1] who carried out an extensively detailed and informed analysis comparing these verses in the chapter of *al-Jathiya* with similar verses from the chapter of *al-Baqara*; the verses in the chapter of *al-Jathiya* beginning with: 'Indeed, within the heavens and earth are signs for the believers,' until 'are signs for a people who reason.' (*al-Jathiya:* 3-5)

And the following verse in *al-Baqara*: 'Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason.' (*al-Baqara:* 164)

The first difference that he found between the two groups of verses was the difference in subject matter: in the chapter of *al-Jathiya*, there is the following: 'within the heavens and earth.' As for *al-Baqara*, the verse is as follows: 'In the creation of the heavens and earth.' They both have the same meaning, for creation refers to the event of originating something from nothing. Thus, the event itself is termed 'creation'. The term is also applied to the created entities of the universe, and the proof for this is His saying *Glorified is He*: '(All) this is Allah's creation.' (*Luqman:* 11) In other words, 'All these are Allah's created entities'. Therefore, the meanings of the two groups of verses are the same.

Secondly, he counted the number of verses that were related concerning the cosmos in *al-Jathiya*, and found that there were six such verses, and he did the same with *al-Baqara* and found that there were eight such verses. When he then researched further into the additional two verses in *al-Baqara*, he found them in His statements *Glorified is He*: 'and the [great] ships which

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(1) Muhammad ibn Abu `Abdullah Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi, the Imam and Quranic commentator, of Qurayshi descent, born in 544 A.H., whose origins are from Tabaristan, and who was born in
Ar-Ray (present-day Teheran); he passed away in Harra' in the year 606 A.H. He has written works such as his commentary of the Quran *Mafatih Al-Ghayb, Ma`alim Usul Al-Fiqh and Muhsil Afkar Al-Mutaqaddimin*.

sail through the sea with that which benefits people', and 'the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth.' (*al-Baqara:* 164)

Ar-Razi concluded by saying, 'These two verses concerning the ships and the clouds do not need to be mentioned by Allah in *al-Jathiya,* as what Allah suffices for them: "and [His] directing of the winds." This is so because both the ships and the clouds are carried forward by the movements of the winds.'

The final difference between the two groups of verses is that the verse in Al-Baqara ends with a single phrase, which is: 'are signs for a people who use reason.' (*al-Baqara:* 164)

On the other hand, the verses in *al-Jathiya* end with three different phrases, which are the following: 'are signs for the believers' (*al-Jathiya:* 3), 'are signs for people who are certain [in faith]' (*al-Jathiya:* 4), and 'are signs for a people who reason.' (*al-Jathiya:* 5)

The moment the believer hears anything from Allah, he confirms it and believes in what Allah has informed him. Furthermore, certainty comes about to the one who actively seeks the truth, who searches for it in any given matter that is a point of knowledge, and desires to reach a state of certainty by means of such striving for the truth.

Now if man is not a believer who is certain of his belief, nor a seeker of the truth, does he not at least have enough intelligence to distinguish between things such that he knows what he consumes for food and drink, and of what he takes hold, and of what he places down?

Therefore, these three different phrasal endings represent the stages of attaining sound consciousness and awareness of the true nature of things, and basic intellectual comprehension of simple matters is the lowest level of understanding. For this reason, He ended the verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara* with the specific phrase indicated above.(1)

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(1) After the completion of his analysis, Ar-Razi states; 'Allah mentioned three different ending phrases in *al-Jathiya*, the first of which is 'those who believe'; the second of which is 'those who are endowed with inner certainty' and the third of which is 'those who have sense'. I believe that the reason for this order is that it is in reference to what is said [to those who disbelieve]. If you are not of the believers, then understand these=

تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱللَّهِ نَتۡلُوهَا عَلَيۡكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثِۭ بَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ وَءَايَٰتِهِۦ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ٦

These are God's signs that We recount to you
[Prophet, to show] the Truth. If they deny God
and His revelations, what message will they
believe in? [6] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 6)

The verse begins with: 'These'. This indicates the other verses of the Quran, or the signs of the cosmos that were referred to previously. 'We recite to you in truth.' The truth, as we have mentioned previously, is something that is firmly established and which does not change, nor does it accept any falsehood. Truth is the judgement of something that corresponds with reality, and falsehood is the judgement of something that diverges from and contradicts what is actually real.

For this reason, we have mentioned previously that the witness to the truth will never change any claims that he makes, no matter how many times he may be asked a question. As for the witness to falsehood, there is no question that he will change his tune from time to time. This is so because the witness to the truth presents reality as it is, and thus comes forward with a single statement which corresponds to that reality, and does not change his statement, whereas the witness to falsehood always presents his erroneous claims and his delusional fancies, and thus, it is inevitable that his claims will change and vary.

It is because of this that The True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes for us to judge by the truth, and make it the standard by which we comprehend all matters, just as we use the metre alone to measure anything else, for example, and never deviate from it as a standard of measurement.

He wishes for us to judge by the truth and make it foundational in our comprehension of matters and our everyday lives. Analogously, a watch will never tell the time precisely and accurately unless it has been calibrated to the correct time itself.

= proofs that are being laid out to you; and if you are not from amongst the believers, nor from amongst those who have certain faith, then at least you are within the group of those who have sense and possess an intellect; so, strive hard to understand and comprehend these proofs that are offered to you.'

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states the following concerning the two signs of the sun and the moon: 'The sun and the moon are made punctual.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5)

In other words, these are two entities created by means of exact and precise reckoning, and both are created with precision and calculation in terms of their heavenly motions such that Allah *Glorified is He* has made them instruments by means of which time can be kept. Thus, the object which you consider to be a standard must of necessity be calibrated and fine-tuned itself to what is most correct, and must of necessity be evaluated in a manner corresponding to its function as the standard.

It is because of this that Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that He created the Heavens and the earth in truth, for they move along their paths in perfectly orchestrated motion, and have never, ever deviated from their courses since the time when Allah Created this cosmos and will never, ever deviate from their specified movements until the coming of the Last Hour.

We stated previously that this is so because the truth is something firmly embedded which does not change, and therefore something that remains, and it is that which is victorious, which overcomes falsehood at the end of the struggle. Furthermore, even if falsehood rises and appears, it is only for a temporary period of time such that it is given an opportunity to be manifest until it torments people and the society at large is made miserable by it; then, people return to the realm of the truth. For this reason, we say that falsehood is actually one of the soldiers of truth.

Now if Islam had gained ascendancy in the Arabian Peninsula because of the inimitability of the Arabic of the Quran, how did it gain ascendancy and spread in the lands of the Persians and Romans? Some commentators have said: This is so because in that period of history, the non-Muslim empires were completely tyrannized by falsehood, and so when they saw the justice and tolerance of Islam, they hurried towards it in droves, and thus, Islam took over half of the world in half a century, for people all over the earth were yearning for something like this religion of truth.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to provide us with a tangible picture by which truth and falsehood are represented in one snapshot, and so He states: ‘He sends down from the sky, rain, and valleys flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries a rising foam. And from that [ore] which they heat in the fire, desiring adornments and utensils, is foam like it. Thus, Allah presents [the example of] truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off, but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth. Thus does Allah present examples.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17)

Now in His statement *Glorified is He*: ‘Then in what statement after Allah and His verses will they believe?’ He means: If all of these signs of the cosmos have not convinced you, nor have all of these miraculous wonders of the cosmos, and if you have not been convinced and moved by the very words of Allah Himself, then what can you possibly be made to believe in after that?

Therefore, the issue, as far as they are concerned, is one of stubborn opposition and violent disputation, for if the very words of Allah Himself have not convinced them, what other words can be used to convince them of anything thereafter? We ask them: is there any discourse that is more truthful than the words of Allah Himself? Is there any relation of news that is more truthful than His news? Allah *Glorified is He* repeatedly shows love and affection towards you by clearly expressing His signs in the cosmos, that you may believe, and that He may take you by the hand into the realm of true belief even though He has no need of you. He merely desires the best for you because you are His servants and His works of creation, and He wishes you to be in the best of conditions. For this reason, He sent to you messengers, revealed Divine books to you, and made clear to you what is licit and illicit according to the Divine Law, and what is true and what is false; so why all the violent disputation? Why all the stubborn opposition to acceptance of faith?

Now although faith in Allah is a high distinction, and to show humble veneration of Him is to occupy a high rank, the term ‘humble veneration’ in general is a term that is detested, for it indicates lowliness and brokenness of spirit. As for having humble veneration towards Allah, it is a high distinction, a mark of honour, and a high rank with Him.

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ أَفَّاكٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿٧﴾ يَسْمَعُ ءَايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ ثُمَّ يُصِرُّ
مُسْتَكْبِرًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَسْمَعْهَا ۖ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٨﴾

Woe to every lying sinful person [7] who hears God's revelations being recited to him, yet persists in his arrogance as if he had never heard them — [Prophet] bring him news of a painful torment! [8] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 7-8)

Some commentators have said that the word 'Woe' refers to a gorge deep in hell, or to a calamitous destruction from which there is no escape or deliverance. The term 'Woe' in general usage differs according to the one who uses it for warning. When one who is equal to your standing says to you: 'Woe to you!', you anticipate being anguished by him to the extent that is proportionate to his ability to exact that anguish on you, and commensurate with his ability to carry out what he threatens you with by manifesting his tyranny upon you. Now, if the one using such a threatening term is the True Lord *Glorified is He* we understand that it is a complete annihilation, unalterable which no-one has the power to change; a serious woe that cannot be resisted or repulsed.

So, to whom is this threat directed? It is directed to '…every sinful liar.' Lying is to turn something completely upside down, or the subversion of what is true with purposed intention. From this we note His statement *Glorified is He*: 'And the overturned towns He hurled down.' (*an-Najm:* 53) The verse refers to villages that Allah turned completely upside down, head over heels, and thereby made their highest structures lowest.

Related to this, as well, is the story of the slander that was propagated against the rights of 'Aisha, *Allah be pleased with her*: 'Indeed, those who slander are a group among you.' (*an-Nur:* 11) Thus, slander, falsely accusing others of misdeeds, is the most abominable, heinous kind of lie for it is an intentional lie designed to make people turn away from the truth and accept falsehood. What is worse is that slander does not affect just one person; rather, it affects a large group of people, and thus, its evil transgresses beyond its mere effects on a single person. Correspondingly, a suitable punishment is required for such a gross transgression upon creation, according to Islamic law. Therefore, the moment you hear the word ‘Woe,’ you should know that it is reference to a truly grave sin.

Also, the word ‘liar’ signifies a habitual practice. ‘Sinful’ is the one who committed a grave sin repeatedly and was so much engaged in it until he became an inveterate practitioner of the evil deed.

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says of this inveterate slanderer and sinner as one: ‘Who hears the verses of Allah recited to him, then persists arrogantly as if he had not heard them.’ It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* wishes to make us familiar with what slander really and truly is in its essence, for the inveterate liar lies against one that is like him, or lies against a whole family or group, but this person in particular lies against the entire world when he falsifies everything that is true, and does so intentionally and purposefully. For this reason, they say in juridical matters in court that someone has committed a crime ‘with premeditation and opportunity (to commit the crime)’.Thus, in the verse: ‘arrogantly,’ the description refers to someone who exalts himself above the truth and disdains it out of arrogance.

In a Noble Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* states, ‘Arrogance is disdaining the truth out of self-conceit and having contempt for people.’(1) Thus, he becomes arrogant over others, for the various signs come to him by means of someone whom he believes to be beneath him; and by doing this, he acts outrageously against the truth, and outrageously against the one who tells the truth, as The Quran relates about those like him: ‘And they said, ‘Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Thus, the problem with them is not something in the Quran, for they themselves are people of eloquence and gifted orators, and know of the inimitability of the Quran and its truth; rather, the problem is that they are envious of the man to whom the Quran was revealed, and consider and appraise him by the standards of position and wealth that they have attained. Thus, the Divine message, according to them, must be sent down to a man who is rich, from the prestigious men of the nation and from amongst its leading figures. Yet, this is quite strange for them, to hold such a belief, for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a very high station amongst them before he was mandated with deliverance of the Divine message, and they used to speak readily of his truthfulness and his trustworthiness. In fact, they had so much trust in his judgment that they appointed(1) him to judge between them in making the final decision concerning their dispute over the Black Stone, when the various tribes disagreed with each other over who should have the right to place it in its proper position in the *Ka`ba*. So, the contradiction between their consideration of him as someone trustworthy and their disbelief in him thereafter is clear. They used to call him a magician, a soothsayer, an inveterate liar, and a masterfully articulate poet that could beguile people with his words. Thus, when there was an extended period of time in which there was no revelation given to him, by which he might respond to certain specific claims of theirs, they alleged: 'Truly, The Lord of Muhammad scorns him.'(2)

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(1) *This is related by Muslim in his collection Sahih Muslim (Number 131) in ‘The chapter on the forbiddance of harbouring pride’ from a Hadith related by `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him.*

As for His statement *Glorified is He*: 'So give him tidings of a painful punishment'; it is well known that 'glad tidings' refer to the relation of good news of something before it actually takes place. Furthermore, it is called 'glad tidings' because it brings joy and happiness, manifest upon the faces of those who receive them, so the moment that you hear such news, it pleases you. Thus, the usage of the term 'glad tidings' here in connection with punishment is a means of conveying mockery and scorn, and it is a type of punishment and insult, like the case of the man who urges his son to review his lessons and demonstrate seriousness and diligence in his studies, but the son disobeys his father's commandments so that when the final results appear, he finds that his son has failed in his studies, and thus says to him: 'Take delight in the good news! You have failed'! In saying this, the father wishes to mock and punish his son for his negligence.

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(1) *This is related by Ibn Kathir in his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (1/272). In the Hadith, the people of Mecca stated: 'We shall judge between ourselves by means the first man that comes out from this road.' The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was the first to come out of the road towards them, so he judged upon their case, deciding that members of every single tribe would all bear the Black Stone together on a cloth, and then raise it together to put it in its proper place.*

(2) *This is mentioned by At-Tabari in his Quranic commentary, from the statement of Qatada concerning the statement of Allah: 'Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He scorn you.' (ad-Duha: 3) He stated: 'Jibril (Gabriel) delayed in conveying revelation to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and so the idolaters said: "Truly, his Lord scorns him and has forsaken him."' This is similarly related by Ad-Dahhak.*

وَإِذَا عَلِمَ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِنَا شَيْـًٔا ٱتَّخَذَهَا هُزُوًا ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ٩

who, if he knows anything about Our revelations,
ridicules it! Such people will have a humiliating
torment [9] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 9)

This is so because after having persisted in evading the signs of Allah, and having shown arrogance towards them, he necessarily must return at some moment or another to his true self and allow for his intellect to process what he has heard; thus, some of the truth of those pieces of knowledge that he has learned of from the signs of Allah finally reach him.

'And when he knows anything of Our verses, he takes them in ridicule.' Yet even though part of the truth of what he has heard reaches him, he makes them an object of derision and ridicule. 'Those will have a humiliating punishment.'

This is on top of the punishment mentioned in the previous verse, where the Lord of Might and Nobility grants him glad tidings of the fact that he will have a grievous, painful punishment.

These are different kinds of punishment; may Allah save us from them! For a painful chastisement is one that causes you deep pain by means of your physical senses and causes you agony, and your physical body and your various limbs experience pain and suffering. This is not even including the humiliating pain referred to in the Quran, for the person has been deflected off his true course, as they say. The humiliating punishment is the punishment of the ego, which humiliates it, debases, and destroys its sense of nobility and dignity. This is so because some people are sometimes unaffected by any of the physical pain caused to them by a palpable beating, but it hurts them deeply to have their sense of dignity and pride wounded even if it be by a mere word.

There is also the term ‘grave punishment’; in other verses, punishment to its furthest extent. It is in this manner that the True Lord *Glorified is He* combined every type of punishment as recompense for their arrogance, their violent disputation, and their stubborn opposition to the signs of Allah which are patently clear and beyond the possibility of denial on the part of anyone who considers them seriously.

Furthermore, there is an indication in the verse that when a human being devotes himself exclusively to the pursuance of the truth, and clears himself of any preconceived notions, and thereafter, ponders the matter over again with his intellect with objectivity, he will necessarily arrive at the strand of truth that leads him to the reality of the affair in question. Thus, the sincere renewal of commitment that the seeker makes to himself leads to the truth. It is for this reason that the True Lord *Glorified is He* teaches man the sound manner of contemplating affairs, and instructs him in the manner in which he may search for the truth, and so He states: ‘Say, “I only advise you of one [thing] - that you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought.” There is not in your companion any madness.’ (*Saba’:* 46) In other words, He means: ‘Leave aside the speculation of the masses, for they are not coherent; they will lead to chaos, and the truth will get lost within’.

Now contemplation is the operation of the intellect, and the intellect is the faculty and power that protects you from erroneous views, and guides you and takes you by the hand towards the truth. The intellect, even by its very name in Arabic is the cord that is used to hobble the feet of a riding beast so that it does not stray and wander off from its owner. In the same manner, the intellect constrains its owner from false ideas and notions.

Therefore, when these people retreated unto themselves and allowed their intellects to consider what they had heard. They arrived at something of the truth, but their haughtiness and their stubborn opposition prevented them from following it. The most illustrative example of this is the statement that some of them say to the others: ‘And those who disbelieve say, “Do not listen to this Quran and speak noisily during [the recitation of] it that perhaps you will overcome.”’ (*Fussilat:* 26)

Now if they were not sure of the truth of the Quran and its impact upon the soul, they would never have said such a thing; but the literary style and force of the Quran captivated them and penetrated the innermost depths of their souls. Had they left themselves to their natural, primordial states, they would have believed; but instead, they confronted the Quran with souls filled with evil inclinations and the desire to be free from any restrictions that the way of truth brought by the Quran might place upon them and their base desires.

مِّن وَرَآئِهِمۡ جَهَنَّمُۖ وَلَا يُغۡنِي عَنۡهُم مَّا كَسَبُواْ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَا مَا
ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَوۡلِيَآءَۖ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ١٠

Hell lurks behind them and their gains will not benefit
them, nor will those beings they took as protectors
beside God — a tremendous torment awaits them [10]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 10)

‘Before them’, has the meaning of something that will come to you in the future, as in this verse: ‘Before them is Hell.’ Thus, Hell will await them in the future. ‘Before them’ is thus something which is found before another thing which hides or conceals it. What conceals knowledge is a veil of time or a veil of place. For instance, we are sitting here, right now (in this lesson) in one place, and each one of us can see the other. However, none of us can see who is outside of this place, for what conceals that from us is a physical barrier of place.

Now when I speak to you of the future, you will find that the future is also veiled from you, by the barrier of time, as it relates to the future. Similarly, the veil of the past makes the past itself imperceptible to you.

Now the Knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* pierces all these barriers. Time, for Him is equally the past, present or future. For this reason, He brings forward something that happened in the past, and speaks about it as if it were present. Allah *Glorified is He* also states, addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Maryam (Mary). Nor were you with them when they disputed.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 44)

For this reason, Allah pierces the veil of the future, as He indicates in His statement concerning the ongoing struggle between Persia and Rome: ‘*Alif. Lam.*

Mim. The Byzantines have been defeated. In the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome. Within three to nine years. To Allah belongs the command before and after. And that day the believers will rejoice.' (*ar-Rum:* 1-4)

This is because the Muslims were worried about the Persians gaining victory over the Romans. The Persians were Magi, adherents of Mazdeism, and had no revelation or Heavenly inspiration sent to them. As for the Romans, they were from the people of the Book by being Christians; they believed in messengers sent from Allah. Thus, it would be the good fortune of Islam if Rome were to be victorious. So, Allah granted the Muslims the glad tidings of this victory before it took place by several years. Therefore, the True Lord informs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of events of the future in the Quran, which is recited to worship Allah in every prayer. So how is it that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could announce these glad tidings - seeing as how highly unbelievable they were at the time - and do so in a manner such that the people in Persia and Rome would eventually hear of them? The answer is that he could announce such news because he was absolutely certain that it was true and veracious, and that it must come to pass.

This is an instance of the piercing of the veil of the future, and this is what really happened. In a matter of years, Rome gained victory over Persia, and the Muslims gained their prophesized victory against the disbelievers at the Battle of Badr. Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And that day the believers will rejoice in the victory of Allah.' (*ar-Rum:* 4-5)

In His statement: 'Before them is Hell', He means that it will await them in the future, and thus, is ahead of them. This is an example of the piercing of the veil of the future. 'And what they had earned will not avail them at all.' He means they will not be protected from the evil of what they were upon because of what they acquired of evil acts in the past, of worshipping false idols and deifying the creation of Allah. Furthermore, is the idol free of need from its worshipper when the worshipper himself is the one who created it? The worshipper is the one who sets it upright if the wind turns it over or carries it off. Similarly, whoever from amongst mankind worshipped them will soon precede them into hell; no helper shall they have, nor anyone to defend them from what awaits them.

Now the verb ‘earn’ is never used for evil except if what is evil has become something habitual to the person in whom it exists, and has become something that is practically inherent and natural. Such a person will hardly desist from evil action, and it will be a very light matter for him to commit such evil again, until it becomes something habitual to him. The verb ‘earn’ refers to what they have done of evil deeds.’

‘Nor what they had taken besides Allah as allies.’ In other words, ‘the idols they worship besides Allah’. Likewise, they will not prevent them from the punishment. ‘And they will have a great punishment.’ Thus, the matter does not end merely with their being forsaken and their inability to defend themselves, but it goes much further: for them there awaits an immense chastisement, or in other words, severe to the utmost degree of pain.

هَٰذَا هُدًى ۖ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رِّجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

This is true guidance; those who reject their Lord’s revelations will have a woeful torment [11]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 11)

There is an indication here of guidance, which is the way that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with through this Quran. True guidance is what directs you forward, or in other words, indicates to you the road that takes you to your destination by means of the shortest and easiest road, and the one that is safest, without difficulty or hardship upon the soul.

In the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, there is the statement: ‘Those are upon guidance from their Lord’ (*al-Baqara:* 5). Thus, guidance is, as it were, the vessel which carries to you to your goal, and the vehicle which moves forward with you until it delivers you safely to your destination. ‘And those who have disbelieved in the signs of their Lord’ in this verse, Allah states ‘their Lord,’ even though they are disbelievers in Him. This is because Allah is a Lord that shows love and affection towards them, even with their disbelief in Him and their denial of Him. This is, as we stated previously, a Divine gift which does not distinguish between the believer and the disbeliever; thus, He grants it to all, and feels compassion for every one of humanity, for they are all His servants and His works of creation 'Will have a painful punishment of foul nature'.

In one place, He states, 'a painful chastisement' and in another place, He states: 'painful punishment of foul nature.' The word 'punishment' has caused many problems in terms of how it is to be understood amongst the scholars of religion concerning some of the legal punishments legislated by Islamic law. Some of them say, 'It is apparent that there is no mention of stoning to death in the Quran, but there is only the mention of punishment by lashes to be found', and they use, as proof, His statement *Glorified is He* concerning female slaves: 'then for them is half the punishment for free [unmarried] women.' (*an-Nisa':* 25)

The text above refers to the legal punishment that is to be meted out to the free woman and the female slave. Thus, these scholars state, 'The punishment of stoning (an adulteress) to death is not halved, but rather, what is halved is the punishment of lashing; the free woman is given 100 lashes, and the female slave is given 50 lashes, whereas the punishment of stoning to death is not halved'. In other words, there are different opinions concerning the exact meaning of the verse. Concerning this matter, we say: 'It may be that their opinion is correct if Allah had stated: 'then for them is half the punishment,' and had not mentioned anything else. However, He stated right afterwards: 'the punishment'. As we have stated previously, punishment is the causing of pain to a living entity, but the punishment of stoning someone causes their death. Therefore, the causing of pain to a living entity applies to the punishment meted out by lashes, whereas stoning leads to the taking of life, and does not merely punish in a manner causing pain.

This is further proved by the fact that the True Lord *Glorified is He* when speaking about Sulaiman's (Solomon's) hoopoe, related: 'I will surely punish him with a severe punishment or slaughter him.' (*an-Naml:* 21) Therefore, it means the punishment that does not lead to slaughter or killing.

In His statement: 'and those who have disbelieved in the signs of their Lord', Allah means: 'They covered them up and repudiated and disavowed them'. Therefore, the signs are present, but they concealed them deliberately. In a similar manner, they disbelieved in Allah, or in other words, they concealed the truth of His Existence. For covering or concealing something does not take place unless it exists in the first place; only then is it covered up.

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى سَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلْبَحْرَ لِتَجْرِىَ ٱلْفُلْكُ فِيهِ بِأَمْرِهِۦ
وَلِتَبْتَغُوا۟ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

It is God who subjected the sea for you — ships
sail on it by His command so that you can seek
His bounty and give Him thanks [12]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 12)

Subjection is for the purpose of service, and that the thing made subservient is at the disposal and service of the one for whom it is made subject. A few decades ago in Egypt, there used to be a system of law that was built upon slavery and subjugation, which is a system built upon workers who carry out their appointed tasks without any wages. The True Lord *Glorified is He* subjected the sea for us, and abased it so that it may serve us; if it were not for that, we would never have been able to embark upon it, nor traverse across it, nor gain any benefit from it whatsoever.

In relation to the subjection of the sea is what we know of the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when his mother cast him in the sea, carrying out the command of Allah: ‘when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will return him to you and will make him [one] of the messengers.’ (*al-Qasas:* 7)

Thus, the orders were issued to the sea to cast him upon the shore, and not to drown him within, as Allah *Glorified is He* stated: ‘and cast it into the river and the river will throw it onto the bank.’ (*Ta Ha:* 39)

Just as the True Lord *Glorified is He* commands rational human beings, He commands inanimate objects, which thereupon carry out His orders pliantly and obey Him. For this reason, He states about the Heavens: ‘And has responded to its Lord and was obligated [to do so].’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2)

To make something subject to another means to forcibly burdening it with something that is compulsory. Thus, all the cosmos is made subject to Him. In other words, it obeys Him and carries out His commandments. It is from this state of being subjected to His will that He has thereby subjugated the very limbs of a human being to him such that they follow his will and are respond to it in a manner that is spontaneous and smooth without any burden or trouble in the process.

The tongue articulates with the statement ‘There is no god (worthy of worship) except Allah’ merely by means of your having willed it and it states expressions of disbelief as well - May Allah save us from that - merely by our will. The case with the hand, the eye, and the leg is likewise, as is the case with every one of our limbs: none of them disobey your orders, being under your influence in a manner in which we do not truly know, for their Creator has made them subject to you, and has abased them so that they may serve you.

He stated to them: ‘Obey my servant, for I wish to call him to account after having given to him the choice of doing or not doing good or evil actions. Furthermore, if faith were something that were to be forcibly imposed upon the human being, I would have forced it upon him as I have done with the angels; however, I do not wish that these forms of creation submit and defer to me without any choice in the matter; rather, I want hearts that are reverently full of humility towards me; I want you, O mankind, to come to me in willing obedience, while having the capacity to turn away from me and escaping from me’.

It is for this reason that we say: ‘The sword is not used in Islam to force or coerce its doctrine upon a people, but rather, it is only used to protect their choice of belief and the doctrines that they have chosen for themselves’. Thereafter, though, the opponents of Islam announce pompously and loudly that Islam was forced upon people by the edge of the sword. This is not true, and the proof of this is the remaining of great numbers of non-Muslims in the lands of Islam upon their original beliefs, after having their lands taken over and ruled by the Muslims.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* made everything in existence subject to the use and service of humankind, He said in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘O son of Adam, I created things in existence for your use, and I created you for the purpose of serving Me, so do not be occupied with what is made for you in place of what you are made for.’(1) In other words, do not look to what are effectively your slaves; rather, look towards Whom you yourself are a slave of, and towards Whom your master is.

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(1) *This is related by Ahmad in his Musnad (2/358) from Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him: Allah stated: ‘O son of Adam, devote yourself exclusively to my worship and I will* =

This subjection of the limbs of man for his service is limited to the life of this world. As for the Hereafter, they will be set free from these fetters and will be unfastened from this forcible confinement and subjugation, for they used to be bound to the will of the servant of Allah, whereas in the Hereafter, the servant of Allah has no volition over them.

At that point, volition over everything will return to the Highest One Who Wills over and above everything else *Glorified is He*. There will be no obedience of the limbs to the human being, and no submission to his commands. All commands on that day will be for Allah alone: 'To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah , the One, the Prevailing.' (*Ghafir:* 16)

For this reason, the various limbs and parts of the body will change in their function and become bearers of witness. They will bear witness to the truth in front of The One, The Alone. Thus, the tongue will say: 'I said such-and-such a thing'; the hand will say, 'I struck such-and-such a thing'; the leg will say, 'I went to such-and-such a place'; the eye will say, 'I saw such-and-such a thing' and so forth.

We have already likened this phenomenon with the leader of squadron who orders the soldiers, who obey him even if the order he gives is a mistaken or wrong one. Then, when they return to the chief leader, they will say, 'Our immediate leader told us to do such-and-such a thing, and we did not disobey his orders, for we were commanded to follow them even if they were wrong and based on poor judgment'.

So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* made our various limbs and parts of the body subject to us, He did so only to give us an analogy and example of His complete, independent command over everything, and to show us that if

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= *fill your heart with riches and abate your poverty, but if you do not, I shall fill your heart with worry and Will not abate your poverty.' It is also related by the author of Al- Iqazh Al-Himam (Ibn `Ajiba) (1/247). These are some of the related stories about what Allah has stated that have come down to us. Ibn `Arabi also relates it in his Al-Futuhat Al-Makkiyya with the wording: 'Allah revealed in the Torah: "O son of Adam, I created things in the universe for your use, and I created you for My service, so do not forsake what was created for my service from what was created for your service."'*

He Wills for something to take pace, He merely states: ‘Be!’ and it is. He states to those who are presumptuously arrogant: ‘Tell me, by Allah, what are the muscles that you employ that you may speak or stand up or sit down? What is the motion, the action that takes place inside such that you may act in any which manner that you wish? What nerves are the ones you use that participate in these motions’? Indeed, you know nothing of them, nor do you consciously have any command over them; rather, merely on the basis of what you will, they follow your volition and obey you. Thus, if this is a gift of Allah to you, and a blessing from amongst His blessings upon you, how can you possibly deem the truth of what Allah relates to be farfetched and remote?

The first of the many phenomena that indicate the subjugation of the sea is that Allah made it suitable for the traversal of ships upon its surface, as He states: ‘And on that (very sea) one sees ships ploughing through the waves.’ (*an-Nahl:* 14)

The first ship that ever existed in the cosmos was the ark of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* which he constructed by the order of Allah, through His revelation of it to him, whereby He taught him how to construct it from planks and nails: ‘And We carried him on a [construction of] planks and nails.’ (*al-Qamar:* 13)

A ship does not travel upon the surface of the earth unless there is an abundance of causal laws to support such motion, which is exactly what its subjugation to mankind is. Firstly, the water must be liquid such that it flows easily in order to allow for the ship to sail smoothly when the wind blows upon it and sets it in motion. If the water were frozen or solid, no such motion would be possible.

Secondly, the water must be free of any kind of stickiness or glueyness. Thirdly, the density of the water must be more than the density of the ship, for if you were to take a lump of metal and throw it into the water, it would sink. However, if you were to forge the metal so as to make it broader and flatter, and expand its surface area, it would float.

Thus, from amongst the phenomena that indicate subjugation of the sea to Allah is that He has made it suitable for the coursing of ships upon it: ‘subjected to you the sea so that ships may sail upon it by His command.’

This is just as Allah states in another place in the Quran: ‘In the name of Allah, be its run and its riding at anchor!’ (*Hud:* 41)

Also, from amongst the indications of the subjugation of the sea to Allah is that He has made it a source of many different foods and wealth: ‘and that you may seek of His bounty.’ Thus, the bounty of Allah in the sea is immense. It has enough nourishment necessary for the preservation of life, and in it is luxury and adornment, such as pearls and corals and other precious objects, so much so that many have said: ‘Indeed, the treasures in the depths of the seas are more than the treasures above the surface of the earth’.

After all this, the ships traverse over the surface of the water carrying you to various countries for the purpose of gaining wealth from all over the world.

In other verses, the True Lord *Glorified is He* has explained His statement: ‘And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat…’ (*an-Nahl:* 14). These are various types of fish and seafood that are eaten: ‘and to extract from it ornaments which you wear.’ (*an-Nahl:* 14) What is meant here is pearls, corals and precious gems that are extracted from the depths of the sea. For this reason, the scholars have stated, ‘Verily, the ornaments, and gems of the earth are not forbidden to use for wear. Even though they are more precious than gold, there is no text that indicates their prohibition for men, as there has been in the case of the wearing of gold.(1) Why is this? This is because gold is used as coinage, by which human beings interact with each other in financial transactions in the form of coinage of various currencies, pounds and so forth. Thus, at its origin, it is to be used for financial transactions between people, and is a means by which production and consumption are linked together and take place, whereas the precious ornaments of the sea are not used for this purpose.

In His statement: ‘and perhaps you will be grateful’, He has ordered His servants to give thanks for His blessings. So, whenever you see one of the manifestations of the blessings of Allah, say, ‘All Praise is to Allah’, and acknowledge the bounty of Allah to Him. It is due to this that the Prophet

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(1) *This is related by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (2535) and by An-Nasa`i in his Sunnan (5053), and by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (3585) and Ahmad in his Musnad (711, 891) from `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him.*

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us the special prayer to be used for boarding ships and other vehicles, as follows: ‘Limitless in His Glory is He who has made all this subservient to our use – since but for Him, we would not have been able to attain to it. Hence, verily, it is unto our Lord that we must always turn.’(1)

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مِّنْهُۚ إِنَّ
فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَأٓيَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

He has subjected all that is in the heavens and the earth for your benefit, as a gift from Him. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect [13]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 13)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* now shifts our attention from the subjugation of the sea to the subjugation of the Heavens and the earth, for they have also been made subject to mankind since the time that Allah created them. However, human beings did not know the various manners in which they were made subject to them all at once, but rather, they came to know about them through the passage of time and the advancement and development of the various sciences.

This is similar to when Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

Thus, for example, when you read His statement *Glorified is He* concerning the ships of the sea: ‘And to Him belong the ships [with sails] elevated in the sea like mountains’ (*ar-Rahman:* 24), you are bound to use your intellect and ask yourself, as we have asked: when did humankind know about multi-decked ships that are raised up above the sea?

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(1) *This is related by Muslim in his Sahih (1343), in the Book of Pilgrimage, from the Hadith of Ibn `Umar Allah be pleased with him who related: ‘Whenever the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him would mount his camel in leaving for a voyage, he would say, “Allah Akbar” three times, and then say, “Limitless in His Glory is He who has made all this subservient to our use – since but for Him, we would not have been able to attain it. Hence, verily, it is unto our Lord that we must always turn.”’ Ahmad similarly relates this Hadith in his Musnad (2/144).*

Humankind learned of multi-decked ships in the last decades of the eighteenth century, for before that, the deck of a ship was like a plain surface upon which nothing else rested. So, who informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that some of the ships would be very high and lofty like mountains? Similar to this is His statement *Glorified is He*: ‘And if it were not that the people would become one community [of disbelievers], We would have made for those who disbelieve in the Most Merciful - for their houses - ceilings and elevators of silver upon which to mount.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 33)

Modern civilization had no knowledge of elevators except in the latter part of the twentieth century. Therefore, this is one of the manifestations of the wondrous inimitability of the Quran and its truthfulness, and the truthfulness of the one who conveyed the Quran to us. Thus, Allah and His Messenger have spoken the truth.

All of this indicates that these new inventions were present in the Knowledge of Allah *Glorified is He* and had a specific form, just like a model of something before its actual construction, before they ever occurred to the intellects of human beings. Allah manifests them to His servants according to their needs and with the passage of time and the advancement and development of the various sciences, and this is the meaning of the verse:

Concerning His statement *Glorified is He*: ‘And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth’, we have said: ‘Everything that is in the Heavens and the earth is a vessel and container of many other things, some of which we know, and others of which we have not attained any knowledge of until now’. Thus, we observe the Heavens as something of great elevation and altitude for us, and we do not see any of the creation of Allah in it except for the sun and the moon, the stars and the clouds. And this is only the Heavens of this earthly realm. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘And We adorned the skies nearest to the earth with lights.’ (*Fussilat:* 12)

As for the Seven Heavens, that is something of an entirely different order of reality, something we have no knowledge about whatsoever.

It is enough for you to know that between you and the sun are 8 light-minutes of distance, and that there are things that have been created that are at a distance of 100 light years distance from you: calculate that distance by multiplying it by 365 days, then by 24 hours, then by 60 seconds, and then by the speed of light, and you will understand how little we know.

Therefore, there is an entire order of universe beyond what you can possibly imagine or conceive. For this reason, Allah states *Glorified is He*: ‘And the heaven We constructed with strength, and indeed, We are [its] expander.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47)

It is enough for you, in terms of how the cosmos has been subjected for your use, to consider the sun, and how its creator has made it subject to you such that it gives you light, warmth, energy, and different types of rays, without you having to expend any effort for it whatsoever, and without any maintenance, any fuel, and without you even having to reach it in the first place.

Thus, it operates in service for you and has done so since the time that Allah created it, and it will continue to do so until the coming of the Last Hour; it does not require anything from you at all. You only need to benefit from it, and contemplate its nature and the manner in which it can be exploited for your own use and benefit. So is the moon, it gives you light that is gentle and tranquil, and by it we are guided in the darkness and depths of the night: ‘And landmarks. And by the stars they are [also] guided.’ (*an-Nahl:* 16)

So, Allah created the moon and sun, with the specific quality of movement. Both are in motion and have been in motion since the time Allah created them, and will continue to do so until the coming of the Last Hour. They move without any fuel and without any energy, operating by the law of inertia, as we have said. As we have said previously, this motion takes place by means of precise and finely attuned calculation: ‘The sun and the moon are made punctual.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 5)

The earth, as well, is a container and a vessel for many different kinds of things and species of all varieties. In it are inanimate objects, which constitute the lowest level of species; if you add the quality or character of development and growth, we have plant life; and if you add the quality of sensation and feeling, you have animate life; and if you add the capacity and faculty of intelligence, we have human life, and this is the highest of all these species, and the most noble to Allah.

For this reason, Allah has made subject to man all the other species and made them at his disposal and for his use. He has made man their overlord, and thereby, His representative in His earth.

So, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of inanimate objects, He states: ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby fruits of varying colours? And in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] extremely black.’ (*Fatir:* 27)

Thus, He presented the fruits first which are from plant life, before mentioning inanimate life because we do not consume inanimate life, but rather, we eat plant life, and fruits are the outcome and produce of such life. They are the most important to us, and they constitute the fundamental elements of life.

Thereafter, He speaks of the mountains which are the source of many benefits, treasures, metals, and precious gems. For this reason, He states in another verse: ‘And He placed on the earth firmly set mountains over its surface, and He blessed it and determined therein its [creatures'] sustenance.’ (*Fussilat:* 10) In other words, these blessings are to be found within the mountains. Now we have already made clear that the mountains are sources of nourishment, and serve as its storehouses in the earth. This is so because it is a source of rich, fertilizing soil that flows with the rainwater and spreads across the ends of the earth. By such mean, the fertility of the earth increases: ‘And there is not a thing but that with Us are its depositories, and We do not send it down except according to a known measure.’ (*al-Hijr:* 21)

Thus, in every species of creation, there are signs. Consider inanimate material, for example, such as the mountains and what they possess of benefit and various colours and hues of all kinds: within, one finds marble, granite, alabaster, and other useful material. Furthermore, plant life represents the essential source of nourishment. Think, for example, of the Arab date palms, and compare them with the European palm trees. For us, the date palm is a source of nourishment and we make use of every part of it, and we never throw away anything from it whatsoever.

Thus, you find that they have bark that serve as steps which you can use to ascend the trees and prune their branches or gather their fruits. As for the European palm trees, they are only for adornment. For this reason, you find them sleek, smooth, and thus hard to climb. This is for a special wisdom of the Creator, and a manifestation of His precision in creation. All praise be to Allah, the Best of Creators!

Contemplate the stalks of the palm trees: you will find them broad at their origins, and slender and delicate at their ends, and the leaves that are upon them are the opposite, for they are even and flat, spreading out at their tips. Then, they start to curl into themselves until they become spines at the base of the palm-stalks, close to where the fruit is, and this is so because these spines protect the fruits from rats and mice. Then contemplate the fact that these spines end at the base of the palm-stalks, and do not extend to the fruit-clustering stalks that bear the actual fruit.

Now contemplate the trunk of the date palm; it is tall and upright, as opposed to other trees, which you will find to be short and branching out. This is so because the fruits upon them are small in size, and it is easy for the branches to bear them. As for other plants like the watermelon, for example, they are found on finely coiled stalks that extend along the earth, and this is because it is such a heavy fruit.

Therefore, the phenomenon of the power of Allah being manifested in the cosmos is not something mechanical. If you consider the food you eat, you will notice that you eat the skin of the apricot, and leave aside the pit, unlike the almond, where you eat the nut and leave aside the shell. This is from the Power, the Great Wisdom, and the facility with which the Creator *Glorified is He* manifests Himself. You eat everything of the fig, for example, which does not have an outer skin. As for the orange or the tangerine, it has an outer peel. Contemplate, then, the different colours and flavours of the various edible plants and fruits, all of which are watered by the same source of water, and say: Glory be to the Creator!

Contemplate the trees: we find some from amongst them that are green which have no fruit, and you deem them to be of no benefit. However, there must necessarily be some benefit in them, either for you yourself or for something else in creation. It is enough that they serve as adornment and beautify their surroundings, and serve as a source of oxygen, and perhaps they have many other benefits of which you are not aware. You find, for example, trees that have flowers of various shapes, beautiful colours, and smell.

This is a whole other world of aesthetically wondrous creation of the natural world. For all the various colours and fragrances, there is a Divine wisdom in their presence, for they attract butterflies and insects that carry out the process of pollination for plant life. For every kind of butterfly and insect has its own blend of colours and smell. For this reason, when the insecticides started to become widespread, this phenomenon started to decrease, and we no longer saw any flowers in the fields. Why is this so? This is because the insecticides killed off the butterflies that carry out the process of pollination.

When you see all this beauty in creation, you should invocate the Creator and say: ‘All Praise be to Allah, the Best of Creators’! Furthermore, what is more beautiful than the beauty in creation is the One Who created this beauty.

Now in the verse, He states: ‘all from Him’; the word ‘all’ is used to indicate everything that is in the Heavens and the earth of the creation of Allah, without exception. Therefore, everything that is small or large in creation, from the atom to the galaxy, is from the bounty of Allah, those that we know of, and those that our limited knowledge cannot possibly encompass.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought.’ In other words, these created things that have been subject to you are wonders and indications people who give thought.

Thus, this is a call to faith, for the True Lord *Glorified is He* presents His creation and his marvellous works in the cosmos to us, and calls us to contemplate them and employ our intellects in considering their nature. Furthermore, The Fashioner and Creator would not do this with his created works unless He were certain and absolutely sure of their excellence.

We have stated previously that if you were to go to a seller of fabric and buy a suit of wool from him, for example, you would see him present you various garments of fabric and make clear to their high level of quality. Then he would take a twist of the fabric and light it on fire in order to demonstrate to you the reality of its high quality. He does this only to demonstrate his trustworthiness to you, concerning the goods that he is selling. As for the seller of corrupted goods that have been debased or adulterated, he will chatter and prattle to you, and try to make you believe him with false words, deceit, and lies. He will never dare to make the defects of his goods clear to you.

Therefore, when your Lord addresses you, try to comprehend, reflect, and bear in mind thoughtfully what He is saying. What this means is that if you were to use your faculty of intelligence and consider this verse carefully and think about it deeply, it would lead you to the truth and to what He wishes from you. For this reason, the True Lord warns His servants against turning away from His signs: ‘And how many a sign within the heavens and earth do they pass over while they, therefrom, are turning away.’ (*Yusuf:* 105)

Then, The True Lord *Glorified is He* states: (1)

قُل لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ يَغْفِرُوا۟ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ أَيَّامَ
ٱللَّهِ لِيَجْزِىَ قَوْمًۢا بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

Tell the believers to forgive those who do not fear God’s days [of punishment] — He will requite people for what they have done [14] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 14)

The word ‘Tell’ indicates the precision which the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* employed in his delivery of what he received from Allah, and that He does not come with anything from himself and nor relate the Words of Allah by their general import, but rather, he conveys the revelation literally, word for word. If this were not the case, it would be possible for him to relate to people that 'Allah is One' when Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following verse to him: 'Say, "He is The One Allah"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1).

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(1) *Reasons behind the revelation of the verse: Ibn `Abbas stated, in a relation from `Ata`: He intended the verse particularly for `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him and He intended `Abdullah ibn `Ubay in mentioning ‘those who do not believe in the coming of the Days of Allah.’ This is because they stopped in the Battle of Banu Mustaliq at the well-called Al-Muraysi. `Abdullah sent his servant to bring water, but then was late in returning, and so when he finally came back to him; he asked him, ‘What kept you?’ The servant replied, ‘The servant of `Umar waylaid everyone else at the rim of the well, and did not let anyone draw any water until he filled the water skins of the Prophet, the waterskins of the Abu Bakr and then he filled up water for his master. `Abdullah replied, ‘There is nothing that is similar between us and them except what has been said by someone: “Fatten your dog, and it will devour you.”’ The news of this statement reached `Umar Allah be pleased with him who took up his sword, wanting to head towards him, when Allah revealed this verse. `Asbab An-Nuzul, Al-Waqidi (p. 215)*

Now when you send your son to his uncle, for example, and tell him: 'Tell your uncle: 'My father wishes to see you', and your son goes to him and tells his uncle: 'My father wishes to see you', the general meaning of what you intended is conveyed, and the expression is complete without resorting to repeating the word 'Tell'.

As for the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he relates exactly what Allah relates to him. He does not interfere in relating the text of what has been revealed to him and cast in to his heart, as if he were to say to us: 'This is the Word of Allah; it is not from myself at all, but rather, is the very Speech of Allah'. Thus, he relates what is revealed to him exactly as he hears it.

It is eccentric that there are some people who call for removing this word from the Quranic manuscripts and allege that it does not add anything to the meaning at all. Refuting their claim, it is enough to know that Allah *the Most High* and then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* mentioned it. Moreover, it has a specific role to play, as previously elucidated.

Allah's saying: 'Tell the believers to forgive…' (*al-Jathiya:* 14) means that the believers should pardon and pass over the trivial speech of disbelievers as long as their words do not exceed the bounds of speech to the realm of action.

The verse: '…Those who do not fear Allah's days [of punishment]…' (*al-Jathiya:* 14) refers to those people who do not take account of Allah's days. Being eager for the best is a kind of request and bears the idea of wishful and wistful desire for achieving it; thus, it refers to attainability and reasonable expectations of realising hope. Though, the meaning of impossible request is quite different; it refers to the unattainable wish, such as that mentioned by the poet laureate :(1)

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(1) The poet is Abu Al-`Atahiyya, (Ismail ibn Al-Qasim), born near Kufa in the year 130 A.H. and lived in Baghdad. He used to excel in poems on abstinence and eulogies. He used to sell jars of earthenware, and then reached the courts of the caliphs where he reached an elevated position. He died in Baghdad in 211 A.H., from *Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi'riyya.*

I wish the flush of youth could return for a single day
I would inform it of what old age brought along its way (1)

As for hopefulness, it refers to reasonably expected attainable action, as it is said, ‘I hope to succeed’ or ‘I hope to travel’.

The reference of the verse: ‘…Allah’s days [of punishment]…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 14) is similar to that in the saying ‘the days of the Arabs’ which refers to the historic significant days of the Arabs, when their great events and occurrences took place. Thus, ‘the Days of Allah’ refers to the historic days of the Muslims in which they won victory over their enemies. As for the Muslims, they are days of victory; whereas, they are days of defeat for the disbelievers. As a consequence, the disbelievers who do not take admonition from these great events, but rather, who pass over them as if nothing happened or as if they were completely ignorant, are the hypocrites. This verse has a related story; in the Battle of Banu-Mustaliq, (2) there was a water well called Al-Muraysi, where both the servant of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* and the servant of `Abdullah ibn Ubay, the chief of the hypocrites gathered to get water. The servant of 'Umar prevented the other from getting water from the well and said, ‘You would not get water until I would have gotten water for Prophet Muhammad first.’ Eventually, the other asked, ‘Have you finished?’ The servant of 'Umar replied, ‘Not yet, there is still a bucket of water for Abu Bakr, and then one for 'Umar.’ The narrator of the story relates that the servant of 'Umar did this due to his knowledge that ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay is a hypocrite. As a result, the servant of Abdullah ibn Ubay was late in getting water, so ‘Abdullah asked him, ‘Why are you late?’ Thereupon, the servant replied, ‘The servant of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab did such-and-such.’ In response, ‘Abdullah nodded his head hypocritically and said: ‘Indeed, we are a typical example of the saying: “Fatten your dog and it will devour you.”’ He said this to satisfy his ego, yet his saying reached 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* who took up his sword to kill him, but Allah revealed this verse: ‘Tell the believers to forgive those who do not fear Allah’s days [of punishment]…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 14).

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(1) It is a 4-verse *Wafir*-metre ode.

(2) *This story has been related by Wahidi An-Naysaburi in Asbab An-Nuzul [al-Jathiya chapter, verse No. 14]. He has also referred to in Nawasikh Al-Quran (1/225) and said, ‘It is related by `Ata` on the authority of Ibn `Abbas.*

Allah commands the believers to forgive and pass over any slipup uttered which is still merely within the framework of speech, and does not reach the level of deeds. However, in case it does, this would be a different matter altogether, as in the case of the Muslim woman with the tribe of Banu Qaynuqa`, when a Jew from Banu Qaynuqa` raised up her garment and her nakedness was exposed. In this case, there should necessarily be a punitive measure against their bad deed. (1)

As for mere words, there is no problem with showing forbearance for these hypocrites. It is sufficient to know that the hypocrite debases himself through hypocrisy because he does in public what he does not hold to be true or does not believe in. Furthermore, hypocrisy, in itself, refers to the strong faith faced by hypocrisy. This shows the strength and nobility of faith and the debasement of hypocrisy.

Thus, the Quran relates their saying: ‘they say, “Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak…”’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). Allah confirms their saying that the powerful will drive out the weak; however, who is the powerful and who is the weak? In this context, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…But power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and to the believers…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8).

It is sufficiently humiliating that these hypocrites actually attended the prayers in the very first row in order to hide their hypocrisy. Accordingly, there is a deep contradiction and wavering within their hearts which refers to the consciousness of their own debasement. It is related that when Allah revealed His saying: 'Who will give Allah a good loan...' (*al-Baqara:* 245), Fanhas,(1) the Jew, laughed and said, 'The Lord of Muhammad is in need and asks us to lend Him.' He uttered this in order to satisfy his ego; yet, he was still fighting in every battle to the side of Muslims and performed the prayers in the first row.

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(1) *This is related by Al-Waqidi in Al-Maghazi (1/65), the chapter of ‘The Battle of Qaynuqa`’ where he said, ‘A woman who had fled from the Arabs came to the market of Banu Qaynuqa` with a man from the Ansar, and sat down near a jeweller who had some jewellery for her. There came a man from the Jews of Banu Qaynuqa`, who sat down secretly behind her, and raised the hem of her garment up to her back, attaching it with a thorn. When the woman stood up, some of her nakedness appeared, and everyone laughed and jeered at her. In response, a man from the Muslims rose, followed the Jew and killed him, upon which the tribe of Banu Qaynuqa` gathered in around him and then killed him in retaliation. Thereby, they breached the covenant they had made with Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.’*

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to forgive the hypocrites so that the hypocrites are involuntary conscious of their own debasement. Hence, orientalists stirred up a big commotion concerning Allah's saying: 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, "We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah." Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). They exclaimed how Allah declares just afterwards: '…And He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). There is a difference between the saying and the content of the saying itself. Thus, they are speaking the truth vis-à-vis the content of their saying: '…"We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah…"' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). However, they are lying in their saying because they are hypocrites.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not say they are lying in their saying that you are Allah's Messenger; but rather, He denies their saying: '…We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). Bearing witness means that the heart agrees with the utterances of the tongue; whereas, the utterances and the actions of the hypocrite are worlds apart.

Thus, Allah's saying: '…Allah's days [of punishment…' (*al-Jathiya:* 14) refers to the days of famous events of victory, bringing gladness and causing the Muslims to rejoice in Islamic history; such as the Battle of Badr, the Battle of Uhud and the Day of Hudaybiya. Meanwhile, they refer to the days of defeat for the disbelievers, grieving their hearts and troubling their lives. Likewise, these days resemble the great retributive events that took place to those nations who denied previous messengers.

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(1) *Fanhas was one of the scholars and rabbis of the Jews. Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him had already met with him, saying to him, "Woe to you, O Fanhas! Fear Allah and accept Islam! For by Allah, indeed you know well that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and that he has come with the truth from Allah, and that you have found mention of him written in your scriptures of the Torah and the Evangel.' Fanhas replied, 'By Allah, O Abu Bakr, we have nothing of poverty from Allah with us, but verily, He is the one who is poor in our eyes. And we do not abase ourselves before Him the way He Abases Himself before us, and verily we are those of wealth when compared with Him, and if He were truly richer and wealthier than us, He would not have asked us for a loan, as your companion claims (referring to the following Quranic verse): "Who will give Allah a good loan...' (al-Baqara: 245). See Tafsir At-Tabari for reference.*

Those hypocrites do not fear or take warning from such retributive events. Hence, they did not turn away from violent disputation, argumentation, and stubborn opposition. This is fully elucidated in Allah's saying: 'And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned....' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40) Then Allah says to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…He will requite people for what they have done' (*al-Jathiya:* 14). Allah *the Almighty* tells His Messenger to leave their requital to Him! Allah's Command to forgive those hypocrites is not to honour or respect them, nor to show mercy to them; but rather, it is to bring down a severer punishment upon them by means of His Might. So, leave them to Allah to take His vengeance, for they are not actually challenging you, but rather, they are opposing Allah *Glorified is He*.

Furthermore, it should be noted that forgiveness has basic principles and certain limits. The man may recurrently forgive someone who does persistent evil, yet he may only find in return violent disputation and rejection. In the face of such evil, one must necessarily turn from showing clemency and mildness to outrage, for it is more beneficial and appropriate in this situation. The famous Arab poet laureate (1) has discerned this and said:

It is intelligent to demonstrate outrage to the delinquent (2)

If shown leniency, the roads of evil are long-drawn-out

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(1) Ahmad ibn Al-Hassan Abu At-Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi, born in 202 A.H. He is a sage poet and one of the most distinguished Arab poets and literature laureate to whom many proverbs are attributed. He was born in a small locale called Kinda, to which he is related. He grew up in the Levant, and thereafter, wandered the country in search of knowledge of Arabic, poetry, and literature in general. At one time, he pretended to be a prophet in the countryside of Samara. He passed away in 354 A.H.

(2) It is the ninth line of a 36-verse *Tawil*-Meter ode of Mutanabbi

Another poet (1) has said:

We pardoned the tribe of Banu Dhuhl
And exclaimed, 'These people are brethren:
Mayhap those days will return
When they were as once they had been.'
But when evil announced itself openly,
Naked, brash, unmistakably,
We marched like lions striding boldly,
Newly become most wrathful
At them we struck hard, enfeebling,
Weakening, retaliating equally (2)
And stabbing, like the piercing of openings
Of wineskins (3) distended with plenty
Showing clemency, submissively, when confronted
With outrage is grovelling compliance
Showing outrage brings succour and safety
When good conduct cannot grant deliverance (4).

Regarding Allah's saying: '…He will requite people for what they have done (*yaksibun*)' (*al-Jathiya:* 14), as previously mentioned, it is clear that

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(1) He is the towering figure of his age, Shahl ibn Shayban, one of the poets of pre-Islamic Arabic Peninsula, from the people of Yamama. He was called 'the towering mountain' for the greatness of his works, which were likened to the mountain. He died approximately 70 years before *Hijra*, cited in *Al-A`lam* for Az-Zirikli.

(2) 'Equally or in equal measure': a man's match in strength. This verse is related in some sources:
At them we struck hard, enfeebling,
Slaughtering, Retaliating equally

(3) 'Wineskin (*az-ziqq*): any vessel that is used for drink. To 'slough off (*tazqiq* – from the same root word) a wineskin' is to strip it open from its top. *Lisan Al-`Arab*

(4) *These verses are related by Abu `Ali Al-Qali in his work `Al-Amali` (1/309-310).*

yaksibun (have done or have gained) is used to refer to good deeds, whereas *yaktasibun* 'have earned' is used to refer to evil deeds because it involves falsification and fabrication of lies. So, good deeds proceed from the doer who commits them naturally, and do not contain any affectation in them. Moreover, the term *yaksibun* 'have gained' originally means the increase in the sale price of something from the price of its procurement, a praiseworthy action, as it stimulates lawful and healthy business enterprise.

However, the human being may become accustomed and habituated to committing sins and does not distance himself from perpetrating them. They may become so natural, and thus, for him, it is an instance of being proud of 'gaining' evil deeds. In other words, he does not repent of his actions, nor does he upbraid himself for them, but rather he is pleased by bad deeds and considers them as good ones being 'gained'. For this reason, Allah does not say *yaktasibun* 'what they earned', but rather, He *the Almighty* says, '…He will requite people for what they have done (*yaksibun*)' (*al-Jathiya:* 14). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to forgive minor faults, for the perpetrator may refrain from his wrong action. Allah *the Exalted* says, '…[Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend' (*Fussilat:* 34).

Consequently, Allah, the Wise Legislator has taken every measure to ensure that the bonds between people would remain well preserved. Even in the most violent campaigns against the enemies, which involves taking life, He allows for retaliatory penalties to be exacted as follows: 'Fair retribution saves life for you, people of understanding…' (*al-Baqara:* 179). Meanwhile, He calls for forgiveness: '…But if the culprit is pardoned by his aggrieved brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and the culprit shall pay what is due in a good way…' (*al-Baqara:* 178). The word 'brother', despite being enemies, refers to their dealing in brotherly way.

There are many people who alleged that they have repelled evil with what was better, yet they did not find the desired result of which Allah has informed them. Their claim is refuted that they did not respond with what was better. If they had, they would have found their desired outcome, just as Allah has informed them; however, they fancied that they did, and they treated the situation as something experimental whose results would be judged thereafter, instead of having certainty in Allah's promise.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* elevates this humane act higher than mere forgiveness; for someone may forgive the other who does evil towards him, but there remains some despise in his heart. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* calls the believer to release himself from the effects of such offences, and then moves onwards to a higher level, which is to do good to the one who has done evil towards him: '…Those who restrain their anger and pardon people — Allah loves those who do good' (*Al-'Imran:* 134).

Al-Hassan Al-Basri(1) was once asked about this matter, to which he responded, 'The evildoer deserves to be requited because Allah is by the side of the aggrieved; thereafter, the good deeds of the former get transferred to the latter.'

For this reason, when a man knew that a man had insulted him in a gathering, he sent him a plate of fresh dates as a gift and told his servant, 'Go with this to so-and-so, and tell him, "My master presents this gift to you, for you granted him your good deeds yesterday."'

Likewise, in our everyday life, when a child hits his brother; the father sympathises with the aggrieved one, whereas he angrily reproaches the sinner who hit the other, and upbraids him for his behaviour. Thus, the strike against the aggrieved child became in his favour and to his advantage.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* desires that all His creation would display compassion towards each other; this signifies that life is not built upon hatred, rancour, or stubborn resistance against others, but rather, upon love, affection, and mutual support.

As the scholars of Islam tackled this matter, they classified the tribulations that afflicted man into two categories; the first is that which afflicts man, where he has an adversary or an offending party. This type is harder on the self, for it summons man to vengeance. The second is the tribulation that afflicts man, where there is no adversary involved. This type is driven by Allah, in which man has no part. This tribulation is easier for man, as there is no offending human party involved. In case there is, by very nature, it stirs in man his perpetual desire for revenge.

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(1) Al-Hassan ibn Yasar Al-Basri Abu Said is one of the *Tabi`in*, those pious followers who came after the generation of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He was the Imam of the people of Basra and a great religious scholar and authority of Muslims of his time. He was one of the great scholars and legal authorities and one of the most widely known for his great piety. He was born in Medina in 21 A.H. and grew up in his early years under the wing of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him*. He passed away in 110 A.H. at the age of 90.

For this reason, Luqman *peace be upon him* advises his son: '…Bear anything that happens to you steadfastly: these are things to be aspired to' (*Luqman:* 17). The verse refers here to the tribulation driven by Allah, therefore, there is no mention of forgiveness or overlooking faults in it whereas, when Allah refers to the tribulation caused due to others, He says, '…This is one of the greatest things' (*ash-Shura:* 43). The above verse is strengthened in its confirmation that forgiveness and forbearance for the offender in this situation is much more difficult and requires greater effort and struggle than in the first case.

In the conclusion of the concerned verse, Allah says, '…He will requite people for what they have done' (*al-Jathiya:* 14), where He *the Almighty* indicates the justice of the requital that will be in accordance with the kind of action performed in this life. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies further this point in the subsequent verse:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَنْ أَسَآءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۖ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

Whoever does good benefits himself, and whoever does evil harms himself: you will all be returned to your Lord [15]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 15)

Thus, the man benefits himself with regards to righteous action; whereas, any evil that he perpetrates is against his own self. Afterwards, as Allah says: '…You will all be returned to your Lord' (*al-Jathiya:* 15). This indicates that both the recompense for right action as well as the punishment for wrong action begins in this life before the person returns to Allah in the Hereafter. This is done to balance the equilibrium of the activity of life upon earth, for if all recompenses were delayed until the Hereafter, people would deem it easy to commit sin and would not care for falling into it. Accordingly, the situation would deteriorate and evil deeds would increase.

Therefore, there must be some earthly punishment that takes place in the world in order to set affairs right within it, so Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Another punishment awaits the evildoers…’ (*at-Tur:* 47). Furthermore, Allah says about the evildoers: ‘We shall certainly make them taste a nearer torment [in this life]…’ (*as-Sajda:* 21) which is followed by the punishment that takes place in the Hereafter: ‘…Prior to the greater torment so that perhaps they may return [to the right path]’ (*as-Sajda:* 21).

This principle is clear in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, as Allah *the Almighty* mentions the saying of Dhu Al-Qarnayn: ‘…We shall punish those who have done evil, and when they are returned to their Lord He will punish them [even more] severely’(1) (*al-Kahf:* 87).

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحُكْمَ وَٱلنُّبُوَّةَ وَرَزَقْنَٰهُم
مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ وَفَضَّلْنَٰهُمْ عَلَى ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

We gave scripture, wisdom, and prophet hood to the
Children of Israel; We provided them with good things and
favoured them above others [16] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 16)

This is meant as a consolation for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at a time when he endured the most painful sufferings and tribulations from the contemporary leaders of disbelief. They opposed him with stubbornness, denial, arrogance and much harm, in word and deed as well as by means of plots and conspiracies. They spared no effort to harm the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Thus, Allah *the Exalted* consoles and tells him that he is not the first messenger who experienced this; many of past prophetic brethren faced similar hardships and denial. So, Allah gives him consolation from the history of previous prophets who called people to faith and truth; whereas, the people, in return, desire falsehood; thus, they will necessarily clash against the prophets.

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(1) *Qatada related that the punishment of Dhu Al-Qarnayn for anyone who associated others with Allah in worship was execution. It was related on the authority of As-Suddi: ‘His punishment was to put them in brass cauldrons and set them on fire until they boiled to death.’ This was certainly a gruesome and terrible punishment. See Ad-Durr Al-Manthur of As-Suyuti and the commentary of al-Kahf, verse 87.*

Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘We gave scripture, wisdom, and prophet hood to the children of Israel…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 16). In other words, Allah gave the Torah to the people of Israel, just as He revealed unto Muslims the Quran. Additionally, Allah provides the people of Israel with the standards of justice, by which their affairs were settled so that they may run smoothly. These standards of justice for the people of Israel are like the Prophetic *Sunnah* for Muslims. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* commands the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as follows: ‘Remember what is recited in your houses of Allah’s revelations and wisdom...’ (*al-Ahzab:* 34). In other words, Allah addresses the wives of the Prophet to remember what is recited in their houses from the Quran and Hadith.

Allah’s saying: ‘…And prophet hood…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 16) refers to Allah’s sending many prophets to the people of Israel more than to any other nation, to the extent that they pride themselves over other nations in this concern. However, the reality is that this is not something to be proud of; but rather, this indicates their disgraced state for which they deserve to be reproached, for the great numbers of prophets indicates their corrupted state. Thus, the people have no need of a new messenger unless they have entered a deteriorated and corrupted state.

Therefore, the great number of prophets is not a point in their favour, but rather, it is a proof against them. They frequently carried out the killing of prophets, the matter which did not take place in any nation before them. Likewise, the disbelievers of Quraysh similarly plotted to kill Muhammad as well, yet how far their plans were from being realised! Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that the possibility of killing the prophets is confined to them only, so He attributes this specific transgression to them alone, as He says, ‘…Why did you kill Allah’s prophets in the past…?’ (*al-Baqara:* 91) These deeds were used to be of the previous people; as for present, no people are currently able to do any similar transgression against Prophet Muhammad.

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘…We provided them with good things…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 16). Among these good things are manna and quail that Allah sent down to them during the period of being wandered in the earth, when they had no rest, nor any cultivation from the earth. Manna is a kind of fluid that resembles honey that runs along the leaves of trees, that turns into translucent grains and that fall down early in the morning. It has a sweet taste, as if it is a blend of honey and cream. As for quail, it is a migratory bird abounding in protein. Thus, with manna and quail, Allah *Glorified is He* granted them a complete, wholesome meal, yet their materialist inclinations overwhelmed them. They wished to eat from their cultivation from the land they were in possession of, saying: ‘Maybe this fully prepared meal will not come one day; thus, *manna* and quail may not descend from the Heavens’.

Accordingly, they asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘…We cannot bear to eat only one kind of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us some of the earth’s produce, its herbs and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions…’ (*al-Baqara:* 61). However, their materialism reached its maximum limit so that they requested Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* to have a sensory vision of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…we will not believe you until we see Allah face to face…’ (*al-Baqara:* 55).

Then Allah says, ‘…and favoured them above others’ (*al-Jathiya:* 16). The scholars have stated: ‘They were merely favoured above other nations that were contemporaneous with them, not above all absolute nations. The People of Israel lived in a time when disbelief and idol-worship had taken reign, whereas they themselves were people of the Book, believing in Allah. Hence, they were better than all the other nations of their time.

وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُم بَيِّنَٰتٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ ۖ فَمَا ٱخْتَلَفُوٓا۟ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْعِلْمُ بَغْيًۢا
بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَقْضِى بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا۟ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

We gave them clear proof in matters [of religion]. They differed among themselves out of mutual rivalry, only after knowledge came to them: on the Day of Resurrection your Lord will judge between them regarding their differences [17]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 17)

Someone may ask about the occasion for mentioning the Jews here. The Quranic commentators said that Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the Quraysh and other people, have some demerits of the Jews. They have done many analogous deeds, so Allah sent down upon them similar tribulations, to what was sent down beforehand upon those previous nations.

Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘Can they not see that We have made [them] a secure sanctuary though all around them people are snatched away’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 67). In those days, anyone who merely left the environs of Mecca, would be accosted, abducted, taken unawares and his wealth and possessions would be seized by bandits. However, the people of Mecca themselves could not dare do such acts, due to their high status related to their possession of *Ka`ba*, the House of Allah, and their fervent desire to maintain the safety of trade caravans travelling between Yemen and the Levant and passing by the territories of other Arab tribes.

Moreover, the service of the Quraysh to the visitors of the *Ka`ba* as being the guests of Allah, the All-Merciful, also ensured their trade and protected their caravans. Thus, this matter serves as the connection between the chapters of *al-Fil* and *Quraysh*. Allah *the Almighty* says in *al-Fil*: ‘Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? Did He not utterly confound their plans? He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay: He made them [like] cropped stubble.’ (*al-Fil:* 1-5)

If it is asked, ‘Why did Allah repulse the Army of the Elephant and make them like a field of grain that had been eaten down to stubble’? The answer is found at the beginning of the chapter of *Quraysh:* ‘[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys.’ (*Quraysh:* 1-2)

If the House of Allah were to be destroyed, the dignity and high regard of Quraysh in the Arabian Peninsula would have been lost; thus, they would not have been able to maintain their trade expeditions in the winter and summer. It is as if Allah, Glorious is He, says to Prophet Muhammad: ‘I treated these people in such manner, defended them, and made them gain status and rank in the eyes of others; yet, they treat your call to Islam with enmity because you will strip them of their haughty and tyrannical leadership that they have become used to assuming’.

Thus, Allah’s saying: ‘We gave them clear proof in matters [of religion]…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 17) refers to the evidences and distinguishing characteristics of

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Jews only went to Medina because they had knowledge of his advent and knew of his attributes and the time of his coming. They used to show pride at his coming against the disbelievers and idol-worshippers. They were saying: 'Indeed, the time for the coming of a Prophet to the Arabs has been due. We will follow him and kill you all in the same manner as `Ad and Iram were killed.(1) But as the Messenger was sent on his mission, they opposed and disbelieved him, just as Allah says in this verse: '…And when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew [to be true], they disbelieved in it…' (*al-Baqara:* 89). Concerning their knowledge of the Messenger, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…(They) know this as they know their own children…' (*al-An'am:* 20).

Therefore, `Abdullah ibn Salam(2), a Jewish rabbi, stated: 'By Allah, I knew him the moment I saw him, just as I know my son, yet my certainty and knowledge of Muhammad is firmer.'(3) Despite this, they denied his message, disbelieved him and disregarded all signs and proofs of his prophet hood found in their sacred Books. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'They denied them, in their wickedness and their pride, even though their souls acknowledged them as true…' (*an-Naml:* 14).

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(1) *This is mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (1/124), narrated from ibn Ishaq from the elders of the Ansar, who said: 'We had forcibly overwhelmed and subjugated them for a long time in the pre-Islamic era, when we were idolatrous people, whereas they were the people of the Book, and they used to say, "Verily a prophet will be send with his mission anytime now, and we will follow him; his time has arrived, and with him, we will kill you all in the same manner of the massacre of the People of `Ad and Iram." But when Allah sent His Messenger Muhammad from Quraysh, we followed him, while they disbelieved in him.' This is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala`il An-Nubuwwa (1/459) & (2/302)*

(2) *`Abdullah ibn Salam ibn Al-Harith Al-Isra`ili Abu Yusuf Allah be pleased with him was a Companion of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. It is said that he is from the descendants of Yusuf (Joseph), son of Ya'qub (Jacob) peace be upon them. He accepted Islam upon the arrival of the Prophet to Medina. His name was Al-Husayn, but later, the Messenger named him `Abdullah. When the tribulations and disorder took place between `Ali and Mu`awiya Allah be pleased with them he lay down his arms and isolated himself from the discord. He remained living in Medina until he passed away in 43 A.H. cited in Al-A`lam of Az-Zirikli (4/90).*

(3) *This is mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (1/194), and it is ascribed by As-Suyuti in his book Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (1/357) to Ath-Tha`labi on the authority of As-Suddi As-Saghir, from Al-Kalbi, from Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him.*

When Allah guided `Abdullah ibn Salam to Islam, he went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Truly, Allah has guided my heart to Islam, but I fear if I accept Islam, that the Jews will censure and blame me once they find out, so please ask them about me before they know about my conversion to Islam!' The Prophet asked the Jews, 'What do you know about Ibn Salam?' They responded, 'He is our master, the son of our master, our rabbi, and the son of our rabbi.' As `Abdullah ibn Salam uttered the 'Testimony of Faith' (I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship save Allah and that you are The Messenger of Allah) they said, 'Nay, he is such-and-such' and went on insulting, abusing and reviling him. Thereupon `Abdullah said, 'O Messenger of Allah, did I not tell you that they are a people of slander and falsehood?'(1)

It is strange that when the disbelievers of Mecca asked the Jews, 'Are we more rightly guided or Muhammad?' They responded, 'Nay! You are more rightly guided than him.'(2) This refers to their worldly temporal power that they wished to preserve. Before the Messenger's entry to Medina, they were preparing Ibn Ubay to be their king and they had prepared the royal crown for him.(3)

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(1) *This is related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (Hadith 3082, 3645, and 4120), and likewise by Ahmad in his Musnad (Hadith 11615 and 13265) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *This is narrated by At-Tabari in his Tafsir (p. 9791) from Mujahid, who stated: 'This was related concerning Ka'ab ibn Al-Ashraf and the disbelievers of Quraysh, where he said, "The disbelievers of Quraysh are more rightly guided than Muhammad."' Ibn Jurayj stated: 'Ka'ab ibn Ashraf came forward, and Quraysh came to him and asked him about Muhammad, so he belittled his work and made it look insignificant, and informed them that he was astray. Then they said to him, 'We implore you by Allah! Tell us, are we more rightly guided, or is he? For indeed you have known that we slaughter meat out of hospitality for our visitors, we give the pilgrims drink, we make the lesser pilgrimage of the House of Allah and we feed whoever it is that the winds bring to us.' He replied, 'You are more rightly guided.' A similar Hadith is given in the Tafsir of Ibn Abu Hatim (p. 5497).*

(3) *This is mentioned by Ibn Hisham in his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (2/584): 'His people had made ready the pearls in order to crown him and appoint him to be their king. Then Allah the Exalted brought them His Messenger peace and blessings be upon him as they were in the middle of what they were doing. When `Abdullah ibn `Ubay's people turned away from him to accept Islam, he resented it strongly; he felt that the Messenger has wrested away his kingship. When he saw that his people had refused him as king and=*

However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* preceded him and as soon as he had reached Quba` and the people of Medina had received him, Ibn Ubay was no longer able to claim this title. He remained secretly angry at what had taken place until he died.

As Allah says, '... They differed among themselves out of mutual rivalry, only after knowledge came to them…' (*al-Jathiya:* 17), this means that they differed concerning the Prophet after their full knowledge of his identity because some of them believed in him and professed Islam, while others denied and disavowed him.

There are some good people amongst the Jews whom Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* praised. In this regard, the Messenger said: 'The best of the Jews is Mukhayriq.'(1) This man, as he converted to Islam, set out with the Messenger for one of the military campaigns and waive all his possessions to him, without declaring this openly. In the battle, he was killed, without even having performed a single prayer.(2)

In Allah's saying: '…on the Day of Resurrection your Lord will judge between them regarding their differences' (*al-Jathiya:* 17), He refers to the matter of belief in the Message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَٰكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ فَٱتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَآءَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

Now We have set you [Muhammad] on a clear religious path, so follow it. Do not follow the desires of those who lack [true] knowledge [18] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 18)

Allah has made Prophet Muhammad upon the *Shari'a* (Straight Path) which would endow man with water as being the origin of life, as Allah says:

= *professed Islam, he entered Islam in a state of hypocrisy and resentment and his hatred persisted all the time.'*

(1) *Mukhayriq An-Nadiri Al-Isra`ili, from the tribe of Banu An-Nadir. He turned to Islam and died a martyr in the Battle of Uhud. He was a scholar and he had bequeathed his wealth to the Prophet, who, in turn, gave it out in charity, cited in Al-Isaba Fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba (6/73) and in Siret An-Nabi (2/88). The text of the Hadith: 'Mukhayriq is on the top of the Jews.' In another narration 'Mukhayriq is the best of the Jews.' See Dala'il An-Nubuwwa of Abu Na`im (Hadith 39) and Kanz Al-`Umal of Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi (Hadith 46154).*

(2) *This is related by Ibn Kathir in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (3/72).*

'…That We made every living thing from water...' (*al-Anbiya':* 30). Thus, the religion of Islam is termed *sharia*. As water endows life to the human body, religion gives life to the spirits and the hearts. It will give man the eternal and everlasting true life in the Hereafter, about which Allah says, 'Believers, respond to Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). There is no doubt that Allah *the Almighty* addresses believers here in their living state in this world. Thus, 'life' refers to the eternal one of the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* advises his Messenger to abstain from concerning himself with the denial and stubborn resistance of those people, for their actions are well known, and have precedents in the procession of previous prophets; so he should bear up any harm and grievance. In the very early period of the Prophet's mission, Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* accompanied the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal(1) and related everything that had happened to him. Waraqa said, 'There has come the greatest prophecy just as that had come to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.' He also told the Messenger, 'Verily, you are the last prophet. If I live to witness the day you call to Allah's path, I will support you with all my strength. I wish I would live until the day they cast you out!'

The Prophet astonished asked, 'Will they cast me out?' Waraqa replied, 'Yes, no previous prophet has ever called to the Right Path without being cast out.'(2) Therefore, the Prophet's immigration for the sake of propagating religion was a known matter from the very beginning of his mission, for it constitutes the perfection of the illumination of Islam emerged from Mecca.

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(1) *Waraqa ibn Nawfal ibn Assad `Abd Al-`Uzza was a sage from the Quraysh in the pre-Islamic period... He distanced himself from idol-worship before Islam, and forbade himself any meat that was slaughtered for the idols and turned to Christianity. He was present in the very early phase of the Prophetic era, but he died before the call to Islam was propagated. He was the paternal cousin of Khadija Allah be pleased with her and he passed away around 12 years before Hijra. By that time, he had reached a very old age and had gone blind. See Al-A`lam of Az-Zirikli (8/114-115).*

(2) *This is related by Muslim in his Sahih (Hadith 221) and by Ahmad in his Musnad (Hadith 24671) from the Hadith of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her. It is also related by Abu `Awana in his Mustakhraj (Hadith 245). The text in Muslim is as follows: 'No man has ever come with what you have come with but that he was treated as an enemy, and should I live to see your day come to pass, I will help you with all my support.'*

Allah says, '…so follow it. Do not follow the desires of those who lack [true] knowledge' (*al-Jathiya:* 18). Allah ordains the Prophet to follow the *shari'a* (the Straight Path), rather than the vain desires of the disbelievers, who later on proposed to the Messenger to worship their gods for a year and they will reciprocally worship Allah for a year.' Allah forbids him from following them, as Allah directs him regarding this matter in the chapter of *al-Kafirun*.(1)

إِنَّهُمْ لَن يُغْنُوا۟ عَنكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ
بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ وَلِىُّ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ١٩

They cannot help you against God in any way.
Wrongdoers only have each other to protect them; the
righteous have God Himself as their protector [19]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 19)

The reference here is to the disbelievers of Mecca, when they went to the Prophet's paternal uncle Abu Taleb and said, 'If the son of your brother seeks wealth, we will put together a fortune for him from our various properties that he would be the richest man amongst us. If he wishes to have sovereignty, we would make him our king.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* replied with his famous statement: 'O my uncle, by Allah, if they were to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left to abandon this matter, I would not do so, until Allah makes it manifest, or I perish for its sake.'(2)

Allah says, '…Wrongdoers only have each other to protect them…(*al-Jathiya:* 19); that means that the oppressors help and support each other, for the forces of oppression have gathered and unified their targets. Whereas, as Allah says,

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(1) *This is related by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur Fi Tafsir bil-Ma`thur) of al-Kafirun. He ascribed it to Ibn Jarir At-Tabari and Ibn Abu Hatim and At-Tabarani from Ibn `Abbas that they said to the Messenger: 'We offer you a proposal which will be to your advantage.' He asked, 'What is it?' They said, 'Worship our gods for a year, and we will worship your God for a year'.*

(2) *This is related in many books of Prophetic biography: it is related by Sayid An-Nas in his `Uyun Al-Athar (1/122), also by Ibn Kathir in his As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (1/474) and by As-Suhayli in Rawd Al-Unuf (2/6); all of them on the authority of Muhammad ibn Ishaq.*

'…The righteous have Allah Himself as their Protector' (*al-Jathiya:* 19), He is the Protector Who will support Allah-fearing people with His victory. These are some of the contrary oppositions that make the meaning in the context clearer.

هَٰذَا بَصَٰٓئِرُ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

This [revelation] is a means of insight for people,
a source of guidance and mercy for those of sure
faith [20] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 20)

Allah's saying: '…A means of insight…' (*al-Jathiya:* 20) refers to the light of truth within the human soul. Thus, the faculty of sight sees material things, whereas the faculty of insight perceives and distinguishes values and ideals.

Therefore, the seat of insight is the heart, where Allah casts His light into it. If it is said that someone has insight, this means that he has a piercing insight and perception of the reality of matters. It may be possible for such person to predict that something will happen and it comes to pass exactly as predicted.

Being guided or following the right path is to reach the truth by the shortest and easiest possible way. Guidance is not difficult to be followed, as Allah has described this with the believers in His saying: 'Such people are following their Lord's guidance…' (*al-Baqara:* 5). Thus, they easily follow guidance, as if they were carried to their desired destination.

Moreover, Allah refers to the Quran as 'Mercy' (*al-Jathiya:* 20), in addition to being guidance and source for mankind's insight, in another verse, Allah refers to the Quran as healing and mercy: 'We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe…' (*al-Isra':* 82).

As previously mentioned, there is a difference between 'healing' and 'mercy'. Healing refers to the treatment of the Quran to a current disease, or its correctness to a crookedness of the path taken. Thus, the Quran cures whatever shortcomings or failings human may have, uprights whatever deviation away from the straight path towards constructive actions.

This resembles the student who abandons his studies; consequently he fails and becomes unsuccessful; yet, if he returns to studies, he then succeeds.

Thus, if human overlooks the Quran as a methodology, he will be stricken with spiritual diseases and problems, but if he returns to it, he will be cured. As for mercy, this means the preventive action to wipe out the disease from the very beginning.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* depicts that the Quran is only a healing and a mercy for the devotees believing in its truthfulness and in being the path for guidance.

أَمْ حَسِبَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱجْتَرَحُوا۟ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ أَن نَّجْعَلَهُمْ كَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟
ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ سَوَآءً مَّحْيَاهُمْ وَمَمَاتُهُمْ ۚ سَآءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Do those who commit evil deeds really think that We
will deal with them in the same way as those who believe
and do righteous deeds, that they will be alike in their
living and their dying? How badly they judge! [21]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 21)

The verb ‘to think’ may mean to assume or, in other instances, ‘to count’, from the idea of calculation and enumeration, as in Allah’s saying: ‘…Commit evil deeds…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 21). Allah *the Exalted* means that the wrongdoers committed and earned evil actions. It is for this reason that the parts of the human body are termed, in Arabic, the same as those predatory birds, for they acquire their prey. As for ‘sin’, it is everything that is offensive and that leads to the punishment or censure of the doer.

In the verse, there is a rhetorical question, which implies obvious denial and wonderment in the assumption made. How are disbelievers and believers put on equal footing? Those who turned away from the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and thought that they could be considered on equal footing to the believers, are mistaken in their assumption. What a vast difference between these two groups, as they could not be for sure dealt the same! Rather, the disbelievers are defeated in this life and then tortured in the Hereafter; whereas, the disbelievers are granted victory and empowerment in this life and then will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

As Allah says, ‘…They will be alike in their living and their dying…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 21), He *the Exalted* negates that the two teams will be dealt the same whether in this worldly life or in the Hereafter. '…How badly they judge!' (*al-Jathiya:* 21) means that whoever judges that the two groups should be judged on an equal footing, has erred because this is unjust.

Thus, it is their surmise that has actually brought about their fall and impelled them towards being faithless. Otherwise, if they had known for certain that the resulting recompense would be different; they would have believed and done righteous deeds.

وَخَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلِتُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ
نَفْسٍۭ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ٢٢

God created the heavens and earth for a true purpose:
to reward each soul according to its deeds. They will not
be wronged [22] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 22)

Allah previously referred to the unfair judgement of the disbelievers and the impossibility of being treated equally to the believers. In this verse, He *the Almighty* then speaks about His Justice and about the balance of truth by which the Heavens and the earth have been established from the beginning, before creating mankind or bringing about the believer and disbeliever into existence.

Thus, Allah has truthfully created the Heavens and the Earth with finely attuned calculation and completely equitable composition. Thus, Allah's Justice is not confined to the rewards and requital of deeds in the Hereafter; but rather, it is an Eternal Justice, by which creation has been managed and attended.

The truth is the firmly established unchanged fact, such as Allah's signs in the Heavens and the earth, which are firmly and precisely established, with perfectly unchanged orchestrated course, from the very beginning of creation. Allah *the Exalted* gives an indication that the human's lives cannot be rectified and will not proceed in peace and security unless they are similarly guided and established by the truth, by which the Heavens and the Earth are managed.

For example, Allah's saying: 'The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses. The plants and the trees submit to His designs. He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance' (*ar-Rahman:* 5-7) means that they have been perfectly established.

The conclusion of this verse: ‘…To reward each soul according to its deeds, they will not be wronged’ (*al-Jathiya:* 22) shows that as creation is established upon truth as justice and requital should necessarily take place, as well as oppression should inevitably come to an end.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* states :(1)

أَفَرَءَيْتَ مَنِ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَٰهَهُۥ هَوَىٰهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِۦ وَقَلْبِهِۦ
وَجَعَلَ عَلَىٰ بَصَرِهِۦ غِشَٰوَةً فَمَن يَهْدِيهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

[Prophet], consider the one who has taken his own desire as a god, whom God allows to stray in the face of knowledge, sealing his ears and heart and covering his eyes – who can guide such a person after God [has done this]? Will you [people] not take heed? [23] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 23)

The deity is the worshipped entity, towards which the entire life is devoted in order to serve and carry out what it requires. ‘The worshipped deity’ is a general term that may refer to Allah, the Truthful Deity, the Creator, and the Originator of this universe, or it may also refer to the false objects of worship such as the idols, the sun or the moon.

These are false objects of worship that do not harm nor benefit anyone; only the ignorant who worship them to satisfy his ardent desire for worship and devotion. Thus, they seek a religion free from hardships or burdens and a god issuing no decrees or prohibitions.

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(1) The cause of revelation of this verse: Ibn Jurayj has related that it was revealed concerning Al-Harith ibn Qays, and An-Naqash has related that it was revealed concerning Al-Harith ibn Nawfal Ibn `Abd Munaf. Muqatil stated: It was revealed concerning Abu Jahl, and that is because he circumambulated the House of Allah one night, and with him was Walid ibn Al-Mughira. They spoke about the matter of the Prophet, and so Abu Jahl said, ‘By Allah, I know for certain that he is being truthful.’ To this Al Walid ibn Al-Mughira retorted: ‘What indicates this to you?’ So, Abu Jahl replied, ‘O Abu `Abd Shams! We used to call him “the truthful and the trustworthy” when he was young, and when he matured, we called him “the inveterate and treacherous liar”. By Allah, I know for certain that he is telling the truth.’ Walid ibn Al-Mughira said, ‘So what prevents you from accepting his message as the truth and believing in him?’ Abu Jahl replied, ‘The little girls of Quraysh will say of me that I followed the orphan of Abu Taleb just for his sake, in a state of defeat. By Lat and `Uzza, I will never follow him!’ Thereupon, the verse was revealed: ‘… Sealing his ears and heart...’ (*al-Jathiya:* 23).

The human’s caprice is one of these false gods, for there are some people who take their whims as their god. Caprice in itself is blameworthy; thus, it is wisely said: ‘The ruination of sound judgement is caprice’. Furthermore, Allah *Glorious is He* lauded Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because: ‘He does not speak from his own desire (caprice)’ (*an-Najm:* 3).

Even if Allah *the Exalted* altered some rulings promulgated by the Prophet during the earliest period of Islam; yet they were not issued out of the Prophet’s personal caprice whatsoever. Therefore, the Prophet said about himself: ‘My Lord has excellently taught me good manners.’(1)

Thereafter, Allah *Glorious is He* makes clear that the person who takes his own caprice as his god has gone astray: ‘…Whom Allah allows to stray in the face of knowledge…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 23). Thus, Allah judged that this person is astray from the Right Path because he had his own caprice. If Allah had made the human forcibly compelled, such as the Heavens and the earth, to obey Him, he would never have been able to oppose Him or go astray. However, as it is previously mentioned, Allah decrees to have willingly compliant hearts of worshippers, rather than imitating replicas of creatures obeying Him without having any choice.

Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And the soul and Him Who made it perfect, Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it' (*ash-Shams:* 7-8). Thus, when a man chooses wrong and Allah finds him to be like that, He passes a judgment that he shall be astray forever. Thus events in this worldly life transpired just as Allah *Glorified is He* willed. Thus, as we stated previously, the angels feel surprised whenever they see actual events in real life transpiring according to what has been written on the Preserved Tablet and say, ‘Glorified is our Lord.’

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(1) `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Ali Ash-Shafei Ash-Shaybani stated in his book *Tamyiz At-Tayyib Min Al-Khabith Fima Yaduru `Ala Alsinat An-Nas Min Al-Hadith* (p. 17) concerning this Hadith: ‘This has been narrated by Al-`Askari in his proverbs about `Ali *Allah be pleased with him* excerpted from a longer Hadith. Our sheikh has said: “Its chain of narration is weak, but its meaning is sound.”’

In the verse we are discussing, Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and the blessings be upon him* to consider the situation of someone who has taken his own desire as a god. He *the Almighty* here, asks Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* 'Have you come to know, whether you saw it with your own eyes or not?' It is just like the statement where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1). It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying, 'Did you not know?' We know that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the same year in which the Episode of the Elephant took place, so he did not actually see it happen himself.

In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has sealed all the different means of perception in the human soul: the ear by which he hears the verses of Allah *Glorified is He* the eloquence of the Divine Speech, His Promises and Threats; the eyes by which he sees and ponders over the signs of the cosmos, thus uses them as evidence proving the presence of their Creator and Originator; and the heart, which is the seat of convictions and belief.

Allah *Glorified is He* would not have sealed these means if it were not for the fact that the one who possessed them wanted disbelief. Thereby, He *the Almighty* aided him in his disbelief by sealing the entryways so as to keep on his disbelief and prevent faith from penetrating his heart. How can someone who does not hear the Divine Speech or see the signs of the cosmos and whose heart does not incline towards the happiness of faith in Allah *Glorified is He* possibly believe?

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse asking about he who can guide such a person after He *the Almighty* [has done this]. No one possesses the power to guide himself, as Allah *Glorified is He* states in another place: 'And whomsoever Allah causes to err, there is no guide for him' (*Ghafir:* 33).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَقَالُواْ مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا ٱلدُّنۡيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحۡيَا وَمَا يُهۡلِكُنَآ إِلَّا
ٱلدَّهۡرُۚ وَمَا لَهُم بِذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ عِلۡمٍۖ إِنۡ هُمۡ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

They say, 'There is only our life in this world: we die, we live, nothing but time destroys us.' They have no knowledge of this; they only follow guesswork. Their only argument [24]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 24)

This clearly shows their denial of the Last Day despite the truth which inevitably appears upon their tongues through the unintentional slips they make. Their description of the life in which they live in such terms is a proof and an unwitting acknowledgement from them that there exists another life that is more noble and higher than this one. Similarly, they said in another verse: 'Do not spend upon those who are with the Messenger of Allah' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). Thus, they acknowledge that he is Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* even though they are hostile to him and disbelievers in his call to faith.

They state that they die and live. However, they mean to say that they themselves die and their progeny live on after their passing away. This is because they do not believe in any life after death. Thus, when they speak of life here, they mean the extension of their progeny through the ages after their own death.

Moreover, they state that nothing but time destroys them. In other words, time alone is what causes them to die. However, it is known that time is a mere frame of events that come to pass and it is created by Allah *Glorified is He* and does not cause death. Rather, the only one who causes death is Allah *Glorified is He* Who says in a Qudsi Hadith 'Do not curse time, for I myself am (the Creator) of time.'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says that they have no knowledge of this; they only follow guesswork. Now someone might ask, 'why would Allah punish them as long as they have no knowledge of this?' The answer is that He would punish them because they refused to accept the knowledge that came from their Lord on the tongues of the Messengers. They only follow their guesswork regarding their statement about their death and life.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Muslim*

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ مَّا كَانَ حُجَّتَهُمْ إِلَّآ أَن
قَالُوا۟ ٱئْتُوا۟ بِـَٔابَآئِنَآ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ٢٥

When Our clear revelations are recited to them, is to say,
'Bring back our forefathers if what you say is true [25]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 25)

It was not merely one claim; rather, they have many such arguments which they have cited in order to evade belief in Allah and His Prophet and the Quran. Thus, when the verses of the Quran are recited to them, we see that they have many different arguments against them.

Allah *Glorified is He* states, 'And when Our communications are recited to them, they say: We have heard indeed; if we pleased we could say the like of it.' (*al-Anfal:* 31) He also states: 'And when Our clear communications are recited to them, those who hope not for Our meeting say: Bring a Quran other than this or change it,' (*Yunus:* 15). They are making two requests; the first is that they want to have a Quran other than that which Allah *Glorified is He* has sent down. They also wish to change the original positions of the verses. They have already requested the omission of verses that deride and mock their idols and statues as well as the verses that threaten them with an evil end.

Furthermore, just as they attempted to discredit and defame the Quran and wished for it to be changed, they attempted to discredit and defame Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to whom this Quran was revealed. So they said: 'And when Our clear communications are recited to them, they say: This is naught but a man who desires to turn you away from that which your fathers worshipped. And they say: This is naught but a lie that is forged. And those who disbelieve say of the truth when it comes to them: This is only clear enchantment' (*Saba':* 43).

Even though they provoked so many arguments, their intention is not to believe, though they know that their arguments are flawed with no basis whatsoever. Now someone may ask, 'If Allah mentions their arguments in many verses of the Quran, why does He state in the verse of the chapter of *al-Jathiya* that their only argument is to say so and so? Why is there restriction of the compass of their arguments?’

If we contemplated all of the previous arguments made by them, we would see that they were merely an act of sophistry, with the aim of attaining no belief. But their main proof that was so deep-rooted in their minds was their denial of resurrection after death. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* used the word only. In addition, He *Glorified is He* states, 'most surely these do say: There is naught but our first death and we shall not be raised again. So bring our fathers [back], if you are truthful' (*ad-Dukhan:* 34-36).

There were even some amongst them who take the ashes of those who had died and rub them until they became dust that would scatter in all directions. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'and they say: What! When we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then certainly be raised up, being a new creation?' (*al-Isra’:* 49)

They used to reject the idea of resurrection for they neglected to consider the beginning of existence and the beginning of the process of the creation of man. If we were to survey the number of people on this earth at any one time, we would find that it steadily increases as we go further into the future and it steadily decreases as we go back into the past. The further we go back, the less people there will be, until we reach the very first origin of mankind, namely Adam *peace be upon him* and Hawwa’ (Eve). How else did we come into existence? This is an unseen matter about which they must think deeply.

Indeed, the Quran has refuted their denial of resurrection and their statement concerning the matter saying: 'Say: Is there any one among your associates who can bring into existence the creation in the first instance, then reproduce it? Say: Allah brings the creation into existence, then He reproduces it; how are you then turned away?' (*Yunus:* 34) It is Allah Alone Who is capable of this. How is it that you invert all the truths and deny the reality of the affair wilfully?

Thus, those people found no argument to base their stubborn resistance and denial when the clear verses that are patently indicative of the truth of the Quran are recited to them. Instead they said, ‘bring forth our forefathers who have passed away, if you are telling the truth.’ Now this request indicates their moral bankruptcy and pig-headedness, for they have no logic behind what they say, nor any proof to use for their position and stubbornness.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* responded by saying:

قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يُحۡيِيكُمۡ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمۡ ثُمَّ يَجۡمَعُكُمۡ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ
لَا رَيۡبَ فِيهِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

[Prophet], say, ‘It is God who gives you life, then causes you to die, and then He gathers you all to the Day of Resurrection of which there is no doubt, though most people do not comprehend’ [26] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 26)

Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say that it is He *the Almighty* Who gives life then causes death, i.e. in this world, and then gathers you all to the Day of Resurrection of which there is no doubt. However, most people do not comprehend. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* denied their possessing any knowledge of the matter.

Their limited knowledge is incapable of grasping the realities of these matters. Just as all of creation is a sign from Allah *Glorified is He.* Similarly, death is also one of the signs of Allah that we see and perceive every day. Since you believe in creation and death and you experience them and do not doubt their realities, you must believe that there shall be a life after this worldly life, for the possessor of these signs is One and the beliefs which you prove to be true must necessarily lead you to the truth as well.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives life and provides man with power and strength to fulfil the purpose for which he was created. The first instance of granting life was in the case of Adam *peace be upon him* when Allah *Glorified is He* created and fashioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit. By so doing, He *the Almighty* brought us into existence through this progeny of Adam *peace be upon him*. In another verse, He *Glorified is He* states: 'How do you deny Allah and you were dead and He gave you the life?' (*al-Baqara:* 28)

Thus, their disbelief has no basis or logic, for the matter of granting life and creating people from nothing does not withstand any argument. Where was Adam *peace be upon him* before Allah *Glorified is He* created him? And where were you? Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'There surely came over man a period of time when he was a thing not worth mentioning.' (*al-Insan:* 1) Thus, no one can dispute the matter of life and death, for Allah created us from nothing. No one at all has ever alleged that he created humankind, or that he created himself.

Speaking of death, no one doubts that he will die, for death is decreed upon all of mankind. Thus, death and the creation of man from nothing are a demonstrably proved reality that is perceived by our senses and by observation. For this reason, Allah, out of His Mercy, compares events that are of the unseen realm for us by means of something we observe. How is that? Here, He *Glorified is He* informs us of a stage of creation that we have not witnessed, but death, on the other hand, is something that all of has witnessed. As long as death is something observable, Allah *Glorified is He* brings it forth as a proof of other stages of creation that we have not witnessed, as death is the opposite of life.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of the act of gathering, which refers to the gathering of mankind after resurrection and their return to life after having been dead. It is the Day of Gathering as He *the Almighty* states: 'And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Quran, that you may warn the mother city and those around it, and that you may give warning of the day of gathering together wherein is no doubt,' (*ash-Shura:* 7). That is to strike fear in them. Furthermore, the gathering will take place on this day in many ways. There will be the resurrection where the body and the spirit will be brought together; the heavenly host of angels will gather together with mankind; the oppressor will be joined with the one he has oppressed; and the leader will be joined with his followers. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah, there is no god but He, He will most certainly gather you together on the resurrection day, there is no doubt in it; and who is more true in word than Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 87)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَخْسَرُ ٱلْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

Control of everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to God. When the Hour comes, those who follow falsehood will be the losers on that Day [27] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 27)

Here, the Arabic expression, by means of being preceded by a prepositional phrase, indicates restriction. Thus, the control and dominion of the Heavens and the Earth has been restricted in its attribution to Allah Alone, without any partner. The Day of Judgement will undoubtedly arise, as if it had been sleeping and then woken up. Furthermore, the Last Hour has been made obscure to us so that we may anticipate its coming at any moment.

Thus, the use of obscurity, as we have stated previously, is the very essence of clarification, for it keeps us in a state of constant preparation for the Last Day at any time. This is just as Allah *Glorified is He* has made obscure for man the time of his appointed end on earth, in order that he always call it to mind at every point in time and never be heedless or careless of it. He who does not have the ability to live for the duration of a blink of an eye must be mindful of the Hereafter and wary of the coming of his time of death, while he is in a state of disobedience to Allah *Glorified is He*.

For whoever dies while doing a thing shall be raised up doing it, since death does not necessarily abide by natural causes. Death comes about with no causes in advance. Someone dies because he was supposed to die at that time and his time has come. Indeed, someone might enter the operation room yet does not exit from it; that is to say, the treatment that was meant to save him becomes the reason that kills him. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* obscures the time of our death with wisdom and a particular aim.

However, it is from His Mercy upon His creation that when Allah *Glorified is He* made the coming of the Last Hour obscure to us, He provided us with signs of its coming. This is so that those who are forgetful and heedless shall take notice and that mankind would not be taken by surprise suddenly. Out of His Mercy, He has provided us with both the minor signs and the greater signs of the Last Hour. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'None but He shall manifest it at its time; it will be momentous in the heavens and the earth; it will not come on you but of a sudden' (*al-A'raf:* 187).

Allah *Glorified is He* made it clear that when the Hour arises, those who stubbornly follow falsehood will be the losers. 'To lose' is the opposite of 'to gain' or 'to profit'. This is a matter that is known by businessmen, for every businessman wants profits and to increase his capital.

Therefore, every single action must be considered in terms of profit or loss. The disbeliever surmises that his work in this life will pay off profitably. However, he will be surprised on the Day of Judgement, when the time for doing actions will have ended. On that Day he will discover that his actions resulted ultimately in loss. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that [evil] there were a long duration of time' (*Al-'Imran:* 30).

The meaning of loss here is to find out that all his actions have become like fine dust scattered about in the winds, completely useless and without any benefit; a fact which is recorded in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And [as for] those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert which the thirsty man deems to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full; and Allah is quick in reckoning,' (*an-Nur:* 39).

It is for this reason that when we were asked how it was possible that all those people who have come up with new inventions and innovations that serve humankind, make daily life easier for people and reduce their pain and discomfort could possibly enter hell, we answered, 'Indeed, this is so; for they carried out these actions for the service of mankind, yet there was nothing in their minds about service to Allah. For this reason, they received accolades and wages from mankind in honour of what they had accomplished and as a way of perpetuating their memories and exalting them. Thus, busts and statues were created of them and books were written about them and so forth.

Therefore, they shall have no portion of the reward of the Hereafter. Had they worked for the sake of Allah, they would have found their wages and reward with Allah *Glorified is He* for the employee does not ask for his wages except from the one for whom he is working. Therefore, the disbeliever will be taken by surprise by this reality as we understand from the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'He finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full,' (*an-Nur:* 39).

Allah states:

وَتَرَىٰ كُلَّ أُمَّةٖ جَاثِيَةٗۚ كُلُّ أُمَّةٖ تُدۡعَىٰٓ إِلَىٰ كِتَٰبِهَا ٱلۡيَوۡمَ تُجۡزَوۡنَ مَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

You will see every community kneeling. Every community will be summoned to its record: 'Today you will be repaid for what you did [28] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that on the Day of Judgement, you will see every nation kneeling and crouching or perching on the tips of their toes. This is a frightening, submissive, and degrading position to assume. Related to this is Allah's statement: 'Then shall We certainly cause them to be present round hell on their knees' (*Maryam:* 68). Similar to this is the verb 'to fall' or 'lie prone.' In other words, to sit or perch in one's place, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'So they became motionless bodies in their abodes' (*Hud:* 94).

Therefore, it is a critical situation and a position indicating terror, fright and great fear and uneasiness, whereby people will not be able to sit and so they will be kneeling. When their fright increases, they will perch on the tips of their toes which is a position assumed by someone who is awaiting and expecting something grave and terrifying to take place. As for the natural way of sitting on the ground, one sits firmly seated upon the earth, a position that grants calm or tranquillity.

Now there is a difference between sitting down and sitting up, even if the final outcome is the same. The difference is that sitting down takes place after having been in a standing position, for we say, 'He was standing and then he sat down.' As for sitting up, this takes place after initially reclining or lying down on one's side, for we say, 'he was lying down and then he sat up.'

There is a fine philosophical point to be noted here, which is that sitting down takes place from a position that is initially higher such as standing. Sitting up takes place from a position that is lower such as lying down. Both sitting up and sitting down ensure that the human being enters a state of rest, whereby most of his body is on the ground. In this way he relaxes, as opposed to one standing, when his body is supported merely by his two feet.

As a result, if you were to stand for a long time, you would tire and you would start shifting from one foot to the other... If you were to begin walking on top of this, you would increase the load and discomfort on your feet. If you were to carry something while walking, you would again increase the load and discomfort you carry, and so forth.

So if a man in this situation begins to tire, the first thing he does to lighten the load and discomfort on his two feet is to put down whatever he was carrying. Then, if he becomes even more tired, he stops walking, in order to lessen the physical exertion he must endure. After that he sits down, and if he tires more, he reclines or lies down and sprawls on the ground with his entire body. This position ensures that he will get the maximum amount of rest his body requires.

However, this Quranic image of crouching or lying facedown on the ground does not indicate a state of rest. Rather, it indicates subjugation, debasement, brokenness and a severe amount of fear that will make the disbeliever in the Hereafter, may Allah save us, lie facedown on the ground, or kneel down on his two knees out of great fear. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* portrays for us a situation that is graphic to make you feel the great horror of the situation and the severity of the distress and agony it will bring. You are free to imagine the situation. Imagine that you are really undergoing this terrifying experience, one in which everyone is anxiously occupied with the state of his own soul.

Thus, when it is said that the Judgement Day will take place, it means that it will not be something passive. Mankind will be crouching; everyone, be he a believer or disbeliever, all will be kneeling in fear and awaiting what will happen. No one will escape the law. All will be overwhelmed with fright and anxiety and everyone will be awaiting the Judgement of Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that every community will be summoned to its record. Thus, He attributed the record to the nation. For this reason, the disbelievers raised an objection about this verse, for Allah *Glorified is He* states in another verse: 'This is Our record that speaks against you with justice;

surely We wrote what you did' (*al-Jathiya:* 29). Thus, they allege, ‘One time, Allah attributes 'the record' to the nation, while the other time He attributes it to Himself.’ Had they truly understood what Allah *Glorified is He* had meant by that, they would not have found any reason to raise such an objection.

The meaning of 'Our Record' here is 'the one We asked the angels to write down that it may serve as a witness and a proof against its owner on the Day of Judgement. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* shall say to him: 'Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day,' (*al-Isra’:* 14). It is also their record in the sense that it is the one which records all the actions of the person. Thus, for every word there is its proper meaning and indication. Here, we should consider that one word in the Quran may give various meanings when used in different positions.

For it to be understood properly, the Quran requires contemplation, reflection, and knowledge of the causes of and general circumstances surrounding the revelation of the various verses. Read, for instance, the statement of Allah: 'And do not give away your property which Allah has made for you a [means of] support to the weak of understanding,' (*an-Nisa’:* 5). The weakness of understanding refers to the one who is incapable of managing his finances with any responsibility and is foolhardy in his expenditure. For this reason, the Lawgiver does not grant him the right to assume control over his wealth, but rather, it is given over to the responsibility and possession of his guardian. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* attributed their property to their guardian although it is theirs. This is because the matter must be considered in its entirety, as indicated by the fact that the Muslims are equal in respect of blood and the granting of immunity or protection of the least of them to a non-Muslim.

Therefore, we take the money of foolhardy person and preserve it for him until we discern some indications of good sense and maturity in him, in which case we give him back his wealth so that he may manage it himself. It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* states: ' Then if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property' (*an-Nisa’:* 6). Note that He attributed the property to them because it has now become their own property and they now have the freedom to manage it by themselves.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Today you will be repaid for what you did' (*al-Jathiya:* 28). The word ‘today’ refers to the Day of Judgement. The recompense accorded on this day will be fulfilled according to the kind of actions performed in this worldly life.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

هَٰذَا كِتَٰبُنَا يَنطِقُ عَلَيۡكُم بِٱلۡحَقِّۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَسۡتَنسِخُ مَا كُنتُمۡ تَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Here is Our record that tells the truth about you:
We have been recording everything you do [29]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 29)

The word ‘record’ here refers to the book of deeds. It is well known that the sense of speech is utilised, and gives expression by use of the tongue, for it is the primary means of expression. The record will be read and will not articulate or utter anything on its own. However, this record will be like someone who articulates and bears witness against its owner. This is because of the severity of the reality of one's worldly actions that is contained within it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have been recording everything you do,’ (*al-Jathiya:* 29) meaning that He has been establishing and confirming or taking from the original record a separate copy to give to the owner. This copy of the original book is made so that the owner may read it and peruse the actions which preceded him in his worldly life. This is just as we say, 'an original record and its copy. Allah *Glorified is He* shall give him a copy of his original book containing all his deeds so that it may serve as a witness against him.

In addition, amongst the various meanings of the term ‘recording’ is the notion of the confirmation of something such that nothing whatsoever is overlooked and for which no large or small deed is left unaccounted. This meaning is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that [evil] there were a long duration of time' (*Al-‘Imran:* 30). He *the Almighty* also says: 'He utters not a word, but there is by him a watcher at hand,' (*Qaf:* 18).

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently states:

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ فَيُدْخِلُهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ
فِى رَحْمَتِهِۦ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿٣٠﴾

Those who believed and did good deeds will be admitted by
their Lord into His mercy – that is the clearest triumph [30]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 30)

We are still talking about the record of deeds that mankind will read in the Hereafter. This verse speaks of the first category of people which are the believers who did righteous deeds. Such people will take hold of their records with their right hand and will find their contents to be in the best of conditions and so they will rejoice and become proud.

These verses have been clarified by Allah *Glorified is He* elsewhere: 'Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he will say: Lo! Read my book: Surely I knew that I shall meet my account. So he shall be in a life of pleasure, In a lofty garden, The fruits of which are near at hand: Eat and drink pleasantly for what you did beforehand in the days gone by' (*al-Haqqa:* 19-24).

If we contemplate the verse in question, we will find that Allah says that He admitted them into His Mercy. Thus, it is as if His Grace and Mercy were a huge vessel in which they are admitted and by which they are encompassed. His Mercy will encompass them and surround them from every direction as if they have nothing except His Mercy. That is because they were unhappy and bore so much trouble in this worldly life. They carried the burdens of worship and righteous actions and were constantly tossed between bliss and suffering, profit and loss, and good health and sickness. However, as for the Hereafter, they will find nothing, but the Mercy of Allah which will encompass and surround them.

Allah *Glorified is He* combines belief and good deeds together so as to refer to the fact that faith in the heart alone is not enough. There must be its fruit, which is crystal clear in acting upon the Divine Way of Guidance. For this reason, the Quran always makes a link between faith and righteous deeds. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I swear by the time, Most surely man is in loss, Except those who believe and do good,' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3). This is because faith in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Resurrection, the Final Accounting and Fate and

Destiny places man in a state of certainty that he will be taken to account for all the deeds he does in the worldly life.

So if you are going to be questioned and taken to account, you must naturally be alert not to commit any sin, however small it may be, nor forsake any good, however easy or light it may be. For whoever faces accounting as his final end would be best not to let these matters slip by him except out of oversight or forgetfulness.

We have stated previously that because of the Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* towards His creation, He prescribed repentance for them. The mere fact that repentance is something legitimate and possible and that its doors are open for all people is itself a great mercy, for both the negligent sinner and the society which is made to suffer misery by the deeds of such sinners.

The pronoun ‘that’ at the end of the verse is an indication of the entrance of the people of faith and those of righteous action into Allah’s Mercy that is the triumph that is patently clear, encompassing the righteous through consummate good and benefit, such that nothing that is inconsistent with the Truth will seep into this Infinite Divine Mercy. Conversely, there is then the opposite case to consider.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَفَلَمۡ تَكُنۡ ءَايَٰتِي تُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فَٱسۡتَكۡبَرۡتُمۡ وَكُنتُمۡ قَوۡمٗا مُّجۡرِمِينَ ٣١

But those who disbelieved [will be asked]: ‘When My revelations were recited to you, were you not arrogant and persistent in wicked deeds? [31] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 31)

These people of disbelief are in opposition to those who believed, thus they will take their record of deeds with their left hands. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And as for him who is given his book in his left hand he shall say: O would that my book had never been given me: And I had not known what my account was: O would that it had made an end [of me]' (*al-Haqqa:* 25-27).

Therefore, their recompense will be hell, but before they enter it, they must be admonished, blamed, and chastised. It must be clarified to them that they have no excuse for their lack of faith. Clear verses and Messengers came down to them, Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* did not take anything away from what was due to them and did not leave them to their own devices, nor did He take them unawares with this punishment. How many times did He *the Almighty* call them to faith and show compassion towards them?

We may note that these people have compounded their arrogance against the Truth with committing crimes. As for arrogance, it is to reject the Truth and refuse to accept it from the ones who bear it. Would that they had stopped at this level of wrong action and left people to themselves! But they transgressed to the point of being culpable of committing criminal sins by deriding and jeering at those who believed and had faith.

This issue has been explained in the verse wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely they who are guilty used to laugh at those who believe. And when they passed by them, they winked at one another' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-30). The reference here is to their mockery and derision at the believers. Further, Allah says: 'And when they returned to their own followers they returned exulting' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31). This demonstrates that such people and their cadre are equally guilty of committing criminal sins, and that they were all equally immersed in corruption.

People like these are found at every time and place. We see them make fun of the one who prays or who emulates Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. We hear many scornful, mocking words from them, even though they read this very same verse with us. However, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures the people of faith and says to them: 'Do not bother yourself with these people who cause so much harm to you in this world and wait for what happens in the Hereafter.' Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So today those who believe shall laugh at the unbelievers; On thrones, they will look. Surely the disbelievers are rewarded as they did' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ إِنَّ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَٱلسَّاعَةُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا قُلْتُم مَّا نَدْرِى مَا
ٱلسَّاعَةُ إِن نَّظُنُّ إِلَّا ظَنًّا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُسْتَيْقِنِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

When it was said to you, "God's promise is true: there is no doubt about the Hour," did you not reply, "We know nothing of the Hour. This is only conjecture in our opinion. We are not convinced"?' [32] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 32)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of another type of people who deny the Resurrection, for the first group are certain and have solid belief in their conviction that there will be no Resurrection, nor any accounting of their actions. The second type, however, have not reached a state of certainty concerning the matter; rather, they merely surmise that the Resurrection may be true. 'To surmise' is 'to guess' something and give preponderance to a belief over another.

We have already clarified previously that there are five states of varying degrees of certainty concerning a matter: true knowledge, ignorance, doubt, surmise, and whim. To surmise is to give preponderance to something you think to be true. Whim is to give preponderance to something other than what is true.

Further, there is something that you believe in and which you are certain; yet there might be something about which you are not entirely sure. Now what you are sure of and use as a basis for other beliefs is 'sure knowledge.' As for what you cannot use as a basis for proof, it is not 'sure knowledge'; rather, it is blind following or imitation, just as when the child says: 'He, Allah, is one.' What the child says is true, but he cannot prove anything, nor can anything else be claimed based on such a statement. Conversely, anyone who says something that he is certain of, but which he does not accord with what is truly real is clearly demonstrating ignorance.

As for the matter of knowledge, it is something that you are certain about and is in accordance with reality. That is, it is proved and it opposes ignorance, which occurs when one believes something with certainty but has no proof of it.

Doubt, on the other hand, is when affirmation and negation of a belief are equally possible in the mind, such that you are unable to be absolutely sure of either one. Thus, to surmise is to give precedence to an option, whereas doubt is when both the affirmation of a belief and its negation are equally possible.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَبَدَا لَهُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتُ مَا عَمِلُوا۟ وَحَاقَ بِهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

The evil of their actions will [then] become clear to them.
The punishment they mocked will engulf them [33]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 33)

Allah *Glorified is He* tells them that the evil deeds that they have committed in this world will became apparent to them. In addition, they have been encompassed by these deeds and thereby will not find any escape, nor any place of refuge.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَقِيلَ ٱلْيَوْمَ نَنسَىٰكُمْ كَمَا نَسِيتُمْ لِقَآءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَـٰذَا وَمَأْوَىٰكُمُ ٱلنَّارُ وَمَا لَكُم مِّن نَّـٰصِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

It will be said, ‘Today We shall ignore you just as you
ignored your appointment with this Day. The Fire
will be your home and no one will help you [34]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 34)

The gentle kindness and Mercy of Allah *Glorified is He* even towards His enemies is crystal clear in this verse in question. Allah *Glorified is He* puts the verb ‘say’ in the passive voice and did not say that He will announce it to them, for it is out of His Mercy not to confront them with this reality directly. The word ‘today’ refers to the Day of Judgement when Allah *Glorified is He* shall ignore them.

Allah *Glorified is He* never forgets anything and is never oblivious of anything. Thus, the meaning here is that He *the Almighty* will abandon and neglect them to their punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* will not look at them with any mercy, just as they neglected and left consideration of this great affair during their worldly life. It never crossed their minds to think about it seriously, for had they done so, perhaps they would have been taken by the Mercy of Allah for their consideration of the matter.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* makes clear the cause of this abandonment, saying, 'As you ignored your appointment with this Day,' (*al-Jathiya:* 34) meaning that He will abandon them just as they abandoned taking any serious consideration of this day and abandoned working and preparing for it. Thus, Hell shall be their abode. The term ‘abode’ refers to a place that a person retires to rest and relieve himself of his tiredness, or a place in which he feels safe from fear. So, what will the situation be, if these people have hell as their abode, final resting place and their end? What will their condition be like?

Moreover, they shall have none to aid them. This is a complete cutting off hope for any deliverance and making them deprived of any support. For in this abode, they will not find anyone to liberate them or feel any compassion for them, or anyone to lighten their punishment; rather, the opposite will take place. Everyone else will wash their hands of them and abandon them to their punishment and some will even precede them into it, as Allah *Glorified is He* states about Pharaoh: 'He shall lead his people on the resurrection day, and bring them down to the fire' (*Hud:* 98).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

ذَٰلِكُم بِأَنَّكُمُ ٱتَّخَذْتُمْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ هُزُوًا وَغَرَّتْكُمُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۚ
فَٱلْيَوْمَ لَا يُخْرَجُونَ مِنْهَا وَلَا هُمْ يُسْتَعْتَبُونَ ٣٥

Because you received God’s revelations with ridicule and were deceived by worldly life.’ They will not be brought out of the Fire on that Day, nor will they be given the chance to make amends [35] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 35)

Allah *Glorified is He* is referring to the fact that the punishment which descended upon them and enclosed them is due to the evil deeds which were done in the worldly life and so this is just and equitable recompense. They will be treated justly and Allah *Glorified is He* will not oppress them, not even an atom's weight. Further, they treated the revelations of Allah *Glorified is He* mockingly and derisively. They denied and rejected them and scoffed at them as well.

Now in the verse, there is the expression of mockery used in a hyperbolic form. This means that they went to furthest extents of mockery and derision, just as we say that ‘So-and-so is just and so-and-so is justice,’ meaning he is justice itself.

Moreover, they were deceived by worldly life. It deceived them with its vanities, apparent splendour, and beauty and with its cheap finery. Thereby they worked in order to obtain what it had to offer and forgot to work for the Hereafter. Therefore, they will not escape from hell, nor will they be allowed to make amends.

The Arabic verb for make amends derives from the verb 'to blame' and this action is something that does not take place except between those who have love for each other. For this reason, some people have stated, 'Love remains as long as people blame each other for their faults.' When you wrong your friend, he comes to you and blames you for what you did and he does this because he wishes to hear an apology or excuse from you so that his love for you may continue. He does this because he does not wish to break off relations with you.

Thus, it is said, ‘So-and-so a person sought to be allowed to make amends, so the other freed him of blame or reproach.’ In other words, he forgave him. A famous poet has said:

As for reproach, it is convenient between those who bear love
For love rectifies by reproach and is so confirmed

For this reason, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned from At-Ta'if after its people made him suffer grievous harm, he sat down and beseeched his Lord saying, 'So long as You are not angry with me, I care not.' However, he then remembered to say, Your Favour is all that counts for me. I seek refuge in the light of Your countenance, by which all darkness is illuminated. And the things of this world and the next are rightly ordered that your anger does not fall on me, nor your displeasure descends on me. To you are all supplications until You are pleased.' In other words, O Lord, I have for you what would rid me of reproach. Thus, it is to receive an acknowledgement of being wrong from someone and you appease him.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says those people will not be asked or allowed to appease. No compromise will be accepted and no excuses that they furnish will avail them, nor will any intercession be granted to them. If they wished to seek Allah's contentment by any means at all, their requests will be refused and will not be accepted. Their repentance will not be accepted, for it will be of no benefit on this Day.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَلِلَّهِ ٱلْحَمْدُ رَبِّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَرَبِّ ٱلْأَرْضِ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

So praise be to God, Lord of the heavens and earth,
Lord of the worlds [36] (The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 36)

First, the term ‘Praise be to Allah’ is a clause consisting of a nominal subject and a fronted predicate to indicate the confinement of praise to Allah alone. For praising Allah *Glorified is He* is obligatory before everything else because He Created and provided from nothing as well as guided mankind through clear signs and verse to the path of truth.

Praising Allah *Glorified is He* is obligatory upon everyone for His attribute of being All Sustaining and for the way to which He has guided us and for the abode of recompense with which He rewards the believer and punishes the disbeliever. Praise is obligatory to Allah for having brought us to life with a spirit from Him which has given life to our material bodies in this life and by which will give life to our values and ideals in the Hereafter. It is for this reason that Allah *Glorified is He* addresses us while we are alive in this world and says: 'O you who believe! Answer [the call of] Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life' (*al-Anfal:* 24). Thus, the meaning of life here is the life lived according to values and ideals that grant you Everlasting life in the Hereafter. Further, Allah says: 'And as for the next abode, that most surely is the life-- did they but know?' (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) This means that it is the true life that merits striving for on our part.

Among His blessings that merit praise is that He taught us how to praise Him by this expression that is so light on the tongue and which both the scholar and the illiterate are equally capable of articulating. Everyone says, 'All Praise be to Allah.' Everyone praises and glorifies Allah with one expression and if it were not for this equivalence in the ability to utter this expression, the educated, the eloquent and those who have mastered pure Arabic expression would have become successful and the illiterate who are not fluent and the person who stammers and cannot express himself clearly would have lost out. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has called our attention to this matter, when he stated concerning the praise of Allah, 'Glory be to You, We cannot enumerate your blessings and praises. You are as You praise Yourself.'

Thus, the meaning of the clause is that Allah *Glorified is He* is always and forever worthy of all praise. This praise is never interrupted or cut off, nor does it ever reach an end, neither from the one who praises, nor on the part of The One praised. Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse with the reasons behind thanking Allah as saying: 'Lord of the heavens and earth, Lord of the worlds,' (*al-Jathiya*: 36). The Lord is The One Who raises and brings up and The Master and The Giver of all that we have, thus how is it conceivable that He not be worshipped?

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَلَهُ ٱلْكِبْرِيَآءُ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾

True greatness in the heavens and the earth is rightfully His: He is the Mighty, the Wise [37]
(The Quran, *al-Jathiya:* 37)

This is another factor that necessitates praising alone and that is that He is described by the attribute of greatness which is grandeur, majesty, and force. Once again, the manner in which this is expressed is by means an expression indicating restriction or confinement.

In other words, this is for Him alone and this is from amongst the greatest favours that Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed upon us that we not be slaves to anything other than Him. For Allah did not make you his servant and slave but to spare you from worshipping other than Him. If haughtiness and pride were not for Allah *Glorified is He,* we would have been slaves of anyone who had any kind of power. Anyone of whom we had any need, be it even the ironworker and carpenter that relieves you of a need that you have could thus exploit and enslave you to some extent.

Therefore, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to you, 'Set yourself at rest, O My slave, for you will not be a slave of other than Me, for grandeur, majesty, pride and haughtiness are for Me alone and I am the Lord of all of you and all of creation are My dependents and the most beloved of them to Me are those that are the most gracious to My dependents.

Do we not say in the popular saying, 'If you do not have a big boss to help you, you better get hold of one.' This is similar to the relationship that Allah *Glorified is He* has with those who believe in Him. He will be on the side of those who worship Him Alone and will facilitate their affairs and take care of their needs: those who ask Him for assistance so that He gives it to them and those who seek refuge in Him so that He defends them and supports them. Therefore, this attribute of Allah *Glorified is He* should be counted as one of His greatest blessings upon His servants.

Allah *Glorified is He* confirms this restriction of this attribute through a Qudsi Hadith when He states: 'Pride is My Cloak and Grandeur is My lower garment. Whoever contends with Me in either of them I will hurl into Hell.'(1)

Why is this so? Because such a contender did not create this creation, nor can he be entrusted with its maintenance and management. Thus, man does not show arrogance to any of creation unless his ego has been veiled from minding the pride and haughtiness of Allah. For only the one is always conscious of Allah's pride and haughtiness in his heart will be ashamed to show any arrogance or contend with His lord in anything relating to this attribute.

The Arabic word *Kibriya'* (glory) is derived from the root *kabar*, with a *fatha* over the letter '*ba*' to indicate magnification, and an increase of the root meaning. It also gives the meaning of the word *'azhama* (greatness) when written with a *damma* vowel over the letter *'ba'* (*kabur)*. Concerning the meaning of the word *kabur*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is a monstrous assertion *(kaburat)* that comes out of their mouths: what they say is nothing but lies' (*al-Kahf:* 5). This is concerning the matter of the slander against 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her*. He *the Almighty* has informed us that the All-Great is one of His Most Beautiful Names. He did not say 'The Greater,' even though the latter term confers a special distinction that does not appear in the former. Nevertheless, He has made it an attribute of His in prayer, and so we say: 'Allah is the Greatest.' We say this because it means that prayer takes you out of something that is great to something that is greater. It is as if He *the Almighty* wishes to say to us, 'The actions and activities of this worldly life are important and great, but Allah is Greater than any other thing.' We can see the importance of worldly activity and engaging in it in the chapter of *al-Jumu'a* which states that He takes you out of your work to perform the prayer; yet after the prayer has ended, He commanded you to return to your regular activities and work. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the Remembrance of Allah and leave off trading,' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9).

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah and Ahmad*

So Allah *the Almighty* took us from the very pinnacle of work which is engagement in trade in order to give us a dose of faith that will assist us in continuing along our life paths. With prayers having been completed, Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah's Grace, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). Therefore, we do not look down on worldly activities, for it is something great according to Allah *the Almighty* and by it life is sustained and continued. However, if the worldly activity is to be compared with the establishment of prayers, then prayers are greater and more important. Now if we return to the matter of the terms used here, we find that Allah *the Almighty* has chosen for Himself the Most Beautiful Name 'The Great,' and not 'The Greater,' for whatever is greater has something below it that is great as well. As for 'The Great', whatever is below it is small or insignificant, and everything other than Allah *the Almighty* is small or insignificant, this point is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'He is *the Almighty*, the Wise,' (*al-Jathiya:* 37) meaning that He is the Vanquisher that is never defeated; as for the word 'Wise', it means that He is the One Who puts everything in its proper place. Thus, the attribute of pride or haughtiness, for Allah *the Almighty* does not simply mean forcible compulsion, might and the subjecting of others to trials without any control or restraint. Rather, He is also All-Wise, and disposes of affairs in accordance with His Absolute Wisdom. The one who contemplates the chapter of *al-Jathiya* will find that it begins with the statement of Allah *the Almighty*: '*Ha Mim* [1] This Scripture is sent down from Allah the Almighty the Wise [2]' (*al-Jathiya:* 1-2). It ends also with His saying: 'He is the Almighty, the Wise' (*al-Jathiya:* 37). It is as if the chapter were parenthesised by the nobility that belongs to Allah *the Almighty* and the Absolute Wisdom that belongs to Allah *the Exalted* Alone. What is amazing in this context is that the chapter of *al-Ahqaf* comes directly afterwards, and it, too, begins with the saying of Allah: *'Ha Mim* [1] This Scripture is sent down from Allah *the Almighty* the Wise, [2]' (*al-Ahqaf:* 1-2). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was confirming these Attributes and establishing the awareness of them firmly in the hearts of the believers to make them feel greater at peace with Him and greater at peace with His Way of Guidance. It is also as if He *the Almighty* were saying to them: 'Set yourself at rest, for I am the One Who graced you with favours from pre-eternity, by bringing you into existence from nothing, by giving life to your material bodies with a spirit from Me, and then supplying you with the necessities and maintenance of life, by guiding you to Me through *ayat* (verses) that revive your hearts and give you everlasting life on the Day of Judgement.' Thus, just as He *the Almighty* has guaranteed your past, He will guarantee your future. For His Blessings will not be wrested away, and His Granting of gifts will never be exhausted. This is because Pride is for Him *Glorified is He* Alone in the Heavens and the Earth; thus no might or power can destroy these blessings or hold them back from you when they are granted to you by Him *Glorified is He*. When Allah *the Almighty* mentions both His Attributes of Might and Wisdom, it is only so that He may say to us: 'Be careful if you are stricken with incidents that oppose this manifestation of might and nobility in the task of calling people to faith, and know that they did not take place except for some special wisdom.' Someone, for example, may say: 'If Allah is Mighty and is not vanquished, why did He leave Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to the people of Ta'if such that they caused him much pain, insulted him and pelted him with stones until his noble feet were stained with blood?' I reply: 'Search deeply for the wisdom of this event; for part of the wisdom intended by Allah *the Almighty* when evil gains the upper hand is that the people of good are tested, and the leadership of Islam is purified in a manner that no one else can uphold and bear witness to except those who are powerfully and firmly established in sound belief and the Truth; those who do not abandon it or even give it up. It is upon their shoulders that the religion will be borne and the call to faith will be spread. There must be some process of testing, purification and distinguishing of the Muslims from the hypocrites. Remember the story of Al-Hudaybiya when the disbelievers repulsed Prophet Muhammad *Allah's* *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers who had come to visit the Scared House. The disbelievers prevented them from entering Mecca, even though the believers were so close. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* agreed to return without entering Mecca and without performing the Lesser Pilgrimage (*'Umra*), and contracted the Treaty of Al-Hudaybiya with the disbelievers. For this reason, the Muslims got angry and almost contradicted his command to return to Medina. At this point 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him* began arguing with him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* saying to him, 'O Messenger of Allah! Are we not upon the Truth?' 'Yes,' replied Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. 'Umar then said to him, 'Are they not upon falsehood?' 'Yes,' Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* replied. 'Then why are we yielding in such a lowly manner against the honour of our religion?' Thereupon Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'Hold on to your stirrup, O 'Umar, for verily, he is the Messenger of Allah.'(1) In other words, he meant to say 'Keep to the proper bounds, and know your station with respect to the Messenger of Allah' This happened because the Muslims were craving to visit the Sacred House of Allah *the Almighty* and underwent the great trouble of travelling to it. They were only 20 kilometres from Mecca, had taken their sacrificial offerings along with them and had made preparations for performing the Lesser Pilgrimage (*'Umra*). Therefore, it was disheartening for them to be prevented from completing it, and for that reason, they were disgruntled and upset at the decision to return.

The matter got to the point that our Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said to his wife, Umm Salama *may Allah be pleased with her*(2), 'The people are ruined Umm Salama.' She asked, 'And why so?' whereupon he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I commanded them, and they did not obey me.' She said, 'O Messenger of Allah, forgive them, for they came with a strong desire to visit the House of Allah. But go forth, O Messenger of Allah, and do what Allah has commanded you to carry out, for if they see you, they will know that the matter is serious, and they will do the same.' Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* felt uplifted upon hearing this, and so he went out and did as she had suggested.(1) When his people saw him, they calmed down and accepted his decision and followed him. Thereafter, they returned to Medina without performing the Lesser Pilgrimage (*'Umra*). Before they reached Medina, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* had received a revelation clarifying to them the wisdom of that which had been hidden from them. This revelation was also meant to teach them a lesson about might and nobility, and its connection with wisdom. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They were the ones who disbelieved, who barred you from the Sacred Mosque, and who prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been among them, unknown to you, believing men and women whom you would have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account– Allah brings whoever He will into His mercy– if the [believers] had been clearly separated, We would have inflicted a painful punishment on the disbelievers,' (*al-Fath:* 25). Therefore, there was wisdom in their being prevented from entering Mecca that year, for there were some of their brethren in faith in the city who had kept their belief secret and had not let the other disbelievers know about their faith. Had they entered into battle with the disbelievers, they would have been forced to encounter the Muslims face-to-face, and would have killed their own brothers in faith, and they would have been stricken with shame and ignominy for their actions, either through sin or through rough abuse.

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1785 in the Book of Jihad; see also Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4844 in the section concerning the commentary of the chapter of al-Fath, from Hadith of Sahl ibn Hanif.*

(2) *Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her is Hind bint Suhayl Al-Qurashiyya Al-Makhzumiyya. She married Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him in the fourth year of Hijra. She was born in the year 28 before Hijra. In other words, she was 32 years old when she married Prophet Muhammad. She passed away in the year 62 A.H. at the age of 90, and was from among the most perfect women in intelligence and character. See Az-Zirikli, Al-'Alam, 8/97.*

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 18152 from the Hadith of Al-Miswar ibn Makhrama and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam regarding the Treaty of Al-Hudaybiya, in which it is related: 'Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said to Umm Salama: "O Umm Salama, what is the matter with the people?" She replied, "O Messenger of Allah, their hearts have been shaken with what you can see, so say no word to any man and go to wherever your offer of sacrifice may be, and perform the sacrifice and shave your head, and if you do that, the people will follow you." So he Allah's peace and blessings be upon him went out without speaking to anyone until he carried out the sacrifice and slaughtered his offering, and then sat down and shaved his head, at which point the people started sacrificing their offerings and shaving their heads.'*

the chapter of

al-Ahqaf

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter *al-Ahqaf*(1):

حمٓ ﴿١﴾ تَنزِيلُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

***Ha Mim* [1] This Scripture is sent down from God,**
***the Almighty,* the Wise [2] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 1-2)**

This is one of the seven *hawamim* chapters which begin with Allah's saying: '*Ha Mim*'. They are seven consecutive chapters in the Noble Quran; the first of them is *Ghafir* which starts with the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '*Ha Mim* [1] The revelation of the Book is from Allah, the Mighty, the Knowing, [2]' (*Ghafir:* 1-2), that is, He Who is All Knowing of that which benefits you and nothing from you is hidden from Him. The second is the chapter of *Fussilat*; Allah *the Almighty* starts it with His saying: '*Ha Mim* [1] A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful Allah, [2]' (*Fussilat:* 1-2), then comes the chapter of *ash-Shura* which begins with the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '*Ha Mim* [1] *Ain Sin Qaf* [2] Thus does Allah, the Mighty, the Wise, reveal to you, and (thus He revealed) to those before you, [3]' (*ash-Shura:* 1-3);

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(1) The chapter of *al-Ahqaf* is a Meccan one, that is, it was revealed before *Hijra* of Prophet Muhammad; it consists of 35 verses. It is related by Al-ʿAwfi and Ibn Abu Talha from Ibn ʿAbbas that it is Meccan, and this is also the opinion of Al-Hasan, Mujahid, ʿ Jahid, Qatada and the majority of scholars. It is related from Ibn ʿAbbas and Qatada that they said: 'It contains one Medinan verse, that is, it was revealed after *Hijra* of Prophet Muhammad, which is Allah's saying: 'Say, 'Have you thought: what if this Quran really is from Allah…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 10). See *Ibn Al-Jawzi*, *Zad Al-Masir*.

then comes the chapter *az-Zukhruf*; Allah *the Almighty* opens it with His saying: '*Ha Mim* [1] I swear by the Book that makes things clear, [2]' (*az-Zukhruf:* 1-2); then comes the chapter of *ad-Dukhan* which begins with the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '*Ha Mim* [1] I swear by the Book that makes manifest (the truth), [2]' (*ad-Dukhan:* 1-2); then follows *al-Jathiya* which starts with the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '*Ha Mim* [1] This Scripture is sent down from Allah *the Almighty* the Wise, [2]' (*al-Jathiya:* 1-2), and finally comes the chapter of *al-Ahqaf*, which starts with the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '*Ha Mim* [1] This Scripture is sent down from Allah the Almighty the Wise, [2]' (*al-Ahqaf:* 1-2). We notice that these chapters all begin in the same way, affirming that '*ha mim'* and the other discrete letters are sent down by Allah *the Almighty* and they are a revelation that only He *the Almighty* knows. They are also part of the Bestowal from on high like the rest of the Noble Quran and the rest of the clear verses. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* once says: '*Ha Mim* [1] A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful Allah, [2]' (*Fussilat:* 1-2) meaning that they themselves are bestowed from on high. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '*Ha Mim* [1] I swear by the Book that makes things clear [2]' (*az-Zukhruf:* 1-2) meaning that these discrete letters, i.e. *Ha Mim* and this Noble Quran are clear and obvious in meaning. Both of them are revealed from Allah *the Almighty* Who says: 'Surely We revealed it on a blessed night…' (*ad-Dukhan:* 3). We believe that these verses come from Allah *the Almighty*; those whose meanings we know and those whose meanings we do not know. This is because Allah *the Almighty* wants to guard every point of faith with something that is seen. This is because faith is only with regards to unseen matters, and not that which is witnessed by us. For example, it is not right to say: 'we believe that right now we are sitting with brothers in Masjid Al-Firdaws having a lesson.' However, we say that we believe that Allah *the Almighty* exists and that paradise is true. It is from Allah's Mercy and Kindness towards us that He protects faith in unseen matters with matters that are seen so that we can take a proof from that which is seen by us for the truthfulness of that which is unseen. Therefore, these letters whose meanings we do not know were sent down for with wisdom for a profound reason. Take the example of the Night Journey and Ascension and you will find an unseen matter being protected by that which is seen. How? You know that Prophet

Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was exposed to much harm and he and his believing followers, were oppressed; the last of this was in Taʾif where the people abused him so much that what he suffered really troubled him. He sat and had an intimate conversation with his Lord and he complained to Him *Glorified is He* about the harshness of these people and he asked Him for victory. After this came the event of the Night Journey and Ascension, and it is as if it was a journey to relieve Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and a message to him saying: 'O Muhammad, if the people of the earth are harsh with you then I will honour you among the creatures of the heavens, and I will take you to a place that no one before you was ever taken to and I will show you some of My signs that no one before you ever saw.' The one who reflects on the progress of this journey will find that Allah *the Almighty* used the Night Journey to pave the way for the Ascension, as He made the Night Journey an earthly sign; a sign that is witnessed and whose details and dimensions are known. Many of the people of Mecca make this journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, so a rational proof can be established for whoever does not believe in it. Therefore when his people denied him, they said: 'Do you claim that you went to Jerusalem in one night when we go there riding our camels for a month?'(1) Then they asked him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to describe Jerusalem for them and to give them some of the landmarks along the way. If they had been certain of this journey, they would not have asked Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* this. They therefore wanted to undermine him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him,* but Allah *the Almighty* helped His Messenger and placed in front of him a detailed picture of Jerusalem. Then Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* started describing it for them. He told them about their caravan(2) which was on the way from trading, and that it was in such-and-such place carrying such-and-such. When their trade caravans arrived, they found them as Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* had described. Therefore, it is possible to establish a proof for the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* in the Night Journey to be a precursor for the Ascension which is a heavenly journey that was not shown to anyone and for which it is not possible to establish a rational proof. However, the One Who altered universal laws for Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* with regards to the Night Journey is fully able to alter those same laws with regards to the Ascension. Therefore, He made the unseen event that has a proof to be a precursor for the unseen event that does not have a proof. Furthermore, what they said when they objected to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was: 'How, when we go there on our camels in a month?' This statement of theirs benefits us with regards to refuting the claims of so-called intellectuals and philosophers who say that the Night Journey was in spirit and not body. I say to them: if the Night Journey had been in spirit, the disbelievers of Mecca would have said this. They only said it because they knew that it was a fact that took place by both the spirit and the body and that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* went there and traversed those distances. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* makes their tongues articulate that which supports the truth without them noticing, a point which affirms their stubborn opposition and stultification just as the Jews did when the direction for prayer was changed. Allah *the Almighty* knew what they were going to say and He informed Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* of it. He *the Almighty* says: 'The fools among the people will say: What has turned them from their *qibla* which they had?' (*al-Baqara:* 142) Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* declared this verse

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(1) *See Al-Baqaʿi, Nazhm Ad-Durar; see also As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 6/204; he attributed it to Abu Yaʿla and Ibn ʿAsakir from Umm Haniʾ.*

(2) *In his Dalaʾil An-Nubuwwa, Al-Bayhaqi (2/356) mentioned that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Then I was taken and I passed by a camel belonging to Quraysh in such-and-such place. They had lost one of their camels and then so-and-so gathered it so I gave them the greetings of peace and some of them said: 'This is the voice of Muhammad.' Then I met my Companions before dawn in Mecca. Indeed it is a sign that I am telling you that I passed by a camel belonging to*=

= *you in such-and-such place. They had lost one of their camels and then so-and-so gathered it, and in their journey they are dismounting in such-and-such place and they will reach you on such-and-such day. They will be led by a camel which will be carrying a black haircloth and two black sacks.' When the day came, the people watched and looked, even though the caravan was still half a day away until it arrived being led by the camel that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him has described. Al-Bayhaqi said: 'This is an authentic chain of narrations.'*

and recited it publicly, but despite that, they still said it. If they had had just a little bit of religious, not worldly, discernment they would have refrained from saying it.

Another example of this is Allah's saying: '…Do not spend upon those who are with the Messenger of Allah…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). The True Lord made their tongues articulate it without them noticing. The same goes for the verses of the Noble Quran that contain something seen and something unseen, as we take the seen as proof for the truthfulness of the unseen. We take the verses that are clear in meaning as proof for the verses that have discrete letters and the meaning of which we do not know and into which we cannot delve any further. We say: 'Allah knows best as to their significance.' However, they are true and they are from Allah *the Almighty* that is, they were sent down as all the other verses were sent down, but their meaning is unclear. This is why the True Lord *the Almighty* gives an indication of this matter that distinguishes between *Ha Mim* and Allah's saying: 'I swear by the Book that makes things clear,' (*az-Zukhruf:* 2). The meaning of *Ha Mim* is obscure, while Allah's saying: 'I swear by the Book that makes things clear,' (*az-Zukhruf:* 2) is clear and obvious in meaning. Thus, He made all verses that are clear in meaning to be connected (read as words) from the first 'In the Name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Dispenser of Mercy' in the chapter of *al-Fatiha* to Allah's saying: 'From among the jinn and the men,' (*an-Nas:* 6). The Quran in general is based on connection except for these fourteen discrete letters which are based on stopping (to be read as individual letters). Thus, you read: (*alif, lam, mim*) and (*ha mim*), and it is as if this stopping is an indication from The True Lord *the Almighty* that you must not pronounce these letters in the same way you pronounce the Noble Quran because they are something which is distinct. It is true that they all come from the same source and they all come from Allah *the Almighty,* but stop at these letters and consign their meaning to the One Who sent them down. He *the Almighty* has taken exclusive possession over them in order to make our faith in the unseen continue and to have us constantly connected to it, in faith and in submission. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* explains this matter by saying: 'I am not saying that *alif lam mim* is a letter, but rather *alif* is a letter, *lam* is a letter and *mim* is a letter.'(1) Thus it is as if this letter, in and of itself, has a reference, and that it has a meaning that we should remain silent about, and if not, then these letters would not have been based on stopping. As long as they are pronounced differently from the remaining verses of the Quran, then they must be distinct because they must contain secrets, and it is for us to wonder about what that is not in our hands. We also notice that the letters in the Arabic language are divided into those that are fixed and those that have a particular meaning. *Kaf*, for example, is a letter that is fixed, meaning that it forms part of a word. It does not have an independent meaning in *kataba* (to write), but when it is joined to the other letters, it conveys the meaning of *kataba*. As for the *kaf* in Allah's saying: '…Nothing like a likeness of Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11), it indicates resemblance. Likewise, *ba'* is a fixed letter in *kataba,* but it indicates a vow in our saying *bi Allah*. Likewise, the discrete letters that appear at the beginning of some chapters are fixed in the way they are pronounced, but they carry meanings when they are said by the One Who knows their meanings, Allah *the Almighty*. He *Glorified is He* may show these meanings to some of His slaves, and thus they understand meanings from them. This is why we say when commenting on them: 'Allah knows best as to their significance,' because our discussion of them is merely independent reasoning and an attempt to understand. I said that these letters are fourteen from the twenty-eight letters of the alphabet which means that they comprise half of all the Arabic letters. However, they have been chosen in an ordered, precise manner, not randomly. From the first nine letters we have *alif* and *ha';* and from the last nine letters we have seven, which are the opposite of the first nine, leaving only *waw* and *fa'*. Therefore, they do not have a specific system, but a rather, a deliberate design for a deliberate purpose. Then, from the ten letters remaining in the middle, the ones that have no diacritical marks are chosen, while the ones that do are left. So, we have *ra'* but not *zay*; *sin* but not *shin*; *Ta'* but not *dad*; *ta'* but not *za'* and *ʿain* but not *ghain.* If someone were to say: 'How can the letters have diacritical points when they did not appear until the age of the Umayyad Caliphate?' I say: 'Their Lord and their Speaker, the One Who articulates them, knows what will become of them, as they are all within His Sublime Knowledge. This is why we stop at them and accept them with the perfection that their Speaker placed them in, for they, as I have said, are like the teeth of a key which opens for you. If you change the key, it will not open. Therefore, everything in the Noble Quran has been placed for a reason even in recitation. Whether it is the learned person who knows the meaning or the illiterate person who does not, you find that recitation is of two types: recitation of reflection and worship and recitation of extraction for which you should use your intellect. If you are reciting for worship, then beware of using your intellect. Take the word or the letters according to the significance of the One Who says it. When you come with a meaning based on your own capacity, you will limit Allah's Perfection and His Unlimited Perfections. Therefore, we find that those who memorise the Noble Quran quickest are those who read it without stopping and pondering over its meaning. Rather, they read it as it is, with or without understanding. Allah says: '…is sent down…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 2) meaning that the One Who sent down '*Ha Mim'* also sent down: '…this Scripture…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 2), i.e. the Noble Quran: '…from Allah the Almighty the Wise' (*al-Ahqaf:* 2). Reflect here on the description of wisdom, as everything has been sent down with wisdom, even the letters of which we do not know any meaning.

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(1) *See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2835; he said: 'This is an authentic, good Hadith with only one transmitter, from the Hadith of Ibn Masʿud.' See Al-Bayhaqi, Shuʿab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 1928; see also Abu Naʿim, Maʿrifat As-Sahaba, Hadith no. 4012.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

مَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَآ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّىۚ
وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ عَمَّآ أُنذِرُوا۟ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣﴾

It was for a true purpose and a specific term that We
created heaven and earth and everything in between, yet
those who deny the truth ignore the warning they have
been given [3] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 3)

Allah's saying: 'It was for a true purpose…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 3) means that He *the Almighty* did not create everything in vain. Rather, He has created according to an exact, precise system that does not change. I have said that the truth is something fixed, meaning that it does not change. It is thus crystal clear that He *the Almighty* has created everything for a purpose. For this reason, look at the sky, for example; Allah *the Almighty* created it without pillars. It has been like that since Allah *the Almighty* created it and it will remain stable until the Hour is established, upon this firmness and in accordance with the truth with which it was created. The same goes for the sun. It has never needed maintenance or spare parts and it has never been broken or damaged. Why? It is because it has been created in accordance with truth and justice, which never change. Since its inception, the universe has been created in accordance with wisdom, and had it not been created from the very beginning in accordance with wisdom, it would have been subject to damage and defectiveness. Therefore, the heavens and the earth, from the very beginning, were created in accordance with truth, an absolute truth that was not preceded by falsehood or by another creation that was then modified. Rather, they have been like this from the very beginning. This is like what I said previously regarding Allah's saying when He was debating the enemies of Islam: '…And made lowest the word of those who disbelieved; and the word of Allah, that is the highest…' (*at-Tawba:* 40).

In the first instance, Allah *the Almighty* makes it utterly low, while Allah's Cause, of course, has always remained supreme. Therefore He did not say that He made Allah's Cause supreme because it has never been anything less than supreme such that Allah *the Almighty* would then make it supreme. Therefore, falsehood is brought about while truth remains truth in essence, firmly established ever since Allah *the Almighty* created it. Allah's saying: '…And a specific term…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 3) refers to a known time, which is the Day of Resurrection, as He *the Almighty* did not create the creation and then leave it to its own devices. Rather, there is a defined term, which is the Resurrection, the Day on which this established universe will change and everything in it will be destroyed and demolished. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'On the day when the earth shall be changed into a different earth and the heavens (as well)…' (*Ibrahim:* 48). That is the Day when the sun will be overthrown and the moon will disappear, and all means of living on earth will be destroyed. As for in the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And the earth shall beam with the light of its Lord…' (*az-Zumar:* 69). This is because there will not be any sun or moon. In the life of this world, you live according to means and causes. As for the Hereafter, you live according to the Establisher of Causes, Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Yet those who deny the truth ignore the warning they have been given,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 3) meaning the deniers of the Truth will turn away on that Day. I said before that the word 'warning' means to instil fear of something before it happens, and it is one manifestation of Allah's Mercy and Kindness towards His slaves and which clearly indicates His *Glorified is He* Eagerness for their salvation. The one who warns you about evil before it happens is doing you a favour. Therefore, it is from Allah's Mercy towards mankind that He has sent Messengers to them to bring glad tiding and to warn them. In the same way, He has sent down the Books and explained the consequences. However, what do you do about those who turn away from this warning and do not pay attention to it? This is why in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, the True Lord *the Almighty* made a warning, saying: 'The flames of fire and smoke will be sent on you two, then you will not be able to defend yourselves. [35] Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? [36]' (*ar-Rahman:* 35-36) Instilling fear regarding these kinds of punishment is a blessing because when you fear the consequence you will not commit the action that leads to it. As they say in medicine: 'prevention is better than cure.' Likewise, distancing oneself from disobedience is better than suffering the consequences of it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُم مَّا تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَرُونِى مَاذَا خَلَقُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ ۖ
ٱئْتُونِى بِكِتَٰبٍ مِّن قَبْلِ هَٰذَآ أَوْ أَثَٰرَةٍ مِّنْ عِلْمٍ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٤﴾

Say [Prophet], 'Consider those you pray to other than God: show me which part of the earth they created or which share of the heavens they own; bring me a previous scripture or some vestige of divine knowledge if what you say is true' [4] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 4)

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants to affirm that those who have taken other than Allah *the Almighty* as protectors have taken them without any preceding perfection or preceding benefit. They have taken idols as gods and worshipped them besides Allah, even though they made them with their own hands. This is why Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said to his people, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Do you worship what you hew out?' (*as-Saffat:* 95) and '…Consider those you pray to other than Allah…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 4) meaning inform me, if you have really given thought, inform me of: '…What they created…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 4) referring to these claimed deities '…Which part of the earth…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 4). Earth is mentioned first because it is where they reside and where they engage in their activity. Allah's saying: '…Or which share of the heavens they own…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 4) means that they did not participate with Allah *the Almighty* in the process of creation. The True Lord *the Almighty* is the One Who has declared: 'I am the Creator of the heavens and the earth.' This declaration has been heard by these stubborn resisters, but has anyone objected to it? Has anyone come forward and claimed that he created the universe?

Therefore, if Allah *the Almighty* had any partner in creation, then let him declare himself. As a matter of fact, intellect states that claims are established for the one who makes them as long as no one objects. The True Lord *the Almighty* says: 'There is no god but Me, and no creator besides Me', and we have not heard anyone objecting to this statement. Therefore, it belongs to Allah Alone and He has no partner and no contender. If you were to reflect on the creation and the wisdom behind it, you would know that He *the Almighty* Alone, and no one else is fully capable of this marvellous, unique achievement. The True Lord *the Almighty* has created the small and the large, the fat and the thin; and despite this, you find that the small have all the characteristics of the large. The elephant eats and moves and so does the mosquito. Indeed, maybe you are able to gain control over an elephant, but you are not able to gain control over a mosquito. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from…' (*al-Hajj:* 73). Indeed, have you ever been able to retrieve what a fly has taken from your food? Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Weak are the invoker and the invoked.' (*al-Hajj:* 73) One of the manifestations of greatness in the creation is that Allah has subjugated the entire universe to our service. If He *Glorified is He* had not subjugated them for us, we would have no power over them. You are amazed when you see a small child leading a camel and carrying things on it, and the camel obeys him. At the same time, you have no power over the flea and you cannot control it, and it may harm you and keep you up all night. Why? It is because the Creator has subjugated this but He has not subjugated that. Therefore, the greatness of the creation is found in subjugation. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Do they not see that We have created cattle for them, out of what Our hands have wrought, so they are their masters? [71] And We have subjected them to them, so some of them they have to ride upon, and some of them they eat [72]’ (*Ya Sin:* 71-72).

When you reflect on Allah’s creation, you find greatness in everything, large and small, and this is why opponents would criticise the True Lord *the Almighty* for talking about the mosquito, the fly, and the spider. Then Allah *the Almighty* responded to them: ‘Surely Allah is not ashamed to set forth any parable—(that of) a gnat or anything above that…’ (*al-Baqara:* 26). Scholars said: ‘Anything above it’ means, ‘less than that,’ which means microbes and viruses and tiny creations that cannot be seen by the naked eye. This is why we find the True Lord *the Almighty* challenging them: ‘…Surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create fly, though they should all gather for it…’ (*al-Hajj:* 73).

As for the saying of Allah: ‘…Bring me a previous scripture…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 4), it means something before the Noble Quran that you were informed of. Allah’s saying: ‘…Or some vestige of divine knowledge…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 4) means a remnant of knowledge that has been transmitted from those before you. As for the saying of Allah, ‘If what you say is true,’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 4), it means ‘offer evidence of the truthfulness of your claims that they are gods and that they partook, with the True Lord *the Almighty* in the matter of creation.’

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَنۡ أَضَلُّ مِمَّن يَدۡعُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَن لَّا يَسۡتَجِيبُ
لَهُۥٓ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ وَهُمۡ عَن دُعَآئِهِمۡ غَٰفِلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

Who could be more wrong than a person who calls on those other than God, those who will not answer him till the Day of Resurrection, those who are unaware of his prayers [5] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 5)

The saying of Allah, ‘…Who could be more wrong than…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 5) is a question that states that there is no one more astray than the person who calls on, besides Allah, those who do not respond to him. Not now, not in the future and especially not on the Day of Resurrection, and he knows that the god he calls on does not respond to him. Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who is worshipped in truth, and He is the Great, the Exalted. This is why when the disbeliever is afflicted with adversity; he does not seek refuge in his false gods. He never calls out and says: ‘O Hubal!’ He does not say it in times of adversity because he knows that Hubal cannot hear him and will never answer him, and he will not deceive himself and lie to himself in this situation. Thus you see him seeking refuge in Allah and calling on Him even though he does not believe in Him. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when distress afflicts you in the sea, away go those whom you call on except He…’ (*al-Isra’:* 67). Indeed, in the moment of distress the disbeliever looks for the True Lord Who is fully capable of bringing him benefit and causing him harm, so he says: ‘O Lord!’ but once Allah has relieved him of his distress, he returns to his disbelief and his stubborn resistance. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when affliction touches a man, he calls on Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove his affliction from him, he passes on as though he had never called on Us on account of an affliction that touched him…’ (*Yunus:* 12). Why? It is because religion, for these people, has become ‘fantasy’. They believe in a god but not in a way of Guidance or in any commandments. It does not tell them what to do or not to do. This is why they were false gods, even in being called ‘gods’ because a god is worshipped and obeyed with regards to its commands and prohibitions. Therefore, this is all a lie and misguidance.

When the True Lord *the Almighty* clarifies this matter for us, He presents it in the form of this question so that we can answer. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Who could be more wrong than…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 5) and we respond: ‘No one could be more wrong than this.’ Thus, the affirmation is from us and we bear witness to it.

Allah’s saying: ‘…Those who are…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 5) means that the so-called gods are ‘…Unaware of his prayers.’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 5) They are not aware of those who are invoking them.

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

وَإِذَا حُشِرَ ٱلنَّاسُ كَانُوا۟ لَهُمْ أَعْدَآءً وَكَانُوا۟ بِعِبَادَتِهِمْ كَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٦﴾

Those who, when all mankind is gathered, will become
his enemies and disown his worship? [6]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 6)

Concerning Allah's saying: '…When all mankind is gathered…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 6), it refers to the Day of Resurrection. Allah's saying: '…Will become…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 6) means that these so-called gods are '…Their enemies…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 6). Indeed, in this situation the enmity between these people will manifest itself. Everyone will absolve themselves of everyone else, and they will all curse each other. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The friends shall on that day be enemies one to another, except those who guard (against evil)' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). He *the Almighty* also says: 'Gather together those who were unjust and their associates, and what they used to worship [22] Besides Allah, then lead them to the way to hell[23] And stop them, for they shall be questioned [24] What is the matter with you that you do not help each other?[25] Nay! On that day they shall be submissive [26] And some of them shall advance towards others, questioning each other [27] They shall say: Surely you used to come to us from the right side [28] They shall say: Nay, you (yourselves) were not believers; [29] And we had no authority over you, but you were an in ordinate people;[30] So the sentence of our Lord has come to pass against us: (now) we shall surely taste; [31] So we led you astray, for we ourselves were erring [32] So they shall on that day be sharers in the chastisement one with another [33] Surely thus do We deal with the guilty, [34]' (*as-Saffat:* 22-34).

This is a portrayal of the dialogue that takes place between these oppressors and the blame and condemnation that takes place between them such that each one of them accuses the other of being responsible for his crime. We also have Allah's saying: 'And those who disbelieve will say: Our Lord! Show us those who led us astray from among the jinn and the men that we may trample them under our feet so that they may be of the lowest' (*Fussilat:* 29). This is the argument of Satan on the Day of Resurrection. He will say as Allah *the Almighty* clearly states in the Quran: '…And I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you obeyed me, therefore do not blame me but blame yourselves…' (*Ibrahim:* 22). I said that the meaning of '…Authority…'

(*Ibrahim:* 22) is argument, and it is of two types; either an argument to convince you to do something, or power to force you to do something. We do not have both. Allah's saying: '…I cannot be your aider (now) nor can you be my aiders…' (*Ibrahim:* 22) means that these so-called gods cannot respond to the cries of those deniers of the Truth for help. Therefore, on the Day of Resurrection, the enmity between the oppressors, the disbelievers, the worshipper, and the worshipped is clear, and the final abode of all of them is the fire. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the firewood of hell; to it you shall come' (*al-Anbiya':* 98). Some people comment on this verse and say: 'How can this be when there are those who worshipped Jesus? How can Jesus be the fuel of hell?' These people have not noticed that Allah *the Almighty* says that verses to indicate non-humans. He did not say 'who.'

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟
لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَآءَهُمْ هَٰذَا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧﴾

When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, the disbelievers say of the Truth that has reached them, 'This is clearly sorcery' [7]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 7)

The meaning of '…In all their clarity…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 7) is that they are obvious and manifest, and despite that, '…The disbelievers say of the Truth that has reached them…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 7) that it is sorcery. They say that about the truth because the *lam* carries the meaning of 'about', or they went to greater lengths, so instead of confronting those who believe in the truth, they confronted the truth itself: '…This is clearly sorcery' (*al-Ahqaf:* 7). Nullifying these claims is simple and easy which is that we say to them: 'If we were to believe that this is magic, and that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is bewitched by it, then how come it has not bewitched you as it has bewitched us; thus we put an end to the matter.'

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ ٱفْتَرَىٰهُ ۖ قُلْ إِنِ ٱفْتَرَيْتُهُۥ فَلَا تَمْلِكُونَ لِى مِنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا ۖ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا
تُفِيضُونَ فِيهِ ۖ كَفَىٰ بِهِۦ شَهِيدًۢا بَيْنِى وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٨﴾

Or they say, 'He has invented it himself.' Say [Prophet], 'If I have really invented it, there is nothing you can do to save me from God. He knows best what you say amongst yourselves about it; He is sufficient as a witness between me and you; He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful' [8] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 8)

After saying that the Noble Quran is magic and that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* used it to bewitch his Companions into believing in him, they said: 'It is an invention made by him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*'. Thus Allah responds to them: '…Say [O Muhammad]…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 8). Tell them, O Muhammad: '…If I have really invented it, there is nothing you can do to save me from Allah…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 8). It means, you would not be able to prevent Allah's punishment if I had invented something about Him or lied in conveying from Him. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse that clarifies the matter: 'And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings, [44] We would certainly have seized him by the right hand, [45] Then We would certainly have cut off his aorta[46] And not one of you could have withheld Us from him, [47]' (*al-Haqqa:* 44-47). So how can Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* lie about Allah *the Almighty* after these words, especially considering that he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was known as the Truthful One (*As-Sadiq*) among his people before he was sent with the Message. The people of Quryash (The Quraysh Tribe) never experienced any lie from him. You know the story (1) of the revered Companion Khuzayma ibn Thabit(2) *may Allah be pleased with him* and Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* bought a horse from a Jew and the payment was to be delayed. On the scheduled day to make the payment, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* met him and gave him the payment yet there was no witness, so the Jew took advantage of the opportunity and claimed that he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* had not paid him for the horse. When Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* spoke to him, the Jew said: 'Bring a witness,' so Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* stood up and said: 'I bear witness, O Messenger of Allah, that you gave the payment for the horse.' The Jew was stunned and he thought that Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* had been there, but he had not seen him. Afterwards, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* summoned Khuzayma and said to him: 'O Khuzayma, what made you say what you said when you were not there, and you did not witness the matter?' Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* laughed and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I believe in you when you bring news from the heavens, so would I not believe you regarding a few *dirhams*?' Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* then smiled and gave him a valued rank, and said: 'If Khuzayma bears witness to something, then that is sufficient.'(1) From that day onwards, the testimony of Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him* was equivalent to the testimony of two men. This rank was of benefit to the Muslims when it was time to gather the Noble Quran. When they were compiling the Noble Quran in one volume, they would not write down the verse unless they had found it recorded on pieces of cloth, leather, wood, or bones. In addition, two upright witnesses had to testify to its authenticity. They did this until they came to the end of the chapter of *at-Tawba* and they found a verse written,(2)

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(1) The testimony of Khuzayma in favour of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*

(2) He is Khuzayma ibn Thabit ibn Al-Fakih ibn Thaʿlaba *Al-Ansari* Abu ʿImmara, a Companion, and one of the most honourable of *Al-Aws* in the Age of Ignorance and Islam; he was one of their most courageous. He was a Medinan and he carried the banner of Banu Khattama on the day of the Conquest of Mecca. He lived until the caliphate of ʿAli ibn Abu Taleb and he was martyred while fighting in the army of 'Ali=

= at the Battle of Siffin. Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others related *38* Hadiths from him. He died in the year 37 A.H. *See Az-Zirikli, Al-'Alam, 2/305.*

(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, v.1, with the wording: 'If Khuzayma bears witness to something or bears witness against something, then that is sufficient.' See also Ibn Abu ʿAsim, Al-Ahaad wa Al-Mathani, Hadith no. 1838; see also Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 2149; At-Tabarani, Al-Muʿjam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 2642; according to them the name of the man was Sawaʾ ibn Al-Harith Al-Muharabi.*

(2) *It is the verse of: 'Of the believers are men who are true to the covenant which they made with Allah...' (al-Ahzab: 23). Aban ibn Saʿid said: 'I examined the Emigrants*=

but it only had one witness; Khuzayma *may Allah be pleased with him,* so they accepted it with only his testimony because his testimony was equivalent to the testimony of two men.

Reflect on the etiquette of conversation; even with those who contravene Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and with those who openly accuse him of lying. He says to them: '…If I have really invented it…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 8) and if it represents doubt, '…There is nothing you can do to save me from Allah…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 8) meaning that you cannot prevent Allah's Punishment. As for the saying of Allah, '…He knows best what you say amongst yourselves about it…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 8), it refers to their statement that the Noble Quran is fabricated. Allah's saying: '…He is sufficient as a witness between me and you; He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful' (*al-Ahqaf:* 8). He returns the matter to Allah *the Almighty* and consigns it to him, and He is pleased with His witnessing between himself and his enemies, as Allah's witnessing is the testimony of truth and veracity.

This is why Allah *the Almighty* offered His Own Testimony, that is, He *the Most High* bears witness to Himself, 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). The angels also bear witness which is the testimony of actual witnessing, as do those who are endowed with knowledge, which is the testimony of deduction; Allah *the Almighty* says: '…And (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining His creation with justice…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). Therefore, in this matter, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is unable to bring a witness to his truthfulness in conveying the Quran from Allah, so it suffices to make Allah *the Almighty* a witness between himself and them. This is from the etiquette of conversation that he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was refined with, as they accused him of deliberately lying yet he showed them affection. In another place, he responded to them when the True Lord *the Almighty* said on the tongue of His Prophet: '…Say: If I have forged it, on me is my guilt, and I am clear of that

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= *and asked them about it and I couldn not find it with any of them. Then I examined the Helpers and asked them about it and I didn not find it with any of them until I found it with Khuzayma ibn Thabit, so I wrote it down.' See At- Tabari, Tafsir, 1/60; see also Ibn Kathir in the introduction to his Tafsir 1/28.*

of which you are guilty,' (*Hud:* 35). Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 8) meaning that it is as if he is showing them compassion and causing their hearts to incline towards him, Thus, despite these false claims the door of forgiveness and mercy is still open in front of them.

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says (1):

قُلْ مَا كُنتُ بِدْعًا مِّنَ ٱلرُّسُلِ وَمَآ أَدْرِى مَا يُفْعَلُ بِى وَلَا بِكُمْ ۖ إِنْ
أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰٓ إِلَىَّ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٩﴾

Say, 'I am nothing new among God's messengers. I do not know what will be done with me or you; I only follow what is revealed to me; I only warn plainly' [9]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 9)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Say…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 9) means 'tell them, O Prophet Muhammad: '…I am nothing new among Allah's Messengers…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 9). *Bidʿ* (first) is something that is newly invented and for which there is no precedent. An example of this is Allah's saying: 'Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth! How could He have a son when He has no consort, and He (Himself) created everything, and He is the Knower of all things?' (*al-Anʿam:* 101) meaning that He *the Almighty* created them without there being any precedent. We also say that a person is a *mubdiʿ* meaning that he brought something that no one else before him did. The meaning here is: I have not come outside of the standard practice that all the previous Messengers before me came in accordance with, or I am not calling you to anything new. I am not the first Messenger to be met with denial and to be confronted with disbelief, stubborn opposition, and persecution. Rather, all the previous Messengers before me experienced the same thing. They were harmed and they were denied and they were patient until Allah gave them victory, as He *the Almighty* has said: ‘So each We punished for his sin…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40). Allah’s standard practice regarding the previous Messengers was that He granted victory to His Messengers and Prophets over those who denied the Messengers and opposed the call to the Truth. As for the Message of Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* Allah entrusted Muhammad and He entrusted His community to take care of disciplining those who deny the call and oppose it, and to give victory to the truth. This is why He said: ‘Goodness is in me and in my community until the Day of Resurrection.’(1) The significance of this statement is that goodness is in me in an exclusive sense and in my community in a dispersed sense. This means that each generation takes a portion of this goodness. Allah’s saying: ‘…Do not know what will be done with me or you…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 9) means, right now I do not know, but perhaps in the future he will know because of what Allah reveals to him, as was the case with going to war against the disbelievers and calling to Islam openly. When some of those who had become Muslim with the Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* asked to go to war with the disbelievers, he would say to them: ‘I have not been commanded, I have not been commanded.’ When he had emigrated to Medina, he gave them permission to fight. Therefore, he proclaimed Allah’s religion outwardly in Mecca and did not engage in martial combat until he was in Medina, and this was for a specific reason, as Mecca was the hometown of Quraysh and the headquarters of their leadership. The Quraysh held a position of importance and respect among all the Arab tribes because of their position with regards to

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(1) *In his Asbab An-Nuzul, Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi mentioned in (p. 215) the reason for the revelation of this verse and he said: 'Ath-Thaʿlabi narrated from Abu Saleh that Ibn ʿAbbas said: 'When tribulations faced by the Companions of the Prophet intensified, the Prophet saw in his dream that he migrated to a land that had palms, trees and plenty of water. He related this dream to his Companions and the latter took it for a good omen and a harbinger of relief from the harm of the idolaters which they faced. After a while, when they saw that nothing had happened, they said: 'O Messenger of Allah! When are you going to migrate to the land which you saw in your dream?' Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him did not answer them, but Allah the Almighty sent down: '...and I do not know what will be done with me or with you...' (al-Ahqaf: 9), meaning that I do not know whether or not I am going to move to the place which I saw in my dream. I follow only that which is revealed to me.'*

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(1) In his *Al-Maqasid Al-Hasana,* As-Sakhawi said: ‘Our Sheikh Ibn Hajar Al-ʿAsqalani said: ‘I do not know it, but its meaning is sound.’ *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 1/10; see also Al-ʿAjluni, Kashf Al-Khafaʾ, Hadith no. 1267; in his Al-Fatawa Al-Hadithiyyah, Ibn Hajar Al-Mekki said: ‘It is not found with this wording.’ I say that it is merely a popular saying among people.’*

Allah's Sacred House and their service to those who made pilgrimage to it. Also because Mecca was in the middle of a trade route between Yemen and the Levant in the journeys of winter and summer, it was necessary to take the rank of the Quraysh into consideration and not declare war against them at that time. When we read, for example, the chapter of *al-Fil*: 'And send down (to prey) upon them birds in flocks, [3] Casting against them stones of baked clay, [4] So He rendered them like straw eaten up? [5]' (*al-Fil:* 3-5). If you were to ask why, the chapter of *Quraysh* answers you: 'For the protection of the Quraysh—[1] Their protection during their trading caravans in the winter and the summer, [2]' (*Quraysh:* 1-2) meaning that Allah *the Almighty* did this for the benefit of the Quraysh so that they would continue to have rank and reverence among the Arab tribes, and so that they would remain safe and secure in their trade journeys between Yemen and the Levant. This is why He *the Almighty* says afterwards: 'So let them serve the Lord of this House [3] who feeds them against hunger and gives them security against fear, [4]' (*Quraysh:* 3-4). The meaning of Allah's saying: '…I do not know what will be done with me or you…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 9) is that I do not know whether Allah *the Almighty* will command us to fight these people or whether He will command us to leave Mecca for another place in which we will seek His victory. This is why Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* commanded them afterwards to immigrate to Abyssinia. He said: 'Indeed there is king there under whom no one is oppressed.'(1) It is as if Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* had a map of the world that was around him, and indeed when they went to Abyssinia they were honoured by the Negus, and he protected them when the Quraysh sent ʿAmr *may Allah be pleased with him* to request their return. He sent ʿAmr *may Allah be pleased with him* back and he sent back the gifts of the Quraysh and he gave security to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and his call. Because of this, and everything else, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* had officiated him to conduct his marriage to Umm Habiba(1) and when the Negus died, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* prayed the funeral prayer over him.(2)

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(1) *In his As-Sira An-Nabawiyyah, Ibn Kathir mentioned in (2/4), As-Suhayli in Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf (2/89) and Ibn Hisham in As-Sira (1/221) via Mohamed ibn Ishaq that the Messenger of Allah said: 'If you were to leave and go to the land of Abyssinia, then indeed you will find a king there under whom no one is oppressed, and it will be a land of sincerity for you until Allah gives you an opening.'*

The emigration to Abyssinia was a transitory phase in which the Muslims who were persecuted found protection with this king under whom no one was oppressed, and this was until Allah *the Almighty* gave permission to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to immigrate to Medina, where the victory of Islam came and His word was made uppermost. There is wisdom behind the first call being in Mecca and the support and victory of the religion being in Medina because the Quraysh were the chiefs of the Arabs and they had power in the Arabian Peninsula. If victory had come in Mecca then they would have said that it was due to the leadership and power of the Quraysh, which made Islam spread throughout the peninsula and then the world around it. The wisdom behind the first call to Islam being in the ears of these chiefs was to agitate them and to make their actions repugnant, and to invalidate their belief idol-worship. However, the victory was postponed until Medina in order to give victory to the religion through the Emigrants and the Helpers so that no one would think that the tribal solidarity of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is what made people believe in Islam. Rather, it is faith in Allah *the Almighty* that created tribal solidarity for Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah's saying: '…I only follow what is revealed to me; I only warn plainly' (*al-Ahqaf:* 9). Look here at the greatness in the personality of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace*

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(1) *Umm Habiba is Ramla bint Abu Sufyan ibn Ummaya, a female Companion and one of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad. She was the sister of Muʿawiya and one of the most eloquent women of Quraysh. She was known for her opinion and discernment. She was born 25 years before the Emigration. Her marriage to Prophet Muhammad was officiated in Abyssinia by the Negus and he gave her four hundred dinars as a bridal gift in the year 7 A.H. (she was 32 years old). She died in the year 44 A.H. at the age of 69. See Az-Zirikli, Al-'Alam, 2/23.*

(2) *ʿImran ibn Husayn narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: 'Indeed your brother the Negus has died. Then stand up and pray over him.' He said: 'So we stood up and made rows as is done in a funeral prayer and we prayed over him as the deceased are prayed over.' Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4/439,446), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (1029), and he declared it authentic, and An-Nasaʾi in his Sunnan (4/70).*

and blessings be upon him as he is speaking according to what he has. It is as if he is saying: 'If I am referred to I say: I am not like one of you, and I am taken from and I say that I am only a human being like you.' Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* did not bring anything from himself unless it was with regards to a matter for which there was no ruling. If he exercised his independent reasoning in a matter for which there was no ruling and made a mistake before Allah *the Almighty* amended it, he is the one who informs us of this amendment, as in His statement: 'O Prophet! Why do you forbid (yourself) that which Allah has made lawful for you; you seek to please your wives; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful,' (*at-Tahrim:* 1).

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

قُلۡ أَرَءَيۡتُمۡ إِن كَانَ مِنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ وَكَفَرۡتُم بِهِۦ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٞ مِّنۢ بَنِيٓ إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ
عَلَىٰ مِثۡلِهِۦ فَـَٔامَنَ وَٱسۡتَكۡبَرۡتُمۡۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهۡدِي ٱلۡقَوۡمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ⑩

Say, 'Have you thought: what if this Quran really is from God and you reject it? What if one of the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity [to earlier scripture] and believes in it, and yet you are too proud to [do the same]? God certainly does not guide evildoers' [10] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 10)

The meaning of: '…Have you thought…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 10) is: inform me if you yourselves have witnessed: '…What if this Quran really is from Allah and you reject it?' (*al-Ahqaf:* 10) The implied answer is: what will happen to you? The known answer is: if this Noble Quran is from Allah *the Almighty* and despite that you disbelieve in it then you will acquire nothing but Allah's wrath in the life of this world and His punishment in the Hereafter. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…What if one of the children of Israel testifies to its similarity [to earlier scripture]…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 10)? The witness who testified to the truthfulness of the Noble Quran and that it is from Allah *the Almighty* was ʿAbdullah ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him*. He was one of the Jewish rabbis who became Muslim and testified to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and the Noble Quran. Allah's saying: '…to its similarity…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 10) means the resemblance of the Noble Quran to the previous books such as the Torah and the Gospel, as it is like them because it is from Allah *the Almighty* and it calls to what they called to such as worshipping Allah and affirming His oneness. Just as the Torah was sent down to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the Gospel was sent down to ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him,* the Noble Quran was sent down to Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and his description is established with them in the Torah.

That is why he used to say concerning Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘By Allah, I recognised him when I saw him, just as I recognise my children and yet my recognition of Muhammad is greater.’ Surely, he knew him *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* from the signs that were mentioned in their Books.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when there came to them a Book from Allah verifying that which they have and aforetime they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieve, but when there came to them (Prophet) that which they did not recognize, they disbelieved in him’ (*al-Baqara:* 89). They used to pray for victory against the disbelievers before the revelation of the Noble Quran. Why did they disbelieve in the Prophet then? They thought that Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* would pull leadership and authority right from their hands.

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* also says about them: ‘And they forgot a portion of what they were reminded’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 13). If they were to be excused because of their forgetfulness, they certainly had no excuse to conceal the Book or to alter it. Indeed, there were some who: ‘Write the book with their hands and then say: This is from Allah so that they may take for it a small price; therefore woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn’ (*al-Baqara:* 79). Therefore, the Jews forgot, concealed, altered, and changed their Book. Allah *Glorified is He* would inevitably make them slip into things that show their deeds and let the truth come to light.

For example, with regards to the issue of whom Ibraham (Abraham) *peace be upon him* sacrificed, they claim it was Ishaq (‘Isaac) and not Ismael (Ishmael) *peace be upon them*. In response, we say, ‘If ‘Isaac was the one sacrificed, then why were the rites of sacrifice and the stoning of devils legislated in Arabia and not where 'Isaac lived?' Let them refer to their Books. Allah *Glorified is He* said to Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in the Torah, in the twenty-fourth chapter: 'O Abraham, take your only son and climb mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice to Allah.' Was 'Isaac the only child? In the very next chapter, He says: 'Isaac was born when Ishmael was fourteen years old.' Therefore, what they say is in complete contradiction to what is in their Books. This allows the truth to come to light and establish the proof against them.

Allah *Glorified is He* asks, 'Will they not be wrong if such a witness believed in it, and yet they were too proud to accept the truth?' We have mentioned the story of how 'Abdullah ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him* embraced Islam. He came to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and said: 'O Prophet of Allah, love of Islam has been inculcated in my heart, but the Jews are a people of slander. If they knew this, they would say things about me that are not true, so ask them about me before I openly declare my Islam. When they had gathered around Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* he asked them, 'What do you say about 'Abdullah ibn Salam?' They said, 'He is superior among us and the son of the most superior among us.' They praised him but at that point 'Abdullah ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah,' they said that he is a liar and the most-wicked person. Ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him* laughed and said, 'Did I not tell you, O Prophet of Allah, that they were a people of slander.'

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying that certainly He *the Almighty* does not guide evildoers. These words have solved problems for us and clarified the meaning of guidance. Some people wonder why Allah *Glorified is He* punishes those for whom he has decreed disbelief and misguidance. This is a common fallacy and if the question were logical, they would wonder why He rewards the obedient when He has written obedience for them.'

We clarified this matter before and said that Allah *Glorified is He* guides both the believer and the disbeliever and the obedient and the disobedient in the sense of showing the true and right path. He *Glorified is He* has shown everyone the straight path and whoever takes this guidance and goes according to its light deserves more from Allah. He *the Almighty* says: 'Just as for those who are (willing to be) guided, He increases their (ability to follow His) guidance and causes them to grow in Allah-consciousness' (*Muhammad:* 17). This type of guidance, the guidance of assistance and enabling success, is viewed as the second type of guidance.

Thus, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah certainly does not guide evildoers,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 10), He means that He does not grant them the guidance of support. This is why He says about the people of Thamud: 'And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way, but they chose error above guidance.' (*Fussilat:* 17) Allah *Glorified is He* showed them the right path, but they preferred error and misguidance over guidance, so He assisted them, just as He assisted the people of guidance with their guidance. We gave an example before to clarify this matter. We said that if you were to ask a traffic officer for directions, he would show you the way and when you take his advice and thank him, he would then give you more advice and maybe even go with you until you reach your destination.

Therefore, the reason why Allah *Glorified is He* does not guide evildoing people is because of their evildoing. He does not guide the iniquitous because of their iniquity and He does not guide the disbelievers because of their disbelief.

Before moving on from this verse, we should mention here that 'Abdullah ibn Salam *may Allah be pleased with him* before declaring his Islam, asked Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* about three things to increase his certainty in the truthfulness of his *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* Message. He asked, 'What is the sign of the Last Hour?' Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A fire coming out of the east gathering people in the west.' Then 'Abdullah asked, 'What is the first thing that the people of paradise eat?' 'The caudate (extra lobe of the fish-liver),' Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* answered. He said: 'When will a child be like his father or his mother?' whereupon he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'If the man's discharge proceeds, the child is to be a man and if the woman's discharge proceeds, the child is to be a woman.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Hibban*

Later, this has been confirmed by modern science and research which proved the inimitability of the noble Prophetic Hadith and the veracity of the Message of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. Men and women share in the process of reproduction. Some people imagine that the process of intercourse is what produces a child, but it is only a means of stimulation that enables the man to discharge the semen. As for the fluid of the woman, the ovum that embraces the sperm has set and defined times in which it descends, regardless of the process of intercourse. It is already there and if the process of intercourse coincides with the ovum descending, then the fluid of the man competes to get to it while it is in its place. Therefore, the ovum has no role in determining the gender, as modern science has confirmed.

When we understand the linguistic meaning of the verb proceed, we will find that it confirms that the Prophetic Hadith agree with science. 'To proceed' means that the two competitors set off from the same place. Therefore, the point of emission is the same, i.e. the man's penis. Thus, we understand that the competition is between the sperm that represents the male and the sperm that represents the female and whichever one is first, the gender of the foetus is determined. Therefore, the role of the woman is to nurse what she receives from the man.

It is true that the Noble Quran is a Book of Creed and a way and legislation. It is also a miraculous Book that touches upon universal matters to the extent that people with varying levels of intellect can understand, as it was sent down to an unlettered community. Would it have been possible to tell this community that the earth is spherical? If we had said that at that time, they would have declared it a lie. That is why the Noble Quran envelops these universal realties and postpones their understanding until intellects have matured and are capable of grasping these realities. It is left to time and events to explain these universal signs and find what supports them in Allah's speech.

Have the Arabs who received the Noble Quran understood the meaning of the statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And you see the mountains, you think them to be solid, and they shall pass away as the passing away of the cloud' (*an-Naml:* 88)? We actually see the mountains as firmly established. Thus, the meaning of them passing away is that they rotate due to the rotation of the earth. We read the verse, ‘He makes the night cover the day and makes the day overtake the night’ (*az-Zumar:* 5). Therefore, the earth is a spheroid object that rotates. Allah *Glorified is He* has given us these meanings in an enveloped manner so as not to shock people and make them run away from the Noble Quran.

This entire universe, with its universal signs explain the meaning of the verse: ‘We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth’ (*Fussilat:* 53). This means that the meaning of this verse will remain established, and that signs will prove it until the Last Hour. These signs will manifest themselves in accordance with what suits the intellects of mankind and the development of their sciences and possibilities.

The Noble Quran explained the matter of man’s creation, clarifying the meaning of Prophet Muhammad’s words: ‘If the man’s discharge proceeds, the child is too be a man.’ Allah *Glorified is He* says ‘Was he not a small seed in the seminal elements?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 37) The sperm drop contains the organism that carries the male or the female; and the semen is the liquid containing sperm. Semen comes from the man, not the woman as confirmed by science and this is why the scientists have called it XY and XX, i.e. both are from the man.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَوْ كَانَ خَيْرًا مَّا سَبَقُونَآ إِلَيْهِ ۚ وَإِذْ
لَمْ يَهْتَدُوا۟ بِهِۦ فَسَيَقُولُونَ هَٰذَآ إِفْكٌ قَدِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

Those who disbelieve say of the believers, ‘If there were
any good in this Quran, they would not have believed in
it before we did,’ and, since they refuse to be guided by
it, they say, ‘This is an ancient fabrication’ [11]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 11)

The speakers here are those who disbelieve, and who address those who believe saying, ‘if there were any good in Islam and the Quran, they would not have believed in it before they did.’ The scholars have an observation on this statement. They say that this statement could be a confrontation between the disbelievers and the believers and it was said to them while they were present: ‘If there were any good, you would not have believed in it before us.’ Further, it could mean the other way around that they were absent from the gathering in which this statement was made: ‘If there were any good, they would not have believed in it before we did.’ Thus, the context is balanced to indicate both prepositions of the verb ‘say’, i.e. to and about and thereby give us the meaning of harming in confrontation and harming, whilst one is absent. It gathers them both in one passage.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying what those who disbelieve say since they refuse to be guided by it. They say, ‘This is an ancient fabrication.’ They claimed that the Quran was the most repulsive and well-known lie and fabrication.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَمِن قَبْلِهِۦ كِتَٰبُ مُوسَىٰٓ إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً ۚ وَهَٰذَا كِتَٰبٌ مُّصَدِّقٌ
لِّسَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّيُنذِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

Yet the scripture of Moses was revealed before it as a guide and a mercy, and this is a scripture confirming it in the Arabic language to warn those who do evil and bring good news for those who do good [12] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* declares that the Torah of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was revealed before the Noble Quran as a guide and a mercy for its adherents in its time. Next, He *the Almighty* refers to the Noble Quran as it confirms the previous Books that were revealed from on high before the revelation of the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear elsewhere in the Quran that the Quran came to confirm the truth of all these Books and determine what is true therein. He *Glorified is He* sent the Noble Quran in Arabic language to warn and make evildoers fear the consequences of their evildoing and to bring glad tiding and inform those, who do the good, of good news before its time.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُواْ رَبُّنَا ٱللَّهُ ثُمَّ ٱسۡتَقَٰمُواْ فَلَا خَوۡفٌ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا هُمۡ يَحۡزَنُونَ ١٣

For those who say, ‘Our lord is God,’ and then follow the straight path there is no fear, nor shall they grieve [13]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 13)

This verse has an equivalent in the chapter of *Fussilat* where Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘(But) behold, as for those who say, “Our Lord is Allah,” and then steadfastly pursue the right way – upon them do angels often descend, (saying, “Fear not and grieve not, but receive the glad tiding of that paradise which has been promised to you!’ (*Fussilat:* 30)

Indeed, no fear or grieve shall they, i.e. the believers have. What fear would afflict them, what grief would befall them while they have said that Allah *Glorified is He* is their Lord, which is the core of the creed? Further, they have not said it as a hollow statement. Rather, they have backed it up with actions that are in accordance with this faith.

They then follow the straight path of the commands and prohibitions of the creed. Thus, to follow the path is to go along the straight path that has been drawn by the One you believe in. This act of following the path helps you with your daily activity as well as the activity of others with you. Straightness represents the shortest path that takes you to your destination. That is why we said that guidance carries you and takes you to your destination. Guidance is not a burden; rather, it is a carrier which takes you to Allah *the Almighty*; He *Glorified is He* says: ‘These are on guidance from their Lord’ (*Luqman:* 5). The Divine Guidance carries them, not the other way around.

Therefore, whoever says that Allah *Glorified is He* is their Lord and then stands firm upon it in their daily activity, Allah assures that they have no fear or grief. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* does not postpone this assurance until the Hereafter. Rather, He gives glad tidings through the angels as He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *Fussilat*: ‘The angels descend upon them, saying: Fear not, nor be grieved, and receive good news of the garden which you were promised’ (*Fussilat:* 30).

The angels descend upon them at the time of death to give them glad tidings and to reassure them that they have no fear and no grief. Fear is to expect that something will harm and hurt you, while grief is the mourning and pain of losing something beloved. They are safe from both of these. As long as that is the case, then do not fear your enemies as they will never gain anything from you. The believers have something to say with courage to their enemies, ‘Say: Do you await for us but one of two most excellent things? And we await for you that Allah will afflict you with punishment from Himself or by our hands. So wait; we too will wait with you’ (*at-Tawba:* 52).

This means if we, believers, confront them, i.e. disbelievers, on the battlefield, we wait either victory or martyrdom after being killed and we welcome either of the two outcomes. As for them, they are waiting for Allah *Glorified is He* to afflict them with punishment, either directly from Him or by our hands. Confidence and certainty without the slightest doubt fill the hearts of Muslims regarding this issue.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا جَزَآءَۢ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ١٤

They are the people of Paradise, there to remain
as a reward for what they were doing [14]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 14)

Allah *Glorified is He* indicates that those who said that Allah is their Lord and followed the right path are the people of paradise. He informs us of their reward and the consequence of their faith and uprightness. They are the people of paradise, which means that they are the owners or that they are the companions, i.e. there is a relationship of love, mutual understanding and inclination between them. They are inclined towards the other and they yearn for each other.

A companion is the one whom you choose and whose morals, character, and manners agree with yours. These people who have said that Allah is their Lord and then followed the right path have chosen paradise and it has chosen and taken them as companions and sincere friends.

It has been mentioned that paradise yearns for its people, waits for them and asks about them, just as the fire yearns for its people and waits for them.

There is nothing strange about this, as every creation has its language of expression even inanimate objects. Allah says: ‘He knows the prayer of each one and its glorification’ (*an-Nur:* 41). Each of them glorifies in its own language that you do not understand because it is not your language. However, the One Who created them gave them a specific language that they communicate with.

The Noble Quran informs us that the ant communicated with its species and that they understood one another. Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* heard them speaking and he thanked Allah for giving him the blessing of being able to understand these creatures. That is why we have rectified the statement that the pebbles praised Allah *Glorified is He* in the hands of Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* because the pebbles naturally glorify Allah even if they were in the hands of Abu Lahab. Thus, we should say that he *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* heard the pebbles praising Allah while in his hands.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that they are the people of paradise who will abide eternally therein. That is because the blessings of paradise are everlasting, eternal and never come to an end. They are not disrupted like the blessings of the life of this world which are disrupted because those blessings of the Hereafter will not miss you, nor will you miss them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that paradise is their reward for what they were doing. Is it something that the slave deserves or is it a favour from Allah *Glorified is He*? Scholars said that paradise is a favour from Allah *Glorified is He* and action is nothing but a cause and a price for entering it. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* legislated obligations for our own good and well-being and to set our daily affairs right, both at the individual level and the group level. Thus, we reap the fruits of righteous action and we enjoy it during our lives in this world. However, Allah rewards us again in the Hereafter with no profit or benefit going back to Him *Glorified is He*. Therefore, entering paradise is something extra and it is a favour from Allah.

Moreover, there is a remark here: what is action? Action is a task which is carried out by a part of the body. The hand moves; the tongue articulates; the eyes see and so forth. If you were to reflect on actions, you would find that there are two types: sayings and doings. Thus the tongue alone takes half of all actions and the remaining limbs take the other half. Therefore, it is through the tongue that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* could convey his Message and people will consequently accept it or reject it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَوَصَّيۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ بِوَٰلِدَيۡهِ إِحۡسَٰنًاۖ حَمَلَتۡهُ أُمُّهُۥ كُرۡهٗا وَوَضَعَتۡهُ كُرۡهٗاۖ وَحَمۡلُهُۥ وَفِصَٰلُهُۥ
ثَلَٰثُونَ شَهۡرًاۚ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُۥ وَبَلَغَ أَرۡبَعِينَ سَنَةٗ قَالَ رَبِّ أَوۡزِعۡنِيٓ أَنۡ أَشۡكُرَ نِعۡمَتَكَ
ٱلَّتِيٓ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَٰلِدَيَّ وَأَنۡ أَعۡمَلَ صَٰلِحٗا تَرۡضَىٰهُ وَأَصۡلِحۡ لِي فِي ذُرِّيَّتِيٓۖ إِنِّي
تُبۡتُ إِلَيۡكَ وَإِنِّي مِنَ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

We have commanded man to be good to his parents: his mother struggled to carry him and struggled to give birth to him – his bearing and weaning took a full thirty months. When he has grown to manhood and reached the age of forty he [may] say, 'Lord, help me to be truly grateful for Your favours to me and to my parents; help me to do good work that pleases You; make my offspring good. I turn to You; I am one of those who devote themselves to You' [15]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 15)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that He has commanded and obligated man to do so. 'To command and enjoin someone' means that you ask him to do a good action that will benefit him in this life and in the Hereafter, and that will help him carry out his task. This is why you find that most of the commandments regarding important matters are made by senior people who are approaching the end of their lives as if they are advising their family and those they are enjoining to follow.

The Arabic root letters of the verb *Wassa* (command) occur in the Noble Quran in two forms. One of them indicates that act of commanding is repeated as in the verse we are discussing, as well as the saying of Allah: 'And the same did Ibrahim enjoin on his sons and [so did] Yaqoub' (*al-Baqara:* 132). As for the second form, it is a transitive verb as in the verse where Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about what the 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* says: 'And He has enjoined on me prayer and poor-rate so long as I live' (*Maryam:* 31). Thus, the Arabic verb for command is like the verbs *anzala* and *nazzala*. The former indicates that something came down all at once, while the latter means that it came down one after another.

The word man, who is being commanded, is absolute and general. It refers to all men, from Adam *peace be upon him* until the Last Hour is established. It is the name of the species which, amongst the chosen of the creation, is the counterpart to the jinn. We say, 'Men and jinn.' The Arabic *Ins* (man) means that we like to keep the company of one another. Unlike the jinn, we do not see them and we are not the same as them in terms of our nature, therefore there is no sociability between us and them. Allah says about Satan: 'He surely sees you; He as well as his host from whence you cannot see them' (*al-A'raf:* 27).

Therefore, this commandment is directed from Allah *Glorified is He* to all of mankind in general including the believer and the disbeliever, the legally responsible adult and the child who will be rewarded if he acts according to the commandment and who will not be punished if not.

It is possible to compare this issue to prayer as Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said in the Noble Hadith: 'Command your children to perform prayer when they are seven years old and beat them (for not offering it) when they are ten.'(1) The command comes from you and the punishment also comes from you because they are still not at the age of legal responsibility. Further, prayer at this age is a matter of training and getting them used to and accustomed to it at a young age so that they continue to do it throughout their lives. Therefore, when they reach the age of legal responsibility, it will be easy for them and they will be doing it habitually.

Parents are the father and the mother who are the direct cause of one's existence. This is because there is an indirect cause which is the Sublime Creator Who brought Adam *peace be upon him* and *Hawwa'* (Eve) into existence. The first existence was out of nothing, while our existence is from procreation and from a cause, namely the parents.

For the preservation of the species and the population of the earth, Allah *Glorified is He* connected reproduction to the strongest natural inclinations and the greatest pleasure in man. How? Scholars said that when man looks at a beautiful sight, his eyes enjoy it and when he smells a nice scent, his nose enjoys it. The same goes for when you eat something that you love. Therefore, each limb has its own specific enjoyment. However, sexual intercourse produces a pleasure and an enjoyment that comprises all the limbs that share in it. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* has legislated that a bath be taken afterwards because all the limbs took part in the process and because one is not thinking about Allah *Glorified is He* at that moment.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud*

Allah *Glorified is He* has also connected the two because He knows that children represent a burden for the family and it is difficult to raise and provide for them. That is why He *the Almighty* swore by this matter when He said: ‘And by the begetter and whom he begot’ (*al-Balad:* 3).

If Allah *Glorified is He* had not connected reproduction to this pleasure, many people would do without it. You see how much a woman suffers from the pain of pregnancy and childbirth. She even says out of regret that she will never do it again. Then she forgets her pain and her suffering and yearns to get pregnant once again. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* connected reproduction to this pleasure for a reason. Unfortunately, it is astonishing that people exaggerate it, overdo it and take it outside of its proper bounds, making sexual pleasure the foundation.

We see animals, for example, practising it merely for the sake of preserving their species. This is why when the male approaches the female, it smells it first, and if it is pregnant, it leaves it alone and it does not give it a chance. It is also amazing that we find fault in animals and say ‘beastly desire’ and so forth. Glory be to Allah!

Moreover, we notice that the childhood of man is approximately the longest childhood comparing to all other creatures. Animals, for example, give birth. The mother breastfeeds her child and after the period of breast-feeding, she does not recognise the child and is not concerned with it.

As for man, he is a child until he reaches adolescence. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when the children among you have attained to puberty, let them seek permission’ (*an-Nur:* 59). That is because man is bound and commanded to fulfil Allah’s Commands and avoid His Prohibitions. Therefore, the nature of man and his honour of being connected to Allah has made his period of nurturing longer in order to suit his task in life. Look, for example, at the cow and how its child comes out, moves and shakes the moisture off itself. Then it stops for a few minutes after which it gets up, stands, and runs around; all of this takes place within an hour of birth.

As for our children, they are able to sit, for example, after a number of months. Then they crawl, stand, and then walk after a year or more. Indeed, we have some people who extend the childhood of their children until they are twenty-five years old and consider them children in the sense that they are dependent and their parents spend on them and do not give them any responsibility.

We find commandments with regards to the parents being connected to the worship of Allah *Glorified is He* in four places in the Noble Quran. First, Allah says: 'And serve Allah and do not associate anything with Him and be good to the parents' (*an-Nisa':* 36). Second, He says: 'And when We made a covenant with the children of Israel: You shall not serve any but Allah and [you shall do] good to [your] parents' (*al-Baqara:* 83). The third place is in the chapter of *al-An'am* where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you–[remember] that you do not associate anything with Him and show kindness to your parents,' (*al-An'am:* 151) and the forth is in the chapter of *al-Isra'*: 'And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve [any] but Him, and goodness to your parents' (*al-Isra':* 23).

These are the four places in which Allah *Glorified is He* commands children to be good to their parents. He connects this, due to its importance, to the His Worship, as if they are of equal weight on the scale. This is because parents, as we have mentioned, are the direct cause of one's existence, thus showing them filial gratitude and goodness paves the way and trains you to be reminded of the Sublime Cause of your existence, that is, Allah, the Creator.

Allah *Glorified is He* obligates us with this commandment even if the parents are disbelievers, which, as we have said, is a general enjoinment. He *Glorified is He* says: 'And We have enjoined on man goodness to his parents, and if they contend with you that you should associate [others] with Me, of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them, to Me is your return, so I will inform you of what you did' (*al-'Ankabut:* 8). He *the Almighty* also says:

'…Do not obey them, and keep company with them in this world kindly' (*Luqman:* 15). If Allah *Glorified is He* is enjoining us with regards to our parents because they are the direct cause of one's existence even if they are not believers, then what do you think of the Sublime Cause of your existence?

Some of the orientalists have objected to this point and said: 'The Quran says: '…Do not obey them, and keep company with them in this world kindly,' (*Luqman:* 15) and in another verse He says: 'You shall not find a people who believe in Allah and the latter day befriending those who act in opposition to Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their [own] fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their kinsfolk' (*al-Mujadala:* 22). They thereby consider it a contradiction between the two verses. This is because they do not understand the Arabic language and are not familiar with its styles and secrets, as there is a difference between love and kindness. Love comes from an emotion in the heart, while kindness is a favour that you do for someone you love and also someone you despise. When Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to show filial piety, He is only training us and preparing us to show piety towards the One Who created them and us. He is the Sublime Establisher of everything into existence.

Speaking legally, 'to be good to someone' means to do goodness and kindness beyond what you have been obligated to and within the same category as the obligation. Allah *Glorified is He* explained this meaning in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyyat.* He says: 'Surely those who guard [against evil] shall be in gardens and fountains. Taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that, the doers of good' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16). Then He *the Almighty* describes them and gives aspects of their goodness, saying: 'They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning they asked forgiveness. And in their property was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied [good]' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19).

These three issues are not mandatory upon a Muslim. Rather, they are beyond what Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded. Have you not seen what He *the Almighty* says regarding wealth: 'In their property was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied [good]' (*al-Ma'ida:* 19). However, when talking about the obligatory alms, He says: 'And those in whose wealth there is a fixed portion' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24).

Here, we should distinguish between the fixed portion, which is the obligatory *zakat* and the recommended one, which is the recommended charity. As for the *zakat*, a fixed portion of the money should be given out; as for the recommended charity, one is recommended to give out what he wants. Here, we should stress that whoever gives out the recommended charity, he reaches the level of *Ihsan,* which is the highest rank of worship.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to show filial piety and do good to our parents as they have a favour over us in the sense that they brought us into existence, raised us and provided for us. Thus, we must give them more than what they deserve and when you give more then what you are obligated to give, you are doing good unto them.

Therefore, the command of filial piety does not stop at the necessary obligation, but rather, it transcends to the rank of *Ihsan*. That is why when Allah *Glorified is He* talks about the right of parents, He says: ‘Say not to them [so much as] “Ugh” nor chide them’ (*al-Isra’:* 23). ‘Ugh’ is a sound that expresses displeasure and indicates constriction. So, beware of saying this word to them, or complaining about them, especially when they are old and in an abject state and in the greatest need of compassion and care.

This is because, at this age, man returns to his childhood once again and he needs someone who carries him, helps him sit and feeds him and thereby he might do things that will cause offense, so beware of being offended by them in this state. Maybe his feet trembles and fall on the ground or breaks a vase, for example. Thus, beware of showing him what offends you and know that you are being rewarded for this. It is being stored away for you and it is a debt that will be discharged. Whoever shows piety to his parents will be shown piety by his own children. Anachronistically, you are showing him piety and bearing his burden while wishing death for him. However, he has done more than that for you and wished you a long life.

In light of this relationship between parents and children, we can understand the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘O young men, whoever amongst you can afford marriage costs, let him get married, for indeed it lowers the gaze and preserves one from immorality.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Getting married at an early age is better because it protects the person who does it and also, as the Bedouin said, is the best way to have a parent who will take care of you in the childhood of your old age such that the child, in this situation, assumes the position of the parent who takes care of his child.

In another place, Allah *Glorified is He* uses a different word for goodness. He says: ‘And We have enjoined on man goodness to his parents’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8). The difference between *husn* and *Ihsan* is that the latter is the action of doing something good to them. As for the former, it is the gerund of this verb and the noun of this process that you are involved in, like saying that ‘so-and-so a person is just’ yet ‘so-and-so a person is the justice itself’ meaning that he has reached the furthest extent in implementing justice such that he and justice are the same thing. Therefore, *husn* is more informative than *Ihsan*. Responding to a greeting with what is better is an Islamic principle. Therefore Allah says: ‘And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better [greeting] than it or return it’ (*an-Nisa’:* 86).

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention any reason for doing goodness to the parents in the verse: ‘Now (among the best of righteous deeds which) We have enjoined upon man (is) goodness (*husn*) towards his parents’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8). Rather, He says afterwards: ‘And if they contend with you that you should associate [others] with Me, of which you have no knowledge’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8). Allah *Glorified is He* maintains this right of theirs even in a situation of their disbelief and He affirmed and enjoined that they must be shown the best of filial piety

Allah, then, follows with the words: ‘It is unto Me that you all must return, whereupon I shall make you (truly) understand (the right and wrong of) all that you were doing (in life)’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 8). While in another verse He says: ‘…Do not obey them, and keep company with them in this world kindly’ (*Luqman:* 15). Scholars explained it saying that this is because parents are of two categories. One needs his child in order to live and a parent who does not need his child and is self-sufficient. If the parent is in need, then you keep company with him in kindness, i.e. assist him and make him live an honourable life. If he is self-sufficient, then that is his affair and everyone will be returned to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Here, in the verse that we are discussing, Allah *Glorified is He* did not say *husn* or *Ihsan*, but rather, He mentioned the reason behind the commandment saying: 'His mother struggled to carry him and struggled to give birth to him and the bearing of him and the weaning of him was thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15).

In the verse we are discussing, He *Glorified is He* determines the period of pregnancy along with the period of breastfeeding as one length of time. Yet in another verse He says about breastfeeding itself: 'And his weaning takes two years' (*Luqman:* 14). Therefore, each verse has taken a gleaning and by bringing the two verses together, we can solve some of the problems regarding the issue of the period of pregnancy and the period of breastfeeding.

It is related that 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* came to see 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him*. 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* wanted to carry out the prescribed legal penalty for adultery on a woman because she had given birth after six months, whilst in her husband's house; it was well-known that the normal period for pregnancy is nine months. 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* told him to wait and he read the verses to him: '... And her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). He then read the other verse: '…And his utter dependence on her lasted two years' (*Luqman:* 14). 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* observed that by subtracting two years from thirty months, it is possible for the period of pregnancy to be six months which is the shortest term possible for a pregnancy.

That is why 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Wretched is the place on earth where Abu Al-Hasan is not there.'(1) Indeed, 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* was renowned for his knowledge and legal verdicts because he had become Muslim since childhood, that is, he drank from the spring of Prophecy from a very early age. His education was an Islamic one from the very beginning. However, other people had some education that was given in the Age of Ignorance.

An example for the correct understanding and legal knowledge of 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* is that when Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, the Emigrants and Helpers met in As-Saqifa to discuss the matter of the Caliphate. Each side wanted one of their own to have the Caliphate and the Helpers were pushing for this. Then they said: ‘A leader from us and a leader from you.’ When this reached ‘Ali *may Allah be pleased with him,* he said: ‘Your arguments are not strong. Ask them, i.e. the Helpers whether they have heard the statement of Prophet Muhammad: “When you are in control, bequeath goodness to the Helpers.”’ Therefore, if leadership was to be with them, then bequests would not take its place.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim and Al-Bayhaqi*

One of the curious stories that occurred between ‘Ali and ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with them* is that ‘Ali came to see ‘Umar and found him angry. Whereupon he *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘What has angered you, O Commander of the Believers?’ ‘Umar said, ‘I asked Hudhayfa*,* ‘How he is?’ and he said, “I woke up loving trial and temptation, hate the truth, pray without ablution and I have on earth what Allah does not have in the heavens.”’

‘Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* then laughed and said that Hudhayfa has spoken the truth. ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* replied, ‘Do you say the same thing, O Abu Al-Hasan?’ ‘Yes,’ ‘Ali said and explained what Hudhayfa meant. He said that he woke up loving his properties and his child. ‘Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* then read the verse: ‘Your possessions and your children are only a trial’ (*at-Taghabun:* 15). He went on saying that he hates the truth, which is death and who from amongst us loves it?! Further, he prays without ablution meaning that he sends prayers upon Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*. In addition, he has on earth what Allah does not have in the heavens meaning that he has a wife and a child. It is astonishing that we hear in our time those who diminish the rank of those people and want to abolish the personages of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Ali *may Allah be pleased with them* from our history.

We also notice in the verse we are discussing that Allah *Glorified is He* says that a mother bears her son with trouble and she brings him forth with trouble. With trouble in this instance means reluctantly or with difficulty. Further, Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘His mother bears him with fainting upon fainting,’ (*Luqman:* 14).

Fainting is the weakness that results from pregnancy and childbirth. As for the troubles of this matter, they are due to the fact that women have different natures. Amongst them are those who love this process and amongst them are those who hate it, but they reluctantly obey their husbands and bear the burdens of pregnancy, craving certain foods and the pain of childbirth afterwards. After the birth, they are fully preoccupied with the newborn child and they feel compassion for it. At the same time, the father is preoccupied with work and obtaining provision. This is why the man is more rational and the woman is more emotional, as each is according to their task in life.

Therefore some people make a mistake in understanding the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* about women wherein he says: 'I advise you to take care of the woman for they are created from a rib and the most crooked portion of the rib is its upper part. If you try to straighten it, it will break and if you leave it, it will remain crooked.'(1)

When we reflect on this Hadith, we find that the crookedness of the rib is for a reason because the ribs were created to protect the most precious and most important two organs in the body, i.e. the heart and the lungs. If the ribs were straight, then they would not be able to perform this task. Do we say, for example, that a hook is crooked, or that its crookedness is a defect? No, we never say that because the nature of its function and task necessitates that it be in this shape. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* compared the woman to the rib because their task is affection and compassion.

It is worth noting that when Allah *Glorified is He* commanded us with regards to our parents, He mentioned the considerations that concern the mother and did not mention any of the considerations that concern the father. Scholars said that it is because the role of the mother comes at a time when the child does not comprehend her role and her precedence in the phases of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. As for the role of the father in providing and caring, it comes at a time when the child can comprehend the favours of his father. That is why we need to remind the child of the role of his mother and her precedence because he is not aware of it. As for the role of the father, he knows it well.

If we are concerned with the role of parents in terms of raising and educating, we must remember the verse wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And say: O my Lord! Have compassion on them, as they brought me up [when I was] little' (*al-Isra':* 24). This verse gives us the general method of raising all children.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

The parents deserve such a commandment for two reasons. They are the direct cause of one's existence and thereby remind you of the Sublime Cause of your existence; and secondly, they raise you and thereby remind you of the Sublime Nurturer. Thus, Allah is a Lord and a Nurturer. He has created us from nothing and He provides for us from nothing. He is the One Who has nurtured and provided us with the means of nurturing. Therefore, the enjoinment to do good to parents trains us to improve our relationship with Allah, our Creator, and our Nurturer.

In addition, we understand from this verse that nurturing alone is a reason and consideration behind doing good. A child could be raised up and nurtured by other than his parents, and thus those who raised him would have precedence over him and would deserve to be shown gratitude because they have carried out half of the process. The father and mother thus have the virtue of bringing them into existence and the nurturer has the virtue of raising and thereby deserves half the reward.

This matter, therefore, encourages us to take care of orphans and nurture them for the sake of Allah's Countenance. If someone's father dies, then the entire community is his father. That is why Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I will be like this in paradise with the person who takes care of an orphan.' He then raised his forefinger and middle finger by way of illustration.(1)

This is because if the father were to die and leave children who do not find anyone in the community to take care of them and be a father for them, they would grow up having resentment towards other children and towards the entire community. Maybe it will even lead to them rebelling against Allah *Glorified is He* Who decreed that they would be orphans.

Allah *Glorified is He* indicates the proper time of bringing up a child when He says: '…As they brought me up [when I was] little' (*al-Isra':* 24). That raising and nurturing have a time which is the time of childhood. I remember when I was invited to give a lecture entitled ‘Raising the Youth’ in one of our universities. However, before beginning the lecture, I sought the permission of the director of the university to change the title of the lecture because the youth are not to be raised. Youth is an energy that is utilised in your daily life. The youth have already been raised. If we were to say ‘Raising the Youth,’ the title would not be correct. It is raising or upbringing children because childhood is like dough that could be formed without objecting. As for the youth, they are fully formed. This is why they object and they react unhappily when you give them criticism or an instruction.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari*

However, the youth who were in attendance at the university said that they were not raised in the correct way, so they wanted to recommence their raising. I said to them: ‘Therefore, recommence your childhood with us and accept instruction and criticism without objecting to it. Be like the patient before the doctor accepting whatever he says without discussion.’

One of our mistakes in raising children is that we prolong their childhood and thus the family continues to bring up the child and provide for him until he is twenty or twenty-five years old. This is why the west has surpassed us in this matter because when one of their children reaches puberty, he becomes independent from his family and provides for himself, even if his father were a millionaire. This increases the numbers of workers, decreases idleness, and increases production. These are all means of advancement that we do not have and up till now we have not been able to utilise the capabilities of the youth.

Indeed, if you were to go to one of the capital cities of the west, you would not see the youth there filling the streets and corners. You would not find the cafes filled with people without jobs. You will only see them at their break time going out like locusts to have their lunch. Nevertheless, the mistake that they have made is that they have made this apply to both boys and girls.

The words of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘…As they brought me up [when I was] little,’ (*al-Isra’:* 24) show that both parents were involved, the father and the mother; and that each of them has a role in raising and nurturing. The father earns, while the woman runs and takes cares of the home. Thus, they are partners in this matter and the presence of the woman in the house, generally speaking, means that she has greater influence than the man in the process of raising and nurturing. This is why we give boys what suits them and we give girls what suits them as we are concerned with raising and nurturing according to gender.

For this reason, it befits us now to mention the advice that the Arab mother gave her daughter as she was preparing her to move in with her husband. She said to her: ‘My dear daughter, if advice is left due to etiquettes of people, I would leave it to your perfect etiquettes, but it is a wake-up call for the heedless and a help for the intelligent. My dear daughter, indeed tomorrow you will leave the house in which you grew up and the nest in which you crawled and learned to walk for a house that you are not familiar with and a companion whom you do not know, to be a slave girl to your husband and he will be a slave to you. My dear daughter, if the woman could dispense of the man due to the wealth of her parents and her lack of need of anyone besides them, then you would be the most independent of people with regards to him, but women were created for men and men were created for them. My dear daughter, take and maintain from me ten qualities that will be stored up for you. The first and the second are that you keep company with him in contentment and that you listen to him properly and obey. The third and fourth is that you check the places that are subject to his eye and nose so that his eye never sees anything ugly from you and he never smells anything from you except the most beautiful fragrance.

‘The fifth and sixth are that you check the time for sleeping and eating, for indeed frequent hunger is inflammatory and disturbing sleep is annoying. The seventh and eighth are that you guard his wealth and take care of his decency and his dependents.

‘The foundation of the matter with regards to wealth is good assessment and with dependents it is good planning. As for the ninth and tenth, do not disobey him in anything and do not divulge his secrets, for indeed if you undermine his command you arouse his anger and if you divulge his secrets you will not be safe from his treachery. Beware of being happy in front of him if he is worried or being depressed in front of him, while he is happy.’

This is the advice of Umama bint Al-Harith *may Allah be pleased with her* to her daughter Umm Unas bint ‘Awf ibn Muhallim Ash-Shaybani. This enjoinment was before Islam, but despite that it contains etiquettes and pieces of advices that would solve most of the family problems that are filling our courtrooms today if they were heeded by the wives in our current age. If every mother were to raise her daughter according to these etiquettes, our affairs would be put right. Unfortunately the fact is that we have abandoned these pieces of advice and become heedless of implementing them in our homes. Rather, we have left the homes to the maids and we have left raising and nurturing to those who are not qualified such that we find ourselves in the situation in which we are.

Moreover, Allah, *Glorfied is He,* says: ‘Until when he attains his maturity and reaches forty years, he says: My Lord! Grant me that I may give thanks for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). This is another phase of life that is the phase of puberty. That is when one has reached the utmost in terms of the completion of his body, strength and intellect.

An example of this is the saying of Allah regarding Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: ‘And when he had attained his maturity, We gave him wisdom and knowledge: and thus do We reward those who do good’ (*Yusuf:* 22). Allah *Glorified is He* also says about Musa (Moses): ‘And when he attained his maturity and became full grown, We granted him wisdom and knowledge; and thus do We reward those who do good [to others]’ (*al-Qasas:* 14).

Therefore, reaching full manhood and maturity and the completion of one’s body, strength and intellect is the beginning of receiving wisdom and it is the beginning of being legally responsible. If one was made legally responsible before puberty and then puberty and adolescence took place along with the changes that happen in the body as result, the slave would might say, ‘Changes have happened to me that I was not thinking about when I came to believe in You.’ This is why the entire process has been delayed until the age of puberty which is the peak of maturity.

The peak of maturity in man is when he is able to reproduce someone like him. The same goes for fruits, for example. We said before that the melon is not nice to eat until its core has become even and black such that if we were to cultivate it, it would give us a new plant. When you eat this you are guaranteed that there will be others. But if you break it open and its core is not even, eat it and then cultivate the core and it will not grow. Thus, this is wisdom for maintaining the species. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Behold, the fruit of it when it yields the fruit and the ripening of it’ (*al-An‘am:* 99). The existence of the word ripening means that you make sure that there will be another tree just as you notice in fruit-bearing trees that if you do not pick the fruits they fall on their own.

It is from the wisdom of The Creator and the wonders of the creation that you, in the phase of growth and before the age of puberty, find the process of growth is completed with an accurate estimation and inimitability. For example, there are things in the body that grow but also things in the body that resemble them that do not grow. Take the example of hair. It grows and we cut it from time to time. As for the hair of the eyebrows, for example, or the eyelashes, it does not grow. The same goes for the bones. They grow as the child grows until it reaches full maturity. At the same time, the teeth are also bones and they stop once they are in a particular shape and then no longer grow. If they continued to grow like all the other bones they would become like the tusks of an elephant.

Therefore, the matter is not mechanical, as we have said, but rather it is engineered by the One Who originated this universe.

Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards: ‘And reaches forty years, he (that is righteous) prays: ‘O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of You with which you have graced me and my parents,’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). Allah *Glorified is He* specifies the age of forty because it is the age at which man should stop, take himself to account and correct his path.

The age of forty is the peak of the intellectual maturity, and it is also the beginning of the descent towards the death. This is why the True Lord *the Almighty* turns our attention towards the age of forty so that we can stop and put in order whatever we need to. Allah’s saying: ‘…help me…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) means: make me concerned and give me the strength. Allah *the Almighty* the says: ‘…to be truly grateful for Your favours to me…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). These favours and blessings include being brought into existence, our health, and well-being, Islam, enabling success and obedience and making the parents nurture and raise us. Then the gratitude is extended to the parents, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and to my parents…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) because the blessing for the parent is a blessing for its child. Then He *the Almighty* says: '…help me to do good work that pleases you…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) which means 'enable me success and inspire me to do righteous action.'

Righteous action is to stand firm in implementing the commands and avoiding the prohibitions that have been related to us via the text. Regarding that for which there is no text, you are free to do it or not to do it. Allah's saying: '…that pleases you…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) means that this action is in accordance with Allah's Way of Guidance, or it means that you accept it and you reward me for it. Then Allah's saying: '…make my offspring good…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15) is a supplication to have righteousness extended to one's offspring, or it could mean that I, O Lord, squandered myself and fell short, and I do not want that for my offspring. I want them to have the righteousness that I did not attain to. This is a known principle; that the father loves to amend what he missed out on in his life and make sure that it is realised in the lives of his children and his progeny after them. He wants them to realise the perfection that he never attained. This is why he is happy even if his child surpasses him. Reflect on the verb in Allah's saying: '…make good (*aslih*)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15), and you will find that it is transitive in and of itself, so why is *fi* (in) mentioned when Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and make good in (*fi)* my offspring…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15)? Why did He not say: 'Grant me righteous offspring'? What is the necessity behind this? The style here is as if He is making the offspring a container for receiving righteousness and man's container is his heart. This is why it is mentioned in the Hadith: 'Indeed in the body there is a lump of flesh; if it is sound then the whole body is sound and if it is corrupt then the whole body is corrupt. Indeed it is the heart.'(1) Therefore, *fi* was used to make the offspring a container and an envelope.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no (50) and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no (2996) from the Hadith of Nuʿman ibn Bashir that he heard Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him saying: 'Indeed the permissible is clear and the impermissible is clear, but in between them there are doubtful matters and most people have no knowledge of them. Thus, whoever saves himself from doubtful matters saves his religion and his honor. And whoever indulges in doubtful matters is like a shepherd who grazes his animals near the private pasture of someone else and at any moment he is liable to slip into it…'*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…I turn to You; I am one of those who devote themselves to You,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15). The door of repentance is open until the end of one's life, but we should not delay it and be heedless of it. However, some of us are taken over by the life of this world and it makes them forget themselves, so they delay repenting and reconciling themselves with their Lord until this age. This is why a tradition has been mentioned: 'If a slave has not repented after forty years, Allah runs His hand over his face and says: 'Is it not time for this face to be ashamed?' There is another Hadith: 'If someone reaches the age of forty and his goodness does not outweigh his evil, then let him prepare himself – and we seek refuge in Allah – for Hell.'(1) Why? It is because you had fun in your youth and you satiated your desires with whatever you wanted. However, when you're forty and above, you should be ashamed of disobeying Allah *the Almighty* and be ashamed of delaying your repentance when you cannot guarantee how long you'll live. Allah's saying: '…I am one of those who devote themselves to You,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15), means that defectiveness and inadequacy are not in the creed. Rather, they are in implementing the rulings that are required by the creed.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ نَتَقَبَّلُ عَنۡهُمۡ أَحۡسَنَ مَا عَمِلُواْ وَنَتَجَاوَزُ عَن سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمۡ
فِيٓ أَصۡحَٰبِ ٱلۡجَنَّةِۖ وَعۡدَ ٱلصِّدۡقِ ٱلَّذِى كَانُواْ يُوعَدُونَ ١٦

We accept from such people the best of what they do
and We overlook their bad deeds. They will be among
the people of Paradise – the true promise that has been
given to them [16] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 16)

Allah's saying: '…these are…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16), refers to those who have just been mentioned along with their attributes. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Al-Fath Al-Azdi from Jubayr from Ad-Dahhak and then from Ibn ʿAbbas who attributed it to Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him: 'If someone reaches the age of forty and their goodness does not outweigh their evil, then let them prepare for the Fire.' See Al-Alusi in his commentary of (al-Ahqaf: 15); see also As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur. Imam Ibn Al-Jawzi said in [Al-Mawduʿat]: 'This is not an authentic Hadith from Allah's Messenger', and Al-ʿAjluni mentioned it in Kashf Al-Khafaʾ (2344).*

'…they from whom We accept the best of what they have done…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16). It is well-known that the verb *taqabbala* (accept) is transitive along with the particle *min* (from), as in the statement of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: 'And when Ibrahim and Ismail raised the foundations of the House: Our Lord! Accept from us…' (*al-Baqara:* 127). In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And He it is Who accepts repentance of His servants…' (*ash-Shura:* 25). Therefore, it is sometimes transitive with the word *min* (from) and sometimes transitive with the word *ʿan* (of), and each of them has a distinctive meaning. Thus, Allah's saying: 'These are they from whom We accept the best of what they have done…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16) means that repentance relieves you of the burden and weight of disobedience because it removes it from you. Therefore He *the Almighty* says: '…of (*ʿan*) what they have done…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16) because using one word in the place of another word should be done for reason and it adds a meaning that is not given by the other word. We clarified this issue before regarding the True Lord's saying: 'Praise be to Allah, Who has given me in old age Ismail…' (*Ibrahim:* 39). All scholars believe that *ʿala* here means: with his old age. By reflecting on the verse, we find that *maʿ* is comprised of two letters while *ʿala* is comprised of three. Why did the Noble Quran use *ʿala* here instead of *maʿ*? Why did it leave off the ease of two letters in favour of three? When we reflect on the matter of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) old age *peace be upon him* we find that the company that is indicated by *maʿ* is insufficient, as the meaning is a word that should indicate company that is overcome. This is because old age was present with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and accompanying him, but his old age was overcome by Allah's Power. It is as if His Absolute Power overcame the law of old age and violated the rule. Thus Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* came in spite of this old age, and this meaning cannot be conveyed with *maʿ* but rather with *ʿala*. Likewise, in Allah's saying: '…and most surely your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness to people, notwithstanding their injustice; and most surely your Lord is severe in requiting (evil)' (*ar-Ra'd:* 6). Thus, it is as if the sin necessitates punishment but Allah's Forgiveness overcomes and takes predominance over this punishment. Therefore, when He uses one word in the place of another, it must add a meaning that is given by the first word. Therefore, Allah's saying: '…We accept the best of what they have done…'

(*al-Ahqaf:* 16) means that We relieved them of the burden that was there before repentance. In another verse the True Lord *the Almighty* explains this meaning: '…so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones…' (*al-Furqan:* 70). Someone even said: 'By Allah, I have no regrets that I have committed any major sins because Allah will transform them into good deeds.' This is wrong, because who can tell you how long you will live so that you can repent. Allah's saying: '…and pass over their evil deeds…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16) means that We will pardon them and be forbearing. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…among the dwellers of the garden…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16). I stated before that being 'the *ashab* of paradise' means that there will be companionship or friendship between them, or that it means that they will be the owners of it. However, here He *Glorified is He* says: '…among *(fi)* the dwellers of the garden…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16). It is as if these people that we are talking about are in the middle of paradise, or the people of paradise are surrounding them. They are in the centre. This understanding comes from the meaning of *fi* here. However, why is it that these people deserve to be in the middle and in the centre and the people of paradise are around them? Scholars said: 'It is because those who had been accustomed to disobedience and then moved over to obedience went through great difficulty after they had been delighted and pleased with disobedience. Thus, they struggle with themselves to stay upon obedience, as opposed to those who have not experienced disobedience. Obedience for these people is natural and they do not need to struggle like the former. This is why Allah *the Almighty* treats them with this lenience and this favour such that He transforms their evil deeds into good ones and this is the utmost of generosity. Then the True Lord *the Almighty* reassures them: '…the promise of truth which they were promised,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16). It is as if they do not believe that Allah *the Almighty* will treat them with this favour, so He reminds them that this is Allah's Promise which is a True Promise that is never broken. There is no one who can revoke or nullify this Promise.

The True Lord *the Almighty* gives His slaves all of these facilitations and incentives, as He accepts the repentance of those who repent and He forgives those who commit bad deeds and He transforms their bad deeds into good ones. This is not for the salvation of only the repentant, but rather, the salvation of the entire society. If repentance had not been legislated, society would have become miserable with every disobedient person having a door slammed in his face and evil and corruption would have become widespread.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلَّذِى قَالَ لِوَٰلِدَيْهِ أُفٍّ لَّكُمَآ أَتَعِدَانِنِىٓ أَنْ أُخْرَجَ وَقَدْ خَلَتِ ٱلْقُرُونُ مِن قَبْلِى وَهُمَا يَسْتَغِيثَانِ ٱللَّهَ وَيْلَكَ ءَامِنْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَيَقُولُ مَا هَٰذَآ إِلَّآ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

But some say to their parents, ‘What? Are you really warning me that I shall be raised alive from my grave, when so many generations have already passed and gone before me?’ His parents implore God for help; they say, ‘Alas for you! Believe! God’s promise is true,’ but still he replies, ‘These are nothing but ancient fables’ [17]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 17)

The Noble Quran gives us a number of gleanings of parents with children, yet they differ according to the circumstances. Because of the importance of this relationship between the parent and the child, Allah *the Almighty* connected the enjoinment concerning parents to His worship, to the extent that He gave it the same importance and sanctity. He *the Almighty* says: ‘And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve (any) but Him, and goodness to your parents…’ (*al-Isra’:* 23). This is because the parent and the child are the essential nucleus for building a community. So if it is sound, the community is sound, and if it is corrupt then the community is corrupt. The soundness of this cell requires that we should know the rank of the parents and that they are the direct cause of one’s existence, and thus they have the right of causality in bringing one into existence, meaning if it was not for them then the child would not exist.

When we show them filial piety and respect them, this trains us to exalt and respect the First Creator and the Original Founder of everything. This is why this enjoinment is general. There is no difference between a believer and a disbeliever, as the True Lord enjoins us to respect our parents, even if they are disbelievers because He is the Lord of everyone and He takes it upon Himself to give life, sustenance and subsistence to everyone because they are His slaves and His making. I said that we must notice the difference between

Divinity and Lordship. Lordship has to do with giving and nurturing while Divinity has to do with commandments and worship by obeying commands and avoiding prohibitions. It is also a gift, but a gift of legal responsibility with regards to doing and not doing. It is a gift because the benefit goes back to the slave and Allah does not benefit from it in the slightest. The obedience of the obedient does not give Him *the Almighty* an attribute that He did not have, nor does the disobedience of the disobedient strip Him of an attribute that is firmly established for Him. This is because Allah has the Attributes of Absolute Perfection and this was the case before He even created this creation. This is why when man is in a serious problem that he is unable to do anything about, we see him saying: ‘O Lord!’ He calls for the Attribute of Lordship. The meaning of ‘O Lord’ is ‘O You Who has taken care of me and raised me. Take me by the hand and help me.’ However, when he wants to seek help in a matter of legal responsibility, he says: ‘O Allah!’ meaning ‘My God, O You Who has commanded me and helped me to obey You in what you have commanded me.’ Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* gets nothing from man’s acts of worship. Rather, the reward is acquired by the one who is legally responsible. The True Lord *the Almighty* wants a believing, righteous community firmly built and established and in the best of states, just as you encourage your little child to revise by saying to him: ‘If you pass, I will buy you a bicycle or a suit.’ This is because you want goodness for him. You will not benefit from what you buy for him. This is why it is mentioned in the Qudsi Hadith ‘O My slaves! Indeed, you will never bring any benefit that would benefit Me and you will never bring any harm that would harm Me. O My slaves! If the first of you and the last of you, those of you who are alive and those of you who are dead, those of you who are human and those of you who are jinn, and those of you who are present and those of you who are absent were all like the most Allah-conscious man among you, that would not increase Me in My Dominion in the slightest. And, if the first of you and the last of you were like the most sinful man among you, that would not decrease my Dominion in the slightest.

O My slave, if the first of you and the last of you…were to gather altogether on an open plain and each one of you were to ask what he wanted, I would grant it to each one of you and that would not decrease what I have except as much as what a needle extracts when it is dipped in the ocean. This is because I am magnanimous, glorious; My giving is speech and My punishment is speech. When I want something My only command is to say: ‘Be!’ and it is.’(1) Therefore, legal responsibility is entirely for the benefit of the legally responsible people. I clarified this matter when we explained the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘These are on a right course from their Lord…’ (*al-Baqara:* 5). It is as if guidance is a beast and a mount that carries the guided people and takes them to the destination that they are heading for. It is thus clear that guidance is not a burden and a weight upon the one who has it, but rather, it helps him. The verse that we are discussing: ‘…But some say to their parents, ‘What?’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) gives us a gleaning of when the parents are believers and the child is a disbeliever. It also illustrates the eagerness of the parents for the child’s salvation, as we have seen in the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his son. This verse was revealed regarding ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr(2) *may Allah be pleased with him*. His parents had accepted Islam, but he himself had refused. They would call on him to have faith in Allah and faith in the Resurrection, but he would say to them: ‘Where is so-and-so? Where is so-and-so?’ and he used to refer to people who had lived and died in the past.(3) Then ʿAbd Ar-Rahman *may Allah be pleased with him* became a good Muslim. It is yet said that ʿAʾisha *may Allah be pleased with her* disagreed with this and said that it was sent down in reference to someone whom she mentioned by name. Allah's saying: 'But some say to their parents…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) means 'remember the one who said to his parents: '…Fie upon both of you…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17). The word *uff* (Ugh) is a noun verb in the imperfect tense and is used to express displeasure. When someone says *yataʾffafu*, it means that he said '*uff*' and he is showing irritation or displeasure with regards to something dirty or filthy or an action that he is not happy with. Allah's saying: '…upon both of you…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) indicates his anger towards both because they are urging him. He *Glorified is He* then says: '…Fie upon both of you…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17). This is not being far from them. But why did he, i.e. the son say '*uff*'? Some scholars said: 'It is because the parents were urging him to believe, yet he did not want faith. After they had urged him a great deal, he said *uff* and then said what Allah *the Almighty* recorded in the Noble Quran: '…Are you really warning me that I shall be raised alive from my grave…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17)?' This question means, 'Will I be resurrected after death?' The *hamza* is used to ask a question here and it indicates astonishment or denial, as he is denying the resurrection. Then he brings the proof that supports his point of view: '…when so many generations have already passed and gone before me' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) meaning that generations have passed and many have died yet I have not seen any of them come out of their graves. However, he who thinks that Resurrection will be in the worldly life is wrong because Resurrection will take place in the time fixed by Allah *the Almighty*. However, after the parents had heard this speech and noticed this determination to remain upon disbelief, they found nothing other than Allah, so they turned to Him *Glorified is He*. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…His parents implore Allah for help; they say, 'Alas for you! Believe!' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) This illustrates the nature of the parents and their strong desire for their son to be saved, as they implore and urge their son to believe and taste the sweetness of faith that they have tasted. Allah's saying, '…Alas for you! Believe!' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) is, again, compelling him to believe, or alas for you if you do not believe. We notice here that the verb *yastaghith* (implore Allah for help) is made transitive with the word *baʾ*, and thus one says: 'so-and-so *yastaghith* (seeks help) in (*bi*) Allah', so why is the *baʾ* removed here and the verb is transitive on its own. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they implore Allah for help

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(1) *See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, no. (2419); see also Ibn Majah, Sunnan, no. (4247) and Ahmad, Musnad, no. (20405, 20560) from the Hadith of Abu Dharr. At-Tirmidhi said: ‘This Hadith is good (hasan).’*

(2) *His nickname was Abu ‘Abdullah or Abu Mohamed. He is the full brother of ʿAisha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, and his mother is Umm Ruman bint Al-Harith. He witnessed Badr and Uhud with his people, while he was still a disbeliever. He accompanied Prophet Muhammad in the treaty of Al-Hudaybiya. The scholars of the Prophetic Biography say: ‘His name was ‘Abd Al-Kaʿba, so the Messenger of Allah changed it and called him ʿAbd Ar-Rahman.’ [Al-Istiʾab fi Maʿrifat Al-Ashab 1/248].*

(3) *Regarding the opinion that states that this verse was revealed down concerning ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, this is the opinion of Ibn ʿAbbas, As-Suddi, Abu Al-ʿAliya and Mujahid. It is also said that it was ʿAbdallah ibn Abu Bakr instead. In his Tafsir (9/6246), Al-Qurtubi mentioned this in his Tafsir. Ibn Kathir said: ‘If someone claims that it was sent down with regard to ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr then their opinion is weak because ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr became a good Muslim and he was from the best of people in his time.’*

(*yasthaghithani Allah*)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17). Some scholars said: 'This shows that they are facing a difficult matter, a hard heart that is blockaded and stubborn. It does not accept any invitation and it does not respond to the call of the parents, nor does it appreciate their feelings.' This is why they turned to Allah *the Almighty* directly to guide their son; to open his heart and soften this hard character so that he can listen, obey and be saved. It is for this reason that I previously said that you will not find anyone who loves goodness for you the way your parents love it for you, to the extent that they love for you to be in a better state than them. This is only found with parents and children. Therefore, in the face of this stubbornness the parents have no choice but to turn to Allah, the One Who turns over hearts and is the Original Founder of all causes. When the means of the creation are restricted, leave it to the Creator, as the hearts are between two of His Fingers and He turns them over as He wills. I previously said this with regards to the story of the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when Allah *the Almighty* said to her: '…then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve…' (*al-Qasas:* 7). By Allah, would you accept or would you fear for your child if you cast him into the sea? Would you accept to save him from a probable death in favour of certain death? However, she believed, affirmed, and carried out what she had to do because Allah *the Almighty* had turned her heart. What the All-Merciful decreed cannot be opposed or nullified by what Satan has decreed. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). This matter happened with the Pharaoh, but Allah *the Almighty* intervened between him and his heart and what he wanted; he was looking for children to kill. Then a child came to him in a box that had been cast into the sea and in a way that was doubtful and questionable. Despite that, he accepted him, raised him and nurtured him to the extent that he affirmed his wife when she said about the boy, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…A refreshment of the eye to me and to you…' (*al-Qasas:* 9). Therefore, this is foolishness, but on behalf of whom? It is on behalf of the Pharaoh, who claimed divinity when he said to the people: 'I am your Lord All-Highest!' Then, when we reflect on the story, we find other proofs of the foolishness of this man. The magicians said to him: 'Indeed your kingdom will come to an end at the hand of child who will be born from the

Children of Israel, so as long as you believe in this prophecy, why are you killing children?'

Therefore, Allah's Decrees must inevitably be realised, and He prepares their means for them. This is the meaning of Allah's saying: '…His parents implore Allah for help…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17). They say: 'O Lord! You have power over everything and You are beyond means. There is nothing we can do with this son and it pains us to leave him in his disbelief and be ruined.' Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* taught him to seek refuge in Allah, whenever he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is in distress, he would get up and pray(1) in order to stand in front of his Lord Who would relieve every hardship and Who would ease every difficulty. The word: '…Believe…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) means: 'articulate the testimony of faith and acknowledge that Allah is the one God.' There are different variations of the word *aaman* (believe) in the Noble Quran with different meanings. You say: '*Amantu bi* (I believe in) Allah', and this verb is transitive with the word *ba*ʾ, meaning: I bear witness and I affirm. '*Amantu lahu*': It means I believe in what he is saying, as in Allah's saying: '…and you will not believe us…' (*Yusuf:* 17) meaning: you will not affirm and trust him, that is, I have placed my trust in him. In their statement: '…Allah's Promise is true…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17), they are stressing this fact to him. As long as it is true, then it will happen and there is no escape from it because Allah is one God and He has no partner. No one can nullify this promise or oppose it. He is the fully Capable, the All-Powerful and He can carry out whatever He has promised. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says regarding the Last Hour: 'Allah's Commandment has come, therefore do not desire to hasten it; glory be to Him, and highly exalted be He above what they associate (with Him)' (*an-Nahl:* 1). This is in the past tense because Allah's Promise is the same, be it in the past, present or future, as He is the Creator of time and He is its Owner. He does what He wants with it. Thus He uses the past tense to indicate the future because He knows that there is no force that can oppose it.

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(1) *In his Musnad (5/388), Imam Ahmad; Abu Dawud Sunnan, Hadith no (1319); Abu Dawud narrated that Hudhayfa said: 'When the Prophet's situation became difficult, he would pray.'*

Therefore, the Resurrection that will come in the future has actually already come and it is an event regarding which there is no doubt. This is why He freely administers the universe with His Testimony for Himself, as the first one to believe is Allah, Who believes with His Essence. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but He…’ (*Al-ʿImran:* 18). Thus, Allah testified on behalf of His Essence before anyone from His creation testified to this. It is as if He, with this testimony, is fully engaged with everything that He wants and He knows that none of it will be impossible and that it is nothing other than ‘Be!’ and it is. Likewise, Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace be upon him* testifies to the Message on behalf of himself before anyone else testifies to it. It is narrated that Jabir ibn ʿAbdullah *may Allah be pleased with him* once owed a debt to a Jewish man and he promised him that once his date palm bore fruit, he would pay off his debt. When the time for bearing fruit had come, his date palm did not produce what he had hoped for and Jabir *may Allah be pleased with him* was unable to discharge the debt. So, some of Jabir’s brothers went to Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and related the story to him, so he sent for the Jewish man and said to him: ‘Give Jabir more time so that he can pay his due.’ The man responded: ‘No, O Abu Qasim’, so Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* repeated himself: ‘Give Jabir more time.’ Again he responded: ‘No, O Abu Al-Qasim’. So, Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* left him and went to Jabir’s orchard and walked through it. Then he said: ‘Where is your bower, O Jabir?’ Jabir *may Allah be pleased with him* then took Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and sat him in his bower wherein he *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Leave me here, O Jabir. Go and cut off and pay back what you owe.’ So, Jabir *may Allah be pleased with him* went to his date palms and cut of what he needed to pay back his debt and there was enough left to suffice him. Then he came back to Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* with a plate of fresh, ripe dates and said to him: ‘O Messenger of Allah, I have paid off what I owed and I have left over an amount greater than any previous year.’ At that point, Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* laughed and said: ‘I bear witness that I am the Messenger of Allah.’(1) Allah’s saying: ‘…Allah’s promise is true…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) means that His Promise is True and it will not be broken. The truth is firm and established and it does not change because He *the Almighty* is the One Who decides it and decrees it. No one can change it. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Such has been the course of Allah that has indeed run before, and you shall not find a change in Allah’s Course’ (*al-Fath:* 23). Allah’s saying: ‘…but still he replies, ‘These are nothing but ancient fables,’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 17) means that this stubborn son says to his parents while they are calling on him to have faith in the Resurrection: ‘Indeed what you are saying is nothing but fables of the ancients, and they are their lies and stories that have come in their books.’ He means ‘what you are calling me to is a lie which is similar to fables and fairy tales.’

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(1) *In his Sahih, Hadith no. (5023), Al-Bukhari narrated from the Hadith of Jabir ibn ʿAbdullah, which states that Prophet Muhammad Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘I bear witness that I am the Messenger of Allah.’*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْقَوْلُ فِىٓ أُمَمٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن
قَبْلِهِم مِّنَ ٱلْجِنِّ وَٱلْإِنسِ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ خَٰسِرِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

The verdict has been passed on such people, along with all the communities that went before them, jinn and human: they are lost [18] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 18)

We notice that the speech in the previous verse was being made by a singular speaker, that is, the one who said to his parents: ‘…Fie upon you…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 17), but here the True Lord *the Almighty* refers to him in the plural: ‘…such people…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 18). Thus, He brings the decision and He informs of it: ‘The verdict has been passed on such people…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 18). It is as if this should not be understood as singular but rather as plural, as in Allah’s saying: ‘I swear by the time, [1] Most surely man is in loss [2] Except those who believe [3]…’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3). Thus, the plural is made as an exception to the singular. They said regarding this verse what they said about the previous verse which is that it was revealed down with regards to ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him*. Yet this opinion does not fit with the meaning of the verse because ʿAbd Ar-Rahman *may Allah be pleased with him* became a good Muslim. This verse is talking about those who are due for punishment, so it must have been sent down with regards to someone else, not ʿAbd Ar-Rahman *may Allah be pleased with him*. With regards to this issue, a story (1) is mentioned in the books of history. This is due to the fact that Marwan ibn Al-Hakam *may Allah be pleased with him* who was the ruler of Medina, is the one who said that this verse was sent down concerning ʿAbd Ar-Rahman. When Muʿawiya *may Allah be pleased with him* pledged the Caliphate to his son Yazid *may Allah be pleased with him* he asked Marwan to pledge allegiance to him, and ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* objected to this. He said: 'Have you made it hereditary?' meaning a monarchy in which the son succeeds his father. He said: 'Be quiet, you!' Then he said: 'Do you know who this is? This is the one of whom Allah says: '…But some say to their parents 'Fie upon both of you'…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17). This statement reached ʿAisha *may Allah be pleased with her* whereupon she said: 'By Allah, it is not him and if I wanted to say the name of whom it referred to, I would, but say to Marwan: 'Indeed Allah has cursed you because of your father.' This is because, one day, Al-Hakam ibn Al-ʿAs(2) was imitating the walk of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* in a mocking way. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* turned and saw him (3) and pointed at him with his hand, and thus he was exiled to Ta'if. After the high rank that he had enjoyed in Medina, he became a shepherd until ʿUthman *may Allah be pleased with him* interceded on his behalf to him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and he was allowed to return. However, the Companions said: 'we did not hear this from Messenger Muhammad', so 'Uthman said: 'I heard it.' Allah's saying: '…The verdict has been passed on…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 18) means that it is necessary and established that they will have the punishment that We have warned them about. As for Allah's saying: '…along with all the communities that went before them…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 18), it means that many nations before them had elapsed and gone. Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse with His saying, '…jinn and human: they are lost' (*al-Ahqaf:* 18). This is because He *the Almighty* said about the believers: 'Successful indeed are the believers' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1). Thus the opposite is that the disbelievers and deniers shall be lost. This verse proves that the jinn are also legally responsible; among them are the obedient and the disobedient, the believer and the disbeliever, and this is why He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Jinn*: ‘And as to the deviators, they are fuel of hell’ (*al-Jinn:* 15). Therefore, they will be punished with what suits their nature.

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(1) *The story of Al-Hakam ibn Al-'As states that the person who told his parents 'Uff' is 'Abu Al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr and 'Aisha's response to that.*

(2) *The story of Al-Hakam ibn Al-'As mocking at the walk of Prophet Muhammad*

(3) *See Ar-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghayb, his commentary on (Al-Humaza: 1); see also Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, Ihya' ʿUlum Ad-Din.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلِكُلٍّ دَرَجَٰتٌ مِّمَّا عَمِلُواْۖ وَلِيُوَفِّيَهُمْ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ⑲

Everyone will be ranked according to their deeds and
God will repay them in full for what they have done:
they will not be wronged [19] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 19)

Allah’s saying, ‘Everyone will be…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 19) refers to both the two categories: the believers who have been mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘(As for) those who say: Our Lord is Allah, then continue in the right way…’ (*Fussilat:* 30), and the disbelievers of whom Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The verdict has been passed on such people…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 18). The believers and the disbelievers, the obedient and the disobedient, each of them will have their reward according to their degree and rank: ‘…Everyone will be ranked according to their deeds…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 19). It is known that paradise has degrees, whilst the fire –we seek refuge in Allah – has descending steps. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely the hypocrites are in the lowest stage of the fire…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 145). However, here He has made degrees for both the believers and the disbelievers. How?

Some scholars are of the opinion that this is a means of mocking and ridiculing them and also of rebuking them, exactly as in Allah’s saying: ‘Hence, give them the tiding of a painful punishment’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 24). It is known that punishment is not something of which you give tidings. Tidings are only for things that bring joy and happiness. This is mocking, as in Allah’s saying: ‘Taste; you forsooth are the mighty, the honourable’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49). He *the Almighty* says this even though in this situation he, the disbeliever is humiliated, chastised, and scorned. Or, He called them degrees in order to vex them and increase their feelings of pain and grief. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…Allah will repay them in full for what they have done…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 19).

The word *wafa*ʾ (repay) means to give a complete reward without anything missing such as you saying: ‘I repaid (*waffaytu*) my debt to so-and-so,’ which means ‘I gave it to him in full.’ Allah’s saying: ‘…they will not be wronged,’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 19) means that nothing will be deducted from their rewards whatsoever.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَيَوْمَ يُعْرَضُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ أَذْهَبْتُمْ طَيِّبَٰتِكُمْ فِى حَيَاتِكُمُ ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَٱسْتَمْتَعْتُم بِهَا فَٱلْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ ٱلْهُونِ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ فِى
ٱلْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ ٱلْحَقِّ وَبِمَا كُنتُمْ تَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

On the Day when those who deny the truth are brought
before the Fire, it will be said to them, ‘You squandered
the good things you were given in your earthly life, you
took your fill of pleasure there, so on this Day a
punishment of shame is yours: you were arrogant on
earth without any right, and exceeded all limits’ [20]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 20)

The meaning here is: Remember, O Prophet Muhammad, the Day when those who have disbelieved will be brought before the fire. Thus, whenever you examine a circumstance, look for the event that takes place in it because time is not intrinsically praiseworthy or blameworthy. Rather, being praiseworthy or blameworthy is determined according to the action that takes place in it. The event here is that those who have disbelieved are being shown to the fire, but who is being shown to whom? The fire is not a rational being while the disbelievers are. The fire is being shown to them, exactly as you say: ‘I showed the material to the customer.’ However, on the Day of Resurrection, it will be made clear to them that the fire is a material being and they are the ones who will be shown to it. This is proved by Allah’s saying: ‘On the day that We will say to hell: Are you filled up? And it will say: Are there any more?’ (*Qaf:* 30) It is also affirmed by the Noble Hadith that it, i.e. the fire yearns for its people; the disbelievers and the disobedient, and that it speaks and articulates. The True Lord *the Almighty* address whatever He wants with whatever He wants. Therefore, we do not understand this verse according to human laws because Allah *the Almighty* has other laws with things. This is why if Allah *the Almighty* were to teach them to any of His creation, He would teach them and deal with them, as we have seen in the story of Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So We made Solomon to understand it…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 79). He understood the language of animals and birds. This is why when he heard the ant and understood it, he smiled and laughed at what it had said, and he thanked the One Who had bestowed this blessing upon him. Some scholars say that the verse contains an inversion, as if you were to say: ‘I showed the pond the camel.’ The actual fact is that you show the camel the pond, so that it can drink from it.

Allah’s saying: ‘…You squandered the good things you were given in your earthly life, you took your fill of pleasure there…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 20) means that this speech is said to them in the Hereafter after the Last Hour has been established, but there is another verse that some people think contradicts this. It is Allah’s saying: ‘The Fire; they shall be brought before it (every) morning and evening and on the day when the hour shall come to pass: Make pharaoh’s people enter the severest chastisement,’ (*Ghafir:* 46). They understand from this that the showing takes place in the life of this world because His saying: ‘…and on the day when the hour shall come to pass…’ (*Ghafir:* 46) is conjoined to it. However, the one who reflects on the verse will find that the showing is not in the life of this world and not in the Hereafter, but rather in the *barzakh* (life in the grave). How? It is because morning and evening are a result of the sun’s movement and the presence of night and day, and there is none of this in the Hereafter. In the Hereafter, there is no sun or moon, or night or day; Allah says: ‘On the day when the earth shall be changed into a different earth and the heavens (as well)…’ (*Ibrahim:* 48). In the worldly life, we live according to means. As for the Hereafter, we live according to the Will of Allah *the Almighty* the Original Founder of causes. The sun gives us light in the worldly life. As for the Hereafter, Allah says: ‘And the earth shall beam with the light of its Lord…’ (az-Zumar: 69). It is thus clear that *Al-‘Ard* will be in the grave. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and on the day when the hour shall come to pass: Make pharaoh’s people enter the severest chastisement.’ (*Ghafir:* 46) The Hereafter is not for showing, but rather for being admitted into the fire, as the showing in the first is not the showing in the second. What informs you that before they enter the fire it will be shown to them? This is due to the fact that *As-Sirat* (the bridge) is fixed over the surface of hell, so they are shown to the fire before they enter it. Allah's saying: '…You squandered the good things you were given in your earthly life, you took your fill of pleasure there…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20). This verse has solved some problems for us, in that we see that the people of disbelief and heresy have more wealth and embellishment than we do in the life of this world, and some people ask about the inventors and discoverers who are not Muslims and who served humanity with their knowledge. Will they have any reward for what they did? The answer is '…You squandered the good things you were given in your earthly life…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20). There is no share in the Hereafter left for them, as this is eternally decreed in Allah's Standard Practice that does not change. This is because Allah *the Almighty* has given means to the believers and the disbelievers. Whoever has done well with regards to the means will not be denied the fruits of his goodness even if he is a disbeliever; and whoever sits around and languishes will be denied, even if he is a believer because this is the gift of Lordship. As for those who provided this gift to humanity and served them in this way, were they thinking about Allah *the Almighty*? No, never. They were thinking about civilisation, progress and serving history and mankind, and they have taken their reward of having a reputation and legacy that perpetuates their memory. People have erected statues of them and written books about them. Therefore, take their reward from those whom they worked for, and that is the end of the matter. This is why Allah *the Almighty* says in describing the state of these people: 'And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full; and Allah is quick in reckoning' (*an-Nur:* 39). They are surprised that Allah *the Almighty* will hold them accountable for their deeds, even though they were not thinking about Him when they were doing their deeds. This is the state of the disbelievers. As for the believers, they do their deeds in the worldly life with an eye on the Hereafter. It has been transmitted that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* passed by the People of the Ledge (*As-Suffa*) and he found them wearing torn clothes with which they could not find anything to patch. So he said to them: ‘Which of your days is best? Is it today or the day you come with a massive grapevine and you go with a massive grapevine, you come in one suit of clothes and you go in another suit of clothes, and on your doors are veils like the veils of the *Kaʿba*?’(1) ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd Al-ʿAziz *may Allah be pleased with him* was well known, before he became a Caliph, as a pampered youth who had luxuries at his disposal, night and day. He would even wear silk, and the servants who would wash his clothes would take bribes from people to wash their clothes in the same water that the clothes of ‘Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* were washed in because of the how much perfume and musk they had in them. When he became the Caliph, he did without these luxuries and he lived a life of abstinence and asceticism, and he wore coarse clothes. When he was asked about this he said: ‘By Allah, if I wanted I could eat better than any of you and be better dressed than any of you, but I am storing up my delights for the Hereafter, (2) and even though I have a longing soul – he means, it desires betterment – it longed for leadership and when it had obtained it, it longed for the Caliphate; yet when it had obtained that, it longed for Paradise.’(3) This is why it has been transmitted from ʿAisha *may Allah be pleased with her* that she said: ‘A crescent moon passed followed by another crescent moon and then another crescent moon,’ meaning: three months passed, and no fire was lit in Muhammad’s house. It was said: ‘What do you eat?’ She said: ‘Water and dates.’(4) However, Prophet Muhammad

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(1) *See At-Tabarani, Al-Muʿjam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. (8086) from Talha ibn ʿAmr; see also Kanz Al-ʿUmmal, Hadith no. (6226-6236).*

(2) *This statement is mentioned in the sources and references as being attributed to ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab and not ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd Al-ʿAziz. The statement has been attributed to the former by At-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, Ar-Razi, An-Nasafi, An-Nisaburi, Az-Zamakhshari, As-Suyuti, Abu Bakr Al-Jazaʾiri and Al-Jasas in all of their Quranic commentaries.*

(3) In his *Al-Aghani,* Abu Al-Faraj Al-Asfahani mentioned that ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd Al-ʿAziz said to Dukayn: ‘Indeed my soul has never obtained anything without then longing for that which is superior to it. I obtained the utmost of the life of this world and then my soul longed for the Hereafter. By Allah, I have not deprived any of the people of their wealth and all I have is a thousand *dirhams,* so take half of it.’ *See Ibn Hamdun, At-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyya and Ibn Qutayba, Ash-Shiʿr wa Ash-Shuʿaraʾ in the chapter on Dukayn Ar-Rajiz.*

(4) *Agreed upon, authentic Hadith; see, Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no (2379, 5978); see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no (5282) from the Hadith of ʿAisha.*

Allah's peace and blessings be upon him had neighbours from the Helpers who used to give him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* some of their milk to drink. Therefore, the house of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was a model and example for the poor. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…in your earthly life (*dunya*)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20); by Allah, when you think of the meaning of the word *dunya* (the lowest), can you find any description that is lower and less than this? When you hear the word *dunya,* you must inevitably be reminded of its opposite, which then must be described as being *ʿulya* (the highest), and it is the life in which there is reward. Allah's saying: '…so on this Day a punishment of shame is yours…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20) means that on the Day of Resurrection, you will be punished for your deeds with the suffering of humiliation, means, disgrace and abasement because you were arrogant in the worldly life with regards to accepting the Truth. From this word *hun* (humiliation), we get the word *hawn* which is the device in which we crush things in the kitchen. It is a device that grinds crushes and pulverises the substance that is placed in it. It is as if the suffering that they will receive will crush their arrogance and make them humiliated and disgraced. Allah's saying: '…you were arrogant…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20) means that those deniers of the Truth will be punished because of their arrogance and self-exaltation with regards to accepting the Truth. As for Allah's saying: '…on earth without any right…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20), it proves that there is arrogance that is right, which is to show arrogance towards the arrogant. This is why it was said: 'Arrogance towards the arrogant is charity.'(1) This is why Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him* would wear a red death band in battle, and he would raise his sword and then walk between the rows in a haughty manner. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* looked at him and said: 'This is walk that Allah hates, except in this situation.'(2) And he said: 'May Allah have mercy on the person who makes himself look strong in front of them.'(1) We understand from the verses of the Noble Quran that the believer is not described as having one character and one outward form. Rather, the situation that he lives in dictates what character is suited to that situation. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves…' (*al-Fath:* 29). He *the Almighty* also says: '…lowly before the believers, mighty against the unbelievers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). Therefore, he is proud in one situation and humble in another situation, firm in one situation and full of mercy in another situation; he gathers between two opposites because the situation differs from one case to another. Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and exceeded all limits' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20). Therefore, there is arrogance and there is iniquity. Arrogance is to be conceited towards accepting the Truth, while *fisq* (iniquity) means to take a date out of its skin. In their evenness, dates have life spans. When they reach their complete size, they begin to have a red or yellow colour, and then they moisten and have a skin. If they are in dry climate, they become hard and dry and the skin sticks to the flesh of the date, and these are the best kinds of dates. The meaning of *fisq* here is to leave the way of obedience; and when you reflect on arrogance and iniquity; you find that they bring together the deeds of the heart and the deeds of the limbs. Man has a heart and an outward form; the heart is the place of secrets and hidden things and it is also the place of sincerity or ostentation, the place of humility or self-exaltation, as arrogance is from the deeds of the heart. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them…' (*an-Naml:* 14). As for iniquity, it is to exit from obedience which is concerned with the deeds of the limbs.

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(1) In his *Rasaʾil Al-Intiqad* (1/9), *Ibn Sharaf Al-Qayrawani* mentioned that: 'Treat this category of people by turning away from them, turning your nose up at them and not mentioning them or thinking about them, it means, arrogance, even if you are not from the people of arrogance.' As for those who understand it to be a *Hadith*, this is not correct.

(2) *See At-Tabarani, Al-Muʿjam Al-Kabir, Hadith no (6388); Abu Naʿim, Maʿrifat As-Sahaba, Hadith no. (3220).*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *See Ibn Kathir, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, (4/430) and Subul Al-Huda wa Ar-Rashad, (5/192) and As-Suhayli, Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf, (4/113).*

وَٱذۡكُرۡ أَخَا عَادٍ إِذۡ أَنذَرَ قَوۡمَهُۥ بِٱلۡأَحۡقَافِ وَقَدۡ خَلَتِ ٱلنُّذُرُ مِنۢ بَيۡنِ يَدَيۡهِ وَمِنۡ
خَلۡفِهِۦٓ أَلَّا تَعۡبُدُوٓاْ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ عَذَابَ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٖ ٢١

Mention [Hud] of the tribe of ʹ Ad: he warned his people among the sand dunes – other warners have come and gone both before and after him –‘ Worship no one but God: I fear for you, that you will be punished on a terrible Day’ [21] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 21)

Allah’s saying: ‘Mention…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 21) means: ‘Remember, O Prophet Muhammad’; it is as if this reminder has come to remind him *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* of the situations that his brothers from among the Messengers went through in the procession of faith. The meaning thus is ‘look at those who came before you and what they had to bear for the sake of the call. Thus, you are nothing new with regards to the Messengers.’ Indeed, they bore with difficulty and harm, but Allah spoke the truth when He promised to give them victory in the end. This is why you notice in the style of the Noble Quran that the number of times the one story is mentioned is according to the number of events that happen to the Messenger. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith…’ (*Hud:* 120). Whenever something happened to Allah’s Messenger and his people, Allah would remind him of one of the situations of the previous Prophets *peace be upon them*, in order to reassure him and make his heart firm upon the truth. As long as every Prophet was exposed to harm in accordance with his mission, then there is no doubt that you will be the Messenger that is exposed to the most harm because you are the last of all of them. Allah’s saying: ‘…the tribe of ʿAd…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 21) refers to Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him.* He *the Almighty* says: ‘And to ‘Ad (We sent) their brother Hud…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 65). The word *akha* (brother) has two plural forms: *ikhwa* and *ikhwan*. *Ikhwa* refers to brotherhood of lineage, as in Allah’s saying: ‘And Yusuf’s brothers came…’ (*Yusuf:* 58). As for *ikhwan*, it refers to the brotherhood of a way, religion, and values, a meaning which is clear in Allah’s saying: ‘… (they shall be) as brethren, on raised couches, face to face’ (*al-Hijr:* 47). Thus, Allah’s saying: ‘…that brother of [the tribe of] ʿAd…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 21) means their brother in lineage, and ʿAd is the tribe or the community to whom Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* was sent. The genitive construction in Allah's saying: '…that brother of [the tribe of] ʿAd…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21) is a means of softening them and invoking feelings of mercy and kinship, as the one who came to them was not a stranger to them. He was in fact a brother of theirs. A Divine Way of Guidance came to them that went against what they were upon, and their Prophet wanted to get them out of the misguidance and corruption to which they had become accustomed. A brother never cheats his brother regardless of whether their brotherhood is one of lineage or one of religion, way, and values. Therefore, they must receive his call with the affection that brotherhood requires. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Mention [Hud] of the tribe of 'Ad: he warned his people among the sand dunes…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21). The ʿAd are a bygone group of Arabs that lived in sand dunes in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The word *ahqaf* (sand dunes) is the plural of the word *hiqf* which means that sand spread out; it becomes taller and shorter and it also moves right and left, here and there. Sand, due to its fineness, is moved by wind and windstorms very easily such that one gust from a windstorm in this place would bury and cover a caravan in this valley. This is why, even until now, the remains of the people of ʿAd have not emerged because they are buried over vast distances under the sand. Likewise, ancient ruins in every place are only found under the earth during excavations because the factors of erosion bury them. This is why if one of us was to travel, for example, and leave his home for a number of months, he would return and find it covered in a layer of dust even if it is locked as best as possible. So, what do you think about the empty space with the winds and windstorms blowing? In the chapter of *al-Fajr*, the True Lord *the Almighty* gives us a glimpse of the history of these communities and the punishment that befell them, saying: 'Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with 'Ad, [6] (The people of) Iram, possessors of lofty buildings, [7] The like of which were not created in the (other) cities; [8] And (with) Thamud, who hewed out the rocks in the valley, [9] And (with) Pharaoh, the lord of hosts, [10] Who committed inordinacy in the cities, [11] So they made great mischief therein? [12] Therefore your Lord let down upon them a portion of the chastisement. [13] Most sure your Lord is watching [14]' (*al-Fajr:* 7-14). Until now, we do not know where their homes are or where their remains are, except what Allah *the Almighty* has informed us of, and this is because they are spread out over vast distances inside the earth. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…other warners have come and gone both before and after him…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21). This means that he is not the first Messenger to come to them and he is not the last, as Messengers have passed: '…other warners have come and gone both before and after him…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21). The word *nudhur* (admonisher) is the plural of *nadheer* which means the person who instils fear in you and alerts you about evil before it is time. The benefit of warning is that it makes you aware of danger before it happens so that you can avoid it and the warning must be made some time before the occurrence of the evil so that you are able to take steps to prevent the matter and avoid falling into it. Allah's saying: '…Worship no one but Allah…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21) means that this issue is one that all the Messengers *peace be upon them* agree on, before Hud (Eber) and after him *peace be upon him*. No religion has come except to serve this issue and call people to it. Worship, as I have explained, means that the slave obeys the commands and prohibitions of the object of worship and this meaning invalidating and nullifying the worship of other than Allah *the Almighty*. This is because they are all false gods and worship of them is false, as they are gods with no way and no commands or prohibitions. What has the sun ever said to those who worship it? What has it ever commanded or prohibited? What reward has it prepared for those who worship it? What has it prepared for those who disbelieve in it? So you ask: 'Why have people worshipped it and worshipped other things?' I say: 'It is because worship is a natural inclination within man, ever since Allah *the Almighty* has created him, and since he was in the atomic world.' However, true worship has requirements and responsibilities that curb the defiance of people and keep their desires in check. This is why some people have resorted to a form of worship that satisfies their natural inclination for worship and excuses them with regards to the requirements of true religion. Thus, they go to false gods and worship them because they do not require anything of them and they do not make them legally responsible for anything and their desires have free rein.

Allah says: '…I fear for you, that you will be punished on a terrible Day' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21). This fear is a requirement of brotherhood, as a brother is eager for the benefit of his brother and eager for his salvation. This is why Allah *the*

Almighty says about Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers (he is) compassionate' (*at-Tawba:* 128). Here, the day of suffering is described as an awesome day and in your daily lives you describe some things as being awesome. This awesomeness in your material existence will eventually come to an end, regardless of how long it lasts. Likewise, every blessing in this worldly life will cause trouble for its owner in one of two ways: either the blessing will escape him, or he will escape the blessing and leave it when he dies. Thus, this day is described as awesome because it is permanent and never-ending, and the one experiencing it will never die and thus have respite from it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُوٓاْ أَجِئۡتَنَا لِتَأۡفِكَنَا عَنۡ ءَالِهَتِنَا فَأۡتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَآ إِن كُنتَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ٢٢

But they said, 'Have you come to turn us away from our gods? If what you say is true, bring down that punishment you threaten us with!' [22] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 22)

The speech here is about the people of Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* for when they were called to worship Allah Alone, '…they said, 'Have you come to turn us away from our gods…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 22)? This is in reference to their so-called gods. The word *ifk* means to turn something on its face, to turn the truth into falsehood, and truthfulness into lying. A variation of this word is found in Allah's saying: 'And the overthrown cities did He overthrow,' (*an-Najm:* 53) and they are the towns that Allah turned upside down. Allah's saying: '…bring down that punishment you threaten us with…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 22) refers to the suffering they will face in the Hereafter. The suffering that He *the Almighty* is promising them with is not coming immediately. Rather, it is on the Day of Resurrection, but they are hastening it. This is why He addresses them with this statement: 'And when it comes to pass, will you believe in it? What! Now (you believe), and already you wished to have it hastened on,' (*Yunus:* 51) and He *the Almighty* also says: '(It is) the day on which they shall be tried at the fire [13] Taste your persecution! This is what you would hasten on [14]' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 13-14).

They are hastening the suffering because they do not believe in it and they deny it. If they had believed in it, they would not have hastened it.

Then he responded to them with the normal answer:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا ٱلۡعِلۡمُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَأُبَلِّغُكُم مَّآ أُرۡسِلۡتُ بِهِۦ وَلَٰكِنِّيٓ أَرَىٰكُمۡ قَوۡمٗا تَجۡهَلُونَ ٢٣

He said, 'Only God knows when it will come: I simply
convey to you the message I am sent with but I can see
you are an insolent people' [23] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 23)

That is, the knowledge of the Last Hour rests with Allah *the Almighty* alone: '…none will reveal its time except Him…' (*al-A'raf:* 187), and I am only a Messenger conveying to you what my Lord has sent me with: '…but I see that you are a people given to ignorance!' (*al-Ahqaf:* 23)

The summation of the matter is that you are ignorant. In other words, ignorant of matters relating to truth. Ignorance constituted the greatest problem faced by the Messengers of Allah *peace be upon them*. Some people think that ignorance is lack of knowledge, but ignorance is knowledge that contradicts the truth.

Therefore, we said that an illiterate person who knows nothing and lacks a cause or subject in life is in a less worse situation than an ignorant person. This is because his mind is empty; when he receives information, he accepts it. In the case of an ignorant person, the knowledge he possesses contradicts the truth, so he needs to be emptied of it first. Consequently, calling him to the truth is more difficult.

Allah's saying: '…I convey to you that wherewith I have been sent…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 23) means to say: I have not come of my own accord. Rather, I have been summoned to call you to Allah, so the action must be attributed to the One Who does it. '…I have been sent…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 23), that is, from Allah *the Almighty* as we said with regards to 'Exalted is He Who took His Servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque (in Mecca) to the *Aqsa Mosque* (in Jerusalem)…' (*al-Isra':* 1). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say: 'I travelled by night' but rather 'I was taken for a journey by night.'

This means that they were lying when they said: ‘…have you come to us…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 22) because he did not come of his own accord, Rather, he was sent by Allah *the Almighty* to convey His Message: ‘…and the duty of the Messenger is only to convey (the Message) plainly’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 18). That is, I am only sent to deliver the Message, and I do not know when the punishment will come. The only One Who knows it is the One Who can inflict it.

‘…But I see that you are a people given to ignorance!’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 23) This means that you are ignorant of the fact that the Messenger has come to convey Allah’s Message. He does not know when the punishment will be inflicted on those who deny Him.

فَلَمَّا رَأَوۡهُ عَارِضٗا مُّسۡتَقۡبِلَ أَوۡدِيَتِهِمۡ قَالُواْ هَٰذَا عَارِضٞ مُّمۡطِرُنَاۚ
بَلۡ هُوَ مَا ٱسۡتَعۡجَلۡتُم بِهِۦۖ رِيحٞ فِيهَا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ٢٤

When they saw a cloud approaching their valley, they said, ‘This cloud will give us rain!’ ‘No indeed! It is what you wanted to hasten: a storm wind bearing a painful punishment [24] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 24)

After they had hastened the punishment by saying: ‘…bring us that with which you threaten us, if you are one of the truthful’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24), a torment came to them in the form of a cloud. ‘So when they saw it as a cloud appearing in the sky…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24), that is, a cloud obstructing the air in the sky advancing ‘…towards their valleys…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24), that is, coming towards them ‘…they said, ‘this is a cloud which will give us rain’...’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24), that is, they thought it was a normal cloud that would pour rain on their valleys and bring them goodness. Therefore, the pronoun ‘it’ in ‘…so when they saw it…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24) is referring to the cloud because it is identifiable from the context; the proof being their statement ‘which will give us rain.’ Only clouds bring rain. Thus, the context proves that it is a cloud.

In its style, the Noble Quran often relies on the context to clarify what the pronoun is referring to, leaving the matter to the discernment of the intellect. You can read, for example: ‘And if Allah were to punish people for that which they earned, He would not leave a moving (living) creature on its surface…' (*Fatir:* 45). What is meant here is the surface of the earth even though it is not mentioned in the context. But the earth is what crosses the mind, as nothing else can be understood from the statement.

The rule is that the pronoun must have an antecedent reference. There is no third-person pronoun that does not have a referent except in one case which is if the absent third-person refers to the Absolute Unseen, and that is the True Lord *the Exalted*. They deduced this from His statement: 'Say: He (*huwa*) is Allah, the One,' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), where the pronoun '(*huwa*; he)' refers to Allah *the Almighty* because it can only refer to Him. You may say: 'Zayd came and I honoured him,' that is, I honoured Zayd. Also, when you say: 'Fatima came and I honoured her.' The pronoun 'her' refers to Fatima, and so forth. The reference of the pronoun has the same antecedent. Such as when I say: 'A man came to me and I honoured him,' that is, I honoured the man. The pronoun can also refer to other than the referent such as when I say: 'I gave charity of a *dirham* and half of it.' The 'it' in 'half of 'it' does not refer to the aforementioned dirham, but rather to a *dirham* like it. Therefore, it refers to half a *dirham* like it.

However, why did they think that the dense, looming cloud would bring them rain? Some scholars said: 'It is because they were in drought and famine, and they were waiting for water. Then they saw a cloud obstructing the horizon, and they noticed that it was dark and moving slowly. These are the signs of a rain cloud, because the slowest bucket is the one that is full and overflowing. Likewise, the slowest cloud is the one that is most burdened. The slowness of the cloud indicated that it was carrying water and they were looking up for rain, so they thought it was rain. Therefore, it gave them the hope of rainfall, as all the signs indicated this. Then, their hopes were suddenly dashed. When hopes are raised and then suddenly dashed, this causes a kind of grief and sorrow, which is called 'despair following hope.'

This, on its own, is a method of torture used, for example, by those in charge of punishing in prisons. They deny the inmate water until his thirst becomes intense, and he pleads for something to drink. Then the soldier comes with a cup of water and brings it close to him until it is touching his lips, and then he throws it on the ground. This is a form of pain and torture. It would have been less painful if he had not brought the water in the first place. Indeed, bringing the water in front of him causes a greater hardship than that of thirst.

The same goes for these people. They were looking up for rain and they said: ‘It will relieve us of the drought that we are in,’ and then suddenly it sent torment down upon them instead of water. It turned out to be the very punishment that they had denied and asked that it come upon them swiftly. ‘…Nay! It is what you sought to hasten on…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24), that is, the punishment came in the form of ‘…a wind in which is a painful punishment’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24).

We said that when the word (*rih*; wind) appears in the singular form, it indicates that it is carrying punishment and evil. Thus, Allah’s statement (‘…a wind…’) means that it is a general punishment, and then He breaks it down into detail: ‘…in which is a painful punishment’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24). But if the word is plural, i.e. (*riyah*; winds), then it indicates goodness; as in Allah’s statement: ‘…and in the turning about of the winds…’ (*al-Jathiya:* 5) because the alteration of the wind direction moves clouds, drives ships, pollinates flowers and so forth. Hence says the supplication made at the time of heavy wind, mentioned in the Hadith: ‘O Allah, make it winds, and not a wind.’(1)

We previously explained that the winds are a power and force that bring benefit when they come from all directions, and they are destructive when they come from one direction. Creating a vacuum of air is now a science that has laws, and people use it in demolition.

Furthermore, air itself is an essential aspect of life; without it there would not be any life. This is why Allah *the Almighty* has made it general and widespread in the universe. No one can own it as some people own food, for example. This is because if the owner of the air were to deny you it for a moment, you would die, as opposed to water and food, for example.

Then, after that, Allah *the Almighty* goes into detail with the words: ‘…a wind in which is a painful punishment’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 24).

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(1) *It was narrated on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that when the wind blew, the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him would turn his face towards it, keel, stretch out his hands and say: ‘O Allah, I beg of You the good of this wind and the good of that which has been sent therewith. And I seek refuge with You from its evil and the evil of that which has been sent therewith. O Allah make it a mercy, not a torment. O Allah, make it winds, not a wind.’ [Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir 11368].*

تُدَمِّرُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍۭ بِأَمْرِ رَبِّهَا فَأَصْبَحُوا۟ لَا يُرَىٰٓ إِلَّا
مَسَـٰكِنُهُمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Which will destroy everything by its Lord's command.'
In the morning there was nothing to see except their
[ruined] dwellings: this is how We repay the guilty [25]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 25)

The words 'Destroying everything…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25) means devastating '…everything…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25), that is, nothing at all was left of them. '…By the Command of its Lord…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25), that is, its Creator and the One Who sets it in motion, as it does not destroy by its own nature, but rather by Allah's Command to it. So instead of bringing them goodness, it brought them evil. Thus, the wind needed an additional command from Allah *the Almighty* to be transformed into an evil force that destroys instead of builds.

Only Allah *the Almighty* controls this matter. Only the Creator of the wind *the Exalted* can bring it out of its nature, as He brought the fire out of its nature in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* said to it: 'O fire, be coolness and safety upon Ibrahim' (*al-Anbiya':* 69).

Therefore, the wind responded to its Lord's Command and it destroyed them utterly, leaving nothing of their belongings behind except for the ruins of their houses. '…So they became such that nothing could be seen except their dwellings!' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25) But why were their dwellings allowed to remain?

The scholars said: 'In order to be a lesson for other people and vivid signs of their past existence and of the punishment that befell them, even though these towns are buried under the earth. These people, as we said, lived in a valley of sands, called *Ahqaf*, and these sands are what buried them.

The scholars also narrated that when Allah *the Almighty* wanted to destroy them and inflict them with the storm wind, the first person to see the approaching torment was a woman among them. She saw her house flying in the air like a bird.

Once the torment came upon them suddenly, they entered their houses, seeking shelter inside from the severity of the storms. But the wind rushed in right after them, and the sands came in until they had buried them inside. The wind that buried them is the same wind that exposed them and brought out their corpses so that the people could learn a lesson from them. Then they were thrown into the sea.

'…Thisis how…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25) means in this way or manner '…We recompense the guilty people' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25). So the requital was not unjust or aggressive, but rather, it was requital in kind and measure. They deserved this torment because they were wrongdoers.

As for those who believed in Prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* and affirmed his call, he protected them from the torment by drawing a line around their houses. It was as if his silent supplication was: 'O Lord! These are the people who have believed in my call, so save and protect them,' and so Allah *the Almighty* saved them.

Allah's statement: '…thus do We recompense the guilty people,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25) is a warning and admonition for the disbelievers of Quryash meaning: 'O disbelievers of Quraysh, take a lesson from those who denied the Messengers before you. This is the requital of every disbeliever who goes against Allah's Way and denies His Messengers. This is a real example in front of you

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّٰهُمْ فِيمَآ إِن مَّكَّنَّٰكُمْ فِيهِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ سَمْعًا وَأَبْصَٰرًا وَأَفْـِٔدَةً
فَمَآ أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُمْ سَمْعُهُمْ وَلَآ أَبْصَٰرُهُمْ وَلَآ أَفْـِٔدَتُهُم مِّن شَىْءٍ إِذْ كَانُوا۟
يَجْحَدُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَحَاقَ بِهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

We had established them in a way we have not established you [people of Mecca]; We gave them hearing, sight, and hearts, yet their hearing, sight, and hearts were of no use to them, since they denied God's revelations. They were overwhelmed by the punishment they had mocked [26] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 26)

This is an address to the Quraysh and draws their attention to the following: These deniers from the people of `Ad were more powerful than you. They surpassed you in material power and were better than you in respect of wealth, goods and outward appearance. They left a stronger impact on the earth, and built it up. They had one of the greatest civilisations in the history of this world.

‘Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with (the tribe of) `Ad, [with] Iram – who had lofty pillars, the likes of whom had never been created in the land?’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-8) Despite all that, this was their end. Their power availed them nothing and their civilisation did not defend them in the slightest against Allah’s punishment. You are not more powerful than them. Thus, take heed from what happened to those who denied their Messenger. Take heed, lest you be afflicted with what afflicted them.

Allah’s statement: ‘We had established them securely in a manner in which We have never established you…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 26) means: We (Allah) enabled and empowered the people of `Ad. The word *tamkin* (enabling, giving power) means that We gave them power and ability and We granted them the means and resources of the life of this world so that they could do what no other nation had done.

The Arabic word (*inn*) in the part saying: ‘…in a manner in which We have never (*inn*) established you…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 26) is for negation, as in Allah’s statement: ‘…they are not [consequently] their mothers. Their mothers are none (*inn*) but those who gave birth to them…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 2). That is, their only mothers are those who gave birth to them. Here (the word stresses that) We empowered them in a way that We have not empowered you, and We granted them means that We have not granted you. Then ‘…and We had endowed them with hearing, and sight, and hearts: but neither their hearing, nor their sight, nor their hearts were of the least avail to them…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 26).

Hearing, sight and the heart are the chief means of perception in mankind. Every time they are mentioned in the Noble Quran, they are found in this form: hearing (*sam`*) is singular, while sight (*absar*) and hearts (*af’idah*) are plural.

This is an example of the subtleties of expression in the Noble Quran. Hearing is not made plural because a sound is heard by everyone, as if we were one person hearing. You may be able to see the source of the sound or not see it, but you still hear it.

As for the sight, it differs from one person to the next. One person sees, while another person does not see. One person has sharp vision while another person has weak vision, and a third person is one-eyed. Therefore, sights differ, and hearts differ as well when it comes to how things are received.

The science of physiology has confirmed that the ear is the first organ that functions in a child immediately after birth. As for the eye, it starts to see between three and ten days after birth, and then after that the intellect starts working.

This is the natural order of how these organs, which are the means of perception, start functioning. Due to the importance of hearing, Allah *the Almighty* made it the first of these sense organs to function, as it is the first organ to receive cognitions after birth. It is also the sense whose task never stops, even during sleep.

The eye, for example, does not see during sleep. As for the ear, it hears because it is the means of being woken up from sleep. Therefore, it must always be prepared to receive and hear.

We have realized this issue in the story of the People of the Cave, when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So We cast [a cover of sleep] over their ears within the cave for a number of years’ (*al-Kahf:* 11). This is because the cave was located in a desert in which there were many unsettling sounds at night, in addition to the sounds of thunder, lightning, and wind. If their ears had been allowed to function normally, these sounds would have disturbed them, but Allah *the Almighty* drew a veil over their ears so that they would not hear.

Because hearing is the means of receiving and accepting that which has been conveyed from Allah *the Almighty* He made it the first of these senses to function. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made it a standard practice (*sunna*) for us to give the call to prayer in the child’s ear as soon as it has been born.(1)

If the ear were not functioning at this time, the commandment would be in vain. If you said, for example: ‘Does the child understand this?’ we would say: ‘Yes, it understands because of the covenant that was taken from Adam *peace be upon him* while we were still in the particle stage.’

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(1) *The Hadith referred to was narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi, who declared it authentic on the authority of Abu Rafi` who said: ‘I saw the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him announcing the adhan (the call to prayer) in the ears of Al-Hassan ibn `Ali when Fatima gave birth to him may Allah be pleased with them.’*

Therefore, the first thing that the parents must be concerned with is to make the child hear this call: '*Allahu Akbar*, *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest) ' of everything else. This is the nucleus of faith around which all the bases of faith revolve.

You still remember our discussion regarding Allah's statement: 'But [there is many a one] who says to his parents [whenever they try to persuade him to believe in Allah], 'Fie upon you both…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 17). What are these parents preoccupied with at this stage of their child's life? They are not thinking about primary school and then secondary school and university, at all. They are concerned with that which is most worthy and most important, which is religion and creed. This is the first concern with regards to small children so that they grow up in accordance with it. This is why we receive the newborn children with the words of the call to prayer in order to instil it within them, while their minds are clear and their hearts are pure. Thus, these words take root in the children and establish themselves securely in them, and they never leave them. A poet (1) once expressed:

Passion for her came to me before I knew what passion was

So it came across a heart that was empty, and it established itself securely (2)

We said that hearing precedes sight, and this is in the life of this world. But in the Hereafter, people will say: '…our Lord, we have seen and heard…' (*as-Sajda:* 12). Thus, sight here precedes hearing because when the Resurrection occurs the human shall be surprised by a horrible sight, so he sees before he hears.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says in describing the people of `Ad: '…but neither their hearing, nor their sight, nor their hearts were of the least avail to them…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 26). So they heard, but it was as if they did not hear. And they saw, but it was as if they did not see. For they did not benefit anything from this, as Allah, *the Exalted and Glorious*, says: ‘And We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness…’ (*al-Isra’:* 46). Consequently, their hearts became empty; Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘…and their hearts are void.’ (*Ibrahim:* 43)

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(1) The poet in question was Qays ibn Al-Mulawwih ibn Mazahim Al-`Amiri. He was a romantic poet from the people of Najd and was nicknamed *Majnun Layla* (Layla's madman) because of his ardent love for Layla bint Sa`d Al-Akhiliyya. Her father kept her away from him until he was found lying dead among some rocks. He was then taken back to his family, and this was in the year 68 A.H. *[Al-Mawsu`a Ash-Shi`riyyah]*

(2) The verse is from a poem on the *tawil* meter, and it consists of two verses, the first of which is: Despite being kept away from her for long, the further I get
The keener are my ears and eyes for her

‘And surely, We have created many of the jinn and mankind for Hell. They have hearts wherewith they understand not, they have eyes wherewith they see not, and they have ears wherewith they hear not (the truth). They are like cattle, nay even more astray; those! They are the heedless ones’ (*al-A‘raf:* 179). However, what is the connection between hearing, seeing and the heart, and why has Allah *the Almighty* stated them together? Scholars said: It is because hearing realizes that which is heard, seeing realizes that which is seen, and from these recognitions the human can form thoughts and then present them to the intellect to choose from and compare between their constituents. So, it takes the good and leaves the bad, and takes that which is right and leaves that which is wrong, and takes that which agrees with the Revealed Law and leaves that which contravenes it.

When it settles upon a matter, it gives it to the heart so that it can be instilled therein. Thus, the creed is firmly established and does not budge, and the faith does not waver and does not go back to the intellect to be discussed once again. Therefore, the heart is where one’s beliefs are located.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Indeed, in the body there is a lump of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart.’(1) This is because the heart is the vessel that carries the fluid of life and pumps it to all the parts of the body. When it is filled with faith, it pumps this faith, along with the blood, to all the parts of the body, and thus one’s conduct and actions come about in accordance with this faith, and every sense carries out its task accurately.

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith… It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (50), Muslim in his Sahih (2996), and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (3974); all of them were based on the Hadith of Nu`man ibn Bashir which starts as follows: ‘Verily, the lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honor…’*

In this way you find that the One Who gives you life does not grant you that which obstructs you from Him, or that which hinders you in implementing His Way. For this, you must read: 'And when they hear ill speech, they withdraw from it and say, 'To us our deeds, and to you your deeds. Peace be to you. We seek not the ignorant' (*al-Qasas:* 55).

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And it has already been revealed to you in the Book (this Quran) that when you hear the Verses of Allah being denied and mocked at, then sit not with them, until they engage in a talk other than that; (but if you stayed with them) certainly in that case you would be like them. Surely, Allah will collect the hypocrites and disbelievers all together in Hell' (*an-Nisa':* 140).

Therefore, when faith is securely established in the heart of the person nothing issues from it except that which agrees with the requirements of faith, in word and deed, and all his activities in life are stamped with this stamp. As for the people of `Ad whom we are discussing, they did not benefit from hearing their Messenger nor from the signs of the universe that they saw around them. They did not taste, therefore, the flavour of faith in Allah *the Almighty*.

The part saying: '…seeing that they went on rejecting Allah's signs…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 26) means that they used to deny them and turn away from them. If they had believed, Allah *the Almighty* would have opened their hearts. But because they chose disbelief and they preferred it, Allah *the Almighty* sealed their hearts, their hearing and their sight. Allah *the Almighty* helped them with what they wanted. This is because He is a Lord Who gives His slave what he wants.

Therefore we advise every woman who excessively grieves over losing someone dear to her: 'Be wary of this. Leave the realm of grief and do not become accustomed to it. Do not look at what has been taken from you but look at what remains. If you do not, Allah will prolong your grief and take away from you what you already have.' This is an important lesson, which is that if something bad afflicts something dear to you, do not look at what the affliction has taken away, but rather look at what you still have. This will help alleviate your grief and keep you from falling into anguish and despair. Then you will find that what remains is greater, and that your affliction is less than other people's afflictions.

This is why when the people came to the Chinese sage and complained to him about the toils and anxieties of life, he said to them: ‘Let each one of you write down his worries and troubles on a piece of paper. Then, put your pieces of paper in this box and come back to me after a week.’ After a week the complainers came back and he said to the first: ‘Put your hand in and take a piece of paper out of the box,’ and so he took a piece of paper. When he looked at it he said: ‘No, I want my piece of paper.’ Why? It is because he found that his calamity was less serious than someone else’s calamity. The common people translated this into in the maxim: ‘Whoever sees the trials of people feels that his own trial pales in comparison.’

It has been narrated that `Urwah ibn Az-Zubayr (1) travelled to see the Umayyad Caliph(2) in Greater Syria. On the way he injured his leg and he could not find anyone to treat it until he reached Damascus. There they found that the wound had festered and there was no solution but to amputate the leg. So, they tried to find an anaesthetic, but he said: ‘No. I do not want to be heedless of my Lord for the blink of an eye. Instead, leave me until I have started praying.’ When he had entered into prayer, they cut off his leg and he did not feel anything. Then they took it and shrouded it, and he said to them: ‘Give it to me.’ When he held it in his hands, he said: ‘O Allah, if you have afflicted me in one limb, You have protected the rest of my limbs.’(3)

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(1) His name was `Urwah ibn Az-Zubayr ibn Al-`Awam Al-Qurashi, the jurist scholar (*faqih*) and one of the seven main Jurists of Medina. He was the son of Asma’ bint Abu Bakr. He was born in the year 24 A.H. and he died in the year 94 A.H. at the age of 70. *[Al-Wafi bil Wafyat vol. 6, p. 359]*

(2) The Umayyad Caliph that `Urwah went to see was Al-Walid ibn `Abd Al-Malik.

(3) He sustained an ulcer in his leg. During the assembly of Al-Walid, they advised him to cut it off; otherwise, his whole body would be affected by gangrene. When they summoned the amputator to cut off his leg, they said: ‘Let us make you drink some intoxicant (wine) to stop you from feeling the pain.’ He said: ‘I would not resort to anything forbidden for the cure I am seeking.’ They said: ‘Let us give you a soporific.’ He said: ‘I hate to be deprived of a part of me without feeling the pain of it and so lose the reward of having patience over it.’ Some people then came in to him, and he disapprovingly asked: ‘Who are they?’ They replied: ‘To hold you still for pain may drive away patience.’ So he said: ‘Let me pray.’ When he would pray, he would get preoccupied by prayer away from himself.’ And so it was amputated while he was praying. *[Al-Wafi bil Wafyat vol. 6, p. 359].*

Indeed, does the person who is absorbed in Allah's Company feel any pain? We must believe in these reports and not deem them to be farfetched because it is from the secrets of the ear that if you completely close your ears (from outside noise), you will not feel pain. If you try and you still feel some pain, know that you have not sealed your ears completely.

The call of '*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest [and more important than everything])' is that which takes you away from the work of the life of this world and places you in front of Allah *the Almighty*. It is the Opening *Takbir* (saying: *Allahu Akbar*) with which you disengage yourself from all things to commence the prayer. We explained before that working and engaging in significant pursuits is considered great, but Allah is the Greatest. Thus, let no one deem working in the life of this world and striving and extracting its treasures to be insignificant because the life of this world is too important to be forgotten about. But at the same time it is not important enough to be our final objective.

Whoever traces the story of the people of `Ad throughout the Noble Quran will find that it is mentioned in several chapters. Here it is mentioned in a general and succinct manner, while the incidents of this story are narrated in detail in the chapter of *Hud.* Also the brief depiction of the punishment that befell them, which is mentioned here, is described in more detail in the chapter of *al-Haqqah*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And as for `Ad, they were destroyed by a furious violent wind which Allah imposed on them for seven nights and eight days in succession so that you could see men lying overthrown (destroyed), as if they were hollow trunks of date-palms! Do you see any remnants of them?' (*al-Haqqa:* 6-8)

The wind that destroyed them was a storm wind (*rih sarsar*), that is, a fierce wind with a disturbing sound, coming upon them from above for seven nights and eight days without cessation.

The word *husum* (used to describe the days; translated as succession) is the plural of *hasim*. It derives from the word *hasimah* and this implies that their issue was conclusively settled and that was the end of the matter. There was nothing left of them.

If you were to ask: why did Allah *the Almighty* say: '…for seven nights and eight days…' (*al-Haqqa:* 7), when the norm in legislation is that the night precede the day, and timing starts with the night-time and not the daytime? The proof is that we confirm the beginning of *Ramadan* according to the night (based on moon sighting), so before we start to fast, we start to offer night prayers (*tarawih*).

This is why they made it a juristic conundrum: what is the *sunna* (an act recommended by the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*) that precedes the *fard* (obligatory act)? It appears that the torment descended upon them at dawn, then the day began, and it ended at sunset. This is how it went on for seven nights and eight days in succession.

The orientalists stopped at this verse and objected to how the Noble Quran makes numbers feminine when the counted noun is masculine, and vice versa. '…For seven nights and eight days (*sab`a layalin wa-thamaniyata ayyamin*)…' (*al-Haqqa:* 7).

The rule in Arabic grammar is that the numbers three to nine are the opposite of the counted noun in terms of being masculine or feminine, and there is a rationale behind this. The default position of every word is the masculine, so you say *katib* (writer). As for the feminine, it needs a sign to distinguish it, so they add the letter *ta'* to it, and thus we say *katibah*.

Thus, the feminine is a branch of the masculine, and this is why it needs something to distinguish it. As for the terms used to express numbers three to nine, their default position is to be feminine, so we say: *thalatha* (three), *arba`ah* (four), *khamsah* (five) and so forth.

When a number comes with a masculine counted noun, both words remain in their original form, and with the feminine it needs a sign. So, instead of adding another sign, they chose to remove the sign that indicates the feminine.

This is how the numbers have come to contradict their counted nouns with regards to being masculine and feminine. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for seven nights and eight days…' (*al-Haqqa:* 7).

Also, there is the fact that, according to astronomers, a day is calculated from one point in time until the same point in time on the following day. This is why we find them at one o'clock in the afternoon saying: 'One o'clock in the evening,' even though we are still in the middle of the day. The same goes for one hour after midnight. They say: 'One o'clock in the morning' even though we are still in the middle of the night. As for the day in legislation, it is counted from sunrise to sunset, and the night from sunset to sunrise.

We notice that this chapter has mentioned some scenes from Hud's (Eber's) *peace be upon him* story, but its details are found in the chapter named after him, which is the chapter of *Hud*. It goes into a lot of incidents that are not narrated here.

In the chapter at hand, the context focuses on three scenes or issues which are: the call to worship Allah *the Almighty* alone; warning against worshipping other than Him because by worshipping other than Him, they would expose themselves to punishment; and the fact that he was their brother and was keen on their salvation. Then they responded to him: 'They said, 'Have you come to turn us away from our gods? Then bring us that with which you threaten us, if you are one of the truthful!' (*al-Ahqaf:* 22)

As for the chapter of *Hud*, it adds more scenes in the portrayal of the story as Allah *the Almighty* says there: 'And to `Ad [We sent] their brother Hud. He said, 'O my people worship Allah; you have no god other than Him…' (*Hud:* 50). This agrees with the verses we have in this chapter. Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* also said: '…Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a terrible Day,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21) and he said: '…you are not but inventors [of falsehood]' (*Hud:* 50).

Accordingly, here Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* talks about the resulting consequences and there he talks about the cause. The cause of the great punishment is that you invented falsehoods about Allah *the Almighty* by ascribing partners to Him.

Then He mentions an additional aspect in the chapter of *Hud* which is His statement: 'O my people I ask of you no reward for it (the Message). My reward is only from Him, Who created me. Will you not then understand?' (*Hud:* 51)

It is as though the issue, when viewed logically, according to the law of trade-offs, would entail that you should pay me for delivering the Message to you. However, I do not want any payment from you as you can never pay me back. My just reward is great and surpasses your capacity. This is why I only ask it from Allah, the One Who has sent me and assigned me this task.

His statement: '…from Him, Who created me…' (*Hud:* 51) means created me and brought me into existence. He did not say: 'The One Who sent me,' as the intended meaning is that Allah *Glorified is He* created me to be a messenger who is qualified to bear His Call and act as His ambassador to His creation.

Even Hud's (Eber's) *peace be upon him* name agrees with this mission. The word Hud comes from *hada* which means to desist, repent and return to Allah *the Almighty*. An example of this is Allah's saying: '…we have turned back (*hudna*) to You…' (*al-A'raf:* 156), that is, we have repented and turned back to Allah *the Almighty*.

Then, in the chapter of *Hud*, he did command his people to seek forgiveness and repent to Allah *the Almighty*: 'And O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him…' (*Hud:* 52). Seeking forgiveness is for sins that have been committed in the past, while repentance means to be determined not to return to the sin once again in the future. Then, Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* explained to them the fruits of doing so. 'He (Allah) will send you (from the sky) abundant rain, and add strength to your strength…' (*Hud:* 52). This part has not been mentioned in the chapter of *al-Ahqaf.*

Also, one of the details that is mentioned in the chapter of *Hud* and not here is their statement: 'All that we say is that some of our gods (false deities) have seized you with evil (madness).' He said, 'I call Allah to witness and bear you witness that I am free from that which you ascribe as partners in worship' (*Hud:* 54).

Here we notice that he did not just refute the claim on his own behalf, but rather called Allah *the Almighty* to bear witness for him, and thus absolved himself from this statement. Then he said to them: 'I put my trust in Allah, my Lord and your Lord! There is not a moving (living) creature, but He has grasp of its forelock. Verily, my Lord is on the Straight Path (the truth)' (*Hud:* 56).

His words demonstrate the confidence that a believer has in his Lord, so he said, challenging them: 'Do whatever you want. I have not come of my own accord and I am not confronting you with my own might, or my own power or my supporters. Rather, I am confronting you with Allah, Who has sent me and upon Him do I rely in my call.'

Here is an important doctrinal lesson, which is that if a trial befalls you do not despair or become angry, but go back to the balance of faith that you have within yourself. If your own laws are suspended remember that Allah's Laws are never suspended; and if worldly ways and means forsake you, remember that the Causer of all things is there, so return to Him.

In the chapter of *Hud*, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a portrayal of the salvation attained by the believers in Him that is not mentioned here: 'And when Our Commandment came, We saved Hud and those who believed with him by a Mercy from Us, and We saved them from a severe torment' (*Hud:* 58). This was a universal sign that broke all laws. 'And when Our Commandment came…' (*Hud:* 58) to destroy the people of `Ad with the torment they were hastening to receive, We (Allah) saved Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* and those who believed along with him. And how were they saved? '…By a Mercy from Us…' (*Hud:* 58). It was only Allah's Mercy that protected them because what happened was an upheaval of nature and an act of wrath against those who sinned against the Creator of this nature. The wind is a tempest; destructive, agitating, and furiously raging. Despite this, it broke all the physical laws of the universe, as it destroyed these people and left other people safe

وَلَقَدۡ أَهۡلَكۡنَا مَا حَوۡلَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ وَصَرَّفۡنَا ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَرۡجِعُونَ ٢٧

We have also destroyed other communities that once flourished around you – We had given them various signs so that they might return to the right way [27]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 27)

The address here is for the Quraysh. He wants to turn their attention towards the end of those denying the communities around them: '…what surrounds you of [those] cities…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 27) meaning around Mecca.

Allah *the Almighty* has addressed them in another place: 'And, verily, you pass by them (the remnants of their dwellings) at morning-time and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) Indeed, they passed by the cities of Saleh (Shelah), the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them*, and the wind-curved sand hills of `Ad and Thamud, and they witnessed their remnants and Allah's punishment that befell them.

In another place Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders? Allah decides— no one can reverse His Decision— and He is swift in reckoning' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41). It means: 'Oh Quraysh, wake up and do not be deluded by the position of leadership you have over the Arabs and the authority you have over the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, and that you have a place in the hearts of people because the power of faith that is entering the hearts of people will strip you of your leadership from right under your feet.

And here you are, seeing the territory of faith increasing every day and the territory of disbelief retreating, so take a lesson from this. This issue is what caused Khalid ibn Al-Walid, ʿAmr ibn Al-`As(1) and other chiefs and leader of disbelief to become believers *may Allah be pleased with them*. When they saw Prophet Muhammad's followers increasing they said: 'Muhammad's call has emerged and become established, and he has come to have such power that no one can confront.' They certainly believed in his call.

His statement: '…and We have diversified the signs [or verses]…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 27) means that Allah *the Almighty* showed them all kinds of proofs and in different ways. 'That perhaps they might return [from their evil ways],' (*al-Ahqaf:* 27) that is, turn back from their arrogance, insolence and stubbornness, and turn back from their disbelief and their ingratitude towards Allah's Blessings. This is because these people, after receiving Allah's Bounties and Favours, disbelieved in the Bestower of them and set up partners with Him. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says in the following verse:

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(1) *Khalid and `Amr became Muslims at the same time. Khalid made up his mind to become a Muslim and he headed towards Medina, and on the way he met `Amr. `Amr said to him: 'Where are you going?' I (Khalid) said: 'What has made you go out?' He said: 'And what has made you go out?' I (Khalid) said: 'I want to embrace Islam and follow Muhammad.' `Amr said: 'This is what has brought me here.' This occurred in the year 7 A.H., i.e. after Badr, Uhud, Al-Khandaq, and several other battles, and before the Conquest of Mecca. `Amr said openly: 'When we left the Khandaq with the confederate clans, I said to my companions: 'I think that Muhammad's matter is rising tremendously.'*

فَلَوۡلَا نَصَرَهُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ قُرۡبَانًا ءَالِهَةَۢۖ بَلۡ ضَلُّواْ
عَنۡهُمۡۚ وَذَٰلِكَ إِفۡكُهُمۡ وَمَا كَانُواْ يَفۡتَرُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

So why did their gods not help them, those they set up as gods besides God to bring them nearer to Him? No indeed! They failed them utterly: it was all a lie of their own making [28] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 28)

The word *(falawla*; why did not) is equivalent to (*halla)*; it denotes incitement and admonition. Accordingly, the part saying '…why did those (*falawla*) whom they had taken for gods besides Allah, as a way of approach not help them?' (*al-Ahqaf:* 28) carries an ironic tone regarding these gods that they adopted besides Allah *the Almighty*. It intends to mock them by saying: why have they not helped you and stood by you through your afflictions? '…As a way of approach (to Allah)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 28) means as a way of bringing them closer to Allah *the Almighty*. None of this happened. Why? It is because they are false, claimed deities, and they can neither harm nor benefit.

Rather, these gods are the work of their own hands. They made them themselves. They would stand a rock up and give it arms and legs and a nose and ears, and if it fell, they would pick it up; and if its arm broke, they would fix it. In Allah's Name, is there any rationality in this?

Their statement '…as a way of approach (to Allah)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 28), is just as they said in another place: '…We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 3). Such statements of theirs are astonishing considering that they were a people of eloquence and fluency. They knew very well the meaning of worship. If they had said that they only respect them so as to draw closer to Allah *the Almighty* this would have made sense. But they said: '…we worship them…' (*az-Zumar:* 3). Although you clearly know that worship means to obey the commands and prohibitions of the object of worship. Do these idols have commands and prohibitions?

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* responds to them: '…nay, but they vanished completely from them (when there came the torment)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 28), that is, they strayed and vanished from them (*bal dallu `anhum*). It similar to us saying: 'So-and-so has lost his way,' and also Allah's saying: 'And when harm touches you upon the sea, those that you call upon besides Him vanish from you except Him (Allah Alone)…' (*al-Isra':* 67). Why? It is because the matter involves destruction.

The human cannot cheat himself, and in times of adversity, he abandons these false gods and he seeks refuge in the True God Who possesses benefit and harm. In this situation, he never says: 'O Hubal (an idol worshipped in pre-Islamic times)!' because he knows that Hubal will never save him. Rather, he says: 'O Allah!'

'And that (*wadhalika*)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 28) is a demonstrative pronoun that indicates their taking gods besides Allah *the Almighty*. While the Arabic word (*ifk*) in '…was their lie…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 28) stands for deliberate falsehood, which is the worst kind of lying. 'And their inventions…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 28) refer\ to their fabrication of lies by claiming that these objects were gods. Thus, it is as if the general meaning is: indeed, the lack of help and support is the result of your self-delusion and false claims regarding Allah *the Almighty* by attributing divinity to other than Him.

وَإِذْ صَرَفْنَآ إِلَيْكَ نَفَرًا مِّنَ ٱلْجِنِّ يَسْتَمِعُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ فَلَمَّا حَضَرُوهُ قَالُوٓا۟ أَنصِتُوا۟ ۖ
فَلَمَّا قُضِىَ وَلَّوْا۟ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِم مُّنذِرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾ قَالُوا۟ يَٰقَوْمَنَآ إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا كِتَٰبًا أُنزِلَ
مِنۢ بَعْدِ مُوسَىٰ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ يَهْدِىٓ إِلَى ٱلْحَقِّ وَإِلَىٰ طَرِيقٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

We sent a group of jinn to you [Prophet] to listen to the
Quran. When they heard it, they said to one another,
'Be quiet!' Then when it was finished they turned to
their community and gave them warning [29] They said,
'Our people, we have been listening to a Scripture that
came after Moses, confirming previous scriptures,
giving guidance to the truth and the straight path [30]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 29 - 30)

The context now takes us to another sphere of the call. After telling us about the situation regarding human beings and how, among them, there were those who believed and others who denied Allah's Messenger, it tells us about the jinn. With regards to the call, they are the counterparts to human beings.

Since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to both human beings and the jinn, the jinn are therefore morally responsible and accountable creatures like us. But they are hidden from us, and so we cannot see them. In this regard, the Noble Quran says: '…indeed, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them…' (*al-A'raf:* 27).

The jinn have agility and the ability to penetrate things because of their igneous nature. This is why, if you were to light a fire behind this wall, in a few moments the heat would be felt. Hence, you must believe that they are from fire, that they are able to penetrate things, and that they have a nature unlike that of human beings.

The True Lord wants to make it clear to us that the jinn, even though they are hidden from us, are like us in terms of legal responsibility. Like us they are addressed by the Noble Quran. Among them there are believers and disbelievers, the obedient and the disobedient.

We know the story of the conflict between the jinn and human beings that has existed ever since Adam *peace be upon him* was created and Satan was commanded to prostrate to him and he refused and acted arrogantly. His argument was that he was created from fire and Adam *peace be upon him* was created from clay, so how could he prostrate to him when he was superior to him, as he said: '…I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay' (*al-A'raf:* 12).

It is true that Adam *peace be upon him* also fell into disobedience, but there is a massive difference between the disobedience of Adam *peace be upon him* and that of Satan. Adam *peace be upon him* disobeyed his Lord when he ate from the tree that his Lord had forbidden him to eat from. He disobeyed his Lord due to heedlessness, and due to being overpowered by his desire and listening to Satan's whisperings.

Then he realized his disobedience and admitted it. He repented from it and acknowledged that he erred against his Lord and that he had wronged himself: 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers,' (*al-A'raf:* 23). And also in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: 'Then Adam received from his Lord

Words. And his Lord pardoned him (accepted his repentance). Verily, He is the One Who forgives (accepts repentance), the Most Merciful,' (*al-Baqara:* 37).

Therefore, Adam's repentance was accepted because He did not reject Allah's Judgement. As for Satan, he rejected His Judgement and did not submit to it, so he was banished from Allah's Mercy and exiled. There is a difference between disobeying a judgment or a law while acknowledging it and affirming that it comes from Allah, and rejecting it altogether.

This is why we use this speech with whoever argues, for example, about religious issues that have a clear ruling, such as usury or growing a beard. Some people say: 'Dealing in usury is now permissible.' We respond to this by saying: 'With this statement you are rejecting Allah's Ruling regarding usury. It is safer for you to say that it is prohibited, but your circumstances are forcing you to deal in it,' for example.

Then it is for you to decide to follow Adam *peace be upon him* and repent, and seek forgiveness so that perhaps Allah *the Almighty* will forgive you, instead of stubbornly opposing your Lord regarding His Ruling which is something you cannot do. Remember Satan's words: '…and indeed I will order them to change the nature created by Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 119).

Be wary of this matter, as you know that Satan was once known as the 'Peacock of the Angels.'(1) After he stubbornly opposed Allah's Command, acted proudly and rejected Allah's Judgement, Allah *the Almighty* made him accursed and expelled him from His Mercy.

There is an important point for us to note regarding Allah's Command to Adam *peace be upon him* not to eat from the tree: '…but do not approach this tree…' (*al-Baqara:* 35). The prohibition was only regarding approaching it, and the same goes for every command concerning what Allah *the Almighty* has prohibited: '…These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Alusi in his Tafsir (vol. 1, no. 272) from Abu Al-`Aliyah regarding the meaning of '...and was one of the disbelievers.' (al-Baqara: 34) Furthermore, the outward meaning is that his disbelief was due to his ignorance, since Allah the Exalted took back from him the knowledge that He had lent him and which he had dressed himself in when he was the 'Peacock of the Angels.'*

Regarding what Allah *the Almighty* has made permissible for you, He says: '…These are the limits of Allah, so do not transgress them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229). That is, do not overstep what Allah has allowed you. As for the prohibited, do not come near it because whoever grazes his animals near the forbidden pasture of someone else is liable to slip into it at any moment.(1)

The progeny of Satan have followed his path in deluding the children of Adam *peace be upon him*. We cannot see them just as we cannot see the angels despite the difference between the two of them, which is that angels are from light, while demons are from fire.

Here the discussion moves, with regards to the message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from human beings to the jinn, informing that the jinn are legally responsible and accountable for their actions and that they can listen to the Noble Quran. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not mention this to us himself, but rather, he related to us what Allah *the Almighty* had informed him concerning the jinn listening to the Noble Quran.

Allah said in the chapter of *al-Jinn*: 'Say [O Muhammad], 'It has been revealed to me that a group of the jinn listened (to the Quran) and said: Indeed, we have heard an amazing Quran. It guides to the right course, and we have believed in it.' (*al-Jinn:* 1-2)

It is as if the True Lord *the Exalted* is saying to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'I have not sent you to go to the jinn and address them because you cannot see them. Therefore, We led a group of the jinn to you and brought them to your presence so that they can listen to the Noble Quran without you perceiving them. And if I had not told you this, you would not have known it.'

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith… It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (50), Muslim in his Sahih (2996), and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan from the Hadith of Nu`man ibn Bashir that he heard the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him saying: 'Verily, the lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his religion and his honor. And whoever falls into doubtful matters falls into the unlawful, just like the shepherd who grazes (his flock) around a private pasture almost grazes (his flock) in it. Behold! Every king has a private pasture, and Allah's Private Pasture is what He has prohibited.'*

Here Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And [mention, O Muhammad], when We directed to you a group of the jinn, listening to the Quran…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 29). You were reciting the Noble Quran and they were around your listening.

There is also their statement in the chapter of *al-Jinn*: ‘It guides to the right course…’ (*al-Jinn:* 2). And here the jinn said: ‘…a [recited] Book revealed after Musa (Moses)…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 30), which proves that the jinn have a connection to the previous prophets and that, like us, they are legally responsible and accountable for their actions.

There is also reference to them in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘We (Allah) shall attend to you, Oh you two classes (jinn and mankind)’ (*ar-Rahman:* 31). That is, We shall devote Ourselves to calling you to account for your deeds, after leaving you free to do whatever your wanted. Do not think that this was heedlessness on Our Part. Rather, We gave you respite in order to confirm the ability of free choice that We created within you and granted you.

The jinn and human beings, referred to by the Quranic word (*ath-thaqalan*; ‘the two classes’), are equal in reckoning just as they are equal in legal responsibility and accountability.

It was narrated that Anas *Allah be pleased with him* said: ‘I was with the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* on one of the mountains of Mecca when an old man with a staff, on which he was leaning, approached us. On seeing him, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* recognized him. He said: ‘His walk and his structure are like that of the jinn.’ The man said: ‘Yes, I am one of the jinn.’ So, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: ‘Who are you?’ He said: ‘I am Hamah ibn Him ibn Laqis ibn Iblis.’ He then said: ‘Between you and your father Iblis there are only two fathers?’ He said: ‘Yes. Indeed, I have lived to see most of time and the lesser part of it remains, and I witnessed Cain killing Abel.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi in his Tafsir (Mafatih Al-Ghayb) as part of his explanation of this verse… and it includes: ‘At the time Cain killed Abel I was walking among the hills.’ It was stated by Al-`Uqayli in Ad-Du`afa’ Al-Kabir (Hadith no. 1809). Its chain of narration is long, strange and contains untrustworthy transmitters. Al-`Uqayli said: ‘Its chain of narrations includes Muhammad ibn `Abdullah Al-Ansari Abu Salamah, who is untrustworthy in narrating Hadith.’* =

This narration is proof that they live a long time and that they can take on different forms, just as angels take on different forms. We do not see angels in their real form and we do not see the jinn in their real form, unless they assume the form of a human being.

You know the long Hadith of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* when he came to the assembly of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the form of a strange man, yet no signs of travel could be seen on him. None of those present recognised him until he sat down close to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and started asking him about *Islam*, *Iman* (belief), and *Ihsan* (excellence) and the Messenger answering him. Then he left; and when the Companions asked about him, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'Indeed that was Jibril. He came to teach you the matters of your religion.'(1)

On this account, we saw some of the enemies of Prophet Muhammad's call trying to stir up obstacles regarding it such as saying that the Messenger should be an angel. This problem has been dealt with. If the Messenger had come as an angel, he would have had to come to people in the form of a man; otherwise, how could he convey the teachings to them and how would they learn from him?

Therefore, the obstacle would remain. Furthermore, an angel cannot be a proper example to be followed because angels do not disobey Allah *the Almighty* in whatever He has commanded them, but always do what they are bidden to do. So, how can an angel be an example for those who, by their very nature, make mistakes, fall into heedlessness, and forget?

Therefore, it is a condition for a Prophet and Messenger to be of the same species as those he is sent to so that he can act as an example for them.

= *Ibn Al-Jawzi said in the book Al-Mawdu`at: 'This Hadith is fabricated and there is no doubt about it. It has two paths of narration. The first of them contains Ishaq ibn Bishr and he was a liar who fabricated Hadiths. While the other contains Muhammad ibn `Abdullah Al-Ansari Abu Salamah, who was untrustworthy in narrating Hadith'*

(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (48) and likewise Muslim in his Sahih (9) According to his version, the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: 'That was Jibril. He came to teach the people their religion'; and according to the version of Muslim, he said: 'Indeed that was Jibril; he came to you to teach you your religion.'*

The True Lord *the Exalted* has given us a detailed illustration of the state of the jinn, and that among them there is the believer and the disbeliever. He said, quoting them: ‘And among us are Muslims [in submission to Allah], and among us are the unjust. And whoever has become Muslim – those have sought out the right course. But as for the unjust, they will be, for Hell, firewood’ (*al-Jinn:* 14-15).

Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘I read the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to your brothers from among the jinn, and they were more responsive to it than you. Whenever they heard: ‘Which, then, of your Lord’s favours do you deny?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 13), they would all say in one breath: ‘Our Lord, we do not deny any of your favours! For you is all praise,’ (1) and they would repeat this every time the verse was repeated.

And you can hear them saying: ‘And exalted be the Majesty of our Lord...’ (*al-Jinn:* 3), that is, sublimely exalted is His Glory, and due to this sublimity: ‘…He has taken neither a wife, nor a son (or offspring or children).’ (*al-Jinn:* 3) Therefore, the jinn have knowledge of the matters of belief and the truth of Allah’s Oneness, and maybe they are more accurate than us in expressing them. It suffices that they deemed Satan to be a fool, as they said: ‘And that our foolish one has been saying about Allah an excessive transgression’ (*al-Jinn:* 4).

We return to Allah’s statement that we were discussing: ‘And [mention, O Muhammad], when We directed to you a group of the jinn, listening to the Quran…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 29). The Arabic word (*nafar;* group) denotes a company of people consisting of anywhere between three to forty individuals. ‘…When We directed to you a group of the jinn…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 29), means that We brought them to you instead of you going to them.‘And when they attended it…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 29), that is, they were present for the recitation: ‘…they said (to one another), ‘Listen quietly’…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 29). Listen with interest and contemplation, which indicate that they advised one another to listen in silence. '…And when it was concluded…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 29), that is, when the recitation came to an end '…they went back to their people as warners' (*al-Ahqaf:* 29). They went back to their people, warning them and conveying to them what they had heard.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Dala`il An-Nabuwwah (vol. 2, p. 108, Hadith no. 522) on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah Allah be pleased with him who said: ‘When the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him read the chapter of ar-Rahman to the jinn, they remained quiet and did not say anything, so the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘The jinn responded better than you. Whenever I read to them: ‘Which, then, of your Lord’s favors do you deny?’ (ar-Rahman: 13), they would say: ‘Our Lord, We do not deny a single one of Your Favors!’*

'They said, 'O our people, indeed we have heard a [recited] Book revealed after Musa (Moses)…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30), that is, the Noble Quran, and their statement '…after [that of] Musa…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30) proves that they had a connection to the previous Messengers and that they believed in our master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*, i.e. they were Jews.

The jinn mentioned Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and not `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* because the Book of Musa presented the doctrine for regulating life's affairs and actions and it contained laws and rulings. As for the book of `Isa, it was merely spiritualties and pieces of advice. This is why they became aware of this matter and they put the Gospel and the Torah in one book despite the partisanship between them, and called it 'The Holy Bible.'

The meaning of '…confirming…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30) is that the Noble Quran confirms '…what was before it…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30), that is, the divine books that came before it. As long as it affirms them, then it has brought what they brought, but it gives even more as it: '…guides to the truth and to a straight path,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30), in that it suits the universality and oneness of religion

This is because every Messenger before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to treat the diseases of his own community in a particular time and place. It is possible for two messengers to be contemporary, as we have seen with our masters Ibrahim (Abraham) and Lut (Lot) as well as Musa (Moses) and Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them* all.

The world at that time was in a state of isolation and solitude, and there was no coming together as there is now, which has made the entire world like a small village. This isolated way of life meant that each community was unaware of other communities.

Consequently, each community had their own social ills and plagues and each needed a messenger to put them right and take his people by the hand back to Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, there were people who worshipped idols instead of Allah *the Almighty* others who cheated in weights and measures, and still others that deviated sexually from the natural way that Allah *the Almighty* had created. Each one of these groups needed a messenger.

However, when the world came together and means of communication became spread worldwide, it was necessary to have one messenger because the world's ills and the different horizons would be united. There must be one messenger to put things right in every time and place. Therefore, every time and place has been honoured by the one who combined all good qualities, anytime and anywhere, Prophet Muhammad ibn `Abdullah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Therefore, a group of the jinn heard the message and took the task of conveying it to others. This is why Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* said: 'May Allah bless the person who hears one of my sayings, contemplates it, and then conveys it to those who did not hear it. Indeed, the person who the message is later conveyed to may be more aware of its meanings than the one who initially heard it.'(1) Indeed, the one who the message is conveyed to may be more eager to implement it than the one who initially heard it. An Arabic poet understood this concept and illustrated it when he said (2)

'Take my knowledge and do not look at my actions,
Reap the fruits and leave the branch for the fire.'(3)

Then, this group of jinn continued to convey the message to their people and warned them concerning what they had heard, Allah *Glorified is He* said, reporting the jinn's message to their people:

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (3175) and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2580, 2581)... He declared the first to be a good (hasan) narration and the second (the Hadith of Ibn Mas'ud) to be hasan sahih (two chains of narrations, one is good and the other is authentic). It was also narrated by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (226, 227, and 228) and he also narrated it from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik (Hadith 232).*

(2) He is the Sheikh, the jurist, Imam Khalaf ibn Abu Al-Qasim Muhammad Al-Azdi Al-Qayrawani Al-Baradhiʿi, and it is also pronounced as Al-Baradiʿi. It is not known exactly when he was born or when he died. (*Tahdhib Al-Mudawana* 1/2)

(3) He said this verse about himself to his students, and the meaning is to take knowledge from him and not pay attention to the one carrying it. Thus, you should eat the ripe fruits and let the rods be used as firewood.

يَٰقَوۡمَنَآ أَجِيبُواْ دَاعِيَ ٱللَّهِ وَءَامِنُواْ بِهِۦ يَغۡفِرۡ لَكُم مِّن ذُنُوبِكُمۡ وَيُجِرۡكُم مِّنۡ
عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٖ (٣١) وَمَن لَّا يُجِبۡ دَاعِيَ ٱللَّهِ فَلَيۡسَ بِمُعۡجِزٖ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَيۡسَ
لَهُۥ مِن دُونِهِۦٓ أَوۡلِيَآءُۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ فِي ضَلَٰلٖ مُّبِينٍ (٣٢)

**Our people, respond to the one who calls you to God.
Believe in Him: He will forgive you your sins and protect
you from a painful torment. [31] Those who fail to respond
to God's call cannot escape God's power anywhere on
earth, nor will they have any protector against Him: such
people have clearly gone far astray [32]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 31-32)**

The words: '…Allah's caller,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30) are primarily referring to Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him*. Additionally, they are referring to the Prophet's followers who strive to convey his message to their people. 'And have faith in him,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30) is an order that we should have faith in what he has brought. 'He will forgive you (whatever is past) of your sins, and save you from a grievous suffering (in the life to come)' (*al-Ahqaf:* 31). Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…forgive you (whatever is past) of (*min*) your sins,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 31) and the Arabic word *min* (of) indicates portioning. This means that He forgives some sins, and this forgiveness is a fruit of faith. He did not refer to the forgiveness of all their sins because Allah *Glorified is He* leaves other sins for us to repent and turn to Him. For example, there are sins that are forgiven from one prayer to the next, from one Friday prayer to the next or from one *Ramadan* to the next.(1) However, there are also sins that cannot be erased by repentance alone, as the sinner must fulfil additional conditions for the sins to be forgiven. These include the transgressions against the rights of other creatures, and the injustices in which objects are forcibly taken from others. In such cases, the sinner must return the rights of the other creatures before the sins are forgiven by Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) Narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (6832) from Abu Hurayra *may Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad said: "Each prescribed prayer after a prescribed prayer is expiation for (the sins) between them." And he said: "And one Friday to the next and one month to the next (are also expiations)." This means that in every month of *Ramadan* is forgiveness for the sins that were done since the preceding *Ramadan*.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…and (He will) save you from a grievous suffering (in the life to come)' (*al-Ahqaf:* 31). Since these sins may result in punishment in the Hereafter, it follows that if Allah *Glorified is He* forgives these sins, He will save the sinner from the fire. This is the principle of emptying oneself from sins before filling our work with good deeds as we have previously mentioned.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention in this verse the entry of these jinn to paradise. This caused some people to ask, 'Do the believing jinn enter paradise?' Some people are of the opinion that they will be transformed into dust after the reckoning, and that will be the end of their matter. The proof these people presented for this argument is that Allah *Glorified is He* did not say that the jinn will enter paradise after being delivered from the fire.

However, we know that the jinn are legally responsible like us, and they include believers and disbelievers. Therefore, the more acceptable opinion is that they are like us, in that they will be rewarded with paradise for their righteous deeds or punished in the fire for their disbelief.

Some people ask, 'How can they be punished with the fire when they were created from it?' This is easy for the Creator to establish, as He has other laws that are beyond our capacity to understand. We previously stated that people are created from mud, but that does not make them dissolve when immersed into water. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…for, behold, it is a tree that grows in the very heart of the blazing fire (of hell)' (*as-Saffat:* 64). How can a tree grow in the very heart of hell-fire, when the worldly laws of nature state that such a tree will burn instantaneously? Thus, there is another set of divine laws concerning such concepts, and we should not consider these matters impossible, when Allah *Glorified is He* knows His creation better than we do.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying: 'But he who does not respond to Allah's call can never elude (Him) on earth' (*al-Ahqaf:* 32). The Arabic word *mu'jiz* was used here ('elude'), and it is generally used to refer to a person who is incapacitating someone else. Incapacity (*'ajz*) is the state of weakness in which a person cannot perform any actions. So, when a person is a *mu'jiz* to another person, it means that he has rendered him unable to act. We also say that the Quran is *muʿjiz* which means that the Arabs were incapable of bringing anything like it. In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* said that the person who disobeyed Allah’s caller and disbelieved in him will never be *mu’jiz* (eluding) to Him, and they will never escape or flee from Allah’s punishment.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘…nor can he have any protector against Him (in the life to come),’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 32). This disbeliever will not find any other power that can defend or intercede for them in front of Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, no forces will be able to protect him from Allah’s chastisement. In the following words, Allah *Glorified is He* described the forces that the disbelievers are naively relying upon: ‘…all these will be in a clear (*mubeen*) loss’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 32). This means that the protectors themselves will abandon them and will themselves be lost on the Day of Judgment, as they had no real power. The word *mubeen* (clear) means that their loss or confusion will encompass them and that they will search for their destination in every direction, just as a wandering person does after losing the right path.

Then, the context of the verses returned to the universal signs that Allah *Glorified is He* created, instructing the disbelievers to contemplate Allah’s power. This is because these disbelievers had denied the tools of hearing, sight and discernment that Allah *Glorified is He* had created in them, and they did not benefit from these means of contemplation. Therefore, Allah highlighted these signs repeatedly to them, as a varying form of lesson and example, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

أَوَلَمۡ يَرَوۡاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ وَلَمۡ يَعۡىَ بِخَلۡقِهِنَّ
بِقَٰدِرٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يُحۡـِۧىَ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰۚ بَلَىٰٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ﴿٣٣﴾

Do the disbelievers not understand that God, who created the heavens and earth and did not tire in doing so, has the power to bring the dead back to life? Yes indeed! He has power over everything [33] (The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 33)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned one of the most overwhelming signs of His creation, which is the creation of the heavens and the earth. Allah

Glorified is He also said in another chapter: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth’ (*Ghafir:* 57). Thus, He mentioned the creation of the heavens and the earth without mentioning the creation of man because they are a greater sign. Each person lives a minute number of years. Even if a person’s age reaches a hundred years, this age is minuscule in comparison to the age of the heavens and the earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘…and (He) was never wearied by their creation’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 33). This means that Allah *Glorified is He* did not become tired because of this creation, as He said in another verse: ‘…and (that) no weariness could ever touch Us’ (*Qaf:* 38). If someone has these attributes and these are the signs of His creation, is He not fully Capable of bringing the dead back to life? The answer to this question comes as: ‘Verily, indeed (*bala).*’ Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is fully Capable of resurrecting the dead, just as He had the power to create everything in the heavens and the earth. The Arabic word *bala* indicated affirmation in this context because the question asked in the verse was a negating question. The basic lexical rule is that negating a negation is actually an affirmation.

The verse is then concluded with the phrase: ‘He has power over everything’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 33). This conclusion emphasises all of Allah’s overwhelming power, and not just the lighter concept of resurrecting the dead. Indeed, His power is capable of every concept, even the transformations that are greater than resurrection, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَيَوۡمَ يُعۡرَضُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ أَلَيۡسَ هَٰذَا بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ قَالُواْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّنَاۚ
قَالَ فَذُوقُواْ ٱلۡعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَكۡفُرُونَ ٣٤

On the Day the disbelievers are brought before Hell [it will be said to them], ‘Is this not real?’ ‘Yes, by our Lord,’ they will reply and He will say, ‘Then taste the punishment for having denied the truth’ [34]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 34)

This is another event that will happen when the disbelievers will see the fire, and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* from their destiny. Allah

Glorified is He said in a previous verse in the same chapter: 'And on the Day when those who disbelieved will be brought within sight of the fire, (they will be told, 'You have exhausted your (share of) good blessings in your worldly life, having enjoyed them (without any thought of the hereafter)' (*al-Ahqaf:* 20). Thus, He mentioned the reason why they will be punished by the fire, which is that they had exhausted their entire share of good bounties in the life of this world. Therefore, there is nothing left for them to enjoy in the Hereafter.

In that respect, we previously said that an apparent blessing which occupies a servant's time or keeps his attention away from Allah *Glorified is He* is in fact a trial and a plight. A true blessing is that which reminds you of the One Who bestowed all these blessings and bounties. This is why Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* taught us to say a particular prayer whenever we see a blessing that we possess or that someone else possesses. He instructed us to say: 'This is what Allah wills (*Masha'a Allah*). Indeed, there is no power except with Allah (*La quwata illa billah).*'(1)

In that Prophetic saying of remembrance, you are attributing the favour to Allah, the One Who created everything and you are freeing yourself from any delusions in attributing the blessing to yourself. You should realize that you do not possess any bounties by virtue of your own skilfulness and cleverness. This was the delusion of the (disbeliever) Qarun when he said: 'This (wealth) has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that is in me!' (*al-Qasas:* 78) The result of that delusion was that Allah *Glorified is He* punished him, as Allah said: 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling' (*al-Qasas:* 81). It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was saying to him: 'As long as this wealth was given to you by virtue of the knowledge that is in you, then protect your wealth with your knowledge.'

It has been narrated that 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *may Allah be pleased with him* came to our Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon*

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in his Mu'jam Al-Kabir (14275) from 'Uqba ibn 'Amir who said that He said: {Whoever has been blessed with a blessing and he wants it to remain, then let him say 'There is no strength and no power except in God.'} Then The Messenger of Allah read: "And (he continued:) "Alas, if thou hadst but said, on entering thy garden, 'Whatever Allah wills (shall come to pass, for) there is no power save with God!'…" (al-Kahf: 39)*

him and found him sleeping on a mat that had left marks on his skin. He did not find any objects of material bliss in the Prophet's room. 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* was saddened by the modest state of the Prophet's room, and he was unable to hide his emotion from the Prophet *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him*. He said to Prophet Muhammad, 'O Messenger of Allah! Ask Allah to grant to your community material bounties, just as He has granted to the Persians and the Romans.' The Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* looked at him and said: 'Are you in doubt, O, son of Al-Khattab? These people (the Persians and Romans) have had their entire share of good bounties hastened for them in the life of this world.'(1)

We have mentioned the statement of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd Al-ʿAziz, 'By Allah, if I had wanted, I could have had better food served to me than any of you, and be better dressed than any of you, but I am storing up my delights for the Hereafter.'(2) This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: '(And all who are thus blest will be told 'Eat and drink with good happiness in return for all (the good deeds) that you have sent ahead in the past (worldly) days!' (*al-Haqqa:* 24)

Therefore, whoever remembers the divine reward, calling to mind the bliss which is prepared in the Hereafter, will find it easy to obey Allah *Glorified is He* in this worldly life. This is like the student who revises for long nights and denies himself the pleasure of rest because he desires a greater pleasure which is the pleasure of success.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And so, on the Day (*yawm*) when those who disbelieved will be brought within sight of the Fire' (*al-Ahqaf:* 34). The word *yawm* (day) on its own is a circumstance of time. Allah was ordering Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* in this verse to remind the disbelievers of the punishment prepared for them in the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* was ordered to warn them of that day and to ask them: ‘Is this not the truth?’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 34) that you have been denying. On that day, this truth will become a reality in their eyes.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2288) and also Muslim in his Sahih (2707) as part of a long, Hadith from Ibn ʿAbbas*

(2) This statement was attributed to ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab and not to ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd Al-ʿAziz. It has been mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir* regarding the verse: "You have exhausted your (share of) good things in your worldly life," (*al-Ahqaf:* 20) and likewise, was mentioned by Ar-Razi in his *Tafsir*, An-Nasafi in his *Tafsir* and As-Suyuti in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur*.

We previously explained that knowledge (and certitude) has three phases. These are the prior knowledge of a certain event before it occurs (*‘ilm-ul-yaqeen*), the sight of that event when it happens in front of our eyes (*‘ayn-ul-yaqeen*) and the immersive experience of that event (*haqq-ul-yaqeen*). Information regarding the Hereafter, including the details of reward or punishment, is part of the knowledge of a certain event that will happen in our next life. When we see these events happening with our eyes, this knowledge will be transformed into a sight of certainty. After that, when we come into direct contact with the reward or the punishment, after the people of paradise enter paradise and the people of the fire enter the fire, the sight will become an experience of certainty.

These phases were mentioned in two chapters in the Noble Quran. The first mention was in Allah’s Verses: ‘You are obsessed by greed for more (bounties), until you go down to your graves. Nay, in time you will come to understand! Then, (and once again) nay, in time you will come to understand! Nay, if you could but understand (it) with an understanding (born) of certainty, you would indeed, most surely, see the blazing fire (of hell)! In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty: and on that Day you will most surely be called to account for (what you did with) the boon of life!’ (*at-Takathur:* 1-8)

As for the truth of certainty, it is mentioned in Allah’s statement: ‘But if one happens to be of those misguided people who deny the truth, a welcome of burning despair (awaits him in the life to come,) and the heat of a blazing fire! Verily, this is indeed the truth of certainty! Extol, then, the limitless glory of your Lord’s mighty name!’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 92-96)

After being asked the question, ‘Is this not the truth?’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 34) on the Day of Judgment, they will answer: ‘Verily (*bala*), by Our Lord (it is the truth)!’ Answering the negating question with the word *bala* is an affirmation because negating a negation is a positive affirmation. Indeed, this is the truth that they were denying.

In fact, they will not just affirm it lightly, but will pledge by Allah’s Name that it is the truth, as a result of the severity of the experience. They will say: ‘Verily (*bala*), by Our Lord,’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 34), after seeing the punishment and coming into direct contact with it. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* will issue the final verdict, as He will say to them: ‘Taste, then, this suffering as an outcome of your denial of the truth!’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 34) Therefore, this punishment was a direct result of their disbelief, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

فَٱصۡبِرۡ كَمَا صَبَرَ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡعَزۡمِ مِنَ ٱلرُّسُلِ وَلَا تَسۡتَعۡجِل لَّهُمۡۚ كَأَنَّهُمۡ يَوۡمَ يَرَوۡنَ مَا
يُوعَدُونَ لَمۡ يَلۡبَثُوٓاْ إِلَّا سَاعَةٗ مِّن نَّهَارِۭۚ بَلَٰغٞۚ فَهَلۡ يُهۡلَكُ إِلَّا ٱلۡقَوۡمُ ٱلۡفَٰسِقُونَ (٣٥)

Be steadfast [Muhammad], like those messengers of firm resolve. Do not seek to hasten the punishment for the disbelievers: on the Day they see what they had been warned about, it will seem to them that they lingered no more than a single hour of a single day [in this life]. This is a warning. Shall any be destroyed except the defiant? [35]
(The Quran, *al-Ahqaf:* 35)

Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* is the one being addressed in this verse. Allah *Glorified is He* consoled him and affirmed his status so that he can be patient and bear the harm that came from the disbelievers. Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* was not the first messenger to be harmed in this way, as he was preceded by many messengers who were also harmed. Therefore, this verse was instructing him to be patient, just as his brothers who carried the message before were patient with their disbelieving peoples.

Indeed, Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* was exposed to a lot of harm from his people. They harmed him in their allegations when they said that he was a sorcerer, a poet, a madman, a soothsayer or a liar. Then they went on to harm him physically, as they harmed him in Ta’if until his feet bled. In the Battle of Uhud, one of his molars was broken, and once, while he was praying, they threw the intestines of a camel on his back.(1)

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(1) *Mentioned by At-Tahawi in Mushkil Al-Athar (Hadith 3327) from ʿAbdullah ibn Masʿud*

In addition to harming him personally, they also harmed him regarding his family and those who believed in him. They persecuted him to such an extent that he was forced to leave Mecca and immigrate to Medina, and they even plotted to kill him. Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* was patient during all of this harm. However, the harm was still overwhelming, just as it is difficult to any human being.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to give him an example and a model of patience from the stories of the previous messengers. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Remain, then, (O believer,) patient in adversity, just as all of the apostles who had firm hearts, were patient’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 35). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was thrown into a fire, but despite that, he did not lose his trust in his Lord. The proof is that when Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to him and offered to put out the fire, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) said to him: ‘I do not ask for help from you (but from Allah).’(1) Then, Allah’s Command came from the heavens: ‘O fire! Be thou cool, and (a source of) inner peace for Ibrahim (Abraham)!’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 69)

Therefore, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was tested in his youth, and was also tested in his adulthood with the command to slaughter his only son at the time, Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was patient with this test as well, and Allah *Glorified is He* granted him a ram to slaughter instead of his son. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* granted him another son, Ishaq (‘Isaac), and a grandson, Ya’qub (Jacob), and both of them were prophets *peace be upon them*.

These blessings were the result of Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham’s) submission to Allah’s Commands and his acceptance of the divine fate. Therefore, we should follow this good example of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), the Father of the Prophets, who was always submissive to the divine ruling, and we should raise our younger generations to imitate his way. In addition, we should know that the main way through which hardships can be lifted is being pleased with

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Jarir At-Tabari from Muʿtamir ibn Sulayman At-Taymi from some of his companions. He said: {Gabriel came to Abraham and he was certain that he was going to be thrown into the fire, so he said: ‘O Abraham! Do you need anything?’ He said: ‘From you, no.’ (Mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 5/641)*

Allah's decrees. This is because the order is not lifted until the person experiencing it is pleased with Allah's choice in it. Otherwise, it remains afflicting that person until he submits to Allah *Glorified is He*.

If a person is experiencing a prolonged adversity that has been decreed by Allah *Glorified is He* then they should know that the main reason for this prolonged hardship is showing objection towards Allah's judgment. On the other hand, if they were pleased with Allah's ruling, Allah *Glorified is He* would alleviate their hardships.

Take the example of a father who punishes his child for a mistake that the youngster has made. If the child submits and accepts the parental ruling, his father will leave him alone, or will even show compassion, mercy and pleasure towards his child. However, if the child objects to the father's rules, he may extend the punishment until the child learns the intended lesson.

In the most sublime manner, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to raise and nurture His servants by testing them. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* said in the Qudsi Hadith 'If someone is pleased with My destiny I will give to him (blessings) according to My power.'(1)

One of the prophets who had great firmness of heart was Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. He continued to call his people to faith for nine hundred and fifty years. His people used to harm him until he would lose his consciousness and only a small minority of them believed his message.

Look at the tests that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* endured. In his young age, he was thrown into a well and sold as a slave. In his old age, he was tested by the wife of the nobleman and was thrown into prison. However, he was patient with all of these tests, and therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* established him securely over the authority of Egypt: 'and thus We established Yusuf (Joseph) securely in the land (of Egypt): he had full mastery over it,

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2320), Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (4021) Al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab Al-Iman (9444) and Al-Qada'i in Musnad Ash-Shihab (1041) that Anas ibn Malik narrated that Prophet Muhammad said: "Indeed, a remarkable reward comes with a remarkable test, and indeed, when Allah loves a people He tests them... Whoever is pleased will receive Allah's pleasure, and whoever is angry will receive anger."*

(doing) whatever he willed. (Thus do) We cause Our grace to alight upon whomever We will' (*Yusuf:* 56).

We also previously explained that our destinies are full of divine wisdom, and that an event is never separated from its doer. So, before objecting to an action, look at the doer of the action. When Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* reflected on the actions of his brothers from amongst the previous messengers and what they were exposed to, the harm that he was receiving from his own people appeared to be less than the afflictions of the previous nations, and this was a consolation for Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him.*

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'and do not ask for a quick end of those (who still deny the truth),' (*al-Ahqaf:* 35). Allah *Glorified is He* was instructing Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* not to ask that their chastisement be hastened, especially as the disbelievers themselves were mockingly asking for a faster chastisement, out of their own ignorance and stubbornness. This is why His Lord addressed Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* by saying: 'And whether We show you (in this world) something of what We hold in store for those (deniers of the truth), or whether We cause you to die (before that retribution takes place) know that, in the end, it is unto Us that they will be brought back' (*Ghafir:* 77). If you die, Oh Muhammad, before you see Allah *Glorified is He* taking revenge from them, then what We have in store for them will be given to them in the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…on the Day when they see (the fulfilment of) what they were promised' (*al-Ahqaf:* 35). That will be the Day of Resurrection. 'It will seem to them) as though they had dwelt (on earth) no longer than one hour of (an earthly) day' (*al-Ahqaf:* 35). Everyone will pass through the stage of the grave, known as the *barzakh* (isthmus), as if it was one hour in a worldly day.

For instance, since Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* died, he did not notice the passage of time, and he will not notice the passage of time until the Last Hour is established. For him, not more than an hour of a day has passed because the perception of time, as we have said, is a result of the events occurring during that time. If there are no events happening, then there is no perception of time, such as when someone is sleeping, for example.

This is what we saw in the story of the people of the cave. Allah *Glorified is He* put them into a deep sleep and they slept: '…three hundred years and an additional nine years (to that number)' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25). Despite that, when they woke up, they said: 'We have remained thus (asleep) a day, or part of a day' (*al-Kahf:* 19). This is because of the lack of events by which they can tell the time. Therefore, we should not ask for the speedy chastisement of the disbelievers because the chastisement is already only an hour away, however long the time until the Day of Judgment may be.

We have also known of the story of 'Uzair (Ezra), regarding whom Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Or as he who passed by a town deserted by its people, with its roofs caved in, (and) said, 'How could Allah bring all this back to life after its death?' Thereupon Allah caused him to be dead for a hundred years' (*al-Baqara:* 259).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying: '(This is our) message (*balagh*)' (*al-Ahqaf:* 35). The Arabic word *balagh* (message) literally refers to a person's arrival to their destination. Here, the word refers to the message arriving to its intended audience. Allah *Glorified is He* said in another chapter: 'This is a message (*balagh*) unto all mankind. Hence, let them be warned thereby' (*Ibrahim:* 52). This divine message is the utmost of what people can be warned.

Allah *Glorified is He* used the word: 'This…' (*Ibrahim:* 52). It means that, indeed, Allah's promise will happen and nothing can prevent it because Allah *Glorified is He* is the only Power, and He has no partner or adversary. 'Will, then, any people be (really) destroyed except the iniquitous (*fasiqoon*) folk?' (*al-Ahqaf:* 35) The word *fisq* (iniquity) means the deviation from obedience, and this is the sole reason for destruction in the Hereafter and one of the reasons of destruction in the life of this world.

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الشعراوي

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المجلد (23)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (23)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (23)

the chapter of

Muhammad

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter *Muhammad* (1) . Allah *Glorified is He* said:

ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَصَدُّواْ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَضَلَّ أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ ١

God will bring to nothing the deeds of those who
disbelieve and bar others from the way of God [1]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 1)

Take notice that the end of the preceding chapter *al-Ahqaf* corresponds beautifully with the beginning of this chapter. In the final verse of the chapter of *al-Ahqaf*, Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Will, then, any people be (really) destroyed except the iniquitous folk?’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 35) Then, the first verse of our current chapter said: ‘As for those who disbelieved (*kafaru*) and barred (others) from the path of Allah, He (Allah) will misguide (or nullify) all their deeds’ (*Muhammad:* 1). It is as if the iniquitous folk mentioned in the final verse of the last chapter were accurately defined in the first verse of this chapter. These iniquitous folks are those who deny the truth and bar others from the path of Allah *Glorified is He*.

We have previously defined *kufr* (disbelief) as being a veil that hides reality or that prevents the effects of reality from being manifested properly.

---

(1) The chapter of *Muhammad* is the 47th chapter in the ordering of the noble *mushaf* and it consists of 38 verses. It is a Medinan chapter and it was revealed after chapter *al-Hadid* and before the chapter of *ar-Raʿd,* and thus it is the 94th chapter to be revealed. It is also called the chapter of *Qital* (Fighting) (*Al-Itqan fi ʿUlum Al-Qurʾan* (1/27)) and it was given that name because of verses 4 and 20.

Thus, the word *kufr* indicates that there must be something that is veiled, so what does the disbelievers' *kufr* hide? It covers its opposite, which is faith. This is because the reality of faith was present before the concept of *kufr* was invented by the disbelievers to hide the truth.

Therefore, the word *kufr* is the first pointer to the truth of faith because faith is part of the natural dispositions and inclinations of the human soul. Allah *Glorified is He* installed this inclination in the primordial world of *Dharr*, when Allah *Glorified is He* took the covenant from the souls: 'Am I not your Lord?' (*al-A'raf:* 172)

Sometimes, *kufr* may not cover the truth itself, but seeks to cover its effects and implications, as in Allah's statement: 'And Allah propounded (to you) a parable: (Imagine) a town which was (once) secure and at ease, with its sustenance coming to it abundantly from all quarters, and which thereupon blasphemously showed ingratitude (*kafarat*) towards Allah's blessings' (*an-Nahl:* 112).

Therefore, *kufr* (disbelief) in Allah's existence is one form of misguidance, and *kufr* in Allah's blessings is another form of misguidance. *Kufr* in Allah's blessings can occur in a number of aspects. These include heedlessness and disregard to these blessings, as well as the failure to search for their sources or failing to extract them from the universe along with some of their means: the water, the air and the earth.

Read, for example, what Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Say (to them), 'Would you indeed disbelieve in Him who has created the earth in two aeons? Do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, The Lord of all the worlds? For He it is (after creating the earth), who placed firm mountains on it, (towering) above its surface, and bestowed blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it' (*Fussilat:* 9-10).

Therefore, our Lord has given us the means of sustenance and commanded us to look for them and extract them from their burial grounds. Therefore, we should not be lazy in searching for the treasures that exist in nature. After Allah *Glorified is He* has given you these blessings, you should not be negligent concerning them, choosing to live like a beggar who is dependent on others.

Another form of misguidance is when man extracts these blessings, but then veils them or holds them away from other people who deserve a share in them. Allah *Glorified is He* said about these people who unjustly gather such riches: '...But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of Allah – give them the tiding of a grievous suffering (in the life to come), on the Day when that (hoarded wealth) shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs (will be) branded therewith, (those sinners shall be told) 'These are the treasures which you have gathered for yourselves! Taste, then, (the evil of) your hoarded treasures!' (*at-Tawba:* 34-35) Therefore, *kufr* (disbelief) can either be through denying the existence of Allah *Glorified is He* by neglecting His blessings and favours or by holding the shares of other people who deserve part of them.

Allah *Glorified is He* said that the disbelievers were those who are: '...barring (others) from the path of Allah' (*Muhammad:* 1).This is because they directly prohibited people from believing in Allah *Glorified is He* or prevented the people's ears from hearing the call to the truth. They may have also covered the people's eyes from seeing Allah's signs in the universe, or prevented these signs from being considered as proofs for the existence of the Creator. Additionally, they may have barred their hearts from having faith and certainty in Allah's existence. Therefore, these people did not just disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He*, but they were not satisfied with their own disbelief. So, they attempted to misguide other people with them.

Some orientalists said, 'If the Quranic verses were clear and decisive, we find a contradiction between the verse: 'And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden,' (*az-Zumar:* 7) and the verse: 'They shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray' (*an-Nahl:* 25). In actual fact, there is no contradiction between these two verses and the orientalists' claim is false. This is because the event illustrated in each verse is different. When the disbelievers lead themselves astray and commit sins, they will bear their own burdens, but when they lead others astray, they will bear the burden of misguiding others in addition to their own personal sins.

The meaning of the words: 'He (Allah) will misguide (or nullify) (*adalla*) all their deeds,' (*Muhammad:* 1) is that Allah *Glorified is He* will nullify their actions and make them of no benefit. This is because the literal meaning of the word *adalla* (lead them astray) is ‘not guiding them to the path that leads to their objective’. Indeed, these disbelieving people committed actions that brought no benefit to them, as there is no benefit from *kufr* and barring others from Allah’s path.

There are people who perform acts of goodness, but are still outside the realm of faith. This goodness will not be accepted from them and it will not intercede for them in the Hereafter because these acts did not emanate from true belief. Rather, their actions may have emanated from a desire towards fame and reputation, civilization, serving humanity or other slogans. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘We shall turn towards all the (supposedly good) deeds they ever wrought, and shall transform them into scattered dust’ (*al-Furqan:* 23).

Allah *Glorified is He* also said: ‘But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their (good) deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty (person) supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds (that) Allah (has always been present) with him, and (that) He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning’ (*an-Nur:* 39).

These are the people to whom it will be said on the Day of Resurrection: ‘You have exhausted your (share of) good things in your worldly life, having enjoyed them (without any thought of the hereafter)’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 20).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said regarding the believers:

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَءَامَنُواْ بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ
مِن رَّبِّهِمْ كَفَّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمْ وَأَصْلَحَ بَالَهُمْ ٢

but He will overlook the bad deeds of those who have faith, do good deeds, and believe in what has been sent down to Muhammad — the truth from their Lord — and He will put them into a good state [2] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 2)

We previously said that contrasting images make each other more manifest. One of the Quranic styles is illustrating contrasting pictures so that there can be a comparison between the two images and a depiction of a clearer meaning. This can be seen in Allah's statement: 'Behold, (in the life to come) the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14).

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the group of people who opposed disbelief. He said: 'And those who have believed,' (*Muhammad:* 2). He did not mention what they believed in because faith is a natural disposition, and when the word 'belief' is used, it generally refers to faith in Allah *Glorified is He* because it is the first faith.

The verb *amana* (to believe) can be used as a transitive verb when the letter '*bi'* is used, as in the saying *amana bi-hi* which means, 'He believed in His existence.' It can also be used as a transitive verb when the letter '*la'* is used, as in the saying, *amana la-hu* which means 'He believed Him.' Furthermore, it can be made transitive without any preposition, as in the verse: '...And made them safe (*amana-hum*) from danger' (*Quraysh:* 4). These modifications of the verb convey the meaning of safety, tranquillity and peace.

Allah *Glorified is He* then described the believers as those who '...did righteous deeds' (*Muhammad:* 2). The Noble Quran frequently mentions faith and righteous deeds together because faith is a deed of the heart alone, whereas righteous deeds are the deeds of the outward form and the limbs. Thus, compliance must be provided from the heart through the affirmation of creed, and from the outward form through obeying the commands of the One God, Allah, in which the heart believes.

The master of all the limbs is the heart. It is the instrument that pumps blood, which is the fluid of life, to all the parts of the body. If the heart is filled with faith, it will pump it to all the limbs as well, and thus they will become upright. This is why Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* said: 'Indeed in the body there is a morsel of flesh, that, if healthy, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart.'(1)

---

(1) *This narration is agreed on. It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (50) and by Muslim in his Sahih (2996) from the Hadith of Nuʿman ibn Basheer, and it is part of the Hadith: "Indeed the lawful and the unlawful is clear, and between them are doubtful matters that most people do not know. Whoever is cautious with doubtful matters has preserved his religion and his honour," as well as the rest of the Hadith.*

The deed of the heart is to believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and in the unseen things of which Allah *Glorified is He* has informed us. Therefore, we need to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, The Last Day, and to believe in divine predestination or fate, whether it seems good or is apparently detrimental.

Then, there are the deeds of the limbs. For instance, the eye must not look at the unmarriable kin of others while the tongue must not bear false witness, backbite people, slander chaste women, or swear false oaths. The belly must only be filled with that which is permissible and the hand must not be used to steal or kill a soul that Allah *Glorified is He* has made sacred unless it is out of justice. The feet must not move towards the impermissible actions. Therefore, every limb has a righteous deed, and they must avoid the impermissible deeds.

There is also a righteous deed that includes all the limbs, which is filial piety, where a person is benevolent and charitable towards their parents. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* connected this deed to worshipping Him, when He said: 'And worship Allah (alone), and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do the good unto your parents' (*an-Nisa':* 36).

In the chapter of *al-'Asr*, the importance of righteous deeds after faith is made clear, as Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Consider the flight of time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself, unless he be of those who believed and did righteous deeds' (*at-Takathur:* 1-3).

Allah *Glorified is He* then said in our verse: '...and have come to believe in what has been revealed to Muhammad – for it is the truth from their Lord' (*Muhammad:* 2). He mentioned this after His statement: 'And those who have believed and did righteous deeds' (*Muhammad:* 2). This is proof that we are obliged to believe in the previous messengers. This is also why Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'In matters of religion, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Nuh (Noah) – and into which We gave you (O Muhammad) insight through revelation – as well as that which We had enjoined upon Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus): Steadfastly uphold the (true) faith, and do not break up your unity therein' (*ash-Shura:* 13).

This is because there is one foundation of religion which is the worship of Allah *Glorified is He* alone, and the issue of faith is the same with all of Allah's

Messengers. Faith in Allah *Glorified is He* leads to faith in His Books and Messengers, as well as faith in the Hereafter and the Reckoning. Thus, believing in all of these concepts emanates from our faith in Allah *Glorified is He*.

However, is Allah *Glorified is He* addressing you alone when He orders you with certain commands and prohibits you from certain actions? No. Rather, He chooses messengers to convey His Message: ‘Allah chooses message-bearers from among the angels as well as from among men’ (*al-Hajj:* 75). He chose Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* to be the one entrusted with His revelation from among the angels, and He chose certain people to be the messengers and prophets of mankind. Thus, faith in Allah *Glorified is He* causes us to having faith in all of Allah’s Messengers in which we regard all of them highly and equally.

I remember that one of the orientalists in San Francisco once asked me, ‘How is it that you allow a Muslim man to marry a woman from the people of the Book, but you forbid a man from the people of the Book to marry a Muslim woman? Why did you not make all marriages lawful to the people of the Book just as you made their food and drink lawful for yourselves?’(1) I said to him, ‘It is because the Muslim man believes in the Messenger who the woman (from the people of the Book) believes in, while the man from the people of the Book does not believe in the Messenger of the Muslim woman he wants to marry.’

Allah’s statement: ‘...for it is the truth from their Lord,’ (*Muhammad:* 2) means that the message that has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* is the firm and established truth that never changes or alters. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* mentioned the fruit of this faith in His words: ‘He will efface their (past) bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest’ (*Muhammad:* 2).

It is from Allah’s mercy that He has allowed people to repent, and opened the door of forgiveness for them. He is their Creator and He knows best what is good for them. He also knows that it is part of man’s nature to be temporarily unmindful. This is why He said: '...and to pardon many (of their actions)' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15). He legislated expiations for us, from one prayer to the next, from one Friday to the next and from one *Ramadan* to the next. All of these times are expiations for our sins and occasions for forgiveness so that we do not despair from Allah's Mercy. They are meant to encourage us to stop our wrongdoing. Therefore, the forgiveness of sins is a mercy that Allah *Glorified is He* shows to His servants so that despair and disobedience do not spread amongst mankind.

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(1) Allah said regarding the permissibility of the food of the people of the Book: “...And the food of those who have been given revelation aforetime is lawful to you” (*al-Ma’ida:* 5).

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...and will set their hearts (*baal*) at rest' (*Muhammad:* 2). All the Quranic commentators(1) said that the meaning of these words is that Allah *Glorified is He* will establish the soundness of their psychological, spiritual and material state (*haal*). However, there is a difference between the Arabic words *baal* and *haal*. The word *baal* refers to the ideas that occupy a person's mind. When you say that a particular thing is in your *baal*, this means that it is concerning your mind. Usually, a man's *baal* is occupied with the concerns of his current state. For example, a student's *baal* is concerned with success in an exam, a university admission, or working after graduation. If Allah *Glorified is He* rectified the student's *baal,* then his *haal* (state) will also be put in order, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ٱتَّبَعُوا۟ ٱلْبَٰطِلَ وَأَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّبَعُوا۟
ٱلْحَقَّ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضْرِبُ ٱللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ أَمْثَٰلَهُمْ ﴿٣﴾

This is because the disbelievers follow falsehood, while the believers follow the truth from their Lord. In this way God shows people their true type [3] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 3)

Allah's word: 'This,' (*Muhammad:* 3) at the beginning of this verse is an indication that this verse is going to be an explanation of the preceding verse.

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(1) The commentators say the following regarding "...and will set their hearts at rest." (*Muhammad:* 2):
- It means that He will rectify their affairs, and this is the opinion of Mujahid and others.
- It means that He will rectify their state, and this is the opinion of Qatada.
- It means that He will rectify their matters, and this is the statement of Ibn ʿAbbas.

Al-Qurtubi said in his *Tafsir* (9/6275): 'The three opinions are close to each other and they interpret rectification with regards to their lives in this world. An-Naqqash interprets the meaning to be that He rectifies their intentions, and based on this interpretation, the verse means that their religiosity will be rectified."

Therefore, the preceding reward mentioned for the believers and the preceding punishment mentioned for the disbelievers has a particular rationale and reasoning which will be explained in this verse. The rationale for the punishment of the disbelievers is that they intentionally followed falsehood, while the rationale for Allah's grace towards the believers is that they strived to follow the truth. Falsehood is an illusion, while the truth is manifest and established. Therefore, whoever follows that which is non-existent loses all goodness, while following the truth leads to established and true integrity.

However, why do the people of falsehood follow falsehood? They follow it because it does not have any commandments that restrict their desires. It does not warn them from any punishment, but rather, gives their souls the freedom to indulge in their wants, desires, and passions. Falsehood can steal and live off the efforts and even the blood of others. With falsehood, people may loathe, envy, or even kill one another.

On the other hand, the truth forbids and restricts us from doing things that go against the requirements of our faith. Indeed, the people who worshipped idols, the sun, the moon, or the stars knew that these false deities cannot harm or bring about benefit. However, these false deities did not have any commandments that restricted their worshippers, and this is why they worshipped them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then said: 'In this way does Allah set forth unto people the parables of their true state' (*Muhammad:* 3). Setting forth parables is a method by which the meanings are explained in the Noble Quran. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified matters, in which people's understanding may come to a stop, by using parables. These parables made complex concepts easier to understand.

For instance, in another chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* sets forth a parable of those who associate partners with Allah. Allah said: '(To this end,) Allah set forth a parable: (Compare) a man who has several masters, (all of them) at variance (quarrelling) with one another, (compared) with a man who depends wholly on one master: can the conditions of these two servants be deemed equal?' (*az-Zumar:* 29) When you read this parable, the absurdity of idolatry and the soundness of monotheism become clear to you. These two concepts are not equal because a servant cannot be equally obedient to a number of masters. Their mastery is not agreed upon but rather disagreed over such that the servant cannot possibly please any one of them completely. On the other hand, in monotheism, the servant only obeys one master.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* set forth parables for us in the chapter of *an-Nur*, to illustrate His Light that illuminates the universe. Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is (enclosed) in glass, the glass is (shining) like a radiant star: (a lamp) lit from a blessed tree – an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west – the oil whereof (is so bright that it) would well-nigh give light (of itself) even though fire had not touched it: light upon light!’ (*an-Nur:* 35)

An example of a clarifying parable is the following verse, in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘The parable of those who worship (beings or forces) other than Allah as their protectors is that of a spider which makes for itself a house: for, behold, the frailest of all houses is the spider’s house. Could they but understand this?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 41) Allah *Glorified is He* said:

فَإِذَا لَقِيتُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فَضَرۡبَ ٱلرِّقَابِ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَآ أَثۡخَنتُمُوهُمۡ فَشُدُّواْ ٱلۡوَثَاقَ فَإِمَّا مَنَّۢا بَعۡدُ
وَإِمَّا فِدَآءً حَتَّىٰ تَضَعَ ٱلۡحَرۡبُ أَوۡزَارَهَاۚ ذَٰلِكَ وَلَوۡ يَشَآءُ ٱللَّهُ لَٱنتَصَرَ مِنۡهُمۡ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَبۡلُوَاْ
بَعۡضَكُم بِبَعۡضٖۗ وَٱلَّذِينَ قُتِلُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَلَن يُضِلَّ أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ ﴿٤﴾

When you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike them in the neck, and once they are defeated, bind any captives firmly — later you can release them by grace or by ransom — until the toils of war have ended. That [is the way]. God could have defeated them Himself if He had willed, but His purpose is to test some of you by means of others. He will not let the deeds of those who are killed for His cause come to nothing [4] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 4)

Allah’s statement: ‘Now when you meet (in war) those who are bent on denying the truth,’ (*Muhammad:* 4) refers to meeting the enemies in the field of battle when war breaks out between the two groups. ‘Strike their necks,’ (*Muhammad:* 4) refers to killing them, whether by striking the necks or other actions, but striking the necks is mentioned because it is the most swift and certain way of killing. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...until you overcome them fully' (*Muhammad:* 4). The Arabic word used is *athkhantum*, which refers to taking away the enemy's ability to move. This Arabic word is derived from the word *thakheen* which is a substance that has become thick that it clings together due to a viscosity that slows its movement.

This can be seen when rice is cooked in milk or soup, or when honey is boiled in order to make jam. The boiling water forms steam and the remaining substance becomes dense and heavy. This is why it does not move when boiled and we say that the remaining liquid is *thakheen* which means that it is thick and solid-like.

The words: '...then, tighten their bonds,' (*Muhammad:* 4) means that proper shackles should be placed and that they should be tied properly with chains and ropes, so that they remain as prisoners who cannot escape easily. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...but thereafter (set them free,) either by an act of grace or in exchange for ransom' (*Muhammad:* 4).

Now, when do we release them and let them go by an act of grace, without asking for anything in return, and when do we do that in exchange for ransom? You should let them go without asking for anything in return in situations in which their army releases our prisoners without asking us for anything in return. Likewise, you should take a ransom if they ask for a ransom in order to release our prisoners. This is what is called a like-for-a-like treatment, and this is what the United Nations have now concluded with regards to these kinds of situations.

Allah *Glorified is He* then said: '...so that war can lift its burdens (*awzaraha*)' (*Muhammad:* 4). The word 'war' here is metaphorically used to refer to the soldiers who are partaking in it. Therefore, the meaning of this phrase is that we should follow the verse's commands until the fighting stops. The word: '...burdens (*awzaraha*),' (*Muhammad:* 4) indicates the heavy weights of war, as war is a hardship and a difficulty upon all the people participating in it. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said about war: 'Fighting is ordained for you, even though it is despised by you' (*al-Baqara:* 216). This is because, in war, you are liable to lose wealth, family, or even your entire life, in addition to the difficulties and hardships of attacking and retreating, striking, being wounded and so forth.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* said in the verse we are studying: '...And (know that) had Allah so willed, He could indeed defeat them (Himself),' (*Muhammad:* 4) which means that, indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* can exact revenge upon them with His power, without the believers having to fight. This is a simple matter for Allah *Glorified is He*. In fact, this is what Allah *Glorified is He* decreed upon many previous nations when He destroyed them with punishments that they could not repel. This is something to which history bears witness. Read, for instance, Allah's words: 'For every one of them did We take to task for his sin: and so, upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm-wind; and some of them were overtaken by a (sudden) blast; and some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some of them We caused to drown' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

Then, why was this fighting legislated upon the believers, when it is detested by them and contains such hardships and difficulty? Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will succour you against them; and He will soothe the hearts of those who believe,' (*at-Tawba:* 14). Thus, fighting was legislated to manifest the strength of the believers, test the firmness of their faith and to distinguish the believers from the hypocrites. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...but (Allah wills you to struggle) so as to test you (all) by means of one another' (*Muhammad:* 4). Therefore, the believers are tested by the disbelievers and the disbelievers are tested by the believers. This was to purify the faith of the believers, who were going to be the bearers of the message, and the people responsible for conveying Allah's call. They will travel with this call all over the earth, and thus, they had to be purified in order to distinguish the valuable people from the ineffective individuals.

The person who will be patient with the pains of wars will not flee and will sacrifice his wealth and himself for Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, Allah does not test human beings to know facts about them because He already knows everything about His creation. These tests are made for us to realize our own strengths or weaknesses.

Allah *Glorified is He* ordained these tests to allow people to distinguish the nature of this community and the nature of this message. Through them, they will get to recognize the greatness of Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* who was sent as the Seal of all the Prophets, to convey Allah's message to all of mankind in every time and every place. Therefore, his followers must be suitable to hold this responsibility and must be worthy of bearing the burdens of the message following Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him.*

It was narrated(1) that Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr(2) *may Allah be pleased with him* had been a proud Qurayshi young man before embracing Islam. For instance, before he became a Muslim, he used to leave his home several times a day, each time wearing new clothes that would give off various scents of musk.

His state transformed when he became a Muslim, and Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* sent him to Medina to teach the people about Islam. He put on rough clothes and did without the life of ease that he used to have before he became a Muslim.

When his mother learned of his state, she grieved over him, went on a hunger strike, and sat in the heat of the sun in order to turn her son away from Islam. She wanted to make him go back to the religion of his parents and grandparents. When Mus'ab *may Allah be pleased with him* learned of what his mother did to herself, he said to them, 'Tell my mother, that by Allah *Glorified is He* if she had a hundred souls and one came out after the other so that I left this religion for her, I would not leave Islam. Leave her and when her hunger becomes severe, she will eat, and when the heat of the sun starts to afflict her, she will seek shade.'(3)

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(1) *The story of Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr's conversion to Islam and the reaction of his mother*

(2) *He is Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr ibn Hashim ibn 'Abd Al-Manaf Al-Qurashi from the clan of Bani 'Abd Ad-Dar, who was a Companion and amongst the earliest people to embrace Islam. He became a Muslim in Mecca and initially hid his Islam. His family then found out, and thus, they tied him up and detained him. He emigrated to Medina and was the first person to gather people for the Friday prayer there. Usayd ibn Hudayr became a Muslim at Mus'ab's hands, as well as Sa'd ibn Mu'adh. In the Age of Ignorance (Jahaliyyah) he was a young, handsome man, who had lived a life of ease and luxury. His nickname was Mus'ab Al-Khayr (Mus'ab, the Person of Good), and he died in the year 3 A.H. (Al-'Alam by Az-Zirikli).*

(3) *Mentioned by As-Shami in Subul Al-Huda wa Ar-Rashad (11/315), Adh-Dhababi in Siyar 'Alam An-Nubala' (1/109), Ibn 'Asakir in Tarikh Dimashq (20/331), Ibn Al-Athir=*

Mus'ab *may Allah be pleased with him* then lived in Medina until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* migrated to it. Prophet Muhammad saw Mus'ab wearing the hide of a ram and said: 'Look at what faith has done to your companion.'

Therefore, war was legislated in Islam for wisdom, as it is like the fire that removes dirt from metals and is therefore used to purify gold and iron. War was the way through which Allah *Glorified is He* prepared the nation of the Arabs to be a nation of courage, even before Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* was sent. When Prophet Muhammad was later compelled to fight, he did not need to train any soldiers or open a military academy. Rather, he found men who were experienced in the arts of war because the wars that broke out between the tribes lasted for forty years before Islam was revealed(1) had made a fully prepared army out of the Arabs. Whenever they heard a cry of transgression, they would rush towards it fearlessly.

Furthermore, the Arabs were a Bedouin community that lived a nomadic life. They used to carry their tents on the backs of camels while following the rainfall and the lands of pasture. It was as if Allah *Glorified is He* was preparing them to carry His message to great distances.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...And as for those who are killed in Allah's Cause, never will He let their deeds go to waste' (*Muhammad:* 4). Those who were killed in Allah's path are martyrs and Allah *Glorified is He* will never invalidate their deeds. In fact, He will compensate them and reward them fully for their righteous efforts. This is because the martyrs have given their lives for Allah *Glorified is He* and sacrificed the most valuable things they owned in Allah's cause. Allah *Glorified is He* will reward them generously with favours they could not have imagined. Indeed, this reward will be according to the rule announced in His verse: 'But when you are greeted with a greeting (of peace), answer with an even better greeting' (*an-Nisa':* 86).

= *in Usd Al-Ghaba (1/469) and Ibn Kathir in Al-Bidaya wa An-Nihaya (8/81), but it is actually regarding Sa'd ibn Malik ibn Abu Waqas and not Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr.*

(1) An example of these wars was the war of *Da'is* and *Al-Ghabra'*, which happened fifty years before Islam, and was between the two tribes of 'Abas and Fazara.

These martyrs have provided their own self in Allah’s Cause, and therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* will free them from having to die another time. Therefore, the martyr’s worldly life will be connected to the life of the Hereafter. An Arab poet drew his listeners’ attention to this meaning when he praised Hamza *may Allah be pleased with him* Prophet Muhammad’s uncle and the master of the martyrs. The poet said(1):

‘Is Hamza not the uncle of The Chosen One and the master
Of the martyrs, all of them without exception
It suffices you from this martyrdom, immunity
From death, while joining the two lives together.’

Some people objected to the concept that martyrs remains alive, saying that if we dig up a martyr’s grave, we would only find a dead body. However, this is a restricted view of the matter of life and death. In order to put yourself at ease, read Allah’s words: ‘But do not think of those that have been killed in Allah’s Cause as dead. Nay, they are alive, with their Lord, receiving their sustenance’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169). Reflect upon the words: ‘...with their Lord’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169). Allah *Glorified is He* did not say that they are alive with us, but rather, they are alive with their Lord, in a life that only Allah *Glorified is He* knows. This is from the unseen matters that we must submit to. The martyr is alive with His Lord even though he appears dead in your eyes.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said regarding these martyrs: ‘...receiving their sustenance’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169). This is another indication that they are alive because sustenance is from the means of maintaining life, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

سَيَهۡدِيهِمۡ وَيُصۡلِحُ بَالَهُمۡ ﴿٥﴾ وَيُدۡخِلُهُمُ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ عَرَّفَهَا لَهُمۡ ﴿٦﴾

He will guide them and put them into a good state [5]
He will admit them into the Garden He has already
made known to them [6] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 5 - 6)

How can Allah *Glorified is He* guide them when they are already guided? Did they attain martyrdom without being guided? This is as the guidance mentioned in Allah's words: '…just as for those who are (willing to be) guided, He increases their (ability to follow His) guidance' (*Muhammad:* 17). This means that He will guide them to paradise or to acknowledge His blessings and favours with gratitude. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* told us that the people of paradise will exclaim: 'All praise is due to Allah who has made His promise to us come true' (*az-Zumar:* 74). Allah *Glorified is He* also said regarding the people of the fire, and we seek refuge in Allah from their destiny: '(And Allah will thus command :) 'Assemble all those who were bent on evildoing, together with others of their ilk and (with) all that they were wont to worship instead of Allah, and lead them all onto the way to the blazing fire' (*as-Saffat:* 22-23). Therefore, the believers and martyrs will be guided to a life of ease, while the disbelievers will be guided to the blazing fire.

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(1) From the poetry of the Sheikh

Part of this guidance is that the martyr will know his palace in paradise without knowing the address and without anyone showing it to him. (1) This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said afterwards: '...and will set their hearts at rest, and will admit them to the paradise which He has promised(2) them' (*Muhammad:* 5-6). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* will establish them in the best state, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

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(1) *It was narrated by Abu Saʿid Al-Khudri may Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad said: "The believers are rescued from the fire and are detained on a bridge between paradise and the fire. Then, certain injustices that occurred between them in the life of this world will be settled, until they are purified and cleansed so they can enter paradise. By The One Who has Muhammad's soul in His hand, each one you will know the way to his home better than he did in the life of this world." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6054), Ahmad in his Musnad (10673, 11123, 11175, 11281), Al-Bayhaqi in Shuʿab Al-Iman (350) and ʿAbd ibn Ḥamid in his Musnad (938)). Al-Qurtubi (9/6281) said: "When they enter paradise it is said to them, 'Disperse to your homes,' and they will know their homes better than they did when they went to their homes after a Friday prayer." This meaning is the opinion of Mujahid and most Quranic commentators.*

(2) *ʿarrafaha lahum ("He has made it (paradise) known to them,") means that He has made it so clear to them that they know it without having to be shown their places in it. Al-Hasan said: "Allah described paradise for them in the life of this world, so when they enter it, they will know it according to its description." Ibn ʿAbbas said: "The words ʿarrafaha lahum ("...He has made it (paradise) known to them,") means that He has added a scent to it to make it pleasant with all kinds of pleasures, and it is taken from the word ʿarf which is a pleasant scent. Muʿarraf food is food that has been scented. (Al-Qurtubi 9/6282)*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن تَنصُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ يَنصُرۡكُمۡ وَيُثَبِّتۡ أَقۡدَامَكُمۡ (٧)

You who believe! If you help God, He will help you and
make you stand firm [7] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 7)

This is a matter of military combat for the Muslims. The principal outlined in this verse does not change because it is one of Allah's standard rules. As long as the Muslim army is fighting for Allah's Cause and to support His religion, they will be granted victory. Allah will give victory to the righteous army if they are fighting for His true cause. This is why we said that if you ever see Muslims being defeated in a battle, you must know that they were not fulfilling the conditions of being Allah's soldiers. You have to examine their intentions closely to find the reasons for their defeat.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'For, long ago, has Our word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they indeed, would be succoured, and that, verily, Our hosts would (in the end) be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) This is why we saw what happened in the Battle of Uhud when the archers went against the commands of Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* and abandoned their obedience to Allah's Commands.(1)

Similar conditions occurred in the Battle of Hunayn, of which Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'And on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers and they proved of no avail to you – for the earth, despite all its vastness, became (too) narrow for you and you turned back, retreating,' (*at-Tawba:* 25). Even Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* himself felt proud regarding the Muslims' strength over the enemy. It is narrated that he said, ‘We will not be defeated today because, indeed, we are numbered.’ When the Muslims became filled with delusion and pride because of their numbers, they were afflicted with defeat at the very beginning of the battle.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3737) from Al-Bara' who said: 'We met the polytheists on that day and The Prophet made a group of archers sit down and he put them under the command of ʿAbdullah. Prophet Muhammad said to the archers: "Do not leave your posts, even if you see us overwhelming them do not leave. If you see them overwhelming us do not come down to help us." Then, the disbelievers were defeated and I saw the women fleeing, lifting up their clothes, and revealing their leg-bangles and their legs. Thus, the companions of ʿAbdullah said, "The war-spoils! The war-spoils!" ʿAbdullah said, "Allah's Messenger told me that you must not leave." They refused to obey, and when they refused, they were forced to turn back, they were defeated and seventy Muslims were killed." The Hadith then continued. It is also narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (3288) and Ahmad in his Musnad (17854 and 17859).*

However, Allah’s Mercy allowed them to re-organize their lines and they were victorious towards the end of the battle. Thus, this was a disciplinary practical lesson from Allah *Glorified is He* to His believing servants so that when they enter a war, their only thoughts should be connected to Allah Alone and fighting for His Cause without fail.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘...and (Allah) will make your feet firm’ (*Muhammad:* 7). Making the feet firm is a reference to being determined and withstanding in the battlefield because feet are what is used to flee from war. Therefore, with Allah’s support, the feet will not flee during combats, Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ فَتَعْسًا لَّهُمْ وَأَضَلَّ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ ﴿٨﴾

As for the disbelievers, how wretched will be
their state! God has brought their deeds to
nothing [8] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 8)

After mentioning the believers and their promise of victory, Allah *Glorified is He* then mentioned the disbelievers and the ill fortune (*ta’s*) that will befall them. *Ta’s* is an Arabic word that refers to a person falling down on their face, and the face is the noblest part of a person’s body. This is why, when expressing ignominy and dejection to a person, some people say, ‘The person’s nose was rubbed in the dirt.’

Therefore, the words: ‘...ill fortune awaits them,’ (*Muhammad:* 8) mean that they will experience shame and ruin, and their faces will be humiliated with the worst kind of humiliation that a person can suffer. Allah *Glorified is He* said in another chapter, regarding the children of Israel: ‘...And so, when the prediction of the second (period of your iniquity) came true, (We raised new enemies against you, and allowed them) to disgrace your faces utterly (*yasu’u wujuhakum*)’ (*al-Isra’:* 7).

Allah’s statement: ‘...since He will let all their (good) deeds go to waste,’ (*Muhammad:* 8) means that He will nullify their good deeds and make them worthless such that they will be of no benefit. This is because they did not do these deeds for Allah’s sake. Therefore, their good deeds will dissolve and they will not benefit from them in any degree.

Allah *Glorified is He* said in another chapter: ‘But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their (good) deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty (person) supposes to be water – until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds (that) Allah (has always been present) with him, and (that) He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!’ (*an-Nur:* 39) Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ كَرِهُواْ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ فَأَحۡبَطَ أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ ٩

It is because they hate what God has sent down
that He has caused their deeds to go to waste[9]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 9)

The word: ‘It’ (*Muhammad:* 9) is referring to the ill fortune and nullification of deeds that has been mentioned as part of the punishment of the disbelievers. The reason for this punishment is that ‘they hated (the very thought of) what Allah has revealed’ (*Muhammad:* 9). This is the reason for the nullification of their good deeds.

These disbelievers hated what Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed and sent down because they saw that Allah’s commands will strip them of their authority, leadership, and power. Allah’s way made them equal to their servants after they had become accustomed to leadership, rank, and dominance over all the other creatures. This is why they hated the truth that Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* conveyed to them.

While Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was going to Medina, they were preparing 'Abdullah ibn Ubay to be crowned a king of Medina.(1) When the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived, the people dispersed from around him and became preoccupied with the advent of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. ‘Abdullah held a grudge deep in his soul against the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he persisted in his enmity towards the Messenger such that when he declared his Islam he was not sincere but rather a hypocrite, and his hypocrisy was well-known

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(1) *It is mentioned by As-Suhayli in Ar-Rawd Al-Anf 3/18 that the Helpers were arranging pearls from Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul in order to crown him and make him their king.*

Despite that, he had a son who became Muslim and whose Islam was sincere and he was a companion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When his son learned that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had commanded that this hypocrite be killed, he came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him for exclusive permission to kill him so that no other man would do it from amongst the Companions. He wanted to avoid the feeling of resentment against any one of them. When he said this to the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Messenger refused and chose to show ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay mercy and pardon him. He said: ‘Do not kill him. Let his punishment be postponed to be carried out by Allah.’(1)

His statement: ‘...caused their deeds to go to waste,’ (*Muhammad:* 9) means, as we have said, that He invalidates their deeds, be it their actions, planning or plotting against the Muslims. This was achieved by the Muslims’ victory over them. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* made their plotting fall back on them. The meaning of this part of the verse might also be that Allah *Glorified is He* caused their deeds to go to waste because they did not do them for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* or seeking His pleasure.

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(1) *Mentioned by Ibn Kathir in Al-Bidverse wa an-Nihverse 4/181 in which he said that Ibn Ishaq said: ʿAsim ibn ʿUmar ibn Qatada related to me that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul came to The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said: ‘O Messenger of Allah Glorified is He! It has reached me that you want to kill ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay because of what has reached you concerning him. If that is the case, then leave it to me and I will bring you his head, for by Allah Glorified is He, I know that amongst Al- Khazraj there is no one more dutiful to his father than me and I fear that you will command someone else to kill him. Do not leave me to look at the killer of ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay walking amongst the people because I will kill him and killing a believing man because of a disbeliever will cause me to enter the fire.’ Thus, The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘We shall be gentle with him and treat him well as long as he is with us.’*

It is known that amongst these people there were those who had righteous deeds that carried weight in their society. It is related that Ibn Jud'an and Al-Mat'am ibn 'Adiyy had pots of food under which a man could seek shade. They had great deeds in generosity, courage, and helping those in trouble, but they did not do this to seek Allah's pleasure, and thus these deeds go to waste.

أَفَلَمۡ يَسِيرُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ فَيَنظُرُواْ كَيۡفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ
مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡۚ دَمَّرَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِمۡۖ وَلِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ أَمۡثَٰلُهَا ١٠

Have they not travelled the earth and seen how those before them met their end? God destroyed them utterly: a similar fate awaits the disbelievers [10] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 10)

His statement: 'Have they not travelled the earth...' (*Muhammad:* 10) is a question whose purpose is to show astonishment at what the disbelievers did. How could they disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* when they were a nation of nomads who travelled regularly, and in their journeys they passed by the ruins of houses that belonged to the previous disbelieving nations, seeing the punishment that befell them and how Allah *Glorified is He* took them to task. Did they not take a lesson from this?

He says in another verse: 'You [people] pass by their ruins morning* and night: will you not take heed?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) He also says: 'Do they not see how We come to [their] land and shrink its borders? Allah decides—no one can reverse His decision—and He is swift in reckoning' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41). He says in another verse: '...We have allowed these sinners and their fore-fathers to enjoy life for a long time. But do they not see how We are shrinking their borders? Is it they who will prevail?' (*al-Anbiya':* 44) That is take a lesson from the facts of life. Have you ever seen a Messenger being defeated by his enemies? Therefore, let them take a lesson from the previous nations: '...and seen how those before them met their end' (*Muhammad:* 10). What did Allah *Glorified is He* do to them? '...Allah destroyed them utterly...' (*Muhammad:* 10). The meaning of *dammara* (destroyed) is that Allah *Glorified is He* ruined them within themselves, while *dammara alayhim*, as mentioned in this verse, mean that He surrounded them with torture and devastation. Thus, He destroyed them, their property, and their families so that nothing was left of them.

'A similar fate awaits the disbelievers' (*Muhammad:* 10), i.e. this outcome is not far from you, Oh disbelievers of Mecca; so beware! In the same vein, the True Lord says in another verse: '...It is not far from the evildoers.' (*Hud:* 83)

Then, the True Lord says:(1)

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَوۡلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَأَنَّ ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ لَا مَوۡلَىٰ لَهُمۡ ١١

That is because God protects the believers while the
disbelievers have no one to protect them [11]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 11)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'That...' (*Muhammad:* 11) referring to Allah's exacting revenge from the disbelievers, as well as His saving the believers and granting them victory: '...because Allah is the protector of the believers,' (*Muhammad:* 11). *Mawla* (Protector) is the One Who gives them victory and takes charge of their affairs; He is the Mighty who is never overcome. 'While the disbelievers have no one to protect them' (*Muhammad:* 11). They will have no helper and no one to grant them victory because they worshiped gods that cannot harm nor benefit them. Then, the True Lord says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُدۡخِلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُۖ
وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ يَتَمَتَّعُونَ وَيَأۡكُلُونَ كَمَا تَأۡكُلُ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمُ وَٱلنَّارُ مَثۡوٗى لَّهُمۡ ١٢

God will admit those who believe and do good deeds to
Gardens graced with flowing streams; the disbelievers may
take their fill of pleasure in this world, and eat as cattle do, but
the Fire will be their home [12] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 12)

Here, The True Lord is telling us about the deeds of the people of faith and their consequences, and the deeds of the people of disbelief and their consequences. The believer has maintained his heart with faith, and thus his limbs were maintained with righteous actions. The consequence is: ‘...Gardens graced with flowing streams...’ (*Muhammad:* 12), where the life of ease is eternal and never-ending.

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(1) *Qatada said: 'It was sent down on the Day of Uhud on the mountain path. When the polytheists cried out: 'A day for a day. We have 'Uzza and you have no 'Uzza' The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'No. Say: 'Allah Glorified is He is our Protector and you have no protector.' (The Quran, Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir 9/6285)*

The meaning of *min tahtiha* (literally: under which), ‘...graced with...’ (*Muhammad:* 12) is that its water is inherent and constantly provided. It does not come from far away and there is no fear of it being cut off.

As for the disbelievers, they eat and enjoy food and drink, and they fill their bellies and their bodies. As for their hearts, they are empty and desolate with no meaning and no faith. Therefore, they live a life that is similar to the life of animals and beasts. They have material glut but in terms of values and spirituality they are impoverished. This is their state in the life of this world. Then, the consequence and normal reward will come as mentioned in the verse: ‘...but the Fire will be their home’ (*Muhammad:* 12), i.e., the fire will be their end, their place of return, their place of settlement and their final destination.

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن قَرۡيَةٍ هِيَ أَشَدُّ قُوَّةٗ مِّن قَرۡيَتِكَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَخۡرَجَتۡكَ أَهۡلَكۡنَٰهُمۡ فَلَا نَاصِرَ لَهُمۡ ﴿١٣﴾

We have destroyed many a town stronger than your own [Prophet] – the town which [chose to] expel you – and they had no one to help them [13] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 13)

His statement: ‘Many a town...’ (*Muhammad:* 13), i.e. many towns ‘...stronger than your own [Prophet]—the town which [chose to] expel you—we have destroyed, and they had no one to help them’ (*Muhammad:* 13). The town referred to here is Mecca, as it is the city that drove out Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and how does it compare to the towns that Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed—which were of greater power, had greater numbers of people, and were more advanced in terms of civilization and development.

The True Lord says about them: ‘Have they not travelled through the land and seen how their predecessors met their end? They were mightier than them: they cultivated the earth more and built more upon it...’ (*ar-Rum:* 9).

How do they compare to ‘Ad, the like of which were not created in the land, with the tribe of Thamud, who hewed out the rocks in the valley or with

Pharaoh, the lord of hosts? How do they compare to these people who were eventually destroyed? ‘We have destroyed, and they had no one to help them’ (*Muhammad:* 13). They had no one to defend them and repel the punishment from them.

Then, the True Lord says:

أَفَمَن كَانَ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ كَمَن زُيِّنَ لَهُۥ سُوٓءُ عَمَلِهِۦ وَٱتَّبَعُوٓاْ أَهْوَآءَهُم ﴿١٤﴾

Can those who follow clear proof from their Lord be compared to those whose foul deeds are made to seem alluring to them, those who follow their own desires? [14]
(The Quran, Muhammad: 14)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to affirm this fact, but He does it in the form of a question: ‘Is this equal to this?’ ‘Can those who follow clear proof from their Lord...’ (*Muhammad:* 14)? *Ala bayyinah* means: on guidance, clear evidence and light from His Lord.

The Lord is The Creator and He is The Nurturer. What do you think of nurturing if it is from Allah *Glorified is He*? This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in the context of stating a favour done to him by his Lord: ‘My Lord refined me and He perfected my refinement.’(1)

The meaning of *ala bayyinah* ‘...who follow clear proof from their Lord...’ (*Muhammad:* 14) is to be on clear evidence, unshakeable certainty and an upright way that secures goodness in the life of this world and well-being in the Hereafter. Is this person equal to someone whose evil deed is made fair to him so much so that he considers it good and he follows his vain passions and desires? You must say that they are not equal.

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(1) *Mentioned by As-Sakhawi in Al-Maqasid Al-Hasana and he attributed it to Al-Askari in Al-Amthal, and he said: ‘Its chain of transmission is very weak and our Sheikh (The Quran, i.e. Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani) restricted its judgement to being gharib (The Quran, having one narrator absolutely, or only one person adding to the text or to the chain of transmission) in some of his legal verdicts fatawa. Ibn Taymiyyah said: ‘It is not known to have an established chain of transmission.’ Ibn Al-Jawzi mentioned it in Al-Ahadith Al-Wahiyya from the Hadith (Prophetic tradition) of ‘Ali and he said: ‘It is not authentic.’*

One of the most severe tribulations that man falls into is when his passions make his evil deeds seem goodly to him. Desires are the inclinations and passions that make you deviate from the straight path. This is why they said(1): ‘The bane of opinion are desires; and this is why Allah *Glorified is He* praised His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘Nor does he speak out of desire’ (*an-Najm:* 3).

Then, the context goes back to striking parables one more time, as the True Lord says:

مَّثَلُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ ٱلَّتِي وُعِدَ ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ فِيهَآ أَنْهَٰرٌ مِّن مَّآءٍ غَيْرِ ءَاسِنٍ وَأَنْهَٰرٌ مِّن لَّبَنٍ لَّمْ يَتَغَيَّرْ
طَعْمُهُۥ وَأَنْهَٰرٌ مِّنْ خَمْرٍ لَّذَّةٍ لِّلشَّٰرِبِينَ وَأَنْهَٰرٌ مِّنْ عَسَلٍ مُّصَفًّى ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ
وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ ۖ كَمَنْ هُوَ خَٰلِدٌ فِى ٱلنَّارِ وَسُقُوا۟ مَآءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَآءَهُمْ ﴿١٥﴾

Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure, [all] flow in it; there they will find fruit of every kind; and they will find forgiveness from their Lord. How can this be compared to the fate of those stuck in the Fire, given boiling water to drink that tears their bowels? [15]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 15)

The word *mathal* ‘...parable...’ is pronounced *mithl* with a *kasra* below the *mim* when likening a singular object to another singular object that is similar. Thus, you say: ‘*Hadha mithl hadha’* (this is like this). You say it with a *fat’ha* when you want to liken an image that has parts to another image that has parts. This is why He says here: *‘Mathalu al-jannati allati wu’ida al-muttaqun,’* ‘Here is a parable of the Garden promised to the pious...’ (*Muhammad:* 15), with a *fat’ha* above the *mim* because it represents an aggregation and a comprehensive image that has various parts and elements.

Read His statement: ‘...parable of the life of this world...’ (*al-Kahf:* 45), i.e. this indicates life including what it contains from birth to death, ‘... like water which We send down from the cloud so the herbage of the earth becomes tangled on account of it, then it becomes dry broken into pieces which the winds scatter; and Allah is the holder of power over all things' (*al-Kahf:* 45).

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(1) This was said by Aktham ibn Sayfi in a speech that he gave as part of the delegations to Khosrau, and it was mentioned by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbuh in *Al-Iqd Al-Farid* 1/97.

A parable *mathal* is a comparison in which you link something unknown to you with something known to you, and this is why, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the descriptions of Musa (Moses) 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* he compared them to what was known of the Companions. Thus, he said: 'As for Musa (Moses), he was a tall man as if he were from the men of Azd Shanuʾa(1)', who were known to them, 'As for 'Isa (Jesus) his face has many beautiful features, and water drips from his face as if he had just come out of the bathroom; from amongst my Companions, he is most similar to 'Urwa ibn Mas'ud Ath-Thaqafi'. So, he likened something unknown to something known.

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has given us parables in order to clarify matters of religion for us, as he said in a Hadith: 'My parable and that of yours is like a man who kindled a fire. When it has illuminated all around him, the moths and grasshoppers began to fall therein. He tried to push them away, but they overcame him and jumped into it. I am catching hold of your waists ties (to save you) from fire, but you slip away from my hands.'(2) He said: *'Mathali wa mathalukum…'* (My parable and that of yours…)'.

The word *janna* '…paradise…' originally means something that is veiled, and from it we have *jann* (cover); for example, we say: '*jann al-layl*' (it became dark because it is night time). The word *janna*—which also means garden—has this same meaning because a garden is a piece of land that is filled with trees that have overlapping branches such that they cover and hide what they contain. Another meaning is that a garden covers and veils its owner and prevents him from leaving because it provides him with everything that he needs for living.

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(1) Azd Shanuʾa: they are the descendants of Kaʿb ibn 'Abd Al-Malik ibn Nasr ibn Al-Azd, and they are currently the tribes of Ghamid and their cousins from Zhahran. Shanuʾa, with the letter *hamza*, is taken from *shanan*, which means 'mutual' hatred'. Ibn Darid said: 'The father of this tribal community from the Azd was called this.' Al-Khafaji said: 'They were called this because of their noble lineage and the excellence of their actions.' One of the things they say is 'a man of Shanuʾa', which means that he has pure lineage and manly virtues. They originate from Yemen.

(2) *Agreed upon Hadith, narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 6002 and Muslim in his Sahih 4224, 4225 from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra peace be upon him. As for the Hadith of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah, it is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih 4226 and At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2799.*

The True Lord strikes a parable of it when He says: '...is as the parable of a garden on an elevated ground, upon which heavy rain falls so it brings forth its fruit twofold, but if heavy rain does not fall upon it, then light rain (is sufficient)…' (*al-Baqara:* 265). He also says: 'And set forth to them a parable of two men; for one of them We made two gardens…' (*al-Kahf:* 32).

The difference between the *jannatayn* (two gardens)—the *janna* in these verses and the *janna* in the verse we are studying—is that the *janna* in the life of this world is man-made and is physically brought about by the means of tilling and cultivating. As for the *janna* of the Hereafter that Allah *Glorified is He* has promised the pious, it exists without any means. It exists according to the power of The Original Creator. This is why there has been a difference of opinion regarding the *janna* that Adam *peace be upon him* entered. Was it a garden in the life of this world or was it the garden of the Hereafter?

When we read this story in Allah's Book, we learn that it is Allah's *janna*, the *janna* of the Hereafter, and the proof is that there is no tilling or cultivating therein, and no means are applied. Rather, Adam *peace be upon him* ate from what Allah *Glorified is He* had prepared for him, and he enjoyed inherent security as long as he adhered to obeying Allah's Commands with regards to eating.

When Satan had deceived him into eating from the tree that Allah *Glorified is He* had forbidden him from, he underwent a transformation in his natural state and came to experience the process of excretion, which he had not known before. He and his wife became aware of their nakedness and they rushed to cover it with leaves.

This experience was a practical training for Adam *peace be upon him* to respect Allah's way and not deviate from it. We also understand form this that nakedness does not appear in Muslim society unless there is deviation from the way. Adam *peace be upon him* was not a normal man. He was a Prophet and a Messenger and The True Lord wanted to teach him the lesson in a practical way.

The True Lord's statement: '...promised to the pious...' (*Muhammad:* 15) means that Allah *Glorified is He* promised them; and Allah's Promise is true and is certain to happen because He is One and has no partner to oppose him. There is no force that can come between Him and the implementation of what He has promised, as is the case, for example, when human beings make promises to one another. Moreover, there is no force that can prevent Him from accomplishing His promise, like what happens with humans, who are subject to change and none of them ever escapes death.

As for The True Lord, He is The Eternal and the Ever-Abiding, and He is the True Lord.

The *janna* (garden) that Allah *Glorified is He* has promised has not been promised by anyone else. To whom has it been promised? It has been promised to the pious who are mindful of Allah. The pious are those who live in accordance with Allah's way, and place a protective barrier between themselves and Allah's punishment. This can only be done by following His Way and not following Satan and one's vain desires.

The True Lord says: 'Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and commands you to do foul deeds; Allah promises you His forgiveness and His abundance: Allah is limitless and all knowing' (*al-Baqara:* 268). Allah's promise is the promise of veracity and truth. He says: '...Who speaks more truly than Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 122)

His statement: 'Here is a parable of the Garden...' (*Muhammad:* 15) means that this description is not a description of paradise, but rather, a parable that illustrates it to make it easier to perceive because if He had wanted to give us a literal description of paradise, He would have been able to do so only by way of terms that express meanings.

In language, it is known that the meaning exists first, and then we give it a term that refers to it. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described paradise for us He said: 'It contains what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what has not occurred to the heart or mind of any man.'(1)

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith, narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 3005, 4406, 4407, 6944 and Muslim in his Sahih 5050, 5051, 5052 from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him.*

First of all, reflect on the progressive development with regards to senses and conceptions that we have in this Hadith. The eye sees that which is within the scope of vision. As for the ear, it hears what you can see and what others can see, while that which occurs to the mind or heart is more expansive.

If our conceptions cannot arrive at what paradise contains, and not even that which occurs to our minds, then how can we describe it? How can we give it terms that express it? Therefore, there is no literal description of paradise. There is only a parable that makes it easier for us to understand. This is why the True Lord says about paradise: 'No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them...' (*as-Sajda:* 17).

Therefore, it contains things that we do not know, so how can we give names to such things? This is why we make such things easier to perceive by using parables of that which we know in the life of this world.

Paradise contains, as in the life of this world, water, milk, wine, and honey, but they are bettered and purified from anything that could spoil them. Thus, they do not resemble the blessings of the life of this world except in their names: '...Therein are rivers of water that does not alter...' (*Muhammad:* 15).

The water in the life of this world alters and corrupts and its smell changes. As for the water of paradise, it does not corrupt. The True Lord begins with water because it is the basis for quenching one's thirst, and with it food ripens and man's cleanliness is completed. Indeed, it is the fundamental element in the creation of every living thing. He said: '...and We have made of water everything living...' (*al-Anbiya':* 30).

We know that the source of freshwater in the life of this world is the sea and that by the process of evaporation and cloud formation that water is purified of its salinity and becomes proper freshwater, yet, we do not know the source of the water in paradise.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about it: '...pure water...' (*al-Furqan:* 48) nothing spoils, sullies or corrupts it. Therefore, it is a blessing that is not disturbed by anything and is not spoiled by anything because you live in this world according to your means. These means are the ones that Allah *Glorified is He* has created for you.

Amongst us are those who disturb the order of these means. As for the Hereafter, you live directly according to The Original Cause. In the life of this world, you seek light from the sun in the daytime and from the moon and stars at night, whereas, in the Hereafter, there is no sun, moon, or stars. Rather, you live with the light of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And the earth shall beam with the light of its Lord...’ (*az-Zumar:* 69), i.e. without the need of any means

Moreover, in the life of this world you have water via means, while in paradise there are no means to have water. Read His statement about water in the life of this world: ‘We send the winds to fertilize, and We bring down water from the sky for you to drink...’ (*al-Hijr:* 22).He says about the water of paradise: ‘...their Lord will give them a pure drink.’ (*al-Insan:* 21)

There is a difference in meaning between *asqa* and *saqa. Asqa* means that the water which we obtain for drinking is brought into existence. Thus, water is sent down from the clouds and we store it in reservoirs until we need it. *Saqa* indicates that giving the water has already been started.

What is amazing about the rivers of paradise is that they do not have shores, and that they merge with one another without mixing. Do not ask about how this is done because these blessings do not exist via means which we know, but rather by the Causer (the Original Cause). So, do not impose upon such blessings your worldly standards. His word: ‘...Therein...’ (*Muhammad:* 15) means that these rivers are contained here (in the Garden).

He says: ‘...rivers of milk forever fresh...’ (*Muhammad:* 15). By contrast, the taste of milk in the life of this world changes with time and it corrupts. ‘Rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink...’ (*Muhammad:* 15). Yes, rivers of wine that are prepared and ready. There are no grapes that are pressed. It is simply a matter of ‘Be!’ and it is.

If the wine in the life of this world is impermissible, and it clouds the intellect and has a repulsive smell, the wine in the Hereafter is delightful to drink and does not cloud the intellect, so the only thing it shares with the wine in the life of this world is its name.

In our worldly life there are no rivers of wine because wine, here, comes about via means. Only small quantities of wine are made, according to the quantity of grapes, or other fruits, pressed. When the True Lord speaks about the wine of this world, He says: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about intoxicants and gambling: say, ‘There is great sin in both and some benefit for people: the sin is greater than the benefit.’ (*al-Baqara:* 219) Its benefits have no worth when compared to its harms as well as its being forbidden; and though it makes you feel drunk and happy that you laugh, rejoice and forget your worries, yet, after that it clouds your intellect and strips you of your dignity.

If you add to that the fact that it is forbidden, and that it is one of the worst enormities, the harm it can do to you becomes evident. It is true that there is profit for whoever trades in it, but it is unlawful profit. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* made the wine in the life of this world to be a small amount. As for the wine in the Hereafter, it flows in rivers because in the Hereafter it is a joy for those who drink it. ‘There shall be no trouble in it, nor shall they be exhausted therewith’ (*as-Saffat:* 47). This means that it does not cloud the intellect, and there is no harm as a result of drinking it. *An-nazf* means to extract something from something such as someone who vomits after drinking it or is afflicted with dizziness or a headache.

‘Rivers of honey clarified and pure...’ (*Muhammad:* 15). Therefore, He mentioned water first because of its first-rank importance, and then milk because it takes the place of water until water is found, and it is a fundamental element of nourishment. Then He mentioned wine because after man eats and drinks he needs to complete his happiness with a cup of this wine.

As for honey, it is mentioned last because Allah *Glorified is He* says about it: ‘...wherein there is cure for man...’ (*an-Nahl:* 69). Therefore, that which distinguishes honey is not its taste or its sweetness, but rather the fact that it is a cure, and in paradise there is no sickness. So, it is drunk in paradise in order to be enjoyed and because of its beautiful taste.

The use of ‘...clarified and pure...’ (*Muhammad:* 15) is to distinguish between it and the honey in the life of this world which is not free of impurities. Man gathers it from mountains which are the bee’s first pastures: ‘And your Lord inspired the bee, saying, ‘Build yourselves houses in the mountains and trees and what people construct…’ (*an-Nahl:* 68).

The American scientist who researched the history of the bee found that the most ancient kind of bee are those that live in mountains, and as long as it comes from mountains it will not be free of impurities. As for the honey of paradise, it is cleansed with the power of the One Who prepared it.

Then He says: '...there they will find fruit of every kind...' (*Muhammad:* 15). After mentioning the fluids that are in paradise the True Lord then mentions the fruits it contains without naming them because we do not know them.

This is why He says in another verse: '...because they were provided with something like it...' (*al-Baqara:* 25), i.e. fruits that resemble what they had before, but taste different; thus, even if He gives us examples of grapes and fruits generally known, in paradise they will be other than what we know in this world.

If the fruits that we know of have environments that suit them and seasons that they grow in, the fruits in paradise are available at all times. The environments in the life of this world are among the means, whereas in the Hereafter there are no means, but in the Hereafter there is only the Causer.

He then says: '...and they will find forgiveness from their Lord...' (*Muhammad:* 15). After our Lord has given material, outward delight in paradise, He gives us a higher delight, which is the delight of obtaining from Allah out of His Generosity and favour because people do not enter paradise except through forgiveness. However, one of them may mention his sin and He will say to him: 'You are forgiven.'

It is related in the Qudsi Hadith that after the people of paradise have entered paradise, the Lord of Might will ask them: ''Are you pleased, my servants?' They will say: 'How could we not be pleased, O Lord? You have given us such-and-such and such-and-such.' Then He will say: 'Now, I bestow upon you My Pleasure, and I will never be angry with you after this.''(1)

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 6067, 6964 and Muslim in his Sahih 5057 from the Hadith of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari may Allah be pleased with him... Its wording according to Muslim is that The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Indeed Allah Glorified is He says to the people of paradise: 'O people of paradise!' And they say: 'Here we are, at your pleasure! Goodness is in Your hands.' Then He says: 'Are you pleased?' They reply: 'How can we not be pleased, O Lord,=*

Then, The True Lord asks us to compare between the people of paradise and the people of the fire. He says: '...How can this be compared to the fate of those stuck in the fire, given boiling water to drink that tears their bowels?' (*Muhammad:* 15) That is to say, which is better? Judge for yourselves and we will accept your judgement.

This is paradise or a likeness of it: is it equal to its counterpart the fire as an eternal abode? 'Given boiling water to drink that tears their bowels?' (*Muhammad:* 15) Just as water is mentioned first in Paradise it is also mentioned first in the Fire—and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He*.

His word: *'suqu'*, '...given waters of burning despair to drink...' (*Muhammad:* 15), does not simply mean 'drink' because drinking is a voluntary act. Rather, *'suqu'*, '...given boiling water to drink...' (*Muhammad:* 15) means that they drink it reluctantly and against their will, just like when you give a small child medicine. You force him to drink it because he does not like it.

'Boiling water...' (*Muhammad:* 15): water is known to be drunk in order to quench thirst and it is drunk cold. As for the water of hellfire—and we seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He*—it will be boiling, i.e. of the maximum temperature. How will they be in the fire when they will want to cool the heat in their throats and they will be given boiling water that will increase the heat and make it hotter than the fire? This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '...If they call for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten metal, scalding their faces...' (*al-Kahf:* 29).

Then, He explains the effect of this boiling water: '...that tears their bowels' (*Muhammad:* 15). If only it would turn and that would be the end of the matter, but instead it is an everlasting punishment that will never be mitigated for them.

When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain...' (*an-Nisa':* 56). *Al-am'a'* '...bowels...' is the plural of *mi'i*, and in the Noble Hadith we have the statement

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= *when You have given us what You have not given any of Your creation?' He then says: 'Shall I give you something better than this?' They reply: 'O Lord! What could be better than this?' He then says: 'I bestow upon you My Pleasure, and I will never be angry with you after this.''*

of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘The Muslim eats in one intestine, and the disbeliever eats in seven.’(1) That is, the believer eats according to his need or in his food there are blessings. As for the disbeliever, he eats until he fills his stomach.

Then, the True Lord says:

وَمِنۡهُم مَّن يَسۡتَمِعُ إِلَيۡكَ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا خَرَجُواْ مِنۡ عِندِكَ قَالُواْ لِلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡعِلۡمَ
مَاذَا قَالَ ءَانِفًاۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ طَبَعَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمۡ وَٱتَّبَعُوٓاْ أَهۡوَآءَهُمۡ ١٦

Some of these people listen to you [Prophet], but, once they leave your presence, they sneer at those who have been given knowledge, saying, ‘What was that he just said?’ These are the ones whose hearts God has sealed, those who follow their own desires [16] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 16)

In His statement: ‘Some of these people...’ (*Muhammad:* 16), Who are these people? You will know after you have read their description: ‘...listen to you...’ (*Muhammad:* 16), i.e. they listen to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reading the Quran: ‘...but once they leave your presence...’ (*Muhammad:* 16), Oh Muhammad ‘...they sneer at those who have been given knowledge...’ (*Muhammad:* 16), like Ibn Mas’ud and Ibn Abbas ‘...saying, ‘What is it that he has said just now?’...’ (*Muhammad:* 16) That is what is new about what Muhammad has said? It is as if they despise what they have heard from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.Therefore, these are not the attributes of disbelievers because the disbelievers would not listen to the Noble Quran. Rather, these are the attributes of the hypocrites who would participate with the Muslims in their prayers and their gatherings and mingle with them subtly and cynically. However, the Quran was being sent down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and it would expose them.

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(1) *Authentic Hadith narrated by Malik in his Muwatta’ 1442, Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 4977,4978, Ibn Majah in his Sunnan 3247 and Ahmad in his Musnad 7184, 9008, 9248, 9496 and all of them from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra peace be upon him and in the chapter regarding Ibn ‘Umar and Abu Musa Al-Ash’ari.*

This is why hypocrisy was worse and more harmful for the Muslims than disbelief because disbelievers are known and they manifest their enmity so one can be on guard against them whereas a hypocrite belongs to the Muslim society and openly declares Islam while concealing his disbelief and thus his enmity is not manifest and his danger is immense.

When one follows the history of hypocrisy in Islam, he will find that it did not emerge in Mecca but rather in Medina. Thus, despite the severe enmity that existed between Islam and disbelief in Mecca, it was still open, declared enmity that could be confronted. There was no hypocrisy there. It did not emerge in Mecca, but it did in Medina, why? It is because hypocrisy only exists in the presence of those who are strong. A weak person will not be hypocritical with another weak person. He would openly declare his enmity, whereas a strong person is dealt with hypocritically in order to avoid any harm of his power.

Therefore, there was no need for hypocrisy in Mecca while the Muslims therein were a weak minority. This means that hypocrisy is a phenomenon that indicates the strength of faith and that it now had a force that was receiving hypocritical treatment. This is what happened in Medina. This is why the True Lord says bout them: '...as are some of the people of Medina— they are obstinate in their hypocrisy...' (*at-Tawba:* 101).

Regarding the word *yastami'u* '...listen...' (*Muhammad:* 16), the root letters are found in the Noble Quran as *sami'a*, *istama'* and *tasamma'*. *Sami'a* means to hear, i.e. without any desire to do so. *Istama'* means to listen, i.e. to hear something that you love to hear. As for *tasamma'*, it indicates assuming and being burdened by listening.

Therefore, He says: 'Some of these people listen to you...' (*Muhammad:* 16), i.e. by choice, and it is something to which they love to listen. This is how the hypocrites were. They would sit in the front rows and show such interest, unlike anyone else, and they would not miss a word or a prayer in order to contrive their plan and hide their hypocrisy.

'These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed...' (*Muhammad:* 16) because they heard the speech and did not believe in it or act according to its requirements, thus, the reward is that Allah *Glorified is He* seals and stamps their hearts. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to them: 'As long as you chose hypocrisy, then I will increase you in it and I will seal your hearts so that hypocrisy never exits from them and faith never enters.’

In ‘Those who follow their own desires’ (*Muhammad:* 16): *al-hawa* (desires) means that your heart inclines towards something that you believe will make you happy and delighted, but it is an immediate delight and temporary pleasure without considering the consequences of this pleasure. Therefore, you must place controls over your desires and choose the desires that have a lasting effect and longer lasting benefit. Make your desires be for that which benefits you and not that which harms you like the person who eats chilli powder because he enjoys eating it as well as its taste. He likes it whilst eating it, but he is heedless of how he will excrete this food because it will bring about pain that will surpass the pleasure of eating.

The intelligent person must contemplate the consequences of his desires and be on guard against inclining towards them. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘but if the truth were in accordance with their desires, the heavens, the earth, and everyone in them would disintegrate...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 71).

The True Lord has brought us a way in order to protect us from vain desires because desires of different individuals contradict and conflict with one another. Thus, it is a device of differing and disagreement, and Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to agree and to support one another, not oppose one another.

In the Noble Hadith, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘None of you truly believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought.’(1)

Some people stop at this statement: ‘These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed...’ (*Muhammad:* 16), and say that as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has sealed their hearts and willed misguidance for them, why does He punish them? We say: Allah *Glorified is He* guides his servants and does not misguide them. They are the ones who choose misguidance and are not guided to faith.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Batta in his book Al-Ibana al-kubra291 from the Hadith of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Al-ʿAs and mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 2/307 and he attributed it to Al-Asbahani in At-Targhib with the wording: ‘No believer has completed his faith until his lusts are in accordance with what I have brought to you.’ Also narrated by Al-Faswi in Al-Arbaʿin 8 and Ibn Abi ʿAsim in As-Sunna 14.*

This is why we read: '...Allah does not guide the disbelievers,' (*al-Baqara:* 264) and '...and Allah does not guide the transgressing people,' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108) and '...and Allah does not guide aright the unjust people' (*al-Baqara:* 258).

Misguidance and going astray is therefore the lack of guidance that comes from them and is a result of them following other than the straight path. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* did not guide them because they were disbelieving, transgressing, or unjust people.

Indeed, the True Lord, in fact, has guided everyone, the believer, and the disbeliever because He called on all of them in His statement: 'O Mankind...' (*al-Baqara:* 21), and He indicated and showed all of them His way and the consequences of following His way, and He warned them of the consequences of not doing so.

He made it clear to them that the way has been laid down for their benefit by setting right their affairs in the life of this world and ensuring their well-being in the Hereafter. Indeed He does not benefit from His servant's obedience and He is not harmed by their disobedience. He is no need of them and has no need of their worship because He has had the attributes of perfection before He created them. This is why He says to His servants: 'O My servant, come near to Me and I will give you my goodness.'

Read His statement regarding the people of Thamud: 'And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance...' (*Fussilat:* 17), i.e. we indicated and showed them the way of goodness '...but they preferred blindness to guidance...' (*Fussilat:* 17), and when they preferred blindness, Allah *Glorified is He* blinded them.

Furthermore, regarding those who say: 'Why does Allah punish them when He is the One Who misguided them?' Why do they not mention the other side and say: 'As long as He has written obedience for them, then why does He reward them?'

This is why it is mentioned in the Qudsi Hadith: 'the sky said: 'O Lord! Allow me to send down an eclipse upon the children of Adam because they enjoy your goodness and they refrain from thanking you.' The earth said: 'O Lord! Allow me to swallow up the children of Adam because they enjoy your goodness and they refrain from thanking you.’ And the mountains said: ‘O Lord! Allow me to fall upon the children of Adam because they enjoy your goodness and they refrain from thanking you.’ Allah *Glorified is He* then said to them: ‘Leave Me and My creation. If you had created them you would have shown them mercy. If they repent to me then I am their beloved, and if they do not repent then I am their doctor. I test them with afflictions in order to purify them of vices.’’(1)

We gave an example of guidance before – and to Allah *Glorified is He* belongs the highest similitude – of a traffic officer when you go to him and you ask about the road and then he tells you that the road is from here. If you obey him he gives you more and says: ‘In the road there is an obstacle in such-and-such place so be careful’ or he takes you himself until you reach where you want to go.

Likewise, The True Lord has indicated and shown everyone where to go, so whoever hears and obeys He increases in guidance and whoever rejects and rebels He increases in misguidance by sealing their hearts.

This is why the scholars have divided guidance into two types; the guidance of showing which is for both the believer and the disbeliever, and the guidance of enabling success and support which is exclusive to the believer. This is why He says in the following verse

وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱهۡتَدَوۡاْ زَادَهُمۡ هُدٗى وَءَاتَىٰهُمۡ تَقۡوَىٰهُمۡ ١٧

God has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path, and given them their awareness [of Him] [17]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 17)

His statement: ‘...‘Allah has increased the guidance...’ (*Muhammad:* 17) means He increased their success, His help to them and their obedience to his commands

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Ghazali in Ihya’ ‘Ulum Ad-Din 4/52 from a statement of some of the first three generations, the wording of which is: ‘There is no slave who disobeys except that his place on earth asks for permission to swallow him and the place above him in the sky asks for permission to send down an eclipse, Then Allah Glorified is He says to the earth and the sky: ‘Hold back from My slave and give him respite, for indeed you two did not create, and had you created him, you would show him mercy. Maybe he will repent to Me and I will forgive him. Maybe he will become righteous and I will turn his bad deeds into good deeds.’’*

'And given them their awareness [of Him]' (*Muhammad:* 17). It is as if *taqwa* (piety and being mindful of Allah) comes to them instead of them going to it (seeking it). He makes it easy and desirable to them, while some find religious responsibility arduous, considering it a chain that shackles them constantly.

When we reflect on religious responsibility, we find that it provides the soul with relief and reassurance. Religious responsibility is protects and safeguards the soul against perils. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Such people are following their Lord's Guidance...' (*al-Baqara:* 5). The meaning of '...following their Lord's Guidance...' (*al-Baqara:* 5) is that the guidance is their means towards the objective that they seek, as it is not a burden upon the slave because The Creator never burdens us with what we are incapable of, and He has not enslaved us except for our benefit so that we can have uprightness in the life of this world and well-being in the Hereafter.

This is why we said that servitude to any other than Allah *Glorified is He* is humiliation and a disgrace while servitude to Allah *Glorified is He* is glory and an honour. This is because servitude to a human being gives the goodness of the servants to the master, but servitude to Allah *Glorified is He* is rewarded by being granted goodness from Allah *Glorified is He*.

When the servant understands worship in this way he loves it and yearns for it. Moreover, he finds pleasure therein to which no other pleasure comes close. This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Bilal, his caller to prayer: 'Give us comfort with it, O Bilal!'(1) This is because prayer is easy and light to the believing heart, but burdensome to the heart of the hypocrite.

Therefore, it is from guidance that you pray as the generality of people pray, and it is an increase in guidance that you yearn for the prayer and you wait for it and you find your comfort therein; for in prayer you are in the presence of your Lord. Allah *Glorified is He* is unseen and He also makes His servant righteous through the unseen because prayer makes you righteous it rectifies your state from whither you know not.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad 5/364 and Abu Dawud in his Sunnan 4985 from a man from amongst the Companions which is that the man from Khuza'a said: 'If only I had prayed, I would have felt rested'... It is as if they found fault with him for this, so he said: 'I heard The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him *say: 'O Bilal! Establish the prayer and give us rest with it.'*

Among the benefits of piety and being mindful of Allah is what He states in the verse: ‘Believers, if you remain mindful of Allah, He will give you a criterion [to tell right from wrong] and wipe out your bad deeds, and forgive you: Allah’s favour is great indeed’ (*al-Anfal:* 29).

Thus, whoever is conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* in accordance with the standard that has come from Allah *Glorified is He* which is the Noble Quran, He increases him by giving him another standard that is exclusive to him, a standard that guides him, illuminates the path for him and with it he is able to distinguish between good and evil.

Therefore, with regards to being mindful of Allah *Glorified is He* all you have to do is to seek it with the intention of acting and obeying. Then, you will find it, itself, pursuing you and seeking you.

Then, the True Lord says:

فَهَلْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا ٱلسَّاعَةَ أَن تَأْتِيَهُم بَغْتَةً ۖ فَقَدْ جَآءَ
أَشْرَاطُهَا ۚ فَأَنَّىٰ لَهُمْ إِذَا جَآءَتْهُمْ ذِكْرَىٰهُمْ ﴿١٨﴾

What are the disbelievers waiting for, other than the Hour which will come upon them unawares? Its signs are already here, but once the Hour has actually arrived, what use will it be then to take heed? [18] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 18)

The discussion is about the disbelievers who do not pay heed to the proofs of Allah’s existence in the universe, or to the miracles of the Messengers *peace be upon them* and thus do not believe in them and affirm them, nor to Allah’s rulings and thus do not act according to them. What are these people waiting for?

‘What are the disbelievers waiting for...’ (*Muhammad:* 18)? *Yanzhuroon* means waiting ‘...for the Last Hour...’ (*Muhammad:* 18). The Last Hour, with regards to them, is death because a man’s lifetime comes to an end at death. Once someone dies, his resurrection is established. No one knows his appointed time and when he will die because Allah *Glorified is He* has hidden it and kept it to Himself and not revealed it to anyone.

Thus, we have no say regarding how long and how short a life is, and we have no control over it. This is because it has been left to the One Who holds all actions and appointed times in His hand to decide. However, it is in your hands to occupy your lifespan with good works and to expand the sphere of goodness in your life and benefit others, just as it is possible for you to add another dimension to your life by doing good deeds that you will be remembered for after you die and will be stored up for you with your Lord.

If you know that your lifetime is subject to a breath that one inhales and may not be able to exhale, or a blink of an eye that does not return, then you must be wary of dying, while in a state of disobedience to Allah *Glorified is He* and be wary of delaying your repentance or postponing it because you cannot guarantee when death will overtake you.

When you hear the call to prayer rise and respond to the call, and do not say that there is plenty of time and that you will pray later. If you have wealth and you are able to perform the pilgrimage, do not say that you will perform it next year. This is because you cannot guarantee that you will be alive in the next moment, so how can you guarantee it after a year. It is true that there is no punishment attached to delaying these works but by delaying you lose out on the bounty of praying on time and praying in congregation. This is why it is mentioned in a saying of one of the Companions: ‘Work for your life in this world as if you are going to live forever, and work for the Hereafter as if you are going to die tomorrow.’

Some people understand the statement: ‘Work for your life in this world...’ to mean that which will suffice you for however long your life is, but the purport here is to work: work in the life of this world but take it easy and do not drown yourself therein. If you miss out on something today you will get it tomorrow, i.e. leisurely. Do not base the matter on the first deal.

That which is blameworthy with regards to striving for the sake of the life of this world is when the life of this world takes precedence over all your other concerns and takes up all your time and you want it immediately. What is even more dangerous than that is for us to seek help from blessings and wealth in order to disobey or we sell a commodity for something that is legally impermissible, and thus the blessing in our hands turns into adversity.

This is why Allah says: ‘do you not see those who, in exchange for Allah’s favour, offer only ingratitude...’ (*Ibrahim:* 28) such as so many of our girls nowadays whom we see clothed yet naked, manifesting the beauty that Allah *Glorified is He* has given them and instead of showing gratitude for such a blessing by safeguarding it, they show ingratitude by displaying it.

If only the misguided person would only misguide himself! What is worse than misguidance is that one becomes an example for others and thus tribulation spreads throughout society. This is why He says at the end of the verse: ‘...and make their people end up in the home of ruin’ (*Ibrahim:* 28). What is the home of ruin? ‘Hell, where they burn. What an evil place to stay!’ (*Ibrahim:* 29)

These tribulations carry away the youth especially in the phases of adolescence and when there are no job opportunities and they are still dependent on their families. This is why we say to our daughters: Be conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* for youth is a time that is excused and overcome and it suffices one to resist the voracity of adolescence. Thus, do not provoke any new voracity by doing things like displaying yourself in public, unveiling and having no modesty.

I remember a time when they wanted to honour one of their prominent figures, so they arranged a party for him and they brought female dancers and so forth. I said: ‘Glory be to Allah *Glorified is He*! Is this how we honour our prominent figures?’ Then I grabbed my companion and said to him: ‘Oh dear! Dancing at nighttime used to be delightful, as the girl was dancing with piety, praising Allah with piety! What are you really doing?’

Yes, indeed. ‘Make their people end up in the home of ruin,’ (*Ibrahim:* 28). His statement: ‘...will come upon them unawares?...’ (*Muhammad:* 18), i.e., will come upon them by surprise. His words: ‘...Its signs are already here...’ (*Muhammad:* 18), i.e. its signs and distinguishing characteristics that give warning of its proximity are already here. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mentioned some of these signs to us. He said: ‘...and the women who will be dressed but appear to be naked, who will be inclined to evil and make others incline towards it. Their heads will be like the humps of long-necked camels inclined to one side. They will not enter paradise and they will not smell its odour, whereas its odour will be smelt from such and such distance.'(1) True, their hair is made in unknown way, their lips are coloured with red, their eyebrows are thinned…etc. They change Allah's Creation and they use Allah's Blessings to disobey Him. This is one of the signs of the Last Hour.

This is why we ask Allah *Glorified is He* to guide our daughters and to protect the beauty of each of them and that there be praise of Allah *Glorified is He* for His blessings and obedience to Him, and that Allah's Blessings are not poisoned by disobeying him. I say to guardians of women: be conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* regarding your daughters and do not force them to work in morally depraved advertisements because it is impermissible, and the money that comes of it is impermissible.

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of other signs of the Last Hour such as: '...when you see stinginess obeyed, passions followed, and everyone who has an opinion being amazed with their own opinion, wait for the Last Hour.'(2) He also said: 'When power and authority come into the hands of those who are unfit, wait for the Last Hour'(3)…etc.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih 3971, 5098 and Imam Malik in his Muwatta' 1421 from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with) and also Ahmad in his Musnad 8311, 9203.*

(2) *Narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan 3778 from the Hadith of Abu Tha'laba Al-Khashni in which The Messenger of Allah Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Rather, enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong until when you see stinginess being obeyed, passions followed, worldly interests being preferred, and everyone who has an opinion being amazed with their own opinion, then you must take care of yourself and leave the common people for indeed there are coming days of patience in which it will be like holding on to hot coal. The one who acts rightly during that period will have the reward of fifty men who act as he does.' The same has been narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan 2984 and Ibn Majah in his Sunnan 4004.*

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih 57 from Abu Hurayra peace be upon him who said: While The Prophet, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was saying something in a gathering, a Bedouin came and asked him, 'When will the Last Hour take place?' Allah's Messenger continued his talk, so some people said that Allah's Messenger had heard the question but did not like what he had said. Some of them said that Allah's=*

His statement: '...but once the Hour has actually arrived, what use will it be then to take heed?' (*Muhammad:* 18), i.e. how will they take heed when it is too late and the Resurrection will be upon them? What will their remembrance avail them? How will good deeds be of any benefit to them?

Then, He seals it with the peak of all matters which, if it is sound, everything for man is sound. He says:

فَٱعۡلَمۡ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡ لِذَنۢبِكَ وَلِلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ
وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ مُتَقَلَّبَكُمۡ وَمَثۡوَىٰكُمۡ ١٩

So [Prophet], bear in mind that there is no god but God, and ask forgiveness for your sins and for the sins of believing men and women. God knows whenever any of you move, and whenever any of you stay still [19] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 19)

The meaning of 'So [Prophet], 'know bear in mind that there is no Allah but Allah...' (*Muhammad:* 19) is: do not, by any means, think that there is a cause besides Allah, and it is not permissible for you to seek refuge in other than Allah because seeking refuge in other than Allah *Glorified is He* is of no benefit. Regarding His statement: *'fa'alam',* 'know bear in mind...' (*Muhammad:* 19), *al-'ilm* (knowledge) is either certain knowledge when you are informed of it by someone whose veracity you trust, or it is the essence of certainty when you see it with your own eyes and you see its effects, or it is the truth of certainty when you experience it directly.

When The True Lord says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'know that there is no Allah but Allah...' (*Muhammad:* 19), does this mean that he does not know it? No. Rather, the objective is to remain upon it. As you knew it in the past, make sure you know it in the present and

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= *Messenger had not heard it. When the Prophet finished his speech, he said, 'Where is the questioner, who enquired about the Last Hour?' The Bedouin said, 'I am here, O Allah's Messenger.' Then the Prophet said, 'When trustworthiness is lost, then wait for the Last Hour.' The Bedouin said, 'How will that be lost?' The Prophet said, 'When power and authority come into the hands of those who are unfit, wait for the Last Hour.'*

in the future. This is similar to His statement: ‘You, who believe, believe...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136). Thus, He commands them to believe when He has already called believers.

They said: when Allah *Glorified is He* commands something that is already taking place then what is meant is persistence in that thing. You are a believer, but you are required to persist with your faith into the future.

When The True Lord gives His Prophet this command it is only to reassure him that if he is rejected or shown hostility or harmed with all kinds of harm and ridicule he must not grieve or be concerned, because Allah *Glorified is He* is by his side, helping him and supporting him. Whatever humanity may do, they will never prevent his call from being implemented.

It is Allah’s standard practice with regards to the Messengers *peace be upon them* that He give them victory: ‘Our word has already been given to Our servants the messengers: * it is they who will be helped,* and the ones who support* Our cause will be the winners’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173). This is why we said before that if you see an Islamic army being defeated, know that the conditions for being an army were not being fulfilled. Otherwise it would not have been defeated.

We provided an example of this from what happened to the Muslims on the day of Uhud when the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was contravened and they were defeated even though he was amongst them. This is Allah’s standard practice, and you will never find any change in Allah’s standard practice. If they had been given victory after contravening, the commands of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would have been taken lightly by them and they would have said to themselves: ‘We disobeyed him and we were still victorious.’

Thus, the defeat came to make them return to the right path and wake them up from their heedlessness with regards to obeying the command of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

He says: ‘...and ask forgiveness for your sins and for the sins of believing men and women...’ (*Muhammad:* 19). Does this mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has sins for which he must seek forgiveness?

This is a matter over which there has been much discussion. The meaning here: if your soul is inattentive, then you have sinned, so seek forgiveness, but not because it is an actual sin. His Lord is saying to him: ‘If there is any sin from you, seek forgiveness for it, and likewise seek forgiveness for the believing men and women.’

In another verse He says: ‘Truly We have opened up a path to clear triumph for you [Prophet], *so that Allah may forgive you your past and future sins…’ (*al-Fath:* 1-2). He mentioned sin with regards to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even though he is infallible. When the scholars looked into these kinds of verses they said: it is from the category of the good deeds of the pious *al-abrar* and is considered the evil deeds of those who draw near to Allah *Glorified is He*: *al-muqarrabin*.(1) It is known that those who draw near to Allah *Glorified is He* are at a degree of obedience and compliance to Allah *Glorified is He* which is higher than the degree of the pious because the pious are those who obey Allah *Glorified is He*, do good deeds and carry out His Commands.

As for those who draw near to Him, they are the ones who do more than that in order to draw near to Allah *Glorified is He*. Even in the customs of people the person who is close to you is the one who is truthful and sincere and stays with you and never leaves you, and they love you and fear for you.

The same goes for those who draw near to Allah *Glorified is He*. They are treated according to a law that is different to the law of the pious, and they have a different scale for good deeds and bad deeds that suits their degree of nearness to their Lord.

Imagine, for example, that you were sick and someone you knew came to visit you while you were sick, even if it was just once. What would you do? You would thank him and you would feel that he had performed his duty.

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir in a number of places 1/309 11/255 and attributed to Al-Junayd may Allah rest his soul. As-Sakhawi mentioned in Al-Maqasid Al-Hasana 1/103 that it is from the speech of Abu Sa'id Al-Kharaz and he said: ‘It was related by Ibn Asakir in his biography.’ Al-'Ajluni mentioned something similar in Kashf al-Khafa' and similarly Al-Fitni in Tadhkira Al-Mawdu'at 1/188.*

As for your close friend, if he visited you only once, like the other person, what would you do? You would rebuke him and censure him because you expect more than just one visit. This is what is meant by the good deeds of the pious and are considered the evil deeds of those who draw near to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, a good deed done by a normal person could be considered an evil deed if done by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is someone who draws near to Allah *Glorified is He* and the one who draws near has a different estimation. There is also a price for this nearness. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to you: 'Maintain this degree of nearness to Me and beware of doing certain things, even if they are simple matters with regards to someone else.' This also may mean what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'My community is excused for what they do by mistake, out of forgetfulness, or what they are forced to do.'(1) When he said: 'My community' it means that he is not included under this ruling. It is not permissible for him to forget as it is permissible for others, so forgetfulness with regards to him is considered a sin.

This is why, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was praying a four-unit prayer and he concluded it after two units, one of his Companions, Dhu Al-Yadayn, said to him: 'Did you shorten the prayer or did you forget, O Messenger of Allah?' He said: 'That is not entirely what happened.' The Companion responded: 'But that is some of what happened.'(2) Look at the augustness of the Companion in asking, the augustness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in responding, and the greatness of the faith of the one who nurtured these people.

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(1) *The wording of the Hadith is: 'Indeed Allah Glorified is He overlooks what my community does by mistake, out of forgetfulness or what they are forced to do.' Narrated by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan 2033, the Hadith of Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari, 2035, the Hadith (Prophetic tradition) of Ibn Abbas, and also narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in his Sunnan Al-Kubra 6/84 from the Hadith of Ibn 'Umar with the wording 'my community is unburdened' and the rest of the Hadith is the same.*

(2) *Narrated by Malik in Al-Muwatta' 196,197, Abu Dawud in his Sunnan 585, An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan 1211 and 'Abd Ar-Razzaq in his Musannaf 3448 from Abu Hurayra peace be upon him who said: 'The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him prayed 'Asr and after two units, he concluded the prayer with the greetings of peace, so Dhu Al-Yadayn stood up and said: 'Did you shorten the prayer or did you forget, O Messenger of Allah Glorified is He?' The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad=*

Therefore, it is possible for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to forget and forgetfulness to be considered a sin. Why? It is because he is a Messenger and the possessor of a message, and he is responsible for conveying it and the radiances of prophethood never leave him, so how can he forget? This is why, when one(1) of the common people asked a devout scholar who had secluded himself to be with Allah *Glorified is He*: 'What is the ruling for someone who forgets in prayer?' he said: 'For us or for you?' The man said: 'For us.' He said: 'Do a forgetfulness prostration.' The man said: 'and what about for you?' He replied: 'We kill such a person.'

We go far when the story of Adam's disobedience is known to everyone. The True Lord says regarding Adam *peace be upon him*: '... Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray...' (*Ta Ha:* 121). Adam's forgetfulness is called disobedience. Why?

Scholars said: it is because Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* directly by His hands and breathed into him from His spirit. Thus, Adam *peace be upon him* is distinguished amongst all other creatures by the advantage of the way of his creation that no one else has. As well, he was only given one commandment which was not to eat from the tree. So, the orders were not so many that he might forget some of them; indeed there was none but one command.

This is why forgetfulness in his case was a matter of disobedience because he is both a prophet and messenger and he is the father of mankind. Therefore, Adam's disobedience took place for a reason. He is the father of all people. There are two categories of people: infallible and the fallible. The infallible

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= *peace and blessings be upon him said: 'That is not entirely what happened.' The Companion responded: 'But some of that happened, O Messenger of Allah Glorified is He?' The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him thus faced the people and said: 'Is Dhu Al-Yadayn speaking the truth?' They said: 'Yes.' So, The Messenger of Allah Glorified is He stood and completed what was left of the prayer and then, after the greeting of peace, did two prostrations while sitting.*

(1) *The story of the layman who asked the worshiper about he who gets distracted in his prayer*

are the Messengers, and the fallible are the rest of creation. Thus, it is necessary for both categories to be embodied in Adam *peace be upon him*

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* He says to him: '...ask forgiveness for thy sins...' (*Muhammad:* 19), i.e. from the forgetfulness that I have overlooked when anyone of your community does it, you must seek forgiveness for it because Allah *Glorified is He* does not forgive you in the same way that He forgives your community.

Then, we should examine the occurrences in the Noble Quran in which Allah *Glorified is He* blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Read, for example: 'O Prophet! Why dost thou, out of a desire to please [one or another of] thy wives, impose [on thyself] a prohibition of something that Allah has made lawful to you?(1) But Allah is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* says: it is not acceptable that you forbid for yourself something Allah had permitted for you just because one of your wives became angry about it; this was considered a sin.

Likewise, when he permitted some of the Companions to stay behind at their houses instead of fight, Allah *Glorified is He* blamed him: 'May Allah pardon thee [O Prophet]! Why didst thou grant them permission [to stay at home] ere it had become obvious to thee as to who was speaking the truth, and [ere] thou came to know [who were] the liars?' (*at-Tawba:* 43) Therefore, His Lord blamed him for this, but He began by pardoning him.

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(1) *There are different positions regarding the reason for revelation behind the beginning of this chapter. It has been said that it was revealed regarding Mariya and The Messenger of God had made her forbidden for himself. Ibn Jarir At-Tabari narrates that The Messenger of God slept with Mariya (the mother of his son Ibrahim) in the house of one of his wives (one narration states that it was Hafsa's house) and she said: 'What O Messenger of God? In my house and on my bed? Thus, he made her impermissible for himself, so she said: 'O Messenger of God, How can you make the permissible impermissible for yourself?' Then, he swore to God that he would not sleep with her and so God sent down: 'O Prophet! Why dost thou, out of a desire to please [one or another of] thy wives, impose [on thyself] a prohibition of something that God has made lawful to thee?...' (at-Tahrim: 1) Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir (4/387): The correct opinion is that he forbade honey for himself. He was drinking honey with Zaynab bint Jahsh and then 'A'isha and Hafsa Allah be pleased with them agreed to say to him: 'You have eaten maghafir (i.e. honey)' and he replied: 'I will never go back to it' and then the verse was sent down.*

Then, there is the fact that a messenger represents two aspects: the aspect of humanity and the aspect of the Prophet's Mission. Adam *peace be upon him* disobeyed out of his humanity; the proof is the Quran verse: '…And [thus] did Adam disobey his Lord, and thus did he fall into grievous error [121] thereafter, [however,] his Lord elected him [for His grace], and accepted his repentance, and bestowed His guidance upon him [122]' (*Ta Ha:* 121-122). Thus, the Prophet's Mission was not granted to him until after he had gone through this experience, and had behaved humanly. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* chose him to be a Messenger.

When we reflect on the issues for which Allah blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we find that they are general matters for which there were no divine orders or religious rulings that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* contravened. He exercised his own judgement using his independent reasoning as a human being, and according to the situation at hand.

For example, in the story of ‘Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum(1) *may Allah be pleased with him* in which Allah *Glorified is He* blamed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because of this Companion. Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'He frowned and turned away [1] because the blind man approached him! [2]' (*‘Abasa:* 1-2) This blame is not an objection to what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did, but rather a show of mercy and compassion towards him.

It is because the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left ʿAbdullah, who was a believer and had come to him to ask about a religious ruling, turning away from him in order to focus on the notables from amongst the disbelievers. Humanly thinking, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was very keen to guide these people. As for ʿAbdullah *may Allah be pleased with him* he was of course a believer then.

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(1) He is ʿAmr ibn Qays ibn Zaʾida ibn Al-Asam, a courageous Companion who was blind. He embraced Islam in Mecca and immigrated to Medina after the battle of Badr. He would give the call to prayer on behalf of God’s Messenger *peace and blessing be upon him* in Medina along with Bilal. Also, The Prophet would appoint him, in general, as his deputy in charge of Medina and he would lead the people in prayer while the Prophet was engaged in raids. He was present at the war of Al-Qadisiyya and he fought while being blind. Afterwards, he returned to Medina and died there in the year of 23, just before the death of ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab. (*Al-ʿAlam, Az-Zirkili* (5/83)

Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was hard on himself for the sake of his mission. Then, read until the end of the story: 'Yet for all thou didst know, [O Muhammad,] he might perhaps have grown in "purity," [3] or have been reminded [of the truth], and helped by this reminder. [4] Now as for him who believes himself to be self-sufficient [5] to him didst thou give thy whole attention, [6] although thou art not accountable for his failure to attain to purity; [7] "but as for him who came unto thee full of eagerness [8] and in awe [of Allah] – [9] him didst thou disregard! [10]' (*'Abasa:* 3-10)

It is as if the True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying to His Prophet: 'O Muhammad! It is not your task to make these people believe. Your job is only to indicate and to show them; '...thy duty is no more than to deliver the message...' (*Al-'Imran:* 20). Also, Allah *Glorified is He* addressed him in another verse, saying: 'Wouldst thou, perhaps, torment thyself to death [with grief] because they [who live around thee] refuse to believe [in it]?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

As well, in the chapter of *al-Kahf:* 'But wouldst thou, perhaps, torment thyself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?' (*al-Kahf:* 6) That is, you only have to convey the message. As for the matter of faith, I want them to be believers fully convinced in their own minds, not their outward forms; that is to enter into faith voluntarily and not by force.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'had We so willed, We could have sent down unto them a message from the skies, so that their necks would [be forced to] bow down before it in humility,' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4); i.e. We could force them to have faith.

'For Allah knows all your comings and goings as well as your abiding [at rest]. (*Muhammad:* 19) The meaning of '...your comings and goings...' (*Muhammad:* 19) is your going out to work and striving all over the vast earth, seeking sustenance. The meaning of '...as well as your abiding [at rest]' (*Muhammad:* 19), is your return to your homes and seeking rest in your beds at night.

The meaning is that Allah *Glorified is He* knows all of your states and nothing about you is hidden from him. Previously, we talked about the virtue of striving throughout the earth and extracting its treasures; when you stay in your own environment, you only take the treasures that are there. But, when you travel throughout the earth, you find other kinds of treasures.

The Creator *Glorified is He* has distributed treasures all over the earth, and every land has a share of wealth and resources. The desert has certain resource and farmland has other kind of resources. There is no land that is poor while another is rich. If you were to take a longitudinal segment of the earth's sphere, you would find that it contains just as many treasures as all the other segments.

We used to think that the bleak desert has no goodness in it. Now, it is a source of abundant sustenance for its owners who had lived a long life of hardship previously.

This is why, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: "Go all over the earth and behold...' (*an-Naml:* 69), and He said: 'Say: "Go all over the earth, and behold...' (*al-An'am:* 11); i.e. reflect on the signs and lessons therein. Man travels and moves either as a tourist or to seek sustenance. In both cases, he should not be heedless of considering and examining the signs of the universe. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* said: '... "Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?"' (*an-Nisa':* 97)

The word At-taqallub ('...your comings and goings...') can be understood as to leave the place that you normally reside in and go to a place that you do not normally reside in. This requires financial capacity, companionship, and strength. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Or that He will not take them to task [suddenly] in the midst of their comings and goings, without their being able to elude, [Him]' (*an-Nahl:* 46).

Therefore, coming and going is an evidence of strength; a rich man is the one who travels every day to different places and he comes and goes throughout the earth. As for the poor person, he stays in his place and never leaves it

وَيَقُولُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَوْلَا نُزِّلَتْ سُورَةٌ ۖ فَإِذَآ أُنزِلَتْ سُورَةٌ مُّحْكَمَةٌ
وَذُكِرَ فِيهَا ٱلْقِتَالُ ۙ رَأَيْتَ ٱلَّذِينَ فِى قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ
نَظَرَ ٱلْمَغْشِىِّ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ ٱلْمَوْتِ ۖ فَأَوْلَىٰ لَهُمْ ﴿٢٠﴾

Those who believe ask why no sura [about fighting] has been sent down. Yet when a decisive sura [that mentions fighting] is sent down, you can see the sick at heart looking at you [Prophet] and visibly fainting at the prospect of death – better for them [20] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 20)

Regarding the phrase: 'Would that a revelation [allowing us to fight] was bestowed from on high,' (*Muhammad:* 20) when you hear the conditional particle '*law' (if, would that, etc.)*, it is as if it is a wish that something would happen. They wish that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would receive a revelation from on high commanding them to fight. A revelation had already been sent down but it commanded them to be patient and to bear with adversity and not to stand up to their enemies.

However, everything has its proper time. This means that the believers' activity and movement have become regulated with the commands of the True Lord. The stubbornness of the disbelievers and their standing in the way of the Prophetic Message does not mean that we will automatically attack them and fight them. Rather, we wait for the higher command.

'...But now that a revelation clear in and by itself, mentioning war, has been bestowed from on high...' (*Muhammad:* 20) which you want, '...thou canst see those in whose hearts is disease...' (*Muhammad:* 20); i.e. the hypocrites '...looking at thee, [O Muhammad,] with the look of one who is about to faint for fear of death!' (*Muhammad:* 20) This simile of someone who looks like they are about to faint out of fear of death means that they are unconscious out of fear and alarm.

It is easy for the hypocrite to go to the mosque and pray with the congregation, and indeed stand in the front row. However, when it comes to fighting, the matter is different, and the hypocrisy that was hidden is now exposed.

'...But now that a revelation clear in and by itself...' (*Muhammad:* 20); i.e. clearly showing the intended meaning; '...thou canst see those in whose hearts is disease looking at thee, [O Muhammad,] with the look of one who is about to faint for fear of death' (*Muhammad:* 20). Censuring himself, a hypocrite person says to himself: ‘Death is approaching, O you who has left off prayer! Shall I go out to fight and waste myself?’

'...And yet, far better for them would be,' (*Muhammad:* 20) to obey the command and go out to fight. The scholars have explained this verse and said that, '...And yet, far better for them would be' (*Muhammad:* 20) means ruin for them; and this is a threat if they do not abandon their hypocrisy.

طَاعَةٞ وَقَوۡلٞ مَّعۡرُوفٞۚ فَإِذَا عَزَمَ ٱلۡأَمۡرُ فَلَوۡ صَدَقُواْ ٱللَّهَ لَكَانَ خَيۡرٗا لَّهُمۡ ٢١

would be obedience and fitting words; it would also be better
for them to be true to God when the decision to fight has
been made [21] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 21)

The word: 'obedience...' (*Muhammad:* 21) coming after '...And yet, far better for them would be,' (*Muhammad:* 20) makes us turn away from affirming ruin for them and instead we say: their obedience to Allah’s Command and their saying a word that could win His approval is better than their current position and better than their hypocrisy.

'For, since the matter has been resolved [by His revelation]...' (*Muhammad:* 21), i.e. has been determined and set to action, as Allah *Glorified is He* said: '...then, when thou hast decided upon a course of action, place thy trust in Allah...' (*Al-‘Imran:* 159). The Arabic verse is in active voice making the word 'matter' the subject of the sentence, literally saying 'since the matter resolved itself.' Therefore the Sheikh asked the following question. However, is it the matter that makes the resolution or a person?

Therefore, there is hyperbole which personifies the matter and makes it resolve, determine, and set itself to action. This is because the discussion here is about fighting, and fighting is the most difficult thing that a person can bear because it means that either one will be martyred or one will be given victory over the enemy.

'Say: "Are you, perchance, hopefully waiting for something [bad] to happen to us – [the while nothing can happen to us] save one of the two best things?

But as far as you are concerned, we are hopefully waiting for Allah to inflict chastisement upon you, [either] from Himself or by our hands! Wait, then, hopefully; behold, we shall hopefully wait with you!'" (*at-Tawba:* 52)

Therefore, saying: '...for, since the matter has been resolved [by His revelation]...' (*Muhammad:* 21), is a more eloquent way of expressing the meaning than saying: you were resolved upon the matter. Thus, it is as if the matter itself urges you, and the matter only urges you because there is much goodness in it for you. Is there anything better than being martyred for Allah's sake?

The story of Mukhayriq (1) the Jew *may Allah be pleased with him* is well known. After declaring his conversion to Islam, he was called to fight and so he went out and fought until he was killed. He entered paradise without even praying a single unit of prayer.

This is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* said about him: 'Mukhayriq is the best of the Jews.'(2) Thus, it is true that if you are eager for death, you will be given the life, the eternal life with Allah *Glorified is He* in paradise.

Allah's statement: '...it would be but for their own good to remain true to Allah' (*Muhammad:* 21) means if they believed Allah *Glorified is He* with regards to His commands and His system, it would be better for them. The Good in this context is the freedom of fire after death. When a believer sacrifices himself for Allah's sake, Allah *Glorified is He* grants him the eternal life in the paradise.

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(1) He is Mukhayriq An-Nadir from Bani An-Nadir, a Companion, a wealthy Jew and one of their scholars. He embraced Islam and bequeathed his wealth to the Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him*. He was martyred at Uhud and died in the year 3 A.H. [*Al-ʿAlam Az-Zirikli* (7/194)]. He said: 'If I die then my wealth is for Muhammad and he can do with it whatever God shows him.' He had seven gardens in the neighborhood of Banu An- Nadir and they were the first endowment property in Islam.

(2) *Mentioned by Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in Kanz Al-ʿAmal (46154), which is that God's Messenger said it after Mukhayriq had been martyred in the Battle of Uhud, and this was also mentioned by As-Suhayli in Ar-Rawd Al-Anf (2/375), Ibn Hisham in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (2/88), Ibn Saʿd in At-Tabaqat Al-kubra (1/501) and Ibn Kathir in Al-Bidaya wa An-Nihaya (3/291)*

فَهَلۡ عَسَيۡتُمۡ إِن تَوَلَّيۡتُمۡ أَن تُفۡسِدُواْ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَتُقَطِّعُوٓاْ أَرۡحَامَكُمۡ ﴿٢٢﴾
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَعَنَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ فَأَصَمَّهُمۡ وَأَعۡمَىٰٓ أَبۡصَٰرَهُمۡ ﴿٢٣﴾

‘If you turn away now, could it be that you will go on to spread corruption all over the land and break your ties of kinship?’ [22] These are the ones God has rejected, making their ears deaf and their eyes blind [23] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 22-23)

This is a yes/no question from Allah *Glorified is He* using the particle '*hal'* (would), and there is also an expression of hope from Allah *Glorified is He* using the word *ʿasa* ('...perchance...'). Allah *Glorified is He* does not ask a question in order to know something, but rather, He asks in order to affirm an actual fact.

The word *ʿasa* is a verb that indicates hope and it is followed by the thing for which is hoped. Possible hope is for something that is loved and expected to happen. It is different from the impossible wish which is for something loved but impossible to be realised such as the statement of the poet:

If only youth would return one day
For I would inform it of what old age has done

As for hope, you say: ‘Perchance, if you study, you will pass.’, but hope differs according to who is speaking and to who is being spoken. When I say to you: ‘Go to so-and-so and he will perchance fulfil your need’, or ‘Perchance I will do something for you,’ this hope is dependent on human beings. When a hope is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* it is more possible; for example, you say: ‘Perchance Allah will forgive me.’

His statement: '[Ask them:] "Would you, perchance, after having turned away [from Allah’s Commandment, prefer to revert to your old ways, and] spread corruption on earth, and [once again] cut asunder your ties of kinship?' (*Muhammad:* 22) means perhaps if you abandon faith, you will do such and such. Therefore, keep clinging to faith and obedience and do not approach sins and disobedience.

'After having turned away [from Allah’s Commandment, prefer to revert to your old ways, and]...' (*Muhammad:* 22), i.e. turned away from faith, or (if we considered the meaning according to another form of the Arabic verb

'Tawalaitum') it can mean that if you take on some of the positions of leadership, for example presidency, they may cause you some troubles.

'Spread corruption on earth...' (*Muhammad:* 22), i.e. cause harm to the entire creation, '...and [once again] cut asunder your ties of kinship' (*Muhammad:* 22). Even your relatives and ties of kinship will be affected which means that your corruption transgresses against all people, including relatives and family members.

Or we say that, '[Ask them:] "Would you, perchance...' (*Muhammad:* 22) means: what is it that made you turn away from the truth that Muhammad has brought? Why do you put obstacles in his path? The first of these obstacles is that you mock him, and you falsely describe him as being sorcerer, soothsayer, poet, and liar.

Then, you caused him harm by insulting him personally, as well as his family and Companions. Indeed, you plotted to kill him. What made you do such a thing? Did you think and hope that if you did that, you would be free to corrupt in the earth and cut ties of kinship?

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to teach us that the Messengers do not interfere and the heavens do not bring a new system unless corruption has spread throughout the entire society. Corruption has stages. The first of them is the corruption of the soul. This type of corruption has a deterrent in the form of the reproachful self (*an-nafs al-lawama*) which is a power of resistance within the human soul that takes it back to righteousness and makes its behaviour upright.

If the soul has become corrupt and the role of the reproachful self has vanished, the role of deterring then comes from the society by enjoining that which is right and forbidding that which is wrong. When there is no deterrent from society and corruption has spread amongst everyone, it is at this point that the heavens intervene with a new Messenger who brings a miracle in order to convince mankind so that they believe in what he has brought.

When you avoid and turn away from the Prophetic Message and place barriers in its way, it seems that you expect to remain in the corruption that you caused to grow in the earth generally, or keep cutting the ties of kinship!

On the contrary, you are destroying yourselves. Have you not seen what happened to your ancestors? Where did they go? Indeed your outcome is like their outcome, so be warned. 'Are they [who are lost in sin] but waiting for the Last Hour – [waiting] that it come upon them of a sudden, without their being aware [of its approach]?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 66)

And He said: 'And ere that suffering comes upon you of a sudden, without your being aware [of its approach "follow the most goodly [teaching] that has been revealed unto you by your Lord," [55] lest any human being should say [on Judgment Day], "Alas for me for having been remiss in what is due to Allah, and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]! [56] or lest he should say, "If Allah had but guided me, I would surely have been among those who are conscious of Him!" [57] or lest he should say, when he becomes aware of the suffering [that awaits him], "Would that I had a second chance [in life] so that I could be among the doers of good!" [58]' (*az-Zumar:* 55-58) Therefore, why do you not act in consideration of this day?

Those who spread corruption think that it will benefit them, but spreading corruption in the world harms everyone. Those who plunder the wealth of people will eventually encounter someone who will be stronger than them and will plunder their wealth. Therefore, you are not safe from being affected by corruption and being burned by its fire because society is one vessel that comprises everyone.

Furthermore, established values are not disagreed over. Goodness is goodness, even according to the people of evil. The proof for this is that when there is a group of bad people, and one of them wants to marry the sister of the other, the latter says to the former: 'No, I will not marry my sister to you (anyone but you, you sinful person.) Therefore, values are values. The liar respects the truthful person, and the deviant respects the upright, etc.

Therefore, The True Lord *Glorified is He* is telling them: 'Do not sow corruption in the earth, and be keen to put an end to corruption in your society. If you have the power with which to impose corruption now upon people, then there will come someone more powerful than you, and they will impose the same or even worse case on you.'

The phrase: '…after having turned away…' (*Muhammad:* 22) means being heedless which indicates that they heard some speech that did not please them, If it had pleased them, they would have be attentive to it would not have avoided it. However, how can this be the case while they want corruption that fulfils their desires? Thus, corruption is preceded by turning away from and neglecting the good.

This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hast thou considered whether he may [not] be giving the lie to the truth and turning his back [upon it]?' (*al-'Alaq:* 13) You (the disbeliever) 'gave the lie to the truth' because the speech did not correspond with your passions not because it did not correspond with reality. Therefore, you are mistaken in this matter and in your denial. Then another mistake emerged from this mistake; it is that you turned away and you thought and expected that you would continue to sow corruption in the earth and cut off the ties of kinship.

Sowing corruption in the earth means to make that which is proper improper. The Creator *Glorified is He* created the universe in a state of absolute properness before He created man. Therefore, you should increase usability of the universe through your ambition for advancement. Or, you should facilitate usability of the universe for other people. If you will not increase usability of the universe, then the least you can do is to leave it as usable as it is and do not corrupt it.

This is why we have seen that the imperfections of society have emerged with the emergence of corruption in the earth, along with pollutants in the environment that corrupt the water, air, food and everything else; '[Since they have become oblivious of Allah,] corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought…' (*ar-Rum:* 41).

When The True Lord *Glorified is He* warns us against sowing corruption in the earth, He only wants us to have a balance of goodness throughout society and for everyone to share in it.

Afterwards, He said: '…and [once again] cut asunder your ties of kinship' (*Muhammad:* 22) because sowing corruption in the universe afflicts all mankind, relatives and non-relatives; He mentioned relatives in particular because they take priority when it comes to doing goodness and charity, not cutting off ties and abandoning. Relatives are either males or females; males have stamina while women are weak and need help. This is why cutting ties of kinship with them is more severe and oppressive in Allah’s sight. Therefore; society reaches the peak of corruption when corruption reaches the stage of neglecting and insulting women even though they are from your family. When you see a woman who is helpless, or she is being oppressed or she has been made to fend for herself and earn her livelihood, then know that there are imbalances in the family, and that the man in the family is not doing his job, or say that he does not have any chivalry or sense of honour because he has left his wife to suffer and he has not satisfied her basic needs. But when does a woman go out to work, and how does she go out?

We find the answer in the story of Musa (Moses) with the two daughters of Shu’aib (Jethro) *peace be upon them*. Read: 'Now when he arrived at the wells of Midyan, he found there a large group of men who were watering [their herds and flocks]; and at some distance from them he came upon two women who were keeping back their flock. He asked [them]: “What is the matter with you?” They answered: "We cannot water [our animals] until the herdsmen drive [theirs] home – for [we are weak and] our father is a very old man' (*al-Qasas:* 23).

Therefore, the rationale behind them going out was that their father, Shu’aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* was an old man who was incapable of carrying out this task. Then when circumstances had compelled them to go out, they did not abandon dignity and decency, and they did not mix with men. ‘We cannot water [our animals] until the herdsmen drive [theirs] home…' (*al-Qasas:* 23). That is when the men have left.

Then the practical role of faith takes place into society: 'So he watered [their flock] for them...' (*al-Qasas:* 24). There must be this model of gallantry in society, and manliness must also play a part. I have mentioned (1) to you the incident when I travelled to Saudi Arabia in the year 1950 and I took a car to get to the college. Suddenly, the driver got out and he took a wooden board that had dough on it from in front of one of the houses. So, I asked him: ‘Why did you take it when the door is closed?’ He said: ‘this dough means that the owner of the house is not in, and whoever sees it has to take it, bake it and then put it back.'

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(1) The story of the friend of Sheikh Ash-Shʿrawi with the dough board in Mecca

His statement 'It is such as these…' (*Muhammad:* 23) means those who are pleased with turning away from and avoiding the call of truth and denying the caller in order to sow corruption in the earth and cut off the ties of kinship ‘Whom Allah curses…' (*Muhammad:* 23), i.e. whom He banishes them from His mercy and places them far away from his pleasure. Those whom Allah *Glorified is He* curses are also cursed by the angels, and the cursers curse them in every time and place, and they are cursed by everyone who suffers from their corruption ‘And whom He makes deaf [to the voice of truth], and whose eyes He blinds [to its sight]!' (*Muhammad:* 23) This is the normal consequence for whomever Allah *Glorified is He* has cursed. He deafens their ears blocking them from hearing the truth and he blinds their eyes from seeing the signs, and thus they do not ponder over them.

Therefore, they can hear and see, but they only hear evil and they only see falsehood. Allah *Glorified is He* has indeed veiled them from goodness and opened upon them the door of every evil as a meet requital because they closed their hearts against the truth and they preferred falsehood; indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* helped them with it and facilitated it for them!

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَآ ﴿٢٤﴾

Will they not contemplate the Quran? Do they have locks on their hearts? [24] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 24)

His statement 'Will they not, then…' (*Muhammad:* 24) is a question that encourages and urges pondering; '…ponder over…' (*Muhammad:* 24), i.e. reflect on and consider the meaning, signs and miracles of '…this Quran' (*Muhammad:* 24). It is Allah’s Speech that was sent down to the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and which presents Allah's System to mankind. It is also a miracle that proves the veracity of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

To ponder over it, means to reflect deeply on it such that we do not stop at the outside of the verses and only look at them superficially. Rather, we must plunge into their depths, reflect on their data, and search for their secrets, as the Noble Quran contains treasures and every day we discover a new one.

It contains a clarification of everything, and from it
I take everything, as much as my mind can take

His question '…or are there locks upon their hearts?' (*Muhammad:* 24) means they do not ponder over the Noble Quran but instead their hearts are locked and thus they do not understand or reflect it. There are padlocks on their hearts that prevent them from interacting with and being affected by Allah’s Speech. Allah *Glorified is He* has no need of the believers’ faith and He has no need of the obedience of the obedient, as Allah *Glorified is He* is not benefitted by obedience and He is not harmed by disobedience. Indeed, He had the attributes of absolute perfection before He created this creation.

It is with His attributes of perfection that He created the creatures, and with His attributes of perfection He nurtured and provided sustenance to them. With His self-sustainment, He made His blessings towards His creation endless, even towards the disbelievers amongst them.

You remember the story(1) of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when a guest came and knocked on his door because he needed something. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* went and asked him, first of all, about his religion. The man said: ‘I am a Magian’, so he closed the door against his face.

When the man had left, Allah *Glorified is He* blamed His Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* for what he had done to the man and he said to him: ‘Do you want, for the sake of some comfort at night, this man to change his religion while I accommodate him throughout his life even though He does not believe in Me?’ Thus, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* went out and followed the man until he caught up with him and then said to him: ‘Come, for my Lord has blamed me for how I treated you.’ The man responded: ‘It is a good Lord who censures His Prophets with regards to His enemies’, and then he testified that there is no God but Allah.

Therefore, the general mercy in this life and blessings of the True Lord *Glorified is He* being the Lord of all beings, accommodates the whole creation.

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(1) The story of Abraham *peace be upon him* and his guest, the fire worshiper

But the specific major mercy and the special divine gifts are designated for those who believe in Him.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱرۡتَدُّواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَدۡبَٰرِهِم مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلۡهُدَى ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ سَوَّلَ
لَهُمۡ وَأَمۡلَىٰ لَهُمۡ ﴿٢٥﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ قَالُواْ لِلَّذِينَ كَرِهُواْ مَا نَزَّلَ ٱللَّهُ
سَنُطِيعُكُمۡ فِي بَعۡضِ ٱلۡأَمۡرِۖ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ إِسۡرَارَهُمۡ ﴿٢٦﴾

Those who turn on their heels after being shown guidance are duped and tempted by Satan [25] they say to those who hate what God has sent down, 'We will obey you in some matters' — God knows their secret schemes [26]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 25 - 26)

These verses are speaking about the hypocrites. We have explained that hypocrisy did not emerge in Mecca despite its hostility to the religion. However, it emerged in Medina which embraced Islam and spread it throughout the entire world. The reason for this is that no one acts hypocritically towards a weak person. People only act hypocritically towards a strong person. So, when the Muslims became strong in Medina, some disbelievers concealed themselves in hypocrisy amongst the Muslim community.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about them: 'Verily, those who turn their backs [on this message]…' (*Muhammad:* 25); that is they were only believers by their tongues, but their hearts did not believe. '…after guidance has been vouchsafed to them…' (*Muhammad:* 25). Indeed, the truth, guidance and straight path that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had brought were clearly seen in front of them.

'Do it because] Satan has embellished their fancies…' (*Muhammad:* 25) means that Satan has influenced them and made their view of deviating away from the truth seem goodly; the meaning of the verb '*sawwala*' ('…embellished…') is to whisper, as Allah *Glorified is He* quotes him: '[Whereupon Iblis] said: "Now that Thou hast thwarted me I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straight way' (*al-A'raf:* 16).He also said: '[Whereupon Iblis] said: "Then [I swear] by Thy very might: I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error' (*Sad:* 82). Then, he sticks to his limits, saying: '[all] save such of them as are truly Thy servants!' (*Sad:* 83) This is so he has no control over these people and he has no means of getting through to them.

It is amazing that Iblis (Satan) reveals his plans to lead people astray; he says: '…I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straight way' (*al-A'raf:* 16), i.e. on the path of obedience in order to corrupt it for you. This is why we said that Satan attends the mosque and he does not attend the tavern.

As well, He said: 'and shall most certainly fall upon them openly as well as in a manner beyond their ken, and from their right and from their left…' (*al-A'raf:* 17), from every direction, in any form and from any point in which he finds some weakness of yours, Thus, he will attack you through the gate of wealth and love of possession, or through the gate of women, or the gate of fame and love of being seen, and so forth. This is because every human being has a 'key', a vulnerability through which Satan attacks him.

It is from Allah's mercy that He has taught us how to protect ourselves against Satan. Allah *Glorified is He* has said: 'And if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs thee up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah…' (*al-A'raf:* 200) because you are not able to ward him off yourself, so seek help from the One Who created him. If you seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He* against Satan, he withdraws and shrinks. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* called him the whispering, elusive tempter.

If you try to ward him off by yourself, then the battle between the two of you will be a long one because he is stronger than you are and he has a lot of experience in misguiding and leading astray using various means against you. He wraps the ropes around you in such a way that you do not realise until he makes you fall into one of his traps.

However, it is from Satan's stupidity that he discloses to us his plans to lead people astray because a one who makes a trap for you does not disclose it. However, Satan does so in order for the proof to be established against everyone who obeys him and listens to him. This is why he will say afterwards: '…Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine…' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

Man is able to identify the source of the whispering whether it is from his soul or from Satan? Satan wants you to be disobedient in any way, shape or form. Thus, if he is unsuccessful with you when using the gate of wealth he will attack to you from the gate of fame; if he still is not successful, he will come to you from the gate of women, and so on until he traps you. As for the soul, it has its own specific desire that it concentrates on and urges you to fulfil.

Then, you notice that Satan, as he said, comes to you from every direction except for two; above and below. Why? Scholars said that is because these two directions represent the relationship between the slave and his Lord. The loftiness of Divinity appears when a believer looks upwards and the humility of slavery to Allah *Glorified is He* appears when he prostrates and places his forehead on the ground, acknowledging his slavery to his Lord. This is why Satan does not come from these two directions.

Allah's statement: '…and filled them with false hopes,' (*Muhammad:* 25) means that Allah *Glorified is He* gives them time and prolongs their hopes for them so that they would persist in their misguidance and stick to their desires. '[They do turn their backs on it] inasmuch as they are wont to say unto those who abhor all that Allah has revealed…' (*Muhammad:* 26). These are the two Jew tribes: Banu An-Nadir and Banu Qurayzha. '…"We will comply with your views on some points."…' (*Muhammad:* 26), i.e. we will assist you and support you in some matters which place obstacles in the path of Muhammad's Message.

In another verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explained the meaning of the phrase ('…some points…'); He said: 'Art thou not aware of how those who would always dissemble [their real feelings] speak to their truth-denying brethren from among the followers of earlier revelation: "If you are driven away, we shall most certainly go forth with you, and shall never pay heed to anyone against you; and if war is waged against you, we shall most certainly come to your succour." But Allah bears witness that they are most flagrantly lying: [11] [for] if those [to whom they have pledged themselves] are indeed driven away, they will not go forth with them; and if war is waged against them, they will not come to their succour; and even if they [try to] succour them, they will most certainly turn their backs [in flight], and in the end will [themselves] find no succour [12]' (*al-Hashr:* 11-12).

'But Allah knows their secret thoughts' (*Muhammad:* 26), i.e. their secret and hidden plotting against Islam; but as long as Allah *Glorified is He* knows about it, He will make it come to nothing.

فَكَيۡفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّتۡهُمُ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَضۡرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمۡ وَأَدۡبَٰرَهُمۡ ٢٧

How will they feel when the angels take them in
death and beat their faces and their backs [27]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 27)

This means: what will their state be when they are doing this? What will they do when the angels come to gather them in death striking their faces and their backs? What will they do in this situation? Are they able to defend themselves? Therefore, why do they stubbornly resist? Why do they stand in the way of the Prophetic Message and conspire against it? It would have been better for them to support it

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمُ ٱتَّبَعُواْ مَآ أَسۡخَطَ ٱللَّهَ وَكَرِهُواْ
رِضۡوَٰنَهُۥ فَأَحۡبَطَ أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ ٢٨

because they practised things that incurred God's
wrath, and disdained to please Him? He makes their
deeds go to waste [28] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 28)

His statement: 'This…' (*Muhammad:* 28) is a demonstrative pronoun that refers to their evil end, which includes the angels striking their faces and backs. Why? '…because they were wont to pursue what Allah condemns…' (*Muhammad:* 28); they followed falsehood which befalls Allah's Wrath upon them, and more besides '…and to hate [whatever would meet with] His goodly acceptance…' (*Muhammad:* 28); they hated the truth that leads to Allah's Goodly Acceptance '…and so He has caused all their [good] deeds to come to nought' (*Muhammad:* 28); He makes them come to nothing and to be of no benefit.

Did they have deeds that merited reward and Allah *Glorified is He* made them come to nothing? Scholars said: yes. They would honour guests and help those in trouble, and other, similar good deeds. However, they did acts of goodness seeking results other than the pleasure of Allah *Glorified is He*. They did it for fame and reputation, and so that people would talk about them. So, let them take their reward from those whom they acted for their sake since they have no share in the reward of the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'for We shall have turned towards all the [supposedly good] deeds they ever wrought, and shall have transformed them into scattered dust' (*al-Furqan:* 23) and He said: '[This, then, is] the parable of those who are bent on denying their Lord: all their works are as ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day: [in the life to come,] they cannot achieve any benefit whatever from all [the good] that they may have wrought…' (*Ibrahim:* 18).

أَمۡ حَسِبَ ٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ أَن لَّن يُخۡرِجَ ٱللَّهُ أَضۡغَٰنَهُمۡ ٢٩

Do the corrupt at heart assume that God will not expose their malice? [29] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 29)

That is, do these people who have '…disease…' (*Muhammad:* 29), i.e. hypocrisy think '...that Allah would never bring their moral failings to light' (*Muhammad:* 29) that is manifesting their resentment and exposes their secrets? Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is able to do such a thing as He exposed them to His Messenger and showed them to him and He laid bare their hidden resentment. This is why He said in the following verse:

وَلَوۡ نَشَآءُ لَأَرَيۡنَٰكَهُمۡ فَلَعَرَفۡتَهُم بِسِيمَٰهُمۡۚ وَلَتَعۡرِفَنَّهُمۡ
فِي لَحۡنِ ٱلۡقَوۡلِۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ أَعۡمَٰلَكُمۡ ٣٠

We could even point them out to you [Prophet] if We wished, and then you could identify them by their marks, but you will know them anyway by the tone of their speech. God knows everything you [people] do [30] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 30)

Deeds include statements and actions. It is not difficult for an intelligent person to identify a hypocrite from the looks of his face and outward appearance. A liar has characteristics that distinguish him and the truthful person has a shining face that indicates his veracity, and so forth.

His statement: '…by the tone of their voice…' (*Muhammad:* 30) means: in the slips of the tongue, or in twisting expressions and playing with them. For example, the Jews said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*: '*As-sam ʿalaykum* (death be upon you) twisting the greeting: *As-salam ʿalaykum*, Oh Muhammad!' Then ʿAʾisha *may Allah be pleased with her* became aware of this and responded to them with what they deserve.(1) Therefore, the poet from the pre-Islamic era said:

Whenever someone has some trait
And they think of hiding it from people, it becomes known

Indeed Allah *Glorified is He* exposed them in His statement: 'And among those [enemies of the truth] there are such as malign the Prophet by saying, "He is all ear." Say: "[Yes,] he is all ear, [listening] to what is good for you! He believes in Allah, and trusts the believers, and is [a manifestation of Allah's] grace towards such of you as have [truly] attained to faith. And as for those who malign Allah's Apostle – grievous suffering awaits them [in the life to come]!"' (*at-Tawba:* 61)

Their statement about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…"He is all ear."…' (*at-Tawba:* 61) is similar to what is commonly said about someone that is '*widani*', that is listening too much to others speaking. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them: '…Say: "[Yes,] he is all ear, [listening] to what is good for you!"…' (*at-Tawba:* 61) Yes, he is all ear, but a good ear hearing goodness and points it out to you.

His statement: '…by a visible mark…' (*Muhammad:* 30) means clear signs on their faces. By '… the tone of their voice…' (*Muhammad:* 30) means their changing of expressions from their recognized meanings.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (5575) that ʿAʾisha Allah be pleased with her said: 'A group of Jews entered upon God's Messenger peace and blessing be upon him and they said: 'Death be upon you (as-sam ʿalaykum)' (instead of saying the greeting: As-salam ʿalaykum) ʿAʾisha responded, as she understood what they had said: 'And upon you be death and curses (wa ʿalaykum as-sam wa al-laʿna)'. Then The Messenger of God said: {Take it easy, ʿAʾisha. Indeed God loves gentleness in every matter.} She responded: 'O Messenger of God, did you not hear what they said?' The Messenger of God said: {You could have said 'and upon you'.} It is also narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (4027).*

وَلَنَبۡلُوَنَّكُمۡ حَتَّىٰ نَعۡلَمَ ٱلۡمُجَٰهِدِينَ مِنكُمۡ وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ وَنَبۡلُوَاْ أَخۡبَارَكُمۡ ﴿٣١﴾

We shall test you to see which of you strive your hardest and are steadfast; We shall test the sincerity of your assertions [31] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 31)

The speech here is addressed to the believers who have believed in Allah *Glorified is He* and have affirmed Allah’s Messenger. Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: 'and most certainly We shall try you all…' (*Muhammad:* 31), i.e. We will test you and examine you with hardships and difficulties. '…so that We might mark out those of you who strive hard [in Our cause] and are patient in adversity: for We shall put to a test [the truth of] all your assertions,' (*Muhammad:* 31), i.e. in order to know those who are firm with the trial from those who are in doubt and hesitancy, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to purify the believers and test the strength of their faith, patience and capacity to bear with difficulty; this is because they will bear the burdens of the divine message on their shoulders. It is a global mission. No one applies themselves to it except someone who is firm in their faith and established in their creed, and unshakeable, as the poet defined:

I am not concerned when I am killed as a Muslim
Either way, my death is according to Allah

These are the people who were eager for death just as much as others were eager for life. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* gave them the rank of martyrdom and freed them from death after they had sacrificed their lives in His cause, and He connected their life in this world to their life in the Hereafter.

His statement '…patient in adversity…' (*Muhammad:* 31), i.e. the difficulty of conveying Allah's Message (*Da'awah*) and the difficulty of religious obligations. When you reflect on the state of this nation before Islam, you find that it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* was preparing it to bear the message of Islam. It is a nation of war and fighting. It knows the arts of war and it has mastered attack and retreat. It is a Bedouin nation that does not settle in any place. Rather, their houses were on the backs of their riding beasts. It was also a nation that does not have a system or law or way of life.

All of this made it suited to carry and convey the message of truth to the entire world, fight falsehood and make people understand Allah’s Religion. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…From within every group in their midst, some shall refrain from going forth to war, and shall devote themselves [instead] to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith, and [thus be able to] teach their homecoming brethren…' (*at-Tawba:* 122).

Therefore, in its struggle with its enemies, Islam needs two forces of struggle (*jihad*); a force that strives to preserve the word and a force that strives to affirm the veracity of the word. This is why trials and tribulations were necessary. A test, 'and most certainly We shall try you all…' (*Muhammad:* 31) is not praised or blamed for its own sake, but rather according to its result. If someone does a test and passes we praise him, and if he fails we blame him.

In 'So that We might mark out…' (*Muhammad:* 31), the literal translation of the Arabic word corresponding 'mark out' is 'know'. Allah *Glorified is He* says 'So that We might know' even though He already knows. Therefore, the meaning is to match the abstract knowledge with the actual fact so that the fact can be a proof against the one who practices the action. Thus, he cannot say: ‘If I had taken the test, I would have passed’.

The words '…patient in adversity…' (*Muhammad:* 31) show that there is difficulty in the religious commandments and the human soul might feel some tightness in them. This is why some people bear with it and are patient, while others feel restricted by it and are anxious.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: 'Endure, then, with patience [all that they who deny the truth may say] – always remembering that it is none but Allah who gives thee the strength to endure adversity…' (*an-Nahl:* 127); Allah is The One Who helps you have patience by explaining to you its good consequences.

Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity' (*al-’Asr:* 3). Enjoining upon one another means that each one of you advises the other because sometimes man is patient and he endures, and sometimes he is weak and unhappy. Sometimes, you advise me and sometimes I advise you. The word *wasiyyah* (advice), as an exact term, is only used with regards to something that is valuable and precious, something that we should be concerned with and vigilant over.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَصَدُّوا۟ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَشَآقُّوا۟ ٱلرَّسُولَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ
لَهُمُ ٱلْهُدَىٰ لَن يَضُرُّوا۟ ٱللَّهَ شَيْـًٔا وَسَيُحْبِطُ أَعْمَـٰلَهُمْ ﴿٣٢﴾

Those who disbelieve, bar others from God’s path, and oppose the Messenger when they have been shown guidance, do not harm God in any way. He will make their deeds go to waste [32] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 32)

Then, these people did not stop at disbelief. Rather, they went even beyond that: '…and on barring [others] from the path of Allah…' (*Muhammad:* 32), i.e. they prevented people from believing in Allah *Glorified is He* and they stood up in the face of the Message and fought it. Then '…and [who thus] cut themselves off from The Apostle…' (*Muhammad:* 32), i.e. they went against him and opposed him such that they were on one side and he was on another side. '…after guidance has been vouchsafed to them…' (*Muhammad:* 32), i.e. the clear truth; the consequence is that they: '…can in no wise harm Allah…' (*Muhammad:* 32).

These are all futile attempts that will not benefit them in the slightest and will not affect the progress of the Message. Why? It is because The True Lord *Glorified is He* has never sent a messenger to the creation and then surrendered him to his enemies so that they could kill him. This is a Divine Rule in the universe. A messenger is never killed. Yes, The True Lord *Glorified is He* has informed us that the children of Israel used to kill prophets, but he did not say messengers; '…Say: “Why, then, did you slay Allah’s prophets aforetime, if you were [truly] believers?”' (*al-Baqara:* 91) Reflect on the word '…aforetime…'; it means that no one from the Jews or even the Muslims can say it is possible for the Jews to kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* just as they killed their prophets because this killing was before Muhammad. Therefore, be reassured that they will never kill Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* as this verse brought reassurance to the Muslims and despair to the disbelievers with regards to this issue. The disbelievers certainly did try but how impossible it was for them.

Furthermore, a disbeliever assumes the bad consequences of his own denial of faith as well as they will be subjected for another punishment for barring others from having faith because they have gone astray on their own and misguided others too. We understand from the words '…and on barring [others] from the path of Allah…' (*Muhammad:* 32), that the path of Allah *Glorified is He* is a straight and even road that attracts people to it with straightforward logic, sweet speech and a beautiful, splendid style that softens hearts towards it, even if they are hard.

It is natural for the disbelievers to stand up in this way and prevent people from having faith and from hearing the Noble Quran. This is why the Noble Quran related their statement: 'Now those who are bent on denying the truth say [unto one another]: "Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it so that you might gain the upper hand!"' (*Fussilat:* 26) They are thus certain that hearing the Noble Quran will affect them and incline their hearts towards it. They did not stop at preventing themselves and other people from listening to the Noble Quran. Rather, they went beyond it: '…but rather talk frivolously about it…' (*Fussilat:* 26); they spread confusion about it so that it does not reach the ears of others. This is because they are native speakers of the Arabic language having its sense and eloquence. They thoroughly enjoy expressions and styles and they are affected by them.

His statement '…but He will cause all their deeds to come to nought,' (*Muhammad:* 32) means that He will invalidate their deeds and make them futile. The meaning of ('…their deeds…') is that deed of barring others from Allah's Path or it is their good deeds that they did in the life of this world. Their deeds included spending wealth in order to bar people from the truth.

Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Behold, those who are bent on denying the truth are spending their riches in order to turn others away from the path of Allah; and they will go on spending them until they become [a source of] intense regret for them; and then they will be overcome! ...' (*al-Anfal:* 36) They spent their wealth and they got nothing in return. The people took it from them and laughed at them, as in the case nowadays with elections. They use their wealth to buy votes and then people take the wealth and do not vote for them because they do not deserve it.

The second category of their actions, after wealth, is fighting; fighting is a reality in their struggle against the truth. Allah *Glorified is He* is calling on them: ‘O you who carry weapons in opposition to the Messenger, you should consider the reality before you: 'Have, then, they [who deny the truth] never yet seen how We visit the earth [with Our punishment], gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon?…' (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41) Have they not noticed that the territory of Islam is growing every day, and the territory of disbelief is decreasing and shrinking every day?

Regarding the Battle of Badr, Allah says: 'and, lo, Allah gave you the promise that one of the two [enemy] hosts would fall to you:…' (*al-Anfal:* 7), i.e. the group of the caravan that was carrying goods and wealth and only had a few guards, and the group that went out to protect the caravan and was led by Abu Sufyan. The Muslims wanted the caravan that had the wealth, but Allah *Glorified is He* decided another matter. They want wealth while Allah *Glorified is He* wants truth to prevail, His word to be uppermost, and for disbelief to be banished so that there is no doubt that could be attached to the Muslims on the basis that they only went out for the wealth and spoils that would compensate for their loss in Mecca.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and you would have liked to seize the less powerful one…' (*al-Anfal:* 7), i.e. the caravan '…whereas it was Allah’s will to prove the truth to be true in accordance with His words, and to wipe out the last remnant of those who denied the truth, [7] so that He might prove the truth to be true and the false to be false, however hateful this might be to those who were lost in sin. [8] Lo! You were praying unto your Lord for aid, whereupon He thus responded to you: "I shall, verily, aid you with a thousand angels following one upon another!" (*al-Anfal:* 7-9)

Yes, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon you* sought refuge in his Lord and asked Him for help: ‘Oh Allah, grant me your victory that You promised me. O Allah, if this small group is destroyed, you will not be worshipped on the earth.’(1) The Companion Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘O Messenger of Allah, have mercy upon yourself, you did prayer for your Lord enough.’

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (3309) and also At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3006) and Ahmad in his Musnad (216,203) from the Hadith of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be please with him… It is also narrated by ‘Abd ibn Hamid in his Musnad (31) and the wording of Muslim is that God’s Messenger called out on the Day of Badr: {O God, fulfil what you have promised me! O God, bring about what you have promised me! O God, if this small group of Muslims is destroyed, you will not be worshipped on the earth.}*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was looking forward to victory over the group that had power because he did not want wealth. Instead, he wanted to make the truth prevail and to obliterate falsehood. According to how much patience a believer has, Allah *Glorified is He* supplies them with support and power. If you want more support, then have more patience, have more contentment and have greater resolve.

If Allah *Glorified is He* willed, He would afflict the disbelievers with defeat without fighting, but He wanted you to fight them in order to show your strength and your superiority over them. 'Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands, and will bring disgrace upon them, and will succour you against them; and He will soothe the bosoms of those who believe' (*at-Tawba:* 14). If Allah *Glorified is He* defeated them with a natural disaster, they would say: ‘This is a natural phenomenon, and we have no power over it.’

Likewise, on the Day (Battle) of Hunayn: 'Indeed, Allah has succoured you on many battlefields, [when you were few;] and [He did so, too,] on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers and they proved of no avail whatever to you – for the earth, despite all its vastness, became [too] narrow for you and you turned back, retreating' (*at-Tawba:* 25).

When the Muslims were deluded by their greater number, Allah *Glorified is He* taught them a lesson in order to discipline them and gave their enemies the upper hand in the beginning of the battle. Then, out of His mercy, He corrected them and decreed victory for them in the end. Thus, on the same occasion, He disciplined both those who believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who denied and opposed him.

This teaches us a lesson which is that when the believers are defeated, it is not because Allah *Glorified is He* is disgracing them. Rather, He is refining them, correcting their understandings, and revising their course of action. This lesson is clear in the Battle of Uhud, as you know. When they disobeyed the orders of the commander, they were defeated. If they had been given victory in this battle, they would have then attached little importance to the commands of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They would have said: ‘We disobeyed his orders at Uhud and we were still victorious.’

This is why scholars say regarding this battle: ‘The Muslims were defeated but Islam was given victory.’ Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* made the disbelievers deeds come to naught with regards to two things; wealth and fighting.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبۡطِلُوٓاْ أَعۡمَٰلَكُمۡ ﴿٣٣﴾

believers, obey God and the Messenger: do not let your deeds go to waste [33] (The Quran, *Muhammad:* 33)

The call here is directed to the believers, as faith is the basis for giving them the command in '…Pay heed unto Allah, and pay heed unto The Apostle…' (*Muhammad:* 33) and in the prohibition '…and let not your [good] deeds come to nought!' (*Muhammad:* 33)

The believer is the one who hears the address and obey the commands because he knows that they are from a wise Lord who is The Creator, The All-Provider and The All-Sustaining.

Goodness is in obeying Him, and loss is in contravening His command. This is why, when the believer is afflicted with some test or adversity, he says to himself: ‘What have I done? I must have contravened my Lord’s way.’ And thus he rectifies his action.

It is also worth noting the repetition of the imperative verb '…pay heed…' (*Muhammad:* 33) once with Allah *Glorified is He* and once with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* There must be a reason for this. Yes, scholars said: ‘It is because Allah *Glorified is He* legislates the general principle in a comprehensive way, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* legislates the detailed rulings of the general principle; an example of this is the prayer. Allah *Glorified is He* has obligated us to perform prayer in a general sense, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has explained the times of each prayer, how many units each prayer consists of and everything that is connected to it.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* is to be obeyed with regards to the general principle, while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to be obeyed with regards to the details. If the verb is not repeated, as in 'And pay heed unto Allah and the Apostle,' (*Al-'Imran:* 132) then the command is one and it refers to both the speech of Allah *Glorified is He* and the speech of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The command also comes in another form: '…Pay heed unto Allah, and pay heed unto The Apostle and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority…' (*an-Nisa':* 59). He did not say: 'obey those in authority over you', but rather, He made obedience to them to be included within obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* and obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, they are owed no exclusive obedience or obedience that is separate from obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* and obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is because, as you know, there is no obedience to a creation in disobedience to The Creator, and this is a religious legislative maxim. His statement: 'and do not invalidate your deeds' because you do good deeds, so preserve them and do not nullify them with sins, as the poet said:

I have not seen amongst the faults of mankind a fault so great
Like the inability of those able to be complete, to initiate

Imam Ash-Shafiʿi (1) says:

If you are in a blessing, take care of it
For indeed disobedience removes blessings

It is a fault for the Muslim to relapse and commit evil deeds after being given success to do good deeds. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds. That is a reminder for those who remember' (*Hud:* 114).

In a Qudsi Hadith: 'Follow up an evil deed with a good deed and it will wipe it out.'(2) It is from Allah's Mercy towards us that good deeds wipe out evil deeds. However, a bad deed does not wipe out a good deed, but it does necessitate that one seeks forgiveness. One of the most dangerous diseases that nullify righteous action is when a desire for ostentation, reputation, or hypocrisy intervenes, or a suspicion of idolatry. We seek refuge in Allah *Glorified is He.*

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(1) He is Imam Muhammad ibn Idris Ash-Shafiʿi, who died 203 A.H., and one if the four Imams of Muslim Orthodoxy (*As-Sunna*) and all Shafiʿis are affiliated to him. He was born in Gaza in the year 150 A.H., visited Baghdad twice, and headed to Egypt in the year 199 A.H. He died there. He was the most poetic and cultured of people and the most knowledgeable of them in jurisprudence and Quranic recitations. *[Al-ʿAlam by Az-Zirikli 6/26]*

(2) *Related by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (1910), Ahmad in his Musnad (20556, 20512, 20435, 20392), Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (165), Al-Bayhaqi in Shuʿab Al-Iman (7795) and Al-Qadaʿi in Ash-Shihab (611), and all of them from Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari and in the chapter on Muʿadh ibn Jabal.*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَصَدُّواْ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ مَاتُواْ وَهُمۡ كُفَّارٞ فَلَن يَغۡفِرَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُمۡ (٣٤)

God will not forgive those who disbelieve, bar others
from God's path, and die as disbelievers [34]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 34)

His statement 'then died while they were disbelievers,' (*Muhammad:* 34) means that they died on disbelief and they did not amend the matter by repenting before death befell them. 'Never will Allah forgive them' (*Muhammad:* 34). This means that if they had repented before the death rattle, while still in this life, He would have forgiven them.

In another verse Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills.' (*an-Nisa':* 48). Dying upon disbelief after guidance had been clarified and shown to mankind is a proof of stubbornness, so how can such a person be the recipient Allah's Mercy?

فَلَا تَهِنُواْ وَتَدۡعُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱلسَّلۡمِ وَأَنتُمُ ٱلۡأَعۡلَوۡنَ وَٱللَّهُ مَعَكُمۡ وَلَن يَتِرَكُمۡ أَعۡمَٰلَكُمۡ (٣٥)

So [believers] do not lose heart and cry out for peace. It is
you who have the upper hand: God is with you. He will not
begrudge you the reward for your [good] deeds [35]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 35)

The meaning of 'So do not weaken,' (*Muhammad:* 35) is: do not be weak when confronting your enemies because they are standing before you in battle, even if they try to make you feel weak by intimidating you or enticing you. One of the manifestations of weakness is that it calls them to reconciliation and a parting of ways. 'While you are superior,' (*Muhammad:* 35) means to act on the basis of this perspective.

Why would it not be so as 'Allah is with you,' (*Muhammad:* 35) to strengthen you and guard your backs, as He is the One Who never forsakes the one who seeks refuge in Him. It is His way that you are fighting for, so how can He abandon you or allow you to surrender to your enemies? Therefore, when there is fierce fighting and the battle becomes harsh, be firm, and do not let them frighten you with their equipment, or numbers, or their stratagems and scheming because Allah *Glorified is He* is with you.

This is why, in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when Pharaoh and his army almost caught up with him, one of Musa's (Moses's) soldiers said: 'Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61). What did Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* say: 'He replied: 'No indeed! My Lord is with me, (and) He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) He said it with a ring of deep conviction and he was certain of Allah's victory.

We understand from His statement 'So do not weaken and call for peace,' (*Muhammad:* 35) that He has forbidden us from seeking peace. He has forbidden us from raising the white flag. Rather, we leave them to seek it. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'But if they incline to peace, incline to it as well' (*al-Anfal:* 61). This is because they understand that peace coming from you would be weakness and submission. You also would not call for peace because you are bound to rise above them and you are mightier and stronger.

'And Allah is with you' (*Muhammad:* 35). If someone is in Allah's company, Allah *Glorified is He* bestows upon him some of His attributes. Have you seen in the Story of the People of the Cave how they stood at the opening of the cave, and even As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* said: 'O Messenger of Allah! If one of them were to look at his feet, he would see us.' So, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: 'Oh Abu Bakr! What do you think of two and Allah is the third of them?'(1) As long as Allah *Glorified is He* is the third of them, then they are in His company, and as long as Allah is not encompassed by human vision, then whoever is in His company will also not be encompassed by human vision.

The meaning of 'and will never deprive you of [the reward of] your deeds,' (*Muhammad:* 35) is that He will not let you lose the reward of your deeds in the slightest. Rather, He will give you the full extent and then more.

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(1) *Agreed upon, authentic Hadith, related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4295), Muslim in his Sahih (4389), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3021) and Ahmad in his Musnad (11), and all of them from the Hadith of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq may Allah be pleased with him.*

إِنَّمَا ٱلۡحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنۡيَا لَعِبٞ وَلَهۡوٞۚ وَإِن تُؤۡمِنُواْ وَتَتَّقُواْ يُؤۡتِكُمۡ أُجُورَكُمۡ وَلَا يَسۡـَٔلۡكُمۡ
أَمۡوَٰلَكُمۡ ﴿٣٦﴾ إِن يَسۡـَٔلۡكُمُوهَا فَيُحۡفِكُمۡ تَبۡخَلُواْ وَيُخۡرِجۡ أَضۡغَٰنَكُمۡ ﴿٣٧﴾

The life of this world is only a game, a pastime, but if you
believe and are mindful of God, He will recompense you. He
does not ask you to give up [all] your possessions [36]
you would be grudging if He were to ask you and press you
for them, and He would bring your ill-will to light [37]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 36 - 37)

The Noble Quran gives us various illustrations of this life which overall show that it is a short, insignificant life that deludes and deceives mankind. One of these illustrations is His statement ‘And present to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds’ (*al-Kahf:* 45). And here: ‘[This] worldly life is only play and diversion’ (*Muhammad:* 36). This is a style of restriction which affirms that this life is nothing but a play and a passing delight, so let the intelligent person be wary of it and not deluded by it.

Amusement means to be preoccupied with something that does not harm you, but it does not benefit you either, and this is why some advanced societies made practical the amusement of children such that they fulfil the purpose of entertaining children and also teaching them something for the future. This is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Teach your children swimming, archery and horseback riding.’(1)

Play, for children, is before the age of legal responsibility. As for ‘diversion’, it is to preoccupy yourself by doing something that does not benefit and it distracts you from doing something that does benefit, like the person who sits in the café, for example, playing chess, and he hears the call to the noon prayer, but he does not pray.

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Bakr ibn ʿAbdullah ibn Rabiʿ Al-Ansari who said: ‘The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said: “Teach your children swimming and archery. The spinning mill is a good passing delight for the believing woman in her house. If your parents call on you then answer your mother.” Related by Abu Naʿim in Maʿrifat As-Sahaba (the chapter on whoever is named Bisr) and mentioned by Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in Kanz Al-ʿUmmal (45343) and he attributed it to Ibn Mundih in Al-Maʿrifa, Abu Musa in Adh-Dhayl and Ad-Daylami in Al-Firdaws.*

In the chapter of *al-Jumuʿa*: ‘But when they saw a transaction or a diversion, [O Muhammad], they rushed to it and left you standing. Say, ‘What is with Allah is better than diversion and then a transaction, and Allah is the best of providers’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11).

The one who follows the verses of the Noble Quran will find that they describe the life of the world in more than one place with this description; a play and diversion, in that order because play is for children and a diversion is for adults. The only exception is in the chapter of *al-ʿAnkabut*: ‘And this worldly life is not but diversion and play. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew,’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) because the speech here is about the tribulations that have dire consequences in the Hereafter and make one lose out on its reward, so diversion is mentioned before play.

Furthermore, the name of this life (*ad-dunya; low*) is enough to show how contemptible and insignificant it is: ‘…this life is only play and diversion…’ (*Muhammad:* 36), as there is nothing less than this description. When you say the word *ad-dunya* you remember its counterpart which is *al-akhira* (the Hereafter). If this is the most inferior, then that is the most superior, and if this is fleeting, then that is everlasting.

Despite this, this life is not generally blameworthy. It is only blameworthy if something happens in it that is blameworthy, and it is praiseworthy if something happens in it that is praiseworthy. It is a place of cultivation for the Hereafter, as you only enter paradise with action from this life. Thus, this life is the subject of the religion, while the Hereafter is the reward, and the reward for something is not the thing itself.

We said previously that for the believer, this life is too important to be forgotten about because it leads you to the Hereafter, but it is too insignificant to be an objective because the objective of something is its end; and this life is not your end. Rather, behind it there is another objective which is the Hereafter. It is the true objective after which there is no other dimension.

Allah’s statement ‘And if you believe and fear Allah’ (*Muhammad:* 36), i.e. you believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and you apply His way with regards to

‘Do!’ and ‘Do not do!’ ‘He will give you your rewards and not ask you for your properties,’ (*Muhammad:* 36), i.e. He will give you the complete reward of your deeds without any decrease, and He will not take your possessions from you, which He favoured you with.

The proof is that when Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to give in charity, He considers this charity to be a loan which He will give back to you, and more. ‘Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah who withholds and grants abundance’ (*al-Baqara:* 245).

His statement ‘If He should ask you for them and press you, you would withhold, and He would expose your unwillingness’ (*Muhammad:* 37). The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not ask us for our possessions because man has been moulded to love possessions and long for them if they are taken away from him. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘If I were to ask you for possessions, the question would require an earnest request.’ ‘And press you,’ (*Muhammad:* 37) He earnestly requests when asking and you hate this because it exposes whatever stinginess you have and it exposes your moral failings and your resentment.

When the moral failings of people are exposed, you ruin the relations between the individuals of society and you have seen an example of this in the issue of nationalization that has taken place because possessions are something that you normally acquire with toil and sweat and it is hard for you to see it taken from you and given to someone else. Here a moral failing is exposed.

And they said regarding: ‘and not ask you for your properties,’ (*Muhammad:* 36) that it indicates the generality of negation and not the negation of generality. How? It is similar to us saying: ‘Not all the students passed.’ This means that some of them passed. Thus, the negation here is for generality, as opposed to saying: ‘All the students did not pass.’ This is the generality of negation such that not a single one of them passed.

He asks you for some of it, as is what happens with alms, charity, ransom and expiation.

هَٰٓأَنتُمْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ تُدْعَوْنَ لِتُنفِقُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَمِنكُم مَّن يَبْخَلُ ۖ
وَمَن يَبْخَلْ فَإِنَّمَا يَبْخَلُ عَن نَّفْسِهِۦ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ ٱلْغَنِىُّ وَأَنتُمُ ٱلْفُقَرَآءُ ۚ وَإِن
تَتَوَلَّوْا۟ يَسْتَبْدِلْ قَوْمًا غَيْرَكُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَكُونُوٓا۟ أَمْثَٰلَكُم ﴿٣٨﴾

Though now you are called upon to give [a little] for the sake of God, some of you are grudging. Whoever is grudging is so only towards himself: God is the source of wealth and you are the needy ones. He will substitute other people for you if you turn away, and they will not be like you [38]
(The Quran, *Muhammad:* 38)

His statement ‘Here you are,’ (*Muhammad:* 38) is to draw attention in order for the person to be ready and not miss anything that is being said. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is addressing them with all of these tools in order to emphasise His call to them, which is to spend out: ‘those invited to spend in the cause of Allah’ (*Muhammad:* 38). Who is the one inviting? Allah *Glorified is He* is inviting them to spend freely.

Reflect here on how the True Lord *Glorified is He* respects and appreciates the efforts of human beings. Even though Allah *Glorified is He* is the Creator, the All-Provider, the Original Cause of causes, Who granted you the strength that you work with, the intellect that you think with, the material that you use despite that He respects your part in directing the energy that Allah *Glorified is He* has created towards beneficial things, and He says to you: ‘Spend freely as if the wealth is your wealth’ and He is borrowing it from you as a goodly loan.

It is similar to you giving your child a daily allowance and he saves it, for example, in a collection box. Then, you fall into difficult circumstances and you need what is in your child’s collection box, so you say to him: ‘Give me what is in the collection box as a loan and I will return it to you when I am able to.’

He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over?’ (*al-Baqara:* 245) The True Lord *Glorified is He* has forbidden usury in transactions between human beings, but He has permitted it for Himself when He borrows from you. This is a favour and generosity from Allah *Glorified is He* towards the creation, in the beginning and in the end.

His statement ‘to spend in the cause of Allah’ (*Muhammad:* 38), i.e. in all the ways that Allah loves. Allah *Glorified is He* is fully capable of enriching everyone such that no one would need anyone else, but instead Allah *Glorified is He* wanted hearts to be interconnected and interests to be interwoven, and for the creation to be joined in the feelings of faith such that the rich are compassionate towards the poor and the poor do not despise the rich, and the strong are merciful towards the weak.

However, when Allah *Glorified is He* calls upon them to spend freely, some of them are miserly: ‘but among you are those who withhold [out of greed]’ (*Muhammad:* 38). They are the ones who understand the philosophy of trade with Allah *Glorified is He* but not the consequences of spending freely. They do not know that spending in this way increases wealth and does not decrease it. Read: ‘Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned’ (*al-Baqara:* 245).

Spending freely in Allah’s cause is like a man who harvests wheat and puts it in storage. He has a certain amount of it, for example, and he takes some of it in order to cultivate the earth again. Would one say that the wheat has decreased by that some taken out? No, because he will take a manifold increase from it.

Therefore, do not just look at what is departing but also look at what is coming in order to complete the illustration and make your calculation sound. Even usury in transactions between people only gives you five or ten per cent more.

As for your Lord *Glorified is He* He gives you seventy or seven hundred times more, or even more than that. Read: ‘The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and knowing’ (*al-Baqara:* 261).

This is why the orientalists had issue with the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘It is written on the door of paradise that charity is rewarded ten times over, and a loan is rewarded eighteen times over.’(1)

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(1) *Mentioned by Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi in Kanz Al-ʿUmmal (10382) and he attributed it to At-Tabarani in Al-Kabir and Al-Hakim in Nawadir Al-Usul from Abu Umama: “I saw=*

They said: ‘This contradicts the Noble Quran which states that a good deed is rewarded ten times over.’ The fact of the matter is that there is never a contradiction between the two because when I give one dirham as a loan, He gives me ten *dirhams* which means that He has actually given me nine. When it is multiplied it becomes eighteen.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* encouraged us to give loans, He taught us how to deal with the debtor. He said: ‘…and if someone is in hardship, then [let there be] postponement until [a time of] ease. But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew’ (*al-Baqara:* 280).

The first stage is that you wait and give him time to pay it back. Then, after that, you can complete your excellence and show good will with this loan, or at least some of it, by way of charity. This is the goodness of the one whose soul aspires to noble things.

Then, in His statement ‘…but among you are those who withhold [out of greed],’ (*Muhammad:* 38) there is equity for the community of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a clarification of its honour, as it is the majority that spend freely and the minority that is miserly. Amongst the community are those who spend all their wealth in Allah’s Cause and there are those who spend half their wealth in Allah’s Cause.

The spending and giving of this community has reached such an extent that there is none like it in all of history. There is the *Ansari* who said to his brother, the *Muhajir*: ‘Look at my wives. If one of them pleases you I will divorce her so that you can marry her.’ It is known that the woman has a special rank with the man, but this is magnanimity and sacrifice.

At the opposite end, you find the *Muhajir* Companion, ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn ʿAwf(1) *may Allah be pleased with him* who refused this generous offer and

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= *written on the door of paradise that a loan is rewarded eighteen times over and charity is rewarded ten times over.} Related by At-Tabarani in Al-Muʿjam Al-Awsat from the Hadith of Anas who said that Allah’s Messenger said: “On my Night Journey, I saw written on the door of Paradise: ‘Charity is rewarded ten times over, and a loan is rewarded eighteen times over.’ I said: ‘O Gabriel, how is a loan better than charity?’ He said: ‘Indeed the asker asks and he has it, while the one who asks for a loan only asks because he has a need.”*

(1) *He is ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn ʿAwf Abu Muhammad Az-Zuhri Al-Qurashi, a Companion and one of them promised direct entrance into paradise. He is also one of the six*=

instead called on his brother(1) and said to him: 'No, Oh brother. May Allah bless you with regards to your women, but show me where the market is.'(2)

ʿAbd Ar-Rahman *may Allah be pleased with him* went to the market and engaged in trade until he was the wealthiest companion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They used to say: 'If he traded in dirt, he would be successful.'

He had a thousand slaves and a man came and asked one of them: 'How is Ibn ʿAwf with you?' The slave said: 'By Allah, if you were to come across us while he was with us, you would not distinguish him among us because he lets us wear what he wears, and he lets us eat what he eats.'

Despite the love of wealth that is seated in the human soul, and the love of ownership, there are still some people who are like a mountain of generosity and benevolence, who give without limit and give as if they do not fear poverty. Look at the example of generosity in Hatim At-Taʾi(3) who said to his slave:

Light a fire, for indeed the night is a night of coldness
The wind, o boy, is violent and cold

= *Companions who were appointed to hold counsel by ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab and appoint a Caliph from amongst themselves and one of the first people to enter Islam. He was born forty-four years before the Emigration and he died in the year 32 A.H at the age of 76. His profession was trade and selling. [Al-ʿAlam by Az-Zirikli 3/321]*

(1) *The one meant by brother here is Saʿd ibn Rabiʿ Al-Khazraji Al-Ansari, and not his brother in the literal sense. The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him established brotherhood between them after the Emigration to Medina. [Look in the Sira of Ibn Hisham 1/504]*

(2) *Mentioned by Ibn Kathir in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya (2/327) from Anas who said: 'ʿAbd Ar-Rahman ibn ʿAwf came and Allah's Messenger peace and blessings be upon him made him and Saʿd ibn Rabiʿ Al-Ansari brothers, so the latter offered him half his family and wealth, to which ʿAbd Ar-Rahman replied: 'May Allah bless you with regards to your family and wealth. Show me where the market is.' So he showed him and he went, and he bought and sold and made a profit and then brought some cottage cheese and clarified butter.*

(3) *Hatim At-Taʾi is Hatim ibn ʿAbdullah ibn Saʿd ibn Al-Hashraj At-Taʾi Al-Qahtani Abu ʿUday is a horseman, poet and generous man from the age of ignorance. Examples are given of his generosity. He was from the people of Najd and he visited Sham and married Mawiya bint Hajr Al-Ghasaniyyah in ʿIwarad (a mountain in the land of Tayʾ). He had a lot of poetry, but most of it is lost. All that remains is a small, printed collection. He died in the year 46 A.H. [Al-ʿAlam by Az-Zarkali 2/151]*

Perhaps someone passing by sees your fire
If you attract a guest then you are free

It is related(1) that a group of people sat in an open space in Mecca and they were talking about the generous person of their time, and they were differing over this. One of them said: ‘The most generous is Saʿid ibn Saʿd ibn ʿUbada. Another said: ‘No, it is ʿAbdullah ibn Jaʿfar.’ Another said: ‘No, ʿUraba Al-Awsi(2) is more generous than both of them.’ They were about to fight with one another when an intelligent man amongst them said: ‘Send a man to each of these people who approaches them as a wayfarer and is in need. Look at how they receive him.’

So, they sent a man to ʿAbdullah ibn Jaʿfar *may Allah be pleased with him* and he found him mounted in order to hunt, so he placed one leg on the mount and the other on the ground. The man said to him: ‘Oh son of the daughter of Allah’s Messenger, I am a wayfarer and possessor of need.’ Then ʿAbdullah *may Allah be pleased with him* took his leg down from his riding beast and said to him: ‘Ride, and in this bag, there are four thousand *dinars*, such-and-such clothes and the sword of ʿAli ibn Abu Taleb, so take care of it.’

Another man went to Saʿid ibn Saʿd ibn ʿUbada *may Allah be pleased with him* knocked on his door, and his female slave replied: ‘Who is it?’ He said: ‘A wayfarer and a possessor of need.’ She said: ‘the lord of the house is sleeping so what do you want?’ He said: ‘I am a possessor of need.’ She said: ‘Your need is not important enough for me to wake him up. By Allah, all he has is seven hundred *dinars.* Take it and go to where his camels are tied up. Choose a female riding camel for yourself and a servant to take care of it. When Saʿid *may Allah be pleased with him* woke up, she told him what had happened, so he said: ‘Did you really do that?’ She said: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘Consider yourself free.’

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(1) *The story of the most generous of the people of Mecca*

(2) *ʿUraba Al-Awsi: He is ʿUraba ibn Aws ibn Qayzi Al-Awsi Al-Harathi Al-Ansari, one of the chiefs of Medina who were known for their generosity. He was alive at the time of The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and he embraced Islam as a youth. He travelled to the Levant in the days of Muʿawiya and he had news with him. He died in Medina in the year 60 A.H. [Al-ʿAlam by Az-Zirikli 4/222]*

Then you notice that the command to spend freely here is for whom? It is specific to the believers, who are being called. ‘O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger’ (*Muhammad:* 33). This is due to the honour and rank of spending out and the manifold increase of its reward. The believer does not want to deny himself this goodness.

Even the word *nafaqa* (spending out) is taken from a market that is *nafiqa* (selling well), i.e. in demand and profitable because it is trade with Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, you must not think that it is a losing trade that has little demand. Yes. It is a market that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has set up between His servants for a reason that He wanted, so He made some of them rich, some of them poor, some of them strong, some of them weak, and each one of them is tested by the other so that there can be this complementary activity in a society of faith.

This is why we said that Allah *Glorified is He* wants the believer to act according to his capacity and not according to his need because if he acted according to his need and the need of those who are dependent on him, there would be nothing left for the weak person who is incapable of doing anything. Then there is the fact that circumstances change. The strong person could become weak and thus has need, or the rich person could become poor, and then he finds someone who gives to him. Man is the child of change.

Therefore, we are able to say that the spending out that Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded is like insurance for the believer’s future. Thus, he does not fear for himself or for his children if his circumstances put him in a state of need, and he is certain that the believing society will give him a helping hand.

The amazing thing about the command to spend out is that the True Lord *Glorified is He* has not excused anyone from it. Whoever is not able to spend out in wealth must spend out in speech. Read Allah’s statement: ‘There is not upon the weak or upon the ill or upon those who do not find anything to spend any discomfort when they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger. There is not upon the doers of good any cause [for blame]. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful’ (*at-Tawba:* 91).

If someone is stingy, then others must wake him up, and if they do not they are in sin, even if they do not have this and that.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* explained this in his statement: ‘Nor [is there blame] upon those who, when they came to you that you might give them mounts,(1) you said, ‘I can find nothing for you to ride upon,’ (*at-Tawba:* 92). What did they do, then? ‘They turned back while their eyes overflowed with tears out of grief that they could not find something to spend [for the cause of Allah]’ (*at-Tawba:* 92).

This is the person who does not own anything but tears and impassioned feelings that express his desire and longing to spend out, but he does not have anything so these feelings suffice, and for him actions are reckoned according to intentions. This stance may encourage him to strive in order to do something so that he can give anything.

Let the rich person be warned that he can be a tribulation for the poor person when he denies him his right, as he may be ruined and object to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed poverty for him and wealth for someone else. Do not let him be poor as well as displeased with Allah’s Decree.

Read: ‘And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah - give them tidings of a painful punishment. The Day when it will be heated in the fire of hell and seared therewith will be their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs, [it will be said], ‘This is what you hoarded for yourselves, so taste what you used to hoard’ (*at-Tawba:* 34-35).

The intelligent person is the one who lightens his load when the loads become burdensome for their bearers, and no one else will carry for them. Whoever wants to lighten his soul, and then there is nothing less than giving what he does not need to someone who deserves it.

Regarding the words ‘…but among you are those who withhold [out of greed],’ (*Muhammad:* 38) withholding to spend out is an active process that emerges as a result of deep-rooted feelings in the human soul. They are the feelings of stinginess that call on the person not to give out. This is why He *Glorified is He* said: ‘And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul - it is those who will be the successful’ (*al-Hashr:* 9). The one who overcomes this natural inclination within himself and he inhibits the reins of his soul, and thus he spends out willingly.

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(1) *This verse was sent down regarding the weepers, and there are six of them: ʿAbdullah ibn Mughaffal, Sakhar ibn Salman, ʿAbdullah ibn Kaʿb Al-Ansari, ʿUlba ibn Zayd Al-Ansari, Salim ibn ʿUmayr and Thaʿlaba ibn ʿAtama. They came to the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and asked for mounts and equipment for battle and he said to them: ‘I cannot find any mounts for you.’ Then they left in tears, and they had wanted one of three things: riding beasts, victuals, or footwear. [Zad Al-Masir by Ibn Al-Jawzi, commenting on the chapter of at-Tawba, verse 9]*

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains the consequence of stinginess: ‘And whoever withholds only withholds [benefit] from himself’ (*Muhammad:* 38), i.e. he is stingy with himself because he denies himself the reward of charity and spending out and he denies himself the reward that is multiplied many times over.

The insightful scholars understood this meaning, as Imam ʿAli was once asked: ‘I want to know if I am from the people of this life or the people of the Hereafter.’ He said to him: ‘The answer is with you.’ He said: ‘How?’ He replied: ‘If someone comes to you with a gift and another comes to you asking for something, which of them makes you happy and joyous?’ If you are happy with the one who brings a gift, then you are from the people of this life, and if you are happy with the one who asks for something then you are from the people of the Hereafter.

This is why some of the righteous would welcome someone when they asked for something, and they would say: ‘Welcome to the one who comes carrying my provision to the Hereafter without a fee.’

His statement ‘Allah is the Free of need, while you are the needy’ (*Muhammad:* 38) was because the Jews said: ‘Indeed Allah is in need and we are self-sufficient because He borrows from us.’ Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* responds to them. Rather, it is Allah Who is Self-sufficient. Self-sufficient in His essence with no need of His creation, He gives abundantly from His wealth and He enriches the creation by cultivating love and mercy between them and making them love spending out. Thus, the wealthy do not become proud of their wealth, and the poor do not hate the wealthy because they are poor. Everyone is pleased and says: ‘Praise be to Allah.’ It is as if the source of all wealth is the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And if you turn away’ (*Muhammad:* 38), i.e. you avoid and refrain from spending that Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded you, and you do not affirm the increase that Allah has promised you, then know that Allah will not leave the weak, the poor and the powerless without acquisition. Rather, He will replace you with those who are better than you and they will respond to Allah’s Command; they will spend out on Allah’s Creation.

‘He will replace you with another people; then they will not be the likes of you’ (*Muhammad:* 38). They will not be like you in stinginess and withholding from giving out because you are My slave and I own you. If you disobey Me I will bring someone else who will be better than you. If there is no goodness in a people, it will be found in others, and if it not found in a land, it will be found in another land.

It is known that when Islam spread to the East and the West, the people of generosity increased in all the lands of Islam, and there are stories and narrations about their generosity.

the chapter of

al-Fath

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Fath* (1) :

إِنَّا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُّبِينًا ١

Truly We have opened up a path to clear triumph for you [Prophet] [1] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 1)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks here in the plural, ‘We’, called the ‘plural of majesty’; for Allah *Glorified is He* does not sustain His dominion with only one single attribute, but with many attributes and numerous perfections of power, knowledge, wisdom, and other attributes of His. But when He speaks about Allah’s own Essence, He uses the singular form, saying for example: ‘Verily, I – I alone – am Allah; there is no deity save Me’ (*Ta Ha:* 14); this is in order to affirm His Oneness. And when He speaks about one of His actions, He says: ‘Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian’ (*al-Hijr:* 9).

We can observe here that Allah *Glorified is He* puts emphasis on the pronoun ‘We’ by saying ‘indeed’. The purpose of this is to emphasise for us the importance of the guidance which the Noble Quran brought, and that it is a heavenly way of guidance from Allah Himself, and that it is a miracle for mankind; this clearly shows the merit of The Noble Quran.

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(1) *The chapter of al-Fath was revealed in the Medinan period according to all the scholars, and contains 29 verses. It was revealed at night in between Mecca and Medina. From the beginning to the end, it speaks about the events of Hudaybiyya. The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him said about it: “This night there has been revealed unto me a chapter more beloved to me than all that over which the sun rises.” It is the 48th chapter in the written order of the Quran, and was revealed between the chapters of as-Saff and al-Ma’ida. (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi).*

The meaning of ‘give’ is ‘victory’ which is what it means in the verse we are currently examining which is borne out by how Allah *Glorified is He* says shortly after it: ‘And [that] Allah may aid you with a mighty victory’ (*al-Fath:* 3). For when the call was first made, and the disbelievers of Mecca opposed it, and turned deaf ears to it, and stubbornly resisted it mocking Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and harming him and those who believed in his call. It was as though a door had been closed in the face of the call. So Allah *Glorified is He* said to him: ‘Indeed, We have given you, [O Muhammad], a clear conquest,’ (*al-Fath:* 1). That is, a plain and clear victory, and an opening of the door for the call to be spread and strengthened so that it would have power, influence and protection. After Quraysh had stifled the call and attempted to destroy it, Allah *Glorified is He* opened the door for it so that it spread throughout the whole of Arabia; and after Quraysh had put a stranglehold on the call, all the Arabs came to protect it and defend it.

And in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* explained this ‘victory’ to us, saying: ‘Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? And Allah decides; there is no adjuster of His decision’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41). He judges that Islam shall be victorious, and spread over the world; and when Allah judges, nothing can annul His verdict or repel His judgement. ‘Whatever grace Allah opens up to man, none can withhold it’ (*Fatir:* 2). And as long as Allah *Glorified is He* has opened it, do not worry that any human being could close it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

لِّيَغْفِرَ لَكَ ٱللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِن ذَنۢبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ وَيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُۥ عَلَيْكَ
وَيَهْدِيَكَ صِرَٰطًا مُّسْتَقِيمًا ﴿٢﴾ وَيَنصُرَكَ ٱللَّهُ نَصْرًا عَزِيزًا ﴿٣﴾

So that God may forgive you your past and future sins,
complete His grace upon you, guide you to a straight path [2]
and help you mightily [3] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 2-3)

In the chapter of *Muhammad*, we explained the meaning of a ‘*sin’* where the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is concerned since he is divinely protected from sin. We said that it is a case of ‘The good deeds of the pious are the sins of the great saints'(1); therefore even forgetfulness on his part was considered a fault because he was a divinely-inspired prophet, trusted to convey Allah's way of guidance, so it is unimaginable that he could forget in the same way that the rest of his community do.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* excuses them their forgetfulness, but does not excuse it of His Messenger. To illustrate this, we gave the example of the forgetfulness of Adam *peace be upon him*: 'And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination,' (*Ta Ha:* 115) and this forgetfulness was called a sin.

So, the forgiveness given here to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was for these matters, such as the times Allah *Glorified is He* upbraided him: 'Oh Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what Allah has made lawful for you, seeking the approval of your wives?' (*at-Tahrim:* 1) And 'We know that you, [O Muhammad], are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject' (*al-An'am:* 33), and 'Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad] if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow' (*al-Kahf:* 6).

So Allah *Glorified is He* admonished Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of pity and compassion for him, as though He were saying to him: 'O Muhammad, do not grieve, and do not take on more burdens that you can bear, for Allah will come to your aid.' So when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sought forgiveness of Allah, it was for these kinds of things, not for any kind of sin against Allah's way of guidance – far be it for him to do any such thing!

'That Allah may forgive for' (*al-Fath:* 2) a fault might either be covered after it has been committed by excusing its punishment, or else it might be covered before it even happens so that it does not happen at all – and this is the meaning of 'what preceded of your sin and what will follow' (*al-Fath:* 2). In other words, what has passed shall not be punished, and the faults which might have occurred in the future shall not occur at all.

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(1) *Related by Al-Qurtubi as a saying of Al-Junayd; As-Sakhawi said it was a saying of Abu Sa'id Al-Kharraz*

‘And complete His favour upon you’ (*al-Fath:* 2). The full measure of Allah’s Blessing upon the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was that He sent him to all people in all times and places, whilst before him each messenger was sent to a specific people at a specific time. As Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he came forth at a time when the civilisations of the world all began to meet and connect from East to West, and thus he came as a universal messenger and a seal upon all the divine messages, and thus we call him the Master of Messengers and the Seal of Prophets.

The full measure of Allah’s Blessings was also that Allah *Glorified is He* opened the way to victory for him, and removed from his way the obstacles which had stood in the way of the call, so that all of Arabia yielded to him and Islam spread throughout it; and through Him, Allah guided this community which bore his message after him and took it to the rest of the inhabited world.

Allah *Glorified is He* brought to him the two greatest civilisations of the time, the Persians in the East and the Byzantines in the West; and because of this, they say that one of the wonders of this religion is that it spread through half the planet Earth in half a century, and this had never happened before.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* explains to us the meaning of the full measure of His blessings when He says: ‘This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 3).

Therefore when Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* heard this verse, he said, ‘Muhammad has announced his own death by reciting this verse, for when something is completed, it must then decline.’(1) So they understood this verse to be a sign that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would soon die and pass away to the Supreme Companion, to attain to his reward.

Therefore, when the Angel of Death came to Him and bade him to choose, he said, ‘I choose the Supreme Companion.’(2) He chose to be with his Lord, not to evade any responsibility, but because he knew that his mission had been completed and fulfilled, and that he had nothing more to do after having fulfilled his trust, conveyed his message, counselled his community, seen the religion become ascendant, and firmly established its foundations.

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(1) *A similar statement is Related from ‘Umar may Allah be pleased with him not Abu Bakr in the exegeses of Al-Baghawi, Al- Alusi, Al-Baqa‘i, Ibn ‘Adil and Abu As-Sa‘ud.*

(2) *Related by Ahmad (25142) on the authority of ‘A’isha may Allah be pleased with her.*

He then says: ‘guide you to a straight path’ (*al-Fath:* 2). So after he saw that the blessing was completed, and nothing was any longer closed upon him, he was reassured that Allah *Glorified is He* would never forsake him. He then says: ‘Allah may aid you with a mighty victory’ (*al-Fath:* 3). Is the victory mighty, or the victorious? The victorious is mighty, but He described the victory as mighty because it is as though Allah’s victory is pleasing to the victory itself and makes it feel proud and mighty, and also in order to say to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘With this victory, you have been given something that no one has ever been given before.’

Elsewhere in the Noble Quran, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explains that He granted Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with victory at times of ease, such as was the case at the conquest of Mecca, and He also did at times of hardship, such as was the case at Hunayn: ‘Allah has already given you victory in many regions and [even] on the day of Hunayn, when your great number pleased you, but it did not avail you at all, and the earth was confining for you with its vastness; then you turned back, fleeing. Then Allah sent down His tranquillity upon His Messenger and upon the believers and sent down soldiers angels whom you did not see and punished those who disbelieved. And that is the recompense of the disbelievers’ (*at-Tawba:* 25-26).

So, when they were deluded by their own great numbers, He corrected them, and then granted them His mercy and vicotry; and Allah *Glorified is He* would not have granted it to them at Badr and then forsaken them at Hunayn. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* were saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Know that Allah is behind you, and will grant you victory and aid you; but you and your community must not be deluded by victory, power, or numbers, for: ‘How often has a small host overcome a great host by Allah’s leave!’ (*al-Baqara:* 249)

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ ٱلسَّكِينَةَ فِى قُلُوبِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزْدَادُوٓا۟ إِيمَـٰنًا مَّعَ إِيمَـٰنِهِمْ ۗ
وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿٤﴾

It was He who made His tranquillity descend into the hearts of the believers, to add faith to their faith — the forces of the heavens and earth belong to God; He is all knowing and all wise [4] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 4)

‘Tranquillity’ is assurance after a time of severe difficulty, when they had been humbled: ‘and when eyes shifted [in fear], and hearts reached the throats and you assumed about Allah [various] assumptions. There the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking’ (*al-Ahzab:* 10-11).

Indeed, when things became intense, Allah *Glorified is He* granted ease; and despite the difficulty, deliverance came and Heaven intervened, and Allah’s victory came, ‘that they would increase in faith along with their [present] faith,’ (*al-Fath:* 4) and to remove from them the delusions they had entertained about their large numbers, therefore contravening the basic conditions of those who wish to fight as Allah’s hosts.

‘And to Allah belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth’ (*al-Fath:* 4), that is, do not think that you are the only forces Allah *Glorified is He* possesses, for He has many forces: ‘And none can comprehend your Lord’s forces save Him alone’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). Among Allah’s soldiers are the angels who manage the affairs of the universe by Allah’s Command: ‘For each one is successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 11). And Allah *Glorified is He* swore by these angels, saying: ‘And those who arrange [each] matter’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 5). These are the forces of Allah *Glorified is He* in the heavens.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has forces in the heavens and forces on earth, by which He destroyed those communities who denied His message: ‘So each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the blast [from the sky], and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40).

These are all forces of Allah: the storm-wind, the blast, the swallowing of the earth, drowning, and more besides. Only Allah *Glorified is He* has knowledge of these forces, how they attain their knowledge, and how they manage to fight Allah's enemies; for they operate mysteriously.

Despite all this, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to aid His Messenger, He did not do so with any of these natural phenomena, but rather with the strong faith of the believers, and their steadfast position against their enemies; for otherwise, they would have said, 'Were it not for these natural phenomena, they would not have been able to defeat us!' But the True Lord *Glorified is He* did attribute victory to these subtle forces in fact, although on the surface it was attributed to these believers so that they would continue to strike dread in the hearts of their enemies.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Emigration: 'If you do not aid the Prophet Allah has already aided him when those who disbelieved had driven him out [of Mecca] as one of two, when they were in the cave and he said to his Companion, 'Do not grieve; indeed Allah is with us.' And Allah sent down his tranquillity upon him and supported him with angels you did not see' (*at-Tawba:* 40).

Allah's forces were in effect at his time, for Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'If one of them looks beneath his very feet, he will see us!'(1) So there were forces which prevented them from seeing: the dove which built her nest, and the spider which spun its web, were nothing but forces of Allah *Glorified is He*.

And when the horse of Suraqa ibn Malik got its feet stuck in the sand, the sand was a force of Allah *Glorified is He*. Even more incredible than this, Allah *Glorified is He* subdued one of the disbelievers themselves to aid the Emigration, the road guide 'Abdullah ibn 'Urayqit, who was a disbeliever who did not know Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.(2) This is because Allah *Glorified is He* has full power to execute His will, and thus destined that the spiritual guide be guided by the material guide!

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (4295) and Muslim (4389) on the authority of Anas may Allah be pleased with him*

(2) *Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him hired him to guide them, and they trusted him to do so even though he was a disbeliever*

Allah said: ‘…and know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart’ (*al-Anfal:* 24). We said that this is because the notion Allah *Glorified is He* inspires cannot be deposed by the notions which Satan inspires, and we saw this in the story of the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when Allah *Glorified is He* inspired her to cast him into the sea. Even though she was a mother, and feared for her child, she indeed did cast him. We also saw this principle in the story of Pharaoh, who was killing the male children of the Israelites, yet when Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came to him in this way he did not suspect him, and raised him in his household. So Allah is the Lord of all hearts and their Creator, and He can turn them whichever way He pleases, and make them accept His decree without debate.

He then says: ‘…and ever is Allah Knowing and Wise’ (*al-Fath:* 4). He knows His forces well, and directs them with wisdom at specific times towards specific people; it is not a matter of unbridled force, tyranny, or injustice – far be it indeed for Allah to do such a thing. The True Lord says :(1)

لِّيُدْخِلَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ جَنَّٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا
وَيُكَفِّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٥﴾

So as to admit believing men and women into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain, absolving their bad deeds a great triumph in God’s eyes [5] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 5)

It is related that when the beginning of this chapter was revealed, the Companions said: ‘Congratulations to you, Oh Messenger of Allah! This is what Allah has in store for you, but what does He have in store for us?’ Then the verse was revealed: ‘[And] that He may admit the believing men and the believing women to gardens beneath which rivers flow to abide therein eternally,' (*al-Fath:* 5). This is what was in store for them.

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(1) *Anas may Allah be pleased with him said: The verse “Verily, [O Muhammad,] We have given you a clear conquest” was revealed to The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him when he returned from Hudaybiyya, the Companions were saddened because they had not been able to make their offerings at the Ka‘ba, offering them instead at Hudaybiyya. When the verse was revealed, He peace and blessings be upon him said to them, “A verse has been revealed to me which is better than the entire world,” and when he recited it to them, they said, ‘Great joy and congratulations to you, O Messenger of Allah, for your Lord has made clear what He will do with you – but what will He do with us?’ So Allah revealed: “[And] that He may admit the believing men and the believing women to gardens” (al-Fath: 5).*

The orientalists have objected to Allah's Words '…and remove from them their sins,' (*al-Fath:* 5) saying: 'Why would He remove their bad deeds, when He has already admitted them into paradise? They do not enter paradise until after He removes their bad deeds.'

We say: The meaning is that He will conceal these bad deeds so that they do not overshadow their lives in paradise, nor their position in the sight of their Lord; or He will conceal their bad deeds so that they forget them and do not feel ashamed of them – for the more you treat well the one who was bad to you, the more he reproaches himself; therefore Allah *Glorified is He* will conceal their bad deeds so they cannot remember them so that the joy of paradise is not diminished for them in any way.

The purpose of the creation was worship. As for the opinion which states that Allah's actions have no purpose, we say that they do not have the purpose of giving benefit to Him, but rather, they give benefit to others – and therefore they do have purpose.

Also, He mentions the believing women here after the believing men – why did He single them out for mention when usually in the Noble Quran men and women are included in the same plural, such as when He says: 'O you who believe,' (*al-Baqara:* 104), and not 'O you men and women who believe'; for the woman is concealed and included with the man, and she does not need to be specifically mentioned unless something concerns her specifically – so why does He mention her here?

They say it is because the context here is that of armed struggle, since Allah has just said 'And [that] Allah may aid you with a mighty victory' (*al-Fath*: 3). Women do not participate in armed struggle, and therefore the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions women here to affirm that they also share in the reward of the struggle, and to dispel any doubt about this.

He says: '…gardens beneath which rivers flow,' (*al-Fath:* 5), and we explained before that elsewhere Allah says: '…gardens, through which running waters flow' (*at-Tawba:* 100). The two verses do not mean exactly the same thing, for when water springs forth from right underneath you, you are assured that it will continue to do so, and no one can withhold it from you because it flows from your own property.

As for 'gardens, through which running waters flow,' (*at-Tawba:* 100), this means that it flows from somewhere else and passes you by, and therefore might be cut off from you. He says 'to abide therein eternally,' (*al-Fath:* 5) in order to dispel any fears you might have that this bliss will ever come to an end; for no matter how great the bliss of this world might be, it is spoiled for you by your fear that it might leave you or you might leave it. Allah *Glorified is He* therefore reassures you that the bliss of paradise is constant and uninterrupted, eternal and unending; it will never leave you by going away from you, and you will never leave it by dying.

Therefore, He calls it a supreme triumph: '…and ever is that, in the sight of Allah, a triumph supreme!' (*al-Fath:* 5) What do you think of a triumph which is described as supreme? And what do you think when all of this comes from Allah *Glorified is He*? A gift is commensurate with the power of the giver: you are happy and delighted when a person of importance is pleased with you, and you are happy when you do someone a favour so he gives you a present or a reward – so what about if Allah *Glorified is He* rewards you?

I always remember the day I went with some ministers to San Francisco and we went to a grand hotel, and everyone admired its design, its beautiful appearance and its facilities; and when I saw the admiration in their eyes, I said to them: 'Take this as a proof of faith, and say: This is what human beings have made for other human beings, so imagine what the Lord of mankind has in store for mankind!'

وَيُعَذِّبَ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ وَٱلْمُنَٰفِقَٰتِ وَٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَٱلْمُشْرِكَٰتِ
ٱلظَّآنِّينَ بِٱللَّهِ ظَنَّ ٱلسَّوْءِ ۚ عَلَيْهِمْ دَآئِرَةُ ٱلسَّوْءِ ۖ وَغَضِبَ ٱللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَنَهُمْ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَسَآءَتْ مَصِيرًا ﴿٦﴾

And to torment the hypo- critical and idolatrous men and women who harbour evil thoughts about God — it is they

who will be encircled by evil! — who carry the burden of God's anger, whom God has rejected and for whom He has prepared Hell, an evil destination! [6] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 6)

Reflect on this contrast, which clearly shows the difference, and invites you to compare the reward Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared for the believers, and the end He has in store for the hypocrites and disbelievers. Mentioning contrasting things side by side is a rhetorical style employed by the Noble Quran to show the difference between them; and the Arab poet said, describing his beloved:

A face as white as the dawn,
Hair as black as night:
Two opposites which are beautiful when combined,
For each opposite shows the beauty of the other.

We may observe here that Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the hypocrites before the polytheists when speaking of the suffering that awaits them. The hypocrite is indeed worse than the polytheist, for he conceals his disbelief and acts as though he has faith so that he can infiltrate the ranks of the believers and conceal himself behind their banner, yet in reality, he is a stubborn polytheist who secretly plots against the believers.

As for the ordinary polytheist, his outward appearance is the same as his inward reality, his enmity is apparent and thus it is easy to guard oneself against him. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* said of the hypocrites: 'Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the fire - and never will you find for them a helper' (*an-Nisa':* 145). That is, they shall be below the polytheists, on a lower level than them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'those who assume about Allah a thought of evil nature,' (*al-Fath:* 6). A 'thought' means an unproven opinion about something, and when you say, 'I think so', you mean that you are not certain about it. Whim is lower than a thought. But what was the thought they had, which Allah *Glorified is He* describes as being evil? They said, 'Muhammad shall never gain victory over us'; and The True Lord *Glorified is He* made this concept clear when He said: ‘Whoever should think that Allah will not support [Prophet Muhammad] in this world and the Hereafter - let him extend a rope to the ceiling, then cut off [his breath], and let him see: will his effort remove that which enrages [him]?’ (*al-Hajj:* 15) That is, the one who thinks this thought has nothing left to do but attach a rope to the ceiling and hang from it like a hanged man, and then cut it down, and see if this has removed his anguish.

As for these thoughts, they had about Allah *Glorified is He* the first thing they thought about Him is that He does not exist; others say that He does exist, but has associates; others say that the Noble Quran is not from Allah *Glorified is He* but from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and others deny that the dead will be resurrected.

These are all evil thoughts about Allah *Glorified is He* and therefore the True Lord *Glorified is He* meets them with an evil punishment, saying: ‘Upon them is a misfortune of evil nature’(*al-Fath:* 6). They cannot escape from it because it surrounds them. And elsewhere, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘While Allah encompasses them from behind’ (*al-Buruj:* 20). Not only this, but also: ‘and Allah has become angry with them and has cursed them and prepared for them hell, and evil it is as a destination’ (*al-Fath:* 6). Glory be to Allah! Look at the abundance of punishment, suffering, wrath, and curse which He has in store for them!

‘Anger’ (*al-Fath:* 6) is an emotion which causes the angry person to seek revenge on the one who has angered him. Now the True Lord *Glorified is He* is far above any emotional reaction, but He is speaking to us according to the limits of our own understanding and the modes of expression which our language possesses.

In His words ‘And has cursed them’ (*al-Fath:* 6), He has expelled them from His vast mercy and exiled them from it; and after this, the angels also reject them, and so does everyone else; ‘and prepared for them Hell,’ (*al-Fath:* 6) meaning that He has already made it, and it exists even now; so, ‘and evil it is as a destination’ (*al-Fath:* 6), tell us the natural consequence of the evil thoughts they entertain about Allah.

وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿٧﴾

The forces of heaven and earth belong to God; He is almighty and all wise[7] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 7)

The True Lord also speaks of His forces here, for His forces come forth in two ways: there are the forces of mercy which descend bearing goodness such as the angels who bring inspiration and revelation, or the sending down of rain; and then there are forces which bring down destruction, chastisement, and humiliation. ‘And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise’ (*al-Fath:* 7). We understand from these words that the forces of chastisement are meant here, which complement the attribute of Almightiness. The Almighty is the One Who always overcomes and cannot be overcome, and this might is directed by wisdom and free of any tyranny or wrongdoing – far be it for Allah *Glorified is He* to indulge in such things!

إِنَّآ أَرْسَلْنَٰكَ شَٰهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا ﴿٨﴾ لِّتُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ
وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَتُعَزِّرُوهُ وَتُوَقِّرُوهُ وَتُسَبِّحُوهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا ﴿٩﴾

We have sent you [Prophet] to bring good news and to give warning [8] so that you [people] may believe in God and His Messenger, support Him, honour Him, and praise Him morning and evening [9] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 8 - 9)

These words are addressed to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘We have sent you as a witness,’ (*al-Fath:* 8), that is, a witness over your community and over those messengers who came before you, that they delivered the message. Indeed, he is a witness over them because of what Allah *Glorified is He* told him in the Noble Quran.

And in another verse, He says: ‘And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you’ (*al-Baqara:* 143). That is, so that you might bear witness before mankind that you have conveyed the message to them, for this community inherited the call from the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and continued to bear it after him. Therefore, it is related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Allah shall give radiance to anyone who hears what I say and understands it, and then passes it on to he who heard it not; for many a one who is told (of it) understands better than the one who heard (it).'(1)

Allah says: 'and a bringer of good tidings and a warner' (*al-Fath:* 8). We said before that tidings and warnings are given before the event actually happens. But why is he a bringer of good tidings and a warner? Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'That you [people] may believe in Allah and His Messenger and honour him and respect the Prophet and exalt Allah morning and afternoon' (*al-Fath:* 9). So, the reason He *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent is that you believe in Allah and His Messenger 'and honour Him,' (*al-Fath:* 9), extolling Him, succouring His religion and upholding His Word; 'and respect the Prophet' (*al-Fath:* 9), i.e. extol Him and give Him all the praise that is due to Him, for He *Glorified is He* provided His creatures a way of guidance to guard the motions of their lives from imbalance.

When Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* formed him and breathed of His spirit into him. Life came into him and he became a complete being. He did not start off as a child and then grow into a man, but rather, life came into him when he was a full-grown man.

Adam *peace be upon him* was brought into a universe in which Allah *Glorified is He* had prepared for him all the constituents of his life such as air, water, the earth, the sun and the moon; and after giving him his material nourishment, He gave him the moral values which nourish the spirit.

Therefore, after giving him the material spirit, Allah *Glorified is He* gave him another spirit of moral values: 'And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command' (*ash-Shura:* 52). Therefore, the Noble Quran is called an inspiration, and the angel who brought it down is a 'spirit': 'the Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193). Allah *Glorified is He* addressed the living people by saying to them: 'Oh you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you the life' (*al-Anfal:* 24). This shows us that there are two lives: the material life, and the spiritual life of Allah's way of guidance.

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(1) *The like of it was related by Abu Dawud (3175), At-Tirmidhi (2580), Ibn Majah (226) and Ahmad (20608).*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ ٱللَّهَ يَدُ ٱللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ ۚ فَمَن نَّكَثَ فَإِنَّمَا
يَنكُثُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِمَا عَٰهَدَ عَلَيْهُ ٱللَّهَ فَسَيُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾

Those who pledge loyalty to you [Prophet] are actually pledging loyalty to God Himself – God's hand is placed on theirs — and anyone who breaks his pledge does so to his own detriment: God will give a great reward to the one who fulfils his pledge to Him [10] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 10)

These words refer to the Pledge of Hudaybiyya which took place underneath a tree, of which Allah *Glorified is He* says in this very chapter: 'Certainly was Allah pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you, [O Muhammad], under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquillity upon them and rewarded them with an imminent conquest' (*al-Fath:* 18).

The victory which we are currently examining was heralded by this pledge which was the beginning of the most supreme victory. Therefore, when 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* objected, and said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'Why do we yield in such a lowly way against the honour of our religion?' Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* rebuked him and said, 'Cleave to your stirrup, 'Umar!'(1), that is, do not go too far, and know your place. Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* would say, 'By Allah, there was no victory in Islam's history greater than the victory of Hudaybiyya.' Why? That was because it paved the way to the conquest of Mecca. But at the time, the people did not know the truth of what was between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Lord and it is the nature of man to be hasty.

As for the True Lord *Glorified is He* He does not hasten as His servants do until things turn out as He wills. You know the story of Umm Salama *may Allah be pleased with her* when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to her in a vexed state, and she said to him, 'What vexes you, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'The Muslims are ruined, Umm Salama! I commanded them, but they did not obey.' She said, 'O Messenger of Allah, they are disappointed, for they came longing to see the *Ka'ba*, but then were prevented from doing so when they were so close. Pardon them, O Messenger of Allah, and see to what Allah has commanded you, and do it without speaking to anyone, for when they see you do it, they shall do it.'(1) The plan of Umm Salama *may Allah be pleased with her* succeeded and the Muslims were saved from a trial which could have destroyed them. It is true that their stubbornness was born of faith, and it, on the surface, might have been pleasing to the Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him*; but if a commandment comes from Allah on high, then it is essential to hear and obey.

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(1) *The like of it is related by Muslim (1785) and Al-Bukhari (4844), on the authority of Sahl ibn Hanif may Allah be pleased with him.*

Therefore, they say that part of bravery is to know when to be cowardly. Suppose that we are sitting somewhere and there are great and important men among us, and then a criminal comes in with a gun and tells us to stand up, and threatens us. What should we do? We must obey what he says in such a situation so that we do not endanger ourselves.

So sometimes bravery is displayed towards others, and sometimes one must be brave towards one's own self, and this is a matter of wisdom and strategy. This is what the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did, and he arrived at this opinion by means of the illumination which the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave him.

This treaty was a way of raising the status of Islam and unfurling its banner even though they went back home without entering Mecca. This is because Quraysh had declared their enmity towards Islam, and had not allowed it to express itself, but now the door of negotiation and discussion was opened. Islam became an established reality, a word to be heard and was lifted above the humiliation and lowliness of the past.

Moreover, the treaty was a way of calming Quraysh and lessening the hatred they felt towards the Muslims; for by making a treaty with them, we were safe from them and could go about spreading the call to the rest of Arabia. And even before the Muslims had got back to Medina, the True Lord *Glorified is He* explained the matter to His Messenger saying: 'Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Muhammad] - they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah' (*al-Fath:* 10).

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(1) *Related by Ahmad (18102)*

A pledge of allegiance is an agreement made between two parties. ‘They made this deal with Allah, for you, Oh Muhammad, are not taking anything for yourself, you are only taking it for the sake of Allah’s way of guidance which He sent you to convey.’

So, to pledge allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is really to pledge allegiance to Allah *Glorified is He* and therefore He says: ‘The hand of Allah is over their hands’ (*al-Fath:* 10). That is, over the hands which stretched out to pledge allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; so Allah’s hand was above all their hands because the favour here was from Allah *Glorified is He*. Do not think that the favour is from you because you have pledged allegiance; rather, the favour is from Allah *Glorified is He* to you, and His hand is above your hands, and He is the One Who sent this goodness to you which will give you happiness in this life and the next. The hand here is not like our own hands, but rather, it is the hand of favour and grace such as when you say, ‘He gave me a hand’, meaning that he helped you or did you a favour.

He then says: ‘So he who breaks his word only breaks it to the detriment of himself,’ (*al-Fath:* 10) because Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be harmed by any of His servants’ actions; obedience does not benefit Him, and disobedience does not harm Him.

On the other hand: ‘he who fulfils that which he has promised Allah’ (*al-Fath:* 10), that is, he faithfully keeps to the covenant to which he has bound himself, ‘He will give him a great reward’ (*al-Fath:* 10).

Al-Bukhari and Muslim both mention this story, and say that Hudaybiyya was a place around 22 kilometres from Mecca, at a spot where a bent tree stood; or there may have been a spring there where they used to collect water. There were one thousand, four hundred people there, and Salam ibn Al-Akwa’ stated that they pledged allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the death;(1) Muslim also mentions that they pledged to him that they would never flee from battle. (2)

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (2851) and Muslim (3462)*

(2) *This was also related by Ahmad (13600).*

سَيَقُولُ لَكَ ٱلْمُخَلَّفُونَ مِنَ ٱلْأَعْرَابِ شَغَلَتْنَآ أَمْوَٰلُنَا وَأَهْلُونَا فَٱسْتَغْفِرْ
لَنَا ۚ يَقُولُونَ بِأَلْسِنَتِهِم مَّا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ ۚ قُلْ فَمَن يَمْلِكُ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ
شَيْـًٔا إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ ضَرًّا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ نَفْعًۢا ۚ بَلْ كَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًۢا ﴿١١﴾
بَلْ ظَنَنتُمْ أَن لَّن يَنقَلِبَ ٱلرَّسُولُ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَىٰٓ أَهْلِيهِمْ أَبَدًا وَزُيِّنَ ذَٰلِكَ
فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَظَنَنتُمْ ظَنَّ ٱلسَّوْءِ وَكُنتُمْ قَوْمًۢا بُورًا ﴿١٢﴾

The desert Arabs who stayed behind will say to you, ‘We were busy with our property and our families: ask forgiveness for us,’ but they say with their tongues what is not in their hearts. Say, ‘Whether it is God’s will to do you harm or good, who can intervene for you?’ No! God is fully aware of everything you [people] do [11] No! You thought that the Messenger and the believers would never return to their families and this thought warmed your hearts. Your thoughts are evil, for you are corrupt people [12] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 11-12)

Allah *Glorified is He* here informs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of a matter of the unseen, telling him what these people will do. ‘Those who remained behind,’ (*al-Fath:* 11) were the ones who were asked to set out with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to make the minor pilgrimage (u*mrah*), but did not set out and then tried to explain their actions with these excuses which the Noble Quran reveals here as false, exposing their intentions and the thoughts that were in their minds. The ‘Bedouin’ (*al-Fath:* 11) are the nomads who live in the wilderness, and they said ‘Our properties and our families occupied us’ (*al-Fath:* 11). ‘They busied us from setting out with you.’ And their words ‘so ask forgiveness for us,’ (*al-Fath:* 11) indicate that they had sinned and erred, for otherwise, they would not have asked the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray for their forgiveness.

The reality is that they were lying about this, for it was not their chattels or families that kept them busy, but rather, they feared to set out because they thought in their hearts that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not return from this pilgrimage and that he would never come home because Quraysh were plotting against him with groups of their confederate allies from Ahabish, Thaqf, Kinana, and elsewhere. They thought to themselves what Allah *Glorified is He* here reveals: 'But you thought that the Messenger and the believers would never return to their families, ever' (*al-Fath:* 12). And therefore, those who had thought this were dumbfounded when they heard Allah reveal it, exposing what their hearts concealed.

What is incredible is that this statement 'Those who remained behind of the Bedouins will say,' (*al-Fath:* 11) was issued in the chapter which was recited publicly, heard by those who stayed behind themselves, and they had the ability to refrain from making these excuses. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* spoke the truth, and indeed they did say what the Noble Quran had predicted they would.

This is just like what happened when Allah *Glorified is He* said about the changing of the prayer-direction: 'foolish among the people will say, 'What has turned them away from their *qibla* which they used to face?' (*al-Baqara:* 142)

The Jews heard these words and this description, yet they still went ahead and said what Allah *Glorified is He* had predicted they would, thereby proving themselves to be weak-minded. These kinds of occurrences are a sign of the truth of the Noble Quran, for the One Who is speaking knows all that will occur in the future. He states that it will happen before it happens, and then things unfold just as He said they would.

They say that those who stayed behind were the members of six tribes, namely Ghifar, Mazina, Jahina, Ashja, Ad-Dayl, and Aslam,(1) and they said, 'Muhammad has cast himself into ruin, and he will never return from this pilgrimage' because of the forces they knew would oppose him there, so they stayed behind. Yet they were keen enough to go out to Khaybar because of the untold riches and spoils that were to be found there.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They say with their tongues what is not within their hearts,' (*al-Fath:* 11) referring to their words 'so ask forgiveness for us,' (*al-Fath:* 11) for they only spoke these words with their tongues, but they were not really concerned with being forgiven. The True Lord *Glorified is He* then makes it clear to them the truth of the matter: 'Say' to them, Oh Muhammad:

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(1) *As stated by Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him (Ash-Shawkani, Fath Al-Qadir)*

‘Then who could prevent Allah at all if He intended for you harm or intended for you benefit?’ (*al-Fath:* 11) This is a rhetorical question meant to express incredulity and rebuke. He was saying to them: Who can hold back Allah’s decree from you, and who can keep you from harm if it afflicts your wealth or your families? Who? No one can.

Likewise, no one can keep benefit from you if Allah *Glorified is He* wills it for you. So, these are false excuses and useless lies. ‘Rather, ever is Allah, with what you do, Acquainted’ (*al-Fath:* 11), that is, none of your affairs escape His attention.

He then rebukes them by revealing the speech which they concealed amongst themselves, saying: ‘But you thought that the Messenger and the believers would never return to ‘their families,’ (*al-Fath:* 12) and they were completely convinced of this thought of theirs, due to ‘and that was made pleasing in your hearts’ (*al-Fath:* 12).

‘And you assumed an assumption of evil,’ (*al-Fath:* 12) meaning the thought that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not return to his kin, and nor would the believers who set out with him; and this would have meant the end for the call of Islam. ‘And became a people ruined’ (*al-Fath:* 12). You are like a barren land, a people of corruption, bereft of all good.

وَمَن لَّمۡ يُؤۡمِنۢ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ فَإِنَّآ أَعۡتَدۡنَا لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ سَعِيرٗا ١٣

We have prepared a blazing Fire for those who do not believe in God and His Messenger [13] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 13)

There is a clear allusion in these words to the aforementioned people; and when He says ‘We have prepared,’ (*al-Fath:* 13) this means that He has actually readied it, so it exists even now. The blazing fire will not be readied for them after they are brought forth to enter it, but rather, it has already been prepared, and it awaits them and longs for them even now.

We have already explained how the True Lord *Glorified is He* readied paradise with enough space to accommodate all humanity if they were all believers, and readied hell with enough space to accommodate all humanity if they were all disbelievers. So when the dwellers of paradise enter it, and the dwellers of hell enter it, there will remain empty spaces in paradise, and Allah *Glorified is He* will cause the dwellers of paradise to inherit them, as He says: ‘Those are the inheritors. Who will inherit *al-Firdaus.* They will abide therein eternally.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 10-11)

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِۚ يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ
مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿١٤﴾

Control of the heavens and earth belongs to God and He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will: God is most forgiving and merciful [14] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 14)

The scholars of rhetoric say that the reason the word ‘Allah’ comes first before ‘the dominion of the heavens and the earth,’ (*al-Fath:* 14) is to emphasise that it belongs to Allah Alone and exclusively without any associate. So ‘to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth,’ (*al-Fath:* 14) is a signal for us to reflect on the wonders of the heavens and the earth in themselves.

And He then says: ‘He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills’ (*al-Fath:* 14). Some people understand this verse incorrectly, saying ‘Then what is the point of free will?’ But the meaning is that Allah *Glorified is He* forgives the believer who follows His guidance, and He does not forgive the disbeliever who rejects His guidance. So, when He says ‘Allah does not guide those who disbelieve,’ this means that He declines to guide them because of their disbelief because the heart of the disbeliever is filled with disbelief and there is no room in it for faith as two things cannot be in the same place at once. He must therefore first remove the disbelief from his heart before considering the matter of faith.

If he removes the desire from his heart and discusses the matter with himself, comparing faith to disbelief and then accepting whichever of them seems best to him, he will inevitably choose faith. Therefore, we say that the disbeliever does not give himself any chance to engage in proper rational enquiry.

And read what He says: ‘Say, ‘I only advise you of one [thing] - that you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought.’ There is not in your companion any madness,’ (*Saba’:* 46).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not want us to engage in chaotic thought or fruitless debate, so He tells us that the proper way to reflect, meditate and examine is to discuss the matter alone with yourself, or with one other person at the most, each speaking and responding to the other, far from any argument or partisan bickering, both close to reaching the truth.

Although the verse speaks about both forgiveness and suffering, it ends with mention of forgiveness and grace, since they are dominant: ‘And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful’ (*al-Fath:* 14).

سَيَقُولُ ٱلْمُخَلَّفُونَ إِذَا ٱنطَلَقْتُمْ إِلَىٰ مَغَانِمَ لِتَأْخُذُوهَا ذَرُونَا نَتَّبِعْكُمْ ۖ
يُرِيدُونَ أَن يُبَدِّلُوا۟ كَلَٰمَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ قُل لَّن تَتَّبِعُونَا كَذَٰلِكُمْ قَالَ ٱللَّهُ مِن قَبْلُ ۖ
فَسَيَقُولُونَ بَلْ تَحْسُدُونَنَا ۚ بَلْ كَانُوا۟ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٥﴾

When you [believers] set off for somewhere that promises war gains, those who [previously] stayed behind will say, ‘Let us come with you.’ They want to change God’s words, but tell them [Prophet], ‘You may not come with us: God has said this before.’ They will reply, ‘You begrudge us out of jealousy.’ How little they understand! [15] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 15)

Again, the True Lord *Glorified is He* predicts what those who stayed behind will say; and the booty they desired was the booty of Khaybar, saying: ‘Let us follow you’ (*al-Fath:* 15), that is, so that we can take the spoils just as you will take them. ‘They wish to change the words of Allah,’ (*al-Fath:* 15) meaning they wish to change His ruling forbidding them to go. The True Lord *Glorified is He* made this clear when He said: ‘And if they had intended to go forth, they would have prepared for it [some] preparation. But Allah disliked their being sent, so He kept them back, and they were told, ‘Remain [behind] with those who remain. Had they gone forth with you, they would not have increased you except in confusion, and they would have been active among you, seeking [to cause] you fitnah. And among you are avid listeners to them. And Allah is knowing of the wrongdoers.’ (*at-Tawba:* 46-47)

The meaning of ‘the Word of Allah,’ (*al-Fath:* 15) here is His ruling that they would not be permitted to go out to Khaybar; and Allah’s Ruling cannot be annulled, and His Word cannot be rebuffed. Allah *Glorified is He* gave them another chance later on, permitting them to fight in the Wars of Apostasy.

The response to them then comes: ‘Never will you follow us. Thus, did Allah say before’ (*al-Fath:* 15), that is, before we returned. So, they will say, ‘Rather, you envy us’ (*al-Fath:* 15). Indeed, they understand only a little, for it is not an issue of war-booty.

قُل لِّلْمُخَلَّفِينَ مِنَ ٱلْأَعْرَابِ سَتُدْعَوْنَ إِلَىٰ قَوْمٍ أُو۟لِى بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ
تُقَٰتِلُونَهُمْ أَوْ يُسْلِمُونَ ۖ فَإِن تُطِيعُوا۟ يُؤْتِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا ۖ وَإِن
تَتَوَلَّوْا۟ كَمَا تَوَلَّيْتُم مِّن قَبْلُ يُعَذِّبْكُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٦﴾

Tell the desert Arabs who stayed behind, ‘You will be called to face a people of great might in war and to fight them, unless they surrender: if you obey, God will reward you well, but if you turn away, as you have done before, He will punish you heavily [16]
(The Quran, *al-Fath:* 16)

That is, ‘Oh you who did not set out alongside the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to perform the pilgrimage of Hudaybiyya, Allah has forbidden you from going to Khaybar because there are other people who deserve to go ahead of you, namely those who obeyed the Prophet Muhammad in going out to Hudaybiyya.

As for you, your opportunity will come in the Wars of Apostasy, wherein you will fight people ‘[face] a people of great military might,’ (*al-Fath:* 16) men of strength and skill in warfare, ‘but if you turn away as you turned away before,’ (*al-Fath:* 16) at Hudaybiyya, ‘He will punish you with a painful punishment’ (*al-Fath:* 16).

لَّيۡسَ عَلَى ٱلۡأَعۡمَىٰ حَرَجٞ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلۡأَعۡرَجِ حَرَجٞ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلۡمَرِيضِ حَرَجٞۗ وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ
وَرَسُولَهُۥ يُدۡخِلۡهُ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُۖ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّ يُعَذِّبۡهُ عَذَابًا أَلِيمٗا ﴿١٧﴾

The blind, the lame, and the sick will not be blamed.' God will admit anyone who obeys Him and His Messenger to Gardens graced with flowing streams; He will painfully punish anyone who turns away [17] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 17)

That is, these people are not guilty of any sin or fault for not going out to fight, for they have legitimate excuses, (1) and do not have the means to fight. The discourse then presents us with a comparison between the act and the reward of the act: 'And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger' (*al-Fath:* 17) in going out to fight, ' He will admit him to gardens beneath which rivers flow,' (*al-Fath:* 17) but whoever refuses to go out, ' He will punish him with a painful punishment' (*al-Fath:* 17).

لَّقَدۡ رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ إِذۡ يُبَايِعُونَكَ تَحۡتَ ٱلشَّجَرَةِ
فَعَلِمَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمۡ فَأَنزَلَ ٱلسَّكِينَةَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَأَثَٰبَهُمۡ فَتۡحٗا قَرِيبٗا ﴿١٨﴾
وَمَغَانِمَ كَثِيرَةٗ يَأۡخُذُونَهَاۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمٗا ﴿١٩﴾

God was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you [Prophet] under the tree: He knew what was in their hearts and so He sent tranquillity down to them and rewarded them with a speedy triumph [18] And with many future gains. God is mighty and wise [19] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 18 - 19)

This is the Pledge of Ar-Ridwan, or the Pledge of Hudaybiyya. 'He knew what was in their hearts,' (*al-Fath:* 18) the longing they had to see the *Ka'ba* and perform the pilgrimage. 'So He sent down tranquillity upon them' (*al-Fath:* 18), i.e. stillness and tranquillity because they obeyed the command of the Prophet

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(1) *Ibn 'Abbas may Allah be pleased with him said that when "but if you turn away as you turned away this time, He will chastise you with grievous chastisement" (al-Fath: 16) was revealed, the infirm said, 'What about us, O Messenger of Allah?', and shortly afterwards "No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick" (al-Fath: 17) was revealed. (Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir)*

Muhammad *peace be upon him*, ‘and rewarded them with an imminent conquest,’ (*al-Fath:* 18) namely the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, which paved the way for the greatest conquest, the Conquest of Mecca. ‘And much war booty which they will take’ (*al-Fath:* 19) namely the spoils of Khaybar.

وَعَدَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ مَغَانِمَ كَثِيرَةٗ تَأۡخُذُونَهَا فَعَجَّلَ لَكُمۡ هَٰذِهِۦ وَكَفَّ أَيۡدِيَ
ٱلنَّاسِ عَنكُمۡ وَلِتَكُونَ ءَايَةٗ لِّلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَيَهۡدِيَكُمۡ صِرَٰطٗا مُّسۡتَقِيمٗا ﴿٢٠﴾

He has promised you [people] many future gains: He has hastened this gain for you. He has held back the hands of hostile people from you as a sign for the faithful and He will guide you to a straight path [20] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 20)

His words ‘and has hastened for you this,’ (*al-Fath:* 20) refer to the spoils of Khaybar. ‘And withheld the hands of people from you’ (*al-Fath:* 20), that is, He has prevented your enemies such as the Jews and others who were in the regions of Medina, by casting dread into their hearts.

وَأُخۡرَىٰ لَمۡ تَقۡدِرُواْ عَلَيۡهَا قَدۡ أَحَاطَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَاۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٗا ﴿٢١﴾

There are many other gains [to come], over which you have no power. God has full control over them: God has power over all things [21] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 21)

That is, other battle-spoils, meaning the spoils of the Battle of Hunayn; Allah *Glorified is He* gave them tidings of this future event, and indeed it took place after the Conquest.

وَلَوۡ قَٰتَلَكُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَوَلَّوُاْ ٱلۡأَدۡبَٰرَ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُونَ وَلِيّٗا وَلَا نَصِيرٗا ﴿٢٢﴾
سُنَّةَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّتِي قَدۡ خَلَتۡ مِن قَبۡلُۖ وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ ٱللَّهِ تَبۡدِيلٗا ﴿٢٣﴾

If the disbelievers had fought against you, they would have taken flight and found no one to protect or support them [22] such was God’s practice in the past and you will find no change in God’s practices [23] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 22-23)

When He says ‘they would have turned their backs,’ (*al-Fath:* 22) this means that they will flee and capitulate. And this is ‘the established way of

Allah' (*al-Fath:* 23), i.e. the usual way He deals with His creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* succours the people of truth and brings the people of falsehood to ruin. 'Which has occurred before,' (*al-Fath:* 23) meaning it came to pass for all the previous communities.

وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى كَفَّ أَيْدِيَهُمْ عَنكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ عَنْهُم بِبَطْنِ مَكَّةَ مِنۢ
بَعْدِ أَنْ أَظْفَرَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا ﴿٢٤﴾

In the valley of Mecca it was He who held their hands back from you and your hands back from them after He gave you the advantage over them — God sees all that you do [24] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 24)

'After He caused you to overcome them,' (*al-Fath:* 24) means that He succoured you against them and gave you the upper hand over them, This is the power which forced the disbelievers of Mecca to sit and negotiate with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for the Muslims had secured an acknowledgeable and respectable presence, and so Quraysh came to make a treaty with them.

هُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَصَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ وَٱلْهَدْىَ مَعْكُوفًا أَن
يَبْلُغَ مَحِلَّهُۥ ۚ وَلَوْلَا رِجَالٌ مُّؤْمِنُونَ وَنِسَآءٌ مُّؤْمِنَٰتٌ لَّمْ تَعْلَمُوهُمْ أَن تَطَـُٔوهُمْ
فَتُصِيبَكُم مِّنْهُم مَّعَرَّةٌۢ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۖ لِّيُدْخِلَ ٱللَّهُ فِى رَحْمَتِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ لَوْ
تَزَيَّلُوا۟ لَعَذَّبْنَا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿٢٥﴾

They were the ones who disbelieved, who barred you from the Sacred Mosque, and who prevented the offering from reaching its place of sacrifice. If there had not been among them, unknown to you, believing men and women whom you would have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account – God brings whoever He will into His mercy – if the [believers] had been clearly separated, We would have inflicted a painful punishment on the disbelievers [25] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 25)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes clear to them here the wisdom of the Treaty and the reason why they did not engage the disbelievers in fighting at that time; ‘It is true that they barred you from the *Ka‘ba* and prevented you from entering Mecca, although you were filled with longing for the House, and you had brought offerings for it with you – and the offerings proved that you had come in peace and were not seeking war, but rather had come to perform religious observances.’ ‘While the offering was prevented from reaching its place of sacrifice’ (*al-Fath:* 25). The offerings were cattle traditionally given to the poor people in the House, yet on this occasion they were ‘prevented,’ (*al-Fath:* 25) and restrained from this purpose.

Allah *Glorified is He* then reveals to us the true situation of the Meccans at that time: ‘For some of the folk of Mecca are your fellow Muslims, but they are concealing their Islam; amongst the disbelievers there are believing men and women who you do not know, and if you engage in war against the Meccans, you will kill these believers without knowing it.’ ‘And there would befall you because of them dishonour without [your] knowledge’ (*al-Fath:* 25). A grievous wrong means a serious harm; ‘And it would have been a great blemish against your names for you to kill your own brethren.’ ‘If they had been apart [from them], We would have punished those who disbelieved among them with painful punishment’ (*al-Fath:* 25). ‘Were the believers clearly distinguishable from the disbelievers, We would have punished them by your hands, and allowed you to fight them.’

إِذۡ جَعَلَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ ٱلۡحَمِيَّةَ حَمِيَّةَ ٱلۡجَٰهِلِيَّةِ فَأَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ
سَكِينَتَهُۥ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِۦ وَعَلَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَأَلۡزَمَهُمۡ كَلِمَةَ ٱلتَّقۡوَىٰ
وَكَانُوٓاْ أَحَقَّ بِهَا وَأَهۡلَهَاۚ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٗا ٢٦

While the disbelievers had fury in their hearts – the fury of ignorance – God sent His tranquillity down on to His Messenger and the believers and made binding on them [their] promise to obey God, for that was more appropriate and fitting for them. God has full knowledge of all things[26]
(The Quran, *al-Fath:* 26)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* makes clear to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the reason why they barred him from entering Mecca that year. It was purely a matter of rancour and the stubbornness of pagan ignorance which had taken root in the hearts of these people so that it seemed a grave thing for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions to enter Mecca, and for them to have entered that year would have been a disgrace for the disbelievers.(1)

‘Chauvinism,’ (*al-Fath:* 26) means rashness, delusion and haughtiness, and power is only praised or blamed according to the effect it has on a person: power is praised if it brings goodness to the one who possesses it, and it is blamed if it draws him into evil and destruction.

‘But Allah sent down His tranquillity upon His Messenger,’ (*al-Fath:* 26) meaning confidence in Allah’s succour, and acceptance of the Treaty and of the return home without entering Mecca that year. ‘And imposed upon them the word of righteousness,’ (*al-Fath:* 26) namely the tenet of monotheism; ‘and they were more deserving of it and worthy of it,’ (*al-Fath:* 26) because of their obedience of Allah *Glorified is He* and His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*

لَّقَدۡ صَدَقَ ٱللَّهُ رَسُولَهُ ٱلرُّءۡيَا بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ لَتَدۡخُلُنَّ ٱلۡمَسۡجِدَ ٱلۡحَرَامَ إِن
شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ ءَامِنِينَ مُحَلِّقِينَ رُءُوسَكُمۡ وَمُقَصِّرِينَ لَا تَخَافُونَۖ فَعَلِمَ مَا لَمۡ
تَعۡلَمُواْ فَجَعَلَ مِن دُونِ ذَٰلِكَ فَتۡحٗا قَرِيبًا ﴿٢٧﴾

God has truly fulfilled His Messenger’s vision: ‘God willing, you will most certainly enter the Sacred Mosque in safety, shaven- headed or with cropped hair, without fear!’ – God knew what you did not – and He has granted you a speedy triumph [27] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 27)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* tells us of the yearning the Muslims had for the House, after they had been away from Mecca for such a long time, and their yearning to perform the rites of the pilgrimage and walk around the *Ka‘ba*, but the stubborn disdain of pagan ignorance, together with its false delusion in its own power, came between them and what they wanted. When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks about this matter, He speaks about it as though it was a vision which occurred before the events actually came to pass; and as you know, a vision is what a sleeping person sees – and it might be true, or it might not.

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(1) *This is because they said, ‘They have killed our sons and our brothers, and now they will enter our very houses! By Lat and by ‘Uzza, they shall never enter them!’ (Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir)*

The Noble Quran also speaks about visions in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him*: '[Of these stories mention] when Joseph said to his Father, 'O my Father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me' (*Yusuf:* 4).

The orientalists have objected to this verse and the rhetorical style of the Noble Quran because it repeats the words: 'I saw them prostrate themselves before me!' (*Yusuf:* 4)

But the one who reflects on the story and its details will find that this is not repetition because each verb has its own meaning and purpose. In the first, he said: 'I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon,' (*Yusuf:* 4), but did not say 'prostrate themselves'; and then the second time, he says: 'I saw them prostrating to me' (*Yusuf:* 4). This means that there were two separate visions. In the first vision, he saw them in their usual form, not prostrating, and then after that he saw them prostrating. You could not tell if the sun was prostrating, for example, unless you first of all saw it in its usual form, and then it prostrated.

So, the vision must have been repeated once without the prostration and once with it, which means that they prostrated all of a sudden before him. If he had said, 'I saw them prostrate themselves' right from the start, we would say, 'How?' Because prostration starts from a position of stillness and then takes form. The True Lord *Glorified is He* does not use a word unless it has a specific purpose meaning to convey and a necessary reason for being there.

When Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* told his Father of this vision: 'He said, 'O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers or they will contrive against you a plan' (*Yusuf:* 5). Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* knew that this vision meant that Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* would be raised above his brothers; and if they resented him because his Father cared for him, or showed more affection to him, then what would they do if he told them of this vision? What would they do if they knew that the celestial bodies had prostrated before him?

And here, too, there is mention of a vision: ‘Certainly has Allah showed to His Messenger the vision in truth’ (*al-Fath:* 27). This implies that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had seen a vision, which was: ‘You will surely enter *Al-Masjid Al-Haram*, if Allah wills, in safety, with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone]’ (*al-Fath:* 27).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his Companions about this vision of his, and so they felt assured that they indeed would enter Mecca and perform the pilgrimage. When the fools of Quraysh forbade them from entering Mecca, they were amazed, and objected to being barred from entering.

And ‘Umar said to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘Are we not in the right? Are they not in the wrong?’ He said, ‘Indeed yes,’ and so ‘Umar said: ‘Then why do we yield in such a lowly way against the honour of our religion?’

It is true that they were in the right, and they came filled with longing for the House of Worship; but had they entered Mecca by force without the sanction of its inhabitants, there would have been a battle, and this would mean that those living secretly as Muslims in Mecca would have been hurt, as the previous verse explained.

Therefore, the True Lord *Glorified is He* then says: ‘He knew what you did not know’ (*al-Fath:* 27). The True Lord *Glorified is He* showed His Prophet the vision, and He showed the truth of it; but it has not yet happened, for Allah *Glorified is He* knows the truth of the matter even if you do not know it, and therefore He has postponed the minor pilgrimage this year, and made the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* agree to a treaty with the disbelievers of Mecca that the Muslims shall be allowed to perform the minor pilgrimage next year.

And read what He says: ‘You will surely enter *Al-Masjid Al-Haram*, if Allah wills’ (*al-Fath:* 27). He did not specify when this would be, so if anyone says, ‘Did you not say that we would perform the minor pilgrimage and enter the Sacred Mosque?’ He may say to them, ‘Not necessarily this year.’

The one who reflects on the wording of the verse will find that this is what it implies, and that the minor pilgrimage would not be performed that year. We can infer this from the words: ‘with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone]’ (*al-Fath:* 27). For had you entered Mecca without the permission and consent of Quraysh, this security would not have been given you, for they would have fought you and aggressed against you; and even if they had let you enter, they would not have been able to bear seeing you walking around the *Ka‘ba*, and they would inevitably have fallen under the spell of the stubborn disdain of pagan ignorance.

He then says: ‘not fearing [anyone]’ (*al-Fath:* 27). This is another assurance of security, referring to the time after the rites of the pilgrimage are finished; for once someone entered the Sanctuary to perform the rites, Quraysh would not touch them, but they would attack them as soon as they finish their rites.

His Words ‘without any fear,’ (*al-Fath:* 27) indicate that they would be safe both at the start of the pilgrimage and the end of it, and this could only be the case if they entered with the consent and permission of Quraysh.

Concerning the words ‘vision in truth,’ (*al-Fath:* 27) as long as Allah *Glorified is He* showed him the vision, it would inevitably be borne out in reality because the visions of the prophets are always true. The prophethood of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* began with true visions, and for six months he continued to receive these visions.

And if we compare this with the 23 years his mission lasted, we find that it is one 46th; and this explains why the Noble Ḥadith says that true visions are one forty-sixth of prophethood.(1) Prophethood begins with true visions because they come when the person is asleep, having no particular thoughts or desires.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and has arranged before that a conquest near [at hand]’ (*al-Fath:* 27). He ordained, after the Truce of Hudaybiyya and their return home without having performed the pilgrimage, a victory soon to come for Islam and the Muslims. It was a victory for several reasons: Firstly, it resulted in an armistice and truce with Quraysh which gave an opportunity for the call to be spread outside Mecca, for the Muslims could do this freely without worrying about attacks from Quraysh.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (6474) and Muslim (4203) on the authority of Abu Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him*

This also means that they acknowledged Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his call, and respected the covenant made with him; so, Islam had become notable after having been an object of persecution.

Moreover, this treaty gave dignity to the Muslims, and do not think that when Quraysh bar you from entering the Sacred Mosque, this is an honour for them. Never, for in Allah's sight all honour and dignity are found in being conscious of Allah *Glorified is He* not in tyranny or false delusions of strength.

In this treaty, the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us a lesson in good polity; for he accepted to make this treaty with the disbelievers, and to return home with his companions without entering Mecca that year despite how close they were to it because this was good for the Muslims and for Islam. In the course of making the pact, He *peace and blessings be upon him* agreed to things which no one could have guessed he would agree to.

For when they came to write the treaty down, the Prophet dictated to 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* who served as the scribe: 'This is what has been agreed by Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.' Suhayl ibn 'Amr said, 'If we believed you were the Messenger of Allah, we would not have fought you, and we would not be here now.' So the Messenger of Allah said to 'Ali, 'Write instead, 'Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah,'' deferring to Suhayl's opinion, but 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* objected to this and insisted on writing 'The Messenger of Allah', so the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'Write it, for you shall have to endure it one day, too.'

Indeed, the years passed and the dispute arose between 'Ali and Mu'awiya *may Allah be pleased with them.* When they came to make a treaty, 'Ali said, 'Write: This is what has been agreed by 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb, the Commander of the Faithful,' but they objected to the title 'Commander of the Faithful', and said, 'If we believed you were that, we would not have fought you.' So he accepted this, and wrote only his name.(1) And this was a miraculous sign of prophethood.

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(1) *At-Tabari, Ar-Riyad An-Nadira*

In addition, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* dictated the word ‘In the Name of Allah, The Most Merciful, The Bestower of Mercy’ at the start of the document, they refused to write it because they did not know this formula, and they insisted it be phrased: ‘In Your Name, O Allah’; and the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* assented to this as well.

These were all concessions which the Messenger of Allah made, and he did so for the good of Islam and the Muslims, in light of Allah’s words: ‘ He knew what you did not know,’ (*al-Fath:* 27). And the outcome was: ‘and has arranged before that a conquest near [at hand]’ (*al-Fath:* 27). And indeed, after this treaty, the conquests came one after another, for they were safe from the Quraysh’s harm for ten years.

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُۥ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ ٱلْحَقِّ
لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ﴿٢٨﴾

It was He who sent His Messenger, with guidance and
the religion of Truth, for him to show that it is above
all [false] religion. God suffices as a witness [28]
(The Quran, *al-Fath:* 28)

‘Guidance’ (*al-Fath:* 28) means directions along the path of goodness which leads to the destination that pleases the one who reaches it in this life and the next. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with guidance to all mankind, and he showed them all the way; and those who follow his guidance will be given aid and extra guidance by Allah: ‘And those who are guided - He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness,’ (*Muhammad:* 17). And those who decline to follow his guidance and choose error instead will be increased in error by Allah *Glorified is He* who will set a seal on their hearts.

We gave the example to illustrate this before of the traffic policeman who gives you directions: if you listen to him and follow his directions, he might do even more for you and accompany you until you get to your destination; but if you reject his advice, he will leave you to the difficulties of the road, and he might even see you go the wrong way but not tell you so because you would not listen to him if he did.

And when The Noble Quran speaks about guidance; it says: ‘Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord’ (*al-Baqara:* 5). This concept corrects the mistaken understanding which some have, thinking that guidance is a burden for the one who follows it to bear, giving him difficult responsibilities and restraining his freedom.

But this is not what guidance is, as it is a vehicle which transports you to your goal. Although the religion appears to restrict your movement, it restricts it for your own good, and it stands in the way of your passions for your own good.

The religion might hold your hand back from stealing, but it holds back everyone else’s hands from stealing from you and when it commands you to lower your gaze from people’s womenfolk, He commands everyone else to lower their gazes from your womenfolk. So, you are the one who wins. The religion restricts your motions towards a fleeting passion in this life so that it can give you lasting bliss in the Hereafter.

His words ‘and the religion of truth,’ (*al-Fath:* 28) means Islam, and the truth is the constant thing which never changes. ‘To prevail it over all religion,’ (*al-Fath:* 28) means to make His religion and His word ascendant over all the religions which came before it because the Noble Quran came to encompass and determine the truth of all other scriptures, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 48).

The prevailing here is one of proofs, arguments and the perfect teachings of the religion. This does not prevent the existence of other religions which still exist even today, fourteen centuries after the coming of Islam.

We were asked this question on one of our travels, and we said that it does not mean that everyone will be Muslim because this prevailing will be a prevailing of teachings; and this has indeed happened by your own admission, for the issues of life have driven you to adopt Islam’s teachings whenever your problems could not be solved in any other way.

We see that they adopted, for example, the Islamic attitude towards divorce; and this was a victory for the religion because they adopted its teachings even without believing in it; and likewise in the matter of polygamy; they used to attack it and criticise it, but now they are adopting it. What is strange is that they accept for a man to have several girlfriends, but not several wives; and this is a corruption of nature and behaviour which no sound law tolerates.

Likewise when it comes to economic matters, their great economist Keynes stated that money cannot perform its proper social function unless interest rates are at zero, and this is just what Islam says which is why it prohibits usury; for usury is a transaction between rich and poor. A rich person who has enough excess wealth to lend it, and a poor person who has nothing at all and so has to borrow – so how could we ask the poor person, who does not even possess the basic amount loaned, to give the rich person this amount and then even more?

Suppose that the poor person takes the money to invest it in a business venture, but this venture fails. He will then be required to pay back the capital, plus the interest, in addition to all the effort he put into this venture which has all gone to waste.

So how many misfortunes have beset him? Forbidding usury, therefore, firstly considers what is best for the poor person. It also does what is best for the rich person when all things are considered because while he is wealthy and able to loan, he is only giving consideration to his present state of wealth – but things might change, and the rich man might become poor and in need of a loan himself. So, it is not in his interest to deal in usury.

And His words '…and none can bear witness [to the truth] as Allah does' (*al-Fath:* 28) mean that His testimony is sufficient, for when a witness testifies, he only testifies as to what he has seen, and his vision is limited; but when Allah testifies, this is a testimony of complete and all-encompassing knowledge which cannot be changed by anyone. But what is it that He 'bears witness' to? They say that He bears witness that the one who follows His guidance will go to paradise, the abode of constant bliss without end, and favour without cease.

مُّحَمَّدٞ رَّسُولُ ٱللَّهِۚ وَٱلَّذِينَ مَعَهُۥٓ أَشِدَّآءُ عَلَى ٱلۡكُفَّارِ رُحَمَآءُ بَيۡنَهُمۡۖ تَرَىٰهُمۡ رُكَّعٗا سُجَّدٗا يَبۡتَغُونَ فَضۡلٗا
مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرِضۡوَٰنٗاۖ سِيمَاهُمۡ فِي وُجُوهِهِم مِّنۡ أَثَرِ ٱلسُّجُودِۚ ذَٰلِكَ مَثَلُهُمۡ فِي ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةِۚ وَمَثَلُهُمۡ فِي
ٱلۡإِنجِيلِ كَزَرۡعٍ أَخۡرَجَ شَطۡـَٔهُۥ فَـَٔازَرَهُۥ فَٱسۡتَغۡلَظَ فَٱسۡتَوَىٰ عَلَىٰ سُوقِهِۦ يُعۡجِبُ ٱلزُّرَّاعَ لِيَغِيظَ بِهِمُ
ٱلۡكُفَّارَۗ وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ مِنۡهُم مَّغۡفِرَةٗ وَأَجۡرًا عَظِيمَۢا ﴿٢٩﴾

Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Those who follow him are harsh towards the disbelievers and compassionate towards each other. You see them kneeling and prostrating, seeking God's bounty and His good pleasure: on their faces they bear the marks of their prostrations. This is how they are pictured in the Torah and the Gospel: like a seed that puts forth its shoot, becomes strong, grows thick, and rises on its stem to the delight of its sowers. So God infuriates the disbelievers through them; God promises forgiveness and a great reward to those who believe and do righteous deeds [29] (The Quran, *al-Fath:* 29)

'Muhammad' *peace be upon him* is his name, and 'Allah's Apostle' is his new title, for we knew Muhammad before he was the Messenger of Allah. And the name *Muhammad* is derived from the word *hamd*, which means 'praise' meaning that people praise him, and his people praised him right from his childhood, and called him 'The Truthful, Honest One' because his life story and past amongst them had shown these to be his attributes, and shown that he was a special person amongst his peers, and no ordinary man.

And they all agreed on this even before the Message came to him, and in his childhood, they saw that he was never tainted by any of the weakness and foolishness of infancy. They saw that he tended sheep, and whilst other young shepherds like him would walk down from the hills into Mecca by night to attend late-night parties, he did not; and he once thought about going with them, but as he was going, sleep overcame him, and he did not wake up until the entertainment had finished.(1) It is as though Allah protected him and preserved his hearing and sight from being exposed to any of these things. And his friends were amazed because they saw that he did not join them in these activities, so they began to consider him as honest; and when they found that he never lied, it made sense for them to name him 'The Truthful, Honest One.'

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(1) *Narrated in Al-Kamil fi At-Tarikh*

And one day, all the boys gathered to carry a heavy stone to play with it, and when it proved too heavy for them, they lifted up their garments to use them to carry it. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was with them, and he began to lift up his garment as they had, but he heard a voice say, 'Your privacy, Muhammad!' So, he was the only one of them not to expose his private parts. (1)

And they noticed this before he reached adulthood, and they inferred from this that he was being prepared for something. And they then came to know his sound intellect and wise opinion, which was revealed when the Black Stone was moved, and the tribes of Quraysh argued about which of them would have the honour of putting the Stone back in its place, and fighting almost broke out, so they said: 'We shall follow the judgement of the very next person who comes in.'

And it happened that the next person to come in was Muhammad, the Trustworthy, and Honest One, whose honesty no one doubted. He took off his cloak and placed the Stone on top of it, and told the representative of each tribe to take hold of a part of it and carry it, and when they reached the place in the *Ka'ba* meant for it, he picked it up himself and put it in its place. In this way, the dispute which had so riled the people was settled. (2)

So, when Allah says 'Muhammad…', He means: 'This man you know, and whose honesty, trustworthiness and good character are known to you; this man who lived openly amongst you for forty years, is the Messenger of Allah whom He has chosen for His Message. So, you attested to him before I sent him to you, and as long as you attested to his good character and wise opinion before, you must believe him now.'

And The True Lord *Glorified is He* did not only purify Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his person, He also purified his roots and kept them unblemished by any idol-worship, despite its prevalence at that time; and the scholars are agreed that none of His ancestors ever worshipped idols.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir, Sira*

(2) *Ibn Kathir, Sira*

Therefore, a Qudsi Hadith states: {I continued to be passed from the loins of pure men to the wombs of pure women.}(1) That is, he *peace be upon him* came from a pure lineage uncontaminated by any of the wickedness of pagan ignorance.

And the story(2) of what happened between his Father ʿAbdullah and Zaynab Al-Khath ʿamiyya was known all over Arabia, especially in Mecca. She saw in him beauty and radiance, and desired him to the point that she offered herself to him, whereupon he said the famous lines:

I would rather die than commit sin,
And it is clear enough what is allowed;
The honourable man preserves his dignity and religion,
And how could I do this if I yielded to your desire?

And when ʿAbdullah married Amina bint-Wahb and The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was conceived, the light which had been in his Father's face passed on to him, and when Zaynab Al-Khath ʿamiyya saw him after that, she said: 'What would I want with him now, when the light which was in his face has departed?'(3) This means that The True Lord *Glorified is He* looked after Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* personally, and protected him from the depravity of pagan ignorance, and guarded him through every stage of his life.

And then after that his Father died and he was sent to be nursed with the tribe of Banu Sa'd, and his wet-nurse witnessed the many wonders and miracles which would come to him. When she said to his fellow nurselings, 'Protect Muhammad from the sun's heat', they said: 'By Allah, mother, we never see him in its heat, for wherever he goes a cloud comes to shade him.'(4) So, He attested to his person, and to his forbears, and everyone knew that he was being aided from on high.

So, His words 'Muhammad is Allah's Apostle' mean that His choice of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as His Messenger was in accord with your opinions, so do not then give the lie to him. And ‘Muhammad’ here is the subject of the sentence, and the predicate is ‘is Allah’s Apostle’; that is, the Muhammad who is known to you all is Allah’s Apostle, and Allah knows best where to send His Message; and so, when he was sent to you, you should have believed in him and trusted him.

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(1) *This is narrated by many exegetes such as Al-Alusi, Ar-Razi and An-Nisapuri, without any chain of narration. It is ascribed to Ibn 'Abbas in Fatawi Al-Azhar.*

(2) *The story of ʿAbdullah ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib with Zaynab Al-Khath'amiyya*

(3) *The like of it is narrated by As-Suhayli in Ar-Rawd Al-Anaf.*

(4) *Ibn Kathir, Sira*

And when The True Lord *Glorified is He* aided Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with miracles, He aided him with a rational miracle, and made a distinction between a rational miracle and a cosmological miracle; for the cosmological miracle only occurs once, as we saw in the story of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and how he spoke to the people when still in the cradle, and no one saw this miracle except for those who present when it occurred and witnessed it first-hand.

As for our case, it is information which we trust and believe because The Quran informed us of it.

But when it comes to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* his message was universal, and set a seal on all revealed messages until the Last Hour, and therefore his miracle had to befit the universality of his message, and had to be an eternal, lasting miracle which did not end in the instant it came.

Therefore, The Quran came as a miracle which would last as long as The Message lasted even until the Last Hour and since The Message was sent down, we have recited ‘Muhammad is Allah’s Apostle’, and it will continue to be recited until the Last Hour; Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is Allah’s Apostle, by the proof of this miraculous Quran.

And therefore, Allah says: ‘Behold, it is We Ourselves who have bestowed from on high, step by step, this reminder: and, behold, it is We Who shall truly guard it [from all corruption].’ (*al-Hijr:* 9) The True Lord *Glorified is He* took it upon Himself to guard The Quran, unlike the scriptures which came before it, where He assigned the role of guarding them to their followers and those who believed in them, as He says: ‘…and so did the [early] men of Allah and the rabbis, inasmuch as some of Allah’s book had been entrusted to their care…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 44). The meaning of ‘entrusted to their care’ is that they were asked to guard them as a religious responsibility from Allah, and responsibilities can be obeyed or disobeyed, and we have seen that they did not guard them, but rather, they altered them, changed them, and forgot much of them.

As for The Quran, it is still the same now as it was when Allah revealed it to the heart of His Messenger *peace be upon him* because Allah guarded it Himself, and did not trust mankind to guard it.

And a clear example of how Allah guarded the Quran is that He subdued men to guard it who do not even believe in it, for many of those who print the Quran and decorate it nowadays are not Muslims; we saw how a German man printed the whole Quran on a single page, and did not even do this with the Gospel, his own scripture.

So, we say that The Messenger's past history showed his people how worthy he was to bear a divine message, and therefore many of those who heard that he *peace be upon him* had been sent as a prophet were quick to believe in him even before they heard a single verse of the Quran. Why? Because they took their past experiences of him as proof that he was telling the truth for they had never known him to lie even once, and the one who does not lie about other people will certainly not lie about Allah, the Lord of all people.

And we saw Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *may Allah be pleased with him* take this same stance after the events of the Night Journey and Ascension, for when he heard that The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* claimed he had been taken to Jerusalem, he said, ‘If he said it, he spoke the truth.’(1)

As for the miracle, it came for those who denied his message, to those who did not believe, and to those who accused the Quran of being a lie and an invention. So the Quran said to them: ‘…Produce, then, a chapter of similar merit…’ (*Yunus:* 38), that is, invent it yourself.

‘…And those who are [truly] with him…’ (*al-Fath:* 29), that is, those who believe in him and are truly with him both personally and religiously, and He says that those people are ‘…firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another…’ (*al-Fath:* 29); so they combine one thing and its opposite: firmness and mercy.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim (4381) on the authority of ‘A’isha may Allah be pleased with her*

This is proof that the believer does not have a single nature which rules him, but rather, he changes in conformity with the responsibilities that come to him from his Lord *the Most High*: with enemies, you find that he is strong and firm towards them, showing him that the believer never yields, and with his fellow believers, he is merciful and compassionate towards them. And the Quran expresses this differently elsewhere, saying: '…humble towards the believers, proud towards all who deny the truth…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). The way of faith is what determines the believer's conduct and directs it; and this is what we saw in fact in the actions of both Abu Bakr and 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with them*.

Despite the kindness and mildness for which Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* was known, when the Apostasy occurred after The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* passed away, we saw that he cast off this mild disposition and was as firm as can be. And he said to 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him*: 'By Allah, if they deny me a single penny (of poor-due) which they used to give to The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* I shall fight them for it.' And he chided 'Umar, saying: 'After being a tyrant in the pagan days, have you become a weakling in Islam?'(1)

And the one who reflects on the story of the Apostasy will see that the situation demanded harshness and firm resolve, for otherwise it would have spread, especially among those whose faith was weak and those who were new to Islam; and this is why Abu-Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* changed from his usual mild disposition to a firm one.

Allah then says: '…You can see them bowing down, prostrating themselves [in prayer], seeking favour with Allah and [His] goodly acceptance…' (*al-Fath:* 29). So despite this firmness they show to the disbelievers, you can see them bowing down and prostrating themselves. Bowing and prostrating are successive stages by which total servitude to Allah is proclaimed, for when you bow you move from a standing position to one in which you incline towards Allah, and then prostrating is greater than bowing because you fall right down to the ground and press your forehead against it, placing the most noble feature of your body against the floor in humility, submission and subservience to Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) *Narrated by As-Suyuti, A-Bayhaqi, Al-Hindi and Adh-Dhahabi*

Therefore, we said that bowing and prostration express total servitude to Allah and this is what we can infer from Iblis's words, of which The Quran tells us: 'And shall most certainly fall upon them openly as well as in a manner beyond their ken, and from their right and from their left…' (*al-A'raf:* 17). He did not mention the other two directions here, i.e. from above and from below. Why not? Because 'above' implies the loftiness of divinity and we raise our hands when we supplicate Allah; and 'below' implies the humility of servitude when we prostrate on our foreheads, and humble ourselves before Allah; therefore, Satan cannot come from these two directions.

And when He says, '…seeking favour with Allah and [His] goodly acceptance…' (*al-Fath:* 29), this is the reason why they are firm and unyielding towards the disbelievers and merciful towards one another, and why they are keen to bow down and prostrate themselves; that is, they do all of this out of desire for Allah's favour, and hope for His goodly acceptance.

And this is the peak of sincerity in action, for they act solely for Allah's sake, and they seek nothing else. Why? Because they always bear in the mind the Day when they will stand before Allah, and when no one but Allah will judge them and requite them.

Therefore, we said that the scientists and inventors who served mankind with their good deeds will receive no share of the good of the Hereafter because they did not work for Allah, but only for humanity and civilisation.

Therefore, Allah said about them: 'But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert which the thirsty supposes to be water – until when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing: instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full – for Allah is swift in reckoning!' (*an-Nur:* 39) He will be shocked to find The True God, who was never on his mind, will be The One Who judges him, and who requites him.

And another of the signs of these believers is that '…their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration…' (*al-Fath:* 29). Their distinctive sign is the mark which prostration leaves on a man's face, which we call in Arabic *zabibat as-salat*, (the prayer's raisin).

The Creator *Glorified is He* did not create all mankind in a single mould, but rather, every person has his own mould, which is not identical to any other mould, despite how many people there are. This shows His omnipotent power of creation. People all have different heights, breadths, colours, features, and so on.

But the distinctive feature of all the believers Allah describes here is that '…their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration…' (*al-Fath:* 29), and this sign is accompanied by light and perceptible radiance in the face of the believer – and {the nearest a servant ever is to his Lord is when he prostrates.}(1)

And many of us experience pleasure when we prostrate, and feel the warmth of Allah's company, and become used to it so that the mark appears on their foreheads in addition to the light and illumination which shows on their faces.

And you can observe this if you compare a man who spends the night engaged in drinking, depravity, and wantonness, and another who spends the night worshipping Allah and praising Him.

And these faces will come forth like this: 'Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, [38] laughing, rejoicing at glad tidings. [39] And some faces will on that Day with dust be covered, [40] with darkness overspread: [41] these, these will be the ones who denied the truth and were immersed in iniquity! [42]' (*'Abasa:* 38-42)

And we can observe this image, and see it beginning in this worldly life even before the Hereafter. Allah then says: '…This', i.e. the attributes of those who believe alongside Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which have just been mentioned, namely: '…firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another. You can see them bowing down, prostrating themselves [in prayer], seeking favour with Allah and [His] goodly acceptance: their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration…' (*al-Fath:* 29) these attributes are 'their parable in the Torah.' (*al-Fath:* 29) This is how the Torah describes them, as though the Torah contained a mention and a parable of those believers who would believe in Muhammad, The Final Messenger *peace be upon him* because the Torah gave the glad tidings of his coming.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (744), Abu -Dawud (741), An-Nasa'i (1125) and Ahmad (9083), on the authority of Abu-Hurayra may Allah be pleased with him*

As for The Gospel, it described them with other attributes as well as these: '…as well as their parable in the Gospel: [they are] like a seed that brings forth its shoot, and then He strengthens it so that it grows stout, and [in the end] stands firm upon its stem, delighting the sowers…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

So, The Gospel described these believers with a parable of the seed which brings forth 'its shoot', i.e. its branches, and the shoot is the highest part of the stem or the ear; 'so that it grows stout', i.e. the stem becomes strong and full, 'and [in the end] stands firm upon its stem' meaning that it becomes full-grown, 'delighting the sowers' with its firmness and straightness, '…so that through them He might confound the deniers of the truth…' (*al-Fath:* 29).

And if you compare these two parables, you will see that the first parable in the Torah is concerned with the spiritual element, mentioning attributes which are all connected with moral and spiritual values; the followers of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are firm and unyielding towards the disbelievers and merciful towards one other, and they bow down and prostrate themselves seeking their Lord's favour and goodly acceptance, and their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration. These are all moral and spiritual values, with no connection to any material concepts at all.

As for their parable in The Gospel, it is material in form, and contains no spiritual or moral concepts at all. Why is this? They say it is because the Jews were a people of extreme materialism, and could not be convinced by anything besides it.

And whilst they were wandering in the wilderness and Allah ordained that their food would be manna and quails, a sweet and delicious food which came to them without any effort on their part, descending upon them without the need for them to work, yet they were not satisfied with it because it was mysterious and they did not know where it came from, so they asked Allah to provide them with the things which grow from the earth, such as its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils and its onions; that is, things they could plant with their own hands and produce themselves.

And they even wanted their relationship to Allah *Glorified is He* to be material in nature, for they said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: '…O Musa, indeed we shall not believe thee until we see Allah face to face…' (*al-Baqara:* 55) yet, The True Lord *Glorified is He* is Unseen: 'No human vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all human vision…' (*al-An'am:* 103).

And we will see Him *Glorified is He* in the Hereafter because we shall be created in a different way there which will allow us to experience this honour so that we will be able to see Him. In this world, however, we cannot do so; for Allah has not refused to manifest Himself before His creation, but in this worldly life we do not have the power to bear this manifestation.

This concept is clearly shown in the story of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* when he said to his Lord *the Most High*: 'O my Lord! Show [Yourself] unto me so that I might behold You!' (*al-A'raf:* 143) And the reply was: '…Said [Allah]: 'Never can you see Me. However, behold this mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then – only then – will you see Me…' (*al-A'raf:* 143). And this means that another being could possibly have seen Him. '…And as soon as his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Moses fell down in a swoon…' (*al-A'raf:* 143). So, when our Lord showed Himself to the mountain, the mountain crumbled; so how would it be if He showed Himself to man? And Musa *peace be upon him* saw the mountain crumbling, so he fell down and swooned in dread at what he saw happen to the object of the manifestation.

We say that because of how materialistic they were, Allah gave them a parable which was concerned solely with moral and spiritual values, as though the Torah mentioned the attributes that Muhammad's followers would have which the followers of the Torah lacked, saying to them: 'You are too materialistic, and I will send forth a prophet whose community shall establish the spiritual and moral values which you lack.'

As for the Christians, they were overly spiritual, and the Gospel is entirely composed of spiritual and moral concepts; and therefore, when Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was asked about the issue of inheritance, he said, 'I was not sent to distribute inheritance.'

And this difference between the Torah and the Gospel made the Jews and Christians agree on one book, a mixture of the Torah and The Gospel so that they would have both the material and the spiritual side, and they call this

‘The Bible’, agreeing on it despite the enmity and difference which exist between them.

And because The Gospel is this way, the parable of the believers there was given in an entirely materialistic form, for this is something which The Gospel lacks, and it does not contain any discourse about social interactions and the motions of life. So, each of these parables came to compensate for something which was missing: the Jews lacked spirituality, and the Christians lacked the material values required by the motions of life.

Let us now stop to consider Allah’s words ‘…so that through them He might confound the deniers of the truth…’ (*al-Fath:* 29). This indicates that our material advances, and our attaining to firmness and self-sufficiency, are something which confounds the disbelievers; so, do not let them get ahead of you in this regard. If they get ahead of you in this regard, they will humiliate you, and hold sway over you, and use the advantage they have over you to dominate you.

And unfortunately, this is just what happened, for we have come to need them for most of the products we use, even the food we live on, and they have done all kinds of things to us; there is no strength nor power except with Allah. It is as though The True Lord *Glorified is He* were saying to us: ‘O you who believe in Muhammad and have accepted Allah as your Lord, Islam as your religion, and Muhammad as your prophet, you must take both sides into consideration: the material side that which gives you prominence and aids you in life’s motions, and the spiritual side that which protects you from error and rectifies your religious and worldly life; for your parable in the Torah was based on spiritual and moral values, and your parable in The Gospel was based on material values.’

Therefore, Islam came to compliment material science, not to oppose it, and The Quran is full of discourse about natural phenomena. If you like, read these verses and reflect on them: ‘Are you not aware that Allah sends down water from the skies whereby We bring forth fruits of many hues – just as in the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as [others] raven-black, [27] and [as] there are in men, and in crawling beasts, and in cattle, too, many hues? Of all His servants, only such as are endowed with [innate] knowledge stand [truly] in awe of Allah: [for they alone comprehend that,] verily, Allah is Almighty, Most Forgiving. [28]' (*Fatir:* 27-28).

All the genera of existence are mentioned here: man, animals, plants, and minerals. And the words 'such as are endowed with [innate] knowledge' do not mean religious scholars only; they mean all those people who have knowledge, whether religious or worldly.

It is as though The True Lord wanted to give us a religion which combined the interests of this worldly life and the Hereafter, and combined worship and the motions of life; so, do not take the religion and leave this worldly life to your enemies, lest they use it to humiliate you.

And as we said before, if a man wants his words to be heard, he must work for his own living. So, do not let your enemies outdo you in this field, for Allah's lordly bestowal is given to both the believer and the disbeliever alike, so do not leave it aside and rely only on His divine bestowal. You cannot worship Allah properly unless you partake of His lordly bestowal, and work to develop the motions of life, benefit from them, and participate in them.

We illustrated this before by giving the example of covering one's nakedness, which is obligatory and essential for worship: look at how many actions we must perform to cover our nakedness with clothes. Follow the piece of cotton from the point where the earth gives it forth to the point where it becomes clothes. So, the motions of life are what allow you to perform the motions of religion.

Allah then says: '…[But] unto such of them as may [yet] attain to faith and do righteous deeds, Allah has promised forgiveness and a reward supreme.' (*al-Fath:* 29) The words 'attain to faith' refer to the side of religion, and then 'and do righteous deeds' refer to the side of this world and the motions of life it requires.

So, beware of neglecting one side for the sake of the other; for your religion is a religion which combines spirit and material; and those who attain to faith are those who combine all these attributes, and those to whom Allah has made this promise.

Faith means belief which is firmly rooted in the soul, and which accepts no discussion because the heart is at peace with this belief and is certain that it will bring happiness in this life and the next. The basis of faith is that you believe that Allah is Lord and Creator of the universe, and that you believe in His Names and Attributes.

And if you believe in these Attributes, your heart will be at peace with the fate and decree He sends to you, for He tests you with good things that you might give thanks, and tests you with bad things that you might have patience. Therefore you are rewarded either way.

The Arabic word for faith is *iman* which is derived from the root *amn* which means ‘security’ and ‘peace of mind.’ You say, ‘I have faith in such-and-such’ meaning that you believe in it with certainty that leaves no room for doubt. And when the verb is used with the proposition *li*, it means ‘to trust’ or ‘to believe.’ And the verb *ammana* means ‘to give an assurance’ to someone about the future of his life. So, the meaning of this root word revolves around the notions of stability, firmness, and unshakeable constancy.

And the fruit of faith is ‘righteous deeds’ which means here the things He spoke of when He said: ‘…firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another. You can see them bowing down, prostrating themselves [in prayer], seeking favour with Allah, and [His] goodly acceptance: their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration…’ (*al-Fath:* 29). And in material matters and the motions of life, they are like the plant which stands up straight on its stem, pleasing the sowers so that through them He might confound the disbelievers.

And what was promised to the believers? ‘Forgiveness and a reward supreme’ were promised to them. (*al-Fath:* 29) We said before that this is a cleansing before an adorning: He first forgives, and then rewards; and the legal principle says that preventing harm comes before seeking benefit.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185). And to be drawn away from the fire is itself a blessing which is why the bridge to paradise crosses over the pit of hell, and everyone who crosses over it must see hell with his own eyes: ‘In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty.’ (*at-Takathur:* 7)

This makes you aware of the magnificence of faith, and what a great blessing it is because it saves us from this hellfire and causes us to enter paradise; and your righteous deeds take you by the hand and guide you past this peril.

And read what Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Consider the flight of time! [1] Verily, man is bound to lose himself [2] unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity. [3]’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3) So, all mankind is in a state of loss, and not one of them is exempt from this, and none of them will be saved except those who have faith and do righteous deeds.

And the mutual enjoining of the truth mentioned here indicates the obligation of commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong, whilst the mutual enjoining of patience indicates that this road is fraught with perils, and requires you to patiently bear the harm of those who oppose it; and advice is a heavy burden to bear.

The words ‘enjoin upon one another’ mean that every individual enjoins, and this implies the notion of constancy, determination and the lack of despair; for the opponent whom you advise might also have patience as he persists in his denial, and therefore you must have even more patience than him; and this is the meaning of Allah’s words: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Be patient in adversity, and vie in patience with one another…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 200).

And Allah’s promise is the promise which is truly constant and unchanging. Why? Because it is a promise from One Who possesses all the means of fulfilment, and nothing can prevent Him from fulfilling His promise, or get in His way, and because He *Glorified is He* is The Truth which never changes or alters – so who could come between Him and the fulfilment of His promise?

He *Glorified is He* is The One Unique God who has no partner in His dominion, and no competitor in His authority, and He is The All-Powerful, and there is no other power which can restrain him. As for the promises which human beings make, they might not be kept because no man possesses all the means to fulfil his promise, and he is subject to vicissitudes and changes.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Verily, Allah does not change men’s condition unless they change their inner selves…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 11). So we say that The True Lord *Glorified is He* is constant and does not change for us, but we must change ourselves for Him.

And the word '…forgiveness…' (*al-Fath:* 29) means that The Creator *Glorified is He* who knows His creatures best, knows that we are sinners, guilty of much forgetfulness and much ignorance, but this is all to be expected from us, and it should not make us despair of Allah's mercy because He is The One Who created us this way, and He has pledged to forgive us, and all we have to do is ask for His forgiveness: 'Yet withal, behold, I forgive all sins unto any who repents and attains to faith and does righteous deeds, and thereafter keeps to the right path.' (*Ta Ha:* 82)

the chapter of

al-Hujurat

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Hujurat* (1) :

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:(2)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تُقَدِّمُوا۟ بَيْنَ يَدَىِ ٱللَّهِ
وَرَسُولِهِۦ ۖ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ١

Believers, do not push yourselves forward in the presence of God and His Messenger — be mindful of God: He hears and knows all [1]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 1)

You can notice the relation between these verses in the opening of the chapter of *al-Hujurat* and those at the end of the chapter of *al-Fath*. In the final verses of the chapter of *al-Fath*, The True Lord *Glorified is He* spoke to us about what took place at Hudaybiyya: how the Muslims concluded a treaty with their enemies and how the conclusion of this treaty caused a difference of opinion between The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who believed in him.

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(1) *The chapter of al-Hujurat is chapter 49 in the arrangement of the Noble Quran. It is a chapter revealed in Medina by consensus of the scholars of Islam, as related by Al-Qurtubi in his Quranic commentary (9/6351). It was revealed after the chapter of al-Mujadala and before the chapter of at-Tahrim. Thus, chronologically, it is the 102nd to be revealed. See "Al-Itqan fi ʿUlum Al-Quran" of As-Suyuti (1/27).*

(2) *The occasion for the revelation of this verse: it is related from ʿAbdullah ibn Az- Zubayr may Allah be pleased with them that a group of riders from the tribe of Banu-Tamim advanced forward to The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him upon which Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him stated, "Appoint Al-Qaʿqaʿ ibn-Maʿbad their leader." To this, ʿUmar may Allah be pleased with him stated, "No, appoint Al-Aqraʿ ibn-Habis their leader." Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him responded, "You wished merely to oppose what I said," to which ʿUmar may Allah be pleased with him replied, "I had no wish to oppose you." They continued to dispute with each other until their voices started rising, at which point the following statement of Allah was revealed the Exalted beginning the verse: "O you who have attained to faith! Do not put yourselves forward in the presence of [what] Allah and His Apostle [may have ordained],…" (al-Hujurat: 1) to the verse: "for if they had the patience [to wait] until you come forth to them [of your own accord]…." (al-Hujurat: 5) This is related by Al-Bukhari (See "Asbab An-Nuzul" of Al-Wahidi, p. 218).*

In this situation, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* alone accepted to conclude a treaty with the enemy, and accept all of their conditions, so much so that he even waived many conditions which indicated his great wisdom in handling worldly affairs demonstrating the depth of his long-term vision; whereas the believers opposed him and protested the conclusion of this treaty, as we have seen.

At the time, this opposition on the part of the believers was so acute that even ʿUmar *may Allah be pleased with him* was saying to The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘O Messenger of Allah, are we not upon the Truth?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied. He then asked, ‘Are they not upon falsehood?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied. He then asked, ‘Then why are we yielding in such a lowly manner against the honour of our religion?’ (1)

We have stated previously that before they reached Medina on their way back, The True Lord *Glorified is He* informed them of the wisdom behind their returning without having performed the Lesser Pilgrimage that year. Thus, the believers were of an opinion, but The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was of another view; this is because the believers were zealously interested in following their own wishes; as for The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* he was fervent first and foremost in considering the interests of Islam.

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon (related by both Imam Al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim). It is related by Al-Bukhari in his “Sahih” (Hadith 2529, 2945, and 4466), and also by Muslim in his “Sahih” (Hadith 3338) and Ahmad in his “Musnad” (Hadith 15408, 18166) from the Hadith of Al-Miswar ibn Makhrama and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam, where each narration confirms the other. Within the Hadith, it is related that ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab may Allah be pleased with him stated, “[So] I came to The Prophet of Allah peace be upon him and said, “Are you not The Prophet of Allah, in truth?” He said, “Yes, I am.” Then I said, “Are we not upon the truth, and our enemies upon falsehood?” to which he replied, “Yes, it is so.” I said, “Then why are we concluding an agreement with them on terms that humiliate us in our faith?” In the Hadith, it is also related that Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him said to him, “O You addressing The Prophet, Verily he is The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and he is not one to disobey his Lord, Who helps and aids him to victory. So hold on to your stirrup, for by Allah, he is upon the Truth. This is the entirety of the Hadith.*

So, when this opposition to The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* took place, the chapter of *al-Hujurat* was revealed in order to deal with the matter, and the first verse that was revealed from it was: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not put yourselves forward in the presence of [what] Allah and His Apostle [may have ordained]…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 1).

The vocative is used here specifically for those who have believed in Allah as their Lord and have taken Islam as their religion and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as their Prophet and Messenger.

‘…Do not put yourselves forward in the presence of [what] Allah and His Apostle [may have ordained]…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 1) In other words, ‘Beware of putting forward an opinion or deciding upon a matter before having the permission of Allah, and before gaining the permission of His Messenger *peace be upon him* and before he decides in favour of it, for The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* does not issue an order except that it is based upon Revelation from Allah.’

Thus, when you stand in opposition to a command from The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* you are, in actual fact, opposing the command of Allah, Whom you have accepted to take as your Lord and Allah, and believed in His Attributes; thus, what is required from such faith is not to advance your opinion over and above his opinion, nor your judgement over his. If Allah or The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* commands something, do not advance a point of view in lieu of it that is from your own selves.

Furthermore, in the phrase: ‘…in the presence of [what] Allah and His Apostle [may have ordained]…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 1) the expression ‘in your presence’ means ‘in front of you.’ In other words, do not precede him in deciding upon an affair without his assent, and remember that you are in the presence of Allah, standing in front of Him. He does not oblige you with an action in order for you to swerve away from it in some other direction.

In His statement ‘…but remain conscious of Allah…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 1), He means, ‘If you wish not to put yourselves forward in the presence of what

Allah and His Messenger *peace be upon him* may have ordained, have consciousness of Allah regarding this matter.' In other words, do not be deniers of what has been commanded, and do not revert to such action again in opposition to what has been commanded, for such action is inappropriate and incorrect.

'…for, verily, Allah is All Hearing, All Knowing!' (*al-Hujurat:* 1) In other words, He means: 'Have God-Consciousness of The One to Whom these attributes belong; for He is All-Hearing, and hears everything that is said, and All Knowing, and knows of everything that stirs in your souls. Thus, nothing about any of your affairs is hidden from Him, and so long as you have believed in Him, it is incumbent upon you to obey Him and His Messenger *peace be upon him*.

The True Lord states:[1]

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَرْفَعُوٓا۟ أَصْوَٰتَكُمْ فَوْقَ صَوْتِ ٱلنَّبِىِّ وَلَا تَجْهَرُوا۟ لَهُۥ بِٱلْقَوْلِ
كَجَهْرِ بَعْضِكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ أَن تَحْبَطَ أَعْمَـٰلُكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢﴾

Believers, do not raise your voices above the Prophet's, do not raise your voice when speaking to him as you do to one another, or your [good] deeds may be cancelled out without you knowing [2] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 2)

Here as well, the summon is directed towards those who have attained to faith, that they should not raise their voices above The Prophet's voice when in his presence, nor should they advance their opinions before his. Furthermore, from the proper manners of speech in general is that one should not raise one's voice at all, for there is something of a sense of superiority betrayed by the one who raises his voice in speech, or at least there is a sense of equal standing; what, then, do you think of such a situation if the person who is speaking to you is The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*?

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(1) *An-Naysaburi has stated (p. 218) that this verse was revealed concerning Thabit ibn-Qays ibn-Shammas, who suffered from a hearing deficiency, and was overly loud in speech: when he would speak to anybody, he would raise his voice. Thus, perhaps he used to address The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him with his raised voice, thereby harming him, and thereafter, Allah the Exalted revealed this verse.*

Thus, it is incumbent upon you not to raise your voice above his, but rather, to keep your voice below his and lower than it, and to address him with decorum and humility, just as you would if you truly believed in him as the Prophet and Messenger of Allah, bearing the message of truth, and advanced his opinion before your own point of view.

Likewise, when you address The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* do not raise your voice over his, for it is more proper that his voice and opinion be the most prominent, for he is more deserving of being heard, and worthier of concern. Nowadays, we live in an age in our history when the popular saying 'There is no voice to be raised above the call of war' has become widespread, for in our times, battle and dispute is considered to be the solution to all of our problems. The meaning, then, is: no voice should be raised over his. '…and neither speak loudly to him, as you would speak loudly to one another…' (*al-Hujurat:* 2). Furthermore, do not call out to The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in the same manner that you call out to each other. Thus, we do not say, 'Come here, O Ahmad,' or 'Come here, O Muhammad.' Rather, we say, 'O Prophet', 'O Messenger' or 'O Messenger of Allah'. For your Lord, who created you and created him and sent him to you as a messenger, addressed him in this manner

This is in contrast with the manner in which He *the Exalted* addressed all of the other messengers by their individual names: 'O Adam', 'O Noah (Nuh)', 'O Abraham (Ibrahim)', 'O Moses (Musa)' and 'O Jesus ('Isa)' However, He made an exception of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and did not address him by his individual name, but rather, by his titles: 'O Prophet' and 'O Messenger.' Thus, if his Creator did not address him by his individual name, it is an obligation upon you to address him by these titles, unless you consider yourself to be occupying a higher station than The One Who Created you, May Allah save us from that!

Thereafter, in His statement '…lest all your [good] deeds come to nought…' (*al-Hujurat:* 2), He means: for fear that your good deeds come to nothing, or in other words, become worthless and corrupted. Why? Because calling out to him in this manner, or raising your voice in his presence, is something that must be considered as opposing the prophetic mandate with which he came.

For The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not come with a method or a way that was of his own; rather, he is a bearer of a message from Allah. Thus, whoever opposes him in this message has opposed the mandate that Allah has set out for humanity, and such a person deserves to have his deeds come to nothing. Furthermore, by affronting The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in this manner, one affront The One Who sent him as well.

In His statement '…without your perceiving it' (*al-Hujurat:* 2), He means: your deeds may well come to nothing and become worthless without you realizing it. This is a matter that is amongst the subtle points of faith which one must be mindful of, for despite his being The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* with respect to the believers and benevolent and merciful towards them, when it comes to your manner of addressing him, you should never be deluded by these attributes of his such that you place him on an equal footing with anyone else; rather, you must preserve his standing, his dignity, and his esteem, and not make him out to be like yourself by addressing him in such a manner. This is like the man who spoils his servant, who thereby becomes deluded and misled by such behaviour and does not maintain the dignity and standing of his master until the matter reaches such a critical point that the master calls out to him, but he neglects to respond.

It is for this reason that we hear of the story of the Arab man who entered the area of a people whom he did not know, nor did they know him, and said, 'Peace be upon you, O People of good manners!' They responded, 'And how is it that you came to know of our good manners?' He replied, 'I learned of your good manners from observing the bad manners of your slaves.' In other words, they spoiled their slaves and did not punish them for their misbehaviour.

It is related by Companion Anas ibn-Malik *may Allah be pleased with him* that he said: 'I served The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and he never said about anything I had done, 'Why did you do it?' nor did he ever say about anything I had not done, 'Why did you not do it?''(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon by Al-Bukhari and Muslim. Al-Bukhari relates it in his "Sahih" (Hadith 5578). Muslim also relates it in his "Sahih" (Hadith 4269, 4271), as does Abu-Dawud in his "Sunnan" (Hadith 4144) and At-Tirmidhi in his "Sunnan" (Hadith 1938) where he states: "It is a Hadith that is good and sound." It was narrated by Anas ibn-Malik may Allah be pleased with him.*

Then The True Lord *Glorified is He* states :[1]

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَغُضُّونَ أَصۡوَٰتَهُمۡ عِندَ رَسُولِ ٱللَّهِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱمۡتَحَنَ
ٱللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمۡ لِلتَّقۡوَىٰۚ لَهُم مَّغۡفِرَةٞ وَأَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٌ ٣

It is those who lower their voices in the presence of God's Messenger whose hearts God has proved to be aware — they will have forgiveness, and a great reward [3]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 3)

In the verse: '…lower their voices in the presence of Allah's Apostle…' (*al-Hujurat:* 3), the meaning is that they lower their voices in his presence *peace and blessings be upon him* out of reverence and esteem for him, and to honour him.

It '…is they whose hearts Allah has tested [and opened] to consciousness of Himself…' (*al-Hujurat:* 3). In other words, He has purified their hearts and made them clear in order for them to serve as abodes of piety and obedience and carry the burden of the Prophetic way of The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and take it to all of humanity; for they have been made fit and suitable for bearing this message after having their hearts cleansed and purified by Allah of all extraneous impure character traits, and cleansed from the diseases of ostentation, hypocrisy, and weakness of faith.

For the events, they have faced have smelt their hearts in the crucible of calamitous hardships such that nothing has remained in the ranks of faith except those who are strong of faith, capable of bearing the trust of this mission. For this reason, He *the Most High* has stated: '…Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that you may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you...' (*al-Baqara:* 143).

Thus, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness that he has conveyed the message to us, and we bear witness that we have conveyed the message to humanity.

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(1) *Ibn-ʿAbbas may Allah be pleased with them narrated that when His statement was revealed: "Behold, they who lower their voices in the presence of Allah's Apostle…" (al-Hujurat: 3) Abu Bakr may Allah be pleased with him took an oath never to speak to The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him except in the manner of someone telling a secret, in an extremely low voice. (See "Asbab An-Nuzul" of Al-Wahidi, p. 219).*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنَادُونَكَ مِن وَرَآءِ ٱلۡحُجُرَٰتِ أَكۡثَرُهُمۡ لَا يَعۡقِلُونَ ٤
وَلَوۡ أَنَّهُمۡ صَبَرُواْ حَتَّىٰ تَخۡرُجَ إِلَيۡهِمۡ لَكَانَ خَيۡرٗا لَّهُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٥

But most of those who shout to you [Prophet] from outside your private rooms lack understanding [4] It would have been better for them if they had waited patiently for you to come out to them but God is all forgiving and merciful [5]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 4 - 5)

This verse was revealed concerning a group of people(1) that had had some prisoners taken; they came to consult The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* about the matter, in order to have him set free those who had been taken prisoners, but they acted mistakenly in many ways.

Firstly, they came to the house of The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* from behind, and did not approach it from the front doors. This is because they did not know which of the private apartments The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was residing in: was he at ʿA'isha's place? Or was he at Hafsa's place? Or was he at Umm Salama's place? They knew that the Messenger of Allah had many varied important duties to fulfil: he had a duty towards the people at large, a duty towards his family, and a duty, before everything else, towards his Lord.

Thus, if the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had not appeared before them in the mosque, they should have waited until he had come out, and they should not have disturbed him, for he was most certainly fulfilling one of his many duties, and perhaps he was busy in spiritual retreat with his Lord *Glorified is He* or otherwise occupied with his family.

Secondly, they called out to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* just as they would call out to each other, and they did not respect the sanctity of the person of The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* nor his standing and rank. For this reason, most of them were described as ‘those who do not use their reason,’ for utilizing one’s intellect requires behaving in a manner that is different from such conduct.

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(1) *Zayd ibn Arqam may Allah be pleased with him related: "Some people came to The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and started to call out to him while he was residing in his residence, 'O Muhammad! O Muhammad!' So Allah the Exalted revealed the verse: "Verily, [O Prophet,] as for those who call you from without thy private apartments – most of them do not use their reason: (al-Hujurat: 4). Muhammad ibn-Ishaq and others have stated: "The verse was revealed concerning some brutish men of Banu Tamim…and amongst them was Al-Aqraʿ ibn-Habis and ʿUyayna ibn-Hasan and Az-Zabraqan ibn-Badr and Qays ibn-ʿAsim (See "Asbab An-Nuzul" of Al-Wahidi, p. 219).*

‘For if they had the patience [to wait] until you come forth to them [of your own accord], it would be for their own good…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 5). Yes, it would be for their own good, for after they had called out to him in such a disrespectful manner, and compelled him to come out, The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* released half of the prisoners, and stated: ‘By Allah, had they been patient until I had come out to meet them, I would have released all of the captives.’(1) He did this as a means of disciplining them for their transgressing the bounds of propriety and decorum and proper manners in their treatment of Him. ‘…Still, Allah is Most-Forgiving, Most-Merciful.’ (*al-Hujurat:* 5)

Allah did not take them to task and punish them, and The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* punished them in a manner that was commensurate with what they had done, as his anger would never be strictly for himself.

Then The True Lord *Glorified is He* says :(2)

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(1) *This is related by Al-Qurtubi in his Quranic commentary (9/6361) where he states: “They had come as intercessors on behalf of the captives of Banu ʿAnbar, and The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him set free half of the captives and ransomed the other half.”*

(2) *Al-Wahidi an-Naysaburi states in “Asbab An-Nuzul” (p. 222): “This verse was revealed concerning Al-Walid ibn-ʿUqba ibn-Abumuʿit, whom The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him had sent to the people of Banu Al-Mustaliq, and had considered reliable and trustworthy, but previously, there had been enmity between Al-Walid and Banu Mustaliq in the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance. Thus, when the people of Banu Al-Mustaliq heard of his coming, and then went out to receive him, glorifying Allah and His Messenger peace be upon him Satan then insinuated to him that they wished to kill him, and he became afraid of them and returned upon the path that he came by, back to The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and said to him: ‘The people of Banu Al-Mustaliq refused to pay the poor-due and wished to kill me.’ The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him became angry and made preparations to go to war with them. The news of Al-Walid’s return reached the people of Banu Al-Mustaliq, who then came to The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and said: ‘We heard of your envoy, and thereupon we went out to receive him, honour him and to grant him our portion of the right of Allah the Exalted over us. However, he decided to return, and we feared that his turning back upon the path was due to a message that had come from you expressing your anger against us, and we seek refuge in Allah from His anger and from the anger of His messenger.’ Thereupon Allah revealed this verse.”*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن جَآءَكُمۡ فَاسِقُۢ بِنَبَإٖ فَتَبَيَّنُوٓاْ أَن تُصِيبُواْ قَوۡمَۢا
بِجَهَٰلَةٖ فَتُصۡبِحُواْ عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلۡتُمۡ نَٰدِمِينَ ٦

Believers, if a troublemaker brings you news, check it first, in case you wrong others unwittingly and later regret what you have done [6] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 6)

Again, the summons is directed towards those who have attained to faith. This is the third summons after: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not put yourselves forward in the presence of [what] Allah and His Apostle [may have ordained]…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 1) and after: ‘O you who have attained to faith! Do not raise your voices above the voice of The Prophet…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 2).

In this instance, the verse is as follows: ‘O You who have attained to faith! If any iniquitous person comes to you with a [slanderous] tale, use your discernment…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 6).

We note that the arrangement of these verses in the Quran is such that it did not join all these three matters together in one summons, nor did it employ particles of conjunction to link them together; rather, it specified each matter with a separate, special summons in order to express an exceeding degree of emphasis and importance.

Thus, in the counsel of Luqman to his son, he stated: ‘…“O my dear son! Do not ascribe divine powers to aught beside Allah: for, behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong!”’ (*Luqman:* 13)

He also stated: ‘“O my dear son! Be constant in prayer, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and bear in patience whatever [ill] may befall you: this, behold, is something to set one’s heart upon! [17] “And turn not your cheek away from people in [false] pride, and walk not haughtily on earth: for, behold, Allah does not love anyone who, out of self-conceit, acts in a boastful manner.” [18] “Hence, be modest in your bearing, and lower thy voice: for, behold, the ugliest of all voices is the [loud] voice of donkeys...’[19]’ (*Luqman:* 17-19).

Thus, he specified each matter that was related to an aspect of faith with a distinct summons in order to emphasize its importance, and he joined the acts of the limbs together in one summons, for they all occupy the same level of importance in the Islamic religion.

Therefore, we are able to understand from the repetition of the vocative expression ‘O you who have attained faith’ that He is giving special importance to each summons. Furthermore, in the verse: ‘…If any iniquitous person (fasiq) comes to you with a [slanderous] tale…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 6), the term ‘iniquitous person’ (*fasiq*) is taken from our saying, ‘the dates have gone bad (*fasaqat*)’: in other words, the flesh of the fruit has protruded from its skin. Now when the flesh of fresh dates comes out from its protective skin, this exposes them to harmful insects and diseases.

Similarly, faith envelops the believer and shields him from being harmed by diseases of the heart. For if he becomes corrupt, or in other words, if he violates the bounds of belief and separates himself from it, he is attacked by devastating diseases of the heart. For this reason, it is said about the iniquitous person that he is a perpetrator of a grave sin or unaware of the seriousness of what he is doing.

Thus, if any news such as this reaches you from such an iniquitous person, do not trust it and consider what he has said to be sound; rather: ‘…use your discernment…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 6). In other words, ascertain the veracity and credibility of both the news and those who have believed in it.

Stop and wait until the truth of the matter that you have heard has been distinguished and made clear to you in its full aspect in order that your judgement of matters be in line with the true state of affairs, and do not be taken by haste or fervour such that you fall into the ambit of what is forbidden: ‘…use your discernment, lest you hurt people unwittingly and afterwards be filled with remorse for what you have done.’ (*al-Hujurat:* 6)

Here, The True Lord *Glorified is He* commands us to ascertain the veracity of what we hear because man is of a constantly changing temperament: it may be that he is known to be truthful, yet he lies in this one instance, or conversely, that he is known to be a liar, but tells the truth in this one instance. Thus, ascertaining the credibility of what we hear is a cautionary measure that must be taken, so that the judgement we make about a particular situation, and the manner in which we deal with it afterwards, is objective, and thus, we do not fall into the compass of committing oppression and transgression against others.

Use your discernment to check the veracity of the report of the iniquitous person, for it may be that it is an instance of a matter in which he has disobeyed Allah, for disobedience and defiance of Allah's Commandments is something that comes easily to him. Thus, if you were to affirm what he reports, you may hurt people who have committed no offense or sin'…unwittingly…' (*al-Hujurat:* 6). You may well be ignorant of the reality of the affair concerned, and thus, the one wronged may in fact be in the right, and you may be the one who is committing wrongful aggression, and thereafter, you will be the one who regrets your transgression and your passing by that which is right. You will regret your actions, for by means of them, you have made the one you have harmed and injured someone who has a right to take recourse against you.

Now there is a difference between someone who commits a sin unwittingly, out of ignorance, and someone who does so intentionally, and in accordance with the state of the human soul, committing a sinful offense is an occasion for the possibility of the acceptance of true repentance. I recall one time, when we were in France, that one of our colleagues was nominated to be the envoy to France; he went on to proceed there for the purposes of gaining knowledge alone, and there was no hint of thought in his mind of any other objectives. Along the way there, he stayed over at the house of one of the families, in the manner of strangers and visitors to the land.

At night, the daughter of the family whom he was staying with entered his room. Now perhaps he would have perpetrated a grievous sin with her in such a situation, but this occurred to him without his being aware that such a thing might happen, and nor had he planned for anything like this to take place.

This is in contrast with some other ill-intentioned person who decides to travel to this country: he may go with these evil intentions in mind, and he may even get in touch with someone who can give him the contact information of those who regularly commit such grievous sins.

It is for this reason that The True Lord *Glorified is He* delimits the conditions of a repentance that is accepted by Him, and thus, He states: 'Forgiveness is only incumbent on Allah toward those who do evil in ignorance (and) then turn quickly (in repentance) to Allah. These are they toward whom Allah relents.

Allah is ever Knower, Wise. [17] The forgiveness is not for those who do ill deeds until, when death attends upon one of them, he says: Lo! I repent now; and nor yet for those who die while they are disbelievers. For such We have prepared a painful doom [18] (*an-Nisa':* 17-18)

Now remorse over the sin committed is the first of the phases of true repentance. However, there is another matter here: is the command of ascertaining the truthfulness of the report of an iniquitous person an admonition first and foremost without a preceding cause, or was there an event that occasioned the revelation of the Quran for it in particular? Numerous scholars have said: 'No, there was an occasion for its revelation, and it was the episode of Al-Walid(1) ibn-ʿUqba ibn Abu Muʿit(2), when The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* placed him in charge of raising the funds of the poor-due from the people of Banu Mustaliq.*'*

Thus when he went to them, they came out altogether in order to meet him and welcome him upon learning that he was the envoy of The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. However, he became afraid when they gathered together in this manner, and feared that they would harm him, as he had previously owed them blood money in the pre-Islamic era of Ignorance. So, he fled, returning to The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, they refused to pay the poor-due.' So, The Messenger of Allah looked into the matter to ascertain its veracity, and asked them about it, to which they replied: 'Nay, we came out to meet him rejoicing over his presence, O Messenger of Allah.' If The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had believed the news that he had heard, he would have considered them apostates for their refusal to pay the poor-due, and it is possible that something could have happened whose end result would have been regrettable.

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(1) *Al-Walid ibn ʿUqba ibn Abu Muʿit Abu-Wahb Al-Umawi Al-Qurashi was a governor from amongst the young men of Quraysh, and one of their poets and men renowned for their generosity. He was known for his elegance and his propensity for joking and merriment. He is the brother of ʿUthman ibn-ʿAffan may Allah be pleased with him through his mother. He became Muslim on the day of the Conquest of Mecca. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him sent him as his envoy to collect the poor-due from the people of Banu Mustaliq. ʿUthman may Allah be pleased with him made him governor of Kufa after Saʿd ibn-Abu Waqqas may Allah be pleased with him (in the year 25 of the Hijri calendar), so he left for Kufa and resided there until the year 29 of the Hijri Calendar. He stayed away from the sedition that took place between ʿAli and Muʿawiya may Allah be pleased with them, but he bewailed the murder of ʿUthman may Allah be pleased with him and eulogized him, and spurred Muʿawiya may Allah be pleased with him on to take his revenge. He died in Ar-Raqqa in the year 61 Hijri/280 AD (See "Al-Aʿlam" of Az-Zirikli, (8/122)).*

(2) *The story of Al-Walid ibn ʿUqba Ibn-Abumuʿit with the people of Banu Mustaliq*

It is also related that The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* received word that Maria, mother of the Prophet's son Ibrahim *may Allah be pleased with her*(1) had a paternal cousin that was in the habit of visiting her and entering her residence. This angered him, and so he told ʿAli *may Allah honour him:* 'Take this sword and go to him, and if you find him, kill him.' ʿAli *may Allah honour him* responded: 'O Messenger of Allah, I am at your service. But do you really want me to kill him? Or is it possible that what is actually the case is not like what has been reported?' Look at ʿAli's cautiousness and circumspection concerning the matter. So, when ʿAli *may Allah be pleased with him* went to him, he found him with Maria *may Allah be pleased with her* and was about to kill him with his sword, but the man dashed towards a date palm tree and climbed up so that ʿAli's sword could not reach him. Then, he threw himself on to the ground and opened his legs wide so that ʿAli *may Allah honour him* could witness that there was nothing at all where his private parts should have been. Thus, he desisted from doing anything to him.

When he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and informed him of the news, he responded, 'You have spoken the truth, 'Ali: The absent cannot see what the witness sees.' Thus, we understand from this story that the one who had initially informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of the matter was a troublemaker who wanted to make a scandalous incident out of it and defame Umm Ibrahim.(2)

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(1) *The story of the cousin of Lady Maria, mother of the Prophet's son Ibrahim may Allah be pleased with her*

(2) *This is narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (6922). Al-Haythami mentions it in Majmaʿ Az-Zawa'id, chapter on jealousy and honour (2/225), ascribing it to Al-Bazzar, saying, 'In the chain of narrators of this Hadith is Ibn Ishaq, who is known as mudallis (apt to leave out the direct narrator from whom he heard the Hadith), but he is trustworthy, and so are the other transmitters of this Hadith.' Ad-Diya narrated it too in his Al-Ahadith Al-Mukhtara. Al-Albani graded the chain of narrators of the Hadith, narrated on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased him as good and maintain its origin to be sound (See: As-Silsilat As-Sahiha [1904]).*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ فِيكُمۡ رَسُولَ ٱللَّهِۚ لَوۡ يُطِيعُكُمۡ فِي كَثِيرٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَمۡرِ لَعَنِتُّمۡ
وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡإِيمَٰنَ وَزَيَّنَهُۥ فِي قُلُوبِكُمۡ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيۡكُمُ
ٱلۡكُفۡرَ وَٱلۡفُسُوقَ وَٱلۡعِصۡيَانَۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلرَّٰشِدُونَ ٧

And be aware that it is God's Messenger who is among you: in many matters you would certainly suffer if he were to follow your wishes. God has endeared faith to you and made it beautiful to your hearts; He has made disbelief, mischief, and disobedience hateful to you. It is people like this who are rightly guided [7] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 7)

The discourse here is related to the opposition of the Muslims to the position of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at Hudaybiyya. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: 'And be aware that it is Allah's Messenger who is among you…' (*al-Hujurat:* 7). This is as if Allah *Glorified is He* were telling them to revere and honour the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* among them. This is because he is the Messenger of Allah and nothing is hidden from him, being aided directly by Allah *Glorified is He* Himself, Who informs him of the reality of matters, and thus, his knowledge of affairs is not like the knowledge of others.

In the phrase: '…is among you (*fikum*)…' (*al-Hujurat:* 7) the word (*fikum*) indicates adverbial qualification of place, as one says, 'the water is in the glass,' or 'the money is in the vault.' Now it is known that what is contained inside is more expensive and valuable than the thing containing it. Furthermore, the word 'you,' stated in the verse, represents a receptacle or a vessel for the Messenger of Allah and his Prophetic Guidance. For this reason, some Quran reciters read the following verse differently:(1) 'Indeed, there has come to you

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(1) *Quran reciters that read (anfusikum) with a fatha vowel marking on the letter 'faa' (anfasikum) include: Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him Abu Al-Aliya, Ad-Dahhak, Ibn Muhaysin, and Mahbub on the authority of Abu 'Amr, as related by Ibn Al-Jawzi in his Zad Al-Masir, in commenting on verse 128 of the chapter of at-Tawba. He, then, states regarding this particular mode of recitation, that there are three opinions regarding the meaning of the verse: first, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is*=

[O mankind] a Messenger from among yourselves' (*at-Tawba:* 128). They recite (*anfusikum*) with a *fatha* vowel marking on the Arabic letter 'faa', thus pronouncing it (*anfasikum*) which could be translated literally as 'the most precious of you' or 'the most valuable of you.'

Thus, the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* amongst Muslims is a distinguishing mark for them and a means of safeguarding and protecting them, for he is connected and bound to his Lord. This was known to the disbelievers of Mecca, their leaders and notables, but they were overcome by obduracy and haughtiness, which prevented them from accepting faith.

For this reason, one day, when Abu Sufyan, Al-Harith ibn Hisham, and Thabit Ibn Qays had gathered together at a time when Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* was giving the call to prayer, Thabit said, 'Allah is indeed pleased with my father, for He took his life before he ever had to see such a sight.' In other words, he would have been very upset at seeing Bilal, the black Ethiopian, being the one to give the call to prayer for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. To this, Al-Harith said, 'could not the Messenger of Allah find anyone other than this black crow to give the call to prayer?!' Abu Sufyan replied, 'By Allah, I would very much like to say what you have in mind, just as you have stated, but I fear that Allah will inform His Prophet of what I say.'(1)

Therefore, those people were aware of the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but their propensity for violent disputation, obdurate opposition, and ostentation prevented them from accepting the truth.

It is also known that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave his two daughters Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum *Allah be pleased with them* in marriage to two of Abu Lahab's sons before his mission. Thus, when hostilities between Abu Lahab and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* intensified, Abu Lahab forced his two sons to divorce them.

= *the best of you in character and manners; second, he is the most noble of you in lineage; third, he is the most obedient to Allah Glorified is He.*

(1) *This is narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his tafsir, on the authority of Ibn Abbas, and a similar narration from Muqatil is narrated in tafsir of Al-Baghawi (7/347), in Zad Al-Masir (5/405) by Ibn Al-Jawzi, and in Tafsir of Al-Khazin (5/467).*

Then, one day, one of the two sons encountered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the road, and seeing him, spat at him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* realized what he had done and prayed against him and said, ‘May one of the dogs of Allah devour you!’(1) News of this prayer reached Abu Lahab, who then began to fear for his son. Thus, when he departed with his trade caravan for Syria, he gathered together its men and said to them, ‘If you strike camp late at night’. In other words, retire for the night – ‘then place my son so-and-so between you, for I fear for him concerning Muhammad’s prayer against him.’

Thus, he was aware that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truthful and that his prayers would surely be answered. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what happened: his men placed Abu Lahab’s son amongst them when they went to sleep, but Allah *Glorified is He* set upon him a lion that actually seized him from amongst them.

Thus, the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was known to these people and their very tongues would slip and articulate their belief in his truthfulness, even against their will. From amongst such slips of the tongue is the following inadvertent reference to him, where they are mentioned saying: '…"Do not spend anything on those who are with Allah's Messenger…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7).

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(1) *This is related to an incident where, when Allah Glorified is He revealed: ‘Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab, and doomed is he!’ (al-Masad: 1)*
Abu Lahab said to his two sons ‘Utba and ‘Utayba, ‘My life and your two lives are forfeit unless you divorce Muhammad’s two daughters.’ So ‘Utayba divorced Umm Kulthum Allah be pleased with her and came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when he separated from her and said, ‘I have disbelieved in your religion and left your daughter; you do not love me, nor do I love you.’ Then he violently grabbed hold of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and tore his robe. To this, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘As for myself, I will ask Allah to set one of His dogs upon you.’ [See: Dalai’l An-Nubuwwa of Al-Bayhaqi (3/338-339)]. Al-Haythami relates this as well in his Majm’a Az-Zawa’id (6/19) and ascribes it to At-Tabarani classifying it as ‘mursal’ (literally: “hurried” – a classification that is assigned to Hadith where the narrator is from the generation after the first generation of Companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him but narrates the Hadith without any intermediary, directly from Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him omitting to mention the specific Companion from whom he heard the Hadith) and states, ‘Within the chain of trasmitters of this Hadith is Zuhayr ibn Al-‘Ala, who is considered a weak narrator.’ Al-Hakim also narrated this narration in his Mustadrak (2/539) on the authority of Abu ‘Aqrab and graded it as authentic. However, Ibn Hajar graded it as good in his Fath Al-Bari (4/39).

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* describes them saying: 'and in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth…' (*an-Naml:* 14). There is also His statement *Glorified is He*: '…in many matters you would certainly suffer if he were to follow your wishes…' (*al-Hujurat:* 7).

An example of this is what happened amongst you at Hudaybiyya, for had he followed you in not concluding a treaty with the disbelievers, '…you would certainly suffer…' (*al-Hujurat:* 7). You would have been stricken by affliction, hardship, and errant misdeeds. Likewise is His statement *Glorified is He*: '…heavily weighs upon him [the thought] that you might suffer [in the life to come]…' (*at-Tawba:* 128). It weighs upon him heavily to see you in hardship for he is full of compassion and mercy towards the believers. If he sees you committing sin, he prays for your forgiveness, and if he sees you upon obedience to Allah, he praises Him. This is so even after he passes away from this earthly life. '…Allah has endeared faith to you and made it beautiful to your hearts; He has made disbelief, mischief, and disobedience hateful to you…' (*al-Hujurat:* 7).

The word *laken* (but) in the verse is a disjunctive expressing emendation to what has preceded; in other words, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not follow you concerning the position you had taken in planning to enter Mecca and perform the Lesser Pilgrimage. However, Allah *Glorified is He* endeared faith to you, and made it beautiful in your hearts, so you turned back from your position and went along with the opinion of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and did not make a decision that was different from his command, but rather accepted what he had decided.

This is the result of Allah's guidance to you, endearing faith to you, and making it beautiful in your hearts. For if it were not the case, you would have been insubordinate and left aside what he had commanded, and you would have been destroyed because of your disobedience to him. Furthermore, at the same time: '…He has made disbelief, mischief, and disobedience hateful to you…' (*al-Hujurat:* 7). This is from the greatest gifts Allah has bestowed upon you.

'…It is people like this…' (*al-Hujurat:* 7). In other words, those who have been described by these attributes and thus have come to love faith and detest disbelief, mischief, and disobedience, it is those people: '…who are rightly guided (rashidun)' (*al-Hujurat:* 7). The word *rashidun* (rightly guided), the plural of *rashid* refers to someone that holds fast to the way of truth and guidance and does not swerve from it at all. It is from this idea that we use theword (*tarshid*) which is making something follow the right course, in the expression in Arabic, 'sagacious management (*tarshid*) of expenses and consumption': in other words, we allot just the right amount of funds for each purpose in the right manner.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَضۡلٗا مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَنِعۡمَةٗۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٞ ﴿٨﴾

Through God's favour and blessing: God is all knowing and all wise [8] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 8)

'Favour and blessing' here means superfluous Abundance. What is intended here is that Allah *Glorified is He* granted them super Abundance of His blessings and His munificence.

Some people once said to one of the pious (concerning a dispute they were having): 'Judge between us.' The man responded, 'With justice or what is better than justice?' They replied, 'Is there anything better than justice?' He responded, 'What is better than justice is favour; justice is that you take back what is rightfully due to you, but favour is that you forgot what is due to you out of complaisance and favour for the other.'

Similarly, the blessings of Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon us are from the realm of his bounty and favour. This is because the responsibilities with which Allah *Glorified is He* has entrusted us are all for our benefit and work in our favour, and do not benefit Allah *Glorified is He* one iota, being the One Free of all needs from His creation. Acts of obedience do not benefit Him, nor do acts of disobedience harm Him in any way. He *Glorified is He* by His Attributes of Perfection, created us. Thus, blessings are not equivalent recompense for obedience: rather, they are purely bounteous grace from Allah *Glorified is He*.

However, in the Quranic verse: '…verily, they who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond all reckoning' (*az-Zumar:* 10), Allah *Glorified is He* calls it 'reward' in order that they may know their acts of worship to have been accepted, and that they will be rewarded with a full and the best reward.

Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…Allah is All Knowing and All-Wise.' (*al-Hujurat:* 8) He is All Knowing, and His Knowledge is all-encompassing: nothing at all of one's affairs is hidden from Him, and what is secret is open and public for Him: '[for] He is aware of the [most] stealthy glance, and of all that the hearts would conceal.' (*Ghafir:* 19) Thus, beware of any hypocrisy, ostentation, vanity, or haughtiness polluting your actions. Allah *Glorified is He* as previously stated, wants hearts that are sincere, not merely actions of the limbs. Then, furthermore, He *Glorified is He* is: '…All-Wise.' (*al-Hujurat:* 8) He *Glorified is He* manages the affairs of His dominion in accordance with His wisdom. Furthermore, wisdom entails placing everything in its proper place.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِن طَآئِفَتَانِ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ٱقۡتَتَلُواْ فَأَصۡلِحُواْ بَيۡنَهُمَاۖ فَإِنۢ بَغَتۡ
إِحۡدَىٰهُمَا عَلَى ٱلۡأُخۡرَىٰ فَقَٰتِلُواْ ٱلَّتِي تَبۡغِي حَتَّىٰ تَفِيٓءَ إِلَىٰٓ أَمۡرِ ٱللَّهِۚ فَإِن
فَآءَتۡ فَأَصۡلِحُواْ بَيۡنَهُمَا بِٱلۡعَدۡلِ وَأَقۡسِطُوٓاْۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلۡمُقۡسِطِينَ ٩

If two groups of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them; if one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other, fight the oppressors until they submit to God's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them: God loves those who are even-handed [9] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 9)

The word *ta'ifatan* 'two groups of the believers' is the dual form of *ta'ifa* 'group' or 'party' which is a singular noun even if it indicates a plural meaning in reality such as the word *qawm* 'nation.' The plural of *ta'ifa* (party) is *tawa'if* (parties). Now this verse provides rulings related to warfare and the need for reconciliation and truce between the hostile parties of the believers until there is no more warfare.

It can be observed in the verse: '…two groups of the believers (*ta'ifatan*)…' (*al-Hujurat:* 9) that the word *ta'ifatan* is in the dual. By analogy, however, it would seem more appropriate to say, therefore, '(the two parties) fight' (*iqtatalata*), thereby using the dual form of the verb as well; however, the Quran employs the plural, stating: '…fight *(iqtatalu)*…' (al-Hujurat: 9). Why is this so? Some of the Quranic commentators stated that this is because a party, as an organized group, can be represented by a single person; i.e. the leader of that party. Nonetheless, if fighting takes place, the various individuals of both groups all face each other in battle, and thus the fighting takes place amongst all of the individuals involved.

This is proven by the fact that when Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of the need for a treaty and reconciliation, He returns to the usage of the dual in reference to the belligerent groups and states: '…you [believers] should try to reconcile them (*baynahuma*)…' (*al-Hujurat:* 9). This is because the council that concludes the peace treaty need not have all the individuals of the two parties attend; rather, each party can have one person to represent it in order to conclude the treaty.

If '…one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other…' (*al-Hujurat:* 9)! The meaning here is, 'after you have concluded the treaty and one of the sides goes on acting wrongfully against the other,' or in other words, has violated and crossed the limits in an open show of hostility, showing no respect to the treaty: '…fight the oppressors until they submit to Allah's command…' (*al-Hujurat:* 9). That is to say, fight them in order to prevent and deter them from transgression: '…until they submit to Allah's Command…' (*al-Hujurat:* 9), i.e. return to what is true and just.

In this manner, there are three parties: two parties that are at war with each other and a third party seeking to bring about reconciliation. This is so because the community of believers in its totality is entrusted with carrying out the duty of judging between two antagonistic groups, has been qualified for this purpose with the qualities of justice, non-partisanship, and the absence of desires in the process of negotiating a settlement. However, if these conditions are not present in such judgement, then no viable treaty will be concluded; rather, matters will become further and further complicated and aggravated.

It is enough of an indication of low standing that the party that is driven by its own interests and partisanship in judging between two sides drops in the awrongly and in falsehood loathes the adjudicating party. It is for this reason that the saying goes of such adjudicating groups, with respect to the party in whose favour judgement is passed in falsehood, ‘the heads are held high in their dispute by its testimony, yet the feet trample down upon its honour.’

The Quranic verse: ‘…then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9) indicates that after the fighting has taken place and the transgressing party has returned upon what is right, and then all of you should return to conciliation. The intended meaning is: do not leave the party that returns upon the truth without settling the affairs between the two sides. It is true that the transgressing party has returned to what is right, but that does not mean lack of dispute and dissension, and so there must be reconciliation until there is no chance of another war sprouting, in order to uproot dispute that burns inside in the hearts of the two parties inciting them into war once again.

In this way, war is first of all prevented from taking place; rights taken unduly from the oppressed party are turned to the rightful owner; and the tension and sources of dispute leading to war are defused.

Furthermore, in the verse ‘…make a just and even-handed reconciliation…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9), the word *aqsatu* (be just and equitable) is derived from the verb *aqsata* (to deal equitably), whose derivatives indicates dealing equitably with others.

Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘…Allah loves those who are even-handed’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9), i.e. He loves those who deal justly with each other.

Another word is *qasata* which means ‘to commit an outrage, to wrong, or to oppress.’ Derivatives of the verb *qasata* include *yaqsitu*– he wrongs someone, and thus, he is *qasit* (a wrongdoer and oppressor). Related to this is the Quranic verse: ‘but as for those who abandon themselves to wrongdoing (*al-qasitun*) – they are indeed but fuel for [the fires of] hell!’ (*al-Jinn:* 15)

Thus, the additional letter *hamza* in the beginning of the term *aqsata* ‘to deal equitably,’ when added to the trilateral root of *qasata* ‘to wrong or oppress,’ is called *hamzat al-izala* ‘the *hamza* that divests the term of its original meaning,’ i.e., it divests the word of the denotation of wrongdoing and oppression.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ إِخۡوَةٞ فَأَصۡلِحُواْ بَيۡنَ أَخَوَيۡكُمۡۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُرۡحَمُونَ ١٠

The believers are brothers, so make peace
between your two brothers and be mindful of
God, so that you may be given mercy [10]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 10)

Now, this verse has a specific occasion for its revelation. In the battle of Hunayn, the believers disagreed with each other upon a matter, and it went too far such that a minor quarrel took place amongst the fools of the group, and started using light objects as weapons in their dispute, such as sticks, date-palm leaves, and stripped palm branches. Before it reached a true state of civil war, the matter reached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said, ‘Make reconciliation between your two brothers.’(1)

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him narrated, ‘I said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him “Shall you go to’ Abdullah ibn Ubayy?” So, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him set off towards him, and rode upon a donkey, whereas the Muslims set off on foot, upon some marshy ground. Approaching him, he said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him “Get away from me, for by Allah, the stench of your donkey offends me.” One of the men from the Ansar responded, “The donkey of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him certainly has a better smell than you do.” To this, one of the ‘Abdullah’s people got angry and all people in support of both sides became angry at each other as well. Thereupon, some of them started striking each other with stripped palm branches, with their hands, and with their sandals. It was then narrated that Allah Glorified is He revealed concerning them: ‘If two groups of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them…’ (al-Hujurat: 9)”. This was narrated by Al-Wahidi; An-Naysaburi in his Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 223), who ascribed it to Al-Bukhari and Muslim, both on the authority of Al-Mutamir ibn Sulaiman.*

This is because the believers are brothers in terms of their lineage back to Adam *peace be upon him* and brothers in terms of faith, while the kinship of lineage is antecedent to the kinship of faith, the latter being established after the former. Thus, this means that the disbeliever has the right of brotherhood by lineage, even if he has no rights in terms of brotherhood by faith. For this reason, kinship by lineage is called 'brotherhood,' and with regards to faith, it is stated: '…[and they shall rest] as brethren, facing one another [in love] upon thrones of happiness.' (*al-Hijr:* 47)

Accordingly, true kinship bonds of brotherhood are made complete and integrally whole when people become brothers in faith. It is related (1) that the chamberlain of Mu'awiya entered his presence and said, 'O Commander of the Faithful, there is a man at the door asking for permission to enter, claiming that he is your brother.' To this, Mu'awiya laughed and said, you have served me for so many years, and you do not even know who my brothers are!' The chamberlain responded, saying, 'That is how he introduced himself to me.' Mu'awiya said, 'Bring him inside.' So when the man entered, Mu'awiya asked him, 'Which of my brothers are you?' The man responded, 'I am your brother by Adam.' Mu'awiya laughed and replied, 'If kinship bonds were ever to be broken, by Allah, I would most certainly be the first to restore them.' He then fulfilled the request of the man.(2)

The term 'brethren' here brings the hearts closer together, and removes any sense of class pride or zealous partisanship that might exist in the hearts of believers. For this reason, we note the Quranic mode of expression, even when it comes to the issue of retribution for murder, Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…And for him who is payment to him in kindness forgiven somewhat by his (injured) brother, prosecution according to usage and …' (*al-Baqara:* 178). This is to remind us that the criminal is still his brother despite whatever enmity and hatred existing between them. Allah softens the hearts of believers, in the desire to maintain the welfare of the Muslim polity. Regarding the status of brotherhood in human relations, some of the wise have noted in their aphorisms: 'It may be that your brother is one that your mother did not give birth to.'

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(1) *The story of the man who claimed to be Muawiya's brother*

(2) *Al-Yusi narrates in his Al-Muhadarat fi Al-Adab wa Al-Lugha that someone came to Mu'awiya and said to him, 'I ask you by the shared bonds of kinship between you and me, to grant me my request.' He said, 'Are you of the line of 'Abd Manaf?' to which he replied, 'No.' He said, 'Are you one of the Arabs?' to which he replied, 'No.' He said, 'Then which bonds of kinship exist between us?' to which he replied, 'The bonds of kinship from Adam.' Thereupon, Mu'awiya said, 'If there were to be any bonds of kinship that were uprooted, I would most certainly be the first to restore them.' He then granted the man his request. A similar narration is related by Al-Abshihi in his Al-Mustatraf fi Kulli Fann Mustazhraf.*

Some have even noted that when someone stumbles in the street and some mishap befalls him, in asking for assistance, he calls out, 'My brother!' – as if he were appealing for help from his own brother, or in other words, a brother that is close to him, who can assist him in such circumstances.

The Quranic verse: '…and be mindful of God so that you may be given mercy' (*al-Hujurat:* 10) means, 'Fear Allah in executing your duties of making peace between the two sides.' Further, what is it from which mercy is given, as stated in the Quranic verse: '…so that you may be given mercy' (*al-Hujurat:* 10)?

The meaning here is, 'that you may be given mercy from the continuance of hostilities between the believers.' This indicates the importance of putting an end to all differences before they get out of control and go on the rampage through the Muslim community. Should it happen, then great harm would afflict all of the believers: starting with the two disputing parties, and then it extends to the entire community until you see every single group outside of the two taking sides as well and exacerbating the conflict. Therefore, it is in the best interests of the society as a whole to put an end to all hostilities and to avoid bloodshed between the believers.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَكُونُوا۟ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَآءٌ
مِّن نِّسَآءٍ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ ۖ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا۟ بِٱلْأَلْقَٰبِ ۖ
بِئْسَ ٱلِٱسْمُ ٱلْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ ٱلْإِيمَٰنِ ۚ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Believers, no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another. How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith! Those who do not repent of this behaviour are evildoers [11] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 11)

In this verse, it can be noted that prohibition is directed towards men as a whole firstly, then towards women as a whole, and specifies an order of prohibition for each. This is because the word *qawm* ‘group of men’ in Arabic is not employed except in reference to men, being the ones responsible for maintaining their families. As for women, they are not responsible for anything except the maintenance of the house, as the poet puts it:

I know not, nor could I possibly know,
Is the people of Hisn, qawm (men) or women?

Therefore, the tword *qawm* ‘group of men’ is not used for women. Furthermore, in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘Men are in charge of women…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 34).

Some people incorrectly assume that the word *qawwamun* ‘in charge of’ denotes forcible coercion and beating – never; rather, men are the protectors and maintainers of women – in other words, they attend to their care and carry out what is necessary to serve their needs.

For this reason, we term the woman, ‘lady of the house,’ as if to say that the man is the servant and caretaker for her. Furthermore, we say, ‘so-and-so is *qaaim* [(undertaking) which is derived from the same stem word as *qawwamun*] this affair;’ in other words, he is taking upon himself work that involves difficulty and hardship.

In the story of Adam *peace be upon him* when Allah *Glorified is He* placed him in paradise to reside therein with his wife, there took place the incident where Adam *peace be upon him* disobeyed the command of Allah, and thus Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and thereupon We said: “O Adam! Indeed, this is a foe to you and your wife: so let him not drive the two of you out of this garden and render you unhappy.”’ (*Ta Ha:* 117)

This is an address to Adam *peace be upon him* and Eve. However, following the general rule of grammatical consistency, it would seem proper to state, ‘the two of you shall fall into distress’ (*fatashqiya*), in the dual form of the verb. However, Allah *Glorified is He* employs the singular (*fatashqa*) stating, ‘…and render you unhappy (*fatashqa*).’ (*Ta Ha:* 117)

In other words, Adam *peace be upon him* alone will fall into distress because the duty of exertion, undergoing hardship and bearing the responsibility of maintaining the family lies upon the man alone. As for the woman, her responsibility is the management of the home in which she plays an important role indeed, one that fills up every moment of her life; but what are we to do today when women wish to suffer distress with the men?

Moreover, the prohibition against mockery in this verse has two causal incidents behind it, one related to men and another related to women. It is narrated(1) that Thabit ibn Qays(2) entered upon the gathering of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and found that the first row was full. Hard of hearing, Thabit wanted to sit in that first row. Hence, he approached one of the weaker members in the gathering and told him to move over, but the man did not move aside. Thereupon, he said to him, ‘Who are you?’ The man replied, 'So-and-so.' He said, 'Son of that woman so-and-so?' This woman was known to have a bad reputation amongst people. Upon hearing that, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked, 'Who said, 'Son of that woman so-and-so?' He replied, 'I did.' At that point, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'Look around our gathering,' which the man did. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'What have you seen?' He replied, 'I have seen some black people, some white people, and some red people.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, 'The best of you are the ones who are most deeply mindful of Allah.'(1)

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(1) *The story of Thabit ibn Qays with the assembly of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.*

(2) *Thabit ibn Qays ibn Shammas Al-Khazraji Al-Ansari Allah be pleased with him was a Companion and preacher of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. He took part in Uhud and many of the other campaigns thereafter. It was narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘What an excellent man Thabit is!’ Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him visited him, once, in an ailing state, and said, ‘Remove his ailment, Sustainer of men, from Thabit ibn Qays.’ He was killed in the battle of Al-Yamama during the caliphate of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him in the year 12 AH/ 633 C.E. See Al-‘Alam by Az-Zirikli (2/98).*

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not forget about the man who did not move aside to make more space when asked to do so. In this regard, the following verse was revealed: '…When you are told to make room for one another in assemblies, do make room: [and in return,] Allah will make room for you [in His grace]…' (*al-Mujadala:* 11).

It is also narrated (2) that Umm Salama *Allah be pleased with her* was short in stature, and at one point was stricken with pain in her leg. To treat it, she bound it with a piece of cloth, the remainder of which dangled and reached the ground, and was dragged along behind her. 'Aisha and Hafsa *Allah be pleased with them* saw her in this condition, and one of them said to the other, 'She walks with a tail like the tail of a dog.' This reached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then the verse was revealed.(1)

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentions this incident in his commentary of the verse and states, 'The verse was revealed concerning Thabit ibn Qays and his statement to the man who did not move aside for him when he said, "the son of that woman So-and-so," upon which the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, "Who was the one mentioning that woman So-and-so?" Thabit replied, "I was, O Messenger of Allah." Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, "Take a look upon the faces of the people in our gathering," which he did. Then he said, "What did you see?" to which he replied, "I saw some white people, some black people, and some red people." He responded, "You are not to give preference to anyone except in respect of their level of piety." Then this verse was revealed concerning Thabit ibn Qays.' Al-Baghawi mentions this narration in his tafsir (7/343), in which he states that Thabit ibn Qays said, 'Who is this?' to which a man replied, 'I am So-and-so.' So Thabit said, 'The son of So-and-so?' mentioning a mother whom he used to be reproached and censured for her behaviour during the Pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance.*

(2) *The story of 'Aisha and Hafsa Allah be pleased with them with Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her while she was bandaging her wound*

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* will declare on the Day of Judgement: 'I established lineage, and you established lineage; I established that 'The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most deeply mindful of Him,' but you refused and said, 'The most noble of us is so-and-so, the son of so-and-so.' So today – (i.e. the Day of Judgement) – I uphold my establishment of lineage and put aside the lines of kinship that you established for yourselves.'(2)

A lame man once entered the presence of one of the others, who began looking at him scornfully due to his lameness. The lame man understood his intent, and said to him, 'Do you take offence at what is created, or at the Fashioner of creation?' The other man was rendered speechless and dumbfounded, until he repented of the behaviour towards the lame man, and stated, 'By Allah, I would have loved to have been in his place, and for him to have been in mine.'

Allah *Glorified is He* forbids us from mocking each other only because He wishes for equality amongst all of His creation. All creation belongs to Allah, and is His specially fashioned work. All people are His slaves, none of whom is a son of Him, and nor is there any relationship of kin with Him; so why, then, do we mock each other? Beware of mocking people, whatever their particular lack may be compared to yourself. If you see a fault in someone's religion or behaviour, it is incumbent upon you to try to rectify him and set right his affair as best as possible.

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(1) *This is narrated by Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi in his Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 224), where he states, 'The verse was revealed concerning two women from amongst the wives of The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him who were ridiculing Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her. They did this because she had bound her waist with a white garment, letting the end of it hang down and dragging it along behind her. So 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her said to Hafsa Allah be pleased with her "Look at what she drags behind her, as if it were the tongue of a dog." This was mockery of Umm Salama Allah be pleased with her.'*

(2) *This is narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (3684, 3685), and by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu'jam As-Saghir (643), and a similar narration is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab Al-Iman (4922), on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him who narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Surely, Allah Glorified is He will say on the Day of Judgment, "I commanded you, but you neglected what I had covenanted with you, and exalted your own lineages above those of others. So today, I raise My lineage, and put aside the lines of lineage you established for yourselves. Where are the pious? Where are the pious? Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him."' Al-Hakim states, 'This Hadith has some questionable issues in its chain of narrators and in its text, and the two authorities of Hadith (Al-Bukhari and Muslim) did not relate it.'*

If the fault is one of bodily form, which human beings have no say in whatsoever, you must show respect and proper manners with The Creator. By Allah, if you were to know what He has prepared of reward for the physically stricken – that is to say, the handicapped – you would all wish to be similarly stricken with such defects. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has no son, but rather, has distributed the causes of His favour upon all of His servants. If He takes a favour away from one of them, He replaces it with something else much better.

Thus, mockery and ridicule only appear in a person who prides himself in some quality lacked in the mocked one, just as a rich person mocks a poor, or a strong person mocks a weak, or a person of sound body or intellect mocks a physically or mentally handicapped. Furthermore, this mode of behaviour is the result of heedlessness of the criteria of superiority between all of creation which is piety and fear of Allah.

As previously stated, if you contemplate the entirety of the cosmos, you will find a principle of just balance at work within it. That is to say, for every human being, the entirety of the favours placed in him or in her is equal to the entirety of favours bestowed upon anyone else. This is because the Creator *Glorified is He* has distributed His bounty upon His slaves so that everyone gets his share in full but in a particular facility; for instance, one is endowed with intelligence, whereas another is gifted with health; but in the end, all people are granted favours equally.

This is so because Allah *Glorified is He* does not want human beings to be identical; rather, they should be dissimilar to each other in terms of the gifts bestowed upon them. In this way, the activity of everyday life runs smoothly and becomes complete and integral, in addition to establishing relations between people of different classes to serve their mutual needs; thus even those of the highest ranks cannot do without the services of the sewage worker.

Thus is His statement *Glorified is He*: '…and has raised some of you by degrees above others…' (*al-An'am:* 165). This means that everyone one of us is above someone else in some human quality or attribute and is superseded in something else. You are aware that Beethoven, the famous musician, was deaf, and that Tamerlane, the man who laid waste to the world with his conquests, was lame.

Accordingly, one should not mock others whatsoever, nor should one bear any malice towards anyone, deeming him inferior in some respects. All people are equal in the balance of Allah *Glorified is He*; thereby giving us a lesson and a reminder that He *Glorified is He* has no son, and neither does He have any partner.

Hence, the Jinn showed better understanding where they are mentioned saying: 'for [we know] that sublimely exalted is our Sustainer's majesty: no consort has He ever taken to Himself, nor a son!' (*al-Jinn:* 3)

For all of us are dependants on Allah. Further, this equal standing is of such importance that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commands us to treat our children equally, even in the simplest matters such as giving a kiss to a child.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructs us in how we should behave when experiencing any incident of mockery or derision, and how to respond to it. It is narrated that the occasion of revelation of this verse was the incident of Safiyya *Allah be pleased with her* the daughter of Huyayy ibn Akhtab, the leader of the tribe of Banu Mustaliq. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* fought them, she was among the prisoners taken captive. To honour her, being the daughter of their king, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* married her. As a result, the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* became jealous of her, and jealousy, as they say, is the outbursts of one's love. Furthermore, 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was the most jealous of all the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and so she addressed Safiyya *Allah be pleased with her* as 'O Jewess, daughter of the Jews!' So Safiyya went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* weeping and told him what 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* had said, upon which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* laughed, for he knew of 'Aisha's jealousy.

For this reason, he did not censure ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her*, but rendered Safiyya *Allah be pleased with her* happy and put her mind at ease saying to her ‘If she ever says it again, then say to her, ‘But my father is Harun (Aaron), my uncle is Musa (Moses), and my husband is Muhammad.’(1)

Notice how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* handled this situation, enhancing the prestige of Safiyya *Allah be pleased with her* the offspring of Messengers and Prophets, and above all the wife of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *peace and blessings be upon him* responded in a manner that would leave anybody dumbfounded which would never have occurred to anyone. It is no surprise, however, since Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was given the faculty of articulating the most eloquent of expressions.(2)

A similar incident occurred between ‘Aisha and Fatima Az-Zahra’, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* used to be jealous of Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* especially that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to praise her in various situations. Once, she said to him, ‘What is it that impresses you about an old woman with grey-streaked hair and red-tinted lips, when Allah has replaced her with a better wife?’ How did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* respond? He said to her, ‘No, by Allah, I was not replaced with a better wife, for she believed in me when all others disbelieved; confirmed the truth of my Message when others denied it; supported me with her wealth when others prevented me; Allah *Glorified is He* granted me children by her while depriving me of children from other women.'(1)

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(1) *It is narrated by Al-Qurtubi in his commentary on the verse, on the authority of Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him that Safiyya Bint Huyayy ibn Akhtab came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, the women censure me, saying scornfully, “O Jewess, daughter of the Jews!”’ Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him responded, ‘Why did you not reply by saying, “Surely, my father is Aaron, my uncle is Moses, and my husband is Muhammad?”’ Afterwards, Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse. A similar narration is narrated in Tafsir Al-Bahr Al-Muhit (10/111) and in Zad Al-Masir (5/401) by Ibn Al-Jawzi.*

(2) *This is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6496) on the authority of Abu Hurayra, who said, ‘I heard Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saying, “I was sent with the concise, yet comprehensive word.’ A similar narration is narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (812, 814) and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (1474), who graded the Hadith as good and sound.*

Afterwards, she met Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* and said to her, 'Do not be deluded by the praise of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for your mother; for she had been previously married before he married her unlike me who was a virgin.' Upon hearing it, Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* complained to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who responded, 'If she ever says it again, then say to her, 'But my mother married Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was a virgin, and you married him as a man married previously.'(2)

It may be wondered as to how could such incidents occur in the house of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? In response, we maintain that this jealousy, in addition to being a sign of love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* indicates that 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* who married Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the age of nine, felt jealous of him, despite his much older age. This signifies that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not someone who did not have active marital relations with his wives.

In the Quranic verse: '…do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11). This verse conveys another prohibition of a different blameworthy character trait that does not befit the people of faith, which is the trait of defaming others and speaking ill of them.

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(1) *This is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (23719) and At-Tabarani in his Al-Mua'jam Al-Kabir (18556) on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her who related that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to praise Khadija Allah be pleased with her in the best manner whenever he mentioned her. 'Aisha said, 'So one day, I became jealous and said, "Why do you keep mentioning her, the woman of red-tinted lips, when Allah Glorified is He has replaced you with a better wife?"'*

(2) *This is indicated by Al-Alusi in his Ruh Al-Ma'ani, in his commentary on the verse: '[O wives of The Prophet!] Were he to divorce [any of] you, his Sustainer might well give him in your place spouses better than you – women who surrender themselves to Allah, who truly believe, devoutly obey His will, turn [toHim] in repentance [whenever they have sinned], worship [Him alone], and go on and on [seeking His goodly acceptance] – be they women previously married or virgins.' (at-Tahrim: 5)*

Contemplate here the subtlety of the Quranic expression in the verse: '…do not speak ill of one another (talmizu anfusakum)…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

The expression (talmizu anfusakum) literally means 'speak ill of yourselves.' Now a human being does not speak ill of oneself, but rather, he speaks ill of others. However, The Quran regards others as oneself and since one avoids speaking ill of oneself, such should be the case with others. Furthermore, speaking ill of others encourages them to do the same, just as the poet puts it:

Your tongue – do not let it recall the faults of others
For you are replete with faults, and others have tongues as well;
And your eye – should an evil trait be revealed to it
Then guard it well and say, 'O eye, others have eyes as well;

In the same way, the word *anfusakum* (yourselves) is used in the following verse when others are intended: '…But whenever you enter [any of these] houses, greet one another (anfusakum) with a blessed, goodly greeting…' (*an-Nur:* 61).

Literally, *(anfusakum)* means to send greetings of peace 'upon yourselves.' This is because when you give greetings of peace upon other people, they respond with the same greetings, and thus it is as if you have given greetings of peace to oneself.

In the Quranic verse: '…do not use offensive nicknames for one another…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11), there is another prohibition, against insulting one another using offensive nicknames. In other words, none of the believers should call his brother by a name that he detests. The word (*tanabudh*) is derived from the verb *nabadha* 'to find fault with something', which means to remove something and leave it aside. Likewise, when you call somebody by a nickname that he detests, it is as if to remove him from your presence, widening the breach between him and you.

Names in Arabic fall under three categories: *Alam* (a proper name), *Laqab* (a nickname), and *kunya* (surname). *Alam* (proper name) refers to the name designating the specifically meant or named such that it becomes known with it, such as the name 'Muhammad.' *Laqab* (nickname), on the other hand, is a description used to indicate praise or blame, such as As-Siddiq 'The Truly Honest,' or when calling a weak person 'So-and-so *Al-Batta* (the Duck).' As for *kunya* (surname), it is the word introduced with 'Father of' (*Abu*) or 'Mother of' *(Umm*), such as 'Abu Bakr' or *'Umm al-Muminin'* 'Mother of the Believers.'

It is not permissible to call out to a person by a detestable word that he does not like to be called by. An example of this is 'Aisha's calling to Safiyya*,* 'O Jewess.'(1) Furthermore, using offensive nicknames sows the seeds of hatred and malice and stirs up one's natural impulses of anger against others. Why not call one by the names he loves instead, so as to bring him closer to you?

Some jurists argue that if someone commits a sin and then repents, one should not remind or censure him for it, otherwise it would be considered a slanderous act, apart from the fact that one would thereby be assisting Satan against him. For instance, when someone repents of drinking wine, we should not then call him, 'winebibber,' or someone else repenting of gambling; we should not call him 'ludomaniac' and so on. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states thereafter: '…How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

In other words, 'What an evil thing it is to remind your brother of a past that he wishes to forget, and how ugly it is to censure him after he has repented, it is utterly ugly to commit such bad actions after attaining to faith.' '…Those who do not repent of this behaviour…' (*al-Hujurat:* 11), i.e., those who do not repent from insulting others with offensive nicknames: '…are evildoers.' (*al-Hujurat:* 11).

Surely, they are evildoers who wrong their own souls, as a result of neglecting this prohibition, and transgress the rights of others when they call them by such detested epithets. After all, it is the right of the one who has repented not to be reminded of his fault, and not to be censured and blamed for it.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) Translator's note: Clearly, using offensive nicknames should be seen in the wider context of the situation, whereby 'Aisha was effectively giving voice to her jealousy – for which she was reprimanded - and love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the honour that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accorded to both Safiyya *Allah be pleased with her* and her ancestors, the Jews, as a whole, as noted by the Sheikh previously.

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱجْتَنِبُوا۟ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ ٱلظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ ٱلظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ ۖ وَلَا
تَجَسَّسُوا۟ وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا ۚ أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ
أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

Believers, avoid making too many assumptions – some assumptions are sinful – and do not spy on one another or speak ill of people behind their backs: would any of you like to eat the flesh of your dead brother? No, you would hate it. So be mindful of God: God is ever relenting, most merciful [12]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* commands us here to avoid most suspicions that we harbour of one another. Suspicion is a notion that occurs to the mind, and is of two types: having a reasonable suspicion of something plausible and worth taking precautions against, and an unwarranted suspicion of something evil or wrong. As for a reasonable suspicion that leads to avoiding harm, there is nothing wrong or sinful with it; in fact, it is required by the Divine Law, as we shall see. What is forbidden, however, is the unwarranted suspicion of evil that leads to corruption in human relations, which in turn results in a punishment.

For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* instructs us to avoid any kind of suspicion of evil. Once He *peace and blessings be upon him* was in a state of *'itikaf* (staying in the mosque), and Safiyya *Allah be pleased with her* who was fully veiled, came to him asking for something, so he came out to see her. Abu Bakr and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them*, saw the two of them, and they went away, fearing that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would see them while he was in this situation. However, he called out to them and said, ‘Take it easy!’ In other words, he meant, ‘Stop, for it is Safiyya.’ They knew what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* intended, and said to him, ‘You are far away from any suspicion, O Messenger of Allah!’ He replied, ‘Indeed, Satan flows through the son of Adam as does his blood.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim... Al-Bukhari narrates it in his Sahih (1897, 1898, 3039, 6636), and Muslim in his Sahih (4040, 4041) on the authority of Safiyya Allah be pleased with her daughter of Huyayy ibn Akhtab, and one of the Mothers of the Believers.*

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directs us to close the door on any type of evil suspicions, to cut off its very roots and to keep ourselves free of falling into such perilous situations.

Further, through the story of the slander levelled against 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* referred to in the chapter of *an-Nur*, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches and urges us to think well of the believers, and to avoid harbouring evil suspicion about them. Thus, concerning their false statements against 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Why do the believing men and women, whenever such [a rumour] is heard, not think the best of one another and say, "This is an obvious falsehood"?' (*an-Nur:* 12)

A reasonable suspicion signifies being on one's guard against harmful situations, without leaving a negative impression in your heart. For example, if someone tells you that some gangsters are lying in ambush, intending to harm you, then it is necessary to take the utmost precautionary measures. In such occasion, one ought to consider what he says to be true, and be cautious and wary of his warning, for it is most likely that he wishes for you safety and security, rather than harm or loss. In case such a suspicion involves an affair that relates to a ruling of the Divine Law, it is obligatory to verify the truthfulness of the matter.

Contemplate the subtlety and prudence of the Quranic style of rendering in the verse: '…too many assumptions…' (*al-Hujurat:* 12). In other words, many harboured assumptions are in fact unwarranted and evil, and should be completely avoided. Nonetheless, it is reasonable and permissible to have suspicions in some cases. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* states thereafter: '…some assumptions are sinful…' (*al-Hujurat:* 12).In other words, not all suspicion is sinful, yet be wary of falling into sin when you harbour evil suspicion of the believers without clear proof or evidence.

Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…and do not spy on one another…' (*al-Hujurat:* 12). This indicates the prohibition of following up, tracking the faults of people, or snooping into their private affairs, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stated, 'Whoever searches for the faults of other Muslims, Allah will search for his faults and disgrace him in his very own home.'(1)

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(1) *'Abd Ar-Razzaq relates in his Musannaf (20251) on the authority of 'Abban and others, that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him stood up after 'Asr Prayer and=*

It is worth mentioning here one of the subtleties of the Divine Names of Allah. It can be noticed that many Divine Names have opposite meanings, as is the case with His Honourable Names: *Al-Muhyi* ‘The One Who Grants life’ and *Al-Mumit* ‘The One Who Causes Death;’ *Al-Mu’izz* ‘The Exalter’ and *Al-Mudhill* ‘The Humiliator;’ and *Al-Qabid* ‘The Restrainer’ and *Al-Basit* ‘The Outspreader.’

However, the Divine Name *As-Sattar* ‘The Veiler,’ does not have a name with opposite meaning, such as *Al-Faddah* ‘The Exposer.’ Glorified and Exalted is Allah above having such an attribute! For His veil that covers the faults of his servants is left suspended. Whatever they may have committed in secret, He does not expose them. Furthermore, the name (As-Sattar) takes a morphological form that indicates hyperbole, from the base verb of *satara* ‘to veil.’

In a Qudsi Hadith, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘I loathe the sinner, but I detest the one who searches for his faults.’ This is because searching for the faults and errors of others results in circulating immorality in the Muslim community.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* protects the community of believers from such an act, and it is enough of an indication that the one who commits sins in secrecy still has within him the modesty that is the natural outcome of true faith. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stated, ‘If you are tried – that is, with committing some sins – then conceal them.’(1)

= *raised his voice that he could be heard by women in seclusion in their private rooms, saying, ‘O you who have professed Islam with their tongues, but in whose hearts faith has yet to enter! Do not harm the believers, and do not search for their faults, for indeed, whoever searches for the faults of believers, Allah will search for his faults, and if Allah searches for the fault of anyone, He will disgrace him in his own home.’ This is also narrated in the Musnad of Abu Yaala Al-Mawsili (7257), on the authority of Abu Barza Al-Aslami, with the wording ‘in his very own home,’ not ‘in the middle of his house,’ which is narrated by At-Tabarani in his Al-Mu’jam Al-kabir (11281), on the authority of Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him and by Al-Bayhaqi in his Shu’ab Al-Iman (9331, 10748), on the authority of Al-Bara ibn Azib Allah be pleased with him.*

(1) *Narrated by Malik in his Muwatta (1299) with the following wording, ‘whoever is stricken by any of these moral defilements should veil them with the veil of Allah, Whoever reveals to us his wrong action, we inflict upon him [the punishment according to] what is in the Book of Allah.’ It is similarly narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in his As-Sunnan As-Sughra (2747).*

This is similar to the case where one is unable to fast in the month of *Ramadan,* for example, and has a legitimate excuse, and thus is allowed to eat during the day. Despite his excuse, he is not allowed to eat publicly in front of people such that he serves as an immoral example to the young, who may not be aware of these excuses.

For when they see him, it allows an idea to ferment in their subconscious that it is permissible for them to break their fast and eat during the daytime in *Ramadan*. Thus, it is incumbent upon him to conceal himself whenever he eats during such days, in order not to serve as an example for others to follow.

Explaining the gravity of spying, the jurists have stated(1): 'If a man were to live in a hut made of reed and sticks, and another person came and stole a look into his house through an eyehole, thereby getting his eye gouged out with a stick by the owner of the hut, he would not be subject to retaliatory punishment by the law, nor would he have to pay any compensatory indemnity, for the other man effectively invaded the privacy of his house and stole a glance at what was going on inside without his permission.'

A similar incident occurred to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*(2) as he was informed that a man was looking at him through one of the eyeholes of his door. It was also narrated(3) that 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* used to investigate the state of affairs of his people by carrying out night patrols, and he received word of a man that was drinking wine with his companions in his house. Hence, he scaled the walls of the man's house and found him sitting with one of his companions, with no alcohol present in their midst, or anything similar to it whatsoever. When the man saw him, he said, 'You suspected me of such-and-such a deed; yet you neglected several religious aspects that are more important to pay heed to. Firstly, you entered the house by way of scaling the walls, whereas Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…So go to houses by the gates thereof…' (*al-Baqara:* 189). Secondly, you entered my house without my permission.' Thereupon, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* went away, without saying anything to him.(1)

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(1) *This is based on the Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said 'If someone snoops into your house, without your permission, and you then throw a pebble at him, and thereby gouge his eye out, there is no sin upon you.' This is narrated by Ibn Hibban in his Sahih (6109).*

(2) *Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'If anyone uncovers a veil placed to protect one's privacy, and then steals a glance without permission to do so, he has transgressed a boundary that he is not permitted, and if a man were to gouge out his eye, it would be shed with impunity (without compensation). However, if a man were to pass by a door without a covering, and see the people inside, there would be no fault upon him; rather, the fault would be upon the people of the house.' This is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (20591).*

(3) *The story of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him entering on a man narrated to have been drinking liquor.*

Now there is a difference between *tajassus* 'spying' and *tahassus* 'making inquiries.' *Tahassus* is to follow up and look into the matters of other people without the intention of following up on their faults. This is clear in the Quranic verse: '[Hence,] O my sons go forth and try to obtain some tidings of Joseph and his brother…' (*Yusuf:* 87), i.e., look for him until you find him, just as detectives might do.

In the Quranic verse: '…or speak ill of people behind their backs…' (*al-Hujurat:* 12), there is a prohibition from backbiting in general, for the Quran does not specify the one who backbites, or the one who is backbitten. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about backbiting, he responded, 'It is to mention something of your brother in his absence which he would dislike.' It was asked, 'What if what I say is actually true of my brother?' He responded, 'If it is actually true of him, then you have backbitten him. If he has nothing of what you claim to be in him, then you have calumniated him.'(1) In other words, you have fabricated a lie and have spoken falsely against him.

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(1) *Al-Askari relates in Al-Awa'il (1/43) that 'Umar Allah be pleased with him used to make night patrols in Midyan, and once he heard the sound of a man singing in his house, so he entered it from the back and found a woman with him and some wine. He said, 'What is this, enemy of Allah?' He responded, 'Do not mark this against me, Commander of the Faithful! For if I have disobeyed Allah in one matter, you have indeed disobeyed Him in three: Allah Glorified is He says: '…and do not spy upon one another…' (al-Hujurat: 12) yet, you have spied on me. He Glorified is He says: '…So go to houses by the gates thereof…' (al-Baqara: 189), but you scaled the walls of my house. He Glorified is He says: '…But whenever you enter [any of these] houses, greet one another…' (an-Nur: 61), but you entered my house without any greetings of peace.' At that point, 'Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'So do you have something of goodness in you such that you will turn towards what is good and right if I forgive you?' 'Yes, Commander of the Faithful! By Allah, I make it incumbent on myself that if you forgive me, I will not return to such deeds.' Thus, 'Umar Allah be pleased with him forgave him.*

Then, the Quran gives a physical example of the nature of backbiting; as stated in the verse: '…Would any of you like to eat the flesh of your dead brother? No, you would hate it...' (al-*Hujurat:* 12).

Ponder over how many repulsive characteristics there are in this portrayal that expresses the hideousness of such a deed. The one that speaks ill of his brother behind his back in his absence is like the one who eats his flesh when he is dead; in other words, when he is absent from life and is unable to defend himself. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has likened backbiting with a repugnant portrayal of the deed, from which any sound human being would flee.

Commentators of the Quran stated that the occasion for the revelation of this verse is related to Al-Walid ibn 'Uqba ibn Abu Mu'it(2). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent him as an envoy to collect the alms that were due from the tribe of Banu Mustaliq to whom he owed an indemnity for killing one of them during the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance. When he encountered them and saw them coming out to meet him, he feared that they would exact revenge, and returned to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'They have withheld payment of the alms that are due.'

It was also narrated(3) that Usama ibn Zayd *Allah be pleased with him* was managing the supply and distribution of food in the house of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Two men wished him to provide them with food, so they sent Salman Al-Farisi *Allah be pleased with him* to request food from him, and when he asked him, Usama *Allah be pleased with him* replied, 'We have no more food.' Thereupon, Salman *Allah be pleased with him* returned to them and said, 'Usama said that they have no more food.' They responded,

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (4690), Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (4231), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (1857), and Ahmad in his Musnad (6849, 8625, 8648, 9522). All of them narrated it on the authority of Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *The story of Al-Walid ibn 'Uqba ibn Abu Mu'it with the people of Banu Mustaliq*

(3) *The story of the two men who accused Usama ibn Zayd of being a miser*

'No, he has food, but he was being stingy with you.' Then they said to Salman, 'You have a face that portends misfortune, and if you were to go to a well of generous provision – i.e., an ebullient, bubbling well – all of its water would disappear.'

In this manner, they spoke ill of Usama and Salman *Allah be pleased with them* behind their backs. Upon seeing those two men, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Indeed, I can smell the odour of stinking meat from your mouths.' They replied, 'O Messenger of Allah! By Allah, we have not eaten any meat!' He responded, 'You have indeed backbitten Usama and Salman: go to them and conciliate them,'(1) for if you do not conciliate the person you have backbitten, you will be viler and fouler than the adulterer in the sight of Allah.

Moreover, when a man once spoke ill of Ibn Sirin(2) behind his back, the man thereafter came to him and said, 'O Imam! I came to free myself of sin from what I have done to you.' He responded, 'Why is that?' The man said, 'Because I have backbitten you.' He replied, 'I do not make lawful what Allah has forbidden.'

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(1) *Ibn Abu Hatim renarrated from As-Suddi that Salman Al-Farisi Allah be pleased with him was with two men on a trip serving them and and taking a share of their food. Salman Allah be pleased with him fell asleep one day, and his companion called out for him, but did not find him, and so they pitched their tent saying: 'Salman wishes for nothing other than coming across limited food and a pitched tent.' Then, when Salman came, they sent him to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to request for food for them. He set off and came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saying, 'O Messenger of Allah! My friends have sent me to have you provision them with food, if you have any.' He replied, 'Do your companions not have food? They have already consumed food.' Accordingly, Salman returned and apprised them of the situation. They set off and came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'By the One Who Sent you with The Truth, we have not encountered any food since we arrived.' He responded, 'Indeed, the two of you have supplied yourselves with food by partaking of the consumption of Salman's flesh with what you have said,' and then the verse was revealed: '...Would any of you like to eat the flesh of your dead brother...' (al-Hujurat: 12). This is mentioned by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (while commenting on the verse 12 of al-Hujurat).*

(2) *Muhammad ibn Sirin Al-Basri, of the Ansar by clientage, whose agnomen is Abu Bakr, was the prominent scholar of his age in Basra in the religious sciences, one of the Followers, the generation that came right after the time of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and from amongst the elite writers. He was born, and passed way, in Basra (33-111 AH). He was raised as a trader of cloth, and suffered from deafness. He was famous for his scrupulousness in matters of religion and for his knowledge of the interpretation of dreams [See: Al-Alam by Az-Zirikli (6/154)].*

Al-Hasan Al-Basri once found out that a man had spoken ill of him behind his back. Consequently, he sent his servant to the man with a dish of fresh dates, and told him to say to the man, 'This is a gift from my master, for he found out that you gave him a gift of your good deeds yesterday.'(1)

This indicates that you must pay for violating the right of the one whom you have backbitten from your store of good deeds. In case you have no good deeds, the wronged man's evil deeds are taken from him and thrown upon you. This was already indicated in the Noble Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this regard.(2)

Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…So be mindful of Allah: Allah is ever Relenting, Most Merciful' (al-*Hujurat:* 12). This verse means that one should be conscious of Allah in His ordinances with respect to what He has forbidden, and stay away from those matters that bring about His punishment.

'…Allah is ever Relenting, Most Merciful' (al-*Hujurat:* 12). In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* is ever Relenting to the one who repents, and full of Mercy to the one who turns to Him in penitence.

The conclusion of the verse inspires the sinner with hope in the Mercy of Allah. The one who backbites should not despair of the His Mercy *Glorified is He*. If someone's tongue runs away with him and slips in error, falling into backbiting, he should rush to repent without delay. Furthermore, knowing that His Sustainer is Oft Returning and Merciful, one should return to Him as soon as possible, and not savour his evil deed, nor persist in them.

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(1) Imam Al-Ghazali writes in his *Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din* (2/347) that a man said to Al-Hasan Al-Basri, 'So-and-so has spoken ill of you behind your back.' Subsequently, he sent this person fresh dates in a dish and said, 'It has reached me that you granted me a gift of your good deeds. Thus I wished to recompense you with something equivalent; so please forgive me, for I really cannot recompense you to quite the same degree.'

(2) *This is the case with any misdeed committed against one's Muslim brother. Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'May Allah have mercy upon the slave who has oppressed his brother, then comes to him begging for his forgiveness before the Day of Judgment when no dirham or dinar will compensate him for wrong deeds, but rather, only his own good deeds will serve as compensation.' It was asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, what if he has no good deeds?' He responded, 'The sins of the oppressed person will be loaded upon his own sins.' This is narrated by At-Tabarani in his Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat (5312).*

One of the greatest blessings Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon us as previously mentioned is that He has allowed for repentance, and opened the doors of its acceptance for us. For if it were not the case, sinners would persist in their deeds, and all life would be corrupted and destroyed.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states: (1)

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَـٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَـٰكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَآئِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware [13] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 13)

It can be noticed that the previous uses of the vocative were directed at the believers because the verses with such calling convey directives and legislative rules pertaining to the believers particularly. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* does not impose legal responsibility except upon those who believe in Him.

In the verse under discussion, the vocative addresses the generality of humankind – all of humanity – drawing our attention to the Miracle of creation, and to the Sublimity of the Creator *Glorified is He*. This verse encompasses one and all since the Creator *Glorified is He* created the believer and the disbeliever, the male and the female which are the source of all creation, for the male does not procreate by himself, neither does the female.

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(1) *Regarding the occasion for the revelation of the verse, Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him stated, 'This verse was revealed concerning Thabit ibn Qays, and his calling the man who did not move aside to make space for him "son of So-and-so." Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him responded, "Who was the one mentioning 'So-and-so'?" Thabit stood up and said, "It was me, O Messenger of Allah." So he said, "Take a look upon the faces of the people in our gathering," which he did. Then he peace and blessings be upon him said, "What did you see?" to which he replied, "I saw some white people, some black people, and some red people." He responded, "You are not to give preference to anyone except with respect to their level of religious practice and piety.' Then, Allah Glorified is He revealed this verse.' This is narrated by Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi in his Asbab An-Nuzul (p. 224).*

However, the verse in the chapter of *as-Sajda* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Who made good everything that He has created and He began the creation of man from dust. [8] Then He made his progeny of an extract, of water held in light estimation.’ (*as-Sajda:* 7-8) refers to the first creature of mankind, Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah created and fashioned him with His Hands. Here, we should know that He *the Almighty* made everything in the universe subject to His Command, ‘Be!’ and it is.’

Hence, Allah says to the Satan: ‘He said: O Iblis! What prevented you that you should do obeisance to him whom I created with My Two Hands?’ (*Sad:* 75) He *the Almighty* wonders how it is that the Satan refuses to prostrate to something that He has created with His Hands. Thus, Iblis was not actually prostrating to Adam *peace be upon him* but rather bowing down in obedience to the One Who commanded him to prostrate.

After creating Adam, Allah brought forth his offspring to come after him; He *the Almighty* says: ‘Of an extract, of water held in light estimation.’ (*as-Sajda:* 8) This requires matrimony between the male and the female. In the chapter of *an-Nisa’*, Allah says: ‘O people! Be careful of [your duty to] your Lord, Who created you from a single being.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1) That single being is Adam *peace be upon him*. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘And from it created its mate.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1) This part of the verse refers to Eve.

Thus, when Allah says in the verse we are studying that He created us all from a single man and a single woman, He does not mean the beginning of human creation, but rather, He means the offspring that have been brought forth after the first of human creation. That is why He *the Almighty* says in the last verse of the chapter of *an-Nisa’*: ‘And spread from these two, many men and women.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1) These men and women dispersed across the earth and became: ‘tribes and families.’ (*al-Hujurat:* 13) The Arabs constitute a nation, so are the Romans and so are the Persians. Thereafter, the peoples were divided into tribes which consequently divided into clans and the clans into family lines and so forth.

Furthermore, the members of a single family have different names, for we do not leave individuals without names to refer to, in order that we get to know one another. Thus, this one is named Mohamed, that one is named

Ahmad, while another is Fatima and so on. The wisdom behind this is: 'that you may know each other…' (*al-Hujurat:* 13). This is with regards to individuals and with regards to peoples and nations.

Becoming mutually acquainted and familiar with one another is something that is necessary for human beings, for their interests are maintained by getting to know one another. Furthermore, the vagaries of life will compel them to become so acquainted. They will need one another because, as we have previously stated, Allah *Glorified is He* has distributed the sources of His bounty amongst all of His creation. What might be available with you may not be present in another person. Thus, we see Europe, which has attained such a high level of civilization and progress, in need of the residents of the deserts- the shepherds of sheep, goats, and camels-due to the petroleum and the valuable natural resources that are present in their lands.

This difference that exists between the bounties that have been bestowed upon various peoples leads human beings to assist and rely on one another. They complete what is lacking in each other. Therefore, this difference leads to integration and not to mutual opposition and stubborn resistance.

We observe this process of integration in the matter of the creation of the man and the woman. The man and the woman are not contrary and opposed to each other, but rather, they are two complementary elements that make each other integral and whole. Each one of them has a function to carry out and this function cannot be fulfilled by the other.

Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified this matter to us with His statement 'I swear by the night when it draws a veil and the day when it shines in brightness.' (*al-Layl:* 1-2) Does any sane person claim that the night is contrary and opposed to the day? Just like the day and the night are the man and the woman. Thus, Allah swears by creating them, i.e. the male and the female afterwards: 'And the creating of the male and the female.' (*al-Layl:* 3) Thus, the man was created for taking upon the burdens of the hardships of life, toil and work, whilst the woman was created for manifesting her affection and compassion. Everyone is assisted to carry out what they were created for.

This is why we are amazed at those who call out for equality between the man and the woman. How is this possible when each of them has a special role and duty for which they were created? Furthermore, some oppress women and say, ‘They are weak and lacking in intelligence and in religion.’ In spite of the fact that the role of the intellect is to arrange and evaluate various options and choose one of these alternatives from amongst the others, this is not the duty of the woman, but rather, the duty of the man, who lead the family through the voyage of life.

As for the woman, her duty is one of showing and manifesting compassion. She feels compassion for the young and the old; she opens her heart to embrace everyone and gives comfort to the tired and the sick of her family. In addition, we witness that when she becomes a widow, she takes on both the duties of the man and the woman, that is, she takes over the role of her husband as well, and it may well be that she is even more successful in raising her children and protecting them.

Allah *Glorified is He* created Adam *peace be upon him* from clay; He *the Almighty* then fashioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit. However, He did not create Eve in the same manner. Rather, He took part of one of the ribs of Adam and created Eve from that. Why did He not create her in the manner of His creation of Adam *peace be upon him*? Some of the Quranic commentators have said that He created her from the man in order that he may have guardianship over her.

Similarly, in the case of childbearing, she takes a seed, i.e. the sperm from a man and she herself completes the entire process of producing forth the offspring. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and created its mate of the same [kind].’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1) Further, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘Women have been created from a rib and the most curved portion of the rib is the upper portion.’(1) Furthermore, just as Adam is distinguished and noble due to his being created by Allah and fashioned by His Hands, similarly, Eve is distinguished and noble due to her being created from something that Allah created with His Hands.

Now the world today is preoccupied with the matter of cloning or the biological replication, which is to make an exact copy of a plant or animal by taking a cell from it and replicate it, exactly just as when we copy a book and come with a copy of it. However, we observe this process with rocks, for instance. We see some of different sizes, but do we observe any individual rock, for example, growing in size? We never do! Why is this so? Some experts said that is so because they have deep deposits within the earth, in which the process of replication takes place. Once they arise out of the earth and are exposed to the atmospheric conditions, they solidify into the forms that they have assumed at that particular instant in time.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

Likewise, we observe this process with plants. Have you seen, for example, the seeds of sugar cane or figs? No, they do not have seeds. Rather, we merely take a small shoot of cane and plant it in the ground or we take one of the twigs of the fig tree and plant it in the ground, and thereafter it gives us a new fig tree. Is this not a replication? It is also conceivable that we find something similar with animate life. Indeed, they have cloned animals as happened with the sheep Dolly.

As for the human beings, no one can possibly genetically clone him, for he is distinct from the rest of the species that exist in the universe. Humans are the vicegerent of Allah upon the earth. They are honoured creatures that the rest of the species of the universe are at their service. Thus, if the replication of solids and plants and animals is conceivable, it is impossible to ever conceive of such a process of cloning with human beings, for their propagation requires certain conditions to be in place and general rules to be followed. In addition, it should not result merely from deriving an exact copy through some process of replication of the original.

Therefore, the propagation of the human species does not take place except through the meeting of the two sexes, the male and the female, a matter which only takes place within a family that embraces the child, gives it love and affection, raises it up and takes care of it and looks after it. It is not seemly for the human being to be born from an incubator like young chicks.

It is for this reason that the childhood of a human being is the longest of all created species. Some children amongst us remain in a state of childhood until the age of fourteen, while birds and animals take care of and attend to their young until they are able to move and eat on their own. Then they leave them to their own devices, as if they never even knew them. It may well happen that an animal is killed in front of its mother and she is wholly unaware of it.

So how is it possible for us to conceive of cloning a human being when the human is the ennobled vicegerent of Allah on earth? Indeed, all religions reject fornication, refuse to accept that a child be born illegally and reject the idea of throwing a new-born out in the street or even being raised in an orphanage. So what would be the case if genetic replication were actually to take place?

It is from this point of departure that we say that the process of genetic replication will never take place with respect to the human being, and that no-one is capable of it except Allah, the Creator of the human being, Who wishes goodness for him and wants that he be raised in the arms of the father who will guard and protect it and the mother who will show love and affection to it. Furthermore, from the two of them, it will imbibe virtues of moral excellence and learn its system of values.

Nevertheless, their success in cloning an animal does not impugn in any way the Divine Power of Allah. Rather, it is a novel proof from amongst the various signs that prove one's faith in His Power. For those that carried out the genetic replication of the sheep did not produce it from nothing. Rather, they produced it from another sheep which was the creation of Allah. Furthermore, the intellect which enabled them to make this in the first place is also one of Allah's creations.

Next in the verse we are discussing, Allah *Glorified is He* lays down a general principle by which some of these peoples and tribes are preferred above others; He *the Almighty* says: '…surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful [of his duty].' (*al-Hujurat:* 13) This means that the real measure of preference of individuals is their level of fearing Allah. Thus, Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith that He established lineage for us and we established lineage for ourselves. He established that 'The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the One Who is most deeply conscious of Him', but we refused and said, 'The most noble of us is so-and-so a person who is the son of so-and-so a person.' Thus, Allah says that today, i.e. the Day of Judgement, He will uphold His Establishment of lineage and put aside the lines of kinship that we established for ourselves.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim*

Then He *the Almighty* concludes the verse, saying that He is All Knowing, All-Aware. He is All Knowing of His creation; He gives to everything from amongst them what is appropriate for them in terms of their duties and roles for life, just as He says elsewhere: ‘Does He not know, Who created, and He is the Knower of the subtleties, the All-Aware?’ (*al-Mulk:* 14)

Allah is the Most Knowledgeable of His creation and the Most Knowledge of their various capacities and their measures. For every one of them, He facilitates the activities that are most appropriate. Thus, we see various classes amongst humanity: a university professor; a blacksmith, a smelter, a carpenter, a shoe-shiner, craftsman, a farmer, etc. If it were not the case and if all of humankind were university professors, how could life operate and move forward?!

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَتِ ٱلۡأَعۡرَابُ ءَامَنَّاۖ قُل لَّمۡ تُؤۡمِنُواْ وَلَٰكِن قُولُوٓاْ أَسۡلَمۡنَا وَلَمَّا يَدۡخُلِ ٱلۡإِيمَٰنُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمۡۖ
وَإِن تُطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ لَا يَلِتۡكُم مِّنۡ أَعۡمَٰلِكُمۡ شَيۡـًٔاۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٤﴾

The desert Arabs say, ‘We have faith.’ [Prophet], tell them, ‘You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, “We have submitted,” for faith has not yet entered your hearts.’ If you obey God and His Messenger, He will not diminish any of your deeds: He is most forgiving and most merciful [14]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 14)

The desert Arabs are the Bedouins. They are the dwellers of the desert who have not settled in civilised regions of towns and cities. Therefore, their personality has become dominated with the characteristics of roughness and harshness. Allah *Glorified is He* informs us about them, noting that they have said that they have faith. But He is More Knowledgeable of their true state and that they have not truly attained to the rank of those who have faith, for faith is not merely words that are proclaimed, but rather, it is something firmly embedded within the heart.

However, Islam is something of outward appearance including the actions of the limbs such as fasting, praying, and other similar acts of worship. That is why Allah corrected their statement and said: ‘…Tell them, ‘You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, “We have submitted”’ (*al-Hujurat:* 14). This means that they carry out the obligations of Islam with the limbs, but their hearts are devoid of faith. Furthermore, the moment Allah tells them that they do not have faith is an indication of something they determined in their hearts and there is no secret of His servants that is hidden from Him, something of which they are well aware.

Thus, Allah informs them of the reality of what is in their hearts and tells them to be honest with their own selves and to submit outwardly, for He *the Almighty* knows what is hidden and concealed in their hearts. In this situation, they actually resemble hypocrites as they were eager to perform the prayers in the very first row and to listen to the Quran being recited. All of these are outward indications of faith, yet Allah is fully aware of what is in their hearts and minds, that is, He *the Almighty* knows best that their utterance is not in accordance with what they uttered by their tongues.

Allah *Glorified is He* says that faith has not yet entered their hearts. He uses a particle of negation that negates the occurrence of an event in the past, but gives an additional meaning of the possibility of the occurrence of this action afterwards, just as when, upon entering a garden, for example, you say, ‘The garden has not produced any fruit as of yet.’ In other words, there is a possibility that it might produce fruit sometime in the future.

That is why scholars have said regarding this verse that it does mean that the door of faith has not been closed to them. Rather, it brings glad tidings of the fact that they will attain to faith sometime in the future. Furthermore, the Quran unveils that which is hidden in their hearts, meanwhile notifying Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of their actual state that will make them think over the matter, thus become convinced, and enter the realm of true faith.

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* says that if they obey Him and His Messenger, He will not diminish any of their deeds. He reassures them that fruits of their deeds performed sincerely for His sake are preserved and accounted. Such deeds will not disappear, nor will He diminish any of them from their account.

Allah concludes the verse saying that He is the Most Forgiving and the Most Merciful; He says elsewhere that ‘He is Most Forgiving and Most

Merciful.’ (*Saba’:* 2) Thus, He *the Almighty* sometimes mentions the attribute of mercy before that of forgiveness and vice versa; He *the Almighty* does so according to the circumstances and conditions of that event. For example, when a criminal stands in front of the judge confessing his crime, but the judge notices that he is poor and needy with shabby clothes and has a pale face, he takes pity on him, thus orders that he be given food and clothing, and thereafter forgives him. In this case, he has preceded forgiveness with mercy or it can be the other way round where the judge forgives him first and then before the man leaves his assembly, the judge orders his men to give him such-and-such favours.

The root of the verb *Yalitu* (to diminish) has been mentioned in another place wherein Allah says: ‘And [as for] those who believe and their offspring follow them in faith, We will unite with them their offspring and We will not diminish to them aught of their work.’ (*at-Tur:* 21) We notice that the discourse here is about the assembly of believers and their offspring. The offspring that come after the believers are also believers, so why will Allah unite and make them follow each other thereafter?

Some of the Quranic commentators have said that they have been mentioned afterwards due to their respective levels of reward, for each of the two groups has good deeds in their favour, but the deeds of the fathers are more and their station is higher, and thus their standing is followed by that of their descendants and they are placed together in one general realm. Thus those of a lower rank follow upon those of the higher rank.

Allah stipulates that they have to obey Him and His Messenger. Someone might ask, ‘In what aspects should they obey Him and His Messenger?’ It is to obey them in terms of attaining to faith, as they were already Muslims but Allah wished to urge and encourage them to attain true faith and remove any hint of lying or false allegations from them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا۟ وَجَٰهَدُوا۟
بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلصَّٰدِقُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

The true believers are the ones who have faith in God and His Messenger and leave all doubt behind, the ones who have struggled with their possessions and their persons in God's way: they are the ones who are true [15]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 15)

Allah *Glorified is He* wishes to clarify to them what true faith is. It is not merely a matter of words that are professed by the tongue. Rather, it is a firm belief that is not seized by any doubt or misgiving. The true believers are the ones who have faith in Allah and His Messenger and leave all doubt behind. They believed in Allah and His Oneness, and that He Alone is the Creator, the Provider, and the Governor of all of the affairs in this universe. They believed in His Divine Names and Attributes. Likewise, they believed in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that he was trustworthy and truthful in conveying the Message of faith from Allah to them. They had no misgivings, nor did they have any doubt in any of these matters whatsoever.

Furthermore, among the attributes of those who believe is that they struggled with their possessions and their persons in Allah's Way. Is there any greater proof of the reality of faith and sincerity therein than your sacrificing yourself for the sake of this faith? Thus, Allah says that those are actually the true believers. They are only the believers who really and truly believe and have faith. They have these distinguishing attributes. In addition, at the end of the verse, He describes them with truthfulness in their faith, saying: 'they are the ones who are true.' (*al-Hujurat:* 15)

Yes, they are those who are truthful in their faith, for they sacrificed with the most precious and noble objects any human being possesses including wealth and soul. The martyr does not sacrifice himself nor give out his wealth unless he is certain that what he will find is better than what he left behind in this worldly life with Allah. That is why Allah will grant him everlasting life such that he will not experience any death afterwards. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: 'And reckon not those who are killed in Allah’s Way as dead; nay, they are alive [and] are provided sustenance from their Lord.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169)

Allah says that He will deal with them in the manner of the people of paradise. They will eat, drink, and enjoy themselves. Note here that He *Glorified is He* describes this life and even attributes it to Himself. In other words, they are not alive with respect to humans, but rather, they are alive in the presence and knowledge of their Lord. This means that if you were to go to the gravesite of a martyr and open his tomb, you would not find him alive, for he is not alive in a way that you can perceive; rather, he is alive in a way that Allah perceives.

When Allah says that such people with such characters are the true believers, there is an intimation of those who have lied against Him and falsely alleged faith. It is as if He were saying to them, ‘Indeed, these people have attained to faith and were truthful and sincere in their profession of faith, while you denied the true faith and overstepped the boundaries of the truth.

He says:

قُلْ أَتُعَلِّمُونَ ٱللَّهَ بِدِينِكُمْ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾

Say, ‘Do you presume to teach God about your religion,
when God knows every- thing in the heavens and earth,
and He has full knowledge of all things?’ [16]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 16)

Allah *Glorified is He* tells them, i.e. the (Bedouin) Arabs to pay attention to this point of truth: for He is their Creator and He knows well what is within their hearts, for no secret is hidden from Him. So beware of saying, ‘We have faith!’ thinking that you can mask the truth and cover for your lies, for He *the Almighty* knows which of you is a believer and which of you is not. In addition, He knows which of you is truthful in his belief and which of you is hypocrite.

He *the Almighty* wonders that they, i.e. the (Bedouin Arabs) presume to teach Him about their religion. In other words, do you think that you are informing

Him of your real level of faith? How is this so while He *Glorified is He* knows all that is in the heavens and all that is in earth?! Nothing from either of these two realms is hidden from Him, but rather, He has full knowledge of all things. His Knowledge *Glorified is He* does not only encompass the Heavens and the earth, but rather crosses those bounds into the very depths of all of creation.

This is because the Heavens and the earth are part of the vast universe of Allah. That is why He *the Almighty* describes them both and all what is contained within 'like a ring that you have cast upon wide open space of desert.'(1) Thus, what we know of the Heavens and the earth is very little in comparison to all the vastness of the universe.

He *the Almighty* then says:

يَمُنُّونَ عَلَيۡكَ أَنۡ أَسۡلَمُواْۖ قُل لَّا تَمُنُّواْ عَلَيَّ إِسۡلَٰمَكُمۖ بَلِ ٱللَّهُ يَمُنُّ
عَلَيۡكُمۡ أَنۡ هَدَىٰكُمۡ لِلۡإِيمَٰنِ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

They think they have done you [Prophet] a favour by submitting. Say, 'Do not consider your submission a favour to me; it is God who has done you a favour, by guiding you to faith, if you are truly sincere' [17] (The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 17)

It is related that this verse was revealed when a group of the desert Arabs, likely from the tribe of Banu Asad, came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while he was in the mosque and said, 'We came to you in order to profess that there is no deity worthy of worship besides Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah; we do so despite that you did not send us any envoy, nor did we ever fight you as did the tribe of so-and-so.' Thus, Allah revealed this verse in question.

Therefore, who is bestowing a favour upon whom, for real? It is not necessary for you to make an outward show of your Islam to Messenger Muhammad because your Islam is for your own good and you are the ones who benefit from it. It is Islam that has safeguarded you from fighting and from being taken captive. You have assumed those aspects and duties that distinguish a

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Battal and Ibn Hibban*

Muslim from others, such as almsgiving and protection. Further, no act of obedience benefits Allah *Glorified is He* nor does any act of disobedience harm Him in any way.

Therefore, do not think that you are bestowing a favour upon anyone with your outward show of submission. Rather, it is Allah Who bestows a favour upon you. It is He Who guided you upon the path of rightness and guidance. If there were any grace of favour to be acknowledged, it would be the grace that Allah has bestowed upon you, for obedience to Allah and travelling along His Way is what safeguards the activities of your lives and organises them for you, not to contradict or go against what is actually in your own interests.

That is all if you are truly sincere. This conclusion means if you are truly sincere in your claims to having attained faith. That is because the particle 'if' here indicates doubt. Thus, it is as if they are showing off Islam which they actually deny in their own hearts; despite all of this, even if they were truly sincere in what they claim for themselves, it was not for them to consider their Islam to be a favour upon anyone in any case.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعۡلَمُ غَيۡبَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرُۢ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ ١٨

God knows the secrets of the heavens and
earth: He sees everything you do [18]
(The Quran, *al-Hujurat:* 18)

We have already previously mentioned that the Heavens and the earth serve as a coffer within which are wonders and marvels from the creation of Allah that are much greater than the coffer itself. The general case is that whatever is contained within the coffer is higher in value and greater than that in which the contents are contained.

Thus, Allah says: 'And Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth.' (*Al-'Imran:* 189) In addition, He *the Almighty* says in another verse: 'And Allah's is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth.' (*an-Najm:* 31) The Heavens and the earth despite whatever they contain of wonders of creation, originality, and fine-tuned engineering, actually encompass what is even more wondrous than all of this.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks to us of what is in the heavens and the earth from the realm of the unseen world. Now the unseen realm of existence refers to everything that is absent from your awareness and consciousness. It may also be something that you are not aware of today but may yet manifest itself for you tomorrow. For example, electricity, before it was discovered, was absent from our awareness and we had no knowledge of it at all. But today, it has become a phenomenon that is witnessed every day, and we all experience and work with it.

If you were to consider the electromagnetic waves that carry voice and video through the atmosphere, you would find something that is truly astonishing. If you were to come with 100 radios and 100 television sets, place them altogether in one place and tuned each one to a different frequency, you would find different programs for each one, be they radio or TV programs. How did all of these waves cross paths in the same space of air and arrive with such precision and clarity, even if they were transmitted from the furthest countries of the earth?

All of these are secrets of the unseen realm of the Heavens and the earth that call us towards belief. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We will soon show them Our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth.' (*Fussilat:* 53)

Despite the exaltedness of creation of the Heavens and the earth, the unseen realm of the Heavens and the earth is even greater. This unseen realm will continue to serve as a means of unexhausted support and assistance and an endless gift. It discloses something new to us from time to time, in order that the Quran continues to manifest its miraculous nature until the coming of the Last Hour.

It is out of the Wisdom of Allah *Glorified is He* that He has distributed the gifts of the Quran across all the various epochs of history in order that no age passes by the Quran, without it giving something of its gifts. Furthermore, these gifts come in accordance with the capacity of people's intelligence and ability to understand and in accordance with the degree to which people examine and ponder over the celestial Realm of Allah. It is from this that we understand the meaning of the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Its wonders never cease and it does not become exhausted of its meanings with continued reflection’. (1)

You may read, for example, the greatest of odes. Eventually, you will certainly become weary of them after reading them over once or many times. However, whenever you read the Quran, you never become weary of it. In fact, your love for it increases every time you examine it closely and study carefully its meanings. This is because it is the Divine Speech of Allah that has a secret that is manifested with everyone who recites it; it is a gift to grant to everyone who ponders over it. Thus, the gifts of the Quran are copious and everyone who recites it takes something from them according to his capacity.

Allah concludes the chapter with this verse, indicating that the Dominion of Allah is vast and that its wonders do not come to an end, that is, they are unbounded and limitless. It indicates that whatever level of progress humanity attains to, the Quran will always have something new to give, as the verses of Allah contain what dazzles and overwhelms the intelligence.

In the past, we used to speak of the age of coal, then came the age of steam and after that came the age of electricity. Now, we speak of the age of nuclear and atomic power. So the question to be asked here is: ‘Where were these new forms of power in the past?’ The answer is that they were hidden within the Knowledge of Allah. He unveiled them to His servants until their thought progressed and advanced. All of these are in fact discoveries which no single person created or brought about on his own. Rather, all of it is from Allah and a bountiful inundation of His Gifts that had been stored up for a period of time up to our present day.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi and Al-Hakim Al-Bayhaqi*

the chapter of

Qaf

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Qaf.* Allah *the Almighty* says:

قٓۚ وَٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ ٱلۡمَجِيدِ ١

***Qaf,* by the glorious Quran! [1]**
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 1)

We have spoken before about the discrete letters that occur at the beginning of certain chapters of the Quran. So it is enough to say that these letters, like the letter *Qaf*, represent the unseen aspect of the Quran and as we have said, ‘the unseen is the pillar of faith. The illiterate farmer, for example, uses the television and switches from one channel to another without having any idea of how it works and how it is possible to flip through channels. He benefits from it without knowing how it works. Likewise, he uses a pump to draw water without knowing the mechanics of how it works. Similarly, when it comes to our standpoint with the discrete letters, we believe in them and we consign their meaning to the One Who said them.

Religion is composed of three things, which are doctrines that fill the heart; acts of worship and responsibilities that busy the body; the speech that conveys all these things through the work of the tongue. All the doctrines, responsibilities, and expressions have mysterious and unseen elements. Allah is unseen, but the effects of His Power in the universe can be perceived. It is as though

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us a mysterious unseen element in these things in order to test our faith, for what you know is proof of the truthfulness of what you do not know.

The same is the case of the discrete letters in the Noble Quran. We generally understand the Quran and know what it means, but the discrete letters are unseen to the sense that we must believe in them even if we do not know their real meanings. These letters remain as an indication of the miraculous nature of the Quran.

Thus, the verse we are discussing combines the two things, i.e. the unseen in the letter *Qaf* and the plain and perceptible aspect in the rest of the verse. These are the two elements of the Quran. The letter *Qaf* indicates the miraculous nature of the Quran followed by the words of Allah, ‘By the glorious Quran’ (*Qaf:* 1); so the verse combines the proof and the object of the proof.

The letter *Qaf* bears the meaning of a vow. It is a vow made on a single letter just as Allah swore a vow by single things as in: ‘By the flight of time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself.’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-2) Allah also says: ‘I swear by the star when it goes down. Your companion does not err, nor does he go astray.’ (*an-Najm:* 1-2)

Further, He *the Almighty* also swears vows by two letters, such as *Ya Sin, Ta Ha* and *Ha Mim*, just as He *the Almighty* swears by two of His creations as in the verses: ‘I swear by the early hours of the day and the night when it covers with darkness.’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-2) In addition, He *the Almighty* swears by three letters like *Alif Lam Mim,* as He *the Almighty* swears by three things in His saying, ‘I swear by those who draw themselves out in ranks. Then those who drive away with reproof. Then those who recite, being mindful.’ (*as-Saffat:* 1-3)

Moreover, Allah swears by four letters, a matter which is clear in His saying, ‘*Alif Lam Mim Sad’* (*al-A‘raf:* 1); just as He swears by four things; Allah says: ‘I swear by the fig and the olive and mount Sinai and this city made secure, Certainly We created man in the best make.’ (*at-Tin:* 1-3) He also swears by five letters when He says: ‘*Kaf Ha Ya ‘Ayn Sad’* (*Maryam:* 1) and swears by five things when He says: ‘I swear by the Mountain, And the

Book written. In an outstretched fine parchment, And the House [*Ka'ba*] that is visited, And the elevated canopy, And the swollen sea.' (*at-Tur:*1-6)

Therefore, there were five kinds of vow, starting from those with one letter to those with five letters. However, no vow in the Quran goes any further than this, lest it be difficult to say. In addition, there is no root word in Arabic which has more than five letters. However, when Allah swears with His cosmological signs, He sometimes goes further than five objects such as when He says: 'I swear by the sun and its brilliance and the moon when it follows the sun and the day when it shows it and the night when it draws a veil over it and the heaven and Him Who made it and the earth and Him Who extended it and the soul and Him Who made it perfect.' (*ash-Shams:* 1-7) Had He *the Almighty* done the same with the vows He made with the discrete letters, He would have gone beyond the bounds of how a single Arabic word is constructed.

We may also observe that Allah only swears with the discrete letters at the beginnings of the chapters of the Quran, unlike vows by cosmological signs that can be made in the middle of them such as when Allah says: 'Nay; I swear by the moon and the night when it departs and the daybreak when it shines.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 32-34) Moreover, the vows which are made by the discrete letters are not preceded by the Arabic letter *wa* (by) but is used in those vows which we understand. Allah did not say 'Consider *Qaf*' because the Arabic letter *wa* is a particle or a letter like *Qaf*, so they would be confusing if placed together. This is one of the miracles of the Quran which we must take some time over which to ponder.

Believing in the unseen is what proves the sincerity of faith; otherwise, what distinction would there be if every verse of the Quran was plain and obvious in its meaning? What distinction would be there if everything about the religion was known to us and subject to logical reasoning and proof? We have explained before that belief in perceptible things is something normal which everyone does. What is important is that you believe in what you cannot see, out of trust for the one who tells you of them.

Suppose you go to the doctor and he, after examining you, prescribes medicine for you. Tell me, do you argue with him as to why he prescribes this particular medicine or that one? You do not argue with him because you went to him willingly and trusted him, and you are ready to follow his instructions and take the medicine he prescribes even though you do not know anything about it. Thus, if you trust the doctor, who is a man like you and me and who is subject to error, then what about Allah? Will you not trust His Word?

Therefore, due to the importance of faith in the unseen, Allah praises those who believe in it, saying: ‘Those who believe in the unseen.’ (*al-Baqara:* 3) Just as we believe in the verses whose meanings are clear, we also must believe in the discrete letters whose meanings may be unclear; the former is the perceptible Quran and while the latter is the unseen aspect of the Quran. Just as we believe in the perceptible cosmological signs, we also believe in Allah Who created and made them, though He cannot be seen.

Allah says: ‘By the glorious Quran.’ (*Qaf:* 1) The Quran is the name for what came down from Allah upon the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which proves that the Message he delivered was true. It was called ‘Quran’ to indicate that it is ‘recited’, and it is called ‘The Book’ to indicate that it is written, for it is written down on pages and memorised in hearts.

In addition, the Quran has a special distinction which no other Scripture before it had. It contains both the teachings of the religion and the miracle which proves it at the same time, while the other heavenly revealed Scriptures which came before the Quran, had the teachings in the book, whilst the miracle was separate. For example, the Scripture of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) was the Gospel and his miracles included curing the blind and the leprous and raising the dead by Allah’s Permission. The book of Prophet Musa (Moses) was the Torah, whilst his miracle was the staff. However, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Message itself. Why is that? That is because his Message was destined to remain until the end of time and to spread throughout all places and thereby gave it universality of time and place. Thus, we say, ‘That is Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah and that is his miracle.’ But we cannot say this about Musa or ‘Isa because their miracles ended when their time on earth ended.

The meaning of the word ‘glorious’ is great, noble, high and lofty. It is in a morphological form that indicates hyperbole and can sometimes have the meaning of an active participle, like *Rahim/Raheem* (one who gives mercy); other times it gives the meaning of a passive participle, like *qateel* (one who has been killed). Thus, the meaning of the Arabic word for ‘glorious’ indicates both that it is inherently sublime and that it has been made inherently sublime. It is both active and passive at the same time because it is the highest and loftiest of speech and the noblest and the most precious of books, that is, it is sublime in its very nature.

Moreover, it came from *the Most High* and Glorious Who is the True Lord; it was conveyed by a sublime angel to a sublime Messenger as well as it was entrusted to a sublime community.

Since the first verse in the chapter in question is a vow, what is the content of this vow? The scholars said that Allah is swearing here that the Resurrection is true. That is to say, ‘*Qaf* and By the Glorious Quran, you shall certainly be raised from the dead.’ But a more satisfying answer than this is that we simply take the content of the vow from the words which Allah *Glorified is He* says next:

بَلۡ عَجِبُوٓاْ أَن جَآءَهُم مُّنذِرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ فَقَالَ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ هَٰذَا شَيۡءٌ عَجِيبٌ ٢

But the disbelievers are amazed that a warner has come from among them and they say, ‘How strange! [2]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 2)

People only deem something to be strange if it is unusual and the soul cannot explain it or rationalise it, such as magic, we find it strange because we do not understand how it is done. The discourse here is about the disbelievers who lived at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Quran has clarified this matter and explained it elsewhere, when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And they say, too, ‘And they say: Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) He also says: ‘And they say: Why has not an angel been sent down to him? And had We sent down an angel, the matter would have certainly been decided and then they would not have been respited. And if We had made him angel, We would certainly have made him a man and We would certainly have made confused to them what they make confused.' (*al-An'am:* 8-9)

Therefore, their objection was not directed at the Quran itself, but rather at Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and how the Quran could have been revealed to him when he was one of the ordinary people and why it was not revealed unto a great man of the people of the two cities. They brought forth another objection which was to ask why it had not been revealed unto an angel.

However, the Quran answered them and refuted this objection. Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger and a role model, thus must be from the same species as those to whom he is sent. For otherwise, how could we follow the example of an angel when his nature is different from ours, and his powers are different from ours?! And if he commanded us something, we would have the right to say that we cannot do what you can do because you can do things we cannot do. Thus, he could not be our role model.

As a matter of fact, part of the greatness of Prophet Muhammad is that he is one of us and thereby Allah reminded us of this blessing when He says: 'Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves.' (*at-Tawba:* 128) That is from your species, your nation and from the closet people to you. He was known with his sincerity and his trustworthiness since before the Message came to him, and you have attested to these yourselves.

Thus, this means that the disbelievers are the ones who find it strange that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was chosen to convey the Message. Those who are not disbelievers do not find this strange. Since the Quran was revealed over twenty-three years, there were some people who believed in him *peace and blessings be upon him* from the moment the very first verse was revealed to him. Indeed, Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* believed in him from the very first moment he told him that, 'I am he Messenger of Allah' without even asking him any questions or doubting him. That is because his past history among his people made him worthy of such a position. Why would they not believe him when he was known as the honest one who had never been known to lie? If someone never lies about creatures, he will certainly never lie about the Creator. Likewise, Abu Bakr believed him about the Night Journey and Ascension and did not argue as others did. He said about that 'If he indeed did say it, then he spoke the truth.' He considered the matter rationally based on what he knew about the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It is worth noting that the name Muhammad itself is a proof of his truthfulness. When Allah says: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' (*al-Fath:* 29), the word 'Muhammad' is the subject of this sentence and the predicate is that he is the Messenger of Allah. Muhammad means a person praised and lauded by the people. Thus, at his very beginnings and childhood he was being prepared for this mission and therefore they never experienced a single lie from him, nor any of those things which his contemporaries used to do in the time of the pre-Islamic period. It is as though He were saying to them, 'This is Muhammad whom you know and whose past history among you is known to you. This is the Messenger of Allah.' It is as though the very reason for believing in him is that he is Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We explained before how Allah protected him *peace and blessings be upon him* from errors and from having his private parts exposed. Therefore, He *the Almighty* instructed Him to say to those who debated with him: 'Indeed I have lived a lifetime among you before it; do you not then understand?' (*Yunus:* 16) This means, 'You know everything about me and you know that I do not lie and that I have never given a speech or recited poetry to you. So why would you give the lie to me now?'

The words 'how strange' at the end of the verse are not a repetition of the aforementioned words 'But the disbelievers are amazed.' Rather, it means that they find strange what has been claimed and they also find strange what the disbelievers themselves said. The Quran explained this when it says: 'And nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said: What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?' (*al-Isra':* 94) He replied to them, 'what do you want?' They said, 'We want an angel.' He said to them, 'Even if he was an angel, he would come to you in the form of a man.' So, the doubt would still remain.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَءِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا ذَٰلِكَ رَجْعُۢ بَعِيدٌ ﴿٣﴾

To come back [to life] after we have died and become dust? That is too far-fetched' [3] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 3)

Here they move the objection away from the human nature of the Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* and turn to doubts the matter of resurrection. Thus, we have two distinct contents of the vow. The first content is that 'You indeed are a warner' and the second content is 'Indeed you shall all be resurrected.' We derive these two from the second and the third verse.

The meaning of their words that is too far-fetched refers to the return to life after death and becoming dust. This seems far-fetched to them. Why is that when you have the remnants of the teachings of our Prophets Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and the rest of the previous religions and you know about Allah and that He is your Creator and the Creator of the heavens and the earth?

The Quran tells us that Prophet Ibrahim said: 'and when Ibrahim said: My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead, He said: What! And do you not believe? He said: Yes, but that my heart may be at ease.' (*al-Baqara:* 260) We said that this question was not asked out of any doubt on the part of Ibrahim in the power of Allah to raise the dead to life. Rather, his question was about the methodology of it.

Thus, Allah showed him the mode with a practical example so as to make him witness and participate in it. It is as though Allah was saying to him and to us: 'Raising the dead to life is not difficult or miraculous for Me and indeed if I will I can lend My power to an of My servants and he shall do it by My Leave.' 'He said: Then take four of the birds, then train them to follow you, then place on every mountain a part of them, then call them, they will come to you flying; and know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.' (*al-Baqara:* 260) This is how Allah may lend some of His Power to one of His servants.

Further, in the story of 'Isa (Jesus), Allah says: 'that I determine for you out of dust like the form of a bird.' (*Al-'Imran:* 49) Therefore, the Quran responds to those who deny the Resurrection and says:

قَدۡ عَلِمۡنَا مَا تَنقُصُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ مِنۡهُمۡۖ وَعِندَنَا كِتَٰبٌ حَفِيظُۢ ﴿٤﴾

We know very well what the earth takes away from them: We keep a comprehensive record [4] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 4)

This means 'why do you deem Resurrection strange, when Allah is well aware of the constituents and the parts of the body and the quantities of each part?' He is well aware of what the earth takes away from you and well able to reassemble it exactly as it was when He created it in the first place even if the parts which belonged to it have been removed from it. So we differ in respect to the constituents of our makeup, not in the way in which these constituents are assembled.

Allah says that this process is based on knowledge and awareness, not on mere words as well as it has another attestation, i.e. the comprehensive record. So this knowledge is backed up by a written record wherein all things are documented. If you say, 'What is the purpose of the record since Allah already knows it?' We respond that Allah's knowledge is vast and is one of His Attributes and He does not forget; but He inscribes it in a record so that this record may be an argument against those who deny, just as is the case with good and bad deeds. Allah knows them well and knows their number. He does not need anything to remind Him of them, but He records them for the servant to be a proof against him on the Day when Allah will say to him: 'Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day.' (*al-Isra':* 14)

The Arabic for the word comprehensive is an intensive adjective and a hyperbole in the morphological form *fa'il*. It has the active meaning of protector or guardian. It means that it securely records all things great and small and it is also protected. No hand can remove anything from it and change anything in it. Therefore, Allah says: 'Most surely it is an honored Quran, in a book that is protected. None shall touch it save the purified ones.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 77-79) He also says: 'And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures–none knows them but He, and He knows what is in the land and the sea and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but [it is all] in a clear book.' (*al-An'am:* 59)

Those who seek to raise doubts about the Resurrection or deny it outright are those who mock religion and squander their own souls. If the Resurrection or the Reckoning were really true, this would be a disaster for them as they simply doubt the Resurrection and deny it and indeed all of religion is a lie in their view.

Reflect, for example, on the futility of their argument when they say, by way of denying the Resurrection, that if a man dies and then an apple-tree is planted on his grave, for example, that his elements will be absorbed by this tree and it will consume him, and then people will eat its fruits. Thereby, some elements from the first person will thus constitute the body of the second person, and when the second person dies, will this element be resurrected in the body of the first person, or the second?

Now this is a feeble objection, and we may respond to it by saying: ‘If a man’s weight is one hundred kilos and he becomes so ill that he loses half his weight and becomes emaciated, and then Allah *the Almighty* grants him a cure so that he regains his health and his previous weight, does this mean that the same matter has returned to him?

No, it has not, but rather, he has consumed other matter than that which left him; yet his form and its individual characteristics remain, and when they return, they are just the same as they were before.

So it is not the very same physical matter which is restored, but rather, the very same person is restored. As long as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Well do We know how the earth consumes their bodies…’ (*Qaf:* 4), this means that He *the Almighty* is fully able to gather them and remake them, simply by saying ‘Be!’ so that it comes into being.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

بَلْ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِٱلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَآءَهُمْ فَهُمْ فِىٓ أَمْرٍ مَّرِيجٍ ۝٥

But the disbelievers deny the truth when it comes to them; they are in a state of confusion [5] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 5)

We understand from their words ‘Why – [how could we be resurrected] after we have died and become mere dust? Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!’ (*Qaf:* 3) that they deny the Resurrection and do not believe that they will be resurrected after death. This denial does not change anything in reality, for the Resurrection is real and it will happen, yet they deny it because it will not be to their benefit.

Therefore, Allah says here: ‘But the disbelievers deny the truth when it comes to them’ (*Qaf:* 5); the ‘truth’ is that which is stable and never changes, no matter what happens; for all the events and incidents will pass by, and the truth will remain as it is.

Allah *the Almighty* gave us a tangible parable of truth and falsehood when He *the Almighty* says: ‘[Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does Allah set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does Allah set forth the parables?’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 17)

In the same way, their denial and disbelief will pass away, and the fact will remain, and the truth will remain stable and unchanged. In the same connection, there are many verses in the Quran which convey this notion, such as: ‘…and [He] brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah’s Cause remained supreme…’ (*at-Tawba:* 40). Now the first instance of the word ‘cause’ here is the object of the verb, whilst the second is the subject of a new clause which is independent of the other.

So, the first is the object of another action, whilst the second is eternally stable beyond the count of time: He brought the cause of the disbelievers utterly low, whilst Allah’s Cause was supreme from the very beginning; it was not low and then He *the Almighty* brought it high. This means that the truth is something pre-eternally firm and unchangeable.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and so they are in a state of confusion.’ (*Qaf:* 5) Now the word *marij* literally means ‘confusing’. So, they are confused and wavering: sometimes they are incredulous, thus say: ‘…A strange thing is this’ (*Qaf:* 2), while other times they deny it; so, their state is confusing.

The word *marij* is derived from the word *maraja* which describes how a ring slides onto a finger if it is wide and easy to move.

The proof that they are in a state of confusion is that they levelled a series of accusations against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and every time they failed to uphold one, they moved on to another because the Quran was ready to answer every plot they made against him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, we heard them accusing him *peace and blessings be upon him* of being a 'sorcerer', 'poet', 'madman' and 'soothsayer.' So '…they are in a state of confusion' (*Qaf:* 5), and they do not know what to say, for every time they make an accusation, the Quran refutes it; for the truth is one, and therefore we see it to be constant, whilst falsehood is multiple and therefore inconstant.

This matter is crystal clear when people testify before a judge: the truthful witness does not say one thing and then another because he is describing a factual event, whilst the deceitful witness changes his story and does not stand up to the judge's questioning, and his deceit is quickly discovered and exposed. This is because he is not describing a factual event, but is inventing his own story.

Allah *the Almighty* then turns His Discourse to the cosmological signs which prove His Omnipotent Power and support doctrinal matters; for once we correct the doctrine of these people and help them attain to faith in Allah *the Almighty* they will then think about having faith in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* thus allow themselves to be guided to the Truth.

Therefore, He *the Almighty* leaves the subject of their denial of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Resurrection to speak about the cosmological signs of the heavens and the earth.

He *the Almighty* says:

أَفَلَمْ يَنظُرُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَوْقَهُمْ كَيْفَ بَنَيْنَٰهَا وَزَيَّنَّٰهَا وَمَا لَهَا مِن فُرُوجٍ ﴿٦﴾
وَٱلْأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَٰهَا وَأَلْقَيْنَا فِيهَا رَوَٰسِىَ وَأَنۢبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍۭ بَهِيجٍ ﴿٧﴾
تَبْصِرَةً وَذِكْرَىٰ لِكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ ﴿٨﴾

Do they not see the sky above them — how We have built and adorned it, with no rifts in it [6] how We spread out the earth and put solid mountains on it, and caused every kind of joyous plant to grow in it [7] as a lesson and reminder for every servant who turns to God [8] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 6 - 8)

The purpose of the question ‘Do they not see…’ (*Qaf:* 6) is to encourage them to look and reflect on the creation of the heavens, the signs and miracles they contain because these signs are proof of Allah’s Omnipotence. The saying of Allah, ‘…We have built…’ (*Qaf:* 7) indicates that despite its vastness, the sky has been built; and despite the hugeness of this building, we do not find any supports holding it up.

Therefore, He *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘It is Allah Who has raised the heavens without any supports that you could see…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 2). So, as long as it has no support holding it up, this means it must be held up from above, and nothing holds up it, except the Infinite Power of Allah *the Almighty* a fact which is clear in the Quran: ‘Verily, it is Allah *the Almighty* [alone] Who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate [from their orbits]…’ (*Fatir:* 41).

We see this concept clearly apparent in the building of long bridges which have no bases or supports holding them up, but are rather suspended from above, and hence named ‘suspension bridges.’

Allah *the Almighty* makes this easier for us to understand when He says: ‘Have they, then, never beheld the birds above them, spreading their wings and drawing them in? None but The Most Gracious upholds them: for, verily, He keeps all things in His sight.’ (*al-Mulk:* 19) So, just as He holds up the birds in the sky, He holds up the heavens, which only refrain from falling onto the earth by His Leave. He *the Almighty* did not only build the sky, but also ‘…adorned it…’ with all the stars and planets shining therein, and also made it 'with no rifts in it…', that is, there are no fissures or breaks in it, but we see that it is level and smooth. Behold it when it is clear, and you will see the most beautiful of colours.

After speaking to us about the signs of the sky, Allah *the Almighty* then speaks to us of the signs He has placed in the earth; if the signs of the heavens are far away from us, then the signs of the earth are close to us and easy for us to perceive.

He *the Almighty* says: 'How We spread out the earth…' (*Qaf:* 7) which means 'laying it out and making it level and easy to live upon'. When something is truly spread out and extended, it has no end – and this is true of the earth, for no matter where you go, you will always find it spread out before you, and it has no edge where it ends. So, this spreading out explains to us the spherical shape of the earth.

As for the saying of Allah, '…and put solid mountains on it…' (*Qaf:* 7), it tells that mountains keep the earth firm so that it does not constantly shake, as He *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'And [have We not made] the mountains [its] pegs?' (*an-Naba':* 7) That is, the mountains are for the earth like the pegs of a tent. He *the Almighty* also causes plants to grow in the land 'And caused…' the earth '...every kind of joyous plant to grow in it…' (*Qaf:* 7). The word for 'kind' here is *zawj* (literally 'pair') means a single type accompanied by another of its kind.

In order for plants to reproduce, there must be a pair of male and female, just as is the case with human beings and animals; and therefore Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And in everything have We created opposites…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49) because otherwise there can be no reproduction.

It is known that plant reproduction involves pollination which is facilitated by butterflies and flying insects which transfer pollen from the male to the female parts. When people use pesticides to kill them all the insects in a garden, they found that the trees in the garden neither flowered nor gave fruits. Why? It is because the butterflies and insects, which would have transferred the pollen, were all dead.

They noticed that insects often have the same colour as the flowers which they pollinate, so that their colours are remarkably alike, to the extent that you can hardly see the butterfly when it is on the flower; and the consonance of these colours is a clear example of Allah's Amazing Creation.

The word *bahij* 'joyous' means a thing is beautiful and pleasant to look at. Scholars understood from the saying of Allah, '…and put solid mountains on it…' (*Qaf:* 7) that the earth used to shake in the very beginning of its creation, and that it turns; for if it were stable from the very beginning, it would not need firm mountains to hold it in place, lest it stray out of place along with all those upon it.

These were all mysteries of the heavens and the earth which Allah *the Almighty* revealed to us by means of the advances of science and civilisation, and therefore we read, for example: 'And you will see the mountains, which [now] you deem so firm, pass away as clouds pass away…' (*an-Naml:* 88). Indeed, mountains move just as air does; but how could the mountains move when they are firmly fixed in place on the surface of the earth? So, the mountains only move as the earth moves; and because such a fact would astonish you, the True Lord says after it: '…a Work of Allah, who has ordered all things to perfection!' (*an-Naml:* 88) As long as it is the Work of Allah *the Almighty* then do not be astonished or find it far-fetched.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'as a lesson and reminder for every servant who turns to Allah' Thus offering an insight and a reminder…' (*Qaf:* 8), that is, these cosmological signs in the heavens and the earth give insight to people, and remind them of the Omnipotence of the Creator *the Almighty* so that they reflect on how this universe and all within it were created with such precision and brilliance.

The word 'insight' means a constant sign, whilst a 'reminder' is used to refer to a phenomenon which is liable to change; for example, the earth can be dry and barren, and then when rain falls upon it, it springs into verdure.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…for every servant who turns to Allah…' (*Qaf:* 8), it refers to the one who repents to Allah *the Almighty* much, and sees in Allah's signs in the cosmos a proof of His Omnipotence, and so yields to them and believes in them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَنَزَّلْنَا مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً مُّبَٰرَكًا فَأَنۢبَتْنَا بِهِۦ جَنَّٰتٍ وَحَبَّ ٱلْحَصِيدِ ﴿٩﴾
وَٱلنَّخْلَ بَاسِقَٰتٍ لَّهَا طَلْعٌ نَّضِيدٌ ﴿١٠﴾

And how We send blessed water down from the sky and grow with it gardens, the harvest grain [9] and tall palm trees laden with clusters of dates [10] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 9-10)

Allah *the Almighty* says: *nazzalna* 'And how We send…'; the root word *n-z-l* gives us the verbs *anzala* and *nazzala*: *anzala* means to send something down all at once, a meaning which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Behold, from on high have We bestowed (*anzalna*) this [divine Book] on Night of Destiny.' (*al-Qadr:* 1) That is, We sent it all down at once on this Night, and then the Angel of Trusted Inspiration brought it down step by step according to different circumstances, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'Trustworthy divine inspiration has alighted with it from on high [193] Upon thy heart…[194]' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193-194).

Likewise, water does not fall from the sky all at once, but rather, it falls down and again on different occasions, and therefore He *the Almighty* says: 'And We send down…' (*Qaf:* 9). His words 'from the skies' mean 'from the direction of the sky', for rain comes from clouds, and originates from the salt water found on earth, which then evaporates and rises to the sky where it clings together and forms clouds which Allah *the Almighty* then directs by the power of wind until it falls when it comes to cold climes. He *the Almighty* calls it '…blessed water…' (*Qaf:* 9) because He made it safe to drink and to water plants. In addition, He *Glorified is He* made it fresh and tasty for those who drink it.

When this blessed rain falls upon the earth, the earth breaks open and gives forth plants: '…and cause thereby gardens to grow…' (*Qaf:* 9). The word for 'gardens' here is *jannat* which is the plural of *janna* which means a place which is filled with trees which give shade (*tajinnu*) to those who walk among them, whence it is named *Janna*. Allah *the Almighty* uses the word in this sense when He says: 'Then, when the night overshadowed (*janna*) him with its darkness…' (*al-An'am:* 76). That is, it covered him with its darkness.

The meaning of 'fields of grain' is any grain which is harvested such as wheat, oats, maize and rice, which are annually sown and reaped. As for 'gardens', they contain trees which remain in place and live for many years in which they give forth fruit, and we only gather their fruit, leaving the trees themselves to remain until the following year.

As for His saying, 'And tall palm trees…', it refers to those palm trees which are very tall and lofty; the height of a palm-tree is a wonder of creation and an indication of the ultimate precision, for we see that storms uproot many huge trees, but we never see palm-trees falling by storms, as other trees fall; but if the palm-tree is weak, we see it bending little by little in stages until it reaches the ground. So it is tall and lofty. Allah *the Almighty* mentions the date palm after the trees of gardens and the fields of grain because the palm-tree combines attributes of both, that is, it gives its fruits every year like other trees, but if it is not pollinated, then the fruit it produces is dry and useless, and is simply cut and discarded.

When He *the Almighty* says '…laden with clusters of dates' (*Qaf:* 10), the word *Tal'* *'cluster'* means a green cob which opens, and from which comes a bunch of panicles which contain date seeds. It is a wonder of creation that you see how thickly clustered these seeds are, and how they are precisely organised within the panicle, such that one does not sit in front of another, but they are spread out evenly in the panicle like 'crow's feet', as they say.

So Allah *the Almighty* mentions to us here some of His signs in the heavens and the earth. We said before that the heavens and the earth are containers for what is within them; and despite the remarkable creation of the heavens and the earth, what they contain is even more remarkable.

Within these contents, man has a special place because he is Allah's vicegerent on earth, and with respect to their status as contents, all men are equal and none of them has a higher status than any other has in this regard. For the purpose of the container is to protect its contents, and a fifty-pound note is equal to a one-pound note in how they are protected in the same container; and gold, silver and iron are equal in the way they are maintained, even though they differ in their natures.

In the same way, all men are looked-after equally even though they may have different values. This difference exists for a wise reason which Allah *the Almighty* willed for the good of all society: '…and [We] raise some of them by degrees above others, to the end that they might avail themselves of one another's help…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). So people are strong and weak, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, intelligent and stupid; in this way, they complement one another in the motions of life.

We said before: 'What if every single person went to university and graduated? Who then would do the manual labour? It is therefore necessary that some people are the elite, whilst others work to serve them, for life would not work properly otherwise.'

Despite the way in which the value of each man's work and effort differs from that of another, the fact remains that we are all Allah's dependents and slaves, and none of us is 'Allah's son'; therefore, each one of us should mind his manners and keep within his boundaries, for we are all superior in one way and inferior in another; in a sense, no one is better than anyone else.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

رِّزْقًا لِّلْعِبَادِ ۖ وَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِۦ بَلْدَةً مَّيْتًا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ ٱلْخُرُوجُ ﴿١١﴾

As a provision for everyone; how with water We give [new] life to a land that is dead? This is how the dead will emerge [from their graves] [11] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 11)

Allah *the Almighty* caused gardens, orchards and farms to grow, some of which give forth grains which nourish people and are thus harvested, such as wheat; He also caused date palms to grow high into the sky, giving goodness to people for many generations.

Therefore, He then says: 'As a provision for everyone…' (*Qaf:* 11) It is sustenance for all Allah's slaves, believer and disbeliever, righteous and sinner because He created everyone and therefore undertook to provide for those whom He created the sustenance they need to live, even if they do not believe in Him.

Then He says: 'how with it', that is, by the water which He mentioned before when He said: 'And We send down from the sky blessed water…' (*Qaf:* 9); so, by this water, 'how with water We give [new] life to a land that is dead?' That is, We bring back to life the soil of a land which had died meaning the dry and dead soil which is bereft of vegetation. As a matter of fact, when rain falls onto it, life returns to it in the form of vegetation, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: '…And [if, O man, thou art still in doubt as to resurrection, consider this:] you cannot see the earth dry and lifeless – and [suddenly,] when We send down waters upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of lovely plant!' (*al-Hajj:* 5)

Allah made the revival of dead earth a proof and a living example of the Resurrection of the dead, saying: '…This is how the dead will emerge [from their graves]…' (*Qaf:* 11). This is similar to what He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: 'and He it is who sends down, again and again, waters from the sky in due measure: and [as] We raise therewith dead land to life, even thus will you be brought forth [from the dead].' (*az-Zukhruf:* 11) It is also similar to His saying: 'He [it is who] brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive, and gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless: and even thus will you be brought forth [from death to life]…' (*ar-Rum:* 19). That is, you shall be brought forth and resurrected in the same way. So, anyone who denies the Resurrection should look at how the hard dead earth is brought back to life with vegetation after rain falls on it. The earth is dead and dry, bearing no signs of life, and then when rain falls upon it and waters it, it springs into motion and the dry cracks in the soil close up, and then it gives forth all manner of beauteous plants, which is a living example of creation and life for all to witness.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

كَذَّبَتۡ قَبۡلَهُمۡ قَوۡمُ نُوحٖ وَأَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلرَّسِّ وَثَمُودُ ﴿١٢﴾ وَعَادٞ وَفِرۡعَوۡنُ وَإِخۡوَٰنُ لُوطٖ ﴿١٣﴾
وَأَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡأَيۡكَةِ وَقَوۡمُ تُبَّعٖۚ كُلّٞ كَذَّبَ ٱلرُّسُلَ فَحَقَّ وَعِيدِ ﴿١٤﴾

The people of Noah disbelieved long before these disbelievers, as did the people of Rass, Thamud [12] 'Ad, Pharaoh, Lot [13] The Forest-Dwellers, Tubba': all of these people disbelieved their messengers, and so My warning was realized [14] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 12-14)

These words consoled Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and made it easier for him to bear the stubborn disbelief of his people; the stance they took was shown in the previous verses, first of all in His saying: '…they deem it strange that a warner should have come unto them from their own midst…' (*Qaf:* 2). They then denied the Resurrection of which He says: 'Why – [how could we be resurrected] after we have died and become mere dust? Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!' (*Qaf:* 3) So, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to present to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the stories of the previous Divine Messages, to show him how often his fellow Messengers were also denied.

It is as though He *the Almighty* were saying to him: O Prophet Muhammad, you are not the first to experience this, for '[Long] before those [who now deny resurrection] did Nuh's people give the lie to this truth…' (*Qaf:* 12) even though he *peace be upon him* lived among them for nine hundred and fifty years, yet they still gave him the lie, and none but a few of them believed in him.(1)

But did Allah simply leave them? No, He requited them by drowning them and utterly wiping them out to the last man; for He *the Almighty* would not leave the people of corruption, those who denied and opposed His Messengers, without punishing them, but rather, He would grant them respite for a while, and then take them to task without further delay.

The people of Nuh *Allah be pleased with him* used to mock at him while he was building the Ark, and so he used to say to them, 'A day will come when we shall mock at you as you now mock at us.' It is as though he was completely certain that Allah *the Almighty* would give succour and aid to his mission.

And just as Nuh people gave the lie to the truth, so did the people of Ar-Rass; Ar-Rass is the name of a righteous man; so was the case of '…[The tribes of] Thamud' (*Qaf:* 12) to whom Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *Allah be pleased with him* was sent; so was the case of the people of 'Ad', the tribe of Prophet Hud *Allah be pleased with him*; so was the case of the people of 'Pharaoh…' (*Qaf:* 13) The story of Pharaoh and Prophet Musa (Moses) *Allah be pleased with him* is well known; so was the case of the people of Prophet '…Lut' (*Qaf:* 13), and so was the case of '…the forest dwellers…' (*Qaf:* 14) who lived in a garden thick with trees and whose branches wind around each other. As a matter of fact, these are the people of Prophet Shu‘aib *Allah be pleased with him*, ‘...And the people of *Tubba'…*’ (*Qaf:* 14) Tubba‘ was a king of Yemen named Abu Kurb Al-Hamiri; those of his people who gave the lie to Allah’s Message were possessed of civilisation, comfort and luxury, but after they gave the lie to their Messenger and contravened Allah’s Way of Guidance, He *the Almighty* changed their condition and destroyed them for their sins.

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(1) Allah *the Almighty* says: '…for only a few [of Noah's people] shared his faith.' (*Hud:* 40)

Therefore, He *the Almighty* says here: ‘…they all gave the lie to the apostles – and thereupon that whereof I had warned [them] came true.’ (*Qaf:* 14) That is, when they gave the lie to My Messengers, they called upon themselves the punishment of which I had warned them, and they had to be destroyed.

In another verse, He *the Almighty* gives the details of this requital, saying: ‘For every one of them did We take to task for his sin: and so, upon some of them We let loose a deadly storm wind; and some of them were overtaken by a [sudden] blast; and some of them We caused to be swallowed by the earth; and some of them We caused to drown. And it was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who had wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40)

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

أَفَعَيِينَا بِٱلۡخَلۡقِ ٱلۡأَوَّلِۚ بَلۡ هُمۡ فِي لَبۡسٖ مِّنۡ خَلۡقٖ جَدِيدٖ ١٥

So were We incapable of the first creation? No indeed! Yet they doubt a second creation [15] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 15)

The discourse returns to refuting the allegations of those who deny the Resurrection; those who said before: ‘Why – [how could we be resurrected] after we have died and become mere dust? Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!’ (*Qaf:* 3) He returns to His subjects to say to them: Why do you deny the Resurrection? Do you not have before you the first creation? ‘So were We incapable of the first creation?’ (*Qaf:* 15) That is, were We unable to do it, or worn out by it? Of course not, but rather, We (Allah) were fully able to do it, and We brought it into being from nothing.

In the first creation, Allah created the heavens, the earth and the first man, Adam *Allah be pleased with him* and the One Who is able to create in the first place is all the more able to recreate.

As for the saying of Allah: ‘No indeed! Yet they doubt a second creation.’ (*Qaf:* 15), it means that they are confused and uncertain, just as He says about them earlier: ‘…and so they are in a rift confusion.’ (*Qaf:* 5)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِۦ نَفْسُهُۥ ۖ
وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ ٱلْوَرِيدِ ﴿١٦﴾

We created man — We know what his soul whispers to
him: We are closer to him than his jugular vein [16]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 16)

After speaking about the signs of the heavens and the earth, Allah *the Almighty* now speaks to us about the signs He placed in the creation of man. He *Glorified is He* made it clear that the signs of the heavens and the earth are greater than the signs which reside in the creation of man: ‘Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth…’ (*Qaf:* 57).

He gives us the promise that ‘In time We shall make them fully understand Our Messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons…’ (*Fussilat:* 53), i.e. the horizons of the heavens and the earth, ‘…and within themselves so that it will become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth…’ (*Fussilat:* 53).

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Verily, We created man…’ (The Quran, 50) emphasising this statement with the word ‘verily’ because they deny this fact and give the lie to it, and this denial of theirs is purely a matter of obstinacy because Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, Allah…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87).

As long as Allah *the Almighty* has said ‘Verily, We created man…’ (*Qaf:* 16), it would be far-fetched to say that it is possible to make a copy or ‘clone’ of man; for the man who forms a family composed of a mother and a father could never be copied, for only He Who created him could copy him.

This is proved by the fact that He *the Almighty* created Adam *Allah be pleased with him* and then created Eve from his rib. You shall never be able to do this. You might be able to clone plants or animals, for these beings are not required to form families.

The purpose of plants and animals is only to reproduce; man, on the other hand, is not required only to reproduce but also to adhere to the moral values. A man strives to form a family, and he thus looks for certain things in the woman he marries and the way he lives with her. Each one of them plays a role in raising the family in a way which is appropriate for them: he goes out and works, and she performs her role inside the home – and her role is higher and more important than his role.

Therefore, we find that the child, whom his father forsakes, undergoes a miserable life because he does not have a father with whom to connect. The child who has a father, on the other hand, is connected to his father who is in charge with him before the entire society. He provides for his living and his education. So, if we suppose that human beings indeed could be cloned, what kind of life do you suppose they would have?

Allah *the Almighty* is the man's Creator and Maker. The Creator knows best those whom He has created, and knows best their secrets and what is good for them: '…We know what his soul whispers to him…' (*Qaf:* 16). That is, We do not only know his open actions, but We also know his inner intentions, and We even know the thoughts and notions which come to his mind. 'How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]? Yea, He alone is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all aware!' (*al-Mulk:* 14)

He *the Almighty* knows the intricate matters and the hidden details of things, just as the manufacturer knows the details of his product. When your clock runs slow, for example, you have no idea what is wrong with it, so you take it to the clockmaker, and as soon as he looks at it, he knows what is wrong with it, and mends it with a simple action.

Allah *the Almighty* created man, that is, man is His *Glorified is He* Make and Creation. Therefore He *the Almighty* knows the secrets of his soul, not just his outward actions; for outward actions are known to all people, and there is no special distinction to this knowledge. As for the innermost whisperings of the self, this is a matter of the unseen which no one can perceive or know but Allah *the Almighty*. This is one of the signs of Allah *the Almighty* in the human being: ‘In time We shall make them fully understand Our Messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons and within themselves…’ (*Fussilat:* 53).

He calls the thoughts which come to the mind *waswasa* (whisperings), which literally means the quietest kind of speech; sometimes these whisperings come from the soul, whilst, at other times, they come from Satan, and therefore they convey nothing but evil. Imam ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* made the difference between the two clear when someone asked him, ‘How can I tell whether this whispering comes from my own soul or from Satan?’ He replied, ‘The soul insists on a particular sin and never relinquishes it, whilst Satan wants you to sin in any way so that if you disobey him in one sin, he will suggest to you another, and so on, until he gets you.’

The soul is the origin of all whisperings because if we consider the first sin of Iblis and ask, ‘Who whispered this to him?’ The answer is ‘his own soul’; that is why a poet once posed this question, saying: When Iblis sinned, who was his Iblis?

So, it all comes back to the soul and the self, and Iblis takes advantage of the soul’s desire and encourages it, and makes it seem alluring to the person. It is amazing how these whisperings assail a man and drown him in concerns and fantasies which are completely baseless so that he concerns himself with things that never happened, imagining that they did happen, or things from the past which he calls to mind again and again.

In this way, worries envelop him so that when you speak to him, you find that he is forgetful, or that he walks along talking to himself. The truly intelligent person is the one who does not allow himself to be caught by these whisperings, and who knows that he has a Lord Who is fully aware of the innermost self-whispers within him; a Kind Lord Who relives worries and alleviates woes. The intelligent person is the one who knows that the past is done with, and the future is a mystery, and what matters is the present moment.

The believer was created to have faith, to protect him so that if the means do not avail him, he can seek refuge with the Creator of all means. Therefore he never despairs or gives up.

We said before that if a man has a single pound, nothing more, and he loses it, he will certainly grieve, especially if he is on a journey to an unfamiliar place. But if he loses a pound and has ten pounds in the house, then his grief will be less. So, what if you have the Lord of the worlds to call on? Therefore, they say, 'There can be no woe as long as You are here, Lord!' We saw this true faith in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *Allah be pleased with him* who said, when the means had been straightened for him: '…Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62)

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…We are closer to him than his jugular vein…' (*Qaf:* 16). The *habl al-warid* (neck-vein) means the two veins in the neck which convey nourishment to the whole body so that if they are cut, life ends. These words are meant to symbolise the nearness of Allah *the Almighty* to His servant, as though He were saying to him: 'I am close to you, and I know every detail about you, and I know the innermost whisperings of your soul.'

He *the Almighty* then says

إِذۡ يَتَلَقَّى ٱلۡمُتَلَقِّيَانِ عَنِ ٱلۡيَمِينِ وَعَنِ ٱلشِّمَالِ قَعِيدٞ ﴿١٧﴾
مَّا يَلۡفِظُ مِن قَوۡلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيۡهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٞ ﴿١٨﴾

With two receptors set to record, one on his right side and one on his left [17] He does not utter a single word without an ever-present watcher [18] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 17-18)

Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that His Knowledge is all embracing so that He does not only know the outer actions of the body, but also knows what goes on in the soul, and all its notions and thoughts, even before they are translated into actions. So if He *the Almighty* knows the innermost whisperings of the soul, then He certainly knows the outermost actions of the body; and so if a man says to himself, 'I shall hide so that no one can see me', He *the Almighty* tells him that even if he hides from the people, he cannot hide from Allah *the Almighty* and his actions shall not escape the attention of the two angels who observe his deeds and record them: an angel on the right to record his good deeds and an angel on the left to record his bad deeds.

The meaning of ‘seated’ is that each of the two angels sits beside for him, watching him and never leaving him such that ‘Not even a word can he utter but there is a watcher with him, ever-present.’ (*Qaf:* 18) Now you might say, ‘Since Allah *the Almighty* knows all that a man does, and not the least thing escapes Him, then why does He record his actions for him?’ They answer this by saying that He records the actions so that there may be an argument against their doers on the Day of Resurrection, for just as Allah *the Almighty* will make the body parts speak and testify against their owners, this written record will also speak. He *the Almighty* says: ‘On the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did!’ (*an-Nur:* 24)

He *the Almighty* also says: ‘And they will ask their skins, “Why did you bear witness against us?” – [and] these will reply: “Allah *the Almighty* who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]…’ (*Fussilat:* 21). He *the Almighty* further says: ‘this Our record speaks of you in all truth: for, verily, We have caused to be recorded all that you ever did!’ (*al-Jathiya:* 29)

Out of His Mercy with His servants in the recording of their deeds, Allah *the Almighty* makes the angels record each good deed tenfold, and each bad deed one fold. In addition, the good deed is recorded as soon as you think of it,(1) whilst the bad deed is not recorded unless you actually do it – and even then, He gives you the opportunity of repenting, and correcting yourself.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says

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(1) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'If a person intends to do a good deed but does not do it, one good deed is recorded for him; and if he intends to do a good deed and does it, it is recorded for him between tenfold and seven hundredfold. And if a person intends to do a bad deed and does not do it, it is not recorded; and if he does it, it is recorded.' See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 186; see also Ahmad, Musnad. Hadith no. 6898.*

وَجَآءَتْ سَكْرَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِ بِٱلْحَقِّ ذَٰلِكَ مَا كُنتَ مِنْهُ تَحِيدُ ١٩

The trance of death will bring the Truth with it: ‘This is what you tried to escape’ [19] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 19)

The meaning of ‘the trance of death’ is the darkness and unconscious state which overcomes a man as he is on the brink of death and the exit of his spirit; it is also called the ‘…the trance of death…’ (*Qaf:* 19) because it is the beginning of death, He *the Almighty* then says that it ‘…brings the truth with it’ (*Qaf:* 19) because death is the truth; it is the due of all creatures, and an arrow which is shot at every new born who only lives until the arrow reaches him.

Therefore, some people die while in their mothers’ womb, whilst others die in their childhood; yet others die in their youth, while others in their old age.

One of the signs which Allah *the Almighty* has placed in death is that He has made its time and place unpredictable. Here, we should know that its unpredictability makes it completely clear, for it makes you expect it at any moment, and makes you prepare for it by repenting and doing good deeds, and makes you feel timid before Allah *the Almighty* lest He causes you to die whilst you are committing sin.

He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘This is what you tried to escape.’ (*Qaf:* 19) That is, this is what you would always seek to avoid, and which you fear. Indeed, we all fear death and wish to avoid it, and we imagine that everyone will die except us. Therefore the saying goes: ‘There is no certitude more similar to doubt that the certitude people have of death.’(1)

We do not always think about death is something Allah *the Almighty* willed for a wise reason; for if every one of us carefully reflected on the reality of death, his life would never be peaceful, he would constantly be at unease and no one would ever benefit from his labour. So it is better to hope for life because this hope is what keeps life in motion. Love for life is what causes us to thrive in it; what is important is that this hope does not make you forget death. You must always be prepared for death by repenting and asking Allah for forgiveness whenever you sin.

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(1) *It is a saying of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz or of Hasan Al-Basri.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَنُفِخَ فِي ٱلصُّورِۚ ذَٰلِكَ يَوۡمُ ٱلۡوَعِيدِ ٢٠
وَجَآءَتۡ كُلُّ نَفۡسٖ مَّعَهَا سَآئِقٞ وَشَهِيدٞ ٢١

The Trumpet will be sounded: 'This is the Day [you were] warned of' [20] Each person will arrive attended by an [angel] to drive him on and another to bear witness [21] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 20-21)

Allah *the Almighty* depicts for us here an image of the Day of Resurrection, the Day when the Trumpet shall be blown; saying that this refers to the second Trumpet, for which the people will rise from their graves. This Trumpet shall be blown by the angel Israfil *peace be upon him* on the Day of Resurrection.

His saying, '…This is the Day [you were] warned of...' (*Qaf:* 20) refers to the warning which He gave us and which causes us fear. A warning is the opposite of a promise, for it heralds something bad, whilst a promise heralds something good. Only those who have committed bad deeds fear death, exactly as the negligent pupil fears the final exam, whilst the hard-working pupil feels happy when it comes.

Likewise, the one who has done good deeds rejoices to meet Allah *the Almighty* because he knows that he is passing on to Allah's Ample Reward; and therefore when a righteous man dies, we say, 'O Allah *the Almighty* cause us to join him!'

He *the Almighty* says: 'Each person will arrive attended by an [angel] to drive him on and another to bear witness.' (*Qaf:* 21) He *the Almighty* will drive him on to the place of the Gathering, and his conscious mind will bear witness to all that he has done. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَّقَدۡ كُنتَ فِي غَفۡلَةٖ مِّنۡ هَٰذَا فَكَشَفۡنَا عَنكَ غِطَآءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ حَدِيدٞ ٢٢

'You paid no attention to this [Day]; but today We have removed your veil and your sight is sharp'[22] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 22)

The saying of Allah, 'You paid no attention to this [Day]…' (*Qaf:* 22) means that people were, before death, heedless and forgetful of this Day, '…but today We have removed your veil’ (*Qaf:* 22), i.e. the veil of their heedlessness, ‘and your sight is sharp.’ (*Qaf:* 22) That is, man’s sight is piercing and sharp, and can well perceive things as they really are, i.e. the things of the Hereafter and what it contains of Resurrection, Reckoning, and Requital.

Allah *the Almighty* then says

وَقَالَ قَرِينُهُۥ هَٰذَا مَا لَدَىَّ عَتِيدٌ ﴿٢٣﴾ أَلْقِيَا فِى جَهَنَّمَ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ ﴿٢٤﴾ مَّنَّاعٍ لِّلْخَيْرِ
مُعْتَدٍ مُّرِيبٍ ﴿٢٥﴾ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ فَأَلْقِيَاهُ فِى ٱلْعَذَابِ ٱلشَّدِيدِ ﴿٢٦﴾

The person’s attendant will say, Here is what I have prepared [23] Hurl every obstinate disbeliever into Hell [24] Everyone who hindered good, was aggressive, caused others to doubt [25] And set up other gods alongside God. Hurl him into severe punishment! [26] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 23-26)

The meaning of’’ The person’s attendant…’ is the angel who always remained with him on his right and his left, recording all his deeds and all his breaths which will come forth; this angel will say: ‘…Here is what I have prepared’ (*Qaf:* 23). ‘This is what I have recorded for this man, and all that I set down in writing of his deeds is ready and prepared.’ It is like when we see a policeman giving his report to the district attorney, presenting all his evidence, and saying, ‘This is what I have, and that is the end of my role; the DA must now decide what to do about it.’

He *the Almighty* then says: ‘Hurl every stubborn disbeliever into Hell [24]’ (*Qaf:* 23). This is a commandment from Allah *the Almighty* to the two angels to cast into the hell ‘…Everyone who hindered good, was aggressive, caused others to doubt [25]’ (*Qaf:* 25). *Kaffar* means every wilful and defiant disbeliever. The word *kufr* can mean either ‘ingratitude’ or ‘unbelief’; and the former meaning can be found in the story of the people of Sheba, of whom Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Thus We requited them for their having denied the truth (*kafaru*)…’ (*Saba’:* 17), that is, they denied Allah’s Blessings by showing ingratitude for them. When *kufr* means ‘unbelief’, it means to deny the Giver of all Blessings, i.e. to deny the Existence of Allah *the Almighty*. The word *kaffar* is an intensive form of the word *kafir* (disbeliever) which implies repetition, i.e. the *kaffar* is one who frequently commits the act of disbelief, that is, not just once, which is why He describes this sort of person as ‘stubborn’, i.e. stubborn, persistent and wilfully determined in his unbelief (*Kufr*).

The root meaning of *kufr* is ‘to cover’ and express ‘ingratitude’ (*kufr an-Ni‘ma*, literally ‘covering the blessing’); it is of two kinds: to cover the blessing in its place meaning that they do not go to it by working and striving to attain it; or that they attained unto it and placed it in their possession, and then were too miserly to share it with the needy. Likewise is the word ‘*anid* (stubborn); it has an element of intensiveness in its morphological form. The *‘anid* is the one who stubbornly refuses every time you call him to the Truth, and insists on keeping to his current position. There is no doubt that the Heaven-sent Messenger always invites the people to embrace faith many times, but the stubborn man refuses to accept the invitation and to follow guidance, and persists in holding to his view, accepting no argument or discussion. So *kufr* can mean ‘ingratitude’, or ‘to cover blessings’; it can also mean ‘unbelief’, or ‘to deny the existence of the Giver of Blessings.’

The saying of Allah, ‘Everyone who hindered good, was aggressive, caused others to doubt [25]’ (*Qaf:* 25) is a third description of the stubborn disbeliever; in addition to his firm unbelief and his stubbornness, he is also *manna‘ lil-khayr* (hindering of good). The word *manna‘* is also the intensive morphological form of the noun *mani‘*, that is, ‘one who withholds’; this means that he frequently withholds what is good, withholding it even from himself after withholding it from others by standing in the way of the call to faith, and by withholding his wealth and not giving any of it to the needy.

In addition to all this, he is also ‘…aggressive…’ (*Qaf:* 25); so, he does not content himself with withholding the good, but also assaults the good which others possess and takes it unrightfully. Sometimes he steals it; sometimes he gets it through bribery; sometimes he plunders and seizes it; sometimes he embezzles it; sometimes he cheats his way to it, and so on.

So, he is an aggressor in every way, and he also ‘…caused others to doubt [25]’ (*Qaf:* 25), that is, he doubts and does not believe in this Day; for if he believed in it and believed in the Reckoning and the Requital, he would not do any of these things, and if he believed in the Divine Justice, he would give instead of withholding.

Another attribute of that person is that he '…set up other gods alongside Allah. Hurl him into severe punishment!' (*Qaf:* 25) It is the ultimate sin against faith in Allah *the Almighty*; Allah says: 'Verily, Allah *the Almighty* does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills…' (*an-Nisa':* 116) And therefore the requital for all this is: '…Hurl him into severe punishment!'– So we have two kinds of suffering: a general suffering which He *the Almighty* does not describe as 'severe' when He says: '…Hurl him into severe punishment!' (*Qaf:* 24), and this is for those who disobey Allah *the Almighty* and commit grave sins without going so far as to ascribe divinity to aught besides Him.

There is then a suffering which He *the Almighty* calls 'severe'; it is for those who ascribe divinity to aught besides Allah *the Almighty*. This is because the one who commits grave sins whilst still believing in the Oneness of Allah *the Almighty* might repent because monotheism has a protective effect on the soul, even in the case of the sinner.

As for the idolater, he does not believe in the Oneness of Allah *the Almighty* and therefore it has no effect on his soul. So, if both of these people went to the same place in the Hereafter, then this would mean that the conviction of Allah's Oneness had no meaning or effect.

When He says: '…although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills…' (*an-Nisa':* 116), this mercy might be given immediately, whilst the person is still alive, and this is the case for those who repent and turn back to Allah *the Almighty* and who replace their evil deeds with righteous ones, in which case Allah's saying will apply to them: 'Excepted, however, shall be they who repent and attain to faith and do righteous deeds: for it is they whose [erstwhile] bad deeds Allah *the Almighty* will transform into good ones…' (*al-Furqan:* 70).

Or it may be that the forgiveness is delayed for him so that he has to suffer in hell for a time, after which Allah's Mercy comes to him; the grace of 'There is no deity but Allah *the Almighty*' envelops him; and the honour of the testimony of faith brings him out of hell.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ قَرِينُهُۥ رَبَّنَا مَآ أَطۡغَيۡتُهُۥ وَلَٰكِن كَانَ فِي ضَلَٰلِۭ بَعِيدٖ ٢٧

And his [evil] companion will say, ‘Lord, I did not make him
transgress; he had already gone far astray himself’ [27]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 27)

His ‘evil companion’ here means his constant companion who made misguidance seem alluring to him, whether from jinn or mankind; this being will say, by way of excusing and defending himself: ‘…Lord, I did not make him transgress; he had already gone far astray himself.’ (*Qaf:* 27) He will seek to absolve himself from his errant companion, and leave him in the pit he dug for himself.

The Noble Quran tells us more than once of this dialogue which will take place between the follower and the followed among those who followed the way of error, and how each one of them will seek to blame the other.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘But [since it will be too late,] they will turn upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins] [27] some [of them] will say: “Behold; you were wont to approach us [deceptively] from the right!” [28] [To which] the others will reply: “Nay, you yourselves were bereft of all faith! [29] Moreover, we had no power at all over you: nay, you were people filled with overweening arrogance! [30] But now our Lord’s word has come true against us [as well]: verily, we are bound to taste [the fruit of our sins]. [31] So then, [if it be true that] we have caused you to err grievously – behold, we ourselves had been lost in grievous error!” [32] And, verily, on that Day they all will share in their common suffering. [33] Verily, thus shall We deal with all who were lost in sin. [34]’ (*as-Saffat:* 27-34)

Even Satan will absolve himself of his followers: ‘and when everything will have been decided, Satan will say: “Behold, Allah promised you something that was bound to come true! I, too, held out [all manner of] promises to you – but I deceived you. Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you – and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine…' (*Ibrahim:* 22). That is, neither one of us can defend the other.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ لَا تَخۡتَصِمُواْ لَدَيَّ وَقَدۡ قَدَّمۡتُ إِلَيۡكُم بِٱلۡوَعِيدِ (٢٨)
مَا يُبَدَّلُ ٱلۡقَوۡلُ لَدَيَّ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ بِظَلَّٰمٖ لِّلۡعَبِيدِ (٢٩)

God will say, 'Do not argue in My presence. I sent you a warning [28] And My word cannot be changed: I am not unjust to any creature [29] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 28 - 29)

Allah *the Almighty* brings an end to this dialogue and this argument between those who were astray and those who led them astray, and ends this battle by saying to them: '…"Do not argue in My Presence.' (*Qaf:* 28) because this contending will not avail you aught now, and none of you can cast the blame on any other, for I know you best, and I know best who sinned, who was astray, and who led others astray; so, there is no benefit in contending, '…I sent you a warning.' (*Qaf:* 28) That is, I gave you a warning in your earthly life, and I showed you My Way of Guidance and told you what is lawful and unlawful, and how such would be requited in paradise or in hell.

As for the saying of Allah, 'And My Word cannot be changed…' (*Qaf:* 29), it means, 'Your contending now will not change My Judgement of you in the least, and I will not go back on My Word', this is in reference to His Order 'Cast, cast into hell every [such] stubborn enemy of the truth.' (*Qaf:* 24) This will bring an end to their hope and cause them to despair of Allah's Mercy; '…I am not unjust to any creature…' (*Qaf:* 29). That is, My Judgement is right and fair, and based on wisdom, not tyranny, and injustice. So, these defences and contentions you offer will not avail any of you aught.

When He *the Almighty* says '…I am not unjust to any creature…' (*Qaf:* 29) [Literally, 'I am not *zhallam* to any of My creatures' (*Qaf:* 29)], the word *zhallam* is an intensive form of the word *zhalim*, which means 'wrongdoer'; so, when we call a person *zhallam* (a great wrongdoer), this means that he is certainly a *zhalim*, a 'wrongdoer' in the general sense; but in the reverse, when the word *zhallam* is negated, this does not mean that the word *zhalim* is also negated. That is, a person might not be a ‘doer of great wrong’, but he could still be a ‘wrongdoer’ in a lesser sense. So, when He says: ‘…I am not unjust to any creature' (*Qaf:* 29), He negates that He is *zhallam*, but not necessarily that He is *zhalim* – so does this mean that Allah *the Almighty* could be called *zhalim* (a wrongdoer)?

We say that an intensive morphological form in Arabic could imply that the action is repeated. For example, when you say that someone is *akul* (the intensive form of *akil*, ‘one who eats’), this does not necessarily mean that he eats large meals; it could mean that he eats a single piece of bread for a meal, but does so several times a day.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* is not speaking about one person here, but rather about everyone in the world, and all His creatures and servants. Because of this, when *zhallam* is negated, *zhalim* is also negated. [So He is not a ‘great wrongdoer’, nor is He a ‘wrongdoer’ in any sense.]

The meaning might also be to negate the action in itself because wrongdoing is commensurate with the power of the wrongdoer over the one whom he wrongs; that is, wrongdoing is only as strong or as weak as the wrongdoer himself is. Therefore, if Allah *the Almighty* could be described as doing wrong – and of course He is completely and transcendently absolved above this – then His wrongdoing would be severely powerful, so we would say *zhallam* not *zhalim*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَوْمَ نَقُولُ لِجَهَنَّمَ هَلِ ٱمْتَلَأْتِ وَتَقُولُ هَلْ مِن مَّزِيدٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

We shall say to Hell on that day, ‘Are you full?’
and it will reply, ‘Are there no more?’ [30]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 30)

In the previous verses, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Cast, cast into hell every [such] stubborn enemy of the truth.’ (*Qaf:* 24), and here He *the Almighty* asks hell: ‘Are you full?’ Allah *the Almighty* also gave His Promise to fill the hell; He says: ‘…Most certainly will I fill hell with invisible beings as well as with humans, all together!’ (*as-Sajda:* 13) So He will certainly fulfil this promise, and the question here is ‘Are you full?’ which is a rhetorical question, to which the answer comes: ‘…and it will reply, “Are there no more”’ (*Qaf:* 30)? This means that it is full, but it wants more; so where will it put them?

We said before that the Creator destined paradise from pre-eternity to have room for all of humanity, were they all to believe, and created hell to have space for all humanity, were they all to disbelieve. Therefore there are empty spaces in the hell which the believers would have taken, and empty spaces in paradise which the disbelievers would have taken; and the hell will say: ‘…and it will reply, “Are there no more”’ (*Qaf:* 30) in order that the empty spaces within it would be filled.

He *Glorified is He* says:

وَأُزْلِفَتِ ٱلْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ غَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ (٣١)

But Paradise will be brought close to the
righteous and will no longer be distant [31]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 31)

After speaking about the hell in several verses, we now have the contrasting view of paradise: ‘be brought close’ (*Qaf:* 31), that is, it will be brought near to those people who were conscious of Allah, for they were given glad tidings of it in this worldly life, and Allah *the Almighty* never breaks His promise.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

هَٰذَا مَا تُوعَدُونَ لِكُلِّ أَوَّابٍ حَفِيظٍ (٣٢)
مَّنْ خَشِيَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنَ بِٱلْغَيْبِ وَجَآءَ بِقَلْبٍ مُّنِيبٍ (٣٣)

This is what you were promised — this is for everyone
who turned often to God and kept Him in mind [32]
who held the Most Gracious in awe, though He is
unseen, who comes before Him with a heart turned to
Him in devotion [33] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 32-33)

Allah’s saying: ‘This…’ (*Qaf:* 32) refers to what was just said about how pious people will enter paradise. Allah’s saying: ‘…is what you were promised…’ (*Qaf:* 32) refers to what Allah *the Almighty* has promised. As for Allah’s saying: ‘…this is for everyone who turned often to Allah…’ (*Qaf:* 32), the Arabic word *awwab* is an intensive form which means to turn back often to Allah such that when one sins he quickly regrets it and repents. The True Lord *the Almighty* explained this concept to us in His saying: ‘Repentance with Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 17), that is, they do not relish it or grow accustomed to it. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…then turn (to Allah) soon, so these it is to whom Allah turns (mercifully), and Allah is ever Knowing, Wise [17] And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds until when death comes to one of them, he says: Surely now I repent [18]…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 17-18).

Awwab is the one who regrets and repents when he commits a sin. This does not mean that he commits a lot of sins; rather, if he, out of heedlessness, ever misses out on a righteous deed, he quickly repents. For the one who repents of his sin and then returns to it, and keeps on doing this, this person is described by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as being like one who mocks his Lord. This is not the case with respect to the *awwab*. The word *Hafizh* in Allah’s saying: ‘…kept Him in mind *(hafizh)…*’ (*Qaf:* 32) is also the emphatic morphological form of the word *hafizh* (keeper). The *hafizh* is the one who always guards Allah’s Boundaries and keeps away from the things which He prohibits; he guards himself against falling into sin and from even going near them. This is the meaning of the Noble Hadith, ‘Watch over Allah, and He will watch over you.’(1) The way to watch over Allah is to keep within His Boundaries, to obey His Commandments and to stay away from His Prohibitions. Another attribute of the pious people, to whom Allah has made this promise, is that they are those: ‘who held the Most Gracious in awe, though He is unseen…’ (*Qaf:* 33). The word ‘awe’ means fear, and it is of two kinds: you might fear someone whom you hate and revile because he is stronger then you, or because he debases and tyrannises you, so that you fear and despise him; and this is the fear which men have for each other. There is yet another kind of fear, which involves love, awe, and wonder, as the poet says:

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(1) *See At-Tirmidhi, Hadith, no; (2440) and Ahmad, Hadith, no; (537) on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him.*

> I fear you in your majesty, though you have no power over me,
> Save that which the beloved has in the eye of the lover.

So you love the one you fear, and you know that he has done favours for you which you could never repay; and this is the Fear of Allah. The following saying of Allah makes this easier for us to understand: ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the cloud, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colours; and in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black? [27] And of men and beasts and cattle are various species of it likewise; those of His servants only who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah [28]’ (*Fatir:* 27-28). The True Lord *the Almighty* does not issue a binding commandment of Sacred Law here, nor does He give us a cause to fear being remiss therein; rather, He speaks about the signs of His universe, wanting us to seek them out and reflect upon them and to delve into their secrets and behold their beauty. Every time we look upon the signs of the universe around us, our awe of Allah increases, and we feel more and more wonder and amazement at His Grandeur and the Blessings He gives us; those who are truly endowed with knowledge are the ones who behold this first and who are closest to giving Allah the awe and esteem He deserves. Let us reflect here on the precision of the Quranic discourse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘who held the Most Gracious in awe, though He is unseen…’ (*Qaf:* 33). He chose the attribute of Grace and Mercy (*rahma*) and did not say, ‘Those who stand in awe of the All-Compeller’ or ‘the All-Dominant’ because the awe here springs from love, mercy and magnification of Allah whom we fear and before whom we stand in awe. Then He specifies this awe by saying: ‘…though He is unseen…’ (*Qaf:* 33) meaning that this awe is not proclaimed before the people, and that the true believer stands in awe before Allah in private before he does so in public, and in seclusion before company; he fears Him when he is alone.

As for the one whose faith is weak, he fears Allah in front of other people; when he is among them, he speaks about the lawful and the unlawful; but once he is by himself, he violates Allah’s Boundaries. This means that his awe of Allah is tainted by ostentation and idolatry; therefore He describes the pious people and the denizens of paradise as being those who fear Allah when only He Almighty can see them. Another meaning of Allah's saying: '…though He is unseen…' (*Qaf:* 33) is that when the believer is reminded of the Terror of Allah's chastisement and of hell, while he is still in the comfort of this world, he fears it and believes in it even though he has not seen it. This is what it means to stand in awe of that which we cannot perceive; for in our present situation, hell is unseen and imperceptible, and we only believe that it exists because Allah has told us that it does. The believer accepts what Allah tells him as though he can see it with his own eyes and touch it with his own senses, and indeed Allah's saying is even truer than the vision of the eye. I clarified this point before while explaining Allah's saying: 'Have you not considered [*alam tara,* literally 'did you not see'] how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) This is an address to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who did not see the incident of the Elephant, for he was born that very year; so why did He *the Almighty* not say to him 'Do you not know?', and say instead 'Did you not see'? Some scholars said that it is because Allah's saying is even truer than the vision of the eye, for indeed the eye might deceive you, but Allah's saying is absolutely true. Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…who comes before Him with a heart turned to Him in devotion.' (*Qaf:* 33) That is, a heart which is solely devoted to Allah and truly obedient. The heart is the seat of faith and as I said before; Allah wants our hearts, not our external forms. You might force the external form to believe, but the heart will only come out of love and obedience. This is why the True Lord *the Almighty* made faith a matter of free will, not compulsion; for had He *the Almighty* willed otherwise, He could have compelled all of His creatures to believe in Him *the Almighty* just as He compelled the heavens and the earth; but He wanted His servants to come to him in obedience and conviction.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱدْخُلُوهَا بِسَلَٰمٍ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمُ ٱلْخُلُودِ ﴿٣٤﴾ لَهُم مَّا يَشَآءُونَ فِيهَا وَلَدَيْنَا مَزِيدٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

So enter it in peace. This is the Day of everlasting Life [34] They will have all that they wish for there, and We have more for them [35]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 34 - 35)

This is an order from Allah *the Almighty* to the believers to enter the paradise in peace, safe and free of all discomforts; in other words, they shall never experience woe or distress again. As for Allah's saying: 'enter it in peace…' (*Qaf:* 34), it will be uttered by the angels when they greet them with the greeting of peace. Likewise, the True Lord *the Almighty* will say it to them, as He says: 'Peace: a word from a Merciful Lord.' (*Ya Sin:* 58) If a man receives greetings of peace from his Lord, he shall never suffer again. Another possible interpretation for Allah's saying: 'so enter it in peace…' (*Qaf:* 34) is 'enter it while giving greetings of peace to your fellow believers, saying to them, 'Peace be upon you', just as you used to greet them in this worldly life; likewise, in the Hereafter you will greet the angels at the doors of paradise with the same words. You will also greet your fellow believers. Allah's saying: 'This is the Day of everlasting Life…' (*Qaf:* 34) refers to the Day of Resurrection. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the Day of everlasting Life…' (*Qaf:* 34), it means that the Day of Judgment will be of permanence and endless uninterrupted bliss; and this is the difference between the bliss of this world and that of the Hereafter. However how great the bliss of this worldly life may be, two things cause the one who attains it to worry about it: either he will leave it by dying, or it will leave him through poverty or sickness. As for the bliss of the Hereafter, it is free of all obstacles and imperfections. Allah's saying: 'They will have all that they wish for there…' (*Qaf:* 35) means that this will take place in the paradise. The orientalists objected to this verse, saying: 'How could they have whatever they desire, when the Hadith states that paradise contains: '…What no eye has ever seen, nor any ear heard, nor any human heart imagined.'?(1) 'If they desire it,’ does this not mean they must know what it is?’ Some scholars said that the believer will desire the blissful things of this worldly life which he knows and which he used to enjoy, while the bliss of the Hereafter will be completely different from these things, sharing nothing in common with them but their names, while their true natures will differ. Therefore, He *the Almighty* goes on to say: ‘…and We have more for them.’ (*Qaf:* 35) The True Lord *the Almighty* explained this further when He says: ‘And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that they shall have gardens in which rivers flow; whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: This is what was given to us before; and they shall be given the like of it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 25). That is, when the believer yearns to eat a mango, for example, he will find it to be different from what he knew in his worldly life; and when he asks for it the next day, he will find it to be different from the one he ate the day before, and so on. It will resemble it, but will not be the same. So He gives them the ability to desire what they know of the delights of this world, and what they enjoy of it, yet in the Hereafter they will be something different, which is what is meant by the Hadith: ‘…What no eye has ever seen, nor any ear heard, nor any human heart imagined.’ This is because if you desire something, you ask for it by name, and the name is part of the knowledge of the thing; and so long as they are things utterly new to us, we do not know their identity, or their names.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Hadith, no. 3005; Muslim, Hadith, no. 5050 on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُم مِّن قَرْنٍ هُمْ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُم بَطْشًا
فَنَقَّبُوا۟ فِى ٱلْبِلَٰدِ هَلْ مِن مَّحِيصٍ ٣٦

We have destroyed even mightier generations before these disbelievers, who travelled through [many] lands – was there any escape? [36] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 36)

The Arabic word *Kam* (how) in this verse means ‘many’; the meaning thus is, ‘We destroyed a great many’; Allah’s saying: ‘…before these…’ (*Qaf:* 36) means ‘before your people, Quraysh’; regarding Allah’s saying: ‘…generation…’ (*Qaf:* 36), the word (*qarn*) means a group of people who live in a specific time. *Qarn* is one hundred years. It might mean something else if it is linked to a Prophet, such as Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* for they were all included in his spell of prophethood which lasted for nine hundred and fifty years. So *qarn* is derived from *iqtiran* (connection), whether that of the time of a king, a Prophet or an event. In another verse, the True Lord *the Almighty* explains how He destroyed the nations who gave the lie to their Prophets in the past, saying: 'So each We punished for his sin; of them was he on whom We sent down a violent storm, and of them was he whom the rumbling overtook, and of them was he whom We made to be swallowed up by the earth, and of them was he whom We drowned…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

All of those people were stronger and more powerful than Quraysh; for what were they, compared to Iram- the many-pillared, the like of whom were never created in all the land? And what were they, compared to Pharaoh, he of the many tent-poles?

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…who travelled through [many] lands…' (*Qaf:* 36) They went out into the land and travelled therein, which shows that they had power and stability, and that they were not overly concerned with the affairs of their lives. The True Lord *the Almighty* made it clear that travel might be undertaken for the purpose of reflection, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: 'Say: Travel in the earth, then see…' (*an-Naml:* 69). Or it might be undertaken to seek provision or for tourism, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Say: Travel in the land, then see…' (*al-An'am:* 11). So His saying: '…who travelled through [many] lands…' (*Qaf:* 36) means that they travelled on earth to seek pleasure and benefit, for they were not content with what they possessed at home, but wanted to enter other lands too; and only the strong do this, while the weak do not leave their homes and are content with a little. And elsewhere in the Quran, He *the Almighty* says of them: '…and dug up the earth, and built on it in greater abundance than these have built on it…' (*ar-Rum:* 9). The Arabic word *naqqaba* (to dig) means 'to look for something concealed beneath the earth'. So they were not content with the easily obtained blessings, but they sought after those which were concealed underground. Allah's saying: '…was there any escape?' (*Qaf:* 36) means that they sought a place to hide in and to be safe from the torment. This means that although they possessed power and stability and were able to travel throughout the land, once the torment was sent down upon them, they could not find any refuge to protect them, or any place wherein they could be defended from Allah's chastisement. The Arabic word *mahis* is derived from the verb *hasa* which means 'to flee.' Even in our common speech, we say, 'He has nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.' In Allah's saying: '…was there any escape?' (*Qaf:* 36), the reason this saying is framed in the form of a question is so that you can answer it yourself. Did they find a refuge from the torment? No, they did not.

This verse was revealed to console Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to relieve his suffering on account of the adversity and stubborn resistance he met from his people. It is as though He *the Almighty* were saying to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Do not grieve, Muhammad, and take your example from your fellow Messengers who came before you; for in the end you shall be victorious.'

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَذِكۡرَىٰ لِمَن كَانَ لَهُۥ قَلۡبٌ أَوۡ أَلۡقَى ٱلسَّمۡعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٞ ٣٧

There truly is a reminder in this for whoever has a heart, whoever listens attentively [37] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 37)

Allah's saying: 'There truly is…' (*Qaf:* 37) refers to the stories of the communities of the past who were taken to task by Allah. As for His saying: '…a reminder…' (*Qaf:* 37), it means that a reminder for you all and to which you must pay heed; for you have learned about what happened to them, i.e. the previous nations either by seeing the remains of their settlements; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And most surely you pass by them in the morning, [137] And at night; do you not then understand? [138]' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) Or else you have heard the accounts of what happened to them in the divinely-revealed scriptures; hearing and sight are indeed man's most important means of perception, which is why He *the Almighty* says here: '…whoever listens attentively' (*Qaf:* 37) that is, who hears and sees. As for Allah's saying: '…for whoever has a heart…' (*Qaf:* 37), it means a conscious heart which reflects and perceives, not a foolish or heedless heart – for what is the point in hearing if one does not have a conscious heart? The words would simply go in one ear and out the other, and the one who heard them would not learn anything from them.

Allah's saying: '…whoever listens attentively' (*Qaf:* 37) means 'to pay attention to what is heard' meaning that one gives his ear and listens with an attentive heart to take in what he hears and receive it with the proper rational inquiry.

The Arabic word *shahid* is the emphatic form of the word *shahid* (one who sees); it implies that he is especially attentive to what he sees, and that he benefits from it; he hears and sees with an attentive heart and a conscious mind, far from any heedlessness.

The True Lord *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَقَدۡ خَلَقۡنَا ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ وَمَا بَيۡنَهُمَا
فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٖ وَمَا مَسَّنَا مِن لُّغُوبٖ ٣٨

We created the heavens, the earth, and
everything between, in six Days without tiring [38]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 38)

The True Lord *the Almighty* makes it clear here that He created the heavens and the earth and all the cosmological signs within them and between them in a total of six Days. He *the Almighty* then says: '…without tiring.' (*Qaf:* 38) That is, this action of creation did not tire Us or exert Us. There are other verses in the Noble Quran similar to this one indicating that the creation took place over eight Days. He *the Almighty* says: 'Say: What! Do you indeed disbelieve in Him Who created the earth in two Days, and do you set up equals with Him? That is the Lord of the Worlds.' (*Fussilat:* 9) So, we have here two (additional) Days. In addition, He *the Almighty* says: 'and He made in it mountains above its surface and He blessed therein and made therein its foods, in four Days: alike for the seekers.' (*Fussilat:* 10) So, the total now is six Days. He *the Almighty* furthermore says: 'then He directed Himself to the heaven and it is a vapour, so He said to it and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly. They both said: We come willingly [11] So He ordained them seven heavens in two Days [12]' (*Fussilat:* 11-12). So, this seems to give us a total of eight Days, a matter that caused some orientalists to claim that these verses in question are contradictory: is it six Days or eight Days? But this accusation of theirs is born of their lack of understanding of the Arabic language and its rhetorical styles. The True Lord *the Almighty* first spoke about the creation of the earth as a separate entity, and then spoke about the creation of what came after the earth, all of which took place in a total of four Days. So the two times states here are inclusive meaning that the two Days are included in the four because they both refer to the creation of one single thing: the earth. After the True Lord spoke about the creation of the earth, He *the Almighty* said: '…in four Days: alike for the seekers.' (*Fussilat:* 10) That is, it was completely finished in four Days. It is like if you say, 'We went from Cairo to Tanta in an hour, and to Alexandria in two hours.' So, there is no contradiction in the verses, but rather they are all in harmony with each other. Another misconception in this regard is that they said, 'If the True Lord *the Almighty* can do whatever He wills without any need for effort, then why did He not create this universe with the word 'Be' so that it would not have taken six Days?' I said before in answer to this that there is a difference between creating something and making the precursors to creation and then allowing the thing to develop on its own and become what it is destined to be. I explained this with the example of yoghurt: we take milk and yeast and mix them together, and then leave this mixture at a certain temperature, and after a while the ingredients react with each other and give us yoghurt. So the effort required to do this takes only a few minutes, but the process of reactions takes place over several hours, until it becomes what we want it to be after we first assembled the ingredients needed to make it. The same is true for the creation of the universe in six Days like the days we know. The meaning of weariness is the lethargy which comes after one works until he is tired. So tiredness and exertion accompany work, and then weariness is the lethargy and relaxation which come after the work is done; and if the lesser thing is negated, then of course the greater thing is negated all the more. So, the meaning is that He became neither weary nor tired, just as is the case when He *the Almighty* says: '…slumber does not overtake Him or sleep…' (*al-Baqara:* 255). Slumber means the drowsiness which comes before sleep; and thus negating slumber means that sleep is negated all the more.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَٱصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ ٱلشَّمْسِ
وَقَبْلَ ٱلْغُرُوبِ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَمِنَ ٱلَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْهُ وَأَدْبَٰرَ ٱلسُّجُودِ ﴿٤٠﴾

So [Prophet], bear everything they say with patience; celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising and setting of the sun [39] proclaim His praise in the night and at the end of every prayer [40] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 39 - 40)

The True Lord *the Almighty* wants to console His Messenger after all the persecution he encountered from his people, so He says to him: 'Go on with your mission, and be not saddened by what they say, and do not despair of your ever triumphing over them'; for when the persecution directed at them became especially severe, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions felt that victory was far-off; Allah says of this: '…and they were shaken violently, so that the Messenger and those who believed with him said: When will the help of Allah come?..' (*al-Baqara:* 214) Here, He *the Almighty* says to him: 'So [Prophet], bear…' (*Qaf:* 39). This is because every time you bear persecution and trial patiently, you earn reward and a higher rank. So the more they persecute you, the more you must bear their persecution patiently, for they are only increasing their sin, while you are increasing your reward. Allah's saying: '…celebrate the praise of your Lord…' (*Qaf:* 39) means 'declare your Lord's Absolute Transcendence above any imperfection and any attribute which does not befit Him *the Almighty* by which His creatures might be characterised; for Allah has a Hand, but it is not like our hands; and He possesses Hearing, but it is not like ours. So, understand all these Divine Attributes in the light of Allah's saying: '…nothing like a likeness of Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) Therefore the True Lord *the Almighty* began telling the story of the Night Journey and Ascension by saying: 'Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go…' (*al-Isra':* 1). That is, Allah is transcendently above all imperfections and above having any resemblance to His creatures because the story involved the breaking of the natural laws with which men are familiar. So, do not find this event far-fetched because it is attributed to Allah, not to a human being; Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not say, ‘I travelled’, but rather said, ‘I was taken’. Distances are traversed in a speed commensurate with the power of the doer: you can travel from Cairo to Alexandria by horse in ten hours and by car in three hours and by plane in half an hour and by rocket in a few minutes. In this way, speed is commensurate with the power of the doer, and as the power increases the time needed decreases. Because the speed in question here is that of the True Lord *the Almighty* no time was involved at all; and the reason why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made this journey over a whole night was that he was shown many things during it, which used up this time. The meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘celebrate the praise of your Lord…’ (*Qaf:* 39) is: Extol the glory your Lord and at the same time praise Him for His Blessings; and therefore, we find that expressions of glorification and praise are always linked with one of Allah’s Blessings and Signs which none but He could provide. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go…’ (*al-Isra’:* 1). He *the Almighty* also says: ‘Glory be to Him Who created pairs of all things, of what the earth grows, and of their kind and of what they do not know.’ (*Ya Sin:* 36) Therefore we have seen over the passing of history that the disbelievers, idolaters, and atheists worship their idols and sanctify them, but yet they never say to their idols, ‘Glory be to you’ because this can only be said to Allah. Also, the Divine Name ‘Allah’ has never been given to anyone despite the existence of atheists and those who deny the Existence of Allah; none of them has ever dared to give his son this name because he is afraid to call his son Allah. Therefore He *the Almighty* says: ‘…Do you know of anyone equal to Him?’ (*Maryam:* 65) So these are two things which no one has ever dared to do, because of Allah’s Grandeur, even though man has free will to do as he chooses.

We can also understand from Allah’s saying: ‘…celebrate the praise of your Lord…’ (*Qaf:* 39) that His Glory itself is a blessing which deserves our praise; for the fact that the True Lord *the Almighty* is transcendently above any likeness, equal or partner, is a great blessing for mankind. For if Allah had a likeness, equal or partner, our lives would be ruined, and we would suffer on account of this equality, and we would not be able to live in peace. Therefore He *the Almighty* says: ‘If there had been in them any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 22).

He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Never did Allah take to Himself a son, and never was there with him any (other) god— in that case would each god have certainly taken away what he created, and some of them would certainly have overpowered others; glory be to Allah above what they describe!...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 91) The meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘…before the rising and setting of the sun; [39] proclaim His praise in the night and at the end of every prayer[40]’ (*Qaf:* 39-40) is: Glorify Him always without ceasing, for these times summarise the entire day; for there are people who work during the day and sleep at night, and others who work at night and sleep during the day; the former take a break from their responsibilities during the night, whilst the latter do so during the day. There are similar verses to this one in the Quran, all of which have their own meaning. Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Bear then patiently what they say, and glorify your Lord by the praising of Him before the rising of the sun and before its setting…’ (*Ta Ha:* 130). He *the Almighty* says here the Arabic word *ghurubiha* and in chapter of *Qaf* the Arabic word *Al-Gharub.* Therefore they ask: ‘what is the difference between the two? Which of them is clearer?’ I say that each word is clear in its place; for when the sun sets, some of us see the sign of the setting, while others do not because of the clouds and such things, and thus deduce that the sun has set by using other means which indicate this to them. In *Ramadan*, for example, many of us do not see the sunset, but we can still break our fasting because we have other means of telling the time. So, Allah’s saying: ‘…and before its setting (*ghurubiha*)…’ (*Ta Ha:* 130) refers to those who can see the sun. As for Allah’s saying: ‘…before the setting (*AL-Ghurub*)’ (*Qaf:* 39), it refers to those who cannot see it. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…proclaim His praise in the night and at the end of every prayer’ (*Qaf:* 40) while elsewhere He says: ‘…and during hours of the night do also glorify (Him)…’ (*Ta Ha:* 130). The former refers to those who wish to glorify Allah for a single part of the night and then sleep, whilst the latter refers to those who wish to glorify Allah and then sleep, and then glorify again and then sleep, several times in a single night. Allah’s saying: ‘…and at the end of every prayer’ (*Qaf:* 40) means ‘after the prescribed prayers’; Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us how to glorify Allah after the prayer’s end.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱسْتَمِعْ يَوْمَ يُنَادِ ٱلْمُنَادِ مِن مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴿٤١﴾
يَوْمَ يَسْمَعُونَ ٱلصَّيْحَةَ بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمُ ٱلْخُرُوجِ ﴿٤٢﴾

Listen out for the Day when the caller will call from a nearby place [41] They will come out [from their graves] on that Day, the Day when they hear the mighty blast in reality [42] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 41-42)

The caller here is Israfil, the angel charged with the task of blowing the Trumpet, and the ‘mighty blast’ is the second trumpet-peal which will bring the people forth from their graves for the Resurrection. The True Lord *the Almighty* says to His Messenger: ‘listen out for the Day when the caller will call…’ (*Qaf:* 41). These words were issued after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* endured persecution through both words and deeds, and so it is as though his Lord *the Almighty* was consoling him and saying to him: If they have done all this, then wait for this Day, the Day when the caller will call them to stand and be reckoned and requited. And listen to what will happen to them then, and how they will regret it, and repudiate and curse one another. This is as the rustic saying goes: ‘Tomorrow we shall sit on the wall and listen to the clamour.’ That is, ‘Wait, Muhammad, and you shall hear all about them.’ And Allah’s saying: ‘…from a nearby place…’ (*Qaf:* 41) means that the one who gives the call will be close to everyone, as though he is keeping their company, and as though every one of us has his own caller. Allah’s saying: ‘the Day when they hear the mighty blast…’ (*Qaf:* 42) means the second trumpet-peal. Allah’s saying: ‘…in reality…’ (*Qaf:* 42) means the very truth which they used to deny and disbelieve in their worldly life, namely the truth of the Resurrection; and the Quran mentioned their saying: ‘…What! When we are dust, shall we then certainly be in a new creation?...’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 5) And His saying: ‘…that Day of [their] coming-forth’ (*Qaf:* 42) means the Resurrection and the coming-forth from the graves; and the second blast will sound after all creatures have died upon the first blast. And therefore Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would always recite the chapter of *Qaf* on the Days of the two *Eid* festivals because of how Allah says therein: ‘…that Day of [their] coming-forth’ (*Qaf:* 42).

Coming forth is a good thing on the days of *Eid*, and even the menstruating woman should attend the prayer, merely to witness the goodness and the gathering of Muslims on this day. And therefore Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* bequeathed to us the practice of holding the *Eid* pray outdoors because it is a prayer attended and observed by those who are in a state where they themselves do not pray. And likewise, reciting the chapter of *Qaf* on *Eid* also indicates that the day of celebration, going out, dressing nicely and rejoicing should not make us forget the greater Day of coming-forth, the Day of Resurrection.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِۦ وَنُمِيتُ وَإِلَيْنَا ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٣﴾
يَوْمَ تَشَقَّقُ ٱلْأَرْضُ عَنْهُمْ سِرَاعًاۚ ذَٰلِكَ حَشْرٌ عَلَيْنَا يَسِيرٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

It is We who give life and death; the final return will be to Us [43] on the Day when the earth will be torn apart, letting them rush out – that gathering will be easy for Us [44]
(The Quran, *Qaf:* 43 - 44)

After saying: '…that Day of [their] coming-forth' (*Qaf:* 42) He *the Almighty* then affirms this truth and gives the conclusion of it, saying: 'It is We who give life and death…' (*Qaf:* 43), and because some people deny this fact, He emphasises it by stressing the pronoun: 'Verily, it is We…' (*Qaf:* 43), for He Alone *the Almighty* is able to do that. Allah's saying: '…the final return will be to Us' (*Qaf:* 43) means the final destination and the return; for the beginning is from Him, and the end is with Him. Allah's saying: 'on the Day when the earth will be torn apart, letting them rush out…' (*Qaf:* 44), that is, they will come forth from it rapidly because they will all respond to the blast at once, coming forth quickly without delay. And Allah's saying: '…that gathering…' (*Qaf:* 44) means, all of the things which happen of this Day, of the earth splitting and the people hastening forth from their graves and being gathered all together for the Gathering: '…will be easy for Us.' (*Ghafir:* 44)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

نَّحۡنُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا يَقُولُونَۖ وَمَآ أَنتَ عَلَيۡهِم بِجَبَّارٖۖ
فَذَكِّرۡ بِٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ مَن يَخَافُ وَعِيدِ ٤٥

We know best what the disbelievers say. You [Prophet] are not there to force them, so remind, with this Quran, those who fear My warning [45] (The Quran, *Qaf:* 45)

As long as We are fully aware of them and of what they are saying, then leave their requital to Us, for if you requite them, you will only do so with your power, while if We requite them We shall do so with Our power, and We shall not have mercy on them, nor shall they evade punishment. So, leave the matter to Us, for We are most capable of punishing them. Allah's saying: '…You [Prophet] are not there to force them…' (*Qaf:* 45), for your mission is to convey the Message, So do not worry yourself about them, and do not make yourself responsible for more than you are able to do. It is just as the True Lord *the Almighty* corrected him when He says: 'Perhaps you will kill yourself with grief because they do not believe.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3) And the meaning of Allah's saying: '…You [Prophet] are not there to force them…' (*Qaf:* 45) is force them to have faith, for if Allah wanted this He would have forced them to have faith as He forced others; but He wants them to come to Him in obedience out of their own free choice. Allah's saying: '…so, remind with this Quran, those who fear My warning.' (*Qaf:* 45) This is because this is your mission, to remind the people by means of the Quran. And then He specifies who this reminder is for: '…those who fear My warning.' (*Qaf:* 45) That is, who fear My warning and My admonition, for only the believer fears this warning, since he is prepared to accept it and respond to it. I explained before the difference between the action and the one who receives it, for not all those who listen to the Quran are alike. Some listen to it, and this listening has an impression on them and they respond, others listen without any attentiveness or reflection so that it is as though they have not heard anything. Therefore He *the Almighty* says of them: 'And there are those of them who seek to listen to you until when they go forth from you, they say to those who have been given the knowledge: What was it that he said just now?...' (*Muhammad:* 16) This kind of listening is a bodily action only, without the presence of an open and attentive heart. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Say: It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing; and (as for) those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears and it is obscure to them…' (*Fussilat:* 44). So the Quran is one, but those who listen to it are different. Some listen to it with an attentive heart, a pure soul, and a mind empty of adversity and corrupted beliefs so that they are affected and respond. And others listen to it with stubborn hearts and minds which are occupied with errant beliefs which prevent them from responding. Therefore I said to those who wish to choose between two things: you must remove both of them from your heart, and then seclude yourself and think and reflect on both of them. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say: I exhort you only to one thing, that rise up for Allah's sake in twos and singly, then ponder: there is no madness in your fellow-citizen…' (*Saba':* 46). Group thinking is not organised, and usually does not come to the correct conclusion.

You will remember that I said, when explaining the different effects of a single action that you blow into your hands in winter to warm them, and you blow into hot tea to cool it down. So, the True Lord *the Almighty* specifies here that this reminder is for: '…those who fear My Warning.' (*Qaf:* 45) This is because they possess attentive hearts and minds free of opposition, delusion, and error; and this is the right way to receive the Quran.

the chapter of

adh-Dhariyat

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *adh-Dhariyat* (2). Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱلذَّٰرِيَٰتِ ذَرۡوٗا ١ فَٱلۡحَٰمِلَٰتِ وِقۡرٗا ٢
فَٱلۡجَٰرِيَٰتِ يُسۡرٗا ٣ فَٱلۡمُقَسِّمَٰتِ أَمۡرًا ٤

By those [winds] that scatter far and wide [1] and
those that are heavily laden [2] that speed freely [3]
that distribute [rain] as ordained! [4]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 1-4)

The Arabic word *wa* expresses a vow, and these are vows which the True Lord *the Almighty* is swearing. We only swear by Allah because the believer magnifies nothing more than he magnifies Allah. As for the True Lord *the Almighty* He may swear by whichever of His creations He wills, for He *the Almighty* knows best the aspects of magnificence they possess, and the wisdom behind every vow which is sworn by Him. For example, elsewhere He *the Almighty* says: ‘I swear by the early hours of the day, [1] And the night when it covers with darkness. [2]’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-2) So why does He *the Almighty* swear here by the bright morning hours and the dark still night in particular here, and not by anything else? This vow was a reply to the disbelievers of Mecca, when the Revelation stopped coming to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a while, and they rejoiced and said, ‘Muhammad’s Lord has scorned him!’(1) So the vow here had a purpose and an occasion; for the morning hours are a time when movement and work take place, and the night is a time of rest and stillness, and neither of them can do without the other. So, there is an indication here of the wise reason for the Revelation’s temporary cease, as though He were saying to them: ‘Reflect on the time which encompasses you, and how it is composed of a night for rest and a day for work, each of which compliments the other.’ And the same is true of the Revelation which came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: at first it was difficult and exhausting for him, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described this difficulty, saying of the angel: ‘He whelmed me in his embrace until he reached the limits of my endurance.’(2) When he returned to his house, he said: ‘Cover me, cover me! Wrap me up, wrap me up!’ So, it is as though the temporary ceasing of the Revelation for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a chance for him to have a rest from this hardship, and yearn to meet the angel again. So, He compared the first descent of the Revelation to the day, and its ceasing to the night. And here, the True Lord *the Almighty* swears by the winds which scatter dust; and wind is a power and energy essential for life in this world. When He says: ‘…that scatters far and wide.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1), this means that these winds blow things and move them; and these are the winds which carry water vapour to the places where it forms clouds. And therefore, He then says: ‘and those that are heavily laden’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 2) meaning the clouds which bear water and gather together so that they become heavy, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Do you not see that Allah drives along the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up so that you see the rain coming forth from their midst…’ (*an-Nur:* 43). And the Arabic word ‘*waqr*’ means something heavy, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘…and (Who) brings up the heavy cloud.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 12) And then once these clouds are formed, they do not remain in the same place, but the wind moves them. Allah's saying: 'that speed freely' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 3), that is, the clouds move along gently, floating in the air with subtlety and ease.

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) In his *Tafsir,* Al-Qurtubi says: The chapter of *adh-Dhariyat* is number 51 in the written order of the Quran, and contains 60 verses. It was revealed before *Hijra.* In his *Al-Itqan, As-Suyuti* says: It was revealed between the chapter of *al-Ahqaf* and the chapter of A*l-Ghashiya*, and was thus the 66th chapter to be revealed.

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(1) *See At-Tabari, Tafsir.*

(2) *See Al-Bukhari, Hadith, no; (3) and Muslim, Hadith, no; (231) on the authority of ‘A’isha Allah be pleased with her.*

He then says: 'that distribute [rain] as ordained' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 4), that is, the winds apportion these clouds and transport them to the lands where they are destined to fall, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: '…afflicting there with whom He pleases and turning it away from whom He pleases…' (*an-Nur:* 43). And then the subject of these four vows is given.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَصَادِقٌ (٥) وَإِنَّ ٱلدِّينَ لَوَٰقِعٌ (٦)

What you [people] are promised is true [5]
the Judgement will come [6]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 5 - 6)

That is, the Resurrection and Reckoning of which you have been promised '…is true.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 5) It means a reality and a fact. Allah says: 'the Judgement will come.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 6) The judgement meant here is the Day of Judgement, the Day when all deeds will be requited, which is as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…will come' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 6): it will definitely come, beyond all doubt. But what is the relationship between the four objects of the vow, and the Day of Judgement? Some scholars said that when you look at the universe in which we live, you find that The Creator *the Almighty* created everything within it, and all of these constituents are just as they were in Allah's universe the moment He created it, and they will remain until the Day of Resurrection, where nothing shall be recreated except man. Take, for example, water or air, by both of which Allah has sworn: you find that water is the same as it has ever been since Allah has created this universe, neither increasing nor decreasing because it goes around in a circle which always returns it back to the natural state of water in which Allah has created it. For example, in the course of your life you might drink several tons of water, but does it all remain inside you? Of course not, it comes out of you in the form of urine, sweat and so on, and returns once again to its source. Even the small amount of water which remains in a human being is absorbed by the earth when he dies, and returns to the ground water. So this is a sign of the fact that you are born, then die, then return once again; take from the material world around you proof of the possibility of your return, and take perceptible material things as proof of the truth of the imperceptible things of which Allah tells you. Do not find it far-fetched that something could disappear and then return once more.

He *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلسَّمَآءِ ذَاتِ ٱلۡحُبُكِ ﴿٧﴾ إِنَّكُمۡ لَفِي قَوۡلٖ مُّخۡتَلِفٖ ﴿٨﴾ يُؤۡفَكُ عَنۡهُ مَنۡ أُفِكَ ﴿٩﴾

By the sky with its pathways [7] you differ in what you say [8] those who turn away from it are [truly] deceived [9] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 7-9)

This is another vow, wherein the True Lord *the Almighty* swears by the sky. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘by the sky with its pathways.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 7) The Arabic word *hubuk* is derived from the root *habaka* which means ‘to fashion something precisely’ neither doing too much nor too little; and this is true of the sky, which we see to be smooth and straight without any fissures or cracks because it was created with precision and skill. Some scholars also say that *hubuk* here means the paths which the celestial bodies follow as they move. And the main clause of this vow is: ‘you differ in what you say.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 8) This refers to the disbelievers of Mecca who opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said different things about him; it is as though the True Lord *the Almighty* were alluding to them that their beliefs should be united without any inconsistency, just as the sky was created uniformly without any variance. He says elsewhere: ‘And the heaven, He raised it high, and He made the balance. [7] That you may not be inordinate in respect of the measure. [8] And keep up the balance with equity and do not make the measure deficient [9].’ (*ar-Rahman:* 7-9) So the sky is straight and level because it was created according to the True Lord’s measure; and if you want your affairs to be ordered, then you must order them in conformity with this measure; for otherwise, you will differ, and your affirmations will be at variance.

The meaning of Allah's saying: 'those who turn away from it are [truly] deceived' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 9) is that the only one who would reject Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and faith in him: '…are [truly] deceived' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 9), for Satan has diverted him away from faith; one of Satan's concerns is to divert the people of truth away from truth, and to make falsehood seem alluring to them, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and most surely the Satan suggest to their friends that they should contend with you; and if you obey them, you shall most surely be polytheists.' (*al-An'am:* 121)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قُتِلَ ٱلۡخَرَّٰصُونَ ١٠ ٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ فِى غَمۡرَةٖ سَاهُونَ ١١ يَسۡـَٔلُونَ أَيَّانَ يَوۡمُ ٱلدِّينِ ١٢
يَوۡمَ هُمۡ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ يُفۡتَنُونَ ١٣ ذُوقُواْ فِتۡنَتَكُمۡ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى كُنتُم بِهِۦ تَسۡتَعۡجِلُونَ ١٤

Perish the liars [10] those steeped in error and
unaware! [11] They ask, 'When is this Judgement
Day coming?' [12] On a Day when they will be
punished by the Fire [13] Taste the punishment!
This is what you wished to hasten [14]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 10 - 14)

The meaning of: '…(*AL-Kharrasun*)…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 10) is liars, as He said in another verse: '…they only lie.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 20) But how could He say: 'Perish the liars.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 10) when they are still alive? Some scholars say that the meaning here is that they have been cursed by Allah and banished from His mercy; to be killed takes you out of the enjoyment of this world, while to be cursed takes you out of Allah's mercy in the Hereafter and puts you into His chastisement – we seek Allah's refuge! It is as though He *the Almighty* were saying to them: 'Who do you curse, and who do you slay? Nay, it is you who shall be slain, and resurrected, and reckoned; and it is you who shall be cursed and banished from Allah's mercy.'

He *the Almighty* then describes them by saying: 'Those steeped in error (*ghamara*) and unaware!' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 11) The Arabic word *ghamara* describes the action of water when it completely covers someone and drowns him; it is as though these people were immersed in ignorance until they drowned in it and it blinded them; and the meaning of Allah's saying: '…unaware!' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 11) is that they are heedless, foolish and astray from their proper purpose. And these people will find no salvation on the Day of Resurrection, the Day which they deny and which they ask about, with doubt and sarcasm: 'They ask, "When is this Judgement Day coming?"' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 12) So Allah makes it clear to them: 'On a Day when they will be punished by the Fire.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 13) The Day of Judgement which you deny will be the Day when you shall be cast into hell wherein you shall taste all manner of torments, as requital for your mocking and your sarcasm. Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Taste the punishment…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 14), that is, taste the results of the trials you inflicted on others in your worldly life. The Arabic word *fitna* is also applied to fire when it smelts metals to clean them of their impurities. So the Day of Judgement, about which you so mockingly ask, is the Day when you shall be smelted in the fire of hell and burned by it just as gold and iron are smelted; and although Gold and Iron are smelted to remove their impurities so they become pure, you shall be smelted in the fire to be tormented by it and exposed to endless pain. Allah's saying: 'This is…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 14) means, the Day of Resurrection: '…what you wished to hasten.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 14) And their hastiness in asking for it was the result of their lack of faith in it; for had they believed that it was real, they would never have called for it to be hastened. And the Quran tells us that they said: '…then bring us what you threaten us with, if you are of the truthful ones.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 22)

So, their question about the Day of Judgement: 'When is this Judgement Day coming' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 12) was meant to mock it and deny it because they do not believe in any of the unseen things of which Allah has told us, although they were happy to accept the material blessings which Allah bestowed upon them, and the benefits He created for them. They took the blessings without considering the Blesser; indeed, they were deluded by the blessings, and that is why they mocked and denied as they did. Therefore we find that many verses debate them with arguments and proofs, and affirm to them that the Resurrection is real. And when they said: '…When we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then certainly be raised up, being a new creation?' (*al-Isra':* 49) He responded: 'Say: Become stones or iron[50] Or some other creature of those which are too hard (to receive life) in your minds! But they will say: Who will return us? Say He: Who created you at first…' (*al-Isra':* 50-51) because they found it far-fetched that bones could be restored to life, He took them even further than bones, for bones have an origin in life; so He said to them: 'Even if you were inanimate objects like stones or iron, which are hard and lifeless, We could still bring you to life.' And after speaking about those who opposed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and denied the Resurrection, the True Lord *the Almighty* then speaks of their contrast; and as I said before, contrast helps to make the image clearer, and opposites show the beauty of their opposites. So He *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّ ٱلۡمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّٰتٖ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿١٥﴾ ءَاخِذِينَ مَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمۡ رَبُّهُمۡۚ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ قَبۡلَ
ذَٰلِكَ مُحۡسِنِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ كَانُواْ قَلِيلٗا مِّنَ ٱلَّيۡلِ مَا يَهۡجَعُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَبِٱلۡأَسۡحَارِ هُمۡ
يَسۡتَغۡفِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَفِيٓ أَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡ حَقّٞ لِّلسَّآئِلِ وَٱلۡمَحۡرُومِ ﴿١٩﴾

The righteous will be in Gardens with [flowing] springs [15] They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before [16] sleeping only little at night [17] praying at dawn for God's forgiveness [18] giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived [19]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 15 - 19)

In Allah's saying: 'Verily, the righteous…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15), the word 'verily' imparts emphasis to the saying; and righteousness (*taqwa*), as I said, means to place a barrier (*wiqaya*) between yourself and Allah's chastisement. This is why the Quran can say in one place: '…be careful of (your duty to) Allah…' (*al-Hashr:* 18), and in another place, say: '…And guard yourselves against the fire…' (*Al-'Imran:* 131). The meaning is: Continue to obey Allah, and avoid disobeying Him and all the means which incur His chastisement; for Allah has Attributes of Beauty and Attributes of Majesty, and pious means to place a protective barrier between yourself and the Attributes of Majesty which deter the sinner and turn him away from evil. And one manifestation of the Attributes of Beauty is that He created for us things which benefit us in this worldly life, and one of these is fire: 'Have you considered the fire which you strike? [71] Is it you that produce the trees for it, or are We the producers? [72]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 71-72) But although you benefit from this fire in this worldly life and consider it to be one of Allah's blessings upon you, you must beware it in the Hereafter because it will be an instrument of torment, and it will be one of the hosts by which Allah punishes the sinners; so be conscious of it. So the meaning is the same: Be conscious of Allah, and be conscious of the fire. And we may observe here that Allah's saying: 'The righteous…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15) refers to the time of moral responsibility, and it is a plural; and Allah's saying: '…gardens…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15) refers to the time of reward, and it is a plural, and the same is true of Allah's saying: '…springs…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15). It is as though the True Lord *the Almighty* were saying that every pious person shall have his own garden with a spring running through it. Indeed yes, he will have his own garden because the grammatical rule says that if one plural is associated with another, they may each be divided individually with the same association. For example, if the teacher says to the pupils, 'Take out your books', this means that each individual pupil must take out his book. But in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*, we find that Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two gardens.' (*ar-Rahman:* 46) So how can we make an agreeable synthesis of these two verses? Some scholars say that the chapter of *ar-Rahman* came to address both man- and jinn-kind, so the meaning is: For those who fear their Sustainer's Presence, whether of man- or jinn-kind, there is a garden: one garden for mankind, and another for jinn-kind. Or, the meaning is that the individual really will have two gardens, and I explained before that when the True Lord *the Almighty* created paradise with room enough for all of mankind were they all to believe, and created hell with room enough for all of mankind were they to disbelieve? I said that there will be no 'overpopulation' in the Hereafter. This means, that when the people of hell enter hell, their places in paradise will be free, and pious people will inherit them. So it will be as though each one will claim both his garden and the garden of the disbeliever who left it and went to hell. A 'garden' is a verdant place filled with trees with tangled branches which give shade and cover to him who walks beneath them, or which contains all the needs of life so that he never has to leave it; and this is the meaning of *qasr* 'palace' or 'castle', namely' a place which relieves (*qasara*) you of the need to go anywhere else, such that you do not need to leave it to go anywhere else to obtain any of life's needs.

He *the Almighty* says: '…will find themselves amid gardens and springs…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15), that is, springs of water because the basis of gardens is verdure, growth and fruits, and all of these things are the result of the presence of water. So, the gardens contain springs to preserve them and keep them as gardens.

Therefore when the Quran speaks of the rivers of the paradise and the presence of the water its gardens require, it sometimes says: '…through which running waters flow…' (*at-Tawba:* 100) *Tajri tahtaha*, and other times says: '…through which running waters flow…' (*as-Saff:* 12) *Tajri min tahtiha* which literally means 'from under which running water flow'; this indicates that the water is an inherent part of the garden, so we do not imagine that the water which flows through them could ever be cut off. It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying to you: 'Rest assured that the waters of the garden are guaranteed for it because they flow right from it.'

His words, 'They will receive their Lord's gifts because of the good they did before' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16) return the context here to the past, and tell us about the cause of this felicity. These divine-conscious people will receive this reward because they accepted Allah's Guidance willingly and freely.

The Arabic word *akhidhin*, here literally means 'takers' which is the plural of *aakhidh* 'taker' means someone who takes something with eagerness and desire, and with acceptance and pleasure. A man does not stretch out his hand to take something unless it will give him benefit, unlike something which is thrown at you so you take it unwillingly.

It is as though these people heard Allah's Way of Guidance and recognised that it would rectify their lives, repair their actions and give them salvation in the Hereafter; so, they took it with desire, love and eagerness; they took it with all their strength, as Allah says: '…Hold fast with [all your] strength unto what We have vouchsafed you…' (*al-Baqara:* 63).

A strong act of taking indicates that the one who takes appreciates the benefit which he is obtaining. Moreover, you took, whilst others left, and you did good, whilst they did evil, although you had free will and the ability to choose whether to take or leave.

You did good when you had the ability to do evil and accept evil; and you listened to Allah’s Revelation and obeyed it, and bore the burden of its responsibilities, gladly and willingly, so you are worthy of this reward.

The verses then made it clear that this taking is a limited one; we do not take everything and all that comes to us, but rather, we take that which comes to us from our Lord and Creator: ‘They will receive their Lord’s gifts…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16). He chose to mention the Attribute of Lordly Sustenance here because it is connected with giving; for the ‘Lord’ is the One Who creates from nothing and sustains from nothing, and preserved the essential needs of life for you by His All-Sustaining Power (*qayyumiyya*); for if we say that a man is *qa’im* over something, this means that he is concerned with it, and does not leave it to anyone else.

So, by His wisdom and Omnipotence, Allah created; and by His All-Sustaining Power He preserved all good things; therefore when something good comes to you, remember the lordly sustenance which gave it to you. Allah’s Lordship is pre-eternally present in a person’s life; for He gave to you and provided for you before you were even created, yet He only made you religiously responsible when you reached the age of adulthood.

So as long as you took the bestowal of lordship and enjoyed it, you must also take the bestowal of godhood and just as you took the first bestowal with love, eagerness, and desire, you must also take the other bestowal in the same way. It is not right for you to take the first bestowal and leave the second and reject it; for if you reflect on the bestowal of godhood, you will find that it is better and more lasting for you than the bestowal of lordship.

The first bestowal of lordship gave you the essential needs of this worldly life, which is limited and ephemeral; it gave you the essentials of the impermanent outer shell. As for the bestowal of godhood, it guarantees for you eternal life in the Hereafter, and revives within you the eternal spirit which never comes to an end. So which of these does it make more sense to take? Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* spoke to us about this matter, He *the Almighty* said: ‘O children of Adam! Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from on high [the knowledge of making] garments to cover your nakedness, and as a thing of beauty: but the garment of Allah-consciousness is the best of all…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 26) .

The garments which cover one's nakedness represent necessities, and the garments of beauty represent luxuries and comforts; and this is the most we can possibly take from this worldly life. He then draws our attention to what is more important: '…but the garment of Allah-consciousness is the best of all…' (*al-A'raf:* 26). They are better than the delights of this worldly life and its ornaments and trifles because all of this will come to an end, whilst the other will be eternal without end. The garment of this world covers you in this world, but the Garment of Allah-consciousness covers you in this world and the next.

Because of the bestowal of godhood has this importance, Allah only gives it to those who believe in Him willingly. Therefore, He only holds the believer religiously responsible, which is why whenever He issues responsibilities to us, He says: 'O you who have attained to faith!' (*al-Baqara:* 153)

The verses then mention another attribute of the divine-consciousness: '…because of the good they did before' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16). That is, they only deserve this rank because they '…were doers of good [*muhsinin*, literally 'doers of *ihsan*']…before' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 16), and *ihsan* or 'spiritual excellence' is the highest rank of faith. Scholars have defined *ihsan* as being that of which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'It is to worship Allah as though you see Him, for if you see Him not, He sees you.'(1) *Ihsan* means to do more righteous deeds than Allah commanded you to do; and therefore, since this verse was revealed in Mecca before the poor-due had been made obligatory, He said: 'Giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19), and did not say 'a due share appointed', for this means the poor-due, which was only made obligatory in Medina, whilst during the Meccan period there was only charity.

So, the meaning of *ihsan* is that they rose to the ranks of spiritual excellence before they were commanded to do so, and this means that the ranks of spiritual excellence are natural and instinctive, and are within your ability and do not overburden you. Likewise, all aspects of obedience and righteousness are natural and not contrived, unlike sin.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, no. 48 and Muslim no. 10, on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Therefore, we say that the righteous man saves on the cost of sitting in cafes and smoking and drinking coffee, drugs and intoxicants; righteousness makes more economic sense.

Even in the physical sense, righteousness is more natural, whilst sin requires affectation, stealth, and wiliness. Therefore, on the linguistic level, The Quran speaks of the acquisition of good deeds using the verb *kasaba*, and of the committing of sins by using the verb *iktasaba* which is from the same root, but implies affectation.

To acquire (*kasb*) is something natural, whilst to commit (*iktasaba*) involves affectation; and you see this affectation in the one who stealthily attempts to look at something which Allah has forbidden him to see, and how he steals glances at people. You see the same difference between the man who walks to the mosque, and the man who walks to the bar, and so on.

The scholars have defined the level of spiritual excellence in worship, saying that spiritual excellence means to do all the worship which Allah has obliged you to do, and then to do more of the same acts which He has obliged. The ordinary believer offers the five daily prayers, and the doer of good (*muhsin*) offers as many extra supererogatory prayers as he can in addition to them. The ordinary believer pays the poor-due of one twentieth or one fortieth of his standing wealth, whilst the doer of good gives more than that; and so on. So 'a rightful share…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) here has two meanings: It means that they did good before they were obliged to, and were eager to do good deeds even before they were obliged to do so; or it means that they did what they were obliged to do, and then did even more of the same kind of acts of worship which Allah obliged them to do.

Allah *the Almighty* then describes the doers of good by saying: 'Sleeping only little at night' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17). The verb *huju'* means literally 'to be still', to neither do something good nor something evil; and therefore in Arabic we say to the naughty child, *Ihja'*, that is, 'Be still!'

This is why they say, 'The tyrant's sleep is an act of worship' because it keeps him from his tyranny. These doers of good have the right to pray the evening prayer and then sleep until the dawn prayer, but their love for obedience made them refrain from sleep save for a small part of the night; and the negation of their lack of movement (*huju'*) negates their lack of sleep.

Spiritual excellence is a result of the servant's love for his Lord. Allah was good to you when He gave these responsibilities to you, and greeted you by them, so you must return the greeting with a better one: if He obliges you to do five prayers, you make it ten; and if He obliges you to give a twentieth or a fortieth of your wealth as poor-due, you give many times more than this; and so on, for all other acts of worship and righteous deeds.

When our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about spiritual excellence, he said: 'It is to worship Allah as though you see Him, for if you see Him not, He sees you.' If you can see someone, this means he is present and not absent. Suppose you are hired by a man who sits behind you and watches you, and observes all your actions: will you be lax or remiss in your work whilst he is there?

The same is true of the doer of good when he worships; and it is related in a Qudsi Hadith: 'O My servants! If you think that I cannot see you, then the fault is in your faith; and if you think that I can see you, then why have you made Me the least important of all those who behold you?'(1)

And He then says: 'Praying at dawn for Allah's forgiveness' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 18). The word *ashar* (praying at dawn) is the plural of *sahar* which means the last part of the night before the dawn breaks, when a faint light can be seen which a man might imagine to be the light of the sun, although the sun has not yet risen; therefore, it is called 'imaginary light.'

From this is derived the word *sihr* which means 'sorcery' or 'magic', for sorcery means to alter reality by means of illusion which is not actually real; Allah says: '…they cast a spell (*saharu*) upon the people's eyes…' (*al-A'raf:* 116). The watches of the night are among the best times to pray for forgiveness but what are these people seeking forgiveness for, given that their Lord described them as Allah-conscious, took all that He gave to them, have attained the station of spiritual excellence, and only sleep for a little part of the night?

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(1) *Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali narrated it as a saying of Abu Al-Jald.*

So, they do not seem to have any sins for which they need to ask Allah for forgiveness. The scholars say that their prayers for forgiveness are appropriate to the rank of spiritual excellence; they do not ask Allah’s forgiveness for their sins, they ask His forgiveness for the shortcomings they think they have in their worship and their deeds, as though they see all they have done to be paltry, and to fall short of the appreciation and worship which Allah deserves. This is an example of the maxim: ‘The good deeds of the pious are the sins of those who are truly close to Allah.’

Allah then says: ‘Giving a rightful share of their wealth to the beggar and the deprived.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) He ascribes the possessions to them, saying 'their wealth' because they own it now even though in reality it belongs to Allah, and man has only been entrusted with it for a while. Therefore He *the Almighty* says: ‘…spend on others out of that of which He has made you trustees…’ (*al-Hadid:* 7).

Man is Allah’s vicegerent on earth, and in light of this vicegerency, he must obey The One Who made him His vicegerent by giving those who ask for help and those who suffer privation from the wealth which Allah has entrusted to him. He must give to the one who is unable to work and earn, giving it in thanks to Allah who gave him the strength to work, whilst others are unable to work and lack this strength.

When Allah *the Almighty* commands us to do this, He gives security to the life and future of both those who are able to work and those who are not because time changes people’s situations, and the events of life are in constant flux, and perhaps the able man will become disabled tomorrow, and then he will find someone to help him in turn.

Therefore, we said before that The Wise Lawgiver taught us to work as much as we are able to, not only as much as you need to; for when you work with all the power that Allah placed within you, you earn enough to meet your needs and also to give charity to those who are unable to work. If we have this assurance and this security, then a man will live without dreading the events of life, or fearing poverty for himself or for his children after him.

When He *the Almighty* says, ‘…to the beggar and the deprived’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19), this means the poor person who is forced by necessity to ask people for help; and 'the deprived.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) means the one who is also poor, but feels ashamed to ask for help, and he might go hungry or even die because of this. In doing this, he sins against himself because Allah has given him the right to ask; he is first of all deprived of possessions, and then he has deprived himself of asking even though it is lawful for him to do so.

Because of this, Islam encourages us to be acquainted with one another, and to attend gatherings where people get to know one another, in the course of which we will come to know those who are needy so we can help them, and those who are sick so we can visit them, and so on.

A beggar came to one of the righteous, and he gave him what he needed, and then his wife came to him and found him weeping. She asked him, 'Why are you crying when you gave him what he needed?' He said, 'I am crying because I neglected him until he had to come and ask me.' So, people should be given their rights without even having to ask for them, and the rich person should spare the poor person the need to ask.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَفِي ٱلْأَرْضِ ءَايَٰتٌ لِّلْمُوقِنِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَفِيٓ أَنفُسِكُمْۚ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

On earth there are signs for those with sure faith [20]
and in yourselves too, do you not see? [21]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 20 - 21)

The earth is the earth upon which we live, and it is singular; yet the reality is that there are many earths, as Allah says: 'Allah is He who has created seven heavens, and, like them, of the earth…' (*at-Talaq:* 12). This means that there are seven earths.

The scholars say that this is because the earth contains several environments in terms of hot and cold weather, and in terms of the soil and the elements it contains, and the good things it produces; because of this, there are several lands; and this is why scientists speak of 'wheat belts', 'banana belts', and so on.

Allah *the Almighty* has given each land what it needs to produce specific plants which suit the populations there. The problem is that we transport the product of one land to another where it is not suitable, for, were it good for those people, they would already have it there. Therefore, we find that that when plants grow in lands where they are not native, they are afflicted by blights. If we look, for example, and the banana belt, we will find that the banana crops there are strong and never get blighted or ruined, whilst when we move these crops to lands where they are not native, they are constantly beset by blight and ruin. It is as though He *the Almighty* were saying to us: ‘This was not created for your environment, but it has its own environment where it excels and where it has all the constituents it needs to grow well.’

‘Signs’ are signals which point to the power of the Creator *the Almighty*. The first of the signs on earth we can observe is how the surface of the earth is divided between water and dry land; and some water is fresh, whilst some is salty and bitter. We drink the fresh water and water our crops and animals with it, and we get fish from the salty water: ‘…And yet, from either of them do you eat fresh meat, and [from either] you take gems which you may wear…’ (*Fatir:* 12).

Some dry land is fertile and good for farming, whilst other land is desert, or mountainous; and each kind of land has its own particular goodness. Another of the signs of the earth is that three-quarters of its surface is covered with water; and the wisdom of this is that the surface area of the water is vast to facilitate the evaporation which gives us rain enough for drinking and farming.

So, the salt water is the store of water on earth, and Allah made it salty to save it from becoming putrid and to keep it from changing; and He says: ‘And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tiding of His coming grace – so that, when they have brought heavy clouds, We may drive them towards dead land and cause thereby water to descend; and by this means do We cause all manner of fruit to come forth. Even thus shall We cause the dead to come forth: [and this] you ought to keep in mind.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 57)

Another of the sings of the earth is how fresh water runs on a higher level than salty water. If the salty water were higher, it would flow into the fresh water and spoil it and we would not be able to benefit from it. Allah says of this: ‘Between them is a barrier which they may not transgress.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 20)

One of the wonders of creation of plants is how the best kinds of date palms and fig trees are found on the salty shores, such as in Al-‘Arish and other places. This is an aspect of Allah’s omnipotent power which is not subject to material means, but rather does as it will; for from salt water, we eat the sweetest and most delicious of dates.

And another of the signs of the earth is the mountains: '…Just as in the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as [others] raven-black.' (*Fatir:* 27) As we said before the mountains are the storehouses of fertility and nourishment, and the storehouses of many treasures such as metals and precious stones.

We explained before that Allah *the Almighty* dispersed good things and spread them out over the whole earth so that if we consider any particular part of the earth, we will find good things therein equivalent to those of any other part: this one has metals, that one has oil; this one has crops, and so on.

And another of the signs on earth is that a single soil can be watered from a single water source, yet the crops which grow from it have different forms and tastes: 'And there are on earth [many] tracts of land close by one another [and yet widely differing from one another]; and [there are on it] vineyards, and fields of grain, and date-palms growing in clusters from one root or standing alone, [all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favoured above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast]. Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who use their reason!' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4)

Indeed, they use their reason and so understand Allah's power of creation, and that these sings were created by a Wise, All-Sustaining Power. And here, He says: '…signs for those with sure faith…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 20). That is, those who are certain of this and believe in it; for the highest level of knowledge is the cosmological sciences which study the cosmos and find, in its signs, proof of Allah's power.

Read, for example: 'Are you not aware that Allah sends down water from the skies whereby We bring forth fruits of many hues – just as in the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as [others] raven-black, [27] and [as] there are in men, and in crawling beasts, and in cattle, too, many hues? Of all His servants, only such as are endowed with [innate] knowledge stand [truly] in awe of Allah… [28]' (*Fatir:* 27-28).

Notice that Allah does not mention here any ruling of Sacred Law such as fasting, praying, or giving the poor-due. So the meaning of; such as are endowed with knowledge' here is those people who have knowledge of nature and the cosmos, and who study plants, animals, man and minerals, deriving from this power evidence of Allah *the Almighty* and guiding mankind to faith in The Creator; and this is something which benefits them both in this life and the next.

And the one who reflects on Allah's words: 'On earth there are signs for those with sure faith' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 20) will understand that if man looks at the universe around him, he will see therein evidence of the existence of Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, He trapped the disbelievers when He asked them: 'Now if thou ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer "Allah"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). Also His saying: 'And thus it is [with most people]: if you ask them, "Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?" –they will surely answer, Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 38).

Indeed, they could not say anything else, for this is as clear and plain as the light of the sun, and no one else has claimed it for himself; and how could anyone claim it, when he was created as a baby without the power to do anything at all? How could he say, 'I created myself', when he was brought into the world just as it is, and how could he claim to have created it?

And His words: 'And in yourselves too, do you not see?' mean that just as in the earth there are cosmological signs which point to Allah's power, there are also signs within your own selves; and if you cannot perceive the signs of the universe around you, then look for them within your own self. And He says '…do you not see?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) because although the signs of the universe around you might be far from you, your own self is close to you, and therefore it is all the more essential that you behold it and contemplate it.

There are many signs in the human self. Take, for example, how the temperature of the body is 37°C for the one who lives at the frozen North Pole, and also for the one who lives on the equator, and the body parts and limbs only work properly at this temperature, and if it increases, the whole system of the body is thrown out of balance, and malfunctions.

As for within the body, each organ has a temperature which is appropriate for it so that there is not one single temperature for the whole body, as we know, although the overall body temperature is 37°C. The temperature of the eye, for example, goes no higher than 9°C; otherwise the eye would be damaged.

As for the liver, it can only function at 40°C; and it is amazing how this difference can exist inside a single body and within a single skin – glory be to Allah, the best of creators!

Likewise, if you reflect on the blood which flows in the veins, and breathing, and the heart, and the brain, and the bones, everything in your body is a sign, or rather each of them contains many signs such that when you contemplate them, you say: ‘Glory be to The Ingenious Creator! Glory be to Him who possesses omnipotent power!’ So, there is no argument left for the one who does not believe, once he has seen all the signs which exist in his own self and in the world around him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَفِى ٱلسَّمَآءِ رِزْقُكُمْ وَمَا تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

In the sky is your sustenance and all that you are promised [22] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 22)

This rhetorical form is called in Arabic *al-qasr* ‘restriction’, namely when the preposition and the noun it precedes come before the subject of the sentence. This implies that sustenance is in Heaven alone, not anywhere else; sustenance comes to you from on high, from Allah. The word ‘sustenance’ means everything which gives benefit: money is sustenance, and health is sustenance, and intelligence is sustenance, and security is sustenance.

The meaning of sustenance being in Heaven is that it is a command of destiny which was ordained before time began, and inscribed in the Preserved Tablet. If you understand it to mean the material life which we live, then the heavens are also the source of the water which falls as rain, and is the source of life and nourishment.

‘…And that you are promised’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 22) comes from Heaven too, for everything is destined and inscribed in the Preserved Tablet, all things great and small, and all that ever was or will be, as He says: ‘…and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth’s deep darkness, nor anything living or dead, but is recorded in [His] clear decree.’ (*al-An‘am:* 59)

So as long as sustenance has been apportioned by Allah, and as long as everything was predestined before time began, then be well-behaved when you seek it, and do not worry about the issue of sustenance except by going to it and working to get it; for you do not create it, but you only go to it, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘…go about, then, in all its regions, and partake of the sustenance which He provides…’ (*al-Mulk:* 15). So travelling and seeking provide the means of the provision which was apportioned to you before time began; and we learned this lesson from Hajar the mother of Ismail (Ishmael) *Allah’s peace be upon them* when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* left her and her child by the *Ka‘ba* and went away, and she said to him, ‘Did your Lord command you to do this?’ He said yes, so she said: ‘then He will not forsake us.’(1)

She was fully confident that all provision comes from Allah, and her running seven times between Safa and Marwa were only meant to give us a clear example of how we should seek provision; it is as though Allah *the Almighty* wanted to make her a witness of the truth of this verse. When Hajar had used up all the means at her disposal for seeking sustenance, she returned to her son with complete confidence in what she had said: ‘Allah will not forsake us.’ And then the boy struck the ground with his foot and out burst forth the well of *Zamzam*.

And after this, Allah made these events one of the rites of the pilgrimage for us, to remind us always of this truth, which is that all sustenance is from Allah, but we are still required to work for it, and to strive to attain it is one of its means. He says:

فَوَرَبِّ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُۥ لَحَقٌّ مِّثْلَ مَآ أَنَّكُمْ تَنطِقُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

By the Lord of the heavens and earth!
All this is as real as your speaking [23]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 23)

The scholar Al-Asma‘i(2) related that he met a Bedouin man one day, who asked him where he was from. He replied, ‘From (the tribe of) Al-Asma‘.’ The Bedouin said, ‘And where have you just come from?’ He said, ‘From the mosque.’ He asked, ‘What were you doing there?’ He replied, ‘Reading Allah’s Quran.’ So, the Bedouin said, ‘Read it to me.’

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(1) *See At-Tabari, Tafsir.*

(2) *The story of Al-Asma‘i with the Arab Bedouin*

So, he recited *adh-Dhariyat* chapter until he got to the verse ‘In the sky is your sustenance and all that you are promised’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 22), whereupon the Bedouin took out his hunting gear and broke it, saying, ‘My sustenance must come from heaven, for Allah does not lie. ’Al-Asma‘i said: ‘So I went on pilgrimage with Harun Ar-Rashid, and there I met that Bedouin man, save that this time he looked very pale and wan. I asked him if he was the man from before, and he asked me if I was Al-Asma‘i. I said: Yes I am – but what has put you in this condition?’ ‘He asked me to recite for him what I had recited before, so I read it to him until I got to the verse: ‘By the Lord of the heavens and earth! All this is as real as your speaking’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 23) He was startled, and said: ‘Who incurred the wrath of the Almighty so that He had to swear an oath?’ He continued to repeat this, until after the third time of saying it he passed away.’

I remember once I made the pilgrimage with Sheikh Ahmad Abu Shaqra(1), and we wanted to climb up to the Cave of Hira’. He said to me, ‘We need a guide to show us the way,’ and I said to him, ‘We know the way.’ So, we went, but we found they had altered the road which leads to the Cave, so we got lost. Then my companion went to a secluded place to urinate, and suddenly he called me, ‘Come and see!’ I looked, and an insect had come forth to drink his urine. I said, ‘Glory be to Allah, it is as though we lost the way just so we could give water to this insect.’ And then a man passed us by and saw we had lost the way, and he guided us aright.

Allah *the Almighty* here swears by His Own Self *the Almighty* and His lordship over heaven and earth; for rainfalls from the heavens, and the earth receives this rain, and gives forth the plants which form the basis of nourishment and life.

When He says: ‘this is the very truth’, He is referring to what He said before: ‘In the sky is your sustenance and all that you are promised.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 22) These words are true and there is no doubt in them because it was all destined in the Preserved Tablet before time began.

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(1) See the story of Sheikh Ash-Sha‘rawi *may Allah rest his soul* with Sheikh Ahmad Abu Shaqra during the pilgrimage and their climbing to the cave of Hira’.

He then gives us an example to illustrate this, saying: '…as true as that you are endowed with speech' (*ar-Rahman:* 23). So just as you know that you are capable of speech, and you are certain that this is true, and you have no doubt in it because you experience it yourself, you should equally have no doubt about the matter of your sustenance, and that it is from Allah; trust this report, for The One Who told you of it is truthful.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

هَلۡ أَتَىٰكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيۡفِ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ ٱلۡمُكۡرَمِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾
إِذۡ دَخَلُواْ عَلَيۡهِ فَقَالُواْ سَلَٰمٗاۖ قَالَ سَلَٰمٞ قَوۡمٞ مُّنكَرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

[Muhammad], have you heard the story of the
honored guests of Abraham? [24] They went in to
see him and said, 'Peace.' 'Peace,' he said, [adding
to himself] 'These people are strangers' [25]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 24-25)

Allah tells us here about Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. Because this was an important event, He *the Almighty* begins it with a question: 'Muhammad], have you heard the story of the honored guests of Abraham?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 24)

This kind of question is always used with amazing things to which we should pay attention. Allah *the Almighty* makes us eager to find out what this thing is. Another instance of this can be found when He says: 'O you who have attained to faith! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering [in this world and in the life to come]?' (*as-Saff:* 10) In this way, He makes us eager to say, 'Yes, Lord, show us!'

Because this story of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is an incredible one, Allah says of it: 'Muhammad], have you heard the story of the honored guests of Ibrahim?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 24) And Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is the Father of the Prophets, and Allah honoured him by saying of him: 'Verily, Ibrahim was a man who combined within himself all virtues…' (*an-Nahl:* 120). Literally, 'he was a nation' as he possessed all the virtues which would usually only be found in an entire nation because Allah dispersed the virtues amongst all mankind: you have a certain virtue, someone else has another, and so on.

In this way, mankind compliment and support one another, for otherwise we would not need one another and society would be divided. Therefore, you find that the intelligent person does not despise anyone when he sees that he is better than him in some way because he knows that these virtues are spread out equally amongst mankind so he says to himself: ‘If I am better than him in one way, he must be better than me in another.’

And Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Allah has hidden three in three He has hidden His goodly pleasure in His obedience, so do not belittle any act of obedience, no matter how small, for Allah once forgave a man because he gave water to a dog which was so thirsty it was eating moist soil. He has hidden His wrath in His disobedience, so do not belittle any act of disobedience, no matter how small, for Allah once sent a woman to hell for imprisoning a cat, and neither feeding or watering it, nor allowing it to eat the insects on the floor. He has hidden His secrets in His creatures, so do not belittle any human being.'(1)

Companion ‘Ali said: ‘When you see someone lower than you in something, then grieve, for you do not know in what way he is better than you.’ People must be aware of this fact, for they are all equal in front of Allah. Allah was not born and none were born of Him, and His creatures are all equal in His sight, and they only become better than one another by their Allah-consciousness and righteous deeds.

The word ‘story’ means a piece of information which has been passed around, and which contains truth or wisdom so that people pass it around and take interest in it. The word ‘guests’ here is *dayf* which literally means ‘guest’ in the singular. Although the guests were several angels, Allah did not use the plural here but rather chose to use the singular.

The scholars say this is because the word *dayf* can actually be used for both singular and plural when it means the person you invite to your house, or who comes to you and becomes your guest; for the host should treat all the guests in the same way and greet them all the same, without honouring one of them more than the others, or paying more attention to one of them than the others.

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(1) *Something similar was narrated by Al-Bayhaqi as a saying of Dhu An-Nun Al-Misri.*

So, it is as though they are all one person with him, none of them is distinguished from the others, either in the place they are seated nor in the attention the host pays to them. Therefore, The Quran refers to them in the singular, as though they were all one man.

And our Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this lesson, for it is related that he would treat those with whom he sat equally even with regard to how much he looked at them(1) so that each one of them would feel like he was the most honoured guest.

There are many places in The Quran where the singular noun is used to refer to a plurality, and when this happens it means that their intention and aim is united, when they gather together for the sake of Allah's Command, which is always one single command without any disparity; and in this case, the group is like a single individual.

Read, for example, what Allah says about Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*: 'And go, both of you, unto Pharaoh and say, 'Behold, we bear a message from The Lord of all the worlds.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 16)

So the word *dayf* here means 'guests', and the meaning of 'honoured' is someone who is given honour by someone else so that the subject of the verb honours and the object of the verb is honoured; and if they were honoured, then who honoured them? Scholars say that this has two meanings: Allah honoured them, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And [yet,] some say, "The Most Gracious has taken unto Himself a son"! Limitless is He in His glory! Nay, [those whom they regard as Allah's "offspring" are but His] honoured servants: [26] they speak not until He has spoken unto them, and [whenever they act,] they act at His behest. [27]' (*al-Anbiya':* 26-27)

Or they were honoured in that Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* honoured them when he prepared for them food and served them himself instead of having his servants do it, and had his wife help him to serve them even though women are usually secluded; and he also honoured them by greeting them first.

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(1) *See At-Tabarani, Al-Kabir, no. (17868).*

Moreover, he did not simply offer them the food he had at the time, but honoured them by slaughtering a calf which Allah describes in one place as being fat, and in another says that it was roasted; and these descriptions show the perfection of this offering, for the calf was plump and not skinny, and roasting was the best way they had of cooking meat; so, it was plump and well-cooked which is the height of honour for a guest.

When He says, ‘They went in to see him and said, “Peace.” “Peace.” He said, [adding to himself] “These people are strangers”’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 25), this means that he did not know who they were – and some say that he said these words to himself, not out loud.

And we may observe that there was a difference between the greeting of the angels and the greeting of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* for they said *salaman*, which is ‘peace’ with an accusative grammatical ending, whilst he said *salamun*, which has a nominative ending. They greeted him first because when you approach someone they might fear you, so they greeted him first to let him know they meant no harm.

Their greeting *salaman* is in the accusative case indicates that it is the subject of a verb, which we could understand to be ‘We wish you peace’; and the presence of this elided verb in the sentence indicates that an event was about to happen which was the reason why they came.

As for his returned greeting *salamun* in the nominative, is simply meant ‘Peace be upon you’ which is an Arabic nominal sentence that indicates stability, which would be the future state of Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَرَاغَ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهِۦ فَجَآءَ بِعِجۡلٖ سَمِينٖ ﴿٢٦﴾ فَقَرَّبَهُۥٓ إِلَيۡهِمۡ قَالَ أَلَا تَأۡكُلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

He turned quickly to his household, brought out a fat calf [26] and placed it before them. ‘Will you not eat?’ he said [27] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 26 - 27)

The meaning of ‘He turned quietly to his household…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 26) is that he went quietly from the guests to his wife; for usually when a guest comes in, the host gets up to go and bring him things to make him comfortable, and the guest says, ‘No no, sit down.’ So, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* slipped away from his guests to bring them food without their noting it, and without their saying to him, ‘Sit down, we do not want anything.’

When he brought them the fat roasted calf, he placed in it front of them for them to eat it, but he saw that they did not reach for the food as most people would do, so he said to them ‘…Will you not eat?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 27) to encourage them to eat, but they did not eat, and did not even stretch out their hands to the food, and so he felt afraid of them.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَأَوۡجَسَ مِنۡهُمۡ خِيفَةٗۖ قَالُواْ لَا تَخَفۡۖ وَبَشَّرُوهُ بِغُلَٰمٍ عَلِيمٖ ﴿٢٨﴾
فَأَقۡبَلَتِ ٱمۡرَأَتُهُۥ فِي صَرَّةٖ فَصَكَّتۡ وَجۡهَهَا وَقَالَتۡ عَجُوزٌ عَقِيمٞ ﴿٢٩﴾
قَالُواْ كَذَٰلِكِ قَالَ رَبُّكِۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ٱلۡعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٠﴾

Beginning to be afraid of them, but they said, ‘Do not be afraid.’ They gave him good news of a son who would be gifted with knowledge [28] His wife then entered with a loud cry, struck her face, and said, ‘A barren old woman?’ [29] But they said, ‘It will be so. This is what your Lord said, and He is the Wise, the All Knowing’ [30] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 28 - 30)

When the fear showed on Ibrahim *peace be upon him* the angels reassured him by saying, ‘Do not be afraid’; and then they gave him glad tidings of a son who would be endowed with deep knowledge – and this meant our master Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him*; and He described him as being ‘…a son who would be gifted with knowledge’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 28) meaning that he would have a great amount of knowledge. But how could this be, when Ibrahim *peace be upon him* was an elderly man, and his wife Sara was barren?

‘His wife then entered with a loud cry, struck her face…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 29) making a clamour and a noise, ‘and struck her face’ a blow in astonishment at these tidings, ‘…and said, “A barren old woman?”’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 29) That is, how could I have a child when I am a barren old woman?

So, she judged the matter according to the standard of human causal means, which said that it was impossible for her to conceive a child but Allah has other standards, and His omnipotent power had something else to say on the subject which is what the angels had come to convey, 'but they said, "It will be so. This is what your Lord said، and He is the Wise, the All Knowing."' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 30) The words 'This is what your Lord said' mean: As long as He *the Almighty* has decreed this, it is a certainty in which there can be no doubt because Allah's power is beyond all material means.

The amazement of Sara *peace be upon her* is expressed when she was given tidings of Ishaq *peace be upon him* is similar to that which Maryam *peace be upon her* is expressed when she was given tidings of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'Said she: "O my Lord! How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?" [The angel] answered: "Thus it is: Allah creates what He wills…"' (*Al-'Imran:* 47). He says: '…He is the Wise, the All Knowing' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 30). He is wise in how He puts all things in their proper places, and all knowing in how His knowledge encompasses all things, and He knows that when He commands something, it obeys Him and does not refuse Him.

He *the Almighty* then says:

قَالَ فَمَا خَطۡبُكُمۡ أَيُّهَا ٱلۡمُرۡسَلُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّآ أُرۡسِلۡنَآ إِلَىٰ قَوۡمٖ مُّجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾
لِنُرۡسِلَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ حِجَارَةٗ مِّن طِينٖ ﴿٣٣﴾ مُّسَوَّمَةً عِندَ رَبِّكَ لِلۡمُسۡرِفِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Abraham said, 'What is your errand, messengers?' [31]
They said, 'We are sent to a people lost in sin [32]
to bring down rocks of clay [33] marked by your
Lord for those who exceed all bounds [34]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 31 - 34)

'Abraham Said' to those who had come to visit him: '…What is your errand, messengers?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 31) *Ma khatbukum*, that is, what is your affair, and what is your story, and what vital thing is it for which you have come? The word *khatb* used here for '…What is your errand, messengers?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 31) implies that the thing in question is an event of great importance, and he wanted to know what it was, and whether it concerned him or someone else.

This word *khatb* is also used in this way in the story of our master Joseph *Allah's peace be upon him*: '[Thereupon the King sent for those women; and when they came,] he asked: 'What was it that you hoped to achieve (*ma khatbukunna*) when you sought to make Joseph yield himself unto you?...' (*Yusuf:* 51) That is, what incredible matter was it that made you do such a thing?

And Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* also said it when he saw the two daughters of Shu'aib *peace be upon him* who had come out to water their livestock: '…He asked [them]: "What is the matter with you (*ma khatbukuma*)?"' (*al-Qasas:* 23) That is, what has forced you to go out? It was as though this was an unusual thing. So, this word is used for vitally important things which inspire astonishment and amazement.

The angels replied: '…"We are sent to a people lost in sin…' (*Qaf:* 32). This reassured Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*, and he realised that the matter was not directly concerned with him; and the people lost in sin at that time were the people of Lut (Lot). Then they revealed that their mission was: 'to bring down rocks of clay…' (*Qaf:* 33) The original Arabic here literally says 'Stones of clay' (*Hijara min tin*), and it is clear that stone is different from clay; stone possesses a hardness and firmness which differs according to the type of stone, starting with marble then granite, then limestone. So how could stones be made of clay when these two words describe completely different things? The scholars say that it means clay which has been baked in fire so that it has become hard and firm, as is done in the pottery craft.

The meaning of '…marked by your Lord for those who exceed all bounds.' (*Qaf:* 34) is that each stone bears the name and address of the one for whom it is intended, and is specially meant for him and no other, and it is directed at him and will not miss.

The words 'marked by your lord' indicate that these stones were sent down from Heaven, and were not made from the stone of the earth, and that they were marked by Allah and then came forth ready to be used; and the role of the angels was to cast them at those whose names were written upon them so that no stone was confused with any other.

The meaning of '…for those who exceed all bounds' (*Qaf:* 34) is those who go beyond the bounds in their sin; it is as though all things have boundaries, and the lawful and unlawful have boundaries, which Allah *the Almighty* has made clear to us and taught us how to keep within them. He said about the lawful: '…These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, transgress them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229).

Whilst about the unlawful, He said: '…These are the bounds set by Allah: do not, then, offend against them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). [Literally, 'Do not go near them'] that is, stay within the bounds of the lawful and do not cross them for anything else; as for the unlawful, do not even go near it, and beware of even approaching it because if you approach it you might fall into it – so this is a protection for you.

Likewise, Allah said to Adam *peace be upon him*: '…but do not approach this one tree…' (*al-Baqara:* 35); and He said: 'And do not commit adultery…' (*al-Isra':* 32) [Literally meaning, 'Do not approach adultery']. So where forbidden things are concerned, He does not only forbid us from the action, but also forbids us from even approaching the means which lead to it.

So, in what way did those people who wasted their own selves transgress? They transgressed by committing an unlawful deed which contradicts the pure natural way which Allah created. When Allah wanted to place His vicegerent on earth, He created Adam *peace be upon him* and created with him his spouse so that there would be procreation, and the tribes would come forth to populate the earth, for it could not be populated by one or two people, but a great number of people were required.

He then also made procreation for all the other things He wanted to grow and continue to serve this vicegerent: 'And in everything have We created opposites…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49).

If man was to procreate, then the part of earth upon which he lived would also procreate, and the plants upon which he lived would also have to multiply. Allah said: '…And out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women…' (*an-Nisa':* 1). So we needed crops which suited this multiplication.

The one who reflects on the matter of procreation in these plants and in man, will find that it is commensurate with the importance of the thing and the degree to which it can be benefitted from. For example, when you plant radishes you can eat them after ten days, and cucumbers after forty days, and dates after four years.

So, before anything gives to you, it takes from you according to how important it is. If you want to produce a human being, this certainly will require a great deal of effort and exertion. Because of this, The Creator *the Almighty* linked procreation to a great pleasure superior to all other pleasures which a person feels in every part of his body, and which is superior to the pleasure of the eye when it sees, the nose when it smells, the tongue when it tastes, the nose when it smells, and the hand when it touches; for each part of the body has its purpose and its domain, whilst sexual pleasure involves every part of the body. Had The Creator *the Almighty* not linked procreation with this pleasure, no one would ever do it or assent to bear its difficulties.

You can compare the difference between the raising of a child and the raising of a lamb or a calf, for example: the lamb can stand and walk behind its mother only a few minutes after it is born, whilst the baby only walks after a year and a half.

Thus, we see that the childhood of a human being is longer than the childhood of any other creature. This is why The Creator *the Almighty* linked human procreation with this great pleasure which a person cannot resist, in order to encourage procreation; for otherwise, no one would be prepared to bear this responsibility and this difficulty.

Islam is also concerned with the makeup of the family, and has set regulations for it which ensure success for us; for this instinct cannot simply be discharged in any way as is the case with animals, but rather, Islam has set for it rules for the choosing of a good spouse, encouraging us to choose a religious person for our spouse. It has made a period of engagement so that each party can get to know the other. It allowed each of them to look at the other so that each can choose the spouse who is right for them, and satisfy their tastes and preferences for the other sex. It legislated the dowry and the marriage contract. All of this is so that the family is made strong and firm, prepared to deal with life and all of its difficulties and responsibilities.

The crime which these people committed and for which they deserved all the punishments which befell them was that they diverted this instinct which

Allah placed in man, from its proper lawful course and directed it towards another, unlawful, end which had no benefit or positive result, and which contradicted sound natural disposition and upright tastes. They preferred to have relations with men instead of women, as Allah allowed; and it is obvious that the only place where sexual relations should occur is the place where a seed may be planted and grow: '…Go, then, unto your tilth as you may desire…' (*al-Baqara:* 223).

So, by this act of theirs, they squandered their own souls, and went beyond the bounds which Allah established; and to engage in sexual relations in the wrong place is forbidden in the case of men and in the case of women as well, and it is all forbidden.

Since this action is tantamount to fornication, it deserved the punishment of stoning. Allah stoned them, not with the stones of this earth, but with stones from Heaven which fell upon each one of them by name, singling him out so that not one single one of them remained, and thus they were wiped from the face of the earth.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَأَخۡرَجۡنَا مَن كَانَ فِيهَا مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾ فَمَا وَجَدۡنَا فِيهَا غَيۡرَ بَيۡتٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾
وَتَرَكۡنَا فِيهَآ ءَايَةٗ لِّلَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ ٱلۡعَذَابَ ٱلۡأَلِيمَ ﴿٣٧﴾

We brought out such believers as were there [35] We found only one household devoted to God [36] and left the town to be a sign for those who fear the painful punishment [37] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 35 - 37)

That is, before the torment was unleashed upon them, We took all of the believers out of the town; this does not mean that He told them to get out, but rather, He facilitated their exit by casting thoughts into their minds, so they left and were untouched by the chastisement. 'We found only one household…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 36), i.e. in the town, '…only one household devoted to Allah' (*Qaf:* 36). So He spoke first about the believers, and then about those who surrendered themselves to Him, and it is *iman* (clear that belief) is broader than *Islam* (surrender), for belief is a matter of doctrine, whilst surrender is a matter of behaviour; thus, every believer surrenders, but not everyone who surrenders believes.

Belief and surrender meet in that you only surrender yourself to the command of one in whose wisdom you believe; as for if the believer acts hypocritically or ostentatiously, this is another matter. Therefore Allah says: ‘The Bedouin say, “We have attained to faith…”’, so He replied to them: ‘Say [unto them, O Muhammad]: “You have not [yet] attained to faith”; you should [rather] say, “We have [outwardly] surrendered” – for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts…' (*al-Hujurat:* 14)

So here He spoke of those who were rescued as being both believers and people who surrendered to Allah; and elsewhere, He *the Almighty* said: ‘…all but your wife: she will indeed be among those that stay behind.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 33) For true kinship is not that of blood and lineage, but rather, it is the kinship of the call and the kinship of following, as The Prophet Muhammad said: 'Salman is one of us, from our own family.'(1)

When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said to his Lord, ‘O my Lord! Verily, my son was of my family…’ (*Hud:* 45), He replied to him: ‘…he was not of thy family, for, verily, he was unrighteous in his conduct…’ (*Hud:* 46).

Allah says here: ‘…and left the town to be a sign for those who fear the painful punishment.’ (*Qaf:* 37) That is, in the town and the place where this event occurred. They say that the sign which remained after their destruction is that the stones with which Allah destroyed them still exist, and those who see them say, ‘These are not the stones of this earth’; for they are another kind of stone which Allah sent to fall upon those sinners and destroy them. In this way, this sign remains to warn all those who think of doing what they did. Others say that the sign Allah left to bear witness to them was a stream with a disgusting smell which no one can bear.

Allah then says:

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(1) *See Al-Hakim, no. 6616, At-Tabarani, no. (5908), Al-Bayhaqi, no. (1306) and Abu Na‘im, no. (2956).*

وَفِي مُوسَىٰٓ إِذۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰهُ إِلَىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنَ بِسُلۡطَٰنٖ مُّبِينٖ ﴿٣٨﴾ فَتَوَلَّىٰ بِرُكۡنِهِۦ وَقَالَ
سَٰحِرٌ أَوۡ مَجۡنُونٞ ﴿٣٩﴾ فَأَخَذۡنَٰهُ وَجُنُودَهُۥ فَنَبَذۡنَٰهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡيَمِّ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٞ ﴿٤٠﴾

There is another sign in Moses: We sent him to Pharaoh with clear authority [38] Pharaoh turned away with his supporters, saying, ‘This is a sorcerer, or maybe a madman’ [39] so we seized him and his forces and threw them into the sea: he was to blame [40]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 38 - 40)

After narrating part of the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), the verses tell us the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them* as the Quran frequently mentions Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and Prophet Musa (Moses) in the same context because of the similarities that exist between their divine missions.

Allah says: ‘Indeed, this is in the former scriptures. The scriptures of Abraham and Moses’ (*al-A‘la:* 18-19), He also says: ‘Or has he not been informed of what was in the scriptures of Moses. And [of] Abraham, who fulfilled [his obligations].’ (*an-Najm:* 36-37)

The Quran links between them because Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was the first man who encountered, in the course of his call, a man who argued with him about his Lord. It appears that he claimed divinity for himself, as he said, ‘…I give life and cause death…’ (*al-Baqara:* 258).

There were many occasions when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* showed Allah’s signs to the people, as he was the first one to teach them to behold the signs of the cosmos. He had experiences with the idol-worshippers, particularly with his father Azar. Then, the Quran narrates that he was cast into fire, and then he was granted a son and was tested with the command to sacrifice him. The Quran also mentions the story of the building of the *Ka’ba* until the end of his story.

Therefore, Allah says about him: ‘and [mention, O Muhammad], when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). This means that he fulfilled them completely and in an outstanding manner. Therefore, his Lord praised him saying: ‘Indeed, Ibrahim was a [comprehensive] leader, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining toward truth, and he was not of those who associate others with Allah.' (*an-Nahl:* 120) This means that he combined all the good attributes which can only be found in an entire nation.

Likewise, Prophet Musa (Moses) underwent similar experiences and trials in the course of the call he made to Pharaoh, who claimed divinity for himself saying to his people: '…I have not known you to have a god other than me...' (*al-Qasas:* 38).

In Allah's saying: 'And there is another sign in Moses…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 38), the word 'and' here implies that Musa (Moses) is one of Allah's signs since this sign is joined to Allah's previous saying: 'On earth there are signs for those with sure faith.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 20) Likewise, there are signs to be found in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses): '…We sent him to Pharaoh with clear authority.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 38) It means he was sent with a clear and plain proof.

As we explained before, authority may be based on power and compulsion which forces the other person to yield or may be based on arguments which convince him. The authority of compulsion compels a person physically, whilst the authority of argument convinces the mind and attracts the heart. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had only the authority of argument, as he had no power to compel Pharaoh. Allah gave him a clear authority to convince Pharaoh, namely the miracles and signs which accompanied his *Da'wah* (calling to Allah).

A miracle becomes effective with people if it is based on something in which they excel; if it challenges them with something they do not know, the challenge will be meaningless. Therefore, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the Quran, as the Arabs excelled in rhetoric and eloquence, so it challenged them with that which they excelled in. As for the people of Pharaoh, they excelled in sorcery, but they were forced to do sorcery, as this is proved by the fact that when Pharaoh called for all the sorcerers in the country to use their sorcery against Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* they said: '…Is there indeed for us a reward if we are the predominant?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 41) This is because they were forced to do the other types of work without receiving any remuneration such as the building of the pyramids.

The basis of the call of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was that he came to call Pharaoh to Allah in order to save the children of Israel from his tyranny. However, he called Pharaoh to Allah was secondary to his main *Da'wah* (calling to Allah), which is proved by how he said: '…so send with us the Children of Israel and do not torment them…' (*Ta Ha:* 47).

Before Prophet Musa (Moses) could call the children of Israel to Allah, he had to rid them of Pharaoh and his clutches. It is well known that Pharaoh persecuted the children of Israel because they helped and cooperated with the Hyksos against Pharaoh when they invaded Egypt until Hyksos triumphed, abolished the Pharaonic dynasty, and replaced it with kingship.

This is how we know that the Hyksos entered Egypt at the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* because when the Quran mentions Egypt, it speaks of Pharaoh, but when it tells the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) it speaks of the King: 'And the King said…' (*Yusuf:* 50) and does not use the word 'Pharaoh.'

When Allah willed to free the children of Israel from the clutches of Pharaoh, He sent Prophet Musa (Moses) with this task. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Pharaoh turned away with his supporters, saying, "This is a sorcerer, or maybe a madman."' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 39) Pharaoh turned away from Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and his *Da'wah* because of his power, authority, tyranny and his oppression over the land.

When you turn away from anyone, you turn your side to him, then your back after you facing him. The Noble Quran depicts this when it says: '…And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah - give them tidings of a painful punishment. The Day when it will be heated in the fire of hell and seared therewith will be their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs.' (*at-Tawba:* 34-35)

This was the order in which they turned away from those who seek something, for they turned away first with their faces, then their sides, then their backs. The torment that people will face on the Day of Resurrection will be a fair requital according to how they acted while refusing to do good deeds.

Pharaoh said: ‘… “This is a sorcerer or maybe a madman”’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 39). Reflect on the contradictions in this accusation; the sorcerer has the ability to arrange things, and is intelligent enough to make people imagine seeing things in a manner that differs from what they really are. However, the madman is completely different because he cannot arrange things and does not even have the power to control his own will and actions. This indicates the confusion caused by falsehood.

Then, Allah punished Pharaoh: ‘So We seized him and his forces and threw them into the sea: he was to blame.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 40) Allah seized them by casting into their hearts the desire to pursue Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* so they followed him and plunged into the sea after him. Then, Allah unleashed the waters and drowned them, after saving Prophet Musa (Moses) and the children of Israel. ‘…and threw them into the sea.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 40) Allah threw Pharaoh and his followers into the sea; ‘…he was to blame.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 42) This is because of his arrogance, tyranny, and claims of divinity. The verse also means that Allah did not destroy him and his forces out of tyranny or injustice, but because they deserved to be punished.

وَفِي عَادٍ إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلرِّيحَ ٱلْعَقِيمَ ﴿٤١﴾
مَا تَذَرُ مِن شَيْءٍ أَتَتْ عَلَيْهِ إِلَّا جَعَلَتْهُ كَٱلرَّمِيمِ ﴿٤٢﴾

There is another sign in the 'Ad: We sent the life-destroying wind against them [41] And it reduced everything it came up against to shreds [42]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 41- 42)

The word ‘And’ is used in ‘And there is another sign in the ‘Ad…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41) which is joined with the verse: ‘On earth there are signs for those with sure faith’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 20) and the verse: ‘There is another sign in Musa…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 38). The verse under discussion means that there is another sign in ‘Ad. This implies that the Quran was consoling Messenger Muhammad and asking him not to grieve because of his people’s obstinacy and refusal of his *Da’wah* (calling to Allah), as the best outcome will be for him. They will have the fate of the other people who belied their messengers, and he could derive lessons from their stories.

Allah says: ‘There is another sign in the 'Ad…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 41) mentioning the tribe and not the prophet, but in another verse, He says: ‘And to ‘Ad (We sent) their brother Hud…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 65). In the verse under discussion, Allah mentions the name of the tribe only because He states their bad end because they belied their prophet.

‘Ad lived at the site of the sand dunes of *Ahqaf.* Allah says about them: ‘“Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with 'Ad, with Iram, possessors of lofty buildings, the like of which were not created in the (other) cities.’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-8) Then, Allah says: ‘…And [with] Pharaoh, owner of the stakes.’ (*al-Fajr:* 10)

This implies that the civilisation of ‘Ad was even greater than that of the Pharaohs, but it is now buried beneath the earth, for Allah destroyed them with a wind which buried them under the sand. This is not astonishing because they lived in a sandy area; when a violent storm blows up, and it can bury a whole caravan, so it disappears into the sand. Therefore, we can find remnants of these people by excavation.(1)

The meaning of *‘ar-rih al-‘aqim’* is a life-destroying wind; for the wind may blow softly and gently, then it is called a breeze, and it may blow fiercely and destructively, in which case then it is called a hurricane. It is one of Allah’s signs, which can be a blessing or a curse.

Wind consists of the same air that you breathe, and which is the most important constituent of life, as if a person is prevented from breathing, he will die. In addition, air is one of the basic components of water, and it makes the movement of clouds and rainfall. It also maintains the lives of animals and plants, and facilitates the pollination of fruits and crops.

We said previously that the Arabic word *rih* refers to evil and destructive wind, while the plural form of the word *riyah* refers to the wind which brings goodness. Allah says: (*ar-rih al-‘aqim*) which means life-destroying wind, and He also says (*ar-riyah lawaqih*) the fertilizing winds. In the verse under discussion, the wind is described as *’aqim* (literally means barren), as it does not bring about any benefit, goodness, rain or pollen, but it only brings about evil and destruction.

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(1) By use of radar and satellite technology, NASA discovered evidence of buried buildings in the desert of the Empty Quarter, including a fortress with huge pillars 9 meters high and 3 meters thick: ‘With Iram, possessors of lofty buildings, the like of which were not created in the (other) cities.’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-8) (Time Magazine, Feb 17 1992)

Allah says: ‘It left nothing of what it came upon but that it made it like disintegrated ruins.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 42) The word *tadhar* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse means ‘left nothing’ like the Arabic verb *tada’*. Both of them are in the present tense and have no past form except in the form mentioned as follows: ‘By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness, Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you].’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-3) The word *wadda’aka* (has not taken leave of you) the word *kar-rameem* means that that the wind leaves everything like disintegrated ruins.

وَفِي ثَمُودَ إِذۡ قِيلَ لَهُمۡ تَمَتَّعُواْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٖ ﴿٤٣﴾ فَعَتَوۡاْ عَنۡ أَمۡرِ رَبِّهِمۡ فَأَخَذَتۡهُمُ ٱلصَّٰعِقَةُ
وَهُمۡ يَنظُرُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾ فَمَا ٱسۡتَطَٰعُواْ مِن قِيَامٖ وَمَا كَانُواْ مُنتَصِرِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

And also in the Thamud: it was said to them, ‘Make the most of your lives for a while’ [43] but they rebelled against their Lord’s command, so the blast took them. They looked on helplessly [44] they could not even remain standing, let alone defend themselves [45]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 43 - 45)

There is also another sign in the story of Thamud, who are the people of Prophet Saleh Allah tells Messenger Muhammad to remember when ‘…it was said to them, “Make the most of your lives for a while.”’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 43) This verse includes a threat and warning to them after what they did to Prophet Saleh (Shelah). Allah tells them to make most of their lives for a while, then the punishment will befall them, and Allah will overtake them after the manner of a Mighty, Powerful One.

Despite this threat and warning, they persisted in their stubbornness. ‘…but they rebelled against their Lord’s command…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 44). The threat did not have any effect on them. Allah says: ‘…but they rebelled against their Lord’s command…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 44). They disobeyed their Lord and deviated from His command.

The verb *’ata* can be followed by the preposition ’ala, as in *ashad ‘ala Allah ‘itiyya* ‘…who were worst against the Most Merciful in insolence.’ (*Maryam:* 69) It is followed by the preposition *‘an* as in the case *‘fa’ataw ‘an amr rabbihim’* ‘…but they rebelled against their Lord’s command…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 44). The word ‘blast’ means noise which accompanies either lightning or a destructive wind. ‘They could not even remain standing…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 45) because of the terror which overcame them and frightened them so much that they could not even stand or flee. ‘…let alone defend themselves.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 45) They could not help or defend themselves and no one defended themselves.

وَقَوْمَ نُوحٍ مِّن قَبْلُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ قَوْمًا فَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Before that We destroyed the people of Noah.
They were a truly sinful people! [46]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 46)

The people of Nuh (Noah) were also a sign and a cause for reflection before Pharaoh, ‘Ad and Thamud. ‘…They were a truly sinful people!’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 46) They disobeyed Allah and belied Prophet Nuh (Noah).

Their story is mentioned in the Quran in detail. Although Nuh (Noah) spent nine hundred and fifty years preaching his people and calling them to Allah, only a few of them believed. They put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and were extremely arrogant, until Nuh (Noah) despaired of them and invoked Allah against them: ‘…And Nuh said, “My Lord, do not leave upon the earth from among the disbelievers an inhabitant. Indeed, if You leave them, they will mislead Your servants and not beget except [every] wicked one and [confirmed] disbeliever.”’ (*Nuh:* 26-27)

In the following verse, Allah summarises their status, saying: ‘…They were a truly sinful people!’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 46) They were rebels and disobedient to Allah. from the Arabic verb *fasaqa* means ‘breaks away from’. The phrase *fasaqat ar-ratibah ‘an qishratha* means: the date breaks away from its peel.

Fresh dates are soft and full of water, so Allah provided Maryam (Mary) with them, as He says: ‘And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates. So eat, drink, and be contented.’ (*Maryam:* 25-26) Thus, the fresh dates served as food and drink at the same time.

In the verse under discussion, there is a metaphor which depicts Allah’s *Shar’* (Law) as the peel which covers the fruit; the *Shar’* (Law) protects the believer just as the peel protects the fruit. Thus, beware of breaking away from the *Shar’* (Law) which protects shields and adorns you.

وَٱلسَّمَآءَ بَنَيۡنَٰهَا بِأَيۡيْدٖ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ فَرَشۡنَٰهَا فَنِعۡمَ ٱلۡمَٰهِدُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾
وَمِن كُلِّ شَيۡءٍ خَلَقۡنَا زَوۡجَيۡنِ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

We built the heavens with Our power and made them vast [47] We spread out the earth – how well We smoothed it out! [48] – and We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note [49] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 47 - 49)

Allah built the *sama’ (*literally means everything which is above us) with power, and wisdom. The act of building requires skill. Then He says: ‘We spread out the earth…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 48). It means that the earth is extended and spread out.

The heavens have the attribute of stability, so Allah says: ‘We built the heavens…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47). The earth is changeable, as highlands may become depressions, and its undulations always undergo change, so He says: ‘We spread out the earth.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 48) Allah prepared it in a manner that becomes comfortable to its inhabitants, just as we prepare a bed for a baby so that it has no wrinkle. How ‘…well We smoothed it out!’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 48) The word *al-mahidun* (smoothed it out) which is used in the Arabic text of the verse, is derived from the word *mahd* (comfortable bed). Just as we always clean and we always change the baby’s mattress from time to time, the earth is in constant change.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49) In another verse, He says:

'Exalted is He who created all pairs - from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.' (*Ya Sin:* 36) The words: '…and from that which they do not know' (*Ya Sin:* 36) encourage us to look for pairs which are not known.

With the progress of science, we have found pairs in the atom, and we have found that rain does not fall unless atomic conjugation takes place. In addition, we have found that electric currents as well as inanimate objects contain opposite pairs. Many scientists continue to research this matter although people's minds could not imagine or understand them in the past, as the Arab community to which the Quran was first revealed was an illiterate community, bereft of culture. If these things had been revealed to them, they might have been disturbed and abandoned the *Da'wah* (calling to Allah).

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* gave them a concise glimpse of these things by saying: 'We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth…' (*Fussilat:* 53) so that there will always be a room for all future developments and new discoveries.

The letter 'sin' in the word *sanurihim*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse indicates the future, and the word *nurihim* (We will show them) is in the present tense which implies continuation, as these discoveries will continue until the Day of Resurrection.

As reproduction takes place by the mating of male and female, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has the power to create human beings in a manner that differs from this rule. Allah does not abide by these rules; He creates whatever He wishes, as He can create from two parents, from one single parent, and without any parents.

This means that Allah's Omnipotence covered all the possibilities of this matter. In addition, He says: '…and He renders whom He wills barren…' (*ash-Shura:* 50). Some people may marry, but they do not beget any children.

As the whole matter of pairs is amazing, Allah introduces it by saying: *'Exalted is He* who created all pairs…' (*Ya Sin:* 36). It is Allah's Omnipotence that creates these pairs, and He is too exalted and beyond compare with anything else.

فَفِرُّوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِۖ إِنِّي لَكُم مِّنۡهُ نَذِيرٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَلَا تَجۡعَلُواْ
مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَۖ إِنِّي لَكُم مِّنۡهُ نَذِيرٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿٥١﴾

[So, say to them, Prophet], 'Quickly, turn to God
– I am sent by Him to give you clear warning [50]
and do not set up any other god alongside Him.
I am sent by Him to give you clear warning! [51]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 50 - 51)

This is a command to flee, which implies that there is a source of fear from which you want to escape, and you want to resort to someone who can keep you safe. This action involves three things: the one who flees, the thing from which he flees, and the thing to which he flees.

In this verse, Allah addresses His servants, saying: 'Flee to Allah…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 50). From what should they flee? In case of fleeing to Allah, people must flee from all that which contradicts Allah's Law, from Iblis (Satan) who opposes Allah's Commandments, from their vain desires, illegal passion, caprice and from suffering to endless bliss.

Thus, the word 'flee' implies moving from something frightening to something safe; and you will never find a refuge safer for you than your Creator Who will provide you with security, peace, happiness, and bliss. He imposes punishment for violations of His Law, so that you return and flee to Him. He cares about you because you are His servants whom He has created, and every artisan is concerned with the safety of his products and keen to protect them from damages.

We must learn this lesson from our Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* and try to perfect our work, as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us: 'Allah loves that when any of you does any work, he does it perfectly.'(1) Doing one's work perfectly increases the spirit of faith and belief in the world. It suffices that your good work impresses everyone who sees it, causing him to remember Allah. Not only man remembers Allah, but also the whole universe does.

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(1) *Related by At-Tabarani in Al-Awsat (909) and Al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab Al-Iman (5080), on the authority of 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her*

Allah’s saying: ‘Flee to Allah…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 50) means clinging to His Rope, following His guidance, drawing close to Him and adhering to His Law. Country people say: ‘Cling to your Lord and go wherever you like.’ As long as you are on Allah’s side, nothing will harm you. Truthful is the one who said:

My Lord, Your love is mixed with my blood and my being,
Like a blazing light which melts in my soul?
I will not be wronged as long as you protect me,
I fear not as long as your good Pleasure makes me safe.

‘…I am sent by Him to give you clear warning!’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 50) In this verse, Messenger Muhammad addresses people telling them that he gives them warning from Allah. Allah mentions: ‘give you clear warning!’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 50) because warning encourage fleeing so that you flee from the source of threat to the source of protection. The word ‘clear’ indicates that this warning is clear and his arguments are manifest. ‘And do not set up any other god alongside Him. I am sent by Him to give you clear warning.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 51) The verse instructs us not to set up any other deity and obey its commands instead of Allah. It is obvious that those who worship idols or anything else besides Allah do so because these idols do not really enjoin any commandments or responsibilities or give any guidance. Therefore, their worship is false and useless.

Allah is the Deity who deserves to be worshipped and obeyed in all His commandments and prohibitions. The prohibition mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘Do not set up any other god alongside Him…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 51) is linked to His command ‘…Flee to Allah…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 50). There is no deity and no refuge for you but Him.

This is the true religion accepted by man’s sound natural disposition when the souls were created but the bodies were not created yet. Allah made us testify: ‘…Am I not your Lord?...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172)

Some people have deviated from this covenant because of heedlessness, Satan’s insinuations, and the soul’s caprice and vain desires. The disbelievers worshipped idols only to satisfy their natural inclination towards religion and to relieve themselves of any hardship, as the idols enjoin neither commandments nor prohibitions.

Before performing any action, the intelligent person should think of its consequences and requital. When he is about to sin, he should imagine the punishment which awaits him; when he is too lazy to perform a good deed, he should imagine the reward prepared for him. If people consider the consequences of any action, they will flee from sin to righteousness.

كَذَٰلِكَ مَآ أَتَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِهِم مِّن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا قَالُواْ سَاحِرٌ أَوۡ مَجۡنُونٌ ﴿٥٢﴾
أَتَوَاصَوۡاْ بِهِۦۚ بَلۡ هُمۡ قَوۡمٞ طَاغُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

Every previous people to whom a messenger was sent also said, 'A sorcerer, or maybe a madman!' [52] Did they tell one another to do this? No! They are a people who exceed all bounds [53] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 52 - 53)

The word '*kadhalik*' which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse refers to the punishments which befell the previous people, such as the blast, and life-destroying winds, as they wait for these people too. They are not so far away from punishment. Allah tells Messenger Muhammad not to grieve, as he is not the first messenger who was belied by his people: 'Every previous people to whom a messenger was sent also said, 'A sorcerer, or maybe a madman!' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 52)

Allah instructs Messenger Muhammad to show patience because other Messengers were accused by their people of sorcery and madness: '…So be patient, [O Muhammad]; indeed, the promise of Allah is truth. And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned.' (*Ghafir:* 77) If torment does not befall them in this worldly life, it awaits them in the Hereafter.

Allah was merciful to those who belied Messenger Muhammad - despite their disbelief and stubbornness - because His Messenger *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* was amongst them. This is the meaning which the following verse refers to: 'But Allah would not punish them while you, [O Muhammad], are among them, and Allah would not punish them while they seek forgiveness...' (*al-Anfal:* 33). Messenger Muhammad was strongly concerned with guiding his people, no matter what they did, and he always called upon his Lord, saying, 'My community, my community!'(1)

We explained previously the falsehood of these accusations as Prophet Muhammad was never a sorcerer or a madman, as he was an example of good conduct, and they never saw on him any sign of sorcery or madness.

If he had been a sorcerer, he would have bewitched all the disbelievers in order for them to believe him. If he had been a madman, he would not have been able to arrange things in this way and would not have conveyed his Lord's Message to you. Moreover, the accusation of sorcery negates the accusation of madness, and they cannot be combined with each other.

Therefore, He says after this: 'Did they tell one another to do this?...' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 53) It seems that those people who belied Allah's messengers over the ages told one another or agreed to accuse their messengers of sorcery. This implies insistence on belying all the messengers and persistence in stubbornness.

Therefore, Allah disregards them and refutes their accusations, saying: '…No! They are a people who exceed all bounds.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 53) Allah instructs Messenger Muhammad to forget about these people, as they exceeded all bounds.

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ فَمَآ أَنتَ بِمَلُومٍ ﴿٥٤﴾ وَذَكِّرْ فَإِنَّ ٱلذِّكْرَىٰ تَنفَعُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

So ignore them [Prophet] – you are not to blame [54]
and go on reminding [people], it is good for
those who believe to be reminded [55]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 54 - 55)

Allah instructs Messenger Muhammad to turn away from these people and to forget about them, for he is not required to force them to believe; he only has to deliver the message to them. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad with words which convey this same meaning: 'Then perhaps you would kill yourself through grief over them, [O Muhammad], if they do not believe in this message, [and] out of sorrow.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 3)

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(1) *Related by Muslim (301), An-Nasa'i (11268) and At-Tabarani (1515) on the authority of 'Amr ibn Al'As Allah be pleased with him*

Allah tells Messenger Muhammad not to destroy himself through grief over them and out of eagerness to guide them, as his mission is to deliver the message, Allah is the One Who guides people: 'If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain humbled.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 4) This means if Allah willed, He would force all people to have faith in the manner the heavens and the earth are compelled to believe in Allah. However, Allah wants people's hearts to believe in Him, not only apparently.

He says, '…you are not to blame.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 54) This means that if people persisted in their disbelief; Messenger Muhammad is not to blame. When Allah blames him for something, it was for his own sake and out of mercy for him, such as when Allah blamed him for what happened with the blind man, ʿAbdullah ibn Um Maktum, concerning which Allah says: 'The Prophet frowned and turned away. Because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting], but what would make you perceive, [O Muhammad], that perhaps he might be purified.' (*'Abasa:* 1-3) Allah blamed him because he overburdened himself and turned away from this believer seeking to guide the chieftains of Quraysh.

Allah says: 'And go on reminding…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 55). This means that Prophet Muhammad's mission is to remind the people who believed him and those who turned away from him of Allah and His guidance. '…it is good for those who believe to be reminded.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 55) The believer is the one who benefits from this reminding and clings to faith.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ ٱلْجِنَّ وَٱلْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾ مَآ أُرِيدُ مِنْهُم مِّن رِّزْقٍ
وَمَآ أُرِيدُ أَن يُطْعِمُونِ ﴿٥٧﴾ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلرَّزَّاقُ ذُو ٱلْقُوَّةِ ٱلْمَتِينُ ﴿٥٨﴾

I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me [56] I want no provision from them, nor do I want them to feed Me [57]
God is the Provider, the Lord of Power, the Ever Mighty [58]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 56 - 58)

Allah says: 'I created…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56). Creating means bringing something into existence from nothing, and forming it without recourse to a previous model, this kind of creation can only be done by Allah. However, He did not withhold this attribute from His creatures, as He allowed them to create in their own way. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) A person may be called a creator when he brings something into existence. For example, the one who made a glass from sand can be called a creator, because he brought it into being. He is a creator who is not denied the fruits of his efforts. Allah is the best of creators. It is obvious that human beings only create by using materials which already exist, but Allah creates from nothingness. Human beings create lifeless objects, but Allah *Glorified is He* creates living beings which can grow, develop, and reproduce. There are many other differences we can list which show that Allah is the best of creators.

In this verse, Allah has mentioned the jinn and mankind as being created in order to worship Allah, and has not mentioned the more sublime creatures, namely angels. Scholars said that He has not mentioned the angels in this verse because they were created for worship, and do not have any choice in the matter. They were created from the outset in order to worship Allah and were compelled to do so. '…they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6) This verse tackles the creatures which possess free will and can either obey or disobey Allah.

Why does Allah mention the jinn before mankind in this verse? Some scholars said it is because worship can be either secretly or publicly, and the jinn worships Allah secretly because we cannot see them. Secret worship is better because it is not tainted by hypocrisy, whilst people's worship is usually in public and is sometimes tainted with hypocrisy.

There is another opinion stating that although the worship of the jinn is hidden from us because we cannot see him, it is public for the members of his kind. Therefore, it is also subject to hypocrisy, as the jinn can see each other.

This issue can be tackled in another way; if you read The Quran carefully, you will find that the jinn were created before mankind: 'And the jinn We created before from scorching fire.' (*al-Hijr:* 27) Thus, Allah mentions the jinn before mankind because they were created before mankind.

Moreover, the main reason behind some people's deviation from worshipping Allah is Satan who is a jinni: '…except for Satan. He was of the jinn and departed from the command of his Lord…' (*al-Kahf:* 50). Thus, the jinn were mentioned before mankind with regard to worship.

Allah's saying: 'I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56) includes a restrictive style, as He restricted the purpose for the creation of jinn and man to worship Him. This indicates that this is the only reason why they were created. Worship means obeying the one you worship with regard to all commands and prohibitions. This is the true meaning of worship which Allah wants of His servants. Therefore, Allah only accepts that which is devoted sincerely to Him.

Yet not all mankind worship Allah sincerely, but rather, each of them offers that which is commensurate with his ability and his view of the Deity he worships.

People are at different levels in this regard, at the top of which are the messengers and Messenger Muhammad, the Seal, is the best of Messengers, as he worshipped Allah truly as Allah intended.

Some people go to an extreme saying that the whole universe was created only for the sake of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We say that it suffices that he is the best person who has ever worshipped Allah, for worship is a concept which can only be realised by means of a true worshipper who does exactly what Allah wants of him.

This type of true worshipper cannot be an ordinary human being, but he must be a prophet. The Master and seal of all prophets is our Messenger Muhammad, who is the best of all who realized true worship of Allah.

The purpose of creation is worship, yet Allah is too exalted to be asked about the reason for His actions, as He does what He wants to what He wants with regard to what He wants. The reason for actions which we should not ask Allah about is that which is relevant to Him.

However, we may find the reason for things which benefit people; worshipping Allah benefits all people because it gives them happiness in the worldly life and salvation in the Hereafter, However, Allah does not benefit from it in any way; He is free of any need for His created beings. Their obedience does not benefit Him and their disobedience does not harm Him.

He created all creation while possessing all Attributes of Perfection and this creation has not added to Him any attribute which He did not possess. He is The Creator before He created, the Provider before He provided, and was glorified before the existence of anyone to glorify Him.

As worship means obeying the commands and prohibitions of the one you worship, this concept encompasses all the motions of life, and is not restricted only to prayer, fasting, and obligatory charity, as is thought by some of those people who wish to separate religion from the motions of life. They say that religion has nothing to do with politics, yet this statement is false and incorrect. People who adopt this line want to gain temporal power which yields to their caprices so that they can do what pleases them.

They have deliberately separated Allah’s guidance from management of the people’s affairs because Allah’s guidance restricts their actions; yet they forgot that it also restricts the actions of the ruled people for their own good.

Therefore, Allah’s guidance encompasses all fields of life, from the testimony of faith: ‘There is no deity but Allah’ to the removal of obstacles from the street(1). We should execute the murderer, carry out the *Hadd* (ordained punishment for violating Allah’s Law) with the adulterer, punish the one who drinks intoxicants, prevent corrupt people from spreading corruption, and resist the people who do evil deeds. So what do they want to achieve by annulling Allah’s Law and separating it from our daily life? Allah has enjoined worship for the good of mankind, as it organises their lives and makes them happy.

When we speak of this matter, we always quote the following Qudsi Hadith (Revelation from Allah in the Prophet's words): ‘O My servants, if the first and last of you, humans and jinn, were as pious as the heart of the most pious man among you, it would not increase My dominion aught. O My servants if the first and last of you, humans and jinn, were as wicked as the heart of the most wicked man among you, it would not decrease My dominion ought.'(1)

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(1) *Abu Hurayra related that Messenger Muhammad said: ‘Faith is has over seventy branches - or over sixty branches - the uppermost of which is the testimony: 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah'; and the least of which is the removal of harmful object from the road, and modesty is a branch of faith.’ Related by Muslim (51), At-Tirmidhi (2539), An-Nasa’i (4919) and Ibn Majah (56)*

Thus, how can we keep Allah's religion away from our daily lives, when it applies to the simplest matters? A sinful man entered paradise because he gave water to a dog,(2) and a woman went to hell for locking up a cat;(3) so what do you think about the human being, whom Allah has honoured? Are we supposed to leave aside the politics of man?

Another Qudsi Hadith reads, 'O Son of Adam, I created you to worship Me, so do not play.'(4) This means that seriousness in life because play is an action with no benefit or purpose. Allah wants the actions of His servants to be beneficial and meaningful.

If you consider the side of worship, the most important of which is prayer, do you not need to cover your private parts with clothes in order to perform this act of worship? How will you get these clothes?

Reflect on the way cotton is taken from the field until you wear the clothes. It is a long course full of work, effort, and labour in which thousands of people are involved in your service.

Accordingly, life activities are not confined to prayer alone, but they include everything which helps one to pray, pay *zakat* (obligatory alms), fast, and make pilgrimage.

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(1) *Related by Muslim (4674), Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Sunnan Al-Kubra (vi. 93), Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak 'Ala As-Sahihayn (7714) and Al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab Al-Iman (6822) on the authority of Abu Dhar Al-Ghiffari*

(2) *Al-Bukhari (168) and Ahmad (10334) narrate on the authority of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad said: 'A man saw a dog so thirsty that it was eating moist soil, so he took off his leather sock, scooped up water in it and gave it to the dog to drink. Thus, Allah thanked him by sending him to paradise…'*

(3) *Al-Bukhari (2192) and Muslim (4160) related on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar that Messenger Muhammad said, 'A woman was punished because of a cat which she locked up until it died, so she was admitted to hell. He said: 'You did not feed it or give it to drink when you confined it, nor did you let it free to eat the insects on the floor.'*

(4) *Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his exegesis as a saying of one of the earlier religions, not a Hadith*

Worship is included in all aspects of life, so how can we separate religion from life activities including politics and the affairs of mankind?

Allah's saying: 'I want no provision from them, nor do I want them to feed Me.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 57) This means that Allah does not want His creatures to provide for Him because He is the All-Provider who has undertaken to provide for all creatures. He provides for the believers as well as the disbelievers, and He has existed before them and has possessed all the Attributes of Perfection before He created them.

Under this divine provision, people serve as a means of provision for one another, and Allah encourages His servant to give and provide for others and likened giving people to giving Him.

This is because Allah is the One Who created mankind, brought them into existence, and has provided for them. Allah's Hand is stretched out to His creatures by means of His creatures, so He called the charity one gives to the poor man a loan, saying: 'Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan...' (*al-Baqara:* 245)?

In another Qudsi Hadith (Revelation from Allah in the Prophet's words), He says: 'Son of Adam, I was ill yet you visited Me not.' Man will say, 'Lord, how could I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?' He will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was ill, yet you did not visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him, you would have found Me there?' Son of Adam, I asked you for food yet you fed Me not.' Man will say, 'Lord, how could I feed You when You are the Lord of the worlds?' He will say, 'My servant so-and-so asked you for food, yet you did not feed him. Did you not know that had you fed him, you would have found Me there?'(1)

The good deed is appreciated by Allah before being appreciated by Allah's servants. Had Allah wanted, He could have sent His provision directly to His servants, but He willed it to pass from the hands of some of His servants to others in order to create affection and love among them, to spread compassion and prevent pride. Allah wants society to be interdependent and cooperative.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (4661), Al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab Al-Iman (8879) and Ibn Hibban (268) on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

'…I want no provision from them, nor do I want them to feed Me.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 57) Why does He join the idea of feeding to the idea of sustenance? We explained before that sustenance means everything that gives benefit. Thus, knowledge, forbearance, generosity, and good health are forms of sustenance. Sustenance, which is mentioned in this verse, refers to general sustenance after which Allah specifically mentions food because it is the most obvious kind of sustenance, and it preserves life. Scholars said that Allah does not mention drink in this verse because it is included with food.

'Verily Allah is the Provider, the Lord of Power, the Ever Mighty.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 58) The context here emphasises this fact in order to firmly establish it in the mind, and to reassure each one that his provision is guaranteed: 'Allah is the Provider…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 58). The word *inna* (verily) then *Dhu Al-Quwwa* (Lord of Power) to emphasise that Allah is the Possessor of Power. This means that His Entity is separated from His Power.

In another verse, Allah speaks about Power and Dominance, saying: 'Allah has written, "I will surely overcome, I and My messengers." Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might.' (*al-Mujadala:* 21) The power here is part of the Entity, for He does not say 'the Lord of power' because the purpose of these words is to proclaim how He prevails over the stubborn people.

The word 'powerful' entails prevailing over others, but other powerful people may join their efforts and powers against a powerful person and prevail over him. Thus, Allah says: '…Exalted in Might.' (*al-Mujadala:* 21) which means that He is invincible and cannot be defeated, In the verse under discussion, Allah says: '…the Ever Mighty.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 58) This means that His Power is constant and neither weakens or lessens.

فَإِنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ ذَنُوبًا مِّثْلَ ذَنُوبِ أَصْحَٰبِهِمْ فَلَا يَسْتَعْجِلُونِ ﴿٥٩﴾

The evildoers, like their predecessors, will have a share of punishment – they need not ask Me to hasten it [59] (The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 59)

One of the rhetorical styles employed in the Quran is to mention opposites side by side. After mentioning the believers, Allah mentions the disbelievers of Mecca, for they are the ones meant by Allah's saying: 'The evildoers…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 59) They committed evil by denying and opposing Messenger Muhammad and standing in the way of his call. Thus, they deserved to have '…like their predecessors, a share of punishment - they need not ask Me to hasten it.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 59) This 'share of punishment' will be akin to that of former deniers belonging to 'Ad, Thamud and Pharaoh.

The word *Dhanub* literally means the pail we use to take out water from a well, and the rope to which the pail is attached is called the *rasha'*. If the pail contains much water, the bucket comes out heavily and slowly. Thus, it is said:

Pails come up slowly because they are full,
And the slowest clouds to come are the fullest.

An Arab poet expressed this meaning, saying:

When a man praises another for gaining benefits,
His critique will also be beyond limits,
If he did not think that the well was distant,
He would not make his rope so long.

If the water is a long way down the well, you need a long rope; if it is difficult to gain benefits from the one praised, it will take a long time to praise him.

The Arabs were accustomed to take out water from wells by pails. These aggressors used a pail to pour water to drink in this worldly life, they will use it in the Hereafter in order to inflict suffering, and punishment upon them, as Allah says in another verse: '…boiling water shall be poured over their heads.' (*al-Hajj:* 19) It will be poured over the people of Quraysh who belied Messenger Muhammad, just as it was poured over the people of Nuh, 'Ad, Thamud, and Pharaoh, as disbelief is the same over time.

Therefore, when Allah spoke about the punishment of the people of Lot, He said: '…rained down upon them stones, of what had been decreed, one after another. Marked (for punishment) with your Lord and it is not far off from the unjust.' (*Hud:* 82-83) The punishment which afflicted the predecessors is not so far away from those who lived after them.

Allah emphasises this meaning, saying: ‘…they need not ask Me to hasten it.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 59) The punishment will inevitably afflict them, and it is not far away from them; it is only a matter of time.

فَوَيْلٌ لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِن يَوْمِهِمُ ٱلَّذِى يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

And woe betide those who deny the truth
on the Day they have been promised [60]
(The Quran, *adh-Dhariyat:* 60)

Some scholars said that the word *wayl* which is the name of a valley in hell,(1) and others said that it means destruction suffering and curse from Allah upon those who refused to obey Him, and did not fulfil the purpose for which they were created: worshipping Him alone.

When they got along without Allah, He left them, casting them out of His Mercy and damning them to eternal suffering which will not come to an end by death and will not be mitigated.

Therefore, Allah says about them: ‘and they shall call out: O Malik! Let your Lord make an end of us. He shall say: Surely you shall remain.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 77) He also says about them: ‘…Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins, so they may taste the punishment….’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56)

Allah’s saying: ‘…on the Day they have been promised’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 60) refers to the Day of which Allah warned them. Allah did not take them unawares, nor did He leave them in their heedlessness, but He told them about the consequences of their actions, saying: ‘whoever does righteousness - it is for his [own] soul; and whoever does evil [does so] against it. And your Lord is not ever unjust to [His] servants…’ (*Fussilat:* 46).

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(1) Abu Sa’id Al-Khudri narrated that Messenger Muhammad said, ‘*Wayl* is a valley in hell in which the disbelievers will fall for forty autumns.’ (*Lisan Al-‘Arab*)

the chapter of

at-Tur

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *at-Tur* (2) :

وَٱلطُّورِ ١ وَكِتَٰبٖ مَّسۡطُورٖ ٢ فِي رَقّٖ مَّنشُورٖ ٣

By the mountain [1] by a Scripture inscribed [2]
in unrolled parchment [3] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 1 - 3)

We notice that the beginning of the chapter of *at-Tur* is similar to the beginning of the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat* which precedes it. At the beginning of the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*, Allah *Glorified is He* swears an oath saying: ‘By those [winds] that scatter far and wide, and those that are heavily laden, that speed freely, that distribute [rain] as ordained!’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1-4) The oath is about: ‘what you [people] are promised is true: the Judgement will come.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 5-6)

In the chapter of *at-Tur*, Allah *Glorified is He* swears an oath saying: ‘By the mountain, by a Scripture inscribed in unrolled parchment, by the much-visited House, by the raised canopy, by the ocean ever filled’ (*at-Tur:* 1-8). The oath is about: ‘[Prophet], your Lord’s punishment is coming – it cannot be put off.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 7-8) Both chapters testify to the truthfulness of facts about the Day of Judgment and the unavoidable suffering it includes.

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) The chapter of *at-Tur* is the 52nd chapter of the Quran. It consists of 49 verses and is a Meccan chapter by consensus. It was revealed after the chapter of *as-Sajda* and before the chapter of *al-Mulk*. It is the 75th chapter to be revealed according to the order of the revelation of the Quranic chapters. [See: Al-Itqan fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran, 1/27]

When we reflect upon that which Allah swears by in the two chapters, we see that in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*, Allah swears by material things such as the wind and the clouds that carry the water that brings life to the earth. In the chapter of *at-Tur*, He swears by spiritual matters. Material things please one in the worldly life, but spiritual things please one in the worldly life and the Hereafter. No matter how long the worldly life lasts, it will end with the Hereafter whose bounties never come to an end.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses us, saying: ‘O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life...’ (*al-Anfal:* 24). He says this, while they are already alive. Thus, the other life is intended by this verse; it refers to the spiritual life and ever-lasting bliss.

This meaning is referred to by Allah’s saying: ‘...And indeed, the home of the Hereafter – that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) The word *al-hayawan*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means the real life that will not end.

Why does Allah swear in the verses under discussion by Mount *at-Tur*? Scholars said that all the other Messengers were addressed via the Revelation, whereas Allah spoke to Prophet Musa (Moses) directly, while he was at the top of this mountain. Therefore, Mount At-Tur has a special status.

The children of Israel were stubborn and persistent in their enmity, and were inclined to materialism in everything, even religion. Thus they said to Musa (Moses): ‘O Musa! We will not believe in you until we see Allah manifestly...’ (*al-Baqara:* 55). Had he told them that the Revelation came to him in secret, they would not have believed him.

In Allah’s saying *wa-Tur*, the letter *waw* at the beginning refers to taking an oath. In this verse, Allah takes an oath by Mount At-Tur. We said previously that Allah swears by whatsoever He wills of His creatures. The word At-Tur is mentioned ten times in the Quran because Allah gives it a high status, as He spoke to Prophet Musa (Moses).

‘By a Scripture inscribed’ (*at-Tur:* 2); the verse refers to the Torah and the Tablets. The word *mastur*, which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means that the writing was inscribed and arranged in lines.

Allah says: ‘In unrolled parchment.’ (*at-Tur:* 3) The word *raq* refers to any type of skin that can be written on, and was the first thing people wrote on. In ancient times, people also used bones and other things to write on. The word *manshur* they mean spread out and not rolled or closed. For example, when a cloth merchant spreads out his textiles to show them to you, this reveals that they are good and free from flaws. Were they faulty, he would not spread them out and give you the opportunity to inspect them.

Allah has opened His Book and presented it for all the created beings to read, a fact that indicates that it is a precise and perfect Book, free from flaws or shortcomings.

وَٱلْبَيْتِ ٱلْمَعْمُورِ ﴿٤﴾ وَٱلسَّقْفِ ٱلْمَرْفُوعِ ﴿٥﴾ وَٱلْبَحْرِ ٱلْمَسْجُورِ ﴿٦﴾

By the much-visited House [4] By the raised canopy [5] By the ocean ever filled [6]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 4 - 6)

Allah’s saying, ‘By the oft-frequented house [of worship]’ is an oath sworn by the House, i.e., the *Ka'ba*. This is a proof that there were people in this time who answered the call to Allah’s way and went to the House and lived there. The scholars said that this also refers to a celestial house which is frequented and circumambulated by angels.

It is as though Allah is saying to them, beware of thinking that I need you to believe in Me to come and visit My House, for I have a House in the seventh heaven. Every day 70,000 angels enter it, and whoever enters it once never goes out again (1). These are His slaves who have been ennobled; they do not speak before He does and they carry out His commandments.

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(1) *This Hadith is agreed upon... Al-Bukhari narrates it in his Sahih [2968] and Muslim in his Ṣahih [234] on the authority of Abu Hurayra. Its wording is, ‘The Oft-frequented House (Al-bayt Al-Ma`mur) was placed before me so I asked Jibril (Gabriel) who said, ‘This is the Oft-frequented House, every day 70,000 angels pray in it. Once they leave it they do not return to it. It is the first and last time they enter it.’ The full Hadith is much longer than this.*

His saying, ‘By the vault [of heaven] raised high’, refers to the sky, a roof raised without supports. ‘By the surf-swollen sea’: the word *masjur* (surf-swollen) has two meanings: It can mean full of water, and in this vein the sea can be of two types, either freshwater or saltwater. It is remarkable that Allah said of these two, ‘...and yet, from either of them do you eat fresh meat...’ (*Fatir*: 12). We do not get salty fish from saltwater seas; we only get fish like those we get from fresh water. The saltiness of the water does not affect the taste of the fish.

Masjur can also mean ‘ignited’; the Arabs say *sajjarahu* meaning ‘he lit it on fire’. It is well known that water and fire are incompatible. Thus this refers to the seas that were full of water, yet on the Day of Judgment they will burn after all their water has evaporated.

Then Allah speaks of the thing He is swearing to:

إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ لَوَٰقِعٞ ٧ مَّا لَهُۥ مِن دَافِعٖ ٨

[Prophet], your Lord’s punishment is coming [7]
It cannot be put off [8] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 7 - 8)

That is, the punishment of the afterlife will certainly happen, there is no doubt about it, for The One Who has promised it is The Strong, The fully-Capable, Whose command none can refuse and Whose Will cannot be opposed by anyone. Allah has neither partner nor peer, neither equal nor opposite, and so long as the matter is thus then, ‘there is none who could avert it’. That is, no-one can turn it back when it comes. When is it going to come?(1)

He says:

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(1) *Jubayr ibn Mut`im said, ‘I came to Medina to ask The Messenger of Allah about the captives from the Battle of Badr. I showed up as he was reading the chapter of at-Tur in the sunset prayer until when he reached Allah’s saying, “Verily, [O man,] the suffering decreed by your Lord [for the sinners] will indeed come to pass: [7] there is none who could avert it. [8]” (at-Tur: 7-8) I felt as if my heart had been rent asunder and I entered Islam out of fear of the punishment descending upon me. I thought that I would not move from the place where I was before the punishment befell me.’ [Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 9/6463]*

يَوْمَ تَمُورُ ٱلسَّمَآءُ مَوْرًا ﴿٩﴾ وَتَسِيرُ ٱلْجِبَالُ سَيْرًا ﴿١٠﴾
فَوَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١١﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ هُمْ فِى خَوْضٍ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

On the Day when the sky sways back and forth [9] And the mountains float away [10] Woe on that Day to those who deny the Truth [11] Who amuse themselves with idle chatter [12] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 9 - 12)

Allah speaks here of the Day of Judgement when the skies will be most severely perturbed. i.e., this sky, this secured roof raised high, this perfect construction of which Allah said, ‘And it is We who have built the heavens with [Our creative] power...’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47), i.e. with power and precision, and of which He also said, ‘And We have built above you seven firmaments’ (*an-Naba':* 12). This sky will be convulsed, i.e., it will become disturbed, start to move and break up, in a similar way to an old, shredded piece of cloth.

In another place Allah described this matter saying, ‘[It will take place] on a Day when the sky will be like molten lead’ (*al-Ma'arij:* 8). This means that the structure of the sky will be destroyed and it will come to pieces, just as everything else in creation will because they will have no role left to play. In this world the sky plays a role in the sustenance of life, but in the next world there will be no need for these intermediaries, for there we will live by the Owner of causes *Glorified is He* and we will have no need of the means we require to live in this world. It is for the same reason that Allah says of that Day, ‘And the earth will shine bright with her Lord’s light...’ (*az-Zumar:* 69), i.e. we will have no need of the sun because we will be illuminated by the Lord of the sun and its Creator.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘and the mountains will move with [an awesome] movement’ (*at-Tur:* 10), as He said elsewhere, ‘and when the mountains are made to vanish’ (*at-Takwir:* 3). These solid mountains are like stakes driven into the ground, yet despite their hugeness they will be made to move, and then they will disintegrate and disperse. He also says, ‘and the mountains will be like tufts of wool’ (*al-Ma'arij:* 9), i.e. like scattered carded wool, for there will be nothing left for them to do; they were there to stabilise the earth, but now the old order has come to an end and been destroyed.

'Woe, then, on that Day to all who give the lie to the truth' (*at-Tur:* 11) Woe to them because they took the means (*al-asbab*) and sufficed themselves with them forgetting the One Who provided them with these means, Now the means have perished and nothing remains except the Lord of these means, Allah, in whom they disbelieved and whose Messengers they denied. Now the only ones who will get good from Him are those who believed and confirmed the Messengers when the means were in place.

This is why we say, beware of becoming deceived by the means, no matter how much they serve you or give you, rather know that behind them is their Creator.

Do you remember some time ago when Pakistan came up with a plan to cultivate huge areas of wheat. Their evaluations promised that Pakistan could become self-sufficient and would then be able to export wheat, even to America. They did indeed cultivate the wheat until the time to break even drew near, but a harmful blight came and ruined the crop, and in that year they had to import wheat, all because they had relied upon the means and forgotten the Lord of the means.

Similarly in the story of Qarun (Korah): 'Answered he: "This [wealth] has been given to me only by virtue of the knowledge that I have!"...' (*al-Qasas:* 78). So when he became deluded by his knowledge and understanding, Allah abandoned him and said to him as it were, 'preserve then your wealth by means of your knowledge'. Then a catastrophe that he was unable to repel befell him, 'And thereupon We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling...' (*al-Qasas:* 81). So where are your skills now?

Indeed, 'Woe, then, on that Day to all who give the lie to the truth' (*at-Tur:* 11); those that deny Allah, The Creator Most High, and deny His Messengers; those who thought that the life of this world was an end in itself and the final chapter, for this is what they who deny Allah and put their faith in nature claim.

This is why Allah goes on to define them saying, 'all those who [throughout their lives] but idly played with things vain', and in another verse, 'Hence, leave them to indulge in idle talk and play...’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 42). *Al-Khawd* (idle things) refers literally to walking through water. It signifies clumsiness and a lack of guidance, for when one goes walking on the ground, he can see where one’s feet are going, one is aware of the dangerous places in his path because one can see where he is going. When however one walks through water, he does not know where he is putting his feet and he is not safe from injury. When we study the Gracious Quran, we find that it does not use the word *khawd* except in relation to falsehood. Allah says, ‘...and then leave them to play at their vain talk (*khawd*)’ (*al-An‘am:* 91), and, ‘Now, whenever you meet such as indulge in [blasphemous] talk about (*yakhudun fi*) Our messages, turn your back upon them...’ (*al-An‘am:* 68). The Quran also expresses this meaning when it says, ‘they who blunder along, in ignorance lost (*fi ghamra sahun*)’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 11), as though they are submerged in water stumbling through it.

يَوْمَ يُدَعُّونَ إِلَىٰ نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ دَعًّا ﴿١٣﴾
هَٰذِهِ ٱلنَّارُ ٱلَّتِي كُنتُم بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

On that Day they will be thrust into the Fire of
Hell [13] This is the Fire you used to deny [14]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 13-14)

The word *yuda'un* (they will be thrust) is declined from the verb *da'a* meaning to push somebody violently so that he falls on his face. Another example of it is found in Allah’s saying, ‘have you ever considered [the kind of man] who gives the lie to all moral law? [1] Behold, it is this [kind of man] that thrusts the orphan away [2]’ (*al-Ma'un:* 1-2). That is, he pushes him away forcefully. It is an orphan who has come to him seeking help regarding some need relating to his sustenance. The man could give to him, or he could ignore and refuse him without harming him, instead however he shoves him away and hurts him, and this is why he deserves the recompense he will get.

Such is the case here with these disbelievers: ‘on the Day when they shall be thrust into the fire with [an irresistible] thrust...’, they will be driven into it, vehemently forced in total humiliation. Who will be casting them to the fire? The angels will. By Allah it would have been sufficient humiliation for them had it been men casting them in – just as in this world a criminal is pushed through the door of the prison for instance – so what then when it is the angels of punishment who are thrusting them into the fire?

When they enter it, they are met by other angels who have a different role to play: ‘On the Day when they shall be dragged into the fire on their faces, [they will be told:] ‘Taste now the touch of hell-fire!’ (*al-Qamar:* 48)

So the thrusting here will be in proportion to the strength of the angels, and what will that be like? To further their humiliation the angels confront them with the reality they now face: ‘This is the fire which you were wont to call a lie!’ (*at-Tur:* 14) Now it is visible, you see it with your own eyes and you can feel its true heat.

أَفَسِحْرٌ هَٰذَآ أَمْ أَنتُمْ لَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾
ٱصْلَوْهَا فَٱصْبِرُوٓا۟ أَوْ لَا تَصْبِرُوا۟ سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ إِنَّمَا تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

So is this sorcery? Do you still not see it? [15] Burn in it –it makes no difference whether you bear it patiently or not — you are only being repaid for what you have done [16] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 15 - 16)

Ponder this rebuke. They used to hurl accusations at The Messenger *peace be upon him* saying he was a sorcerer and that the Quran was sorcery, but now they are being addressed with their own words. They say to them, ‘Was it, then, a delusion…’, i.e. this punishment that you are now experiencing, is it magic? Magic is illusion, it does not inflict pain upon you, yet you are in pain. Thus, it cannot be magic, indeed it is real; ‘…or is it that you failed to see [its truth]?’ It must be one or the other.

‘Endure it…’, i.e., enter hell. Experience its heat and its suffering. ‘…But [whether you] bear yourselves with patience or without patience…’, this is the first time we see patience which has no benefit nor reward – the patience of these people dealing with the heat of hell. ‘…It will be the same to you…’: Whether you are patient or not, it makes no difference to Us;

both are evil states, and you will never escape it. This is not oppression though, it is their just desserts.

‘…You are but being requited for what you were wont to do’; none of this is a form of injustice, and rather, it is merely the consequences of your deeds which we bring you. It is you who put yourselves in this position.

إِنَّ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ فِى جَنَّٰتٍ وَنَعِيمٍ ﴿١٧﴾ فَٰكِهِينَ بِمَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ وَوَقَىٰهُمْ
رَبُّهُمْ عَذَابَ ٱلْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٨﴾ كُلُوا۟ وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ هَنِيٓـًٔۢا بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Those who were mindful of God are in Gardens and in bliss [17] rejoicing in their Lord’s gifts: He has saved them from the torment of the Blaze [18] ‘Eat and drink with healthy enjoyment as a reward for what you have done’[19] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 17-19)

Mentioning opposites together is one of the pinnacles of the Quranic rhetoric and one of the manifestations of its excellence. As we mentioned previously, one thing manifests the good in its opposite, and it is for this reason that we so often find these pairs of opposites in the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* says for example, ‘Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss, [13] whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire [14]’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14).

Having spoken here of the disbelievers and their recompense in hell, (we seek Allah’s refuge from it), He then speaks to us of the pious and the blessings that await them.

Thus when the believer reads these verses and visualises the two opposite outcomes, he says, ‘Praise be to Allah for the faith which will save me from this ignominious ending,’ while the disbeliever says, ‘Woe to me! My disbelief will prevent me from attaining these blessings’.

This comparison makes the believer cheerful while making the disbeliever feel miserable. It lifts the believer up and it puts the disbeliever down. Allah also says, ‘...he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '[But] verily, the God-conscious. (*al-muttaqin*)…' *Taqwa* (God-consciousness) is that one places a barrier of obedience between oneself and Allah's punishment. We have said previously that The True Lord says, '...Remain conscious of Allah...' (*al-Baqara:* 278), and '...then be conscious of the Fire...' (*al-Baqara:* 24), yet the meaning is effectively the same: that one place a barrier of obedience between oneself and Allah's attributes of majesty. When you protect yourself from the fire, you protect yourself from Allah because it is but part of Allah's army.

We note here that in Allah's saying, '[But] verily, the Allah-conscious will find themselves [on that Day] in Gardens and in bliss', the word *Muttaqin* (God-conscious) is in the plural, as is the word 'Gardens'. This means that every believer will have a garden specific to him. It is just as if we said to some students, 'Get your books out,' i.e., let each and every student get his book out. When two plurals are put together like this, it means that the distribution is on individual basis.

For the same reason when we explained the verse in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'But for those who of their Lord's Presence stand in fear, two gardens [of paradise are readied]' (*ar-Rahman:* 46), we asked how we could join between them. The scholars say that it says, 'two gardens' because the speech here relates to men and jinn, the two 'sin-laden' groups (*ath-thaqalayn*): '[One day] We shall take you to task, O you sin-laden two!' (*ar-Rahman:* 31) Thus it means that he from among the jinn who fears his Lord will have a Garden, and he from among men who fears his Lord will have a Garden.(1)

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(1) *Al-Mawardi said in his exegesis of this verse, 'There are four interpretations of these two gardens:*
The first is that there is one garden for men and one garden for the jinn. This was the opinion of Mujahid.
The second is that one is the Garden of 'Adn while the other is the Garden of an-Na'im, and this was the opinion of Muqatil.
The third is that they are two of the gardens of Paradise, and this was related with an unconnected chain of narrators (marfu`).
The fourth is that one of the gardens is that of his own residence, while the other is the garden of his wives and servants' residence, as is the practise of the rich in this world.
There is also a fifth possibility, and that is that one of the gardens will be the place where he lives, while the other will be its garden.
A sixth possibility is that one of the gardens is beneath his palaces, while the other is above them.

The preposition in Allah's saying, '…in Gardens…' means that the Gardens are a place and the God-conscious will be inside them. The garden will encompass the believer. He then says, '…and in bliss' because someone's being in a garden does not necessitate his being in comfort. Imagine for instance the Pasha sitting in the garden of his residence, with flowers, trees, and fruits. He has a worker with him who cares for the trees, pruning and watering them. The garden is comfortable only for its owner; it is not comfortable for he who works in it.

As for these believers, they are in Gardens and in comfort; they are enjoying themselves. This is why The True Lord *Glorified is He* emphasises this saying afterwards, 'rejoicing in all that their Lord will have granted them…' (*at-Tur:* 17-19). That is, rejoicing in the comforts that they have. The word *fakihun* (rejoicing) means they are joyful, and this is another addition because one may be in a garden and be in comfort, yet not happy with it.

We saw this in Egypt after the revolution of 1952. We saw such-and-such a Pasha with estates and gardens, filled with all different types of fruits to eat, yet he was not happy because the state was confiscating land and nationalising it, and the fear of this spoiled his enjoyment of them for him. Thus, he was in a garden and in comfort, but he was not happy with it.

'…In all that their Lord will have granted them...', i.e. directly from Himself with no intermediaries. So, the God-conscious are in gardens, in comfort, enjoying themselves rejoicing in what Allah has granted them, and on top of and prior to all of that: '…their Lord will have warded off from them all suffering through the blazing fire' (*at-Tur:* 17-19). This is from the fulfilment of Allah's blessing, for it is possible that after having entered paradise, one would be afraid of being taken out of it and put into the fire. Thus this verse tells us this will not happen, for he who enters it will never leave it.

It could also refer to the fact that Allah has already protected them from entering the fire in the first place, i.e. before they entered paradise, as Allah says, '...he that shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph...' (*Al-'Imran:* 185).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '[And they will be told:] 'Eat and drink with good cheer as an outcome of what you were wont to do,' and in another verse He says, '...then 'eat it, tasty and wholesome' (*hani'a mari'a*)' (*an-Nisa':* 4). That is, in paradise, eat and drink from it, tasty and wholesome (*hani'a mari'a*). *Al-Hani'* refers to food or drink which one eats and finds to have a delicious taste at first but which afterwards is followed by unwanted side effects such as causing indigestion, wind, etc. It is tasty, but it is not wholesome (*mari'*). Allah describes the food and drink of paradise as being tasty and wholesome; it is good for you and it does not produce any ill effects.

The food and drink of paradise of course has none of that because people there do not eat out of hunger, rather, they eat out of luxury; even if one does not eat – it is all the same.

Allah *Glorified is He* then goes on to mention some of the other comforts of paradise.

مُتَّكِـِٔينَ عَلَىٰ سُرُرٖ مَّصۡفُوفَةٖۖ وَزَوَّجۡنَٰهُم بِحُورٍ عِينٖ ﴿٢٠﴾

They are comfortably seated on couches arranged in rows; We pair them with beautiful-eyed maidens[20]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 20)

Reclining (*al-ittika'*) is a type of sitting. One does not sit on one's posterior rather, he leans on his side. This is indicative of rest and tranquillity and that nothing is disturbing him. The concerned person on the other hand is anxious in his sitting; he can hardly rest his back against anything. Why? Because his heart is busied by things that prevent him from resting even when sitting

Thus, Allah's saying, 'reclining…' indicates that their hearts are tranquil, free from concerns or disturbances. '…On couches [of happiness]…' The word *surur* (couches) is the plural of *sarir*. It refers to something that one may sit on, and it has connotations of happiness. '…Ranged in rows...', i.e., arranged and attached one to other. When we went to France we saw hotels at the acme of luxury, beauty, and comfort. The people were astonished by it, so I said to them, 'Are you astonished by what man has prepared for man? What then do you imagine The Lord of man has prepared for man?'

'…We shall mate them with companions pure, most beautiful of eye' (*at-Tur:* 20), i.e., Allah will partner them with beautiful-eyed, pure companions (*al-hur al-`in*). The Arabic verb *zawwaj* (to marry/mate) is transitive in and of itself. One says *zawwajtu fulanan fulana*, meaning 'I married so-and-so to so-and-so' because marriage is a mutual benefit, the husband and the wife both derive benefit from each other.

As for being married to the *hur al-`in,* the benefit is one-way. In paradise the believer will derive pleasure from his associations with the *hur al-`in,* but they will not do so. Allah says, '…We shall mate them with companions pure, most beautiful of eye (*zawwajnahum bi hur `in*)' making the verb transitive with the preposition *ba'* (with).The word *hur* is the plural of *hawra'* and it refers to a woman, the whites of whose eyes are extremely white, and whose pupils are extremely dark. *Al-`In* is the plural of *`ayna'* and it refers to a woman whose eyes are wide, a sign of elegance and beauty.

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُم بِإِيمَٰنٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَآ
أَلَتْنَٰهُم مِّنْ عَمَلِهِم مِّن شَىْءٍ كُلُّ ٱمْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ ﴿٢١﴾

We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith — We do not deny them any of the rewards for their deeds: each person is in pledge for his own deeds [21] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 21)

'And as for those who have attained to faith…', i.e., faith in Allah alone, believing that He is One, Singular and has no associates. His being One (*Wahid*) means that there is no one else with Him, and His being Singular (*Ahad*) means that He is One in Himself, i.e., that He has no parts: 'Say: 'He is The One Allah' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1).

Faith is not complete until it is accompanied by the actions which such faith dictates, i.e., action according to the path The One you have believed in has decreed. This is why Allah has mentioned faith and righteous deeds together in so many places, an example of which being: '...those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds...' (*at-Talaq:* 11).

Allah then says here, '…and whose offspring will have followed them in faith...' (*at-Tur:* 21). Such a man believed and did righteous deeds and his offspring followed him in that. They had faith as he did, yet their works were less than those of their father. The True Lord through His mercy and generosity for the offspring, and honour to the father, raises his children up to the higher level at which he is.

'…We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste…' (*at-Tur:* 21). We will take nothing from them. We will grant increase to the offspring, yet not lessen the lot of the fathers, for the condition of faith is present in both. As for deeds, if they are few, then Allah will fix that out of His generosity and bounty.

The Arabic word *dhurriyya* (offspring) refers to one's chain of descendants. Thus the *dhurriyya* of a man includes his children and his grandchildren. A father can be from the *dhurriyya,* as can a son – it refers to relations through descent. It is split into two sorts: before carrying legal responsibility, and after carrying it. What is referred to in this verse is the offspring which is legally responsible and from which faith and action are sought.

When Allah says, '…and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste…', it means none of them, no matter how small.

He *Glorified is He* then says, '...every human being will be held in pledge for whatever he has earned' (*at-Tur:* 21). The word *raheen* (held in pledge) is in an emphatic form on the morphological pattern *fa`il*. This pattern can have the meaning of an active participle, such as *Raheem*, meaning 'merciful', and it can have the meaning of a passive participle, such as *qatil*, meaning 'killed'.

Here *raheen* has a passive meaning derived from the word *rahn*. The word *rahn* refers to something of value that the one who needs money leaves as a guarantee with the one granting him a loan until he repays his debt. The *rahn* stands in place of the money until it is returned to its owner. Similarly on the Day of Judgement, the slave of Allah is subject to his works, captive to them.

We could also say that the word *rahin* has an active meaning in this verse, i.e. he is the mortgagor of his work. If it is good, he will get good, and if it is bad, he will get bad.

وَأَمْدَدْنَٰهُم بِفَٰكِهَةٍ وَلَحْمٍ مِّمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾
يَتَنَٰزَعُونَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا لَّا لَغْوٌ فِيهَا وَلَا تَأْثِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

We provide them with any fruit or meat they desire [22] They pass around a cup which does not lead to any idle talk or sin [23] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 22-23)

Allah's saying, 'And We shall bestow on them...' means that this is another gift on top of and in addition to what has preceded it 'and in that ... they shall pass on to one another a cup...', i.e. they will pass a cup around in paradise. This passing will not spring from any type of difference or dislike; rather, it will be out of kindness and intimacy. Thus it seems they will be drinking in pleasure, harmony, and mutual care. 'And in that [paradise] they shall pass on to one another a cup...' (*at-Tur:* 22-23): The word *ka`s* (cup) refers to the vessel from which wine would be drunk, and such a cup is not called a *ka`s* unless it is full. If it is empty it is called a *koob*.

Allah then says, '...which will not give rise to empty talk....' *al-Laghw* (empty talk) refers to action in which there is no benefit and frivolous talk that is devoid of meaning, while yet also being devoid of sin. '...And neither incite to sin'; it comprises no sin, nor does it lead to forbidden things. This is the distinguishing characteristic of the wine of the next life.

The difference between it and the wine of this world is that the latter veils the intellect and takes its drinker into an irrational state, and what ensues is frivolous talk and sin. The wine of the next world is above such traits; this is why The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '...and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it...' (*Muhammad:* 15). The True Lord describes wine in terms of its shortcomings. The wine of the afterlife shares only its name with the wine of this world. If you see someone drinking alcohol you see him swig it back quickly in one go, why? This is because it smells and tastes nasty.

In the next life however, they will savour its flavour and take pleasure in it. So why do people drink alcohol in this world if its characteristics are such? If you ask one of them, he will tell you it is so he can forget his sorrows, worries, and troubles. This is strange because Allah does not want us to forget our sorrows and concerns and flee from them. He wants us to live with them, know their causes, and try to overcome them. There is no benefit it trying to cover them up and forget them.

وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ غِلۡمَانٞ لَّهُمۡ كَأَنَّهُمۡ لُؤۡلُؤٞ مَّكۡنُونٞ (٢٤)

Devoted youths like hidden pearls wait on them [24]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 24)

In paradise, they will be served drinks by youths. The word *ghilman* (youths) is the plural of *ghulam* and it refers to a handsome young boy. In another place Allah *Glorified is He* says describing them, ‘and immortal youths...’ (*al-Insan:* 19), i.e., they are perpetually young, never getting older. If a youth ages, he will eventually become an old man; these youths, however, stay at the same age and do not grow old.

Allah’s saying, ‘...of their own...’ means they are assigned to serve them. The preposition *lam* (of/for) can denote ownership and it can also denote assignment. If we say ‘the money is for (*li*) Zayd’, it means it is his property. If we say however, ‘the reins are for (*li*) the horse,’ it means they have been assigned to the horse – not that the horse owns them. The words *lahum* in this verse indicate that this cupbearer serves them without wages or other benefit. Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘...as if they were pearls hidden in their shells’ (*at-Tur:* 24), i.e., these youths are pure and white like pearls. Pearls are famed for their purity, whiteness, and glow. What then if it is still hidden in its shell, for when a pearl comes out of the oyster it becomes subject to dust and impurities that may blemish its purity.

وَأَقۡبَلَ بَعۡضُهُمۡ عَلَىٰ بَعۡضٖ يَتَسَآءَلُونَ (٢٥) قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا كُنَّا قَبۡلُ فِيٓ أَهۡلِنَا مُشۡفِقِينَ (٢٦)
فَمَنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡنَا وَوَقَىٰنَا عَذَابَ ٱلسَّمُومِ (٢٧)

They turn to one another and say [25] When we were still with our families [on earth] we used to live in fear [26] God has been gracious to us and saved us from the torment of intense heat [27] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 25 - 27)

Allah’s speech here still relates to the people of paradise: ‘And they [who are thus blest] will turn to one another, asking each other [about their past lives]'. 'They will say: 'Behold, a foretime...', i.e. in the world, '...when we were [still living] in the midst of our kith and kin – we were full of fear (*mushfiqin*)...' (*at-Tur:* 25-27). The word *ishfaq* refers to fear, and this can be either fear with a hatred for the source of fear, or it can be out of awe and respect for the source of one's fear. What is intended here is the fear of awe and respect because it is Allah whom they fear, but why? The scholars say it is because they are afraid of falling short it their worship of Allah. Although they obeyed Him and fulfilled their obligations, yet they did not worship Allah as He deserves to be worshipped, for He deserves more than that. Their fear thus contains hope that Allah will make up for this shortcoming on their part. Allah *Glorified is He* says of the angels, '...Nay, [... they ... are but His] honoured servants' (*al-Anbiya':* 26), and '...who do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do' (*at-Tahrim:* 6), and yet despite that Allah says of them, 'they fear their Lord high above them...' (*an-Nahl:* 50).

Alternatively, '...when we were [still living] in the midst of our kith and kin – we were full of fear...' (*at-Tur:* 25-27) could mean that they were afraid that death would separate them after having once been together, but now that they are in the next world they are in a better state than they were before. It could also mean they were afraid of Allah's punishment in the hereafter. They then say, 'and so Allah has graced us with His favour...' (*at-Tur:* 25-27), i.e. out of His bounty, and given us more than we deserve out of His generosity and grace. He gave us gifts unaccompanied by harm or punishment: '...and has warded off from us all suffering through the scorching winds [of frustration]'. The Arabic word *as-sumum* (in Allah we seek refuge from it), refers to pure fire. It is called *sumum* because it penetrates through the pores of the skin.

إِنَّا كُنَّا مِن قَبۡلُ نَدۡعُوهُۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلۡبَرُّ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٢٨﴾

We used to pray to Him: He is the Good, the
Merciful One [28] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions here the reasons for their entering paradise and being saved from fire: it is because they frequently supplicated to Him.

They did not attribute it to their deeds, but to their supplication, humility, and hope in Allah. They called on Him as a merciful Lord, good and generous, hoping for the mercy which outstrips His anger. '...He alone is truly benign, a true dispenser of grace' (*at-Tur:* 28). The manifestation of His response was that He entered us into paradise. We moved on to better things without tiredness, worry, or sorrow. We moved on to bliss the likes of which had never occurred to us.

He is the '...truly benign...', i.e. the extremely generous and beneficent. The, '...true dispenser of grace' (*at-Tur:* 28), i.e. extremely merciful with His creation, for He is their Lord, Creator and guarantor. He created them from nothing and provided for them. He only made them legally responsible after puberty and the stabilisation of their intellects, along with other blessings

فَذَكِّرْ فَمَآ أَنتَ بِنِعْمَتِ رَبِّكَ بِكَاهِنٍ وَلَا مَجْنُونٍ ٢٩

So [Prophet] remind [people]. By the grace of your Lord
[Prophet], you are neither oracle nor madman [29]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 29)

This is a commandment to The Messenger of Allah to remind his people. Reminding is to repeat what you have already informed somebody of, and to do it again and again. Reminding does not take place except after forgetfulness, and this is the nature upon which Allah has created man.

Reminding is beneficial in numerous ways. First it benefits the one who is reminding because when he does it he is rewarded for it. Then it benefits the believer whom he is reminding: 'yet go on reminding [all who would listen]: for, verily, such a reminder will profit the believers' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 55).

As the events of life pass by the believer, the purity of his belief may become clouded. Reminding him removes these clouds and wipes away the dust of heedlessness and forgetfulness. This is why Mu`adh *may Allah be pleased with him* would often ask The Messenger of Allah about matters that escaped him.

The Messenger of Allah said, 'Temptations will be presented to men's hearts as a reed mat is woven stick by stick. Any heart which rejects them will have a white mark put on it, while any heart which is permeated by them will have a black mark put on it. This will continue until there are two types of hearts: one white like a white stone which will not be harmed by any temptation as long as the heavens and the earth endure; and the other like a vessel on its side, not accepting what is good or rejecting what is detestable'.(1) One's reminders may benefit the disbelievers as well, the proof of which is that the leaders of disbelief in Mecca eventually came to faith through constant reminders. What is important is that the reminder encounters a pure heart so that it may extinguish the fervour of pre-Islamic ignorance.

We can see this in the story of `Umar's(2) acceptance to Islam; before Islam he was a tyrant, yet, when he heard the Quran, his heart softened and he was affected by it. This was because when he struck his sister and the blood flowed from her face, his feelings for her were stirred and along with them his compassion and thus his heart was softened. So when his heart opened up, the light of guidance entered and he submitted to Allah. Thus he benefited from being reminded.

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(1) *Narrated be Muslim in his Sahih (307), Ahmad in his Musnad (22343), Abu 'Uwanah in his Mustakhraj (112), Hadith of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman*

(2) *Ibn Kathir mentions in As-Sira An-Nabawiyya [2/32] that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab went out bearing his sword searching for The Messenger of Allah and a group of his Companions, of whom he had been told that there were nearly 40 gathered in a house near As-Safa... [On his way] he met Na`im ibn `Abdullah who asked him, 'Where are you going `Umar?'*

'I want Muhammad, this heretic who has divided Quraysh, muddled their minds, found fault with their religion and insulted their gods, so I may kill him,' he replied.

'By Allah `Umar you are deluded. Do you think the tribe of Bani `Abd Manaf will leave you to walk on earth after you have killed Muhammad? Why do you not return to your own family and set them straight?'

'And which of my family might that be?' 'Your son-in-law and paternal cousin Sa`id ibn Zayd and your sister Fatima; they have both entered Islam and followed Muhammad in his religion. It is them you should go after.' So 'Umar went back to his sister Fatima who was with Khubab ibn Al-'Aratt who was reading to her from a parchment on which was the chapter of Taha. When he entered he said, 'What was that murmuring I heard?' and he struck his son-in-law Sa`id ibn Zayd. His sister stood up to him to restrain him from her husband, so he struck her, breaking her skin. When `Umar saw what he had done to his sister he felt remorseful and said to her, 'Give me that parchment that you were reading just now. I want to see what this thing that Muhammad has brought is,' but his sister would not let him touch it until he had washed. When he read some of it he said, 'How good and noble this speech is!' So he went to where The Messenger of Allah and his Companions were and entered Islam.

‘...For, by your Lord’s grace, you are neither a soothsayer nor a madman’ (*at-Tur:* 29). The True Lord *Glorified is He* negates these accusations they have made against His Messenger *peace be upon him* and emphasises this negation by addressing his prophet. He says, ‘...you are neither...’. Then He uses the preposition *ba’* when He says, ‘...a soothsayer (*bi kahin*)...’ meaning that there is not a trace of this attribute in you at all. A soothsayer is a diviner who claims knowledge of the unseen, and there were many of them at the time. They tended to have bodies different from those of normal men. There was, for example, a man named Shiqq Anmar who had one eye, half a nose, half a mouth, one hand and one foot. Our Lord chose to bestow upon the likes of these an element of acceptance. The devils would come and reveal things to them that they had overheard in the heavens before The Prophet was sent and before heavens being closed before them. They would mislead people with things that contained a little truth and a lot of falsehood, which they themselves would add so as to lead them astray. When these soothsayers spoke, people would listen to them. They would consult them and accept their opinions in both secular and religious matters.

Yet The Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* was as far as it could be from their attributes. Similarly Allah negated his being mad. The madman has no intellect. He cannot put things into order, nor take care of his daily affairs. Was anything like this visible in the life of The Messenger of Allah? He was well known among them for the maturity of his intellect, his excellent character, his truthfulness and his trustworthiness. How could they say this when Allah praised him saying, ‘for, behold, you keep indeed to a sublime way of life’ (*al-Qalam:* 4).

When Allah says, ‘...For, by your Lord’s grace...’, it means that Allah’s blessings upon you are many, and among them is that, as He says, you are neither a soothsayer nor a madman. Alternatively it could mean, ‘remind by the grace of your Lord, not by the grace of a soothsayer or of a madman’.

Allah then negates another accusation against him saying:

أَمۡ يَقُولُونَ شَاعِرٞ نَّتَرَبَّصُ بِهِۦ رَيۡبَ ٱلۡمَنُونِ ٣٠
قُلۡ تَرَبَّصُواْ فَإِنِّي مَعَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡمُتَرَبِّصِينَ ٣١

If they say, 'He is only a poet: we shall await his fate' [30]
Say, 'Wait if you wish; I too am waiting' [31]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 30 - 31)

After their schemes came to nothing and their accusations of soothsaying and madness did not stick, they called Him a poet, and in this too they failed because The Messenger of Allah came to a people who were as eloquent as could be. They knew rhetoric and they knew how to speak with precision. They knew poetry all too well, and they knew that what Muhammad *peace be upon him* was reciting to them was not poetry and neither had they seen him to be a poet before his election to Prophethood. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* said in refutation of their claims, 'Say: 'Had Allah willed it [otherwise], I would not have conveyed this [divine writ] to you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. Indeed, a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you before this [revelation came unto me]: will you not, then, use your reason?'' (*Yunus:* 16) Where are your intellects? I have lived amongst you for forty years and you have never seen me recite poetry. Has it suddenly come forth after forty years when it is well known that genius manifests in the second decade of life?

Then how could I guarantee that I would have this gift to bring such speech before I died? Furthermore I do not tell you that this is my speech. Rather this is from Allah, through revelation from Him, such is not granted to soothsayers, for soothsayers take their inspiration from the devils, '...And, verily, the evil impulses [within men's hearts] whisper unto those who have made them their own...' (*al-An'am:* 121) nor is it granted to madmen, sorcerers, or poets.

When these claims also failed, they said, '...Fables of ancient times' (*al-Qalam:* 15). They said that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would steal away(1) to a man from the people of the Book who would teach him this speech, but yet again the Quran exposed their falsehoods and self-contradiction. Allah has said, ‘And, indeed, full well do We know that they say, “It is but a human being that imparts [all] this to him!” – [not withstanding that] the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth [of its source].’ (*an-Nahl:* 103) Thus all these claims spring from obstinacy and enmity and none of them hold water with the intelligent person who reflects upon them.

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(1) *Yakhtalif ila fulan* means, 'to visit and sit with him from time to time'.

They then say, ‘...let us await what time will do unto him’, i.e. we will wait and see what happens to him in life and wait for the death that will free us from him. So Allah replied, ‘Say: “Wait, [then,] hopefully; behold, I, too, shall hopefully wait with you!”’. The command here, ‘Say: “Wait...”’ (*at-Tur:* 30-31) is a threat, just as one may say to one’s enemy, ‘Do your worst!’ That is, do what you will, for whatever you do, you will get nothing from me.

So Allah tells them to wait as they wish, for they will not damage the believers, and their plots against them will come to nothing because they are in Allah’s care and under His watchful gaze. They already had experience of this. They harmed the believers through speech but they did not damage them. They harmed them physically but they did not renounce the Message. They harmed them through plots and schemes to kill them, but Allah turned their plans against them. When their outward schemes failed, they turned to secret plots using sorcerers and jinns, but still they did not achieve their goals and Allah thwarted their efforts.

So, wait as you like, and be sure that we are also waiting with you. Allah has illustrated this matter in another verse when He said, ‘Say: “Are you, perchance, hopefully waiting for something [bad] to happen to us – [the while nothing can happen to us] save one of the two best things? But as far as you are concerned, we are hopefully waiting for Allah to inflict chastisement upon you, [either] from Himself or by our hands! Wait, then, hopefully; behold, we shall hopefully wait with you!”’ (*at-Tawba:* 52) So, what are you waiting for? Either we gain victory over you or we are killed and achieve martyrdom. Both ways are good. We are waiting with you. Either Allah will punish you in the afterlife for your disbelief or He will punish you on our hands when we are victorious over you. So wait with us; your schemes will achieve nothing because we are in Allah's care and under His watchful gaze.

أَمۡ تَأۡمُرُهُمۡ أَحۡلَٰمُهُم بِهَٰذَآۚ أَمۡ هُمۡ قَوۡمٞ طَاغُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Does their reason really tell them to do this,
or are they simply insolent people? [32]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 32)

The word *ahlam* (minds) refers to intellects. When their intellects, '...bid them [to take] this [attitude]...', i.e. of obstinacy and opposition to the call to Allah, it indicates the corruption of their thought and intellects. Had their intellects been left in the natural state in which they were created, and had they been liberated from passion, they would have come to faith in Allah and His Messenger, and not taken the stance they did.

'...Or are they [simply] people filled with overweening arrogance'? The True Lord repeats the word *am* (or) a number of times here to present all the possibilities that they had. The word *taaghun* (people filled with overweening arrogance) refers to people who have crossed the boundaries in disbelief, obstinacy, and opposition to the summons to Allah.

أَمۡ يَقُولُونَ تَقَوَّلَهُۥۚ بَل لَّا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾
فَلۡيَأۡتُواْ بِحَدِيثٖ مِّثۡلِهِۦٓ إِن كَانُواْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

If they say, 'He has made it up himself '– they certainly
do not believe [33] let them produce one like it, if what
they say is true [34] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 33 - 34)

'...He himself has composed this [message]...', i.e. he fabricated it of his own accord. When this calumny failed to deceive, they said, '...It is but a human being that imparts [all] this to him...' (*an-Nahl:* 103), to which Allah replied, '...the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth [of its source].' (*an-Nahl:* 103) Here, The True Lord replies to them saying, '...Nay, but they are not willing to believe' (*at-Tur:* 33-34). Thus this is not an issue of the Quran being from Muhammad; rather, it is that they do not want to enter the realm of faith. This is it, out of obstinacy, oppression, and arrogance; they refuse to accept the truth, without thought or reflection. They know that all of these accusations that they try to affix to The Messenger of Allah or the Book of Allah are falsities invented by themselves to try to prevent Him from his mission. They know he is truthful, that the Quran is true and that it is from Allah, but they do not want to have faith.

For this reason, The True Lord teaches them sound ways to reflect that will bring them to the truth. He says to them, 'Say: "I counsel you one thing only: Be [ever-conscious of] standing before Allah, whether you are in pairs or alone (1); and then bethink yourselves [that] there is no madness in [this prophet,] your fellow-man..."' (*Saba':* 46). That is, leave your groupthink and your public speech because it will not bring you to the truth. If you use your intellects and think in a sound manner, you will necessarily arrive at the fact that Muhammad is truthful in that which he has brought.

The Quran invites them to reflect only so that this reflection might bring them to this reality. This is why we read so often, '...will they not, then, use their reason?' (*Ya Sin:* 68), and, '...will you not, then, keep this in mind?' (*Yunus:* 3), and, '...Will you not, then, take thought?' (*al-An'am:* 50)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'But then, [if they deem it the work of a mere mortal,] let them produce another discourse like it – if what they say be true!' (*at-Tur:* 34) That is, if this Quran is fabricated as they claim, and then let them produce a fabricated recital like it. These were the most capable people in terms of speech, eloquence, and rhetoric; so much so that they even had market places for making speeches and reciting poetry. '...If they are truthful', i.e. in their claims!

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(1) *Ash-Shawkani said in "Fayd Al-Qadir" (Saba' 43): 'This refers to one's efforts to reach the truth with serious thought while in pairs or alone because larger groups distort thought'. Al-Alusi said in "Ruh Al-Ma`ani": 'Because usually in crowds one's thoughts become distorted and one is unable to reflect. Speech gets mixed up and there is little justice.'*

أَمۡ خُلِقُواْ مِنۡ غَيۡرِ شَيۡءٍ أَمۡ هُمُ ٱلۡخَٰلِقُونَ ٣٥
أَمۡ خَلَقُواْ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَۚ بَل لَّا يُوقِنُونَ ٣٦

Were they created without any agent? Were they the creators? [35] Did they create the heavens and the earth? No! They do not have faith [36] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 35 - 36)

The True Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* presents them with the intellectual proofs that establish the truthfulness of His Messenger in conveying the Message from Allah. He expresses surprise at their deeds and how they deny Allah and oppose the mission of His Messenger *peace be upon him*.

So he asks them, '...Have they themselves been created without anything [that might have caused their creation]...' (*at-Tur:* 35-36)? How could such be when creation means to bring something out of nothing? Did they come into the universe just like that, without a creator? The intellect tells us that nothing can come into being without a creator even the smallest of things. Could we believe that this clear crystal glass that I am now drinking out of, after having drunk from mugs made from tin or pottery, came into being without a maker? Similarly this universe must have a creator.

Allah then moves to deal with another issue regarding creation: '...or were they, perchance, their own creators' (*at-Tur:* 35-36) i.e., the creators of this creation? In another place He says, 'Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to whom it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah."...' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) Indeed they could say nothing else. Man came into this marvellous universe with its sun, moon, stars, earth, water, wind, sky and mountains, so how can he say, 'I created this,' when it is older than him? He cannot claim to have created himself, and even if he did, who was it who created his father and his descendants all the way back to Adam?

This sequence of logic brings us to a creator who himself was not created, and this is The True Lord. This is why Allah says afterwards, '[And] have they created the heavens and the earth? Nay, but they have no certainty of anything' (*at-Tur:* 35-36). If they are not able to create themselves, then how could they possibly have created the heavens and the earth? We have mentioned previously that no one has claimed this creation to be his own; a matter is given to the one who claims it if no opponent manifests himself, and no one has claimed to have created heavens and earth except Allah.

أَمۡ عِندَهُمۡ خَزَآئِنُ رَبِّكَ أَمۡ هُمُ ٱلۡمُصَۜيۡطِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Do they possess your Lord's treasures or have control over them? [37] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 37)

That is, do they possess the storehouses of providence such they provide for whom they will and deprive whom they will? Do they possess the storehouses of mercy such that they can grant mercy to whom they will. '...Or are they in charge...' (*at-Tur:* 37), i.e. the possessors of ultimate power, to allow, forbid or vanquish whom they will? The answer of course is that they are neither this nor that. Allah only deprived them of rain, and they were starving until they ate the leaves of the trees and *`alhaz* (1), i.e. blood mixed with fur. Then they went to the uncle of The Prophet to seek rain through him (2).

They admitted that the storehouses were Allah's and that they had no hand in the matter. The proof of this is that one time they were rich and another poor, one time strong and another weak. So they had no control; rather, the storehouses are in the hands of one they hate and deny. Similarly they had no power over the keys of the universe or the outcome of matters. The proof of this is that, despite their great numbers on the day of the battle of Badr, the faithful minority defeated them; their leaders were captured and they had to come and negotiate with The Messenger of Allah for their ransom.

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(1) Al-Jawhari said in "As-Sihah" under `Ala that 'al-`alhaz is a type of food they would make from blood and camel fur in years of famine'. An-Nawawi said in "Tahdhib Al-Lugha" under `Alhaz that, 'Abu Al-Haytham said, 'Al-`Alhaz is dried blood pounded with camel fur in times of hunger to be eaten'.'

(2) It is related on the authority of Anas who said, 'If there was a drought in the time of The Messenger of Allah, the people would ask him to pray for rain. He would pray and the rain would come. During the time of `Umar, there was a drought, so he brought out Al-`Abbas to seek rain through him saying, 'O Allah, if we had a drought in the time of Your Prophet, we would ask him to pray for rain and it would come. Now we turn to You through the uncle of our Prophet, so grant us rain.' And the rain came.' It was related by Ibn Abu ʿAsim in Al-Ahad wa Al-Mathani and Ibn Habban in his Sahih.

أَمۡ لَهُمۡ سُلَّمٞ يَسۡتَمِعُونَ فِيهِۖ فَلۡيَأۡتِ مُسۡتَمِعُهُم بِسُلۡطَٰنٖ مُّبِينٍ (٣٨)
أَمۡ لَهُ ٱلۡبَنَٰتُ وَلَكُمُ ٱلۡبَنُونَ (٣٩)

Do they have a ladder to climb, in order to eavesdrop [on Heaven's secrets]? Let their eavesdropper produce clear proof [38] Does God have daughters while you have sons? [39] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 38 - 39)

Allah asks them if they have a ladder (*sullam*), i.e. a means to rise up into the heavens so that they might bring something like what The Prophet Muhammad has brought. So, this is an admission from them that there is something in heavens, but you do not have the means to reach it. Muhammad who has no ladder, revelation came to him from heavens.

'...Let, then, any of them who has listened [to it] produce a manifest proof [of his knowledge]' (*at-Tur:* 38-39). That is, if they do have somebody who has listened, then let him come forth with clear proof and disprove Prophet Muhammad's words.

Allah then goes on to say, 'Or, [if you believe in Allah, how can you believe that] He has [chosen to have] daughters, whereas you yourselves would have [only] sons'? This verse exposes their foolishness regarding the issue of daughters, in that they would prefer males and despise females.

The Quran mentioned them in this matter in Allah's saying, 'for whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger, [58] avoiding all people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received, [and debating within himself:] Shall he keep this [child] despite the contempt [which he feels for it] – or shall he bury it in the dust... [59]' (*an-Nahl:* 58-59).

It mentions their burying of their daughters, saying, 'and when the girl-child that was buried alive is made to ask [8] for what crime she had been slain [9]' (*at-Takwir:* 8-9). Yet then they attribute the weaker sex to Allah and the stronger sex to themselves. Allah says, 'and [yet] they claim that the angels – who in themselves are but slaves to The Most Gracious – are females: [but] did they witness their creation? This false claim of theirs will be recorded, and they will be called to account [for it on Judgment Day]!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 19)

In another verse The True Lord mentions their transgression in this matter saying, ‘Why – for yourselves [you would choose only] male offspring, whereas to Him [you assign] female: [21] that, lo and behold, is an unfair division[22]’ (*an-Najm:* 21-22) which is an unjust and ill-allocated distribution, How could the weaker sex be for Allah and the stronger sex for you?

أَمۡ تَسۡـَٔلُهُمۡ أَجۡرٗا فَهُم مِّن مَّغۡرَمٖ مُّثۡقَلُونَ ٤٠

Do you [Prophet] demand a payment from them
that would burden them with debt? [40]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 40)

The verses are still asking about the reason these people are rejecting and denying the path of The True Lord *Glorified is He*. Did The Messenger of Allah demand payment for his summons, such as weighed upon them and they were unable to bear it. The word *maghram* (debt) is money that is paid for other than a crime or somebody’s right. ‘...They would be burdened...’ (*at-Tur:* 40), i.e., overwhelmed and unable to pay it.

The Quran has mentioned in several places that the Messengers did not seek any reward for calling people; that their rewards for that lay with Allah who sent them. Allah says that prophets used to say, ‘...I have asked no reward whatever of you: my reward rests with none but Allah...’ (*Yunus:* 72).

أَمۡ عِندَهُمُ ٱلۡغَيۡبُ فَهُمۡ يَكۡتُبُونَ ٤١

Do they have [access to] the unseen? Could they
write it down? [41] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 41)

Or perhaps they have attained knowledge of the unseen and come to know that they will be leaders in the next world just as they were leaders in this one, and that their afterlife will be better than this one, like the one who said, ‘...But even if ... I am brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this as [my last] resort’ (*al-Kahf:* 36). Thus it means that your mission does not bother them O Muhammad because they think they are going to paradise any way!

أَمْ يُرِيدُونَ كَيْدًا ۖ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هُمُ الْمَكِيدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Do they think they can ensnare you?
It is the disbelievers who have been ensnared [42]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 42)

That is, are they scheming against you? The word *kayd* refers here to plotting and planning in secret to harm The Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him*. The danger of such schemes is that they are formulated in secret, and thus one cannot see them to oppose them. They are the affair of the weak who are unable to face opposition. When the opportunity presents itself, they do not waste it. As the poet said:

When the weak one found the opportunity,
she killed, for that is the nature of the weak.

Allah then says, '...But they who are bent on denying the truth...', i.e. these plotters and planners, '...it is they who are truly entrapped'. Just as Allah says in another verse, '...Yet [in the end,] such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors...' (*Fatir:* 43) because when they plot, they must hide their scheme from their peers, yet when Allah has plans for them no-one can protect them, and His plans for the disbelievers are painful and severe. The word *al-makidun* is a passive participle and means that they are the objects of His plans.

The proof that Allah has frustrated their plans is that He thwarted their plots against The Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him*; indeed, their plots turned against them. On the night of the Emigration they gathered to kill him, and conspired against him such that his blood would fall upon all the tribes together, yet despite their planning and scheming, it was they who were mocked; dust was thrown upon their heads, while he *peace be upon him* was saved and unharmed.

أَمْ لَهُمْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Do they really have another god besides God?
God is far above anything they set alongside Him [43]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 43)

This is another rhetorical question. What is it that has turned you away from Allah's summons? Do they have some other god beside The One True

God? And if so then what does he have to do with the creation of the heavens and earth? Why does he remain silent and not answer?

Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* refutes them in this matter saying, '...If there were – as some people assert – [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His almightiness' (*al-Isra':* 42).

Then the end of this verse clarifies the question at its beginning: '...Utterly remote is Allah, in His limitless glory...' (*at-Tur:*43), i.e., transcendent and high above, '...anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity' (*at-Tur:*43), and the claims they make. Allah is One, Unique, Singular, the Self-Sufficing. He has no son and He has no associates, and there is nothing like unto Him.

وَإِن يَرَوۡاْ كِسۡفٗا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ سَاقِطٗا يَقُولُواْ سَحَابٞ مَّرۡكُومٞ ﴿٤٤﴾

Even if they saw a piece of heaven falling down on them, they would say, Just a heap of clouds [44]
(The Quran, *at-Tur:* 44)

The Lord *Glorified and Exalted is He* said in another verse, 'then He makes them into a mass, and you see the rain emerge from within it' (*an-Nur:* 43)

See how they are deceived by the outward of the universe. They think it is for their benefit when in fact it is an affliction and a punishment. When they see a cloud coming towards them they think it is bringing them rain and goodness, but then it rains down punishment upon them.

This message is clear in Allah's saying, 'And so, when they beheld it in the shape of a dense cloud approaching their valleys, they exclaimed, "This is but a heavy cloud which will bring us [welcome] rain!" [But Hud said:] "Nay, but it is the very thing which you [so contemptuously] sought to hasten– a wind bearing grievous suffering, [24] bound to destroy everything at its Sustainer's behest!" And then they were so utterly wiped out that nothing could be seen save their [empty] dwellings' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25).

Here Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* says,

فَذَرْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يُلَٰقُوا۟ يَوْمَهُمُ ٱلَّذِى فِيهِ يُصْعَقُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾
يَوْمَ لَا يُغْنِى عَنْهُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

So leave them, Prophet, until they face the Day when they will be thunderstruck [45] the Day when their snares will be of no use to them, when they will get no help [46] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 45 - 46)

‘Hence, leave them alone...’ (*at-Tur:* 45), i.e. turn away from them and leave them be because there is no hope for them and there is no benefit to be gained from them, so leave them and do not overburden yourself trying to guide them. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* also said to Him, ‘...your only duty is a clear delivery of the message [entrusted to you]’ (*an-Nahl:* 82), so leave them, ‘...until they face that [Judgment] Day of theirs, when they will be stricken with terror’ (*at-Tur:* 45). That is, they will be afflicted by death and destruction. What is referred to here is the Day of Judgement. Then Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* clarifies this Day some more saying, ‘the Day when none of their scheming will be of the least avail to them...’ (*at-Tur:* 46), i.e. their scheming against The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and their conspiracies against him. ‘...And they will receive no succour’ (*at-Tur:* 46), i.e. Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* will not help them, nor will anyone else be able to defend them from the punishment, for the command will be Allah’s alone on that Day

وَإِنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ عَذَابًا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Another punishment awaits the evildoers, though most of them do not realize it [47] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 47)

Those intended here are the disbelievers of Mecca, for they oppressed themselves through their disbelief and prevented themselves from attaining the everlasting blessings in the afterlife they would have attained had they believed. As Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* said, ‘...and no wrong did We do to them, but it was they who persistently wronged themselves’ (*an-Nahl:* 118). Such as these will have, ‘...suffering in store [even] closer at hand...’

(*at-Tur:* 47), i.e. than the punishment of the afterlife; they will be punished in this world, '...but most of them are not aware of it' (*at-Tur:* 47).

وَٱصۡبِرۡ لِحُكۡمِ رَبِّكَ فَإِنَّكَ بِأَعۡيُنِنَاۖ وَسَبِّحۡ بِحَمۡدِ رَبِّكَ حِينَ تَقُومُ ﴿٤٨﴾
وَمِنَ ٱلَّيۡلِ فَسَبِّحۡهُ وَإِدۡبَٰرَ ٱلنُّجُومِ ﴿٤٩﴾

Wait patiently [Prophet] for your Lord's judgement: you are under Our watchful eye. Celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise [48] Glorify Him at night and at the fading of the stars [49] (The Quran, *at-Tur:* 48 - 49)

This is a commandment to our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to have patience waiting for Allah's decree. It is a commandment accompanied by such care and concern as is reserved only for Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon them* for his Lord addressed him saying, '...Build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark...' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27). Thus Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* consoles His Messenger and comforts him: Bear with patience O Muhammad the harm of your people. You are under our watchful eye, care, and protection, so do not be concerned about what they do. This is a station that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was also given in Allah's saying, 'and I bestowed upon you love from Me that you would be brought up under My eye' [*Ta Ha:* 39].

So, Allah's saying, '...or indeed, you are in Our eyes ...' (*at-Tur:* 48) is a higher station that is appropriate to the rank of Muhammad, the master of the Prophets *peace and blessings be upon him*.

'And exalt [Allah] with praise of your Lord when you arise' (*at-Tur:* 48), i.e. glorify Him and praise Him at the same time. 'when you arise' (*at-Tur:* 48), i.e. when you rise from your seat say, 'Glory be to Allah,' and, 'All praise is for Allah,' and it will be an expiation for anything that may have happened in your gathering. It is purification for the end of gathering. The words *qu`ud* and *julus* both refer to the same type of sitting, but *qu`ud* means sitting down from being standing, whereas *julus* means sitting up from lying down. We say that someone was lying down and then he sat up (*jalas*), or he was standing up and then he sat down (*qa`ad*).

‘When you arise’ (*at-Tur:* 48) could also mean when you rise from sleep praise and glorify Allah for returning your soul to your body and replenishing your energy after your sleep. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to say when we wake up, ‘Glory be to the One Who brought us to life after giving us death, and unto Him is the resurrection,’(1) and when getting up from a gathering to read the chapter of *al-`Asr* as an expiation for anything that may have happened during it (2).

Similarly, ‘and extol His glory at night...’ (*at-Tur:* 49), i.e., glorify Allah throughout the night, at its beginning and at its end, ‘...and at the time when the stars retreat’ (*at-Tur:* 49), i.e. at the very end of the night when the stars go dim. Thus it means one should glorify Allah at all these times, a continuous glorification because Allah *Glorified and Exalted is He* has given you many blessings and more that are specific to you that necessitate this praise and adoration.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman may Allah be pleased with him that he said, ‘When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him went to bed he would say, ‘In Your Name do I die and live,’ and when he rose he would say, ‘All Praise is for Allah who brought us to life after giving us death, and unto Him is the resurrection’. It was related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih [5837, 5839], and Muslim relates it in his Sahih on the authority of Al-Bara’ ibn `Azib may Allah be pleased with him [4886].*

(2) *It is narrated on the authority of the Companion Abu Madina Ad-Darimi that if two of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him met, they would not part until one had read to the other: “Consider the flight of time! [1] Verily, man is bound to lose himself [2]” (al-'Asr: 1-2), and then one of them would wish peace unto the other. [It is related by A-Ṭabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Awsaṭ 5281].*

the chapter of

an-Najm

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *an-Najm*(1) (The Star):

وَٱلنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ ١ مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ ٢

By the star when it sets! [1] Your companion
has not strayed; he is not deluded [2]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 1-2)

Here, Allah swears by whatever He wills from among His created things, and here He swears by the star. In the Arabic phrase *wa-an-najm,* the letter *waw* is used to introduce something which is sworn by, which in this case is *an-najm* usually referring to a star. The word *an-najm* has two meanings, the first of which is a celestial body in the sky such as the sun and the moon. In this sense Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has said: 'as well as [various other] means of orientation: for [it is] by the stars that men find their way' (*an-Nahl:* 16), in other words, as they travel by night. Another connotation of *an-najm* is herbage which has no stalk and which camels graze upon in the desert.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has combined both meanings in His utterance: '[At His behest] the sun and the moon run their appointed courses; [5] [before

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(1) The chapter of *an-Najm* is number 53 in the arrangement of the Noble Quran, comprising a total of 62 verses. It was entirely revealed in Mecca according to the opinion of Al-Hasan Al-Basri, ʿIkrimah, ʿAtaʾ and Jabir. According to Ibn ʿAbbas and Qatada one verse is an exception to this and was revealed in Medina, this being His utterance: "As for those who avoid the [truly] grave sins and shameful deeds..." (*an-Najm:* 32). It has also been said that the entire chapter was revealed in Medina; however, Al-Qurtubi states in his *Tafsir* (9/6483): 'It is correct that it was revealed in Mecca based on Ibn Masʿud's related statement that it was the first verse which Prophet Muhammad proclaimed publicly in Mecca.'

Him] prostrate themselves the stars and the trees. [6]' (*ar-Rahman:* 5-6) A poet likewise combined the two meanings when he said:

I observe the stars in my journeying towards her
And my camel grazes upon herbage of the wasteland.

Just contemplate here the precision of the wording of the Quran, as the sun and the moon signify the celestial bodies (*an-najm*) of the sky, and the trees denote by association the herbage (*an-najm*) of the earth. All prostrate to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and the greatest thing and the most insignificant thing submit to Him; everything is obedient to the same degree.

In another passage He *the Glorified and Exalted* says: 'Nay, indeed, I swear by the mansions of the stars – [75] and, behold, this is indeed a most solemn affirmation, if you but knew it! [76]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 75-76) Hence, swearing an oath by the stars is an oath sworn by a tremendous sign of the signs of Allah. The swearing of an oath by the stars here is specific to a particular state from among their states.

The opening verse (*wa-an-najm idha hawa*) means that the star has fallen. Now the star is a distinguishable mark in the sky which guides the traveller and shows him the way; therefore, when it falls, guidance is prevented and the usefulness is halted. However, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has not lost his way nor has he become deluded.

The next verse: 'This fellow-man of yours has not gone astray, nor is he deluded' (*an-Najm:* 2) comprises the concluding clause of the oath. It is as if He *the Glorified and Exalted* were saying: Even if the star which guides travellers falls, the star of Muhammad will never fall. The stars of the sky lead to material things which are bound by time, while the star of Muhammad leads to moral values and spiritual phenomena which are enduring, everlasting.

As for the meaning of '...has not gone astray...' (*an-Najm:* 2), this is to say that he has not turned aside from the truth, nor inclined away from it, and he has not deviated from the path of correct guidance. With respect to the phrase: 'fellow-man...' (*an-Najm:* 2), as expressed in the Arabic *sahibu-kum*, this refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since the companion (*sahib*) of a people is one of them, beloved by them and possessing stature among them. Finally, concerning the passage: ‘...nor is he deluded’ (*an-Najm:* 2), delusion (*al-ghawaya*) is to hold false convictions, and Muhammad never believed in any false convictions even before the beginning of his prophetic mission.

وَمَا يَنطِقُ عَنِ ٱلْهَوَىٰٓ ﴿٣﴾ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْىٌ يُوحَىٰ ﴿٤﴾
عَلَّمَهُۥ شَدِيدُ ٱلْقُوَىٰ ﴿٥﴾ ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَٱسْتَوَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

He does not speak from his own desire [3] The Quran is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him [4] It was taught to him by [an angel] with mighty powers [5] and great strength, who stood [6] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 3 - 6)

These verses are an extension of the concluding clause of the oath: ‘This fellow-man of yours has not gone astray, nor is he deluded’ (*an-Najm:* 2). Here, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* swears by another attribute of Prophet Muhammad: ‘and neither does he speak out of his own desire’ (*an-Najm:* 3). In this verse, the Arabic word *an-nutq*, used as a verb and translated as ‘speak’ means utterance. In other words, he does not make statements based upon his own capricious inclination, and does not bring forth anything from himself, nor through his own independent judgement.

The initial phrase of the following verse, expressed in Arabic as *in huwa* and translated as ‘that [which he conveys to you] is’ means ‘it is not’, whereby ‘it’ refers to the Noble Quran to which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave voice. There follows: **‘...**but [a divine] inspiration with which he is being inspired’ (*an-Najm:* 4), this is to say that it comes from Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*. This comprises succinctness of expression signifying: The Quran is only divinely inspired revelation and nothing else.

As regards the next verse: ‘something that a very mighty one has imparted to him’ (*an-Najm:* 5), this means that the one who taught Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and inspired him with the revelation is ‘...a very mighty one...’ (*an-Najm:* 5), ‘Mighty One’ being the guardian of divine inspiration, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. In this verse, the Arabic word *al-quwa*, signifying powers, is the plural of *quwwa*, for he has numerous powers which accord with his function. He possesses the power of intelligence with respect to reception, the power of preservation, the power of transmission, and the power of delivery. He has in him no whimsical desire which might alter that which has come to him, nor any trace of traitorous deception or falsehood. These are the attributes which have protected the Quran from alteration as previous scriptures have been altered.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* said of the people of the Scripture: 'Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be] divine writ, and then say, 'This is from Allah,' in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby…' (*al-Baqara:* 79).

With respect to the phrase '...a very mighty one...' (*an-Najm:* 5), Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* clarified this in other verses wherein it is said, even with reference to the Quran before it descended: 'Behold, it is a truly noble discourse, [77] [conveyed unto man] in a well-guarded divine writ [78] which none but the pure [of heart] can touch [79]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 77-79). Elsewhere, He said: 'trustworthy divine inspiration has alighted with it from on high' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193); and He also said: 'with strength endowed, secure with Him who in almightiness is enthroned [20] [the word] of one to be heeded, and worthy of trust! [21]' (*at-Takwir:* 20-21) All of these are the attributes combined in Jibril.

In the verse under study, He said of Jibril: '[an angel] endowed with surpassing power, who in time manifested himself in his true shape and nature' (*an-Najm:* 6). The Arabic phrase *dhu mirra*, translated as 'with strength endowed', means the possessor of *mirra* which is strength and efficacy (*quwwah*) in everything it undertakes. It is precision which does not err. *Al-mirra* is a trait of tenacity and constancy which strengthens things. For example, when you see a rope as it is being twisted together, its manner of plaiting is suited to its function; thus, a clothesline, for example, is not the same as a rope which holds the sails of boats in place.

Likewise, the function of Jibril *peace be upon him* with Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to perform this function with strength, precision and intelligence in such a manner as to appear to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in an acceptable form which will not be rejected, a form which engenders a longing for receiving divine inspiration so that the human nature of Muhammad does not reject it. Similarly, the speech itself possesses sweetness because it is the speech of Allah and not the speech of men, and it has certain outward manifestations which signify it, and which point to its divine origin.

When divine inspiration first came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it was a very great strain on him. This is because it was the first time in which the human nature and the angelic nature encountered one another, and therefore he exuded sweat and became cold, saying: 'Wrap me up, cover me up!' Hence, he was affected in his body and in his soul, to the degree that he was afraid that what had happened to him was something related to the influence of Satan.

When he informed our lady Khadijah *may Allah be pleased with her* of the situation, and she possessed sagacity in these matters, she told him: 'When he comes to you, inform me.' Then when divine inspiration came to him, he informed her, whereupon she sat on his knee and asked him: 'Can you see him?' He said: {Yes.} Then she laid her chest bare and asked: 'Can you see him?' He said: {No.} She said: 'Hence he is an angel and not a devil.'(1)

Take a moment to contemplate the judiciousness of Khadija *peace be upon her* and that which she possessed of understanding before the advent of Islam. It is as if Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* had prepared certain people from among men and women who would be receptive to its first communication, and would support it and believe steadfastly in it without waiting for a miracle they could witness in order to have faith in it. This is because for them the miracle of The Messenger of Allah was extant in his person and in his comportment among them. His miracle from their perspective was in his truthfulness, his trustworthiness, his generosity, and his virtuous character.

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(1) *This narration is narrated by Ibn Sayyid An-Nas in ʿUyun Al-Athar (1/117) as related by Ismaʿi ibn Abu Hakim, a subordinate client of the house of Az-Zubayr, who recounted that Khadijah said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him: 'O son of my paternal uncle, are you able to inform me of this your companion [i.e., Gabriel] who comes to you when he comes to you?' He said: {Yes.} She said: 'So when he comes, then tell me about him.' Then Gabriel came and so The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: {O Khadijah, this is Gabriel who has come to me.} Thereupon, she told him: 'Get up, O son of my paternal uncle, and sit on my left thigh.' So The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him got up and sat on her. She asked: 'Do you see him?' He said: {Yes.} Then she had him sit on her right thigh, and then in her lap, and each time he responded: {Yes.} Then she became distressed and cast aside her head shawl as The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was sitting in her lap, and subsequently she asked him: 'Do you see him?' He said: {No.} Thereupon she said: 'O son of my paternal uncle, be assured and of good cheer, for by Allah he is indeed an angel, this is not a devil.'*

In this context it is sufficient for us to mention the stand taken by Abu Bakr As-Siddiq when people said to him: ‘Verily your companion claims that he is a prophet and that divine inspiration comes to him.’ Whereupon As-Siddiq, who was just returning from a journey, said: ‘If he had said this, then he has spoken the truth.’(1) Hence, the proof of his truthfulness in the eyes of As-Siddiq is that he says it, the mere fact of his uttering it, it sufficient for his statement to be believed.

This meaning is evident in His utterance: ‘Muhammad is Allah’s Apostle…’ (*al-Fath:* 29), in other words, it is sufficient as regards his identification that he is Muhammad, whom you all know, that he is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The station of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* among his people does not require description or definition beyond this.

It might have been expected from them to say: ‘And who is more deserving of the mission of prophethood than him?’ However, instead they said, as the Quran relates: ‘…Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

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(1) *It is narrated by A-Bayhaqi in Dala’il An-Nubuwwa (2/361) on the authority of ‘A’isha that she said: “When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was taken on his night journey to Al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem], he began to tell people about this, and some people who had previously believed in him and put faith in his words became apostates. Some of these rushed to Abu Bakr and told him: ‘What do you think of your companion who claims that he was taken on a night journey to Jerusalem.’ He responded: ‘Did he really say that?’ They replied: ‘Yes’. Thereupon he stated: ‘If he indeed said that, then he has spoken the truth.’ They then said: ‘You mean you actually believe that he went this last night to Jerusalem and returned before morning?’ He replied: ‘Yes, for verily I believe him in that which is even more remote than this. I believe him in what he conveys from heaven in the early morning and in the evening.’ So it is for this reason that he was called As-Siddiq.” This narration is likewise narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (6213, 63).*

Returning to the verse under study above, '[an angel] endowed with surpassing power...' (*an-Najm:* 6), another meaning of the original Arabic phrase *dhu mirra,* is one possessed of excellent character and handsome appearance. Now, Jibril used to come to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a good-looking form which he liked, and He *peace and blessings be upon him* used to appreciate the appearance of a man called Dahiya Al-Kalbi(1) so Jibril used to come in his form.(2)

Hence, the Arabic expression *dhu mirra* encompasses in meaning every good attribute which will render Jibril acceptable and unobjectionable. Yet with this power is also attributed to him, for when he manifested himself to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his true form, he appeared in the form of a beautiful flying creature with wings. As He *the Glorified and Exalted* said: '…endowed with wings, two, or three, or four. [Unceasingly] He adds to His creation whatever He wills…' (*Fatir:* 1). As an illustration of his power it suffices that he smote the villages of Lot with one feather of his wing, thereby smashing them and turning their most elevated portions into their lowest portions.

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(1) *Dahiya Al-Kalbi's full name was Dahiya ibn Khalifa ibn Farwa ibn Fadala Al-Kalbi. He was a Companion whom Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him sent with his message to the Byzantine Emperor (Qaysar), calling him to Islam. He was present at many military campaigns, among them the Battle of Yarmuk; then he settled in Damascus, residing in Al-Mizza. He lived until the Caliphate of Muʿawiyah and died in the year 45 AH. (This information is taken from Az-Zirikli's Al-A'lam 2/337).*

(2) *It was narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Muʿjam Al-Kabi (707) as related by Anas ibn Malik that The Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to say: {Gabriel comes to me in the appearance of Dahiya Al-Kalbi.} Anas added: Dahiya was a handsome man of fair complexion. It was also related by Al-Bayhaqi in Dalaʾil An-Nubuwwa (1361) as related by ʿAʾisha that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him heard the sound of a vigorous jumping, so he went out towards it and I followed him to see what it was. Then there he was, leaning against the mane of his horse, and behold it was Dahiya Al-Kalbi—as far as I could perceive—and there he was bound in a turban with the slack part of it hanging between his shoulders. When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him came back in to my dwelling, I said: 'There was vigorous jumping sound and so I left and went to see and lo there was Dahiya Al-Kalbi.' He said: {Did you actually see him?} I replied: 'Yes'. He then said: {That was Gabriel who ordered me to march on Banu Qurayzha}.*

And what can enable you to grasp the status of the one who taught Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as expression in the verse: ‘something that a very mighty one has imparted to him’ (*an-Najm:* 5)? Now, the student increases in dignity and honour according to the dignity and honour of the teacher. This is similar to when we see an articulate preacher who does not make a single linguistic mistake in his sermon, and hence we say: ‘Yes, indeed, for the one who taught him is so-and-so.’ Likewise, the one who taught Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is Jibril *peace be upon him* with all that he possesses of the attributes of power, intelligence, trustworthiness and honesty; in summary: *dhu mirra*.

As regards the final phrase of the last verse above, *fa-stawa*, translated interpretatively as ‘who in time manifested himself in his true shape and nature’, it signifies that Jibril taught him to the point where Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* attained to a firmly established station (*istawa*) and matured through a process of sufficient learning in order to provide guidance to the world. He then entrusted him with this mission to guide people. Along these same lines, we have His utterance with regard to Prophet Musa (Moses): ‘Now when [Moses] reached full manhood and had become mature [of mind] (*istawa*) We bestowed upon him the ability to judge [between right and wrong] as well as [innate] knowledge: for thus do We reward the doers of good.’ (*al-Qasas:* 14)

However, in its initial period divine inspiration was burdensome for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* says: ‘...We shall bestow upon you a weighty message’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 5). So, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wished to relieve His Messenger of this strain in order to give him the opportunity to taste the sweetness of what he was conveying unto him, and in order that he might long for it once again. Thus, divine inspiration would be lighter on his heart and its hardships made easier for him.

It is well known that a person normally bears difficulty for the sake of that which he loves. Hence, when divine inspiration subsided from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a period of six months, the adversaries of the message took advantage of this opportunity, saying: ‘Verily

Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him. Exalted be Allah, only now and during a period of tribulation, they acknowledge Muhammad's Lord. For this reason Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* refuted them: 'Consider the bright morning hours, [1] and the night when it grows still and dark. [2] Thy Sustainer has not forsaken you, nor does He scorn you: [3] for, indeed, the life to come will be better for you than this earlier part [of your life]! [4] And, indeed, in time will thy Sustainer grant you [what your heart desires], and you shall be well-pleased. [5]' (*ad-Duha:* 1-5)

In other words: 'Your Lord has not forsaken you, O Muhammad, nor has he scorned you. Rather, he has desired that you have a restful respite.' Then He provides him with analogies drawn from the actual movements of the cosmos: 'For in your relationship to divine inspiration you are only like the bright morning hours and the night. The bright morning hours are for toil, and the night is for rest. Then morning comes again in order that you might face it with renewed energy and strength. Similarly, divine inspiration will come back to you, and will be more beloved to you and easier on you. And the latter portion of your life—or the Hereafter—will be better for you than the initial portion.

It must also be stressed that the Arabic word *al-wadaʿ*, meaning farewell, as employed as a verb in the verse: 'Thy Sustainer has not forsaken you (*waddaʿa-ka*), nor does He scorn you' (*ad-Duha:* 3), signifies love in its essence. For He did not say 'spurn you', for example, but rather 'bid you farewell', and bidding farewell is done in the hope of meeting again, just as a beloved bids farewell to his loved one when he embarks upon a journey.

وَهُوَ بِٱلۡأُفُقِ ٱلۡأَعۡلَىٰ ﴿٧﴾ ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ ﴿٨﴾ فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوۡسَيۡنِ أَوۡ أَدۡنَىٰ ﴿٩﴾

On the highest horizon [7] and then approached —
coming down [8] until he was two bow-lengths away or
even closer[9] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 7-9)

It is said that the discourse here concerns Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* inasmuch as he was in the highest part of the horizon during the voyage of the night journey and ascension (*al-Israʾ wa-al-Miʿraj*).

In this respect, He *the Glorified and Exalted* said: ‘And, indeed, he saw him descend a second time [13] by the lote-tree of the farthest limit [14]’ (*an-Najm:* 13-14).

This is to say that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Jibril *peace be upon him* once on the earth and once in the heaven. There follows: ‘and then drew near, and came close, [8] until he was but two bow-lengths away, or even nearer [9]’ (*an-Najm:* 8-9). In other words, after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had become firmly established in spiritual maturity, and had attained the objective which qualified him to carry out his mission of conveying the message from his Lord, he was exposed to many hardships and wrongs from his people in both word and deed in Mecca. The situation reached such an impasse that he sought protection in the city of Ta’if where they goaded their foolhardy youths against him who threw stones at him until they bloodied his two feet. In the same year came the death of his wife Khadija—who used to mitigate the vexation of that which he encountered from his people—as well as the death of his paternal uncle Abu Taleb, who used to protect him and defend him against the enmity of Quraysh.

It is for this reason that this year was called ‘the year of sadness’, as you know. Then, when He *peace and blessings be upon him* returned from Mecca, he returned with a broken spirit. He was unable to find anyone in Mecca who could assure his security to reside in his own house. Just as he found it impossible to find support in Ta’if, he found it impossible to find a protecting guardian in Mecca, until at last Al-Mutʿim ibn ʿUdai received him—and he was a disbeliever—who then granted him his sworn protection to take up residence there. This illustrates to us that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* may provide assistance to His Prophet and his message even by means of a disbeliever.

Therefore, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wished to heal the spirit of His Prophet, and to compensate him for the mistreatment of the people of the earth towards him. Hence, He told him: ‘If this is the welcome reception of the people of the earth for you, then I will show you the welcome reception of the residents of heaven.’ Consequently, He took him on the voyage of the night journey and ascension that it might provide consolation for Him *peace and blessings be upon him* it was there that he saw the horizon’s loftiest part, while he was two bow-lengths away, or even nearer, from the station of his

Lord *the Glorified and Exalted*. It is this which is meant by His utterance: ‘for, indeed, the life to come will be better for thee than this earlier part [of thy life]!’ (*ad-Duha:* 4)

After that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* made His religion triumphant and provided aide to His Prophet, causing the adherents of disbelief and the leaders of Quraysh to fall down one after the other. Thus, was the unfolding of events until even Khalid ibn Al-Walid would say to ʿAmr ibn Al-ʿAs: O ʿAmr! Verily the distinctive sign of your companion has risen upright—that is to say, the situation has become well-established for Muhammad — and his star has ascended and there is no longer anyone who can resist him.(1) Thus, there is nothing for us to do but to go to him and believe in him.’ Later Mecca was conquered and people embraced Islam in successive masses.

Hence, the discourse here: ‘and then drew near, and came close’ (*an-Najm:* 8) means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* drew near to the station of his Lord, and to the lote-tree of the farthest limit (*sidrat al-muntaha*). Concerning the verse: ‘until he was but two bow-lengths away, or even nearer’ (*an-Najm:* 9), this means the extent of two bow-lengths, with the bow being the well-known instrument for shooting arrows. The final phrase of this verse, ‘...or even nearer’ (*an-Najm:* 9) signifies ‘or closer than that’, with the Arabic particle *aw*, translated as ‘or’ denoting an affirmation of the extent of two bow-lengths away. This usage is similar to that of another passage in which He *the Glorified and Exalted* said: ‘And [then] We sent him [once again] to [his people,] a hundred thousand [souls] or more’ (*as-Saffat:* 147). This is because the increase alluded to confirms the existence of the number one hundred thousand inasmuch as this amount is not be diminished but only augmented. The same is true for the proximity of two bow-lengths or closer than two bow-lengths.

There are some commentators who believe that the words here refer to Jibril. Hence, they interpret the Arabic phrase *fa-stawa*, rendered above as: ‘…who in time manifested himself in his true shape and nature’ (*an-Najm:* 6), to mean that Jibril *peace be upon him* appeared to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his actual form, and with his wings which blocked the horizon. Furthermore, they understand the verse: ‘and then drew near, and came close’ (*an-Najm:* 8), as signifying that Jibril *peace be upon him* came close to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Finally, in their opinion, the verse: ‘until he was but two bow-lengths away, or even nearer’ (*an-Najm:* 9) means that he came near to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until he was this distance away from him.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Harith in Al-Bughya (chapter 27, Hadith 1032). It was likewise related by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (5299, 5947), and it was cited by Al-Haythami in Mujmaʿ Az-zawaʾid (4/281) who attributed it to Ahmad and At-Tabarani.*

فَأَوۡحَىٰٓ إِلَىٰ عَبۡدِهِۦ مَآ أَوۡحَىٰ (١٠) مَا كَذَبَ ٱلۡفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰٓ (١١)

And revealed to God’s servant what He revealed [10]
[The Prophet’s] own heart did not distort what he saw [11]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 10-11)

This is to say that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* revealed unto His servant Muhammad as regards the verse: ‘The [servant’s] heart did not give the lie to what he saw’ (*an-Najm:* 11); this means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* with his eyes, but rather saw Him with his innermost being and his heart. Thus, Musa (Musa) *peace be upon him* heard [Allah’s] Word on the earth, and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw [Him] with the vision of his heart in heaven. The passage: ‘The [servant’s] heart did not give the lie…’ (*an-Najm:* 11), implies a warning to those who have doubts about this issue and deny it. For this reason, there follows this critical question:

أَفَتُمَٰرُونَهُۥ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ (١٢) وَلَقَدۡ رَءَاهُ نَزۡلَةً أُخۡرَىٰ (١٣)
عِندَ سِدۡرَةِ ٱلۡمُنتَهَىٰ (١٤) عِندَهَا جَنَّةُ ٱلۡمَأۡوَىٰٓ (١٥)

Are you going to dispute with him what he saw with his own eyes? [12] A second time he saw him [13] by the lote-tree beyond which none may pass [14] near the Garden of Restfulness [15] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 12-15)

Here, the initial particle indicates a interrogative clause from which is to be understood a reproachful contestation and amazement at their denying the truthfulness of The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding what he informed them of after the voyage of the night journey and ascension concerning his going up into the heaven and his vision of his Lord *the Glorified and Exalted*. The Arabic verb *tumarun* in the first verse above, translated as ‘contend with’, is derived from the same semantic root as *al-mira’* meaning to argument or dispute. However, this contention is groundless and engaged in for the sake of denial and provoking doubt, it is not intended as a means of arriving at the truth.

With respect to the following verse: ‘And, indeed, he saw it descend a second time’ (*an-Najm:* 13), this means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Jibril *peace be upon him* a second time. The next verse mentions where this occurred: ‘by the lote-tree of the farthest limit’ (*an-Najm:* 14). Here the Arabic word *as-sidra*, translated as ‘lote-tree’, refers to the lote-tree which is located to the right of The Throne of Allah. Concerning the Arabic word *al-muntaha*, translated as ‘of the farthest limit’, this signifies that at this tree the knowledge of created things comes to an end, and not one of the angels can pass beyond it, let alone men. It was at this lote-tree that He *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Jibril *peace be upon him* for the second time. Moreover, in this place of proximity prayer was made incumbent upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Canonical prayer is the sole ritual obligation which was imposed by direct oral command, and this means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the word of Allah in this intimate divine audition.

But when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about his vision of his Lord he said: {Light wherever I saw Him.}(1) In other words, in whatever manner I perceived Him. This is a very subtle expression on the part of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for when he looked he found nothing but light, and light is not visible but rather makes things perceptible to sight. Thus, if Allah is light, then there is no means of seeing Him.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (261) as related by Abu Dharr who said: “I asked The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him: ‘Did you see your Lord?’ He replied: {Light wherever I saw Him.}” This was also narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3204), by Ahmad in his Musnad (20427, 20547) and by At-Tayalisi in his Musnad (470).*

Now, as for visualization as expressed in the likes of His utterance: 'Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, [22] looking up to their Sustainer [23]' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23), the discourse here concerns the Day of Resurrection when mankind will be brought back to life in another form other than their form in this world. By means of this form they will be enabled to see their Lord. Evidence of this is found in the fact that in this new state in the Hereafter we eat but do not defecate, we drink but do not urinate or sweat. Why? This is because Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has fashioned us in another form which is suited to the blissful pleasures of the Hereafter. While we eat in this world from what we cook and what we prepare, whereas in the hereafter we eat of Allah's cooking. This cuisine is prepared with precise calculation whereby no waste remains of it in the body.

Likewise, among the miraculous aspects of the voyage of the night journey and heavenly ascension is that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* prepared Prophet Muhammad in a special way so that he might be capable of ascending into heaven. It is common knowledge that oxygen does not exist in the higher layers of the atmosphere. The Quran confirms this fact in Allah's utterance: 'And whomsoever Allah wills to guide, his bosom He opens wide with willingness towards self-surrender [unto Him]; and whomsoever He wills to let go astray, his bosom He causes to be tight and constricted, as if he were climbing unto the skies: it is thus that God inflicts horror upon those who will not believe.' (*al-An'am:* 125)

The question of visualization of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is an issue of great controversy about which much debate has raged without just cause. The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw light, and the true vision will be in the Hereafter. We must limit our discussion of this topic to what has been authoritatively reported about it, otherwise it becomes knowledge which is of no benefit and ignorance which is of no harm.

What is important is the prescribed path which he brought and the extent of our adherence to its application to our practical lives. The apex of this prescribed path is canonical prayer which was imposed upon him directly on account of its importance in the proceedings of life, and the rectification of what is crooked in it. We have previously elucidated this in the following analogy: a director or chief sends a communication to the employee to do this and that; but if the matter is more important than this, he contacts him by telephone; and if it is even more important, he summons him to his office and notifies him of what he wants directly. In such a way was prayer prescribed. It is for this reason that we view prescribed prayer as incumbent upon every male and female Muslim. It is an obligation that can never be waived under any circumstances, as opposed to all other acts of worship which may be neglected with adequate excuse.

The Hadith concerning the pillars of religion: {Islam is founded upon five...}(1) makes the stature of prayer evident. Prayer is among the pillars of religion and among the central supports upon which it is erected. This Hadith also makes it clear that these five pillars do not constitute all of Islam. Nay, indeed, Islam is of greater scope than these for Islam encompasses all the activities of life, beginning with the summit of 'There is no deity save Allah, Muhammad is The Messenger of Allah' to removing something harmful from a pathway.

We are therefore astonished by those who call for the separation of Allah's religion from the politics and policies of this world. They say: There should be no politics in religion and no religion in politics. Now, this statement is absurd and incorrect. Would it be permissible to allow the murderer, the fornicator, the thief, and other criminals like them to run havoc among Allah's human creatures without punishment or restricting deterrents?

Given the importance of prayer in the proceedings of life, Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* rendered it a duty based on certain times, thus its obligation is linked to specific timing. These times are dispersed throughout the day and night in order that the believer remains in permanent contact with his Lord, and continually mindful of the prescribed path. It is not permissible to delay prayer beyond its prescribed time except with an acceptable excuse in the eyes of The Wise Law-Giver. Thus, whoever sleeps through a time of prayer, its time is when he wakens. And whoever forgets a prayer, its time is when he remembers. In these two cases, the obligation of prayer is not waived, but rather, it must be observed immediately. On the other hand, if a person misses a prayer out of indolence without excuse, then his prayer cannot be fulfilled because it has a specific time which he has let pass to the detriment of his own soul without a legal pretext.

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(1) *This Hadith regarding the five pillars of Islam is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7), by Muslim in his Sahih (20, 21), and by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (4567, 5414) as related by ʿAbdullah ibn ʿUmar.*

The deeper wisdom of assigning prayers a determined time lies in the fact that a man does not know when he will be caught unawares by his destined death, and therefore takes the initiative first by performing his prayers according to their appointed times. Prayer comprises duration and continuity across the extent of hours, as opposed to pilgrimage, for example, which is only once in an entire life.

We reiterate, then, that there is no call for us to differ with regard to the vision that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had of his Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* in the course of the night journey and heavenly ascension. What is important is that he was transported to a sublimely elevated place in view of being charged with ritual prescriptions. He used to be charged with religious obligations while he was on the earth, and now he is being charged with such prescriptions, while he is in heaven. Is it not enough that Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* spoke to him directly aside from divine inspiration and is it not sufficient that He *peace be upon him* says about his vision of his Lord: {Light wherever I saw Him.}?

Now, someone might justifiably ask: why did this vision come in the heaven specifically, while Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is capable of manifesting Himself to His Messenger, and appearing to him while he is on the earth? To this we respond: The place is not for what is seen, but rather for the beholder, for the latter only sees in this place. Analogous to this is if I were to say to you, for example, while we were in the mosque, the moon has appeared. Then one of you says: But I do not see it. Then I tell him: Whoever is outside of the mosque or on its roof can see it.

In this context, His utterance: ‘will you, then, contend with him as to what he saw?’ (*an-Najm:* 12) is an affirmation of the vision, lending it weight and warning against doubting in it. And why should there be any dubiousness when the entire matter in the issue belongs to Allah, and Muhammad did not claim any special power for himself, but rather said: {I was taken on a night journey.}?

Perhaps you recall when we discussed His utterance: ‘O you who live in close communion with [evil] invisible beings and humans! If you [think that you] can pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, pass beyond them! [But] you cannot pass beyond them, save by a sanction [from Allah]!’ (*ar-Rahman:* 33); we noted that there were some scholars of the opinion that the final Arabic word of this verse *sultan*, translated as ‘sanction [from Allah]’, meant knowledge or science (*al-ʿilm*). We said that this is not so, and that rather *sultan* was from Allah, The All-Capable of accomplishing this. Now, if the intended meaning of *sultan* were knowledge or science, He would not have said after this: ‘A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succour!’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35) If it were not for this verse, heaven would be wide open, with the Jinn having easy access to it.

Prophet Muhammad’s vision of Gabriel as expressed in His utterance: ‘And, indeed, he saw it descend a second time [13] by the lote-tree of the farthest limit [14]’ (*an-Najm:* 13-14) is to be viewed as an honour and distinction for Gabriel and an honour and distinction for The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. As we have said the lote-tree (*as-sidra*) is a tree which produces the *nibq* fruit, which is an edible berry the size of an olive. Whereas the *nibq* tree of this world has thorns, the lote-tree of the utmost boundary has no thorns. It is as He said: ‘amidst fruit-laden lote-trees’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 28) comprising the Arabic word *makhdud* which is to say denuded of its thorns. Prophet Muhammad said in describing the size of it fruits in paradise, that they were as the capacious ceramic jugs made in *Hijr*, in other words, like large earthenware jars.

But do not be astonished at the existence of this tree in the seventh heaven, for this arises from the unlimited extent of divine power and capability. Did He not place a tree in hellfire—may Allah protect us from it—regarding which, He *the Glorified and Exalted* said: ‘for, behold, it is a tree…’ (*as-Saffat:* 64) which is to say the tree of *az-Zaqqum*, ‘…that grows in the very heart of the blazing fire [of hell], [64] its fruit [as repulsive] as satans’ heads [65]’ (*as-Saffat:* 64-65).

Concerning His utterance: ‘near unto the garden of promise’ (*an-Najm:* 15), this signifies the garden in which find ultimate refuge the martyrs who have been slain striving in the path of Allah. It is as if it is a special garden reserved for them, apart from the garden of the Hereafter which is for after The Day of

Reckoning. For in the case of the one who dies a martyr, and sacrifices his life in the path of Allah, Allah says to him: ‘You will not die in my presence’. Then He restores him from death a second time, as if He were saying: ‘It is I who grants life, and I am the one who takes it; so if someone else takes it, I conspire against him in that I render the martyr alive in my presence, with his life in the world joined to his life in the *al-barzakh* ‘an interval life between life and death’ awaiting the Last Hour.

You will recall that when we discussed Prophet Yahya (John), we said that it was Allah who named him Yahya. Furthermore, we said that when we give names to our children, we select beautiful, excellent names out of optimism for what they signify. Thus, we call a child *Dhaki* (intelligent), in the hope that he will be so, and we call a child *Saʿid* (happy), yearning that he be happy in his life. However, it may happen that reality brings forth the contrary of that for which we had wished. We call him *Dhaki,* but he is dull-witted, or Saʿid and then we see that in actuality he is unhappy. This is because we do not have control over the realization of that for which we wish.

But if the name-giver is Allah, then there is no doubt that the name ascribed by Him will correspond to reality. This is because with respect to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* there is nothing that can hinder His decree, and nothing that can amend His pronouncement, nor is there anyone who can stand in opposition to His command. Hence, the appellation Yahya, which has the semantic connotation of ‘to live’ is an indication that he will live an eternal unbroken life. From this, certain scholars possessed of comprehension of the divine have understood that he will die a martyr. The reason for this is that it is martyrdom which guarantees him continuation of life inasmuch as his life in this world is connected to the life of a martyr with Allah *the Glorified and Exalted*:

إِذۡ يَغۡشَى ٱلسِّدۡرَةَ مَا يَغۡشَىٰ ﴿١٦﴾ مَا زَاغَ ٱلۡبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾

When the tree was covered in nameless [splendour] [16]
His sight never wavered, nor was it too bold [17]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 16 - 17)

The meaning of ‘…the lote-tree veiled…’ (*an-Najm:* 16) is that it was covered, or encompassed and concealed. The Arabic particle *ma*, not translated literally here, is indicative of abundance and something tremendous deserving of amazement. The lote-tree of the utmost boundary is veiled in a multitude of marvellous created things of which only Allah is cognizant. The structure of the expression here is analogous to what occurs in His previous utterance: 'and thus did [Allah] reveal unto His servant whatever He deemed right to reveal' (*an-Najm:* 10), which is to say that He revealed unto him a great number of tremendous, wondrous things, This usage is similar to when you say: 'I was magnanimous to him, how numerous and marvellously diverse was my magnanimity to him'.

It has been narrated that among the amazing created things around the lote-tree of the utmost boundary were birds of wondrous forms and colours. Now, if we witness a great many marvellous manifestations of creation in the birds of the earth, and all that they possess of beautiful forms and patterns which we place for ornamentation in baskets in our houses, and all that they possess of lovely sounds, then how would you envisage the birds which Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* placed around this lote-tree in heaven?

Locusts made of gold have also been mentioned in this context, and these golden locusts are related to a story (1) involving Prophet Dawud (David) *peace be upon him*. It is related that he was sitting on the roof of his house, worshipping Allah and confiding in Him, when on that day he saw a locust made of gold fluttering above him. Thereupon he spread out his robe for it, and it came to pass that the locust landed upon it and Dawud seized it. At that point Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* said to him: 'O Dawud, do I not suffice you?' And he answered: 'Yes, indeed, O Lord, but I cannot dispense with your gracious favour.'(2)

With respect to His utterance: '[And withal,] the eye did not waver, nor yet did it stray' (*an-Najm:* 17), this is to say that the sight of Prophet Muhammad did not deviate during this journey. The Arabic verb *zagha*, translated as 'waver', has the meaning of inclining away from the objective. The word *zagha* bears the same significance as *ragha* which occurs in the story of

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(1) *The story of David with the golden locust*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated in the context of a Hadith by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (270, 3140, 6939), and by An-Nasai in his Sunnan (406), and by Ahmad in his Musnad (7695, 7812, 9957) as related by Abu Hurayra, but in reference to Job rather than David.*

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*: ‘Then he turned quietly (*ragha*) to his household, and brought forth a fat [roasted] calf’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 26), in other words, he inclined towards his family in a discreet manner so that those present would not perceive it. The difference between the two words lies in the diacritical dot above the letter *za* ʾ, but the meaning is the same or close to it. When we say: ‘So-and-so departed surreptitiously (*zugha*)’, this signifies that he left furtively such that no one was aware of him. Another expression which approximates this meaning is His utterance: ‘…those of you who would withdraw surreptitiously…’ (*an-Nur:* 63), in other words sneak out stealthily.

Concerning His utterance after this: ‘…nor yet did it stray’ (*an-Najm:* 17), this means that his gaze did not transgress or go beyond the proper bounds in vision, and he did not extend it to anything besides its objective. Here we learn the correct norm of looking, and how it remains within the limits of what is permitted. This is like the guest who enters your house in the presence of your family and daughters, for he does not probe with his eyes to gaze upon that which he is not allowed to see.

لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِ رَبِّهِ ٱلْكُبْرَىٰٓ ١٨

And he saw some of the greatest signs
of his Lord [18] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 18)

In other words, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw numerous wondrous signs of Allah during the voyage of the night journey and heavenly ascension, including both marvellous signs on the earth and in heaven. The Arabic word *al-kubra*, translated in this verse as ‘the most profound’, is the feminine plural and also the superlative form of *kabira*, whereas the corresponding masculine forms are *kabir* and *akbar*. The meaning here is that He *peace and blessings be upon him* saw a great number of the wondrous signs of his Lord which are described as being the great signs (*ayat kubra*), or that he saw the greatest of all the marvellous signs.

After these *ayat* (signs) have related this to us and have sworn to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with regard to conveying the message of his Lord, and have mentioned to us some of the cosmic signs and miracles, they subsequently transport us to the opposing phenomenon, to a discussion of idols and the worshippers of idols

أَفَرَءَيْتُمُ ٱللَّٰتَ وَٱلْعُزَّىٰ ﴿١٩﴾ وَمَنَوٰةَ ٱلثَّالِثَةَ ٱلْأُخْرَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾
أَلَكُمُ ٱلذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ ٱلْأُنثَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾ تِلْكَ إِذًا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَىٰ ﴿٢٢﴾

[Disbelievers], consider al-Lat and al-ʻUzza [19] and the third one, Manat [20] are you to have the male and He the female? [21] that would be a most unjust distribution! [22]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 19 - 22)

The interrogative structure in the phrase 'Have you, then, ever considered' (*an-Najm:* 19) signifies: 'Inform me of the status of these idols which you have adopted as deities apart from Allah.' They were wont to adopt deities of various types: human, animal or tree, and sometimes they adopted an idol which had no form at all.

Concerning *al-Lat*, this was an idol in the form of a man who resided among them and used to knead (*yaluttu*) dough in order to relieve women of this toilsome labour. He died and left no offspring behind him to carry on with this task, so they were grieved by his death, and fashioned a statue of him in honour of his memory. Later they began to worship this statue.

As for *al-ʻUzza*, this is the name of a tree which they used to worship, and which Prophet Muhammad ordered Khalid to go and cut down (1). Concerning it, Khalid would say:

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(1) *In the book ʻUyun Al-Athar (2/207) it is narrated that the raid of Khalid ibn Al-Walid against al-ʻUzza took place five days before the end of the month of Ramadan in the year 8 AH in order to raze it. So he departed with thirty horsemen from among his companions until he reached it, and then he demolished it. Then he returned to Prophet Muhammad and notified him. Thereupon he said: {Did you see anything?} Khalid answered, 'No'. Then He peace be upon him said: {Then surely you did not destroy it.} So Khalid returned to it in great fury, and unsheathed his sword, and there came out to him a naked black woman with unkempt hair, and the custodian began to scream at her. Khalid then struck her and split her in half. He then returned to Prophet Muhammad and informed him of what had happened, at which He said: {Yes, that was al-ʻUzza.}*

O ʿUzza, your disavowal [I seek], not your forgiveness
Verily, I perceive that Allah has distained you.(1)

Regarding the verse: ‘as well as [in] *Manat*, the third and last [of this triad]?’ (*an-Najm:* 20), *Manat* was also a name of one of their idols. Here He said: ‘...the third and last [of this triad]?’ (*an-Najm:* 20), as this is the third of them, and it was not in the form of a man or beast, The final Arabic word *al-ukhra*, translated as ‘last’ is an expression of contempt and ridicule for these idols and for those who worship them.

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has set them up as judges over what they are doing and over their worship of idols, saying to them: ‘Tell Me about these idols, do they merit being worshipped, do they have power and volition, although they are rocks which you brought with you own hands and moulded them into the forms which you desired? Subsequently, when an idol falls over or is knocked down by the wind, you raise it upright; and if its arms should break, you mend it; how then can you worship them? Where are your clear minds?’

However, this is a reflection of the fact that devotional nature in an innate part of the human constitution. The Creator fashioned man with a natural disposition towards religiosity. Even before Adam was created, while he was still in the world of potential

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* has us make a solemn pledge while we were in the world of potential enclosed in the back of Adam *peace be upon him*.

Thus, Allah said: ‘And whenever Your Sustainer brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: “Am I not your Sustainer?” – to which they answer: “Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!” [Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, “Verily, we were unaware of this”; [172] or lest you say, “Verily, it was but our forefathers who, in times gone by, began to ascribe divinity to other beings beside Allah; and we were but their late offspring: wilt Thou, then, destroy us for the doings of those inventors of falsehoods?” [173]’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172-173)

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(1) *This is cited by Ibn Kathir in his As-Sira An-Nabawiya, as well as by Ash-Shami in Subul Al-Huda wa-Ar-Rashad (chapter 52), and by Al-Waqidi in his Maghazi (1/873). In all sources al-ʿUzza is a constructed idol and not a tree.*

Hence, they worshipped idols on account of what they possessed of innate faith in the soul. But true belief comprises consequences and requirement which may be hard on the soul and bind its movements towards objects of lust and desire. Therefore, man is inclined to worship a deity with no prescriptions in order to satisfy the instinctive yearning for devotion in his soul. And based on this they began worshipping idols because they were deities according to their claims. But these idols did not make any demands, and possessed on prescribed path, and they did not worship them except to relieve their devotional sentiments.

We notice here the precision of the Quranic expression in His utterance ‘Have you, then, ever considered [what you are worshipping in] al-Lat and al-ʿUzza, [19] as well as [in] Manat, the third and last [of this triad]? [20]’ (*an-Najm:* 19-20) They also used to worship angels apart from Allah, but He does not mention them with al-Lat, al-*ʿUzza and Manat* since angels cannot be seen. With regard to the verbal phrase of the first verse above: *a-fa-raʾaytum*, meaning ‘Have you, then, seen’ but translated as ‘have you, then, ever considered’, it would not be correct to use it for angels since they could not perceive angels. Rather, they heard about them and believed in them though they were invisible. About all of these they said: these are our intercessors with Allah. Similarly, they said**:** ‘…We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah…’ (*az-Zumar:* 3). Thus, even in their disbelief in Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* they are disputatious about Allah.

There follows His utterance: ‘Why – for yourselves [you would choose only] male offspring, whereas to Him [you assign] female’? (*an-Najm:* 21) Here the interrogative is to indicate amazement and repudiation of them since they have ascribed the angels to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* and classified them as feminine, in light of the final feminine *taʾ marbuta* of the plural word for them (*malaʾika*). However, angels are creations of Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* composed of light, they do not eat, drink, or procreate and they are not qualified as being masculine or feminine.

Now, the situation described in this verse is viewed in terms of judgement and partitioning in a way which the Quran refers to as: ‘that, lo and behold, is an unfair division!' (*an-Najm:* 22) This is to say: iniquitous and wrong. This is because you attribute to yourselves the superior gender, and to Allah the inferior one. The first error is that you regarded the angels as females, and the second is that you worshipped them. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* refutes them: 'And [yet] they claim that the angels – who in themselves are but beings created by The Most Gracious – are females: [but] did they witness their creation? This false claim of theirs will be recorded, and they will be called to account [for it on Judgment Day]!' (*az-Zukhruf:* 19)

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* also said: 'Verily, you and all that you [were wont to] worship instead of Allah are but the fuel of hell...' (*al-Anbiya':* 98), in other words, its combustible material which kindles it—may Allah protect us from such. The critical conundrum into which the worshippers of idols have fallen into is that they said: '…We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 3); but if only they had said: 'We only seek closeness to them in order that they might bring us closer to Allah', this would have been acceptable. However, they said 'we worship them', and this is a false, groundless statement. Hence Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* rebuts them, saying: 'Verily, you and all that you [were wont to] worship instead of Allah are but the fuel of hell...' (*al-Anbiya':* 98).

If you were to ask: 'So, what is the offence of 'Isa (Jesus) and 'Uzair (Ezra)? And what is the offence of the angels if people have worshipped them apart from Allah?' The answer in found in the same verse, examine it closely: '...all that you [were wont to] worship...' (*al-Anbiya':* 98), for in the Arabic original, *wa-ma taʿbuduna*, the relative pronoun *ma* here, translated as 'all that' is for non-rational things. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* did not say: 'and all those who you worshipped'. Hence, this decree does not include 'Isa or ʿUzair or the angels.

Consider the Arabic word *diza*, translated as 'unfair', you will discover it to be a rare, obscure word in its formulation and pronunciation which does not re-occur among the vocabulary items of the Quran. It occurs in just this perplexing way in order to signify that their deed is strange and bewildering. It also signifies that this division of theirs is outrageously iniquitous and unjust since they have assigned offspring to Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* while He is The Creator of the fair sex, at least in their own opinion.

The dogmatic convictions in Islam did not give any preference to the male over the female, for both the male and the female are equivalent in the scale of religious jurisprudence. In order to illustrate this question, you should read, for example, the story of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* in the Quran, in which Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…when a woman of (the House of) 'Imran prayed, 'O my Lord! Unto You do I vow (the child) that is in my womb, to be devoted to Your service' (*Al-'Imran:* 35).

The mother of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* wanted to raise her child strictly in the service of the house of worship. 'But when she had given birth to the child, she said, "O my Lord! Behold, I have given birth to a female" – the while Allah had been fully aware of what she would given birth to, and (fully aware) that the male child is not like the female child' (*Al-'Imran:* 36). The mother of Maryam assumed that a male child would have been more suitable for the service of a house of worship than a female child. Allah *Glorified is He* made it clear to her that this female child shall assume a station which no other female has assumed before her, as she would attain a great stature in the history of religion, and a position which will raise her above all women.

When Allah *Glorified is He* spoke of several examples of women in the Quran, He referred to each of them without mentioning their names. He said: 'For those who are bent on denying the truth, Allah has revealed a lesson in (the stories of) the wife of Nuh (Noah) and the wife of Lut (Lot)' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). Likewise, He said 'And for those who have believed, Allah has revealed a lesson in (the story of) Pharaoh's wife' (*at-Tahrim:* 11). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specified that the name of Pharaoh's believing wife was Asiya Bint Muzahim *may Allah be pleased with her*. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* did not mention the specific names of these women in the Quran. Their stories were mentioned to set a parable and a lesson, and to stress the issue of a woman's freedom of belief. There is no one who is able to coerce anyone into adhering to a particular belief system.

On the other hand, when Allah *Glorified is He* narrated the story of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* he mentioned her name and the name of her father. He said: '…Mary, the daughter of 'Imran,' (*at-Tahrim:* 12) because her story was a unique and a special example that will not be repeated after her. Hence, there are verses in the Quran where the anonymity of the persons was preferred, and there are other verses where the person concerned is specifically identified and named. Each of these preferences was used properly, with every instance having its appropriate motive.

Allah told us the story of the young men in the chapter of the Cave: '…Behold, they were young men who had believed in their Lord: and (so) We increased their guidance to the right way' (*al-Kahf:* 13). However, the Quran did not specify their exact number or their names, and it did not mention anything about them aside their belief in Allah *Glorified is He*. This is the intended extent of their description in the verses, as specific details regarding their names and exact number had no importance in the context of their story. Mentioning these specific names would have been unnecessary because a person learning them will not gain any utility and a person ignorant of them will not be harmed in their life.

These young men were mentioned to show the believers how to adhere steadfastly to their convictions and confront oppressive injustices during any time and in any place, regardless of their number and their circumstances. If Allah had specified their names, they would have been perceived as a unique story that may not necessarily be repeated in other circumstances.

At this point, I would like to discuss whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Allah *Glorified is He*. This issue was greatly debated among the commentators of the Quran and their opinions varied.

I would like to begin by saying that this is an issue of controversy which does not affect the basis of the theological dogma. It only serves to highlight the stature of Prophet Muhammad in the Eyes of his Lord. There are scholars who, out of love for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desired to elevate him to the degree of seeing his Lord.

However, there are other scholars who also had deep love towards Prophet Muhammad *peace blessings be upon him* but they also desired to shield people from the labyrinths of doubt. Therefore, they saw that this encounter between Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* and his Lord *Glorified is He* did not involve an actual physical vision of Allah.

We will try to simplify this issue in a manner that makes it clear for everyone. It is normal that the opinions of scholars may differ regarding certain concepts. Such differences strengthen the essence of religion and do not impair it. When we read the beginning of the chapter *of an-Najm,* we find that it discusses the issue of divine inspiration (*al-wahy*) in two verses. Allah said in the first passage: ‘that (which he conveys to you) is but (a divine) inspiration with which he (Muhammad) is being inspired. The one with a mighty power taught (it to) him,’ (*an-Najm:* 4-5). The intended inspiration here is the divine revelation which Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* brought down to Prophet Muhammad while he was on the earth.

Consequently, the subsequent verse referring to divine revelation: ‘And, thus, He (Allah) revealed to His servant that which He revealed’ (*an-Najm:* 10) does not have the same meaning as the first verse referring to divine revelation upon the earth. Rather, the second verse adds a new meaning, and the inspiration mentioned in it referred to a more direct revelation from Allah to his Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, the second verse did not mention Angel Jibril *peace be upon him* as the intermediary of this divine inspiration. Moreover, the nature of the revelation was not explained, as Allah said: ‘...revealed to His servant that which (*ma*) He revealed’ (*an-Najm:* 10). Thus, the revelation mentioned in this verse was different, and its nature was lexically concealed by the ambiguous pronoun *ma* (‘that which’). On the other hand, the previous divine verses, conveyed by Angel Jibril to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were not ambiguous or concealed.

The general description of this direct divine revelation indicated the revelation’s sublime greatness, and that it transcended material limitations. Another possible interpretation is that this new revelation that Prophet Muhammad experienced was extraordinary and overwhelming. In this sense, the usage of the pronoun *ma* was similar to its usage in another chapter in which Allah said: ‘…and they were overwhelmed by the sea, with that which (*ma*) they were overwhelmed by’ (*Ta Ha:* 78).

Thus, we can see that the verses in the beginning of the chapter of *an-Najm* have mentioned two types of divine inspiration (*al-wahy*). The two revelations do not have the same meaning because if both types of revelation were similar, there would be no imperative necessity for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to go on this journey from the earth to the heavens since the Angel Jibril already came down to him with revelation.

Therefore, the verse: ‘And, thus, He (Allah) revealed to His servant that which He revealed,’ (*an-Najm:* 10) refers to a new bestowal upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but it is a bestowal enveloped in mystery. It may be that conventional minds were not constituted to accept this different revelation, as these sublime bounties only inspire the pure souls. People’s constitutions differ greatly regarding this issue.

Thus, there are scholars who did not believe that Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* saw Allah *Glorified is He* while other scholars accepted that concept. Praises are due to Allah *Glorified is He* that He did not make this disputed opinion part of our necessary body of religious beliefs. Allah *Glorified is He* addressed all believers by the necessary message. These believers include those who only fulfil the fundamental ordinances of Islam, as well as those who enhance their actions and intensively observe further voluntary acts of worship. Indeed, Allah will grant appropriate rewards for each group of believers.

The direct revelation that Prophet Muhammad received from Allah *Glorified is He* involved proximity, and listening. Prophet Mohammad defined what he saw during that revelation by saying: ‘There was Light. How could I see Him?’(1) Hence, Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* definitely saw the Light, and what other objective is needed beyond this experience?

There is another narration that confirmed this meaning which has been cited in a narrated Hadith stating that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to one of his Companions: ‘My Lord has granted me three vessels (of knowledge): a vessel which he commanded me to convey and this is the knowledge of prayer, a vessel which he left me free to choose (to convey it to the folk of purity who are capable of receiving it and to conceal it from those who are not capable of its reception) and a vessel which Allah forbade me to divulge (and this vessel contains matters which are beyond the comprehension of all men and which their minds could not bear).' Thus, there are details which Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* was commanded to conceal.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih (261) as related by Abu Dharr who said: “I asked Prophet Muhammad, ‘Did you see your Lord?’ He replied, “There was Light. How could I see Him?” The same Hadith was narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3204) and by Ahmad in his Musnad (20427, 20547).*

The Companions themselves were diverse in their capacity to understand such concepts. Thus, when ʿUmar (1) *may Allah be pleased with him* finished his circumambulation around the *Ka'ba* and stood before the Black Stone, he said: 'By Allah, I truly know that you are just a stone that cannot do harm or cause benefit, and if I had not actually seen the Messenger of Allah [Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*] kissing you I would not have kissed you.'(2)

Thus, ʿUmar *may Allah be pleased with him* drew our attention to the fact that a devotional act is not observed for its own sake, but rather out of belief in the one who instructed us to perform it. However, 'Ali *may Allah be pleased with him* possessed another form of abundance of understanding. Therefore, he closely approached 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* and said: 'O Commander of the

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(1) *The story of ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab circumambulating the Ka'ba and his stance regarding the black stone and the response of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (1635) as related by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri who said: "We performed pilgrimage with ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab and when he set about circumambulating, he faced the (Black) Stone and said, "Verily, I know that you are a stone which cannot do harm or bring benefit, and if I had not actually seen Prophet Muhammad kiss you, I would not have kissed you." Then he kissed it. Thereupon, ʿAli ibn Abu Taleb remarked, "But indeed, O Commander of the Faithful. It surely can do harm and cause benefit." (ʿUmar) then asked, "On what basis?" (ʿAli) replied, "On the basis of the Book of Allah." (ʿUmar) then asked, "And where is this in the Book of Allah?" (ʿAli) said, "Allah said: "And when your Lord brought forth their offspring from the backs of the children of Adam, He (thus) called upon them to bear witness about themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' – to which they answered, 'Indeed, we do bear witness thereto!'" (al-A'raf: 172) And verily, I bear witness that I heard the Messenger of Allah say: "On the Day of Resurrection, the Black Stone will be brought and it will possess an eloquent tongue that testifies to those who have acknowledged it within the framework of Divine Unity." Hence, O Commander of the Faithful ('Umar), it can do harm and bring benefit.' Thereupon, ʿUmar said, "I seek protection from Allah from living amidst a people among whom you are not present, O father of Al-Hasan ('Ali).'"*

Faithful ('Umar), but I know that it (the Black Stone) can do harm and give benefit, for it does bear witness to its companion on the Day of Resurrection.'

Hence, it is not necessary for us to know everything. Allah *Glorified is He* said: '…and you have been granted very little of (real) knowledge' (*al-Isra':* 85). This is the case of all people, regardless of who they are. In our daily lives, we have the habit of protecting precious items in several wrappers. For instance, we may place the item in an envelope, and then place the envelope in a secure storage container. We may then place the storage container in a private chamber. Therefore, if the precious matter was related to the vision of Allah *Glorified is He* we should expect a transcendental level of concealment. Hence, this knowledge was concealed highly in this sublime manner, and every intellect will perceive this knowledge according to its own understanding.

Allah said: 'Will you (disbelievers), then, contend with him (Muhammad) as to what he saw?' (*an-Najm:* 12) It might be asked whether divine inspiration is seen or heard. Indeed, divine inspiration is heard, so why did Allah say: '...as to what he (Muhammad) saw?' (*an-Najm:* 12) Therefore, we have to recognize that there was a vision involved. The people who do not accept the notion that Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* saw Allah, support their opinion with Allah's verse: 'No human vision can encompass Him (Allah), whereas He encompasses all human vision' (*al-An'am:* 103). Allah has defined the instrument of perception in this verse as being the sense of sight, and indeed, human vision cannot encompass Allah. However, this verse only stated that the eyes cannot perceive Allah. Therefore, the verse did not negate that other senses can perceive Allah. There is a saying that wisely stated, 'When my eyesight was transformed into a spiritual insight, I saw the One (Allah) to whom nothing can be compared.' It is imperative that we understand that this issue comprises the concealment of a precious and a wondrous phenomenon.

Indeed, the one who meditates upon these verses discovers that they go far beyond that which we are discussing. Read the verse in which Allah said: 'Will you, then, contend with him as to what he saw?' (*an-Najm:* 12) And read the verse that comes after it: 'Truly did he (Muhammad) see some of the most profound of his Lord's symbols' (*an-Najm:* 18). In other words, Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw more than that of which you are speaking. So, what would your stance be if We informed you of all that he saw?

In this context, let us consider the story of our Prophet Musa (Moses), when he said to his Lord: '"O my Lord! Show (Thyself) to me, so that I might behold Thee!" (Allah) said, "Never can you see Me. However, behold this mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then – only then – will you see Me." And as soon as his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Musa (Moses) fell down in a swoon' (*al-A'raf:* 143). Firstly, consider Allah's statement: '...Never can you see Me...' (*al-A'raf:* 143). Allah did not say, 'Never will I be seen.' In other words, Allah was telling Prophet Musa, 'You will never see Me, O Musa, while you are in a state that does not enable you to have such a vision.' However, Allah revealed Himself to the mountain, and this revelation implies vision. Hence, the phenomenon here lies in the beholder and the extent of his preparedness to perceive Allah.

Prophet Muhammad is like Prophet Musa in this respect except that when he ascended into the heavens, he assumed an angelic nature which enabled him to ascend and enter these sublime realms. This angelic nature covered his human nature and overcame it, Allah *Glorified is He* then said:

إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّآ أَسْمَآءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَآ أَنتُمْ وَءَابَآؤُكُم مَّآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطَٰنٍ ۚ إِن يَتَّبِعُونَ
إِلَّا ٱلظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى ٱلْأَنفُسُ ۖ وَلَقَدْ جَآءَهُم مِّن رَّبِّهِمُ ٱلْهُدَىٰٓ ﴿٢٣﴾

These are nothing but names you have invented yourselves, you and your forefathers. God has sent no authority for them. These people merely follow guess-work and the whims of their souls, even though guidance has come to them from their Lord [23] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 23)

The discourse remains focused on the idols of *al-Lat*, *al-'Uzza* and *Manat*, with Allah *Glorified is He* stating that these idols are naught: '...but empty names which you have invented – you and your forefathers – (and) for which Allah has not revealed any warrant' (*an-Najm:* 23). They fabricated these idols by their own hands. Now, it is well known that a name is coined in order to refer to the thing that is named. However, the names which they gave to these idols were references to null and invalid forces. They have claimed that they are deities, but they were only stones which do no harm and produce no benefit.

Allah said: ‘...which you have invented – you and your forefathers...’ (*an-Najm:* 23). This is due to the fact that they inherited these idols from their ancestors. The polytheists themselves said in that respect: ‘Behold, we found our forefathers agreed on what to believe – and, verily, it is but in their footsteps that we follow!’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 23) Hence, they acknowledged that it was the path of their forefathers, and confirmed that they were pursuing their pre-established course.

Subsequently, Allah stated the falsity of their beliefs: ‘…for which Allah has not revealed any warrant’ (*an-Najm:* 23). These beliefs arose from themselves without any proof or evidence and were not from Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, neither they nor their forefathers were fit to be religious legislators. In fact, religious ordinances and tenets of faith are not to be derived from men, but are only to be received from Allah *Glorified is He*. These disbelievers did not follow the guidance of Allah, but instead: ‘Indeed, they (who worship them) follow (*inn yatibi’una*) nothing but surmise (*azh-zhann*),’ (*an-Najm:* 23). The Arabic phrase *inn yatibi’una* contains the negating particle *inn*. The use of this particle gives rise to the meaning, ‘They do not follow but their guesses and their own wishful thinking.’ They do not follow fundamental truths or adhere to reality. The Arabic word *azh-zhann* (surmise) is one of the six levels of the truthfulness of a statement which we have previously clarified. These six levels state that a scholastic statement or utterance can be either a statement of knowledge (*‘ilm*), a statement of ignorance (*jahl*), an unthinking imitation (*taqleed*), a doubt (*shakk*), a hypothesis (*zhann*) or a deluded statement (*wahm*).

Firstly, if a scholastic axiom reports a definitive reality and establishes the proof of that reality, then it constitutes a statement of knowledge (*al-‘ilm*). The second type is a statement that definitively defends a perception without providing a proof for it. Then, this statement would only be considered an imitation (*al-taqleed*). Thirdly, if the scholastic assertion is not founded upon reality, but is asserted with a definitive manner, then it is ignorance (*al-jahl*). Fourthly, in the event that the scholastic imputation is not asserted with certainty meaning that there is an equal probability of the event occurring or not occurring, then it is doubt (*as-shakk*). The fifth form of utterance is a hypothesis or an assumption (*azh-zhann*) which is when an event is likely. Finally, if the statement is highly improbable, then it is a self-deceiving delusion (*al-wahm*).

It is possible to base some of our actions upon an assumption (*azh-zhann*) in ordinary affairs. Thus, for example, if we wished to travel to Alexandria, and I said to my companion, 'This first route is easy and it is provided with the necessities of travelling,' he might respond, 'I believe (*azhunnu*) that the second route is better because it is newly constructed.' In that situation, it would be permissible for me to leave aside the certainty with which I regard the first route, and instead, take the second route based on an assumption. This is because if our choice is mistaken, the resulting harm will be minimal.

On the other hand, in the matters of religion and fundamental beliefs, it is necessary to adhere to certainty and not to assumption. Allah *Glorified is He* informed us that these polytheists followed hypothetical assumptions in their matters of worship. For instance, they said, 'Verily, Allah has an elevated majesty and glorious grandeur, and so, we cannot worship Him directly. We need to worship other (earthly) deities that can bring us closer to Him and that can intercede for us with Him.'

Therefore, Allah's words: 'Indeed, they (who worship them) follow nothing but surmise' (*an-Najm:* 23) refer to the false religious convictions of these polytheists. On the other hand, the phrase which follows this: '…and their own wishful thinking (*tahwa al-anfus*)' (*an-Najm:* 23) means that they follow the passionate inclinations of their souls in their behaviours and actions. The Arabic word *tahwa* is the verb derived from the word *al-hawa* (desire or wishes). *Al-hawa* is formed of the blameworthy and unprincipled yearnings and longings of desire.

In the final passage of this verse, Allah said: '…although, righteous guidance has hitherto, indeed, (*la-qad*) reached them from their Lord' (*an-Najm:* 23). The Arabic word *la-qad* ('hitherto, indeed') consists of the particle *la* which is used for lexical confirmation, followed by the particle *qad* which strongly confirms the verb following it. Hereby, Allah confirmed a reality which is that the guidance of Allah *Glorified is He* has indeed reached these polytheists and that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* properly conveyed it to them. Yet, in spite of this, they turned aside from this certain truth, and followed the mere suppositions and presumptions they had inherited and imitated.

If they had followed their assumptions and passionate desires before the prescribed path of their Lord was conveyed to them, they would have had an excuse. However, as they have done this after guidance has come to them from Allah *Glorified is He* they have no excuse or defence, Then, Allah said:

أَمۡ لِلۡإِنسَٰنِ مَا تَمَنَّىٰ (٢٤) فَلِلَّهِ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةُ وَٱلۡأُولَىٰ (٢٥)

Is man to have everything he wishes for [24] when the present life and the life to come belong only to God? [25]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 24 - 25)

After deviating from Allah's guidance and following their spurious assumptions, did they imagine that they can proceed in this world on the basis of their unprincipled inclinations and desires? Did they think that man can have whatever he wants, even if his longings are contrary to the ordained path of his Lord? The reality is that mankind will not attain their unchecked desires in this world because the principals of religion and faith are not obtained through desires. Indeed, Allah's decrees do not follow mankind's whims.

The Arabic verb *tamanna* (wished) is derived from the word *at-tamanny*, which is when a person seeks something that is impossible to attain. This word only signifies the great desire and love towards a particular aspiration, and that the aspiration will never be accomplished. A poet once said:

'If only my young years would return one day,

So I can inform them of what my old age has done.'

The polytheists may wishfully desire a particular outcome, but their wishes will be in vain. They wished that they could have whatever they wanted without restrictions, and this was a futile desire and will never be realized. This is because man does not have any control over his own circumstances, nor does he have control over all the causative factors that can lead to his wishes. Nay, indeed, he has a Lord who decrees all the destinies and deeds.

There are numerous verses in which Allah illustrated the vain desire of these people. Among their vain wishes was their statement: 'We worship them (the idols) for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3). Another example of a vain desire was uttered by the owner of the garden in the chapter of *al-Kahf*. This disbeliever said: '…But even if (the Day of Judgment should come, and) I am (resurrected and) brought before my Lord, I will surely find something even better than this (garden) as (my last) resort!' (*al-Kahf:* 36) In another verse, a man was mentioned to have said: '…but if (it should come, and) I should indeed be brought back unto my Lord, then, behold, the ultimate good awaits me with Him!' (*Fussilat:* 50) In this manner, these disbelievers only had vain wishes that did not respect any limit. Thus, Allah said: 'Man is never weary of asking for the good (things of life); and if evil fortune touches him, he abandons all hope, giving himself up to despair' (*Fussilat:* 49).

Likewise, these vain desires included the utterances of Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira. The Quran described Al-Walid in the verses in which Allah said: 'And have you (Muhammad) seen the man who denied the truth of Our messages and said, "I will surely be given wealth and children"? Has he (Al-Walid), perchance, attained to a realm which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception? – or has he concluded a covenant with (Allah) the Most Gracious?' (*Maryam:* 77-78) Indeed, Al-Walid did not reach the knowledge of the unseen realms, nor has he had a covenant with Allah regarding these wishes. Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* refuted his wishes, and said: 'Nay! We shall record what he said, and We shall greatly lengthen his suffering (in the hereafter), and divest him of all that he is (now) speaking of: for (on the Day of Judgment), he will appear before Us in a lonely state' (*Maryam:* 79 - 80).

Thus, man will not have what he vainly desires, and how could he have his desires when the entire matter belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* alone, from beginning to the end. Allah said: 'Rather, to Allah belongs the Hereafter and the first (life)' (*an-Najm:* 25).

This verse employed an abbreviated lexical mode of expression in which the main clause, '…belongs to Allah,' preceded the opening clause, 'The Hereafter and the first (life).' This lexical mode highlights that the Hereafter and the first life belong to Allah alone. Here, Allah placed the reference to the

Hereafter first because the polytheists said that their idols were their intercessors with Allah *Glorified is He*. Therefore, Allah announced that the Hereafter belongs to Him alone, and that the polytheists will not derive any benefit from their idols because their assumptions were futile and groundless. The phrase: '…and the first (life)' (*an-Najm:* 25) refers to the fact that they have not even achieved their enjoyments in this life by themselves.

It is also said that the Hereafter is mentioned before the present life in this verse, despite the fact that it is contrary to the normal order because the Hereafter is the object of contention between the person who believes in it and the one who denies it. It is the concept that the disbelievers have a doubt in and therefore, Allah mentioned it before the first life to reaffirm that it is the truth. Indeed, its truth is more certain than the first life they are now living, Then, Allah said:

وَكَم مِّن مَّلَكٖ فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ لَا تُغۡنِي شَفَٰعَتُهُمۡ شَيۡـًٔا
إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعۡدِ أَن يَأۡذَنَ ٱللَّهُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيَرۡضَىٰٓ ﴿٢٦﴾

There are many angels in heaven whose intercession will be of no use until God gives permission to those He will, whose words He will accept [26] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 26)

The polytheists believed that the idols would intercede for them with Allah *Glorified is He* as they said: 'We worship them (the idols) for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah' (*az-Zumar:* 3). Allah *Glorified is He* refuted this concept with a statement that illustrated the futility and groundlessness of their convictions. How could they expect that the idols can intercede for them, when even the angels of divine proximity and the honoured servants in Allah's presence do not possess the power of intercession except by His permission?

Allah said: 'And (how) many (*kam*) an angel?' (*an-Najm:* 26) This means that there is a multitude of angels, as the particle *kam* is an explicative rather than an interrogative particle. It refers to the great number of these angels since it is asking about a number which has no limit.

The verse continued talking about these numerous angels: '...their intercession will not avail at all except (only) after Allah has permitted (them) to whom He wills and approves' (*an-Najm:* 26). Consequently, there are two conditions for the acceptance of the intercession of the angels. The first condition is that it can only happen if Allah *Glorified is He* gives the permission for the angels to intercede. The second condition is if Allah *Glorified is He* is well pleased with the one for whom the angels are interceding. Indeed, Allah will be pleased with the adherents of pure monotheism (*at-tawheed*). Therefore, this refers to the dignity of the intercessor and the dignity of the one interceded for.

In the verse of *al-Kursi*, Allah said: ‘Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave?’ (*al-Baqara:* 255) The angels are honoured servants who do not speak without His leave and they only execute his commands. Allah has said about them: ‘…they do not disobey Allah in whatever He has commanded them, but (always) do what they are bidden to do’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6). Hence, if this is the conditional state of the angels with respect to the acceptance of their intercession, then what is one to think of the intercession of the null futile idols?

We can observe in the Quranic wording of this verse that the words: ‘...many (*kam*) an angel (*malaak*),’ (*an-Najm:* 26) was mentioned in the singular form. On the other hand, the intercessions were attributed to many angels when Allah said: ‘...their intercessions will not avail at all,’ (*an-Najm:* 26). Allah did not say, ‘…his intercession’ because the particle *kam* is explicative and indicates a great quantity, and when it is conjoined with the singular form ‘angel’, it still renders the plural meaning. The Arabic phrase *wa-kam min malaak* (...and (how) many an angel) signifies a multitude of angels, and it is fitting that Allah then said: ‘…their intercessions’ employing the plural form. Then, Allah said:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ لَيُسَمُّونَ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ تَسۡمِيَةَ ٱلۡأُنثَىٰ ﴿٢٧﴾ وَمَا لَهُم بِهِۦ
مِنۡ عِلۡمٍۖ إِن يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا ٱلظَّنَّۖ وَإِنَّ ٱلظَّنَّ لَا يُغۡنِي مِنَ ٱلۡحَقِّ شَيۡـٔٗا ﴿٢٨﴾

Those who deny the life to come give the angels female names [27] They have no knowledge to base this on: they merely follow guesswork. Guesswork is of no value against the Truth [28] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 27 - 28)

Allah exposed the false convictions that the polytheists expressed in their statement: ‘We worship them (the idols) for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah’ (*az-Zumar:* 3). The polytheists considered that the angels would intercede for them with Allah *Glorified is He*. However, their concept was fragile and frail because they did not really believe in the Hereafter. Therefore, their speech of an intercession in the Hereafter was only composed of empty statements.

Allah said: ‘Behold, those who do not believe in the Hereafter,’ (*an-Najm:* 27) and this is a reference to the disbelievers. The verse continued that they: ‘…regard the angels as female beings’ (*an-Najm:* 27) which means that they claimed that the angels were the daughters of Allah *Glorified is He*. Then Allah *Glorified is He* stated that their statement had no basis in knowledge: ‘…but they have no knowledge thereof,’ (*an-Najm:* 28). Allah said in another passage: ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves; and neither do I (have any need to) take as My helpers those (beings) that lead (men) astray’ (*al-Kahf:* 51).

Hence, they had no knowledge regarding the creation of the angels, and, thus, they were liars in their claim. The problem is that they followed their baseless suppositions in this matter, as they only considered the angels to be females because the Arabic word *mala-‘ika* (angels) is lexically feminine. In the Arabic language, the lexical femininity of a name is not an indication that the being carrying the name is feminine, but these disbelievers did not have any connection with veritable reality.

The truth regarding this issue is what Allah *Glorified is He* informed us since He is their Creator Who has the absolute knowledge of their nature. Thus, Allah said: ‘Indeed, conjecture (*azh-zhann*) will never take the place of the Truth,’ (*an-Najm:* 28). Supposition or assumption (*azh-zhann*) can never take the place of definitive manifest knowledge, Then, Allah said:

فَأَعۡرِضۡ عَن مَّن تَوَلَّىٰ عَن ذِكۡرِنَا وَلَمۡ يُرِدۡ إِلَّا ٱلۡحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا ﴿٢٩﴾ ذَٰلِكَ مَبۡلَغُهُم
مِّنَ ٱلۡعِلۡمِۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦ وَهُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَنِ ٱهۡتَدَىٰ ﴿٣٠﴾

So [Prophet] ignore those who turn away from Our
revelation, who want only the life of this world [29] Their
knowledge does not go beyond that. Your Lord knows best
who strays from His path and who follows guidance [30]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 29 - 30)

After Allah made the position of His adversaries clear to His Prophet, and that they did not have any desire for the truth, but instead, followed their vain assumptions, Allah told him: ‘O Muhammad, relieve yourself of such people, for there is nothing to be gained from them.’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was earnestly keen on the guidance of his people. He used to push himself to great lengths for the sake of summoning them to the truth, far beyond what is bearable for human beings. For this reason, Allah addressed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the following words: **‘**But wouldst thou, perhaps, torment thyself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?’ (*al-Kahf:* 6) In addition, He said to him: ‘…thou art not bound to do more than deliver the message (entrusted to you)’ (*ash-Shura:* 48).

We have clarified that Allah *Glorified is He* did not want the disbelievers to approach obedience as empty shells without obedient hearts. Rather, he wanted their hearts to approach Him voluntarily and of their own free choosing. Therefore, Allah said to His Prophet: ‘Avoid (*a’rid*), therefore, those who turn away from all remembrance of Us’ (*an-Najm:* 29). In this passage, the word *a’rid* was used to mean ‘avoid’. The word is derived from the same semantic root as the verbs *ʿarada* (presented or showed), and the word *ʿaarid* (a presenter or shower, such as those who present their merchandise in markets). However, in this verse, a *hamza* (glottal stop) was added to these roots, and this *hamza* is known as *hamzat al-izala* (cessation). In other words, when this *hamza* is added to the semantic verb *‘arada* (presented), it transforms it into *a’rada* (avoided) which has the opposite meaning of the word *‘arada* (presented).

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* presented (*’arada*) the guidance and the ordained path of Truth to his people. He explained the objectives and advantages of this path. However, they only renounced his guidance. They showed insults and opposition to him and avoided his way. This situation remained until his Lord commanded him to avoid them (*a’rid*) and pay no heed to those who reject his way. Allah ordered him: ‘Avoid, therefore,’ (*an-Najm:* 29). Just as they have turned away from you, then you must turn away from them. They have avoided you, O Muhammad, so you must shun them.

This lexical principal of *hamzat al-izala* which transforms a verb into its opposite meaning can also be found in other words. For instance, the verb *a'jama* is used to refer to a book that is provided with diacritical points (*uʿjima al-kitab*)', as these points remove the book's obscurity. Another example of this usage is the word *mu'jam* (dictionary) that eliminates the ambiguities of words or expressions. This is because a *mu'jam* clarifies the meanings of the words of the language, deciphers them and renders them intelligible. However, if we remove the *hamza* from the word *a'jama,* it becomes *'ajama* (ciphered) which is the opposite of *a'jama* (deciphered).

Likewise, *aʿrada* means the cessation presentation (*al-ʿard*). Hence, the passage: 'Avoid, therefore, those who turn away from all remembrance of Us' (*an-Najm:* 29) indicated that it was the disbelievers who began by shunning the remembrance of Allah *Glorified is He*. In other words, they averted themselves from the Quran and from its ordained path because it restricted their indulgent freedoms and lustful desires.

The ordained path entails prescriptions and proscriptions, and they had no desire for such obligations. They desired an unbridled pursuit of their passionate inclinations, where they can enjoy their pleasures without any oversight. If these disbelievers had given serious consideration to the ordained path of Allah *Glorified is He* they would have recognized that it was in their interest. This is because, for example, when religion forbids you from stealing as an individual it also forbids all people from stealing from you. It does restrain your hand, but at the same it also restrains millions of hands from stealing you.

Therefore, before looking at the hardships of religious ordinances, you should look at its beneficial gifts. You may recall the youthful companion who came to Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* and said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah. Give me the legal permission to fornicate.' Can you imagine the reaction of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* towards this bizarre request? He did not drive him away, but rather brought him closer to himself, and smiled in his face and told him: 'O kinsman of the Arabs. Would you accept it if your sister did it (fornicated)?' Thereupon, the man said, 'No, O Messenger of Allah, may I be your ransom.' Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked: 'Would you like this for your mother? Would you like this for your daughter?' The narrator of this Hadith said, '(The Prophet continued asking him) until he mentioned the paternal aunt and the maternal aunt, with the man saying, ‘No, O Messenger of Allah, may I be your ransom.’ Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: ‘It is the same for other people, O kinsman of the Arabs. They too would not like this for their sisters, or their mothers, or their daughters.’ The young man subsequently said, ‘So I departed from the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and there was nothing more detestable to me than fornication, and I have never thought of committing anything (of that sort) except that I recalled the honour of my sister, my mother and my daughter.’’(1)

For this reason, Allah said of the righteous and pious people at the beginning of the chapter of *al-Baqara*: ‘It is they who are upon the guidance (which comes) from their Lord; and it is they, who shall attain to a happy state’ (*al-Baqara:* 5). Thus, religious ordinances and the ordained path are not an encumbrance upon you, but rather, carry and deliver you towards your objective. The cited verse refers to the righteous people as being ‘upon the guidance’ (*ʿala al-huda*), with the preposition *ʿala* suggesting mastery and superiority over (*al-istiʿlaʾ*). Hence, it is the ordained path that carries you, and it helps you and renders you happy.

Now, we can return to our verse in the chapter of *an-Najm* in which Allah said regarding the disbelievers: ‘…and (those who) care for no more than the life of this world’ (*an-Najm:* 29). This signifies that the life of this world constitutes their ultimate aim, and they act only for its sake. The disbelievers have surely confirmed their disbelief by saying: ‘There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die as we come to life, and nothing but time destroys us’ (*al-Jathiya:* 24). Hence, the Hereafter is of no account to them. Therefore, Allah deemed their opinion to be foolish by saying: ‘which, to them, is the only thing worth knowing’ (*an-Najm:* 30). This is the ultimate extent of the knowledge they had acquired, and they stopped at that limit of knowledge.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (21185), by At-Tabarani in Al-Muʿjam Al-Kabir (7077), and is found in Musnad ash-shamiyin (1036, 1494) as well as in Shuʿab Al-Iman by Al-Bayhaqi (5181) as related by Abu Umama . In its full version, it is narrated that The Messenger of Allah prayed for the youth: {O my Allah, forgive him his transgression and purify his heart, and safeguard his sexual organ.} And afterwards, the young man never so much as glanced at anything.*

It is bewildering that they have closed their ears and deafened their hearing towards the guidance, and that they did not adopt the knowledge that Allah *Glorified is He* revealed to them. ‘Behold, your Lord is fully aware as to who has strayed from His path, and fully aware is He as to who follows His guidance’ (*an-Najm:* 30).

Let us first examine the conciseness of expression in the Arabic phrase *huwa aʿlamu*, ‘(He) is fully aware’. In this phrase, knowledge and awareness were limited to Allah *Glorified is He* alone. This because the issue of guidance and straying from the right path is primarily related to the world of the unseen and no one is acquainted with this world except Allah, the One Who knows all secrets and what is even more concealed than secrets. Moreover, every person claims to be rightly guided and that others are misguided. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* reserved this knowledge exclusively for Himself.

It is noteworthy to say that Allah said: ‘Behold, your Lord is fully aware as to who has strayed from His path, and fully aware is He as to who follows His guidance,’ (*an-Najm:* 30) after He had said to His Prophet: ‘Avoid, therefore, those who turn away from all remembrance of Us’ (*an-Najm:* 29). There is a correspondence between these two verses, as Allah’s knowledge of their reaction to His message preceded their existence and their turning away from this message.

Therefore, Allah told Prophet Muhammad *may the peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him* to unburden his soul: ‘…thou art not bound to do more than deliver the message (entrusted to thee)’ (*ash-Shura:* 48). Moreover, Allah informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of those who will be guided and those who will remain lost in misguidance. In this respect, consider that Abu Lahab, Abu Sufyan, ʿAmr ibn Al-‘As and Khalid ibn Al-Walid were all aligned in a single trench against Islam, but it was Allah’s will that Abu Sufyan, Khalid and ʿAmr become believers. On the other hand, Abu Lahab continued in his idolatry, even after the following verses were revealed concerning him: ‘Doomed are the hands of Abu Lahab, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him, and all that he has gained? (In the life to come) he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing’ (*al-Masad:* 1-3). Then, Allah said:

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ لِيَجْزِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسَٰٓـُٔواْ
بِمَا عَمِلُواْ وَيَجْزِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُواْ بِٱلْحُسْنَى ﴿٣١﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God.
He will repay those who do evil according to their deeds,
and reward, with what is best, those who do good [31]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 31)

Here, again, is a concise expression that placed the predicate of a nominal clause before its nominal clause signifying that everything belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* alone. In another passage Allah said: ‘To Allah alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth’ (*ash-Shura:* 49). Now, the heavens and the earth are wondrous in themselves, and that which is in them is even more marvellous. ‘Indeed, to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth’ (*an-Najm:* 31). Likewise, He said: ‘And to Allah (alone) is the knowledge of the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth’ (*an-Nahl:* 77).

There are three realms of Allah’s dominion. He holds absolute command over the heavens and the earth. He supremely reigns over the contents that are in the heavens and the earth, as each of them has wondrous and amazing contents of their own. Finally, he is the sole master of what is even more marvellous, which is the unseen realm that is hidden from us in the dominions of the heavens and the earth.

This means that mankind should not abstain from working towards more discoveries and inventions, as the universe will continue to overflow with marvellous signs and wonders, some of which they are familiar with and some of which they have no knowledge of. The heavens and the earth contain provisions which have no limit and cannot be finished as long as the heavens and the earth abide. Then, when the marvels and secrets run out with the termination of this world, there will arise wonders and secrets of the Hereafter.

Then, Allah made it clear that this dominion over the heavens and the earth is the reason for the presence of recompense in the Hereafter. This is because the dominion is the dominion of Allah *Glorified is He* and the creation is Allah’s creation. Indeed, the messengers are Allah’s messengers, and the ordained path is the ordained path of Allah. In front of you, O man, is the vast universe and all that it comprises of wondrous cosmic signs showing the power and capability of the Creator. Therefore, you should seek to find the proofs and signs of the Creator throughout His creation.

Then Allah sent to you His messengers, revealed His Books, established the laws and clarified that which is permissible and that which is forbidden. He defined the limits and made the reward clear. It is absolutely necessary that the dominion of the heavens and the earth be concluded with requital. Indeed, the recompense must comprise the same nature as the deeds that were done in this world. Therefore, Allah said: '…and so He will reward those who do evil in accordance with what they did, and will reward those who do good with ultimate good' (*an-Najm:* 31).

We have previously said that there are three kinds of messages (*ayat*). These include the cosmic signs which indicate the omnipotence of Allah *Glorified is He*. They also include the miraculous signs which illustrate the truthfulness of the messenger in his conveyance from Allah *Glorified is He* and finally, include the verses of a binding judicial nature which the Noble Quran encompasses. Hence, whoever does not give proper consideration to these verses, and does not receive them in an adequate manner, has done wrong and will be punished for their transgression.

On the other hand, whoever receives them with care and excellence, will be rewarded for this excellence. It is as if their worldly obedience was a greeting or a salutation to the One Who ordained these religious obligations, and Allah *Glorified is He* will return the greeting in a superior form: '…and will reward those who do good with ultimate good' (*an-Najm:* 31). In other words, they will be rewarded with a reward that is better than their actions. Thus, if Allah had ordered us to return any good salutation in this world with a superior salutation, we should know that Allah will reward our good actions with a greater good in the Hereafter.

Consider the fluency and the precision of the expression that is found in this verse. Allah did not say that He will punish those who have done evil with an evil punishment, but instead said that the punishment will be: '...in accordance with what they did,' (*an-Najm:* 31). He will not confront them with an 'evil' action, but rather, He will place before them the deeds which they have done themselves. This is an illustration of the justice of Allah *Glorified is He* that is referred to in the following verse: '…for it is not Allah who does them wrong, but it is they who are wronging themselves' (*Al-'Imran:* 117).

Furthermore, in our verse in the chapter of *an-Najm*, Allah mentioned the reward of the evil deeds before mentioning the reward of the doers of good, in order that the recompense of the ultimate good (*al-husna*) be the last thing that we hear. Subsequently, the verses expanded and provided detailed descriptions concerning those who have done good, including the aspects of charity and righteousness found in their deeds, Then, Allah said:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كَبَٰٓئِرَ ٱلْإِثْمِ وَٱلْفَوَٰحِشَ إِلَّا ٱللَّمَمَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ وَٰسِعُ ٱلْمَغْفِرَةِ ۚ
هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِذْ أَنشَأَكُم مِّنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ وَإِذْ أَنتُمْ أَجِنَّةٌ فِى بُطُونِ
أُمَّهَٰتِكُمْ ۖ فَلَا تُزَكُّوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ ۖ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰٓ ﴿٣٢﴾

As for those who avoid grave sins and foul acts, though they
may commit small sins, your Lord is ample in forgiveness.
He has been aware of you from the time He produced you
from the earth and from your hiding places in your mothers'
wombs, so do not assert your own goodness: He knows best
who is mindful of Him [32] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 32)

One of the attributes of those that do the good is that they: '…avoid the (truly) grave sins and immoralities' (*an-Najm:* 32). This is to say, that they entirely avoid these major transgressions (*al-kaba᾽ir*) of sins, and do not approach this forbidden area. However, they may still fall in occasional unfortunate slips (*al-lamam*) which are minor sins. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* with His Mercy guaranteed the forgiveness of the minor offenses by deleting them and providing an eraser which removes them. This eraser is the five obligatory prayers, on the condition that we avoid the major sins.

Hence, we find that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a Hadith: 'The five daily obligatory prayers, and one Friday congregational prayer to the next Friday congregational prayer, and one *Ramadan* to the next *Ramadan*, are an expiation (*kaffara*) for what lies between them, if the major sins are avoided.'(1) So, whoever does these obligatory good deeds, and pursues this prescribed path, will have the ultimate good (*al-husna*), and will be considered among the doers of good.

Therefore, the sinful offenses and lewd acts are the major sins that Allah *Glorified is He* threatened with dire consequences. The Arabic word *al-fawahish* (immoralities) comprises the major sins that are excessively obscene or abominable. Allah *Glorified is He* has laid down a prescribed punishment and a penalty for these sins.

Then, there are the occasional unfortunate slips (*al-lamam*) which Allah *Glorified is He* will forgive. These are the miniscule insignificant sins which do not give rise to serious harm. However, there is a condition for these sins to be forgiven, which is that a person should not recklessly indulge upon them, or be excessive in doing them, in order that they do not become part of a sinful habit.

So, if Allah *Glorified is He* deals with you in this manner, then you should show sufficient bashfulness towards Him and refrain from being emboldened in disobeying Him, even in the domain of minor sins. This is because when a minor offence is added to another minor offence and is committed repeatedly and regularly over time with wilfulness, it becomes a major sin. Moreover, the thinking people should consider the Greatness of Allah. He is the One they are disobeying when they are committing these minor sins. Hence, they are ordered to restrain themselves.

We have said that the Arabic word *al-kaba᾽ir* refers to the grave sins. This word is the plural of *kabeera* which is a sin concerning which Allah *Glorified is He* gave a stern warning of chastisement in the Hereafter, or are the crimes for which He has prescribed a penalty in this world. These sins pertain to the rights of the servants, for Allah *Glorified is He* has given precedence to the rights of servants over His own rights and has established just punishments for them in this world. Do you not see that Allah *Glorified is He* has made the payment of debt a greater priority than the performance of pilgrimage? Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not pray at the funeral of one of the Companions because he was in debt, and urged the other companions to first settle the debts of the deceased companion.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in his Sunnan Al-kubra and also in Shu῾ab Al-Iman (3466) as related by Abu Hurayra. It was also narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (344, 342) with a slightly different wording.*

It is even said that: 'Whoever performs pilgrimage without having behaved in an obscene manner, or having acted sinfully, will be delivered from his sins like the day his mother gave birth to him.'(1) It is also said that this Hadith pertains to the due rights of Allah *Glorified is He* as well. However, the due rights of servants will remain upheld until they are justly settled, or until an atoning punishment is carried out. This provides a deterrent factor and prevents people from recklessly transgressing against the inviolable belongings of others.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this lesson in his supplication: 'O Allah. Whatever I have done against your rights, and then grant me forgiveness for it, and whatever I have done against the rights of your servants, and then relieve me of its burden.' He was only asking for forgiveness from the servants' rights only if he became unable to fulfil their requirements himself.

Consider a thief who has wronged his own soul and wishes to repent after persisting in his crimes. In order to repent, he must exert every effort to restore the stolen possessions to their owners. Then, if he is still unable to do this, he must calculate the sum total of all that he has robbed from the people, and give it away in charity with the intention that the reward for this action be attributed to its rightful owners. If Allah *Glorified is He* acknowledges the sincerity of his repentance, He will forgive these transgressed rights, as a mercy unto this repentant sinner.

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(1) *This Hadith is related by Ahmad in his Musnad (6839) with the wording: "Whoever performs pilgrimage without having behaved in an obscene manner, or having acted sinfully, will revert to the form he had on the day his mother gave birth to him." It is related by Al-Bayhaqi in his Shuʿab (3933, 3934, 3935), by Ibn Hibban in his Sahih (3764) and by Ibn Khuzayma in his Sahih (3214) as related by Abu Hurayra with the wording: "Whoever performs pilgrimage, without having behaved obscenely, or having acted sinfully, will revert to the state when his mother gave birth to him." None of these Hadiths contains the phrase, "...from his sins."*

Let us take note that the verse conjoined the word *al-fawahish* (‘shameful deeds’) with the word *kabaʾir al-ithm* (‘grave sins’). This is because both of these groups are types of grave sins. However, shameful deeds add the attribute of obscenity and ignominy to that of a major sin. Hence, they constitute more serious and more severe offences than major sins, because they are abominable and abhorrent.

Scholars have discussed the topic of major sins (*al-kabaʾir*) and have established a link between them and the bodily extremity or organ which commits them. ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd(1) was a pious scholar who used to avoid that which other scholars and poets of his day were indulged in, regarding their visits to kings and princes in order to receive their gifts. He continued this avoidance, until a poet in the ʿAbbasid era said of him:

‘All of them seek quarry

Except for ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd’

ʿAmr Ibn ʿUbayd examined the issue of major sins (*al-kabaʾir*) and wished to ask the most knowledgeable man of his time with respect to the Quran and the transmitted practice of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding these sins. Ultimately, he found no one more knowledgeable than Ja’far As-Sadiq(2), who was the son of Muhammad Al-Baqir*,* who was in turn the son of Zayn

Al-ʿAbideen, the son of Al-Husayn*,* the son of ‘Ali ʿibn Abu Taleb and Fatima

Az-Zahraʾ *may Allah be pleased with them all.*

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(1) *ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd At-Taymy (Abu ʿUthman Al-Basri) was the most famous scholar among the Muʿtazilites of his time, and he was their mufti. He was also one of the famous ascetics. He was born in 80 AH and died in 144 AH at the age of 64 years. His grandfather was among the captives of Persia, and his father was a policeman for Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf in Basra. He died in the vicinity of Mecca. There are some scholars who regarded him as a falsifier and a disbeliever.*

(2) *He is Abu ʿAbdullah Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi, one of the most honorable of the generations after the Prophetic age who held an exceptionally elevated status in religious knowledge. He was born in 80 AH and died in 148 AH at the age of 68. Among his students were the two Imams Abu Hanifa and Malik. His place of birth and death was in Medina. (Summarized from Al-Aʿlam of Az-Zirikli 2/126)*

Ja’far As-Sadiq was well versed in the verses of the Quran, the absorption of its secrets and the investigation of its treasures. He used to research its meanings and bring forth proofs based upon them. He once said: ‘I am astonished by the one who fears anything without occupying himself with the remembrance of the verse: ‘Allah is enough for us; and how excellent a guardian is He!’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 173) Indeed, I have surely seen that Allah *Glorified is He* said after it: ‘…and (they) returned with Allah’s blessings and bounty, without having been touched by evil’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 174). He went on to say, ‘and I am astonished by the one who is plunged into anxiety without occupying himself with the remembrance of the verse: ‘There is no deity except You (Allah)! Limitless are You in Your glory! Verily, I have done wrong (*La illaha illa anta Subhanak, Inny kontu mina azhzhalimeen*)’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 87). Indeed, I have seen that Allah said after it: ‘And so We responded unto him and delivered him from (his) distress: for thus do We deliver all who have faith’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 88).

Furthermore, Ja’far As- Sadiq said, ‘And I am astonished by the one who is the object of insidious plotting without occupying himself with the remembrance of the verse: ‘…But (as for me,) I commit myself unto Allah: for, verily, Allah sees all that is in (the hearts of) His servants,’ (*Ghafir:* 44). Indeed, I have seen that Allah said after it: ‘And Allah protected him from the evil of their scheming,’ (*Ghafir:* 45). And I am astonished by the one who desires this world without occupying himself with the remembrance of the verse: ‘…Whatever Allah wills (shall come to pass, for) there is no power except with Allah’ (*al-Kahf:* 39). Indeed, I have seen that Allah said after it: ‘Yet, it may well be that my Lord will give me something better than your garden’ (*al-Kahf:* 40).

Thus, Ja’far (1) *may Allah be pleased with him* established this therapeutic prescription and derived it from the Book of Allah. This prescription encompasses everything that can happen to the servant in terms of their different circumstances. So, ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd went to ask Ja’far about the major sins (*al-kabaʾir*) inquiring about each grave sin according to the physical organ which commits it.

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(1) *The story of Jaʿfar As-Sadiq with ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd and his talk about cardinal sins*

Ja'far replied: 'The heart is required not to associate any partners with Allah, not to despair from the mercy (*rawh*) of Allah, and not to feel secure from the encompassing plots (*makr*) of Allah.' Then, he brought evidence from the Book of Allah for each one of these concepts. With respect to the issue of associating partners with Allah, Ja'far cited the verse in which Allah said: 'Verily, Allah, does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, and He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills' (*an-Nisa': 48*). Regarding the sin of despairing from the mercy of Allah, Ja'far cited the verse: 'O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against your own selves! Despair not of Allah's mercy' (*az-Zumar:* 53)

One of the major sins of the tongue is the offering of false testimony. Allah said: **'**And (know that the true servants of Allah are only) those who never bear witness to what is false, and, whenever they pass by (people engaged in) frivolity, pass on with dignity' (*al-Furqan:* 72). Other grave sins of the tongue include slandering chaste believing women behind their backs, and swearing an ominous oath (*al-yameen al-ghamus*) which means making a solemn oath regarding something which has passed and intentionally falsifying reality. Additionally, sorcery is among the major sins of the tongue.

As for the major sins of the stomach, these are related to drinking wine, consuming the wealth of the orphans, and eating from the money resulting from usury. We seek the refuge of Allah from such sins. With respect to the sexual organs, their grave sins are fornication or adultery. Regarding the hands, their major sins consist of stealing and murder, while the sins of the legs involve running away after engaging in the combat of battle. The sinfulness of each of these grave transgressions was clearly stated in the Book of Allah.

These major sins also include abandoning the observance of the prescribed prayers. This sin is very grave, as many parts of the body are involved in it. Neglecting prayers is a major sin because it was imposed as an obligation, as we have said, directly by Allah *Glorified is He* to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, these prayers should never be waived by a Muslim under any circumstances. Therefore, it is one of the pillars of Islam, and also, a pillar of the Muslim himself because it is obligatory upon him and cannot be omitted.

As for the minor infractions (*al-lamam*), these are the transgressions that are lesser than the major sins (*al-kabaʾir*). They are called *as-saghaʾir* (the lesser sins), and include looking (annazhar) at what is forbidden. It is for this reason that it is said: ‘You are given the first glance, but you are not permitted the second one.’(1) This is because the first glance came upon you unexpectedly, and you necessarily need that first glance to recognize the person’s identity.

As for the second glance, it comprises the intention of continuing to stare, and this, in turn, draws us into looking at what is forbidden. Hence, the person who prolongs the first glance under the excuse that the first glance was permitted should beware. Indeed, Allah is the Overseer of sight and is the One Who is aware of the treachery of the eye and that which is concealed in the heart. In reality, you are not actually entitled for the first glance, yet you are excused in taking it since it spontaneously occurred to you without your intention.

Other minor sins include giving someone a light blow which does no physical harm, finding fault with some attribute of someone else, or with one of their features or mannerisms, and other things of this nature. It is for this reason that Allah refers to them as *al-lamam*. The records of such misdemeanours will be quickly forgiven by asking Allah for His forgiveness and the observance of daily acts of devotion.

Therefore, following this passage, Allah said: ‘…behold, your Lord is vast in forgiveness’ (*an-Najm:* 32). Yes, indeed, Allah’s forgiveness is vast and frequent. Indeed, He created man and is aware of the weak spots in him. When He imposed certain obligations upon him, He did not constrict him or place severe hardships upon him. Rather, Allah imposed obligations upon him to the extent of his capabilities, and did not make him responsible for them except after the attainment of maturity. Hence, as a child, he remains free to romp around in the universe without any binding religious obligations for more than ten years.

Then, once he has been made responsible for the injunctions, the negative consequences of committing minor sins are erased, and the woeful punishments of grave sins is made clear to him so that he does not approach them. This is a mercy from Allah *Glorified is He* for his servant. Allah said in another chapter: '…and He pardons a great deal (of sins)' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15). Allah's forgiveness is abounding and forbearing. His mercy takes precedence over his wrath, and his pardon takes precedence over his punishment.

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(1) *Burayra ibn Al-Hasib Al-Aslami narrated that Prophet Muhammad said to ʿAli: “O ʿAli, verily, you are given the first glance, but not the second one.” This Hadith is narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (1837), by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2701), and by Ahmad in his Musnad (21896, 21913, and 21943).*

Then, in a man's life comes the great repentance, as Allah said: '…And so, when he attains full maturity and reaches forty years, he (that is righteous) prays, 'O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of You with which You have graced me and my parents, and that I may do what is right (in a manner) that will meet with Your goodly acceptance; and grant me righteousness in my offspring (as well). Verily, unto You have I turned in repentance: for, verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves unto You!'' (*al-Ahqaf:* 15)

Therefore, the one who disobeys his Lord after the age of forty is a spoiled person. This is because they have attained the age where they can no longer be excused for having the audacity to disobey Allah *Glorified is He*. On the other hand, when a Muslim attains an advanced elderly age in Islam, Allah *Glorified is He* may choose not to punish him since he had devoted himself to Islam in his younger years.

Regarding His saying: '…He is fully aware of you when He brings you into being out of dust, and when you are still hidden in your mothers' wombs…' (*an-Najm:* 32), the initial creation is known by no one save Allah, a fact which is proved by His saying: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves…' (*al-Kahf:* 51).

His saying '…He brings you into being out of dust…' (*an-Najm:* 32) means that He initially created you from the clay of the earth which is a reference to the creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. Inasmuch as we are created of the earth, it is thus considered our origin and mother, which is why we, the sons, should be attached to their mother to which will be their final return.

Subsequently, He mentions another phase of the phases of creation: '…and when you are still hidden in your mothers' wombs…' (*an-Najm:* 32). For while Adam was created out of earth's clay, yet his offspring arose from coupling which results in the creation of the foetuses in the wombs of mothers.

Allah says: '…do not, then, consider yourselves pure…' (*an-Najm:* 32) The Arabic *tazkiyat an-nafs* means 'self-praise' and 'deeming purity'. There follows His saying: '…[For] He knows best as to who is conscious of Him.' (*an-Najm:* 32); this is to say that Allah *the Almighty* is Most Aware of the subtle, hidden and what is apparent. He is the Most Knowledgeable of you. He knows what you conceal and what you appear. Thus, there is no room for deeming yourself a praiseworthy or a superior person.

Even in the case of praising others and eulogising them, we have learned to say: 'We do not evaluate one's belief; it is Allah Who does so.' This is because He *the Almighty* is the One Who praises and purifies, and He is the fully Aware of those possessed by obedience, and true fearing of Him *Glorified is He*.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:(1)

أَفَرَءَيْتَ ٱلَّذِى تَوَلَّىٰ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَأَعْطَىٰ قَلِيلًا وَأَكْدَىٰٓ ﴿٣٤﴾ أَعِندَهُۥ عِلْمُ ٱلْغَيْبِ فَهُوَ يَرَىٰٓ ﴿٣٥﴾
أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبَّأْ بِمَا فِى صُحُفِ مُوسَىٰ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَإِبْرَٰهِيمَ ٱلَّذِى وَفَّىٰٓ ﴿٣٧﴾

[Prophet], consider that man who turned away [33] he only gave a little and then he stopped [34] Does he have knowledge of the Unseen? Can he see [the Hereafter]? [35] Has he not been told what was written in the Scriptures of Moses [36] and of Abraham, who fulfilled his duty [37]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 33 - 37)

It is said(1) that these verses were revealed regarding Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira. At the early period of Islam, he argued with Muslims concerning their beliefs, turned away from it and from the Quran. His heart, later on, began to soften and he was attracted by what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him. He gave a small assurance of protection to the cause of the Message and felt reassured by this.

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(1) *Concerning the cause of revelation of these verses, As-Suddi, Al-Kalbi and Al-Musayyab ibn Sharik narrated that Ibn ʿAbbas, Allah be pleased with him, said: They were revealed concerning ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan Allah be pleased with him. He used to disperse wealth and give in charity, so one day his milk brother ʿAbdullah ibn Abu Sarh said to him: 'What is this that you are doing? Soon you will have nothing left.' ʿUthman replied: 'I have surely accumulated many sins and made many mistakes, and verily I seek the good pleasure of Allah the Almighty with what I do, and I hope for his pardon.' Thereupon ʿAbdullah said to him: 'Give me your camel with its saddle and I will assume responsibility for all of your sins.' So he gave him what he requested and called people to witness upon what had been agreed. Thereafter, he refrained from some of what he formerly used to give in charity. It was then that Allah the Almighty revealed: 'Have you, then, ever considered him who turns away [from remembering Us, and cares for no more than the life of this world], [33] and gives so little [of himself for the good of his soul], and so grudgingly? [34]' (an-Najm: 33-34) Then ʿUthman returned to giving even more and better than previously. See Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p. 227.*

Thereafter, he recalled his high position among his people and feared that he would be accused of having become a monotheistic gnostic after being a follower of the religion of his fathers and forefathers. So he retreated and reverted back to his former beliefs. It is said that a man came to him and warned about believing in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* telling him: ‘If you are afraid of punishment, then I will assume charge of it in your place in exchange for you giving me such-and-such.’ Then he gave him what he asked and reverted to disbelief and refrained from giving anything more in charity.

It is also said that these verses were revealed concerning An-Nadaru ibn Al-Harith(2). A man came to him and told him: ‘Most surely, Allah's punishment is severe, but I will take over its burden from you, so give me five young camels. However, he subsequently found this offer too generous, and so the man withheld this gift from him. It has also been said that these verses were revealed with regard to Safwan ibn Umayya.

This is the meaning of: ‘[Prophet], consider that man who turned away…’ (*an-Najm:* 33). This means that this man had shunned you and gone his own way. The next verse continues: ‘he only gave a little and then he stopped’ (*an-Najm:* 34), that is, of gifts or assurance of protection. With respect to the

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(1) *See Al-Wahidi, Asbab An-Nuzul, p. 228. This is the opinion of Mujahid and Ibn Zayd; he opines that they were revealed regarding Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira. He had followed Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him in his religion and was reviled by one of the polytheists who said to him: ‘Why have you abandoned the religion of the elders, and decried them as being misguided, asserting that they are in hellfire?’ He answered: ‘I was afraid of the punishment of Allah the Almighty.’ Then the one who had reviled him gave him something of that which he had safeguarded for him, and then became niggardly and withheld further gifts. Thereupon, Allah the Almighty revealed this verse.*

(2) *See Az-Zirikli, Al-‘Alam, 8/33. This is the opinion of Ad-Dahhak who opines that An-Nadaru ibn Al-Harith gave five young she-camels to a poor man of the emigrants in order that he renounce his religion, and further guaranteed him that he would take charge from him the burden of his reversion to disbelief. He was the bearer of the flag of the polytheists at the Battle of Badr and was killed in it in the year 2 A.H.*

Arabic phrase *wa-akda*, (stopped), it means that He withhold his giving out of stinginess. One says: ‘So-and-so dug a well-pit and it turned out successfully for him.’ In other words, he got what he was anticipating from it, while another says: ‘So-and-so dug a well-pit but it was begrudging.’ This is to say, that he did not gain anything, or that he came across a large stone which hindered him from reaching his objective. The stone in this case is called a *kudya*. In a related sense, we have the expression: ‘An insurmountable obstacle (*aqaba ka᾽da*)’. In other words, it prevents you from attaining your goal.

Allah says: 'Does he have knowledge of the Unseen? Can he see [the Hereafter]?' (*an-Najm:* 35) It means: ‘Did he look into the world of the unseen and gain cognizance of the truth? Or did he come to know that this man will fulfil his promise of taking charge of the burden for him?’ The next two verses read: ‘Has he not been told what was written in the Scriptures of Moses [36] and of Abraham, who fulfilled his duty [37]’ (*an-Najm:* 36-37). In other words: ‘Is this opponent unaware of the Message of truth which came in the Scriptures of Musa (Moses) and Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*?’

Yet, what is meant by with what came in the scripture of Musa and Ibrahim *peace be upon them*? The Quran gives us a detailed explanation saying:

أَلَّا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ﴿٣٨﴾ وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنسَٰنِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾
وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُۥ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾ ثُمَّ يُجْزَىٰهُ ٱلْجَزَآءَ ٱلْأَوْفَىٰ ﴿٤١﴾

That no soul shall bear the burden of another [38] that man will only have what he has worked towards [39] that his labour will be seen [40] and that in the end he will be repaid in full for it [41] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 38 - 41)

This is what is related in the Scriptures of Musa and Ibrahim *peace be upon them*: ‘That no soul shall bear the burden of another.’ (*an-Najm:* 38) No soul shall assume the burden of the sin of another soul. Therefore, do not think that someone can carry your burden, and that the punishment will befall him instead of you, for the reckoning in the Hereafter is based upon equity and justice.

Moreover: ‘That man will only have what he has worked towards…’ (*an-Najm:* 39) A man only has his deeds recorded for him: if they are good, then it will be good with him; if they are evil, then it will be bad for him. This eliminates the hope of deriving benefit from someone else's deeds, as He *the Almighty* said: '[On the Day of Judgment,] every human being will be held in pledge for whatever [evil] he has wrought' (*al-Muddaththir:* 38). Thus, you do not benefit except from your own deeds and your own striving, so apply yourself with assiduity.

At the end of the chapter of *al-A'la*, He *the Almighty* says: 'Verily, [all] this has indeed been [said] in the earlier revelations [18] the revelations of Ibrahim and Musa. [19]' (*al-A'la:* 18-19) Yet, inasmuch as the context here is relating to a discussion regarding the fulfilment of a promise of someone who said to him: 'I will relieve you of the burden of your sins', He *the Almighty* mentions the attribute of fidelity possessed by Ibrahim *peace be upon him* saying: '…and of Ibrahim, who fulfilled his duty.' (*an-Najm:* 37)

For this reason, He *the Almighty* says with respect to Abraham *peace be upon him*: 'And [remember this:] when his Lord tried Ibrahim by [His] commandments and the latter fulfilled them…' (*al-Baqara:* 124). Yes, indeed, Ibrahim *peace be upon him* carried out that which Allah commanded him to do in the most literal way, and he succeeded in the examination with excellent grade, and with the rank of honour. This is evident in the story of the *Ka'ba* construction, and in the story of the sacrifice of his son Ishmael *peace be upon them*. Then, when he had fulfilled what he was commanded to do, Allah said to him: '…Behold, I shall make you a leader of men…' (*al-Baqara:* 124). Thus, the reward was in accord with the fulfilment and the sincerity of execution.

Certain orientalists have scrutinised this verse: 'That no soul shall bear the burden of another' (*an-Najm:* 38) saying: 'How can we reconcile it with His *the Almighty* saying: 'Hence, on Resurrection Day they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray: oh, how evil the load with which they shall be burdened!' (*an-Nahl:* 25) So which of these two is more correct? To this we respond: 'Both of them are correct since each one of them has a specific meaning. The first speaks of sin and evil which man commits of his own accord. Thus, he bears the punishment for this, and no one can relieve him of it. But as for the second verse, it speaks about man who misguides others. He himself is misguided and his misguidance extends to others. Therefore, he bears his own burden and the burden of the one whom he has misguided without true knowledge.'

Scholars have differed in their opinions about His saying: 'man will only have what he has worked towards.' (*an-Najm:* 39) Some of them have said that man has nothing except what he sends before himself of good deeds, and that no one can benefit from the deeds of anyone else. Others have said that man can indeed benefit from the deeds of another. In our history and in the transmitted practice of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we find that which supports this view. On our part, we give preference to the second opinion. This is because striving refers to an unrestricted endeavour in view of a specific goal. Now, this endeavour may have an evil end, such as the one who strives for corruption and injustice on the earth. It may be towards a laudable end, such as the one who strives for the betterment of the universe and its probity.

Striving differs according to the capacity of the one who is striving, and the extent his faith in the precepts of his religion and his homeland is. Hence, you have one person who strives for himself and gives no thought except to his own interest. But there is another person who strives for his family, another who strives for his country, and a third who strives to help the entire world. In this regard, a poet once said:

In accordance with the capacity of those of firm resolve
comes the accomplishment of challenging endeavours
And in accordance with the capacity of those of magnanimity
arise deeds of noble generosity.

Hence, it is said: 'Unto men belong loci (*awtan*) which vary according to the differences of their zealous ambitions.' Thus, for one man, his locus is himself; for another man, his locus is his family. For a third, his locus is his homeland; for a fourth, his locus is the entire world. This latter pertains to the philosophy of faith that urges the believer to go beyond his own benefit, extending to all people even the disbelievers among them.

With this philosophy and with this ideal, a man will be useful to others. The proofs of this opinion are numerous. Was Prophet Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him* not sent to the whole world? Are the Mercy and Grace of Allah not shown to both believer and unbeliever like? Did Allah not say to him *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘And [thus, O Prophet,] We have sent thee as [an evidence of Our] grace towards all the worlds’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 107)?

A manifestation of His Mercy unto those who stand awaiting judgment in the Hereafter is that He intervenes on their behalf by expediting the final reckoning for them. This is because they find themselves in a situation in which they yearn for departure, even if it be to hellfire. Furthermore, the intercession of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* includes interceding for those monotheists who committed sins and who have entered the fire. Is this not benefitting from the deeds of someone else?

Moreover, does Islam not command us to pray for the dead? If prayer for the dead were of no benefit to the deceased, this would be frivolous. Evidence of this is found in the fact that we petition Allah on his behalf in this prayer, and this is a benefit. But the counter opinion argues: ‘But do we pray over every deceased person? We pray over a deceased Muslim. Hence, the benefit comes from his being a Muslim, and his Islam is what avails him.’

To this, we say: ‘Take into consideration another proof which is clear in His *the Almighty* saying: ‘And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste…’ (*at-Tur:* 21). Does, therefore, offspring not derive benefit from the uprightness of their parents?’ But they retort: ‘They are availed by their uprightness because they have borne the burden of this uprightness in this world, and therefore Allah compensates them for what they have been deprived of in the Hereafter.’ This is to say that the righteous man who is intent upon eating and drinking only what is lawful undoubtedly oppresses his children. This is in contrast to the one who romps about through the length and breadth of this world without any concern for the issue of what is lawful and what is forbidden. This latter man’s children will be in a better condition in terms of food, drink, and clothing, and so forth. But the man who is pious and upright, his children will receive blessings of the Hereafter as compensation for what they have endured in this world.

In addition, it is related(1) about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he once passed by a man who was praying alone. So, he said: 'Is there no man who will offer charity to this one?' In other words, is there no man to pray with him in order for him to receive the reward of praying in congregation? Is this not benefitting from the deeds of someone else?

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refrained from praying over a deceased person who was in debt(2), his abstaining was for the benefit of the deceased. The deceased actually derived benefit from this abstention: Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refrained from praying over him because he wanted to urge people to settle their debts: 'Whoever obtains people’s money with the desire to pay it back, Allah will settle the debt for him...'(3) It seems that this deceased person died, while he owed a debt which he was unable of repaying. Therefore, he *peace and blessings be upon him* wished to provoke the sentiments towards goodness in the souls of the Companions so that they would take the initiative of repaying the debt of their comrade. When he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Go ahead and pray over your Companion', Abu Qatada stood up and said: ‘I will repay his debt for him, O Messenger of Allah.’ Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* led the funeral prayer over him(4). Is this not deriving benefit from the deeds of others?

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(1) *See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. (487, Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. (11187, 11380), and Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak ʿala As-Sahihayn, Hadith no. (714), on the authority of Abu Saʿid Al-Khudari Allah be Pleased with him.*

(2) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to be brought a deceased man who was in debt, so he would ask: 'Did he leave behind anything to settle his debt?' If it were said that he left enough behind to repay it, he would pray over him. But if not, he would say: 'Go ahead and pray over your comrade.' But after Allah had granted him conquests, he said: 'I am more duty-bound for the believers than they are for themselves. Hence, whoever dies while he owes a debt, it is my responsibility to repay it, and whoever leaves behind wealth or property, these are for his heirs.' This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih, no. (3040).*

(3) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih no. (2212) and by Ahmad in his Musnad no. (8378, 9039) as related by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(4) *It is related by Salama ibn Al-Akwaʿ Allah be pleased with him who said: 'We were sitting in the presence of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when there came a funeral procession, and people asked him to pray over it. Thereupon he asked: 'Did* =

In order for us to settle this dispute and solve this controversy, we say: If we carefully examine the verse: ‘That man will only have what he has worked towards.’ (*an-Najm:* 39) We will find that it supports our opinion. Here, the initial preposition *li* of the Arabic phrase *li-l-insan*, translated as ‘accounted unto man’, is, as stated by grammarians, to indicate possession or control. This is such as when you say: ‘Zayd has nothing belonging to him in my possession except for ten. This is the actual truth.’

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* mentioned justice, but did not mention magnanimity or gracious favour. Now, when you yourself go into a restaurant, for example, in order to eat lunch, as you are on the point of leaving, you ask the waiter: ‘How much is the bill?’ He then says: ‘Such-and-such amount.’ Whereupon you tell him: ‘Here, take this and keep the change for yourself.’ This is what transpires between people in affairs of this insignificant world. Therefore, how would you imagine things to be in affairs of religion and ordained law? If this is your own generous giving, then how would it be with Allah’s Generous Giving?

With respect to His saying: ‘That his labor will be seen.’ (*an-Najm:* 40), which literally means ‘his striving will be seen,’ this striving is not neglected just like that without comment or consequences. Nay, indeed, it will be monitored and perceived, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘And say [unto them, O Prophet]: “Act! And Allah will behold your deeds, and [so will] His Apostle, and the believers…’ (*at-Tawba:* 105).

In the verse under study, the Arabic word *sawfa*, translated as ‘in time... will’, denotes the future. Hence, your striving does dissolve into nothing; rather,

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= *he leave any debt unpaid?' They said, ‘No.’ Then he asked: 'Then did he leave anything of an estate?' They said, ‘No.’ So he prayed over him. Then a second funeral procession came, and people said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, lead the funeral prayer for it.’ He asked: 'Did he leave any debt unpaid?' It was said, ‘Yes.’ Then he asked: 'Did he leave behind any estate?' They said, ‘Three Dinars.’ So, he presided over the funeral prayer. Then a third funeral procession came, and the people asked him to pray over it. He then asked: 'Did he leave behind any estate?' They said, ‘No.’ Then, he asked: 'Did he leave behind any unpaid debt?' They replied, ‘Three Dinars.’ Thereupon, he said pray over your comrade’s funeral.' At this point, Abu Qatada said, ‘Pray over him, O Messenger of Allah, and I will repay his debt.’ So, then, he prayed over him.' ---This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, no. (2127, 2131); Abu Dawud narrated a similar Hadith in his Sunnan, no. (2902) and so did At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan, no. (989).*

your deeds in this world will be perceived by Allah and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. In other words, in the Hereafter, where you shall receive a suitable recompense, not a reward based upon simple justice, but rather, a reward based on overflowing magnanimity.

In this context, consider the verse: ‘and that in the end he will be repaid in full for it’ (*an-Najm:* 41). Here, He did not say: ‘the most equitable requital’, but rather, requital with augmentation, gracious generosity, and incentives. As for the saying of Allah: ‘...repaid in full for it’ (*an-Najm:* 41), the Arabic word *al-awfa*, translated as ‘in full’, is in the superlative form which indicates supplemental augmentation. He *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ٱلْمُنتَهَىٰ ﴿٤٢﴾

‘That the final goal is your Lord’[42]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 42)

Unto your Lord is the return, and unto your Lord is the proceeding and ultimate end. The verse is phrased concisely through placing the predicate of the nominal clause before the clause itself, meaning literally: ‘unto your Lord is the ultimate end –or utmost limit’. Unto your Lord alone, apart from anyone or anything else, do all things eventually end up in the Hereafter? Thus, this world is not the final course, and it is not the final goal. This reason confirms this matter before the ordained law. For, if this world were the ultimate goal and the final end, then good fortune would belong to those who pursue their lustful desires and to those who commit injustice and transgressions. This is because, in such circumstances, they would have actualised that which they wanted in this world, and would have enjoyed life in it to its fullest extent, thereby having attained the pleasures of this world. For this they would not be punished or called to account.

Hence, reason says: ‘Nay, there must be a day for reckoning and requital, as justice requires this.’ If only people grasped this verse with certainty and understood this significance, their affairs would be set in order, and a person would think carefully a thousand and one times before he set about disobeying Allah or doing wrong to his fellow men. Moreover, he would take account of this ultimate end (*al-muntaha*) unto which he will inevitably terminate.’

This verse also indicates that while the servant is created by his Lord with free will—to believe or disbelieve, to obey or disobey—, there is nevertheless another domain comprised of coercion in which he has no freedom of choice.

To wit, do you have a choice in your being wealthy or impoverished; healthy or sick, or in the matter of your living or dying?

Thus, to whatever degree you are free and possessed of self-determination, you cannot dispense with your Lord, and you have no refuge other than Him. Therefore, do not rebel against Him through disobedience because your ultimate end is unto Him in the Hereafter for settling of accounts. In addition, your ultimate recourse in the affairs of your worldly life is also unto Him alone, for you are in the grasp of His All-Powerful decree and cannot evade it.

In the light of this, can the one who rebel against the ordained path of Allah rebel against sickness if it afflicts him? Can he fend off the angel of death if his time of death comes? Thus, you have your ultimate end in this world before the ultimate end of the Hereafter.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says(1):

وَأَنَّهُۥ هُوَ أَضْحَكَ وَأَبْكَىٰ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَأَنَّهُۥ هُوَ أَمَاتَ وَأَحْيَا ﴿٤٤﴾
وَأَنَّهُۥ خَلَقَ ٱلزَّوْجَيْنِ ٱلذَّكَرَ وَٱلْأُنثَىٰ ﴿٤٥﴾ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ إِذَا تُمْنَىٰ ﴿٤٦﴾

That it is He who makes people laugh and weep; [43]
that it is He who gives death and life; [44] that He Himself
created the two sexes, male and female, [45] from an ejected
drop of sperm [46] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 43 - 46)

Concerning His saying: 'That it is He who makes people laugh and weep' (*an-Najm:* 43), it signifies that He created laughter and weeping in you, causing you be happy and sad. Hence, for example, when you watch a comic work, you laugh. It is the comedy which provoked laughter in you. However, it did not bring forth in you the inborn disposition to laughter. For this reason, in light of what this activity comprises of uncertainty regarding shared association, Allah *the Almighty* affirms His Singular, Unique role in the act. Hence, none but Him intervenes with it. This verse opens with the Arabic emphatic phrase *wa-anna-hu huwa*, translated as 'and that it is He who…', in which the attached relative pronoun *hu* is reaffirmed by the second relative pronoun *huwa* which is unattached, thus it is He alone Who makes you laugh. In other words, He created in you this natural disposition, and provides you with the aptitude for it.

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(1) *See Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi, Asbab An-Nuzul p. 227; he cites a Hadith related by ʿAʾisha Allah be pleased with him who said: 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him once passed by a group of people who were laughing, and so he told them: 'If you knew what I know, you would weep much and laugh little.' Thereupon, Gabriel peace be upon him revealed unto him His saying: '...and that it is He alone Who causes [you] to laugh and to weep.' (an-Najm: 43) So he returned unto them and said: 'I did not take forty paces, but that Gabriel peace be upon him came to me and said, 'Go back to those people and tell them that Allah the Almighty says: '...and that it is He alone Who causes [you] to laugh and to weep.' (an-Najm: 43)*

Consequently, we find that sentiments and emotions and innate phenomenon in mankind are of a unified nature in all languages, and among all peoples with all their differences. There does not exist, for example, an Arab laugh or an English or German one. There is not a Russian manner of weeping or a Japanese one.

In these aspects, people are alike. Even in terms of gestures, we find that they are unanimous in spite of the differences of languages. Everyone comprehends them because they are the basis of mutual understanding between human beings even before the existence of languages. Gestures constitute the global language.

Similarly, with regard to His saying: '...that it is He who gives death and life' (*an-Najm:* 44), the attached relative pronoun *inna-hu* reconfirms the unattached pronoun *huwa*. This is because the matter of giving life and causing death comprises a kind of shared association. Thus, some may think that the physician, for example, is the one who causes the sick person to die or to live, or one may think that the murderer is the one who kills the slain person.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* claims exclusivity for Himself in these matters which pertain to Him alone apart from anyone but Him. Hence, He says: 'that it is He who gives death and life' (*an-Najm:* 44). The reality is that when the slain is killed, it is not the murderer who causes him to die; rather, it is his pre-ordained time of death that has come, coinciding with this blow and, so he dies. He dies because he was predestined to die at that moment, even if the killer had not smitten him.

For this reason, He *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘He who has created death as well as life…’ (*al-Mulk:* 2**)** Hence, Allah created death and life by Himself, and no one else has anything to do with either of them. Thus, a poet once said:

Whoever does not die by the sword dies in another manner
The causes are numerous and diverse, but death is one.

It is also said: ‘In the case of death without causes, death itself is the cause.’ That is to say, a person died because he was destined to die.

There follows His saying: ‘That He Himself created the two sexes, male and female’ (*an-Najm:* 45). It is noteworthy here that He *the Almighty* did not say: *wa anna-hu huwa*, as in the previous verses where He repeats the relative pronoun to reaffirm that it is Him alone. This is because the phenomenon in question does not call for this emphasis, since the matter of all of creation is rendered unto Allah. No one has ever claimed it for himself, and there is no possible ambiguity of partnership with respect to creation. Concerning the meaning of the Arabic word *az-zawjayn*, translated as ‘the two exes’, it refers to the two genders of male and female. The word *az-zawj* signifies an individual along with another one of his kind, as occurs in His saying: ‘…eight pairs [of livestock], from among sheep one pair...’ (*al-An‘am:* 143).

The following verse reads: ‘From an ejected drop of sperm’ (*an-Najm:* 46); this is a reference to the fact that the basis of creation is a dribble of semen (*nutfa*) which is a drop of sperm. Concerning His saying, ‘…an ejected drop of sperm.’ (*an-Najm:* 46), it refers to the sperm which is ejaculated into the womb of the woman and from which the foetus is created by the Power of Allah.

This verse solves a controversy for us which has long been the object of dispute among scholars. There are those who believe that the woman is the one who is responsible for determining the gender of offspring, male or female. However, when we read: ‘That He Himself created the two sexes, male and female, [45] from an ejected drop of sperm [46]’ (*an-Najm:* 45-46), we know with certainty that the man himself is the one who is responsible for this matter. This is because the word *an-nutfa* refers to the sperm of the man which he ejects into the womb of his wife. Hence, the wife looks like the ground which grows what is planted in it.

Furthermore, we say that the Arab woman has arrived at this truth by means of her nature and innate disposition. Thus, a woman whose husband married another because she only gave birth to daughters said:

What is wrong with Abu Hamza that he does not come unto us
He remains in the dwelling which is next to ours
Angry that we do not bear sons for us
By Allah, this is not in our hands
We are like the earth with respect to its sower
We give them the like of which we have received.

Hence, the Arab woman by means of her primordial nature has come to the same conclusion which scientists have arrived at recently. It is necessary to differentiate between *an-nutfa* and *al-mani*: the former is the fluid in which the seminal organisms live; whereas the latter refers to the microorganism or sperm itself which results in a child.

May Allah have mercy on Al-ʿAqqad (1) who once said: ‘Verily, half a tailor’s thimble contains the offspring of the whole world, and it is possible to fill half a tailor’s thimble with a single ejaculation of man.’ Exalted be Allah!

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ ٱلنَّشْأَةَ ٱلْأُخْرَىٰ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَأَنَّهُۥ هُوَ أَغْنَىٰ وَأَقْنَىٰ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَأَنَّهُۥ هُوَ رَبُّ ٱلشِّعْرَىٰ ﴿٤٩﴾

That He will undertake the second Creation [47] that it is He who gives wealth and possessions [48] that He is the Lord of Sirius [49] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 47 - 49)

In other words, He *the Almighty* says: ‘do not think that this world is itself the ultimate end of the journey because the One Who brought you all forth in this world is fully-capable of bringing you back in a second creation on the

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(1) His full name is ʿAbbas Mahmud Al-ʿAqqad. He was born in June 28, 1889 CE in Aswan and completed primary school in the year 1903 CE. He was an avid reader in a wide range of fields, and served in clerical positions in a number of provinces. Then he directed himself towards work in journalism, in particular with the newspaper Sahifat Ad-Dustur. He engaged in literary disputes with Zaki Mubarak, Ar-Rafiʿi, and Bint Ash-Shatiʾ. He died in the year 1964 CE at the age of 76 years.

Day of Resurrection. As He *the Almighty* says in another verse: "Could We, then, be [thought of as being] worn out by the first creation? Nay – but some people are [still] lost in doubt about [the possibility of] a new creation!" (*Qaf:* 15)'

The new creation will be in the Hereafter when Allah revives the dead, for the One Who created at the beginning from nothing is all the more fully capable of restoration from the remnants of the first creation. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says: 'Well do We know how the earth consumes their bodies, for with Us is a record unfailing.' (*Qaf:* 4)

There follows the verse: 'That it is He Who gives wealth and possessions.' (*an-Najm:* 48) Here, let us take note of the specification and affirmation expressed by the repetition of the unattached relative pronoun *huwa* after the attached relative pronoun *inna-hu*. This indicates to us that the question of sustenance, wealth, and poverty belongs to Allah alone, with no one else having anything to do with it. It is He *the Almighty* alone Who channels means of sustenance, and renders this person wealthy and that one impoverished.

Hence, as for the doubt of the possibility of someone sharing in this question with Allah, this verse occurs in this manner of expression. Just consider the verse which comes before it: 'That He will undertake the second Creation' (*an-Najm:* 47); it is phrased in the same way without the supplementary relative pronoun of *huwa*. This is because the issue of the second creation bears no ambiguity of there being a possible partner in actualising it.

With respect to the Arabic word *aghna* 'free from want', it signifies that He relieves you of need, O you servant, by means of that which He has granted you possession over apart from what is owned by others. Thus, the Arabic word *al-ghina* refers to everything which spares you from dependency upon people in terms of wealth, strength and such things. As for the Arabic word *aqna* 'causes to possess', it means that He has satisfied you and gratified you by means of what you possess, regardless of how little it is.

There are many people whose means of sustenance are constrained, yet you find them content with what Allah endowed them with, indeed happy with it. It may be that they are in a better state than the wealthy people. Hence, this wealth is a gift, and this contentment is also a gift. Contentment and satisfaction are tantamount to wealth and plenitude of life. In this vein it is said(1): 'Contentment is a treasure which never runs out.' On the other hand, the treasure of money and possession may well run out. Hence, true wealth and self-sufficiency, then, are relating to the soul and not to the material things. It has also been said that the Arabic word *aqna*, translated as ‘causes to possess’, is related to property (*qinya)* which is to say: that which a person acquires of possessions, furnishings and the like.

Concerning the next verse: 'that He is the Lord of Sirius' (*an-Najm:* 49), the final word *ash-shiʿra*(2) is one of the celestial bodies. It is said that it is one of the massive stars inasmuch as it is compounded of a million suns like our sun, and that if it were to come near to the earth, the earth would burn up. It is as if this gigantic star supplied heat to the sun, which in turn provides us with heat. Thus, we do not take from it directly as with an electrical current.

If we were to acquire power for our homes from high voltage transformers, the appliances and light bulbs in the house would burn up. This is because the weak is not able to receive directly from the strong; indeed, it is necessary to utilise a regulator or transformer. And such is the sun with respect to *ash-shiʿra*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَنَّهُۥٓ أَهۡلَكَ عَادًا ٱلۡأُولَىٰ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَثَمُودَاْ فَمَآ أَبۡقَىٰ ﴿٥١﴾
وَقَوۡمَ نُوحٖ مِّن قَبۡلُۖ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ هُمۡ أَظۡلَمَ وَأَطۡغَىٰ ﴿٥٢﴾

That it was He who destroyed, in their entirety, ancient
'Ad [50] and Thamud [51] and before them the people of
Noah who were even more unjust and insolent [52]
(The Quran, *an-Najm:* 50 - 52)

It is well known that ʿAd are the people of Prophet Hud *peace be upon him* and that Allah annihilated them with a tempestuous, raging wind when they gave the lie to their Prophet. The Arabic phrase *ʿAd al-ula* ‘the ancient [tribes of] ʿAd’, signifies that besides this earlier or initial people, there was also a subsequent or second people called ʿAd. It is said that when this wind came down upon them, it wiped out those of them who existed at this locality where the punishment was unleashed upon them. In addition, there were among them scattered groups who gathered and sought refuge in a safe place. These then went to Mecca and they constituted the latter people of ʿAd.

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(1) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (2/232); Al-Bayhaqi attributes it to Jabir ibn ʿAbdullah Allah be pleased with him although there are some questions regarding the soundness of the chain of narrations.*

(2) *Ash-shiʿra* is the name of two stars; one of them is the Northern Sirius which is the brightest star of the Lesser Dog Constellation, located eleven million light years away from the earth. There is also a Southern Sirius in the Greater Dog Constellation which is closer to the earth than the Northern Sirius; it is eight light years away from the earth. This information is taken from *Al-Mawsuʿat Al-Falakiya*, p. 229, published by Al-Hayʾat Al- Misriyat Al-ʿAmma li-l-Kitab.

There follows the verse: ‘and Thamud’ (*an-Najm:* 51). Thus, just as He annihilated ʿAd, He annihilated Thamud by means of a tremendous cry. The saying of Allah: ‘and Thamud’ (*an-Najm:* 51) means that not one of them survived. Similarly, with respect to the initial passage of the following verse: ‘And before them the people of Noah who were even more unjust and insolent’ (*an-Najm:* 52), it clearly indicated that Allah destroyed them. Subsequently, He distinguishes them from those mentioned previously with two attributes: ‘who were even more unjust and insolent’ (*an-Najm:* 52). Hence, wrongdoing and arrogant tyranny were prevailing among ʿAd and Thamud; however, the people of Nuh *peace be upon him* were even more excessive in their wrongdoing, and even more oppressively haughty. As evidence of this, it suffices to recall that their Prophet remained among them for nine hundred and fifty years, and only a few of them followed him in faith.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلۡمُؤۡتَفِكَةَ أَهۡوَىٰ ﴿٥٣﴾ فَغَشَّىٰهَا مَا غَشَّىٰ ﴿٥٤﴾

That it was He who brought down the ruined cities [53] and enveloped them in the punishment He ordained for them? [54] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 53 - 54)

The Arabic word *al-muʾtafika* ‘the ruined cities’ is conjoined to ʿAd, Thamud and the people of Nuh. It refers to the townships of the people of Lut *peace be upon him* which were called *al-muʾtafika* because Allah *the Almighty* reversed (*kafaʾa*) them head over heels causing their elevated portions to become their lowest portions. It is for this reason that we use the word *ifk* meaning calumny or slander, to refer to a lie since it turns truths upside down. In this same sense, we have the incident of slander (*hadithat al-ifk*) in which our Mother ʿAʾisha *Allah be pleased with her* has been falsely and wrongly accused of fornication.

With regard to the Arabic word *ahwa* ‘He thrust into perdition’, this means that these townships tumbled down (*hawat*) and collapsed. This is because the angels raised them up to the clouds of the sky and then flipped them over upon all who were in them. There follows the verse: ‘and enveloped them in the punishment He ordained for them’ (*an-Najm:* 54) signifying that He descended upon them, encompassed them or covered them. The verse comprises the phrase *ma ghashsha*, loosely translated as ‘forever’, in which the particle *ma* is expressive of wonderment and incredulity, indicating great quantity which exceeds description. In other words, they were overcome by a terrifyingly amazing phenomenon and a horrifying spectre. Indeed, this is true because Allah *the Almighty* combined against the people of Lut *peace be upon him* various kinds of punishment at the same time, or sequentially one after the other. In this respect, He said: ‘And so, when Our judgment came to pass…’ (*Hud:* 82), that is to say, regarding your annihilation, ‘…We turned those [sinful towns] upside down, and rained down upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained, one upon another, [82] marked out in thy Sustainer’s sight [for the punishment of such as are lost in sin]. And these [blows of Allah-willed doom] are never far from evildoers! [83]’ (*Hud:* 82-83) The Arabic word *musawwama* in the last verse, translated as ‘marked out’ means labelled, with each stone bearing the name of the one it was meant for, and not striking anyone but him. These are like the stones which He rained down upon the companions of the elephant: ‘Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying creatures [3] which smote them with stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained [4]’ (*al-Fil:* 3-4).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكَ تَتَمَارَىٰ ٥٥

Which then of your Lord’s blessings do you deny? [55] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 55)

Allah *the Almighty* comforts His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and reassures Him of Allah’s backing and support for him and for the conveyance of the Message. The time-honoured practice of Allah with respect to His Messages is that the matter ends in the triumph of the truth, with the proofs still visible and tangible of the annihilation of those who denied the truth. Thus, He *the Almighty* said: ‘and, verily, [to this day] you pass by the remnants of their dwellings at morning-time [137] and by night. Will you not, then, use your reason? [138]’ (*an-Najm:* 137-138) Their ruins are still extant and you see them by day and at night.

Returning to the verse under study, He *the Almighty* says to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Which then of your Lord’s blessings do you deny?' (*an-Najm:* 55) In other words: with respect to which favour of your Lord, O Muhammad, do you remain in doubt? The Arabic word *al-miraʾ*, derived from the same semantic root as the final verb of the verse, means doubt or dispute. It is as if He *the Almighty* is telling him: ‘Rest assured, for Allah will fulfil His favour unto you.’

A similar expression is found in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 13) Here the discourse is directed towards men and Jinn. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited it, he said: 'I have already recited the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to your brothers from among the Jinn, and they were better in their affirmative response than you. When they heard ‘Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?’ (*ar-Rahman:* 13) they immediately replied, ‘O, our Lord, of your gracious favours we do not deny a single one, for unto you all grateful praise is due.’'(1).

Hence, it is legitimate to react with emotions when we hear the Quran with what is appropriate to the situation. When there is mention of thankful praise (*al-hamd*), we give thankful praise to Allah; when mention is made of exaltation, we say ‘Exalted be Allah (*subhana Allah*)’; when mention of paradise is made, we supplicate Allah to bless us with it; and when mention of hellfire is made, we seek refuge in Allah from it, and so forth.

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Dalaʾil An-Nubuwwa no. (532) as related by Jabir ibn ʿAbdullah Allah be pleased with him; it was also narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan no. (3291). It is cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur who attributes it to Al-Bazzar, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Mundhir, Ad-Daraqutni, Ibn Mardawayh, and Al-Khatib with a sound chain of narration as related by Ibn ʿUmar Allah be pleased with him.*

There is a difference between silent wonderment suppressed in the soul, and voiced wonderment expressed openly. Moreover, when you give expression to your interaction with the Quran in words, the power of this affects the one who hears you.

With regard to the opening phrase of the verse under study, *fa-bi-ayyi-alaʾ*, translated interpretively as, ‘which, then, of...powers’, the word *ayyi* (which) is indicative of copiousness or varied multiplicity. As for the Arabic word *alaʾ*, translated as ‘powers’, this signifies gracious favours and is the plural of *alan*, that is to say blessing. Concerning the final verb of the verse, *tatamara* ‘can you disavow’, it is derived from the same semantic root as *al-miraʾ* which refers to dispute. This latter occurs between two parties with each of them striving to establish definitive evidence against the other. In linguistic usage the word *al-miraʾ* is taken to mean two things. The first is related to the twisting (*marw*) of a cord or rope, this is to say, braiding it in order to strengthen it, with the number of threads braided depending upon the intended function of the cord or rope. Another meaning derives from milking a she-camel (*yamri an-naqa*); in other words, to draw milk from it and bring forth everything it its udder.

Hence, it means that you wrangle in order to strengthen your argument, or you wrangle (*tujadil*; a word related to *jadala* which can also signify twisting or plaiting a rope) in order to draw out everything that is contained in the cartridge of the opponent.

هَٰذَا نَذِيرٌ مِّنَ ٱلنُّذُرِ ٱلْأُولَىٰٓ ﴿٥٦﴾ أَزِفَتِ ٱلْءَازِفَةُ ﴿٥٧﴾ لَيْسَ لَهَا مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ كَاشِفَةٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

This is a warning just like the warnings sent in former times [56]
The imminent Hour draws near [57] and only God can
disclose it [58] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 56 - 58)

Concerning the initial word of the first verse above, it consists of the demonstrative pronoun *hadha*, not translated here but meaning ‘this’, it refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Message. This is followed by the Arabic word *an-Nadheer*, translated as ‘warning’ but also meaning ‘warner’, is the one who warns people and cautions them of evil before its time of occurrence. In the passage: ‘…a warning just like the warnings sent in former times.' (*an-Najm:* 56), the phrase *an-nudhur al-ula*, signifies those who passed away before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of the procession of previous messengers. The tremendous stature of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with regard to his function of solemn harbinger lies in his being the final warner and the culminating seal of all messengers.

There follows His utterance: 'The imminent Hour draws near' (*an-Najm:* 57). In other words, the Final Hour is approaching. Thus, it is as if he *peace and blessings be upon him* appeared on the cusp of the Final Hour since immediately after the verse speaking of him as a warner He followed it with: 'The imminent Hour draws near' (*an-Najm:* 57). It is for this reason that a Noble Hadith states: 'I was sent as an Envoy, with me and the Final Hour being like these two' and he held up his index finger and middle finger.'(1) Thus, His mission is counted among the signs of the impending Final Hour.

His Lord has addressed him with His utterance: '[But] how could you tell anything about it' (*an-Nazi'at:* 43), which is to say: about the Final Hour and its signs? But in as much as its time has drawn near and come close, you better take heed, for this is the last of the messages. Therefore, attach yourself to it and adhere to this culminating Messenger and final warner after whom there will be no warner for you to gain salvation through.

We grasp from the connotation of the Arabic verb *azifat* translated as 'draws ever nearer' that the Final Hour is approaching, and that the Final Hour itself which is striving towards you, seeking you with urgent steps, hastening towards you. Not long after this, in *al-Qamar* chapter, He will state: 'The Last Hour draws near…' (*al-Qamar:* 1).

The next verse under study reads: 'and only Allah can disclose it' (*an-Najm:* 58). In other words, when the horrors of the Last Hour arise, there will be no one except Allah capable of dispelling or controlling it. In the accidents of this world and the mishaps of life, there may be someone who can relieve you of calamity or protect you from evil. However, in the Hereafter, that is the place of truly momentous happenings, where no one has the power to hinder them. How could anyone repel it, for this is the day of the mighty overwhelming disaster which universally affects everyone—how could someone shield you, while he cannot even defend himself against it?

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, his Sahih, no. (4889); see also Muslim, Sahih, no. (5244) as related by Sahl ibn Sa'd As-Sa'idi Allah be pleased with him.*

Therefore, prepare yourselves for this situation, and acquire for yourselves protective force from Allah, for it is He alone, without any partner, is the All-Capable of protecting you on this day. There is nothing strange about this impending event which draws ever nearer and the approaching of the Final Hour given the fact that in the actual reality of life some of its minor signs, about which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has prophesied to us, have already appeared. Among these is the existence of women in Muslim society bedecked, naked, bent over, tilting their heads like the slumping backs of hybrid camels.(1)

Other signs of the Last Hour include his statement 'When authority is entrusted to those not worthy of it, then expect the Final Hour.'(2) Similarly, there is His utterance: '[When you witness] the self-satisfaction of every opinion-holder with his own opinion.'(3) Also: '...if you witness barefoot, naked sheep-herders constructing towering buildings.'(4) These are in addition to other prophetic sayings regarding the signs of the Final Hour which we have witnessed in actuality. Why, then, should there be such astonishment with respect to this matter?

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(1) *This depiction of the signs of the Final Hour is narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad, no. (8311), by Al-Bayhaqi in his Shuʿab, no.(5124, 7553), by Abu Yaʿla Al-Mawsuli in his Musnad, no.(6549) and by Ibn Hibban in his Sahih, no.(7584) as narrated by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, no.(6015) and Al-Bayhaqi in his As-Sunnan Al-kubra as narrated by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

(3) *In Kitab Al-Fitan, Nuʿaym ibn Hammad narrated on the authority of Abu Thaʿlaba Al-Khishani that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said: 'When you witness the self-satisfaction of every opinion-holder with his own opinion, then you should leave aside the condition of the masses.' This was narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Muʿjam Al-Kabir (18033), by Al-Bayhaqi in Shuʿab Al-Iman, no. (9397), and by Ibn Hibban in his Sahih, no. (386).*

(4) *This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (9), by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (4075), by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2535), and by An-Nasa'i in his Sunnan, no. (4903, 4905) as related by ʿUmar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him.*

Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَفَمِنْ هَٰذَا ٱلْحَدِيثِ تَعْجَبُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾ وَتَضْحَكُونَ وَلَا تَبْكُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾
وَأَنتُمْ سَٰمِدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾ فَٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِلَّهِ وَٱعْبُدُوا۟ ﴿٦٢﴾

Do you [people] marvel at this? [59] Why do you laugh instead of weeping? [60] Why do you pay no heed? [61] Bow down before God and worship [62] (The Quran, *an-Najm:* 59 - 62)

The interrogative particle at the beginning of the first verse is to express amazement, for they were bewildered by '…marvel at this…' (*an-Najm:* 59). This is to say, by the Quran, which, in turn, expresses bewilderment at them. It says to them: 'Are you astonished and perplexed at the Quran? It would be more fitting for you to be bewildered and amazed at your own state, and what you are engrossed in of distracting pastimes, heedlessness, and aversion to the truth. This will cause you to miss an opportunity, and will deprive you of abundant benefit.'

This same notion is contained in the verse: 'Why do you laugh instead of weeping?' (*an-Najm:* 60) You laugh out of scorn and mockery, but it would have been more fitting for you to weep over yourselves and over that which has passed you by of goodly benefit. The next verse continues: 'Why do you pay no heed?' (*an-Najm:* 61), in other words, engaged in idle distractions and heedlessly negligent.

This is the state of those whose hearts have grown hard, and whom Satan and the sensual soul have vanquished. Besides their aversion to the truth, you see them deriding those who follow it sincerely and laughing contemptuously at them. As He *the Almighty* says in depicting this situation: 'Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin…' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29), whom he has called criminal sinners (*al-muijrimun*), '…are wont to laugh at such as have attained to faith; [29] and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another [derisively]; [30] and whenever they return to people of their own kind, they return full of jests; [31] and whenever they see those [who believe,] they say, "Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!" [32] And, withal, they have no call to watch over [the beliefs of] others. [33]' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-33).

Yes indeed; this is the state of the adherents of vain falsehood who invert truths in this world. But this world is not the ultimate goal, and not the termination of the course of existence, for there is another day in which those who do wrong are separated from those who are wronged. As it is said: 'In Allah's presence are assembled all antagonists.'

Allah reassures the adherents of faith saying: 'But on the Day [of Judgment]' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34), that is, on the Day of Reckoning, '…they who had attained to faith will [be able to] laugh at the [erstwhile] deniers of the truth' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34) and the one who laughs last, laughs much'[for, resting in paradise] on couches, they will look on [and say to themselves]: [35] "Are these deniers of the truth being [thus] requited for [aught but] what they were wont to do?" [36]' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 35-36) At this juncture, we will say: 'Yes, O Lord, you have requited them with what they deserved.'

The chapter then ends with His utterance: 'Bow down before Allah and worship' (*an-Najm:* 62) Him. We note here, firstly, the concise manner of expression of Quranic wording which leaves space for acquired acumen. The obvious meaning is: 'Then prostrates yourselves to Allah and worship Allah since He alone merits worship without any partners ascribed with Him. Thus, the matter of worship is directed towards none save Him even if the one worshipped the Almighty is not specifically referred to.

When Allah *the Almighty* orders them to prostrate, submit and obey, it is as if he were saying to them: 'You had all the more reason to weep, to show humility and to beseech in supplication, you should have clung steadfastly to this truth which came to you, so that it might assist you, for it is the rope of salvation which you cannot encounter with derisive ridicule.

Here it is noteworthy that at the end of the chapter comes the command to prostrate: 'Bow down before Allah and worship' (*an-Najm:* 62) Him. It is as if Allah is reaching out in compassion to his servants, even to the disbelievers, telling them: 'O My servants, you are My handiwork and My dependents, so come forth to My domain. Stop arguing and bickering, and submit to me through prostration and worship, for I wish only the best for you.' Is there any craftsman who wishes ill to his handiwork? For this reason in a Qudsi Hadith, we find: 'O Son of Adam, I am full of love for you, hence, by my due right over you, be full of love for me.'(1)

Unto Allah belongs the most sublime parable; Can you imagine if there were a rich man whom Allah had given plentiful means, and he had a son who was dissolute and so he called after him saying: ‘O my son, come and take advantage of my wealth, since you are the more entitled to it’? In a similar manner, Allah *the Almighty* calls to those who are outside the bounds of his ordained path: ‘Come hither, copious good awaits you.’

Now, while the command found in: ‘Bow down before Allah and worship’ Him (*an-Najm:* 62) is meant for the disbelievers, yet it is also directed at the believers: ‘Prostrate in gratitude to Allah who has guided you to faith and has saved you from disbelief.’

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(1) *See Al-Qushayri in his Tafsir in the context of commenting upon His utterance: 'And, lo, Moses spoke [thus] unto his people: 'Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you…' (Ibrahim: 6). He says that this saying is mentioned in certain scriptures revealed to the prophets. It is also mentioned by Isma'il Haqqi in his Tafsir and attributed it to Ka'b Al-Ahbar from the Torah.*

the chapter of

al-Qamar

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Qamar*(1) (The Moon):

اقْتَرَبَتِ ٱلسَّاعَةُ وَٱنشَقَّ ٱلْقَمَرُ ﴿١﴾

The Hour draws near; the moon is split in two [1] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 1)

'The Hour' is one of the names of the Day of Resurrection, which is known as the Hour, the Reality, the Cry, the Event, the Calamity, and other names besides this. All of these names convey a sense of fear and alarm.

We can observe how the ending of the chapter of *an-Najm* correlates to the beginning of the chapter of *al-Qamar*, for He said there: 'The Hour draws near; the moon is split in two' (*al-Qamar:* 1), and He says here: 'The Hour draws near…' (*al-Qamar:* 1). As we said, the very arrival of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was one of the signs of the Last Hour, for we know that the Hour will only rise upon the most evil of men, when no one remains who says, 'Allah, Allah.'(2)

As for those who have lain in their graves from the time of Prophet Adam *peace be upon him* and all who will die before the Last Hour, we said that time is stopped for them because time is a locus for events, and therefore those who experience no events experience no time. Therefore, Allah says of them: '…On the Day when they behold it…' (*al-Hujurat:* 46), i.e. the Resurrection,

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(1) The chapter of *al-Qamar* is number 54 in the written order of the Quran. The majority consider it to have been revealed in the Meccan period. It was revealed between the chapters of *at-Tariq and Sad*, and was thus the 37th chapter to be revealed.

(2) See *Muslim*, *Sahih*, no. (3550), on the authority of *'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As Allah be pleased with him*.

'[it will seem to them] as if they had tarried [in this world] no longer than one evening or [one night, ending with] its morn.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46) Allah caused the man who argued with Ibrahim *peace be upon him* about his Lord to die for one hundred years and then raised him to life, whereupon he said: '…I have remained thus a day, or part of a day…' (*al-Baqara:* 259).

The People of the Cave said the same after having been asleep for three hundred and nine years because this is as long as a person usually spends asleep. The time spent in the isthmus-world of the grave will be the same, and it will be as though they just fell asleep for a while, and then woke up.

Now Allah *the Almighty* is the Owner of time, and He is The Withholder and The Out spreader: He withholds from whom He wills and outspreads for whom He wills.

The meaning of 'The Hour draws near' is that it is close to you on a personal level, so do not wait for the minor signs of it to come, and then the major signs, saying, 'There is still a lot of time between us and the Resurrection'; for this is not how the Resurrection should be envisaged.

For a man's resurrection comes when he dies, and not after thousands of millions of years, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'When a person dies, his resurrection has come.'(1) Indeed this is true, for he moves on from the realm of this worldly life to the realm of the Hereafter, and his worldly works all come to an end. Allah kept the time of death unknown to us all so that we would remember it at all times.

He says: 'The Hour draws near; the moon is split in two' (*al-Qamar:* 1). The splitting of the moon was a cosmological sign affirmed by The Quran and the *Sunna*, and it is related that the moon split for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that the cave of Hira' could be seen between the two halves;(2) and this sign was witnessed by all those at the time who were able to see it, and they witnessed it just like that.

We do not say that the whole world saw it, for the purpose of cosmological miracles is to support the messengers, and prove that they are truly sent by Allah.

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(1) *Narrated by Ad-Daylimi on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him; there is some doubt as to whether it is a Hadith or a saying of one of the early Muslims*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, no. (3579) on the authority of Anas Allah be pleased with him*

It was not necessary that everyone alive at the time saw this sign – and how could this be, when even now with the amazing progress of science and the abundant means of communication, we hear about solar or lunar eclipses at certain times, and the television channels show them, yet despite the advanced reports only a few people are able to see them? The moon is a phenomenon of night at a time when most people are sleeping.

Moreover, the cosmological signs and miracles given to the messengers are not intended to be eternal miracles, but rather, each miracle is meant only for those who witness it, to strengthen their faith if they are already believers, or to bring them to faith in Allah if they are disbelievers.

Therefore, they say that a miracle is like a matchstick: it can only be lit once and this is the case with all the miracles of the messengers. Had The Quran not told us of the staff of Musa *peace be upon him* we would not know anything about it.

These cosmological signs break the laws of nature the moment they occur, and then things go back to how they were. The moon split, for instance, and its natural state was altered, and then it returned to its previous state after it had been seen by the disbelievers of Mecca who gave the lie to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* – not all the disbelievers, but only some of them, for those of them who saw the miracle were enough to affirm it.

They say that the meaning of ‘The Hour draws near’ is that the hour of every man’s death, and his appointed time, is near to him, ‘and the moon is split on two’ meaning that he will split away from his life and leave it behind. As long as Allah said ‘draws near’, this means that it truly has drawn near, and you do not need to look into this fact any further.

Allah *the Almighty* also said: ‘Allah’s judgment is [bound to] come: do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent…’ (*an-Nahl:* 1). He said that it was ‘come’ in the past tense, as though it has already happened – but then how could He then say ‘do not, therefore, call for its speedy advent’? The scholars say that it is because Allah is The One Who said ‘come’, and no one can object to Him or prevent Him from bringing His words into fruition.

The same is the case when He says ‘The Hour draws near’, for it has truly drawn near, whether it means the Last Hour of every person which comes at the moment of his death, which is near, or it means the Last Hour at the end of time, which is also near, for the splitting of the moon and the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were among its heralds.

It is narrated that the disbelievers said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘If you were telling the truth, bring forth a sign now that could prove that you are truthful.’ They were al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, Abu Jahl ibn Hisham, Al-'As ibn Wa'il, Al-'As ibn Rabi'a, Al-Aswad ibn 'Abd Yaghuth, Al-Aswad ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib, Rabi'a ibn Al-Aswad and An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith.

All of those men and others witnessed this event-taking place. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called upon and beseeched his Lord and the moon split into two halves, one half above the mountain of Abu Qabis and the other half above Qaynuqa' so that the cave of Hira' was visible between them. When the disbelievers saw that, they called it sorcery, while the people of intelligence said, 'We shall ask the people travelling in the desert far from this place.' On asking them, some were positive about it and others said that they did not see it. 'Ali *peace be upon him* observed that the splitting of the moon was a night sign, so some people saw it, whilst others, indeed most, did not.

On examining the verses that are concerned with the Last Hour and the signs that shall herald it, we read: ‘When the sun is covered. And when the stars darken’ (*at-Takwir:* 1-2). We read many other verses that depict for us how these beings will meet destruction. However, Allah says nothing about the moon except: ‘So when the sight becomes dazed. And the moon becomes dark.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 7-8) The darkening of the moon is lesser and lighter than the shrouding of the sun.

We understand from this that the worldly event of the moon's splitting will be counted for it in the Hereafter and thereby the moon will not endure what will happen to the other celestial bodies. Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And the trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are in the earth shall swoon, except such as Allah please.’ (*az-Zumar:* 68) This implies that certain beings will be spared.

Similarly, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* depicted the events of the Resurrection, he said, ‘When I shall awake, I shall find my brother Musa (Moses) holding on to the frame of the Throne.' This means that Musa will not swoon as others. That is why the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was amazed at this.(1)

Prophet Muhammad clarified that Musa *peace be upon him* already swooned in this world when he was on the mount as Allah says: ‘but when his Lord manifested His glory to the mountain He made it crumble and Musa fell down in a swoon.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 143) Allah *Glorified is He* would not cause His Prophet Musa to swoon twice. Since he already swooned in this world, he will be saved from swooning in the Hereafter. And that is the exception meant by the verse: ‘except such as Allah please.’ (*az-Zumar:* 68)

The same is the case of the moon, i.e. the splitting was real and a cosmological sign which changed the moon from its natural and usual state; and thereby the moon will not be subject to the same destruction which other celestial bodies face in the Hereafter.

وَإِن يَرَوْا۟ ءَايَةً يُعْرِضُوا۟ وَيَقُولُوا۟ سِحْرٌ مُّسْتَمِرٌّ ٢

Whenever the disbelievers see a sign, they turn away and say, ‘Same old sorcery!’ [2] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 2)

The word *aya* (sign) here means an amazing and incredible thing of huge impact, the like of which people have never seen. It means a cosmological sign as is the case when He says, ‘…and He has made the sun and the moon subservient…’ (*az-Zumar:* 5), and when He says: ‘And amongst His signs are the night and the day…’ (*Fussilat:* 37).

Although these signs are clear proof of Allah’s Power and the obligation to have faith in Him and believe His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*), they reacted to them by turning aside and ignoring them: ‘whenever the disbelievers see a sign, they turn away…’ (*al-Qamar:* 2). They turned away from the sign which they suggested and demanded from the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* even when it came to them as plain as dawn. This shows how they were too haughty to accept the truth and how they stubbornly resisted the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* despite the clarity of the sign. Their intense stubbornness and hatred of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* blinded them to the truth.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim*

It is enough here for us to mention(1) the stance taken by his uncle Abu Lahab who had been happy to see two of his sons marry two of Muhammad's daughters. Yet, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* began his call and enmity broke out between him and his uncle, Abu Lahab could not bear to see his sons married to Muhammad's daughters and made them divorce them.

This in itself did not anger the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but what angered him was that one of these two sons(2) passed him by and then spat towards him. The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* supplicated against him, 'May one of Allah's hounds devour you!'(3)

When Abu Lahab heard that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had supplicated against his son with these words, he became fearful because in the depths of his soul he knew that his nephew was on the truth. When it was time for his son to set out with the trade caravan, Abu Lahab told his son's companions not to leave him alone by saying, 'When you make camp, put my son in the middle of you, for I fear for him because of what Muhammad has invoked against him.' Indeed, one night during the journey a lion came to him and ate him before their eyes.

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(1) *This is the story of Abu Lahab and his two sons with the Prophet and the latter's accursing the son of Abu Lahab.*

(2) *His name may have been Lahab, 'Utba or 'Utayba, according to Al-Bayhaqi Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, Vol. 2, p. 338.*

(3) *Al-Bayhaqi narrated in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 623 that after the sons of Abu Lahab divorced the daughters of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him one of the sons 'Utayba came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'I disbelieve in your religion, and I have forsaken your daughter. You love me not, nor do I love you.' He then rushed at the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and tore his shirt. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him then said, 'Behold, I implore Allah to unleash His hounds upon you!' 'Urwa ibn Al-Zubayr said that a lion came to them that night and then went again, so they slept, and then the lion came back and pounced upon them, seizing 'Utayba's head in its jaws and crushing it.*

What is strange here is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘One of Allah’s hounds’, but it was a lion. They explain that this is because when a hound is ascribed to Allah, it must surely be a lion. So, this was another sign which came to this very same stubborn opponent and which was not far from him; yet, he did not believe and his heart did not soften to the call of the truth which came to him from his nephew.

Out of His Mercy to this community, Allah *Glorified is He* did not destroy those of them who denied His Message, nor did He wipe them out as He did with the communities who came before them. The people of 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* asked him to supplicate to Allah and so he said, ‘Lord, send down to us a feast from heaven so that we can have a festival—the first and last of us…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 114). This was a tangible sign which they suggested, and Allah *the Almighty* responded to them thus: ‘I will send it down to you, but anyone who disbelieves after this will be punished with a punishment that I will not inflict on anyone else in the world.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 115)

Likewise, the people of Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* hamstrung the she-camel, and Allah *Glorified is He* says of them: ‘and then they hamstrung the camel. They defied their Lord's commandment and said, "Saleh (Shelah), bring down the punishment you threaten, if you really are a messenger!" An earthquake seized them; by the next morning they were lying dead in their homes.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 77-78)

As for the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the True Lord *the Most High* did not treat them in this way; rather, He said: ‘But Allah would not send them punishment while you [Prophet] are in their midst, nor would He punish them if they sought forgiveness.’ (*al-Anfal:* 33)

His Words, ‘Whenever the disbelievers see a sign, they turn away…’ (*al-Qamar:* 2), mean that they saw it with their own eyes in reality, so how could they deny it? Scholars say that they did so due to their stubbornness and persistent denial because they thought that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to gain something for himself through his call such as fame and power amongst his people, as well as to exalt himself on earth.

This is why, when they sent their delegation to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they said, ‘O, Muhammad, if you want dominion, we shall make you our king, and if you want wealth, we shall gather wealth for you until you are the richest one of us', and so on. So, he said to his uncle his famous words, 'By Allah, uncle, were they to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, that I leave this affair, I would not leave it, until Allah makes it ascendant or I die before that.'(1) They did not stop at merely turning away and denying, but they went as far as reviling and insulting.

They '…turn away and say, "An ever-recurring delusion!"' (*al-Qamar:* 2) This accusation was ever levelled at the messengers *peace be upon them* and the deniers ever resorted to it throughout history. After these people witnessed the splitting of the moon, their sick natures refused to acknowledge the truth, and so they levelled accusations at it instead. What did they say? They said, 'An ever-recurring delusion!' (*al-Qamar:* 2); what this means is a constant(2) one, as though Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were bringing them a series of acts of sorcery, one after another. As we said previously, this is a false and base accusation, for which the only rebuttal needed is that if Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were a sorcerer, why did he not bewitch you as well as he bewitched those who believe in him?

It is obvious that sorcery is only a trick of the eyes, and is not real as Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and they did, casting a spell on people's eyes…' (*al-A'raf:* 116), and He says: '…through their sorcery, their ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving.' (*Ta Ha:* 66) Concerning the signs which Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* brought, they were real, and they all had proofs which those people knew and recognised.

وَكَذَّبُوا۟ وَٱتَّبَعُوٓا۟ أَهْوَآءَهُمْ ۚ وَكُلُّ أَمْرٍ مُّسْتَقِرٌّ ﴿٣﴾

They reject the truth and follow their own desires — everything is recorded [3] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 3)

The meaning of *kadhdhabu* ('they reject the truth') is that they denied the clear signs; *al-kadhib* means one speaking words which contradict reality, and it is blameworthy according to all. These people denied the truth through stubbornness and deference to their desires: '…and follow their own desires…' (*al-Qamar:* 3).

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayahqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa 495, Ibn Kathir in As-Sira Vol. 1, p. 474, and As-Suhayli in Ar-Rawd Al-Anf Vol. 2, p. 6*

(2) *Ibn Al-Jawzi narrates three possible meanings of 'ever-recurring' mustamirr in this verse: The first is 'passing', as in 'impermanent' from marra, 'to pass'; the second is 'powerful' from Al-marra, meaning 'power'; and the third is 'constant'.*

Desires, then, incite them to deny to the truth in order to obtain what they desired. Desires never call one to goodness, but they call one only to evil and destruction as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…those who follow their own low desires, those whose ways are unbridled.' (*al-Kahf:* 28) Also, the True Lord *the Most High* says of them: '…These people merely follow guesswork and the whims of their souls…' (*an-Najm:* 23). The desire of the soul controls them and governs their actions.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…everything is recorded.' (*al-Qamar:* 3) Everything, whether it be disbelief or faith, obedience or disobedience, always comes to a goal which is set and known unto Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *the Exalted* knows all things from pre-eternity. Before any event occurs, He knows it, and the inscribing angels have recorded it.

When the True Lord *the Most High* ordained the disbelief of a disbeliever, He did not force him to disbelieve but gave him the choice; however, due to His pre-eternal knowledge, He wrote down what he would do. This is part of His Magnificence and the absolute encompassment of His Knowledge over all that was, all that is and all that is not.

We spoke of this matter before when discussing His Words: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him. He will burn in the Flaming Fire and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a palm-fibre rope around her neck.' (*al-Masad:* 1-5)

These verses were revealed and recited for Abu Lahab to hear, and he was still in the life of this world and the realm of free will(1); he could have denied these verses by claiming to have entered Islam, even falsely. Yet, he did not do so, for he could not even do this; Allah's decree came to pass both for him and for his wife. Why is this? The reason is due to Allah's Decree that cannot be resisted by anyone, and no one can amend what He ordains.

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(1) Abu Lahab lived another 15 years after these *ayat* (verses) were revealed.

This is the meaning of '…everything is recorded.' (*al-Qamar:* 3) Indeed, everything must do so because it is firmly set in Allah's Knowledge. Do not trouble yourself, then, Muhammad, and do not wear yourself out by preaching to these people. All you have to do is convey the message; as for faith and disbelief, it is already known to Allah *the Almighty* that this one will believe and take a place in paradise, whilst that one will disbelieve and take a place in hell.

Thus, the desire of these deniers would not ever change from this set position because it was a truth and a reality inscribed in the Preserved Tablet in the Mother of all Books, which no one can change.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ جَآءَهُم مِّنَ ٱلْأَنۢبَآءِ مَا فِيهِ مُزْدَجَرٌ ﴿٤﴾
حِكْمَةٌۢ بَٰلِغَةٌۖ فَمَا تُغْنِ ٱلنُّذُرُ ﴿٥﴾

Although warning tales that should have restrained them have come down to them [4] far-reaching wisdom — but these warnings do not help [5] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 4 - 5)

These verses speak about the deniers from amongst the disbelievers of Mecca and how Allah *the Exalted* gave them tidings of the nations who came before them and how they brought destruction and death down upon themselves by lying about their messengers *peace be upon them*. Indeed, the remnants of these nations still existed so that they could see them when they passed by them: 'You [people] pass by their ruins morning and night. Will you not take heed?' (*as-Saffat:* 137-138) He also says: 'And surely it is on a road that still abides.' (*al-Hijr:* 76) This means that these remains still existed on roads which were still travelled and known to them, which they often traversed. *Muqim* (still abides), and also *yuqim* mean to confirm signs.

The word *Al-anba'* (narratives) (*al-Qamar:* 4) literally means news. Its singular is *naba'* which is an important piece of news that should inspire one to take admonition and to pay heed to its lessons. These narratives included what they had been told about concerning the Ad, Thamud, the people of Lot, the Ahqaf, and so on.

The meaning of '…wherein is prevention…' (*al-Qamar:* 4) is that they were given admonitions and lessons in the stories of such nations who had come before them and had denied so that Allah *the Almighty* destroyed them; this should have restrained them from falling into the very same denial and rejection of the call to the truth. 'Far-reaching wisdom' (*al-Qamar:* 5) means to put things in their proper places, and 'far-reaching' means that which reaches its ultimate goal so that nothing could be wiser than it, for wisdom differs according to the minds which bring it.

So, people are described with the level of wisdom which is appropriate to their minds, and the True Lord possesses the ultimate wisdom. This is akin to what we said about the attributes of being a creator: man may be described by this attribute when he invents something which did not exist before; he is then a creator, and Allah *Glorified is He* is the best of creators.

If you like, read what He says about the story of how adoption was prohibited, which concerned the relationship between the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Zayd ibn Haritha *Allah be pleased with him* when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Name your adopted sons after their real fathers; this is more equitable in the sight of Allah…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5).

When Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* adopted Zayd, this was equitable and just, but Allah's verdict was even more equitable and just. What our master, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did was equitable in human terms, and it was an honour for the one who preferred him to his own father and family; however, what Allah *the Exalted* decreed that people should be named after their real fathers was even more equitable. This is because it gives the true father his right since he was the direct means of life and existence for the child; furthermore, by valuing the father, we value the Lord, Creator and Originator of all.

Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* made a link between worshipping Him and treating parents well by saying more than once: 'Worship Allah; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents…' (*an-Nisa':* 36); He also says: 'Your Lord has commanded that you should worship none but Him and that you be kind to your parents…' (*al-Isra':* 23). Therefore, to dishonour parents is a grave sin,⁽¹⁾ and it is a sin which spreads throughout the entire body as we explained before.

Concerning His Words '…but these warnings do not help.' (*al-Qamar:* 5), they say that *nudhur* (warnings) in this verse means the messengers who warned and alerted them of the punishment and consequence of denying; this would make *nudhur* in this verse the plural of *nadheer*, which means 'warner'. This indicates that they did not benefit from these warnings, and the calls of the messengers did not affect them.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ يَوْمَ يَدْعُ ٱلدَّاعِ إِلَىٰ شَىْءٍ نُّكُرٍ ۝٦

So [Prophet] turn away from them. On the Day the Summoner will summon them to a horrific event [6]
(The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 6)

The commandment in this verse is being issued to our master the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: '…turn thou away from them…' (*al-Qamar:* 6). Turn from them and bid them farewell as He says elsewhere: 'So, [O, Prophet] ignore those who turn away from Our revelation, who want only the life of this world.' (*an-Najm:* 29) This means they will never believe.

His Words '…On the Day the Summoner will summon them to something that the mind cannot conceive' (*al-Qamar:* 6) allude to the second blowing of

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(1) *'Abdullah ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him narrated that a Bedouin came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, what are the grave sins?' He said, 'To associate partners with Allah.' He said, 'Then what?' He (Prophet Muhammad) peace and blessings be upon him said, 'To dishonour one's parents.' He said, 'Then what?' He (Prophet Muhammad) peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The disastrous oath.' He said, 'What is the disastrous oath?' He said, 'It is to swear falsely to obtain the property of a Muslim.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari 6409... Ahmad 7609 narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'The gravest of the grave sins is to dishonour one's parents.' He was asked what this means, and answered, 'A man curses a man, so the latter curses the former's father, and he curses his mother, so he curses his mother (in return).'*

the trumpet whereupon all mankind will rise for the Lord of the worlds, and the meaning of ‘something that the mind cannot conceive’ is something unknown to the people, something whose horror and awfulness is beyond their ken so that the soul cannot conceive of it.

We may ask what the connection between ‘turn away from them…’ and ‘…On the Day the Summoner will summon’ (*al-Qamar:* 6) is. Scholars say that this means for the Prophet to turn away from them now and not to say anything to them about this Day; others say it means for the Prophet to turn away from them and not to intercede for them on that Day.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

خُشَّعًا أَبْصَٰرُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ ٱلْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُّنتَشِرٌ ٧
مُّهْطِعِينَ إِلَى ٱلدَّاعِ ۖ يَقُولُ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ هَٰذَا يَوْمٌ عَسِرٌ ٨

Eyes downcast, they will come out of their graves like
swarming locusts [7] rushing towards the Summoner.
The disbelievers will cry, ‘This is a stern day!’ [8]
(The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 7-8)

These verses are connected to what *the Almighty* says before: ‘…On the Day the Summoner will summon them to something that the mind cannot conceive’ (*al-Qamar:* 6); on that Day, these deniers will have ‘eyes downcast’ (*al-Qamar:* 7).

Allah *the Exalted* describes in this verse what their state will be on the Day when the Summoner will summon them, and they will come forth, ‘…come out of their graves…’ (*al-Qamar:* 7), in a state of humility and abasement; their eyes will be cast downwards looking to the ground, none of them having the power to look upwards.

So, the movement of the eyes in order to see has significance and reactions, and the movement of the eyes is connected to the state of its owner. The people of truth will have eyes which are strong and bold, whilst the people of falsehood will have eyes which are abased and humiliated. This is why we criticise the people of falsehood when they are proud of their falsehood, and we say, ‘So-and-so said such-and-such with eyes like daggers’;

indeed, this is said because the liar contradicted the nature of the situation in which he finds himself.

His Words '…like swarming locusts' (*al-Qamar:* 7) mean that when they come forth from their graves, they will come forth scattered like locusts; this describes their multitudes and how they will disperse here and there. Imagine if we were to examine any settled place and consider how many will have been buried there, generation after generation from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection; how many graves will there be?

Notice that the verb *yakhrujun* (come out) (*al-Qamar:* 7) is in the active voice; He did not say *yukhrajun* (brought out) in the passive voice. This means that they will come out of the graves as though they are doing so out of their own volition, all at once, after the second trumpet blast awakens them by Allah's Leave, and they will rise and come forth.

His Word *muhti'in* (rushing towards the Summoner) (*al-Qamar:* 8) means rushing swiftly; for in such a situation, who could be slow or tardy? The *muhti'* is the one who stretches his neck forward as he walks so he goes faster. Reflect on the state of these people in the life of this world and how they were governed by arrogance, haughtiness and stubbornness which took them far away from the straight path; yet, now they come forth humiliated and abased, rushing to the destination to which they had always denied, like a criminal being taken to his punishment.

Because of this, He then says: '…The disbelievers will cry, "This is a stern day!"' (*al-Qamar:* 8) He specifies that it will solely be disbelievers who will say this, and indeed, it will be a sorely calamitous day, for there will be no way to avoid it or escape it, along with there being no way to be protected from it or succoured against it. How could they have any escape or succour when the deities (gods) they worshipped instead of Allah, thinking they would intercede for them, will enter hell before them?

Allah *Glorified is He* says about Pharaoh: 'He will be at the forefront of his people on the Day of Resurrection, leading them down towards the Fire. What a foul drinking place to be led to!' (*Hud:* 98) This will cause them to despair and lose all hope.

The discourse now moves away from the Quraysh, and Allah tells them about the deniers of another nation, specifically the people of our master Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَذَّبَتۡ قَبۡلَهُمۡ قَوۡمُ نُوحٖ فَكَذَّبُواْ عَبۡدَنَا وَقَالُواْ مَجۡنُونٞ وَٱزۡدُجِرَ ٩

The people of Noah rejected the truth before them: they
rejected Our servant, saying, 'He is mad!' Noah was
rebuked [9] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 9)

It is as though Allah were saying to the idolaters of Mecca, 'You are not so far from the fate which met other people who denied, for you have not stopped at denying alone but have assaulted the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in every manner and way; you have assaulted him with words and deeds, openly and plainly, and when this did not avail you, you assaulted him with plots and devious schemes. More than this, you even sought the aid of jinn to assault him, working sorcery upon him.(1) You tried to kill him with poison but could not.(2) Thus, give yourselves a break, for the call of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will continue on its way, and nothing will hold it back; therefore, stop trying to impede it, and the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* are not so distant from you.

'The people of Nuh (Noah) rejected the truth before them…' (*al-Qamar:* 9); thus, take admonition from them. He begins with the people of Nuh (Noah) in this verse because our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to all mankind for all times and places, while our master Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* was sent to his own people, and the breadth of his Message was restricted to them alone, and was not for all times and places; then after this his Message was restricted to the people who boarded the Ark. Moreover, our master Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* spent nine hundred and fifty years making his call, so the denial which occurred in his story is plain to see. He tried every way possible to reach them, but they did not believe; thus, Allah *the Almighty* made them an example and an admonition for the deniers who came after them.

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(1) *It is narrated that 'A'isha Allah be pleased with her said, 'A man of Banu Zurayq named Labid ibn Al-A'sam worked sorcery on Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him so that he (the Prophet) would imagine he had done something when he actually had not.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari 5321, 3524, 5912 and Muslim 4059*

(2) *Anas ibn Malik related that a Jewess gave Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him a poisoned sheep, and he ate from it. She was brought forth, and it was said, 'Shall we not kill her?' He said, 'No.' Anas said, 'And ever after I could see the effect of it on the Messenger of Allah's peace and blessings be upon him throat.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari 2424 and Muslim 4060*

See how this verse mentions how they denied their prophet twice: ‘The people of Nuh (Noah) rejected the truth before them…’ and ‘…they rejected Our servant…’ (*al-Qamar:* 9). So, their denial went beyond all denial, and this is why Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* lived longer than any other messenger, for his call lasted longer than any other call.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Our servant’, in this verse, He means our master Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*; it is an honour for him that Allah *the Exalted* called him ‘Our servant’, which is akin to what Allah says about the ascension of our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night…’ (*al-Isra’:* 1).

Therefore, sincerity in servitude brings about the gifts of Lordship. We said before that servitude to human beings is demeaning, whilst servitude to Allah is noble and honourable. When a person is servant to another human being, he gives his goodness to his master; however, when a person is a servant to Allah *the Almighty* he takes the goodness of his Master. It is thus a kind of ‘servitude of sovereignty’.

They did not stop at merely denying Allah’s prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* but they went as far as assaulting him: ‘…saying, "He is mad!"’ (*al-Qamar:* 9) They accused him of being mad, which, as we said, is a foolish and easily rebutted accusation; furthermore, if it were to prove anything at all, it would only prove the stupidity and intellectual bankruptcy of such people.

Wa izdujir (was rebuked) (*al-Qamar:* 9) appears in the verse; it means that they rebuked him and prevented him from completing his call and delivering his message.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَدَعَا رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنِّي مَغۡلُوبٞ فَٱنتَصِرۡ (١٠) فَفَتَحۡنَآ أَبۡوَٰبَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ بِمَآءٖ مُّنۡهَمِرٖ (١١) وَفَجَّرۡنَا
ٱلۡأَرۡضَ عُيُونٗا فَٱلۡتَقَى ٱلۡمَآءُ عَلَىٰٓ أَمۡرٖ قَدۡ قُدِرَ (١٢) وَحَمَلۡنَٰهُ عَلَىٰ ذَاتِ أَلۡوَٰحٖ وَدُسُرٖ (١٣)
تَجۡرِي بِأَعۡيُنِنَا جَزَآءٗ لِّمَن كَانَ كُفِرَ (١٤)

And so he called upon his Lord, 'I am defeated: help me!' [10] So We opened the gates of the sky with torrential water [11] burst the earth with gushing springs: the waters met for a preordained purpose [12] We carried him along on a vessel of planks and nails [13] that floated under Our watchful eye, a reward for the one who had been rejected [14]
(The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 10 - 14)

After all this patience on the part of our master Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* only a few of the people believed in him, which caused him to feel despair that they would never be guided: 'and so he called upon his Lord, "I am defeated. Help me!"' (*al-Qamar:* 10) What this means is for Allah to succour him against them because he does not have the power to face them alone. To 'come to someone's succour' means to claim the right for him which he cannot claim for himself. This is why Allah *Glorified is He* says that disbelievers '…have no one to help them' (*ar-Rum:* 29); they cannot succour themselves, nor find anyone else to succour them.

When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* made this supplication, Allah *Glorified is He* responded: 'So, We opened the gates of the sky'; this refers to the clouds: '…with torrential water' (*al-Qamar:* 11). Thus, the heavy fall of rain 'burst the earth with gushing springs…' so that many springs of water gushed forth from the ground, and so 'the waters met', the water of the sky from above and the water of the ground from below '…for a preordained purpose' (*al-Qamar:* 12). Therefore, it was something which Allah *the Almighty* had decreed and ordained, which was namely the destruction of these deniers and the survival of the believers. This was pre-ordained, which means before time began.

Elsewhere in the Quran the details of this story are given. Before water fell upon them from, the sky and springs gushed forth from the earth, Nuh's (Noah's) Lord commanded him to build the Ark: 'Build the Ark under Our [watchful] eyes and with Our inspiration…' (*Hud:* 37); thus, it was the first ship ever to be built on earth, and people knew nothing about this. So, Allah *the Most High* taught him how to build it.

It is said that Allah *the Almighty* gave him the first clue as to how to build it by showing him the trunks of trees floating on the surface of the water and not sinking; this has its own law pertaining to size and volume. When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* saw this phenomenon, he was inspired to gather the trunks and bind them together with rope. Then, he was inspired with the concept of nails.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We carried him along on a vessel of planks and nails’ (*al-Qamar:* 13); this refers to the Ark. The word *dusur* means nails which hold planks of wood together. Once he had built the Ark, ‘…We opened the gates of the sky with torrential water.’ (*al-Qamar:* 11)

His Words ‘floated under Our watchful eye…’ (*al-Qamar:* 14) mean that the Ark floated on the surface of the water ‘under Our watchful eye’, namely by Allah's power and under His care, His protection and His observance. This is akin to what Allah *the Exalted* says to our master Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘…planned that you should be reared under My watchful eye.’ (*Ta Ha:* 39) Were it not for Allah’s protective care, the Ark would not have settled above those billows.

His Words ‘…a reward for the one who had been rejected’ (*al-Qamar:* 14) mean that the Ark, the destruction of the disbelievers and the survival of the believers were all a reward for Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* whose people had disbelieved in him and denied him. He is the one who was rejected, or was disbelieved, and his reward and that of those who believed with him was that Allah *the Exalted* saved him and those who believed in him.

This could also mean ‘a recompense for those who disbelieved,’(1) which means how they were punished by drowning.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Al-Qurṭubi states in his exegesis Vol. 9, p. 6533 that some early Muslims read the verse in this way with kafar ‘who rejected’ rather than kufir ‘who had been rejected’.*

وَلَقَد تَّرَكۡنَٰهَآ ءَايَةٗ فَهَلۡ مِن مُّدَّكِرٖ ﴿١٥﴾ فَكَيۡفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿١٦﴾

We have left this as a sign: will anyone take heed? [15] How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings! [16] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 15 - 16)

These words pertain to the Ark: 'We have left this as a sign…' (*al-Qamar:* 15); what this means is that it is a lesson and an admonition to the people who came after Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*? Scholars say that this may mean that Allah left it as a story which would be read in a preserved Book until the Day of Resurrection, namely the Quran; furthermore, the Quran would continue to tell the story to people as the ages pass so that they might take admonition from it.

It may also mean that Allah *Glorified is He* caused the Ark itself to remain a sign in the place where it berthed after the waters subsided, namely Mount Judi,(1) about which Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…The Ark settled on Mount Judi…' (*Hud:* 44). It is said that this mountain is in Turkey, and I think you have probably read articles about this which affirm that there are some signs in this region; this might be an indication from Allah *the Almighty* of this incredible sign by which He saved the believers and drowned the disbelievers. Since it is a sign which must be pondered and reflected on, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Will anyone take heed?' (*al-Qamar:* 15) This means who is willing to reflect on it, ponder it, and take admonition from it?

The discourse then returns to address our master Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directly: 'How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfillment of] My warnings!' (*al-Qamar:* 16) This is a rhetorical use of a question to affirm a reality; the True Lord asks His Messenger, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfillment of] My warnings!' (*al-Qamar:* 16); this indicates that there is a connection between the inflicting of suffering and warning.

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(1) *In southeastern Turkey near the borders with Iraq and Syria there are many indications that this is the right mountain, for the town and villages in the area are named after Nuh (Noah) peace be upon him; the nearest town to the north of the mountain is called 'The Town of the Eighty', which is the number of people who survived the flood with Nuh (Noah).*

Allah *the Almighty* did not wrong them, nor take them to task without their being aware. Rather, He sent a warning to them—and what a warning—after a call which lasted nine hundred and fifty years, during which Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* warned them of the coming chastisement. It is as they say, ‘The one who is being warned has no excuse.’ When someone warns you, he removes your excuse, and you have no excuse after that.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِن مُّدَّكِرٍ ﴿١٧﴾

We have made it easy to learn lessons from the
Quran: will anyone take heed? [17]
(The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 17)

The letter *lam* (*la*) in the word *la-qad* is used in Arabic for emphasis, and *qad* is used for establishing. The True Lord wants to emphasise this fact, which is that the Quran has been made easy: ‘We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran…’ (*al-Qamar:* 17). We have made it easy to read and recite; We have made it easy to listen to and We have made it easy to understand, to appreciate and enjoy and to which to react.

The Quran is the only book which you love more the more you repeat it, and it is one which you understand more, along with experience and discover more of its secrets. Its wonders never cease, and its gifts are never exhausted because they are the overflowing graces of the Speaker of this Quran.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about the Quran, ‘Its wonder never ceases, and it does not grow stale after much repetition.’(1) This is because when you speak, you give your words as much meaning as your ability allows you to and as far as your literary and cerebral power allows you to; likewise, if the speaker is the True Lord, His gifts never cease. As long as what you have is ephemeral, whilst what Allah *the Almighty* has is everlasting, the Quran will remain fresh and keep on giving its abundant gifts to you until the Day of Resurrection.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi 2831 as part of a longer Hadith*

Moreover, Allah's Speech is one of His Attributes, and the Attribute of the Perfect One is itself perfect. Therefore, He says about the Quran: 'which falsehood cannot touch from any angle, a Revelation sent down from the Wise One, Worthy of All Praise.' (*Fussilat:* 42) A poet said about the Quran:

All things are explained therein,

And every reciter of it takes from it as his mind allows.

For example, when you reflect upon Quranic explanations through the ages, you will find that it is incredible. Were explanations confined to any one person, the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to whom the Quran was revealed, would have been the only one fit to give explanation of it; however, he left this task to others.

Had Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* given explanations about the Quran, no one else would have been able to add anything to his, but he left it to the coming generations so that each generation could take from it according to its perception, its development, its inventions and discoveries, as well as the secrets it uncovered, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth…' (*Fussilat:* 53).

Had the Quran given all it had to give to the generation of the companions, for example, all the subsequent generations would not have anything else to take from it, but Allah *the Exalted* wants to keep on giving His gifts until the Day of Resurrection.

So, He says: 'We shall show them…' (*Fussilat:* 53); each generation reads these words in the future tense like this, regardless of how much they have taken from the Quran because they are taking from a spring which never stops flowing.

One aspect of this making the Quran easy to read is that both Arabs and non-Arabs can read the Quran; when you are in *Al-Haram* (the Holy Mosque) in Mecca, you are amazed to see many non-Arabs reciting the Quran, though they know not even a single sentence of Arabic; yet, they recite the Quran in Arabic with a proper Arab accent. Indeed, they make mistakes in it and find it difficult to read, but they would not go through all that hardship if they did not find sweetness in the experience.

Also, young children read it, and even memorise it at the age of seven; yet, if you were to give them any man-made book, they would not be able to memorise it.

All this is part of the meaning of His Words: ‘We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran…’ (*al-Qamar:* 17). Were it not for this Divinely decreed ease, the child whose mind is not yet fully developed would not be able to memorise it; yet, he memorises it even though he does not know what it means or understands its decrees.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that the Quran is not counted by sentences but is counted by letters, each letter having a secret and a gift to offer, and indeed even an angel assigned to it.(1) So, when you love to read the Quran, you love the angels of the True Lord; and when you need them, they come to you and aid you.

Test yourself with the Quran: when you read it with a longing and hope and then forget a letter or a word, when you repeat the foregoing part in your mind, it quickly comes to you because it loves you just as you love it. Is it like the servant who loves his master so that when he calls him, he rushes to him? You all know the Hadith, ‘…do not say that "*alif-lam-mim*" is a letter. Nay, *"alif"* is a letter, "*lam*" is a letter and "*mim*" is a letter.’(2)

Therefore, we have seen wonders during Noble Quran competitions held for children and youths and how they test seven hundred competitors in a limited amount of time. To do this, they employ artful questions by which you can test the competitor’s memorisation of the entire Quran with a single question. For example, one could say to him, ‘This is a reminder. Let whoever wishes take the way to his Lord’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 19), and ask him to read on. If he has really memorised everything, this boy will say, ‘From where should I read?’ This is because this sentence appears in more than one place.

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(1) *As narrated by At-Tirmidhi 2835 and Al-Bayhaqi in Shu‘ab Al-Iman 1928, on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ud.*

(2) *Ibn Mas‘ud Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Whosoever reads a letter from the Book of Allah earns a good deed thereby, and good deeds are rewarded tenfold. I do not say that "alif-lam-mim" is a letter. Nay, "alif" is a letter, and "lam" is a letter, and "mim" is a letter.’ Narrated by At-Tirmidhi 2835 and Al-Bayhaqi in Shu‘ab Al-Iman 1928*

There is a question which they framed as a verse of poetry:

How many times does the plural of *nas* appear in Allah's Book?

Qad, yawma nad'u, akhriju, wa anasi. (Arabic)

(What they are asking is how many times the word *unas* or *anasi*—both are plurals of *nas*, meaning people—occur in the Quran. The question is in the first line of the poem, and the answer is in the second):

These words refer to key words in the verses wherein this word is found, as follows:

'...Qad 'alima kullu unasin mashrabahum...' ('…and every people knew its watering place…') (*al-Baqara:* 60).

'Yawma nad'u kulla unasin bi imamihim...' ('The day when We will call every people with their record…') (*al-Isra':* 71).

Akhrijuhm min qaryatikum innahum unasun yatatahharun' ['…Turn them out of your town. Surely, they are a people who seek to purify (themselves).'] (*al-A'raf:* 82)

Akhriju al lutin mun qaryatikum innahum unasun yatatahharun' ['…Turn out Lut's (Lot's) followers from your town. Surely, they are a people who would keep pure!'] (*an-Naml:* 56).

Wanusqihi mimma khalaqna an'aman wa anasiyya kathiran' ('…and give it for drink, out of what We have created, to cattle and many people.') (*al-Furqan:* 49)

So, the second line of the poetry gives the answer to the question in the first line. Why is this? The reason is that it has been made easy: 'We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran…' (*al-Qamar:* 17).

He then says: '…Will anyone take heed?' (*al-Qamar:* 17) Since We have made this Quran easy for remembrance, will anyone take lessons and admonition from it, along with taking admonition from the signs it contains?

For whom the Quran has been made easy? Allah *the Exalted* has made the Quran easy for those who believe in the speaker of the Quran and who believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to whom it was revealed. For there are those who hear the Quran and then ignore it and turn away, along with those who hear the Quran and mock it; the Quran has spoken about such people: ‘And there are those of them who seek to listen to you, until when they go forth from you, they say to those who have been given the knowledge, "What was it that he said just now?"…’ (*Muhammad:* 16) They say this by way of mocking and disparaging the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘…Say: It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing, and [as for] those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears and it is obscure to them…’ (*Fussilat:* 44). The Quran is one, as we have said, but those who receive it vary.

This is why when Al-Walid calmed himself and wanted eagerly to listen, he received the Words of Allah in the best way, inclined towards it, and was moved by it. The Quran affected him when he was yet a disbeliever, and he said, ‘By Allah, I have heard a speech that is not sorcery, nor poetry, nor soothsaying. By Allah, the highest part of it is fruitful, and the lowest part of it is plentiful, and it is above all, and below nothing!’(1)

Reflect on the first impact the Quran had on this man’s soul, whilst he was yet a disbeliever and how he expressed it in this beautiful way, ‘The highest part of it is fruitful, and the lowest part of it is plentiful.’ He was comparing the Quran to a tree which is fruitful above and green and verdant from below; trees generally have their fruit at the top at a time when their lowest parts are covered with dry leaves which fall. As for the Quran, it is all good, and every single letter of it has gifts to give.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Sira Vol. 1, p. 499, Ash-Shami in Subul Al-Huda wa Al-Irshad Vol. 9, p. 408, Al-Hakim 3831 and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala’il Al-Nubuwwa 505 and Shu‘ab Al-Iman 126, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him.*

كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿١٨﴾ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمِ نَحْسٍ
مُّسْتَمِرٍّ ﴿١٩﴾ تَنزِعُ ٱلنَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ مُّنقَعِرٍ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿٢١﴾

The people of 'Ad also rejected the truth. How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings! [18] We released a howling wind against them on a day of terrible disaster [19] it swept people away like uprooted palm trunks [20] How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings [21] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 18 - 21)

The Quran now lists, for those who deny the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and opposed his call, the people who denied their own messengers throughout history. It has already spoken to them about the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and what became of them, and now it speaks to them about the people of ‘Ad, and what Allah *the Almighty* did with them when they denied their Messenger Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him*.

The people of 'Ad were the ones who dwelled in the southern sand dunes, and they had a great civilisation of which Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have you [O, Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of 'Ad, of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land, and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-8). Their civilisation was mightier than that of Pharaonic Egypt which astonished the whole world; despite the scientific advances of the modern world, they have still not discovered all the secrets of this civilisation, and the pyramids remain a wonder whose secrets are still unknown.

The civilisation of 'Ad was greater still, but now it is buried below the sand because it is a desert environment wherein there are many sandstorms and the passage of time has caused sand to cover it. In this regard, they say that the sands of the dunes could bury an entire caravan if a storm blew over it. For this reason, we could only find the remains of this nation which Allah *the Almighty* destroyed under many layers of earth.

He speaks about the people of 'Ad, just as He speaks about the people of Nuh (Noah): ‘…How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings!’ (*al-Qamar:* 18) The suffering did not come to them by surprise, and their Lord did not take them to task while unaware; rather, He sent warnings to them by means of their prophet Hud (Eber) *peace be upon him* but they did not benefit from this, and the one who has been warned has no excuse.

Allah *the Exalted* then explains how He destroyed them: ‘We released a howling wind against them on a day of terrible disaster.’ (*al-Qamar:* 19) *Sarsar* (storm-wind) is a wind of intense cold, accompanied by an alarming cry which terrified them.

In another verse, this sound is called a *Sayha* (blast) (*Hud:* 94), and a blast is accompanied either by a fierce destructive wind or a blazing burning fire. On ‘…a day of terrible disaster’ (*al-Qamar:* 19) is a day of destruction that was *mustamirr* which means both ‘terrible’ and continuous; it means that it continued to assail them for the time which Allah had decreed, until it utterly destroyed them. The meaning of ‘It swept people away…’ (*al-Qamar:* 20) is that this fierce wind plucked them from their places, picked them up and flung them, scattering their belongings.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…like uprooted palm trunks.’ (*al-Qamar:* 20) You know what happens to the trunk of a palm tree when you cut off its upper part and uproot it from the ground. It is as though the wind was so strong it uprooted them from the ground, dragged them from their houses, and flung them as though they were uprooted palm-trunks. He then repeats: ‘How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfillment of] My warnings!’ (*al-Qamar:* 21) He repeats it to repeat the admonition and also because the suffering inflicted upon those people was varied, taking each of them to task with the kind of punishment and requital which Allah *the Almighty* willed. This is the absoluteness of Allah’s Power when it deals with punishment; Allah *the Exalted* has absolute Power to give blessings and also absolute Power to deal out retribution. He says: ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm, some were overcome by a sudden blast, some We made the earth swallow, and some We drowned. It was not Allah Who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40)

The discourse then repeats once more. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ يَسَّرۡنَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ لِلذِّكۡرِ فَهَلۡ مِن مُّدَّكِرٖ ٢٢

We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran:
will anyone take heed? [22] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 22)

This is in order to emphasise the fact that Allah has made the Quran easy; '…Will anyone take heed?' (*al-Qamar:* 22) It is as though He is seeking out one person to take admonition, 'O, mankind is there no one who will take the signs of the Quran to heart and reflect upon them?'

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَذَّبَتۡ ثَمُودُ بِٱلنُّذُرِ ٢٣ فَقَالُوٓاْ أَبَشَرٗا مِّنَّا وَٰحِدٗا نَّتَّبِعُهُۥٓ إِنَّآ إِذٗا لَّفِي ضَلَٰلٖ وَسُعُرٍ ٢٤
أَءُلۡقِيَ ٱلذِّكۡرُ عَلَيۡهِ مِنۢ بَيۡنِنَا بَلۡ هُوَ كَذَّابٌ أَشِرٞ ٢٥ سَيَعۡلَمُونَ غَدٗا مَّنِ ٱلۡكَذَّابُ ٱلۡأَشِرُ ٢٦

The people of Thamud also rejected the warnings [23] they said,
'What? A man? Why should we follow a lone man from
amongst ourselves? That would be misguided; quite insane! [24]
Would a message be given to him alone out of all of us? No,
he is an insolent liar!' [25] Tomorrow they will know who is
the insolent liar [26] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 23 - 26)

The True Lord tells us here about the people of our master Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* who were called Thamud and dwelled in Mada'in Saleh near Medina. He says: 'The people of Thamud also rejected the warnings.' (*al-Qamar:* 23) The word *nudhur* is the plural of *nadheer*, which literally means 'warner', namely a messenger. Allah *Glorified is He* says to His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You [O, Muhammad] are not but a warner.' (*Fatir:* 23)

The word *nudhur* is in the plural for this verse because the one who denies one messenger has essentially denied all messengers since they have a common goal and a common way, the essence of which is the worship of Allah *Glorified is He* alone with no partner.

Read this: 'Allah took a pledge from the prophets by saying, "If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him. Do you affirm this and accept My pledge as binding upon you?"…’’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 81) The duty of a messenger is to counsel his people that when a new messenger comes to them with a way akin to the way he has brought them, they must follow him believe in him and aid him.

The usual thing is that people are loyal to their messenger, for he teaches them: ‘The goal is one and the way is one, and if anyone comes to you and has these attributes, then follow him and do not oppose him, for we are all enlightened by the same lamp.’

Allah *Glorified is He* then tells us the Words by which these people denied: ‘They said, "What? A man? Why should we follow a lone man from amongst ourselves? ..."’ (*al-Qamar:* 24) This is akin to what the Quraysh said, ‘and they said, "Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?"’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31)

Thamud found it far-fetched that they should follow a single man amongst them, namely our master Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* when he was merely a human being. They objected to his being human and his being just one man. So, what do you want? They wanted a group of people all sharing in the delivery of this message so that all of them would be equal.

The reality is that the prophet does not bring anything of his own invention, nor of anyone else’s invention; he brings forth Revelation from Allah *the Exalted.* Doubting a messenger or prophet because he is human is rebutted by Allah’s Words: ‘Indeed, if We had sent an angel as messenger, We would still have sent him in the form of a man, so increasing their confusion.’ (*al-An‘am:* 9) Furthermore, an angel cannot be a role model for human beings.

They then said, ‘Most surely we shall in that case’, which means if they followed one man, they would ‘…be in sure error and distress!’ (*al-Qamar:* 24) *Su‘ur* means madness, and it also means *sa’ir* (the flames) of hell.

Their Words ‘Would a message be given to him alone out of all of us? ...’ (*al-Qamar:* 25) are a question by which they intended to express incredulity and denial of this. ‘How could the reminder have been given to him, and the Message been revealed to him from amongst all of us?’ By saying this, they were declaring that they deemed themselves to be equal to Allah’s prophet, Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*; yet, prophethood is not a matter of equality because Allah *the Exalted* elects whomever He wills from amongst His servants: '…But Allah knows best where to place His Messages…' (*al-An'am:* 124). He also says: 'Allah chooses messengers from amongst the angels and from amongst men. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.' (*al-Hajj:* 75)

They then took their denial to another level and made a bold accusation of lying: '…"No, he is an insolent liar!"' (*al-Qamar:* 25) A liar is someone who speaks untruths, and this was a false accusation, for our master Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* never told them anything untrue.

Ashir (insolent) means' very arrogant and haughty', or a person who is not content with his situation and is unhappy with what he has; he wishes to usurp authority over others and make himself the leader of his people so that everyone follows him.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* rebuts them by saying: 'Tomorrow they will know who is the insolent liar' (*al-Qamar:* 26); this means on the Day of Resurrection and Requital. The word 'Tomorrow' is used to refer to the near future, namely the day which comes after the present day, but in this verse, Allah *the Almighty* calls the Resurrection 'Tomorrow'. Why is this? It is because it is indeed near to us, for there is nothing between you and it but your own death. Therefore, He says about it: 'The imminent Hour draws near.' (*an-Najm:* 57) He also says: 'Ever closer to people draws their reckoning, while they turn away, heedless.' (*al-Anbiya':* 1) In this chapter we are discussing, He says: 'The Hour draws near…' (*al-Qamar:* 1).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…who is the insolent liar' (*al-Qamar:* 26)? This was a warning to them, along with being a casting back of their own accusation upon them, 'No, you are the boastful liars, for you hate and envy Saleh (Shelah) because of how his Lord has chosen him for prophethood from amongst you. Yet, this is Allah's Grace which He gives to whomever He wills, and so you ought to have believed in him, not opposed him.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا مُرۡسِلُواْ ٱلنَّاقَةِ فِتۡنَةٗ لَّهُمۡ فَٱرۡتَقِبۡهُمۡ وَٱصۡطَبِرۡ ﴿٢٧﴾ وَنَبِّئۡهُمۡ أَنَّ ٱلۡمَآءَ قِسۡمَةُۢ بَيۡنَهُمۡۖ كُلُّ
شِرۡبٖ مُّحۡتَضَرٞ ﴿٢٨﴾ فَنَادَوۡاْ صَاحِبَهُمۡ فَتَعَاطَىٰ فَعَقَرَ ﴿٢٩﴾ فَكَيۡفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿٣٠﴾
إِنَّآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا عَلَيۡهِمۡ صَيۡحَةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ فَكَانُواْ كَهَشِيمِ ٱلۡمُحۡتَظِرِ ﴿٣١﴾

For We shall send them a she-camel to test them: so watch them [Salih] and be patient. [27] Tell them the water is to be shared between them: each one should drink in turn.' [28] But they called their companion, who took a sword and hamstrung the camel. [29] How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings! [30] We released a single mighty blast against them and they ended up like a fence-maker's dry sticks[31] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 27 - 31)

The she-camel that was brought forth by our master Saleh (Shelah) was a sign, a plainly visible sign which they themselves had suggested when they said to their prophet, 'Bring forth for us a she-camel out of this rock.'(1) Indeed, the she-camel did miraculously come forth from the rock.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'For We shall send them a she-camel to test them…' (*al-Qamar:* 27). This means that the she-camel is a trial and a test for them: Will they believe in Allah *the Most High* or disbelieve? 'So [O, Saleh (Shelah)] watch them' (*al-Qamar:* 27) means that Saleh (Shelah) should watch what their reaction will be '…and be patient.' (*al-Qamar:* 27) Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him* should be patient in the face of their stubbornness and in the face of their assaults and their denials; he must not expect his call to them to yield fruit immediately.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Tell them the water is to be shared between them…' (*al-Qamar:* 28). As long as the she-camel was a miracle, it has a special position regarding its food and drink, and Allah made it clear to them that they were to divide the water they drank between them and the she-camel.

He says: '…each one should drink in turn.' (*al-Qamar:* 28) They each had their open apportioned share of drink which came in turns; they would drink on their day and not go near the water on the she-camel's day; however, on the day when they did not drink, the she-camel would give them enough of its milk to suffice any need for water on that day.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir (al-A'raf: 73)*

In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, this verse speaks about what the she-camel ate: 'To the people of Thamud We sent their brother Saleh (Shelah). He said, "My people, serve Allah. You have no deity other than He. A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord. This is Allah's she-camel—a sign for you—so let her graze in Allah's land and do not harm her in any way, or you will be struck by a painful torment."' (*al-A'raf:* 73)

However, they did not understand this warning: '…and do not harm her in any way…' (*al-A'raf:* 73); they did not believe in this sign, so they began inclining towards the notion of slaying the she-camel, resolving upon doing so. A foolish and wicked man amongst them, a 'thug' as they say, volunteered to do it; they call him 'the ruddy-faced man of Thamud', and scholars tell us his name was Qaydar ibn Salif.

The proof that he was one of the most foolish and wretched of people is that when he wanted to hobble the she-camel, he had nothing to do it with, so he snatched a sword from one of the others and hobbled it with it. They were responsible for this deed since not only did they agree together to do it, but they also cooperated in doing it.

When they did this, they brought upon themselves this chastisement: 'We released a single mighty blast against them ...' (*al-Qamar:* 31). A blast is a terrifying and destructive sound; scholars say that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* shouted out, and this was enough to utterly destroy them.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and they ended up like a fence-maker's dry sticks.' (*al-Qamar:* 31) The True Lord *the Most High* compares them to *hasheem*, which means dried up twigs that the wind blows here and there. *'Al-muhtadhir'*, (fence-maker) is a farmer who makes a pen for his sheep out of these twigs. So, when this blast struck them, it overtook them exactly like the manner of a Mighty, Powerful One, making them like dry sticks.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* repeats the verse:

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabari in his Tafsir*

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِن مُّدَّكِرٍ (٣٢)

We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran:
will anyone take heed? [32] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 32)

Observe that the discourse keeps repeating this verse and mentioning the Quran after each mention of a community that denied the truth. This is because the Quran is the final Revelation which encompasses all those which came before it as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We sent to you [O, Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it and with final authority over them…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 48).

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍۭ بِٱلنُّذُرِ (٣٣) إِنَّآ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَاصِبًا إِلَّآ ءَالَ لُوطٍ ۖ نَّجَّيْنَٰهُم بِسَحَرٍ (٣٤)
نِّعْمَةً مِّنْ عِندِنَا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى مَن شَكَرَ (٣٥)

The people of Lot rejected the warnings. [33] We released a
stone- bearing wind against them, all except the family of
Lot. We saved them before dawn [34] as a favour from Us:
this is how We reward the thankful [35]
(The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 33 - 35)

After beginning their discourse on the communities who denied the messengers with the people of Nuh (Noah), 'Ad and then Thamud, the verses now move on to their brethren, the people of Lut (Lot). What all these communities have in common is that they denied Allah’s messengers *peace be upon them*. Thus, we find that the Quranic discourse says of each of these communities that they denied *Al-nudhur* (the warnings) (*al-Qamar:* 33).

We said before that the word *nudhur* literally means ‘messengers’, for the one who denies one messenger has essentially denied all messengers, for they all share a common purpose and a common way.

The verses now take us directly to a scene of chastisement and requital: ‘We released a stone-bearing wind against them…’ (*al-Qamar:* 34). *Al-hasib* is a strong wind which blew upon them and pelted them with little pebbles by means of which Allah *the Almighty* rained down destruction upon them.

Allah *Glorified is He* only saved the family of Lut (Lot) before dawn. No one was spared from this suffering but the kinsfolk of Lut (Lot) and those who believed in him. They were saved at the break of dawn, and to be absolutely precise, the final part of the night, right before dawn. Allah *the Exalted* saved them as a blessing from Him, and that is how He rewards the thankful.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ أَنذَرَهُم بَطْشَتَنَا فَتَمَارَوْا۟ بِٱلنُّذُرِ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَلَقَدْ رَٰوَدُوهُ عَن ضَيْفِهِۦ فَطَمَسْنَآ
أَعْيُنَهُمْ فَذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابِى وَنُذُرِ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَلَقَدْ صَبَّحَهُم بُكْرَةً عَذَابٌ مُّسْتَقِرٌّ ﴿٣٨﴾
فَذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابِى وَنُذُرِ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِن مُّدَّكِرٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

He warned them of Our onslaught, but they dismissed the warning [36] they even demanded his guests from him – so We sealed their eyes –'Taste My [terrible] punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings!' [37] and early in the morning a punishment seized them that still remains [38] "'Taste My [terrible] punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings!' [39] We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran: will anyone take heed? [40] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 36 - 40)

Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* warned his people of Allah's onslaught and chastisement. He warned them of how sternly Allah takes those who disbelieved in the messengers. Other verses give further details of this story and show how Lut (Lot) engaged in debates with his people. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He said, "O, my people! These are my daughters. They are purer for you, so guard against [the punishment of] Allah and do not disgrace me with regard to my guests. Is there not amongst you one right-minded man?"' (*Hud:* 78)

However, they denied him *peace be upon him* and stubbornly cast doubt on these warnings. When he warned them of Allah's punishing Might, they stubbornly cast doubt on it; that is, they doubted it, denied and rejected it and then persisted in the wickedness in which they had been indulging. In addition, they even demanded that he give up his guests (to them).

The Arabic word for guest (*dayf)* refers to both the singular and the plural as is the case here. This is because whether one, two, or three guests come to you, you do not differentiate between one guest, and another but must treat them all the same as though they are one guest. Thus, the Quranic discourse refers to them using the singular form on more than one occasion. Allah says: 'And inform them of the guests of Ibrahim (Abraham).' (*al-Hijr:* 51) He also says: 'has there come to you information about the honored guests of Ibrahim (Abraham)?' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 24) Yet, Ibrahim (Abraham) did not have only one guest, but several. They demanded his guests from him and asked him to leave them so that they could do to them the abhorrent things they were accustomed to; they, namely the people of Lut (Lot), saw that they were the most exceedingly beautiful people they had ever seen which is why they thought that they could sodomise them. They did not know that those guests were not human beings but angels. Thus, Heaven intervened immediately to protect Lut (Lot) and preserve his dignity.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* sealed their eyes and blinded them which mean that He took away their sight. Other scholars say that He *the Almighty* completely wiped their eyes from their faces so that it looked as though they had never had eyes to begin with.

As a result, we observe that all the stories of the communities before Lut's (Lot’s) were followed by the words 'How [terrible] was My punishment and [the fulfillment of] My warnings ' (*al-Qamar:* 30). Yet as far as the people of Lut (Lot) were concerned, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Taste My [terrible] punishment and [the fulfilment of] My warnings.' (*al-Qamar:* 37) In other words, they taste the suffering which they deserve. The word ‘taste’ in this verse imparts irony and mockery towards them because of the enormity of their sin and the vileness of their deed.

Thereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And early in the morning a punishment seized them, and it still remains.' (*al-Qamar:* 37) The suffering befell them in the early morning as Allah says: 'But when it shall descend in their court, evil shall then be the morning of the warned ones.' (*as-Saffat:* 177) There is a special wisdom behind the way the suffering befell the deniers from the people of Lut (Lot) by morning. The reason for this is that early morning is a time when people are usually still asleep or just rising from sleep, so when suffering befalls them at this time, they are surprised and cannot flee what is befalling them which is more severe on them.

Once again comes the mention of the Quran as Allah says: 'We have made it easy to learn lessons from the Quran. Will anyone take heed?' (*al-Qamar:* 17) This is because there is a lesson to learn in the story of each of these deniers, so after each story, Allah *Glorified is He* repeats: ‘Will anyone take heed?’ That is, is there anyone to reflect and take admonition from such people?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ جَآءَ ءَالَ فِرْعَوْنَ ٱلنُّذُرُ ﴿٤١﴾ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا كُلِّهَا فَأَخَذْنَـٰهُمْ أَخْذَ عَزِيزٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

The people of Pharaoh also received warnings [41]
They rejected all Our signs so We seized them with all
Our might and power[42] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 41 - 42)

Allah speaks to us here about another group of deniers, namely the people of Pharaoh, who denied and rejected Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and to the clear signs he brought forth and which numbered nine in all, i.e. the staff, the hand, etc.

Thus, the consequence of this was that Allah took them with all His Might and Power. ‘To take’ means ‘to grasp firmly’, and the action of taking is determined by the power of the taker. When the taker is Allah, it is the Most Powerful, which is why He *the Almighty* mentions two of His Divine Attributes in this context, namely *the Almighty* and the All-Powerful. *The Almighty* is the One Who overcomes all and cannot be overcome, and The Powerful is the One Who possesses absolute power which is never exhausted.

We said before that the mission of Musa (Moses) concerning Pharaoh was to save the children of Israel from his clutches and from the suffering which the people of Pharaoh afflicted upon them as Allah says: 'therefore send the children of Israel with us and do not torment them.' (*Ta Ha:* 47) This was the essential mission and then Musa's (Moses') preaching to Pharaoh was only part of this mission; he began to call him to Allah and to explain to him matters of doctrine and religion.

The reason for the enmity which existed between Pharaoh and the children of Israel was that when the Hyksos entered Egypt, the children of Israel aided them and helped them to defeat the Pharaohs; the children of Israel staying at that time in Egypt were all of the descendants of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph). When the Pharaohs defeated the Hyksos and drove them out of Egypt, they paid the children of Israel back with mistreatment and cruel torment; so, Allah *the Exalted* sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* not to preach to Pharaoh and his people, but to free the children of Israel from this torment.

You all know the story of how Prophet Musa (Moses) left Egypt with the children of Israel and how Pharaoh followed them with his armies and how the sea divided and Musa (Moses) and the children of Israel were saved by a clear miracle: when Musa (Moses) struck the sea with his staff, it divided and became like two great mountains. Scholars say that when they were saved from both Pharaoh and drowning, they passed by people who were keeping vigil before idols. Thus, the children of Israel said, 'O, Musa (Moses)! Make for us a god as they have [their] gods.' (*al-A'raf:* 138) The exegetes say that they asked this of Musa (Moses) when their feet were still wet from crossing the sea. Thus, they denied the miracle of the signs at a time when it was all the more proper and fitting that they believe in Allah Who have rescued them and saved them from suffering.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَكُفَّارُكُمْ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أُوْلَٰٓئِكُمْ أَمْ لَكُم بَرَآءَةٌ فِى ٱلزُّبُرِ ﴿٤٣﴾ أَمْ يَقُولُونَ نَحْنُ جَمِيعٌ مُّنتَصِرٌ ﴿٤٤﴾
سَيُهْزَمُ ٱلْجَمْعُ وَيُوَلُّونَ ٱلدُّبُرَ ﴿٤٥﴾ بَلِ ٱلسَّاعَةُ مَوْعِدُهُمْ وَٱلسَّاعَةُ أَدْهَىٰ وَأَمَرُّ ﴿٤٦﴾

'Are your disbelievers any better than these? Were you
given an exemption in the Scripture?' [43] Do they perhaps
say, 'We are a great army and we shall be victorious'? [44]
Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee. [45]
But the Hour is their appointed time –the Hour is more
severe and bitter [46] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 43 - 46)

After telling us the stories of the communities of old who denied and rejected the messengers, starting with the people of Nuh (Noah), passing by the people of 'Ad, then the people of Thamud, the people of Lut (Lot) and ending with the people of Pharaoh, the Quran now returns to the disbelievers of Mecca who denied and rejected Prophet Muhammad, who opposed him and who stood in the way of his mission. It comes back to mention their story with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* after it shed light on the punishments that afflicted the previous peoples who denied the Messages of their messengers.

Allah *the Exalted* asks whether the disbelievers of Mecca are better than other deniers upon whom Allah's Retribution and Chastisement were unleashed, or have the disbelievers of Mecca been given an exemption in the ancient books that they would not be punished! Has Allah given you a Promise that He would not chastise you?! Do you perhaps say, 'We are a great army, and we shall be victorious?' Thus, you were deluded by your large numbers and your collective agreement on falsehood.

Therefore, the Quran was revealed to debate with the disbelievers of Mecca with the aim of convincing them. It let them choose from three possibilities: Are they better than the deniers of the Truth who came before you and were destroyed by Allah? Or have they been given immunity in the Scriptures of old or promised that Allah would not chastise them? Or were their numbers so great that they could not be overcome? All the three possibilities are rejected, for they were not better than those who preceded them, nor did they have any immunity from chastisement because Allah has given immunity to no one, nor allowed anyone to deny and reject His Messengers.

Furthermore, concerning the third possibility, He *the Almighty* says: 'Their forces will be routed and they will turn tail and flee.' (*al-Qamar:* 45) This means that these hosts, of which you, O, disbelievers of Mecca, are so proud, shall be routed.

This verse was revealed at the time when the disbelievers' oppression of the Muslims was exceptionally severe. Muslims were a minority and could not defend themselves. Therefore, when ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* heard this verse he said: 'What forces are these that will be routed when we are unable even to defend ourselves and protect our lives?' However, when the Battle of Badr took place and the forces of disbelief were indeed routed, he said, 'Indeed, Allah spoke the truth.'

Therefore, when you see the Quran declare things in the future tense, you should know that they are definitely true and that they will inevitably occur because the Quran has recorded them and preserved them. Usually, one is keen to record things that others owe him, not what he owes others.

It is the Quran that clearly mentions that the hosts of the disbelievers would be routed, thus events would never ever contradict this Divine Decree; this is proven by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones.' (*as-Saffat:* 173) As long as people are a true host that fight for the Cause of Allah, succour is assured for them. Yet, if they fail to live up to the conditions of being Allah's Hosts, succour will not be theirs; Muslim's defeat in the Battle of Uhud when they disobeyed Prophet Muhammad is a case in point.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* says that they will turn tail and flee. They will flee and be routed. This is the punishment that will afflict them in this world, but the punishment of the Hour is more severe and bitter. The Resurrection will be the time for recompense and punishment. The Last Hour will be most calamitous and most bitter. It will be more painful and bitter than what they suffer in this world because the calamity of this world has an end, and its wounds can be healed, whilst the calamity of the Hereafter is the greatest calamity, which neither ends nor heals.

Before the beginning of the Battle of Badr, it is amazing that our prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stood on the battlefield and pointed with his staff saying, 'This is where so-and-so will die, and this is where so-and-so will die.' He was referring to the chieftains of the Quraysh.(1) Indeed they were all slain in the very places where Prophet Muhammad had indicated. Look at this trust in Allah's Succour for His Messenger Muhammad; he *peace and blessings be upon him* made these declarations and was not worried that the events of the battle would prove him wrong, despite the fact that battles are always to-and-fro melees, and no one could ever predict what will happen with this much detail. Yet, this was the declaration of him who spoke not from caprice.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i and Ahmad*

إِنَّ ٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ فِي ضَلَٰلٖ وَسُعُرٖ (٤٧) يَوۡمَ يُسۡحَبُونَ فِي
ٱلنَّارِ عَلَىٰ وُجُوهِهِمۡ ذُوقُواْ مَسَّ سَقَرَ (٤٨)

Truly the wicked are misguided and quite insane [47] on the Day when they are dragged on their faces in Hell. 'Feel the touch of Hell' [48] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 47 - 48)

Indeed, the deniers of the Truth are misguided for they have recognised the truth yet refused to follow it. They are quite insane on the Day of Judgment. The Arabic word for insane has two meanings. It either means a blazing fire or else a kind of madness. However, the following verse suggests that the meaning here may actually be blazing fire.

On the Day of Resurrection, these wicked people will be dragged on their faces into Hellfire. The face is the noblest part of a person, and therefore, he tries to protect it and keep it from harm. It is the part through which man's identity is known and the most dignified part of him. For example, when a car comes past you and splashes you with water, you spontaneously raise your hands to protect your face without even thinking about it. Thus, the most degrading and humiliating of things will be the on the Day when the disbelievers are dragged on their faces into hell. The word 'taste' mocks at and humiliates them. Furthermore, Allah *the Most High* mentions only 'the touch' because the mere touch of it is enough to inflict suffering and degradation upon them. The word *saqar* is one of the names of hell; some say it is the name of a valley in hell.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيۡءٍ خَلَقۡنَٰهُ بِقَدَرٖ (٤٩) وَمَآ أَمۡرُنَآ إِلَّا وَٰحِدَةٞ كَلَمۡحِۭ بِٱلۡبَصَرِ (٥٠)

We have created all things in due measure [49] when We ordain something it happens at once, in the blink of an eye [50] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 49 - 50)

The antecedent of the pronoun 'We' is Allah *Glorified is He*. Everything in the universe, great, or small, from the atom to the galaxy, is created in due and precise measure and proportion set by Allah Who has the All-Power to do all that He wills and decrees. He is the only deity who has no partner. There is no other power which could change His Measure or Decree.

Therefore, concerning the testimony of faith 'there is no deity but Allah', we previously stated that Allah *the Almighty* testified to Himself even before creation did so; He *the Most High* says: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

Were this testimony not utterly true, He *the Almighty* would not be able to bring a thing into being by saying, 'Be!' since if He had a partner, this partner would say to the thing, 'Do not be!' So, all creation belongs solely to Allah, and all the command belongs solely to Him. Thus, He says about the earth, which is one of His created beings: 'And obeys its Lord and it must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2) The earth hears and listens to receive the command.

Consider the story of Musa's (Moses') mother, when Allah *Glorified is He* said to her: '…then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve; surely We will bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers.' (*al-Qasas:* 7)

Allah *Glorified is He* reassured Musa's (Moses') mother and gave her this promise that her son would survive and would be one of Allah's messengers. The reason for this is that the sea belongs to Allah and thus would obey His Command to protect the boy and to bear him to the place it was supposed to. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* testified for Himself that there is no god but He and ordained His Decree in His Universe, the Decree of One Who knows that there is no god but He and that no one can defy His command. Since He has stated it, reality never contradicts it.

Therefore, we said that the first evidence proving faith in Allah is that He Himself declared that He alone is the Creator and that no one else made a counterclaim; He *the Almighty* says: 'Say: If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of power.' (*al-Isra':* 42)

When Allah ordains something, it happens at once, in the blink of an eye. This means that He does not have to repeat the commandment, for His commands always come to fruition immediately. He expresses this in another verse by saying: 'Our Word for a thing when We intend it is only that We say to it, "Be", and it is.' (*an-Nahl:* 40) Thus, a single word of two letters, 'Be', is immediately obeyed. The word 'and' here expresses order and consequence.

Furthermore, Allah says: 'He said, "Even so, your Lord says: 'It is easy to Me.''' (*Maryam:* 21) He also says: 'And this is not difficult for Allah.' (*Ibrahim:* 20)

Reflect here on the swiftness of the response; the Divine Order takes place in a blink of an eye meaning ‘a quick unfocussed glance’. Allah *Glorified is He* is likening the swiftness of the response to the swiftest and the most instantaneous thing known to man, namely the twinkling of an eye. All things are the created beings of Allah. They know their Creator and respond to His commands without delay because it is their nature to respond and obey. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely, We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and man has turned unfaithful to it; surely, he is unjust, ignorant.' (*al-Ahzab:* 72)

He *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَآ أَشْيَاعَكُمْ فَهَلْ مِن مُّدَّكِرٍ ﴿٥١﴾
وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَعَلُوهُ فِي ٱلزُّبُرِ ﴿٥٢﴾ وَكُلُّ صَغِيرٍ وَكَبِيرٍ مُّسْتَطَرٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

We have destroyed the likes of you in the past. Will anyone take heed? [51] Everything they do is noted in their records; [52] every action, great or small, is recorded [53] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 51 - 53)

Allah *the Almighty* addresses the disbelievers of Mecca by saying that He had destroyed people like them in the past. He *the Most High* destroyed those who followed the same way of resistance, opposition, denial, and rejection of the messengers throughout the ages. Therefore, will anyone from amongst you, O, disbelievers of Mecca, take heed? Who will take admonition and reflect on the lessons of history and the Way of Allah with His Messages?

Everything the deniers of the Truth did is recorded in the books to be evidence against those who committed such deeds. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand.' (*Qaf:* 18) If we are now able to watch events with images and sound in every detail, why should we find it hard to imagine that Allah could have the power to do so? The mind which beholds the scientific and technological advances in the field of sound and image recording will certainly arrive to faith in the angelic scribes who record all of man's deeds. Every action, great or small, is recorded and written in the Preserved Tablet.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ فِى جَنَّٰتٍ وَنَهَرٍ ﴿٥٤﴾ فِى مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِندَ مَلِيكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍۭ ﴿٥٥﴾

The righteous will live securely among Gardens and rivers [54] secure in the presence of an all-powerful Sovereign [55] (The Quran, *al-Qamar:* 54 - 55)

This is the conclusion of the matter and the ultimate goal to which we must strive. It is to achieve righteousness which will lead us to Gardens and rivers. Allah does not say a garden and a river; rather, He says gardens and rivers.

Allah prepares for them, namely believers, a secure seat. A seat is where one sits, for a person may sit in a place which is rightfully his, meaning a place which is good and of which he is worthy, whilst another may sit in a seat of evil which is not rightfully his and of which he is not worthy. A believer who truly achieves righteousness is worthy to sit in this place which receives him gladly. Therefore, when we look into the word 'secure seat' in the Quran, we find that it is something for which the faithful should hope and pray. Read this: 'and say: "My Lord! Make me enter a goodly entering, cause me to go forth a goodly going forth and grant me from near You power to assist [me]."' (*al-Isra':* 80)

If you want to begin any action, call upon Allah and ask Him to enter, or begin, it in a correct and beneficial manner, that is, to enter a goodly entering by having Allah aiding you to do it so that you do it properly and sincerely and in a way pleasing to Him *the Almighty* and His Messenger. Likewise, when you finish doing something, call upon Allah to bring you out of it in a manner which is true and sincere and to complete it for you with the same truth as that with which you began it.

Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And ordain for me a goodly mention among posterity.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 84) The word 'goodly mention' in this verse symbolises remembrance and praise. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was asking Allah to make the praise directed towards him true and not false. He wanted to be worthy of praise and not to be praised falsely or hypocritically. He was saying, 'Make them praise me for what is true, not what is false. Furthermore, O, Allah, make their praise be for the goodness I truly have, which will be passed down to later generations.'

Thus, those who are eager for good at their entrance, their exit and in their praise as well as truth in their lives will come by means of it by obtaining truth in the Hereafter. It is a secure seat of honour in the presence of the All-Powerful Sovereign. By Allah, were this seat to be only in the presence of a king of this world, it would be a great honour and ennoblement. So, what do you think about a seat in the presence of Allah, the Sovereign? This is the One Who rules over all kings and all that they rule.

O, Allah, help us to attain this goal, inspire all our hearts sound belief and aid our bodies to act in proper accordance with it, by adhering to the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad so that he may take us all by the hand and lead us in his company to a seat of truth in the presence of a Sovereign Who determines all things! Amen. The word ‘Sovereign’ is one of the Names of Allah that refers to His Absolute Power and Might.

One of the rhetorical features of the Quran is that it brings together opposing concepts because opposites highlight each other's beauty. Thus, after concluding this chapter with the Lofty Name ‘Sovereign’, Allah begins the next chapter *ar-Rahman*, by saying: 'He is the Lord of Mercy.' (*ar-Rahman:* 1) Thus, the Sovereign Who determines all things is also the Most Merciful.

the chapter of

ar-Rahman

In the Name of God,[1] the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *ar-Rahman* (The Merciful). Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ ١

It is the Lord of Mercy [1]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 1)

The Most Merciful is one of Allah's Most Beautiful Names; it is derived from the Attribute of Mercy which means to give favours even if the recipient does not deserve them. Therefore, we have been taught to say before beginning any action, 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy.' If you have been sinful, you might be ashamed to begin your action with the Name of the One you have disobeyed. Nevertheless, Allah orders you to say it, for He is the Most Merciful.

The attribute is an intensive noun derived from ‘mercy’, and its hyperbole form has two aspects: intensiveness of the attribute itself, thus meaning ‘vast mercy’ and intensiveness in the number of mercies for those to whom this mercy is shown, meaning that no one mercy can take the place of any other. This is the meaning of Allah being the Lord of Mercy. He is the One Whose Mercy enfolds believer and disbeliever alike. He does not withhold from either of them if they utilise the means at their disposal as He *the Almighty*

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

says: 'Whoever desires the gain of the Hereafter, We will give him more of that gain, and whoever desires the gain of this world, We give him of it, and in the Hereafter he has no portion.' (*ash-Shura:* 20) It is as though sinners and disbelievers are given blessings in this world because of the manifestation of the attribute of Mercy.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Merciful in this world and the Giver of Mercy in the Hereafter. This is why they say 'the Most Merciful of this world, the Giver of Mercy of the Hereafter'. This is because His Mercy in the Hereafter is only given to a believer, while a disbeliever will have no share of it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

عَلَّمَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ ﴿٢﴾ خَلَقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ ﴿٣﴾ عَلَّمَهُ ٱلْبَيَانَ ﴿٤﴾

Who taught the Quran [2] He created man [3] and taught him to communicate[4] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 2 - 4)

Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by the intermediation of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*; He *the Almighty* says: 'The Lord of Mighty Power has taught him, The Lord of Strength; so he attained completion.' (*an-Najm:* 5-6) He also says about him: 'The processor of strength, having an honourable place with the Lord of the Dominion.' (*at-Takwir:* 20)

Thus, the knowledge of Prophet Muhammad was imparted from Heaven and not from the earth. Knowledge is something that could only bring absolute good to man in his conduct. When knowledge comes from earth, it is a mixture of good and evil. This is why we said before that illiteracy is usually a weakness and a flaw; yet, it was an honour for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because it meant that He did not take his knowledge from any human being but learnt all he knew from Heaven.

It is the wisdom of Allah that the community of Muhammad be an unlettered nation of nomads who had no civilisation and were not known to be advanced in science or any other of life's fields. Thus, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent from amongst them, he established a new civilisation for them and gave them the power to smash the civilisations of Persia and

Byzantium at the same time. This means that their power came from this religion which came from Heaven and took its teachings from the Lord of all humanity, not from any human being.

It is curious that Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of *'Ilm* (knowledge) first before speaking of creation. He did this in order to teach us the importance of knowledge and establishing guidance and principles before we begin to act. Before creating man, Allah *the Almighty* established guidance for his life. This is akin to how a manufacturer makes an 'instruction booklet' for his product, explaining how to make sure it works properly. We see that machines break down and stop working if they are not used in accordance with the instructions given for their use; likewise, human beings only go wrong when they contravene the guidance of their Lord.

Thus, this means that the establishment of guidance came before the creation of man so that when man came into existence, he found the guidance which told him: 'Do this and do not do that; this is lawful and that is unlawful, and this is good and that is evil.'

One of the meanings of the mercy included in the Quran is that the merciful person/object takes care of the person/object to whom the mercy is shown in a way which preserves its constituents and keeps them safe and unblemished. Allah says: 'And We reveal of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to believers.' (*al-Isra':* 82) Scholars say this means a cure for a disease that comes from heedlessness. Thus, we should take into account that mercy prevents the affliction of a disease from the very beginning.

Concerning the circumstances behind the revelation of these verses, they say that the disbelievers of Mecca accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of learning the Quran from a non-Arab man. They said, as the Quran tells: 'And certainly We know that they say, "Only a mortal teaches him."' (*an-Nahl:* 103) However, Allah answered them logically: 'The tongue of him whom they reproach is barbarous, and this is clear Arabic tongue.' (*an-Nahl:* 103) How could a non-Arab, without knowledge of Arabic, have come up with this eloquent Quran? Rather, the Quran came from on high and was sent down from Heaven; it did not come from earth.

Let us consider another meaning of mercy which we find in Words of Allah: 'Say: Call upon Allah or call upon, the Beneficent Allah.' (*al-Isra':* 110) Allah *the Exalted* appends the Attribute of Mercy in this verse to the Attribute of Divinity. This is because divinity implies responsibility which can be difficult for the soul, so it was fitting to mention the Attribute of Mercy after it. It is as though Allah were saying to you: 'Do not worry, for the One Who has issued responsibility to you is the Most Merciful Whose Mercy enfolds all and Whose Most Mercifulness encompasses believer and disbeliever alike.'

Concerning the beginning of creation, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods, and He is firmly established on the throne of authority, the Merciful Allah, so ask respecting it one aware.' (*al-Furqan:* 59) Allah *Glorified is He* after creating all creation established Himself upon His Throne meaning that He had control and command over all things. He thereby mentions the Attribute of Mercy by way of saying to us that His Power is not that of tyranny and despotism, but it is a Merciful Power.

It is even when speaking about the Hereafter and all the terrors it involves, He speaks of His Mercy: 'There is no one in the heavens and the earth but will come to the Merciful Allah as a servant.' (*Maryam:* 93) Allah is Ever Compassionate with His created beings, thus He gives them cause to hope for His Affection and His Love for them.

He *the Most High* mentions the Attribute of Mercy in the very first independent verse. The reason for this is when such Attribute is generally mentioned, nothing comes to one's mind but Allah. It combines all these concepts and flows through in every Divine Command.

Concerning the precedence of the matter of knowledge over that of creation, scholars have spoken about means and ends and which of them precedes the other. It is usually the case that the end comes after the means. For example, if you want to go to Alexandria, you use a mode of transport and follow the road which leads you there; that means that by using this means, you arrive at your destination which is Alexandria. A poet expressed this concept by saying:

Ah, who will show me my destination before I leave?

How could they, when destinations always come after journeys*?*

Indeed, people cannot know ends before they come to be. However, the Lord of mankind knows them in advance and from pre-eternity. He, therefore, informs you of the end. Thus, it is possible for ends to precede means. On the other hand, we say that you only followed the road to Alexandria because you already had it in mind; thus, the end existed before the means.

Furthermore, we can synthesise these two opinions by saying that when the end comes first, it is a plan because you define the desired end before you set out to use the means; however, when the means comes first, it is reality and implementation. Means takes us to the desired end. Thus, the means coming after the end represents prior planning, whereas the end coming after the means represents utilisation. In other words, the end comes before the means as motive, but when it comes after the means, it is an actual reality.

The ultimate purpose and end of the Quran is to impart doctrines, laws, ethics, and stories. Man’s heart is the place of the doctrines, and their essence is to believe in One God without any partner of any kind. This faith has two essential sides, which are fear and hope. If you are in a state of goodness, safety and security, do not doubt that Allah might change this, and if you are in a state of severe difficulty and anguish, do not despair of the Mercy of Allah. When a heart is imbibed with this sound doctrine, it pumps it through the rest of the body, and therefore, the whole body acts in accordance with the heart's belief.

When you follow the laws, commands and ethics of the Quran, you find that the Mercy of the Most Merciful flows through the whole body. Where moral responsibility is concerned, the primary part of the body is the tongue and then comes the ear because it is the tongue that conveys and the ear that receives. When the Message is first conveyed from Allah, it must be accompanied by sincerity and trustworthiness because it is a Divine One.

Therefore we said, by way of praising Prophet Muhammad: ‘*Peace and blessings be upon you,* O, Messenger of Allah. You are ear of goodness which received the final Message from Heaven and the tongue of sincerity which conveyed Allah's Will to creation!' Allah prepared His Messenger Muhammad for this task and endowed him with the necessary qualities of reception and conveying. Before he was sent forth, his people attested to this. As we know, there were those who believed in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before seeing any miracle to support his claim; they believed in him because of what they already knew of his moral character and nature.

Therefore, when Allah *the Exalted* spoke to his people about him, He said: 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.' (*al-Fath:* 29) This is as though He *the Almighty* were saying, 'Muhammad, whom you know, to whose character you have attested and upon whose sincerity and trustworthiness you are all agreed, is the Messenger of Allah to you.' It is as though the word 'Muhammad' and his very name offer a proof for his being the Messenger of Allah.

Moreover, the Quranic guidance is the instruction booklet that rectifies the motions of human life; it gives instructions for the protection of the tongue, commanding you to remember Allah and speak the truth and forbidding you from speaking falsehoods and vain words; it gives instructions for the protection of the ear, commanding you to listen to what is good for you and beneficial for your life and forbidding you from paying heed to what is false.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when you see those who enter into false discourses about Our communications, withdraw from them.' (*al-An'am:* 68). He also says: 'And indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear Allah's communications disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse; surely then you would be like them; surely Allah will gather together the hypocrites and the disbelievers in Hell.' (*an-Nisa':* 140)

Thus, you find that the Quranic guidance protects your whole body for you by making clear to you what is lawful and what is unlawful and by the goodness it enjoins upon you and the evil from which it forbids you. Furthermore, when you reflect upon these commandments and prohibitions, you find that they are all manifestations of Allah's Mercy and that His Most Mercifulness is flowing through them all. If the motions of life are based on Allah's Guidance, security and ease will prevail, and the rights of all will be preserved, but if they are based on anything other than this guidance, then rights will be squandered, corruption will spread and honours will be violated.

Out of His Mercy, Allah forbade lying and false testimony because it wrest people's rights from them and gives those rights to others. Just reflect on the corruption which sweeps through society because of the violation of rights. Bearing false witness, cheating, stealing, usurping, embezzling, bribery, forgery, nepotism and other such things are forbidden by the Law, which is why the Quran calls them 'devouring the wealth of others wrongfully’ as Allah says: 'O you who believe! Do not devour your property amongst yourselves falsely.' (*an-Nisa’:* 29) Is this not a Mercy of Allah upon us? Indeed, it is for we are mercifully spared from each other's injustice.

Thus, we say that the manifestation of 'The Most Merciful' flows through all the laws and teachings of the Divine Guidance. Even when He commands us to apply lawful retribution and decrees that murderers be executed, there is even mercy in this execution since it protects the murderer, the victim, and all society. When the prospective murderer knows that he will be executed if he does it, he will be less likely to go through with it.

Since Allah *the Almighty* created Adam *peace be upon him* and made him dwell in the Garden and gave him the test of obeying His command, all religious responsibilities spring from this Divine Mercy. As long as Adam obeyed the command, he remained in the Garden and enjoyed it; however, when he disobeyed it, he failed, his nakedness was exposed and his condition became wretched. From this experience, we learnt what the attitude of Satan is towards man. In other words, we must learn a lesson from what our father Adam experienced so that we are wary of contravening Allah's Guidance.

Read: 'Then his Lord chose him, so He turned to him and guided [him]. He said: "Get forth you two therefrom, all [of you], one of you [is] enemy to another. So there will surely come to you guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy. And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life, and We will raise him on the day of resurrection, blind. He shall say, 'My Lord! Why have You raised me blind, and I was a seeing one indeed?' He will say, 'Even so, Our communications came to you, but you neglected them. Thus, you shall be forsaken this day.''' (*Ta Ha:* 123-126)

Therefore, all responsibility is a manifestation of the Divine Mercy. Even when you contravene His Guidance, your Lord does not forsake you, and this Mercy does not leave you, for He has established the possibility of repentance for you and opened the door for you to return to Him by saying: 'Surely, Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases.' (*an-Nisa':* 48) The very establishment of repentance itself manifests mercy.

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And taught him to communicate.' (*ar-Rahman:* 4) To understand this verse, we refer to the verse 'who taught the Quran' (*ar-Rahman:* 2) where Allah *Glorified is He* did not explicitly state to whom He taught it. Thus, it means that He prepared the Quran and qualified it to be taught and then when He created man, He *the Almighty* taught him how to communicate. This means that He taught man, His vicegerent on earth.

‘To communicate’ means to be able to express what it is in your mind in a clear and plain way which the hearer understands. This means that we must have something in common which we all understand, namely language, and this is what Allah imparted unto Adam. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And He taught Adam all the names.' (*al-Baqara:* 31) Allah did as such so he *peace be upon him* could use them to express what was in his mind. The meaning of 'the names' is the individual name for every single thing. So, Adam is the source of all languages.

We said before that if we were to follow the chain of language back to its origin, we would come back to Adam *peace be upon him*. The child learns from his father who learned from his father, and so on until we come back to Adam. So, who taught Adam? His Lord taught him. Someone might say, 'Allah taught Adam the names of the things that existed in his environment, so he learnt the names of the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, certain people and certain animals and so on; however, what about the names that were made after his time?'

We say in response that the imparting of the names to him means more than we understand from the concept of teaching alone. What it means is that He imparted unto him the tools of speech, to enable him to express the new names which he would see and to use what he was taught to discover new things which he had not known before. Television, for example, did not have a name before it was invented, but once it came along, they agreed on a name for it. This answers the claim of those who say that language must be taken as it is in a fixed way. No, we say, this is not the case for those new words which come into being.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلشَّمْسُ وَٱلْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ ﴿٥﴾ وَٱلنَّجْمُ وَٱلشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ ﴿٦﴾

The sun and the moon follow their calculated courses [5]
the plants and the trees submit to His designs [6]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 5 - 6)

The sun and the moon are two of the signs of Allah *the Almighty*. They follow their calculated courses that are precisely fixed. It is akin to what we say of a well-made clock, 'It never misses a beat', meaning that it is extremely precise.

Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere describing this precision: 'Neither is it allowable to the sun that it should overtake the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day; all float on in a sphere.' (*Ya Sin:* 40) Since Allah created the sun and moon, they have followed their courses without any deviation, and because they are so precise, Allah has made them measures and indicators of the passage of time. If the watch on your wrist did not run precisely, it would not be useful for telling the time.

The sun indicates for us the passage of day and night, while the moon indicates for us the passage of the months. The sun does this by rising and setting, whilst the moon by the stages it passes through during the month, starting from a crescent and then growing until it becomes full in the middle of the month after which it shrinks until it is as it was at its very beginning. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He it is Who made the sun a shining brightness and the moon a light and ordained for it mansions that you might know the computation of years and the reckoning. Allah did not create it but with truth; He makes the signs manifest for a people who have knowledge.' (*Yunus:* 5)

The sun has its own light and heat; the moon reflects the light of the sun and does not produce heat. We may observe that the lunar month is shorter than the solar one because of the different motions of each; the sun has a different position every day. This is why the temples of Pharaohs have 365 apertures, so that the sun enters a different one of them every day. By means of this, they were able to allow the sun to shine on Ramses' face on any given day of the year.

Out of His Wisdom, Allah has connected our daily worship and prayers to the sun and connected our monthly and annual acts of worship to the moon. If *Ramadan* was connected to the motion of the sun, for example, it would always fall at the same time of year. If it fell in June, for example, it would always be in June, and if it fell in January, it would always be in January. But its connection to the motion of the moon means that it falls in every part of the year, and all of us, at some point, have fasted *Ramadan* in summer and in winter. The same is the case for the pilgrimage.

You know that the difference between the solar and the lunar year is eleven days; this makes the responsibilities of worship easier and allows them to be fulfilled without ever breaking down, for the sun and the moon are two great cosmic signs which do not ever need to be maintained by human hands. They do their jobs by the Power of Allah and have done so since He created them.

Allah *the Almighty* says that plants and trees submit to His Designs. The Arabic word for plants can mean the stars of the sky, a meaning which is clear in the verse: 'And landmarks, and by the stars they find the right way.' (*an-Nahl:* 16) It can also mean herbage and plants which have no stalk.

Thus, these two verses bring together two different kinds of the signs of the universe: the sun and the moon are signs of the heavens, whilst herbage and trees are signs of the earth; the word ‘plants’ combines them. The sun and the moon are together because they are of one kind and so are the herbs and the trees: one of the heavens, the other of earth.

They all submit to the Will of the Creator. In many other verses, Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear that these inanimate objects and plants prostrate before Him and glorify Him in the way that suits them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you not see that Allah is He Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, along with the sun, the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many of the people; many there are against whom chastisement has become necessary. Whomsoever Allah abases, there is none who can make him honorable; surely, Allah does what He pleases.' (*al-Hajj:* 18)

This is why we hear biologists saying that plants draw their nourishment from the ground by means of capillaries; yes, it is utterly true that plants have capillaries which are miraculously created. They also have life and power. If you take a basin of water and put some of these capillaries in it, they will suck up all the water. As for the way plants draw their nourishment, it is something else, for they take what they need from the soil and are able to distinguish between the soil's different constituents. Observe how sugarcane absorbs the sweetness from the soil, whilst pepper absorbs what is spicy.

Read the verse: 'And in the earth there are tracts side by side and gardens of grapes and corn and palm trees having one root and [others] having distinct roots. They are watered with one water, and We make some of them excel others in fruit; most surely, there are signs in this for a people who understand.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4) Therefore, it is not a question of the capillaries, but it is one of the signs of Allah 'Who creates, then makes complete, and Who makes [things] according to a measure, then guides [them to their goal]' (*al-A'la:* 2-3).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلسَّمَآءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ ٱلۡمِيزَانَ ٧ أَلَّا تَطۡغَوۡاْ فِي ٱلۡمِيزَانِ ٨
وَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلۡوَزۡنَ بِٱلۡقِسۡطِ وَلَا تُخۡسِرُواْ ٱلۡمِيزَانَ ٩

He has raised up the sky. He has set the balance [7]
so that you may not exceed in the balance [8]
weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance [9]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 7 – 9)

The word 'sky' in this verse follows the plants and the trees in the previous verses. Allah raised the sky up, and you see it above you without any support. He has set the balance. He revealed the foundations of justice and truth; the measure is the tool which determines what is true and what is false. He then commands us to not exceed in the balance, which means do not fail to meet the required measure. Do not exceed the line between truth and falsehood. Thus, these verses are telling us about a cosmological order which is founded on truth and a precise measure which has no exceptions or violations.

Justice governs the motions of the sun and the moon, just as it governs the motions of man. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Neither is it allowable to the sun that it should overtake the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day; all float on in a sphere.' (*Ya Sin:* 40) Thus, nothing transgresses against anything else, and so must man be.

Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to not exceed in the balance because when the celestial bodies remain firm upon the nature in which they were created and the role Allah wanted them to play, their motions run smoothly and they fulfil their purpose in existence. We have never seen any conflict between these bodies. Likewise, if man wants the motions of his life to run smoothly, he has to direct them according to this measure that Allah established for them.

After forbidding any transgression against the measure, He then commands us to weigh according to the justice with that which everyone is given their rights, as He says elsewhere: 'And weigh [things] with a right balance.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 182) ‘To weigh something with equity’ means to perform it in the most perfect way. Since measure is the criterion, it must be precise and adhere to the law which Allah wants for it, namely justice. He then emphasises this by ordering us to not fall short in the balance. Scholars say that this means ‘do not decrease the measure’. However, there are several different ways to decrease the measure. The one who cheats you by disguising rancid fruit as fresh and selling it to you thereby decreases the measure; and the one who rigs his scales thereby decreases the measure. Allah *the Exalted* wants to preserve His creatures' rights for them, and this is a manifestation of the Mercy of Allah.

He *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلۡأَنَامِ (١٠) فِيهَا فَٰكِهَةٞ وَٱلنَّخۡلُ ذَاتُ ٱلۡأَكۡمَامِ (١١)
وَٱلۡحَبُّ ذُو ٱلۡعَصۡفِ وَٱلرَّيۡحَانُ (١٢) فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (١٣)

He set down the Earth for His creatures [10] with its fruits, its palm trees with sheathed clusters [11] its husked grain, its fragrant plants [12] which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [13] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 10 - 13)

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the skies that He raised them up, and He says about the earth that He set it down which means He made it low and spread out. He *the Almighty* says: 'the earth for you an expanse' (*Ta Ha:* 53). So, it is spread out like a bed. Elsewhere He *Glorified is He* called it a 'resting-place' (*an-Naba':* 6), which bears mankind just as a crib bears a baby. Thus, the earth was laid down for man to dwell upon it.

The word 'created beings' refers to human beings and some have said that it actually includes all those things which have a spirit, which would mean that animals are also included since they consume the fruits of the earth and live upon it. They also say that the jinn are included.

We may also observe that this verse speaks of the earth in general terms; it does not say which part of the earth is meant for whom. This means that it is comprehensive: the earth in this verse refers to the whole earth, in other words, every place on it. Likewise, 'created beings' means all living beings, whatever their identity is. So, Allah's earth, in every place, is for Allah's servants, in every place.

We can also understand this from Allah's Words: 'Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves, [the angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer, "We were too weak on earth." [The angels] will say, "Was, then, Allah's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?" For such, then, the goal is Hell and how evil a journey's end!' (*at-Tawba:* 97)

Thus, Allah's earth is for everyone; if you find it hard to live in a given place, and then go somewhere else where it is easier. This on its own would be enough to solve the problems of the world today if they were to implement it; however, what has happened is that they have cut-off the means of this natural unity which the Creator wanted for mankind, and they have set up their own borders and barriers.

It is extraordinary how we see them squabbling over metres of land at their borders when they live in thousands of kilometres of Allah's earth. If you look at a map and observe the borders between nations now, are they composed of straight lines? No, they are bent and crooked and intertwined. Therefore, this is how Allah *the Almighty* wanted it to be: the whole earth is meant for all living beings.

We now witness lands which are almost exploding with overpopulation but have scarce resources, while on the contrary, there are other lands which are empty of people but filled with resources which are neglected and have no one to extract them. Is this the just measure upon which the affairs of man are supposed to be based? No, by Allah, this is injustice and a transgression of the measure.

Just look at the man-made borders, the walls, the airports, the doors and the stern laws that govern them, along with the visas and conditions for entry. It sometimes takes months and months to prepare all the paperwork and visas to enter certain countries.

When these boundaries were made, this led to disputes between nations, and nationalist divisions, along with the hoarding of wealth and resources by such nations who possessed them; as a result, wars and conflicts broke out as you can see for yourselves.

The verses then list a number of Allah’s Favours on earth: 'with its fruits…' (*ar-Rahman:* 11); this refers to the fruits on the earth. The Arabic word for fruit is *fakiha*, related to the word *tafakkaha*, which means ‘to amuse oneself’; this is because fruit is a luxury which is extraneous to the basic elements of food. Fruit is mentioned here before wheat, barley or any other grain.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…its palm trees with sheathed clusters' (*ar-Rahman:* 11). The word *kumm* means the sheath that covers the fruit before it ripens, and in this verse, the plural *akmam* means 'sheathed clusters'. 'Its husked grain…' (*ar-Rahman:* 12) means wheat, barley, corn and other stables. As for His saying, '…its fragrant plants…' (*ar-Rahman:* 12), it refers to the husk which covers the grain; the fact that it is mentioned calls our attention to its nutritional importance. Scientists have discovered that the husk of wheat has many important medicinal values(1) and that wheat grains only fulfil their purpose when they are with their husks.

Furthermore, scientists have warned against eating high-grade flour in which the grain has been separated from the husk; people who eat too much high-grade flour are forced in their old age to eat bread made of bran or coarse flour. This is why whole-wheat bread is more expensive than white bread.

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(1) The thin husk of wheat contains six vitamins, from B1 to B6 as well as several others. It also contains a phosphorous substance which is good for the brain and the nerves, as well as iron, which is good for the blood. It also contains calcium, which strengthens the bones, silicone, which strengthens the hair, iodine, which aids the thyroid gland, and so on.

Therefore, we understand from '…its husked grain and its fragrant plants…' (*ar-Rahman:* 12) that the grain should be taken just as it is when it comes out of the ground on its stalk, for this is how it is supposed to be. The word *'asf* (stalk) also occurs when Allah speaks of the people of the Elephant: 'And [He] caused them to become like a field of grain (*'asf*) that has been eaten down to stubble.' (*al-Fil:* 5) In other words, this is like chewed stalks and the remnants of food.

As for the word *rayhan* (fragrant plants), scholars say that this means either the kernel of a grain or a sweet-smelling plant which is known by this name. 'Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 13) These words are addressed to the 'sin-laden two', namely jinns and mankind, to whom He will later address thus: 'We shall attend to you two huge armies [of jinn and mankind]' (*ar-Rahman:* 31). In the verse being discussed, Allah *the Almighty* addresses them with this question: these are the favours of Allah and His boons, so which of these favours will you deny, O, men and jinns?

One of the rhetorical features of the Noble Quran is that when Allah *the Exalted* wants to affirm and emphasise something, He presents it not as a statement but as a question as though He were saying to them, 'You say it.' Thus, when you look for an answer to the question, you will inevitably say, 'Not one of Your Favours, Lord, do we deny.'

Now you only use this rhetorical question if you are certain that the answer will prove your point. For example, if someone denies that you have done him any favours, you might say to him, 'Did I not do such-and-such for you?'

The word *ala'* means blessings; it is the plural of *al*. This verse 'Which then of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' is repeated many times in this chapter, and there is a special purpose and wisdom to this, just as the similar repetition in the previous chapter of 'Hence, indeed, We made this Quran easy to bear in mind: who, then, is willing to take it to heart?' (*al-Qamar:* 17) and 'For how severe is the suffering which I inflict when My warnings are disregarded' (*al-Qamar:* 21). Such repetitions have wisdom, and they add something new, for otherwise, they would be meaningless additions, and there is none of that in the Quran.

So, the repetition of the Words 'Which then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 13) serves to make each favour independent; with each favour, these words are repeated, and this question is asked for every individual favour.

This verse is repeated thirty-one times in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*. It is as though Allah *the Almighty* wants to emphasise for us how His Most Mercifulness flows through this chapter, so He mentions it after each favour: ‘Can you disavow this?' 'Can you disavow this?’

Thus, how could we disavow, when we live in the midst of this favour night and day? Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us that when we read this verse, we should say, ‘Not one of Your favours, Lord, do we deny!’

Likewise, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I recited the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to your brethren amongst the jinns, and they responded to it better than you did. Every time I read 'Which then of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 13), they said, ‘Not one of Your favours, Lord, do we deny! Praise be to You!’(1)

This means that when we listen to the Quran, we must react to it and reflect on its meaning, not simply let it pass through our ears as we do when we listen to human speech. we have seen those of strong faith who are near to Allah doing just this: when the Name of Allah is mentioned, they say ‘Glory be to Allah’, or ‘Truly Majestic is He’; and when the name of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is mentioned, they say ‘Allah bless him and grant him peace’; and when paradise is mentioned, they ask for it; and when hell is mentioned, they seek refuge with Allah from it. This is how the believer should react to Allah’s Word. Do we do as they do?

I once heard the Quran being recited at a wake. The master was reciting verses in which the suffering of the hellfire was described, and one from the audience was saying to him, ‘How wonderful, master, keep going, May Allah increase you!’

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(1) *See At-Tirmidhi and Al-Bayhaqi*

خَلَقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِن صَلْصَٰلٍ كَٱلْفَخَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾ وَخَلَقَ ٱلْجَآنَّ
مِن مَّارِجٍ مِّن نَّارٍ ﴿١٥﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٦﴾

He created mankind out of dried clay, like pottery [14] the jinn out of smokeless fire [15] which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [16] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 14 - 16)

Sounding clay (*salsal*) means clay which has dried out and hardened, and this is one of the stages through which man passed during the first creation of Adam *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* told us that man was created from water, clay, soil and transmuted dark sludge; thus, he passed through all these stages until he became sounding clay, like pottery.

So, these are all stages of the same thing. Water and soil combined make clay, and if clay is left, it ferments and decays, along with its scent changing so that it becomes transmuted sludge. Then, it dries and becomes sounding clay.

Therefore, no particular one of these stages was the beginning of creation; rather, all of them combined constituted the beginning of creation. Allah *the Exalted* tells us: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own selves…' (*al-Kahf:* 51). So, we do not know how we were created except for such things which Allah has told us of the matter, and therefore, He follows these Words by saying: '…and neither do I [have any need to] take as My helpers [beings] that lead [men] astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) Those who lead others astray are ones who describe the creation in terms other than that which Allah has told us of such as the one who came along(1) and told us that the origin of man was an ape which then evolved into man. The Quran anticipated this and spoke of what would come in the future, and it warned us not to trust these lies and fabrications against Allah.

Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks to us about a matter of the unseen which the mind has difficulty comprehending, He clarifies it for us by using something visible which is comparable to it. Indeed, we did not witness the first creation, and it is a matter of the unseen, but we have seen its opposite, which is death, and we have witnessed this plainly. Death brings an end to life, and usually destruction is the mirror image of building: that which is built first is destroyed last, and that which is built last is destroyed first.

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(1) Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

Thus, creation began with water, soil and clay, then transmuted sludge and then sounding clay like pottery. Then after that, Allah blew something of His Spirit into it so that life quickened within it. As for death, it begins with the exit of the spirit, and then the body dries out so it becomes as sounding clay; then, its scent changes so it smells like transmuted sludge; then, all the water evaporates, and there is nothing left but materials which degrade into soil. So from the death which we witness, we can take evidence of the unseen matter of 'He created mankind out of dried clay, like pottery.' (*ar-Rahman:* 14)

He then says: 'the jinns out of smokeless fire' (*ar-Rahman:* 15). The word *marij* means a clear flame unadulterated by any smoke. The nature of fire is subtler than that of clay since fire is quick moving and penetrating, unlike clay which does not penetrate in this way. For example, if you have an apple and you are in one room, can the person in the room next door feel the presence of the apple? However, fire is different because it penetrates through the wall so that the person on the other side can feel its heat. This is where the jinns get their power. They have the power to penetrate through things and are not impeded by anything material. This means that they were created from the translucency of fire, whilst we were created from the solidness of clay; this is why they can see us, but we cannot see them. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Which then of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 13)

رَبُّ ٱلْمَشْرِقَيْنِ وَرَبُّ ٱلْمَغْرِبَيْنِ ﴿١٧﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٨﴾

He is Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two
settings [17] Which, then, of your Lord's
blessings do you both deny? [18]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 17-18)

Allah *the Almighty* mentions in this verse the points of sunrise and sunset in the context of His favours, which means that there must be many favours contained within them. When we examine these two words *mashriq* meaning 'east' or 'point of sunrise', and *maghrib* meaning 'west' or 'point of sunset', in the Quran, we find that they are sometimes given as singulars and sometimes as duals. He says: 'The Lord of the east and the west [is He]…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 9). Yet, in another verse, He says: '[He is] the Lord of the two farthest points of sunrise, and the Lord of the two farthest points of sunset. Which, then, of your Lord's favours can you disavow?' (*ar-Rahman:* 17-18) Likewise, He says: 'But nay! I call to witness [Our being] the Lord of all the points of sunrise and sunset…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 40).

The reason for this plurality is that there are several locations; in one place there is a point of rising and a point of setting for the sun, but when the sun sets for you, it rises for someone else. Thus, there is a sunset with every sunrise and a sunrise with every sunset.

So there are two points of sunrise and two points of sunset, and the revolving motion of the earth gives us a sunrise and a sunset at every moment so that here are multiple sunrises and sunsets. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Which then of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 18)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَرَجَ ٱلۡبَحۡرَيۡنِ يَلۡتَقِيَانِ ﴿١٩﴾ بَيۡنَهُمَا بَرۡزَخٞ لَّا يَبۡغِيَانِ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢١﴾

He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet [19] yet there is a barrier between them they do not cross [20] which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [21] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 19 - 21)

'He released' means that He has brought together 'the two bodies of [fresh salt] water', or in other words, the fresh and the salty, '…meet' (*ar-Rahman:* 19); what this means is that they exist side by side or follow one another. 'Yet, there is a barrier' means that a boundary prevents them from mixing: '…barrier between them they do not cross' (*ar-Rahman:* 20); neither of them can infringe upon the other. This is one of the signs of creation. Fresh water comes into contact with salt water without either diffusing into the other. This is why when you to go a place like 'Areesh, you find the finest kinds of palm trees growing on the beach. If these trees were nourished by salt water, they would not be so fine, but Allah has ordained it to be this way.

Read: 'Are you not aware that it is Allah Who sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth in the shape of springs?'

(*az-Zumar:* 21) He *the Almighty* says: 'We send down water from the skies in accordance with a measure [set by Us], and then We cause it to lodge in the earth, but, behold, We are most certainly able to withdraw this [blessing]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 18).

Allah's Power preserves fresh water so that it does not mix with salty water. This is why you find that fresh water is found higher up than salty water. If you go to Dumyat, you will find that the fresh water of the Nile extends for some distance out into the salt water, without the salt water intruding into the fresh. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 21)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَخۡرُجُ مِنۡهُمَا ٱللُّؤۡلُؤُ وَٱلۡمَرۡجَانُ ﴿٢٢﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٣﴾

Pearls come forth from them: large ones, and
small, brilliant ones [22] Which, then, of your
Lord's blessings do you both deny? [23]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 22 - 23)

The meaning of 'Pearls come forth from them: …' (*ar-Rahman:* 22) is out of the two waters, fresh and salty. Yet, pearls (great and small alike) only come out of salt water. We can understand this if we consider the story (1) of the court doorman who went to propose marriage to Saniyya bint Mahdiyya. They asked him, 'What is your job?' He said, 'I am the court doorman.' 'And how much do your earn,' they asked. 'Well,' he said, 'the judge and I are paid one hundred pounds.'

So, His Words 'Pearls come forth from them: …' (*ar-Rahman:* 22) mean from the sum of them together(2); now, scientists say that pearls (both great and small) are only found in those areas of the sea into which fresh water flows.(3) 'Which then of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 23).

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(1) The story of the court's secretary who went to ask Saniyya bint Mahdiyya's hand in marriage

(2) *Al-Qurtubi confirms this in his Tafsir.*

(3) *Even some of the scholars of old stated this, including Al-Qurtubi in his Tasfir.*

وَلَهُ ٱلْجَوَارِ ٱلْمُنشَـَٔاتُ فِى ٱلْبَحْرِ كَٱلْأَعْلَـٰمِ ﴿٢٤﴾ فَبِأَىِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٥﴾

His are the moving ships that float, high as mountains, on the sea [24] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [25] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 24 - 25)

'His', meaning Allah's, 'are the moving ships', the ships which sail on the surface of the water. These are ships 'that float', for they are made for sailing on the sea (or produced by the sea) 'high as mountains through the seas' (*ar-Rahman:* 24); this means they are like great and prominent mountains, or huge palaces. 'Which then of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 25)

It is amazing that our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us of this, despite the fact that he never made a seagoing voyage and was not familiar with these kinds of ships. The ships that existed at the time of our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were small and flat with only one tier; multi-tiered ships were not invented until the eighteenth century CE. Therefore, this verse is a miracle and a sign of prophethood, along with being proof of the truth of what the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed to us from Allah.

He *the Almighty* then says:

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو ٱلْجَلَـٰلِ وَٱلْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٢٧﴾
فَبِأَىِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٨﴾

Everyone on earth perishes; [26] all that remains is the Face of your Lord, full of majesty, bestowing honour [27] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [28] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 26 - 28)

His Words 'Everyone on earth…' (*ar-Rahman:* 26) mean everyone who is upon the earth. The earth is not specifically mentioned in this verse, but scholars say that a pronoun can refer to something which has been recently stated or to something which is intuitively obvious as is this case. Allah says: '…perishes' (*ar-Rahman:* 26); this means that one is bound to die.

All' …that remains is…' after everything has passed away '…the face of your Lord (*wajh*)' (*ar-Rahman:* 27); the word *wajh* literally means 'face', but it can also express the self or being because for all mankind the face is what identifies the person, as no two people are exactly alike; thus, the face represents the self.

Therefore, 'the face of your Lord' means His Being. This issue serves as a rebuttal to those who say that no figurative interpretation of the Quran is allowed, for if so, then what can you say about this verse? (1)

The meaning of 'full of Majesty' is the Possessor of magnificence and absolute self-sufficiency; as for 'and glory' (*ar-Rahman:* 27), this means the Possessor of absolute munificence and bounty. 'Which then of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 28)

Allah says:

يَسْـَٔلُهُۥ مَن فِى ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِى شَأْنٍ ﴿٢٩﴾ فَبِأَىِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٠﴾

Everyone in heaven and earth entreats Him; every day He is at work [29] Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [30] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 29 - 30)

The phrase:'…every day He' means that Allah *the Almighty* '…is at work.' (*ar-Rahman:* 29) The word ‘day’ means the period of time which includes all moments, both of daylight and night hours. Thus, the meaning of 'every day' in this verse is that in every moment, He manifests Himself in a new way. Every time something happens, in it is manifested a decree which He ordained in pre-eternity.

The Caliph Al-Ma’mun was asked about this, the questioner saying, ‘What does your Lord do now when the pen (of destiny) has long since dried? Furthermore, why, then, does He say: '…every day He is at work' (*ar-Rahman:* 29)?’ He replied, ‘He does not begin things anew but brings them into the open. He raises some people and lowers others.’(2)

We have explained how all decrees of fate were ordained in pre-eternity and that they are preserved in the Preserved Tablet; all that happens now is the manifestation of this decree in reality. 'Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 30)

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(1) What the sheikh means is that if we do not understand *wajh* to be 'Face' here, and we take it literally to mean ‘face’, this would mean that Allah *the Almighty* is made up of parts which will all pass away except for His face. Thus, scholars say that *wajh* here must mean 'Face'.

(2) *It is narrated that when Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was asked about this verse, He said, 'He forgives sin, relieves distress and raises some people and lowers others.'*

Allah says:

سَنَفۡرُغُ لَكُمۡ أَيُّهَ ٱلثَّقَلَانِ ﴿٣١﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٢﴾

We shall attend to you two huge armies [of jinn and mankind] [31] Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [32] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 31-32)

These words are framed as a warning, and what do you think about a warning from Allah Himself? Who could dare disregard it? Yet, Allah’s Most-Mercifulness is still present here because He is warning us in advance of this so that we can prepare for it: 'We shall attend you to…' (*ar-Rahman:* 31). It is like when you say to your enemy, ‘Tomorrow I am coming for you’; what you mean is ‘Prepare yourself for it.’ Allah *the Almighty* is saying: ‘We shall take you to task, reckoning you and requiting you, after first giving you some time. You shall not evade Us.’

The '…two huge armies' (*ar-Rahman:* 31) are the ‘sin-laden two’, the jinns and mankind; they are called *thaqalan* (‘the two laden ones’ or ‘the two heavy ones’) because they have settled firmly on earth.(1) 'Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 32)

He *the Almighty* then says:

يَٰمَعۡشَرَ ٱلۡجِنِّ وَٱلۡإِنسِ إِنِ ٱسۡتَطَعۡتُمۡ أَن تَنفُذُواْ مِنۡ أَقۡطَارِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ
فَٱنفُذُواْۚ لَا تَنفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلۡطَٰنٖ ﴿٣٣﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٤﴾

Jinn and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so: you will not pass without Our authority [33] Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [34] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 33 - 34)

This call is being made to all of jinns and mankind, who were addressed in the previous verse with the words '…you two huge armies' (*ar-Rahman:* 31).

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(1) Ibn Al-Jawzi, *Zad Al-Masir*

Furthermore, He challenges them all: '…if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so…' (*ar-Rahman:* 33). This means that jinns and mankind cannot do such a thing: '…You will not pass without Our Authority' (*ar-Rahman:* 33); this means that it is a sanction from Allah, for if He were to give this power to any of His created beings, they would be able to do it.

Therefore, some people understand that when man travelled to the moon, this constituted ‘passing beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth’, understanding '…You will not pass without Our Authority' (*ar-Rahman:* 33) to mean the sanction of science which allowed them to do so.

The fact of the matter is that man’s landing on the moon was not a ‘passing beyond’ because the moon is but a region of the earth, like a suburb of a city. When we reflect upon the distances between planets, we will easily understand this.

Scientists have ascertained that we are eight light minutes from the sun and 2.5 million light years from the Andromeda Galaxy. One light second is three hundred thousand kilometres. So, what about the rest of the stars in the universe? As for the moon, it is only a suburb of the earth.

Now the exemption implied by '…You will not pass without Our authority' (*ar-Rahman:* 33) affirms that our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was truthful in what he informed us about the Night Ascension and Journey, for otherwise, they would have said, ‘How can this be? It is beyond human power.’ It can only be done with a sanction from Allah; if Allah wants someone to pass beyond, he will pass beyond by Allah’s Power.

He *the Almighty* mentions the jinns before mankind in this verse because they are subtler and quicker moving than we are. In the story of our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* we saw that when he wanted to be brought the throne of Balqis, he said to his aides: '…Which of you can bring me her throne?…' (*an-Naml:* 28) No human being responded because he wanted it to be brought before him quickly: '…she and her followers come unto me in willing surrender to Allah?' (*an-Naml:* 38) They were on their way to him at the time.

No human being could do this so quickly; however, as for the jinns, one of them said, '…I shall bring it to you before you rise from your council-seat…'

(*an-Naml:* 39). This was a bold jinni, not an ordinary one, which means that some of the jinns are energetic and skilled, whilst others amongst them do not have this ability.

Furthermore, this offer from the bold jinn would still have taken some time, for Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* was not due to rise from his council-seat for several hours. So, another jinn who was even more skilled than the first and possessed knowledge of scripture said, '…[Nay,] as for me, I shall bring it to you before the twinkling of an eye ceases! ...' (*an-Naml:* 40) The twinkling of an eye takes no time at all.

Likewise, since jinns have this level of skill in motion, Allah *the Almighty* mentions them first here because He is issuing a challenge.

Moreover, this challenge pertained to the heavens (*samawat*), the plural of (sama') 'heaven' or 'sky'. Man has been able to reach as far as the moon, and jinns are able to ascend to listen; yet, all this takes place in the sky of this earth. Thus, has man or have jinns been able to penetrate the other heavens?

These are the heavens which our master Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ascended through in the company of our master Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* until he came to their end at the Lote-Tree of the Uttermost End. So '…You will not pass without Our Authority' (*ar-Rahman:* 33) does not mean the sanction of science, but it means the sanction of Allah's Power. Otherwise, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed through places wherein there is no air to breathe—and how can science do this?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شُوَاظٌ مِّن نَّارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنتَصِرَانِ ﴿٣٥﴾
فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٦﴾

A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you and no one will come to your aid [35] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [36] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 35 - 36)

These words are addressed to jinns and mankind: if you want to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth without any sanction from

Allah, 'A flash of fire and smoke will be released upon you, and no one will come to your aid' (*ar-Rahman:* 35); this means that both jinns and mankind have boundaries of motion beyond which they cannot venture. The meaning of 'a flash of fire' is a pure flame of fire with no smoke, and this kind of fire is extremely hot.

And 'brass' in this verse means melted, or molten, brass, which is an instrument of torture; '…and no one will come to your aid' (*ar-Rahman:* 35), which means you will not be able to pass by, and you will find no one to defend you from this torment.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا ٱنشَقَّتِ ٱلسَّمَآءُ فَكَانَتْ وَرْدَةً كَٱلدِّهَانِ ﴿٣٧﴾
فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٨﴾ فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَّا يُسْـَٔلُ عَن ذَنۢبِهِۦٓ إِنسٌ وَلَا جَآنٌّ ﴿٣٩﴾
فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٠﴾

When the sky is torn apart and turns crimson, like red hide [37] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [38] On that Day neither mankind nor jinn will be asked about their sins [39] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [40] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 37 - 40)

We may observe in this verse that the word used for 'when' is *idha*, which is used in Arabic to introduce a conditional clause: 'When the sky is torn apart…' (*ar-Rahman:* 37). The main clause is 'On that Day neither mankind nor jinns will be asked about their sins.' (*ar-Rahman:* 39) So between the conditional clause and the main clause there is a separation because in each of them there is a sign and a wonder, and each of them are amongst Allah's favours; thus, each of them is mentioned in a separate verse and followed by 'Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 38)

The renting asunder of the sky is one of the signs of the Resurrection and the Day of Reckoning, the Day when all shall be asked about what they have done. Because of this, some orientalists objected to this verse and said that it contradicts what Allah says elsewhere: '"And halt them [there]!" [And then,] behold, they shall be asked, "How is it that [now] you cannot succour one another?" Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to Allah].' (*as-Saffat:* 24-26)

The reason they think there is a contradiction in this verse is that they do not have a proper understanding and mastery of the language. The word *su'al* (question) in Arabic has two aspects: the pupil asks the teacher to learn the truth from him, and the teacher asks the pupil to make sure he knows the truth. Therefore, His Words '"And halt them [there]!" [And then,] behold, they shall be asked' (*as-Saffat:* 24) refer to how they will be questioned so that they themselves will admit the truth.

Likewise, the meaning of '…neither mankind nor jinns will be asked about their sins' (*ar-Rahman:* 39) is that Allah will not need to hear their words or their confession since He will have recorded all their actions, and His angels will have written their deeds, so He will have no need to ask them about it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

يُعْرَفُ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَٰهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِٱلنَّوَٰصِى وَٱلْأَقْدَامِ (٤١)
فَبِأَىِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (٤٢)

The guilty will be known by their mark and will be seized by their foreheads and their feet [41] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [42]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 41-42)

This describes one of the moments of the Day of Resurrection when the angels of chastisement will know those who were lost in sin by marks which identify them. Those lost in sin will be known '…by their mark…' (*ar-Rahman:* 41) meaning by their blackened faces, and the angels will seize them by their forelocks, namely the hair at the front of their heads, and by their feet, and then cast them into hell—we seek refuge in Allah! This seizure will be a humiliation and a debasement, in addition to the suffering because the forelock is a place of human pride and dignity.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذِهِۦ جَهَنَّمُ ٱلَّتِى يُكَذِّبُ بِهَا ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
يَطُوفُونَ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَ حَمِيمٍ ءَانٍ ﴿٤٤﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٥﴾

This is the Hell the guilty deny [43] but they will go round between its flames and scalding water. [44] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [45]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 43 - 45)

Allah *the Almighty* will chide them, rebuke them, and increase their woe, for the angels will say to them: 'This is Hell…' (*ar-Rahman:* 43); in other words, it means 'The place you now see, and whose heat you now feel, is the very place you used to belie in the life of the world. So taste its heat now!'

Observe that the imperfect verb is used in this verse, expressing a continuous action: '…the guilty deny' (*ar-Rahman:* 43). What this means is that they call it a lie here in this world, but on that Day, they will suffer therein and experience its heat directly.

So, He evoked their denial in this world, as though they have taken in with them to the Resurrection, and this is all the more bitter for them, along with being a sterner rebuke for them.

He then says: 'between its [Hell]…scalding water'; this refers to boiling hot water which is so hot it scalds their insides as they drink it. Allah *the Exalted* then says: '…but they will go round between its flames and scalding water' (*ar-Rahman:* 44). As the heat of hell increases, they will look for water to lessen it, so they will be taken to boiling water, of which they will drink their fill in the hope that it will lessen the burning of hell, yet it will make them even hotter: 'Out of the frying pan into the fire' as the saying goes.

Yet, we see that the Quran still follows this by saying: 'Which then of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 45) This description of the suffering of hell is counted amongst Allah's favours and His blessings upon us since it inspires us to flee from this fate and to avoid the things which lead to it.

Allah *the Almighty* then describes the contrasting state:

وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِۦ جَنَّتَانِ ﴿٤٦﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٧﴾ ذَوَاتَآ أَفْنَانٍ ﴿٤٨﴾
فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٩﴾ فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ تَجْرِيَانِ ﴿٥٠﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥١﴾
فِيهِمَا مِن كُلِّ فَٰكِهَةٍ زَوْجَانِ ﴿٥٢﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٣﴾

For those who fear [the time when they will] stand before their Lord there are two gardens. [46] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [47] With shading branches. [48] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [49] With a pair of flowing springs. [50] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [51] With every kind of fruit in pairs. [52] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [53] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 46 - 53)

What this means is that those who fear Allah's Attributes of Majesty and fear His reckoning along with His chastisement—what is their reward? They shall have '…two gardens' (*ar-Rahman:* 46), not only one garden. The orientalists have also objected to this by saying: 'Is it one garden, or two?' Now, scholars say it is two gardens in this verse because Allah is speaking about mankind and jinns, and jinns will have their own garden.

Others understand it differently, saying that it means the paradise of a believer which Allah has prepared for him in the Hereafter and then the paradise of a disbeliever which was prepared for him by Allah in case he believed; however, since he did not believe, a believer inherited it from him, as we have explained already. Thus, a believer will have two gardens.

Furthermore, our master Shaqiq Al-Balkhi,(1)(2) a great gnostic, said something of interest about this verse. He had a pupil named Hatim(3) who was nicknamed Al-Asamm, 'the Deaf One', and the story of how he got this nickname is itself a story which shows us the fine conduct of those who fear their Lord's presence.

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(1) A Sufi of the 9th century CE

(2) The story of Shaqiq Al-Balkhi with his disciple Hatim Al-Asamm

(3) The story of Hatim Al-Asamm, the deaf one, and the reason behind calling him so

They say that a woman came to him to ask him for something, but as she was about to speak she broke wind and was sorely embarrassed. However, Hatim said, ‘Raise your voice, I did not hear you’, pretending to be deaf to put her at ease. From then on, they called him ‘the Deaf One’.

So, Al-Balhki asked his pupil Hatim Al-Asamm, ‘How long have you been with me, Hatim?’ ‘Thirty-three years,’ he answered. He asked, ‘And what have you gained from me in all this time?’ He said, ‘Several things. ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him we shall return!’ he said. ‘In all this time, you have only gained a few things?’ Hatim replied, ‘It is as I have said.’ ‘Then what are these things?’ asked Al-Balkhi. Hatim replied, ‘I have come to love paradise because I have seen that people amongst whom I live are all consumed by spite and malice toward one another, so I have come to hate those traits. When I heard Allah say: "…We shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been [lingering] in their bosoms…" (*al-A‘raf:* 43), I yearned for the paradise wherein there is no malice.’ ‘Well done,’ said Al-Balkhi. ‘And what is the second?’ Hatim replied, ‘I have learned that the path which leads to it is fear of Allah: "For those who fear [the time when they will] stand before their Lord, there are two gardens" (*ar-Rahman:* 46). Thus, I feared my Lord’s Presence and rid my soul of its caprice, so that it became easy for me to obey Him.’ [He was alluding to Allah’s Words: 'But unto him who shall have stood in fear of his Lord's Presence and held back his inner self from base desires, Paradise will truly be the goal!' (*an-Nazi‘at:* 40-41)]

‘Well done, Hatim,' said Al-Balkhi. ‘And what is the third?’ Hatim replied, ‘I examined mankind and found that every one of them has a beloved whom he loves and accompanies, but however great his love may be, it ends when he enters the grave. So, I loved to have a companion who does not leave me even in my grave, and I found no such companion but my own deeds.’ Well done, Hatim,’ said Al-Balkhi. ‘What is the fourth?’ Hatim replied, ‘I saw that everyone loves something and looks after it, and yet, it may be stolen by a thief or snatched away by the whim of fate. Therefore, I dedicated all my deeds to Allah so that my Lord could look after them for me.’ ‘What is the fifth?’ he asked. Hatim replied, ‘I learnt that people make enemies of one another, envy one another, and hate one another. Thus, when I searched for the reason for this, I found that it is that some have abundant provisions, and others have scanty provisions. When I read Allah's Words "…It is We Who distribute their means of livelihood amongst them in the life of this world…" (*az-Zukhruf:* 32), my heart was at peace, and I cast from me all malice, rancour and envy.

'What is the sixth?' he asked. Hatim replied, 'I saw the enmity that exists amongst people, and then read: "Behold, Satan is a foe unto you: so treat him as a foe…" (*Fatir:* 6). So, I left all enmity towards my fellow man and directed all my enmity towards Satan.' 'And what is the last, O, Hatim?' he asked. Hatim replied, 'I found that people put their trust in things such as wealth, property, business and manufacture, yet these things will eventually leave their owners, so I put my trust in the Living One Who neither dies nor leaves.'

Furthermore, His Words 'With shading branches' (*ar-Rahman:* 48) mean that the two gardens contain many branches (*afnan*, plural of *fanan*); they are filled with many branches which intertwine, so that they cover and shade those who walk amid them.

'With a pair of flowing springs' (*ar-Rahman:* 50) refers to fresh water. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'With every kind of fruit in pairs' (*ar-Rahman:* 52). Scholars say that this means there will be two kinds, one of which you will recognise and the other of which you will not. If this is how it will be with fruits, which are luxuries, then what do you imagine it will be with necessities?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

مُتَّكِـِٔينَ عَلَىٰ فُرُشِۭ بَطَآئِنُهَا مِنْ إِسْتَبْرَقٍۚ وَجَنَى ٱلْجَنَّتَيْنِ دَانٍ ﴿٥٤﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا
تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٥﴾ فِيهِنَّ قَٰصِرَٰتُ ٱلطَّرْفِ لَمْ يَطْمِثْهُنَّ إِنسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَآنٌّ ﴿٥٦﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ
رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٧﴾ كَأَنَّهُنَّ ٱلْيَاقُوتُ وَٱلْمَرْجَانُ ﴿٥٨﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٩﴾

They will sit on couches upholstered with brocade, the fruit of both gardens within easy reach. [54] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [55] There will be maidens restraining their glances, untouched beforehand by man or jinn. [56] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [57] Like rubies and brilliant pearls. [58] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [59] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 54 - 59)

The verses continue to list the different kinds of favours which will be manifested in paradise; one of these is that you will see the dwellers of paradise 'sit on couches upholstered with brocade…' (*ar-Rahman:* 54), which means rich silk. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…the fruit of both gardens within easy reach' (*ar-Rahman:* 54). The word *Jana* here means fruit which is ripe and ready to be picked, and 'within easy reach' means that this fruit will be close at hand without anything to prevent you from taking it, and nor anything between you and it. It will be close at hand wherever you are and whatever position you are in: you will take it when you are standing, when you are sitting and when you are lying down on this silken couch of yours.

There will be more than this, for you will only need to think of something and you will find it before you(1) without your having to move a muscle or make any effort to get it: 'In that [Paradise] they shall have whatever they may desire, but there is yet more with Us.' (*Qaf:* 35).

He then tells us of another of paradise’s favours, that which is 'There will be maidens restraining their glances…' (*ar-Rahman:* 56). This means that there will be beautiful women whose eyes will look only upon their spouses, and not stray anywhere else.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…untouched beforehand by man or jinn' (*ar-Rahman:* 56). That is, they have never before been wed, and no one has taken their virginity, neither human nor jinn. This further means that they are preserved exclusively for the dwellers of paradise. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Like…' which means as beautiful as '…rubies and brilliant pearls' (*ar-Rahman:* 58).

One might ask how all this favour can be attained. The next verses give the answer:

هَلْ جَزَآءُ ٱلْإِحْسَٰنِ إِلَّا ٱلْإِحْسَٰنُ ﴿٦٠﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦١﴾

Shall the reward of good be anything but good? [60]
Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [61]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 60 - 61)

Actions are rewarded like-for-like; when a believer does good, Allah does good to him, for He has mercy on him for such things wherein he has fallen short—for action alone is not enough to reach this goal.

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(1) *See Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya and As-Suyuti: Ibn Mas‘ud Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘You will behold the birds of paradise and desire one, and it will fall roasted into your hands.'*

وَمِن دُونِهِمَا جَنَّتَانِ (٦٢) فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (٦٣)
مُدْهَآمَّتَانِ (٦٤) فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (٦٥)

There are two other gardens below these two. [62] Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [63] Both of deepest green. [64] Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [65] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 62 - 65)

What this means is that alongside the two gardens mentioned earlier, and lower than them in rank, there are two other gardens. This is because paradise is a place of levels and ranks, according to people’s deeds and their level of sincerity to Allah. These levels will be explained in the chapter of *al-Waqi‘a*. The previously mentioned two gardens, with all these blessings, is the level of those who are nearest to Allah and besides them and lower than them are two other gardens, for ‘the companions of the right’.

The meaning of 'Both of deepest green' (*ar-Rahman:* 64) is that these two gardens will be a deep green colour which is almost black; this colour is only found in fertile lands which are well irrigated with fresh water.

Therefore after describing the gardens as being of the deepest green, He then says:

فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ نَضَّاخَتَانِ (٦٦) فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (٦٧)
فِيهِمَا فَٰكِهَةٌ وَنَخْلٌ وَرُمَّانٌ (٦٨) فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (٦٩)

With a pair of gushing springs. [66] Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [67] With fruits – date palms and pomegranate trees. [68] Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings do you both deny? [69] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 66 - 69)

This means that in these two gardens will be two springs gushing forth with water, and fresh water is the source of growth and verdure in plants. He then mentions that another of this level’s favours is that 'With fruits—date palms and pomegranate trees' (*ar-Rahman:* 68). Of a higher level, He says: 'With every kind of fruit in pairs' (*ar-Rahman:* 52).

فِيهِنَّ خَيۡرَٰتٌ حِسَانٞ ﴿٧٠﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧١﴾
حُورٞ مَّقۡصُورَٰتٞ فِي ٱلۡخِيَامِ ﴿٧٢﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٣﴾
لَمۡ يَطۡمِثۡهُنَّ إِنسٞ قَبۡلَهُمۡ وَلَا جَآنّٞ ﴿٧٤﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٥﴾

There are good-natured, beautiful maidens. [70] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [71] Dark-eyed, sheltered in pavilions. [72] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [73] Untouched beforehand by man or jinn. [74] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [75] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 70 - 75)

This is also a description of the maidens of paradise; they are 'most excellent', which scholars say refers to their character and comportment, and they are beautiful in face and appearance. They are *hur* or 'Dark-eyed' (*ar-Rahman:* 72). The related word *hawr* describes an intense whiteness and blackness of the eyes, for which a woman is praised; '…sheltered in pavilions…' (*ar-Rahman:* 72) means that they keep to their houses, neither acting immodestly nor going out to work.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

مُتَّكِـِٔينَ عَلَىٰ رَفۡرَفٍ خُضۡرٖ وَعَبۡقَرِيٍّ حِسَانٖ ﴿٧٦﴾ فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٧﴾

They will all sit on green cushions and fine carpets. [76] Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? [77] (The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 76 - 77)

The word *rafraf* (cushions) means a pillow which is leaned upon or a rug upon which is sat. The word for 'carpets' in this verse is *'abqari* which means an especially beautiful carpet, yet in ordinary Arabic usage, it means 'genius'. The word comes from a valley in Arabic called *'Abqar* which Arabs used to believe was haunted by jinns, so when someone said something brilliant, they would call him *'abqari*, meaning that he went to the valley of *'Abqar* and learnt it from jinns there. Thus, it came to be that they would call anything of outstanding and seemingly super-human craftsmanship *'abqari*.

Allah *the Almighty* then ends the chapter by praising Himself by saying:

تَبَٰرَكَ ٱسۡمُ رَبِّكَ ذِى ٱلۡجَلَٰلِ وَٱلۡإِكۡرَامِ ﴿٧٨﴾

**Blessed is the name of your Lord, full
of majesty, bestowing honour [78]
(The Quran, *ar-Rahman:* 78)**

The word *tabarak* 'Blessed' is derived from *baraka* which means ‘blessing’, so He affirms the blessing of the Name itself—even the Name is hallowed.

The word *tabarak* is a verb in the perfect *madi* (past tense), and no other derivation of this word exists, such as the imperfect or the active participle. The meaning of it is the following: Allah’s goodness is immense and ever increasing, and this goodness is magnificent and free of any flaw.

Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: 'Blessed is He Who from on high, step by step, has bestowed upon His servant the standard by which to discern the true from the false…' (*al-Furqan:* 1). Also, He says: 'Blessed be He in whose hand all dominion rests…' (*al-Mulk:* 1). Thus, the attribute is ascribed to the Named and to His Essence.

As for here, He says: 'Blessed be your Lord’s name…' (*ar-Rahman:* 78) which affirms the attribute for His Name. Therefore, how can the Name be magnified and of immense goodness, when these attributes seem to belong more properly to the Named?

Scholars say that when names are given, they are given with optimism for the named. For example, we might call a child *Dhakiy* (clever) hoping that he will turn out to be clever or *Sa‘id* (happy) hoping that he will turn out to be happy, and so on.

After this, the reality of the person named might turn out to be the opposite of his name; we call him *Amin* (honest), and he ends up being a traitor. Thus, blessed indeed is the name whose attribute conforms to that of the named, so that we call him *Sa‘id,* and he ends up being happy.

In such a case, the name is imbibed with the blessing of the named such that it agrees with it and does not contradict it. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says, 'Blessed is the name of your Lord…' (*ar-Rahman:* 78), for His is the Name which has the best claim over this blessing.

Allah *Glorified is He* is: '…full of Majesty, bestowing honour' (*ar-Rahman:* 78). He is the possessor of Magnificence, the possessor of awe and dread and the possessor of Power, Might, and Dominance. We said before that Allah has Attributes of Majesty, such as those we have just mentioned, and He also has Attributes of Beauty, such as Mercy, Kindness, Forgiveness, Clemency, and so on.

So, when Allah *the Almighty* manifests His Attributes of Majesty for you to behold, you see that which strikes fear and awe into you; likewise, when He manifests His Attributes of Beauty for you to behold, you see that which gives you peace, happiness, and joy.

Therefore, when someone said to us, ‘I find that my state in Medina is different to that in Mecca’, we replied to him, ‘That is so because Allah manifests Himself in Mecca with His Attributes of Majesty and manifests Himself with His Attributes of Beauty in Medina.’

Furthermore, just as He is 'full of Majesty', He is at the same time 'full of Glory', showering mankind with His Grace, Favour and Goodness.

the chapter of

al-Waqi'a

In the Name of God,[1] the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Waqi‘a* [2] (The Final Day):

إِذَا وَقَعَتِ ٱلْوَاقِعَةُ ۝١ لَيْسَ لِوَقْعَتِهَا كَاذِبَةٌ ۝٢

When that which is coming arrives [1]
no one will be able to deny it has come [2]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 1-2)

The verb *waqa‘a* (to come to pass) literally means ‘to fall from above’ in such a way that nothing can prevent it from falling, and we say it was gravity that made it fall. The root letters *w-q-‘*also relate to the concept of weighty and awe-inspiring matters. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Now, [as for the deaf and blind of heart] when the word [of truth] stands revealed (*waqa‘a*) against them, We shall bring forth unto them out of the earth a creature which will tell them…’ (*an-Naml:* 82). He says: ‘Whereupon the truth was established (*waqa‘a*), and vain was proved all that they had been doing.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 118) Likewise, He says: ‘Said [Hud (Eber)]: “You are already beset (*waqa‘a*) by loathsome evil and by your Lord’s condemnation…”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 71).

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) It is chapter 56 in the written order of the Quran, containing 96 verses, revealed in Mecca according to Al-Hasan, ‘Ikrima, Jabir and ‘Ata’; Ibn ‘Abbas and Qatada who said it was all revealed in Mecca save for one verse, no. 82, which was revealed in Medina. It was revealed between the chapters of *Ta Ha* and *ash-Shu‘ara’*. (*Tafsir Al-Qurtubi*)

Therefore, the verb *waqa'a* suggests something inevitable and bound to occur by the command of Allah Who ordained and set it to occur in this way, just as you set the alarm clock to wake you for the dawn prayer; when it rings at dawn and rouses you, this is not the favour or greatness of the alarm clock, but it is of the one who set it to go off at that time. Likewise, when the truth is established and comes to pass, the greatness belongs to Him Who established it.

Thus, the words 'come to pass' indicate that the thing was inevitable and cannot be put off; so He *the Almighty* says: 'When that which is coming arrives' (*al-Waqi'a:* 1); referring to the Resurrection that is certain to come to pass and was ordained as such before time began so that it is as though it has already come to pass, for the one speaking these words is Allah *the Almighty* Whose command cannot be rebutted.

He gave it this name in pre-eternity, and then says of it: 'no one will be able to deny it has come' (*al-Waqi'a:* 2). This is because they were belying it and denying that there is any life after death, so Allah *the Almighty* speaks of the Resurrection as though it has already come to pass: 'no one will be able to deny it has come' (*al-Waqi'a:* 2); it is as though it is already here.

So, He called it 'no one will be able to deny it has come' in pre-eternity and set a precise time for it known only to Him, and then said, 'This thing which must come to pass, of which We have told you, has indeed already come to pass, and it might have been possible to deny it before it happened, but now that it has happened there can be no denial.'

Therefore, *Al-Waqi'a* is one of the names of the Resurrection. It has many other names which illustrate for us an aspect of this terrible and portentous Day. Reflect on these names: it is The Disaster, The Reality, The Sudden Calamity, The Clamour, and That Which Must Come to Pass. Each of these names has a lesson, and this Day combines all of these meanings in their different aspects, all at the same time.

Also, by looking into the occurrences of the root *w-q-'* in the Quran, we find that it usually means something terrifying except when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And he who forsakes the domain of evil for the sake of Allah shall find on earth many a lonely road as well as life abundant. If anyone leaves his home, fleeing from evil unto Allah and His Prophet, and then death overtakes him, his reward is ready (*waqa‘a*) with Allah…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 100).

This means that his reward falls to Allah. To understand the Words ‘his reward is ready (*waqa‘a*) with Allah’, we must read again Allah’s Words: ‘Now, [as for the deaf and blind of heart] when the word [of truth] stands revealed (*waqa‘a*) against them…’ (*an-Naml:* 82).

The word *waqa‘a* in this verse means ‘to fall’, but not like the falling which we know; it means to go unto Allah. Why does Allah use the word *waqa‘a* here to mean ‘to fall’? He *the Almighty* does it to alert us to something important which is that the reward is more eager to go to the servant than the servant is to get the reward. If a servant dies, the reward rushes to him and is kept for him with Allah, and the reward knows exactly to whom it is meant to go.

Thus, the meaning of ‘no one will be able to deny it has come’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 2) is that when it comes to pass, no one will be able to belie it. It is like the Words: ‘Be constant in [your] prayer from (*li*) the time when the sun has passed its zenith…’ (*al-Isra’:* 78); the preposition *li* in this verse means ‘when’, namely when the sun has passed its zenith.

Allah *the Almighty* then says

خَافِضَةٌ رَّافِعَةٌ ﴿٣﴾ إِذَا رُجَّتِ ٱلْأَرْضُ رَجًّا ﴿٤﴾
وَبُسَّتِ ٱلْجِبَالُ بَسًّا ﴿٥﴾ فَكَانَتْ هَبَآءً مُّنۢبَثًّا ﴿٦﴾

Bringing low and raising high [3] When the earth is shaken violently [4] and the mountains are ground to powder [5] and turn to scattered dust [6] (The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 3 - 6)

What this means is that it abases some people and exalts others; it debases disbelievers who belied it and did not act with it in mind. Allah says: ‘But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water—until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing. Instead, he finds [that] Allah [has always been present] with him and [that] He will pay him his account in full, for Allah is swift in reckoning!’ (*an-Nur:* 39)

It exalts those who believed in it, worked with it in mind, and awaited it and hoped for the best reward from it; so, it raises them through the levels of the gardens paradise. Allah *the Exalted* says: '…whereas those who have attained to faith stand in awe of it and know it to be the truth…' (*al-Kahf:* 42). Thus, the Resurrection will lower disbeliever down through the levels of hell and raise believers up through the levels of paradise.

'When the earth is shaken violently (*rujjat*)' (*al-Waqi'a:* 4). This earth, made firm by solid mountains, will shake and tremble. From this, we may understand that Allah *the Almighty* created the earth in a moving state and then made it firm with mountains; for had it already been firm, it would not need the mountains. Therefore, these verses affirm that the earth moves and revolves.

The word *rajj* means to shake from its position and shake it violently, just as a peg is pulled from the ground; you do not pull it out from the ground all at once, but you move it back and forth to uproot it and weaken the ground's grip on it, so it is easier to pull out. In the same way, the earth will be violently shaken and disturbed.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* describes this as an earthquake: 'When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake' (*az-Zalzala:* 1); also, He says: '...verily, the earthquake of the Hour (of Judgment) is a terrible thing.' (*al-Hajj:* 1) Since this shaking will be violent and strong, He emphasises its violence by repeating the root word (this is called the *maf'ul mutlaq* in Arabic or 'absolute or cognate object' that expresses the manner of the action) by saying: 'When the earth is shaken violently' (*al-Waqi'a:* 4), this means a strong and violent shaking. Can you imagine how this will be like when it will be Allah Who does it?

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'and the mountains are ground to powder (*bussat*).' (*al-Waqi'a:* 5) This will be the result of the violent shaking which will break these hard immovable mountains into pieces, making them seem like ground flour, as the rural dish that we call *bisia* (a mixture of roasted, ground grains). The verbal form *bussat* means to be crumbled and grounded into powder.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and turn to scattered dust' (*al-Waqi'a:* 6). What this means is that it will be like dust too small to be seen with the naked eye unless a beam of sunlight shines directly on it because of its minuteness.

In another verse, the Quran expresses this meaning in another way: 'And the mountains will be like wool, fluffed up.' (*al-Qari`a:* 5) What this means is that mountains will become like carded wool. When the threads of wool are separated, they become like scattered dust.

So, the Resurrection will begin with the destruction of this entire universe. All the fixed constituents of the universe around you will come to an end; the sky will split and crack, the stars will fall and disperse, the mountains will crumble, and then it will be time for you to stand and be judged.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكُنتُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗا ثَلَٰثَةٗ ﴿٧﴾ فَأَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡمَيۡمَنَةِ مَآ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡمَيۡمَنَةِ ﴿٨﴾
وَأَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡمَشۡـَٔمَةِ مَآ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡمَشۡـَٔمَةِ ﴿٩﴾ وَٱلسَّٰبِقُونَ ٱلسَّٰبِقُونَ ﴿١٠﴾
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلۡمُقَرَّبُونَ ﴿١١﴾ فِي جَنَّٰتِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ﴿١٢﴾

Then you will be sorted into three classes. [7] Those on the Right — what people they are! [8] Those on the Left — what people they are! [9] And those in front — ahead indeed! [10] For these will be the ones brought nearest to God [11] in Gardens of Bliss [12] (The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 7 - 12)

That is, mankind at this juncture will be divided into three categories: the first are those on the right side (*ashab al-maymana* or the companions of the right), who elsewhere are called *ashab al-yamin* (which means the same thing). They are those who will receive their books of deeds in their right hands. The statement '…who will be those on the Right Hand? (*al-Waqi'a:* 8) magnifies and exalts this status. This linguistic structure resembles His saying elsewhere: '…and there covered them from the sea that which covered them' (*Ta Ha:* 78). (In both cases, the word *ma* implies a sense of special importance to what follows it.)

The right side symbolises goodness; therefore, the right hand is used for good and virtuous actions. The Islamic Law urges us to use the right hand and prefer the right side. However, the left side is not denied the favour of the right, for when you cut your fingernails, for example, the right hand cuts the left-hand nails precisely and safely, while the left hand cuts the right-hand nails haphazardly and imprecisely.

This teaches us a lesson in life, which is that we can benefit from those who are better than us, so we must not hate them or envy them because they compensate for what we ourselves lack, their goodness benefits us and they make up for our own shortcomings.

Owing to this, the Islamic Law encourages us to seek knowledge, to teach it to people and to spread virtue throughout society; it also encourages us to enjoin it upon others and to forbid indecent and immoral acts, for the good of others will affect you, as will their evil; therefore, if all people adhere to Allah's Law, they would be at peace and behave peacefully with one another.

Also, the True Lord *the Exalted* has told us that those on the right side will be proud of their records of deeds when they receive them in their right hands, and they will boast of them by saying: '"Here, read my record! Indeed, I was certain that I would be meeting my account." So, he will be in a pleasant life—in a lofty Paradise.' (*al-Haqqa:* 19-22) These are the ones whom the Resurrection exalts.

The second group are those on the left side—we seek Allah's refuge from this— who shall receive their records of deeds in their left hands: 'and those on the Left Hand; who will be those on the Left Hand?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 9) The right side is associated with good omens and goodness, while the left side is associated with bad omens and evil.

The Quran tells us what they will say when they receive their books of deeds in their left hands: 'Oh, I wish I had not been given my record and had not known what my account is. I wish my death had been the decisive one. My wealth has not availed me. Gone from me is my authority.' (*al-Haqqa:* 25-29)

Then, a command will be issued concerning them: 'Seize him and shackle him. Then into Hellfire drive him. Then into a chain whose length is seventy cubits insert him.' (*al-Haqqa:* 30-32)

The third and final of the three groups is 'And those foremost will be foremost.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 10) He repeats the word 'foremost' to honour them. Now though these people are mentioned last, they are the best and the highest ranked of all three groups, which is made clear by what He *the Most High* says about them next: 'These will be those nearest' (*al-Waqi'a:* 11). This means that they will be close to the Throne. So, if you wanted to list them in order with the highest first, you would say the foremost, then those of the right side, then those of the left side.

Thus, these are the three ranks to which people will be assigned in the Hereafter, depending on what their deeds are like in this world. The foremost will be those who have begun their lives with good deeds in their youths, and then have continued in this way until their deaths so that they will be foremost to enter paradise. Then those of the right side, or the companions of the right, will be those who have started their lives with evil deeds in their youths, but then their self-reproaching souls corrected them so they repented and changed their ways and have continued to do good deeds until their death. Then, the people of the left side, or the companions of the left, will be those who have done nothing but evil, from their youth until their death.

Now, paradise is Allah's Gift, and therein will be placed both the foremost and those of the right side except that the foremost will have a place which is higher and nearer to (Allah's) Throne: 'These will be those nearest' (*al-Waqi'a:* 11). Where will they be? They will be in the Gardens of Bliss. We can infer this from what Allah says in the chapter of *az-Zumar*: 'and those who kept their duty to their Lord will be led to Paradise in groups, till, when they reach it, and its gates will be opened [before their arrival for their reception], and its keepers will say: "Peace be upon you! You have done well, so enter here to abide eternally therein."' (*az-Zumar:* 73) After this, He says: 'And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne (of Allah) from all round…' (*az-Zumar:* 75). Therefore, 'closeness' in this context means closeness to the Throne.

The 'foremost' in this verse means those who vie with others to outstrip them, and the competition here is for goodness, which is something that the Islamic Law encourages. Therefore, the True Lord commands us to vie and compete for good causes: 'And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.' (*Al-'Imran:* 133) He also says: 'Race to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden whose width is like the width of the heavens and earth…' (*al-Hadid:* 21).

This is a competition of faith and righteous deeds, and it is open to all who want to be foremost and at the same time love for others what they love for themselves. It is a competition free of all rancour and selfishness.

A believer vies with others, and the issue is clear in his mind. Prizes await those who are foremost, and they come from a source which is inexhaustible. It is amazing how a believer strives eagerly to do good deeds in his life and might even strive eagerly for his death because of his longing for the paradise whose signs he has seen, while he lies in the final moments of his life.

So, when people in the countryside say, 'His funeral bier bore him very swiftly', some people deny this and say it is delusion. However, it is indeed true that some good people seem to be sped to the grave by their biers, and by looking at their lives, we see that they were good people and that they are rushing because of their eagerness to receive their rewards. Those who are directly involved in the burial preparations of the deceased know that dead people are marked by certain signs that their ending was good or bad—we seek Allah's refuge from bad ending.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ثُلَّةٌ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ (١٣) وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنَ ٱلۡأٓخِرِينَ (١٤)
عَلَىٰ سُرُرٖ مَّوۡضُونَةٖ (١٥) مُّتَّكِـِٔينَ عَلَيۡهَا مُتَقَٰبِلِينَ (١٦)

Many from the past [13] and a few from later generations. [14] On couches of well-woven cloth [15] they will sit facing each other [16]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 13 - 16)

These words are connected with the previous context. The foremost, who are close to Allah, are 'a multitude', the majority of which are composed of 'the first generations.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 13) These are those people who were first and foremost to embrace Islam, namely the Companions *Allah be pleased with them*.

So, there were many of the foremost who were close to Allah in the generation of the companions. 'And a few of those [foremost] will be from the later time [generations]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 14); this means that a minority of them will be from the later generations. Only a few in our generation and those preceding it, at such later times, could be described as being of the foremost who are close to Allah *the Exalted.*

We often hear arguments where one person says, 'So-and-so is a good man who does so much good that he is like the Companions', and the other responds, 'No, none of us could be like the Companions, and no matter what we do our actions will never reach their level.'

However, the Quran settles this issue for us. The foremost who are close to Allah are present in the Islamic worldwide community; the first of them are those who lived at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who followed them, and also even in our time, but there were more of them in the first generations and less of them in the later ones.

The reason there are less now is either because there are more people in general, so that the foremost among them seem to be less, or because wickedness and corruption have become so widespread in these times. Yet, they do exist. A poet said:

The One Who made the truth bitter
Will never leave a generation bereft of people of truth;
And perhaps passion has killed many of its men –
Perished be passion! How many has it killed!

Likewise, His Words '[They will be] on thrones woven with gold and precious stones' (*al-Waqi'a:* 15) mean that their reward will be to dwell in paradise 'on thrones woven with gold and precious stones'; this is referring to exquisitely and finely embroidered and interlaced with threads of gold. And 'reclining thereon…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 16) means that they will be upon these thrones. A reclined position indicates tranquility, repose, and comfort. As well'…face to face' (*al-Waqi'a:* 16) means that they will be positioned face to face, not back to back; this position indicates companionship and comfort when faces filled with joy and cheerfulness are turned to one another. This position will always be possible to them; even when they move, they will not turn their backs to one another.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَٰنٌ مُّخَلَّدُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ بِأَكْوَابٍ وَأَبَارِيقَ وَكَأْسٍ مِّن مَّعِينٍ ﴿١٨﴾
لَّا يُصَدَّعُونَ عَنْهَا وَلَا يُنزِفُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

**Everlasting youths will go round among them [17]
with glasses, flagons, and cups of a pure drink [18]
that causes no headache or intoxication [19]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 17-19)**

One of the delights of paradise which they will enjoy is that 'they will be served by immortal boys' (*al-Waqi'a:* 17); what this means is that they will be waited upon and served glasses of drink by youths, namely young boys with beautiful faces; to behold a beautiful face is itself a blessing. Furthermore, these youths will remain as they are, without growing older.

This is the general state of all the dwellers of paradise; they remain the same age, namely the age of youth and vigour, and never suffer decrepitude or old age. This is why the women there are described as 'loving [their husbands only], equal in age' (*al-Waqi'a:* 37); this means that they are all of the same age.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'with vessels, pitchers and a cup [of wine] from a flowing spring.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 18) This means that these immortal youths will wait upon them with goblets, ewers and '…a cup [of wine] from a flowing spring,' (*al-Waqi'a:* 18) which means filled with fresh water or wine that flows from springs, for these are all drinking vessels.

The difference is that a *kub* (goblet) means a vessel with no handle or spout; a vessel with both a handle and a spout is called an *ibriq* (ewer). As for a *ka's* (cup), it specifically means a drinking vessel containing liquid. (This means an empty cup in Classical Arabic would not be called *ka's*, but only a full cup would have this name.)

Furthermore, when they partake of these blessings, '…they will get neither any aching of the head…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 19). Since Allah says '…and a cup [of wine] from a flowing spring' (*al-Waqi'a:* 18), then these words must be referring to the drinking of wine. Yet, this wine must be different to the wine of this world, for He says '…wherefrom they will get neither any aching of the head…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 19); what this means is that they will not be affected as one who drinks wine in this world is affected, and they will not get headaches.

The phrase'…nor any intoxication' (*al-Waqi'a:* 19) means that the wine will not impair their mental faculties as the wine of this world does. Thus, the wine of the Hereafter will be a pure pleasure, free of all ills and defects. The first thing the wine of this world does to the one who drinks it is to cause him a headache, and then make him feel sick. This is the meaning of '…nor any intoxication' (*al-Waqi'a:* 19). The wine of the Hereafter gives pleasure without making the drinker feel these bad sensations. It is a pure pleasure and joy without anything to cloud it.

It is strange that many people drink wine because they have a worry which they want to get rid of, so they cloud their minds with alcohol in order not to think about their worry. Yet, this only makes things more complicated; it does not solve problems. Concealing a worry does not remove it. An intelligent person faces his problems and looks for a way to remove his worries through thought, reflection, and seeking practical solutions.

When the Quran describes the wine (of the Hereafter), it says that it is '…delightful to those who drink it…' (*Muhammad:* 15). Allah *the Almighty* took something to which people had a connection, which they loved and enjoyed, and made it one of the delights of paradise; however, He purified it from all the defects of worldly wine by saying: '…wherefrom they will get neither any aching of the head nor any intoxication.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 19)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَفَٰكِهَةٖ مِّمَّا يَتَخَيَّرُونَ (٢٠) وَلَحۡمِ طَيۡرٖ مِّمَّا يَشۡتَهُونَ (٢١) وَحُورٌ عِينٞ (٢٢)
كَأَمۡثَٰلِ ٱللُّؤۡلُوِٕ ٱلۡمَكۡنُونِ (٢٣) جَزَآءَۢ بِمَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ (٢٤)

[there will be] any fruit they choose [20] the meat of any bird they like [21] and beautiful companions [22] like hidden pearls [23] a reward for what they used to do [24]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 20 - 24)

Another one of the delights of paradise will be that they will find before them fruit '…that they may choose' (*al-Waqi'a:* 20) and of the kind they love;

they will choose from many different kinds in order to know the difference between one and the other. The fact that they have a choice implies that much will be offered to them. The phrase'and the flesh of fowls that they desire,' (*al-Waqi'a:* 21) means of the kind which they prefer and love. Thus they will be given food, drink, and fruit – so what human pleasure found in this world remains? They say it is the pleasure of women, and therefore, He then says: 'and [there will be] *houris* [fair females] with wide, lovely eyes [as wives for the pious]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 22); thus, all forms of pleasure will be included.

The word *hur* (fair female) is the plural of *hawra'*, derived from *hawar* which is an attribute of beauty in women describing eyes, which is intense whiteness of the white part of the eye along with intense blackness of the pupils; so, they are strikingly black and strikingly white and wide as well. An ancient Arab poet praised this kind of beauty by saying:

The eyes wherein there is hawar
  Have slain us and never again revived us;
They can overcome even a wise man and render him powerless,
  Though they be the weakest of Allah's human creations!

He then describes these beautiful-eyed companions by saying: 'like unto preserved pearls.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 23) A pearl is beautiful in itself, with its resplendence and its attractiveness, and yet, it is also 'preserved' which means protected and secured so that it cannot be sullied by dust that would lessen its beauty and resplendence. From 'like unto preserved pearls' (*al-Waqi'a:* 23), we understand that the beautiful-eyed companions are not like the women of this world in the pleasure they give, for the feelings you experience with them are loftier and more refined than what occurs with the women of this world.

Then, pleasure is elevated until it reaches the highest of levels, wherein there is neither food, nor drink, nor women, and where nothing suffices but the pleasure of beholding Allah *the Exalted* Himself.

All this is 'a reward for what they used to do.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 24) This is due to their good deeds, so they attain this reward. This does not mean that the deeds 'pay' for the reward, for it is mentioned in a Noble Hadith that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None of you shall enter paradise by his deeds.’ The Companions said, ‘Not even you, O, Messenger of Allah?’ He said, ‘Not even I, unless Allah showers me with His Mercy.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَا يَسۡمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغۡوٗا وَلَا تَأۡثِيمًا ﴿٢٥﴾ إِلَّا قِيلٗا سَلَٰمٗا سَلَٰمٗا ﴿٢٦﴾

They will hear no idle or sinful talk there [25]
only clean and wholesome speech [26]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 25 - 26)

This means that in paradise ‘no evil vain talk will they hear…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 25). The Arabic word *laghw* means empty, useless talk or false speech. ‘…nor any sinful speech’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 25) means they will not lead one another into sinful speech because they will do no sin there at all. The words ‘but only the saying of “Peace, peace”’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 26) mean that they will hear nothing there other than the word ‘peace’. This means that they will give greetings of peace to one another, or the angels will greet them; beyond this, it means that the True Lord *Glorified is He* Himself will greet them as He says in the chapter of *Ya Sin*: ‘[It will be said to them]: “Peace”, a word from a Merciful Lord.’ (*Ya Sin:* 58)

وَأَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡيَمِينِ مَآ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡيَمِينِ ﴿٢٧﴾ فِي سِدۡرٖ مَّخۡضُودٖ ﴿٢٨﴾
وَطَلۡحٖ مَّنضُودٖ ﴿٢٩﴾ وَظِلّٖ مَّمۡدُودٖ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَمَآءٖ مَّسۡكُوبٖ ﴿٣١﴾ وَفَٰكِهَةٖ كَثِيرَةٖ
﴿٣٢﴾ لَّا مَقۡطُوعَةٖ وَلَا مَمۡنُوعَةٖ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَفُرُشٖ مَّرۡفُوعَةٍ ﴿٣٤﴾

Those on the Right, what people they are! [27] They will dwell amid thornless lote-trees [28] and clustered acacia [29] with spreading shade [30] constantly flowing water [31] abundant fruits [32] unfailing, unforbidden [33] with incomparable companions [34] (The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 27 - 34)

The previous verses have already told us about three groups: those of the right side, those on the left side and the foremost; the reward of the foremost is then made clear, and how most of them are of the early generations and only a few are of the later generations. Now, the verses turn to the reward of those of the right side.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (5037) on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

We can observe here that their reward in paradise will be a lower degree than that of the foremost who are close to Allah. It is as though the Quran is now giving the details of these three groups, after first mentioning them in general terms.

Allah says: ‘And those on the Right Hand; who will be those on the Right Hand? (*ma ashabu l-yamini*)’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 27). He repeats their name after the exclamatory *maa* (*maa l-ta`ajjub*, or the *maa* of wonder); this magnifies and honours these people. It is akin to using *maa* to express your wonder or amazement by saying, ‘I gave him what (*maa*) I gave him.’ It is also like Allah’s Words: ‘And He revealed to His Servant what (*maa*) He revealed.’ (*an-Najm:* 10) This means that He revealed to him something tremendous which can hardly be described or encompassed by words.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘amongst thornless lote-trees’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 28); the word *sidr* is the plural of *sidra* and means ‘lote-trees’. This tree has a great distinction, which is that *Sidrat-Al-Muntaha* (the Lote-Tree of the Uttermost End) is of this type of tree although, of course, it is not like the lote-trees known to us.

In description of its fruit, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said they were as big as *hajar* jugs (a huge jug known to the Arabs). (1) When the fruit of the lote-tree is ripe and the tree is planted in good soil and a good environment, it is delicious and sweet. You eat one after another and do not want to stop.

What tempers this delight is that the lote-tree has thorns that hurt you whenever you want to pick its fruit. Precious trees often have thorns to protect their fruit, just as roses and date palms do, to protect them from mice and insects.

As for paradise, we said that all the blessings therein are free of all imperfections and anything which might sully their purity. The lote-trees of paradise are ‘thornless’ (*makhdud*), which means that their thorns have been removed. Allah *the Almighty* has removed from them all that which is harmful and preserved in them all that which is delightful and pleasurable. Paradise does not contain any blights or pests for which the trees might require protective thorns.

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Nu’aym in Hilyat Al-Awliya’*

The phrase'and banana trees layered [with fruit]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 29) means banana trees whose fruits are arranged in compact piles, one on top of the other, as bunches of bananas are, with the bananas lined up in an orderly way.

And 'in shade long-extended' (*al-Waqi'a:* 30) means that the shade is extended at all times and does not decline. As you know, the sun is what causes shade to move and depart, but in paradise, there will be no sun so that the shade that these trees provide will be constant.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'by water flowing constantly' (*al-Waqi'a:* 31) and then 'and fruit in plenty, whose season is not limited, and their supply will not be cut off.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 32-33) By Allah, once the delights of food, drink, and fruit have been met, what other human enjoyments remain?

The enjoyment of women remains, and so the Quranic discourse then speaks of it with this subtle phrase, alluding to it by saying: 'and on couches (*furush*), raised high.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 34). Now, the word *furush* literally means beds and the word in Arabic may be used to allude to a person's spouse. This is a lofty expression of this pleasure, which is based on concealment and privacy, and therefore, He then says:

إِنَّآ أَنشَأۡنَٰهُنَّ إِنشَآءٗ ﴿٣٥﴾ فَجَعَلۡنَٰهُنَّ أَبۡكَارًا ﴿٣٦﴾ عُرُبًا أَتۡرَابٗا ﴿٣٧﴾
لِّأَصۡحَٰبِ ٱلۡيَمِينِ ﴿٣٨﴾ ثُلَّةٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَثُلَّةٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡأٓخِرِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

We have specially created [35] virginal, [36]
loving, of matching age [37] for those on the Right [38]
many from the past [39] and many from later
generations [40] (The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 35 - 40)

Thus, we understand the word *furush* to be a euphemism for 'women' because He *the Exalted* says thereafter: 'Verily, We have created them [maidens] of special creation' (*al-Waqi'a:* 35); this refers to the *houris* whom Allah forms and creates anew.

So, do not take the image you have of her in this world and say, ‘She will be with me in the Hereafter as well.’ Indeed, she will be with you, if you go to paradise, but she will have another form which is cleansed and purified from all the imperfections that existed in her in this world, and free of all that you do not like about her.

Also, Allah says: ‘…and purified spouses’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 15). Once I was talking to a friend about Allah’s Words ‘They and their spouses—in shade, reclining on adorned couches’ (*Ya Sin:* 56), and he said, ‘Ah! Does this mean that so-and-so will be my wife even in paradise?’ I said, ‘Yes, but after Allah has purified her of everything that you do not like about her in this world.’

‘And made them virgins’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 36); that is, they will ever remain as virgins no matter how often they couple so that they will never tire of one another. The phrase ‘loving (their spouses only), equal in age’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 37) means they will love their spouses and will be all of the same age so that no one will ever be attracted to anyone but their own spouses.

‘A multitude [of those on the Right Hand] will be from the first generation. And a multitude [of those on the Right Hand] will be from the later times.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 39-40) This means that the rank of ‘the companions of the right’ will include many from past times and many from later times, an equal amount from each. As for the higher level (the foremost), they will consist of many of the first generations and a few from later generations.

Allah then tells us about the other side – may He protect us!

وَأَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلشِّمَالِ مَآ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلشِّمَالِ ﴿٤١﴾ فِي سَمُومٖ وَحَمِيمٖ ﴿٤٢﴾ وَظِلّٖ مِّن يَحۡمُومٖ ﴿٤٣﴾ لَّا
بَارِدٖ وَلَا كَرِيمٍ ﴿٤٤﴾ إِنَّهُمۡ كَانُواْ قَبۡلَ ذَٰلِكَ مُتۡرَفِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ وَكَانُواْ يُصِرُّونَ عَلَى ٱلۡحِنثِ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ
﴿٤٦﴾ وَكَانُواْ يَقُولُونَ أَئِذَا مِتۡنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابٗا وَعِظَٰمًا أَءِنَّا لَمَبۡعُوثُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾ أَوَءَابَآؤُنَا
ٱلۡأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾ قُلۡ إِنَّ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ وَٱلۡأٓخِرِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ لَمَجۡمُوعُونَ إِلَىٰ مِيقَٰتِ يَوۡمٖ مَّعۡلُومٖ ﴿٥٠﴾

But those on the Left, what people they are! [41]
They will dwell amid scorching wind and scalding water [42]
in the shadow of black smoke [43] neither cool nor refreshing [44]
Before, they overindulged in luxury [45] and persisted in great
sin [46] always saying, ‘What? When we are dead and have

become dust and bones, shall we then be raised up? [47] And our earliest forefathers too?' [48] Say [Prophet], 'The earliest and latest generations. [49] will all be gathered on a predetermined Day [50] (The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 41 - 50)

Those on the left side (or the companions of the left) are those who will receive their records in their left hands—Allah is our refuge! Allah *the Almighty* says in this verse '…who will be those on the Left Hand? ...' (*al-Waqi'a:* 41) to place emphasis and draw attention to their condition and to imply that the torments they will suffer are beyond description.They shall be 'in fierce hot wind and boiling water' (*al-Waqi'a:* 42) meaning that they are enveloped by scorching winds and scalding water. The Arabic word *samum* (scorching winds) means extremely hot winds that penetrate through the pores of the skin, whereas *hamim* (boiling water) means extremely hot water.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And shadow of black smoke.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 43) which is *Yahmum* meaning very hot, black smoke; when people see it, they will imagine that it will give them shade, yet in fact a fire within it will burn them. Allah *the Exalted and the Glorious* further describes this shadow by saying that it is 'neither cool nor good' (*al-Waqi'a:* 44) because we usually hope for shade to be cool and pleasant, protecting us from the sun's heat, along with being soothing and relaxing for those taking shelter under it. As for the shade of these people (Allah is our refuge!), it will be a shadow of billowing smoke.

The Quran then answers the question as to why Allah does all this with them by saying: 'Verily, before that, they indulged in luxury' (*al-Waqi'a:* 45) meaning during the life of this world, and so their recompense will be akin to their deeds, just as He says of the foremost: '…as a reward for what they used to do.' (*as- Sajda:* 17)

Thus, those on the left side will meet this fate because of how they indulgently pursued pleasure in the life of this world. Now, pleasure and comfort are not sins in themselves, but these people kept all the pleasure to themselves and neglected to share it with others and were stingy in sharing it with those who had no pleasure of their own. They did not fulfil Allah's commandments pertaining to the comforts they enjoyed. This is what the word *mutraf* denotes; it is one who abandons himself to the pursuit of pleasures.

As for those who uphold Allah’s Rights and share the comforts they enjoy with others, they are not termed *mutrafeen* (people abandoned to the pursuit of pleasure) because by enjoying things, they allow others to attain their essential needs. The one who makes his house nice or buys new furniture is not guilty of recklessly pursuing pleasure because he spends his money for the public good and does a service to the lower strata of society who benefit from this.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And were persisting in great sin (*al-hinth*)’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 46). The Arabic word *Al-hanth* means all misdeeds and acts of disobedience which constitute sin. However, scholars say that here it signifies *shirk* (associating others with Allah in His Divinity or worship) because it is described as ‘great,’ and *shirk* is the worst of all sins.

Thus, they combined affluence and pleasure with the worst disobedience towards the Bestower, which is disbelief in Him *the Exalted*. In the same respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have you not considered those who exchanged the favour of Allah for disbelief and settled their people [in] the home of ruin?’ (*Ibrahim:* 28) What is even more heinous still: ‘And they used to say, “When we die and become dust and bones, shall we then indeed be resurrected? And also our forefathers?”’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 47-48) They deny the Resurrection because they have done nothing that could be of any avail to them on that Day. Once the Resurrection and the Reckoning would occur, their fate would be grave indeed. Thus they prefer to deny the Resurrection. Otherwise, if the Resurrection were on their minds, they would never have dared sin and would never have fallen into disbelief and *shirk*.

So, Allah replies to them with words that affirm the truth they deny by saying: ‘Say [O, Muhammad], “[Yes] verily, those of old, and those of later times. All will surely be gathered together for appointed Meeting of a known Day.”’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 49-50) He has already affirmed it earlier by saying: ‘And there can be no denying of its befalling.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 2)

Therefore Masruq(1) *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Whosoever desires to have knowledge of the first and the last, the life of this world and the Hereafter and reward and punishment, let him read the chapter of *al-Waqi`a.*’(2)

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(1) *Masruq ibn Al-Ajda` ibn Malik Al-Hamadani Al-Wadi`i, Abu Aisyah; he was a well-known trustworthy tabi`i from the people of Yemen.*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah and Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir*

It was also narrated that our master `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* heard something about `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him* which made him cut off his allowance. When Ibn Mas`ud fell ill, `Uthman went to visit him and said, 'Of what do you complain?' He replied, 'I complain of my sins' — and this is the condition of those who live by Allah and for Allah; he did not say 'I complain of a headache' or 'stomach ache'. He said, 'And for what do you hope?' He replied, 'I hope for my Lord's Mercy.' He said, 'Shall we return to you the allowance you should have had?' He said, 'You withheld it from me when I was well, and now you wish to give it to me as I lie dying?' He said, 'It shall be for your children.' He replied, 'They need it not, for I have taught them the chapter of *al-Waqi`a*. I heard the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* say, "Whoever reads the chapter of *al-Waqi`a* (every night) shall never suffer poverty."'[1]

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ أَيُّهَا ٱلضَّآلُّونَ ٱلْمُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٥١﴾ لَءَاكِلُونَ مِن شَجَرٍ مِّن زَقُّومٍ ﴿٥٢﴾ فَمَالِـُٔونَ مِنْهَا ٱلْبُطُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾
فَشَٰرِبُونَ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ ٱلْحَمِيمِ ﴿٥٤﴾ فَشَٰرِبُونَ شُرْبَ ٱلْهِيمِ ﴿٥٥﴾ هَٰذَا نُزُلُهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٥٦﴾

And you who have gone astray and denied the truth [51] will eat from the bitter tree of *Zaqqum* [52] filling your bellies with it [53] and drink scalding water [54] lapping it like thirsty camels [55] This will be their welcome on the Day of Judgement [56] (The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 51-56)

After affirming to them that they will indeed be resurrected and gathered on a Day known only to Him, the True Lord *the Exalted* informs them what their requital will be on that Day. The trees of *zaqqum* are explained in detail in another place in the Quran when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Verily, the tree of *Zaqqum* will be the food of the sinners. Like boiling oil, it will boil in the bellies, like the boiling of scalding water.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 43-46) He also says regarding it: 'Verily, it is a tree that springs out of the bottom of Hellfire; the shoots of its fruit-stalks are like the heads of devils.' (*as-Saffat:* 64-65)

Allah *the Almighty* wants to show us how ugly this tree is, so He compares it to something frightful which no one has seen, namely the heads of devils so

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Shu`ab Al-Iman and by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir*

that people will go to great extremes in imagining its vileness. We have already explained that if we held a competition for artists to draw a picture of Satan, each artist would present a different vile image from the ones presented by the others. We could gather up millions of depictions of Satan's vileness, each artist drawing the vileness he imagines. Therefore, the Quran compares the tree of *zaqqum*, which is unknown to us, with the heads of devils, which are also unknown to us. This is not how comparison usually works: we compare something unknown to something known. As we said before, sometimes obscurity is, in itself, disclosure; this is also the case when it comes to the vagueness of the timing of death and the Last Hour.

The statement, 'Then you will fill your bellies therewith' (*al-Waqi'a:* 53) indicates that they will have no other food with which to fill their bellies. This is another kind of the torments they will have to endure, filling their bellies with it. That is the food, but what about the drink? (Allah is our refuge) 'And drink boiling water (*hameem*) on top of it. So you will drink (that) like thirsty camels!' (*al-Waqi'a:* 54-55). *Hameem* means boiling hot water, at the absolute hottest it can possibly be. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So you will drink [that] like thirsty camels (*heem*)! (*al-Waqi'a:* 55); the word *heem* means a thirsty camel which keeps on drinking without being satiated. So, they will fill their bellies of the *zaqqum* tree. Then they need to drink to abate its heat, but they will be given boiling water to drink, which they will also drink until their bellies are full. In another verse, He says about this boiling water: '…and are given to drink scalding water that will sever their intestines.' (*Muhammad:* 15)

After this punishment, the True Lord *Glorified is He* rebukes them by saying: 'That will be their entertainment (*nuzuluhum*) on the Day of Recompense!' (*al-Waqi'a:* 56) In Arabic, the word *nuzul* signifies an 'accommodation' that is prepared to entertain a guest and the food and drink which are presented to him; so *the Almighty* says in this verse 'That will be their entertainment…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 56) by way of deriding them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

نَحْنُ خَلَقْنَٰكُمْ فَلَوْلَا تُصَدِّقُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾ أَفَرَءَيْتُم مَّا تُمْنُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾
ءَأَنتُمْ تَخْلُقُونَهُۥٓ أَمْ نَحْنُ ٱلْخَٰلِقُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾ نَحْنُ قَدَّرْنَا بَيْنَكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتَ وَمَا نَحْنُ
بِمَسْبُوقِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾ عَلَىٰٓ أَن نُّبَدِّلَ أَمْثَٰلَكُمْ وَنُنشِئَكُمْ فِى مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

It was We who created you: will you not believe? [57]
Consider [the semen] you eject [58] do you create it
yourselves or are We the Creator? [59] We ordained death
to be among you. Nothing could stop Us [60] if We intended
to change you and recreate you in a way unknown to you[61]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 57 - 61)

The matter of creation is acknowledged solely for Allah, and none but He has laid claim to it. Therefore, He speaks of it in this emphatic way: ‘It is We Who have created you…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 57); He is restricting creation to Himself. ‘…then why do you believe not?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 57) This means ‘Now that I have told you this fact, do not belie it and do not believe those misguiding people who tell you about how the creation process was, for they are liars.’

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘I did not make them witness to the creation of the heavens and the earth or to the creation of themselves, and I would not have taken the misguiders as assistants.’ (*al-Kahf:* 51) We said before that a claim is rightfully proved to the claimant as long as no counter-claim is made, and no one else has ever laid claim to creation, not even disbelievers. We can read in the Quran: ‘And if you ask them who created them, they will surely say, “Allah.” How then are they turned away [from the worship of Allah Who created them]?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). Allah *the Most High* says: ‘Say, [O, Muhammad], “If there had been with Him [other] gods, as they say, then they [each] would have sought to the Owner of the Throne a way.”’ (*al-Isra’:* 42)

‘Then tell Me (about) the human semen that you emit.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 58) This is one of the stages of creation, which began first with clay as we are told by the verses which give the details of creation: ‘Who perfected everything which He created and began the creation of man from clay. Then He made his posterity out of the extract of a liquid disdained.’ (*as-Sajda:* 7-8) So, the first stage was the creation of Adam *Allah be pleased with him* from clay, and the latter stage was creating his progeny from a humble fluid. Therefore, you can witness the act of procreation which occurs through the meeting of male and female, so take from it evidence of the truth of the first creation. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…then why do you believe not?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 57) This refers to the truth of your own existence through procreation. The words 'then why' are meant to exhort and inspire reflection.

Therefore, Allah speaks to us about this stage in this verse: 'Then tell Me [about] the human semen that you emit (*tumnun*).' (*al-Waqi'a:* 58) Semen (*mani*) is the fluid which a man casts into the womb of a woman and from which the foetus is formed.

Elsewhere, He says: 'From a sperm-drop when it is emitted.' (*an-Najm:* 46) The 'drop' here is the sperm by which the creation takes place, and semen is the fluid in which this sperm lives. The True Lord *Glorified is He* is saying: 'Have you seen this drop, which is almost invisible—do you create from it a perfectly-formed human being, or is it us Who do so?'

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Is it you who create it [i.e. make this semen into a perfect human being], or are We the Creator?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 59) The rhetorical question in this verse is for affirmation, for there is only one possible answer, which is that creation is Allah's Work alone. If you were the creators, none of you would ever be stricken with the problem of infertility.

He *Glorified is He* then says: 'We have decreed death to you all, and We are not unable, to transfigure you and create you in [forms] that you know not.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 61). After speaking about creativity and creation from nothing, the True Lord *the Exalted* says to us: 'Beware of being deluded by the fact that We created you in the best form, for the One Who gave you the life is well able to take it away.'

In another place, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[He] Who has created death and life, that He may test you [and thus show] which of you is best in deed. And He is the All-Mighty, the Oft-Forgiving.' (*al-Mulk:* 2) He mentions death first so that we face life without delusion: the strong should not be deluded with their strength, nor the rich with their riches. Remember always that you will die. So before we can face life, we must face death.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and We are not unable to transfigure you…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 60-61). It is like Allah is saying, 'Nothing can overcome Us, and no one can prevent Us from bringing forth a new creation instead of you.' Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If He will, He can remove you and bring (in your place) a new creation! And for Allah that is not hard or difficult.' (*Ibrahim:* 19-20) The reality of life affirms this, for the jinns were created before you. '…and create you in [forms] that you know not.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 61) This means creating you in a hideous form, after you were in the best of forms.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ عَلِمۡتُمُ ٱلنَّشۡأَةَ ٱلۡأُولَىٰ فَلَوۡلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

You have learned how you were first created:
will you not reflect? [62] (The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 62)

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And indeed, you have already known the first form of creation…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 62). This refers to the first creation, the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* from clay, the truth of which you can deduce from the second creation which you all witness, that of procreation. Therefore, as long as you know this, '…Why then do you not remember or take heed?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 62). This means that you must bethink yourselves of Allah's Power and keep it always in your minds. They also say that the 'first form of creation' means 'your first creation in the life of this world'.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَرَءَيۡتُم مَّا تَحۡرُثُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾ ءَأَنتُمۡ تَزۡرَعُونَهُۥٓ أَمۡ نَحۡنُ ٱلزَّٰرِعُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾ لَوۡ نَشَآءُ لَجَعَلۡنَٰهُ
حُطَٰمٗا فَظَلۡتُمۡ تَفَكَّهُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ إِنَّا لَمُغۡرَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ بَلۡ نَحۡنُ مَحۡرُومُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

Consider the seeds you sow in the ground [63] is it you who make them grow or We? [64] If We wished, We could turn your harvest into chaff and leave you to wail [65] ['We are burdened with debt [66] we are bereft' [67]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 63 - 67)

After speaking to us of the creation of man, the True Lord *Glorified is He* now speaks to us of the creation of plants: 'Tell Me! The seed that you sow in the ground' (*al-Waqi'a:* 63). Soil is the place of crops and their growth because before the farmer sows the seeds, he ploughs the land to turn the soil so that it is penetrated by air and becomes more fertile. Just as Adam *peace be upon him* the first man, was created from the earth, plants are also created from the earth.

Allah *the Exalted* asks us, and He knows best, so the question must be rhetorical for affirmation: ‘Is it you that make it grow, or are We the Grower?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 64) Thus, He speaks no more about the ploughed soil but speaks about crops since the purpose of ploughing is to grow crops.

The True Lord makes clear the power He has over this matter, for no one has ever claimed that he causes crops to grow from the earth. It is a matter of creation to which no one has ever laid claim. Furthermore, once a plant has grown and matured, can you then protect it? Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Were it Our Will, We verily could crumble it to dry pieces, and you would be regretful [or left in wonderment].’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65). Allah could turn it into chaff and dust blown by the wind, from which you could not benefit in any way. So, He has spoken here about human life and its antithesis, death, and then about plant life and its antithesis, namely its drying up and withering away into chaffs.

For this reason, when Allah *the Almighty* gives a parable of the life of this world, He says: ‘And present to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allah is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability.’ (*al-Kahf:* 45)

Thus, beware of being deluded by your crops and their beauty and lushness, for in reality it is We (Allah) Who cause them to grow, and We are well able to take them away. Your role in the matter, as a human being, amounts to nothing more than casting the seeds into the earth. You play no further role in the growing of the crop or plant, which is carried out by an overwhelming power that belongs solely to Allah.

For example, we may predict a large harvest of blooming cotton plants, but shortly before it is ready for picking it is afflicted by blight and completely ruined without anyone being able to prevent it. Thus, Allah says thereafter: ‘…and you would be regretful [or left in wonderment]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65); we are left wondering just what has happened and how the harvest could have been taken away so quickly and saying, 'We are indeed ruined!' (*al-Waqi'a:* 66). This means that we planted but did not harvest! 'Nay, but we are deprived [of our livelihood]!' This means that we have been deprived of the fruits of our harvest.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَرَءَيۡتُمُ ٱلۡمَآءَ ٱلَّذِى تَشۡرَبُونَ ٦٨ ءَأَنتُمۡ أَنزَلۡتُمُوهُ مِنَ ٱلۡمُزۡنِ أَمۡ نَحۡنُ ٱلۡمُنزِلُونَ ٦٩
لَوۡ نَشَآءُ جَعَلۡنَٰهُ أُجَاجٗا فَلَوۡلَا تَشۡكُرُونَ ٧٠

Consider the water you drink [68] was it you who brought it down from the raincloud or We? [69] If We wanted, We could make it bitter: will you not be thankful? [70]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 68 - 70)

After speaking about food, He now speaks about water; these are the two essential constituents of life: food and water. We explained before that life's constituents are ranked according to how much they are needed: the first of them is air, then water, then food. You need air at every moment and cannot survive without it, for if even a single breath is denied you, you will die. Therefore, Allah, in His Wisdom, has made air universally available so that no one individual could possess it.

Then, when it comes to water, you can go without it for ten days; and therefore, you usually find that water is free, and people rarely own it. As for food, you could go as long as a month without it. This is because if you are denied food, your body can draw nourishment from the fat stored in it.

We can make an observation here concerning the linguistic style used. When the True Lord *the Glorious and Exalted* speaks about farming and crops, He says: 'Were it Our Will, We verily could crumble (*laja`alnahu*) it to dry pieces, and you would be regretful [or left in wonderment]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 65); the verse has *lam al-tawkid*, or the *lam* of emphasis, and it is translated as 'verily'. Yet, when He speaks about water, He says: 'If We willed, We could make it salt [and undrinkable]…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 70); in this verse, He without the *lam* of emphasis is not used. Scholars say this is because mankind plays a part in the act of farming since he ploughs, sows, and harvests. Yet, when it comes to water, no human being plays any role in it, for the act of causing rain to fall is solely the province of Allah’s Omnipotence. Who else can cause even a drop of rain to fall? Think about the work and processes required for a chemist to prepare even a single cup of distilled water. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘is it you who cause it from the rainclouds to come down, or are We the Causer of it to come down?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 69) Man plays no part in the bringing down of rain, not even in a superficial way as is the case with farming, He says: ‘If We willed, We could make it salt [and undrinkable]…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 70); this means that it is salty and useless. Then, His question ‘…why then do you not give thanks [to Allah]?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 70) stresses the importance of giving thanks for these favours which are sent to you, favours that happen without your playing any part in them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَرَءَيۡتُمُ ٱلنَّارَ ٱلَّتِي تُورُونَ ﴿٧١﴾ ءَأَنتُمۡ أَنشَأۡتُمۡ شَجَرَتَهَآ أَمۡ نَحۡنُ ٱلۡمُنشِـُٔونَ ﴿٧٢﴾
نَحۡنُ جَعَلۡنَٰهَا تَذۡكِرَةٗ وَمَتَٰعٗا لِّلۡمُقۡوِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾ فَسَبِّحۡ بِٱسۡمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾

Consider the fire you kindle [71] is it you who make the wood for it grow or We? [72] We made it a reminder, and useful to those who kindle it [73] so [Prophet] glorify the name of your Lord, the Supreme [74] (The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 71-74)

The meaning of ‘…the fire which you kindle’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 71) is the fire that you light using kindling. The question ‘Is it you who made the tree thereof to grow, or are We the Grower?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 72) implies that the origin of fire is the wood which is taken from these trees. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have made it a Reminder…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 73); this is an enduring reminder for all. So, you can see how the True Lord *Glorified is He* mentions a favour of His and its antithesis: He speaks of man’s creation, and then says: ‘We have decreed death to you all…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 60). He speaks of crops, and then says: ‘Were it Our Will, We verily could crumble it to dry pieces…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65). He speaks of water, and then says: ‘If We willed, We could make it salt…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 70).

However, when it comes to fire (Allah is our refuge), He does not mention its antithesis, but He says after mentioning it: ‘We have made it a Reminder…’

(*al-Waqi'a:* 73). He caused it to remain so that it may be a reminder for you: '…and an article of use for travellers.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 73) This alludes to the man who is travelling abroad and wants to light a fire to give him warmth.

After all these favours, there is nothing left but for us to give thanks to Allah for them, and the first of thanks is to say 'Glory be to Him Who blessed us with all these favours!': 'Then glorify with praises the Name of your Lord, the Most Great.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 74) This is why we find that the words 'Glory be to Allah' are always uttered after every amazing thing: 'Exalted is He Who took His Servant by night from *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* [in Mecca] to *Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa* [in Jerusalem]…' (*al-Isra':* 1) and 'So glory be to Allah when you enter the night and when you enter the morning.' (*ar-Rum:* 17)

Scholars say that if, when you receive a blessing, you say: 'Glory be to Allah. This is Allah's Will. There is no power save through Allah', you will not see anything bad in this blessing, and it will not be spoiled because you have ascribed the blessing to its Giver, and so He will take care of it. It is like when a manufacturer sells you a product and gives you a one-year guarantee. Thus, when the True Lord *Glorified is He* gives you a guarantee, it is open and has no time limit.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِمَوَٰقِعِ ٱلنُّجُومِ ٧٥ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَقَسَمٞ لَّوۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ عَظِيمٌ ٧٦
إِنَّهُۥ لَقُرۡءَانٞ كَرِيمٞ ٧٧ فِي كِتَٰبٖ مَّكۡنُونٖ ٧٨
لَّا يَمَسُّهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱلۡمُطَهَّرُونَ ٧٩ تَنزِيلٞ مِّن رَّبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٨٠

I swear by the positions of the stars [75] a mighty oath,
if you only knew [76] that this is truly a noble Quran [77]
in a protected Record [78] that only the purified can touch [79]
sent down from the Lord of all being [80]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 75 - 80)

His Words 'But nay, I swear by…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 75) are meant to affirm and give emphasis. Allah swears here '…by the mansions of the stars' (*al-Waqi'a:* 75). Now the orientalists did not understand this and objected to the verse by saying: 'How can He say, 'But nay, I swear,' and then give the main clause of the oath right afterwards, as though He said, ‘I do swear’? To explain this, we say that to say ‘I swear’ means to take an oath. In matters of legal rights, they say that the plaintiff has the burden of proof, and the defendant has to swear to his innocence. If there is no proof to be given, we turn to the oath. So an oath is only sworn to give emphasis and in a situation where there is denial.

When you ask, for example, ‘Is Mohammad in the house?’ the answer is ‘Yes, he is,’ not ‘By Allah *the Almighty* Mohammad is in the house.’ There is no need for all this because you do not doubt or deny the answer. Yet, if the other person feels that you do not believe him, he will emphasise his claim with an oath, saying, ‘By Allah *the Almighty* it is true.’

So, it is as though when the True Lord *the Exalted and the Glorious* says: ‘But nay, I swear by the mansions of the stars’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 75), the thing to which He is swearing is so clear that it requires no argument, evidence, emphasis or oath. Furthermore, if I were to swear, I would swear by what I say, not by such-and-such.

If you reflect on this oath, which is preceded by a negative, and on its main clause, you would see that it is something clear that does not need to be affirmed by an oath. Take, for example: ‘Nay, I swear by this city [Mecca]’ (*al-Balad*: 1). To emphasise something which is plain and requires no oath can actually serve to raise doubts about it, so such things should not be emphasised.

The Arabic for *mawaqi` an-nujum* literally means ‘the positions of the stars’ and it signifies the paths or courses which they follow; this is one of Allah’s creations, in which there are miracles and mysteries. Moreover, the True Lord *the Exalted* may swear by any of His creations He wills, and for any reason He wills, for He knows these created beings best.

Elsewhere, He says about stars: ‘and landmarks. And by the stars they are [also] guided.’ (*an-Nahl:* 16). A star has mysteries when it rises and mysteries when it sets (or falls), of which we know nothing; however, the Lord of the stars knows.

This allusive phrase is enough for us: ‘And verily, that is indeed a great oath, if you but know.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 76) Be alert and well aware because in the stars there are many benefits for you of which you are not aware, and the fact that you are not aware of something does not prevent you from benefitting from it, along with gaining from its motion and activity.

A farmer, for example, knows nothing about how a television works or how a signal is transmitted. Yet, he can switch on the television and benefit from its presentations—if only they were beneficial.

This indicates that if you knew the mysteries and benefits of this, you would certainly find it to be great. We see how those who study the stars and their movements and delve into their mysteries say that there is a connection between the stars and mankind, such that each one of us has a star which resembles him. There are bright stars which symbolise famous people, and then stars which are less bright, and stars whose light has not yet reached us. They say that a person's 'star has waned', meaning that he is no longer important.

Then, *jawab al-qasam*, or the thing sworn about, comes: 'That [this] is indeed an honourable recital [the Noble Quran].' (*al-Waqi'a:* 77) This means that this Book which you have before you is noble, and we sense that there is a kind of aptness here since the stars *nujum* were the object of the oath, and the thing sworn about is *munajjam* (the Quran came down in stages). So, the heavenly *najm* (star) is mentioned along with the Quranic *najm* (coming down in stages).

He describes the Quran as *karim* (noble) because the person who is *karim* (in Arabic) is the one who gives what he has without stinginess; likewise, the Quran gives to each generation after the other, an infinite gift and an unceasing flow.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'In a Book well-guarded' (*al-Waqi'a:* 78). This means that it is guarded in the Preserved Tablet, along with being guarded in people's hearts. Owing to its position and lofty rank, it is a must 'which [that Book with Allah] none can touch but the purified' (*al-Waqi'a:* 79). Those who touch the Quran must be ritually pure of body and also spiritually pure of all deviance and corruption.

The final attribute of the Quran is that it is 'A Revelation [this Quran] from the Lord of the worlds.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 80) Its revelation is ascribed to the Lord of the worlds Who is generous to believer and disbeliever alike, and the fact that the attribute 'Lord of the worlds' is used here indicates that the Quran is a Book for all the worlds.

It was revealed by the Lord of the worlds Who knows what is best for the worlds and is their Creator and the One Who knows them best. His Quran for them is like a maintenance booklet which protects them and keeps them safe with its instructions and guidance, for the One Who created them is the One Who revealed this guidance.

Therefore, He addressed Adam and Hawwa' (Eve) *peace be upon them* after they had eaten from the Tree, with the Words: '…but if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from Me, so whosoever follows My Guidance will not lose his way nor fall into misery. And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life, and We will raise him on the Day of Resurrection blind.' (*Ta Ha:* 123-124)

We said that if a servant follows the guidance of his Lord and Creator, he will never fall into ruin. If you have encountered difficulties in your life, then consider how you have deviated from your Lord's guidance. A pious person once said, 'I see the effects of my sin on my wife and my horse.' Indeed, every time his horse stalled, he would say, 'What have I done?' Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Allah does not change the condition of a people [for the worse] unless they change what is in themselves…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11).

What tells us that what is meant here by *najm* is the part-by-part revelation of Quranic verses is that Allah swears by it, i.e. by the Quran: 'That [this] is indeed an honourable recital [the Noble Quran].' (*al-Waqi'a:* 77) *Al-Karim* (a generous person) is the one who gives from the good things he has, and this depends on how much generosity he has and how constant it is.

One aspect of the Quran's noble generosity is that it keeps on giving to all aspects of life, both material and spiritual: in agriculture, manufacturing, economics, engineering, language, wisdom, and morality. Another aspect of its generosity is that it does not give everything it has to give all at once because it did not come for one particular time, but it came for all times until the Last Hour.

Had the Quran given all it had to give in one century, every other century would have had to go without receiving anything. We can infer this from the letter *sin* in Allah's words: 'We will soon show them Our signs' (*Fussilat:* 53). It is a constant and ever-renewed gift because 'What is with you passes away and what is with Allah is enduring…' (*an-Nahl:* 96).

The word *Al-Karim* also means (precious), as when we describe a stone that it is *karim* (gemstone), which means a stone that is innately precious. Thus, He then says, 'In a Book well-guarded' (*al-Waqi'a:* 78) because a precious thing must be stored in a safe place that safeguards it.

The Quran is guarded and protected against being touched by any but a pure hand; and in this verse, *'al-mutahharun',* or 'the purified' (*al-Waqi'a:* 79) are the angels. The word *mutahhar* means those purified by another, not by themselves; that is why He did not say *al-mutatahhirun*. The scholars who say that it is permissible to touch the written Quran without ritual purity adduce this verse as evidence since the *mutatahhir* is the one who purifies himself.

This is relevant to the issue of menstruation: (*fa'tazilu an-nisa' fi al-mahidi wa la taqrabuhunna hatta yathurna fa idha tathharna fa'tuhunna min haythu amarakumu Allah*) '…do not go near them until they have become clean; then when they have cleansed themselves, go in to them as Allah has commanded you…' (*al-Baqara:* 222). The word *yathurna* means that their courses have come to an end, whilst *tatahharna* means that they have bathed. Thus, *yathurna* comes from another because Allah *Glorified is He* decrees when menstruation finishes, unlike where bathing is concerned.

As for those who say that ablution is necessary before touching the written Quran, they look at the verse in a general sense, namely that it shows that the written Quran is not like any other book, but must be handled with sanctity. They say that you received it from those who are pure, so do not touch it unless you have purified yourselves.

Allah *the Exalted* describes the Quran here with three attributes: it is noble, protected in a well-guarded divine writ, and can only be touched by the pure. He is saying to us, 'Take this Book carefully, for it contains a gift which never stops giving, and it came to you safely just as it was sent down from Allah *Glorified is He* so look after it and do not even let anyone impure touch it.'

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'A Revelation [this Quran] from the Lord of the worlds' (*al-Waqi'a:* 80). This summarises and explains all that has just been said. It is a noble Book which only the pure can touch because it is a revelation from the Lord of all being, and ‘the Lord of the worlds’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 80) implies sustenance, and the giving of Lordship is to believers and disbelievers, righteous and sinners alike. It is a noble and generous Quran in its gifts, from a generous Lord Who gives unto His sinful servant and does not withhold from him, despite his sin.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

أَفَبِهَٰذَا ٱلْحَدِيثِ أَنتُم مُّدْهِنُونَ ﴿٨١﴾ وَتَجْعَلُونَ رِزْقَكُمْ أَنَّكُمْ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾ فَلَوْلَآ إِذَا
بَلَغَتِ ٱلْحُلْقُومَ ﴿٨٣﴾ وَأَنتُمْ حِينَئِذٍ تَنظُرُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنكُمْ وَلَٰكِن لَّا
تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾ فَلَوْلَآ إِن كُنتُمْ غَيْرَ مَدِينِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾ تَرْجِعُونَهَآ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

How can you scorn this statement? [81] And how, in return for the livelihood you are given, can you deny it? [82] When the soul of a dying man comes up to his throat [83] while you gaze on [84] We are nearer to him than you, though you do not see Us [85] why, if you are not to be judged [86] do you not restore his soul to him, if what you say is true? [87]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 81 - 87)

The word *Hadith*, or ‘statement’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 81) in this verse refers to the Quran; He says elsewhere: (*Allahu anzala ahsana al-Hadithi…’*) ‘Allah has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings…’ (*az-Zumar:* 23); the word *Hadith* literally means what people say (*yatahaddath*), and it also means ‘new’. We said before that the Quran gives us something new every day so that its wonders never cease, and it never grows old however much it is repeated.(1)

The word *mudhinun*, or ‘scorn’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 81), is the plural of *mudhin*, whose origin is what someone does when he used *dihan,* meaning *dahana* (to smear something so that it sticks to something else); it also means cajoling, and flattering’. In this verse, it means to doubt and belie, along with scorning this ‘statement’, namely the Noble Quran.

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(1) *These latter words are from a description of the Quran given by the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him as narrated by At-Tirmidhi (2831) on the authority of ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him.*

The Noble Quran expresses this concept elsewhere by saying: 'When they meet the believers, they say, "We believe," but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, "We are really with you. We were only mocking."' (*al-Baqara:* 14) In the chapter of *al-Qalam,* Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'they want you to compromise with them, and then they will compromise with you.' (*al-Qalam:* 9) What this means is that they would like for you to sweet-talk and flatter them.

He says: 'And make [the thanks for] your provision that you deny [the Provider]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 82). This means that you make your portion and share of the life of this world to belie this Book, and you use the provision which Allah *the Almighty* sends unto you as a means of belying His guidance, instead of giving thanks to the Provider Who created you out of nothing and gave you sustenance out of nothing.

Indeed, He speaks truly of them when He says: '[Prophet,] do you not see those who, in exchange for Allah's favour, offer only ingratitude and make their people end up in the home of ruin, Hell, where they burn? What an evil place to stay!' (*Ibrahim:* 28-29).

He then speaks of the fate awaiting the deniers, from which there is no escape: 'Why is it not then that when it (soul) comes up to the throat' (*al-Waqi'a:* 83)? The subject of the verb 'comes up to the throat' is not mentioned directly here because it is obvious to everyone that it means the spirit; this is akin to His Words: '…until [the sun] was hidden in the veil [of night]' (*Sad:* 32); this is referring to the sun. Another example is found in His Words: 'If Allah were to punish men according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the back [of the earth] a single living creature…' (*Fatir:* 45); this means on the surface of the earth, which is obvious. It is true that a pronoun must have a clear antecedent, but if this antecedent is obvious and established, it does not need to be mentioned because it is clear what is meant.

The spirit's 'coming up the throat' is one's deathbed. Remember this moment, O, you who scorn. What will you do? Will you deny when this moment comes, too?

His Words ‘while you gaze on’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 84) means that when you look upon a person is in his deathbed and can do nothing for him nor keep death away from him since death belongs solely to Allah, and no one has any say in the matter.

The word *falawla*, or ‘why, if you’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 86) is a particle that indicates encouragement and exhortation, like the words ‘Would you do such-and-such?’ The word *hulqum,* or ‘…throat…’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 83) is the first part of the windpipe which is where the spirit comes out. Scholars said that it does not come from the gullet through which food passes, but it comes from the windpipe through which air passes since air is the most important thing in human life. We spoke about the hierarchy of life’s necessities, namely food, drink, and air, before and said that the most important of them is air, for one cannot go without it at all, and if a single breath is denied you, you will die.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘We are nearer to him than you, though you do not see Us’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 85). This means that at this occasion, when the spirit finally leaves the body without your being able to do anything about it, We are closer to it than you are ‘though you do not see Us’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 85).

The Words ‘though you do not see Us’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 85) solve many problems for us, for some people understand ‘togetherness with Allah’ in His Words: ‘…Allah is with us…’ (*at-Tawba:* 40) and ‘for Allah is with those who are mindful of Him…’ (*an-Nahl:* 128); they take them to mean togetherness of knowledge. Were this true, He would not have said: ‘though you do not see Us’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 85).

Thus, it is real togetherness, and if your sight were sharp, you would have been able to see, for there is no reason why this togetherness could not be envisaged impartially. There is an example for this in your own self; your spirit controls all your motions in life, yet do you know in what part of your body it resides?

If you cannot perceive it even though it is inside you, what do you think about the True Lord who controls this whole universe? Togetherness with Allah in His Essence is not like any other essence, and if you cannot perceive some of Allah’s created beings, can you possibly hope to perceive exactly how He *the Exalted* is with you? Some of Allah’s created beings cannot be perceived, so how could you hope to perceive Him Who created that which cannot be perceived?

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Why, if you are not to be judged, do you not restore his soul to him if what you say is true?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 86-87) This means to go ahead and return the spirit to the body—do you have the power to do so? In fact, you are dependent on Us and in Our grasp; you belong to Us. You do not have the power to return this spirit once We have decreed that it leaves. Thus, you are in the grasp of Divine Omnipotence, even though you were created with free will.

The Words '…if what you say is true' (*al-Waqi'a:* 87) refer to their claim that there will be no Resurrection or Reckoning.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَمَّآ إِن كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾ فَرَوۡحٞ وَرَيۡحَانٞ وَجَنَّتُ نَعِيمٖ ﴿٨٩﴾
وَأَمَّآ إِن كَانَ مِنۡ أَصۡحَٰبِ ٱلۡيَمِينِ ﴿٩٠﴾ فَسَلَٰمٞ لَّكَ مِنۡ أَصۡحَٰبِ ٱلۡيَمِينِ ﴿٩١﴾

If that dying person is one of those who will be brought near to God [88] he will have rest, ease, and a Garden of Bliss [89] if he is one of those on the Right [90] [he will hear], 'Peace be on you,' from his companions on the Right [91]
(The Quran, *al-Waqi'a:* 88 - 91)

At its beginning, the chapter spoke to us about these three groups, and now at its end, the True Lord summarises for us what the fate of each group will be. The first and highest in rank of them are the foremost or those who are drawn near; we said that they are near to Allah *Glorified is He* and to paradise. They are those who were keen to obey Him and did so consistently, not sullying themselves with sins, and therefore, they attained this rank.

Their reward, then, is *rawhun*, or 'Rest' (*al-Waqi'a:* 89), which scholars say means Allah's Mercy and the joy of His favour. The extent of mercy depends on the power of the one who gives it, and if mercy is from Allah *the Almighty* it has no bounds.

The word *rayhan*, or 'bounty' (*al-Waqi'a:* 89), literally means basil, a well-known herb with a pleasant smell. This word also occurs when Allah

Glorified is He says: ‘its husked grain, its fragrant plants.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 12) However, the *rayhan* of paradise is something else, not at all the same as the one we know in this world.

The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made this clear to us, by saying about paradise and its delights, ‘Therein will be bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.’(1)

It is obvious that the eye has seen less than the ear has heard because what the eye sees is confined to its power of sight, whilst the ear hears what the eye sees, what it does not see and what others see. The ear is therefore a broader means of reception. Beyond this, paradise contains what the heart has never conceived of and the mind never imagined. The eye sees things that exist, and the ear hears things that exist, but that which the mind has never imagined must be something completely new that we have never encountered and delights which no mind has ever thought of before.

Therefore, we said that when the True Lord *the Most High* wanted to give us a depiction of the bliss of paradise, He did not describe the bliss itself but gave parables to illustrate it as though it cannot be described with any words we know. Thus, He says: ‘The likeness of Paradise, which the righteous have been promised…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 35).

When you reflect upon the bliss of paradise, you see that it encompasses all human sensations; it contains delights of taste such as food, drink, fruit, water, honey and milk, along with the delights of sight such as seeing *Al-hur Al-‘in* (beautiful companions) like hidden pearls and the vision of the comely youths, and so on; it also contains the delights of touch, such as silk and brocade of many colours, and delights of hearing: ‘They will hear no idle or sinful talk there, only clean and wholesome speech.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 25-26) It also contains the delights of smell such as *rayhan* (basil) of which we have just spoken.

He then says: ‘…and a garden of bliss’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 89); ‘bliss’ means that which pleases the soul and gives it enjoyment without any annoyance to spoil it. It is a pure bliss because you might consume food and drink in this world and enjoy it, and it might give you pleasure, that is true; however, after a while, you find that it causes you pain or undesirable effects.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (3005) and Muslim (5050) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

Therefore, He says about the food of paradise: ‘…then eat it with enjoyment and with wholesome result.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 4) It is pleasurable and enjoyable to consume, and it gives you cheer thereafter without causing any annoyance or discomfort.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘And if he is one of those on the Right, then peace to you from those on the right.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 90-91) Those on the right are the second kind of people (of paradise); Allah *Glorified is He* does not describe the bliss which they will encounter in detail, and He does no more than allude to it; they will be in peace and give greetings of peace to one another, each multitude of them greeting the other: the angels will greet them, or the True Lord Himself will greet them, as He says in the chapter of *Ya Sin*: ‘”Peace”, a word from the Lord of Mercy.’ (*Ya Sin:* 58) This greeting of peace from the Merciful Lord involves all blessings.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says

وَأَمَّآ إِن كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ﴿٩٢﴾ فَنُزُلٌ مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ ﴿٩٣﴾ وَتَصْلِيَةُ جَحِيمٍ ﴿٩٤﴾

But if he is one of those who denied the truth and went astray [92] he will be welcomed with scalding water [93] He will burn in Hell [94] (The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 92 - 94)

These—Allah is our refuge—are the bad people, and their requital shall be in hell; they ‘will be welcomed with scalding water’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 93). *An-Nuzul* is the things by which a guest is shown hospitality; the word *nuzul* is used in modern Arabic to mean ‘hotel’. These people will have burning despair *hameem* (scalding water) prepared for them to consume, meaning boiling water of the highest temperature, and they will have hell prepared for them into which they will be cast and whose heat and pain they will suffer: ‘…When their skins have been burnt away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56). We said before that this verse is an example of the miraculous nature of the Quran because it is the first one to affirm to the world that the skin is the place where human physical sensation takes place.

This will be the welcome of disbelievers and deniers, whilst the welcome of the believers will be paradise which Allah *Glorified is He* describes ‘as a welcoming gift from the Most Forgiving, Most Merciful One.’ (*Fussilat:* 32) An intelligent person may then decide which of these two welcomes he would rather have.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ حَقُّ ٱلۡيَقِينِ ﴿٩٥﴾ فَسَبِّحۡ بِٱسۡمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ﴿٩٦﴾

This is the certain truth [95]
[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord the
Supreme [96] (The Quran, *al-Waqi‘a:* 95 - 96)

We said that there are three levels of knowledge: ‘*ilm al-yaqin* (the knowledge of certainty), ‘*ayn al-yaqin* (the eye of certainty) and *haqq al-yaqin* (the truth of certainty or certain truth). After speaking of the bliss of paradise and the torment of hell, the True Lord *the Most High* says: ‘This is the certain truth’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 95). This means that when they enter paradise and they experience its delights, and when the people of hell suffer its heat, this will be true certainty, the final stage of knowledge.

The first two of these three levels of knowledge are mentioned in the chapter of *at-Takathur* (chapter titled ‘Striving for More’): ‘Striving for more distracts you until you go into your graves. No, indeed! You will come to know. No, indeed! In the end you will come to know. No, indeed! If only you knew for certain. You will most definitely see Hellfire; you will see it with the eye of certainty. On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.’ (*at-Takathur:* 1-7)

‘Ilm al-yaqin (the knowledge of certainty) is when a truthful person tells you something; ‘*ayn al-yaqin* (the eye of certainty) is when you see it for yourself; *haqq al-yaqin* (the truth of certainty or certain truth) is when you experience it directly.

Here the final stage is spoken of; it will occur on the Day of Resurrection when the dwellers of paradise will directly experience its bliss and the denizens of hell will directly suffer its torments. The requital of the Hereafter is a fair requital, the requital of Him who wrongs no one even the smallest amount. Were it not for this requital, people would not have been able to live in this world.

It is not possible that sinners and bad people who cause misery and woe to society because of their misdeeds could be equal to the believers who please society and benefit them with their virtue, generosity, and righteousness.

It is as though the True Lord *Glorified is He* is jealously protective of His created beings and angry for their sake, protecting them from falling into ruin; yet, aside from this, the True Lord is free of any need for His created beings; for their obedience does not benefit Him nor their disobedience harm Him. His created beings should receive their reward in the Hereafter by praising Allah *the Exalted* and glorifying Him because He has given them the blessing of reward in the Hereafter and not neglected them. Even the fire and torment of hell is a favour from Allah *Glorified is He*. This is why He ends the verses that speak about this matter by saying: 'glorify the name of your Lord the Supreme.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 96)

So, this glorification is a natural result of what Allah *the Almighty* has here mentioned, namely the endless bliss of believers and the lasting torment of disbelievers. This should inspire us to glorify Allah. This means to declare that He is free of all imperfections and of any resemblance to His creation, to affirm for Him every Attribute of Majesty, Perfection, and Beauty and to believe that there is nothing like Him.

The True Lord *the Most High* gives us a sign in our ordinary lives to indicate this: history is filled with tyrants and oppressors like Pharaoh and his kind, and people have gone so far as to make them deities beside Allah *the Almighty* along with offering them their allegiance and obedience, but no one ever said to them 'Glory be to you!' because this can only be said about Allah *the Exalted* and no one would dare say it about anyone except Allah.

We said the same about the Divine Name 'Allah' that despite the fact that atheists and disbelievers exist, none of them dare to give themselves this name. The simple reason for this is that they know deep down that Allah *Glorified is He* is real and that if they were to dare to use this name, He would seize them with a seizure of one Exalted in Might and Perfect in Ability. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Do you know of anyone equal to Him?' (*Maryam:* 65)

This exclusivity is also found in the obligation of fasting; a similar statement to the testimony of 'there is no deity but Allah' could be said to a human being, and we might see hypocrites and sycophants raising their voices and praising an evil tyrant and saying to him, 'There is only you, and no one besides you!' as Pharaoh said: 'You have no other god that I know of except me.' (*al-Qasas:* 38) History gives many further examples of this.

When it comes to prayer, you might find someone prostrating before his fellow human being and doing obeisance to him, and when it comes to the poor-due, we see those who spend money on parties to honour human beings. Likewise, when it comes to the pilgrimage, there are those who come on a weekly basis to sign the guest book and declare their allegiance and loyalty.

As for fasting, we have never seen anyone worshipping a human being by fasting, and therefore, the Qudsi Hadith says: 'All the deeds the son of Adam does are his, except for fasting. It is Mine, and I reward it personally.'(1)

These three things belong solely to the True Lord *the Most High* and can only be for Him; this is proof of the absoluteness of Divine Omnipotence and the magnificence of the Supreme Being.

The meaning of His Words 'glorify the name of your Lord the Supreme' (*al-Waqi'a:* 96) is to glorify the name of Him Whose mightiness cannot be encompassed or comprehended. We say this 'Glory be to my Lord, the Supreme' every time we bow in prayer. The beauty of the Quran's accomplished form can be seen in how the next chapter *al-Hadid* 'The Iron' begins with the Words 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah—He is the Almighty, the Wise.' (*al-Hadid:* 1) as though the heavens and the earth and all that they contain have responded to the command, 'glorify the name of your Lord the Supreme' (*al-Waqi'a:* 96), glorifying as they were commanded to When you say *subhan Allah* (Glory be to Allah), you affirm that He is glorified without stating which of His created beings glorifies Him. It is similar to what we said about the attribute of creation: Allah *Glorified is He* possesses this attribute, and He was Creator before He created anything; it was by His attribute of creation that He created.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1771) and Muslim (1942) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

Likewise, He *the Almighty* was glorified in pre-eternity before there was anyone to glorify Him and merciful before there was anyone to receive His Mercy. So, Allah's Attributes are intrinsically His. When we call someone a poet, we do not say this because he has just composed a poem; rather, he composed the poem because he is a poet, and if he was not a poet in the first place, he would not have composed it.

The word *subhan* (glory be to) occurs several times in the Quran, followed either by a substantive or by the second person pronoun. It occurs eighteen times before a substantive in eighteen different chapters, first of all in the chapter of *Yusuf*, '…glory be to Allah. I do not join others with Him.' (*Yusuf:* 108), and finally in the chapter of *al-Qalam*, 'they said, "Glory be to Allah, our Lord! Truly, we were doing wrong:' (*al-Qalam:* 29), about the story of the people of the garden.

It occurs as the first *masdar* (verbal noun) added to '*kaf* of addressing' (*ka*) in the chapter of *al-Baqara* 'The Cow': *'qalu subhanaka la 'ilm lana illa ma 'allamtana',* 'They said, "May You be glorified! We have knowledge only of what You have taught us…:' (*al-Baqara:* 32). This form (with *kaf* of addressing) occurs in nine chapters. The word *subhana* occurs with *ha' al-ghaib* (third person ha') in fourteen chapters, the first of which is in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: *'subhanahu bal lahu ma fi al-samawati wa al-ard kullun lahu qanitun',* '…May He be exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him, and all surrender with obedience [in worship) to Him.' (*al-Baqara:* 116) All these occurrences affirm for us that this attribute belonged to Allah *the Exalted* in pre-eternity, before He created anyone to glorify Him.

Once He had created the heavens and the earth and all that is within them: angels, jinns, men and all other beings; they obeyed the command of their Lord to glorify Him, and still continue to do so. This verb *yusabbih* (to glorify) is found in the Quran in both past and present perfect tenses to show that it will continue until the Day of Resurrection; it circles throughout the entire universe and will remain as long as the universe remains until the Day of Resurrection.

He says: *'Sabbaha lillahi ma fi as-samawati wa al-ard',* 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah.' (*al-Hadid:* 1); *Sabbaha* literally means (glorified). He also says: *'Yusabbihu lillahi ma fi as-samawati wa ma fi al-ard',* 'Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1); *Yusabbihu* means (glorifies) this verb also occurs in the imperative form: *'fasabbih bismi rabbika Al-'Azhim',* 'so [Prophet] glorify the name of your Lord, the Supreme.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 74) This means 'O, mankind, do not break away from this chain of glorification. You must glorify, too.'

For us Arabs, to glorify means to say *subhan Allah* and every nation has their own way of saying this. Each nation glorifies Allah in their own language; even inanimate objects, plants, and animals glorify Him with their own languages which are known to their Creator. It is not necessary that we ourselves know these languages; if we do not know many human languages, how can we hope to learn the languages of other creatures?

The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'The seven heavens and the earth and everyone in them glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44). This means that they glorify in a literal way with a special language—not that they only glorify indicatively as some people say.

Does Allah *Glorified is He* not say: '…We made the mountains and the birds celebrate Our praises with Dawud (David). We did all these things' (*al-Anbiya':* 79)? In the story of our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* we saw that ants have a language, hoopoes have a language, and all birds have a language.

The True Lord blessed our master Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* by teaching him this language so that he could understand what these creatures wanted to say to him. Language is based on mutual understanding; humans understand human language, animals understand animal language, plants understand plant language, and inanimate objects understand their own language.

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REFLECTIONS

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الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (24)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (24)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY

الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (24)

the chapter of

al-Hadid

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Hadid* (1) (The Iron):

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ١

Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God(2)—He is the Almighty, the Wise [1] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 1)

This means that everything that exists in the heavens and the earth literally glorifies Allah in its own language which He created for it, not indicatively as some people say(3); the proof of this is that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…though you do not understand their praise…' (*al-Isra':* 44). Therefore, when they say that one of Prophet Muhammad's miracles was that stones glorified Allah while in his hand.(4) We say that it is more accurate to say that the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the glorification of the stones which were in his hands because stones always glorify Allah, even if they are in the hand of an evil man like Abu Jahl.

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(1) It was revealed in Medina according to the consensus of the scholars between the chapter of *az-Zalzala* and the chapter of *Muhammad*. It has 29 verses and is chapter 57 in the written order of The Quran.

(2) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(3) *Al-Qurtubi also affirms that it is a literal glorification in his Tafsir, quoting Az-Zajjaj.*

(4) *Narrated by Abu Na'im in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…He is the Almighty, the Wise.' (*al-Hadid:* 1) *Al-'aziz* (the Almighty) is He Who overcomes all and cannot be overcome. The word '*aziz* also means something precious, rare, and incomparable. The verse combines both meanings. He says elsewhere: '…Who protects, while there is no protection against Him…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88).

He is also *Al-hakim,* or '…the Wise' (*al-Hadid:* 1); the wise one is he who puts all things in their proper place with wisdom and knowledge. This means that Allah's Mightiness is not governed by tyranny and violence, but is a mightiness governed by wisdom and balance.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَهُۥ مُلۡكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ يُحۡيِۦ وَيُمِيتُۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٌ ٢

Control of the heavens and earth belongs to Him;
He gives life and death; He has power over all things[2]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 2)

We said that the Arabic root letter *m-l-k* form the noun *malk* as in His statement: *'ma akhlafna maw'idaka bimalkina',* '…They said, "We did not break our word to you deliberately…"' (*Ta Ha:* 87); *malk* means 'ability and will'. The root letters also form the noun *milk* which means 'possession'; if you own something, it is your *milk*. They also form the noun *mulk*, as in the case here meaning 'dominion'. *Mulk* means to have ownership over the one who owns: the earth (with that is on it), for example, belongs to mankind; yet, Allah *Glorified is He* has ultimate possession of all these things and also those who own them.

Now the heavens and earth are the containers of the created beings that dwell within them, and therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: 'All that is in the heavens and earth belongs to Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 4). So, He owns the containers and the contents as well; the heavens contain angels, stars, planets, galaxies and other created beings, whereas the earth contains man, jinn and the protective angels.

Usually, as we have said, contents are more valuable than their containers, and the more valuable something is the more valuable is its container. So, if the heavens and the earth, which are full of great signs and marvels, are so magnificent, then their contents must be more wondrous and magnificent still.

Moreover, this dominion over the heavens and earth encompasses unseen things of which we have no knowledge: 'All that is hidden in the heavens and earth belongs to Allah…' (*Hud:* 123). These are three stages of Allah's dominion; He has dominion over the heavens and the earth; He has dominion over all that the heavens and the earth contain, and He has dominion over the unseen things of the heavens and the earth.

Every day a new secret of Allah's dominion is discovered in the heavens and the earth, and the verses alert us to this fact by saying: 'Everything in the heavens and on earth, everything between them, everything beneath the soil, belongs to Him.' (*Ta Ha:* 6)

His Words: '…He gives life and causes death…' (*al-Hadid:* 2) means that He gives us life and then causes us to die; He brought us to life at first when He created us out of nothing, and then He causes us to die. He then will bring us to life again in the Hereafter.

Giving life and dealing death are solely for Allah *the Almighty* and no one else participates in them. The Noble Quran tells us the story of the one who argued with Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* about his Lord, claiming that he could give life and deal death. Our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* debated with him until he had proven that he had spoken falsely: '[Prophet], have you not thought about the man who disputed with Ibrahim (Abraham) about his Lord because Allah had given him power to rule? When Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "It is my Lord Who gives life and death," he said. "I too give life and death…"' (*al-Baqara:* 258). When our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* felt that the man only wanted to argue, he stopped him from going any further and moved him on to a field where no argument is possible: '…So, Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "Allah brings the sun from the east, so bring it from the west." The disbeliever was dumbfounded…' (*al-Baqara:* 258).

Allah *the Exalted* says: '…and He has power over all things.' (*al-Hadid:* 2) Nothing can prevent Him, and nothing can get in His way. The One Who created out of nothing is all the more able to bring back: ‘So were We incapable of the first creation? No, indeed! Yet they doubt a second creation.’ (*Qaf:* 15) He also says: ‘He is the One Who originates creation and will do it again—this is even easier for Him. He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth; He is the Almighty, the All Wise.’ (*ar-Rum:* 27) Where Allah *Glorified is He* is concerned, there is no concept of ‘easy’ or ‘easier’, but He speaks to us in a way we can understand and goes along with the opponent so that He can provide decisive arguments against him. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…The disbeliever was dumbfounded…’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). This means that the argument defeated him, and there was nothing more he could say.

The True Lord is the King of kings and has the power to give life and death. He creates from out of nothing and sustains from out of nothing; He is all-sustaining, preserving things as they are. He did not create the universe and then leave it alone; rather, He continues to attend to it with His all-sustaining presence.

Therefore, He says: ‘Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease…’ (*Fatir:* 41). This is His all-sustaining presence. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving.’ (*Fatir:* 41) In the verse under discussion, He says: ‘…and He has power over all things.’ (*al-Hadid:* 2) This means that His Power is such that He may create whatever He wills; He creates from out of nothing in the beginning, and He creates from things that already exist, and with His all-sustaining Power, He preserves His creation just as He created it.

The third person pronoun *huwa* (he or him) can only refer to something which has already been mentioned. You say, *‘Zarany zayd fa’akramtuhu’*, ‘Zayd visited me, and I treated him well’, where ‘him’ refers to ‘Zayd’. The antecedent is understood from the words that have gone before as we said about the words, *‘hatta tawarat bi al-hijab’,* ‘…until [the sun] was hidden in the veil [of night]’ (*Sad:* 32), which refer to the sun.

Likewise, in this verse, the pronoun could not refer to anyone but the True Lord *the Most High* whose dominion is shared by none, nor is His Power to create and to give life and death.

He says about His Oneness: ‘Say, “He is Allah the One.”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1) We cannot say that the antecedent of the pronoun ‘He’ in this verse is deferred; rather, its antecedent must have come before it, even if it was not mentioned directly, for it could only be referring to the One Allah *Glorified is He* Who has no second and Who is One in His Essence and not composed of interdependent parts.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هُوَ ٱلْأَوَّلُ وَٱلْـَٔاخِرُ وَٱلظَّٰهِرُ وَٱلْبَاطِنُ ۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ٣

He is the First and the Last; the Outer and the Inner; He has knowledge of all things [3] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 3)

Based on the fact that He is the One Who brought all things into existence, then He must be ‘the First’ (*al-Hadid:* 3) Who existed before all things and ‘the Last’ (*al-Hadid:* 3) Who will remain after all things have passed into nothingness; this is why we say in praise of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘O, You, the First, Who came not before a last; O, You, the Last, Who came not after a first!’ Rather, they are both integrated, and the mind can penetrate the matter any further.

His Words: ‘…the Outer and the Inner…’ (*al-Hadid:* 3) mean that He appears outwardly to us all, yet He is inwardly hidden from us all. He is both Outer and Inner: Outer with His signs and indications in the universe to which none but Him lay claim, and claims are always awarded to their claimants as long as there is no counter-claim: ‘If you [Prophet] ask them who created them they are sure to say, “Allah”, so why are they so deluded?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87) He also says: ‘If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, “Allah.” Say, “Praise belongs to Allah…”’ (*Luqman:* 25).

He is the Inner in His Essence: ‘No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision. He is the All Subtle, the All Aware.’ (*al-An‘am:* 103) Human vision can encompass only that which is spatially limited, yet Allah *the Exalted* is limited by neither space nor time because space and time are both creations of His; thus, when it comes to Allah *Glorified is He* there is no ‘when’ or ‘where’ because ‘when’ and ‘where’ belong to Him.

The reality of life tells us that human vision can encompass only that which can be seen; there are many abstract and unseen things which cannot be seen by the eye, and yet they exist.

Take justice, for example, by which the balance of truth and falsehood is known; ‘justice is the basis of government’, yet has anyone ever seen it, smelt it or touched it? We know it by its effects when we see the victim of oppression treated fairly and the oppressor punished.

We said the same about the spirit; it certainly exists in your body, but do you know where it is exactly? With this in mind, could we ever hope to know where Allah *Glorified is He* is when we are but one of His creation and a manifestation of His Power? His Words ‘…He has knowledge of all things.’ (*al-Hadid:* 3) mean that nothing is beyond His ken; He knows what is inward just as He knows what is outward because He Himself is the Outer and the Inner.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ۚ
يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنزِلُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۖ
وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٤﴾

It was He who created the heavens and earth in six Days and then established Himself on the throne. He knows what enters the earth and what comes out of it; what descends from the sky and what ascends to it. He is with you wherever you are; He sees all that you do[4] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 4)

He whom all created beings glorify is the One Who created them: ‘It was He Who created the heavens and earth…’ (*al-Hadid:* 4). This verse speaks about the time the creation covered, namely *sittati ayyam* (six days); Allah *Glorified is He* does not need any time to do things but creates things simply by saying ‘Be!’ so that they come to be. However, there is something called the time-span of creation and another thing called the purpose of creation.

We explained this before by giving the example of how a cup of traditional Egyptian yogurt is made. The process takes a few seconds. First, you take the milk and put some yeast in it. That is how long the action takes, but after this it takes several hours for the milk and yeast to react and give us what we want. So, these six days were not the time in which the Creator laboured or worked. They were six days only for us, humans.

The orientalists have objected to this issue and said, 'All the verses speaking of the creation of the heavens and the earth say "…in six days…" (*al-Hadid:* 4), yet in the chapter of *Fussilat*, He says: "Say, 'How can you disregard the One Who created the earth in two days? How can you set up other deities as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!' He placed solid mountains on it, blessed it, measured out its varied provisions for all who seek them—all in four Days. Then, He turned to the sky, which was smoke. He said to it and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not', and they said, 'We come willingly'— and in two Days He formed seven heavens ..." (*Fussilat:* 9-12). This seems to total eight days, not six.'

This understanding is a result of their lack of mastery of the language, for what these words actually mean is 'in a total of four days'. The earth was created in two days, and then it was completed by the creation of the firm mountains atop it, and the blessing bestowed on it, and the appointing of its means of subsistence, all of which totalled four days in an hour and to Alexandria in two hours'; the total time here is two hours, not three (Tanta is midway between Cairo and Alexandria).

Concerning His Words, '…and then established Himself on the throne…' (*al-Hadid:* 4), scholars differ as to what *istawa*, or 'established' means in this verse. Some of them say it literally means 'established'; Ibn Al-Qayyim (1) said that it means 'settled, rose above and ascended'. However, we say that it cannot mean 'rose above' or 'ascended' since the True Lord is not only above the Throne but is above all things.

The most reasonable interpretation is that since He created all creation and then finished it, 'established' in this verse means that He completed the creation of this universe and everything went well with Him. In our world, we see that kings only sit on their thrones when all the affairs of their kingdom are in order, and no one bothers them or gives them trouble.

---

(1) 691-751 AH

The word *istawa* occurs seven times in the Noble Quran and which a poet summarised by saying: Allah's istiwa on the throne is mentioned seven times in His Quran, so count: In the chapter of *al-A'raf*, then *Yunus*, then *ar-Ra'd*, then *Ta Ha*, Then *al-Furqan*, then *as-Sajda*, then *al-Hadid*—so perceive with certainty!

The verses then continue to mention the signs in His creation: '…He knows what enters the earth and what comes out of it…' (*al-Hadid:* 4). This means that He knows all that goes into it and all that comes out of it: what goes into the earth is rain which falls from the sky and benefits all created beings; this includes what they do not use flows into springs in the earth, in which fresh water is stored so that people can get it from the depths of the earth in places where there are no rivers. From the earth, there come crops, which are vital for our lives.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…what descends from the sky…' (*al-Hadid:* 4). Rain comes down from the sky: '…We send it down only according to a well-defined measure.' (*al-Hijr:* 21) The angels come down from the heavens, as so do the mercies of Allah *the Almighty* He sends to mankind, and so does the guidance which Allah *the Exalted* gives unto mankind to direct their activities in life.

'…and what ascends to it…' (*al-Hadid:* 4) means all that rises into the sky. *Sama'*, or 'sky', is in the singular; the word in this verse is used to mean the entire genus of sky; there are seven skies, and He refers to them all here by using the name of the genus. *Ya'ruj*, or 'ascends', is originally used with the preposition *ila*; *ya'ruju ilayha* literally means 'ascends in it'. In this verse, He says: *'ya'ruju fiha'* using the preposition *fi* (in). Thus, *fiha* is used here to mean *ila* (to). The reason for this is that *fi* implies a sense of intensity. Another example of this usage is found in Allah's Words, '…Their messengers come to them with clear arguments, but they thrust their hands into their mouths and said…' (*Ibrahim:* 9), which literally says *'fi afwahihim'* (in their mouths) rather than *ila afwahihim* (to their mouths) to impart intensity to their action; it is as though they were saying, 'Bite your tongue or do not move your mouth. I do not want to hear what you have to say.' Another example is '…put their fingers into their ears to keep out the thunderclaps for fear of death…' (*al-Baqara:* 19).

His Words, '…He is with you wherever you are; He sees all that you do' (*al-Hadid:* 4), which follows the words concerning the heavens and the earth, is an indication that the True Lord wants to say to us, ‘The heavens and the earth were created in a state of obedience, and they always fulfil their roles without veering away from their created purpose, and they will not be held to account. However, as for you, you indeed shall be held to account because you have free will.’

‘…He is with you wherever you are…’ (*al-Hadid:* 4); this means that the outward does not veil Him from the inward, and the inward does not veil Him from the outward.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…He sees all that you do.’ (*al-Hadid:* 4) He is with you and sees you. If His being with us is through His presence, He would not have then said: ‘He sees all that you do.’ (*al-Hadid:* 4) Thus, togetherness is by His seeing. He mentions sight, in this verse, to indicate ‘seeing’, and the reality of these kinds of issues cannot be imagined but must simply be accepted, putting in mind that He is Perfect.

As long as Allah *the Exalted* is with us, and we are and under His sight, we should be aware of this and keep it in mind when we act—why not do so when we keep the presence of other human beings and their being able to see us in mind when we act? These days, people are inventing spying equipment which allow them to know everything that an enemy is planning and doing, capturing it in sound and picture, and by day and by night. Indeed they have done this because they do not have the power to do this intrinsically but must make use of tools, and yet what knowledge do they have compared to Allah’s Knowledge? What eyes do they have compared to Allah’s Eye?

We always say of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘When the eye sees, there is no need to ask “where?”’ Every atom of His universe is under His sight, and nothing escapes it. The Qudsi Hadith says: ‘O My slaves! If you believe that I cannot see you, then the fault is in your faith, and if you believe that I can see you, then why have you made Me the least significant of all who look upon you?’(1)

It is as though He is saying to us: ‘Am I less significant to you than My creation since you conceal from them what you do not conceal from Me?’

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(1) *Ibn ‘Ajiba mentions this in Al-Bahr Al-Madid, vol. 3, p. 1.*

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘They try to hide themselves from people, but they cannot hide from Allah…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 108).

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…He knows what enters the earth…’ (*al-Hadid:* 4), He uses the imperfect tense verb, which indicates the present and future tense because He is speaking to us about reality, for otherwise, Allah’s Knowledge is pre-eternal; He knows all that enters, and all that has ever entered since He created the heavens and the earth.

So, every drop of rain that has been imbibed by the earth since it was created is known to Allah *Glorified is He* and was indeed recorded in the Preserved Tablet before it was created; furthermore, the fact is that the Pen has dried after having written all that will be until the Day of Resurrection. (1) Therefore, we said that the angels glorify Allah *the Almighty* more and more as they see reality coming to pass just as it is recorded in the Preserved Tablet.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّهُۥ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ ٱلْأُمُورُ ﴿٥﴾
يُولِجُ ٱلَّيْلَ فِى ٱلنَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فِى ٱلَّيْلِ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٦﴾

Control of the heavens and earth belongs to Him. Everything is brought back to God [5] He makes night merge into day and day into night. He knows what is in every heart [6] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 5 - 6)

When He says in this verse *‘lahu’,* or ‘His…’ (*al-Hadid:* 5), this could not mean anyone but Allah *the Almighty*: ‘His is the dominion of the heavens and earth…’ (*al-Hadid:* 5). This is a claim which the True Lord has made, and no one else has made a counter-claim; so, it must be acknowledged for Him. Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘…And to Allah are returned [all] matters.’ (*al-Hadid:* 5) This means that Allah is not only with us in the sense that He sees us and records all that happens with us, and that is all; rather, we will all return to Him in the end so that all the accounts can be reckoned. Allah *Glorified is He* did not create us for no reason, and He has not left us alone; rather, we shall return to Him—so (O, humans) prepare yourselves for this.

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(1) *This was stated by Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in a Hadith narrated by Ahmad on the authority of Ibn Abbas Allah be pleased with him.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He makes night merge into day and day into night…' (*al-Hadid:* 6). This means that He makes the night enter into the day and makes the day enter the night; each of them takes the place of the other as He says elsewhere: 'It is He Who made the night and day follow each other—so anyone who wishes may be mindful or show gratitude.' (*al-Furqan:* 62) Each of them follows the other. One of the signs inherent in night and day is that summer has long days and short nights, whilst winter has short days and long nights.

He says: '…He knows what is in every heart.' (*al-Hadid:* 6); He also says in a previous verse: '…He sees all that you do.' (*al-Hadid:* 4) This means that His knowledge is not confined only to activities and events; rather, He knows the inner contents of hearts and the secrets of souls and all that we think but do not express by deeds: 'Allah is aware of the most furtive of glances and of all that hearts conceal.' (*Ghafir:* 19)

This is one of the special characteristics of His Knowledge. His True Greatness does not lie in knowing what He compels us to do but in knowing what we will and will not do after granting us the ability to choose.

For example, imagine if you were to go out with your spouse on an errand and leave your children at home and say to them, 'The food is in the fridge, and everyone can eat what they want.' Then, on the way you were to tell your spouse which children would eat which foods, and then discover upon returning home that your predictions were correct.

The greatness of Allah's Knowledge is that He knows the bare intentions that hearts contain. Since He has knowledge of intentions, He made them the basis for judging actions. Prophet Muhammad said, 'Actions are but intentions...'(1) . Thus, the heart, as it were, governs the conduct of the rest of the body by its convictions. When you spend, for example, He knows what your intention is in doing so, and He accounts you for the intention, not the deed. It is as though the intention guards the action and the outward motion.

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(1) *Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari (1) and Muslim (1882) on the authority of 'Umar Allah be pleased with him*

So, from ‘…He knows what is in every heart’ (*al-Hadid:* 6), we understand that what is being spoken about here is the content of the heart, namely the intentions. Therefore, the Noble Hadith says: ‘Verily, in the body there is a morsel of flesh. If it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily, it is the heart.’(1) Even when it comes to the Resurrection, He says: ‘The Day when neither wealth nor children can help, when the only one who will be saved is the one who comes before Allah with a sound heart.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 88-89) This means with a pure intention and a pure purpose, free of flaws.

Outwardly, the heart is the organ that pumps blood, the fluid of life to the whole body. If the heart is filled with faith, it will pump this with the blood to the entire body, and this blood will become pure, and so will the whole body with all its parts. They will take only the lawful path, and will do only what conforms to the heart’s faith, doing what they are commanded to do and abstaining from what they are forbidden to do.

ءَامِنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَأَنفِقُواْ مِمَّا جَعَلَكُم مُّسۡتَخۡلَفِينَ
فِيهِۖ فَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مِنكُمۡ وَأَنفَقُواْ لَهُمۡ أَجۡرٞ كَبِيرٞ ٧

Believe in God and His Messenger, and give out of what He has made pass down to you: those of you who believe and give will have a great reward [7] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 7)

There is a strong relation between what is in the heart and ‘Believe in Allah and His Messenger…’ (*al-Hadid:* 7). Faith is relevant to the heart and resides therein, and when it settles therein, it is called ‘’*aqidah*’ (creed). The literal meaning of ’*aqidah* is that which is firmly tied and cannot be untied and something that is confirmed and will not be discussed in the mind. It is settled in the heart and has become a creed because the mind deliberated on it and chose it from all other alternatives.

Do you believe in Allah because of Prophet Muhammad? Or do you believe in Prophet Muhammad because of Allah? ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* said when someone asked him, ‘Did you know about your Lord through Muhammad, or did you know Muhammad through your Lord?’ He answered, ‘I knew my Lord through my Lord, and Muhammad told me what my Lord commands me to do.’

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (50) and Muslim (2996) on the authority of Nu‘man ibn Bashir*

After Allah’s Commands to believe in Him and His Messenger, He enjoins something so that the society’s affairs become righteous, spending for the sake of Allah: ‘…give out of what He has made pass down to you…’ (*al-Hadid:* 7). This verse refers to all that Allah *the Almighty* has entrusted you with, including money or anything else. This is because man cannot fulfil his purpose in life unless he has all the necessary constituents of life, the first of which is nourishment which results in life activities. There are some members of society who are unable to work and earn their living.

Allah will not leave these people to be lost amidst the powerful and competent people, so He has made spending on them and helping them as part of a believer’s faith. A believer must give the poor the right which Allah has entitled to them and is considered a means of thanking Him for granting him bounties, good health, and well-being which have enabled him to work, earn his living, and spend on himself.

Moreover, when a person who is unable to work finds someone that takes care of him and helps him, he becomes happy and free from worry. He also finds that his Muslim society compensates what he has lost. The bounty comes to him and saves him from begging. Despite his inability to work, he has a high status in this believing society. Allah *the Exalted* has honoured the poor person by making *zakat* a condition of a rich man’s faith, while richness is not a condition of a poor man’s faith.

Zakat (obligatory charity) appeases the poor and removes any rancour that may exist in a poor person’s heart against a rich man and makes him content with Allah’s decree. Therefore, the commandment to spend follows the commandment to have faith. Spending in Allah’s sake is a means of preserving life which includes acts of obedience. Therefore, when you provide for the poor, you help him obey Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…what He has made pass down to you…’ (*al-Hadid:* 7). This means that you have not brought this sustenance, but

Allah has provided you with it and has passed it down to you. In fact, Allah is the Provider because He created the material which you use, the body parts with which you work, the time in which you work, the power, which enables you to work in safety and security and created the mind with which you plan and think.

Thus, you have not brought anything on your own, as Allah *the Most High* is the source of the wealth which He has entrusted to you. Thus, do not withhold Allah’s wealth from the poor, whom He created and undertook to provide for them.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…those of you who believe…’ (*al-Hadid:* 7) in Allah and His Messenger ‘…and give…’ (*al-Hadid:* 7) of what He has made pass down to them, ‘…will have a great reward’ (*al-Hadid:* 7). This reward will be great because they will attain the reward for belief in Allah and His Messenger and the reward for spending in His cause and fulfilling the requirements of belief, which is only truly attained by doing righteous deeds and practice. Faith is a speculative and doctrinal matter that cannot do without good deeds. Therefore, faith is always associated with righteous deeds: ‘By time. Indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3).

Moreover, the reward will be great because the reward that Allah gives you is not equal to what you do for His sake, but it is commensurate with the power of the Giver Who rewards good deeds tenfold up to seven hundredfold or more. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah does not bless usury, and He causes charitable deeds to prosper…’ (*al-Baqara:* 276). He increases them and makes them prosper for those who do them.

Allah *Glorified is He* illustrates this for us with an example from our ordinary lives: ‘The parable of those who spend their property in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears (with) a hundred grains in every ear, and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases, and Allah is Ample-giving, All Knowing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 261) If paradise which Allah *the Exalted* created can give a seven hundredfold increase, then what do you think about the Creator of paradise?

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ ۙ وَٱلرَّسُولُ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِتُؤْمِنُوا۟
بِرَبِّكُمْ وَقَدْ أَخَذَ مِيثَٰقَكُمْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ٨

Why should you not believe in God when the Messenger calls you to believe in your Lord, and He has already made a pledge with you, if you have faith? [8]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 8)

The question in this verse is rhetorical and is intended to express incredulity and rebuke. In other words, it means ‘How could you do this?’ It is strange that they did not believe in Allah while Prophet Muhammad was calling them to believe. Notice He does not say ‘believe in Allah’ but ‘…to believe in your Lord…’ (*al-Hadid:* 8). Thus, the One in Whom you must believe is your Lord.

The Lord is the Creator, the Guide, the Provider and the Giver Who gives you bounties and created all things for you before He even created you. Your Lord has provided for you after bringing you into existence, has implanted your love in your mother and father’s hearts so that they become happy to bear the difficulties of raising you until you become old enough to look after yourself. Accordingly, does this Lord not deserve that you believe in Him?

Is it not enough that He lets you live in this universe without asking you anything nor charging you of any responsibilities until you reach adulthood and become able to work? The bounties of your Lord have enveloped you before you were even created, and then Allah’s bounties have come to you in the form of moral responsibility.

Therefore, the bounties of your Lord lay the ground for Divine bounties (legal responsibilities) which are also for your own good since you are the one who benefits from them, and Allah does not receive any benefits. Obedience does not benefit Allah *the Exalted* nor does disobedience harm Him as He created you while possessing the Attributes of Perfection.

Why do you not believe in Him when He has sent a messenger to you to convey His messages and instructions to you? Consider, for example, a worker who works for you in return for a wage, and how he obeys you and does what you ask him to do, and never deviates from your instructions. Yet, you pay only that which meet his needs. What do you think of Allah Who gives you freely and in abundance and blesses you with all these bounties? You should obey him and abide by His commands.

Thus, your disbelief is an astonishing matter: 'Why should you not believe in Allah…' (*al-Hadid:* 8)? The verse indicates that people's disbelief is unimaginable. In the chapter of *al-Baqara*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'How can you disbelieve in Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 28). How could you dare to do so when sound intellect denies and refuses this concept? You must believe Allah especially when a messenger of Allah has come to you to give you evidence and reminders.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and He has already made a pledge with you if you have faith' (*al-Hadid:* 8). This means that Allah made a pledge with you that you would believe. Thus, faith is an ancient covenant to which you agreed and accepted, so why do you deny it now? Allah *the Most High* made this pledge with the children of Adam during the phase of the creation of souls without bodies. It is related that Allah made a pledge with them when they were still in his loins: 'And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them] "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware." Or [lest] you say, "It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship] with Allah before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?"' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173)

Allah *the Exalted* made this pledge with all children of Adam before they possessed souls which incite evil; once they possessed these souls, this pledge was violated and no longer fulfilled. Since we are all descended from Adam, each one of us has a living cell from him which he took from his father, and his father took it from his father and so on, all the way back to Adam *peace be upon him*.

Natural disposition for faith, the conscience, and the self-rebuking soul come from this cell. Therefore, when a person commits a sin while heedless of his natural disposition for faith, this sense is quickly awakened so that he reforms his behaviour according to inherent faith.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* made another pledge with the prophets: 'And [recall, O People of the Scripture] when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, [saying] "Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." [Allah] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment?" They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."' (*Al-'Imran:* 81)

Every messenger was required to tell his community and those who believed in him that another messenger will come after him with certain attributes and that they should not oppose him as his mission is to complete previous messages.

This is what Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them* said to their people and which the Quran mentioned against the Jews: 'When there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them—although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved—but [then] when there came to them that which they recognised, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

The Jews in Medina used to implore Allah for assistance to achieve victory over the idolaters by the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They used to tell them that the time came for a new prophet whom they would follow him and the idolaters will be killed in the way 'Ad and Iram were killed.

However, when Prophet Muhammad came to them, they disbelieved in him and opposed his call because it threatened the temporal power which they enjoyed. Had they accepted that it came from Allah and remembered what their prophet told them about him, then they would not have opposed Prophet Muhammad's call. The status of the disbelievers of Mecca and the idol-worshippers was not as grave as that of the Jews because they were not given any tidings of the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We can deduce that all Divine religions agree upon the same truth and instructions, which are to worship solely Allah, with no associate. The successive religions are only links in a single chain to the effect of submission to Allah *Glorified is He* as they are parts of the same building, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The similitude of mine and that of the messengers is like that of a person who built a house and he completed it and made it perfect except for the space of a brick. People were surprised at it and said, "Had there been a brick (it would have been complete in all respects)." Allah's Messenger, "I am that place where the brick (completing the building is to be placed), and I am the seal of prophets."'(1)

Thus, '…He has already made a pledge with you…' (*al-Hadid:* 8) refers to the pledge made with all mankind before they came to life, and the pledge made with the prophets in order for them to tell people that the religion of Allah is based on accord, not discord.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُنَزِّلُ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِۦٓ ءَايَٰتٍۭ بَيِّنَٰتٍ لِّيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ
إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُمْ لَرَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٩﴾

It is He who has sent down clear revelations to His Servant,
so that He may bring you from the depths of darkness into
light; God is truly kind and merciful to you [9]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 9)

This means that Allah sends down to His Prophet '…clear revelations…' (*al-Hadid:* 9), which plainly guide towards the Creator. The word *ayat* has three meanings: cosmological signs like the sun, moon, night and day; miracles and wonders which accompanied the missions of messengers in order to prove to the people that they were truly sent by Allah; and finally the verses of the precise and wise message which convey the guidance and laws which govern life motions and lead people to happiness.

Those are the three meanings of the word *ayat*, each of which has its own purpose, and Allah *the Almighty* combines all of them in His saying: '…so that He may bring you from the depths of darkness into light…' (*al-Hadid:* 9). Light and darkness are opposites; light is the means by which we see things and has its entity. As for darkness, it does not have its own entity, but it has only a negative reality in case of the lack of light.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (2271) on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

We said that light allows us to see things so that we can walk safely without bumping against anything. However, when we walk in darkness we stumble, crushing the weak and being crushed by the strong. This is true of physical light as well as the abstract light which is the light of Divine teachings and morals which guide us in life: '…there has come to you light and a clear Book from Allah. With it Allah guides him who will follow His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by His Will and guides them to the right path.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 15-16) Thus, it is light upon light.

Allah *the Almighty* says about disbelievers who turn their backs on and oppose His Guidance: 'Their example is that of one who kindled a fire, but when it illuminated what was around him. Allah took away their light and left them in darkness [so] they could not see.' (*al-Baqara:* 17)

Thus, the intended meaning is spiritual as it means taking you out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of faith. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Allah is truly Kind and Merciful to you.' (*al-Hadid:* 9) The Arabic word *ra'fah* means removing a person's pain and suffering and curing his ailment; the word *rahma* means protecting a person after being afflicted with pain or illness.

This meaning is also indicated by Allah's saying: 'We send down of the Quran that which is healing and mercy for believers, but it does not increase the wrongdoers except in loss…' (*al-Isra':* 82). The Quran, which includes Allah's Guidance, contains a cure for the ailments of society, rousing it from heedlessness, keeping it away from the paths of corruption and repairing its faults and flaws. Then, mercy protects and guards the society from error so that these ailments do not afflict it again.

Previously, we likened Allah's Guidance to handbook, which if followed; we will never fall into sins. The maker of something knows what is best for it and is keener than anyone else to ensure to its safety.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا لَكُمۡ أَلَّا تُنفِقُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَٰثُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ لَا يَسۡتَوِي مِنكُم
مَّنۡ أَنفَقَ مِن قَبۡلِ ٱلۡفَتۡحِ وَقَٰتَلَۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَعۡظَمُ دَرَجَةٗ مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنفَقُواْ مِنۢ بَعۡدُ
وَقَٰتَلُواْۚ وَكُلّٗا وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡحُسۡنَىٰۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٞ ﴿١٠﴾

Why should you not give for God's cause when God alone will inherit what is in the heavens and earth? Those who gave and fought before the triumph are not like others: they are greater in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards. But God has promised a good reward to all of them: God is fully aware of all that you do [10] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 10)

Allah *Glorified is He* says about faith: 'Why should you not believe in Allah…' (*al-Hadid:* 8)? He says in this verse: 'Why should you not give for Allah's Cause…' (*al-Hadid:* 10)? This means: how could they do this when all possessions truly belong to Allah and are only entrusted to them: '…when Allah alone will inherit what is in the heavens and earth? ...' (*al-Hadid:* 10) Thus, this is a general principle for wealth and other things: everything belongs to Allah and must return to Him.

Have you ever seen anyone leave this worldly life taking his wealth with him? Allah *the Almighty* gives you wealth and let you possess it during your lifetime so that you enjoy it. When you die, you will leave it to your heirs. When an intelligent person reflects on his wealth, he finds that he will use some of it, and the rest goes to his heirs. Will he take the money after his death? Is it reasonable to apportion some of it to yourself?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this lesson when he said, 'Son of Adam says, "My wealth, my wealth." Do you own of your wealth other than what you eat and consume, and what you wear and wear out, or what you give in *sadaqah* (charity) (to those who deserve it), and that what you will have in stock for yourself?'

You all know the story of the ram which was given as a gift to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When he came home at the end of the day, he asked about it. Prophet Muhammad loved the meat of the shoulder, and when 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* answered, 'It is all given away in charity except for the shoulder, which I kept for you, O, Messenger of Allah.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* corrected her words and said, 'Nay, all of it remains but the shoulder.'(1)

When some said to 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* 'I want to know if I give precedence to the worldly life or the Hereafter?' He replied, 'Only you can answer that. If one person came to give you a gift and another to ask for charity, which one would you greet most kindly and smile at his face? If you would greet the first one most kindly and happily, then you give precedence to this worldly life. If you would greet the second one most kindly, then you give precedence to the Hereafter.'

Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to encourage us to love spending in His Cause, so the Quran tackles this issue in many verses. This is because spending on others plays a major part in the preservation of life as the life of a poor person cannot be maintained without it. Thus, it is very crucial.

The Quran always reminds us of this fact: '…Allah alone will inherit what is in the heavens and earth…' (*al-Hadid:* 10). Allah says: '…and We are the inheritors.' (*al-Qasas:* 58) He also says: 'Surely, We inherit the earth and all those who are on it, and to Us they shall be returned.' (*Maryam:* 40)

If Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* is the true Inheritor of wealth, and if you will inevitably leave this world without taking anything just as you entered it, then why are you so stingy to yourself?

Even when it comes to the issue of inheritance and estate division, Allah *the Almighty* manages this issue and divides the inheritance in His own way, for He is the Inheritor. This is because all wealth belongs to Allah, Who divides it as He wills. Thus, do not interfere in the matter of the division of inheritance: '…you know not which of them are nearest to you in benefit…' (*an-Nisa':* 11).

Allah says: '…Those who gave and fought before the triumph are not like others…' (*al-Hadid:* 10). Some scholars said that that this triumph refers to the conquest of Mecca. However, this conquest did not result from the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, but this treaty was the beginning of the conquest.

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(1) *Related by Ahmad (6/50), At-Tirmidhi (2470) and Abu Na'im (5/23)*

Therefore, our Abu Bakr said, ‘Islam never achieved a triumph greater than the Treaty of Hudaybiyya.’(1)

This is because the Quraysh were attacking Prophet Muhammad and opposing his *da’wah* (calling to Allah); after the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, the Quraysh began to recognise Muhammad and his *da’wah* (calling to Allah), make pledges and deals with him. This is considered a triumph.

Moreover, the treaty gave Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the time to spread his *da’wah* (calling to Allah) in Medina because it relieved him of the burden of the enmity and threat of Quraysh. Thus, we find that after the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, the area occupied by disbelievers began to shrink and the area occupied by believers began to grow.

Allah does not treat those who spent before the triumph and those who spent after it on equal basis because those who spent before the triumph were a weak minority, few in number and provisions and lacking power at a time when all the power and control was in the hands of their enemies. However, after the triumph, the state changed completely, and the believers became powerful with large numbers and provisions and were reassured that matters became stable.

Therefore, those who spent before the conquest are not equal to those who spent after it: ‘…they are greater in rank…’ (*al-Hadid:* 10). This means that those who gave and fought before the triumph ‘are greater in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards…’ (*al-Hadid:* 10). However, Allah *the Almighty* did not wrong those who gave and fought after the triumph, as He says: ‘…But Allah has promised a good reward to all of them…’ (*al-Hadid:* 10). Allah *the Exalted* promised to give the two sides’ good reward, so they used to say that good reward from Allah is enough for them: ‘…Allah is fully aware of all that you do.’ (*al-Hadid:* 10)

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(1) *Al-Waqidi, Al-Maghazi (vol. 1, p. 610)*

مَّن ذَا ٱلَّذِى يُقۡرِضُ ٱللَّهَ قَرۡضًا حَسَنٗا فَيُضَٰعِفَهُۥ لَهُۥ وَلَهُۥٓ أَجۡرٞ كَرِيمٞ ﴿١١﴾

Who will make God a good loan? He will double
it for him and reward him generously [11]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 11)

Allah has made *zakat* (obligatory charity) obligatory and one of the pillars of Islam in order to look after the poor, along with preserving the life of those who are unable to work. If you reflect on life and the manner in which fortunes and resources are distributed, you will find that the Creator *the Glorified and Exalted* has provided His created beings with enough sustenance to suffice their needs. The wealth of rich people contains enough sustenance to provide for the poor and let them live happily no less than rich people's happiness.

Accordingly, if matters go on in a different way, you should know that there is something wrong: either the rich person is stingy, or the poor person is a trickster as the Creator *Glorified is He* directs the affairs of the universe in such a way which lets His servants live in happiness.

You may see, for example, a wealthy man with large estates in Tanta who desires to live in Alexandria, so he goes and acquires properties there. This movement is not meaningless, but it occurs by the Will of God, the Lord of all. This man's wealth has sufficed the needs of the poor people in Tanta, so Allah wants to spread it to a new area in Alexandria. You might perhaps be astonished that he moved to another place although he is rich, but this is managed by the Creator and Provider Who controls everything.

Because of the importance of spending on others and society's need for it, the Lawgiver has not limited the *zakat* (obligatory charity), but He has given the wealthy the opportunity to give more than what he is obligated to give, going beyond 2.5% to 5 or 10%.

Therefore, the Quran says about *zakat*: 'And those within whose wealth is a known right for the petitioner and the deprived' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24-25). Allah says about giving to the poor outside *zakat*: 'And from their properties was [given] the right of the [needy] petitioner and the deprived.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) Notice that in this latter verse, the word 'known' is not used.

The ‘known’ spending is *zakat* (obligatory charity), and the unrestricted one is *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) which belongs to the category of benevolence as Allah says in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*: ‘Indeed, the righteous will be within gardens and springs, accepting what their Lord has given them. Indeed, they were before that, doers of good. They used to sleep but little of the night. And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness. And from their properties was [given] the right of the [needy] petitioner and the *deprived.*’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-19)

The one who wishes to be benevolent and does more than what the Sacred Law obligates will find a reward which is commensurate with his benevolence; he will receive a special reward just as he gave in a special manner.

Therefore, the Quran calls this virtue benevolence and this extra charitable spending as a loan: ‘Who will make Allah a good loan?’ (*al-Hadid:* 11) The good loan is the one which you give happily and contentedly and should be from lawful wealth and earnings because Allah *the Almighty* accepts only that which is good: ‘…Indeed, Allah only accepts from the righteous [who fear Him].’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 27) This loan must not be given from the worst of the things you possess: ‘…and do not aim at what is bad that you may spend [in alms] of it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 267). You must also give it in a voluntarily and while loving to do so: ‘And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan and the captive.’ (*al-Insan:* 8)

In addition, you must not proudly remind others of the charity you give them: ‘…and then do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury…’ (*al-Baqara:* 262). You must give others charity secretly so that you do not embarrass the one who receives it, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings of Allah be upon him* made clear, ‘…his left hand does not know what his right hand has given.’(1) Moreover, secret charity is far from dissemblance; giving charity ostentatiously benefits the recipient, but the giver is deprived of the reward for giving charity, and his good deed becomes useless to him.

When you give a loan, you protect the needy person, along with sparing him the humility of begging for charity. There are many people who experience hard times after being wealthy and comfortable; such people should be given loans to preserve their dignity as it is said, ‘Have mercy on the lowly man who used to be mighty.’

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (620) and others on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

When you give such a person a loan, you facilitate his circumstances. Afterwards, he may be able to pay it back; if he is not able, you will have two options, as Allah says: ‘And if someone is in hardship, then [let there be] postponement until [a time of] ease. But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you if you only knew.’ (*al-Baqara:* 280) You may give him some time until he is able to pay it back, or you cede the loan and consider it to as charity.

Allah *Glorified is He* has given us different stages of giving charity, the first of which is the *zakat* (obligatory charity) and spending more than that, which is due, then lending, then refusing to take the loan back and considering it as charity.

As long as Allah is the One Who enjoins charity and says these words, the reality of life could never prove them untrue. A wealthy person must maintain the proper norms required of him, while a needy person must maintain the proper practices of asking others for charity, so that we can all do what Allah wants us to do. However, the situation at the moment is that most rich people are stingy, and most poor people beg with importunity and scheme.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us this lesson when he said, ‘Whoever takes the money of the people with the intention of repaying it, Allah will repay it on his behalf, and whoever takes it in order to spoil it, then Allah will spoil him.’(1) Therefore, when a man died and Prophet Muhammad was asked to lead his funeral prayer, he asked, ‘Does he have any debts?’ When they said that he did, he declined to lead his funeral prayer.(2)

The question that comes to mind is ‘What was his sin when he had died?’ The previous Hadith explains that the debtor who takes a loan with the intention of repaying it will be helped by Allah to repay it. Rather, Allah will repay it for him. The fact that this person died without repaying his debt indicates that he did not really intend to repay it when he took it; otherwise, Allah *the Almighty* would have repaid it for him and would have helped him.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (2212) and others on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

(2) *Related by Abu Dawud (2902), Ahmad (14009) and Ibn Hibban (3129) on the authority of Jabir… The full story is that Abu Qatada Al-Ansari then offered to assume the man’s debt, so Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him prayed for him.*

There is another reason for Prophet Muhammad's refusal of leading the funeral prayer for the man which is to encourage people to repay the man's debt for him before his burial, as an act of mercy towards him. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also did so in order to give the people a lesson and to show the gravity of debt, as it is the people' right that cannot be excused. This is in order for people not to treat debts lightly and take them coercively. Therefore, 'Ali and Qatada *Allah be pleased with them* offered to settle the dead man's debt.

Furthermore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refrained from praying the funeral prayer for the man, he did not forbid others from doing so, but he said to them, 'Pray for your companion.'(1) This means that the man had a defect in his faith and in following Prophet Muhammad which prevented him from receiving the great honour of having him lead his funeral prayer. If this man had truly followed the commands of Prophet Muhammad, he would not have died, while owing debts.

Once when we were in San Francisco, we met with an orientalist who was studying Islam. He said, 'I am neither Christian nor Muslim.' The man was inclined to Islam, but he had some doubts and had expressed to the others his desire to meet me and discuss some issues with me.

One of the doubts he had was concerning the issue of charity and lending. He asked me about Allah's saying: 'Who will make Allah a good loan? He will double it for him and reward him generously.' (*al-Hadid:* 11) This means that He will repay with double the original loan, and since good deeds are rewarded tenfold, this means the repayment will be twenty times the original loan. A Hadith says, 'There is written on the door of paradise: "Charity brings a tenfold reward and a loan brings an eighteen fold reward."'(2) However, this is less than twenty.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (2127)*

(2) *Related by At-Tabarani in Al-Awsat (6907) on the authority of Anas*

Allah *the Most High* inspired us to reply to him, ‘When you give a dollar in charity, for example, how much does our Lord repay you?’ He said, ‘Ten’ and showed ten fingers. I said, ‘Was your first dollar returned to you?’ He said, ‘No.’ I said, ‘You received nine. When it is doubled, it becomes eighteen. Thus, there is no contradiction between the two texts.

When the following verse was revealed, ‘Who will make Allah a good loan?…’ (*al-Hadid:* 11), a Jew named Fanhas said,(1) ‘Muhammad’s Lord is poor and needs a loan from us!’ Upon hearing this, Abu Bakr struck him on the face. Prophet Muhammad said to him, ‘Why did you do that?’ He replied, ‘O, Messenger of Allah, the enemy of Allah said a terrible thing. He claimed that Allah is poor, and they are rich. When he said this, I became angry for Allah’s sake and struck him on the face.’ Fanhas denied this by saying, ‘I never said such a thing.’ Then Allah *the Almighty* revealed a saying refuting what Fanhas said and showing the truthfulness of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*: ‘Allah has certainly heard the statement of those [Jews] who said, “Indeed, Allah is poor, while we are rich.” We will record what they said and their killing of the prophets without right and will say, “Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 181)

Allah says: ‘…reward him generously.’ (*al-Hadid:* 11) After doubling the reward and all good deeds are rewarded tenfold, Allah *the Most High* also rewards this person generously. The generous reward is an additional bounty, and the fact that He describes the reward as being generous indicates its magnificence. If a gift itself is generous, then what will the giver be like?

Concerning loans, Allah *Glorified is He* preserves the outcomes of a believer’s labour, appreciates his efforts in life and does not withhold from him what is rightfully his. Therefore, He calls charitable spending on the poor a loan. Although all wealth belongs to Allah, He borrows it from you not for Himself, but from one person to another.

This principle exists in our ordinary life: a father does it with his children, for example. When he gives his children their pocket-money, some of them save it in their moneyboxes, If a father later needs money for an operation for one of the children, he says to the other children, ‘Give me what you have, and I will give it back to you later when I can.’ Thus, he takes a loan from them, even though it is really his money.

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(1) *This story is related by At-Tabari in his Tafsir.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوۡمَ تَرَى ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِ يَسۡعَىٰ نُورُهُم بَيۡنَ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَبِأَيۡمَٰنِهِم بُشۡرَىٰكُمُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ
جَنَّٰتٞ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَاۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ﴿١٢﴾

On the Day when you [Prophet] see the believers, both men and women, with their light streaming out ahead of them and to their right, [they will be told], ‘The good news for you today is that there are Gardens graced with flowing streams where you will stay: that is truly the supreme triumph!’ [12]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 12)

The verb *tara* (see) in this verse refers to vision of the eye since it is relevant to something physical which can be seen. When the verb *tara* is used concerning something which is not physical, it means ‘know’ as in Allah’s saying to Prophet Muhammad: ‘Have you not known [O, Muhammad] how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born in the year in which the events of the elephant took place, and he did not see them. ‘*Alam tara*’ (have you not known), which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, indicates that what the Prophet learned from his Lord is more certain than what he might have seen with his eyes.

The following verse tackles one of the events of the Day of Resurrection: ‘On the Day when you [Prophet] see the believers, both men and women, with their light streaming out ahead of them and to their right…’ (*al-Hadid:* 12). This light of faith and righteous deeds will stream out ahead of them and to their right bearing them to paradise.

‘Their light’ indicates that this light belongs to them. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘the good news for you today…’ (*al-Hadid:* 12). The light will be a glad tiding; when they see it, they will rejoice and know that it will guide them to paradise.

Allah *the Exalted* says: '…"The good news for you today is that there are Gardens graced with flowing streams where you will stay." This is truly the supreme triumph.' (*al-Hadid:* 12) It is supreme triumph because it is an eternal triumph which will never end or be disturbed. A person may enjoy gardens, orchards and all kinds of delight in the worldly life, but since these pleasures will not last forever, this spoils his delight. Either this person will leave these pleasures, or they will leave him. However, delight of paradise is eternal and everlasting that will never change.

While believers are watching their light going ahead of them and guiding them, causing them to rejoice, disbelievers and hypocrites will be in darkness which will envelop them and lead them astray. Allah *the Exalted* will command His angels to cast them into hell (we seek refuge with Allah from it): '[The angels will be ordered], "Gather those who committed wrong, their kinds, and what they used to worship other than Allah, and guide them to the path of Hellfire.' (*as-Saffat:* 22-23).

This means the angels will lead them to hell and will place them at the beginning of the way to hell. The word 'guide' in this verse is used ironically.

يَوْمَ يَقُولُ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقُونَ وَٱلْمُنَٰفِقَٰتُ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱنظُرُونَا نَقْتَبِسْ مِن نُّورِكُمْ قِيلَ ٱرْجِعُوا۟ وَرَآءَكُمْ
فَٱلْتَمِسُوا۟ نُورًا فَضُرِبَ بَيْنَهُم بِسُورٍ لَّهُۥ بَابٌۢ بَاطِنُهُۥ فِيهِ ٱلرَّحْمَةُ وَظَٰهِرُهُۥ مِن قِبَلِهِ ٱلْعَذَابُ ﴿١٣﴾

On the same Day, the hypocrites, both men and women, will say to the believers, 'Wait for us! Let us have some of your light!' They will be told, 'Go back and look for a light.' A wall with a door will be erected between them: inside it lies mercy, outside lies torment [13] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 13)

'On the same Day…' (*al-Hadid:* 13) means the Day of Resurrection when believers will see their light spreading before them and to their right sides to bear them to paradise. Allah says that on the same day '…the hypocrites, both men and women, will say to the believers, "Wait for us! Let us have some of your light!" ...' (*al-Hadid:* 13) However, it will be said to them: '…"Go back and look for a light."...' (*al-Hadid:* 13)

These believers will tell the hypocrites to go to the worldly life and seek light which could guide them now as the light which believers will follow was sent in the form of the righteous deeds they did in the worldly life when they believed in Allah and obeyed His Messenger. They are now reaping the fruits of their good deeds. The hypocrites need to start a new life of responsibility and action, and the Day of Resurrection will be for requital, not action.

Reflect here on the greatness of the Quran discourse. This dialogue takes place between believers and hypocrites, yet the verb is stated in the passive voice ‘they will be told’, not ‘The believers will tell the hypocrites’. This indicates that the believers will gloat over the misfortune of the hypocrites. The believers do not want to take this stance with the hypocrites as though the voice comes to them from an unknown direction.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…A wall with a door will be erected between them…’ (*al-Hadid:* 13). This means that a wall will be erected between the believers and the hypocrites. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* brings this dialogue to an end and separates the believers from the hypocrites with a wall which has a gate so that they cannot see or hear them. This is because a believer is tenderhearted, and so his Lord protects him from hearing and seeing the suffering which hypocrites will encounter in hell (we seek refuge with Allah). ‘A wall with a door will be erected between them; inside it lies mercy…’ (*al-Hadid:* 13) on the believers’ side, while ‘…outside lies torment’ (*al-Hadid:* 13) on the hypocrites’ side.

يُنَادُونَهُمۡ أَلَمۡ نَكُن مَّعَكُمۡۖ قَالُواْ بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّكُمۡ فَتَنتُمۡ أَنفُسَكُمۡ وَتَرَبَّصۡتُمۡ وَٱرۡتَبۡتُمۡ
وَغَرَّتۡكُمُ ٱلۡأَمَانِيُّ حَتَّىٰ جَآءَ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ وَغَرَّكُم بِٱللَّهِ ٱلۡغَرُورُ ﴿١٤﴾

The hypocrites will call out to the believers, ‘Were we not with you?’ They will reply, ‘Yes. But you allowed yourselves to be tempted, you were hesitant, doubtful, deceived by false hopes until God’s command came – the Deceiver tricked you about God [14] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 14)

The dialogue still continues, and the hypocrites call the believers and say to them: ‘…Were we not with you?’ (*al-Hadid:* 14) This means that in the worldly life, they prayed as the believers did and stood in the first rows of the prayer. So, why will believers go to paradise, and hypocrites go to hell although their deeds are the same? The believers will respond to the hypocrites: '…Yes…' (*al-Hadid:* 14). Believers were with hypocrites in the worldly life, and they did the same deeds and even the hypocrites did more deeds. '…But you allowed yourselves to be tempted…' (*al-Hadid:* 14). The hypocrites did the good deeds with their bodies only but with absent hearts; they did good deeds out of hypocrisy and dissemblance saying things that are not felt by their hearts. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…but you allowed yourselves to be tempted…' (*al-Hadid:* 14); this means that they subjected themselves to temptation.

Therefore, a hypocrite is even worse than a disbeliever is and deserves to be in the lowest level of hell. A disbeliever is true to himself and to the people and declares plainly that he is a disbeliever so that we treat him accordingly, and his true state is not ambiguous to us.

On the other hand, a hypocrite seems to be one of the believers, but we do not know his true intentions and inward thoughts. His enmity towards us is hidden, so it is very difficult to deal with him.

Allah *the Exalted* says: '…You were hesitant…' (*al-Hadid:* 14). Hypocrites waited for misfortunes and calamities to befall believers, for this religion to collapse and for Prophet Muhammad to die, thinking that his mission would die with him.

In other verses, Allah *Glorified is He* explains this attitude by saying: 'Say, "Do you await for us except one of the two best things while we await for you that Allah will afflict you with punishment from Himself or at our hands? So wait. Indeed, we, along with you, are waiting."' (*at-Tawba:* 52)

The verse means that the believers ask the hypocrites, 'What do you think that will happen to us? It will be one of two good things: either victory or martyrdom. As for you, there is nothing awaiting you but torment: either Allah will torment you by our hands, or He will torment you in hell in the Hereafter.'

While they were waiting for Islam to disappear and vanish, it was spreading and growing: 'Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? ...' (*ar-Ra'd:* 41) This means that the area dwelled by disbelievers is shrinking, while the area dwelled by believers is increasing.

The word *irtabtum* which is mentioned in the Arabic text of the verse, means that hypocrites doubted in the call to faith and in the veracity of

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in what he conveyed from Allah. Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…deceived by false hopes…' (*al-Hadid:* 14). They were deceived by your vain hopes that this religion would disappear upon the death of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that his call would come to an end.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…until Allah's command came…' (*al-Hadid:* 14). This command decrees either their defeat or death. It also means Allah's Command for the Resurrection to begin. He says: '…the Deceiver tricked you about Allah.' (*al-Hadid:* 14) Satan deceives people and draws them away from Allah; yet in the end, he exposes and disavows them: 'And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded, "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you, but I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me, but blame yourselves…"' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

فَٱلْيَوْمَ لَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنكُمْ فِدْيَةٌ وَلَا مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ۚ مَأْوَىٰكُمُ
ٱلنَّارُ ۖ هِىَ مَوْلَىٰكُمْ ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٥﴾

Today no ransom will be accepted from you or from
the disbelievers: your home is the Fire – that is where
you belong — a miserable destination!' [15]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 15)

This dispels all their hopes to be saved, for there is no escape from the fate that awaits them, and no ransom will be accepted form any of them if he wishes to ransom himself from Allah's torment. Someone might think that this is true only of the hypocrites who have been subject of discussion because Allah says: 'Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire, and never will you find for them a helper.' (*an-Nisa':* 145) Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* clarifies that this is true of the disbelievers as well: '…or from disbelievers…' (*al-Hadid:* 15); it needs to be pointed out because open disbelievers are not as bad as hypocrites, Thus, He affirms that no ransom will be accepted from either one of them and that they must face this fate.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Your home is the Fire. That is where you belong—a miserable destination!' (*al-Hadid:* 15) Their destination is hellfire, where they belong, as a person needs in this situation a protector to help him and give him refuge. Whoever does not have Allah as refuge on this day shall have the hellfire as their refuge instead (we seek refuge with Allah).

Therefore, Allah says in the chapter of *an-Nisa'*: '…never will you find for them a helper.' (*an-Nisa':* 145) He also says: '…And the wrongdoers have not any protector or helper.' (*ash-Shura:* 8) Anyone for whom hellfire is his refuge has a wretched refuge indeed, and his fate is evil.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمۡ يَأۡنِ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَن تَخۡشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمۡ لِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُواْ كَٱلَّذِينَ
أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبۡلُ فَطَالَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡأَمَدُ فَقَسَتۡ قُلُوبُهُمۡۖ وَكَثِيرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ فَٰسِقُونَ ١٦

Is it not time for believers to humble their hearts to the remembrance of God and the Truth that has been revealed, and not to be like those who received the Scripture before them, whose time was extended but whose hearts hardened and many of whom were lawbreakers? [16]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 16)

The question in this verse is rhetorical, for it is meant to express astonishment and to encourage hastening. The verse means 'Is it not time for their hearts to feel humble?' This implies that they were tardy in submitting their hearts. This is similar to what we may say to an old man who continues to live a sinful life despite his old age: 'Is it not the time for you to repent and turn back to Allah?' This means that his repentance is delayed.

The verse tackles believers whose faith is incomplete, for their good deeds are scant, or they perform them with inattentive hearts and without the humility and piety which Allah expects of them. Allah says: '…to humble their hearts to the remembrance of Allah…' (*al-Hadid:* 16); this means when Allah is mentioned and the verses of the Quran are recited, a believer should be deeply stirred, especially when hearing the verses which convey warnings, along with threading and tackling hellfire and reckoning.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and the Truth that has been revealed…' (*al-Hadid:* 16); this refers to the verses of the Quran. Allah *the Exalted* says:

‘…and not to be like those who received the Scripture before them…’ (*al-Hadid:* 16); the verse refers to the Jews and Christians ‘…Whose time was extended’ (*al-Hadid:* 16); it means the time was extended so that they were overcome with heedlessness, and their hearts became too hard to be softened by the remembrance of Allah. Also, Allah says: ‘…many of whom were lawbreakers.’ (*al-Hadid:* 16) This means that they were disobedient to Allah.

There is a story concerning the meaning of this verse. It was said that Fudayl ibn ‘Ayyad,(1) a great Sufi and *`Arif* (a Sufi who has reached a high station of worship), was a highwayman when he was a young man. One day, as he was scaling a wall to engage in robbery, he heard a voice reading the verse: ‘Is it not time for believers to humble their hearts to the remembrance of Allah…’ (*al-Hadid:* 16)? Upon hearing this, he said, ‘Indeed it is time, Lord’ and climbed down. This was the moment when his life changed.(2)

Someone asked Fudayl about this amazing story and how he turned from a highwayman and robber into a righteous person. He said to him, ‘Had you ever done a good deed before Allah guided you to repentance?’ He replied, ‘By Allah, I do not remember any good deeds, except one. Once as I was walking along the road I saw a page from Allah’s Book on the ground, upon which the people were trampling, so I picked it up and kept it. I only had a single dirham with me, so I bought some perfume with it and perfumed the page. Upon doing this, I heard a voice saying, “By Allah, I shall brighten your name as you have brightened mine.”’

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحْىِ ٱلْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۚ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Remember that God revives the earth after it dies; We have made Our revelation clear to you so that you may use your reason [17] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 17)

Notice the appropriate juxtaposition between the hardening of hearts and the revival of the earth after its death. Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* wants to say to us that if our hearts have died and hardened and we have lost the teachings of religion, we should not despair, for the One Who revives the earth after it dies can also revive our dead hearts.

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(1) Sheikh of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca who was born in Samarqand (105-187 A.H.)

(2) This story was related by Ibn Asl-Shajari in *Al-Amali Asl-Shajariyya*.

This was a glad tiding to them that they would return to faith in a state better than they had been before. Allah *the Exalted* says: '…We have made Our signs clear to you so that you may use your reason.' (*al-Hadid:* 17) One of signs is that Allah revives hearts with His remembrance just as He revives the earth with rain; each of them is a sign which should make us think, reflect, and meditate.

إِنَّ ٱلْمُصَّدِّقِينَ وَٱلْمُصَّدِّقَٰتِ وَأَقْرَضُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ قَرْضًا
حَسَنًا يُضَٰعَفُ لَهُمْ وَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

Charitable men and women who make a good loan to God will have it doubled and have a generous reward [18] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 18)

The verse tackles again the subject of charity and spending in Allah's Cause because of the great effect and importance it has in society. Allah affirms and emphasises these things because spending money charitably after working hard to earn it is difficult to do and requires much effort.

As this subject has been tackled in previous verses, they are reaffirmed in this verse, just as the wonders and signs of the cosmos are constantly reaffirmed in the chapter of *ar-Rahman* in Allah's saying, 'Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?' (*ar-Rahman:* 13) And that was repeated after each sign.

Likewise, He reaffirms in this verse the importance of charitable spending and emphasises the noble reward which awaits those who give charity. It is a well-known fact that people love money, especially when it has been earned after hard work and effort.

وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦٓ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلصِّدِّيقُونَۖ وَٱلشُّهَدَآءُ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡ لَهُمۡ أَجۡرُهُمۡ
وَنُورُهُمۡۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَكَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ١٩

Those who believe in God and His messengers are the truthful ones who will bear witness before their Lord: they will have their reward and their light. But those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations are the inhabitants of Hell [19] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 19)

Allah says: ‘Those who believe in Allah and His messengers…’ (*al-Hadid:* 19); He says this because belief in one messenger entails belief in the other messengers since the Divine Message is one. Therefore, belief in all of messengers is an essential pillar of faith.

Then, He describes the believers as *siddiqun*, the plural of *siddiq* which means someone who has absolute belief in the Messenger and the Message he conveyed.

Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* was called *As-Siddiq* because he believed everything that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said. Allah *the Almighty* also described Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her* with the same description: ‘…his [‘Isa (Jesus)] mother was truthful…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 75); Allah says this about her because she believed her Lord *the Glorified and Exalted* concerning the miraculous conception she experienced which went against all norms of conception.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘…who will bear witness before their Lord. They will have their reward and their light ...’ (*al-Hadid:* 19). Allah says in another verse: ‘Never think of those who have been killed in the Cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 169) They are alive with their Lord because after a martyr is killed you see him shrouded and buried; we consider him as dead, and if you open his grave, you will find him dead.

Thus, they are alive with Allah, and ‘…They will have their reward and their light…’ (*al-Hadid:* 19); their light also spreads out in front of them and on their right sides, guiding them and showing them their places in paradise.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the opposite party: '…But those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations are the inhabitants of Hell' (*al-Hadid:* 19). This means that they will dwell in hell and keep suffering from its blaze as though they are in intimacy with it.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّمَا ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌۢ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِى ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ وَٱلْأَوْلَٰدِ ۖ
كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ ٱلْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُۥ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَىٰهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَٰمًا ۖ وَفِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ
عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرِضْوَٰنٌ ۚ وَمَا ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَآ إِلَّا مَتَٰعُ ٱلْغُرُورِ ﴿٢٠﴾

Bear in mind that the present life is just a game, a diversion, an attraction, a cause of boasting among you, of rivalry in wealth and children. It is like plants that spring up after the rain: their growth at first delights the sowers, but then you see them wither away, turn yellow, and become stubble. There is terrible punishment in the next life as well as forgiveness and approval from God; the life of this world is only an illusory pleasure [20] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 20)

This verse reveals the reality of this world and exposes its false adornment. Some people seek the pleasure of the worldly life as though it is the ultimate goal when in fact this is not the case. Allah *Glorified is He* describes the worldly life with several attributes, employing the Arabic rhetorical style of restriction (*Al-qasr*) using the word *Innama* (just), which implies that this world is nothing other than what He describes in the verse.

In the Quranic verse, '…a game, a diversion, an attraction' (*al-Hadid:* 20), the word *la'ib* (game) signifies a human action with no good purpose, such as dangerous games children play at home for fun. Playing games is only a kind of amusement and a way to pass the time and release their energy. The word *la'ib* denotes playing before one reaches the age of legal responsibility; once one passes this age, it becomes *lahw* (diversion) because it distracts one from performing righteous deeds.

The word *zeena* (attraction) refers to things which are an addition to life's essentials and basic needs. There is a minimum level of food, drink, and clothing, with which hunger can be satiated and nakedness covered. When man is granted the means of subsistence in abundance, he attains to greater comfort in his food, drink, clothing, and mode of transport.

This is clear in the Quranic verse: ‘O Children of Adam! Indeed, We have bestowed upon you from on high [the knowledge of making] garments to cover your nakedness, and as a thing of beauty (*Rishan*)…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 26). The word *Rishan* implies having plentiful luxurious clothes, which do more than merely cover his nakedness.

However luxurious and prosperous one’s life may be, one should not forget that it is only the lower world (*dunya*), and the Creator is the One Who describes it as such. The world in which we live, being the lower one, indicates that there must be a higher world, which is the Hereafter.

To perceive this world’s lowly nature, it is enough to realise that its delights are flawed and its life span is short. For one, this world extends only to one’s life span, and it does not matter how long everyone else, from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* until the Day of Resurrection, lives. When a person dies, his reckoning starts.(1)

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* gives us a parable of the life of this world by saying: ‘And propound to them the parable of the life of this world: [it is] like the water which We send down from the skies and which is absorbed by the plants of the earth, but [in time] they turn into dry stubble which the winds blow freely about. And it is Allah [alone] Who determines all things.’ (*al-Kahf:* 45)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* explains the meaning of *zeena* (attraction) by saying: ‘Alluring (*zuyyina*) to man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, children, heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, horses of high mark, cattle and land. All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world, but the most beauteous of all goals is with Allah.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 14)

In the verse under discussion, the word *tafakhur* (boasting) means to feel proud and superior to someone else because of something inherently possessed, such as health or beauty, or due to something outside of oneself like wealth, children, fame, or power. The word *takathur* (rivalry) suggests seeking pride in amassing more and more of the things one possesses, such as children and wealth.

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(1) *This is the saying of 'Alqama, narrated by At-Tabari in Tahdhib Al-Athar (240) on the authority of Abu Qays.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* gives a parable to illustrate the overall picture: '…It is like plants that spring up after the rain; their growth at first delights the sowers (*kuffar*)…' (*al-Hadid:* 20). The word *kuffar* here refers to 'farmers' rather than 'disbelievers', unlike how it is commonly used.

At the end of the chapter of *al-Fath*, Allah *Glorified is He* gives a parable of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his community by saying: '…This is their parable in the Torah as well as their parable in the Gospel: [they are] like a seed that brings forth its shoot, and then He strengthens it, so that it grows stout and [in the end] stands firm upon its stem, delighting the sowers (*zurra*). [Thus will Allah cause the believers to grow in strength] so that through them He might confound the deniers of the truth (*kuffar*). [But] unto such of them as may [yet] attain to faith and do righteous deeds, Allah has promised forgiveness and a reward supreme.' (*al-Fath:* 29) In this verse, the word *zurra* (sowers) is used to be distinguished from the word *kuffar* (disbelievers), which also occurs in the verse.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…but then you see them wither away, turn yellow, and become stubble…' (*al-Hadid:* 20); this means that it blooms and blossoms, and then quickly withers and turns yellow and decays into dust. In the same way, the life of this world allures people with false joy and temporal pleasures, which then come to nothing in the end, leaving behind inevitable consequences.

'…There is terrible punishment in the next life…' (*al-Hadid:* 20) for those who are deluded by the life of this world and who regard it as a game and a passing delight, as well as a cause for boasting and bragging; '…as well as forgiveness and approval from Allah…' (*al-Hadid:* 20) is for those who are not deluded by the life of this world and who do not turn away from Allah's Guidance.

The verse then emphasises this concept: '…the life of this world is only an illusory pleasure' (*al-Hadid:* 20); what this means is a false enjoyment that does not endure. The word *ghurur* means (illusion), whilst the word *gharur* alludes to 'Satan' and all other things that delude you, such as wealth and the like, as inferred from the verse: '…let not, then, the life of this world delude you, and let not [your own] deceptive thoughts (*gharur*) about Allah delude you!' (*Fatir:* 5)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

سَابِقُوٓاْ إِلَىٰ مَغۡفِرَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرۡضُهَا كَعَرۡضِ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ أُعِدَّتۡ لِلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦۚ ذَٰلِكَ فَضۡلُ ٱللَّهِ يُؤۡتِيهِ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلۡفَضۡلِ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ٢١

So race for your Lord's forgiveness and a Garden as wide as
the heavens and earth, prepared for those who believe in
God and His messengers: that is God's bounty, which He
bestows on whoever He pleases. God's bounty is infinite [21]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 21)

After exposing the reality of the worldly life and depicting it as a game, a diversion, an attraction and a cause of boasting and rivalry, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'So, race for your Lord's Forgiveness…' (*al-Hadid:* 21). It is as if to say, 'Leave this worldly life and its delusions, for it is a useless mirage and instead, vie for what shall be more lasting for you.'

The Quranic verse 'So, race for your Lord's Forgiveness…' (*al-Hadid:* 21) implies that forgiveness is the goal, the aim and the destination, just as you would say 'I travelled from Cairo to Alexandria.' This goal can only be achieved by vying and striving with the utmost earnestness. Forgiveness is not to be granted to those who are careless or lazy in seeking it. Racing, as mentioned in the verse, refers to competing with one another to perform righteous deeds and acts of obedience and to adhere to Allah's Commands.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Exalted* says: 'and hasten (*sari'u*) with one another to attain to your Lord's Forgiveness…' (*Al-'Imran:* 133). Both words *sari'u* (to hasten) and *sabiqu* (to race) imply a sense of mutual participation and competition between believers who adhere to Allah's Guidance; each of whom wants to surpass others and hasten to reach the goal which they all share, namely forgiveness: '…for your Lord's Forgiveness…' (*al-Hadid:* 21).

In another verse, however, Allah *the Almighty* says about prophets *Zakaryya* (Zechariah), and Yahya (John) *peace be upon them*: '…surely, they would hasten with one another in doing good deeds…' (*al-Anbiya':* 90). The preposition *ila* (to), which implies reaching an end, is not used in this verse because good deeds are not an end in themselves. They are rather a means to the ultimate goal, which is forgiveness.

Furthermore, the phrase 'good deeds' is used in the plural form in order to accommodate all spiritual ambitions, which each believer hastens to perform to the extent of his ability and readiness. Accordingly, good deeds have different levels: the more you do and hasten earnestly to do them, the higher the level you reach.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…in that', i.e. in doing good deeds, 'then, let all such aspire as [are willing to] aspire to things of high account.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified this concept by saying, 'There should be no envy except in two cases: a man to whom Allah gives wealth and thus allows him to spend it in the cause of the truth and a man to whom Allah gives knowledge, by which he judges amongst the people.'(1)

The word *hasad* (envy) mentioned in the Hadith, refers to noble rivalry and competition. The stem verb from which the word *munafasa* (competition) is derived signifies competition in holding one's breath. Once(2) 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said to 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* 'Let us compete (*natanafas*)' which means 'Let us go underwater and see which of us can hold his breath the longest.'(3) It is obvious that the healthier and copious one's lungs are, the longer he will be able to remain under water. Thus, let us compete in doing good deeds to see which of us shall win and which of us will reach the goal first.

Therefore, it is narrated that Hatim Al-Asamm(4)(5) was asked by his teacher Al-Balkhi(6), 'What have you spent your life doing?' He said, 'Certain things. I learnt that there is never a moment when Allah is not looking at me, so I was ashamed to disobey Him. I learnt that I had provision appointed for me by Allah that would not miss me, so I felt content with it. I learnt that I had a debt which none, but I could pay, so I engaged myself with it. Furthermore, I learnt that my death time hastens to me, so I hasten to meet it.' This is the meaning of 'competition'; he knew his death hastens to him, so he hastened to meet it by doing righteous deeds.(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (71) and Muslim (1352) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *The story of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him, and Al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib Allah be pleased with him diving under water*

(3) *The story is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi.*

(4) *D. 237 A.H.*

(5) *The story of Al-Balkhi asking his disciple Hatim Al-Asamm about what he spent his life doing*

(6) D. 194 A.H.

In the Quranic verse: '…and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth…' (*al-Hadid:* 21), Garden is mentioned after forgiveness. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* first forgives their sins, and then admits them into paradise. As it is known, there is the principle that warding off harm precedes seeking benefit, and as previously stated, detachment precedes beautification.

For instance, if a person throws a stone at you, and another throws an apple at the same time, you will certainly defend yourself against the stone first. This concept is clear in the Quranic verse: '…he who shall be drawn away from the fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph…' (*Al-'Imran:* 185). Forgiveness is either preceded committing a sin or effacing it, or it conceals a sin from you so that you do not commit it in the first place.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Exalted* gives us a clarifying similitude of paradise because it is unseen and unknown to us. He brings it closer to our comprehension by comparing it to something we know and see, for we can see the sky and the earth and how vast they are.

Describing paradise, Allah says: '…as wide as the heavens and earth…' (*al-Hadid:* 21). The Arabic letter *kaf* (as) is employed in the verse to indicate resemblance; its vastness is akin to the vastness of the heavens and the earth. Looking at the heavens and the earth, one finds that they are stretched out without limits. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* gives the example of the vastest things we are familiar, the sky, and the earth, to depict something which we do not know, namely paradise.

In the Quranic verse, '…and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth…' (*al-Hadid:* 21), the '*ard* (width) is mentioned instead of length, for it is known that width is always less than length. If paradise's width is as vast as the heavens and the earth, then what do you think its length must be? This is a symbol of its vastness.

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(1) *Ibn Hamdun, Al-Tadhkira Al-Hamduniyya*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…prepared for those who believe in Allah and His messengers…' (*al-Hadid:* 21). This implies that it has already been prepared to entertain those who believe in Allah and His messengers. It is already in readiness, not in the process of being made. Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Harith ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* 'How are you this morning, Harith?' He answered, 'I awoke this morning as a true believer in Allah.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Every claim has a reality (proof). What, then, is the reality of your faith?' He said, 'I have distanced myself from the affairs of this worldly life, so that its gold and its clay are equal to me. It is as if I were looking at the dwellers of paradise enjoying its bliss and the inmates of Hell being tormented therein.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'You have come to know, so remain firm!'(1)

Hence, the past form of the verb 'prepared' implies that it exists now. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said of his Night Journey and Ascension, 'Paradise was shown to me', namely the 'maquette' of paradise. Before building an apartment block, for example, a model or maquette is designed to map out all its details, even the furnishings. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* has an exalted 'maquette' of paradise.

Therefore, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked 'What busies your Sustainer now when the pen has dried?' He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'He brings certain things to light, which He does not begin. He raises some people and lowers others.'(2) The meaning of 'He brings certain things to light' is that He presents them to the world; they already exist in the realm of the unseen, waiting for the command to show themselves.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…This is Allah's Bounty, which He bestows on whomever He pleases. Allah's Bounty is infinite' (*al-Hadid:* 21). All those who enter paradise are only admitted into it by virtue of His Bounty. The word *fadl* (bounty) alludes to things which are extraneous to the essentials of life. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whosoever has an extra (*fadl*) mount, let him offer it to one who has no mount, and whosoever has surplus (*fadl*) provisions, let him offer them to one who has no provisions.’(1) This regards the human bounty. As for Divine Bounty, all that exists in the universe, both now and in the Hereafter, are bounties of Allah because they are extraneous to one’s needs. Allah *the Almighty* does not need His creation, or any of His favours, whether past or future.

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(1) *Narrated by Ibn Abu Shayba*

(2) *Al-Bahr Al-Madid*

Therefore, He *the Most High* says: ‘…Allah’s Bounty is infinite’ (*al-Hadid:* 21); this means possessed of immense bounty beyond one’s need, and the true bounty is that which is granted by Allah.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* is limitless in His great Bounty because He is above any need of His creation or His universe since He existed before anything else did, and He will continue to exist after everything else is gone. This is what is called ‘great Bounty’.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَآ أَصَابَ مِن مُّصِيبَةٍ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَا فِيٓ أَنفُسِكُمۡ إِلَّا فِي كِتَٰبٖ
مِّن قَبۡلِ أَن نَّبۡرَأَهَآۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرٞ ٢٢

No misfortune can happen, either in the earth or in
yourselves, that was not set down in writing before We
brought it into being – that is easy for God [22]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 22)

The word *musiba* (misfortune) denotes something that befalls a person and displeases him or disturbs his peace and security. Thus, the meaning of the designation for the word *musiba* implies occurrence, in essence, since it cannot be called as such unless it actually occurs. It is said, ‘Death is an arrow which has been let loose against you, and you live as long as it takes to reach you.’ The arrow has already been fired, but when it hits, *musiba* (misfortune) occurs. It refers to that which will inevitably come to pass.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (3257) and others on the authority of Abu Sa’id Al-Khudri*

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to consider the misfortunes which happen ‘in the earth’, such as droughts, famines, fires, floods, earthquakes and the like, as well as those which occur ‘... in yourselves…’ (*al-Hadid:* 22). Misfortunes of the self are those which befall individual people, such as sickness, death, as well as the loss of family or possessions.

Misfortunes in the earth are collective, whereas that of the self are personal; yet, personal misfortunes may also affect people collectively, striking them with famines and floods. This is because when a person commits sins, a calamity befalls him personally; however, when many people indulge in sin, misfortune befalls them all collectively, just as they all sinned collectively.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Now whatever misfortune may befall you [on Judgment Day] will be an outcome of what your own hands have earned, although He pardons much.’ (*ash-Shura:* 30) This is one of the aspects of Allah’s Mercy shown to His servants. It is further explained in another verse: ‘Now if Allah were to take men [at once] to task for whatever [wrong] they commit [on earth], He would not leave a single living creature upon its surface…’ (*Fatir:* 45).

Mercy is one of Allah’s Attributes, and of His Names are *Ar-Rahman* (the Most Merciful) and *Ar-Rahim* (the Bestower of Mercy). Therefore, He *the Most High* has appointed for us seasons of Mercy, from one Friday Prayer to the next, from one daily prayer to the next and from one *Ramadan* to the next; each is an expiation for the sins committed in the intervals between them as long as grave sins are avoided.(1)

Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to grant us mercy and forgiveness and does not intend to make us suffer. Furthermore, calamities do not occur unless people bring them on by their own misdeeds. Elsewhere, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men’s hands have earned…’ (*ar-Rum:* 41).

Consider, for example, how much we suffer today from pollution of water, air and everything else in our lives. This is a natural consequence of people's sinful conduct. Allah *Glorified is He* brought this entire universe and every atom in it into being in a completely sound and perfect state, and then told us to preserve this state by saying: 'Hence, do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered…' (*al-A'raf:* 56).

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(1) *This is the import of two Hadiths, one narrated by Muslim (342), and the other by Ahmad (8830).*

The Quranic verse, '…He would not leave a single living creature upon its surface…' (*Fatir:* 45) indicates the vastness of Allah's Mercy. Were it not for this Mercy, every living being on the earth would be destroyed because of man's sin. This is further explained in the Qudsi Hadith 'Were it not for babies suckling, old men bowing and animals grazing, I would rain down chastisement upon you.'(1) We are therefore given mercy because of the weak amongst us as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By reason of the weak amongst you, you are provided for.'(2)

The Quranic phrase, '…that was not set down in writing…' (*al-Hadid:* 22) means that it is recorded with Him, predestined and ordained. The difference between what is destined (*maqdur*) and what is Divinely decreed (*maqdi*) is that Divinely decreed matters are completely out of one's control, whilst in regard to destined matters one has a free choice, though they are known to Allah in pre-eternity, as well as being recorded beforehand.

For example, the Minister of Agriculture may say, 'We predict that the cotton harvest this year will be such-and-such', but then blight befalls the cotton fields so that the yield is not as predicted by the minister. This is because his prediction is based only on his knowledge of the outward appearance of things, and it has no control over the unseen things. Hence, his prediction could turn out to be wrong.

On the other hand, when Allah *the Almighty* decrees a matter, it inevitably comes to pass as decreed. The word *qadar* (predestination), then, signifies what Allah decrees for one wherein he has a free choice, and the result of which is known and recorded by Allah before it occurs.

To make it clearer, consider the example of the teacher who predicts that a specific student will be top of the class in the final exam. His judgement is based on the cleverness and diligence of the student. All the preliminary indications support this judgment, but at the exam time, the student may suffer from nerves or some other ailment, thereby falling short of his teacher's expectations.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bazzar on the authority of Abu Hurayra*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2681) on the authority of Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqaṣ.*

Thus, the result contradicts the teacher's prediction because of a defect in his knowledge, yet Allah *Glorified is He* has the Attributes of Perfection, and His Knowledge is completely free of defects.

This issue has already been explained when shedding light on the meaning of the verse: 'Doomed are the hands of him of the glowing countenance, and doomed is he! What will his wealth avail him and all that he has gained? [In the life to come] he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing, together with his wife, that carrier of evil tales [who bears] around her neck a rope of twisted strands!' (*al-Masad:* 1-5) Hearing these verses, Abu Lahab could have become a believer, just like his contemporaries 'Umar, Khalid, 'Amr and 'Ikrima all did. However, it was Allah's decree from pre-eternity, and His predestination that was known to Him beforehand that Abu Lahab would never believe and would choose disbelief. Allah *the Almighty* did not compel him to be a disbeliever, but he left it up to him to choose.

The Quranic phrase, '…before We brought it into being…' (*al-Hadid:* 22) means 'Before Allah creates it and brings it out into the outward world.' Allah further says: '…This is easy for Allah' (*al-Hadid:* 22).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِّكَيۡلَا تَأۡسَوۡاْ عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمۡ وَلَا تَفۡرَحُواْ بِمَآ
ءَاتَىٰكُمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخۡتَالٖ فَخُورٍ ٢٣

So you need not grieve for what you miss or gloat
over what you gain [23] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 23)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* teaches us not to despair and grieve over what we have missed. As long as this was destined and decreed by Allah, it is only fitting that one accepts it contentedly, for grieving will not change reality, nor bring back what was lost. Hence is the saying, which is common in the countryside, 'Only would the foolish cry for what has gone.'

A woman, losing her husband or someone dear to her and excessively grieving for him in mourning attire, should be told that this grief will not bring back what is gone. She is also to be advised not to get used to grief nor come to love it, lest Allah makes it permanent for her. For Allah *the Almighty* helps His servants to get what they want and what they love, and thus, He seals the heart of a disbeliever so that faith cannot enter and disbelief cannot exit. Satisfaction with Allah's Decree is better for a believer.

The same is true of exultation: '…or gloat over what you gain…' (*al-Hadid:* 23). This is because one does not know what the final outcome of blessings Allah *the Exalted* gives him will be; for example, will they bring him good fortune, or not? Will they help him to obey Allah, or open the door to sin? Accordingly, in reality, they are only a test.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then, when they had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We threw open to them the gates of all things…' (*al-An'am:* 44). A blessing is not necessarily an indication of Allah's pleasure. Many sinful people, who are too far away from Allah, have comfortable lives, and everything they touch seems to turn to gold. Why is this?

It is because they forget what they are reminded of, and consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to punish them. How does He punish them? He raises them to the highest status so that when He finally takes them to task, it is all the more painful. As previously stated, if you want to throw someone down, do not throw him off a mat, rather take him to a high place, and the higher you take him, the more painful the fall will be.

Furthermore, scholars of linguistics maintain that the Arabic phrases *fataha lahu* (to open for him) and *fataha 'alayhi* (to open to him) are not the same. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Surely, [O Muhammad] We have laid before you [*fatahna lak* (literally 'opened for you')] a manifest victory' (*al-Fath:* 1); this means that it is for Prophet Muhammad's benefit, whereas He says: '…We threw open to them (*fatahna 'alayhim*) the gates of all things…' (*al-An'am:* 44); this means against them and to their detriment: '…until—even as they were rejoicing in what they had been granted—We suddenly took them to task…' (*al-An'am:* 44).

Therefore, do not '…gloat over what you gain…' (*al-Hadid:* 23) because it might be a test and a trial for you, and those who do not have it may be better off than you are. Allah *the Almighty* directs us not to grieve or exult in order to protect believers from that which may harm them or threaten their security.

In this regard, psychologists state that one should not let grief or happiness affect him in such a way that causes him to stray from nature and balance, for incidents go by, and one encounters grief and joy throughout his life.

To be affected and influenced by grief or joy causes one to undergo a dramatic change; grief makes one contract, whereas joy makes one expand. Yet, every organ has a particular size and state, and it is not preferable to be contracted or expanded, so one should avoid both and always try to be balanced so that you maintain a state of soundness in both soul and body. Depicting this idea, a poet once said:

Be a man like a tooth, which stays in its place to chew,
And is not affected by sweetness, nor by sourness.

It is blameworthy exultation, which is prohibited in the verse; it means that the joy which causes one to be boastful or deluded makes one proud and arrogant, along with inspiring hubris and conceit. Allah *Glorified is He* says about this kind of joy: ‘Those [hypocrites] who were left behind rejoiced in their staying away [from war] after [the departure of] Allah’s prophet…’ (*at-Tawba:* 81).

On the other hand, the praiseworthy exultation is that which causes one to be humble and grateful to Allah, the Bestower of Blessings, for He instructs righteous people to rejoice in their good deeds: ‘In Allah’s grace and mercy let them rejoice; these are better than all they accumulate.’ (*Yunus:* 58)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Allah does not love the conceited, the boastful’ (*al-Hadid:* 23); this means those who are always exulting and whose exultation draws them into conceit and boasting.

The upshot of all this is that as long as all things are destined and set down in writing before Allah *the Almighty* brings them into being, and as long as one has no power to bring back what has gone nor to guarantee what is coming, it is wise to maintain an attitude of contentment, acceptance and balance. It is permissible to rejoice, but only when it does not lead to pride and conceit.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَبۡخَلُونَ وَيَأۡمُرُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ بِٱلۡبُخۡلِۗ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلۡغَنِيُّ ٱلۡحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٤﴾

God does not love the conceited, the boastful, those who are miserly, and who tell other people to be miserly. If anyone turns away, remember that God is Self-Sufficient and worthy of praise[24] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 24)

This verse takes us to another concept, namely spending in Allah's Cause. Allah *Glorified is He* wants a believer to share what he has with his fellow believers. Hence, He *the Most High* divides the command to spend into three stages: first, He commands the rich to spend on the poor, who are forbidden from holding back the rich and dissuading them from giving.

A person might be stingy himself and disinclined towards giving to others. His stinginess may reach such a level that he tries to dissuade others from giving, too. On the other hand, he himself may be poor and have nothing to withhold, so he urges others not to spend in order to keep something for their children. A rural saying goes 'Neither does He have mercy, nor lets others have mercy!'

At the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the hypocrites, persuading others to be stingy, said about *Ahl Al-Suffa* (the People of the Porch)(1): '…Do not spend anything on those who are with Allah's Prophet, so that they [may be forced to] leave…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7).

The Quranic phrase 'Those who are miserly…' (*al-Hadid:* 24) indicates that these misers were wealthy and had the financial ability to spend for Allah's Cause, but were too stingy to do so. Furthermore, their stinginess went so far that they tried to pass it on to others: '…and who tell others to be miserly…' (*al-Hadid:* 24). These people are responsible for the sin not only of their own miserliness, but also the miserliness they inspire in others by dissuading them from spending.

Then, a basic truth is established in the verse: '…if anyone turns away…' (*al-Hadid:* 24), namely from spending, '…remember that Allah is Self-Sufficient and Worthy of Praise.' (*al-Hadid:* 24) The verse implies that one's stinginess does not affect Allah *the Exalted* for in reality one is only being stingy towards himself; all wealth belongs to Allah, and all dominion is His, and it is He Who is truly Self-Sufficient, and it is He Who provides for His servants.

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(1) *Poor people of the Emigrants who used to live in the shade of the mosque in Medina*

He only directs people to give away so that all of them bond together and cooperate in the journey of life and in order to put an end to the feelings of rancour and envy the poor may harbour towards the rich. On finding those who give and lend him a helping hand in society, a poor person praises Allah and feels content with His Decree. Similarly, when an orphan finds compassion and sympathy, he trusts those who take just as much as he trusts those who give, and so he lives contentedly.

Hence, giving charity is made obligatory because it helps a believer to uphold his faith and causes people to feel love for Allah's Law and content with His Decree. If those who are financially able act stingy, then a believer knows with certainty that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And there is no living created being on earth but depends for its sustenance on Allah…' (*Hud:* 6).

A distinction should be made between *bukhl* (miserliness) and *shuhh* (covetousness). The word *bukhl* denotes that a person is stingy to others, but generous to himself; the word *shuhh*, on the other hand, implies that a person is stingy even with himself, and hence Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for such as from their own covetousness are saved; it is they who shall attain to a happy state!' (*at-Taghabun:* 16)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* speaking of the succession of Messengers whom He sent says:

لَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا رُسُلَنَا بِٱلۡبَيِّنَٰتِ وَأَنزَلۡنَا مَعَهُمُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَٱلۡمِيزَانَ
لِيَقُومَ ٱلنَّاسُ بِٱلۡقِسۡطِۖ وَأَنزَلۡنَا ٱلۡحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأۡسٞ شَدِيدٞ وَمَنَٰفِعُ
لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعۡلَمَ ٱللَّهُ مَن يَنصُرُهُۥ وَرُسُلَهُۥ بِٱلۡغَيۡبِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٞ ﴿٢٥﴾

We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance, so that people could uphold justice: We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind, so that God could mark out those who would help Him and His messengers though they cannot see Him. Truly God is powerful, almighty [25] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 25)

As previously explained, the word *rasul* (messenger) signifies one who receives a revelation, which he must follow himself and convey to his people.

The word *nabi* (prophet), on the other hand, refers to one who receives a revelation, which he must follow himself, without being required to convey it to others. On this basis, prophets do not have Scriptures or miracles; rather, their miracles belonged ultimately to the messenger whose religion they followed.

Adam *peace be upon him* was both the first prophet and messenger, but how could it be the case when he sinned by eating from the forbidden tree? It is argued that he sinned before being a prophet. Furthermore, the purpose of his sin was to teach him the vital importance of adhering to Allah's Guidance and that straying away from which exposes his nakedness. Consequently, Adam *peace be upon him* learnt this lesson and taught it to his subsequent progeny who came after him.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* forgave him and elected him as prophet and messenger, as stated in the verse: '…And [thus] did Adam disobey his Sustainer, and thus did he fall into grievous error. Thereafter, [however] his Sustainer elected him [for His grace], accepted his repentance, and bestowed His guidance upon him.' (*Ta Ha:* 121-122)

Thus, the election occurred after his disobedience, and this marks the beginning of the message and the call, but whom did he call when he was still alone? Scholars deem it as akin to the Quranic verses: 'The Most Merciful has imparted this Quran [unto man]. He has created man.' (*ar-Rahman:* 1-3)

First, Adam *peace be upon him* learnt the Guidance for himself, and then when his progeny came along he conveyed the Message to them and taught them morals and ethics. However, as time passed, heedlessness overcame people as their numbers grew, so they needed a new Message to remind them.

The Noble Quran summarises the lesson that Adam *peace be upon him* learnt from his misdeed by stating: 'He said: "Down with you all from this [state of innocence and be henceforth] enemies unto one another! Nonetheless, there shall most certainly come unto you Guidance from Me, and he who follows My Guidance will not go astray, and neither will he be unhappy. But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me, his shall be a life of narrow scope, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him up blind."' (*Ta Ha:* 123-124)

Subsequently, following Allah's Guidance is what preserves man's safety and security and makes him happy in this life and at peace in the Hereafter. As for he who turns away, he will lead a straitened life.

The meaning of the word *dank* (narrow scope) is not restricted to straitened circumstances and poverty as some people think; it has a rather broader meaning that covers all the aspects of depressed life. Statistics show that the wealthiest nation on earth is Sweden, and yet, it has the highest suicide and insanity rates.

Accordingly, it is not a matter of provision, food, and drink. Many poor people, in spite of having but very little, are thankful to Allah and feel content and happy with what they are given, despite witnessing the prosperous life of the rich.

The word *dank* does not signify poverty, then, but refers to a psychological and emotional state wherein the heart, not the provision, is constricted. One afflicted with this condition can find no way out of it, and it continues to build up upon him forcing him to eventually end his life in an attempt to find peace. As a poet eloquently puts it:

A burden is not what weighs down the back;
A burden is what the heart must bear.

Adam *peace be upon him* came with a Message and Guidance, which he taught and conveyed to his progeny. Nonetheless, as the population increased, heedlessness arose, distances grew between communities, and the ailments afflicting each community became numerous, so the need for a plurality of messengers was imperative.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We sent Our messengers with clear signs…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). Such clear signs alert mankind to the existence of Allah *the Almighty* and support messengers sent to guide mankind. These signs can be cosmological, miracles supporting messengers, or verses of the Wise Book which bears Allah's Guidance and Laws to mankind. The word *Al-Kitab* (the Scripture) alludes to the scriptures revealed from Allah and literally denotes something that is written down.

The word *Al-Mizan* (the Balance) refers to the balance of truth that weighs, measures, and clarifies things. This balance is not only concerned with material things that can be weighed; it is a scale that weighs all things, both material and spiritual, according to truth. In regard to material matters, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…And [in all your dealings] give full measure and weight, with equity…' (*al-An'am:* 152). He *the Most High* commands us to uphold this measure with all things: '…And whenever you judge between people, to judge with justice…' (*an-Nisa':* 58). Even in courts today, the balance is used as a symbol of justice and is taken as emblem with two equal scales to represent a just ruling. The balance, which messengers brought, is that which distinguishes truth from falsehood. As long as there are messengers, clear signs and a way of Guidance that benefits mankind and manages their lives, then the motions of life will surely be sound and upright.

Hudhayfa (1) *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'There was a time when I cared not with whom of you I made a pledge. If he were a Muslim, his religion would keep him faithful to me, and if he were a Jew or Christian, his inspector (the person charged with inspecting people's affairs and dealings) would keep him faithful to me. As for today, I will only make a pledge with so-and-so and so-and-so amongst all of you.'(2)

Consequently, things cannot be sound and upright unless they are governed by this Guidance, without which people cannot find happiness. Should it be obliterated, the balance will be upset, and truth will be exchanged for falsehood.

In our courtrooms today, lawyers play their games; some of whom rely on their rhetorical skill to make arguments seem true although they are false. They ignore the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'I am but a human being. You bring your disputes to me, and perhaps one of you is more eloquent and convincing in presenting his argument than the other.' (A saying goes 'A slick lie beats a clumsy truth.') 'Should I happen to allot the right of someone to his brother because of his words, I am but giving him a piece of the hellfire. Let him not take it.'(3)

As such, Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings be upon him,* referred the balance to the religion, to the Sacred Law, and to the Book and its clear signs.

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(1) A Companion, d. 36 A.H.

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6016)*

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2278) and Muslim (3232)*

Those who cleave to the Book and the clear signs will not mix truth with falsehood, nor will they have but one clear truth. When people differ over the clear signs, falsehood surely arises, and there comes the balance to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…We sent Our messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance so that people could uphold justice…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). Revelation is for legislation and the implementation of laws, and the balance is for heedlessness or sin when they occur, distinguishing truth from falsehood.

As long as people behave with equity and justice, the whole world can feel comfortable. This justice comes either from individual conscience or from the judiciary which judges amongst them. Therefore, it is better in legal affairs, as previously stated, that trials do not last too long because the longer they last, the more the victims are wronged, and the more the guilty are encouraged to continue with their wrongdoing.

As trials get longer, the crime seems less grave and the victim is forgotten, and thereby the retribution is perceived from the murderer's point of view as if he were wronged or as if another crime were committed by executing him. Thus, emotions arise inspiring mercy for the killer, and the balance gets lost.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* warns us not to take these rights lightly by saying: '…let not compassion with them keep you from [carrying out] this law of Allah…' (*an-Nur:* 2). Pity on criminals leads to an increase in crime and corruption on earth.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* decrees that legal punishments be carried out publicly: '…and let a group of the believers witness their chastisement.' (*an-Nur:* 2) In this way, everyone will act equitably after seeing the just verdict being applied at the proper time, inflicting the required deterrent.

If, on the other hand, lawyers go astray and judges take bribes, the nation will be ruined. It is reported that during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mahdi (1), a man named Qamih, (2) who was known to be spotlessly honest, was appointed as judge. However, one day, he went to see the caliph and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, remove me from my post in the judiciary!’ The caliph said, ‘And who else could be as just after you are gone?’ He said, ‘Commander of the faithful, I no longer trust myself to judge. As you trusted me when you appointed me, trust me now when I ask you to remove me. I am either lying or telling the truth. If I am lying, I am not fit to be a judge, and if I am telling the truth, then accept what I say.’ The caliph said to him, ‘Tell me, then, what the reason for this is.’ He said, ‘Two rivals were brought before me, each of them having such convincing arguments that I could not judge between them, and I delayed my verdict out of fear that I would be unjust. One day my servant brought me a plate of dates, and when I asked about the one who sent it, he described the giver to me, and I realised that it was one of these two rivals, so I returned the plate to him. It is well known that I love dates. The next day, the two rivals stood before me, but they were no longer equal in my sight, and I found myself inclining towards the one who sent me the dates, even though I had sent them back to him.’

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(1) 127-169 A.H.

(2) The judge Qamih with the Abbasi caliph Al-Mahdi

Hence, Allah *the Exalted* clarifies that He sent His messengers with ‘…the Scripture…’ (*al-Hadid:* 25) to those who adhere to it and with ‘…the Balance…’ (*al-Hadid:* 25), which distinguishes truth from falsehood for those who do not adhere to it, ‘…so that people could uphold justice…’ (*al-Hadid:* 25). If a murderer is executed and the thief’s hand amputated, no one will dare to murder or steal. It is worth noting that Allah *Glorified is He* does not restrict upholding justice to believers, but He says ‘people’, to encompass all humanity.

The Quranic verse, ‘…We also sent iron with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind…’ (*al-Hadid:* 25) indicates that just as Allah *the Almighty* sent down the Scripture and the Balance, He also sent down iron. Although iron is now on earth, it originated from on high. Iron is a symbol of power; those who are not deterred by the Quran, let them be deterred by iron. Therefore, ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Allah removes by authority that which He does not remove by the Quran.’(1) A wise person is to be deterred by clear proofs, whereas an ignorant one can only be deterred by power and force.

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(1) *Kanz Al-'Ummal*, no. 14284.

Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that in addition to the Quran, He also gives him iron as well as the sword, which he may use as he sees fit to restrain the disbelievers and sinners who are not deterred by the Scripture. A poet (1) depicts this idea by saying:

Patience and forbearance, followed by a warning;
And if this does not work, then one's firm resolve will.

Another(2) puts it:

There is naught but forbearance or a sharpened blade
Whose edge can stymie the pride of the rebel;
The first is the way to treat the wise,
And the second is how you deal with the ignorant.

The Quranic phrase '…with its mighty strength…' (*al-Hadid:* 25) indicates that iron is the most powerful tool in life. This is practically proven, for it is from iron that axes, ploughs, and all other powerful tools used for digging and carrying are made. Despite its power, it has '…many uses for mankind…' (*al-Hadid:* 25) such as using it to make knives, spoons and other utensils.

Iron has another role as well: '…so that Allah could mark out those who would help Him and His messengers though they cannot see Him…' (*al-Hadid:* 25). This is an allusion to the sword, by which succour is attained; the sword is for those to whom the Scripture and clear signs are of no avail.

In the Quranic verse, '…so that Allah could mark out those who would help Him and His messengers though they cannot see Him…' (*al-Hadid:* 25), the verb '*yaa'lam'* (know), translated in the verse as (mark out) refers to knowledge as manifested in reality, for Allah *Glorified is He* knows everything from pre-eternity, and nothing is beyond His ken. It is not that Allah seeks to know of such people but that He wants to manifest His knowledge in reality.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…those who would help Him and His messengers…' (*al-Hadid:* 25) because helping Allah is regarded as equal to

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(1) It was Ibrahim ibn Al-'Abbas As-Sawli (d. 243 AH).
(2) It was Abu Tamam At-Taai.

Helping His messengers, and vice versa. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Hence, obey Allah, and obey the Messenger…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 92); He also says: ‘Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 80). This is because the rulings given in the preceding verses are intertwined.

There are rulings stated by Allah *Glorified is He* and others stated by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well as rulings that are specific to Allah and others specific to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, the command to obey both is repeated, for obedience to Allah is mentioned distinctly from obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is clear that the *Sunnah* explains in detail what the Quran states concisely.

The Quranic phrase ‘…though they cannot see him…’ (*al-Hadid:* 25) refers to faith in the unseen and to the visible reality of the sword. This is designed to defend an unseen reality, the inevitability of the coming of the Resurrection. Allah *Glorified is He* Who cannot be seen, emphasises this matter of the unseen. However, when He supports new religions, He does so either by Revelation or by the sword.

Accordingly, when the disbelievers stubbornly held to their disbelief, Allah *the Almighty* said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Avoid, therefore, those who turn away from all remembrance of Us…’ (*an-Najm:* 29). The command to ‘avoid’ means to leave them and cease to no further call them with clear signs and firm proofs.

Furthermore, the meaning of ‘helping Allah’ (*nusrat Allah*) is clear in the verse: ‘…If you help [the Cause of] Allah, He will help you…’ (*Muhammad:* 7). If you help Allah’s Cause with your power, He will help you with His Power. Thus, one is only required to follow the means to the end, then: ‘…and it was not you who cast [terror into them, O, Prophet] when you did cast it, but it was Allah Who cast it…’ (*al-Anfal:* 17).

Undoubtedly, Allah *the Exalted* is well able to wipe all of these disbelievers out in the blink of an eye, so why was war needed? Scholars say that if Allah destroyed them by means of an unseen command, without the military intervention of the Muslims, they would have deemed it as a natural phenomenon. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands…’ (*at-Tawba:* 14). When defeat is inflicted upon them by Muslims’ own hands, it is even worse for them.

Ending the verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Truly, Allah is Powerful, Almighty!’ (*al-Hadid:* 25) This emphasises that Allah *the Most High* possesses all Power and Might, lest we understand from the preceding phrase, ‘…so that Allah could mark out those who would help Him and His messengers though they cannot see Him…’ (*al-Hadid:* 25), that Allah is in need of help from His created beings.

Allah *the Almighty* possesses overwhelming Power and unconquerable Might. However, He orders you only to help His cause so that you stand by the side of the Imam and for His succour to come about by your own hands, thereby giving you honour and glory. When the enemy is vanquished and conquered, it should be caused by your own hands.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا نُوحٗا وَإِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَجَعَلۡنَا فِي ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا ٱلنُّبُوَّةَ
وَٱلۡكِتَٰبَۖ فَمِنۡهُم مُّهۡتَدٖۖ وَكَثِيرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ فَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

We sent Noah and Abraham, and gave
prophethood and scripture to their offspring:
among them there were some who were rightly
guided, but many were lawbreakers [26]
(The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 26)

Allah *Glorified is He* singles out Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* by mentioning him since his Message was naturally a universal one—not universal in time and place, but universal in the sense that it was directed at all of those who were borne by the Ark with him. However, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is mentioned because he was the Father of the prophets, and he fulfilled Allah’s commandments.

The Quranic phrase ‘…and gave prophet hood and Scripture to their offspring…’ (*al-Hadid:* 26) indicates that all messengers descended from this origin. When prophet hood and Revelation came to them, and the Message reached them '…amongst them there were some who were rightly guided…' (*al-Hadid:* 26) such as 'Abdullah ibn Salam who was a Jewish scholar. When the call of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reached him, he believed in it and said, 'By Allah, I knew Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when I saw him, just as I know my own son. I even know Muhammad better.'(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…but many were lawbreakers.' (*al-Hadid:* 26) This suggests that the minority of them were on the right way, while the majority were iniquitous. Therefore, when 'Abdullah ibn Salam *Allah be pleased with him* wanted to announce his conversion to Islam, he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, the Jews are liars, and my heart has been filled with Islam, but I fear that if I become Muslim, they will tell lies about me. Ask them about me.'

When his Jewish people came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he said to them, 'What say you about Ibn Salam?' They said, 'He is our master and the son of our master, and our rabbi and the son of our rabbi.' Ibn Salam then said, 'Now that they have said this, I declare that there is no deity but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.' Upon hearing this, they said, 'Nay, you are a fool and the son of a fool.' Ibn Salam then said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Did I not tell you that they are liars?'(2)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…but many were lawbreakers' (*al-Hadid:* 26), i.e. they were far from obedience.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Baghawi in his Tafsir*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (3645) and Ahmad (11615) on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him*

ثُمَّ قَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰٓ ءَاثَٰرِهِم بِرُسُلِنَا وَقَفَّيْنَا بِعِيسَى ٱبْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ
ٱلْإِنجِيلَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِى قُلُوبِ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُوهُ رَأْفَةً وَرَحْمَةً وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً
ٱبْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَٰهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ٱبْتِغَآءَ رِضْوَٰنِ ٱللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقَّ
رِعَايَتِهَا ۖ فَـَٔاتَيْنَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنْهُمْ فَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After those We sent Jesus, son of Mary: We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. But monasticism was something they invented – We did not ordain it for them – only to seek God's pleasure, and even so, they did not observe it properly. So We gave a reward to those of them who believed, but many of them were lawbreakers[27] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 27)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We sent other Messengers to follow in their footsteps…' (*al-Hadid:* 26); this means that Allah caused other prophets to come after them, succeeding one another. Allah says, '…After those We sent 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)…' (*al-Hadid:* 27), namely Prophet 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* was sent after those messengers.

Hence, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* represent one stage, while the messengers who came after Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* represent another stage. Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* the last of the Messengers to come before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* yet represents another stage. '…We gave him the Gospel…' (*al-Hadid:* 27) which is the Scripture of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.

Describing his followers, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers…' (*al-Hadid:* 27). The word *ra'afa* (compassion) signifies what removes pain and suffering, and the word *rahma* (mercy) denotes a further increase of kindness.

In the verse, 'But monasticism was something they invented…' (*al-Hadid:* 27), the word *rahbaniyyah* (monasticism) means excessive worshipful devotion. The followers of Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) engaged in this practice, isolating themselves in monasteries and taking vows of celibacy. It is stated in a book written in 1935 called *Wadi An-Natrun wa Ruhbanuh* (*Natron Valley and Its Monks*) that monasticism began one hundred and fifty years after Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*.(1)

The Quranic phrase ‘…something they invented…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27) implies that they made it up themselves and enjoined it upon themselves: ‘…We did not ordain it for them…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27); Allah *the Exalted* did not enjoin it upon them, but they obligated it upon themselves in order to lead ascetic lives and devote themselves solely to worship.

Although such practices are good in themselves, they were not ordained for them because they are in conflict with the nature of ordinary people, whose lives cannot be balanced unless they engage in both sides: the worldly life and the spiritual life. As for celibacy, it conflicts with the process of procreation and populating the world, which Allah *the Almighty* enjoin upon us.

Although they invented the practice of monasticism ‘…only to seek Allah’s pleasure…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27), they did not stick to this intention: ‘…and even so, they did not observe it properly…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27). They did not keep to it and went beyond its limits until they became bad role models.

The one who decides to rise to the level of *ihsan* (spiritual excellence) must be careful to keep within its bounds and to free his deeds from shortcomings, which otherwise will corrupt his doctrine. Therefore, Allah *the Exalted* encourages us to perform supererogatory acts of worship to reach this level. He *the Most High* says in a Qudsi Hadith, ‘My servant draws not near to Me with anything more beloved to me than the duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works until I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing wherewith he hears, and his sight wherewith he sees, and his hand wherewith he grasps, and his foot whereupon he walks. Were he to ask of Me I would surely give him, and were he to seek My aid I would surely aid him. I hesitate not about anything I do as I hesitate about taking a believer’s soul. He hates to die, and I hate to offend him.’(2)

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(1) ‘Umar Tusun, *Wadi Natrun wa Ruhbanuh*, p. 22

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6021) and others on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

Drawing nearer to Allah *the Almighty* with supererogatory acts is evidence of love and nearness to Him. Love takes one to the level of nearness, thereby distinguishing him from ordinary people. For instance, one may have many acquaintances, of whom only some are close friends, while others are merely ordinary ones, and each has his own status. In case I fall ill and some of my friends do not come to visit me, I will not blame all of those who did not give me a visit. However, if one of my closest friends does not visit me, then I do blame him for this.

As for blame, I direct it at my beloved ones;
And love is proven true by means of blame.(1)

Likewise, the one who gets to the level of love and closeness to Allah *the Most High* should never then turn back. Furthermore, it is not befitting that he should break this vow or even fall short of fulfilling it, for if he does, it will be as if he were saying to his Lord *Glorified is He* 'We tried being near to You, but we did not find You worthy', or 'We tried being near to You, but we did not find it useful, so we turned away.'

If we do not accept it ourselves, then do we think that Allah *the Almighty* will accept it?

Therefore, I say that you must beware of getting into this level; no one forces you to do so. Before you enjoin it upon yourself, take the time to learn its limits and conditions so that you do not put yourself into difficulty.

So, monasticism is not in itself a bad thing, but it becomes a bad thing when it is not duly observed. For example, remains of bodies of babies were found buried in courtyards of some monasteries; this means that the inhabitants of these monasteries had been committing adultery.

The more a servant draws nearer to his Lord, the more lights Allah flows over him. When it comes to worldly matters, there are things that everyone knows about you, things that are only known to your acquaintances, and things that only known to your nearest family members. Likewise, as you draw nearer to the True Lord *the Most High* He grants you certain graces of His; otherwise, people would have done only the obligatory things, and no one would bother to do any supererogatory acts.

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(1) This is a line of Ahmad Shawqi (d. 1932).

Therefore, you find that people occupy different levels and ranks in which they compete with one another; as one of us rises to a higher rank; another one beats him to a rank even higher. We told the story before about Al-Balkhi (a scholar and an ascetic), whom people once asked, ‘Do you yearn for your Lord?’ ‘No,’ he said, ‘only absent things are yearned for. Has He left me so that I might yearn for Him?’

His Words, ‘…only to seek Allah’s pleasure…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27) indicate an exception (in Arabic, the phrase is preceded by the word *illa* which literally means ‘except’) from: ‘…But monasticism was something they invented…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27); in other words, this means ‘We did not enjoin it upon them lest they would be remiss. We wanted Our goodly acceptance to be preserved for them by means of their fulfilment of their obligations.’ Also, His Words, ‘…and even so, they did not observe it properly…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27) are an instance of the principle: ‘The good deeds of the pious (*abrar*) are like sins for those who are nearest (*muqarraboon*) to Allah.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says; ‘…So, We gave a reward to those of them who believed…’ (*al-Hadid:* 27). They took their reward because they had faith, and as soon as the Messenger came, they believed in him; ‘…but many of them were lawbreakers’ (*al-Hadid:* 27); what this means is that they went outside the bounds of obedience and were mindlessly loyal to their old religion.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَءَامِنُوا۟ بِرَسُولِهِۦ يُؤْتِكُمْ كِفْلَيْنِ مِن رَّحْمَتِهِۦ
وَيَجْعَل لَّكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِۦ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

Believers, be mindful of God and have faith in His Messenger: He will give you a double share of His mercy; He will provide a light to help you walk; He will forgive you – God is most forgiving, most merciful [28] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 28)

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘O, you who have attained to faith!…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28) He describes them as having faith; then, why does He say to them: ‘…Remain conscious of Allah and believe in His Prophet…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28)? Scholars say that this means: ‘O, you who have faith in Allah connect your faith in Allah to your faith in His Messenger who conveys His Message. The Messenger whom you followed is followed by another messenger’; they should have showed this fact to other people, so that they did not blindly cling to their old religion.

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(1) *Al-Qurtubi mentions this in his Tafsir as a saying of Al-Junayd.*

‘…Remain conscious of Allah and believe…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28); this is a command for them to maintain God-consciousness which is preceded by a description of having faith and followed by a command to have faith. This is because faith is only beneficial if you obey the commandments in which you have faith.

‘…He will grant you doubly of His Grace…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28); ‘doubly’ is the translation for the Arabic word *kiflayn* which means ‘two shares’ or ‘two rewards’ of Allah’s Mercy: one share and reward for faith in ‘Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* and another share and reward for faith in Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*.

So, the meaning of ‘…and believe in His Prophet…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28) is the new and final prophet, Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…And [He] will light for you a light wherein you shall walk…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28); this refers to the light of insight. Allah says: ‘…and will forgive you…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28) which means that He will forgive you for any misgivings you may have had about believing; Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…for Allah is Much-Forgiving, a Dispenser of Grace.’ (*al-Hadid:* 28)

لِّئَلَّا يَعۡلَمَ أَهۡلُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ أَلَّا يَقۡدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ شَيۡءٖ مِّن فَضۡلِ ٱللَّهِ وَأَنَّ
ٱلۡفَضۡلَ بِيَدِ ٱللَّهِ يُؤۡتِيهِ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلۡفَضۡلِ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ٢٩

The People of the Book should know that they have no power over any of God’s grace and that grace is in the hand of God alone: He gives it to whoever He will. God’s grace is truly immense [29] (The Quran, *al-Hadid:* 29)

This is lest you might say, ‘We believe in ‘Isa (Jesus) but not in Muhammad’, envying him because of the Divine Message with which Allah blessed him, such as the disbelievers of Mecca said, ‘…Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) to which Allah replied: 'But is it they who distribute thy Lord's Grace? [Nay, as] it is We Who distribute their means of livelihood among them in the life of this world…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

Then, if they cannot even dispose of the simple matters of this worldly life, can they hope to distribute higher matters? In addition, this bounty is distributed by Allah, and no one can restrict Allah's bounty: '…seeing that all bounty is in Allah's hand…' (*al-Hadid:* 29); this means that He is alone without having any other partner, and '…He grants it unto whomever He wills…' (*al-Hadid:* 29). Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says: '…[Nay, as] it is We Who distribute their means of livelihood amongst them in the life of this world and raise some of them by degrees above others…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

How, then, could you lay exclusive claim to Allah's bounty and envy Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* for the Message Allah has given him? You do not have power over even the affairs of this world, or any control of them, so how can you presume to have control over the affairs of the Hereafter?

Then, the chapter is ended by His holy saying: '…for Allah is limitless in His great bounty.' (*al-Hadid:* 29) Indeed, Allah's bounty is great, for He created us, sustains us, has undertaken to provide our livelihood, and subdued the whole universe to our service; as well, He gave us a system of guidance to protect us from harm and sent messengers to us to remind us when we became heedless. He opened for us the door of repentance, giving mercy to those who sin, not to mention the other manifold effects of His Mercy towards His created beings.

the chapter of

al-Mujadala

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Mujadala* (2) :

قَدْ سَمِعَ ٱللَّهُ قَوْلَ ٱلَّتِى تُجَٰدِلُكَ فِى زَوْجِهَا وَتَشْتَكِىٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ
وَٱللَّهُ يَسْمَعُ تَحَاوُرَكُمَآ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌۢ بَصِيرٌ ١

God has heard the words of the woman who disputed with you [Prophet] about her husband and complained to God: God has heard what you both had to say. He is all hearing, all-seeing [1]
(The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 1)

This verse was revealed in connection with a female Companion Khawla bint Tha‘laba, when her husband, the Companion Aws ibn As-Samit (3) (the brother of ‘Ubada ibn As-Samit) declared her to be ‘as his mother’s back’ (4). The story was that Aws saw her praying and felt desire for her, and when she finished her prayer, he called her over so he could have his way with her, but she refused because she had not yet finished praying; so, he said to her, ‘You are to me as my mother’s back!’

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) The chapter is no. 58 in the written order of the Quran. It was revealed in Medina according to Ibn ‘Abbas; Al-Baydawi says in his *Tafsir* that some say that the first ten verses were revealed in Mecca, and the rest in Medina. It has 22 verses in all.

(3) The story of Aws ibn As-Samit and his swearing not to touch his wife

(4) The pagan Arabs would pronounce divorce on their wives by using this expression; Islam forbade this practice and prescribed expiation for those who did it thereafter.

For Arabs, these words were worse than pronouncing divorce since in saying them the husband likens his wife to his mother. When Aws said this, Khawla said, ‘By Allah, you shall not come near me until I have put the matter to the Messenger of Allah.’ She went to Prophet Muhammad and said, ‘O, Messenger of Allah, Aws has declared me akin to his mother’s back! When he married me, I was beautiful, but now I have grown old and have bore him children who will go hungry if I have to raise them alone, and if I give them to his care, he will ruin them!’

This is the meaning of Allah’s Words: '…her who pleads with you concerning her husband and complains unto Allah…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 1). Whenever she raised the subject, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would say, ‘All I can see is that you have become forbidden unto him.’

She was complaining to Muhammad about this so that he would take pity on her, yet he *peace and blessings be upon him* could not help but to say ‘All I can see is that you have become forbidden unto him’ (1), and he was awaiting and hoping for a decision to be revealed to him from Allah on this unprecedented issue in the Muslim society.

Indeed, Khawla was under Allah’s sight and hearing, and no sooner had she finished presenting her complaint to Prophet Muhammad, than the angel Gabriel came to him with these verses which gave the ruling on this practice, showing mercy not only to Khawla, but to all the Muslims: 'Allah has indeed heard the words of her who pleads with you concerning her husband and complains unto Allah. And Allah does hear what you both have to say. Verily, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.” (*al-Mujadala:* 1)

The whole chapter is named after this pleading woman (*mujadila*) Khawla to honour her and restore her esteem. The chapter was revealed to forbid this vile phrase and to make it clear that it is neither appropriate nor valid.

Your mother is the woman who gave birth to you, and indeed, the greatest favour made to a person is that made their mother to them. Therefore, it is not right that you liken your wife to your mother; the word ‘back’ here evokes an image of a sexual nature, which is not appropriate for a man to say in connection with his mother, for she is forbidden to him, and it is vile to say such a thing about one’s own mother.

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(1) *This is narrated by At-Tabariin his Tafsir.*

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah has indeed heard the words of her who pleads with you concerning her husband…' (*al-Mujadala:* 1). In this verse, the word 'indeed' is used , implying affirmation and emphasis, and the word 'words' indicates that He really did hear it, and that 'heard' is not a metaphor for ‘answered’, as we say in our daily interaction: ‘So-and-so has heard you’, meaning that he will meet your request.

We should have the proper norm when dealing with those Attributes of Allah’s which resemble human attributes, and we must understand them in the light of the verse: '…there is nothing like unto Him, and He alone is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.' (*ash-Shura:* 11). How can we hope to know the reality of Allah’s hearing and sight, when we do not even know the reality of our own senses?

For example, when you are awake, you hear with your ears and see with your eyes; however, when you are asleep, how do you see and how do you hear? When you are asleep, you can see people and colours and distinguish between green and red, and hear sounds; what are the senses that allow you to perceive these things?

So, you have senses which are unseen and unknown to you; then, what do you think of the Absolutely Unseen, whom no eyesight can encompass, though He encompasses all eyesight?

It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad was with ʿAisha when the pleading woman came to see him, and that woman spoke so quietly and secretly to the Messenger of Allah that ‘Aisha could not hear anything even though the woman was near to her; yet Allah heard what the woman said from beyond the seven heavens.(1)

Concerning His Words: '…her who pleads with you concerning her husband…' (*al-Mujadala:* 1), the verb *tujadil* (pleads) is from the noun *jidal* which means argument and debate; the woman was speaking, and Prophet Muhammad replied to her. Thus, she was debating with him concerning what had happened.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2406)*

As for the complaint, it was put to Allah: '…and complains unto Allah…' (*al-Mujadala:* 1); this is because it is Allah Who relieved her and sent down a ruling to please her and grant mercy upon her weakness and the weakness of all believing women. Whenever a man wants to leave his wife, he can do so by means of divorce; as for declaring of one's wife to be sexually forbidden to them as their mother (*zhihar*), it does not befit believers.

'…Verily, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.' (*al-Mujadala:* 1); Allah *the Almighty* hears and sees from pre-eternity; this means before He had yet created the created beings who would do things He would see and say things He would hear. The True Lord *the Most High* hears all that is said and sees all that is done; hearing is connected with sounds and sight with actions. He is All-Seeing and All-Hearing, and nothing escapes His ken.

ٱلَّذِينَ يُظَٰهِرُونَ مِنكُم مِّن نِّسَآئِهِم مَّا هُنَّ أُمَّهَٰتِهِمْۖ إِنْ أُمَّهَٰتُهُمْ إِلَّا ٱلَّٰٓـِٔي
وَلَدْنَهُمْۚ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيَقُولُونَ مُنكَرًا مِّنَ ٱلْقَوْلِ وَزُورًاۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَعَفُوٌّ غَفُورٌ ٢

Even if any of you say to their wives, 'You are to me like my mother's back,' they are not their mothers; their only mothers are those who gave birth to them. What they say is certainly blameworthy and false, but God is pardoning and forgiving [2] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 2)

The Quranic discourse now addresses those who practise uttering those forbidden words and that wicked comparison by saying to them: 'Beware of these words and make clear the difference between your mothers and your wives. The mother is the one who bore you, and your wife can never be your mother, and it can never be fitting to call her a "mother".' So, put things in their right places: a mother is a mother, and a wife is the wife, and each of them have their boundaries. He, then, makes it clear to them that this declaration of *zhihar* (saying 'You are as unlawful to me as my mother's back') is counter to reason: 'behold, they but utter a saying that runs counter to reason and is [therefore] false…' (*al-Mujadala:* 2).

Something ‘counter to reason’ is something that the mind denies and sound sense rejects; a falsehood is a lie and an untruth. It is both counter to reason and false to liken a wife to a mother, or a mother to a wife. Allah *Glorified is He* has wanted to put an end to this saying so that the Muslims never utter it again, just as He put an end to the practice of adoption in the story of Zayd ibn Haritha which you all know.(1)

The verse ends with the Words: '…But, behold, Allah is indeed an Absolver of Sins, Much-Forgiving.' (*al-Mujadala:* 2); this means He is forgiving of all that you have done in the past and all the transgressions you may have committed.

After this, He *the Most High* speaks to us about the ruling pertaining to the practice of *zhihar* by saying:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُظَٰهِرُونَ مِن نِّسَآئِهِمۡ ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا قَالُواْ فَتَحۡرِيرُ رَقَبَةٖ مِّن قَبۡلِ أَن يَتَمَآسَّاۚ
ذَٰلِكُمۡ تُوعَظُونَ بِهِۦۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٞ ﴿٣﴾ فَمَن لَّمۡ يَجِدۡ فَصِيَامُ شَهۡرَيۡنِ
مُتَتَابِعَيۡنِ مِن قَبۡلِ أَن يَتَمَآسَّاۖ فَمَن لَّمۡ يَسۡتَطِعۡ فَإِطۡعَامُ سِتِّينَ مِسۡكِينٗاۚ ذَٰلِكَ لِتُؤۡمِنُواْ
بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦۚ وَتِلۡكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِۗ وَلِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

Those of you who say such a thing to their wives, then go back on what they have said, must free a slave before the couple may touch one another again — this is what you are commanded to do, and God is fully aware of what you do [3] but anyone who does not have the means should fast continuously for two months before they touch each other, and anyone unable to do this should feed sixty needy people. This is so that you may [truly] have faith in God and His Messenger. These are the bounds set by God: grievous torment awaits those who ignore them [4] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 3 - 4)

The meaning of '…and thereafter would go back on what they have said…' (*al-Mujadala:* 3) is that they change their mind about their declaration of *zhihar*, and want to take back their wives, just as a husband might take back his wife after divorcing her. The penalty for such is '…the freeing of a human being from bondage…' (*al-Mujadala:* 3); this refers to the manumission of a slave '…before the couple may touch one another again…' (*al-Mujadala:* 3). The word ‘touch’ in this verse is a metonymy for conjugal relations, or sex.

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(1) The Prophet *peace and blessing be upon him* had adopted him and called him his son, but the Quran instructed him to call him by his father’s name. He died in the year 8 AH.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'However, he who does not have the wherewithal…' (*al-Mujadala:* 4); this means if he does not have a slave to free, he '…shall fast [instead] for two consecutive months…' (*al-Mujadala:* 4). This means two months, one after the next without a gap in between them, unless he is forced to stop fasting for a religious excuse, in which case it is not considered to be interrupted.(1)

Furthermore, He says: '…and he who is unable to do it…' (*al-Mujadala:* 4), namely fast for two consecutive months, he '…shall feed sixty needy ones…' (*al-Mujadala:* 4). So, Allah made the penalty severe so that it would be a deterrent, and this evil practice would be pulled up by the roots.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Now these are the bounds set by Allah…' (*al-Mujadala:* 4). Allah’s bounds are His commandments and prohibitions; of His commandments, He says: '…do not, then, transgress them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229); and of His prohibitions, He says: '…do not, then, offend against them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187).

A bound (*hadd*) means a separation between two things; Allah’s bounds separate between the lawful and the unlawful. This allows us to understand His Words: '…those who contend against Allah and His Prophet…' (*al-Mujadala:* 5); the phrase 'contend against' is the translation for the Arabic verb *yuhaddun*, which is taken from the noun *hadd* (bound). Thus, this part of verse refers to those who place their caprice on one side, and Allah’s Commandments on another.

Then, Allah heard the words of the pleading woman and responded to her by revealing a passage of Quran about her situation which would thereafter be recited until the Day of Resurrection; as well, He pronounced a binding ruling on the practice of *zhihar* and a stern expiation to deter it. Thus, this was not mere hearing. When we rise from bowing in the prayer, we say ‘Allah hears the one who praises Him’, meaning that He hears them and responds to them, for He says: '…If you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly give you more and more…' (*Ibrahim:* 7).

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(1) *Many scholars, including Ash-Shafi‘i and Malik, say this; others, including Abu Hanifa, say that even if there is a lawful reason for breaking the fast, the two months still must be started anew. (Al-Shawkani, Fath Al-Qadir)*

Strangely enough is that scholars disagree as to the identity of the woman who pleaded with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; there are four different opinions (1); there is no benefit in finding out her identity and knowing her name because to specify the personality is to restrict the ruling to her, yet Allah wanted this to be a universal rule.

The jurisprudential principle is consideration is given for the general proper meaning of a provision, not for the specificity of the cause. If this ruling was specific to Khawla, it would have applied only to her, yet in fact, it is a universal ruling which applies to all Muslims. This means it is a universal gift, and it does not especially matter which woman it was originally revealed about, for she was only the immediate cause of its revelation.

We also see this principle in the case of the young men of the cave, for example. The Quran does not tell us the time when they lived, nor their place nor their names; rather, the Quran speaks of them in general terms so that the benefit of their story would be general for all times and places. Had Allah *the Almighty* told us their identities, we would have said that this was a special circumstance for them and not for anyone else. Rather, He wanted them to be mentioned as generic youths, so that they could be role models for all young people who believe in their Lord.

In this way, the story is more influential and is as a good word which gives its fruits, like a good tree, at all times by its Lord’s leave.

If it is necessary to identify a person, the Quran always mentions them by name as is the case in the story of Lady Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon her* wherein Allah says: 'And [We have propounded yet another parable of

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(1) *Ibn Al-Jawzi says the four opinions as to her identity: Khawla bint Tha‘laba, Khawla bint Khuwaylid, Khawla bint As-Samit and Khawla bint Ad-Daliu. (Zad Al-Masir)*

God-consciousness in the story of] Maryam (Mary), the daughter of ‘Imran…' (*at-Tahrim:* 12). He mentions her name and the name of her father so that there can be no ambiguity or ignorance. This is because a special circumstance applied to her which would never be repeated for anyone else in the world. The identity is important in this instance because the circumstance was peculiar to her alone.

In the Pre-Islamic era, the act of *zhihar* was the severest method of separation between a man and his wife, wherein he would say to her, ‘You are unlawful to me as my mother’s back’, for one's mother is the foremost forbidden of all women to a man, for Allah says: 'Forbidden to you are your mothers…' (*an-Nisa’:* 23). There is nothing viler than a woman who gives birth to a son, and then has intimate relations with that son when he is an adult.

Therefore, it is preferable to avoid having marital relations with a near kin. This has always been the case since man first came into being. However, how did the children of Adam achieve this? Scholars say that, out of Allah's Wisdom, Hawwa’ (Eve) always gave birth to a set of male and female twins, and then the male of one set of twins would marry the female of another set so that there was some kind of distance between spouses at a time when no other option was possible.

Prophet Muhammad has encouraged keeping this distance in marriage; he said, 'Marry from a non-kin woman, so that you may avoid weak offspring'(1); this means to avoid marrying those who are related to you, so that your children are not weak and feeble. Science has now proven this and has proven that marrying close relatives can cause children to contract certain illnesses.

Therefore, we see that many historical heroes were the offspring of marriages between Arabs and non-Arabs since they inherited the characteristics of both races. Poets have spoken about this with one of them saying (2):

A boy who was born not of his father’s cousin,
For the children of kin-marriages are often weak.

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(1) Ibrahim Al-Harbi narrates this as a saying of ‘Umar, rather than a Hadith.

(2) It was Ziyad Adh-Dhabyani, a pre-Islamic poet (d. 18 before the *Hijra*).

Another said:

I passed over my cousin, though I loved her,
In fear that my progeny would be weak

So, do not say to your wife, ‘You are unlawful to me as my mother’s back’, for Allah has deemed your mother far above having a conjugal relation with you, and she is indeed furthest in this regard. Therefore, Arabs considered these words to be far severer than the simple words of divorce.

Here, we must reflect on the part of the verse on the expiation for *zhihar:* '…the freeing of a human being from bondage…' (*al-Mujadala:* 3). Some say that we no longer have slaves because the law forbids this. However, this is a matter of civil law; if there were a war, it would be possible for us to find captives who could be freed.

So, there is a difference between a matter of Sacred Law and a matter of civil law upon which they have agreed.

In Saudi Arabia, King Faisal(1) wanted to bring an end to slavery once and for all, so he bought all the remaining slaves and freed them.(2) What then happened is that the slaves all went back and knocked on the doors of their former masters, wanting to go back to the lives they had had as slaves. This was because the slaves had been eating from the food of their masters, and the slave-women had been wearing from the clothes of their mistresses, and their male owners might have cohabited with them.

The wisdom of freeing slaves is that the slave was confined and threatened with death after having taken part in a war against Muslims and been captured. He could have been killed, but Allah had mercy upon him, for He shows mercy to all mankind, even disbelievers and He said to you as a Muslim, ‘Do not kill him, for he shall serve you and be a benefit to you.’

It is as though Allah protected the life of a disbeliever by making him a slave. So, do not make a comparison between slavery and freedom but between slavery and death. Slavery is more merciful since it spares a disbeliever’s life.

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(1) 1906-1975; reigned 1964-1975
(2) This happened in 1962 when Faisal was Crown Prince.

The Creator *Glorified is He* spares the life of His created being, which He gave to him, and then after that, He makes it possible for this slavery to be brought to an end.

When Islam came, slavery was already established in society. A man would buy land along with the slaves who lived therein, and there were more than twenty ways of enslaving someone in those days. When Islam came, it reduced these ways so that there was only one way a man might become a slave: by being taken prisoner during a lawful war.

After reducing the ways that slavery could occur, Islam then expanded the ways that it could be ended so that it could be completely abolished. So, Islam did not establish slavery; rather, it established manumission. Look at how many cases there are where Allah *the Almighty* established the freeing of a slave as the expiation for an offence, doing so for any kind of slave, whether believer or non-believer.

When we examine the Quran, we find that there is only one verse which stipulates that the freed slave must be a believer, namely: 'And it is not conceivable that a believer should slay another believer, unless it be by mistake. And upon him who has slain a believer by mistake there is the duty of freeing a believing soul from bondage and paying an indemnity to the victim’s relations, unless they forgo it by way of charity. Now if the slain, while himself a believer, belonged to a people who are at war with you, [the penance shall be confined to] the freeing of a believing soul from bondage, whereas, if he belonged to a people to whom you are bound by a covenant, [it shall consist of] an indemnity to be paid to his relations…' (*an-Nisa’:* 92).

Concerning the verse pertaining to oaths and their expiation, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah will not take you to task for oaths which you may have uttered without thought, but He will take you to task for oaths which you have sworn in earnest. Thus, the breaking of an oath must be atoned for by feeding ten needy persons with more or less the same food as you are wont to give to your own families, or by clothing them, or by freeing a human being from bondage…' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 89); He did not say that this slave has to be a believer.

Abu Hanifa commented on this by saying that the fact that Allah *the Exalted* specifies a believing slave in the former verse and does not in the latter implies that it could even be a disbelieving slave. In many issues, Islam does not make a difference between believers and disbelievers, for it is a universal religion meant to rectify the whole world.

You all remember the story (1) of the shield which the Companion Ta'ma ibn Ubayriq stole and hid at the house of Zayd ibn As-Samin who was a Jew. They accused the Jew of the theft and wanted to acquit the Muslim, and they tried to convince Prophet Muhammad of this so that a Muslim would not be exposed as a thief.(2)

However, the Revelation passed judgment on the matter, and it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad: 'Behold, We have bestowed upon you from on high this Divine Writ, setting forth the truth, so that you may judge between people…' (*an-Nisa':* 105); this means making no distinction between believers and disbelievers; '…in accordance with what Allah has taught you. Hence, do no contend for those who are false to their trust.' (*an-Nisa':* 105) What this means is not to defend a traitor, even if he is a Muslim since Divine Justice does not make any distinction between Allah's servants.

Therefore, when the Jew was acquitted and the Muslim convicted without any bias or indulgence, the people rushed to embrace Islam. This is part of the greatness of this religion: it does not protect falsehood or cover up corruption even if it is committed by its own followers.

Notice that the expiations for *zhihar* are given here in order: first freeing a slave, then fasting, then feeding the poor. This is so that each one can do what is most appropriate for him and also so that the jurists have an opportunity to make this expiation a proper deterrent. There is a story (3) about Mundhir ibn Sa'id(4), an Andalusian jurist which illustrates this.

When the caliph 'Abd Ar-Rahman An-Nasir (5) made a vow and wanted to expiate it, scholars told him to feed ten poor people. When Mundhir ibn Sa'id heard of this ruling, he said, ‘Will it deter the Commander of the Faithful to feed ten poor people, while he already feeds so many every day? Only fasting will deter him.’ He based his judgment in the spirit of the Divine Ruling, not its mere letters.

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(1) *The story of Ta'ma ibn Ubayriq's stealing the shield and accusing Zayd ibn As-Samin for its theft*

(2) *Related by Ibn Al-Jawziin Al-Muntazhim (Vol. 1, p. 337)*

(3) *The story of the vow of 'Abd Ar-Rahman An-Naser and the judgment of Al-Mundhir ibn Sa'id*

(4) 275-355 A.H.

(5) 277-350 A. H.; reigned 300-350

After making clear the ruling regarding *zhihar* and its expiation, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Now these…' (*al-Mujadala:* 4); this means that these laws which have just been mentioned '…are the bounds set by Allah…' (*al-Mujadala:* 4), namely His commandments and prohibitions, As we said, a bound is a separator between two things; if a bound is between you and Allah, it must be rejected.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do they not know that for him who sets himself against Allah and His Prophet there is in store the fire of hell, therein to abide—that most awesome disgrace?' (*at-Tawba:* 63) A human being is required to not separate himself from his Lord *the Almighty*. Rather, they should always be connected to Him at all times. He must not place himself on one side and his Lord on another; this is contrary concerning the accompaniment of faith. Your Lord wants you to be with Him, not separate from Him.

This is clear in the verses of the chapter of *al-Jumu‘a*: 'O, you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave all worldly commerce…' (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9). Then, Allah says after the prayer: “and when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of Allah’s bounty, but remember Allah often, so that you might attain to a happy state!' (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10) So you are with Allah in the prayer, and you are with Allah after the prayer; you should be instantly preoccupied by Him.

The True Lord *the Most High* then says: '…and grievous suffering [in the life to come] awaits all who deny the truth.' (*al-Mujadala:* 4) This refers to those who do not keep within Allah’s bounds and do not adhere to what He has decreed for His servants; they shall be subjected to the grievous suffering of hellfire; this deed of theirs is called ‘denying the truth’ to express harsh rebuke and severe condemnation to it.

When it comes to those who do not believe and do not adhere to the rulings of this Sacred Law or keep within Allah’s bounds, do not think that they will escape Allah’s reckoning and His punishment, for it will not be as they imagine, and they will undergo grievous suffering in this life and the next.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُحَآدُّونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ كُبِتُوا۟ كَمَا كُبِتَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ
وَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَآ ءَايَٰتٍۭ بَيِّنَٰتٍ ۚ وَلِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿٥﴾

Those who oppose God and His Messenger will be brought low, like those before them: We have revealed clear messages, and humiliating torment awaits those who ignore them [5] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 5)

We said that '…contend against Allah…' (*al-Mujadala:* 5) means ‘place their caprice on one side of the bound (*hadd*), and Allah’s Commandments on the other side’. The words, '…and His Prophet…' (*al-Mujadala:* 5) indicate that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has his own right to legislate because Allah has given him the freedom to do so: '…Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Prophet gives you and refrain from anything that he withholds from you…' (*al-Hashr:* 7); this is so because a commandment may come from Allah and from Messenger Muhammad, or it may come solely from Allah or solely from Messenger Muhammad. This is due to commandments coming from Allah in a general way, and then they are detailed by Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, certain verses came to explain this such as Allah’s Words: '…And pay heed unto Allah and pay heed unto the Prophet…' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 92) and '…pay heed unto Allah and the Prophet…' (*Al-‘Imran:* 132) and '…and pay heed unto the Prophet…' (*at-Taghabun:* 12).

These verses allow us to challenge those who claim that the Quran alone must be considered and followed, while the *Sunna* of Prophet Muhammad is rejected. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* indeed told us that such people would come one day when he said: 'Verily, a man may be told of my words as he sits back on his couch, and he may say, "You and we have the Book of Allah. What we find to be lawful therein we shall call lawful, and what we find to be forbidden therein we shall call forbidden." Yet in fact, what the Messenger of Allah forbids is like what Allah forbids.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi (2588), Ibn Majah (12), and Ahmad (16564) on the authority of Al-Miqdam Allah be pleased with him*

This is one of the miracles of the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him.* Now, to respond to these people, we say, 'By Allah, tell us how you pray the afternoon or sunset prayer. How do you know that the afternoon prayer has four cycles and the sunset prayer three? Is this in the Quran? Does the Quran tell you how to do all the rites of the pilgrimage, or how much the poor-due should be?'

Prophet Muhammad also said, 'Pray as you see me pray'(1) and: 'Take your rites from me'(2); this means that Messenger Muhammad was distinguished amongst the messengers in that Allah gave him the right to legislate for his community. Before Muhammad, the messengers' function was only to convey Allah's Laws; as for Prophet Muhammad, he was both conveyer and legislator.

So, believers are ordered to obey Allah when receiving Divine Rulings in general and to obey Prophet Muhammad concerning the particulars of such rulings. If this was not the case, the True Lord *the Most High* would not have said: 'Whoever pays heed unto the Prophet pays heed unto Allah thereby…' (*an-Nisa':* 80).

The meaning of '…shall be brought low (*kubitu*)…' (*al-Mujadala:* 5) is that they shall be humbled and humiliated or shocked with a sudden calamity which leaves them speechless because of its horror; this is akin to Allah's Words: '…he who was bent on denying the truth remained dumbfounded…' (*al-Baqara:* 258); this means that he was stunned.

The one who is stunned by a sudden shock finds himself tongue-tied and unable to speak or vent or alleviate his soul. A poet(3) expressed this by saying:

You must make complaint to an honourable man,
Who can advise you, console you, or have pity on you.

When a person beset by calamity finds someone to complain to and the latter listens to him, the complainer feels relieved, and his soul is calmed since he finds someone to lighten his burden and empathise with him. As for these people, they will be brought low in a way that silences them and ties their tongues; thus, Allah will subject them to the utmost humiliation and degradation and show them the most terrible wrath.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqiin Al-Kubra (2/245) and others on the authority of Malik ibn Al-Huwayrith*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqiin Al-Kubra (5/125) on the authority of Jabir*

(3) *It was Bashar Al-'Aqili (95-167 A.H.).*

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Even as those [evildoers] who lived before them were brought low…' (*al-Mujadala:* 5); what this means is that they will not be the first ones to be brought low, but the deniers who came before them were also brought low such as the people of ‘Ad, Thamud, Lut (Lot), the people of Pharaoh and others.

The first way in which the disbelieving Arabs who stood in the way of the Islamic message were brought low is that they were defeated before the message of truth, and their unbelief disappeared, whilst Islam spread over the world; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Nay, We have allowed these [sinners]—as [We allowed] their forebears to enjoy the good things of life for a great length of time, but then have they never yet seen how We visit the earth, gradually removing from it all that is upon it? Can they, then, [hope to] be the winners?' (*al-Anbiya’:* 44)

Every day, the numbers of disbelievers were getting less and less, and their lands shrunk, while the numbers of Muslims grew higher and higher, and their lands broadened. This made Khalid ibn Al-Walid say to ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As, ‘Muhammad has clearly proved himself, ‘Amr. We should believe in him.’(1) This means that Muhammad has the upper hand and things are going his way, and we no longer have the power to resist him.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…After We had bestowed [on them] clear messages from on high…' (*al-Mujadala:* 5); this means clear signs which the mind can easily believe and sound instinct can easily accept. He says: '…And [so] for those who deny the truth there will be shameful suffering in store.' (*al-Mujadala:* 5) What this means is that those who belie these signs and refuse to believe in them despite their clarity and conformity to sound natural instinct, shall be subjected to shameful suffering, which will shame and debase them.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim (1033)*

This is because the truth of Faith in Allah is clear, and no one can rebut it; even these disbelievers do not deny it. The first part of faith is the existence of an All-Powerful Lord who created them and created the world in which they live.

They have even acknowledged that Allah created them: 'And thus it is [with most people]. If you ask them, "Who is it that has created the heavens and the earth?" they will surely answer, "Allah"…' (*Luqman:* 25); furthermore, He says: 'Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than Allah] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, "Allah"…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). Could any of them dare to say otherwise? Yet despite this, they belie and disbelieve in the truth and the clear signs of which no one could be ignorant. They should have reflected upon them.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* says:

يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوٓا۟ ۚ أَحْصَىٰهُ
ٱللَّهُ وَنَسُوهُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٦﴾

On the Day when God will raise everyone and make them aware of what they have done. God has taken account of it all, though they may have forgotten: He witnesses everything [6] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 6)

Allah *the Almighty* reminds them of the Day of Resurrection and Reckoning when He will reckon them for everything they have done, whether great or small; they may have forgotten it, but He took it into account and recorded it against them, and His recording angels wrote it down. If you were to ask a man of sixty or seventy years, for example, if he remembered all his sins, he would tell you he could not; this is because forgetfulness is part of man's nature so that he does not have too low an opinion of himself. It is as though the human soul appreciates the attributes of perfection intrinsically, and not only relatively.

For example, the cognisance of false testimony is intrinsic, not only relative. How is that so? Suppose that you are guilty of transgression against someone and deriding them, and your friend witnesses it, but when the other person asked your friend to corroborate his story, your friend does you a favour and says, ‘That never happened.’ Indeed, this helps you, and your friend puts himself at risk for your benefit, yet at the same time, he degraded himself before you, and you consider him thereafter to be a liar, even though his testimony helped you. This indicates that disgraceful conduct is recognisably disgraceful, even to those whom it helps.

We have also given this example before. Suppose that there is a band of thieves, and one of them repents. The others call him a ‘rat’ and a ‘traitor’, but suppose that one of these thieves was looking for a husband for his daughter. Would this one choose one of the thieves, or would he choose this ‘rat’ that repented and went straight? He will choose the one who repented and went straight. Even though he himself is a crook, he does not want a crook for his daughter.

This is why we see that the disbelievers of Mecca, who waged war against Muhammad and disbelieved in his message, nevertheless, would trust him to look after their belongings,(1) for they knew that he was ‘the honest, trustworthy one’.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Allah will have taken [all of] it into account, even though they [themselves] may have forgotten it…' (*al-Mujadala:* 6); He will have taken it into account because Allah takes all things into account, and they will have forgotten it because they are forgetful by nature. He says: '…for Allah is witness unto everything' (*al-Mujadala:* 6) because He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Therefore, the Sacred Hadith says: 'O, My servants! If you think that I cannot see you, then the fault is in your faith, and if you think that I can see you, then why have you made Me the most trifling of all who see you?'(2)

'…Allah is witness unto everything.' (*al-Mujadala:* 6) ‘Everything’ implies universality; there is nothing in existence to which Allah is not witness, and faith in One Allah is a ‘thing’, so He *the Most High* is witness to it.

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(1) *After the Messenger of God peace and blessings be upon him emigrated to Medina, ‘Ali Allah be pleased with him stayed behind in Mecca for three days to return to the people the things they had entrusted to the Messenger of God. (Subul Al-Huda wa Ar-Rashad, Vol. 3, p. 267)*

(2) *Related by Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali as a saying of a wise man*

Therefore, He says: 'Allah bears witness that there is no deity save Him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). Before He asks people to bear witness to this, He bears witness to it Himself; likewise, before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked people to bear witness to his prophethood, he bore witness to it himself. It is essential that he bears witness to it and believe in it.

It is related (1) that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I bear witness that I am the Messenger of Allah.' This was in the story of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah when he owed a debt to a Jew, and it was due, but Jabir was unable to settle it because his date-palm grove had not yielded enough fruit to pay back the loan. Jabir told Prophet Muhammad about this and asked him to speak to the Jew in order to ask him to give him more time to pay him back, but the Jew refused, seeing a chance to humiliate the Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then asked Jabir to take him to his orchard. Prophet Muhammad walked about the palms, and then asked Jabir to take him to his hut. Jabir did so, and Prophet Muhammad napped for a while. When he woke, he said, 'Jabir! Harvest and repay!' Jabir picked his date palms and found there was enough to repay the Jew and still leave for him more than he had ever harvested before. When Prophet Muhammad was told of this, he smiled and said, 'I testify that I am the Messenger of Allah.'(2)

Then, Allah says: '…Allah is witness unto everything' (*al-Mujadala:* 6); He *the Most High* bears witness to Himself, which testimony is given from Himself to Himself; the angels, as well, bear witness based on direct vision, and those who are endowed with knowledge bear witness based on rational proof: 'Allah bears witness—and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge—that there is no deity save Him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

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(1) *The story of the debt of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah and his cutting of the dates and the Jewish man*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (5023) on the authority of Jabir*

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ مَا يَكُونُ مِن نَّجْوَىٰ ثَلَٰثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ
رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَآ أَدْنَىٰ مِن ذَٰلِكَ وَلَآ أَكْثَرَ إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا
كَانُوا۟ ۖ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوا۟ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

Do you not see [Prophet] that God knows everything in the heavens and earth? There is no secret conversation between three people where He is not the fourth, nor between five where He is not the sixth, nor between less or more than that without Him being with them, wherever they may be. On the Day of Resurrection, He will show them what they have done: God truly has full knowledge of everything [7]
(The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 7)

Scholars say that although the Arabic for 'Are you not aware (*alam tara*)…' (*al-Mujadala:* 7) literally means ‘did you not see?’; it actually means ‘do you not know’ because He says it about things that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not see, such as in the chapter of *al-Fil*: 'Are you not aware (*alam tara*) of how the Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1) The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad, did not see this incident, so the meaning of *alam tara* must be ‘do you not know?’ In fact, the meaning is ‘did you not see?’ because Allah could easily have said *alam ta‘lam*, ‘do you not know’, had He wanted so. The reason the verb ‘to see’ is used in this verse is to confirm that any information given from Allah to His Messenger is more certain than the vision of his own eyes; if Allah tells him it, it is as though he has seen it with his eyes.

Allah’s Words, ‘Are you not aware that Allah knows all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth…' (*al-Mujadala:* 7) imply that Allah’s Knowledge encompasses all things, for He says elsewhere: '…for not even an atom’s weight [of whatever there is] on earth or in heaven escapes your Lord’s Knowledge, and neither is there anything smaller than that or larger, but it is recorded in [His] clear decree.' (*Yunus:* 61)

Allah knows the heavens and earth as containers, and He knows all that they contain. The earth in itself is a marvel of creation and design, and the created beings it contains are more marvellous still; we said before that the content is always more valuable than the container. Allah's Knowledge is not restricted to visible things; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* also has knowledge of all that we cannot see within the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth: 'And Allah alone comprehends the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth…' (*Hud:* 123). Another aspect of His comprehensive Knowledge is that '…Never can there be a secret confabulation between three persons without Him being the fourth of them…' (*al-Mujadala:* 7). Allah *the Almighty* knows all the created beings in the heavens and the earth. Someone might say, 'He knows them only because they are His creations and His handiwork', then He corrected himself by saying, 'No, He also knows all the new things which are constantly happening in His universe', for He says: '…Never can there be a secret confabulation between three persons without Him being the fourth of them…' (*al-Mujadala:* 7).

'Secret confabulation' is when people speak to one another about a secret; it is always a matter of something secret which we conceal from others. Therefore, He begins with the number three, which is the smallest number of people who can be involved in secret confabulation.

A Noble Hadith says: 'Let no two people hold secret confabulation, whilst excluding a third person, for to do so hurts him.'(1) The secret conversation of two people makes the third person in their presence feel uneasy. As for the True Lord *the Most High* He knows everything, and therefore says to them: 'Conduct secret conversations as much as you like. I can see you, and I know what you say. I am the fourth of every three and the sixth of every five people.' Allah says: '…and neither between less than that, or more, without His being with them wherever they may be…' (*al-Mujadala:* 7); thus, this verse included all chances.

Allah *the Exalted* says: '…But in the end, on Resurrection Day, He will make them truly understand what they did…' (*al-Mujadala:* 7); this is because the attendant angels write down their actions, and on the Day of Resurrection, each person will be given his record to read what is in it and be a witness to it:

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (4045), Abu Dawud (4211), At-Timridhi (4211), Ibn Majah (2751) and Ahmad (3379), on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him*

'Read this your record! Sufficient is your own self today to make out your account!' (*al-Isra': *14)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ نُهُوا۟ عَنِ ٱلنَّجْوَىٰ ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا نُهُوا۟ عَنْهُ وَيَتَنَٰجَوْنَ بِٱلْإِثْمِ
وَٱلْعُدْوَٰنِ وَمَعْصِيَتِ ٱلرَّسُولِ وَإِذَا جَآءُوكَ حَيَّوْكَ بِمَا لَمْ يُحَيِّكَ بِهِ ٱللَّهُ وَيَقُولُونَ فِىٓ
أَنفُسِهِمْ لَوْلَا يُعَذِّبُنَا ٱللَّهُ بِمَا نَقُولُ ۚ حَسْبُهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ يَصْلَوْنَهَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٨﴾

Have you not seen how those who have been forbidden to hold secret conversations go back afterwards and hold them, and conspire with one another in what is sinful, hostile, and disobedient to the Messenger? When they come to you they greet you with words God has never used to greet you, and say inwardly, 'Why does God not punish us for what we say?' Hell will be punishment enough for them: they will burn there – an evil destination [8] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 8)

Those who were forbidden to engage in secret confabulation were a group of Jews and hypocrites; '…and yet [always] revert to that which they have been forbidden…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8), which is 'secret confabulations'. Allah says: '…and conspire with one another with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct, and disobedience to the Prophet…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8); this implies that secret confabulation itself is not forbidden, but what is forbidden is to conspire with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct and disobedience to the Prophet. As for planning secretly to do good things, there is nothing wrong with this such as the one who conceals his charity so that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Now whenever such [people] approach you [O, Muhammad] they salute you with a greeting which Allah has never countenanced…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8).

The True Lord *the Most High* exposes their hypocrisy and tells His Messenger of their evil intentions. The way they greeted Prophet Muhammad was evidence of their hypocrisy; 'they salute you' and '…with a greeting which Allah has never countenanced…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) indicates their disobedience as they used a greeting other than Allah's greeting, which is 'peace be upon you' (*as-salam 'alaykum*). Instead, they were saying to Prophet Muhammad, '*As-sam 'alaykum*', which means 'death be upon you'; they used the word *sam* (death), which sounds like the word *salam* (peace).

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(1) *This is from a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari (620), At-Tirmidhi (2313), An-Nasa'i (5285) and Ahmad (1712), and by Muslim (1712) with a slightly different wording.*

Lady 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was aware of their intention in doing this, and she replied to them with the same evil greeting by saying: 'Nay, but may death and curses be upon you!'(1) Therefore, Allah will place the hypocrites in the lowest level of hell, for they are even worse than disbelievers are. This is because a disbeliever, as we said, says what is in his heart, whilst the hypocrite acts like a believer when really he is a disbeliever.

The way the hypocrites said '*as-sam 'alaykum*' to Prophet Muhammad is similar to how their consorts, the Jews, said *hinta* in place of *hitta* when Allah told them: '…say, "Remove You from us the burden of our sins", [whereupon] We shall forgive you your sins…' (*al-Baqara:* 58); they said *hinta* which means 'wheat' instead of *hitta* which means 'remove the burdens of our sins' by way of sarcasm and mockery.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…And they say to themselves, "Why does not Allah chastise us for what we are saying?"…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) They said this to themselves inwardly, not publicly. Yet, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed them of it. They should have taken admonition from this, reflected on it, and asked themselves, 'Who told Muhammad of this when we said it to ourselves?' This situation should have led them to guidance and faith in Prophet Muhammad.

The meaning of '…Why does Allah not chastise us for what we are saying…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) is 'Is Allah not going to punish us?' It is as though they wanted to be punished. However, punishment will not come to them now; '…Hell shall be their allotted portion; they shall [indeed] enter it…' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) on the Day of Resurrection '…and how vile a journey's end'

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(1) *The Messenger of God peace and blessing be upon him then told her to calm down and to simply reply, 'And upon you.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari (5565) and Muslim (4027)*

(*al-Mujadala:* 8). How vile shall be their fate and their end. Their ' allotted portion' means it will be enough for them, and 'they shall [indeed] enter it' means that they will be cast into it and feel its heat.

Then, the True Lord *the Most High* addresses believers and teaches them how secret discourse should be conducted:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا تَنَٰجَيۡتُمۡ فَلَا تَتَنَٰجَوۡاْ بِٱلۡإِثۡمِ وَٱلۡعُدۡوَٰنِ وَمَعۡصِيَتِ
ٱلرَّسُولِ وَتَنَٰجَوۡاْ بِٱلۡبِرِّ وَٱلتَّقۡوَىٰۖ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِيٓ إِلَيۡهِ تُحۡشَرُونَ ٩

[You who believe, when you converse in secret, do not do so
in a way that is sinful, hostile, and disobedient to the
Messenger, but in a way that is good and mindful [of God].
Be mindful of God, to whom you will all be gathered [9]
(The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 9)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* combines a prohibition of and a warning against the blameworthy kind of secret confabulation, along with enjoining of the praiseworthy kind of secret confabulation. The blameworthy kind of secret confabulation is that which involves sinful doings, aggressive conduct, and disobedience to the Messenger. He says: '…do not conspire with one another with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct…' (*al-Mujadala:* 9). Sin (*ithm*) means something foul which people are ashamed of, while aggressive conduct (*'udwan*) means the wickedness of aggression, plotting and evil planning.

As long as they lower their speech and conceal it, something about it must be contrary to sound natural instinct, for if it were purely the truth, they would say it aloud. Secret confabulation indicates that they feel guilt in their minds, their hearts, and every part of their being.

At the same time, the verse enjoins the praiseworthy kind of secret confabulation: '…but hold counsel in the cause of virtue and God-consciousness…' (*al-Mujadala:* 9). We said before that mentioning opposites side by side serves to clarify their meaning. There is nothing wrong, then, with secret discourse when it is in the cause of virtue and God-consciousness and in the cause of aiding the religion and upholding the dignity of Muslims. Military leaders, for example, hold secret meetings to discuss strategies of war, and it is right for them to make sure no one else knows about it, lest the enemy get wind of their plans.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and [always] remain conscious of Allah, unto Whom you all shall be gathered.' (*al-Mujadala:* 9) This means be conscious of Allah by obeying His commandments and avoiding all that He prohibits, for it is Allah *Glorified is He* '...Whom you all shall be gathered' (*al-Mujadala:* 9). This implies exclusivity which means that solely to Him will you be gathered and brought forth to be reckoned on the Day of Resurrection.

إِنَّمَا ٱلنَّجْوَىٰ مِنَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ لِيَحْزُنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَلَيْسَ بِضَآرِّهِمْ
شَيْـًٔا إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

[Any other kind of] secret conversation is the work of Satan, designed to cause trouble to the believers, though it cannot harm them in the least unless God permits it. Let the believers put their trust in God [10] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 10)

This refers to secret confabulations with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct and disobedience to the Messenger are essentially from Satan because this has been his role since he pledged a vow to Allah by saying: 'Then [I swear] by Your Might, I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error,[all] save such of them as are truly Your servants!' (*Sad:* 82-83) In addition, he exposed himself when he announced his plan to tempt the sons of Adam by saying: '...I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Your straight way.' (*al-A'raf:* 16)

Therefore, we said that Satan does not go to bars but goes to mosques in order to spoil the righteousness of obedient people. The intelligent person does not announce his plan to his enemy. This is why people often complain of having forgetfulness when praying, and this is natural since Allah's enemy (Satan) does not simply leave you to obey your Lord.

Our religion permits us, when we encounter these misgivings which distract us from our presence of mind with Allah, to pause our recitation and seek refuge in Allah from them, for when Satan hears you seeking refuge with Allah, he becomes like a thief who lurks around a house: when he finds that you are aware of his presence, he leaves. He is, as the True Lord *the Most High* calls him, the whispering, sneaky tempter; he whispers misgivings to you, and when you seek refuge with Allah, he sneaks away and flees: 'Hence, if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs you up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah. Behold, He alone is All-Hearing, All Knowing!' (*Fussilat:* 36)

The commandment in His Words '...but hold counsel in the cause of virtue and God-consciousness...' (*al-Mujadala:* 9) gives an opportunity to those who wish to plan to succour Allah's religion, allowing them to hold secret talks so that no one can know the details of their plan, even other Muslims, for a Muslim might be weak and reveal his army's secrets to the enemy.

You know the story(1) of Hatib ibn Abu Balta'a.(2) He was a Companion of the Messenger of Allah, yet he weakened and told Quraysh that Prophet Muhammad was preparing to conquer Mecca, sending them a letter with a woman in the caravan. However, Allah informed His Prophet about what Hatib had done and sent for 'Ali, instructing him to follow a certain road to find the woman in whose braids the letter was hidden. 'Ali went and followed her tracks and brought the letter to Prophet Muhammad. It was from Hatib, so he sent for him and said to him, 'Hatib, what made you do what you did?' Hatib replied, 'O, Messenger of Allah, I am a man of no status, and I want to have influence with Quraysh, for I know that in any case that Allah will give you victory over them.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave him be, for it may be that Allah has looked upon those who fought at Badr and said, "Do as you please, for I have forgiven you."'(3)

Prophet Muhammad taught us this lesson by saying, 'Make it easier to get things done by employing discretion.'(4) This is allowed as long as it is in the cause of virtue and God-consciousness.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...so that he might cause grief to those who have attained to faith...' (*al-Mujadala:* 10); he wants to do this, but he cannot: '...yet he cannot harm them in the least, unless it be by Allah's Leave...' (*al-Mujadala:* 10). This is like a man who may have all the means to do evil; Allah has given him power and money, and he may have a gun and be a good shooter, but when he points the gun at his enemy's heart, he might jerk and miss, or something might get in the way and deflect the bullet.

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(1) *The story of Hatib ibn Abi Balta'a and his blowing the whistle on Prophet Muhammad to Quraysh*

(2) *D. 65 A.H.*

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2785) and Muslim (4550)*

(4) *Narrated by Al-Khara'it in I'tilal Al-Qulub (665)*

Thus, he wants to do it, but Allah does not want it to happen; he wills it, but Allah does not will it. Every motion in the universe, whether great or small, from the atom to the galaxy, takes place by Allah's Power and Will. Satan wants evil to befall the believers, but it can never happen unless Allah wills it.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and when everything will have been decided, Satan will say, "Behold, Allah promised you something that was bound to come true! I, too, held out [all manner of] promises to you, but I deceived you. Yet, I had no power at all over you, I but called you and you responded unto me..."' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

We said before that power is either force which compels you to act or an argument which convinces you. Satan does not possess either one of these; all he can do is whisper to you and make a deed seem alluring to you. It is as though he wants to say to them, 'You were willing captives to my suggestions. I only suggested evil things to you, and then you went and did them on your own.'

Moreover, some sinful acts do not involve Satan at all. There are sins which are made alluring by the passionate soul which enjoins evil and by caprice. Therefore, it is an established fact that Satan is chained up in *Ramadan*, (1) yet we still commit many sins in that month. A poet expressed this by saying:

The devil, the world, the soul, and caprice:
What can I do when they are all my enemies?

Likewise, it is in the case of sorcery; many people own the paraphernalia of sorcery and practise it, but they cannot harm anyone save by Allah's Leave: 'And [they] follow [instead] that which the evil ones used to practise during Sulaiman's (Solomon's) reign, for it was not Sulaiman (Solomon) who denied the truth, but those evil ones denied it by teaching people sorcery and [they follow] that which has come down through the two angels in Babylon, Harut and Marut, although these two never taught it to anyone without first declaring, "We are but a temptation to evil. Do not, then, deny [Allah's] truth!" And they learn from these two how to create discord between a man and his wife, but whereas they can harm none thereby save by Allah's Leave. They acquire knowledge that only harms themselves and does not benefit them although they know, indeed, that he who acquires this [knowledge] shall have no share in the good of the life to come. For vile indeed is that [art] for which they have sold their own selves. Had they but known it!' (*al-Baqara:* 102)

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(1) *This was stated by the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him in a Hadith narrated by Al-Bayhaqi (3448) on the authority of Abu-Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

And on (*'ala*) Allah, then, "let the believers place their trust…" (*al-Mujadala:* 10) In the verse, the word *'ala*, which literally means 'on' implies that trust in Allah is like a vehicle which leads you to your goal. This word, here and elsewhere in the Quran, is often used to refer to those who are illuminated by Allah's Guidance, and it refutes the claim of those who say that religious responsibilities are difficult for the soul and that this is indicated even by their name *takalif* which can also mean 'burdens'.

In fact, even the most strenuous of religious responsibilities is easy and within the ability of all; the only ones who find them difficult are those who care more about the short term than the long term. How difficult can religious responsibilities really be when they are compared with the reward that is given for them? Thus, if a Muslim considers the punishment for sin, he will not dare to commit it, and if he considers the reward for obedience, everything he needs to do to attain it will seem easy.

In Allah'...then, let believers place their trust' (*al-Mujadala:* 10). This is like the expression 'leave it to me'. If you are powerless, then know that Allah has power over everything in the earth and in the heavens. Yet, it is clear that reliance on Allah *the Exalted* has certain conditions, one of which is that it must be preceded by an effort to utilise the means at one's disposal.

The True Lord addresses believers by saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمۡ تَفَسَّحُواْ فِي ٱلۡمَجَٰلِسِ فَٱفۡسَحُواْ
يَفۡسَحِ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمۡۖ وَإِذَا قِيلَ ٱنشُزُواْ فَٱنشُزُواْ يَرۡفَعِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ
مِنكُمۡ وَٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡعِلۡمَ دَرَجَٰتٖۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ خَبِيرٞ ﴿١١﴾

You who believe, if you are told to make room for one another in your assemblies, then do so, and God will make room for you, and if you are told to rise up, do so: God will raise up, by many degrees, those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge: He is fully aware of what you do [11] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 11)

This verse was revealed when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had come to have many companions and people who loved him and wished to keep his company until it got to the point that they were so crowded around him that they could find nowhere to sit. Allah, therefore, commanded them to make room for one another by saying: ‘O, you who have attained to faith! When you are told, "Make room for one another in your collective life", do make room...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 11). What this means is to spread out and make space for those who have no space: ‘...[And in return] Allah will make room for you [by His Grace]...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 11). So, you must utilise the means to spread out, and Allah will make the room for you in your gatherings.

When an action is ascribed to Allah *the Almighty* it is carried out by His Omnipotent Power. You make as much room as you are able, and Allah *the Exalted* will make as much room for you as He is able. This is akin to the words of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Allah comes to His servant’s aid as long as the servant comes to his brother’s aid.'(1)

This is clearly a relative agreement; you aid your brother with your limited power and your limited strength, and Allah aids you with His unlimited Power and infinite strength. Who benefits the most from this?

This concept is universal when it comes to making room: make room for your brother, and Allah will make room for you in a way you cannot perceive.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (4867), Abu-Dawud (4295), At-Tirmidhi (1345) and Ibn Majah (221) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

This ‘making room’ from Allah *the Most High* takes the form of blessed increase in space, blessed increase in provision and blessed increase in all things.

We must all act on this direction from Allah and from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for otherwise we will be sinful. You all know the story of the debtor who died while still owing debts, and so the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* declined to pray his funeral prayer; but he allowed the Muslims to pray for him by saying, 'Pray for your companion.'(1) What was the sin of this debtor? Why did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* decline to lead his funeral prayer? They say it is because he disobeyed an instruction of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Whosoever takes people’s money while intending to repay it, Allah will repay it for him, and whosoever takes it intending to waste it, Allah will lay him to waste.'(2)

The fact that this debtor died while having not repaid his debt shows that he did not intend to repay it, so that he was not aided in doing so. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to teach his community this lesson; the debtor was denied the honour of having the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* lead his funeral prayer because he disobeyed his commandment, but he was not denied the honour of having Muslims offer his funeral prayer.

This story also shows us how concerned the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was that the man’s debt be paid so he could be cleansed of it before going to meet his Lord. Therefore, he encouraged companions to donate so that the debt could be paid, and the people were quick to do so. (3)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us a model of this ‘making room’ in the mother’s womb, which receives the foetus as an infinitesimal speck which then grows, and as it grows, the womb enlarges after having been narrow. The same is the case with Muslim gatherings; Allah *the Exalted* makes more room for them as long as they make room for each other. If you only move a little from your place, He causes everyone else to make room for you so that a small space can accommodate a large number of people.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2133) and Muslim (3040)*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (22) and Ahmad (83) on the authority of Abu-Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

(3) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2127)*

Thus, if you want Allah to make room for you, make room for your brethren. Therefore, the Sacred Law allows, for when a prayer space is very crowded that one may bow and prostrate on his brother's back.

Also, Allah *the Exalted* says: '…And whenever you are told, "Rise up [for a good deed]", do rise up…' (*al-Mujadala:* 11); this means that one should get up and stand to make room; '…[And] Allah will exalt by [many] degrees those of you who have attained to faith and [above all] such as have been vouchsafed [true] knowledge…' (*al-Mujadala:* 11). This means that those who obey these commands and implement them as Allah enjoins them will be exalted many degrees by Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…for Allah is fully aware of all that you do.' (*al-Mujadala:* 11) The True Lord *the Most High* wants to strengthen the faith of believers and bolster their trust in Allah and in the reward He has in store. Allah *the Almighty* wants some of us to be martyrs who enter battle with the certitude that what we will find with Him is better than what they are leaving behind. Likewise at the same time, He wants there to be others who bear the message and call the people to it—people who learn the religion, study it and teach it to others.

Islam provides for both these directions and has them run parallel courses: one course for the defence and protection of the religion, while another course for calling to Allah's religion and spreading it. Otherwise, if we all went out to war, who would stay behind to teach the people and give them a sound understanding of their religion?

Therefore He *the Most High* says: '…From within every group in their midst, some shall refrain from going forth to war and shall devote themselves [instead] to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the faith, and [thus be able to] teach their homecoming brethren so that these [too] might guard themselves against evil.' (*at-Tawba:* 122)

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا نَٰجَيۡتُمُ ٱلرَّسُولَ فَقَدِّمُواْ بَيۡنَ يَدَيۡ نَجۡوَىٰكُمۡ
صَدَقَةٗۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡ وَأَطۡهَرُۚ فَإِن لَّمۡ تَجِدُواْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٌ ١٢

You who believe, when you come to speak privately with the Messenger, offer something in charity before your conversation: that is better for you and purer. If you do not have the means, God is most forgiving and merciful [12]
(The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 12)

After speaking about the kind of secret discourse which is blameworthy and forbidden, along with the kind which is permitted, the verses now turn to another form of discourse, namely discourse with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and there are special norms for this: The first of these is found in Allah’s Words: ‘Do not regard the Prophet’s summons to you [in the same light] as a summons of one of you to another…’ (*an-Nur:* 63). This means not to call Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as you call one another; do not say, ‘O, Muhammad!’ Secondly: if we want to speak privately with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* we should give charity before doing so. Scholars say that there were people who sat with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and spoke with him apart from the other attendants, doing so in order to gain a reputation as the Prophet’s secret confidants, with whom he shared things he did not with others.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to put an end to this phenomenon. How did He do so? He did so by instituting this charity which was a kind of duty for private discourse with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* did not take this charity for himself, but it was given to the poor. When this verse was revealed, those who used to go to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* with this intention were put off from continuing to do so and did not come back.

Thus, the intention of this charity was simply to curb the large number of people who would crowd around Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is like a famous doctor who is forced to raise the price of consultations, for no reason other than to reduce the number of patients who come to him.

The meaning of '…offer up something in charity on the occasion of your consultation…' (*al-Mujadala:* 12) is before the consultation, not during it. This is akin to Allah's Words: 'O, you who have attained to faith! When you are about to pray, wash your face…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6). We do not make ablutions as we are about to pray; we do so before we pray.

Those who were too stingy to give charity to the poor were so because money was more important to them than to gain the honour of speaking privately to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*; thus, Allah *Glorified is He* exposed what was in their souls with His Words '…Whenever you [intend to] consult the Prophet, offer up something in charity on the occasion of your consultation…' (*al-Mujadala:* 12).This is because the Messenger of Allah's time was divided among many areas, and he would sit with everyone, and he did not want anyone to monopolise the time he had to talk privately because he did not have enough time for this; indeed, this matter weighed heavily on him, for much was required of him. He devoted time to his Lord, to his family, to certain individuals and to the general public.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'This…', namely this charity you give before consultation, '…will be for your own good and more conducive to your [inner] purity…' (*al-Mujadala:* 12); this means the purity of your hearts. Furthermore, His Words '…Yet, if you are unable to do so, [know that] verily, Allah is Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Grace' (*al-Mujadala:* 12) indicate that this was not obligatory.

ءَأَشْفَقْتُمْ أَن تُقَدِّمُوا۟ بَيْنَ يَدَىْ نَجْوَىٰكُمْ صَدَقَـٰتٍ ۚ فَإِذْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا۟ وَتَابَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ
فَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُوا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

Were you afraid to give charity before consulting the Prophet? Since you did not give charity, and God has relented towards you, you should [at least] observe your prayers, pay the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger: God is well aware of your actions [13] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 13)

When they did not give this charity and abstained from it, Allah *the Almighty* exposed them to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: 'Do you, perchance, fear…' (*al-Mujadala:* 13) meaning: do you fear poverty so that you have not offered charity before your consultations? '…But if you fail to do it…' (*al-Mujadala:* 13) and do not go to consult the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* it is as though He were saying to them, 'You have relieved Us of yourselves and of your going to the Messenger of Allah.'

Yet 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* was an exception to this when the verse was revealed commanding that this charity be given. He later said, 'I did something that no one before or after me did. I had a *dinar*, so I exchanged it for some *dirhams*, and every time I wanted to go to see the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* I gave a dirham in charity.'

Therefore, after the verse was revealed, 'Do you, perchance, fear lest [you may be sinning if] you cannot offer up anything in charity on the occasion of your consultation…' (*al-Mujadala:* 13) and this matter was annulled, 'Ali, Allah be pleased him, continued to give this charity ever after; this is why he said, 'I did something that no one before or after me did.'(1)

Allah *the Exalted* says: '…And Allah turns unto you in His Mercy…' (*al-Mujadala:* 13); this means that He excuses you from giving this charity. He also says: '…remain but constant in prayer and render [no more than] the purifying dues, and [thus] pay heed unto Allah and His Prophet…' (*al-Mujadala:* 13). In other words, it is as He is saying, 'All you have to do is what Allah has made compulsory for you, obeying His commandments and the commandments of His Messenger. That is enough.'

Allah *the Exalted* says: '…for Allah is fully aware of all that you do.' (*al-Mujadala:* 13) This means that He knows the inner reality of things, and nothing is beyond His ken. It is as though He were saying to us, 'As long as you are only responsible for doing what is obligatory, then do it thoroughly and sincerely.' This thoroughness and sincerity in worship is like a 'deposit' for the consultation with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and a substitute for the charity which Allah has excused you from giving.

Do not forget, then, that Allah, Who gave these responsibilities to you, is fully aware of your deeds. Therefore the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* advised Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* by saying, '…And be sincere in your deeds, for He Who will judge you sees you well.'(1)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim (3753)*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ تَوَلَّوۡاْ قَوۡمًا غَضِبَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِم مَّا هُم مِّنكُمۡ
وَلَا مِنۡهُمۡ وَيَحۡلِفُونَ عَلَى ٱلۡكَذِبِ وَهُمۡ يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

Have you not seen [Prophet] those who give their loyalty to
people with whom God is angry? They are neither with you
nor with them, and knowingly swear to lies [14]
(The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 14)

This verse speaks of the alliance that existed between the hypocrites and the Jews. He *the Most High* says: ‘Are you not aware [O, Muhammad] of those who would be friends with people whom Allah has condemned…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 14); this refers to the hypocrites would be friends with those whom Allah condemned, namely the Jews. This means that they took them as allies and offered them succour.

Allah says: ‘…They are neither of you’; this refers to the believers. He also says: ‘nor of those [who utterly reject the truth]…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 14); this refers to the Jews. In the chapter of *al-Fatiha*, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…not of those who have been condemned…’ (*al-Fatiha:* 7); scholars say this means the Jews.

We explained before that hypocrisy did not emerge in Mecca but did so in Medina, and this was ultimately a good thing which shows the strength of the religion, for people only seek to infiltrate and falsely ally themselves to those who are strong. Islam was weak in Mecca, and no one had any reason to pretend to be Muslim there.

As for Medina, Islam had become strong by that time and had a high place in society, and this is why hypocrisy emerged there. 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy was the forerunner of the hypocrites in the Prophet’s city; this was because before Islam came, they were preparing to crown him as their king. (2)

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(1) *Related by Al-Haytami in Al-Zawajir (Vol. 1, p. 51)*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Dala’il (1403)*

Thus, when the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy lost his social status, and the people left him. Ibn Ubayy did not forget this and eventually started pretending to be Muslim so that he could enjoy Islam's benefits, all the while keeping his disbelief and hypocrisy hidden. His son 'Abdullah, on the other hand, embraced Islam and remained a true Muslim and was sorely grieved at his father's hypocrisy.

It is related that 'Abdullah (the son) went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Messenger of Allah, give me your leftover drinking water so I can give it to my father to drink so that perhaps Allah might cleanse his heart of this hypocrisy by means of it.' He took the leftover water to his father and told him to drink it. He asked what it was, and he told him it was the Prophet's leftover drinking water. His father replied, 'Bring me your mother's urine instead!'(1)

'Abdullah grew angry at this and went to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O, Messenger of Allah, you and I both know what my father is, and I fear that one of the believers will kill him in his rancour. If this must happen, command me, then and I shall kill him myself so that I feel no resentment towards my father's killer.' The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'Be kind to him.'(2) From that day forth, Ibn Ubayy was always treated well for the sake of his son 'Abdullah.

Thus, the strength of Islam and the strength of the faith emerged in the souls of Muhammad's followers in Medina in a way which was unprecedented. Reflect on how 'Abdullah told the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* he would be willing to kill his own father. Reflect also on the brotherhood that existed among the Emigrants and Helpers, to the point where a Helper would say to an Emigrant, 'I have many wives, so see which one pleases you, and I will divorce her and you can marry her.'

It is common knowledge that a man might happily give away anything he has, except his wife. This kind of generosity was unprecedented in history, and therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says of them: ‘And those who, before them, had their abode in this realm and in faith—[those] who love all that come to them in search of refuge and who harbour in their hearts no grudge for whatever the others may have been given; rather, they give them preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot…’ (*al-Hashr:* 9).

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(1) *Narrated in a slightly different form by 'Abd ibn-Hamid and ibn Al-Mundhir; also related by At-Tabari in his Tafsir*

(2) *Narrated by As-Suhayli in Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf (Vol. 4, p. 350)*

Thus, the friendship that existed between the hypocrites and Jews was problematic for the Muslims since the hypocrites would mix with the Muslims and even perhaps pray in the front row at the mosque, and then go and pass information about them on to the Jews.

This was the danger posed by hypocrisy and the hypocrites. They were more dangerous than the disbelievers of Mecca or the Jews because a disbeliever and Jew were open in their enmity, whilst a hypocrite concealed his enmity. This is why Allah places them in the lowest level of hell. Allah says: ‘…and so they swear to a falsehood while they know [it to be false].’ (*al-Mujadala:* 14) They know that they are lying, and they know that Allah will reveal to His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* what is in their souls and their minds, and had they any insight, they would realise that the Prophet had a connection to Heaven and would thus believe in him and follow him.

What is incredible is that they swear to their falsehoods in this word and lie to one another, and even in the Hereafter they will swear to falsehoods. Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they will say: ‘...By Allah, our Lord, we did not [mean to] ascribe divinity to aught beside Him!’ (*al-An‘am:* 23) Also, He says: ‘and would persist in heinous sinning [*hinth,* which also means ‘lying’].’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 46) So they will even try to lie to Allah in the Hereafter.

Allah tells us what their fate will be:

أَعَدَّ ٱللَّهُ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٗا شَدِيدًاۖ إِنَّهُمۡ سَآءَ مَا كَانُواْ يَعۡمَلُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

God has prepared a severe torment for them: what they do is truly evil [15] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 15)

Indeed, Allah has prepared for them—the hypocrites—a severe chastisement, more heinous and severe than that of disbelievers: ‘Verily, the hypocrites shall be in the lowest depth of the fire, and you will find none who could succour them.' (*an-Nisa':* 145)

Allah says: 'Behold, evil'; this means vile '…indeed is what they are wont to do' (*al-Mujadala:* 15); they pretended to be believers when their hearts harbour disbelief.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱتَّخَذُوٓا۟ أَيْمَٰنَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا۟ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ١٦

They have used their oaths to cover up [their false deeds], and barred others from the path of God. A humiliating torment awaits them [16] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 16)

The True Lord *the Most High* wants to expose them and reveal their games. Before, He said that they '...swear to a falsehood while they know [it to be false]' (*al-Mujadala:* 14); this means that they swear they are not hypocrites. In this verse, He says: 'They have made their oaths (*aymaan*) a cover...' (*al-Mujadala:* 16). The word *aymaan* is the plural of *yameen*, which means 'oath'. Swearing and oath making are methods of deception in which they are adept and behind which they hide.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...a cover...' (*al-Mujadala:* 16); *junna* means a shield; they would use their oaths as shields to hide behind, just as a warrior protects himself with a shield or armour.

The root verb *janna* means to cover and conceal; it is used to describe how the night covers the land with darkness. *Junna* when used for a person means 'to go insane'; *junayna* means a covered garden that gives shade to those who walk in it; the *mijann* is the shield a soldier carries to protect his breast. A poet (1) said:

My shield (*mijann*), to protect me from those I feared,
Was three people: two buxom girls and teenage lass!

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(1) *It was 'Umar Al-Makhzumi (23-93 A.H.).*

Therefore, our master 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* used the door of the fort of Khaybar as his shield at the Battle of Khaybar; now the shield only protects the front, not the back, and he said of this, 'By Allah, may I not survive if I show them my back!'(1)

This was the state of the hypocrites, for they took their false oaths as a cover to shield them and conceal their disbelief so that they could live amongst the Muslims and take advantage of their benefits and share in their agreements, enjoying their protection over their persons and their possessions. They sought only to deceive the believers when they proclaimed their Islam whilst concealing their disbelief.

However, 'Behold, the hypocrites seek to deceive Allah—the while it is He Who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]...' (*an-Nisa':* 142). Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Thus, have they [always] schemed, but Allah brought their scheming to nought, for Allah is above all schemers.' (*al-Anfal:* 30) This means 'Though you may benefit from your hypocrisy in the life of this world and make an ephemeral gain from it, you shall find the consequences for it in the Hereafter.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...and thus, they have turned others away from the Path of Allah...' (*al-Mujadala:* 16). They turn other's away from the Path of Allah, so they are responsible for the consequent sins of others as well as their own sins: '...hence, shameful suffering awaits them.' (*al-Mujadala:* 16) The shameful suffering is that which will abuse and humiliate them.

In this way, Allah *the Almighty* will punish them with all kinds of suffering; sometimes He says 'grievous', sometimes 'mighty', sometimes 'painful' and sometimes 'shameful'. All this will be a just requital for the harm they have inflicted on the call of Islam and the way they have hurt Muslims and infiltrated them hypocritically.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *This is related by Al-Assami in Samt An-Nujum Al-'Awali (p.821).*

لَّن تُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَٰلُهُمْ وَلَآ أَوْلَـٰدُهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا ۚ
أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَـٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Neither their wealth nor their children will be of
any use to them against God – they will be the
inhabitants of Hell, where they will remain [17]
(The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 17)

This means that neither the worldly possessions which their hypocrisy was meant to preserve, nor their children which their hypocrisy was meant to protect and save, will benefit them or keep from them the manifold punishments which await them.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '...It is they who are destined (*ashab*) for the fire...' (*al-Mujadala:* 17). They and the fire are like companions (*ashab*) or friends because they have chosen to accompany those things which lead to hell; they love the sins which send them there, and thus, there is a kind of companionship between them and hell theirin 'to abide!' (*al-Mujadala:* 17); they will remain therein forever, neither leaving it nor having it leave them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ جَمِيعًا فَيَحْلِفُونَ لَهُۥ كَمَا يَحْلِفُونَ لَكُمْ ۖ
وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ عَلَىٰ شَىْءٍ ۚ أَلَآ إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ ٱلْكَـٰذِبُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

On the Day God raises them all from the dead,
they will swear before Him as they swear before you now,
thinking that it will help them. What liars they are! [18]
(The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 18)

What this means is that their tongues have become so accustomed to lying that they do not know anything else. Just as they used to lie to you in the life of this world and swear to you that they were not hypocrites, so too in the Hereafter they will swear to Allah saying as He *the Most High* tells us: '...By Allah, our Lord, we did not [mean to] ascribe divinity to aught beside Him!' (*al-An'am:* 23) This is such an incredible thing; even in the Hereafter and after they have seen with their own eyes the truth they once denied and come to know that Allah is real, they will still lie to Him!

The Words ‘...them all...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 18) mean that on the Day of Resurrection Allah will bring forth the Jews and hypocrites who made alliances with them; He will bring them all forth together, for they will share the same fate. In the life of this world, they used to be allies with them and aid them, and he who loves a people shall be raised alongside them.(1)

It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* was consoling His Messenger and setting him at ease by saying to him: ‘On the Day when Allah will raise them all from the dead...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 18); it is like Allah is saying: ‘O, Muhammad, wait this Day, and you shall see how Allah will requite them as they deserve.’

He then says: ‘...they will swear before Him as they [now] swear before you, thinking that they are on firm ground [in their assumptions]. Oh, verily, it is they who are the [greatest] liars!’ (*al-Mujadala:* 18) This means that they imagine that they are in the right, yet ‘...Oh, verily, it is they who are the [greatest] liars!’ (*al-Mujadala:* 18) They think this, but you should be aware that they are, in fact, nothing but liars. The word ‘Oh’ in this verse is meant to alert us to the statement which follows. This means do not let it escape your attention that these people are treacherous liars.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱسۡتَحۡوَذَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ فَأَنسَىٰهُمۡ ذِكۡرَ ٱللَّهِۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ حِزۡبُ
ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِۚ أَلَآ إِنَّ حِزۡبَ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ هُمُ ٱلۡخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Satan has gained control over them and made them forget God. They are on Satan’s side, and Satan’s side will be the losers [19] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 19)

This means that they did all this and became hypocrites because ‘Satan has gained mastery over them...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 19); Satan overcame their minds and their thoughts, and thus ‘...caused them to remain oblivious of the remembrance of Allah...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 19). This is his mission, which he swore to undertake when he said, ‘Then, [I swear] by Your Might, I shall most certainly beguile them all into grievous error. [All] save such of them as are truly Your servants!’

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(1) *The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'A man shall be (resurrected) with those he loves.' Narrated by Al-Bukhari (5703) and Muslim (4779)*

(*Sad:* 82-83). He said: '...I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Your straight way.' (*al-A'raf:* 16) What this means is that he shall lie in wait for them on the road of obedience so that he might ruin it for them. This is why we said he does not go to bars but to mosques in order to spoil the obedience of the obedient. So when a misgiving from Satan comes to you as you pray, all you have to do is say the words Allah taught you: 'Hence, if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs you up [to blind anger], seek refuge with Allah...' (*Fussilat:* 36).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '...Such as these…'; this means hypocrites '...are Satan's partisans...' (*al-Mujadala:* 19). The word 'Oh' comes again to command our full attention: '...Oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Satan, who will truly be the losers!' (*al-Mujadala:* 19) The word *hizb* (partisans) comes from the verb *hazaba* which means 'to cause concern' such as a thought which occupies you so that you cannot stop thinking about it.

Thus, *hizb* is a word used for every group that ascribes to one opinion, serves this opinion, and propagates it. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* calls believers 'Allah's partisans', and disbelievers and hypocrites 'Satan's partisans'. Furthermore, He passes judgment on Allah's partisans by saying: '...behold, it is they, the partisans of Allah, who shall be victorious' (*al-Ma'ida:* 56), while saying of Satan's partisans: '...Oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Satan, who will truly be the losers!' (*al-Mujadala:* 19)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُحَآدُّونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥٓ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ فِي ٱلۡأَذَلِّينَ ٢٠
كَتَبَ ٱللَّهُ لَأَغۡلِبَنَّ أَنَا۠ وَرُسُلِيٓۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٞ ٢١

Those who oppose God and His Messenger will be among the most humiliated [20] God has written, 'I shall most certainly win, I and My messengers.' God is powerful and almighty [21] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 20 - 21)

We said that '...contend (*yuhaddun*) against Allah and His Prophet...' (*al-Mujadala:* 20) means that they put themselves on one side, and Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other side, separating themselves from Allah. A *hadd* is a boundary which separates two things for two different claimants.

Allah *the Exalted* says: '...It is they who [on Judgment Day] shall find themselves among the most abject.' (*al-Mujadala:* 20) As long as a servant separates himself from his Lord, he will inevitably end up abject and humiliated because a man only attains dignity through his Lord, even if he is a disbeliever, for Allah provides for believer and disbeliever alike because they are all His servants, and He called them all into this life, and therefore undertook to provide for all of them.

You all remember you story(1) of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* when a guest came to his door one night. He asked him about his religion, and the man said he was a Zoroastrian, so Ibrahim (Abraham) closed the door in his face, and the man went away. Allah *the Almighty* rebuked His prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* for treating the visitor this way and said to him: 'Ibrahim (Abraham), I allow him to exist in My dominion though he disbelieves in Me, yet you want him to change his religion in return for a single night's hospitality!'

So, our master Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*rushed after the man, found him, and then invited him to be his guest. He said to him, 'I came to you, but you turned me away.' Ibrahim (Abraham) said, 'My Lord rebuked me for treating you so.' The man said, 'He rebuked you on my account? What a fine Lord Who rebukes His loved ones on account of His enemies.' He then testified that there is no deity but Allah.

'[For] Allah has thus ordained (*kataba*): "I shall most certainly prevail, I and My prophets!' Verily, Allah is Powerful, Almighty!' (*al-Mujadala:* 21) The word *kataba* 'to ordain' or 'decree' literally means 'to write'; writing implies recording something so that it is preserved. That Allah and His prophets will prevail is a fate which He has decreed and recorded, and so nothing can prevent it or change it. None can come between Allah *the Exalted* and the fulfilment of His Decrees, or the fruition of His ordainments.

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(1) *The story of our master Ibrahim (Abraham) peace be upon him and his guest, the fire worshipper*

Therefore, He calls the Noble Quran a ‘Book’ (*Kitab*) because it is inscribed and written down to remain forever, written on pages, and He called it Quran because it is recited *yuqra’* and memorised in hearts.

Allah is destined to prevail because He is Powerful in His Essence *Glorified is He* and His prophets are destined to prevail because He lends to them His Power, Grace, and Might. They are His servants and His emissaries to his created beings, so how could He abandon or forsake them?

Therefore, He *the Most High* says: ‘For, long ago has Our Word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they—they indeed—would be succoured and that, verily, Our hosts—they indeed—would [in the end] be victorious!’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173) Could it be imagined that Allah would send a messenger with His Message of guidance and the religion which He has approved, and then leave him to be defeated by the forces of falsehood? How could this be when He only sends messengers to establish His Guidance and put an end to the falsehood which has overcome their communities?: ‘They aim to extinguish Allah’s Light with their utterances, but Allah has willed to spread His Light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth.’ (*as-Saff:* 8)

Thus, the victory of truth over falsehood is one of the ways of Allah in His creation. Why is it that it now seems to us that falsehood is triumphing over truth? As we said before, when you see the supporters of truth being defeated by the supporters of falsehood, know that the fault is their own because they have failed to live up to the necessary conditions of being forces of truth which would have guaranteed victory for them.

We saw this principle manifested at the Battle of Uhud when the archers disobeyed the command of their leader, thus ensuring that their enemies would gain the upper hand over them.(1) We also see it manifested in many present-day situations.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants to affirm this fact and ingrain it in the souls of believers, that they become ever more certain that Allah will succour them. Therefore, Allah says: ‘...I shall most certainly prevail...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 21); He is emphasising this with the words ‘most certainly’, as though He were swearing by it and saying: ‘By My Might and My Majesty, I shall most certainly prevail as shall My prophets.’

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (3737), Abu-Dawud (2288) and Ahmad (17853)*

He then adds further affirmation by repeating the pronoun ‘I’ again; He also uses words of emphasis more than once when He says: ‘For, long ago has Our Word gone forth unto Our servants, the message-bearers, that, verily, they—they indeed—would be succoured and that, verily, Our hosts—they indeed—would [in the end] be victorious!’ (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘...Verily, Allah is Powerful, Almighty!’ (*al-Mujadala:* 21) This is why He will always prevail: He is the All-Powerful Who prevails by means of His intrinsic Power, and He is the Almighty Who cannot be defeated. If He willed it, He would prevail over them directly, along with taking them to task as only the Almighty Determiner can; however, what He wants is you, believer, to have the honour of prevailing over them: ‘Fight against them! Allah will chastise them by your hands, will bring disgrace upon them and will succour you against them, and He will soothe the bosoms of those who believe.’ (*at-Tawba:* 14) Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ يُوَآدُّونَ مَنْ حَآدَّ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَلَوْ كَانُوٓا۟
ءَابَآءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَآءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَٰنَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ ۚ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ كَتَبَ فِى قُلُوبِهِمُ ٱلْإِيمَـٰنَ
وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِّنْهُ ۖ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّـٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَـٰرُ خَـٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ رَضِىَ
ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا۟ عَنْهُ ۚ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ حِزْبُ ٱللَّهِ ۚ أَلَآ إِنَّ حِزْبَ ٱللَّهِ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

[Prophet], you will not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day giving their loyalty to those who oppose God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or other relations: these are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His spirit. He will let them enter Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay: God is well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are on God’s side, and God’s side will be the one to prosper [22] (The Quran, *al-Mujadala:* 22)

The word ‘not’ in this verse is a negation, meaning that you will never find any people of faith loving and making alliances with the people of disbelief and hypocrisy who contend against Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings* *be upon him* because these attributes are opposites, which can never meet. The meaning of ‘love’ in this verse is the affection of the heart.

We said that ‘...contends against Allah and His Prophet...’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22) means to put oneself on one side, and Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* on the other side, thus denying oneself any connection with Allah and any nearness to Him. This is what disbelievers and hypocrites do.

This is one of those verses which those orientalists who search for ‘mistakes’ in the Quran have objected to. They ask how this verse can stand alongside Allah’s Words: ‘[Revere your parents] yet should they endeavour to make you ascribe divinity, side by side with Me, to something which your mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not, but [even then] bear them company in this world’s life with kindness...’ (*Luqman:* 15).

The first one commands us not to love them, and the second commands us to keep their company with kindness.

Now this confusion is a result of their lack of understanding of the meaning of the Quran, along with their unsound knowledge of Arabic. There is a clear difference between love and kind companionship; love is an emotion of the heart and can only exist between a believer and his fellow believer; as for kindness, it means the goodness you offer to all people, believers and disbelievers alike, and the favour you extend to your parents, even if they are disbelievers, since they were the direct cause of your existence in this world, and to respect them is to respect the higher cause of your existence: the True Lord *Glorified is He*.

Therefore He *the Most High* says: ‘And worship Allah [alone], and do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him. And do good unto your parents...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 36). Yet, they do not have any right to your deeper affection or love because the divergence in belief and their decision to contend against Allah denies them this filial love. Relations are not only a matter of blood and kinship, then, but also a matter of religion and faith.

Therefore, this verdict is universal. Examine any relationship, and you will never find people who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, and yet despite this faith, love those who contend against Allah and His Messenger. This does not exist, even if those who contend against Allah and is Messenger are ‘...their fathers, their sons, their brothers or [others of] their kindred...' (*al-Mujadala:* 22). He lists all the levels of relations in this verse, and 'kindred' (*'ashira*) means all those who live alongside one aside from the others mentioned here.

Allah *the Exalted* then describes the people of faith who base their relationships on faith in Allah and never put anyone else before it by saying: '...[As for the true believers] it is they in whose hearts He has inscribed faith...' (*al-Mujadala:* 22); this means that He has strengthened it in their hearts so that it will not leave them and more besides: '...and whom He has strengthened with inspiration (*ruh*) from Himself...' (*al-Mujadala:* 22). This does not mean the primary spirit (*ruh*) of life; it means that He aids their faith with another spirit of inspiration from Himself and special inspiration of His Light and Grace. An example of this is what He says about His righteous servant: '...on whom We had bestowed Grace from Ourselves and unto whom We had imparted knowledge [issuing] from Ourselves' (*al-Kahf:* 65); this is in addition to the content of the message. Furthermore, He *the Most High* says: 'O, you who have attained to faith! If you remain conscious of Allah, He will endow you with a standard by which to discern the true from the false...' (*al-Anfal:* 29). This means that if you are conscious of Allah by doing what He commands and staying away from what He forbids, as has been conveyed to you by the Quran, He will give you another criterion as well, namely a light from Himself and a special illumination by which you will be able to discern truth from falsehood. These are special graces from Allah to those who have faith, and therefore, the righteous servant said: '...And I did not do [any of] this of my own accord...' (*al-Kahf:* 82).

Thus, there is a spirit for the material by means of which bodies live; this is the spirit which Allah blew into Adam *peace be upon him* when he was still in the clay stage, and there is another spirit for moral values and psychic matters, a spirit of inspiration which gives life to the heart. This is the spirit of which Allah says: 'And thus, too, [O, Muhammad] have We revealed unto you a life-giving message (*ruh*), [coming] at Our behest…' (*ash-Shura:* 52).

Therefore, orientalists also raise an objection to Allah's Words: 'O, you who have attained to faith! Respond to the call of Allah and the Prophet whenever he calls you unto that which will give you the life…' (*al-Anfal:* 24). They say, ‘How can He say this to them when they are already alive?’ We answer this by saying that what is meant here is the life of the heart and the life of moral values, and therefore He *the Most High* says: ‘…Light upon light!’ (*an-Nur:* 35).

He then tells us how these people will be rewarded: ‘…He will admit [them] into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide. Well-pleased is Allah with them, and well-pleased are they with Him…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22). He will admit them into these gardens because He is well pleased with all their deeds, and when Allah is well pleased with someone, He showers them with His goodly favour and is never displeased with them thereafter. This goodly favour will be a grace from Allah and an addition to the delights of paradise which they will have already attained.

The Sacred Hadith says that after He admits them into paradise, and they see all the delights therein which are beyond their wildest dreams; the True Lord *Glorified is He* will speak to them by saying: 'Today I shower you with My goodly favour so that I shall never be displeased with you again.'(1)

His Words ‘…and well-pleased are they with Him…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22) mean that they will be pleased with His gifts and graces or that they were always pleased with them and He with them—this is from a perspective which is beyond the confines of time.

The word ‘gardens’, a plural, means that each believer in the Hereafter will have more than one garden; this is further indicated by His Words in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: ‘But for those who of their Lord’s Presence stand in fear, two gardens [of paradise are readied].’ (*ar-Rahman:* 46) They say that there will be multiple gardens because He is addressing a plurality of people, each of which will have one garden, or alternatively because He is addressing the ‘two nations’ of men and jinns, each of which will have their own garden.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…They are Allah’s partisans…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22). Earlier, He said of disbelievers and hypocrites: ‘…Such as these are Satan’s partisans…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 19); thus, Allah passed judgment on them: ‘…Oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Satan, who will truly be the losers!’ (*al-Mujadala:* 19) In this verse, He says of the faithful: ‘…They are Allah’s partisans…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22); thus, He passes judgment on them: ‘…Oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Allah, who shall attain to a happy state!’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari (6067) and Muslim (5057)*

Compare the two partisans and see the difference between the two groups: those shall be the losers, and these shall be the successful. Allah’s partisans are those who chose to have allegiance to His Guidance, coming together in its name, supporting it, carrying its banner, and defending it.

He again uses the word ‘Oh’ in this verse to draw our attention, meaning: ‘Pay attention to this verdict, and do not forget it or become oblivious of it.’: ‘…Oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Allah, who shall attain to a happy state (*muflihun*)!’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22) This word is derived from *falah* which means literally to farm the earth by ploughing it and readying it for sowing. That *falah* preserves material life, whilst this *falah* preserves the bliss of the life to come.

the chapter of

al-Hashr

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Hashr* (1) :

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ١

Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God; He is the Almighty, the Wise [1]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 1)

First of all, notice the connection between the end of the chapter of *al-Mujadila* and the chapter of *al-Hashr*. The last verses of the chapter of *al-Mujadila* tell us of the partisans of Satan by saying, '…Such as these are Satan's partisans. Oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Satan, who will truly be the losers' (*al-Mujadala:* 19) and then of the partisans of Allah by saying: '…They are Allah's partisans. Oh, verily, it is they, the partisans of Allah, who shall attain to a happy state!' (*al-Mujadala:* 22)

In this verse, the True Lord *Glorified is He* wanted to give us a practical example of each partisan and a working demonstration of these theoretical principles by telling us what some of Satan's partisans did, and what some of Allah's partisans did.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extol Allah's limitless Glory…' (*al-Hashr:* 1) There are similar verses to this one in the Quran. In the chapter of *al-Hadid*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All that is in the heavens and on earth extols Allah's limitless Glory…' (*al-Hadid:* 1); He says this without repeating 'all that is'; the difference between them is that the repetition of ‘all that is’ means that Allah has forces that dwell in the heavens alone, and others that dwell on earth alone. There are also forces of Allah *the Almighty* that dwell both in the heavens and on earth.

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(1) This chapter is number 59 in the written order of the Quran, revealed in Medina.It contains 24 verses and was revealed in between the chapter of *al-Bayyina* and the chapter of *an-Nasr*.

Thus, His Words ‘All that is in the heavens and on earth extols Allah’s limitless Glory…’ (*al-Hadid:* 1) refer to those forces which serve both the heavens and the earth, and when He says: ‘All that is in the heavens and on earth extols Allah’s limitless Glory, for He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise!’ (*al-Hashr:* 1); this means the angels of the heavens alone and the angels of earth alone.

This means that everything in the universe extols Allah’s Glory. He *the Most High* says: ‘…and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless Glory and Praise…’ (*al-Isra’:* 44); this means that everything in the universe extols Allah’s Glory: ‘…but you [O, men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!...’ (*al-Isra’:* 44)

This means that the glorification of all things is real glorification, not merely an allusion to how they are evidences of Allah’s existence, as some exegetes say.(1) Were this true, Allah *Glorified is He* would not have then said: ‘…but you [O, men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him!...’ (*al-Isra’:* 44)

So everything in the universe glorifies Allah with its own language, and we do not understand these languages, for every kind of being has its own special language with which it communicates. Did the ant not say: ‘…"O, you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Sulaiman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]"’ (*an-Naml:* 18)? Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* heard this and understood it because of the understanding Allah vouchsafed to him.

The hoopoe said: ‘…I have encompassed [with my knowledge] something that you have never yet encompassed [with yours] for I have come to you from Sheba with a tiding sure!’ (*an-Naml:* 22) Therefore, it showed a sound understanding of Allah’s Oneness, for it said: ‘Behold, I found there a woman ruling over them, and she has been given [abundance] of all [good] things, and hers is a mighty throne. And I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made these doings of theirs seem goodly to them, and [thus] has barred them from the path [of Allah] so that they cannot find the right way.' (*an-Naml:* 23-24)

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(1) *Az-Zamakhshari was one of those who said this.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says about inanimate objects: '…And We caused the mountains to join Dawud (David) in extolling Our limitless Glory and likewise the birds, for We are able to do [all things].' (*al-Anbiya':* 79) Thus, it is a real glorification with a spoken language, which can be understood by those to whom Allah vouchsafes this understanding.

By meaning of 'extolling glory' is to ascribe total uniqueness to Allah in His Essence, for His Essence is not like other essences and in His Attributes, for His Attributes are not like the attributes of others, and in His Acts, for His Acts are not like the acts of others.

Furthermore, we must understand all this in the light of '…there is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11) and with the knowledge that He *the Exalted* alone possesses absolute perfection. If we should read, for example, '…and [He] is established on the throne of His Almightiness…' (*al-Hadid:* 4), we should not say that He 'sits' or 'settles' as we do; rather, He is established in a way that suits His Majesty *Glorified is He*.

When you read 'Limitless in His Glory is He Who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship…' (*al-Isra':* 1), do not say that this is beyond human power and ability, for Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not transport himself by his own human power, but he was taken, and Allah's act is not like the act of mankind, nor is His Power like their power.

The root word *s-b-h* (from which *sabbaha*, 'to extol the glory of' comes) occurs in the Quran with its different derivations more than 179 times. Sometimes it occurs as *subhan* added to the Name of Allah, meaning 'glory be to' and sometimes added to the pronoun as in 'glory be to Him' or 'glory be to You'; sometimes it is given as a verb meaning 'to extol the glory of', whether perfect (*sabbah*), imperfect (*yusabbih*) or imperative (*sabbih*).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extol (*sabbah*) Allah's limitless Glory…' (*al-Hashr:* 1). The perfect tense is used here, referring to the time before Allah created man to extol Him; furthermore, once He created him, he extolled Him. Thus, He says: ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extol Allah’s limitless Glory…’ (*al-Hashr:* 1); man extols Allah’s Glory and will continue to do so until the Day of Resurrection.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…for He alone is Almighty (*‘aziz*), Truly Wise.’ (*al-Hashr:* 1) The word *‘aziz* literally means something rare and unique as is the case when Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘nor is this difficult (*‘aziz*) for Allah.’ (*Fatir:* 17) Another of its meanings is one who overcomes all and cannot be overcome.

The ‘truly wise’ one is he who puts all things in their proper places with precision and wisdom. Allah is Wise in His creation, in His Will, in His Decree and in His Measure. Consider the hair on the human body, for example; you will find that some of it is shaven, some trimmed, and some not cut at all, like the hair of the eyebrows and the eyelashes. This is because it was created for a wise purpose, which it cannot fulfil if we cut it. The wisdom behind it is the protection of the eyes from dust, so it is not trimmed or shaved.

Consider as well the temperature of the human body; you will find that its average is 37°C. The body keeps itself at this temperature: whether he lives at the equator or the North Pole; a man stays at this temperature. Thus, there is wisdom in the human body itself: ‘Just as [there are signs thereof] within your own selves. Can you not then see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21)

In the same body, you find that one organ (the liver) is 40°C, whilst another is 9°C (the eyes); yet neither one disturbs the temperature of the other: the temperature of the liver does not spread to the eye, for example. This and many other examples like it show the wisdom of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

The discourse then moves us on to a practical example of Allah’s partisans and Satan’s partisans:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَخْرَجَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ مِن دِيَـٰرِهِمْ لِأَوَّلِ ٱلْحَشْرِ ۚ مَا
ظَنَنتُمْ أَن يَخْرُجُوا۟ ۖ وَظَنُّوٓا۟ أَنَّهُم مَّانِعَتُهُمْ حُصُونُهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ فَأَتَىٰهُمُ
ٱللَّهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَمْ يَحْتَسِبُوا۟ ۖ وَقَذَفَ فِى قُلُوبِهِمُ ٱلرُّعْبَ ۚ يُخْرِبُونَ بُيُوتَهُم
بِأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَيْدِى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَٱعْتَبِرُوا۟ يَـٰٓأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَبْصَـٰرِ ﴿٢﴾

It was He who drove those of the People of the Book who broke faith out from their homes at the first gathering of forces — you [believers] never thought they would go, and they themselves thought their fortifications would protect them against God. God came up on them from where they least expected and put panic into their hearts: their homes were destroyed by their own hands, and the hands of the believers. Learn from this, all of you with insight! [2]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 2)

The pronoun 'He' refers to the True Lord *the Most High* Whose Glory is extolled by all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth and Who is Almighty and truly Wise. 'He it is Who turned out of their homes, at the time of [their] first gathering [for war] such of the followers of earlier revelation as were bent on denying the truth…' (*al-Hashr:* 2). This refers to the Jews of Banu Nadir,(1) who lived on the outskirts of Medina until the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* exiled them to Khaybar*;* this was 'the first gathering'.

In this verse, the word *li* (which usually means 'for') means 'at' when He says: '…at (*li*) the time of [their] first gathering…' (*al-Hashr:* 2); this usage is also found in His words 'Be constant in [your] prayer from (*li*) the time when the sun has passed its zenith…' (*al-Isra':* 78). The second gathering took place when the Muslims exiled them from Arabia to the Levant during the rule of Caliph 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him*.

The meaning of 'gathering' (*hashr*) in this verse is that they were all gathered in one narrow place; the verb *inhashar* means to enter a very narrow place where there is not enough room. In other words, the size of the object is greater than the size of the container.

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(1) *They are a Jewish tribe who lived on the outskirts of Medina. They had a treaty with the Prophet* peace and blessings be upon him *for four years, but they helped the idolaters of Mecca to invade Medina at the Battle of Uhud, so the Prophet* peace and blessings be upon him *banished them from the city.*

However, why did Allah turn the Jews out of Medina to Khaybar, and then to the Levant? They say it is because they betrayed the covenant they had made with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* and declared war on him, and even aided the idolaters of Mecca against him. It is strange that originally the enmity existed between the Jews and the disbelievers of Mecca because the Jews were people of the Book and followers of a Divinely revealed religion, whilst the disbelievers of Mecca were idolaters.

Due to this, the Jews used to predict their victory over the disbelievers by saying: ‘The time is nigh for the coming of a new prophet in whom we will believe and with whom we will slay you as ‘Ad and Iram were slain.’(1) Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And whenever there came unto them a [new] revelation from Allah, confirming the truth already in their possession—and [bear in mind that] a foretime they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the truth—whenever there came unto them something which they recognised [as the truth], they would deny it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 89).

When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* immigrated to Medina, they took him as their enemy and helped the disbelievers of Mecca fight against him after they had sworn to him they would never take sides against him: ‘We will be neither with you nor against you.’ Yet, they broke this covenant and helped the disbelievers of Mecca; they sent Ka‘b ibn Al-Ashraf to Mecca with forty Jewish knights, where they met with Abu Sufyan and went with him, alongside forty more knights from Mecca, to the *Ka’ba*, upon whose hangings they swore to join together in fighting Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Message.(2)

However, the True Lord *the Most High* informed His Messenger of what they were plotting against him by saying: ‘He it is Who turned out of their homes, at the time of [their] first gathering [for war], such of the followers of

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(1) *Suhayli, Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf, Vol. 1, p. 369*

(2*) Al-Baghawi, Tafsir*

earlier revelation as were bent on denying the truth.' (*al-Hashr:* 2) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* exiled them to Khaybar.(1)

What fuelled the enmity between the two sides was that a tribe had a treaty with Banu An-Nadir, and 'Amr ibn Umayya Al-Hadrami killed two men from that tribe, with whom the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* also had a treaty. They wanted to pay the blood money jointly, so the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* went to Banu An-Nadir and asked them for help in paying the blood-money that Al-Hadrami had incurred for killing the two men. Upon this, Ka'b ibn Al-Ashraf (whom we spoke of earlier) said, 'Muhammad has come and stood needy before us!'

They were the ones who said, 'Allah's hand is shackled' (*al-Ma'ida:* 64) and 'Behold, Allah is poor while we are rich.' (*Al-'Imran:* 181)

So, they said, 'This is a chance for us to humiliate Muhammad!' Ka'b ibn Al-Ashraf gestured for a group of them to go onto a rooftop and drop a boulder on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to get rid of him. However, Allah *the Almighty* told His Messenger what they had plotted, and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* walked away from them on foot. When he did not come back, they asked about him, and a man said, 'I saw him enter Medina.'(2)

The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* went to Muhammad ibn Maslama, Ka'b's foster-brother, and told him of Ka'b's plot to assassinate him. He instructed him to go and kill Ka'b with the company of three men whom he trusted. He took three man of the tribe of Banu Al-Harith with him and went *to Ka'b's* fortress and called for him. There was friendliness between them because they were foster-brothers, so Ka'b answered him. Muhammad said, 'I need a loan from you.' Ka'b replied, 'You know that I do not give loans without collateral.' He said, 'I have it here.'

Thus, Ka'b came down to him, but it was the first night of his wedding celebration, and his bride prevented him from leaving by saying, 'I detect the scent of blood on this voice.' However, he went down anyway, and

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(1) *A town north of Medina*

(2) *At-Tabari, Tafsir*

Muhammad took hold of him, took him away, and killed him. This enraged Banu An-Nadir, and so they made their pacts with the disbelievers of Mecca against Prophet Muhammad.(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You did not think [O, believers] that they would depart [without resistance]' (*al-Hashr:* 2). Allah is speaking to the believers: It did not cross your minds that the Jews would leave Medina, for it seemed very unlikely. Why is this so? This is due to the Jews seeming immune and powerful, backed by large numbers and resources; so, how could they possibly banish them given they were a minority?

The believers thought that it was unlikely they would be able to drive them out, but this was only surmise, not certainty, and they still had some hope that the Jews would be driven out. They experienced this in the Battle of Badr, where they were the smaller force, yet defeated, and routed the much larger disbelievers' forces.

Simultaneously, the Jews '… thought that their strongholds would protect them against Allah.' (*al-Hashr:* 2) They also thought that they had fortresses powerful enough to protect them from defeat against the believers; it was a mere thought not certainty since they too remembered the day of Badr when the Muslims were the victors despite their numerical and material disadvantage.

The cautious thing to do is to act on surmise if it is connected with something good; if you think that something is good, then do it. Allah says: 'But those who were certain that they would meet Allah said, "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allah."' (*al-Baqara:* 249) So, when it comes to good things, it is better to act on surmise.

There are many examples of this principle in our ordinary lives. For example, if we want to travel somewhere and someone tells us that a certain road is dangerous or slow and that we should take another road, and then another person says, 'Nonsense, I just travelled by that road yesterday and it was fine.' Whose opinion is best to follow?

We will follow the first opinion because it is the most cautious. We will not lose anything if we follow the road recommended by the first man, whilst the second opinion is not guaranteed, and we might follow the road and find that indeed it is dangerous or slow.

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(1) *Cf. Ibn Sayyid An-Nas, 'Uyun Al-Athar, Vol.1, p. 393*

When the poet Abu Al-‘Ala’ Al-Ma‘arri(1) came to have sound doctrine, he opposed the stargazers and those who deny the Resurrection. He said about this issue:

The stargazer and the doctor each suppose
That the bodies will not be resurrected, but I say:
If you are right, then I lose nothing,
Yet, if I am right, you will be the ones to lose!

We have here two opinions which basically said that the Jews would not be driven out: the Muslims thought that the Jews would not go, and the Jews thought that their fortresses would protect them. Furthermore, when good things come to you where you least expected them, you are all the more joyful; so, the joy of the Muslims when the Jews were driven out was all the greater, as was the woe of the Jews.

His Words ‘protect them against Allah’ (*al-Hashr:* 2) imply that they believed in Allah and were certain of the glad tidings their scriptures had given them of Muhammad’s coming. Because they rejected his message, they did not say, ‘against the Messenger of Allah’; rather, they said, ‘against Allah’.

He continues: ‘but Allah came upon them in a manner which they had not expected and cast terror into their hearts’ (*al-Hashr:* 2). Allah *the Almighty* did not literally come upon them, but it was His chastisement and punishment that came upon them, startling, routing and terrifying them ‘which they had not expected’ (*al-Hashr:* 2).

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and [He] cast terror into their hearts…’ (*al-Hashr:* 2). The word ‘cast’ means to throw forcefully, and the ‘heart’ is what pumps blood around the body. When Allah *the Almighty* casts terror and dread into the heart, the heart then pumps it around the rest of the body so that it feels severe dread and panic all over.

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(1) 363-449 A.H.

This implies that the object of this ‘casting’ enters into every corner of the container into which it is thrown, just like how, when building, they cover the wall with cement. Why do they do this? They do so because they cast the cement onto the wall forcefully so that it feeds every fissure in the wall.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[and thus] they destroyed their homes by their own hands as well as the hands of the believers.’ (*al-Hashr:* 2) This means that their stronghold homes, which they thought would protect them, were destroyed by their own hands. This may also mean that they did not do so directly, but it was their fault that their homes were destroyed by the Muslims, or it may mean that they really did destroy their own homes so that the Muslims could not benefit from them once they were gone.

There are instances of this in their history when they destroyed houses, cut down trees, and despoiled the land so that they leave rubble behind them. Whenever they left a place, they would destroy it, take with them everything from it and unhinge doors and windows.

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘Learn a lesson, then, O, you who are endowed with insight!’ (*al-Hashr:* 2) To ‘learn a lesson' means to use what has happened in the past to predict what will happen in the future. Do not rush things, for Allah is with you.

Vision is reflection that begins with sight and then moves on to 'insight'; insight can only develop if the sight is strong and the vision is alert, leading to rational conviction on the part of the one who has this insight. Thus, it is the True Lord *Glorified is He* who causes this insight to develop, by His Grace.

وَلَوْلَآ أَن كَتَبَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْجَلَآءَ لَعَذَّبَهُمْ
فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِى ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ عَذَابُ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٣﴾

If God had not decreed exile for them, He would have
tormented them [even more severely] in this world.
In the Hereafter they will have the torment
of the Fire [3] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 3)

Allah *the Almighty* decreed that they and their families leave Medina for Khaybar at first, and then for the region of Dera’a in the Levant. None of them remained in Arabia except Ibn Abu Al-Haqiq and Huyay ibn Akhtab, the father of Safiyya, the mother of the believers.

Allah *the Almighty* says, '…punished them in [this] world' with death, 'and for them in the Hereafter is the punishment of the Fire.' (*al-Hashr:* 3) What this means is that, though, they may escape the suffering of this world, they will not escape the suffering of the Hereafter. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says to His Prophet Muhammad: 'and whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death, it is to Us they will be returned.' (*Ghafir:* 77)

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ شَآقُّوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ ۖ وَمَن يُشَآقِّ ٱللَّهَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿٤﴾

Because they set themselves against God and His
Messenger: God is stern in punishment towards
anyone who sets himself against Him [4]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 4)

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'That', namely their banishment, 'because they opposed Allah and His Messenger' (*al-Hashr:* 4), they cut themselves off from Allah and His Messenger and therefore all of this happened to them. They declared war on Allah and His Messenger and his mission.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And whoever opposes Allah—then indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.' (*al-Hashr:* 4) Some say that this sentence is coupled with the previous sentence, but in fact, it is a new sentence. After telling us about the Jews, and what they did, Allah *the Exalted* and then begins a new sentence, disconnected to what preceded it, affirming both a principle and a fact of nature.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'whoever opposes Allah' (*al-Hashr:* 4); this means that whoever shows enmity to Him and waging war on His Guidance, his fate will be severe retribution from Allah, to Whom he showed enmity instead of drawing near to Him and attaching himself to Him. This is a principle of faith of which one must never lose sight.

Notice here that the verse first says, 'That is because they opposed Allah and His Messenger' (*al-Hashr:* 4), and then in the other sentence says, 'And whoever opposes Allah' without mentioning His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This means that to obey the Messenger is to obey Allah, and that to cut oneself off from Allah is to cut oneself off from the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* at the same time, for Allah says: ‘He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 80)

One of the unique distinctions Allah gave to His Messenger apart from all other messengers was that the right to legislate for his community by saying: ‘And whatever the Messenger has given you take, and what he has forbidden you refrain from.’ (*al-Hashr:* 7)

Some want to connect this verse with the matter of the distribution of the spoils after the Battle of Hunayn alone,(1) but the principle of Sacred Law is that laws are based on the general applicability of the words, not the specificity of the circumstance.

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

مَا قَطَعۡتُم مِّن لِّينَةٍ أَوۡ تَرَكۡتُمُوهَا قَآئِمَةً عَلَىٰٓ
أُصُولِهَا فَبِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِ وَلِيُخۡزِيَ ٱلۡفَٰسِقِينَ ٥

Whatever you [believers] may have done to
[their] palm trees — cutting them down or
leaving them standing on their roots — was done
by God’s leave, so that He might disgrace those
who defied Him [5] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 5)

After the Jews had done what they did, and the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had banished them, Allah *the Almighty* commanded him to cut down some of their date palms, to undermine them and to show the power of Islam. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* therefore commanded the companions to do so, and some of them cut the palms, whilst others left them. The Jews responded to this by saying, ‘O, Muhammad, were you not forbidden from despoiling the earth?’ So, Allah revealed: ‘Whatever you have cut down of [their] palm trees or left standing on their trunks—it was by permission of Allah.’ (*al-Hashr:* 5) As long as Allah *the Exalted* commanded that the trees be cut, no one could say, ‘This is despoiling the earth’ because to cut down a few date-palms was more beneficial than harmful. It corrected unsound beliefs, which far outweighs than the harm done by cutting them.

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(1) *Az-Zamakhshiri was one of those who held this opinion.*

This verse implies equivalence between cutting the palms and leaving them standing because one companion would cut one down and say, ‘I cut this down for you, O, Messenger of Allah’, and another would leave them and say, ‘I left this one for you, O Messenger of Allah!’ This means that it was right that some be cut and others left. Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and so He would disgrace the defiantly disobedient.’ (*al-Hashr:* 5) This means to humiliate them and abase them. The defiantly disobedient are those who are beyond the limits of Allah’s Commandments and His Guidance.

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

وَمَآ أَفَآءَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِۦ مِنْهُمْ فَمَآ أَوْجَفْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ خَيْلٍ وَلَا رِكَابٍ
وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُسَلِّطُ رُسُلَهُۥ عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٦﴾

You [believers] did not have to spur on your horses or your camels for whatever gains God turned over to His Messenger from them. God gives authority to His messengers over whoever He will: God has power over all things [6] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 6)

The things which believers take from disbelievers by Allah’s consent are of two kinds: *fay’* and *spoils*. *Fay’* means what is taken from them without warfare, and *spoils* means what is taken from them when they are defeated on the battlefield, which are distributed amongst believers in a designated manner.

Allah says about the *spoils* of war: ‘And know that anything you obtain of war booty—then indeed, for Allah is one fifth of it and for the Messenger and for [his] near relatives and orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer.’ (*al-Anfal:* 41) The rest is then distributed amongst those who fought in the battle. As for *fay’,* it is not given to fighters but to Allah, His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the poor.

Here, the True Lord *the Most High* is speaking to us about the *fay’* which He allowed the Muslims to take: ‘and what Allah restored [of property] to His

Messenger from them…' (*al-Hashr:* 6); this refers to what you take from disbelievers without any armed struggle.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…you did not spur for it [in an expedition] any horses or camels' (*al-Hashr:* 6). What this means is that you did not have to rush to it. This evokes the image of a knight who is keen to fight and yearns to die as a martyr.

As for 'or camels' (*al-Hashr:* 6), what this means is that Allah blessed you by making this provision come right to you lawfully without any fighting and without your having to expend any effort in getting it.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…but Allah gives His messengers the power over whom He wills, and Allah is over all things competent.' (*al-Hashr:* 6) This means that this *fay'* came to you as a grace from Allah and a gift to His Messenger; it did not come from your own efforts or your own warfare, but Allah gave his hosts mastery over it. This is akin to what He said before: 'and [He] cast terror into their hearts.' (*al-Hashr:* 2) The meaning of 'His messengers' in this verse is His hosts or His forces.The True Lord *the Most High* says:

مَّآ أَفَآءَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِۦ مِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْقُرَىٰ فَلِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ وَلِذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْيَتَـٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَـٰكِينِ
وَٱبْنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ كَىْ لَا يَكُونَ دُولَةًۢ بَيْنَ ٱلْأَغْنِيَآءِ مِنكُمْ ۚ وَمَآ ءَاتَىٰكُمُ ٱلرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ
وَمَا نَهَىٰكُمْ عَنْهُ فَٱنتَهُوا۟ ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿٧﴾

Whatever gains God has turned over to His Messenger from the inhabitants of the villages belong to God, the Messenger, kinsfolk, orphans, the needy, the traveller in need – this is so that they do not just circulate among those of you who are rich — so accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you. Be mindful of God: God is severe in punishment [7] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 7)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is for Allah and for the Messenger and for [his] near relatives, orphans and the wayfarer.' (*al-Hashr:* 7) So, this *fay'* is for Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; meaning the treasury of the Muslims and all expenditure in Allah's Cause and for the Messenger to spend from, and then it is for near kin, orphans, the needy and the wayfarers.

No part of the *fay'* is given to the warriors because it came by way of a treaty without any warfare, so they have no part in it. They only have a share of battle-spoils, which the Muslims take from their defeated enemies in war; the warriors play a part in this, so they have a right to that part of it that Allah has assigned them: ‘And know that anything you obtain of war booty —- then indeed, for Allah is one fifth of it and for the Messenger and for [his] near relatives and the orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer.’ (*al-Anfal:* 41) Warriors receive four-fifths of the battle spoils, whilst the final fifth is distributed to the same people who receive the divisions of the *fay'*. He continues: ‘so that it will not be a perpetual distribution amongst the rich from amongst you.’ (*al-Hashr:* 7) This refers to the money which circulates amongst the rich only without being passed on to the poor and the needy. Therefore, when the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* distributed these possessions, he did not give any of them to the *Ansar* but only to the poor Emigrants. When he noticed that the *Ansar* were somewhat put out by this, he said to them, ‘Are you not content that they return home with (the trifles) of this world, whilst you return home with the Messenger of Allah alongside you?’(1)

Moreover, you do not need this wealth; you are so wealthy you are able to share your wealth with your fellow Emigrant brothers. It was about the *Ansar* that Allah said: ‘give [them] preference over themselves, even though they are in privation.’ (*al-Hashr:* 9)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And whatever the Messenger has given you take, and what he has forbidden you refrain from.’ (*al-Hashr:* 7) This verse is a rebuttal to those who say that this principle is restricted to this particular situation alone; yet, Allah made it clear to them that this is a general principle because words are interpreted according to the generality of their content, not the specificity of their circumstances.

From this verse, we can deduce that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had the right to legislate and that his Lord gave him free rein in that regard. We can also adduce this verse to rebut those who say we need to follow the Quran only without the need for the *Sunnah.*

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (3992)*

The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There will soon be a time when a man will recline on his couch and be told of my sayings and will say, "We and you have the Book of Allah, so we shall make lawful what we find it says is lawful and forbid what we find it forbids."’⁽¹⁾

People from time to time emerge who deny the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and say, ‘We have the Book of Allah, so we shall make lawful what we find it says is lawful, and forbid what we find it forbids’; they deny the Hadiths of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and doubt their authenticity as an excuse not to follow them. Ironically, this stance of theirs is itself an affirmation of the Messenger’s veracity, for he was not unaware of this eventuality, yet he warned us of it so we can be immune against it. Had they not made this claim, we would have said, ‘O, Messenger of Allah, you said there will soon be a time when a man will recline on his couch and be told of my sayings, and will say, "We and you have the Book of Allah", yet how could this be, O, Messenger of Allah, when no one has said such a thing?’

So their foolish words only prove that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he said this. The True Lord *the Most High* humiliates them by allowing them to say this exact thing so that we can use the words of the Prophet’s enemies as proof of the truth of the Prophet’s words.

Without even knowing it, they affirm that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was speaking the truth. This Hadith exposes their stupidity. These fools like the idea of using the Noble Quran against the Hadith; one of them might say to you, ‘Speak to me about the Quran only.’ Glory be to Allah! Do you seek to use the Quran against the Messenger who brought you the Quran when you would not even know the Quran without him?’

We say to those who make such statements: How many *rak’as* are in the dawn prayer, the midday prayer, the afternoon prayer, the sunset prayer and the evening prayer? He will say that they have two, four, four, three, and four *rak’as* respectively. Furthermore, if we ask him where he gets this from, he will say, ‘The *Sunnah*!’

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(1) *Related by Abu Dawud (3988), At-Tirmidhi (2588), Ibn Majah (12) and Ahmad (16546)*

So, you must follow the *Sunnah* in order to pray, and you cannot understand the practical application of many laws without recourse to the *Sunnah*. How does he know that the sunset prayer has three *rak'as* (kneeling rounds)? From the Quran, which he is solely loyal, or from the *Sunnah* which he denies? How can he worship according to the words of the Messenger of Allah, and then deny these words?

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah; but those who turn away - We have not sent you over them as a guardian.' (*an-Nisa':* 80) To obey the Messenger is to obey Allah, and this is only logical since messengers only pass on what they were told to say.

If the obedience of Allah coincides with the obedience of His Messenger, then we obey them both; if Allah gives a general commandment, such as the command to pay the *zakat*, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* gives the details of this, then we obey Allah in the general command, and we obey the Messenger in the details.

The Quran is not only a book of laws like some previous scriptures, but it is a miraculous scripture. Because of this, Allah included some principles and laws in it and left the rest for the Messenger to explain and clarify in the Blessed *Sunnah*, giving him the right to legislate with these words: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you take, and what he has forbidden you refrain from.' (*al-Hashr:* 7) Allah *the Almighty* gave His Messenger the general freedom to legislate and to give the details of what the True Lord included in the Quran in a general way. This is a unique matter by which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is distinguished apart from all other prophets and messengers.

The Prophet's legislation is thus prescribed and permitted by the Quran itself, and therefore, if anyone comes to you with a ruling and says to you, 'Where does it say this in the Quran, for I cannot find it there?', say to him, 'The proof of this ruling in the Quran is Allah's Words: "And whatever the Messenger has given you take and what he has forbidden you refrain from.' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

When a ruling is given in the Quran in a general sense, and then the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* explains it in detail and applies it in practice, this is the end of the matter. An action is the strongest expression of command, for a spoken command might be theoretical, and some people might seek to interpret it in one way or another, but when the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* actually does it himself, the ruling becomes binding because the one who did is the one who legislated it.

Did the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* implement the punishment of stoning, or did he not? The Messenger of Allah did, and his action is a practical proclamation. An action is not like a spoken proclamation which might be explained away. The Messenger of Allah judged that Ma‘iz and Al-Ghamidiyya be stoned and also a Jewish man and woman who tried to evade their punishment on the grounds that they were married and free.

The action of the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is the basis of the ruling, and so their argument is proved to be baseless. What remains is the action of the legislator, the Messenger to whom Allah gave free rein to legislate with word, deed, and tacit approval.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is an intrinsic part of the Quranic message. An analogy to explain this from our daily lives is that someone might say, ‘If an employee is absent from his job for fifteen days, the law states that he will be fired.’ Yet, another employee comes with the constitution in his hands and says, ‘I have read the constitution and cannot find this law anywhere in it, so what you are saying about the employee being fired is unconstitutional.’

Yet, we respond to him: What the constitution says about this is that the employment authority is empowered to deal with these matters. So, there is an authority which makes the rules for employment conduct and is empowered to do so by the constitution. Every legal clause pertaining to employment is governed by this delegation of power by the constitution to the relevant authorities or committees that deal with secondary legislation.

Likewise, we pray as the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed despite the fact that the method of prayer and the number of *rak’as* in each prayer is not mentioned by Islam’s constitution, i.e. the Quran; rather, it came to us through the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and we are commanded to obey him.

Likewise, we give the amount of *zakat* that the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* specified, and we perform the pilgrimage to the House of Allah in the way the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* did. As for the prayer, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Pray as you have seen my pray’(1); and he said about the pilgrimage: ‘Take your rites from me.’(2)

Another example of this is also found in Allah’s Words: ‘Say, "I do not find within that which was revealed to me [anything] forbidden to one who would eat it unless it be a dead animal or blood spilled out or the flesh of swine"’ (*al-An‘am:* 145).

Now, if dead animal and blood are forbidden, then it would be logical to say that this applies to fish as well and that we cannot eat such organs as the liver and spleen because of the blood they contain. Yet, although the True Lord *Glorified is He* forbade the dead animal and blood in general, the Messenger of Allah, to whom He gave free rein to legislate said, ‘Two dead animals and two kinds of blood have been made lawful for me: the two dead animals are fish and locusts, and the two kinds of blood are the liver and the spleen.’(3)

This is a case where the *Sunnah* adds specificity to what the Quran says in general terms. Now if someone says, ‘The Quran forbids dead animals, while fish and locusts are as such, so why do we eat them?’ We answer that fish and locusts are not conventionally considered to be meat; this is why the saying goes ‘When locusts abound, meat is cheaper.’ This indicates that locusts are not really meat.

As for fish, they are not like the dead animals which Allah forbids because the forbidden kind of is all that could be slaughtered so that its blood runs out, whilst fish do not have the same kind of flowing blood; the same is true of locusts.

Thus, the reason they are permitted to eat when found dead is that they do not have the same kind of flowing blood which could be harmful to man if he were to eat it.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (595)*

(2) *Related by Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Kubra (5/125); Muslim narrates the like of it (2286).*

(3) *Related by Ahmad (5465) and Ibn Majah (3305) on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him*

The same is true of the liver and spleen: they do not really contain blood since blood flows whilst the liver and spleen are solid and coagulated, the remnant of the blood from which they are formed.

Another important example which illustrates the role where Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explains the rulings of the Quran is the case of the threefold pronouncement of divorce on a woman and how she can then become lawful again for the one who divorced her.

The True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Divorce is twice.' (*al-Baqara:* 229) Then: 'And if he has divorced her [for the third time], then she is not lawful to him afterward until [after] she marries a husband other than him. And if the latter husband divorces her [or dies], there is no blame upon the woman and her former husband for returning to each other if they think that they can keep [within] the limits of Allah. These are the limits of Allah, which He makes clear to a people who know.' (*al-Baqara:* 230)

Some people who wish to free themselves from this religion's laws that might cause them some effort have tried to interpret this verse in a certain way. A man might divorce his wife three times, using up all the chances that the *Shari'a* has given him so that he cannot remarry this wife unless she first marries someone else and is divorced by him. There are those who say, based on the literal meaning of the aforementioned verse, that since 'marriage' only means a contract, this means that the woman who has been divorced three times can make herself lawful for her ex-husband again by simply making a marriage contract with another man and then dissolving it.

Now had the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* not intervened, it would have been possible to understand things in this way, and say that a mere contract of marriage with another would allow the wife to return to her former husband; furthermore, had the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* not stipulated a condition for this, namely she must marry another man with a real marriage, not merely a fake one, people would play around with this ruling and conduct these fake marriages that we hear about were it not for this.(1)

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(1) *The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him said, 'May Allah curse the man who makes a fake marriage (with a woman to allow her to return to the former husband) and the one (the former husband) he does it for.' Related by Abu Dawud (1778) and Ibn Majah (1925)*

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Not until you taste his sweetness, and he tastes your sweetness.’(1) This means a real marriage involving conjugal relations. This is extremely hard on the husband, and this was the intention of the legislator to whom Allah gave the right to legislate as a punishment for the man who thinks that pronouncing divorce is a trifling matter.

We may observe here that when the *Shari’a* is precise or difficult, this is mostly not because Allah wants to make things hard for people, but that He wants to make them fearful of doing certain things. He wants them to stay clear of the pronouncement of divorce and not resort to it unless it is absolutely necessary.

Now, people who say, ‘We have the Book of Allah with us’ and reject the saying of the Messenger of Allah, have they not read the Word of the True Lord *Glorified is He* in His Book: ‘O, you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority amongst you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day’ (*an-Nisa’:* 59)?

Thus, any dispute that occurs must be about an internal matter within the perimeters of obedience to Allah; and it must be referred to an authority which can bring the dispute to an end. The matter must be referred to Allah *the Exalted* and to the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*; how, then, could anyone dare to try to ruin Islam by rejecting the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and claiming that the lawful and unlawful can be known through the Book of Allah alone? These people should be cautious that they do not become those of whom Allah says: ‘It is but a just recompense for those who make war on Allah and His Messenger.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 33) It is waging war on the Prophet to reject any word, deed, or approval of his by way of denying his Hadiths.

These people also say that there are too many Hadiths of the Messenger of Allah. We say to them that the mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lasted twenty-three years, and everything he said was a Hadith. Every word which left his lips was a blessed Hadith, and were we to count his words alone, it would fill countless volumes—never mind his deeds.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (2445) and Muslim (2587)*

Every word he heard spoken by another person, and approved of, is also a Hadith, as well as every deed someone did in his presence without his objecting to it. So how many Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* must there be? They are the second source of Islamic legislation after the Quran, so how could we dispense with it for the sake of some outside minority opinion, which the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* warned us about?

The True Lord *the Most High* then says: ‘And fear Allah’ (*al-Hashr:* 7); this means to be conscious of Allah lest you disobey, for disobedience would nullify your good deeds. Obedience of Allah is no good without obedience of His Messenger: ‘indeed, Allah is severe in penalty’ (*al-Hashr:* 7).

When we hear Allah say ‘indeed, Allah is severe in penalty’ (*al-Hashr:* 7), the mind immediately assumes that there is a sin which deserves punishment, and the retribution here is severe because the sin is grave, namely the disobedience of the Messenger of Allah; for Allah commands us to accept everything the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* brings us and refrain from everything that he forbids us.

Allah’s retribution for a sinner will come at a time when no one will have any prestige, wealth, status, or lineage to protect him from Allah; so, if the weaknesses of society tempt you to commit a sin or cooperate in one, you should fear Allah, for His retribution is severe.

However, how does this punishment come to a sinner? It gradually comes to a sinner in his person such as in the form of a painful illness which does not only cause the sinner to spend his money, but also forces him to ask others to help with his treatment or the treatment of someone he loves. The hosts of Allah’s punishment might not wait until the Hereafter, but might come into the sinner’s life gradually without his realising it, and this is the more severe kind of punishment.

We know that punishment only comes to people in proportion to their sins. To say Allah is severe in punishment does not mean that His severest punishment will afflict those who commit minor sins; rather, each person will be requited according to the measure of his sin—yet, no matter how light this punishment is, it is still severe and painful.

Furthermore, if the True Lord *the Most High* is severe in punishment to those who disobey Him, He is also forgiving and merciful, as He says: ‘Allah is Much Forgiving, a Dispenser of Grace.’ (*al-Baqara:* 218) This means He is forgiving of the sins you may have committed and then asked your Lord for forgiveness for them, and He is ‘a Dispenser of Grace’ (*al-Baqara:* 218) to you, not punishing you immediately for your sins because of His compassion for you and His love that you return to Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لِلۡفُقَرَآءِ ٱلۡمُهَٰجِرِينَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُخۡرِجُواْ مِن دِيَٰرِهِمۡ وَأَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡ يَبۡتَغُونَ فَضۡلٗا
مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرِضۡوَٰنٗا وَيَنصُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥٓۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلصَّٰدِقُونَ ٨

The poor emigrants who were driven from their homes and possessions, who seek God’s favour and approval, those who help God and His Messenger – these are the ones who are true – [shall have a share] [8] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 8)

Those who most deserve these *fay’* are the Emigrants who were driven from their homes, leaving behind all that they owned, ‘seeking’ by their emigration ‘bounty from Allah and [His] pleasure’ (*al-Hashr:* 8). They seek an increase in worldly provision, for favour is related to the things of this life, whilst pleasure is related to the bliss of the Hereafter.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘And Allah has favored some of you over others in provision.’ (*an-Nahl:* 71)

They seek Allah’s pleasure in the Hereafter. A sacred Hadith relates that the True Lord *the Most High* will ask the inhabitants of paradise about their state, and they will say, ‘You have given us more than we deserve’, whereupon He will say, ‘Shall I not give you more?’ They will say, ‘What could be more than this?’ He will further say, ‘Indeed, I will enfold you in My pleasure so that I will never be angry with you again.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and supporting Allah and His Messenger’ (*al-Hashr:* 8). This means that by their emigration and their leaving behind their possessions and homes, they seek to aid the cause of Allah’s religion and the call of the Messenger of Allah: ‘those are the truthful.’ (*al-Hashr:* 8) They are true in their faith, true in their emigration and true in bearing the consequences.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (6067) and Muslim (5057)*

Were it not for this sincerity in faith, it would not have been easy for them to do anything in the cause of the religion, and they would have never left their homes and their possessions.

After the Emigration, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* looked upon Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr*,* who was dressed in a simple leather garment, and said, ‘Look what faith has done to your companion!’⁽¹⁾ Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr had been one of the richest men in Mecca, and they called him ‘Quraysh’s spoiled boy.’ People would even pay to have their clothes washed alongside his clothes so that they would imbibe the fragrance of the perfume on them. (2)

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلَّذِينَ تَبَوَّءُو ٱلدَّارَ وَٱلۡإِيمَٰنَ مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡ يُحِبُّونَ مَنۡ هَاجَرَ إِلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ
فِي صُدُورِهِمۡ حَاجَةٗ مِّمَّآ أُوتُواْ وَيُؤۡثِرُونَ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ وَلَوۡ كَانَ بِهِمۡ
خَصَاصَةٞۚ وَمَن يُوقَ شُحَّ نَفۡسِهِۦ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ ٩

Those who were already firmly established in their homes [in Medina], and firmly rooted in faith, show love for those who migrated to them for refuge and harbour no desire in their hearts for what has been given to them. They give them preference over them- selves, even if they too are poor: those who are saved from their own souls’ greed are truly successful [9] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 9)

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And [also for] those who were settled in Medina and [adopted] the faith before them’ (*al-Hashr:* 9); this means the abode is for the physical body: a man goes there to have relief from the day’s toil and life’s motions, and faith is for the heart. Just as the abode is the place where the body returns, faith is the place where the heart returns in all its affairs for management and regulation in all life’s motions.

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(1) *Ibn Al-Jawzi, Safwat Al-Safwa, and Abu Na‘im, Hilyat Al-Awliya’*

(2) *Related by Al-Hakim (4892)*

Allah *the Exalted* says: ‘they love those who emigrated to them and find not any want in their breasts of what the emigrants were given.’ (*al-Hashr:* 9) What this means is that the *Ansar* are happy about what their brothers from the Emigrants took from the *fay’* not harbouring any rancour or envy in their souls on account of it, nor boasting to them about what they gave them. None of them said, ‘So-and-so took this from me.’ All the Emigrants took something from the *Ansar* except those of them who abstained such as ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf, who said to the Helper assigned to be his brother, Ibn Ar-Rabi‘, ‘Keep your wealth and your family to yourself and show me the marketplace.’ Then, he ended up becoming the richest man in Medina.(1) He ended up owning a thousand slaves, and when they asked them about him after he died, one of them said, ‘By Allah, had you come to us when he was sitting with us, you would not have recognised him.’

Despite this, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* had a vision of him slowing his entrance into paradise, and when he asked him what slowed him down, he answered, ‘They asked me, O, Messenger of Allah, about this and that.’

The *Ansar* did not stop at this generosity; rather, they went as far as preferring the Emigrants to their own selves. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…give [them] preference over themselves, even though they are in privation…’ (*al-Hashr:* 9). Generosity is to give some of what you own; preferring another to yourself, however, is to give everything you have and keep nothing back for yourself. The *Ansar* would prefer their brothers from the Emigrants to their own selves, giving them all that they needed.

‘Privation' is severe poverty; yet, despite the fact that they suffered from this poverty and need, they preferred their brethren to themselves. As we said before, the *Ansar* gave us such an example of giving that was utterly unprecedented in history.

The verse then asserts this fact: ‘And whoever is protected from the miserliness of his soul—it is those who will be the successful.’ (*al-Hashr:* 9) The one who attains to a happy state is he whom Allah saves from this blameworthy trait. Some people say that miserliness means stinginess, but actually it is a broader and stronger word than that because stinginess actually arises from it. It signifies something is scant; thus, you will certainly be protective of the little amount that remains so that it does not run out. Miserliness penetrates your very person and all your actions, and we might say that miserliness concerns the heart, whilst stinginess concerns the shell of the body.

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(1) *Related by Al-Bukhari (3496)*

وَٱلَّذِينَ جَآءُو مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِمۡ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا ٱغۡفِرۡ لَنَا وَلِإِخۡوَٰنِنَا ٱلَّذِينَ
سَبَقُونَا بِٱلۡإِيمَٰنِ وَلَا تَجۡعَلۡ فِي قُلُوبِنَا غِلّٗا لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ رَبَّنَآ إِنَّكَ رَءُوفٞ رَّحِيمٌ ١٠

Those who came after them say, ‘Lord, forgive us our sins
and the sins of our brothers who believed before us, and
leave no malice in our hearts towards those who believe.
Lord, You are truly compassionate and merciful’ [10]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 10)

Who are those who would come after the Emigrants and *Ansar*? The Emigrants and *Ansar* were the generation of the Companions, and those who came after them were the Followers. The generation of the Followers were the best generation after the Companions of the Messenger of Allah, and all those who follow their way share in their superiority. The more closely they adhere to the way, the more they share in the superiority.

One of the supplications of these Followers is that they say, ‘Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith.’ (*al-Hashr:* 10) They pray for them because the fact that they preceded them (and us) in faith is what preserved for them (and us) the faith in which they (and we) rejoice and are proud. Thus, this generation is owed a debt by every Muslim who came after them because they were either martyrs in Allah’s Cause who gave their lives for the sake of this religion or scholars who devoted their lives to the preservation and dissemination of this religion.

He then says, ‘…and put not in our hearts [any] resentment towards those who have believed…’ (*al-Hashr:* 10), because they attained to a high rank which no other can attain, it is as if they are saying, 'So remove, Lord, any unworthy thoughts from our hearts so that we neither resent nor envy them.'

The word ‘resentment’ means to have ill feelings against someone for attaining what one cannot possibly attain; it is a negative emotion of the soul.

Allah says: ‘Our Lord, indeed, you are Kind and Merciful.’ (*al-Hashr:* 10) Kindness means to ward off harm and refrain from punishing, and Merciful means to replace punishment with reward. For example, say you have an employee who is lax in his work in a way that deserves a reprimand; you are kind to him by excusing him the reprimand, and then your heart softens further towards him, and you give him a gift.

The discourse now turns once more to a discussion of the hypocrites:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ نَافَقُواْ يَقُولُونَ لِإِخۡوَٰنِهِمُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ
لَئِنۡ أُخۡرِجۡتُمۡ لَنَخۡرُجَنَّ مَعَكُمۡ وَلَا نُطِيعُ فِيكُمۡ أَحَدًا أَبَدٗا وَإِن قُوتِلۡتُمۡ
لَنَنصُرَنَّكُمۡ وَٱللَّهُ يَشۡهَدُ إِنَّهُمۡ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ﴿١١﴾ لَئِنۡ أُخۡرِجُواْ لَا يَخۡرُجُونَ مَعَهُمۡ وَلَئِن
قُوتِلُواْ لَا يَنصُرُونَهُمۡ وَلَئِن نَّصَرُوهُمۡ لَيُوَلُّنَّ ٱلۡأَدۡبَٰرَ ثُمَّ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

Have you [Prophet] considered the hypocrites who say to their fellows, the faithless among the People of the Book, ‘If you are driven out, we shall go with you – we would never listen to anyone who sought to harm you – and if you are attacked, we shall certainly come to your aid’? God bears witness that they are in fact liars. [11] If they are driven out, they will never leave with them; if they are attacked, they will never help them. Even if they did come to their aid, they would soon turn tail and flee – in the end they would have no help [12] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 11-12)

In this verse, the True Lord *the Most High* exposes Jews and hypocrites, reveals their secrets and tells His Messenger of what they said in secret. He says to him: ‘Have you not considered’? (*al-Hashr:* 11) This implies that when Allah tells His Prophet something, it is surer than the vision of his own eyes. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…those who practise hypocrisy’ (*al-Hashr:* 11); these people had three leaders: ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy, ‘Abdullah ibn Al-Akt’a and Rafi ibn Zayd.(1) These people took their chance and said to Banu

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(1) *As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur*

An-Nadir, ‘If Muhammad seeks to exile you, do not leave.’ When the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered them to leave, they said, ‘Give us respite, O, father of Qasim, for death would be easier for us than to do this. Give us ten days to prepare.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave them this ten-day respite, and when they refused to leave, he besieged them for twenty-one days until they gave up and raised the banner of surrender.

Allah *Glorified is He* reveals the hypocrisy of these dissemblers by saying: ‘Have you not considered those who practise hypocrisy, saying to their brothers who have disbelieved amongst the People of the Scripture’ (*al-Hashr:* 11)? He describes them as disbelievers in this verse because although they had begun as followers of a Divine religion, when the one they knew was coming and of whom they had tidings in their scriptures, came to them, they disbelieved in him; thus, He calls them disbelievers.

This is why He says about the people of the Book: ‘they are not [all] the same; amongst the People of the Scripture is a community standing [in obedience], reciting the verses of Allah during periods of the night, and prostrating [in prayer].’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 113)

One of these was ‘Abdullah ibn Salam, the story of whose conversion to Islam you all know; he is the one who said, ‘By Allah, I knew Muhammad when I saw him as well as I knew my own son. I knew Muhammad even better!’

What do they say to them? The hypocrites said, ‘If you are expelled’ (*al-Hashr:* 11); what they meant is that if Muhammad exiles you from Medina and its surrounding areas, ‘we will surely leave with you.’ (*al-Hashr:* 11) They said this to them privately and kept it secret between them.

Allah *the Exalted* calls them ‘brothers' because they were, indeed, united in enmity against the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and the call of truth, or He calls them 'brothers' in the sense that they made a pact of allegiance or brothers in the sense of disbelief in this Message.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘and we will not obey, in regard to you, anyone—ever.’ (*al-Hashr:* 11) In other words, it is as if they are saying, 'We shall never obey anyone who tells us to fight you.' Allah continues their speech: ‘and if you are fought, we will surely aid you.’ (*al-Hashr:* 11) Then Allah testifies and proclaims that these words are a lie: ‘But Allah testifies that they are liars.’ (*al-Hashr:* 11) This is because they are hypocrites, and deceit runs in their blood.

He then exposes their lies and reveals their intentions: ‘If they are expelled, they will not leave with them, and if they are fought, they will not aid them. And [even] if they should aid them, they will surely turn their backs’ (*al-Hashr:* 12); Allah intends that they will flee the battlefield; ‘then [thereafter] they will not be aided.’ (*al-Hashr:* 12) Thus, Allah *the Exalted* spoke the truth about them. This is the way of the hypocrites in every time and place; they lie even to Allah, and then lie about their lying.

The True Lord *the Most High* says:

لَأَنتُمۡ أَشَدُّ رَهۡبَةٗ فِي صُدُورِهِم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ قَوۡمٞ لَّا يَفۡقَهُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

Fear of you [believers] is more intense in their hearts
than fear of God because they are people devoid of
understanding [13] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 13)

This means that however much they display their pride and seeming strength; they are terrified of the Muslims in their souls and fear them even more than they fear Allah. Allah *the Almighty* expresses this concept when He says: ‘Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them.’ (*at-Tawba:* 14)

Had the True Lord *the Most High* wanted, He would have requited them and taken them to task as only the Almighty Determiner can. In that case, they would have said it was a natural phenomenon. However, the True Lord wanted to humiliate them and punish them by the Muslims’ hands because they were the ones who faced up to them.

Therefore, they fear you more than they fear Allah because they are materialistic people who only believe in material things and things they can see. This is why when you read the Talmud, you find it speaking about material things and contains no mention of the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘That’, which refers to their fear of the Muslims and their lack of fear of Allah; furthermore, He says: ‘because they are a people who do not understand' (*al-Hashr:* 13). Indeed, they do not grasp the truth because the Muslims fought against them by Allah's direction only.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَا يُقَٰتِلُونَكُمۡ جَمِيعًا إِلَّا فِي قُرٗى مُّحَصَّنَةٍ أَوۡ مِن وَرَآءِ جُدُرِۭۚ بَأۡسُهُم بَيۡنَهُمۡ
شَدِيدٞۚ تَحۡسَبُهُمۡ جَمِيعٗا وَقُلُوبُهُمۡ شَتَّىٰۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمۡ قَوۡمٞ لَّا يَعۡقِلُونَ ١٤

Even united they would never fight you, except from within fortified strongholds or behind high walls. There is much hostility between them: you think they are united but their hearts are divided because they are people devoid of reason [14]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 14)

Since they fear the Muslims and are terrified of them, they avoid confronting them in open war in the desert. They do not have the courage to face a Muslim soldier, and therefore, 'They will not fight you all except within fortified cities.' (*al-Hashr:* 14)

Strongholds are fortified by digging trenches around settlements so that no one can enter them. The trench must be wide, deep and steeply inclined so that a horse cannot jump across it or ride down into it. Also, a settlement can be fortified by building a wall around it that no one can climb; this is the meaning behind 'or from behind walls.' (*al-Hashr:* 14) They would also fortify their houses by blocking the doors with wooden crossbars, so no one could open them.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Their violence amongst themselves is severe' (*al-Hashr:* 14); this means that they act as though they love one another when really they hate and despise each other. Allah also says: 'You think they are together, but their hearts are diverse.' (*al-Hashr:* 14). You are led to think they are united outwardly, but in truth, their hearts are in dispute. This was the case, for example, with Banu Qurayzha and Banu An-Nadir, and it is natural that such people differ and have hearts at odds, for they have no truth to unite them and to bring together their hearts and bodies.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'That is because they are a people who do not reason.' (*al-Hashr:* 14) This means they do not have the rationality with which to distinguish between truth and falsehood, along with between right and wrong.

The reason, as we said, is the middle stage of the senses; it is what examines things that have been sensed and judges between them; when it is convinced by something, it passes it on to the heart so that it becomes a stable belief. So, what can you expect from people who will not use their reason?

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَمَثَلِ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِهِمۡ قَرِيبٗاۖ ذَاقُواْ وَبَالَ أَمۡرِهِمۡ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ﴿١٥﴾

Like those who went just before them, they have tasted the result of their conduct and a painful punishment awaits them [15] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 15)

The True Lord *the Most High* compares the state of the Jews with the state of their brothers, the polytheists of Mecca: 'those shortly before them; they tasted the bad consequence of their affair' (*al-Hashr:* 15); what this refers to is the evil consequences of their polytheism and their opposition to the call of truth. This is an allusion to the events of the Battle of Badr.

'…With [yet more] grievous suffering awaiting them [in the life to come]', this suffering will cause them pain; and the Noble Quran gives several attributes to the suffering of the Hereafter – may Allah save us all from it – each of which has an aspect that suits the state of those who suffer it. One person's suffering will be severe, another's grievous, and another's shameful.

We said before that there are some people who are not hurt by blows, but are hurt by words. Therefore, a man (1) once went to Mu`awiya (2) wanting to show him how powerfully he could bear the persecution of his enemies who hated him. He said, quoting the poet Abu Dhu`ayb Al-Hadhli:

I keep patient before my enemies to show them
That I do not cower before the incidents of time

So, Mu`awiya responded to him with another line from the same poem:

Yet when death sinks its claws into you,
No ransom you offer will do you any good.

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(1) The story of the man who wanted to show Mu`awiya the strength of his endurance

(2) A Companion and Caliph (d. 60 A.H.)

كَمَثَلِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ إِذْ قَالَ لِلْإِنسَٰنِ ٱكْفُرْ فَلَمَّا كَفَرَ
قَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيٓءٌ مِّنكَ إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ ٱللَّهَ رَبَّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

Like Satan, who says to man, ‘Do not believe!’
but when man disbelieves, says, ‘I disown you;
I fear God, the Lord of the Worlds’ [16]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 16)

That is, what the hypocrites did by making a pact with the Jews that they would go out with them if they were sent out, and fight alongside them if they were fought, and then forsaking them, was akin to what Satan did when he deceived the son of Adam and tempted him into danger, and then said to him when he obeyed him and disbelieved: ‘I am not responsible for you’. He got what he wanted from him, and then moved on to find someone else.

So, this is a comparison, and the True Lord gives us comparisons to explain unknown things with known things, such as when He says, ‘The parable of those who spend their possessions for the sake of Allah is that of a grain out of which grow seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains…’ (*al-Baqara:* 261). The reward of charity is not known, so He explains it to us with something we can see: the plants of the earth, and how the grain is multiplied up to seven hundred times.

‘…Behold, I fear Allah, The Lord of all the worlds!’ Satan fears Allah, the Lord of the worlds because when he was cast out of paradise he said: ‘…Grant me a respite till the Day when all shall be raised from the dead.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 14)

Satan’s words here ‘…Behold, I fear Allah, The Lord of all the worlds’ mean that all what Satan does is to lead you into sin and then abandon you; for Satan betrays all who follow him. He throws the rope of hope to you, yet when he is needed, he forsakes you and abandons you. This is what Satan does with his allies.

Allah says, ‘And, lo, Satan made all their doings seem goodly to them, and said, “No one can overcome you this day, for, behold, I shall be your protector…”’ (*al-Anfal:* 48). And elsewhere, Satan says to his followers: ‘…It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine…’

(*Ibrahim:* 22). Satan makes it clear here that he will not come to the aid of any of those who followed him; Satan will save no one from Allah's chastisement. They will call upon him so save them after they had followed him and responded to the evil temptations he presented to them, but he will forsake them and say: '…Behold, Allah promised you something that was bound to come true! I, too, held out [all manner of] promises to you – but I deceived you…' (*Ibrahim:* 22).

فَكَانَ عَٰقِبَتَهُمَآ أَنَّهُمَا فِى ٱلنَّارِ خَٰلِدَيْنِ فِيهَا ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ جَزَٰٓؤُا۟ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

Both will end up in the Fire, there to remain.
That is the reward of evildoers [17]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 17)

That is, this will be the fate of both Satan and those who followed him in disbelieving in Allah, His Messenger and His commandments. The True Lord declares that their fate will be the same: to abide in hell because both rebelled against Allah.

So, those who deny the religion and deny Allah's guidance will be requited with an abode in hell. When something which is opposed to Allah's guidance is presented to you, you must put Allah's guidance above everything else, and know that Satan, who tempts you to contravene Allah's guidance, will enter hell before you and abide therein. You will not be able to bring him out of it, and he will not be able to save you from it.

You do evil to yourself by disbelieving in Allah and belying His Messenger and by rejecting Allah's Commandments; and abiding in hell is the fate of evildoers. Here, the word 'evildoers' means the disbelievers who committed the gravest sin of all, which is to disbelieve in Allah and associate partners with Him. And Allah has said: '…for, behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong!' (*Luqman:* 13) Associating partners with Allah is considered evil or wrong, as you make something which neither created nor provided a partner to Him who created and provided; and you make human beings associates with Allah in lawgiving; thus, you ban what Allah has allowed, and allow what Allah has banned.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَلۡتَنظُرۡ نَفۡسٞ مَّا قَدَّمَتۡ لِغَدٖۖ
وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرُۢ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ ١٨ وَلَا تَكُونُواْ كَٱلَّذِينَ
نَسُواْ ٱللَّهَ فَأَنسَىٰهُمۡ أَنفُسَهُمۡۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡفَٰسِقُونَ ١٩

You who believe! Be mindful of God, and let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow; be mindful of God, for God is well aware of everything you do [18] Do not be like those who forget God, so God causes them to forget their own souls: they are the rebellious ones [19]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 18 - 19)

The call of ‘O you who have attained to faith’ is a divine command to which we must listen and see what Allah wants of us. Just as we took the gifts of lordly sustenance from Him, we must also take the gifts of divine ordain, which are the responsibilities of the Sacred Law: ‘…Remain conscious of Allah; and let every human being look to what he sends ahead for the morrow.…’

After calling them by the attribute of their faith, He then commands them to be conscious of Him. This means that theoretical faith is not enough on its own; rather, it must be backed up by practical faith and adherence to Allah’s Commandments.

‘…And let every human being look to what he sends ahead for the morrow…’ The command here is phrased in an emphatic way, using the Arabic letter *Lam*; and ‘every human being’ implies universality: every human being is required to look to what he sends ahead for the Day of Resurrection.

He says ‘…for the morrow…’ to indicate its imminence. This means that Allah’s way of guidance which He has chosen for you to adjust the motions of your life and give you happiness in your worldly lives, is not the end of the matter; and those who oppose this way of guidance and stray from it, spreading corruption in land or living off the backs of others, will not come to an end of their affair simply by the ending of their worldly lives. Rather, there will be a ‘morrow’, and there will be a reckoning and requital. So, do not let this fact leave your mind, and let it guide your life’s actions; and beware lest it escape your attention.

Because of the importance of this, He repeats again the command for the Allah-consciousness: '…And [once again]: Remain conscious of Allah.…' So, the reference to looking at one's deeds and observing them comes between two commands for Allah-consciousness; and Allah-consciousness, as we said, is the practical part of faith. It is as though He were saying to you: 'Beware of knowing your final end but not working for it and striving for it'.

And by this way of guidance, people find happiness and man feels safe about his possessions and dignity. We understand from '…and let every human being look…' that every person must observe his faith, and consider what it is that he wants, and what his goal is, and what his destination is. For others, too, have their goals and desires in life.

You only possess your own self; so beware of comparing yourself to others, for each of us has his goals in life, and one might conflate and admix his goal with other things. Look at yourself in isolation, because others will not be asked about you and you will not be asked about them. That is why the word 'human being' (*nafs*) is given here in the singular form.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says to us, '…and let every human being look to what he sends ahead for the morrow…', He is only calling us to reckon ourselves and consider what we have sent ahead so that we may become aware that there are shortcomings in our conduct or that we have strayed from the straight path.

A man's life is too short for him to squander it and let it slip through his hands without even noticing it. Your Lord created you and left you to enjoy the pleasant things of the life of this world until the age of fifteen, without making you responsible for anything.

He only held you morally responsible once you had become fully formed and fully mentally conscious; and then He made for you a moment of self-reflection at the age of forty, which is the age of full maturity and the age of prophethood: '…And so, when he attains to full maturity and reaches forty years, he [that is righteous] prays: "O my Lord! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of You with which You has graced me and my parents, and that I may do what is right [in a manner] that will meet with Your goodly acceptance; and grant me righteousness in my offspring [as well]. Verily, unto You have I turned in repentance: for, verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves unto You!'" (*al-Ahqaf:* 15)

He then repeats the reward: 'It is [such as] these from whom We shall accept the best that they ever did, and bad deeds We shall overlook: [they will find themselves] among those who are destined for paradise, in fulfilment of the true promise which they were given [in this world].' (*al-Ahqaf:* 16)

Look, then, at this grace Allah gives to His servants – and could there be any more excuses once the age of forty has been reached? And furthermore, who can guarantee to even reach the age of forty? So, the intelligent person races against time with good deeds, snatching as many of them from the passing days as he can; for he might not even reach the age of forty.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of the Hereafter using the word 'morrow' to express how near it is; and indeed, the morrow is even further away than it because it might come to you in the blink of an eye. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Paradise is nearer to you than the strap of your shoe – and so is Hell.'(1)

From the word 'morrow', we understand that in the life of this world you live by material means, whilst tomorrow you will live by the Owner of all means: there will be no sun, no moon, no farmland, no work, and no effort.

Therefore, when The True Lord speaks about the Hereafter, He says, 'And the earth will shine bright with her Lord's light…' (*az-Zumar:* 69) because the sun will not be there; the only light there will be the light of the Divine Essence.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, 'And be not like those who are oblivious of Allah, and whom He therefore causes to be oblivious of [what is good for] their own selves.…' There was a commandment to be conscious of Allah and follow His guidance, and now there is a prohibition against forgetting Allah. This means that when you follow Allah's guidance, you must keep remembering Allah all the time because He is your Lord and your Allah for whom you are working.

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (6007) and others*

Notice here that the noble verse does not say ‘Do not be oblivious of Allah’, but says, ‘And be not like those who are oblivious of Allah.…’ It is as though forgetting Allah is not something that those who believe would ever be expected to do.

To forget means to have knowledge of something and then become oblivious of it because of other distractions, or to be so heedless of it that you forget it. This is because the mind contains both the forefront of the consciousness and the margins of the consciousness: a fact enters the forefront of the consciousness, and as long as it remains there you remember it.

If it moves to the margins of the consciousness, however, you forget it and need to be reminded of it so that it returns to the forefront of the consciousness. Otherwise, if everything were to remain in the forefront of the consciousness, you would not be able to notice anything else.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Never has Allah endowed any man with two hearts in one body…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 4). One of the blessings Allah has given you is that you can recall information from the margins of your consciousness to the forefront when you make an effort to remember them.

But how could Allah be known to them, only for them to forget Him? They say that Allah *Glorified is He* has been known to all mankind since they were in the stage of seeds in the loins of their forefather Adam *peace be upon him* and since Allah took from them this pledge: ‘And when your Lord took the seeds of the children of Adam from their loins, He made them bear witness against themselves: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ – to which they answered: “Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!…”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172) The True Lord addresses this atom in you which you took from your father Adam *peace be upon him* for He alone can do this; He speaks to atoms just as He speaks to the earth and to the bees.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* took this pledge from us so that it would be a proof against us if we became heedless of Him or forgot Him: ‘…[Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, “Verily, we were unaware of this.” Or lest you say, “Verily, it was but our forefathers who, in times gone by, began to ascribe divinity to other beings beside Allah; and we were but their late offspring: wilt Thou, then, destroy us for the doings of those inventors of falsehoods?'" (*al-A'raf:* 172-173)

It is as though He were saying to you: 'Beware of saying this – beware of being afflicted by this obliviousness which causes you to forget the remembrance of Allah, for you have no excuse to do so because He took a pledge from us all, and then sent His successive messengers to continually remind us of this pledge'.

So, when a person becomes oblivious, this atom performs its immunising function and reminds him and turns him back to Allah. They say that this atom is the self-reproaching soul in man; and when it weakens, and does not deter one from sinking into sin, society should deter him instead. And if society offers no deterrent because it is also corrupt, we said that this is when Heaven intervenes by sending a new messenger.

This went on until the message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came, and Allah made his community the best of communities ever brought forth for the good of mankind because it took upon itself the role of the prophets in enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong: 'You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong…' (*Al-'Imran:* 110). Therefore, Allah made them witnesses over all other communities, '…so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you…' (*al-Baqara:* 143). By this, this community took on the role of the messengers, and we were given an assurance that our society will never be bereft of the constituents of goodness and those who bear the lights of guidance; and however, much truths may be obscured and images darkened, we will always have an exemplar of goodness and guidance to return people to righteousness.

The meaning of '…and whom He therefore causes to be oblivious of [what is good for] their own selves…' is that because of how they forget Allah, and their worldly possessions and offspring distract them from Allah, heedlessness overcomes them to such an extent that they forget even their own selves meaning that they forget what is good for them. When they deny themselves what is good for them, it is as though they forget their own selves.

When a man separates himself from his Lord and Creator, he lives a straitened life, no matter what comforts and delights of this world he attains. Yet the believer, who is connected to his Lord, leads a happy life even if he does not have enough provisions to last him the day. Therefore, despite their riches and prestige, some people go to a poor man and ask for his prayers because they know that he has something they do not have: he has a connection to his Lord.

If a person knows what his goal is, he will feel that the way towards it is easy, and will be able to reach it. People are only different because they have different goals in life. Identifying one's goal is more difficult than actually attaining it; a poet expressed this by saying :(1)

Who can show me my destination before my journey:

How, when destinations only determined after journeys?

The true goal is that which is followed by no further desires; and were you to follow the chain of all the goals in the world, you would find that they lead to the Hereafter, where there is success, happiness and bliss forever without end.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* then says, '…[for] it is they, they who are truly depraved (*fasiqun*)!' The verb *fasaqa* means for a fruit to break away from its skin when it is ripe. Before the fruit is ripe, it adheres tightly to its skin and cannot be peeled away from it. Then, when the fruit becomes soft, its skin breaks away from it so that you can peel it easily.

This is the *fasiq*, who strays from Allah's guidance: he breaks away from it easily and is pleased to be rid of it. To break away from Allah's guidance means to cut your connection to His commandments and prohibitions.

This *fisq* is of two kinds: small and great. This raises a problematic question: does *fisq* here mean simply to go beyond the limits of obedience to the Messenger? But this is applied to all sinners. That is, the person who does this may be a believer in the guidance, but separate from it partially.

We can say that every sinner is guilty of *fisq*, in that he believes in the guidance but breaks away from it partially. Yet the *fisq* which the True Lord is speaking about here is the most extreme form of *fisq*, namely to break away from faith entirely.

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(1) Ibn Ar-Rumy (221-283 A.H.)

لَا يَسۡتَوِيٓ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ وَأَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَنَّةِۚ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ هُمُ ٱلۡفَآئِزُونَ ٢٠

There is no comparison between the inhabitants of
the Fire and the inhabitants of Paradise – and the
inhabitants of Paradise are the successful ones [20]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 20)

This is something logical and natural. They are not equal in this human world, so how could they be equal in the sight of Allah, the Just Judge? Far be it that this be the case! To hold them equal is nothing but foolishness: how could the one who lives according to his passions be equal to the one who lives according to the guidance of his Lord and Creator?

In the life of this world, these two represent the Paradise and Hell of the Hereafter. Just as Paradise and Hell and not equal, those destined for them are not equal in this world.

We can find evidence here for the existence of Paradise and Hell in the Hereafter. Were those who sin and despoil the land and harm other people to evade punishment, and were it all to end with their deaths, this would mean that they would be the fortunate ones, whilst the people of faith and righteousness would be the losers; and this is something that no mind can accept.

Some of these people seek to justify their evasion of Allah's guidance by saying, 'Even if there is a punishment and requital, we will burn away in the fire of hell and that will be that'. They forget about the reality of the Hereafter, which is that it is an eternal abode whose bliss will never fade, nor its torment ever end: '…every time their skins are burnt off We shall replace them with new skins so that they may taste suffering [in full]…' (*an-Nisa':* 56).

I remember that once we spoke about this verse and repeated it to a group of orientalists, and seven of them embraced Islam in a single sitting. This was because they realised that in these words was manifested one of the scientific miracles of the Quran.

The Quran was the first to say that the skin is the source of sensation and the locus of taste; for before this, they used to say that the brain was responsible for sensation.

The words ‘…those who are destined for (*ashab*) the fire and those who are destined for (*ashab*) paradise…’ suggest the presence of some kind of companionship (*musahaba*); it is as though there is a familiarity and friendship between them. The sinners are the companions of hell and the righteous are the companions of paradise, and each of them is familiar with its companions and content with them; indeed, they each yearn for them. Paradise yearns for its denizens and companions, and awaits them; and likewise, hell burns and rages with desire for its denizens and companions.

‘…Those who are destined for paradise – it is they, they [alone] who shall triumph!’ Indeed, they shall triumph by winning paradise and Allah’s favour, and gaining relief from the toils and suffering of the life of this world. Their thoughts will now run their lives; as soon as they think of something, it will appear there before them without any effort.

لَوۡ أَنزَلۡنَا هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٖ لَّرَأَيۡتَهُۥ خَٰشِعٗا مُّتَصَدِّعٗا مِّنۡ خَشۡيَةِ ٱللَّهِۚ
وَتِلۡكَ ٱلۡأَمۡثَٰلُ نَضۡرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ٢١

If We had sent this Quran down to a mountain, you
[Prophet] would have seen it humbled and split apart in its
awe of God: We offer people such illustrations so that they
may reflect [21] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 21)

Indeed, were this to happen, and were this Quran to be sent down upon a mountain, its state would be ‘…humbling itself, breaking asunder for awe of Allah…’. Despite its firmness and strength, the mountain would humble itself and break asunder, crumbling in fear of Allah. Every atom in it fulfils its purpose and follows its Lord and Creator’s instructions. This would be the case if a mountain were morally responsible, instead of an inanimate object.

So, what would happen if the Quran were sent down upon it? It would crumble just as Mount Sinai (At-Tur) crumbled in the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘And when Musa (Moses) came [to Mount Sinai] at the time set by Us, and his Lord spoke unto him, he said, "O my Lord! Show [Yourself] unto me, so that I might behold you!" Said [Allah], "Never can you see me, however, behold this mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then – only then – will you see Me." And as soon as his Lord revealed His Glory to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Musa (Moses) fell down in a swoon…' (*al-A'raf:* 143).

This means that the mountain broke asunder because of the terror of this event. Of course, mountains are not morally responsible, and they were offered this trust but refused to bear it: 'Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it…' (*al-Ahzab:* 72). But their responsibility is to remain as they are stores of nourishment and growth, to give human beings their provisions.

The linguists say that the Arabic word *law* (which here is translated as '*had*', as in 'Had we…') expresses that the second verb did not occur because the first one did not happen. The Quran was not sent down to the mountain; but had it happened, you would really have seen the mountain humbling itself and breaking asunder, crumbling into dust. As for the story of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* what happened was that the mountain remained in one piece but sank into the ground like a peg: 'And were you like the mountain, this would have happened to you too because you are not ready to see Allah nor receive anything directly from Him'.

If you say: 'So how can we see Allah in the Hereafter?' we answer: Allah will make us in another form and a different creation, which will allow this to happen. He will create us in a form which is able to see Him. Do you not see that in this world, you might have poor eyesight so that you have to go to the optician and have an operation that allows you to see well? It is like this. Therefore, He says: 'some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, looking up to their Lord.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

'…And [all] such parables We propound unto men so that they might [learn to] think.' Parables (*amthal*, singular *mathal*) are comparisons which make things easier for us to understand, and impart wisdom unto us; and the parable is a vast field in Arabic literature.

A *mathal* is also a proverb, something that happened in the past and was summed up in a few concise words which people then began to use in all similar situations.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* uses parables in the Noble Quran on many occasions, to make it easier for us to understand the matters of the unseen of which we have neither knowledge nor experience. Therefore, He gives us parables to illustrate the pinnacle of doctrine, that is the Oneness of Allah; and He gave us the parable of His light; and He gave us parables of the disbelievers.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* gives us the parable of the mountain here, saying that if the Quran were revealed to it, it would humble itself and break asunder in fear of Allah. Thus, The True Lord expresses a metaphysical concept using physical representations, to make it easier for people to understand and increase its clarity, awe, and power – for you human beings are not stronger than mountains.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '…so that they might [learn to] think'; that is, that they might think with true logic and fear Allah, and keep themselves away from falling into falsehood, and thus protect themselves from Allah's chastisement and wrath.

So, He inspires them to think, having inspired in them the sense of the greatness and the awesomeness of what would happen to the mountain if the Quran were sent down upon it.

'…And [all] such parables We propound unto men, so that they might [learn to] think.' It is a characteristic of the Quran's rhetorical style that it uses parables to explain things; a parable means to connect something unknown with something very well known. When a poet(1) wanted to describe a hunchback to someone who had never seen one, he said:

The veins of his neck are short, and his nape is bent,
As though he thinks someone is about to strike him.
It is as though his neck was once slapped,
And he fears it is going to happen again, so prepares for it.

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(1) Ibn Ar-Rumi

هُوَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ عَٰلِمُ ٱلْغَيْبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ ۖ هُوَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٢٢﴾

He is God: there is no god other than Him. It is He who
knows what is hidden as well as what is in the open,
He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy [22]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 22)

We said that when the third person pronoun ‘He’ is used, the mind immediately thinks of Allah because He is always present and never absent, even if we call him with the third-person pronoun [which in Arabic is called *gha`ib*, meaning literally ‘absent’]. In another verse, He says, ‘…Say, Allah! – and then leave them to play at their vain talk.’ (*al-An‘am:* 91) That is, respond to them by saying ‘Allah!’, for this word alone is enough, and indicates that there is no other Allah besides Him.

The Messenger of Allah *peace be upon him* said: ‘The best thing the prophets before me said was “There is no deity but Allah.”’(1) The fact that the Messenger of Allah said only ‘Allah!’ implies that Allah absolved him of the need to pronounce the negation and affirmation of ‘…save whom there is no deity…’ (*al-Hashr:* 22). That is, perhaps if I say ‘there is no deity…’, I might die before completing the phrase; so He said: No, your Lord knows that you will say it, so He will not take your spirit before you finish it.

The words ‘He is Allah…’ (*al-Hashr:* 22). *Huwa Allah*, the pronoun ‘He’ refers to the (absent) third person because in this created world you do not see the Creator, but only to infer His presence using your mind. So, the one you cannot see, and who appears to be absent from you, is Allah, your Lord and Creator. The same is the case with ‘Say, “He is Allah, The One God”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1): the ‘absent’ third-person pronoun comes first, before being specified by name. This is because a nominal sentence sometimes contains both the reference and its referent.

For example, when He says ‘Muhammad is Allah’s Apostle…’ (*al-Fath:* 29), ‘Muhammad’ is the name of a person known to them, and the unknown thing that needs to be stated is that he is Allah’s Apostle; so how can you present something unknown as information about something known? The scholars say that it is as though He were saying to them: ‘Muhammad, whom you know, and whose life story you know, and whose trustworthiness you know, is the one I have chosen as an apostle to you.’ It is as though the subject here is the proof of the predicate; Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is himself made the proof of the truth of his message.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi (3585)*

Now ‘Allah’ is the name of The Exalted Being, the Name which indicates His Essence; all His other Names indicate His Attributes, such as ‘The Living, The Sustaining, the All-Powerful, The Giver of Life’ and so on. Therefore, The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to begin everything by mentioning Allah’s Name because it is the Name to which all things respond, and by its means your body obeys you and reacts to your will.

Then His words ‘…save whom there is no deity…’ negate the existence of any deity other than Allah, and affirm Godhood for Allah alone without any partner. The first one to testify to this fact, that there is no deity but Allah, is Allah Himself: He testifies it to Himself, and then the angels testify to it, and then those endowed with knowledge: ‘Allah bears witness– and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge – that there is no deity save Him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). This is a testimony of the Essence for the Essence; and then the angels gave a testimony of witnessing, and then those endowed with knowledge gave a testimony of reasoning, proof and evidence.

As long as Allah made this testimony for Himself, and no one made any objection or counter-claim, the claim must be given to the claimant if no objection can be made: ‘Say, “If there were – as some people assert – [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His Almightiness”’ (*al-Isra’:* 42). He is ‘…The One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind…’ (*al-Hashr:* 22). We said that claims are given to their claimants as long as there is no objection, and thus His words ‘…The One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind…’ mean that there has never been any objection to this, and there never will be; for Allah, who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind, has informed us of this.

The word *ghaib* means all that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and this is of two types: first, there is that which can be ascertained by following the preliminary clues which lead to it, such as an algebra exercise which gives you certain information to allow you to deduce the solution; this is beyond your perception now, but you have the preliminary clues which can lead you to it later. This is the case with new inventions like television and radio: they were *ghaib* (unperceived) for a time, and then became apparent for all to see.

Something might be imperceptible for you but not for someone else: when something is stolen from you, it becomes imperceptible to you, but not to the one who stole it.

As for that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception and known only to the True Lord *Glorified is He* and no one else, this is the absolutely imperceptible which only Allah knows, and for which there are no preliminary clues that might allow it to be discovered. Therefore, He says, 'He [alone] knows that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and to none does He disclose aught of the mysteries of His Own unfathomable knowledge, unless it be to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect [therefor]…' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27).

As for '…all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind…' (*al-Hashr:* 22); *Al-shahada* means all that is visible (*mashhud*). So, what is special about Allah's Knowledge of visible things, since even human beings have this knowledge? We examined this issue when we were explaining Allah's words 'Verily, He knows all that is said openly, just as He [alone] knows all that you would conceal.' (*al-Anbiya':* 110) The True Lord *Glorified is He* invites us to marvel at His Knowledge of what people conceal; but what is special about His Knowledge of what is said openly, when everyone has this knowledge? They say that this means communal loud speech.

We explained this by saying: imagine we are attending a protest rally against someone or other. Indeed, this involves loud speech, and we can hear it; but can you identify which voice belongs to which person? No one can do this but Allah who knows what is said out loud in every time and place. He knows what is said loudly in every moment, in every place in the world – and who can do this but Allah?

'…He, The Most Merciful, The Dispenser of…' What is the relationship between The Most Merciful, The Dispenser of Mercy, and the One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind? The meaning of this is that the One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception is the Most Merciful in that He conceals the secrets of every person from the rest of mankind so that the motions of life can proceed safely; it is in His mercy that Allah keeps our secrets and private matters hidden.

Therefore, the noble Sacred Law allows you to poke the eye of the one who spies on you and invades your house without your knowledge. When a man spied on the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* through a hole in the door, he said: 'By Allah, had I seen him I would have poked his eye!'(1)

This is because houses are built for keeping privacy, and Islam preserves the Muslim's privacy in his own home, in his private room and in his bedroom. Therefore, the True Lord commands us to ask permission before entering and to teach this to our young children so that they imbibe this etiquette; and He warned us not to spy and seek out other people's private matters.

The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'If someone seeks out the Muslims' private affairs, Allah will seek out his private affairs and expose him in his own home.'(2)

This is because seeking out other people's private matters is one of the worst ways in which society can be corrupted and relations spoiled. You might see a man whose piety and good conduct pleases you, yet if you try to discover his secrets and private matters, you end up becoming displeased with him, and your opinion of his plummets.

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(1) *At-Tabarani, Al-Awsat (213)*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Mawsuli (7423)*

Concealment is better for the preservation of relations; and it is an evil thing to think badly of those who do the Good and enjoin it. A poet expressed this by saying:

> Act on my knowledge, and depend not on my actions:
>
> Take the fruit, and leave the wood for the fire!

So Allah is Merciful and Compassionate in His Knowledge of all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception. We begin our actions by invoking this, saying: ‘In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, and the Dispenser of Mercy’; and by this, we are aided and given grace; and by it, things react for us and bend to our will. You cannot act on your own power, but things only respond to you because Allah bends them to your will. Even if you are a sinner and neglected His guidance, He does not deny you the gifts of the Most Merciful and the Dispenser of Mercy. He does not take you to task for your own foolishness because you are His servant and His creation, and He is your Lord and Creator who called you into this existence.

هُوَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلْمَلِكُ ٱلْقُدُّوسُ ٱلسَّلَٰمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُ ٱلْمُهَيْمِنُ
ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْجَبَّارُ ٱلْمُتَكَبِّرُ ۚ سُبْحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

He is God: there is no god other than Him, the Controller, the Holy One, Source of Peace, Granter of Security, Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Truly Great; God is far above anything they consider to be His partner [23] (The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 23)

The repetition of ‘Allah is He save whom there is no deity…’ serves to emphasise that He alone possesses the attributes which now follow: Allah alone, save whom there is no deity, is The One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy, the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One who determines what is true and false *the Almighty* the One who subdues wrong and restores right, and the One to whom all greatness belongs.

‘The Sovereign Supreme’ (*al-Malik*) is one of His Names; the root *m-l-k* gives us *maalik*, which means ‘one who owns something’, however small and trifling it may be. Even the one who owns a piece of clothing to wear is called the *maalik* (owner) of it. It means, therefore, anyone who owns anything. The root also gives us the word *malik*, (king) which means the one who owns (or has dominion over) the one who owns. The True Lord then is *Al-Malik*, ‘The Sovereign Supreme’, who owns all things and their owners as well (maalik), for they are His servants and His handiwork. The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes Himself as being the owner (*maalik*) of the Day of Resurrection: ‘Owner of the Day of Judgment!’ (*al-Fatiha:* 4) On that day, He will be the true Owner, since there will be no owner besides Him; for on that day, all possessions will be wrested from their owners, and no one will own anything.

The meaning of ‘The Holy’ (*Al-Quddus*) is He who is absolutely free of all flaws, and utterly pure and able to purify all things. Therefore, the angels say in glorifying Allah: ‘Glorified, Holy, Lord of the angels and the Spirit!’(1) Our Lord, You are glorified by all creatures, and holy; that is, completely pure of any flaw or defect.

This is one of those words which can only be attributed to Him; that is why we say, by way of calling unto Allah: ‘Glory be to You – and this cannot be said to anyone but You’! And indeed, we find this is true in this world, for there are many people who are obeyed in all they command and prohibit, and praised with all kinds of expressions of laud and honour; yet we have never heard anyone say to another human being, ‘Glory be to you (*subhanak*)’!

We also said this about the word ‘Allah’. Despite the existence of disbelief and disbelievers and atheists who deny the existence of Allah, we have never heard of anyone naming his son ‘Allah’. Why not? Because no one would dare to do such a thing for they fear lest they be taken to task at once by the Almighty Determiner.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, by way of lauding Himself: ‘…Do you know any whose name is worthy to be mentioned side by side with His?’

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(1) *As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (12/717)*

(*Maryam:* 65) Those who ascribe to the concept of divine prevention [1] say: ‘It was Allah Himself who turned them away from doing so’.

To this, we say: even had He not turned them away, they would not have dared to do it. People of this school of thought also say, about the issue of the miraculous nature of the Quran, that Allah turned the Arabs away from coming up with speech that is equal to the Quran, and had Allah not turning them away, they would have done so. This assertion is wide of the mark; in reality, they would still have not been able to come up with the likes of it even if He had not turned them away.

The meaning of ‘…The One with whom all salvation rests…’ (*As-Salam*) is He who is Peace in His Essence. *Salam* (peace) comes from *salaama* (safety and soundness), which means the soundness of the body parts from any kind of mutual conflict: they all exist in harmony with one another.

Therefore, when it was said to Khadija *Allah be pleased with her* that her Lord greeted her with peace, she replied ‘Allah is Peace’(2), not ‘upon Allah be peace’, because He is Peace itself. That is why the greeting of the Muslims is ‘Peace be upon you’; for when someone comes to you, you do not know whether he means you good or harm. When he says, ‘Peace by upon you’, we feel safe and secure about him, because he has come in peace; so we reply to him, ‘And upon you be peace’; that is, we are also people of peace, and we will show you nothing but peace.

Thus, Allah made it the greeting of the angels in paradise: ‘…Peace be upon you! Well have you done: enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide’ (*az-Zumar:* 73). And this greeting rises even higher, for it is the greeting the True Lord will extend to those of His servants who enter paradise: ‘Peace and fulfilment through the word of a Lord who dispenses all grace.’ (*Ya Sin:* 58)

The word ‘…The Giver of Faith…’ (*al-Mu`min*) is also one of His Names and Attributes. The root letters *a-m-n* form the transitive verb *aamana* (meaning ‘to make safe’), as in Allah’s words: ‘…and made them safe (*aamana*) from

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(1) *That is, who say that Allah prevented mankind from opposing the Quran, for otherwise, the Arabs would have been able to oppose it. This was the opinion of the Mu’tazilite sect, though the Sunnis refuted it.*

(2) *At-Tabarani, Al-Kabir (18559)*

danger.' (*Quraysh:* 4). He also says, '…Why – have We not established for them a sanctuary secure? (*amin*)…' (*al-Qasas:* 57), that is, We have made them safe so that nothing can frighten them.

The verb *aamana* can also be intransitive with the preposition *bi*, as in: 'They believe in (*yu`minun bi)* Allah…' (*Al-'Imran:* 114), where it means 'to believe in'; it can also be used with the particle *li*, as in: '…But [we know that] you would not believe us…' (*Yusuf:* 17) in which case it means 'to trust'us or 'to affirm the truth of' us.

So, *Al-Mu`min* means the One Who keeps His servants safe from what threatens them; or it means 'The Believer', for He is the foremost of those who believe in Him, and as we said, He testifies this to Himself when He says: 'Allah bears witness…that there is no deity save Him…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). And if it means 'to affirm the truth', then He affirms the truth of His messengers by giving them miracles.

'…The One who determines what is true and false…' (*Al-Muhaymin*) means the One Who looks after things and has power over them. Allah says, 'And unto you [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true (*muhaymin*) therein…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48). So, the Quran is *muhaymin* over all the scriptures that came before it, and Allah is *Muhaymin* over His creatures in that He looks after them and has power over them.

In'The Almighty (*Al-`Aziz*)' (*al-Hashr:* 23), the word *`aziz* means something precious and unique; and the Almighty is He who overcomes all and cannot be overcome. *Al-Jabbar* is one of the True Lord's Majestic Attributes: it means that He overcomes those who oppose His guidance. A human being can also be *jabbar*; Allah says, 'And will you [always], whenever you lay hand [on others], lay hand [on them] cruelly, without any restraint (*jabbarin*)?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 130) And He says, '…and you can by no means force (*tujbir*) them [to believe in it]…' (*Qaf:* 45). That is, you do not have power over them so that you could force them to believe.

Allah is also *Jabbar* in the sense that He heals (the verb *jabara* also means 'to heal'); we say, 'O You who heals those who are injured!' He mends the ailment of the poor by enriching them, and mends the ailments of the ignorant by teaching them, and mends the ailment of the weak by strengthening them.

And the one who sets broken bones is called in Arabic *mujabbir*: he sets the bones in their proper place and then wraps them with bandages (*jabeera*).

Yet the attributes of the True Lord are not like those of created beings; for the attributes of the True Lord *Glorified is He* are intrinsic to Him, whilst the attributes of created beings are given to them and may be taken from them. The attribute of *jabarut* is evil and unjust in the case of human beings (where it means tyranny), whilst for Allah it involves forbearance, wisdom and justice.

'…The One to whom all greatness belongs…(*Al-Mutakabbir*)' comes from *kibr*, which for human beings means 'arrogance' and is blameworthy; yet in the Creator, it means 'greatness', and is praiseworthy. For human beings it is a flaw, whilst for The Creator it is perfection.

Greatness is an intrinsic attribute of Allah, yet an affected attribute of human beings because they are proud of something that has only been given to them and is not intrinsic. Some people are proud of their wealth, or their health, or their fame; yet these are all mere passing delights and fleeting accidents.

Therefore, Allah alone is the One Who can truly lay claim to greatness, and all other claims to greatness are false. Allah is the One to Whom all greatness belongs because He is free of need for His creation; He lacks nothing, and He is the giver of all things. Therefore, it is a great blessing of His upon us that He is the One to Whom all greatness belongs, because His greatness means that He does not wrong us: '…and never does Allah do the least wrong to His creatures.' (*Fussilat:* 46)

This is an aspect of His Greatness; for wrongdoing means to take what is not yours to increase what you have; and Allah's greatness is utterly beyond this, for He owns everything in reality, and is not in need of anything.

But if the servant acts with tyranny (*jabbariyya*), does this take him outside the overwhelming power (*jabbariyya*) of his Creator? No, he remains under the overwhelming power of his Creator from which he cannot escape. How could he? Even though his Creator has given him free will to obey or disobey, to believe or disbelieve, and to act or not act, he is still compelled in other areas and has no free will in them.

This is the overwhelming power of his Creator over him, from which he cannot escape. Therefore, I like the popular saying: ‘If your power allows you to wrong others, remember the power that Allah has over you’.(1)

It is good for mankind that greatness belongs to the Creator alone; for every one of us has an equal share in this greatness. That all greatness belongs to Allah means that no one of us can claim to be greater than any other is because we are all equal before Allah’s greatness. He who knows that all greatness belongs to Allah alone would be ashamed to hold himself greater than any of His creatures.

‘…Utterly remote is Allah, in His Limitless Glory, from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity!’ That is, He is utterly free of all that they associate with Him.

هُوَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡخَٰلِقُ ٱلۡبَارِئُ ٱلۡمُصَوِّرُۖ لَهُ ٱلۡأَسۡمَآءُ ٱلۡحُسۡنَىٰۚ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُۥ
مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٤﴾

He is God: the Creator, the Originator, the Shaper.
The best names belong to Him. Everything in the heavens
and earth glorifies Him: He is the Almighty, the Wise [24]
(The Quran, *al-Hashr:* 24)

Again here He repeats ‘He is Allah…’ for the third time because these verses are a continuing mention of Allah’s Names and Attributes, which include: ‘…the Creator, the Maker, He who shapes all forms and appearances…’ (*al-Hashr:* 24). These are all listed together because these three concepts are all really successive stages of the same thing.

Allah is the Creator (*Al-Khaliq*), and to create means to bring into being out of nothing; and He is the Maker (*Al-Bari’*), i.e. the One who sets this creation in a form that allows it to fulfil the purpose for which it was made, just as you sharpen (*bara*) a pencil to write with it, or sharpen an arrow so it will hit the target.

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(1) This is a saying of the Caliph `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz.

Things cannot fulfil their purpose unless they have a specific form. An example to illustrate this: a boy goes with his father, a blacksmith, to the workshop, where his father takes a straight length of iron and bends it. The boy finds this strange: why is his father bending something that is straight? So, the father explains to him that he wants to make a hook, and a hook can only do its job if it is bent like this.

Then He is: '…He who shapes all forms and appearances…' (*Al-Musawwir*), who shapes this creation as He wills, and makes it into a form which has no precedent, He said about man: '[He] has created you, and formed you in accordance with what you are meant to be, and shaped your nature in just proportions' (*al-Infitar:* 7), and: 'having put you together in whatever form He willed [you to have]' (*al-Infitar:* 8). This is omnipotent power: first, the power to bring something into being from out of nothing, and bring something into existence which was not there before; and this is preceded by a will that selects this outcome. And after this, He who shapes all forms and appearances comes and gives it its proper form.

Reflect on the miracle of man's creation and forming, and how this omnipotent power is manifested in there being so many people, yet no two who are identical. We see the engineer, for example, who makes a single product like a cup: he makes a mould for it to act as a prototype and a model for all the others. The Creator, on the other hand, has constant ingenuity in His creations so that every person is unique and never identical to any other.

You know now about how every person has unique fingerprints and a unique voice; and every day they are finding out new ways in which every person is unique and distinguished from everyone else. Were it not for these distinctions, people would resemble one another and their identities would be confused, and there would be so much confusion that human life would not be able to function at all without these distinctions. Otherwise, when a crime was committed, how would we tell the perpetrator from everyone else?

'…His [alone] are the attributes of perfection [*al-asma' al-husna*] (literally 'the names of perfection')…' We said before that the name 'Allah' is the

Name of *the Glorified* Being, the true Name, whilst all His other names are in fact attributes. 'the Creator', 'the Maker' and 'He who shapes all forms and appearances' are attributes of the True Lord, and because of how well known they are, they have gone from being attributes to being names.

The proof that they are attributes is that Allah calls them *husna*, which is a feminine plural in Arabic (*sifa*, meaning attribute, is also feminine), whereas *ism* (name) is masculine and would yield the plural *hissan (feminine)*. So, they are attributes, but they have become so well known of Him, and applied to Him alone, that they have become names for Him. When you say '…the Maker…', you do not mean anyone but Allah. 'He who shapes all forms and appearances' is also only said of Him *the Glorified and Exalted*.

So, these words are attributes and since they are only attributes to Allah they have become names for Him. An attribute can become so famous that it sticks to the one it is given to so that the mind thinks only of him when it hears it. When we say: 'The Prince of Poets', you think of none but Ahmad Shawqi. (In English, when we say, 'The Bard', you think only of Shakespeare.)

The meaning of '…of perfection…' is that which indicates the Attributes of Absolute Perfection. The name 'Allah' indicates His Being, all things respond when you begin them in the Name of Allah; this is like when the judge begins a hearing by saying 'in the name of the people' since the people are the ones who have given him this duty.

Likewise, when you want to do anything involving power, wisdom, knowledge, or mercy, you say 'O Allah' because this name combines all these attributes, and all the manifestations of these names.

'…All that is in the heavens and on earth extols His Limitless Glory….' We have already observed that the root verb *sabbaha*, 'to extol the glory of' is used in the Quran in all its tenses: past, present and Imperative. He says here: '…All that is in the heavens and on earth extols (*yusabbih*, in the present tense) His Limitless Glory…', and elsewhere He says: 'All that is in the heavens and on earth extolled (*sabbaha*, in the past tense) Allah's Limitless Glory…' (*al-Hadid:* 1). And He says: 'Extol (*sabbih*, the imperative) the Limitless Glory of your Lord's name: [the Glory of] the All-Highest.' (*al-A'la:* 1)

So, Allah is glorified in all times: '…and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you [O men] fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him…' (*al-Isra': *44). And indeed, He was already glorified before He created anything to glorify Him.

He says here '…extols His Limitless Glory…' using the third person pronoun which refers to Him because the previous few verses have all begun with 'Allah is He…'. So Allah Who has these attributes: the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with Whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One Who determines what is true and false *the Almighty* the One Who subdues wrong and restores right, and the One to Whom all greatness belongs – He it is whom all that is in the heavens and the earth glorify.

Sometimes He says, 'All that is in the heavens and all that is on Earth…' (*al-Jumu'a: *1); we said that this is because the heavens and the earth are marvels of Allah's creation in themselves: 'Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth…' (*Ghafir: *57). So the heavens and the earth were glorifying Allah before man was created to glorify Him.

'…For He Alone is Almighty ('*Aziz*), Truly Wise!' We said that '*Aziz* means something rare and unique or a power which overcomes and cannot be overcome; and this vanquishing power is free of any tyranny or despotism because it is tempered by wisdom.

'…He is the Almighty, the Wise.' (*al-Hashr: *24) He is the Wise Who puts everything in its proper place as its purpose requires. Power alone is blameworthy when there is no wisdom to direct it.

the chapter of

al-Mumtahana

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Mumtahana* (1):

Note

In our verification and compilation of these volumes of the Commentary of Imam *Mohammad Mutawalli Ash-Sha`rawi* on the Glorious Quran, we have adhered to the standards of academic honesty. This necessitates that we make the following note:

The sheikh *Allah have mercy on him* passed away when he was near the end of the chapter of *al-Mumtahana*, but we resolved to complete his reflections on the rest of the chapters of the Glorious Quran, following the same approach he used throughout his commentary. He combined his scholarly reflections with linguistic, literary, and stylistic remarks that all show the miraculous glory of the Quran.

In our completion of his commentary, we sought assistance of the heritage he left, his audio and video recordings and what he completed of his reflection on the Glorious Quran. We made our best efforts to phrase it in an easily comprehensible style for which the sheikh was known *Allah rest his soul*. We have not strayed even a little from the approach, style, and tone of his reflections, nor have we spared any effort in consulting numerous commentaries on the Quran of exegetes who followed various approaches. Some of them were based on explaining verses of the Quran guided by other verses of it. Some undertook to explain the Quran based on the *Sunnah* (Hadiths) of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We also consulted commentaries which dealt with the Quran from a linguistic approach such as that of Al-Baghawi, or an intellectual approach such as the commentaries of Ar-Razi and Al-Alusi.

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(1) This is the 60th chapter in the written order of the Glorious Quran. It is comprised of 13 verses and was revealed in Medina between the chapter of *al-Bayyina* and the chapter of *an-Nasr*. Thus, it was the fifth chapter of the Quran to be revealed in Medina.

We have done this work hoping for Allah's goodly reward and seeking to make the treasure left by the sheikh complete and perfect, for generations to come to remember it and benefit from it. This work was accomplished under the supervision, and with the assistance of Sheikh Sami Mutawalli Ash-Sha`rawi.

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Allah says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَّخِذُواْ عَدُوِّى وَعَدُوَّكُمۡ أَوۡلِيَآءَ تُلۡقُونَ إِلَيۡهِم بِٱلۡمَوَدَّةِ وَقَدۡ
كَفَرُواْ بِمَا جَآءَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡحَقِّ يُخۡرِجُونَ ٱلرَّسُولَ وَإِيَّاكُمۡ أَن تُؤۡمِنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ رَبِّكُمۡ إِن
كُنتُمۡ خَرَجۡتُمۡ جِهَٰدٗا فِى سَبِيلِى وَٱبۡتِغَآءَ مَرۡضَاتِىۚ تُسِرُّونَ إِلَيۡهِم بِٱلۡمَوَدَّةِ وَأَنَا۠ أَعۡلَمُ
بِمَآ أَخۡفَيۡتُمۡ وَمَآ أَعۡلَنتُمۡۚ وَمَن يَفۡعَلۡهُ مِنكُمۡ فَقَدۡ ضَلَّ سَوَآءَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ١

You who believe, do not take My enemies and yours as your allies, showing them friendship when they have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven you and the Messenger out simply because you believe in God, your Lord — not if you truly emigrated in order to strive for My cause and seek My good pleasure. You secretly show them friendship — I know all you conceal and all you reveal — but any of you who do this are straying from the right path[1]
(The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 1)

This is a command from Allah to those who believe in Him as the One God, the Creator, and Provider of all. He calls them to adhere to His guidance which His Messenger has delivered to them. In this guidance lies their deliverance and happiness in this life and the next. In the verse is a warning to the believers not to forsake this guidance or turn away from it, for life cannot be set to rights unless governed by the ordinance of the Creator of life and all that is in it. Whoever strays from His path would not prosper unless he returns to it once again. This is the cure of all our ailments and solution of all our problems, for Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change themselves.

Our obedience to Allah does not add anything to His dominion, nor does He benefit from our compliance with His commands. Allah has forever existed with no beginning and no end, and to Him have the Attributes of Perfection forever belonged. Allah has sent down His religion and made it obligatory for us only for our own good. Every maker would love to see what he has made prosperous. To Allah belongs the Highest Example. He has made humankind and He wants us to prosper; that is why He revealed to us His Straight Path. Based on that, Allah commands His believing servants: '…do not take My enemies and yours as your allies…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). They are enemies, so do not take them as friends, for they can never be friends.

The word *`aduw* (enemy) is always singular even when used to modify a dual or a plural noun. It can mean one enemy, two enemies, or many enemies. In the following verses, the word is used in the singular form though its referent is a plural noun: 'Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "Those idols you have worshipped, you and your forefathers, are my *`aduw* (enemies)…"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 76-77).

In the verse we are considering, it is noticeable that Allah underlines the disbelievers' enmity towards Him first; He says: '…My enemies…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1), then He says, referring to the believers: '…and yours…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). Anyone who is an enemy to Allah must therefore be an enemy to the believers. If you- O believers- make friends or allies out of Allah's enemies, they will work against you, for they reject Allah's guidance, and therefore no good can come out of their friendship. Allah explains to us this meaning in another verse: 'The believers should not make the disbelievers their allies rather than other believers– anyone who does such a thing will isolate himself completely from Allah– except when you need to protect yourselves from them…' (*Al-'Imran:* 28). The exception in the aforesaid verse means the ruling is not rigid, for it might sometimes be the case that enemies are stronger than the believers, so the believers may pretend to ally with them until they prepare enough power to confront them.(1) This is a specific case, but what we should beware of is taking Allah's enemies truly as allies, and Allah knows fully our intentions; He concludes the aforesaid verse by saying: '…Allah warns you to beware of Him: the Final Return is to Allah.' (*Al-'Imran:* 28)

Critical as the matter is, Allah explains much about it in several verses of the Quran; He says, 'You who believe, do not take for your intimates such outsiders as spare no effort to ruin you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 118). Allah wants the believers to prosper, but those outsiders want to destroy the believers' power and make them suffer. The verse goes on to say: '…their hatred is evident from their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is far worse…' (*Al-'Imran:* 118). Allah has exposed their intentions by saying: 'This is how it is: here you are, you love them, but they do not love you; you believe in all the Scriptures and when they meet you, they say, "We believe", but when they are alone, they bite their fingertips in rage at you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 119). After this has been made clear, no one has any excuse for taking them as friends and allies.

Allah says in another verse: 'You who believe, do not take as allies those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it– whether people who were given the Scripture before you, or disbelievers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 57). Caution against hypocrites is such a crucial issue that a significant portion of the Quran is devoted to dealing with it so that the believers would not fall into their trap.

The translation of the verse says: '…showing them friendship…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1), yet the original Arabic text of the verse literally translates: '…offering affection to them…'. This includes passing on to them the secrets of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to seek their affection. This implies that letting out secrets is a sign of affection.

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(1) This principle is only permissible in cases of extreme necessity where a Muslim fears great harm, like killing, so he may resort to such pretence to protect himself. This is quite different from the hypocrisy employed by Shi'ites who claim to be Muslims. It appeared in the fourth century A.H., and it is a form of deception they always practice to conceal their hatred of Islam.

Allah says afterwards: '…when they have rejected the truth you have received…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). That is, how can you offer them your friendship, whereas they disbelieve in the truth which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received from Allah. '…And have driven you and the Messenger out simply because you believe in Allah, you Lord…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). So, they rejected the Message and expelled you, believers, and the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* solely because of your belief in Allah; faith alone is the reason for your expulsion, which is similar to what Allah says in another verse: '…How can you kill a man just for saying, "My Lord is Allah?"…' (*Ghafir:* 28)

The disbelievers of Mecca could not bear the presence of the believers among them, for their presence would change the order of society and take their power. They knew it is a religion that makes masters and slaves all equal in their rights and dignity as human beings.

Allah goes on to address the believers: '…not if you truly emigrated in order to strive for My cause and seek My good pleasure…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). If this has been truly the case, if your struggle has been truly for My cause, then do not take My enemies as friends. It is a message to the believers: Complete the journey of faith; just as you have been sincere in your immigration for My cause, be sincere to the end and do not take My enemies as friends.

'…You secretly show them friendship…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). That refers to harbouring secret affection for them or secretly passing on to them news about The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. '…I know all you conceal and all you reveal…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). Beware of Him Whom no secret of yours can elude.

'…But any of you who do this…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1); that is, who take Allah's enemies as allies '…are straying from the right path' (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). Allying the disbelievers is deviation from the way of Allah. The Arabic word used in the original text of the verse to mean 'the right path' is *sawa`* which means 'middle'; namely, the middle of the path. The roads of the Arab environment then were either desert tracks or mountain passes. Therefore, Arabs always preferred to travel in the middle of the road so as not to be harmed by avalanches of sand or rocks falling from mountainsides.

Those who did not go down the middle of the road would get lost, because they followed a way which could not lead them to a good end. Thus, the middle of a path was ‘the right path’, for it was the safest part of it and the one most likely to lead one to the destination

إِن يَثۡقَفُوكُمۡ يَكُونُواْ لَكُمۡ أَعۡدَآءٗ وَيَبۡسُطُوٓاْ إِلَيۡكُمۡ أَيۡدِيَهُمۡ
وَأَلۡسِنَتَهُم بِٱلسُّوٓءِ وَوَدُّواْ لَوۡ تَكۡفُرُونَ ٢

If they gain the upper hand over you, they will revert to being your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to harm you; it is their dearest wish that you may renounce your faith [2] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 2)

Their enmity towards the believers is permanent: if they get any chance, they will exercise that enmity in the meanest way and would use all means to harm the believers.

The expression ‘stretch out one’s hand’ is usually associated with the positive connotation of offering good to others. However, as for the disbelievers, nothing will come your way from them but evil and harm, sometimes with words and other times with deeds. This is a natural result of the hatred and rancour they feel against faith and its adherents.

Moreover, ‘…it is their dearest wish that you may renounce your faith’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 2). What they conceal is no less rancorous than what they revealed. Much as they harm you openly, they have much bitterness against you in their hearts that they would love you to be disbelievers like them so that you would have no power or advantage over them and they would remain in control

لَن تَنفَعَكُمۡ أَرۡحَامُكُمۡ وَلَآ أَوۡلَٰدُكُمۡۚ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ يَفۡصِلُ بَيۡنَكُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ بَصِيرٞ ٣

Neither your kinsfolk nor your children will be any use to you on the Day of Resurrection: He will separate you out. God sees everything you do [3] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 3)

It is of no use to ally with Allah’s enemies for fear of your families, for they will avail you nothing before Allah on the Day of Resurrection: ‘On a

Day when everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, and from his mother and father, and from his spouse and his children: on that Day, to every one of them will his own state be of sufficient concern' (*'Abasa:* 34-37). Allah also says: '…stand in awe of the Day on which no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child will in the least avail his parent…' (*Luqman:* 33). Do not befriend of Allah's enemies for anyone's sake, for they will not be able to protect you from His punishment. On the Day of Judgement 'He will separate you out' (*al-Mumtahana:* 3). Some will go to paradise, and some to hell.

It has been narrated that these verses were revealed on occasion of a misdeed Hatib ibn Abu Balta` unintentionally committed. He was a believer and one of those who immigrated to Medina. When he learned that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was preparing to conquer Mecca, he sent a woman with a letter to Mecca, in which he wrote, 'From Hatib ibn Abu Balta` to Quraysh: Muhammad intends to conquer you, so be on your guard.'

Allah revealed this to His Messenger, so he called for `Ali, `Ammar, `Umar, Talha, and Az-Zubayr, who were all skilled knights then. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them, 'Seek out a woman travelling. You will find her at Rawdat Khakh, carrying a letter to Quraysh. Bring that letter to me.' When they caught up with her, they asked her about the letter and she denied having it, so they searched her and her belongings and found nothing, and wanted to leave. Still, `Ali said, 'Indeed we have not lied! The Messenger of Allah has not lied! And the Revelation sent by Allah has not lied to the Messenger of Allah!' Then, he drew his sword and said, 'Show me the letter or I will kill you.' Seeing he was serious and decisive, she brought the letter out of her hair, and they returned with it to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Messenger of Allah sent for Hatib and asked him why he had done that. He said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I am a man of no great family or clan. I have a family in Mecca and I wanted to win some influence with Quraysh so they would protect my family. I knew that would not harm you in any way, for Allah has guaranteed to give you victory.' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'You have spoken the truth.' `Umar said, 'No, Messenger of Allah! Let me strike his neck!' Prophet Muhammad said, 'No, `Umar. You do not know, but it may be that Allah has looked upon the people of Badr and said, "Do as you will, for I have forgiven you."' Hatib was one of the believers who fought along with Prophet Muhammad at the Battle of Badr. (1)

So, family ties and relations should never cause you to act at variance with Allah's ordinance, for you do not know where good lies. Islam is the highest bond over which no other ties should prevail. It even comes before blood ties.

The history of Islam abides in examples that prove this fundamental truth about the Islamic faith. `Ubaidullah ibn 'Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul asked Prophet Muhammad's permission to kill his own father- who was the leader of the hypocrites- rather than have any other Muslim kill him. The son of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq said to his father, 'I saw you at the Battle of Badr, but I avoided you'; that is, he could have killed him, but left him out of mercy. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* replied to his son, 'As for me, had I seen you then, I would have killed you!'(2) That was quite natural and plausible. The son of Abu Bakr had to choose between his father and his false religious beliefs, so he chose his father. As for Abu Bakr, he had to choose between his Lord, the True God, and one of his sons. A true believer would not prefer any to his Creator and Lord. The companion Mus`ab ibn `Umayr killed his own brother, `Ubaid ibn `Umayr, in a battle. His other brother was taken captive, so he said to Abu Al-Yusr, his captor, 'Bind your captive well, for his mother is rich, and will pay a great ransom for him.' His brother looked at him and said, 'Is this the advice you give for your brother, O Mus`ab?!' He replied, 'He (Abu Al-Yusr) is my brother, not you!' So the tie of Islam was so firm that it prevailed over every other tie and was the foundation upon which the early Muslims based their actions.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…Allah sees everything you do' (*al-Mumtahana:* 3). Allah watches over you, so beware of that. His Eye never blinks or sleeps. Know that He sees you and witnesses all your deeds.

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(1) *This is part of a long Hadith cited by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3007, 3983, 4274) and Muslim in his Sahih (6557) - chapter on the merits of the Muslims who fought in Badr. It was also cited by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (2652), At-Tirmidhi (2305) and Ahmad in his Musnad (600) on the authority of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him as well as Az-Zubayr and Al-Miqdad.*

(2) *Ibn Qasim Al-Hanbali, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, p.47*

However cautiously you try to hide your alliance with His enemies, and whatever ruses you employ, He sees you.

Allah says in the following verse:

قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِيٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَٱلَّذِينَ مَعَهُۥٓ إِذْ قَالُوا۟ لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَءَٰٓؤُا۟ مِنكُمْ
وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ ٱلْعَدَٰوَةُ وَٱلْبَغْضَآءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّىٰ
تُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَحْدَهُۥٓ إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَأَسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ وَمَآ أَمْلِكُ لَكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن
شَىْءٍ ۖ رَّبَّنَا عَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنَبْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤﴾

**You have a good example in Abraham and his companions,
when they said to their people, ‘We disown you and what
you worship besides God! We renounce you! Until you
believe in God alone, the enmity and hatred that has arisen
between us will endure!’ — except when Abraham said to
his father, ‘I will pray for forgiveness for you though I
cannot protect you from God’ — [they prayed] [4]
(The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 4)**

After warning us against taking Allah’s enemies as allies, Allah emphasizes this fundamental aspect about faith by offering an example. He tells us about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), the Father of Prophets, for he had a relevant experience during the course of his call to his father and his people: ‘Tell them the story of Ibrahim (Abraham), when he asked his father and his people, “What do you worship?” They said, “We worship idols, and are constantly in attendance on them.” He asked, “Do they hear you when you call? Do they help or harm you?” They replied, “No, but this is what we saw our fathers doing.” Ibrahim (Abraham) said, “Those idols you have worshipped, you and your forefathers, are my enemies; not so the Lord of the Worlds”’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 69-77). So, take your father Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as a role model in this matter. Take him as an example of righteous conduct which you can emulate. He renounced idolatry and idolaters, even though they included his father, i.e. his uncle who had raised him.

After renouncing them and condemning the idolatry they held fast to, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and those who believe with him clarified the nature of the relationship between them and the idolaters which was pure enmity: '…the enmity and hatred that has arisen between us will endure…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 4). There cannot be friendship or alliance, for faith and disbelief can never be united and their adherents must forever be opponents. That enmity and hatred would persist '…until you believe in Allah alone…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 4). So, the reason for that enmity was that they associated partners with Allah. Had they believed in Him alone, that enmity would have given way to affection and unity

However, there was one exception of that attitude: '…except when Ibrahim (Abraham) said to his father, "I will pray for forgiveness for you..."' (*al-Mumtahana:* 4). This was an exception; that is: you have a good example in Ibrahim (Abraham) except that he promised to implore Allah's Forgiveness for his uncle, which meant that his heart was still attached to him.

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) did not mean to show friendship or affection to an enemy of Allah. In the Quran, there is mention of the discourse that took place between Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and his uncle. Allah says, 'Ibrahim (Abraham) asked forgiveness for his father because he had made a promise to him, but once he realized that his father was an enemy of Allah, he washed his hands of him. Ibrahim (Abraham) was tender-hearted and forbearing' (*at-Tawba:* 114). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) kept on praying that his uncle be forgiven, as he had promised him until it was made clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, so he left him and renounced him.

Allah mentions Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) as a good example for all mankind. He was the Father of Prophets and Allah said about him: 'Verily, Ibrahim (Abraham) was an *ummah*…' (*an-Nahl:* 120). The word *ummah* means nation. Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was like an entire nation in the sense that in him were all virtues; combined virtues that could only be found in a nation, not a single person. Allah has distributed virtues among His creatures so that each one of us would need the virtues of his fellow humans and people would thus be connected to one another. What was special about Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was that he possessed all virtues. Therefore, his Lord says about him: 'And of Ibrahim

(Abraham), who fulfilled his duty' (*an-Najm:* 37), and: 'When Ibrahim's (Abraham's) Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled…' (*al-Baqara:* 124).

Back to the verse we are reflecting on, Allah says, '…though I cannot protect you from Allah…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 4) means I cannot ward off from you any of Allah's punishment; all I can do is pray that you be forgiven. This was Ibrahim's (Abraham's) attitude.

Allah concludes the verse by the supplication: '…[They prayed] 'Lord, we have put our trust in You; we turn to You; You are our final destination.'' (*al-Mumtahana:* 4) Trusting Allah is an act of worship performed by the heart, not by the body: the body acts, and the heart trusts. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* and those who believed with him thus prayed to Allah: we have taken the means of deliverance and put our trust in you that you will save us. '…We turn to You…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 4). This means: We have turned to You in repentance and awakened from what we were doing before. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) ceased to pray and supplicate that his uncle be forgiven when he realized he was Allah's enemy. They acknowledged: '…You are our final destination.' (*al-Mumtahana:* 4) The journey's end is the Hereafter, the place to which we will inevitably all return to meet Allah and receive our recompense.

Allah then says:

رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَٱغْفِرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٥﴾

Lord, do not expose us to mistreatment [at the hands of] the disbelievers. Forgive us, Lord, for You are the Almighty, the All Wise' [5] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 5)

This prayer was said by the believers who followed Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). How can the believer be a 'trial' for the disbelievers? This can be in two cases. One of them is when the believers are defeated in battle by the disbelievers. Hence, the disbelievers would say: Were they believers, they would not have been defeated. Allah would have supported them! Had they a Lord to defend them, they would not have been defeated! That would certainly dissuade the disbelievers from embracing faith, for they see the condition of the believers and their defeat, and that is one case where the believers can be a *fitna* (trial) to the disbelievers.

The other case when the believers may be a *fitna* (trial or test) to the disbelievers is when they stop adhering to Allah's guidance, commit sins and spread corruption, so they cause the disbelievers to be averse to Islam and disinclined to embrace it. Unfortunately, such is the case with Muslims now; people are frightened away from Allah's religion instead of being attracted to it. As one of the renowned scholars of Islam said, the later generations of Muslims cannot be reformed except by that which reformed the earlier generations.(1) The believers bear responsibility for this– for how people are turned away from Allah's religion. We need to pray now as did the followers of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham): 'Our Lord! Do not make us a trial for those who disbelieve...' (*al-Mumtahana:* 5). Make us among those who obey Your commands in a way that attracts other people to Your religion, and do not make us an excuse for them to reject Your religion, O Allah.

When we disobey Allah, we do not only subject ourselves to His punishment, but we may also repel others from His Straight Path.

Allah says in the following verse:

لَقَدۡ كَانَ لَكُمۡ فِيهِمۡ أُسۡوَةٌ حَسَنَةٞ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرۡجُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلۡيَوۡمَ
ٱلۡأٓخِرَۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلۡغَنِيُّ ٱلۡحَمِيدُ ٦

Truly, they are a good example for you [believers] to follow, a good example for those who fear God and the Last Day. If anyone turns away, [remember] God is Self-Sufficing and worthy of all praise [6] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 6)

The example of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is one to follow for those are mindful of Allah. He never compromised to offer affection or friendship to the enemies of Allah, even if they were of his family. Such is an example to follow for those who hope to be worthy of receiving Allah's reward, who aspire to attain righteousness which leads to the best reward of winning Allah's good pleasure as well as His reward in the Hereafter.

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(1) *This was said by Imam Malik Allah rest his soul in Sharh Al-`Aqida Al-Tahawiyya (1/9). What reformed the earliest of the Muslim nation was following Allah's Book and the Sunnah of His Messenger.*

Allah says: '…who fear Allah and the Last Day…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 6). That refers to those who fear His requital and hope for His reward. Finally, '…If anyone turns away…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 6) from taking them as example and following the way of Allah, then '…[Remember] Allah is Self-Sufficient and the Praiseworthy.' (*al-Mumtahana:* 6)

Allah then says:

عَسَى ٱللَّهُ أَن يَجۡعَلَ بَيۡنَكُمۡ وَبَيۡنَ ٱلَّذِينَ عَادَيۡتُم مِّنۡهُم مَّوَدَّةٗۚ
وَٱللَّهُ قَدِيرٞۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ٧

God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies – God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful [7] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 7)

The Arabic word *`asa* (may still) denotes hope that something is possible or likely to happen. You may tell someone, 'Come to me tomorrow and *`asa* (I may) help you out with that'. This would give him hope of fruition, yet you may well be prevented from helping him by something out of your hand. Such is a promise giving hope, yet it is expressed by someone who does not have control over all the means and circumstances involved in the matter, so he cannot ensure success. Now, when hope is expressed by Allah, the One Who controls everything, no one, and nothing can prevent it or get in its way.

After forbidding them from showing affection or friendship to the disbelievers, Allah Almighty soothes His believing servants. He knew some of the believers had friends and relations among the disbelievers, and that their thoughts were with their former dear ones who still rejected faith. Allah meant to reassure them: do not grieve because you must be estranged from them, for it may be that Allah would turn that enmity into affection. That was truly the case, for many of those disbelievers embraced faith later and served the religion of Allah.

Some of them were sworn enemies of Islam and leaders of disbelief. They eventually embraced Islam and proved to be firm and true believers. Some of them became leaders of Muslims, such as ‘Amr, Khalid, and `Ikrima. Glory be to Allah! `Ikrima was one of the most fervent opponents of Islam, who stood alone in the trench on the day of the Conquest of Mecca to repel the Muslim army! After all, Allah guided him to faith, and then he struggled to make up for what he had done in his pagan ignorance. In the Battle of Yarmuk, swords and spears cut into his body and filled him with wounds. Before he breathed his last, he turned to Khalid ibn Al-Walid *Allah be pleased with him* and said, ‘O Khalid, is this a death that pleases Allah and His Messenger?’ Allah be pleased with `Ikrima!

After making that reassurance, Allah further alleviates the concerns of the believers by reminding them of this fundamental truth: ‘…Allah is All-Powerful…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 7). Nothing is beyond the Power of Allah. Nothing is outside the realms of submission to Him. He has the Power to do anything, and He is the Almighty. Everything is under His control including the hearts of people. He is the One Who can draw the hearts and minds of these people to you and create affection between you and them, O believers, after you have been enemies.

This is similar to the meaning expressed in the following verse: ‘…And remember the blessings which Allah has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 103).

Allah concludes the verse by saying: ‘…Allah is Most Forgiving and Merciful’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 7). He is their Lord and can forgive them what they did before they were Muslims. He can bestow His favours and blessings on them and on you too, for Allah’s Bounty is immense.

Allah then makes further clarification of the ruling governing the relationship between the believers and the disbelievers:

لَّا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ
أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٨﴾

And He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly
with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or
driven you out of your homes: God loves the just [8]
(The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 8)

It is narrated that the circumstance behind the revelation of this verse was that a group of Muslims had wondered if they could just do good to their families who did not embrace Islam, so Allah revealed the aforesaid verse.

Allah does not forbid the believers from being kind and good to the disbelievers on condition that those disbelievers do not fight them or drive them out of their homes. So long as they do not harm you in any way, you, O believers, are allowed to be kind to them. Allah refers to this meaning in the following verse: ‘If they [your parents] strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge [scriptural proof], then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life according to what is right… (*Luqman:* 15).

We have explained before that the verse we are considering does not contradict Allah’s words: ‘[Prophet], you will not find people who truly believe in Allah and the Last Day giving their loyalty to those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers or other relations…’ (*al-Mujadala:* 22). We are forbidden from inclining to the disbelievers with our hearts or showing loyalty or alliance to them. This is different from doing good to them or showing them kindness, provided that they do not fight us on the basis of faith. Doing a good act to someone does not mean you love him, but one may do the good even to someone he dislikes. The verse we are considering says: ‘…to deal kindly…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 8). This means: if you are asked to, then be kind to them, but do not be the one to initiate it (not to seem like seeking their affection or alliance).

Not only ‘kindly’ but also ‘…*tuqsitu* (to deal justly)…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 8). So we are asked to deal with them based on justice. The Arabic root *qist* has derivatives that carry a meaning and its opposite as well. The verb *qasata* means to wrong or transgress. When the prefix ‘a’ is added, the word becomes *aqsata* which means to remove injustice, for the prefix denotes ‘remove’ or ‘undo’. Allah says: ‘But *al-qasitun* (those who go wrong) will be fuel for Hellfire’ (*al-Jinn:* 15). In this verse, the word denotes wrongdoing. Allah also says, ‘…Allah loves *al-muqsitun* (those who act equitably)’ (*al-Hujurat:* 9). Here the word denotes ‘removing injustice’.

Another connotation of *tuqsitu* (translated in the verse as ‘to deal justly’) is to offer assistance by *aqsat* which literally means ‘instalments’. This is like offering them regular monthly shares of your wealth, for example. So, the word denotes ‘justice’ and can also mean sparing them the humiliation of begging by offering them what satisfies their needs. Allah says in another verse: ‘and do not chide the one who asks for help’ (*ad-Duha:* 10). Being unkind to the needy would drive them to object to what Allah has decreed, ‘Why has He made me poor and made them wealthy?!’ This meaning is further explained in the verse: ‘A kind word and forgiveness is better than a charitable deed followed by hurtful [words]…’ (*al-Baqara:* 263). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘You cannot share your wealth with everyone, so share with them instead your good character.’(1) You cannot help everyone with money, but it is easier to help them with a kind word and a positive attitude. That is why Allah says here: ‘…to deal kindly and justly…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 8). Kindness relieves them of their need, and justice is to spare them the humiliation of begging by helping them even before they ask for help. It has been narrated that once a beggar knocked on a man’s door. The man opened it and gave the beggar what he wanted. The man then went back into his home, crying. His wife asked him, surprised, ‘Why are you crying while you have given him what he needed?!’ He replied, ‘I cry because I left him so long that he needed to beg.’ People who love goodness should be aware of the condition of those around them, whether family relations, neighbours, or acquaintances. They should reach out to those who are in need but are too dignified to beg or even let anyone know that they need help. Go to them and spare them the shame of having to ask others for help. Behind closed doors, poverty hides in the guise of dignity, so seek them out and help them without hurting them.

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(1) *Cited by Al-Bazzar in his Musnad (8544, 9319, 9651), Abu Ya`la Al-Mawseli in his Musnad (6550) and Ibn Abu Shayba (25842) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

It has been narrated that a group of Arabs were sitting at the *Ka`ba* discussing who the most generous of all the Arabs was. They had varied views. One said it was Sa`d ibn `Ubada, another chose Abdullah ibn Ja`far, and still another said `Arraba Al-Awsi was the most generous of all. Someone suggested, ‘To find out who the most generous of them is, let us send to each of them a man who will pretend to be a traveller in need, and see what each of them will give him.

The first man went to Abdullah ibn Ja`far *Allah be pleased with him* and said, ‘O son of the daughter of the Messenger of Allah, I am a lone traveller in need.’ ‘Abdullah was setting out for hunting at that moment, just about to mount his horse when he heard this. He took his foot out of the stirrup and said to the petitioner, ‘Come and put your foot in the stirrup.’ Besides the horse, he gave him a bag containing four thousand *dirhams* and four garments, in addition to something even more valuable: the sword of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb. 'Abdullah returned home walking.

The second man went to Sa`d ibn `Ubada. He knocked the door of his house and a slave-girl came out and asked what he wanted. He said he wanted to see Ibn `Ubada. She asked him why. ‘I am a lone traveller and have lost all my means.’ She replied, ‘He is sleeping, and I can see to your need without having to wake him. All he possesses is a bag containing seven hundred *dinars*. Take it, and go to the camel market and get yourself a mount and a servant, and go on your way.’ When Sa`d woke up, the slave-girl told him what had happened. He was pleased with her that he set her free from slavery.

As for the third man, he went to `Arraba Al-Awsi, of whom a poet (1) once said:

If a banner of honour were ever raised,
`Arraba would bear it in his right hand.

`Arraba had aged by then and had lost his eyesight. He had nothing left of his wealth as well. The man found him leaning on two slaves who were taking him to the mosque. He said to him, ‘O `Arraba, I am a lonely wayfarer and have nothing to support myself.' He replied, 'Woe be to `Arraba! The claims of people have left him nothing at all!' He shook himself off the two slaves and said, 'Take these two slaves for your own.' The man said, 'How can I deprive you of your only means of assistance?' `Arraba said, 'If you do not take them, I will set them free.'

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(1) *Ash-Shammakh Adh-Dhibyani (d. 22 AH)*

The three men went back to their assembly, and each of them told his tale. They agreed that `Arraba was the most generous of all, for he gave the only thing he had, despite his desperate need for it. (1)

If a generous person has nothing at all to give, he can at least give a kind word, which is counted as charity too. A poet (2) said:

If you cannot give money or a horse,
Then give happiness with kind words.

Allah concludes the verse by saying: '…Allah loves *al-muqsitun*' (*al-Mumtahana:* 8). As we have said earlier in our commentary on this word, it has several meanings, one of which is to give shares of your wealth to those in need. The word *qist* means a 'share'. They give regularly without being asked to. About them Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, '*Al-muqsitun* shall be upon pulpits of light on the right side of the Throne (on the Day of Judgement): they are those who are just in their judgements, with their families and whatever is entrusted to them.'(3)

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ قَٰتَلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ وَظَٰهَرُوا۟
عَلَىٰٓ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَن تَوَلَّوْهُمْ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

But God forbids you to take as allies those who have fought against you for your faith, driven you out of your homes, and helped others to drive you out: any of you who take them as allies will truly be wrongdoers [9] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 9)

After speaking about those disbelievers to whom the believers may show kindness, the discourse now turns to the other category of disbelievers, those to whom the believers are forbidden from showing any kindness. As the verse tells, the believers are forbidden to take as allies those who fight against you on account of your religion, who drive you out of your homes or aid others in driving you out. Those of the believers who show affection of offer friendship to these disbelievers are wrongdoers, for they wrong themselves by disobeying Allah's Command, and they wrong the believers by taking their enemies as allies.

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(1) *Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidaya Wa An-Nihaya (where the name of Qays ibn Sa`d is mentioned, instead of Sa`d ibn `Ubada)*

(2) *That was the Shi`ite, Mohammad Kashif Al-Ghita` (1877-1954 CE)*

(3) *It was cited by Al-Bazzar (2340) on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-`As.*

Allah says in the following verse:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا جَآءَكُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتُ مُهَٰجِرَٰتٍ فَٱمْتَحِنُوهُنَّ ٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِإِيمَٰنِهِنَّ فَإِنْ
عَلِمْتُمُوهُنَّ مُؤْمِنَٰتٍ فَلَا تَرْجِعُوهُنَّ إِلَى ٱلْكُفَّارِ لَا هُنَّ حِلٌّ لَّهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحِلُّونَ لَهُنَّ وَءَاتُوهُم مَّآ
أَنفَقُواْ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ أَن تَنكِحُوهُنَّ إِذَآ ءَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ وَلَا تُمْسِكُواْ بِعِصَمِ ٱلْكَوَافِرِ
وَسْـَٔلُواْ مَآ أَنفَقْتُمْ وَلْيَسْـَٔلُواْ مَآ أَنفَقُواْ ذَٰلِكُمْ حُكْمُ ٱللَّهِ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

You who believe, test the believing women when they come to you as emigrants – God knows best about their faith – and if you are sure of their belief, do not send them back to the disbelievers: they are not lawful wives for them, nor are the disbelievers their lawful husbands. Give the disbelievers whatever bride-gifts they have paid – if you choose to marry them, there is no blame on you once you have paid their bride-gifts – and do not yourselves hold on to marriage ties with disbelieving women. Ask for repayment of the bride-gifts you have paid, and let the disbelievers do the same. This is God's judgement: He judges between you, God is all knowing and wise [10] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 10)

One of the terms of the Truce of Hudaybiyya was that if anyone left Quraysh and went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a believer, he should return them to Quraysh, but if any Muslim apostatised and went to Quraysh, Quraysh would not have to return them to Prophet Muhammad. The Messenger of Allah accepted this term for a reason. It was an acknowledgement that the Muslim nation was starting to gain enough regional weight to the extent of concluding treaties that involved give-and-take with the most dominant power in the region then; namely, Quraysh. When Islam became strong enough to confront Quraysh directly, this rule was abolished. The Muslim power was rising high enough to reject any such compromises.

The name of this chapter of the Quran we are considering, *al-Mumtahana,* means '*Women Tested*'. Women came as Muslim emigrants to Medina. They could not be sent back to the disbelievers, but Allah commanded His Prophet to test their faith, and if they proved to be believing women, Muslims were forbidden from returning them to the disbelievers. They were asked if they testified that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. They were asked to swear that they left their homes solely because of their love for Islam and the Messenger of Islam, and not because they hated their husbands there or desired certain husbands in Medina. Once that was found to be the case, the believer was forbidden to return them to the disbelievers.(1)

Allah says, '…Allah knows best about their faith…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 10). That means the believers were not responsible for what those women truly harboured in their hearts. They only had to test their faith in the above manner, but only Allah knew their inner intentions. As long as a woman said she was a believer, she was treated as one, and she could by no means be sent back to a disbelieving husband, because a believing woman is not a lawful wife for a disbeliever, nor is he lawful for her as a husband.

It is particularly worthy of notice and admiration that the Wise Lawgiver does not ignore the financial rights of the two spouses, even the disbelieving party. Islam deprives a disbelieving man from his wife because she is a Muslim and is no longer lawful for him, yet it ordains that his money must be paid back to him. This shows the exemplary justice of Islam. Husbands would devote money and possessions to their wives, so when a man loses his wife because her new religion, Islam, she must return what he has devoted to her of his money so the husbands would not be harmed by their wives' conversion to Islam. I believe such justice must move the hearts of whoever experiences it in some way. It is a proof that Islam is the true and just religion that is keen on doing wrong to no one, even those who reject it.

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(1) *Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him tested immigrant women by asking, 'Swear by Allah that you did not leave out of hatred for your husband and nor out of desire to move from one land for another. Swear by Allah that you did not leave in order to seek worldly things and you left only out of love for Allah and His Messenger.' That is cited by At-Tabarani in his Tafsir, on the authority of Ibn `Abbas. This proves that Islam gives women the freedom of worship, and does not simply consider her to be a follower of whatever religion her husband or father follows. Islam does not compel a woman to do what is against her will and choice whether in the community of Muslims or the disbelievers.*

Allah then says, '…if you choose to marry them, there is no blame on you once you have paid their bride-gifts…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 10). Those women who embraced Islam did not turn into 'public property' of Muslim men. Any of those believing woman was lawful only to one man whom she gave her consent to marry. Furthermore, whoever proposes to have her as a wife, must give her the rights Islamic Law prescribes. That ruling was first to preserve the dignity and rights of Muslim women. Besides, it was to protect the hearts of Muslim men from thinking of invading any people, seeking only to claim their women so long as there was no ruling in Islam to regulate the destiny those women were to meet when they become part of the Muslim community.

On the other hand, Allah commands Muslim men: '…and do not yourselves hold on to marriage ties with *kawafir*…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 10). The word *kawafir* (singular: *kafira*) means women who apostatise from Islam. A Muslim husband of such a woman was not allowed to retain her as his wife and had to divorce her so she would return to the disbelievers in Mecca. He too had the right to ask for a return of the money he had devoted to his wife to marry her.

Just as disbelieving husbands were given the right to ask for what they had paid in relation to their marriage with their formerly disbelieving wives, Muslim men also had the right to ask for what they had paid to their apostate wives: '…Ask for repayment of the bride-gifts you have paid, and let the disbelievers do the same…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 10). This is the justice of Islam. Rights must be preserved for all people, even the disbelievers.

We have mentioned before the story of the Jew(1) whom Muslims unjustly accused of theft, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* removed that injustice. It was on that occasion that these verses were revealed: ‘We have sent down the Scripture to you [Prophet] with the truth so that you can judge between people in accordance with what Allah has shown you. Do not be an advocate for those who betray trust. Ask Allah for forgiveness: He is Most Forgiving and Merciful. Do not argue for those who betray their own souls: Allah does not love anyone given to treachery and sin.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 105-107)

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(1) *That was Zayd ibn As-Samin. The story is cited in Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan by An-Naysaburi.*

After making clear those rulings, Allah says, ‘…This is Allah’s judgement: He judges between you…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 10). As long as it is Allah’s judgement, it cannot be disobeyed. His Judgement is just, for ‘…Allah is All Knowing and Wise’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 10).

وَإِن فَاتَكُمۡ شَيۡءٞ مِّنۡ أَزۡوَٰجِكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلۡكُفَّارِ فَعَاقَبۡتُمۡ فَـَٔاتُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ ذَهَبَتۡ
أَزۡوَٰجُهُم مِّثۡلَ مَآ أَنفَقُواْۚ وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَنتُم بِهِۦ مُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾

If any of you have wives who leave you for the
disbelievers, and if your community subsequently
acquires [gains] from them, then pay those whose
wives have deserted them the equivalent of
whatever bride-gift they paid. Be mindful of God,
in whom you believe [11]
(The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 11)

This verse is related to Muslim men whose disbelieving wives returned to the disbelievers, but did not pay back what they had devoted to them. The way to return the rights of those Muslim men was this: ‘…and if your community subsequently acquires [gains] from them, then pay those whose wives have deserted them the equivalent of whatever bride-gift they paid…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 11). That means when the community of Muslims defeat the disbelievers at war and take their riches as battle-spoils, a share of these spoils should be dedicated to reimbursing those Muslim men whose former disbelieving wives denied them their rights.

Allah then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ إِذَا جَآءَكَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتُ يُبَايِعۡنَكَ عَلَىٰٓ أَن لَّا يُشۡرِكۡنَ بِٱللَّهِ شَيۡـٔٗا وَلَا يَسۡرِقۡنَ وَلَا
يَزۡنِينَ وَلَا يَقۡتُلۡنَ أَوۡلَٰدَهُنَّ وَلَا يَأۡتِينَ بِبُهۡتَٰنٖ يَفۡتَرِينَهُۥ بَيۡنَ أَيۡدِيهِنَّ وَأَرۡجُلِهِنَّ وَلَا
يَعۡصِينَكَ فِي مَعۡرُوفٖ فَبَايِعۡهُنَّ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡ لَهُنَّ ٱللَّهَۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ١٢

Prophet, when believing women come and pledge to you that they will not ascribe any partner to God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor lie about who has fathered their children, nor disobey you in any righteous thing, then you should accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them: God is most forgiving and merciful [12] (The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 12)

At the Conquest of Mecca, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sat at *as-suffa* (a corner of the Mosque of the Prophet where poor Muslim immigrants to Medina stayed as they had no homes). He took pledges of allegiance from the men and shook hands with them. Then came the turn of the women, so how did they pledge allegiance to the Messenger of Allah? He took the men's pledges by shaking hands with them, so did he do the same with the women, since he was the Prophet of Allah and all the women of his community- all Muslim women- are like his daughters? Allah says, 'The Prophet has a higher claim on the believers than [they have on] their own selves, [seeing that he is as a father to them]…' (*al-Ahzab:* 6).

It has been narrated that Prophet Muhammad never touched the hand of a woman who was not lawful to him.(1) Even when it came to pledges of allegiance, which usually involve handshakes, he did not shake hand with Muslim women. A pledge of allegiance is like a deal; based on it, the believers declared their acceptance and willingness to abide by Allah's covenant. Allah says: 'Allah has purchased the persons and possessions of the believers in return for the Garden– they fight in Allah's way: they kill and are killed– this is a true promise given by Him…' (*at-Tawba:* 111).

So how did the Muslim women pledge allegiance to Prophet Muhammad? The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* took a pail of water and placed his blessed hand in it, so that his hand came into contact with the water; then, each woman who wanted to pledge allegiance to the Messenger of Allah came and dipped her hand into the water so that her hand touched the same particles of water as the Messenger of Allah, and this is how the pledge was made. (1)

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(1) *This is cited by Muslim (4942) on the authority of `Aisha.*

Reflect on the cautious attitude of Prophet Muhammad despite his status among Muslim women. It is astonishing how some Muslim men and women today shake hands and claiming there is nothing wrong with that. That attitude of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* is to teach us that indeed there is something, or many things, wrong with it. It is a matter of what is lawful and what is unlawful. If the Sacred Law forbids a man to look at a woman that is unlawful to him, though eye contact is less direct than handshaking, At least it does not involve close contact with the other person. Would it allow a man to touch her, which is a closer and more direct form of contact and has more effect on both parties?

Some say that it is a custom in society. Indeed, it is, but it is an evil custom which is not allowed in Islam– and is it for society to make laws? Legislation and the determination of what is lawful and what is unlawful is only for our Creator to do. It is society that should commit itself to the guidance of Allah. If a woman refused a man's stretched hand to shake hers, if a man refused a woman's stretched hand to shake his, only once, it would not be repeated. This would be enough to end that tradition. (2)

Now, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took the pledge of allegiance from Muslim men, in essence, it was that they would struggle in the cause of Allah to spread His religion. As for the Muslim women, their pledge involved other terms, as the verse we are considering explains: 'Prophet, when believing women come and pledge to you that they will not ascribe any partner to Allah, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor lie about who has fathered their children, nor disobey you in any righteous thing, then you should accept their pledge of allegiance…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12).

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(1) *As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (14/433)*

(2) *Cited by Ahmad in his Musnad (27051, 27053, 27054) on the authority of Umayma bint Raqiqa*

Among the Muslim women who pledged allegiance to Prophet Muhammad was Hind bint `Utba(1), the wife of Abu Sufyan, who had-before she embraced Islam- hired Wahshi (2) to kill Hamza *Allah be pleased with him* at the Battle of Uhud. She did not only hire his murderer, but cut open his belly after he was killed, took out his liver and bit into it.(3) On the day she became a believer, she was the feistiest of women and made the most comments on the terms of the pledge, and Prophet Muhammad bore with her clemently. When she heard '…nor steal…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12), she said, 'O Messenger of Allah, my husband (Abu Sufyan, who was present) is a miserly man, and I used to take his money without his knowledge.' Prophet Muhammad said, 'Are you Hind?' 'Yes', she said, 'Pardon what I did, may Allah pardon you!'(4) Abu Sufyan said to her, 'The money you took from me in the past is yours rightfully.' The Messenger of Allah then said it was allowed for a woman to take enough of her husband's money to suffice her and her children's needs, in case he was miserly and made things hard for her.(5)

When Hind heard '…nor kill their children…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12), she said to Prophet Muhammad, 'We raised them as infants, and you killed them when they were grown, and Allah knows you and them best.' She was referring to her son Hanzhala who was killed at the Battle of Badr. All the Messenger of Allah did, while hearing this was smile. (6)

'…nor lie about who has fathered their children…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12). The word used in the original text of this sentence is *buhtan* which is not just a 'lie', but it means something which is so ugly and astounding to anyone who witnesses it. It is something said or done and causes the mind to marvel at its vileness. The same root word is found in this verse: '…The disbeliever was *buhita* (dumbfounded)…' (*al-Baqara:* 258). That is, he was bewildered and had nothing to say in response.

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(1) *Died 14 A.H.*

(2) *Died 25 A.H.*

(3) *As-Sira An-Nabawiyya by Ibn Hisham*

(4) *This is part of a long story related by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir*

(5) *Cited by Muslim (4574)*

(6) *Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidaya Wa An-Nihaya (7/60)*

The expression used in the original text of the verse in this part is literally translated as '…lie about what is between their hands and their feet…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12). The phrase 'what is between their hands' refers to the belly, and 'what is between their feet' refers to the private parts. This is an allusion to a woman's claim that her child is her husband's, deliberately lying about it.

Abu Hurayrah *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that he heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say, when the verses of *mula`ana*(1) were revealed, 'Any woman who brings to her husband a child who is not born of him thereby forgoes her connection to Allah, and Allah will never admit her into paradise. If any man disowns his own child as he looks at him, Allah will prevent him from seeing Him and will expose him among all people, the earliest of them and latest of them.'(2) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A child belongs to the owner of the bed (the husband of his mother) and the fornicator gets nothing but stone (punishment by stoning, or deprivation from his child).'(3) This preserves the dignity of the child so that he would not live in disgrace for the rest of his life. He is the child of the man in whose bed he was born. As for the woman, if there is proof that she was unfaithful, she must be punished as prescribed in the Islamic ruling for fornication.

On hearing '…nor disobey you in any righteous thing…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12), Hind said, 'Indeed we have only come to attain the goodness that would come to us by following you, so how can we disobey you when we have come willingly in obedience to you?' Allah tells His Messenger if they accept that pledge: '…then you should accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to Allah to forgive them…' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12). Allah granted it to the believers that His Messenger implored Allah to forgive their sins, as Allah says in another verse: '…If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves, and begged Allah's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found that Allah accepts repentance and is Most Merciful' (*an-Nisa':* 64).

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(1) *This refers to the following verses: 'And as for those who accuse their own wives [of adultery], but have no witnesses except themselves, let each of these [accusers] call Allah four times to witness that he is indeed telling the truth, and the fifth time, that Allah's curse be upon him if he is telling a lie. But [as for the wife, all] chastisement shall be averted from her by her calling Allah four times to witness that he is indeed telling a lie, and the fifth [time], that Allah's Wrath be upon her if he is telling the truth' (an-Nur: 6-9).*

(2) *Cited by An-Nasa'i (5645), Al-Bayhaqi in his Ma`rifat As-Sunnan (4798) and Al-Hakim (2814)*

(3) *Cited by Al-Bukhari (2053) and Muslim (3686) on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her*

Allah *Glorified is He* will grant them His repentance and Mercy only if they approach you, O Muhammad, praying for Allah's forgiveness. After they ask for Allah's forgiveness, you can pray for their forgiveness as well.'

This is a gift from Allah *Glorified is He* and indeed, no one can benefit you besides Him. Any person who tries to approach Allah's door in any other way, will not be allowed to proceed. The believers who lived with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had the opportunity to approach him and acknowledge their sins. They were able to pray for Allah's forgiveness and also asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to pray for their forgiveness. Do the believers living after the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* have a similar opportunity? The scholars say that, indeed, all the believers have the same opportunity to benefit from Prophet Muhammad's prayers, whether they saw him or not. If someone commits a sin, he should imagine that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is with us. When we send our greetings of peace to Him, he will also greet us in return. So, likewise, acknowledging our sins is similar to what the Companions did when they said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah, we have sinned, so ask Allah to forgive us!'

In this way, we are all equal before Allah's Commandments because Prophet Muhammad's message was conveyed to all mankind. In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave all the generations of his community who lived after his time a special status that is not lower than the status of his Companions.

It is related that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his Companions: 'When shall I meet my beloved ones?' They said, 'Are we not your beloved ones, O Messenger of Allah?' He said: 'Nay, you are my Companions. My beloved ones are the people who will come after me and who will not have seen me, but will wish to pay the weight of the earth in gold just to see me. The good deed of a single one of them will be equal to fifty deeds.' The Companions asked, 'Will their good deeds be more valuable than fifty of our deeds, or fifty of their deeds?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: '(Their good deeds will equal) fifty of your good deeds because you find people who assist you to do good actions, while they will not have people who assist them in doing good actions.'

It was narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in another Hadith to his Companions: 'If a man in your time leaves only a tenth of his obligations, he shall be in danger of damnation. Indeed, a time shall come when a person doing a tenth of what is required of him shall be saved.'(1)

'Indeed, Allah is a much-forgiving (*Ghafoor*) Giver of Mercy (*Raheem*)' (*al-Mumtahana:* 12). The word *Ghafoor* is the intensive form of the word *Ghafir* (forgiving), and therefore indicates the frequency of the forgiveness. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* is 'Forgiving (*Ghafir*) (of) sin and accepting (of) repentance (*Qabil-u-atawba*)' (*Ghafir:* 3). He is described as *Ghafir* when the forgiveness pertains to one sin, and is described as *Ghafoor* regarding the forgiveness of multiple sins. He has mandated that, with each Prayer, He will forgive the time since the preceding prayer, and also provided His forgiveness for the times between the consequent Friday prayers and His forgiveness for the year between the months of *Ramadan.* Therefore, He has made His forgiveness a door that never closes, and any time you ask for His forgiveness, He will grant it to you.

It is in the nature of the servant to sin, and it is in the nature of the Lord to forgive. Therefore, the existence of sinners proves the existence of one of Allah's Attributes of Perfection. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'By Allah, if you people did not sin, Allah would have replaced you with people who did sin and then asked His forgiveness, and He will forgive them.’(1)

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani in As-Saghir (1156) and Abu Na`im (7/316) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. However, only Na`im ibn Hammad narrated this Hadith from Sufyan, and therefore, it was considered as a weak Hadith by Ibn Al-Jawzy in Al-`Ilal Al-Mutanahiyah (1425), and he mentioned the opinion of Abu 'Abd Ar-rahman An-Nasa`i, 'This is a Hadith that is munkar, and Na`im ibn Hammad is not a trusted narrator.'*

Allah then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَتَوَلَّوۡاْ قَوۡمًا غَضِبَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ قَدۡ يَئِسُواْ
مِنَ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ كَمَا يَئِسَ ٱلۡكُفَّارُ مِنۡ أَصۡحَٰبِ ٱلۡقُبُورِ ١٣

You who believe, do not take as allies those with whom God is angry: they despair of the life to come as the disbelievers despair of those buried in their graves [13]
(The Quran, *al-Mumtahana:* 13)

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have believed,’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 13) and this is a call that Allah *Glorified is He* has directed many times in the Quran to every person who believes in Allah as his Lord, and also believes in His guidance, commands and prohibitions. Allah *Glorified is He* called the believers with the words, ‘O you who have believed’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 13), and thus, we should know that faith is the pre-requisite of religious responsibility. Certainly, Allah *Glorified is He* did not issue responsibilities to those who did not believe in Him, and only gave obligations to those who believed in Him.

Directing the laws of religion to the believers is because faith is an indication of adherence and commitment. Therefore, if you adhere to the belief that He is Wise, it follows that you should take the laws of your religion from Him *Glorified is He*. This religious law is a contract between you and Allah *Glorified is He*. The condition of the contract is having faith in Him. Then, we are obliged to follow the commandments and prohibitions that He has issued.

Indeed, Allah’s Commandments have the attribute of justice. He did not give us these responsibilities against our will, and His obligations did not violate our free choice. He only gave us these responsibilities after we made the choice to have faith in Him. Indeed, faith in Allah *Glorified is He* is the foundation of every Islamic commandment. We obey His commands because it is He Whom we believe in, and we should follow His orders whether or not we understand the wisdom. Indeed, it may be that obeying a commandment of Allah *Glorified is He* without realising its wisdom, is a greater sign of faith than obeying a commandment while knowing the clear wisdom behind it.

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(1) *Narrated by Muslim (7141) and others on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him*

Allah *Glorified is He* started the chapter of *al-Mumtahana* with: ‘O you who have believed, do not take My enemies, who are your enemies, for your allies, showing them affection…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). He ended it with: ‘O you who have believed, be not allies of people with whom Allah has (become angry and) condemned’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). Therefore, the two calls have a common theme and a common prohibition, and the final meaning of the chapter is aligned with its first concept, as if the two meanings complete a circle. This makes it plain to us that the issue these verses are talking about is a very important part of religious responsibility.

To become an ally with a person means to give that person succour (*nusra*), and succour means that one allying party should support its ally when they need help. How, then, can you befriend Allah’s enemies and your own enemies, and expect them to help and succour you in return, when they are opposed to Allah’s guidance and have corrupted their own scriptures, turning them from guidance into error?

Alliance, succour and aid must only be given to those who agree with you on the ultimate aim. As long as people show animosity to Islam regarding its ultimate aim, which is faith, it is not right for the believer to trust them, be an ally for them, succour them or show them affection.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies: they are but allies of one another – and whoever of you allies himself with them becomes, verily, one of them; behold, Allah does not guide such evildoers’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 51). So: ‘they are but allies of one another’ befriending one another and helping one another against the believers. Therefore, you should not assist them if their aims fight the higher aims of Islam.

They might differ over worldly power. However, they often speak with one voice and help one another when it comes to opposing Islam. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘If they could but overcome you, they would (still) remain your foes, and would stretch forth their hands and tongues against you with evil intent: for they desire that you (too) should deny the truth' (*al-Mumtahana:* 2). So, they are united in their desire to harm you in any way. They can do that with their hands, or through the use of material force, weapons, and arms. If they cannot do so, then they may harm you through the use of their tongues, by insulting you, your Messenger and your Sacred Law, and by separating the believers from each other and spreading mischief among them, until they get the opportunity to harm you with their hands. So how can you consider such people as allies, when their desire is: '…that you (too) should deny the truth' (*al-Mumtahana:* 2)? If this is their aim, then you should not forget Allah's words: 'For never will the Jews be pleased with you, nor yet the Christians, unless you follow their own creeds' (*al-Baqara:* 120). Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…and whoever of you allies himself with them becomes, verily, one of them' (*al-Ma'ida:* 51).

Indeed, the issue of taking them as allies is the central issue of the chapter of *al-Mumtahana*. Allah *Glorified is He* tested the hearts and deeds of the believers with this chapter to determine the strength of their faith in Him. So do not befriend the enemies of Allah *Glorified is He* who are also your enemies.

Allah *Glorified is He* emphasised that those who believe in Him should be distinct from all other people. Indeed, there cannot be any alliance between them and Allah's enemies, as Allah says, 'Are you not aware of those who befriended people with whom Allah has become angry and condemned? They are neither of you (O believers) nor of those (who utterly reject the truth): and so they swear to a falsehood while they know (it to be false)' (*al-Mujadala:* 14).

Those who form alliances with Allah's enemies are hypocrites. They do not belong to you, or to those whom they support, but rather flitter back and forth between the two groups. If you befriend them and bring them into your circle, they will spread mischief among you and sow the seeds of discord and hypocrisy.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have believed, do not take for your (private) companions people who are not of your kind. They spare no effort to corrupt you and they would love to see you in distress. Vehement hatred has already been declared by their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is yet worse. We have indeed made the signs (thereof) clear unto you, if you would but use your reason.' (*Al-'Imran:* 118) It is therefore foolish and witless to befriend those who harm you and seek to cause you suffering and pain, and whose hearts conceal a deep hatred for you. Allah has made these verses clear to you and shown you what is in their hearts. So, will you cease befriending them and drawing them close to you, and involving them in your affairs? Protect your faith and your progeny, and do not become involved with the disbelievers in ways that will ruin your religion. Indeed, they will spare no effort in plotting against you and in spoiling your lives.

Allah says, 'Lo! It is you who (are prepared to) love them, but they will not love you' (*Al-'Imran:* 119). Why, then, do you fool yourselves by befriending them, and continuing to be their allies, when they do not love you? Allah *Glorified is He* then says, '…Be not friends with people with whom Allah has (become angry and has) condemned' (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). Who are these people whom Allah *Glorified is He* has condemned? Allah *Glorified is He* made their characteristics clear in His Quran, and He revealed these characteristics to the believers so that they will have no excuse or any doubts regarding the identity of those with whom Allah *Glorified is He* has become angry.

The first of these condemned people are the disbelievers, and this includes the atheists as well as the other kinds of disbelievers. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have believed, do not take the disbelievers (*kafirun*) for your allies instead of the believers' (*an-Nisa':* 144).

The word *kafirun* (disbelievers) is a general term. It includes all those people who do not believe in Allah *Glorified is He* as well as those who do not believe in Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* has reproached the hypocrites for taking the disbelievers as allies instead of Him, and therefore, it is not acceptable for the believers to follow their actions. Instead, they should be aware of the gravity of this sin.

A clear result of this sin is that Allah will send His chastisement upon you in this world, by making you a humiliated follower of other people.

Allah *Glorified is He* may also punish you in the Hereafter because you separated the believers when you formed alliances with other people who oppose them.

Another group of people condemned by Allah were the Jews and Christians, and Allah also forbade us from forming alliances with them. Allah says, ‘O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 51).

The condemned people also include those who mock our religion and make a playful jest out of its commandments, as Allah says, ‘O you who have believed, do not take for your friends those who mock your faith and make a jest of it – be they from among those who have been given revelation before your time, or (from among) those who deny the truth (of revelation as such). Indeed, remain conscious of Allah if you are (truly) believers’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 57).

To mock something means to insult and deride it. These people consider the verses of the Quran and the messages of our religion as an object of derision and scorn, and pay no heed to the warnings it presents to them. This is the usual way of those who stray from Allah’s guidance. They mock pious people and deride those who follow the straight path of righteousness by belittling their views and actions. So, beware of befriending such people and helping them or cooperating with them, or taking them as allies and showing them affection. Indeed, this alliance will continue to detract from your religiosity as long as the alliance continues.

Therefore Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Whenever you meet those who indulge in (blasphemous) talk about Our messages, turn your backs upon them until they begin to talk of other things; and if Satan should ever cause you to forget, remain not, after recollection, in the company of such evildoing folk’ (*al-An‘am:* 68). If they speak about Allah’s messages with scorn, sarcasm and derision, then turn away from them, and do not sit with them as long as they are doing this. Otherwise, you will be counted as their accomplice in this derision, your religion will begin to seem unimportant to you and you will come to resemble them. When the idolaters sat with the believers, they used to speak ill of Prophet Muhammad and the Quran by insulting and belittling them. So, Allah *Glorified is He* commanded the believers not to sit with them until they spoke of something else. Do not befriend or aid any of these people whom Allah *Glorified is He* has condemned.

Allah *Glorified is He* often spoke about His condemnation of the Jews in particular because of their manifold sins and transgressions. Allah says, '…and they earned the burden of Allah's condemnation' (*al-Baqara:* 61). Allah's condemnation became, as it were, specially mentioned for the Jews due to the manifold acts of disobedience they committed. Allah stated the reason for that in: 'this was because they persisted in denying the truth of Allah's messages and in slaying the prophets against all right: all of this was because they rebelled (against Allah) and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right' (*al-Baqara:* 61). That is, they used to show their ingratitude towards Allah's favours and refused to be thankful for them. In addition, they used to formulate lies about Allah's messages and sell them for a worthless price. They did not stop there, but actually went as far as killing the prophets of Allah against all right. Allah *Glorified is He* drew our attention to an important concept in this verse: 'Be not friends with (these) people (*qawm*)' (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). A *qawm* (a people) is the singular of the word *aqwam* (peoples). This suggests that Allah is speaking about one group of people in particular. He even mentions these people in the first chapter of His Book: 'Guide us to the straight path: the way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your blessings, not of those people You are angry with, nor of those who go astray' (*al-Fatiha:* 6-7).

Allah was angry with these people and condemned them because they were aware of His commandments, but they chose to disobey His way by committing all that He had been forbidden for them. Therefore, they deserved His condemnation. They altered and replaced Allah's Commandments because these alterations gave them a temporary power in the life of this world and allowed them to falsely seize the possessions of others.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The Jews were the people who have incited Allah's anger (and condemnation), and the Christians were the people who went astray.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by `Uday ibn Hatim. He was a Christian who embraced Islam. Imam Ahmad mentioned this Hadith in his Musnad (19381) and At-Tabarani mentioned in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (13691).*

It was narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Anger (*ghadab)* is a firebrand which ignites in the heart. Do you not see how the angry person's veins swell and his eyes redden?'(1) So how could it be said that Allah *Glorified is He* gets angry (*yaghdab*)? Indeed, when a person gets angry his veins swell up and his face reddens, and his fury continues until his eyes blaze and his hands move with their sudden inclinations. This is an impulsive state that happens to human beings, and indeed has even happened to Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who was a messenger of firm resolve. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when Musa (Moses) returned to his people, full of anger and sorrow, he exclaimed, "Vile is the course which you have followed in my absence! Have you forsaken your Lord's commandment?" And he threw down the tablets (of the Law), and seized his brother's head, dragging him towards himself.' (*al-A'raf:* 150)

We know that the tablets contained Allah's Message, but yet, despite this, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* threw them from his hands because of his anger. He then turned to his brother and dragged him by the head. This was an angry reaction to what his people had done because their sin had incurred Allah's anger as well.

Therefore, the state of anger is a reaction of the soul that causes a change in the chemical state of the body. It causes the veins to swell up, a person's face to redden, and his appearance to change. However, since these are all temporary states which accompany a chemical reaction, the anger of Allah does not resemble the state of anger in His creatures. Indeed, Allah is not subject to temporary states and emotions. So, if anger is related to the angry being's ability to punish, then how can we understand Allah's anger? The anger of Allah *Glorified is He* is the condemnation and the expulsion of the disbelievers from His mercy, and His punishment of the sinners and those who stray from His commandments. Allah's anger is not a chemical reaction, as the state of anger in human beings, for Allah says, '…there is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad (11604), Al-Hakim (8543) and At-Tirmidhi (2350), on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudari Allah be pleased with him.*

For instance, Allah *Glorified is He* exists, and you exist, but your existence is not like His existence. Allah *Glorified is He* is alive, and you are alive, but your life is not like His life. In the same manner, your hearing is not like Allah's hearing and your sight is not like His sight. So, even though we believe that you have attributes that resemble Allah's attributes, however, we understand Allah's attributes in the light of the verse in which He said: '…there is nothing like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11).

Allah *Glorified is He* describes those people He has condemned by saying: 'They are indeed bereft of all hope of a life to come – just as those deniers of the truth are bereft of all hope of (ever again seeing) those who are (now) in their graves' (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). Their sins made the lack of hope for the Hereafter one of their inherent attributes. Then, Allah condemned them and expelled them from His Mercy due to their sins as well as their lack of hope in the Hereafter. Therefore, their lack of hope for the Hereafter was both a result and a cause of their condemnation.

They despaired of having any share in the goodness of the Hereafter, and so, they resorted to altering Allah's scriptures and corrupting them. They killed Allah's prophets, spread corruption in the land, and invented lies about Allah *Glorified is He*. This was because they felt that the present life of this world was their final abode.

They were untruthful when they said: 'None shall ever enter paradise unless they are a Jew or a Christian' (*al-Baqara:* 111). They also claimed that the Hereafter belonged to them alone, and were lying about that, too. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Say (to them, O Muhammad,) "if an afterlife with Allah is to be for you alone, to the exclusion of all other people, then you should long for death – if what you say is true!" But never will they long for it because (they are aware) of what their hands have sent ahead in this world: and Allah has full knowledge of evildoers.' (*al-Baqara:* 94-95) In these verses, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad: 'If they really believed that Allah made the afterlife for them alone and no one else, they would have hoped for death so that they could go on to an eternal bliss. If the abode of the Hereafter was made for them, and they were sure that they would enter paradise alone, what reason would they have for remaining in this worldly life?'

Indeed, they were liars, as Allah *Glorified is He* used the words: '…if what you say is true.' (*al-Baqara:* 94) Then, He says, 'But never will they long for it because (they are aware) of what their hands have sent ahead in this world' (*al-Baqara:* 95). Their sins and acts of disobedience and their defiance of Allah *Glorified is He* prevented them from ever hoping for death. In reality, they had lost all hope of gaining any share in the reward of the Hereafter.

Allah *Glorified is He* also describes the Jews who have incurred Allah's anger and condemnation. He says, 'Behold, those who barter away their bond with Allah and their own pledges for a trifling gain – they shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come; and Allah will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them of their sins; and grievous suffering awaits them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 77) So, their hopes for the Hereafter have all been annulled, and their despair started to resemble the disbelievers' despair of ever again seeing the deceased people in the graves.

The Quran described this despair of the disbelievers when Allah says, 'And he (the disbeliever) gave an argumentative parable to Us, and is oblivious of how he himself was created! (And so) he (the disbeliever) said, "Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?"' (*Ya Sin:* 78) The books of Prophet Muhammad's biography tell us that Ubay ibn Khalaf Al-Jumahi(1) asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about a dried bone, and said, 'Are you telling us, O Muhammad, that when our bones have crumbled into dust, Allah will bring us back again?' Then he crumbled the bone and scattered the dust in the wind, and said, 'O Muhammad, who shall bring this back to life?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied: 'Indeed, Allah will cause you to die, and then bring you back to life, and then send you to Hell!'(2)

The disbelievers found the idea of resurrection of the dead from the graves and the concept of life after death far-fetched concepts. They said: 'After we will have become bones and dust (*rufat*), shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead in a new act of creation?' (*al-Isra':* 49)

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(1) *A chieftain of Quraysh*

(2) *As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur*

The word *rufat* refers to the crumbled pieces and wisps of an object when it is transformed into dust or rubble. These people found it far-fetched that there will be a resurrection after death because they were heedless of the beginning of existence and the beginning of man’s creation. So, the Jews who were condemned by Allah *Glorified is He* were devoid of hope in the Hereafter, just as the pagan disbelievers were devoid of any hope that the deceased people will ever be resurrected. Therefore, do not befriend such people, nor show them affection so that you do not end up becoming part of either group.

‘O you who have believed, be not friends with people with whom Allah (has become angry and has) condemned! They are indeed bereft of all hope of a life to come’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). This means that they have lost the hope of attaining any reward in the Hereafter or being saved from its torment, ‘...just as those (pagan) disbelievers are bereft of all hope of (ever again seeing) those who are (now) in their graves’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). Similarly, the disbelievers have no hope that the dead will ever come back to life.

We may observe here that the concept mentioned in the end of the chapter is the same as the concept mentioned in its beginning. This concept revolves around the essential importance of renouncing Allah’s enemies and avoiding any alliance with them. At the opening of the chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have believed, do not take My enemies, who are your enemies, for your allies, showing them affection’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 1). Allah mentioned these people in the last verse in which He says, ‘…people with whom Allah (has become angry and has) condemned’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). These people are the Jews, as well as other disbelievers.

It is as though the opening verse and the final verse constitute two brackets. The verses between the brackets ordered us to renounce the Jews and the disbelievers, and not to befriend Allah’s enemies in all their different forms. In the first verse, He called them: ‘Allah’s enemies’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 1), and in the last verse He called them: ‘…people, with whom Allah (has become angry and has) condemned’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 13). How can a believer befriend the enemies who deserved Allah’s anger and condemnation? Do you seek protection against Allah, when it is: ‘(He) who protects, and there is no protection against Him’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 88)?

It is more fitting to befriend and aid the people who believe in Allah, His Messenger, and the Resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And (as for) the believers, both men and women – they are close unto one another: they (all) enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto Allah and His Apostle. It is they upon whom Allah will bestow His Grace: verily, Allah is Almighty, and All-Wise!’ (*at-Tawba:* 71) The final words of this verse are in harmony with another verse in the chapter of *al-Mumtahana*, in which Allah says, ‘…for You (Allah) alone are Almighty, Truly Wise!’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 5) He also says, ‘…Allah is truly self-sufficient, the One to whom all praise is due’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 6), and then: ‘…for Allah is All-Powerful, and Allah is Much-Forgiving, a Giver of Grace’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 7). Then, Allah says, ‘…for Allah is All Knowing and All-Wise’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 10), and then: ‘…for, behold, Allah is Much-Forgiving, a Giver of Grace’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 12). These attributes are also in harmony with the first verse of the following chapter *as-Saff* which began with a glorification of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth praises Allah’s Limitless Glory: for He Alone is Almighty, Truly Wise!’ (*as-Saff:* 1)

Therefore, you should glorify Allah and declare His absolute transcendence above any flaw, and you should not take His enemies and your enemies as friends instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. You should not befriend those whom Allah *Glorified is He* has condemned, for otherwise, this will taint your faith. Praise Allah’s Limitless Glory to remain in harmony with the entire universe around you!

the chapter of

as-Saff

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *as-Saff*[1] (The row):

Allah *Glorified is He* starts this chapter by stating:

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ وَهُوَ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ١

Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies
God — He is the Almighty, the Wise [1]
(The Quran, *as-Saff:* 1)

The scholars say that the chapter of *as-Saff* is one of the *musabbihat* chapters. The first verse in each of these *musabbihat* chapters started with derivatives of the Arabic root s-b-h. These words included the derivatives: *sabbaha* (praised) *yusabbihu* (praises) and *sabbih* (praise). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* referred to these chapters as the *musabbihat* chapters and he used to recite them before retiring to bed. This is because their initial verses[2] are superior to one thousand verses, as they praise the Limitless

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[1] *as-Saff* chapter was revealed in Medina and contains a total of 14 verses. Al-Qurtubi has mentioned that it was revealed in Medina, according to Al-Mawardi. However, relying on the authority of Ibn `Abbas, An-Nahhas suggested that it may have been revealed in Mecca. The chapter is also referred to as Al-Hawariyin and the chapter of `Isa (Jesus). It is the 61st chapter within the arrangement of the Quran. It was revealed after the chapter of *at-Taghabun* and before the chapter of *al-Fath* which means that it was revealed before the Treaty of *Hudaybiyya.*

[2] *It was narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (17200), Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (5059), At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (2921), and An-Nasa`i in his Sunnan (7972). In each of the previously mentioned collections, the Hadith was narrated on the authority of Al-`Irbaḍ ibn Sariya Allah be pleased with him.*

Glory and Exaltedness of Allah *Glorified is He*. These verses praised Allah before He brought creation into existence, and praised Him after originating this creation.

Allah *Glorified is He* states in the chapter of *al-Hadid*: ‘All that is in the heavens and the earth praised (*sabbaha*) Allah’s Limitless Glory’ (*al-Hadid:* 1). He says in the chapter *al-Hashr:* ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth praised (*Sabbaha*) Allah’s Limitless Glory’ (*al-Hashr:* 1), and in *as-Saff:* ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth praises (*Sabbaha*) Allah’s Limitless Glory: for He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise!’ (*as-Saff:* 1)

Does this mean that the beings in the heavens and the earth praised Allah’s Limitless Glory in the past, on a single occasion only? Of course not, as indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth praises (*Yusabbih*) the Limitless Glory of Allah, the Sovereign Supreme *the Exalted*’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 1). He also states in the chapter of *at-Taghabun*: ‘All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth praises (*Yusabbih*) Allah’s Limitless Glory: His is all the dominion, and to Him all praise is due; and He has the power to will anything’ (*at-Taghabun:* 1).

Thus, the glorification of Allah is absolutely existent. Everything in existence has praised and will continue to praise Allah *Glorified is He*. This includes everything that is in the heavens and in the earth, and everyone on them. They all joined in praising Allah *Glorified is He* except you, O human being! So, glorify Allah, the Most-High!

Firstly, we have to know that absolute Glory innately belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* before any creation. Then, He created the angels which have, since then, glorified Him without interruption. Then, He created the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them has also glorified Him. Therefore, direct your praises to Allah, O believer in Him. Glorify Him as the rest of creation glorifies Him!

This glorification is the defining characteristic of the entire created order. In a sense, these praises of glorification are the language of creation. We are only able to understand some of these praises, and other praises remain inaccessible to us. Allah *Glorified is He* has decreed that everything in creation will glorify and praise Him. Allah says, ‘The seven heavens praise His

Limitless Glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His Limitless Glory and praise: but you (O men) fail to grasp the manner of their glorification! Verily, He is Forbearing and Much-Forgiving' (*al-Isra':* 44).

These glorifications are not figurative, but are indeed real, even if we are unable to understand or comprehend their manner. In fact, if Allah *Glorified is He* granted someone access to this hidden language, he will understand the praises and glorifications of creation just as he hears clearly articulated speech. Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* taught Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* the speech of the birds.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Everything that (*ma*) is in the heavens and in the Earth praises Allah's Limitless Glory' (*as-Saff:* 1). Allah uses the Arabic word *ma* (a thing that) as a relative pronoun which refers equally to sentient beings and other non-sentient objects. This means that both the living and the non-living things in creation praise and glorify Allah. None of them differs in this regard.

In a different verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Are you not aware that everyone who (*man*) is in the heavens and the earth praises Allah's Limitless Glory?' (*an-Nur:* 41) In this verse, we observe a subtle difference due to the use of another pronoun, *man* (who) which is used exclusively to refer to sentient beings. If we view these verses together, we will realise that everything in creation praises Allah *Glorified is He*. These things include the sentient beings as well as the inanimate objects in creation. Only an obstinate, ungrateful rebel abandons this ritual.

Indeed, the individual constituents of a disbeliever's body have faith in Allah *Glorified is He*! The organs of his body praise and glorify Allah *Glorified is He* but these praises do not occur in accordance with the will of the disbeliever. In this, he is literally subjecting the limbs of his body to pain and torment through his sinful and disobedient conduct. The limbs obey his sinful commands, but they do so unwillingly. Then, these same limbs will testify against him on the Day of Judgment! Therefore, even if they are subject to his command in the life of this world, they will break free from his will in the Hereafter.

For instance, the tongue is subjected to the will of its person. If the person wishes, the tongue will recite the testimony of faith, and if the person wishes, the tongue can utter words of disbelief. This is because the volition and the will of the tongue belong to the person's worldly choice. However, on the Day of Judgment, the only expression of will and volition will belong to Allah *Glorified is He*. Only during sleep can the limbs and the atoms of the sinner's body receive temporary relief from the evil of the person's sinful compulsions in disobeying Allah *Glorified is He*.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* states the seven heavens in the plural form, but He mentions the earth in the singular form. He says, 'All that is in the heavens and in the earth praises Allah's Limitless Glory' (*as-Saff:* 1). However, Allah *Glorified is He* says in a different verse: '(It is) Allah who has created seven heavens, and (a number) like them of the earth' (*at-Talaq:* 12). Just as Allah *Glorified is He* created seven heavens, He created seven earths. So, why did Allah mention the heavens in the plural form while mentioning the earth in the singular form?

In Arabic, the plural word *`ardeen* (earths) is very difficult to pronounce, and as a result, the singular *ard* (earth) was given preference. The word *as-samawat* (heavens), on the other hand, was mentioned in the plural form because it rolls off the tongue with considerable ease.

Where are these seven heavens and seven earths to which the Quran referred? The Quran informed us about the existence of the seven heavens and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that he ascended through them during the blessed Night Journey and Ascension. He also described what he saw in each of the heavens. The answer to this question is that the positions of the earths and the heavens are relative. The sky of those who dwell in one heaven is the ground of those in the following heaven, while their ground is the sky for the preceding inhabitants.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise' (*as-Saff:* 1). This means that He is the Almighty One Who is always triumphant! He exerts unlimited power over His dominion. There are no precautionary measures you can take if He decides to exact retribution from you. There is absolutely nothing which can ever pose a threat to him. Glory is to Allah. The grandeur He possesses is eternal and not dependent upon anything else. If you truly desire to obtain the real power which is free from the vicissitudes of other changing creatures, your only recourse is seeking it from the source of true honour, the Unchanging Allah *Glorified is He*.

The description of Allah's Power after Al-Mumtahana should grab our attention. If you wish to learn the correct way of attaining true strength, then you must alter some of your fundamental ideas about the manner in which it is sought. If you befriend the disbelievers and form alliances with them, you will be asking for the support of a feeble source, as the disbelievers are subjected to the changes of fate.

Indeed, the created beings change daily between moments of fortune and moments of misfortune. Even if the disbelievers are wealthy today, they may not be wealthy permanently. In fact, the process of seeking glory and nobility from another creature who is subjected to the vicissitudes of life will never give you a true standing. Only Allah *Glorified is He* possesses absolute and unchanging Glory. So, seek your power from Allah *Glorified is He* and you will attain that which you seek, as: '…all glory belongs to Allah (alone)' (*an-Nisa':* 139).

In addition to possessing absolute Glory, Allah is also the Most-Wise. Every act which emanates from Him is issued on the basis of wisdom. If Allah *Glorified is He* commands you to cease taking His enemies as advisors and patrons, His command contains a wise purpose. He intends to honour you as believers, through sparing you the indignity of seeking false glory from others.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* said :(1)

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(1) *The events surrounding the revelation of this verse: Al-Hakim compiled this Hadith in his Mustadrak (2799), based on Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. It was narrated on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Salam, who said, 'A group of the Prophet's Companions were sitting one day. We said, "If only we had some way of knowing which action was most pleasing to Allah, we would perform it." Allah then revealed: "All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth praised Allah's Limitless Glory: for He alone is Almighty, Truly Wise! O you who have believed, why do you say one thing and do another? Most loathsome is it in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do!" (as-Saff: 1-3) Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him recited this verse before us.' At-Tabarani included the same narration in his Al-Mu`ajam Al-Kabir (172) and it was narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3624).*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفۡعَلُونَ ﴿٢﴾
كَبُرَ مَقۡتًا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَن تَقُولُواْ مَا لَا تَفۡعَلُونَ ﴿٣﴾

You who believe, why do you say things and then do not do them? [2] It is most hateful to God that you say things and then do not do them [3]
(The Quran, *as-Saff:* 2 - 3)

This verse is addressed to the believers. In the Quran, when Allah *Glorified is He* summons His servants by the initial statement ‘O you who have believed’ (*as-Saff:* 2) means: ‘O you who have chosen to believe in Me with your own free will! You believed in Me as your Lord, Who Has all the attributes of knowledge, power, wisdom, and self-subsistence’. With this reminder in mind, you are now ready to listen to the commands of your Lord *Glorified is He*. Allah *Glorified is He* is not summoning those who do not possess faith. Indeed, He is only calling on those who have chosen to believe in Him mindfully with their own free choice. Additionally, this statement means that implementing the following commands and abstaining from the following prohibition will contain immense benefit for the believers.

A party of the Prophet’s Companions once asked about the acts of obedience that Allah likes, and Allah revealed that He likes unshakeable faith in Him and military strife in the Way of Allah against the forces of disbelief. When the verses speaking of military struggle were mandated, some of the Companions did not like this mandate as it was a great test for them. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed this verse: ‘O you who have believed, why do you say (*taquloon*) things which you do not act upon (*taf`aloon*)?’ (*as-Saff:* 2)

In the Arabic language, the words *ya`mal* (work), *yaf`al* (act) and *yaqool* (say), have distinct meanings. The (works) *a`maal* we perform are the greatest indication of who we are. Indeed, every *`amal* (work) emanates from the heart and then makes use of all the body parts necessary for its performance. The work of the heart is formulating the intention. The tongue is the organ involved in the work of speech, whereas hearing is the work of the ear and sight is the work of the eye. Therefore, every bodily organ carries out a form of work for which it was created.

In the language of the Arabs, every instance of a bodily organ carrying out its intended purpose is referred to as a work (*`amal*). The work which is performed by the tongue is known as a *qawl* (speech), and the work that is performed with any organ other than the tongue is referred to as a *fi`l* (action). Therefore, *al-aqwaal* (speeches) and *al-af`aal* (actions) are both forms of *al-a`maal* (works).

The activity of the tongue (*qawl*) is never referred to as an action (*fi`l*) in the Arabic language because indeed, people speak often, but they rarely hold themselves accountable to what they have said. This explains why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O you who have believed, why do you say (*taquloon*) things which you do not act upon (*taf'aloon*)?’ (*as-Saff:* 2)

In summary, one could say that speech and action are counterparts, but each represents a different type of work. Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…why do you say (*taquloon*) things which you do not act upon (*taf`aloon*)?’ (*as-Saff:* 2) He did not say, ‘...why do you say things which you do not work upon (*ta`maloon*) ’ because speech is a type of work (*`amal*), but it is not an action (*fi`l*).

Integrity, or maintaining a consistency between your actions and your speech, is essential for a believer. When actions and speech are not concordant, the integrity of the person is lost. The mention of the truthful people (*al-sadiqun*) which occurs throughout the Quran refers to the people of integrity.

In the same way, Allah *Glorified is He* has chided the individual who commands people to observe piety while forgetting to observe it himself. He fails to act in accordance with the counsel he gives others, and does things against which he cautions them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do you bid other people to be pious, while you forget your own selves’ (*al-Baqara:* 44)?

In essence, the objective of one who enjoins good and forbids evil, and conveys the way prescribed by Allah unto others, is to pull them out of the misguided movements with which they have become familiar. Indeed, rescuing a disbeliever from a misguided movement is a painstaking affair. After first acknowledging his misguidance, the sinner or disbeliever must distance himself from what formed the intimate habits of his life. It is perhaps for these reasons that he becomes a close observer of the person who helped him to recognize his misguidance.

Therefore, the disbeliever watches the person who is trying to guide him very closely. Does he actually practise what he calls me to practise? Does he really abstain from the things which have been prohibited? If he finds that the individual actually practises what he preaches, he will recognize that he is truthful in his outreaching effort. On the other hand, if he notices cognitive dissonance on behalf of the believer, it becomes an excuse for the sinner to return to his former state of disbelief.

Indeed, Islam is comprised of words and deeds. A lapse in consistency between these two entities will destroy the efforts of inviting people to Islam. Allah made the gravity of the matter of integrity clear when He used the words: ‘O you who have believed’ (*as-Saff:* 2). This means that this integrity is one of the demands of faith. Why is that the case? Indeed, if a person engages in the same sins which he is commanding others to avoid, he will be seen as a fraud impostor. Essentially, there is no available way for a person to call people towards things which he has not adopted himself.

This gives us a greater insight into the Quranic declaration: ‘Verily, in the Apostle of Allah (Prophet Muhammad) you have a good example, for everyone who looks forward (with hope and awe) to Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah unceasingly.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 21)

As a system, Islam does not serve us well unless we implement it. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not command His companions to carry out an action except after preceding them in performing it. Therefore, the Muslims followed his example in actions as well as in words.

It has been mentioned that when `Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* became responsible for the believers, he wanted to introduce a new form of legislation into law. So, he gathered his own family members first and said to them, ‘It seems to me that this legislation is beneficial. I swear by Allah, if any of you (my family) disobeys me (by not obeying this new legislation as other people will obey it) I will issue you a speedy and exemplary punishment before the other Muslims.’ In this manner, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab was able to close the door of disharmony and contention. He understood that being accused of nepotism could potentially be a major source of disruption in the community.

The condition of integrity is of a great importance to religious scholars. They must set ideal examples for others. In disciplines other than religious studies, it is enough that specialists be knowledgeable in their respective fields. If an outstanding chemist has an alcohol addiction, people would say that his personal behaviour is irrelevant as they only rely upon his knowledge of chemistry. If he excels in his field, people will still respect him for his specialization and will not be concerned with his conduct. The same thing could be said about geologists or any other group of specialists. Religious scholars are a major exception from this allowance.

If a religious scholar taught you and guided you to live righteously, and then you learned that he drank alcohol or stole possessions from others, would you continue taking guidance from him? Of course you would not because his esteem would fall drastically in your eyes. Regardless of the amount of knowledge he possessed, you would not listen to him nor attend his classes. You would refer to this type of an individual as a cheating imposter. This makes it very clear that a scholar of religious faith must have an exemplary character. He should not be guilty of commanding people to abstain from evil while he, himself, perpetrates it. He should not enjoin people to do good deeds while he, himself, is negligent in their performance. Undoubtedly, people are watching him closely.

Additionally, what good is there in saying that we are Muslims, if our actions are not representative of Islam? The believer is requested to do two things. Firstly, the believer should abstain from committing evil. Secondly, the believer should forbid the perpetuation of evil.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, if someone guides you to do good deeds and cautions you from committing evil deeds, and then, you find that he, himself, engages in them, do not resort to the argument, ‘Straighten yourself out first before advising me’! Even if the adviser is a sinner, try to take his advice all the same. You should not be like the one being scolded in the following couplet of poetry:

To the messenger pay no mind, but to the message take heed,
Reap the fruit of the harvest and leave the wood for the fire.

However, we are also saying to the people advising others that they should follow their own advice first before trying to guide others. This is because a believer should avoid being included among those mentioned in the previous two verses!

Before Islam began to spread through verbal scholarly efforts, it actually spread through the exemplary conduct of righteous Muslims. In fact, one could go so far as to say that the vast majority of people who embraced Islam did so as a result of the exemplary character they observed among Muslims. Take those who were responsible for the spread of Islam in China, for instance, as most of them were traders who attracted people to Islam with their uprightness and moral character.

Allah *Glorified is He* provided us with an example of this phenomenon in the story of Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*. He was admonishing his people for tampering with their scales and measures, and for their engagement in other fraudulent practises when conducting business transactions. Allah *Glorified is He* narrated to us that Prophet Shu`aib said to them: 'I have no desire to do, out of opposition to you, what I am asking you not to do' (*Hud:* 88). This means that he was only inviting them towards the righteous rules which he personally imposed upon himself because Allah had mandated these rules and prohibited these fraudulent practises.

There is another important point within the two verses we are currently examining. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'O you who have believed, why do you say (*taquloon*) things which you do not act upon (*taf`aloon*)? Most loathsome is it in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do' (*as-Saff:* 2-3). As we said, this verse was revealed after a group of Muslims had gathered to discuss the most beloved action to Allah *Glorified is He*. When they learned that the most beloved action to Allah *Glorified is He* was taking up arms in His way, with firmness and composure, this mandate was not liked by some Muslims. Therefore, Allah says, to them: '…why do you say (*taquloon*) things which you do not act upon (*taf`aloon*)?' 'You were asking about the action most beloved to Allah *Glorified is He*. So, why were you unresponsive to the mandate of Allah when it was revealed'? This marks a characteristic of the hypocrites, whom Allah described in the verse in which He says, 'Now those who have believed say, "Would a revelation (allowing us to fight) be revealed?" But now that a revelation clear in and by itself, mentioning war has been revealed, you can see those in whose heart is a disease looking at you, (O Muhammad,) with the look of one about to faint for fear of death' (*Muhammad:* 20).

This verse compared the hypocrites to people in the last throes of death! The metaphor illustrated the anxiety and fear that a dying person has in these moments. The companions were requesting a chapter which would decisively settle this matter for them, but when such a chapter was revealed and made mention of taking up arms, the hypocrites started fretting fearfully like a person experiencing the pains of death. It may be easy for a hypocrite to attend the congregational prayer in the mosque. In fact, he might even pray in the first row! Yet, if faith demands that he take up arms, it is a different story as he will reveal his true colours.

'Woe to them (the way they have chosen). Indeed, far better for them would be obedience (to Allah's call) and a word that could win (His) approval: for since the matter has been resolved (by His revelation), it would be but for their own good (to remain true to Allah's way)' (*Muhammad:* 20-21). Indeed, carrying out that which Allah *Glorified is He* commanded would have been better for them than the hypocrisy they displayed. They will be honoured with the voluntary strife in the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* and they will be spared from the compulsory death which will come later in their lives without an honorable strife.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Most (*kabura*) loathsome it is in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do!' (*as-Saff:* 3) This saying is intended to convey the odiousness of such a trait in the sight of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The Arabic word *kabura* is used in two meanings. The first meaning is in the reference to a person's age and becomes *yakburu* in the present tense. The second meaning refers to something becoming enormous, great, or grave and poses a challenge to people. An example of this can be located in the verse in which Allah *Glorified is He* says, '...dreadful (*kaburat*) is this saying that comes out of their mouths, (and) nothing but falsehood do they utter' (*al-Kahf:* 5). The verse clarified that the claim that Allah has offspring is a gravely horrendous claim.

Then again, as we mentioned above, the 'enormousness' conveyed by the term *kabura* may be used in a different way, as in the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…that (monotheism) to which you call them (to embrace) appears difficult (*kabura*) upon the polytheists' (*ash-Shura:* 13). This means that the call to true faith and monotheism was a severe challenge to the idolaters and proved very difficult for them.

In the verse we are currently examining, we find the word *kabura* in the following context: 'Most (*kabura*) loathsome (*maqtan*) it is in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do' (*as-Saff:* 3). This is intended to convey the heinousness of the lack of integrity. The Arabic word *maqt* is actually the strongest type of dislike one can express. This lack of integrity between words and actions is absolutely detestable in the sight of Allah *Glorified is He*.

The following statement of Allah *Glorified is He* is another example of this usage. Allah says, '...those who would pose arguments against Allah's messages, without having any (revealed) evidence to support them: (have committed a sin) exceedingly loathsome in the sight of Allah and the believers' (*Ghafir:* 35).

So, remember that saying things that one does not do is a most heinous crime in the sight of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِهِۦ صَفّٗا كَأَنَّهُم بُنۡيَٰنٞ مَّرۡصُوصٞ ٤

God truly loves those who fight in solid lines for
His cause, like a well-compacted wall [4]
(The Quran, *as-Saff:* 4)

A solid row (*saff*) or rank is achieved when a mass of people coalesces and join tightly so that there are no gaps between the soldiers. Solid ranks do not simply refer to throngs of people, but refer to rows made with formation and discipline. Indeed, the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us how he was even straightening the rows of his army while staring down the enemy!

As a matter of fact, he once nudged one of his men in the stomach to get him back into formation. The soldier, who loved Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: ‘O Messenger of Allah. That hurt me a little!’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* responded, ‘Here is my stomach. You may strike me back if you like.’ The man accepted his offer but then kissed the Prophet instead and said, ‘By Allah, I hope to leave this battle a martyr. Nothing would delight me more than to have my life punctuated by an encounter with you.’(1)

Neat, tightly closed ranks are a sign of discipline, order, and preparation in a fighting force. It demonstrates their capacity to effectuate orders. This is how the angels stand in ranks and wait for the orders of Allah *Glorified is He*. Each angel is ready to carry the role they have been assigned to perform.

If you analyse the words that occur in the Quran with the Arabic root *s-f-f*, you will find that the meaning of each relates to ranks. For example, ‘Hence, (O sorcerers of Egypt,) decide upon the scheme which you will pursue, and then come forward in one single body (*saff*)’ (*Ta Ha:* 64). This means, ‘Plan among yourselves and then stand together firmly.’ Indeed, the believers should stand together as if they were one fist. Surely, this makes their appearance more awe-inspiring and intimidating to the enemy. It is interesting that this is the same advice the magicians of Pharaoh gave each other when they attempted to stand against Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (5262) on the authority of Ibn Abu Layla, who said: ‘Usayd ibn Hudayr was a righteous, good-natured man. Once, while Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was arranging the ranks in preparation for battle, he was creating a disruption by talking and entertaining people, so Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him gave him a slight jab in the waist to get him into position. After being struck, he said, “That hurt a bit”, so Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him offered him the chance to even the score by striking him back. He agreed to take the offer, but first pointed out that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was wearing a shirt (which would shield him from the blow) while he was bareback. Once Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him removed his shirt, Usayd embraced and kissed him, and said: ‘O Messenger of Allah. May my mother and father be offered as your ransom!’” Concerning the Hadith, Al-Hakim said, ‘Its chain of narrators is sound but neither Al-Bukhari nor Muslim included it within their collections.*’

Even in the Hereafter, the appearance of humanity before Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment will take place in rows! Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And they will be lined up before your Lord’ (*al-Kahf:* 48). They will be lined up before Allah, as an army is lined up before its commander. He will see all of them as they stand before Him in well-arranged ranks.

The manner in which judgment will be carried out will be similarly well arranged. On that day, no one present will be able to avoid or flee from the orders of Allah *Glorified is He*. They will be arranged in rows, one after another, but each row will be separate and distinct.

Allah *Glorified is He* also said concerning the angels in general: ‘And, verily, we too are arranged (before Him in worship)’ (*as-Saffat:* 165). This refers to their standing in highly disciplined formations waiting to receive their orders. In addition to the ordered formation, the idea of ranks also conveys a sense of harmony. There is no jockeying for position within the ranks. Lastly, ranked formations are a daunting sight for any enemy that stands before the army and it inspires awe within onlookers.

In a Prophetic Hadith narrated on the authority of Al- Bara` ibn `Azib(1), it is narrated that: ‘When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* arranged the ranks in preparation for a prayer, he would run his hands over our chests and shoulders while saying, ‘Gaps in your ranks will lead to dissension among your hearts’. Indeed, Allah and His angels send blessings upon those who pray in the first rows. Stand shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot while reciting your prayers. Allah likes the perfection of the rows for the prayer just as He likes the perfection of the ranks during battle.’(2) He then recited the following verse: ‘Verily, Allah loves those who fight in His cause in (solid) ranks, as though they were a building firm and compact' (*as-Saff:* 4). In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* loves the ranks within the prayer to be closed and compact, and does not like them to be disorderly and sloppy. As we mentioned above, the same rules of formation apply to the ranks during combat.

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(1) *Al-Bara` ibn `Azib is Al-Bara` ibn `Azib ibn Al-Harith Al-Khazraji (Abu `Umara) was an Ansari. He converted while still a young man and accompanied Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him on 15 military campaigns. The first of them was the Battle of Al-Khandaq. He was appointed Governor of Ar-Ray (in Persia) at the age of twenty-four. Some of the most splendid territories of Western Qazwin were obtained under his command. He lived out the end of his days in Kufa and finally passed away during the time of Mus`ab ibn Az-Zubayr (Al-A`alam 2/46, by Az-Zirikli).*

(2) *This Hadith was narrated by An-Nisa`i in his Sunnan (811) on the authority of Bara` ibn `Azib.*

In both the battle ranks and the prayer lines, closing the ranks facilitates the process of receiving the orders of the commander, keeping composure and poise before the enemy, as well as effectuating commands. Perhaps this explains what happened on the battle of Uhud, when some soldiers in the Muslim army did not follow the orders of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This proved to be a critical mistake, as after breaking their ranks, the army was exposed to danger and suffered defeat.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* assembled fifty archers and appointed `Abdullah ibn Jubayr(1) as their commander. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them: 'Stand here, at these positions, and watch our backs. Whether you see us appearing victorious or appearing to be routed, hold your positions all the same.' However, they did not carry out their orders, as they could not resist the temptations of war spoils. They disobeyed the orders of their commanding officer to hold their positions, and following the order of commanding officers is the basis of all military operations.

They disobeyed the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*; their defeat was inevitable. In retrospect, it was vital that they experience defeat while in the company of the Prophet. Remember, the first battle saw the Muslims victorious. After their initial success, they began to concern themselves with accumulating war booty.

The archers said, 'all the valuables will be claimed by others and nothing will be left for us.' They abandoned their positions and descended to take their share of the spoils. Khalid ibn Al-Walid — who at the time was following the religion of his people—was able to use this to his advantage; he surrounded the Muslim army and the rest is history.

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(1) *'Abdullah ibn Jubayr is `Abdullah ibn Jubayr ibn An-Nu`man Al-Ansari. He was present for both `Aqaba and Badr. He was appointed the leader of the archers for the Battle of Uhud and was martyred therein during the year (3 A.H.) (Al-A`lam by Az-Zirikli, 4/76).*

The absence of the archers from the post they had been assigned by the Prophet at the base of the mountain provided Khalid with the perfect opportunity to attack the vulnerable, unprotected Muslim army. Perhaps gravest of all, the negligence displayed by the archers almost led to the death of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. After the Muslims were left unguarded, the disbelievers of Quraysh unleashed a vicious attack upon them. The companions were made to flee wildly in every direction and the Muslim ranks were disbanded. The army of the idolaters intensified their surge upon the Prophet and even got so close to him that Ibn Qam`a was able to strike the Prophet with a stone and fracture one of his teeth.

The shields of the Prophet were broken and his helmet was smashed into his head so forcefully that it caused blood to flow from his head. During the commotion, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* attempted to reach the summit of the mountain in order to address his troops, but ended up mounting the shoulders of Talha ibn 'Ubaydullah(1) when he was prevented from doing so.(2) For this reason the most beloved action to Allah that those struggling in His way can perform is standing together as though they were a fortified structure.

The order to stand together in well-organized ranks is not simply for those conducting prayer or fighting in the way of Allah on the battlefield; by no means, it is also for those calling unto the way of Allah. Those channelling their energies to invite others to Islam as well as scholars studying various aspects of the faith should also stand together in unified ranks—not allowing anything to divide them or their efforts.

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(1) *Talha ibn `Ubaydullah ibn Abu Muhammad among the Companions was known for his bravery. He was born in the year 28 B.H. He was one of the ten Companions who were promised paradise and one of the six consulted about the Caliphate after the death of the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him. Prior to his embracing Islam he was known as one of the most brilliant members of Quraysh and recognized as one of their scholars. He was known as Talha Al-Jood. He was present for the Battle of Uhud, a battle which saw him stand with the Prophet; defending him while sustaining twenty-four wounds. At age sixty-four he was killed (26 A.H.) during the Battle of the Camel as he fought alongside `Aisha Allah be pleased with her. He was buried in Basra.*

(2) *Cited in Ar-Rahiq Al-Makhtum (1/245): The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him told Talha: 'You have earned the promise.' He was referring to the fact Talha had earned the promise of Paradise.*

As a matter of fact, some scholars have opined that the statement of Allah: ‘Consider these [messages] ranged in serried ranks’ (*as-Saffat:* 1) contains a wide range of meanings; among them, the ranks of propagating and inviting others to Islam, the ranks of defending Islam, and the ranks of protecting the uninhibited right of others to choose Islam.

In other words, this verse can refer to all manner of propagating the Religion of Allah and defending it before its enemies. Propagating the faith is the responsibility of the scholars, and defending the physical integrity of the community is the responsibility of those striving upon the battlefield. Both the aforementioned groups should concert their efforts and work within closed ranks as though they represent fortified structures. The True Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘Verily Allah loves [only] those who fight in His cause…’ (*as-Saff:* 4).

Indeed, in order for fighting to be legitimate in Islam, it must be for the sake of Allah, and not for worldly reasons such as claiming land or wealth. In order for fighting to really be for the sake of Allah its motivation must be Allah alone and unmixed with any desire to exult in power, display arrogance or oppress others. The idea of fighting wars in order to bolster one’s status as a superpower or gain wealth by opening new markets is regarded as morally repugnant in Islam. The goal of a just war is to make the way Allah has prescribed for His servants prevail and giving aid to the Religion of Allah. This sheds light on the following statement of Allah *the Exalted*: ‘Hence let them fight in Allah’s cause’ (*an-Nisa’:* 74). To be sure, this highlights the fact that fighting can be carried out for other than the sake of Allah; for instance, those who fight as a result of blind partisanship or in order to demonstrate their bravery and valour.

In fact, this has caused some people to question among themselves: Who is the real martyr? The scholars responded: One who fights in order to see the way of his Lord prevail and is killed is a martyr. In the final analysis, we can say that fighting may be engaged for the sake of Allah or for other selfish and perhaps even devilish ends.

Allah encourages the believers to strive in His cause and expend themselves in effort to make His way prevail. Indeed, once an individual has accepted faith it is not conceivable that he would neglect the responsibility of striving within the ranks of the faithful. As long as his heart finds contentment in faith, is it possible for him to invest his effort into striving with those who are motivated by other than faith?

The statement of Allah '…those who fight in His cause in [solid] ranks, as though they were a building firm and compact' (*as-Saff:* 4) gives special attention to a particular type of fighting. Human beings fight for different reasons; some are motivated by blind partisanship to particular groups, some by defending their nationalities, and some by other affiliations. From the standpoint of the faith, these various affiliations have no value unless they emanate from the way prescribed by Allah and are placed in the service of making His way prevail.

This is the frame of mind the believer assumes before entering battle, and thus he is removed from the zeal which is produced by the motivation of arrogance, wealth, or prestige. Quite the reverse, you fight when fighting is required. You proceed and engage the circumstances as faith demands, taking assurance in the fact that your only aspiration is to be counted among those who truly fear Allah. When you are fighting with the goal of helping the way of Allah prevail you are in the accompaniment of Allah.

Perhaps it should go without saying that in as much as you are fighting for the sake of Allah, that fighting must be engaged according to the law of Allah. To be sure, Allah has prohibited you from using extreme force and transgressing by killing women, children, or the elderly. Killing any of the above-mentioned categories of non-combatants would be transcending the limits set by Allah. (1)

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(1) *On the authority of Safwan ibn-`Assal Al-Muradi: 'The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him sent us out as a military detachment and said to us, "Attack in the name of Allah. Do not use excessive force, do not fight dishonourably, do not mutilate the corpses of the dead and do not kill a child."' This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (18122). Also, in Al-Mu`ajam Al-Wasit (4/268) it is cited on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him when sending forth a military detachment would say: 'Make your approach in the name of Allah, and as soldiers striving in His way. Go forward and fight those who avowedly reject the religion of Allah; however, do not use excessive force or fight dishonourably. Furthermore, you should refrain from mutilating the corpses of the dead, and killing women, children or the elderly.'*

Additionally, because those fighting within the ranks are fighting for the sake of Allah, their formation must be as Allah commanded: '…as though they were a building firm and compact.' (*as-Saff:* 4)

At perhaps a deeper a level, we can say that the verse is demonstrating that faith makes the believers into a fortified structure; one in which all the parts support each other. And while this is true of the believers generally, it is especially true of those fighting in the way of Allah.

The statement of Allah '…a building firm and compact' (*as-Saff:* 4) is a metaphor which shows its merits upon reflection. A building is described as firm and compact when the bricks which make it up are set well enough to avoid the possibility of ever becoming loose. This means that the other bricks surround it in a way that gives it stability and firmness.

Next, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِۦ يَٰقَوْمِ لِمَ تُؤْذُونَنِى وَقَد تَّعْلَمُونَ أَنِّى رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ
إِلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَلَمَّا زَاغُوٓا۟ أَزَاغَ ٱللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلْفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٥﴾

Moses said to his people, 'My people, why do you hurt me when you know that I am sent to you by God?' When they went astray, God left their hearts to stray: God does not guide rebellious people [5] (The Quran, *as-Saff:* 5)

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* dispatched Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) unto Pharaoh with a verse which demonstrated their truthfulness, their primary objective was delivering the children of Israel and rescuing them from the oppression of Pharaoh. The question of faith, i.e., the misguidance of Pharaoh in matters of faith was of secondary importance. These words of Musa's (Moses's) capture the first priority of the mission: '…let, then, the children of Israel go with us, and cause them not to suffer…' (*Ta Ha:* 47).

In other words, Musa (Moses) was saying, 'we have come for our children, we have come to rescue them this torment and suffering'. Indeed, he came to Pharaoh with miracles which should have served as proof of his truthfulness. Nevertheless, Musa (Moses) was not spared of the evil of Pharaoh. Pharaoh said of him: '…a spellbinder is he, a liar!' (*Ghafir:* 24)

Allah say, '[Pharaoh] exclaimed: "Behold, [this] your 'apostle' who [claims that he] has been sent unto you is mad indeed"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 27), and '…am I not better than this contemptible man who can hardly make his meaning clear?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 52)

Naturally, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was exposed to the evil of Pharaoh; indeed, he had come to challenge his claim to divinity. How was Musa (Moses) subjected to harm by the children of Israel? Was it not Musa (Moses) who had come to rescue them from the oppressive grip of Pharaoh and enslavement?

This explains why Musa (Moses) scolded his people so harshly. The True Lord says, 'Now when Musa (Moses) spoke to his people, [it was this same truth that he had in mind:] "O my people! Why do you cause me grief, the while you know that I am an apostle of Allah sent unto you?"…' (*as-Saff:* 5)

The scholars have said: in causing Musa (Moses) grief, the children of Israel were causing grief to one who had been sent unto them from Allah *Glorified is He*! They said to him: '…Make us see Allah face to face…' (*an-Nisa':* 153). With comments like these they extended their transgression from doubts about the actions of Allah to doubts about His essence. They were so submerged in materialism that they even requested to observe Allah within the physical world! They did not understand the idea of the unseen and hence, their souls were not contented with it.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* thusly: 'The People of the Scripture demand of you [O Prophet] that you cause a revelation to be sent down to them from heaven. And an even greater thing than this did they demand of Musa (Moses) when they said, "Make us see Allah face to face" – whereupon the thunderbolt of punishment overtook them for this wickedness. After that, they took to worshipping the [golden] calf – and this, after all evidence of the truth had come unto them! None the less, We effaced this [sin of theirs], and vouchsafed unto Musa (Moses) a clear proof [of the truth].' (*an-Nisa':* 153)

Another example of their causing Musa (Moses) grief is when they rejected the provision of manna and quail that Allah had given them; they said: '…indeed, we cannot endure but one kind of food; pray, then to your Lord that He bring forth for us aught of what grows from the earth—of its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils, its onions. Musa (Moses) said, "Would you take a lesser thing in exchange for what is [so much] better? Go into [any] settlement, and then you can have what you are asking for…"' (*al-Baqara:* 61).

Afterward, their actions were again injurious to Musa (Moses) when they worshipped the calf instead of Allah. This took place right after they had been delivered safely from the sea. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* had taken the elect from among them and had set off to be with his Lord. He left his brother Harun (Aaron) in charge of the children of Israel.

They fashioned the calf out of jewellery they had stolen from Egypt with their own hands. As a matter of fact, much of the jewellery used for making the calf had been pieces that they were entrusted with while in Egypt but failed to return upon their departure. In retrospect, perhaps this is why that jewellery ended up containing bad consequences for them in the long run. Their leader in their madness was referred to as As-Samiri: '…the effigy of a calf, which made a lowing sound; and thereupon they said [to one another], "This is your deity, and the deity of Musa (Moses)—but he has forgotten [his past]!"' (*Ta Ha:* 88)

The pain this caused Musa (Moses) is indescribable. He had gone to receive the guidance of Allah and His rulings and laws while his people were engaged in idolatrous worship. They were worshipping other than Allah while he, himself, was experiencing untold nearness to the presence of Allah. Lest they forget, Allah had just rescued them from many long years of bondage and oppression at the hands of Pharaoh in Egypt.

This explains the intensity of Musa's (Moses's) anger at his people. Concerning this occasion, The True Lord says, 'Thereupon Musa (Moses) returned to his people full of wrath and sorrow, [and] exclaimed: "O my people! Did your Lord not hold out [many] a goodly promise to you? Did, then, [the fulfilment of] this promise seem to you too long in coming? Or are you, perchance, determined to see your Lord's condemnation fall upon you, and so you broke your promise to me?"' (*Ta Ha:* 86)

To be sure, Musa (Moses) was deeply pained and saddened at what had taken place among his people. Indeed, he even said to them: 'and when

Musa (Moses) said unto his people: "O my people! Verily you have sinned against yourselves by worshipping the calf; turn, then in repentance to your Maker…'" (*al-Baqara:* 54).

As for the act of atonement that had been specified for them by their prophet and messenger Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* it was: '…mortify yourselves; this will be best for you in your Maker's Sight…' (*al-Baqara:* 54); it has been said they executed some seventy-thousand members of their people.

Furthermore, they annoyed and vexed Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* personally when they accused him of murdering his own brother, Harun (Aaron) while they were scaling a mountain and the latter died. They said, 'indeed, Musa (Moses) harboured animosity and rancour toward his brother so he killed him.' Allah ordered the angels to carry the body of Harun (Aaron) and pass through the procession of the children of Israel so that they could see that his body was unscathed. This occasion is what is intended by the statement of Allah *the Exalted*: '…Allah showed him to be innocent of whatever they alleged…' (*al-Ahzab:* 69).

In relation to this verse, others(1) have mentioned that they abused Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* by claiming that he had some sort of bodily ailment. They only arrived at this silly conclusion due to his extreme modesty. When dressed he would cover his entire body; even when he bathed or relieved himself!

It is bad enough that some of them claimed that he had leprosy, but even worse, some of them went so far as to claim that he had some type of condition which afflicted his genitals. Allah wanted to clear him of these outrageous charges. One day(2) Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* came out and laid down his garments in order to bathe. After he finished, he set off to grab his clothes, but found that the stone upon which he had laid them had dashed away! Musa (Moses) promptly scurried after the stone, grabbing his staff, and screaming 'O stone, my clothes!' repeatedly as he ran behind the stone. At last, the chase ended with him running into a party of the children of Israel. When they saw him without clothes they realised he was absolutely free of the condition with which they claimed he was afflicted. This is what has been transmitted from the Prophet, who said, ‘At last, the chase ended with him running into a party of the children of Israel. When they saw him naked they realised that Allah had created him in a beautiful body.’ In this manner, Allah cleared him of the silly accusations his people had made about him. Finally, the stone stood still so Musa (Moses) could take his clothes; he dressed and eventually set off but not before giving the stone a few blows with his staff!

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(1) *On the authority of Abu-Hurayra*

(2) The story of the taking stone and the stealing of the clothes of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* referred to the fact that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not afflicted with leprosy or any other physical ailment in His statement: ‘[and now] put your hand into your bosom: it will come forth [shining] white, without blemish…’ (*al-Qasas:* 32).

The word (white), as it appears here, means that his hand was shining and without any trace of ailment or skin condition. Bear in mind that Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was of swarthy complexion which made his hand shining forth with white light even more extraordinary. For this reason, Allah added ‘…without blemish…’ (*al-Qasas:* 32). This was in order to pre-empt their speculation that he might be afflicted with leprosy or something similar. By no means, his hand was miraculously shining with natural light.

Musa (Moses) was subjected to much abuse; when he began to challenge the authorities, Qarun(1) did the unthinkable. He hired a prostitute to publicly accuse Musa (Moses) of sleeping with her. However, Allah decreed that after the people had assembled she came forward and told the truth about Qarun’s plot. Indeed, Allah cleared the name of His Messenger, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. On this occasion, Qarun persuaded the prostitute to perform this insidious task by giving her a large metal tin filled with gold. His goal was simply to discredit Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* so when he appeared before the people and attempted to explain the law of Allah by saying: The one guilty of theft shall have his hand amputated, the one guilty of fornication shall be subjected to the lash, the one guilty of adultery shall be executed by stoning, etc. Qarun challenged him. Qarun screamed out, ‘and what if it is you, O Musa (Moses)? Musa (Moses) responded with integrity, ‘Yes, even if it is me.' This is when the prostitute stood and blurted out: 'He (Musa (Moses) seduced me! Obviously shocked at the utter falsehood of her statement, Musa (Moses) said to the woman, 'By the One Who separated the sea, speak the truth! Just then, the woman trembled and plainly acknowledged—in front of all the on-lookers—Qarun's plan to assassinate *Musa*'s (Moses's) character. Needless to say, the plan Qarun had hatched became exposed and this marked the beginning of a long period of contention between he and Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*.(1)

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(1) *The story of Qarun's spite to Musa (Moses) peace be upon him, and his investigation of a whore to frequent him.*

This explains why Allah mentions: '...O my people! Why do you cause me grief, the while you know that I am an apostle of Allah sent unto you?...' (*as-Saff:* 5)

Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was saying: First, you acknowledge the truth of my prophetic mission. The word *qad* appears here in order to convey emphasis. In other words, they were absolutely certain that he was a prophet. Imagine a perplexed Musa (Moses) questioning, 'You clearly seem to acknowledge that I am sent unto you by Allah, why then, do you insist on causing me such harm? In and of itself, what you have charged me with is odious, but when looked at through the lens of prophethood and conveying the message of Allah, it is even worse'. Allah *the Exalted* not only declared him innocent of these baseless charges, but also positively asserted his uprightness by saying: '...for of great honour was he in the sight of Allah.' (*al-Ahzab:* 69)

The great honour mentioned in the previously cited verse refers to the fact that his requests and supplications will find reception with Allah. Wrongfully charging him with misconduct is something from which one with at least a shred of intelligence would shrink. Being honourable entails respect, dignity, and esteem.

These characteristics aren not gained haphazardly; absolutely not, they are usually preceded by actions which earn them for their possessor. If truth be told, people normally respect individuals who excel them in qualities they esteem.

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(1) *This was cited in a collection of Hadiths attributed to Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him. Narrated by At-Tabari in his Tafsir (20/116), Ibn Abu Hatim in his Tafsir (9/2006) and by Ibn `Asakir in Tarikh Dimashq (61/97-98)*

The source of one's honour among people can be as varied as knowledge, strength, compassion, and concern for the vulnerable, using experience to benefit others, or just simply being helpful.

When the children of Israel looked at Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* they did not see a prophet—this despite the fact that he was primarily responsible for delivering them from Pharaoh and his oppression and tyranny. They countenanced the favour of Musa (Moses) by swerving from the truth and surrendering to rebelliousness.

To be sure, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…and so when they swerved from the right way, Allah let their hearts swerve…' (*as-Saff:* 5). The verb *zaygh* (swerve) indicates deviation from a straight course. It is derived from the phrase *tazayugh al-asnan* which describes teeth which are growing from different positions within the mouth: Some along the gum line, others behind teeth etc. Swerving—as it is used in the last verse—is something which involuntarily occurs within a sick heart. Primordial goodness—with which all people are born—does not naturally incline toward deviation. It is rather the capricious whims; these are the source the heart's deviation. A person might know of the correct position within the law of Allah on a particular matter, but at some point, his undisciplined passions will intervene and he may deviate from the correct way.

Take the children of Israel for instance; they were absolutely positive that Musa (Moses) was a messenger from Allah. Nevertheless, they swerved from that which they knew. The urge to deviate was first found among their hearts. Next, the thoughts became subservient to the hearts' deviation. Then they began to articulate their thoughts. And thus, you observe the source and progression of their deviance.

Indeed, we should observe the manner in which the Quran describes this process when it proclaims: '…and so when they swerved from the right way, Allah let their hearts swerve…' (*as-Saff:* 5), it is as if Allah is saying, in so much as the original desire to deviate from the right course starts with you, I will facilitate and even further that which you, yourselves, desire.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* doesn not begin by making a person incline toward something which contravenes His orders. The desire to rebel always begins with the individual and his whims. Once this occurs, Allah leaves the person to his own desires and then furthers the inclination toward deviance.

The phenomenon we are discussing is starkly similar to that being described in the following verse: ‘and whenever a chapter is bestowed from on high, they look at one another [and say, as it were], “is there anyone who can see you?” – and then they turn away. Allah has turned their hearts away [from the truth] – for they are people who will not grasp it.’ (*at-Tawba:* 127)

This establishes that the deviance began with them: Only after they turned away did Allah make their hearts turn away from faith. Thus, no one can say, ‘it was Allah who made them disincline from faith, so how can they be blamed for turning away?’ Quite the reverse, they turned away of their own choosing because they lacked understanding and comprehension.

For this reason, the believers call upon their Lord while saying: ‘O our Lord! Let not our hearts swerve from the truth after you have guided us…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 8). The True Lord *Glorified is He* has not left the issue of guidance and misguidance without clarification. He has made the characteristics of those who are guided and those who are not, sufficiently clear. What guidance can there be for a man or a woman after they have rejected Allah, deviated from His way, and spread corruption?

Then, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘…for Allah does not bestow His guidance upon iniquitous folk.’ (*as-Saff:* 5) When the True Lord restricts guidance from an individual it does not mean that he is justified in saying, ‘Allah didn not grant me guidance, what can I do?’, in this way he attempts to absolve himself of blame by making Allah wholly responsible for the outcome. On the contrary, we must question the deviant individual: Why did Allah restrict his guidance from you? He only did so because you expressed an inclination toward deviance.

Therefore, we can say that a lack of guidance from Allah is the result of taking the path of misguidance and distancing oneself from the way of Allah. With this as a premise we clearly recognize that the usage of guidance within this verse does not correspond with the general definition of ‘leading someone on the path to good’. Allah leads both believers and disbelievers to the path of good. The way of Allah, which has been clearly detailed for all people demonstrates the path of good and shows men and women the way to it. The concept of guidance these verses endeavour to convey is the special phenomenon that occurs for people who enter the domain of faith and thereafter perform acts of righteousness. This latter form of guidance is what we often refer to as 'facilitated guidance'.

Each individual who treads the path of faith is aided by Allah so that he can remain upon the path. It is inconceivable that we could ever exculpate a group of deviant persons on the grounds that Allah did not grant them guidance. This is absolutely preposterous. Allah *Glorified is He* has shown all people the path of goodness. However, the onus of their misguidance should be placed squarely upon their own shoulders. They, of their own will and volition, chose to follow the path of disbelief, oppression, and deviance.

Speaking of deviance, perhaps we should mention a precise definition for the term: it is leaving the obedience of Allah and failing to conform to His way. When we analyse the term etymologically we find that its original usage occurs in the saying, '*fasaqat ar-rutabah*' which was said to express the idea of a fruit being deeply submerged underneath its peel. Thus, red dates and other fruits grow naturally with peels which, before they ripen, are almost inextricably linked to them. However, when the red date or other fruits ripen and become moist, the peel darkens and the fruit begins to separate from them. As this natural process nears completion it becomes easy to remove the peel off the fruit.

This is exactly the manner in which a deviant is removed from beneath the protective canopy that is the way of Allah. This 'peel', if you will, sloughs off the deviant until he is no longer connected with it. Disconnection from the way of Allah occurs when the servant no longer has a practical relationship with His commandments and prohibitions.

Deviance is at the seat of all moral corruption. To be sure, moral corruption only appears when the way of Allah has been abandoned, on a particular occasion in which case it is to be classified as caprice, or repeatedly in which case it is referred to as obstinacy. Allah *Glorified is He* does not guide a disbelieving people; nor does He bestow His guidance to a deviant or iniquitous people.

Whoever wants to boldly flaunt his restriction from the guidance of Allah only needs to perform actions of disbelief, deviance, or iniquity. Nonetheless, in all of the abovementioned cases, it will be the individual who chose his own path and thereby made the punishment of Allah his rightful recompense. Perhaps this sheds light on the statement of the disbelievers from among the children of Israel who were restricted from the guidance of Allah when He sealed their hearts. Yet, it was the same scenario: They, themselves, had chosen to follow the path of deviance and disbelief. In other words, they wilfully chose to be misguided!

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ يَٰبَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ إِنِّى رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ إِلَيْكُم مُّصَدِّقًا
لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَىَّ مِنَ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةِ وَمُبَشِّرًۢا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِى مِنۢ بَعْدِى ٱسْمُهُۥٓ أَحْمَدُ ۖ فَلَمَّا
جَآءَهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ قَالُوا۟ هَٰذَا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦﴾

Jesus, son of Mary, said, ‘Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad.’ Yet when he came to them with clear signs, they said, ‘This is obviously sorcery’ [6] (The Quran, *as-Saff:* 6)

Most of the personalities of the Quran occur without attention to their lineages. There are, however, two noted exceptions to this general rule: `Isa (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary) and Maryam (Mary) the daughter of `Imran. Why is this so; one might ask? Indeed, their story involves a miracle which will not ever be duplicated. This is the reason Allah presents them in the Quran by using their full names; lest a woman dare come along and claim that she, like Maryam (Mary), experienced Immaculate Conception!

The miracle of Maryam (Mary) will never occur again. Indeed, this is the reason Allah mentioned her specifically by name. Conversely, He never details the lineages of Pharaoh, Musa (Moses) or the Sleepers of Ephesus. Similarly, we find no mention as to the exact person of the Two-Horned One, or the man who owned the two gardens. Again, this can be said of the overwhelming majority of personalities which occur throughout the Quran because the focal point of these stories is not personalities.

`Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was sent exclusively to the children of Israel. Indeed, he addressed them: '…O children of Israel! Behold, I am an apostle of Allah unto you…' (*as-Saff:* 6), and Allah spoke of him *peace be upon him* in the following terms: '…an apostle unto the children of Israel…' (*Al-'Imran:* 49).

`Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was sent as a messenger to a specific group of people, the children of Israel; his message was not intended for all humanity. This is what differentiates the message of `Isa (Jesus) and his ministry from that of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In fact, we find a similar construction introducing the message of Hud *peace be upon him*. Allah says, 'and unto [the tribe of] `Ad [we sent] their brother Hud…' (*al-A'raf:* 65), and concerning the people of Midyan:(1) 'and unto [the people of] Madyan [We sent] their brother Shu`aib (Jethro)…' (*al-A'raf:* 85).

The True Lord *Glorified is He* made the mission and message of every prophet who preceded Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specific to particular times and places. To put it more succinctly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was given the distinct honour of being sent to all people. The message that was given to him is relevant to all times and places. The True Lord highlights this distinction with the following statement: 'Say [O Muhammad]: "O mankind! Verily, I am an apostle of Allah to all of you…"' (*al-A'raf:* 158).

One of the common characteristics of the messengers is that each of them confirms the truth of the messenger which preceded him and heralds the messenger who will come after him. As we stated above, this characteristic is shared among all the messengers with the exception of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He confirmed the truth of that which preceded him, but he did not announce the advent of a messenger who would come after him. Indeed, he is the Final Messenger. Focusing our attention on `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* he confirmed the message of the Torah—which was still the most current revelation at the onset of his prophetic ministry. The phrase '…confirm the truth…' (*as-Saff:* 6) which occurs within the verse means that the message brought by `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was in conformity with the Torah.

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(1) Midyan: the name is derived from a tribe and ruling family. It was a city in the north-western region of the Arabian Peninsula. Currently, it is located in the area known as Al-Bada`a in north-western Saudi Arabia, a region whose major city is Tabuk and its major source of commercial activity is trade. Although they are separated by some large hills, it actually faces the Egyptian city of Dahab which is located on the Red Sea.

With the phrase (whatever still remains) `Isa (Jesus) is making a reference to the Torah and highlighting that he was sent to fulfil and uphold it, To be sure, this does give one occasion to question: in so much as the Torah was present, and `Isa (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary) came to confirm the message of the Torah as it existed in his time, what was the purpose of his being sent to proclaim a new, distinct message? The answer lies in recognizing that one can introduce new rulings while confirming that which preceded you. The two are not mutually exclusive. In another place, Allah *the Exalted* says concerning `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*: 'and [I have come] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah and to make lawful unto you some of the things which [a foretime] were forbidden to you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 50). As such, his mission is not limited to confirmation. `Isa (Jesus) also came to make some of the things that were prohibited in the Torah lawful unto the children of Israel. Of course, it goes without saying that the core beliefs which define the way of Allah and the rulings which emanate from them do not change or alternate. Likewise, the stories and parables of the people of the past that have been included in the various revelations do not change. Change only occurs in a few rulings.

Revelation occurs in a progression. Nevertheless, there is congruency, harmony, and reinforcement among the various instalments within the progression. None of the messengers ever propagated a message which contradicted that which preceded them or that which came after them. Therefore, `Isa (Jesus) came to confirm what remained of the Torah in his time.

Torah is a Hebrew term which became the name assigned to the book that was revealed to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. The inclusion of this term in the Quran, a purely Arabic scripture does not mean it is somehow less authentic. The Quran was revealed to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This was a common word among the Arabs; when said, its meaning was readily understood.

Within a contemporary context, a good example of the same phenomenon would be our adoption of the word (bank). This has become an Arabic word:

it is written in Arabic script and regularly used by Arabic speakers. The Quran being purely an Arabic scripture means that when Allah addressed the Arabs He did so with words and terms that they understood and were in use among them; even if some of them originated in languages other than Arabic.

Therefore, the effort that some scholars have expended to prove that these words actually have Arabic origins is totally unnecessary. They are often at pains to find original Arabic linguistic patterns to which these words conform and to uncover etymological roots for them.

Thus, we can observe the dual function of `Isa (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary): He came to confirm that which was conveyed by Musa (Moses). He also came to herald the advent of a messenger who would come after him. He said to his people: ‘and [this happened, too,] when `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), said: “O children of Israel! Behold, I am an apostle of Allah unto you, [sent] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give [you] the glad tiding of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name is Ahmad.” But when he [whose coming `Isa (Jesus) had foretold] came unto them with all evidence of the truth, they said: “This [alleged message of his] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence!”’ (*as-Saff:* 6)

In the Gospel, Prophet Muhammad is referred to by the name Ahmad. (1) In the Quran he is referred to be the name Ahmad only once but referred to by the name Muhammad in four places: Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘and Muhammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144). He also says, ‘[and know, O believers, that] Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is Allah’s apostle and the Seal of all Prophets. And Allah indeed has Full Knowledge of everything.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40), and Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘whereas those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds, and have come to believe in what has been bestowed from on high on Muhammad – for it is the truth from their Lord – [shall attain to Allah’s Grace:] He will efface their [past] bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest.’ (*Muhammad:* 2)

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(1) In the Hebrew Torah, in third book of Exodus we find: ‘The land will be filled with the praise of Ahmad. He will seize the nations by their necks with his right hand.’ We have also located older copies; the first printed in London in the year 1848 and another printed in Beirut in 1884. In the older printings, you find that the mention within the Book of Exodus occurs with stark clarity: ‘indeed, the skies will be illumined by the splendour of the Praised One (Muhammad). The earth will be filled with his praise… Your call to reform is echoed by the rivers. Even in the depth of the seas your burning voice is not extinguished. O Muhammad! The mountains were put to pasture after witnessing you.’

Allah *the Exalted* proclaims: ‘Muhammad is Allah’s apostle; and those who are [truly] with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another. You can see them bowing down, prostrating themselves [in prayer], seeking favour with Allah and [His] goodly acceptance…’ (*al-Fath:* 29).

The words Muhammad and Ahmad are derived from the same tri-lateral root h-m-d. All of the words derived from the root involve the concept of praise; however, the words Ahmad and Muhammad have different connotations.

Upon analysis, we find that Muhammad refers to an entity which is praised by others. The word *mukarram* — which appears on the same linguistic pattern but is derived from the tri-lateral root k-r-m whose derivatives all involves honour—provides an example of the same phenomenon. When we say, ‘so and so is *mukarram*’ we are saying that he has been honoured by others. The word Ahmad on the other hand, refers to an entity which engages in the act of praising something other than itself.

Additionally, the word Ahmad corresponds with the linguistic pattern *af`al* which connotes superlative expression. For example, we say, ‘so and so is generous *(karim)* and so and so is more generous (*akram*).’ Therefore, we can conclude that the word Ahmad refers to someone who praises abundantly. Looking in further detail, we find that the word *hamid*, derived from the same root, is used to refer to one whose level of praise is appropriate for that which he is praising.

If you look at the names of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* referred to by most frequently, Ahmad and Muhammad, you find that both express qualities about him in the superlative. Ahmad is a superlative expression of one who praises, while Muhammad is a superlative expression of one who receives praise.

Allah granted the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* two beautiful qualities: He is praised by Allah and he engages in abundant praise of Allah. This is quintessence of the prophetic personality: He is at once the Chosen and the Elect, and one striving to earn the favour of Allah.

The names Muhammad and Mahmoud highlight the election of the Prophet while Hamid and Ahmad express his striving to be near to Allah. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is the embodiment of these two essential qualities; as he said once, 'I am Muhammad. I am Ahmad. I am *Al-Muqaffi* and *Al-Hashir*, (1) the Prophet of Repentance, and the Prophet of Mercy.'(2)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'and there shall not be one of the People of the Book, but shall believe in him [`Isa (Jesus)] before his death and on the Day of Judgement he shall be a witness against them.' (*an-Nisa': 159*)

This verse is making it clear that every member of the people of the Book will believe that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* as a servant, a messenger and perhaps most important of all, a human being, before he passes away. However, this will not happen until he comes in the flesh and proclaims to them: 'You were mistaken when you rejected my foretelling of the coming of Muhammad, the Seal. Also, you were mistaken when you accused my mother of impropriety. To be sure, evidence of your mistake is contained in the messenger whose coming I foretold: Muhammad, the messenger who has been sent to all mankind. Right here, before you all, I pledge my allegiance to Muhammad by offering prayer behind one of the members of his community'.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'those who shall follow the [last] apostle, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and [later on] in the Gospel…' (*al-A'raf:* 157).

Notice the detail in the exposition of the Quran. It did not say mention the last apostle whose description is written in their scriptures; on the contrary, it said: '...whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and [later on] in the Gospel...' (*al-A'raf:* 157). Indeed, the verse affirms that one who reads the Torah or the Gospel can find a detailed depiction of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*. Both the Torah and the Gospel grant us ample, comprehensive accounts of the last Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *Al-Muqaffi: some say that the source of this name is the fact that 'the affair' ended with him. That is to say: He is the last of the Prophets. There will be no prophet after him. The name could also refer to his being a follower of the Prophets who came before him. Tahdhib Al-Lugha... This was the opinion offered by Shamr*

(2) *This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3532) and by Muslim in his Sahih (6251). In the Hadith which was narrated on the authority of Jubayr ibn Matam.*

If truth be told, the people of the Book had come to Yathrib to witness the fulfilment of prophecy: They wanted to identify and follow this prophet whose arrival had been mentioned in the Torah.

Reflect upon the covenant Allah took from the prophets: '...you must believe in him and succour him...' (*Al-'Imran:* 81). The messengers conveyed the message to the various communities to which they were sent, and told the people of faith of the coming generation that they would encounter a messenger who would teach them the consummate expression of the way of Allah. This was the fulfilment of the covenant.

Those who truly know the Torah and the Gospel can recognize the descriptions of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* within them: 'They unto whom We have vouchsafed revelation a foretime know him as they know their own children: but behold, some of them knowingly suppress the truth' (*al-Baqara:* 146).

Vividly underscoring this point, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab(1) *Allah be pleased with him* once asked `Abdullah ibn Salam: 'How did you know him, O ibn-Salam?' What `Umar intended to convey by his question was how `Abdullah ibn Salam recognize Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by the content of his message or by his physical characteristics. Ibn Salam, who we must remember was a Jewish rabbi, responded by saying, 'I knew him as I knew my own son. In fact, I knew him better than I knew my own son! Indeed, regarding my son there is a chance—no matter how slight—that his mother could have deceived me; with Muhammad however, his description occurs in the Torah with such detail as would make it nearly impossible to misidentify him.'(2) As such, the people of the Book know the Prophet: they know the time of the advent of his prophecy, his message, and his physical characteristics with great certainty. Before the arrival of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* the Jews of Yathrib would say to the idolaters, 'We have been awaiting the arrival of our prophet for quite some time. However, once he arrives, we will believe in him and proceed to vanquish you as the peoples of `Ad and Iram were vanquished.(1)

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(1) *The story of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him, asking `Abdullah ibn Salam about the mention of Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in the Torah.*

(2) *Ath Tha`alabi mentioned the following narration from As-Suda As-Saghir who mentioned it on the authority Al-Kalbi who transmitted it from ibn `Abbas. Also, this Hadith was cited by As- Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (2/32)*

Nevertheless, when the Prophet arrived in Medina they were the first to disbelieve, oppose him, and dispute the legitimacy of his prophethood. Read the verse of Allah *the Exalted*: 'and whenever there came unto a [new] revelation from Allah, confirming the truth already in their possession—and [bear in mind that] a foretime they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the truth—: whenever there came unto them something which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it. And Allah's rejection is the due of all who deny the truth.' (*al-Baqara:* 89)

Therefore, the advent of Muhammad's prophecy did not come as a surprise to the people of the Book; quite the reverse, they were awaiting his arrival and preparing to believe in him as their scriptures had commanded. Yet, when he arrived they rejected faith and denied the message.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…But when he [whose coming `Isa (Jesus) had foretold] came unto them with all evidence of the truth, they said: "This [alleged message of his] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence!"' (*as-Saff:* 6)

The pronoun 'he' which occurs in the verse refers to the messenger whose coming was prophesied by `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*. Of course, this is Ahmad. Thus, one may read the verse, 'But when Ahmad came unto them, and his prophethood became clear to them, they said, "This [alleged message of his] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence." (*as-Saff:* 6)

Racked with doubt, these people did not find any reasonable grounds to oppose the Quran. They claimed that he was sorcerer; but then again, does someone under a spell have a will independent of the sorcerer. If he was a sorcerer compelling people to embrace Islam by force of magic, why did he spare you? Why did he fail to cast a spell on you?

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(1) *In Dala`il An-Nubuwwa (2/76), Al-Bayhaqi cited the following Hadith on the authority of `Asim ibn `Umar ibn Qatada. A similar citation occurs in Ibn-Ishaq's (2/63) work on the Prophetic Biography.*

The True Lord *Glorified is He* primed His Messenger for the contumacy of the haughty and the arrogance of the prideful. He says, ‘But even if We had sent down unto you [O Prophet] a writing on paper, and they had touched it with their own hands – those who are bent on denying the truth would indeed have said, ‘This is clearly nothing but a deception!’ (*al-An‘am:* 7)

Despite their being able to touch the parchment with their hands, they would still say, ‘…This is clearly nothing but a deception.’ (*al-An‘am:* 7) The like of this speech would never come from a wise, thinking and reflective person.

Indeed, sorcery can only change the way people see reality. So how can they deem this magic when they are able to touch it with their hands and verify that it is truth! Again, the argument stands: if the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* is such a powerful sorcerer, why did he not cast a spell on them? Why have they proven so difficult to bewitch?

In terms of the portion of the verse which reads ‘…But when he [whose coming `Isa (Jesus) had foretold] came unto them with all evidence of the truth, they said: “this [alleged message of his] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence”’ (*as-Saff:* 6), it could possibly refer to `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him*; he came to them with ‘evidence of the truth’ in the form of the various miracles he performed. ‘Lo! Allah will say, “O `Isa (Jesus), Son of Maryam (Mary)! Remember the blessings which I bestowed upon you and your mother—how I strengthened you with holy inspiration so that you could speak unto men in your cradle, and as a grown man; and how I imparted unto you revelation and wisdom, including the Torah and the Gospel; and how by My leave you did create out of clay, as it were, the likeness of a bird, and then did breathe into it so that it might become, by My leave, a bird and how you did heal the blind and the leper by My leave, and how you did raise the dead by My leave; and how I prevented the children of Israel from harming you when you came unto them with all evidence of truth, and [when] those of them who were bent on denying the truth were saying, ‘This is clearly nothing but deception.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 110)

Allah enabled `Isa (Jesus) to make, out of clay, the shape of a bird, and by the permission of Allah, he was able to bring it to life by breathing into it. Likewise, the True Lord *Glorified is He* gave him the ability to give sight to the blind and cure the leper by renewing his skin. In fact, Allah even completed the process of giving life to the dead at the hands of `Isa (Jesus).

Nonetheless, they disbelieved in that which was brought by `Isa (Jesus) and considered it no more than sorcery. They were singularly focused on the natural world, and the miracles of `Isa (Jesus) involved defying the laws of nature.

Perhaps this is the reason they found it difficult to grasp the idea that Allah had allowed some members of creation to perform actions which theretofore had only been performed by Allah, Himself. Actions such as reviving the dead, breathing life into the clay figure of a bird, curing the blind, lepers, and others are not natural occurrences. Theses miracles were so impressive that some who were with `Isa (Jesus) erroneously believed he was Allah! Indeed, conjecture never avails the truth of anything!

Afterward, The True Lord says:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ وَهُوَ يُدْعَىٰٓ
إِلَى ٱلْإِسْلَـٰمِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ٧

Who could be more wrong than someone who
invents lies against God when called to submit to
Him? God does not guide the wrong-doers [7]
(The Quran, *as-Saff:* 7)

To answer this rhetorical question, no one is more wicked than someone who invents a lie about Allah. First, such an individual is wronging himself by limiting his concern to the fleeting life of this world and neglecting the Hereafter. Next, he is wronging his community. In fact, he will share in the consequences of the disobedient actions that were committed as a result of the lie he told concerning Allah.

As for the portion of the verse which reads, '…and who could be more wicked…' (*as-Saff:* 7), it is actually a positive assertion that there is no one more wicked than the one who invents a lie about a message from Allah. In the context of the verse, wickedness consists of misplacing legitimate rights. In scale, wickedness can be grave and egregious; like wickedness in belief, concerning which Allah *Glorified is He* said, '…for, behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed an awesome wrong!' (*Luqman:* 13) On the other hand, wickedness can be slight and negligible.

The individual who invents a lie about Allah is the most wicked of people. If truth be told, inventing a lie about one of his peers might be regarded as inconsequential; but in this case, who has he invented a lie against? Without doubt, the thing which makes his lie so egregious is that it is about Allah. Put succinctly, it is utter foolishness to invent a lie against Allah. Allah is Omnipotent. He is capable of furnishing proof to combat your lies and refuting you. Furthermore, Allah can completely disable your attempt to concoct this lie! As such, anyone foolhardy enough to even approach this act of wrongdoing is really, only wronging himself.

The word *iftira`* (inventing a lie) is used to indicate purposefulness. It is quite possible for someone to speak on the basis of what he deems true, while reality happens to be unaligned with his statement.

That is why scholars made a point of developing precise definitions for truth and falsity. They have mentioned: When something that is said is in accordance with reality it is the truth. Conversely, if what is being said is not in accordance with reality it is considered false. Thus, if someone makes a comment—on the basis of their knowledge—which is not supported by reality the statement becomes false. However, it does not necessarily mean the one who issued the statement is a liar.

The statement of Allah, 'and who could be more wicked than one who invents [such] a lie about [a message from] Allah…' (*as-Saff:* 7) is a clear warning against asserting anything about Allah that has not been revealed to a messenger or within scripture. Inventing a lie about Allah is only a means to harming oneself.

In the final analysis, we have explained that you will not find anyone more wicked than one who conjures up a lie about Allah. However, we have yet to examine how someone invents a lie about Allah. One way a person conjures up a lie about Allah is to falsely claim prophethood. This is a grave lie about Allah; it is not simply an act of deceiving the people as some wrongly believe. A person who falsely claims to have been sent by Allah is engaged in a heinous crime against Him.

This would definitely apply to the false claims to prophethood we have observed throughout history, such as that of Musaylamah Al-Kaddhab, Sajah, Tulayha Al-Asadi, Al-Aswad Al-`Ansi etc.(1) all of these people claimed to be prophets.

One of them even claimed that he was capable of producing something like the Quran, he offered: ‘The grinders and the intensity of their grinding; the kneaders and their kneading; the bakers and the passion of their baking!’ At that rate, it would have been better to start from the beginning of the process! He should have also included: The planters and the intensity of their planting; the harvesters and their harvesting!’ In conclusion, I suppose he could have just said, ‘the food and its being food; the antacids and their not being acidic!

I think it goes without saying that this is just a bunch of poppycock. To be sure, The True Lord revealed His revelatory speech not only in measured, metered tones but also with meanings that contain value as information.

The only purpose their lies serve is misguiding people and barring them from the path of Allah, as is confirmed by the following verse: ‘…and who could be more wicked than he who, without any [real] knowledge, attributes his own lying inventions to Allah, and thus leads people astray? Behold, Allah does not grace [such] evildoing folk with His guidance.' (*al-An'am:* 144) This means that their expressed reason for conjuring up lies about Allah is to mislead people.

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(1) *Musaylamah ibn-Habib Al-Hanafi of the tribe of Banu Al-Hanafiya from the region of Al-Yamama... He embraced Islam in the year 9 A.H. Afterward, he returned to Al-Yamama and made his false claim to prophet hood. He claimed that prophet hood was divided among him and Prophet Muhammad* peace and blessings be upon him. *At the Battle of Al-Yamama, he finally met his demise at the hands of Wahshi ibn-Harb during the reign of Abu-Bakr. As for Sajah bint Al-Harith ibn-Suwayd, she claimed prophet hood after the death of the Prophet* peace and blessings be upon him. *She was a woman of Christian faith. There were actually a few people who responded to her claim to prophethood like Malik ibn Nuwayra. Musaylama married her and after the marriage was consummated she received half the produce of his land as a dowry. Tulayha Al-Asadi ibn-Khuwaylid was a commander during the apostasy wars; however, his false claim to prophethood occurred after the death of the Prophet* peace and blessings be upon him *in the year 11 A.H. He met defeat at the hands of Khalid ibn Al-Walid and subsequently repented and returned to Islam. In the end, he was martyred at the Battle of Nahawand in the year 21 A.H. `Abhala ibn-Ka`b Al-`Ansi from Madhjah. He was given the sobriquet Dhu Al-Khimar. He was a magician and used to show the people many wondrous tricks. When the Prophet* peace and blessings be upon him *returned from the Farewell Pilgrimage infirm, he began to announce his false claim to prophethood.*

If one thinks about it, a liar is only capable of lying to an individual who is 'green'. Does anyone waste their time lying to someone who is aware that they are lying? No one is capable of making someone who knows the truth believe his lie. Indeed, the individual who lies about his peers among women and men is wronging them. However, it is infinitely more wrong to lie about Allah *Glorified is He*.

There is no action more shameful or despicable than lying about Allah. Indeed, as long as they are concocting lies about their Lord, they are removed from His Mercy.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Musa (Moses) told them: "Woe unto you! Do not invent lies against Allah, lest He afflict you with most grievous suffering: for He who contrives [such] a lie is already undone!"' (*Ta Ha:* 61) Whoever invents a lie against Allah is defeated from the beginning; his punishment will be immediate. In other words, Allah will issue them a brutal punishment in the life of this world before they are punished in the Hereafter.

For this reason, the True Lord *Glorified is He*—in His Omniscience—poses the following question, 'But what do they think—they who attribute their own lying inventions to Allah—[what do they think will happen to them] on the Day of Resurrection…' (*Yunus:* 60). What do they think will become of them on the Day of Reckoning? Do they not know that Allah is far above ever being heedless? On the other hand, if they think the Hereafter does not exist, and that there is not any reckoning, they have indeed erred in their judgment.

If they actually took a moment to reflect upon the exemplary punishment Allah has prepared for them on the Day of Judgment they would restrain from their foolish behaviour. The only plausible explanation for their actions is that they do not really believe in Allah that will take them to account for inventing lies about Him. Allah says, 'it is but they who will not believe in Allah's messages that invent this falsehood; and it is they, they who are lying!' (*an-Nahl:* 105)

The sincere believer is never described as a liar. Indeed, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was once asked, ‘Does a believer steal?’ He responded, ‘Yes.’ ‘Does a believer engage in illicit intercourse?’ He was questioned. ‘Yes,’ he responded. When he was asked, ‘Can a believer be a coward?’, he responded, ‘Yes.’ ‘Can a believer be a miser?’, the next question followed, and again he responded, ‘Yes.’ However, when he was questioned, ‘Can a believer be a liar?’, he responded, ‘No.’(1)

For a believer, truthfulness is an indispensable quality. To be sure, setting aside truthfulness would entail setting aside his faith. In one way or another, all good can be subsumed under the category of truthfulness. Furthermore, a commitment to truthfulness benefits all of creation. Conversely, dishonesty is the source of the world’s corruption. Dishonesty hampers development within many areas within our lives.

Dishonesty is the last characteristic you would expect to find in a believer. Why? Indeed, many have mentioned that dishonesty prevents one from knowing reality because it distorts the truth. As such, a believer never fans the fire of dishonesty. Without doubt, this is inconsistent with his being one who proclaims the oneness and transcendence of Allah. If he is dishonest about less significant things, what should convince me that he is sincere in his commitment to Allah? In this light, dishonesty destroys faith from its foundations; its being an element of the believer’s character is inconceivable.

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Beware of dishonesty. Indeed, dishonesty leads to indecency, and indecency leads to hellfire. A man will lie habitually until Allah records him as a liar.’(2)

If the previous Prophetic Hadith was addressed to people who spread lies about other men and women, what do you think is the state of someone who lies about Allah? The next question we could pose is: Who are those inventing lies about Allah? As a matter of fact, those who take on the task of judging things (within the law of Allah) to be lawful or unlawful without proper recourse to Allah, can be said to be involved in inventing lies about Allah.

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(1) *Imam Malik Allah rest his soul narrated this Hadith in his Muwatta` with an interrupted chain (1795) on the authority of Safwan ibn-Salim. This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Shu`ab Al-Iman (4472) by way of Malik.*

(2) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad Allah rest his soul in his Musnad (4108), Abu-Dawud in his Sunnan (4991), and Ibn Abu Shayba in his Musannaf (26112) from a Hadith that was narrated on the authority of `Abdullah ibn-Mas`ud.*

Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘hence, do not utter falsehoods by letting your tongues determine [at your own discretion], “This is lawful and that is forbidden”, thus attributing your own lying inventions to Allah: for, behold, they who attribute their own lying inventions to Allah will never attain to a happy state! A brief enjoyment [may be theirs in this world] – but grievous suffering awaits them [in the life to come]!’ (*an-Nahl:* 116-117)

The right to legislate the lawful and unlawful among His servants is the unique preserve of the True Lord *Glorified is He*. Beware of declaring something lawful or unlawful on the basis of your own caprice and without Allah’s endorsement. Doing this would properly be considered inventing lies against Allah. The right to determine the lawful and unlawful belongs to Allah alone; no creature of His has any share in the matter.

Determining the lawful and unlawful is an expression of Allah’s unique authority. This explains what happened to `Adi ibn Hatim.(1) He entered upon the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* who, upon finding someone wearing a crucifix, said to the man, ‘Rid yourself of this idol!’(2) The fact that the man immediately removed the crucifix is an expression of his manners with the Prophet. Indeed, the Prophet said to him: ‘Indeed, you have taken your rabbis and monks as lords beside Allah.’ The man responded, ‘We do not worship them.’ The Messenger then proceeded to explain, ‘Do you not obey them in their determinations about the lawful and the unlawful?’ When the man responded in the affirmative, the Prophet said: ‘That is precisely the manner in which you worship them.’(3)

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(1) *`Adi ibn Hatim ibn `Abdullah At-Ta`i, Abu Wahb, was a leader among the Companions and his generosity and intelligence were well-known among them. Both during the age of Pre-Islamic ignorance and after the dawn of Islam he was leader of the region of Tayy. He converted to Islam in the year 9 A.H. And he witnessed the conquest of Iraq. He was also present at the Battles of the Camel, Siffin and Nahrwan with `Ali Allah be pleased with him. He lived to be more than one hundred years and died in the year 68 A.H. Al-A`lam (4/220), Az-Zirikli*

(2) *Narrated by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (3095), At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`ajam Al-Kabir (13673) from the Hadith of `Adi ibn Hatim Allah be pleased with him.*

(3) *Narrated by At-Tabari in his Tafsir (16632)… The Hadith was also cited by Al-Qurtubi in his Tafsir (in which he attributed it to At-Tirmidhi).*

Allah *the Exalted* states: ‘Say, “Have you ever considered all the means of sustenance which Allah has bestowed upon you from on high – and which you thereupon divide into ‘things forbidden’ and ‘things lawful?” Say, “Has Allah given you leave [to do this] – or do you, perchance, attribute your own guesswork to Allah?”’ (*Yunus:* 59)

In as much as the True Lord *Glorified is He* causes sustenance to descend from the skies, and clarifies what of it is lawful for consumption and what of it is unlawful, why have you taken it upon yourselves to declare the lawfulness and unlawfulness of different things? In the process, you have made some unlawful things permissible and some lawful things impermissible. Why could you not allow this function to remain the distinct preserve of Allah, The One Who created all things and provides you with sustenance? Does it not stand to reason that He is more knowledgeable than you about where benefit lies?

‘Say, “Has Allah given you leave [to do this]…”’? (*Yunus:* 59) In other words, has Allah *the Exalted* consigned to you the matter of clarifying the lawful and the unlawful? ‘…or do you, perchance, attribute your own guesswork to Allah?’ (*Yunus:* 59) Stated differently, the last portion of the verse reads ‘Or do you intentionally lie about Allah’?

From among those who invent lies about Allah are those concerning whom He has mentioned, ‘Are you not aware of those who consider themselves pure? Nay, but it is Allah who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity; and none shall be wronged by as much as a hair’s breadth. Behold how they attribute their own lying inventions to Allah—than which there is no sin more obvious.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 49-50)

So, they vainly praise themselves and declare themselves free of faults. Some of them claim that they are the children of Allah and His beloved; however, in reality they are nothing of the sort. Allah *the Almighty* states their saying: ‘The Jews and the Christians say, “We are the children of Allah and His beloved ones.” Say, “Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation”…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 18). Yet, if they, presumably, are His children and beloved ones, so why does He let them suffer for the sins they have committed? In essence, their engaged superciliousness was nothing but vain self-flattery; they gave themselves an undeserved rank. Indeed, it is foolish enough that the man proclaims his own purity in matters that do not require this straightforwardness.

Their absurd lies about Allah are clearly observed in Allah's saying: '…"We are the children of Allah and His beloved ones"…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 18). Allah also mentions their claim: 'they also say, "No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian"…' (*al-Baqara:* 111).

Another clear instance of their falsity is Allah's saying: 'The disbelievers say, "The Lord of Mercy has offspring"' (*Maryam:* 88). Concerning this, Allah says, 'How terrible is this thing you assert: it almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, the mountains to crumble to pieces, that they attribute offspring to the Lord of Mercy. It does not befit the Lord of Mercy [to have offspring]' (*Maryam:* 89-92). Their saying was utterly a pure lie about divinity, in addition to being despicable, disgusting, and abominable. Conceivably, Allah is exalted above having a son. Only the one who needs others, desires to have progeny to be remembered and to derive physical strength from them to be supported in his work or profession, whereas, Allah *the Exalted* possesses incomparable Limitless Power; He is far removed from such considerations.

Another example of inventing lies against Allah is apostasy and returning to disbelief. There can be no doubt that apostasy is tantamount to claiming that Islam (as a belief) and that the Quran (as a scripture revealed from Allah to the Messenger) are false. Apostasy is a clear challenge and grave lie against the truth revealed by Allah *the Almighty*.

In the story of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* Allah says, 'His people's arrogant leaders said, "Shu`aib (Jethro), we will expel you and your fellow believers from our town unless you return to our religion"…' (*al-A'raf:* 88). Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* thus, responded to them: '…He said, "What! Even if we detest it? If we were to return to your religion after Allah has saved us from it, we would be inventing lies about Him"...' (*al-A'raf:* 88-89).

The disbelievers know that returning to their disbelief would be a clear instance of lying against Allah. Anybody knows the truth but speaks otherwise, thus, his action is definitely considered lying, dishonesty and mendacity.

Furthermore, the believers of Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him* acknowledged that their previous creed was malicious; especially after having experienced the sweetness of faith with Shu`aib (Jethro) *peace be upon him*. Consistent with the stance they had adopted, they rejected the enticements of the disbelievers to persistently lie against Allah.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned this blatant lying against Him in many instances throughout the Quran. However, in this verse, Allah appends this with an additional comment about their actions: 'Who could be more wrong than someone who invents lies against Allah when called to submit to Him?...' (*as-Saff:* 7) This verse should be examined within the context; it occurs in the chapter of *as-Saf,* where the most notable prophets (Musa (Moses), `Isa (Jesus) and then Muhammad *peace be upon them*) are being mentioned. Thus, this verse draws the attention to the people inventing lies against Allah that they are either among the Jewish followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or among the followers of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* who were being requested to have faith in Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to validate their belief in Allah. Hence, Allah says, '…When called to submit to Him…' (*as-Saff:* 7). But rather, they responded to the call to Islam and invented lies about Allah, claiming that the Quran is not revealed from Allah, but that it was produced by Muhammad. Such lie was mentioned and refuted in the Quran, as Allah says, 'The disbelievers say, "This can only be a lie he has forged with the help of others"—they themselves have done great wrong and told lies.' (*al-Furqan:* 4)

If Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*—who is a human being like others—was capable of fabricating this Quran himself, why did they not produce a similar creation? What prevented them from coming with a 'Quran' of their own? Allah says, 'Or do they say, "He has devised it?" Say, "Then produce a chapter like it, and call on anyone you can beside Allah if you are telling the truth."' (*Yunus:* 38) Additionally, He *the Exalted* says, 'If they say, "He has invented it himself" say, "Then produce ten invented chapters like it, and call in whoever you can beside Allah, if you are truthful."' (*Hud:* 13)

Since inventing similar product of the Quran is easy, what prevents them from producing the like; even if it is only a ten-chapter piece of art? As they have lived with Muhammad since his childhood, he has neither composed poetry nor prose, he has not functioned as a public speaker nor does he have a history of embellishing his speech with language arts; as well he has never participated in the annual poetry recitals which were held at the famous marketplace of `Ukaz. Therefore, it should be easier for them, given their background and inherent gifts in these fields, to produce at least a similar piece of art, as they are the people of oratorical brilliance and language arts. Yet, they were not able to fabricate a similar piece of work. Once their lie, that Allah had neither revealed the Quran nor sent Muhammad as a Messenger, had failed, they began to take aim at certain verses of the Quran; they falsely claim that some verses were self-contradictory. Allah says, ‘Will they not think about this Quran? If it had been from anyone other than Allah, they would have found much inconsistency in it’ (*an-Nisa’:* 82).

Afterwards, Allah says, ‘…Allah does not guide the wrongdoers’ (*as-Saff:* 7). Indeed, they wronged themselves as they wronged Allah by inventing lies against Him, in addition to misguiding people to be wrongdoers as a result of their lies and attempts to block the path of Allah. Not only did they reject Allah’s Call to faith, but they also lied against Him. Hence, they do not deserve Allah’s guidance which does not refer here to clarify and distinguish between right and wrong. Certainly, Allah has taken it upon Himself to definitely make them clear for everyone. Allah says, ‘We guided him to the right path, whether he was grateful or not’ (*al-Insan:* 3). He also says, ‘And point out to him the two clear ways [of good and evil]’ (*al-Balad:* 10). Allah has shown His servants the path of goodness, and also that of evil.

However, Allah *Glorified is He* has also guided the believers to the path of goodness by facilitating their adherence to it. To put it more succinctly, Allah not only shows them the path of goodness, but He also helps them to meet the criteria of the path. In this regard, Allah says, ‘Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path, and given them their awareness [of Him]’ (*Muhammad:* 17). Thus, Allah does not guide the dissolute people tending to evil but the obedient committed to justice.

Afterwards, Allah says:

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِـُٔوا۟ نُورَ ٱللَّهِ بِأَفْوَٰهِهِمْ وَٱللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِۦ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْكَـٰفِرُونَ ﴿٨﴾

They wish to put His light out with their mouths.
But He will perfect His light, even though the
disbelievers hate it [8] (The Quran, *as-Saff:* 8)

Allah refers to His light and to the disbelievers who thought that they had the power to extinguish it. They either had allowed themselves to forget or were feigning ignorance of the fact that the light of Allah is All Encompassing and Omnipresent.

In the physical realm, it has long been established that the sun is the primary source of natural light. When the daylight breaks and the sunrays penetrate the darkness, people put out their lamps. The same scenario is applied to the light of guidance; when Allah issues the light of guidance, all other lights should be extinguished.

Indeed, Allah's Path is incandescent; it illuminates the way to morals and values. In the presence of Allah's light of guidance, there is no need for other lights of ideas based on whims. However, all the earthly light is derived from Allah's Straight Path, which is perfect for all times and places.

As there is no one capable of extinguishing the shining sunlight, the light of Allah is impervious in the same manner; no one is capable of putting it out!

Nevertheless, extinguishing the light of Allah was nothing short of their ardent desire. The desire is said to be ardent when it blindly fills the heart only to satisfy the whims. The disbelievers were desirous of suppressing the promotion of truth; however, Allah decrees that their twisted ambitions would ultimately be frustrated. The reason was their hope of retaining their shot-caller status as leaders through disempowering the weak. Furthermore, they wanted to suppress the promotion of truth so that their whims are not challenged by Allah's light. Allah says, 'They use their wealth to bar people from the path of Allah, and they will go on doing so. In the end this will be a source of intense regret for them: they will be overcome and herded towards Hell' (*al-Anfal:* 36).

Not only were these disbelievers guilty of rejecting faith in Allah, but they also spent their money with the intention of impeding Allah's Path. Yet, their desire would remain unfulfilled; they were not allowed to even come close to their goals. Thus, Allah *the Exalted* entices the disbelievers to expend their resources in suppressing the truth to waste their wealth and to bear the brunt of their woes. In the end, Allah sets His decree over them, no matter how much they spend, or how strenuous efforts they put forth, but they will ultimately be seized and routed. In this concern, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '[Prophet], say to the disbelievers, "You will be defeated and driven together into Hell, a foul resting place"' (*Al-'Imran:* 12). Not only will they foolishly waste their resources in a futile attempt to extinguish the light of Allah, but they will also be utterly disappointed, defeated and eye-witnessed Allah's light spreading to achieve perfection. Undoubtedly, this will cause them a great deal of pain and sorrow. Afterwards, in the Hereafter, they will be punished; resurrected, gathered, driven to the place of reckoning and ultimately cast into the hellfire.

As a matter of fact, this is the second instance where Allah mentions those disbelievers seeking to extinguish His Light. He mentions them also in the chapter of *at-Tawba*: 'They try to extinguish Allah's Light with their mouths, but Allah insists on bringing His Light to its fullness, even if the disbelievers hate it' (*at-Tawba:* 32). In this verse, Allah mentions another means by which they desire to suppress the propagation of truth with their mouths. Thereby, He means that their attempts, by sending forth their own callers to falsehood, are directed to counter the call of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The disbelievers of Quraysh expended tremendous efforts to counteract the invitation to Islam by spreading falsehood. They accused the Messenger with many false charges. On one occasion, he was called a magician: '…They say, "He is just a lying sorcerer"' (*Sad:* 4). On another occasion, he was called an insane: 'They say, "O Receiver of this Quran! You are definitely mad"' (*al-Hijr:* 6). On a third occasion, he was said to be a poet: 'And said, "Are we to forsake our gods for a mad poet?"' (*as-Saffat:* 36) They made several unwarranted attempts to assassinate him and tried to distract people from listening to his Message. As a result, Allah responded (within the Quran) and chided them so vigorously, for the lies they had invented. In the end, they could not come up with anything other than alleging that Muhammad is a magician whose Message is to break up families. (1)

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(1) *It has been narrated by Abu Na`im in Dala`il An-Nubuwwa (178) on the authority of Sa`id ibn Jubair.*

Moreover, they said: '…Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) In this verse, they were attempting to belittle Prophet Muhammad. They alleged that any person from either the people in Mecca or in Ta`if, was of greater stature and was worthier of having the Quran revealed to him than Muhammad. (1)

Additionally, the Quran itself was also attacked spared, in their vain attempts to extinguish the light of Allah. They tried to impugn the revelation despite their readiness to accept its divine origins, in case that it had been revealed to an elevated person among them. Allah quotes their saying: '…It is just ancient fables, which he has had written down: They are dictated to him morning and evening' (*al-Furqan:* 5). Allah also says concerning them: 'Whenever Our Revelation is recited to them they say, "We have heard all this before— we could say something like this if we wanted— this is nothing but ancient fables"' (*al-Anfal:* 31).

An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, who had gone to Persia and observed fancy books of fables and myths, was among the sceptics of the prophecy of Muhammad at that time. Standing before Quraysh, he proclaimed, 'Here it is! Now, I can tell the same as Muhammad's recital!' However, his work was devoid of guidance and without a clearly defined objective. The fables told by An-Nadr refer to fanciful tales; most important of them are; Arabian Nights, Kalila and Dimna (the Panchatantra) and The Iliad (an ancient Greek epic poem).

As much as they impugned both Messenger Muhammad and the Quran, as they also ridiculed the believers following the guidance. Their attitude was similar to that of the people of Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* as Allah says, 'But the prominent disbelievers among his people said, "We can see that you are nothing but a mortal like ourselves, and it is clear to see that only the vilest among us follow you…"' (*Hud:* 27).

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(1) *On the authority of ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him, who was asked the following about the verse, '…Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man from either of the two cities?' (az-Zukhruf: 31) What are the two cities? He responded, 'Ta`if and Mecca.' He was also asked, 'Who are the two men?' He responded, `Urwa ibn Mas`ud and another person from among the elite of Quraysh.' This was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (12/200), in which he attributed it to `Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Al-Mundhir` and Ibn Mardaway*

This explains the stance of some of the disbelievers who set a condition to believe, thus attempting to take a moderate stance in relation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They said to him, ‘We will come and sit with you (to listen to the Message) on condition that you drive those who are currently sitting with you away. Only when our meeting is adjourned, should they return to their places.’(1)

Indeed, when the adversaries of Islam witnessed the incremental spread of the Message, they redoubled their exerted strenuous efforts to halt its growth. Not only did they abuse the newly converted Muslims, but they also aimed their ploy at Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself. They sent a delegation to him, proclaiming, ‘We have come to a compromise; drive away those riff-raff people and do not keep them in your company; but rather make us the focal point of your call.’ Thus, Allah says, ‘Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval…’ (*al-Kahf:* 28). When this verse was revealed, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Praise be to Allah Who has put among my people those with whom I have been ordered to stay.’(2)

In fact, the most startling thing said in an attempt to extinguish Allah’s light was their effort to deceive people into believing that they were upon the truth. Allah says: ‘They also said, “Allah, if this really is the truth from You, then rain stones on us from the heavens, or send us some other painful punishment”’ (*al-Anfal:* 32).

The disbelievers deemed the moral teachings and warnings spread by Messenger Muhammad ridiculous. As such, they brazenly and foolishly requested for Allah’s punishment to rain down stones upon them or otherwise requite them for their actions. They were attempting to challenge the truth and turn people away from it. This proves their utmost level of compounded heedlessness of Allah and their tribal zeal which affected their ability to think clearly. They wished they would have rather died, or been killed by stones raining from the skies than to follow the path of guidance!

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(1) *This was narrated by At-Tabari in his Tafsir (13255) on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud.*

(2) *This was cited by As-Suyuti in Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (9/522) in which he attributed it to Abu Ash-Sheikh who narrated it on the authority of Salman Al-Farisi.*

Had they use their minds, they would have carefully considered the matter and then concluded, 'if indeed this is the truth, O Lord! Guide us unto it.' Yet, they allowed disbelief, envy and rancour to blind them from the truth with which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent. This demonstrates the extent to which their misguidance had grown. Furthermore, this shows the absurdity and the incoherence of the thoughts of the disbelievers. Had Allah answered their request of His wrath, they would have met their decisive end just as they have requested and then they would have entered the blazing inferno. However, Allah sets His Decree to give them a chance so that those who choose belief will be allowed to believe. Whereas, those who choose disbelief, will bear the burden of the deviance they caused by urging the people to apostate.

Allah says, 'They wish to put His Light out with their mouths. But He will perfect His Light, even though the disbelievers hate it' (*as-Saff:* 8). It has been asked how the Quran says that Allah will perfect His light, while there are other religions than Islam. In fact, some of these religions have more influence and adherents. It is apparent that those who pose this question have misunderstood Allah's saying: '…He will perfect His Light…' that all people would convert to Islam. However, if this were the case, Allah would not have concluded the verse by saying: '…Even though the disbelievers hate it' (*as-Saff:* 8), and nor would He have also said: '…Even though the idolaters hate it' (*as-Saff:* 9).

Therefore, Allah affirms the continued existence of disbelief and polytheism along with Islam. The meaning of Allah spreading His Light in all its fullness is that His Light will spread despite the presence of disbelief and polytheism. Indeed, those who oppose faith will never be able to extinguish the light of Allah, which will continue to glow until it overcomes them by the sheer practice of teachings. Indeed, viable solutions will only come from Islam to certain issues. Allah's Light is a conclusive matter, as explained by the following verse in *at-Tawba:* '…But Allah insists on bringing His Light to its fullness, even if the disbelievers hate it' (*at-Tawba:* 32). In another verse, Allah says, '…Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them: fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion Islam:

[total devotion to Allah]…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 3). Definitely, Islam has been completed and people have entered it in crowds. It is by Allah's Light that the Quran has been preserved. No one has attempted to conceal the contents of the Quran, nor has anyone been able to distort the meanings of the Quran. In fact, the Quran has been saved from the distortion that happened to previous scriptures.

The disbelievers had given up any hope of overpowering Islam; contrariwise, its rise to pre-eminence. It can be incontrovertibly asserted that Allah has perfected this religion. Allah says, 'The word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice. No one can change His words: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing' (*al-An'am:* 115) The word 'complete' indicates that Allah's Word has a beginning and an end. However, what is meant by the completion of Allah's word? Does it mean the ultimate promise of Allah that Islam will be victorious because He, Himself, will grant it success? Or is it the promise that Allah made before His message to humanity is completed? Or does it refer to the Quran itself?

It is thought that the word 'complete' refers collectively to all different affairs which have been taking place until the coming of the Final Hour. This means that no one is permitted to 'correct' any of the rulings mentioned in the Quran, for they cover all aspects of life. The rulings needed to ensure upright and dignified lives have been explicated in the Quran.

Allah says, '…Even though the disbelievers hate it' (*as-Saff:* 8). This refers to those who despise the Path of Allah. Allah stresses this fact in another verse: 'It is because they hate what Allah has sent down that He has caused their deeds to go to waste' (*Muhammad:* 9). They harboured intense disdain for the Path of Allah because it would pull the 'rug' of unchallenged dominance from beneath them. They knew that it would establish for equality between them and their servants. This is very difficult for them as they were accustomed to prominence, status, and power. Actually, this is the real reason for their intense hatred for the light with which Messenger Muhammad had been sent.

Subsequently, Allah says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُۥ بِٱلْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ ٱلْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْمُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٩﴾

It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to show that it is above all [other] religions, even though the idolaters hate it [9] (The Quran, *as-Saff:* 9)

Allah proves that He will spread His Light in all its fullness, in spite of being hateful to those who deny the truth, and in spite of sparing no mental or material efforts to prevent its propagation. The Light of Allah has three aspects; it refers to guidance in the first place. Secondly, it refers to the religion of truth and thirdly, that it is sent upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, how can a sacred light comprising of these three aspects be extinguished?

As for the aspect of guidance, they are signs granted by Allah, the Creator, to human beings to find their Right Path. Certainly, if Allah leaves His servants to their own devices in this regard, they would be lost on account of their undisciplined passions. Moreover, it is undoubtedly known that Allah is absolutely free of any need of His creatures; however, human beings, on the other hand, are in need of the guidance, thus they could not control it or rather, they would use it for their benefit.

This is broadly applicable to the world's economic and social systems such as communism and capitalism. As for the individuals who desire to forcibly seize the assets of the wealthy people, they, thereby, fly the flag of Communism, whereas, the individuals who suck the blood of the working class, wave the banner of Capitalism!

On the other hand, guidance is a right ensured to everyone, so it must be devoid of any desires. Furthermore, the individual granting guidance should intimately be acquainted with all future details that may happen. Thus, there is no one but Allah, the Ever-Wise and the Omniscient, Who offers guidance. Therefore, Allah says: '…Say, "Allah's guidance is the only true guidance"…' (*al-Baqara:* 120). The guidance of Allah leads to a single straight path of Truth; however, the presumably guidance proffered by human beings would emanate from caprice. As such, they offer myriad paths, which, for all their diversity, still lead to a single destination; i.e. misguidance! Allah draws the attention of His creatures to an indubitable fact that if they desire guidance or the Path free from pitfalls leading to the firm goal, they should adhere to Allah’s Path of guidance.

Allah’s Light is the religion of truth, which offers practical guidance for human beings indistinctively. In as much as Islam is the religion of truth, it does not seek to mislead or deceive anyone; but rather, it convinces people with strong mental evidences which will be victorious whether people believe in it or not. However, Allah shows His servants the Path so that they could secure happiness and goodness. The religion of truth comes in accordance with Allah’s drawn Path. The truth, by its very nature, should be firm, unchanging, and eternal.

The Message has been revealed by Allah unto His messengers in truth, Allah is the Truth, and He created the heavens, earth and everything else with truth. He revealed His Book, in its entirety, in truth and has kept His established patterns within creation uninterruptedly in truth. Thus, Allah always supports the truth.

As such, Allah revealed the Quran in truth; it is an expounder of truth and impervious to falsehood. However, there are times when it seems that truth is being obscured and falsehood is gaining the upper hand. Yet, the appearance of corruption only forces people to be more resolute in pursuit of the truth. The spread of corruption and moral dissolution is directly related to the eagerness of human beings to demand the truth. Indeed, falsehood, by its very nature, wears on people until they request its removal and replacement with the truth; to which they subsequently adhere with renewed zeal.

The Quran was revealed with the true knowledge of Allah. Additionally, it explicates matters with indubitable truth related to the angels, the Prophets and their miracles and the ordinances and commands of Allah. The Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* was Allah’s chosen carrier to reveal the Quran, the unchanging truth, upon the heart of the chosen Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

As for the third aspect of Allah’s Light, He sent Muhammad to demonstrate His Path. In fact, the Messenger, himself, is also a light for mankind. Allah says, ‘He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with [the task of] spreading guidance and the religion of truth…’ (*as-Saff:* 9). Allah sent His Messenger with the task of refining the human instinct. As Allah has sent His Messenger with faith and moral methodologies, as He has certainly chosen the most faithful person for conveying the Message for humanity.

This makes Islam prevail over all other religions; this does not mean to eradicate Jews, Christians, disbelievers or polytheists. On the contrary, as previously mentioned, the pre-eminence of Islam would prevail through its distinct commandments, the erectness of Allah's Path and the adherence to faith through logical methodology rather than through oppression or obligation. Undoubtedly, Islam will prevail; they will be overtaken by its practical usefulness. They will tend to rely on Islam and Islamic law to solve the problems facing their communities. Indeed, they adopt many laws borrowed from the Islamic teachings. Definitely, all Muslims should overwhelmingly be confident that those disbelievers would discover the truthfulness of Islam its law on one day.

The sheer impracticality of their man-made laws forced the Vatican (1) to authorise Islam-permitted divorce. In their view, this gives preference to man-made laws over their distorted sacred law. However, practical life had only forced them to unintentionally implement the teachings of Islam. Such examples provide an increased appreciation and confidence in practical application of Islamic teachings, which are the only resort to solve the problems facing the disbelievers. Even if they refused to convert to Islam as a religion, but they are forced to adopt it as a life-arranging principle to foster peace and stability in their communities

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) The Protestant denominations also permitted divorce, but only for reasons they deemed legitimate, such as: Insanity, terminal illness or any other condition which frustrates conjugal relations. Indeed, the cold realities of life forced them to make this transition. They were forced to implement Islamic law. As a matter of fact, even the Orthodox Church, after taking a long time to come to terms with reality, was forced to enact the statute of 1938 which gave Copts the right to seek legal divorces for nine stated reasons. This position differs with the stance taken by the hardliners among them who forbid people from enjoying Allah's Grace and, in a certain sense, compel them to commit adultery.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ هَلۡ أَدُلُّكُمۡ عَلَىٰ تِجَٰرَةٖ تُنجِيكُم مِّنۡ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٖ ﴿١٠﴾ تُؤۡمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ
وَتُجَٰهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ بِأَمۡوَٰلِكُمۡ وَأَنفُسِكُمۡۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡ إِن كُنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿١١﴾

You who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from painful torment? [10] Have faith in God and His Messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your persons — that is better for you, if only you knew [11]
(The Quran, *as-Saff:* 10-11)

Allah's saying: 'You who believe…' (*as-Saff:* 10) refers to the believers who entered the covenant of faith with Allah. The verse calls upon the believers to follow, by their own free will, the Commands of Allah, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Wise, the Self-Sufficient and the Creator. Therefore, the commands are only directed to those believers who have chosen to accept faith willingly by consulting their own consciences. Considering this, there is no way the believer should ever ask about the underlying purpose behind a certain ruling. As long as he has already submitted to Allah, he should accept His commandments and prohibitions without argument as an extension of that belief. For example, Satan firstly, believed in Allah; however, his downfall referred to his insane refusal to Allah's ruling. He insolently asked Allah to explain the reason behind His command, with which he, ultimately, declined to comply.

As for Allah's words, '…Shall I show you…' (*as-Saff:* 10), after His saying: 'You who believe…' (*as-Saff:* 10), convey a profound meaning that Allah calls upon the believers to draw their full attention to clarify something for them. Inconceivably, the believers could not refuse Allah's offer to guide them. Allah guides people to the Straight Path leading to the right destination such as the pathfinder who guides people for their way across the desert; surely, to Allah belongs the utmost example of perfection. Of course, when people guide others, they will misdirect and lead them away from the right destination. Yet, Allah only guides people towards their benefits and directs them away from any harm.

When Allah tackles the matter of faith, He uses the analogy of business transactions; i.e. the language of commerce (buying and selling), As Allah says, 'Allah has purchased the persons and possessions of the believers in return for the Garden…' (*at-Tawba:* 111). In the verse under examination, Allah says, 'You who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from painful torment? Have faith in Allah and His Messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your persons…' (*as-Saff:* 10-11). It is known that business is the medium of exchange between producers and consumers. The producer target to sell his product and the consumer is in need to buy the product. Profit margins within business vary a lot, depending on how the product is received within the market and whether sales are brisk or stagnate

Allah uses analogies related to business to demonstrate the most expedient path to achieve benefit. Business is the process of buying and selling products among people. Similarly, the believer, who is involved in the transaction with Allah, needs to voluntarily relinquish (sell) some of his personal freedom in exchange for (to buy) Allah's everlasting bliss. Thus, the pious men who are intimately familiar with the favour of Allah say, 'When giving, choose someone who values your generosity'. Certainly, when someone is given a gift, his appreciation will be shown in accordance with his ability to express gratitude. Perhaps he expresses this gratitude with a kind word or some other means. However, how does Allah evaluate things in return? It goes without saying that He will assign tremendous value for the product.

Therefore, the intelligent person looks at the giver of the blessing; such as `Uthman ibn `Affan *Allah be pleased with him*. When the merchants knew that he had some products that came to him with the intention of purchasing some inventory; they offered him to pay for them. He said, 'Indeed, I have been presented with better offers than what you intend to pay. I gave the items in the cause of Allah.' `Uthman *Allah be pleased with him* decided to trade with Allah to receive the greatest value for his products. Certainly, as long as Allah is the Purchaser, the product will always be appreciated in value! Hence, the person who ostentatiously performs acts of worship is really the major loser. If he does not perceive the concept of trading with Allah; thus, he does not know anything about business!

Everyone wishes to be engaged in profitable transactions; i.e. to receive more than he pays on making the deal. As Allah says, '…(It is they who) may hope for a trade that will never decline' (*Fatir:* 29). Before being engaged in the transaction, the person should compare what he gives to what he gains and observe whether the difference is worth the sacrifice. Allah deals with people on the basis of the theory of personal benefits; intelligent trader should seek out the most beneficial transactions that will ultimately prove profitable by giving him more than they take. Sacrificing a small amount of worldly transactions to trade with Allah reaps immeasurable favour and honour from Him. Indeed, it is undeniable that Allah is so generous that the single good deed shall be rewarded up to seven-hundred times! (1)

Going into business with Allah is always profitable, as Allah says, ‘You who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from painful torment?’ (*as-Saff:* 10) He also says, ‘…(It is they who) may hope for a trade that will never decline’ (*Fatir:* 29). Definitely, the trader who is engaged in business with Allah should be sagacious and intelligent; he identifies his goals and objectives before he pursues them. The most pervasive malady among people in this world is that they live without having any idea of their ultimate goals. Actually, most of them have a myopic focus on minor worldly objectives, serving as a distraction from achieving more significant goals. Indeed, the life span of people hugely varies; someone may live for fifty years, his counterpart for sixty and a third for merely a single one!

Therefore, people should direct their focus towards the goal to which they are proceeding. Furthermore, what plagues contemporary societies is that people are totally busy by working to support their worldly status. In fact, their worldly acquisitions represent the lowest level of short-term gratification. Undoubtedly, life, no matter how long it lasts, is fleeting, but the pleasures of the Hereafter are eternal. Additionally, the acquisition of the worldly pleasures is directly related to the means available at everyone’s disposal. Conversely, the pleasures of the Hereafter are abundant because they are at the disposal of Allah; He Who brought them into existence and controls them.

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him: The Messenger peace and blessings be upon him said: ‘Every time the son of Adam performs a good deed, its reward is multiplied by ten to seven hundred times as Allah wills.’ Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘Except for the act of fasting; it is for Me, and I reward it. The servant gives up his carnal desires for My sake. The one who fasts reaps two pleasures: The pleasure he experiences upon breaking his fast and the plea*sure he *experiences upon meeting his Lord.’ It is narrated by Ibn Majah in his Sunnan (1638).*

Considering this, the failure of the disbelievers to 'trade' with Allah can only be considered a humiliating and devastating loss. As Allah says, 'Lost indeed are those who deny the meeting with their Lord until, when the Hour suddenly arrives, they say, "Alas for us that we disregarded this' (*al-An'am:* 31). Therefore, 'doing business' with Allah is a means of securing everlasting benefits for the people; the greatest of which has been expressed in Allah's saying: '…That will save you from painful torment' (*as-Saff:* 10). Allah also says, 'But Allah will deliver those who took heed of Him to their place of safety: no harm will touch them, nor will they grieve' (*az-Zumar:* 61). Indeed, Allah will save the believers from the despicable torment which awaits the disbelievers. The biggest victory for people is that being saved from the punishment of the blazing inferno. As Allah says, '…Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed…' (*Al-'Imran:* 185). It is noticed that Allah does not merely connect the eternal triumph to entering into paradise; but rather to simply being kept away from the hellfire. This is the primary victory to be pulled back from the fire, even if the person is left on the heights with those whom judgment has been suspended. On that Day, simply being able to traverse the Bridge outstretched above the hellfire (1) will represent the major triumph!

As previously mentioned traversing the Bridge safely is a tremendous blessing, whereas, the disbeliever wishes that he could become dust in order to avoid being punished in the hellfire. As the believer traverses the Bridge and views the hellfire beneath, as he feels the blessing because this gives him the chance to witness first-hand what he was saved from: '…Painful torment'

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him: The Messenger peace and blessings be upon him said, 'There will be a bridge outstretched between two plains. I will be the first messenger, along with the members of his ummah, are allowed to cross it. On that Day, the only people allowed to speak will be the messengers, and their speech will be: "Allahumma Sallim, Sallim (Oh Allah! Save us, save us!)" Below, in the hellfire, there will be hooks which resemble the thorns of As-Sa`adan (a thorny tree); have you ever seen the thorns of As-Sa`adan?' After they responded that they had in fact seen them, the Messenger continued, "These tenterhooks are like the thorns of As-Sa`adan except for the fact that their size is so immense that none but Allah could even attempt to grasp them."' It is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Al-Asma` Wa As-Sifat (2/184), Ibn Al-Mundhir in Kitab Al-Iman (2/418) and Ibn Abu `Asim in As-Sunna (387)*

(*as-Saff:* 10), by virtue of his faith and the overflowing Mercy of Allah, the Most Beneficent, The word torment refers to the physical suffering which is experienced by the living being through the sensation of pain, whereas, death takes life and senses away from the living organism. Death and suffering are two distinct states; suffering, as opposed to death, necessitates that the individual remains alive to experience agony. Allah's saying: '…Painful torment' (*as-Saff:* 10), draws the attention to the meaning of the verse: 'We shall send those who reject Our revelations to the Fire. When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain: Allah is Mighty and Wise' (*an-Nisa':* 56).

The torment is painful and unbearable because its intensity is derived from the Power of Allah, Who creates pain itself. The punishment of hellfire incomparably and unrestrictedly expresses His Might and Ability. Sometimes, the torment of Allah is described as being great; another time, it is described as being humiliating; and a third time, it is described as being painful. Interestingly enough, the description used is changed according to those being mentioned in connection with it. Each disobedient, evildoer and disbeliever will be punished with the appropriate penalty. Some people might bear the pain of the punishment rather than humiliation; whereas, others might be vice versa. Each person will face the unbearable kind of punishment that cannot be endured. Accordingly, Allah addresses the believers: 'You who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from painful torment?' (*as-Saff:* 10) Allah desires that the believers be saved from suffering, as He *the Exalted* says: 'Why should Allah make you suffer torment if you are thankful and believe in Him? Allah always rewards gratitude and He knows everything' (*an-Nisa':* 147). Thus, if the believers show gratitude to Allah and believe in Him, He will never cause them to suffer His wrath.

After Allah invites the believers to 'trade' with Him, He *the Almighty* clarifies the elements to be saved from punishment; He says, 'Have faith in Allah and His Messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your persons; that is better for you, if only you knew' (*as-Saff:* 11). Thus, the first element is that they should believe in Allah *Glorified is He* and in His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Indeed, this poses a new question;

how someone being summoned by being a believer is further commanded to have faith? In as much as these verses are addressed to the believers generally, the command to have faith should be understood as a command to increase in faith.

Allah addresses the believers by highlighting their relationship with faith; He desires that they receive His address as people of faith and that they would also fulfil His commands as people of faith. There is no lapse or breakage in the chain of faith; Allah ensures its continuation. Indeed, it is of critical importance that the believer is keen on keeping up with this honour. If someone summons another by a virtuous quality and then request him to apply it; thus, it is really being requested to be consistently kept up.

Allah, within these verses, addresses all believers; including the Jewish and Christian communities, represented in *as-Saf,* by the mention of Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*. If someone simply believes in Allah, this belief will necessitate that he should follow His commands expressed by the Messenger. Thus, having faith in Allah necessitates believing in His Messenger. In as much as the human being has been given an active intellect, the least he can do is to arrive at the conclusion that there is a Lord behind this universe. However, what are the Commands of the Lord? The people can only gain access to this knowledge by way of the Messenger expressing Allah's revelation. In a certain sense, revelation and the dispatch of the Messenger can be considered the reward of the believers for their good faith.

Therefore, as long as the believer has professed his belief in Allah and in His Messenger, as he would naturally believe in the scripture revealed on the Messenger. These scriptures inform him of a set of invisible creatures who inhabit the world, called angels. In fact, angels are the means by which revelation reaches the Messenger. Despite that, they are invisible, yet the believers have faith in their existence. In essence, faith is to mainly believe in Allah, which necessitates believing in the Messenger and the scripture revealed to him. Furthermore, in as much as the people of the Book—who believe in their respective messengers—are also included in this command to have faith, it should be understood as a command for them to similarly believe in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in the Quran revealed to him.

As a general rule, strict compliance to Allah’s Commands simply maintains the strongly entrenched beliefs. In the current verse, the request to have faith is a command to consistently display the defining characteristics of faith day in and day out. In this way, belief becomes deeply rooted in the heart, without being liable to be shaken by the insinuations assailing the mind. These well-established beliefs are referred to as creed, to which the heart is bound.

Allah commands the believers to have firm and unshakable faith that prepares them to be engaged in ‘commerce’ with Allah; namely, striving in the path of Allah with their lives and material resources. As Allah says, ‘Have faith in Allah and His Messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your persons…’ (*as-Saff:* 11). This verse connects having faith in Allah to *jihad* (striving in His cause). By striving in the cause of Allah, the believer ensures that faith, to which he has pledged his life, will remain intact until the coming of the Final Hour. The maintenance of the faith entails its widespread propagation. As the believer has resolved to strive in the cause of Allah, he means that he has given preference, within his soul, to faith (over the life of this world and its pleasures) and found goodness in faith which has made him desirous of conveying it to others. Thus, it is not sufficient for him to simply experience the sweetness of faith without sharing this with his contemporaries outside the lands of Islam, who are deprived from it. However, he ardently desires to give opportunity to the whole world to experience faith.

Upon analysis, this represents a profound insight concerning the idea of communal life. Thus, good and evil are communicable; if people are good, the society, being affected, and benefits from goodness and vice versa. Indeed, life, in its entirety, represents the concept of *jihad* (striving for the sake of Allah). By no means, should the Muslim restrict striving for the cause of Allah to the battlefield. Thus, Allah’s saying: ‘…And struggle for His cause…’ (*as-Saff:* 11) should be understood as striving for propagating the Message of Allah. Muslims should devote themselves to studying and understanding the Message of Islam to strive for it by tooth and nail; through open discussions, books, pamphlets, etc.

A thoroughgoing implementation of Allah’s saying: ‘…And struggle for His cause…’ (*as-Saff:* 11) provides the basis for a Muslim community ready to lead the world. The word *jihad*, as related to the idea of martial engagement, is simply the form of striving in the cause of Allah. People fight for different reasons; they could fight for nationalism or any other affiliation. In the view of Islam, none of those affiliations are of any substantive value unless they emanate from being committed to propagate and make Allah's Message triumphant.

Allah does not legislate *jihad* so that the Islamic Ummah would forcefully impose its religion on others. However, it has been only legislated to grant the people the right to freely choose whatsoever religion under the mercy of Islam. Therefore, it targeted to remove oppression and impediments blocking the way of the others to freely choose faith.

Yet, we are aware that this is a major area of contention. People often question: If that is what fighting in Islam is all about; what purpose did the various battles that were fought throughout the history of Islam serve? Those wars were for the purpose of opposing and resisting the attempts of others to impose their beliefs on the Muslims. Islam came in order to say to these people: Remove your false constraints from people and allow them to choose the religion best suited for them.

Even when one looks at the *jizyah* that Muslims levy on non-Muslim minorities living in Muslim lands, it is not simply taxation. Quite the reverse, this institution actually demonstrates the freedom promoted by Islam. Think about it: If the goal of Islam was to compel people to become Muslims, why would there be any tax levied against those who lived amongst the Muslims while electing to maintain their own religious traditions.

Redirecting out attention to an earlier point, in order for military engagement for the cause of Allah to be legitimate in Islam, there must be a clear intention to fight solely for the cause of Allah. This fighting cannot be for the purpose of domination, control or the subjugation of others. Similarly, the fighting cannot be carried out for the purpose of gaining access to the resources of others or securing emerging markets in new lands. As we stated, struggling to make the Word of Allah triumphant is the only legitimate reason for fighting. (1)

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(1) *On the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash`ari Allah be pleased with him, who narrated: 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him was once questioned about a man* =

Fighting in the way of Allah can be performed by sacrificing one's material resources or life in His path. If truth be told, giving up either represents a grave test; especially for those who have yet to fully realize faith and taste its sweetness. This explains why Allah begins His address, 'O you who believe' (*as-Saff:* 10) and immediately follows by saying, 'You are to believe in Allah and His Prophet.' (*as-Saff:* 11)

Next, Allah introduces the substance of the test and its requirements, 'and strive in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives.' (*as-Saff:* 11) Actually, your money does not really belong to you; you are merely a trustee that has been allowed to benefit from the money in his possession. Indeed, the same could even be said of our souls! Our souls are gifts that we have been given by Allah so we have no justifiable reason for being stingy with them in the path of the True Lord *Glorified is He*!

This explains the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Quran. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? So, rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted. And it is that which is the supreme triumph' (*at-Tawba:* 111).

The word 'purchased' creates the impression that there is a transaction of some sort taking place, i.e. buying and selling commercial activity. Nonetheless, in essence, in as much as Allah owns everything, He is the buyer and the seller.

When the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties' one should understand from this that life goes to waste otherwise and possessions are ill-spent. Indeed, life will inevitably end in death and wealth and possessions are subject to loss. Naturally, upon hearing this—and reflecting upon its meaning—a person should be moved with fear.

= *who fights bravely for the sake of tribal zeal or merely for ostentation. He peace and blessings be upon him responded by stating, "The individual who fights for the sake of making the Word of Allah triumphant is in His path."' Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (2810, 3127, 7458), and also by Muslim in his Sahih. (5029, 5031)*

Nonetheless, as soon as The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘Indeed, Allah has purchased’, you will recognize that it contains a glad tiding for the believer. He should be overflowing with happiness and delight whose traces can be seen upon his face. Amazingly, the believer experiences this although this implies that his life is going to be taken. True, his life will be taken, but he knows that Allah *Glorified is He* is going to give him an eternal life in exchange for his temporal life.

Indeed, all the matters of faith follow this pattern; we do not have to countenance them in fear. Quite the reverse, we should countenance them in high spirits and anticipation (of impending good). This explains why the True Lord *Glorified is He* says ‘Rejoice.’ Besides being pleased, you should also know, with conviction, that, ‘That is best for you, if you should know’. Indeed, faith in Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and struggling for His sake with your lives and possessions is more advantageous for you than the temporal world and all that it contains. Put differently, all that you can amass in this life is of no comparison with the reward of those who struggle in the way of Allah.

The word ‘best’—as it is used here—encompasses the good of this world and that of the Hereafter. Allah grants the believers manifold good so that their state remains good perpetually; first in this life then in the Hereafter.

The portion of Allah’s statement, ‘if you should know’ means: If you are absolutely positive about the reward of sacrificing in the way of Allah, you will be guided to proof concerning it. Indeed, this creates the impression that there are introductory steps which precede the acquisition of knowledge. If they do not know (about spiritual affairs), Allah will teach them.

To be sure, someone who strives in the path of Allah sacrificing his material resources and life for His sake is convinced and assured that his striving will be the source of attaining what is superior to what he is giving up.

Afterward, the True Lord says:

يَغۡفِرۡ لَكُمۡ ذُنُوبَكُمۡ وَيُدۡخِلۡكُمۡ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ
وَمَسَٰكِنَ طَيِّبَةٗ فِي جَنَّٰتِ عَدۡنٖۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ١٢

And He will forgive your sins, admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, into pleasant dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity. That is the supreme triumph [12] (The Quran, *as-Saff:* 12)

The first thing a martyr is rewarded with is the forgiveness of his sins. With the first drop of his blood he becomes as though he had never committed any sins.

When someone is killed in the path of Allah, he transitions into a life better than that which he is leaving behind. The martyr is given this distinct honour. This explains why the True Lord *Glorified is He* at the instant of martyrdom, shows them their destinations. At this point, they make utterances that those near them, while they are in their final moments can hear.

During this critical moment some have mentioned, ‘The winds of paradise are blowing over me.’(1) This statement was issued to make it clear to those in his presence that he was gazing at paradise.

This explains what happened during the Battle o*f Badr,* when one of the Companions heard the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* speaking of the reward of the martyr while he (the Companion) was chewing some dates he had. He said, ‘O Prophet Muhammad is there anything which stands between me and paradise but being killed for the sake of Allah?’ After the Prophet answered, ‘Yes’, the Companion tossed the rest of the dates he was eating and entered the battle. He responded so decisively because he had total conviction that the reward he would receive as a martyr far excelled that which he was leaving behind.(2)

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(1) *This statement was related by several Companions of the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him. Al-Kashf Al-Bayan 8/23, An-Naysaburi)*

(2) *This Hadith was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (143) in Kitab Al-Jihad in a section entitled, Thawab Al-Janna Li-Shahid. It was also narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4046) on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah Allah be pleased with him.*

He was absolutely certain that the only thing between him and paradise was being killed for the sake of Allah. At the time, there were some dates in his hand—that he had been eating—in his eagerness to enter battle, he threw them! Indeed, he even saw the time that he would spend chewing the dates as unnecessary procrastination! At that point, the dates were preventing him from attaining his goal. Hence, he decided to toss them aside and rush into battle seeking martyrdom without delay.

Again, faced with a story of such an extraordinary act of faith, we must ask: why? His actions reflected the outcome of a comparison of the pleasures and comforts of this life with those of the Hereafter. If an intelligent person compares the comforts and delights of this world with those of the Hereafter, he or she will always give preference to those of the Hereafter.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, 'And how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought many religious scholars. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. And Allah loves the steadfast. And their words were not but that they said, "Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excess [committed] in our affairs and plant firmly our feet and give us victory over the disbelieving people." So, Allah gave them the reward of this world and the good reward of the Hereafter. And Allah loves the doers of good.' (*Al-'Imran:* 146-148)

All the respective peoples referenced above who fought with their prophets encountered hardship, but they did not weaken or become faint of heart. On the contrary, they persevered and continued to seek the truth so that their sins might be forgiven. Equally impressive was the fact that they recognized the source of their weaknesses and sincerely sought the help of Allah to overcome them. So, what did Allah do with them?

Allah *Glorified is He* supported them by giving them the reward of this world and that of the Hereafter. Indeed, Allah loves the doers of good. All of this is an expression of conduct that is guided by faith; conduct which protects against defeat and the stratagems of the enemy. This is one of the outcomes of sincere Allah-consciousness. It helps the believers to remain in the accompaniment of Allah. While in Allah's accompaniment the Muslim is impervious to attacks from others, there are none among creation who would dare transgress him—while in this state.

Essentially, the believer willingly sacrifices his life, soul, and material resources for Allah *Glorified is He*. Put another way, the Muslim is ready to sacrifice everything he loves in this life for the sake of Allah, and the journey to Him. Allah is unfailingly generous to those who seek Him.

The first expression of His generosity is that He forgives them of their sins, relieves them of their burdens, and completely diverts from them the punishment that would have befallen them on account of the sins they had committed.

Allah *Glorified is He* only forgives them of the sins they have committed in relation to Him. As for the sins, they have committed against others, forgiveness for these sins is contingent upon being forgiven by those whom they have wronged. The True Lord will request that they pardon one another on the Day of Judgment. (1)

The only other thing Allah does not forgive is debt. Abu Qatada narrated that a man said: ‘O Prophet Muhammad, if I killed for the sake of Allah, all of my past misdeeds are forgiven, correct?’ The Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* answered him: ‘Yes, if you are killed for the sake of Allah and you endure it patiently, seeking a reward in the Hereafter, advancing toward the enemy as opposed to fleeing, all of your past misdeeds will be forgiven.’ Then, the Prophet Muhammad said: ‘On second thought, what exactly are you asking?’ ‘If I am killed in the path of Allah’ the man repeated, ‘are all of my past misdeeds forgiven, correct?’ Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Yes, all of your past misdeeds will be forgiven; provided that you patiently endure, seeking a reward in the Hereafter, and are advancing toward the enemy, not retreating. However, there is one exception: You will not be exempted from making good on your debts. I was informed of this by Jibril (Gabriel).’(2)

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(1) *On the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him, Al-Matalib Al-`Aliyya, Ibn Hajr 5/46)*

(2) *This was narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (117) (3/1501). It was also narrated by An-Nisa`i in As-Sunnan Al-Kubra (4365) and by At-Tirmidhi in his Sunnan (1712). The latter said concerning the Hadith, ‘Its text is sound and its chain is rigorously authenticated.’ Ahmad also narrated the Hadith in his Musnad (22638) on the authority of Abu Qatada.*

Debts are the rights of those to whom they are due. As a rule, Allah does not force people to relinquish what legitimately belongs to them. As such, the questioner had to be informed of the limitation of the forgiveness of his sins—even as a martyr! Indeed, even if Allah is pleased with someone who is killed in His path, what offense did the creditor commit that would warrant having his right waived?

Allah is Wise and Just. He does not oppress anyone, and He has made consuming wealth by way of corruption and falsehood impermissible—even if it means by way of martyrdom in His path!

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘and admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow.’ The True Lord *Glorified is He* is issuing glad tidings to all those who struggle in His way and particularly those among them who are martyred for His cause. He will admit them into gardens through which running waters flow. You will notice that the word ‘gardens’ appears here in the plural. This is an indication of the abundance and variation that exist among the gardens of paradise. Indeed, each garden is comprised of levels, the variety of which exceed the gardens on earth.

In fact, there are many different gardens of paradise such as *Jannat Al-Firdaws*, *Jannat Al-`Adn*, *Jannat An-Na`im*, *Dar Al-Khuld*, *Dar As-Salam*, *Jannat Al-Ma`wa* and finally *`Illiyun*, the highest and most exalted of the gardens of paradise. To be sure, *`Illiyun* has earned this status because of its ultimate form of blessing which is seeing Allah.

Indeed, Allah has prepared for the believers who exert themselves in His path, giving aid to His religion, striving to make His word triumphant, gardens through which running waters flow. This represents the highest achievement. As a point of clarification, when the word garden is used in this context it refers to tree-lined orchards enjoying the choicest of fruits and all that in which the soul finds contentment.

Linguistically, the word *jannah* refers to something which covers or conceals. It was most likely glossed this way on account of the way it covers those within it behind the dense foliage of its trees.

Someone walking inside a dense garden is not visible to those outside because the trees have concealed him. The same can be said of someone relaxing inside of a garden; they cannot be seen by people outside the garden, and in fact, might be tempted to remain in the garden, removed from people on account of all of the pleasing things within the garden!

In fact, thinking about the garden—and before proceeding we remind ourselves that none of our analogies or similitudes can come close to the indescribable Glory of Allah—it is like a humongous park; its expansiveness extends as far as the eye can see (no matter where you are standing within it).

In terms of looking at the rivers of this world and those of the Hereafter, we find that the rivers of this world are bodies of water that fill clefts within the surface of the earth and are surrounded by banks and shores. Conversely, the rivers of the Hereafter flow across the surface of the garden of paradise without being enclosed by borders.

In the Hereafter, we also find rivers of wine and milk. These rivers are independent and do not mix with the rivers of water. All of this is an expression of the creative power of a Wise and Omnipotent Lord.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* describes the rivers of paradise: ‘The description of Paradise, which the righteous are promised, wherein are rivers of water unaltered, rivers of milk the taste of which never changes, rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of purified honey, in which they will have from all [kinds of] fruits and forgiveness from their Lord.’ (*Muhammad:* 15)

The reward of those who strive in the way of Allah is not limited to having their sins forgiven or being admitted to a garden underneath which rivers flow. Even more, Allah has prepared for them, ‘goodly dwellings’ (*at-Tawba:* 72). This means that the garden is not the actually place in which one lives. No, as a matter of fact, one lives in mansions that are located in the garden. This is clearly mentioned in the following statement of the True Lord *Glorified is He* ‘goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence’ (*at-Tawba:* 72).

The gardens—being referenced in the verse above—are verdant pastures filled with vegetation. The mansions referred to as goodly dwellings are located on the pastures. Within our lived experience, we have seen villas situated in open fields—and have observed their beauty. So, what do we think about what Allah has prepared in terms of placing sumptuous dwellings (for the believers) in the middle of the verdant gardens?

Allah has placed these luxuriant dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss. These have termed 'gardens of perpetual bliss' because the beauty and comforts they contain are everlasting. This quality of the Garden of Paradise is highlighted to show how much it differs from the temporal world—in which we currently reside and will eventually fade away.

Your ability to enjoy every comfort and enjoyment that exists in this life can end with a change in your condition, and if it does not end with a change in your condition, it will certainly end with death. The gardens of perpetual bliss, on the other hand, which paradise contain, are everlasting and its dwellers will enjoy its comforts eternally. In short, these gardens will contain everything a soul could ever desire; there is absolutely no need to look outside the garden for anything!

Imagine that you entered one of the most splendid gardens in the world, Hyde Park, for instance. The most you would be able to do is take a casual stroll about the park, enjoying its scenery before finally becoming tired and worn out. Phrased differently, even if you were touring one of the most beautiful parks in the world you would still be forced by your human limitations to take a momentary rest. The Garden of Paradise, on the other hand, is a garden of perpetual bliss; it is all the more delightful because you can enjoy it without pause or ending.

'[Therein are] gardens of perpetual residence which the Most Merciful has promised His servants in the unseen.' (*Maryam:* 61) The appellation The Most Gracious was chosen by the True Lord *Glorified is He* here in order to give hope to those who have transgressed against themselves through sin. They should know that their Lord is Gracious and Merciful; if they turn to Him in sincere repentance, He will accept it from them. Allah always fulfils His promise!

To be sure, this is what is being conveyed by the following statement: 'It is that which is the supreme triumph.' (*Maryam:* 61) As long as the Most Gracious is the One making a promise, its fulfilment can be assured. It will definitely be realized; Allah *Glorified is He* never reneges on His promise.

'That is the supreme triumph.' When Allah refers to the Last Day as a 'supreme triumph' this is only a reference to what this day will mean for the believers—for them it will indeed be a day of great vindication. Our acceptance of this enables us to patiently preserve in the face of the challenges we encounter—in striving for Allah—and press forward, seeking martyrdom for His sake.

To be sure, Allah has prepared gardens interspersed with rivers for those who believe in Him and fight for His cause, striving to make His word triumphant, and lend their support to the victory of His religion. We have learned that this is the supreme triumph; however, in effort to better understand it we should take a closer look. What exactly is this supreme triumph? It is success and felicity; it is triumph and accomplishment at the highest level imaginable!

Our worldly success is normally accompanied by rewards in which we find delight. In fact, the delight we experience in attaining success pleases us so thoroughly that it seems as though it can last a lifetime. If this is the case, what are we to think about the success which comes in the Hereafter? Indeed, it is an everlasting success which will be enjoyed in a garden decorated by our Lord. Is this not the greatest success?

Moreover, our worldly achievements only represent success in minor matters. The success of the Hereafter, on the other hand, is granted by the True Lord—who is unlimited in His power—and is issued on a scale which reflects His grandeur. If we compared the success of this world with that of the Hereafter, we would discover that success in the Hereafter is unadulterated splendour.

Whatever sacrifice a believer does in order to attain felicity in the Hereafter, he will be awarded that which will fully account for his sacrifice and make up for it. Put differently, the supreme triumph is the highest attainment. It does not restrict anybody from what they desire and it will remain forever. Next, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَأُخۡرَىٰ تُحِبُّونَهَاۖ نَصۡرٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَفَتۡحٞ قَرِيبٞۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

And He will give you something else that will really please you: His help and an imminent breakthrough. [Prophet], give the faithful the good news [13] (The Quran, *as-Saff:* 13)

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has already made a promise to those who believe in Him and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* and strive in

His cause with their lives and material resources. Concerning their ‘trading’ with Him, Allah has promised to forgive them of their sins, admit them to gardens with rivers flowing beneath them, and place them in sumptuous mansions. This is the way in which they will live for eternity.

Notice the provisions of the verse we are currently examining. To be sure, it is the outcome of an aspect of the True Lord’s divinity: He is Omniscient; He knows what His servants want and the desires of their hearts. As such, Allah *Glorified is He* makes them an additional promise to give them other things from which they derive pleasure and contentment—in addition to the rewards that were mentioned in the previous verse.

According to the scholars, the verse means: As a precursor to the reward you will receive in the Hereafter, you will also be rewarded in this life. Of course, Allah knows the inner-workings of the human soul: Men and women like to see the fruit of their labours within their lives. Victory over their enemies and triumph would be the most obvious signs that their efforts to support the religion of Allah had been accepted.

The following statement of Allah *Glorified is He* provides us with a good example of this divine mercy—out of which Allah considers the feelings and emotions of His servants— ‘Would you not fight a people who broke their oaths and determined to expel the Messenger, and they had begun [the attack upon] you the first time? Do you fear them? But Allah has more right that you should fear Him, if you are [truly] believers. Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them and satisfy the breasts of a believing people. And remove the fury in the believers' hearts. And Allah turns in forgiveness to whom He wills; and Allah is Knowing and Wise.’ (*at-Tawba:* 13-15)

The victory—in battle—the believers gain, with the help of Allah *Glorified is He* over the disbelievers brings consolation to their hearts. Lest we forget, the disbelievers had sought to subjugate and transgress them. It is as if the triumph of the believers cures a disease that has been festering in their hearts and removes rancour from them.

Simply stated, rancour and rage are removed from the hearts of the believers. In this sense, the believers fighting the disbelievers not only results in the punishment and debasement of the disbelievers and victory of the believers; even more, it also consoles the believers after having experienced transgression and harm from the disbelievers.

The word ‘another’ in the verse under discussion is referring to another reward—other than that of the Hereafter. This verse refers to an additional compensation the believers will receive for their devotion—besides being admitted to paradise. In other words, this verse is talking about a reward the believers will receive in this life.

This means that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Facilitator of the believers. However, by no means should you think that the facilitation and help of Allah come on the basis of other than wisdom: Allah’s aid of the believers always contains wisdom.

Customarily, when people think about victory, they think about the acquisition of territory and establishment upon that territory. However, in Islam there is an alternative measure by which victory is judged. Victory is not truly considered victory unless it provides a firm foundation for the subsequent growth of good and prosperity. When good and prosperity have been given fertile soil, the believer has truly succeeded.

The victory comes exclusively from Allah. Allah says, ‘no victory can come from any save Allah, The Almighty, The Truly Wise’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 126). He also says, ‘no victory can come from any save Allah: verily, Allah is Almighty, Wise!’ (*al-Anfal:* 10)

You do not attain victory through your numbers, preparation, or weaponry. Rather, the believers are merely instruments that Allah uses in order to place victory where He chooses. Ultimately, the victory comes from Allah *Glorified is He* alone, and is granted to the individuals who prepare for it.

Allah’s name refers to the fact that He is never overcome while His identification as the Truly Wise implies that He gives victory to those who prepare for it and fulfil the conditions of truly being soldiers of Allah. When entering into battle with an opposing force, the believers can use the outcome of the battle to identify the state of their hearts.

If the battle draws to a close and the believers are victorious, they know that they were truly fighting for the cause of Allah. Conversely, if the conclusion of the battle finds the believers on the losing end, they must look to themselves and their own inadequacies as the source of their defeat. Indeed, Allah speaks of faith as the determining factor of battles. This is what we find in the book He has promised to preserve. He says, 'and that, verily, Our hosts – they indeed – would (in the end) be victorious!' (*as-Saffat:* 173)

Accordingly, if we fail to attain victory, we must look to ourselves. What condition of truly being a fighting force striving for the sake of Allah were we lacking?

For example, in the Battle of Uhud, when the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded the archers to hold their positions, and they failed heed his command.(1) In this instance a fundamental condition of being true soldiers fighting for the cause of Allah was unfulfilled; obeying the Prophet Muhammad. What would have happened if the believers would have still been victorious despite the gross disregard of these archers for the orders of the Prophet Muhammad? The believers might not have understood the gravity of obeying the orders of Allah's Messenger.

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(1) *On the authority of Bara ibn `Azib, who narrated: 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him was marshalling his troops on the day of Uhud. That day, some fifty men were under the direct command of `Abdullah ibn Jubayr, who said to them at the battle's onset: "Wherever you see us, protect our flanks. Hold your positions and do not move until you are given my signal. Even if we appear to be laying waste to the enemy and routing them, hold your positions and do not move until you are given my signal, then you may join in the combat." By Allah, I saw women in frenzy, shaking their bangles and anklets, and raising their garments (but he continued to hold his position). Those in the company of `Abdullah ibn Jubayr said, "The spoils of war, our companions are getting all of the spoils of war! What are we waiting for?" 'Abdullah chided them by saying "Have you forgotten the orders of the Messenger of Allah?" They responded, "By Allah we must get down there and get our share of the spoils!" As they abandoned their positions and neglected their responsibility to defend their comrades, the tide of the battle turned and the believers started suffering some casualties. As this was taking place, The Messenger was calling them from the rear, but only approximately twelve of them remained with the Messenger of Allah. In the aftermath of this critical blunder, seventy believers were killed. On the day of Badr, the Messenger of Allah and his Companions took one hundred and forty disbelievers: Seventy were killed in battle and another seventy were taken as prisoners.' This Hadith was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (3039, 3986, 4067).*

During the Battle of Hunayn, the believers were sure that they would triumph because they turned out for the battle in tremendous numbers. They were not relying on their faith. As the battle commenced, the believers found themselves on the losing end.(1) This was a critical lesson in faith for them. Accordingly, if you observe unfaith gaining the upper hand on belief, you can be sure that one of the conditions of being a true soldier fighting for the sake of Allah has been left unfulfilled.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* has not only promised to aid them, He has also promised them an impending victory. Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And [you will obtain] another [favour] that you love - victory from Allah and an imminent conquest.' The pinnacle of being given divine aid is being granted victory. To be sure, it entails empowerment. In fact, from an Islamic perspective, victory is termed 'a conquest,' and is always governed by the guidelines of the sacred law. Such guidelines include the prohibition of plunder and the wanton killing of non-combatants, women, elderly people, monks, and hermits in their cloisters. The proscription of environmental degradation and deforestation is also included within these guidelines.

In terms of the specific victory being referenced within the verse we are currently examining, the scholars have offered many opinions. Some maintain that it is a reference to the Conquest of Mecca, while others opine that it prophesies the conquests of the Persian and Byzantine empires. All these explanations are plausible.

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(1) *On the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud who narrated: 'I was with the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him on the day of Hunayn. It was a battle in which many people fled and abandoned the Messenger of Allah but eighty men—comprised of both the Muhajirun (the emigrants) and the Ansar (the helpers)—stood firmly with him. We turned on our heels and fled; however, there were about eighty infantrymen who stood their ground and refused to flee. These were the individuals Allah gave tranquillity.' 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud continued: 'The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him was circling the ranks so vigorously that he was thrown from the saddle when his mule turned a sharp corner. I said to him: "Rise O Messenger of Allah, and may Allah elevate you!' After requesting a handful of dirt, which he threw in their faces and which filled their eyes, he asked, "Where are the Ansar and Muhajirun?" After I informed him that they had fled, he told me to call them back. Returning with swords in hand, they were a frightening sight which startled the disbelievers and caused them to flee.' This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (4336) and by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`ajam Al-Kabir. (10351).*

Here, the word ‘conquest’ is mentioned but no specific event is mentioned in connection with it. As such, we can conclude that this victory could be granted—at any time—to those who believe in Allah and His Messenger; just so long as they strive earnestly for the sake of Allah with their lives and material resources, and fulfil the conditions required for receiving divine aid and being empowered by Allah.

Considering this, we opine that the address contained within the verse we are currently examining is not directed strictly to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as is the case in of the chapter of *al-Fath* or of the chapter of *an-Nasr.* Quite the reverse, this verse is addressing the generality of the believers. Listen to the following statement of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘O you who have believed, shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment?’ (*as-Saff:* 10)

Accordingly, the opinion that some have expressed about the conquest mentioned in the verse before us referring to the later conquests of the Byzantines and the Persians is a sound opinion. Obviously, these represent two conquests that the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not witness. But this is not even limited to these two conquests; the conquests of Egypt or Constantinople might also be included.

Afterward, the True Lord *Glorified is He* says, ‘and gives good tidings to the believers.’ This is in order that they realize that Allah will never abandon them or leave them without guidance as long as they adhere to His way. Allah commanded the Prophet to give the believers glad tidings. First, Allah promises the believers a victory; this will occur in this life. Then, in the Hereafter He gives them glad tidings of gardens of perpetual bliss in which they will dwell in mansions; living gracefully.

Next, The True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُونُوٓاْ أَنصَارَ ٱللَّهِ كَمَا قَالَ عِيسَى ٱبۡنُ مَرۡيَمَ لِلۡحَوَارِيِّـۧنَ مَنۡ
أَنصَارِيٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِۖ قَالَ ٱلۡحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحۡنُ أَنصَارُ ٱللَّهِۖ فَـَٔامَنَت طَّآئِفَةٞ مِّنۢ بَنِيٓ
إِسۡرَٰٓءِيلَ وَكَفَرَت طَّآئِفَةٞۖ فَأَيَّدۡنَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّهِمۡ فَأَصۡبَحُواْ ظَٰهِرِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

You who believe, be God’s helpers. As Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, ‘Who will come with me to help God?’ The disciples said, ‘We shall be God’s helpers.’ Some of the Children of Israel believed and some disbelieved: We supported the believers against their enemy and they were the ones who came out on top [14] (The Quran, *as-Saff:* 14)

The address, ‘O you who have believed’ occurs three times in this chapter. In the first time, the True Lord *Glorified is He* addresses the believers by bringing some of their faults to attention. This particular behaviour (of saying one thing and doing another) was characteristic of some members of the believing community. They would speak and they would act, but their actions were not consistent with their speech. When the situation demanded both speech and action they were nowhere to be found.

There were some members of the community who would talk incessantly (about their devotion and commitment) but were never present in the ranks. They were absent from the ranks of inviting others to Islam as well as from the ranks of defending the physical integrity of the community. They also failed to be among the doers of righteous deeds and the devout in worship. Perhaps most lamentably, many of them even failed to be counted among those who restrict their evil to themselves and refrain from harming others. This was the context of Allah’s statement: ‘O you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do? Great is hatred in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do.’ (*as-Saff:* 2-3)

As for the second calling, ‘O you who have believed, shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment?’ (*as-Saff:* 10) In this, Allah is directing the attention of the believers to another important element of personal conduct: Not simply refraining from vain talk, nonsense, and that which is not corroborated by actions; on the contrary, He demands that their speech contain the most praiseworthy things and that their integrity remain intact by matching their speech with their action. Pursuant with that objective, He points out to them the most desirable course for them to follow in their actions if they are truly among the sincere.

The course of action, 'the trade' with Allah that He points out to them is: '[It is that] you believe in Allah and His Messenger and strive in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives.'

Finally, this verse places the believers upon the path that will deliver them to the pinnacle of servanthood to Allah: To be Helpers in the cause of Allah.

To be sure, someone might be prompted to ask: does Allah really need anyone to help Him? When the True Lord *Glorified is He* speaks of helping the faith, He says, 'O you who have believed, if you support Allah, He will support you and plant firmly your feet.' (*Muhammad:* 7)

In essence, our 'help' of Allah is expressed in implementing the religion that He has given us; this is the meaning Allah intends. This explains why sometimes the help is mentioned as coming from the believer to his Lord while at other times it is mentioned as coming from the Lord to the servant. It is a reciprocal relationship: by being on Allah's side you ensure that He will be on your side.

Then again, how do we know if we are really being helpers to Allah? We know that we are, in fact, serving as helpers to Allah when the desired outcome accrues as a result of our help. To be sure, when Allah *Glorified is He* mentions one of the laws which regulate creation, He does not allow reality to contravene that law. If Allah proclaimed a law of creation which was subsequently contravened by reality, it would force us to deem the law false or inapplicable.

Receiving the help of Allah is predicated upon entering the battle with the sincere desire to aid Him. Nevertheless, with what exactly will you aid Him? You aid Him with your desire to see His word actualized and made triumphant. Naturally, if one desires to see the prominence of the word of Allah, this entails undermining the word of the disbelievers until it becomes a thing of absolutely no consequence.

As such, if you fail to help Allah, you have only yourself to blame if you are not granted the help of Allah. And if the help of Allah has been restricted from you, there is no one else that can possibly help you. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘but if He should forsake you, who is there that can aid you after Him?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 160)

If you see the believers suffer defeat after entering battle, you must search for the source of their deviation from way of truth. Indeed, as long as you are firm upon the way of Allah, you can be sure that Allah will aid you. This is an indubitable law, established by the Quran, and uncontested.

Allah says, ‘and Allah will most certainly support him who supports His cause.’ (*al-Hajj:* 40) The True Lord *Glorified is He* wants us to know that He has placed the keys of paradise in this world. Each of us holds the key to a path which leads to paradise or to the hellfire.

This explains why Allah says, ‘and fulfil your promise unto Me, (whereupon), I shall fulfil my promise unto you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 40) In another verse, He said: ‘so remember Me, and I shall remember you.’ (*al-Baqara:* 152)

In a Qudsi Hadith that the Prophet narrates from his Lord, we find the following: ‘If he draws near Me by a hand span, I draw near to him an arm length. If he approaches Me an arm length, I approach him a cubit length. And if he comes to me walking, I go to him with speed!’(1) In this way, the True Lord *Glorified is He* makes us aware that the key is our own hands. If we begin with His obedience, He will give us from His bounty without measure. In the same way, if we draw near to Allah, He draws near to us. The inverse is also true: If we distance ourselves from Allah, He distances Himself from us. This basic principle corresponds with the natural understanding of faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘be supporters of Allah, as when `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), asked the disciples, “Who are my supporters for Allah?” `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) *peace be upon them* came to know the core principles of the prophetic missions, he said: ‘Verily, Allah is my Lord as well as your Lord: so worship Him (alone): this is a straight way.' (*Al-'Imran:* 51) This statement warns the followers of `Isa (Jesus) against saying anything about other than that he was a submissive servant of Allah who was ordered to establish prayer and obey Allah.

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(1) *It was narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (7405) and by Muslim in his Sahih (7008). The Hadith was transmitted by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The Hadith begins as follows: ‘I am to My servant as he thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me within himself, I remember him to Myself. And if he mentions Me in a gathering, I mention him in a gathering which is superior to his gathering.’*

'But when `Isa (Jesus) felt [persistence in] disbelief from them, he asked, "Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?"' (*Al-'Imran:* 52) The hidden lesson in this is that everyone advancing an idea, practicing a trade, or pursuing a certain goal must be acutely aware of the details involved in his pursuit.

Allah commands the caller unto Him to have this heightened sense of awareness because for every group of people that will find guidance and contentment in his words, there will certainly be another group which is angered by his words. As such, the caller unto Allah must have an acute awareness of the impact of his activity. In other words, he must pay attention to those deeply ensconced characteristics and motivations which affect the receptivity of his message among people.

When `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) began to go public with the message of truth, he found promoters of indecency, oppression, and spiritual darkness opposed to his teaching; indeed, his was a message which illuminated a clear path to Allah. This resistance toward faith is what the Quran terms as 'disbelief'. Nonetheless, for our purposes here, the bottom line is that `Isa (Jesus) was uncannily aware of what was taking place around him.

To be sure, he realized that he had been sent with a message from Allah to deliver people from moral corruption to moral excellence, and once he sensed their unwillingness to believe, he needed a group of people to come forth and assist him in inviting people to the truth. So, he questioned, 'Who are my supporters for Allah?' Inviting to the path of Allah entails struggle, and struggle entails sacrifice. Moreover, sacrifice is only real when it involves giving up one's life and valuables. As such, whoever finds within himself the desire to aid the cause of Allah must be prepared to work assiduously.

Another interesting insight we glean from the statement of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* mentioned in the chapter of *Al-`Imran*, is that his appeal for help in propagating the message was not directed toward specific individuals. On the contrary, he directed his appeal toward any and all who found within themselves the willingness and ability to bear the standard of Allah's message. In this way, all their sacrifice was voluntary and none of it was forced upon them.

`Isa (Jesus) did not request the help of those who wanted to work propagating the message because it was profitable or lead to positions of public esteem. He did not request this kind of help. He requested the help of the truly determined so that each of them would be prepared to strive to the height of his ability to aid the cause of Allah.

The appeal that `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* made in *Al-`Imran* is general. In the chapter of *as-Saf*, however, the appeal is directed to the 'the disciples' in exclusion to others that were also present at the time of `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary). To be sure, some have opined that the verse which appears in *as-Saff* clarifies who was being addressed in the verse which appears in *Al-`Imran*. That is to say: The disciples of `Isa (Jesus) were being addressed in each of the verses. Nonetheless, this begs the question: was it in fact the disciples from whom `Isa (Jesus) detected disbelief despite the fact that we know that they ended up being his most sincere and devoted followers?

The correct view about the statement of `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), 'Who are my supporters for Allah' which appears in the chapter of *Al-`Imran* is that it was addressed to everyone. The disciples volunteered to help `Isa (Jesus), and support him in his efforts. 'The disciples said, "We are supporters of Allah.' It almost seems as though he wanted to make sure of their dedication; which does not necessarily mean that he doubted them or that there was someone among them dishonestly claiming sincerity but not truly one of them.

'The disciples said, "We are supporters of Allah."' (*as-Saff:* 14) They wanted to help the cause of Allah so each of them wholeheartedly dedicated himself to His way. Faith, which in the deepest sense is the heart's being content with something, is the most important element of giving help to the cause of Allah.

Allah demanded that the disciples have faith in Him and His Messenger, `Isa (Jesus). He said: 'And [remember] when I inspired to the disciples, "Believe in Me and in My messenger `Isa (Jesus)." They said, "We have believed, so bear witness that indeed we are Muslims [in submission to Allah].'" (*al-Ma'ida:* 111)

The meaning of 'inspired' in the previous verse is generic. That is, it simply refers to the process of making someone aware of something previously unknown. As such, the True Lord inspired them to believe in the message of `Isa (Jesus), who was conveying His message. Put differently, Allah inspired the thoughts which occurred to their minds in the same manner He inspired the mother of Moses to throw her newborn into the sea so that it could deliver him safely to the shore.

Accordingly, this does not refer to the inspiration given to the Messenger. The inspiration given to the Messenger contains practical rules and injunctions (concerning how we should live our lives), and is always issued via the medium of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* the archangel and trusted emissary of Allah. The inspiration Allah sent the mother of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or the Disciples of `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* conversely, was expressed in allowing the motivation of belief to take root in the heart. After which, the inspired party follows what is in the heart and finds that reality reinforces it.

The revelation and thoughts which were inspired by Allah are what caused them to believe in Allah and His Messenger, `Isa (Jesus). Thus, when they were requested to aid the cause of Allah by being His helpers, they responded by articulating that which had been placed in their hearts; they said: 'We are supporters of Allah.'

When faith was requested of them, they responded accordingly; they said, 'Our Lord, we have believed in what You revealed and have followed the messenger `Isa (Jesus), so register us among the witnesses [to truth].' (*Al-'Imran:* 53)

The intended belief within this verse is belief in that which `Isa (Jesus) received from Allah and subsequently taught them. The proclamation of the Disciples is a declaration of their faith in what came before `Isa (Jesus) in terms of the fundamentals of belief as well as a declaration of their adherence to what he brought by way of laws and ethics. The people were then separated into two camps: One representing faith and the other representing disbelief. This explains the following statement of Allah: 'And a faction of the children of Israel believed and a faction disbelieved.'

The word *faction* is a group of people united for a specific purpose and working toward one end. Therefore, some faction from among the children of Israel believed in that which was introduced by `Isa (Jesus), while some disbelieved in his message.

Yet, why did Allah make a point of saying, ‘of the children of Israel’? In addressing this question, we would point to the fact that `Isa (Jesus) was only sent as a messenger to the children of Israel. His message was not intended for all men and women. The main objective of his prophetic mission might have been strengthening their hearts and removing their overwhelming preoccupation with material concerns. In a certain sense, `Isa (Jesus) came to complete the Torah and restore unto it that which the Jewish nation had removed.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions here: ‘And [mention] when `Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary), said, “O children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you.”’ This statement makes it unequivocally clear that he was only sent to the children of Israel as a reformer and someone sent to guide them to redemption.

The problem with the children of Israel was that they consistently rebelled against the way of the Messengers because it did not conform to their desires. As a matter of fact, there rebelliousness reached such levels that they began to plot and conspire against the Prophets, striving to frustrate their missions; even if this meant killing them.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘and when I restrained the children of Israel from [killing] you when you came to them with clear proofs and those who disbelieved among them said, “This is not but obvious magic.”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 110)

Indeed, just as the Disciples were determined and resolute in their faith in `Isa (Jesus), others were determined and resolute in their disbelief, and their desire to harm him. Thus, Allah restrained the evil of the children of Israel when they desired to harm or even potentially kill `Isa (Jesus). Nonetheless, even after witnessing all of that, there were still some who believed in him and others who did not. Heinously, those who did not believe alleged that he was a magician.

Put succinctly, this group among the children of Israel disbelieved in ‘Isa (Jesus) and vehemently opposed him and went even further in inventing an insidious lie against Maryam (Mary).

Then, Allah says, ‘So We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they became dominant.’ Allah was on the side of His Messenger and those that believed and were prepared to aid His Messenger in his mission. These were the people unto whom the divine aid of Allah was given. Their foes were none other than those who had disbelieved in `Isa (Jesus), the Messenger sent by Allah.

For a time, it appeared that the party of disbelief had been victorious—after the ascension of `Isa (Jesus) into the heavens. This was until the advent of Muhammad’s prophecy. Allah made the message given to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a support and reinforcement for those with true faith. This will stand until the coming of the Final Hour. To be sure, Allah has described some members of the people of the Book thusly, that ‘…is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant. And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognized of the truth. They say, “Our Lord, we have believed, so register us among the witnesses.”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 82-83)

Therefore, falsehood, no matter how much it seems to be dominating publicly, it will eventually be overcome by the pure truth. Truth will affect them in the depth of their souls and their eyes will overflow with tears because they recognize it when they hear it.

‘And they became dominant.’ In other words, they shall become victorious. In the end, the truth will always triumph and it will never be overcome. This is clear from the statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, ‘There will always remain a band of believers upon the truth and triumphant. They will not be affected by those who forsake them, and they will persevere in that state until their affair is settled by Allah.’(1)

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(1) On the authority of Mu`awiya ibn Abu Sufyan, who said: ‘I heard The Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* say, “There will remain a party from amongst my nation who stand for the cause of Allah. The people that forsake them will not be able to harm them or oppose them. In the end, their affair will be decisively settled by Allah, and will find them victorious.” This Hadith was narrated by Ahmad in his *Musnad* (16974)

the chapter of

al-Jumu'a

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Jumu'a* (1):

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ ٱلْمَلِكِ ٱلْقُدُّوسِ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿١﴾

Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God, the Controller, the Holy One, the Almighty, the Wise [1]
(The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 1)

If one were to examine the expressions of glorification in the Noble Quran, one would find that glorification is established for Allah *Glorified is He* before He created those who glorify Him, such as in His statement 'Exalted is He who took His Servant.' (*al-Isra':* 1) Then, after Allah had created the creation: 'Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth exalts Allah.' (*al-Hashr:* 1)

The creation still glorifies Him in the present: 'Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is exalting Allah, the Sovereign, the Pure the Exalted in Might, the Wise.’ Therefore, glorifying Allah has always been and shall remain until the Hour is established. This is why the True Lord Glorified is He commands Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him along with his *ummah*, to continue glorifying Him: ‘Exalt the name of your Lord, the Most-High.’ (*al-A‘la:* 1)

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(1) *Al-Jumu`a* is the 62nd chapter in the order of the Noble Quran and it consists of eleven verses. It was revealed in Medina. As-Suyuti said in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthur* (8/151): 'Ibn Ad-Daris, An-Nahas, Ibn Mardawayh have all related, along with Al-Bayhaqi in *Ad-Dala`il*, that Ibn `Abbas said: 'The chapter of *al-Jumu`a* was sent down in Medina. It was sent down after the chapter of *at-Tahrim* and before *at-Taghabun*. The verse that mentions the Friday Prayer was sent down after its ruling, i.e. the verse that mentions *Al-Jumu`a* was sent down in Medina even though the Friday Prayer was made obligatory in Mecca. This is supported by what Ibn Majah has narrated from `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Ka`b ibn Malik that As`ad ibn Zarara was the first person to lead the Friday Prayer before the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* arrived from Mecca. *Al-Itqan fi `Ulum Al-Quran* 1/108)

The command to remember Allah came after the command to glorify Him, as if He is telling you whenever you remember Him: ‘He is transcendent in His Essence, His attributes and His actions, and it is for your benefit, throughout life, that Allah has no equal, no parallel, no peer and no rival because everyone will be under His justice.’ Thus, Allah is transcendent for your benefit. Allah is transcendent and sanctified above being compared to anything in creation. His Name is exalted; His essence is exalted and so are His attributes and actions. Limitless is He in His Glory above any attribute that men may ascribe to Him that does not befit His Essence.

Tasbih (Glorification) and *taqdis* (sanctification) were established for Allah before the act of creation. Allah was glorified before He brought into existence those who would glorify Him, just as He was the Creator before He brought the creation into existence. He possessed the attribute of creating before He created anything.

Likewise, we say in the countryside: ‘A person who does not have a guardian should seek one’ because the existence of someone greater and bigger than everything and everyone protects you from anyone being overbearing towards you. Therefore, Allah’s Sublimity and Grandeur are some of His Greatest Blessings on you.

Thus, when you glorify Him and declare Him transcendent, be thankful to Allah because He is Transcendent. Be thankful to Allah that He has no partner and that all of mankind are equal before Him. Be thankful to Allah that His Word and Command are powerful over all. Be thankful to Allah that He has never taken a wife or a son, and there is no kinship between Him and anyone from among His creation.

The True Lord *the Exalted* has made your remembrance of Him and your glorification of Him for your benefit, and it is from His Countless Blessings that the heavens and the earth and all that they contain glorify Allah, declare

Him transcendent, and sanctify Him *Glorified is He*. This glorification by the creation necessitates that they be submissive to Him and obedient to His Commands, not rebelling against His commands.

Therefore, the human should feel assured that the entire universe glorifies Allah and is submissive to Him because if that were not the case humanity would not be able to live on earth. Thus, Allah *the Most High* has decreed, on the basis of Him being glorified by all creatures, that all of them be harnessed to the service of mankind.

Allah *the Exalted* says, 'See you not (O mankind) that Allah has subjected for you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth…' (*Luqman:* 20). He also says, 'See you not that Allah sends down water (rain) from the sky, and then the earth becomes green? Verily, Allah is the Most Kind and Courteous, Well-Acquainted with all things. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. And verily, Allah He is Rich (Free of all wants), Worthy of all praise. See you not that Allah has subjected to you (mankind) all that is on the earth, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except by His Leave. Verily, Allah is, for mankind, full of Kindness, Most Merciful.' (*al-Hajj:* 63-65)

The True Lord *the Exalted* is transcendent above every imperfection and is glorified because He is characterized by all the attributes of grace and beauty; He is '…the *Malik* (the King, the Owner of everything), the Holy, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1).

In the *witr* (odd-numbered) prayer, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* would recite the chapters of *al-`Ala, al-Kafirun and al-Ikhlas*; and after finishing the prayer with *taslim* (salutation of peace ending the prayer), he would say three times: '*Subhan Al-Malik Al-Quddus*' (Glory be to the King, the Holy), and he would raise his voice when doing so. (1)

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad (15390) and An-Nasa`i in his Sunnan (1698) based on the Hadith of `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Abza. It was also narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in his Sunnan (5057) and Ad-Daraqutni (1679) based on the Hadith of Ibn Abza from `Ubay ibn Ka`b.*

Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* is the *Malik* (the King, the Owner). If every human being is the owner of what he possesses, the owner of his clothes, or the owner of the morsel of food that he eats, or the owner of the house that he sleeps in, then the *Malik* is the True Owner Who owns all things and owns every owner.

Every person has some property, but there is a difference when a human being owns something that he is unable to keep. Allah has given some of us control over the affairs of other people, as there is an owner of food or clothes; but not every owner is truly an owner. The true owner is the one who owns any owner, and this is the standard way of the universe.

In the Hereafter there is One Owner, the Owner of the Day of Judgment. Allah *the Exalted* says, '…His will be the dominion on the Day when the trumpet will be blown; All Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the All-Wise, Well-Aware (of all things).' (*al-An'am:* 73) Has dominion belonged to any but Allah on any day ever?

In the realm of means, our Lord *the Exalted* has given each one of us some dominion. He has given some people dominion over us such they becoming kings, but in the Hereafter, there is none of this. Therefore, He *the Most High* says, '…To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing…' (*Ghafir:* 16).

In the life of this world, for example, you may be able to employ me and give me a wage. Or you may be able to cook for me and give me food, or you may be able to sew some clothes for me. However, in the Hereafter no one will have the means to do anything for anyone because in the life of this world we live according to the means that Allah has granted us, and in the Hereafter, we will live according to the Original Causer alone without any means.

That is why we say to every king: 'Indeed, this dominion is not intrinsically yours because if this dominion were intrinsically yours, no one would ever be able to strip you of it. Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* says, 'Say, 'O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty …' (*Al-'Imran:* 26).

Therefore, no one intrinsically possesses sovereignty or dominion except Allah. Allah has the dominion of the heavens and the earth; therefore, unless

Allah has willed, nothing and no one will harm you, nor will anyone or anything passes you by.

As for the True Lord's Name *Al-Quddus* (the Holy), it means that He is the Pure, as sanctification means to honour Allah as Holy and far above all vicissitudes. Because You, My Lord, are Holy and Pure, it is not befitting that anything should be ascribed to You except that which is Pure, nor is it befitting that anything should come from those whom You have created with Your Own Hands except that which is pure.

It is said: 'Allah is Sanctified', i.e. transcendent because Allah's Essence is not like human essence. He *the Glorious and Exalted* has attributes that are transcendent above being like your attributes. He *the Glorious and Exalted* has actions, but His actions are sanctified, purified, and transcendent above being like your actions.

His Life is also transcendent. His Essence is not like your essence. His Attributes are not like your attributes. You have power, but it is limited. He has Absolute Power. He hears and the human beings hear, but the hearing of human beings is limited while His Hearing is unlimited. Therefore, Allah's Attributes are sanctified, in other words, His Attributes are pure, perfect and far above any imperfection.

The angels said: '…while we declare Your praise and sanctify You…' (*al-Baqara:* 30). *Tasbih* (glorification) means to declare Allah transcendent above that which does not befit Him being transcendent. *Taqdis* (sanctification) means purification, and it is taken from the word *quds* which is the bucket that people would use with which to purify themselves That is why we say: '*Subbuh Quddus*' (Glorified and Holy). 'Glorified' means that He is transcendent above everything that does not befit His Majesty, and 'Holy' means pure.

The term *tasbih* (glorification) means to sanctify Allah and declare Him transcendent in His Essence, His Attributes, and His Actions. This means that no essence is like His Essence: '…there is nothing like unto Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11), whether in His Person, Attributes or Actions. Therefore, do not say that Allah's Hearing is like your hearing, or that His Seeing is like your seeing, or that His Actions are like your actions.

The meaning is: we glorify You and we sanctify You in a way that befits Your firmly established divinity, and thus we do not add anything from ourselves. Glorification causes the one glorifying to feel pleasure within himself, and obedience causes the obedient person to feel pleasure within himself, just as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The comfort of my eyes is made in prayer'(1), and whenever anything distressed him, he would pray.(2)

The True Lord's Name *Al-`Aziz*, (the Almighty) in His words: '…the King, the Holy the Almighty the Wise!' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1) means the One Whose Power is never overcome and no one dare to argue with Him. No one can enter into a dispute with Allah. Allah's creation only enters into arguments and struggles with one another.

However, no one would dare enter into a dispute with Allah because He is Almighty and can never be vanquished. Know that Allah always prevails in whatever is His Will, and even though His Will dominates, He is All-Wise in implementing it.

The True Lord *the Most High* gives us a glimpse of the meaning of His Might along with His Wisdom in His statement: 'Surely! Those who disbelieved in Our *Ayat* (signs, proofs or revelations), We (Allah) shall burn them in Fire. As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for other skins that they may taste the punishment. Truly, Allah is All-Mighty, the All-Wise.' (*an-Nisa':* 56)

Allah's Attribute of *Al-`Aziz*, (the Almighty) is the One Who is never overpowered and you will never be able to protect yourself against Him vanquishing you. A disbeliever might say: 'We enjoyed ourselves with a sin committed once for five minutes, and another time for two hours, so how would it harm me for my skin to burn and that would be the end of the matter?'

We would respond to him: 'No. Indeed, the One punishing you is never overcome. He will make the punishment permanent for you by replacing your skin with another skin. He *the Exalted* is also Wise, so the issue is not a matter of arbitrary power that He is using. No. He is using His Power justly.

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(1) *Narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad (12315, 13079, 14069) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. It was also found in the Musnad of Abu Ya`la Al-Mawsuli (3482, 3530).*

(2) *Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (23347) from Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him... It was also narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (1319), Al-Bayhaqi in his Sunnan (3181, 3182) and Abu Na`im in Ma`rifat As-Sahabah (4216, 4217).*

The True Lord is described as being Almighty and also an Avenger of Evil. He *the Most High* pardons past sins, but if someone returns and violates Allah's prohibitions in a certain field, the True Lord will punish him, and He will not accept any sacrificial offerings, or feeding of the poor, or fasting from him because by repeating a sin, one is persisting in it. That is why Allah takes revenge from him, and He is the Almighty Who is never vanquished.

The True Lord *the Exalted* has spoken to us about the planning of the celestial bodies in His saying: 'The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation' (*ar-Rahman:* 5), '…and the sun runs on its fixed course for a term (appointed). That is the Decree of the All-Mighty, the All Knowing.' (*Ya Sin:* 38) The word 'the Almighty' indicates dominance and subdual, and thus no one can prevail over Him.

These celestial bodies that you see are stronger than you are, and your hand cannot grasp them. They carry out a function for you without you being close to them. You do not approach the sun to adjust it, as you would do with a watch that has been made by a human like you.

The sun has a strength that Allah, its Creator, has placed in it. There is nothing whatsoever in Allah's handiwork or creation that can challenge or resist Him. This is the planning of the Almighty, the All Knowing. He, the Majestic, gives us reliable means of calculating things, as He *the Most High* is the One Who Created them with wise planning that is never overcome. He is Almighty and has absolute, limitless knowledge of everything.

Know that '…verily, your Lord, He is the All-Strong, the All-Mighty.' (*Hud:* 66) The True Lord is Omnipotent; He seizes every disbeliever and no one overcomes Him and absolutely nothing incapacitates Him. The One Who is absolutely the Almighty is Allah, but we might say about someone that he is the mighty one among his people, i.e. their leader. We say that the One Who is absolutely rich beyond any needs or wants is Allah, but we also say that so-and-so is rich and so-and-so is poor.

Allah's Names are names of His Essence or they are names of His Attributes and Actions. If the name has no opposite, it is a name of essence, such as *Al-`Aziz* (the Almighty). On the other hand, if it is a name of an attribute or an action, such as The Exalter, it must have an opposite, which in this case is the Al-Abaser.

If He were only able to exalt and were not able to humiliate, He would not be God. If He could only harm and could not benefit anyone, it would not be possible for Him to be God. If He were only able to give and had no power to withhold, it would not be possible for Him to be God.

Each of these attributes has an opposite whose effect manifests itself in other than Allah. So, He, for example, is Almighty in His Nature; He exalts some and humbles others.

Allah *Glorified is He* is *the Almighty,* the Most Merciful. Allah is Almighty; He overpowers and is never overpowered. An example of this is His statement '…it is He Who feeds and is not fed…' (*al-An'am:* 14), and His statement 'Say, "In Whose Hand is the sovereignty of everything? And He protects (all), while against Whom there is no protector."' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88)

Despite His Might, He is full of Mercy; so, He is Merciful when He overcomes and dominates because He is the Lord of the entire creation. He shows mercy to people when they repent, and He accepts them when they turn back to Him.

It is stated in the Noble Hadith: 'Allah is more joyous at the repentance of His slave when he repents than one of you are when he is on his riding beast in some barren land, and it escapes from him while carrying his food and drink, and he despairs of it and decides to recline under the shade of a tree. After having despaired of ever finding his riding beast, he suddenly finds it in front of him and he grabs it by the halter. He then says out of extreme joy: 'O Allah, You are my slave and I am your Lord.' He makes this mistake due to his extreme joy. (1)

Although Allah is Mighty, He is Compassionate towards His slaves. He opens the door of repentance to whoever repents, so no one should think that there is any tyranny in the attribute 'the Almighty' because He *the Exalted* is also The Bestower of Mercy.

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(1) *Narrated by Imam Muslim in his Sahih (7136) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik, and Al-Bukhari also narrated it in his Sahih (6309) from the Hadith of Anas.*

It is part of the sublimity of the Quranic style that it brings these two attributes together The Almighty and the Most Merciful. It is as if He is teaching us an Islamic principle according to which Islam nurtures its followers, and indeed it is proportion and moderation. Let not a single attribute, quality, disposition, or character dominates you, and always adhere to the middle course because every disposition in the human has a function.

Reflect on the Allah's statement regarding the attributes of the believers: '…humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). Thus, a Muslim is not moulded upon humility or pride. Rather, it is the situation that makes him humble or proud, and so the believer is described as being modest and humble towards believers and proud towards disbelievers.

Thus, the might of the Almighty towards an arrogant person is a mercy for the person who is treated arrogantly, and thus both His Might and His Mercy are in your favour. This is not all, because He is also All Knowing. He could be Almighty and Invincible, but devoid of knowledge. Therefore, the True Lord *the Exalted* is Almighty and All Knowing, and He puts might in its proper place and humility in its proper place.

His Might and Domination are sovereign and ascendant, but despite that the True Lord follows their mention with the attribute of mercy in order to bring forth balance in the believer's soul between the attributes of dominance and sovereignty and the attribute of mercy.

If you want true might and glory, seek them from the One Whose Might never changes. He is the True Lord *Glorified is He*: '…to Allah belongs all honour, power, and glory.' (*an-Nisa':* 139) This statement contains a direction for the one seeking might and glory; so, let everyone who is seeking might and glory do so by having faith in Allah. He is the One Who grants might and Whose might never changes.

'…To Allah belongs all honour, power and glory.' (*an-Nisa':* 139) The word 'all' indicates that there are different kinds of might: the might of wealth, the might of authority, the might of dignity. So, if someone wants to know and comprehend might, the True Lord *the Exalted* possesses it all.

Therefore, when the True Lord says, '…to Allah belongs all honour, power and glory' (*an-Nisa':* 139), the meaning is: 'O human, if you want might that is orderly and superior to all might, go to Allah because it is He Who has made us honourable and powerful for we are His creation'.

The True Lord *Glorified is He* says, '…honour, power, and glory belong to Allah, His Messenger (Muhammad), and to the believers, but the hypocrites know not…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). Might and glory inherently belong to Allah, and you cannot surpass them. Yet He *the Most High* has willed for the might and glory of His Messenger and the believers to emanate from His Might and Glory.

'…To Allah belongs all honour, power and glory' (*an-Nisa':* 139) means that all types of power and glory belong to Allah *the Exalted.* If might lies in wisdom, He is the Wise. If might lies in seizing matters, He is the Almighty. If might lies in forbearance, He is the Forbearing. And if might lies in anger and retributory vengeance, He is the Lord of Retribution, the All-Compeller.

As for the True Lord's Name *Al-Hakim* (the Wise), it indicates that the Creator governs all created beings so that they do not live without guidance and knowledge.

Wisdom in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) means that an objective is set for every undertaking so that all actions are harmonious with one another, and the universe is governed according to the truth, which no falsehood can approach from before or from behind it.

The Wise and the All Knowing is the One Who lays down a framework and limits for every created being, and wisdom signifies that everything carries out what is required from it with proficiency. Wisdom in *fiqh* means to derive a sound ruling, while wisdom in poetry means to balance the words according to their poetical patterns. Wisdom in medicine means to know the diagnosis of the illness and the medication that will treat it. Wisdom in architecture means to design a hospital in accordance with the needs of the patients, doctors, medical appliances and equipment, medical storage facilities and so forth, or in designing a house that is comfortable for its occupants. And the wisdom in building a house, for example, is different from the wisdom in building a palace or a workplace.

If the Almighty is the One Who is not overcome due to His Omnipotence, and no one dare question Him, then indeed the Wise is the One from Whom nothing comes except what is profoundly wise.

The word *hikma* (wisdom) derives from the word *hakama* which is placed in a horse's mouth and we call it a bridle. As we know, it is comprised of a piece of leather that is positioned in the horse's mouth and it contains a piece of iron. So, if the horse inclines away from the direction that you want, it is easy to pull it back to the right direction.

Indeed, the presence of the bridle means the presence of something that governs it, and thus it does not deviate to the right or to the left. As long as Allah has testified that there is no god but He, and the angels and those endowed with knowledge have also testified, and after these testimonies the matter has been concluded that there is no god but He and that He is *the Almighty,* the Wise, then every way provided by Him must be submitted to and obeyed.

As long as the person has believed in Allah Who is the Capable, the Wise, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Holy, then he should listen to his Lord with regards to what will rectify his life. He *the Exalted* is Wise and He puts everything wisely in its exact place, so no one should look at the outward gifts of something now and be heedless of the harms that may ensue.

Thus, Allah is the Wise the Almighty. He does not receive commands from any of His creatures. He is not hastened by the impatience of the creatures. He is the Wise Who does not leave anything to no avail, as He is The Planner of every matter such that it matches what is correct. That is why contradictory matters cannot come from the One Wise Lord, but rather, contradiction is the result of someone differing with someone else, or lack of wisdom regarding a certain matter.

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى بَعَثَ فِى ٱلْأُمِّيِّـۧنَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ لَفِى ضَلَـٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢﴾

It is He who raised a messenger, among the people who had no Scripture, to recite His revelations to them, to make them grow spiritually and teach them the Scripture and wisdom – before that they were clearly astray [2]
(The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 2)

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to unlettered people. He came into an unlettered community that did not have any cultural refinement, and the Quran was sent down to address an unlettered community. It came on the tongue of the unlettered Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* among people who were ignorant about highly complex scientific matters, philosophies, cultures and civilisations.

Accordingly, Allah *the Exalted* did not send the Quran down to someone who was well versed in Hellenistic, Greek or Ancient Egyptian philosophy. Rather, He sent it down to an unlettered prophet who did not read or write, among an unlettered people. This has a profound wisdom for him because the meaning of *ummi* (unlettered) is that he did not acquire knowledge from human beings. Instead, he remained as on the time his mother gave birth to him, and his refinement and knowledge came from the heavens.

Concerning Allah's statement 'He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom. And verily, they had been before in manifest error. (*al-Jumu'a:* 2) Qatadah ibn Di`amah As-Sadusi(1) said: 'This Arab tribe was illiterate. There was no book that they would read, so Allah sent Muhammad among them as a mercy and a guide, to give them guidance through him.'

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(1) He was one of the *tabi`un* (followers). His surname was Abu Al-Khattab Al-Basri. He was a trustworthy scholar and was blind. He died in Wasit when he was fifty-six or fifty-seven years old, seven years after the death of Al-Hasan Al-Basri. He related Hadiths from Anas ibn Malik. He was the sheikh of Shu`bah, Abu `Awanah and others. He was a reliable authority in Hadith. *`Ajili, Ath-Thaqat*

If the True Lord *the Exalted* has described Himself as being: '…the *Malik* (the King, the Owner of everything), the Holy, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise' (*al-Jumu'a:* 1), and that everything in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him and declares Him transcendent, here He is giving us the foundations of these magnificent attributes and names. He is the Owner of everything in this world, everything in the heavens and the earth, everything in the Hereafter, such as the Judgment, paradise, the fire the scales. He is the Holy, the Transcendent, the Pure from all defects and imperfections. He is the Almighty and can never be overpowered or subdued. And He is the Wise; He places all matters in their proper place, and He does not use His Might tyrannically or oppressively.

Indeed, Allah *Glorified is He* manifests all these attributes to His creatures, so He warns them, admonishes them, gives them glad tidings and sends messengers to mankind with His Books to guide them to the path of the truth.

One of His Blessings is that 'He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2). He and no one else; for indeed there is no lord besides Him and no god other than Him Who sends prophets and messengers throughout the ages and epochs. Throughout these successive heavenly messages no one has claimed prophethood or messenger ship from another god besides Allah.

Even those who allege that they are messengers, when in fact they are not, say that they are messengers or prophets of Allah. Allah *the Exalted* is the One Who sends and commissions messengers because He is the Creator and no one else. He *the Most High* is the One responsible for His creation, namely all those whom He has created, by providing for them and sustaining their lives on earth, and also by sending messengers and prophets and Books that guide them to the values and manners in the life of this world, and Allah rewards them with paradise in the Hereafter – if they are truly believers.

We notice that the True Lord *the Exalted* uses the Arabic verb *ba`atha*, rather than the verb *arsala* in His saying: '…He it is Who sent (*ba`atha*) among the unlettered ones a Messenger…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2). The meaning of *arsala* is to send someone to people who could be from among them or not, and the same goes for *ba`atha ila* (send to). But in this context Allah says, '*ba`atha fihim* ('…sent among…'), and the meaning of (*ba`atha fihim*) includes bringing back to life. Here it signifies bringing back to life the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them* which had been among the Arabs since ancient times.It is known that this land did not contain any vegetation and was not inhabited by people, and Allah favoured this land by bringing Prophet Ismail (Ishmael), the son of Ibrahim (Abraham), there, totally alone and isolated along with his mother, Hajar. Ibrahim (Abraham) left her, by Allah's Command, in this desolate place, far from any source of water, which was why people had not populated it or lived there.

People did not live there until after the well of *zam-zam* had gushed out under the feet of Ismail (Ishmael), and Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) had raised the foundations of the Sacred House and purified it for those who would stay there for worship, and those who would bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer, as was Allah's Command for both.

The True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'and [mention] when We made the House a place of return for the people and [a place of] security. And take, [O believers], from the standing place of Ibrahim a place of prayer, And We charged Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael), [saying], "Purify My House for those who are circumambulating it and those who are staying [there] for worship and those who bow and prostrate [in prayer]."' (*al-Baqara:* 125)

Therefore, the beginning of residing in this place was based on Allah's Oneness and establishing His House and raising its foundations so that it would be prominent for mankind, and so that it would be secure such that people could reach it quickly, seek refuge in it and live around it.

The rites of the pilgrimage to Allah's House that had survived, such as the circumambulation and running between the mountains of As-Safa and Al-Marwa, were proof of the original religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) in this place; but over the lengthy passage of time the Arabs brought in the worship of idols at the hands of `Amr ibn Luhay (1), even to the extent that idols were placed inside Allah's House.

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(1) *His name was Khuza`ah `Amr ibn Luhay ibn Qam`ah ibn Khindif. Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said regarding him: 'I saw `Amr ibn Luhay dragging his intestines in the Fire.' He also said: 'Because he was the first man to change the religion of Ismail (Ishmael). He set up idols and started the custom of releasing animals for the sake of false deities.'*

Therefore, the sending of the Messenger of Allah is called a *ba`tha* because He revived the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon them* cleansed the House of idols and made it purely for Allah alone.

That is why Allah says, 'He it is Who sent among (*ba`atha*) the unlettered ones…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2). The unlettered people are those who do not know of any divine book. The True Lord *Glorified is He* called the Arabs who were contemporary to the Messenger of Allah unlettered, which signify they did not have any sources of knowledge.

This attribute of being unlettered, in the Messenger of Allah and his community, is a testimony of superiority because it is a community that has not taken its knowledge through reading about the civilizations of previous nations. Rather, they have taken it from Allah because the utmost that lettered people can achieve in their knowledge is to share knowledge with one another.

However, knowledge has come to the community of Muhammad *peace and blessings upon him* from Allah, and they ruled the life of this world for more than a thousand years. Thus, this illiteracy is an honour for them so that no one can say: 'They are people who made a civilizational leap from a civilized nation'. This illiteracy was remarkable because what has come out of this community such as its legislations has caused the other nations to stand before it in astonishment and appreciation, right up until this age of ours.

Allah *Glorified is He* sent among these unlettered people someone who was unlettered like them: 'He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2).

The True Lord *the Exalted* says about him: 'neither did you (O Muhammad) read any book before it (this Quran), nor did you write any book (whatsoever) with your right hand. In that case, indeed, the followers of falsehood might have doubted.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48) Thus, you did not recite or write any books before the Quran, and there is a difference between reciting and writing. You recite because you have memorised something, and memorising is the result of hearing. As for writing, this is something else.

If the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* had had some portion of reading and writing, then they would have had an excuse, and there would have been uncertainty calling for doubt in the matter. For this reason, his Lord *the Most High* described him as being: '…Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet…' (*al-A'raf:* 157).

Beware of thinking that being unlettered is some sort of shortcoming in the Messenger of Allah; for indeed, if it is a shortcoming in others, it is an honour in him. This is because the meaning of being unlettered is that one maintains his original disposition, as pure and natural as the day his mother gave birth to him, and has not learned anything from anyone.

Likewise, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not learn from the creation. Rather, he learned from the Creator, and thus his rank is above that of the rest of creation. This was the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* as he said: 'Our Lord, send among them a Messenger of their own, who shall recite to them Your verses and instruct them in the Book (this Quran) and wisdom, and sanctify them. Verily! You are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.' (*al-Baqara:* 129)

Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* supplicated to Allah *the Exalted* to complete His blessings upon his progeny and to increase His Mercy towards His slaves by sending a messenger to them who would convey to them the law of the heavens so that there would not be a period of darkness on earth in which sin, corruption and disbelief would prevail and people fall into worshipping idols, as was the case before Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

The meaning of 'Our Lord, send among them a Messenger of their own, who shall recite to them Your verses…' (*al-Baqara:* 129) is to convey to them the verses of the Noble Quran. Then he supplicated: '…and instruct them in the Book (this Quran) and wisdom…' (*al-Baqara:* 129). You must know that there is a difference between reciting and instructing or teaching. Reciting is for reading the Quran, while teaching is to know its meanings, how they are to be practically applied, and to know where they have come from.

If the Book is the Noble Quran, then the wisdom constitutes the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which the True Lord *the Exalted* referred to when addressing the wives of Prophet Muhammad: 'And remember what is recited in your houses of the verses of Allah and wisdom…' (*al-Ahzab:* 34). In another verse, the True Lord *the Most High* says: 'Just as We have sent among you a Messenger from yourselves reciting to you Our verses and purifying you and teaching you the Book and wisdom and teaching you that which you did not know.' (*al-Baqara:* 151)

The function of reciting Allah's verses is to grow in purity that is purification, as Allah's verses cleanse the souls and the hearts from the defilement that may cling to them. So, they purify them from the worship of idols and from burying baby girls alive, and from intoxicants, games of chance, gambling, and usury. The meaning of purification also means to clear away harm, so it is as though he has brought benefit to them and removed harm from them.

When he purifies them, and causes them to grow in purity, He is only leading them to the path of goodness and the perfection of belief. This is by teaching them the Book and wisdom. The Book, in absolute terms, refers to the Noble Quran, and wisdom is to put things in their proper place. The Book gives you the commandments; it commands you to do something or it forbids you from something, so it goes between doing and forbearing.

Wisdom means to do the action that will bring about goodness for you and protect you from evil, and it is taken from the word *hakama*, or the piece of iron that is placed in a horse's mouth in order to control its movement while moving and standing still, and thus every movement carries out its purpose.

Allah's statement '…and teaching you the Book and wisdom and teaching you that which you did not know' (*al-Baqara:* 151) refers to you being an unlettered community. So, if the life of this world dazzles you with its civilizations and its achievements, you will dazzle them with the rays of faith that will make you superior to them because everything that comes to you from the heavens is superior to all the civilizations of the earth.

When we look at the objectives behind sending Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we find that they are mentioned in the noble verse: 'He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2). Thus, the first of these objectives is the recitation of Allah's verses. He *the Exalted and the Glorious* says: '…reciting to them His verses…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2). The act of reciting is not restricted to just the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*. Rather, it is also stated relative to Allah *the Exalted*.

Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘These are the verses of Allah, We recite them to you (O Muhammad) in truth, and surely, you are one of the messengers (of Allah).’ (*al-Baqara:* 252) He also says, ‘These are the verses of Allah. We recite them to you, (O Muhammad), in truth; and Allah wants no injustice to the worlds.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 108) And He says, ‘These are the verses of Allah, which We recite to you (O Muhammad) with truth. Then in which speech after Allah and His verses will they believe?’ (*al-Jathiya:* 6) Allah’s recitation of His verses to His Messenger Muhammad confirms him as one of the honourable messengers who have been sent to mankind with Allah’s verses and Words. It indicates the extent of Allah’s Concern for humanity to be guided to the path of the Truth, for Allah wills no injustice to His creatures.

He *the Most High* conveys His Messages and His Words to them by way of His messengers so that there can be no excuse for them on the Day of Resurrection that Allah’s Words have not reached them. No indeed, because He recites them to His Messengers so that they can convey them to mankind in truth, as He conveyed them to them. ‘…Then in which speech after Allah and His verses will they believe?’ (*al-Jathiya:* 6)

The True Lord, due to His Absolute Justice and Mercy towards His servants, send His messengers to them with Books and Scriptures, and He does not punish anyone unless His warnings and glad tidings have reached him. He *the Glorious and Exalted* says: ‘And never will your Lord destroy the towns (populations) until He sends to their mother town a Messenger reciting to them Our verses. And never would We destroy the towns unless the people thereof are wrongdoers.’ (*al-Qasas:* 59)

The meaning of ‘…mother town (*fi ummiha*)…’ (*al-Qasas:* 59) is the Mother of Towns, namely Mecca the Ennobled. This is how Mecca the Ennobled is like a mother and an origin of all towns. Mecca the Ennobled is called *Umm Al-Qurah* because all the towns visit it. The word *qaryah* (town) can only apply to a place that contains all the essentials of life that are adequate enough to accommodate the guests who happen to visit it. If the town is large and abundant provision comes to it from all directions, as if it were a source, we call it *Umm Al-Qura*.

The True Lord *the Exalted* does not punish anyone until after sending a messenger to them who conveys His commandments to them; what to do and what not to do. The True Lord says: '…And We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (to give warning).' (*al-Isra':* 15)

Allah *the Glorious and Exalted* only commands His Messenger Muhammad to recite the Quran, saying: 'And recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord…' (*al-Kahf:* 27). He also says in another verse: 'Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). So, recite the Quran, O Muhammad, and persist in reciting it, even if people deny it. And perhaps Allah will bring forth from these people a progeny whose hearts will be purified in order to receive what the heavens have sent and thus believe in what these people have rejected, and the command to recite is for the continuation of the miracle.

So, read and do not become weak and do not despair, as the Quran is solace for your soul. And since your people have denied you, return to Me by listening to My Book, which I have sent down to you as a miracle to support you, and wait for the coming of people who will hear Allah's Speech from you. It shall come across pure hearts from among them and thus they shall believe in it.

This is the distinguishing factor of your miracle, O Muhammad; that you can repeat it at any time and you can recite it as you wish, and whoever has heard it can recite it after you and it continues to be repeated until the Day of Resurrection.

The issue is not that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recites the Quranic verses merely so that people can be amazed by them. No, because The Messenger has a mission of faith that directs anyone who hears the Quran towards the One Who has created this beautiful, splendid universe that contains wondrous signs.

After that, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us the way that is suited to the beauty of the universe. So, the Messenger moves the believers towards the way that causes mankind to grow in purity.

Regarding the True Lord's statement: '…purifying them…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2), you know that the expression *yuzakkihim* (causing them to grow in purity) derives from *zakat*, and the first meanings of *zakat* are purification, cleansing and growth, and, similarly, the verses that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has brought have only come to cause them to grow in purity.

Is this purification for the benefit of the one purifying or the one being purified? Indeed, it is for the benefit of the one being purified. Cleansing and growth are for your benefit. Thus, cleansing is for our benefit, purification is for our benefit, and growth is for our benefit.

Causing to grow in purity (*tazkiyah*) is purification, cleansing, and growth. It causes the human himself, in his own self, to grow in purity. Instead of lying, his tongue is purified of lying. Instead of extending his gaze towards the impermissible, his gaze is purified from looking at the impermissible. Instead of secretly extending his hand and stealing, he does not do it.

The True Lord *the Most High* wants the purity of individual humans as well as their progeny, and to make a noble and virtuous vessel for that purity that is not tarnished by flaws and blemishes, so the heavenly law came to cause them to grow in purity in everything. The movements of their sense and bodily organs are purified so that every movement is directed towards fulfilling that which is sought from it by the One Who created it.

The Creator has made it clear: ‘O eye, your boundaries are such and such. O tongue, your boundaries are such and such. O hand, your boundaries are such and such. O leg, your boundaries are such and such. O heart, your boundaries are such and such’. This is how we see that the divine law has come to cause you to grow in purity; that is, it purifies you, cleanses you, and makes you grow in all aspects of life.

Causing to grow in purity must be associated with teaching the Book and the wisdom, so here are three matters: reciting the Quran, causing to grow in purity, and then teaching the Book, that is, teaching them what the Book contains and instructing them and warning them.

The Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* does not just teach them the book, but he also teaches them the wisdom, and it is the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Exalted* says, ‘And remember what is recited in your houses of the verses of Allah and wisdom…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 34).

Allah's verses are the verses of the Noble Quran, and the wisdom is the Hadith and *Sunnah* of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Wisdom requires that you know which path to be guided to and to travel along, and the True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and he, to whom wisdom is granted, is indeed granted abundant good…' (*al-Baqara:* 269).

Wisdom means to put things in their proper, beneficial place, so it is as if the True Lord *the Exalted* is saying: 'Everything that I have commanded you to is the essence of wisdom because I want to safeguard your life in this world and safeguard the bliss of the Hereafter for you'. Thus, if the believing slave does what Allah has commanded him, this is putting things in their proper place, and it is adhering to wisdom.

These unlettered people, to whom Allah sent a Messenger from among them to recite His verses, and whom Allah causes to grow in purity and He teaches them the Book and the wisdom, they: '…had been before in manifest error (*dalal*).' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2)

What is *dalal* (deviation, error)? They say that so-and-so lost his way which means that he walked somewhere that did not lead him to his destination, or it led him to the opposite of his destination. So, being lost in the life of this world and in material matters may mean that you do not reach your desired destination, but what does it mean when related to values and moral issues?

It means that it does not take you to your desired destination, which is paradise and nothing else, but it takes you to the opposite, which is the fire. This is what it means to be most obviously lost in error. It is clear, manifest error, and it is obviously wrong to the one who is lost in it.

Thus, being manifestly lost in error is to be completely absent from the truth, and it is obvious; that is, encompassing in such a manner that there is no way to break out of it. It is also intentional error and misguidance which is when someone knows the path of truth but chooses falsehood. And there is also unintentional error such as when someone walks along an unknown path, hoping to get to his destination, and he gets lost.

Ja`far ibn Abu Taleb(1) *Allah be pleased with him* described the stance of the Arabs before the mission of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and that was in his speech in front of the Negus, the King of Abyssinia, at the time of the emigration to Abyssinia.

He said: ‘O king, we were a people in a state of ignorance, worshipping idols and eating the flesh of dead animals. We committed all sorts of abominations. We cut off ties of kinship, and we wronged our neighbours. The strong among us exploited the weak. We remained in this state until Allah sent to us a messenger; one of our own people whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness and integrity was well known to us. He called us to worship Allah *the Almighty* alone, and to renounce the stones and the idols which we and our ancestors would worship besides Him. He has commanded us to pray, to give in obligatory charity (*zakat*) and to fast. We have affirmed him, believed in him and followed him according to what he has brought from Allah alone, associating nothing with Him. We declare impermissible what He has declared impermissible for us, and we declare permissible what he has declared permissible for us.’(2)

This is a description of the state of misguidance which the Arabs were in before the sending of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* and how his mission affected them morally, in terms of growing in purity and purification.

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(1) *Ja`far ibn Abu Taleb ibn `Abd Al-Muttalib ibn Hashim, one of the Companions. He was called Ja`far At-Tayyar (the Flyer). He was the brother of `Ali ibn Abu Taleb and he was ten years older than `Ali. He became Muslim before the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him entered Dar Al-Arqam. He emigrated to Abyssinia in the second emigration. In the Battle of Mu`tah he carried the banner and his right hand was cut off, followed by his left, until he died as a martyr. It was said: ‘Indeed Allah compensated him for his hands by giving him wings in Paradise.’ He died in the year 8 A.H. Az-Zirkili, Al-`Alam, vol. 2, p. 125*

(2) *Narrated by Ibn Athir in his book Al-Kamil (1/266) in the chapter on the Quraysh sending a delegation to the Negus to demand the deportation of emigrants (back to Mecca) in which Quraysh sent `Amr ibn Al-`As and `Abdullah ibn Abu Umayyah to ask the Negus to return the Muslims who had emigrated to Abyssinia. One of the things they said (against the Muslims) was that the Muslims had brought a newly invented religion that ‘we do not know, and you do not know.’ The Negus then asked them: ‘What is this religion that has caused separation among your people, and you have not adopted my religion or the religion of anyone else?’*

Then the True Lord *Glorified is He* says:

وَءَاخَرِينَ مِنْهُمْ لَمَّا يَلْحَقُوا۟ بِهِمْ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣﴾

To them and others yet to join them. He is the Almighty, the Wise [3] (The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 3)

Although the True Lord *Glorified is He* has said in the previous verse: 'He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves, reciting to them His verses…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2) regarding the people of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the state of the Arabs, yet the message of Muhammad is not just for the Arabs, but rather for all of creation.

The message of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was for both the Arabs and the non-Arabs, the people of the Book and other than the people of the Book. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And [to] others of them who have not yet joined them. And He (Allah) is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 3)

Regarding this point, there is the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* which has been related to us by Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* in which he said: 'We were sitting with the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* when the chapter of *al-Jumu'a* was revealed to him, and when he recited: "And [to] others of them who have not yet joined them…" (*al-Jumu'a:* 3), a man said: "Who are these other people, O Messenger of Allah?"' Abu Hurayra said: 'The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* made no reply until the man repeated his question once or twice or three times. At that time, Salman Al-Farisi was with us, so the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* put his hand on Salman and said, 'If faith were at the Pleiades (star cluster), men from among these people (Salman's folk) would attain it.'(1)

The Pleiades is a star cluster that people used to guide them on their travels in the deserts and barren lands such that an Arab would say: 'Place the

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4897) and Muslim in his Sahih (6662) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. It was also narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad (9396).*

Pleiades on your right', or the Pole Star, or Canopus, or whatever else.' In this regard, the True Lord *the Exalted* says, 'and landmarks and by the stars (during the night), they (mankind) guide themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 16)

So, if faith was at the Pleiades, or suspended on the Pleiades, it would be reached and attained by men from among these people, i.e. the descendants of the Persians or the non-Arabs in general, and this is because of their lofty ambition and determination to adhere to the truth.

Salman Al-Farisi(1) had an immense role in giving victory to Islam in the Battle of the Trench, and while the Hadith does not mean Salman personally, the meaning of 'men from among these people' is the descendants coming after Salman and others like him *Allah be pleased with them all*.

The True Lord *the Exalted* did not deprive the non-Arabs from this merit. Indeed, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Salman the Persian: 'Salman is from us, O Household (of the Prophet).'(2) He did not say: 'You are one of the Arabs.' Rather, he attributed him to his own household.

In other words, he attributed him to the legacy of prophethood which entails complete application of the way that this legacy necessitates; as this legacy is not inherited by blood relations but rather by applying the doctrine in letter and spirit.

Many of them strove in search of the Truth, and they included Salman the Persian, who saw Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in Medina. He saw many signs on him that showed his truth and he wanted to see a physical sign on him that would identify him as the Prophet of the end of time, and thus he saw the Seal of prophethood on the shoulder of the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him*.

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(1) *Salman Al-Farasi: His origin was from the Magians of Isfahan. He lived a long life and he read the books of the Persians, the Romans and the Jews. He was heading for the land of the Arabs when he was met by a caravan from the Banu Kalb tribe. They employed him and then enslaved him and sold him. Muslims helped him to buy his freedom from his owner, and then he became Muslim. He was the one who suggested digging the trench. He died in the year 36 A.H. Az-Zirkili, Al-`Alam, vol. 3, p. 311*

(2) *Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (6541) and At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (6040).*

Al-Haythami said in Majma` Az-Zawa`id (vol. 6, p. 189) (10137): 'At-Tabarani rnarrated it. Its chain of narration includes Kathir ibn `Abdullah Al-Muzani who has been declared weak by the majority (of Hadith scholars). However, At-Tirmidhi classed the Hadith transmitted by him as good (hasan); the rest of the narrators in the chain are reliable.'

Therefore, when Salman the Persian *Allah be pleased with him* learned that there was a new Prophet in Mecca, he went to, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and started contemplating and scrutinizing him. He found two signs on him that had been mentioned in the previous heavenly books, and they were that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would accept gifts but not accept charity.

Salman then started looking here and there in the hope of finding a third sign. By the perspicacity of prophethood that Allah had placed within him, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* discerned what he was aiming at, and he said: 'Perhaps you are looking for this,' and he showed him the Seal of prophethood, which was the third sign.(1)

Those whom Allah referred to as 'And [to] others of them who have not yet joined them…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 3), also include Suhayb Ar-Rumi(2) *Allah be pleased with him* nicknamed Abu Yahya. He was in Mecca and he had come of age and wanted to emigrate, so the disbelievers said to him: 'You came to Mecca as a pauper and we took you in. Now you are a possessor of great wealth, and you want to emigrate with all your wealth!' He responded to them: 'What would you say if I leave you my wealth, would you then leave me alone?' They said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Will you ensure that I have a riding beast and expenses so that I can go to Medina?' They said: 'You can have that.'(3)

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(1) *Narrated by Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (6544), which is part of a long Hadith from Salman Al-Farisi.*

(2) *Suhayb Ar-Rumi: His name was Suhayb ibn Sinan ibn Malik, from Banu Namir ibn Qasit. He was born twenty-three years before the Hijra. He was a Companion and one of the best archers among the Arabs. He was one of the first to embrace Islam. Suhayb was born in Mosul, and then the Romans invaded their area and took Suhayb prisoner. Thus, he grew up among them and spoke inarticulately. He became Muslim, lived in Mecca, and engaged in trade. He died in Medina in the year 38 A.H. Az-Zirikli, Al-`Alam, vol. 3, p. 310*

(3) *Narrated by Adh-Dhahabi in Siyar A`lam An-Nubala' (vol. 2, p. 23), Ibn Al-Jawzi in Safat As-Safwa (vol. 1, p. 170) and Ibn Sa`d in At-Tabaqat (vol. 3, p. 193).*

And thus, by doing so, he purchased his own self and used his wealth to safeguard his faith. When he had arrived in Medina, he was met by Abu Bakr and `Umar and they said to him: ‘A profitable sale, O Abu Yahya.’ He said: ‘And may Allah make all your trade profitable.’ Abu Bakr and `Umar *Allah be pleased with them* said to him: ‘Indeed, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* had informed him of your story.’(1)

It was related that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him: ‘A profitable sale, O Abu Yahya.’

Accordingly, the call of Islam is universal and not specific to the Arabs, and for this reason Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wrote letters to Persia and Byzantium and other nations, calling them to Allah *the Exalted* and to follow the message he was sent with.(2)

Islam is a worldwide call for every time and every place. The Islamic call continued to spread among certain tribes and clans until the capital of disbelief surrendered, and Mecca became Allah’s Sacred House as Allah had willed. Then the entire Arabian Peninsula submitted to Allah’s Way and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent letters to the kings and emperors, and they all contained the statement: ‘Become Muslim, and you will be safe.’(3)

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(1) *Narrated by As-Sa`di in his Tafsir (vol. 1, p. 182) based on the statement of Ibn `Abbas and Anas that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab met him close to the outskirts of Medina, Al-Harra’, and they said to him: ‘The sale has been successful’, so he said: ‘And you too. May Allah never allow your trade to fail. What do you mean?’ Thus, they informed him that Allah has sent down this verse regarding him: ‘And of mankind is he who would sell himself, seeking the Pleasure of Allah…’ (al-Baqara: 207).*

(2) *The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him sent these letters to the kings early in the year 4 A.H., along with a delegate, to call them to Allah, and he used a silver seal upon which was engraved ‘Muhammad, The Messenger of Allah’ to mark his letters.*

(3) *The text of letters sent by Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was: ‘In the Name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. From Muhammad, the slave and Messenger of Allah, to Heraclius, the ruler of Byzantium, peace be upon those who follow guidance. To proceed; I am inviting you with the call of Islam. Become Muslim and you will be safe. Become Muslim and Allah will grant you a two-fold reward. But if you turn away, you will bear the sin of (misguiding) your subjects.=*

These letters prove that the invitation of Islam was extended to all of mankind. This is in fulfilment to Allah's Words to His Messenger, that he is 'a Messenger for all of mankind'.

Allah *the Exalted* says, 'And We have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind...' (*Saba':* 28). Hence, in compliance thereto, the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* sent letters to the contemporary rulers of the time, bearing invitations to enter Islam. Then Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* handed down this task to those who would come after him. He *peace and blessings be upon him* invited the Arabian Peninsula to come under the banner of 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' after they had been numerous tribes.

This is how the diverse tribes became one community, after Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had gathered them together as one doctrinal unit under the banner and flag of Islam. Regarding this unlettered nation, the True Lord says, 'He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 2).

After his departure to the Most High, the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* spread forth with the final message throughout the entire world. Within half a century, Islam came to have two wings: a wing in the east and a wing in the west.

Islam defeated the two greatest empires of the time, and they were the Persian Empire and its civilization, and the Byzantium Empire. These lands adopted Islam as a way of life.

This happened after Islam had waged war against the two empires at the same time, and the people entered Islam to ascertain his miracle, which they had experienced in the character of those who had heard the Quran and

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= *'O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. Then, if they turn away, say: "Bear witness that we are Muslims." (Al-'Imran: 64).' Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih (4707) and Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (4553)* carried its Message. Then they discovered the justice of the Quran in administering life’s activities.

This is how they discovered that the miracle of Islam is mental and that His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Final Messenger who has not come to them with a material miracle. If the Quran was a linguistic miracle for the people whom it was sent down to, for those who do not know the language of the Quran, its Glory lies in the justice and values that originate from it.

People rushed towards Islam through the force of encouragement on behalf of the believers in it and the force of attraction that non-believers felt when they saw that there was no difference between a leader and the least of men under its banner, and when they experienced its justice and equality between human beings.

Islam has not only been a miracle for its own people but also for the entire world, and the True Lord’s statement is always ascertained: ‘We (Allah) will show them Our Signs in the universe, and in their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this (the Quran) is the truth.’ (*Fussilat:* 53)

We find a great thinker from the contemporary west declaring his Islam, even though he has never read the Quran. Rather, he only looked at the principles that Islam has established and how they contain solutions for that which successive civilizations and legal scholars have been incapable of in every country on earth.

In the field of science, the Germans studied the process of sensory perception and how the human feels pain. Why is it that when someone touches something soft, he is pleased, but feels the opposite when he touches something rough?

The Germans continued studying this for years in order to know the location of sensation in the human body; is it in the brain or somewhere else? This continued until they concluded that for every person, sensation is anchored in the skin, and that it is spread out in cells directly under the skin. The proof is that when we inject a needle into someone, they only feel pain at the point of entry, and no more. This caught the attention of one of the scientists, and he said: 'The Quran spoke about this issue when it said: 'Surely! Those who disbelieved in Our *ayat* (verses, signs, revelations) We shall burn them in Fire. As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for other skins that they may taste the punishment.' (*an-Nisa':* 56)

Another contemporary example can be found in criminology. A young Muslim from Sohag travelled to Germany to do his doctorate in law, and he found them looking at the issue of 'abuse of rights.'(1), and they considered it one of the most important legal achievements of the twentieth century. This young man explained that Islam had preceded them in dealing with this matter, and had laid down an appropriate ruling regarding it fourteen centuries ago. He related to them how a man had come to the Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'So-and-so has date palms in the courtyard of my house, and he enters my house every hour under the pretence of taking care of these date palms, sometimes on the pretext of pollinating them, other times on the pretext of gathering their fruits, and still other times on the pretext of making sure of them such that they have become his foremost concern.

The man complained to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he and his household were harmed by this man's intrusion into their private life, so he *peace and blessings be upon him* summoned the owner of the date palms and said to him: 'You have three choices: either you give him the date palms – and that would be the peak of generosity – or you sell them to him, or we cut them down.'(2)

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(1) *In Islamic Law, it means: 'Using a right to achieve a benefit that is not intended by the Islamic Law, or to inflict harm on others by abusing the legislative objective and intent of the Lawgiver behind the enactment of such a right.' This is a pure, Islamic principle that is stated in the Quran and the Sunnah, and numerous juristic principles have stemmed from it in order to prevent the abuse of rights, including the intent of harm, such as when a husband takes back his wife with the intention of harming her, and not out of desire for her. The same goes for someone who uses his right of hibah (gift), but not out of desire to do so, but rather to harm his inheritors and creditors. It also applies to someone who intends an unlawful purpose such as someone who marries a woman – and this is his right – but with the intention of divorcing her so that her first husband, who had divorced her irrevocably, can remarry her. Al-Fiqh Al-Islami Wa Adilatuhu – Dr. Wahba Az-Zuhayli*

(2) *Samurah ibn Jundub narrated that he had a row of palm-trees in the garden of an Ansari man. The man had his family with him. Samurah used to visit his palm trees,*=

This is how the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* laid down the principles of dealing with what is called ‘abuse of rights.’ That is why the Quran is a miracle the impact of which influences the faith of non-Arabs and leads to their embracing Islam due to the beneficial effects of its implementation not because they are Arabs or have read the Quran. Therefore, the True Lord *the Most High* says, ‘And [to] others of them who have not yet joined them…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 3).

The scholars have said that the people being referred to are the non-Arabs, while others have said that it means anyone who entered Islam after the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* whoever they may be, until the Day of Resurrection. Even At-Tabari(1) said: ‘The more correct of the two statements, in my opinion, is the one saying that this means everyone who joins the Muslim Companions of the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* from any race, without specifying any specific type. Thus, everyone who joins them will be counted among the later and succeeding generations, and not the early Muslim generation to whom the Messenger of Allah recited Allah’s verses.’(2)

This verse is one of the miracles of the Quran because it informs us that Islam will spread and its expansion will not stop at the borders of the Arabs. Rather, it will comprise everyone, and the terrain of Islam will expand east

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= *and the man was harmed and distressed by that. So, he asked him (Samurah) to sell them to him, but he refused. He then asked him to take something else in exchange, but he refused. So, he came to the Prophet peace and blessings be upon him and mentioned it to him. The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him asked him to sell them to him, but he refused. He asked him to take something else in exchange, but he refused. He then said, ‘Give them to him and you can have such and such,’ mentioning something with which he tried to please him, but he still refused. He then said, ‘You are a nuisance.’ The Messenger of Allah peace and blessing be upon him then said to the Ansari man, ‘Go and uproot his palm-trees.’ Narrated by Abu Dawud in his Sunnan (3638)*

(1) *At-Tabari: His name was Muhammad ibn Jarir ibn Yazid At-Tabari, surnamed Abu Ja`far, a historian, mufassir (Quranic commentator) and imam. He was born in Amol, Tabaristan, in the year 224 A.H., settled in Baghdad, and died in the 310 A.H., at the age of 86. He refused to be a judge and resolve grievances. He wrote Akhbar Ar-Rusul Al-Wal-Muluk and Jami` Al-Bayan fi Tafsir Al-Quran. He is a reliable historian. He had a brown complexion, large eyes, and a slim build, and he was eloquent. Az-Zirikli, Al-`Alam, vol. 6, p. 96*

(2) *Stated by At-Tabari in his commentary on the chapter of al-Jumu`a (62:3) [vol. 22, p. 631], Cairo: Dar Hajr Press*

and west. Therefore, Allah's statement: 'And [to] others of them who have not yet joined them…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 3) means the believers who have not come yet, but they will come.

This is similar to Allah's saying: 'Rather, they have denied that which they encompass not in knowledge and whose interpretation has not yet come to them…' (*Yunus:* 39). That is, they did not comprehend the aims of the Quran and as soon as they heard of his Message, they suddenly accused him of lying. We seek refuge in Allah. These are the people who denied the message before its meanings and interpretations had come clear to them. Likewise, 'and [to] others of them' (*al-Jumu'a:* 3), that is, from those who become believers and Muslims 'who have not yet joined them…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 3); that is, they have not yet come, but they will come.

One of the tools of negation in Arabic is the particle *lam* such as us saying 'so-and-so has not (*lam*) come.' We also say: 'So and so has not (*lamma*) come'. The negation in the first example is definitive and not connected to the present tense, as if this person did not come yesterday. However, using the particle *lamma* for negation means that the act of joining is negated until the time of speaking but would happen after that because that particle indicates both negation and the expectation of occurrence. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Bedouin: 'the dwellers of the desert say: "We believe." Say, "You do not believe but say, we submit; and faith has not yet entered into your hearts."' (*al-Hujurat:* 14) They have not attained to faith at the time of speaking, but when they heard Allah's saying on them, they praised Him *the Almighty* because the verse denotes that faith will enter their hearts.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Do you think that you will enter the garden while Allah has not yet known those who strive hard from among you, and [He has not] known the patient.' (*Al-'Imran:* 142) When the believers heard that verse, they said that they were confident that Allah would know of them their striving and patience, thus, we know that *lamma* denotes that the thing that is negated is expected to occur.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying that He is the Almighty, the All-Wise. These two Attributes are appropriate to be mentioned here because Might is about dominance and the verse is telling us about Islam being victorious and prevailed over all other religions as well as the expansion of its terrain and dominance. This all fits saying that Allah is Almighty Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Most surely, We help Our Messengers, and those who believe, in this world’s life and on the day when the witnesses shall stand.’ (*Ghafir:* 51) He, despite His Might, Dominance, Power, and giving victory to those who believe in Him, is also the All-Wise. Wisdom means to put something in its proper place so that it can carry out its function, so He makes everything in accordance with wisdom.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ فَضۡلُ ٱللَّهِ يُؤۡتِيهِ مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلۡفَضۡلِ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ٤

Such is God’s favour that He grants it to whoever He will;
God’s favour is immense [4] (The Quran, *al-Jumu‘a:* 4)

The Arabic word for ‘such’ is comprised of a demonstrative pronoun; the letter *lam* that indicates distance and a *kaf* for addressing someone. The demonstrative pronoun here refers to what has been mentioned in the previous verse concerning sending unto the unlettered people an apostle from among themselves. It refers to the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a favour that Allah has generously bestowed upon Muhammad himself, and then upon his *ummah*.

A favour is something extra than your necessary needs as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: ‘He who has a spare riding beast should give it to him who has no riding beast; and he who has surplus equipment should give it to who has no equipment. We thought that none of us had a right in surplus property.’(1) Favour is what is extra to man’s needs. However, the favour of Allah is everything in the universe now and in the Hereafter, as He *the Almighty* needs nothing at all from His creation. Allah has no need for His creation or any blessing that has come or is yet to come.

The favour referred to here is the prophethood of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the disbelievers objected that the Quran being sent down to Muhammad and thus said: 'And they say: "Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) That is why Allah *Glorified is He* responded to them saying: 'Will they distribute the Mercy of your Lord? We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We have exalted some of them above others in degrees, that some of them may take others in subjection; and the mercy of your Lord is better than what they amass.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32)

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(1) *Narrated by Abu Dawud, Ibn Hibban and Abu Ya`la*

Although, the disbelievers acknowledged the greatness of the Quran, they tried to find faults with it, but they did not find any, even though they were masters of eloquence and rhetoric. Therefore, the matter that was stuck in their throats was that the Quran being sent down to Messenger Muhammad. Thus, it was a matter of envy. That is why Allah says, 'Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His Grace?' (*an-Nisa':* 54)

The word 'people' in the previous verse refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In Arabic, this word can refer to one person who possesses numerous characteristics and thereby Allah *Glorified is He* describes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with it to inform that he is better than all mankind. Another example of this matter is the man who went to the believers to inform them that the idol-worshippers were preparing to fight them. Allah revealed concerning him saying: 'Those to whom the people said: "Surely men have gathered against you, therefore fear them."' (*Al-'Imran:* 173) Despite he was one man; Allah described him with the word 'people', as if by alerting the Muslims he was gathering all the attributes of goodness that people possess.

They envy Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because Allah *Glorified is He* chose and selected him for the Message. They envy him because the Quran was sent down to him. Envy only arises from a malevolent heart that rebels against the distribution of Allah's Favours amongst His slaves. To envy someone is to wish that he loses the blessing bestowed upon him. This means that you hate seeing someone else having a blessing. One does not do that except that he is rebelling against the One Who gives all blessings.

Indeed, they envied Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for taking this favour and blessing. Even the Jews and the people of the Book envied him for being a prophet and forgot that Allah had given prophethood to Ibrahim (Abraham), Dawud (David), Sulaiman (Solomon) and Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon them* before him. Therefore, why do they feel jealous when Allah wants to honour Ibrahim's (Abraham's) second branch, that is, that of Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him*?

Allah had already honoured the first branch through Ishaq (Isaac) *peace be upon him* from whom came Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* from whom came Yusuf (Joseph) and the rest of the prophets and messengers of the children of Israel including Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon them*. All of them were honoured. However, when Allah honours Ibrahim's (Abraham's) second branch, which is the progeny of Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* and sends a messenger from amongst them, they are upset and adopt a position of hatred. They forgot that it is not for anyone to choose the Messenger because he is only selected by Allah.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not make it up to the hands of the idol-worshippers or anyone else to distribute and plan affairs. Rather, He is the One Who distributes His Gifts amongst humanity so that every individual relies on others for things that he himself is incapable of and others rely on him for things that they are incapable of.

The issue of prophethood is one of Divine Selection and it is greater and exalted above all stations in the life of this world. Allah *Glorified is He* expressed this in His statement: 'and the Mercy of your Lord.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) Mercy is a Divine Gift.

If Allah has distributed their provision in the least of matters, which is their livelihood, how can they want to administer freely when it comes to the greatest of matters? They must have tact with Allah because He did not require them to choose to whom His Mercy and Message should be sent down. Rather, He is the One Who chooses, as the Message is a Mercy from Him with which He favours whomever He wills from His slaves.

Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah best knows where He places His Message.' (*al- An'am:* 124) The Message only comes in order to spread goodness for everybody. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to spread his goodness among others and he himself does not obtain any reward from people for conveying it. Before his death, he commanded his family not to receive *zakat* and what he left was charity for people. This means that he did not benefit from it in the life of this world as he is only trustworthy with the Message. In addition, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want to take any of the delights of the life of this world so that his family could inherit it after him, and this also shows how Allah wanted his goodness to be for all of mankind.

The Message is a responsibility and the reward for prophethood is not in this worldly life. Rather, the greatest reward is in the Hereafter. Thus, no one should ask why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specifically was sent. Indeed, this is the planning of Allah Who says, 'Is it a wonder to the people that We revealed to a man from among themselves?' (*Yunus:* 2) How can they deem it strange that We brought a Messenger to them from among themselves? It is not a strange matter because it is actually logical and natural. That is why Allah gives His Favour to whomever He wills, as He says, 'Surely grace is in the Hand of Allah, He gives it to whom He pleases; and Allah is Ample-Giving, All Knowing.' (*Al-'Imran:* 73)

As long as grace is in Allah's Hands, then you, who are plotting against Muslims, will never be able to mislead people away from their religion, Messenger and Quran. When Allah gives His Favour to those who believe, then no one will take it from them except He *Glorified is He*. Thus, when He *Glorified is He* says, 'Say, "Are you better knowing or Allah?"' (*al-Baqara:* 140), there is only one response because they will never be able to say that they know more than Allah. Allah undoubtedly knows more, which is an undeniable fact.

The one whom Allah selected to carry His Message to mankind is only being selected for a mission that is difficult. He selects him so that his selection can spread amongst people. It is as if Allah specifically selected him for the sake of mankind and their benefit, whether this selection is for a place or a person or a time so that his selection would spread among those who were selected over.

Selection being made by Allah *Glorified is He* frees the person selected from anything that could possibly happen from his counterpart. Allah *Glorified is He* wants him to be a model from which only goodness comes. The perfect example of this is Allah choosing His Messenger Muhammad from the beginning and making him only have good conduct from the beginning. This was up until He gave us The Messenger, the exemplar of faith, over twenty-three years, which was the period of the Message of Muhammad. Allah *Glorified is He* knows best about whom He chooses. The will to select and choose is only consummated according to the specifications of Allah as He says, ‘Allah best knows where He places His message.’ (*al-An‘am:* 124)

In addition, the favour of Allah of sending Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has affected all the creation including the Arabs and the non-Arabs, as he, is a mercy to all of creation. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 107). He *Glorified is He* showed them mercy through Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and gave them the favour of being the addressees with this final Message. The Mercy of Allah is not confined to the Arabs only. Rather, it is a general mercy for all of creation which is a great rank.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Indeed Allah has sent me as a mercy to all of creation.’(1) He, was sent to be happy and to make those with him happy; his people and all of mankind should not to be wretched. The peak of the Mercy of Allah and His Favour upon the creation is clear in the fact that He sent Muhammad as the Final Messenger. He will not be emended by another messenger after him. That is why his final Message comprises all matters of life, those which are contemporary to you and those which will fit those after you, until the Day of Resurrection.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse saying that His Favour is great. This means that He is the Most Generous. Someone may have some favour but retains it because he will need it in the future. True favour is that which is with Allah. That is why Allah is the Possessor of immense favour because He does not need anything from His creation or His universe. This is because He *the Almighty* existed before all creatures came into existence and will exist after the end of life.

When favour is described as being immense, it means that there is favour that is less than immense, just as there is a favour that is greater than it in distinction. We know that disparity exists amongst humanity. This person has been favoured in terms of food, clothes, drink, or place of residence. This means that there are numerous kinds of favours, but they are not described as immense because immense favour is only from Allah since every favour from other than Him will be attributed to Him *Glorified is He*.

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(1) *Narrated by At-Tabarani, Ahmad and At-Tayalasi*

Allah is the source of all favours. This is the most sublime favour. We also find that the one who has favour over someone else inevitably seeks to attain something beyond this favour such as perfection of one's essence, being praised, or seeking comfort for his soul. The one who has been favoured only wants something which is either abundance of wealth, or praise, or laudation or comfort for his soul from the painful sights that he sees. This is a proof that one suffers from some kind of deficiency which is why he wants to perfect it. If Allah is the possessor of favour, does He have any deficiency in perfection?! No, He does not.

Therefore, this is the immense favour which He grants to His slaves as a favour from Him, without desire for perfection or praise. Also, every favour from other than Allah contains showing off, but Allah's Favour is not like that, nor does it contain humiliation for anyone because life itself, all of it, is a gift from Him.

If you were to trace every aspect of your existence in life, every aspect of your remaining alive and every aspect of your blessings, you would eventually arrive at Allah. If you were to interlink everything in your life, so you would find that Allah is the source of all favours and bounties. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…so were it not for the Grace of Allah and His Mercy on you, you would certainly have been among the losers.' (*al-Baqara:* 64)

Among the favours of Allah bestowed to the *ummah* of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His statement 'It is made lawful to you to go into your wives on the night of the fast; they are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them; Allah knew that you acted unfaithfully to yourselves, so He has turned to you [mercifully] and removed from you [this burden]; so now be in contact with them and seek what Allah has ordained for you.' (*al-Baqara:* 187)

This is because Allah knows that man does not have the strength to constantly refrain from desires. You used to deprive yourselves and then Allah sent down this concession for you and here you can experience Allah’s Favour towards you. From Allah’s Favour towards you is that He respects your work, to the extent that He attributes it to you; lending money to your fellow Muslim is a case in point; He *the Almighty* says, ‘Who is it that will offer of Allah a goodly gift, so He will multiply it to him manifold, and Allah straitens and amplifies, and you shall be returned to Him.’ (*al-Baqara:* 245) Thus, Allah made the goodly gift for Himself. It is from Allah’s Favour towards man that when He asks man for some of his wealth, He asks for it as a loan meaning that He will return it afterwards with manifold increase.

It is from Allah’s Favour that He turns evil deeds into good deeds, and that He Himself has made the Way of Guidance for all of mankind so that no man has to follow another man’s personal desires or caprice. Allah *Glorified is He* does not have any personal desires. Further, it is from Allah’s Favour that He hides what people conceal from each other; He *the Almighty* says, ‘Nor is Allah going to make you acquainted with the unseen.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 179) This is because everyone might be agitated and a period of time could come in which he is weak in something, and thus if there were people around him who knew his secrets, they could take advantage of what they know of his weakness.

Beware of thinking that your action is what gives you reward. Rather, it is Allah’s Favour that gives you reward. Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Say: In the Grace of Allah and in His Mercy- in that they should rejoice.’ (*Yunus:* 58) It is favour that makes the believers’ hearts rejoice.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا۟ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ ٱلْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًۢا ۚ بِئْسَ
مَثَلُ ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ٥

Those who have been charged to obey the Torah, but do not do so, are like asses carrying books: how base such people are who disobey God’s revelations! God does not guide people who do wrong [5] (The Quran, *al-Jumu‘a:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of those who were graced with the burden of the Torah (the Jews). There is a category of people who carried the Torah, yet they did not know anything about it; they were graced with the burden of the Torah, but they did not view it as a Divine Way of Guidance, and thus they were like donkeys. A donkey is not worthy of blame because it does not understand the load of books that it is carrying on its back because it is not its task to understand and comprehend what is in the load of books. Rather, its task is merely to carry them and transport them from one place to another without understanding what they contain or acting in accordance with the content.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* warns us not to be like donkeys which are only good enough in carrying items. Rather, I want you to act upon the Way of Guidance and to benefit from the legislation that these donkeys carry upon their backs. He says: 'O Yahya (John)! Take hold of the Book with strength...' (*Maryam:* 12). Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him* is one of the prophets of the children of Israel. The Book here refers to the Torah that contains Allah's Way which will regulate their daily activities for them. Allah orders him to take it with strength, that is, with sincerity in preserving it and keenness to act in accordance with it.

Thus, the heavenly knowledge and the divine way that came to you in the Torah are not just for you to know but also to act in accordance with it. Allah graced them with the burden of the Torah, yet they did not carry it, nor did they act in accordance with it. They were graced with the burden of the Torah and they carried it in the sense of knowing it and preserving it in their books and in their hearts, but they did not carry it in the sense of giving it its full right and acting in accordance with it.

As for the word 'Torah', some scholars, when turning their attention to some term, try to find its Arabic origin and try to find a pattern for it from amongst the patterns of Arabic and give it one of the qualities of the Arabic language. However, I say to them that they have looked at these terms as if they are Arabic terms, but Torah is a Hebrew term and injil is either a Syriac or a Greek word. Those words became proper nouns to refer to those books and they came into our language.

Do not think that just because the Quran came down in Arabic that all its terms are Arabic. No, it is not. It is true that the Quran is Arabic and it is also true that it has been revealed while these words were circulating on the tongues of Arabs; and when they were uttered, their meanings were understood.

An example of this in our modern age is that we have inserted the word ‘bank’ into our common language; we normally use it in our speech to the extent that it has become an Arabic word because it circulates on the tongues of the Arabs. The meaning of the Quran being Arabic is that when Allah addressed the Arabs with it, He addressed them with terms that they understood and that circulated on their tongues even if they are not Arabic in origin.

The Torah is the Book of the Jews. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* along with the leaders of his people went to the place defined for them by Allah, to receive the Way and the Torah; and when Musa (Moses) returned with the Torah and the Tablets, they found the instructions therein hard for them, which why they said that they would not apply this legal responsibility and decided not to adhere to it or accept it. The legal responsibility is from Allah Who has burdened them with it, yet they were unable to carry it out, even though He *the Almighty* does not burden any human being more than he can bear. The Jews had the Torah with them and despite that, they did not follow their Book.

An example of them not following what came in their Book and trying to get away from Allah’s Command to follow the Torah is that they came across a command or a ruling they would ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to judge therein. That is why Allah says, ‘And how do they make you a judge and they have the Torah wherein is Allah’s Judgment?’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 43)

Allah *Glorified is He* makes it clear: ‘How is it that they come to you, asking for a ruling and they have the Torah and they do not believe that you, O Muhammad, are a Messenger from Allah? How can they feel pleased to give a ruling when they do not believe in you? There must be a benefit in that which contradicts what is in the Torah, otherwise, they would have implemented the ruling that they have in their Book. They only came to you, O Prophet Muhammad out of desire that you give them a ruling that is somewhat easier, mistakenly thinking that you would allow them to consume ill-gotten property or that he would listen to lies’.

It is an amazing issue that must be understood because they have the Torah which contains Allah’s Injunctions and if they were to ask you for a ruling regarding a matter that is not in the Torah, then that would be acceptable. However, they are asking you for a ruling regarding a matter that is in their Book, the Torah and this means that they were desiring to cheat and not to adhere to what Allah has sent down to them in the Torah. Allah entrusted the Torah with the early men of Allah and the rabbis, i.e. He asked them to preserve it and this command was one of legal responsibility. A matter of legal responsibility is liable to be obeyed and liable to be disobeyed. Further, Allah entrusted them with the Torah and the Gospel. However, 'They neglected a portion of what they were reminded of...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 14). The matter of the Divine Way became forgotten and was not much on their minds, because if it constantly came to mind and was always in the depths of one's emotions, it would top their thoughts. However, forgetfulness comes when the matter is far from one's mind.

Allah *Glorified is He* asked them to preserve the Divine Way, but they, apart from the Prophets, did not do so. Every matter of legal responsibility is within the sphere of choice and that is why we find that the rabbis and the early men of Allah had forgotten; even what they did not forget, they concealed it. The first stage of not preserving was that they forgot; the second stage was that they concealed what they did not forget. The third stage was yet that they distorted what they did not conceal, even with their own tongues.

If only they had restricted themselves to just those phases, but instead, they brought things forward and claimed that it was from Allah, while it was actually not. Allah says, 'Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands and then say, "This is from Allah."' (*al-Baqara:* 79) Therefore, the preservation on their behalf was not fulfilled and this is why Allah did not call for the preservation of the Quran to be by way of legal responsibility because He had tested humanity before and because He wanted the Quran to be a permanent miracle. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* did not entrust the creation with preserving it. Rather, He took it upon Himself to preserve it: 'Surely, We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.' (*al-Hijr:* 9)

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example so that it is easier for us to understand something that is abstract; He gives us the example of something that is tangible, that is, we can see and touch with our own hands. The carrying of the Torah does not actually mean carrying it in a literal sense. Otherwise, every Jew would have had to carry the Book of the Torah in his hand or some other way. Rather, the meaning is carrying it in an abstract sense, i.e. acting in accordance with its teachings and following Allah's Way of Guidance. They were asked to adhere to the Torah and its rulings but they did not adhere to it. Instead, they tried to get away from its rulings on the pretext that they were difficult. They did not adhere until after Mount Sinai had been raised over their heads; Allah *Glorified is He* relates this to us when He says: 'And when We shook the mountain over them as if it were a covering overhead, and they thought that it was going to fall down upon them: Take hold of what We have given you with firmness, and be mindful of what is in it so that you may guard [against evil]' (*al-A'raf:* 171).

That verse orders them to hold fast to what has come to them in the Book with seriousness and diligence in terms of actions and values; it prohibits them from taking on legal responsibility with negligence. Man usually holds fast, with all his strength to that which benefits him and that is why it is the nature of Allah's Ways that they be adopted with strength and certainty so that you can be given much good with strength and certainty. When you adopt Allah's Divine Way with strength, then you have placed your trust in Him, and your heart has been opened so that you want to take more.

They did not respond to Allah's Command even after He had raised the mountain over their heads, although they only submitted to material signs. That is why He *Glorified is He* raised the mountain over them because either they would hold fast to what Allah had given them with strength, thus implemented what was sought from them, or the mountain would collapse on them. Even the Quran censured them for how they carried out His Command to sacrifice a cow. Allah says, 'And when Musa (Moses) said to his people: Surely Allah commands you that you should sacrifice a cow; they said, "Do you ridicule us?"' (*al-Baqara:* 67)

Thus, Allah gave them the command first to test the strength of their faith and the extent to which they carry out legal responsibility without hesitation or deliberateness. However, instead of doing that, they took to haggling and slowness. If a man were to be endowed with the lowest of intellect and then he was asked to slaughter a cow, would this need clarification? If they had slaughtered a cow, any cow, then everything would have been completed without any trouble, so as long as Allah has asked them to slaughter a cow, then all they have to do was to carry out the slaughtering.

However, look at the stupidity, even in the question. They willed to do anything to nullify their legal responsibility. They were commanded to carry out an act of legal responsibility, but they were not pleased with carrying it out because it did not agree with their caprice.

For them, the teachings of Allah and His Divine way are nothing but a load of books as He *the Almighty* says, 'And they do not assign to Allah the attributes due to Him when they say: Allah has not revealed anything to a mortal. Say, "Who revealed the Book which Musa (Moses) brought, a light and guidance to men, which you make into scattered writings which you show while you conceal much?"' (*al-An'am:* 91)

The book referred to here is the Book that Allah sent down to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* which is the Torah. They made it in scattered writings, i.e. detached sheets of paper from which they manifest what they wanted and concealed what they did not want. Their distortion to the legal ruling of stoning to death is a case in point.

Two of the Jews of Khaybar, a man and a woman, committed adultery. They were both noble Jews, which is why the people did not want to bring out Allah's Ruling from the Torah which was stoning to death. So, they resorted to a trick which was to go to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The mere fact of them going to him, gives us an idea about them. They wanted a mitigated ruling other than stoning. They wanted to save these two adulterers from the ruling of stoning because they were from the noble Jews of Khaybar, so they, along with their rabbis went to him.

When they entered upon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he told them: 'Which of you is the most knowledgeable of the Torah?' They pointed to `Abdullah ibn Suraya who was with them; they gave him the Torah and told him to: 'Read'. So, the man sat and began reading. When he came across the verse regarding stoning, he put his hand over it to hide it and kept reading. `Abdullah ibn Salam was present at that moment, so he said: 'O Messenger of Allah, did you not see that he covered the verse with his hand

and kept on reading?’ Ibn Salam moved the man’s hand and read himself and it was the verse regarding stoning.

When Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of a donkey or a dog, this is not to degrade donkeys or dogs. When Allah *Glorified is He* makes an example of those who were graced with the burden of the Torah but did not carry it and did not adhere to it, not in terms of Allah’s legal responsibilities or His Way which is something evil; this is not to mean to degrade donkeys.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And recite to them the narrative of him to whom We give Our communications, but he withdraws himself from them, so Satan overtakes him, so he is of those who go astray. And if We had pleased, We would certainly have exalted him thereby; but he clung to the earth and followed his low desire so his parable is as the parable of the dog; if you attack him he lolls out his tongue; and if you leave him alone he lolls out his tongue; this is the parable of the people who reject Our communications; therefore relate the narrative that they may reflect. Evil is the likeness of the people who reject Our communications and are unjust to their own souls.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 175-177)

When a dog approaches you, you chase it away and scold it; otherwise it pants with its tongue lolling. If you leave the dog alone without chasing it away or scolding it, it will also pant with its tongue lolling because its nature is that it always pants with its tongue lolling. This is something exclusive to dogs since they always breathe quickly with their tongues sticking out. Animals do not do anything like this unless they are hungry or tired or attacking, while it is only dogs that do it when they are hungry and full, thirsty and not thirsty, scolded or not scolded, because they always pant with their tongues lolling.

But why does Allah liken this person to a panting dog with its tongue lolling? It is because he discards Allah’s signs; notice that this person resembles those who were graced with the burden of carrying Allah’s Book yet did not carry it, nor did they carry out what they had to therein because the one who is portrayed in this way will be seen as permanently despised, due to the fact that he is following his caprice and being controlled by his desires.

Once his desires have been satisfied, it is asked; will he do the same thing tomorrow? His desires are in control all the time and that is why he lives in continuous apprehension because he fears that blessings will escape him or he himself will escape those blessings. His state thus becomes like that of a panting dog, panting whether it is safe or not safe, hungry or not hungry and thirsty or not thirsty.

Just as Allah *Glorified is He* says about those who were graced with the Torah and then did not do according to it that they are those who disobey Allah's revelations, He also said the same about he who withdraws himself from Allah's communications.

Those who have denied Allah's communications are the disbelievers, the idol-worshippers, and those who reject Islam and try to fight against the religion. Allah has determined for us the final outcome of all these people. Those who have denied Allah's communications are either those who have denied the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in terms of the signs that prove his veracity and he is the one who conveys from Allah and these people have fallen under the category of disbelief, or they are those who have denied the signs of the way and thus they have not used the way according to its foundations and they have deviated from the straight path and the correct path. Therefore, they have denied Allah's signs and they have denied the Last Day and they have not acted in accordance with the way of faith and so have recompense and punishment from Allah *Glorified is He* who sent down this way, but they turned away from it and denied it.

Regarding those who denied the signs, it is either because they do not believe in a deity, or they believe in a deity but do not believe in a Messenger, or they believe in a deity and a Messenger, but they do not believe in what has been sent down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

At the end, Allah *Glorified is He* says that He does not guide people who do wrong. Those who have been banished from Allah's Guidance in assisting them towards faith are the evildoing folk. He has withheld his guidance from three kinds of people; disbelievers, oppressors and the iniquitous.

However, has He withheld his guidance from the beginning, or is it they who have committed error that has made them unworthy of Allah's guidance? They are the ones who rejected the burden of Allah's trust with regards to the

Book that was sent down to them and they refused to adhere to Allah's way and what their prophets had brought to them from Allah. They were like a donkey carrying loads of books and not understanding anything of what they contain and this is how the hearts of these people have become locked from understanding that to which Allah is demanding them to adhere. Therefore, they did not deserve Allah's guidance, His enabling success, His assisting them towards faith, and perfected faith in Allah and His Message, holding fast to the Book that was sent down to them with all their strength as well as with perfect devotion.

Allah *Glorified is He* thereby concludes the verse saying that He does not guide them towards any proof or evidence because their patron is Satan. We know that oppression means to take someone's right and give it to someone else and the highest degree of oppression is to associate partners with Allah. It is the most immense oppression and the cause of them not being guided is their oppression.

Thus, it is their oppression that denies them guidance and Allah *Glorified is He* has left it to the slave to choose guidance or to choose misguidance and whatever the slave does and chooses is not done under compulsion from Allah because if He had not created all of us with the ability to choose, man would not be able to go against what Allah wants. However, he created man with the ability to choose and whenever you choose guidance or misguidance, this is what Allah has granted you and He has made it clear that those who do evil and are iniquitous are worthy of being assisted by Allah in their misguidance, just as much as He assists those who choose guidance because they are worthy of being assisted by Allah in their guidance.

Thus, the lack of goodness begins on their part and therefore they proceeded in their disbelief and Allah did not guide them. They proceeded in their oppression and thus Allah did not guide them. They preceded in iniquity and thus Allah did not guide them.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ هَادُوٓا۟ إِن زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ
لِلَّهِ مِن دُونِ ٱلنَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوُا۟ ٱلْمَوْتَ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٦﴾

Say [Prophet], 'You who follow the Jewish faith, if you truly claim that out of all people you alone are friends of God, then you should be hoping for death' [6]
(The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 6)

The vocative is one kind of speaking style and the rhetoricians divide speech into 'Information' which means that you inform of something by way of speech and it can be true or false and 'bringing about' which is to request something by way of speech and it can not be true or false. The vocative is from bringing about because you want to bring about something for your part. When you say, 'O Muhammad', you want him to turn towards you. Therefore, the vocative is requesting that someone turn towards you.

There is a great variation of vocative forms in the Noble Quran. They include the vocative from Allah to fifteen categories of people, inanimate objects, and other things. They include the vocative from the messengers to their peoples, the vocative of the nations and peoples to their messengers, the vocative between angels, and several other examples of the vocative. The most frequent vocative in the Noble Quran is from Allah to the believers, as the vocative 'O you who believe!' which is found in more than eighty verses. It addresses those who believe in Allah and His Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, all the vocatives for them come and request legal responsibilities and they address everyone who believes in the way.

Allah addresses and calls on the believers directly without addressing Muhammad to say something. There is no verse in which the believers are being addressed that begins with 'Say.' For example, Allah says: 'O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient.' (*al-Baqara:* 153) He also says, 'O you who believe! If you obey a party from among those who have been given the Book, they will turn you back as unbelievers after you have believed.' (*Al-'Imran:* 100) Another verse reads: 'O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 51) There are several other examples. It is a direct vocative from Allah to the believers. However, when Allah *Glorified is He* addresses those who follow the Jewish faith, he says: 'Say, "O you who are Jews, if you claim that you are allies of Allah excluding the [other] people, then wish for death, if you should be truthful."' (*al-Jumu'a:* 6)

This is the only vocative which contains this form for those who follow the Jewish faith and despite that it begins with the order to say O Muhammad. This gives us a gleaning that Allah is angry with them and that He is distancing them from being those who are near to Allah, as opposed to being Allah's children or His beloveds. When you are angry with someone after you had been close to them and you had been good to them and generous to them and you had stood at their side through their hardships and saved them from their enemy, but they denied and were ungrateful for everything, you would not talk to them and when you did talk to them, you would put a barrier between you and them and speak to them through an intermediary.

Allah *Glorified is He* has generously bestowed bounties upon the Jews and given them several blessings. He says, 'O children of Israel! call to mind My favour which I bestowed on you and be faithful to [your] covenant with Me, I will fulfil [My] covenant with you; and of Me, Me alone, should you be afraid.' (*al-Baqara:* 40) He also says, 'O children of Israel! Indeed, We delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the blessed side of the mountain, and We sent to you the manna and the quails. Eat of the good things We have given you for sustenance, and be not inordinate with respect to them, lest My Wrath should be due to you, and to whomsoever My wrath is due be shall perish indeed.' (*Ta Ha:* 80-81)

However, the children of Israel did not respect Allah's right regarding that with which He had blessed them. Instead, they invented lies about Allah and killed their prophets. When Allah *Glorified is He* calls those followers of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* who were given the name hadu because they said that they have returned to Allah. *So hadu* are the Jews. The verb *had* means to return and *hudna ilayka* means that we returned to Allah as Musa (Moses), on behalf of himself, his brother, and the people who worshipped the calf and then repented.

Their repentance was a difficult event for the children of Israel. Allah says, 'And when Musa (Moses) said to his people: O my people! you have surely been unjust to yourselves by taking the calf [for a god], therefore turn to your Creator [penitently], so kill your people, that is best for you with your Creator: so He turned to you [mercifully], for surely He is the Oft-Returning [to mercy], the Merciful.' (*al-Baqara:* 54) They worshipped other than Allah and what was worse was that they worshipped a calf that was made for them by As-Samiri with the gold that they had taken with them from Egypt after the people of Egypt had entrusted them with it.

When Allah sent down the ruling that they should kill themselves as atonement for their associating partners with Allah, the children of Israel stood in rows and He said to them: 'Those who did not worship the calf shall kill those who did worship it.' However, when they stood for the execution, some of them found themselves facing their cousins and brothers and other relatives, so Allah had mercy on them by sending a fog to cover them so that it would not be difficult for them to carry out the killing and it was said that they killed seventy thousands of themselves.

Allah ordered them to kill themselves because these selves, with their desires and disobedience, made them rebel against the way. Indeed, the legislation here to kill is expiation for their sins because those who worshipped the calf took it as a deity besides Allah and then presented themselves in order to be killed so that they could acknowledge that what they had worshipped was a false deity. With this they return their selves, which rebelled against Allah's way to correct worship and this is the most difficult kind of expiation, which is to kill one's self in order to affirm one's faith that there is no deity but Allah, showing remorse for what one has done and declaring as such. It is as if killing here was an honest testimony of returning to faith.

That is why they said they have turned in repentance and become proof that they fell into the greatest idolatry which necessitated that they kill one another. The Arabic name for the Jews has become proof of the crime that was erased by them killing themselves, but still, they did not desist from killing the prophets and being insolent towards them, and indeed, being insolent towards Allah.

An example of their insolence towards Allah is that they said what Allah narrates: ‘Allah has certainly heard the saying of those who said, “Surely Allah is poor and we are rich.” I will record what they say, and their killing the prophets unjustly, and I will say, “Taste the chastisement of burning.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 181)

The Prophetic Biography relates to us that Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* entered the Beth Midrash and found many of the Jews gathering around a man called Finhas, who was one of their scholars and rabbis and he had a rabbi with him called Ashya`. Abu Bakr said: ‘Woe to you, O Finhas, fear Allah and become Muslim, for by Allah, you know that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah from Allah and he has brought the truth from Him which you have written with you in the Torah and the Evangel.’ Finhas replied: ‘By Allah, O Abu Bakr, we are not poor or in need of Allah, but rather, He is poor and in need of us. We do not humiliate ourselves before Him the way He humiliates Himself before us. Indeed, we are rich and independent of Him and if He were rich and independent of us, He would not ask us for loans, as your companion claims. He forbids you from usury and gives it to us and if He were rich and independent, He would not give us usury.’ Abu Bakr became angry and struck him on the face with a severe blow and then he said: ‘By The One in Whose Hand is my soul, if it were not for the treaty between us and you I would smite your neck, O enemy of Allah, so lie to us as much as you are able to, if indeed you are telling the truth.’ Finhas then went to the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said: ‘O Muhammad, look at what your Companion has done to me.’ So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘What made you do this, O Abu Bakr?’ He said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, indeed the enemy of Allah said immense blasphemy. He claimed that Allah was poor and needy and that they were rich and independent. When he had said that, I became angry for Allah, so I struck him on the face.’ Finhas denied it and said ‘I did not say that.’ Thus, Allah revealed that verse.

Despite this, they claimed and alleged that they were Allah’s children and His beloved sons; Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and the Jews and the Christians say, “We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones.”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 18) Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* nullifies their false claim by saying: 'Say, "Why does He then chastise you for your faults? Nay, you are mortals from among those whom He has created, He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 18) If you are truly Allah's children and His beloveds, you would have been saved from the punishment for the sins that you have committed, or the truth is that you are human beings of His creating and if He wills He will forgive you and if He wills He will punish you.

Thus, they imagine that regardless of the sins that they commit, Allah will never punish them on the Day of Resurrection, but Allah's Justice rejects this. How can he punish human beings for their sins and then not punish the Jews for the sins they have committed? All of this is just delusion and fabrication and they even claimed that the fire would only touch them for no more than a few days. They also claimed that Allah: 'and they say, "None shall enter the garden [or paradise] except he who is a Jew or a Christian."' (*al-Baqara:* 111)

The Jews said that only they would enter paradise and the Christians said the same thing, so each group has its own monopoly over paradise. Allah *Glorified is He* responded to these claims by saying: 'These are their vain desires.' (*al-Baqara:* 111) Wishful beliefs are those hopes that you attach to yourself and these hopes do not have any connection to reality such that you can realise these hopes. Wishful beliefs are just foolish aspirations because they will never be realised.

Thus, it is as if Allah is reminding them of what they repented of before and tells them to not persist in their false claims and allegations. Before, when you committed an error, you repented and turned back to Us, so why are you deriving pleasure from fabricating?

Here they are making another claim, so Allah *Glorified is He* says to them: '…if you claim that you are allies of Allah excluding the [other] people, then wish for death, if you should be truthful."'' (*al-Jumu'a:* 6)

Those who are friends of Allah are close to him that Allah assists the believing slaves and thus Allah is the assistance of those who believe, i.e. He assists them and gives them strength. Those who are close to Allah are also those who give victory to Allah's cause and Allah gives victory to them. The word *wali* means the one who assists and sometimes it means the one who is assisted because if you are Allah's *wali* and Allah is your *wali*, then Allah *Glorified is He* assists you and you are assisted. The word *wali* means one who is close to you and when you need something this is the first person to whom you go to seek refuge and help and no one else. If someone needs help, this person helps him and his goodness is abundant towards the one he has befriended. He is the one who is close, who helps, who assists, and who is a friend. Thus, if you were that close to Allah, as you say and He is your friend, He helps you and He gives you abundantly from His favour and his goodness, regardless of the sins that you commit and the fire will only touch you for a number of days and only those who follow the Jewish faith will enter paradise, then why do you not long for death?

Allah *Glorified is He* is asking them this and He knows with absolute knowledge that they will never long for death because they are as He says about them in another verse: 'Say, "If the future abode with Allah is specially for you to the exclusion of the people, then invoke death if you are truthful."' (*al-Baqara:* 94) Thus, if the Hereafter is for them alone and no one else will share it with them, then they must long for death in order to go towards eternal blessings, for as long as they have the Hereafter and as long as they are certain that they alone will enter paradise, then what is making them remain in the life of this world? Do they not long for death in order to enter paradise?

The Messenger of Allah said to them, 'If you are truthful in what you are saying, then say, "O Allah, cause us to die!" For by the One in Whose hand is my soul, not a single man from amongst you would say it without choking on his saliva and dying on the spot.' They refuse to do it and they hated what he had said to them, so He sent down: 'And they will never invoke it on account of what their hands have sent before' (*al-Baqara:* 95). Indeed they will never desire it and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said when the verse had come down: 'By Allah, they will never long for it.' This is because their claim that they are Allah's friends to the exclusion of the rest of mankind is a false claim, as they are not actually certain that they will enter paradise. Rather, their final destination could be the fire. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'If the Jews were to desire death, they would die, and they would see their places in the fire.' Indeed it is the greatest loss that they find themselves from the people of the fire and at that time their affair will be revealed and that they made claims that have no foundation and are rather based on their own delusion, as well as their claims that they are Allah's chosen people.

They are not telling the truth and they will never desire death because of the sins and disobedience that they dared to commit before Allah and they know very well that they will be taken to account for them. That is why Allah says that they will never long for it because of what their hands have sent ahead in this world. Further, Allah has full Knowledge of evildoers. The proof that they will never desire death is that they cling to life more eagerly than any other people do. Allah says, 'And you will most certainly find them the greediest of men for life.' (*al-Baqara:* 96)

Their eagerness for life is even greater than that of those who associate partners with Allah, as the one who associates partners with Allah is eager for life because he believes that the life of this world is the ultimate objective and the Jews are more eager for life than those who associate partners with Allah because they fear death due to the evil of their previous actions. That is why whenever they lived long lives they thought that they were far from the torment of the Hereafter. Life does not make them come face to face with punishment and that is why they are happy with it, but why are they more eager for life than those who associate partners with Allah?

Indeed, the one who associates partners with Allah has no Hereafter and thus this world is his entire concern and his entire life and that is why he desires a long life, at any cost and in any form. This is because he believes that after this there is nothing and he does not know that after this there is punishment and the Jews are more eager for life than those who associate partners with Allah. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* describes them by saying: '…every one of them loves that he should be granted a life of a thousand years.' (*al-Baqara:* 96) They would love to live for a thousand years or more and they think that having a long life or one of them reaching a thousand years would save them from the punishment.

However, Allah *the Almighty* dashes their hope regarding this issue by saying: '…although the grant of long life could not save him from suffering [in the hereafter]…' (*al-Baqara:* 96). So, would living thousand years, or even more than that, not save him from the punishment? No. Longevity will not change the outcome.

As long as death is the final destination, then the one who lives a few years and the one who lives thousands of years are the same, and he will never escape the punishment. Greediness is to pin one's hopes on something, be it beneficial or harmful. It is a kind of clinging that requires one to exert effort.

Allah *the Almighty* has given us an actual example of the Jews' love to life to the extent that they refused to support Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or to give victory to Allah and His Religion. Musa (Moses) said to his people: 'O my people! Enter the holy land which Allah has promised you; but do not turn back [on your faith], for then you will be lost! They answered: "O Musa (Moses)! Behold, ferocious people dwell in that land, and we will surely not enter it unless they depart therefrom; but if they depart therefrom, then, behold, we will enter it."' (*al-Ma'ida:* 21-22) However, they replied: '… "O Musa (Moses)! Behold, never shall we enter that [land] so long as those others are in it. Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight, both of you! We, behold, shall remain here!"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 24) They said to Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'Leave us alone. We will never enter this land as long as these Amalekites are in it. If you are determined to enter this land, then go with your Lord and fight. We will be sitting here, waiting for you.'(1)

This is how fear and eagerness for their lives led them to make fun of Musa (Moses) and his Lord. They always disobeyed their Prophet, Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and indeed all their prophets; they even killed some of them. Out of their disobedience to those who came after Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* says about them: 'Are you not aware of those elders of the children of Israel, after the time of Musa (Moses), how they said unto a prophet of theirs, 'Raise up a king for us [and] we shall fight in Allah's cause." He said, "Would you, perchance, refrain from fighting if fighting is ordained for you?" They answered: "And why should we not fight in Allah's Cause when we and our children have been driven from our homelands?" Yet, when fighting was ordained for them, they did turn back, save for a few of them; but Allah had full Knowledge of the evildoers.' (*al-Baqara:* 246) They fear death, even if it is to defend their children and homes. They claim adherence to Allah's way such that they said to a prophet of theirs: 'Raise up a king for us [and] we will fight in Allah's Cause…' (*al-Baqara:* 246).

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(1) For further information on the Amalekites: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amalek

But upon carrying out, '…they did turn back, save for a few of them…' (*al-Baqara:* 246), and even when Allah sent them Saul as a king to fight Goliath, the Tyrant, they rejected it. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And their prophet said unto those elders: "Behold, now Allah has raised up Saul to be your king." They said: "How can he have dominion over us when we have a better claim to dominion than he, and he has not [even] been endowed with abundant wealth?"' (*al-Baqara:* 247)

They are always interested in the life of this world. Their standard of judging is always based on materialism. As wealth and riches are the basis, and likewise their racism surpasses their reliance on might and authority; they said: '…and he has not [even] been endowed with abundant wealth' (*al-Baqara:* 247).

But, Allah shows that their standard of judging is wrong. Rather, the standard of judging is that he is selected by Allah Who knows best who benefits from that and who gets harm. In addition, Allah *the Almighty* chose him with knowledge and wisdom. Consequently, He is showing us good reasons for authorising Saul. '[The prophet] replied: "Behold, Allah has exalted him above you, and endowed him abundantly with knowledge and bodily perfection…"' (*al-Baqara:* 247). This is because he came for a task that requires him to be strong for war and fighting (endowed with bodily perfection) and to be knowledgeable, learned and wise in order to lead the nation with knowledge and wisdom (endowed him abundantly with knowledge).

But because they do not observe except the life of this world, many of them rebelled against Saul. He tested their obedience to him, and they failed. Allah *the Almighty* tells us: 'And when Saul set out with his forces, he said: "Behold, Allah will now try you by a river: he who shall drink of it will not belong to me, whereas he who shall refrain from tasting it – he, indeed, will belong to me; but forgiven shall be he who shall scoop up but single handful."…' (*al-Baqara:* 249)

The challenge was in preventing them from what they were inclining towards because when they saw what they loved and desired, they rushed towards it and forgot about Allah's command. Whoever is described like this cannot be trusted to be in Allah's Army.

As for those who see the water and restrain themselves from it, they are patient and in control of themselves. They will be in Allah's army because they prefer what Allah had sought to what their stomachs desired. They are worthy because they have been tested.

In the beginning, before this, they turned away from fighting, except for a few of them, and here an even fewer number restrained themselves from drinking, and these are the sieves of selection, or the filters of the challenge.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلَا يَتَمَنَّوْنَهُۥٓ أَبَدًۢا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ٧

But because of what they have stored up for themselves with their own hands they would never hope for death — God knows the wrongdoers very well [7] (The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 7)

The Quran has challenged them to wish death, and they have never wished it and they never will. Logic says that as long as the Hereafter is exclusive for them and Allah has challenged them to wish death if they are indeed truthful, then they should wish it in order to move on to eternal blessings.

However, Allah *the Almighty* decreed beforehand that this would never happen from their part. Why? It is because they are liars and they know that they are liars, and that is why they flee from death and do not desire it.

However, why did Allah *the Almighty* declare that: 'they would never hope for death' (*al-Jumu'a:* 7)? Allah clarified the matter by saying: 'But because of what they have stored up for themselves with their own hands' (*al-Jumu'a:* 7).

It means that their evil deeds make them afraid of death. As for the person who has righteous actions, he is pleased with death. That is why we hear that when so-and-so died, he had a charming face because he was righteous. At the time of death, a person knows for sure that he is dead.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet him, and whoever hates to meet Allah, Allah hates to meet him.' `Aisha – or some of his wives- then said: 'Indeed we hate death.' He said: 'That is not what I mean. Rather, when death comes to the believer, he is given the glad tidings of Allah's Pleasure and His Munificence, and thus there is nothing more beloved to him than that, which is in front of him, and so he loves to meet Allah and Allah loves to meet him. When death approaches the disbeliever, he is given news of Allah's punishment and torment. Thus, there is nothing more hated to him than his situation at that moment, so he hates to meet Allah and Allah hates to meet him.'(1)

Thus, those who are rightly guided are those who have adhered to the path that leads to the objective which, for them, is to be inundated with prayers and mercy from their Lord. Allah *the Almighty* says about these people: 'It is they upon whom their Lord's blessings and grace are bestowed, and it is they, they who are on the right path!' (*al-Baqara:* 157)

These people love to meet Allah and Allah loves to meet them because they preferred to do goodness in the life of this world, and that is why you find the signs of glad tidings on their faces the moment death comes to them.

As for those who submitted to the worldly life and oppressed themselves by rebelling against Allah's way, like these Jews whose historical record is replete – ever since there was a Jewish people – their record is replete with disobeying Allah and bluffing their way out of Allah's Commands.

You find these people hating to meet Allah because the misdeeds they have done in the life of this world, and thus they fear meeting Allah, to the extent that they wish that there would not be any resurrection or reckoning.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. (6507); Ibn Athir, Jami` Al-Usul Fi Ahadith Ar-Rusul, no. (7367) attributed it to Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasa`i. In some of them the text says only: 'Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet him, and whoever hates to meet Allah, Allah hates to meet him'- without adding the saying of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her.*

When man is sick, he hopes to get better and that death is away from him. However, at the agony of death, he becomes sure that he is dying and his whole life flashes before his eyes. If his actions were righteous, his face lights up and he rejoices, because he will be blessed in the Hereafter with eternal blessings; it is at this moment – when the spirit is leaving the body – that man knows his final destination, either in paradise or in the fire.

He is received by either the angels of mercy or the angels of torment. The one who obeyed Allah is delighted because he will meet the angels of mercy. The one who disobeyed *the Almighty,* and did that which angered Him, his deeds will flash before his eyes. He will find a record of evil while he is moving towards Allah, so there is no opportunity to repent or change his actions.

When he sees his final destination in the fire, his face contracts and, then, passes away, while in that moment. Then it is said: 'So-and-so died and his face was black and contracted'. Therefore, the one who does evil in the life of this world never longs for death; unlike the one of righteous actions, he is delighted to meet Allah.

Someone might ask: How can Allah demand that they long for death when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade longing for death: 'None of you should long for death or call for it before its time unless he is certain of his actions.'?(1)

We say: 'Indeed the forbidden type is the longing of despair and protesting against one's afflictions, meaning that someone longs for death because they cannot bear the afflictions that Allah has decreed upon them…or that they desire it in order to protest against what Allah has decreed upon them in life. This is the longing for death that is forbidden.

As for the person who has righteous actions, it is recommended for him to yearn to Allah's meeting. Read Allah's, statement at the end of the chapter of *Yusuf*: 'O my Lord! You have indeed bestowed upon me something of power, and have imparted unto me some knowledge of the inner meaning of happenings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are near unto me in this world and in the life to come…' (*Yusuf:* 101). Then He says: '…let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto You, and make me one with the righteous!' (*Yusuf:* 101)

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, no. (8592) from the narration of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

The statement of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* means not to long for death because you are unhappy with what Allah has decreed for you. In other words, it means that you should be patient with what Allah has decreed. There is a noble Hadith that instructs us not to long for death when life becomes difficult, but rather to say: 'O Allah, cause me to live as long as life is good for me, and cause me to die when death is good for me.'(1)

We have said that longing for death is forbidden if one is objecting to what Allah has decreed and rebelling against what Allah *the Almighty* has willed, as if you hate life and living when it becomes hard for you, and thus you long for death. As for longing for death because you know that you will go on to something better, this is another matter.

The one who disobeys Allah and rebels against His command does not long for death because of what his hands have done. Does that mean that all disobedience comes from just the hands? Indeed, there is the disobedience of the eyes, the disobedience of the tongue, the disobedience of the feet, the disobedience the heart etc.

Therefore, why did Allah *the Almighty* say, 'But because of what they have stored up for themselves with their own hands' (*al-Jumu'a:* 7)? Allah says this because outward actions are usually done by the hands, as it is the limb with which we perform most actions. Based on this, His saying: 'But because of what they have stored up for themselves with their own hands…' indicates that they have stored up with their own hands referring to that which has been done by any limb.

Sins, indeed, are either statements or actions of the body, or deeds of the heart, such as malice, for example, or hypocrisy, and so forth. Most of these activities are done with the hands.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. (6351); Muslim, Sahih, no. (6990) from the Hadith of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him said that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'None of you should long for death because of some harm that has befallen him. If he cannot avoid longing for death, let him say: "O Allah, cause me to live as long as life is good for me, and cause me to die when death is good for me."'*

But what have the Jews committed? Because of what their hands have wrought, will they never desire death because they fear their eternal punishment? One of their sins is the worshipping of the calf. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And in his absence the people of Musa (Moses) took to worshipping the effigy of a calf [made] of their ornaments, which gave forth a lowing sound. Did they not see that it could neither speak unto them nor guide them in any way? [And yet] they took to worshipping it, for they were evildoers’ (*al-A‘raf:* 148).

They deceived the people of Egypt and took their jewellery as a loan on grounds that they would return it afterwards. Then their exodus came and they took the jewellery with them. The people of Pharaoh were drowned and the jewellery remained with the people of Musa (Moses), and then As-Samiri made the calf out of the gold from this jewellery. He made it from gold as if he wanted to get it distinguished from other false gods that are made from stones. He tried to make it a precious god, so he made it with stolen jewellery.

They took to worshipping the calf after Allah had completed His Sublime Favour to them, which is that He saved them from Pharaoh and his armies, and indeed he drowned Pharaoh and his armies and his entourage.

After Allah *the Almighty* had caused the children of Israel to cross the sea, they passed by some people worshipping idols, whereupon they asked Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: ‘…set up for us a deity even as they have gods…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 138).

They said this while they were still inundated in Allah’s Blessings of saving them from their enemy and appointing them as vicegerents in the earth; and despite that, by merely coming onto dry land and seeing a group of people worshipping an idol, they asked Musa (Moses) to make an idol for them to worship. That is why Allah *the Almighty* threatened them by saying: ‘[And to Harun (Aaron) he said:] “Verily, as for those who have taken to worshipping the [golden] calf – their Lord’s Condemnation will overtake them…”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 152), ‘…and ignominy [will be their lot] in the life of this world!’ For thus do We requite all who invent [such] falsehood.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 152)

Their Lord’s condemnation as well as ignominy and shame have overtaken them in the life of this world when Allah commanded them to kill themselves as a true proof for their repentance. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and when Musa

(Moses) said unto his people: "O my people! Verily, you have sinned against yourselves by worshipping the calf; turn, then, in repentance to your Maker and mortify yourselves; this will be the best for you in your Maker's Sight." And thereupon He accepted your repentance: for, behold, He alone is the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace.' (*al-Baqara:* 54) This is a dangerous violation of Allah's way. It is the peak of violation of the due right of worshipping Allah Alone.

Another crime that their hands wrought is that they asked to see Allah, face to face, as they did not truly believe. They only believe in tangible matters that are visible to them. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And [remember] when you said, "O Musa (Moses), indeed we shall not believe thee until we see Allah face to face!" – whereupon the thunderbolt of punishment overtook you before your very eyes. But We raised you again after you had been as dead so that you might have cause to be grateful' (*al-Baqara:* 55-56).

After Allah had accepted the repentance of Musa's (Moses's) people who worshipped the calf, they returned once again to their stubbornness and materialism. They wanted a material god, a god that they could see, but Allah, due to His Sublimity, is unseen and not encompassed by human vision.

They asked to see Him face to face, clearly so that they could perceive Him with their senses. The thunderbolt of punishment overtook them before their very eyes because of this audacity of theirs. When you see something with your eyes, it is demarcated for you within limits, and this is not possible with regards to Allah *the Almighty*.

Their hands wrought four other crimes that they committed and continue to commit. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge, and their refusal to acknowledge Allah's messages, and their slaying of prophets against all right, and their boast, "Our hearts are already full of knowledge" – nay, but Allah has sealed their hearts in result of their denial of the truth, and [now] they believe in but few things.' (*an-Nisa':* 155)

They still continue to commit these four crimes and engage in them, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* mentioned the noun and not the verb in the following verses: '…their breaking of their pledge…' (*an-Nisa':* 155), '…their refusal…' (*an-Nisa':* 155), '…their slaying of prophets…' (*an-Nisa':* 155) and '…their boast, Our hearts are already full of knowledge…' (*an-Nisa':* 155). The noun indicates permanence and continuation, unlike the verb which expresses a time and is limited in its form.

Thus, they continue to break their covenants and pledges. They continue to disbelieve in Allah's verses whether they were sent down in the Torah giving glad tidings of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or the verses of the Noble Quran, which they were asked to have faith in, and they refused. They have gone far in their audacity towards Allah as they even killed His prophets.

Another thing they wrought with their hands is that they write the Book with their own hands and then claimed that it is from Allah; Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be] divine writ, and then say, "This is from Allah", in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby; woe, then, unto them for what their hands have written, and woe unto them for all that they may have gained!' (*al-Baqara:* 79)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* shows the extent to which these people deliberately commit sins. It is as if it does not suffice them, for example, to tell someone else to write. Rather, due to their great concern for forging and corrupting Allah's Speech, they did it with their own hands in order to make sure that the matter was done exactly as they wanted it.

Thus, the matter is not a temporary whim or something accidental. Rather, it is done with wilfulness and premeditation, and that is why they deserved Allah's Punishment. The noble verse began with His statement 'Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be] divine writ…' (*al-Baqara:* 79), and is followed then by His statement '…woe, then, unto them for what their hands have written, and woe unto them for all that they may have gained!' (*al-Baqara:* 79)

Thus, upon writing, they have woe and punishment; upon concluding the sale, they have woe and punishment and that which they gain is woe and punishment. Allah says, '…[for] it is they who have taken error in exchange for guidance; and neither has their bargain brought them gain, nor have they found guidance [elsewhere]' (*al-Baqara:* 16). An example of their exchanging guidance for error is 'Behold, those who barter away their bond with Allah and their own pledges for a trifling gain…' (*Al-'Imran:* 77).

The circumstances(1) in which this verse was sent down is that during a time of drought a group of people entered upon Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf (2), the Jew, and they asked him for provision, so he said to them: 'Do you know that this man is Prophet Muhammad?' They said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Indeed I intended to feed you and clothe you, but Allah has denied you much goodness.' Then they asked: 'Why has Allah denied us much goodness?' The answer came to them: 'You have declared your faith in Muhammad.' When they had found themselves in this situation, they said to Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf: 'Leave us for a while because doubt might have overcome us. In that time, we will make up our mind.' After the period of time had passed, they came to prefer food and clothing to faith, and they said to Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf: 'We read in our Book that we have with us and we made a mistake. Muhammad is not a Messenger, so Ka`b gave them food and clothing. (3)

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(1) *The story of the group of people who forfeited their faith in return for some food from Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf*

(2) *Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf: a man from Nabahan from the tribe of Tay`, and his mother was from Banu Nadir. His agnomen was Abu Na`ila. His father was killed in the Pre-Islamic Period and then he moved to Medina and allied himself with the Jews of Banu An-Nadir. He married `Uqayla bint Abu Al-Haqiq and she gave birth to Ka`b.*

(3) *See Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi, Asbab An-Nuzul, (1/106), from the statement of Al-Kalbi: 'Due to scarcity of foodstuff, some poor Jewish scholars went to seek help from Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf in Medina. Ka`b asked them: 'Is there anything in your Book which indicates that this man is Allah's Messenger?' They said: 'Yes! Do you not find the same?' He said: 'No, I do not!' They said: 'Well, we bear witness that he is Allah's slave and Messenger.' Ka`b said: 'Allah has deprived you of much good, you came to me and I really wanted to be good to you and to clothe your dependents. But Allah has deprived you and deprived your dependents.' They said: 'We are not sure about him. Give us some respite until we meet him.' They went and wrote down a description which was different from that of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him after which they met Prophet Muhammad, and spoke with him and asked him some questions. They went back to Ka`b and said: 'We had thought that he was Allah's Messenger, but when we met him we realized that he does not fit the description that we had and found that his description is different.' They got out the new description which they had written down and showed it to Ka`b. Ka`b was very happy with them. He fed them and spent on them, and because of this Allah the Almighty revealed this verse.'*

So, do you think that it is possible for people like them to wish death? Allah says about them: ‘Then, for having broken their solemn pledge, We rejected them and caused their hearts to harden – [so that now] they distort the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of their context; and they have forgotten much of what they had been told to bear in mind; and from all but a few of them thou wilt always experience treachery…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 13).

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Among those of the Jewish faith there are some who distort the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of their context and saying [as it were,] “We have heard, but we disobey”, and “Hear without hearkening”, and, “Hearken thou unto us, [O Muhammad]” – thus making a play with their tongues, and implying that the [true] Faith is false…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 46). Also, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…so as to make you think that [what they say] is from the Bible, the while it is not from the Bible; and who say, “This is from Allah”, the while it is not from Allah: and thus, do they tell a lie about Allah, being well aware [that it is a lie].’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 78)

They twisted some of the meanings that had been derived from the words in order to deceive the believers that these incorrect meanings are actually correct. Indeed, they claim that the way sent down from the heavens contains what it does not contain actually.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…so as to make you think that [what they say] is from the Bible, the while it is not from the Bible…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 78). Indeed, when they distorted the Bible with their tongues, they twisted it out of a desire to deceive and swindle you into thinking that it is from the Book that was sent down from Allah to His Messenger.

It did not suffice them to distort their Book, insert verses into it and conceal its contents; rather, they proceeded to dissuade the believers away from Islam and the Quran; they even wanted to cause Muslims to have doubt concerning the Way. That is why they resorted to tricks, which Allah *the Almighty* mentioned in His statement” ‘And some of the followers of earlier revelation say [to one another]: “Declare your belief in what has been revealed unto those who believe [in Muhammad] at the beginning of the day, and deny the truth of what came later, so that they might go back [on their faith]”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 72).

This is mixing truth with falsehood and deceiving the believers, and some of the Jews, from the people of the Book, tried to deceive the believers by declaring their faith at the beginning of the day and then declaring their conversion back at the end of it. The objective, of course, was to spread doubt and confusion amongst the souls of the believers with regards to this religion.

Some of the members of Quraysh or Arabs could say: 'The people of the Book tested this new religion and they were the people who have knowledge of the ways of the heavens, and they did not find that it conformed to the ways of the heavens.'

When the people of Quraysh asked them about this religion: 'Are we more guided or Muhammad?', the Jews said: 'No, you are upon guidance.' Commenting on this incident, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Are you not aware of those who, having been granted their share of the divine writ, [now] believe in baseless mysteries and in the powers of evil, and maintain that those who are bent on denying the truth are more surely guided than those who have attained to faith?' (*an-Nisa':* 51)

Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf(1) asked Abu Sufyan: 'What has Muhammad done to you?' He replied: 'He has left the religion of his ancestors, cut off his ties of kinship and fled to Medina, while we are not like that. We give water to the pilgrims, we receive our guests hospitably, we set prisoners free, we keep our ties of kinship, and we make pilgrimage to the House and circumambulate around it.' Abu Sufyan magnified the deeds of Quraysh, so those who had been given the Book, due to their enmity towards Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Abu Sufyan and his people: 'You are more guided than Muhammad.'(2)

That is why Allah *the Almighty* said about them: 'It is they whom Allah has cursed: and he whom Allah rejects shall find none to succour him.' (*an-Nisa':* 52) That is their reward for dissuading them from His Path and preferring the disbelieving idol-worshippers to the one of whom their Books had given glad tidings. Indeed they lied, as how can those who associate partners with Allah and worship idols be more guided than Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? How will Allah *the Almighty* receive these people on the Day of Resurrection? With what face will they stand before Allah? That is why it is impossible for them to long for death or love to meet Allah, as they are infused with loving to disobey Allah and rebelling against His commands. Thus, they cannot imagine themselves dying and being reckoned for what their hands have wrought, that is, what they have done and what they have gained; they cannot leave off their evil which is their worldly nature.

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(1) *The story of the pact between Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf and Abu Sufyan*

(2) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, (5/249).*

That is why they oppressed themselves before they oppressed those whom they led astray. Allah *the Almighty* says, '…Allah knows the wrongdoers very well' (*al-Jumu'a:* 7). Allah has full knowledge of their oppression and their disobedience. This oppression and disobedience is what makes them fear death and not long for it.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْمَوْتَ ٱلَّذِى تَفِرُّونَ مِنْهُ فَإِنَّهُۥ مُلَٰقِيكُمْ ۖ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ
إِلَىٰ عَٰلِمِ ٱلْغَيْبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

So say, 'The death you run away from will come to meet you and you will be returned to the One who knows the unseen as well as the seen: He will tell you everything you have done' [8] (The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 8)

Allah *the Almighty* orders His Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say this to the people of the Book who think that they will never die, or that they will remain forever on earth or that they are able to flee from death. Allah *the Almighty* says to him: 'So say…', and Allah *the Almighty* does not want to address them directly due to the magnitude of what they have fabricated regarding Him *the Almighty* and how much Allah has favoured them with throughout their history. Thus, due to His Anger with their deeds and actions, He instructed His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* to address them.

In the past, they were entrusted with Allah's Revelation and Books and they were asked to preserve them, but they broke their pledges and their covenants with Allah, so the legacy of prophethood transferred from them to other people, and revelation was transferred to Muhammad*peace and blessings be upon him*.

Indeed, they came to be addressed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Allah sends to them what He wants via him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'So say…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 8).

Indeed, they want to flee from death because they have not done anything good that could be stored away for them on the Day they will meet Allah, the Day that will inevitably come; they have forgotten that death has been decreed for all people, and that the life of this world is a stage between parentheses.

The first parenthesis is that Allah creates us and brings us into existence and the journey of life lasts until the second parenthesis, which extinguishes our humanity and ends our lives, i.e. death. In other words, we are on the journey of life by the Will of Allah and we will go back to Him. Therefore, the procedure of the life of this world truly starts with Allah and ends in death. No one controls life or death except Allah. If someone owned this, he would prevent someone from dying. Death is the violation of life. Allah *the Almighty* has concealed the time, place and cause of death as well as one's life span from us. He has not concealed it in order to veil it, but rather to make us expect it at any moment.

This is a sweeping notification of death such that it makes people rush towards righteous action and reward because in the life of this world there is no life span that is certain; no child can ascertain how long it will live, no youth can ascertain how long he will live and no middle-aged person can ascertain how long he will live. That is why each and every one of us must rush towards good deeds, so that death does not catch us by surprise and come to us in a state of disobedience.

Those who adhere to the way are reassured about meeting their Lord and they are reassured about His Reward. Those who do not believe in the Hereafter take life from Allah and spend it in that which is of no benefit. Then, after that, they find nothing but the reckoning and the fire.

The blessings that you currently enjoy will eventually come to an end, you leave them when you die or they will leave and abandon you. You will leave the life of this world carrying only your deeds to your grave. Everything will come to an end while your sins will remain for you to carry into the Hereafter.

Upon facing death and ending life, man becomes coerced and can no longer choose. He cannot do anything for himself and he cannot say that he does not want to die now. His humanity has ended and his control over himself has ended, such that his limbs will testify against him.

Allah *the Almighty* emphasises the matter of meeting death here by using the Arabic particle *inna*. Allah *the Almighty* uses it twice in the same verse by saying: ‘So say, “The death you run away from will come to meet you…”’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 8). No one thinks that he will escape death and the meeting of Allah *the Almighty* because Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Wherever you may be, Allah will gather you all unto Himself…’ (*al-Baqara:* 148). This indicates that there is no place in which you can hide from Allah’s Knowledge. Allah *the Almighty* informs us that we cannot flee from His Knowledge or His Decree or His punishment, and that the only path that is open to us is to flee to Him. There is no refuge from Allah except with Him, and that is why neither the disbelievers nor the disobedient think that they will escape from Allah.

A person could be afflicted by death at any moment, and thus no one is able to take precautions against death in terms of time or place. Here, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Wherever you may be, death will overtake you – even though you be in towers raised high…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 78). The human intellect that thinks that it is possible to take precautions against death must be made well aware that this cannot happen. The existence of the individual, whatever the circumstance is, cannot avoid or prevent death.

Death has been created with a secret that is extremely precise, and which suits only the precision of the Maker. It is subtle; it comes to man and seizes him at a moment and in a place that are not known to him. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Wherever you may be, death will overtake you…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 78). His Words: ‘…overtake you…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 78) indicate that when the spirit creeps within man, death and the spirit are released at the same time until the former overtakes the latter at the time decreed by Allah.

The Arabic word *yudrik* (overtake) makes it clear to us that death chases the spirit until it overtakes it and snatches it, as he *peace and blessings be upon him* said about the righteous tradition of death chasing life: 'Until it overtakes it, life runs, and each one of you will be overtaken.' That is why the people of gnosis say: 'Death is an arrow that has been fired at you, and your life span is only measured by how long it takes to reach you'. Death chases the life of man and runs behind his spirit until it overtakes it, as if it is an arrow that has been fired and your life span is only according to how long it takes to reach you.(1) Death is real, no doubt about it.

The proof for this is that Allah *the Almighty* used the term 'fleeing (*tafirruna*)', as they are fleeing from death. They are running and death is running behind them. They are fleeing in order not to meet death and out of fear that it will overtake them and catch them.

But Allah dashes their hopes regarding this. He frustrates their hopes and wishes that they will be able to flee from death and escape from it. Allah *the Almighty* says it, '…will come to meet you' (*al-Jumu'a:* 8).

With its unique style, the Quran is distinguished in how it expresses an event and illustrates it in a way that is tangible and can be witnessed with one's eyes; people fleeing from something, and this thing is pursuing them until it overtakes them. Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…will come to meet (*yudrikkum*) you…' (*an-Nisa':* 78). However, here He gives us another gleaning: '…will come to meet you and you…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 8). The word *mulaqi* (meet you) contains the meaning of meeting face to face, which is not the same as (*yudrikkum*) which means to chase and catch up with.

The meaning of *idrak* and *darak* is made clear to us in Allah's statement 'and as soon as the two hosts came in sight of one another, the followers of Musa (Moses) exclaimed: "Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]"' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61).The situation was that the sea was in front of them and Pharaoh's armies were behind them. There was nowhere to flee or escape to, but Allah *the Almighty* reassured them and reassured Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* when He said: 'And, indeed, [a time came when] We thus inspired Musa (Moses): "Go forth with My servants by night, and strike out for them a dry path through the sea; [and] fear not of being overtaken, and dread not [the sea]."' (*Ta Ha:* 77)

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(1) *See Ath-Tha`labi, Al-`Ijaz Wal Al-`Ijaz; he mentions the statement of `Abdullah ibn Al-Mu`tazz: (Death is an arrow that has been fired at you and your life span depends on how long it takes to reach you.)*

The statement: '…fear not of being overtaken…' (*Ta Ha:* 77) means do not be scared of Pharaoh catching up with you. When Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* wanted to take the children of Israel from Pharaoh and leave with them, before he had arrived with them at the sea, he let them know that the people of Pharaoh were coming with their armies. The people of Pharaoh were behind them and the sea was in front of them. Musa's (Moses's) people said, having faith in the means: '…Behold, we shall certainly be overtaken [and defeated]!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) So what did Musa (Moses) say? He did not say what his people said, but rather, he looked to the Original Cause *the Most High*. He said to those around him: '…Nay indeed! My Lord is with me, [and] He will guide me!' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) Musa (Moses) being sent by Allah is a sign that Allah will never forsake him because He wants to fulfil the blessing of guidance at his hands, and Musa (Moses) was filled with certainty and confidence.

If death will overtake man, then at the same time, it will meet him, and man will come face to face with that from which he was fleeing. Death is man's final outcome, as well as his antecedent. It precedes you and it waits for you for the moment that Allah has decreed for it, and in the place that Allah will decide for it. This gives the expression *yudrikkum* the sense of 'encompassing'. Indeed, death will come after you, but all of a sudden, it will appear in front of you, i.e. you do not know where it will come from, whether from behind you or in front of you.

Meeting death is not an easy matter, especially for those who have spent their lives disobeying Allah because the disobedient, as well as the disbelievers who did not believe in death, or that it was possible to flee from it, will have the realities shown to them when the agonies of death approach them, and they will see what we do not see, as is mentioned in His *the Almighty* statement: '…and sharp is thy sight today!' (*Qaf:* 22)

At that time man wishes to go back to the life of this world and he is still in the agonies of death, why? It is because he has seen the reality that he was denying and disavowing and which he did not want to face. He has seen with his own eyes what he was fleeing from and now he is meeting it.

Those who witness someone's state as they go through the agonies of death see indications from them that they are seeking things that we do not, and everyone is according to their state and their conclusion.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Why, then, when [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dying man], the while you are [helplessly] looking on and while We are closer to him than you, although you see [Us] not, why, then, if [you think that] you are not truly dependent [on Us], can you not cause that [ebbing life] to return – if what you claim is true?' (*al-Waqi'a:* 83-87)

When death approaches someone, they see its severity with their own eyes and they see the angels of mercy or the angels of torment, according to their actions. They know for certain that they are undoubtedly leaving the life of this world and the opportunity to do righteous actions or have faith has gone.

When they see what was veiled from them in the life of this world, at the moment their deeds flash before their eyes, and if they see a recording of their life that is pleasant and illuminating, they smile and their face lights up and they are taken in that state. As for those who filled their lives with evil and disobedience, their faces turn black and contract and they are taken in that state. This is what we call the conclusion of one's deeds (*khatima*), for the moment of dying contains the certainty of death, and it is just like the moment an exam starts. You find the failing student turning pale, trembling, or twitching, while the diligent student is smiling, and his face lit up.

During the agonies of death, the mind is emptied of everything but the record of one's deeds, as that is what remains in the seat of one's feelings. At that moment, the dying person does not find any other thought in the seat of his feelings that contradicts or competes with the matter of the Hereafter.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says about the spirit leaving the disbeliever and the hypocrite: '…and [to cause] their souls to depart while they are [still] denying the truth.' (*at-Tawba:* 55) The moment of death is difficult and arduous for the disbeliever and the hypocrite. They leave their wealth and their children, their nice homes and towers that they built, and they head towards torment.

The towers that they have built will never protect them from death befalling them, as it is not prevented by anything, whatever it may be. There is no defence against it. We notice that the thoughts of the Jews from the people of the Book are directed towards establishing fortresses, towers, and walls, thinking that they will protect them from Allah’s torment befalling them.

Allah *the Almighty* says about them: ‘He it is who turned out of their homes, at the time of [their] first gathering [for war], such of the followers of earlier revelation as were bent on denying the truth. You did not think [O believers] that they would depart [without resistance] – just as they thought that their strongholds would protect them against Allah…’ (*al-Hashr:* 2).

In Medina, they had fortresses and citadels, like the fortress of Khaybar. They were from the people of fortresses and the people of agriculture, and they live off of usury. They were heedless of the fact that if they were all sheltered in their fortresses and towers that were surrounded by other towers, like a fortified fortress, that sometimes their construction would be completed and it would be as if they were points surrounding a small circle surrounded by larger circle. This is how you find that the fortress is a point surrounded by several fortresses, and death overtakes human beings even if they are in a tower surrounded by towers, as Allah *the Almighty* has absolute power in executing the matter of death.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and you will be returned to the One who knows the unseen as well as the seen: He will tell you everything you have done.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 8) To be brought back to Allah *the Almighty* is to return to Him *the Almighty* by being restored to life on the Day of Resurrection.

The word ‘…return…’ indicates that they were with Him initially, and after that, they will be returned. They are from Him *the Almighty* because He brought them into existence. They will be brought back to Him to be reckoned, rewarded, and punished. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and all will be brought back unto Allah, their true Lord Supreme…’ (*Yunus:* 30). The words ‘…be returned to…’ do not indicate that they were with the opposite and then they came to Him. Rather, it indicates that they were with Him initially and then they went to the opposite. Then they are brought back to Him a second time.

This is like Allah's statement about Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'And thus We restored him to his mother…' (*al-Qasas:* 13). This indicates that Musa (Moses) was with his mother and then he was separated from her. Then he was restored to her.

No one thinks that he will escape returning to Allah and being restored on the Day of Resurrection. Allah *the Almighty* settles this matter by saying: '…and you shall behold the earth void and bare: for [on that Day] We will [resurrect the dead and] gather them all together, leaving out none of them.' (*al-Kahf:* 47) It means that We will gather them for the Day of Reckoning because they have left the life of this world in stages, starting with Adam *peace be upon him* and death harvests the spirits and the day has come in which these people are gathered.

Allah says: '…leaving out none of them.' (*al-Kahf:* 47) In other words, We will not leave any of them, even if they were claiming that they were Allah's children and His beloveds. Everyone will be brought before Allah.

The root of the word *nughadir* (leaving out) leads to the meaning of leaving because the word *ghadr* means a breach of faith, or treachery. There is also the word *ghadir* which is a small stream of water because when the rain falls onto the ground, it flows and leaves behind a little bit of water in its tracks.

If the rain leaves something behind in the streams, then Allah – and He has the highest similitude –will not leave behind anyone such that they will not be brought before him. No one, not even an atom from one's body, will get away from standing before Allah in order to be reckoned. They will be brought back to: '…to the One who knows the unseen as well as the seen…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 8). This is a precise expression because as long as Allah *the Almighty* is the Knower of the Unseen, then it is prima facie that He knows that which is witnessed. Allah *the Almighty* Knows what is hidden by the veil of the past and that of the future, and everything that is absent from man. He knows what man witnesses. His knowledge is not restricted to the unseen, while leaving that which is witnessed outside His knowledge. No. Rather, He knows the unseen and He knows that which is witnessed.

What is meant by *al-ghayb* (the unseen) is the absolute unseen, meaning that which is absent from you and others. We are witnessed by those who have attended this gathering of ours. We are only unseen to those who are absent from it. This also includes electricity, gravity and other discoveries made by humanity. These things were unseen to those who came before us, even though they existed. When we had arrived at their preliminaries, they appeared to us and became witnessed.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '…whereas they cannot attain to aught of His Knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain]…' (*al-Baqara:* 255). Therefore, what is known to others and unseen to you is not unseen. Likewise, what is unseen to you but has preliminaries that lead to it is also not unseen. Rather, the unseen is the absolute unseen that is absent from you and others.

Because Allah *the Almighty* is the Knower of the Unseen and that which is witnessed, nothing of the actions or statements of mankind are absent from His knowledge. Allah *the Almighty* knows what is even more hidden than this. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And if you say anything aloud, [He hears it –] since, behold, He knows [even] the secret [thoughts of man] as well as all that is yet more hidden [within him].' (*Ta Ha:* 7)

For Allah, saying something aloud is like keeping it secret, for just as He knows what is stated aloud He knows what is secret. Indeed, He knows what is more hidden than secret. A secret means that you single out someone and tell him something that you do not want to spread amongst people, and you whisper in his ear that you trust him with what you have said. You feel at ease when you tell your secret to someone you can confide in and trust not to disseminate.

But there is something that is more hidden than a secret because if a secret has left your mouth and entered the ear of the one listening to you, then there is another secret that you have kept and not uttered to anyone. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And [know, O men, that] whether you keep your beliefs secret or state them openly, He has full knowledge indeed of all that is in [your] hearts.' (*al-Mulk:* 13)

Allah *the Almighty* has full Knowledge of the hearts' hidden contents before they become speech, but some Gnostics say: 'In Allah's Knowledge, there is that which is more hidden than the most hidden'. What is it? They say: 'Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* knows what will be in the soul before it actually is'. Therefore, we have that which is stated aloud, that which is secret, that which is more hidden than secret and that which is more hidden than the most hidden; Allah knows all of this. When mankind is brought back to the Knower of the Unseen and that which is witnessed, Allah will inform them of everything that they did. Allah *the Almighty* says: '…He will tell you everything you have done.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 8)

Allah *the Almighty* did not say that He would inform them of what they were doing or making in terms of actions, but rather what they were doing in an absolute sense, as actions are restricted to that which is done with the hands and legs, and the same goes for making. The word *ya`malun* comprises everything that man does, even if it is with his tongue, and a statement that the tongue utters is a deed (*`amal*) and not an action (*fi`l*).

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, 'on the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did!' (*an-Nur:* 24) He puts tongues together with hands and feet regarding what they used to do. There is also Allah's statement: 'till, when they come close to it, their hearing and their sight and their [very] skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing [on earth]' (*Fussilat:* 20).

The deeds of hearing and seeing are not like the deeds of hands and feet, but Allah *the Almighty* gathered them altogether in. Thus, the ears heard what Allah had forbidden and the eyes looked at what Allah had forbidden, and these are not actions but rather deeds, meaning that they did not do an affirmative action in response to something. Someone who has heard something, maybe he heard something evil, but he did not harm anyone else because of what he heard, and this is a deed.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* defines for us the most intelligent of mankind and the most precise of them in terms of knowing the reality of the life of this world. The intelligent person therein is the one who knows and is certain that the life of this world is nothing but a crossing point to the life of the Hereafter. The true life is what Allah *the Almighty* has described by saying: '…whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life: if they but knew this!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64)

He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The intelligent person is the one who takes his soul account and works from what comes after death, while the feeble-minded person is the one who follows his soul's caprice and hopes for the best from Allah.'[1] The intelligent person is the one who takes himself to account and works for what comes after death because death is the barrier between us and the life of the Hereafter. It is inevitable that death will meet us, as every soul is bound to taste death.

No one deceives himself into thinking that he will be able to flee from his destined outcome, otherwise he would have become feeble-minded and have deficiencies in his intellect. Thus, you would find him following his soul's whims and hoping for the best from Allah. How then, can you hope for the best from Allah when you have not worked for what comes after death with deeds that would rank you amongst the honoured ones? Instead, you have ranked yourself amongst the despicable who will be tormented because of what your hands have wrought and because you have not done acts of goodness and increased in acts of righteousness.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَوٰةِ مِن يَوۡمِ ٱلۡجُمُعَةِ فَٱسۡعَوۡاْ
إِلَىٰ ذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ وَذَرُواْ ٱلۡبَيۡعَۚ ذَٰلِكُمۡ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡ إِن كُنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ٩

Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of God and leave off your trading — that is better for you, if only you knew[9]
(The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 9)

Allah *the Almighty* wants his slaves to gather together once every week because you can pray your obligatory prayers in your factory or your farm, or in any other place. However, on Friday you must gather together with others; why? It is because it is possible that you are humbling yourself before Allah, between you and Him, bowing, prostrating, and weeping before Him.

But Allah *the Almighty* wants this matter to be before people so that you can see everyone who has leadership and rank prostrating and humbling himself

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(1) *See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, no. (2459), Ibn Majah, Sunnan, no. (4260), Ahmad, Musnad, no. (17164), Al-Bazzar, Musnad, no. (3489) and Abu Dawud At-Tayalasi, Musnad, no. (1218) on the authority of Shadad ibn Aws.*

before Allah along with you. On the Pilgrimage, you can see everyone who has rank and leadership carrying out the rites, just like you, and you say to yourself or to this person: 'We have been made equal in terms of servitude, as no one is raised over anyone else and no one humbles himself to anyone else. Rather, we are all Allah's slaves and we humble ourselves before Him alone'.

There are two days in the week that have been mentioned in the Quran by name, and they are Friday and Saturday, while there are seven days in the week and five have not been mentioned in the Quran by name. They are Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Friday is the festival of the Muslims, on which it has been legislated for them to gather together in the mosques and perform the Friday Prayer. We notice that Friday (*al-jumu`a*) has not derived its name from numbers, as all the days of the week are attributed to numbers apart from Friday and Saturday.

That is why we find that Sunday (*al-ahad*) comes from one (*wahid*), Monday (*al-ithnayn*) comes from two (*ithnayn*), Tuesday (*ath-thulatha`*) comes from three (*thalatha*), Wednesday (*al-arbi`a`*) comes from four (*arba`a*) and Thursday (*al-khamis*) comes from five (*khamsa*).

It was assumed that Friday would come from six; it does not; why? This is because it is the day on which the system of His Existence gathers together for the universe, so Allah *the Almighty* called it *Al-Jumu`a* and made it a festival.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us about Friday by saying: 'Indeed Friday is the master of the days and the greatest of them in the sight of Allah. In the sight of Allah, it is greater than the Day of the Sacrifice and the Day of Breaking the Fast. It contains five attributes: it is the day on which Allah created Adam, on which Allah sent Adam down to earth and on which Allah caused Adam to die. It contains an hour in which no slave will ask Allah for something except that Allah will grant it to him, as long as it is not impermissible. On it the Last Hour will be established. There is no angel who is near unto Him, no sky, no earth, no wind, no mountain, and no sea except that they are aware of Friday.'(1)

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(1) *See Ibn Majah, Sunnan, no. (1084), At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir no. (4387), Al-Bayhaqi in Shu`ab Al-Iman, no. (2712), Ibn Abi Shayba in Musannaf no. (815), and Abu Na`im Al-Asbahani in Ma`rifat As-Sahaba, no. (2405) on the authority of Abu Lubaba ibn `Abd Al-Mundhir.*

The festival is the gathering of the entire universe on this day, a gathering of Allah's blessing in bringing the universe into existence and completing it on that day. Thus, the believers in Allah gather together to honour the completion of the creation of the euniverse for them, and the completion of the creation was on Friday.

Allah legislated the gathering of Friday for a social reason, which is that a person looks for each of his brothers. What has held him back? Is he in need or ill? Has something happened to him? This means that the person does not have to humiliate himself and ask, and when he does that he has the sagacity of faith.

The children of Israel asked for a day in which they could take a rest from work and be free to worship Allah. Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* proposed Friday to them, as it is the day on which Allah completed the creation of the universe in six days and it is also the day which Allah's close friend, Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* chose, but they rejected Friday and chose Saturday.

They said: 'Indeed Allah created the world in six days, starting on Sunday, finishing on Friday and resting on Saturday, and likewise we want to rest and be free to worship Allah on Saturday.' This was their desire and their choice. As for the Christians, they refused to follow the Jews in Saturday or Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in Friday, and instead chose Sunday based on it being the very beginning of creation. As for the *ummah* of Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah has chosen Friday for them as the day of concluding and completing the blessing.

This commandment to perform the obligatory Friday Prayer is like a congregational prayer, and a congregation is required therein. It is necessary that we turn up for it as a congregation because a congregation is stipulated and the prayer is not valid without it.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew. Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9-10)

Of these two commands, one is connected to the religion and the other is connected to the life of this world, and they are both from Allah's way, as Allah does not want you to trade and work during the time of the prayer, nor does He want you to leave your work without any reason and remain in the mosque after the prayer. When you are called to the prayer, go to the mosque, and when the prayer is ended go and strive for your provisions.

Allah *the Almighty* addresses those who believe in the way by saying: 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). When the caller to prayer raises his voice with the words 'Allah is the Greatest', this is a call to devote oneself to Allah; to devote oneself at a defined time to stand before Him *the Almighty* and to be in His Presence and Allah will give you support.

When a person comes into his Lord's Presence through prayer and he begins with 'Allah is the Greatest', it is from this moment that he is in Allah's Presence. When the caller to prayer says, 'Allah is the Greatest', you observe that everyone comes, the rich before the poor, the subject along with the ruler. Everyone leaves their rank at the door of the masjid along with their shoes to be equal in prayer. Whoever has a boss who is overbearing over him sees him prostrating towards Allah, just like him, and he is at ease in that moment of equality in servitude. Let us assume that each one of us offers his daily prayers alone, the matter will be different as to the Friday Prayer because Allah *the Almighty* commands us to stop and leave everything to perform it together; the weak see the powerful abasing them standing before Allah, just as they do; and the strong see the weak besides them. When each one of us returns to his work, the masks of power and haughtiness will have been already taken off and removed because we all stand equally before One Creator. The words: 'Allah is the Greatest' draw our attention and remind us that Allah is Greater than anything that may preoccupy you, and we know that it is from the inimitable qualities of the call to prayer: 'Allah is the Greatest' and not 'Allah is Great'; this is out of respect for the many things that do preoccupy us in the life of this world and which we view them great. This is because the life of this world must not be neglected, since it is a passageway leading to the coming reward in the Hereafter. That is why I always say that the life of this world is too important to be forgotten and at the same time it is not important enough to be one's ultimate objective. In the life of this world, you move about in the earth and strive for your nourishment and the nourishment of your dependents, so that this nourishment can assist you with worship. That is why no one should scorn the life of this world. Rather, he should thank Allah and supplicate to Him to give him enabling success so that he can expend all his effort in being successful in his work, as it is through good work that the slave obtains reward. As soon as the slave hears 'Allah is the Greatest', he must direct himself towards that which is actually greater, the True Lord *the Almighty* to perform the prayer. This is the meaning that is drawn from those who come early for the prayer and those who come late. When you hear the caller to prayer says, 'Allah is the Greatest' for the Friday Prayer, for example, you must leave the means of the life of this world and go to stand before Allah *the Almighty*. As for the soul of the believer, the greatness of the True Lord *the Almighty* is greater than everything is, and greater than everything that is great. That is why the words 'Allah is the Greatest' are the motto of your call to prayer and the prayer itself so you must declare Allah to be the Greatest and make Him greater than all vicissitudes that are besides Him. So, if you are called to prayer, whatever work you are doing, say: 'Allah is Greater than my work'. If you are called and you are in the presence of a powerful person, say: 'Allah is greater than every powerful person'. Declare Him to be the Greatest such that His commands and prohibitions take precedence over all other commands and prohibitions. The True Lord *the Almighty* says, '…and keep up prayer for My Remembrance.' (*Ta Ha:* 14) This means, 'for My Remembrance' because the permanence and monotony of blessings could make you forget about the Granter of Blessings. When you hear the call 'Allah is the Greatest', you see people rushing to mosque, nothing prevents them from it. You will remember if you had already forgotten and your heart awakens if you were heedless. The Arabic word *dhikr* (remembrance) is a gerund, and a gerund is added to a subject. For example, Arabs say, 'I was astonished by the ruler's beating of Zayd'. It can also be added to an object. For example, 'I was astonished by Zayd's beating on behalf of the ruler'. So, when you say, 'Allah's Remembrance', it is correct that the meaning could be remembrance emanating from Allah or even the slave's remembrance of Allah. If you said: 'Remembrance emanating from Allah' to the praying person, then when a person prays and remembers Allah in terms of

His Greatness when he says 'Allah is the Greatest' and declares Him transcendent when He says, 'Glorified is Allah' and prostrates and bows to Him the Almighty then you have indeed done Remembrance of Allah therein, remembrance in word and action, and Allah *the Almighty* recompenses your remembrance of Him by remembering you, as remembrance is remembrance from Allah of whoever remembers Him in their prayer. There is no doubt that Allah's Remembrance of you is greater and more sublime than your remembrance of Him *the Almighty* because you remember Allah from your adolescence until your death. As for Him *the Almighty* because of your remembrance of Him, He will grant you high ranks that have no end on the Day on which no one dies and His Blessings and Benefits will not be withheld from you. Allah's Remembrance of you, by way of reward and mercy, is greater than your remembrance of Him by way of obedience. This is according to the meaning of Allah's Remembrance of the slave. The other meaning or the slave's remembrance of Allah means that remembering Allah outside the prayer is greater than remembering Him in the prayer. How is that so? Some scholars say: 'It is because you are in the presence of your Lord after the opening *takbira* 'Allah is the Greatest', so when you have finished the prayer and gone back to your daily activity, your remembrance of Allah when you are far from His Presence is more immense and greater than your remembrance of Him when you are in His Presence. Do not think that remembrance is restricted to just the prayer. Rather, Allah's Remembrance must never be absent from your mind because your remembrance of your Lord outside the prayer is greater than your remembrance of Him *the Almighty* in the prayer. Your Lord is not waiting for you to come to Him. Rather, He is inviting you to visit Him. He turns to you before you turn to Him. Did He not say in a Qudsi Hadith: 'If someone remembers me within himself, I remember him within Myself, and if someone remembers Me in a gathering I remember him in a better gathering. If someone comes to Me walking, I come to him running, and if someone approaches me by an arm's length I approach him by a fathom's length.'(1)

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. (6981); see also Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith, no. (9340, 10285), Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Arba`in As-Sughra, Hadith, no. (43), At-Tabarani, Ad-Du`a, Hadith, no; (18, 1865, 1870) and Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith, no. (811) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

Therefore the reins are in your hand, what an excellent Lord is He Who treats His slaves in this way and bestows all these excellent favours upon them! Hastening to Allah's remembrance and leaving off trade for that end give a person boundless energy whose effects manifest themselves in man's second activities. That is why the True Lord *the Almighty* says after that: '…then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's Bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) The True Lord *the Almighty* has only called them to get a collective benefit which is that every believer should declare his slavery to Allah in front of the rest of creation. Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* calls you and invites you: He says, 'Allah is the Greatest' because the activities of life and the necessities of livelihood are a great matter in Allah's sight that should not be neglected. But if life's activities and striving therein are a great matter, then Allah is Greater, and your Lord takes you away from your work to pray, and after that He calls you to work. We notice in the term '*Allah Akbar*' that *Akbar* (greater/greatest) is a superlative used for hyperbole, and when something is less than *akbar*, we say *kabir* (great). It is as if the term is an indication that working and striving are not something paltry and insignificant. Rather, it is something great that you should be concerned with because it is the sinew of life and the building up of the earth cannot be done properly without it. The True Lord *the Almighty* draws our attention to the inimitability of the Quranic style in His saying: 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). The preposition *min* (of) defined an intended time for the prayer, and it is the Friday Prayer as a specified prayer to be performed in the time of the noon prayer, and unlike the noon prayer, it is performed as two units instead of four. This is from the Quranic exact style, for indeed Allah's saying: '…prayer is made on the day of congregation…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) does not single out a specific time, but rather, it makes the obligation to gather for prayer generally applicable to all the prayers on Friday, and this contains hardship, and Allah does not want hardship for His slaves. The True Lord *the Almighty* says, '…Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty…' (*al-Baqara:* 185). He *the Almighty* also says, '…and He has not laid upon you a hardship in religion…' (*al-Hajj:* 78). Thus, Allah does not want to bring hardship upon you or constrain you, or make matters difficult for you. Rather, He wants to make everything easy, and thus His Legislation is laid down according to your ability. He has made concessions for you that make matters lighter for you and He has removed constriction and restraint from you. As for Allah's saying: '…hurry towards the reminder of Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9), 'hurry' here means to direct oneself and go to Allah's mosques. We must accompany this designation of place with a designation of task for which a person will enter mosque and direct himself towards Allah. The mosque is designated for the worship of Allah, and even though you can pray anywhere on the earth, when you come to the mosque, you must be accompanied by the etiquettes of worshipful devotion. The way you are affected, your interactions, your movement and your activity must all be for Allah's sake, and that is why the best thing you can do when you enter the mosque is to intend spiritual retreat (*`itikaf*), and thus stay away from anyone who intends to speak to you about worldly matters, A tradition has been mentioned regarding the prohibition of chatting in the mosque because it causes actions to go to waste and wipes out good deeds.(1) You do many good deeds outside the mosque, but you must enter the mosque with the standard proper practices of the mosque, as being present before Allah *the Almighty* in His mosque and in His House has its norms. Thus, you must not step over people, and this requires organisation, meaning that you do not make the places at the front empty and those at the back crowded, and this is so that everyone who wants to pray can sit without anyone being stepped over. People should sit in the first row and complete it before starting the second, and this is how faithful proper practices can be achieved in the mosques. One day, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Salman Al-Farisi: 'Do you know what Friday is?' He said: 'Allah and His Messenger know best.' He said it three times and the third time he said: 'It is the day on which your father Adam was brought together.(2) Shall I not tell you about Friday? No man purifies himself and does so with excellence, wears his best clothes, applies perfume from his household if they have perfume and if not then with water, then comes to the mosque and sits and listens quietly until the imam finishes his prayer except that it is an expiation for what is between two Fridays, as long as major sins have been avoided, and this applies all the time.'(1) This day is Friday, and to exalt this day Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Shall I not tell you about Friday?' This means that what this day deserves great concern from us, so we should purify ourselves well and wear the best of our clothes.

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(1) *This is a statement that is uttered by common people: 'Chatting in the mosque consumes good deeds just as animals eat grass.' See Al-Ghazali, Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din, (1/136); commenting on his Takhrij Al-Hafizh Al-`Iraqi said: 'I have not found any basis for it.' In his Tabaqat Ash-Shafi`iyyah, As-Subki said: 'I have not found a chain of narration for it.'*

(2) *See Ibn Jarir At-Tabari and Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Asma` Wa As-Sifat and Ibn `Asakir from Ibn Mas`ud and other Companions. See also As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, (1/254).*

The perfection of the Creator's Blessing towards the creation is that a person purifies himself in the way that Allah has laid down for him, and to hasten to Allah's mosque where Allah *the Almighty* is remembered. When the Muslim performs *ghusl* on Friday or makes ablution, two things have happened for him: purification and purity. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us about the effect of ablution in purifying the Muslim and keeping him pure, as well as cleansing his limbs from filth and sins. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'When the Muslim slave, or believer, performs ablution and washes his face, every sin that his eyes looked at falls away with the water or the last drop of water, when he washes his hands, every sin that his hands grasped falls away with the water or the last drop of water. When he washes his feet, every sin that his feet walked in falls away with the water or the last drop of water such that he comes out cleansed of his sins.'(2) The Muslim who is hastening to Allah's mosques wherein he will remember Allah must not rush to catch up with the imam and get the sermon or the prayer. This actually should be from the moment he makes ablution and leaves his house for the prayer. Beware of doing things that are incompatible with the prayer. Enter the mosque with tranquillity and dignity to carry out the prayer with the *imam*. (3)

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(1) *See Ahmad in his Musnad, Hadith no. (23769, 23780). See also Ibn Khuzayma, Sahih, Hadith no. (1732); see also Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. (2526); An-Nzsa`i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. (1677), 1737; Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. (1028) and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no, (5967) from the Hadith of Salman Al-Farisi.*

(2) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith, no. (600); see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith, no. (2); he graded it as a good and authentic Hadith. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith, no. (8007); Ibn Khuzayma, Sahih, Hadith no. (4); Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. (1040); and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. (385, 386); all these narrations are from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra.*

(3) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'When you are called to the prayer,=*

The first attribute that the True Lord *the Almighty* gave to those believers who attain to a happy state is: 'Who are humble in their prayers.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 2) He did not say, for example: 'those who perform the prayer' because the issue of the believers performing the prayer is settled. The lesson here is about 'manner and form', the lesson is to have humility and reverence, to have tranquillity and calmness of one's heart and to think in Allah before Whom you are standing. Likewise, you say to your child: 'Sit in front of the teacher, pay attention, and listen quietly'. You do not advise him to go to the school or attend the lesson because that matter is settled. That is why we are concerned with the essence of the subject and the state in which he should be. Humility (*khushu`*) means that the heart is calm and tranquil in this task that it has, and thus it is preoccupied with nothing but the prayer because Allah has only placed one heart in man. As long as one is in the presence of one's Lord *the Almighty* one should not be preoccupied with anything besides Him. In this respect, some pious Muslims said that the meaning of humility entails that if one intentionally knows who is on his right or his left, his prayer is invalid(1). When `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* entered upon a man who was praying and playing with his beard, he struck him on his hand and said: 'If your heart were in a state of humility, your limbs would be in a state of humility.'(2) Indeed, the True Lord *the Almighty* has made these people among the true servants of the Most Gracious. He *the Almighty* says, 'And the servants of the Beneficent Allah are they who walk on the earth in humbleness…' (*al-Furqan:* 63). This means 'with gentleness, tranquillity and tenderness, not with arrogance, pride or haughtiness', why? It is because walking is what exposes you to numerous

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= *come to it walking and with tranquillity. Pray whatever you get from the prayer and complete what you have missed.' See Muslim in his Sahih, Hadith no. (1391); see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. (327); Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. (7649 and 8207); Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. (7664); and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. (3759, 3770 and 3772) from the Hadith of Abu Hurayra.*

(1) *In his Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din (1/160), Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali said: 'On the authority of Mu`adh ibn Jabal: 'Whoever intentionally knows who is on his right and his left while in prayer has no prayer.' In his Risalat Al-Qushayriyya, Al-Qushayri said: 'It has been stated that a condition of humility in the prayer is that one does not know who is on one's right and on one's left.' See also As-Saharwardi, `Awarif Al-Ma`arif, (1/306); he attributed it to Ibn `Abbas's sayings.*

(2) *See Al-Bayhaqi in his As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. (3692).*

societies, and this divine modesty in walking brings about human equality in society which makes everyone equal. In another place, the True Lord *the Almighty* teaches us the modest way of walking, as He says, ‘And pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice…’ (*Luqman:* 19). Some scholars said: ‘What is meant by ‘pursue the right course in your going’ is that man should walk naturally without feigning pride or arrogance, but at the same time without humiliation and dejection. When `Umar saw a man walking sluggishly, he hit him and forbid him from walking in such a dejected or sluggish way; and this shows clearly how the walk of the believer should be; it is not arrogant and it is not sluggish and languid. The True Lord *the Almighty* is asking us to hasten to the mosque when He calls us to the prayer, and even though the entire earth is a mosque and all of it is pure, the mosque has been designated for prayer, and thus prayers should be performed there. If someone’s house is far from the mosque, he must still come for prayer with tranquillity and dignity, and he should maintain this manner even if it means he will miss the opening *takbira* (*Allah Akbar*). Therefore, let us dedicate our sitting in the mosque to the Granter of Blessings, and He is Allah *the Almighty*. As for when we are outside the mosque, and at all other times, we live with the blessings that Allah has bestowed upon us. When the True Lord commands you to hasten to His Remembrance in His mosques, He is only inviting you to His mosque so that you can have a break and be relieved of your burdens and concerns. He rectifies whatever is wrong with you and opens the doors of comfort for you.

The mosque is a place of worship in which Allah is never disobeyed, unlike homes and other places. Allah has exalted His Houses such that He is not disobeyed therein, and He has exalted their visitors above being preoccupied with the trivialities of the worldly matters while therein, so you must leave the life of this world at the door of the mosque, just as you leave your shoes. That is why Islam has forbidden us from conducting transactions in the mosque, or even looking for something that one has lost because a transaction that is conducted in the mosque will be unsuccessful and unprofitable. How can you spend your entire time engaged in worldly matters, day and night, and then find it troublesome to spend a few minutes carrying out what Allah has obligated you to do, such that you are fully occupied with the life of this world, even into the mosque? Do you not know that the mosques have only been made for Allah's worship? The believer must leave his worldly life outside the mosque, and he must intend to be in spiritual retreat, worshipping his Lord and remaining constant in His remembrance in His house. It is not befitting of you to be in the mosque and to be preoccupied with other than Him. If you were to adhere to the etiquettes of the mosque, you would receive light upon light from your Lord and you would be relieved of your anxieties and worries. Your problems would be solved from where you would never imagine, so make your moments in the mosque for Allah, as the mosque is a place of worship. That is why I say to anyone who talks to me in the mosque about anything related to life's activities: 'I am informing you that it will not be beneficial because you have entered the mosque solely for worship. Indeed, the moment you entered the mosque was the moment in which you came to draw near to your Lord, be in intimate conversation with him and live under his providence, so why are you bringing the life of this world with you?' Let one of the Companions be a good example for us, as he would say, 'We would leave the affairs of this world with our shoes.' Another Companion added: 'Even more, my brother. We leave our ranks with our shoes.' Look at the subtlety: the second Companion does not just leave his world with his shoes at the door of the mosque. He also leaves his rank in the life of this world. It is possible that the life of this world can take up several hours of your time, while going to the mosque only takes up a small amount of time, so put your rank with your shoes outside the mosque, and enter the mosque with no rank other than the rank of your faith in Allah. Sit in the place that you find empty and do not step over anyone to get to a specific place in the mosque because you are entering as Allah's slave. Someone who serves may end up sitting next to you and a young person may sit next to an old person. We do not notice you that have any rank except your rank with Allah. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would sit at the edge of the gathering,(1) this means that where he found a place for himself, and this is the opposite of our time in which a person uses a prayer mat to reserve a place for someone else. A person may also enter and step over people to sit in the first row, and he doesn't know that Allah arranged the rows before he came to the mosque. As long as we will leave aside our ranks, do not say: 'Where will I sit and next to whom?' Rather, sit where you find the edge of the gathering and do not step over people. Intend spiritual retreat and do not talk about any worldly matter, and this is so that you do not come under the supplication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah does not bless you in that which you are seeking and have been cherishing for a long time.(1) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbade a person from setting aside a place for himself in the mosque that he would constantly sit in(2) because the basis is that the person prays at the edge of the gathering, and thus people sit on a first come first serve basis according to their place and their hastening to the prayer, and thus one does not step over people or separate between two people. We see some people rushing to the first row, for example, and laying down a prayer mat to reserve a place and then they go and take care of some business. When they come late for the prayer, they step over the necks of people to get to their place. This leads to people being constrained by this behaviour, and they put the prayer mat aside and sit in its place. Indeed this behaviour is not befitting of the mosque, which bring about equality among all of Allah's creation and realise equality of slavery to Allah. Today you are next to so-and-so and tomorrow you will be next to someone else. Everyone is submissive to Allah, bowing and prostrating, and no one is deeming himself above anyone else. One of the most serious things that

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(1) *In his Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (17868), At-Tabarani narrated from the Hadith of Hind ibn Abu Hala At-Tamimi, describing Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him that he peace and blessings be upon him would sit at the edge of a gathering when he came upon one and he commanded others to do likewise.' See also Al-Bayhaqi, Dala`il An-Nubuwwa, Hadith no. (1/290).*

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'If you see someone selling or buying in the mosque, say: 'Allah will not make your trade profitable.' If you see someone looking for something that they have lost, say: 'Allah will not grant you any return for it.' See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. (1321); Ibn Khuzayma, Sahih, Hadith no. (1305); and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. (8260).*

(2) *It is narrated on the authority of Salman Al-Farisi that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'A man does not perform ghusl on Friday, purify himself as much as he is able, rub some of his oil on himself or apply some perfume from his house, then leave and not separate between two people, then pray what Allah has prescribed for him, then listen quietly when the imam is speaking, except that he is forgiven for what is between that Friday and the last.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. (883, 910); see also Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. (23761) and Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. (2776).*

Muslims are afflicted with is that places are now designated in the mosque for a specific class, and their places are left vacant. They are accompanied by bodyguards, even in the mosques. Then the person comes at a later time and sits in the first row, while another person spreads out his prayer mat to reserve a place. All Muslims should reject this behaviour. You must put the prayer mat to the side and sit down because the first to sit are the first to come, and Allah has made this arrangement in the mosque out of concern for it. This evil habit causes the person who does it to fall into many impermissible acts, in that they step over the necks of people and distinguish themselves over others without any right, and there is a lessening of slavery in the mosque. Allah *the Almighty* has distributed the places according to the arrival of people. If you come to the mosque first, you get the reward of the first row, even if you pray in the last row. If places were not reserved, harmony would spread among people, disparities would be removed, and people would become acquainted with each other. In each prayer, you would be next to a new person and you would get to know them and know how they are doing. Once someone is sitting in their place, they must listen quietly to the imam's *sermon* because it includes verses from the Quran. The True Lord *the Almighty* says, 'And when the Quran is recited, then listen to it and remain silent, that mercy may be shown to you.' (*al-A'raf:* 204) Some scholars have pointed out that listening quietly to the sermon has been established by the proof of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'If you say to your Companion, while the *imam* is giving the sermon on Friday, "Be quiet", you have made a mistake.'(1) The Arabic word *khutba* (sermon) is comprised of the letters *kha`*, *ta`* and *ba`*, and they indicate matters that contribute to a number of particularities. These include the word *khutba*, the word *khatb* which is something immense, and there is also the word *khitba* (engagement).

All these particularities indicate that an immense matter is being dealt with, as *khatb* is an immense matter because it separates between two lives: the life of liberty and the life of being restricted by family. These are all meanings that contribute to a matter that is important and significant. The matter of the Friday Prayer requires that you beautify yourself, confirming the True Lord's saying: '…attend to your embellishments at every time of prayer…' (*al-A'raf:* 31). This is what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* means in the Prophetic Hadith: 'Shall I not tell you about Friday? No man purifies himself and does so with excellence, wears his best clothes, applies perfume from his household if they have perfume and if not then with water, then comes to the mosque…'(1) Regarding His saying: '…attend to your embellishments…' (*al-A'raf:* 31), when you hear of beautification, you turn your attention towards embellishing yourself beyond your normal habit, and this means that the Muslim goes to the mosque wearing the most splendid clothes that he has. We know that the mosque is a place in which Allah's slaves come together. We know that people's ranks and positions are different, yet we should also know that every task in this life has its own apparel and its own attire. The person who sits at a desk to meet people has a certain kind of clothes, and the person who works in metalwork has his particular uniform that suits his work. But when you go to the mosque to gather altogether to pray to Allah, does each person come wearing the clothes of his profession to enter the mosque? No, there should be clothes for the mosque that do not inconvenience others. If one's work clothes are not befitting, so wear clean clothes so that you do not trouble someone who is next to you. This is because we go to the mosque to perform a common deed that governs all of us, which is performing prayer to Allah in the mosque, so you must honour this praying. In another Hadith from Salman Al-Farisi, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Whoever performs *ghusl* on Friday, purifies himself as much as he is able, applies some oil or perfume, then leaves and does not separate between two people, then prays what Allah has prescribed for him, then listens quietly when the *imam* has come out, he is forgiven for what is between that Friday and the last.'[1] Furthermore, the True Lord *the Almighty* commands that we hasten to the prayer on Friday. He *the Almighty* commands the believers to leave off trade for the sake of the Friday prayer. He says, 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). The True Lord *the Almighty* did not say 'leave off agriculture', or 'leave off manufacturing', 'leave off teaching'. Rather, He chose, from all the activities of life, the activity of trade specifically because it contains commerce and commerce includes all the activities of life. The True Lord *the Almighty* has taken you from trade to prayer and He has not taken you from idleness. Rather, He has taken you from the activity of trade, and He used the Arabic word *bay`* (trade) because it is a process that brings about immediate profit because when you plant crops you have to wait for a period of time, lengthy or not, before they bear fruit. However, trade bears its fruit immediately. You trade and you take the profit immediately.

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(1) *See Malik, Al-Muwatta, Hadith no. (232); see also Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. (934); Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. (2002); Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. (1114); and An-Nasa`i, Sunnan, Hadith no. (1402 and 1577).*

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Salman Al-Farisi that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'O Salman, do you know what Friday is?' I said: 'It is the day on which your father, or the father of all of you, was gathered.' He said: 'No, but I will tell you about Friday. There is no Muslim who purifies himself and does so with excellence, wears his best clothes, applies perfume from his household if they have perfume and if not then with water, then comes to the mosque and sits and listens quietly until the imam finishes and then prays, except that it is an expiation for what is between two Fridays, as long as enormities have been avoided, and this applies all the time.' See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. (5967).*

Trade permeates all the activities of trade because the meaning of trade is that it is a medium between a producer and a consumer. When you buy a commodity, that commodity has come from a producer, and the producer looks for an intermediary to sell it to the consumer, and you find this consumer to also be a producer and the producer to also be a consumer. Thus, producing and consuming are exchange and activity, and all of life is in buying and selling, and as long as there is buying there is selling, and this is the continuation of life's activity. Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear: Leave off this process that brings immediate profit, and heed the call to the Friday Prayer. When man leaves off buying he obviously leaves off selling because buying and selling are two sides of the same process. The only difference is that the buyer may buy the commodity and be reluctant to buy because he is consuming his money with what he is buying. As for the trader, he wants to obtain the price of the sale immediately, and most of the time one obtains the profit afterwards, and this is the peak of earning. A farmer's earnings, for example, come months after the actual farming. The earnings of the employee come at the beginning

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. (910); see also Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. (2776); Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. (2103); and Ad-Darami, Sunnan, Hadith no. (1541), from the Hadith of Salman Al-Farisi.*

of the month. As for the trader, he obtains the earnings immediately, and that is why the True Lord commands us to leave off trade when we hear the call to the prayer on Friday. If we were to look at the subtlety of the effectuation of trade we would find that it is the peak of directly taking one's provision, and the True Lord *the Almighty* mentioned trade because it is the peak of instant expediency. The command came to leave off this instant benefit to perform the Friday Prayer, and this command guarantees that all matters that could bring about subsequent profit are left off in order that the prayer be performed.

Indeed the word *bay`* is a subtle expression because the One speaking is Allah, and the True Lord did not speak here, for example, about buying because the buyer may buy something reluctantly. The seller, on the other hand, is more than happy to sell. A man may go to buy some things for his house and hears the call to prayer and thus rushes to the mosque. He says to his family afterwards: 'I went to buy but the call to the Friday Prayer was given'. This is because man does not like to spend money. As for the seller, he benefits absolutely. Man's desires are attached to selling and not buying, as buying requires that we have money, as opposed to selling, which earns money. That is why the seller is sad when he does not sell. As for the buyer, when he ca not find something or he finds that the shop is closed, he says, 'Oh well, Allah did not want this transaction to happen'. Know that if you devote yourself to Allah, He gives you abundant blessings that compensate your profits in the life of this world and its commerce. That is why the motto of the call to prayer that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was pleased with is 'Allah is the Greatest', means greater than anything besides Him. If you are sleeping, then Allah is greater than sleep, and if you are engaged in commerce then, Allah is greater than commerce, if you are working, then Allah is greater than work and so on and so forth. It is amazing that we see those who give precedence to work over the prayer on the argument that the time is extended and one can pray after finishing work. This is a flimsy argument because when your Lord calls you with 'Allah is the Greatest', He wants you to respond immediately and not with slackness. Otherwise, how can you call it responding to the call if it is delayed beyond its time? The length of time, especially between dawn and noon and between nightfall and dawn, does not mean that you pray throughout this time, because the call necessitates hastening and response.

Allah's saying: '…that is…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) is a demonstrative referring to that which preceded it which means hastening to Allah's remembrance, and it is the Friday Prayer and its connection to leaving off trade. The particle *dha* is a demonstrative while the letter *kaf* indicates address because the True Lord *the Almighty* is addressing a group. Some of those who do not understand the Arabic language say that *dhalikum* is one word of address or a demonstrative, and you say to them: 'No, rather, it is two words, a demonstrative and an address, and the demonstrative here is for one thing and the address is for a group. In Allah's saying: '…better for you…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9), the Arabic word *khayr* (better) is a comparative and its origin is *akhyar* meaning that it gives you lawful benefit and profit. This is a good thing that brings goodness to man. If this is better, then it has more goodness than it and it is responding to the call to the prayer on Friday, leaving off trade, and hastening to Allah's remembrance wherever you are called to it. In Allah's saying: '…if only you knew' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) knowledge means that you take a matter that you believe in; it has a reality and you are able to prove it, and if one of these conditions is unfulfilled, it is no longer knowledge. I say that Allah's saying: '…if only you knew' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) means that you know for certain a matter that is relative, real, and believed in and you are able to prove it, as there are scales by which we know what is good and what is evil. And when the True Lord *the Almighty* says, '…if only you knew' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9), it is as if there are preliminary steps leading to knowledge, and if they do not know then Allah will teach them.

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says:

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةُ فَٱنتَشِرُوا۟ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱبْتَغُوا۟
مِن فَضْلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out God's bounty. Remember God often so that you may prosper [10] (The Quran, *al-Jumu'a:* 10)

When the True Lord *the Almighty* tells us about the prayer from Friday He says, 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew, then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9-10). This is how the True Lord *the Almighty* takes us from work to prayer, and after the prayer He commands us to work and strive, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain something of Allah's bounty. Disobey command in Allah's saying: '…hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). The same as disobeying the command in Allah's saying: 'then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). This is because Islam does not approve of laziness and is not pleased with idleness and sitting around. Whoever wants stillness will not benefit from the activity of someone moving. When \`Umar (1) saw a man living in the mosque and never leaving it, he asked: 'Who is providing for him?' Some people said: 'His brother.' He said: 'His brother is more worshipful than him.'(2) Why? It is because he partakes in life's activity and he spreads benefit among mankind. Therefore, every beneficial work is worship on the condition that it has the right intention. The disbeliever works and his intention is to provide for himself, and if the believer were to do likewise then what is the difference? Yes, the believer works to feed himself, and to make it easier for his brothers to be nourished and to facilitate their activities in life. If a taxi driver, for example, works and earns enough for the day and then goes home and parks his car, who is going to take the patient who needs to get to the doctor? If the seller were to earn his sustenance and then close his shop, who would sell to the people? Therefore, work for yourself but at the same time think about the benefits and needs of others, and if you do that you will be in a state of worship. Work according to your capacity, not according to your need. Then take what you need from what your capacity has produced. The rest can be given back to people, either in the form of charity or at a price, and it suffices that you facilitate a way for it. Therefore, we say that worship is every activity that carries out a service in the universe and your intention therein is for Allah. Worship is the worshipper's obedience of the object of worship. Therefore, do not think that the only worship we do is prayer, fasting, *zakat* and the Pilgrimage because these are the pillars of Islam. As long as these are the pillars and the foundations upon which Islam is based, it therefore means that Islam is not just comprised of the pillars. Rather, the pillars are the foundations upon which Islam is built. The foundations upon which a house is built are not the entire house, and that is why Islam is a multifarious construction. Those who take from systematic terminology, or technical terminology in science, say that worship is the prayer and whatever is connected to it, along with *zakat*, fasting and the pilgrimage because in the books of jurisprudence, they are referred to as 'worship' (*`ibadat*) I have replied by saying that this is the technical term, but every matter from Allah is worship, and that is why some people say: 'We worship Allah and we do not work.' We respond to them by saying: 'Worship is the worshipper's obedience of the object of worship, so do understand worship on the basis that it is the outward rites only, as the outward rites are a declaration and a perpetuation of allegiance to Allah. The outward rites give you a boost with which you face the events of life, but the outward rites alone are not all of worship, as transactions (*mu`amalaat*) are also worship, and the true understanding of worship is that it comprises the building up of the earth. That is why He *the Almighty* says, 'then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). Thus, if we have obeyed Allah in the first command: '…hurry towards the reminder of Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9), then the command in Allah's saying: '…disperse in the land…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10), also merits obedience. Thus, every activity in life is worship. Then, does not the prayer need some sustenance of life? Indeed, it provides you with the essentials of life so that you can pray, and what are your life's essentials? Indeed, they are food, drink, a place to live and clothing, and that which is needed to fulfil an obligation is also an obligation.

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(1) *The story of \`Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him with the worshiper in the mosque.*

(2) What Al-Ghazali mentioned in *Al-Ihya\`* (2/350) is from the statement of \`Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* that he said to a man: 'Your brother is more worshipful than you.' See Abu Bakr Ad-Daniuri, *Al-Mujalasa Wa Jawahir Al-\`Ilm*, (753); and Ibn Qutaiba, *\`Uyun Al-Akhbar*, (1/137). As for what has been mentioned from \`Umar ibn Al-Khattab, he said to someone who was not working: 'Indeed the sky does not rain down gold or silver.' Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (2/153) attributed it to \`Umar saying: 'None of you should sit around asking for sustenance by saying 'O Allah, grant me sustenance', when you know that the skies do not rain down gold or silver.'

An example of this is that when a person prays he needs strength, and strength originates in the body as a result of consuming food. Therefore, the process of making food is an obligatory matter, and everything that is a consequence of that is also an obligatory process. That is why, when someone comes and says, ‘I want to dedicate myself to worship and be isolated from life’s activity’, we say: ‘Do that on one condition, which is that you do not benefit from the activity of a single active person in life and that you do not eat any food. That is because the loaf of bread that someone gives you is from the work of many people who have not cut themselves off from life.’ I also say: ‘Why are you wearing those clothes? Indeed, these are the products of the life activity of many other people, as there are those who grow the cotton, those who gin the cotton, others who turn it into yarn, still others who weave it and last of all, those who add the details to these clothes. ‘Look at the tools that are behind each one of these people. So, as long as you have decided to cut yourself off from life’s activity, beware of deriving benefit from the activity of a single person who is preoccupied with the means.’ Indeed, working with the means is worship because worship cannot be done without it, and whatever is needed to fulfil an obligation is itself obligatory. That is why we learn the beneficial skills of life, and they are a communal obligation. The obligations that are binding upon man fall into two categories. The first is an individual obligation, which is a command for which each individual is legally responsible. A person has to do it himself and is not allowed to have someone else do it for him such as the prayer. The second is a communal obligation without which the obligatory cannot be done, and that is why it is obligatory. Each one of us wants food, and that is why we must divide the work, so this person grows crops and this person manufactures. We need to grow wheat. We need to build mills. We need to build ovens, and we need engineers to design these machines. All these are matters that make it easy for man to acquire the strength to perform prayers. You stand before the True Lord to perform the prayer, but what about after the prayer? Here the True Lord *the Almighty* says, ‘then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah’s bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10) Therefore, let no one say that he is dedicating his entire life to prayer, as no one is able to go and pray without having his essentials of life, and the essentials of life require that man go about the earth and man must seek to obtain some of Allah’s bounty. The True Lord *the Almighty* has commanded His believing slaves to disperse freely on earth because He has a goal and an objective. The goal is to strive and seek sustenance, and one of the meanings of *intishar* (dispersing freely) is *siyaha* (travel), which is taken from water flowing, and when it overflows, it occupies a larger area. Dispersing freely, or travelling in the earth, should be organised, just as you sprinkle a drop of water onto a fabric and an ordered circle appears. The same goes for your dispersing freely in the earth to strive and seek sustenance; it must be according to a specific order such that there is no accumulation in a place or crowding, while at the same time, in another place, there is no one to develop it and extract its resources. Allah *the Almighty* wants us to travel in the earth, or disperse freely therein, for two objectives. The first is to go about the earth and seek Allah's sustenance and His bounty, as He *the Almighty* says, '…and others who travel in the land seeking of the bounty of Allah…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). Going about the earth does not just mean dispersing freely therein. Rather, what is meant is work, marriage and extracting its resources because the Creator *the Almighty* has scattered nourishment all over the earth in equal measure, and He has done the same with resources. That is why the earth gives us new blessings from Allah every day. We did not know about the earth's resources apart from agriculture, and as science and discoveries have advanced and their machines and tools have developed, we have come to know about minerals, petrol and other treasures buried in the earth. We would not know about or extract any material treasures in the earth without going about the earth, and we said previously that the original meaning of *darb* (going about) is to attack something with force. We used to be amazed at the people who live in the steppes and the desert and we would feel sorry for them. How could they live in this barrenness and scarcity? Why did they not leave this place for somewhere else? Now, after the discovery of petrol, they have become the wealthiest of people and all the resources of the world have come under their feet; why? It is because they held onto their land and their territory and they were patient with it until the time came and they benefitted from its resources. If they had despaired of it, they would not have obtained this benefit. As for the second objective of travelling in the earth and going about therein, it is travelling to consider and reflect on Allah's signs in His universe, for by travelling and roaming the earth I can see signs that do not exist in my usual surroundings. Regarding this, He *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "Travel in the earth and see how He makes the first creation, then Allah creates the latter creation; surely Allah has power over all things."' (*al-'Ankabut:* 20) In another place, He *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "Travel in the land, then see…’” (*al-An‘am:* 11). The meaning of going all over the earth is to seek sustenance that should be accompanied by beholding and reflecting on Allah’s signs. Beware of thinking that Allah wants you to remember Him for just a while. Rather, you should remember Him always and forever, and if prayer has a circumstance in which it is performed, remembrance of Allah has no set time. That is why Allah has made it easy and simple without any difficulty, not in terms of time or effort. In remembering Allah, it suffices you to reflect on the things you see as you pass by them, and let your eyes behold them so that you can see Allah’s Power therein. It is from His *the Almighty* magnanimity that He rewards the slave for every activity of goodness he does in this world because this activity is required by faith.

For example, if you want to perform the obligation of prayer, you need strength to carry out this obligation and you will only acquire this strength from food and drink. Let us take the simplest kind of food that can be imagined…a loaf of bread…and look at how many hands participated in producing it, from the moment the grain of wheat was placed in the ground until it became a tasty loaf. Indeed, all the people who spun the wheel of this process are carrying out a positive activity in life which is, in and of itself, worship because it assists you with worship. Also, when you want to pray, it is obligatory for you to cover your nakedness. Look at the fabric without which your prayer cannot be done. Everyone who participated in the growing of the cotton, or in the raising of sheep to take the wool and manufacture it so that it could reach you, all these people are performing an act of worship because of their participation in manufacturing this fabric. Therefore, everything that assists you in worshipping Allah is also worship, and every activity in the world that leads to anything from this is worship. When the True Lord *the Almighty* summons the believers to the Friday Prayer, He says, ‘Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading that is better for you, if only you knew.’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9) He did not take them from idleness but from work, and when the prayer has ended, He commands them to return to work and strive throughout the earth: ‘then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah’s bounty…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10). Know that the sustenance for which you are dispersing freely to obtain and which you are seeking is only from Allah's bounty, so beware of letting your dispersing and your seeking of Allah's bounty and your use of the means in the life of this world preoccupy you from your obligation towards Allah. Rather, you must remember Him *the Almighty*. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And remember your Lord within yourself humbly and fearing and in a voice not loud in the morning and the evening and be not of the heedless ones.' (*al-A'raf:* 205) It means, do not be from among those who are heedless of what Allah has required and the bounds that Allah *the Almighty* has made clear, because the meaning of heedlessness is that you are preoccupied from your Creator. If you keep your Creator in mind at all times, then you will not be heedless of His requirements, in the morning and in the evening, and at all times, whether you are performing one of the five prayers or going about the earth, in any of its meanings. The call of your Lord is greater than the activity of life, so you must respond to it, because the call of your Lord is what will grant you strength and energy, and it will give you the boost of faith that will enable you to devote yourself to your work with resolve and sincerity. Let us look at the subtlety in His *the Almighty* saying: '…disperse in the land…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). Dispersing means that human beings spread out to enter and take part in all the activities of life, and this is how every activity therein develops, as every activity in life is worship. It is as if you go to the mosque to take a boost of faith that will assist you and take control over all your senses, in your activities in commerce, in your production and consumption and in everything that benefits you and augments your life. And when your Lord commands you to free up some time to perform the prayer, He does not want this free time to hamper your activity in life. Rather, it is so that He can give you the necessary fuel so that your activity in life can come to be in accordance with what Allah wants. And how similar is this time that you store up, from the benefits of our life in this world, for worshipping Allah to the charge of an electric battery because when you take the battery to the charger you do not say, 'You killed the battery'. Rather, you increased its efficiency to perform its task and you take the benefit. What is sought from the believer is that he participates in life's activity in a positive way, constructive and beneficial in life and assists with religious devotion. If we were to take the example of covering one's nakedness which is obligatory and the prayer cannot be done without it, to cover your nakedness so that you can perform the prayer you need a garment to wear. How will you be provided with this garment? It needs a tailor to sew it. It needs a retail merchant from which the fabric is bought. Then it needs a wholesale dealer, followed by a textiles factory, followed by spinning, dyeing and ginning. It also needs a farmer who grows the cotton and gathers it. This entire process needs several machines, tools and working hands and all this activity is for your sake, to serve you and assist you. Therefore, these worldly jobs, without which religion cannot be established, are obligatory and are not to be undervalued. Rather, they should be preserved and sanctified because they hold the rank of obligation. When your Lord takes you from these jobs to the prayer, for example, He is not taking you from an insignificant, trivial job that has no value. Rather, He is taking you from work, which in and of itself is worship, and that is why He has declared it great. As for calling you to the prayer, it is greater than all of that. That is why the True Lord *the Almighty* has only called the believer to the Friday Prayer, when He *the Almighty* says, 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9).

When the prayer has ended, your Lord returns you to the work from which He summoned you, and He takes you back to your life in this world. Therefore, do not undervalue working in the life of this world and do not think that it is far from the religion. Rather, it is a part of it, and that without which an obligation cannot be done is itself an obligation. Thus, He commands us to go back to the activity of life because it is a means to the abode of the Hereafter and a field in which our provisions are prepared to meet Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, the life of this world is too important to be neglected, as it helps us for the Hereafter, but it is not important enough to be an objective in itself. The True Lord *the Almighty* has given you an intellect to think with and He has given you energy with which to act. He has subjugated the world for you with all the sustenance that is buried within it so that you can extract it and live off it. This is how it is made clear to you that everything needs you to be active, and in your activity, you need energy that you take from those higher than you are and you give to those lower than you. When you are called to respond to Allah's call, your energy is boosted, and you go back to your daily life after renewing your allegiance to the One Who created you and created the entire universe. If you stand before Allah with excellence then your future will come to you based on that excellence. An example of the magnitude of the feelings that the Followers had for Allah's signs is that which has been related from `Arak ibn Malik (1). When he had completed the Friday Prayer, he would go out and stand at the door of the mosque and say: 'O Allah, I have responded to Your call, I have prayed what You made obligatory and I have dispersed as You commanded me, so grant me sustenance from Your bounty, and You are the best of those who provide sustenance.'(2) And You said your saying of truth: 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew, then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9-10) When `Abdullah ibn Bisr(3) had completed the Friday Prayer, he would leave the mosque and go far away from it. Then he would return to the mosque and pray whatever Allah had willed him to pray, so he was asked: 'Why do you do this?' He replied: 'It is because I saw the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* doing likewise.'(4) Those who want to detach the religion from the activities of life say: 'Indeed the religion is concerned with acts of worship like the prayer, fasting, *zakat* and the pilgrimage.' I say to these people: 'You are talking about what has reached you from a religion that has not come to organise the activities of life. Rather, it has come to give the dose that was lost by the Jews, which is the spiritual dose.' As for the religion of Islam, it has come as a seal of all religions, organising the activity of life, as every matter in life and every activity therein comes within the bounds of obedience. Islam is broader than the five pillars. The pillars are a boost that your Lord summons you to. So, from meeting Him, take the support that will help you engage in life's activity. This is similar to a battery that you take to be charged. We do not benefit while it is charging. Rather, we give it the necessary charge so that we can use it afterwards. What is amazing about divine mercy is that Allah *the Almighty* has made going to boost one's energy a legal obligation that must be done. You must meet Me five times in the day and night and you must hasten to the prayer from Friday. You are My creation and My making. The maker knows best as to what will benefit his making, so imagine a making that is shown to its maker five times in the day and night. Will it continue to bear any damage? This is the case with a human maker, so what do you think if the maker is the Maker of humanity and their Creator *the Almighty*? The human maker will fix his making with material things, and this is because the engineer and his making are material and they are fixed with that which is material. As for the Creator *the Almighty* He is unseen, and when He fixes whatever is wrong with you He does so with the unseen, and thus you do not feel it and you do not see it. Therefore, we say that we must understand the religion as it truly is, and we must understand that each one of us has a task. If someone is better than you are at something, then know that his superiority is for your benefit and it will come back to you because with his superiority he is carrying out a service for you while at the same time you will not benefit him. One of the things that draw our attention is the True Lord's saying: '…hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) followed by: 'then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). The address is entirely for men, as it is men who are legally responsible for the Friday Prayer when it is called to. Also, they are the one usually involved in the process of trade. You notice that the True Lord did not mention buying, which can be engaged in more by women. Then comes: '…disperse in the land…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9). For women, spreading freely on earth and striving for sustenance is only done out of some necessity that pushes them towards it, and the society must not put women in situations where they have to manage their necessities as well as their lives.

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(1) *`Arak ibn Malik was from Banu Ghafar ibn Malil. He died in exile in the time of Yazid ibn `Abd Al-Malik in the year 104 A.H. in Dahlak. He was a great sheikh, one of the most reliable followers, an abstaining slave, one of the closest companions of `Umar ibn `Abd Al-`Aziz against Banu Marwan regarding what they had taken from the spoils of war and the injustice they had committed.*

(2) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, (18/109); see also Ibn Kathir (8/122); Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghayb; and Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari in Sharh Sahih Al-Bukhari, p. 546.*

(3) *`Abdullah ibn Bisr Al-Mazani Abu Safwan is from Banu Mazin ibn Mansur, a Companion from among those who prayed towards both Jerusalem and Mecca. He died in Homs in the Levant in the year 88 A.H. at the age of 90, and he was the last Companion to die in the Levant. Al-`Alam Az-Zirikli 4/74]. In his in Siyar A`lam An-Nubala` (3/430), Adh-Dhahabi described him as the blessings of the Levant.*

(4) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur (chapter of al-Jumu`a) and he attributed it to Abu `Ubayd, Ibn Al-Mundhir, At-Tabarani and Ibn Mardawayh. See also Al-Alusi, Ruh Al-Ma`ani, (14/298).*

Men are legally responsible and demanded to be active in this world. As for women, they administer their homes so that they are a place of rest for their husbands and children, and to produce men for this society. If the circumstances and the necessities of life push her towards it then she can be active to earn a living, but it must be according to what will bring about respect and appreciation for her from the society. The society, in turn, must suffice her needs and preserve her dignity.

Then the True Lord *the Almighty* says, '…Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) When the True Lord *the Almighty* addresses the Muslims, He does not say what He said to the children of Israel: 'Remember Allah's blessings.' Rather, He says, '…remember Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) because the children of Israel are materialistic and worldly. It is as if the True Lord *the Almighty* is saying to them: 'As long as you are materialistic and worldly, then remember Allah's material blessings that He gave you'. But we are Muslims, a nation that is not materialistic, and there is a difference between someone being with the blessing and being with the Granter of Blessings. The materialists love the blessing, while the non-materialists love the Granter of Blessings and live in His company. That is why Allah's address for the Muslims is: '…remember Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) because we, Muslims, worship the Lord of Blessings, while Allah's address for the children of Israel is: '…Remember the blessings which Allah bestowed upon you…' (*Ibrahim:* 6).

Another time, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O You who have attained to faith! Remember Allah with unceasing remembrance' (*al-Ahzab:* 41), and another time He says, 'And remember your Lord…' (*Al-'Imran:* 41).

His statement '…remember Allah…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10) has the name of majesty, *Allah*. Hearing '*Allah*', one becomes aware of the commandments because Allah is the One to be worshipped; consequently, He is obeyed in what He commands and forbids.

As for His statement 'And remember your Lord…' (*Al-'Imran:* 41), it reminds you of the favours that He has granted you. He created you, nurtured you and gave you some of His overflowing blessings, which is countless. Remember your Lord because if you do not ardently love His commandment then you, at least, ardently love Him because He has granted you these blessings, and Allah *the Almighty* protects and bestows favours upon all of us.

Remember your Lord in two states. The first is a state of imploring, i.e. humility; one may remember someone with pride. Allah is The Beneficent Creator. You must remember Him with the humility of someone who is a slave to His station of Lordship.

The second is to remember your Lord in a state of dread, i.e. fearful and imploring because whenever you humble yourself before Him, He makes you mighty, and remembrance means remembering Allah always.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘so remember Me, and I shall remember you…’ (*al-Baqara:* 152). It is that remember Me with obedience and I will remember you with goodness and manifestations. If the remembrance is with these meanings, then we can find tranquillity in any of them. Remembrance according to the meaning of the Quran causes tranquillity.

That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us a similitude by saying: ‘The likeness of someone who remembers his Lord and someone who does not remember His Lord is like that of the living and the dead.’(1)

The process of remembrance itself is a spiritual process. In other words, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us a similitude of the living and the dead. A living person is a living, active being who feels, hears, sees, and speaks, i.e. he contains life. As for a dead person, his feelings have died within him, and indeed he is a motionless body.

The one who remembers Allah has a living heart, conscience, and feelings, which receive Allah’s speech with an open heart and understanding intellect. As for the dead person, you do not expect anything good from him because he is simply dead.

Do not think that remembrance is simply restricted to the prayer. Rather: ‘Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah’s bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10).

Thus, do not give up Allah’s remembrance because your remembrance of your Lord outside of the prayer is greater than your remembrance of Him

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. (6407); Abu Muhammad `Abd Al-Haqq Al-Ishbili, Al-Ahkam Ash-Shar`iyya vol. (3/141); and Al-Baghawi, Sharh As-Sunna, no. (1243) on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash`ari Allah be pleased with him.*

the Almighty in the prayer. It has been related (1) from `Ata` ibn As-Sa`ib(2) that Ibn `Abbas asked `Abdullah ibn Rabi`a:(3) 'What do you say about Allah's statement: "…and remembrance of Allah is indeed the greatest [good]. And Allah knows all that you do" (*al-'Ankabut:* 45)? He replied: 'Reciting the Quran is good. The prayer is good. Glorifying Allah is good. Praising Him is good. Declaring Him the Greatest is good. Declaring that there is no deity but Him, is good. But what is better than all that is for someone to remember Allah just before they are about to commit disobedience, and by remembering their Lord they refrain from disobeying Him.'

So, what did Ibn `Abbas say, even though this statement contradicted what he had said regarding the verse? He said: 'Amazing, by Allah.' He was amazed at the statement of Ibn Rabi`a, and blessed his understanding of the verse. He did not reject his independent reasoning because it is natural for a person to remember Allah in a state of obedience, as he is prepared for remembrance.

As for remembering Him in a state of committing a sin, it is greater. A person, in that case, is more prevented from doing so because it needs more power and intense as Allah *the Almighty* said: '…and remembrance of Allah is indeed the greatest…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45).

That is why it is mentioned in the Noble Hadith: 'Seven people will be shaded by Allah's shade on the Day when there will be no shade but His – and they include: a man who is invited by a woman of rank and beauty and he says, "Indeed I fear Allah."'(4)

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(1) *The story of `Abdullah ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him asking `Abdullah ibn Rabi`a Allah be pleased with him.*

(2) *See Adh-Dhahabi, Siyar A`lam An-Nubuwwa: `Ata` ibn As-Sa`ib, a Hadith scholar of Kufa. He was known as Abu As-Sa`ib. He was from amongst the senior scholars, but his memory became a bit weak towards the end of his life. Abu Hatim said: 'He was previously known for his veracity, before he became confused and his memorising changed.'*

(3) *See Siyar A`lam An-Nubuwwa, vol. (3-116/504): `Abdullah ibn Rabi`a ibn Farqad As-Salmi. It is said that he was a Companion, but if he is not, then a Hadith from him would considered as mursal (discontinued at the level of Companion). He settled in Kufa and died after the age of eighty. Ibn Rabi`a said: 'I performed the dawn prayer behind `Umar and he read the chapter of al-Hajj and the chapter of Yusuf slowly.'*

(4) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. (660); Muslim, Sahih, no. (2427); Ahmad, Musnad, no. (9663); and Malik, Muwatta`, no. (1709), on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

This is the remembrance of Allah that is the greatest because the motives are motives of disobedience, and the matter needs great struggle to turn from disobedience into obedience.

Allah says, '…and remembrance of Allah is indeed the greatest…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). Do not think that Allah wants you to remember him just when you are praying. Indeed, remember Him continually and forever. While prayer has a fixed time in which it is performed, Allah must be remembered all the time.

That is why Allah has made remembering him easy and simple, timeless or effortless. In remembering Allah, it is enough to reflect on you what you watch around you, so that you can see Allah's power therein.

Remembering Allah does not burden you at all, nor is it difficult for you. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and remembrance of Allah is indeed the greatest…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). It is greater than any other act of obedience because it is easy on the tongue and you can do it while doing any of your actions, at any time and in any place.

Remembering Allah is greater than any act of worship because acts of worship, as we have mentioned, need preparation, time, toil, and that one not be preoccupied with anything else. As for Allah's remembrance, it can flow on your tongue at any time, without preparation or toil, and your tongue can be devoted to it at any time and in whatever state in which you are.

Read in that statement of Allah's in the chapter of *al-Jumu'a:* 'Then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10).As long as remembrance means to have Allah in your thoughts and on your tongue, then striving and working will not prevent you from it because remembrance is the lightest and easiest act of worship for the soul and the heaviest on the scales.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O you who have attained to faith! Remember Allah with unceasing remembrance, and extol His limitless glory from morn to evening.' (*al-Ahzab:* 41-42)

Allah *the Almighty* has commanded us to remember Him unceasingly because remembrance is the pillar of the other acts of worship and the easiest of them for the believer. That is why we find our Lord commanding us to it when we have finished acts of worship like the prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage.

Remembering is the preoccupation of the memory which is an area in the brain. Information is received by man in the seat of his feelings, and if he wants to remember something for when he will need it, he keeps it in his memory or in the periphery of his feelings. For example, you might see someone and say: 'I have not seen this man for twenty years', and another time: 'I saw him in such-and-such place.'

Therefore, remembering something is present in the seat of one's feelings. Remembrance means a matter that is present with you in reality and it has a time in which it exists. However, you become heedless of it and it moves to the periphery of your feelings, or memory. After that, we do not want you to forget it in the periphery, or somewhere faraway, such that you will require effort to remember it. Rather, you should always keep it somewhere close so that it will be easier for you to remember it without trouble.

Likewise, your remembrance should be for Allah, as it is a vital matter that you should be remembering constantly, always and forever. How can you forget the remembrance of your Lord when you took the covenant from Him while you were in the atomic world? He took affirmation from you that Allah *the Almighty* is your Lord.

Remembrance is the one act of worship that does not burden you at all and does not hinder any of your limbs. It does not require any time or effort on your behalf and it does not have a fixed time. Whoever remembers Allah standing, or remembers Allah on his side, is considered amongst those who remember. This is according to your situation when remembering. Whoever remembers Allah early in the day, or late in the day, in the morning or in the evening becomes amongst those who remember. This is according to the time of your remembrance.

Whoever says 'Glory be to Allah, Praise be to Allah, There is no deity but Allah, Allah is the Greatest and There is no power and no strength except in Allah, The Sublime, The Most Great' thirty times a day, he will be written down as one of those who remember.(1) Whoever wakes up at night, wakes up his family and prays two units of prayer is considered amongst those who remember. (1)

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(1) *See Ibn Abu Shayba, Musannaf, no. (29728) On the authority of Al-Hasan, who said that Prophet Muhammed peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Shall I not inform you of an act of charity that fills up what is between the heavens and the earth: 'Glory be to Allah, Praise be to Allah, There is no deity but Allah, Allah is the Greatest and There is no power and no strength except in Allah, The Sublime, The Most Great, thirty times a day.'*

Therefore, remembering Allah is an easy matter. You can remember Allah while you are working with an axe or writing with a pen. You can remember Allah while you are eating or drinking, and so forth. Thus, even though remembering Allah is the greatest, it is still easy and light on the believer.

Know that remembering Allah *the Almighty* will make you an imperturbable pillar and you will not be reached by anything evil or unpleasant. Indeed, the remembrance of Allah, the Lord of Blessings, will give you the activity of life in everything. Remembering Allah brings about humility in the hearts, lessens disobedience, everyone benefits from it and it makes the activities of life upright.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not sit or stand without being in remembrance. (2) In a Hadith: 'Prophet Muhammad would do much remembrance.'(3) Why? It is because sitting and standing cancel one activity with another activity. If someone is standing and then they sit, they have carried out the activity of sitting. If someone is sitting and then he stands, he has carried out the activity of standing. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would remember Allah in every activity, showing gratitude for the blessings of the Creator *the Almighty*.

The Lord of Might *the Almighty* says in a Qudsi Hadith: 'I am as My slave thinks of Me. I am with him when He remembers Me. If he remembers Me within himself, I remember Him within Myself. If he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a better gathering. If he comes to Me walking, I come to him running, and if he approaches Me by an arm's length I approach him by a fathom's length.'(1)

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan As-Sughra, no. (609) On the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri and Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with them who said, 'Prophet Muhammad said: 'If someone wakes up at night, wakes up his family and they pray two units of prayer together, on that night they are written down as amongst those who remember Allah much.'*

(2) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Shu`ab Al-Iman, no. (1362); and At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, no. (17868) On the authority of Al-Hasan ibn `Ali ibn Abu Taleb, who said: 'I asked my uncle Hind ibn Abu Hala, and he was giving a description, part of which was: "I asked him what he was like in gatherings and he said: 'Prophet Muhammed peace and blessings be upon him would only sit or stand after some remembrance. He would not reserve places and he would forbid them from being reserved. When he came across some people sitting he would sit at the edge of the gathering.'"'*

(3) *On the authority of Ibn Abu Awfa, who said: 'Prophet Muhammed peace and blessings be upon him would remember Allah much, he would speak little, lengthen the prayer, shorten the sermon and he would not disdain walking with widows and poor people and then fulfilling their needs.' Narrated by An-Nasa`i in his Sunnan (1414), Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak (4225) and At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (1377).*

With your faith in Allah, you make yourself mighty and you strong. If you want Allah to remember you, then remember Allah. If you remember Him within yourself then He will remember you within Himself. If you remember Him in a gathering, He will remember you in a better gathering. If you approach Him by an arm's length, He will approach you by a fathom's length.

What more than that do you want, especially if you will never add anything to it? Therefore, the situation is in your hands. If you want Allah to be with you, then travel along His path, and his support will come to you immediately. This is how the situation is with you and it comes under your control, and it is through your faith in Allah, your devotion to being connected to Him and your faith in Him *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* tells us how remembering Allah affects the heart and the body. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Believers are only they whose hearts tremble with awe whenever Allah is mentioned, and whose faith is strengthened whenever His messages are conveyed unto them, and who in their Lord place their trust.' (*al-Anfal:* 2)

Remembering Allah causes the believers' hearts to tremble and have fear, and trembling; '*wajal*' is the kind of fear that makes the heart shake and beat faster. But if remembering Allah *the Almighty* makes the believers' hearts tremble, does that not contradict this statement of Allah *the Almighty*: 'those who believe, and whose hearts find their rest in the remembrance of Allah – for, verily, in the remembrance of Allah [men's] hearts do find their rest' (*ar-Ra'd:* 28).Actually, there is no contradiction between the two statements because remembering Allah *the Almighty* brings about various states. If a person is extravagant with himself, he will tremble when He remembers Allah, The One Whose way he has contravened.

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(1) *Agreed upon Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. (7405); Muslim, Sahih, no. (6981, 7008); At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, no. (3603); and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, no. (38822) on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him.*

If a person respects Allah's right in every action, as much as he is able, then his heart will inevitably find rest the moment Allah is remembered because he has followed Allah's way as much as he is able.

Therefore, fear and trembling come about from the awe and authority of the attributes of majesty, and finding rest only comes from the illuminations and tenderness of the attributes of beauty. That is why one verse gathers all of this together, and it is Allah's saying: 'Allah bestows from on high the best of all teachings in the shape of a divine writ fully consistent within itself, repeating each statement [of the truth] in manifold forms – [a divine writ] whereat shiver the skins of all who of their Lord stand in awe: [but] in the end their skins and their hearts do soften at the remembrance of [the grace of] Allah...' (*az-Zumar:* 23).

The skins shiver out of fear, trembling at awe of Allah *the Almighty*. Then they soften, finding rest and desiring the tenderness of the Benefactor *the Almighty* because our Lord says, 'Tell My servants that I – I alone – am truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace' (*al-Hijr:* 49).

The remembrance of Allah is imperative in man's most difficult moments which is when he is facing his enemy on the battlefield. Allah *the Almighty* says, '[Hence,] O you who have attained to faith, when you meet a host in battle, be firm, and remember Allah often so that you might attain to a happy state!' (*al-Anfal:* 45)

Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of the human soul, and He is the All Knowing regarding it when it is facing a force that has not been reckoned with. He knows how the soul suffers immense distress, especially if this is happening on the battlefield.

That is why He has asked the believers to always remember that they are not alone in battle, and that Allah *the Almighty* is with them. Let them remember this often so that He can assist their victory over their enemies because as long as they are in a state of remembering Allah *the Almighty* then this remembrance will strengthen their faith and give their hearts the necessary courage to achieve victory.

Allah *the Almighty* has described those who remember Allah often as being endowed with insight. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are indeed messages for all who are endowed with insight' (*Al-'Imran:* 190).

Then He described them by saying: '[and] who remember Allah when they stand, and when they sit, and when they lie down to sleep…' (*Al-'Imran:* 191). In commenting on this verse, some scholars have said that what is meant by this is the prayer because whoever cannot pray standing can pray sitting down. If someone cannot pray sitting down, then he can pray lying down. (1)

We say to these scholars: 'You have singled out this meaning when the purport is actually more general such that no one should think that remembering Allah is only in the five obligatory prayers. Allah *the Almighty* has said: 'And when you have finished your prayer, remember Allah – standing and sitting and lying down; and when you are once again secure, observe your prayers [fully]. Verily, for all believers prayer is indeed a sacred duty linked to particular times [of day]' (*an-Nisa':* 103).Thus, remembering Allah is a continuous obligation, in the prayer and outside of it. The is, have Allah constantly in your thoughts, and the hearts only find rest in Allah's remembrance, as finding rest grasps all the hearts and every person has a corner in which his heart beats. No sooner does he remember Allah that he finds rest and his heart is settled.

Remembering Allah after committing disobedience will inevitably cause the soul to fear and tremble and become troubled out of fear of Allah *the Almighty*. If one remembers Allah after some affliction or hardship, one's soul finds rest and takes comfort from the balance of faith that it contains, and it returns to this balance of faith and relies on it in moments of constraint and tribulation.

As long as the believer has established his heart with Allah's remembrance, faith and the testimony of that faith, then his heart will never deviate and never shake with regards to the truth. But what is remembrance? Remembrance means to preserve something from being forgotten because life's routine makes us forget the Original Cause of blessings. The sun rises every day, and who from amongst us remembers that it only rises with Allah's permission and thus thanks Him?

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Sunnan, no. (3493), on the authority of Al-Husain ibn `Ali Allah be pleased with them that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'The sick person should pray standing, and if he cannot, then he can pray sitting. If he cannot prostrate, then he can lean forward and make his prostrating lower than his bowing. If he cannot pray sitting then he can pray on his right side, facing the direction of prayer. If he cannot pray on his right side then he can pray lying down with his feet facing the direction of prayer.'*

The rainfalls from time to time, and who remembers that Allah sends down the rain and thus thanks Him?

Remembrance is performed with the tongue and the heart, and Allah *the Almighty* is veiled and unseen. It is from His sublimity that He is unseen, but Allah's blessings indicate Him. With remembrance, Allah is always in our thoughts and we are always remembering Him and thanking Him for His blessings.

Allah *the Almighty* wants remembrance from His slaves, and whenever they remember Him *the Almighty* and thank Him, He thanks and increases them. The desire of The Bountiful to give is on the condition that we are worthy of the gift because He wants to give you more and more.

Allah's statement '…remember Me…' (*al-Baqara:* 152) means: remember Allah for all His blessings, His gifts, His veiling, His Mercy, His Acceptance of Repentance and so forth.

Some of the righteous people say, 'I heard from whoever heard from my beloved, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that when you drink you should divide it into three parts: with the first gulp say 'In the Name of Allah' and drink. Then say 'Praise be to Allah'. Start drinking the second gulp by saying 'In the Name of Allah', and after finishing it say 'Praise be to Allah'. Then say 'In the Name of Allah' and drink the third gulp, and finish it by saying 'Praise be to Allah'. As long as this water is inside you, no particle in your body will tell you to disobey Allah.'(1)

Practise doing this daily. Say 'In the Name of Allah' and drink and then say 'Praise be to Allah', and repeat three times. Then you will receive the blessing by remembering the Lord of Blessings. You will distance yourself from your strength and your power and you will conclude the blessing by praising Allah.

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(1) *See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, no. (332); Al-Mu`jam Al-Awsat, no. (840) On the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him would drink in three breaths. When he brought the vessel to his mouth he would say 'In the Name of Allah' and when he was finished he would praise Allah, and he would do that three times. Also, Abu Ash-Sheikh Al-Asbahani narrated it in `Akhlaq An-Nabi no. (656) on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud, who said: 'When Prophet Muhammed peace and blessings be upon him would drink, he would do it in three breaths. He would praise Allah with each breath and thank Him with the last one.'*

Dhikr (remembrance) in the absolute sense is the remembrance of Allah; His Blessings, His Sublimity, His Power and His Attributes of Perfection. *Tasbih* (glorification) means to declare Allah transcendent because what Allah does cannot be done by anyone else.

Thus, 'Glory be to Allah' means that Allah is transcendent because He is the One Who is fully Capable of doing what that the means do not do and what no one can make. Indeed, He wants us to thank Allah, who grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.

Sometimes, what is meant by remembrance is glorification and praise. Look at Allah's statement: 'In the houses [of worship] which Allah has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there [are such as] extol His limitless glory at morn and evening, people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert from the remembrance of Allah, and from constancy in prayer, and from charity…' (*an-Nur:* 36-37).

It is remembrance because there are those who glorify Him therein in the morning and the evening, and they are described as people who do not let commerce and trade divert them from remembering Allah. *Dhikr* (remembrance) can also refer to Allah's goodness towards His slaves. It can also refer to their acts of worshipping Him in obedience, as Allah *the Almighty* remembers them with goodness and they remember Him with obedience.

His remembrance of them through blessings and favours is a bounty and beneficence, and He is the Great *the Exalted*. Thus, there is a second, lesser remembrance, which is their worship of their Lord in obedience. So 'remember Me, and I shall remember you…' (*al-Baqara:* 152). It is as if Allah is saying, 'Remember Me with obedience, and I will remember you with favours'.

The place for remembering Allah could be the mosque or outside the mosque, indoors or outdoors, at home or at work, while walking or while sleeping, when you wake up from your sleep and at every time and in every place.

However, the most certain remembrance of Allah is in the mosque, Allah's houses. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Hence, who could be more wicked than those who bar the mention of Allah's name from [any of] His houses of worship and strive for their ruin…' (*al-Baqara:* 114).

There is no one more in wickedness than those who prevent Allah’s name from being mentioned in His houses. This is tremendous wickedness and it is the peak of wickedness. Allah’s statement ‘…and strive for their ruin…’ (*al-Baqara:* 114) means to put an end to them or maintain them in a way that they are no longer fit for worship. Striving to ruin the mosque means to destroy it.

Indeed, I warn every believer against being weak and feeble in the face of those who are trying to prevent Allah’s name from being mentioned in Allah’s mosques because in that case one is partaking in their sin and maybe even doing worse, and Allah will not leave such a person alone on the Day of Resurrection. Rather, He will throw him in the fire.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says,

وَإِذَا رَأَوۡاْ تِجَٰرَةً أَوۡ لَهۡوًا ٱنفَضُّوٓاْ إِلَيۡهَا وَتَرَكُوكَ قَآئِمٗاۚ قُلۡ مَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ
خَيۡرٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهۡوِ وَمِنَ ٱلتِّجَٰرَةِۚ وَٱللَّهُ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ﴿١١﴾

Yet they scatter towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it, and leave you [Prophet] standing there. Say, ‘God’s gift is better than any entertainment or trade: God is the best provider’[11] (The Quran, *al-Jumu‘a:* 11)

Twelve men remained with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* including Abu Bakr and `Umar, and they did not leave him while he was giving the sermon as the others had done. Rather, they remained with Him *peace and blessings be upon him* because they were the ones who had certainty that goodness was found in keeping the company of the beloved, the chosen one because in his company they became guests of Allah *the Almighty*.

That is why they remained firm with Prophet Muhammad while the others looked at the life of this world and its ceasing pleasures and dispersed from around Him *peace and blessings be upon him*. They went out to receive a caravan that had come from the Levant accompanied by entertainment and drumming.

Allah *the Almighty* did not want to punish them or chastise them because of what they had done because of the presence of Prophet Muhammad, who was a security for them against a punishment befalling them. We must understand that Medina had become a stopping place and people were coming from all over to learn about the new religion, and there were many people who were new to Islam or were hypocrites.

It has been related from Jabir ibn 'Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was standing, giving the sermon on Friday when a caravan arrived from the Levant and the people went out to see it until only twelve men remained.(1) Then this verse, which is in *al-Jumu`a,* was sent down: ‘Yet they scatter towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it, and leave you [Prophet] standing there say, “Allah’s gift is better than any entertainment or trade: Allah is the best provider.”’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11)

The Quran has precision in its stylistic and linguistic rendering, and an example of this is that here the Quran says, ‘Yet they scatter towards (*ra`aw*)…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11). The verb *ra`a* (to see) can be used to indicate knowledge such as in His statement: ‘have you ever seen [the kind of man] who makes his own desires his deity?...’ (*al-Furqan:* 43), i.e. have you even known? These people, who were in the mosque of Prophet Muhammad listening to his *peace and blessings be upon him* Friday sermon, did not literally see the caravan that had come. Rather, they knew about it or they heard the commotion and noise of the approaching caravan. Thus, they went outside and left Prophet Muhammad standing, apart from twelve men, and they included Abu Bakr and `Umar.

Another example of *ra`a* meaning ‘to know’ is in Allah’s statement to His Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Are you aware of how you Lord dealt with the Army of the Elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) It means: do you not know with certainty? This is because Prophet Muhammad was born in the Year of the Elephant and thus did not see this event. It is as if Allah is informing him of it and saying to Him: ‘Do you not know?’ It is also as if He is saying to him: ‘Know with absolute certainty as if you have seen it, because your Lord is more reliable than your eyes.

These people saw it literally, or they ‘saw’ it in terms of hearing and knowledge. They saw the merchandise or the entertainment. They saw the merchandise that they had been waiting for to fulfil their needs, but this does not permit them to leave Prophet Muhammad while He is giving them the sermon. That is why Allah *the Almighty* censured them, and due to His Forbearance He did not chastise them for what they had done.

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(1) *See At-Tabari, Tafsir, no. (34460).*

For the Arabs in that time, commerce was the most important economic activity. Merchandise and caravans would go out to Yemen in the winter and to the Levant in the summer, and it is something that Allah favoured Quraysh with, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘So that the Quraysh might remain secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys.’ (*Quraysh:* 1-2)

Commerce was the heart of their livelihood, as they brought goods from the north and the south and sold them to those visiting the Sacred House in Mecca in the Age of Ignorance, or they sold the merchandise of the Levant to the people of Yemen and sold the merchandise of Yemen to the people of the Levant.

Quraysh had two journeys every year; a winter journey to Yemen and a summer journey to the Levant. They would travel along various routes and use the stars to guide their way. That is why they were people of power and wealth.

Allah brought about security and assurance for them in their trade because they were in control of Allah’s Sacred House, and man only feels assured in a place that is free of disturbances and which contains the essentials of life, as security and assurance are the secret to a life’s happiness and its stability.

When Allah *the Almighty* bestowed favours upon Quraysh, He said: ‘So that Quraysh might remain secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. Let them, therefore, worship the Lord of this House, who has given them food against hunger, and made them safe from danger.’ (*Quraysh:* 1-4)

Allah *the Almighty* says about Mecca: ‘…Why – have We not established for them a sanctuary secure, to which, as a provision from Us, shall be gathered the fruits of all [good] things? But most of them are unaware [of this truth].’ (*al-Qasas:* 57)

Sustenance would come to this town from every place. As for Medina, it did not have a sacred house and its commerce was only with the Levant. The road to Yemen was surrounded by dangers, because Quraysh would not allow the Muslims’ caravans to go to Yemen.

The accounts relate that the owner of the caravan(1) that had entered Medina at that time was `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Awf, and he is who he is in the world of commerce, such that when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina he turned down the Helper's offer to divide his wealth and family with him and instead said to him: 'Show me where the market is.'

Commerce is buying and selling, and it is an intermediary between the producer and the consumer. The producer wants to sell his produce and the consumer needs this produce. Allah *the Almighty* has used the process of trade to make it clear us that it is the quickest way to acquire benefit.

Commerce gathers together all of life's jobs, as commerce include agricultural production, manufactured production, as well as services. That is why commerce gathers all of this together.

This commerce was done in an outwardly beautiful way, and it took a long time to get back to Medina, where everyone was waiting for it. Its return coincided with the Friday sermon of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and those who remained sitting, listening to Prophet Muhammad, were only twelve men. The rest went out to meet the caravan.

As for *lahw* '…passing delight…', it kills time, causing it to pass by and preoccupying man from his obligations. The meaning of *lahw* is to do something that has no objective and no benefit, and if we look at a life that is stripped of Allah's way, it is *la`ib* and *lahw*. *La`ib* (play) might be *lahw* and it might not. If *la`ib* preoccupies you from something you are supposed to do then it is *lahw* because it has diverted you from an obligation because when you direct your energy towards that which is less important it is *lahw*.

You find the loss due to *lahw* to be heavy because the distracted person leaves off an important matter and does something that is not important. He sits and plays backgammon [1] instead of doing the work that provides him an income that he lives off.

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(1) *See Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir, vol. 18/109, (Dar Al-Kutub Al-Misriyya) says that the one who brought the caravan was Dihya ibn Khalifa Al-Kalbi. Also, in At-Tahrir wa At-Tanwir it has been mentioned on the authority of Mujahid and Muqatil. Muqatil ibn Sulaiman mentioned in his Tafsir vol. (3/361) that Dihya was from Banu `Amir ibn `Awf and he was involved in bringing merchandise from the Levant before he became Muslim. He arrived on a Friday and the people of Medina received him with drums and clapping.*

If only this *lahw* were confined to the distracted person, but instead it attracts the glances of those who are not distracted and takes up their time, this time that should be used for beneficial matters. The corruption of entire societies comes about because of some individuals therein using their energy in that which will not bring about any benefit for themselves or their nation.

Therefore, *lahw* is inactive energy. An example of a distracted person who does not achieve anything in life is that student who does not go to school and does not revise. Rather, he spends him time playing and amusing himself and giving himself what he wants, but he only takes limited enjoyment. Afterwards, he lives the rest of his life in misery.

As for the one who limits his activity to revision, he has denied his soul's desire for games and amusement, and the fruit of this is that he achieves a future for himself that is comfortable and admirable.

Both the student who works hard and the student who plays games and amuses himself partake in a kind of enjoyment, but one of them has very limited enjoyment, after which he becomes one of life's paupers. As for the second, he restrained his soul for several years so that he could enjoy a successful future.

Likewise, if you restrict yourself to the commandments of 'Do!' and 'Do not do!' it looks like you have restricted your freedom, even if you do it willingly because Allah gives you comfort, rest and enjoyment for your soul.

As for the beneficial work that man should be preoccupied with, it is that which is imposed upon you by The One Who is higher than you, and He is Wise and Beloved to you. You will only find these specifications in Allah, and that is why everything that distracts from what your Allah has imposed upon you is *lahw* because it preoccupies you from what is more important.

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, no. (6033); Abu Dawud, Sunnan, no. (4941); Ibn Majah (3763); and Ahmad, Musnad, no. (23029, 23075, 23106): on the authority of Burayda that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'If someone plays backgammon it is as if he has dipped his hand in the flesh and blood of a pig.'*

An example of the *lahw* that Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned is in the chapter of *Luqman*. Allah says, 'But among men there is many a one that prefers a mere play [*lahw*] with words [to divine guidance]…' (*Luqman:* 6). Scholars have said that mere play with words is everything that distracts one from what Allah requires, even if it is not intrinsically *lahw*, i.e. when it is not outside of what Allah requires. Thus, if someone allows their work such as agriculture, or manufacturing, or something else, to preoccupy them from the prayer or from carrying out some other obligation of Allah *the Almighty* that work is considered *lahw*.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *an-Nur:* 'In the houses [of worship] which Allah has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there [are such as] extol His limitless glory at morn and evening. People whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert from the remembrance of Allah, and from constancy in prayer, and from charity: [people] who are filled with fear [at the thought] of the Day on which all hearts and eyes will be convulsed.' (*an-Nur:* 36-37)

Allah *the Almighty* has described these people who fill Allah's houses with remembrance and glorification as: 'people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert…' (*an-Nur:* 37).

His saying: 'people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert…' (*an-Nur:* 37) does not mean a prohibition against commerce, as the honest person will not let commerce divert him from Allah's remembrance. These people could have waited until Prophet Muhammad had finished his Friday Sermon and until the prayer had ended, and then directed themselves towards the caravan bringing merchandise. At that time, their preoccupation with commerce would not have been considered *lahw*.

Someone might wonder: Allah says, 'Yet they scatter towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11). There are two matters, commerce, and passing delight, so why does He say afterwards: '…they scatter towards trade…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11), and not 'they rush headlong towards them'? Allah *the Almighty* uses the singular for both by saying '…they scatter towards trade…' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11) because commerce and a passing delight have the same function which is to preoccupy the believers from worship, remembrance and listening to goodness

Al-Infidad (scattering) means to turn away from what they were gathered upon or gathered for, and Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘It is they who say [to their compatriots], “Do not spend anything on those who are with Allah’s Apostle so that they [may be forced to] leave [*yanfadu*]”’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7).

They had a mistaken understanding of those who believed in Prophet Muhammad, as they thought that if they did not spend on them they would apostate from their faith. They forgot that the emigrant believers had left behind their wealth and their native land, and if someone has left behind their wealth to emigrate for Allah’s sake, would he disbelieve if he cannot find something? No, because he has already left everything behind for Allah’s sake.

When the hypocrites like `Abdullah ibn Ubay said to the Helpers: ‘Do not spend on those who are with Prophet Muhammad so that they leave’, i.e. apostate and withdraw from Islam, they did not leave. Their intention was to starve those who were with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and make them abandon him.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…and leave you [Prophet] standing there’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11). This standing was during the sermon and Jabir ibn `Abdullah relates: ‘In the sermon, I only saw Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* standing.’(1) ‘Abdullah ibn Mas`ud(2) was asked: ‘Did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* give his sermons standing or sitting?’, so he recited: ‘…and leave you standing there…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11).

It is on the authority of Ibn `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would give two sermons and sit between them. (3)

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, no. (20903, 20927): it is on authority of Jabir ibn Samra and not Jabir ibn `Abdullah: ‘In the Friday sermon, I only saw Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him standing, and whoever says that he has seen him give the sermon while sitting is lying.’*

(2) *See Ibn Majah, Sunnan, no. (1108); Abu Ya`la, Musnad, no. (5034); and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, no. (9860) on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud and in Al-Anjam Az-Zahirat.*

(3) *See Muslim, Sahih, no. (2032); Abu Dawud, Sunnan, no. (1096); and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, no. (1103) on the authority of Ibn `Umar.*

Even Ka`b ibn `Ujra [1][2] entered the mosque and found `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Umm Al-Hukm[3] was giving the sermon while sitting, so he said: 'Look at this wicked person giving the sermon while sitting[4], when Allah has said: '…and leave you [Prophet] standing there' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11).

Tawus ibn Kisan[5] considered it a false innovation, as he said: 'Sitting on the pulpit on Friday is a false innovation.'[6] This is for the person who is able to stand, as it is not permissible for him to sit and give the sermon. Between the schools of jurisprudence, the scholars have many details regarding this.

The priority for these people, who left Prophet Muhammad standing giving the sermon and rushed outside, was to be polite by showing forbearance and patience. Allah *the Almighty* has said: 'Verily, [O Prophet,] as for those who call you from without thy private apartments – most of them do not use their reason, for if they had the patience [to wait] until you come forth to them [of thine own accord], it would be for their own good. Still, Allah is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.' (*al-Hujurat:* 4-5)

If Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had not yet appeared, they were supposed to wait for him to come out and not disturb him, as he must have been doing something important. Maybe he was busy in seclusion with Allah *the Almighty* or with his family.

These people called Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as they would call one another. They did not respect the sanctity of Prophet

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(1) *See Az-Zirikli, Al-`Alam, vol. (5/227): he is Ka`b ibn `Ujra ibn Ummaya ibn `Uday Al-Balwi, an ally of the Helpers and a Companion who was known by the name of Abu Muhammad. He witnessed all the incidents in which people were martyred. He lived in Kufa and died in Medina in the year 51 A.H. at the age of 75.*

(2) *The story of Ka`b ibn `Ujra with `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Umm Al-Hukm the Jew*

(3) *He is `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Abdullah ibn `Uthman Ath-Thaqafi ibn Umm Al-Hukm.*

(4) *See Muslim, Sahih, no. (2038); Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, no. (5914); and Ibn `Urwiya, Kitab Al-Awa`il, no. (1/156). Ibn `Urwiya mentioned that the first person to sit while giving the Friday sermon was Mu`awiya, and then he mentioned `Abd Ar- Rahman ibn Umm Al-Hukm.*

(5) *See Tabaqat Al-Huzhaz, vol. 1/73: Tawus ibn Kisan Al-Yamani, a client of the children of the Persians. He died in Mecca in 106 A.H. while performing the Pilgrimage. He was a revered jurist.*

(6) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, vol. 14/488, Dar Hajr edition; he attributed it to Ibn Abu Shayba on the authority of Tawus. Ibn Abu Shayba narrated it in his Musannaf, no. (5228).*

Muhammad and his rank. That is why most of them were described as not using their reason since using reason would produce the opposite of this behaviour.

'for if they had the patience [to wait] until thou come forth to them [of thine own accord], it would be for their own good…' (*al-Hujurat:* 5). Indeed, if they had been patient, it would have been better for them, as after they had called him and compelled him to come out, he released half of the prisoners that had come under their ransom, and he said: 'By Allah, if they had been patient until I had come out, I would have released all the prisoners.'(1)

Thus, it is Prophet Muhammad's right that you have etiquette with him, whether it is calling him, not leaving him while he is speaking or giving a sermon, or in dealing with his *Sunna*.

Here Allah *the Almighty* says, '…Say, "Allah's gift is better than and entertainment or trade: Allah is the best provider."' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11) What is with Allah is not to be feared for. Rather, it multiplies and increases. What is with Allah is not to be grieved over because man grieves when he loses out on goodness, but what is with Allah remains and will never lose you, nor will you lose it. There is nothing with Allah *the Almighty* which is grieved over because it has been lost.

'…Verily, that which is with Allah is by far the best for you…' (*an-Nahl:* 95). Thus, in actual fact, goodness is not to be found in the enjoyments of the life of this world, regardless of how numerous they may be. Rather, it is found with Allah *the Almighty*. Man's lot in the life of this world is contingent and transitory. Either you will leave it when you die or it will leave you through some event happening to you. As for what is with Allah, it remains and never comes to an end.

What is with Allah is better than your passing delights and your commerce. It is not appropriate for you to leave Prophet Muhammad to go out for passing delights, or even commerce. You only came to the Friday Prayer because Allah called you to it: 'Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9).When you left your work in the life of this world, you responded to Allah's call, so after you have responded to his call, how can you then disperse from Him when you see commerce or a passing delight?

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(1) *See Al-BaghawI in Ma`alim At-Tanzil, vol. 7/333 Dar Tayyiba.*

If you are seeking sustenance by going out for commerce, then where will you seek sustenance? Is it not with Allah *the Almighty*? Is He not the All-Provider? Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* is '…the best of providers!' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11)

Sustenance is not just wealth and it is not just food. Rather, clothes are sustenance, knowledge is sustenance, forbearance is sustenance, and everything that you benefit from is sustenance from Allah. The slave is a means in sustenance because Allah *the Almighty* first, is the Creator of sustenance. Then He gives it to you, you benefit from it and work with it, and then from it you give to others.

Sustenance from you is just handed over from the Original Provider *the Almighty*. In this sense you are a provider, even though it is disliked for a person to be called a provider because no one should think that sustenance comes from people.

That is why we often hear of simple labourers, or lower-ranking employees, or doormen, for example, saying to their employers after being dismissed: 'Sir, sustenance is in Allah's hand'. How can you say that when you took your salary from his hand and from his wealth? They said: 'It is because he was looking at the First One to hand over the sustenance, not the second one to hand it over'.

Some of those who seek to discredit the Quran say that His statement: '…And Allah is the best of providers' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11) means that the attribute of providing is shared, as others besides Him *the Almighty* also provide, but He is The Best of Providers because He provides the creation with the sources of things from which they provide others. If you provide someone else with food, for example, Allah *the Almighty* is the source and origin of that food.

Allah's statement '…best of providers!' (*al-Jumu'a:* 11) is like His other statements '…the Most Merciful of the merciful!' (*Arham Ar-Rahimin*), or '…the best of inheritors…' (*Khayr Al-Warithin*) or '…best of creators (*Ahsan Al-Khaliqin*). Each plural is an attribute of Allah. He is inviting His creation to be moulded by this character and to be described as such.

Know that Allah did not deny them from being described with these attributes because they have a task therein even if it is limited, that suits their ability and their nature as created beings and slaves, let alone being a gift and a grant from Him *the Almighty*. As for Allah’s attributes, they are unlimited and boundless in their majesty, perfection, and beauty.

If it is Allah’s creation and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful (*Arham Ar-Rahimin*), then this means that He will not prevent His creation from showing mercy to one another. If someone is merciful towards his brother then he is called *Rahim* or *Raheem*, but Allah is the Most Merciful of the merciful.

The same goes for ‘…the best of all forgivers!’ (*al-A‘raf:* 155) because forgiveness can be from one person towards another, but we know that Allah’s forgiveness is superior to the creation’s forgiveness because a human being may forgive for the sake of ostentation, or reputation, or because he is scared of the other person. However, Allah *the Almighty* is not scared of anyone, and He is the Best of Forgivers, with no equal.

We notice here that this verse: ‘Yet they scatter towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it, and leave you [Prophet] standing there’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11), is a preface and introduction for the chapter that comes afterwards, *al-Munafiqun* which exposes and uncovers their actions. What they did by leaving Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* standing and giving the sermon was nothing other than a reaction to the hypocrisy that was in their souls. That is why they were not able to control their reaction, and thus they rushed headlong without thinking because this is the reality that was in their hearts and minds.

Indeed, they did not truly believe, even though they declared their Islam and they prayed with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and with the Muslims. However, in actual fact, they were concealing disbelief and hypocrisy and their hearts were filled with love for the life of this world, wealth and the adornments of this life. That is why they rushed headlong towards what they loved and what they hoped for from their life in this world, and they will have no share in the Hereafter.

the chapter of

al-Munafiqun

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Munafiqun* (1) (Hypocrites):

إِذَا جَآءَكَ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقُونَ قَالُواْ نَشۡهَدُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُ ٱللَّهِۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ إِنَّكَ
لَرَسُولُهُۥ وَٱللَّهُ يَشۡهَدُ إِنَّ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ لَكَٰذِبُونَ ١

When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, ‘We bear witness that you are the Messenger of God.’ God knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars [1] (The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 1)

The hypocrites came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to testify to the truthfulness of his Message; meanwhile, Allah *the Almighty* knows that this testimony is true yet insincere on the part of the hypocrites. This is because He *the Almighty* knows that the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is true, but at the same time, He *the Almighty* testifies that the hypocrites are liars. Here, a question arises which is, ‘How could He *the Almighty* affirm the truthfulness of the hypocrites’ testimony and then call them liars?’ To this we reply, ‘This is because the hypocrites said with their tongues what is not in their hearts. Therefore, they only testified with their tongues that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the

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(1) In his book, As-Suyuti says, ‘*Al-Munafiqun* is the chapter number 63 in the order of the Noble Quran, with a number of 11 verses.’ According to Al-Qurtubi, it was revealed in Medina, as all the scholars opine that it was revealed with relation to the Battle of *Banu Al-Mustaliq* in 6 A. H. as a result of what ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul said. The chapter of *al-Munafiqun* was revealed after the chapter of *al-Hajj* and prior to the chapter of *al-Mujadala*. *See As-Suyuti, Al-Itqan Fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran, 1/78.*

Messenger of Allah, yet their hearts denied and opposed this fact. Thus, though what the hypocrites said is true, they lied and said with their tongues what is not in their hearts, since truth means that the speech is consistent with what is in the heart. Those hypocrites lied because while testifying to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad's Message, they were not expressing what is in their hearts which denied what they testified to.'

More often than not, people misunderstand the reality, and, therefore, think that they found contradiction regarding some Quranic ways of expression. Some orientalists' understanding of Allah's saying: 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, "We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah," (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) is a case in point. Is the statement of the hypocrites consistent with the reality or contradicting it? It is consistent with the reality, for it is confirmed by Allah's saying: '…Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). So, what did the hypocrites lie about? Did they lie about the fact that: '…Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1)? No, Allah *the Almighty* does not deny their saying: '…Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) since He *the Almighty* approves this truth, saying: '…And Allah knows you are His Messenger...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1).

However, Allah *the Almighty* denies what the orientalist critic missed regarding the hypocrites' saying: 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) Here, He *the Almighty* denies their sincerity in that testimony, not what they testify to, namely, that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger sent by Allah. He *the Almighty* knows that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is His Messenger whom He sent as a mercy for the worlds. However, the hypocrites' lie about their sincerity in their testimony.

To recap, Allah *the Almighty* does not deny their saying that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is Allah's Messenger as it is a true fact. Rather, He *the Almighty* denies their utterance, 'We bear witness,' since this suggests that their statement is consistent with what they believe in their hearts, which is not the case. So, they are described as liars because their words contradict what is in their hearts. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘They tell a lie against Allah and they know it…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 75). This means that they consciously lie and say words which are not in line with the reality. Thus, we cannot say they uttered them unconsciously.

The hypocrites lied on purpose as they know they were not speaking the truth. Mainly, we need to differentiate between the truthfulness of the information and the truthfulness of its reporter; the truthfulness of the reporter means that his/her information is consistent with the reality. However, sometimes the reporter is truthful, but his/her information itself is untrue. For instance, when someone says: ‘So and so studies all night,’ because this person saw the light on and found him/her opening a book. In reality, however, this so and so was overwhelmed with reading a novel. Here, the reporter is truthful yet the information is untrue. Therefore, there is a distinction between the truthfulness of the information and the truthfulness of the reporter. If the reporter’s conviction is consistent with the reality, then the information is true and the reporter is truthful. Meanwhile, if the information is consistent with the reality and contradictory to the reporter’s conviction, then the information is true yet the reporter is untruthful.

Thus, only verbally did the hypocrites testify to the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad’s Message. This issue is true though Allah, the All Knowing of hearts, reveals their true stance before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘…and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) So, their verbal testimony is in conformity with what Allah *the Almighty* knows, yet their statement contradicts what is in their hearts. Thus, He *the Almighty* bears witness that they are liars about their testimony since the hypocrite among them did not testify a sincere testimony which requires that the statement of the tongue agrees with what is in the heart.

Some idiots who attempt to spot errors in the Quran do not adequately understand its language and its subtleties; therefore, they become confused and unable to purely comprehend the Quran. They said, ‘The Quran has contradictions,’ while they know that the hypocrites did not lie in their saying, ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,’ but rather in their sincerity regarding this testimony. Allah *the Almighty* denies only their saying, ‘We testify,’ since they declared faith only with their tongues, not with their hearts.

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to expose the hypocrites as they testified to Prophet Muhammad's truthfulness only with their tongues while their hearts denied that. So, He *the Almighty* revealed what was inside their hearts and clarified that their tongues did not utter what was in their hearts. The Quran clarifies that the hypocrites: 'Say with their tongues what is not in their hearts.' (*Al-'Imran:* 75) The heart is concerned with the inner faith, whereas the person may say something with the tongue and then s/he does not comply with it. So, we said, 'The hypocrite has a fragmented soul with fragmented faculties, saying things with his/her tongue while denying them in his/her heart. As a result, they will be in the deepest level of the hell because they are deceitful with fragmented souls.'

Speech, which is uttered for revealing what is inside people's hearts, is mainly done with the tongue. When the people explain through writing what they have in their inner self, this is considered as speaking in terms of expressing themselves and revealing what is in their heart. Therefore, if someone is embarrassed to say something to someone else, s/he writes it on a piece of paper. The moment s/he writes about something, it is as if s/he had said it. Those hypocrites said their words not by means of writing, but through their tongues and this is an act of boasting, for if they were ashamed, they would whisper their words. Moreover, they were presumptuous enough to say, 'We testify,' given the fact that testimony is the most emphatic kind of speech.

There was a man who used to come to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and say, 'O Prophet! I testify that you brought the truth from Allah,' so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to be pleased with his words. Then, the man would say, 'By Allah, O Prophet Muhammad, Allah knows that I utter what is in my heart.' In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and he calls on Allah to witness as to what is in his heart...' (*al-Baqara:* 204).

The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'These are the hypocrites,'(1) and recited Allah's saying: 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, “We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah.” Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) Allah *the Almighty* warns us against those people, saying: ‘And among men is he whose speech about the life of this world causes you to wonder, and he calls on Allah to witness as to what is in his heart…’ (*al-Baqara:* 204). This shows that those hypocrites reveal goodness and conceal evil. It is not forbidden to be pleased by speech, yet it is better to be pleased by speech which does not concern the worldly life. In order that Allah *the Almighty* grants us goodness, speech that pleases us should be related to the Hereafter which will last eternally. He *the Almighty* indicates that it is necessary for Muslims to be attentive and smart. So, when one of the caliphs of the Muslims sent for Imam Ja‘far As-Sadiq, (1) asking him, ‘Why do you not visit us like other people? Imam Ja‘far As-Sadiq wrote to him, ‘I have nothing in the worldly life to worry about and you have nothing from the Hereafter that I am looking forward to having.’(2) It is as if he wanted to tell him, ‘Leave me alone. You need someone who flatters you, and you do not know that those who think badly of you are most willing to flatter you.’

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(1) *In his Tafsir, At-Tabari narrates that Ibn Zayd said, 'There was a man who used to come to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and say, "O Prophet! I testify that you brought the truth from Allah," until Prophet Muhammad wonders=*

Allah *the Almighty* has revealed His saying: ‘And among men is he whose speech about the life of this world causes you to wonder, and he calls on

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= *about his words. Then, the man would say, “By Allah, O Prophet Muhammad, Allah knows that I utter what is in my heart.” In this connection, Allah the Almighty says, “...and he calls on Allah to witness as to what is in his heart...” (al-Baqara: 204) Ibn Zayd said, “These are the hypocrites.”’ See At-Tabari, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 3993.*

(1) *Ja‘far As-Sadiq is Ja‘far ibn Mohammed Al-Baqir ibn Ali Zain Al ‘Abidin Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi Abu ‘Abdullah. Nicknamed As-Sadiq (The Honest); he was born in Medina in 80 A.H. and, for the Imamiyyah, he was the sixth among the twelve Imams. He was among the major followers with a high position in knowledge influencing both Imam Abu Hanifah and Imam Malik. Further, he was nicknamed As-Sadiq (The Honest) since he was never known to lie and was daring regarding the truth. Ja‘far was 68 years old when he died in Medina in 148 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam, 2/126.*

(2) *This occurred with Caliph Al-Mansour Al-‘Abbasi as he wrote to Ja‘far As-Sadiq, ‘Why do you not visit us like other people?’ Ja‘far replied, ‘I have nothing in the worldly life to worry about and I can ask you for nothing in the Hereafter. You do not have a blessing to congratulate you on nor do you go through hard times that need consolation. So, what shall we do when we visit you?’ Al-Mansour wrote, ‘You accompany us to advise us.’ Ja‘far replied, ‘Who wants the worldly life does not advise you and who wants the Hereafter does not accompany you.’ See Ibn Hamdun, At-Tadhkera Al-Hamduniya, 1/24.*

Allah to witness as to what is in his heart…' (*al-Baqara:* 204) with regard to Ubbay, Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq Ath-Thaqafi.(1) He was called Al-Akhnas (The retreater) because he retreated and did not fight the Muslims with Quraysh at the Battle of Badr; he apologised to the people of Quraysh, claiming that his camels survived from the attack of the Muslims and returned to him. Besides, when he met Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he declared his belief in Islam, showed kindness towards him, and claimed his love for him. However, as soon as he had left Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passing by some crops and donkeys belonging to a group of Muslims, he destroyed the crops and killed the donkeys.(2) Though the verse is revealed with regard to Al-Akhnas Ibn Shariq, it concerns every hypocrite.

With regard to Allah's saying: '…and he calls on Allah to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the most violent of adversaries,' (*al-Baqara:* 204) he should not have called Allah *the Almighty* to witness for him, but rather, he should have brought his witnesses to testify to the trueness of his words, since his saying, 'Allah testifies' means that he tells the Muslims that Allah *the Almighty* testifies for him. Meanwhile, he is a liar and only wants to validate his lie by involving Allah *the Almighty* in the matter. Therefore, whenever you hear someone saying, 'Allah testifies that I am so and so,' tell him/her, 'this means that you are affirming that He *the Almighty* testifies, but perhaps you are untruthful. I would prefer that two people witness for you than involving Allah *the Almighty* in this testimony.'

Further, the hypocrites are the fiercest of opponents and the most threatening to the believers because they seek sedition and dissension; spread lies among Muslims while claiming that they are Muslims; discourage those who fight in the cause of Allah *the Almighty*; keep them away from Jihad; and promise the laggards who refrain from fighting with the Muslims with survival and prosperity. In addition, the hypocrites refute the fundamentals of the society like its virtues and morals; call for anything that destroys the Islamic Law; and desire corruption for the Muslim society and family. The hypocrites practiced this during the time of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ,so Allah *the Almighty* warns against them in numerous verses of the Noble Quran, especially in the chapters of *al-Baqara* and *Al-'Imran* and allocates a chapter titled with their name: *al-Munafiqun* (The hypocrites). Allah *the Almighty* exposes them through their looks and deep secrets, displays their evil deeds and reveals the issues by which they invoke dissension between the Muslims.

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(1) *Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq Ath-Thaqafi is an ally for Banu Zahrah. His name is Ubayy ibn 'Amro ibn Wahb ibn 'Ilaj ibn Abu Salama. He was among those whose hearts need winning over for Islam. He witnessed the Battle of Hunayn and died at the outset of the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab. Known for his handsome look and speech; he retreated at the Battle of Badr with three hundred allies and did not fight Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. See Ibn Hajar, Al-Isaba, 1/25.*

(2) In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti mentions this narration and ascribes it to Ibn Jarir At-Tabari, Ibn Al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abu Hatim. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 2/476.

People in this worldly life can be divided into three types: A believer, a disbeliever and a hypocrite. Allah *the Almighty* at the outset of the Noble Quran, in the chapter of *al-Baqara,* wants to present a description for all people according to His Way of Guidance showing that they are one of three categories. The first category is the believers; He *the Almighty* describes their qualities in three verses, saying: 'Those who believe in the unseen and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them. And who believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you and they are sure of the Hereafter. These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that shall be successful.' (*al-Baqara:* 3-5)

The second category is the disbelievers whom Allah *the Almighty* describes their qualities in two verses, saying: 'Surely those who disbelieve, it being alike to them whether you warn them, or do not warn them, will not believe. Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great punishment for them.' (*al-Baqara:* 6-7) As for the hypocrites, Allah *the Almighty* identifies their qualities in thirteen successive verses. So, what is the reason for this? The reason is that they pose a threat to the religion of Islam. Indeed, the one who is more likely to destroy the religion is the hypocrite, unlike the disbeliever whom we avoid and beware since s/he declares his/her disbelief.

The hypocrite pretends before you that s/he is faithful yet conceals evil and disbelief. You may think s/he is a believer and start showing him/her your secrets which s/he uses against the religion of Islam. Allah *the Almighty* has endowed the human beings with many faculties. In order for him/her to live in inner peace, his/her faculties ought to be consistent and compatible. As for the believer, his/her faculties are consistent since s/he has faith in his/her heart and utters with his/her tongue what s/he believes. Thus, there is no contradiction between his/her faculties. Likewise, the disbeliever who claims s/he lives in inner peace rejects belief and denies it in his/her heart and utters this with his/her tongue. The hypocrite, on the other hand, undergoes a contradiction between his/her faculties; s/he conceals disbelief in his/her heart and reveals belief with his/her tongue. This contradiction remains with him/her till the last day of his/her worldly life and then continues with him/her in the Hereafter so as to turn against him/her, leading him/her into the hellfire. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Until when they come to it, their ears and their eyes and their skins shall bear witness against them as to what they did. And they shall say to their skins: Why have you borne witness against us? They shall say: Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak, and He created you at first, and to Him you shall be brought back.’ (*Fussilat:* 20-21) Thus, all their faculties turn against them in the Hereafter. Neither in their worldly life nor in the Hereafter did the hypocrites reach peace. The tongue of the hypocrite, his/her hands, legs and skin will all testify against him/her. So, what is left for him/her?

The hypocrite has contradictions between himself/herself and his/her Lord, society, Hereafter and even the disbelievers. His/her tongue says what is not in his/her heart. Allah *the Almighty* describes the qualities of the hypocrites, saying: ‘And there are some people who say: “We believe in Allah and the Last Day”; and they are not at all believers.’ (*al-Baqara:* 8) This is the first characteristic of the hypocrites mentioned in the Quran. They declare faith while concealing disbelief in their heart. So, they just pretend to be believers. If they were to pray, their prayer would not be accepted since they pretend to be praying and do not establish it faithfully. Further, if they were to give the prescribed alms, it would be a source of regret for them since they spend it unwillingly as they claim it decreases their wealth and they will not be rewarded for it in the Hereafter. In addition, if someone of them were killed in a battle, they would be overwhelmed with sadness and grief since they lost their lives without getting the reward of the one who lost his/her life in the cause of Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, everything they do is a plight for them.

Unlike the believer who prays, gives the prescribed alms or is killed in the cause of Allah while striving for paradise, the hypocrites do all these without expecting any reward. It is as if they were destined by Allah *the Almighty* to lose both the worldly life and the Hereafter. They do not have the pleasure that the believer has when s/he does good deeds in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* nor do they have the reward that the believer seeks in the Hereafter.

The second characteristic of the hypocrites suggests their ignorance and stupidity. They think that they deceive Allah *the Almighty* with their hypocrisy, but how can a human being deceive the Lord of the worlds? Allah, All Knowing, knows what we conceal and what we reveal, and He knows the secret and what is more concealed than the secret. But is there something more concealed than the secret? We say, ‘Yes, the secret is what you tell to someone else so it is known by two people: You and that one. Yet, what is more concealed than the secret is what you keep to yourself and do not tell anyone about it; it remains in your heart and no one knows about it.’ Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And if you utter the saying aloud, then surely He knows the secret, and what is yet more hidden.’ (*Ta Ha:* 7)

No one can deceive his/her Creator *Glorified is He*; yet because the hypocrites are ignorant, they believe they can deceive Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, there is no peace between them and Allah *the Almighty* but rather detest and anger. Meanwhile, they think they deceive the believers when they reveal before them something other than what they conceal. Yet, this deception is a misery for them since they live in constant fear that the believers might find out their true position or listen to them at their private sessions while speaking about their disbelief and mocking the believers.

For this reason, if they spoke, they would make sure first that no one of the believers hear them and then ensure that none of the believers would join them while speaking. Their hearts are overwhelmed with fear even if they are sitting with the believers; everyone fears that s/he might say a word which reveals his/her hypocrisy and disbelief. Thus, there is no peace between them and the believers. In fact, they only deceive themselves, for Allah *the Almighty* knows their hypocrisy. As for the believers, they may know this hypocrisy; however, if they did not, Allah *the Almighty* would tell them. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And if We please We would have made you know them so that you would certainly have recognised them by their marks and most certainly you can recognise them by the intent of (their) speech; and Allah knows your deeds.’ (*Muhammad:* 30)

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) He *the Almighty* exposes the hypocrites and reveals to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* what they keep in their hearts. Though their deception to the believers is one between the human beings, they sometimes lose control over their tongues so they reveal their reality. If their tongue is controlled, Allah *the Almighty* exposes them and consequently they do not deceive anyone since He *the Almighty* knows their secrets and declarations. Thus, sometimes He *the Almighty* helps the believers to reveal them and other times the tongues of the hypocrites themselves lose control and thus they reveal themselves.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

ٱتَّخَذُوٓاْ أَيْمَٰنَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّواْ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِۚ إِنَّهُمْ سَآءَ مَا كَانُواْ يَعْمَلُونَ ۝٢

They use their oaths as a cover and so bar others
from God’s way: what they have been doing is
truly evil [2] (The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 2)

In fact, the oaths are one of the means of deception that the hypocrites use and master. They use them as a cover which protects them from being exposed. In this way, they conceal their deep disbelief in order to live among the Muslims without being exposed. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘But how will it be when misfortune befalls them on account of what their hands have sent before? Then they will come to you swearing by Allah: We did not desire (anything) but good and concord.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 62) They believe that hypocrisy benefits them; it allows them the benefits of the Islamic legal rulings. Hence, whenever they are exposed before people, they resort to false swearing by Allah *the Almighty* as they desire sustainability of their hypocrisy.

Besides, they attempt to justify heading to unjust tyrants by claiming that they intended good conduct and reconciliation between them and their opponents.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They swear to you by Allah that they might please you and, Allah, as well as His Prophet, has a greater right that they should please Him, if they are believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 62) The hypocrites aimed to please the believers by means of false oaths so that the latter may trust them and expect no evil from them. This indicates the stupidity of the hypocrites since it is Allah *the Almighty* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who are most worthy of being pleased. The human being can deceive other people, but s/he cannot deceive Allah *the Almighty*. Consequently, their deception does not escape Allah's Knowledge and He *the Almighty* will justly recompense them for it.

So, the hypocrite always clings to false, solemn oaths because s/he wants to conceal his/her disbelief and that no one finds out about the secrets of his/her ill soul. On the other hand, the disbeliever, who publicly declares his/her disbelief, does not need to hide his/her disbelief. Thus, the hypocrites conceal disbelief and reveal the belief in Islam. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and when they meet those who believe, they say: We believe; and when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking.' (*al-Baqara:* 14) They are two-faced people, dealing with the believers in one way and dealing with the disbelievers in another different way; that is why they constantly need to swear, for no one believes them. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They swear by Allah that they did not speak, and certainly they did speak, the word of unbelief, and disbelieved after their Islam…' (*at-Tawba:* 74).

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had called the people to fight the Byzantines in the cause of Allah *the Almighty,* the hypocrites made up false excuses in order not to go for Jihad. As a result, the Quran revealed verses concerning those retreaters for two whole months. A man called Al-Jallas ibn Suwayd(1) said, 'By Allah, if what Muhammad says about those retreaters is true, then we are worse than donkeys.' 'Amer ibn Qays *Al-Ansari* replied, 'Messenger Muhammad spoke the truth; you are worse than donkeys and you, Jallas, are worse than the donkey.'(1)

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(1) *Al-Jallas ibn Suwayd is among thirty-six hypocrites and one of those who retreated at the Battle of Tabuk. See Al-Baghdadi, Al-Muhabbar, 1/ 467.*

'Amer ibn Qays went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to tell him about the incident. So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent for Al-Jallas ibn Suwayd to ask him about the issue. Al-Jallas swore by Allah that all what 'Amer ibn Qays said did not occur and that he did not say anything against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Then, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left him after swearing. Meanwhile, 'Amer ibn Qays raised his hands invoking Allah, saying, 'O Lord! Reveal the truth to your servant and Messenger, and allow the truthfulness of the truthful and the lie of the liar to be known.' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Amen!' Before they finished their supplication, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying (2): 'They swear by Allah that they did not speak, and certainly they did speak, the word of unbelief, and disbelieved after their Islam…' (*at-Tawba:* 74).

Those who remained behind after the departure of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had made up false excuses in order not to fight with him, telling each other: 'Do not go forth in the heat.' (*at-Tawba:* 81) In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will swear to you by Allah when you return to them so that you may turn aside from them...' (*at-Tawba:* 95). The expression 'will swear' comes in a future tense to suggest that they have not sworn yet. So, they would swear by Allah *the Almighty* and make up trivial excuses. But why will the hypocrites swear by Allah *the Almighty* to the believers? Allah *the Almighty* provides the answer, saying: '…so that you may turn aside from them...' (*at-Tawba:* 95). This means that they swear in order for the believers to stop condemning and blaming them for not fighting with them. Allah *the Almighty* indicates the best way to deal with such people, saying: '…so do turn aside from them…' (*at-Tawba:* 95). They asked the believers to turn aside from them which suggest asking for forgiveness. Similarly, the governor of Egypt tells Prophet Joseph *peace be upon him* after the plot of his wife was revealed: 'Joseph, turn aside from this…' (*Yusuf:* 29). This means that the governor of Egypt asked him to forget what happened and forgive their abuse.

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(1) *In his book, Abu Nu'aym Al-Asfahani narrates on the authority of Mohammed ibn Ishaq that Al-Jallas ibn Suwayd retreated from fighting with Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him in the Battle of Tabuk, saying, 'If what this man (Messenger Muhammad) says about those retreaters is true, then we are worse than donkeys.' 'Umair ibn Sa'd related his words to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him who was staying with Al-Jallas. Al-Jallas claimed 'Umair is a liar, swearing by Allah that he did not say so. Henceforth, Allah the Almighty revealed His saying: 'They swear by Allah that they did not speak…' (at-Tawba:74) See Abu Nu'aym Al-Asfahani, Ma'rifat As-Sahaba, 15/88.*

(2) *See Al-Fakhr Ar-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghaib; Az-Zamakhshari, Al-Kash-shaf, 2/291; An-Nasafi, Madarik At-Tanzil, 1/455; and Al-Alusi, Ruh Al-Ma'any, 5/ 328.*

Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to turn aside from the hypocrites as a way of belittling and insulting them, not to show that they had forgiven them. Thus, the believers were commanded not to blame or condemn them, for blaming them signifies that they may return to the truth, which in fact is impossible. Therefore, reproaching the hypocrites is of no avail, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…surely they are unclean and their abode is Hell; a recompense for what they earned.' (*at-Tawba:* 95)

The hypocrites do not watch Allah *the Almighty* in their actions, believing that He *the Almighty* does not see them and knows nothing of what they conceal in their hearts. Besides, they are heedless of Him, thinking only about the benefits and interest people might provide for them. Indeed, their belief is infected. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will swear to you that you may be pleased with them…' (*at-Tawba:* 96). They ask 'the believers' to be pleased with them, forgetting that the true Pleasure comes from Allah *the Almighty*. By swearing, they might gain the believers' satisfaction with them, yet He *the Almighty* says: '…but if you are pleased with them, yet surely Allah is not pleased with the transgressing people.' (*at-Tawba:* 96) If Allah *the Almighty* is not pleased with them, the believers' pleasure will not benefit them; it will not bring forth or hold back anything which does not please Allah *the Almighty*.

Using their oaths as a cover, the hypocrites bar others from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* since they tempt others to follow their example by adopting deception and scheming as a means for concealment and hiding. By so doing, they attempt to avert the implementation of the Islamic rulings regarding their disbelief. This tempts people to find ways far from Allah's Way of Guidance. Our popular proverb can be best quoted here: 'They asked the thief to swear, he rejoiced: Thanks Allah.' This is similar to the case of the deviant people who bar others, by means of their deviant behaviour, from the Way of Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, the hypocrites refuse to follow the Way of Allah *the Almighty* and incite others to do the same. In other words, not only did they go astray, but they also mislead others. They disbelieve in Allah's Way of Guidance and seek to falsify it. Consequently, they oppose the implementation of the prescribed penalties and legal retribution and discourage people and keep them away from Allah's Way of Guidance. This makes people turn away from the religion. When the people see the disbelievers, who oppose Allah's Way of Guidance and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* having the upper hand, dance, sing and rejoice for their victory by means of plotting, deception, false swearing and hypocrisy, this will tempt people to follow the approach of the opponents to Allah's Way of Guidance.

The reason for their opposition to the Way of Allah *the Almighty* is that they want the Way to be crooked in order to avert people from faith. This will enable them to have a temporal power and to cause corruption in the earth. This is because the religious reformation disturbs them and prevents them from exploiting corruption.

So, how do they avert people from the Way of Allah *the Almighty*? Those who mislead people attempt to ensure that the verses of Allah *the Almighty* do not reach people since they know that the sweetness of the Call makes anyone listening believe in it. One of the things the hypocrites did in order to avert people from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* is by building a mosque called '*Masjid Ad-Dirar*' (Harming Mosque)(1). In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then there are those who built a mosque—in an attempt to cause harm, disbelief, and disunity among the believers—as an outpost for those who fought Allah and His Messenger before…' (*at-Tawba:* 107). Those people desired to express their hypocrisy through a manifestation of obedience by building a mosque to divide the Muslims; a group of Muslims prays here and another prays there. If they stayed to pray in it, they would be free to say whatever they want; yet, if they headed to another mosque, they would stay there suppressed and unable to speak. Thus, their objective of building the mosque was to divide the believers, and to make that mosque: 'as an outpost for those who fought Allah and His Messenger before…' (*at-Tawba:* 107).

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(1) *Allah the Almighty says: 'Then there are those who built a mosque—in an attempt to cause harm, disbelief, and disunity among the believers —as an outpost for those who fought Allah and His Messenger before: they swear, "Our intentions were nothing but good," but Allah bears witness that they are liars. [Prophet], never pray in that mosque.' (at-tawba: 107-108)*

Those who built that mosque made it an outpost to Abu 'Amir the monk, whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called 'the Disobedient.' This monk asked them to establish that mosque in order to cause harm, disbelief and division. It also would be an outpost for that monk who would head to Ash-Sham and bring soldiers to fight Allah's Cause and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Though, they dare to swear by Allah *the Almighty* falsely, saying: 'Our intentions were nothing but good.' (*at-Tawba:* 107) They swore claiming, 'By building this mosque, we only desire the interest of the Muslims; it would assist the disabled and sick people and those who are unable to walk to the other mosque. Besides, if it is a rainy or cold night, people could find another mosque to perform prayers.'

They desire to avert people from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* so the Quran has been decisive regarding this issue. Allah *the Almighty* says: '[Prophet], never pray in that mosque. You should rather pray in a mosque founded from its first day on consciousness of Allah: in this mosque there are men who desire to grow in purity – Allah loves those who seek to purify themselves.' (*at-Tawba:* 108)(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti relates that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'These are people from the Ansar (The Helpers). They built a mosque so Abu 'Amir told them, 'Build your mosque and prepare your arms because I am going to the Caesar of the Romans to provide soldiers in order to expel Muhammad and his Companions.' When they finished building their mosque, they came to Prophet Muhammad saying, 'We finished building the mosque and we would like you to establish the prayers and invoke Allah to bless it.' Thereupon, Allah* the Almighty *reveals His saying: '[Prophet], never pray in that mosque...' (at-Tawba: 108). As-Suyuti ascribes this narration to Ibn Jarir At-Tabari, Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Mardawayh and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala'il An-Nubuwwa. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 7/522.*

Allah *the Almighty* also says: ‘And those who believe will say: Are these they who swore by Allah with the most forcible of their oaths that they were most surely with you? Their deeds shall go for nothing, so they shall become losers.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 53) The hypocrites who oppose Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* swore by Allah *the Almighty* with the strongest oaths so as to show those whom they swore to that they keep their word. When they swore by Allah *the Almighty* their strongest oaths, they might have been close to Faith. However, their hearts do not stick to one doctrine, but rather fluctuate constantly. Hence, if their doctrine is unstable, how can we believe them at the moment they swore by Allah *the Almighty*?

Another thing the hypocrites do to bar others from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* is that they divide the Muslims who intend to fight the enemy. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Go forth light and heavy, and strive hard in Allah’s way with your property and your persons; this is better for you, if you know.’ (*at-Tawba:* 41) This is the Decree of Allah *the Almighty* Who declares the mobilisation; yet, the hypocrites desired to avoid responding to it and began to make up excuses. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Had it been a near advantage and a short journey, they would certainly have followed you, but the tedious journey was too long for them...’ (*at-Tawba:* 42). They only respond to easy tasks; however, if the task was difficult, they: ‘…steal away from among you, concealing themselves...’ (*an-Nur:* 63); and another hypocrite says: ‘Allow me and do not try me. Surely into trial have they already tumbled down.’ (*at-Tawba:* 49)

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wants to meet one of his enemies, he rarely reveals his true destination. Yet, at the Battle of Tabuk, he said, ‘O people! Know that I want to fight the Byzantines.’ This was at the days of hardships, extreme heat, barren grounds and when the fruits of the city ripen. During that time, people liked to reside by their fruits and shades and hated to leave them.

One day, while Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was preparing for the battle, he asked Jadd Ibn Qays, ‘Will you fight the Byzantines, Jadd?’ He said, ‘My people knew that there is no one more infatuated by women than me and I am afraid that their women might seduce me. So please permit me, Messenger of Allah, to stay.’ Thereupon, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ignored him saying, 'I permit you.'[1] Thus, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: 'And among them there is he who says: Allow me and do not try me. Surely into trial have they already tumbled down.' (*at-Tawba:* 49)

Surprisingly, the Quran is revealed before they refused to join Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his war and before they swore their strongest oaths. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and they will swear by Allah: If we had been able, we would certainly have gone forth with you; they cause their own souls to perish, and Allah knows that they are most surely liars.' (*at-Tawba:* 42) Using the future tense 'will swear' suggests that they have not sworn yet, but rather will swear in the future. If they were alarmed, they would not swear and would say, 'The Quran says we would swear, but we did not.' However, Allah *the Almighty* knows that they will swear. Similarly, the opponents of Islam unintentionally testify to the veracity of Islam. By swearing, they divided the Muslims who were preparing to fight the enemy because they refused to go forth and thus they encouraged others to retreat, causing dissension among the Muslims. The hypocrites typically do that.

It is true that hypocrites' staying behind was better for the Muslims, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Had they gone forth between you, they would not have added to you aught save corruption, and they would certainly have hurried about among you seeking (to sow) dissension among you, and among you there are those who hearken for their sake; and Allah knows the unjust.' (*at-Tawba:* 47) Indeed, the hypocrites would have only caused confusion to the minds if they had gone forth to fight; thus, the Muslims would not have been able to take the right decision. It is as if they were spying for the enemies of the Muslims. Besides, they might have been factors for defeat, which was not destined for the Muslims. Thus, if the hypocrites had gone forth with the Muslims, they would have caused division

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(1) *In his book, Al-Bayhaqi narrates this Hadith on the authority of 'Asim ibn 'Amr ibn Qatada and 'Abdullah ibn Abu Bakr ibn Hazm. In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this Hadith and ascribes it to Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Al-Bayhaqi. It is also narrated by Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, 5/ 214; As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 7/ 396; Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 6/ 1809.*

between them and would have penetrated them, aiming at causing corruption; they would join the groups of the Muslims to corrupt and divide them.

Notably, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Had they gone forth between you...’ (*at-Tawba:* 47). He *the Almighty* does not say ‘gone forth with you’ since ‘with’ implies total obedience; unlike ‘between you’ which signifies penetrating into weak spots and causing problems, arguments and division, such as those caused by microbes and germs when they penetrate the weak parts of the human body.

Mainly, they whisper in the ears of the believers and beautify falsehood in order to refute any directive issued by the leader. The hypocrites desire dissension and the defeat of the Muslims so that when the former would return to Medina, their popularity increases. Their leader (1) even said: ‘Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8)

Back to the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* describes their act of swearing falsely and using their oaths as a cover to avert people from His Way, saying: ‘…what they have been doing is truly evil.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 2) The evil meant in the verse is not temporal; rather, it implies a present and a future evil as well since its impacts are continuous. Their evil includes their speech and acts; they swore through their tongues, lied intentionally, sought dissension between the Muslims and averted others from the Way of Allah *the Almighty*.

So, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…what they have been doing is truly evil.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 2) Thus, their evil deeds are many; for instance, they avert people from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* by their speech and sometimes by force.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا۟ ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا۟ فَطُبِعَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Because they professed faith and then rejected it, so their
hearts have been sealed and they do not understand [3]
(The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 3)

This verse follows Allah’s saying: ‘…they use their oaths as a cover and so bar others from Allah’s way: what they have been doing is truly evil.’

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(1) Their leader is called ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, the head of the hypocrites in Medina.

(*al-Munafiqun:* 2) So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…what they have been doing is truly evil' (*al-Munafiqun:* 2) it includes both of the hypocrites' deeds, that is, using their oaths as a cover to bar others from Allah's Way and disbelieving after believing.

The Quran tells us about those who believe and then disbelieve in many instances. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely (as for) those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will not forgive them nor guide them in the (right) path.' (*an-Nisa':* 137) These are the hypocrites who declared belief and concealed disbelief. Thus, they turned belief, which is a doctrine that the heart believes in and the deeds confirm, to a mere word. The hypocrites were keen on performing the apparent rituals and requirement of Islam in order not to be doubted while concealing disbelief in their hearts. So, they desired to corrupt and to bring about confusion to the minds.

In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the Bedouins, saying: 'The desert Arabs say, "We have faith." [Prophet], tell them, "You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, 'We have submitted,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts."' (*al-Hujurat:* 14) Allah *the Almighty* reveals their inner secrets to make known to them that they are Muslims by words only since their hearts did not believe. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* addresses them with: 'You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, "We have submitted," for faith has not yet entered your hearts.' (*al-Hujurat:* 14)

They have been the first ones in the rows of prayers; yet, when the Quran revealed their inner secrets, they recognised that it is revealed by Allah *the Almighty* and that He *the Almighty* had exposed their secrets to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If they had believed that it is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who knew their inner secrets, they would not have recognised him as a Prophet only; instead, they would have exaggerated the matter and would have made him a god. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* settled the matter and indicated that Allah has revealed that to him as He *the Almighty* has asked him to tell them: 'You do not have faith.' (*al-Hujurat:* 14)

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…surely (as for) those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief…'—that is, they disbelieved till their death — '…Allah will not forgive them nor guide them in the (right) path.' (*an-Nisa':* 137) He *the Almighty* will not guide such people because they disbelieved after their belief.

By so doing, they have committed what is mentioned in the previous verse: '…bar others from Allah's way.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 2) By this behaviour, they intend to cause dissension since other people watch them when they believe and watch them when they disbelieve. These hypocrites would justify their disbelief saying that when they have delved into the doctrinal issues of Islam, they disbelieved. They act so in order to diminish the value of Islam. Mainly, they intend to cause dissension by showing belief then declaring disbelief. This is enough to cast doubt into the Muslims' hearts.

Those who hesitate between belief and disbelief and ended up increasing in disbelief are punished, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Allah will not forgive them nor guide them in the (right) path.' (*an-Nisa':* 137) Indeed, they have committed high treason against faith.

Allah *the Almighty* tells us about a group of the people of the Book who believed then disbelieved, saying: 'And a party of the followers of the Book say: Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe, in the first part of the day, and disbelieve at the end of it, perhaps they go back on their religion.' (*Al-'Imran:* 72) Some of the people of the Book wanted to make the Muslims skeptical about the religion of Islam so they planned this plot. Notably, at that time, the Arab and Quraysh, believers and disbelievers, were illiterate and acknowledged that the people of the Book are well versed in the Divine Revelation. So, if some of them believed in the Message revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at the beginning of the day and rejected it at its end, that would confuse the Truth with falsehood and amount to deception and dissension to the believers. So, by believing at the beginning of the day and disbelieving at its end, this group of the people of the Book aimed at making the believers skeptical and confused about the religion of Islam and averting those who want to believe by means of making them hesitate and then refuse to believe. In this way, they would hinder the spread of Islam.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* reveals the plot of those who tried to conceal their deception and wickedness. They pledged each other to keep the matter secret for fear that the plot would not achieve its aim. That is why these schemers told each other: ‘And do not trust except those who follow your religion.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 73) This means that they warned one another against revealing that secret except for those who follow their religion. However, Allah *the Almighty* revealed the whole issue to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to convey it to the believers. Thus, confusion ended and the psychological war that they waged backfired.

Allah *the Almighty* does not guide such people, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their believing and (after) they had borne witness that the Messenger was true and clear arguments had come to them; and Allah does not guide the unjust people.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 86)

Among those people who believed in the Message of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then disbelieved are Tu‘ma ibn Ubayriq, Ibn Al-Aslat and Al-Harith ibn Suwayd. After they had declared belief, they headed to Mecca, declared their disbelief and stayed there. One of them repented, yet the rest did not.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and then rejected it...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 3). This means that the hypocrites denied their belief in Allah *the Almighty* and in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Disbelief is the attempt to cover and deny the existence of Allah *the Almighty* the Necessary Being. In addition, the attempt to conceal this existence is actually a declaration that Allah *the Almighty* exists since you do not attempt to conceal something unless it exists in the first place. The thing which has no existence does not need concealment, since it does not exist in our minds. So, when those disbelievers attempt to conceal the existence of Allah *the Almighty,* they prove His Existence because you do not conceal something unless it exists. Thus, disbelief is evidence for belief.

The disbeliever who denies the existence of Allah *the Almighty* deprives himself/herself of His Way of Guidance. Indeed, such a person had gone far, far astray. Belief in Allah *the Almighty* is a natural disposition in the created beings. Yet, some people reject this belief or became unconscious about it. Disbelief, which linguistically means to cover something, is evidence for belief. If Allah *the Almighty* does not exist, how would they cover what did not exist?! Therefore, if someone tells you s/he disbelieved – Allah forbid – you shall reply, ‘Disbelief linguistically means concealing what exists, so you must have concealed what exists, that is, Allah *the Almighty*.’

Thus, the one who disbelieved in the countless universal signs of Allah *the Almighty* has concealed and denied their existence. Likewise, they disbelieved in the Messengers and their miraculous signs, which transcend the laws of nature. Similarly, they did not believe in the verses of the Book that are revealed to show them Allah’s Way of Guidance.

The result of their disbelief after belief was that: ‘…their hearts have been sealed...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 3). This shows that Allah *the Almighty* has sealed their hearts so that guidance could not enter their hearts, neither could disbelief leave them. It is worth mentioning that Allah *the Almighty* sealed their hearts only when they had disbelieved. Then, Allah *the Almighty* abandoned them in their error, and sealed over their hearts so that disbelief could not leave and belief could not enter.

Other disbelievers listen to Quran, and then leave faithlessly. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And there are those of them who seek to listen to you until when they go forth from you, they say to those who have been given the knowledge: What was it that he said just now? These are they upon whose hearts Allah has set a seal and they follow their low desires.’ (*Muhammad:* 16)

Those who do not believe in the Quran could not perceive or understand Allah’s Revelation; this is called ‘the rust of the heart’ about which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Nay! Rather, what they used to do has become like rust upon their hearts.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 14) Thus, their hearts became closed and blocked after Allah *the Almighty* had sealed them that they could not tolerate or incline to goodness; and thus, they do not believe.

The seal of the hearts is for those who are filled with wickedness and deny Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, Allah *the Almighty* does not unjustly seal their hearts; rather, this was due to the fact that they are hypocrites and conceal disbelief in their hearts. They led to that seal after they had disbelieved. So, Allah *the Almighty* sealed their hearts with the disease in it. If they had not disbelieved, Allah would not have sealed their hearts.

When the act of sealing is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* then it is considered the most powerful seal over hearts. It is a final Judgment that He *the Almighty* has issued against them, so even an atom of hypocrisy or disbelief cannot leave their hearts. He *the Almighty* emphasises that the hypocrites have driven this seal to their hearts since they disbelieved in their heart then apparently declared faith, vainly attempting to deceive Allah *the Almighty* and the believers.

So, Allah *the Almighty* wants to indicate to them that if they opted for hypocrisy and disbelief in their hearts, Allah would seal these hearts that disbelief could not leave them nor could faith enter them. They express their feeling about that seal, saying: ‘Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and there is a heaviness in our ears, and a veil hangs between us and you, so work, we too are working.’ (*Fussilat:* 5) He *the Almighty* has made their hearts under coverings that neither faith can enter nor can disbelief leave. By doing so, He *the Almighty* does not oppress His servants, but responds to what they asked for and desired. In other words, when they desired and were satisfied with disbelief, Allah *the Almighty* increased it for them because He is the Lord who grants His servant what s/he desires.

Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease and they shall have a painful chastisement because they lied.’ (*al-Baqara:* 10) Allah *the Almighty* responded to them with what they desired and sealed their hearts to increase their disbelief inasmuch as they liked it.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…and they do not understand...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 3). Understanding occurs after being convinced through the vision and other senses, though, those disbelievers do not see except their desires. Besides, their ears listen only to what they like; they do not listen to guidance nor do they reflect on the signs which prove the Existence of the Creator. Thus, they have no understanding in their hearts. So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and they do not understand...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 3), it means they do not understand by themselves. For the human beings, understanding is the first stage of having knowledge. Notably, there is a distinction between understanding and knowledge. Understanding suggests that you have the ability to understand things by yourself. Yet, knowledge implies that you may not understand by yourself and that someone else shall understand and then teach you. Someone may ask here, ‘As long as they do not understand, why do we blame them?’ We say, ‘Who does not understand has to accept learning; though, they did not understand nor did they learn. Besides, they insisted on refusing education and that is why they deserved the seal on their hearts.’

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ ۖ وَإِن يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعْ لِقَوْلِهِمْ ۖ كَأَنَّهُمْ خُشُبٌ مُّسَنَّدَةٌ ۖ
يَحْسَبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرْهُمْ ۚ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۖ أَنَّىٰ يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٤﴾

When you see them [Prophet], their outward appearance pleases you; when they speak, you listen to what they say. But they are like propped-up timbers — they think every cry they hear is against them — and they are the enemy. Beware of them. May God confound them! How devious they are! [4] (The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 4)

Allah *the Almighty* describes these hypocrites with numerous characteristics relating to their physical appearance: ‘When you see them [Prophet], their outward appearance pleases you…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4) and their speech: ‘…when they speak, you listen to what they say...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4). They are like propped up timbers. Due to their hypocrisy and fear of being revealed: ‘…they think that every cry is against them…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4).

In fact, their hypocrisy is a manifestation of the influence of Islam and the Muslims in Medina since the hypocrites used to deceive people with their pleasant speech and acts. So, hypocrisy originated in Medina, not in Mecca. In Mecca, Islam was weak, so hypocrisy did not appear there, for no one flatters weak people. However, the power of Islam in Medina gave rise to hypocrisy. Henceforth, the existence of hypocrisy in Medina was a healthy phenomenon as it proves that belief became so powerful that non-Muslims claimed it.

The hypocrites’ speech was sweet and beautiful and they acted pleasantly in front of true Muslims; however, they do not adhere to righteousness. Yet, when they give Muslims their backs, they return to their disbelief.

The pleasant speech and acts of the hypocrites run counter to piety because they stem from insincere souls. It is true that they pray at the first row, show keenness on doing religious deeds and speak nicely to please the believers; yet, their behaviour and speech conceal a corrupt intent.

The believer has to be intelligent and smart in order not to apparently judge the pleasant speech of the hypocrites, for their speech contradicts their acts. Allah *the Almighty* reveals to us the reality of the hypocrites through actual practices so that no one among them shall say, ‘I am not a hypocrite.’ When He *the Almighty* exposes the hypocrite through a shameful incident, s/he will be stigmatised as a hypocrite.

Many people who practice hypocrisy during their life under their pretense of being Muslim are not left without punishment. Allah *the Almighty* must expose them to the believers so that they find out their reality. For instance, when the believer assembles with a group of hypocrites at the time of noon prayer and they hear the call to prayer, the believer says, ‘Let us establish the prayer.’ Then, the hypocrite mockingly tells the believer, ‘Protect me on the Day of Judgment.’ Let us offer another example; if a believer joined a group of people, the hypocrite among them would greet the believer sarcastically, saying, ‘How are you, Sheikh so and so?’ This suggests that he does not welcome the believer, so he mocks him.

Moreover, the hypocrites do not observe toward a believer any tie(1) of kinship or treaty. This is best illustrated by the story of Zayd ibn Thabit *Allah be pleased with him* and one of the hypocrites who was about to kill Zayd since the hypocrites conceal hatred and evil and reveal compliance with Islam. One day, Zayd ibn Thabit departed from Mecca to At-Ta’if with a hypocrite. When they arrived at a secluded place, the hypocrite said, ‘Let us rest here.’ So, both of them entered and Zayd slept. Then, the hypocrite tied Zayd in order to kill him. Zayd asked him, ‘Why do you want to kill me?’ He said, ‘This is because Muhammad likes you and I hate him.’ Zayd invoked Allah *the Almighty* saying, ‘O Allah, You are the Most Merciful, so save me.’ Then, the hypocrite heard a voice saying, ‘Do not kill him.’ So, the man went out looking for the one who spoke, but did not see anyone. The hypocrite came back to kill Zayd, but he heard a closer voice crying, ‘Do not kill him;’ and so he looked once again, but did not see anyone. He came back for the third time to kill him, but heard a closer voice saying, ‘Do not kill him.’ As soon as he had gone out, he saw a knight holding a lance; the knight killed him, then entered the secluded place and untied Zayd. Then, the knight asked him, ‘Do you not know me? I am Gabriel. When you invoked Allah, I was at the seventh heaven. So Allah said, ‘Save my servant.’ At the second time, I was at the lowest heaven and at the third time, I reached the hypocrite.’(1) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…they are the enemy. Beware of them.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4) A believer should not trust a hypocrite with his/her life, wealth, chastity, ideas, doctrine or principles.

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(1) Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Where believers are concerned, they respect no tie of kinship or treaty.’ (*at-Tawba:* 10) This means that they do not consider kinship, a covenant, inviolability, etc.

The hypocrites considered telling lies about the lawful Creator, thinking that Allah *the Almighty* does not see them. So, it is conceivable that they deceive and lie to the servants of Allah *the Almighty* Who says: ‘And if We please We would have made you know them so that you would certainly have recognised them by their marks and most certainly you can recognise them by the intent of (their) speech...’ (*Muhammad:* 30). Therefore, if you observe their speech, you will notice hypocrisy in it. Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that if He wished to identify them to him, He would reveal their identity to him. However, He *the Almighty* concealed their identities, taking into consideration that they might repent. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can recognise them through their speech and behaviour. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* calls people to examine what the hypocrites say, even if it seems pleasant.

Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the necessity of cautiousness and that the believers should have intelligence, shrewdness and true vision. So, He *the Almighty* reveals to us all forms of hypocrisy; He *the Almighty* identifies the hypocrites from among the people of Medina and the Bedouins, who include both hypocrites and non-hypocrites. Further, He *the Almighty* has educated the believers to identify the hypocrites by their appearances which reveal the inner souls.

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(1) *See Ar-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghaib, 1/ 154; and Al-Safouri, Nuzhat Al-Majalis Wa Muntakhab An-Nafa’is, 1/81.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…intent of (their) speech...' (*Muhammad:* 30), it suggests that the tone of their words indicates other meanings; for instance, they greet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'Death be upon you,' instead of: 'Peace be upon you,' as the Arabic words for death and Peace are somewhat similar in the pronouncement. Another common instance is that they attributed frivolity to Messenger Muhammad while saying, 'Consider us.'

So, Allah *the Almighty* advises us to beware of them. He will expose them in order that the believers know their behaviours and their evil deeds. He *the Almighty* says: 'And among men is he whose speech about the life of this world causes you to wonder, and he calls on Allah to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the most violent of adversaries.' (*al-Baqara:* 204) With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And among men is he whose speech about the life of this world causes you to wonder...' (*al-Baqara:* 204) is it forbidden to be pleased with speech? No, it is better to be pleased by speech which does not concern the worldly life. Thus, speech which should please us is what is related to the eternal Hereafter in order that Allah *the Almighty* grants us goodness. It is enough for the flattered one to know that the flatterer conceals his/her hatred from him/her, which reflects the stupidity of the flattered one, since the flatterer says to himself/herself, 'The flattered is an idiot because I flatter him/her though I hate him/her and s/he still believes my flattery.'

Allah *the Almighty* emphasises that the believer ought to be attentive and smart. If someone tells us a pleasant speech concerning the worldly life, we should tell him/her that his/her speech is unpleasant because the best speech concerns the Eternal Hereafter. So, when one of the caliphs of the Muslims sent for Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq asking him, 'Why do you not visit us like other people? Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq wrote to him, 'I have nothing in the worldly life to worry about and you have nothing from the Hereafter that I am looking forward to' as if he wants to tell him, 'Leave me alone. You need someone who flatters you, and you do not know that those who think badly of you are most willing to flatter you.'

Allah *the Almighty* has revealed His saying: ‘And among men is he whose speech about the life of this world causes you to wonder, and he calls on Allah to witness as to what is in his heart…’ (*al-Baqara:* 204) with regard to Ubbay, Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq Ath-Thaqafi, He was called Al-Akhnas (the retreater) because he retreated and did not fight the Muslims with Quraysh at the Battle of Badr; he apologized to the people of Quraysh, claiming that his camels survived from the attack of the Muslims and returned to him. Besides, when he met Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he declared his belief in Islam, showed kindness towards him, and claimed his love for him. Though the verse is revealed with regard to Al-Akhnas ibn Shariq, it concerns every hypocrite.

Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that speech differs from the actual works. You may hear pleasant speech from someone, but when it comes to real work and execution, s/he disappears. At the beginning, s/he easily promises you, ‘I am at your service or I am all yours,’ but when you actually need him/her, s/he would vanish.

Hence, in the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* describes them, saying: ‘…they are like propped-up timbers…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4). They are like pieces of wood. He *the Almighty* describes them by their pleasant look and sweet speech. They avoid understanding what they hear and refuse to implement what belief necessitates and, therefore, they became like wood. The hypocrite does not want to respond to Prophet Muhammad’s orders or advice, so s/he seems to be inanimate or a piece of wood that does not move or respond. Besides, they are propped-up pieces of wood, leaning against a wall. The simile suggests there is no hope for their guidance. They are semi-people with no souls; they are bodies with no minds. So, some scholars said, ‘They are like the empty and hollow pieces of wood which are useless.’ Similarly, the hypocrites are endowed with big bodies which please people and eloquent tongues saying what pleases the audience; yet, their hearts are empty and bereft of belief and obedience.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…they think that every cry is against them.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4) This is because doubt fills their hearts. If one of them saw a believer walking towards him, he would think he came to beat or kill him. The skeptical seems to say; ‘I did it,’ for his/her behaviour exposes him/her.

Allah *the Almighty* has cast terror into their hearts. That terror, which is one of Allah's soldiers, overwhelms them, so they are terrified lest they are exposed.

The 'cry' here does not mean 'the cry of punishment' which was sent upon some previous peoples, as when Allah *the Almighty* says about the people of Prophet Lut: 'By your life!(1) They were blindly wandering on in their intoxication. So the rumbling overtook them (while) entering upon the time of sunrise.' (*al-Hijr:* 72-73)

In the verse in question, 'the cry' suggests the shout of calling them for confrontation. In fact, the shout terrifies the opponent, and it is recommended in some sports, like karate where the player shouts to his/her opponent in order to increase his/her terror. Moreover, it is common to see certain shouts in the training of the military; these shouts enable the fighter to cast terror into the heart of his/her enemy. Namely, terrifying the opponents begins with a shout making him/her lose his/her mental balance.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* describes the behaviour of the hypocrites, saying: '…but when fear comes, you will see them looking to you, their eyes rolling like one swooning because of death...' (*al-Ahzab:* 19). Their eyes revolve here and there; they do not settle down whether for fear, anxiety, or uncertainty. When terror and horror overwhelm the eyes, the eyes either stare in shock or revolve here and there looking for an escape or resort. Terrified and frightened, people are subject to these states. Their eyes do not settle down and turn dull: '…like one swooning because of death...' (*al-Ahzab:* 19). This is their state when they are afraid and terrified: 'but when the fear is gone they smite(2) you with sharp tongues...' (*al-Ahzab:* 19). 'Smite you' suggests that they hurt and abuse the believers by their insults, hurting and blaming.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…they are the enemy. Beware of them. May Allah confound them! How devious they are!'

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(1) Allah *the Almighty* swears by the life of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Life means the whole life of the person. See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim,* 2/35.

(2) 'Smite you with their tongues…' (*al-Ahzab:* 19) means to abuse you. It also means exaggeration in saying what someone hates. So the hypocrites exaggerated in speech and opposed the believers fiercely. See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 1/323;* Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan Al-'Arab, root: Salaqa.*

(*al-Munafiqun:* 4) Here, Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to observe the hypocrites' moves, speech and acts in order to feel secure. They should watch them closely and exert all efforts to avoid their evil deeds. The believers should not be deceived by their pleasant speech and falsified behaviours which they use to please them. If the believers were pleased with them, it would go against the pleasure of Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The word 'enemy' in the verse seems to be a singular word; yet, it can suggest one enemy, two enemies or a group of enemies. So, you say, 'He is an enemy, she is an enemy, both are enemy,' since this word is used for both genders, singular and plural.

Allah *the Almighty* employs the pronoun 'they' and the definite article 'the' to refer to the enmity of the hypocrites; as if Allah *the Almighty* limits all the enemies to one enemy–the hypocrites–since they are indeed the real enemies for the believers. These hypocrites drive people to doubt their religion, cause dissension between Muslims, attract those with fragile hearts and weak doctrine, divide the row of Muslims and spread misconceptions among them.

The enemy is the opponent who wants to cause you harm and abuse. Unlike the hidden enemy, the evil of the apparent enemy is clear. The hidden enemy is more dangerous than the apparent one since we can be cautious about the apparent enemy, unlike the hidden enemy who knows one's inner secrets and moves and can deceive his/her at any time without being noticed.

Enmity drives us to be active and attentive. The orientalists, for instance, oppose Islam; however, their opposition stimulates us to search and read in order to respond. Likewise, the human soldiers of the devil oppose the believers; yet, their enmity encourages us not to become oblivious. So, if you have an enemy, try to surpass him/her by all means. It becomes clear that belief awakens the souls of people to defend Islam when it is attacked by any of its enemies. If people did not find out the dire consequences of evil, they would not incline to good deeds.

The word 'enemy' suggests the existence of conflict, namely, the believer will go through a conflict against the hypocrite. It is a conflict between righteousness and wrongfulness concerning the principles and values. Besides, it is a non-stopping conflict since it is controlled by the whims of the human beings; no wonder they differ deeply.

Enmity persists and becomes heated, while conflict grows fierce; so Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And prepare against them what force you can and horses tied at the frontier, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them, whom you do not know (but) Allah knows them…’ (*al-Anfal:* 60). Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the fact that the enemies of the Muslims do not only include those who appeared during the time of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such as the disbelievers of Quraysh, the Jews and the hypocrites, but also include so many future enemies only known by Allah *the Almighty*. Further, Allah *the Almighty* highlights that the enemies of the Muslims do not only include those fighters who appear in the battlefield, but also include many other people who do not show up there, yet they are fighting the religion of Allah *the Almighty* and the Muslims by other means.

So, you should be a righteous believer so that Allah *the Almighty* grants you victory. You should also know that the hypocrite is worse than the disbeliever; since the disbeliever declares his/her opposition to the religion and is an apparent enemy whom you can take precaution against. Unlike the disbeliever, the hypocrite pretends belief so that you may trust him/her and thus, his/her abuse is greater and his/her betrayal is the fiercest.

So, Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘…they are the enemy...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4). Here, He *the Almighty* advises the believers to beware of thinking that the disbelievers are their only enemy, for the hypocrites are their real enemy who combines all the evils of all enemies.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Beware of them...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 4). Needless to say, being cautious about the enemies is important, so Allah *the Almighty* highlights this fact regarding the hypocrites. The hypocrites feel deep inside their hearts that every Muslim doubts their behaviours. Indeed, the believers are endowed with belief immunity which prevents them from believing what the hypocrites say in order to beware of them and avoid any plotted harm. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* warns the believers against believing the speech of the hypocrites, even if they swore.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…May Allah confound them…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 4). Here, He *the Almighty* curses and expels them from His Mercy. If you see someone doing a foul act, we say, 'May Allah kill him/her,' as his/her life increase the wrong deeds.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…How deviant they are!' (*al-Munafiqun:* 4) The Arabic word for 'how' here suggests two meanings: 'from where?' and 'how.' An example for the first meaning is what Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon him* said when he entered upon Virgin Mary: 'O Mary, from where comes this to you?' (*Al-'Imran:* 37)

An example for the second meaning is found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And the Jews say: Uzair is the son of Allah; and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah; these are the words of their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before; may Allah destroy them; how they are turned away.' (*at-Tawba:* 30) How can they turn away from righteousness while they should have realised the truth of belief directed by one's natural disposition? How do they avert from the apparent truth and resort to falsehood?

In fact, no one can bear Allah's fighting against him/her. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and relinquish what remains (due) from usury, if you are believers. But if you do (it) not, then be apprised of war from Allah and His Messenger…' (*al-Baqara:* 278-279). We have nothing to say about the war of Allah *the Almighty* except His saying: 'And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31) No one can beware of this war. As for the war of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the war of the believers against the hypocrites–it is apparent. It is clear that Allah *the Almighty* sends forth a huge number of His Soldiers, which are known by Him only, to fight the hypocrites just like those who deal by usury.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'How deviant they are!' (*al-Munafiqun:* 4) So, how do they avert from Allah *the Almighty* and the Truth? Deviation is to change the reality of something. That is why lying is called deviation since the liar speaks about an issue contradicting the reality; thus, s/he denies the existence of something existent and vice versa. Thus, mainly, the hypocrite is a liar.

A related derivation of the root deviation is translated as ‘overthrown’ in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And the overthrown cities did He overthrow.’ (*an-Najm:* 53) They are the villages which Allah *the Almighty* overturned.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا۟ يَسْتَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ لَوَّوْا۟ رُءُوسَهُمْ
وَرَأَيْتَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ وَهُم مُّسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٥﴾

They turn their heads away in disdain when they are told,
‘Come, so that the Messenger of God may ask forgiveness
for you,’ and you see them walking away arrogantly [5]
(The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 5)

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated from Mecca to Medina,(1) the people of Yathrib were making preparations for appointing ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul king over Yathrib. Yet, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina, people abandoned Ibn Ubayy, as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directed all people’s attention. This made Ibn Ubayy angry and increased his hatred towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and thus he attempted to fight him, planned plots against him and envied him due to the love and support of the people for him. ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy could not forget that when Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered Medina, he got all people around him and affected his popularity. This was on the day when people were making him a crown to appoint him king.

The disbelievers gathered at Mount Uhud with 3,000 fighters to fight Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, he consulted his Companions and sent for ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul who was not summoned except for this Battle. Ibn Salul and most of the *Ansar* (The Helpers) said, ‘O Messenger of

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Jarir relates on the authority of Mohammed ibn Ishaq that Asad ibn Hudair told Prophet Muhammad: ‘O Messenger of Allah, be kind to him, for Allah has sent you as a Prophet while his people were preparing to appoint him as a king. He thinks you have seized his kingship.’ This is also narrated by Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi and Al Bayhaqi. See At-Tabari, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 34494; Al-Wahidi, Asbab An-Nuzul; and Al-Bayhaqi, Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 4/53.*

Allah, we were always defeated when we confronted our enemies out of Medina, yet, we were always victorious when we confronted enemies inside Medina. So we think you should not confront them out; if they stayed out, it would be the worst prison, yet, if they entered, our men would fight them face to face, women and boys would throw stones at them, and if they retreated, they would be disappointed.'

Meanwhile, other Companions suggested confronting the disbelievers, saying, 'O Messenger of Allah, let us out to confront our enemies lest they say we fear them.' The supporters of the second suggestion insisted on their opinion until Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* agreed to follow their opinion. So, he entered his house, wore his armour and carried his sword. Those who insisted on confronting the disbelievers thought that they pushed him into doing what he does not want, so they regretted doing so. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* met them, they said, 'We pushed on you, Messenger of Allah, and we should not have done that. If you wish, stay.' Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'A Prophet who put on his armour should not take it off until he fights.'(1) So, they confronted them out.

In this story, we find that Ibn Ubayy supported the stance that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should stay in Medina. What is the reason for this? This is because it is proved that if some people entered Medina to attack it, the people of Medina would win; though, if the people of Medina left it to confront them out, they would be defeated. So, it was clear for Ibn Ubayy that he refused to go forth because the past experiences proved that if they went out of Medina to fight their enemy, their enemy would win; yet, if they stayed, they would win. Thus, he was sure of the result of going forth. However, since this opinion came from the leader of hypocrisy, you cannot decide where the right is. Perhaps the day of *Hijra* from Mecca to

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(1) *In his book, Abu 'Umar ibn 'Abd Al-Barr relates that the Muslims said, 'O Messenger of Allah, if you wish, stay.' Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him replied: 'A Prophet who put on his armour should not put it off until he fights.' This is also mentioned by Al-Mubarkfuri and As-Suhaily. See Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr, Ad-Durar Fi Ikhtisar Al-Maghazi Wa As-Siyar, 1/145; Al-Mubarkfuri, Ar-Rahiq Al-Makhtum, 1/215; and As-Suhaili, Ar-Rawd Al-Anuf, 3/243.*

Medina was still affecting him. At that day when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated from Mecca to Medina, Ibn Ubayy was supposed to be king of Medina; yet, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with the Message, the situation changed and the crown had no king which badly affected Ibn Ubayy.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And that He might know the hypocrites; and it was said to them: Come, fight in Allah's way, or defend yourselves. They said: If we knew how to fight, we would certainly have followed you. They were on that day much nearer to unbelief than to belief. They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, and Allah best knows what they conceal. Those who said of their brethren whilst they (themselves) held back: Had they obeyed us, they would not have been killed. Say: Then avert death from yourselves if you speak the truth.' (*Al-'Imran:* 167-168)

When Ibn Ubayy desired to discourage the army from fighting, some hypocrites agreed with him but others did not. Those who stayed inside Medina gloated over the fate of those who did not agree with them, went forth for fighting and were killed, saying, 'If they had obeyed us and stayed in Medina, they would not have been defeated and killed.' It is as if Allah *the Almighty* clarifies the behaviour of the hypocrites so that we can recognise their position. They stayed and said about their brothers who were killed in the Battle: '…Had they obeyed us, they would not have been killed…' (*Al-'Imran:* 168). They thought that those who were less hypocritic were killed because they did not obey their order to stay behind. So, how does Allah *the Almighty* reply to this? Let us reflect on His beautiful reply: 'You, hypocrites, say: 'Had they obeyed us...' (*Al-'Imran:* 168) as if your obedience was the means for their safety. So, you think you know the way which makes you avoid being killed. However, the one who knows how to avoid being killed, does he know how to avoid death?' So, Allah *the Almighty* mocks them, saying: 'Then avert death from yourselves if you speak the truth.' (*Al-'Imran:* 168) This is a reply to their saying: 'Had they obeyed us, they would not have been killed...' (*Al-'Imran:* 168).

The heart of 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul was filled with grudge, bitterness, hatred and hostility; thus, there were dark depths inside his heart.

As the head of hypocrisy in Medina, Ibn Ubayy is known with many instances of hypocrisy. Among these was what is mentioned in a Hadith that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came to Medina after he returned from the Battle of Uhud while ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul was making his usual Friday speech where he would show off his nobility and that of his people, for he was the noblest among his people. If Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sat while he was making his speech on Friday, Ibn Ubayy would stand up saying, ‘O people, this is the Messenger of Allah, sitting beside you. Allah *the Almighty* blessed and supported you through him, so support, revere and obey him.’ Then, he would sit.

Thus, after his deed at the Battle of Uhud (i.e., withdrawing with a third of the army), he did what he was used to doing, that is, addressing people; yet, the people pulled his clothes from all sides urging him to sit down, saying, ‘Sit down, enemy of Allah, you are not entitled to speak so after doing what you did.’ So he left passing by all people while saying, ‘By Allah, it is as if I said foul speech when I stood to strengthen his position.’ Some of the Helpers saw him at the door of the mosque and asked him, ‘Woe to you! What happened?’ He said, ‘I stood to strengthen his position so some of his Companions jumped at me, pulling me and condemning me as if I did a grave mistake when I stood to promote his cause.’ They said, ‘Woe to you! Return and the Messenger of Allah will ask Allah to forgive you.’ He said, ‘By Allah, I do not want him to ask Allah to forgive me.’(1)

After Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned from the Battle of Uhud, he wanted to stand up and say what he used to say despite committing a major sin, namely, turning back at the battlefield and the withdrawal with one-third of the army that went forth to confront the disbelievers at the Battle of Uhud.

Fleeing the army is among the destructive things which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered to avoid; he said: ‘Avoid the seven destructive things.’ It was asked: (by those present), ‘What are they, O Messenger of Allah?' He mentioned among them, 'fleeing from the battlefield.'(1) In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And whoever shall turn his back to them on that day-unless he turn aside for the sake of fighting or withdraws to a company-then he, indeed, becomes deserving of Allah's wrath, and his abode is hell; and an evil destination shall it be.' (*al-Anfal:* 16)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Mohammed ibn Shehab Az-Zuhari. See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 3/328.*

Thus, the withdrawer, who flees the battlefield, returns with the anger of Allah *the Almighty*. Such a person who retreats from confronting the enemy at the battles of Islam makes the hellfire his refuge, which is the most wretched destination. Those who retreated and avoided confronting the enemies lest they would be killed will find a worse destination than death.

Indeed, the following saying of Allah *the Almighty* applies to Ibn Ubayy ibn Salul: '…when they speak, you listen to what they say...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 4). He said about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* pleasing words, thinking that the Muslims would accept and believe it. Mainly, after his deed at the Battle of Uhud (i.e., fleeing the battlefield with a third of the army), he did what he was used to doing, that is, addressing people; yet, people pulled his clothes from all sides urging him to sit down, saying, 'Sit down, enemy of Allah, you are not entitled to speak so after doing what you did.' So he left passing by all people while saying, 'By Allah *the Almighty* it is as if I said foul speech when I stood to strengthen his position.'

As a hypocrite, Ibn Ubbay said so in order to conceal what he committed at the Battle of Uhud and his withdrawal with a third of the army after he had gone forth to confront the people of Quraysh with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. If he desired to strengthen Prophet Muhammad's position, why, then, did he not do that at the battlefield? Why did he withdraw and weaken the Muslims? Did he not realise that if the people of Quraysh won, it would be a disaster for all the people of Medina? They would invade it, capture its people, kill and commit all kinds of atrocities.

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(1) *It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Avoid the seven destructive things.' It was asked: (by those present): 'What are they, O Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'Associating anyone or anything with Allah in worship; practising sorcery; killing of someone without a just cause whom Allah has forbidden; devouring the property of an orphan; eating of usury; fleeing from the battlefield; and slandering chaste women who never even think of anything touching chastity and are good believers.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2766; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 272.*

So, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Haram *Al-Ansari*(1) told the hypocrites, ‘Go forth and fight with us. If you do not go forth to fight with us, go forth to defend yourself, your wealth and your women because if they defeat the Muslims, they would enter the Medina, committing so and so.’(2) After losing hope that they would fight in the cause of Allah, ‘Abdullah urged them to go forth by stimulating their enthusiasm and pride. Yet, when he found them insisting on turning back, he told them, ‘Go, enemies of Allah, Allah will suffice His Prophet.’ In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And that He might know the hypocrites; and it was said to them: Come, fight in Allah’s way, or defend yourselves. They said: If we knew how to fight, we would certainly have followed you. They were on that day much nearer to unbelief than to belief. They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, and Allah best knows what they conceal.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 167) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* exposes them, saying: ‘…They were on that day much nearer to unbelief than to belief...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 167). The hypocrites say with their tongues what their hearts deny. They are wavering all the time between belief and disbelief, belonging neither to the side of the Muslims nor to that of the disbelievers. Their fleeing of the battlefield made their hearts nearer to apparent disbelief.

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(1) *He is ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Haram ibn Tha‘laba, Abu Jaber Al-Ansari Al-khazraji As-Salmi, an honorable Companion, and one of the twelve heads. He witnessed Al-Aqaba with seventy of the Ansar, witnessed the Battle of Badr and was killed at the day of Uhud in 3 A.H. Az-Zirikli, Al-A’lam, 4/111.*

(2) *In his book, Ibn Hisham mentions in the context of Prophet Muhammad’s going forth to Uhud that ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul opposed going out of Medina to fight; yet, Messenger Muhammad considered the stance of the young people. So, when they were between Medina and Uhud, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul turned back with a third of the people, saying, ‘He obeyed them and disobeyed me; we do not know why we kill ourselves here, O people.’ Then, he turned back with those who followed him among his tribe and the hypocrites. Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn Haram of Bani Salma said, ‘O people, remember Allah. Do not disappoint your people and your Prophet when he is about to fight the enemy. They said: If we had known that you would fight, we would not have left you; though we do not think there will be fighting. He said, ‘When they insisted and refused to stay in the field, he said, ‘May Allah keep you away, enemies of Allah, Allah will suffice His Prophet.’ This is also narrated by At-Tabari. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 2/64; At-Tabari, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 8236.*

Some of the Helpers saw Ibn Ubayy at the door of the mosque and asked him, ‘Woe to you! What happened?’ He said, ‘I stood to strengthen his position so some of his Companions jumped at me, pulling me and condemning me as if I did a grave mistake when I stood to promote his cause.’ They said, ‘Woe to you! Return and the Messenger of Allah will ask Allah to forgive you.’ He said, ‘By Allah, I do not want him to ask Allah to forgive me.’ That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…when they are told, “Come, so that the Messenger of Allah may ask forgiveness for you,” and you see them walking away arrogantly.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 5)

The Noble Quran draws for us a picture for evading from the truth and arguing, saying: ‘They turn their heads away in disdain…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 5). Evading from the Truth always begins with turning the head, then the side and finally giving the back. All these observances are used to avoid arguing when it fails to convince.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Turning away haughtily that he may lead (others) astray from the way of Allah; for him is disgrace in this world, and on the day of resurrection We will make him taste the punishment of burning.’ (*al-Hajj:* 9) So, when someone disputes about Allah *the Almighty* without knowledge, guidance or illuminating books, s/he tends to turn his/her side and head because s/he does not like your speech not because your speech is false, but rather, because s/he is groundless. S/He does not have evidence to defend his/her point, so s/he tends to resort to this body movement.

The Helpers invited Ubay to elevate his lower rank, so Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…when they are told, “Come”...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 5). The Arabic word for ‘come’ can also mean to rise from a low position, for the religion of Islam came to prevent us from falling. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when it is said to them, “Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger”...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104). Answering this invitation elevates your low position to reach the level of belief in Allah *the Almighty* and receiving His Guidance so that you do not follow your own desires, stances or laws. They told Ibn Ubayy, ‘Come and the Messenger of Allah will ask Allah to forgive you.’ Needless to say, mercy and the wiping out of sins are granted for whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asks Allah *the Almighty* for forgiveness.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And We did not send any Messenger but that he should be obeyed by Allah’s permission; and had they, when they were unjust to themselves, come to you and asked forgiveness of Allah and the Messenger had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah Oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 64) It is necessary for those who wrong themselves by their sins, violate the laws of Allah *the Almighty* and cause harm to the Muslims to repent in the first place. Then, they should ask Allah *the Almighty* for forgiveness and please Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he asks forgiveness for them.

However, the hypocrites were passive, adhered to the earth and things were reversed for them. When they were called to go to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask forgiveness for them, their response was: ‘They turn their heads away in disdain…and you see them walking away arrogantly.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 5) Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when it is said to them: Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger you will see the hypocrites turning away from you with (utter) aversion.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 61) This means that they ignore this call. Aversion, here, suggests ignoring and averting from following the right course. As for averting from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* it comprises averting and preventing others from following it. The one who averts others from the Way of Allah commits a greater sin since not only did s/he avert by himself/herself from it but averted others as well.

The one who averts from the right course does so in haughtiness; s/he is arrogant and considers himself/herself higher than following the right and responding to the Call. Ibn Ubayy, for instance, and some leaders of the hypocrites saw themselves higher than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, they refused to come to him to ask forgiveness for them. Moreover, they turned their heads away, averted and showed their arrogance. They acted as great persons without having the qualities of greatness. The qualities of greatness are not inherent in anyone of us and they may be taken away from those who are endowed with them. So, it becomes clear that each one of us needs to be humble to his/her Creator and to observe his/her Lord.

When the hypocrite is reminded of the verses of Allah *the Almighty* and about Messenger Muhammad: ‘And when Our communications are recited to him, he turns back proudly, as if he had not heard them, as though in his ears were a heaviness, therefore announce to him a painful chastisement.' (*Luqman:* 7) Thus, Ibn Ubay turned away in arrogance and considered himself greater than what he is called to do. His arrogance is pointless since the arrogant is always forgetful of Allah *the Almighty* because s/he looks at himself/herself in comparison to people and forgets Allah *the Almighty*. If he had recalled the Greatness and Mightiness of Allah *the Almighty* he would have been ashamed to be arrogant. Pride implies greatness and mightiness and this can only be attributed to Allah *the Almighty*. His Pride is an honour for us; it prevents us from becoming servants for anyone but Him.

That arrogant one refused to listen to the verses: '…as though in his ears were a heaviness...' (*Luqman:* 7). The Helpers said to Ibn Ubayy, 'Woe to you! Return and the Messenger of Allah will ask Allah to forgive you.' He said, 'By Allah, I do not want him to ask forgiveness for me.' This was due to his envy and malice which filled his heart with dark depths of hypocrisy, arrogance and plotting against the Muslims: '…out of envy from themselves...' (*al-Baqara:* 109). Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace?' (*an-Nisa':* 54) They envy Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since Allah *the Almighty* has chosen him and selected him to bear the Message. Envy is only generated from a malevolent heart revolting against the destiny of Allah *the Almighty*. Notably, envy occurs when someone desires that Allah's Favour on others comes to an end. This amounts to a rejection of Allah's Predestination for people. Thus, Ibn Ubay's heart was burning with malice. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* will not forgive them, for He *the Almighty* then says:

سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَسْتَغْفَرْتَ لَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ لَن يَغْفِرَ
ٱللَّهُ لَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلْفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٦﴾

It makes no difference whether you ask forgiveness for them or not, God will not forgive them: God does not guide such treacherous people [6] (The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 6)

Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: 'Ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them; this is because they disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.' (*at-Tawba:* 80) There are two issues here: Firstly, the Forgiveness of Allah *the Almighty*; and secondly, the flattery of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abdullah ibn Ubay, a believing son to a hypocrite father. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knows that Allah *the Almighty* will never forgive the hypocrites.

There is asking for forgiveness which results in Allah's Forgiveness; yet, in the case of Ibn Ubay, it is meant to please 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdullah ibn Ubay. Further, the one who committed a sin and desires to repent and ask for forgiveness must ask Forgiveness of Allah *the Almighty* by himself in the first place, then ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask Allah *the Almighty* to forgive him.

Because he did not desire forgiveness, Ibn Ubay, head of the hypocrites, did not know that way of asking forgiveness. Therefore, he should have come humbly to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order that he asks forgiveness for him, not to look for someone else to ask him for that on his behalf. Then, Allah *the Almighty* illustrates the reason for not forgiving them, whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked forgiveness for them or not, saying: '…this is because they disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.' (*at-Tawba:* 80) In the verse in question, He *the Almighty* says, '…Allah does not guide such defiantly disobedient people.' (*at-Tawba:* 80)

Allah *the Almighty* deprived three types of people of His Guidance and Support. They include the disbelievers: '…and Allah does not guide the disbelieving people;' (*at-Tawba:* 37) the unjust people: '…and Allah does not guide the unjust people…;' (*at-Tawba:* 19) and the defiantly disobedient people '…and Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people.' (*at-Tawba:* 24)

Further, has Allah *the Almighty* prevented His Guidance first? Or have they committed sins which made them unworthy of His Guidance? How could a human being defy Allah *the Almighty* with disbelief and refuse to listen to His verses and His Messenger? They began with disbelief, wrongdoing or disobedience, so Allah *the Almighty* did not guide them. Some people say, 'Guidance comes from Allah; if He had guided me, I would not have killed, stolen, or taken a bribe.' However, we say, 'This is a misunderstanding of the matter. Let us observe the Noble Quran. With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and Allah does not guide...' (*at-Tawba:* 80), it negates that the wrongdoer, the disobedient and the disbeliever deserve Guidance; since Allah *the Almighty* does not guide someone who gave precedence to disbelief, wrongdoing, or disobedience. It is as if the disbeliever, the wrongdoer or the disobedient are the ones who prevent Guidance from themselves.

If the human being gives priority to belief, s/he will be included in the Guidance of Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if being excluded from the Guidance of Allah is an act controlled and chosen by the human being. S/he can choose the way of error and leave the way of Guidance. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* does not guide him/her because He *the Almighty* only guides the believer. On the other hand, if the human being chooses the way of Guidance, Allah *the Almighty* will grant him/her more Guidance. This is because s/he believes in Allah *the Almighty* chooses the way of Guidance and accepts the religion of Allah. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* guides the one who listens to the Quran with the spirit of belief, is certain that s/he has a Lord and believes in Him.

Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that He does not guide the disbelievers, the wrongdoers and the disobedient people, for He guides the believers, the righteous and obedient people. Actually, He, guides who gives priority to the Way of Guidance and submits to Faith, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And Allah increases in guidance those who go aright…' (*Maryam:* 76) and also His saying: '…and (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil).' (*Muhammad:* 17) Allah *the Almighty* clarifies for us in advance who deserves His Guidance and who does not so that you can choose your way. You can either believe and receive His Guidance or choose the way of disbelief and wrongdoing – Allah forbid – and so you will be deprived of His Guidance.

It becomes clear therefore that their previous misdeeds lead Allah *the Almighty* to deprive them of His Guidance. In other words, if someone prefers disbelief and insists on defiance, Allah *the Almighty* will abandon him/her, increase his/her disbelief and seal his/her heart. He *the Almighty* says: 'And We will leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly.' (*al-An'am:* 110) They refused Allah's Guidance, so He *the Almighty* deprived them of His Support of Guidance. He *the Almighty* has made the Way of Guidance clear; yet, those people who ignored it deprive themselves of attaining the Guidance of belief.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

هُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ لَا تُنفِقُوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَنْ عِندَ رَسُولِ ٱللَّهِ حَتَّىٰ يَنفَضُّوا۟ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ
خَزَآئِنُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلْمُنَٰفِقِينَ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٧﴾

They are the ones who say, 'Give nothing to those who
follow God's Messenger, until they abandon him', but to
God belong the treasures of the heavens and earth, though
the hypocrites do not understand this [7]
(The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 7)

The defiance of the hypocrites to Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is limitless. They are the fiercest of enemies because they reveal their Islam while concealing their disbelief, malice and envy for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers. One of the means they followed to defy him is that they desired to disperse people away from him using all means since their leader wants to be the king of the people of Medina. So, they thought that if they deprived the poor Emigrants of what the Helpers give them, they would disperse from around Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The hypocrites did not realise that those Emigrants believed in order to please Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not for worldly life, wealth or getting close to the rich.

The hypocrites wrongly thought that if they did not support those who believed in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with their wealth, they would abandon their belief, forgetting that the Emigrant believers left their wealth and country for Allah's sake. If someone left his/her wealth for emigration in the cause of Allah and found no wealth, would s/he disbelieve in Allah? No, because s/he left everything for His Sake. For example, Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr(1), who used to be the spoiled young man of Quraysh and whose mother used to shower him with favours and perfumes, emigrates from Mecca to Medina and wears leather of goats in order to cover his body. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* looked at him saying to his Companions, 'Look to what faith has done to your brother.' The hypocrites think that the believers can substitute a piece of bread with their belief; as if they forgot that who substitutes a piece of bread with his/her belief is the one who upholds a false doctrine. Yet, the one who believes in a right doctrine adheres to it, enjoys its sweetness in his/her inner soul and his/her reward is saved with his/her Lord. 'Ali Ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* said about him, 'I came to the mosque, then I saw Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr wearing a garment with a fur patch though he was the most spoiled boy in Mecca. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him, he shed tears for remembering the advantages that Ibn 'Umayr left behind compared to his current state. Then, he said, 'Are you better today or when you had someone offering you some bread and meat?' We said, 'We were better that day when we had enough food and were dedicated to worship.' He said, 'No, you are better today.'(1)

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(1) *Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr ibn Hashim ibn 'Abd Munaf, a young man from Quraysh, who relates particularly to the family of Bani'Abd Ad-Dar, was one of the first Companions*=

You should take into account that the believer enjoys the sweetness of Certainty and Belief when s/he sacrifices everything in the cause of Belief. Yet, those people with false principles do not attract the people to their ideology unless they pay for them in advance, i.e. they buy their followers. Therefore, if you see a principle whose supporters attract people by money, you should know it is a false principle. If it was a right principle, not only

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= *to believe in Islam. He believed in Mecca yet concealed his Islam. He helped Usayd ibn Hudayr and Sa'd ibn Mu'az to believe in Islam. He witnessed the Battle of Badr and held the banner of Islam at the Battle of Uhud. He was killed in the cause of Allah in 3 AH. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam, 7/248.*

(1) *In his Musnad, Abu Ya'la Al-Mausili narrates that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Are you better today or when you were offered bread and meat, followed by other treats, moving from one place to another, and meeting the needs of your homes like the Ka'ba?' We said, 'We were better that day when we had enough food and were dedicated to worship.' He said, 'No, you are better today.' In his book, Al-Haythami says, 'At-Tirmidhi narrated some of it. It is narrated by Abu Ya'la through the narration of upright narrators including a unanimous narrator.' Abu Ya'la, Musnad, 502; Al-Haythami, Majma' Az-Zawa'id 10/ 231*

would people spend all their wealth on it, but would sacrifice their lives in its cause as well.

Amazingly, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made the covenant in The Pledge of Al-‘Aqabah, Helpers said, ‘If we fulfilled this, what is left for us?’ It is as if they said, ‘You took what you need, what will we get?’ Observe the grandness of belief and the certainty of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he said that belief itself is a reward. Did he promise he would give them the kingdom of the earth? Did he promise them that these weak people would be empowered? No, he said, ‘You are promised the Paradise.’(1) Had he said to them, ‘You will have the sovereignty of the worldly life, which actually took place afterwards, the truthfulness of his Prophehood would not have been proven for those whose lives came to an end before the fulfillment of this promise.’ Thus, he told them about the guaranteed reward which the believer enjoys as soon as s/he dies. He said to them, ‘You are promised the Paradise.’

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, while being surrounded by a group of his Companions, ‘Come along and give me the pledge of allegiance that you will not worship anything besides Allah, will not steal, will not commit illegal sexual intercourse, will not kill your children, will not utter slander invented by yourself, and will not disobey me if I order you to do something good. Whoever among you will respect and fulfil this pledge, will be rewarded by Allah. And if one of you commits any of these sins and is punished in this world, then that will be his expiation for it, and if one of you commits any of these sins and Allah screens his sin, then his matter will rest with Allah: If He will, He will punish him and if He will, He will excuse him.'(1)

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(1) *In their books, Abu Nu‘aym and As-Suhayli relate that Mahmoud ibn Labid said, ‘When people met for the pledge of allegiance to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him Al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Ubada ibn Nadlah Al-Ansari then one of Bani Salem ibn ‘Awf said, ‘O people of Khazraj, do you know why you pledge that man?’ They said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘You pledge him to fight; if you see that destroying your wealth is a disaster and that if your honourable people are killed, you will forsake him, then do not pledge allegiance to him, for if you did so, it would be shame on you in the worldly life and the Hereafter. But if you will fulfil what you pledge at the expense of the destruction of your wealth and the killing of the honourable people, what are we going to get, Prophet Muhammad?’ He said, ‘The Paradise.’ They said, ‘Extend your hand.’ When he did so, they pledged him. See Abu Nu‘yam Al-Asfahani, Ma‘rifat As-Sahaba; and As-Suhaili, Ar-Rawd Al-Anuf, 2/271.*

He did not tempt them saying they will have power; neither did he say to them, 'You will live luxuriously and the worldly life will be yours.' Instead, he said at the very beginning of the pledge of allegiance, 'You are promised the Paradise.' He orders them not to long for anything except the Paradise. No wonder, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loves the people of the *Ansar*. During the Battle of Hunayn, the emigrants were given some of the gains, while the *Ansar* were given nothing. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarded them with a faithful hint saying, 'O people of the *Ansar,* is it not pleasing for you that people go with goats and camels and you return to your positions with the Messenger of Allah? By Him in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, but for the emigration, I would have been one of the *Ansar;* and if the people took their way in a valley, I would take the *Ansar's* valley. May Allah extend His Mercy upon the *Ansar*, the sons of the *Ansar* and the sons of the *Ansar*!'(2) The people cried until their beards became wet with tears saying, 'We are pleased with the Messenger of Allah as our share and destiny.' What sublime Faith is this!

The hypocrites said to the *Ansar*, 'Do not spend your wealth on those who are with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until they disband.' However, the believers did not disband. They left the abundance and wealth in Mecca and emigrated from Mecca to Medina; they did not come for doubtful, limited, little bliss as they are satisfied with what they are promised of certain, vast, everlasting bliss. Through Belief, they knew that the worldly bliss is either missed when you die, or when it changes; yet, the bliss of the Hereafter is limitless: It never leaves you and you never miss it.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad, An-Nasa'i and Ad-Daraqutni on the authority of by 'Ubadah ibn As-Samit Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 18, 3892, 6801, 7213 and 7468; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no.22785; An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4161, 4178; and Ad-Daraqutni Sunnan, Hadith no. 3506, 3507.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. It is also narrated by As-Suhaili and Ibn Jarir At-Tabari. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no.11748; As-Suhaili, Ar-Rawd Al-Anif, 4/274; and At-Tabari, Tarikh Al-Umam wa Al-Muluk 2/ 177.*

The hypocrites said to the Helpers, the wealthy people in Medina: ‘Give nothing to those who follow Allah’s Messenger until they abandon him.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) They wanted to sever the brotherhood ties between the Emigrants and the Helpers even though they described Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as: ‘the Messenger of Allah’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). Ironically, while they urge the wealthy people of Medina to let the Emigrants starve and thus they disband away from him, they say about him: ‘the Messenger of Allah’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). So, did they believe in that? Or is it the overwhelming of the truth? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was subject to their ridicule and mockery. The Quran narrates their saying to him: ‘O you upon whom the message has been sent down, indeed you are mad.’ (*al-Hijr:* 6) With regard to their saying: ‘…upon whom the message has been sent down,’ (*al-Hijr:* 6) it does not imply that they believe in the Message, as they mock and ridicule him. Their saying: ‘the Messenger of Allah’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) does not result from their belief in him. Instead, either they are unaware of their untrue practices or they are ridiculing and mocking him. For example, if you were in a gathering and you saw someone pretending to have knowledge, you would say, ‘Ask that scholar.’ In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says about their ridicule at Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘And those who disbelieve would almost smite you with their eyes when they hear the reminder, and they say: Most surely he is mad…’ (*al-Qalam:* 51).

Surprisingly, the hypocrites admit and declare that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah; however, they deny that with their deeds and behaviours, causing confusion in thinking and statement. Though they know that he is the Messenger of Allah, they prevent people from spending on the poor Emigrants. Even their defiance is characterised with stupidity. They acknowledge the Quran, and they are convinced with it; yet, what makes them spiteful is that it is revealed to Messenger Muhammad. Then, we see them contradicting themselves regarding this as well when they admit, but unwary, that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah, saying: ‘Give nothing to those who follow Allah’s Messenger, until they abandon him.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) If they acknowledge that he is the Messenger of Allah, why do they oppose him? Indeed, their natural disposition contradicts them so that they utter the truth unwarily.

When they say: ‘Give nothing...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) not only do they withhold, but they urge people to be stingy as well. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who are niggardly and bid people to be niggardly and hide what Allah has given them out of His grace; and We have prepared for the unbelievers a disgraceful chastisement.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 37) The stingy person can hardly give; s/he does not welcome giving out any of his/her own wealth and finds difficulty in giving others. Even though, s/he might be stingy on himself/herself. The poet(1) draws a picture of a miser called ‘Isa and wants to condemn him because he is so miserly. He is depicted as stingy with people as well as with himself regarding what would not harm if it was done and what would not benefit if it was prevented. Naturally, since he is stingy on himself, then it is expected that he is stingy on others:

‘Isa is stingy on himself, though mortal and approaches death

Were it possible, out of one hole(2), he would take his breath

He is so stingy that he wishes to breathe out of one nostril in order not to use the other nostril. Allah *the Almighty* says about stingy people: ‘And let not those deem, who are niggardly in giving away that which Allah has granted them out of His grace, that it is good for them; nay, it is worse for them; they shall have that whereof they were niggardly made to cleave to their necks on the resurrection day; and Allah’s is the heritage of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is aware of what you do.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 180) From the beginning of emigration, they witnessed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* promoting the brotherhood relations between the Emigrants and the Helpers.

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(1) This poet is Ibn Ar-Rumi Ali Bin Al-‘Abbas ibn Jarir Abu Al-Hasan who was born in Baghdad in 221 A.H., a major poet like Bash-shar and Al-Mutanabbi. Al-Mizribani said about him, ‘Anyone praised by him whether a superior or a subordinate is satirised later.’ He has a collection of poems in three volumes. In 283 AH, he was poisoned and died at the age of 62 in Baghdad. *See Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam, 4/ 297.*

(2) *In his book, Al-Baghdadi relates that ‘Ali ibn Al-‘Abbas said, ‘Al-Buhturi was sitting with me when Ibn ‘Isa Al-Mansour came and greeted us. He said to him, ‘Who is this?’ I said, ‘This is ‘Isa ibn Al-Mansour whom Ibn Ar-Rumi says about his father and mentioned two lines of poetry.’ He said, ‘That is among the thoughts of the demons not the thoughts of humans.’ Then he stood up and left. This is also narrated by Abu Hilal Al-‘Askari and Ibn Hamdun. See Al-Baghdadi, Tarikh Baghdad, 12/35; Abu Hilal Al-‘Askari, As-Sina‘tain, 1/34; and Ibn Hamdun, At-Tadhkira Al-Hamdouniya, 1/328.*

During that time, the Muslims spent nights without food and so the Jews and hypocrites ridiculed their state, saying, ‘The hand of Allah is chained and cannot assist Muhammad and his companions.’

Furthermore, the hypocrites were criticising those who give charity among the believers. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They who taunt those of the faithful who give their alms freely, and those who give to the extent of their earnings and scoff at them; Allah will pay them back their scoffing, and they shall have a painful chastisement...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 181). Here, is the story of this verse: ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf emigrated from Mecca to Medina, leaving his wealth and properties in Mecca. Meanwhile, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been establishing brotherhood bonds between the Emigrants and the Helpers, so he urged each one of the Helpers to share his wealth with a man from the Emigrants. When it was the turn of ‘Abd Ar-Rahman Ibn ‘Awf, his brother from the Helpers said to him, ‘You will share my wealth with you’ He said, ‘May Allah bless your wealth; show me where the market is.’ He went to the market and Allah *the Almighty* blessed his trade as he has been dividing his profits by half: one for charity and the other for his family.(1)

One day, ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I earned 8,000 *dirhams*. I spent four of them for Allah’s sake and kept four for my family.’ Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘May Allah bless what you gave and what you kept.(2) When the hypocrites knew about what ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf had done, they said, ‘Abd Ar-Rahman has given alms to show off and gain reputation.’ However, do people have knowledge about showing off or does Allah alone have knowledge about it?

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him established brotherhood bonds between ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf and Sa‘d ibn Ar-Rabi’ Al-Ansari who offered to share his family and wealth. ‘Abd Ar-Rahman said, ‘May Allah bless you in your family and your wealth; show me the market.’ He went to the market and gained some dried buttermilk and butter. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saw him some days later scented with yellowish perfume. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no.3937; Al-Bazar, Musnad, Hadith no. 6548, 6541; and Abu Ya‘la, Musnad, Hadith no. 3836.*

(2) *It is narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said to him, ‘May Allah bless what you lent and what you kept.’ So, Allah blessed his wealth very much. See Ibn 'Adel, Al-Lubab, 10/157; Al-Alusy, Ruh Al-Ma‘any, 2/33; Az-Zuhaili, At-Tafsir Al-Wasit, 1/154; and Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta’wil, 2/389.*

Likewise, ‘Asim ibn ‘Uday,(1) owner of a garden which yielded many fruits, contributed to charities with 100 loads of dates. The hypocrites said, ‘By Allah, ‘Asim has done so to show off.’ Moreover, a man called Abu Uqail *Al-Ansari* came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘O Messenger of Allah, I spent the night working and my wages were two measures of dates; I kept one measure for my family and I would like to contribute to the charities.’ The hypocrites said, ‘Allah and his Messenger do not need your measure, Abu 'Uqail.’(2) Thus, the hypocrites criticised ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn ‘Awf who donated much saying, ‘This is showing off;’ attacked ‘Asim ibn ‘Uday, saying, ‘He shows off by donating half of the fruits of his garden;’ and ridiculed Aba Uqail, though he had only a measure to donate, saying, ‘Allah and his Messenger do not need your dates.’ They mocked who gave much and ridiculed who gave little. They should have praised the contributors instead of ridiculing them since each one donated according to his ability; they gave out of the Bounty of Allah *the Almighty* whether it is much or little.

Among those who were with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are some destitute people, people of As-Suffa(3) about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Alms are for the poor who are confined in the way of

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(1) ‘Asim ibn ‘Udayy ibn Al-Jadd Al-Balwy Al-‘Ajlany, ally of the Helpers, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* appointed him over Al-‘Alia in Medina. He lived a long life (he died in 45 AH at the age of 120). In his *Tafsir,* As-Suyuti relates that ‘Asim ibn ‘Udayy said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I have seventy measures of dates.’ The hypocrites considered it exorbitant, saying: ‘He donated to show off and gain reputation.’ *See Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam, 3/ 248; and As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur 7/46.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Muqatil ibn Sulayman says, ‘Abu 'Uqail ibn Qays Al-Ansari from Bani ‘Amr got a measure of dates and put it into the charity saying, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I spent the night working and my wages were two measures of dates; I lent one measure for my Lord and left one for my family and I would like to contribute in the charities.’ In his Tafsir, Ibn Jarir At-Tabari relates that the hypocrites said, ‘Allah and his Messenger do not need your measure, Abu 'Uqail.’ See At-Tabari, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 14/387; Muqatil ibn Sulaiman, Tafsir Muqatil ibn Sulaiman, 2/62.*

(3) *People of As-Suffa are the poor people among the Emigrants who had no home to reside in; they lodged at the shaded corners of the Mosque of Medina. ‘As-Suffa’ is the shaded corner of the mosque which the poor use as a refuge. See Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-‘Arab, root: Safaf.*

Allah— they cannot go about in the land…' (*al-Baqara:* 173). Their limited charity was due to reasons beyond their will or their dedication to the cause of Allah. The Helpers used to bring dates, leave it in its bunches and hang them in tight robes to the pillars of the mosque so that those poor people, including those who were secluded for worship and were subject to rumors and rejection, could eat. The hypocrites used to criticise them, saying, 'Why do not they work? Why do not they labour like all people?'

Moreover, the hypocrites went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'We want you to regard us and leave those destitute people.' So Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: 'And withhold yourself with those who call on their Lord morning and evening desiring His goodwill, and let not your eyes pass from them, desiring the beauties of this world's life; and do not follow him whose heart We have made unmindful to Our remembrance, and he follows his low desires and his case is one in which due bounds are exceeded.' (*al-Kahf:* 28) Allah *the Almighty* has ordered Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to regard them saying: '…and let not your eyes pass from them…' (*al-Kahf:* 28). This means that he should focus on them and not abandon them for other people of the worldly life; since his look is a supply for these poor believers. Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '….and do not follow him whose heart We have made unmindful to Our remembrance, and he follows his low desires and his case is one in which due bounds are exceeded.' (*al-Kahf:* 28) This is because only the one who is heedless of the Remembrance of Allah orders you to ignore these poor people for the company of people of the worldly life; yet, the ones whose hearts are concerned with His Remembrance and tasted the sweetness of Belief will not issue such an order.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…but to Allah belong the treasures of the heavens and earth…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7). This is a reply to the hypocrites who think they can give or deprive those with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Actually, Allah *the Almighty* is the Ever-Affluent; He does not seek the bounties we have because they are His Bounties in the first place and He does not need our wealth because He owns the treasures of the heavens and the earth. Treasure includes all kinds of precious things that you save in order to be used at the time of need.

Allah *the Almighty* owns all the treasures of the earth, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'And the earth— We have spread it forth and made in it firm mountains and caused to grow in it of every suitable thing. And We have made in it means of subsistence for you and for him for whom you are not the suppliers. And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure.' (*al-Hijr:* 19-21) The treasures of Allah *the Almighty* are either buried or highly secured and can only be bestowed by Him to the people at the appropriate time. When He *the Almighty* addresses the hypocrites, saying: '…but to Allah belong the treasures of the heavens and earth…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) it means that if you consider those with Messenger Muhammad destitute people, Allah *the Almighty* Who owns all the treasures of the earth, is able to make them wealthy, possessing the countries and the earth.

Indeed, this is exactly what happened, as it has been a prophecy and good news to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. An example for this is Suraqah ibn Malik,(1) who pursued Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the emigration journey in order to win the prize of Quraysh. After he repented and returned to the right course, the Companions were wondering about his thin arms and mocking them with their descriptions. Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'How do you find them in the bracelets of Kisra? (2) Later on, the Muslims control the dominion of *Kisra* and the bracelets are allocated to Suraqah, who wears them on his hands before people.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…though the hypocrites do not understand this...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) because: 'They know what is apparent of the worldly life...' (*ar-Rum:* 7). They know artificial issues without delving into the valuable matters. They have no knowledge about the realities, the essence, and the outcome of things and the changing state of the universe. Instead, they know apparent, superficial sciences; so they do not understand. They are similar to the people of Qarun, about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So he went forth to his people in his finery. Those who desire this world’s life said: O would that we had the like of what Qarun is given; most surely he is possessed of mighty good fortune.’ (*al-Qasas:* 79) They were dazzled at the superficiality of his adornment since they look at issues according to their measure in the worldly life. Like the hypocrites, they consider the destinies of people by the extent of their wealth, fame and power. They admire the worldly life with its pleasures and adornments, unlike people of knowledge who consider issues with a different vision. Allah *the Almighty* relates that they said: ‘And those who were given the knowledge said: Woe to you! Allah’s reward is better for him who believes and does good, and none is made to receive this except the patient.’ (*al-Qasas:* 80) They are unaware of the fact that the adornment is a worldly aspect which does not imply the outcome of those who oppress, spoil and rejoice at his/her adornment and wealth. That is why Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘Thus We made the earth to swallow up him and his abode...’ (*al-Qasas:* 81). The swallowing involved him and his home, which includes his treasures, depositories and all his possessions.

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(1) *He is Suraqah ibn Malik ibn Ja'sham Al-Madlajy Al-Kanany, Abu Sufian. He narrated 19 Hadiths mentioned in Hadith collections. During the period before Islam, Abu Sufyan asked him to trace the Messenger of Allah when he went to the cave with Abu Bakr. He became Muslim after the Battle of Ta'if in 8 AH and died in 24 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam, 3/80.*

(2) *See Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no.13414; Ibn Al-Athir Asad Al-Ghaba, 1/ 422; As-Safady in Al-Wafy Bilwafyat, 5/ 37; and Adh-Dhahabi, Tarikh Al-Islam, 1/377.*

The hypocrites do not understand that those with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would not disband if the Helpers did not spend on them or aid them, for they did not gather around him seeking the worldly life, but they sought to obey and follow him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَقُولُونَ لَئِن رَّجَعۡنَآ إِلَى ٱلۡمَدِينَةِ لَيُخۡرِجَنَّ ٱلۡأَعَزُّ مِنۡهَا ٱلۡأَذَلَّۚ وَلِلَّهِ ٱلۡعِزَّةُ
وَلِرَسُولِهِۦ وَلِلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقِينَ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٨﴾

They say, ‘Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak,’ but power belongs to God, to His Messenger, and to the believers, though the hypocrites do not know this [8] (The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 8)

The hypocrites, especially their leader Ibn Ubay ibn Salul, were constantly abusing Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Here, they say: ‘Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) They mean that they are the powerful and honoured, while the believers are weak and humble. Allah *the Almighty* partly agrees with them, ‘Yes, the powerful will expel the weak’; yet, He *the Almighty* wants to indicate who is the powerful and who is the weak, so He says: ‘…but power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and to the believers…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). This is called a positive saying, that is, to agree with the speaker who means evil by his/her words; yet, you reverse the meaning of the speaker and direct it towards goodness. Here, it is meant to increase the humiliation of the speaker; you make him/her think you agree with him/her, filling him/her with joy and delight, but then you reverse what s/he said so s/he feels humiliation. It is exactly like when the guard of a prison agrees to bring a cup of water to a thirsty prisoner who begs for a cup of water, saying, ‘I will bring you a cup of water.’ Then, he comes back with a cup full of cold water. The prisoner rejoices thinking he will get what he longs for. Though, as soon as the guard brings the cup closer to the mouth of the prisoner, he spills the water on the ground. Thus, if the guard refused to bring the water from the beginning, the prisoner would not suffer more humiliation.

Another example of this is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And there are some of them who molest the Prophet and say: He is one who believes everything that he hears; say: A hearer of good for you (who) believes in Allah and believes the faithful and a mercy for those of you who believe; and (as for) those who molest the Messenger of Allah, they shall have a painful punishment.’ (*at-Tawba:* 61) They mean to insult and abuse Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* accusing him of not examining the speech transferred to him and believing all what is said to him. Allah *the Almighty* agrees with them that he *peace and blessings be upon him* believes everything he hears; however, He replies with the contrary of their meaning, saying: ‘…A hearer of good for you…’ (*at-Tawba:* 61). He is a hearer of goodness because he listened to the last Revelation coming from the Heavens to guide the people of the earth and because he has brought goodness for all humanity. Yet, this does not suggest the intended meaning of the hypocrites. He may hear their insults, then listen to their excuse and forgive them.

When Ibn Ubayy said, ‘the powerful,’ he meant the hypocrites; and when he said ‘weak,’ he meant the Muslims of the Emigrants and the Helpers. Allah *the Almighty* approved his saying that the powerful will expel the weak, saying: ‘They say, “Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak,” but power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and to the believers, though the hypocrites do not know this.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) The hypocrites will leave Medina, while the believers will stay powerful in it; however, why does Allah *the Almighty* say: ‘…but power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and to the believers...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8)? Allah *the Almighty* wants to indicate that the power of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that of the believers is derived from His Power. He *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘…surely might is wholly Allah’s…’ (*Yunus:* 65). This means that Power in all forms belong to Allah *the Almighty*. His Power accompanies His Wisdom, Mighty, Forbearance, Anger and Revenge, for He is All-Wise, All-Mighty, All-Forbearing, the Avenger and the Omnipotent. All other forms of Power belong to Him. If this is the reality, then the hypocrites are the weak and they are the ones who will be expelled.

The reason for the revelation of this verse is narrated by Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah who said, ‘We were with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Battle of Banu Al-Mustaliq(1) when a man from the Emigrants kicked a man from the Helpers. When he heard this, he said: ‘Leave that, for it is disgusting.’ ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul heard that and said, ‘Did they really do that? By Allah, if we return to Medina indeed the powerful will expel therefrom the weak.’ Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew about that, so ‘Umar said, ‘Allow me to cut off the head of this hypocrite, O Messenger of Allah.’ He said, ‘Leave him. I do not want the people to say that Muhammad kills his Companions.’(2) So his son ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdullah said: ‘By Allah! You shall not return until you admit that you are the mean and that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the honourable.’ So he did so.(1)

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(1) *The Battle of Banu Al-Mustaliq is the ninth battle among the nineteen battles of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him according to Al-Bukhari. It was before the Battle of Al-Hudaybiyya. Notably, Banu Al-Mustaliq were allies for Quraysh from Al-Ahabish, a tribe from Khuza’a. The name of Al-Mustaliq: Judhaima ibn Sa‘d.*

(2) *In his book, Al-Bukhari narrates that Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah said, ‘We were along with Allah's Messenger in an expedition that a person from amongst the emigrants struck at the back of a person from the Ansar. The Helper said, ‘O Helpers!’ And the Emigrant said, ‘O Emigrants!’ Thereupon Allah's Messenger said, ‘What are these proclamations of=*

This incident shows that the hypocrites play a negative role in the society, seize any opportunity to divide the Muslims and arouse the spirit of tribalism among the Muslims. The incident that took place between an Emigrant and a Helper might have taken place in any time and any place; however, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul wanted to seize the opportunity to quench the malice in his heart towards Messenger Muhammad, Islam and the Muslims.

The Jews were typically acting like them. When Islam reached Medina, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* established brotherhood bonds and put boundaries between Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj. Due to these brotherhood bonds, the scientific position of the Jews deteriorated since Islam came with a religious Law and a Book which is a guardian over the previous Books. Besides, the Jews lost their military position, as they witnessed a minority of believers defeating the disbelievers at the Battle of Badr. Moreover, the Jews lost all their authority in Medina; so they desired to revive their powers of the Pre-Islam period. They said, ‘Let us fuel the hostilities and awaken the animosity between Al-Aws and the Al-Khazraj.*’* Upon witnessing the light of belief adorning the faces of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj people, the harmony of belief uniting them, affection and smiles prevailing among them,

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= *the Days of Ignorance?’ They said. ‘Allah's Messenger, a person from the emigrants struck at the back of a Helper, whereupon he said, ‘It is something disgusting.’ ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy heard it and said, ‘They have indeed done it. By Allah, when we would return to Medina the respectable amongst them (The Helpers) would turn away the mean (the Emigrants).’ Thereupon ‘Umar said, ‘Permit me so that I should strike the neck of this hypocrite.’ But he (the Prophet) said, ‘Leave him, the people may not say that Muhammad kills his Companions.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4905.*

(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this Hadith and ascribes it to Sa‘id ibn Mansour, Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh, Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah. At-Tirmidhi added, ‘So his son ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdullah said, ‘By Allah! You shall not return until you admit that you are the mean and that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him is the honourable.’ So, he did so. He said it is an authentic, good Hadith. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 14/ 503; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3631.*

a man called Sha's ibn Qays[1] was provoked. He said, 'By Allah! We must return the old days and bring back their grudge and animosity; we cannot settle down when they are united.'[2] So, he sent a Jewish boy to sit in a gathering between the people of Al-Aws and the Al-Khazraj. Then the boy digressed talking about a day called '*Ba'ath*', a day when Al-Aws tribe defeated the Al-Khazraj tribe in the pre-Islamic era. The boy began elaborating on the events of that day and recalled its poetry until he provoked the anger of the people of Al-Aws and the Al-Khazraj. This resulted in fighting, showing off, awakening hatred and calling for war.

Thus, the plot succeeded, so when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew about it, he went with his companions to the gathering of Al-Aws and the Al-Khazraj to find that they were highly provoked (fighting, hating each other and carrying their swords). He said, 'The call of pre-Islamic pride while I am still among you!'[3] This means that they should have been ashamed of themselves because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is sitting with them. He then added, 'Allah has blessed you with Islam,

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(1) Sha's ibn Qays belonged to the Jews of Bani Qaynuqa'. He was a fierce disbeliever and enemy to the Muslims, and he was among those who said, 'The Hand of Allah is chained.' He was blind.

(2) *In his Tafsir, At-Tabari relates that Zayd ibn Aslam said, 'Sha's ibn Qays, an old man known with his bold disbelief, intense grudge and deep envy for the Muslims, passed by some companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him belonging to Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, gathering together in a seating he prepared. He was aroused by their gathering, their affection and unity over Islam though they were enemies before it. So he said, 'Bani Qila are gathering in this country. No! By Allah! We cannot live here if they are united.' Therefore, he asked a Jewish young man to go to sit with them, remind them of the day of Ba'ath and elaborate on some of its poetry…' See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 7563; and Ash-Shukani, Fath Al-Qadir, 2/5.*

(3) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti ascribes this narration according to Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jarir At-Tabari, Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, and Abu Ash-Sheikh Al-Asbahani on the authority of Zayd ibn Aslam who said, 'The Messenger of Allah said, "O Muslims! Allah! Allah! The call of pre-Islamic tribalism while I am sitting among you! Allah has guided you to Islam, blessed you with Islam, prevented you from pre-Islamic customs, saved you from disbelief, and brought your hearts together. And now you return to your old state, disbelievers?" Thus, the tribes knew it was a whisper of the devil and plot by an enemy, so they threw their swords, shed their tears and hugged each other.' See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 3/699; At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 5/ 628.*

prevented you from the days of the pre-Islamic era, and brought your hearts together.' How did the words of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* influence the tribes? They made them drop their weapons, cry, hug each other and leave with the Messenger of Allah. There was no day worse in its beginning and better by its end like that one.

The same foul plot which the Jews used to implement in Medina between Al-Aws and the Al-Khazraj was planned by Ibn Ubayy to increase dissension, division and arguments between the Emigrants and the Helpers. Jabir ibn 'Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* narrated, 'We were in a Battle when a man from the Emigrants kicked a man from the Helpers. The Prophet heard this and said, 'Leave that, for it is disgusting;' that is, stop that because it will result in a great evil and dissension. Believers cannot be subject to or provoked by tribalism and pride of the pre-Islamic era. Here, Emigrants kicked a Helper, so the latter said, 'O Helpers!' While the former said 'O Emigrants!' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard this and said, 'It is the evil call of the pre-Islamic tribalism.'

The call of the pre-Islamic tribalism aims at dividing the Helpers and the Emigrants or any two different parties, driving each party to factionalism, dissension and fighting; and consequently, resulting in acts which belong to the pre-Islamic era. So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave that, for it is disgusting;' that is, ugly and mean since it provokes disputes over falsehood and drives to fire. He said, 'Whoever calls the Call of the pre-Islamic era is not one of us and let him take his seat in fire.'(1)

The call of the pre-Islamic era is a call for war, for they used to say, 'O the tribe of so and so.' Then, the tribe gathers to support the speaker even if he is a wrongdoer; yet, Islam prohibits this. The people of the pre-Islamic era came together through tribalism regarding all the issues of the worldly life and were settling their rights through coalitions and tribalism. Islam came to prohibit all these and settle issues through the Islamic rulings. Thus, if someone engaged in an aggressive action against someone else, the judge would adjudicate between them according to the Islamic laws, not the tribal code, and would obligate him/her to receive the due legal punishment for his/her aggression.

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(1) *Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrate on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Masu'd that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He who (on befalling of a calamity) slaps his cheeks, tears his clothes and follows the ways and traditions of the days of Ignorance is none of us.' Al-Harith Al-Ash'ari narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He whoever calls with the call of the days of Ignorance, then he is among the coals of hell.' A man said, 'Even if he performs prayers and fasts, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'Yes. So call with the call that Allah named you with: Muslims, believers and worshipers of Allah.' This is narrated by At-Tyalisi, Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi and others. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1294, 1298 and 3520; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.148.*

When the call of the Pre-Islamic tribalism and achieving triumph through fanaticism and tribalism appear, the hypocrites – who desire to fuel the fires because they are beneficiary – appear as well. Here, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul, the head of the hypocrites, seized the opportunity as well, even though he was out of Medina. When he heard about the quarrel between a boy from the Emigrants and a boy of the Helpers, he said, ‘Did they really do that?’ It is as if he was waiting for this incident since he wanted dissension. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…had they gone forth between you, they would not have added to you aught save corruption, and they would certainly have hurried about among you seeking (to sow) dissension among you, and among you there are those who hearken for their sake; and Allah knows the unjust.’ (*at-Tawba:* 47) They cause division between the rows of the believers in order to penetrate them aiming at causing corruption. Allah *the Almighty* employs the word ‘between’ to indicate penetration and division between two things or persons. So, one of them would enter a group of believers to corrupt it and another one would join another group to corrupt it as well. Thus, they penetrate the believers to divide them.

When Ibn Ubayy said, ‘Did they really do that?’ he means that the Emigrants dared to harm the Helpers; though, at the beginning, the latter were greater in number than the former, as the Emigrants only increased later on. Then, he said, ‘By Allah, if we return to Medina, indeed, the powerful will expel therefrom the weak.’ It is known that he would have been appointed king of Medina and that during the celebration of the crown, they were surprised by the arrival of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrating to Medina. This is one of the reasons for the malice of ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; he lost kingship and his son, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay, became a true Muslim.

The proof of the sincere belief of his son can be found when he went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* upon hearing that he would order the killing of his father after he had said: ‘Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) The son went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘If you have to order the killing of my father, O Messenger of Allah, let me implement it because I am afraid that if a believer brother killed him, I would hate him and I do not like to hate a believer.’(1) Thus, his truthfulness and strength of belief become clear; Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* desired to treat that hypocrite with generosity for his son, so he did not order him to be killed. Later on, the son came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah for forgiveness of my father.’ Due to the fact that he was sent as a mercy for all people, he asked Allah *the Almighty* to forgive ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay; and thus, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying, ‘Ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them; this is because they disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah does not guide the transgressing people.’ (*at-Tawba:* 80) The good son wanted to kill his father himself in order not to seek a Muslim for revenge. In the same vein, when ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* passed by the killer of his brother, Zayd ibn Al-Khattab, ‘Umar said to him, ‘Get away from me, I do not love you.’ The man replied with a daring faith, ‘Does your hatred deprive me a right of my rights?’ ‘Umar said, ‘No.’ The man said, ‘Women only cry over love.’

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* sent for ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul in order to ask him about what he said; yet, he denied and swore by Allah he had not said that. So, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: 'They swear by Allah that they did not speak, and certainly they did speak, the word of unbelief, and disbelieved after their Islam…' (*at-Tawba:* 74). He made ibn Salul swear by Allah that he did not say that.

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(1) *In his book, At-Tabari narrates that ‘Asim Ibn ‘Amr ibn Qatada said that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay came to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saying, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I heard that you want to kill ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy because of what he said. If you will kill him, order me and I will bring his head to you. By Allah, the Khazraj tribe did not witness a man more obedient to his father than me and I fear lest you order someone else to kill him. Do not let me see the killer of my father walking among people lest I would kill him and thus go to fire because I killed a believer in revenge for a disbeliever. Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Alright, we will be kind and good to him as long as he stays with us.’ This is also narrated by Ibn Al-Athir. See At-Tabari, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 23/407; Ibn Al-Athir, Al-Kamil Fi At-Tarikh, 1/309.*

In the same connection, Zayd ibn Arqam said, 'We went for a journey with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* where people suffered a hardship. So, 'Abdullah ibn Ubay said to his friends, 'Do not spend on those who are with the Messenger of Allah until they disband…if we return to Medina, the powerful will surely expel therefrom the weak.' Zayd came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and related that to him. Then, he sent for 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy to ask him; yet, he denied and swore he did not. They said, 'Zayd lied to the Messenger of Allah.' So, this really disappointed Zayd until Allah *the Almighty* revealed the truth, saying: 'When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet]…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). Finally, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called them to ask forgiveness for them; however, they turned their heads(1) aside.

Since the son of Ibn Ubay was a true Muslim, when his father returned to Medina, he carried his sword and said to his father, 'You claim if we return to Medina, the powerful will surely expel therefrom the weak. By Allah! You will not enter Medina until the Messenger of Allah permits you.' He also said, 'By Allah! You shall never return to Medina until you admit that you are the mean and that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the honourable.' He also said, 'By Allah! I will not return the sword back until you admit that Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the honourable and you are the mean.' So, he admitted.

Ibn Salul was constantly hurting Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For instance, when two men – one from the tribe of Juhaina, which is an ally to the Helpers, and the other from Ghafar – fought each other, the man from Ghafar defeated the man from Juhaina. So, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubaycried out, ‘O people of Aws! Help your brother.’ He added, ‘By Allah! The example of Muhammad with regard to us is as one says, “Feed your dog and it would eat you.”’(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this narration and ascribes it to At-Tabarani that 'Usama ibn Zayd said, 'When Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him came back from the Battle of Banu Al-Mustaliq, 'Abdullah ibn Abdullah ibn Ubay drew the sword against his father saying, "By Allah! I will not leave the sword until you admit that you are the mean and that the Messenger of Allah is the honourable." So he said, "Woe to you! Muhammad is the honourable and I am the mean." When this was narrated to Prophet Muhammad, he admired him and appreciated it.' See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 14/504.*

Besides, Ibn Ubay abused Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by slandering his wife, ‘A’isha *Allah be pleased with her*. During the Battle of Banu Al-Mustaliq, he was involved in and increased the abuse of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and slandered the reputation of his wife, accusing her of committing adultery. So Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely they who concocted the lie are a party from among you. Do not regard it an evil to you; nay, it is good for you. Every man of them shall have what he has earned of sin; and (as for) him who took upon himself the main part thereof, he shall have a grievous chastisement.’ (*an-Nur:* 11) ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salul is responsible for spreading the rumour since he began the talk, saying, ‘The wife of your Prophet spent the night with a man, and then at the morning, he came to lead the camel for her.’(2)

The hypocrites were unaware that Power and Honour belong to Allah, His Messenger and the believers and that humiliation is for the hypocrites, so He the Almighty Allah says: '…but power belongs to Allah, to His Messenger, and to the believers…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8). Allah *the Almighty* defeats and is undefeatable. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is also honoured with untouchable dignity and chastity, and the believers, by following the Book of Allah, are endowed with honour and dignity. The word for Power in the verse in question is derived from a concrete meaning which is rigidness and toughness. For instance, we say 'rigid earth,' that is, concrete and cannot be affected by a pickax. Then, the adjective was used to describe anything sturdy. So, when it is said: Allah is Almighty, it means that He controls everything; no one can bear His Scheme, Power or Punishment. The same adjective is used to refer to something rare and valuable, for all precious metals are valuable due to their scarcity and rarity.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Abu Hatim narrates that Qatada said, ‘It was mentioned to us that two men - one from the tribe of Juhain, which is an ally to the Helpers, and the other from Ghafar - fought each other, the man from Ghafar defeated the man from Juhaina. So, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay cried out, “O people of Aws! Help your brother,” and added, “By Allah! The example of Muhammad with regard to us is as one says, ‘Feed your dog and it would eat you.’”’ In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti ascribes this narration to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abu Hatim. See Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir Ibn Abu Hatim, 10403; As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthour, 7/445.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Jarir At-Tabari narrates that Ibn Zayd said, ‘He who is responsible for spreading the rumour is ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, the wicked man, since he began the calumny saying, ‘The wife of your Prophet spent the night with a man and then he came to lead us with her.’ Ibn Abu Malika narrated from ‘Urwa that ‘A’isha said regarding the calumny, ‘Then I rode and Safwan led the camel by the rope. We passed by a group of hypocrites who used to be hated by people. So, ‘Abdullah ibn Ubay, their head, said, ‘Who is this?’ They said, ‘‘A’isha.’ He said, ‘By Allah! She did not survive nor did he survive.’ He added, ‘The wife of your Prophet spent the night with a man; and then at the morning, he came to lead the camel for her.’ See At-Tabari, Jami’ Al-Bayan, 26050.*

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…though the hypocrites do not know this.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) This is not negation of their knowledge and obtaining the information, yet, it negates their benefit from the knowledge that reached them. In fact, the knowledge which does not influence the movement of the human being is useless. It is as if the knowledge is negated from the hypocrite because s/he did not benefit from it. They do not know the useful knowledge, nor the essence and outcome of the matters. This is because they do not assess the issues with the precision that leads to real benefit, nor do they value the true belief. The human being may not understand something, but someone else may understand it and help him/her understand it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تُلۡهِكُمۡ أَمۡوَٰلُكُمۡ وَلَآ أَوۡلَٰدُكُمۡ عَن
ذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِۚ وَمَن يَفۡعَلۡ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡخَٰسِرُونَ ٩

Believers, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering God: those who do so will be the ones who lose [9] (The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 9)

Whenever the believer remembers that Allah *the Almighty* sends down the rain, for example, s/he thanks Him. So, remembrance is achieved through the tongue and the heart. Allah *the Almighty* is unseen and concealed from us. In fact, His Mightiness lies in the fact that He is unseen; yet, His Favours are evidence for Him. So, remembrance should be always in our minds. We should constantly remember and thank Allah *the Almighty* for His Favours. Actually, remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* facilitates the movement of life in all aspects because when it exists in the humble hearts, it diminishes the sins, benefits all people, and corrects the movement of life. So, in the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Believers, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering Allah: those who do so will be the ones who lose.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9) He *the Almighty* addresses the believers to keep their belief pure, clear and flawless.

This verse should be explained in the context of what was previously mentioned in the chapter of *al-Jumu'a*. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew—then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out Allah's bounty. Remember Allah often so that you may prosper. Yet they scatter towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it, and leave you [Prophet] standing there. Say, 'Allah's gift is better than any entertainment or trade: Allah is the best provider.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9-11) The believers are called to seek remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* when the call to prayer is made on Friday and stop trading; though after the prayer, they are encouraged to disperse within the land and seek from the Bounty of Allah *the Almighty*. During that time, you should: 'Remember Allah often so that you may prosper.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10)

Meanwhile, Allah *the Almighty* condemns those believers who disbanded, leaving Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* giving the Friday sermon and were deluded by the trade coming to Medina on that day. So, He *the Almighty* addresses the believers because they are the ones who are entitled to comply with His Commands and Prohibitions. Unlike the disbeliever, the believer is obliged to act in accordance with the religion of Allah; thus, s/he enters an agreement of Belief with the Almighty. Thus, He *the Almighty* does not address all people with respect to His Commands; instead, He addresses the believers only. For example, He says: 'O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may guard (against evil).' (*al-Baqara:* 183) He *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient.' (*al-Baqara:* 153) Thus, Allah *the Almighty* only charges the believer who enters the agreement of Faith with the religious obligations. If the servant has believed, then his/her moves in life become the responsibility of his/her Lord who reveals to him/her the law of life. As for the disbeliever, Allah *the Almighty* does not command him/her to do anything. Belief is a commitment. As long as you acknowledged Allah's Wisdom, then commit yourself to obtain the rulings of your religion from Him. Allah's Justice necessitates that He does not command the disbelievers; unlike the humans whose leaders command all people whether they consent or not. Besides, if that human leader is powerful, s/he tends to force anyone under his/her authority to do what s/he says. So, Allah *the Almighty* often begins the verses which include commands with: 'O you who believe…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* does not command all people. He only commands those who believe.

Allah *the Almighty* does not interfere in the actions related to one's free choice. He only commands those who believe to comply with His Way of Guidance. Notably, He *the Almighty* does not command the disbeliever because He has no agreement with him. Instead, He commands the believer. Thus, every verse bearing a ruling starts with this faithful call: 'O you who believe…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9). Our belief in Allah, Who decrees the dos and do nots, is what makes us entitled to receive His Rulings and comply with them. Therefore, the one who agrees to believe in Allah *the Almighty* has entered an agreement of Belief with Him and that is why s/he receives from Allah the Islamic Way of Guidance related to the dos and do nots. In addition, s/he should apply this approach without questioning the logic of everything. The logic behind any religious decree is that it is issued from Allah *the Almighty*. You cannot argue it because it is not issued by an equivalent person to you. On the contrary, it is issued by Allah *the Almighty* Whom you are obliged to obey because He is the Lord and you are His worshiper. It is sufficient that He *the Almighty* says, 'Do' so that we carry out the command, and it is sufficient that He says, 'Do not,' that we refrain from what He prohibits. Thus, we comply with all the commands of Allah *the Almighty* because He has decreed them and not due to anything else. Mainly, we receive all what is revealed from Allah in the Quran as the Words of Allah *the Almighty*. This is the belief that He *the Almighty* wants us to adhere to and follow in our life.

Allah *the Almighty* calls those who have believed saying: ‘O you who believe…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 9) and commands them to seek the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘O you who believe! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of Allah...’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 9). This is a Command to do something. In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* forbids those who believe, saying: ‘O You who believe, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering Allah…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 9).

Diversion is spending the time in an act which may distract you from your duties. If the worldly life which Allah *the Almighty* created and created man in it, is free from His Way of Guidance, then it is diversion and amusement. Diversion is the unwise recreation; the worldly life may pass while the person is in diversion, amusement and business, for s/he did not take life seriously. Anything that diverts you from what Allah *the Almighty* has created you for is a diversion because it diverted you from what is most important. The word ‘diversion’ points to the thing which does not benefit you and diverts from what is required from you. There is a difference between diversion and amusement, yet both are useless and diverts from what is required from you.

The Quran mentions diversion and amusement in numerous verses, yet amusement was mentioned first in the following saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And the worldly life is not but amusement and diversion; but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah, so will you not reason?’ (*al-An‘am:* 32) And in another verse Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Know that life of this world is but amusement and diversion...’ (*al-Hadid:* 20). Yet, diversion is mentioned first in the following saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64). Amusement is mentioned before ‘diversion’ in two verses because ‘amusement’ suggests that you make unintended moves like children while playing; mainly, it implies aimless movements which we call ‘amusement of children’. It is called ‘amusement’ since the child amuses himself/herself before s/he is charged with anything. Thus, amusement does not divert him/her from any duties. However, when s/he grows up and moves to the stage of being religiously responsible, ‘amusement’ diverts him/her from something required from him/her; and thus, it becomes ‘diversion’. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…yet they scatter towards trade or entertainment whenever they observe it, and leave you [Prophet] standing there…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 11). So, it becomes clear that diversion is the thing which is useless and diverts you from what is required from you. Notably, the verse in the chapter of *al-‘Ankabut* which mentions ‘diversion’ prior to ‘amusement’ means that the issues which divert from religion are countless, that corruption has prevailed and that diverting from what is required has exacerbated. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And of men is he who takes instead diversion of speech to lead astray from Allah’s path without knowledge…’ (*Luqman:* 6). According to the scholars,(1) ‘diversion of speech’ is all that diverts from what Allah decrees. Therefore, the work which diverts the person from performing the duties for Allah, such as performing the prayers, is considered diversion. It is extreme diversion and amusement that they play when they hear the Quran. They did not even listen to it like any purposeful diversion, but they heard it as amusement with no aim or benefit because its aim is harmful to them. Amusement is lawful in the period before adolescence; yet, the hearts need to be brought up to observe Allah *the Almighty* the Creator and the Provider in this early period of man’s life. This task should be done by the father. When he brings food or drink for his child, he should say before him/her, ‘Allah *the Almighty* has provided us with it.’ Thus, we attribute all the issues of life to Allah. We should command the young boy to say, ‘In the Name of Allah and praise be to Allah.’ Hence, the father embeds in his child’s soul Certainty of Allah the Almighty, the Omnipotent. If the boy does not see Him, he sees His signs and favours and sees his father, who takes responsibility for him, not attributing this favour to himself; instead, he attributes everything to Allah *the Almighty*. His father – his role model—is humble and attributes all issues to Allah. Thus, belief becomes embedded in the conscience of the boy. If the boy was not brought up this way, diversion and amusement would find their ways to his soul.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti relates that Ibn ‘Al-Abbas said, ‘Diversion of the speech means futile speech, i.e. singing and other similar things.’ Ibn Mas‘ud said, ‘A man buying a girl who sings for him at day or night.’ In his book, Ash-Shawkani says, ‘It is everything that diverts from goodness such as singing, clubs, false talk and all forbidden acts.’ In his book, Al-Biqa‘i says, ‘It means what distracts among the evolving things which amuse so man loses track of time such as singing and jokes among other useless things.’ See Ash-Shawkani, Fath Al-Qadir, 4/483; Al-Biqa‘i, Nazhm Ad-Durar, 6/6.*

On the other hand, if you divert from the way of Allah *the Almighty* the worldly life will be a useless home for diversion and amusement. Yet, He *the Almighty* specifies, in the verse in question two things from the worldly life: wealth and children, saying: ‘O you who believe! Do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering Allah…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 9). Allah *the Almighty* forbids the believers from being diverted from remembering Him by their wealth and children. Both these factors are also combined in another verse in *Al-'Imran* and when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life...’ (*al-Kahf:* 46).(1) Wealth and children are fundamental elements that test people in the worldly life. Yet, why does Allah mentions ‘wealth’ prior to ‘children’? Is the wealth more worthy for people than the children? We say, ‘Allah *the Almighty* mentions “wealth” before “children” in both verses not because wealth is more precious, but because wealth is more general, unlike children, since all people have property even if it is little, yet, “children” is more specific as some people are deprived of them. In addition, the children do not come unless the person possesses wealth because he needs marriage and expenses in order to produce and bring children. Everyone has wealth, yet, everyone does not necessarily have children. When Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life...’ (*al-Kahf:* 46) this means that they are not necessities of life: they are mere adornment and artificial things since the believer who is pleased with what Allah *the Almighty* has destined for him/her lives his/her life happily even with no wealth or children. Wealth or children might make the person so miserable that s/he wishes s/he had died before having that wealth or that child. You might see a distressed, worried man because he wants to have a boy for ancestry and honour; however, he might be provided with a boy who truly humiliates him.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi says, ‘Wealth and children are adornment of the worldly life because wealth has beauty and benefits while the children imply strength and advancement; thus, they become the adornment of the worldly life.’ In his Tafsir, Al-Baydawi says, ‘They adorn man in his worldly life and leave him sooner.’ In his Tafsir, Ibn Al-Jawzi says, ‘This responds to the polytheists who used to show off with their wealth and sons; Allah the Almighty tells them that these adorn only your worldly life.’ See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 10/413; Al-Baydawi, Anwar At-Tanzil, 3/ 500; and Ibn Al-Jawzi in Zad Al-Masir, 4/ 228.*

Wealth, here, does not mean gold and silver, but rather, it is a general word including gold, silver, money, horses, crops, cattle, and everything you spend to pay for something else. Wealth specifically refers to money because it enables us to buy everything. Wealth is divided into two types: wealth which is used directly, like food, drinks, clothes, etc. This type of wealth benefits people directly. The other type of wealth is money which does not benefit people directly. In other words, they can benefit from it only when they buy things that benefit them directly.

So, you should not be diverted by your wealth and children from the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* since they will not benefit you on the Day of Resurrection. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘As (for) those who disbelieve, surely neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them in the least against Allah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 116). Moreover, wealth and children are reasons for temptation, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And know that your property and your children are a temptation, and that Allah is He with Whom there is a mighty reward.’ (*al-Anfal:* 28) The hypocrites and the disbelievers do not succeed in the temptation of the wealth and children. Instead, there will come a day when they lose that wealth and these children. Even if they have wealth, it will not buy anything in the Hereafter and, besides, each one of their children will be fully busy with himself/herself, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘O people! guard against (the punishment of) your Lord and dread the day when a father shall not make any satisfaction for his son, nor shall the child be the maker of any satisfaction for his father; surely the promise of Allah is true, therefore let not this world’s life deceive you, nor let the deceiver(1) deceive you in respect of Allah’ (*Luqman:* 33). If wealth and children are among the decoration and adornment of the worldly life, why do we let them delude us from the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* and distract us from religious duties and obligations decreed by Allah *the Almighty*? Why are we attracted to mere decoration and adornment?

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(1) *In his Tafsir, ‘Abd Ar-Razzaq relates that ‘the Deceiver’ is Satan and falsehood. In his Tafsir, Ash-Shawkani says that the deceiver is the Satan who tempts people with false temptations and untrue promises. See ‘Abd Ar-Razzaq, Tafsir Ibn ‘Abd Ar-Razzaq, 2434; and Ash-Shawkani, Fath Al-Qadir, 2/62.*

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about this verse: ‘O you who believe! Do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering Allah…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 9). He said, ‘They are worshipers from my *Ummah*, the good among them who are not diverted by trade or transaction from the remembrance of Allah and the five daily prayers.’(1) So, these are worshipers of the Prophet Muhammad’s *Ummah*, but he specifies their category, saying, ‘The good among them,’ who connect themselves to Allah *the Almighty* through His remembrance, and whom He *the Almighty* provides with support in order that they become able to lead the movement of life on earth and thus, establish security, peace, mercy and justice in it. This is what should make us feel proud.

Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* is achieved through the renewal of connection with Him and standing before Him in the prayers. Even during war and time of fear, we should remember Him. In general, remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* includes recalling His Favours, Mightiness, Omnipotence and His Attributes of perfection. This should be continuous, and it is obligatory during prayers and at other times. So, Allah *the Almighty* says in this regard: ‘Then when you have finished the prayer, remember Allah standing and sitting and reclining…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 103).

In addition, remembrance means reflection and to live as a true Muslim following Allah’s Way of Guidance. Remembrance can also mean glorification and praising of Allah *the Almighty*. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘In houses which Allah has permitted to be exalted and that His name may be remembered in them; there glorify Him therein in the mornings and the evenings, Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of poor-due…’

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this Hadith on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him. He ascribes it to Ibn Mardawayh. In his Tafsir, Ash-Shawkani narrates it on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas and ascribes it to Ibn Mardawayh as well. He said, ‘They were men seeking from His bounty, buying and selling; yet, as soon as they hear the call to prayers, they throw what is in their hands and rush to the mosque for prayers.’ See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur; and Ash-Shawkani, Fath Al-Qadir, 5/228.*

(*an-Nur:* 36-37). It is remembrance since there are people who glorify Allah *the Almighty* in the morning and in the evenings; they are men described as not being distracted from the remembrance of Allah by trade or sale.

Remembrance may also refer to Allah's Bounties bestowed on His worshipers; and it also may refer to their worship through obedience. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* remembers them with goodness, while they remember Him by obedience.

So, you should never let your world businesses and interests distract you from the remembrance of Allah, for He says: '…and leave off your trading—that is better for you, if only you knew.' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9) Yet, here, Allah *the Almighty* warns us against letting wealth and children avert us from remembrance of Him, as He *the Almighty* says: 'O You who believe, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering Allah: those who do so will be the ones who lose.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9)

You should never think that the remembrance of Allah is done only in the mosque or during times of prayers. Instead, keep remembering Him during all events of life; if you do so and He remembers you, then you will be among the successful. Remembering Allah frequently means that you constantly feel Him beside you, so you fear Him, praise Him and ask Him for Guidance; and thus the connection between you and Allah *the Almighty* becomes constant at all times. However, whoever follows his/her desires and lets them distract him/her from the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* will not be concerned with what He *the Almighty* requires from him/her since s/he is busy with what s/he requires. In short, you should always remember Allah and be conscious of Him.

That is why, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and the Remembrance of Allah is greater…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45). It means that the remembrance of Allah is greater than all other acts of worship because they need preparing, time, dedication and spare time, unlike remembrance which can be said at any time, with no preparation, or hardship, and regardless of your state. As remembrance of Allah means being mindful of Him, and it does not prevent you from working. It is the lightest and easiest worship for the soul and the heaviest worship in the Scale. It is the only act of worship which does not cost you anything; it does not occupy any of your senses or need time or effort, nor does it require a specified time. So, whoever remembers Allah *the Almighty* while standing, sitting, or lying on his/her side is considered one of those who remember Allah *the Almighty* frequently(1) and so is the one who remembers Him at the morning or the evenings. Further, whoever says, 'Allah is free from imperfection, all praise is due to Allah, there is no true god except Allah, and there is no change of a condition nor power except by Allah *the Almighty*' 30 times a day is recorded among those who remember Allah frequently.(2) Also, whoever wakes up at night, wakes his wife and prays two units of prayer becomes one of those who remember Allah frequently.(3)

Thus, to remember Allah *the Almighty* is an easy act of worship. You can remember Him *Glorified is He* while you are using an axe, writing by pen, eating a meal or having a drink. Though being the greatest act of worship, the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* is an easy, effortless act for the believers

Someone may ask, 'If the act of remembering Allah *the Almighty* is an easy one and is considered the lightest act of worship, why would it be difficult for any person to do it?' In the context of talking about those who get distracted by their wealth and children from remembering Him, He *the Almighty* says: '…those who do so will be the ones who lose.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9)

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(1) *Abd Ibn Hamid, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim mention that Qatada said regarding the saying of Allah: 'Who remember Allah while standing or siting or [lying] on their sides...' (Al-'Imran: 191), 'These are all your states, son of Adam, remember Allah while you are standing, if you cannot, then remember Him while sitting; if you cannot, remember Him while lying on your side. This is to make it easier and lighter.' In his Tafsir, Ibn Abu Hatim narrates that Mujahid said, 'The worshiper does not become among those who remember Allah frequently until he remembers Allah while standing, sitting and lying on his side.' See Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Adhim, 4657.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, As-Sam'ani relates that Ad-Dahaak ibn Muzahim narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Whoever says, 'Allah is free from imperfection, all praise is due to Allah, there is no true god except Allah, Allah is the Greatest and there is no change of a condition nor power except by Allah the Most High the Almighty' is recorded among those who remember Allah frequently, wipes out his sins just as leaves of a tree fall down and Allah looks to him and whom Allah looks at him do not receive punishment.' See As-Sam'ani in Tafsir Al-Quran, 4/ 284.*

(3) *In his book, Al-Bayhaqi narrates on the authority of Abu Sa'id and Abu Hurayra that Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said, 'If someone wakes up at night, wakes his wife and they pray together two units of prayer, they are known among those who remember Allah frequently.' See Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan As-Sughra, Hadith no. 609.*

This clearly indicates that the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* meant here has an unrestricted meaning; it is broader than uttering words for glorifying and praising Allah *the Almighty*. Here, it means to abide by Allah's Way of Guidance which He has sent for us. Whoever does not abide by it will be one of the losers, for s/he disregarded Allah's Laws and established his/her own laws according to his/her whims and inclinations.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* describes those who deviate from His Way of Guidance, saying: 'These are they who buy error for the right direction, so their bargain shall bring no gain, nor are they the followers of the right direction.' (*al-Baqara:* 16) They lost everything and did not gain anything, that is, they did not achieve anything useful. Moreover, they lost guidance and thus lost the profit and capital of their trade, both in this worldly life and the Hereafter.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: '…those who do so will be the ones who lose,' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9) He indicates that the bargain has been concluded and that they, i.e. those deniers of the Truth ultimately lost everything. Moreover, such loss is timeless and cannot be compensated in any way. It is permanent and will be bitterly regretted.

As for those who remember Allah *the Almighty* and strictly observe His Rules and what He revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they will be: '…the successful.' (*al-Baqara:* 5) Linguistically, the Arabic word *Al-Falah* (successfulness) means cultivating lands for growing crops. When a dry land is cultivated, it gives a large, bumper harvest, and that is why this word is used here. Allah *the Almighty* gives us an example from practical reality to enable our limited thinking to properly understand the Unseen. Therefore, He *the Almighty* likens the observance of His Rules and its reward in the Hereafter to the cultivation of lands. Thus, the successful person is the one who makes a profitable trade, so his/her position is the opposite of the loser.

After knowing this, how could we be distracted by our wealth and children from remembering Allah *the Almighty* and from following His Guidance? Those who are deluded in the worldly life by their wealth and children will find them a source of regret on the Day of Resurrection. But, what is the reason for this? This is because whenever they remember that their wealth and children have distracted them from paying attention to the good deeds that prepare them for that Day, they feel regret and deep sorrow. That is why Allah *the Almighty* refers to them, saying: '…those who do so will be the ones who lose.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَنفِقُواْ مِن مَّا رَزَقۡنَٰكُم مِّن قَبۡلِ أَن يَأۡتِيَ أَحَدَكُمُ ٱلۡمَوۡتُ فَيَقُولَ رَبِّ
لَوۡلَآ أَخَّرۡتَنِيٓ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٖ قَرِيبٖ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُن مِّنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ١٠

Give out of what We have provided for you, before death comes to one of you and he says, 'My Lord, if You would only reprieve me for a little while, I would give in charity and become one of the righteous' [10] (The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 10)

Allah *the Almighty* says that He does not ask us to spend on Him, but rather, He wants us to spend of what He has provided us with. The provision is gained as a result of the human beings' actions which are based upon arranged thought. In fact, the human thought, organs, senses, and the materials s/he uses are created by Allah *the Almighty*. If we take the farmer as an example, we find that the land, which is his/her source of provision, is created by Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, the human being uses what Allah *the Almighty* has created for him/her in order to get his/her provision. The mind which devises a plan; the organs and senses used by man to generate power; and even the materials which s/he makes use of to reap the fruit of his/her work are all created by Allah *the Almighty*. So, can you tell me which of all these things does the human being own?

Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Give out of what We have provided for you…' (*al-Munafiqun:* 10), He *Glorified is He* means that we are not giving charity to Him in the material sense of the word; rather, we give charity to others out of what He *the Almighty* has provided for us. It is out of His Generosity that He appreciates the result of our effort and ascribes its outcome to us. So, when someone is in need, it is as if s/he borrows money from you, not from Allah, the Provider of everything.

Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the importance of giving charity out of what He has provided for us before the coming of the Last Day on which there will be no more trading. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘O you who believe! Spend out of what We have given you before the Day comes on which there is no bargaining, neither any friendship nor intercession, and the unbelievers— they are the unjust. (*al-Baqara:* 254)

In the Hereafter, there will be no bargaining, no purchasing, no friendship, and no intercession; those are the means on which the human being can depend. On that Day, s/he does not own money to buy with, nor do others own goods to sell. So, this door is closed. Likewise, there will be no friendship or intercession. Therefore, He *the Almighty* tells us that if we spend out of what He has given us, we will be well-prepared for that Day, and He teaches us that we should make use of this opportunity before the coming of that Day, as there will be neither bargaining, nor friendship, nor intercession.

Furthermore, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Out of what We have provided for you,’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 10) He *the Almighty* clearly states that He is the True Owner of all provisions, yet He makes the human being earn his/her provision and even makes it his/her property. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘O you who believe! Spend (benevolently) of the good things that you earn and or what We have brought forth for you out of the earth…’ (*al-Baqara:* 267). He *the Almighty* directs our attention to the fact that pursuing one’s provision is not the cause of gaining it, for having the means to gain the provision is part of one’s provision gifted by Allah *the Almighty*. In other words, the means of gaining the provision such as the intellect and the bodily power are part of Allah’s Provision bestowed on us, and so is His subjection of the earth for us.

In general, the act of spending, especially if rationally made, enhances the course of life and contributes to its development and promotion. On the contrary, the act of receiving money and then holding it hinders the course of life and results in unemployment, market recession and stagnation which spoil life and interrupt its course. So, the act of spending is a must to contribute to the development of the course of life. Spending entails transferring the money from the property of someone to another by selling, buying, or due to a relationship.

The Arabic word *Infaq* (giving out) in the verse in question originally refers to the flourishing of the trade in the market. Markets mainly depend on goods, and when we find a marketplace empty from goods, this means that it is a flourishing market. But if we find that the goods are heaped up in a marketplace, this means that it is in a standstill. Then, the flourishing of the market means that it became empty of all goods, just as the spirit departs from the corpse.

With respect to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Give out…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 10), it does not mean only to give charity or *zakat*, but it also means to spend money in general and not to hoard it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘O you who believe! Most surely many of the doctors of law and the monks eat away the property of men falsely, and turn (them) from Allah’s way; and (as for) those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah’s Way, announce to them a painful chastisement…’ (*at-Tawba:* 34).

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…(as for) those who hoard up gold and silver…’ (*at-Tawba:* 34), He *the Almighty* talks about two types of metal, namely silver and gold. These two metals are the base of economy in worldly life. The first economic business was conducted by exchanging some goods in consideration of other goods, which is called ‘bartering’. After the development of the economic business, the currency was invented and has become the main means for conducting businesses among people and countries.

Allah *the Almighty* wants to draw our attention to the fact that silver and gold are the primary means for running an economy, which requires permanent circulation of money as the benefit of money is to be used for populating the earth and creating its civilisation.

If you are a believer and you do not invest your money, it will decrease by 2.5% annually — which is the small value of *zakat* the Muslims are asked to pay out of their property — and thus it may run out within forty years. Thus, if a believer wants to maintain his/her property, s/he should engage in the course of life to invest and increase it, and s/he should refrain from hoarding it, otherwise, the annual repayment of *zakat* will decrease the amount of his/her property.

If a money holder invests what s/he owns in practical life, other people will benefit from that, even if s/he did not intend to benefit them. Let us give an example to illustrate this point: the one who invests his money in a building only cares about the profit he will reap for himself. However, other people get benefit of such investment even if he did not intend to do so, i.e. the one who sets up the foundations will have a remuneration; every one of those who bring bricks, cement or steel will receive its price; and so will the labs which manufactured the building materials; the workers in sanitary ware and electrical wires factories will also receive salaries; and those who install all such things will receive their remunerations, etc. Thus, a large number of the society members benefit from the owner of this building even if he does not mean it. Therefore, whoever builds a building provides the society with an economic service that benefits a large number of people, and so does everyone who sets up an investment project.

Allah *the Almighty* wants people to engage in financial transactions and not to make their money stagnant, even if they are disbelievers. This is because if such money is spent in a trade, all the people will benefit from it; they will sell and buy; goods will be produced; factories will be built; and job opportunities will be provided for the labour force, etc.

On the contrary, if every one of us hoards his/her money and does not spend or invest it in the practical life, goods will not be consumed; factories will stop working; and people’s work will be interrupted. That is why Allah *the Almighty* wants money to be operated and not hoarded.

The aforementioned verse also refers to the act of not paying the duty that Allah *the Almighty* has ordered us to pay from our money. Thus, if the *zakat* due is taken from money, such money is not considered hoarded money because it decreases annually owing to the payment of *zakat*.

If we spend money and do not hoard it, markets will flourish and, therefore, there will be job opportunities and means for earning our living. For example, if you buy a washing machine or a refrigerator, or even build a small house, you are contributing to the economic development of the society. Meanwhile, we are developing the different means we use. Such prosperity stimulates people to discover more things that may serve humanity. On the one hand, hoarding all of our money leads to economic stagnation.

Evidently, this does not mean that a money holder spends all that s/he has because Allah *the Almighty* likes moderation in all things, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘And they who when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and (keep) between these the just balance.’(1) (*al-Furqan:* 67) Here, Allah *the Almighty* warns about being wasteful in our spending and not keeping a part of our money for any sudden crisis. At the same time, if we are niggardly, markets will stagnate; production will stop; and workers will stop working. But Islam wants a moderate spending that generates marketability of goods while saving what helps us promote our life and prepare us for crises.

There are two types of spending: first, spending for a material consideration which maintains a continuous trading between the producers and consumersand secondly, spending without a material consideration such as giving *zakat* to the poor, the needy, and the indigent. This purifies the society from many corruptions as it prevents malicious feelings among people.

If a poor person finds someone who satisfies his/her needs, s/he will ask Allah *the Almighty* to keep His Grace on the giver to be able to continue to give charities. Thus, the poor will not envy the rich as both of them receive equal benefit. When the poor person takes a charity, s/he will not feel dissatisfied with his/her state, but rather, s/he will be satisfied for receiving charity. Similarly, when the rich person gives a charity, s/he feels secure as s/he knows that if s/he no longer has this wealth, s/he will find someone who will give him/her. Thus, there will be a social equilibrium between people–no one will be unable to have the basic needs of life, and no one will have a surplus that s/he might hold from others.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…before death comes to one of you…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 10). This means that He *the Almighty* wants us to take advantage of this opportunity, and to make use of our lifetime before death overtakes us. It is out of Allah’s Great Wisdom that He made the time of death unknown to all people. Were the human being to know the time of his/her death, s/he would say, 'I will do whatever I want, then I will repent to Allah before death.'

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(1) *The word for ‘the just balance’ is being just, i.e. in the middle between being wasteful and miserly, that is, to be economical. In his Tafsir, Ibn Abu Hatim relates that Ibn Zayd says, ‘The just balance is to spend on the things that please Allah and to keep away from the unlawful things.’ See Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir, p. 15395.*

No one doubts the fact that s/he will die; it is the destiny of all people. It is the time when our reality as humans fades, our life stops and our deeds come to an end. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'When a man dies, his deeds come to an end, except for three: a continuous charity, knowledge by which people derive benefit, a pious son who prays for him.'(1)

When anyone dies, his/her deeds come to an end and his/her book of records is closed. S/he cannot compensate the good deeds or the degree of faith that s/he has lost. It is as if this death represents his/her Day of Resurrection. Every one of us should never feel that his/her lifetime in this worldly life is too long. This worldly lifetime extends to include all people's life span, so you should not think that your life span will be as long as that of the worldly life. So, one's life span is limited, and as long as the death time would come, believers should remember the saying of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'When any of you dies, this is his Day of Resurrection.'

It is out of the Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty* that He made the matter of death hidden in relation to time, cause, and place. So, this hidden nature of death is, in reality, the very essence of clarity because this makes the human being ready to face it at any time, for any reason and at any place. This is because death comes suddenly and does not depend on time, reason, or place. A child may die in his/her mother's womb, after a day or days of his/her birth or after a hundred years. S/he may also die without a reason. We may be surprised when one of us dies without apparent reason like a car accident, the falling down of a wall or a stone upon him, or an illness; so we wonder, 'What is the reason for his/her death?' The reason is death itself, i.e. s/he died because the time of his/her death has come. In this regard, it is being said that death without a reason is in itself the reason.

This death has a specific moment and hour that no one knows but Allah *the Almighty*. If a person's death time comes, s/he cannot delay nor hasten it, even for a minute, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* '…when their time comes, they cannot delay it for a moment nor can they bring it forward.' (*an-Nahl:* 61) No one can delay the time of death, or bring it forward, as it is controlled by Allah, the Lord of this universe. This appointed time comes and it cannot be postponed or hastened.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi grades it as good, authentic Hadith. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 4310; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2882; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1376; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8831.*

Then Allah *the Almighty* tells us about some of those who fail, throughout their lifetime, to spend or give *zakat* out of what He *the Almighty* has provided them with, or who do not perform the prayers, and who were then taken suddenly by death. Allah *the Almighty* mentions that such people would say: 'My Lord, if You would only reprieve me for a little while, I would give in charity and become one of the righteous.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 10)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…would only reprieve me for a little while,' (*al-Munafiqun:* 10) this means that they ask Allah *the Almighty* to give them more time and to extend their lifetime even for a little short period so they can have further opportunity in life. The reason behind this failure is the extended false hope in life by which they were deceived. This is similar to the case of a person who dies before s/he can perform the Islamic pilgrimage; if Allah *the Almighty* would extend his/her life till s/he performs it, this obligation would be waived. But who can give him/her a guarantee that s/he will live until that time? Therefore, one of Prophet Muhammad's Hadiths states: 'Perform *Hajj* (Islamic pilgrimage) before you will not be able to perform it.'(1)

Similarly, regarding the performance of the prayers, it seems that we have long and extended time for performing them, but who can guarantee such extendedness?! That is why the one who does not perform the prayers will be considered a sinner at the last moment of his/her life, i.e. if s/he has the opportunity to live till performing all the obligatory prayers, s/he will bear no sin. However, such limited lifetime is doubted and uncertain; we may die at any moment, and, as we said before, when a person dies, his/her Day of Resurrection begins.

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(1) *Ad-Daraqutni narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said: 'Perform Hajj before you will not be able to perform it.' Then he was asked, 'What would be the problem in performing Hajj to Mecca?' He said, 'The Bedouins will be at the gates of its valleys and no one can reach it.' It is also narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Al Fakihi. See Ad-Daraqutni, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2795; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 8963; and Al-Fakihi, Akhbar Makka, Hadith no. 809.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…I would give in charity and become one of the righteous.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 10) They ask Allah *the Almighty* to let them get back to life so that they can correct their deeds, yet their request will be unquestionably rejected. It is human nature that when death time approaches, the human being tends to repent and feel regret and remorse for his/her previous misdeeds and for his/her failure to do good deeds. So, s/he asks for extra time to pay *zakat*, perform Islamic pilgrimage, give charity, do more good deeds and voluntary acts of worship, and try to get closer to Allah *the Almighty* by doing the acts of goodness that He loves, but unfortunately, his/her wishes, requests and supplications will be of no avail.

The disbelievers ask Allah *the Almighty* imploringly to delay their death for a period of time so that they can compensate for the good deeds and the acts of spending that they were distracted from doing in this worldly life.

Here, someone may ask, 'Why do they ask for "a little while" (*al-Munafiqun:* 10) and not for a long period of time?' This is because it is commonly known among people that things that are simple and may not take much time are more likely to be accepted by an official. Therefore, such a conception prevails when they are asking Allah *the Almighty* and their souls follow the knowledge established in their minds.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '...and become one of the righteous.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 10) In our daily life, we say, 'S/he is a righteous person,' and to the opposite of that, we say, 'S/he is an unrighteous person.' A righteous person leaves what is good as it is, or adds to its goodness. On the contrary, an unrighteous or corrupt person tends to spoil the good thing and does not do any good.

The words 'righteous person' mean that s/he is a suitable person to be a Vicegerent of Allah *the Almighty* on earth; s/he executes the good aspect of any act. We can see that the Quran correlates the acts of giving charity and spending for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* with righteousness and being righteous.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And there are those of them who made a covenant with Allah: If He gives us out of His grace, we will certainly give alms and we will certainly be of the righteous.’ (*at-Tawba:* 75) The person referred to in this aforementioned verse is Tha‘laba.(1) He asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to supplicate to Allah *the Almighty* to make him a rich man. Then, after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed for him and after Allah *the Almighty* had given him an abundant wealth, he stingily refused to pay *zakat* and tried to evade payment.

After the revelation of theses verses, Tha‘laba tried to pay *zakat* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but he did not accept it. After the death of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he went to Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* but Abu Bakr did not accept it, too. Then, after the death of Abu Bakr, he went to ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him,* but he also did not accept it. Then Tha‘laba died during the reign of ‘Uthman *Allah be pleased with him*. This is what we can call rejection. (2)

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(1) His name is Tha‘laba ibn Hatib ibn ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubaid Al-Awsi Al-Ansari. He witnessed the Battle of *Badr,* as Muhamed ibn Ishaq says. He is the one who asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to ask Allah *the Almighty* to grant him wealth, then he refrained from paying *zakat.* Allah *the Almighty* then revealed some verses to Prophet Muhammad talking about this incident. He *the Almighty* says: ‘There are some among them who pledged themselves to Allah, saying, “If Allah gives us some of His Bounty, we shall certainly give alms and be righteous, ” yet when He did give them some of His Bounty, they became mean and turned obstinately away. Because they broke their promise to Allah, because of all the lies they told, He made hypocrisy settle in their hearts until the Day they meet Him.’ (*at-Tawba:* 75-77)

(2) *Abu Umama Al Bahli said, ‘Tha‘laba came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said to him, ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to provide me with wealth.’ Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Woe to you, Tha‘laba, a small amount of money that you can give its [due] thanks is better than having a wealth that you cannot give its [due] thanks.’ He said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to provide me with wealth.’ Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Woe to you, Tha‘laba, do you not want to be like me? If I asked Allah to turn these mountains into gold, He would turn them for me.’ He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to provide me with wealth. I swear by Allah Who sent you with the True Message, if He provided me with wealth, I will give everyone who has a right what is due to him.’ Prophet Muhammad repeated, ‘Woe to you, Tha‘laba, a small amount of money that you can give its [due] thanks is better than having a wealth that you cannot give its [due] thanks.’ But the man said [again]: ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to provide*=

What we need to highlight here is that giving charity, spending for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* and paying *zakat* are indications to the righteousness of the person. Giving charity spreads the sense of goodness among people and protects the poor from being driven to committing sins and being deviated from the right course.

Social solidarity must be established in societies; there must be cooperation among all the members of the society. If you are poor or needy and a rich person gives you what helps you to satisfy your needs, you will wish him/her all the best because whatever blessing s/he will have, you will have a share thereof. On the contrary, if s/he does not give you anything, mistakenly thinking that if s/he gives you, s/he will become poor, your feelings of bitterness towards him/her will be intensified.

Allah *the Almighty* wants the sense of social solidarity to be fostered in societies. That is why some Muslim scholars in Andalusia(1) believe that the punishment

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= *me with wealth.' Then Prophet Muhammad supplicated to Allah, saying, 'O Allah! Provide him with wealth.' Abu Umama said that Tha'laba bought sheep and their number increased rapidly like the number of worms increases. They increased till Medina became a small place for him to operate his trade. He took them to another place and was attending the prayers with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him only during the day and not at night. Then they doubled again in the same way that the number of worms grows. He took them to another place and thus did attend the prayers, neither during the day nor at night. He was only attending the Friday prayers with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. Then they trebled, so he moved to another more spacious place, and he thus did not attend any of the prayers with Prophet Muhammad, even Al-Janaza prayer. He even used to meet the caravans and ask them about the latest developments. Then Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked about him and he was told that he had bought sheep and moved to another place more spacious than Medina, and Prophet Muhammad was told his story. Then he peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Woe to Tha'laba Ibn Hatib, woe to Tha'laba ibn Hatib.'*

(1) *Allah the Almighty commanded Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him to take alms. He the Almighty says: 'In order to cleanse and purify them [Prophet], accept a gift out of their property [to make amends]...' (at-Tawba: 103). Then, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him sent two men, one of them was from Juhayna tribe and the other was from Bani Salama, to collect alms and wrote for them the ages of the sheep and camels and how could they know this from their faces. He asked them to go to Tha'laba ibn Hatib and another man from Salim tribe. When they reached Tha'laba and asked him to pay alms, he said to them, 'Show me the letter you have, ' and after having a look, he said to them, 'It is a mere levy, continue your way and pass by on your way back.' For this incident, Allah the Almighty revealed the following verse: 'There are some among them who pledged themselves to Allah, saying, 'If Allah gives us some of His* =

that should be meted out on someone who refrains from paying *zakat* of anything which reaches the minimum amount on which *zakat* is payable is to cut his/her hand, that is to say, the punishment of theft. Those scholars actually depended on the fact that Allah *the Almighty* ordained *zakat* as being a 'due right,' and whoever refrains from paying a right to whom it is payable is deemed as if s/he has stolen it from him/her. The Muslim scholars in Andalusia adopted this opinion for they were living in a rich country so that they were conservative towards this issue as there was no excuse for anyone who did so.

When individuals perform good deeds, everyone will receive larger returns of the good deeds done by others than those done by him/herself, i.e. s/he is one individual and benefits from the good deeds of the whole society. Hence, we should not feel that the Lawgiver's Orders and Obligations are burdens. In this way, we can deal in life with feelings of satisfaction at times of prosperity and feelings of safety at times of poverty.

The believers ask Allah *the Almighty* to return them back to the worldly life and to give them a chance to do good deeds. One of the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives this meaning: 'Whoever has wealth which enables him to perform the Islamic pilgrimage to the House of his Lord, or upon which *zakat* is obligatory, but he does not do it, then he shall ask to return to the worldly life upon his death.'(1)

When Ibn 'Abbas narrated this Hadith, a man said to him, 'O, Ibn 'Abbas! Fear Allah! Only the disbelievers are the ones who will ask to be returned to

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= *Bounty, we shall certainly give alms...' (at-Tawba: 75). Knowing about the revelation of this verse, Tha'laba came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said to him, 'This is the due alms of my wealth,' whereupon he peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allah ordered me not to take alms from you.' Then he started to regretfully weep and cry. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'You brought it upon yourself. I ordered you and you did not obey.' Prophet Muhammad did not accept the alms from him until his death. Then Tha'laba went to Abu Bakr, and he did not accept it; after that he went to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab who also did not accept it. See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, 5/290.*

(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this Hadith and ascribes it to 'Abd ibn Hamid, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim, At-Tabarani and Ibn Murdawayh, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas. It is also narrated by Ibn Abu Hatim, At-Tirmidhi and Hamid ibn Zanjwyh. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 8/179; see also Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir, 3316; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 18901; and Hamid Ibn Zanjwyh, Al-'Mwal, 1352.*

the worldly life.’ In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: Send me back, my Lord, send me back; Haply I may do good in that which I have left. By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks; and before them is a barrier until the day they are raised.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 99-100) But Ibn ‘Abbas, who was known as the ‘Interpreter of the Quran’, clarified to them what they did not know. He said to them, ‘I will recite to you verses of the Quran,’ and he recited: ‘Believers, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering Allah: those who do so will be the ones who lose. Give out of what We have provided for you, before death comes to one of you and he says, “My Lord, if You would only reprieve me for a little while, I would give in charity and become one of the righteous.”’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 9-10)

Throughout the worldly life, the believers are asked to hasten to good deeds before their death, and no one of them should think that s/he can escape from Allah’s Ordinance of death. He *the Almighty* says: ‘And a soul will not die, but with the permission of Allah the term is fixed…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 145). The ‘fixed term’ sometimes refers to the whole lifetime of the human being, yet it may also refer to the time of his/her death. When a killer destroys by his/her act of killing the structure of the killed, s/he is just doing so at the appointed term that Allah *the Almighty* has previously set. But, if so, why is the killer punished? As a matter of fact, s/he is punished because s/he destroyed the structure of another person.

If some of the scholars who care about scrutinising words ask, ‘If the killed person had not been killed by the killer, would have s/he died?’ The answer is ‘yes’ because the killed person died because his/her death time has come. But, did the killer know the killed person’s appointed death time? No, s/he did not. Therefore, s/he is punished for committing the crime of causing death. According to Allah’s Will, the killed person was destined to die in that way. Death is to die without the body structure being destroyed; this is only done by Allah *the Almighty*. But the act of killing and causing destruction to the body structure can be done by anyone, and then the person dies by Allah’s Will. This does not mean that the killer has interfered and hastened the time of death of the killed, but s/he merely interfered and caused destruction to a body structure that Allah *the Almighty* has built. If no one interfered to cause such destruction to this body, it still would have died at its appointed term.

No one of us knows when s/he is going to die, no matter how so many physicians s/he sees, a point which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'He it is Who created you from clay, then He decreed a term; and there is a term named with Him; still you doubt.' (*al-An'am:* 2) With regard to Allah's saying: '…then He decreed a term…' (*al-An'am:* 2), it means that He *the Almighty* has specified a term of death for every one of us, and another appointed term for everything. So, the individuals will continue to meet their appointed time of death until the appointed time of the whole comes, which is the Day of Resurrection.

There is a piece of wisdom behind setting the moment of the human being's death at a time that is only known to Allah *the Almighty*. So if someone knows when s/he is going to die, s/he may commit sins for a long time, and then starts to do good deeds shortly before the time of death. But Allah *the Almighty* wants the time of death to be hidden, so it may occur at any time.

In this vein, He *the Almighty* says: 'And for every nation there is a doom, so when their doom is come they shall not remain behind the least while, nor shall they go before.' (*al-A'raf:* 34) When one's appointed time of death comes, no one can delay it, because it is controlled by the Maintainer of the universe, or hasten it as we do not know when it will come. When Allah *the Almighty* hides the time of death from us, it is as if He makes it a commonly known time. In fact, such hiddenness is the best way to make it obvious. Thus, when He *the Almighty* wants to make something very clear to us, He makes it obscure. Let us give an example to illustrate this point further; if He *the Almighty* sets a certain age for death, it would be totally a fixed time with no hope to change. But He *the Almighty* has not set for death certain age or cause, but rather made it possible to occur at all times. The human being may die at any moment; it does not depend on a reason, but it happens for and without a reason.

As long as the human being expects death at any moment, a sinner should not meet Allah *the Almighty* while s/he is committing sins. Death can be caused by many things, and it also can happen without a material cause. When it happens with no evident cause, then death itself is the cause, i.e. if someone just dies with no evident cause, s/he dies because the end of his/her lifetime has come.

There is an end waiting for every one of us; an end for the lifetime of every individual. Besides, there is an appointed time for the end of the lifetime of the whole, which is the Day of Resurrection. If such end comes, it cannot be delayed or hastened.

We have to know that every lifetime, even if long, can be counted, and anything that can be counted is still ‘few’ even if it seemed ‘many,’ i.e. anything that can be counted is considered few as long as we are able to enumerate it.

Can anyone guarantee that our lifetime will be extended until we repent? Death comes suddenly and our souls are not destined to be given a delay because, after reaching the end of our lifetime, this is impossible.

Reality proves to us that our ages are not similar, nor are the causes of death. Allah *the Almighty* has made the human soul expect death at any moment of our life. Thus, death exists at all times. As long as this is the case, we should be aware and fear to die while we are committing a sin. As we said before, hiddenness is the best way to make things obvious.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَلَن يُؤَخِّرَ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَآءَ أَجَلُهَا ۚ وَٱللَّهُ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١١﴾

God does not reprieve a soul when its turn
comes: God is fully aware of what you do [11]
(The Quran, *al-Munafiqun:* 11)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* puts an end to the hopes of the sinners, criminals and hypocrites who might think that He *the Almighty* may delay the death of a soul whose time has come so that it can do what it could not do at the time of health and wealth and when there was a space of time in the worldly life; such delay cannot be achieved.

In this verse, He *the Almighty* employs the particle *Lan* (does not) to negate the future. He *the Almighty* does not say ‘did not’, but rather, He says ‘does not,’ which means that the delaying of a soul’s appointed time of death will never happen. So, He *the Almighty* advises us not to give ourselves vague and groundless hopes. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘This shall not be in accordance with your vain desires or in accordance with the vain desires of the followers of the Book; whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it…' (*an-Nisa':* 123).

What is a false hope? A false hope is a thing that you heartily wish that it would happen, yet it is impossible to happen. So, it will not occur and will never exist. False hopes mean that you deeply want a wish to be achieved while you do not have any practical means to achieve it. Thus, false hopes are the fools' longing for wishes that cannot be achieved, that is why they are 'false'.

In this verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* uses the word 'soul' as it refers to both the body and spirit of the human being. So, the assembly of both constitutes the soul. The soul has the choice whether to be obedient or disobedient. This will become much clearer when we quote the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When you kill a soul…' (*al-Baqara:* 72). Here, the act of killing occurs both to the substance which is the body, by destroying its structure, and to the spirit, by causing its death. So the soul includes both together, as both of them constitute the human being.

Allah *the Almighty* uses the word 'soul' here and in many other instances without a definite article. Also, the one who scrutinises the verses of the Quran will find that when this word 'soul' has the definite article, it also refers to the body and spirit together. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'In the Torah We prescribed for them the soul for the soul...' (*al-Ma'ida:* 45) and He *the Almighty* says: 'Do not kill the soul Allah has made sacred...' (*al-An'am:* 151). The word 'soul' here came with the definite article 'the', thus it means both the body and the spirit of the human being together.

But, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...man's very soul incites him to evil...' (*Yusuf:* 53) and His saying: '...you, soul at peace...' (*al-Fajr:* 27) the word 'soul' is used to refer only to the spirit of the human being.

One of the manifestations of the highly Quranic styles is that it uses one word to give various meanings. When Allah *the Almighty* says: '…when its death time comes...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11), He says: '…its death time…' and does not say, 'The death time,' as a general term. Here, He *the Almighty* connects the death time to the soul which is mentioned here without a definite article. This means that every soul has its own death time which is not related to the other souls. There are those who die in their mothers' wombs; others might live for an hour or two then die; yet others might live too long. Even the foetuses that die in their mother's wombs, some of them die after one hour, whilst others die after a month or months.

Death overtakes all living souls; this is a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Wherever you are, death will overtake you, though you are in lofty towers…' (*an-Nisa':* 78). The word 'overtake' shows that when the human being becomes alive, his/her spirit is being pursued by death till it overtakes it at the time that Allah *the Almighty* has previously specified.

Mystic scholars say: 'Death is like an arrow which has been shot towards you, and your life span is as long as the time it takes to reach you.'(1) Thus, we realise that this word 'overtake' demonstrates that the human being's life and spirit are pursued by death until it overtakes them.

With regard to the moment of death, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And He is the Supreme, above His servants, and He sends keepers over you; until when death comes to one of you, Our messengers cause him to die, and they are not remiss.' (*al-An'am:* 61) Those messengers do not disregard, fail in, or exceed the limit of their duty. They come to us at the appointed moment set previously by Allah *the Almighty* not before or after it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Our messengers cause him to die...' (*al-An'am:* 61) and: 'Allah takes the souls at the time of their death....' (*az-Zumar:* 42).

The Arabic word for 'cause to die' linguistically means to take something in full. The Arabic language shows this clearly. For example, if you lent money to someone, then s/he asks you to deduct part of the loan and you refuse saying, 'I want to take my money in full,' when s/he yet pays you all your money, you say, 'I took my money in full, my money.'

With regard to delaying the time of death, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And warn people of the day when the chastisement shall come to them, then those who were unjust will say: O our Lord! Respite us to a near term, (so) we shall respond to Your call and follow the Messengers. What! Did you not swear before (that) there will be no passing away for you'? (*Ibrahim:* 44) The last two verses of the chapter of *al-Munafiqun* arouse the fear that asking for a delay may be similar to what the disbelievers mistakenly think that Allah *the Almighty* may delay their reckoning time and may return them back to worldly life so that they may do good deeds and respond to the call of the Messengers, though they were swearing before that there is no Resurrection after death: 'What! Did you not swear before (that) there will be no passing away for you'? (*Ibrahim:* 44) Can anyone repel against death when it comes to him/her? We have no power to refuse the exit of our spirits from our bodies, a fact which is crystal clear in the Quran; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And He is the Supreme, above His servants, and He sends keepers(1) over you; until when death comes to one of you, Our messengers cause him to die, and they are not remiss.' (*al-An'am:* 61)

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(1) *'Abdullah ibn Al-Mu'taz said, 'Death is like an arrow which is shot towards you, and your lifetime is as long as the time it takes to reach you.' See Ath-Tha'alibi, Al-I'jaz, 1/90; and Abu Ishaq Al-Qirawany, Zahr Al-Adab Wa Thimar Al- Albab, 2/251.*

Allah *the Almighty* talks about their expected behaviour as an unquestionable issue. He *the Almighty* says: '…and if they were sent back, they would certainly go back to that which they are forbidden…' (*al-An'am:* 28). Whether they are returned again to the worldly life or their death time is postponed, they will return to the bad deeds and to the things that they were forbidden from doing. They are not honest in their request to return back to life, nor are they honest in their demand for a delay for their death time. If someone really had wanted to do good deeds, s/he would have done them at the times of health and power and when s/he had a space of time.

Thus, we can understand that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Allah does not reprieve a soul when its death time comes...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11) urges us to hurry to perform good deeds in advance of the coming of death. So, we should hasten to do good acts and be prepared for what is coming. Allah *the Almighty* will not grant a delay period for anyone, whoever s/he is, nor will He elongate his/her lifetime. This incites people to hurry towards performing good acts, lest death time comes while they had fallen short in doing good deeds, or while they had not prepared themselves for meeting their Lord *Glorified is He*.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: 'Allah is fully Aware of what you do.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11) The fact that Allah *the Almighty* is fully

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(1) Here, the keepers are the watching angels. In his lexicon, Ibn Mandhur says, 'The keepers are the angels who list and record the deeds of the children of Adam; they are the watching angels.' *See, Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 1/163;* Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan Al-'Arab, root: Hafizha.*

Aware of what we do makes our hearts filled with fear and awe. The human being can deceive other humans like him/her. For example, there are some people who evade taxation by making two tax records, one for the real gains and another for the false losses. Such tax evaders own money and deny it. Such persons have to know that Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of all what they are doing. Therefore, we find in many instances in the Quran that Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself as the All-Subtle, Who knows the minute details of everything, the All-Aware and the Omnipotent over all things.

In our daily life, we frequently use the Arabic word for 'All-Aware' to mean 'an expert'. For example, when we face a problem, we say, 'We need the opinion of an expert,' and in courts of law we find the judge requests an expert to write a report on a special matter that this expert is specialised in and knows more about it. So, the expert in a certain field is the one who knows its details. What if we are talking about Allah, the All-Aware Who is not disobeyed by anything in His Dominion and Who perfectly knows everything in the universe, be it hidden or apparent? So, you should not deceive yourself, for if you hide something from people, it cannot be hidden from Allah *the Almighty*. If you were able to escape the law on earth, you will not be able to escape the Judgment of Allah *the Almighty*. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And your Lord will most surely pay back to all their deeds in full; surely He is aware of what they do.' (*Hud:* 111)

Allah *the Almighty* is Fully Aware of the deeds of His servants while they are doing them, and also before they do them. But when such deeds occur, they will be held accounted for them; they will not go in vain because the One Who knows about such deeds is the All-Aware Who has All-Knowledge.

The expert differs from the one who has general knowledge in that s/he is highly specialised in a particular field. That is why the two terms 'the All-Subtle' and 'the All-Aware' are usually used together because the 'All-Aware' means the One Who knows the places where things are, and the 'All-Subtle' means the One Who knows how to reach these places. For example, you may know the place where someone is hiding in a mountain, but such knowledge or information is not enough to reach and enter his/her place. But this needs something more which is experience, and more importantly, accuracy and delicacy.

Nothing can hinder Allah *the Almighty* as He is the All-Knower of the positions and locations of all things. He *Glorified is He* possesses both All-Subtlety and All-Awareness. His Power to know all the details cannot be confronted by anyone; nothing can be concealed from Him and nothing can stand against His Will.

Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of the positions of things, and His Knowledge is infinite. He is the All-Wise Who runs the course of events according to His Wisdom and no one can add to Him anything. He has the Absolute Perfection.

In some verses of the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* mentions His Attribute of All-Subtlety and All-Awareness together. He *the Almighty* tells us what Luqman was saying to his son: 'My son, if even the weight of a mustard (1) seed were hidden in a rock or anywhere in the heavens or earth, Allah would bring it [to light], for He is All-Subtle and All-Aware.' (*Luqman:* 16)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…even the weight of a mustard seed…' (*Luqman:* 16) it means something which is equal to the weight of a mustard seed. This was the smallest thing they knew at that time, so they used it as a unit which indicates small things. So, no one now can wonder and ask, 'Is a mustard seed the smallest thing in the universe?' The Quran used it as an example for tininess according to the people's knowledge at the time of revelation. But for purposes of validation, we will find that the Quran mentioned atoms and other smaller things.

Allah *the Almighty* is the All Subtle. No matter how small or tiny things are, He reaches it by His Knowledge. Thus, He is the All-Aware and All Knowing of everything, regardless of how small it is. He is the All-Able to reach them regardless of how delicate they are because He is the All-Subtle and nothing can hinder Him. The Attribute of being All-Subtle means the full ability to know the minute details of things.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He is All-Subtle and All-Aware,' (*Luqman:* 16) this means that He is neither in need for more Knowledge about space nor for something to facilitate access to things.

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(1) Mustard is a tiny plant; if its seeds become dry, it becomes extremely tiny. It is an herb plant whose taste is bitter and whose seeds are used in medicine. *See Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 1/190.*

As long as: 'Allah is Fully Aware of what you do,' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11) He is the One Who provides you with goodness of deeds by His Awareness, Wisdom, Omnipotence and Ever-Watchfulness. Awareness means the complete and wide knowledge that nothing, no matter how minute it is, can escape it owner. Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of our inner souls; He knows our inner thoughts and our intentions of doing good deeds. If someone does something in secrecy, s/he should not think, even if the people do not witness him/her, that this deed is forgotten. Indeed, it is not forgotten; Allah *the Almighty* knows what everyone does even if no one has witnessed him/her.

Someone may ask, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* end the chapter of *al-Munafiqun* by His saying: 'Allah is Fully Aware of what you do.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11)? The reason is clear. The original meaning of hypocrisy is to hide something other than what you show by your words or deeds. So He *the Almighty* clearly tells the hypocrites that He knows the reality of what they are doing or saying. He knows their secrets, their private discussions and what they are hiding.

Additionally, the chapter of *al-Munafiqun* talks about the issue of giving charity and spending out of our money. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Give out of what We have provided for you, before death comes to one of you and he says, "My Lord, if You would only reprieve me for a little while, I would give in charity and become one of the righteous."' (*al-Munafiqun:* 10) Here, He *the Almighty* is fully Aware of our intentions behind giving of charity, be they concealed or disclosed. In addition, He *the Almighty* will reward us according to them. It is not disapproved that your giving of charity is disclosed as long as it is done for the purpose of giving a good example.

What is important is that when you give charity, you should dismiss any intention of showing-off. Allah *the Almighty* puts it clear to us that we should not spend while we are showing-off. However, the one who gives charity while his/her heart is waiting for praise, this charity will reach to the poor; they will not be deprived of it, yet the giver will not be rewarded. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to the poor, 'Take the charity from him/her, but s/he will be the loser and s/he will not be rewarded, although the society will reap the benefit.'

Thus, the end of the chapter of *al-Munafiqun* is in line with its subject. When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah is Fully Aware of what you do,' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11) He reminds and warns the hypocrites that all their actions cannot be concealed from Him. Here, He *the Almighty* says that He is fully Aware of what we do; He does not mention what we say because 'doing' in Arabic includes both the actions and the sayings.

Allah *the Almighty* knows every act or feeling, a matter which requires being Fully Aware and All-Subtle. Deeds are divided into three types: the sayings of the tongue; the actions of the limbs; and the intentions and desires of the heart.

You should be aware of doing deeds that look sincere but, in reality, you are waiting for adulation. Every organ of our body has a field in which it performs its function. The function of the tongue is to utter; the ears' function is to listen; and the function of the nose is to smell; and all of them are gathered under the umbrella of deeds which include both the acts and the sayings. Sayings are made by the tongue, whilst acts are made by the other body organs.

This chapter also discusses what the hypocrites were saying. They said: 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) As Allah *the Almighty* is the All-Aware, He continues and says: 'Allah knows that you truly are His Messenger. He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1)

Allah *the Almighty* also says about them: 'They are the ones who say, "Give nothing to those who follow Allah's Messenger until they abandon him."' (*al-Munafiqun:* 7) They also said: 'Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 8) Those are examples for their sayings.

As for their acts, they are the ones whose children and wealth distract them from remembering Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, He *the Almighty* commands the believers not to be like the hypocrites in their acts, saying: 'Believers, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering Allah...' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9) because this is an act, and Allah *the Almighty* says: '…those who do so will be the ones who lose.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 9)

Lastly, the hypocrites do not give charities, and prevent others from doing so, and this is an act. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Allah is fully aware of what you do' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11) includes both of their sayings and the acts they did not do. Thus, deeds include acts and sayings.

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المجلد (25)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (25)

the chapter of

at-Taghabun

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *at-Taghabun* (1):

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِۖ لَهُ ٱلْمُلْكُ
وَلَهُ ٱلْحَمْدُۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٖ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١﴾

Everything that is in the heavens and earth glorifies God; all control and all praise belong to Him; He has power over everything [1] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 1)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* states a fact that the human being is not aware of, that is, the earth which we walk on and which He *the Almighty* has made subservient to us is glorifying Him *Glorified is He* the heavens that are above us and shelter us and which He *the Almighty* holds from falling upon the earth are also glorifying Him *the Almighty*. So, why does the human being deviate from this matter and does not glorify and exalt Him, Who is above all imperfections, and do like what the inanimate things do?

The human being thinks that such inanimate things are totally senseless, while this is not the truth. They do not glorify Allah *the Almighty* temporarily, but rather, they permanently glorify Him. That is why He *the Almighty* uses here the present tense,(1) which means that their glorification for Him *the Almighty* started in the past, is happening in the present time and will continue in the future.

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(1) The number of verses of this chapter in question is 18. Scholars differed on whether it was revealed in Mecca or Medina. In his *Tafsir*, As-Sam'ani says, 'Most of the scholars say it was revealed in Medina.' Ad-Dahhak said it was revealed in Mecca. Al-Kalbi said it is both Meccan and Medinan, which means that some of its verses were revealed in Mecca and some others were revealed in Medina. It was revealed after the chapter of *at-Tahrim*. It is chapter number 64 of the Quran. It is the last chapter that begins with a glorification for Allah. *See As-Sam'ani, Tafsir Al-Quran, 5/448*

The heavens and the earth are part of the vast universe which we know little about its secrets and facts. The heavens and earth are under the control and Power of Allah *the Almighty* so they obey His Orders. Even if the human being cannot understand the nature of this glorification made by what is in the heavens and the earth and how it can be done, s/he can realise it as a practical glorification, i.e. when the heavens rain, this rain can be considered as a glorification for Allah *the Almighty* as they obeyed His Order to rain on His servants. As for the glorification of the earth, it is clear in the fact that it produces various kinds of plants.

What about you, O man? What do you do?! You rebel against Allah *the Almighty* and disobey His Orders. You are not like what is in the heavens in their glorification for Allah *the Almighty* nor like what is on earth in their submission to Him and in their bringing benefit for people. Allah *the Almighty* talks about this obedience of the heavens and the earth, saying: ‘Then He directed Himself to the heaven and it is a vapour, so He said to it and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly. They both said: We come willingly.’ (*Fussilat:* 11)

So, you who believe in Allah *the Almighty* as your Lord shall glorify Him, as all the universe does. You should never think that you can escape from His Dominion. That is why He *the Almighty* then says: ‘…all control and all praise belong to Him.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 1) This means that you and whatever you own is the property of Allah *the Almighty* and that He has the Power over you. He is the Only Owner of the Kingdom. In the worldly life, He *the Almighty* made things belong to people according to their efforts, but in the Hereafter no one will have any control. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).’ (*Ghafir:* 16) Also, He *the Almighty* says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘Say, “Allah, holder of all control”…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). No one has control over things except Allah *the Almighty*. The control we have over things is not obtained by ourselves because if so, no one would be able to take it from us, and we would never lose it.

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(1) The present tense in Arabic Language refers to an act that started in the past, still continuing in the present time, and will continue in the future as well.

Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who gives control to whomever He wants. He is the Grantor of sovereignty, power, and authority. No one, even the tyrant, can force Him *the Almighty* to do something. That is why He *Glorified is He* says elsewhere in the Quran: ‘Say, “Allah, holder of all control, You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will; You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your Hand: You have power over everything.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26)

It is necessary to know that there is a difference between ‘ownership’ and ‘sovereignty’. Everyone has something which s/he owns such as clothes, pen, or the furniture of his/her house. Such things are called possessions, whereas ‘sovereignty’ means to have control over those who have ownership. Allah *the Almighty* has given sovereignty to some human beings over others. First, He *the Almighty* gave them ownership of some items, and then He gave sovereignty to others over them. Allah *the Almighty* removes sovereignty from one and gives it to another in order to avoid monotony. He has the real sovereignty; He grants from His sovereignty to whomever He wills. However, the king and what lies in his sovereignty are controlled by Allah *the Almighty* since He is Ever Watchful over His creatures. No one gets out of His control.

Allah *the Almighty* has the everlasting sovereignty of the worldly life and the Hereafter. Since there is sovereignty in the worldly life, He *Glorified is He* grants part of it to His creatures, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘…because Allah had given him the kingdom…’ (*al-Baqara:* 258). He *the Almighty* also says in another verse: ‘…You give control to whoever You will and remove it from whoever You will...’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). So, it is clear that sovereignty is for Allah *the Almighty* and that He gives it to His creatures in the worldly life for certain reasons. However, in the Hereafter, sovereignty will be removed from everyone except Allah *the Almighty*; even the human being’s control over his/her senses will be taken away from him/her that his/her senses will testify against him/her, saying what s/he did in the worldly life.

The fact that all-sovereignty belongs only to Allah *the Almighty* ensures that the components of life on earth are sustained; the air will not be cut one day; the sun, the moon and the earth will never refuse to serve you one day because they are controlled by Allah *the Almighty*. No one shares their sovereignty with Him, and so no one can prevent you from them. They are guaranteed to serve you all the time, so do not worry about them. This is because the sovereignty of the heavens, the earth, and that which is on, inside, and between them all belong to Allah *the Almighty* Alone. In this regard, He says: 'Do you not see that Allah drives along the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up, so that you see the rain coming forth from their midst? And He sends down of the clouds that are (like) mountains wherein is hail, afflicting there with whom He pleases and turning it away from whom He pleases; the flash of His lightning almost takes away the sight.' (*an-Nur:* 43)

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do not think those who rejoice for what they have done and love that they should be praised for what they have not done—so do by no means think them to be safe from the chastisement, and they shall have a painful chastisement.' (*an-Nur:* 188) This threatening will be achieved since no one can escape from Him out of the ultimate fact that He *the Almighty* is the Owner of the heavens and the earth. When He promises, He is Fully Able to execute what He has promised, thus no one will escape from Him. We live within His dominion; the sky is above us and the earth holds us. Both are the possessions of Allah *the Almighty* so where will you go?

Allah's Omnipotence is manifested in the issue of reproduction. He *the Almighty* says: 'To Allah is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons. Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren…' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50). He *the Almighty* has the Absolute Power to create whatever He wills. So, He *the Almighty* willed to divide people into the four logical categories, as follows: whether to create them from both parents, or to create a human being without two parents, like Adam, or to create a being from the male only, like Eve, or to create through the female only like Jesus *peace be upon him*.

The heavens and the earth are the place where all creatures, including the constellations, the sun, the planets, the moon, the stars, the air, the clouds, water, the animals, and the human beings, exist. The earth is the bottom dominion which we see, and which upon it exist food, animals and the human beings. The heavens with all of their components represent the higher dominion; they both are the Possessions of Allah *the Almighty*. He is the Supreme Owner of everything and owns even the owners of things. No creature can avert from His Will. As for the worldly life, He *the Almighty* made its means of sustenance under the control of people; for instance, the provision of one human being is under the control of another. He *the Almighty* also has made some of us take control of the affairs of others; for instance, someone owns the food, while another owns clothes.

However, not every owner is sovereign because the sovereign is the one who owns the owners. This is a Divine Law in the universe. By contrast, in the Hereafter, there is One Sovereign Who has control over the Day of Judgment. He *the Almighty* owns the whole universe which is composed of various elements. The first element is the servant which is not served, namely, the inanimate objects, including water, mountains, iron, the sun, the moon and the stars, etc. All of these are inanimate objects since they have no senses. Such inanimate objects serve first the plants; the plants then serve the animals and finally the animals serve the human being. Thus, the inanimate objects are servants for all the superior elements: the plants, animals and the human being. The plants serve their superior elements as well which are animals and the human being, while the animals serve their superior element which is the human being.

So, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…all control and all praise belongs to Him…' (*at-Taghabun:* 1). Whenever you hear the word 'praise', you have to understand that it is the word of glorification, commendation and gratitude. Praise is something innate that we direct to Allah *the Almighty* since He has provided each one of us with His Provision, as He *Glorified is He* is the Provider of Graces. Due to His Mercy, He *the Almighty* has made thanking Him in these words: 'Praise be to Allah.' By contrast, when you want to thank someone for a favour s/he did for you, you may spend long hours eliciting the words of gratitude and praise, removing, and adding and asking people about their opinions until you figure out a poem or a letter full of praise and gratitude. Thus, due to His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* has taught us the way of praising Him. If He had left the matter without specifying these words, it would have been challenging for people to find the appropriate expression to praise Him for His Divine Perfection.

No matter how eloquent and fluent people are, they fail to come up with a praise formula appropriate for the Sublimity of Allah, the Provider. How do we praise Allah *the Almighty* while the mind is unable to realise His Omnipotence, count His favours or comprehend His Mercy? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* depicts the human failure to thank the Divine Perfection of Allah *the Almighty* saying, ‘I cannot enumerate Your praises as You praise Yourself.’(1)

Allah *the Almighty* makes all people equal through these words of praise; the illiterate who does not read or write expresses his/her gratitude through these words like all other people. As Allah *the Almighty* is All Just, He wants to make all His worshipers equal using one praise formula. The first words in the Quran are: ‘All praise belongs to the Lord of the Worlds.’ (*al-Fatiha:* 2) Before He created us, Allah *the Almighty* had created all the favours due for praise; He created the heavens and the earth; He provided us with water and air and placed on earth its sustenance until the Day of Judgment.

This is a favour which deserves praising because Allah *the Almighty* created His favours even before He created mankind. So, when He *the Almighty* created the human being, His favours were already there receiving him/her. Moreover, He created Adam, father of all mankind, after He had created paradise wherein he lived without fatigue or misery. So, He *the Almighty* is praised because all that is praiseworthy is actually found in the universe, even before the existence of mankind. He created in this universe what supports the human being without effort or submission; however, the human being is unable to provide him/herself with these favours which Allah *the Almighty* offers without efforts. The sun gives warmth and life to the earth without compensation or effort by the humans; the rain is sent down from the heavens without effort or ability to bring it down; and the air is there surrounding you everywhere in order to breathe with no effort or ability; even the earth provides you with fruits as soon as you sow it and water it; the plants grow by the Will of Allah *the Almighty*. Meanwhile, the day and night rotate in order that you can sleep and seek sustenance for your life. You did not bring the light of the day, nor did you make the darkness of the night; however, you rest at night and work all day thanks to Allah's Omnipotence and without any interference by us. This necessitates due praise.

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(1) *‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her said, ‘One night I missed the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him from bed so I felt for him with my hand and I put my hand on his feet and he was prostrating and saying, “I seek refuge in Your Pleasure from Your Wrath, in Your Forgiveness from Your punishment and in You from You. I cannot enumerate Your Praises as You praise Yourself.”’ See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1118; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 879; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3493.*

When you say, 'Praise belongs to Allah,' this carries meanings of gratitude that even fails to provide due thanks to Allah *the Almighty* Who is All-Perfect and Who is the Provider of All Bounties. These words are not only uttered through the mouth, they pass through the mind first in order to be aware of the Greatness of Allah's Favours. They then settle in the heart in order to be influenced by the Favours, and they finally move to the organs. Thereupon, the person stands up to perform prayers thanking Allah *the Almighty* with all his/her body shaking and trembling and with his/her eyes full of tears. Allah's return of our souls to us after getting up from sleep is a favour that deserves praising. If we stood up, this is due to the ability that Allah *the Almighty* has granted us. As a matter of fact, without this ability, we would not be able to stand up. This deserves praising as well. (1)

Any movement of the human being in this worldly life requires praise. So, the human being should praise Allah *the Almighty* constantly. S/he should praise Him *Glorified is He* for any harm striking him/her because what you, O man, think as evil may entail good in essence. You should praise Allah *the Almighty* for all conditions because His Predestination is good, whether you like it or not. It is good for you because you do not know, while Allah *the Almighty* perfectly knows.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'When any of you goes to bed, he should say, 'With Your Name, my Lord, I place my side and with Your Grace I will raise it up. If you withhold my soul [cause me to die], have mercy on it but if You let it go [let me live], guard it against which You guarded Your pious slaves.' And when you awaken, you should say, 'All praise is due to Allah Who healed me in my body, and returned to me my soul, and permitted me to remember Him' See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3401; see also An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 10636.*

Among the Most Beautiful Names of Allah *the Almighty* is the Praiseworthy and the Honourable; He, says: 'Indeed, He is Praiseworthy and Honourable.' (*Hud:* 73) So, He *the Almighty* deserves praise for Himself and for all that He does to His creatures; His Goodness and Benevolence are limitless. The Arabic word *Al-Hamid* '…Praiseworthy…' (*Hud:* 73) suggests two meanings: 'praising' and 'being praised'. So, Allah *the Almighty* is *Hamid* because He praises whoever obeys Him faithfully. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* is the Praised One because people praise Him for His Generous Favours.

Moreover, we praise Him *the Almighty* because His Destiny and His Knowledge of the unseen are concealed from us; He is the One Who protects us from the others, that is to say that we should praise Him *Glorified is He* since He concealed our fate from the others. If you knew what I hide in my heart, it might not please you; you might never forget that and thus harbour a bad idea about me. However, bad thoughts and ideas may pass through our minds and then we forget them, without even being known by others. If each one of us knew the unseen of the other, life would be exhausting. There is a popular saying, 'If you share all of your secrets, you will not bury each other.'(1) Therefore, one of the greatest favours of Allah *the Almighty* which deserves praise is that He *the Almighty* conceals the defects of people from each other.

Praise is also due to Allah *the Almighty*: 'And say: (All) praise is due to Allah, Who has not taken a son and Who has not a partner in the kingdom, and Who has not a helper to save Him from disgrace; and proclaim His Greatness magnifying (Him).' (*al-Isra':* 111) Allah *the Almighty* refrains from taking sons; He *Glorified is He* made all people, His servants, equal to each other. Yet, He *the Almighty* loves the most pious ones. Thus, all creatures receive Compassion and Mercy from Him *Glorified is He*.

In the verse in question of the chapter of *at-Taghabun,* Allah *the Almighty* says: '…all control and all praise belong to Him…' (*at-Taghabun:* 1) He also says in the chapter of *al-Isra'*: '…Who has not a partner in the kingdom…' (*al-Isra':* 111). This is also one of the bounties that require praising Allah *the Almighty* for can you imagine the confusion of the servants if there is a partner with Allah *the Almighty* in His Dominion? Which one should they obey and which one should they please?!

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(1) *In his book, Abu Bakr Ad-Dinury relates that Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, 'I hear faint sounds and see no one saying, "(The manners of) People went while the (manners of) monkeys remained. If you share all of your secrets, you will not bury each other. You exchanged plates as gifts, but you did not exchange pieces of advice."' Al-Mubarrid says, 'If you share your secrets, you will find it heavy to bury each other.' See Ad-Dinury, Al-Mujalasa Wa Jawahir Al-'Ilm, 3/21; see also Ibn Al-Jawzi, Gharib Al-Hadith, 2/291.*

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* explains for us this matter by offering us the following example: He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah sets forth an example: There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition?' (*az-Zumar:* 29) Allah's being One, without a partner, in His Dominion makes you feel reassured about His Command and Proscription because His Commands are certainly implemented and no one can reverse His Decision or even oppose Him. There is no other god who commands you to something contradictory to His command. Is this not a bounty for which Allah *the Almighty* requires praising?

Allah *the Almighty* never seeks the protection of anyone, nor does He seek the support of anyone. That is because He is *the Almighty* Who grants honour, Who is Self-Sustained and Who does not need anyone. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: '…and Who has not a helper to save Him from disgrace…' (*al-Isra':* 111).

The Bounties of Allah *the Almighty* that we should praise Him for are countless, but these three Bounties are at the top of them all, i.e. Praise belongs to Allah *the Almighty* because He has no child; Praise belongs to Allah *the Almighty* Who has no partner because He is the One God; and Praise belongs to Allah *the Almighty* Who is not so weak as to need a protector since He is the All-Dominant the Almighty and the One Who grants honour.

The word 'praise' in the verse in question indicates restriction, that is, the absolute and complete praise belongs only to Allah *the Almighty*. It is the praise that encompasses everything as He *the Almighty* says: 'All praise belongs to Him…' (*at-Taghabun:* 1). So, the absolute praise is confined to Allah *the Almighty* Alone. This Praise for Him *the Almighty* shall be continuous, so that He *Glorified is He* is praised forever and the servant keeps praising Him eternally. We are praising Him because He is glorified by all creatures, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'Everything that is in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah…' (*at-Taghabun:* 1) He is far exalted over any similarity with His creatures and this is a bounty for which we should thank Him *the Almighty* and praise Him. We should also praise Him because there is nothing like Him *Glorified is He*.

He is the All-Powerful Who never becomes weak and the All Knowing Who knows all that is in the heavens and the earth. He is the All-Generous Who never becomes stingy, and the All-Omnipotent Who never becomes disabled. This is a great bounty that also entails extending praising for Him *the Almighty*. How would He support those who believed in Him if He were weak? How would He know the distressed among His servants and answer their supplications if He were not All Knowing? How can a God grudge giving bounty to His creatures?!

Thus, all the praise belongs to Allah *the Almighty* because He is exalted over any defect, as He says: 'He has power over everything.' (*at-Taghabun:* 1) Everything is subjected to Allah's Will and Power. He says: 'Do you [Prophet] not know that control of the heavens and earth belongs solely to Allah?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 40) Therefore, everything in the universe is possessed by Allah *the Almighty* and He does what He wants in His Possession. So, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* emigrated to Medina, the Jews were possessing property and some religious and mundane knowledge. For this reason, they were the masters of Medina and started to scheme against him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* has made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* feel reassured that the Absolute Power in the universe belongs only to Him *Glorified is He* and that the Jews' sovereignty will not last forever because He *the Almighty* takes sovereignty away from whom He wills and gives it to whom He wills. As long as He *the Almighty* is the Only Sovereign, He can take from the Jews and from all the people in the worldly life what they possess because there is nothing that He cannot do and nothing can disobey Him, as He is the All-Powerful over everything. Thus, you should seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty* Who is the Supreme Creator and holds control over everything, thus nothing can dominate Him in His affairs. He is the Ever Powerful Who can give you or hold from you, and He *the Almighty* has Unlimited Power.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُمْ فَمِنكُمْ كَافِرٌ وَمِنكُم مُّؤْمِنٌ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ (٢)

It is He who created you, yet some of you disbelieve
and some believe: God sees everything you do [2]
(The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 2)

To start with, we must receive the information of how we were created only from Allah *the Almighty* because He is the One Who created us, thus we must believe Him regarding this matter. In this vein, He *the Almighty* says: 'I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as my supporters those who lead others astray.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) No one had ever claimed that s/he had created the creation, which is one of the well-established facts about the universe. Allah *the Almighty* has created the universe and all that is in it, and as no one else had claimed that, then this creation is purely attributed to Him *the Almighty*.

If there were many gods in the universe, every one of them would claim he had created the universe. However, no one except Allah *the Almighty* had claimed this. As this is the case, then it is a well-established fact that Allah is the Creator of everything. In fact, no one in the creation can claim that s/he has created him/herself or anyone else. Thus, the matter of creation conclusively belongs to Allah *the Almighty*.

In the Noble Quran, Allah *the Almighty* mentions for us what is unknown about the creation. He says that He has created man from dust, and then from clay which later became black mud fashioned in shape, and then He breathed the Spirit into him. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'O people! If you are in doubt about the raising, then surely We created you from dust.' (*al-Hajj:* 5) He also says: 'Surely We created them of firm clay.' (*as-Saffat:* 11) Further, He *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly We created man of clay that gives forth sound, of black mud fashioned in shape.' (*al-Hijr:* 26) Moreover, He *Glorified is He* says: 'So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down making obeisance to him.' (*Sad:* 72)

Thus, the Creator *Glorified is He* says that He has created the human being from dust which turned to clay and became black mud fashioned in shape and then became dry clay, like earthen vessels, after which He *the Almighty* shaped him in the form of a man. Then He *the Almighty* breathed into him of His Spirit and thus he became a living human being.

These stages have not been witnessed by the human being or any other creature, but Allah *the Almighty* has put forward evidence for these stages by what we can see in the case of death; the soul, which was the last thing to be put into the human being, is the first element to depart from the body. Then, the body becomes stiff like dry clay similar to earthen vessels. Afterwards, it decays and the water inside the body evaporates and thus returns to be dust. What we see in the case of death and the stages of the decay of the bodies makes us fully realise the stages of creating man from dust, which only happened for one time in the case of Adam *peace be upon him*. Thereafter, Eve was created from Adam and, afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* has made the reproduction of the human beings through the water (sperm) of the man and the woman.

In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘The man should reflect on what he was created from. He is created from spurting fluid, and then he emerges from between the backbone and breastbone.’ (*at-Tariq:* 5-7) In reality, this fluid, which is the sperm, has special characteristics about which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm which became a clinging form, which Allah shaped in due proportion’ (*al-Qiyama:* 37-38)?

Allah *the Almighty* creates either a male or a female from the sperm and gives them the ability of reproduction, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘We have created man from an essence of clay, then placed him as a drop of fluid in a safe place, then he made that drop into a clot of thick blood, and made that form into a piece of flesh, and made that piece into bones, and clothed those bones with flesh, and later made him into other forms—glory be to Allah, the best of creators.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 12-14)

In this regard, it is narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘A human being is put together in the womb of the mother for forty days, and then he becomes a clot of thick blood for a similar period, and then a piece of flesh for a similar period. Then Allah sends an angel who is ordered to write four things. He is ordered to write down his (i.e. the new creature's) deeds, his livelihood, his (date of) death, and whether he will be blessed or wretched (in religion). Then the soul is breathed into him.'(1)

Thus, the first stage of creation of the human being is the sperm which is spurted out of the man into the womb of the woman. This fluid is called the 'spermatozoon,' which carries, as the modern science has proved, the characteristics of either femaleness or maleness. Thus, the woman has nothing to do with determining the gender of the foetus. This seems to refer to women's mission as a source of serenity for the man, just as the ovum receives the spermatozoon and embraces it so that the development of the human being's creation completes.

The sperm-drop of the man mixes with woman's water to form what we call 'a clot of thick blood'. This happens when the sperm-drop attaches to the uterine wall after forty days. The embryologists call this clot of thick blood 'zygote', which refers to a fertilised ovum that starts to take its nourishment from it.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and made that form into a piece of flesh…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14), it means that out of this 'clot of thick blood,' Allah *the Almighty* then creates a piece of flesh which is proportional to the piece that can be chewed. In Arabic, the word *Mudgha* (piece of flesh) means a mixture of many kinds of food chewed together, as when one eats, for instance, a piece of meat with a spoon of a vegetable salad and a spoon of rice, which all finally turn into a mixture by chewing them together.

As far as the creation of the human being is concerned, the piece of flesh is either shaped or unshaped; the shaped one forms the limbs and the organs of the human being, while the unshaped one repairs what is damaged of the human body. For example, when an injury or any other form of disorder happens to the human being, the unshaped piece of flesh does its part to repair the body. So, the shaped piece of flesh forms the limbs and the organs whilst the unshaped one serves as the balance put in the body to maintain it and compensate for any disorder that happens to the shaped limbs.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of 'Abdulah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3208, 3332 and 6594; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 6893; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 3624 and 4091; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 15819 and 21816*

This piece of flesh remains for another forty days and then the fashioning of the human being takes place in the womb. This stage is concerned with creating the substance from which the human being will be fashioned in a specific form that differs with regard to the gender, male or female; the colour of the skin be it white, black, brown or red; and the stature, be it short or tall. These are the distinctive features that the created beings will have.

After the completion of the human being's formation, Allah *the Almighty* sends an angel who is ordered to write down the new creature's deeds, livelihood, date of death, and whether s/he will be blessed or wretched in religion. Then the soul is breathed into it.

Being wretched or blessed in religion is predestined for the one who is so described according to Allah's Eternal Knowledge. He *the Almighty* perfectly knows whether the new creature will be blessed or wretched and also knows for certain where and when s/he will be, which is beyond the ability of the doctors and researchers in the present and in the future.

In this verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is He Who created you…' (*at-Taghabun:* 2). Here, He *the Almighty* uses the demonstrative pronoun 'Who' after the third person pronoun 'He', in order to confine the act of creating the human beings to Himself, and to emphasise that no other creature has created them. This fact has been mentioned twenty-eight times in the Quran. For example, He *the Almighty* says: 'He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth…' (*al-Baqara:* 29); 'He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He likes...' (*Al-'Imran:* 6); 'He it is Who made the sun a shining brightness and the moon a light.' (*Yunus:* 5) In addition, He *the Almighty* says: 'He it is Who sends down water from the cloud for you; it gives drink, and by it (grow) the trees upon which you pasture.' (*an-Nahl:* 10) He further says: 'Say: He it is Who brought you into being and made for you the ears and the eyes and the hearts: little is it that you give thanks.' (*al-Mulk:* 23)

Here arises a question, which is, 'If all the creation were created by Allah *the Almighty* why does He say: '…so blessed is Allah, the best of creators…'?

(*al-Mu'minun:* 14) Are there other creators and Allah *the Almighty* is the best one among them all?' We respond to that question by stating that Allah *the Almighty* has not prevented the human beings from creating things, but the creation of Allah *the Almighty* is better than theirs, as He creates out of nothing, while they create from something already existent. He *the Almighty* creates His creatures and endows them with life and ability of multiplication, but the human beings, on the contrary, create something bereft of life and development. Moreover, the human beings do not create something out of nothing; rather, they compose something from existing substances; therefore, they use substances already created by Allah *the Almighty* to create something. Furthermore, what is created by the human beings remains in the same condition without reproduction, development, or sensibility, whereas the Great Creator, Allah *the Almighty* creates out of nothing.

So, Allah *the Almighty* has willed to bestow out of His Bounty on His servants by giving them the attribute of creating, but what they create is totally different from His Creation. He *the Almighty* has created Adam and brought his offspring into existence out of him. On the contrary, the human beings may make some useful instruments and tools for their lives, but, unlike Allah, they do not create out of nothing; they create from what is existent and their creation remains fixed in the same condition.

For this reason, those who believed in the divinity of Jesus *peace be upon him* thought that his creation of the birds from clay is evidence for his divinity. By so doing, they have committed a fatal mistake and have gone far astray. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…I determine for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission…' (*Al-'Imran:* 49). Thus, Jesus *peace be upon him* did not create the birds out of nothing, but rather from clay composed of dust and water, which are originally created by Allah *the Almighty* alone. Jesus *peace be upon him* only shaped from the clay a form like the bird, which is also created by Allah *the Almighty*; thus, his work is confined to shaping the birds. Afterwards, he *peace be upon him*: '…breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission…' (*Al-'Imran:* 49). This breathing of the spirit into the formed bird is not an intrinsic attribute of Jesus *peace be upon him*; rather, it is carried out with Allah's Permission.

If Allah *the Almighty* had not granted His Permission to make Jesus' breath the cause of placing the spirit into the shaped bird, it would not have become a living bird even if his breathing continued until the Day of Resurrection. Thus, Jesus' miracle of making a bird out of clay is carried out with Allah's Permission. Similarly, his healing of the blind and the leper and his bringing of the dead back to life are all carried out with Allah's permission. Thus, Jesus *peace be upon him* did not really create the birds, as his role was simply confined to making the bird's shape out of the clay.

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* is the only True Creator, for He creates out of nothing. By contrast, the human beings can make things and shape them in the image of Allah's creation, but what they make is not really a creation. This is evident in the sculptures that an artist makes out of stones or clay in the shape of a camel or a bird, for example; s/he cannot breathe the spirit into them. Further, the human being can make a cup from purified, molten sand, but we have never heard of making a male and a female cup that produces other cups!

Allah *the Almighty* describes the human being as 'a creator' and respects his/her creating of something new out of something else, whereas He is the best of creators as He creates out of nothing. Further, He *the Almighty* has created living, developing, and multiplying creatures, but the human being only creates fixed things that remain in their original conditions.

Thus, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…I determine for you out of dust like the form of a bird…' (*Al-'Imran:* 49) it is known that the human being can make the shape of a bird out of clay, but can we say that the human being has created a real, living bird? In other words, does the greatness stem from the act of shaping the bird itself? No, the greatness is embodied in bringing life to it, which is only done by Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Jesus *peace be upon him* said: '…I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission…' (*Al-'Imran:* 49).

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is He Who created you, yet some of you disbelieve, and some believe.' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) After discussing the topic of creation, scholars discussed the question of whether or not Allah *the Almighty* has created the believer and the disbeliever as such; in other words, is the human being coerced and compelled to be a disbeliever? If so, why does

Allah *the Almighty* punish him/her and throw him/her eternally in the hellfire? Some people understood from this verse that Allah *the Almighty* has destined a person to be a believer, while in his/her mother's womb and, similarly, He has destined the disbeliever to be as such while in his/her mother's womb. They cited the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he said, 'Allah has created Pharaoh in his mother's womb as a disbeliever and created John in his mother's womb as a believer.'(1) They also cited Messenger Muhammad's saying, 'By Allah other than Whom there is no God, certainly, one of you will definitely perform the deeds of the people of paradise until there is not between him and paradise except an arm's length and then what has been recorded will overtake him and he shall perform the deeds of the people of hell and enter it. And, certainly, one of you will definitely perform the acts of the people of hell until there is not between him and hell except an arm's length and then what has been recorded will overtake him and he shall perform the deeds of the people of paradise and enter it.'

The verse in question and these Hadiths do not give the meaning mistakenly understood by some people, which is that the servant is compelled to do his/her actions and has no choice but to do them, like a piece of paper facing a violent storm. However, creating Pharaoh in his mother's womb as a disbeliever, does not mean that Allah *the Almighty* has compelled him to disbelieve or that He *the Almighty* has predestined that for him. The fact is that He *the Almighty* has created him as a disbeliever according to His Eternal Knowledge that he, i.e. Pharaoh would not believe and would die as a disbeliever. If He *the Almighty* has compelled Pharaoh to disbelieve, why has He sent Moses *peace be upon him* to him and has given him the chance to believe? However, Allah *the Almighty* eternally knows that Pharaoh would disbelieve and claim divinity.

For this reason, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'What has been recorded will overtake him,' which means that what

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this Hadith on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him. He ascribes it to Ibn 'Uday, Ad-Daraqutni, Al-Bayhaqi and Ibn 'Asakir. Furthermore, it is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi and Ibn 'Uday. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 3/529; see also Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Qada' Wa Al-Qadar, 1/80; and Ibn 'Uday, Al-Kamil Fi Du'afa' Ar-Rijal, 8/277*

Allah *the Almighty* has recorded, according to His eternal Knowledge, in the Preserved Tablet about what would happen until the Day of Resurrection and what the servant would do out of his/her own accord will overtake him/her, not what Allah *the Almighty* has compelled His servant to do.

Some other scholars stop in the recital of this verse at Allah's saying: '…created you…' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) then resume the recital with His saying: '…some of you disbelieve and some believe.' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) This means that Allah *the Almighty* has created the human beings with a true faith in Islam as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Every child is born with true faith in Islam, then his parents convert him to Judaism or Christianity or Magianism.'

Thus, disbelief or belief comes from the human being him/herself; it is up to the servant to disbelieve or believe. Let us give an example to further illustrate this point. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And Allah has created from water every living creature: some of them is that which walks upon its belly, and of them is that which walks upon two feet, and of them is that which walks upon four; Allah creates what He pleases; surely Allah has power over all things.' (*an-Nur:* 45) Therefore, He *the Almighty* has created all living creatures from water, yet their actions differ; some walk upon their bellies like the creeping creatures and snakes; some others walk upon two feet like the human being and the birds; and some walk upon four feet like the cattle, the cows, goats and sheep.

So, He *the Almighty* has created all of these from the same materials, but their way of walking is determined by their choice, as He says: '…some of them is that which walk…' (*an-Nur:* 45). Those who maintained this opinion were unaware that their walking upon their bellies, two feet or four feet is a sign of the perfection of their creation by Allah *the Almighty*. That is to say that He *the Almighty* has wanted to make the snakes and the creeping beings walk upon their bellies; the human being to walk on two feet; and the cattle and the lion, for example, to walk on four. All that He has willed come to pass. So, the way these creatures walk is not merely dependent on their will or independent choice.

At this point, all that remains to say is that the stance of the *Sunnites* is middle between the two previous stances: between *Al-Jabriyya,*(1) who maintained the Absolute Will of Allah *the Almighty* and that He has created His servants and also their deeds and that the servant has no choice or action, and those who maintained that the human being has an absolute will and that Allah *the Almighty* has created the universe and the human being, but then left them, that is, He has no Will over that of the human being. Both stances are wrong, as the sound stance is the middle between them.

The people discussed the issue of creating the servants' deeds. Let us, first of all, define the meaning of the 'deed'! It means to direct a power to do something. There is a power, for instance, in the hand that enables it to do good or bad; it does what the human being wants, such as hitting someone, carrying someone off the ground, or patting on an orphan's head. The limbs and its readiness to do good or bad are created by Allah *the Almighty* but it is the human being who directs them to do what Allah *the Almighty* has obliged him/her to do. This direction of the power is what the servant will be rewarded or punished for. Thus, you will be held accountable not for the creation of the actions, but rather for doing them, as Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of the actions and you carry them out by your choice and will. The tongue, for example, has a created power to express what is in the soul; it enables the believer to say, 'There is no god but Allah,' and also the atheist to say – Allah forbid –: 'There is no God.' The tongue, created by Allah *the Almighty* does not disobey man in either case.

Thus, the human being's limbs are nothing but witnesses against him/her on the Day of Resurrection, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Until when they come to it, their ears and their eyes and their skins shall bear witness against them as to what they did. And they shall say to their skins: Why have you borne witness against us? They shall say: Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak, and He has created you at first, and to Him you shall be brought back.' (*Fussilat:* 20-21)

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(1) *Al-Jabriyya* is a sect whose followers believe that the servant is compelled to do his/her actions and that s/he has nothing to do with it, to the extent that they believe that attributing the action to the servant is an act of disbelief. In their opinion, the servant has no control over his actions like someone falling from a high place or a palm leaf moved by the wind. They also maintain that the servant does not do an act of obedience or disobedience with his/her free will and that Allah does not burden him/her according to his/her ability, but rather, He overburdens him/her. Further, they hold that the servant does not create his/her actions and has no power over them. By so doing, they excused the disbelievers, the transgressors and the disobedient. *See* Al-Hakami, *Ma'arij Al-Qabul, 1/372*

When we ponder over the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'It is He Who created you, yet some of you disbelieve and some believe…' (*at-Taghabun:* 2), we find that He *the Almighty* mentions the disbeliever before the believer, so what is the reason for this? The intended meaning here is to rebuke some people for disbelieving in Allah *the Almighty* even though He has created them and bestowed life and countless Bounties on them. The disbelieving group is the majority of people and that is why Allah *the Almighty* will say to Adam *peace be upon him* on the Day of Resurrection: 'Bring forth the group of (the denizens of) Fire.' Adam would say: 'Who are the denizens of Hell?' It would be said: 'They are out of every thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine.'(1) In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And very few of My servants are grateful;' (*Saba':* 13) He *the Almighty* also says: '…but most people do not believe.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 1)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'It is He Who created you, yet some of you disbelieve and some believe…' (*at-Taghabun:* 2), we notice that the verse only mentions two kinds of people, namely: the disbeliever and the believer. It does not make mention of the hypocrites, the transgressors or the wrongdoers. The reason for this is that the position here is intended to talk about the creation of the human being: 'It is He Who created you…' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) and, then, the creation of the heavens and earth: 'He created the heavens and earth for a true Purpose…' (*at-Taghabun:* 3). The people are divided in this regard into believers and disbelievers, either believing that

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(1) *Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri narrated that Messenger Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allah, the High and Glorious, would say: O Adam I and he would say: At Your service, at Your beck and call, O Lord, and the good is in Your Hand. Allah would say: Bring forth the group of (the denizens of) fire. He (Adam) would say: 'Who are the denizens of hell? It would be said: 'They are out of every thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine.' Prophet Muhammad then said: 'It is at this juncture that every child would become white-haired and every pregnant woman would abort and you would see people in a state of intoxication, and they would not be in fact intoxicated but grievous will be the torment of Allah.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3348; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 554*

Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator or disbelieving in that. Accordingly, Allah *the Almighty* only mentions two kinds of people here.

Some scholars consider this verse an argument against those who maintain that there is a degree between belief and disbelief. Although we also believe that this article of faith is wrong, this verse has nothing to do with this. The verse talks about those who deny the Existence of Allah *the Almighty* and His Creation of the universe with its heavens, earth, human beings, jinn, and angels.

The previous chapter of *al-Munafiqun* exposes the hypocrites and discloses their secrets because they are included under the category of disbelief, as they inwardly disbelieve even if they outwardly claim otherwise. The hypocrites are even more dangerous than the disbelievers who declare their disbelief. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely, the hypocrites are in the lowest stage in the Hellfire.' (*an-Nisa':* 145)

Thus, the verse in question addresses two kinds of people: the believers who believe in Allah's creation of the universe and that He is the Creator and the Originator. It also addresses those who disbelieve in that. It does not, however, address the article of faith of the degree between 'belief' and 'disbelief' because there are only two degrees with regard to belief in Allah's Creation, that is, either to believe or to disbelieve in that.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Allah sees everything you do.' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) This means that He *the Almighty* sees our deeds and utterances, as the 'doing' includes both the deeds of the limbs and the utterances of the tongue. This part of the verse indicates clearly that every action carried out by the human being proves his/her belief, or his/her disbelief. As for the actions, Allah *the Almighty* does not compel anyone to do an act of belief or disbelief, nor does He *the Almighty* order anyone to do an act of transgression or injustice.

So, as for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Allah sees everything you do.' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) it means that He *the Almighty* knows our actions and that is why we should not think that there is anything hidden from Him or that someone can deceive Him, for He sees everything, not only what you reveal, but also what you conceal in your soul that no other human being knows about it.

In the same connection, He *the Almighty* also says: '…Allah sees the servants.' (*Al-'Imran:* 15) Here, He does not say that He knows His servants because His Knowledge is pertinent to perceiving people's hidden beliefs. Therefore, He *the Almighty* describes Himself in the verse in question, saying: '…Allah sees everything you do.' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) This is because the sight is only used to perceive a movement or a conduct.

So, what does Allah *the Almighty* see from His servants? He *Glorified is He* sees the movements of His servants and whether they are in conformity with Islam or not. Overseeing a movement requires the existence of the Attribute of sight, not that of Knowledge. Describing Himself as seeing what they do signifies the stupidity of the wrongdoers because they did not even try to conceal themselves while committing their sins, that is, they made the act of sinning a visible movement. Thus, using the Attribute of sight is more expressive than the Attribute of Knowledge, as employing the latter may indicate that they feel ashamed so that they conceal their sins, but, on the contrary, their movements are obvious and visible.

One of the miraculous aspects of the Quran is that when Allah *the Almighty* talks about the hypocrites, He says: '…Allah is Fully Aware of what you do.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 11) The outward actions of the hypocrites are in conformity with the principles and the rulings of Islam. They, for example, pray and fast like all Muslims, and they are even keen on praying in the front rows in the mosque. Therefore, knowing about their real intentions requires the existence of the Attribute of Knowledge of Allah *the Almighty*.

On the contrary, the actions of both the believers and the disbelievers, whether good or bad, are clear and obvious to Him *Glorified is He* and that is why the Attribute of the All Seeing perfectly fits this context. Allah *the Almighty* knows the movements that the servant makes, whether they are acts of worship or sins because they are visible. He gathers between the two Attributes of Seeing and Knowing about the actions of His servants when He says: 'Your Lord is sufficient as Knowing and Seeing with regard to His servants' faults.' (*al-Isra':* 17)

As a matter of fact, the Attribute of sight is one of the requirements of Divinity and that is why Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him* said to His father:

'O my father! Why do you worship what neither hears nor sees, nor does it avail you in the least?' (*Maryam:* 24) How can they worship a false god that cannot hear their moaning and sufferings and that cannot see anything due to its blindness? These are not the Attributes of the One worthy of being worshipped. Allah's seeing of His servants does not mean that He *the Almighty* has an eye like ours; we should understand this fact within the context of His saying: '…nothing is like Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.' (*ash-Shura:* 11) Allah *the Almighty* can hear and see, but His Attributes of Hearing and Seeing are not similar to yours – Exalted is He over any similarity with His creatures.

Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضَ بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَصَوَّرَكُمۡ فَأَحۡسَنَ صُوَرَكُمۡۖ وَإِلَيۡهِ ٱلۡمَصِيرُ ٣

He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose;
He formed you and made your forms good: you will all
return to Him [3] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 3)

These verses continue addressing the topic of creation. First, they remind us about our creation: 'It is He who has created you…' (*at-Taghabun:* 2). Then, they talked about what is greater than the creation of the human being, namely: the creation of heavens and earth. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The creation of the heavens and the earth is certainly greater than the creation of men, but most of them do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57) The people were created from the earth, a point which is clear in the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in which he says, 'Allah has created Adam from a handful which he took from the whole of the earth; so the children of Adam are in accordance with the earth: some red, some white, some black, some a mixture, also smooth and rough, bad and good.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, Ahmad, Al-Bazzar and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari Allah be pleased with him. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4795; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2955; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 19659 and 19597; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 3026; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 18163*

We have to express our wonder about the creation of the heavens and the earth. The human being should know what has been created for him/her, in order to find the evidence of the existence of the Creator in which s/he believes and to whom s/he bears witness that He is the only God. If the human being reflected on the creation of the heavens and the earth, s/he would be guided by his/her natural disposition to the fact that there is a Creator Who has created this universe in a precise and accurate manner. If s/he thought about the creation of the heavens and the earth, s/he would find that it is greater than the creation of mankind, for the universe includes the heavens, the earth, and what is between.

Allah *the Almighty* has created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and no one should dare to ask how He has created them, as He *the Almighty* says in the Quran: ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls; nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders.’ (*al-Kahf:* 51) So we have to take information about the creation from our Creator, Allah *the Almighty*. Some people said that the earth had separated from the sun and then it cooled; these are just unproved hypotheses because no one of them had seen the creation of the heavens and the earth. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders,’ (*al-Kahf:* 51) applies to those people.

When we carefully reflect on the heavens and the earth, we become fully aware of the absolute precision of Allah’s Creation. The heavens and the earth encompass the human being, the Vicegerent of Allah *the Almighty* on the earth. The human being came to this universe, with all its powers and laws, after Allah *the Almighty* prepared it for him/her. This was prior to the creation of man, so that s/he would find a universe subjected to him/her, and where nothing can disobey Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *the Almighty* has willed to create the heavens and earth in Six Days similar to the days of our worldly life, even though He *Glorified is He* has the Full Ability to create them in a time less than a twinkle through His command: ‘Be.’ There is a difference between creating something and bringing the components necessary for that creation. When you think about the creation of the heavens and the earth, you will find it a very mighty matter. It is sufficient for you to be baffled by the matter of your creation and formation, even though you are only one individual with limited space and a limited lifetime. What would you think then about the creation of the heavens and earth that came into existence before you and that will last after your passing away, until they split and the stars break with the Permission of Allah *the Almighty*!

Allah *the Almighty* veiled two matters from the minds so that the human being should not exhaust him/herself in looking for them. The first matter is how the human being was created, and whether s/he was an individual from the outset and then evolved. You have nothing to do with this matter, and so you should not involve in it with hypotheses that lead you to error.

The second matter is the creation of the heavens and the earth. You should not hypothesise that the earth was part of the sun from which it separated, then its surface cooled down and became frozen; these hypotheses are baseless and groundless.

No one has the ability to create the like of the heavens and the earth; they were not created according to any previous pattern, as Allah *the Almighty* says that He is: ‘The Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth….’ (*al-Baqara:* 117). This means that He has not created the heavens, the earth and all what they contain from any previous model, i.e. there had not been another heaven, earth, angels, jinn or human beings and then He *the Almighty* has created something similar to any of them in the shape, size or power; that is to say that He *the Almighty* has not resorted to what we call ‘the template.’

The one who makes a cup first makes a pattern in which the marble of the molten glass is poured and, eventually, the cups will be similar to each other. All the creations, apart from Allah’s, are based on making the pattern and then the production follows. For this reason, the true cost lies in preparing the good pattern or model that gives us an image of what we want. The one who bakes bread, for example, may not need a template, as s/he imitates someone before him/her; the shape of the loaf and its quality has been prepared before and s/he just imitates it every time. S/he, nevertheless, cannot give the similarity in the weight, the shape, or the roundness; rather, there is a difference in the imitation and there is no perfection in the product.

When Allah *the Almighty* creates the human beings from Adam, and up till the Day of Resurrection, He *Glorified is He* makes them similar in some features: in the form of the body, shape, head, legs, hands, eyes and other organs. They are precisely similar in the form and the function so that every individual carries out his/her mission in life. This similarity, nevertheless, has not been done by using a template; rather, through Allah's Word: 'Be,' without any previous model, as He is the Wonderful Originator and Creator.

The purpose of the universal signs of Allah *the Almighty* is to attract the creatures' attention towards His Wonderful Creation, and to convince them of the necessity of believing in Him. Through this wonderful universe, we came to know that there is a Creator and a power that provides and regulates it. Who provides the sun with this immense power? Who created it out of nothing and provided it with a power that comes from nothing? If you looked at the sun and asked yourself about how many generations enjoyed its warmth and benefited from it, you would not, for sure, know the answer because the sun was created before the human beings and everyone enjoys it and benefits from it for the period of his/her lifetime and then passes away.

Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the creation of the Heavens and the Earth, saying: 'Do those who disbelieve not see that the heavens and the earth were closed up, but We have opened them; and We have made of water everything living, will they not then believe?' (*al-Anbiya':* 30) The people before us did not deeply understand this verse, but we understood it when the scientists found out that the heavens and the earth were one entity and then Allah *the Almighty* willed to separate them and made of water everything living.

However, some scholars maintained that the heavens and the earth had not been joined together; they cited the following verses as evidence: 'The man should reflect on his food that We pour down the water, pouring (it) down in abundance, then We cleave the earth, cleaving (it) asunder, then We cause to grow therein the grain, and grapes and clover.' (*'Abasa:* 24-28) In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So We opened the gates of the cloud with water pouring and We made water to flow forth in the land in springs, so the water gathered together according to a measure already ordained.' (*al-Qamar:* 11-12) The intended meaning, according to these scholars, is that the earth was closed up and then it was opened by the plants; and similarly, the heaven was closed up and was then opened by the rain. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has cleaved the heaven with the rain and the earth with the plants that split it. We understand from this opinion that the split is not related to ripping the heaven apart from the earth; rather, separating each one from itself.

Allah *the Almighty* has created the heavens and the earth with truth so that the universe is constructed with truth, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We did not create them both but with the truth, but most of them do not know.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 39) 'Truth' is the established matter that does not change. All the matters of truth are consistent: Allah *the Almighty* is the True God; the creation of the heavens, the earth, and the whole universe was done with truth; the universe was originated with rightful Laws; and the Divine Laws of Allah *the Almighty* continue in the universe with truth. Further, Allah *the Almighty* has made His following saying one of the supplications of the believers: 'Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord! You have not created this in vain; save us then from the chastisement of the Fire.' (*Al-'Imran:* 191) Thus, He is the True God and the heavens and the earth were created with truth and their natural laws and systems were prescribed with truth. Thus, we have to receive Allah's Bounty that He *the Almighty* has created for us in the right way because if someone dealt with it unrightfully, it would be calamitous for him/her.

Allah *the Almighty* is the Supreme Truth Who created everything with truth: the creation of the heavens and the earth, the running of the sun and the falling of the rain are all created with truth. Everything, whether static or dynamic, has laws prescribed by Allah *the Almighty*. Creating with truth means that the creation of the heavens and the earth was carried out with subtle and precise balance and that Allah *the Almighty* has set for them a fixed system that regulates their motion with truth and wisdom. The sun, for example, did not fail to rise one day so that we would say, 'The sun did not rise on those people because they are wrongdoers.' This does not happen because the sun has certain laws that regulate its motion, and it was created with established truth that does not change. As long as these cosmic creatures were created with unchangeable truth, you can base your calculations on them and regulate your life according to them. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The sun and the moon follow a reckoning.' (*ar-Rahman:* 5) This means that they were created with a reckoning and thus Allah *the Almighty* has made them a means of calculation.

In this regard, He *the Almighty* also says: 'We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 38) He has not created the heavens and the earth as a game; rather, He has created them with truth. As a matter of fact, there is a big difference between the truth and the game. The ones who randomly mess around with something may realise something by chance and then s/he or someone else uses it as a game.

On the contrary, Allah *the Almighty* has created everything with truth and thus He will not leave the people wandering without a purpose; rather, every action done by man is recorded and s/he will be held accountable for it on the Day or Resurrection. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Does man think that he is to be left to wander without an aim? Was he not a small seed in the seminal elements, then he was a clot of blood, so He has created (him) then made (him) perfect. Then He has made of him two kinds, the male, and the female.' (*al-Qiyama:* 36-39) Thus, we were not created in vain, without an aim. This fact is clearly mentioned by Allah *the Almighty* Who says: 'What! Did you then think that We have created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 115) Had Allah *the Almighty* left us without any Reckoning, the deviated person, who satisfies his/her whims and desires in this worldly life, would have been more fortunate than the righteous one. However, Allah *the Almighty* could never deceive His servant who believed in Him and followed His Way of Guidance. In addition, He could never equate him/her with the wrongdoers and deviant people.

Allah *the Almighty* created the heavens and the earth and also created the sun and the moon and made them two of the Signs of His Omnipotence and of the Greatness of His Dominion. In fact, He did not create them in vain, but for a great Wisdom, which is stated plainly in the saying of Allah: '…that you might know the computation of years and the reckoning.' (*Yunus:* 5) Thus, nothing was created in vain; everything was created with truth.

Allah *the Almighty* does not show His Bounty on us by the creation of the heavens and the earth because they are the most wonderful creation, but because they are created for the people and subjected to their service. The whole universe is made subservient to the human being. Therefore, s/he should have searched with his/her mind about the One Who subjected all of that for him/her. S/he should have been guided to the One Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them because He has not created them in vain or for playing but to serve the human being.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: '…He formed you and made your forms good…' (*at-Taghabun:* 3). Here, Allah *the Almighty* refers to the formation of the human being in the womb; not the first formation of Adam from clay, and that is why He says: '…and made your forms good…' (*at-Taghabun:* 3) using the plural form. He says in another verse: 'He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He likes…' (*Al-'Imran:* 6). The formation of the human being in the womb means finding the substance from which s/he will be created in a specific form that differs in the gender, male or female; in the skin colour, white, black, brown or red; and in the stature, short or tall. Allah *the Almighty* shapes our forms according to His Choice for us and every formation has a profound wisdom and, subsequently, all of His Creation is beautiful. You should not think about your formation without taking the wisdom behind it into consideration; rather, consider every formation according to the wisdom behind it. Thus, what makes you say that so and so is ugly is separating the creation from its wisdom. So, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O man! What has beguiled you from your Lord, the Gracious One Who has created you, then made you complete, then made you symmetrical? Into whatever form He pleased He constituted you.' (*al-Infitar:* 6-8) Here, Allah *the Almighty* numerates some of His Bounties on the human being with regard to their creation in the best form, the perfection of their creation and making them symmetrical. The human being cannot doubt these facts when s/he reflects on his/her intellect, form, and perfection of his/her creation above the rest of Allah's creatures. Allah *the Almighty* has not made the human being walk upon his/her belly or four feet, but rather, He *Glorified is He* made him/her upright. Not to mention the perfection of his/her subtle systems about which the scientists are still wondering and discovering its secrets.

Allah *the Almighty* also shows His Bounty on the human being when He says: 'Have We not given him two eyes, and a tongue and two lips.' (*al-Balad:* 8-9) The dominion and the creation belong only to Allah *the Almighty* and so is the formation of the human being in the womb, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'He shapes you in the wombs as He likes, no God but He…' (*Al-'Imran:* 6). In this context, the meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'No God but He…' (*Al-'Imran:* 6) is that Allah *the Almighty* forms the people while knowing that they will take on such forms because there is no other god to say to Him, 'I do not like this form and I will make another one.' This does not happen because the One Who forms the people is Allah *the Almighty* Who no one can overcome or prevent what He wants. All what He wants will come to pass, and everything He does has a profound wisdom behind it. With regard to His saying: 'He shapes you in the wombs as He likes…' (*Al-'Imran:* 6), someone may say, 'What about the deviant and unnatural forms?' But Allah *the Almighty* says to you, 'I Am the All-Wise and I have done so for Wisdom, so do not separate the action from the Wisdom behind it and consider both of them. Then you will find these forms beautiful.'

So, Allah *the Almighty* forms the people in the wombs as He likes. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us how to recognise that fact in our prostration in prayer. He used to say when he prostrated, 'O Allah, to You I have prostrated and to You I have submitted, and in You I have believed. My face has prostrated to the One Who created it and shaped it well, and brought forth its hearing and sight. Blessed be Allah the best of Creators.'(1) Besides, he *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say when he looks in the mirror: 'Praise belongs to Allah Who has beautified my creation and my conduct and beautified me with what He deprived others of.'(2)

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(1) *'Ali ibn Abu Taleb related that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to say when prostrating: 'O Allah, to You I have prostrated and in You I have believed and to You I have submitted, and You are my Lord. My face has prostrated to the One Who created it and formed it, and brought forth its hearing and sight. Blessed be Allah the best of Creators.' See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1848; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 760; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3421*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Abu Ya'la and At-Tabarani in the Book of Supplication on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Abu Ya'la, Musnad, Hadith no. 2611; and At-Tabarani, Hadith no. 402.*

Allah *the Almighty* also says: ‘Certainly We created man in the best make.’ (*at-Tin:* 4) This means that He *the Almighty* with regard to the material side, created the human being in an upright form and in the best state. Further, He *the Almighty* wants man to remain in this fine state in everything, so if this Vicegerent violates the laws of his/her preservation, s/he undoubtedly makes Allah *the Almighty* angry as He *Glorified is He* wants His Make to remain beautiful as He has originated it.

As Allah *the Almighty* talks about the creation of the human being in the best form after talking about the creation of the heavens and the earth, He says in another verse: ‘Allah is He Who made the earth a resting-place for you and the heaven a canopy, and He formed you, then made goodly your forms…’ (*Ghafir:* 64). He has created the heavens and the earth and made the earth a resting-place, that is, a proper place for the human being to live on. He *the Almighty* also made the heavens a strong construction; He even holds it, lest it falls on the earth.

The creation of the human being and shaping him/her in such a form was addressed along with the creation of the heavens and the earth; this is conclusive evidence that Allah *the Almighty* has formed man without a previous pattern, as He wonderfully originated the whole universe. This fact refutes the hypothesis of those who believe in the evolution of the human being from an ape. How can we believe that an ape evolved into a man? Why did the ape of Darwin evolve, while the rest of the apes did not? Further, why did the rest of the apes not evolve into men so that the species of apes come to an end? What completely refutes Darwinian Theory is to understand the nature of evolution according to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Of everything We have created pairs…’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49). This means that all the beings are originally created by Allah *the Almighty*; not a single species evolved of another one. Shaping the human being in this wonderful form constitutes honour bestowed by Allah *the Almighty* upon mankind. He *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely We have honoured the children of Adam.’ (*al-Isra’:* 70)

The aspects of honouring the human being are numerous; s/he was honoured by the intellectual ability, discerning, the freedom of choice, walking upright – unlike the cattle – and the shape of the fingers and its symmetry in a wonderful form that allows him/her to move easily while handling things and carrying out precise actions. S/he was also honoured by making him/her eat with his/her fingers, not with the tongue like some animals, not with the beak like the birds, and not with the trunk like the elephant. All of this is manifested in the creation of man.

One of Allah's Names is the Fashioner Who creates everything in a distinct form which no two species, kinds or even two individuals share; everyone has its special form that distinguishes him/her from others. Thus, the 'Fashioner' is one of the Most Beautiful Names of Allah *the Almighty* Who wonderfully originated and beautified the forms of the creatures. He *the Almighty* gave each creature its form according to His Infinite Wisdom, and likewise, He has formed men in the wombs of their mothers in different stages and forms.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'You will all return to Him.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 3) This means that to Allah *the Almighty* all people will return and no one will be able to escape, for the ultimate destination and the returning of the people on the Day of Resurrection will be to Allah *the Almighty* as He *Glorified is He* says: 'They said: No harm; surely to our Lord we go back.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 50) Allah *the Almighty* Who has created the heavens and the earth with truth, has not created the human beings in vain or in play. He has created them also with truth, as He says: 'What! Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us? (*al-Mu'minun:* 115)

Our belief in the ultimate returning to Allah *the Almighty* is the core of our belief because it entails belief in the Last Day and the Resurrection after death. If we will return to Allah *the Almighty* why then do we disobey Him and violate His Way of Guidance? If the human being disobeyed Him *the Almighty* as He has given him/her the choice to obey or disobey, s/he will not have any choice after death but to return to Him *the Almighty* willingly, out of his/her love for meeting with Him, or unwillingly by being compelled against his/her will.

You should not think that you will have any place of refuge, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He asks: When is the Day of Resurrection? So when the sight becomes dazed, and the moon becomes dark, and the sun and the moon are brought together, the man shall say on that day: Whither to fly? By no means! There shall be no place of refuge! With your Lord alone shall on that day be the place of rest.' (*al-Qiyama:* 6-12) Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'Therefore strive with one another to hasten to virtuous deeds; to Allah is your return, of all (of you), so He will let you know that in which you differed.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48) So, we should compete with each other in doing righteous deeds as all people will return to Allah *the Almighty* whether they were adhering to His Way of Guidance or even deviating from it. We will return to our inevitable destination of standing before Allah *the Almighty* to let us know that in which we differed. If our beginning was brought about by Allah *the Almighty* Who has created us and the heavens and the earth, and Who shaped our forms, why then some people consider returning to Him far-fetched?

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'You will all return to Him.' (*al-Munafiqun:* 4) employing of the preposition 'to' attracts our attention to the inevitability of the human being's return to Allah *the Almighty* not to any other false god. The returning back will be to your Creator Who also has created the heavens and the earth and formed you in the wombs as He liked. The ultimate destination must be to Allah *the Almighty*; otherwise, those who have excessively committed evil in this world would not be punished for their misdeeds, and those who dedicated themselves to fulfilling Allah's Obligations and carrying out the acts of worship and who deprived themselves of some of the gratifications and pleasures of this worldly life would have endeavoured in vain.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

يَعۡلَمُ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَيَعۡلَمُ مَا تُسِرُّونَ وَمَا تُعۡلِنُونَۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمُۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿٤﴾

He knows what is in the heavens and earth; He knows what
you conceal and what you reveal; God knows very well the
secrets of every heart [4] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 4)

To Allah *the Almighty* belongs the Dominion of the heavens and the earth and He is the Creator of everything, including mankind. He has formed us in a fine and good state. As long as He *the Almighty* is the Owner of the dominion and the Creator of everything, then He knows for certain everything about His creatures. It is as if this verse in question serves as the conclusion of the previous three verses of this chapter: 'Everything that is in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah; all control and all praise belongs to Him; He has power over everything. It is He who created you, yet some of you disbelieve and some believe: Allah sees everything you do. He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose; He formed you and made your forms good: you will all return to Him.' (*at-Taghabun:* 1-3)

Allah *the Almighty* makes it crystal clear that He knows everything about us, as He says: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.' (*al-Mulk:* 11) Let us give an example for this point by the maker of the chair. S/he knows the kind of wood which s/he uses to make the chair and the kind of nails that bring the pieces of wood together. Besides, s/he knows which glue to be used to stick the parts of the chair together and likewise the painting material. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware...' (*al-Mulk:* 11) does not need any evidence. Thus, the carpenter who wants to make his product obvious would say to the buyer, 'I will make a chair from beechwood, so come and see the stages of making it.' Similarly, Allah's Creation is also obvious and clear, as He *the Almighty* says: 'He created the heavens without pillars as you see them, and put mountains upon the earth lest it might convulse with you, and He spread in it animals of every kind; and We sent down water from the cloud, then caused to grow therein (vegetation) of every noble kind.' (*Luqman:* 10) Then, He *the Almighty* clearly says: 'This is Allah's creation, but show Me what those besides Him have created.' (*Luqman:* 11)

The creation of the heavens, the earth, the sun, and the moon is a challenge for all the worlds; it is so obvious that no one can deny it. When Allah *the Almighty* orders the polytheists to show Him what those gods besides Him have created, they provided no answer for this question, for they do not have a tangible proof and cannot deny His Creation. Therefore, the truth is obvious and clear and the falsehood is doubtful. Accordingly, we did not hear anyone of them saying, 'Our gods created the mountains, the sun, or the moon.' They could not answer Allah's question even though they are adamant disbelievers.

This is the creation of Allah *the Almighty*. The human being is not challenged to create something like the heavens, the earth, or the mountains and s/he is not asked to cause the rain to fall or the plants to grow; rather, s/he is challenged to do what is easier than that. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly, though they should all gather for it.’ (*al-Hajj:* 73) Those whom the polytheists worship and pray to besides Allah *the Almighty* cannot create a fly, which is one of the smallest creatures, even if they all gathered and cooperated to accomplish this task and meet that challenge. So, Allah *the Almighty* does not challenge them to create the heavens, the earth or even a human being; rather, to create a fly. He *the Almighty* decisively says that they will not be able to do that. This verse negates the future, not only the past, so this negation is eternal; they could not create a fly in the past and will not be able to do so in the future. So, no one should think that s/he will be able to do that in the future.

If the matter of creating the cosmos is conclusively ascribed to Him, then attributing Knowledge to Him is also conclusive, as the one who creates something knows everything about his/her creation. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.’ (*al-Mulk:* 11) It is thus conceivable that Allah *the Almighty* knows everything about His Creation, as He is the Creator. Every maker knows the secrets of his/her make. So how should we think about the Supreme Creator Who is All-Aware and All Knowing about everything?

In this regard, Ibn Mas‘ud *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that two people of Bani Thaqif and one from Quraysh, who had fat bellies but little wisdom, met near the *Ka‘ba*. One of them said, ‘Do you see that Allah hears what we say?’ The other said, ‘He hears us if we speak aloud, but He does not hear if we speak in stealthy quietness (softly/murmuing).’ The third fellow said, ‘If He hears when we speak aloud, then He surely hears us if we speak in stealthy quietness (softly).’ So Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: ‘And you did not veil yourselves lest your ears and your eyes and your skins should bear witness against you, but you thought that Allah did not know most of what you did.’ (*Fussilat:* 22)

Those three men, out of their narrow mindedness and caring for their big bodies and not their minds, were thinking that Allah *the Almighty* does not know what they are saying and doing. They thought that He does not know what they confined to themselves and that He does not know what they conceal in their hearts. But one of them has more understanding than the rest, even if they all lacked the deep knowledge, so he said, ‘If He hears when we speak aloud, then He surely hears us if we speak in stealthy quietness.’

Allah *the Almighty* controls the creation from the time of its beginning until its end and to Him all will return: ‘…you will all return to Him.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 3) This matter requires Knowledge and Awareness because the one who makes something must know what reforms it and what ruins it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah is Knowing and Powerful.’ (*an-Nahl:* 70) The creation was originated with Allah’s Knowledge, but Knowledge alone is not enough, as you may be knowledgeable but unable to apply what you know. The electrician, for example, may have vast knowledge about electricity, but s/he cannot make an electrical network or a laboratory, so s/he goes to one of the financiers to help him/her. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself as having both Knowledge and Power.

In the verse in question, He *the Almighty* says: ‘He knows what is in the heavens and earth…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 3). He is the All Knowing and All-Wise; His Knowledge and Wisdom are unlimited that nothing in the heavens or the earth escapes it. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘With Him are the keys of the unseen treasures-- none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and the sea, and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear Book.’ (*al-An‘am:* 59) Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* knows all the unseen because His Knowledge is all-inclusive and nothing can escape from it. He knows what is in the heavens with all its spaces, bodies, suns, and stars. He also knows all that is in the heavy clouds and what they carry for the people and for the earth and its living creatures. Moreover, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the cloud, and then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colours.’ (*Ya Sin:* 27) Allah *the Almighty* sends down water from the cloud and no one of His Creation has anything to do with this, as we are unconscious of the water evaporation. We have known how the clouds are filled with the water and how the rain falls afterwards.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and He knows what is in the land and the sea…’ (*al-An‘am:* 59). There is a countless number of Allah’s Creatures in the land and in the sea, which all are beyond the knowledge of anyone. The human being perceives all the inanimate objects, plants, trees, animals, other human beings, countries, and roads. There are countries that do not overlook any seas, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* mentions the land first before the sea that some people may not see. Allah's Knowledge of what is in the heavens and the earth is not only general, but rather, it is fully detailed; He knows what happens in the heavens, the earth and what is between them, as He says: '…and there falls not a leaf but He knows it...' (*al-An'am:* 59). So, He *the Almighty* knows all about the leaf of the tree after it does its part in the photosynthesis process and the ripening of the fruits until it falls on the ground. Thus, He *the Almighty* knows the time of the movement of all the leaves in any tree, which signifies His Perfect and All-inclusive Knowledge. Then, He *the Almighty* says: '…nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, and nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear Book.' (*al-An'am:* 59) He *the Almighty* furthermore knows everything about every being in the worldly life, as all the beings are either green or dry.

In this regard, He *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran about what Luqman said to his son: 'O my son! Surely if it is the very weight of the grain of a mustard-seed, even though it is in (the heart of) rock, or (high above) in the heaven or (deep down) in the earth, Allah will bring it (to light); surely Allah is Knower of subtleties, Aware.' (*al-Ahzab:* 16) Here, Luqman teaches his son one of the Attributes of Allah, namely: His absolute Knowledge from which nothing escapes. It is as if he said, 'Do not think that what can be hidden from the people can also be hidden from Allah *the Almighty*.' As the very weight of the grain of a mustard-seed cannot be hidden from Him, even if it is in the heart of a rock or above the heaven or even deep down in the earth; He *the Almighty* also knows the good and the bad deed, even if it is subtle and even if its doer tried to conceal it. Thus, nothing escapes His Knowledge, even something as little as a muster-seed, which signifies His All-Encompassing Knowledge.

Allah *the Almighty* then directs our attention to another aspect of His Knowledge, namely: what the human being conceals or reveals. He says: 'He knows what you conceal and what you reveal.' (*an-Nahl:* 19) The secret–as we know– is what you conceal in yourself or what you confine to someone else and ask him/her not to reveal it to anyone else. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…surely He knows the secret, and what is yet more hidden.' (*Ta Ha:* 7) This means that He *the Almighty* knows what we conceal in our souls and also what may be a secret before we conceal it. Thus, no one can deceive Allah *the Almighty* as He knows everything: what we conceal or reveal. He knows the secret and what is more hidden than the secret. But is there something more hidden than the secret? Yes, the secret is what you confine to someone else, so it is known by two people, but what is more hidden than the secret is what you keep to yourself and do not reveal to anyone. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And if you utter the saying aloud, then surely He knows the secret, and what is yet more hidden.' (*Ta Ha:* 7)

Allah *the Almighty* criticises the hypocrites who think that they can deceive Him, saying: 'And when they meet those who believe they say: We believe, and when they are alone one with another they say: Do you talk to them of what Allah has disclosed to you that they may contend with you by this before your Lord? Do you not then understand?' (*al-Baqara:* 76) Then, He *the Almighty* says: 'Do they not know that Allah knows what they keep secret and what they make known?' (*al-Baqara:* 77) What is the concealed matter and what is the revealed one? The revealed matter is what you say out loud so that anyone can hear it and what is visible so that anyone can see it. If the action is a soundless movement, it is perceived by the eye, and if it has a sound, it is perceived by the ear; these are the basic faculties of perception.

The secret is what you do not confide to anyone else because if you did so, it would not be a secret anymore. The secret, however, is what you conceal in your soul. Thus, what you revealed is what you declare, and it thus becomes an apparent matter if it is known by two people. The apparent matter is known to the people, whereas the secret is hidden from them. However, Allah *the Almighty* knows the secret and the public and also what is more hidden than the secret: '…surely He knows the secret, and what is yet more hidden.' (*Ta Ha:* 7) So, if the secret is what you conceal in yourself, Allah *the Almighty* knows what is more hidden, that is, He knows what you will do before you do it.

Allah *the Almighty* can use what is hidden as the opposite of the manifest when He says: 'That they do not make obeisance to Allah Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth and knows what you hide and what you make manifest.' (*an-Naml:* 25) This makes us recall once again the relation between Allah's Knowledge of what is in the heavens and the earth and what the human being conceals or reveals. What is hidden in the heavens refers to the rain and what is hidden in the earth refers to the plants. These two elements are the sources of sustenance in the worldly life, as the water of the rain and the fertility of the soil bring out the plants that nourish the animals and the human beings.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Allah knows very well the secrets of every heart.' The human being cares to hide in his/her heart what s/he wants to keep to him/herself, just as the friend cares for his/her friend. It is as if the heart avoids revealing what it contains, but Allah *the Almighty* exposes the hypocrites' secrets before the people and themselves so that they may not be deceived by themselves. The words for the 'secrets of the heart' refer to the qualities that never leave the heart; they are always in the heart, whether they are bitterness or hatred. These secrets may also refer to the good or bad intentions that do not appear in the outward actions.

Allah *the Almighty* depicts for us the image of those who think that He *the Almighty* does not know what they reveal or conceal or what their hearts hide. He says: 'Now surely they fold up their breasts that they may conceal (their enmity) from Him; now surely, when they use their garments as a covering, He knows what they conceal and what they make public; surely He knows what is in the breasts.' (*Hud:* 5) When the human being folds up his/her breast, s/he folds it to the direction of his/her bellies to hide his/her face and conceal his/her facial expressions, given that the sentiments of the human soul appear on the faces. They covered their faces with their garments in order to hide their facial expressions. Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'Whether you hide what is in your hearts or manifest it, Allah knows it, and He knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, and Allah has power over all things.' (*Al-'Imran:* 29) He *the Almighty* knows what is concealed in the hearts, let alone what is revealed, which could be known by anyone else. Thus, what is concealed in the heart is only known by Allah *the Almighty* and no one else knows it except Him, the Creator of the human being.

After talking about His Knowledge of what the human being hides or reveals, Allah *the Almighty* attracts our attention to the fact that: ‘He knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, and Allah has power over all things.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 29) He knows all that is concealed or revealed, for All-Knowledge comes from Him. He knows our intentions and the degree of our sincerity. Further, He knows what the disbelievers and the hypocrites’ scheme and even what is in their breasts before they even utter it. Recalling Allah’s Most Beautiful Name and Attribute of Knowledge regulates the conduct of the human being because s/he knows very well that Allah *the Almighty* knows what s/he reveals or conceals and what is in his/her heart. Allah *the Almighty* gives us an example of this when He says: ‘Bequest is prescribed for you when death approaches one of you, if he leaves behind wealth for parents and near relatives, according to usage, a duty (incumbent) upon those who guard (against evil).’ (*al-Baqara:* 180) Allah, Who is the All Knowing about the soul of His servants, expects that the testator may be wrong and the heir may be right, so He takes precaution in this Legislation. When the legatee takes his/her share, s/he will decrease the shares of the heirs. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wants to preserve the rights of all the parties by protecting the testator, the legatee and the heir. Here, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Whoever then alters it after he has heard it, the sin of it then is only upon those who alter it; surely Allah is Hearing, Knowing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 181) The testator cleared him/herself, but the heir should be notified that Allah *the Almighty* knows what the hearts hide, for He is All Hearing and All Knowing.

Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘And make not Allah because of your swearing (by Him) an obstacle to your doing good and guarding (against evil) and making peace between men, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 224) He *the Almighty* hears the oath of the one who took it and He knows the intention behind it, whether good or bad. So, you should not take the oath as a pretext to prevent righteousness, piety, and reform. Allah’s Knowledge is intrinsic, but the knowledge of the human being stems from the events’ pressure that provokes his/her thinking about what rids him/her of a potential evil, but Allah’s Supreme Knowledge surpasses that because it is intrinsic.

As His knowledge is intrinsic and He is the All Knowing about what the hearts conceal, then He is not only Able to repay the people for their inclination, but also to expose what their hearts hide. Knowledge is often unapparent to the people, unlike what they hear or see; that is why Allah *the Almighty* gathers between the Hearing and Knowing, saying: ‘He is the Hearing, the Knowing.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 76) Hearing refers to perceiving the utterances that can be heard, whereas Knowing refers to perceiving what is in the minds. When you talk, He *the Almighty* hears what you say, and when you think about something, He knows it, as the reasonable person should think about his/her speech before uttering it. Every speech has an inclination which is known by Allah *the Almighty* with His Eternal Knowledge that remains forever.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He is the Hearing and Seeing.’ (*al-Isra’:* 1) He hears what can be heard and sees what can be perceived by sight, but His Attribute of Knowledge perceives what was not heard or seen, namely: what is in the soul. Allah *the Almighty* hears the utterance of the one who cannot do an action and sees the one who does this action.

Knowing the intentions needs Allah’s Knowledge and Awareness. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So, whoever emigrated for Allah and His Messenger, then his emigration was for Allah and His Messenger, and whoever emigrated to take some worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, then his emigration was for what he emigrated.’ Thus, Allah *the Almighty* knows the intention behind your action. The one who pats the head of an orphan, for example, has a great reward, and the one who takes care of an orphan will be with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the paradise. But the one who determines this is Allah *the Almighty* according to the intention of the human being who does these actions, as the doer may seek the closeness of an orphan and treats him/her with kindness and gentleness to get closer to the mother of that orphan. Thus, the cause of reward or punishment is the intention which drives you to do the deeds. Accordingly, you should be careful to make the patting of the head of an orphan for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* not to get closer to his/her mother.

The intention can only be good when it is accompanied with the fear of Allah *the Almighty* as He says: ‘Be mindful of Allah for He knows what is in the hearts.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 7) Piety does not stem from the sensual action, rather, from the inward, concealed state of the soul. An example for this is the good and the bad intentions. So, the bad qualities like bitterness, envy, and scheming, which are hidden in our hearts, are known by Allah *the Almighty*. Piety purifies you from these bad qualities so that your behaviour would be in line with fearing Allah *the Almighty* and certitude that He knows what is in your soul even before you utter it or act upon it.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

أَلَمۡ يَأۡتِكُمۡ نَبَؤُاْ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِن قَبۡلُ فَذَاقُواْ وَبَالَ أَمۡرِهِمۡ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ٥

[Disbelievers], have you not heard about those who
disbelieved before you? They tasted the evil consequences
of their conduct, and a painful torment awaits them [5]
(The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 5)

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Have you not heard the story?' (*at-Taghabun:* 5) this affirms that the news about those people reached the disbelievers. When you negate something already negated, you affirm it. You do not ask such a question unless you are certain that the answer is in the affirmative. You may say to someone, 'You have forsaken me in my calamity,' but he replies to you, 'Have I not visited you on so and so day? Have I not given you such and such? Have I not done so and so to your son?' He is sure that you cannot deny anything of these because they are affirmed by reality.

We notice here that Allah *the Almighty* makes the verse in a form of address like when He says: 'O assembly of jinn and men! Did there not come to you Messengers from among you, relating to you My communications and warning you of the meeting of this day of yours?' (*al-An'am:* 130) Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: 'Has the account not reached you of those before you, of the people of Noah and 'Ad and Thamud, and those after them?' (*Ibrahim:* 9) The address from the beginning of this chapter is for the second person, as He *the Almighty* says: 'It is He who created you, yet some of you disbelieve and some believe…He formed you and made your forms good.' (*at-Taghabun:* 2-3) The address for the second person then continues, as He *the Almighty* addresses the disbelievers and then the believers. That is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'It is He who created you…' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) and then addresses all His creatures, saying: '…some of you disbelieve and some believe.' (*at-Taghabun:* 2) As long as Allah *the Almighty* addresses the disbelievers, saying: '[Disbelievers], have you not heard the story of who disbelieved before you?' (*at-Taghabun:* 5) Then this question is used to rebuke and reproach them because they rejected the Truth. Here, the word 'story' signifies the importance of what Allah *the Almighty* wants to attract their attention to, because the Arabic word for 'story' is only used for the important news that attracts the attention, not any normal kind of news. An example for this is Allah's saying: 'About what are they asking one another? About the great news.' (*an-Naba':* 1-2) Thus, this word refers to very important news, not trivial news which the usefulness of knowing it equates the harm of ignoring it. Thus, the word for 'story' refers to the great and surprising news that is valuable and beneficial. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '[O Muhammad], inform My servants that it is I who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.' (*al-Hijr:* 49) The informing here is about something very important. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is a message of importance, (And) you are turning aside from it.' (*Sad:* 67-68) The great news should not be neglected; rather, we should keep it in mind and prepare ourselves for it. So, we should not turn our backs on it or neglect it in our action because this leads to perishing. You should listen attentively to the great news and take it into consideration.

The Arabic word translated in the verse in question as 'story' and which refers to the important news also appears in Allah's saying: 'Has the news of those before them not come to them; of the people of Noah and 'Ad and Thamud, and the people of Abraham and the dwellers of Midyan and the overthrown cities; their Messengers came to them with clear arguments; so it was not Allah Who should do them injustice, but they were unjust to themselves.' (*Ibrahim:* 70) The word for news is used in the singular form to refer to the action of those who disbelieved in the Messengers of Allah because this is regarded as one action even if the Messengers are numerous, as we say, 'Disbelief is one religion.'

However, when Allah *the Almighty* mentions the news of the Messengers, He says: 'And all we relate to you of the accounts of the Messengers is to strengthen your heart therewith.' (*Hud:* 120) The plural form of the word ‘accounts’ has been used because Allah *the Almighty* talks about the experience of every Messenger with his people; what Noah suffered is different from what Saleh, Hud, Moses, Jesus and Abraham *peace be upon them* have suffered. Every one of them has a different story, so each one of their stories was important news. Additionally, the news of the Prophets is scattered in the chapters of the Quran to illustrate what every Prophet came with to heal the diseases from which his people were suffering and to show the stubbornness of the people to whom each Messenger was sent. Those accounts were mentioned in the Quran to strengthen the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he was facing troubles and difficulties in his Mission.

Here, a question arises, which is, ‘How has the news of the previous disbelievers come to the disbelievers of Quraysh?’ We respond that the people of Quraysh were traders and they had two annual journeys: one to Ash-Sham in the summer and the other to Yemen in the winter, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘For the protection of the Quraysh is their protection during their trading caravans in the winter and the summer.’ (*Quraysh:* 1-2) Allah *the Almighty* has given the mastery to the tribe of Quraysh so their caravans were going to Al-Yemen and Ash-Sham and no other tribe could dare to attack them. The prosperity of the tribes of Quraysh comes from settling beside the Sacred House of Allah. Their mastery and safety come from their staying in prosperity, while their caravans travel to Ash-Sham and Al-Yemen and then return with goods and profits. Thus, they lived in safety and assurance. In their trading journeys, they used to hear the stories of the previous nations and what happened to them. Further, the routes of trade to Ash-Sham and Al-Yemen enabled them to see the remnants of the disbelievers whether from the people of Thamud, ‘Ad or other nations. Thus, they should have taken admonition from their journeys.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Say: Travel in the land, then see what was the end of the rejecters.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 11) The purpose of travelling is to take admonition and lessons; thus, there should be some remnants belonging to the people of ancient civilisation to be taken into account. So, the remnants of the inhabitants of those before us are still there and anyone can go and examine them. The cities of Prophet Saleh, ‘Ad and everywhere have remnants of previous nations.

Allah *the Almighty* explains that the believer believes in these accounts. As for the disbeliever, s/he can verify the veracity of these accounts when s/he: ‘Travel through the land; then observe how the end of the deniers was.’ (*an-Nahl:* 36) Further, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And indeed, you pass by them in the morning.’ (*as-Saffat:* 137) The disbelievers used to pass by the cities of the previous disbelievers like Sadum in the morning and evening during their travels in trades in the winter and summer. They also witnessed the remnants of these cities and what is left from their homes. So, people of Quraysh used to pass by these places built by the disbelievers before them. These disbelievers wronged themselves, so Allah *the Almighty* punished them.

Allah *the Almighty* says about the habitations of Prophet Lut’s people, Sadum, on which the punishment had fallen: ‘And surely it is on a road that still abides.’ (*al-Hijr:* 76) This means that the road that the people of Quraysh pass by when they go to that place is still there. This road, therefore, is known to them as it has not been hidden by the means of covering of sand and changes; these means will not make the place hidden except with Allah’s Will. The people of Quraysh were the people of travelling and journeys and they had seen what happened to the people before them, so how could they turn their backs on the signs of Allah *the Almighty*? How could not they understand these signs? How could not these signs affect their hearts? Allah *the Almighty* says about them: ‘And certainly they have (often) passed by the town on which was rained an evil rain; did they not then see it?’ (*al-Furqan:* 40) The city that was rained an evil rain is Sadum, the city of Prophet Lut’s people. Did they not then see it and watch it in their travels? These are not merely some historical scenes that the Quran portrays; rather, the disbelievers of Mecca saw these habitations in their summer journeys and passed by them: ‘So, those houses have fallen down because they were unjust.’ (*an-Naml:* 52) ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said that they passed by the habitations of *al-Hijr,* so Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them: ‘Do not enter but weeping to the habitations of these persons who committed tyranny among themselves, lest the same calamity should fall upon you as it fell upon them. He then urged his mount to proceed quickly and pass through that valley hurriedly.'(1)

You find the true Muslim remembering Allah *the Almighty* in his/her travels and take a lesson from the history of the nations before him/her. S/he knows what happened to them and guards him/herself against falling in what makes them deserve the punishment. When s/he passes by the remnants of their houses and habitations, s/he recalls the punishment that befell them and sweepingly should implore Allah *the Almighty* not to inflict the similar punishment on him/her. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was always careful to teach this to his *ummah*. In the battle of Tabuk, which is a place to the north of Medina far away from the road to Ash-Sham, he *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions passed by the town of Thamud about which He *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly did the companions of Thamud deny the Messengers.' (*al-Hijr:* 80) The companions of Thamud were the people of Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him*. The place of their habitation was stony; it is still known til today between Khaybar and Tabuk. Allah *the Almighty* says about them: 'Do you construct on every elevation a sign, amusing yourselves, and take for yourselves palaces and fortresses that you might abide eternally?' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 129)

The people of Prophet Saleh are the Thamud about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And Thamud, who carved out the rocks in the valley.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 9) The power of the people of Thamud was greater than that of Quraysh, as the latter had the mastery only because of the existence of the *Ka'ba*, and had Allah *the Almighty* left Abraha to destroy it, they would not have prosperity on earth. The people of Saleh had stony houses and were skilful in carving their houses from the mountains. The one who visits the area between Syria and Medina can watch the cities of Prophet Saleh carved in the mountains. Allah *the Almighty* says regarding them: 'And you hew houses out of the mountains exultingly…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 149).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim and Ibn Hibban on the authority of Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 7656; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 6199; and Ibn Al-Kharrat, Al-Ahkam Ash-Shar'yya, 3/345*

The people of Prophet Saleh disbelieved after the coming of a specific pregnant she-camel out of the stones, which is the miracle that they asked for. But they slaughtered it and that was the sign of the falling of the punishment on them. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘But they slew her, so he said: Enjoy yourselves in your abode for three days, that is a promise not to be belied.’ (*Hud:* 65) These cities of Prophet Saleh are still the evidence for the truthfulness of the Message that the people of Thamud, ‘Ad and Lut all rejected. So, the one who passes by them should be admonished by them, and should not pass by obliviously They wronged themselves when they disbelieved, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves.’ (*an-Nahl:* 118)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is reported to have said, ‘Do not enter but tearfully (the habitations) of these people.’ So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded the companions to take admonition by the remnants of these habitations when they passed by them, lest they would be affected by the same punishment. After all, they were not stronger than those people who were afflicted with that Divine Punishment.

In the same vein, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed by the remnants of Thamud, he forced his she-camel to hurry in order to get out of that place that was exposed to Allah’s Punishment. The she-camel hurried till it passed the dwellings of the people of Thamud that were carved inside the mountains.

When Allah *the Almighty* commanded the people of Quraysh to believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in the Quran, many of them opposed and disbelieved in him. That is why He *the Almighty* reminded them about what they used to see in the summer and winter, that is, the remnants of the evildoing people who preceded them.

They knew about the previous nations through many ways; not only did they use to pass by the remnants of the previous nations, but they also lived in their dwellings. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And you dwell in the abodes of those who were unjust to themselves, and it is clear to you how We dealt with them and We have made (them) examples to you.’ (*Ibrahim:* 45)

The disbelievers of Mecca were not admonished by the fate of the previous nations whose dwellings were not far away from them, as they used to pass by the cities of Prophet Saleh in their summer and winter journeys and saw the remnants of those who wronged themselves by disbelief and polytheism. They also used to pass by the region of Al-Ahqaf and saw what happened to the people of ‘Ad.

All of these previous peoples were punished by Allah *the Almighty* either by a screaming, violent wind, or a violent storm, or a shriek [It is the *Saiha* (the loud cry) by which Allah destroyed some disbelieving nations and peoples as He *the Almighty* says: ‘So the shriek seized them in truth, and We made them as [plant] stubble. Then away with the wrongdoing people!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 41)] from the sky, or by being drowned; each of them was seized by their sins.

Hence, Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear that the people at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were able to see the traces of the punishment that befell the previous nations that rejected their Messengers. The news that came to them is not like any normal news. He *the Almighty* says about it: ‘…the news of those who disbelieved before.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 5)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…those who disbelieved before...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 5) disbelief means covering the belief in Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Due to their disbelief, He *the Almighty* seals their hearts, eyes and ears, which are the main faculties of perception. Disbelief, thus, means trying to hide the reality of Allah’s Existence. In fact, this trial in itself is a confession of His Existence because you do not try to hide something that does not exist.

One of the established Laws of Allah *the Almighty* on the earth is to punish those who disbelieve in His Messages in this worldly life first and then in the Hereafter. He *the Almighty* does not postpone all the punishment till the Hereafter. Otherwise, the good people would be inflicted with the harm of the disbelieving and disobedient people. That is why these disbelievers receive part of the punishment in this worldly life. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘(Such has been) the way of Allah with respect to those who have gone before; and you shall not find any change in the Way of Allah.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 62)

The ‘way’ here means the law that controls life. We knew from the news of the previous people what happened to both the believers who obeyed their Lord, and the disbelievers who denied their Messengers. With regard to these disbelievers, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins: some We struck with a violent storm of stones; some were overcome by a sudden blast; some We made the earth swallow; and some We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40)

These are the various kinds of punishment that afflicted the disbelievers of the previous nations. The people of Mecca knew well what happened to them. So, were they waiting for a similar end? In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘What do they wait for then but the like of the days of those who passed away before them? Say: Wait then; surely I too am with you of those who wait.’ (*Yunus:* 102)

Thus, the disbelievers of Quraysh should not have stubbornly rejected belief in Prophet Muhammad’s Message. In one verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions all kinds of punishment that afflicted the previous nations, though they were in different times and the reasons for their punishment were various. This is because these disbelievers were similar to each other. He *the Almighty* says: ‘And We punished each one of them for their sins...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40). This means that He *the Almighty* did not wrong any of them, but rather, He *the Almighty* punished them justly due to their sins. That is why He *the Almighty* says at the end of this verse: ‘It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…some We struck with a violent storm of stone...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40). The violent storm here is that which carries small stones that are very hot and cause pain when thrown by the wind. He *the Almighty* does not say that He had sent fire on them because fire would cause them to die quickly, while the firing stones would increase their pain.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…some were overcome by a sudden blast...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40). The sudden blast is that which causes the earth to shake. Those who were seized by it are the people of Thamud. With regard to His saying: ‘…some We made the earth swallow...’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40). It refers to the punishment that befell Qarun; and His saying: ‘…and some

We drowned...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40) refers to the punishment of the people of Noah and Pharaoh.

These are four ways of destroying the disbeliever: they are destroyed either by fire which afflicted them in the form of stones, or by air which afflicted them in the form of a shriek, or by the collapse of the earth with them, or by drowning them in water.

Instead of taking a lesson from what happened to the previous nations, you find that when one of them, 'Amr ibn Luhayy(1) travelled to Ash-Sham, he found them worshipping idols, and he brought one of them, Hubal' to Mecca. By so doing, he was the first one to bring idols to Mecca. The idols they worshipped came from Byzantines and were placed around the *Ka'ba,* the House of Allah *Glorified is He*.

In the verse in question, the word: '…before…' (*at-Taghabun:* 5) aims at reassuring Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by informing him that his people were not the first to disbelieve, for the people before them denied the Messages of their Prophets as well. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And if they reject you, then already before you did the people of Noah and 'Ad and Thamud reject (Prophets).' (*al-Hajj:* 42) This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not a special case, for many Prophets before him were denied.

As a matter of fact, we should not look at disbelieving apart from its punishment. What was the result of their disbelief? Had Allah *the Almighty* left them unpunished or had He *Glorified is He* taken them with His Mightiness and Power?! So, He *Glorified is He* reassured Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the punishment could befall the disbelievers of Mecca just as: '…the people of Abraham and the people of Lut, as well as those of Midyan, and Moses (too) was rejected, but I gave respite to the unbelievers, then did I overtake them, so how (severe) was My disapproval.' (*al-Hajj:* 44)

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(1) *'Amr ibn Luhayy was from the tribe of 'Khuza'ah' and was the leader of Mecca. He was the first to change the religion of Abraham peace be upon him as he was the first to bring the idols inside the Arabian Peninsula. He added many things to the original religion of Abraham peace be upon him.*

Allah *the Almighty* prolonged enjoyment for the disbelievers till they thought that they would not be punished. He *the Almighty* gave them a complete opportunity to believe and follow the Guidance. So, what did they do? Not only did they disbelieve, but they also tried to mislead the believers. That is why Allah's Punishment befell them.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse in question: 'They tasted the evil consequences of their conduct…' (*at-Taghabun:* 5). The 'evil consequences' here refer to the difficult and bad outcomes of their misdeeds. To know the meaning of tasting the consequences, you should read the following saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And Allah sets forth a parable: (Consider) a town (1) safe and secure to which its means of subsistence come in abundance from every quarter; but it became ungrateful to Allah's favors, therefore Allah made it taste the utmost degree of hunger and fear because of what they wrought.' (*an-Nahl:* 112)

We know that food is the thing that could be tasted, and that only the tongue can sense that taste, unlike the garment which covers the whole body. But in this verse, Allah *the Almighty* mentions that all the body will taste, not only the mouth. The mouth intakes the food in favour of the whole body, but if the food does not reach the body, all the body tastes the hunger.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* made every part of their bodies taste the consequences, and hence the torture. He *the Almighty* makes every organ in the body able to taste, just like the tongue, as if the taste turned to a garment of hunger that is felt by all the body. He *the Almighty* uses the word 'taste' to express the strength of the feeling, and the word 'garment' to express its inclusion of all the body, as if the whole body has the ability to taste: the fingertips, the feet, the chest, the neck, etc., that is, all of them are able to taste.

The Quranic style uses the word 'taste' in the verse in question, which is different from 'swallow' or 'to be full', so why? The punishment that the disbelievers underwent at the hands of the believers at the battle of Badr is nothing compared to their severe, painful, and endless punishment in the Hereafter.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, At-Tabari says that the city, according to Mujahid and Qatada, is Mecca; yet another group of scholars believe that it is Medina. In his Tafsir, Ibn Al-Jawzi says, 'It is just an example.' It is also said to be a village that was very rich to the extent that they were using bread in cleaning themselves after using the toilet, so Allah the Almighty sent them hunger, till they were forced to eat their dirt. See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 17/309; see also Ibn Al-Jawzi, Zad Al-Masir, 4/132.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says to the disbelievers after the battle of Badr: ‘That is what you get! Taste that!’—‘and the torment of the fire awaits the disbelievers.’ (*al-Anfal:* 14) This refers to what happened at the battle of Badr, when the believers struck them upon the necks and struck from them every fingertip. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…strike above their necks and strike all their fingertips.’ (*al-Anfal:* 12)

In fact, the disbelievers at all times tasted the consequences of their misdeeds, which are disbelief, denial, deviating from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* and disobeying their Messengers. They will taste the punishment in this worldly life and in the Hereafter: ‘…a painful torment awaits them.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 5) Thus, besides being tortured in this worldly life, there is a painful punishment waiting for them in the Hereafter. Describing the punishment as: ‘…painful’ (*at-Taghabun:* 5) shows that they will suffer a punishment followed by another punishment that will be more painful and severe.

Now, the strength of the deed comes in accordance with the strength of its doer. For example, when we say that a child slapped a man, we understand that the slap of a child differs from that of a young man, and that the young man’s slap differs from that of a boxer, and so on. Hence, we know that the strength of the deed depends on the strength of the doer. So, if the Doer is Allah *the Almighty* this means that the pain of the punishment is infinite, may Allah protect us from such a punishment.

There are many aspects of torture; the torture may be painful, but the tortured endures it and shows some patience. His/her arrogance may prevent him/her from showing pain, as one poet says:

I keep patient to show my enemies

that forever I cannot be defeated

This patience is in fact a kind of arrogance and that is why the people of the fire will be exposed to another kind of torture which is great in amount, more painful and more humiliating; it breaks the arrogance of the human soul. It will be said to the tortured one: ‘Taste! Indeed, you are the honoured, the noble!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) The chastisement will break the arrogance and haughtiness of the disbeliever who felt proud over Allah *the Almighty* and His Messengers. If s/he is really honoured, s/he would not have disbelieved and led him/herself to the hell.

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Taste…’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49) here means to taste and feel the humility, as food and drink are not meant here. This is more severe and painful, may Allah protect us from the hellfire.

Allah says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُۥ كَانَت تَّأْتِيهِمْ رُسُلُهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ فَقَالُوٓا۟ أَبَشَرٌ يَهْدُونَنَا
فَكَفَرُوا۟ وَتَوَلَّوا۟ ۚ وَّٱسْتَغْنَى ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَنِىٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿٦﴾

That is because their messengers came to them with clear signs, yet they said, ‘Should we take guidance from mere mortals?’, rejected the message, and turned away. But God had no need for them: He is all sufficient, worthy of all praise [6] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 6)

The word ‘that’ here indicates the reasons why they were punished; it correlates to the previous verse: ‘They tasted the evil consequences of their conduct…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 5). Thus, this punishment is not unfair; rather, it is because of what they have done.

This is similar to the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who disbelieved from among the children of Israel were cursed by the tongue of David and Jesus, son of Mary; this was because they disobeyed and used to exceed the limit.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 78) Being cursed and driven away from Allah's Mercy is the result of their disobedience and transgression. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And abasement and humiliation were brought down upon them, and they became deserving of Allah’s Wrath; this was so because they disbelieved in the communications of Allah and killed the Prophets unjustly; this was so because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits.’ (*al-Baqara:* 61)

Further, Allah *the Almighty* addresses them, saying: ‘Allah has certainly heard the saying of those who said :(1) Surely Allah is poor and we are rich. I will record what they say, and their killing the Prophets unjustly, and I will say: “Taste the chastisement of burning.”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 181) Then, He *the Almighty* says: ‘This is for what your own hands have sent before and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 182) The word ‘this’ here refers to the chastisement of burning. So, Allah *Glorified is He* has not wronged them, but they wronged themselves. This is a general principle in Islam: Allah *Glorified is He* is not ever unjust to His servants.

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(1) *Ibn‘Abbas narrated that Abu Bakr once entered a place and found a group of Jews therein, whereupon he said to one of their scholars called ‘Finhas’, ‘Fear Allah and be*=

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It was not Allah who wronged them; they wronged themselves.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40) This emphasizes that Allah *the Almighty* will judge them according to their understanding of the miracle of the Messenger. This verse means that He *the Almighty* would not have wronged them. If you say, ‘I would not do this,’ you mean that you were able to do that, but it is not good from you to do it. So, He *the Almighty* says that He is far removed from committing injustice; however, this is not because He is not Able to do it, but because this Attribute does not behove Him *the Almighty*. That is because injustice aims at taking others’ rights, and since He *the Almighty* is the Owner of everything, why does He need to be unjust? Thus, He *the Almighty* was not unjust to them when He punished them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And Allah was not unjust to them, but they were unjust to themselves.’ (*an-Nahl:* 33)

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* does not punish without warning, or without criminalising the actions for which they are punishable because it is not accepted to punish someone for a sin without warning and showing what the punishment would be. If you punish someone for a crime without clarifying that it is a crime, you do injustice to him/her. That is why the lawgivers say, ‘Nullum crimen sine lege, and nulla poena sine lege [no crime without law and no punishment without law]’.

= *a Muslim. You know that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’. The man then said bad words and said that Allah is poor and they, i.e. the Jews are rich. Abu Bakr became very angry and hit Finhas strongly on his face. Finhas went to Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him and complained to him, and denied that he had said that, so this verse was revealed. In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this Hadith and ascribes it to Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur.*

Indeed, the disbelievers received the text that shows that their deeds are crimes. Further, the Messengers have informed and warned them, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And never would We punish until We sent a Messenger.’ (*al-Isra’:* 15)

This proves what we have previously said in explaining the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘It is He who created you, yet some of you disbelieve and some believe…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 2). He *the Almighty* does not force you to be a believer or a disbeliever; it is according to your choice, which is proven by your deeds and sayings. Our Lord created us and gave us the choice either to obey or disobey Him, and to believe or disbelieve in Him. Thus, He *the Almighty* gave the people the freedom of choice in this worldly life, but this choice is not against His Will, for if someone chooses to disbelieve, s/he does so according to the freedom of choice given to him/her by Him *Glorified is He*.

If they had been forced by Allah *the Almighty* He would not have punished them. So, the disbelievers simply realise His Will regarding them. He *the Almighty* gave us the freedom of choice, and gave us the ability to either obey or disobey and, thus, the human being has the choice to do any of them. Consequently, people have no excuse, for He *the Almighty* gave them the ability to choose and sent His Messengers to guide them to the Right Path and to give glad tidings to those who obey and to warn those who disobey.

Before we speak more about the Messengers and their Messages, we should clarify that this verse refutes all the excuses of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment which Allah *the Almighty* calls: ‘The Day of Mutual Gain and Loss’. It is the Day when the people of paradise will triumph over those of the hell who gave up paradise in exchange for hell. The loss occurred because they changed the good for the bad, the enjoyment for torture. For example, when you exchange a bad type of goods with a good type, you will be considered a winner. No doubt that the loser in this worldly life feels great pain and sadness, so how about losing on the Day of Judgment?! In this worldly life, you may have other opportunities, but the pain of loss, on the Last Day, will be endless and cannot be compensated.

In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* allocated a place in paradise for all the people, but the disbeliever loses it because of his/her disbelief, and then his/her share goes to a believer. The disbeliever must realise that these consequences are due to his/her own deeds because s/he chose the way of disbelief, rejected the Message and went against his/her own natural disposition with which Allah *the Almighty* created him/her.

We know that Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘These are they who are the heirs, Who shall inherit the Paradise; they shall abide therein.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 10-11) When you read this verse, you know that Allah *Glorified is He* will make the believer inherit that place in paradise which was prepared for another one, i.e. the disbeliever if s/he had believed. So, the believers will inherit the disbelievers’ share in paradise.

In fact, Allah’s Knowledge about the destiny of the people preceded their creation. He *the Almighty* created for every one of us a place in paradise and a place in hell. Those who will stay in hellfire forever will leave their places in paradise empty, so He *the Almighty* will give them to the believers, in addition to their original places in paradise.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There is no one among you who does not have two abodes: An abode in Paradise and an abode in Hell. If he dies and enters Hell, the people of Paradise inherit his abode.’(1)

The disbeliever wronged him/herself and lost his/her place in paradise because of his/her own misdeeds; nobody has wronged him/her. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the verse in question: ‘That…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 6) refers to the reason why the painful torment befalls the disbelievers in this worldly life, and in the Hereafter: ‘…a painful torment awaits them.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 6) Then, He *the Almighty* clarifies this reason, saying: ‘That is because their Messengers came to them…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 6).

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* refers to the previous nations without details, but in another verse, He *Glorified is He* mentions them in detail, saying: ‘Has the news of those before them not come to them, of the people of Noah and ‘Ad and Thamud, and the people of Abraham and the dwellers of Midyan and the overthrown cities? Their Messengers came to them with clear arguments; so it was not Allah Who should do them injustice, but they were unjust to themselves.' (*at-Tawba:* 70)

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(1) *See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4341; and Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Ba'ath Wa An-Nushur, 1/151.*

So, not only did the people of Noah, Abraham and other Messengers and Prophets receive the Divine Messages, but they also saw the miracles that prove the truthfulness of their Messengers. They have no excuse to reject or deviate from the Divine Way of Guidance, given the fact that every Message is supported by a miracle that proves the truthfulness of the Messenger.

The Messengers were sent to the human beings to guide them to Allah's Way of Guidance, and to show them the Right Path. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Has the account not reached you of those before you, of the people of Noah and 'Ad and Thamud, and those after them? None knows them but Allah. Their Messengers come to them with clear arguments, but they thrust their hands into their mouths and said: Surely we deny that with which you are sent, and most surely we are in serious doubt as to that to which you invite us.' (*Ibrahim:* 9)

Messengers carried Allah's Way of Guidance for their people, but the reaction of their people was that: '…they thrust their hands into their mouths and said: Surely we deny that with which you are sent...' (*Ibrahim:* 9). The disbelievers put their hands over the Messengers' mouths to prevent them from delivering the Message. Another possible interpretation is that some of them told their Messengers that their speaking with such people was in vain.

In this verse, the disbelievers declare openly that they disbelieve, saying: 'Surely we deny that with which you are sent...' (*Ibrahim:* 9). To be logical, they said that they are in doubt about what their Messengers came with, as if they were willing to believe if their doubts were to be omitted. That is why they said: '…and most surely we are in serious doubt as to that to which you invite us.' (*Ibrahim:* 9)

But in the verse in question, they said: 'Should we take guidance from mere mortals?' (*at-Taghabun:* 6) Here, they search for another excuse for their disbelief other than doubt, a lame excuse that has no credibility. They said, 'Shall human beings guide us? They are humans just like us, not better, how will they guide us?!' However, do the Messengers guide them by a human message that they invented or by a Divine Message from their Lord?! Every

Messenger conveys a Message from Allah *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* chooses to send human Messengers to the human beings, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘And We have not sent before you but men from (among) the people of the towns…’ (*Yusuf:* 109). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* chose them as humans.

This was the excuse used by the disbelievers to justify their disbelief. In this vein, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And nothing prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them except that they said: What! Has Allah raised up a mortal to be a Messenger?’ (*al-Isra’:* 94) So, they asked for non-human Messengers.

But why does Allah *the Almighty* not send angels to humans? If there had been angels living on earth, The Almighty Allah would have sent an angel for them. Yet, as long as those who live on earth are mere humans, it is more convenient to send a human Messenger like them. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Say: Had there been in the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a Messenger.’ (*al-Isra’:* 95)

Even when Gabriel came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked him about Islam, Faith, and Goodness, he did not appear in the form of an angel; rather, he appeared in the form of a human and left directly after completing his duty, without being noticed. Later, when being asked about him, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told his Companions that he was Gabriel who came to teach them their religion.(1) ‘Umar ibn Al-Kattab, the narrator of this incident, said, ‘While we were one day sitting with the Messenger of Allah, there appeared before us a man dressed in extremely white clothes and with very black hair. No traces of journeying were visible on him, and none of us knew him. He sat down close by the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* rested his knees against the knees of the Prophet and placed his palms over his thighs.’

In this Hadith, ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* describes the clothes of the man as being extremely white, meaning that his clothes are not affected by the sand of the desert, and he stresses this meaning by saying, ‘No traces of travelling were visible on him,’ moreover, ‘none of us knew him’. This means that he was not a human, but an angel who appeared suddenly in a form of a man. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And if We had made him an angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and We would certainly have made confused to them what they make confused.’ (*al-An‘am:* 9) They asked for an angel, yet if He *the Almighty* had fulfilled their request and sent an angel, He would have made him in the form of a man, and still they would have kept disbelieving and rejecting.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 50 and 4777; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 106 and 108.*

Thus, if Allah *the Almighty* wanted to send an angel, He would make him in the form of a man because they cannot see an angel in his real form. They might die out of horror then. Even Prophet Abraham *peace be upon him* was terrified when he saw the angels, although they were in human form. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with good news. They said: Peace. Peace, said he, and he made no delay in bringing a roasted calf. But when he saw that their hands were not extended towards it, he deemed them strange and conceived fear of them. They said: Fear not, surely we are sent to Lut's people.’ (*Hud:* 69-70)

The same happened to Mary *peace be upon her* when she saw the archangel Gabriel *peace be upon him* in the form of a man, while she was in her prayer chamber. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And mention Mary in the Book when she drew aside from her family to an eastern place; So she took a veil (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her Our spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man.’ (*Maryam:* 16-17) She was frightened although he came in a form of a well-proportioned man in order that she feels secure and not to be afraid. She said: ‘Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent if you are one guarding (against evil).’ (*Maryam:* 18) She sought refuge in Allah *the Almighty* because she was afraid that he would attack or harm her, and she is weak.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* chose to send Messengers from humans, not from angels, and He *Glorified is He* supported them, i.e. His Messengers with proofs and miracles to prove their veracity and truthfulness. In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘That is because their Messengers came to them with clear signs…' (*at-Taghabun:* 6). They came with clear signs to prove the truthfulness of their Messages. The word 'signs' may refer to drawing their, i.e. the disbelievers' attention to the cosmic signs around them, or to the miracles that prove the truthfulness of the Messengers. All the Messengers came with the clear signs that proved their truthfulness, whether they were miracles or verses that contained clear rules organising their life and making them happy. However, most of their people rejected and disbelieved in these clear signs.

All Messengers came with clear signs to their people, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'But if they reject you, so indeed were rejected before you Messengers who came with clear arguments and scriptures and the illuminating book.' (*Al-'Imran:* 184)

Moses *peace be upon him* came to his people with clear signs, as Allah says: 'And most certainly Moses came to you with clear arguments, then you took the calf (for a god) in his absence and you were unjust.' (*al-Baqara:* 92) He *the Almighty* also says: 'And certainly We gave Moses nine clear signs; so ask the children of Israel. When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him: Most surely I deem you, O Moses, to be a man deprived of reason.' (*al-Isra':* 101) Those clear signs Moses *peace be upon him* showed to his people include the stick that turned to a snake; his hand that he took out of his pocket shining in a white colour; the years of famine; and deficiency in property, souls and fruits. Then when they rejected those signs, Allah *the Almighty* sent upon them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood.

Moreover, there are some other signs directed to the children of Israel, like striking the stone with the staff, and there gushed forth from it twelve springs; raising the mountain above them as if it was a dark cloud; and sending down to them manna and quails. Despite all these signs, they disbelieved and turned away. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They disbelieved and turned away.' (*at-Taghabun:* 6) The same was done by the people of Hud, Saleh, Shu'aib, Lut, etc. They turned away on purpose, and disbelieved in the clear signs with which their Prophet was sent.

The *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* must avoid acting like those deniers. That is why Allah *Glorified be He* says: 'O you who believe! Obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn back from Him while you hear.’ (*al-Anfal:* 20) Yet, if they do misdeeds, tell them, O Muhammad, that you fear for them the punishment of the Last Day. He *the Almighty* says: ‘But if they turn away, [say], ‘I have already conveyed that with which I was sent to you.’ (*Hud:* 57) If they turn away, they have no excuse because he *peace and blessings be upon him* has showed them the Way of Guidance with which he was sent, as Allah *the Almighty* does not punish those who are unaware.

The people of previous nations turned away in many ways; let us take the example of the people of Prophet Noah *peace be upon him* to illustrate the point. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And whenever I have called them that You may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, cover themselves with their garments, and persist and are puffed up with pride.’ (*Nuh:* 7) They put their fingers in their ears in order not to hear the Truth. Moreover, they covered their heads and ears with their garments out of their hatred to the Message of Allah *the Almighty* and to the calling for Allah’s Oneness that Prophet Noah *peace be upon him* came with; so they could not hear the Truth.

Another way of turning away from the Divine Message is that of the Jews. They said: ‘Our hearts are wrapped...’ (*al-Baqara:* 88). It is as if their hearts are covered with a wrap, thus nothing can go out of them or even enter into them.

Likewise, the people of Shu‘aib said: ‘O Shu‘ayb, we do not understand much of what you say…’ (*Hud:* 91) This is in fact a turning away from understanding the Truth, even though they could comprehend what Prophet Shu‘aib *peace be upon him* was saying.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘But Allah had no need for them…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 6). In fact, people’s belief or disbelief will not affect Allah by any means, for He has the Perfect Attributes of Divinity and Lordship. He *the Almighty* is free of need; if some of His creatures turned away from belief and chose to disbelieve, He *the Almighty* helps them to turn away, and never help them to believe. He *the Almighty* does not need any partner, nor does He need those who associate partners with Him. That is why He blamed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘As for him who considers himself free from need (of you), To him do you address yourself. And no blame is on you if he would not purify himself.’ (*‘Abasa:* 5-7) This man thought that he does not need to believe in Allah *the Almighty* in Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in the Divine Way of Guidance. Instead, he was content with the pre-Islamic lustful way of life which is represented in having dominance and power. So, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* was telling him: ‘Why do you, O Prophet Muhammad, give attention to those who do not want to believe? I do not need them.’

In this regard, Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that once Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was preaching to his Companions, then three men came. The first one came and sat with the Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him;* the second one sat behind; while the third went away, whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Shall I not inform you about these three people? One of them sought refuge with Allah and Allah gave him refuge; the second one felt shy and Allah showed kindness to his shyness (and so he was accommodated in that meeting), and the last one averted, and so Allah turned away from him.’(1)

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘He is All Sufficient, worthy of all praise.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 6) He *Glorified is He* is free of need, and deserves to be praised for having this Attribute. His Richness is beneficial for His servants. Evidently, the rich person is not praised unless his/her richness is beneficial for others. In fact, the believer is the only one who benefits from his/her belief, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And whoever is grateful, he is only grateful for his own soul; and whoever is ungrateful, then surely Allah is Self-Sufficient, Praised.’ (*Luqman:* 12)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bazzar on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. It is also narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Waqid Al-Laythi Allah be pleased with him. Their narration reads: ‘While Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was sitting in the mosque (with some people), three men came, two of them came in front of Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and the third one went away, and then one of them found a place in the circle and sat there, while the second man sat behind the gathering, and the third one went away. When Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him finished his preaching, he said, ‘Shall I tell you about these three persons? One of them betook himself to Allah and so Allah accepted him and accommodated him; the second felt shy before Allah, so Allah did the same for him and sheltered him in His Mercy (and did not punish him), while the third turned his face from Allah, and went away, so Allah turned away from him likewise.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 66 and 474; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 5810; and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 7243*

So, Allah *Glorified is He* is not in need of anyone of His servants, a fact which is clearly manifested in His saying: ‘And say: “The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills-let him disbelieve.’ (*al-Kahf:* 29) He *the Almighty* also says: ‘…and Allah is Self-Sufficient and you have need (of Him), and if you turn back He will bring in your place another people, then they will not be like you.’ (*Muhammad:* 38) If the people turned away from Allah’s Way of Guidance, He *Glorified is He* will replace them with other different people.

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* had revealed His Way of Guidance for the benefit of people. He *the Almighty* had created them by the means of all His Perfect Attributes. None of His creation can add to or remove any of these Attributes.

Allah *Glorified is He* is Praiseworthy, whether you praised Him or not. He *the Almighty* deserves to be praised even if there is no one to praise Him, for His Attributes are eternal. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* is free of need, and deserves to be praised by all the creation due to His Generosity and Graces bestowed on them.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

زَعَمَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَن لَّن يُبۡعَثُواْۚ قُلۡ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتُبۡعَثُنَّ ثُمَّ لَتُنَبَّؤُنَّ
بِمَا عَمِلۡتُمۡۚ وَذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرٞ ٧

The disbelievers claim they will not be raised from the dead.
Say [Prophet], ‘Yes indeed! I swear by my Lord! You will be
raised and then you will be informed about everything you
have done: an easy matter for God’ [7]
(The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 7)

The disbelievers of the previous nations were arrogant to believe in and follow the Messengers of Allah *the Almighty*. They considered sending a human Messenger to guide them something which is far-fetched. This was out of their arrogance and envy to those Messengers. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they, i.e. those deniers of the Truth, said: ‘Has the reminder been revealed to him from among us?’ (*Sad:* 8) After objecting to the humanity of the Messenger, they left this point and moved to the personality of the Messenger himself. They said: ‘Has the reminder been revealed to him from among us?' (*Sad:* 8) In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* relates that they said: 'Has the reminder been made to light upon him from among us? Nay! He is an insolent liar! Tomorrow shall they know who the liar is, the insolent one.' (*al-Qamar:* 26-27)

All of these are lame excuses and pretexts, but the truth will be revealed to them when Allah *the Almighty* gathers them on the Day of Resurrection and punishes them for their disbelief.

The problem with those disbelievers is that they do not believe in the Resurrection or the Reckoning. They do not believe that they will return to Allah *the Almighty* because they do not want to stop their evils deeds and transgression against others. They want to do whatever evils they like, without being restricted to a Messenger, a Book, a moral principle, or any ethics.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The disbelievers claim…' (*at-Taghabun:* 7). 'To claim' is to say something which is not true. It is another way of lying. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says to these disbelievers: 'Nay, you thought that We had not appointed to you a time of the fulfilment of the promise.' (*al-Kahf:* 48) This discourse is directed to the disbelievers who do not believe in Resurrection and Reckoning.

Thus, with regard to the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'The disbelievers claim…' (*at-Taghabun:* 7) the word 'claim' means that they are liars in denying the reality of being resurrected and held accountable after death. Their claim stems from their wrong thoughts and illusions which have no relation with the reality. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And they say: There is nothing but our life in this world; we live and die and nothing destroys us but time, and they have no knowledge of that; they only conjecture.' (*al-Jathiya:* 24)

In fact, the one who transgressed against him/herself by disbelief or disobedience does not hope to be resurrected and held accountable because s/he cannot discipline him/herself and control his/her behaviour. S/he thinks that by denying Resurrection, s/he will not be exposed to his/her evil destiny in the Hereafter. That is why you find them questioning Resurrection, not knowing that they will be resurrected for sure, whether or not they believed in the Day of Resurrection, as the One Who created them out of nothing has the Power to resurrect them; even Resurrection is easier for Him *Glorified is He*.

The One Who created them is the One Who sent Messengers to warn them against the Day of Resurrection. He *the Almighty* is the One Who revealed the Books to guide them, and He *the Almighty* is the Owner of the heavens and the earth.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the disbelievers claimed that: '…they will not be raised from the dead.' (*at-Taghabun:* 7) Nowadays, the disbelievers, atheists, and some materialistic philosophers deny the issue of Resurrection. This is not a novel claim, for they are following the steps of the former ignorant disbelievers of the pre-Islamic era about whom He *the Almighty* says: 'And they say: What! When we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation? Nay! They are disbelievers in the meeting of their Lord.' (*as-Sajda:* 10) So, the disbelievers are asking, 'Will we be resurrected after our bodies' decay?' They ask in astonishment, 'Will we be raised from the death after our bodies have been dissolved into the earth?!' Thus, they do not believe that the One Who created them from nothing has the Power to resurrect them.

Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the Quran that the disbelievers said: 'What! When we are dead and have become dust? That is afar (from probable) return.' (*Qaf:* 3) He *the Almighty* refutes their claim, saying: 'To Him is your return, of all (of you); the promise of Allah (made) in truth; surely He begins the creation in the first instance, then He reproduces it, that He may with justice recompense those who believe and do good; and (as for) those who disbelieve, they shall have a drink of hot water and painful punishment because they disbelieved.' (*Yunus:* 4)

In the same connection, Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Ubay ibn Khalaf came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with crumbled particles and said, 'Do you claim, O Muhammad, that Allah will resurrect us as new creation after our bones turn to crumbled particles like these?' Then he smashed the bones and threw them into the wind, saying, 'Who will recreate this, Muhammad?' Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah will do that; He will make you die, then resurrect you, then throw you into the Hellfire.' Subsequently, He *the Almighty* revealed this verse: 'And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten? Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognisant of all creation.' (*Ya Sin:* 78-79)

Ubay ibn Khalaf was a bitter enemy of Islam. He came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with old bones and smashed them between his fingers and said, 'Do you claim, O Muhammad, that we will be resurrected after our bones turn to crumbled particles like these?' He kept throwing them into the air and saying, 'Who will resurrect this?!' Due to the arrogance and the toughness of that man, Prophet Muhammad's reply was strong and decisive; he said, 'Allah will do that; He will make you die, then resurrect you, then throw you into the Hellfire.'

This arrogant man said once to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'I feed my horse a big amount of corn daily to kill you one day while riding on it.' Thereupon, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said with a complete trust in His Lord, 'It is me who will kill you, if Allah wills.'(1)

This arrogant man wanted to fulfil his oath when he saw Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a weak position at the battle of Uhud, for he *peace and blessings be upon him* was wounded, his teeth were broken, and he was bleeding. At that moment, Ubay ibn Khalaf came to kill him *peace and blessings be upon him,* but he *peace and blessings be upon him* stabbed him with his bayonet. So, he fell down off his horse and kept screaming. His companions said to him, 'Why are you so terrified? It is just a small wound!' He said, 'I am sure that Muhammad will kill me! He promised to do so by the will of Allah! That is why I am sure he will kill me even by a spit!' Indeed, he died on their way back to Mecca. (2)

The One Who created us out of nothing, Allah *the Almighty* will make us die and resurrect us on the Day of Judgment. As the disbelievers could not deny the creation, they turned to denying Resurrection. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*Q-a-f.* I swear by the glorious Quran. Nay! They wonder that there has come to them a warner from among themselves, so the unbelievers say: This is a wonderful thing: What! When we are dead and have become dust? That is afar (from probable) return.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 15-16)

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(1) *See Al-Baghawi, Ma'alim At-Tanzil, 2/114; and Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, 3/211*

(2) *See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 7/385; As-Samarqandi, Bahr Al-'Ulum, 1/318; and Ibn 'Ashur, At-Tahrir Wa At-Tanwir, 20/25.*

They think it is unlikely that they will be resurrected after death and the decay of their bodies, but Allah *the Almighty* decisively says: 'Then after that you will most surely die. Then surely on the day of resurrection you shall be raised.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 15-16) As He *the Almighty* says: 'To Him is your return.' (*Yunus:* 4) Then His Promise must be fulfilled because He *the Almighty* has the Power to fulfil it and is far removed from lying or cheating, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And who is more truthful than Allah in statement.' (*an-Nisa':* 87)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to these disbelievers, 'Do not think that you gained the worldly life and enjoyed it and that is all! Rather, you will be resurrected and held accountable. Why do you think it is impossible?' In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: '…surely He begins the creation in the first instance, then He reproduces it...' (*Yunus:* 4). Is He *the Almighty* Who created out of nothing not Able to create out of something? Further, He *the Almighty* says: '…for I created you before, while you were nothing.' (*Maryam:* 9) So, they should not ask, 'How will Allah resurrect us?', for their atoms are there. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Were We then fatigued with the first creation? Yet are they in doubt with regard to a new creation?' (*Qaf:* 15) By referring to the first creation, He *the Almighty* proves Resurrection. If you wonder about being resurrected while your atoms are there, think about the first creation that was out of nothing. Thus, the One Who created you out of nothing is fully Able to resurrect you out of something.

The disbelievers mocked at the reality of Resurrection, Accountability, and Punishment that await them. In this regard, the Quran tells us that they said: 'What! When we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we then certainly be raised, Or our fathers of yore?' (*as-Saffat:* 16-17) Their mocking intensified to the extent that they asked for the punishment to come soon; they said: 'So bring us what you threaten us, if you should be of the truthful?' (*Hud:* 32) They also said: 'Or you make the heaven fall upon us in fragments as you have claimed.' (*al-Isra':* 92) Does anyone ask his/her enemy to bring him/her the punishment except in ridicule? They laugh at the idea of being resurrected after being decayed and dissolved in the earth. Their denial of Resurrection is not meant in itself; rather, it is a disbelief in meeting with Allah *the Almighty* and being held accountable. As they hate to meet with Him *the Almighty* they deny the whole process, starting with Resurrection, from the very beginning.

In fact, they were liars when they said: ‘And they say: What! When we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation?’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) They were not truthful in their denial of Resurrection, a fact which is clearly stated by the Quran: ‘Nay! They are disbelievers in the meeting of their Lord.’ (*as-Sajda:* 10) The word ‘nay’ refutes their words, and establishes the fact that they deny Resurrection out of fear and terror of facing their Lord.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* relates that they said: ‘And they say: What! When we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then certainly be raised up, being a new creation?’ (*al-Isra’:* 49) They mentioned bones then crumbled particles because the human body decays and nothing is left of it except the bones. By time, the bones turn to crumbled particles. So, they do not accept the idea of being resurrected after they turn to bones and crumbled particles.

As for their saying: ‘…shall we then certainly be raised up, being a new creation?’ (*al-Isra’:* 49) It is a rhetorical question that carries the meaning of denial. But why do they deny Resurrection? The disbeliever is confused and denying Resurrection because this is better for his/her desires. S/he thinks that even if the Resurrection occurred, s/he would be a master there as s/he was in this worldly life.

In the same vein, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten? Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognisant of all creation.’ (*Ya Sin:* 78-79)

Some disbelievers said, ‘After we die we turn to dust and mix with the soil. This soil may be planted, thus our elements will mix with the trees, vegetables and fruits that are planted. Then a child may eat from these fruits that are nurtured by our elements. This means that we will be part of this child. How will Allah then collect our bodies and resurrect us?’

Allah *the Almighty* replies on this question decisively, saying: ‘Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first.’ (*Ya Sin:* 79) If the human being remembered his/her first creation, s/he would not give such example. The One Who created them the first time out of nothing will give them life again. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is easy to Him; and His are the most exalted attributes in the heavens and the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.’ (*ar-Rum:* 27)

He *Glorified is He* is fully Able to start creation without a previous example, and to resurrect it after death. As a matter of fact, recreation is easier than creating according to human understanding. He *the Almighty* is Omnipotent over His creation, Predominant in His Dominion, and Wise in His Actions and Determination. Creating is out of nothing, while recreating is out of something, and that is why the latter is easier than the former.

Back to the verse in question: Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: ‘Yes indeed! I swear by my Lord! You will be raised…’ (*al-Mulk:* 7). He *the Almighty* commands him to assure the disbelievers that they will, for certain, be resurrected. Not only does He *the Almighty* affirm the fact of Resurrection by using the expression, ‘Yes indeed,’ but also by ordering him *peace and blessings be upon him* to swear by His Lord *Glorified is He*. He *the Almighty* is Truthful for sure; He does not need to swear, so what if He swears? This further emphasises that fact.

The Arabic word *Bala* (Yes indeed!) has the same meaning of ‘yes,’ but the difference is that it comes after the sentence to negate it. Let us offer some Quranic examples to illustrate this point. The people of the Book said: ‘Never will the Fire touch us, except for a few days.’ (*al-Baqara:* 80) The answer then was: ‘Yes indeed, whoever earns evil and his sin has encompassed him- those are the companions of the fire; they will abide therein eternally.’ (*al-Baqara:* 81) The expression, ‘Yes indeed,’ here negates their belief of not being touched by fire except for a few days; it then affirms that the hellfire is the destiny of those who were encompassed by their sins and disobeyed Allah *the Almighty*.

Another example is what Allah *the Almighty* says in this verse: ‘And they say, “None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian.”’

(*al-Baqara:* 111) Then He *the Almighty* refutes their claim, saying: ‘Yes Indeed, [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear there will be concerning them, nor will they grieve.’ (*al-Baqara:* 112) The expression, ‘Yes indeed,’ here refutes their saying, and affirms that another people will enter paradise. So, when the Arabic word ‘*Bala*’ (Yes indeed) comes after a negated issue, it negates it and affirms its opposite.

Strangely enough, disbelievers assure that there is no Resurrection, Gathering, or Account, as if they were given a pledge by this, but who gave it to them? Nobody knows! So, Allah *the Almighty* says that these are mere wishes that will never be fulfilled because they have no relation with reality.

In the same connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says about them: ‘And they swear by Allah with the most energetic of their oaths: Allah will not raise up him who dies.’ (*an-Nahl:* 38) They assured their claim with their strongest oaths, so He *the Almighty* replied to them, saying: ‘Yea! It is a promise binding on Him, quite true, but most people do not know.’ (*an-Nahl:* 38)

So, Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: ‘Say [Prophet], “Yes indeed! I swear by my Lord! You will be raised.”’ (*at-Taghabun:* 7) Although the issue of Resurrection does not need any emphasis, He *the Almighty* emphasises, through many styles of emphasis, that the people will be resurrected on a Day that nobody knows its timing but Him *the Almighty*.

Then He *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: ‘…and then you will be informed about everything you have done…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 7). Not only will you be resurrected, but you will also be informed of what you did in this worldly life, be it good or bad.

The Arabic word *Naba’* (announcement) describes the important, strange, and great events. Being informed of what they did will be a very strange and important event for them, as they did not expect that this Day will be a reality, or that what their Messengers told them will really occur. But all of a sudden, they find themselves being resurrected. Not only that, but they will also be informed of what they have done in a way that inwardly shakes them. Allah *the Almighty* says about them: ‘And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert which the thirsty man deems to be water until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full; and Allah is quick in reckoning.' (*an-Nur:* 39)

The disbeliever will be surprised in the Hereafter when s/he meets Allah *the Almighty*. When s/he committed misdeeds, s/he was not thinking that He *the Almighty* will hold him/her accountable for them. They knew that if they are resurrected, they will be punished for what they did, which is difficult for them. It is better for them, therefore, that the Hereafter is not true. The poet Abu-Al-'Ala' Al-Ma'arri speaks the truth when he says:

Both the doctor and the astrologer claimed
that the bodies will not be resurrected.
I said to them:
If you are right, I am not loser,
but if I am right, you will be losers'.

This means that if the one who believes in Resurrection does not win for holding this belief, s/he will not lose. As for the one who denies it, s/he will be the loser. The human being should realise that s/he will be resurrected, and thus should prepare him/herself for it. Suppose that one person believed in Resurrection, whilst another did not believe in it; if there is no Resurrection, the believer will lose nothing, but if there is Resurrection, who will lose? Of course, it is the disbeliever. If the disbelievers were saying the truth (this is not true for sure), the believer would not lose anything, because s/he does good deeds. However, if there is Resurrection (and there will be for sure), the believer will be rewarded in paradise. In this sense, the believer is a winner and not a loser anyway. As for the disbelievers, they will be losers because they committed misdeeds. The philosophic rule here says, 'If I do not win, I will not lose, and if you do not lose, you will not win'.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…everything you have done…' (*at-Taghabun:* 7), it means that He *the Almighty* has recorded every single action. This is another surprise for the disbelievers. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah has recorded it while they have forgotten it…' (*al-Mujadala:* 6).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…an easy matter for Allah.' (*at-Taghabun:* 7) Every action is easy for Him *the Almighty* a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'What! Do they not consider how Allah originates the creation, then reproduces it? Surely that is easy to Allah.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 19) Which one is easier: creation out of nothing or Resurrection from something?! Which is easier according to the human standards?! That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is easy to Him...' (*ar-Rum:* 27). Although it is not accepted to say this thing is 'easier than' with regard to Allah *Glorified is He* He addresses us according to our understanding. Evidently, resurrecting what was previously existent is easier than creating out of nothing. Thus, Resurrection, according to our understanding, is easier for Allah *the Almighty* than creation. However, with regard to Him *the Almighty* there is nothing easy and another easier because He *the Almighty* just says for what He wills 'Be' and it is. The word 'Be' is the shortest formula for order, but our minds cannot grasp the reality of His Order.

Allah *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

فَـَٔامِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ وَٱلنُّورِ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلْنَا ۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٨﴾

So believe in God, in His Messenger, and in the light
We have sent down: God is fully aware of what you do [8]
(The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 8)

Belief is a practical way of life that combines the mind and the heart, the sayings of the tongue and the deeds of the limbs. Thus, belief is not just a reasonable theory that mind and heart believe in; rather, it must be consistent with one's sayings and deeds. That is why Allah *the Almighty* does not conclude the previous verse with saying: 'Allah is fully aware of what you believe'; rather, He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah is fully Aware of what you do.' (*at-Taghabun:* 8)

In this way, He *the Almighty* turns our attention from the theoretical belief to the practical one. The believer should adhere to the good morals that are consistent with his/her belief in Allah *the Almighty*; Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Quran. S/He should not do what contradicts this belief. Such a believer should apply what the Quran and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with. S/He is not allowed to work on or call for ignoring the Law of Allah *the Almighty* deviating from it or even following another law.

Allah *Glorified is He* reproaches them for following the steps of the previous disbelievers. That is to say that they did not accept a human Messenger. In this regard, He *the Almighty* relates that they said: 'Should we take guidance from mere mortals?' (*at-Taghabun:* 6) Moreover, they disbelieved in Resurrection, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'The disbelievers claim they will not be raised from the dead…' (*at-Taghabun:* 8). They did not want to believe, so they tried to find excuses and justifications and put many obstacles in the way of belief. Disbelieving in the Messengers is in fact tantamount to disbelieving in Allah *the Almighty* as disbelieving in them means disbelieving in the One Who sent them.

They should have believed in those whom Allah *the Almighty* sent, be they humans or non-humans. He *the Almighty* according to His Wisdom chose the Messengers from among the humans to be able to make contact easily with people, and to be good examples for them. If they were angels, disbelievers would argue that they cannot do what angels could.

Others accepted the Messengers to be humans, but they wanted to choose the Messenger themselves! In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that they said: 'And they say: Why was not this Quran revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) They wanted the Messenger to be one of the masters of Quraysh. Their problem was not with the Quran; it was rather, with the fact that it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Those ignorant people said, 'Why was the Quran not revealed to one of the masters of Mecca or At-Ta'if?' So, they were trying to degrade and look down on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They wanted the Quran to descend on a rich man from one of the two cities, in order to keep the mastership and to keep humiliating others, while the Quran came to make all humans equal before Allah *the Almighty*. They saw that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was unworthy of receiving the Glorious Quran. This was a test for him, and he passed it and persevered, delivering the Message with no consideration of what they said. Moreover, he took this as evidence for the strength of the miracle of the Quran that proves the veracity of his Message.

Allah *Glorified is He* calls them to believe in Him first, saying: ‘So believe in Allah…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 8). As a matter of fact, believing in Allah *the Almighty* is the core of our belief, and the top of it. It is not confined to acknowledging His Existence, as we should also believe that He *the Almighty* is the only One Who deserves to be worshipped, given the fact that it is He *the Almighty* Who created the whole universe: the sky, the land, humans, animals, plants, etc.

So, believing in Allah *the Almighty* does not only mean to reject atheism and believe in His Existence because the disbelievers of Quraysh to whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent believed in this as well, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And if you ask them, Who created the heavens and the earth and made the sun and the moon subservient, they will certainly say, Allah. Whence are they then turned away?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 61); ‘And if you ask them Who is it that sends down water from the clouds, then gives life to the earth with it after its death, they will certainly say, Allah. Say: All praise is due to Allah. Nay, most of them do not understand.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 63) They even admitted that He *the Almighty* created them as well: ‘And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say: Allah. Whence are they then turned back?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87)

The essence of their disbelief was that they were worshiping idols and images along with Allah *the Almighty* and taking them as mediators between them and Allah *Glorified is He*. In this regard, they said as mentioned in the Quran: ‘We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position.’ (*az-Zumar:* 3) They affirmed that they do worship the idols and, thus, there is no outlet for them. They admitted that they want to be nearer to Allah *the Almighty* but, He *the Almighty* clearly says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Say: I do not bear witness. Say: He is only one God, and surely I am clear of that which you set up (with Him).’ (*al-An‘am:* 19) He *peace and blessings be upon him* does not testify that there is a god other than Allah *the Almighty*.

Moreover, all the people testified that Allah *the Almighty* is their Lord when they were first created. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes! We bear witness.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172) Thus, they admitted that He *the Almighty* is their Lord at the first moment of their creation and gave the oath on this, but later on, they rejected this admission and associated partners with Him. They put idols around the *Ka‘ba*, and claimed: ‘We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position.’ (*az-Zumar:* 3)

Belief in Allah *the Almighty* entails believing in both His Divinity and Lordship. This means that He *the Almighty* is the Lawgiver Who prescribes the Divine Way of Guidance revealed to the Messengers to convey it to the people. The creature is not allowed to disobey the Creator or to seek a way of reformation other than His *Glorified is He* or to try to reform him/herself apart from this Divine Way.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not send Messengers and reveal Books uselessly; rather, He *the Almighty* sent them with the True Message, and revealed the Books to guide people to the true way of life. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Does He not know, Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware.’ (*al-Mulk:* 14) This universe will not be reformed except by Allah’s Way of Guidance because He *the Almighty* is the Creator Who knows best what is good and what is bad for His creation, given the fact that the one who makes something knows best its secrets.

Some people have great hatred towards belief; Allah *the Almighty* says about them: ‘And when it is said to them: Believe as the people believe they say: Shall we believe as the fools believe? Now surely they themselves are the fools, but they do not know.’ (*al-Baqara:* 13) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers call such people to believe, but they accused them of being fools, that is, they were poor and in low positions. The masters of Quraysh saw themselves as wise and rich, and thus ought not to believe!

Out of their excessive hatred to Allah’s Oneness and Divinity, Allah *the Almighty* says about them: ‘And when Allah Alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter shrink, and when those besides Him are mentioned, lo! They are joyful.' (*az-Zumar:* 45) When a person hears something s/he does not like, his/her heart shrinks with aversion, and this appears on his/her face, then s/he gets away from it. That is what happened to those disbelievers; when Allah *the Almighty* is mentioned Alone, their souls get away from believing in His Oneness. So, what is the reason for this? This is because belief entails believing in Resurrection, Gathering, Facing their Lord and being punished for what they did. This is what is mentioned here in the chapter of *at-Taghabun:* 'The disbelievers claim they will not be raised from the dead. Say [Prophet], "Yes indeed! I swear by my Lord! You will be raised and then you will be informed about everything you have done: an easy matter for Allah."' (*at-Taghabun:* 7)

Their idols issue no commandments or prohibitions. They do not promise them with Resurrection or Account, and that is why they feel happy when the idols are mentioned, thinking that the idols will intercede for them. In fact, they will not, for they will be thrown in the fire before them, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Surely, you and what you worship besides Allah are the firewood of hell; to it you shall come.' (*al-Anbiya':* 98) Those idols and stones that they worshipped with Allah *the Almighty* will be the firewood of hell. Thus, all the wishes of disbelievers to be saved by their idols will vanish.

In this verse, the Arabic word *Hasab* (firewood) refers to anything that the fire is kindled with, be it wood, straw, petrol, or electricity. The fuel of the hellfire will be those worshippers and their objects of worship that will not be able to protect them from hellfire.

In this chapter of *at-Taghabun*, Allah *the Almighty* orders the disbelievers to believe in Him as the Creator of the heavens, the earth, and the human beings in the best form. They should believe that the Dominion belongs to Him, and He *the Almighty*: '…has power over everything.' (*at-Taghabun:* 1) He knows everything in the heavens and the earth, and knows what we conceal and what we reveal. He *the Almighty* is free of need of any of His creation, a fact which is clear in the following Sacred Hadith: 'O My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and even the whole of human race of yours, and that of Jinn even, become (equal in) conscious of

Allah like the heart of a single person amongst you, nothing would add to My Power. O My servants, even if the first amongst you and the last amongst you and the whole human race of yours and that of the Jinn too in unison become the most wicked (all beating) like the heart of a single person, it would cause no loss to My Power.'(1)

The problem with these disbelievers is that they did not estimate Allah *the Almighty* His Measure; they mistakenly thought that He *the Almighty* just wants to punish them. But this is not true because He *the Almighty* clearly states: 'Why should Allah chastise you if you are grateful and believe? And Allah is the Multiplier of rewards, Knowing.' (*an-Nisa':* 147) One of the manifestations of the Greatness of Allah *the Almighty* is that no good deed benefits Him, nor does any bad deed harm Him *the Almighty*.

Then, He *the Almighty* gathers between believing in Him and believing in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'So believe in Allah, in His Messenger…' (*at-Taghabun:* 8). Imam Ash-Shafi'i says, 'Allah *the Almighty* ranked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in a high position; He made him a leader to His Religion by giving him the right to be obeyed and not to be disobeyed. He *the Almighty* gathered between obeying Him and obeying His Prophet, and this is one of his merits. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'So believe in Allah, in His Messenger…' (*at-Taghabun:* 8).

After ordering disbelievers to believe in Him, Allah *Glorified is He* orders them to believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because believing in Him *the Almighty* requires believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was sent to deliver His Message represented in His Orders and Prohibitions. Or do they think that they were created uselessly?!

In many verses of the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* connects between believing in Him *Glorified is He* and believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: O people! Surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you all, of Him Whose is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth there is no god but He; He brings to life and causes to die therefore believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet who believes in Allah and His words, and follow him so that you may walk in the right way.' (*al-A'raf:* 158)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim, Ahmad, Al-Bazzar, Al-Bayhaqi and Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 6737; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 21458; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 4053; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra; and Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 490*

This verse shows the nature of believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he is a Prophet to all mankind, and his Message is universal, that is, it is not confined only for Arabs, but for all men and jinn, Arabs and non-Arabs.

All the previous Messages before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were revealed to specified people in a specified time to cure the spiritual diseases of those particular people, whereas he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to the whole world; that is why he was given all merits and light.

As a matter of fact, the Message of Islam is the last Message, and believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entails believing that he is the last Prophet. In this vein, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The similitude of mine and that of the Messengers before me is that of a person who built a house quite imposing and beautiful, but for one brick in one of its corners. People would go round it, appreciating the building, but saying, 'Why has the brick not been fixed here?' He said, 'I am that brick and I am the last of the Prophets.'(1) Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the last Prophet and Messenger, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Last of the Prophets; and Allah is cognisant of all things.' (*al-Ahzab:* 40)

Some of the misled people believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but in a way that differs from what Allah *the Almighty* prescribed. They believe that he is the last Prophet, but not the last Messenger. They believe that there is a Messenger after him and there is a Book after the Glorious Quran. Such false creeds exist among the Bahais and the Qadianis. They tend to forget that every Messenger is a Prophet, but not every Prophet is a Messenger. The difference is that the Messenger, unlike the Prophet, comes with a new Legislation.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari, Al-Bazzar and At-Tabarani on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3535; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8233; and At-Tabarani, Musnad, Hadith no. 130.*

In the same connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We did not send before you any Messenger or Prophet except that…’ (*al-Hajj:* 52). Thus, both the Prophets and Messengers are sent by Allah *the Almighty* but the difference is that the Messenger comes with a new Legislation and rules that did not exist in the previous Message, while the Prophet is chosen by Him *the Almighty* just to call people to apply the Legislation of the previous Messages. Therefore, the Prophets were sent to be examples in applying the previous Divine Legislation, without bringing a new one. On the other hand, the Messenger was sent with a new Legislation, and was ordered to apply and work according to it.

Believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entails believing that he was unlettered, which is an honour for him, for it proves the veracity of the Quran about which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So believe…in the light…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 8). In fact, the Quran is a revelation from Allah *the Almighty* and Prophet Muhammad’s role is confined to conveying it. That is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* must be unlettered. This is a clear fact, but the disbelievers in the past and the present claimed that he *peace and blessings be upon him* contrived the Quran and that it is not a revelation but rather taken from the previous Books. How could that be possible while he *peace and blessings be upon him* is unlettered? He could not read or write! He was not known as a poet or an orator amongst his people. How can he say such miraculous words that great eloquent Arabic poets could not say even one verse like it?! That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our servant [Muhammad], then produce a chapter like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than Allah, if you should be truthful.’ (*al-Baqara:* 23)

The third point that Allah *the Almighty* calls the disbelievers to believe in is the Light that He revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that is, the Quran. But here He *the Almighty* uses the word ‘Light’ to refer to the Quran. This indicates that they are in complete darkness and that the belief will take them out of that darkness into the Light that was revealed to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *Glorified is He* identifies the role of this Book, saying: '*Alif Lam Ra*. (This is) a Book which We have revealed to you that you may bring forth men, by their Lord's permission from utter darkness into light— to the way of the Mighty, the Praised One.' (*Ibrahim:* 1) This Book shows the peak of our creed, that is, believing that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger. By following this creed, He *the Almighty* brings them out of the darkness of Polytheism and disbelief into the Light of His Oneness and Belief.

The Holy Quran also draws their attention to the signs of the universe, and tells them that there is a Hereafter wherein there is either eternal bliss or suffering. It sets the proofs in front of them and discusses their arguments with regard to the One Who revealed and the one who received the Revelation. This Book proves its authenticity and replies to those who doubt it.

After this Light was revealed, the disbelievers ran away from it rather than running towards it. They deviated from everything that may guide them to the Way of Allah *the Almighty*. If they had believed, the light of belief and Islam would have illuminated their way. However, their hearts are actually full of the darkness of disbelief, so they could not see the Way of Light.

The Quran shows the believers the Way of Guidance and the Obligations with which He *the Almighty* assigned them. It also guides those who choose to be guided. By this Book, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called them to the Straight Path.

Thus, belief in Islam is a gradual process that starts with belief in Allah *the Almighty* which is the summit of belief, and then in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who delivered the Message. He *peace and blessings be upon him* came with the Light, that is, the Quran. In another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: 'So they who have believed in him, honoured him, supported him and followed the light which was sent down with him - it is those who will be the successful.' (*al-A'raf:* 157) The Light is attached to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, you should not think that you can separate between believing in Allah *the Almighty*; believing in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Light revealed to him.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Allah is Fully Aware of what you do,' (*at-Taghabun:* 8) it draws our attention to an important issue;

the beginning of the verse speaks about the topic of faith which is internal and abstract, whereas its end speaks about the practical side of faith: ‘Allah is fully Aware of what you do.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 8) Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, ‘Belief is not achieved by looking like believers or wishing to be like them; rather, it is something that is established inside the heart and followed by good deeds that prove its existence.’

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah is Fully Aware of what you do,’ (*at-Taghabun:* 8) includes the deeds and sayings because speaking is the action of the tongue, while the deeds are the actions of the hand, leg, eye, etc. All of that is known by Allah *the Almighty*. He *Glorified is He* is fully Aware of one’s belief in Him, in Messenger Muhammad, in His Book, and how strong his/her belief is. He *the Almighty* knows your intentions behind your actions or sayings, even if nobody sees you. Moreover, He *the Almighty* knows the intention of the one who gives charity or strove in His cause, and will reward him/her according to his/her intention.

Allah says:

يَوۡمَ يَجۡمَعُكُمۡ لِيَوۡمِ ٱلۡجَمۡعِۖ ذَٰلِكَ يَوۡمُ ٱلتَّغَابُنِۗ وَمَن يُؤۡمِنۢ بِٱللَّهِ وَيَعۡمَلۡ
صَٰلِحٗا يُكَفِّرۡ عَنۡهُ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِۦ وَيُدۡخِلۡهُ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدٗاۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ٩

When He gathers you for the Day of Gathering, the Day of mutual neglect, He will cancel the sins of those who believed in Him and acted righteously: He will admit them into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain for ever – the supreme triumph [9] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 9)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells those who deny Resurrection and Account that they will have no way out; they will not be able to run away from facing that Day when they will be gathered. He *the Almighty* nullifies their previous claim of not being resurrected, which is clearly stated in His saying: ‘The disbelievers claim they will not be raised from the dead. Say [Prophet], “Yes indeed! I swear by my Lord! You will be raised and then you will be informed about everything you have done”…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 7).

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘When He gathers you…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 9). On that Day, they will be informed about what they have done in this worldly life. It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying: ‘Allah will inform you about what you have done and punish you for that on the Day of Resurrection.’ Another possible meaning is that they will be surprised on that Day to find out that Allah *the Almighty* knows all what they have done. They were thinking that nothing of their deeds will be recorded, but they will find themselves being held accountable and punished for them.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘On the Day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time; and Allah makes you to be cautious of (retribution from) Himself; and Allah is Compassionate to the servants.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 30) Thus, everyone will find the result of his/her deeds, be they good or bad. The one with good deeds will be rewarded for them, but everyone will wish that there was a great distance between him/herself and his/her bad deeds.

The meaning of the verse in question may also be as follows: ‘You will be distinguished and divided in the Day on which He will assemble you’, or it may also be: ‘Remember the Day when He will assemble you’. All these meanings are accepted and possible.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to warn the people against that Day, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Quran, that you may warn the mother city and those around it, and that you may give warning of the day of gathering together wherein is no doubt; a party shall be in the garden and (another) party in the burning fire.’ (*ash-Shura:* 7) He calls them to pay attention to the Day on which the earliest and latest people will all be gathered. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘This is the Day of Decision: We have gathered you and those of yore.’ (*al-Mursalat:* 38) This is the Day on which all the people will be gathered. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘So if you have a plan, plan against Me (now).’ (*al-Mursalat:* 39) So, He *the Almighty* will fulfil His Promise; on that Day, He *the Almighty* will punish whoever disbelieved in Him, and if they have any means to save them from His Punishment, let them do their best.

On that Day, the disbelievers' lies will be disclosed; it will be the Day of Disclosure. Every liar, cheater, and caller to anything other than the Truth will be disclosed. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then how will it be when We shall gather them together on a Day about which there is no doubt, and every soul shall be fully paid what it has earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly?' (*Al-'Imran:* 25) How will their condition be when He *the Almighty* gathers them for Account on a Day about which there is no doubt? This Day is coming for sure, for there are many proofs that substantiate this fact. Despite their antagonism, He *the Almighty* will not wrong them; rather, He *Glorified is He* will treat them according to His Justice. In the same connection, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah, there is no god but He— He will most certainly gather you together on the Resurrection Day, there is no doubt in it; and who is more true in word than Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 87)

Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to gather and resurrect people on the Day of Resurrection; He *the Almighty* emphasised this by two Arabic letters of emphasis: *'Lam'* and *'Nun'*. No one is more Truthful than Allah *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* puts it in the form of a question, saying: '…and who is more true in word than Allah?' (*an-Nisa':* 87) When a piece of information comes in a form of a question and the answer is left to you, this means that He *Glorified is He* knows that you can say nothing but agree with what He said. He *the Almighty* gives you a chance to search and be convinced that no one is more Truthful than Him *Glorified is He*. So, you should not deceive yourself, for you will surely find what Allah *the Almighty* has promised you. In this vein, He *Glorified is He* says: 'And the dwellers of the garden will call out to the inmates of the fire: Surely we have found what our Lord promised us to be true; have you too found what your Lord promised to be true? They will say: Yes. Then a crier will cry out among them that the curse of Allah is on the unjust.' (*al-A'raf:* 44)

In the same connection, Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called the disbelievers who were killed in the battle of Badr saying, 'O Abu Jahli ibn Hisham, O 'Utba ibn Rabi'a, O Umayya ibn Khalaf, have you found that what your Lord has promised you is true? I found it true.' The Companions said to him, 'Are you calling dead people, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'They hear me better than you, but they could not reply.'(1)

In addition to gathering the earlier and the latest people, Allah *the Almighty* will also gather the leaders and their followers, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'When those who were followed shall renounce those who followed (them), and they see the chastisement and their ties are cut asunder. And those who followed shall say: Had there been for us a return, then we would renounce them as they have renounced us. Thus will Allah show them their deeds to be intense regret to them, and they shall not come forth from the fire.' (*al-Baqara:* 166-167)

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Quran to address his people, saying: 'Say: Who gives you the sustenance from the heavens and the earth? Say: Allah. And most surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error. Say: You will not be questioned as to what we are guilty of, nor shall we be questioned as to what you do.' (*Saba':* 24-25) Then, He *the Almighty* says: 'Say: Our Lord will gather us together, then will He judge between us with the truth; and He is the greatest Judge, the All Knowing.' (*Saba':* 26) It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'We will not argue with you anymore because we are telling you the truth and you just argue with falsehood. At the end, Allah *the Almighty* will judge between us in His Divine Court on the Last Day.'

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So to that [religion of Allah] invite, [O Muhammad], and remain on a right course as you are commanded and do not follow their inclinations but say, "I have believed in what Allah, has revealed of the Quran, and I have been commanded to do justice among you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us, are our deeds, and for you, your deeds. There is no [need for] argument between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and to Him is the [final] destination."' (*ash-Shura:* 15)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by An-Nasa'i, Ahmad, Abu Ya'la and Ibn Abu 'Asim on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. It was authenticated by Al-Albani. See An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2075; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 182, 12039 and 12896; Abu Ya'la, Musnad, Hadith no. 2808; and Ibn Abu 'Asim, As-Sunna, Hadith no. 2878*

As we disagreed in this worldly life over the Truth, Allah *the Almighty* will gather us in the Last Day, and every one of us will be asked about his/her deeds and will take his/her full right. So, the believer submits his/her case to the Decree of the All-Just Judge *Glorified is He* because s/he is sure that s/he is right, and He *the Almighty* is All-Sufficient as Judge.

As a matter of fact, humans leave this life gradually; death is collecting the souls from the time of Adam *peace be upon him*. One day, all people will be gathered, even though they left the world in different successive times. No one will be away from the scene, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We will gather them and not leave behind from them anyone…' (*al-Kahf:* 47); '…and the trumpet will be blown, so We will gather them all together.' (*al-Kahf:* 99) The Blow in the last verse refers to the second one, which is the Blow of resurrecting and gathering people from their graves. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: 'And the trumpet shall be blown, when lo! From their graves they shall hasten on to their Lord.' (*Ya Sin:* 51) They will come out from their graves like yarn coming out of the cloth.

When they come out of the graves and see the truth that they denied, they will say: 'Oh woe to us! Who has made us rise again from our sleeping-place?' (*Ya Sin:* 52) It is strange to say this, for they forgot that Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Our Lord! Surely You are the Gatherer of men on a Day about which there is no doubt; surely Allah will not fail (His) Promise.' (*Al-'Imran:* 9) The human being may break his/her promise because something stronger than him/her might have prevented him/her from fulfilling it. By contrast, with regard to Allah *the Almighty* there is no power over Him; He will never change His Words or change in Himself because changing is not One of His Eternal Attributes. So, the disbeliever and the hypocrite must be sure that nothing will save him/her on that Day.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…the Day of mutual neglect…' (*at-Taghabun:* 9). *At-Taghabun* which means 'mutual neglect' is one of the names of the Last Day. It is the Day when the people of paradise will win over those of hell, as the people of hell will exchange hell with paradise, and that is why they will be losers.

We see this in our daily life when we buy and sell. We say in some cases that the one who sells his/her property is a loser, whereas the one who buys is a winner. Although the one who sells takes money in exchange for his/her property, the value of this money is likely to decrease. As for the buyer, s/he bought something that will increase in value by time, even if s/he pays a lot of money for it.

Similarly, those disbelievers sell their houses, homes and places in paradise that Allah *the Almighty* prepared for them at the beginning of their creation, and buy instead of that the enjoyment of this worldly life. Thus, their property in paradise went to the people of paradise that would have much enjoyment therein. Conversely, the people of paradise left their places in hellfire for those who deserve them. That is the meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* regarding the believers: ‘Those are the inheritors.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 10)

When Allah *Glorified is He* created mankind, He gave them the freedom of choice, either to believe or disbelieve, or to obey or disobey. Accordingly, He *the Almighty* made for every one of them a place in paradise in case they all believe and a place in hellfire in case they all disbelieve. Consequently, when the people of paradise enter it, they leave their places in hellfire empty, and thus the people of hell inherit them; and, conversely, the people of paradise inherit the empty places of paradise.

In fact, the loss on that Day will be endless. There is also a loss in this worldly life, as Al-Hasan and Qatada said that there are three forms of loss in this worldly life, which are:

- A person learned useful branches of knowledge and taught them to others, but s/he did not adhere to what s/he said and, consequently, s/he lost, while others who learned from him/her adhered to what they learned from him/her and thus became winners.
- A person who is keen on earning money from everywhere, but this money made him/her turn away from obeying Allah *the Almighty* and s/he did nothing good with his/her money. Then, s/he died and left the money to the inheritor, who used that money in charity work.

- A master and his slave; the master disobeyed Allah *the Almighty* and thus became a loser, whilst the slave obeyed Him *the Almighty* and became a winner.

It was narrated that Allah *the Almighty* will make a husband and his wife stand in front of Him on the Last Day and ask them about their money. The man says, ‘O my Lord, you ordered me to spend upon her, so I collected money from different sources, both legal and illegal. Now those people whom I wronged are asking for their rights, and I have nothing to give them!’ The wife, on her part, will say, ‘O my Lord, he earned money from illegal sources. It was unlawful for him, but lawful for me; he disobeyed you to satisfy me, but I did not accept that, so let him be far away from me!’ Whereupon, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘You said the truth,’ and then orders the angels to take him to Hell, and to take her to Paradise. She then looks at him and says, ‘What a loser you are; we enjoyed with what made you wretched.’(1)

Thus, the loser on that Day is the one who loses his/her family and houses in paradise. The disbeliever will be a loser because of his/her disbelief, and even the believer will be partly a loser because of what s/he missed of good deeds.

On the Day of Judgment, the people will be divided into two parties: one in paradise, and the other one in the hell. With regard to the people of paradise, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He will cancel the sins of those who believed in Him and acted righteously: He will admit them into gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain forever –the supreme triumph.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 9)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…those who believed in Him...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 9) refers to those who sincerely believe in Him *Glorified is He* as a Creator, Provider and Owner of the heavens and earth, and that He created man in the best form and will resurrect and gather all people and recompense them according to their deeds, be they good or bad. In addition to this, such a believer should work according to the Way that He *the Almighty* revealed in

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi narrates this Hadith with a formula indicating its weakness. He does not ascribe it to anyone or name its narrator. That is why Ibn ‘Adil ascribed it to Al-Qurtubi. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran, 18/137; and Ibn ‘Adil, Al-Lubab, 1/4942.*

His Book. That is to say that his/her internal belief should be accompanied with deeds that prove it.

In fact, when someone does good deeds, this benefit will return to him/her. You should not think that the benefit of your good deed will not return to you, for, indeed, it will.

The good deeds are the outcome of our belief which is meant to straighten our life. Man will not do good deeds unless s/he is a believer, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and whoever does good, they prepare (good) for their own souls.' (*ar-Rum:* 44) This verse is expressed in the plural form, because the one who does good deeds in this worldly life does not only benefit him/herself, but rather, the whole community. If every one of us does good deeds and avoids causing mischief, good will prevail, and Muslims will save their energy from being wasted in committing misdeeds.

So, the good doer will find good fruits, and the bad doer will find bad results. That is why the good doer feels happy to return to Allah *the Almighty* whereas the disobedient disbeliever feels sad and afraid of returning to Him *Glorified is He* and tries to avoid returning, but s/he cannot.

The believer, however, may commit some sins, and the Creator *Glorified is He* knows His creation best; that is why He *the Almighty* says directly after this: 'He will cancel the sins of those who believed…' (*at-Taghabun:* 9) Here, He *Glorified is He* mentions the reward of belief and good deeds. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And (as for) those who believe and do good, We will most certainly do away with their evil deeds and We will most certainly reward them the best of what they did.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 7) How Great our Lord is! He mentions removing sins before giving merits — 'cleanness before decorating'. He *the Almighty* wipes out the sins of the believer first and then gives him/her the reward and admits him/her to paradise. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to his/her servant, 'Do not be afraid, I will omit your sins before I give you merits because the human being naturally inclines to do misdeeds more than doing good ones.'

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* will give them what is even greater. In another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Except him who repents and believes and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.' (*al-Furqan:* 70) Not only will He *the Almighty* omit the sins and purify the believer, but He may also change their sins into good deeds! Further, in another verse He *the Almighty* says: 'Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds.' (*Hud:* 114) In the same connection, the Hadith reads: 'Do good deeds if you committed bad ones; the former will wipe out the latter.'(1)

Allah *the Almighty* bestows His endless Favours on you as long as you have believed in Him, in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and in the Book revealed to him. He *the Almighty* will forgive your sins, purify you from them, turn them into good deeds, and then reward you for your good deeds. It is as if He *Glorified is He* is purifying you from sins, to make you ready for receiving the reward and being admitted into paradise. In this way, you will enter paradise honourably with His Grace.

Allah *Glorified is He* will also purify the believers' hearts from any ill feelings or any diseases of the heart. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And We will remove whatever of ill-feeling is in their breasts; the rivers shall flow beneath them and they shall say: All praise is due to Allah...' (*al-A'raf:* 43). Believers in the Hereafter will be purified from all the defects and hardships of this worldly life, including resentment or ill feelings.

The reward of those believers who did good deeds and were purified from bad deeds and sins will be great. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He will admit them into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain forever...' (*at-Taghabun:* 9). He *the Almighty* says 'To admit' not 'to live' which indicates that mere entering paradise is in itself a great triumph, nothing is compared to it. He *the Almighty* also says: 'And whoever is removed away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise, he indeed is successful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 185) Being removed away from the fire even to a place between Hell and Paradise is a great triumph; this is the first degree of triumph. Imagine that a person is standing in terror looking at the fire blazing and burning people. For him/her, being removed away from the fire is a great triumph, but Allah *the Almighty* will also admit him/her to paradise. He *the Almighty* says: 'He will admit them into Gardens...' (*at-Taghabun:* 9). This shows that there is not only one garden, but many gardens; some are special for the believer, while others are shared by all the people of paradise. In the same connection, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A place in Paradise equal to the size of a lash is better than the whole worldly life and whatever is in it.'(1)

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(1) *Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Fear Allah wherever you are, do good deeds after doing bad ones, the former will wipe out the latter, and behave decently towards people.' This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ahmad and Al-Hakim who said, 'This is an authentic Hadith according to the conditions stipulated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, but they did not narrate it in their books.' Adh-Dhahabi agreed with him. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1987; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 21392 and 21441; and Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 178*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Gardens graced with flowing streams…' (*at-Taghabun:* 9). Not only one stream, but rather so many streams run beneath these gardens. In another verse, He *the Almighty* tells us more details about these rivers, saying: 'A parable of the garden which those guarding (against evil) are promised: Therein are rivers of water that does not alter, and rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change, and rivers of drink delicious to those who drink, and rivers of honey clarified…' (*Muhammad:* 15). The believers will be graced with rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey. Not only that, but also '…they will have from all kinds of fruits…' (*Muhammad:* 15). They will stay in these gardens forever; no one will ever drive them out. Besides, the enjoyment will be everlasting; it will neither change, nor decrease, nor vanish.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'That is the supreme triumph.' (*at-Taghabun:* 9) The success that you gain in this worldly life out of your belief and good deeds is not the greatest one; what is greater than that is Allah's Reward for you on the Day of Judgment. Every enjoyment in this life is fleeting, and any reward or success here will vanish, whereas the achievement on the Day of Judgment will be the greatest, as it will never be followed by any kind of loss.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3250 and 6415.*

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَكَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ
ٱلنَّارِ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٠﴾

But those who disbelieved and rejected Our signs will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain – a miserable destination [10] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 10)

In the previous verse, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the reward of the one who believes and does righteous deeds, saying: ‘He will cancel the sins of those who believed in Him and acted righteously: He will admit them into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain forever – the supreme triumph!’ (*at-Taghabun:* 9) Conversely, He *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: ‘But those who disbelieved and rejected Our signs will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain – a miserable destination.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 10) Here, He *Glorified is He* speaks about the destiny of the disbelievers, affirming that they will be the people of the hell wherein they will accompany each other.

The people are either believers or disbelievers. This is how Allah *the Almighty* created them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘It is He who created you, yet some of you disbelieve, and some believe.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 2) That is why the Quran always speaks about the two parties, saying: ‘…a party shall be in the garden and (another) party in the burning fire.’ (*ash-Shura:* 7)

We have spoken about the reward of those who have believed and done righteous deeds. Then, Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the disbelievers, saying: ‘But those who disbelieved and rejected Our Signs...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 10). Disbelief means to try to hide the fact of the Existence of Allah *the Almighty*. This trial is in itself a confession of His Existence because you do not try to hide something that does not exist. Thus, disbelief in itself proves the reality of belief. Thus, how do you disbelieve in Allah *the Almighty* while everything in this world and inside yourself proves His Existence?!

There are two kinds of disbelievers: the first kind disbelieved in the Existence of Allah *Glorified is He* but when they received the guidance and employed their minds, they arrived at the truth and belief. The other kind includes those people who benefit from their disbelief, and that is why they adhere to it, regardless of any proofs or signs that come to them. They want to keep their worldly power that is based on injustice and tyranny. They do not accept to be deprived of it by any means. This kind is what Allah *the Almighty* refers to by saying: ‘Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe.’ (*al-Baqara:* 6) They did not believe because no revelation, Messenger or Prophet came to guide them to Allah’s Way of Guidance, but rather because they consider disbelief, which makes them masters and falsely distinguished, their way of life. Furthermore, belief makes all people equal and prohibits injustice, thus this will not make them distinguished over others. They are not punished only because of their disbelief, but also because of their rejection of Allah's signs. He *the Almighty* describes those who disbelieve, saying: ‘…deaf and dumb within darkness…’ (*al-An‘am:* 39). They cannot see the guidance, nor can they hear or say the truth. Moreover, they live in darkness that prevents them from attaining belief.

They rejected the signs (miracles) that prove the veracity of the Prophet, or the signs of Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran. Those who reject Allah's signs arrogantly refuse to follow Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For such people, the doors of the heavens will not be open, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘Surely (as for) those who reject Our communications and turn away from them haughtily, the doors of heaven shall not be opened for them, nor shall they enter the garden until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle; and thus do We reward the guilty.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 40) This verse shows the kind of people for whom the door of the heavens will not be opened and thus shows that the opposite kind of people, the believers, are the ones for whom the doors of the Heavens will be opened. When their souls ascend to Allah *the Almighty* their good deeds will raise them up; yet, the deniers of the Truth do not rise, instead, they descend and do not enter paradise.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* stipulates a logically, normally, and naturally impossible condition for allowing them to enter the paradise which is: ‘…until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle; and thus do We reward the guilty.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 40) The eye of the needle is the place where the thread enters. The thread never enters unless the diameter of the thread is smaller than the diameter of the eye of the needle and unless the thread is so firm and uncut since it does not enter if it was cut and its parts are straight. So, the tailor sharpens the thread in order to enter it into the eye of the needle. Thus, if you bring a camel and order it to enter in the eye of the needle, can it enter? Of course not; so it is clear that He *the Almighty* stipulates an impossible condition for having them enter paradise.

Those who denied and disregarded the universal signs of Allah *the Almighty* did not deduce from them the Existence of a Mighty, Omnipotent and All-Wise God. They also denied the miraculous signs of the truthfulness of the Prophethood and denied the verses of the Quran, refraining from adhering to their decrees. Allah *the Almighty* will punish such people and deprive them of paradise. If the disbelievers of Quraysh rejected Allah's Verses and Signs, why do the people of the Book also disbelieve? He *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: 'Say, O People of the Book, why do you disbelieve in the verses of Allah, while Allah is Witness over what you do?' (*Al-'Imran:* 98) Their disbelief in Allah's Verses is not due to their premier concealing of them; instead, they believed in Allah and in His Verses which carry good news about the advent of Islam and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* – such verses were inscribed in the Torah and the Bible – yet, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did come, they disbelieved in him, which is tantamount to disbelieving in such verses. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: 'And when there came to them a Book from Allah, confirming that which was with them – although before they used to pray for victory (1) against those who disbelieved – but [then] when there came to them that which they recognised, they disbelieved in it; so the Curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89) In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘O People of the Book, why do you disbelieve in the Verses of Allah while you witness [to their truth]?’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 70) It is as if Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asking them on behalf of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Why do you disbelieve in the verses while you testify to their truth? You used to pray for the coming of the new Messenger to defeat your enemies.’ They used to pray, saying, ‘We ask you, by the unlettered Messenger whom You promised to send by the end of time, to grant us victory’; thus, they defeated their enemies. However, when Allah *the Almighty* sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they disbelieved in him out of their rebellion and envy. They disbelieved because they wanted to keep the temporal authority they had. In fact, they did not only resort to mere falsification, but they also distorted all their available Books that prove the truthfulness of Messenger Muhammad’s Prophethood.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti says that Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundir, Abu Na'yim and Al-Bayhaqi narrated on the authority of 'Asim ibn 'Amr ibn Qatada Al-Ansari that he said, 'Some elderly people among us told us that no one among the Arabs knew about Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him more than we did. There were Jews, people of the Book, among us, and we worshiped idols; when we attacked them, they used to say: "A Messenger will be sent soon whom we will follow and will kill you with him like the people of 'Ad and Iram." However, when Allah sent Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him we followed him and they disbelieved in him; thus, Allah the Almighty revealed about them and us: '...although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved – but [then] when there came to them that which they recognised, they disbelieved in it; so the Curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.' (al-Baqara: 89) See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 1/ 456.*

Another kind of people denied the Resurrection, the Gathering, the Account, and the Recompense of the Day of Judgment and denied the universal signs of Allah *the Almighty* which are proof in and of themselves for Allah’s Power to resurrect the people. Such kind of people are mentioned in the chapter in question. He *the Almighty* says: ‘The disbelievers claim they will not be raised from the dead…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 7) yet, He *the Almighty* emphatically states: ‘Say: [Prophet], “Yes indeed! I swear by my Lord! You will be raised and then you will be informed about everything you have done…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 7) These will not only enter the fire, but will also be its dwellers. It is a home of fire, blaze, *zaqqum*, lamenting, crying, purulence, chains, restrictions and burning bodies. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘(As for) those who disbelieve in Our communications, We shall make them enter fire; so oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement; surely Allah is Mighty, Wise.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56)

Allah *the Almighty* will eternalise their lives so that their punishment continues endlessly; they will taste an everlasting punishment by a Decree of Allah *the Almighty*. Science proved that the human being’s sensitivity to pain resulting from beating by the lash decreases after the first twenty lashes; yet, man forgets that the punishment of the Hereafter is completely different. He *the Almighty* creates for the punished ones new sensors in order to feel the punishment constantly, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘Abiding eternally therein. The punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 88) Thus, the punishment continues by maintaining their skins and replacing them with others. It is known that the normal fire eats what is in it, and then it ends. Yet, the fire in the Hereafter has no end; whenever they are roasted in it, they are replaced with other skins and thus the fire remains blazing and does not get quenched.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says that those who disbelieved and denied His verses and signs: ‘…are the companions of the Fire…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 10). The companion is the one who is pleased with his/her companion and likes to sit with him/her and spend his/her best time with him/her. Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…the companions of the Fire…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 10) implies that fire loves them; it rejoices when they enter it, like when a Companion rejoices at his/her friend and does not want to leave them ever. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘On the Day We will say to Hell, “Have you been filled?” and it will say, “Are there some more?”’ (*Qaf:* 30) Thus, the love of the fire for the disbelievers is clear; it will accompany them everywhere. It is not a noble company for the fire, but it loves it, for when it burns every disbeliever, sinner, and hypocrite, it becomes happy as it punishes those who disbelieved in Allah’s Way of Guidance and denied His signs in the worldly life.

Similarly, paradise loves the company of those who believed in Allah *the Almighty* those who dedicated themselves to worship Him and who applied His Way of Guidance. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, they who have believed and done righteous deeds and humbled themselves (1) to their Lord – those are the companions of paradise; they will abide therein.’ (*Hud:* 23) This means that paradise befriends, loves and accompanies the believers, just as the fire accompanies the disbelievers and the deniers of Allah’s signs. Like the fire when it rejoices while burning the disbeliever, paradise rejoices when it pleases the believer. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘the companions of the Fire…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 10) means that the sinner befriends and accompanies the fire, exactly like a person who befriends and accompanies his/her friend because the fire communicates with the disobedient people, wondering: ‘Are there some more?’ (*Qaf:* 30) Companionship requires a kind of association and attraction between the companions; thus, there will be attraction between the disbelievers and the fire. Further, the word ‘companion’ is attributed to someone who you know very closely. There is a distinction between someone whom you accompany, someone whom you befriend, another whom you establish brotherhood relations with and others whom you are acquainted with yet do not have a close relationship with them. Acquaintance has degrees, while companionship means connection and attraction between two people.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Al-Jawzi mentions that there are seven meanings for ‘Humbled themselves’, as follows: they feared their Lord; repented and turned back to Him; are content with and faithful to Him; and yield and submit to Him. See Ibn Al-Jawzi, Zad Al-Masir, 3/333.*

There are also the companions of hellfire, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘But those who disbelieve and deny Our Signs – those are the companions of Hellfire.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 10) When we hear Allah’s saying: ‘companions of Hellfire,’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 10) our souls are shaken by such undesired companionship. As mentioned previously, companionship implies accompaniment and association – as if the hellfire does not leave them and they do not either. Even though, the hellfire longs for them. On the Day of Judgment, it has two missions: the first one is the companionship which the disbeliever cannot avoid; and the second is restricting the disbeliever in order not to have an opportunity to leave it. As the fire loves and longs for these disbelievers, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And those who disbelieved will be driven to hell in groups until when they reach it, its gates have been opened…’ (*az-Zumar:* 71). On the contrary, He *the Almighty* says about the people and companions of the paradise: ‘But those who feared their Lord will be driven to Paradise in groups until when they reach it, its gates are being opened…’ (*az-Zumar:* 73). The fire opens its gates as soon as the disbelievers are driven to it in groups; meanwhile, the people of paradise receive a welcome party, honouring them at the gates of paradise. It is worth noting that Allah’s saying: ‘are being opened’ (*az-Zumar:* 73) suggests that the gates of paradise are being opened slowly and leisurely in order to celebrate the newcomers of the obedient people who are received by the angels at the gates of paradise. On the other hand, those who disbelieve and deny Allah’s Verses and Signs and who are the companions of the fire are taken out of the mighty woeful situation into immediate execution of the punishment – they are pushed and driven to such punishment.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The Day they are thrust toward the Fire of Hell with [violent] thrust…’ (*at-Tur:* 13) This means that the disbelievers on that Day will be pushed violently, shoved roughly, and pulled, while on their faces into the fire of hell. In addition, they will be rebuked by the angels who will say: ‘This is the Fire which you used to deny.’ (*at-Tur:* 14) Thus, on the Day of Judgment, they will taste the eternal punishment which is unmatchable and ineffable. ‘Thrust’ means to push suddenly and violently, namely, they are pushed violently, forcibly and powerfully into the fire. In this regard, Muqatil said, ‘Their hands are chained to their necks and their foreheads are tied to their feet, then they are pushed violently and dragged into the fire on their faces.’

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: ‘…there to remain…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 10). This indicates that it is impossible for those who disbelieved and denied the Verses of Allah *the Almighty* to escape from this punishment, for it is eternal; the punished one does not leave it, nor does it leave him/her. They are the companions of the fire. It accompanies them and they connect with it, so it does not leave them and they do not move away from it. Yet, does ‘remaining’ mean staying for a long time or eternally? If the meaning of ‘remaining’ signifies eternity, Allah *the Almighty* would not have described staying in the fire as: ‘…there will abide therein…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 88) and in another instance: ‘they will abide therein forever.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 169) This indicates that ‘forever’ implies magnifying the meaning of ‘abide’ without the adverb ‘forever’. Thus, if both verses showed that ‘abide’ suggests perpetuation, then the adverb ‘forever’ would not add extra meaning. However, the Quran is the Speech of Allah *the Almighty* which is free of redundancy and repetition. So, it is necessary to note that ‘abiding’ here indicates staying for long; yet, ‘abiding forever’ means staying for so long that staying has no end since each word in the Quran is clear and meaningful. Allah *the Almighty* says about the eternality of the disbelievers’ dwelling in the fire: ‘The Day it comes no soul will speak except by His Permission. And among them will be the wretched and the prosperous. As for those who were [destined to be] wretched, they will be in the fire. For them therein is [violent] exhaling and inhaling. [They will be] abiding therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except what your Lord should will. Indeed, your Lord is an effecter of what He intends.' (*Hud:* 105-107) Allah *the Almighty* mentions abiding forever in the fire in only three verses of the Quran: 'Except the path of Hell; they will abide therein forever. And that, for Allah, is [always] easy.' (*an-Nisa':* 169); 'Indeed, Allah has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a Blaze. Abiding therein forever, they will not find a protector or a helper.' (*al-Ahzab:* 64-65); 'And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger – then indeed, for him is the fire of Hell; they will abide therein forever.' (*al-Jinn:* 23)

In the same vein, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Death will be brought forward in the shape of a black and white ram. Then a call-maker will call: "O people of Paradise!"' Thereupon, they will stretch their necks and look carefully. The caller will say, "Do you know this?" They will say, "Yes, this is death." By then all of them will have seen it. Then it will be announced again, "O people of Hell!" They will stretch their necks and look carefully. The caller will say: "Do you know this?" They will say, "Yes, this is death." By then all of them will have seen it. Then it (that ram) will be slaughtered and the caller will say, "O people of Paradise! Eternity for you and no death! O people of the Fire! Eternity for you and no death!"(1) Then, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited: "And warn them [O Muhammad] of the Day of Regret when the matter has been concluded, and [yet] they are in [a state of] heedlessness and they do not believe."' (*Maryam:* 39)

Depicting death as a white and black ram suggests that death has an entity. Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that He slaughters death so that we live eternally without death. The people of paradise and also the people of the pire will recognise death and stretch their necks and look carefully. Slaughtering death before them is meant to disappoint the disbelievers because there will be no hope for ending their punishment since death would cease to exist.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4730; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 7360; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 13165.*

As Allah *the Almighty* emphasises eternity in the fire for the disbelievers who denied His Verses and Signs, He *Glorified is He* makes them lose hope in the mitigation of their punishment or reconsideration of their case in hope for mercy. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Abiding eternally therein. The punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved.’ (*al-Baqara:* 162) They should not think that punishment in the Hereafter will be mitigated, decreased in degree or period, or that it will be discontinuous. When punishment is repeated, the human being may get adapted to it. Yet, in reality, the punishment of the Hereafter becomes more severe as its mitigation is not possible. It remains perpetually painful. People might mistakenly think that as long as the disbeliever enters the fire and is burned, s/he will perish and come to an end. Yet, they forget an issue while remembering another. The disbeliever pretends to have forgotten the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Indeed, those who disbelieve in Our Verses – We will drive them into a Fire. Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted in Might and Wise.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 56) The punishment of the disbelievers is inevitable and He *the Almighty* does not relieve them for a break; He *the Almighty* says: ‘And those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, “Supplicate your Lord to lighten for us a day from the punishment, ”’ (*Ghafir:* 49) and ‘Those are the ones who have bought the life of this world [in exchange] for the Hereafter, so the punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be aided.’ (*al-Baqara:* 86) Further, no one can lighten the punishment for them.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And they will call, “O Malik, let your Lord put an end to us!” He will say, “Indeed, you will remain.”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 77) They wish to perish by death in order to rest from the permanent punishment which has no end.

Afterwards, Malik says to them: ‘Indeed, you will remain.’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 77) Thus, the disbelievers will remain in the Fire forever because they have no excuse for their disbelief. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* has decreed the matter in order to disappoint the disbelievers who might mistakenly think that death will end their punishment and thus relieve them. This is impossible since He *the Almighty* brings death and slaughters it before their eyes. Hence, there will be no death, since death is dead. That is why He *the Almighty* describes their fate as: ‘a miserable destination.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 10) This shows the evil fate of the disbelievers. The word ‘miserable’ suggests condemnation and disapproval. So, when the fire becomes the last and permanent dwelling, is not this the wretched destination? They did not find resort except in hell which is naturally a miserable destination.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

مَآ أَصَابَ مِن مُّصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۗ وَمَن يُؤۡمِنۢ
بِٱللَّهِ يَهۡدِ قَلۡبَهُۥۚ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءٍ عَلِيمٞ ﴿١١﴾

Misfortunes can only happen with God’s permission — He
will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him:
God knows all things [11] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 11)

Nothing runs counter to Allah’s Predestination for it is inevitable; no one can oppose Him *Glorified is He* if He wills to make him/her sick, poor, or dead. So, nothing in the universe can avert His Will. As long as you cannot, you should yield pleasantly and be patient regarding His Predestination for you in order to taste and enjoy the belief in His Comprehensive Knowledge, Wisdom and Omnipotence. In this connection, ‘Ubada ibn As-Samit said to his son, ‘O son! You will not get the taste of reality in faith until you know that what has come to you could not miss you and that what has missed you could not come to you. I heard Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say, “The first thing Allah created is the pen. He said to it: ‘Write.’ It asked: ‘What should I write, my Lord?’ He said: ‘Write what was decreed about everything till the last Hour comes.’ Son, I heard Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* say, ‘He who dies on something other than this does not belong to me.’”’(1)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Misfortunes can only happen with Allah’s permission—He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him: Allah knows all things.' (*at-Taghabun:* 11) He *the Almighty* mentions the reward of the believers, saying: 'He will cancel the sins of those who believed in Him and acted righteously: He will admit them into Gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain forever – the supreme triumph.' (*at-Taghabun:* 9) Then, He *the Almighty* mentions the punishment of the disbelievers, saying: 'But those who disbelieved and rejected Our Signs will be the inhabitants of the Fire there to remain–a miserable destination.' (*at-Taghabun:* 10) In the chapter in question, He *the Almighty* states the elements of faith required from people, saying: 'So believe in Allah, in His Messenger, and in the light We have sent down…' (*at-Taghabun:* 8). Thus, the elements of faith are as follows: Belief in Allah, in His Messenger, in the Quran and in the Divine Predestination. So, He *the Almighty* says here: 'Misfortunes can only happen with Allah's permission...' (*at-Taghabun:* 11).

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(1) *See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4702; see also Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 21400; At-Tabarani, Musnad, Hadith no. 59; Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Qada’ Wa Al-Qadar, Hadith no. 8; and Abu Nu‘aym, Hilyat Al-Awliya’, 5/248*

'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'Once we were sitting in the company of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when there appeared a man dressed in very white clothes with extraordinary black hair. No signs of fatigue of journey appeared on him and he was known to none of us. He sat down facing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* leaning his knees against the knees of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and placing both his palms over his two thighs and said, "O Muhammad, tell about faith." Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: "It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers and the Last Day and that you believe in preordainment, its bad and good consequences." He said: "You have spoken the Truth."'(1)

There are times when the human being does not have choices, such as sickness and death, so s/he cannot say, 'I will not get sick,' or 'I will not die.' S/he may lose his/her wealth or have his/her home burned, so s/he cannot prevent the Predestination. The calamities are destined by Allah *the Almighty* in order to benefit the believer for when s/he faces a calamity, it either removes a misdeed for him/her or raises him/her one degree. If the believer receives the calamity with satisfaction and recognises that Allah *the Almighty* Who decreed it, is All-Wise and only destines for him/her what He knows for sure to be good, even if it is unknown by him/her, then s/he is rewarded for his/her patience and satisfaction. Thus, s/he quits the circle of severe pain.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ahmad, An-Nasa'i, At-Tayalisi, and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. It is the Hadith of Gabriel who was asking about Islam, Iman and Perfection while in the shape of a man. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 367; An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4990; At-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no. 21; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 21393*

So, the true believer receives all Allah's Predestinations with satisfaction. Allah's Predestinations, as long as unchosen, have wisdom behind them since He *the Almighty* only destines what is good for the believer. After the soul is satisfied with its destiny, the person will ultimately know the wisdom behind it. If you receive your various destines well, you will find out that your failure in any incident destined for you is a result of your deeds. As for the destinies which you have no control over, they are destinies for a good reason which might be unknown to you.

Thus, if receiving the destiny has been out of your control, it is in your interest; if it has been resulting from you, it is against you. Besides, if you count the destinies which benefit you, you will find them much more than the bad ones. So, the believer needs to be connected with Allah *the Almighty* and put his/her trust in Him, taking into consideration that putting trust in Him *Glorified is He* means that the limbs act while the hearts trust Him, since trust in Allah *the Almighty* is the mission of the hearts, not the limbs. Each one of us should beware that Allah *the Almighty* may constrain our means of sustenance in order not to tempt us. In this way, your faith in Him as well as that of the people will be straightened. Hence, you should thank Allah *the Almighty* and submit to His Preordainment and Destiny. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not.' (*al-Baqara:* 216) Whoever accepts His Predestination and remembers that s/he has a Lord Who bestows beyond all reasons, s/he will be endowed with a heart filled with reassurance before any incident. When the Muslim accepts and submits to Allah's Predestination, s/he will reap the fruits of this submission. The period of tribulation lingers for people because they do not accept it as Allah's Predestination; however, He *the Almighty* cannot be forced by anyone, and His Predestination is inevitable whether you accept it or not.

When you submit to Allah *the Almighty* and accept His Predestination, He removes your tribulations or shows you the goodness embodied in them. So, you have to respect and accept His Predestination because it is decided by your Lord, the Creator, and the All-Wise. His Predestination is not removed until people accept it. More often than not, we see people rejecting the Predestination, especially when a young child dies. You see his/her family crying and wailing so much over him/her to the extent that we might hear someone saying, ‘S/he did not enjoy his/her youth.’ These acts of ignorance are absurd; what youth?! What pleasure is this? S/he left a futile and mortal worldly life and a temporary pleasure, moving into the everlasting dwelling and permanent pleasure. How is this? S/he stopped living with the creatures and went to the Creator *Glorified is He*.

When you face a painful destiny, you should be patient because you should know it is decreed with the Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty*. The person afflicted with such destiny should believe that: ‘Misfortunes can only happen with Allah’s Permission...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 11). S/he must return to Allah *the Almighty* and recall His saying: ‘Who, when disaster strikes them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.’ (*al-Baqara:* 156)

The disaster is the thing which causes hardship and pain to the human being. The believer shall receive the disaster trusting that s/he will be rewarded proportional to the inflection. When the believer says: ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return,’ (*al-Baqara:* 156) it means that even if s/he is afflicted by the calamities of the worldly life, including oppression by a human being, s/he will be rewarded for it when we return to Allah *the Almighty*.

We belong to Allah *the Almighty* in the first place, and we are His Possession in the final destination as well; He *the Almighty* is the Owner of our beginning and end. So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught us to say when we suffer from a calamity: ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.’ (*al-Baqara:* 156); and: ‘O Allah, reward me for my affliction and give me something better than it in exchange for it.’(1) If you say so when you suffer from any calamity, then Allah *the Almighty* will compensate you with something better in exchange. The believer may suffer the calamity of the death of someone dear to him/her, yet, s/he receives the calamity with faith and says, ‘My grieving will not get him/her back; it is better to win paradise by being patient and accepting this predestination. The reward I gain out of this is a sufficient condolence for me; I would not gain from him/her the reward I have gained when I endure the calamity of losing him/her.’ When the human being suffers a calamity, s/he should be satisfied and say, ‘As long as I have no interference in the calamity which Allah *the Almighty* destined for me, then it is a test and He *the Almighty* will reward me for it.’

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(1) *In his book, Imam Muslim mentions that Um Salama Allah be pleased with her said, ‘I heard Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him say, “There is no Muslim who is stricken with a calamity and reacts by saying as Allah has commanded: Indeed=*

When a father is inflicted by the death of a son, he may grieve for a long time and the deceased’s mother may wail whenever she sees a child at his age. However, if they want Allah *the Almighty* to remove their calamity, then they need to close the door of grieving by acceptance and submission to His Predestination. Each believer should know that s/he will be compensated for the death of someone dear to him/her by a reward better than what s/he lost, and that the dead one will be compensated with a reward better than the worldly life. As a result, it is said, ‘The inflicted one is not one who is stricken with a calamity of losing his/her dear ones, but it is s/he who loses the reward of bearing this calamity and accepting Allah’s Predestination.’(1) It is as if the inflicted one, who was deprived of the reward, had sold his/her calamity with a cheap value. When people stricken with the calamity recall its reward, this helps them live in pleasure. No wonder some people praise and thank Allah

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= *we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return. O Allah, reward me for my affliction and give me something better than it in exchange for it,” but Allah will compensate him with something better than it.’ It is also narrated by Ahmad and Al-Bayhaqi. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2165; Ahmad, Sunnan, Hadith no. 26677, 16388; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 7376*

(1) *Al-Bayhaqi mentions that Ja‘far Ibn Mohamad said: ‘When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him died and condolences came, they heard someone saying: “There is in Allah a condolence for every calamity, a compensation for every loss and attainment for every missing issue.” So, trust and ask Allah; the infected one is the one who is deprived of the reward.’ It is also mentioned by Al-Hakim who authenticated it, and Adh-Dhahabi agreed with him. See Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, 7342; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 4391.*

the Almighty for the calamities since they may be provided with a greater reward than what they lost. So, you have to receive the calamity with satisfaction and beware of separating the calamity from the One Who decreed it; rather, you should examine the goodness that follows it and should never despair. Despair upon the calamity is futile. If you associate the calamity with the One Who decreed it, you will know that He is All-Wise and decreed it for an unseen wisdom. So, if you deeply thought about it, you will reach the same conclusion.

The calamity does not strike anyone except by the permission of Allah *the Almighty* since nothing occurs in His Dominion without His Will. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Say, "Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us…' (*at-Tawba:* 51) Thus, nothing will happen to us except what He *the Almighty* has decreed for us. It is worth noting that He *the Almighty* says: '…what Allah *the Almighty* has decreed for us…' (*at-Tawba:* 51) and does not say 'what was decreed against us.' When we examine the matter of being stricken by a calamity, we will find it in our interest, as He *the Almighty* will reward us for it. He *the Almighty* does not say: 'what was decreed against us' because it will suggest that it is a punishment by Him. So, the true believer receives each calamity while expecting goodness out of it. Besides, as long as we cannot prevent calamities and incidents, then we should accept them as what the true believer should do. As it is Allah's Decree for us, this makes us feel that the calamity is in the interest of whoever is stricken by it. So, if you saw a calamity striking us and thought it would harm us, you need to know that we trust the One Who decreed it; it bears a piece of wisdom as everything is decreed in our interest, not against it. Thus, all what Allah *the Almighty* has decreed for the believer is in his/her interest in order to rectify or reward him/her or improve his/her position in life; that is why it is in our interest.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…only happen with Allah's Permission...' (*at-Taghabun:* 11) it emphasises that the calamities do not befall except by His permission. This is one of His favours because it saves the human being from humbling him/herself before others as those people cannot cause him/her harm unless it has been decreed by Allah *the Almighty*. This proves what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said in a Hadith: 'If you ask, ask from Him [alone]; if you seek help, then seek help from Allah. And remember that if all people gather to benefit you, they will not be able to benefit you except that which Allah *the Almighty* had decreed for you; and if all of them gather to do harm to you, they will not be able to afflict you with anything other than which Allah *the Almighty* had pre-destined against you. The pens had been lifted and the ink had dried up.'(1)

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him...' (*at-Taghabun:* 11) The greatness of faith is manifested when the sincere believer is stricken by an undesirable destiny. His/her sincere faith guides his/her heart. 'Guide' here means to show, indicate, clarify, and manifest; this is the Guidance of natural disposition. The other kind of Guidance is that of guiding to the Straight Path and Support. Guidance of Natural Disposition is the closest meaning for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him...' (*at-Taghabun:* 11) It means to direct his/her heart and help it accept Allah's Predestination and Decree when s/he is stricken with calamities. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who guide us to the Straight Path. Guidance is realised only through adhering to Allah's Way of Guidance and His Straight Path, which makes people patient, content and satisfied when they are inflicted with a calamity.

'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, one of the greatest scholar of the *ummah* and the Interpreter of the Quran, explained the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him...' (*at-Taghabun:* 11) saying, 'Guide his/her heart to certainty in order to recognise that what has stricken you could not miss you and that what has missed you could not inflict you.' Abu Al-'Aliya(2) says, 'Allah *the Almighty* has committed that He guides whoever believes in Him; He suffices whoever puts his/her trust in Him; He rewards whoever gives charity for His sake; He saves whoever trusts Him; He responds to whoever prays to Him.’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ahmad and Abu Ya'la on the authority of Ibn 'Abass Allah be pleased with him. It was authenticated by Husayn Salim Asad. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2516; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 2763; Abu Ya'la, Musnad, Hadith no. 2556*

(2) *Abu Al-'Aliya Rafi' ibn Mahran, an Imam, reciter, memoriser and interpreter of Quran, is a figure from Bani Rayyah, Al-Basra. He was a slave for a woman from Bani Rayyah ibn yarbu' then Bani Tamim. He witnessed the era of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him when he was a young man. He declared his Islam when Abu Bakr As-Sidiq was Caliph. He used to listen to 'Umar, 'Ali and Abu-Dharr among other Companions before he died in 93 A.H.*

In the same vein, Muqatil ibn Sulaiman(2) said, ‘Whoever believes in Allah in the event of a calamity and recognises that the calamity is the Destiny of Allah, and submits to Him, Allah *the Almighty* guides him/her to say: ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.’ (*al-Baqara:* 156) So, Allah’s saying: ‘He will guide his heart...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 11) means that He *the Almighty* guides his/her heart to submission to His Decree and contentment with His Predestination, as s/he recognises it is a decree by Allah *the Almighty*. At that time, He *the Almighty* guides his/her heart, which makes him/her reassured, content, enduring patiently the calamities; and thus s/he gains an immediate reward along with the reward saved for him/her on the Day of Judgment. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account [i.e. limit]’ (*az-Zumar:* 10). On the contrary, those who despair and panic do not settle down before calamities related to the self, wealth, children or dear ones. When Allah *the Almighty* guides one’s heart, s/he does not panic; instead, s/he endures the calamity pleasantly and does not complain, despair or fear. When the human being is stricken with a calamity beyond his/her endurance and has no way out, s/he has two options: first, to receive the calamity with despair and complaint; secondly, to receive it with endurance and patience. Allah *the Almighty* frequently inflicts the believers with hardships. However, these hardships are favours from Him *the Almighty* since the mere hardship is not evil in itself; instead, the real evil is to fall in the event of hardships by not enduring them and accepting His Predestination. So, each hardship is a test and a trial.

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(1) *Abu Al-‘Aliya said, ‘Allah has committed Himself that He guides whoever believes in Him; the proof is: ‘And whoever believes in Allah – He will guide his heart...’ (at-Taghabun: 11); He suffices whoever puts his trust in Him; He rewards whoever lends Him; the proof is the saying of Allah: ‘Whoever that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over.’ (al-Baqara: 245); He saves whoever trusts Him; the proof is His saying: ‘And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all-together.’ (Al-‘Imran: 103) Holding to Allah is Trust. He responds to whoever prays for Him; the proof is His saying: ‘And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me – Indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me…’ (al-Baqara: 186). See Adh-Dhahabi, Siyar A‘lam Al-Nubala’, 4/211; and Abu Na‘yam, Hilyat Al-Awliya’, 2/ 221*

(2) *Muqatil ibn Sulayman ibn Bashir Al-Uzdi Al-Balkhi, Abu Al-Hasan, a figure among the interpreters of Quran, originated from Balkh, moved to Basra and entered Baghdad. He died in 150 AH. His narrations of Hadiths were avoided. His books include At-Tafsir Al-Kabir, Nawadir At-Tafsir, Ar-Radd ‘Ala Al-Qadariyya, and Mutashabih Al-Quran. See, Az-Zirikli, Al-‘Alam, 7/ 281.*

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And He will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient.’ (*al-Baqara:* 155) The first hardship of these is fear, since your fear helps its source to overwhelm you. So, do not live in fear and panic before their actual time comes. The plight of people is that they live in calamities before they strike them; thus, they extend the period of the calamities. The calamity might come after a month, for instance, so why do you extend the period of the calamity by fearing and worrying about facing it? You need to know that when the calamity befalls you, Allah, the Most Merciful, accompanies it with relief. So, if you lived in the calamity before it struck you, you would undergo it without the relief accompanying it; yet, if you remained patient, content and able to face any hardship, then you would not experience the calamity without relief. The second hardship is hunger, the third is the decrease of wealth, the fourth is the loss of lives, and the fifth is the loss of fruits.

Most importantly, the human being should manage these hardships in order to face life with endurance and strength. The hardship is not evil in itself; it is a test which the person might pass while another one might fail in it. So, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He will guide the heart of anyone who believes in Him...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 11). The one who succeeds is the one who believes in Allah *the Almighty* truly, tastes the sweetness of Faith that all the destinies are decreed by Allah. Such a believer has his/her heart guided by Him *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah knows all things.’ (*at-Taghabun:* 11) Allah *the Almighty* has All Encompassing Knowledge about everything whether in the past, the present, or the future. He *Glorified is He* knows the events before they come to pass. Moreover, He knows the submission of those who yielded and accepted His Predestination and rewards them, and He knows the rejection of those who rejected it. He *the Almighty* is All Knowing; no secret can be concealed from Him and nothing may occur in the universe without His Knowledge and Permission. He *the Almighty* knows what we conceal and what we declare. No atom of His universe is hidden from Him. Further, He knows people's conditions, speeches, acts, and secrets. Thus, His Knowledge is comprehensive; He knows your intent, the extent of your patience over what has stricken you, as well as your degree of certainty and submission to Him.

In this regard, a father advises his son before his death; he is about to leave the worldly life and meet Allah *the Almighty*. Al-Walid ibn 'Ubada As-Samit entered upon his father, 'Ubada, while he was sick and dying. Al-Walid says, 'I said, "O Father, advise me to the best of your ability." He said, "Help me sit down," and added, "O son you will not taste faith and will not realise the true reality of knowledge about Allah until you believe in predestination; whether good or evil." I said, "O father, how do I know the good predestination and the evil one?" He said, "What has struck you could not miss you and that what has missed you could not come to you. O son, I heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'The first thing created is the pen. Then, he said: Write. By this hour, everything until the Day of Judgement was decreed' O son, if I died while not on this, I would enter the fire (1).

On the other hand, sometimes the calamities are destined because of the people themselves, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And when We let the people taste mercy, they rejoice therein, but if evil afflicts them for what their hands have put forth, immediately they despair.' (*ar-Rum:* 36) If you associate the mercy or calamity with the One Who decreed them, you will know that He *the Almighty* is Wise in both conditions. Yet, if you look at the calamity only, you will grieve and despair. However, if you consider the Mercy of the One Who decreed such calamity, you will be content and reassured.

The calamity is meant to be the thing which strikes you and it does not miss you because it is decreed by your Lord, the Wise. If He *the Almighty* decreed something good for you, it will come so do not worry about it or compete with people for it. If it was bad, you should never say, 'I will be cautious in order to avoid it,’ because there is no escape for you from it. Further, why do you despair and become disappointed if you are stricken with a calamity? Why do you not wait and see; it should have wisdom behind it. Maybe there is unseen goodness out of it and perhaps it is a hardship which will be relieved soon. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 22757; and At-Tabarani, Musnad, Hadith no. 949.*

وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱلرَّسُولَ ۚ فَإِن تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَىٰ رَسُولِنَا ٱلْبَلَٰغُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿١٢﴾

So obey God and the Messenger. If you turn away,
remember that Our Messenger’s duty is only to make
plain his message [12] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 12)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* commands the Muslims to obey Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because it is part of their obedience to Him *Glorified is He*. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah; but those who turn away – We have not sent you over them as a guardian.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 80) So, whoever refrains from obeying him *peace and blessings be upon him* will be punished in the Hereafter. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says about those who rebel against his obedience: ‘Say, “Obey Allah, and the Messenger.” But if they turn away – then indeed, Allah does not like the disbelievers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 32)

In the same vein, it is narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘I was sitting with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and some of his Companions when he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Do you not know that I am the Messenger of Allah who has been sent for you?’ They said, ‘We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah.’ He said, ‘Do you not know that Allah *the Almighty* has revealed in His Book that whoever obeys me has obeyed Allah?’ They said, ‘We testify that whoever obeys you obeys Allah. Allah orders us to obey you.’ He said, ‘Obey Allah and the Messenger; the obedience of Allah is my obedience. My obedience requires obedience of your Imams; if the Imam performed the prayers while sitting down; perform your prayers while sitting. (1)’

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 5679; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 6093; At-Tabarani, Mu‘jam, Hadith no.13060; Abu Ja‘far At-Tahawi, Sharh Mushkil Al-Athar, Hadith no. 5644, and Ibn ‘Asakir, Mu‘jam Sheikh, Ibn ‘Asakir, Hadith no. 732.*

Obedience involves complying with the commands and avoiding the prohibition; this is the obedience in the religion. If you examined the Quran, you will find that the verses regarding the matter of obedience required from those who believe in Allah's Way of Guidance and testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, is represented in orders and prohibitions. If you read the Quran, you will find He *the Almighty* says regarding obedience: 'Say, "Obey Allah, and the Messenger."' (*Al-'Imran:* 32) Here, He *the Almighty* does not repeat 'obey' and only repeats the ones to be obeyed: Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger. However, He *Glorified is He* repeats the verb 'obey' saying in another verse: 'Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger…' (*an-Nisa':* 59). In a third instance, He *the Almighty* says: 'And obey the Messenger that you may receive mercy.' (*an-Nur:* 56); and in a fourth instance: 'Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.' (*an-Nisa':* 59) Here, those in authority are added. So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Obey Allah, and the Messenger,' (*Al-'Imran:* 32) it includes the rulings ordained by Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Therefore, you must obey both of them with regard to these rulings. If He *the Almighty* has provided a general ruling, while Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has provided a detailed one, such as prayers, *zakat* and pilgrimage, then, you must also obey both of them.

In addition, if there is a ruling not decreed by Allah *the Almighty* but by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* we must obey him according to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you – take; and what he has forbidden you – refrain from.' (*al-Hashr:* 7) We obey him in such a ruling since Allah *the Almighty* also says in another verse: 'He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah...' (*an-Nisa':* 80). This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has acted by the authority that Allah *Glorified is He* granted to him: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you – take; and what he has forbidden you – refrain from.' (*al-Hashr:* 7)

Thus, obeying Allah *the Almighty* requires obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. There are kinds of rulings decreed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: First, he decrees what Allah *the Almighty* has decreed in order to emphasise it; secondly, he elaborates on what Allah *the Almighty* has decreed generally. For example, He *the Almighty* has decreed prayer and *zakat.* These are general obligations which were elaborated on by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For instance, he *peace and blessings be upon him* has clarified the prescribed minimum amount liable to *zakat*. Therefore, we obey Allah *the Almighty* in His general Decree and obey Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding its details.

Sometimes Allah *the Almighty* does not issue a ruling regarding a matter; yet Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* issues one by the authority granted to him. So, if anyone argued about any ruling and needed a proof from the Quran, yet you cannot find one, and can only provide a proof from what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, then you should quote Allah's saying: 'And whatever the Messenger has given you – take; and what he has forbidden you – refrain from.' (*al-Hashr:* 7) So, Allah *the Almighty* commands the Muslims to obey Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since his obedience is derived from obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* Who says: 'He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah; but those who turn away – We have not sent you over them as a guardian.' (*an-Nisa':* 80) Thus, obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is obedience to Allah, and whoever refrains from his obedience is punished in the Hereafter. So, He *the Almighty* stresses the importance of obeying both Him and His Messenger, for the former entails the latter.

Obedience to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is related to all kinds of rulings and obligations. Sometimes Allah *the Almighty* decrees a ruling that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* confirms it by his Hadith or a practice; so when the believer obeys this decree, s/he obeys both Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger. Other times, the decree is revealed by Allah *the Almighty* generally; then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* elaborates on it. For instance, He *the Almighty* says: 'And establish prayer and give *zakat* and obey the Messenger – that you may receive mercy.' (*an-Nur:* 56) One would not have been able to know the number of daily prayers or the number of their units or the way of praying if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had not explained them.

So, the believer obeys Allah *the Almighty* with regard to the general commandments and obeys Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with regard to their details. In fact, we should take into consideration that obedience here is divided into two types: obedience to Allah *the Almighty* and obedience to His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for the commandments issued by both of them, they must all be obeyed. This is because they all are of the same nature.

Concerning Allah's Commandments that carry general religious obligations, He *the Almighty* leaves the task of their explanation to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, the true believer obeys Allah *the Almighty* regarding general commandments, such as the establishment of obligatory prayers, and obeys Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with respect to the detailed rules and procedures of prayers. Sometimes, the religious injunctions are issued by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on account of the authority that Allah *the Almighty* granted to him.

He *the Almighty* entrusts him *peace and blessings be upon him* with making legislations that ensure the sound and correct life of believers. Further, He grants him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* the general authority to make legislations. As long as it is so, a believer's obedience to Messenger Muhammad includes what he commanded independently, even if it is not issued by Allah *Glorified is He*.

Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; we find no textual evidence in the Quran that indicates that the Dawn Prayer consists of two units. But it is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who provided the details of prayer for us and taught us that the Dawn Prayer comprises two units; the Noon Prayer is composed of four units; the Afternoon Prayer consists of four units; the Sunset Prayer consists of three units, whilst the Evening Prayer is made up of four units. (1)

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(1) *Ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him narrated that Jibril (Gabriel) came to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said to him, 'Rise and perform prayer.' This was at the time when the sun reached the meridian. He indeed observed the Noon Prayer as four units. Then Jibril (Gabriel) came to him again at the moment when his shadow was double its size and said, 'Rise and perform the Afternoon Prayer as four units.' When the sun set, Jibril (Gabriel) came to him peace and blessings be upon him=*

Obedience is obligatory on all the believers, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'O you, who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger…' (*an-Nisa':* 59).

Once you have believed in Allah *the Almighty* as the Wise Creator Who charges you with certain obligations, then you must obey and listen eagerly to what He *the Almighty* says to you. He *the Almighty* does not order all people to obey Him from the beginning; rather, He orders them first to believe in Him. As soon as one believes in Him *the Almighty* He thus commands him to obey His Commands.

Obedience to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is based on belief in Allah *the Almighty* and His Messenger. This is entirely fair because Allah *the Almighty* only commands those who believe in Him to fulfil the obligations. As for those who disbelieve, He *the Almighty* commands them to believe in Him first before charging them with any obligations. So, after the person believes in Allah *the Almighty* He says to him, 'Obey me'. That is why we note that His Commands always begin with His Saying: 'O you who have believed….' (*an-Nisa':* 59).

You should beware of delving into or arguing over the Injunctions of Allah *the Almighty* mistakenly thinking that if you are convinced of them, you will adopt them; but if not, you will neglect them! This is unacceptable altogether, since it indicates that you have doubted these injunctions. What you are bound to do is to hasten to implement these injunctions as long as you believe that they are issued by Allah *the Almighty*.

He *the Almighty* warns us against not obeying Him and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and beware…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 92). So, why does He *the Almighty* give this warning? It is meant to teach us that Satan will attempt to prevent us

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= *and said to him, 'Rise and perform the Sunset Prayer as three units.' When the twilight disappeared, Jibril (Gabriel) came to him peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'Rise and observe Evening Prayer as four units.' When the dawn broke, Jibril (Gabriel) came to him and said, 'Rise and observe the Dawn Prayer as two units.' Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him rose and performed the Dawn Prayer as two units. See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 14143* from obeying Him *Glorified is He* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that he will also try his best to plunge us into confusion.

The moment Satan knows that a person has an inclination towards any kind of physical pleasure; he tries to attract him to disobedience through this door. However, if a person closes all doors to Satan, he cannot beguile him into stealing or drinking alcohol, for example. So, Satan does not leave the human being alone, for he attacks him through acts of obedience. He, for example, comes to a person when he performs ablution and makes him forget to wash of his hands or makes him wonder if he has performed ablution properly or not. Satan can also come to a believer when he prays and makes him forget how many units he prayed or how many prostrations he made. Thus, Satan can attack a believer through obedience. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and beware…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 92).

Allah *the Almighty* informs us that Satan said threateningly: 'I will certainly lie in wait for them in Your Straight Path' (*al-A'raf:* 16). He swears to lie in wait for Allah's servants in the Straight Path, not the crooked one, and to sit in wait for them in the way of obedience to discourage them from it.

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* does not force the believer to obey Him. He gives him freedom of choice so that the final Reckoning in the Hereafter will be on a fair basis. Likewise, if one opts for disbelief, He *the Almighty* does not coerce one to believe. Similarly, if one opts for transgression, He *the Almighty* does not force one into obeying Him. Thus, He *the Almighty* respects one's own choice because it is He Who grants one this choice in order to hold one accountable on the Day of Judgement.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us the choice to believe, obey, or disobey, to know who obeys Him out of love and who does so compulsorily. Then, He *the Almighty* says: '…If you turn away…' (*at-Taghabun:* 12). Turning away here means diverting from Allah's Way of Guidance and refusing to obey Him *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *the Almighty* forbids the believers from turning away from His Obedience, saying: 'O you who believe! Obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn back from Him while you hear' (*al-Anfal:* 20). As long as you have believed, you are not allowed to give up what you have believed in. It is worth noting that He *the Almighty* does not say: 'and do not turn back from them,' according to the human style. But He *the Almighty* rather says: '…and do not turn back from Him...' (*al-Anfal:* 20). This signifies that He *the Almighty* regards obedience to Him and to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as one thing. As he *peace and blessings be upon him* communicates Allah's Commands, there is thus no difference between the two types of obedience. Another possible interpretation is that turning away from Allah *the Almighty* is unimaginable, for He *the Almighty* seizes anyone who tries to turn away at any time.

So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'If you turn away remember that Our Messenger's duty is only to make plain his Message' (*at-Taghabun:* 12), it means that if they shun the religious obligations, this will not do any harm to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he is only required to communicate the Message of Islam clearly. As a matter of fact, they cause harm to themselves when they turn away from the religious duties. Allah *the Almighty* has known since time immemorial that some people will argue, 'This ruling does not exist in the Quran.' So, obedience to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is mentioned together with that of Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, obedience to Messenger Muhammad is independent, and He *the Almighty* wills it to be so, to respond in advance to those who look for all the religious details. So, it is as if He *the Almighty* was saying to them, 'What you will search is found in the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad.' He *the Almighty* has known since time immemorial that some people will say that they will obey Allah *the Almighty* according to the Quranic texts only. In this respect, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'The time will come when a man sits on a couch and relates my Hadiths and says, "What adjudicates between me and you is the Scripture of Allah. If we find in it something unlawful, we will regard it as such, and if we find therein something unlawful, we will deem it so." [He *peace and blessings be upon him* continues,] Indeed, what Allah's Messenger declares unlawful is the same as what Allah forbids.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Abu Dawud, Ibn Maja, Ahmad and Ad-Daraqutni on the authority of Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Yakrib. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1406; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2664; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 12; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 17213 and 17233; and Ad-Daraqutni, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4767.*

Needless to say, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* communicates the Message of Islam on behalf of Allah *the Almighty*.

So, we should beware of Satan when he tempts us through obedience. But why does Allah *the Almighty* say: 'If you turn away...' (*at-Taghabun:* 12)? What are the things from which are turned away? He *the Almighty* explains to us that the human being has a choice between obedience and disobedience. Even if a person inclines towards disobedience and turns away from belief which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed from Allah *the Almighty* and persists in disbelief, such a person must know that he *peace and blessings be upon him* has actually fulfilled his mission in the most optimal way.

It is only required of him *peace and blessings be upon him* to communicate the Islamic Way of Guidance, and he indeed clarified everything connected with all the aspects of life. He *peace and blessings be upon him* informed us about what Allah *the Almighty* wants from us. For example, he taught us to believe in One Omnipotent and Wise God Who has all the Perfect Attributes, and to avoid all the practices of Pre-Islamic Arabs, such as slaughtering animals on stone altars and idolatry.

The communication of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* obliges us to believe and to do certain actions. The actions are divided into two types: positive actions and negative ones. The first type revolves around firmly committing to doing the commands if you do not already do them, whereas the second is pertinent to refraining from what Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* forbid.

We must keep in mind that Allah *the Almighty* does not want Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to be overburdened with guiding people into belief. His mission is only to convey Allah's Message so that the final Reckoning will be based on sound and fair foundations. As for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he is not responsible for those who throw themselves into hell and torment, nor is he accountable for their being rightly guided; rather, he is only responsible for conveying the Message of his Lord. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and you shall not be called upon to answer for the companions of the flaming fire' (*al-Baqara:* 119).

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hopes that each member of his *ummah* is rightly guided. However, He *the Almighty* says: ‘You have no concern in the affair whether He turns to them (mercifully) or chastises them, for surely they are unjust’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 128). This verse means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* has nothing to do with the matter of Allah’s pardoning or punishing of those who disobey. Their punishment should not grieve him, for they are unfair people. In other words, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is commissioned to convey the Message only. As far as those who disbelieve are concerned, it is they who have wronged themselves with their disbelief. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* was saying to him, ‘Do not upset yourself, Muhammad! Only the communication of the Message is incumbent upon you.’ Thus, He *the Almighty* facilitates Messenger Muhammad’s mission.

That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah, and whoever turns back, so We have not sent you as a guardian over them’ (*an-Nisa’:* 8). The word ‘guardian’ here refers to the one who guards those to whom he conveys the Commands of Allah *the Almighty* and sets them straight when they deviate from the Right Path. But Allah *the Almighty* makes it clear, ‘I have not sent you, Muhammad, as a guardian over them. I just sent you to communicate the Message to them. They have the choice to follow the religious duties or to neglect them.’

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* declares a ruling, the believers must receive it on the basis that it primarily comes from Allah *the Almighty* Who knows best that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would never conceal the Message, and so he is not to be blamed by anyone.

Thus, the main duty of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to convey the Message, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Nothing is (incumbent) on the Apostle but to deliver (the Message)…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 99). Concerning the implementation of the Message, it falls on the shoulders of those who believe in it. If they carry it out, their reward will be paradise, but if they do not, they will deserve punishment.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Indeed there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord; whoever will therefore see, it is for his own soul and whoever will be blind, it shall be against himself and I am not a keeper over you' (*al-An'am:* 04). Here, He *the Almighty* states that the enlightening proofs have reached us, and that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has communicated the Message clearly. Thus, He *the Almighty* revealed His Laws and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* imparted them to us. What remains is that we put them into practice. So, we will not be excused by the Supreme Lawgiver, Allah *the Almighty* the Creator, or by the infallible communicator, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Delivering the Message must be carried out in a gentle, tender manner. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* relates that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* said: 'I deliver to you the Messages of my Lord, and I offer you good advice and I know from Allah what you do not know' (*al-A'raf:* 62). So, delivering the Message requires Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* to inform his people about the Way of Allah *the Almighty* first and then to call them to follow that Way by winning over their hearts by means of addressing and counselling them in a gentle manner. The Quranic wording is miraculous; he *peace be upon him* says: '…I offer you good advice…' (*al-A'raf:* 62). This indicates that he seeks no benefit from them for giving the advice; rather, it is for the good of the one who receives it.

Thus, the disbelievers should not think that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gets any benefit from them if they believe. In fact, their disbelief will not scale down his reward, for he *peace and blessings be upon him* will obtain no advantage from them whether they believe or disbelieve. Their turning away from what he communicates to them, neither benefits and nor harms him, as he does not receive any reward from them, but rather from Allah *the Almighty*.

With respect to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Our Messenger's duty...' (*at-Taghabun:* 12), it refers to the obligation which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is required to fulfil. This obligation is confined to conveying the Message as he received it without adding or omitting anything.

In this vein, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is not permitted to make additions to the Quranic verses which he receives from Allah *the Almighty*. That is why, He *the Almighty* says: 'Nor does he speak out of desire [3] It is naught but revelation that is revealed [4]' (*an-Najm:* 3-4) so, we should have confidence in his *peace and blessings be upon him* judgements since he does not speak according to his own desires; rather, he only delivers the Call to mankind and teaches them the Quran. Allah *the Almighty* also tells us that he *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'I only follow what is revealed to me…' (*al-An'am:* 50). Thus, Messenger Muhammad's statements are not based on his personal inclinations; rather, he imparts the Divine Revelation exactly as it was revealed to him.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* is but a human who conveys Allah's Message to the people and obeys His commands. To this effect Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say, [O Muhammad], "It is not for me to change it on my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. Indeed I fear, if I should disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous Day"' (*Yunus:* 15).

In a related context, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* adds for us another aspect of obedience to him, saying: 'Obedience to me also includes obeying your Imams. If an Imam performs prayer while sitting, observe prayer while you are sitting as well.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* talks to us about leading others in prayer and tells us that Imams must be imitated regarding some procedures and body positions linked with prayer. If the Imam performs prayer while sitting, we should do the same.

In this connection, Jabir ibn 'Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Allah's Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* got ill. So we performed prayer standing while he was sitting. Abu Bakr uttered the *Takbirs* aloud so that people [praying behind] could hear. Then the Messenger turned towards us and saw us standing. He signalled to us, and we sat down [while we were performing prayer]. After uttering salutation he said, "You were at this time about to do an act like that of the Persians and the Romans. They stand before their kings while they sit, so do not do that; follow your Imams. If they perform prayer standing, you should also do so, and if they perform prayer sitting, you should also do prayer sitting."'(1)

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 955; see also Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no.1240; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 14630; and Ibn Khuzayma, Sahih, Hadith no. 486*

Conveying the Message from Allah *the Almighty* must be clearly and unequivocally done, and that is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Our Messenger’s duty is only to make plain his Message’ (*at-Taghabun:* 12). This entails explaining everything needed for the life of the human being who is a vicegerent on earth. It must embrace all the features and fields of life. Thus, the Divine Way of Guidance encompasses all the aspects of life, starting from the declaration that there is no god but Allah and ending with removing harmful objects from roads.(1) This clear impartment of the Message should include all the interests of people. One should not contend, ‘Allah left such-and-such a thing unsettled.’ On the contrary, Allah’s Way of Guidance is perfect and comprehensive.

The conveyance of the Message should clarify Allah’s Way of Guidance. Here, we should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* facilitates the impartment of His Message to all people, including those with limited understanding and those who are cultured, intellectual, and meditative. Thus, no one is deprived of the goodness of the Message on the grounds of his lack of ability to understand the Quran. Quite the opposite, everyone can comprehend the Quran, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘So, [O Muhammad], We have only made Quran easy in the Arabic language that you may give good tidings thereby to the righteous and warn thereby a hostile people’ (*Maryam:* 97). Therefore, He *the Almighty* facilitated the Quran and made it easy for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to learn by heart and to comprehensively understand its meanings. He employed it in the task for which it is revealed, that is to say, delivering the Message of Allah *the Almighty*.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa’i, Ibn Maja and Ahmad on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The version of Muslim reads, ‘Belief consists of about seventy-two or sixty-two branches. The uppermost branch is to declare that there is no god but Allah, and the least branch is to remove harmful objects from roads. And modesty is a branch of belief.’ See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 162; see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 26614; An-Nasa’i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 5005; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 57; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8913*

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَۚ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلۡيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

God! There is no god but Him, so let the faithful put their trust in Him [13] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 13)

When we say ‘Allah’, we refer to the Creator of everything. Allah *the Almighty* acquaints us with His Name ‘Allah,’ and informs us that He challenges anyone to give the same name to someone other than Him. Though there are atheists and disbelievers, none of them ever dares to call himself ‘Allah’. No one of them had the nerve to do this. They could have said, ‘We will call someone by this name and see what will happen as a result.’ But this did not occur. The word ‘Allah’ is the Name that Allah *the Almighty* selected for Himself and about which He informed us. It encompasses all His Perfect Attributes. As for His Attributes, we call them ‘the Lofty Names’, like the Omnipotent, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of existence and *the Almighty*; even though these are all Attributes, they are regarded as Names. This is due to the fact that these Attributes in their absolute sense refer only to Allah *the Almighty*.

When these attributes are referred to in their absolute senses, they belong to Allah *the Almighty*. It is allowed to describe anyone other than Him with any of these Attributes in their limited sense. By contrast, the Name ‘Allah’ refers to Allah *the Almighty* alone.

The moment you hear the word ‘Allah,’ you must take it together with the grandest and best Attributes it implies, regardless of what you know thereof and what you do not. This is because Allah *the Almighty* created the whole universe and He is its Lord. Creation and sustaining entail numerous Attributes, such as Omnipotence, Wisdom, Omniscience, Mercy and so on. To combine His Lofty Attributes into a single word, Allah *the Almighty* calls Himself ‘Allah’ to refer to all of His Attributes.

When you commence any action, you say: ‘In the Name of Allah.’ This sums up what this action needs. That is to say that any action requires an ability, knowledge, wisdom, or might; so you should say, ‘In the Name of the Omnipotent,’ ‘In the Name of the Omniscient,’ ‘In the Name of the Wise,’ and ‘In the Name of the Almighty.’ Sometimes you need to defeat your enemies when you go to war against them, and thus you say, 'In the Name of the Almighty.' It is thus clear that any action needs a set of perfect and grand attributes to serve it. So, instead of saying 'In the Name of the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, or the Withholder,' Allah spares you the saying of all these words as you can say only, 'In the Name of Allah' as this very Name embodies all His Perfect Attributes.

Thus, when you say, 'In the Name of Allah,' this is sufficient for you. If you are in need of power or richness, you will obtain it. The moment you utter 'Allah,' it is as if you said, 'The Omnipotent, the Harmer, the Bringer of benefit, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the Benefactor and so on.' Hence, the word 'Allah' is a proper noun that connotes all His Perfect Attributes, not a specific one.

Allah *the Almighty* confirms for Himself all the Perfect Attributes in His Name 'Allah'. Then, He declares the fundamental fact that there is no god but Him. It means there is no god worthy of being worshipped but Him *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* made this clause a slogan for the believers. The slogan is a mark that distinguishes a group of people or a specific religious ritual. For example, the slogan of the calling for prayer is 'Allah is the Greatest,' whilst the slogan of every believer who is going through a misfortune should be 'there is no misfortune greater than You, Allah, while You are the Lord.' The purport of this slogan is that as long as you have a Lord, you should not worry or despair, for all problems are surmounted through Allah *the Almighty*. But the real problem is when a person has no Lord to turn to for help.

In the same connection, when the confederates gathered and besieged Medina, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* uttered this spiritual statement, 'There is no god but Allah, the Only God. He fulfilled His Promise; He supported His servant; He conferred might upon His soldiers; and He alone vanquished the confederates.'(1)

Also, when the believers are resurrected from their graves, their motto will be, 'There is no god but Allah. And upon Allah let the believers rely.'

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bazzar on the authority of Abu Hurayra who said that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'There is no god but Allah, the Only One who supported His servant and defeated the confederates. There is nothing like Him.' See Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8438.*

The believers' slogan is monotheism, and He *the Almighty* will resurrect them while they are monotheists and reliant upon Him. In this respect 'A'isha *Allah be pleased with her* related that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The moment when believers are resurrected from their graves, their motto will be, "There is no god but Allah. And upon Allah let the believers rely."' The believers live in this worldly life adopting monotheism and relying upon Allah *the Almighty* and, therefore, when they get out of their graves, they will do the same and hope for Allah's Mercy.

The clause 'there is no god but Allah' contains a negative part and an affirmative one. The negative part is the words 'there is no god' and the affirmative part is the words 'but Allah'. What is more, the clause 'there is no god but Allah' contains the evidence of veracity. Suppose that this is untrue; have we ever heard of any person who claimed to be a god?

Allah *the Almighty* casts more light on this issue in His saying: ' Say: If there were with Him gods as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of power [42] Glory be to Him and exalted be He in high exaltation above what they say [43]' (*al-Isra':* 42-43). If those alleged gods had any manifestations of power, they would go to Allah *the Almighty* and deny His Divinity. Moreover, if there was a god besides Him, a conflict would arise between them. But all of this did not happen. Thus, the clause 'there is no god but Allah' is veracious in itself even from the viewpoint of those who refute it. This is corroborated by the fact that none disputed this truth. As there is no one to dispute this truth, it is proven that there is no god but Him *the Almighty*. Suppose that there is a disputing god; where is he?

Allah *the Almighty* is the only God to whom worship and obedience are to be dedicated. Worship connotes obedience which in turn implies obeying the commands and refraining from the prohibitions. He *the Almighty* testifies for Himself that there is no god but Him, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining His creation with justice; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise' (*Al-'Imran:* 18).

He *the Almighty* bears witness for Himself that there is no god but Him, and Messenger Muhammad also testifies that there is no god but Allah, and so do the angels. In addition to the angels, scientists can easily derive conclusive proofs of Allah's Oneness and Divinity from this vast universe.

Allah *the Almighty* bore witness that there is no god but Him even before the existence of any creature that could attest to His Oneness. He did so even before the creation of the angels who would be eyewitnesses for His Oneness.

He *the Almighty* declares: '…there is no god but He…' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). He made these Words 'the declaration of Monotheism' and thus made it as easy as possible for the people. He *the Almighty* did not wish the evidence of belief in the Supreme Power to be complicated, philosophic, or only accessible to those highly cultured ones. Religion is required for all – from the shepherd to the philosopher and from the street sweeper to the professor. So, this matter should be extremely simple and intelligible to everyone.

Allah *the Almighty* attests to His Oneness from the very beginning. Among His Lofty Names is the Believer. We also believe in His Oneness, but He *the Almighty* attested to His Oneness before He ordered us to do so. If someone argues, 'How does Allah testify for Himself?' We will reply to him, saying, 'Yes, He bears witness for Himself because there is no other god but Him. Allah's Testifying for Himself is normal. It seems as if He *the Almighty* says, "there is no deity but Me, and if there should be another deity, let him show himself and disclose his whereabouts."'

If the alleged deities knew about this testimony, their silence about it and the absence of their objection to it is certainly a token of powerlessness. If they did not know about it, they would be heedless and unaware. In both cases, they cannot be true deities. What are these deities that are unfamiliar with what is happening around them or that lack the courage to confront their adversaries?

As there is no god but Allah *the Almighty* let your reliance be upon Him alone. You should know well that when you depend upon Him, alone, you count on the All-Powerful, Almighty God. In this vein, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'If you beg, beg of Him alone; and if you need assistance, supplicate to Allah alone for help. And remember that if all the people gather to benefit you, they will not be able to benefit you except that which Allah had foreordained (for you); and if all of them gather to do harm to you, they will not be able to afflict you with anything other than that which Allah had predestined against you. The pens have been lifted and the ink has dried up.'(1)

You take refuge with the Greatest Creator Who has Power and Control over everything. The statement 'there is no god but Allah' makes you dispense with others' service. You should thus rely on and worship the only God whom nothing can overwhelm or subdue. As a matter of fact, when you turn to Allah *the Almighty* alone for help and take refuge with Him, you free yourself from the humiliation of this worldly life through the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful and *the Almighty* Lord. Once you appeal for Allah's Help, He will give you His Support and Care. He alone is fully able to turn your powerlessness into power and your humbleness into honour. Therefore, the motto of those who believe in Allah *the Almighty* as only One God is: 'there is no god but Allah.' This short clause is one of the distinguishing features of Islam.

Religious rituals are also among the distinguishing features of Islam. They are all included in the order 'do' and the prohibition 'do not do'. They also include matters relating to creed and religious injunctions. Here, we should pay attention to the point that 'the religious rituals' is predominantly used today to refer to the rites of Pilgrimage. Among the slogans of believers is reliance on Allah *the Almighty* alone. As long as we believe that there is no god but Allah, why do some of us count on anyone other than Him? Why do we place our hopes, wishes and trust in anyone other than Him?

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…so let the faithful put their trust in Him' (*at-Taghabun:* 13). Those who truly and duly believe in Allah *the Almighty* should rely on Him. The value of belief is that our body parts work while our hearts have confidence in Allah *the Almighty*. The role of our body parts, for example, is to plant, plough, bring good seeds, irrigate the soil, and spread fertilisers. Suppose that frost might come and we fear that it would damage the plants, so we bring straw and cover the plants to protect them. All of this falls into the work of the body parts. As regards our hearts, they should have confidence in Allah *the Almighty*. So, you should beware of saying, ‘The crop will surely be good because I have exerted all my efforts very well.’ Instead you should not depend wholly on the physical causes because Allah’s Power transcends them.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith 2763; see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2516; Abu Ya'ala, Musnad, Hadith no. 2556; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 1043.*

The value of belief is that the believer is fully convinced of the Omnipotent God. Allah *the Almighty* has the full ability to create things both with and without causes. So, it is up to you to adopt the physical causes, but as for what is beyond these causes, it is controlled by Allah *the Almighty*. So when you work, you act according to the physical causes, and when you rely on Allah *the Almighty* you ensure His Help as He is the Establisher of causes.

You should beware of assuming that ‘reliance’ means stopping your body parts from working or keeping them idle, for this in fact amounts to indolence or false reliance. This is proved by the fact that those people (who do this) like to rely on Allah regarding what is difficult, yet carry out what is easy without relying on Him *the Almighty*.

One who does not rely on Allah *the Almighty* must check his faith. So, each body part has a particular function to do; the heart is to believe and place trust in Allah *the Almighty*. We should also remember that walking is the function of the feet while doing things is the function of the hands. So do not replace the function of the heart with that of the feet or hands. True reliance is to let your body parts work and let your heart trust Allah *the Almighty*. Sometimes a person works without reliance on Allah *the Almighty* and so the final outcome is loss and disappointment. So, you should beware of neglecting the physical causes or being infatuated with them since when you abandon physical causes, you are indolent, not truly reliant on Allah *the Almighty* and you thus exchange the function of the heart for those of the body parts.

If a person says to you, ‘I do not work, but I rely on Allah *the Almighty*’ you can say to him, ‘Let us learn how you consider reliance!’ Then, bring him a dish full of food s/he likes most, and when he stretches out his hands towards the food, say to him, ‘Leave the food and allow it to jump into your mouth.’ Those who do not employ their body parts and announce that they depend upon Allah *the Almighty* are liars, as reliance is not the function of the body parts responsible for the physical work; it is rather the function of the heart. Therefore, the body parts should work while the hearts have full confidence in Allah *the Almighty*.

Here arises the question, 'Upon whom should we rely?' The answer is offered in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'So let the faithful put their trust in Allah' (*at-Taghabun:* 13). When you rely upon Allah *the Almighty* you put your trust in the Ever-Living God Who never lets your effort go in vain. But if you count upon a person like you – even if he is more powerful – his power may vanish; he may hate or humiliate you; or a calamity may befall him and claim his life. The believers must rely upon Allah *the Almighty* alone and submit themselves to His Will. In this connection, He *the Almighty* tells us that the true believers say: 'And why should we not rely upon Allah while He has guided us to our [good] ways. And we will surely be patient against whatever harm you should cause us. And upon Allah let those who would rely [indeed] rely' (*Ibrahim:* 12). He *the Almighty* orders us to count upon Him as He is the Ever-Living. So, you should not depend upon anybody else, for this person may forsake you overnight. By contrast, if He *the Almighty* is your Patron, He will never abandon you. If you take anybody else as a patron besides Him, such a person who is currently strong and influential enough to depend upon him may die at any time. So, he cannot really be a patron as he might lose his influence and authority, or become helpless and weak, thus unable to help others.

The true Patron whom we must rely upon and hold fast to is Allah *the Almighty* Who is Unchangeable since He is Ever-Existent, Ever-Living and Ever-Powerful. He *the Almighty* is the true Patron in whom you must place your trust. Therefore, He clarifies for us why we must place our faith and hopes in Him alone, saying: 'And rely upon the Ever-Living Who does not die…' (*al-Furqan:* 58). Never ever rely upon anyone other than Him *the Almighty* as He is unchangeable; He is the Ever-Powerful, the Ever-Subduing, the Ever-Living, the Ever-Supporting, and the Ever-Lasting. You should not count upon anybody who suddenly dies; rather, rely upon the Ever-Living, the Ever-Existent the Almighty and the Powerful One. A poet once put it as follows:

Do receive your esteem from your Lord so that it will remain and last.

If you seek honour from a person who eventually dies, your honour will surely die.

A truly wise person should rely only upon the One Who is Trustworthy and Helpful. So, what is the point of depending on a person to serve your temporary interest and suddenly you hear about his death? In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And rely upon the Ever-Living who does not die…’ (*al-Furqan:* 58). This means that He *the Almighty* instructs His servants, ‘If you really want to be reliant, rely upon the One Who benefits and supports you; the One Who always fulfils His Promise, and Who is All-Powerful over anything on earth and in the heavens.’ This is the climax of wisdom; what is the point of relying upon the one who eventually dies? Even if such a person should live forever, do you ensure that he will not hate you one day?

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So rely upon Allah; indeed, you are upon the clear truth’ (*an-Naml:* 79). So, the believer should rely upon Allah *the Almighty* follow the truth, and obey Him tenaciously. As you count upon and obey Him, He *Glorified is He* must be your Supporter and Helper.

Further, you should be satisfied with your reliance on Allah *the Almighty* alone, for He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs’ (*al-Ahzab:* 3). In this vein, He *the Almighty* reassures His servants that He is the Disposer of affairs, saying: ‘And He is Disposer of all things’ (*al-An‘am:* 102). You should know that Allah *the Almighty* is your Guardian Who manages your affairs. This is like a person who takes care of a minor and orders him to do such-and-such. So, Allah *the Almighty* is our Guardian.

The believers depend only on Allah as their Disposer of affairs. Reliance means to believe that you have a manager who disposes all your matters. For example, when you face something you cannot accomplish, you say, ‘I authorise so-and-so to do that thing to the full.’ Hence, the believers count on their Lord and submit themselves to Him.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance for the Children of Israel that you not take other than Me as Disposer of affairs’ (*al-Isra’:* 2). This means that we must not take anyone other than Allah *the Almighty* as a manager and disposer of our affairs. Even if there is someone in whom you trust and to whom you can entrust your interests, what do you think if your Disposer is Allah *the Almighty*? Undoubtedly, if He *the Almighty* is your Disposer of affairs, He will support you and never let you be in dire need of anyone other than Him. It suffices that He *the Almighty* is your Disposer of affairs, given the fact that nothing is difficult or impossible for Him. He *the Almighty* is not in need of physical means and nothing can challenge His Will.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So let the faithful put their trust in Him’ (*at-Taghabun:* 13). In other verses, He says: ‘And upon Allah should the reliant rely’ (*Ibrahim:* 12); and also: ‘The decision is only for Allah; upon Him I have relied, and upon Him should the reliant rely’ (*Yusuf:* 67).

Thus, if you are a true believer, you should rely on Allah *the Almighty*. As belief is highlighted in the verse in question, ‘So let the faithful put their trust in Him’ (*at-Taghabun:* 13). We note here that your reliance must be true, not a claim. The true reliance of your body parts is to let them work. So, you should work and adopt the physical means while simultaneously relying on Allah *the Almighty* with your heart. As for idleness, it is to neglect the physical means which He *the Almighty* creates for you and to stop adopting them, claiming that you are depending on Him *the Almighty* which is not true. You should first exhaust your available physical means. If they are inaccessible, do not despair because your Lord’s Power transcends these physical potentials which He creates for you.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us an illustrative example by the birds. He says, ‘If you rely upon Allah as duly as required, He will provide for you as He does for the birds: they go early in the morning hungry and return in the evening full.’(1)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘If you actually count on Allah in the most optimal way, He will provide you with sustenance as He does for the birds; they go in the morning hungry and return at the end of the day full.’ At-Tirmidhi said that it is a good, authentic Hadith. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2344; see also Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4164; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 205, 370 and 373.*

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَٰجِكُمْ وَأَوْلَـٰدِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَّكُمْ
فَٱحْذَرُوهُمْ ۚ وَإِن تَعْفُوا۟ وَتَصْفَحُوا۟ وَتَغْفِرُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ١٤

Believers, even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies – beware of them – but if you overlook their offences, forgive them, pardon them, then God is all forgiving, all merciful [14] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 14)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* addresses the believers who are firmly convinced that there is no god but Him and who put their trust in Him. He *the Almighty* addresses those who obey Him and His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to pave the way for their accepting the warning against their wives and children.

The disbelievers are antagonistic towards themselves, so Allah *the Almighty* does not warn them against their wives and children, for they must be warned against their souls in the first place. With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Believers…' (*at-Taghabun:* 14), it means that the address is limited to those who have believed in Allah *the Almighty* as the true God, Creator and Lord; those who entered into a Contract of Faith with Him. They are commanded to fulfil these subsequent commands which come from Him on the grounds of their belief in Him. In fact, faith here is the cause of the imposition of the religious obligations; He *the Almighty* does not enjoin religious obligations on the disbelievers, for this is only confined to the believers. Hence the responsibility of their daily lives resides in Allah *the Almighty*. He, as a result, provides them with a Divine Way of life. As regards the disbelievers, He *Glorified is He* does not impose upon them any religious obligations.

The verse in question begins with calling the believers to listen and obey Allah's Commands. Thus, He *the Almighty* does not impose any religious obligations on those who do not believe in Him; He addresses only those who love and believe in Him. As long as they love Him, every believer must turn his attention to the One Whom he loves. By so doing, He *the Almighty* grants the believer what brings and achieves his happiness.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* draws the attention of those who believe in Him to an important matter, namely; a man's relationship with his wife and children and their influence on him regarding diverting his attention away from the religious requirements and obligations. So He *the Almighty* says: '…even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies…' (*at-Taghabun:* 14). He *the Almighty* specifies two kinds of people who are around us all the time, that is, the wives and the children. This is because they are in direct and close contact with the men. We should take into account that Allah *the Almighty* says: '…among your spouses…' (*at-Taghabun:* 14). This, in turn, means that only some wives and children are enemies to men, not all of them. This is what the Arabic preposition *min* (among) signifies here. A similar example is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'But he who does of righteous deeds…' (*Ta Ha:* 112). The particle *min* (of) implies that it is sufficient to do some good deeds, for a person is unable to perform all righteous actions. You do the good deeds to the best of your ability; another person does the same, and so on and so forth. Ultimately, all these good deeds combine together to form a state of perfect righteousness in the society.

Another similar example is found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Are there any of your "partners" who does anything of that?' (*ar-Rum:* 40) In this verse, the words 'anything of' denote that none of their alleged gods can do anything, be it related to creation, providing means of sustenance, Resurrection or causing death.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…among your spouses…' (*at-Taghabun:* 14) since it is the spouses who take the lead in seduction and enticement. Furthermore, one of them, that is, the husband or the wife may be the wicked partner who paves the way for moral deviations. The Arabic word *azwaj* (spouses) refers to both the husband and the wife. It does not mean two things that exist together, as some people mistakenly think. Conversely, it means a thing or an individual that exists along with another of the same type. The word 'twin' is another example for this case, and it means one of two identical things. This is corroborated by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And of all things We created two mates…' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 49). The word 'mates' means males and females. The male alone is a mate, and the female alone is a mate. This division applies to creatures.

We note that the word ‘spouses’ comes in the masculine plural form to refer to the wives of Prophet Muhammad in Allah’s saying: ‘O Prophet, indeed We have made lawful to you your wives…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 50). This is because the word ‘spouse’ is linguistically used to refer to either the female or the male. Accordingly, we understand from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Believers….’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14) that it refers to male and female believers. A man can be faithful and righteous, while his wife turns him away from the Path of Belief. Likewise, the wife can be faithful and righteous, while the husband turns her away from that Path of Belief.

In this regard, we find that the Quran talks about some wives who were disbelievers though their husbands were Prophets and Messengers. There are also examples of husbands who were disbelievers although their wives were faithful. This point is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah presents an example of those who disbelieved: the wife of Nuh (Noah) and the wife of Lut (Lot). They were under two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them, so those prophets did not avail them from Allah at all, and it was said, “Enter the Fire with those who enter”’ (*at-Tahrim:* 10).

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* could not prevent the disbelief of his own wife, nor could Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* do the same to his wife. Both the wives conspired against their husbands – who were Prophets – with their peoples. So, their fate was the hell. The wife of Lut (Lot) used to inform her people of the men who visited Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* so that they would come and sodomise them. This happened to the delegation of the angels who visited Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* in the form of smart and attractive young men. In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when Our messengers, [the angels], came to Lut (Lot), he was anguished for them and felt for them great discomfort and said, “This is a trying day”; And his people came hastening to him, and before [this] they had been doing evil deeds. He said, “O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?”’ (*Hud:* 77-78)

Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* knows that the crime of his people is sodomy, and so does his wife. But their stands on it differ greatly. She welcomes it, while Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him* does not. The following is related, ‘As soon as the wife of Prophet Lut (Lot) saw some handsome young men (who were in fact the angels of punishment), she climbed the roof of her house and clapped her hands to attract the attention of her fellow tribesmen. But none noticed her. She then made a fire, and the people saw her. She gestured for them that some good-looking guests came to Lut’s (Lot’s) house.’

In our daily life, we find that if the wife is not righteous, she can be an enemy of her own husband by causing problems to embitter her husband’s life. The wife may even be sharp-tongued, quarrelsome, and heedless of her husband. She may even provoke his anger by making him doubt her chastity.

The husband can be modest, while the wife has a limitless craving for getting money in any way. Likewise, the wife can be virtuous and rejects the fact that her husband earns illegal property.

Relying on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Believers, even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies – beware of them …’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14), we conclude that enmity comes from wives first. We also find that it is the wife who sometimes hates her husband and the children are consequently affected by this to the extent that they start imitating her. Very often, children become a great ordeal for their fathers. Their trial stems from the fact that fathers do everything they can to make their children lead a comfortable life. The financial capabilities can be limited, so the father may resort to ill-gotten money. So, a man’s trial often comes from his wife or his children. This is because the wife and children may prompt the husband to overwork, steal, or take bribes to satisfy their needs.

In this respect, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Your foe is not the person whom if you kill, you will be rewarded for, and if he kills you, you will be admitted into paradise, but rather, your mortal enemies can be your own children and your wealth which you possess.’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tabarani. In his As-Silsila Ad-Da‘ifa, Al-Albani grades this Hadith as weak. In his book, Ibn Hajar Al-Haythami writes, ‘Mohamad ibn Isma‘il ibn ‘Ayyash is part of the chain of narrators, and he is weak.’ See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘ajam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 3367 and Musnad Ash-Shamiyyin, Hadith no. 332; Al-Albani, As-Silsila Ad-Da‘ifa, Hadith no. 4375; and Al-Haythami, Majma‘a Az-Zawa’id, Hadith no. 17799.*

When one of us has a son or daughter, he becomes overjoyed, to the extent that he favours him or her over himself, does his best to make him or her lead a decent life and tries to secure a bright future for him or her. In this regard, a poet once said (1):

Our children are like our hearts that walk on earth
If wind blows over some of them, we do not sleep a wink. (2)

In many cases, a man's children can be the source of his hardship and enmity towards his relatives. The children can distract their fathers from acts of obedience or force them to earn unlawful money to meet their daily needs. Not only can children be a source of trouble for their fathers, but wives can also be so for their husbands. In this vein, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, 'But the bitterest enemies of you are your own self, your wife whom you have intimate relations with her and your own children.'(3)

In the Glorious Quran, we find the story of the righteous servant who killed a young boy whose parents were believers. The righteous servant feared that this young boy would grow up and overburden his parents by transgression and disbelief. So, the boy was an ordeal for his parents and he would drive them towards unlawful things and cause them troubles. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And as for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared that he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief' (*al-Kahf:* 80). Very often, the children are a source of trials and hardship for their fathers. The essence of their trials arises from the fact that fathers strain every nerve to make their children lead a life of ease. But if the means are insufficient, they, that is fathers, may resort to ill-gotten gains. Allah *the Almighty* knew best that the young boy would be a source of hardship for his faithful parents. So, He *the Almighty* did not want the parents of the boy to suffer, for He *the Almighty* decreed that they would die as believers. That is why He *the Almighty* says: '…and we feared that he would overburden them by transgression and disbelief' (*al-Kahf:* 80).

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(1) He is Habib ibn Aws At-Ta'i, Abu Tammam; he was born in Gasim, Syria in 188 A.H.; he visited Egypt and Baghdad; he was brown and tall; his poems are eloquent and powerful. He died in 231 A.H., the year when the Abbasid State emerged.

(2) *These two verses are mentioned by Ibn Abu 'Awn and Al-Basri who attribute them to Hattan ibn Al-Mu'alla. The poetical verse reads, 'Our children are but our hearts that walk on earth.' On the other hand, Ibn Al-'Adim narrates the two verses and ascribes them to Abu Tammam Habib ibn Aws at Ta'i. See Ibn 'Awn, At-Tashbihat; see also Al-Basri, Al-Hamasah Al-Basriyya; and Ibn Al-'Adim, Ad-Darari Fi Dhikr Adh-Dharari*

(3) *See Ad-Dailimi, Al-Firdaws Bi Ma'thur Al-Khitab, Hadith no. 5248; see also Al-Muttaqi Al-Hindi, Kanz Al-'Umal, Hadith no. 11264.*

Anyone of us can have a son who is the apple of his eye. Yet the son may be the cause of his father's corruption, lying, taking bribes or stealing. So such a son can lead his father to hell. The son of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* is a clear example of the son who disobeyed his father and opposed his Call. In this respect, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and Nuh (Noah) called to his son who was apart [from them], "O my son, come aboard with us and be not with the disbelievers"' (*Hud:* 42); the son refused to answer the demand of his father and said that he would resort to the mountain for protection, whereupon Nuh (Noah) replied, 'There is no protector today from the Decree of Allah, except for whom He gives Mercy' (*Hud:* 43).

When Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* ordered his son to come aboard with him, the son disobeyed his father, rejected belief and preferred to remain a disbeliever. This happened at the time when the disbelievers were surrounded by a devastating flood. The son of Nuh (Noah) thought that he would be able to take shelter on a mountain to protect him from the flood by its height. Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him,* however, knew for certain that no disbeliever would survive, for survival was only for the believers. So, he *peace be upon him* warned his son, saying: 'There is no protector today from the Decree of Allah except for whom He gives Mercy' (*Hud:* 43).

Thus, the son of Nuh (Noah) was an enemy of his father and of himself because he destroyed his own self. It is known that a person does injustice to someone else for his own good or for a certain reason. But how can one mistreat himself? Doing injustice to oneself is idiotic. How is it idiotic? As we know, if the enemy is from the outside, it is easy to withstand him/her, whereas if your enemy is your own self, it is more dangerous and difficult to resist and get rid of.

Your child, your soul and your wife, who are closer to your heart, may become your bitterest enemies. They have a strong grip on your heart and mind and thus may direct you into what may cause your destruction and keep you away from the Path of Belief.

It is narrated that the verse in question was revealed concerning ‘Awf ibn Malik Al-Ashga‘i (1) who had a large family. Whenever he intended to strive in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* his family cried over him and entreated him to stay. So, he yielded to their wish and stayed with them.(2) In this respect, Mujahid says, ‘A person’s intense love for his children and wife may lead him to sever good ties with his relatives and disobey Allah. So Allah forbids obeying them in this regard.’

The family’s temptations resemble the very words of Satan, the first enemy of the humans. Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Satan sits in the paths of the son of Adam. He sits waiting for him, in the path to Islam, and he says: “Will you accept Islam, and leave your religion, and the religion of your forefathers?” But he disobeys him and accepts Islam. Then he sits, waiting for him, on the path to Jihad, and he says: “Will you fight in *Jihad* when it will cost you your life and your wealth? You will fight and be killed, and your wife will remarry, and your wealth will be divided.” But he disobeys him and fights in *Jihad*.’ The Messenger of Allah said: ‘Whoever does that, then he has a right from Allah that He will admit him to Paradise.’(3)

Satan’s enmity towards humans is so ancient. He swore to mislead all humans, saying: ‘I will certainly lie in wait for them in Your Straight Path’ (*al-A‘raf:* 16); ‘Then by Your Might I will surely make them live an evil life, all, [82] Except Thy servants from among them, the purified ones [83]’

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(1) *He was nicknamed Abu ‘Abd Ar-Rahman. The first battle he participated in was Khaybar; he was in charge of the battle of Ashga‘a on the day of the opening of Mecca. He lived in Syria and died in Damascus in 73 A.H. He partook in the battles of Dhat As-Salasil, Mu’ata and Tabuk. He was one of the noble Companions. See Ibn Al-Athir, Usd Al-Ghaba, 2/38*

(2) *This is mentioned by At-Tabari and Ibn ‘Ashur.*

(3) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Sabra ibn Abu Fakih Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 16000; see also An-Nasa’i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3134; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 4593; Al-Baghawi, Mu‘ajam As-Sahaba, Hadith no. 1188; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘ajam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 6428.*

(*Sad:* 82-83); and: ‘I will most certainly cause his progeny to perish except a few’ (*al-Isra’:* 62). Satan swore by the Might of Allah *the Almighty* to lead humankind astray. So he is the primary enemy of the human being and lies in wait for him/her on the Straight Path.

In this regard, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* succeeded in the test that Allah *the Almighty* put him to regarding his son Ismail (Ishmael). The son helped his father to obey Allah *the Almighty*. Regarding this, He *the Almighty* relates that Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said: ‘O my son! Surely I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; consider then what you see’ (*as-Saffat:* 102). Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* replied to his father, saying: ‘O my father! Do what you are commanded; if Allah please, you will find me of the patient ones’ (*as-Saffat:* 102). So, Ismail (Ishmael) was very sure that this was a Divine Command, and thus he complied with it.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…but if you overlook their offences, forgive them, pardon them, then Allah is All Forgiving, All Merciful’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14). Someone may argue, ‘What is the relationship between pardoning and forgiving on the one hand, and the enmity of some wives and children on the other?’ To know the answer to this question, we should learn the reason behind the revelation of this verse. This verse was revealed concerning the children of those who emigrated from Mecca to Medina. Their families, wives and children tried to dissuade them from emigration by saying entreatingly, ‘To whom do you leave us?’ Some responded by desisting from emigration and thus stayed with them instead. However, some others did not yield to their wishes and even stopped supporting them for their rejection to migrate in the Cause of Allah. They also said to them, ‘If Allah brought us together, we would not do any good to you and we would do such-and-such.’ Thus, Allah *the Almighty* revealed this verse.(1)

For this reason, Allah’s saying: ‘…but if you overlook their offences, pardon them, forgive them, then Allah is all forgiving, all merciful’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14) comes after His saying: ‘…beware of them...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 14). So the verse in question calls for handling the troubles caused by a believer’s wife or children gently and carefully. If the believer is to beware of the enemy who is closer to him, this enemy should be viewed from another perspective as a friend and that enmity, in this case, is accidental and can be addressed with wisdom and gentleness, but not at the expense of the religion. The act of pardoning, overlooking, and forgiving which a believer shows towards his wife or children, who are his enemy in terms of diverting him from the religion, is a kind of patience and forbearance meant to maintain the friendly family relations. At that point, we note that Allah *the Almighty* mentions three stages, which are: pardoning, overlooking and forgiving. In the verse in question, the coordinating particle ‘and’ denotes dissimilarity. This means that ‘pardoning’ is a stage unlike ‘overlooking’ and ‘forgiving’. You can excuse a person who offends you in a specific situation, but you do not pardon him because pardoning makes you overlook his subsequent mistakes, a matter that did not actually take place. Likewise, forgiving differs from pardoning. You can pardon a person, overlook his mistake, decide not to punish him and intend to pardon him in other situations.

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(1) *See Muqatil, Tafsir, 369; and Abu Ishaq Ath-Tha‘alabi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan Fi Tafsir Al-Quran, 9/329.*

As regards forgiving, it is a high-level act that is attainable by those who are distinguished by pardoning others. So, they attain the manners of forgiveness and adopt them in their daily lives. They overlook others’ offences even if they repeat them. They do not revenge against their offenders or wait for anyone to ask for pardon. They are lenient and gentle and have no desire to retaliate even by giving their offenders dirty looks. We find these gradual levels in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men; and Allah loves the doers of good (to others)’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 134). You suppress your anger in the first stage, pardon in the second and remove anger from your heart in the third which represents the apex of faith and benevolence.

If it is required to restrain your anger, it is better for you to pardon others. Pardon requires you to eliminate what makes you angry from your heart. What outclasses the two acts of suppressing anger and pardoning is to be kind towards your offender by speaking to him in a gentle way or even by giving him a gift.

Someone may argue that the verse we are discussing here begins with pardoning, not the suppressing of anger as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…but if you overlook their offences, pardon them, forgive them, then Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful' (*at-Taghabun:* 14). Yes, pardoning here is the first stage, while it is the second stage in the chapter of *Al-'Imran,* after suppressing anger. This is because the verse of *Al-'Imran* talks about the harm done to one's self or his repute. So, suppressing anger is to be the first stage in that case. As for the verse in question, it is relating to disobeying the father regarding any of Allah's Commands. So, it needs gentle treatment to handle the errors of one's wife and children. The difference between pardoning and overlooking is that the former is to remove from yourself any trace of offence. As for overlooking, it means to let bygones be bygones and not to let what happened worry you anymore, which is different from overlooking the mistake even though its negative impact on you remains, to the extent that you continue to be infuriated and revengeful. So, Allah *the Almighty* instructs us to eliminate the trace of offence from our minds and hearts. After overlooking a mistake, its impact vanishes, as overlooking keeps you away from being worried by something you have pardoned. The third stage is an open chance for a believer who desires to reach the level of benevolence and the highest degree of belief. This is by being kind towards the person who insulted you, which is the rank of forgiveness. Ubay ibn Ka'b narrated, 'When Allah sent down the verse: 'Take to forgiveness and enjoin good and turn aside from the ignorant' (*al-A'raf:* 199), Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'What is this, Jibril (Gabriel)?' Jibril (Gabriel) said, 'Allah orders you to forgive those who wronged you, give [charity] to those who withhold [things] from you and maintain friendly ties with those who severed good relations with you.'(1)

Your forgiveness makes you overlook any offences you suffer, be generous to those who deprive you and keep good relations with those who break off friendly ties with you.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse With His saying: 'Allah is All Forgiving, All Merciful' (*at-Taghabun:* 14). 'All-Forgiving' is an exaggerated form as Allah *the Almighty* is Ever-Forgiving and He is the Lord Who forgives and pardons all the time. So, one should have these great qualities as well. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And they should pardon and turn away. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful’ (*an-Nur:* 22). If you want Allah *the Almighty* to forgive you, you should pardon a person who has offended you. He *the Almighty* is All-Forgiving regarding the sins you have committed and for which you asked Him for forgiveness; and He *Glorified is He* is also All-Merciful towards you as He does not rush to punish you; of course this is out of His Compassion for you so that you may turn to Him in repentance.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti narrates this Hadith on the authority of Ash-Sha'abi. He ascribes it to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir, Ibn Abu Hatim and Abu Ash-Sheikh Al-Asbahani. It is also narrated by Abu Nu'aym Al-Asbahani on the authority of Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Ubada. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 6/708; see also Abu Nu'aym Al-Asbahani, Ma'rifat As-Sahaba, Hadith no. 5134.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّمَآ أَمۡوَٰلُكُمۡ وَأَوۡلَٰدُكُمۡ فِتۡنَةٞۚ وَٱللَّهُ عِندَهُۥٓ أَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٞ ﴿١٥﴾

Your wealth and your children are only a test for
you. There is great reward with God [15]
(The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 15)

In our life, some people enjoy wealth and children. But one does not bear in mind that wealth and children may be an instrument for punishment. Someone else may argue that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world…’ (*al-Kahf:* 46). We respond to this argument by saying, ‘Complete the same verse you quote to its very end: ‘…and the ever-abiding, the good works, are better with your Lord in reward and better in expectation’ (*al-Kahf:* 46). No one should be beguiled by wealth or children, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Let not then their property and their children excite your admiration; Allah only wishes to chastise them with these in this world's life and (that) their souls may depart, while they are unbelievers’ (*at-Tawba:* 55). So when you see someone provided with wealth and children, you should not say, ‘How can they be punished in this worldly life, while they have wealth and children?’ Dazzled by wealth and children means ‘admiring them very greatly and thinking of them as absolutely propitious’. If one profoundly reflects on wealth, children, and other worldly possessions, he will discover that none of them deserves admiration. So, you should beware of being beguiled by something that will surely leave or may cause you hardship. Wealth and children may make a person entirely occupied with the blessings, and thus distracts him from the Benefactor. Unless a person pays attention to the Benefactor *Glorified is He* he will not praise Him and will thus neglect His Way of Guidance. Wealth and children may lead you to fear to leave the worldly life. If a person is not firmly convinced of the pleasure prepared for him by Allah in the Hereafter, he will dread leaving wealth or children.

A person who does not believe in the Last Day is wholly engrossed in and enslaved by the worldly life. If he loses it, this will be distressing and catastrophic for him; and if he misses it, this will be grievous for him as well. But when one believes fully and firmly in Allah *the Almighty* and in the Day of Judgement, he will say, ‘Even if I lose this worldly life, I will obtain what is better from Allah *the Almighty* in the Hereafter.’ Allah *the Almighty* wants to protect the believers from being enslaved and captivated by the material possessions that distract their attention from the Way of Guidance. So He says: ‘Let not then their property and their children excite your admiration...’ (*at-Tawba:* 55). This indicates that wealth alone can be impressive and children alone can be so as well. One who has wealth or children gets impressed by either of them. He becomes more impressed if he has both of them. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that wealth and children together should not impress us. Moreover, the context of the verse warns us against being impressed by either of them.

He *the Almighty* also teaches us that providing disbelievers and hypocrites with wealth and children does not mean that they are of high ranks in the sight of Allah, for He *the Almighty* does so to punish them through this worldly life and in the Hereafter. So, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah only wishes to chastise them with these...’ (*at-Tawba:* 55). He *Glorified is He* gave them wealth and children in this worldly life, but ultimately they will be punished in the Hereafter.

Wealth and children do not avail anyone against the Punishment of Allah *the Almighty* a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘(As for) those who disbelieve, surely neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them in the least against Allah…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 116). The disbelievers think that wealth and children can protect them against the Punishment of Allah *the Almighty* but they are actually wrong, for wealth and children can be a source of trials and troubles. This is confirmed by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And know that your property and your children are a temptation, and that Allah is He with Whom there is a mighty reward’ (*al-Anfal:* 28). As long as wealth and children are a trial, we should understand the matter properly. The trial is not bad in itself because it is a test that a person can go through and in which he can eventually succeed. So, for example, if a person has wealth and children, he should not be beguiled by wealth but should use it in a good way. As for his children, they should not make him conceited. Besides, he should teach them to follow Allah’s Way of Guidance and the religious moral standards. So, the trial is not bad in itself; we should bear in mind that this trial is a test which we should pass. It actually does harm to the person who fails in it and who weakens when facing it.

The disbelievers fail in the trial of wealth and children, and the Day, that is, the Day of Resurrection when they do not have wealth or children will come. Even if they possess wealth in this worldly life, they will not buy with it anything in the Hereafter and each of their children will be preoccupied with his own affairs.

In fact, the disbeliever deceives himself, for he gets enticed by wealth and children and forgets that life is run by the Command of the One Who owns and controls the whole universe. He deals with life improperly. As a matter of fact, being impressed by wealth and children in this worldly life is delusive. After all, the human being can live without wealth or children. Whoever gets deceived by his wealth or children in this worldly life will be sorrowful and depressed on the Day of Judgement. What is the reason for this? This is because whenever a person remembers that wealth and children kept him away from being prepared for the Hereafter, he bitterly regrets his misdeeds.

As for those disbelievers who are lured by wealth and children, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 116). This is the fate of the one who deceives himself by wealth or children. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And know that your property and your children are a temptation, and that Allah is He with Whom there is a mighty reward’ (*al-Anfal:* 28). In this respect, it is related that once

Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* visited Caliph ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him;* the latter asked, ‘How are you, O Hudhayfa?’ He replied, ‘I like the “test” but dislike the “truth.” I do pray without ablution and I have on earth what Allah does not in heaven.’ ‘Umar raged and if ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* had not entered at this moment, he, that is ‘Umar*,* would have punished Hudhayfa. ‘Ali asked ‘Umar, ‘What has angered you, Commander of the Believers?’ He said, ‘I asked Hudhayfa how he was and he said such-and-such,’ whereupon ‘Ali said, ‘Yes, Commander of the Believers. He likes the test, that is to say his wealth and children, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Your wealth and children are only a test for you…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 15). He hates death which is the truth. And who loves death, Commander of the Believers? In addition, he asks Allah *the Almighty* to confer His Blessings upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* without performing ablution. Furthermore, he has a wife and children on earth but Allah *the Almighty* has neither a wife nor a child in the heaven.’ Thereupon ‘‘Umar said, ‘It is intolerable to stay at a place where Abu Al-Hasan, that is ‘Ali is not present.’(1)

In the chapter of *al-Anfal,* Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And know that your property and your children are a temptation...’ (*al-Anfal:* 28); and in the chapter of *at-Taghabun,* He says: ‘Your wealth and children are only a test for you…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 15). Both of the two verses indicate that He *the Almighty* tells us about a natural fact, that is to say wealth and children are a test and trial. In the second verse, He *the Almighty* emphasises this fact by the restrictive particle *innama* (only).

Someone may ask, ‘Why do these verses begin with wealth first and mention children second?’ We reply by saying that when one looks at the Quranic verses, he discovers that they always mention wealth before children. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world…’ (*al-Kahf:* 46). Here, He *the Almighty* also mentions wealth before children. He also says to Satan: ‘And incite [to senselessness] whoever you can among them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their children…' (*al-Isra':* 64). He further says: 'Know that this world's life is only sport and play and gaiety and boasting among yourselves, and a vying in the multiplication of wealth and children…' (*al-Hadid:* 20). Thus, the Glorious Quran always mentions wealth before children. Here arises a question which is, 'Why does the Quran mention wealth first? Is wealth better for people than children?' Allah *the Almighty* mentions wealth first because it is common among the addressees in contrast with children. Everyone has a property even if it is little. As for having children, it is not common among all people, for there are some who have no children. Also, having children needs money for marriage and expenses. So, everyone can have money but may not have children.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Sa‘d on the authority of Sa‘id ibn Al-Musayyib who also said, ’Umar used to take refuge with Allah from a problematic issue in which Abu Al-Hasan is not involved.’ See Ibn Sa‘d, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, 2/239; see also As-Suyuti, Jame‘ Al-Hadith, Hadith no. 30829.*

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Your wealth and children are only a test for you…' (*at-Taghabun:* 15). The Arabic word *fitna* (test) is the trial and the test by which Allah *the Almighty* examines people's belief. Some people mistakenly think that tribulation is evil in itself. In fact, tribulation is a mere test. So you may succeed or fail in it. The test is not something disagreeable or a calamity that befalls the person, but it is catastrophic for anyone who fails in it.

The Arabic term *fitna* is derived from a concrete meaning of 'refining gold and iron with the use of fire.' Refining gold means fusing it in a crucible so that impurities mixed with it will float and be removed. Iron is also melted so that the sticking atoms will separate and the dross will float. We know that the types of iron include cast iron and steel. The impurities of cast iron are visible and so it is fragile. As regards steel, it contains no dross. It is thus clear that refining gold and iron removes the strange metals mixed with them.

The word *fitna* (test) then transitioned from a concrete meaning to an abstract one. It here denotes a test in which a person passes or fails. Thus, the test is not harmful per se; rather, it is bad for the person who fails in it. The trials experienced by a person are tests; they are good for the one who passes them and bad for the one who does not.

In this connection, once Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* quoted the verse reading: 'Your wealth and your children are only a test…' (*at-Taghabun:* 15) 'Abdullah ibn Burayda narrated that his father Burayda

Al-Aslami(1) had said, ‘I saw Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* delivering the sermon, whereupon Al-Hasan and Al-Husayn came, wearing red shirts, walking and tripping up. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* descended from the pulpit and carried them. Then he said, “Allah says: ‘Your wealth and your children are only a test…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 15), but I found these two boys walking and stumbling, which I could not stand. So, I stopped my speech and steadied them.”(2) At last he resumed his sermon.’

In this Hadith, he *peace and blessings be upon him* explains the *fitna* of the children as ‘being preoccupied with his two grandchildren’. It does not mean that the two grandsons would lead him *peace and blessings be upon him* towards a path other than that of belief. Rather, it means they *Allah be pleased with them both* diverted his attention away from his sermon for a short while.

Another Hadith narrated by Ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* reads, ‘Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once shortened the Dawn Prayer. When he was asked why he did so, he said, “I heard a little boy crying and thought that his mother was praying with us. So I desired to free up his mother for him.”’(3) He *peace and blessings be upon him* was preoccupied with the crying of the little boy. So, what about the little boy’s mother’s heart? Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to have mercy on the mother and the little boy who cried in need of his mother. As we said before, his *peace and blessings be upon him* being preoccupied with the boy does not apply to the test meant by the verse in question.

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(1) *Burayda Al-Aslami ibn Al-Khasib was the chieftain of Aslam tribe. During his Hijra, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him passed by Kira‘ Al-Ghamim where Burayda lived and he peace and blessings be upon him called him and his fellow tribesmen to embrace Islam. They indeed adopted Islam and then Burayda left for Medina, while Messenger Muhammad was building the mosque. He died in Marw during the caliphate of Yazid ibn Mu‘awiya.*

(2) *See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 111; see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3774; An-Nasa’i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1413; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3600; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 23045.*

(3) *This is narrated by Imam Ahmad on the authority of Anas ibn Malik; Ibn Abu Dawud narrated that Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudri said that Messenger Muhammad used to recite the long chapters of Al-Mufassal during the Dawn Prayer. One day he recited some of the short chapters. When he was asked, he said, ‘I heard a little boy crying, so I wanted to free up his mother for him.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 13726; and Ibn Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 424.*

It is thus crystal clear that his *peace and blessings be upon him* kindness and affection for his daughter Fatima and her two sons was great. Fatima was dearer to his heart, and so were Al-Hasan and Al-Husayn whose father ‘Ali risked his life for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* on the night of *Hijra* to Medina.

It was hard for him *peace and blessings be upon him* to see his two grandsons tripping up while they were walking. So he decided to steady them. He stopped delivering his sermon, descended from the pulpit, and lifted them from the ground. He said, ‘Allah is All-Truthful as He says: “Your wealth and children are only a test…” (*at-Taghabun:* 15).’ So, children can be a source of trial and a test. But what matters most is the result of this trial: will it be good or bad? The trial can be either good or bad, but in both cases it is necessary. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, we believe, and not be tried?’(1) (*al-’Ankabut:* 2) The trial of wealth drives people into miserliness and hoarding money. As a matter of fact, it causes all the forms of corruption and immorality. As regards the trial of children, it leads to neglecting the primary duties a person is required to fulfil. It also drives him into cowardliness, niggardliness, and avarice. The believer is to rise above the trial of wealth; he should devalue wealth and prevent it from preoccupying him.

Even though one gets benefit from wealth or children, this is a temporary benefit which will come to an end, which is why one should not be attracted by it, irrespective of their extent and number. Instead, a person should pay attention to the great future benefit which he will receive from Allah *the Almighty* alone when he adheres to the Right Path. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘There is a great reward with Allah…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 15). Allah *Glorified is He* wants His servants to pass the tests they go through. If a person seeks to get money by all means or succumbs to the trial of his children, they may keep him away from showing obedience to Allah, or even make him earn illegal money. So, He *the Almighty* wills one's children to be brought up through lawful gains.

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(1) *Al Miswar ibn Makhrama narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Fatima is my own flesh and blood. What harms her hurts me as well.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6461; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3714 and 3767.*

Your compliance with Allah's Way of Guidance will not go in vain, for He *the Almighty* will reward you for your obedience and your passing of the test, and that is why He concludes the verse in question by saying: 'There is a great reward with Allah…' (*at-Taghabun:* 15).

The human soul, by virtue of its natural constitution, likes what benefits it. But what really matters is the extent of the benefit. For example, the person who steals wants to benefit himself through the effort of someone else. The person who does not steal, on the other hand, wants to benefit himself so that Allah *the Almighty* blesses his money and grants him lawful sustenance.

Achieving benefit is behind any action, be it positive or negative. If you think that your breach of moral responsibility will benefit your children or increase your wealth, you should remember the reward Allah *the Almighty* gives you for your fulfilment of responsibility. Put the breach of moral responsibility in one pan of the scale and the fulfilment of responsibility in the other and see which of the two will tilt. Indeed, the one of Allah's Reward will tilt.

We should reflect on the greatness of Allah's Reward and the usefulness of the Path of Belief for those who follow it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do' (*an-Nahl:* 97).

In fact, good life is the natural result of good deeds which one performs for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* and His Reward in the Hereafter. So, He *the Almighty* grants the believer two portions of reward: the portion of a happy, good life in this worldly life and the portion of the Hereafter about which He *the Almighty* says: 'And We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do' (*an-Nahl:* 97).

One of the benefits the believer derives from following Allah's Way of Guidance is to live a good, tranquil, and happy life; he lives in the guidance, blessing, and sustenance of Allah *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* rewards him in the Hereafter for his obedience and righteousness though he already benefited from righteousness in this worldly life.

For people, recompense is equal to the value of the action. But the Reward of Allah *the Almighty* does not equal the worth of the action, for it is proportional to Allah's Omnipotence. So, there is a difference between the reward people give to one another and that of Allah *the Almighty* in the Hereafter. People regard reward as an emolument for a job. According to the extent of your job, you receive your wage, recompense, or emolument. If you do not work, you will not receive any recompense.

On the other hand, the reward which Allah *the Almighty* grants to His servants in the Hereafter is great and endless. If people reward you unfairly in this worldly life, Allah *the Almighty* is the All-Just and rewards you generously, for He is the All-Just and the Granter of bestowals. Unlike the reward of this worldly life, the reward in the Hereafter continues forever. In fact, the ease of this worldly life is evanescent because you will lose it one day or it will vanish. Allah's Reward is described as great, and this indicates that it is considerable in terms of size, characteristics, and continuity which are the elements of the greatness of His Reward. Is there a reward greater than this? What makes it greater than any other reward is that it comes from Allah *the Almighty* not from the humans. In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'There is a great reward with Allah…' (*at-Taghabun:* 15). In another verse, He *Glorified is He* also says: '…will have his reward with his Lord' (*al-Baqara:* 122).

It is Allah *the Almighty* Who imposes religious obligations, so it is logical that the reward shall come from Him. Therefore, the true believers do not fear or feel sorry, for they are certain that Allah *the Almighty* will reward them with what He promises them. Fear is to dread something that will happen. As for sorrow, it is to grieve for something that has already happened. The believers will neither fear nor grieve when the reward comes from Allah *the Almighty*. We should not be apprehensive about what is with Allah *the Almighty* for it multiplies and increases. The person feels sad when he loses something good, but the Reward of Allah *the Almighty* is permanent; you never lose it and it will never pass you by.

Fatima, the daughter of Messenger Muhammad, used to burnish and perfume the *dirhams* when she donated them to charity. When she was asked about this, she said, ‘I polish and perfume *dirhams* because I have intended to donate them to charity.’ She was asked, ‘Why do you burnish and perfume them then?’ She replied, ‘This is because I know that they fall into Allah’s Hands before they do into the hands of the poor.’(1)

When one reflects over the Quranic verses, one concludes that the great reward has a significant meaning. Sometimes reward is not equivalent to good deeds. Rather, it is purely surplus. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘While if there is a good deed, He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 40). He *the Almighty* calls it ‘reward’ though it is surplus and excessive. This is because this surplus is resultant from the reward. If a person does not perform the good deed, he is not entitled to any reward, and in turn he does deserve any surplus.

As the reward comes from Allah *the Almighty* it is the greatest ever because the Granter is Allah *Glorified is He* Who says: ‘But Allah has preferred those who strive hard in Allah’s Way over those who remain [behind] with a great reward’ (*an-Nisa’:* 95). What is this great reward? It is explained by the following verse that reads: ‘Degrees [of high position] from Him and forgiveness and mercy. And Allah is Ever-Forgiving and Merciful’ (*an-Nisa’:* 96). The degree here means the high position or rank which the person attains. Besides, Allah *the Almighty* adds two privileges: forgiveness and mercy.

In the verse in question, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…With Allah…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 15) gives two indications, as follows: the first is making those who do not believe in Allah *the Almighty* lose hope that they can find reward in the Hereafter for any good deeds, for they have not done these deeds to gain the pleasure of Allah *the Almighty*. Rather, they have done them for the sake of alleged deities who cannot reward them in any way, given the fact that there is no god but Allah both in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. On the Day of Judgement, Allah *the Almighty* will say: ‘To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing’ (*Ghafir:* 95). None but Allah *the Almighty* has all dominion over the Day of Judgement. How do the disbelievers expect a reward for deeds they do not perform for His *Glorified is He* sake? They have done them to find favour with other people in this world which they already achieved.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Sam‘ani narrates that Ibn Masu‘d said, ‘Charity falls into the Hand of Allah before it falls into the hand of the poor person.’ See As-Sam‘ani, Tafsir Al-Quran, 2/346*

The second indication is that the reward will be in this worldly life along with the Hereafter because Allah *the Almighty* possesses both. Concerning the reward in the Hereafter, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘We will bestow upon him a great reward’ (*an-Nisa’:* 74). We have three stages of receiving the reward for deeds: a reward that comes immediately upon the occurrence of the deed; a reward that comes after a short time; and a reward that comes true after a longer time. In the above-mentioned verse, Allah *the Almighty* uses a particle that refers to the realisation of the reward in the distant future, that is, in the Hereafter since the great reward can only be fully granted there. So, the believers should beware of saying, ‘Why does not Allah *the Almighty* reward us immediately for the good deeds in this worldly life?’ This is because He *the Almighty* says: ‘We will bestow upon him a great reward’ (*an-Nisa’:* 74). This indicates that even though Allah provides those who do good deeds with great reward in this worldly life, His Reward for them in the Hereafter will be even greater.

فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ مَا ٱسْتَطَعْتُمْ وَٱسْمَعُوا۟ وَأَطِيعُوا۟ وَأَنفِقُوا۟ خَيْرًا
لِّأَنفُسِكُمْ ۗ وَمَن يُوقَ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِۦ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Be mindful of God as much as you can; hear and obey; be charitable – it is for your own good. Those who are saved from their own meanness will be the prosperous ones [16]
(The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 16)

The Arabic word *At-Taqwa* (mindfulness/fearing) means guarding one’s self against something; it is derived from the word *Wiqaya*, which gives the meanings of protection, guarding, shielding and so on. It means avoiding and being cautious about something evil. So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Be mindful of Allah…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16), it means to beware of His Wrath in order to protect ourselves against all of His Attributes of Majesty. Whoever guards himself against these Attributes will take advantage of Allah’s Attributes of Beauty. The Attributes of Majesty include the Ever-Subduing, the Powerful, the One Who Humiliates, the giver of Bestowals and the Harmer. When one protects himself against the Subdual, Might and Avengement of Allah *the Almighty* he takes advantage of His Attributes of Beauty, namely; the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Relenting and the Pardoner.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Be mindful of Allah…' (*at-Taghabun:* 16) means to guard yourselves against Allah's Attributes of Majesty so that you will not bring down His grievous punishment upon you. Hence, the believer should perform his deeds in this worldly life according to Allah's Way of Guidance. Fearing Allah *the Almighty* and guarding one's self against His punishment are direly required in the worldly life. You cannot endure the resultant implications of His Attributes of Majesty, His Wrath, Might or Revenge.

You should beware of provoking Allah's Wrath through any actions you perform. The Muslim must be firmly convinced that he will meet Allah *the Almighty*. After all, what remains for him, if he adheres to this Divine Way of Guidance, is to be promised paradise. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers' (*al-Baqara:* 223). Fearing Allah *the Almighty* means to implement His commands and to refrain from His Prohibitions. In this way, we can adapt our choices and actions to His Way of Guidance. If we do so, we, like other creatures in the universe, will do what is good and beneficial.

Some superficial people look at some Quranic verses and claim that they are inconsistent. They argue that some verses say: 'then fear the Fire…' (*al-Baqara:* 24), while other verses read: 'and fear Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 278). Does the believer fear the fire as he fears Allah *the Almighty*!

Such people do not understand that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'and fear Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 278) means to protect yourself against what may cause you harm and trouble. This also means to guard yourself against His punishment. This protection is the shield of a person who is to abide by Allah's Commands and Prohibitions. When you guard yourself against Allah's Wrath, you protect yourself against His punishment. Thus fearing Allah *the Almighty* is equivalent to protecting one's self against hell. Devout people are those who guard themselves against anything that provokes Allah's Anger. The only way is to follow His Way of Guidance so that we will not enter hell which is one of His punitive means. Protecting one's self against hell entails obeying Allah's Commands and avoiding His Prohibitions. To say 'fear Allah' means to protect yourself against His punishment and Wrath. The same meaning goes for saying 'fear hell,' that is to say, shun what causes you to enter it.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…' (*at-Taghabun:* 16). This verse is connected to the previous two verses in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Believers, even among your spouses and your children you have some enemies – beware of them – but if you overlook their offences, forgive them, pardon them, then Allah is All Forgiving, All Merciful. [14] Your wealth and your children are only a test for you. There is great reward with Allah [15]' (*at-Taghabun:* 14-15). You should not let your wealth or children keep you away from your obedience to Allah *the Almighty* and from following His Way of Guidance. Otherwise, you will fail in your test and the result of your trial will be bad for you. Therefore, Allah's saying: 'Be mindful of Allah…' (*at-Taghabun:* 16) follows these two verses. This means to be careful and to make your fear of Allah *the Almighty* control you, not your own inclination towards hoarding wealth and stinginess.

If we ponder over the Quran, we find that it says: 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…' (*at-Taghabun:* 16), that is, it makes the command contingent on the person's ability. On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: 'O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared…' (*Al-'Imran:* 102). So, the question to be asked here is 'Who is able to fear Allah *the Almighty* as duly as required?' In fact, this is hard for Muslims. That is why when the verse of *Al-'Imran* was revealed, Muslims said, 'No one of us is able to fear Allah as He should be feared.' Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can; hear and obey; be charitable – it is for your own good. Those who are saved from their own meanness will be the prosperous ones' (*at-Taghabun:* 16).

One who puts Allah's saying: '…fear Allah as He should be feared…' (*Al-'Imran:* 102) into practice will make remarkable achievements. However, one can fear Allah *the Almighty* as duly as required concerning limited actions. The reward is surely great, but the deeds that apply to this verse are limited. As regards His saying: ‘Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16), He *the Almighty* enjoins us to fear Him as far as we can. As a result, the deeds that are accepted by Him become numerous even if the reward for them is not great. The final result is that there are some limited good deeds that require high reward, while there are a lot of good deeds which call for low reward. Which of the two types is better? Of course the numerous good deeds that require low reward surpass in general the few good deeds that call for high reward.

So, what is the due and optimal fearing of Allah *the Almighty*? The due, optimal fearing of Him *(the Almighty)* is that a believer’s belief must be firm and unshaken and that His Way of Guidance must be adopted as compliantly as possible. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* must be remembered and thanked instead of being forgotten and shown ingratitude.

It is said that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…fear Allah as He should be feared…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102) means that you should not be dissuaded or affected by those who blame you as long as you are pleasing Allah *the Almighty* or that you must tell the truth even if it is against yourself. Such a person is the true pious one who fears Allah as He should be feared. Some Islamic exegetes state that when the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…fear Allah as He should be feared…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102) was revealed and Messenger Muhammad’s Companions heard it, they found themselves unable to put it into effect. Some of them wondered, ‘Who can fear Allah as He should be feared?’ In the same respect, it is said that at this time Allah *the Almighty* revealed the verse reading: ‘Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). But does this mean that He *the Almighty* first imposed upon Muslims religious obligations that are beyond their capacity and then He said: ‘…fear Allah as He should be feared…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102)? No, Allah *the Almighty* charges humans with the obligations which are within their capacity. People misunderstand the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). One can say, ‘I cannot perform such-and-such religious obligation.’ Accordingly, such a person mistakenly thinks that he is absolved from that religious obligation. However, this is a misunderstanding.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…fear Allah as He should be feared…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102) means that you must fear Him as far as you can. What you are able to do, you should do. One should not hold the opposite meaning and say, ‘I am not able,’ for Allah *the Almighty* knows best the bounds of his capability. Once you are unable, Allah *the Almighty* pardons you and alleviates your difficulty. He knows best whether a certain obligation is beyond your capacity or not.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…fear Allah as He should be feared…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 102) denotes a high level of piety attainable by distinct people. When this verse seemed hard on the Companions and they asked(1) Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Who can fear Allah as duly as He should be feared?’ Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: ‘Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16) and imposed piety according to one’s capacity. So the verse in question abrogates the most optimal mandatory fearing of Allah *the Almighty*. But the verse of *Al-‘Imran* remains as an opportunity for anyone to attain the highest level of piety. If one desires to reach this level, it is much better for him. If one is not able, he can adopt the verse in question.

If we look at the two verses mentioned above from another angle, we will discover another meaningful point that refutes the allegation that there is a contradiction between them. The verse of the chapter of *Al-‘Imran* comes in a context different from that of *at-Taghabun*. The verse of *Al-‘Imran* comes in the context of verses that talk about disbelief and belief. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘O you who have believed, if you obey a party of those who were given the Scripture, they would turn you back, after your belief, [to being] unbelievers; [100] And how could you disbelieve while to you are being recited the verses of Allah and among you is His Messenger? And whoever holds firmly to Allah has [indeed] been guided to a straight path [101]’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 100-101). The two verses here are about belief and disbelief, and thus what is suitable here is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…fear Allah as He should be feared…' (*Al-'Imran:* 102). A person is obliged to believe in Allah *the Almighty* and what He ordains and to avoid all forms of disbelief and polytheism. Accordingly, belief in Allah *the Almighty* Messenger Muhammad, the Scriptures, the Last Day and Predestination is not based on one's capacity; rather, a person is required to believe in all of this as duly as possible.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir relates that Sa‘id ibn Jubayr (one of the greatest Followers) said, ‘When Allah revealed the verse reading: “O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared…” (Al-‘Imran: 102), Muslims intensified their acts of worship to the point that their Achilles tendons got swollen and their foreheads became sore. Thereupon, Allah alleviated the hardships of Muslims and revealed the verse saying: “Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…” (at-Taghabun: 16). Thus the first verse was abrogated by this verse.’ See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 8/140.*

Capacity is related to the matters on which it is applicable, as in the context of the chapter of *at-Taghabun*. A person can be faithful, but his personal inclinations or love for wealth might control him, or his affection for his children might lead him to yield to their wishes. Excluding the matters that are related to disbelief or polytheism, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Be mindful of Allah as much as you can…' (*at-Taghabun:* 16), which perfectly fits the context of this chapter.

Allah *the Almighty* knows that a person is weak and the circumstances can affect him greatly. Belief is not among the matters that depend upon one's capacity. It can be beyond your capacity only in the case of coercion, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Except for one who is forced [to renounce his religion] while his heart is secure in faith' (*an-Nahl:* 106).

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…hear and obey…' (*at-Taghabun:* 15). The believers are to listen to and to obey what is ordained by Allah *the Almighty*. Not only is listening with ears needed, but what is also necessary is obedience and implementation.

You can hear what is said but may not pay heed to it. So, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and [that] a conscious ear would be conscious of it' (*al-Haqqa:* 12). The consciousness of the ear enables it to attain benefit and understand what it hears so that it will not hear mere sounds and voices as in the case of those about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And there are those of them who seek to listen to you until when they go forth from you, they say to those who have been given the knowledge: What was it that he said just now?' (*Muhammad:* 16) Those people listened to Messenger Muhammad's words, yet they left him and asked, 'What has he said just now?' They listened to him *peace and blessings be upon him,* but they did not understand, nor did the spiritual light penetrate into their hearts. They looked as if they were deaf to the verses of Allah *the Almighty*. The believer, on the contrary, listens and is affected by what he hears which increases his belief. As regards the disbeliever, he cannot comprehend what he hears. The tears of the believers are shed when they listen to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the Quran. As for those whose hearts are immune to the light of the Quran, they are reluctant to listen to the truth even if they hear it with their ears.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And those who do not believe – in their ears is deafness…’ (*Fussilat:* 44). This deafness hinders their hearing. As the ears are deaf, they cannot listen to the truth. Even if they hear something, the heart will impugn it. This is due to the fact that one’s body parts get influenced by the beliefs one holds within one’s heart. As for those who are rightly guided, they listen to the truth; their hearts receive it with satisfaction and their body parts comply with it. You listen with your ears, accept the truth with your heart and your body parts put into practice what you are ordered to do. This is the intended meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…hear and obey…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). The close correlation between hearing, obedience and fearing Allah *the Almighty* is also highlighted by Prophet Muhammad’s Hadith.

Concerning the believers, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers; they all believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers; We make no difference between any of His Messengers; and they say: We hear and obey…’ (*al-Baqara:* 285). He *the Almighty* also says: ‘The only statement of the [true] believers when they are called to Allah and His Messenger to judge between them is that they say, “We hear and we obey”’ (*an-Nur:* 51).

‘Listening’ signifies the communication of the Islamic Calling, while obedience represents undertaking the obligations and compliance with Allah’s Commands and Prohibitions.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…hear and obey…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16) means to listen in a conscious and careful way that converts into obedience. You listen to comply and obey, not just to receive words with your ears without being influenced by them. So, the hearing’s function is to deliver the sayings of Allah *the Almighty* to one’s heart and mind to be finally put into practice. Allah *the Almighty* wants us to be among those who listen and obey, not among those who said, ‘We listen and disobey.’

In this regard, He *the Almighty* says about the Jews: ‘And when We made a covenant with you and raised the mountain over you: Take hold of what We have given you with firmness and be obedient. They said: We hear and disobey’ (*al-Baqara:* 93). The Jews heard what Allah *the Almighty* said to them, but they disobeyed. They listened to the commands but yet defied them. They said, ‘we hear,’ but they did not implement what they heard. Allah *the Almighty* wants them to listen and obey, not just to receive His Words with their ears.

Thus, it is incumbent on the believers to listen, obey, and comply with Allah’s sayings. Then He *the Almighty* draws our attention to charitable spending as an aspect of obedience to Him; He says: ‘be charitable – it is for your own good…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). We should note that He *the Almighty* says: ‘…it is for your own good…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). This means that He *the Almighty* draws a comparison between two things: charitable spending, which is better and more advantageous, and avarice. A person’s avarice occurs when he fears that he would be powerless and poor. So, he tries hard to keep and maintain what he owns for fear of poverty. A person thinks that his niggardliness and retaining of material possessions are better for him. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to an important fact, saying: ‘be charitable – it is for your own good…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). He *the Almighty* reassures those who spend charitably, saying: ‘The parable of those who spend their property in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears (with) a hundred grains in every ear; and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases; and Allah is Ample-Giving, Knowing.’ (*al-Baqara:* 261) Through charitable spending Allah *the Almighty* blesses and increases your property. So do not grieve over or fear for your wealth, for you donate your money for the sake of the Almighty and the Bountiful Who will surely increase your property.

One day Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entered upon Bilal while the latter had a pile of foodstuff. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Bilal, spend charitably and do not fear impoverishment by the Owner of the Throne.’(1) According to another narration, the pile consisted of dried dates. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Bilal, ‘What is this foodstuff?’ He replied, ‘Some dried dates. I want to save them,’ whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Woe betide you, Bilal! Do not you fear that they produce smoke in hell? Make charitable donations, Bilal, and do not fear impoverishment by the Owner of the Throne.’(1) Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* was poor and wanted to save some dried dates to entertain Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in case he visited him. However, he *peace and blessings be upon him* instructed him to donate the dried dates charitably and said to him, ‘Make charitable donations, Bilal and do not fear impoverishment by the Owner of the Throne.’ This does not mean that he *peace and blessings be upon him* discourages us from saving a portion of our money or foodstuff to use it later in the future. Rather, he *peace and blessings be upon him* thought that Bilal *Allah be pleased with him* had saved the dried dates for his fear that Allah *the Almighty* would not provide him with anything other than them. He wanted his Companions to keep their hearts pure from the worldly pleasures.

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(1) *See Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 1366.*

As a matter of fact, this matter has to do with the believer’s piety and his fear that he might disobey Him by being unable to implement the command in His saying: ‘be charitable – it is for your own good…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). This is also connected to the fear of being captivated by the love of the worldly life and indulging in miserliness or avarice. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who are saved from their own meanness will be the prosperous ones’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). So, His saying: ‘…be charitable – it is for your own good…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16) serves as a rule that He *the Almighty* intends to use to combat the avarice within the people’s selves. He *the Almighty* says to all of us, ‘Be far-sighted, for alms and charitable spending do not decrease a person’s property.’ Using a small measurement of wheat grains as planting seeds for your land will not decrease your depository a great degree when you grow your land. This is because you expect that the land will produce many times the amount of this measure. As Allah *the Almighty* clarifies for us the roots of avarice within the human soul, He teaches us that the first thing that the human soul encounters is a person’s apprehension that charitable expenses would cut down his property. On the other hand, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* warns us against niggardliness and avarice by saying, ‘Beware of injustice, for it will be darkness on the Day of Resurrection. Avoid avarice, for it brought destruction down upon those who were before you and prompted them to shed the blood of one another and violate their prohibitions.’(1) Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who are saved from their own meanness will be the prosperous ones’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). The human soul inclines towards avarice, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Those who are saved from their own meanness...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). So, one of the Blessings Allah *the Almighty* conferred upon the person and one of the tokens of His Mercy towards him is that He *Glorified is He* protects the person from avarice and miserliness. A person who stints on his money, knowledge, or wisdom will inevitably suffer loss and forfeiture. As regards those who: ‘…are saved from their own meanness...’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16), they will succeed and escape loss, for they have spent charitably and Allah *the Almighty* has granted them many times as much as what they spent. They have struck a deal with Allah *the Almighty* Who says: ‘And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills…’ (*al-Baqara:* 261).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ud Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 1978; Abu Ya‘ala, Musnad, Hadith no. 6040; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 1017.*

One who communicates his knowledge to others will be rewarded in return for any person who receives this knowledge, be it religious or mundane. Likewise, a person who has great experience in some field and is known for wisdom is rewarded for providing others with them because he protects the inexperienced from committing what provokes Allah’s Anger. So He *the Almighty* says: ‘Those…will be the prosperous ones’ (*at-Taghabun:* 16). The Arabic word *al-falah* means success, winning, and prosperity, while the word *al-muflih* means a winner, a successful and prosperous person. The word *falah* (success) contains its evidence; it is derived from a clause meaning ‘to till the land’. The farmer who cultivates his land and grows it will reap the fruit in the end. Likewise, the successful person benefits from his deeds.

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 6741; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 14501; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 11835; and Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 488 and 483.*

The success of the believers is not confined to the Hereafter, but it can also come in this worldly life as a result of charitable expenditure. So, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and (as for) those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah's way, announce to them a painful chastisement' (*at-Tawba:* 34). Charitable spending includes numerous fields. It creates activity and circulation in society, which are beneficial for all people. People benefit from *zakat* (obligatory alms) when you pay it, exactly as when you pay to equip the Muslim army. Once you spend charitably and stop hoarding your wealth, markets will be brisk. This means the creation of a lot of job opportunities, means of living and the incentive for humanity to progress. For example, when you buy yourself a washing machine, fridge or build a small house, you cause an economic boom in society. At the same time, you develop your material comforts. Prosperity leads to the best discoveries that benefit humanity. However, if you hoard up all your money, economic recession will prevail. This does not mean that one should spend all of one's money, for Allah *the Almighty* likes moderation in all aspects of life, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'And they who when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and (keep) between these the just mean' (*al-Furqan:* 67). Here, Allah *the Almighty* warns us against extravagance and not keeping a portion of our money for contingencies. But penny-pinching brings about stagnancy, the cessation of production and unemployment. Islam encourages thriftiness and moderate spending that creates marketability and simultaneously allows the saving of money to improve your everyday life and help you in any potential problems you encounter. In this case, you will succeed in this worldly life and in the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِن تُقۡرِضُواْ ٱللَّهَ قَرۡضًا حَسَنٗا يُضَٰعِفۡهُ لَكُمۡ وَيَغۡفِرۡ لَكُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ شَكُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧﴾

If you make a generous loan to God He will multiply it for you and forgive you. God is ever thankful and forbearing [17] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 17)

Allah *the Almighty* talks to us in the preceding verse about charitable spending, saying: '…be charitable – it is for your own good. Those who are saved from their own meanness will be the prosperous ones' (*at-Taghabun:* 16). You should not make the worldly life capture your heart. Be thrifty and spend your money on your families and on the interests of your society. If the worldly life captivates you, you will not rid yourself of stinginess in your knowledge, views, or advice. So, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Those who are saved from their own meanness will be the prosperous ones' (*at-Taghabun:* 16). The problem lies in the niggardly soul whose owner even begrudges smiling at his coreligionist. This is despite the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'To smile at your brother is an act of charity.'(1) Therefore, you should cleanse your heart of niggardliness to be successful.

A parsimonious person stints on and thus harms only himself. As for the generous person, he, unlike misers, receives more blessings from Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, He *the Almighty* says: 'Behold! You are those who are called upon to spend in Allah's way, but among you are those who are niggardly, and whoever is niggardly is niggardly against his own soul…' (*Muhammad:* 38). If your Lord sees you give charity out of your property, He will increase it for you. In this regard, one of the righteous people says, 'O Allah! You habitually bestowed blessings on me and I got used to give out of them to the people. So, I invoke You to keep bestowing on me what I got accustomed to so that I do not stop giving the people what they used to take.'

As a matter of fact, charitable expenditure generates and multiplies the blessings of Allah *the Almighty*. Suppose that you have several children and you give one of them one pound. Then this child of yours goes to a shop, buys sweets, and divides them among his brothers. You will certainly give him more money because he is kind towards his brothers.

Know, O you rich person, that when you withhold charity from the poor, you deprive yourself. Allah, the Omnipotent, is not in need of you; He is fully

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibban on the authority of Abu Dharr Allah be pleased with him. Al-Bazzar narrated it with the following wording: 'Your smiling at the face of your coreligionist is a kindness; to pour [water] from your bucket and fill that of your coreligionist is a kindness; to promote virtue and combat vice is a kindness; to remove thorns and stones from the road is a kindness, and to show the way to a lost person is a kindness.' See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1956; see also Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 474; and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 4070.*

Able to replace stingy people with others who openhandedly donate some of their property to charity. A person who scrimps denies himself the avenues of the Mercy of Allah. Spending in the form of charity, *zakat* (obligatory alms) or household expenditure leads to an economic boom and youth employment. This also safeguards societies from moral deviations and the loss of generations.

In this vein, lending money to a needy person is a form of spending as well. It is possible that there will be no needy person in the society if each rich person gives financial aid at least to his poor relatives. If every wealthy person provides for his needy relatives, there will be no poverty-stricken people in the Muslim societies.

If you want to broaden the scope of good deeds, you should widen the range of charitable spending. When you give charity to the needy whom Allah *the Almighty* brought into being, you endear yourself to Him by helping them, even though this is not obligatory on you.

The one who withholds charity from the needy invokes their spite and hatred. If spite and grudge spread in a society, all immoralities and abominations will be rampant. Allah *the Almighty* orders us to purify our property by spending charitably, so that it will increase and grow and spite will be eliminated from society. If grudges prevail in a society, such a society will be at stake. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to humans, ‘Go about in this life and it is Me Who will ensure the result of your effort. But I have an entitlement to your wealth which I have entrusted you with: you have to give the needy a portion of it.’ If the rich do not assist the needy, the needy may take what they need by stealing, robbing, or even resort to killing or complicity in murder.

By giving charity to the needy, you actually give them on behalf of Allah *the Almighty* Who bestows all the means of sustenance. He *the Almighty* commands the believers, saying: ‘O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you…’ (*al-Baqara:* 254). In fact, you spend out of the favours that Allah *the Almighty* confers upon you. He *the Almighty* regards charitable spending as a loan which a servant gives to Him, the Lord, the Creator, and the Bestower of sustenance. Wealth, in fact, is Allah’s. If He puts you in possession of wealth and orders you to give charity to your poor coreligionist, He respects your ownership and does not take back His Grant.

So He *the Almighty* orders you to give charity to the poor as a loan and He will repay it on behalf of them. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan…’ (*al-Baqara:* 245). In this verse, He *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘would loan so-and-so’. Rather, He says: ‘would loan Allah’. In the verse in question, He *the Almighty* also says: ‘If you make a generous loan to Allah…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 17). That is, when you give someone a loan, it seems as if you have given it to Allah *the Almighty* Himself.

The Arabic word *al-qard* (loan), linguistically, means nibbling an object with canine teeth. Allah *the Almighty* knows best that loaning is difficult. To show that it is so, He says: ‘…would loan Allah’ (*al-Baqara:* 245). Thus, He *the Almighty* gives the reward according to its difficulty.

Loaning is harder than almsgiving. The moment you give charity, you are not worried about what you donate out of your money because you initially exclude your charitable donation from your calculations; you do not expect any recompense from the person you give charity. By contrast, when you give a loan to someone, you think about a lot of things and even ask many questions: ‘Will he pay off the loan? Will I give him a loan less than he wants? How can I take back my money if he fails to repay it?’

Thus, loaning is a lot more difficult than almsgiving. The loaner always calculates the remaining time when the loan repayment becomes due. He can also commit numerous sins because of this loan. For example, he may embarrassingly or insultingly demand repayment of the borrower whenever they meet together. Also, the loaner may offensively remind the borrower of his favour and blame him vehemently. This in turn leaves no room for speaking together normally and comfortably. So, loaning is harder for both the loaner and the borrower.

Allah *the Almighty* gives a reward for the act of loaning more than He does for charity. Here, I can remember that when I was in America, an orientalist asked me, ‘There is a contradiction between the Quranic verse reading: “Whoever comes [on the Day of Judgement] with a good deed will have ten times the like thereof [to his credit]…” (*al-An‘am:* 160) and the Hadith of Messenger Muhammad which reads: “The following words are written on the gate of paradise: the reward for one act of charity is ten times as much as the like thereof and the reward for a loan is eighteen times as much as the like thereof.”’(1) Allah *the Almighty* inspired me to give the answer to the orientalist. So I said to the interpreter, ‘Yes, the reward for a good deed is tenfold as much as the like thereof in case you give charity. As regards the loan, if you, for example, donate one dollar to charity, it equals ten dollars in the sight of Allah *the Almighty*. But you take back your dollar, and thus it seems as if you have nine dollars; if they multiply, they make eighteen dollars.’

If someone asks, ‘Why is the reward for a loan multiplied?’ We say, The almsgiver has no desire to take back his alms. As regards the loaner, he expects that his loan will be paid off. The longer he keeps patient, the greater his reward will be. Moreover, the borrower takes out a loan in case of dire need, while the recipient of the alms may accept the charity even if he does not need it. Allah *the Almighty* wants to encourage Muslims to give loans because He *the Almighty* wills life to continue and its aspects to integrate. One takes care of his money and tries hard to make it grow; this can be realised by giving charity as a loan to Allah *the Almighty*. This is the way through which Allah *the Almighty* increases and multiplies your reward. Therefore, He says: ‘If you make a generous loan to Allah He will multiply it for you…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 17). He *Glorified is He* lays down a condition for the loan to be multiplied, namely; it must be goodly. But what is the goodly loan? Describing the loan as goodly indicates that the source of the money from which you give someone else a loan must be lawful. In this regard, Messenger Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Allah is good and accepts nothing but that which is good.’ (2)

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(1) *Anas ibn Malik narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘On the Night of Al-Israa’, I saw these words written on the gate of paradise: “The reward for one act of charity is ten times as much as the like thereof and the reward for a loan is eighteen times as much as the like thereof.” I asked Jibril (Gabriel), “Why is loaning better than charity?” He replied, “Because the beggar asks for help and can manage while the borrower takes out a loan when s/he is in dire need of it.”’ See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2431; see also At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 6719; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu‘ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 3288.*

(2) *Abu Hurayra narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said ‘Allah is good and accepts nothing but that which is good. And Allah orders believers to do what He commands Prophets to do; He says, “O Messengers, eat from the good=*

When you give someone else a loan, you give it to Allah *the Almighty*. So, you deal with Allah *the Almighty* and your dealing must be based on lawful gains. How can one deal with Allah *the Almighty* with ill-gotten gains he makes out of theft, embezzlement, usury or any kind of sins? Your money must be lawful and good so that your loan will be goodly and acceptable.

Allah *the Almighty* describes the loan as goodly and generous in order for it to be devoid of taunts and harm or any benefits whatsoever for the lender; otherwise, the loan will be an interest-based loan, which is forbidden in Islam. Imam Abu Hanifah(1) sets a great example to us in this regard. He used to sit in the shade of one of his friends' houses. One day the owner of the house borrowed some money from Abu Hanifah. The next day Abu Hanifah sat away from the shade of the house. On seeing him, the owner of the house asked him why he did so, whereupon he explained that he feared that his sitting in the shade of the house might be a type of usury.

As for reproaching and harming the recipient of charity, Allah *the Almighty* says: '(As for) those who spend their property in the way of Allah, then do not follow up what they have spent with reproach or injury, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve. [262] Kind speech and forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury; and Allah is Self-sufficient, Forbearing' [263] (*al-Baqara:* 262-263). As He *the Almighty* talks about charity in the two above-mentioned verses, we should stress here that the interest-free loan is also a kind of charitable spending. As previously stated, loaning is harder on one's self than almsgiving. So, you should not taunt the person who receives your charity or borrows from you or hurt his feelings in one way or another.

= *foods and do good deeds…" (al-Mu'minun:51). He also says, "O you who have believed, eat from the good [that is, lawful] things which We have provided for you..." (al-Baqara: 172). Then he (the Messenger) mentioned the example of a dishevelled dust-covered man who makes a long journey, raising his hands towards the sky (saying), "O my Lord! O my Lord!" But his food is unlawful; his drink is unlawful; he was nourished from illicit gains. So how are his supplications answered?'*

(1) Abu Hanifa An-Nu'aman ibn Thabit At-Taymi was born in Kufah in 80 A. H. and grew up there; he traded in silk and pursued knowledge since his boyhood. Afterwards, he devoted himself to teaching and giving *fatwas.*

It is among the norms of faith that a person should forget about the fact that he gave charity. He should not tell anyone of his relatives about his kindness towards the poor, notably little children who do not understand such matters. If my son knows that I give some help to my neighbour, he may taunt the son of my neighbour about this. So beware of following your charitable expenditures by taunting or insulting their recipients. If you do so, the one who receives your charity or borrows from you will have a grudge and hatred against you.

We find a lot of people say boastfully, ‘We did too many favours to so-and-so. We helped so-and-so in such-and-such a way. But they were ungrateful to us.’ As you remember the kindness you do to others but tauntingly, it is fair that they receive it with ingratitude. As you did not seek Allah’s Cause by your favours, people will not be grateful for them.

Your charitable expenditures should not be accompanied by taunting or boasting, not only at the time when you give it but also after you do that. More appropriately, you must continue doing the same, no matter how much time passes.

The moment you give charity or give a goodly loan, you deal with Allah *the Almighty*. Consider what Lady Fatima (1) used to do. She would burnish and perfume the *dirhams* whenever she donated them to charity. When she was asked about this, she said, ‘I polish and perfume *dirhams* because I have intended to donate them to charity.’ She was asked, ‘Why do you want to donate them burnished and perfumed?’ She replied, ‘Because I know that they fall into Allah’s Hands before they do into the hands of the poor.’(2)

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(1) *She is Fatima Al-Hashimiyya Al-Qurayshiyyah, the daughter of Messenger Muhammad. Her mother is Khadija Bint Khuwaylid. Fatima was born before the Hijra. She was famous for eloquence and wisdom. She married ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb, Messenger Muhammad’s paternal cousin, at the age of eighteen. She bore him Al-Hasan, Al-Husayn, Umm Kulthum and Zainab. She died six months after the Messenger’s death in 11 A.H. She was then 29 years old. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A‘lam, 5/123.*

(2) *There is another version in Nuzhat Al-Majalis which is mentioned by ‘Abd Ar-Rahman As-Safuri and which reads: ‘Whenever ‘A’isha wanted to donate a dirham to charity, she would perfume it. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him asked her about that, and she said, “Messenger of Allah, I would like to perfume my dirham, for*=

In order for a loan to be goodly, it must be interest-free. Interest makes the loan bad and causes the borrower to suffer from straitened circumstances even if he is actually in dire need of the loan. Also, the one who gives interest-based loans and exploits others' difficulties suffers from loss and damage. The Messenger of Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Any loan that generates a benefit [on the part of the loaner] is based on usury.'(1)

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And whatever you lay out as usury so that it may increase in the property of men, it shall not increase with Allah; and whatever you give in charity, desiring Allah's pleasure – it is these (persons) that shall get manifold' (*ar-Rum:* 39). He *Glorified is He* prohibits practising usury even if it is for the purpose of achieving an increase, be it in the form of a material advantage, or money or valuable items, be it conditional or unconditional. Under these circumstances, interest-based money turns into a commodity. For example, one hundred pounds taken as a loan may be repaid as one hundred and fifty pounds.

This does serious damage to the society because wealth should grow through business. If the growth of wealth is not based on business, life will be corrupted; the poor will grow poorer and the rich will become richer. Regretfully, this is what we see in the world these days.

At the country level, we notice that poor countries become poorer because they borrow money and the resultant interest will mount and accumulate until it is more than the original debts. With the passage of time, interest increases, thus debts multiply and the settlement becomes nearly impossible. Rich countries become richer because they give loans and recover them many times.

The contract of usury protects the creditor only. There is another moral question: a person gives an interest-based loan when he has money in excess of his basic needs. One takes out the loan from a usurer only when one is in dire need of it. Look at the ethical setback in the universe; the destitute have no choice but to borrow money and later they are bound to repay it at high rates

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= *it falls into the Hands of Allah before it does into the hands of the beggar." Thereupon, he peace and blessings be upon him said, "Allah has invested you with success, 'A'isha."' See 'Abd Ar-Rahman As-Safuri, Nuzhat Al-Majalis, 1/334.*

(1) *See Al-'Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa', Hadith no. 1991.*

of interest to the wealthy who are not in need. How can such a loan be lawful if it is not a goodly loan which the borrowers take out to meet their daily needs or handle an emergency? The goodly loans should not harm the debtor, but rather relieve him from concern about paying it back along with its interest.

In order for a loan to be goodly, it must be based on the rules and regulations of Islamic Law. Therefore, the debt should be documented and be attested to so that neither the creditor nor the debtor will be wronged in any way. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! When you deal with each other in contracting a debt for a fixed time, then write it down; and let a scribe write it down between you with fairness; and the scribe should not refuse to write as Allah has taught him, so he should write; and let him who owes the debt dictate, and he should be careful of (his duty to) Allah, his Lord, and not diminish anything from it; but if he who owes the debt is unsound in understanding, or weak, or (if) he is not able to dictate himself, let his guardian dictate with fairness; and call in to witness from among your men two witnesses; but if there are not two men, then one man and two women from among those whom you choose to be witnesses so that if one of the two errs, the second of the two may remind the other; and the witnesses should not refuse when they are summoned; and be not averse to writing it (whether it is) small or large, with the time of its falling due; this is more equitable in the sight of Allah and assures greater accuracy in testimony, and the nearest (way) that you may not entertain doubts (afterwards), except when it is ready merchandise which you give and take among yourselves from hand to hand, then there is no blame on you in not writing it down; and have witnesses when you barter with one another, and let no harm be done to the scribe or to the witness; and if you do (it) then surely it will be a transgression in you, and be careful of (your duty) to Allah, Allah teaches you, and Allah knows all things' (*al-Baqara:* 282). In this verse of *al-Baqara,* He *the Almighty* lays down rules for borrowing and loaning. The loan must be documented so that rights will be preserved and the proprietors of wealth will be reassured that their wealth is safe. In this way, lending continues and the needy will be aided without harming the owners of capital.

As Allah *the Almighty* closes the door of interest-based loans, He opens the door of interest-free lending that is based on documentation and testifying.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘The usury that was practised during the Pre-Islamic period is illegal, and I begin by declaring forbidden the amount of interest which ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib used to receive. Surely, it is entirely unbinding.’(1)

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and relinquish what remains (due) from usury, if you are believers. [278] But if you do (it) not, then be apprised of war from Allah and His Messenger; and if you repent, then you shall have your capital; neither shall you make (the debtor) suffer loss, nor shall you be made to suffer loss [279]’ (*al-Baqara:* 278-279).

He *the Almighty* forbids giving interest-based loans but allows and encourages interest-free lending according to the set rules, to maintain the solidarity of society.

The fact that He *the Almighty* ordains the documentation of debts helps in preventing any possible differences, especially among close relatives and friends. A lot of people mistakenly think that He *the Almighty* means by the documentation of debts the protection of the creditor. Actually, the purpose of this, first and foremost, is to protect the debtor. When the debtor knows that his debt is registered, he does his utmost to pay it off. But if the debt is unregistered, the debtor may stop working and desist from settling his debt. As a result, he manages to meet his family’s needs only once, and the rich would refrain from lending money to the poor. The rich also would take the lack of settlement of debts by some needy people as a pretext for not giving them any loans anymore. The person who defaults on his debts may involve himself in committing more sins because he narrows the chances of interest-free lending.

Allah *the Almighty* wants the badly-off to take part in economic life. As for the wealthy people, they can manage their lives as they like. The have-nots, on the contrary, are always in need of help. Therefore, there is a proverb in the Egyptian countryside, reading, 'Whoever takes and gives can have the whole money.'

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(1) *Ibn Khuzayma narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah and ‘Amr ibn Al-Ahwas that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Surely, the usurious practices that were made during the Pre-Islamic period are illegal; you are entitled to your capitals without doing injustice to one another. Also the amount of interest which ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib has to receive is unlawful. Surely, it is entirely unbinding.’ See Ibn Khuzayma, Sahih, Hadith no. 3087; see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3087.*

When a person borrows and repays his debt, all people trust him and think of him as sincere and true to his word. It, then, seems that he owns the entire money. So Allah *the Almighty* wants the badly-off to manage his life through the documentation of the debt as the better-off are not in need of loans.

To put more emphasis on the protection of the debtor, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and let him who owes the debt dictate, and he should be careful of (his duty to) Allah, his Lord, and not diminish anything from it…' (*al-Baqara:* 282). The debtor must dictate the debt he owes as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and not diminish anything from it…' (*al-Baqara:* 282). Here arises a question, which is, 'Why does the creditor not dictate the debt himself?' This is because the debtor is usually in a position of weakness and feels embarrassed to talk. Further, the creditor may reduce the repayment deadline the moment this deadline is written. Thus, the documentation of debts is also useful for the creditor as this encourages him to lend to others and promote interest-free loans.

One may ask, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* say: "If you make a generous loan to Allah…" (*at-Taghabun:* 17) using the conditional particle "if" which connotes doubt or uncertainty? On the other hand, He says: "Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over?" (*al-Baqara:* 245); and He also says: "Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He will multiply it for him and he will have a noble reward?" (*al-Hadid:* 11)

The answer to this argument is that the verse of the chapter of *at-Taghabun:* '…if you make a generous loan…' (*at-Taghabun:* 17) comes after talking about those who stint on their wealth and are niggardly. So, He *the Almighty* says: '…be charitable – it is for your own good. Those who are saved from their own meanness will be the prosperous ones' (*at-Taghabun:* 16). The compulsive miser finds spending money very hard, especially with regard to charity and lending others. There is a colloquial saying that reads, 'A leopard cannot change its spots; old habits die hard.' So Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If you make a generous loan to Allah…' (*at-Taghabun:* 17). He *Glorified is He* gives a multiplied reward for those who lend interest-free loans, saying:

‘If you make a generous loan to Allah, He will multiply it for you…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 17). That is to say that He *the Almighty* multiplies your reward for this loan many times over.

Loans, apparently, decrease your wealth, as you can invest them to make profits and maximise your wealth. However, you opt to lend your money to people in need, to gain the Reward of Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, He *the Almighty* increases your wealth many times double its amount. In the Hereafter, He *the Almighty* gives you a great reward. You give your loan for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* and He returns your loan many times double its amount and its reward.

He *the Almighty* continues, saying: ‘…and forgive you…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 17). But what does the word ‘forgiveness’ in this verse signify? It means that He *the Almighty* will forgive the misgivings that boil up inside the lender about his money and any inadvisable behaviour towards the borrower.

In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…if you keep up prayer and pay the obligatory alms and believe in My Messengers and assist them and offer to Allah a goodly gift, I will most certainly cover your evil deeds…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 12). Forgiving sins and wiping out misdeeds in addition to increasing his wealth many times double its amount are a reward that Allah *the Almighty* gives to the lender. He *Glorified is He* concludes the verse in question with His saying: ‘Allah is Ever-Thankful and Forbearing’ (*at-Taghabun:* 17).

He *the Almighty* appreciates the assistance that the beneficent, the almsgiver, and the lender give to the needy. Ibn ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘A man came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, “Messenger of Allah, which people are dearer to Allah? Which [good] deeds are most liked by Allah?” Messenger Muhammad said, “The dearest people to Allah are those who are more helpful towards others. The deeds that Allah likes best are to give pleasure to a Muslim, eliminate his suffering, settle a debt for him or help him satisfy his hunger.” ’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him. See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 13468; see also At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 6026; and Al-Mu‘jam As-Saghir, Hadith no. 861.*

Allah *the Almighty* is the Ever-Thankful Who gives a great reward for few deeds. He appreciates the one who thanks Him for His Blessings. If you praise Him, He *the Almighty* will thank you and give you more reward. So, 'The Ever-Thankful' is one of the Lofty Names of Allah *the Almighty*.

It is thus clear that He *the Almighty* appreciates the aid that a servant gives to others. If people thank and appreciate one another, what do you think of Allah's Appreciation and Thankfulness! Whenever you thank Allah *the Almighty* He grants you more reward for this good deed.

But why does Allah *the Almighty* say: 'Allah is Ever-Thankful and Forbearing…' (*at-Taghabun:* 17)? What is the relationship between thankfulness and forbearance? Allah *the Almighty* mentions forgiveness and forbearance together in other Quranic verses, such as: 'Allah does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing' (*al-Baqara:* 225).

The fact that Allah *the Almighty* combines thankfulness and forbearance raises some questions and calls for consideration. Forbearance is a good quality which means enduring others' offence and pardoning them. On the part of Allah *the Almighty* forbearance means that He does not hasten to punish the sinners.

He *the Almighty* is All Forbearing towards a servant who commits misdeeds and also pardons the minor sins of the righteous. If your good deeds are tarnished with something bad or you contravene Allah's Way forgetfully or by mistake, do not let this trouble you or damage your relationship with Him. He *the Almighty* is All Forbearing and pardons you for such a misdeed. This applies to the popular proverb saying, 'Your mistakes are always overlooked by your lovers.'

By saying: 'Allah is Ever-Thankful and Forbearing' (*at-Taghabun:* 17), Allah *the Almighty* wants to say to His servants: 'I appreciate your lending money to My servants who are in need. I am also All Forbearing towards you; I will not hasten to punish you when you speak tauntingly or insultingly the moment you lend money to others. This gives you a chance to repent so that you will get your reward many times over. What matters most is that the interests of those in need must be served.'

The books of Hadith give us the following account: ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘When the verse: “Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan…?” (*al-Baqara:* 245) was revealed, Abu Ad-Dahdah said, “Messenger of Allah, does Allah want us to give a loan?” Whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “Yes, Abu Ad-Dahdah.”(1) Abu Ad-Dahdah said, “So extend your hand.” Messenger Muhammad extended his hand to him, whereupon Abu Ad-Dahdah said, “I have decided to give my orchard as a loan to my Lord.” The orchard consisted of six hundred palm trees. Abu Ad-Dahdah walked away till he reached the orchard where his wife and children lived and called out, “Umm Ad-Dahdah.” She replied, “Here I am at your disposal!” He said, “Go out. I have lent the orchard to my Lord.” ’(2)

Abu Ad-Dahdah *Allah be pleased with him* knows well that Allah *the Almighty* is Ever-Thankful and Forbearing. He *Allah be pleased with him* extended his hand to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and donated the orchard to charity. His wife did not object or disagree with him. He gave the orchard as a loan to Allah *the Almighty* so that its yield would go to the poor and needy.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently, says:

عَـٰلِمُ ٱلْغَيْبِ وَٱلشَّهَـٰدَةِ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿١٨﴾

He knows the unseen, as well as the seen; He is the Almighty, the Wise [18] (The Quran, *at-Taghabun:* 18)

The above-mentioned verse includes three of the Lofty Names of Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, the chapter of *at-Taghabun* includes a number of Allah’s Lofty Names, including: the Omnipotent, the All Seeing, the Omniscient, the Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy, the All-Acquainted, the Forgiving, the

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(1) *Abu Ad-Dahdah, Thabit ibn Ad-Dahdah, was from Banu Anif or Banu Al-‘Ajlan. He took part in the battle of Uhud and was martyred at the hands of Khalid ibn Al-Walid (while he was still a polytheist). It is said that Abu Ad-Dahdah died at home after Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him returned from Al-Hudaybyya.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 12504; see also Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 7259; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 2032; and Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 2194.*

All-Merciful, the Ever-Thankful and the All-Forbearing. He *the Almighty* concludes this list of these Lofty Names with His saying: ‘He knows the Unseen, as well as the Seen; He is the Almighty the All-Wise’ (*at-Taghabun:* 18). With regard to His saying: ‘He knows the Unseen, as well as the Seen…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 18), the unseen is that which is known only by Allah, the Knower of the unseen. He does not acquaint any of His creatures with the Unseen except those whom He selects from among the humans, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘The Knower of the unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to any [26] Except to him whom He chooses as a Messenger; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him [27]’ (*al-Jinn:* 26-27). The unseen is what is unknown for you and others. As for things that are unknown for you but known to others, they are not called unseen. For example, if your money is stolen, you do not know who has stolen it. The thief, in this case, is unknown for you, not for others. The thief knows himself; the person who is complicit in the crime knows him too; and the person who sees and connives knows him as well. You do not know the place where the stolen objects are hidden while the thief does. So, it is unknown for you but actually known to others. There are things which are unseen and unknown for you and others too. Such matters are known only by Allah *the Almighty* Who says: ‘The Knower of the Unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to any’ (*al-Jinn:* 26). The Unseen meant by Allah *the Almighty* in His saying: ‘The Knower of the Unseen’ (*al-Jinn:* 26) is the absolute Unseen which is exclusive to Him *Glorified is He*.

Allah *the Almighty* may bestow some indications of the Unseen on some mystics, but when he tells the people about it, He *the Almighty* may bring the events contrary to what he said in order to prove that He *the Almighty* is the only Knower of the Unseen.

Allah *the Almighty* knows the absolute Unseen which has no premises or clues that may help us come to it. Thus, we cannot discover it, for it is known only by Him *the Almighty*.

Thus, the absolute Unseen is what is known to Allah *the Almighty* alone, and has no clues. He *the Almighty* may disclose it to the one whom He wishes. This is supported by His saying: ‘The Knower of the Unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to any [26] Except to him whom He chooses as a Messenger; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him [27]' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27). The absolute Unseen differs from the clue-based Unseen. The human being can use these clues to discover one of the mysteries of the universe.

An example of the absolute Unseen is the Day of Judgement about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say, "None in the heavens and earth knows the Unseen except Allah"…' (*an-Naml:* 65). So He *the Almighty* alone knows the time when the Day of Judgement will take place. At the same time, He creates the preliminary events and signs that indicate the imminence of this Day.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* boasts about not knowing the appointed time of the Day of Judgement. When he was asked about it, he said, 'The one who is asked about it does not know more than the one who is asking.'(1)

To hide the Unseen from people is of a great advantage. Allah *the Almighty* is the Lord of all mankind and He wants people to help and benefit from one another. For example, if you detect one fault in someone else's character, you may ignore all of his good qualities and dislike him. So, He *the Almighty* hides from you the flaws of others in order that you can take advantage of their good qualities.

He *the Almighty* hides from us the Unseen through three barriers: the past, the future, and the place. Before your birth, you have no idea about the past events, but someone reliable comes to you and informs you of these past events. Also, you do not know what will happen in the future. As for the barrier of place, you have no idea about things existing at a place other than the place at which you are present. Besides, an object can exist at the same place where you stay, but you are unaware of it.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He knows the Unseen, as well as the Seen…' (*at-Taghabun:* 18). This informs us that He *the Almighty* knows the Unseen and the Seen alike. Someone may mistakenly think that if he stays at an isolated, hidden place and does what he likes, Allah *the Almighty* will not witness him. This is untrue, for He *the Almighty* knows and observes the Seen as well as the Unseen. Nothing is hidden from Him in this vast universe.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. The Hadith reads as follows: 'O Messenger of Allah, when will the Hour be?' He said: 'The one who is asked about it does not know more than the one who is asking.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 50 and 4777; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 102, 108 and 106; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4697; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2610.*

Any secret or mystery is known by Allah *the Almighty* a fact which is clearly manifested in His saying: 'The Beneficent Allah is firm in power. [5] His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth and what is between them two and what is beneath the ground. [6] And if you utter the saying aloud, then surely He knows the secret, and what is yet more hidden [7]' (*Ta Ha:* 5-7). Allah *the Almighty* knows the unseen which is hidden and the seen as well. Some may assume that He, Who is Unseen to us, knows only the unseen. But He *the Almighty* stresses the fact that He knows both the Unseen and the seen.

The fact that Allah *the Almighty* knows the seen protects people against wronging and attacking one another, as they know well that He *the Almighty* is fully Aware of the seen and the unseen. Thus He *Glorified is He* is the best of all witnesses. Witnesses can be really reliable and even-handed or even pretend to be so to conceal their dishonesty. But Allah *the Almighty* is the best of all other witnesses.

He *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed Allah is over all things, Witness' (*al-Hajj:* 17). The witness is the one who sees or observes something without affecting or changing the thing witnessed in any way. As regards Allah *the Almighty* He is the Judge who arbitrates between His servants. The judge needs evidence or witnesses who must also be reliable and honest. Reliable testimony comes true through adhering to a Divine Religion that prevents humans from deviating from the truth. As the Judge is Allah *the Almighty* there is no need for evidence or witnesses. His Knowledge encompasses everything, nor is there absent from Him an atom's weight within the heavens or within the earth.

Witnessing connotes the recording of the deeds of people; it also means that they have been notified of Allah's Way of Guidance, but they opposed and deviated from it and committed sins that incurred their punishment. Punishment is based on the crime; incrimination is based on religious texts which must be conveyed and spread.

In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say, "Sufficient is Allah as Witness between me and you. Indeed he is ever, concerning His servants, acquainted and seeing"' (*al-Isra':* 96). Allah being a Witness, means that He is the Witness Who observes, the Arbitrator Who judges and the executive authority that executes.

After that He *the Almighty* describes Himself, saying: ‘He is the Almighty’ (*at-Taghabun:* 18). The Almighty is the One Who is never surmounted due to His Omnipotence and Who cannot be questioned by anyone. He is the Dominant Who cannot be conquered by any other power. He is the All-Powerful and Exalted in Might.

The phrase ‘the Exalted in Might’ connotes dominance and subdual. Nothing can subdue or defeat Him. The Arabic word *Al-‘Aziz* (The Almighty) means also something which is rare. It comes in the sense of invincibility or rarity and scarcity. It also means something which is difficult for people to achieve or do. For example, you can say, ‘It was hard for me to reach the summit of the mountain.’

Allah is the Almighty One since there is no god but Him, and He is the Invincible and All-Powerful God. He says: ‘Indeed, it is your Lord Who is the Powerful, the Exalted in Might’ (*Hud:* 66).

The Almightiness as an absolute Attribute belongs to Allah alone. In a restricted sense, we say, ‘the one who is the most honourable and influential of his people’. It is an attribute that is treated here as a Name. Allah’s Names are divided into two categories: proper nouns and nominalised adjectives. If the Name has no antonym, it is a proper noun like the ‘Almighty’. If the Name is derived from the adjective and verb roots like the Bestower of Honour, it must have an antonym such as the Humiliator. If Allah *the Almighty* only bestowed honour or if He only inflicted dishonour, He would not be the True God.

In a general sense, the Name ‘the Almighty’ applies to Allah alone. But it is allowed to say, ‘So-and-so is most influential among his people; so-and-so is merciful towards others; so-and-so is beneficent towards others.’ But if you say ‘the All-Beneficent’ as a general word, it refers to Allah *the Almighty* alone.

Allah *the Almighty* is not only the Exalted in Might, but He is also the Lord of Might, a fact which is stated in the Quran: ‘Exalted is your Lord, the Lord of Might, above what they describe’ (*as-Saffat:* 180). He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘Those who take disbelievers as allies instead of the believers. Do they seek with them honour [through power]? But indeed, honour belongs to Allah entirely’ (*an-Nisa’:* 139).

If you really aspire to dignity and power, ask Allah, the Owner of the Eternal Might, for them. If you desire honour that makes you dispense with other humans, turn to the Source of Honour and Might, namely; Allah *the Almighty*.

If you desire true honour, derive it from Allah Whose Might never changes. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘But indeed, honour belongs to Allah entirely’ (*an-Nisa’:* 139). This means that the proper way to obtain honour and might is to ask Allah *the Almighty* for them.

The adverb ‘entirely’ in the above-mentioned verse indicates that honour is of different forms: wealth, authority, and glory. When one tries to meditate on these forms, he concludes that all of them apply to Allah *the Almighty*.

If a person desires a permanent and outstanding honour, he must turn to Allah *the Almighty* and regard Him as his first and last Refuge. As Allah is the Exalted in Might, those who believe in Him are honourable and mighty, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘and to Allah belongs [all] honour, and to His Messenger, and to the believers…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 8).

All might and honour originate from Allah *the Almighty* alone. Also, the honour of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers is derived from Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, Mightiness, together with is its various forms, belongs to Allah *the Almighty* such as the Mightiness of forbearance and avengement.

No one can ask Allah *the Almighty* why He does such-and-such and leaves such-and-such. Thus He is described as the Exalted in Might Who possesses all forms of Almightiness.

To be honourable you should derive your honour from Allah *the Almighty* from Messenger Muhammad and from faith. Concerning some people, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and they have taken besides Allah [false] deities that they would be for them [a source of] honour’ (*Maryam:* 81). Idolaters seek honour from their worship of idols. But what is the point of idolatry? Allah *the Almighty* responds to them, saying: ‘No! “Those gods” will deny their worship of them…’ (*Maryam:* 82). The adverb ‘no’ negates the fact that these idolaters can derive honour from idols. Quite the opposite, those false deities will be against them on the Day of Judgement.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself as: ‘The All-Wise’ (*at-Taghabun:* 18). He is the One Whose Actions are extremely wise. Although Allah is the Exalted in Might, His Actions are wise and He subdues and dominates everything wisely.

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* calls Allah ‘Exalted in Might and Wise’ in his saying: ‘Indeed, I will emigrate to [the service of] my Lord. Indeed, He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise’ (*ar-Rum:* 26). So, he *peace be upon him* chooses ‘the Exalted in Might’ from among other Attributes of Allah because this Attribute suits his situation when his people attempted to burn him to death. It is as if he says to his people, ‘I will turn to the refuge of the invincible one.’ He also describes Allah *the Almighty* as ‘the All-Wise’ with regard to His Actions. Therefore, Allah is Exalted in Might, yet He is All-Wise and He never does injustice to anyone. He is the Owner of insurmountable Might and impeccable Wisdom.

The Arabic word *hikma* (wisdom) is derived from *al-hakama,* meaning ‘the metal bar attached to a horse’s bridle and put into its mouth so that its owner can control it’. This is because the horse is a pampered, unruly animal which needs taming. So the metal bar put into a horse’s mouth makes it more controllable.

To describe Allah *the Almighty* as ‘the All-Wise’ means that He controls and dominates His creatures so that they do not proceed without spiritual guidance and knowledge. Wisdom entails setting a goal for every movement so that all movements will be in harmony with one another and the whole universe will be controlled by the absolute truth. Allah is the All-Wise because He sets the framework and limits of each being. Wisdom also means that everything performs its function proficiently and masterfully. Wisdom with regard to Islamic jurisprudence is to deduce the sound rulings; regarding poetry, it is to compose well-rhymed and well-metered poetical verses; with regard to medicine, it is to diagnose diseases and find suitable cures for them; regarding engineering, it is to design a hospital according to the needs of patients, physicians, medical equipment, drug stores, and the like. Wisdom required for building a house differs from that needed for constructing a hospital or bridge.

Finally, we must consider the verses of the chapter of *at-Taghabun* in the light of Allah’s Wisdom with which He concludes the same chapter. In this case, we will discover that He *the Almighty* is All-Wise with regard to creating humans as believers and disbelievers, the creation of the heavens and earth, the misfortunes that befall people, making some of our wives and children enemies to us, dividing people into rich and poor, ordering the rich to give charity, paying *zakat* (obligatory alms) and giving interest-free loans to the poor and the needy and multiplying the reward for aiding and lending money to the poor.

The Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* is clearly manifested in the fact that He is *the Almighty* Who cannot be defeated and the All-Wise Who puts everything in its proper place. Therefore, when people get to know the wisdom behind Allah's Ordinances, they will admire the Greatness of His Power.

As He *Glorified is He* says: 'So believe in Allah, in His Messenger, and in the light We have sent down: Allah is fully Aware of what you do' (*at-Taghabun:* 8). We must submit and surrender to His Unchallengeable Will by obeying His Commands which are decreed on the basis of His Wisdom and Comprehensive Knowledge. At this point, a human being's choice must submit to Allah's Will because it, that is, the Divine Will cannot be changed by any means.

In our daily life, we may find that a person is experienced and has deep knowledge about a certain issue more than all other people. Therefore, we say to him, 'We delegate this matter to you; whatever you decide we shall follow!' This means that we abandon our right to choose and submit ourselves to the wisdom of that person. However, we do not grant this privilege to anyone unless we are very sure that he is well versed in the matter in hand and that he is a very wise person. In such a case, when one asks you, 'Why do you follow the opinion of so and so?' You say to him, 'He is experienced in such matters.' This response proves that you trust his knowledge, truthfulness, and wisdom.

The Wisdom of Allah *the Almighty* entails that He *Glorified is He* does not consider the superficial aspects of something without taking its bad consequences into account. But you, O man, may take a decision thinking that it will end your troubles, while this very decision may lead to greater harm.

Likewise, with regard to the medications and their different effects, the clever doctor is the one who tries hard to avoid the side effects of the medications he prescribes. Therefore, a doctor may prescribe a medication with a side effect but yet prescribes another one to alleviate this side effect.

This falls under the concept of wisdom as he takes into account the side effect which may arise in the future. In the Egyptian countryside, they call the doctor *Al-Hakim* (the wise man) as he wisely treats human beings by prescribing the medications which cure the disease and do not cause them grave harm.

Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself as the All-Wise because He does not leave anything to coincidence. Instead, He decrees all matters according to what is right. Similarly, the Glorious Quran is described as 'a Book of Wisdom', a meaning which is clear in His saying: '*Alif Lam Mim*. [1] These are verses of the Book of Wisdom [2]' (*Luqman:* 2). This means that the One Who revealed it is the All-Wise.

In the Glorious Quran, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies the Way of Guidance which leads people to goodness. So, when we follow it, it will bring about all that is in our interest and will not cause any harm. This is the essence of wisdom. Therefore, the Quran is full of wisdom as it is revealed by Allah, the All-Wise. Besides, it decides on all matters of faith.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* urged Muslims to praise Allah as the Knower of the Seen and the Unseen, in the mornings and evenings. In this regard, Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O Messenger of Allah, command me with something that I may say when I reach morning and evening,' whereupon he said: 'Say: O Allah Knower of the Unseen and the seen, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Lord of everything and its Possessor, I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except You, I seek refuge in You from the evil of my soul and from the evil of Satan and his shirk.'(1)

As a matter of fact, the early Muslims used to practice their religion in the mornings and evenings. It is narrated that Al-Harith ibn Malik *Al-Ansari Allah*

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tirmidhi who said, 'It is a good, authentic Hadith'. It is also narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, At-Tayalisi, An-Nasa'i and by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3392; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 63; At-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no. 9; An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 7652 and 10563; and Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 1202.*

be pleased with him once passed by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who asked him, 'O Harith! What state are you in?' 'I find myself as a true believer,' replied Al-Harith. Prophet Muhammad then asked him, 'Everything possesses a truth; what is the truth behind what you claim?' 'O Prophet of Allah! I have become disenchanted with this world,' he answered. 'I stay awake (in worship) in the night, and endure thirst (by observing fasting) in the day. It is as if I am witnessing the Throne of Allah, observing the inmates of Paradise meeting each other and hearing the shrieks of the inmates of Hell.'

That is why in the aforementioned Hadith of Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* did not ask for mere words to be just uttered with the tongue. Instead, he asked about a supplication to be felt by his entirety; by his tongue, hands, legs, heart, and intellect. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taught him the following supplication to praise Allah *the Almighty* with in the mornings and evenings and when he goes to his bed as well. He taught him to say: 'O Allah Knower of the Unseen and the Seen, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Lord of everything and its Possessor, I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except You, I seek refuge in You from the evil of my soul and from the evil of Satan and his shirk.'

This supplication affirms that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Knower of the Unseen and the Seen. He knows what is hidden from the people exactly as He knows what is known to them, for He is the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, that is, the One Who originated them without any previous model. He *Glorified is He* is the Lord and the King of all things; He is the Owner of all that exists in the Heavens and the Earth. In addition, He possesses all what you own, even the most precious thing within you, O man, your spirit.

He is the Only God; there is no god but Him. He created us and endowed us with spirits so that our bodies could move in this life according to His Divine Way of Guidance, not according to any other paths which drive us away from the Only One Who knows the seen and the unseen.

As we praise, remember, supplicate and return to Allah *the Almighty* alone in all our affairs, we also seek refuge in Him from the evil of our own tempting souls which, if we succumbed to their whims, cause us to suffer more grave effects resulting from the evil of Satan and his vicious schemes.

Here, we should not forget that Satan had sworn by Allah *Glorified is He* that he would exert all his effort to misguide the children of Adam.

Muslims believe that Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, that He is the Lord and the King of all things, and that there is no god but Him *Glorified is He*. This belief, which is underscored each morning and evening and also when one goes to bed, is further confirmed when you believe that He *Glorified is He* is the All Knowing, the All-Seeing, the All-Hearing, the All-Wise *the Almighty* the Knower of the Seen and Unseen and the One from Whom nothing can be hidden.

Accordingly, we realise why the chapter of *at-Taghabun* begins and concludes with glorifying Allah *Glorified is He*. It begins with His saying: ‘Everything that is in the heavens and earth glorifies Allah; all control and all praise belong to Him; He has power over everything’ (*at-Taghabun:* 1) and ends with His saying: ‘Allah is ever thankful and forbearing; [17] He knows the unseen, as well as the seen; He is the Almighty the All-Wise’ (*at-Taghabun:* 17-18).

the chapter of

at-Talaq

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *at-Talaq*[1] (Divorce):

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ إِذَا طَلَّقۡتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَطَلِّقُوهُنَّ لِعِدَّتِهِنَّ وَأَحۡصُواْ ٱلۡعِدَّةَۖ
وَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ رَبَّكُمۡۖ لَا تُخۡرِجُوهُنَّ مِنۢ بُيُوتِهِنَّ وَلَا يَخۡرُجۡنَ
إِلَّآ أَن يَأۡتِينَ بِفَٰحِشَةٖ مُّبَيِّنَةٖۚ وَتِلۡكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِۚ وَمَن يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ ٱللَّهِ
فَقَدۡ ظَلَمَ نَفۡسَهُۥۚ لَا تَدۡرِي لَعَلَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحۡدِثُ بَعۡدَ ذَٰلِكَ أَمۡرٗا ﴿١﴾

Prophet, when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start, and calculate the period carefully: be mindful of God, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes — nor should they themselves leave — unless they commit a flagrant indecency. These are the limits set by God — whoever oversteps God's limits wrongs his own soul — for you cannot know what new situation God may perhaps bring about [1] (The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 1)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'Prophet…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). This shows his greatness and high status in the sight of the One Who selected him to be the last Prophet, a point which is further illustrated by the fact that He *the Almighty* has addressed and called other Prophets and Messengers with their given names, saying: 'He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names' (*al-Baqara:* 33); 'O Musa (Moses)! Surely I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds' (*al-Qasas:* 30); 'O Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), did you say to people…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 116)

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(1) The chapter of *at-Talaq* was revealed in Medina. It consists of 12 verses. Ibn Mas'ud called it the smaller chapter of *an-Nisa'*. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-Baqara* and before the chapter of *al-Bayyina*. According to the order of revelation, it is the chapter number 96, but according to its current order in the Quran, it is the chapter number 65.

and: ‘O Nuh (Noah)! Descend with peace from Us…’ (*Hud:* 48). It is thus clear that He *Glorified is He* addresses each of His Messengers with his name, without any adjective of glorification, whereas He always addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with an adjective such as: ‘O Messenger…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 41) or ‘O Prophet…’ (*al-Anfal:* 65).

As He *Glorified is He* does not address him *peace and blessings be upon him* with his name, then it is not permissible for us to call him *peace and blessings be upon him* with his given name without any adjective of esteem and honour. This point is clearly indicated in His saying: ‘Do not hold the Messenger’s calling (you) among you to be like your calling one to the other…’ (*an-Nur:* 63). Therefore, it is not fitting to address him with his name only, saying, ‘O Muhammad, ’ as the relationship between him and the Muslims is not based on his own character, but rather, on the fact that he is Allah’s Messenger and, therefore, we should address him, saying: ‘O Prophet,’ or ‘O Messenger’. This is the proper and honorary way we should follow when we address him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In our daily life, when we want to address a high profile person, we address him saying: ‘His Majesty!’, ‘His Eminence Sheikh!’ or ‘Dear Sir!’ Accordingly, it is more worthy to follow Allah’s Way of addressing him *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying ‘O Prophet’ or ‘O Messenger’.

As a matter of fact, the Messenger is an intermediary between Allah *the Almighty* and the people in terms of delivering the revelation. He is the person who informs people of Allah’s Revelation which people should follow. On the other hand, a Prophet sent by Allah brings about no new legislation. Instead, he preaches the same legislation of the preceding Messenger or Messengers. He acts as a role model for his people.

One may ask here, ‘Why does Allah *Glorified is He* address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this context as a Prophet and not as a Messenger although the issues discussed here are concerned with legislations?’ The answer is that the purpose here is to make him a role model for the Muslims in such matters, a mission which properly suits the Prophets.

In Arabic, the word *nabi* (prophet) is derived from *naba’* (announcement) which means great news that should be cared for. It here refers to the issue of divorce that is pertinent to the marital relationship which tackles the core of the social life of any community, as it, that is, divorce organises the relationship between men and women and what is pertinent to their children. Leaving these matters unorganised makes the communities suffer complete disorder.

In fact, divorce is one of Allah's Legislations, thus violating it is an act of wrongdoing. When He *Glorified is He* addresses the communal issues, He treats them in a way that totally prevents defects and disorder. On the contrary, when people make legislations, they, even if their intentions are good, draft such legislations according to their limited knowledge and, therefore, they may be ignorant of something that may occur in the future. If we assume that they made a particular piece of legislation, and then come to know that there is an aspect that they had not considered, what will be the case?

If they are sincere, they will not act arrogantly and will reconsider what they have legislated. However, if they insist on applying what they have legislated, then it is the community that will suffer until another legislator considers the needs of the community and reconsiders the legislation.

Allah *Glorified is He* has enacted Legislations which prevent people from suffering and the divergence of opinion. By so doing, He guarantees that the community shall not suffer from the mistakes that may be committed by human legislators for a while until other legislators amend what has been mistakenly done. The one who enacted the first legislation has not got enough knowledge of the new incidents which may arise. Accordingly, when such new incidents come about, people become in need of an amendment to the legislation.

If we investigate any man-made law concerning any worldly issue and consider its development, we come to know that people continuously develop it until it becomes identical, or at least closer, to the Islamic Legislation in that regard. For example, the Europeans objected to the rulings of divorce in Islam, but they, later on, came to enact divorce in Italy in the very heartland of the Vatican. Here is the question, 'Have they legislated it under the influence of Islam?' The answer is 'No'. They have legislated it due to the necessities of life which have compelled them to do so and which conclusively prove the correctness of the rulings of the Islamic *Shari'a*, even before they are put into practice, a point which is crystal clear by the fact that the Europeans were compelled to enact this piece of legislation on divorce in order to address the social problems of their community.

Divorce is a very difficult process as it happens at a time when both the husband and the wife are angry with each other. In fact, marriage is a relationship which is based on living in tranquillity, love, and kindness. When these feelings are absent, how can a husband or a wife be compelled to live with a spouse she/he hates? Separation in such a case is a means ordained by Allah *the Almighty* in order to open an avenue for both man and woman to seek a more suitable spouse. There are many real incidents where we find that a husband or a wife finds his happiness with a new spouse. Taking into account all these considerations, such separation is legislated and approved, despite the fact that severing the marital relationship is difficult for the family.

Allah *Glorified is He* determines three constituents for the preservation of the marital relationship, saying: ‘And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect’ (*ar-Rum:* 21). Investigating these three phases, we find that the marital life of the two spouses starts with tranquillity. At this level, they enjoy mutual happiness, reassurance, and satisfaction of their needs. When this level of dealing with each other is jeopardised, then love comes to be the basis for their life that guarantees a level of mutual acceptance. When love is lost between them, then they move to the third level of compassion in which each party shows kindness towards the other in the state of weakness or sickness. As such, the marital relationship endures and survives the hardships of life.

If these three constituents are absent from the relationship between the two spouses, then their life together becomes impossible and separation is then better for them. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* makes divorce legal as a solution in such cases. However, He *Glorified is He* considers it one of the most detestable things, that is, it should be the last resort. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* underlines this, saying, ‘Of all the lawful acts the most detestable to Allah is divorce.’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar Allah be pleased with him. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2180; see also Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2018; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra Hadith no. 15292.*

This is why He *Glorified is He* says here: ‘When any of you intend to divorce women…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1) the Arabic particle *idha* (when) is used here to bear the meaning of conditionality and to indicate that this divorce is not the general rule to be followed. This is also asserted by the usage of the Arabic particle *in* (if) in His saying: ‘There is no blame on you if you divorce women when you have not touched them or appointed for them a portion, and make provision for them, the wealthy according to his means and the straitened in circumstances according to his means, a provision according to usage; (this is) a duty on the doers of good (to others)’ (*al-Baqara:* 236), to communicate the same meaning, that is, He *Glorified is He* does not intend divorce to be the standard practice.

Although Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in this verse in question, this is also viewed as an address to all Muslims as he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the one who receives the commands and then conveys them to the people. Similarly, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Then set your face upright for religion in the right state…’ (*ar-Rum:* 30).

One may ask, ‘Why does not Allah say: ‘O you who believe! When you intend to divorce women,’ instead of: ‘Prophet, When any of you intend to divorce women’ (*at-Talaq:* 1), although the verb used afterwards is in the plural form?’ We underline it again, ‘When He *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is in fact an address to all Muslims. It is also some kind of veneration for him.’

This Quranic chapter discusses the matter of divorce which touches upon the lives of the people and organises their marital relationship and how, in some cases, it ends. It also addresses some issues that could destroy families and communities if they were not properly regulated. In fact, it is necessary that *Shari’a* regulates the issue of divorce in order not to let any party wrong the other and to prevent confusion of lineage. Therefore, regulating such a matter cannot be left to laymen. Instead, it is the responsibility of the governor or the judge.

So, being the ruler and the judge of the Muslim *Ummah* during his lifetime, Allah *the Almighty* addresses His Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and instructs him how to settle disputes among the spouses. In other words, as the affairs of divorce rest in the hand of the State which shall apply the rulings of the *Shari'a* upon Muslims, then it is suitable here that the Divine Address shall be for the ruler of the Muslim *Ummah* during that time (that is, Prophet Muhammad), not the believers.

No one is entitled to marry a woman without the consent of her guardian and without a marriage contract, witnesses, and a bride-gift. Likewise, no one is entitled to divorce his wife without registering the divorce or bringing just witnesses to attest to it. The same applies when one wants to take back his wife during her waiting period after having divorced her once or twice. All this is prescribed for safeguarding woman's rights and avoiding wrongdoing.

In this regard, 'Umran ibn Husayn narrated that Messenger Muhammad was asked about a person who divorced his wife, and then had intercourse with her, but he did not call any witness to attest to her divorce or to her restoration, whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Your act of divorce is against the *Sunnah* and your taking her back is against the *Sunnah*. Call two witnesses to attest to her divorce and to her return in marriage, and do not repeat it.'(1)

In this chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). This verse indicates that there are certain kinds of waiting periods for the divorcee. They are as follows:

- When the divorced woman is not pregnant, then the waiting period is three menstrual periods;
- If she is pregnant, then the waiting period lasts until she delivers her baby; and
- For those women who have ceased menstruating and those who have not yet menstruated, the waiting period is three months.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Dawud, Ibn Maja and At-Tabarani on the authority of 'Umran ibn Husayn. In his commentary on the Sunnan of Ibn Maja, As-Sindi says, 'This signifies that it is more appropriate for one to bring witnesses in both cases in order to avoid dispute and mistrust.' See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2188, Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2025; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir Hadith no. 14690.*

The first type of waiting period is clearly defined in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods before remarrying…’ (*al-Baqara:* 228). This verse explains that in the case where the woman is divorced once or twice, her husband has the right to take her back in marriage so long as she is still in her waiting period. As soon as the waiting period ends, he has no right to take her back unless he concludes a new marriage contract and gives her a new bride-gift. This applies only to the first two occurrences of divorce, for after divorcing her for the third time, he has no right to remarry her.

The waiting period is the time which follows the divorce or the death of the husband and during which a woman has no right to marry. In the case of divorce, the waiting period is three menstrual periods or three periods of purity. With regard to the woman who reached menopause or has not menstruated yet, her waiting period is three months. As for the woman whose husband died, her waiting period is four months and ten days. Further, the waiting period of the woman whose marriage is consummated differs from that of one whose marriage is not.

With regard to the divorcee who is pregnant, her waiting period lasts until she delivers her baby as indicated in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘If they really believe in Allah and the last Day, it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs…’ (*al-Baqara:* 228). This verse indicates also that it is prohibited for a divorcee to conceal her pregnancy for fear that she will be obliged to wait without marriage until she delivers her baby. A woman may marry, while she is still pregnant and thus the newborn baby is falsely attributed to someone who is not his real father. The word ‘women’ in His saying: ‘…when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1) includes all these kinds of divorcees. The verse orders Muslims to consider each divorcee’s state and to apply the legislation of divorce as clearly stated in the *Sharia*.

The address here is for all the members of the Muslim *Ummah*. In Arabic, when a command is directed to a group, then it is directed to each member of the group. For example, when a teacher orders the students to bring out their pens, this means that each student should bring out his own pen. Likewise, when a group head orders a group of drivers to get into their cars, then each driver should get into his own car. Thus, the Arabic rule states that when a command is given in the plural form to a group of people, it is also directed to each member of that group. Another example for this point is found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 3). In this verse, He *the Almighty* generally addresses the entire Muslim *Ummah*. Yet, this is not an individual command which means that each one must be polygamous.

We should take into account that His saying: ‘…do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1) means that the husband shall not divorce his wife during menstruation or in the state of purity in which they had sexual intercourse. Instead, he should wait until her menstrual period ends. In this case, if she is a menstruating woman, then her waiting period is three menstrual periods. If she reaches menopause, then her waiting period is three months. As for the waiting period of a pregnant woman, it lasts until she delivers her baby.

In the case of a menstruating woman, what is considered is the state of purity between two menstruations. It is narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar divorced his wife during the lifetime of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while she was menstruating. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab mentioned that to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, he ordered him to order his son, ‘Abdullah, to take her back and to keep her until she is clean from her menses, and then to wait until she gets her next period and becomes clean again. Then, if he wishes to divorce her, he can divorce her when she is clean from her menses, before he has sexual intercourse with her. Then, Messenger Muhammad said to him, ‘This is the waiting period which Allah has fixed.’(1)

Allah *the Almighty* decrees that the husband should not divorce his wife during her menstruation as he may not have a desire for her during this period.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5251; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3725; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no.2181; and An-Nasa’i, Sunnan Hadith no. 3390.*

Therefore, He *the Almighty* commands him, if he wills, to divorce her in a period of purity when he has not had sexual intercourse with her. By so doing, we will be sure that he had done so out of an absolute and total conviction that their life will no longer be possible and that he no longer has any desire for her.

In the aforementioned Hadith, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered ‘Abdullah to take his wife back and keep her until she is clean from her menses, and then to wait until she has her next period and becomes clean again. This period is more than one month. Then, if he wishes to divorce her, he can divorce her when she is clean from her menses, before he has sexual intercourse with her. He *peace and blessings be upon him* then said, ‘This is the waiting period which Allah has fixed.’

There is no doubt that this gives the husband a great opportunity to reconsider the matter many times before he divorces his wife and destroys his family.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And calculate the period carefully…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1). This means that they should remember the time when divorce occurs in order to be able to calculate the waiting period after which the woman is permitted to marry another husband. *Al-Ihsaa’* (the calculation) intended here means to know the beginning and the ending of the waiting period of the woman so as to remove harm from her by not allowing the period of her *‘idda* (waiting period) to be extended.

But who is ordered here to calculate the waiting period? Is it an order to the husbands, wives or all Muslims? Some scholars contend that the order here is directed to the husbands as they are obliged to fulfil some rights such as maintenance payments. In addition, they are entitled to take their wives back during the waiting period, if they so want. If they do not calculate the waiting period until it is over, then it will be too late to take them back, a case under which they will be obliged to conclude a new marriage contract and pay a new bride-gift if they want to take their wives back in marriage.

Accordingly, we find that calculation has many benefits, such as knowing the time during which a husband may take his wife back and knowing the time when maintenance payments and housing become an obligation on him. It is noteworthy here that commanding Muslims to ‘calculate’ signifies that they should be very accurate in this regard. This is because inaccuracy in this process may lead to two problems, as follows: first: the divorcee may get married before the completion of her waiting period and this, consequently, may lead to confusion of lineage; second: the waiting period of the woman may be lengthened, a matter that may put her into difficulty because she becomes in need of someone to support and take care of her.

Thus, calculation in this context signifies exactness and precision with regard to the waiting period so that no mistake should occur in this process. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, 'O Prophet Muhammad, order the believers who want to divorce their wives not to divorce them during the menstrual period, but at the time when the prescribed waiting period can start properly. In other words, the husbands should not leave them until they are clean from their menses, and then wait until they get their next period and become clean again.' This is the order that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave to 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* in this regard. This address applies only to the divorcee whose marriage is consummated. In case the marriage is not consummated, there shall be no waiting period.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* prescribes the waiting period as a preservation of the husband's right, the right of the widow and the woman's dignity, as no one is allowed to propose to her until she completes her waiting period.

A divorcee may, out of desire to avenge herself against the man who divorced her, rush to marry another man. She may be insinuated to by another man to seek divorce and, therefore, becomes in a hurry to marry him. Further, as soon as the woman gets divorced and goes through the waiting period, people may propose to her or she may aspire to marry someone. So, He *Glorified is He* prohibits her from marriage for a certain period as a means of protecting her.

Then He *Glorified is He* says: 'Be mindful of Allah, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes – nor should they themselves leave – unless they commit a flagrant indecency…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). He *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the matter of piety which controls the relations between the spouses in the affairs of marriage, divorce, the waiting period and maintenance allowance. He says: 'Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 2); 'Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 4); 'Allah will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards of anyone who is mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 5) and: 'So, you who have understanding, you who believe, beware of Allah' (*at-Talaq:* 10). The Arabic word *taqwa* (piety/fearing Allah) means to act upon the Orders of Allah *the Almighty* and to refrain from what He forbids, so as to regulate our choices according to His Way of Guidance. By so doing, we will be acting in such a way that serves the benefit and general good of humanity, exactly as the entire universe around us does.

Piety, in general terms, refers to obedience to Allah by following His Orders and refraining from His Prohibitions. It suggests abstinence from the dilemmas and troubles of life by adhering to the Divine Way of Guidance. Only then could anyone shun such troubles. By contrast, anyone who turns away from piety will live miserably, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…his shall be a straitened life…' (*Ta Ha:* 124). One should not think that piety is confined to protecting oneself from the hellfire, it is rather, more comprehensive. It signifies desistance from troubles and misery arising from transgressing Allah's Way of Guidance. It should be noted that as a person may violate the rights of others, he will similarly have his rights violated.

Further, piety indicates shunning the troubles of life, which are caused by approving and complying with man-made laws which are contrary to the Divinely enacted Law by virtue of which we can avoid such troubles. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And whoever turns away from My Reminder, his shall be a straitened life…' (*Ta Ha:* 124). This verse indicates that the life of such a person will be full of troubles and worries because he violates the Way of Allah. Should there be no problems as a consequence of such violations, people would say, 'We violated Allah's Law and yet we prospered.' Thus, problems have to exist in order to remind us that the Divine Way of Guidance must prevail and that adhering to it will entirely solve our problems.

The Arabic word *danka* (straitened) denotes extreme distress and misery from which one cannot escape. It is not limited to poverty and need; rather, it incorporates many other forms, which is why we stress that the level of civilisation should not be evaluated only on the basis of the material aspect, regardless of the other specifications. Undoubtedly, perfecting the material aspects of life results in success and prosperity in the worldly life. However, upholding the religious, spiritual, and moral values leads to luxury in the worldly life and delight in the Hereafter. The issue does not concern the economic aspect of life as much as it has to do with neglecting and cancelling the Divine Laws that guarantee our happiness in this life even in the state of poverty.

In fact, life becomes miserable in the absence of the Light of Faith and its Guidance. When one preserves the purity of one's spirit and testifies that Allah *the Almighty* is the Only God, all the Divine Teachings will be clear to him. By following them, he will be protected from falling prey to forgetfulness of the Remembrance of Allah *the Almighty*. Here, we should strongly stress that if one forgets the Remembrance of Allah, he will be directly put into a state of difficulty and hardship.

When you hear someone saying, 'Life is miserable,' this only conjures up the problem of poverty even though 'misery' has a broader meaning. People can be extremely miserable in spite of wealth, prosperity, and welfare. For example, Sweden, one of the richest countries, is the abode of insanity, perversity, psychological problems, and suicide despite the high level of income provided to individuals.

The relation between divorce and piety is explained in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And when you divorce women and they reach their prescribed time, then either retain them in good fellowship or set them free with liberality, and do not retain them for injury so that you exceed the limits, and whoever does this, he indeed is unjust to his own soul; and do not take Allah's communications for a mockery, and remember the favour of Allah upon you, and that which He has revealed to you of the Book and the Wisdom, admonishing you thereby; and be careful (of your duty to) Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 231).

To 'be careful of your duty to Allah' means to adhere to the Path of Truth. The pious believer is the one who fears Allah *the Almighty* as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* admonished men, saying, 'Fear Allah regarding women for they are powerless. Indeed, you have got them under Allah's Trust and have the right to intercourse with them by Allah's Word.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah who narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him told this Hadith in his farewell sermon on Mount Arafat. See Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab A-Iman, Hadith no. 4881.*

In the verse in question, He *Glorified is He* says: '…be mindful to Allah…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). Then He immediately follows the word 'Allah' with His saying: '…your Lord…' (*ar-Rahman:* 1) to indicate that He *Glorified is He* combines the Attributes of Divinity and Lordship.

Moreover, His Provision is guaranteed to His creation, believers, and disbelievers alike, since He *Glorified is He* brought them into existence and created them; thereby securing their sustenance and life and depriving none of them of His Conferment of Lordship in the worldly life.

As a matter of fact, Divinity has to do with legal obligations, whereas Lordship signifies provision and nourishment, both are basic requirements for everyone's life on earth. No one has brought himself into existence; rather, it is only Allah, the Creator, Who brought all the people, believers, and disbelievers, into existence; hence He *the Almighty* is the only One Who is Fully Able to secure their sustenance.

In other words, the Conferment of Lordship encompasses all the creatures of Allah *the Almighty*. By contrast, the Conferment of Divinity is concerned with the Divine Commands ('dos' and 'don'ts').

The Arabic word *Rabb* (Lord) refers to the one who raises someone under his guardianship until he reaches the expected level of perfection. With regard to Allah *the Almighty* Lordship implies that He rears the creation for a specific end and a specific mission. Considering that such rearing requires material, spiritual and methodological fundamentals, which He *Glorified is He* provides to all people, as He says in the chapter of *al-Fatiha*: 'All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds' (*al-Fatiha:* 2).

He *Glorified is He* is the Master, the King and the Provider of all the Worlds. He nourishes all the creation in a way that makes them fit for their mission in life by giving them physical strength, by ensuring the survival of the species by reproduction and by promoting ethical values.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'but I am a Messenger from the Lord of the worlds…' (*al-A'raf:* 61). Here, that particular Prophet tells his people that he was sent by the Master and the Provider of the Worlds. It is not befitting for the Provider to send down a revelation to mislead those whom He nourishes, but rather to send down a reforming and guiding one.

In the context of divorce, Allah's saying: 'be mindful of Allah, your Lord…' (*at-Talaq:* 1) signifies that Muslims should not disobey His Orders, and that He forbids them from divorcing their wives during the period of menstruation or after having intimacy with them. It is permitted, though, to divorce them during a period of purity in which they did not have intercourse.

It is also a warning against leniency with regard to the rulings of divorce and the calculation of the waiting period. In this context, the people of the pre-Islamic era used to neglect women and the relatives of a divorcee hardly defended her rights and consequently such rights were gradually forgotten and denied.

Therefore, these verses are so strongly worded that such rights are referred to as 'the Limits of Allah'. To urge Muslims to be more pious, the Most Honourable Name 'Allah' is immediately followed by His saying 'your Lord' to remind people that His Wrath must be seriously feared and taken into account. Consequently, it is as if He *the Almighty* said to them, 'Fear Allah, your Lord, and do not prolong their waiting periods to harm them and do not disobey His Commands.' This is a call for men, in particular, to fear Him *the Almighty* in respect of divorce that it should not arise from the desire to transgress or revenge, or following a sudden whim or impulse because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Of all the lawful acts the most detestable to Allah is divorce.'(1)

Thus, Muslims should be careful of their duty to Allah by guarding themselves against committing any act of disobedience including that of harming their wives by divorcing them during their menstrual period or at the other times when divorce is prohibited.

Not only does Allah *Glorified is He* direct orders regarding one's spouse or household by virtue of His Divinity and His Right to be obeyed, but also because His Lordship guides one to what improves life with his spouse and within his household. So, when divorce takes place, it has to be in accordance with the *Shari'a* and to emanate from piety and fear of Allah.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2180; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2018; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 15292; and At-Tartusi, Musnad Hadith no. 14*

Further, He *the Almighty* provides the believers with His Guidance and guards them with His care so that their life may be on the Right Path. Yet, piety here is concerned with counting the days of the divorcee's waiting period; it also has to do with not allowing the revocably divorced women to leave their husbands' houses. Allah, our Lord, knows what is in the minds of His creation, men, and women, and knows what may reconcile between a husband and his divorcee whom he divorced at a moment of anger. Thus, He *Glorified is He* prescribed that the divorcee should not leave her house so that they may come together and get their life back on track.

In this regard, Jabir ibn 'Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'My maternal aunt was divorced and she went out to cut down fruit from her palm trees. A man met her and forbade her (to go out). So, she went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and mentioned that to him. He said, "Go out, and cut down fruit from your palm trees for perhaps you may give alms or do an act of kindness."'(1) Some people may mistakenly think that this Hadith is contradictory to the verse under discussion in which Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not drive them out of their homes…' (*at-Talaq:* 1).

In Islam, a woman is entitled to possess her own money and to manage her property either personally or by authorising a trustworthy person to do so. Yet, she has to abide by Allah's Law, that is, she does not have the right to go out during her waiting period. However, this is not entirely prohibited, for she is allowed to go out for necessary needs and to look after her property. The preceding Hadith gives us a practical example; the maternal aunt of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah was divorced and went out to cut down fruit from her palm trees and a man met her and forbade her to go out. Yet, when she went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he allowed her to go out to look after her property. With greater foresight, he said to her, 'Perhaps you may give alms or do an act of kindness.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* directed her to do good deeds such as giving charity or doing favours like rendering relief to the grief-stricken, repaying the debts of the heavily indebted, helping someone who wants to get married or giving some dates to the poor and the needy.

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3794; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2299; An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3550, Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2034; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 14484.*

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Do not drive them out of their homes…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1). Here, He *the Almighty* forbids husbands from driving their divorced wives out of their houses until their waiting periods are over. In addition, the divorcee is not allowed to leave the house without the husband’s permission and he should not give her leave as long as she is still in the waiting period. If she leaves the house, she is not entitled to housing or maintenance allowance.

The possessive pronoun in the word ‘homes’ mentioned in the verse refers to the divorced women, to indicate that they have the same right to stay at such houses as their owners. In Islamic Jurisprudence, this is called ‘beneficial ownership’ and the divorcee, during her waiting period, has the same ruling as the wife except for intercourse with her husband.

Given that they are still in their waiting period, the divorced wives should not be driven out of the houses which they used to inhabit before divorce, that is, the houses of their husbands. So, the ‘homes’ were attributed to the wives because they are more engaged with them with regard to lodging. Thus, men are forbidden to let their wives leave their houses before the waiting period is over. Instead, they should keep them in their houses for they, during the waiting period, are still their wives. Further, attributing the houses to the divorced wives gives rise to a feeling in the spouses that their marital life is still present during the waiting period because the wife is still at her marital home.

This, undoubtedly, shortens the psychological distance between the spouses, thus paving the way for reconciliation and eliminating the causes of parting. During her waiting period, a woman should reside in her marital house, and thereby she will not feel that she is a stranger. This feeling stimulates her to act in the same way as she used to do before divorce, providing a great chance for reconciliation and amicable reunion.

Husbands should not drive their divorced women (during their waiting periods) out of the houses they shared with them before divorce because of anger or hatred for them or being in need of such houses. This is so because housing is a right prescribed by Allah *the Almighty* for wives, and therefore not to be transgressed except in the case of necessity, such as the collapse, the burning or the damage of the house or out of fear of falling into a religious trial.

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* ‘Do not drive them out of their homes…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1) provides evidence for the divorcees’ right of housing during the waiting period, for the houses out of which their husbands are forbidden from driving them are the ones they used to inhabit before divorce.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘…nor should they themselves leave – unless they commit a flagrant indecency.…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1). Throughout her waiting period, a revocably divorced woman should not leave the house of her husband, yet she can go out if a necessity arises during the daytime provided that she stays at home over night. The husband is also not permitted to drive her out of the marital house during her waiting period and she is not allowed to go out except in the case of an urgent necessity. Should it happen, she will be a sinner but meanwhile should continue to count the waiting period, whether revocably or irrevocably divorced, to prevent the confusion of lineage.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘...unless they commit a flagrant indecency.…’ (*at-Talaq:* 1), it is also mentioned in His saying: ‘O you who believe! It is not lawful for you that you should take women as heritage against (their) will, and do not straiten them in order that you may take part of what you have given them, unless they are guilty of manifest indecency…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 19) and in His saying: ‘O wives of the Prophet! Whoever of you commits an open indecency, the punishment shall be increased to her doubly; and this is easy to Allah’ (*al-Ahzab:* 30). In spite of the fact that Muslim scholars differ concerning the definition of ‘indecency’, it signifies a terrible sin. The Arabic root of the word implies excessive ugliness, thereby deemed by some scholars to refer to specific kinds of sin, namely; adultery and fornication which are utterly obscene; this point of view is supported by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And go not nigh to fornication; surely it is an indecency and an evil way’ (*al-Isra’:* 32). Other groups of scholars believe that it denotes sins for which there is a prescribed punishment or that it may refer to the major sins.

I opine that this word in question is used to refer to any form of extreme obscenity. The word ‘indecency’ does not only connote normal ugliness, but rather an intense and excessive one. Examining the verses of the Quran, one can find that adultery is the only sin referred to as an act of indecency, and therefore this word has to mean adultery or anything opposing Allah’s Laws. But why does the word ‘indecency’ refer to adultery in particular?

It is because all sins other than adultery have to do with the circumstances surrounding the human soul, while adultery is the only sin which is concerned with the human soul itself because it results in confusion of lineage, disgrace, suspicions about one’s wife and children, depravity and corruption. Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* clearly commands the Muslim *Ummah*, saying: ‘And go not nigh to fornication; surely it is an indecency and an evil way’ (*al-Isra’:* 32).

Scholars defined indecency as the great sin for which the sinner feels embarrassed. S/he keeps it in secrecy and cannot expose it openly, recognising how obscene and abhorrent it is. Acknowledging the indecency of such a sin, the one perpetrating it tries not to become exposed and to conceal his crime from others. Further, he detests seeing it happen to his family and relatives. It suffices that Allah *the Almighty* describes such a sin as being ‘indecent’ and prescribed a punishment to be inflicted publicly on anyone committing it.

However, the question to be asked here is: ‘What is meant by “indecency” in the saying of Allah: “…be mindful of Allah, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes – nor should they themselves leave – unless they commit a flagrant indecency...” (*at-Talaq:* 1)? Some scholars maintain that it implies hatred and disobedience of her husband’s commands. If this is the case of the woman, then her husband becomes entitled to *fidyah* (ransom). In this regard, Ibn Mas‘ud *Allah be pleased with him* stated, ‘If she harms you, you will have the right to get back what she took from you, that is, the bride-gift.’(1) Other scholars suggest that a divorcee, who leaves her house before the waiting period is over, is committing an open indecency. Furthermore, other scholars said that a woman committing an open indecency is the one who insults and abuses the family of her husband; hence, they are allowed to drive her out. In this verse, ‘indecency’ denotes outright disobedience, such as insulting and abusing the family of her husband and, thus, she is rendered an ill-mannered woman. Such a sharp-tongued, insolent woman does not deserve to stay at the marital house with her husband until her waiting period is complete. In this regard, Imam Ash-Shafi‘i permitted driving out the woman who insults her in-laws. The open indecency is the evident reason for driving such a woman out of the house during her waiting period, as her staying in this house inflicts harm on the household owing to her abusive language and disgraceful deeds. That being the case, it is permissible to expel her because she inflicted harm upon herself through ill-treatment, even though housing could have been a source of compassion and care for her. This ruling is only related to the revocably divorced woman, while the irrevocably divorced one has no right to housing, since this right to housing follows that right of maintenance allowance which is confined to the revocably divorced women. Further, it is out of Allah’s Wisdom that He obligates housing for the divorcee in order to preserve her *‘ird* (honour) and to protect her from the piercing gazes of men.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti attributes this Hadith to Ibn Jarir At-Tabari’s Tafsir Jame‘ Al-Bayan; the interpretation of the verse (4:19). See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 290/4.*

It is worth noting that Allah *Glorified is He* describes the act of indecency as flagrant to emphasise that it is conspicuously manifest and self-evident, with no room for ambiguity. This is also an expression of how this woman exposes her indecency or insolence openly in an intolerable way and how she insults and rebels against her husband and his family.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘These are the Limits set by Allah – whoever oversteps Allah’s Limits wrongs his own soul – for you cannot know what new situation Allah may perhaps bring about’ (*at-Talaq:* 1). Here, these demonstrative pronouns ‘these’ refer to the Limits of Allah presented here in the rulings of divorce in the case where there is no chance to go on with the marital life. When divorce is imperative, it has to follow the legal way to preserve the rights of the woman, the right of the man to take his wife back and the right of the society to protect offspring and prevent the confusion of lineage.

These are included in the Limits of Allah, for it is not right to confine His Limits to the penalties for theft, adultery, highway robbery(1) and murder. Thus, Allah’s Limits are His Rulings which may be in the form of orders or prohibitions.

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(1) The punishment for highway robbery is mentioned in Allah’s saying: ‘The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive to make mischief in the land is only this, that they should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides or they should be imprisoned…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 33). It is the most vicious crime since it incorporates other crimes, such as robbery, violence, murder, intimidation, threatening innocents and causing random destruction. Any offence including these multiple crimes is subject to the punishment for highway robbery.

The Arabic word *hadd* (limit) denotes the barrier preventing things being mingled, and *hudud* (limits) of Allah are His Prohibitions for which He set certain limits in order not to be transgressed. As a matter of fact, in order to prevent yourself from indulging in such prohibitions, you should observe Allah’s Commands and keep a distance from His Prohibitions. Thus, Allah’s Limits are His Rulings which stand as a barrier between the permissible and the impermissible.

Allah’s Limits are mentioned either after the prohibitions or after the commands. For example, with regard to Allah’s saying: ‘…these are the Limits of Allah, so do not exceed them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 229), it comes after a command, meaning that we must not go beyond them. But, when it comes after the prohibitions as in His saying: ‘…these are the Limits of Allah, so do not go near them…’ (*al-Baqara:* 178), it indicates that He *Glorified is He* wants to protect one’s soul from the bad effects of committing prohibited acts. So, it would be better that he keeps himself away from them.

It is important to pay attention to the Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between that are matters that are doubtful (not clear). So whoever leaves it to protect his religion and his honour, then he will be safe, and whoever falls into something from them, then he soon will have fallen into the unlawful. Just like if someone grazes (his animals) around a sanctuary, he would soon wind up in it. Indeed for every king is a sanctuary (pasture), and indeed Allah's Sanctuary is what He made unlawful.’(1)

Due to the fact that Allah’s Limits include orders and prohibitions, we can say that they all fall under ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’. Were we to convert the obligations into prohibitions and vice versa, the world would be thrown off balance, thereby allowing injustice to take place.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of An-Nu‘man Ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 52 and 2051; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 4178 and 4181; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3331; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1205; An-Nasa’i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4453; and Ibn Maja, Sunnan Hadith no. 3984.*

Injustice suggests giving the right of someone illegally to another. In fact, the rulings of divorce are part of the Limits of Allah. If you transgressed them by substituting them with man-made laws, this constitutes an act of injustice. It is He *the Almighty* Who is entitled to set the Limits that prevent the confusion of the right with the wrong. He also gives some rights precedence over others. In our daily lives, when we divide houses and lands, we set clear boundaries. As such, the boundary/limit is a barrier between two rights so that no one oversteps his boundaries.

So, regarding His Limits relating to His Commands, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…these are the Limits of Allah, so do not exceed them…' (*al-Baqara:* 229); regarding His Prohibitions, He says: '…these are the Limits of Allah, so do not go near them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). This means that when you follow His Orders, you must not go beyond them, and when you are forbidden from doing something, you must not approach it. For instance, when He *the Almighty* prohibits wine, He does not say 'do not drink wine,' He says instead: 'O you who believe! Intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an uncleanness, the devil's work; shun it therefore that you may be successful' (*al-Ma'ida:* 90). It implies that one should not even go to the place where such things could be found, he should rather keep himself at a distance. He *Glorified is He* loves those who abide by His Limits; they do not approach His Prohibitions nor do they transgress what He made permissible.

These topics of divorce, the waiting period, the counting of the waiting period, the obligation of piety and not to drive the divorcee out of her house unless she commits an open indecency are the Limits of Allah that He set for the people. Obedience to Allah entails that one should not overstep these Limits. As a matter of fact, one's obedience, piety, and preservation of Allah's Limits will not benefit Him *the Almighty* nor do they negatively affect Him *Glorified is He* in any way. Nonetheless, whoever observes these Limits, He *the Almighty* will fulfil His Promise to him.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…whoever oversteps Allah's Limits wrongs his own soul…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). Likewise, He says in another verse: '…and whoever exceeds the Limits of Allah these it is that are the unjust' (*al-Baqara:* 229). He *Glorified is He* warns us against transgressing these limits because the transgressor commits injustice against himself, his dependants and the entire society. Thus, the transgressors are those who violate and transcend the Divine Legislation. In His warning to us, He *the Almighty* distinguishes between transgressing the Orders and transgressing the Prohibitions.

So, He *the Almighty* says: '…whoever oversteps Allah's Limits wrongs his own soul…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). Likewise, He says: 'And when you divorce women and they reach their prescribed time, then either retain them in good fellowship or set them free with liberality, and do not retain them for injury so that you exceed the limits, and whoever does this, he indeed is unjust to his own soul…' (*al-Baqara:* 231). So, He *the Almighty* warns against transgression; for example, one who physically abuses his wife after taking her back should not think that he does injustice to her, for, in fact, he does injustice to his own self. When you inflict harm on a person, Allah *the Almighty* stands by his side, and if he invokes Him against you, the supplication will be accepted; thereby depriving you of gaining Allah's Pleasure. Is there, then, any type of injustice worse than what incurs Allah's Wrath?

One of the types of injustice committed by one against himself is pursuing a temporary whim or a false joy that brings about regret, grief and pain. In doing so, he imposes upon himself an intolerable burden. This is apart from doing injustice to other people. However, committing injustice against oneself is the pinnacle of absurdity. Were he to do injustice to others, we would assume that it may be beneficial for him, but what is the benefit of doing injustice to oneself? Injustice to oneself is the misdeed which affects its wrongdoer badly, or it is that which invokes great punishment in the Hereafter. As Allah *Glorious is He* forbids you to do injustice to yourself, the same is true for others.

Anyone who violates the Divine Legislations and Laws concerning himself and his wife deprives himself of the delight of this worldly life and the Hereafter. Further, anyone who transgresses the Limits of Allah with regard to divorce, taking back his wife after divorce, the calculation of the waiting period, and not driving the divorcee out of the marital house actually commits injustice against himself. That is because he, by so doing, destroys his life, in the first place, by a divorce that might have been issued because he could not deal properly with his wife, which in turn resulted in dissension, parting and child displacement.

In other words, the one who oversteps Allah's Limits and Orders by divorcing his wife during her menstrual period in fact does injustice to himself. Some people intend to divorce their wives to harm them. With regard to those people, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when you divorce women and they reach their prescribed time, then either retain them in good fellowship or set them free with liberality, and do not retain them for injury so that you exceed the limits, and whoever does this, he indeed is unjust to his own soul…'(1) (*al-Baqara:* 231). In the pre-Islamic era, some people used to divorce their wives once and leave them until shortly before their waiting periods are over at which they would take them back; then they would then divorce them again. In fact, they did so to harm their wives by prolonging their waiting periods, which is why Allah *the Almighty* prohibits this practice.

So, a husband should not keep the marital life going with the aim of harming and humiliating his wife, yet pretending that he is doing good for her. In other words, he should not maintain that he does not want to divorce her and that he will take her back while intending within himself to humiliate and retaliate against her. This is utterly rejected in Islam. In fact, doing injustice to one's wife or divorcee leads to the marital life being thrown off balance and losing its benefits by virtue of dissension, dispute, conflict, stubborn wills and verbal abuse.

Such a husband took Allah's Verses in jest and manipulated the concession granted to him by Allah to take his divorced wife back in marriage to inflict more harm and suffering on her. We know that Allah *Glorified is He* offers the husband the chance to take his revocably divorced wife back and to keep her in their marital house after divorce until her waiting period is complete. Her staying could provide an incentive for the husband to consider the matter of taking her back during her waiting period which is a common practice, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…for you cannot know what new situation Allah may perhaps bring about' (*at-Talaq:* 1). If she leaves her house, with much gossip going on and people causing calumny between them, the relationship between them, which is cautiously guarded by the Legislation, will be severed. Here, He *Glorified is He* commands the divorcing husband to abide by the Rulings of Allah *the Almighty* regarding the matters of divorce as he does not know what will happen later on. After all, He *the Almighty* knows best the interest of people and can cause things to go well between the two spouses.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir relates that Ad-Dahhak stated: 'Those husbands referred to in this verse used to inflict harm on their wives to pay ransom. Other scholars maintain that a husband used to divorce his wife once and leave her until shortly before her waiting period is over at which he takes her back, intending to harm her so as not to get married to another one, then divorces her again and frequently does the same thing, only to harm her by prolonging her period, which is why Allah prohibits this practice and warns against committing it.' See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/629.*

In Arabic, the word *la'ala* (perhaps) signifies one's wish for and expectation of the occurrence of a certain thing. When this word is said, this means that the thing said after it will most probably happen. As a matter of fact, the levels of expectation differ from one person to another and to Allah *the Almighty*. You may say, 'Ask so and so that he may give you what you want.' This is a level of expectation. But it is more expected to happen when one says, 'I may give you,' as this expression in this case is relating to yourself. The third, and the highest, level of expectation is relating to Allah *Glorified is He*. When He *the Almighty* says, 'Allah may perhaps do such and such', then He will do that thing as He is the Most Generous One Who loves to show Mercy to people and nothing can prevent Him from doing what He wills.

'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Utba narrated that 'Amr ibn Hafs ibn Al-Mughira set out along with 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* to the Yemen and sent to his wife, Fatima Bint Qays,(1) the one pronouncement of divorce which was still left from the (irrevocable) divorce; and he commanded Al-Harith ibn Hisham and 'Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi'a to give her maintenance allowance. They said to her, 'By Allah, there is no maintenance allowance for you, except in case you are pregnant.' She then came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and mentioned their opinion to him, whereupon he said: 'There is no maintenance allowance for you.' Then she sought permission to move (to another place), and he (Prophet Muhammad) permitted her. She said: 'Allah's Messenger, where (should I go)?' He said: 'To the house of Ibn Umm Maktum' and, as he is blind, you could put off your garments in his presence and he would not see you. When her waiting period was over He *peace and blessings be upon him* married her to Usama ibn Zayd.(1) Marwan ibn Al-Hakam (the governor of Medina) sent Qubisa ibn Dhu'ayb in order to ask Fatima about this Hadith, and she narrated it to him, whereupon Marwan said, 'We have not heard this Hadith but from a woman. We would adopt a safe (path) which is followed by the people.' When these words of Marwan were conveyed to Fatima, she said, 'Allah's saying judges between us and proves who of us is of correct opinion; He *the Almighty* says: "Do not drive them out of their homes – nor should they themselves leave – unless they commit a flagrant indecency"' (*at-Talaq:* 1). After she recited the entire verse, she asserted, 'This is in regard to the revocable divorce, so what new turn can the event take after three pronouncements of separation of divorce? Why do you say there is no maintenance allowance for her if she is not pregnant? Then, on what grounds do you restrain her!'

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(1) She is Fatima Bint Qays ibn Khalid, a woman from the clan of Fihr which belongs to the tribe of Quraysh. She is the sister of prince Ad-Dahhak ibn Qays. She is one of the early female Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. She narrated some Hadiths from him. She was intelligent and beautiful. When the Caliph 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab was killed, the group of consultation gathered in her house to deliberate on the next Caliph. She died during the reign of Mu'awiya in 50 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam.

This Hadith gives us an overview of the life of one of the great female Companions of Prophet Muhammad, Fatima Bint Qays, who had profound knowledge of the Quran to the extent that she corrected the understanding inferred by the other Companions.

Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* got divorced from her husband, 'Amr ibn Abu Hafs ibn Al-Mughirah three times, and 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* ordered Al-Harith ibn Hisham and 'Ayyash ibn Abu Rabi'a to give her maintenance allowance. But they refused because she was not pregnant and it was her third time of divorce and therefore her divorce was irrevocable.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Fatima Bint Qays Allah be pleased with her. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadiths no. 3771, 3772 and 3777; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2292; An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra Hadith no. 9199; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 20366.*

She referred the matter to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who told her, ‘There is no maintenance allowance for you.’ As long as she is not entitled to have maintenance allowance, then she is not entitled to housing also. Therefore, she sought permission from him *peace and blessings be upon him* to leave the house of her ex-husband, whereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* permitted her to move to the house of ‘Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, a blind man, until she fulfilled her waiting period.

When her waiting period was over,(1) he *peace and blessings be upon him* married her to Usama ibn Zayd. During the reign of Marwan ibn Al-Hakam(2), the governor of Medina during that time, he asked her about this story. When she related it to him, he denied her moving from the house of her ex-husband to another place, which is why he totally denied the story. Fatima then said, ‘What judges between me and you is the saying of Allah: “Do not turn them out of their houses”’ (*at-Talaq:* 1). She then asserted, ‘This is in regard to the revocable divorce only.’

Allah *the All-Wise and the Most Merciful* does not want to put people into difficulty or hardship. His *Sharia* is all based on justice and mercy. Therefore, as He permits man to divorce his wife, He sets out regulations and limits to be observed. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘When any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start, and calculate the period carefully: be mindful of Allah, your Lord’ (*at-Talaq:* 1). He *Glorified is He* gives the husband and the wife, who go through revocable divorce, an opportunity to reunite again and continue their marital life. Therefore, He orders the revocably divorced woman to calculate her waiting period so that her husband may take her back during this period.

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(1) *When the waiting period was over, Mu’awiya ibn Abu Sufyan and Abu Al-Jahm proposed to her. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him advised her, ‘As for Abu Jahm, he does not put down his staff from his shoulder, and as for Mu‘awiya, he is a poor man having no property; marry Usama ibn Zayd.’ She objected to him, but he again said: marry Usama; so she married him. Allah honoured and raised her rank by him. Usama ibn Zayd was young as he was twenty years old at the death of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. However, he was previously married to Hind Bint Al-Fakih and Durra Bint ‘Uday and had a son, Mohamad, and a daughter, Hind. When he married Fatima, they had Jubayr, Zayd and ‘Aisha. He married other women also and died in 50 A. H. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1480; and Ibn Sa‘d, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, 4/66.*

(2) *He is Abu ‘Abd Al-Malik, Marwan ibn Al-Hakam ibn Abu Al-‘Aas, an Ummayad Ruler. He was born in Mecca in 2 A.H. and died in 65 A.H. at the age of sixty three. See Az-Zirikli, Al-‘Alam, 7/207,*

It is as if He *Glorified is He* is saying that He decreed that the divorced woman should remain her husband's wife during the waiting period so that the husband may regret his decision or the reason for which he divorced her ends, and thus decides to take her back in marriage. Thus, it will be easy for him to do so because she is still in his house.

Some scholars drew our attention to the fact that this verse encourages people to issue, if they willed, revocable divorce, and not to issue three pronouncements of divorce at one time in order not to miss the chance to take their wives back in marriage during the waiting period should they regret their decision.

One may ask, 'Does this verse: "for you cannot know what new situation Allah may perhaps bring about…" (*at-Talaq:* 1) address Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*?' The answer is that it addresses the one who transgresses the limits laid down by Allah *Glorified is He* that is, it is not directed to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Accordingly, this verse means that whoever transgresses the limits laid down by Him *the Almighty* actually puts himself into hardship, as one does not know what may happen regarding his marital issues later on. He *the Almighty* may cause the husband to change his mind, thus replaces his enmity towards his wife with love and affection and, in such a case, he will still have the opportunity to correct his mistake and to take his wife back in marriage during her waiting period.

This is similar to Allah's saying: 'And as for those who are guilty of an indecency from among your women, call to witnesses against them four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness confine them to the houses until death takes them away or Allah opens some way for them' (*an-Nisa':* 15). The Arabic word *sabil* (way) here refers to lashing or stoning to death – two punishments which completely purify the sinful women. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* wants to relieve people of all hardships and difficulties, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion…' (*al-Hajj:* 78) and in His saying: 'Allah does not desire to put on you any difficulty…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6).

Thus, He *the Almighty* does not choose you to be Muslims in order to put you into difficulty and hardship. Instead, the *Shari'a* is all about easiness and facilitation. In case of difficulty, He *the Almighty* makes concessions to people and introduces measures so that the people can live peacefully in their communities.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ فَارِقُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَأَشْهِدُوا۟
ذَوَىْ عَدْلٍ مِّنكُمْ وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلشَّهَٰدَةَ لِلَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ يُوعَظُ بِهِۦ مَن كَانَ
يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ ۚ وَمَن يَتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ يَجْعَل لَّهُۥ مَخْرَجًا ﴿٢﴾

When they have completed their appointed term, either keep them honourably, or part with them honourably. Call two just witnesses from your people and establish witness for the sake of God. Anyone who believes in God and the Last Day should heed this: God will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him [2] (The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 2)

The Arabic verb *balagha* (to complete) has two meanings: sometimes it refers to being close to completing something, while other times it is used to signify the real completion of the thing. The first meaning is clear in Allah's saying: 'O you who believe! When you rise up to prayer, wash your faces…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 6) which orders Muslims, when they are about to perform prayer, to prepare themselves and perform ablution. An example of the real completion of something is the case in which an aeroplane arrives at its destination and then its pilot announces that they have *balagha* (reached) a certain country. So, when the husband divorces his wife and her waiting period is about to end, he can either complete the divorce or take her back again in marriage, an act which is recommended by Allah *the Almighty* till the very last moment.

However, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And when you have divorced women and they have ended – their term (of waiting), then do not prevent them from marrying their husbands when they agree among themselves in a lawful manner…' (*al-Baqara:* 232), it refers to the time when the waiting period is over and a husband is no longer entitled to take back his wife except with a new contract and bride-gift. If a husband wants to take her back in marriage, some relatives may oppose this remarriage. We say to those people, ‘As long as both husband and wife agree to resume their marriage, no one shall hinder this reconciliation and reunion.’

Thus, the verse in question refers to the time when the waiting period has not come to an end, and that is why the husband is commanded to: ‘…either keep them honourably, or part with them honourably…’ (*at-Talaq:* 2). As for the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *al-Baqara*, it refers to the actual termination of the waiting period. This is also the case in His saying: ‘And (as for) those of you who die and leave wives behind, they should keep themselves in waiting for four months and ten days; then when they have fully attained their term, there is no blame on you for what they do for themselves in a lawful manner; and Allah is All Aware of what you do’ (*al-Baqara:* 234). This verse refers to the waiting period of the widow which lasts up to four months and ten days. The meaning here is that she may marry another one when her waiting period is over.

As for the waiting period of the menstruating woman, it is defined in Allah’s saying: ‘Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods’ (*al-Baqara:* 228). Here, the waiting period is not defined according to time, but according to the periods of purity. As for the waiting period of the woman who reached menopause or those who have not menstruated yet, it is defined by a period of time which is nearly equal to the periods of menstruation, namely; three months; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The period of waiting will be three months for those women who have ceased menstruating and for those who have not [yet] menstruated…’ (*at-Talaq:* 2).

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…either keep them honourably…’ (*at-Talaq:* 2), it means that the husbands, if they will, can take their wives back in marriage honourably. This is one of two options available for a husband in this case. However, taking her back in this case shall be done according to *ma‘ruf,* which is an Arabic term signifying all acts of obedience to Allah, drawing nearer to Him, being kind to people and observing the obligations of *Shari’a* and refraining from what is prohibited. It also signifies good deeds. With regard to taking back one’s wife, it means being just to her, treating her well and giving her all her due rights.

In Arabic, *al-ma'ruf* (good) is the opposite of *al-munkar* (evil). The good thing is known to all people by their natural disposition. *Al-Ma'ruf* also refers to the thing that is widely known to people. Allah *the Almighty* commands Muslims to live with their wives in accordance with what is fair and kind, saying: '…and treat them kindly…' (*an-Nisa':* 19).

There is a difference between love and kindness. Marital life can survive as long as both parties consider the latter, that is, kindness, even if there is no love. Here arises the question, 'Does the absence of love ruin the marital life?' The answer is 'No'. The husband may take back his revocable divorcee and continue his life with her, even if he hates some of her bad behaviours in order to preserve the interest of their children and to give her the chance to change her behaviour.

Accordingly, we find that Allah's saying, '…either keep them honourably…' (*at-Talaq:* 2) alleviates the psychological pressure of the husband which may prevent him from seeking to take his wife back in marriage out of his hatred for her. It is noteworthy that one should always remember that he is required to treat his wife kindly and fairly, and not necessarily with love. As a matter of fact, marriage may start with kind and fair treatment between the two spouses and then they both may develop this relationship into love.

Kind and fair treatment means that a husband should fulfil his duties with regard to his wife. This is why some scholars say, 'Kind treatment means that in case a husband fails to maintain his wife, he should divorce her in order not to cause her any harm.'

Thus, Allah's saying: '…either keep them honourably…' (*at-Talaq:* 2) means that when one takes his revocable divorcee back, he should give her all her due rights which include spending on her, clothing, housing and good treatment. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to the divorcing husband, 'Do not be in hurry to lose your wife as Allah will make a way out for you and your affairs will become better.'

This meaning is also underscored in Allah's saying: '…Keep your wife and be mindful of Allah' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). This is what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to *Zayd* (1) *Allah be pleased with him*.

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(1) He is Zayd ibn Haritha ibn Shurahel ibn 'Abd Al-'Uzza. He was a poet and one of Prophet Muhammad's Companions. In a raid on his mother's tribe, Tay', he was enslaved by=

Fair and kind treatment necessitates that a husband should not take his wife back with intent to harm her, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And when you divorce women and they reach their prescribed time, then either retain them in good fellowship or set them free with liberality, and do not retain them for injury so that you exceed the limits…’ (*al-Baqara:* 231). Harm with regard to marriage occurs when a husband pretends that he wants to take his revocable divorcee back while he intends to humiliate her. This is utterly prohibited in Islam.

Yet, how can taking one’s wife back occur? Imam Ash-Shafi‘i(1) says, ‘As long as marriage and divorce cannot be concluded except by talking, taking one’s wife back is concluded by talking also.’ As for Imam Abu Hanifa, he says, ‘Taking one’s wife back can occur by having sexual intercourse.’ Imam Malik yet says, ‘If a husband has sexual intercourse with his revocable divorcee with the intention of taking her back, then it occurs’.

Taking one’s revocable divorcee back in marriage occurs when one says, for example, ‘I took back my wife in marriage.’ The basic ruling is that ‘this act is concluded by uttering words to that effect.’ This is because the husband has the right to take his revocable divorcee back in marriage before the end of her third menstruation, even though he is not allowed to have sexual intercourse with her during her menses. If the third menses ends before he takes her back in marriage, then he cannot take her back in marriage except with a new contract and bride-gift.

Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘…or part with them honourably…’ (*at-Talaq:* 2) and similarly He says: ‘…set them free with liberality…’ (*al-Baqara:* 231).

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the tribe of Banu Al-Qayn and was sold at Mecca. Khadija Bint Khuwaylid bought him and gave him as a present to Prophet Muhammad who adopted him as his son. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* prohibited the act of adoption. Concerning his divorce of Zaynab Bint Jahsh, Allah’s saying: ‘But when Zayd had accomplished his want of her, We gave her to you as a wife…’ *(al-Ahzab:* 37) was revealed. He died in 8 A.H.

(1) In his book, Al-Mawardi mentions these opinions. He further states, ‘Taking back one’s revocable divorcee in marriage does not take place except with an utterance on the part of the one who can speak, a signal on the part of a dumb and a sexual intercourse on the part of the capable one.’ Abu Hanifa said, ‘This takes effect by utterance or action such as sexual intercourse, kiss or even lustful gaze.’ But Imam Malik stated, ‘In order for taking the wife back in marriage to be valid, a husband should have an intention to do so.’ See Al-Mawardi, Al-Hawi Al-Kabir, 10/759-60.

This indicates that separation should be fulfilled in the best possible manner, without violence or repulsiveness, as it, that is, separation in itself is an awful thing that should not be compounded with severity and violence.

Divorce and separation shall be effectuated without hatred, enmity, or aggression. Instead, it shall be done in a good way. In fact, divorce is usually associated with anger and rage, so it should be done without violence. In order to alleviate her pain, a husband may say to his divorcee, ‘This is our destiny and I hope that Allah may compensate you with a better husband.’ It is sufficient for a woman to bear the pains of separation and divorce. What an awful state is it when one separates from his wife while cursing her, speaking harshly to her and preventing her due rights!

Fair and kind treatment to the divorcee requires that she should be given all her due rights. With regard to this point, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And for the divorced women (too) provision (must be made) according to usage; (this is) a duty on those who guard (against evil)’ (*al-Baqara:* 241). Thus, each divorcee shall receive a maintenance allowance prescribed by Him *Glorified is He*. If the bride-gift is not specified for a wife and the marriage is not consummated, she is given a bride-gift according to the state of the husband, whether wealthy or destitute, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘…and make provision for them, the wealthy according to his means and the straitened in circumstances according to his means…’ (*al-Baqara:* 236). If the bride-gift is specified for a woman, and the husband divorces her before consummation of the marriage, she is to be given one-half of it. This indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* did not only specify a suitable ruling for each state, but also distinguished each state with a special expression.

When a woman gets divorced before the consummation of marriage, then this process is called *tasrih* (sending forth), an expression which signifies separation without any pain felt on the part of both spouses. There is no doubt that a husband who divorces his wife before having sexual intercourse with her does not grieve or incline to her. Therefore, he should separate from her in the best manner as a way of alleviating the great deal of pain she would endure in this case.

Moreover, in this case, there is no waiting period for the divorcee. This means that she has the right to marry again if anyone proposes in marriage to her.

Furthermore, she should be given maintenance allowance as a compensation for the psychological pain she would endure.

On the other hand, as for a woman who gets divorced after the consummation of marriage, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…or part with them honourably…' (*at-Talaq:* 2). He reminds both of them that He gathered between them by way of a marital relationship saying: '…They are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187) and by saying: '…you have lain with each other…' (*an-Nisa':* 21). Therefore, they should consider this matter if they decide to end this relationship, that is, they should end it with kind and fair treatment.

The last verse signifies the best level of interaction between both the husband and his wife. In this case, a woman is exposed to her husband in a way that never happened, and shall not happen, even before her father, brother, mother or sister. This is the highest level of exposition and involvement that may happen between a man and a woman. A husband and wife directly interact with each other at all levels and in all daily activities, a matter which clearly indicates that they become closely connected to each other, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…They are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). Therefore, He *Glorified is He* reminds the husband that he is going to separate from someone who he used to love very much. This is an encouragement for him to take her back in marriage.

Furthermore, if the separation becomes inevitable, then it should happen in a good manner, that is, without cursing, wrongdoing, or depriving the wife of any of her due rights. It is noteworthy here that Allah *the Almighty* gives precedence to taking one's revocable divorcee back over the completion of divorce. This proves that taking the revocable divorcee back is more pleasing to Him *the Almighty* and more consistent with the ultimate objectives of the *Shari'a*. After all, of all the lawful acts, divorce is the most detested by Him *the Almighty*.

Moreover, in order that the process of taking one's wife back in marriage is done in the best manner, one should bring two just people to witness it. If a husband does not take his revocable divorcee back before the completion of her waiting period, then he cannot marry her except with her consent. In this case, she has the right either to marry him or any other one.

If a husband takes his wife back in marriage during the waiting period, then he is not required to fulfil the requirements of marriage except for bringing just witnesses to prevent the possibility of subsequent denial and to confirm the legal rights such as inheritance, if any of the spouses dies.

One may ask, ‘How can we bring forth just witnesses?’ We say that we should consider their truthfulness and their behaviour, whether or not they are upright and moderate with regard to all their states and ethics. If we find that a certain person is upright and just with regards to his own affairs, then we can trust him with regards to others’ affairs. A witness shall also be experienced in the field about which he is brought to give witness.

As Allah *the Almighty* orders us to choose the just ones among us to make a judgement about a sheep,(1) then what about people’s lives and benefits? Therefore, we are required to distinguish the just people among us through observing their attitude towards themselves and their family. On discovering their competence and ability, we should charge them with this public service; otherwise, the *ummah* will be harmed. In fact, it is always the rash decision on the part of those who should be holding the leading positions in a nation that leads to its destruction.

So, ‘just witnesses’ in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Call two just witnesses from your people…’ (*at-Talaq:* 2) means those whose religion, honesty and integrity are approved. They avoid the major and minor sins; abide by chivalry, honesty, pure-heartedness, and uprightness.

The Quranic verses as regards testimony can be either general or restricted. It is restricted in Allah’s saying: ‘And as for those who are guilty of an indecency from among your women, call to witnesses against them four (witnesses) from among you...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 15). This is also the case of the divorced women in their waiting periods as clarified in His saying: ‘When they have completed their appointed term, either keep them honourably, or part with them honourably. Call two just witnesses from your people and establish witness for the sake of

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(1) This is a reference to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘O you who believe! do not kill game while you are on pilgrimage, and whoever among you shall kill it intentionally, the compensation (of it) is the like of what he killed, from the cattle, as two just persons among you shall judge…’ (*al-Ma’ida:* 95).

Allah…' (*at-Talaq:* 2). On the other hand, as for His saying: '…and have witnesses when you barter with one another…' (*al-Baqara:* 282), testimony or calling up witnesses in this situation is not limited; it rather extends to all Muslims, irrespective of any qualifications.

Allah *Glorified is He* stipulates that witnesses in such incidents relating to the personal affairs of the Muslim women should be Muslims, whereas this stipulation is not mentioned in the case of testimony to giving over the property of the orphans to them or buying and selling. The difference between the purely financial rulings and the Muslim women's rulings is conspicuously obvious in this regard.

The verses in their totality, however, maintain that the basic ruling of testimony is that witnesses have to be just and trustworthy. They warn us against false statements and deception, which are the characteristics of unfaithful and dishonest people. We should not bring such witnesses especially in the matters relating to the Muslim women. On the other hand, in other matters there is some leniency with regard to the qualifications of the witness as in the case of the financial contracts and the incidents that take place in public before many people. In this case, testimony of the truthful and honest people who adhere to their religion is to be accepted.

Thus, not everyone is qualified for giving testimony. In actuality, for one's testimony to be accepted, ten conditions must be met in the witness: he must be free, mature, Muslim, just and fully aware of his testimony; getting no benefit from his testimony, nor defending harm from himself; not known for frequent mistakes, nor lacking chivalry and having no hostility towards the one against whom he testifies.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* directs us to give upright testimony whenever we are called to witness, saying: '…and establish witness for the sake of Allah…' (*at-Talaq:* 2). Establishing testimony entails not testifying to something unless it is totally clear to you.(1) The matter of testimony should then be clearer to you than sunlight. To establish testimony is to give it whenever needed, without change or alteration, or concealing any part of it. If a person properly gives testimony, Allah *the Almighty* will be pleased with him, and thus the person draws near to Him. He *Glorified is He* promises those who are upright in their testimonies will be admitted into paradise, saying: ‘Those shall be in gardens, honoured’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 35). Those upright witnesses testify only to what they know, favour neither relative nor friend nor even themselves, with no regard to the status of the one they attest for or against. Further, they do not conceal or change their testimony. Allah *Glorified is He* commands us to accept the calling to witness, saying: ‘…and the witnesses should not refuse when they are summoned…’ (*al-Baqara:* 282). Once you are called as a witness, you have to hasten to give your testimony. If you are called, then giving testimony will fall under one of three types:

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(1) *Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him narrated that when Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was asked about giving witness, he said, 'Do you see the sun?' He replied, 'Yes'. He said, 'Give witness in a similar case [which is as clear as the sun], or leave it.' Ibn Hajar said, 'Ibn 'Adi narrated it with a weak chain of narrators; Al-Hakim* =

- People’s rights; in this case, giving testimony is not permissible unless one is called for giving it.
- Allah’s Rights: this has to do with laws such as divorce or setting slaves free. In these cases, testimonies shall be given, whether one is asked to give it or not.
- Allah’s Rights such as legal corporal punishments. In such case, one shall not give testimony unless one is asked to do so.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses all of us, saying: ‘anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should heed this: Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, and will provide for them from an unexpected source’ (*at-Talaq:* 2). This verse refers to all previously stated legal rulings which include divorce, the waiting period and its calculation and the prohibition of driving the revocable divorcee out of the marital house unless the waiting period is over. He *the Almighty* also commands that we should not transgress the Limits He specified unless women are proven to

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= *nonetheless graded it authentic, but he was mistaken.’ See Al-Bayhaqi, Shu‘ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 10469; see also An-Naysabouri, Al-Muzakkiat, Hadith no. 21; Al-Mutaqi Al-Hindi, Kanz Al-A‘mal, Hadith no. 17782; and Ibn Hajar, Bulugh Al-Maram, Hadith no. 1405.*

have committed adultery. Moreover, He *the Almighty* orders the one who takes his revocable divorcee back in marriage before the termination of her waiting period to be kind and fair in his dealing with her and to refrain from harming or subjugating her. Even in the case of separation, it shall be performed without cursing or depriving the woman of her due rights.

Among these legal rulings is that two just Muslims should be brought to witness in the case of divorce or taking a divorcee back in marriage, in order to prevent any circumvention, manipulation or twisting of the truth. These witnesses are commanded to give testimony in the best manner, as He *the Almighty* says: '…and establish witness for the sake of Allah…' (*at-Talaq:* 2).

Establishing the testimony means that one should consider Allah *the Almighty* alone and not fear any anyone else, as indicated in His saying: 'O you who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness of Allah's sake, though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; if he be rich or poor, Allah is nearer to them both in compassion; therefore do not follow (your) low desires, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allah is aware of what you do' (*an-Nisa':* 135). Here, the people are forbidden from distorting or changing the truth or refraining from giving their testimonies in fear of the one they are witnessing against because Allah is Fully Aware of all that they do.

Sometimes people give testimony, but they twist the truth. This is why it is said that one's own whims jeopardise justice. Therefore, all people are in dire need of the Help of Allah *the Almighty* in this regard. This meaning is also asserted in His saying: 'O you who believe! Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety, and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is Aware of what you do' (*al-Ma'ida:* 8).

As a matter of fact, falsifying the testimony leads to the destruction of the societies. If the members of the society bear witness fairly and justly, every one of them will be deterred from doing injustice when he is about to do it. The believer is commanded to establish justice to Allah *Glorified is He* by rectifying himself. Then, he is commanded to bear witness fairly and justly in order to reform others.

The Arabic word *shahada* (testimony) indicates numerous correlated meanings which are all gathered under the meaning of the word 'presence', a point which is clear in Allah's saying: 'And proclaim among men the Pilgrimage: they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path, [27] That they may witness advantages for them… [28]' (*al-Hajj:* 27, 28).

If the one bearing witness is truthful, he will not be afraid to have a conversation with any party or to answer any question he is asked. As long as the incident has actually happened, it remains in that state, no matter how numerous are the questions and no matter what changes may happen in the way of expressing it. The truthful witness states a real incident that never changes. The untruthful witness, on the contrary, tries to twist the truth, to beat about the bush and to change his testimony.

As a matter of fact, a witness serves as the decisive factor in the case of settling disputes, and that is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commanded the witness not to testify about anything except if he actually saw it with his naked eyes, that is, as clear as he sees the sun. If he meets this condition, he can attest to a certain incident, otherwise he should not do that. Testimony requires two conditions: the presence of the witness at the moment when what he attests to happened and honesty in reporting the incident. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…This is more proper in order that they should give testimony truly' (*al-Ma'ida:* 108).

The witness is the one who, by his witnessing, enables the judge to give a just judgement. When there is a conflict or a dispute that cannot be settled except by the judge, we refer the case to him, and thus he will ask to summon the witnesses. He will question them, that is, the witnesses to give their testimony, to enable him to give a sound and a just verdict in the light of what the witnesses said. Establishing the testimony also means to consider the Pleasure of Allah *Glorified is He* which is the ultimate goal of the testimony and also of every good deed. Thus, you should seek Allah's Pleasure in every testimony you give.

Allah's Legislation is an admonition for everyone believing in Him as his Lord Who is the All-Wise, the Lawgiver and the All Knowing about the instincts of the goodness and the evil of the human soul.

The Arabic word *maw'izha* (exhortation) means to advise someone to do the right thing concerning a certain matter. Actually, the advised one knows what he should do but needs someone to admonish him. So, the adviser does not issue new orders; rather, he admonishes the listener regarding the teachings of Islam which the latter already knows but neglects.

In the verse in question, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who admonishes us, and that is why we should heed and pay attention to His Admonition. He *the Almighty* cares for us and wants our spiritual education to be perfect. Indeed, He is Far Exalted over seeking anything in return for His Admonition, for nothing reaches Him from us, given the fact that we are powerless in comparison to Him.

In fact, only the reasonable and wise people accept the Divine Admonition and thereby follow Allah's Way of Guidance, because they employ their minds in the matter first and thereupon choose from among the alternatives. On the contrary, the insane people's thoughts are unorganised and inconsistent because they lack the intellectual ability to choose from among the alternatives. On the other hand, the reasonable person accepts the exhortation and exhorts others; he neither rejects it nor deviates from the Divine Way of Guidance which He *Glorified is He* has prescribed on us concerning the social relationships with one's wife or divorcee.

So, with regard to His saying: 'Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should heed this…' (*at-Talaq:* 2), the believer recognises that his belief entails some requirements and thus constitutes a practical responsibility for him. It entails acting according to Allah's Will and following His Way of Guidance. When someone embraces Islam of his own accord, he should adhere to the covenant of belief which is the first thing with which He *the Almighty* entrusts him. Thus, as long as the person believes in Him *Glorified is He* he should obey His commands.

Here, He *Glorified is He* mentions the quality of believing in Him first, which is the first pillar of belief. Afterward, He mentions the necessity of believing in the Last Day, which is the last pillar of belief. So, attaining to faith starts with believing in Him *Glorified is He* and ends with believing in the Last Day.

Thus, the true believer obeys Allah's Command with regard to calling witnesses and establishing the witness for His sake because he submits to His Legislations and fears His punishment in the Hereafter. He, therefore, is heedful of His Teachings and does good deeds to the best of his ability to be prepared for the Hereafter. By contrast, the disbeliever is heedless of the consequences of his misdeeds.

Allah *the Almighty* exclusively mentions the believers because they are the only ones who benefit from His Teachings that warn them against what is harmful and that remind them about what softens their hearts. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: '…with this is admonished he among you who believes in Allah and the Last Day, this is more profitable and purer for you; and Allah knows while you do not know' (*al-Baqara:* 232). In the chapter of *at-Talaq*, He *Glorified is He* unlike it in the chapter of *al-Baqara,* does not use the singular form. This is because in the chapter of *al-Baqara,* He *Glorified is He* addresses only the guardian who prevents the irrevocably divorced woman that ended her waiting period from returning to her husband with a new contract and a new bride-gift. By contrast, in the chapter of *at-Talaq,* He *Glorified is He* addresses numerous people with different commands and prohibitions; He commands the husband to divorce his wife at a time when her prescribed waiting period can properly start and to calculate the period carefully, and meanwhile He prohibits him from driving her out of her home. Besides, He *Glorified is He* commands the divorcee to calculate her waiting period properly and accurately and not to leave her home. Further, He *the Almighty* addresses the one who wants to take his divorced wife back in marriage during her waiting period either to keep her honourably or to part with her honourably. Moreover, He *the Almighty* commands the husband to call two just witnesses to establish the witness for Allah's sake. Thus, He says: 'Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should heed this…' (*at-Talaq:* 2).

Subsequently, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him…' (*at-Talaq:* 2). Every verse in the Quran has a high position, status and rank including this verse that talks about the rulings of divorce, waiting period, housing of the divorced wife and the prohibition of driving her out of her husband's house. It is, nevertheless, a general verse that applies to anyone undergoing a hardship, a worry, or a calamity. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about this verse, 'I know a verse if all the people followed it, it would suffice them.'(1) Thus, this verse is sufficient for Allah's servants so as not to seek refuge with or humiliate themselves before anyone other than Him *the Almighty*. It opens the door of hope for anyone who has a concern, who feels sad or undergoes a hardship in his life.

In this vein, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the believers, saying: 'O you who believe! If you remain mindful of Allah, He will give you a criterion…' (*al-Anfal:* 29). This *furqan* (criterion) is the way out that He *the Almighty* provides for those who are mindful of Him. It also represents the way to salvation, victory, and casting the light of guidance into the hearts of the pious people. Therefore, being mindful of Him *Glorified is He* saves the believer and enables him to overcome his anxiety about his current situation in life. The verse in question clearly tells us that He *Glorified is He* will find a way out for the pious people and will provide for him from an unexpected source. So, the believer should abandon every sinful act and reflect on Allah's Bounties that He bestows on him.

He *Glorified is He* will make the matters easy for the pious person as long as he remains mindful of Him and pursues the earthly causes. Afterwards, he will find that the alleviation of his calamity has come from an unexpected source because He *Glorified is He* is the Ultimate Refuge for the believer. If you could not find any solution for your problems, all what you should do is to take refuge with Allah *Glorified is He* Who is the Supreme Causer. The 'way out' for the believer is to accept Allah's Predestination and to know that He is the One Who gives, deprives, tests, relieves and protects.

In the same vein, 'Ubada ibn As-Samit *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that a husband divorced his wife by a thousand pronouncements of divorce. So, his sons went to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, our father has divorced our mother by a thousand pronouncements of divorce; is there any way out of this?' He replied, 'Your father did not fear Allah, so He will not find a way out for him. She has been irrevocably divorced three times even though this divorce is not according to the *Sunnah*, and the remaining number of pronouncements of divorce are sins that burden him.'(1) In the same connection, when a man asked Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* about divorcing his wife by one hundred pronouncements of divorce, he told him that he had disobeyed his Lord, that his wife had become irrevocably divorced, and that he did not fear Allah, so He would not find a way out for him.(2) Then, Ibn 'Abbas recited the saying of Allah: 'Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him…' (*at-Talaq:* 2).

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(1) *See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4220; An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 11539; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 3819; Ad-Darimi, Musnad, Hadith no. 2767; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 21591.*

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* will find a way out for the one who is mindful of Him by virtue of doing what He Commands and refraining from what He prohibited. If the husband divorces his wife, He *the Almighty* makes the waiting period of the woman a means to take her back in marriage. Even if her waiting period elapses before taking her back and then he desired her, he can propose to her and remarry her. But if the husband divorces her three times, he will find no way to get his wife back.

Therefore, He *the Almighty* makes the matters easy for the pious husband who divorces his wife one time by enabling him to take her back with the witness of two just people. Even if her waiting period elapsed without taking her back, he can propose to her like anyone else.

Here, having piety along with believing in Allah and the Last Day makes the husband fear to play with the matter of divorce; he refrains from issuing it one time during every menstrual period of his wife; otherwise, he will be violating the *Sunnah*, disobeying Allah and making the matter hard for himself, to the extent that there will be no way out for him.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* makes the matters easy for the one who fears Him by obeying His commands and refraining from His Prohibition. He takes him from disobedience to obedience and from the unlawful and the doubtful matters to what is lawful and certain. Further, He will save him from the doubtful matters, the tribulations of this worldly life and the hardships of the Day of Judgement.

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(1) *See Ad-Daraqutni, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3943; and Al-Haythami, Majma' Az-Zawa'id, Hadith no. 7772.*

(2) *See Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 15373; see also Sa'id ibn Mansur, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1064; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 10994.*

One should beware of deviating from Allah’s Way because this runs counter to piety which rids the believer of the ordeals of the worldly life through adhering to the Divine Way of Guidance. By contrast, the one who turns his back to piety, he will live miserably, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life’ (*Ta Ha:* 124). No one should think that piety only means to protect oneself from the hellfire, for it also signifies the protection from the worldly problems and risks that result from violating Allah’s Way of Guidance. As a matter of fact, life is full of problems caused by setting and applying man-made laws, but if we apply the Divine Laws, we will ward off such problems and ordeals. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘And whoever turns away from My Reminder, his shall be a straitened life’ (*Ta Ha:* 124). Thus, the life of such a person will be full of problems and anxieties due to his violating the Divine Way of Guidance. By contrast, the one who follows that Way will derive a great benefit.

Living miserably means that the person undergoes many distresses and hardships from which he cannot escape. In fact, the one who turns his back on Allah *Glorified is He* is inflicted with such a miserable life. On the contrary, the life of the one who believes in Him will never be distressful even if he lacks the means of sustenance, as he knows that his Lord can find a way out for him. When the disbeliever, on the other hand, faces straitened circumstances and lacks the means of sustenance, he finds no one to take refuge in and that is why he may commit suicide. The miserable life does not only mean to be needy or poor as it comprises many other forms and aspects. For example, some developed countries, like Sweden, enjoy materially luxurious lives, but they suffer the highest rates of suicide and sexual perversion, even though they have the highest income rates in the world. So, you should not measure the level of civilisation according to the material side only, but you should also take into consideration all other aspects. The one who is successful in the material sides avails himself thereof in this worldly life only, but upholding religious, moral and ethical values is the way to prosperity in this worldly life and the Hereafter.

Some scholars opined that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, [2] and will provide for them from an unexpected source [3]’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3) is applicable to everything that inflicts the person and needs alleviation. So, they did not make it specific to the matters of divorce. In this connection, Ibn ‘Abbas narrated that ‘Awf ibn Malik Al-Ashga‘i came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, my son was captured by the enemy and his mother grieves for him. What should I do?’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘Fear Allah, be patient and ask her to say, “No power or might except with Allah,” many times.’ He returned to her and upon asking him, ‘What did the Messenger of Allah tell you?’ he said to her, ‘He ordered you and me to say, “No power or might except with Allah,” many times.’ She said, ‘He has ordered you with something good.’ So they kept saying it until the enemy became oblivious about their son and he managed to escape and brought four thousand sheep to his father. Thereupon, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, [2] and will provide for them from an unexpected source [3]’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3) was revealed. With regard to the previous Hadith, the unexpected source of provision refers to the spoils that the captured son seized from the enemies.(1)

In the same connection, it is related that a man came to ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* and asked him to appoint him as a governor. ‘Umar asked him, ‘Do you recite the Quran?’ ‘No,’ replied the man. So, he told him that those who do not recite the Quran are not qualified for governorship. Afterwards, the man went and exerted his effort to learn the Quran, hoping that ‘Umar would appoint him. However, after he learned the Quran, he abandoned ‘Umar who later asked him, ‘Why have you abandoned us, man?’ He replied, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, I did not abandon you, but I had learned the Quran, so Allah made me dispense with ‘Umar.’(1) He asked him, ‘Which verse had made you dispense with me?’ He said, ‘The saying of Allah: “Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, [2] and will provide for them from an unexpected source [3]”’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3).

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ath-Tha‘alibi narrates this Hadith on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas. It is also narrated by Az-Zay‘li in his book. See Az-Zay‘li, Takhrij Ahadith Al-Kash-shaf, 4/53*

Allah *the Almighty* makes a way out from the straitened circumstances for the pious people, whereas the impious ones will be inflicted with all forms of hardship. Thus, the one who adheres to the Limits that He *the Almighty* sets and is mindful and fearful of His Power will be alleviated from all his suffering and hardship and will be guided to the Straight Path. This applies to the case of divorce or any hardship that the person may confront in this worldly life.

Piety, which leads to the way out of all hardship, has two forms: outward and inward. The outward piety has to do with the actions of the body; it includes preserving the Limits of Allah *Glorified is He* by not transcending them to the best of one’s ability. If he were forced to do so, he should hastily repent and seek Allah’s Forgiveness.

As for the inward piety, it is the source of sincerity in the actions and the good intention. The *ummah* unanimously agreed on the virtue of having piety and that one should only seek the accompaniment of the pious people so that he can have a living heart which is always heedful of Allah *the Almighty*. Piety results in fearing Him *the Almighty* which in turn protects the person from all evils.

He *the Almighty* has guaranteed to find a way out for the pious people from what makes people’s lives miserable. If this does not happen, this indicates that there is a defect in the person’s piety and therefore he should seek Allah’s Forgiveness and repent to Him.

Undergoing straitened circumstances means that what was spacious diminishes and that the life becomes miserable. These straitened circumstances have many levels. One may find that his country closes in around him, so he travels to another one to lead a good life. The whole world may become unbearable to him, but in that case, he may find his soul spacious for him. If one’s soul closed in around him, he would reach the maximum level of misery. When a matter closes in around someone, this means that he cannot think about an alternative to get him out of his straitened circumstance. His situation is contrary to the believer who is certain that Allah *the Almighty* will save him from the hardship he is undergoing. For this reason, you will bear any hardship because Allah *Glorified is He* is your Lord. Thus, when the worldly life, your relatives, beloved ones or even your soul close in around you, your Lord will be enough for you and you will be under His Care. That is why He *the Almighty* has described those who will be saved, saying: ‘Surely Allah is with those who guard (against evil) and those who do good (to others)’ (*an-Nahl:* 128). Therefore, He *the Almighty* puts the one who fears Him under His Protection and Care. In this case, no hardship will afflict him.

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(1) *See Ath-Tha‘labi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan Fi Tafsir Al-Quran, 9/338; see also Ash-Shirbini, As-Siraj Al-Munir, 4/227; and Al-Biqa‘i, Nazhm Ad-Durar Fi Tanasub Al-Ayat Wa As-Suwar, 8/31.*

Piety, in a general sense, means obeying Him *the Almighty* by following His Commands and avoiding His Proscriptions. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* finds a way out for the one who is undergoing a hardship due to his problems with his wife to the point that he is about to divorce her. He *Glorified is He* preserves his house, wife and children for him. Thus, if the husband fears Him *the Almighty* in dealing with his wife and children, He *Glorified is He* guides him to a way by which he can reform them without destroying the family.

In fact, having piety and fearing Allah *the Almighty* are the foundations of all the marital issues. In addition, they prevent many evil things. So, the one whose marital situation is so difficult that he resorts to divorcing his wife should do that in conformity with Allah's Commandment, that is, he should not divorce his wife during her period of menstruation; rather, the wife should be in a state of purity. This may give a chance for employing reason, deliberating, and reforming this matter.

Even if the husband divorced his wife during the period of purity, he can take her back during her waiting period. Allah *Glorified is He* has made the chance of taking the divorced woman back in marriage more likely by prohibiting the revocably divorced wife from leaving the house. This could make the chance of reconciliation, closeness, and tranquillity between the husband and his wife more possible so that he takes her back in marriage and ends their discord.

If the ignorant person, who does not know about the prohibition of *bid'i* (innovative) divorce, divorces his wife during her menses or by triple divorce, he should repent to Allah *the Almighty* to be alleviated from this problem.

This verse under discussion may also apply to the one who may have resorted to divorcing his wife because of some reasons relating to her. Allah *the Almighty* relieves him and his children from this situation by providing him with another wife that preserves him and his children. He *the Almighty* says that He will also: '…provide for him from an unexpected source' (*at-Talaq:* 3). He provides him with sexual gratification, a wife, money (if he had divorced his first wife for his poverty) and good health (if he had divorced her for his deteriorating health).

Every verse in the Quran has a high position, status, and rank including this verse that talks about the rulings of divorce, waiting period, the housing of the divorced wife and the prohibition of driving her out from her husband's house. It is, nevertheless, a general verse that includes everyone undergoing a hardship, a worry, or a calamity. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about this verse, 'I know a verse if all the people followed it, it would suffice them.'(1) Thus, it is sufficient for Allah's servants to not seek refuge in or humiliate themselves to anyone other than Him. This verse opens the door of hope for anyone who has a concern, feels sad, or undergoes a hardship in his life.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the believers, saying: 'O you who believe! If you remain mindful of Allah, He will give you a criterion…' (*al-Anfal:* 29). This 'criterion' is the way He *the Almighty* provides for those who are mindful of Him. It also represents the way to salvation, victory, and casting the light of guidance into the hearts of the pious people. Therefore, He *the Almighty* saves the pious believer and enables him to overcome his anxiety about his current situation in life. If he adheres to His Limits, He *the Almighty* finds a way out for him and provides for him from an unexpected source.

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(1) *See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4220; see also An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 11539; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 3819; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 21591; and Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 6669.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَيَرۡزُقۡهُ مِنۡ حَيۡثُ لَا يَحۡتَسِبُۚ وَمَن يَتَوَكَّلۡ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسۡبُهُۥٓۚ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بَٰلِغُ أَمۡرِهِۦۚ قَدۡ جَعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدۡرٗا ٣

And will provide for them from an unexpected source;
God will be enough for those who put their trust in Him.
God achieves His purpose; God has set a due measure for
everything [3] (The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 3)

Allah *Glorified is He* finds a way out for the pious people if they try to the best of their ability to avoid the sinful acts. The person should ponder over Allah’s Bounties and feed himself and his dependants only from rightful property earned through a legal activity.

The believer should always find support in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him. [2] And will provide for them from an unexpected source [3]’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3). The last verse means that we should not measure our provision according to our activities because it, that is our measure, may be incorrect. The person should exert his efforts in the means of getting provision, but he should not measure his provision according to these means because one’s provision may come from an unexpected source. That is why He *Glorified is He* says here: ‘Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him. [2] And will provide for them from an unexpected source [3]’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3). Inasmuch as the believer exerts his effort in pursuing the means of provision, He *Glorified is He* bestows on him what is more than his effort. This also applies to the pious people, for every believer receives a provision beyond his effort, provided that he is pious and exerts his (utmost) effort. At a point of time during his calamity, he will find that the relief has come from an unexpected source, as Allah *the Almighty* is the Ultimate Refuge for the believer.

Assume that you are walking in a street with only one pound in your pocket and then you lost it; will you feel sad? Yes, you will. But if you have ten pounds in your house, your sadness will be less. Further, if your balance in your bank account is one thousand, you will not be sad at all.

The one who believes in one Lord and exerts his effort in seeking the means of provision will be relieved from his calamity and provided with more than the effort which he exerted. In fact, you do not seek your provision inasmuch as it seeks you. The mystic scholars say that one's provision knows his place better than one's knowledge about where his provision is. The evidence of this fact is that you may seek your provision in a place, but Allah provides you in another place. Similarly, you may see the plants growing well in the fields, and thus hope for an abundant harvest, but the crop may be spoiled for one reason or another. Therefore, you would not be provided with that abundant harvest.

Allah *Glorified is He* provides immeasurably for whomever He pleases. So, no one should think that he is provided in return for his work; rather, He *the Almighty* makes work a means for providing people. He *Glorified is He* does not deprive anyone of lawful work and provision for maintaining himself if he abandons the illegal work.

Now, what is provision? It is all that is useful, even though some people mistakenly think it is confined to money. We say to them that provision is all that is useful and beneficial; your knowledge, creation, and status are all forms of provision because they are useful.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* commands the divorcing husband and the divorcee to try all the means to prevent their separation, but with regard to those who failed to find a solution, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And if they separate, Allah will render them both free from want out of His Ampleness, and Allah is Ample-Giving, Wise’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 130). In fact, Allah’s Bounty is infinite and He is fully Able to provide the husband with a good wife that satisfies his desires, and to provide the divorcee with another good husband who satisfies all her needs and accept her ugliness, if she were so. He *the Almighty* will cause a man of insight to see the good and the beautiful aspects she has.

You should beware of thinking that He *the Almighty* cannot provide alleviation for the human being. Out of His Wisdom, He *the Almighty* does not force the two spouses to live together, while they hate each other due to the lack of mutual love and mercy between them.

Allah *the Almighty* is Limitless and Omniscient. His Knowledge encompasses His Dominion and no one thing distracts Him from another thing. That is why when Imam *'Ali Allah pleased with him* was asked, 'How does Allah hold all people accountable at the same time?' He answered, 'He does so as He provides all of them at the same time'. Thus, Allah's Bounty is Limitless, for He is fully Able to bestow His Favours on all people. By so doing, His Favours, nevertheless, do not decrease nor come to an end.

The provision, as we have said, is all that is useful; thus, strength, knowledge, wisdom, humbleness, the husband, and the wife are all different forms of provision. That is to say that all that serves the movement of life is a provision. For example, you may have little money, but you have good health by which you can work, earn money, and even give some of your money as a charity to the disabled and the sick people. Likewise, if you are wise, you can prevent the foolish person from committing what harms you and your society. Similarly, if you have knowledge, you can make use of it to teach the ignorant people and more importantly to act upon it.

Thus, some people's provision may be knowledge and wisdom by which they can address some problems in their houses and with their wives. Handling the marital problems needs Allah's Help to prevent the severing of the bond between the husband and the wife. This can only be achieved by following Allah's Way and Laws in our dealings with the wives, a matter that is fulfilled by either keeping them honourably or parting with them honourably. No one should think that leaving one's husband or wife is the end of the world; rather, it could be the beginning of a new good life.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…And will provide for them from an unexpected source...' (*at-Taghabun:* 3). This means that He *the Almighty* provides the pious people from a source they do not know or expect. Some scholars even said that if the person fears Allah, opts for the lawful provision, and has patience towards his family, He *the Almighty* will relieve him from any financial difficulties and provide for him from an unexpected source. In this context, Abu Dharr narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* kept reciting the saying of Allah: 'Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him. [2] And will provide for them from an unexpected source [3]' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3). When he finished reciting them, he said, ‘O Abu Dharr, if the people adhere to these two verses, it will suffice them.’ Abu Dharr then said, ‘He kept reciting them to me until I slept. He then asked me, “What would you do if you were driven out of Medina?”’ I replied, ‘I will go to the vastness and comfort of Mecca.’ He then asked me, ‘What would you do if you were driven out of Mecca?’ I replied, ‘I will go to the vastness and comfort of Ash-Sham and the sacred land.’ He then asked me, ‘What would you do if you were driven out of Ash-Sham?’ I said, ‘By the One Who sent you with the true Message I will use my sword.’ He said, ‘There is something better than that.’ I asked, ‘What is better than that?’ He replied, ‘To listen and obey even if the leader was an Abyssinian slave.’(1)

Thus, whoever puts his trust in Allah, his soul will never close in on him because he is certain that He *Glorified is He* will find a way out for him; He will bestow relief on him from an expected source. Thus, He *Glorified is He* delivers him from all the calamities in both this worldly life and the Hereafter.

Such certainty was affirmed by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his advice to Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him*. ‘Ibn Abbas was a fourteen-year-old boy when Prophet Muhammad died. He said, ‘The Messenger of Allah said, “O young man, I shall teach you some words [of advice]: Be mindful of Allah and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, then ask Allah [alone]; and if you seek help, then seek help from Allah [alone]. And know that if the nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, they would not benefit you except with what Allah had already prescribed for you. And if they were to gather together to harm you with anything, they would not harm you except with what Allah had already prescribed against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.”’(2)

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 21591; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 2474.*

(2) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 2669, 2763 and 2804; see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2516; Abu Ya‘la, Musnad, Hadith no. 2556; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 6304; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 6304; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu‘ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 192, 1042, 9528 and 9529.*

When Allah preordains something according to His Knowledge, it will inevitably come to pass, be it in your interest or not. That is why you should only rely on Him because He is *the Almighty* God Who always achieves His Purpose.

If you do good deeds for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* alone, He will satisfy all your needs. Thus, you should seek Help from Him *the Almighty* alone, for this excludes you from any form of humiliation in this worldly life. When you seek the help of anyone other than Him, you seek the help of a human being whose power and authority, however great they are, are limited. Hence, you should seek the Help of the Ever-Living Who never dies. If the human being does his best in seeking the means of provision, he must recall that his Lord, the only true God, supports him.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Allah will be enough for those who put their trust in Him’ (*at-Talaq:* 3). In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Believers should put their trust in Allah’ (*al-Baqara:* 160) and: ‘Allah loves those who put their trust in Him’ (*al-Baqara:* 159). As a matter of fact, the one who does not put his trust in Him *Glorified is He* should check his faith.

Every part of the body has a distinct action to perform. Having certainty and putting trust in Allah *the Almighty* are the actions of the heart. Evidently, walking is the action of the foot; working is the action of the hand, and so on. Thus, you should not assign the action of the heart to the foot or the hand, as the true meaning of putting trust in Him *the Almighty* is to work (that is, perform the religious obligations) with the limbs and to rely on Him *the Almighty* with the heart. In fact, the outcome of many actions and efforts were disappointing because they lacked the element of depending on Him *the Almighty*. For instance, you may find a farmer who grows his crops well. As he does not rely on Him *the Almighty* a storm may blow or a climatic change may take place, thus the crops may be spoiled and he will be disappointed.

You should beware of neglecting the means and the causes, or letting them seduce you. After all, if you neglected the means of provision, you would not truly put your trust in Allah *Glorified is He* which entails that the limbs should perform their due work, while the heart shall rely on Him. So, beware of thinking that depending on Him *the Almighty* implies neglecting the actions of the limbs, for this is a kind of fatalism and laziness. The evidence of this fact is that such a person likes to put his trust in Him *the Almighty* in the difficult situations, not in the easy ones.

We say to the one who falsely claims that he puts his trust in Allah *the Almighty* yet does not perform the due work, ‘You are not truly putting your trust in Allah. If you are truthful in your claim, do not stretch your hand out to a piece of bread to put it in your mouth. Confirm your claim by letting your trust in Him put that morsel in your mouth and chew it for you. Thus, your claim that you are relying on Him without pursuing the means is lethargy in your faith, not true dependence on Him *the Almighty*.’

Putting one's trust in Allah *Glorified is He* generally means that he has pursued all the possible means and takes refuge with Allah, the Omnipotent God. Relying on Him *the Almighty* faithfully means to render all your affairs to Him because you trust His Precise Measurement. If He provides you with the means of provision, you should not desist seeking them, claiming that you are putting your trust in Him *the Almighty*.

As a matter of fact, He *the Almighty* does not abandon the one who puts his trust in Him. Let us offer an example to further illustrate this point; Hajar the wife of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was left in the area of Allah's Sacred Mosque with her baby, Ismail (Ishmael) in a place bereft of food and water.

When she asked him, ‘To whom are you leaving us? Has Allah commanded you to do so?’ He answered in the affirmative. Then she said, ‘Then He will not abandon us.’ By her dependence on the Creator, she had no need for the creation.

When her son became very thirsty, she looked for any passing caravan to get water from them. In her search for water, she went to the high places and left the valley; she climbed the top of the mountains of As-Safa and Al-Marwa, but she could not find anything. She kept going back and forth between these two mountains seven times. We can imagine how difficult her condition was. Further, she must have been thirsty like her baby.

When she became exhausted, she quit and returned to her baby. If her walking between the two mountains of As-Safa and Al-Marwa had been useful and she had seen a source of water, we would have said that her effort brought water to her. But she said previously, ‘He will not abandon us.’ Her statement has actually to do with the Creator of the means and not with the means themselves. Had Allah *the Almighty* given her the means directly in her pursuit for water, she would not have provided a tangible proof for the truthfulness of her statement that He *the Almighty* would not abandon them.

Thus, He *the Almighty* wanted her walking between the two mountains to prove useless. When she returned to her baby, she found the water beside his foot. In this way, she was truthful in her reliance on Him *the Almighty* and in her certainty that He would not abandon her. It is as if He *the Almighty* wanted to tell her that He would not abandon her, for the water would not be brought to her through her walking; rather, by the foot of her child with which he hit the ground and thereupon water gushed forth. The baby’s hitting of the ground with his foot is not normally an effective cause, but He *the Almighty* wanted to retain the causation even if the cause is inadequate to bring about the effect.

So, you should put your trust in Allah, the Ever-Lasting Who never ceases to exist; the Almighty Who is Invincible, and the Omnipotent Who cannot be overpowered.

As for His saying: ‘Allah will be enough for those who put their trust in Him’ (*at-Talaq:* 3), it means that He supports and provides for them sufficiently. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: ‘O Prophet! Allah is sufficient for you and (for) such of the believers as follow you’ (*al-Anfal:* 64). This means that He *the Almighty* is enough for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and also for the believers who followed him.

The verse could possibly mean that He *Glorified is He* is enough for him *peace and blessings be upon him* in what is beyond the human capacity, and that He *the Almighty* is sufficient to the believers with regard to such matters which are within the human capacity. He *the Almighty* says: ‘Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers (he is) compassionate, [128] But if they turn back, say: Allah is sufficient for me, there is no god but He; on Him do I rely, and He is the Lord of Mighty Power [129]’ (*at-Tawba:* 128-129).

If you carefully examine the matter, you will find that no one is enough for you except Allah *the Almighty* Who can bestow His Protection and support on you. Thus, it is better for you to rely on Him *the Almighty* and to obey Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who completely conveyed the Message of Allah. As long as He *Glorified is He* is enough for you and there is no god but Him, you should remain under His Care. Thus, you will need no one else because He gives you all what you want and protects you from what is evil which you mistakenly may think is good. Further, if you put your trust in the Ever-Living Who never dies, He will protect you from His servants' sins and evils. This is due to the fact that He Alone knows the sins of His servants and about which they are thinking.

In this vein, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud(1) *Allah be pleased with him* says that the greatest verse concerning entrusting one's affairs to Allah *the Almighty* is His saying: 'Allah will be enough for those who put their trust in Him' (*at-Talaq:* 3). He *the Almighty* will relieve the concern of the one who entrusts his affairs to Him. That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever likes to be the strongest among people should put his trust in Allah.'(2) Thus, Allah's saying: 'Allah will be enough for those who put their trust in Him' (*at-Talaq:* 3) entails that the person should entrust Allah *the Almighty* with all his affairs and accept His Predestination. Wahb ibn Munabih narrated that He *the Almighty* says: 'If My servant put his trust in Me, I will find a way out for him even if the heavens and the earth schemed against him.'(3)

It should be noted here that Allah's saying: 'Allah will be enough for those who put their trust in Him' (*at-Talaq:* 3) does not only apply to the marital issues, but also to all the affairs of the people. Therefore, whoever relies on Allah and entrusts his affairs to Him, He *the Almighty* will be enough for him, and He will manage his affairs for him. Relying on Him *the Almighty* in the religious and mundane matters implies depending on Him to bring about the benefits and ward off the harm.

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(1) *See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 8577; see also Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 489; 'Abd Ar-Razzaq, Musannf, Hadith no. 6002; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 2173*

(2) *See Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 7707; and 'Abd ibn Humayd, Musnad, Hadith no. 675*

(3) *See Ahmad, Az-Zuhd, Hadith no. 291; see also Al-Alusi, Ruh Al-Ma'ani, 14/331.*

As for His saying: ‘Allah achieves His Purpose…’ (*at-Talaq:* 3), it means that His Decree and Predestination will inevitably take place. His Purpose will be achieved regarding those who put their trust in Him and also those who do not, for He *Glorified is He* executes His Decrees regarding His creation according to His Unchallengeable Will. ‘Abdullah ibn Rafa‘ *Allah be pleased with him* said that when Allah’s saying: ‘Allah will be enough for those who put their trust in Him...’ (*at-Talaq:* 3) was revealed, the Companions of Prophet Muhammad said that if they put their trust in Allah, they would not care about preserving their possessions. Thereupon, His saying: ‘Allah achieves His Purpose…’ (*at-Talaq:* 3) was revealed.

Allah's Decree will inevitably come to pass, whether the person relies on Him *the Almighty* or not. If you put your trust in Him, He grants you comfort and blessings. Otherwise, He will leave you to your incapability and indignation. In either case, His Purpose will certainly be achieved.

The believers should not consider what Allah *the Almighty* has promised to be unlikely to happen due to the absence of the means of achieving it, for if He has made a Promise about something He wanted, He provides the means of achieving it. After all, He is the Master and the Controller of this universe; everything is subjected to His Power and complies with His Will. Thus, what He *the Almighty* wants will inevitably happen; nothing can stop or change it.

Then, He *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question with His saying: ‘Allah has set a due measure for everything’ (*at-Talaq:* 3). This means that He has set a specified time and end for everything. In this context, He *the Almighty* has set a specific time and due measure for divorce, the waiting period and other relevant issues. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, [2] and will provide for them from an unexpected source; Allah will be enough for those who put their trust in Him. Allah achieves His Purpose; Allah has set a due measure for everything [3]’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3). Thus, the true believer should not be anxious about anything in this worldly life as long as he is under Allah’s care, for He has the way out of your situation. Further, He is the Provider in Whom you should put your trust and be certain that His Decree and Predestination will take place. He *the Almighty* achieves His Purpose and has set a due measure for everything. When He decrees something, no one can stop it.

He *the Almighty* subsequently says:

وَٱلَّٰٓـِٔي يَئِسۡنَ مِنَ ٱلۡمَحِيضِ مِن نِّسَآئِكُمۡ إِنِ ٱرۡتَبۡتُمۡ فَعِدَّتُهُنَّ ثَلَٰثَةُ أَشۡهُرٖ وَٱلَّٰٓـِٔي لَمۡ يَحِضۡنَۚ
وَأُوْلَٰتُ ٱلۡأَحۡمَالِ أَجَلُهُنَّ أَن يَضَعۡنَ حَمۡلَهُنَّۚ وَمَن يَتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ يَجۡعَل لَّهُۥ مِنۡ أَمۡرِهِۦ يُسۡرٗا ٤

If you are in doubt, the period of waiting will be three months for those women who have ceased menstruating and for those who have not [yet] menstruated; the waiting period of those who are pregnant will be until they deliver their burden: God makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him [4] (The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 4)

Menstruation is a necessary chemical process for women and for having children. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* does not talk about menstruation, but rather about the waiting period of the woman who was divorced during the time of her purity. He *the Almighty* has specified the waiting period of the revocably divorced woman, stating that it is three times of purity, that is, she menstruates and becomes pure three times.

However, what about the divorced woman who reached menopause? How can she fulfil Allah’s Command to calculate her waiting period? If the woman ceases menstruating, her waiting period is not calculated by menstrual periods or periods of purity; rather, it has a fixed period, namely; three months. Normally, women reach menopause at the age of fifty-five or sixty. Their waiting period in such a case is three months instead of three menstrual periods.

In the chapter of *al-Baqara,* Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods’ (*al-Baqara:* 228). Thus, menstruation is the basis for determining the time of the waiting period, but after the cessation of menstruation, months are used to determine it. Hence, the waiting period of a woman who has reached menopause is three months. The age of ceasing menstruation, like the age of its beginning, differs according to the woman and the country she lives in.

The Arabic word *mahid* (menstruation) is an infinitive which refers to the menstrual blood or to the menstrual period during which Allah *the Almighty* has commanded the husband to keep away from women, saying: ‘…so keep away from women during it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 222).

The ‘menstruating woman’ refers to the one who menstruates even if she is not during her monthly period. This meaning is clear in the Hadith in which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah does not accept the prayer of a woman who has reached puberty unless she wears a veil.’(1) Here, he is not referring to days of the menstrual period because the menstruating woman is not commanded to pray. The Hadith, therefore, refers to the woman who menstruates. When she ceases menstruating, the woman is no longer called a menstruating woman. She becomes from the elderly women who have ceased menstruating, but she must keep praying while wearing a veil, even if she reached menopause.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘If you are in doubt…’ (*at-Talaq:* 4). Therefore, if you have a doubt and you are not certain about the state of the woman, whether she is a menstruating one or still young, or whether she ceased her monthly period or not, then the waiting period of the women who ceased menstruating or those who have not started menstruating yet is three months.

If a young woman stopped menstruating, we have to check whether or not she is pregnant. If her pregnancy is confirmed, her waiting period lasts until she delivers her baby. If her pregnancy is not confirmed, she should wait for one year’s period of time maximally. Thus, His saying: ‘If you are doubtful…’ (*at-Talaq:* 4) refers to the state of being doubtful and ignorant about the divorcee’s waiting period.

Among the women about whom we may be doubtful are those who have not menstruated yet. They are the young women who were divorced after the consummation of marriage. Their waiting period is three months because they have not menstruated yet and their husband had already had sexual intercourse with them.

Thus, the young women who have not menstruated yet are treated like those who ceased menstruating because they are linked in the verse in question with the conjunction ‘and’, so they share the same ruling, namely; that their waiting period is three months. The waiting period of women in both these circumstances is not calculated according to the menstrual periods, as they either have not menstruated yet, or have reached menopause.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 641; see also Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 655; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 25208, 25875 and 26269; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 1711; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 3379*

Marriage to the young woman who has not attained puberty is permissible according to this verse. Furthermore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* got married to 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* when she was six years old.(1) As Islam is embraced by different societies, jurists allowed the marriage to young women stipulating that no harm inflicts her and that she can endure the consummation of marriage.

Allah says: '…the waiting period of those who are pregnant will be until they deliver their burden' (*at-Talaq:* 4). Thus, the waiting period of the pregnant woman ends when she delivers her baby. The woman should not conceal her pregnancy as He *the Almighty* says: 'Divorced women must wait for three monthly periods before remarrying, and, if they really believe in Allah and the Last Day, it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs' (*al-Baqara:* 228). This verse is proof that the woman is entitled to bear witness regarding her private matters that no one knows except her. She has to confirm whether she is pregnant or not, and she should not conceal that because she may be pregnant and conceal this matter to avoid waiting for the long period of pregnancy that hinders her marriage to someone else. If this happened, the baby would be attributed to someone other than his real father. The period of pregnancy normally remains for nine months. Concealing pregnancy may lead to many problems including that the child will not inherit from his real father and that the women who are presumptively unmarriageable to him are not really unlawful. For example, the daughter of the one who is not his real father is not really his sister and thus he is allowed to marry her. This also applies to the unreal paternal and maternal aunts. Thus, the scale will be upside down.

As for the unreal father, the baby gains illegal rights by inheriting from someone who is not his/her biological father. Further, the marriageable women who are the relatives of that unreal father would be unmarriageable to him. He would unrightfully enter and see from them what is forbidden. Besides, other illegal matters will happen.

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(1) *In this regard, Al-Bayhaqi narrated a Hadith that reads: 'After the death of Khadija, the Messenger of Allah got married to 'Aisha in Mecca when she was six years old. He consummated the marriage in Medina when she was nine years old.' See Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 13805; see also Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, 7/384*

Accordingly, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘It is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs’ (*al-Baqara:* 228) indicates that life should be based on purity, honour, decency and safeguarding the rights of each other.

So, the waiting period of the pregnant women ends with the delivery of the baby. In this regard, it is narrated that during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a woman called Subay‘a Bint Al-Harith Al-Aslamiyya(1) delivered her baby fifteen days after the death of her husband and he *peace and blessings be upon him* allowed her to marry again immediately. Furthermore, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, ‘If a widow gives birth to a child, she can marry again even if the late husband has not been buried yet.’

Thus, the waiting period of a pregnant woman, whether a divorcee or a widow, ends with the delivery of the baby, even in the case of a miscarried foetus. Menstruation has nothing to do with this case.

However, it is not permissible for the divorcee to lie about her true state in terms of her menstruation or pregnancy by claiming, when she is pregnant, that her waiting period is over in order to marry another one soon with the intention of attributing her baby to him. Likewise, it is unlawful for her to claim that she is still in her waiting period in order to inherit from her deceased husband, given the fact that the divorcee is not entitled to inherit from him after the end of her waiting period.

Here arises a question, which is, ‘How can the waiting period of a pregnant widow be calculated? Should she wait for four months and ten days, which is the waiting period specified for a widow, or should she wait until the delivery of her child?'

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(1) *Subay‘a Bint Al-Harith Al-Aslamiyya was the wife of Sa‘d ibn Khawla. He died in the Farewell Pilgrimage while she was pregnant. She gave birth to her baby twenty days after his death. She was one of the female Companions of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and narrated Hadiths from him. Her Hadiths were narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, Zhufar ibn Aws and Masruq. She was one of the Companions regarding whom the saying of Allah the Almighty: ‘O you who believe! When believing women come to you flying, then examine them…’ (al-Mumtahana: 10) was revealed.*

The answer is that Allah *Glorified is He* specified the waiting period of a widow, saying: 'And (as for) those of you who die and leave wives behind, they should keep themselves in waiting for four months and ten days; then when they have fully attained their term, there is no blame on you for what they do for themselves in a lawful manner; and Allah is Aware of what you do' (*al-Baqara:* 234). However, this ruling only applies to a widow who is not pregnant. In the case of pregnancy, her waiting period shall be the longer of the two periods. If the period of four months and ten days is the longest, then it will be her prescribed waiting period. Conversely, if the period prior to her delivery is longer than four months and ten days, then her waiting period lasts until the delivery of her baby. So, if the wife of a deceased husband gives birth to a baby before his burial, for example, her waiting period is four months and ten days. However, some jurists opine that her waiting period in this case ends upon the delivery of her baby. If she is not a widow, that is, a divorcee, then her waiting period ends when she gives birth to her baby and afterwards she is legally permitted to marry again immediately.

Some people try to rationalise the ruling of the widow's waiting period, saying that if the foetus is a male, her pregnancy can be confirmed after three months; and if it is a female, her pregnancy can be confirmed after four months. That is to say that the waiting period in the case of the widow is intended to ascertain whether or not she is pregnant. I say to them, 'May Allah reward you for your interpretation, but the widow's waiting period is not prescribed to ascertain whether or not she is pregnant, for if this were the case, her waiting period would be over after three menstrual periods, if she is a menstruating woman, or after three months if her menstruation ceased or she has not menstruated yet. However, Allah *the Almighty* specified the waiting period of the widow as four months and ten days as a token of gratitude and honour for her late husband and their marital life.'

When a pregnant widow waits for the longer of the two terms, then she applies the two verses regarding the waiting period of the widow and the pregnant woman. However, if she only waits until she delivers her baby, when its date comes in less than four months and ten days, then she does not apply one of the two verses. In fact, it is agreed upon by the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence that applying the two verses is more preponderant.

Accordingly, when a husband dies, while his wife is still pregnant in her first month, then her waiting period is not four months and ten days; rather, she must wait until she gives birth to her baby. It is wrong to say that she waits for the shorter of the two periods as this entails that, if she is in her first month of pregnancy, her waiting period ends after four months and ten days, that is, she can marry, while she is still in the sixth month of her pregnancy. This is not lawful according to the scholars' consensus. In fact, it is one of the major sins. In this vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A pregnant woman shall not get married unless she gives birth to her baby.'(1) He also said, 'It is not lawful for a man who believes in Allah and the Last Day to marry a pregnant woman (until she delivers her baby).'

Afterwards Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 4). This is the third time in this chapter where He *Glorified is He* reminds the people about piety or being mindful of Him in the space of only four verses. He *the Almighty* says: 'Prophet, when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start and calculate the period carefully: be mindful of Allah, your Lord…' (*at-Talaq:* 1); 'Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him…' (*at-Talaq:* 2); and: 'Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 4). So, piety is mentioned in the first, the second and the fourth verse. This indicates the greatness of being mindful of Allah *the Almighty* adhering to His limits and fearing His punishment.

In the context of divorce, He *the Almighty* underlines the importance of piety which entails avoiding sins, obeying His commands and abiding by His Rulings concerning the issues of divorce. If the husband is pious, He *the Almighty* guides him to obedience, facilitates the matter for him, and finds a way out for him. Moreover, He *the Almighty* makes it easier for him to take his revocable divorcee back as long as she is still in her waiting period, and even if her waiting period is over, he can propose to her and remarry her.

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(1) *Abu Sa'id Al Khudri Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said the following statement regarding the captives taken at Awtas, 'There must be no intercourse with a pregnant woman till she gives birth to her child or with the one who is not pregnant till she has had one menstrual period.'*

Allah *Glorified is He* commands the husbands and wives to apply these rulings and to endure the hardships they may entail for His sake because this helps the pious people and relieves them from such hardships.

As for Allah's saying: '…makes things easy…' (*at-Talaq:* 4), it means that He *the Almighty* makes the matters that seem difficult for someone very easy by delivering him out of his current difficult situation. This Promise is intended to encourage the husbands to obey His Commands with regard to spending on revocable divorcees during their waiting periods, taking them back, and leaving the marital house for her if it is not spacious enough for both of them. It is also intended to encourage revocable divorcees to wait for a specified waiting period and to stay in their marital houses. Thus, whoever fears Allah *the Almighty* is mindful of Him with regard to his actions and deeds and abstains from all that He prohibits, He makes all his affairs much easier and grants him success.

He *the Almighty* intends for us ease and does not intend for us hardship, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty…' (*al-Baqara:* 185). What puts us in hardship and difficulty is our negligence in following His Way of Guidance and our failure to be mindful of Him.

In fact, a hardship that you may think unbearable is indeed accompanied with ease. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'He has not laid upon you any hardship in religion' (*al-Hajj:* 78). Instead, He *Glorified is He* wants to make all your affairs easy for you and, therefore, He legislates concessions for you in order to relieve you of harm and hardship.

It is noteworthy that Allah *Glorified is He* asserts that He decrees this for the interest and benefit of people, saying: 'Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 4). He *the Almighty* has no interest nor does He benefit from all of this. Instead, it is all about the interest and safety of people. Among the benefits the pious person acquires are that his affairs are made easy; he is guided to goodness and is also led to the means of welfare in this worldly life and in the Hereafter alike. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* makes things easier for the pious person, protects him from hardships and difficulties, makes for him a way out of distress and provides him with an unexpected provision. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘O you who believe! If you are careful of (your duty to) Allah, He will grant you a distinction and do away with your evils and forgive you…’ (*al-Anfal:* 29); He also says: ‘O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and believe in His Apostle: He will give you two portions of His mercy, and make for you a light with which you will walk, and forgive you…’ (*al-Hadid:* 28). Thus, by virtue of piety, one’s mind develops an enlightened insight which lightens one’s dark way and with which one can distinguish between the truth and falsehood and between what is beneficial and what is harmful. In the first verse, Allah *the Almighty* promises the pious people that He will grant them Furqan(1) (that is, a criterion that distinguishes between right and wrong).

Further, piety helps one feel secure when people are fearful, be at ease when they are saddened and become optimistic when they feel despair, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Now surely the friends of Allah – they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. [62] Those who believe and guarded (against evil): [63] They shall have good news in this world’s life and in the Hereafter; there is no changing the words of Allah; that is the mighty achievement [64]’ (*Yunus:* 62-64). It also helps in strengthening one’s devotion to Allah *the Almighty* and helps the person to guarantee success and welfare in the worldly life and in the Hereafter.

In addition, piety makes one feel assured that one’s offspring, especially the vulnerable among them, will be secured and protected after one’s death, a point which is clearly manifested in His saying: ‘And let those fear who, should they leave behind them weakly offspring, would fear on their account, so let them be careful of (their duty to) Allah, and let them speak right words' (*an-Nisa':* 9).

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Al-Jawzi relates that Ibn ‘Abbas stated that Furqan means a way out and accordingly the verse means that Allah makes for you a way out from deviation. Qatada and As-Suddi said that it means salvation. Al-Farra’ said that it means victory. Ibn Zayd and Ibn Ishaq said that it means guidance in their heart with which they distinguish between the truth and untruth. See Ibn Al-Jawzi, Zad Al-Masir.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَٰلِكَ أَمۡرُ ٱللَّهِ أَنزَلَهُۥٓ إِلَيۡكُمۡۚ وَمَن يَتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ يُكَفِّرۡ عَنۡهُ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِۦ وَيُعۡظِمۡ لَهُۥٓ أَجۡرًا (٥)

This is God's command, which He has sent down to you.
God will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards
of anyone who is mindful of Him [5] (The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 5)

Here, the demonstrative pronoun 'this' refers to all the legal rulings which have been explained in the preceding verses, such as the rulings of divorce, taking one's revocable divorcee back in marriage, the waiting period, the prohibition of driving the revocable divorcees out of their marital houses as well as the rulings of the waiting periods of the women who go through menopause and those who have not yet menstruated.

It is noteworthy here that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the demonstrative pronoun 'this' to underline the great interest shown by the Legislator regarding these rulings. In addition, this demonstrative pronoun is stated in the singular form although the address here is directed to all the Muslims, as it is only intended to underline the great significance and importance of this issue, and not to specify the addressees. However, this demonstrative pronoun is mentioned in its plural form in many other Quranic verses as in His saying: '…so kill yourselves, that is best for you with your Creator: so He turned to you (mercifully), for surely He is the Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful' (*al-Baqara:* 54); 'O you who believe! Do not enter houses other than your own houses until you have asked permission and saluted their inmates; this is better for you, that you may be mindful' (*an-Nur:* 27); and: 'O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know' (*al-Jumu'a:* 9).

Allah's saying: 'This is Allah's Command…' (*at-Talaq:* 5) is mentioned in many places in the Quran to signify different meanings, including Allah's Decree, a meaning which is clear in the following verse: 'O you who have been given the Book! Believe that which We have revealed, verifying what you have, before We alter faces then turn them on their backs, or curse them as We cursed the violators of the Sabbath, and the command of Allah shall be executed' (*an-Nisa':* 47). This verse relates the story of the children of Israel.

As a matter of fact, nothing in this universe can violate Allah's Decrees as He *Glorified is He* is the Omnipotent and the Only One entitled to all the Attributes of Perfection. Therefore, when He *the Almighty* promises us something, then His Promise will be fulfilled. This certainly differs from the human beings' promises which sometimes may be broken.

You, as a human being, may promise another person something good, but when the time is due to fulfil your promise, you may become unable to fulfil it. Likewise, you may threaten somebody that you will harm him in a certain way, but you may become ill and unable to carry out your threat. This is because your ability to do so is prone to change, and therefore it may exist or not exist.

On the contrary, when Allah *the Almighty* makes a promise or issues a threat, no one can change that. So, His Promise to reward someone will inevitably be fulfilled. As for His threatening, He may, out of His Generosity and Bounty, lift it except in the case of associating others with Him in worship.

'Allah's Command' may also refer to what will happen before and on the Day of Judgement as indicated in His saying: 'Allah's Commandment has come, therefore do not desire to hasten it…' (*an-Nahl:* 1). Besides, it refers to Allah's Decree that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers will undoubtedly be victorious and that the disbelievers will certainly be defeated if they insist on their disbelief.

When the Quranic verse: 'Allah's Commandment has come…' (*an-Nahl:* 1) was revealed, all the people became frightened as they knew that Allah's Command shall come true. In the same verse, He *the Almighty* says: '…therefore do not desire to hasten it…' (*an-Nahl:* 1). Here, He *the Almighty* orders them not to ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to bring it on sooner as its time is only known to Him *the Almighty*. The verb 'to come' is used in the past tense to express the inevitability and the nearness of its occurrence in the future. This indicates that time is absolute for Allah *the Almighty*; what is considered future for us is something real for Him *Glorified is He* as no one can prevent something decreed by Him regarding the future. Accordingly, the disbelievers will be tormented and no one will be able to alleviate their pains.

Furthermore, Allah's Commands may also refer to something good decreed for a human being as was the case with the wife of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And his wife was standing (by), so she laughed, then We gave her the good news of Ishaq (Isaac) and after Ishaq (Isaac) of (a son's son) Ya'qub (Jacob). [71] She said: O wonder! Shall I bear a son when I am an extremely old woman and this my husband an extremely old man? Most surely this is a wonderful thing. [72] They said: Do you wonder at Allah's Command? The Mercy of Allah and His blessings are on you, O people of the house, surely He is Praised, Glorious. [73]' (*Hud:* 71-73) Here, Allah's Command signifies good news for Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham) wife, who was an old, infertile woman married to an aged man. He *the Almighty* reminds her that He is the Creator of causes and He Alone can give without causes.

Having elaborated on the different meanings of the expression 'Allah's Command' throughout the Quran, what is its meaning in His saying: 'This is Allah's Command, which He has sent down to you' (*at-Talaq:* 5)? It refers here to the rulings and legislations ordained by Allah *Glorified is He* to judge among people. It is He *the Almighty* alone Who judges between them, and, therefore, the Command here is attributed to Him.

He *the Almighty* legislated these rulings for the believers to be followed and applied without circumvention. Thus, they must not be like the children of Israel who used to circumvent His Commands in order to evade their application to their lives. In this vein, He *the Almighty* says: 'And ask them about the town which stood by the sea; when they exceeded the limits of the *Sabbath*, when their fish came to them on the day of their *Sabbath*, appearing on the surface of the water, and on the day on which they did not keep the *Sabbath* they did not come to them; thus did We try them because they transgressed' (*al-A'raf:* 163). This is the story of the inhabitants of a city(1) nearby the sea. They were Jews for whom working on the *Sabba*th was forbidden. Allah *the Almighty* put them into a difficult test by prohibiting them from what was lawful for others. This was due to their extravagance and rebellion against His Rulings. Forbidding them from fishing the huge fish they used to see on the *Sabbath* was a test and a punishment for them, for on the other days of the week, they could not see even one fish.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Al-Jawzi mentions five different opinions regarding the specification of this city as follows:* =

They said, ‘As Allah prohibited us from fishing on the *Sabbath,* then we should contrive to detain fish for the other days by putting fishnets which fish get into and cannot get out. Therefore, we can take it out of the sea on the next day.’

They used also to build basins with an inlet and without an outlet. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* put them to this difficult test because they transgressed His Command, disobeyed Him and made lawful what was prohibited for them. Consequently, He *the Almighty* prohibited them from what was lawful for others. However, they circumvented His commands by making fishnets to hold fish.

In fact, nothing can be hidden from Allah *the Almighty*; He knows the inner secrets of the people as well as their intentions. The similitude of the above-mentioned story is the circumvention of Allah’s and Prophet Muhammad’s command that, during congregational prayer, men shall stand in the front rows, followed by children and then women. Pious men are keen on standing in the front rows in order to avoid seeing women. By contrast, some other men may manage to stand in the rear rows in order to keep looking at women, as far as possible. All such misdeeds are not hidden from Him as He is fully Aware of all the secrets and what is even more hidden than the secrets.

= - *Ibn Mas‘ud, Ibn ‘Abbas, Sa‘id ibn Jubayr say that it is Ayla, currently known as Eilat;*
- *Ibn ‘Abbas says also that it is Midyan;*
- *Qatada says that it is the Coast of Midyan;*
- *Az-Zuhri says that it is Tiberias; and*
- *Abu Zayd says that it is a village called Miqna located between Midyan and Ainouna. See Ibn Al-Jawzi, Zad Al-Masir.*

As many people may try to circumvent the rulings of marriage, divorce, the waiting period and taking a revocable divorcee back in marriage, Allah *Glorified is He* asserts in this verse that all these rulings are from Him, saying: 'This is Allah's Command…' (*at-Talaq:* 5). Accordingly, it is not allowable for anyone to circumvent or refrain from applying them. In fact, obeying His Commands with regard to the relationships between men and women helps people avoid many difficult problems which bring about hatred.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O Allah, I declare inviolable the rights of two weak ones: the orphans and women.'(1) In this Hadith, he states that no one is allowed to infringe the rights of these two vulnerable kinds of people. As a matter of fact, the woman becomes more vulnerable when she is a widow or divorcee. In both cases, she loses her husband's support. Therefore, the people should fear Allah *the Almighty* and refrain from harming her by infringing her rights. How can we stand before Him *the Almighty,* while we have harmed the women! I sternly warn against this wrongdoing. He *the Almighty* does not command the people to wrong others. Instead, He prescribes justice and good conduct. His Rulings and Legislations with regard to the marital relationship are not confined to marriage, but rather, they address the issues of divorce, the waiting period and how it is calculated. These are His commands that should not be transgressed.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The most despicable amongst persons in the eye of Allah is one who tries to fall into dispute with others (for nothing but only to display his knowledge and power of argumentation).'(2) This is because the one who confronts you with his enmity incites you to be cautious, whilst the one who shows you something other than what he really conceals is a hypocrite who wants to cheat you. His enmity for you is fierce because the outspoken opponent hides nothing from you, but when you have an enemy who shows you love while concealing enmity, this will be hard for you because he wants to cheat and trick you.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. Al-Hakim said, 'It is authentic according to the conditions of Muslim.' See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3678; see also Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 9664; An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 9104 and 9105; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 2011; and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8483 and 8488*

(2) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2457 and 7188; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 6951; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2976; and An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 5423*

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Allah's Command which He has sent down to you...' (*at-Talaq:* 5). Although the command is revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* He *the Almighty* asserts that He sent it down to the Muslims. This proves that He *the Almighty* addresses these legislations to all the Muslims as if they are revealed to each member of the *ummah*.

The Command here comes from Allah, the Creator and the Lord. The Arabic word *Rabb* (Lord) signifies the one who takes care of someone until he reaches a certain level of perfection so that he becomes able to fulfil his role in this worldly life. This can be clarified by the example of a father who educates and takes care of his son in order to qualify him for achieving a certain goal in his life. As Allah *Glorified is He* is my Lord, then He only orders me to do what serves me personally and the *ummah* in general. As a matter of fact, our obedience to Him *the Almighty* does not benefit Him, nor does our disobedience harm Him, as He is the Most Perfect and the Creator of the whole universe.

In fact, our natural disposition requires that we should fully surrender to and obey Allah's Commands. Investigating this chapter from the beginning, we find that Allah *the Almighty* mentions the term 'His Command' in the first, the third, the fourth and the fifth verse. This signifies that His Legislations concerning the waiting period and taking the revocable divorcee back are intended to facilitate the matter for the people, and to ward off any difficulty. This is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 4). This chapter also mentions Allah's Command afterwards in His saying: 'Many a town that insolently opposed the command of its Lord and His messengers We have brought sternly to account: We punished them severely' (*at-Talaq:* 8).

As He *Glorified is He* gives a warning to those who rebel against His Legislation and Command, it is suitable here that He *Glorified is He* for the fourth time, reminds the people to be pious and to fear Him, saying: 'Allah will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards of anyone who is mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 5). For the third time, He *the Almighty* reminds us about the reward of having piety; firstly, He says: ‘Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, [2] and will provide for them from an unexpected source…[3]’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3); secondly, He says: ‘Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him’ (*at-Talaq:* 4). He *the Almighty* promises the pious one that He will provide for him from where he does not expect and will make easy for him his affairs. This goodness is the worldly reward for the pious people.

As for Allah’s Reward for them in the Hereafter, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards of anyone who is mindful of Him’ (*at-Talaq:* 5). Thus, He *the Almighty* promises the pious people a great reward and also that he will remove their sins.

However, removing or wiping out the sinful deeds is conditional on one’s avoidance of the major sins like adultery and murder, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘If you shun the great sins which you are forbidden, We will do away with your small sins and cause you to enter an honourable place of entering’ (*an-Nisa’:* 31).

Avoidance of the major sins does not mean that one abstains from doing them, but rather that he should not draw nearer to the means which may lead him to commit these grave sins. Removing or wiping out the sinful deeds here means that even if one commits a punishable sin, Allah *the Almighty* protects him and shields him against His Punishment as long as he avoids the major sins. Accordingly, there are three types of sins: major sins, minor sins and slight sins. (1)

Allah *the Almighty* states here that He wipes out the minor sins, not the major ones, because wiping out our sins is conditional on our avoidance of major sins. He *Glorified is He* will not only wipe out the punishment, but He will also give them huge rewards, as He *the Almighty* says: '…and cause you to enter an honourable place of entering' (*an-Nisa':* 31); and He also says: 'For those who do good is good (reward) and more (than this)…' (*Yunus:* 26).

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(1) Linguistically, *Al-lamam* (slight sins) means approaching something. There are six opinions concerning its meaning:
- The sins and misdeeds committed by the early Muslims in the pre-Islamic period are forgiven after Islam;
- That one commits a sin and repents and never returns to it again;
- Refers to the minor sins such as gazing at women and having kisses;
- When one becomes on the verge of committing a sin and abstains from it;
- The passing thoughts;
- Unintentional gazing at women.

See Ibn Al-Jawzi, Zad Al-Masir.

It would have been sufficient if He *the Almighty* only removes their sins and protects them from His punishment. However, when the Muslim abstains from the major sins, He *the Almighty* admits him to a noble entrance which suits His Power and Benevolence. So, how can one imagine Allah's Promise in this regard?

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* states that Allah *Glorified is He* said, 'I have prepared for My pious slaves things which have never been seen by an eye, or heard by an ear, or imagined by a human being.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If you wish, you can recite this verse from the Holy Quran: "No soul knows what is kept hidden for them, of joy as a reward for what they used to do" (*as-Sajda:* 17).'(1)

In this vein, we should take into account that Allah *Glorified is He* prescribed other rulings for wiping out people's sins in order to purify them of their sins and to make matters easy for them on the Day of Judgement. These rulings include the illness and the death of the relatives. Therefore, when any one experiences any of these afflictions, one should think that He *the Almighty* wants the best for him. Such afflictions may be a reminder from Him or a way with which He *the Almighty* grants him huge rewards.

There are also many means for removing sins. Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The five (daily) prayers and the Friday Prayer to the Friday Prayer expiate whatever (minor sins) may be committed in between, so long as major sins are avoided.'(2) Thus, Allah opens many doors to Forgiveness and Mercy such as fasting on the day of *'Arafa* (the ninth day of the month of *Dhul-Hijja*). In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Fasting the day of *'Arafa* wipes away the sins.'(1) Allah *Glorified is He* also says: 'And keep up prayer in the two parts of the day and in the first hours of the night; surely good deeds take away evil deeds this is a reminder to the mindful' (*Hud:* 114).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3244; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 7310; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3197; and Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4328.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 572; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 214; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1086, Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 10290; and Ibn Khuzayma, Sahih, Hadith no. 413.*

The first and foremost good deed is believing in Allah and testifying that there is no god worthy of worship except Him as this testimony negates disbelief. Wiping out sins is done through removing it from one's record of sins or by being pardoned by Allah *the Almighty* or by diverting one away from doing the sin. All what one does is preserved and written down by the angels assigned by Him *Glorified is He* a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand (*Qaf:* 18); and His saying: 'And most surely there are keepers over you [10] Honourable recorders [11]' (*al-Infitar:* 10-11).

This is how a misdeed could be forgiven and removed; either by erasing it from the record of deeds or by keeping it while waiving its punishment through Forgiveness. In fact, piety encompasses the good deeds which do away with evil ones, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards of anyone who is mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 5). In addition, piety to Allah as regards your wife, children and household as well as treating them in a way that pleases Him, and sparing them difficulties and privation lead to the forgiveness and removal of your bad deeds.

The command to observe piety is addressed to the divorcing husband and the divorcee; the spouses should fear Allah *the Almighty* regarding the rulings of taking the revocable divorcee back in marriage and counting the days of the waiting period. Further, the wife should not lie about her menstrual period or pregnancy to take advantage of inheritance, for example. They are all addressed by His saying: 'Allah will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards of anyone who is mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 5), to be encouraged to observe piety in order to receive a big reward in return.

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(1) *Another Hadith was related by Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Al-Fadl Ibn 'Abbas that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said 'Whosoever preserves his tongue, his hearing and his sight on the day of 'Arafa, Allah forgives his sins from that day of 'Arafa to the next year's 'Arafa day.' See Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 3490.*

Thus, after the removal of the evil deeds and punishment, there comes the big reward, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'For those who do good is good (reward) and more (than this)…' (*Yunus:* 26). The reward is made greater by multiplying one's good deeds ten to seven hundred times over, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly' (*al-An'am:* 160). This represents the absolute Mercy and Bounty of Allah *the Almighty*; hence the Hadith states: 'Indeed, your Lord is the Most Merciful; if someone intends to do a good deed, but does not do it, the reward of one good deed is recorded for him, and if someone intends to do a good deed and also does it, ten to seven hundred good deeds are recorded for him. If someone intends to do a misdeed, but does not commit it, one good deed is recorded for him, but if he committed that, it is recorded or removed. Allah does not put to destruction anyone except he who is doomed to destruction.'(1)

But why is it that Allah *the Almighty* gives us rewards in return for doing good and observing piety? Is it not better to do good deeds and have piety without seeking any reward? By giving us rewards, He *Glorified is He* stimulates us to do good deeds, and such deeds will be a source of benefit to others. In pursuit of a greater reward, the one doing the good deed will be careful to have a sincere intention. In fact, most of the people like to get rewards for their deeds, and the greater the reward is, the harder they work. Such is the human nature.

Only few people do the good for the good itself out of love, and that because Allah *the Almighty* is worthy of love and obedience. Thus, he who obeys Him *Glorified is He* desiring to enjoy the delights of paradise will be admitted to it, and he who obeys Him because He is worthy of obedience will be granted the delight of looking upon His Glorious Countenance. To the same meaning, Rabi‘a Al-‘Adawiyya (1) puts it lyrically: ‘All of them worship Allah for fear of hell, and see that salvation is a great reward. I am not one of them; I seek nothing at the expense of my love for Allah.’ She also said, ‘O Allah! If I worship You for fear of hell, burn me in hell and if I worship You in hope of paradise, exclude me from paradise. I only worship You because You are worthy of worship.’

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 2519; An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 7623 and 11801; Abu 'Uwana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 187; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir; and Ibn Manda, Tawhid, Hadith no. 190.*

Hence, it is but your love, obedience, and piety to Allah *the Almighty* which elevate you in the ranks of faith, not your love for rewards and recompense. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Whoever possesses the following three qualities will have the sweetness (delight) of faith (1): The one to whom Allah and His Messenger become dearer than anything else; (2) Who loves a person and he loves him only for Allah’s sake; (3) Who hates to revert to disbelief as he hates to be thrown into the Fire.’(2) Further, in a Qudsi Hadith, Allah *Glorified is He* said: ‘Even if I did not create Paradise and Hell, would I not be worthy of worship?’

Allah *Glorified is He* is Greater than anything is and meeting with Him is the greatest of all the rewards, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘…therefore whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and not join anyone in the service of his Lord’ (*al-Kahf:* 110). Here, He does not say: ‘Whoever hopes to get the Reward of His Lord, or the Delight of His Lord or to be admitted to Paradise,’ for the true believer does not aim at delight but hopes to meet His Lord, the rovider of Blessings.

The reward could also be multiplied by changing evil deeds into good ones, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘Except him who repents and believes and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful’ (*al-Furqan:* 70). Thus, the good deed could be multiplied ten times up to seven hundred times, whereas the evil deed is recorded as one only. Good deeds then ought to be manifold unlike the evil ones, and yet Allah *the Almighty* will change these few evil deeds into good ones. This is also a manifestation of His Exceeding Favour and Bounty and that He does not want to punish His servants as they are His creation. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Why should Allah chastise you if you are grateful and believe? And Allah is the Multiplier of rewards, All Knowing’ (*an-Nisa’:* 147).

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(1) *Rabi‘a Bint Isma‘il Al-‘Adawiyya Al-Qaysiyya Al-Basriyya, Umm Al-Khair, a famous female Muslim saint. She was born in Basra and known for her devotion and piety. She used to compose poetry and passed away in Jerusalem in 135 A.H.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 16, 21and 6914; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 174 and 175; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan Hadith no. 2624; and An- Nasa‘i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4987 and 4988.*

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَسۡكِنُوهُنَّ مِنۡ حَيۡثُ سَكَنتُم مِّن وُجۡدِكُمۡ وَلَا تُضَآرُّوهُنَّ لِتُضَيِّقُواْ عَلَيۡهِنَّۚ وَإِن كُنَّ
أُوْلَٰتِ حَمۡلٖ فَأَنفِقُواْ عَلَيۡهِنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَضَعۡنَ حَمۡلَهُنَّۚ فَإِنۡ أَرۡضَعۡنَ لَكُمۡ فَـَٔاتُوهُنَّ
أُجُورَهُنَّ وَأۡتَمِرُواْ بَيۡنَكُم بِمَعۡرُوفٖۖ وَإِن تَعَاسَرۡتُمۡ فَسَتُرۡضِعُ لَهُۥٓ أُخۡرَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

House the wives you are divorcing according to your means, wherever you house yourselves, and do not harass them so as to make their lives difficult. If they are pregnant, maintain them until they are delivered of their burdens; if they suckle your infants, pay them for it. Consult together in a good way – if you make difficulties for one another, another woman may suckle the child for the father [6] (The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 6)

Allah *Glorified is He* regulates the rights of the divorcee in respect of housing and maintenance allowance in a way that is never done in any other religion or legislation. His Legislation considers the conditions of the woman with regard to revocable and irrevocable divorce, whether minor or major. He also regulates the rights of the pregnant divorcee because she has a prior right to be cared for and her child is entitled to be breastfed at his father’s expense. He also enjoins both spouses, seeking Allah’s Pleasure, to consult and confer with one another for the benefit of their baby.

In fact, Islam guards the rights of a divorcee on her husband, irrespective of the case of divorce. If she is divorced revocably, she becomes entitled to stay in the marital house and to receive maintenance allowance, hoping that this would bring them together and spur the husband to take his wife back.

In doing so, they will get their life back on track and provide a loving atmosphere for their children.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* forbids the husband to expel his revocably divorced wife, leaving her homeless or sending her to her family's house, except in case of open indecency which leaves no room for doubt or ambiguity. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: '…be mindful of Allah, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes – nor should they themselves leave – unless they commit a flagrant indecency. These are the limits set by Allah – whoever oversteps Allah's limits wrongs his own soul…' (*at-Talaq:* 1). But what about the divorcee's right when her waiting period is over or when she is irrevocably divorced? In both cases, her husband can only take her back with a new contract and a new bride-gift. Until it happens, she has the right to housing, as Allah *Glorified is He* enjoins the husbands to 'house' the irrevocably divorced women who are neither pregnant nor in the waiting period. Were housing to be at the same place with the husband, the expression: 'House the wives…' (*at-Talaq:* 6) would not be used.

Besides, the Arabic word *as-sakan* (housing) connotes serenity and peace of mind, that is, to provide a safe house where one can rest and feel comfortable. This word is also used elsewhere in His saying: 'And We said: O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden…' (*al-Baqara:* 35). Thus, the word 'house' denotes two elements: peace and serenity. In the absence of either element, the place where one resides cannot be called 'a house'. It provides stability and allows one to eat freely and comfortably. Thus, your true house is the place where you find serenity, comfort, privacy, and self-stability not shared by anyone.

As for Allah's saying: 'Wherever you house yourselves…' (*at-Talaq:* 6), the Arabic preposition *min* (of) is used to mean that the husbands should lodge their divorcees in any of their houses. Accordingly, Qatada said, 'If the husband has but one house, he should let her inhabit one of its parts.'(1) Such is the case with the verse in which Allah *the Almighty* orders the Muslims to lower their gaze, saying: 'Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks…' (*al-Furqan:* 30). Here, the same preposition is used to imply that in some cases one is not to lower his gaze, as in the case of a judge deciding on a lawsuit and one of its parties is a woman.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, At-Tabari mentions this opinion as adopted by Sa'id ibn Jubayr, who said, 'If you cannot find but a corner of your house, let her dwell in it.' In their Tafsirs, Ibn Kathir and Ash-Shawkani ascribe this opinion to Qatada. See Ash-Shawkani, Fath Al-Qadir, 7/246.*

If it is the right of the divorcee to have a serene and comfortable house for herself and her children, one's wife also has such right, for Allah *the Almighty* orders the husbands to treat their wives kindly, saying: '…and treat them kindly…' (*an-Nisa':* 19). This entails offering them dwellings, without which they cannot protect themselves from people's gazes and manage their affairs freely.

The house should be equipped with the requirements of the age and have the basic necessities. However, this does not mean that a wife should burden her husband with unbearable demands that he cannot afford. For this reason, He *the Almighty* says: '…according to your means, wherever you house yourselves…' (*at-Talaq:* 6). This points out that the house is to be in proportion to his financial status so that she accepts to inhabit it and not find it repulsive.

In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* directs us to offer the housing according to one's financial abilities, saying: '…according to your means…' (*at-Talaq:* 6). A poor man builds a humble dwelling, whereas a wealthy man builds a large mansion. So, He *the Almighty* made housing obligatory for the divorcee according to the husband's means and to the extent of his ability. In the case of a rich husband, it is not proper that he houses his wife in a humble house that does not suit his financial abilities.

The Quranic restrictive phrase: '…according to your means…' (*at-Talaq:* 6) suggests a miraculous solution to many social problems between the spouses. It means that if the husband is rich, he should give housing and maintenance allowance in abundance and if he is poor, then he should provide her to the extent he can afford. So, the house should be in good condition according to what is recognised to be fair and according to the husband's financial status; if he is rich, he should give housing and maintenance allowance in abundance and if he is poor, then to the extent he can afford.

The same is the case with maintenance allowance; the rich husband should spend according to his means and so should the poor one, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and make provision for them, the wealthy according to his means and the straitened in circumstances according to his means, a provision according to usage; (this is) a duty on the doers of good (to others)' (*al-Baqara:* 236). The rich person has abundant means of provision unlike the poor one and according to the capability of each one, the compensation, housing, and maintenance will be evaluated.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah does not burden a soul with something that it cannot afford' (*al-Baqara:* 286). Therefore, it should be noted that Allah's Obligations are within one's ability and he can bear them. Then, He *the Almighty* commands the husbands, saying: '…and do not harass them so as to make their lives difficult' (*at-Talaq:* 6). Here, the Arabic word *daarra* (to harass) connotes intending to inflict harm on the woman. Whereas another word of the same root could have been used, but it would not convey the meaning of deliberation since the husband may do something with good intention, but it turns out to be harmful to his wife. The word in the verse, however, implies intentional harm done to the woman after exerting effort and spending money to achieve this purpose. This intentional harm has many forms which are intended, for example, to get a ransom from the woman or to waive her right to stay in his house. Such harms are perpetrated by those who lack the proper Islamic manners.

Intentional harm can have another form where the husband divorces his wife and takes her back in marriage when there are only two days left before her waiting period is over. He intends to go beyond Allah's Limits by exerting every possible effort to deprive the woman of her rights, being negligent of the fact that He *the Almighty* watches over him.

Thus, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying, 'Do not harm your wives verbally or physically during their stay in the marital house after divorce in order to drive them out before the end of the waiting period as this is forbidden.' That is why, He *the Almighty* says: 'Do not drive them out of their homes – nor should they themselves leave' (*at-Talaq:* 1). Thus, He *the Almighty* forbids the husbands from expelling their wives and likewise forbids the wives from leaving the house. In addition, He commands the husband to house the divorcee in a way that does not cause difficulty or pain for her.

So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and do not harass them so as to make their lives difficult' (*at-Talaq:* 6), the husbands are ordered to observe Allah's Limits as regards their divorcees who stay with them in their houses and not to force them to waive any of their rights by guile and skill.

The rights of the revocably divorced include housing and maintenance allowance. The dwelling provided for the divorcee should be, according to the husband's means, akin to the one which he inhabits, even if he let her reside in one of the rooms of the house. Yet, it is forbidden to harm the divorcee, even verbally, to make her leave the house or discharge their right to maintenance allowance. Instead, the husbands should treat them kindly even during their waiting period and remember Allah's Commandments in this regard. This requires nobility, mercy, kind treatment, and commitment to Allah's Orders and Limits. Having these qualities prevents the intentional harm done to the divorcee which can take the form of either restraining them in the house or harsh treatment.

In fact, divorce cases are always surrounded by quarrels, rage, guile and plotting. To cure this with something above the authority of man-made laws, Allah *Glorified is He* kindly and mercifully takes the people to the springs of affection and kindness which gush forth in their hearts through the touches of piety and hope that He *the Almighty* facilitates their matter and grants them a way out of their difficulty. That is why He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, [2] and will provide for them from an unexpected source…[3]' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3); and also says: 'Allah will wipe out the sinful deeds and increase the rewards of anyone who is mindful of Him' (*at-Talaq:* 5). In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Whoever causes harm, Allah harms him, and whoever causes hardship to others, Allah will punish him in the same way.'(1) Further, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'I heard Prophet Muhammad

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Qays Al-Ansari Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad Hadith no. 15793, At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1940; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3637; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 22342; and Al-Baghawi, Mu'jam As-Sahaba, Hadith no. 1965.*

peace and blessings be upon him saying, "Cursed are those who harm a believer, or plot to do so"; and he also said, "Cursed are those who harm a believer or deceive him."'(1)

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'If they are pregnant, maintain them until they are delivered of their burdens' (*at-Talaq:* 6). The divorced woman could be pregnant, and to assert her right here a special part of the verse is assigned to address this issue. Allah, the Creator of mankind and the All Knowing of their intentions, knows that some men will withhold maintenance allowance from their divorced pregnant women in spite of their conceiving of their children. The waiting period of the pregnant divorcee extends to birth giving as He *the Almighty* says: 'The waiting period of those who are pregnant will be until they deliver their burden…' (*at-Talaq:* 4). If she is divorced in the first month of pregnancy, her husband will be obliged to maintain her until she delivers her baby by which her waiting period ends.

On talking about the housing rights, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the divorced women in general but specifies maintenance allowance as a right for the pregnant ones. Thus, some scholars maintain that He *Glorified is He* mentioned the right to housing absolutely but restricted maintenance to the pregnant, implying that an irrevocably divorced woman has no right to maintenance allowance. This is evidenced by the Prophetic Hadith narrated by Fatima Bint Qays(2) who said: 'My husband, Abu 'Amr ibn Hafs, sent 'Ayyish ibn Abu Rabi'a to convey to me the news of my divorce, and he also sent with him five Sa's(3) of dates and five Sa‘s of barley. I said, ‘Is there no maintenance allowance for me but only this, and I cannot even spend my waiting period in your house?’ He said, ‘No.’ She said, ‘I dressed myself and came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who asked, “How many pronouncements of divorce have been made for you?” I said, Three. He said, “What he (‘Ayyish ibn Abu Rabi‘a) had stated was true. There is no maintenance allowance for you. Spend the waiting period in the house of your cousin, Ibn Umm Maktum. He is blind and you can put off your garment in his presence. When you have spent your waiting period, you inform me.”’(1) This woman was irrevocably divorced and accordingly she has no housing nor maintenance rights. Imam Abu Hanifa, though, opined that she has the right to housing and maintenance because depriving her of such rights will cause her harm, which is prohibited by Allah’s saying: ‘…and do not harass them so as to make their lives difficult’ (*at-Talaq:* 6).

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(1) *This Hadith isnarrated by At-Tirmidhi who said, 'This is Hadith Gharib.' Al-Albani said it is a weak Hadith and so said Abu Bakr Al-Mawruzi. Al-Bazzar narrated it through a very long narration: 'Flesh which has grown out of what is unlawful will not enter paradise and the one who treats his slaves badly will not enter paradise and cursed are those who harm a believer or deceive him.' See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1941; Al-Maruzi, Musnad Abu Bakr, Hadith no. 100; and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 43*

(2) *Fatima Bint Qays is the sister of Ad-Dahak ibn Qays the Qurashi, Al-Fihri, one of the early beautiful wise immigrants. She solely narrated the long story of the false Messiah and the Shura (consultative) council was held at her house when 'Umar was killed. Ibn Sa'd said, 'Her mother is Umayma Bint Rabi'a of Bani Kinan.' See Ibn Sa'd, At-Tabaqat, 8/200; and Ibn Al-Athir, Usd Al-Ghaba, 3/400*

(3) Sa's is the plural of Saa', which is a unit of measure which equals four Mudds. A Mudd, however, is the amount that can be scooped up when one puts his hands together. Major scholars in Saudi Arabia hold that Saa' is equal to 2.6 kg on the basis that Mudd,=

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of the right of the infant, after the woman gives birth to him and her maintenance ceases, obliging the husband to pay for his breastfeeding: ‘If they suckle your infants, pay them for it’ (*at-Talaq:* 6). It is as if He *Glorified is He* gives the woman that right by virtue of the infant, even though she is his mother and she is going to breastfeed him anyway. However, He prescribes a payment to her for breastfeeding him. Moreover, He *the Almighty* creates milk in his mother’s breast to feed him whenever he is hungry until he feels satisfied. Though the infant is her own child and milk is Divinely created in her breasts, her ex-husband is required to pay for the breastfeeding of his infant. These verses point out the responsibilities of the husband towards his child’s breastfeeding and maintenance after the period of breastfeeding which may extend to two whole years, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘And the mothers should suckle their children for two whole years for him who desires to make complete the time of suckling; and

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= in their view, equals 650 gm. It is known that Mudd differs from one to another according to the size of his hands.

(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Fatima bint Qays Allah be pleased with her. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3786; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1153; An-Nasa‘i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3418; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 27361; and An-Nasa‘i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra. Hadith no. 5581.*

their maintenance and their clothing must be – borne by the father according to usage; no soul shall have imposed upon it a duty but to the extent of its capacity; neither shall a mother be made to suffer harm on account of her child, nor a father on account of his child…' (*al-Baqara:* 233). Out of His Favour on the people, He *the Almighty* addresses the matter of suckling the infants after their mothers give birth to them. Considering the fact that divorce results in contention between the man and the woman, Allah, the Most Merciful, and the All Knowing of His creation, wants to protect the fruit of marriage, that is, the children. He orders us not to let the dispute between the spouses harm the infant. Had there been no divorce, a husband would have been only responsible for providing for the newborn baby according to what is commonly accepted. But in the case of the divorced wife, Allah *the Almighty* obliges the husband to pay for the baby's breastfeeding. If there is no baby, such a divorcee will not be entitled to receive such payment.

Some people mistakenly inferred that maintenance and clothing are obligatory for the divorced women in general, but only the divorced women who breastfeed their children are intended. A divorcee may or may not breastfeed her baby. In case she suckles her baby, its father must pay her in return for suckling, by mutual agreement. If she agrees to breastfeed her baby for an appropriate payment, then the father should not bring a wet nurse. He is rather required to fully pay for her suckling and other forms of maintenance, for she has a prior right to her baby and feels more empathy for it than any wet nurse. Thus, an irrevocably divorced woman has the choice to breastfeed her baby or not after giving birth to it. It should be noted that suckling it with colostrum, the first milk produced in the early days of breastfeeding, is very important for the babies. On suckling it, she becomes entitled to a proper payment by an agreement with its father.

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If they suckle your infants, pay them for it' (*at-Talaq:* 6). This means that the payment for breastfeeding, clothing and maintenance is to be incurred by the divorcing husband because unpaid breastfeeding is only obligatory on a woman joined in marriage to her husband. However, because her waiting period ends after childbirth, the father is responsible for paying her for suckling his infant. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* calls upon the man and the woman to confer among themselves concerning the issue of breastfeeding their baby and other affairs relating to their children and what suits them best, saying: ‘Consult together in a good way’ (*at-Talaq:* 6).

Allah *Glorified is He* spurs both spouses to confer and deliberate the matter among themselves with kindness, decency, understanding, and forbearance. The husband should not deny his responsibility and the wife should not try to put the husband into difficulty and hardship. They should consult with each other to reach an agreement on a reasonable payment, without excessiveness nor negligence, neither harming nor reciprocating harm, as stated in Allah’s saying: ‘…neither shall a mother be made to suffer harm on account of her child, nor a father on account of his child…’ (*al-Baqara:* 233). Both spouses are ordered to enjoin one another to have tolerance, forbearance, and kindness. The husband is to be kind to his wife and she is to be obedient to him. Every one of them should do good as much as he can to the other; the favour of the woman is to breastfeed her child and that of the man is to offer her maintenance in return, with the overriding concern being the benefit of the child and protecting him from harm.

Justice alone is hard and may leave hard feelings, but graciousness eliminates rancour, contention, and hatred. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* commands the spouses, saying: ‘So do not forget to be generous towards one another: Allah sees what you do’ (*al-Baqara:* 237).

Disputes happen when everyone deems himself the rightful owner, and circumstances may also tempt both parties. Upholding justice will lead humanity to the ultimate consent, but with graciousness there will be satisfaction and the matter will be settled.

Graciousness implies that everyone should waive his right to settle the issue. Allah *the Almighty* prescribes rights and legislates what guarantees will be fulfilled, but this is not to forbid graciousness between people. In most cases, the problem lies in the fact that excuses, obstinacy, dissention, and contention are what prevail among people, except those whom Allah *the Almighty* has excluded. Disagreement on the payment for breastfeeding and maintenance is possible if the husband does not intend to pay or if the payment is too little to suffice the baby and its mother. It may also be on the part of the divorcee by exceeding in her recompense for breastfeeding, burdening the husband with what he cannot afford, and causing him difficulty. It could be the husband who exceeds the limit by refusing to pay for his wife. Regarding this case, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…if you make difficulties for one another…' (*at-Talaq:* 6). Difficulty here is the opposite of ease and tolerance.

So, how could the husband deal with the excessiveness of the divorcee in her demands? He is allowed to hire a wet nurse to suckle his infant. In fact, Allah's saying: '…if you make difficulties for one another, another woman may suckle the child for the father' (*at-Talaq:* 6) is miraculous; it is as though He *Glorified is He* draws the woman's attention to the fact that breastfeeding is not limited to her. Therefore, if she does not suckle her baby with kindness and goodness, its father can hire another woman to take up the job.

Allah's saying: '…another woman may suckle the child for the father' (*at-Talaq:* 6) notifies the woman that there is another solution in which she is not involved and which will result in her baby being taken away from her to be breastfed and embraced by another woman. The divorcee here is the one to be blamed because she is required to be lenient with her ex-husband and not to burden or restrain him. In any case, he is to bear the payment and, thus, the divorcee should not be obstinate with him. Instead, she should be content whether he pays little or much; otherwise another woman will suckle for him.

She is also required to breastfeed her child which costs her nothing, as Allah creates milk in her breasts without her having a hand in that except for consuming food to have enough of it for her baby. But what if the baby rejects breastfeeding from another woman? In this case, his mother is to be forced to nurse him in order that he not is harmed and she becomes entitled to an appropriate payment.

Further, the etiquettes of breastfeeding are stated in Allah's saying: '…and if you wish to engage a wet nurse for your children, there is no blame on you so long as you pay what you promised for according to usage…' (*al-Baqara:* 233). Hence, if they wish to suckle their children by a wet nurse, there shall be no blame on them. This wet nurse needs to feel the generosity of the father so as to suckle the child honestly and take care of it earnestly.

The husband should not deceive the community by pretending to implement Allah's Laws with regard to breastfeeding, since He *Glorified is He* is Well Aware of his intentions, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…and be careful of (your duty to) Allah and know that Allah sees what you do' (*al-Baqara:* 233). You find that whenever this father sees his baby's nurse, he welcomes her warmly and claims to be spending and paying her dues in full, while this is not the case in reality. He should pay attention to the fact that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Whom he deals with and not the society.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لِيُنفِقْ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّن سَعَتِهِۦ ۖ وَمَن قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُۥ فَلْيُنفِقْ مِمَّآ ءَاتَىٰهُ
ٱللَّهُ ۚ لَا يُكَلِّفُ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَآ ءَاتَىٰهَا ۚ سَيَجْعَلُ ٱللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا ٧

And let the wealthy man spend according to his wealth.
But let him whose provision is restricted spend according
to what God has given him: God does not burden any
soul with more than He has given it – after hardship,
God will bring ease [7] (The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 7)

The human being should improve his means of provision and make a good income to suffice him and those under his care, and to give in charity. The difference between the believer and the disbeliever as regards seeking provision is that the disbeliever works to earn sufficient money for him and his dependents only, whereas the believer, in addition to this, gives of what he has to those who are unable to work for the sake of Allah *the Almighty*.

He *Glorified is He* does not stimulate the human being to earn money for himself alone; rather; He spurs him to multiply his sources of income to suffice himself and those under his care, extending his benefit to all circles around him. Such circles are mentioned in Prophet Muhammad's order to maintain yourself, your child, your household, your wife and your servant.

So long as Allah *Glorified is He* specifies for us the reasons for the continuity of life and thus established the way of going about in the spacious sides of the earth to seek the provision, He *Glorified is He* also established the honorary means to preserve the species. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* made the endeavour of someone return to his offspring.

As one of His signs, Allah *Glorified is He* instils within everyone the instinct of love and affection, and we see such instinct firmly established in the hearts of parents. Therefore, we see the father striving in this worldly life to sustain himself and his children. When someone spares no effort to gain wealth, there may come the time when his gains suffice him for the rest of his life because he worked earnestly and honestly, and accordingly Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed upon him abundant provision. Other people strive and exert themselves to obtain money for their children and grandchildren, and thus we find that those who try their best to get their provision not only get benefit for themselves, but for the society in its entirety as well.

Allah *Glorified is He* orders every Muslim to take the responsibility of spending on the nearest circle to him so that everyone in life bears the responsibility for a part of the society, such as his parents and relatives. He *Glorified is He* even orders us to deem the helpless orphans a common responsibility upon the society as a whole, whether there is a blood relationship or not, since we are ordered to take care of them as our own relatives.

It should be noted that their provision could be directed to them through you. One may make a large sum of money, but he neither spends it nor benefits from it. Thereby, it is not really his provision, for he only keeps it well guarded without spending a penny of it. If a servant considers that he does you a favour, you would say, 'You only serve yourself and your children as you serve me to provide for yourself and for them, whereas I am the one who works hard to give you money to spend on your family.' So, everyone strives and exerts himself to make money and spend on his children. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah amplifies and straitens the means of subsistence for whom He pleases' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26). So, He is the One Who restricts one's provision or gives him in proportion to his needs.

With regard to the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'But let him whose provision is restricted spend according to what Allah has given him…' (*at-Talaq:* 7), it means that He *the Almighty* may provide but with restriction. This verse obliges the person, whether rich or poor, to spend according to his means. The letter '*Lam*' at the beginning of the Arabic word *liunfiq* (let him spend) is an imperative prefix marked by a *kasra.*(1) Its original diacritical marker is *sukun* (a marker of the jussive case), but it is marked by *kasra* for being at the beginning of a sentence which in Arabic cannot begin with *sukun*. In other positions of the sentence, however, it is to be marked by *sukun* as in His saying: ‘But let him whose provision is restricted spend according to what Allah has given him’ (*at-Talaq:* 7). He *Glorified is He* enjoins people to spend out of their wealth in order to promote social solidarity and improve the economic climate, for parsimonious attitudes lead to the opposite consequences.

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(1) Kasra: is a mark for words in the genitive case, which goes below the end of a word and is pronounced as a short 'i'.

So long as He *Glorified is He* orders us to spend out of our wealth, we need to know what to spend and who is worthy of charity. In this connection, Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated: ‘A man said, “Messenger of Allah, I have a dinar.” He said, “Spend it on yourself.” The man said, “I have another.” He said, “Spend it on your child.” The man said, “I have another.” He said, “Spend it on your wife.” He said, “I have another.” He said, “Spend it on your servant.” The man said, “I have another.” He said, “On whomever you see fit.”’(1) Whenever Abu Hurayra narrated this Hadith, he used to say, ‘Your child asks, “Spend on me, on whom can I rely?” Your wife says, “Spend on me or divorce me.” Your slave says, “Spend on me or sell me.”’(2) Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They ask you as to what they should spend. Say: Whatever wealth you spend, it is for the parents and the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, and whatever good you do, Allah surely knows it’ (*al-Baqara:* 215).

We should spend out of the good things Allah *the Almighty* has given us, and those meant for spending on are one’s closest relatives. This is so because He *the Almighty* wants to make the believer responsible for his own relatives so that such circles stick together. Accordingly, the responsibility of maintaining the welfare of the society is shared by all its members. Besides, spending constitutes a kind of protection for one’s household. For example, my circle includes my parents and relatives and so does everyone’s circle, therefore, the circles get wider to encompass even the orphans and the destitute. Thus, if we take into consideration the circles of parents and relatives and what they have of the orphans and the needy, we will find that the joined circles encompass all the poor and that the needs of the society are borne by all of its members, leaving no one unable to work or deprived of his needs.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 3337; Ahmad, Musnad, 2/251 and 471; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1619; An-Nasa’i, Sunnan, 5/62; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 1/415; and Al-Bayhaqi, Sunnan, 7/466*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. They asked him, ‘Is it of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad or is it your own saying?’ He said: ‘It is my own saying.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 7423.*

Spending denotes giving out of your possessions by means of selling, or giving a gift or grant. If one would like to open the door of righteousness with Allah *the Almighty* he should broaden the circle of spending and he will find that righteousness has occupied a great deal of his spending, given that the giver spends on behalf of Allah *the Almighty*. He *Glorified is He* brought the human being into existence and guaranteed his sustenance. With you spending out on those under your care and by helping those whom you are not obliged to spend on, you draw near to Allah *the Almighty*. You need to strive in this worldly life so as to make money which suffices you and your dependents; otherwise you will find no money to cover your expenses. Every Muslim should take upon himself the responsibility of spending on his closest circle in order that everyone in this life assumes the responsibility of a part of the society to whom he is related by blood, such as parents and relatives.

The man is required to work hard and to do his best to earn a living from lawful and good sources, given the fact that it is prohibited to get money from unlawful sources. The person who spends out is either a rich one to whom Allah *Glorified is He* granted an abundance of wealth, or one whose provision is straitened. Spending according to one's means suits the previous verse in which He *the Almighty* says: 'House the wives you are divorcing according to your means, wherever you house yourselves, and do not harass them so as to make their lives difficult. If they are pregnant, maintain them until they are delivered of their burdens…' (*at-Talaq:* 6).

Allah *Glorified is He* does not want the woman to exceed the limit in her demand for maintenance, imposing on the husband that which he cannot afford and what is beyond his capacity and provision. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* makes clear that His Command to the man to provide maintenance is to be related to what he has of wealth and whether he is rich or poor. Maintenance, then, should be in accordance with the financial status of the husband; if he is rich, he should give in a way befitting to what Allah *the Almighty* has given him; and if he is poor, then he should give according to his means, as He *the Almighty* says: '…and make provision for them, the wealthy according to his means and the straitened in circumstances according to his means' (*al-Baqara:* 236).

You should consider that provision is broadened by Allah *the Almighty*. However, He *the Almighty* requires you to broaden your means of obtaining provision and He will increase your provision in proportion to how expansive your sources are. 'The rich' refers to the one who has multiplied his sources of provision, whereas the 'straitened' refers to someone with a limited provision. Thus, spending out should be in accordance with one's financial state, whether he is rich or poor.

Allah *Glorified is He* is Limitless and All Knowing and His Dominion is boundless and His Provision is endless. Hence, one should never think that His Dominion will fall short of providing for the man who divorced his wife or for the divorced woman. Given that Allah *Glorified is He* allows divorce as a way out when dissention between spouses is at its utmost. At that point, He will give both spouses in abundance so that the husband spends on his divorcee and his infant of what He *the Almighty* has given him. Further, the wife should be sure that He *Glorified is He* will provide for her amply if she fears Him and is not excessive in the material demands she asks for herself and her infant. He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah amplifies and straitens the means of subsistence for whom He pleases' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26) and He also says: 'Surely your Lord makes plentiful the means of subsistence for whom He pleases and He straitens (them); surely He is ever Aware of, Seeing His servants' (*al-Isra':* 30).

He *Glorified is He* Whose Depositories never run out, provides for His creation in a measured amount; neither does He extend it completely nor restrict it completely. Instead, He extends provision to some people and restricts it to others so that the universe works in harmony. Were He *Glorified is He* to amplify it to all people abundantly, they would dispense with and abandon each other, leading to the corruption of their lives. There is a profound Divine wisdom behind this. Thereby, one has but to be content with whatever is destined for him and to lead a lifestyle in proportion to what is provided for him, as He *the Almighty* says: 'But let him whose provision is restricted spend according to what Allah has given him' (*at-Talaq:* 7).

Here, we find that Allah *Glorified is He* attributed the abundant provision to the wealthy person, whereas in the case of the restricted one, He *Glorified is He* states that this is what He has given him. It is as though He *Glorified is He* represents and views wealth as a result of the human being's effort in spite of the fact that what he gains through his own effort is conferred to him by Allah *the Almighty*.

Furthermore, His saying: 'But let him whose provision is restricted' (*at-Talaq:* 7) draws the attention of the divorcee to the fact that if her divorcing husband cannot afford her demands, then it is not his fault; it is only what Allah *the Almighty* destined for him of provision. Using the passive form 'is restricted' here signifies that the husband has no hand in the matter of extending or restricting provision. Rather, this is purely a gift from Allah, and restraining one's provision is something predestined by Him *Glorified is He*.

In fact, the man only spends of what Allah *Glorified is He* has given him and provided for him; He *Glorified is He* decides whether he should be rich or poor, and thereby a father is required to spend out on the nursing mother, whom he divorced, according to his capability. However, one whose provision is restricted should only spend according to his means, since Allah *the Almighty* does not burden a person to maintain those under his care except in accordance with what He has given him. This depends on whether the person is rich or poor because He *Glorified is He* does not charge a soul except according to what He has given it of ability and finances. In the case of disagreement, the judge evaluates the maintenance according to the husband's income and wealth.

This ruling considers the condition of the poverty-stricken, if he is truthful, and spurs himself to exert himself to spend out in proportion to his means. 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* once asked about the condition of Abu 'Ubayda. He was told that he wore the coarsest of attire and ate the most frugal food. Thereby, 'Umar sent him one thousand *dinars*. On asking his messenger what Abu 'Ubayda did with them, he told him that he dressed himself in fine clothes and ate good food. Then, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'May Allah have mercy upon him! He interpreted this verse: "And let the wealthy man spend according to his wealth. But let him whose provision is restricted spend according to what Allah has given him…" (*at-Talaq:* 7).'(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti attributes this Hadith to Ibn Jarir on the authority of Abu Senan. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, and Jame' Al-Ahadith, Hadith no. 4657; and At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 34666.*

Abu Malik Al-Ash‘ari narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There were three people; one of them had ten *dinars,* so he gave a *dinar* in charity; the second one had ten *Uqiyyas* (One *Uqiyya* is equal to 40 *Dirhams)* so he gave an *Uqiyya* in charity, and the third one had one hundred *Uqiyyas,* so he gave ten *Uqiyyas* in charity.’(1) He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘They will be equal in reward, for each gave the tenth of his money in charity.’ Hence, the poor person is not to be charged the same as the rich, and that is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah does not burden any soul with more than He has given it…’ (*at-Talaq:* 7). Thus, the one to whom Allah *the Almighty* extends the provision should spend out bountifully on housing, maintenance and breastfeeding payment, but the poverty-stricken should spend to the extent he can afford and is not to be blamed.

As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* charges people only with what is within their capacity and ability. He *Glorified is He* does not impose upon a soul a duty but to the extent of its ability. This is presented in the fact that He *Glorified is He* gives a concession when the duty is beyond one’s capacity. For example, He gives the order to the husbands to spend, saying: ‘And let the wealthy man spend…’ (*at-Talaq:* 7) and there comes the concession in the same verse: ‘…according to his ability…’ (*at-Talaq:* 7). Duties are always related to capacity and ability; so He *the Almighty* guides the one who is straitened to a way out of dissentions and disputes, laying down the principle: ‘Allah does not burden any soul with more than He has given it…’ (*at-Talaq:* 7).

Thus, no one should think that He *the Almighty* imposes duties upon the human being to burden him; for it is the human being who burdens himself. Man should spend according to his income; he should not borrow except at times of dire need, not in order to lead a luxurious life. Consider your income and live according to it, without embezzling or bribing, assuming that this is what Allah *the Almighty* has given you. For example, if you earn 100 L.E, then live in proportion to it so that your expenses equal your income because He

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tabarani on the authority of Abu Malik Al-Ash‘ari. Al-Albani graded it as a weak Hadith. See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 3361, and Mu‘jam Ash-Shamiyyin, Hadith no. 1662; Al-Albani, As-Silsila Ad-Da‘ifa, Hadith no. 3449, and Da‘if Al-Jami‘, Hadith no. 2588*

the Almighty does not charge you except with what He has given you. Accordingly, we should suffice ourselves to what is given to us and to seek only what He made lawful to us, avoiding stealing or plunder. So, we should take and benefit from that which He made lawful in order that He will help us satisfy our needs and manage our affairs. Living according to Allah's Way will rid you of the unforeseen misfortunes of life which require you to spend more than what He has given to you. For example, if you enter the market with a limited amount of money and see many good things, but you can only buy a few things, He *the Almighty* beautifies for you what is within your means and keeps you away from what you cannot afford because He does not charge a soul except with what He has given it and does not arouse one's desire for something beyond his limits.

Allah *Glorified is He* assures us, saying: '…after hardship, Allah will bring ease' (*at-Talaq:* 7). Therefore, as for the one whose provision is restricted, He *the Almighty* will make things easy for him and will change his misery into ease and comfort. Ibn Mas'ud *Allah be pleased with him* used to say, 'I do not care on which condition I will find my household; for if they are in difficulty, I will expect ease.'(1)

After hardship comes ease; and after straitened circumstances comes comfort; and after poverty comes wealth. This is a promise to the poverty-stricken to wait for Allah's Provision and to make sure that ease will take the place of difficulty and it will improve his living conditions. Whenever it happens, he should not be parsimonious or niggardly.

This is good news for those in hardship, since Allah *the Almighty* will relieve their hardship and eliminate their difficulty. Even if they live in straitened circumstances, He will grant them ease and comfort. He *Glorified is He* mentions ease after hardship to indicate that anyone who is satisfied and content with the provision he has been destined with will be granted ease after hardship. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely with difficulty is ease. [5] With difficulty is surely ease [6]' (*ash-Sharh:* 5-6). Here, He *Glorified is He* makes ease accompany, not only follow, the difficulty. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out once while he was happy and said laughingly: ‘A hardship will not overcome two eases.’(1)

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(1) *Ibn Mas'ud said, 'I have never been in a condition and wished that this condition is different.' 'Umar said, 'I do not care if I become in difficulty or ease because I do not know which one is better for me.' See Al-Ghazali, Ihya' 'Ulum Ad-Din, 3/319.*

Using the Arabic letter ‘*Sin*’ (will), as a prefix to the Arabic verb *yaj‘al* (bring), implies occurrence in the future. Allah *the Almighty* guides us not to be too hasty for ease, but rather to be sure that He *the Almighty* will fulfil His Promise to us. It is worth noting that He *Glorified is He* did not use the Arabic word *sawfa*, instead of the prefix *Sin*, because *sawfa* means that the action will happen in the distant future, whereas the prefix *Sin* indicates that it will happen soon in the near future if one fears Allah *the Almighty* and has patience.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن قَرْيَةٍ عَتَتْ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهَا وَرُسُلِهِۦ
فَحَاسَبْنَٰهَا حِسَابًا شَدِيدًا وَعَذَّبْنَٰهَا عَذَابًا نُّكْرًا ﴿٨﴾

Many a town that insolently opposed the command of
its Lord and His messengers We have brought sternly
to account: We punished them severely [8]
(The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 8)

Here, He *the Almighty* states the consequence of rebellion against His commands. The Arabic word ‘*ka’ayyin*’ (many) indicates multiplicity. For instance, when someone asks you, ‘Why do you abandon me?’ you reply, ‘How many times did I visit you?’ Here you do not intend to pose a question or to inquire about the number of visits; rather, this expression signifies the myriad visits you paid him. Moreover, you do not ask him such a question unless you are sure of the answer being, ‘You visited me many times.’ Therefore, when you use ‘many’ in similar question forms, it conveys the meaning of multiplicity. The same is the case in Allah’s saying: ‘And how many a Prophet has fought with whom were many worshippers of the Lord…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 146). This verse means that there were many Prophets with whom faithful believers fought, exactly as what happened with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions. Similarly, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it’ (*Yusuf:* 105). So, once you hear this word ‘*ka’ayyin,’* you should know that it denotes something innumerable; too many to be counted, and we do not count things which cannot be enumerated such as sand in the desert. Not counting something means that it is infinite such as the stars in the sky. Hence, this word is used in His saying: ‘And how many a sign...’ (*Yusuf:* 105) to indicate that His signs in the heavens and the earth are too many to be counted. Accordingly, when Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this word, it indicates that what follows is too many that one is not to be blamed if he cannot enumerate it. Allah’s signs, which are too many to be counted, signify something miraculous. Thus, the Arabic word ‘*ka’ayyin,’* (many) denotes multiplicity as when you say, ‘How many times did I treat you kindly’ to suggest that it happened so many times that it cannot be counted. It denotes exaggeration in number and quantity. This word recurs in His saying: ‘And how many a living creature that does not carry its sustenance: Allah sustains it and yourselves…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 60). Here, it refers to the countless number of creatures that do not carry their own provision, and yet they are sustained and alive. Although flies and mosquitoes are weak, they feed on the blood of the powerful human being. So is the case with the microorganisms which destroy the human being, while they do not carry their provision. It is surprising that horses, donkeys, and cattle do not carry their provision despite their ability to carry different items. Therefore, when they satiate their hunger, they save nothing to eat later. Instead, they may step on the leftovers or urinate on them. This is common in all animals that it is said, ‘Of all creatures, only the human being, the rats and the ants save their food.’

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(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘Whoever takes the money of the people with the intention of repaying it, Allah will repay it on his behalf, and whoever takes it in order to spoil it, then Allah will spoil him.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2387; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2411; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8718, Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8158; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 11274.*

The word ‘town’ in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘How many a town…’ (*at-Talaq:* 8) refers to a group of people living together in a limited place. It does not refer to the village as we know it nowadays. This is because the Arabs used to refer to the place which is synonymous with the city nowadays as ‘town’. In the past, they used to inhabit the desert and to keep moving from one place to another without settling in a specific area. Thus, the capital of the Bedouins was the ‘town’ which consisted of a small number of houses.

Accordingly, the Quran calls Mecca ‘the Mother of Cities’ in Allah’s saying: ‘This is a blessed Scripture that We have sent down to confirm what came before it and for you to warn the Mother of Cities…’ (*al-An‘am:* 92) and in His saying: ‘And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Quran, that you may warn the mother of cities and those around it…’ (*ash-Shura:* 7). So, the Mother of Cities is Mecca which is the greatest of all places and the spotlight of those around it. It has all the requirements for life and anyone residing in it or staying in it to perform Pilgrimage can engage in commerce or other activities and thus can fully satisfy his needs.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about many towns such as the village of Ayla or Tiberias about which He says: ‘And ask them about the town which stood by the sea; when they exceeded the limits of the *Sabbath*, when their fish came to them on the day of their *Sabbath*, appearing on the surface of the water, and on the day on which they did not keep the *Sabbath* they did not come to them…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 163). There is also the town of Jerusalem or Jericho which is mentioned in His saying: ‘And when We said: Enter this city, then eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish, and enter the gate making obeisance, and say, forgiveness’ (*al-Baqara:* 58). While narrating what the brothers of Yusuf (Joseph) said after they left Egypt and went back to their father without their brother Binyamin (Benjamin), Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And inquire in the town in which we were…’ (*Yusuf:* 82). With the ‘town’, they meant the capital of Egypt at that time, which was the city of Memphis (1) or what is known now as Al-Badrashein.

As the ‘town’ is mentioned in the Quran to refer to the civil societies at that time, the ‘city’ is used as well. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Pharaoh said: Do you believe in Him before I have given you permission? Surely this is a plot which you have secretly devised in this city…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 123);

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(1) Memphis was an ancient city founded in 3200 BC by Narmer. It was the capital of Egypt during the old kingdom (dynasties 3-6) where they used to worship the god Ptah and is now located near to Saqqara in the town of Mit Rahina. It was the first capital of Egypt after unification and Manf is its Arabic name which means the white wall.

'And he went into the city at a time of unvigilance on the part of its people…' (*al-Qasas:* 15); 'And he was in the city, fearing, awaiting…' (*al-Qasas:* 18); and: 'And from the remote part of the city there came a man running, he said: O my people! Follow the Messengers' (*Ya Sin:* 20). In the last verse, the word 'city,' according to all the exegetes, is Antioch.

Even in its traditional usage, the city is distinguished from the village in that 'cities' are regulated by laws; have a king, ministers, officials, constitutional ruling and an army to defend it. Therefore, the word 'city' is used to refer to the city of Pharaoh, Antioch, and above all Prophet Muhammad's City, which was named *'Yathrib'* at the outset, then became 'Medina, ' – being the capital of the new-born state. Medina is mentioned in many verses, as in Allah's saying: 'And from among those who are round about you of the dwellers of the desert there are hypocrites, and from among the people of Medina (also); they are stubborn in hypocrisy…' (*at-Tawba:* 101) and in His saying: 'It did not beseem the people of Medina and those round about them of the dwellers of the desert to remain behind the Messenger of Allah…' (*at-Tawba:* 120).

So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the verse in question: 'Many a town that insolently opposed the command of its Lord and His Messengers…' (*at-Talaq:* 8), it means that many towns rebelled against Allah's Commandment; some of which are told to us, and the town most mentioned in the Quran is that of the people of Lut (Lot).(1) For example, He *the Almighty* says: 'And (as for) Lut (Lot), We gave him wisdom and knowledge, and We delivered him from the town which wrought abominations; surely they were an evil people, transgressors…' (*al-Anbiya':* 74); and He says: 'Surely We will cause to come down upon the people of this town a punishment from heaven because they transgressed' (*al-'Ankabut:* 34). The town of Lut (Lot) was the most rebellious one against the Commands of Allah *the Almighty* thereby deserving His punishment: a rain of hard stones and the city was turned upside down because they committed a flagrant indecency which none of the nations has ever done before.

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(1) Sodom and Gomorrah are the cities of the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) which were swallowed by the earth owing to their practice of homosexuality. Many researchers and religious scholars believe that the swallowed villages are situated in the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley. According to Hebrew sources, the cities that were destroyed are: Sodom and Gomorrah, (Odomh and Sabim). They used to approach men with desire, instead of women.

As for Allah's saying: 'How many a town…' (*at-Talaq:* 8), He *the Almighty* does not intend the place with its buildings, streets and suburbs, but rather, He intends the people of the town and its inhabitants. This is because 'the town' is a name for the place well prepared for people to reside in. It is axiomatic that when Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And inquire in the town in which we were…' (*Yusuf:* 82), He means to ask the people of the town, not the buildings or the place itself. Thus, in the verse under discussion, Allah's saying: 'Many a town that insolently opposed the command of its Lord and His Messengers…' (*at-Talaq:* 8) means that the town itself did not rebel against His command, but it is its people who rebelled and transgressed. The Arabic word *'ata* (to oppose) connotes haughtiness and disobedience. In the context of this verse, it means to rebel against Allah's Commands and make corruption rampant. This was because they did not hope or wait for meeting Allah *Glorified is He* and therefore He describes them as haughty and rebellious in His saying: 'They are too proud of themselves and too insolent' (*al-Furqan:* 21). This verse means that they have exaggerated in their injustice and opposition and transgressed the limits. The people of these towns rebelled against the Commands of Allah *the Almighty*. Such a rebel is the one who goes to extremes in his injustice, such as a despot who inflicts much oppression and tyranny and gains more power when people are afraid of him.

To 'rebel,' then, is to reject, disobey and be haughty; thereby deserving Allah's Punishment. This verse, in question, is mentioned in two other positions in the Quran, which are His saying: 'And how many a town to which I gave respite, while it was unjust, then I overtook it, and to Me is the return' (*al-Hajj:* 48) and His saying: 'And how many a town which was far more powerful than the town of yours which has driven you out: We destroyed them so there was no helper for them' (*Muhammad:* 13). Thus, they deserved the punishment and destruction because they rebelled against the Commands of Allah and His Prophets.

With regard to His saying: 'The command of its Lord and His Messengers' (*at-Talaq:* 8), it presents a threat to those who go beyond Allah's Law as regards divorce, the waiting period, driving the revocably divorced woman out of the marital house during her waiting period and non-compliance with the rulings of breastfeeding. In fact, disobeying Allah's Commands will result in manifold injustices, homelessness of children, depravation of women, obstinacy of men and rebellion of women. In such a case, the society would live in the darkness of misguidance that may end up with killing and shedding blood; it would certainly cause the society to lag behind, for being full of problems, disputes, discords, conflicts, plotting, and guile. The scholars state that His saying: 'Many a town that insolently opposed the command of its Lord and His Messengers...' (*at-Talaq:* 8) suggests that those people did not abide by the commands of Allah *the Almighty* and His Messengers, nor did they refrain from what they prohibited. In doing so, they rejected and rebelled against His commands.

Allah *Glorified is He* poses a grave threat to those who do not abide by His *Shari'a* and seek their laws from other systems and cultures which rebelled and transgressed against His commands. Further, He *Glorified is He* did not inflict His punishment on the people of these towns without previous warning, guidance and sending Prophets to guide them. Rather, He *Glorified is He* sent Prophets and revealed Scriptures to guide those people and gave them respite in order to be deterred from their transgression and be admonished. However, they insisted on doing injustice; hence He *Glorified is He* says: 'And how many a town to which I gave respite while it was unjust...' (*al-Hajj:* 48). Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* grants respite to the oppressor, but when He seizes him, He does not then let him off, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clearly stated.

So, after respite and deferment, there comes the severe Account, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We have brought sternly to account…' (*at-Talaq:* 8). He *the Almighty* will take them to account sternly for all what they did, and their sins will be investigated. They will be held accountable for everything, be it small or great, without pardoning or overlooking their misdeeds. Calling to account entails discussion and investigation and He *the Almighty* has given the disbelievers the choice so as to decree a fair judgement regarding them. So, if someone chooses disbelief, he is not forced to be obedient. Thus, they were given the freedom of choice according to which they will be held accountable on the

Day of Judgement. The Arabic word *hisab* (account) signifies precision, and implies counting and numbers and sometimes refers to doubts and thoughts.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* gathers account and punishment together, saying: ‘We have brought sternly to account: We punished them severely’ (*at-Talaq:* 8). In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘He who is thoroughly examined in reckoning is put to torment.’(1) Thus, there is a relationship between reckoning one’s deeds which he had done in the worldly life and asking him about his money and youth and between inflicting punishment on him, since no one is free from sin. ‘Aisha narrated that ‘he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “Anybody whose account (record) is questioned will surely be punished.” I said, Does Allah not say: “He surely will receive an easy reckoning?” (*al-Inshiqaq:* 8) He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, “This is not the actual reckoning but only the presentation of one’s deeds to Him, whereas he who is thoroughly examined in reckoning is put to torment.” ’(2)

With regard to Allah’s saying: ‘He surely will receive an easy reckoning?’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 8), it refers to the people of paradise who will be given their record of deeds in their right hand, and that is why He *the Almighty* then says: ‘And he shall go back to his people joyful’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 9). Thus, they will return to their people in happiness with Allah’s Favour and Bounty. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he will say: Lo! Read my book: [19] Surely I knew that I shall meet my account. [20] So he shall be in a life of pleasure, [21] In a lofty garden, [22] The fruits of which are near at hand [23]' (*al-Haqqa:* 19-23). Thus, he who is given his record in his right hand will call upon people to read his record, as it will be full of good deeds and a cause for being rescued from the fire. For this reason, his Account is easy, only to present his deeds to him and to let him read his record. It is as though this is an Account or torment for him; the torment of waiting for the Divine Decree. These decisive moments are what make it an Account for the believer. Yet, this is only the Account of presentation of one's deeds, not that of thorough examination. During such presentation, it is said to him, 'You made so and so,' then it is said, 'I covered it up for you in the worldly life, and I forgive you for it Today.' Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* grants him Forgiveness.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her who said, ‘Has Allah Glorified is He not said this, “He will be made subject to an easy reckoning” (al-Inshiqaq: 8)?’ Thereupon he peace and blessings be upon him said: “It is only the presentation of one's deeds to Him.” ’ This Hadith is also narrated by Al-Hakim; his narration reads, ‘She said, I heard Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saying in his prayer: “O Allah, judge me with an easy account!” When he finished his prayer, I said, O Messenger of Allah, what is reckoning? He said, “Allah looks in one’s record and pardons him, but he who is thoroughly examined in reckoning is doomed, and never a believer is stricken by anything even the prickling of a thorn but Allah expiates of his sins.” ’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6536; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 199; Ahmad, Musnad Hadith no. 24958; and Al-Hakim, Mustadrak. Hadith no. 190*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 25002; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 7406.*

By contrast, the one who defied and rebelled against the commands of Allah *the Almighty* will be taken to a severe Account and will have his deeds, small and great, thoroughly examined and investigated, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…what a book is this! It does not omit a small one or a great one, but numbers them (all); and what they had done they shall find present (there)...' (*al-Kahf:* 49). A part of their reckoning may take place in this worldly life, so they are held accountable for their deeds and will be inflicted with a severe torment. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And how many a town to which I gave respite, while it was unjust, then I overtook it...' (*al-Hajj:* 48). In this worldly life, those rebels will be punished and destroyed, no matter how powerful they are, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And how many a town which was far more powerful than the town of yours which has driven you out: We destroyed them so there was no helper for them' (*Muhammad:* 13); and He also says: 'So each We punished for his sin; of them was he on whom We sent down a violent storm, and of them was he whom the rumbling overtook, and of them was he whom We made to be swallowed up by the earth, and of them was he whom We drowned…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40). The first type of punishment is sending a storm of burning stones that injure them and burn their skin. Allah *Glorified is He* did not say that He sent upon them a fire, for instance because fire may burn them to death and thus pain ceases, while heated stones will cause them everlasting pain.

The second type of punishment is the high blast that seizes the ears, which was inflicted on the tribes of Thamud, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Then as to Thamud, they were destroyed by an excessively severe punishment’ (*al-Haqqa:* 5). Allah *Glorified is He* gives respite to the rebels and transgressors and extends their period until He suddenly seizes them. The punishment may come from above them, such was the case with the people of Abraha who came to destroy the *Ka‘ba,* thus He *the Almighty* sent against them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of hard clay, and rendered them like straw eaten up.

Besides, other people were seized by the high blast, and yet others were destroyed by a screaming, violent wind. Further, other people were destroyed by causing the earth to swallow them such as in the case of Qarun (Korah) who was swallowed along with his palace and his possessions. Moreover, others were drowned such as Pharaoh. All of these punishments were that of eradication.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us another example in the story of the Kingdom of Bilqis (Sheba) in Yemen and how they were destroyed when they turned away from His Guidance, saying: ‘Certainly there was a sign for Bilqis (Sheba) in their abode; two gardens on the right and the left; eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him: a good land and a Forgiving Lord! [15] But they turned aside, so We sent upon them a torrent of which the rush could not be withstood, and in place of their two gardens We gave to them two gardens yielding bitter fruit and (growing) tamarisk and a few lote trees [16]’ (*Saba’:* 15-16).

Allah blessed the people of Bilqis (Sheba), but they turned with ingratitude and turned away from His commands. They used to take pride in the dam which preserved the rainwater and provided them with water throughout the year forgetting that He *the Almighty* is the real Provider. This very dam was the means of their destruction; it destroyed all their crops and fruits.

As they are taken to a severe Account, they are also punished with a painful torment that we do not know how terrible it is. Some scholars state that the verse: ‘We have brought sternly to account: We punished them severely’ (*at-Talaq:* 8) involves reversing the word order*,* which is an Arabic rhetorical style. Accordingly, the meaning is that Allah *the Almighty* punishes them in this worldly life, through hunger, drought, humiliation, and destruction, and will take them to severe Account in the Hereafter.

It is narrated that ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘Have you encountered a day harder than the day of Uhud?’ He replied, ‘Your tribes have troubled me a lot, and the worst trouble was the trouble on the day of ‘Aqaba when I presented myself to Ibn ‘Abd Yalayl ibn ‘Abd Kulal and he did not respond to my demand. So I departed, overwhelmed with excessive sorrow, and proceeded on, and could not relax till I found myself at Qarn Ath-Tha‘alib where I lifted my head towards the sky to see a cloud shading me unexpectedly. I looked up and saw Jibril (Gabriel) in it. He called me saying, “Allah has heard your people's saying to you, and what they have replied back to you, Allah has sent the Angel of the Mountains to you so that you may order him to do whatever you wish to these people.” The Angel of the Mountains called and greeted me, and then said, “O Muhammad! Order what you wish. If you like, I will let Al-Akhshabauyn (that is, two mountains) fall on them.”’ Prophet Muhammad said, ‘No, but I hope that Allah will let them beget children who will worship Allah alone, and will worship none besides Him.’(1)

Allah *Glorified is He* decreed certain rules which govern the creation. We discussed the recompense of those who followed Allah’s Messengers and those who disobeyed them. The people of Mecca should have taken an example by the preceding nations and their responses to Allah’s Prophets as well as the torment which struck those who denied the Message and persecuted the Prophets.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went through hard days. His own people were hostile to him and fought him. One of his hardest days was the battle of Uhud where his teeth were broken, and the battle of Hunayn in which the Muslims were startled by the disbelievers and therefore they fled, while he *peace and blessings be upon him* encouraged them to hold fast and not to turn away saying, ‘I am truly Allah’s Prophet I am the [grand] son of ‘Abd Al-Mutalib.’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3231; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 4754; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 103, An-Nasa’i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 7659; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 8902*

What was harder than this was that he *peace and blessings be upon him* called people to Islam and to respond positively to Allah’s Call, but they refused and turned away. Further, they incited the wicked people among them to hurt him. This was very hard on him as he knew the recompense which is destined for those who belie Allah’s Prophets. Therefore, out of his mercy and fear for his people, he did not invoke Allah *the Almighty* to punish them. Instead, he supplicated, ‘O Allah, guide my people for they do not know.’(2)

The Angel of the Mountains said to him, ‘O Muhammad! If you like, I will let Al-Akhshabauyn (that is, two mountains) fall on them.’ But he *peace and blessings be upon him* was a mercy to mankind and, therefore, he refused. In this situation, he did not only show mercy to the people of Mecca, but he also considered the interest of the coming generations, saying, ‘No, but I hope that Allah will let them beget children who will worship Allah alone, and will worship none besides Him.’ This came to happen afterwards as the sons of those disbelieving chiefs of Mecca embraced Islam and showed extraordinary courage in spreading its Message.

Allah *the Almighty* states clearly: ‘And how many a town to which I gave respite while it was unjust, then I overtook it, and to Me is the return’ (*al-Hajj:* 48). So, He gives respite to the unjust people in order that they may show repentance to Him. However, if they insist on their disbelief and injustice, He puts them into a severe torment. This is exactly what happened with the previous nations which showed disobedience and rebellion against Him *the Almighty*.

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(1) *This is part of a long Hadith in which somebody asked Al-Bara’ ibn ‘Azib, ‘Did you flee deserting Allah’s Messenger peace and blessings be upon him during the battle of Hunayn?’ Al-Bara’ replied, ‘But Allah's Messenger did not flee. The people of the Tribe of Hawazin were good archers. When we met them, we attacked them, and they fled. When the Muslims started collecting the war booty, the pagans faced us with arrows, but Allah’s Messenger did not flee. No doubt, I saw him on his white mule and Abu Sufyan was holding its reins and the Prophet was saying, ‘I am the Prophet in truth, I am the son of ‘Abd Al-Muttalib.’ According to the narration of Muslim, Prophet Muhammad added, ‘O Allah, descend Your Help.’ Al-Bara’ continued, ‘When the battle grew fierce, we, by Allah, would seek protection by his side, and the bravest among us was he who confronted the onslaught and it was the Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him.’ See, Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2864; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 4716.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Ubayd Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bayhaqi, Shu‘ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 1375.*

This is why Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَذَاقَتْ وَبَالَ أَمْرِهَا وَكَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ أَمْرِهَا خُسْرًا ٩

To make them taste the ill effect of their conduct
the result of their conduct was ruin [9]
(The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 9)

In fact, tasting is the strongest perception. Its linguistic meaning signifies the perception of the flavour of a foodstuff or a drink. Metaphorically, however, it signifies tasting anything, even if it is not food or drink. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Taste; you forsooth are the mighty, the honourable’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49). Here, it does not refer to perceiving the flavour of food or drink, which is the literal meaning of the word. One tastes food or drink in order to decide whether it is, for example sweet or sour. However, the taste intended in the last verse includes all the body; the hands, the legs, the chest, the neck and so on.

In this context, we understand the saying of Allah: ‘And Allah sets forth a parable: (consider) a town safe and secure to which its means of subsistence come in abundance from every quarter; but it became ungrateful to Allah’s favours, therefore Allah made it to taste the utmost degree of hunger and fear because of what they wrought’ (*an-Nahl:* 112). We know that hunger is the absence of food, but what would tasting the hunger be like? Neither the hunger nor the garment can be really tasted. The intended meaning is to show how strongly they feel that hunger.

Tasting is to perceive the flavour of something, not to eat or drink it. When you buy some fruits, the seller says to you, ‘Taste this one and you will find how tasty it is.’ Therefore, tasting, which is a sense shared by the whole body, means to perceive the flavour of something. You see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and smell with your nose, but tasting is shared by all these senses and is the strongest kind of perception.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us here about the town that insolently opposed the Command of its Lord, saying: 'To make them taste the ill effect…' (*at-Talaq:* 9). He *Glorified is He* chose the sense of taste because every other means of perception may only be related to one kind of luxury in the worldly life, whereas tasting is related to food and drink which keep and sustain the human being's life. After all, they are part and parcel of one's life, not only a means of luxury. It is not only the tongue that tastes the food but also the whole body. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says to the disbelievers: 'Taste the chastisement of burning' (*Al-'Imran:* 181) and: 'And among men there is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge and without guidance and without an illuminating book, turning away haughtily that he may lead (others) astray from the way of Allah; for him is disgrace in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection We will make him taste the punishment of burning' (*al-Hajj:* 8-9). Burning is not a kind of food to be tasted, but rather, it causes pains to the skin and the soul. The human being may lose one of his senses like sight, touch or smell, but he never loses the sense of taste.(1) In this sense, taste supersedes the tongue and overwhelms all the organs of the body.

The expression 'tasting' is also used with regard to the punishment of the fire, as Allah *the Almighty* says to the disbelievers: 'Taste the chastisement of the Fire which you called a lie' (*Luqman:* 20). Tasting transcends the tongue and dominates all the organs so that every tiny part of the disbeliever's body tastes the chastisement of the fire.

When Allah *(Glorified is He)* uses the word 'taste' with regard to the punishment of the people of the town, He means that they felt this punishment with all their senses, even that of taste which is hidden in the soul. Thus, the punishment covers all the parts of their bodies.

In passing, it is good to know that tasting is something other than swallowing or feeling satisfied from the food. We see that in the commercial transaction in our daily life. When you buy some fruits, the seller says to you, 'This is a sweet fruit, taste it.' He does not order you to eat it completely or to satisfy yourself. He rather asks you to only try its taste and then you can buy and eat according to your desire and ability.

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(1) From Proofreader: This information is according to the knowledge and belief of Sheikh Ash-Sha'rawi *may Allah rest his soul*, and it was stated by him to further clarify certain points, but it does not necessarily conform to the scientific facts and information proven true.

If Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered them to taste the chastisement, can you imagine how painful that chastisement itself is? Concerning this punishment, He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely the guilty are in error and distress. [47] On the day when they shall be dragged upon their faces into the Fire; taste the touch of Hell [48]' (*al-Qamar:* 47-48). In another verse, He says: 'I will cast him into Hell. [26] And what will make you realise what Hell is? [27] It leaves naught; nor does it spare aught [28]' (*al-Muddaththir:* 26-28). The hellfire does not leave a piece of flesh or a nerve except that it destroys it and then it returns to its original state in order to taste the punishment again. If mere tasting or touching the hellfire is so terrible, ferocious and painful, what do you think of those inside the hellfire itself?

The tasting of the chastisement is the conclusion of the previous verse, in which He *the Almighty* says: 'Many a town that insolently opposed the command of its Lord and His messengers We have brought sternly to account: We punished them severely' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). Due to their opposition to and rebellion against the Command of Allah *the Almighty* they tasted the consequences of their misdeeds. Similarly, He *the Almighty* says: 'Then it shall be said to those who were unjust: Taste abiding chastisement; you are not requited except for what you earned' (*Yunus:* 52), and says: 'On the day when the chastisement shall cover them from above them, and from beneath their feet; and He shall say: Taste what you did' (*az-Zumar:* 55).

Allah *Glorified is He* has not been unjust to them as they taste the punishment for what they used to do, as if their misdeeds will be the hell that burns them. He *Glorified is He* does not charge them with what they did not do, and He does not compel them with His Dominating Power to disbelieve and thus deserve the punishment; rather, according to Allah's Absolute Justice, they deserved that punishment for their actions. We notice that He *the Almighty* does not use the verb *taktasibun* with regard to their undertaking of misdeeds because they no longer exert any effort to do the misdeeds; rather, they became part of their nature, so He uses the verb *taksibun* (to do). Thus, their pure nature has been corrupted out of their excessive sinning and opposition to the commands of Allah *Glorified is He*.

When you see a sentence starting with the Arabic particle *fa'* (then), you should know that the sentence is the outcome of what is before it. For example, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Then He causes him to die, then assigns to him a grave' (*'Abasa:* 21) means that the putting of him in the grave came after death. Thus, what is before the particle *fa'* (then) is the cause of what is after it.

So, what did the people of the towns that opposed the command of its Lord taste? Allah *Glorified is He* provides the answer, saying: '…taste the ill effect of their conduct' (*at-Talaq:* 9). The 'ill effect' here is the bad consequences that happen to the one who opposes and rebels against the command of Allah *Glorified is He*. Such a person mistakenly thinks that this will be useful to him, but he does not realise the bad consequences of his action, even if he temporarily benefitted from his misdeeds. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: 'But when they neglected that with which they had been admonished, We opened for them the doors of all things, until when they rejoiced in what they were given We seized them suddenly; then lo! They were in utter despair' (*al-An'am:* 44). He *Glorified is He* has opened for those people the doors of everything: wealth, position and power, but this was not beneficial to them. They felt happy for these bounties and caused mischief on earth.

Therefore, He, says: '…until when they rejoiced in what they were given We seized them suddenly; then lo! They were in utter despair' (*al-An'am:* 44).

The 'ill effect' of their misdeeds is that Allah *the Almighty* has seized them suddenly. What He has bestowed on them at the beginning was not in their interest. So we should not be deceived by such bounties given by Allah *Glorified is He* to some people who exulted in them. Hereby, this was the cause of their punishment. The one who goes astray from the Truth and deviates from the Righteous Path only harms himself, and he will suffer the ill effect of his misdeeds, as he will abide in the hellfire eternally.

The Arabic word *al-wabal* (ill effect) linguistically is the infinitive of *wabeel,* which is the fatty food that causes harm to the one who eats it. This word, therefore, suits Allah's saying: '…to make them taste the ill effect of their conduct' (*at-Talaq:* 9). The people of that town tasted the ill effect of their opposition to Allah's Command. Their conduct linguistically refers to one's condition, and it may refer to their misdeed of opposing Allah's Command and Ruling. They tasted the ill effect of their conduct like the one in this worldly life who eats a kind of food that would have bad effects on him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…the result of their conduct was ruin' (*at-Talaq:* 9). They should have considered the consequences of their misdeeds, but their recklessness and foolishness diverted them from thinking about these consequences and made them have superficial views about these matters.

They looked at the temporal pleasure and forgot the ill effect that they will not be able to endure. If they had been rightly directed by Allah's Guidance or that of His Messenger and considered the veracity of the chastisement against which they had been warned, they would not have been inflicted with these serious consequences.

As a matter of fact, the returning of all the creatures will be to Allah *Glorified is He*. The problem with these people is that they neither considered the consequences of their actions nor reflected on Allah *the Almighty* Who manages all the affairs. That is why they were not deterred from committing misdeeds. By contrast, the one who considers the consequences and does good deeds in this worldly life will have the great reward and will be admitted to paradise. On the other hand, the one who does not consider the consequences and opposes, disobeys and rebels against Allah's Commands will be punished, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Then to Us shall be their return; then We shall make them taste severe punishment because they disbelieved' (*Yunus:* 70). If they had insight and reflected on these serious consequences, they would not have dared to disobey Allah *Glorified is He*.

Further, He *the Almighty* says: 'Whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray' (*al-Isra':* 15). This means that the person who deviates from His Divine Way will suffer the consequences of his action. The evil of the human being stems from not adhering to Allah's Way of Guidance, which causes harm for him and for the people around him; so he as well as the society will suffer.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘To Allah is the end of the affairs’ (*al-Hajj:* 41). This means that the ultimate end will be to Him *Glorified is He*. In the verse in question, He says: ‘…the result of their conduct was ruin’ (*at-Talaq:* 9). So, the ill effect of opposing Him and committing misdeeds is perdition. They mistakenly thought that their actions were beneficial for them, but they did not achieve anything for themselves except loss and perdition. This is not a temporal loss and it cannot be recompensed in a further bargain; rather, it is an eternal loss that incurs a great, eternal regret once the Day of Judgement comes. Their punishment starts when the Day of Judgement suddenly seizes them. They will be astonished for its coming which they used to deny, mistakenly believing that what they had done in the worldly life does not incur a punishment. It is the great loss that accompanies the person and never leaves him. It is not confined to this worldly life so that one can compensate or endure it patiently; rather, it will extend to the Hereafter where there is no compensation for the loss or any ability to endure the punishment.

Allah *Glorified is He* also says: ‘In the Hereafter they shall be the greatest losers’ (*an-Naml:* 5). Here, ‘the greatest loser’ is the superlative form of the ‘loser’ who loses the bliss of the paradise because he has not done good deeds in the worldly life. Not only will he be deprived of the bliss of the paradise, but he will also be punished in the hellfire. That is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘…they shall be the greatest losers’ (*an-Naml:* 5). This is because they do not enter the paradise, as they do not deserve it, which is a great loss. Moreover, they will be the companions of the hellfire which is another loss. Thus, they have lost their worldly life, the Hereafter and themselves; about those people Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Say [Prophet], “Shall we tell you who has the most to lose by their actions, [103] whose efforts in this world are misguided, even when they think they are doing good work? [104] These are they who disbelieve in the communications of their Lord and His meeting, so their deeds become null, and therefore We will not set up a balance for them on the Day of Resurrection[105]”’ (*al-Kahf:* 103-105).

He *Glorified is He* has excluded the believers from the great loss, saying: ‘Except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience’ (*al-’Asr:* 3). Thus, belief in Allah, His

Messenger and the Quran; doing righteous deeds; and enjoining the truth and patience on each other save the Muslim from the great loss about which He *Glorified is He* says: ‘I swear by the time, [1] Most surely man is in loss [2]’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-2). Thus, the human beings in general are in loss; so, what should the one who wants to be saved do? He *the Almighty* answers this question, saying: ‘I swear by the time, [1] most surely man is in loss, [2] except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience [3]’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-3). Therefore, the one who deviates from the Way of Allah suffers a great loss, but he who adheres to it is protected from loss and humiliation.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the people in the way they understand, that is, gaining and losing; the believers gain in all their affairs, whereas the disbelievers and the disobedient ones who rebel against His Way are the losers, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘They bought error with the right direction, so their bargain brought no gain, nor were they the followers of the right direction’ (*al-Baqara:* 16). Trade is to buy and sell, thus it implies gaining or losing. The seller’s interest is to gain from the commercial transaction. If he gains from his trade, he is successful. But if he does not gain anything, he is unsuccessful. Thus, Allah’s saying ‘…so their bargain brought no gain, nor were they the followers of the right direction’ (*al-Baqara:* 16) indicates that they have lost everything because they did not achieve a profit and they lost the right direction. Thus, they lost both the profit and the capital. If they had not gained anything, they, at least, should not have exchanged the right direction with error and therefore lost their capital. They suffered the consequences of the misdeeds that they had done, so their end was loss due to their opposing Allah’s Way and their haughtiness. So, they suffered unmatchable loss and destruction.

With regard to what is prepared for such miserable losers, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَعَدَّ ٱللَّهُ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٗا شَدِيدٗاۖ فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ يَٰٓأُوْلِي ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ
ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْۚ قَدۡ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيۡكُمۡ ذِكۡرٗا ﴿١٠﴾

God has prepared a severe torment for them.
So, you who have understanding, you who believe,
beware of God. He has sent you the Quran [10]
(The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 10)

Allah, the All-Powerful and the Omnipotent, has prepared a severe torment for them according to His Power. He has prepared a very painful torment for them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘We have prepared for the unbelievers a disgraceful chastisement’ (*an-Nisa’:* 37). The matter has already been settled, for He *the Almighty* had previously prepared this punishment for them. With His Power and Wisdom, the Paradise and the Hellfire have already been created and prepared; they will not be prepared in the future.

To chastise someone means to hurt a living being in order to make him feel the pain; it does not mean to kill him, for death prevents feeling the pain of the chastisement. Every tyrannical town must suffer a certain kind of chastisement. In fact, the severity and the strength of that chastisement are proportional to the power of the one who undertakes it. By analogy, if the One Who punishes the people is Allah *the Almighty* can anyone bear that punishment?

The chastisement is described at one time as painful and another time as disgraceful and yet a third time as severe. Each of these kinds of punishment has its ill effect on the punished one. The disgraceful punishment is what humiliates the soul and the painful one is intended for the body itself. In fact, the human being has both a physical and a spiritual side. The painful punishment befalls the physical side and the disgraceful one befalls the spiritual side. As for the severe punishment, it is the unbearable torment. Evidently, the severity and the strength of the punishment differ according to the punisher; if he is weak, then his punishment is also weak, and if he has an average strength, then his punishment will be the same. But if the punisher is strong, then his punishment must also be strong and severe. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘If only the idolaters could see – as they will see when they face the torment – that all power belongs to Allah, and that Allah punishes severely’ (*al-Baqara:* 165). Hence, as soon as they see the punishment, they will know for sure that all the Power belongs to Allah and that He punishes severely. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: '…and be careful (of your duty) to Allah, and know that Allah is severe in requiting (evil)' (*al-Baqara:* 196).

The punishment will befall them on a Day when no one will have the power of money, rank, or lineage to protect himself from Allah's punishment. So, if the corruption of the society stimulates you to disobey Him, you should fear His severe punishment in the Hereafter. Those who oppose Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deserve His unbearable punishment and chastisement. He says: 'Allah destroyed them on account of their faults; surely Allah is strong, severe in requiting (evil)' (*al-Anfal:* 52). Thus, Allah is Omnipotent over all what they are doing and His punishment is severe and painful.

As a matter of fact, the punishment befalls people inasmuch as they commit sins. So, Allah's severe punishment does not befall the one who has committed a minor sin; rather, the repayment of everyone is proportional to his sin. Despite the fact that His Punishment for some people is easier than His punishing of others, it will also be painful.

One of His severe Punishments prepared for those who rebelled against Allah's Way is *Az-Zaqqum* concerning which He *the Almighty* says: 'It is a tree that grows in the bottom of the Hell; [64] its produce is as it were the heads of the serpents. [65] Then most surely they shall eat of it and fill their bellies with it [66]' (*as-Saffat:* 64-66); and 'Surely the tree of the *Zaqqum*, [43] is the food of the sinful [44] like dregs of oil; it shall boil in their bellies [45]' (*az-Zukhruf:* 43-45).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us a hint about the severe punishment of eating *Az-Zaqqum,* saying: 'If one drop of it fell on all the oceans of this worldly life, it would corrupt the livelihood of the people.'(1) Thus, one drop of *Az-Zaqqum* is enough to corrupt the sustenance of the people because they would not benefit from the great, vast oceans, including their water and animals. So, what about the one whose food is *Az-Zaqqum*?

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no. 276; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 10905; Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 7525; and Al-Mu'jam As-Saghir, Hadith no. 911.*

If Allah *the Almighty* has prepared a painful punishment, then it is fitting here that He commands them to fear Him, saying: 'Beware of Allah' (*at-Talaq:* 10). There is something wonderful about the issue of piety. You sometimes find Allah *the Almighty* commands the people to fear Him and sometimes to fear the fire. So, how can we have the same attitude towards Him and the fire in which He will punish the disbelievers, even though the fire is one of His creations? In fact, His command to fear the fire means that we should not do what provokes His Anger so that we avoid the punishment of the fire. It is as if you have placed a barrier between you and the fire by abandoning sins and doing good deeds. Fire is one of the soldiers of Allah Who wants us to guard ourselves against its punishment by placing a barrier between us and His Attributes of Majesty. As the fire is one of the soldiers of punishment and is relating to His Attributes of Majesty, His command to fear Him equals His commands to fear the fire. We should take into account that the fire does not intrinsically chastise the disobedient people; rather, it chastises them according to His command.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And be mindful to Allah, and know that you will meet Him, and give good news to the believers' (*al-Baqara:* 223). This means that we should beware of provoking His Anger by avoiding the misdeeds. The pious Muslim should be certain that he will meet His Lord and should have no doubt about that. By so doing, he is given the glad tidings of the paradise. Thus, you should place a barrier between you and the Majestic Attributes of Allah *the Almighty*. His Attributes of Majesty includes His Mightiness, Compelling, and Revenge; and His Attributes of Beauty includes His Forgiveness, Mercy, Enriching, and Wisdom. Thus, we should protect ourselves against His Majestic Attributes in order to guard ourselves against the soldiers of these Attributes, including the hellfire.

Only the people of understanding comprehend that and thus maintain righteous conduct and fear Allah *the Almighty*. They know for sure that believing in Allah and being mindful of Him saves them from the severe punishment prepared for the insolently rebellious people. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*:

'So, you who have understanding…' (*at-Talaq:* 10) refers to the people with sound minds. The Arabic word *lub* (mind) linguistically refers to the core of a thing. The mind is called so because it gives us the essence and benefits of the matters. The outer cover of something preserves its core and what is preserved is more valuable than what covers and preserves it. Thus, the people of understanding are those who perceive the issues of faith with their reason and employ their minds in order to always remember these issues, as the preoccupations, pleasures and desires of the worldly life may divert the human being from Allah's Way of Guidance. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'That those who have minds may take heed' (*Ibrahim:* 52). This means that the people of understanding remember that Allah is One God and there is no god except Him. The minds of such people guard them against following the whims, as the defect of the reason is following the whims and inclining towards what the soul desires. Thus, the mind judges the essence of the matter, not its exterior or inessential part. Thus, the people who employ their minds are those who can understand, think, and discern.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* addresses them in another verse, saying: 'Most surely there are signs in this for those endowed with understanding' (*Ta Ha:* 54). The mind is the faculty by which the process of sound selection is carried out. In Arabic, the word *'aql* (mind) is derived from the rope by which you tie a beast so that it does not go astray and, similarly, the mind protects the one from going astray and following his whims. It bridles one's desires and disciplines them according to their mission in the worldly life. The mind forbids you from doing the evil actions and thus the person must have a sound mind that bridles his desires and stops them from transcending their assigned mission; otherwise, following these desires will cause mischief in the universe. Thus, the mind commands the person not to follow his desires because he is not alone in this worldly life; so, what would happen if all the people did the same?

Therefore, the mind tells you the realities of the mattes so that you may have a deeper and a broader understanding. It is the scale that strikes the balance between all the matters and prevents the person from being superficial in his thinking.

Allah, Gloried is He, draws people's attention to the importance of the minds so that they employ them in the matter of faith, for they support the issue of believing in Him *the Almighty* and guide the human being to what is good for him. Employing the mind means to try to understand the laws of the universe in order to arrive at the Causer of these effects, that is, the Creator of this creation. That is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Will they not understand?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 80) and says: ‘Will they not come to know?’ (*as-Sajda:* 4) Allah *Glorified is He* urges the human being to reflect, think and ponder. Had the Quran attempted to deceive the human being, it would not have attracted his attention to the necessity of reflection, thinking and pondering. Commanding them to use their intellectual capabilities affirms the fact that if they use their minds and follow the premises that they take for granted, they will attain to belief in Allah *the Almighty*.

The Arabic word *‘aql* (mind) is derived from the word *‘uqaal* which is the rope by which the legs of the camel are tied so that it does not stand up. Likewise, the mind's mission is to control the faculties of the body because every faculty has its inclinations. The eye, for instance, has the ability to see everything, so the mind prevents it from seeing certain harmful scenes. Likewise, the ear likes to hear everything, so the mind forbids it from listening to harmful things. Thus, the mind regulates the functions of the rest of the organs. Further, Allah *the Almighty* describes the mind as *lub* (core) because it is concerned with the important matters and judges the matters wisely to discover their essence.

So, who are the people of understanding? Allah *the Almighty* provides the answer, saying: ‘You who have understanding, you who believe…’ (*at-Talaq:* 10). Thus, they are the believers who have believed in Allah *the Almighty* and pledged the covenant of faith by believing in Him and in His Messengers without any doubt in their belief. They also believed that the Quran is a revelation from Allah *the Almighty* and that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger who conveys Allah’s revelation.

They believed in Allah as a Lord, God and a Creator and therefore they deserved to be described as the people of understanding. So, following their belief in Him, they obeyed His commands and adhered to His Way, avoiding any unlawful activity. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying, ‘You who believed in Me, out of your own accord, as your God Who possesses the

Attribute of Knowledge, Power, Wisdom and Lordship; as long as you believed in Me, then obey My Commands.' With regard to His saying: '…you who believe…' (*at-Talaq:* 10), He does not specify the matters that they believe in because the person is a believer in Allah, and thus he is required to look for what He wants from him, which is conveyed by a Messenger from Him. Thus, believing in Allah entails believing in His Messenger because the ultimate of what the mind arrives at is that there is a God Who has created the universe and is managing it. Further, your belief in a Messenger entails believing in the Book that he brought as well as believing in the angels.

The believers are the people of understanding because they soundly used their minds to attain to their belief in Allah, His Messenger, and His Book. They did not allow their whims to divert them from the Truth. Allah *the Almighty* wants us to be restricted by our minds from the chaos in our pursuit to satisfy the desires of the soul. Thus, He stops you from following your desires by endowing you with intellectual capabilities.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He has sent you the Quran' (*at-Talaq:* 10). The Arabic particle *qad* is used for affirming an action if it is followed by a verb in the past tense. If it is followed by a verb in the present tense, then it means that the action is likely to happen if there are logical reasons to support that; otherwise, the action is deemed unlikely to happen.

Sending down the Quran means that it descended from on high. Everything has come into existence according to the Will of Allah *the Almighty* to directly or indirectly serve the interests of the human being.

You should not consider the term 'sending down' of the Quran in a physical sense, but consider its abstract meaning of supremacy. In truth, it is unlike sending down the rain from the sky. The latter is sensual as the water falls from the sky and mixes with the earth so that the plants grow. Sustaining the people by the rain and the earth is decreed by the Supreme Creator. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We sent Our Messengers with clear signs, the Scripture and the Balance so that people could uphold justice: We also sent iron, with its mighty strength and many uses for mankind' (*al-Furqan:* 75). He *the Almighty* has sent His Messages to the Prophets in order to reform the life of the people. Further, He has sent iron that we extract from the mountains and the earth, but sending here means to bring something into existence for the interest of the people.

Allah *the Almighty* has sent His Way of Guidance to straighten the life of the human being as well as the life of his offspring if they follow it. It shows us the good way and takes us away from the evil one. Besides, this Way of Guidance, conveyed by Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informs us that Allah *Glorified is He* has created the universe for us and tells us about what He wants from us and how we should worship Him. It guides us to the right direction and draws up our lifestyle in order to ensure the good life of the human being on earth.

So, when you hear the word (sent down), you will find it always attributed to Allah, as in His saying: 'We sent it down on the Night of Glory' (*al-Qadr:* 1). The Arabic verb *anzal* (to reveal) is only attributed to Allah *the Almighty* but the verb *nazzal* (to descend) can be attributed to the angels, while the verb *nazzal* (to bring down) is attributed to the one trusted with revelation, that is, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*.

In Arabic, the verbs *anzal*, *nazal* and *nazzal* all mean to send down. However, each verb has an extra indication. The verb *nazal* refers to the revelation of the Scripture and to the One Who brought it down. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The Faithful Spirit has descended with it' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193), and He also says: 'And with truth have We revealed it, and with truth did it come…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193). The two verbs 'to reveal' and 'come down' show that the Quran was revealed from a high supreme position.

He *the Almighty* also says: 'And who believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you and they are sure of the Hereafter' (*al-Baqara:* 4); and He says in another verse: 'And We have not revealed upon you the Book except that you may make clear to them that about which they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe' (*an-Nahl:* 64). Sometimes, we find that the verb *anzal* (to reveal) is followed by the preposition *'ala* (upon) or *ila* (to). Some scholars say that when Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the verb is followed by the preposition 'upon', as in His saying: 'And We have not revealed upon you the Book except that you may make clear to them that about which they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe' (*an-Nahl:* 64). Those scholars, unintentionally, differentiate between Allah's Address to Prophet Muhammad and His Address to the *ummah*. They do not realise that the purpose of revealing it to him *peace and blessings be upon him* is only to guide the people. Therefore, we should consider that the purpose of the address – whether the verb is followed by the preposition 'upon' or 'to' – is that the Quran is revealed for both Prophet Muhammad and his *ummah*, as is the case in His saying: 'And We have not revealed upon you the Book except that you may make clear to them that about which they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe' (*an-Nahl:* 64).

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* states: 'And indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear Allah's communications disbelieved in and mocked at do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse…' (*an-Nisa':* 140). In this sense, the verse means that this Glorified Book was revealed from the heaven in order to serve the higher interests of people so that they show great reverence to it as it was only revealed for their best interest.

Accordingly, when the verb 'to reveal' is followed by the preposition 'upon', it signifies that the Book is revealed from a supreme position, the heaven; and when it is followed by the preposition 'to', it means that it is revealed by Allah *the Almighty* to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so that he conveys it to the believers in order to serve their interests.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He has sent you the Quran' (*at-Talaq:* 10). The Arabic word *Adh-Dhikr* (The Reminder or the Quran) linguistically means to recall or memorise something. It may also mean to say something as one cannot say anything unless he recalls it. Further, it may refer to the Glorious Quran, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them, and that haply they may reflect' (*an-Nahl:* 44). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the first one who put the Quran into practice and his *Sunnah* is also considered a part of the Reminder. When the word 'Reminder' is stated without any other description, it then refers only to the Quran, as in Allah's saying: 'This We recite to you of the communications and the wise reminder' (*ar-Ra'd:* 9).

The Arabic word *adh-dhikr* may also mean reputation and fame. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you shall soon be questioned’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 44). This means that the Quran is a great honour which shall give him and his people established reputation till the Day of Judgement. Further, He *the Almighty* addresses the believers, saying: ‘We have certainly sent down to you a Book in which is your mention’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 10). The honour of the Quran is everlasting as it is continuously recited with different modes of recitation, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘By the Quran with its reminding…’ (*Sad:* 1).

It may also refer to all the Scriptures revealed to all Messengers of Allah, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Their reckoning has drawn near to men, and in heedlessness are they turning aside. [1] There comes not to them a new reminder from their Lord but they hear it while they sport [2]’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 1-2); and He also says: ‘And certainly We gave to Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) the *Furqan* and a light and a reminder for those who would guard (against evil)’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 48).

Adh-Dhikr also means to remind. In this sense, Allah *the Almighty* has sent the Quran to remind the people about their Lord and Creator and to do what pleases Him. It attracts their attention towards believing in Him and obeying Him. Indeed, the Quran is an honour for them. Further, He *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Alif Lam Mim Sad. [1] A Book revealed to you – so let there be no straitness in your breast on account of it – that you may warn thereby, and a reminder close to the believers. [2] Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord… [3]’ (*al-A‘raf:* 1-3). This Book was revealed to him because he was sent to the people to warn them if they deviated, and to remind, guide, help and give glad tiding for the believers.

Allah *the Almighty* says that He has sent the Quran to be followed because it is the Divine Way of Guidance that was prescribed for reforming the worldly life. So, the people should follow what was sent to them from their Lord. You should not follow any other path like what most people do through setting man-made laws according to their desires. For example, some governments attempt to impose capitalism by force. These man-made legislations cannot be compared to the Legislations of Allah, because they are human ideas that contradict other human ideas. What is better than that is to receive our legislations from the One Whom we do not disdain to be His servants, that is, Allah *the Almighty*.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

رَّسُولٗا يَتۡلُواْ عَلَيۡكُمۡ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ مُبَيِّنَٰتٖ لِّيُخۡرِجَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ
مِنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِۚ وَمَن يُؤۡمِنۢ بِٱللَّهِ وَيَعۡمَلۡ صَٰلِحٗا يُدۡخِلۡهُ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي
مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدٗاۖ قَدۡ أَحۡسَنَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُۥ رِزۡقًا ١١

And a messenger – reciting to you God's revelations that make things clear – to bring those who believe and do righteous deeds from darkness into light. God will admit those who believe in Him and do righteous deeds into Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will remain for ever — He has made good provision for them[11]
(The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 11)

The word 'Messenger' here is a substitution for the word *Dhikr* (Reminder). The messenger here is Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. So, both the Quran and Jibril (Gabriel) are sent down because the latter was sent with the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, Jibril (Gabriel) is the Messenger of Allah from among the angels to the Messenger of Allah from among the human beings. He *the Almighty* describes him as: 'The Faithful Spirit has descended with it' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193). Therefore, he is the Holy Spirit trusted with delivering the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

One of the great Bounties of Allah *the Almighty* is that He has sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to us to recite the verses of the Quran in order to attract people's attention to the universal signs. He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: '…a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His communications and purifying them…' (*Al-'Imran:* 164). Thus, Prophet Muhammad's mission was not confined to reciting the verses of the Quran so that the people admire them; rather, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was assigned to draw the listeners' attention to the One Who has created this marvellous universe and its wonderful signs. There is a difference between the recitation of the verses and teaching them. The recitation means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* reads the Quran to them, but teaching it entails that the listeners become able recite it themselves. So, He *the Almighty* says: '…and teaching them the Book and the wisdom…' (*Al-'Imran:* 164). Teaching means to transmit knowledge from the teacher to the student.

The revelation used to descend to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with some revelations up to forty verses or three-quarters of a *hizb* (section). When the revelation of these verses ends, he recites them to his Companions in order that they write them down and memorise them. So, the scribes write them down and they, along with other Companions, memorise them. So, they were the *ummah* of memorisation and narration.

Thus, the recitation of the Quran is just to read it, whereas teaching its verses means to know their meaning and the commands they carry in order to apply them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was brought up among the people of Mecca and it is known that he could neither read nor write, and that he did not go to a teacher. Reading is the synonym of recitation because we do not recite except what is written down and is meaningful. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* commands him *peace and blessings be upon him* to recite the Quran to all people whether they believe in him and in the Quran or not. This recitation constitutes a Call to Islam.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'These are the revelations of Allah which We recite to you [Muhammad] with the truth' (*al-Baqara:* 252), He refers to His wonderful signs. The signs of Allah *the Almighty* are of three kinds:

1- The universal signs that are the wonderful phenomena in the cosmos about which He *the Almighty* says: 'And from His signs is the night and day and the sun and the moon…' (*Fussilat:* 27); and: '…one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves' (*ar-Rum:* 21).

2- The miracles that prove the veracity of the Messengers while conveying the Divine Messages. The miracles go against the laws of nature that the people are familiar with and that is why they attract people's attention. An example of this is when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* was thrown into the fire, and then Allah *the Almighty* saved him. The primary purpose of this incident is not to save him from the fire because Allah *the Almighty* could have made them unable to catch him in the first place. Further, if He had willed, He could have quenched the fire with rain. However, this was intended to be a miracle to prove his truthfulness. He *the Almighty* has ordered the fire, saying: 'O fire! Be a comfort and peace to Ibrahim (Abraham)' (*al-Anbiya':* 69).

3- The verses of the Holy Quran are also called signs. As long as the Quranic verses, the miracles and the universal signs are all from Allah *the Almighty* then no contradiction can happen among them. This is due to the fact that the One Who has created the universe, sent the Messengers with the miracles, and revealed the Quran is One God. If this were not the case, the contradiction would happen among these signs.

The word 'sign' is used to refer to the wonderful and attractive things. You may say, for example, that so and so is a sign in beauty, which means that his beauty is attractive. You may also say, 'So and so is a sign in smartness,' which signifies that his smartness is wonderful. Thus, the sign is that the human being reflects on its wonderfulness for a long time.

Thus, the signs are either seen in the cosmos or recited in the Quran. The Quran explains the signs of the universe and the universe reciprocally explains the verses of the Quran. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with the verses of the Quran to attract people's attention to the seen signs in the universe. The wonderfulness of the signs of the universe is represented in the precision of the creation.

Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* has a religious mission which is to attract the attention of the listeners of the Quran to the Creator of this marvellous universe which is full of wonderful signs. Then, he *peace and blessings be upon him* should inform them about the Way of Guidance that corresponds with the marvelousness of the universe. By so doing, he *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys the Divine Way that purifies and elevates the human being.

In fact, Islam is the path of light whose principles are clear. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has conveyed it perfectly, clearly and comprehensively in a way that encompasses all the matters of life. With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…that make things clear…' (*at-Talaq:* 11), it means that the Quranic verses prove for the one who listens to and reflects on them that they are Allah's revelations. These verses are clear in themselves and illustrate for the people the rulings that they need to regulate their lives.

Hafs recited the Quranic word *Mubayanat* as *Mubayinat* (clarifying) which means that the Quranic verses clarify the rulings that the people need. The majority of the reciters of the Quran recited it as *Mubayanat* (clarified) which means that these verses are clarified by Allah *the Almighty* as He says elsewhere: 'We have made the communications clear to you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 118). This means that He *the Almighty* clarifies through these verses what is lawful and what is unlawful. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly We have sent to you clear communications…' (*an-Nur:* 34). So, these clear verses guarantee a life of honour and purity for Allah's Vicegerent on earth. They address and regulate all the matters of life; there is no matter that the Islamic legislation does not regulate, so no one is excused for violating it.

In this regard, 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb said about the Quran, 'It contains the rulings that judge between you; the news of what happened before you; and what will happen after you. It is the Criterion (between right and wrong) without jest. Whoever among the oppressive abandons it, Allah crushes him and whoever seeks guidance from other than it, Allah leaves him to stray.'(1) The time keeps confirming this statement. Consider the fate of all the ideas, ideologies, parties and the capitalist and the communist states that attempted to destroy the religion of Islam; all of these ideologies, beliefs, and states declined before people's eyes.

Indeed, whoever among the oppressive people abandons it, Allah *the Almighty* crushes him, and whoever seeks guidance from a source other than it, He *the Almighty* leaves him to stray. He *the Almighty* is your Creator and He knows best what is in your interest. So, it is not appropriate to be one of His creatures and then you become arrogant and set laws for yourself.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him. See: At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no.2906; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 636; Ad-Darimi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3331; and Ibn Abu Shayba, Musannaf, Hadith no. 30629.*

The meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…that makes things clear…' (*at-Talaq:* 11) is that His revelations are the clear verses that straighten the movement of life. In fact, life necessitates that everyone undertakes his mission and that people's activities become supportive not conflicting. What causes people to suffer is that some of them build, while others destroy. The intended outcome of these verses is stated in His saying: '…to bring those who believe and do righteous deeds from darkness into light…' (*at-Talaq:* 11).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to bring the people out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of belief. In order that his people could understand his Message, he was selected from among them and shared their cultural norms. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Certainly Allah conferred a benefit upon the believers when He raised among them a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His Messages and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the wisdom, although before that they were surely in manifest error' (*Al-'Imran:* 164).

Thus, the Quran was revealed to bring the people out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of belief in order to lead their lives upon guidance and insight. Allah *Glorified is He* makes a comparison between the believers and the disbelievers, saying: 'Allah is the guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light; and [as for] those who disbelieve, their guardians are the devils who take them out of the light into the darkness' (*al-Baqara:* 257). The Lord *Glorified is He* is the Ally of the believers Who cannot leave them in the darkness of polytheism and disbelief; rather, He brings them out of that darkness into the light of belief, monotheism and obedience. Hence He *the Almighty* is the Guardian of the believers in all their affairs; He loves, supports and grants them victory. Accordingly, He *Glorified is He* brings them out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of belief. On the other hand, the allies of the disbelievers, that is the false gods and the devils, take them out of the light into the depths of darkness.

Hence, the believers followed the way of peace and pleased Allah *Glorified is He*. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah guides those who follow what pleases Him to the ways of peace and brings them out of darkness [lit. darknesses] into light' (*al-Ma'ida:* 16) meaning, whoever follows what pleases Him *the Almighty* Allah will be pleased with him and will guide him to the ways of peace as a reward for him. Such good people are brought out of darkness into light. Darkness, as we know, is the state where collision is likely to happen.

When Allah *Glorified is He* brings them out of darkness into light, the believers are able to distinguish between the Righteous Path leading to goodness and the other paths that lead to evil. We should take into account that He *the Almighty* says that He brings the believers out of darkness using the plural 'darknesses', but He does not say He brings them into lights, that is He does not use 'light' in the plural form; rather, He uses it in the singular form, 'light'. This is due to the fact that light is only one and cannot be numerous. The darkness, on the other hand, overwhelms any place devoid of light and it can be found everywhere. Not only the material side but also the spiritual side of the worldly life needs to be illuminated by the spiritual light of guidance. The light with which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came simultaneously enlightens the material and the spiritual sides for us not to collide with anything hidden in the darkness and for us to move on a clear path without colliding with any barriers.

Someone may ask, 'Why do people live in darkness? Why do they not incline towards the light?' We respond to this question, saying, 'Some people derive benefits when the rest of the people live in darkness. Such people, who forcibly appropriate people's properties and cause mischief on earth, are afraid of the callers who forbid them from doing injustice and call them to guidance using logic and reason. In fact, the unjust person hates the Call to faith as well as its callers. Such people have become accustomed to living in darkness and chaos, and causing mischief to others. When the true religion came, they turned away from its light because it deprives them of their delusive pleasures of living in darkness and error, and because it guides other people from whose misguidance they derive benefits'.

Darkness is the place where collision is likely to happen. When Islam brings the people out of darkness into the light, they are able to see the Righteous Path leading to goodness and the other paths leading to evil. Besides, their movements and activities will be supportive, not conflicting. Hence, all the causes of rancour and hatred among those who embrace Islam will come to an end. As a matter of fact, the spiritual darkness is stronger than the material one and, similarly, the spiritual light is stronger than the material one.

Allah *Glorified is He* brings only the believers who do righteous deeds out from darkness. Thus, every good deed must stem from one’s Belief, that is, the believer's activities in life should be consistent with the Will of Allah *the Almighty* and with his Belief. Consequently, Belief is the source of every righteous deed.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Those who believe...’ (*at-Talaq:* 11), He refers to the actions of the heart, and when He says: ‘…do righteous deeds…’ (*at-Talaq:* 11), He refers to the actions of the limbs. The actions of the heart along with that of the limbs achieve together a righteous behaviour that complies with Belief. In fact, having a profound Belief makes the toil of doing righteous deeds acceptable and easy for the believer. Thus, doing righteous deeds is the fruit of having a strong belief. The righteous deeds are the actions that comply with Allah’s Way of Guidance. The opposite of righteousness is corruption. The least form of righteousness is to leave what is good in the same state if you cannot make it better. As a matter of fact, no one can do all the righteous deeds, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘But he who has done [whatever he could] of righteous deeds and has faith need have no fear of injustice or deprivation’ (*Ta Ha:* 112). But the Muslim is required to do righteous deeds to the best of his ability.

The lowest rank of righteousness is to leave what is good in the same condition by refraining from corrupting it. As a matter of fact, any action that serves man’s vicegerency on earth is a righteous deed. For example, paving the roads for people not to be tired; providing transportation for them to reach their destinations easily, and working on ending their concerns about the necessities of life are all forms of righteous deeds.

Allah’s Reward in the Hereafter will be on the grounds of believing and doing righteous deeds, a fact which is clearly manifested in His saying: ‘Allah will admit those who believe in Him and do righteous deeds into Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will remain forever…’ (*at-Talaq:* 11).

In the worldly life, He *Glorified is He* wants us to lead the good life that He grants to those who obey Him by believing and doing righteous deeds. In fact, the believer lives in a state of tranquility due to his Belief. In addition, He *Glorified is He* will admit him into Gardens with flowing rivers.

The rivers flow from beneath the Gardens, indicating that the source of these rivers is under these Gardens which are full of plants and sublime buildings. According to human estimation, the water which the plants need causes harm to the buildings; but the Estimation of Allah *Glorified is He* is different as He prepares everything according to what befits His Omnipotence.

In the worldly life, people's buildings are harmed by water, but on the contrary, Allah designs, due to His Omnipotence, Gardens with flowing rivers without these rivers causing any harm either to the buildings or the plants. With regard to the rivers of the Gardens, He *the Almighty* says: '…and He has prepared for them Gardens beneath which rivers flow…' (*at-Tawba:* 100) and He also says: 'Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will remain forever…' (*at-Talaq:* 11).

These rivers flow by themselves and they have no banks. They consist of numerous things that the human being desires, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure, [all] flow in it…' (*Muhammad:* 15).

The problem with the water of the river in this worldly life is that it may become stagnant and, consequently, its smell changes and algae appear on it. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about the water of paradise: '…rivers of water forever pure…' (*Muhammad:* 15). He *Glorified is He* removes from the water of the Gardens all the defects that we see in the water of our worldly life. Moreover, the water of the Gardens flows forever without the banks that restrain it.

In this vein, Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'You think that the rivers of the Garden flow in river beds dug in the earth. This is not true, for, by Allah, these rivers flow without river beds. One of their two banks is made of pearls and the other is made of rubies. The mud of these rivers is pure musk'. He was asked, 'What is pure musk?' He responded, 'It is the musk that has not been mixed with anything'.(1)

As far as the rivers of milk are concerned, they will be forever fresh. In this connection, the Arabs used to milk the she-camels and store the milk in containers made of goatskin. When the she-camels went far away for grazing or travelling and the Bedouin needed milk, his only option was to drink the stored one. He used to find its taste had altered, but he could not find anything else to drink. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* grants the believers rivers of milk which are forever fresh because they will live forever in these Gardens, as He says in the verse we are discussing: '…they will remain forever…' (*at-Talaq:* 11).

With regard to the rivers of the Garden, Allah *the Almighty* also says: '…rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink…' (*Muhammad:* 15). That wine is different from the wine of the worldly life which takes away one's reason. The wine of the Garden is delightful for those who drink it, unlike the wine in this worldly life. This is evident when you see the one who drinks wine, as he consumes the whole glass all at once. By contrast, when you drink a cup of mango juice, for example, you do not drink it all at once in order to enjoy its taste. The one who drinks wine in this worldly life, though, drinks it all at once. This is because if it is consumed quickly, its bitter and sour taste is less. Moreover, unlike the wine in the Hereafter, the wine of the worldly life takes away one's reason.

The fourth of these rivers is that of clarified honey. It is clarified and pure from any sand, pebbles, impurities or any other defects. It will be granted to the believers without any effort on their part. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* will provide us in the Hereafter with the best kind of honey that we used to desire in this worldly life, but without its defects.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they will remain forever (*khalideen*)…' (*at-Talaq:* 11) meaning the believers will dwell in the Gardens forever, for neither will the Gardens vanish nor will the believers be driven away from them. The Arabic word *'al-khulud'* (eternity) which is derived from '*khalideen*' (remain forever) means to live for a very long time and endlessly; it implies that living in the Gardens is not just for a long time, but it is endless. This fact is further illustrated in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And as to those who are made happy, they shall be in the Garden, abiding in it as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please...' (*Hud:* 108). Here, about what heaven and what earth does Allah *Glorified is He* speak? Is it the heaven that we see and the earth that we live on? This is not possible as He says in another verse: 'On the Day when the earth shall be changed into a different earth and the heavens (as well)' (*Ibrahim:* 48). The earth on which we live, and the heaven that shadows us, will be destroyed on the Day of Judgment. This means there is no eternal or immortal life on this earth, and that is why we should neglect this fleeting worldly life and focus on the eternal life of the Hereafter. Paradise is the Promised Land where you live without means of sustenance; you will not cultivate, harvest or do anything to earn your provision. Rather, once you think about something, you will find it before you without any effort or toil.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Abu Nu'aym, Hilyat Al-Awliya', 6/205; Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya, Sift Al-Janna, Hadith no. 66; and Ad-Daylami, Al-Firdaws Bi Ma'thur Al-Akhbar, Hadith no. 5412.*

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question, saying: 'He has made good provision for them' (*at-Talaq:* 11). The word 'provision' here reminds us about the Promise that Allah *Glorified is He* has made for the pious people, saying: 'Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, and will provide for them from an unexpected source' (*at-Talaq:* 2-3). Thus, the pious person is provided abundantly in this worldly life from an unexpected source. The Lord *the Almighty* grants him provision for himself, the maintenance of his wife under his guardianship—or the alimony of his divorced wife—and for his children.

Furthermore, in the Hereafter, Allah *Glorified is He* will give the believers another provision, namely, Gardens with flowing rivers where they will remain forever. Concerning this abundant provision, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He has made good provision for them' (*at-Talaq:* 11). Hence, He *the Almighty* will provide the believer abundantly with endless bliss in the Gardens of Paradise that contain many kinds of food, drinks and all what He has prepared for His righteous slaves.

Therefore, Allah, the Most Merciful, made a generous Promise, to reward those who believe in Him and do righteous deeds, of Gardens with flowing rivers where they will remain forever. The bliss of these Gardens will never run out or come to an end. No reward or provision is better than paradise, for it is incomparable with any bliss in this worldly life. He *Glorified is He* bestows His provision in both this worldly life and in the Hereafter, but His provision in the former is deemed little when compared with that of the latter, that is, paradise.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not say that He gave good provision to ‘them’, but He uses the singular form ‘him’ to indicate that every believer who does righteous deeds will have a special provision; it is not a general provision shared by all the believers. As a matter of fact, people vary concerning the provisions they receive in this worldly life and this will also be the case with the regards to their provision in paradise; they will have different food, drinks and houses. They will share, however, the state of eternity in paradise, and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…they will remain forever…’ (*at-Talaq:* 11), using the plural ‘they’. Hence, all of them will live eternally.

In many Quranic verses, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the provision in paradise; He, says, for example: ‘And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds that they shall have gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say, “This is what was given to us before”, and they shall be given the like of it’ (*al-Baqara:* 25). Both the chapter of *at-Talaq* and *al-Baqara* talk about the rivers and the provision of the Gardens whose fruits differ in taste and scent from that of the worldly life, although they share the same name. The people of the paradise will guess that this fruit may be a mango and that one may be a fig that they had eaten in the worldly life, but the fruits of paradise are totally different from that of the worldly life.

Moreover, the food of the people of paradise does not produce any wastes and the one may eat as much as he likes without discharging anything. This is because the fruits of this worldly life are different from that of the Hereafter with respect to how they are formed. Besides, while gaining the provision of this worldly life could be tiring, the provision of Allah *Glorified is He* in paradise is granted without having to rely on any means, and it is better than the provision of the worldly life that comes from pursuing means.

Inasmuch as Allah *Glorified is He* tells the believer that He has made for him a good provision, the believer should do righteous deeds. In this vein, the people of Qarun (Korah) advised him, saying: ‘Do not exult, surely Allah does not love those who exult [in riches]; And seek, by means of what Allah has given you, the abode of the future’ (*al-Qasas:* 76-77). Inasmuch as Allah *the Almighty* treats you benevolently, you should deal with other people kindly. You should forgive their faults and give good things to them to the same extent as you like Allah *Glorified is He* to forgive you your sins and give you of His Bounty.

Refraining from causing mischief on earth is an act of righteousness. In fact, corruption results from violating Allah’s Way of Guidance. In this connection, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and do not corrupt the earth after it has been set right’ (*al-An‘am:* 56). Allah *the Almighty* has created everything in a good state in order to delight His creation. For this reason, you should abstain from corrupting anything in the universe. His Way of Guidance is needed to establish a good spiritual life which takes precedence over the material one. Thus, you should be disciplined towards the universe around you to the extent that if you could not increase its goodness, at least leave it as it is, without corrupting it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَٰوَٰتٍ وَمِنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ ٱلْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوٓا۟
أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عِلْمًۢا ﴿١٢﴾

It is God who created seven heavens and a similar
[number] of earths. His command descends throughout
them. So you should realize that He has power over all
things and that His knowledge encompasses everything [12]
(The Quran, *at-Talaq:* 12)

The Divine Way of Guidance that the Lord *the Almighty* revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* teaches us that He has created the human beings as well as the universe. In fact, the precision of creation indicates the Existence of a Great Creator.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us about the greatness of the creation. In this regard, He says: ‘Allah has raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then He established Himself on the Throne; He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and explains the signs in detail so that you may be certain of meeting Him’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 2), and: ‘Allah, to Whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and woe to the unbelievers on account of the severe chastisement’ (*Ibrahim:* 2), and: ‘Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and sent down water from the clouds, then brought forth with it fruits as a sustenance for you. And He has made the ships subservient to you, that they might run their course in the sea by His command, and He has made the rivers subservient to you. He has made subservient to you the sun and the moon pursuing their courses, and He has made subservient to you the night and the day. He gives you all that you ask Him; and if you count Allah’s Favours, you will not be able to number them; most surely, man is very unjust, very ungrateful’ (*Ibrahim:* 32-34).

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that He has created the heavens and earth and explains that the heavens are seven, and that is why they are used in the plural form, while the word ‘earth’ is used in the singular, a point which is clear in His saying: ‘Surely your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 56). However, in the chapter of *at-Talaq*, He *the Almighty* says: ‘It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth the like of them’ (*at-Talaq:* 12). Here arises a question, which is, ‘Why does He mention the heavens in the plural, while the earth is mentioned in the singular? Why does Allah not say, ‘seven earths’ using the plural form?’ He *Glorified is He* does not use the Arabic word *‘aradin’* (earths) because it is heavy on the tongue and difficult to pronounce, but He mentions the Arabic word *‘as-samawat’* (the heavens) in the plural form because is it light and easy to pronounce. This is why, when Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the heavens, He says: ‘seven heavens’ (*at-Talaq:* 12). On the contrary, He does not say, ‘seven earths’; rather, He says: ‘…and of the earth the like of them’ (*at-Talaq:* 12). This indicates that the earths are seven like the heavens, even if we literally consider that the heaven is what shadows you and that the earth is what you live on.

But where are the seven earths? The Quran tells us that the heavens are seven and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told us that he passed by them on the Journey of Ascension. He said that there is so-and-so in the first heaven and so-and-so in the second one, and so on. Given that the heaven is what shadows you and the earth is what carries you, then the heaven of the creatures living in the lowest heaven is the heaven that is immediately higher than theirs. Likewise, the lowest heaven is the heaven of those living on earth, and so on and so forth.

The heaven is a canopy, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We made the heaven a well-secured canopy, and yet they turn away from its wonders’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 32). Thus, the Great Creator made the heaven a canopy that covers the whole earth and it is preserved without any visible supports. Accordingly, the Lord *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah has raised up the heavens with no visible supports’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 2), and He says: ‘He created the heavens without any pillars that you can see, and put mountains upon the earth lest it might shake with you…’ (*Luqman:* 10). Hence Allah *Glorified is He* has created high heavens which are sustained by His Omnipotence without any supports. Another possible interpretation is that the verse implies the existence of supports for the heavens, but they are different from the ones that we are familiar with. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* has raised the heavens using the laws of gravity. The verse could also mean that the heavens’ supports are invisible; when we look to the horizon, we find that the heaven has no supports.

The creation of the heavens and the earth is not an easy action except for Allah, the Omnipotent, Who has created mankind wonderfully. However, the creation of the heavens and the earth is more wonderful than the creation of man, as He says: ‘Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind’ (*Ghafir:* 57).

Consequently, we come to know that Allah *Glorified is He* might have raised the heavens by so subtle and fine supports that our eyes cannot perceive them. These supports may be existent, but we cannot see them because we are restricted by the limitations of our sight. You should not be surprised to know that there could be invisible creatures because the eye, which is one of the means of perception, has its special law that enables it to see things and not see others.

Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created the seven heavens, is not one of the false gods or idols worshipped by the polytheists. These gods and idols cannot create anything, and that is why the Lord *Glorified is He* says to the polytheists: ‘Have you considered your associates which you call on besides Allah? Show me what part of the earth they have created, or have they any share in the heavens’ (*Fatir:* 40).

Allah's Perfect Omnipotence is evident in the creation of the heavens and earth; He says: ‘Do you not see how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another’ (*Nuh:* 15). He has created them one over the other with precision to the extent that the beholder sees no flaw in them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Who created the seven heavens one above another; you see no incongruity in the creation of the Most Gracious. Then look again and again, can you see any disorder?’ (*al-Mulk:* 3) If the beholder looks again and again to the heaven, he finds no defects, cracks or flaws. This is the creation of the Creator Who wonderfully builds designs and adorns.

To continue, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and of the earth the like of them. His Command descends throughout them.’ (*at-Talaq:* 12) His command descends throughout the seven heavens as well as the seven earths. The command can refer to the revelation or the Divine Decree and the Predestination about who will live or die and who will become rich or poor. Allah's Command regulates all things; He, for example, sends water from the sky, causes the plants to grow and brings the day and night and summer and winter. Some scholars said that in every earth and heaven, there are some of Allah's Creatures, Commands and Decrees.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘So you should realise that He has power over all things’ (*at-Talaq:* 12). Hence, Allah's Decree and Command descends throughout the heavens and earths in order for us to know the reality of His Power and Control and that He is Able to do anything He wants, for nothing can stop Him. Everything is subjected to His Will and Omnipotence, and to Him belongs the control of the heavens and earth as His Power is over all things. He has absolute Power over His Dominion so that if He wills to do something, it will definitely happen. There is no absolute power in the universe except Allah's Power, and only what He wills takes place. He is Able to eternalise His Divine Laws because no power can change this reality, as these Laws are prescribed by Allah *Glorified is He* Himself, and thus no one has the power to change them.

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* is eternally Powerful; He possessed this Attribute even before anything existed for Him to have power over. That is to say that He did not become powerful only after the creation of mankind; rather, He was Omnipotent even before creating them, and by virtue of His Power, they were created. He is unchangeable, and as a result He will remain Powerful and Existent in every moment and forever.

Allah *the Almighty* is eternally omnipotent. He has been Able to bring all His creation into existence and to give them what maintains their lives and preserves their species. Out of His Bounty, He provides everyone with provision, principles and morals they need. His command descends between the heavens and the earths in order for the people to know the reality of His Power and Control, and to know also that nothing is beyond His Power.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…and that His knowledge encompasses everything' (*at-Talaq:* 12). He *the Almighty* is fully aware of everything, even one's thoughts. He knows what the ears hear, what the eyes see and what is in the people's chests. As His Knowledge encompasses all things, He knows all the feelings of human beings.

This all-inclusive Knowledge entails having Knowledge and Power over the people; they will not escape from either His Knowledge or His Power. The knowledge is required along with the power, and that is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely, your Lord encompasses men' (*al-Isra':* 60). This comprehensive knowledge means that Allah *the Almighty* is fully aware of the people and is able to impose His commands on them.

the chapter of

at-Tahrim

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *at-Tahrim* (1).

Allah(2) *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَآ أَحَلَّ ٱللَّهُ لَكَۖ تَبۡتَغِي مَرۡضَاتَ
أَزۡوَٰجِكَۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمٞ ١

Prophet, why do you prohibit what God has made
lawful to you in your desire to please your wives?
Yet God is forgiving and merciful [1]
(The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 1)

What links Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to his followers is not his name, Muhammad; rather, it is his being the Prophet and Messenger of Allah. Thus, every Muslim should call him with that title. Allah *Glorified is He* Who has created and selected him, distinguished Prophet Muhammad from other Prophets and even from the Messengers of firm resolve by addressing them with their names while addressing him *peace and blessings be upon him* with the honorary title of prophethood or Messengership. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden…’

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(1) The chapter of *at-Tahrim* was revealed in Medina. It is chapter number 66 in the Quran and number 107 in terms of its revelation. It consists of 12 verses and was revealed after the chapter of *al-Hujurat* and before the chapter of *al-Jumu‘a*. It is also called *‘Lima Tuharrim’* (Why do you prohibit).

(2) The Islamic conception of ‘Allah’ is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of ‘God’. However, the word ‘Allah’ does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use ‘Allah’ rather than ‘God’ as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(*al-Baqara:* 35), and: ‘O Nuh (Noah)! Descend with peace from Us…’ (*Hud:* 48), and also: ‘O Ibrahim (Abraham)! You have already fulfilled the dream…’ (*as-Saffat:* 105), including: ‘O Musa (Moses)! I am Allah…’ (*al-Qasas:* 30), and: ‘O ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Mary, did you say to men…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116), as well as: ‘O Dawud (David)! Surely We have made you a ruler in the land…’ (*Sad:* 26).

By contrast, Allah *Glorified is He* did not address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by his name; rather, He called him by his honorary title as a Messenger and a Prophet. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* has not made the way of addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* like the way of addressing other Prophets and Messengers. If this is the case, we should not call him by his name; rather, we should call him by his title as a Prophet and a Messenger because these are the honorary titles that befit him.

When He *Glorified is He* addressed the most honourable people from among His creation, that is, His Messengers, He used their personal names. The personal name does not give any description because it only serves to specify the person, apart from his qualities. Thus Allah *Glorified is He* has addressed His Messengers with their names which only define their persons, but He has never called Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by his personal name, as He used the title of prophethood or Messengership that gives an additional description about him. The reason is that Allah *the Almighty* wanted to tell us that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believes in all the Messengers and that his Message abrogates theirs. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad deserves to be called by the title of the Messenger as it gives another description about him: he will remain the Messenger of Allah until the coming of the Hour.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘O Prophet…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1). The Quran mentions that Prophet Muhammad’s personal name is Muhammad and Ahmed. When someone is born, he is given a name. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has a name, a *kunya* (tecknonym) and a title. His name is Muhammad, which is mentioned four times in the Quran; firstly: ‘Muhammad is only a Messenger before whom many Messengers have gone…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 144); secondly: ‘Muhammad is not the father of anyone from the men; he is Allah’s Messenger’ (*al-Ahzab:* 40); thirdly: ‘Muhammad is the

Messenger of Allah…' (*al-Fath:* 29); and lastly: 'He will overlook the bad deeds of those who have faith, do good deeds, and believe in what has been sent down to Muhammad' (*Muhammad:* 2). In the Quran, he was called Ahmed only one time in Allah's saying: '…giving the good news of a Messenger who will come after me ['Isa (Jesus)], his name being Ahmad…' (*as-Saff:* 6).

Prophet Muhammad's *kunya* (teknonym) is Abu Al-Qasim and his honorary title is the 'Messenger of Allah'. When he was born, his grandfather named him by the most beloved name to him; He said that he named him 'Muhammad' (the praiseworthy) in order for him to be praised on earth and in the heaven.(1) When Prophet Muhammad's son, Al-Qasim, was born, his *kunya* (teknonym) became Abu Qasim (the father of Al-Qasim). Further, when Allah *Glorified is He* selected him to convey His Message to the creation, He gave him the title of Prophet and Messenger. These two titles are greatly dignifying for anyone if the people called him by them, let alone Allah *Glorified is He*. When we want to dignify the person we are addressing, we put some titles before his name, saying, for example, 'Your Master', 'Your Excellency', and, 'Your Majesty'.

In the verse under discussion, the Arabic word *'iyyoha'* (O you!) preceded the name of the person who is being called, that is, *'an-Nabyy'* (the Prophet) because it starts with the article *'al'* (the). This is because in Arabic it is not possible to call someone by their name without mentioning the word *'iyyoha'* (O you!) first. However, this does not apply to the Name Allah, as we call Him *the Almighty* with this Name without inserting the word *'iyyoha'* in front of it, although His Name has the article '*al*' at the beginning. It is as if He *Glorified is He* is Unique is everything, even in the way of calling Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Muhammad as a Prophet and a Messenger because he is like an ambassador between Him *the Almighty* and His creation; Prophet Muhammad was sent to convey the Divine Way of Guidance to the people in order that they follow it in their lives. In fact, a Messenger is the one who conveys a Divine Message, whereas a Prophet is the one sent by Allah *the Almighty* without any new laws, as he follows the laws of the Messenger who preceded him. A Prophet constitutes a role model and a good example for his people. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* deserves the two titles. He is a Prophet because he was commanded to do certain acts of worship but he was not commanded to impose them on the people, and he is a Messenger because he was ordered to do certain obligations and was commanded to convey and impose them on the people.

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(1) *See Ibn 'Ashur, At-Tahrir wa At-Tanwir, 3/237.*

The scholars said that a Messenger is necessarily a Prophet, but a Prophet is not necessarily a Messenger. This is true if the terminological meaning is considered; however, they are all sent by Allah *Glorified is He*. The Arabic word *'Nabi'* (Prophet) is derived from the word *'naba'*' (an important announcement) which refers to a great matter of which we should be heedful. The root of the word *'naba''* is *'nabwa',* which refers to a high circular area in the middle of a flat place. When you say, for example, that you have seen so-and-so today, this is not called a *'naba''* because it is not an important piece of news. For this reason, Allah says about the Day of Judgment: 'What are they asking about? The momentous announcement (*an-naba'*)' (*an-Naba':* 1, 2). '*An-naba''* is a momentous announcement that reaches all people.

As a matter of fact, Prophet Muhammad's prophethood is a mercy in itself and is the reason Allah keeps sending down His Mercy on the creation. He is a supreme example of good manners and ethics. Those who obey Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are his true followers. A Prophet only comes to direct people's attention towards Allah's Way of Guidance that properly regulates their activities in the universe. The people themselves are the ones who benefit from it, and they suffer only when they deviate from the Divine Way.

Allah is the One Who selects His Prophets, and prophethood is superior to any worldly position. It is a Mercy from Allah *the Almighty* as He says about Al-Khidr (Khidr): 'They found one from among Our slaves on whom We had granted mercy from Us…' (*al-Kahf:* 65). Moreover, when the polytheists asked, 'Why was this Quran not revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 31), Allah *the Almighty* responded to them saying: 'Will they distribute the Mercy of your Lord?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32) Here, mercy refers to prophethood. He *the Almighty* also says: 'Those who disbelieve from among the followers of the Book do not like, nor do the polytheists, that good should be sent down to you from your Lord, and Allah chooses whom He pleases for His special Mercy, and Allah is the Lord of Mighty Grace' (*al-Baqara:* 105).

Allah *Glorified is He* grants prophethood and shows His Mercy to whom He wills. Prophethood is a Divine Bounty and is considered the highest form of His Mercy which has been given to the people, being represented in the Prophets. It is a Mercy that He *Glorified is He* has distributed among the offspring of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him*.

How can the polytheists distribute Allah's Mercy represented by prophethood while He is the One Who distributes even what is lower than it, that is, their provisions and livelihood in this worldly life? Therefore, His saying about Prophet Lut (Lot) *peace be upon him*: 'And We admitted him into Our Mercy; surely he was of the good' (*al-Anbiya':* 75) means that He *the Almighty* selected him as a Prophet because he was qualified for this mission. After all, He *Glorified is He* knows best where to place His Messages.

However, the climax of Allah's Mercy is embodied in sending the seal of the Prophets and the Messengers, namely, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, He *the Almighty* addresses him, saying: 'We have not sent you except as a mercy to all people' (*al-Anbiya':* 107). This means, while the Messengers before him *peace and blessings be upon him* were a mercy to their people, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a mercy to all people. Hence, Allah's Message is a Mercy for which He singles out whoever He wills from among His slaves, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'Allah knows best where to place His Messages' (*al-An'am:* 124).

In order to differentiate between a Prophet and a Messenger, we say that both of them are sent by Allah *the Almighty,* but a Prophet does not come with a new Law; he is sent with the Law of the Messenger who preceded him. Proving that a Prophet is different from a Messenger, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And We did not send before you any Messenger or Prophet, but when he desired…' (*al-Hajj:* 52). A Prophet is only sent to be a practical example for the implementation of the teachings conveyed by the Messenger who preceded him.

A Messenger sent by Allah *the Almighty* bears a new Message that includes new rulings and addresses new issues which were not addressed by the Message that preceded it; but a chosen Prophet is the one who applies what came in the previous Message. That is, the Prophets are practical examples who implemented the previous Messages, but they do not come with new Messages. By contrast, a Messenger is sent with a new Law to adhere to and apply; this is his additional mission. To sum up, the Lord *Glorified is He* has sent Messengers to convey and apply a Message and He has sent Prophets to be ideal examples of applying these Messages with which the previous Messengers were sent.

Back to the verse in question; Allah *Glorified is He* reproaches Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you…' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). Allah *the Almighty* has reproached him many times in the Quran. This reproach, in fact, is in his interest and not against him, just like the father who reproaches his son for exhausting himself with studying, out of fear for him. An illustrative example for this is when the Lord *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *'Abasa*: 'He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him. And what could make him know that he will purify himself?' (*'Abasa:* 1-3) Here, Allah has reproached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he left the believing man who came to ask him about some religious matters, calling instead the disbelievers, who denied his Message, to Islam; as if he chose the hard choice and left the easier one.

Thus, this reproach is in the interest of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and not against him, as some people mistakenly think when they try to understand this verse. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* reproaches him, saying: 'O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you…' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made matters difficult for himself by prohibiting what is lawful for him. As we have said previously, this reproach is beneficial for him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

With regard to the case of Ibn Umm Maktum, for which Allah *Glorified is He* reproached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the chapter of *'Abasa*, we find that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* realised that the weak people easily accepted his Message. And for this reason, he pre-occupied and exhausted himself by calling the disbelieving, arrogant masters of Quraysh, hoping that they might taste the sweetness of Belief. Thus, the reproach is in his best interest. Out of his keenness on guiding all the people to Islam, he used to deal with arrogant people kindly and leniently, hoping that he may win over their hearts.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1), it means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prohibited himself from what is lawful for the rest of the believers. The Lord *the Most High* explains to Prophet Muhammad that he should not prohibit what He has made lawful for him, which is in his interest. Of course, only He *the Almighty* is entitled to make something lawful or unlawful; no one should intervene in this matter. The human being, however, sometimes intervenes in Allah's Ruling by prohibiting what He made lawful or by permitting what He made unlawful. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘O you who believe! Do not forbid the good things which Allah has made lawful for you…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 87).

But the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 1) alludes to something that made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* so angry that he refrained from certain lawful matters which he desired. We should note that he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not permit what the Lord *the Almighty* had made unlawful; rather, he prohibited for himself what Allah *Glorified is He* made lawful, which is not in his interest. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is reproaching Prophet Muhammad for exhausting himself by doing this. That is, this reproach is in his interest.

As prohibition constrains the person, Allah *the Almighty* reproached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for constraining himself by prohibiting what He has made lawful for him, just as you may reproach your son who exhausts himself by staying up to study. Consequently, the reproach is beneficial to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. We should note that Allah *Glorified is He* made things lawful and others unlawful; consequently, you should not make what is unlawful permissible or what is lawful prohibited, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Who has prohibited the embellishment of Allah which He has produced for His slaves and the good provisions?’ (*al-A‘raf:* 32)

We see that Allah *the Almighty* forbids Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from constraining himself by prohibiting what Allah has made lawful for him in the same way that He will blame him if Prophet Muhammad—Allah forbid—permitted what He has made unlawful. Regarding this incident, 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to visit Zainab Bint Jahsh and to have honey there. So, 'Aisha and Hafsa agreed that the one whom Prophet Muhammad visited first should say, 'I notice that you smell of the *Maghafir* (gum of mimosa)'. Prophet Muhammad visited one of them and she said that to him, whereupon he said, 'I have had honey in the house of Zainab Bint Jahsh and I will never do that again'. Afterwards, the following verses were revealed: 'O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you in your desire to please your wives? Yet Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. He has ordained a way for you [believers] to release yourselves from [such] oaths—Allah is your Helper: He is the All Knowing, the All-Wise. Prophet [Muhammad] told something in confidence to one of his wives. When she disclosed it [to another wife] and Allah made this known to him, he confirmed part of it, keeping the rest to himself. When he confronted her with what she had done, she asked, "Who told you about this?" He replied, "The All Knowing, the All-Aware told me". If both of you [wives] repent to Allah—for your hearts have inclined [away from/to what is right]—[all will be well]; but if you collaborate against him, [be warned that] Allah, He is his Protector, and so are Jibril (Gabriel) and all righteous believers, and furthermore, the angels will be his supporters. His Lord may well replace you with better wives if the Prophet [Muhammad] decides to divorce any of you: wives who submit to Allah, true believers, devout, who turn to Him in repentance and worship Him, given to Fasting/travelling [for their faith in Islam], whether previously married or virgins' (*at-Tahrim:* 1-5).

Thus, this story begins when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in the habit of visiting all his wives after the Dawn Prayer. One narration states that Hafsa Bint 'Umar *Allah be pleased with her* was gifted a bottle of honey and she used to give some of it to Prophet Muhammad when he visited her. Therefore, 'Aisha became annoyed because Prophet Muhammad used to stay a long time with Hafsa. She asked a slave girl from Abyssinia called

Khadra' to see what he was doing when he went to Hafsa. The slave girl told 'Aisha about the matter of the honey, which made her jealous. She sent to the other wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and asked them to tell the Prophet that they smell *Maghafir* (gum of mimosa) on him, which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* hated because of its bad smell and because it harmed the angel who used to bring the revelation to him. Thereupon, all his wives told him that they smelt the gum of mimosa on him. When he visited 'Aisha, she put her hand on her nose, whereupon he asked her, 'What is the matter with you?' She replied that she smelt the gum of mimosa. When she asked him if he had eaten it, he answered her negatively and told her that Hafsa had given him honey. She replied, 'You have had the honey of the bees which took their nectar from the gum of mimosa'. Thus, he took an oath to refrain from eating honey and he made it unlawful for himself.(1)

Allah *the Almighty* does not want Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to do the same as Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* who prohibited some matters for himself which Allah *the Almighty* had made unlawful. In this regard, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'All food was lawful to the children of Israel except that which Israel had forbidden to himself, before the Torah was revealed. Say, "Bring, then, the Torah and read it, if you are truthful"' (*Al-'Imran:* 93). That is, Israel, Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* made unlawful for himself some kinds of food because he was allowed to do that or because He *the Almighty* approved his action.

When someone makes a vow, he commits himself to do what Allah *the Almighty* has not imposed on him. Israel only prohibited himself from some kinds of food before the revelation of the Torah, and these then became unlawful for the children of Israel as well. By contrast, the Lord *the Almighty* reproached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for prohibiting himself from what is lawful. His prohibition was not imposed on the believers; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* has established the following maxim: 'Who has prohibited the beautiful [gifts] of Allah which He has produced for His slaves and the provisions [which are] clean and pure?' (*al-A'raf:* 32). As long as Allah *the Almighty* has brought forth the adornments and good provisions, then He allows His slaves to enjoy them.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5268 and 6972; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3752.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…in your desire to please your wives?' (*at-Tahrim:* 1), it indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prohibited what was lawful for him in order to please his wives. The word *'azwaj'* (mates) is the plural of *'zawj'* (mate), which means one mate that has something similar to the other mate. For this reason you should not think that it refers to two mates; rather, it refers to only one mate, as the Lord *the Most High* says: 'Then He made of him two mates (*az-zawjain*), the male and the female' (*al-Qiyama:* 39) meaning the male is one *'zawj'* (mate), and the female is also one '*zawj*'.

In fact, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was the best one among the people, especially in terms of good treatment of his household and wives. To the best of his ability, he was keen on pleasing and treating them benevolently. However, Allah *Glorified is He* willed to correct the matter of his making what is lawful prohibited for himself. The husband should not prohibit what He *the Almighty* has made lawful for him in order to please his wives.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse, saying: 'Yet Allah is Forgiving and Merciful' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). This is a proof that He has forgiven Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for prohibiting himself from what He has made lawful. The Lord *the Almighty* is Forgiving and Merciful; He forgives people's sins if they seek His Forgiveness. The Lord *Glorified is He* is so merciful that He does not hasten to punish the people for their sins out of His Compassion for them, and He loves those who repent to Him.

This means that Allah *the Almighty* is Forgiving and Merciful even to the one who delays repentance for a while, in order for him to join those who have faith and make up for what he has lost. Allah *the Almighty* forgives the previous sins of His slave if the slave wants to make amends for them. Allah *Glorified is He* is eternally All-Forgiving and All-Merciful; He possesses these Attributes even before anyone existed to forgive or for Him to show mercy to. His Attributes have been affirmed and He is the Unchangeable One Who can change anything. Time does not change Him; He is eternally All-Forgiving, All-Merciful, All Knowing and All-Wise.

In their absolute sense, the Attribute of Forgiveness and Mercifulness are only attributed to Allah *the Almighty*. These Attributes are manifested in accepting the repentance of the guilty and showing mercy to the wronged person. That is, Allah *the Almighty* is the All-Forgiving and the All-Merciful.

You should never say that so-and-so does not deserve Allah’s Forgiveness and Mercy because He *the Almighty* controls the affairs of the heavens and earth, and He is the One Who has made it obligatory on Himself to justly recompense the human beings with what they deserve. He has Absolute Power over the universe, and His Forgiveness and Mercy precede His Anger and Punishment. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Before Allah created the creations, He wrote a Book [wherein is written], “My Mercy has preceded My Anger”. That Book is written with Him on His Throne’.(1)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَدْ فَرَضَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَحِلَّةَ أَيْمَٰنِكُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ مَوْلَىٰكُمْ ۖ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢﴾

He has ordained a way for you [believers] to release you from [such] oaths — God is your helper: He is the All Knowing, the Wise [2] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 2)

Prescribing the expiation for one’s broken oaths preceded Prophet Muhammad’s oath to prohibit for himself some of what is lawful. We know that the Arabic particle *‘qad’,* written before ‘has ordained’ in this verse, is used to affirm the action when it precedes a verb in the past tense. However, when it is used with the present tense, it indicates that the action is likely to happen if there are logical reasons to support that; otherwise, the action will be deemed unlikely to happen. This particle, however, affirms the action, even if the verb is in the present tense, when it is pertinent to any of the Attributes of Allah *the Almighty* as in His saying in the chapter of *al-An’am*: 'We know indeed that what they say certainly grieves you...' (*al-An'am:* 33), where the verb 'know' is preceded by the particle *'qad'*.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7554; Abu Ya‘la, Musnad, Hadith no. 6432; and Ibn Manda, Tawhid, Hadith no. 714.*

Thus, Allah's Knowledge is eternal and no power or matter goes beyond His Knowledge. In the verse in the chapter of *al-An'am*, the particle *'qad'* preceded the present tense, but it was used to affirm the action, as it is attributed to Allah *the Almighty*. Here, He *Glorified is He* wants to tell us that He eternally knows all that will happen.

Obligatory acts are what Allah *the Almighty* has imposed on us, like praying five times a day, fasting the month of *Ramadan*, giving *zakat* (prescribed alms) of 2.5% of one's property that reaches a certain amount after the lapse of one year, and performing the major Pilgrimage to the Sacred House once in a lifetime if the person is able to do this.

However, it is not obligatory that the Muslim does the supererogatory Prayers, fasts some days other than the month of *Ramadan,* gives more than the prescribed alms, or performs the major Pilgrimage more than one time or the optional minor pilgrimage. These are good deeds that the Muslim does out of his own accord and are the same type as the obligatory rites.

So, when Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the morning they asked forgiveness' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-18), does He make it obligatory on the believers to pray at night and sleep only a little? No, but whoever wants to attain to the level of excellence should do this. The ordinary Muslim has to only perform the obligatory prayers like the Evening Prayer, and he can sleep until the Dawn Prayer of the following day. On the contrary, the one who attained the level of excellence sleeps only a little at night.

The obligatory matter requires the existence of the one who ordains it, i.e. Allah *the Almighty* and the one on whom it is imposed. There is a subtle difference between *fard* and *wajib*, which both refer to an obligatory act. The former is imposed by Allah *the Almighty,* while the latter may be imposed by the person on himself. The person may oblige himself to do something that Allah *the Almighty* has not imposed on him.

An illustrative example of an act ordained by Allah (*fard*) is the dowry. The Lord *Glorified is He* made it obligatory for the husband to give the dowry to his wife, saying: ‘And to those, with whom you desire to enjoy marriage, give them their dowries (*faridah*) as appointed…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 24), using the word ‘*faridah*’ (dowries) which is derived from the word *‘fard’* (obligatory act ordained by Allah). Therefore Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who made it obligatory for the husband to give the dowry to his wife. After that, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and there is no blame on you if, after [having agreed upon] this lawful due (*faridah*), you mutually agree upon something [else]…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 24). We notice here the difference between the rights imposed by Allah *the Almighty* and the matters for which He has left the door of generosity open. The wife is entitled to take the dowry, but she can willingly refuse to take it. Besides, the husband can give her more than the dowry. These cases are addressed in His saying: ‘Do not forget to be generous towards one another’ (*al-Baqara:* 237). Thus, the husband and the wife are not blamed for what they mutually choose to do after fulfilling the obligation.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says at the beginning of the chapter of *an-Nur*: ‘(This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory (*faradna*)…’ (*an-Nur:* 1). The obligatory act (*fard*), from which the word ‘*faradna*’ (We made obligatory) is derived, is one of His Rulings that the person is obliged to do. Moreover, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And if you divorce them before you have touched them and you have appointed (*faradtum*) for them a portion, then (pay to them) half of what you have appointed’ (*al-Baqara:* 237). In this case, the husbands have to give half of what they had fixed. Therefore, every matter has a ruling in the Islamic *Shari’a* which is ordained wisely by Allah *the Almighty*. What the husband has imposed on himself in this case is different from Allah’s Obligation of the five pillars of Islam, for example.

The meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘(This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory (*faradnaha*)…’ (*an-Nur:* 1) is that He made the rulings mentioned in this great chapter obligatory. He has sent it down and obligated us to act on its rulings. With regard to His saying: ‘Allah has ordained a way for you (*farada…lakum*) [believers] to release yourselves from [such] oaths…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 2), it means that Allah has ordained this obligation to achieve the interest of the Muslims in order for them to find a way to release themselves from the oaths that they took but then caused hardship for them.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* clarified the way for the Muslims to release themselves from the oaths that they have taken. Some scholars said that if the verb '*farad'* (to obligate) is followed by the preposition '*'ala'* (on), then the command only indicates an obligation, as when He *the Almighty* says: 'We know what We have obligated on them (*faradna 'alaihim*)' (*al-Ahzab:* 50). But if that verb is followed by the preposition *'lam'* (for), as in the verse under discussion in the chapter of *at-Tahrim*, then the command may indicate either a clarification or an obligation.

We should take into account that Allah's saying: 'O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you…' (*at-Tahrim:* 1) addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specifically, but when He talks about the obligatory expiation of the broken oath, He addresses all the Muslims. For this reason, the scholars held different views about whether Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* expiated for his broken oath or not, and whether the command is directed to only the rest of the Muslims.

In this regard, Al-Hasan Al-Basri maintained that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not expiate for his oath because Allah *the Almighty* had forgiven his past and future sins.(1) This verse carries certain teachings to the believers in general. Was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* taking the oath of refraining from eating honey to please his wives a sin? And is it right to say that it is a sin, but Prophet Muhammad was not required to expiate for it because Allah *the Almighty* had forgiven his past and future sins?

In the same vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to a few men from the Ash'ariyyin tribe, 'By Allah, I will not give you any mount; besides, I do not have anything to mount you on'. But after that a few camels from the war booty were brought to him, and he asked about them, saying, 'Where are the group of the Ash'ariyyin?' He ordered for five fat camels to be given to them, and then they set out. But they said, 'What have we done? We made Prophet Muhammad forget his oath. By Allah, we will never be successful'. Consequently, they returned to him and reminded him of his oath. He said, 'I have not provided you with the mount, but Allah has provided you. By Allah, I may take an oath to do something but on finding something else which is better, I do that which is better and make an expiation for my oath'.(1)

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(1) *See Al-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghaib, 30/270.*

Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the following verse concerning them: 'Nor (is there blame) on those who, when they came to you to be provided with mounts, you said, "I cannot find that on which to carry you"; they went back while their eyes overflowed with tears on account of grief for not finding that which they could spend' (*at-Tawba:* 92). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not have mounts for them to ride, so they turned away with their eyes shedding tears, being grieved because they had nothing to contribute regarding the battle of Tabuk.

They did not shed tears in front of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; rather, they shed tears after turning away. They were pushed to the point of tears due to their grieving for not participating in fighting. But had they shed tears before the Prophet, the hypocrites will have claimed that they were shedding crocodile tears and trying to show-off. Thus, they expressed their strong feelings of grief away from him.

Moreover, as the Quran recounts their story, this proves the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that the Quran is a revelation from Allah *the Almighty* for how could he *peace and blessings be upon him* know about this incident while it did not happen before him.

As for the expiation of the broken oaths, it is ordained for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims alike, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you...' (*at-Tahrim:* 1); and He says: 'He has ordained a way for you [believers] to release yourselves from [such] oaths—Allah is your Helper: He is the All Knowing, the All-Wise' (*at-Tahrim:* 2). When we reflect on these two verses, we find that the first one only talks about Prophet Muhammad's prohibition for himself of what is lawful and that the second one talks about Allah's Ordainment for the Muslims to expiate for their oaths. As such, does this mean that the mere prohibition of what the Lord *the Almighty* made lawful without taking an oath necessitate expiation? The scholars held different stances about this issue. However, whether his prohibition of what is lawful alone necessitated expiation or it was combined with an oath, as some narrations confirm, the verse obligates releasing oneself from one’s broken oath. In other words, it prescribes expiation for the broken oath.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3133, 4385 and 5518; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 4354 and 4358.*

Allah *the Almighty* clarifies this expiation, saying in the chapter of *al-Ma’ida*: ‘Allah does not call you to account for your inadvertent oaths, but He calls you to account for the oaths you make deliberately. The expiation in that case is the feeding of ten poor men with the average amount (of food) you feed your families, or clothing them, or the freeing of a slave; but whosoever cannot find (means) to do this should fast for three days. This is the expiation of your oaths that you have sworn. And guard your oaths. In this way Allah makes His Commandments clear to you that you may be thankful’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 89).

As a matter of fact, the expiation wipes out the penalty, but this does mean that the one is required to expiate for a binding oath that he fulfills. Rather, the expiation is only required when the person breaks his oath. The expiation should be one of four kinds: firstly, feeding ten poor people with food equivalent to what the person normally gives his own family; secondly, clothing poor ten people; thirdly, setting free a slave if this is possible; and lastly, fasting for three days if the person cannot find the means for the above.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘He has ordained a way for you [believers] to release yourselves from [such] oaths...’ (*at-Tahrim:* 2), it refers to the way of expiating for the broken oath mentioned in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida*, as it preceded the revelation of the chapter of *at-Tahrim*.

The expiation has two aspects; it is a deterring measure for the person and it also wipes out the sin of breaking the oath. When an Andalusian caliph took an oath and wanted to make an expiation for it, Mundhir ibn Sa‘id, who was a judge at the time, gave him a religious verdict that the expiation for his broken oath was fasting for three days, even though fasting is only the last resort for the one who does not have money to feed or clothe ten poor people or free a slave. Did the caliph have no money? Of course not, but Mundhir ibn Sa‘id considered for the expiation the aspect of being deterred from breaking another oath. That is why he responded to the one who asked him about this verdict, saying, ‘How can the Commander of the Faithful be deterred by freeing a slave or feeding ten poor people?’

Someone may ask, ‘Why was Prophet Muhammad obliged to expiate for his oath even though he did not break it?' Yes, he did not break his oath; he did not take honey or have sexual intercourse with Mariya. This second point is according to the narration that stated that the cause of revelation for this verse is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had sexual intercourse with Mariya in the room of his wife Hafsa, which provoked Hafsa’s anger. After this, he took an oath to refrain from having sexual intercourse with Mariya and made her unlawful for him. Thereafter, this verse was revealed.

In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* has not prescribed the expiation only as a penalty for the one who breaks his oath, but as a way of releasing the person from his oath even before breaking it. That is, He prescribed what releases us from our oaths before and after breaking them. Everyone who prohibits himself from what Allah *the Almighty* made lawful or takes a binding oath can release himself.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not break his oath. This is because the Arabic word '*tahilla*' (release) indicates that the releasing from an oath does not take place after breaking it, which obligates expiation. The release, however, takes place when you dissolve yourself from the oath before breaking it. The dissolution of the oath after breaking it is expiation because it wipes out the sin of breaking it.

The miraculous style of the Quran is clearly manifested here, as it did not mention anything about the expiation by saying, for example, that Allah *the Almighty* had ordained for them the expiation for their oaths. Rather, He *the Almighty* says: 'He has ordained a way for you [believers] to release (*tahilla*) yourselves from [such] oaths...' (*at-Tahrim:* 2). We have said previously that this obligation is in the interest of the believers; for if it had been a penalty, Allah *the Almighty* will have said that He has obligated that as a punishment for the sin that they have committed. We also notice that the following verse indicates that the believer should reduce the number of oaths he takes. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And keep your oaths' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89).

Keeping an oath means that the person should not break it. Therefore, the person should reduce the number of oaths he takes as much as possible, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'No Muslim whose three children die will go to the hellfire except for Allah's Oath that has to be fulfilled'.(1) Allah's Oath is mentioned in His saying: 'And there is not one of you but will pass over it [Hell]; this is [a promise] from your Lord that has to be fulfilled' (*Maryam:* 71). This Hadith means that if the one whose three children die remains patient and does not despair or disbelieve, he will not enter the hellfire, but he has to pass over it.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an example of releasing oneself from an oath in the story of Prophet Ayyub (Job) *peace be upon him* saying: 'And take in your hand a green branch and beat her with it, and do not break your oath' (*Sad:* 44). Ayyub *peace be upon him* took an oath to strike his wife one hundred lashes if he recovered from his illness. Allah *Glorified is He* wanted to release him from that oath, commanding him to take a bunch of grass that consists of one hundred rods and to strike his wife lightly with it one time.

This was a mercy that Allah *the Almighty* showed to Prophet Ayyub *peace be upon him* and his wife who had taken care of him during his illness. Ayyub *peace be upon him* was thankful to Allah *the Almighty*. It was as if the one strike equalled one hundred. By taking this concession, he released himself from the oath.

The expiation is sufficient for preserving the sublime position of taking an oath by Allah *the Almighty*. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* recommends the Muslims to accept the concession in order to release themselves from the oaths which were taken due to sincere intentions.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Allah is your Helper (*mawla*)…' (*at-Tahrim:* 2), it means that He *the Almighty* is the Supporter of the believers

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1251 and 6656; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 6865.*

Who takes care of their affairs. The Arabic word *'mawla'* (helper) could mean a relative, a supporter, and a helper on whom one relies in times of hardship.

You may have a helper in this worldly life but he may not always remain your helper, and he may not be able to support you if your calamity is beyond his capacity. Furthermore, he may refuse to support you against your proponent because the latter has a stronger relationship with him. In this case, your helper will take the side of your opponent and may delude you into believing that he is on your side. By contrast, Allah *Glorified is He* is the True Helper; no power is greater than His and He, unlike His creation, is Unchangeable.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the verse in question, saying: 'He is the All Knowing, the All-Wise' (*at-Tahrim:* 2). Here, Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself with two Attributes: Knowledge and Wisdom. He *Glorified is He* knows everything, be it visible or invisible, and He is the Bestower of knowledge. He knows our intentions, how sincere we are and what is in our chests, even before we utter anything. Therefore, His Knowledge encompasses everything, for nothing can escape from Him.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* knows the people's secrets and properly legislates what is necessary for them. Besides, He knows what the human soul can withstand and does not charge it with more than what it can bear. He *Glorified is He* also knows what is suitable in every condition a person may be in and what benefits all the people. Therefore, His Knowledge encompasses all matters and He even knows what we are thinking of in our minds.

Allah *the Almighty* is also the Wise One Who does not undertake any action except for a profound wisdom. He is Wise in His Actions, Determinations and Decrees. He puts everything in its right place and only prescribes what is in our interest. He *the Almighty* does not look to the apparent aspects of something, neglecting the harm that it may cause. On the contrary, you yourself may think that something will save you from your problems, but it turns out to be harmful.

Allah *Glorified is He* organises everything in the right way. His Knowledge encompasses what the people reveal and conceal. He *Glorified is He* is wise with His Creation and Directives, and that is why He laid down for us the rulings that ensure our interests and suit our conditions.

Allah then says:

وَإِذْ أَسَرَّ ٱلنَّبِيُّ إِلَىٰ بَعْضِ أَزْوَٰجِهِۦ حَدِيثًا فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَتْ بِهِۦ وَأَظْهَرَهُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَرَّفَ بَعْضَهُۥ
وَأَعْرَضَ عَنۢ بَعْضٍۖ فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِۦ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنۢبَأَكَ هَٰذَاۖ قَالَ نَبَّأَنِىَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْخَبِيرُ ﴿٣﴾

The Prophet told something in confidence to one of his wives. When she disclosed it [to another wife] and God made this known to him, he confirmed part of it, keeping the rest to himself. When he confronted her with what she had done, she asked, 'Who told you about this?' and he replied, 'The All Knowing, the All Aware told me' [3] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 3)

The secret is what you tell someone confidentially; it is to be known only by two people, you and the one to whom you disclosed it. There is, however, what is more hidden than the secret, namely, what you keep only to yourself; it remains in your heart and you share it with no one. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And if you utter the saying aloud, then surely He knows the secret (*as-sirr*), and what is yet more hidden' (*Ta Ha:* 7). This means that what you confidentially tell someone is a secret, but what you hide in your heart without telling anyone about it is what is even more hidden that the secret.

The secret only becomes a secret when you tell another one about it, but what the person hides in his heart and no one knows except Allah *the Almighty* is what is more hidden that the secret. In fact, you only confer your secret to the one whom you trust, as if the secrets are kept in a safe and no one knows what is inside it. When you tell someone a secret, you consider him like yourself, believing that he will not reveal it.

The Arabic word *'najwa'* (secret counsels) means to speak privately with someone when you are with other people. The secret (*sirr*), when mentioned with the word '*najwa*', is what you conceal inside yourself. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do they not know that Allah knows their secret [thoughts] (*sirrahum*) and their secret counsels (*najwahum*)' (*at-Tawba:* 78). In this context, the secret thought (*sirr*) is what you conceal and do not tell anyone about it. Here, the secret does not refer to the private discussions in which you tell someone about a certain matter apart from other people sitting with you. He *the Almighty* knows both the secret that you entrust someone with and what you hide inside yourself.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The Prophet told something in confidence (a secret) to one of his wives...' (*at-Tahrim:* 3), 'the secret' belongs to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who shared it with one of his wives.

What is more hidden than the secret is what you keep to yourself, but Allah *Glorified is He* knows the secret as well as what you do not disclose to anyone. He *the Almighty* is fully aware of it even before it is a secret. We know that the secret can mean what you keep to yourself without telling anyone about it. It also refers to the confidential matter about which you inform someone, but in this case it is not really a secret anymore. If you cannot keep something in your heart, others will be more unlikely to keep it in their heart without disclosing it to others.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘The Prophet told something in confidence (a secret) to one (*ba’d*) of his wives…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 3), Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told a secret to only one of his wives. If he had shared it with all his wives, it will have not been a secret anymore. The Arabic word *‘ba'd’* (one) may refer to one male or female. Here, it refers to Hafsa Bint ‘Umar, Prophet Muhammad's wife.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had sexual intercourse with his concubine, Mariya, in Hafsa’s room *Allah be pleased with her*. On seeing Mariya with him, she said, ‘O Prophet Muhammad, why did you do that in my house and not in any other one of your wives?' Whereupon he told her that he made Mariya unlawful for him and asked Hafsa to keep the matter secret.

Additionally, Hafsa went to meet ‘Aisha and said to her, ‘Daughter of Abu Bakr, shall I tell you good news? Prophet Muhammad, may my mother and father be sacrificed for him, told me that your father will succeed him and that my father will succeed your father. He asked me to keep that a secret and I promised him to do so'. (1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 504; and Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 2316.*

Mariya was Prophet Muhammad's concubine that Al-Muqawqas, the leader of the Coptic in Egypt, gave to him as a present after Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had sent him a message calling him to Islam. Subsequently, Al-Muqawqas gave her to him. She became his concubine and gave birth to his son Ibrahim. As she became the mother of his son, he freed her and she became one of his wives.

The Arabic word *'zawj'* (a spouse, wife or mate) refers to something which has a mate. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And We said, "O Adam! Dwell you and your wife (*zawjuka*) in the garden…"' (*al-Baqara:* 35). Here, Huwwa (Eve) is called a *'zawj'* (a spouse), literally '*zawjuka*' which means 'your spouse'. That is, Adam is a *'zawj'* (a spouse) and Eve is also a '*zawj*'. Every one of Prophet Muhammad's wives is his spouse. You should not think that the word *'zawj'* refers to two mates; rather, it refers to one mate only. Allah *the Almighty* also says: '…and created its mate (*zawj*) of the same (kind)…' (*an-Nisa':* 1).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made Mariya unlawful for himself in order to please Hafsa. That is why Allah *the Almighty* reproached him just as He *the Almighty* reproached him for prohibiting honey for himself in order to please his wives. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O Prophet [Muhammad], why do you prohibit what Allah has made lawful to you in your desire to please your wives? Yet Allah is Forgiving and Merciful' (*at-Tahrim:* 1). The matter of honey was known to most of his wives as they agreed to ask him when he arrived at anyone of them if he had eaten honey. As for the case of prohibiting Mariya for himself, it was only known by Hafsa and so was the matter of her father's succession after Abu Bakr, the father of 'Aisha. These two matters were what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had told her secretly, but she soon disclosed them to 'Aisha.

We have said that the Arabic word *'naba''* (announcement) is only used with important news. Therefore, we do not refer to any normal piece of news as *a 'naba''*. '*Naba"* means very important news that has a great impact, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* uses it in this verse. Its importance here is presented in Hafsa's carefulness about disclosing the information to 'Aisha.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…and Allah made this known (*azhhara*) to him…' (*at-Tahrim:* 3). This means that Allah *the Almighty* informed Prophet

Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Hafsa had disclosed to ‘Aisha what he had secretly told her. Linguistically, the Arabic word *‘azhhara*’, the verb in the present being (*yazhharo*), has two meanings. The first one is to come to know about something, as in Allah’s saying: ‘If they come to know (*yazhharo*) about you, they will stone you’ (*al-Kahf:* 20). The meaning is that if their enemies knew their place, they will stone them. The second meaning of *‘azhhara’* is to scale something high and to defeat someone; this meaning is found in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'So they were not able to scale it (*yazhharo*) or could make a hole in it' (*al-Kahf:* 97). This means that Yajooj (Gog) and Majooj (Magog) could not scale the barrier of Dhu Al-Qarnayn, nor could they pierce it.

The first meaning applies to Allah’s saying: '…the children who have not attained knowledge (*yazhharo*) of what is hidden of women…' (*an-Nur:* 31). They do not know about women’s private aspects or cannot enter into marriage because they are not aware of them. As such, *‘azhhara*’ means to know something, but it here implies that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* overlooked what had happened, namely, Hafsa’s disclosing the secret that he had confided to her and ordered her to keep secret.

For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards: '…he confirmed part of it, keeping the rest to himself…' (*al-An‘am:* 3). That is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* confirmed part of what Hafsa disclosed, keeping the rest to himself. He rebuked Hafsa for revealing some of what he had confided to her, but he did not rebuke her for revealing the other part, due to his noble character. In this regard, some scholars said that the noble person never investigates people's faults.

It is said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* informed her about her revealing what happened with Mariya and making her unlawful for himself. However, he avoided rebuking her for disclosing the secret that Abu Bakr and ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* will succeed him.

If you had talked in confidence with someone and then found that he had revealed your secret, you will find him confused when you encounter him. He tries to know if you had discovered that the whole secret was revealed or only part of it. If you informed him about only one thing he has revealed, you will find him anxious, confused, and ashamed that he revealed it, especially if you had asked him to keep it a secret.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered Hafsa to keep the matter secret. When he confronted her with what she had done, she asked, ‘Who told you about this?' She thought that ‘Aisha had informed him that she, that is Hafsa, had disclosed the secret to her. She did not imagine that Allah *Glorified is He* had informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about what he does not know regarding his followers. She asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* about the one who had told him, thinking that ‘Aisha had told him. She wondered how he knew about her disclosure of the secret even though she talked with ‘Aisha in private; she wondered, 'Had ‘Aisha told him?' But Prophet Muhammad told her that it was Allah *Glorified is He* Who had told him, as He is the All Knowing, the All-Aware. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…she asked, “Who told you about this?”' and he replied: ‘The All-Knowing, the All-Aware told me’ (*at-Tahrim:* 3).

Allah *the Almighty* is the Omniscient Who knows everything be it hidden or apparent, and all knowledge comes from Him. He is the All-Hearing of what is said and the fully Aware of what in the chests, even before it is said. In fact, every movement is known by Him *Glorified is He* even before it takes place.

Allah's Attribute of being fully aware indicates that He possesses comprehensive knowledge; He is the Omniscient Who possesses subtle knowledge about hidden matters. In the important worldly problems, we call an expert to solve them because the normal specialist cannot solve them, for the expert has in-depth knowledge; we should not ask those who only have basic knowledge, but we should ask an expert who has detailed knowledge.

Thereupon, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Hafsa and ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with them* saying:

إِن تَتُوبَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا ۖ وَإِن تَظَٰهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَىٰهُ
وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَٰلِحُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۖ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ ٤

If both of you [wives] repent to God — for your hearts have deviated — [all will be well]; if you collaborate against him, [be warned that] God will aid him, as will Gabriel and all righteous believers, and the angels too will back him [4]
(The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 4)

Allah *Glorified is He* has commanded His slaves to repent to Him as accepting repentance is a Mercy that He *the Almighty* shows to His slaves. In fact, prescribing repentance is a Mercy not only to the sinner but also to the whole society. If it had not been prescribed, the whole society will have suffered. That is to say that if Allah *the Almighty* had not prescribed repentance and given us the glad tidings of Him accepting it, the sinner will not have stopped committing sins. In fact, He *Glorified is He* accepts the repentance in order for the person not to despair; the person will feel that the doors of Mercy are always open and that Allah, his Creator, is Merciful to him. Hence, if he commits a mistake, the Lord *the Almighty* opens for him the doors of repentance and forgives his. In this way, the person feels the Care that Allah *Glorified is He* provides for him.

The way Allah *Glorified is He* acts is already set for the one who wants to believe; and repentance is legislated for every sinner. It results in Allah forgiving you, for if you repent from your sin and are determined never to repeat it, Allah *Glorified is He* accepts your repentance and pardons you. Allah *the Almighty* delights at His slave's repentance and He is more pleased with it than the one who found his camel after he had lost it in a waterless desert.(1)

As such, the verse means that if Hafsa and ‘Aisha repented to Allah *the Almighty* and regretted doing what they had done, their repentance will be accepted. When the Lord *Glorified is He* says: ‘If both of you [wives] repent to Allah…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 4), this is a way of urging and offering repentance to them because He *Glorified is He* says after this: '…but if you collaborate against him, [be warned that] Allah, He is his Protector…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4).

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(1) *A Hadith to that effect has been narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6309; Muslim, Hadith no. 7137.*

With regard to the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'If both of you [wives] repent to Allah—for your hearts have inclined (*saghat*) [away from/to what is right]—[all will be well]…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4), the Arabic word *'al-isgha''* (listening attentively), from which the word '*saghat*' (deviated) comes, means to listen attentively to the speaker, as you may not be able to hear the speaker without listening attentively. For example, when one of us walks in the street, he hears a lot of sounds, but he listens attentively to what he thinks is important. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And that the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter may incline (*tasgha*) to it and that they may be well pleased with it and that they may earn what they are going to earn (of evil)' (*al-An'am:* 113). It is true that the ears hear, but the hearts may or may not listen and incline to what is being said.

When Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If both of you [wives] repent to Allah—for your hearts have inclined (*saghat*) [away from/to what is right]—[all will be well]…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4), He moves the sense of listening from the ears to the heart. This means that their hearts inclined to Prophet Muhammad's prohibition of Mariya for himself, even if he hated that. Some scholars said that they inclined to repentance. As a result, this part of the verse means that Hafsa and 'Aisha wanted to repent for what they had done because their hearts inclined to the right way which required refraining from doing what displeased Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him.*

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…if you support each other (*tazhahara*) against him…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4), the Arabic word *'al-zhahir',* from which the verb '*tazhahara*' (support each other) is derived, means the supporter, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'Those who have not supported anyone (*yuzhahiro*) against you...'(*at-Tawba:* 4). Etymologically, the root of the verb *'yuzhahir'* (to support) is *'al-zhahr'* (back), which can bear more than the hand. The person, for instance, may not be able to carry a certain measure of wheat with his hand, but he can carry it by means of his back. There is the Egyptian proverb that says, 'Whoever is supported by a powerful figure, he cannot be harmed'. Likewise, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: '…then We aided those who believed against their enemy, and they became the ones that prevailed (*zhahireen*)' (*as-Saff:* 14).

This means that the meaning of His saying: '…if you support each other against him…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4) is that if they collaborated to harm Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by supporting each other with regard to their excessive jealousy and disclosing his secret, Allah *the Almighty* will aid him with His unlimited Omnipotence. He *Glorified is He* it the True Ally; there is no greater power than His and He is Unchangeable.

Allah *Glorified is He* stresses the fact that He Himself is the Ally of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'Allah, He is his Protector…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4). The Lord *the Almighty* mentions the pronoun 'He' after His Majestic Name to emphasise His Support and Help for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Not only Allah *Glorified is He* is his Ally but also the angel Gabriel and the righteous believers, as He then says: '…and so are Jibril (Gabriel) and all righteous believers…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4). Here, He *Glorified is He* especially mentions Jibril (Gabriel) even though He then mentions the angels' protection of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '…and furthermore, the angels will be his supporters' (*at-Tahrim:* 4). Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* is the one trusted with the revelation and the closest angel to the Prophets and Messengers, especially Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. As such, every Messenger was supported by Jibril (Gabriel), the Holy Spirit.

He *Glorified is He* tells us about Jibril, saying: 'Say [Prophet Muhammad], “If anyone is an enemy of Jibril (Gabriel)—who by Allah’s leave brought down the Quran to your heart confirming previous scriptures, as a guide and good news for the faithful— if anyone is an enemy of Allah, His angels and His Messengers, of Jibril (Gabriel) and Mikail (Michael), then Allah is certainly the enemy of such disbelievers”' (*al-Baqara:* 97-98); and: 'He was taught by one mighty in power. [An angel] Endowed with surpassing power, who manifested himself in his true state' (*an-Najm:* 5-6); and saying: 'Most surely it is the Word of an honored Messenger, the processor of strength, having an honorable place with the Lord of the Dominion, one (to be) obeyed and faithful to his trust' (*at-Takwir:* 19-21). As such, Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be* *upon him* possesses a hidden and an apparent mighty power for him to be able to do what Allah *Glorified is He* commands him and deliver the revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and all righteous believers…' (*at-Tahrim:* 4). As such, not only will Allah *the Almighty* and Jibril support Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but also the righteous believers, namely, Abu Bakr and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them*. The quality of righteousness, however, refers to every righteous believer. In this connection, 'Umar used to support Prophet Muhammad's position and reproach his daughter, Hafsa, for arguing with him, that is, Prophet Muhammad, although the Prophet thought this arguing had never occurred. 'Umar said, 'Once, while I was thinking over a certain matter, my wife said, "I advise you to do so-and-so". I said to her, "What have you got to do with this matter? Why do you poke your nose in a matter which I want to see fulfilled?" She said, "How strange you are, O son of Al-Khattab! You do not want to be argued with whereas your daughter, Hafsa, surely argues with Prophet Muhammad so much that he remains angry the whole day!"' 'Umar then related how he immediately put on his outer garment, went to Hafsa and said to her, 'O my daughter! Do you argue with Prophet Muhammad to the extent that he remains angry the whole day?' She said, 'By Allah, we argue with him'. 'Umar said, 'Know that I warn you of Allah's Punishment and the anger of Allah's Messenger . . . O my daughter! Do not be deceived by the one who is proud of her beauty and of the love of Prophet Muhammad for her (that is, 'Aisha)'.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse, saying: '…and furthermore, the angels will be his supporters' (*at-Tahrim:* 4). The Arabic word *'malai'ka'* (angels) is feminine, but Allah did not say *'zhaheerah'* (supporter), which matches this feminine form in the Arabic language. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word, *'zhaheer'* (supporter). This is because the support entails power, determination and strength, and therefore this word is used to imply possessing power. That is, the word *'zhaheer'* in this noble verse refers to the supporter. If it is said that so-and-so backs someone, this means he supports him powerfully. If so-and-so *'zhahara'* (defeated) so-and-so, this means that the former defeated and overpowered the latter. The word *'zhaheer'* is used equally to refer to the masculine and the feminine, just like the word ‘*qareeb*’ (near), which is used with the feminine word *‘rahma’* (mercy) in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…surely the Mercy (*rahma*) of Allah is near (*qareeb*) to those who do good (to others)...' (*al-A‘raf:* 56). To sum up, Allah, Jibril, the righteous believers and the angels are all supporters of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against those who harm him or intend to offend him. Here, the word *‘zhaheer’* (supporter) is used to refer to the plural, *‘zhuhara’’* (supporters), just like when He *the Almighty* says: ‘What excellent companions (*rafeeq*) these are!' (*an-Nisa’:* 69), where the word ‘*rafeeq*’ (companion) is used to refer to ‘*rufaqa’*’ (companions).

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

عَسَىٰ رَبُّهُۥٓ إِن طَلَّقَكُنَّ أَن يُبْدِلَهُۥٓ أَزْوَٰجًا خَيْرًا مِّنكُنَّ مُسْلِمَٰتٍ مُّؤْمِنَٰتٍ
قَٰنِتَٰتٍ تَٰٓئِبَٰتٍ عَٰبِدَٰتٍ سَٰٓئِحَٰتٍ ثَيِّبَٰتٍ وَأَبْكَارًا ﴿٥﴾

His Lord may well replace you with better wives if the Prophet decides to divorce any of you: wives who are devoted to God, true believers, devout, who turn to Him in repentance and worship Him, given to fasting, whether previously married or virgins [5] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 5)

Linguistically, the Arabic word ‘*'asa’* (‘may’ or ‘hope’) has different meanings. It could signify hoping for something; when you say, for instance, ‘So-and-so may come', and when someone says to his friend, 'So-and-so may bring something good for you’. This means that these actions are possible. Further, someone may say to his friend, ‘I may bring something good for you’. Here, the occurrence of what is hoped for is higher than in the first example because its occurrence depends on the speaker. Can the speaker, nevertheless, guarantee the ability or even that he will still be alive to bring that good thing for the addressee? If someone says, ‘I hope that Allah relieves you of your condition’, is his hope stronger? Is the speaker certain of Allah's Acceptance for what he is hoping for? He *the Almighty* may or may not accept that, according to His Will, not according to the will of the one who hoped that or the one for whom he wished that relief. However, when Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘His Lord may well…'

(*al-An'am:* 5), this implies that what He wills attains the highest rank of being a certain hope. The word '*'asa'* ('may' or 'hope'), with its different levels, reaches its highest level when Allah *the Almighty* uses it. What He hopes will inevitably come to pass. He says in another verse: 'Allah may well (*'asa*) pardon them' (*an-Nisa':* 99). This is what we hope from our Generous and Powerful Lord. Nothing can challenge or disobey Him *the Almighty* and hence when He says that He may do such-and-such, then what He has promised will be fulfilled. Thus, the verse means that Hafsa and 'Aisha should be in awe of Allah *Glorified is He* because He may well replace them with better wives.

In this connection, we notice Ya'qub's (Jacob's) confidence that Allah *Glorified is He* will achieve His Promise to bring all of his sons back to him, saying: '…maybe Allah will bring them all together to me; surely He is the Knowing, the All-Wise' (*Yusuf:* 83). In this verse, he hoped for an alleviation which actually took place later. He did not say, 'Maybe they will all come', rather, he attributed this action to Allah *the Almighty* saying: '…maybe Allah will bring them all…' (*Yusuf:* 83). This means he wished that Allah *the Almighty* will bestow His Bounties on him. When you say that Allah *the Almighty* may give you, this constitutes a high hope because you ask for the bounty from the One Who is Omnipotent and Unchangeable. That is, your hope, which depends on Him, will inevitably happen.

Similarly, the matter in the verse in question has nothing to do with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; rather, it is handled by Allah *the Almighty* as He *the Almighty* says: 'His Lord may well replace you with better wives...' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). Moreover, He *Glorified is He* does not say: 'Allah may well', rather, He says: 'His Lord may well...' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). As such, it is Prophet Muhammad's Lord who may well replace them with good wives because they did not preserve his status of messengership and prophethood. Using the word 'his Lord' instead of 'Allah' reminds us about the Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I have been educated by My Lord and He has educated me properly'.(1) This means Allah *Glorified is He* is his Lord Who educated him properly.

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(1) *In his book, Al-Albani grades this Hadith as weak. Ibn Taymiya said, 'The meaning of this Hadith is correct, but it has no authentic chain of narrators'. This opinion is supported=*

The perfection of education is proportional to the perfection of the educator. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* said to him, 'I am your Lord Who has perfected your education. Therefore, if anyone wants to see the Omnipotence of My Lordship, let him witness it in you'. If the educator is perfect, the educated person achieves the highest level of education. Clearly, Prophet Muhammad's Lord will not forsake him and He is not displeased with him.

Similarly, Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* took refuge with his Lord and invoked Him, saying: 'My Lord! I prefer prison to what these women are calling me to do' (*Yusuf:* 33). He supplicated Allah *the Almighty* referring to His Attribute of Lordship as recognition of His Favours, for Allah had educated and put him under His Care. Invoking Allah *the Almighty* to not abandon him in his calamity, Prophet Yusuf *peace be upon him* uses the Attribute of Lordship. It is clear that the Lord is the One in charge of educating and bestowing Bounties. Besides, His Divinity dictates that we worship Him and carry out His Obligations. For this reason, the believer invokes his Lord during times of hardships, saying, ‘My Lord’, recognizing Him as his Creator Who cares for him and bestows the means on him.

This idea is referred to in the Hadith when ‘Aisha said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Messenger of Allah, I see that your Lord hastens in fulfilling your desires'.(1) He told her, ‘If you are pious, He will hasten to fulfill your desires'. That is, Allah *the Almighty* fulfills what you desire if you fulfill His Purpose; if you obey His command, He gives you what you desire, even before asking Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* using the third person singular, saying: 'His Lord may well replace you with better wives…' (*at-Tahrim:* 55). This is because He *the Almighty* is addressing his wives in order to defend Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the Prophet did not do anything wrong to them. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is entitled to eat whatever he desires with whoever he wants from among them. Furthermore, he is entitled to have

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= *by As-Sarkhasi and As-Suyuti. See Al-Albani, As-Silsila Ad-Da'ifa, 1/172; Ibn Taymiya, Majmu' Ar-Rasa'il Al-Kubra, 2/236; and Al-'Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa', 1/70.*

(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4788.*

sexual intercourse with any of them and wherever he wants from among his homes. However, he conceded to them by prohibiting himself from taking honey and having sexual intercourse with Mariya, the mother of his son Ibrahim. What do his wives want after all of this?

Allah's Discourse in this verse is directed to Prophet Muhammad's wives, presenting to them that He was Prophet Muhammad's Lord and that He never forsakes him. Consequently, He *the Almighty* says: 'If both of you [wives] repent to Allah— for your hearts have inclined [away from/to what is right]— [all will be well]; but if you support each other against him, [be warned that] Allah, He is his Protector, and so are Jibril (Gabriel) and all righteous believers, and furthermore, the angels will be his supporters' (*at-Talaq:* 4).

We have said that His saying: '…the righteous believers…' (*at-Tahrim:* 5) refers to Abu Bakr and 'Umar *Allah be pleased with them*. 'Umar said, 'I came to know that some of the Mothers of the Believers caused troubles to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and therefore I talked to each one of them and admonished them to refrain from causing troubles to him, saying, 'If you refuse, Allah will replace you with wives better than you'. Zaynab came to him and said, 'O son of Al-Khattab*,* is Prophet Muhammad able to admonish his wives?' Thereupon, Allah revealed the verse: 'His Lord may well replace you with better wives if the Prophet decides to divorce any of you…' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). This means replacing his wives was to be through divorcing them. The word '*'asa'* (may) does not connote that this replacement is obligatory, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not actually divorce them. The verse is only intended to frighten and admonish his wives.

The first attribute of the wives with whom Prophet Muhammad's wives may be replaced is their submission to Allah *the Almighty* in all His commands, as Allah says: '…wives who submit to Allah…' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). Secondly, they are described as believing in Allah and Prophet Muhammad. This means that they possess the same attributes of his wives and even more because they are true believers who do not submit and believe only by words.

The third of their attributes is their devotion to Allah *the Almighty* which indicates their permanent obedience to Him. *Qunut Al-Fajr* in the Dawn Prayer, in which we invoke Allah *the Almighty* and prolong our standing in prayer, is derived from the same Arabic word of *'qanitat'* (devout). The devoted woman is the one who submits to Allah *Glorified is He* out of her righteousness. He *the Almighty* says: '…the righteous women are therefore devoutly obedient (*qanitat*)...' (*an-Nisa':* 34). Clearly, the righteous women are those who adhere to the Divine Path that their Creator set for them.

Devotion to Allah *the Almighty* is an act of worship accompanied by permanent humbleness and submission. He *the Almighty* addresses the wives of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'O wives of the Prophet [Muhammad]! Whoever of you commits an open indecency, the punishment shall be increased to her doubly; and this is easy for Allah. And whoever of you devoutly obeys and submits (*yaqnut*) to Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] and does good, to her We will give a reward twice over, and We have prepared for her an honorable sustenance' (*al-Ahzab:* 30-31), where the word '*yaqno*t' (is obedient) is derived from the word '*qanitat*' (devout). As such, devotion means excessive righteousness and fear to the extent of humbleness and submission. It refers to complete submission to Allah *the Almighty* and humbleness and submission while supplicating Him. He *the Almighty* for instance, commands Mary, saying: 'O Mary, devoutly obey and submit (*uqnuti)* to your Lord and humble yourself, and bow down with those who bow' (*Al-'Imran:* 43), where the word '*uqnuti*' (devoutly obey and submit) is derived from the word '*qanitat*' (devout). This means that she should be excessively humble and submissive to Allah by prostrating and putting her forehead, which is the most honourable part of the person, on the ground, as prostration is the highest level of submission.

Allah *the Almighty* does not want the bodies; rather, He wants the devoted and submissive hearts. Concerning the one who is obedient to Allah but then stops being obedient, it is as though he experienced closeness to Allah but did not find his Lord qualified for that closeness—Allah forbid. On the contrary, the truly obedient slave devotes himself to Allah and as a result does not abandon the acts of worship, as he has tasted the sweetness of worshipping Him. As long as he has tasted the sweetness of worshipping Allah, he will always do the acts of worship with humbleness and serenity to be a devout slave.

The wives who could replace Prophet Muhammad's wives will also be ones who repent to Allah *the Almighty*. Repentance requires a determination to not commit sins again. The Lord *Glorified is He* opened the gates of repentance, and He is slow to punish us, deprive us of His Bounty or cause us to perish for disobeying Him.

It is out of Allah's Mercy to us that He has prescribed repentance to protect us from the ferocity of evil and disobedience. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘All the sons of Adam are sinners, but the best of sinners are those who repent often’.(1) If Allah *Glorified is He* had not prescribed repentance and had not given us the glad tidings of accepting our repentance, every sinner will have never stopped his disobedience, and the whole world will have suffered.

Allah *Glorified is He* is pleased with the truthful and sincere repentance after which the persons does not return to the sin. It requires that the sinner stops doing the sin, regrets committing it and is determined not to return to it once again. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah *the Exalted* will continue to stretch out His Hand in the night so that the sinners of the day may repent, and He will continue to stretch His Hand in the daytime so that the sinners of the night may repent, [and this will continue] until the sun rises from the west’.(2)The repentant women are those who repent from their sins and abide by Prophet Muhammad's orders, leaving what they desire if he hates it.

Allah *the Almighty* also describes these wives, saying: '…and worship Him [Allah]…' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). This attribute is implicitly included in describing them with the character of being devoted, but the Lord *the Most High* emphasises this attribute, proving that the acts of worship are not confined to praying, fasting and being humble and submissive in doing these rites. Rather, worshipping Allah *the Almighty* entails obeying Him by following His commands and refraining from His prohibitions. Consequently, describing them as worshippers here implies that they obey Him as the God Who is worshipped in His universe. This entails obeying Him by doing what He has commanded and refraining from what He has prohibited.

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(1) *See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4251; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 7236; and Abu Ya‘la, Musnad, Hadith no. 2922; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 7617; Ad-Darimi, Sunnan, Hadith no.2727; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 6725.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash‘ari Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 7165; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 19547 and 19635; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 3021; and At-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no. 492.*

In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'I only created jinn and mankind to worship Me' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56). Clearly, the human beings should worship Him, but not only through sitting in the mosques and remembering and exalting Him; rather, worship is a path that includes the whole life, it includes your home and work. This means worshipping Him *the Almighty* means to obey Him by doing what He has commanded and refraining from what He has prohibited. If Allah *Glorified is He* commands me to do something, I should do it, and if he prohibits me from doing something, I should refrain from it; this is the meaning of worshipping Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* prohibits the believers from offending Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '…and it does not behove you that you should cause trouble to the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad]' (*al-Ahzab:* 53). Therefore, if Prophet Muhammad divorced his wives, Allah *the Almighty* will replace them with ones who will worship Him and submit to His commands. They will refrain from offending Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and will submit to what he wants.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* mentions another attribute, saying: '…given to fasting/travelling [for their faith in Islam] (*sa'ihat*)...' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). The Arabic word *'al-sa'ih'*, from which the word '*sa'ihat*' (given to fasting/travelling) is derived, refers to the one who leaves his country in which there are his home, family, children and friends from among his people. He leaves all these and goes to a potentially dangerous place bereft of all such comforts. The word *'as-siyaha'* means to travel for far distances to ponder over the dominion of the heavens and the earth and to deduce from the signs of Allah what strengthens your belief in you Lord. But a man may travel for worldly interests, like travelling through the land seeking Allah's Bounty. However, travelling for reflection is shared by men and women, as He *the Almighty* describes women, saying: 'His Lord may well replace you with better wives if the Prophet [Muhammad] decides to divorce any of you: wives who submit to Allah, true believers, devout, who turn to Him in repentance and worship Him, given to fasting/travelling [for their faith in Islam]…' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). Describing the women as ones who travel is meant for travelling for reflection, while she is with her husband who travels through the land to seek His Bounty.

The word '*as-siyaha'* also refers to fasting because travelling takes you out of your country where you used to stay and where your property and family are, and likewise fasting deprives you of having what you are familiar with, namely food, drinks and sexual intercourse. That is, what is common between men and women is travelling for refection and fasting. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to divorce Hafsa *Allah be pleased with her*, but Jibril came to Prophet Muhammad and said, 'Do not divorce her as she habitually fasts and prays at night and she will also be your wife in Paradise'.(1) When the news reached 'Umar that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to divorce his daughter, he put dust on his head and said, 'If this happens, Allah will not care about you, O son of ibn Al-Khattab'. Thereupon, Jibril went to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'Allah commands you to keep Hafsa as a mercy for 'Umar'.

'Umar narrated this situation, saying, 'When Prophet Muhammad left his wives, I entered the mosque and found people striking the ground with pebbles and saying, "Allah's Messenger has divorced his wives". That was before they were commanded to observe seclusion, and therefore I went to 'Aisha and said to her, "Daughter of Abu Bakr, have you reached the extent of causing trouble to Prophet Muhammad?" Thereupon she said, "Son of Al-Khattab, you have nothing to do with me, and I have nothing to do with you. You should look to your own receptacle"'. He ('Umar) said, 'I visited Hafsa, daughter of 'Umar, and said to her, "Hafsa, the (news) has reached me that you cause Prophet Muhammad trouble. You know that Allah's Messenger does not love you, and had I not been (your father) he will have divorced you". (On hearing this) she wept bitterly. I said to her, "Where is Prophet Muhammad?" She said, "He is in the store room". I went in and found Rabah, the servant of Allah's Messenger, sitting on the threshold of the window dangling his feet on the hollow wood of the date-palm with the help of which Prophet Muhammad used to climb (into the apartment) and leave it. I asked permission to enter into [the presence of] Prophet Muhammad three times. The last time I cried, “O Rabah, ask Allah's Messenger's permission for me to strike her (Hafsa’s) neck”. I raised my voice and he pointed to me to climb up (and enter his apartment). I entered upon him and he was lying on a mat. As I had entered I saw the signs of anger on his face, and I therefore said, “Messenger of Allah [Muhammad], what trouble do you receive from your wives for you to divorce them. Surely Allah, His angels, Jibril, Mikail, me, Abu Bakr and the believers are with you”. I hardly talked, and I hoped that Allah will testify to my words that I uttered (on that day). Consequently, Allah’s saying: “His Lord may well replace you with better wives if the Prophet decides to divorce any of you” (*at-Tahrim:* 5) was revealed’.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Ammar ibn Yasir Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 1401; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu 'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 18827; and Abu Nu'aym, Ma'rifat As-Sahaba, Hadith no. 6770, and Hilyat Al-Awliya', 2/50.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…but if you support each other against him, [be warned that] Allah, He is his Protector, and so are Jibril (Gabriel) and all righteous believers, and furthermore, the angels will be his supporters' (*at-Tahrim:* 4), it was ‘Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, and Hafsa who support each other against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. ‘Umar continued, ‘I said, “Messenger of Allah, have you divorced them?” He said, “No”. I said, “Messenger of Allah, I entered the mosque and found the Muslims playing with pebbles (absorbed in thought) and saying, 'Allah's Messenger has divorced his wives’. Should I climb down and inform them that you have not divorced them?” He said, “Yes, if you wish to”. And I went on talking to him until I (found) the signs of anger had disappeared on his face and (his seriousness was changed to a happy mood and as a result thereof) his face had its natural tranquility on it'. (1)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…whether previously married or virgins' (*at-Tahrim:* 5). The previous six attributes, regarding their Islam, belief, devotion, repentance, worship and fasting, are all abstract qualities. In this verse, He *Glorified is He* addresses women some of whom were very jealous about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* wanted to eliminate their jealousy, saying, 'If you were either previously married or virgins, Allah is Able to replace you with not only previously married women but also with virgins'.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3764; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 4188; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 195; and Abu Ya‘a, Musnad, Hadith no. 164.*

The Arabic word *'thayyib'* (deflowered woman) refers to the woman who has previously married, whether she is divorced or a widow. She was called this because after she is divorced or her husband dies, she returns to her father's house. As for the Arabic word *'bikr'* (a virgin woman), it refers to the woman which is not deflowered. The woman cannot be a virgin and deflowered at the same time, and that is why He *the Almighty* uses the conjunction 'or', meaning: '…whether previously married or virgins' (*at-Tahrim:* 5).

The first six attributes can all be found in one man or one woman and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* has not used the conjunction 'or' here. That is to say that it is possible to find a Muslim, believing, devoted, repentant, worshipping and fasting (or travelling) man or woman who has all these qualities at the same time.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…whether previously married or virgins' (*at-Tahrim:* 5), the attribute of virginity in this verse may refer to 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* and that of being deflowered may refer to Hafsa *Allah be pleased with her* because she was married to someone before Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. By contrast, 'Aisha was a virgin when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* married her and she used to take pride in being the only woman who was a virgin when he married her to the extent that she once asked him, 'O Messenger of Allah! Suppose you landed in a valley where there was a tree of which something had been eaten and then you found trees of which nothing has been eaten, from which tree will you let your camel graze?' Prophet Muhammad said, '(I will let my camel graze) from the one from which nothing had been eaten before'.(1) She was referring to the fact that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had not married any virgin except her.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5077; and Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 4331.*

One may ask, 'What is the virtue of replacing Prophet Muhammad's wives with deflowered ones if he preferred virgins?' Prophet Muhammad said to Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah after he married, ‘Have you married a virgin or a previously married woman?' Jabir said, 'A previously married woman'. He said, 'Why not a virgin, so you could play with her and she could play with you?'(1) However, the previously married woman has certain benefits in practical life. For this reason, Jabir mentioned the reason for preferring the previously married woman, saying, 'Abdullah (my father) died and left girls, and I did not like to marry a girl like them who cannot educate them or take care of them, and that is why I married a previously married woman in order for her to look after them and educate them’.(2) Jabir had nine young sisters whose father, ‘Abdullah ibn Haram, left when he died, and for this reason Jabir wanted to marry a previously married woman who could take care of and educate his young sisters. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knows that a previously married woman has many benefits, but he wanted to make Jabir happy after the death of his father.

Thus, Allah’s saying: ‘…previously married…' (*at-Tahrim:* 5) is intended for Hafsa *Allah be pleased with her* as if He *Glorified is He* is saying that He will replace Prophet Muhammad's wives, whether previously married or virgins, with also previously married and virgin wives, but the latter will be better than the former.

Nothing can be harder for the woman than divorcing her and her husband's determination to marry another wife. This can break her heart and pre-occupy her mind. Accordingly, it is an extremely serious threat for her.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2967 and 5247; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3709.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3967; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 4184; and Abu ‘Uwana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 3924.*

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ قُوٓاْ أَنفُسَكُمۡ وَأَهۡلِيكُمۡ نَارٗا وَقُودُهَا ٱلنَّاسُ وَٱلۡحِجَارَةُ عَلَيۡهَا مَلَٰٓئِكَةٌ
غِلَاظٞ شِدَادٞ لَّا يَعۡصُونَ ٱللَّهَ مَآ أَمَرَهُمۡ وَيَفۡعَلُونَ مَا يُؤۡمَرُونَ ٦

Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire fuelled by people and stones, over which stand angels, stern and strong; angels who never disobey God's commands to them, but do as they are ordered [6] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 6)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses those who believe in Him as their Lord and have pledged the covenant of faith with Him. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses all people to pay their attention to the matter of faith, whereas when He addresses the believers, He charges them with religious obligations. By contrast, He *the Almighty* does not assign any rulings to those who do not believe in Him. This is due to the fact that belief entails a commitment; as long as you devoted yourself to Allah as your All-Wise Lord, you should take the rulings of your religion from Him.

The believers adhere to the obligations of Allah *Glorified is He* out of their love for Him, even if His Obligations are difficult for them, like fasting or striving in His Way. Let us take fasting as an example; He *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may guard (against evil)' (*al-Baqara:* 183). Fasting entails that one refrains from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset for one lunar month. Undoubtedly, fasting is a hard obligation; however, the true believers wait and feel happy for the advent of *Ramadan* every year.

Let us offer another example to illustrate this point further; Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe! Retaliation is prescribed for you in the matter of the slain, the free for the free, and the slave for the slave and the female for the female…' (*al-Baqara:* 178). The retribution can be brutal, but the believers accept it wholeheartedly because it leads to social reform and deters criminals. For this reason, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'And there is life for you in (the law of) retaliation, O men of understanding, that you may guard yourselves' (*al-Baqara:* 179).

The true believers believe that Allah's Legislation is absolutely precise as Allah wisely sets the duties and the rights. There is no duty without a right and vice versa. In order to recognise the supremacy of Allah's Legislation, every believer should reflect on and compare his duties with his rights. Thereupon, he will realise that, in the light of Allah's Way of Guidance, he is treated with absolute justice.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Believers, guard (*qu*) yourselves and your families against a fire…' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). The believers should place a barrier between them and the hellfire and be cautious about being cast into it. The Arabic word *'wiqaya'* (prevention), from which the word '*qu*' (guard) is derived, means to guard yourself against the evil that you cannot bear. This means Allah *the Almighty* commands us to place a barrier between us and the hellfire because its evil is unbearable.

Out of His Greatness, Allah *Glorified is He* perfected the creation of the human soul. In every soul there is a commander and a commanded being. The person should guard himself by directing the order of the commander to the commanded being and to make the latter obey the former. You are commanded to protect your soul from the causes of perdition by ordering it to do good and not to commit evil. To give an example of this, the Lord *the Almighty* says: 'His [Qabil's (Cain's)] soul prompted him to kill his brother…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 30). This implies that part of Qabil's (Cain's) entity incited his whole entity to kill his brother, Habil (Abel).

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* has instilled numerous qualities within the human soul, like generosity and miserliness. The generous one tends to seek peoples' praise while the miser seeks to have sufficient money. These qualities compete with each other within every human soul and that is why He *the Almighty* commands us to guard ourselves. That is to say that we should guard ourselves against the bad qualities of our souls. One bad quality of the soul could be its longing to satisfy its desires, but another good quality within the same soul warns it against these fleeting desires whose consequences will be suffered later. Thus, there is a struggle within one's soul; when it renounces evil, it returns to goodness.

When Allah *Glorified is He* sets His Way of Guidance, He instills religious inclinations in every soul to make it adhere to His Way if it is careful and alert. But if these religious inclinations are neglected, the soul goes astray.

However, after this temporal deviation, it becomes alert again. This happens to the self-reproaching soul that whispers to the person when he does something wrong that Allah *the Almighty* commanded him not to do. Thereupon, the person returns to Allah’s Way of Guidance in order to seek His Forgiveness and Pardon.

If the self-reproaching soul is absent, then the soul that incites him to evil takes its place and directs the person towards deviations. Every soul is surrounded by many souls that want to reform the society and resist deviations. However, sometimes the reformation and redirection towards the right, after committing something wrong, comes from one's self-reproaching soul. But when one’s self-reproaching soul is absent, the soul that incites to evil replaces it.

Deviation from the Divine Way takes place gradually. When someone does not follow Allah's Way in a certain matter, his soul reproaches him for that; such a soul is called a self-reproaching soul. After a person commits a sin, his soul returns to being careful about following the Divine Way if such a person possesses religious immunity. By contrast, another person enjoys deviating from the right course and his soul urges him to go astray. He has a soul that incites him to evil and frequently prompts him to commit sins. Such a person needs someone else to guide him to do good.

Allah *Glorified is He* has made the human soul three kinds: self-reproaching, inciting to evil and at peace. The self-reproaching soul is in charge of rejecting the whispers of the soul inciting to evil. If it does not reject such whispers, the soul inciting to evil keeps inciting the human being to do wrong and nothing can stop it. As for the soul at peace, it is the one who is assured regarding the Divine Way of Guidance. We should take into account that the human soul naturally loves goodness. If its evil does not control it, it inclines to goodness and loves it. But if the evil soul controls it, its evil veils its goodness and its whims and desires open the gates of evil for it.

The person may follow his whims and commit a bad deed, but he then becomes heedful and his soul reproaches him for committing the bad deed; this is the self-reproaching soul which rebukes himself for doing evil and motives himself to do good. If the self-reproaching soul prevails, the society will be in a good state. To sum up, the soul at peace obeys Allah *the Almighty* and commands the human beings to obey Him, and the self-reproaching soul reproaches himself for doing evil. Every believer may undergo some weakness in his faith. In such a case, he should seek instruction from his co-religionist who will blame him for his weakness in faith and put him back on the right track.

The person is not only responsible for guarding himself against the hellfire, but he is also responsible for his household, including his wife and children. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘How can we guard ourselves and families against the hellfire?’ He replied, ‘By ordering them to do what pleases Allah and not to do what He dislikes’.(1) This means that we should learn what is good and then teach it to our families in order to guard ourselves and the people we know against the hellfire by obeying Allah *the Almighty*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* commands us to first learn what is beneficial for us, and then teach it to those we are responsible for; that is, the person starts with himself, then his closest relatives, and then the rest of his family. This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Start with your dependents'.(2) The man is in charge of his family and should take care of them as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘All of you are guardians (*ra’i*) and are responsible for your charges’.

The root of the Arabic word *‘ra'i'* (guardian) is derived from grazing sheep because when the shepherd takes the sheep to the pasture, he guards them for none of them to go astray and then be caught by the wolves. He provides for the sheep what makes them at rest for them not to become exhausted and die on the way.

Thus, the man shoulders the responsibility of his family as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The man is the guardian of his family and is responsible for them; a woman is the guardian of her husband's home and his children and is responsible for them; and the slave is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it. Surely, every one of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges'.(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti ascribed this Hadith to Ibn Mardawayh on the authority of Zayd ibn Aslam. It is also narrated by Sa'id ibn Mansor, Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Jarir, and others. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 14/588.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1426.*

Giving the example of one of the Prophets, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us how to care for our families, saying: 'And he [Ismail (Ishmael)] enjoined on his family prayer and almsgiving, and was one in whom his Lord was well pleased' (*Maryam:* 55). One of the virtues of Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) *peace be upon him* is that he used to order his wife and children to pray and give alms. He *Glorified is He* does not make mention of a virtue unless it is great and proportional to Ishmael's virtues of being truthful to his promise and being a Messenger and a Prophet. As such, anyone who wants to be described with a prophetic virtue should command his household to pray and give alms.

But why does Allah *Glorified is He* especially mention one's household? This is because they immediately surround him and that if they are righteous, his whole family and offspring will be good. If the man draws his household's attention towards the remembrance of Allah and praying five times a day, this blocks the ways of Satan. After all, he has no chance in a home where prayer is established five times a day. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'May Allah show mercy to a man who gets up during the night and prays two units of prayer, and who wakens his wife and she prays; but if she refuses, he sprinkles water on her face. May Allah show mercy to a woman who gets up during the night and prays, and who wakens her husband and he prays; but if he refuses, she sprinkles water on his face'.(2)

This means every night, every man and woman can be like a Messenger for their household. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And enjoin prayer on your followers, and be constant in it. We do not ask you for subsistence; We give you subsistence. And the (good) end is for those who guard (against evil)' (*Ta Ha:* 132). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* explained this matter for us, saying, ‘Command your children to perform prayer when they are seven, and beat them for not offering them when they are ten’.(1) The order to pray is issued by the child's family, but it is ultimately issued by Allah *the Almighty*. This is because He *the Almighty* wanted to make the child, in this early age, ordered from someone physically closer to him. His father is the one who gives him the material bounties by providing him with food, drink and all the necessities of life. For this reason, if his father orders him to pray, he will likely obey him. After all, the child's faculties of perception are not broad enough to understand the One Who really bestows the bounties, namely Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Allah commands the father to make his child accustomed to carrying out Allah’s Obligations, punishing him if he does not adhere to that order. This is because the one who issues any order is the one who punishes for neglecting it. When the child attains puberty, he receives the order from the One Who bestows bounty on him, that is Allah *Glorified is He*. At that time, the child will be familiar with the religious obligations; therefore, they will be easy for him.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7138; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 4828;*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. In his Musradrak, Al-Hakim grades it as authentic, meeting the conditions stipulated by Muslim. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1310 and 1452; An-Nasa'i, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1610; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 7404 and 9625; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8502; and Al-Hakim, Musradrak, Hadith no. 1164.*

You should notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and be patient (*istabir*) in it [the prayer, yourself]' (*Ta Ha:* 132) meaning, the responsibility of the father and the mother is not confined to ordering the children to pray, but they should be steadfast in praying themselves. There is a difference between the imperative *‘isbir’* and *‘istabir’* (be patient), which have similar meanings. The Arabic verb *‘istabir’* used in the last verse expresses a hyperbole; to be more patient and deliberately do it by, for example, caring to pray in front of the children to established the importance of prayer in their minds. For instance, when you enter your house and find the food is ready, you can say to your children, ‘Wait until I offer my prayer’. In this way, the children will be aware that Prayer is more important than food. Furthermore, you will instill the idea of respecting Allah's Obligation in their souls, and that keeping up prayer takes precedence over any other action, whatever it may be. ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* used to get up at night to pray what Allah *the Almighty* used to make easy for him until the Dawn Prayer. Then he used to wake his household up for prayer; but if they refused, he would sprinkle water on their faces. When you make your children accustomed to the call for prayer, they will answer it once they hear it without prioritising anything else. In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* does not bless any work that distracts you from answering the call for prayer.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Amr ibn Al-'As Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 6756; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 495.*

Back to the verse in question; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a fire fuelled by people and stones…' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). In another verse, He *the Almighty* also says: '…then be on your guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for the unbelievers' (*al-Baqara:* 24). This means people and stones will be the fuel of the hellfire that lights it and makes it blaze strongly. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are firewood (*hasab*) of hell; to it you shall come' (*al-Anbiya':* 98). The Arabic word *'hasab'* (firewood) means all that is used as fuel for fire, whether it is wood, cloth, oil or electricity. So, what do you think if the fuel of the hellfire is the disbelieving people themselves? The hellfire waits, longs and yearns for their coming; a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'On the Day when We will say to Hell, "Are you filled up?" And it will say, "Are there any more?"' (*Qaf:* 30), and in His saying: 'When they shall be cast therein, they shall hear a [dreadful] inhaling as it boils up' (*al-Mulk:* 7). When the disbelievers are thrown into the hellfire, it will blaze forth, making a great blast. Its inhalation seizes the hearts as if it sucks in what is thrown into it.

It has been narrated that when Allah's saying: '…a fire fuelled by people and stones…' (*at-Tahrim:* 6) was revealed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited it and thereupon a young person sitting beside him fell unconscious. Out of mercy for him, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* put his head on his lap. After a while, the young boy opened his eyes to find his head on the lap of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thereupon, the young man said, 'May my father and mother be scarified for you, Prophet Muhammad. What is the stone of the Hell like?' He replied, 'Is what has inflicted you not enough? Anyhow, if one of its stones were placed on a mountain, it would melt'. (1)

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated by Ibn Al-Mundhir on the authority of Mohammad ibn Hisham, but Al-Albani graded it as weak. In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti ascribed it to Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya* =

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* describes the angels who are in charge of the hellfire and are its keepers as being: '…stern and strong…' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). The Arabic word *'ghilazh'* (strong) refers to those who have strong and big bodies. The distance between the two shoulders of any of these angels is like the distance of travelling for one year. They also use harsh words and treat the disbelievers who are the companions of the hellfire roughly. Furthermore, they are heartless and merciless to the disbeliever when they beg for mercy, for their mercy to the disbeliever has been taken away from their hearts, even though they are angels. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And We have not made the wardens of the fire other than angels. And We have not made their number but as a trial for those who disbelieve, in order that the people of the Book may be certain and those who believe may increase in faith…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31).

The number of these angels who are in charge of the hellfire is nineteen, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Over it are nineteen' (*al-Muddaththir:* 30). They are harsh when responding to the people of the hellfire, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And those who are in the Fire shall say to the keepers of Hell, "Call upon your Lord that He may lighten to us one day of the punishment"' (*Ghafir:* 49). But the keepers of the hellfire will shatter their hopes, saying: 'They shall say, "Did your Messengers not come to you with clear arguments?" They shall say, "Yes". They [the angels] shall say, "Then call. But the call of the unbelievers is nothing but [futile wandering] in [mazes of] error"' (*Ghafir:* 50).

The punishment of the hellfire is so severe that the disbelievers will ask Allah *the Almighty* to cause them to perish in order to relieve themselves from that punishment. In this regard, the Lord *the Almighty* says: 'And they shall call out, "O Malik! Let your Lord put an end of us". He shall say, "Surely, you shall abide"' (*az-Zukhruf:* 78). Furthermore, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When the people of Paradise enter Paradise and the people of Hell enter Hell, death shall be brought in a form of a sheep. Then it will be said to the believers, "Do you recognise this?" They will say, "We recognise it. It is death. It came to us and we knew it". Then it will be said to the people of the fire, "Do you recognise this?"

= *and Ibn Qudama in his book Al-Buka' Wa Ar-Riqa. See Al-Albani, Da'if At-Targhib, Hadith no. 2152; and As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 14/689.*

They will say, “Yes”. Then it will be said, “O people of Paradise! Have an everlasting life without death! O people of the Fire! Have an everlasting life without death!”'(1)

Therefore, the people of the hellfire will wish to die in order to be relieved of the chastisement. There is a great difference between death and punishment. Death ends the life and causes one's pain to come to an end, whereas the punishment lasts as long as the person lives. You can imagine the severity of the punishment that makes the punished person wish and beg for death. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They will be hurled into a narrow part of the hellfire, chained together. They will cry out for death. Do not cry out this day for one death, but cry out for many deaths' (*al-Furqan:* 13, 14). A poet says in this regard:

How terrible your suffering is if you consider death a cure

and how calamitous it is to wish to die!

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the angels in general and the keepers of the hellfire in particular, saying: '…angels who never disobey Allah’s Commands to them, but do as they are ordered' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). They never disobey His command, and for this reason not one of the disbelievers should think that they can, for instance, incite one of the keepers of the hellfire to let them leave the hellfire. Naturally, the angels obey the commands of Allah *the Almighty* and never disobey Him. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* made the keepers of the hellfire angels who were created from light and who naturally obey Him. Furthermore, the Lord *Glorified is He* describes them, saying: 'They fear their Lord above them and do what they are commanded' (*an-Nahl:* 50). Besides, they never disdain to worship Him *the Almighty* nor do they grow weary, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Those who are with Him [Allah] are not proud to serve Him, nor do they grow weary' (*al-Anbiya’:* 19). They are not like the disbelievers and the deniers; rather, they do not become weak, eat or grow weary of obeying Him *Glorified is He*. Moreover, Allah *the Most High* says: 'Those who bear the Supreme Throne [of Allah] and those around Him

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4730; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 7360.*

[Allah] celebrate the praise of their Lord and believe in Him, and ask protection for those who believe…' (*Ghafir:* 7). They do not celebrate Allah's praise out of fear and awe; rather, out of love and faith, and that is why the Lord *Glorified is He* says that they: '…believe in Him…' (*Ghafir:* 7).

Afterwards, Allah *the Exalted* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا۟ ٱلْيَوْمَ ۖ إِنَّمَا تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٧)

‘You who disbelieve, make no excuses today: you are only being repaid for what you used to do’[7]
(The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 7)

There are numerous kinds of addresses in the Quran, and the addresses differ according to the addressee. For example, Allah *the Almighty* addresses the believers, saying: ‘O you who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from a painful torment? Believe in Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] and struggle for His Cause with your possessions and your persons—that is better for you, if only you knew’ (*as-Saff:* 10-11), and: ‘O believers, obey Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad]: do not turn away when you are listening to him. And do not be like those who say, “We heard”, though in fact they were not listening. The worst creatures in Allah’s eyes are those who are [wilfully] deaf and dumb, who do not use reason’ (*al-Anfal:* 20-22).

In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the Prophets and the people of the Book, but He does not address the disbeliever except in this verse that reads: 'O you who disbelieve, make no excuses today: you are only being repaid for what you used to do' (*at-Tahrim:* 7). He, however, includes the disbelievers in His general address directed to all the people commanding them to believe in Him, as in His saying: ‘O people, be mindful of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing’ (*al-Hajj:* 1), and: ‘O people, be mindful of your Lord and fear a day when no parent will be able to avail their child at all, nor will a child be able to avail their parent at all. Allah’s Promise is true, so do not let the present life delude you nor let the Deceiver delude you about Allah' (*Luqman:* 33). Here, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses all people, believers and disbelievers.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not address the disbelievers except when they enter the fire and suffer the severe torment, saying: ‘O you who disbelieve, make no excuses today…' (*at-Tahrim:* 7). The disbelievers wishfully think that pleasure is confined to the worldly life, which runs counter to the Truth that they will come to know only in the hereafter, after they are thrown in the hellfire. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Leave them to eat and enjoy themselves and to let false hopes distract them for they will come to know the consequences of their actions' (*al-Hijr:* 3).

The disbelievers are of two kinds: one kind disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty,* but when guidance came to them, they employed their minds, arrived at the Truth and declared their belief in Him *the Almighty*. The other kind of disbelievers benefited from their disbelief and, therefore, clung to it, no matter what proofs of faith were presented to them, out of their stubbornness in their disbelief.

These disbelievers did not disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He* because the Message did not come to them. After all, it is their right to be sent a Prophet or a Messenger to lead them to the Divine Way. However, they considered their disbelief a mission to fulfill and a path to follow, given the fact that their disbelief made them masters and unjustly gave them extra privileges over other people. Disbelief means to try to veil the reality of Allah's Existence, the necessarily existing God. In fact, their concealment of Allah's Existence is a proof in itself that He exists, for no one attempts to conceal what is non-existent. Thus, their attempt to conceal Allah's Existence rebound, as it proves His Existence. As such, the disbelievers themselves attest to Allah's Existence.

The worst kind of disbelief is that preceded by believing in Allah *the Almighty* as He says: 'Surely, those who disbelieve after having believed, then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted, and these are the ones that go astray' (*Al-‘Imran:* 90). The one whose disbelief increases is the one who, after disbelieving himself, bars others from having faith in Allah *the Almighty*. Such a disbeliever is not satisfied with his disbelief, for he tries to spread it to others, which increases his disbelief. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely, those who disbelieve and die while they are unbelievers, the earth full of gold shall not be accepted from one of them, though he should offer to ransom himself with it. They are the ones who shall have a painful chastisement, and they shall have no helpers' (*Al-'Imran:* 91). It will be said to them: 'Did you disbelieve after having believed? Taste therefore the chastisement because you disbelieved' (*Al-'Imran:* 106). This is because they first believed then disbelieved and died in the state of disbelief.

Their faces will be black on the Day of Judgment, even if they were masters in this worldly life, enjoying its pleasures. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims, saying: '[O Prophet], do not be deceived by the disbelievers' [lucrative] trading to and fro in the land' (*Al-'Imran:* 196). The disbelievers only enjoy the short, fleeting pleasure of this worldly life. By contrast, the believers will enjoy the deferred yet eternal pleasure in the hereafter. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says about the disbelievers' enjoyment: 'This is only a brief enjoyment, after which Hell will be their home—a miserable resting place!' (*Al-'Imran:* 197) That is why the Lord *the Most High* will not accept their excuses because, on the Day of Judgment, the matter is over and their life in this world will have end. As a result, they had already lost their opportunity to believe and their excuses will neither be accepted nor be beneficial for them. They will be punished for their misdeeds, as they did not offer anything except their disbelief in Allah *the Almighty* rejecting His signs and fighting His Messengers and righteous slaves.

They will give many excuses in the Hereafter, saying, for instance: 'The last of them shall say with regards to the foremost of them, "Our Lord! These led us astray, therefore give them a double chastisement of the Fire". He will say, "Every one shall have double, but this you do not understand"' (*al-A'raf:* 38). This excuse is not accepted because all the disbelievers have a double punishment. Those who imitated others in going astray from the Way of Guidance increased the number of the callers towards error and strengthened their position, which incited many people to follow them.

The oppressed ones among the disbelievers will give another excuse that the haughty, disbelieving oppressors schemed, night and day, against them, ordering them to disbelieve in Allah *the Almighty*. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The oppressors will say to them, “Was it we who prevented you from following right guidance after it had reached you? No! You yourselves were sinners”. The oppressed will say to them, “No, it was your scheming, night and day, ordering us to disbelieve in Allah and set up rivals to Him”. When they see the punishment, they will fall silent with regret, and We shall put iron collars on the disbelievers’ necks. Why should they be rewarded for anything other than what they have done?' (*Saba’:* 32-33) Each of the two groups will blame the other, claiming that it is responsible for the punishment they suffer. When the oppressors charged the oppressed saying that they were sinners who followed them to avail themselves of the pleasures of the worldly life, the oppressed will respond by stating that the oppressors used to scheme, day and night, persuading and urging them to disbelieve until they followed them.

Furthermore, they will give another lame excuse, saying: 'O our Lord! Our adversity overcame us and we were an erring people. O our Lord! Take us out of it; then, if we return (to evil), surely we shall be unjust' (*al-Mu’minun:* 106-107). Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* replies: 'Away with you! Remain in it [Hell] with ignominy! Do not speak to Me!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 108) They wanted to be acquitted of their charge, putting the blame on Allah *Glorified is He* by saying that He predestined their waywardness and as a result they are not sinful, for how can they be among the blessed if their destiny was otherwise. Moreover, they will say, 'If Allah willed, we will not have disbelieved'. As a result, Allah *the Almighty* replies: 'Away with you! Remain in it [Hell] with ignominy! Do not speak to Me!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 108) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to them, 'Be silent in your humiliation and disgrace, for you used to persecute the believers'.

On their entry to the hellfire, Allah *the Almighty* says to them: 'O you who disbelieve, make no excuses today: you are only being repaid for what you used to do' (*at-Tahrim:* 7). This is meant to shatter their hopes of salvation. The Lord *the Almighty* also says: 'But on that day their excuse shall not profit those who were unjust, nor will they be allowed to receive a reprove [so as to be given another chance after it] (*yust’ataboon*)' (*ar-Rum:* 57). In addition to the unacceptability of their excuses, they will not be allowed to make amends.

The Arabic word *‘al-'itab’* from which the word ‘*yust’ataboon*’ (receive a reprove) is derived, means to reprove someone gently for something he has done. No one will even dare to ask them to plead with Allah *the Almighty* to waive their punishment.

The Day of Judgment is not the time for giving excuses; rather, it is the Day of Recompense for deeds. The disbelievers will be admitted to the hellfire as a repayment for their misdeeds. Their excuses for their sins and crimes will not be useful for them as they had been warned in the worldly life.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…you are only being repaid for what you used to do’ (*at-Tahrim:* 7). That is, the disbelievers' punishment is not decreed unjustly against them because the Lord *the Almighty* neither unjustly favours the one who does good deeds nor is He unjust to the one who does misdeeds; a fact which is clear in His saying: '…no injustice (shall be done) this Day…' (*Ghafir:* 7).

Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'And you shall see every nation kneeling down; every nation shall be called to its book. Today you shall be rewarded for what you did' (*al-Jathiya:* 28). Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* does not unjustly punish them; rather, He says to them: '…Taste what you did' (*al-'Ankabut*: 55). It is as if their misdeed is the hellfire that burns them. In fact, the person is only held accountable and rewarded for his own actions, and as a result no one should ask the Lord *the Exalted* about something that has nothing to do with him.

The human being is asked to repent regardless of his religious condition. If he is a disbeliever, his repentance is to believe in Allah *the Almighty* and if he is a believer, his repentance is to stop committing sins, misdeeds and injustice, and to refrain from appropriating people's rights.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* commands the believers, in particular, to repent, saying:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ تُوبُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ تَوۡبَةٗ نَّصُوحًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمۡ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنكُمۡ
سَيِّـَٔاتِكُمۡ وَيُدۡخِلَكُمۡ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ يَوۡمَ لَا يُخۡزِي ٱللَّهُ
ٱلنَّبِيَّ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مَعَهُۥۖ نُورُهُمۡ يَسۡعَىٰ بَيۡنَ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ وَبِأَيۡمَٰنِهِمۡ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ
أَتۡمِمۡ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَٱغۡفِرۡ لَنَآۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ﴿٨﴾

Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance. Your Lord may well cancel your bad deeds for you and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, on a Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet or those who have believed with him. With their lights streaming out ahead of them and to their right, they will say, 'Lord, perfect our lights for us and forgive us: You have power over everything' [8]
(The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 8)

One may ask, 'Why does Allah address the disbelievers in the previous verse, although in the verse before and after it He addresses the believers? He firstly addresses the believers, saying: 'O believers, guard yourselves and your families against a fire fuelled by people and stones, over which stand angels, stern and strong; angels who never disobey Allah's Commands to them, but do as they are ordered' (*at-Tahrim:* 6), and followed it by saying: 'O you who disbelieve, make no excuses today: you are only being repaid for what you used to do' (*at-Tahrim:* 7), and then He says: 'O believers, turn to Allah in sincere repentance' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). The one who reflects on these verses will find that Allah *the Almighty* has compassion for the disbelievers as He places His discourse to them between two verses addressing the believers. He *the Almighty* wants them to believe in Him; but why do they reject the Call of Belief?

From these verses we also learn that Allah *the Almighty* also warns the believers against disbelieving and asks them to guard themselves and their families against the hellfire fuelled by men and stones. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our slave, then produce a chapter like it and call on your witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful. But if you do (it) not, and never shall you do (it), then be on your guard against the fire whose fuel is men and stones; it is prepared for the unbelievers' (*al-Baqara:* 23-24). After Allah *the Almighty* makes mention of the hellfire in the earlier verse in the chapter of *at-Tahrim*, it is suitable that He calls the disbelievers, saying: 'O you who disbelieve, make no excuses today: you are only being repaid for what you used to do' (*at-Tahrim:* 7).

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to repent, saying: 'Believers, turn to Allah in sincere repentance (*tawba*)' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* also said, 'Allah is more delighted at the repentance of His slave than the one who found his camel after he had lost it in a waterless desert'.(1) If one tries to get closer to Allah *the Almighty* He guides him. Repentance requires the determination of the repentant to not commit new sins or return to those which he had previously committed. The Lord *the Almighty* does not reject the invocations of anyone who seeks His Bounty.

To know how great His Mercy towards His slaves is, we should read the following Sacred Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad related Allah as saying, 'On every day the sun rises, the sky says to Allah, "My Lord, grant me the permission to fall apart on the human beings for they eat from Your Provision but are ungrateful to You". The seas say, "My Lord, grant us the permission to drown the human beings for they eat from Your Provision but are ungrateful to You". The mountains also say, "My Lord, grant us the permission to smash the human beings for they eat from Your Provision but are ungrateful to You". Thereupon Allah says, "Leave them, for if you had created them, you will have been merciful to them. They are my slaves. If they repent to Me, I will be pleased with them. Otherwise, I will reform them"'.(2)

The Arabic verb *'taba'* (to repent), from which the word '*toobu*' (turn in repentance) in the verse under discussion is derived, means that the slave repents to Allah *the Almighty* seeking His Forgiveness for his sins and misdeeds. By doing this, the Lord *the Almighty* accepts his repentance. Thus, the word repentance revolves around returning to Him *the Almighty*.

Allah's Kindness and Mercy is evident in prescribing repentance in order for the people to have their sins forgiven. Accordingly, when the person commits a sin and regrets doing it, he should not think that repentance is difficult for him, as the Lord *Glorified is He* says: 'Except those who repent and amend and make manifest (the Truth), these are the ones to whom I turn (in mercy); and I am the Oft-Returning (to mercy), the Most Merciful' (*al-Baqara:* 160). Thus, Allah accepts the repentance of all sinners as He is the Oft-Returning (to mercy). In addition to prescribing repentance in order for the slaves to have their repentance accepted, Allah *the Almighty* prescribed it to guard His slaves against the evils of committing sins and to show Mercy to the repentant sinners.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See: Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6309; Muslim, Hadith no. 7137.*

(2) From the proofreader: This is not a Hadith. See: http://dorar.net/spreadH/465.

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* shows great Mercy to His slaves and especially the repentant ones among them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And (as to) those who do evil deeds but then repent and believe, your Lord after that is most surely Forgiving, Most Merciful’ (*al-A‘raf:* 153). Thus, repentance means to regret your sin and be determined not to do it again. It also means to return from falsehood to Truth. Some people even repent from their disbelief that inflicted their pure natural belief in order to follow the Divine Way of Guidance. Out of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* opens the doors of repentance to the sinners which protects the whole society from the deviant people and the followers of whims and desires. Had these doors of repentance been closed in front of the sinners, the whole society will have suffered because the sinners will keep on their falsehood and error, as they will not have had any motivation to be righteous.

The repentance should be a sincere one, for Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘O believers turn to Allah in sincere repentance...’ (*at-Tahrim:* 8). Being sincere in repentance requiring that the repentant slave abstains from committing the sin, is determined not to repeat it, and returns the rights to the people, if applicable. The sincere repentance, therefore, is the one after which the repentant person does not commit the sin and does not mockingly renege on it saying, ‘I will commit such-and-such a sin and then I will repent again’. Thus, the person should truly return to Allah *the Almighty* by being determined not to return to the sin again.

There are some conditions that should be met with regard to repentance in order for it to be a sincere one. These stipulated conditions include: firstly, to abstain from committing the sin; secondly, to regret committing it; and finally, to be determined not to repeat it again. This does not mean that if you commit the same sin again He *the Almighty* does not accept your repentance because you may undergo some circumstances that make you fall into the same sin once again. What you should do is be truthfully determined not to return to the sin after your repentance, but if you fell into it again, this should be unintentional. However, if you said you will commit the sin and then repent, how can you be sure that the Lord *the Most High* will grant you a respite until you repent again? As such, we should hastily repent before it is too late. These are the conditions of repentance of the slave regarding a sin committed against Allah *the Almighty*.

If it is related to other people, the repentant person should meet another condition, namely, returning the rights to the people concerned if this is possible. If it is not possible, he should give any good type of charity, intending to give the reward thereof to the people he had wronged.

Allah says: ‘Your Lord may well cancel your bad deeds for you…’ (*at-Tahrim:* 8). That is, He forgives the major and the minor sins of the believers. There are many reasons He forgives, including repentance, concealing the charity given to the poor, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘If you give alms openly, it is well. But if you hide it and give it to the poor, it is better for you; this will do away with some of your evil deeds. And Allah is aware of what you do' (*al-Baqara:* 271), and piety. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'O you who believe! If you are careful of (your duty to) Allah, He will grant you a distinction, do away with your evils and forgive you. And Allah’s Favour is indeed immense’ (*al-Anfal:* 29).

It has become clear that Allah *Glorified is He* conceals the believer's misdeeds and forgives them, waiving the punishment they deserve for committing these misdeeds. In addition, avoiding the major sins like killing, committing adultery and fleeing the battlefield is one of the reasons for having sins forgiven, a fact which is illustrated in His saying: ‘If you avoid the great sins you have been forbidden, We shall wipe out your minor misdeeds and let you in through the entrance of honour’ (*an-Nisa’:* 31).

But this is a matter over which the scholars have pondered and lingered. They said, 'The people may be incited to do the minor sins if they avoided the major ones'. We say, 'No'. On the other hand, insisting on doing a minor sin is a great sin. For this reason, you should not insist on committing minor sins; He *the Almighty* only forgives what you do unintentionally. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Repentance with Allah is only for those who do evil (*as-soo'*) in ignorance and then turn (to Allah) soon. These are the ones to whom Allah turns (in mercy), and Allah is All Knowing, All-Wise' (*an-Nisa':* 17). They do the misdeed without previously arranging to do it, for repentance is not accepted from the one who enjoys committing sins and is heedless of repentance except when he is dying. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is not true repentance when people persist in doing evil deeds (*as-sai'aat*) until death confronts them and they then say, "Now I repent", nor those who die while they are disbelievers: We have prepared a painful torment for these' (*an-Nisa':* 18).

You should notice that the Quran used the word 'as-soo'' ('evil', in the singular) to refer to the one sin that the person unintentionally fell into, but for the one who deviates from Allah's Way of Guidance, the word '*as-sai'aat*' ('evil deeds', in the plural) is used to describe them as persisting in doing evil deeds. Committing only one sin means that the person has only one weak point, and he does his best to make up for it by doing good deeds. By contrast, the one who habitually commits evil deeds does not have only one weak point as he commits many sins and indulges in deviation. He also defers repentance until the time he is dying, and then he says: 'Now I repent' (*an-Nisa':* 18).

Wiping out the sins means that Allah *the Almighty* conceals them in this worldly life and waives the punishment they incur in the Hereafter. Allah *the Almighty* wipes out the sins of the one who repents sincerely by abstaining from committing a certain sin and not thinking about returning to it. It is as if the sincere repentance has purified the organs of his body; it has purified the heart and the mind from having or thinking about bad intentions.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Believers, turn to Allah in sincere repentance…' (*at-Tahrim:* 8), 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* commented, 'It is related to the person who commits a sin and then repents honestly and does not return to it'.(1)

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(1) *See Al-Fakhr Al-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghaib, 3/469.*

In fact, Allah's Mercy encompasses all the believers who sin, for He forgives all their sins for them. However, the person might not have all his sins wiped out; this is because sins are of two types: there are sins which are committed against Allah *the Almighty* by violating His Orders, and there are others which are committed by the people against each other. The repentant person may have all the sins committed against Allah *the Almighty* forgiven for him. This is because he, that is the sinner, does not actually do wrong against Allah *the Almighty* Himself by committing such sins, but rather to himself. However, any harm committed against the human beings will abuse them and violate their rights. For this reason, repentance in this case occurs only by the restitution of these rights.

Islam is a religion that takes into consideration the reality of the human beings. Allah *the Almighty* knows that His slaves frequently commit sins, and that is why He *Glorified is He* has laid down for them the way to ask for forgiveness. If they commit sins, Allah *the Almighty* asks them to seek repentance.

Polytheism is the major sin that Allah *the Almighty* does not forgive, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, but forgives anything else besides that to whomsoever He pleases; and associating anything with Allah is to devise a most heinous sin indeed' (*an-Nisa':* 48). That is, Allah *the Almighty* does not pardon those who die without repenting from polytheism, and consequently they will go to the fire whose fuel is men and stones. To such people He *the Almighty* says: '…make no excuses today: you are only being repaid for what you used to do' (*at-Tahrim:* 7).

Returning to the verse under discussion, the Lord *the Almighty* then says: '…and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, on a Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet or those who have believed with him. With their lights streaming out ahead of them and to their right, they will say, "Lord, perfect our lights for us and forgive us: You have power over everything"' (*at-Tahrim:* 8).

There are many kinds of Gardens. They include: *Al-Firdaws*, Eden, the Bliss, the Abode of Eternity, the Abode of Peace and the Abode of Shelter. But the best of these Gardens is called *'Illiyun*. Furthermore, the greatest of all the blessings in paradise is to enjoy seeing Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, the bliss of paradise is far superior to the bliss of having food and drink in this worldly life.

These Gardens are fully equipped with everything and do not require any effort on the part of the believers. The rivers are running underneath them, and the believers will find there what Allah *the Almighty* had promised them: '…wherein they abide eternally, with purified spouses…' (*Al-'Imran:* 15).

Allah *the Almighty* has created paradise and made it a perpetual abode, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in Gardens of perpetual abode; and best of all is Allah's goodly Pleasure—that is the grand achievement' (*at-Tawba:* 72).

In paradise, there are Gardens and Homes provided for the human beings. This is because the human being likes to have a home in order to enjoy his own pleasures by himself. Besides, he likes to sit with other people in a beautiful place, exactly as we do on holidays and special occasions when we go out to the gardens and orchards to sit together. It is as if the Gardens are prepared for extra luxury when you want to meet the people. On the other hand, the Homes of paradise are dedicated for privacy in which each one has a special place to privately enjoy his surroundings.

Therefore, the Gardens are like the orchards, but they were not created with normal causes and means because it is Allah *the Almighty* Who created them. When we go to a house of a rich person, we may find that the house has a garden looked after by a skilled gardener who takes care of its flowers and trees for them to look nice for the rich owner. In this case, we enjoy sitting in this garden very much and hate to leave it. If this is what happens in the worldly life and within human capacity, how about the Garden created by Allah *the Almighty*? How great will be the beauty, sweetness and pleasure of these Gardens?!

It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who promised to admit us into these Gardens, and He is Fully Able to fulfill His Promises to make us enjoy the bliss which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined. He *the Almighty* made these Gardens vast and full of plants and flowers which please the eye with their beauty, the hand with their soft touch, and the nose with their pleasant fragrance.

The rivers running under paradise give it another feature of beauty. They are running underneath it and the source of the water comes from another place or branch from underneath paradise itself. That is, the water originates itself from the same place, so it seems that every river springs from underneath its paradise. They are very beautiful, for they were created by Allah *the Almighty*. In our worldly life, we see that every river has two banks, but the rivers of paradise run without banks. These rivers, which contain milk, honey, water and wine share the same canal but do not mix. Each river is separate from the others because it is Allah *the Almighty* Who created them.

The paradise consists of Gardens that contain homes. In the worldly life, we find villas placed in the centre of gardens; but just imagine the beauty of the homes that Allah *the Almighty* promised us in the centre of paradise! In the Arabic language, the word *'janna'* (garden) means 'concealment' or 'hiding', and one of its derivatives is the word *'al-junun'* (insanity). The garden can conceal everything by means of the great number of its trees. This means that anyone can walk under its shade or sit in it without being seen. Since it is full of luxuries, the human being will not think of leaving it. The Gardens of Eden and residence in them are perpetual because they contain everything the human being needs. Besides, everyone wishes to live eternally therein.

Allah *the Almighty* describes these Gardens, saying: 'Gardens of perpetual residence, which they will enter, beneath which rivers flow…' (*an-Nahl:* 31), and: '…Gardens graced with flowing streams' (*at-Tawba:* 100). These verses mean that the rivers are running beneath the Gardens, but the source of the water may come from another place. Someone may say, 'The flow of these rivers may be stopped'. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…beneath which rivers flow' (*an-Nahl:* 31). This means that the Garden provides water for itself, and it does not come from another source that may be stopped.

Regarding the Lord's saying: '…Gardens graced with flowing streams' (*at-Tawba:* 100), it means that the spring of this water comes from a remote place and passes underneath the Garden. As for His saying: '… beneath which rivers flow' (*an-Nahl:* 31), it implies that this water springs from underneath the Garden itself. Consequently, the believers should not fear of it stopping or drying up. This offers assurance that the bliss of paradise is eternal and permanent.

The Arabic word *'anhar'* (rivers) is a plural whose singular is *'nahr'*. The river is a canal which contains running water; it does not refer to just the water itself. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Gardens of perpetual residence, which they will enter, beneath which rivers flow…' (*an-Nahl:* 31). Where are these rivers running? Are they running under the plants or homes of paradise?

The garden is the orchard which contains trees that the people can hide behind, but it is not similar to the flowering orchard in which only the flowers delight the eyes. Paradise has high trees, thus they can conceal people walking in it. Furthermore, it contains a provision and all what the person needs. It does not let you look for an alternative place because it contains everything. If anyone lacks anything in his worldly life, he looks forward to having everything he needs. But if he has everything he needs, he does not look for other things.

From this we learn that the Garden in paradise covers the believers; its trees have grown to hide the people walking under their branches and leaves. The believers do not look forward to leaving paradise as everything is provided there: water, food, a comfortable place to sit or dance and other blessings bestowed by Allah *the Almighty*.

The difference between the rivers in this worldly life and those of paradise is that the former are channels that have banks, but the latter run on the surface of the land, without banks to detain the water. In paradise, the rivers of wine are running on the surface of the land but they do not mix with the rivers of water or that of milk. And nothing can stop the flow of the rivers in paradise. All of this has been created by an Omnipotent, All-Wise Lord. The running of the rivers in the worldly life is merely a way to achieve greenery, fertility and ripeness. To sum up, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…beneath which rivers flow' (*Ta Ha:* 76) means that the water provides itself; it does not come from another source that may be stopped or banned.

Allah *the Almighty* says about the rivers of paradise: 'Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure, [all] flow in it. There they will find fruit of every kind, and they will find forgiveness from their Lord. How can this be compared to the fate of those who dwell forever in the fire and are given boiling water to drink that tears their bowels?' (*Muhammad:* 15)

The Lord *the Most High* gives the rivers of paradise certain names that we are familiar with. However, He purified these rivers from any mud that we might see in the rivers of this worldly life which run between two banks. By contrast, the rivers of paradise will have no banks to detain the water as they will be detained by Allah's Power.

In paradise, you will find rivers of milk whose taste has not been changed, and rivers of wine different from that of the worldly life; it will be delicious for the drinkers. In this worldly life, on the other hand, people drink wine without pleasure, as a person drops it into his mouth at once to reduce its sharp and acidified taste.

Unlike this worldly life, paradise has rivers of honey refined by Allah *the Almighty*. In this regard, the Arabs used to collect honey from the mountains but they used to find it mixed with stones and sand. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* filters these blessings from all impurities; He filters water from dirtiness, milk from its taste being altered, wine from what causes drunkenness, and honey from all impurities. That is, He *the Almighty* purified them from all the impurities known in this worldly life. In this worldly life, water, for example, is sweet, serene and pure, but it becomes dirty when it stagnates. On the contrary, the rivers of water in paradise are purified from all these impurities.

Also, the wine of the Hereafter differs from that of this worldly life; it does not harm the mind. Besides, the wine of this world is not delicious for its drinkers because it is extracted from alcohol which has an astringent taste. This is why you find its drinkers pour it quickly into their mouths in order to avoid its bitterness which in turn hurts their stomach. The situation is different if the drink is mango, orange or sugar-cane juice. People like to taste those fruits, and as a result, we find that they drink their juices slowly to retain their taste for a longer time. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says about the wine of paradise: 'No bad effect is there in it' (*as-Saffat:* 47). He *the Almighty* purifies the rivers of wine from the impurities of the wine of this worldly life which make the mind unaware of what he is doing.

The greatness of paradise is presented by the fact that regardless of the pleasures we enjoy in this worldly life, we cannot have a river of wine, milk or honey. Moreover, out of Allah's Omnipotence, these rivers run in paradise without banks, yet they do not mix with each other.

Enjoying these pleasures will be realised on: '…a Day when Allah will not disgrace (*yukhzi*) the Prophet [Muhammad] or those who have believed with him' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). The word *'khizi'* (disgrace), from which the verb '*yukhzi*' is derived, has two meanings in the Arabic language: scandal and shame.

The two senses are interconnected; if a person encounters a scandal, he becomes ashamed. This indicates that disgrace is an ugly thing that you hate people to know about. With regard to the Hereafter, the 'disgrace' is a level of punishment that is more severe than the torment of hell. The most severe disgrace is when a person takes things from this worldly life in order to redeem himself from the punishment of hell, but Allah *the Almighty* does not accept that from him. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely (as for) those who disbelieve, even if they had everything that is on the earth, and the like of it with it, to give as a ransom for the punishment of the Day of Resurrection, it shall not be accepted from them. They shall have a painful punishment' (*al-Ma'ida:* 36). This is the harshest disgrace that one should avoid.

Likewise, the Jewish will suffer from disgrace and scandal, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'For them in this world is disgrace and they will have in the Hereafter a great punishment' (*al-Baqara:* 114). Thus, not only will they be punished by being disgraced, but also by a great torment in the hellfire.

In fact, disgrace is harsher on the soul than torment because it entails a scandal. For example, if a person, who used to have a high status in his neighborhood, had a fight with a young boy in front of the people, the disgrace which afflicts this person for starting a fight will be harsher than any physical beating, to the extent that he will become unable to face the people.

The torment which results in disgrace in this worldly life can be embodied in every haughty bully who persecutes the people. His disgrace in this worldly life is realised by being punished and humiliated by the people.

Furthermore, the torment of the Hereafter is the severest and the worst type of torment. Any disgraced person feels worthless and suffers due to the scandal among the people.

Thus, disgrace is an unbearable dishonour and humiliation which is more painful than any physical harm. Disgrace is a chill that inflicts the body and no one can escape from it, even if he is able to conceal his pain. It affects the person psychologically, and this appears on the face; no one can conceal this because it affects one's arrogance, removing it.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…on a Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet [Muhammad] or those who have believed with him' (*at-Tahrim:* 8), this tells those who did not believe in Allah *the Almighty* that they will be subject to disgrace and debasement, leaving them ashamed and worried and in a poor position. Moreover Allah *the Almighty* will not disgrace the believers as long as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will not be subject to disgrace. The word 'believers' here refers to those who follow the Prophet’s way. But if they abandoned his way, they will be subject to disgrace.

In this connection, the Lord *the Almighty* says: 'Our Lord, indeed, whoever You admit to the Fire—You have disgraced (*akhzaytahu*)' (*Al-‘Imran:* 192). Here, the believers do not focus on the torment of those who will go to the fire, but rather on how they will be disgraced. The word *‘khizi’* (disgrace) from which the word ‘*akhzaytah*’ is derived, reminds me about a joyful situation which I experienced when I was young. Sheikh Hassan Zaghloul *Allah rest his soul* used to review Quran for us to ensure we were reciting it in a good way. He was blind and we often used to trick him. If we found an opportunity, we escaped from him and ran away to avoid having our recital of the Quran checked. Concerning this point, I wish to stress strongly that those students, who memorise the Quran alone, without a teacher, can make mistakes in their recitation.

One day, one of our colleagues, Sheikh Mohamad Hassan ‘Abd Al-Bary, forgot to have his Quran recitation reviewed. Suddenly, the principal of the school attended and tested him in the Quran. Sheikh ‘Abd Al-Bary recited: 'Our Lord, indeed, whoever You admit to the Fire—You have disgraced' (*Al-‘Imran:* 192). But instead of reciting the word *‘akhzaytah’* (disgraced him) with the letter *'zay'*, he recited it with the letter *'raa'*. Sheikh Hassan Zaghloul *Allah rest his soul* laughed very much and said, 'The meaning is correct, but the narration is not like that'. Usually, whenever we wanted to make Sheikh 'Abd Al-Bary laugh, we used to remind him about this situation.

Next, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'With their lights streaming out ahead of them and to their right…' (*at-Tahrim:* 08). This verse is similar to His saying: 'On that day you will see the faithful men and the faithful women—their light running before them and on their right. Good news for you today: Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein, that is the grand achievement' (*al-Hadid:* 12). This means that their light will shine in front of them, whereas Allah relates what the hypocrites will say to the believers: 'The Day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the believers, "Wait for us, that we may have light from your light"; it will be said, "Turn back and seek a light". Then a wall will be put up between them, with a gate in it; (as for) the inside of it, there shall be mercy throughout, and (as for) the outside of it, all along there will be punishment' (*al-Hadid:* 13). It too late for such hypocrites to seek light, for the time to seek light was in the worldly life by following the Right Path and doing good deeds. From the verse we learn that the Lord *the Most High* gives the believers light above their light in the Hereafter. Anyone who follows the Divine Way will be given a guiding light streaming out ahead of him and to his right.

Allah *the Almighty* relates that the believers will say: 'Lord, perfect our lights for us…' (*at-Tahrim:* 08). When the believers see the hypocrites' light extinguished, they will ask Allah *the Almighty* to perfect their light in order to reach paradise. Ibn 'Abbas said, 'Every Muslim will be given a light on the Day of Judgment'. (1)

Thus, the light of the hypocrite will be extinguished, and when the believers see that, they will become fearful and thus: 'They will say, "Lord, perfect our lights for us…"' (*at-Tahrim:* 08). The people of the hell do not get anything from the bliss of paradise and the light of the believers. When they request some light from the people of paradise, the people will reply to them, 'It is too late as the time of fulfilling the religious obligations is over'. Therefore, whoever wishes to obtain the light in the Hereafter should work hard in this worldly life. After all, this light is not a gift from a human to another but a gift from Allah *the Almighty* to the believers.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Al-Jawzi ascribed this narration to Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, and Ibn Kathir does as well. However, As-Suyuti ascribed it to Al-Bayhaqi. See Ibn Al-Jawzi, Zad Al-Masir, 4/311; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 1/192; and As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 8/228.*

To sum up, the hypocrites will say, 'Wait for us that we may acquire some of your light'. But the people of paradise will not be able to give them light. Allah *the Almighty* says regarding these hypocrites: 'Their parable is like the parable of one who kindled a fire, but when it had illumined all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in utter darkness—they do not see' (*al-Baqara:* 17). They lit a fire to give them light in order to see the Path of Belief, but when this light was present, they did not take it. At that point, Allah *the Almighty* took away the light from their hearts. Thus, they are the ones who requested the Light of Belief, but when He *the Almighty* bestowed light on them, they did not take it.

Allah *the Almighty* keeps relating what they will say: '…and forgive us' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). We ask Him *the Almighty* to save us from the sins that provoke His Anger. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And their words were not but that they said, 'Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excess [committed] in our affairs, and plant firmly our feet and give us victory over the disbelieving people' (*Al-‘Imran:* 147).

Seeking Allah's Forgiveness means the person acknowledges he was negligent and committed sins. When you ask Him for forgiveness, you also acknowledge your belief in Him and that the religious obligations He charged you with are right. Moreover, as long as the person has asked forgiveness for the past sins, he should not commit new sins. In other words, after repenting, the slave should be keen to avoid sins.

Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who forgives all sins. One day, Al-Asma'i was near the *Ka'ba* and saw a Bedouin invoking Allah *the Almighty* saying, 'O Lord, I know that I am disobedient and I am not entitled to supplicate You in such a case, but I know there is no god but You. Hence, if I cannot ask you, who else can I ask?' Thereupon, Al-'Asma'i said, 'Allah will forgive you because you supplicated Him in the proper way'. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Say, “O My slaves who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the Mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He Who is the All-Forgiving, the Most Merciful' (*az-Zumar:* 53).

Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to do anything and that is why the believers say in their invocation: 'You have power over everything' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). He *the Almighty* knows we tend to be inattentive, and He always alerts us to His Omnipotence. He *Glorified is He* has full Power over His universe, and there is no Ultimate Power but His. Allah is the All-Powerful even before the existence of anything. That is to say that He did not become Omnipotent after bringing human beings into existence; rather, His Power existed before mankind and the entire universe was created. Allah *the Almighty* remains Powerful and in control in every moment.

Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who created paradise, including its rivers. Out of His Omnipotence, He has the Power to admit anyone who believes in Him into paradise. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* gives such a person light to guide him, while the disbeliever will be deprived of this light. Rather, the hell into which such a disbeliever will be thrown is full of only the light from the fire.

The believers will continuously pray and invoke Allah *the Almighty* to perfect their light. On the other hand, the hypocrites will say to the believers: 'Wait for us that we may borrow from your light...' (*al-Hadid:* 13). This verse means that the hypocrites will say to the believers, 'Look at us or wait for us to walk through your light', but it will be said to them: 'Turn back and seek a light' (*al-Hadid:* 13). That is, it will be said to them, 'Go back to this worldly life, for in the Hereafter you will find only the lights you had in the worldly life!' This means His saying: 'Turn back and seek a light' (*al-Hadid:* 13) is a form of sarcasm, as, on the Day of Judgment, it is not possible to return to this worldly life to seek light. Moreover, in the Hereafter, there will be no light for those who had not acquired it in the worldly life.

All Muslims will have light on the Day of Judgment to guide them along the Straight Path. By contrast, the hypocrites will not have light and will be separated from the believers. This verse tells us that the Lord *the Almighty* has allocated light for the believers in the Hereafter but deprived the hypocrites of light because they did not follow the light that He *the Almighty* revealed in this worldly life.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'On a Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet [Muhammad] or those who have believed with him. With their lights streaming out ahead of them and to their right, they will say, “Lord, perfect our lights for us…”' (*at-Tahrim:* 8), ‘Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, the well-known interpreter of the Quran, said, 'All the Muslims will have light on the Day of Judgment'. As for the hypocrites, they will have no light. When the believers see that, they become fearful and say: 'Lord, perfect our lights for us…' (*at-Tahrim:* 8). Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ جَـٰهِدِ ٱلۡكُفَّارَ وَٱلۡمُنَـٰفِقِينَ وَٱغۡلُظۡ
عَلَيۡهِمۡۚ وَمَأۡوَىٰهُمۡ جَهَنَّمُۖ وَبِئۡسَ ٱلۡمَصِيرُ ﴿٩﴾

Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Deal with them sternly. Hell will be their home, an evil destination! [9] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 9)

The Arabic word *‘jahada’* (to strive) has the same form as *‘sharaka’* (to participate) and *‘qatala’* (to fight); the verb 'to strive' and 'to fight' depend upon participation in the incident which means that if someone fights you, you should exert your effort to fight against him. They are similar to the verb 'to participate'. In Arabic, it is not correct to say, 'Zayd participates', for you should complete the meaning and say, 'Zayd participates with 'Amr'. In the case of the verb ‘to fight’, you should say, 'Zayd fights 'Amr'. That is, there is reaction when you fight. The verb 'to strive' entails resistance, patience and confrontation in the battle. It means exerting the utmost effort in the battlefield. One of its derivatives is used when you say, 'Someone strove to do something', and 'Striving in extracting the legal ruling'. We can see that striving produces a reaction, which needs a great effort. In other words, it comes from two sides, you and the other party.

These two verbs ‘to strive’ and ‘to fight’ refer to participation in an action. Similarly, you say, 'Zayd participates with 'Amr'. In this example, both of them are simultaneously a subject and an object.

Striving is needed in many fields: striving against the instincts and emotions, the hardship of following the commands and the prohibitions, the demons of mankind and jinn, and the opponents of Islam who want to extinguish Allah's Light.

Furthermore, Jihad takes many forms; whoever has power and money or one of them must strive with what he has. If the person is weak, he should provide money to the strong to buy arms, horses, armour, and any other means needed for fighting. As a matter of fact, the one who strives with money is certain that Allah *the Almighty* will reward him with better than what he spent.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites. The disbelievers benefit from corruption and in order to keep this corruption, they resist the Right Path of the believers. By doing this, they want to keep the privileges they gained by means of following the falsehood.

Consequently Allah *the Almighty* alerts Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the reality of these disbelievers who benefitted from corruption, and consequently fought him. That is why He *the Almighty* says to him: '…strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites' (*at-Tahrim:* 9).

Striving against the disbelievers is two types: firstly, when the disbelievers resist the call of Islam and stand in the way of the ones who call others to it, trying to silent them; secondly, Muslims strive in order to spread the Message of Allah *the Almighty* worldwide, without coercion. As a matter of fact, no one can be forced to adopt any religion. As such, the Islamic military campaigns were not intended to impose the religion of Islam, but rather to guarantee the freedom of religion for the human being, in order for people to choose their religion without coercion. The freedom of choice comes by removing the obstacles that used to force a person to adopt a certain religion. After that, all the religions become available to him and he can choose whatever he wants.

As long as Jihad is an obligation in this sense, every Muslim is obliged to strive. Here, we should know that *Jihad* is either an individual obligation upon the Muslim—this is when the believers are attacked and their number is insufficient to resist the enemy or a collective obligation—this is when the numbers and troops of the Muslim army are sufficient to defeat the enemy.

Striving against the disbelievers differs from striving against the hypocrites. As for the disbelievers, Allah *the Almighty* describes their characteristics in two verses, saying: 'Indeed, those who disbelieve—it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them—they will not believe. Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great punishment for them' (*al-Baqara:* 6-7). The disbelievers are explicit in their hostility. And, as they explicitly announce their disbelief, we can avoid their harm. In fact, unlike the hypocrites who deny faith inwardly and announce it outwardly, the disbelievers deny faith and announce it with their tongues.

As for the hypocrites, we must be cautious about them because we do not know their true state. For this reason, we should be careful in dealing with them, for they may betray us and can harm us greatly.

As such, the believers face enmity from two categories: the disbelievers and the hypocrites. The disbelievers announce their disbelief publicly and everyone knows they are disbelievers. This matter appears in their speech and actions, for they disbelieve inwardly and outwardly.

On the other hand, the hypocrites announce faith with their tongues but hide disbelief in their hearts. In this way they are a dangerous enemy as they cheat us. You may think that someone is a believer and you disclose your secrets to him. Then you discover that he betrayed you in order to distort your religion. That is, the hypocrites declare with their tongues what runs counter to what is in their hearts, and fear that other people may discover their reality.

As the hypocrites declare with their tongues what is not in their hearts, Allah *the Almighty* will treat them in the same way. While they are treated like the true Muslims in the worldly life, their secrets will be disclosed on the Day of Judgment when they will go to the bottom of the hell; their status will not be equal to the disbeliever but be even worse.

The Arabic word *‘nifaq’* (hypocrisy) is derived from *‘nafaq al-jerbou'* (the holes of jerboa). Jerboa is a desert animal that cheats anyone who wants to kill it. It opens two holes, entering into one of them in front of the person, and then going out from the other. If the person waits for it at the entrance of one hole, it will come out from the other.

By announcing his disbelief, the disbeliever has given the Muslims an indication to be careful in dealing with him. For this reason, his harm to us will be limited. On the other hand, the hypocrite pretends to be a believer, and this makes his harm more likely. After all, he knows our secrets and weaknesses, and as a result he can hurt us fatally. That is, the disbeliever is an explicit enemy, but the hypocrite is an enemy in disguise. In fact, the invisible enemy is more harmful than the apparent one. We usually do not take care of the invisible enemy, and he knows all our movements and can betray us at any time without us being mindful of this treachery.

The initial stage of Jihad is achieved by using argument. At the early time of Islam, the believers were weak and few, and did not have the strength to face the great power of disbelief. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who have believed, fight those adjacent to you of the disbelievers and let them find in you firmness. And know that Allah is with the righteous' (*at-Tawba:* 123). This refers to the believers confronting a disbelieving group who was relatively closer to them than other groups which were further away. In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And fight against the disbelievers collectively as they fight against you collectively…' (*at-Tawba:* 36) and: 'Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like the transgressors' (*al-Baqara:* 190).

The intention of fighting must be for Allah's sake, not for arrogance and tyranny. Therefore, in Islam, no fighting shall be launched for the sake of the worldly life, wealth or gaining an economic market. Rather, fighting shall be only for the sake of making the Word of Allah superior and supporting the religion. This is the purpose of fighting in Islam: fighting to repel aggression, not to initiate it. We should take into account that the sword was not used to impose the religion but to protect the freedom of religion.

Allah *the Almighty* did not prescribe fighting for the preceding Messengers before Prophet Muhammad, *peace and blessings upon him*. They used to call their people to belief. If they believed, they were saved from the punishment; otherwise they were punished with a furious wind, quake, blast, drowning, causing the earth to swallow them, etc.

That is, the previous Messengers communicated Allah's Message, and Allah *the Almighty* punished those who denied them. Fighting was not prescribed until the followers of the previous Prophets, like the children of Israel, asked Allah *the Almighty* to prescribe it. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Have you not considered the assembly of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Moses when they said to a Prophet of theirs, “Send to us a king, and we will fight in the way of Allah…”' (*al-Baqara:* 246).

They were the ones who proposed fighting. But fighting for the sake of spreading Allah's Message to the whole world came only with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It seems that Allah *the Almighty* granted his followers the merit of being entrusted with the rest of the people.

Someone might ask, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* not grant victory to the believers and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directly, without them fighting the disbelievers and the polytheists?’ We reply, 'If victory came due to an unseen reason or unrealized wisdom, it might be said that victory came due to any natural phenomenon. But Allah *the Almighty* wants to show us that a small number of believers achieved victory over their enemy'.

When Allah *the Almighty* commands the believers to fight the disbelievers, we understand that the latter must have done something wrong to deserve to be fought, or that they had intended to fight the believers, which is why the believers must fight them. The disbelievers sought to fight Muslims in the Battle of Badr. Furthermore, they marched to Medina and held alliance with the Jews in the Battle of the Trench in order to eliminate the Islamic State that emerged in Medina. Clearly, fighting becomes a must to defend Islam and ensure its survival.

Satan incited the disbelievers to fight the believers promising them to achieve victory and to become notables in the entire Arabian Peninsula. This will result in other people fearing them and they will finally become the chiefs of the peninsula. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And [remember] when Satan made their deeds pleasing to them and said, “No one can overcome you today from among the people, and indeed, I am your protector”. But when the two armies sighted each other, he turned on his heels and said, “Indeed, I am clear of you. Indeed, I see what you do not see; indeed I fear Allah. And Allah is severe in punishment' (*al-Anfal:* 48).

Striving against the disbelievers here refers to fighting against them in the battlefield where there will be a victor and a loser. But striving against the hypocrites is another kind of *Jihad* because they do not announce their hostility; rather, they declare a false loyalty. *Jihad* against them is to inflict punishment on them because they used to commit sins and afterwards deny doing them by means of false oaths. Having been interrogated by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* they denied their wrongdoing, and thus he forgave them. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they swear by Allah that they are from among you while they are not from among you…' (*at-Tawba:* 56), and: 'They swear by Allah that they did not say [anything against Prophet Muhammad] while they had said a word of disbelief…' (*at-Tawba:* 74). Moreover: 'They swear by Allah to you [Muslims] to satisfy you. But Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad] are more worthy for them to satisfy…' (*at-Tawba:* 62), and: 'When the hypocrites come to you, [O Muhammad], they say, "We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah". And Allah knows that you are His Messenger. And Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars' (*al-Munafiqun:* 1).

The hypocrites used to stand in the first rows of prayer because all of them wanted to hide their hypocrisy. For this reason, they were keen on doing the apparent acts of worship. They are more dangerous to the believers than the disbelievers! In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Surely Allah will gather together the hypocrites and the disbelievers, all in Hell. Those [are the ones] who wait for (some misfortune to befall) you; if you have a victory from Allah they say, "Were we not with you?" And if the disbelievers gain a success, they say [to them], "Did we not gain an advantage over you and guard you from the believers?" So Allah shall Judge between you on the Day of Resurrection, and Allah will by no means give the disbelievers a way against the believers' (*an-Nisa':* 140-141). They wait looking at the believers; if they are victorious, they try to benefit from that, but if they are defeated, they try to benefit from the opponents of Islam. They are believers in public, and disbelievers in secret. They wait looking at the believers to see what will happen in order to arrange their affairs according to that.

If Allah *the Almighty* granted victory to the believers in a battle and they took the spoils of war, the hypocrites say: 'Were we not with you?' (*an-Nisa':* 141)

This means that they used to claim a share in the spoils of war. But if the believers were defeated, the hypocrites turn to the disbelievers, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'And if the disbelievers gain a success, they say [to them], “Did we not gain an advantage over you and guard you from the believers?”' (*an-Nisa’:* 141) The hypocrites said: 'Did we not gain an advantage over you and guard you from the believers?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 141) This reveals their status during the battle. They, that is the hypocrites, try to know the details of the battle to recognise the intention of the believers. When they go into the battlefield, they pretend to capture the disbelievers, just to protect them from the swords of the believers. Then they say to the disbelievers, 'Did we not gain the advantage over you, but we protected you from the believers?' Finally, they asked them for a price for that.

We see that Allah *the Almighty* mentions the disbelievers and the hypocrites together in the verse under discussion, saying: 'O Prophet [Muhammad], strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Deal with them sternly. Hell will be their home, an evil destination!' (*at-Tahrim:* 9) Dealing sternly with them signifies warning them against the horrible torment that awaits them in order that they may take admonition. Harshness is not always needed, but it is applicable when necessary. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who have believed, fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you and let them find you firm…' (*at-Tawba:* 123). This means, the believer should attack his enemy strongly, boldly and bravely. And when the enemy tries to attack him, he should be steadfast. Thus, firmness is required in both cases. It is not enough to hit your enemy severely, but you should bear his attack with ruggedness. As such, firmness requires you to attack and to bear you enemy's attack. Patience entails endurance, which in turn requires courage. If your opponent has patience and courage, you should have more patience and endurance than him.

Ruggedness should be shown by Muslims in the battlefield by being strong in both attack and defence. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved so strike [them] upon the necks and strike from them every fingertip [which holds a sword]' (*al-Anfal:* 12). Striking above the necks means to cut the head in order for the enemy to lose his ability to think and as a result his life comes to an end. As for those who averted death in the battlefield, they will grieve for the death of their fellows. With regard to His saying: '…and strike from them every fingertip' (*al-Anfal:* 12), it means to strike their hands with swords to make them incapable of fighting.

The disbelievers and the hypocrites will go to hell, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying: 'Hell will be their home (*ma'wa*)' (*at-Tahrim:* 9). The word *'ma'wa'* ('home' or 'refuge') is a place to which one returns. That is, the fire will be their home. In the Arabic language, this word refers to the place that protects you from something. If the fire is their refuge, then its surroundings must be even more severe. They resort to the fire for refuge as it is their final destination.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…where they burn? What an evil place to stay!' (*Ibrahim:* 29) The hell has gates as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So enter the gates of hell (*Jahannam*) to abide eternally therein, and how wretched is the residence of the arrogant' (*an-Nahl:* 29). *Jahannam* (hell) is one of the names of the fire in the Hereafter. It looks very ugly and its bottom is very deep.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…an evil destination!' (*at-Tahrim:* 9), the destination is the final fate for everything. Thus, the last destination of the disbelievers will be unpleasant. They will not go to hell by their choices; rather, Allah *the Almighty* will force them to go there, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…then I will drive him to the punishment of the fire, a wretched (*bi's*) destination indeed' (*al-Baqara:* 126). Here Allah *the Almighty* warns the disbelievers that they will be punished in the Hereafter, as they will be forcibly thrown into the hell. Therefore, the path that leads to hell must be extremely bad.

Out of His Mercy to His creation, Allah *the Almighty* revealed to them the religious approach that guides them through this life on earth for them not to be captivated by this fleeting worldly life. In addition, He warned them against the bad fate that awaits the disbelievers which indicates His *Glorified is He* Love for His creation. Out of His Love for them, He does not want to see them in such a bad fate, being cast into hell in the Hereafter. That is why He warns the people against the fate of the disbelievers. The fire is the eternal resting place for the disbelievers. The Arabic word *'bi's'* (wretched) is used to vilify and offend something. Surely, the fire will be a wretched refuge.

One of the battles in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* performed *Jihad* against the disbelievers and the hypocrites together is the Battle of the Confederates about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'O you who believe! Call to mind the favor of Allah to you when there came down on you hosts, so We sent against them a strong wind and hosts that you saw not. And Allah sees all that you do. When they came on you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes turned dull and the hearts rose up to the throats, and you began to imagine various [vain] thoughts about Allah. There, the believers were tried and they were shaken with a severe shaking' (*al-Ahzab:* 9-11).

In this fierce battle, Allah *the Almighty* caused the wind to blow so strongly against the disbelievers that it dispersed them everywhere. Afterwards, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* returned to Medina. The Muslim fighters were supposed to rest after the battle.But before they took off their clothes for war, the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said, 'O Messenger, did you take off the clothes for war?' He said: 'Yes'. The angel said, 'Allah ordered the angels not to put their arms down until they attack Banu Qurayza. O Muhammad, Allah the Almighty commands you to attack Banu Qurayzah, and I will precede you to strike fear into their hearts'. Then, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered his Muedhin (an announcer to Prayer) to say, 'Do not pray *Al-'Asr* Prayer except in Banu Qurayzah'. Some of the people prayed it on the way when its time had come, while others said, 'We should not pray it until we reach Banu Qurayzah'. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was told about their different actions, he did not reproach any of them.

Next, the Lord *the Almighty* says:

ضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ٱمْرَأَتَ نُوحٍ وَٱمْرَأَتَ لُوطٍ ۖ
كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَٰلِحَيْنِ فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا
عَنْهُمَا مِنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا وَقِيلَ ٱدْخُلَا ٱلنَّارَ مَعَ ٱلدَّٰخِلِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

God has given examples of disbelievers: the wives of Noah and Lot who married two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them. Their husbands could not help them against God: it was said, 'Both of you enter the Fire with the others'[10] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 10)

Allah *the Almighty* has given us examples (*daraba*) with physical matters to convey abstract meanings to our minds. That is because we are familiar with matters we can sense. The human being's perception begins with the matters we can see which enable him to understand abstract matters after this.

In this regard, the Lord *the Exalted* gives examples even using small creatures, as He says: 'Allah does not disdain to give examples (*yadrib*) even using something as small as a gnat or larger…' (*al-Baqara:* 26), using the word '*yadrib*' (give examples) which is derived from '*daraba*' (has given examples). He *Glorified is He* is not shy to give such an example because mosquitos have all the systems needed for having a life, just like the elephant, the camel and the other large animals. In addition, this mosquito that you despise may be stronger than you and may challenge one's strength and tyranny. As such, Allah *the Almighty* gives you this despicable creature in your eyes as an example to alert you to hidden matters.

Regarding the importance of giving an example to clarify unclear matters, poets usually use this method to clarify meanings. The poet may face a complex issue that is only perceived by wise people, but he wishes to express this issue for the public audience to understand.

One such example is that even though an innocent person might be accused of unjust charges, these false accusations often make him attain a higher status among the people. The following lines of poetry are a case in point:

If Allah wanted to show a concealed virtue

He makes an envious man talk about this virtue

Unless a fire breaks out
Scant smell of aloes wood will not appear

You may have a virtue that no one knows about, and then an envious person accuses you and tarnishes your reputation. As a result, he unintentionally discloses this virtue and all of your other unknown talents. This is similar to aloes wood that we cannot smell unless we burn it.

Thus, 'the example' aims at clarifying an unknown matter using a well-known one. For example, if you do not know the person we are talking about, we can tell you that he is similar in height to someone you know, and similar in colour to another person. Then you can combine these images to form a complete picture of this person who you do not know.

In the Quran, there are many examples that clarify unknown matters with known ones. They describe the abstract matters with ones we can sense. Allah *the Almighty* gives us an example of spending money for His sake and how He has promised us to multiply such money, saying: 'The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is All-Encompassing and All Knowing' (*al-Baqara:* 261).

The word *'darab'* (to give an example) is taken from the phrase *'darbu al 'umla'* (minting coins), as currency in the past used to be made from gold and silver. The people shaped pieces of silver or gold in a specified form to determine their value, and thus they became circulating currencies. Another meaning of this word is used in the phrase, '*durib fi Misr'* meaning it was manufactured in Egypt, which means that this object became a reality, and likewise examples spread and become realities. In the past, currency was made from gold and silver. Out of fear of fraud, the experts used to mix the gold with copper and stamp it to become certified, reliable and valid for trading.

When Allah *the Almighty* gives us an example of something unknown by something known, the matter will become clear in our minds. The Arabic word *'ad-darb'* (hitting), which is derived from '*daraba*' (give an example), means to hit something with a tool. As we have said, this word refers to minting coins and stamping them to become valid for trading.

This word also means 'to strike', a meaning which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And We had inspired to Musa (Moses), “Travel by night with My slaves and strike (*fadrib*) for them a dry path through the sea, without fear of being overtaken [by Pharaoh] and without fear [of drowning]' (*Ta Ha:* 77). Musa *peace be upon him* hit (‘*fadaraba*’ from the word ‘*darb*’) the sea with his stick and so the sea divided into two parts, providing a dry path for the crossing of the children of Israel. In other words, it means that the path was paved for them for transportation.

In the verse in question, the word *‘darb’* (to strike) does not entail an adverse impact, but rather a positive one. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And others traveling (*yadriboon*) throughout the land seeking [something] of the bounty of Allah…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20), which uses the word ‘*yadriboon*’ which is derived from the word ‘*darb*’. It is as if hitting has a lasting impact on the ground as it extracts its treasures. Likewise, minting leaves a significant impact on the coins that cannot be erased by people’s hands during the trading activity.

In the same sense, giving examples clarifies unclear matters exactly as the process of minting coins defines their shapes. It makes the idea clear in the mind. The Arabic word *‘darb’* (to strike) needs three elements: the striker, the one who is struck and the tool used for this purpose.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us an example to explain the topic of Oneness, saying: 'Allah sets forth an example (*daraba*): There is a slave in whom are (several) partners differing with one another, and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two alike in condition? (All) praise is due to Allah. Nay! Most of them do not know' (*az-Zumar:* 29).

Whoever worships another god with Allah *the Almighty* is similar to a slave who has two masters who are always in disagreement; when he tries to satisfy one, the other becomes angry. He feels tired with them. The question now is ‘Is this slave equal to one who has only one master?’ This example is similar to worshipping Allah *the Almighty* without any partners. In this way, the issue becomes clear in our mind. It is as if He *the Almighty* says, 'I do not disdain to give you such an example because I want to make facts clear for you and to explain abstract meanings for you'.

In the same vein, He *the Almighty* says: 'And We have certainly given (*darabna*) to the people, in this Quran, every [kind of] example' (*ar-Rum:* 58). This means that He *Glorified is He* has given them examples and signs that should leave an effect on the mind in the same way striking leaves an effect on the person because striking is the last stage of perception.

Now, why does Allah give us examples? The scholars have said, 'This is because the human being has many senses; he sees, hears, smells, tastes and touches. If you think about these senses, you will find that ‘hitting/striking’ is the most effective way to affect someone’s perception. That is why if you want to awaken a person from sleep, you shake him as if you are hitting him in order to make him get up, as he might not hear your call.

Clearly, hitting leaves a massive and powerful impact on matter, a point which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and others traveling (*yadriboon*) throughout the land seeking [something] of the bounty of Allah' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). The verse means that they, that is the pious people, left a great impact on the land through ploughing, for example, which is similar to hitting. Allah *the Almighty* gives examples to make you perceive matters, just as a person feels pain when hit. If the person does not understand the example, it is as though he does not feel the physical pain of being hit.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us an example about two women who were wives of two Prophets, saying: 'Allah has given examples (*daraba*) of disbelievers: the wife of Nuh (Noah) and the wife of Lut (Lot) who were under two of Our righteous slaves but betrayed them...' (*at-Tahrim:* 10).

Despite being Prophets, Nuh and Lut *peace be upon them* both, did not succeed in convincing their wives to believe in the Oneness of Allah. It is noteworthy to mention concerning this story that the betrayal here is not a sexual one. Rather, it means that even Messengers are not entitled to force their wives to believe in the sound creed.

Thus, the woman has freedom of belief and the man cannot force her to adopt any religion. Even Pharaoh, who claimed divinity, could not do that, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Allah has also given examples of believers: Pharaoh’s wife, who said, “Lord, build me a house near You in Paradise. And save me from Pharaoh and his actions, and save me from the evildoers"' (*at-Tahrim:* 11). These facts tell us that the issue of faith has nothing to do with lineage or marital relationship. The verse we are discussing has made it clear that a Messenger cannot impose any faith on his wife, for sound conviction has to do with freedom of belief.

With regard to His saying: 'Allah has given examples of disbelievers: the wife of Nuh (Noah) and the wife of Lut (Lot) who were under two of Our righteous slaves...' (*at-Tahrim:* 10), we should take into account that none of the two wives in question were arrogant to her husband, a fact which is clearly stated in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Who were under two of Our righteous slaves…' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). That is to say that both were under the guardianship of their husbands, but they did not obey them in the matter of faith which is subject to one's free choice.

Some people mistakenly tried to accuse both women of adultery, but this is a pure fabrication. In this regard, we stress that their betrayal is a result of their rejection of the Divine Messages with which their husbands were sent. Both Prophet Nuh and Lut *peace be upon them* did not succeed in convincing their wives to believe in Allah *the Almighty* emphasising that belief cannot be achieved except through self-choice.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* does not specify the names of the wives, as mentioning their names here will add nothing. The verse states that the matter of guidance is controlled by Him *the Almighty* Alone, and that even the Prophets could not convert their wives and relatives to the sound creed. The verse clearly indicates that women have absolute freedom of belief.

Allah *the Almighty* does not specify their names, but rather, He mentions an important description of them, namely: being the wives of two Messengers. However, neither Prophet Nuh nor Prophet Lut *peace be upon them* was able to convince his wife to renounce her disbelief. Both of the two women had conspired against their husbands and that is why their last destination will be the hellfire. The lesson deduced from this story is that choosing religion is up to every person's free choice. In fact, freedom of belief is a clear foundation for the Right Path.

Clearly, both the man and the woman are entitled to freedom of belief; there is no authority for a particular gender over the other. No man can force a woman to adopt any religion. As for those who accused the wife of Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* of adultery, they should ask for forgiveness from Allah *the Almighty* for He *Glorified is He* is far removed above being unfair to His Messenger by allowing him to marry a wife who was unchaste. The wife of Prophet Nuh's betrayal was nothing but her disbelief in the Message he brought from Allah. As for the wife of Prophet Lut's betrayal, it lies in her cooperation with the transgressors and her disclosure of his secrets; she used to inform her people about Lut's guests.

In this regard, the angels prohibited Prophet Lut *peace be upon him* from bringing his wife with him because she had betrayed him. Consequently, he had to leave her with those who suffered the torment. Yet, when Prophet Lut *peace be upon him* was about to leave the town, she claimed that she was faithful to him and said, 'I will leave with you'. But she preferred her people and as a result returned to stay with them, and thereby received the punishment brought by the angels in the time set, namely the morning. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They said, "O Lut (Lot), indeed we are Messengers of your Lord; [therefore], they will never reach you. So set out with your family during a portion of the night and let not any among you look back—except your wife; indeed, she will be struck by that which strikes them. Indeed, their appointment is [for] the morning. Is the morning not near?' (*Hud:* 81)

Instead of being happy with meeting the angels, Prophet Lut *peace be upon him* was sad and afraid. At this moment, they said: 'Fear not, nor grieve. Indeed, we will save you and your family, except your wife; she is to be of those who remain behind' (*al-'Ankabut:* 33). They said to him, 'Do not be afraid of those corrupt people as we are not human beings, but rather, we are angels. We came to root out those malicious people and we will save you and your relatives from the torment that will befall them'. However, they excluded his wife from salvation, saying: 'Except your wife; she is to be of those who remain behind (*ghabireen*)' (*al-'Ankabut:* 33). This is because she used to disclose his secrets and inform her people about his guests. Hence, she was one of those who remained behind to receive the punishment. The Arabic word *'ghabra'*, from which the word '*ghabireen*' (remain behind) is derived, has many meanings; it means staying in a place and it also refers to anything that is finished in the past.

While Allah *the Almighty* saved Prophet Lut *peace be upon him* from the torment that inflicted his people, we find that his wife did not go out with him and stayed in the place where the torment occurred. We should not delve into the details about why she stayed with her people. Some people accused her of sexual betrayal. According to this allegation, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* was unfair to one of His Prophets for allowing him to marry an unchaste woman. Here, it is of great importance to clearly state that we only accept what Allah *the Almighty* mentions about this matter, that is, she was a disbeliever, which means she was not a follower of Prophet Lut.

Both the wife of Prophet *Nuh* and the wife of Prophet Lut were: '…under two of Our righteous slaves (*salihain*)…' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). Allah *the Almighty* says about Prophet Nuh: 'O descendants of those We carried [in the ship] with Nuh (Noah). Indeed, he was a grateful slave' (*al-Isra':* 3). This verse means that Nuh's righteous deeds benefitted his offspring. As a result, the Lord *Glorified is He* has taken care of his offspring and has not left them scrambling in the maze of life. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* sent for them the guidance that explains for them the Right Path to avoid slipping and deviating.

With regard to Allah's saying: '…righteous slaves (*salihain*)…' (*at-Tahrim:* 10), it means that both Prophet Nuh and Lut *peace be upon them* were righteous; they were two good slaves, and were not coerced by Allah *the Almighty* to do their good deeds. Instead, they were righteous in themselves and that is why Allah *the Almighty* chose them to be Prophets.

The Arabic word *'salih'* (a righteous man), from which '*salihain*' (two righteous men) is derived, means that the person is qualified to be Allah's vicegerent on earth. This term is also used to refer to cultivating the land. The righteous person is the one who leaves what is good in its state of goodness and tries to increase its goodness, or is the one who reforms anything bad. Depending on his in-depth knowledge, such a person does not do what apparently seems useful but eventually turns out to be harmful.

Continuing with the verse under discussion, nothing can avail the disbelievers against Allah's Torment, a fact which is clear in His saying: '(As for) those who disbelieve, surely neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them in the least against Allah, and these it is who are the fuel of the

Fire' (*Al-'Imran:* 10). Nothing can save them from the fire and what will happen on the Day of Judgment, for children, wealth, friends, and intercession are not helpful on that Day. The Judgment is not determined by one's ancestry or relationships, and the paradise is not for sale. In other words, no one can buy a place in paradise with money.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Their husbands could not help them against Allah…' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). Thus, Prophet Nuh and Lut *peace be upon them* cannot save their wives from the fire, even if they are Prophets who are close to Allah *the Almighty*.

The disbelievers grudged Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for receiving the Glorious Quran, which was a test for him. However, he was patient and continued to communicate Allah's Message without paying attention to what the disbelievers said. In fact, Prophet Muhammad took their saying as evidence of the strength of the miracle of the Quran that confirms his truthfulness.

Allah *the Almighty* calls these disbelievers to faith, saying: 'So believe in Allah…' (*at-Taghabun:* 8). Believing in Allah is the foundation of faith and the most important element in religion. It is not only related to believing in His Existence, but also in His Oneness and Him being worthy of worship, for Allah *the Almighty* Alone is the One Who created this universe with its sky, land, human beings, animals and plants.

This means it is not enough to just believe in Allah's Existence, refuting thus the charge of atheism. Here, we should take into account that the disbelievers of Quraysh, to whom Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, acknowledged that Allah is the Creator of the entire universe; the Quran recorded this undeniable fact in more than one position: 'If you asked them, "Who created the heavens and earth and subjected the sun and the moon?" they will surely say, "Allah". Then how are they deluded?' (*al-'Ankabut:* 61), and: 'And if you asked them, "Who sends down rain from the sky and gives life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness?" they will surely say "Allah". Say, "Praise to Allah", but most of them do not reason' (*al-'Ankabut:* 63), and: 'And if you asked them who created them, they will surely say, "Allah". So how are they deluded?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87)

Associating other gods and idols with Allah *the Almighty* was their problem and the reason behind their disbelief. Furthermore, they used to take idols as mediators to Him, saying: 'We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position' (*az-Zumar:* 3). If they had said, 'We slaughter for them to be close to Allah', it will have been possible to include them among the worshippers of Allah *the Almighty*. However, they confirmed their worship of the idols. For this reason they will, undoubtedly, go to the hellfire.

The Lord *the Almighty* says: '…it was said, "Both of you enter the Fire with the [others] ones who enter [it]"' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). This means that the wives of Prophets Nuh and Lut will go to hell with the other disbelievers of their peoples whom they supported against these Prophets.

That is, Allah *the Almighty* gives no hope to those who commit sins that they will not benefit from the good deeds of others. There is no intercession in the matter of disbelief. They had the ability to believe and, therefore, go to paradise, but they chose not to.

The word *'imra'a'* (a woman) illustrates how wonderful the Quran was written. In this verse under discussion, it was not written with the last letter shaped as a *'taa' marbouta'*, but with the shape *'taa' maftouha'*, which clearly indicates that the marital relationship between each Prophet and his wife was already established at the time. This is because '*taa' maftouha*' is used when the wife is mentioned in the possessive form that is the Prophet's wife.

In the verse in question, the verb 'to say' is used in the passive voice; Allah says: '…it was said, "Both of you enter the Fire with the [others] ones who enter [it]"' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). By using the passive voice, it shows a disregard for them because of their disbelief. They should have believed in Allah's Messengers, especially because they were their husbands.

Both of them were: '…under two of Our righteous slaves' (*at-Tahrim:* 10). They were their wives and Allah's Revelation came down in their presence. But why did they lose the way of guidance even though they were wives of Prophets who lived in their houses?!

One should only take pride in Islam and faith, not in ancestry, relatives or parentage. If you reflect on the history of early Muslims, you will find that they took pride in Islam, not in ancestry. Religion and belief are the strong link that binds a human being with another, even if the latter is lower according to life’s standards.

Hudhayfa *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Al-'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* was sitting on his right, and Fatima *Allah be pleased with her* on his left. Then Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, “O Fatima, daughter of the Messenger, do good deeds for the sake of Allah, as I cannot avail you on the Day of Resurrection; O 'Abbas ibn ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, uncle of Prophet Muhammad, do good deeds for the sake of Allah as I cannot avail you on the Day of Resurrection”, he repeated that three times'.(1)

Thus, on the Day of Judgment, the criterion will be the good deeds, not the relationships. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his relatives, 'People will come to me with their good deeds on the Day of Judgment but you should never come to me with your relationships'.(2) Prophet Muhammad also said, 'O Fatima, daughter of the Messenger , do good deeds for the sake of Allah, as I cannot avail you on the Day of Resurrection'.

On that Day, people’s relationships and lineages are not beneficial. Allah *the Almighty* told us through the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) that one’s relatives have no value, for only one’s religion will be beneficial. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Every soul, for what it has earned, will be detained' (*al-Muddaththir:* 38). The good deeds and faith will only be the controlling factors on the Day of Judgment, not relatives.

In the same connection, we should reflect on the story of Musʿab ibn ‘Umayr *Allah be pleased with him*. He was the most indulged boy of Quraysh and one of the richest people. He used to wear the finest clothes and lead a luxurious life. When he believed in Allah, he renounced all this bliss and deprived himself of the money that his family owned. Then he migrated to Medina. There, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw him wearing the skin of a sheep. Thereupon he said, 'Look! How faith changed your brother Musʿab!'

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2753; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 351.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Al-'Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 897; Ibn Abu 'Asim, As-Sunna, Hadith no. 213.*

In the Battle of Badr, Musʿab saw that his brother Abu ʿAziz ibn ʿUmayr had been captured; he had been captured by the Companion Abu Al-Yusr *Allah be pleased with him*. Musʿab said to Abu Al-Yusr, 'Be careful of him lest he escapes from you as his mother is rich and will ransom him with a lot of money'. Then Abu ʿAziz ibn ʿUmayr looked at his brother Musʿab and said, 'This is a bad intercession from you, brother'. Therefore, Musʿab said to him, 'Abu Al-Yusr is my brother in Islam, not you'. Clearly, there are no lineages between the believers or the disbelievers in the worldly life and in the Hereafter.

The Lord *the Almighty* then says:

وَضَرَبَ ٱللَّهُ مَثَلٗا لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱمۡرَأَتَ فِرۡعَوۡنَ إِذۡ قَالَتۡ رَبِّ ٱبۡنِ لِي عِندَكَ بَيۡتٗا
فِي ٱلۡجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي مِن فِرۡعَوۡنَ وَعَمَلِهِۦ وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ١١

God has also given examples of believers: Pharaoh’s wife, who said, ‘Lord, build me a house near You in the Garden. Save me from Pharaoh and his actions; save me from the evildoers’ [11] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 11)

Here Allah *the Almighty* does not mention the name of Pharaoh's wife because the important matter here is that she was a believing wife of someone who claimed divinity, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And Pharaoh said, “O eminent ones, no god do I know for you but myself”' (*al-Qasas:* 38). Although he claimed divinity, he could not convince his wife that he was a god, nor could he force her to disbelieve in Allah *the Almighty*. This is evidence that the man has no authority over the woman in the matter of belief and cannot coerce her to follow a certain religion, even if he was Pharaoh who claimed divinity. It suffices here to know that she was the wife of the tyrannical Pharaoh; it is not important to mention her name here.

As such, the wife of Pharaoh—the man who misguided people and claimed divinity—was a believer. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* alludes for all people that religions and beliefs are related to the choice of the person and cannot be affected by other people, no matter who they are. The guidance of a Prophet or the false enticements of the one who claimed divinity does not affect a person with regards to choosing a religion.

Therefore, Islam preserves women's role and power and respects her opinion. Allah *the Almighty* brought this story without telling the names of the characters in order for it to be a role model and example for everyone. Had their names been mentioned, it will have been associated with only one specific person.

Why does Allah *the Almighty* not disclose her name? This is to know that the same situation can happen to any woman; she can be a believer, while her husband is a tyrant. Conversely, the woman can be a disbeliever, while her husband is a pious man.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But no one believed Musa (Moses), except [some] youths (*dhuriya*) among his people, for fear of Pharaoh and his chiefs, least they should persecute them. And indeed, Pharaoh was haughty within the land, and indeed, he was of the transgressors' (*Yunus:* 83). Commenting on the meaning of the word *'dhurriya'* (offspring, youths among his people) in this verse, scholars said, 'It included the wife of Pharaoh (Asiya), the treasurer of Pharaoh and his wife, the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter, and some of Musa's people who concealed their faith'. All of these people feared Pharaoh's torment, so they did not disclose their belief in the Message of Musa *peace be upon him*. Pharaoh was a tyrant who claimed divinity; if he saw anyone falsify his claim of divinity, he used to have killed him. And they feared this oppression. With the help of his soldiers, Pharaoh killed the sons of the children of Israel but left their women alive. They were afraid of these aides who carried out what Pharaoh wanted.

Allah *the Almighty* made Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, love Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* when he was a child in the cradle. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I showered you with My Love and planned that you should be reared under My Watchful Eye' (*Ta Ha:* 39). This means that Asiya loved Musa *peace be upon him* by the Will of Allah. When she saw Musa, she loved him despite the opposition of Pharaoh.

Moreover, Pharaoh's daughter, who suffered from leprosy, had seen in a dream that her recovery will be through something coming out of the sea and that she should take the saliva of this thing and paint her body with it if she wanted to be cured. When she saw Musa *peace be upon him* she remembered her dream. She took his saliva and rubbed her skin with it, and then she was recovered immediately. As a result, she hung on to him *peace be upon him*.

Pharaoh's tyranny could not prevent his wife and daughter from believing in Allah *the Almighty* despite the fact that he, that is Pharaoh, said: 'I am your most exalted lord' (*an-Nazi'at:* 24). He was helpless in making his wife a disbeliever.

This indicates that choosing one's belief is a well-protected right, as the human being chooses his religion on the basis of full conviction, and not on the basis of oppression. Pharaoh's wife was an example of faith that appeared in the house of disbelief.

Out of her faith in Allah, the Last Day and the existence of paradise, Pharaoh's wife said: 'Lord, build me a house near You in Paradise…' (*at-Tahrim:* 11). Pharaoh and his soldiers used to torment her; they used to place her under the scorching sun, hanging her from four pieces of wood to which her hands and feet were tied. Whenever the torturers left, the angels used to put their wings above her to protect her from the heat of the sun. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* enabled her to see her home in Paradise.(1)

The reason behind her faith was that she had seen the wife of the treasurer suffering from the torment of Pharaoh. The story started when a comb fell from the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter. She said, 'O miserable disbelievers'. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Do you have a lord other than my father?' She said, 'Allah is my Lord, the Lord of your father and the Lord of all things'.

Pharaoh's daughter slapped the hairdresser and told her father about what she had said. Pharaoh said to her, 'Do you worship a lord other than me?' She said, 'Allah is my Lord, your Lord and the Lord of all things, and I worship Him'. Pharaoh claimed she was a liar. He tied up her hands and legs, and brought snakes to bite her. One day, he came to her and said, 'Do you insist on your belief?' She said to him, 'Allah is my Lord, your Lord and the Lord of all things'. He said to her, 'I will slaughter your son if you do not give that up'.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti attributed this narration to Ibn Abu Shayba, 'Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mudhir, Al-Hakim, who authenticated it, and Al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab Al-Iman on the authority of Salman. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 8/229; and At-Tabari, 23/114.*

She said to him, 'Do what you want'. He slaughtered her son, but the spirit of her son came and said to her, 'Be patient, my mother, Allah will reward you'. She insisted on her stance. Then Pharaoh came to her another day and repeated what he had earlier said, whereupon she repeated what she had said. Then he slaughtered her younger son. The spirit of this son said to her, 'Be patient, my mother, Allah will reward you with such and such'.

The wife of Pharaoh saw the whole situation, and she heard the words of the spirit of the hairdresser's eldest and younger sons, which is why she believed in Allah. The hairdresser eventually died and her high status in paradise was uncovered to the wife of Pharaoh, a matter that increased her belief and certainty.

When Pharaoh knew about the belief of his wife Asiya, he went out to the public and said, 'What do you know about Asiya Bint Muzahim?' The people praised her. He said to them, 'She worships another lord'. At that time, they asked him to kill her. He tied up her hands and feet, and as a result she invoked Allah *the Almighty* saying: 'Lord, build me a house near You in Paradise. Save me from Pharaoh and his actions, and save me from the evildoers' (*at-Tahrim:* 11).

While she was looking at her house in paradise, she laughed, which is why Pharaoh came next to her and said, 'She is mad. We torment her and she laughs'. Then he killed her. At this moment, she saw her house of white pearl in paradise.(1)

Here arises a question which is, 'Why did she ask her Lord to build her a house in Paradise?' The answer is that her people claimed that if she believed, she will lose a great kingdom and a magnificent palace. They also claimed that if she believed in the Lord of Musa, she will not be buried in the pyramid that Pharaoh had built for himself and his wife. That is why she asked Allah *the Almighty* to build her a house in paradise. Moreover, she said: '…near You…' (*at-Tahrim:* 11). That is, she chose to be near to Allah, not Pharaoh. She wanted her house to be close to the Mercy of Allah or in the group closest to Allah. She wanted to be among the upper rank in paradise because Allah *Glorified is He* is far removed above being confined in any place. Thus, her saying: '…near You…' (*at-Tahrim:* 11) means that the house is near to Allah's Throne, while Pharaoh will be helpless and without any power.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi, related this narration on the authority of Abu Al-'Aliya as well as Salman Al-Farisi. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 18/203.*

The Arabic word *'bayt'* (house) is taken from *'al-baytuta'*, that is a shelter that you resort to in order to live and rest. It is as if the wife of Pharaoh wants to get rid of Pharaoh's torment.Then she says: '…Save me from Pharaoh and his actions...' (*at-Tahrim:* 11). She asked Allah *the Almighty* to save her from Pharaoh's tyranny, injustice, torment and all his misdeeds, including disbelief. She asked Allah *the Almighty* to grant her steadfastness in faith and to rid her of Pharaoh's deeds and his tyranny against the believers.

After that, Allah *the Almighty* relates that she said: '…and save me from the evildoers' (*at-Tahrim:* 11). The verse refers to the wrongdoing people who committed injustice that is polytheism; they took Pharaoh as another god with Allah *the Almighty*.

We know that injustice is to unfairly give a right to someone other than its due owner. Clearly, the highest level of injustice is polytheism; it is a great injustice, a fact which is clear in the Lord's saying: 'Indeed, association [with Allah] is a great injustice' (*Luqman:* 13).

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَمَرۡيَمَ ٱبۡنَتَ عِمۡرَٰنَ ٱلَّتِيٓ أَحۡصَنَتۡ فَرۡجَهَا فَنَفَخۡنَا فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِنَا
وَصَدَّقَتۡ بِكَلِمَٰتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَكَانَتۡ مِنَ ٱلۡقَٰنِتِينَ ١٢

And Mary, daughter of 'Imran. She guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her from Our spirit. She accepted the truth of her Lord's words and Scriptures: she was truly devout [12] (The Quran, *at-Tahrim:* 12)

The wife of Pharaoh is not the only example of the believing woman given by Allah *the Almighty* for He also makes Maryam (Mary), daughter of 'Imran (Amram), an example. He says: 'And Maryam (Mary), daughter of 'Imran (Amram); she guarded her chastity [of her body and soul; lit. opening], so We breathed into it [the opening of her garment] from Our Spirit.

She accepted the truth of the Words of her Lord and His Revelation, and was one of the truly devout' (*at-Tahrim:* 12).

He *the Almighty* mentions Maryam (Mary) with her given name along with the name of her father because the event which happened to her is unique and will not be repeated for any other woman.

It is wisely recommended to leave general matters vague, not linked to any particular person, time or place, as in the story of the People of the Cave. Allah *the Almighty* did not disclose their names in order to make them an example and a role model for every believer in every time and place.

For this reason, the stories of the Quran provide anonymous figures, except in the story of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), and Maryam (Mary), daughter of ‘Imran (Amram) because what happened with them is a miracle that will not be repeated. This is why Allah *the Almighty* identified them by their names.

With regard to the word ‘Imran (Amram) as a name in the Quran, we should know that there are two persons bearing that name: the father of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them* and the father of Maryam (Mary). The former is 'Imran, the son of Qahat. His grandfather is Levi, the son of Ya’qub (Jacob), the son of Ishaq (Isaac), the son of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon them*. The other 'Imran is the father of Maryam (Mary) *Allah be pleased with her*. He is 'Imran, the son of Mathan, a descendant of Sulaiman (Solomon), the son of Dawud (David) *peace be upon them*.

In the chapter of *Al-‘Imran*, Allah *the Almighty* says about Maryam (Mary): 'And [mention] when the angels said, “O Maryam (Mary), indeed, Allah has chosen (*istafa’*) you and purified you and chosen (*istafa’*) you above the women of the worlds' (*Al-‘Imran:* 42). The Arabic word *‘istafa’* means has selected or chosen. It also refers to something which is pure. In this verse in the chapter of *Al-‘Imran,* Allah *the Almighty* says twice that Maryam (Mary) has been chosen; in the first time, the word *‘istafa’’* is neither preceded nor followed by any preposition, as for the second time, it is followed by the preposition ‘*'ala’* (over).

The first time Maryam (Mary) was chosen was a means to inform her that Allah *the Almighty* had distinguished her by giving her faith, goodness and good ethics. Many individuals, men and women, may be chosen in this way.

As for the second time Maryam (Mary) was chosen, about which Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds' (*Al-'Imran:* 42), it is special for her, for she was the only woman that gave birth to a child without a man, that is, she was a mother for a newborn who had no father.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* mentions Maryam (Mary), saying: 'And Maryam (Mary), daughter of 'Imran (Amram); she guarded her chastity (*ahsanat*)…' (*at-Tahrim:* 12). This means that she prevented any one from having sexual intercourse with her and did not succumb to anyone.

The Arabic word *'ihsan'* (chastity), from which the word '*ahsanat*' (guarded her chastity) is derived, refers to chastity which is a merit in the free woman who prevents anyone from having a sexual relationship with her. The Arabic word *'muhsana'* (chaste) refers also to a free woman that no one can dare to touch because of her status.

The Arabic word *'muhsana'* (chaste) has three meanings, as follows: first, the married woman who preserves her chastity and has no sexual relationship except with her husband; second, a chaste woman even if she is unmarried; third, a free woman, for the crime of adultery during the time of the revelation of the Quran was mostly committed by slave women.

Chastity means preservation; it is derived from the word *'hisn'* (fortress) that protects what is inside it. The chaste woman thus fortifies herself with marriage in order to avoid adultery, or preserves her chastity even if she is unmarried, exactly as Maryam (Mary) did; she never got married, but she was chaste.

But if she had: '…guarded her chastity…' (*at-Tahrim:* 12), how was Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* born?! Allah *the Almighty* provides the answer, saying: '…so We breathed into her from Our Spirit…' (*at-Tahrim:* 12). Breathing the Spirit here was in Maryam's (Mary's) vagina, not in anything else. Breathing the Spirit into other things was a special privilege for Prophet 'Isa, son of Maryam (Mary). In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* relates that 'Isa said: 'Indeed, I have come to you with a sign from your Lord in that I design for you from clay [that which is] like the form of a bird, then I breathe (*fanfokho*) into it and it becomes a bird, by the Permission of Allah' (*Al-'Imran:* 49).

This aforementioned verse in the chapter of *Al-'Imran* refers to blowing in the mud which had been shaped like a bird for it to become a living creature. Here, we should know that the Quran mentions that the act of breathing into Maryam (Mary) was inside herself; He *the Almighty* says: 'And she who guarded her chastity [of her body and soul; lit. opening], so We breathed into it [the opening of her garment] (*fanafakhna fihi*) of Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for the nations' (*al-Anbiya':* 91), and it also states that it was in her vagina; He *the Almighty* says: 'And Mary, daughter of Imran. She guarded her chastity [of her body and soul; lit. opening], so We breathed into it [the opening of her garment] (*fanafakhna fihi*) from Our Spirit. She accepted the truth of the Words of her Lord and His Revelation, and she was one of the truly devout' (*at-Tahrim:* 12). As a matter of fact, the two verses give the same meaning. Here, we should also remember that Allah blew into Adam, when he was lying on the ground, which resulted in a soul entering him.

The act of breathing was not made directly into her vagina but rather into the opening of her dress, till it reached her womb and thus carried Prophet 'Isa *peace be upon him*. Here, we should know that every opening or crack is called *'farj'*, as we can see from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and [how] it has no cracks (*furooj*)?' (*Qaf:* 6), where the word '*furooj*' ('cracks' or 'openings') is plural for '*farj*' (opening).

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…from Our Spirit...' (*at-Tahrim:* 12). The spirit has many meanings. First, it refers to the basic element of our life. When Allah blows the Spirit into the bodies, they become alive and the body systems start to work.

The Spirit also refers to Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then We sent to her Our Spirit…' (Maryam: 17). Jibril (Gabriel) presented himself, that is, he was not in his real form or nature. The angels' image has other characteristics; they have, for example, two, three or four wings. He came to her in a human form because their meeting cannot be in a hidden way. In addition, it is impossible for the angels and the humans to meet with each other when both are in their normal form and nature. Each has his own rules, which does not fit with the other. That is, the angel must be in a human image or the human must be upgraded to an angelic form, exactly as what was done with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was upgraded to the rank of the angels during the Night Journey. Meeting between two different types of beings cannot happen without this convergence.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'She accepted (*saddaqat*) the Truth the Words of her Lord and His Revelation…' (*at-Tahrim:* 12). The word 'accepted' (*saddaqat*) here means that she believed. The word in Arabic, *'saddaqat,* means that she acknowledged this Divine Truth and proved her faith by doing good deeds. Here, we should take into account the true believer is known through his good deeds and commitment to the Divine Way of Guidance. This means the true proof of faith is its interpretation into doing good deeds. Therefore, the matter of *'tasdiq'* (practical faith), which is derived from the word '*saddaqat*', refers to more than the abstract faith of the heart. But the first step needed for faith is to firmly believe in the soundness of the creed, for believing is the most important factor in this respect.

The Words of Allah *the Almighty* are the imperative order, 'Be!' by which all what He wants in the universe is carried out, including what we have known or will know in the future, and what we will know only on the Day of Judgment.

Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* is a Word; Allah says: '…and His Word which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a soul [created by a command] from Him' (*an-Nisa':* 171). He was not created through the natural way known to all people, that is, from a mother and a father. Rather, he was created by Allah's Power, which is meant to prove His Omnipotence regarding His creation and that He creates what He wills.

One time, Allah *the Almighty* created a man without a father and a mother, like Adam *peace be upon him*. Another time, He created a man from a mother, that is, without a father, as in the case of Prophet 'Isa *peace be upon him*. Other times, He *Glorified is He* creates people through a father and a mother. Finally, He created a woman through a father but without a mother, as in the case of Hawwa' (Eve).

Maryam's (Mary's) belief in the Words of Allah clearly indicates her belief in Angel Jibril, who Allah relates as saying: 'He [Angel Jibril (Gabriel)] said, “I am only a Messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy” She said, “How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?” He said, “Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us’. And it is a matter [already] decreed”' (*Maryam:* 19-21).

Maryam (Mary) believed in the Words of her Lord and His Books revealed to the former Messengers. She believed in the Torah of Prophet Musa *peace be upon him*. She used to worship Allah *Glorified is He* in her sanctuary. Her sister's husband was Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* and her sister's son was Prophet Yahya (John) *peace be upon him*.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes this verse in question, saying: '…she was one of the truly devout (*qaniteen*)' (*at-Tahrim:* 12). The Arabic word *‘al-qaniteen’* (the truly devout) is plural the singular form of which is *‘qanit’*. It means the slave who continuously worships his Lord in humility and contentment. When someone adheres to obedience but then leaves it, this will be as if he tries Allah's Kindness yet finds that He *Glorified is He* is not appropriate for that kindness.

The obedient slave is the one who does not stop worshipping Allah because he has already tasted and fully realised the sweetness of the continuity of worship, which is why he firmly adheres to worship with reverence, tranquility and sustainability, and he becomes among the devoutly obedient people.

The good woman is the righteous one who follows Allah's Way of Guidance. As long as she is a good woman, she will be devoutly obedient. One of the practical applications of the Arabic word *‘qunut’* (devoutness), from which the word ‘*qaniteen*’ (devout) is derived and which refers to permanently worshipping Allah, is ‘*Qunut Al-Fajr’* (supplication of devoutness in *Al-Fajr* Prayer) in which we pray a longer time to supplicate Allah *the Almighty*.

The devoted woman is subject to Allah *the Almighty*. As a result, she adheres to His Way of Guidance. Allah *the Almighty* says about Maryam (Mary): 'She accepted the Truth of the Words of her Lord...' (*at-Tahrim:* 12) as well as: '…she was one of the truly devout' (*at-Tahrim:* 12), and: 'The Maseeh (Messiah), son of Maryam (Mary), was nothing but a Messenger;

[other] Messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of the Truth' (*al-Ma'ida:* 75). She was a support of the Truth, that is, she did not only believe in the Truth, but rather supported it as well. This is a trait she had which was granted by Allah *the Almighty*. Thus Allah *the Almighty* concludes this chapter with His saying: 'And Maryam (Mary), daughter of 'Imran (Amram); she guarded her chastity [of her body], so We breathed into it [the opening of her garment] from Our Spirit. She accepted the truth of the Words of her Lord and His Revelation, and she was one of the truly devout' (*at-Tahrim:* 12).

the chapter of

al-Mulk

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Mulk*(1).

تَبَٰرَكَ ٱلَّذِى بِيَدِهِ ٱلْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ١

Exalted is He who holds all control in His hands; who has power over all things [1] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 1)

The Dominion belongs to Allah(2) *the Almighty* Alone. He has the power to do anything. We did not exist until He *the Almighty* granted us life in His own universe. Besides, He *the Almighty* prepared the universe for us before bringing us into existence.

The chapter of *al-Mulk* provides us with a comprehensive view that goes beyond the limited realm of the earth and the earthly life; it delves into the realms of the heavens that have no flaws. When the human being understands the nature of his presence in this universe, he becomes compatible with the system of the universe that glorifies Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) The chapter of *al-Mulk* was revealed in Mecca. It consists of 30 verses and was revealed after the chapter of *at-Tur*. It is also called *Al-Waqiya, Al-Munjiya* and *Ad-Dafi'a. Ibn 'Abbas* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I wish that every Muslim glorifies the One in Whose Hands is Dominion'. Furthermore, Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'One of the chapters of Allah's Book, which only consists of 30 verses, will intercede on behalf of man so that he will be taken out of the Hellfire on the Day of Judgment and admitted to Paradise. It is the chapter of *Tabarak*'. *See Atha 'alibi, Tafsir, 9/354.*

(2) The Islamic conception of ‘Allah’ is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of ‘God’. However, the word ‘Allah’ does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use ‘Allah’ rather than ‘God’ as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Exalted is He (*tabarak*)...' (*al-Mulk:* 1). If you carefully examine the word *'tabarak'* ('exalted' or 'blessed') in the Quran, you will find that the letter *'alif'* is clearly written after the letter *'baa''* in some cases, while in other cases the *'baa''* comes without the *'alif'* being clearly written as a separate letter. This is to indicate that the matter is not a result of the words being written haphazardly.

Just as the words and structures of the Quran are miraculous, Allah *the Almighty* wanted its writing to be a miracle too. Some have said that the Arabs in the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not master writing. We say, 'If they were not familiar with the rules of writing, they could not write the word *'bism'* (in the name) properly, without a letter *'alif'* in its position. They knew that the Quran should be written in the exact way in which it was revealed by the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel), and as Allah *the Almighty* ordained'.

The expression 'Exalted is He' (*al-Mulk:* 1) usually refers to blessings, which refer to gaining more than what you expect from something. For example, when food for three persons becomes enough for ten, you say that this food is blessed. The word *'tabark'* means that Allah is Almighty, the Bestower of all good and All-Generous in His Bounty, three characteristics which are complementary to each other.

Interestingly, the way the term 'Exalted is He' (*al-Mulk:* 1) is written and its form is a miracle. If you trace it in the Quran, you will find that this word is mentioned nine times; seven of them having the letter *'alif'* as a separate letter and the other two without *'alif'* being written clearly. We may ask why this word was not written with a letter *'alif'* clearly written as a separate letter in all the verses, or vice versa. This shows us that the writing in the Quran has been divinely ordained; the words have not been written haphazardly. The word *'bism'* (in the name of…) in the saying of Allah: 'Recite, in the name (*bism*) of your Lord who created…' (*al-'Alaq:* 1) is a case in point. In this verse of the chapter of *al-'Alaq,* unlike in the other verses of the Quran, this word is written with the letter *'alif'* after the letter 'ba''. To conclude, the way the Quran is written and read is not ordinary. For example, you read any other book in any situation, but when you recite the Quran, you must perform ablution first.

Thus, the expression: 'Exalted is He…' (*al-Mulk:* 1) connotes three meanings, which are: Allah is Almighty, no one is equivalent to Him, and He bestows on His creation abundant good. He is unparalleled in His Power, His Being, His Attributes and His Actions. All this is in our interest. There is no God that is Almighty or Self-Sufficient but Him *Glorified is He*.

When we read: '…in whose Hands is Dominion (all control)…' (*al-Mulk:* 1), we must know that Allah *the Almighty* knows best about Himself. As a result, we should stop delving further into this topic. Yes, Allah *Glorified is He* has two Hands. But beware of imagining that anything related to Him is similar to the human being.

Basically, you exist, and Allah *the Almighty* exists. But your existence is different from His, and your hand is likewise different from His. For this reason we should avoid anthropomorphism by mistakenly saying that His Hands are like ours. Let us say that His Hand is meant to represent His Power or Blessing. The noble aim behind this is to maintain that He is Exalted.

And some people say, 'Allah has Hands, but not like our hands because we perceive each Description of Allah in the light of the verse: “There is certainly nothing like Him” (*ash-Shura:* 11), and accordingly the interpretation of Allah’s Attributes is possible'.

The Lord *the Most High* says: ‘…both His Hands are spread out, He expends as He pleases…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 64) and: ‘…the Hand of Allah is above their hands' (*al-Fath:* 10). This means that His Power is over theirs, just like when He talks about His Ability to create, saying: ‘And the heaven, We raised it high with [Our] Hands (power), and most surely, We are steadily expanding it' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47).(1)

Therefore, as the true dominion is controlled by Him, you should not worry about your provision; since He has created you, He has guaranteed your provision. Such provision is sent down from the heaven to the earth in the form of rain by means of which plants grow; it is upon these plants that every creature, including the human beings who may also eat herbivores, such as cattle and sheep feed.

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(1) The phrase ‘with Hands’ means by Power and Capability. An extra vowel letter is added to the Arabic word in the Holy Quran to distinguish its meaning from the literal meaning of the word. Interpreting the word ‘Hand’ in this context as Allah's Power by means of which He has built the sky undoubtedly takes precedence over the literal meaning of the word ‘Hands’. *See Al-Ibyari, Al-Mawsu'a Al-Qur'aniyya, 3/104.*

Your provision is linked to all the natural phenomena on the earth including the wind, air, sun or rain. All of such are within the Dominion of Allah *the Almighty* Alone because there is no other god besides Him. Why then should the human being feel worried about his provision?

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…in Whose Hands is all Dominion (control) (*mulk*)…' (*al-Mulk:* 1). When there is a dominion (*mulk*), it logically follows that there is a dominator, persons who are dominated and a power to maintain such dominion. It is as if the Lord *the Almighty* wants to show us His Absolute Power in this phrase.

The human being does not truly have the ability to dominate or maintain what he dominates. There is a difference between the two words here: ‘ownership’ and ‘dominion’, both of which are derived from the word ‘*mulk*’ in Arabic. As for ‘ownership’, it means that the human being possesses some things, such as clothes, books and other belongings.

But, to have control over the owners of such things is what we call ‘dominion’. If such possession is part of what we can see, we call it 'the dominion' of the world we can behold. If such possession is part of the unseen, we call it ‘the kingdom of the unseen world’.

Now, we have ‘ownership’, ‘dominion’ and ‘kingdom’. Ownership is used with a person who owns things, whereas the dominion is what is controlled by those who are in charge of some group of people, like the kings. This has to do with the dealings of humans.

As for Allah *the Almighty* He is the Owner of all things and all owners. Thus, no one should ever think that there is a person who owned something or any position in this worldly life without Allah's Permission, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Say, “O Allah, Lord of all dominion! You give dominion to whomsoever You please and take away dominion from whomsoever You please, and You exalt whom You please and abase whom You please. In Your hand is all good; surely, You have power over all things”' (*Al-‘Imran:* 26).

Therefore, any worldly ownership or dominion is temporary because Allah *the Almighty* takes it away from whom He wills and gives it to whom He wills. All of this is done according to the Will of the Supreme Creator; whenever He wills, nothing can stop His Decree.

With His Absolute Power and Might, He *the Almighty* created life and death, and the heaven with its planets, the suns and the stars. He has also subjected the earth, mountains and rivers to be of service to the human being. Then He *the Almighty* asked the human being to walk in the paths of the earth, seeking His Provision. That is, Allah *the Almighty* is the Omnipotent Who created the human being and gave him the ability to cultivate the land and to pave the ways of the earth and the mountains. But all this is due to His Power, not the power of the human being.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Who has power over all things' (*al-Mulk:* 1). Allah *the Exalted* has Absolute Power in this dominion. Consequently, if He says He wills to do something, that thing will definitely come to pass. There is no capability or power in this universe but Allah's, and only what He wills can happen. Nothing can overpower Him *the Almighty* and nothing goes against His Will. The Lord has Power over everything, and everything occurs according to His Will and Power. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earths, and He is the Omnipotent.

Allah has the Power to do anything: creating, providing, bringing to life, causing death, and starting immortality in either Paradise or Hell. He is truly Capable of anything.

Since actions vary according to different capabilities, Allah's Ultimate Power requires no time to bring about any action. In this regard, the Lord *the Almighty* says: 'Look then at the signs of Allah's Mercy, how He gives life to the earth after its death. Most surely He will raise the dead to life; and He has power over all things' (*ar-Rum:* 50). Allah *the Almighty* has the All Perfect Attributes of Knowledge, Power, Wisdom, Withholding, Giving and Causing benefit or harm.

The Lord *the Almighty* was All-Powerful even before the existence of any object over which this Power is exercised. That is to say He did not become All-Powerful when He created the human beings; rather, by His very Power, He created the entire universe. As Allah *the Almighty* is Unchangeable, He remains Fully Capable and Ever-Living.

The Arabic word *‘qadir’* (fully capable) is in the morphological form *‘fa'il’,* which may refer to a subject or an object. This is like when we say, ‘Allah is *Rahim* (All-Merciful)’, in which Allah is the subject that does the action, whereas the word *‘qateel’* (the killed person), which is in the same morphological form, refers to the object upon which the action is done.

The Lord *Glorified is He* then says:

ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلْمَوْتَ وَٱلْحَيَوٰةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٢

Who created death and life to test you [people] and reveal which of you does best — He is the Mighty, the Forgiving [2] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 2)

Allah *the Almighty* has created a Spirit whereby He provided the human being with life. Thus, we can imagine that death has a reality; when death approaches the human being, it takes away his Spirit. In the light of this, we can understand His saying: 'He created death and life...' (*al-Mulk:* 2). As such, death is not a negative process as some people mistakenly think. It is rather a positive process; it is created with such high efficiency which is appropriate for the Creator *Glorified is He*.

In this verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that He brought death forward before life, even though we apparently believe that life came first, not the other way round.

Life gives man power with which he can make use of what has been created in his service: he plants the earth, trades in goods, invents whatever is suitable for his life and enjoys hearing and sight. Therefore, he thinks life was created first. However, Allah *the Almighty* clarifies and draws our attention not to think carefully about life unless you are already aware of its opposite. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'He created death and life...' (*al-Mulk:* 2). This makes it easier for us to understand the Sacred Hadith that explains to us how it will be like after the people of the paradise enter paradise and the people of hell enter hell. After this, Allah *the Almighty* calls upon death to be brought in the form of a ram that is then slain.

Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'On the Day of Resurrection, death will be brought to stand on the *Sirat* (the Bridge over Hell). It will be said, “O people of Paradise!” Thereupon they will look, anxious and afraid lest they be brought out of the place where they are. Then it will be said, “Do you know this?” They will reply, “Yes, Allah, this is death”. Then it will be said again, “O people of Hell!” They will look, hoping that they may be brought out of the place where they are. It will be said, “Do you know this?” They will reply, “Yes, this is death”. The command will be given that the ram will be slaughtered on the *Sirat*, and it will be said to both groups, “Eternity for you, and no death ever”'.(1) Embodying death as a ram means that death has an entity. Then Allah *the Almighty* tells us that death will be eliminated which clearly means that we will live in eternity.

It is Allah *the Almighty* Who created death and life, and He is the Ever-Eternal. He needs no human to keep His Life; He has the Power to do everything, with no exception.

Before Allah *the Almighty* shows how He benevolently bestowed life upon us, He warned us against being deceived by it. He urges the human being to perceive life, knowing that He *the Almighty* has likewise created death, the opposite of life. Allah *the Almighty* does not say that He created life and then death, but rather says: 'He created death and life...' (*al-Mulk:* 2). In this way, each one of us realises that life is preceded by death, its opposite.

This is for you not to be arrogant or forget about such an inevitable end, and to act accordingly. It is as if the Lord *the Almighty* tells us about our death even before creating life. He brought death forward before life to warn us against being deceived by the worldly life and to urge us to strive for the Hereafter.

If a person examines the verses in the Quran, he finds that the word life has always preceded death, except for the verse in question: 'He created death and life...' (*al-Mulk:* 2). The reason for this is that Allah *the Almighty* by granting us life, grants us also a will to move all the parts of our body. Life then may deceive the person into believing that he is in control of his will and body, and consequently he transgresses. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to warn people that He can cause them to die. Such a warning will make him perceive life and its opposite, and so make him follow a straight path in life.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi graded it as a good authentic Hadith. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4730; see also At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3156; and Al-Ajurri, Shari'a, Hadith no. 942.*

Creation and ending life are Established Attributes of Allah *the Almighty* even before He created or ended the life of anything. In other words, they are Eternal Attributes that existed even before He used them to bring about life or cause death to any creature.

Life is created, and death is also created. Death can be sensed and observed. Both death and life are controlled by Allah *the Almighty*. Death is subject to His Will and Absolute Power which determine its definite time, which will not be advanced or delayed. Afterwards, each person will face the consequence of his deeds.

Both life and death are controlled by the Giver of Life. One should never think that fighting in battles causes death. In this regard, Khalid ibn Al-Walid on his deathbed sets an example for each believer in Allah *the Almighty*. He said, 'I have witnessed around 100 battles, and there is no spot in my body left without a scar or a wound made by a sword or a spear. Yet here I am dying on my bed just like a camel. May the eyes of cowards never fall asleep!'(1) Therefore, life and death are not conditional on fighting in battles or other causes. They are conditional on Allah's Will, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And most surely We bring to life and cause to die, and We are the heirs' (*al-Hijr:* 32). When Allah *the Almighty* addresses the matter of death and life, and the return of everything in the universe eventually to its Creator, He talks to us about two matters experienced by each creature: life and death. They are experienced by all creatures, for every creature has a defined period in which to live and a fixed time when he will die.

The creation of death and life has a purpose which is clearly illustrated in His saying: '…to test you [people] and reveal which of you is best in deeds…'

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(1) *In his book, Ibn Kathir ascribed this narration to Al-Wahidi, who quoted Ibn Abu Az-Zinad. See Ibn 'Abd Al-Bar, Al-Isti'ab, 1/409; Adh-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam An-Nubala', 1/382; Al-Kandahlawi, Hayat As-Sahaba, 1/565; and Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidaya wa An-Nihaya, 7/129.*

(*al-Mulk:* 2). That test, then, is the purpose of creating life and death. Life is not futile; rather, it is a test and trial for the people. A test is not something bad in itself; it is bad only when its result is bad. As long as Allah *the Almighty* tests us with what He provides us, we ought to be wise and hasten to do good deeds. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…hasten to good deeds; to Allah is your return, and so He will let you know that in which you differed' (*al-Ma'ida:* 48).

Hastening to do good deeds is for the purpose of passing the test which results in a greater reward than what we will get by being disobedient to Him *the Almighty*. Clearly, such a test is in our interest because those who pass it will surely attain eternal success.

The meaning of the saying of Allah: '…to test you [people]…' (*al-Mulk:* 2) indicates that such a test is in order for the people to see which one of them does best. But who determines those deeds? It is Allah *the Almighty*.

Does Allah *the Almighty* then need to test His creatures? No, simply because He knows beforehand all the deeds His creatures will do. But by such a test He means to match what His creatures do to what He already knew, and thereby leave no excuse for anyone; this test is evidence for or against us.

Unlike what some people think, Allah's Test is a blessing; it is good if we pass and bad if we fail. Hence, this test is not bad in itself; it is rather a scale for testing the good and the bad deeds. It is Allah, our Lord, Who tests us. He is the Lord Who educates us in a way that qualifies us to reach the required state of goodness. One of the basics in educating someone is to test him to know whether he learnt the topic well or not.

There must be some good out of such a test. The test may be in the form of a temptation. When people say 'test the gold', they mean put it in a pot and heat it at a high temperature until it turns into liquid in order to get rid of any impurities and make it pure.

Temptation in itself is not bad. What is bad is its negative results, that is whether a person will pass or fail the test. All the tests that the human being encounters are temptations; but whoever passes the test, temptation is something good for him. As for he who fails, temptation is something bad.

Allah *the Almighty* has bestowed upon the human being the ability to choose in order to see who will pass the test and who will fail in it, who will believe and who will disbelieve.

The Lord *the Almighty* does not neglect the reward of the doers of good deeds who remember Him while doing their work. The losers are those who work for the sake of pleasing people instead of Allah *the Almighty* but the people possess no power to benefit them. Hence, whoever does good deeds for the sake of Allah will be rewarded in both this worldly life and the Hereafter, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We do not neglect the reward of those who do good deeds' (*al-Kahf:* 30).

In this verse, the word 'who' is general, thus it includes both the believers and the disbelievers. The Lord *the Most High* does not say, 'We do not neglect the reward of the one who has good faith', because there might be a worker who does his work well though he is a disbeliever. Allah *Glorified is He* does not diminish the reward of such a disbeliever, yet the reward is given to him only in this worldly life.

If a disbeliever works hard and excels at science, agriculture, or trade, etc., he will not be deprived the fruits of his work and diligence. However, he will have his fruit early in this worldly life, but he will have no reward in the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* says that He is: '…the Mighty…' (*al-Insan:* 2), Who, due to His Greatness, is never defeated and is not held accountable by anyone. Hence, He *Glorified is He* is Predominant in all that He wills to do. He is the All Powerful and the Mighty Whom no one can harm.

The word 'the Mighty' implies Allah's Predominance, Omnipotence and Power; no one has supremacy over Him. Mightiness means Power and Predominance. He is the absolutely Almighty, for there is no god but Him and He is never defeated or overpowered by anyone.

He is the Lord of Glory in all its forms. If it is the glory of wisdom, He is the Most Wise. He is the 'Almighty' Who is never defeated or overpowered, and He is also the '…All-Forgiving' (*al-Insan:* 2). Due to His Almightiness, He forgives; and due to His Greatness, He pardons as He is All-Sufficient and is not in need of any creature.

In order to understand this fact, we should read Allah’s saying: 'When Allah says, ‘‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as two gods alongside with Allah'?” He will say, “May You be exalted! I will never say what I had no right to say—if I had said such a thing You will have known it. You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You. You alone have full knowledge of things unseen…If You should chastise them, then surely they are Your slaves; and if You should forgive them, then surely You are the Mighty, the All-Wise”' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116-118).

Since the context is about Mercy, we should logically say, 'You are the All-Forgiving and the Most Merciful’, yet ‘Isa *peace be upon him* addresses the matter not from the perspective of Mercy or Forgiveness but from the perspective of Absolute Power which may not be objected to. That is why he said: 'You are the Mighty, the All-Wise' (*al-Ma‘ida:* 118).

If some people say, 'Why does He forgive them though they said so and so?' The answer is that He is *the Almighty* Who predominates and is never defeated, and no one can object to His Judgment.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ سَبۡعَ سَمَٰوَٰتٖ طِبَاقٗاۖ مَّا تَرَىٰ فِى خَلۡقِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ
مِن تَفَٰوُتٖۖ فَٱرۡجِعِ ٱلۡبَصَرَ هَلۡ تَرَىٰ مِن فُطُورٖ ﴿٣﴾

Who created the seven heavens, one above the other.
You will not see any flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates.
Look again! Can you see any flaw? [3] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 3)

Allah *the Almighty* is the God Who created the universe. He is the Creator, the Originator, the All-Wise and the Most Merciful to His slaves. He created everything on this earth and in the heavens, and He is Exalted and high above having a partner in His Creation, for He Alone is the One: 'Who created….' (*al-Mulk:* 3).

He is the Creator, the Lord of Mercy, the Most Merciful, and the Predominant. He is the Creator even before bringing His creatures into existence, for He, due to His eternal Attribute of being able to create, is a Creator. He is the Provider even before the existence of what receives His Provision. With His Ever-Lasting Attributes, He orders a thing to 'Be', and it is.

Thus, if a Messenger told us that Allah is the One Who created the sun; he is either truthful and hence we all shall acknowledge that Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator and the Originator, or he is not truthful and then a question arises, ‘Why then has no one else claimed to be its Creator?!’

Yet, the accuracy and the inimitability of the creation which cannot be matched by any individual or any collective and cooperative human powers is undisputable proof that it is Allah *the Almighty* Alone Who created everything. Thus, until we find—and we will never find—someone who claims to have created the universe, the issue is settled in favour of Allah *the Almighty* and there are no adversaries.

A Messenger came to us to say, 'The Creator of the earth, the sun and the heavens is Allah *the Almighty*'. Since no one else claimed to have created any of these, this is proof of the credibility of the Messenger’s call. This affirms that this universe is created by an Infinite Power. He *the Almighty* says: 'Or were they created out of nothing, or are they the creators?' (*at-Tur:* 35)

If the answer is 'no' for both the two aforementioned Divine Questions, there must be a Creator–Who is Allah–in Whom we must believe because He did not let anyone be able to claim that he is the creator of this universe or that he created himself.

Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator Who accurately created everything and placed His signs in the universe. When we ponder over the universe around us, we find signs that prove the creativeness of the Creator and the wonderfulness of His creation. We also find harmony and congruity among these signs of the universe.

Allah *Glorified is He* says in some verses addressing this matter: 'And of His signs are the night and the day, the sun and the moon…' (*Fussilat:* 37) and: 'And of His signs are the ships that run on the sea like mountains' (*ash-Shura:* 32). These verses draw our attention to the Omnipotence of the Creator *Glorified is He*.

Allah *the Almighty* created the universe, including the earth, the heavens and human beings, and revealed the Quran to regulate their lives. He did not leave the universe to work automatically by itself and did not separate Himself from His creation because they are in continuous need of His Provision.

Some creatures share some Attributes with Allah *the Almighty* but in a limited sense. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So blessed is Allah, the best of creators' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14) and: 'And you create falsehood…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 17).

This means that there are creators other than Allah *the Almighty*. Creation means bringing something into existence. A person who produces glass from sand is a creator and a manufacturer of the glass. In this example, a person brought something into existence, and Allah brings things into existence. However, such a person has brought something into existence out of something else which already existed even before the existence of such a person.

Hence, the Lord *Glorified is He* is the best of creators. He *Glorified is He* was fair to you and did not deny you the title of a creator. Consequently, you should be fair and describe Him *the Almighty* with the description: '…the best of creators…' (*al-Mu'minun:* 14). Allah *the Almighty* respected your bringing something into existence and called you a creator. He did not deny you one of His Attributes, but told you that He is the best of the creators. Hence, He is the best of creators, the best of providers, the best of those who inherit, and the best of those who arrange matters.

It is more proper to turn towards the Great Creator Who brought this universe into existence. Allah's universal signs draw humans' attention to His wonderful, unrivalled creation and the necessity of believing in Him. Through these signs, we come to know that there is an All-Powerful Creator Who manages and maintains this magnificent universe. Even before the creation of the human beings, Allah *the Almighty* created the heavens, the earth, water, and air for them. Besides, Allah *Glorified is He* determined the creatures' sustenance on the earth till the Day of Judgment. Further, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the human beings, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'The creation of the heavens and earth is greater than the creation of mankind, but most of the people do not know.' (*Ghafir:* 57)

When Islam emerged and presented empirical science, it called our attention to the signs of the Creator in the universe and ordered us to meditate on them. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it...’ (*Yusuf:* 105). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to His signs in the heavens and the earth for us to contemplate over them and derive from them what contributes to the achievement of our civilisation. It is important to note that Allah *the Almighty* unprecedentedly created the heavens, the earth and everything therein, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘The Originator of the heavens and the earth.’ (*al-Baqara:* 117) In other words, before, Allah *the Almighty* created them, there were no heavens, earth, angels, jinn and humankind, so that the same entities would be patterned by Him *the Almighty*. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* did not have recourse to ‘patterning’ or ‘moulding’.

We should be filled with wonder about the creation of the heavens and earth. The human being should be conscious of what Allah *the Almighty* created for him in order that he finds out about his Creator, believes in Him and bears witness that He is the only One God.

If the humans ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth, their natural dispositions will guide them to the fact that this well-knit, perfect universe is originated by Allah *the Almighty*. However, most of them do not think properly. So, the heavens and the earth are maintained in a stunning balance by Him *the Almighty* alone. In this connection, He says, ‘Surely, Allah upholds the heavens and the earth lest they come to naught; and if they should come to naught, there is none who can uphold them after Him; surely, He is the Forbearing, the Forgiving.’ (*Fatir:* 41). If the heavens and the earth were destined by Allah *the Almighty* to cease to exist, no one can preserve them, given the fact that they are maintained by His Omnipotence. In other words, if He wills them to vanish, no one can hold them and prevent their disappearance.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Who created the seven heavens…’ (*al-Mulk:* 3), the word ‘heavens’ is in the plural form. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods, and revealed in every heaven its affair; and We adorned the lower heaven with brilliant stars and (made it) to guard; that is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing.’ (*Fussilat:* 12)

In the past, some people used to claim that the seven heavens refer to seven planets: the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and the Earth. But Allah *the Almighty* willed to refute this claim, while those who made it were still alive. This refutation was done by the astronomers who discovered other planets such as Neptune and Pluto. This serves as a rebuttal of the claim of those who argued that the 'seven heavens' mean 'seven planets'. They held this view in good faith and in an attempt to link the Quran with science. However, they did not scrutinise the Quranic verses properly, for Allah *the Almighty* informs us that the sun, the moon, and other planets are just the adornments of the lower heaven. So, what would we think of the nature and the adornments of the remaining heavens?!

In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And certainly We made above you seven heavens; and never are We heedless of creation.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 17) The Arabic word *tarai'q* means the 'beaten ways' or the paths made for the angels. A beaten object has a size which widens by treading, exactly as a piece of iron expands by striking against it. So, you should look at the heaven and its boundless vastness and say, 'Exalted is the One Who expanded it'.

It is worth noting here that Allah *the Almighty* does not mention the earth. So, what is the reason for that? This is because we can stand steady on the earth without fear; whereas we fear that the heaven should collapse upon us. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and never are We heedless of creation.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 17) Allah *the Almighty* is never unaware of the heaven and He holds it with His Power. The birds that fly and are held aloft by Him *the Almighty* provide us with a tangible proof of how He raised the sky over us without pillars. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Do they not see the birds above them spreading and closing their wings? It is only the Lord of Mercy who holds them up: He watches over everything.' (*al-Mulk:* 19)

Linguistically, the Arabic word *as-sama`* (the sky) means everything that overtops and shades you. So, does the sky, meant by Allah *the Almighty,* refer to all that is over you, including the stars, the sun, and the moon? We should say to those who claim that the seven heavens are the planets that these planets are not always over us. The sun and the moon, for example, sometimes overtop us and at times go down. So, the sun, the moon, and other planets cannot be the seven heavens. Besides, these people are mistaken because Allah *the Almighty* revealed to them via modern science that the sun has other satellites. Some astronomers say that they are eight satellites while others state they are nine. According to some others, they amount to ten. Thus, the notion that these satellites are the seven heavens has been refuted, for the heaven overtops all these celestial bodies.

Allah *the Almighty* created the heavens in layers, one above the other, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'You will progress from stage to stage.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 19) It is Allah *the Almighty* Who perfectly created the seven-layered heavens. When one looks at heaven, he cannot find any defect. Even if he looks once again, he also finds no cracks or flaws.

Let us notice the objects that the humans make. If one wants to build, for example, a house or a ceiling, it should be built in a very precise way. However, you may see protruding bricks. So, a plasterer tries hard to level the surface of the wall and measures it with a spirit level. However, we may see unlevelled parts in the wall. At this point, the painter's role comes; he tries to repair any faults by using putty.

After a person uses up all the means of building his house as he likes, some days later Allah *the Almighty* discloses for him the defects in his building, regardless of its precision, by means of a layer of dust that vertically covers the wall. This exposes clearly any faults in the wall.

If the objects made by the humans differ according to their skills and adeptness, what do you think about Allah, the Creator Who builds perfects and beautifies His creations?

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '…You will not see any flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates…' (*al-Mulk:* 3). By virtue of His Mercy, Allah *the Almighty* created the universe in this perfect way. Here, He mentions the Name which must be extolled, namely; the Lord of Mercy. Out of His Mercy and Bestowals, people live in the universe and enjoy their sustenance and all what surrounds them. So, they should have appreciated the creation of the Lord of Mercy in which they played no role. Allah, the Lord of Mercy, is the One Who grants all the bestowals and blessings, and He mentions this Attribute in particular because Mercy evokes people’s tender feelings unlike His Attribute of Omnipotence or the Almightiness.

There are no flaws in the creation of the Lord of Mercy. Let us offer an example to illustrate this fact; the most skilful maker may be asked to flatten the ceiling of several rooms with one material and paints them in one colour. However, you can notice that his painting of each room differs from the others in some aspect. Even if the painter combines the colour of the paint at one time for all the rooms, the colour will be different because when he takes out some of the paint mixture, the remaining quantity becomes more concentrated. Further, if the task does not finish on the same day, what remains of the paint loses a quantity of water the next day, which affects the degree of the colour.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…You will not see any flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates…’ (*al-Mulk:* 3) means that His creation is devoid of any dissimilarity or disproportion. Using the word ‘any’ in this verse implies that there are no flaws whatsoever in His creation. For example, if you go to someone to borrow some money from him, he may say to you, ‘I do not have enough money to lend you’. This means that he owns several pounds that are insufficient for lending. However, when you go to another person for the same purpose, he may say to you, ‘I do not have any money’. Using the word ‘any’ means that he does not even one pound. Likewise, you will not see any flaw in the creation of Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, you cannot notice any imperfection in His creation. In the heaven, for example, you cannot see any disproportion, dissimilarity, or crookedness. Disproportion refers to the inharmonious objects that do not fit together. All of this is untrue regarding the creation of Allah *the Almighty* thereby the beholder cannot say, ‘If the heaven had been created in such-and-such a way, it would have been better’, because Allah *the Almighty* created it perfectly and in a well-knitted way.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…Look again...’ (*al-Mulk:* 3). So, let anyone look at the heaven repeatedly and meditates on His creation; he should not just look at this creation without consideration and reflection, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Look again...’ (*al-Mulk:* 3). You may mistakenly think that some words have the same meaning, yet we stress that each word has a specific sense. For example, the verbs ‘see, look, catch sight of, glance sideways at and stare at’ refer generally to the act of seeing something, but each verb has a specific meaning.

Regarding concrete objects, sight is the function of the eye. When the sight is accompanied with insight and reflection, this enlightens the heart till one discerns that Allah’s creation is not tainted with dissimilarity or imperfection. One who is endowed with the in-depth knowledge and the insight of the scholars discerns, by means of reflection and knowledge, the hidden aspects of the world, and therefore, extracts mysteries and deduces facts.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…Look again! Can you see any flaw?’ (*al-Mulk:* 3) If the human being looks repeatedly at the heaven, he woill not spot any fissures or cracks. He, the Omnipotent, bestows on each of His creatures’ specific characteristics that make it suitable for its function. So, the one should not think that such a creature is out of the control of its Creator. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who created the heavens and the earth with absolute creativity and perfection; it is He alone Who can ruin them or cause breaks in them at any time. Also, it is He Who will wrap the sun in darkness, dim the stars, and turn the mountains into dust.

The lower heaven has one shape and contains no cracks or defects whatsoever as Allah *the Almighty* perfected its creation, as He says, ‘And the heaven, We raised it high with power...’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47); and He says in elsewhere: ‘I swear by the heaven full of ways.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 7) Thus, the creation of the heaven is well-knit and consistent. In the last verse, the Arabic word *hubuk* (compactness) refers to the fact that the invisible atoms of the heaven fit neatly together and that it why it seems smooth and even. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says about the heaven: ‘He raised its ceiling and proportioned it.’ (*an-Nazi’at:* 28). If you have a look at the heaven when it is clear, you find that it is an even structure having no protrusions or curvatures despite its vastness and the absence of pillars. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* orders you to consider and meditate, as if He is saying: ‘We do not deceive you. Look at the heaven attentively and carefully’. So, He says in the verse in question: ‘…Look again! Can you see any flaw?’ (*al-Mulk:* 3); and He says: ‘Say, “Observe what is in the heavens and earth…”’ (*Yunus:* 101). It is as if

He is saying to the people: ‘The entire universe is before your eyes. Why do not you observe and meditate on it’?

Allah *the Almighty* raised the heaven and laid down the balance. The heaven does not fall on the earth, and everything in His creation is completely precise and cohesive. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. The moon and the stars move with utmost precision and perfection because the humans have nothing to do with such celestial bodies.

If you want your life to be managed as perfect and sound as the heaven and the earth, you should apply the Divine Balance to your affairs and follow the saying of Allah: ‘And the heaven, He raised it high, and He made the balance. That you may not be inordinate in respect of the measure, And keep up the balance with equity and do not make the measure deficient (*ar-Rahman:* 7-9).

As you notice that the celestial bodies move in an orderly way without any human intervention which caused corruption to many things, why do not you follow Allah’s Way of Guidance regarding the matters in which you involve? If you adopt this Divine Way, which He created for you, in this worldly life, your affairs will be as sound as everything related to the universe. The heaven, for example, does not fall on the earth because it is governed by a perfect system. The earth does not move away from its orbit as Allah *the Almighty* determined its order as well. This is a precise and perfect system which the human being has nothing to do with. Thus, you should lay down a balance for all the matters that are left to your choice so that you do not transgress this balance. By virtue of His Omnipotence, Allah *the Almighty* perfected the creation of the heaven.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ثُمَّ ٱرۡجِعِ ٱلۡبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيۡنِ يَنقَلِبۡ إِلَيۡكَ ٱلۡبَصَرُ خَاسِئٗا وَهُوَ حَسِيرٞ ﴿٤﴾

Look again! And again! Your sight will turn back to you, weak and defeated [4] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 4)

Even if you have a look several times, you still cannot see any cracks, dissimilarity or imperfection in the creation of the heaven. If you did not ascertain through your first look, you can look once again carefully and closely. However, this will not change the fact that its creation is flawless. One may not spot the faults of something unless he repeatedly looks at it. Hence, if you think that the heaven has defects or disproportions, take repeated looks so that you eliminate your doubts. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Take your time looking and scrutinizing to be certain of this fact.’ The result is that your sight will be fatigued and too weak to withstand the intense light. For example, if your eyes encounter the sunlight or a car light, your eyes cannot bear such light. This is because light is primarily used to enable us to see things.

So, regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…your sight will turn back to you, weak and defeated’ (*al-Mulk:* 4), it means that your sight will get humbled and fail to keep looking. It will be humbled because it will not make you see cracks and faults.

Not only will your sight turn humbled but it will also become too exhausted and strained to endure the intense light. The Arabic word *hasra* means to regret losing something. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘To Him belongs whoever is in the heavens and the earth. And those near Him are not prevented by arrogance from His worship, nor do they tire.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 19) This word here means to be weary of something.

Allah *the Almighty* makes mention of the creation of the Heaven and earth, saying: ‘Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods, and He mounted the throne (of authority)…’ (*as-Sajda:* 4). Allah *the Almighty* informs us that He established Himself above the Throne after the creation of the heavens and the earth. We should consider this fact in the context of His being the All Exalted and far above the way the humans seat themselves. Allah *the Almighty* also says, ‘The Beneficent is firm in power.’ (*Ta Ha:* 5) Has Allah *the Almighty* got a body to seat Himself on a Throne?! This anthropomorphism must be categorically negated. The reality of this matter is one of the ambiguous ones that the believers must believe in without arguing over them. Humans’ existence, hand and sitting are unlike Allah’s Existence, Hand and Establishing Himself on the Throne. Concerning His Throne, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: ‘Over them is the Throne, and the distance between its upper and lower parts is the same as the distance between every two heavens. Then Allah is above all that.'(1) We are bound to believe in these facts as they are. At the same time, we must not understand them according to our human capabilities. Whatever crosses your mind, Allah *Glorified is He* is absolutely unlike it.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَلَقَدْ زَيَّنَّا ٱلسَّمَآءَ ٱلدُّنْيَا بِمَصَٰبِيحَ وَجَعَلْنَٰهَا رُجُومًا
لِّلشَّيَٰطِينِ ۖ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابَ ٱلسَّعِيرِ ٥

We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and made them [missiles] for stoning devils for whom We have also prepared the torment of a blazing fire [5] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 5)

The Arabic particle *qadd* (already) emphasises the predicate of a sentence. It can be used before the past and present tenses. Allah *the Almighty* adorned the lower heaven with lamps which are the stars. Surprisingly, the light of some stars reaches us in fifty light years. If we want to calculate the distance between us and a star, we will have to add a lot of zeros to a figure.

Astronomers set a suitable unit for measuring the distances of stars. This unit of measurement is called 'light year'. As we know, the speed of light is about three hundred thousand kilometres per second. As a huge and bright star, the sun is ninety-three million miles from us. Its light reaches us within eight minutes and a third. The light of Sirius (1), the brightest star in the earth's night sky, reaches us in nine light years. Thus, the 'light year' is the measurement unit for the celestial distances.

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(1) *Ibn `Abbas is narrated to have said, 'Once we were sitting with Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him at Al-Batha, a cloud appeared (in the sky). Thereupon, he asked, "Do you know what this is?" We replied, "It is a cloud." He asked, "And a nimbus?" We replied, "And a nimbus." He asked, "And Al-`Anan?" We kept silent, then he asked, "Do you know the distance between the sky and earth?" We said, "Allah and His Messenger know better." He said, "The distance between the sky and earth is five hundred years; the distance between one heaven and another is five hundred years; the thickness of each heaven amounts to the distance of five hundred years. Over the seventh heaven is a sea; the distance between its top and bottom is like that between the heaven and earth. Over (that sea) are eight ibexes, the distance between their knees and hoofs is like the distance between the heaven and earth. Over that is the Throne, the distance between its upper part and lower part is the same distance as that between the heaven and earth. Above that is Allah and nothing of the actions of the humans is beyond His Knowledge."' See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 1770.*

We also observe bright stars in the lower heaven, and thus Allah *the Almighty* states that the sun, the moon, and the stars are its adornments. So, what do we think about the nature and the adornments of the remaining heavens? We should bear in mind that the stars and the planets are objects of adornment hanging down from the lower heaven and giving light at the same time. But they do not constitute the lower heaven.

The lower heaven is far more remote than the bright stars we see. The sun is eight light minutes from us, while the Andromeda Galaxy(2) is one hundred light years from us. The distance between us and our galaxy is one million light years. You can multiply one million light years by one hundred and sixty-five days, then multiply the total by twenty-four hours, then multiply the total by sixty minutes, then sixty seconds and finally multiply the total by three hundred thousand kilometres. Afterwards, reflect on the final number you come to.

The sun is the largest star that beautifies our sky and from which all people benefit, believers, sinners, atheists, and polytheists. When the sun sets, everyone uses a source of light within a limited place and according to his own capabilities; a person may light a candle, another brings an oil lamp and someone else brings an electric light bulb or many electric lamps to fill his room or house with light. Does anyone leave their lamp being lit on once the sun rises? Everyone turns off his lamps for being satisfied with the light of the sun. This is the tangible light. The difference between the light that one gets by human means and the light of the sun is that the latter overwhelms all the lamps in the worldly life because it encompasses everything.

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(1) Sirius is the brightest star in the sky at night and the fourth brightest celestial body. It consists of two stars that appear together. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And that it is He who is the Lord of Sirius.' (*an-Najm:* 49)

(2) The Andromeda Galaxy is the nearest to our galaxy and is approximately two million light years and a half away from us. It contains two hundred and fifty billion stars. Its diameter is one hundred and fifty thousand light years. The Andromeda Galaxy can be seen with the naked eye.

Allah *the Almighty* does not only created the stars as lamps beautifying the sky, but He also made them signs of guidance for people, as He says, ‘And landmarks; and by the stars they find the right way.’ (*an-Nahl:* 16)

We know that those who travel by sea depend on the stars to guide them to the right way. Likewise, those who travel by land through deserts depend on the stars. In this regard, the people of Quraysh used to make two commercial journeys every year: one in winter and the other in summer. They used to follow certain routes with the help of stars as they were familiar with the positions of stars. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And He it is Who has made the stars for you that you might follow the right way thereby in the darkness of the land and the sea; truly We have made plain the communications for a people who know.’ (*al-An‘am:* 97). Allah *the Almighty* created the stars so that those who travel by land or sea at night are guided by them. After all, they need some light to show them the way.

So, the Arabs used to depend on the stars to be guided to the right directions in their travels. One can say to another, ‘Go while such-and-such a star is facing you; walk while such-and-such a star is on your left and you will reach such-and-such a place; go ahead while such-and-such a star is behind you and you will find such-and-such.’

The stars are not only designed to guide us when we travel by land or sea. If so, all the stars would be the same size; however, we see large and small stars. Due to its remoteness, a seemingly small star may be larger than an apparent big one.

Allah *the Almighty* also created stars for aesthetic purposes. They give us the sense of pleasure and awe when we look at them. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘…and has beautified it for the observers.’ (*al-Hijr:* 16) An object can be useful but has no aesthetic value. However, Allah *the Almighty* gave aesthetic values to the stars because the human soul has the faculty of appreciating beauty and being impressed by it. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And We have placed within the heaven great stars and have beautified it for the observers.’ (*al-Hijr:* 16)

As a matter of fact, beauty is a value and a blessing from Allah *the Almighty* Who mentions some of His Blessings, saying: ‘And [He created] the horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment.' (*an-Nahl:* 8). It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who created these animals in beautiful shapes. In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And there is beauty in them for you when you drive them back (to home), and when you send them forth (to pasture).' (*an-Nahl:* 6) Allah *Glorified is He* does not only create these animals for us to make use of them, but to satisfy our feelings of beauty. The more we get impressed by beauty, the more we recognise Allah's Oneness.

Allah *the Almighty* spreads His Blessings among all His creatures by beautifying the lower heaven with stars. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* provides those who have loads with the animals that can carry their loads, as He says, 'And they carry your heavy loads to regions which you could not reach but with distress of the souls; most surely your Lord is Compassionate, Merciful.' (*an-Nahl:* 7) About those who have no heavy loads, they can see horses move gracefully and enjoy their attractive shapes even though these horses may not belong to them. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* spreads His Favours among His creatures.

Allah *the Almighty* grants us luxuries in addition to the basic needs of life. He does not only give the necessary warmth, benefits and foodstuff but also the luxuries of life, like the beautiful things that the person delights upon seeing them. Warmth, useful things, and food are special benefits for those who own cattle and livestock whereas beauty is common to everyone. The moment you see a beautiful horse or a vigorous cow you enjoy the Favours of Allah *the Almighty* that please the beholders. This beauty and splendour please our soul.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* conferred upon us the necessities of life as well as its luxuries. The adornment is for the purpose of beauty. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Surely, We have adorned the nearest heaven with an adornment, the stars. And (there is) a safeguard against every rebellious devil. They cannot listen to the exalted assembly and they are thrown at from every side. Being driven off, and for them is a perpetual chastisement.' (*as-Saffat:* 6-9)

When you look at the sky during the night, you find it exquisitely ornamented with twinkling stars. In this respect, 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud is narrated to have said, 'Jarir ibn 'Abdullah said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* "Tell us about the lower heaven, O Allah's Messenger." He said, "Allah created the lower heaven from smoke then raised it. He placed therein a sun and a luminous moon; He also ornamented it with stars and designed them to pelt devils with shooting stars; He safeguarded it from every damned devil.'"(1)

Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and made them [missiles] for stoning devils…' (*al-Mulk:* 5); and: 'And We adorned the nearest heaven with lamps and as protection. That is the determination of the Exalted in Might, the Knowing.' (*Fussilat:* 12) According to these two verses, Allah *the Almighty* made the stars, with which He beautified the lower heaven, an instrument for throwing devils with meteors and preventing them from listening secretly to the Highest Assembly of angels. Allah's saying: '…and made them…' (*al-Mulk:* 5), refers to the meteors which are taken from the planets, not the planets per se.

So, some stars are immobile ornaments for the sky; others guide humankind through the darkness of land and sea; while some others are designed to pelt devils with meteors. The stars with which the lower heaven is ornamented are not the ones thrown at devils to burn them. The stars and planets are bright objects in the sky which resemble a ceiling decorated with pendent lamps. Allah *the Almighty* describes these stars as lamps that are noticeably luminous. The stars give incandescent light while the moon gives a gentle derived light. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'It is He who made the sun a shining light and the moon a derived light' (*Yunus:* 5); 'And made the moon therein a [reflected] light and made the sun a burning lamp?' (*Nuh:* 16)

As the sun gives incandescent light, it is like a burning lamp. Unlike the gentle and heatless light of the moon, the incandescent light of the sun is accompanied with heat and warmth. Heat arises when light intrinsically comes from a shining object such as the sun. As for the moon, its light is extrinsic and emanates from the sunrays when they are reflected on it. The moon is like a mirror; if you direct some light towards it, it reflects this light.

The hurled objects thrown at the eavesdropping devils are the meteors that are derived from the stars, and they look like a flaming brand taken from a fire, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He saw a fire and said to his people, "Stay here—I can see a fire. Maybe I can bring you a flaming brand from it or find some guidance there.'" (*Ta Ha:* 10) Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* brought his family a torch out of a fire, but it remained the same. In another context, he *peace be upon him* said, 'an ember', which is a piece of wood or coal that remains very hot after a fire stops burning. Elsewhere, he said: 'I will bring you from there information or will bring you a burning torch…' (*an-Naml:* 7).

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(1) *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/69.*

Allah *the Almighty* made the meteors missiles shot at the devils. Before the revelation of the Quran, they used to eavesdrop and have positions of eavesdropping in the sky to listen secretly to what was sent down to the earth, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'We used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him.' (*al-Jinn:* 9) They used to eavesdrop and add numerous fabrications to each single truth they heard.(1) So, Allah *the Almighty* relates that the devils said: 'We tried to reach heaven, but discovered it to be full of stern guards and shooting stars—we used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him.' (*al-Jinn:* 8-9)

Allah *the Almighty* then says in the verse in question: '…for whom We have also prepared the torment of a blazing Fire.' (*al-Mulk:* 5) Just as Allah *the Almighty* punishes them with shooting stars is their worldly life, He has prepared for the devils the punishment of the blazing fire in the Hereafter. Devils are the rebellious jinn about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely, We have adorned the nearest heaven with an adornment, the stars. And (there is) a safeguard against every rebellious devil. They cannot listen to the exalted assembly and they are thrown at from every side. Being driven off, and for them is a perpetual chastisement. Except him who snatches off but once, then there follows him a brightly shining flame.' (*as-Saffat:* 6-9)

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(1) Ibn `Abbas said, 'Each tribe of the jinn used to have fixed positions for eavesdropping. Whenever a divine revelation descended, the angels heard a sound like the crash of a piece of iron thrown on the mountain of As-Saffa, whereupon they prostrated themselves and did lift their heads till the divine revelations had been sent down. Afterwards, they asked one another, "What did your Lord say?"' In case these divine revelations were related to the earth such as the unseen, deaths or anything else, they talked about them and said, 'Such-and-such a thing will take place.' Devils used to listen secretly to the conversation of the angels and convey them to their leaders. When Allah sent Prophet Muhammad, the devils were repelled by shooting stars.' *See* Ibn Abu Shayba*, Al-Musannaf, Hadith no. 36542.*

As-Sa`ir (the Blaze) is one of the names of hell and also one of its types which include: the Flame, the Crusher, Saqar and the Abyss. The Blaze is the fire that burns non-stop and devours everything before it. From the same root of this word, we refer to the rabid dog.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَلِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِرَبِّهِمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٦﴾ إِذَآ أُلْقُوا۟ فِيهَا
سَمِعُوا۟ لَهَا شَهِيقًا وَهِىَ تَفُورُ ﴿٧﴾ تَكَادُ تَمَيَّزُ مِنَ ٱلْغَيْظِ ۖ كُلَّمَآ أُلْقِىَ
فِيهَا فَوْجٌ سَأَلَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَآ أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَذِيرٌ ﴿٨﴾

For those who defy their Lord We have prepared the torment of Hell: an evil destination [6] They will hear it drawing in its breath when they are thrown in. It blazes forth, [7] almost bursting with rage. Its keepers will ask every group that is thrown in, 'Did no one come to warn you?' [8]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 6 - 8)

While the blazing fire is the punishment of the devils, the disbelievers' punishment is hell. The punishment of the latter begins with hearing the inhalation of hell while it is boiling over. Inhalation linguistically means the power that takes the air into the nose and chest. So, what do we think of the strength of the inhalation of hell which attracts and pulls people destined to be punished towards it? In the following Quranic verse, hell itself answers the question of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We shall say to hell on that Day, "Are you full?" and it will reply, "Are there no more?"' (*Qaf:* 30) It is the power of hell which calls for punishing more disbelievers. It breathes in those destined to enter it. Naturally, inhalation of air occurs more rapidly than its exhalation. Taking air into the lungs in this worldly life is a necessary process for maintaining one's life. It also exists in the Hereafter, but it is connected with hell which inhales to swallow the disbelievers, as it yearns and waits for them.

Hell also exhales as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'When it shall come into their sight from a distant place, they shall hear its vehement raging and roaring.' (*al-Furqan:* 12) Those who enter hell will also breathe in and out, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'For them therein is [violent] exhaling and inhaling.' (*Hud:* 106) As we know, those who breathe in hell will take hot air into their lungs and send it out hot as well. Imagine how breathing occurs in Hell which is filled with flames. A person in this worldly life breathes to relax by fresh air. So, how can he breathe in that extremely hot air? Without doubt, this will be unbearably painful.

What sort of ease or relaxation can a person get from the hot air of a boiling hell? As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…it blazes forth.' (*al-Mulk:* 7), it means that the fire of Hell boils as water does when it is heated. Water contains air, given the fact that fish breathe while in water. Otherwise, how do fish breathe? If we boil water, we see bubbles rise to the surface.

The disbelievers and sinners will be thrown into hell with a lot of force. Entering hell will not be easy or merciful for them. The act of throwing is associated with concrete objects. This verb is mentioned in many verses of the Quran; Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and he threw down the tablets and seized his brother by [the hair of] his head, pulling him toward him. [Harun (Aaron)] said, "O son of my mother, indeed the people oppressed me."' (*al-A'raf:* 150) Throwing down the tablets is something visible and physical. Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'So they threw their ropes and their staffs and said, "By the might of Pharaoh, indeed it is we who are predominant."' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 44). As for Allah's saying here: 'When they are thrown in…' (*at-Talaq:* 7), it means that the disbelievers will be flung into hell, body and soul.

On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* uses the verb 'throwing' in some Quranic verses to refer to abstract meanings. He says, '…We will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve…' (*Al-'Imran:* 151). Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make terror overwhelm the disbelievers. It seems as if He brings terror and places it into their hearts. Terror is an abstract feeling, but it has a tangible effect on their hearts.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'They will hear it drawing in its breath when they are thrown in.' (*al-Mulk:* 7), it means that the disbelievers will hear hell inhaling when it swallows them. They are sucked into it violently. This prospect is full of activity and vehemence: the disbelievers are thrown into a fire, while it is moving forward and swallowing them. Its flames receive them while it is boiling up and blazing forth. Allah *Glorified is He* describes this miserable destination, saying: 'For those who defy their Lord We have prepared the torment of hell: an evil destination.' (*al-Mulk:* 6) How cannot hell be a most miserable destination for the disbelievers?! They should have borne in mind that fate when they had the free choice in the worldly life. The worst thing about this fate is that it is inescapable, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'On that Day man will say, "Where can I escape?" Truly, there is no refuge:] they will all return to your Lord on that Day. ' (*al-Qiyama:* 10-12); 'They will wish to get out of the Fire, but never are they to emerge therefrom, and for them is an enduring punishment.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 37)

Whenever the flames of fire burn the disbelievers, they wish to get out of it. But how do they wish to exit from it? The moment the fire burns them and they move about restlessly, the flames push them towards outside, whereupon they think that their torment comes to a stop. However, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and for them is an enduring punishment.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 37) Thus, the punishment of the disbelievers in the fire is perpetual. It is a painful torment that will remain unbearably so, and it will never be alleviated. Likewise, its humiliating punishment will also remain so forever. In both cases, the punishment is eternal.

Allah *the Almighty* then describes hell, saying: 'Almost bursting with rage. Its keepers will ask every group that is thrown in, 'Did no one come to warn you?' (*al-Mulk:* 8) As the fire boils up, inhales and exhales, it is: 'Almost bursting with rage…' (*al-Mulk:* 8) at the disbelievers. An example of this is when you see a pot in which water boils up and produces bubbles; some of these bubbles get out from the pot. Likewise, when a person rages, things like the bubbles come out of him, which expresses his seething with rage. Hell also is incandescent with rage as it is punishing the disbelievers who did not realise the value of belief.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us another example in Allah's saying: 'How many of the gardens and fountains have they left! And cornfields and noble places! And goodly things wherein they rejoiced. Thus (it was), and We gave them as a heritage to another people. So, the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-29)

The earth is resentful at the existence of the disbelievers on it. So, neither the heaven nor the earth grieves for the underground burial and exemplary punishment inflicted on the disbelievers. Conversely, they grieve over the death of the believers. The earth never gets along with the sinners. Likewise, hell explodes with rage against all those who disbelieve in Allah *Glorified is He*. However, it is crazy about torturing the disbelievers. It is as if the punishment itself is yearning for inflicting them.

Hell is raged at the disbelievers and so it eagerly prepares itself for them. When anger is unendurable by a person, he certainly feels irritated and explodes. So, the saying of Allah: 'Almost bursting with rage…' (*al-Mulk:* 8) means that the constituents of the fire of hell almost break away from one another.

The Arabic word *al-ghayzh* (rage) is an inner feeling and it is a considerable degree of anger which is accompanied by sadness and sorrow. Both the believers and the disbelievers explode with rage; we get angry about the disbelievers' obstinacy and mockery, but Allah *the Almighty* drives our anger away. Thus, the fire of hell is: 'Almost bursting with rage…' (*al-Mulk:* 8).

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Its keepers will ask every group that is thrown in, 'Did no one come to warn you?' (*al-Mulk:* 8) The dwellers of hell will be flung into it in groups, as He *the Almighty*, says, '[Its inhabitants will say], "This is a company bursting in with you." No welcome for them. Indeed, they will burn in the Fire.' (*Sad:* 59); 'and [warn of] the Day when We will gather from every nation a company of those who deny Our signs, and they will be [driven] in rows.' (*an-Naml:* 83)

Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'So, as to those who are unhappy, they shall be in the fire; for them shall be sighing and groaning in it.' (*Hud:* 106) Those who brought down distress upon themselves because of their deviation from the Way of Allah will be bound together by wretchedness. But they will enter Hell individually and in groups, a fact which is clearly manifested in Allah's saying: 'And those who disbelieved will be driven to Hell in groups...' (*az-Zumar:* 71); '…every time a nation enters, it will curse its sister…' (*al-A'raf:* 38). So, the appointed dwellers of hell will come to Him *the Almighty* singly and in groups.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…its keepers will ask every group…' (*al-Mulk:* 8), the 'keepers of Hell' are the angels including Malik and his associates. The same question is also mentioned in a verse of the chapter of *az-Zumar*, which reads: 'And those who disbelieve shall be driven to Hell in companies; until, when they come to it, its doors shall be opened, and the keepers of it shall say to them: Did there not come to you Messengers from among you reciting to you the communications of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours? They shall say: "Yea!" But the sentence of punishment was due against the disbelievers.' (*az-Zumar:* 71)

The keepers of hell ask the disbelievers reprovingly: 'Did there not come to you Messengers from among you reciting to you the communications of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?' (*az-Zumar:* 71) This question dumbfounds and overwhelms the disbelievers. Allah *the Almighty* does not seize the disbelievers suddenly when they were unaware. Rather, He sent for them Messengers from themselves, that is to say, they were humans like them and belong to the same milieus, so that they can easily model themselves on them.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Did no one come to warn you?' (*al-Mulk:* 8), we should state that the warnings given to the people during their lives are a clear token of Allah's Mercy towards His servants. The warners (i.e. the Messengers), including Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will bear witness that they conveyed the Divine Message to their people.

The Arabic word *an-nadheer* (a warner) refers to a person who tells about something bad that may happen in the future so that its causes can be avoided or prevented. The opposite of a warner is a giver of glad tidings who notifies of something good that will happen if the person does what it takes to obtain it. So, giving a warning and glad news are concerned with future occurrences. Warning implies intimidation and advice. For example, if you want your son to study hard, you will say to him, 'If you do not study hard, you will be as miserable and worthless as the son of so-and-so'. You warn him in order that he avoids the practices that lead him to school failure.

Warning and bringing glad tidings are intended for those who have free choice. Allah *the Almighty* tells us in this regard: '…and there is not a people but a warner has gone among them.' (*Fatir:* 24) A warner testifies that he conveyed the Divine Message to his community. All the prophets came as warners for their peoples, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And We had certainly sent Nuh (Noah) to his people, [saying], "Indeed, I am to you a clear warner."' (*Hud:* 25)

The prophets are givers of warnings as well as glad tidings. Those who believe shall receive the glad tidings. As for the disbelievers, they should expect the realisation of the warnings. So, to give a warning means to tell someone about something bad that will affect him in the future in order that he get ready to protect himself. On the other hand, giving glad tidings is about something promising and hopeful.

Through warning and giving glad tidings, all issues and aspects of the human being's life become clear. In Arabic, the word *bishara* (giving a glad tiding) denotes telling about something pleasant or unpleasant. But it is commonly used in the sense of telling pleasant news that will realise in the future. As for the act of warning, it is exclusively associated with telling about potential depressing and sad events, which is a blessing in itself. It, in fact, is one of the best favours that Allah *the Almighty* confers upon humans, for by virtue of which they can take their precautions. Such threatening, instruction and intimidation are intended to avoid what incurs punishment. There must be an interval between giving a warning and the realisation of the potential danger so that a person can properly take his precautions. Thus, warning means to advise someone against doing something that can harm him in the future. Allah's warning is directed to all people so that they can shun what leads them to hell. This implies the necessity of quitting one's faults before having good qualities. In other words, you should safeguard yourself against what causes you harm and then turn your attention to what is beneficial for you. This is based on the maxim that read: 'warding off harm takes precedence over the obtainment of benefit'. The warner forewarns against evil things before they occur, for giving such a warning at the time of their occurrence is pointless. The Prophets were sent to the humans and jinn as warners, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'O company of jinn and mankind, did there not come to you messengers from among you, relating to you My verses and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?' (*al-An'am:* 130) Hence, Allah *the Almighty* states that He has sent Messengers for both the jinn and mankind from among themselves. However, some scholars hold the view that the Messengers were all human beings because the Quran says on the jinn's tongues: '…indeed we have heard a [recited] Book revealed after Musa (Moses) confirming what was before it which guides to the truth and to a straight path.' (*al-Ahqaf:* 30). Here, the jinn argue that they knew about a Scripture that was revealed after Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. So, it seems that they receive their Message from the human Messengers. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* sent the prophets only from among the human beings, but their messages include the jinn as well.

Allah *the Almighty* sends prophets as warners so that people do not have any arguments or pleas, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: '[We sent] Messengers as bringers of good tidings and warners so that mankind will have no argument against Allah after the Messengers.' (*an-Nisa':* 165)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

قَالُواْ بَلَىٰ قَدۡ جَآءَنَا نَذِيرٞ فَكَذَّبۡنَا وَقُلۡنَا مَا نَزَّلَ ٱللَّهُ مِن شَيۡءٍ إِنۡ أَنتُمۡ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَٰلٖ كَبِيرٖ ٩

They will reply, 'Yes, a warner did come to us, but we did not believe him. We said, "God has revealed nothing: you are greatly misguided"' [9] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 9)

Allah *the Almighty* does not punish for crimes before revealing religious texts through the messengers that clearly criminalise them. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* does not penalise people for their wrongdoings except after being notified of His Message. None is excusable after having received the Message. The rationale of sending Prophets is to leave no room for pleas or argument by the people who received the divine messages through these prophets.

Here, after having been thrown into Hell, the disbelievers are asked: '…Did no one come to warn you?' (*al-Mulk:* 8) They will reply, 'Yea.' (*al-Mulk:* 9) The word *bala* (yea) is a particle like *na`am* (yes). The only difference between both is that *bala* is used to answer a question or a statement containing a negation to indicate that the opposite is true. *Bala,* unlike *na`am*, negates what is stated in a question. For example, if a person says to you, ‘You are not entitled to anything with me’ and you reply with ‘yes’, this means that what he says is true and you agree with him. But if you say, ‘Yea’, this means that you are entitled to something and disagree to his claim.

Once you say a negative statement and it is followed by the particle ‘*bala*’, you indicate that the opposite of the statement is true. So, it comes as an answer to a negative question. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…am I not your Lord?’ They said, “Yes…”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172), is a case in point. The adverb ‘Yes’ comes as an answer to the negative question and affirms the opposite of the question. That is, Allah *the Almighty* is their Lord.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And they swear by Allah their strongest oaths [that] Allah will not resurrect one who dies. But yes - [it is] a true promise [binding] upon Him.’ (*an-Nahl:* 38) The disbelievers deny Resurrection, swearing that Allah *Glorified is He* will not raise anyone from death. So, Allah *the Almighty* replies to them by the adverb ‘yes’ to negate their preceding statement and to affirm that He will resurrect those who die.

As for Allah’s saying in the verse in question: ‘They will reply, “Yes, a warner did come to us, but we did not believe him.” We said, “Allah has revealed nothing…”’ (*al-Mulk:* 9), the disbelievers admit that a warner came to them, but they rejected it. Allah *the Almighty* sent prophets to the people in different periods of times so that they would have no arguments against Him, saying: ‘…there came not to us any bringer of good tidings or a warner...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 19). Prophets already warned the people against the Day of Judgment, but the disbelievers utterly denied the Prophets and the revelation.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…but we did not believe him. We said, “Allah has revealed nothing…”’ (*al-Mulk:* 9), the denial of the truth is a detestable matter that denotes the rejection of the denier. It implies adopting a hostile stance and turning away from the Divine Way of Guidance. The disbelievers have three stages regarding rejecting belief: abandonment, denial, and derision. Abandonment is a negative response while denial is a positive one even though it runs counter to belief. As for derision, it exceeds the denial and embodies clashing with the believers. The disbelievers do not praise and exalt Allah *Glorified is He* as duly as required because they claim: '…Allah has revealed nothing…' (*al-Mulk:* 9).

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* also says, 'And they did not praise Allah with true praise when they said, "Allah did not reveal to a human being anything..."' (*al-An'am:* 91). So, Allah *Glorified is He* replies to those deniers: '…say, "Who revealed the Scripture that Musa (Moses) brought as light and guidance to the people?"...' (*al-An'am:* 91) The disbelievers denied that Allah *the Almighty* selected some of His servants to receive His Way of Guidance and communicate it to other people.

Some people of the Book were among those who claimed: '…Allah has revealed nothing…' (*al-Mulk:* 9). In Prophet Muhammad's biography, it is related that a rabbi called Malik ibn As-Sayf used to argue against Islam. While a rabbi should be an ascetic who devotes himself to knowledge and worship, he was obese as he used to overeat in contrast to other devoted rabbis. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that such a rabbi was in the habit of impugning Islam. So one day they met and he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'Is it true that the Torah says, "Allah hates the fat rabbi?" He stood thunderstruck and immediately said, 'Allah did not reveal to a human being anything', meaning that Allah did not reveal anything of what he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to a human. Thus, we know that such claims are made by the people of the Book.

After Malik ibn As-Sayf made this allegation, some Jews criticised him for his statement. He said to them, 'Muhammad infuriated me, so I had to respond to him by this falsehood.' Thereupon, they said, 'So you are not qualified for being a rabbi as you disgraced us.' They indeed deposed him and appointed Ka`b ibn Al-Ashraf as the new rabbi.(1)

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(1) In his *Tafsir,* As-Suyuti narrates this account and ascribes it to Ibn Jarir, Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of Sa`id ibn Jubayr who said, 'A Jew called Malik ibn As-Sayf came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and disputed with him. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, "I adjure you by the One who sent down the Torah upon Musa (Moses). Do you read in the Torah that Allah hates the fat rabbi?" Malik ibn As-Sayf was indeed an obese man. He was angered by the Messenger's question and said, "I swear that Allah did not reveal anything to a human." Thereupon, the companions of Malik ibn As-Sayf said to him, "Woe betide you! Even to Musa (Moses)?"' *See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 3/314.*

Allah *the Almighty* judges the disbelievers saying, '…you are not but in great error.' (*al-Mulk:* 9) The short clause 'You are not but' occurs in many Quranic verses, as in Allah's saying: 'And to `Ad [We sent] their brother Hud. He said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. You are not but inventors [of falsehood]."' (*Hud:* 50) This verse means they are fabricators of lies regarding worshipping idols besides Allah *Glorified is He*. Another related example is the verse reading: 'Their messengers said, "Can there be doubt about Allah, Creator of the heavens and earth? He invites you that He may forgive you of your sins, and He delays your death for a specified term." They said, "You are not but men like us."' (*Ibrahim:* 10) According to this verse, the opponents of the messengers argue that they are human beings like them, and thus they assume that the messengers have no advantage over them.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And We have certainly presented to the people in this Quran from every [kind of] example. But [O Muhammad], if you should bring them a sign, the disbelievers will surely say, "You [believers] are but falsifiers."'(*ar-Rum:* 58) Here, the disbelievers label Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Companions as liars and inventors of falsehoods. Thus, all the disbelievers accused the messengers who conveyed the Message of Allah *Glorified is He* of being liars. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says to these disbelievers: '…you are not but in great error.' (*al-Mulk:* 9)

The Arabic word *dalal* (error) means following a way that does not lead you to your desired destination. Those who deviate from the Right Path no longer have a guide. This word has several meanings: firstly, getting lost and perishing, a meaning which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And they say, "When we are lost within the earth, will we indeed be [recreated] in a new creation?" Rather, they are, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, disbelievers.' (*as-Sajda:* 10); secondly, not following the right way or not being righty guided as in the verse reading: 'And He found you lost and guided [you].' (*ad-Duha:* 7) It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying: 'Muhammad, you did not approve of idolatry like the people of Quraysh. So, you kept on searching for the sound Way of Guidance till Allah guided you and sent down upon you the Right Path. You were lost and looked for spiritual guidance and finally Allah conferred on you this great blessing'. Thirdly, swerving from the Right Path, after having recognised it, and adopting human approaches based on personal inclinations.

Deviation regarding worldly and material matters may not achieve your desired goal; rather, it may cause a greater evil. About deviation from the true religion, it does not only make you fail to attain your desired goal, namely paradise, but it also leads you to the opposite, hell. This is the manifest error.

So, deviation means that a person follows a route that does not lead to his desired goal. Each step a person takes towards his error keeps him away from this desired goal. This is called the extreme error or deviation.

This extreme error is extensive as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And whoever disbelieves in Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers and the Last Day has certainly gone far astray.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136) The phrase ‘gone far astray’ means that the person deviated from the Right Path and was misguided. Once a person strays from his desired goal, he is said to have swerved from the right path. As for one who ‘…has certainly gone far astray’ (*an-Nisa’:* 136), he is the person who sinks into the deep abyss of disbelief.

Misguidance is repairable whereas extreme error and sinking into the abyss of disbelief is irreparable. The error of the person who is involved in deviation from the Right Path will stop at the end of his life. On the other hand, misguiding and leading others astray elongates the effect of error beyond the person’s life. In other words, the error will outlive the one misleading himself as the succeeding generations inherit error from him.

Going astray is contrary to being rightly guided; the former means that a person does not follow the Path leading to the desired goal, while the latter denotes reaching the desired goal. Also, a person who is unaware of the true way that is conducive to the desired goal is in error. As for the disbeliever, he is the one who knows the True Path but goes astray. When Allah *the Almighty* talks about the disbelievers, He describes them as being engaged in extreme error. This is because they recognise the route to spiritual guidance, but they do not follow it. This is the apex of error.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…You are not but in great error.’ (*al-Mulk:* 9), their error is described as ‘great’ because the disbelievers excessively went stray from the Truth and Right Path.

Some exegetes are of the opinion that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…you are not but in great error.' (*al-Mulk:* 9) is among the words of the disbelievers themselves and that it functions as a supplement of their previous words: '…we said, 'Allah has revealed nothing…' (*al-Mulk:* 9). They went to say these words to their prophets: '…you are not but in great error.' (*al-Mulk:* 9)

Allah *the Almighty* mentions to us some similar statements in the Quran. For example, He says about Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him*: 'The people of Nuh (Noah) denied before them, and they denied Our servant and said, "A madman", and he was repelled.' (*al-Qamar:* 9) According to this verse, the people of Nuh (Noah) accused him of lunacy. Allah *the Almighty* also tells us about him: 'And he constructed the ship, and whenever an assembly of the eminent of his people passed by him, they ridiculed him. He said, "If you ridicule us, then we will ridicule you just as you ridicule."' (*Hud:* 38)

Nuh's (Noah's) people made fun of him and wondered how the ark could sail from Naynawa(1) to the sea, while there were no seas or rivers nearby. They did not realise that he *peace be upon him* knew that the floodwater would make the ark float and sail. They went as far as to say to him: '…indeed, we see you in clear error.' (*al-A'raf:* 60) They feared that the call Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* should be the Straight Path. So, they deluded themselves into believing that his call was a deviation from the Straight Path and project their error onto him.

Allah *the Almighty* then continues to relate what the disbelievers will say:

وَقَالُوا۟ لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِىٓ أَصْحَٰبِ ٱلسَّعِيرِ ﴿١٠﴾

They will say, 'If only we had listened, or reasoned,
we would not be with the inhabitants of the blazing fire' [10]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 10)

So, they confessed their error, saying, 'if we had minds to reason properly or listen carefully and meditatively to the Truth that Allah revealed, we would not have been with the inhabitants of the blazing Fire'. Some other scholars state that this verse means that if they had listened consciously or thought perceptively, they would not have been among the denizens of hell.

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(1) Naynawa is a governorate in the north of Iraq and its city centre is Mosul, the second largest city of Iraq. It is 402 km from Baghdad. The Mosque of Prophet Yunus (Jonah), located on a foothill, is one of the landmarks of the city.

Listening attentively and reasoning are among the ways of discernment and guidance. As for listening attentively, it is directed at what Allah *the Almighty* revealed to the Prophets, while reasoning helps a person recognise facts and attain to faith. Thus, it is as if the disbelievers' means of discernment broke down. Their ears were deaf to listen to the call to the Right Path; their tongues failed to express what was within their hearts; and their eyes were blind to Allah's signs in the universe. Hence, their faculties of spiritual discernment were broken-down. Allah *the Almighty* describes such disbelievers, saying: 'The example of those who disbelieve is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries cattle or sheep - deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand.' (*al-Baqara:* 171) There is something that obstructed their ears and made them deaf, for if a person does not hear, he does not speak. Ears help one to hear what is useful, but their ears cannot hear the call guidance, so they seemed to be out of order.

The mind helps one to think, but if a person does not think properly and logically, he will seem to be mindless. A deaf person is better than another person who has the sense of hearing but does not understand. This is because the person who is born deaf or dumb is excusable, and so is the mad person.

Reasoning occurs after one listens carefully and uses his faculties. As a matter of fact, the primary constitution of the human being is kinetic and sensory; he sees, hears, and tastes. Then, he formulates his rational thoughts. The fact that the disbelievers do not hear does not mean that their ears are out of order. Actually, they listen with their ears but do not understand that to which they listen. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says about them: '…so what is [the matter] with those people that they can hardly understand any statement?' (*an-Nisa':* 78) When you say, 'So-and-so does not understand', this means that his mind is hindered from understanding. But if you say, 'So-and-so can hardly understand', this means that such a person almost does not understand. Thinking and employing the mind lead to understanding. So, when the disbelievers do not understand, we wonder at their lack of understanding because the matter put forward is intelligible. Understanding is to have the faculty of comprehending what is said to you. So, it is the first stage, while knowledge is the second one. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Have they not travelled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts.’ (*al-Hajj:* 46)

Does a person understand with his heart? As we know, our minds are in our brains, while our hearts are in our breasts. Any person has means of perception, namely; the senses which receive what is tangible like eyesight and touching. When a person perceives things through his senses, his mind intervenes to filter them and choose what is suitable among them. After the mind decides on and compares between the alternatives, it reaches the judgment of which a person is convinced. This final judgment does not require further perception or choosing between alternatives.

In addition to choosing and comparing between alternatives, reason has other functions: it prevents a person from wrongdoing and safeguards him against falling into labyrinths. Some people hold the erroneous belief that the intellect entails freedom of thought and thus gives free rein to one’s ideas. In fact, the opposite is true. Linguistically, the Arabic word *`aql* (intellect) is derived from the word *`iqal* which means a hobble with which a camel is tied to prevent it from running away. So, the intellect does not mean that you indulge yourself excessively in your thoughts; rather, it functions as a regulator and controller of your thoughts and behaviour. It says to you, ‘Consider your ideas carefully. Do not let your own inclinations influence your ideas so that you do what is correct and say what is proper’.

The disbelievers subjected themselves to their errors and unsound personal inclinations. They do not listen to Allah’s Guidance in a useful, reasonable, and deliberate way that stops them from falling into disbelief and error. As they do not listen thoughtfully or meditate, they deserved to be among the denizens of the blazing fire. What is more, the Satan himself entraps them and leads them to that catastrophic fate, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Indeed, Satan is an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy. He only invites his party to be among the companions of the Blaze.’ (*Fatir:* 6)

The disbelievers will be among the companions of the blaze as if there is intimacy between both. Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse under discussion: '…would not be with the inhabitants of the blazing fire.' (*al-Mulk:* 10) Here, Allah *the Almighty* uses the Arabic preposition *fi* (in), instead of *min* (among), to indicate that those mentioned in the verse are in the centre of hell, while its other dwellers surround them. We conclude this from the connotation of the preposition *fi*. But why do these disbelievers deserve being in the centre of hell, while other dwellers are around them?!

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَٱعۡتَرَفُواْ بِذَنۢبِهِمۡ فَسُحۡقٗا لِّأَصۡحَٰبِ ٱلسَّعِيرِ ﴿١١﴾

And they will confess their sins. Away with
the inhabitants of the blazing fire! [11]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 11)

The companions of the blazing fire confess to doing their sins and wrongdoings. As a matter of fact, confession is the strongest evidence. Allah *the Almighty* refers to their admission in other verses, saying: 'And their declaration when Our punishment came to them was only that they said, "Indeed, we were wrongdoers!"' (*al-A'raf:* 5); 'They said, "O woe to us! Indeed, we were wrongdoers."' (*al-Anbiya':* 14) They wronged themselves by disbelieving in Allah *Glorified is He* as He says in another verse: 'Lest a soul should say, "Oh [how great is] my regret over what I neglected in regard to Allah."' (*az-Zumar:* 56)

Allah *the Almighty* also tells us about another kind of people, saying: 'And [there are] others who have acknowledged their sins. They had mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. Perhaps Allah will turn to them in forgiveness. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.' (*at-Tawba:* 102) This verse shows that those people confessed their sins and did not persist in hypocrisy and disbelief. On the contrary, the disbelievers and hypocrites only admit their sins when facing the punishment of hell. In the verse in question, they confessed to only one sin, namely, disbelief, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And they will confess their sin…' (*al-Mulk:* 11). About Allah's saying: '…others who have acknowledged their sins…' (*at-Tawba:* 102), it refers to multiple sins though those who committed them were believers. So, the word ‘sin’ comes in the plural form ‘sins’ because they are different from one another.

Confessing sins is of two types: penitence-based confession and brazenness-based confession. The example of the second type is to ask someone else, ‘Did you hit so-and-so?’ and that person says, ‘Yes, I did’, and brazenly adds, ‘I will also hit any person trying to defend him’. As for the first type, which is accepted by Allah *the Almighty* it denotes that a person admits a sin and asks for pardon. Accordingly, the verse reading: ‘…others who have acknowledged their sins…’ (*at-Tawba:* 102), refers to a confession based on penitence. This is also supported by Allah’s saying: ‘…they had mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad...’ (*at-Tawba:* 102). The ‘righteous deed’ denotes here their admission of their sin and recognising that their confession in the worldly life is less serious than their confession in the Hereafter. The bad deed here is desisting from jihad and spending money charitably. So, their confession is based on penitence.

One of the admissions of the disbelievers is stated in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘If you asked them, “Who created the heavens and earth and subjected the sun and the moon?” they would surely say, “Allah.” Then how are they deluded?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 61) The question of creation is so clear that none should deny it. So, the disbelievers answer here by saying: ‘…Allah…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 61). This acknowledgement obliges the believers to thank Allah *Glorified is He* and say to themselves, ‘Thanks to Allah! The disbelievers have recognised this indubitable fact. Thanks to Allah Who made them tell the truth and thus He showed the argument that refuted their disbelief’. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says at the end of the verse: ‘…Then how are they deluded?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 61) How do they turn their backs on Him *Glorified is He* and the truth after such an acknowledgement?

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And they will confess their sin…’ (*al-Qalam:* 11). Now, what is the point of this admission? How does it benefit the confessors, while they face the final Reckoning? Such an admission is similar to that of Pharaoh before he drowned: ‘…I believe that there is no deity except that in whom the Children of Israel believe…’ (*Yunus:* 90). So, Allah *the Almighty* replies to him: ‘Now?! And you had disobeyed [Him] before and were of the corrupters?’ (*Yunus:* 91)

Pharaoh disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* and disobeyed His commands. How did he acknowledge Resurrection and final Judgment, while he only committed the acts of disbelief and disobedience? Moreover, he used to deny what Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* conveyed to him.

Even if the human soul has its own desires, its sound state of mind makes it feel sorry when its owner commits a sin or an act of disobedience. Thus, we see a lot of people suffer from troubles because of their sins. They want to confess these sins before anyone. But those who receive confession are unable to eliminate the aftereffects of these sins as they have already happened. What does a person who admits his sin before someone else want? A person confesses to unbosom himself. Each activity a person does can have an effect. For example, when someone provokes your anger, you tend to retaliate. Thus, Islam orders one to shift his position when someone else infuriates him. So, regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And they will confess their sin…' (*al-Mulk:* 11), those disbelievers admitted their guilt the moment when they are at their wits' end. They will say, 'Unless Allah has mercy on us and forgives us, we will be destroyed'. This indicates their confession to their sin and turning to Allah *Glorified is He* for help.

Their sin is their denial of Allah's Existence, which is the gravest sin. To such people, it will be said, '…Away with the inhabitants of the blazing Fire.' (*al-Mulk:* 11) This means they are excluded from the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, their final fate is loss and wretchedness. How miserable and destructible they are! They will lose His reward and be punished with the blazing fire that will burn their bodies. For them, the reward and Mercy of Allah are unattainable.

The Arabic word s*uhqan* (destruction) is in the accusative case as a verbal noun and it means that Allah *Glorified is He* inflicted upon them great destruction. Allah *the Almighty* also says, '…then away with the wrongdoing people.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 41) So, the wrongdoing people will not obtain the Mercy and Bliss of Allah *the Almighty* which they are promised in case they believe in Him. This does not mean that they are far above being punished. Distance can be in time or place. So, to say, 'this is remote or distant' means that it is far away in time or place. What is meant here is that they will not attain the bliss that awaits them in case they believe, and they are not far away from the punishment. Allah *the Almighty* also says, '…so away with a people who do not believe.' (*an-Nur:* 44) This verse means that the disbelievers are away from Allah's Mercy and Bliss which they would attain in case they believe. He who turns away from Allah *Glorified is He* He makes him more distant once and for all.

In the same vein, concerning the people of Hud, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And they were [therefore] followed in this world with a curse and [as well] on the Day of Resurrection. Unquestionably, `Ad denied their Lord; then away with `Ad, the people of Hud.' (*Hud:* 60) The people of Hud deserved the destruction and punishment inflicted on them and none pitied them because of their grave sin. The phrase 'away with' does not denote an imprecation against the people of Hud because they had already been ruined. The root of the Arabic word *bu`d* (away with) is *b-a-d* (to be far away). It is used for separation that is either followed by a meeting or not. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…then, away with Midyan as Thamud was taken away.' (*Hud:* 95) Remoteness meant by this verse denotes separation that is not followed by a meeting except when Allah *Glorified is He* gathers all mankind on the Day of Judgment. A poet wrote:

They say while burying me, 'Do not go away';
But that is the only distant place I will settle at.

The grave is the faraway place a person goes to and never returns. In the same vein, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will say on the Day of Judgment to those who deviate from the Way of Allah and change the religious matters, 'Be off with you'. He said to his companions, 'I will reach the fountain ahead of you.' They said, 'O Messenger of Allah, how will you recognise those of your *ummah* who have not yet come?' He said, 'If a man has a horse with a blaze on its forehead and white feet, do you not think that he will recognise it among horses that are deep black in colour?' They said, 'Of course.' He said, 'On the Day of Resurrection, they will come with radiant faces, hands, and feet because of the traces of ablution.' He said, 'I will reach the fountain ahead of you.' Then he said, 'Men will be driven away from my fountain just as stray camels are driven away. And I will call to them, "Come here!" But it will be said, "They changed after you were gone, and they kept turning on their heels." So I will say, "Be off with you! Be off with you!"'(1) Some exegetes state that as-suhq is a valley in hell in which fire is kindled and its dwellers will be the companions of the blazing fire.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَخۡشَوۡنَ رَبَّهُم بِٱلۡغَيۡبِ لَهُم مَّغۡفِرَةٞ وَأَجۡرٞ كَبِيرٞ ١٢

there is forgiveness and a great reward for those
who fear their Lord though they cannot see Him [12]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 12)

The true believer fears Allah *the Almighty* Alone because he knows for certain that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Omnipotent. So, when he embarks on something, he fears none except Him. Everyone must fear Him and put His Way of Guidance into practice.

The Arabic word *khashya* (fear) means to fear someone who is able to harm you. As no one but Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to bring benefit or cause harm, a person should not fear someone like him. So, it is not true to think that a ruler or someone in power is able to harm you. Let everyone fear Allah *Glorified is He* Alone as He instructs us to dread Him.

Hence, as Allah is the One Who causes harm, He orders us to fear Him. Out of veneration and exaltation, the believers fear Him because He is their Lord and Creator. You may fear something, while you hate or despise it, whereas when you fear Him *the Almighty* you hold Him in awe and veneration.

An example of awe is to fear that your father or teacher should see you neglect your duties. As for dreading Allah *the Almighty* it means your fear that you may fall short of doing the obligations Allah *the Almighty* imposes on you. It is the pious people who fear their Lord even though they cannot see Him, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'We gave Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron) [the Scripture] that distinguishes right from wrong, a light and a reminder for those who are mindful of Allah, those who stand in awe of their Lord, though He is unseen, and who fear the Hour.' (*al-Anbiya':* 48-49)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4306; see also Malik, Muwatta`, Hadith no. 72; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 9292.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…though they cannot see Him…' (*al-Mulk:* 12), it means that the believers fear Him *the Almighty* though they do not see Him with their eyes, but rather through the signs of His Creation. Another possible interpretation is that they fear Him *Glorified is He* through the unseen things about which He informs them. Thus, these unseen matters became as clear to them as what they see with their eyes. Moreover, the verse could mean that the believers fear Him *the Almighty* when they are alone. They dread Him even when they are in solitude, unlike those who pretend to be Allah fearing only before others.

Those who stand in awe of their Lord though He is unseen also: '…fear the Hour.' (*al-Anbiya':* 49) The Arabic word *al-ishfaq* means 'fear,' which is accompanied by being cautious about what you fear. Hence, fearing Allah *the Almighty* is associated with awe and reverence while dreading the Hour is accompanied by being cautious about it, lest it should take place before one prepares oneself fully for it. Dread is a strong fear of something. The person can fear something, but he hopes for salvation and protection against it. That is to say that he hopes that there is a chance to avert what he fears. But your dread of Allah *the Almighty* leaves no room for hope. So, if you fear His punishment, you should not think that there is a chance to escape from it if you do what incurs it.

Fear is of two categories which are referred to in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and you feared the people, while Allah has more right that you fear Him…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37). The first category is your fear of something that may harm you, and the second one is the fear which is provoked by diffidence. The fear of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stated in Allah's saying: '…and you feared the people…' (*al-Ahzab:* 37) is provoked by diffidence. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, '…surely this gives the Prophet trouble, but he forbears from you, and Allah does not forbear from the truth…' (*al-Ahzab:* 53). He *peace and blessings be upon him* was afraid that the disbelievers should spread rumours about him and say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* married the wife of his adopted son. But it slipped their minds that Allah *the Almighty* abolished adoption.

It is normal that he *peace and blessings be upon him* fears the slanders of the disbelievers because he came to change the bad traditions and customs of the pre-Islamic period. He *peace and blessings be upon him* was destined to bear the consequences of this transformation as it was carried out by him. He was shy about his marriage to Zaynab, the ex-wife of his adopted son, and the gossip of the people and thus wanted to clear himself of anything dishonourable. He always disproved any doubts about him.

Once, some of his companions saw him meeting a woman. They walked quickly so that they would not embarrass him. He called them and said, 'Wait! This is my wife Safiyya.' They said, 'We never have any misgivings about you, O Messenger of Allah.' He said, 'Satan's evil suggestions run through the mind of the son of Adam as blood runs [through his body].'(1) He *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to eliminate any suspects concerning him so that no one would assume that he concealed something wrong about himself. Thus, his fear was not about anything that might harm him; rather, it was based on his diffidence as he desired to refute any suspicions about him.

The prophets never feared to convey anything from Allah *the Almighty*. So, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that Messenger Muhammad's fear was not due to conveying the Message; rather, it was due to his diffidence about the rumours that might circulate concerning him. In fact, he knows for sure that they cannot harm him in anyway. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* describes all His prophets, saying: '[Allah praises] those who convey the messages of Allah and fear Him and do not fear anyone but Allah. And sufficient is Allah as Accountant.' (*al-Ahzab:* 39)

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(1) *It was narrated that Safiyya Bint Huyayy, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, went to him while he was staying in the mosque during the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan. She spoke to him for a while at night and then she got up to return home. Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him got up to accompany her and when they reached the gate of the mosque opposite the dwelling place of Um Salama, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, two Ansari men passed by and greeted Messenger Muhammad, then they quickly went ahead. He peace and blessings be upon him said to them, 'Do not be in a hurry. She is Safiyya, the daughter of Huyayy.' They said, 'Exalted is Allah! O Allah's Messenger (how dare we suspect you).' That was a great thing for both them. He peace and blessings be upon him then said, 'Satan runs in the body of the sons of Adam as his blood circulates in it, and I was afraid that he (Satan) might insert an evil thought in your hearts.' See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 26863; see also Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1779.*

The believers dread their Lord though He is unseen. The unseen is what cannot be perceived by the means of perception. None differs over the concrete things we notice with our senses. So, it is said, ‘There is no evidence besides the eyes’. As for the unseen, it is not perceived with the senses. They, the believers, fear Allah, their Lord and Creator, as a token of veneration and exaltation for Him. The wise believers also fear the evil Reckoning in the Hereafter, and thus they strain every nerve to follow Allah’s Commands and shun all what provokes His Anger.

So, Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘But there is forgiveness and a great reward for those who fear their Lord though they cannot see Him.’ (*al-Mulk:* 12) Fearing Him *the Almighty* leads a servant to join those who are referred to in Allah’s saying: ‘Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 35)

But for one’s fear of Allah *the Almighty* and recalling His punishment and reward, he would not be a devout, truthful, patient, humble, benevolent, fasting, and chaste Muslim. For such a Muslim, ‘Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 35) After all these characteristics of the Muslim, he needs forgiveness. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* purges the believer of sins before he receives his final reward.

This final reward is abundant and great. Any reward a person gets in this worldly life for an achievement lasts for a specified time and comes to an end. By contrast, the reward of the Hereafter lasts forever, and a believer will not miss it. Thus, it is described as ‘great’. Anything is given or done for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* never gets lost, as He says, ‘…and whatever good you send before for yourselves, you shall find it with Allah; surely Allah sees what you do...’ (*al-Baqara:* 110).

Every believer should feel reassured that he will be rewarded for each good deed he does. When he performs Prayer, pays *zakat,* gives alms, fasts, or performs Pilgrimage, he obtains a reward for all this. The reward a believer gets is not according to the actual amount or value of the good deed; rather, it is doubled too many times. It also depends on the Power of Allah *the Almighty* not the human abilities. Furthermore, this reward is not transient; on the contrary, it is eternal.

You do not keep the reward for the righteous deeds with yourself or with someone else who may deny it one day. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who saves it for you. So, you should be confident that Allah *the Almighty* will multiply your reward for you many times so that you will find it when you are in a dire need for it, that is, on the Day of Judgment.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَأَسِرُّوا۟ قَوْلَكُمْ أَوِ ٱجْهَرُوا۟ بِهِۦٓ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿١٣﴾

Whether you keep your words secret or state them openly, He knows the contents of every heart [13] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 13)

How do you call your Lord who is closer to you than your jugular vein?! How do you call Him while He hears you before you speak a word?! If Allah *the Almighty* is Ever-Watchful over you, what is the purpose of calling Him? Your calling of others differs from invoking Allah *Glorified is He*. You need to raise your voice to make others hear you, but when you call Him *the Almighty* you supplicate to the One Who knows the public and private matters alike. One of the approved of practices of supplication is to invoke Him as He instructs us, saying: ‘Call upon your Lord in humility and privately...’ (*al-A‘raf:* 55). He *the Almighty*: ‘…knows the secret and what is [even] more hidden.’ (*Ta Ha:* 7) So, Allah *Glorified is He* knows what is more hidden than secrets because He knows the secret before it becomes so.

Allah *the Almighty* teaches us that the best supplication is that which is private and covert. Perhaps a person invokes Him *the Almighty* aloud and someone else hears the supplication and thus disparages him, as the person may confess his sins in his supplication. Thus, the supplication should be private so that one’s personal affairs will not be known by others. After all, Allah *the Almighty* likes concealing people’s faults even if they are sinners.

Sometimes a pious person invokes Allah *the Almighty* and pleads Him for something private. The supplication of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* is a case in point. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘This is a mention of the Mercy of your Lord to His servant Zakaryya (Zechariah). When he addressed his Lord with private supplication, He said, “My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened, and my head has filled with white, and never have I been in my supplication to You, my Lord, unhappy. And indeed, I fear the successors after me, and my wife has been barren, so give me from Yourself an heir Who will inherit me and inherit from the family of Ya`qub (Jacob). And make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You].”’ (*Maryam:* 1-6)

Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* invoked Allah *the Almighty* in private because he asked Him *Glorified is He* to bestow a child on him despite the presence of his paternal cousins who would be in charge of his righteous path after his demise. But he had no confidence in them because their lifestyles were inconsistent with his approach. So, how could he *peace be upon him* entrust them with the Path of Allah *the Almighty,* while they could not be entrusted with themselves? If he *peace be upon him* had invoked Allah *the Almighty* in public to grant him a male child to inherit prophethood from him, his relatives would have showed enmity towards him. Therefore, he invoked Him *Glorified is He* in private.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And if you speak aloud - then indeed, He knows the secret and what is [even] more hidden.’ (*Ta Ha:* 7) As Allah *the Almighty* knows what is overt and secret, He is also fully Aware of what is more hidden. To say something aloud means to let others hear you, while what the secret means what is known about by a limited number of people and kept hidden from others.

So, whether you speak publicly or privately, ‘…He knows the contents of every heart. (*al-Mulk:* 13) This verse means that Allah *the Almighty* knows your innermost thoughts and feelings before you express them. Moreover, He says, ‘And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him...’ (*Qaf:* 16). Misgivings and innermost thoughts are more hidden than secrets. Therefore, we have what is public, what is secret, and what is more hidden than secrets. In the same vein, He *the Almighty* says, 'And your Lord knows what their breasts conceal and what they declare.' (*al-Qasas:* 69) 'Indeed, He knows what is declared of speech, and He knows what you conceal.' (*al-Anbiya':* 110)

As for Allah's saying: '…knows the contents of every heart' (*al-Mulk:* 13), it means what stays at and accompanies the breasts. One keeps his inner thoughts hidden from others within his breast as he keeps the secrets of his friend. The same phrase also denotes the inner feelings that always exist in hearts such as hatred, spite or the senses that do not appear through ordinary actions such as good or bad intentions.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ ٱللَّطِيفُ ٱلْخَبِيرُ ﴿١٤﴾

How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware? [14] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 14)

Allah's Way of Guidance is the most optimal and appropriate way as it comes from the Creator Who knows best about His creations. For example, a human maker is supposed to know best about the object he makes and gives a set of instructions for its operation and maintenance. This, in turn, guarantees good performance and safe use. If you use your machine according to the rules and instructions of its maker, it will carry out its functions accurately and efficiently and be devoid of any failures or breakdowns. Similarly, the One Who created the human beings is more acquainted with the do's and do not's of reforming them. The big problem with the people, who are created by Allah *the Almighty* is that they renounce His Laws and derive their laws from other humans. This is even though these man-made laws are defective and can never be on an equal footing with those of Allah *the Almighty*. His Laws are superior to any man-made ones.

So, life cannot be sound and optimal without Allah's Way of Guidance. Whoever adopts this Divine Way will enjoy optimal life and the well-being of belief. This in itself is a great bestowal that one obtains in this worldly life. On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* informs us of what is better than this worldly bestowal, that is, the bliss of the Hereafter. So, Allah *the Almighty* grants us the bliss of this worldly life and that of the Hereafter together.

In fact, you enjoy blissful life in case you follow Allah's moderate and precise approach. It ensures righteousness, peace, and secure coexistence with others. This is corroborated by the following Quranic verses: 'And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance – there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 38); '…then whoever follows My Guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the Hereafter].' (*Ta Ha:* 123); Whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life, and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did.' (*an-Nahl:* 97)

Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of everything about mankind and does not involve them in a labyrinth. He says to us: 'How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk:* 14) Let us give an example to clarify this point; a chair maker knows well that the chair is made of wood, be it beech, oak or mahogany and that the nail that joins parts together is made out of steel or another metal. Also, the chair maker knows which kind of glue is used to stick the parts of the chair and the paint materials with which the chair is painted.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk:* 14), is indisputable. Let us offer another example; the carpenter who wants to display his product would tell a customer, 'I will make a chair for you out of beech and you should pass by me every day to see the stages of making the chair'. Then the chair maker begins to make the chair under the supervision of the customer. Likewise, a nomadic Bedouin knows how to make a saddle or a tent.

Allah *the Almighty* states what refutes any arguments and polemics based on premises and conclusions in His decisive saying: 'How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk:* 14) Allah *the Almighty* is the Omniscient Whose Knowledge encompasses everything, and it is He Who created all the human beings and thus He knows best about the laws most suitable for them.

According to our human traditions, the person who makes an object lays down the code of its maintenance so that it functions properly. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* Who created humankind laid down the code of their maintenance through do's and do not's. That is why He says, 'How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?' (*al-Mulk:* 14) For example, one takes his watch and goes to the watchmaker who examines the watch, identifies its problem, and repairs it. This is what we do to repair a watch, so what about the human being? It is Allah *the Almighty* Who lays down the Laws that reform our lives because He is our Creator; thereby, He is fully Aware of what is good and what is bad for us.

The prevailing corruption in our worldly life is ascribable to the fact that people who are firmly convinced that Allah *Glorified is He* created them lay down laws far from His Way of Guidance. We say to them, 'Let the Creator of mankind lay down for you the code of your maintenance through do's and do not's. If the humans want to make laws, they should do that in the light of the Divine Way of Guidance. In this way, if a failure or problem arises, a person should remit it to the code of the maintenance of the Supreme Creator, namely; the Quran'.

Troubles result from the fact that the human being sometimes ignores that he is a creature of Allah's and thus tries to make laws far removed from His Laws. Thus, what eliminates the sufferings of humanity is to return to the code of its maintenance which the Supreme Creator laid down.

In our daily life, we find that a person makes a device, machine or tool and other people make use of it. Such a person clarifies the specifications of using the device or the machine even if it is a thresher or plough. By following these instructions, the device or the machine will work properly and smoothly.

In the same connection, if a person's car breaks down, he calls a mechanic to examine and mend it. If the mechanic is honest, he will diagnose the problem with the car correctly and repairs it. If he is dishonest, he will damage the parts that work well and increase maintenance works which the car does not need.

Thus, we see that every maker knows well about his product. So, what do we think of the Great Creator *Glorified is He* Who is fully Acquainted with everything? Knowledge is required because a maker who produces something must be aware of what is good and bad for it. This also necessitates the ability of comprehension, for knowledge alone is insufficient.

Every maker is aware of his own product and he alone lays down the code of its maintenance. As regards Allah’s Way of Guidance, which is composed of do’s and do not’s, it allows of neither addition nor modification. You must adopt it as it is. If the human beings go beyond the framework which He *the Almighty* provides for them, they will cause a great deal of corruption and disorder in the universe through disobeying the commands and committing the prohibitions. As every maker knows well about the minute details of his product and what causes its ruin, Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of what is good and bad for the human beings and He laid down His Laws accordingly.

The maker of a product provides a manual along with it to show how to maintain it. The first failure in the universe is done at the hands of the people who desire to lay down a code of maintenance by themselves. This is wrong because the one who makes laws for others must meet certain conditions. The most important condition is that the lawmaker must have extensive knowledge that allows of no further amendments. As for the humans, their knowledge is limited and often proves unsuitable, wrong, and rectifiable. Only the Laws of Allah *the Almighty* cannot be amended or corrected because of His Omniscience. Moreover, all the humans are equal before Him and He does not favour a group of them over others. He has no wife or children. That is why Allah *the Almighty* reassures us, saying: ‘And that He— Exalted be the Majesty of our Lord— has not taken a consort, nor a son.’ (*al-Jinn:* 3) It seems as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us: ‘Be reassured that your Lord has neither a wife who can influence Him nor a child to favour him’. After all, the wife and children can be a weakness point and lead to deviations regarding legislation.

Allah *the Almighty* does not get benefit from what He legislates for us as He created us with His Power and He does not derive benefit from people’s obedience, nor is He harmed by our disobedience. Consequently, it is Allah *the Almighty* Alone Who fulfils the conditions of lawgiving and is entitled to it.

Allah *the Almighty* Alone has the right to lawgiving as He is the Omniscient, the Fully Aware Who knows best about everything, be it visible or invisible.

All knowledge comes from Him and it makes Him create everything wisely. Allah *the Almighty* also knows about the mysteries and subtleties of humankind since His Knowledge is intrinsic.

If the humans derive their laws from Allah's Knowledge, the whole world will be in harmony. Allah *Glorified is He* is Fully Aware of the mysteries of His servants and their natural characteristics. He knows from eternity about all human actions and mysteries and what is beneficial for mankind at all times and in all places.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Allah is He Who created you from a state of weakness then He gave strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and hoary hair after strength; He creates what He pleases, and He is the Knowing, the Powerful.' (*ar-Rum:* 54) As for Allah's saying here: '…and He is the Knowing, the Powerful.' (*ar-Rum:* 54), it means that creation is based on Knowledge, but Knowledge alone is not enough. You may have knowledge, but you are unable to put it into practice. For example, an electrical engineer can have a lot of information about his field but he may be unable to install an electric grid or an electric plant. So he asks a financer to help him install the grid or the electric plant. About Allah, He describes Himself as the All Knowing and the All Powerful as in the two verses reading: 'Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons. Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren; surely, He is the Knowing, the Powerful.' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50)

Allah *the Almighty* is All Knowledgeable about the laws He made for the human beings and is Fully Able to enforce these laws. Allah *Glorified is He* is the Subtle as He says, 'Vision comprehends Him not, and He Comprehends (all) vision; and He is the Knower of subtleties, the Aware.' (*al-An'am:* 103) As believers, we believe that Allah *the Almighty* can never be seen with eyes, yet He knows about everything hidden from you.

There are certain things in the universe which we do not perceive. However, Allah *the Almighty* created them for our benefit. Even when you manage to discover them, they continue to be at your service. If Allah *the Almighty* tells you about something unseen by you, you should not say, 'As such a thing is unperceivable, it does not exist'. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; you cannot see electricity or gravity. Further, none knows the place of the spirit which is the ever-unsolved mystery of life and if it exits from your body, you become dead. No one sees, hears, smells, tastes, or touches this spirit. It is present in your entire body but you do not notice it. Thus, if you are unable to see one of the creatures of Allah *the Almighty* then how is it possible for you to see the Creator? If you should see Him, He would not be a God because in this case He becomes the object of your senses.

The Arabic word *latif* (Subtle) has many connotations. It may refer to something minute. For example, we have discovered microbes only recently because they are too tiny to be seen with the naked eye. When the microscope was invented, we became able to see these microbes. The more minute something is, the more difficult it is to be seen. Also, the subtler a thing is, the nobler it becomes. So, we can say, 'Allah is Subtle and Kind towards His servants'.

So, the Arabic word *latif* (kind) is an active participle like *akil* (eater). When this adjective is used regarding Allah *the Almighty* it denotes an intensiveness form as Allah *the Almighty* is All Kind towards all the humans and all the creatures. Also, the Divine Attribute 'Most Merciful' expresses intensiveness because His Mercy encompasses all His servants.

The first form of the Subtlety and Grace of Allah *the Almighty* is clear in managing people's delicate matters in a way that serves their interests in this worldly life. If we, for example, want to bring a glass of water for every person, we will need to exert a lot of effort. What do we think about Allah's management of all His servants needs?

Allah *the Almighty* created the earth and made three quarters of its area consist of bodies of water while the remaining quarter is land. He willed to increase the area of water so that evaporation would be easier and more. If water was deep and its area was small, evaporation would be at a superficial level only. Thereupon, clouds will not bring the rainwater sufficient for all creatures. So, Allah *the Almighty* increased the area of the bodies of water so that water would evaporate and form clouds in the sky and then rain would fall as fresh water over a cold area in order that its dwellers drink, water their cattle, and irrigate their crops thereof.

There are other indescribable forms of the Subtlety of Allah. So, each scholar looks at one of the aspects of Allah's Kindness and Mercy towards His creatures. These aspects are as follows: plentiful and wide-ranging bestowals; precise management; conferring numberless blessings upon all creatures as Allah's Favours are numerous and never run out or decrease.

So, the manifestations of Allah's Subtlety and Kindness are innumerable. He is the All Subtle Who answers your invocations when you supplicate Him, Who gives you protection when you seek refuge with Him, Who favours you when you love Him, Who rewards you generously when you obey Him, Who grants you well-being and care when you give charity and interest-free loans and Who calls you when you turn away from Him.

A scholar impressed by Allah's Subtlety and Kindness said, 'The Subtle One is the One Who rewards you when you fulfil your obligations and pardons you when you are negligent.' Another scholar added to the meaning of Subtlety and Kindness by saying, 'He who takes pride in Him will be honoured; he who shows his need for Him will be self-sufficient.' A third scholar referred yet to an additional form of Subtlety, saying, 'Allah's Bestowals are forms of goodness and His withholding of Favours are kept in reserve for the person in the Hereafter.' All of these are forms of His Subtlety and Kindness.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes Himself as: '…the Most Subtle, the All Aware.' (*al-Mulk:* 14) He is the Most Subtle as He knows what permeates things, the All-Aware of everything and the All Powerful over everything. Allah *the Almighty* also says: '…my Lord is Most Subtle in achieving what He wills; He is the All Knowing, the Truly Wise.' (*Yusuf:* 100) Allah *the Almighty* is the Manager from Whom nothing is hidden.

The Arabic word *lutf* (fineness) is the opposite of *kathafa* (density). As for the adjective *latif*, it refers to the tiny objects. The tinier an object is, the more intense it is since there are no obstacles in its way.

Nothing hampers Allah *the Almighty* Who knows best about the whereabouts of all things. So He combines Subtlety and Acquaintance. Being Subtle, Allah *the Almighty* is never hindered by anything. Nothing can be hidden from Him or stand against His Will.

In fact, Allah’s Knowledge is absolute, and He is All Wise as He manages all the affairs for subtle purposes. None can add to or decrease anything from His Knowledge or Wisdom and He is the Possessor of Unlimited Perfection. Further, He is the All-Aware Whose Knowledge encompasses everything.

An expert differs from a scholar; the latter knows general matters, while the former is a trained specialist. So, the two Attributes ‘the Most Subtle and the All-Aware’ are often used together since ‘the All-Aware’ denotes knowledge about the positions of things whereas ‘the Most Subtle’ means knowing how to reach these positions. For example, you can know that a person hides in a mountain. But mere knowledge is not enough to reach the whereabouts of the hiding person. What is needed in this situation are subtlety and accuracy. So, we depend upon an expert who knows about mysterious matters, particularly the important, mundane ones. About a normal specialist, he is unable to know such mysterious matters. An expert has a lot of accurate information. Thus, it is said, ‘Ask the one who is well-versed’. So, the expert is a person who is well-informed about things.(1)

Subtlety and meticulousness mean to handle matters and come to good results even if your means are limited. As we said earlier, the tinier the harmful objects are the stronger and more effective they are. For example, the metal bars you fix into your windows to protect yourself against wolves are different from those you fix to protect yourself against snakes, mosquitoes, flies and so on. We also note that the most deadly diseases result from microscopic viruses.

The proper handling of matters means to attain your goals regardless of their complexity. For example, you may need to insert your hand into a narrow object to take out something inside it. If you fail, you can ask a little boy whose hand is smaller than yours are to help you take out the thing you want. If this fails, you can use a gadget for this purpose.

To sum up, the attribute ‘subtle’ is complemented by the attribute ‘aware’. The former means being meticulous and precise about dealing with matters and the latter denotes being well informed about a situation. Having subtle knowledge is only achieved by having a practical experience.

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(1) Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘…so ask about Him one well informed.’ (*al-Furqan:* 59) To say, ‘So-and-so is well-versed in such a matter’ means that he is well-more informed about this matter than someone else.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَرْضَ ذَلُولًا فَٱمْشُوا۟ فِى مَنَاكِبِهَا
وَكُلُوا۟ مِن رِّزْقِهِۦ ۖ وَإِلَيْهِ ٱلنُّشُورُ ﴿١٥﴾

It is He who has made the earth manageable for you — travel its regions; eat His provision – and to Him you will be resurrected [15] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 15)

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the creation of the earth on which human beings live. None claimed to have created or originated the earth. In the same regard, we should note that there is a difference between 'creation' and 'making'. With respect to Allah *Glorified is He* creating is to bring something out of nothing while 'making' means to direct a creature towards its function in life. None of Allah's creatures have the power to create anything, for creation and making are exclusive to Him *the Almighty*. As human beings, we must single out everything for its predetermined function in life that Allah *the Almighty* willed for it. To put it differently, we are bound to leave determination and direction to Him *the Almighty* Alone. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* created pigs to eat garbage. By prohibiting people from eating pork, Allah *the Almighty* protects them from many illnesses and harms. The human being is obliged to designate pigs for this function, not to consume their meat. This is because changing the primary function of any of Allah's creatures harms the human being who, in turn, is created to be a vicegerent on the earth.

It is Allah, the Creator, Who 'creates' and 'determines'. An example of this is Allah's saying: 'It is He who made the sun a shining light and the moon a derived light.' (*Yunus:* 5) In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* does not only remind us that He created the sun and the moon, but He also refers to the original functions of both celestial bodies.

As a matter of fact, corruption arises in the universe when we change the primary function of something which Allah *Glorified is He* created for us. We should take it for granted that everything is created for a special function. So, we are not allowed to direct a thing to a function different from its original one. If we do so, this has serious consequences.

Allah *the Almighty* created the earth and determined its definite functions; Allah *the Almighty* says, '[He] who made the earth a resting place…' (*al-Baqara:* 22). 'Resting place' suggests that Allah *the Almighty* prepared the earth in a comfortable way for mankind. This looks like a mat you spread out on the ground to sit or lie on so that you have comfort.

The earth, which we inherit, generation after another, is suitable for our life. From the moment the earth was created till the Day of Resurrection, it will remain as a prepared land for the human being. Even after the world became more civilised and prosperous, the earth remains as a resting place despite the other physical comforts that man may experience in his life.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* prepared the earth for us in a way that suited every generation. Allah *Glorified is He* endowed each generation with a life of ease. By virtue of the modern civilisation and the advancement of science, Allah *the Almighty* makes the earth more subservient to the human being.

Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: '[The one] who has made for you the earth a bed.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 10) The Arabic word *al-mahd* (a bed) means 'a cradle' which is used as a small bed for babies. It should be comfortable because if it is not restful, the baby is not able to make it restful itself. Thus, a mother prepares her baby's cradle well so that it can sleep peacefully. So, the Arabic word *al-mahd* is derived from arranging and preparing an object to be fit for its function as when you tidy your bed before sleeping. The small bed of a baby is called a cradle because you prepare it and remove any inconveniences for the sake of the baby's comfort.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[It is He] who has made for you the earth as a bed [spread out]' (*Ta Ha:* 53) means that Allah *Glorified is He* prepared the earth and made it suitable for your life and livelihoods. It does not mean that Allah *Glorified is He* levelled and paved the earth. It denotes that He adapted it to its function since it contains mountains and valleys without which we cannot live. Preparing the earth entails making it fit for the function of living on it despite its straight, sinuous, high, or low parts.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And whoever does righteousness - they are for themselves preparing.’ (*ar-Rum:* 44) This verse shows that the person who does good deeds in this worldly life prepares a palace for himself in the Hereafter. In this connection, Abu Mansur ibn Hazim narrated that 'Abu 'Abdullah Al-Husayn said, ‘Good deeds precede their doer to the paradise to prepare a bed for him as a servant tidies a bed for any of you’.

Allah *the Almighty* made the earth manageable and subservient, and thus the human being can travel through it and benefit from what it yields. It is serviceable and tractable. These attributes are mentioned in the story of the Cow which Allah *the Almighty* ordered the Jews to slaughter. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘It is a perfect and unblemished cow, not trained to till the earth or water the fields. They said, “Now you have brought the truth”, and so they slaughtered it, though they almost failed to do so.’ (*al-Baqara:* 71) The Cow was not trained to carry out farming works. A tractable cow is the domesticated one which works smoothly and easily. Also, trained horses do not put those who ride them to hardship. The first characteristic of the cow of the children of Israel was that it was undomesticated. It used to graze freely and was intractable. It was not used for ploughing soil or irrigating it. Allah *the Almighty* made cattle serviceable and tractable for us, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah’s saying: ‘Do they not see that We have created cattle for them, out of what Our hands have wrought, so they are their masters? And We have subjected them to them, so some of them they have to ride upon, and some of them they eat.’ (*Ya Sin:* 71-72)

The believers should consider that Allah *the Almighty* made camels manageable by their owners and enabled even a little child to order a camel to kneel to put heavy loads on it and rise up. But if a person sees a snake or serpent, he cannot make it tractable. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to His Absolute Power: He made huge animals like the camel manageable for the humans and made them frightened of snakes.

There are other types of tractable animals. For example, the donkeys that farmers use for carrying manure do not object to this task. In another case, the farmer can work as a chief of the guards and orders that his donkey should be washed and a saddle be put on its back for him to ride it when he meets the police commissioner. The donkey does not disobey in both cases as it is tractable.

The human being should beware of thinking that his skills alone make animals tractable. If he relies on his skills alone, he cannot control the small flea which attacks him at any time. A flea may also disturb you all night and force an entire family to stay up late.

It is Allah *the Almighty* Who renders some animals manageable for the human being. If it was not for Him *the Almighty* the human being could never make them tractable. By virtue of His Wisdom and Mercy, He made all things we need to live with serviceable for us. For example, a little boy can drive a huge camel, make it kneel down or carry heavy loads because Allah *the Almighty* made it serviceable. However, if the camel angers, none can control it. Thus, it is not controlled by one's power; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* made it subservient to the human being.

Let us offer another example; a snake, despite its small size, is dangerous and everyone fears to get near it because Allah *Glorified is He* did not make it tractable for us. There is a rationale behind this. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is telling us, 'Anything I make serviceable for you, even if it is a camel or elephant, you can use it, and if I do not make it tractable for you, you will be unable to render it so even if it is small'. Hence the matter does not depend on your abilities or skills. That is why you must use the creatures which are subservient to us according to the function for which Allah *the Almighty* created them. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And We have tamed them for them...' (*an-Nahl:* 69). Thus, Allah *the Almighty* subjected these animals to us and they are not controlled by the human abilities.

In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* commands the bees, saying, '…and follows the ways of your Lord laid down [for you]…' (*an-Nahl:* 69). This verse means that the bees are commanded to follow the ways which Allah *Glorified is He* facilitated for them and to move freely from a flower to another. So, we cannot build houses for bees to live therein since they have to move from a garden to another. As for Allah's saying: '…laid down [for you]…' (*an-Nahl:* 69), it means that the ways are facilitated and arranged for the bees; they follow these facilitated ways smoothly and fly from a flower to another. Have we ever heard that a tree repelled a bee?! This does not take place because Allah *the Almighty* facilitated the life of bees.

Therefore, the universe is serviceable for the human being. This means that there are some manageable phenomena in the universe. At the same time, there are other universal phenomena uncontrollable by mankind such as floods, volcanoes and other natural disasters. These unmanageable phenomena in the universe draw our attention to the fact that everything in it is serviceable by Allah's Command and Power, not by our control. If the creatures serve you through your own power, can you control them when they get intractable? Everything in the universe is subject to His Omnipotence and so are the causes and effects. The existence of flooding, storms, earthquakes and volcanoes proves that the human being is incapable of controlling the universe he lives in. Interestingly, some animals feel earthquakes before they happen and run away from the locations of these earthquakes. One the other hand, despite the human being's mental capabilities; he cannot comprehend what will occur.

Allah *the Almighty* made the earth easy to plough, grow crops and walk through, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: '…disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah...' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* also orders us to travel through the earth, saying: '…travel its regions…' (*al-Mulk:* 15).

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions those who travel throughout the land to earn their livings side by side with those who fight in His cause, saying: 'Indeed, your Lord knows, [O Muhammad], that you stand [in prayer] almost two thirds of the night or half of it or a third of it, and [so do] a group of those with you. And Allah determines [the extent of] the night and the day. He has known that you [Muslims] will not be able to do it and has turned to you in forgiveness, so recite what is easy [for you] of the Quran. He has known that there will be among you those who are ill and others traveling throughout the land seeking [something] of the bounty of Allah and others fighting for the cause of Allah. So, recite what is easy from it…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20).

The code of reformation which Allah *Glorified is He* lays down for humans' life is based on two foundations: travelling through the earth to satisfy the necessities of life and fighting in the Way of Allah to protect the Islamic Call and the Divine Way of Guidance. These two foundations protect both the material and spiritual aspects. If the *ummah* neglects either of these foundations, it becomes a coveted object for its enemies. That is why we note that underdeveloped countries live on the financial aids of the rich ones. This is attributable to the fact that the underdeveloped countries neglect Allah's favours and desist from construction(1) and reclamation.

The human being should make the best use of the earth as it is serviceable for him. He should seek his provision by traveling through the earth and planting it. Travelling through the land can be for the purpose of meditating on the realms of the heavens and the earth and concluding the proofs that strengthen and consolidate one's belief in Allah *the Almighty*. Besides, one can go throughout the land to earn his provision.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* attributes the provision to Himself, saying: '…eat of His provision…' (*al-Mulk:* 15). In other verses, He ascribes it to the human being, saying: 'And as for man, when his Lord tries him and [thus] is generous to him and favours him, he says, "My Lord has honoured me." But when He tries him and restricts his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me." (*al-Fajr:* 15-16) Allah *the Almighty* reassures everyone that his sustenance inevitably reaches him, even from an unexpected source. As for seeking hard to earn your living, it is something different, for you may work to provide for someone else, not yourself. For example, you can grow wheat and leave the crop to travel abroad. So, others consume your wheat crop, while you eat out of someone else's crop.

The Provision of Allah *the Almighty* is everything He confers upon you. You can get it by multiple means and from different sources. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Allah extends provision for whom He wills and restricts [it]. And they rejoice in the worldly life, while the worldly life is not, compared to the Hereafter, except [brief] enjoyment.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 26)

People look at sustenance from just one angle. They think that it is only money and thus divide people into rich and poor. However, sustenance is not confined to money. It is anything beneficial for a person, be it reasoning, physical strength, or any other useful thing. Thus, we should not look at sustenance from one angle; rather, we should bear in mind the various faculties and talents that Allah *Glorified is He* endows others with like good health, strength, intelligence, forbearance and bravery. People vary in these forms of Divine Bestowals.

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(1) Ibn `Arabi said, 'Some Shafi' jurists state that *al-ist`amar* means construction.' As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and settled you in it…' (*Hud:* 61), it means that He created you to construct the earth. In his *Tafsir*, Sheikh Rashid Rida writes: 'Allah created you to populate the earth as they [the people of Thamud] were farmers, artisans and builders.' The word '*ist`amar'* (colonialism) has been used in the sense of seizing and subjugating poor countries by powerful states. See Rashid Rida*,* *Tafsir Al-Manar*, 12/101.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Highest Provider of Sustenance and from His favours all the creatures benefit. His Provision is based on Wisdom and Predestination; granting abundant provision is not a token of tribute, nor is giving little provision a sign of offense. This is proven by the fact that He *the Almighty* gave Qarun great wealth and then inflicted an exemplary punishment upon him.

In this vein, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘O My servants who have believed, indeed My earth is spacious, so worship only Me.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 56) This verse means that if you fail to make a decent living somewhere, try to make it somewhere else, for the whole earth belongs to Him *Glorified is He*. Once people divided it and demarcated borders that hindered movement, a lot of problems arose and humans found it difficult to travel for reflection or finding work to earn good livings.

The Sudan, for example, owns vast areas of fertile land which can be sufficient for the whole Arab world if they are grown. Are we able to go there to grow this fertile land? If we went there, others would claim, ‘They come to occupy our land’. So, when I had an opportunity to speak at the UN Organization, I said, ‘The current problems of the world cannot be solved. Allah made us vicegerents on the earth to settle and construct it, a matter which requires us to move throughout the land. As Allah wills us to move about and construct the earth, there must be some activities and procedures to organise travelling and regulate some diverse arts which are necessary for constructing the earth like architecture. Allah distributes the energies of these arts in the form of talents and natural abilities.’

Every action that leads to the construction of the universe and extracting the mysteries of existence is regarded as an act of worship. This is because when we get out the treasures which Allah *the Almighty* placed into the earth, the people turn their attention to the truth of belief. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And the earth He laid [out] for the creatures.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 10)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* created the earth for all creatures, not for a specific group of them apart from the others.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question, saying: '…and to Him you will be resurrected.' (*al-Mulk:* 15) The Arabic word *an-Nashr* (dispersion) linguistically means 'moving throughout the earth' as in the verse reading: '…disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah...' (*al-Jumu'a:* 10). Allah *Glorified is He* also made day as a time of movement and activity, while night is a period of repose and sleep, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'And He it is Who made the night a covering for you, and the sleep a rest, and He made the day to rise up again...' (*al-Furqan:* 47).

As other living beings do, the humans need rest according to their efforts and activity. Thus, time is divided into night in which people sleep and take rest, and day in which they earn their livelihoods. Allah *the Almighty* knows from eternity that night is not a time of torpor for all people, for there must be some people who keep wakeful to perform their duties during the night. Concerning this kind of people, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And of His signs are your sleep by night and day...' (*ar-Rum:* 23).

Allah *the Almighty* gives a chance to those who keep wakeful all night to have rest by day. He made day and night alternate. If night or day were endless, life would be impossible. Therefore, He swears by specific times, saying: 'By the morning brightness. And [by] the night when it covers with darkness.' (*ad-Duha:* 1-2) Forenoon which is one of the periods of the day is a time of activity, while night is a time of repose. Hence, both the day and night must exist together.

The Resurrection means rising from graves on the Day of Judgment, as Allah *the Almighty* says, '…and they possess not [power to cause] death or life or resurrection.' (*al-Furqan:* 3) The false deities that the disbelievers worship have no ability to cause death, give life or resurrect the dead, for only Allah *Glorified is He* has the Power to do that. So, the Arabic word *an-nushur* refers to the Resurrection that precedes the final Reckoning, while *an-nashr* means 'spreading something through a limited area'. There is something rolled and there is something else that is spread. The rolled object coalesces and its space is narrow, while the spread object scatters and is wide. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘O mankind, fear your Lord, Who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1) The verb ‘dispersed’ means spreading something in different directions. This very word points out that people must scatter through the earth so that they all benefit from Allah’s favours that Allah *Glorified is He* placed on the earth.

A believer must turn his life to useful work that can benefit him and others who are unable to work. Not only does Allah *Glorified is He* order us to travel through the earth to satisfy our daily needs but also to benefit those who are not able to work. In this way, the society embodies everyone and gets rid of spite, envy, and hatred.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* wants our work to be noble and honest. One must earn his living through his own efforts. Before a person thinks of eating, he should work to eat. In other words, he should not wait for the fruit of others’ work. This is because laziness diffuses chaos in the society as the idle person, who satisfies his daily needs through the efforts of others, can become an example, and even persuades others to stop working and live as parasites. As a result, the movement of life will cease, the fruit of hard-working people will go in vain, and everyone will starve. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wants the humans to work so as to satisfy their basic needs and so that life cycle continues.

In conclusion, Allah *Glorified is He* wants us to have the honour of work and to do whatever is useful for us. Our efforts are good for us and for others. When the people vie for noble work, they will all take part in it. On the contrary, when some people simply depend on the fruit of other’s work, the chaos will prevail in the society.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

ءَأَمِنتُم مَّن فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ أَن يَخۡسِفَ بِكُمُ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ فَإِذَا هِيَ تَمُورُ ﴿١٦﴾

Are you sure that He who is in Heaven will not make the earth swallow you up with a violent shudder? [16] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 16)

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* also says, ‘And He it is Who is Allah in the heavens and Allah in the earth…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 84). Concerning feeling secure from His Plan, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘But no one feels secure from the plan of Allah except the losing people….’ (*al-A‘raf:* 99) Feeling secure from His Plan is one of the major sins, as He says, ‘Then, did the people of the cities feel secure from Our Punishment coming to them at night, while they were asleep? Or did the people of the cities feel secure from Our Punishment coming to them in the morning, while they were at play? Then did they feel secure from the plan of Allah? But no one feels secure from the plan of Allah except the losing people.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 97-99)

What is it that makes the disbelievers feel safe from the same punishment that befell the previous nations? So, one should not think that he can escape the punishment during the night or in the daytime. Safety means lack of fear or trouble. To say, ‘So-and-so is safe’ means that such a person leads a tranquil life.

We should consider that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Then did they feel secure from the plan of Allah?’ (*al-A‘raf:* 99) We may mistakenly think that some of the Actions Allah *Glorified is He* attributes to Himself do not behove Him. We wonder, ‘Does our Lord scheme?’ for we consider scheming improper for Him *the Almighty*. We should note that the Quran says: ‘…but the evil plot does not encompass except its own people…’ (*Fatir:* 43). According to this verse, scheming on the part of Allah *the Almighty* is good and beneficial. So, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Then did they feel secure from the plan of Allah? But no one feels secure from the plan of Allah except the losing people.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 99) All the stories of the prophets affirm that those who feel secure from His Plan are losers.

Thus, Allah’s plans are stronger and more forceful than those of humans. The plans of humans can be detected or thwarted by other people. On the other hand, if Allah *Glorified is He* makes plans against the humans, can they discover them? Of course not!

In the chapter of *al-Isra`*, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Then do you feel secure that [instead] He will not cause a part of the land to swallow you or send against you a storm of stones? Then you would not find for yourselves an advocate. Or do you feel secure that He will not send you back into the sea another time and send upon you a hurricane of wind and drown you for what you denied? Then you would not find for yourselves against Us an avenger.' (*al-Isra':* 68-69) You should not think that the earth is safe. It can be dangerous to you whether you are on land or at sea.

The Arabic word *al-khasf* means causing the earth to swallow what is on it. The object that is swallowed by the earth is that which sinks into the ground. With the same Arabic word, we refer to 'the lunar eclipse'. Allah *Glorified is He* punished Qarun by causing the land to swallow him along with all his material possessions, a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'And We caused the earth to swallow him and his home...' (*al-Qasas:* 81). This type of punishment is mentioned in several Quranic verses like the one reading: 'So each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the blast [from the sky], and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40).

So, the Arabic word *al-khasf* means that the ground splits and swallows what is on it. This was exactly what happened to Qarun when the earth swallowed him along with his house, treasures, and all his possessions. Is there anyone who feels secure from being swallowed by the earth while it shakes and sways? If this happens, the ground shakes violently till the thing swallowed reaches the lower earth and is buried therein.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَمۡ أَمِنتُم مَّن فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ أَن يُرۡسِلَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ حَاصِبٗاۖ فَسَتَعۡلَمُونَ كَيۡفَ نَذِيرِ ١٧

Are you sure that He who is in Heaven will not send a whirlwind to pelt you with stones? You will come to know what My warning means [17] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 17)

The punishment that the humans inflict on one another is governed by their own capabilities and laws. As for the punishment of Allah *the Almighty* it matches His Power. So, can we withstand or endure His punishment? Of course, we cannot. His punishment sometimes comes suddenly and at times occurs openly.

Punishment occurs surprisingly so that the person anticipates it at any time and takes place openly so that he will be terrified and frightened before it occurs. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Say, “Have you considered if the punishment of Allah should come to you unexpectedly or manifestly, will any be destroyed but the wrongdoing people?”’ (*al-An‘am:* 47); ‘…“we will never believe you until we see Allah outright”; so the thunderbolt took you while you were looking on.’ (*al-Baqara:* 55) If death comes to them suddenly, they will not feel its shock and horribleness except at the moment in which it happens. But if it occurs openly, they will experience it while they are in panic and terror. Are you safe from the punishment of Allah? You must safeguard yourselves against it as you are not able to endure it. It occurs suddenly or outright so that no one argues, ‘If punishment does not occur unexpectedly, I will take my precautions’. Further, it occurs, while the people are hopeless and desperate; they cannot find any way out.

So, what is the rationale behind inflicting the punishment suddenly and outright? Sudden punishment proves to those who worship idols and false deities that they are deluded into worshipping these false deities. If those deities and idols were true gods, they would not accept that their worshippers would be punished without their knowledge. Consequently, unexpected punishment evidences the powerlessness of idols and false deities as they are unable to protect their worshippers.

As for the disbelievers who argue, the ‘…punishment occurs suddenly, but if it comes outright, we will be able to confront and resist it’, Allah *the Almighty* inflicts the punishment outright on them. As they are unable to resist it, then their arguments are baseless. However, such obstinate disbelievers keep blind to the truth of belief.

Hence, no one can repel or prevent the punishment of Allah *Glorified is He* as He says, ‘…and indeed, there will reach them a punishment that cannot be repelled.’ (*Hud:* 76) Here, Allah *the Almighty* reminds the wrongdoers that His punishment is irresistible so that they bear in mind that the punishment may befall them at any moment and none would be able to prevent it.

By studying the history of previous nations, we learn the normative precept of destroying the wrongdoers. The peoples of Nuh (Noah), `Ad, Thamud and Lut (Lot) faced the punishment of annihilation. Concerning the punishment that happened to those peoples, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘So each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the blast [from the sky], and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow.' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40)

It is Allah *the Almighty* Who inflicts the punishment upon the disbelievers and wrongdoers. He did not order any of the former Prophets before Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight for the sake of His Faith. For example, Prophet `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* was sent to guide the people to the true faith, not to protect his faith by means of war.

Regarding the Muslim *ummah*, it is allowed to carry the sword to discipline those who stand in the way of the Right Faith. We should strongly emphasise that force is not permitted to impose religion. Rather, it aims at protecting people's freedom of religion. Instead of leaving the people being compelled to embrace wrong faiths, Muslims use force against those who subdue and oppress other peoples. By so doing, the people can be free to choose their religious beliefs.

The disbelievers from among the peoples of 'Ad, Thamud, Midyan, Lut (Lot) and Qarun, Pharaoh and Haman were on an equal footing regarding disbelief but varied in punishment. The first type of these penalties, which is mentioned in the chapter of *al-`Ankabut* and here in the chapter of *al-Mulk*, is sending a tempest of stones against the disbelievers, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'So each We seized for his sin; and among them were those upon whom We sent a storm of stones...' (*al-'Ankabut:* 40); 'Are you sure that He who is in Heaven will not send a whirlwind to pelt you with stones?' (*al-Mulk:* 17); 'Then do you feel secure that [instead], He will not cause a part of the land to swallow you or send against you a storm of stones? Then you would not find for yourselves an advocate.' (*al-Isra':* 68) This last verse means that Allah *the Almighty* can send against the people a storm of stones that hits them violently. None can resist this kind of punishment and that is why He, *the Glorified is He* says, '…then you would not find for yourselves an advocate.' (*al-Isra':* 68) It means that the people will not find any protector. So, they should not feel secure from the punishment whether they are on the ground or at the sea.

The Arabic word *al-hasib* (A storm of stones) denotes 'small stones' that are violently hurled to burn and scorch slowly when a strong wind stirs them up. Allah *Glorified is He* does not say here: 'He will send against you a Fire' because fire may burn disbelievers to death at once, while scorching, small stones burn them and make their pains last longer. So, we hear some people say, ‘I will burn it on a slow fire’, denoting that they will make the painful punishment lasts as long as possible.

Wind is described as ‘a storm of stones’ because it hurls pebbles at those destined to be punished. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…send a whirlwind to pelt you…’ (*al-Mulk:* 17), implies that this storm is set against each individual from among the disbelievers. Similar examples are the verses reading: ‘There will be sent upon you a flame of fire…’ (*ar-Rahman:* 35); ‘Or do you feel secure that He will not send you back into the sea another time and send upon you a hurricane of wind and drown you for what you denied? Then you would not find for yourselves against Us an avenger.’ (*al-Isra’:* 69)

The stony wind is sent upon disbelievers from above. In this connection, the people of Lut (Lot) were punished by sending against them a storm of stones like that which destroyed the soldiers who intended to demolish the *Ka`ba.*

One may argue, ‘Allah refers here to the sinking down of the earth first and then He mentions the punishment that comes from the heaven, as He says: “Are you sure that He who is in Heaven will not make the earth swallow you up with a violent shudder? Are you sure that He who is in Heaven will not send a whirlwind to pelt you with stones?” (*al-Mulk:* 16-17) Elsewhere, however, He says, “Say, ‘He is the [one] Able to send upon you affliction from above you or from beneath your feet...” (*al-An‘am:* 65). So, why is the punishment that descends from the heaven mentioned before that of the earth in the last verse, unlike the previous two verses’?

This is an example of the exceptionally inimitable expressions of the Quran. The chapter of *al-Mulk* says: ‘It is He Who has made the earth manageable for you—travel its regions; eat His provision– and to Him you will be resurrected.’ (*al-Mulk:* 15) What suits this context is to remind the disbelievers that Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to cause the earth to swallow them. Regarding the chapter of *al-An`am*, He *the Almighty* says, ‘And He is the subjugator over His servants, and He sends over you guardian-angels…’ (*al-An‘am:* 61). So, it is more proper to say afterwards: ‘Say, “He is the [one] Able to send upon you affliction from above you...”’ (*al-An‘am:* 65). Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the punishment that comes from above the disbelievers, not from the earth.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse under discussion, saying: '…you will come to know what My Warning means.' (*al-Qalam:* 17) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying, 'You, people of Mecca, will realise how serious the consequence of My Warning is once punishment befalls you'. In other verses, Allah *the Almighty* says: '`Ad denied; and how [severe] were My punishment and warning. Indeed, We sent upon them a screaming wind on a day of continuous misfortune. Extracting the people as if they were trunks of palm trees uprooted. And how [severe] were My punishment and warning.' (*al-Qamar:* 18-21) As a matter of fact, the warning of Allah *the Almighty* precedes His punishment, for He does not punish anyone without prior warning. The conjunction 'and' in the verse that reads: '…My punishment and warning…' (*al-Qamar:* 18), does not connote sequence; it just joins the two actions together.

Sending prophets gives the disbelievers the warning that they will face Allah's punishment in case they insist on disbelieving in Him, His prophets, and the Sacred Books. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, '…And never would We punish until We sent a Messenger.' (*al-Isra':* 15) He is the All Merciful towards the human beings as He sent prophets to show them the Right Path and distinguish it from the wrong one. There is no punishment without incrimination that is based on unequivocal texts conveyed to the people through the prophets who warn them against the punishment.

Abu Umama *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Some people of this *ummah* will spend the night eating, drinking and amusing themselves [in an unreasonable and illegal way]. And in the morning, they will be metamorphosed into monkeys and pigs, and they will be swallowed by the earth to the point that people will say, "So-and-so people were swallowed by the earth yesterday; the buildings of so-and-so sank into the ground yesterday." A storm of stones from the sky will be sent, as was the case with the people of Lut (Lot), against some tribes and their houses. A barren wind like that which destroyed the people of `Ad will be set against some tribes and their houses for their consumption of wine, wearing silk clothes, having songstresses, practicing usury and severing good ties with kith and kin.'(1)

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(1) *See Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no. 1233.*

Thus, you should not do what provokes Allah's Anger to avert the punishment that befell those who preceded you. You must safeguard yourselves against hell and the Wrath of Allah *Glorified is He*. As for the ill-gotten gains, they never bring good results. If your basic needs are satisfied from illicit money, your entire body will be affected by it. Moreover, your actions and characteristics will resemble those of monkeys and pigs.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿١٨﴾

Those who went before them also disbelieved –
how terrible was My condemnation! [18]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 18)

The disbelievers of Mecca were not the first to disbelieve in and deny the Divine Message, for so did the peoples who preceded them, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And certainly did the companions of Thamud deny the Messengers.' (*al-Hijr:* 80); '[Theirs is] like the custom of the people of Pharaoh and those before them. They denied Our signs, so Allah seized them for their sins. And Allah is severe in penalty.' (*Al-'Imran:* 11) The people of Pharaoh were in the habit of disbelief and tyranny, and thus Allah *the Almighty* inflicted on them an exemplary punishment.

Denial is an act of rejection on the part of the denier, and it also implies repudiating a statement or an action. It also means barring the people from believing in Allah *the Almighty*. Further, it was the cause of drowning those who disbelieved in Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* a fact which is crystal clear in Allah's saying: 'But they denied him, so We saved him and those who were with him in the ship. And We drowned those who denied Our signs. Indeed, they were a blind people.' (*al-A'raf:* 64). According to this verse, drowning was the first punitive event in the history of the messages as Prophet Nuh's (Noah's) Message was the first one to be denied and rejected.

Denying the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* entails rendering them false and unreal. The category of the deniers includes the atheists; those who believe in a god, but not in any prophet; or believe in a God and a prophet but not in what was sent down upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Denial was a phenomenon from which all former Prophets suffered because they announced to their peoples what they would reject at first blush. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And if they deny you, [O Muhammad] - so, before them, did the people of Nuh (Noah) and `Ad and Thamud deny [their prophets].’ (*al-Hajj:* 42) It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘As the people of Mecca deny and encumber your Message, Muhammad, know that you are not the first prophet to meet this reaction. Many previous Prophets were denied. But the question of disbelief is not separated from its consequences. Yes, your people have denied your Message, but sooner or later they will face the same punishment as the previous deniers.’ That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘And if you [people] deny [the Message] - already nations before you have denied.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 18). You have to be alert to what happened to the previous disbelievers and how severe their punishment was. It is as if He is telling Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Since your people have disbelieved you, do not grieve, for many former prophets were disbelieved too. Muhammad, you are not the first prophet to be disbelieved and obdurately opposed. So be completely sure that I will support you’.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the verse in question: ‘…how terrible was My condemnation!’ (*al-Mulk:* 18), the statement is made in the form of questions so that the addressees confirm its veracity. The meaning is: ‘Did We give them their just punishment’? Thus, the addressee confirms that this happened.

The Arabic word *nakir* (condemnation) means reproaching and neglecting a person. For example, suppose that a person treats you kindly and generously and suddenly stops doing that, whereupon you wonder, ‘Why does he shun me like this’? So the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…how terrible was My condemnation!’ (*al-Mulk:* 18), means Allah *Glorified is He* condemned their ingratitude for His favours and thus He replaced them with calamities that befell them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَوَلَمۡ يَرَوۡاْ إِلَى ٱلطَّيۡرِ فَوۡقَهُمۡ صَٰٓفَّٰتٖ وَيَقۡبِضۡنَۚ مَا يُمۡسِكُهُنَّ
إِلَّا ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُۚ إِنَّهُۥ بِكُلِّ شَيۡءِۭ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١٩﴾

Do they not see the birds above them spreading and closing their wings? It is only the Lord of Mercy who holds them up: He watches over everything [19] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 19)

In this verse Allah *Glorified is He* draws the attention of the deniers, who disbelieve in Allah, His Messenger, and the Book, to reflect on the sky. Allah *the Almighty* states this point in the form of a question: ‘Do they not see…?’ (*al-Mulk:* 19) This indicates that those disbelievers have noticed this matter. So why do they disbelieve? Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Do they not see that We have created for them from what Our hands have made, grazing livestock, and [then] they are their owners? And we have tamed them for them, so some of them they ride and some of them they eat.’ (*Ya Sin:* 71-72); ‘Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? And Allah decides; there is no adjuster of His Decision. And He is swift in account.’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 41)

Allah *the Almighty* reminds the people of Mecca about something they themselves have experienced in their lives, saying: ‘Have they not seen that We made [Mecca] a safe sanctuary…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 67). Further, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the people of `Ad: ‘As for `Ad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said, “Who is greater than us in strength?” Did they not consider that Allah who created them was greater than them in strength? But they were rejecting Our signs.’ (*Fussilat:* 15)

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Do they not see…’ (*al-Mulk:* 19), He does not say, ‘Do they not know?’ because knowledge could be unseen. So, He uses the verb ‘to see’ to denote that the sign mentioned in this verse is clearly witnessed and perceived by their eyes. This expression directs people’s attention to consider and reflect on the creations of Allah *Glorified is He*. Among His creations is water which He sends to the barren land, a fact which is crystal clear in the verse reading: ‘Have they not seen that We drive the water [in clouds] to barren land and bring forth thereby crops from which their livestock eat and [they] themselves? Then do they not see?’ (*as-Sajda:* 27)

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the birds which fly in the sky, saying: ‘Do they not see the birds above them spreading and closing their wings?’ (*al-Mulk:* 19) The birds fly aloft by the motion of their wings which push air away and resist gravity so that they do not fall down. Also, a predatory animal pushes water away with its forelegs to swim. If a bird folds its wings while flying, it does not fall. So, who keeps it aloft in this case? The birds you observe glorify and praise Allah *Glorified is He*. This fact is supported by the verse saying: ‘Do you not see that Allah is exalted by whoever is within the heavens and the earth and [by] the birds with wings spread [in flight]? Each [of them] has known his [means of] prayer and exalting [Him].’ (*an-Nur:* 41)

We see the birds fly high. In this regard Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘Do they not see the birds controlled in the atmosphere of the sky? None holds them up except Allah. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who believe.’ (*an-Nahl:* 79) This does not refer to the flapping of wings, for we watch the birds fold their wings while they are high in the air, yet they do not fall down. So, there must be a power that prevents them from falling. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Do they not see the birds above them spreading and closing their wings?’ (*al-Mulk:* 19) This means that whether the birds spread out or fold their wings, they keep flying and do not fall over. On the other hand, we notice that some other birds have long wings but they do not fly, like the geese. Accordingly, the matter has nothing to do with having wings; rather, it is one of Allah’s miraculous signs: the birds fly through the air freely without being hindered by the gravity; they lift off and land whenever they want.

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to make birds as an example of something greater. The birds are subject to the law of gravity that attracts anything heavy in the air towards the ground. Nevertheless, Allah *the Almighty* breaks this law regarding the birds which stretch and fold their wings through the air and do not fall over. So, He says here: ‘Do they not see the birds above them spreading and closing their wings? It is only the Lord of Mercy who holds them up…’ (*al-Mulk:* 19).

You can see birds stretching out their wings and staying steady in the air without falling; nothing but Allah’s Power holds them up in the air. It is as if

Allah *Glorified is He* is asking us to take such a view of the birds as an example and a means of clarification for His following saying: '…And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission…' (*al-Hajj:* 65). We must believe in and accept such truth. Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'surely Allah upholds the heavens and the earth lest they come to naught; and if they should come to naught, there is none who can uphold them after Him…' (*Fatir:* 41). As we recognise the fact that He *the Almighty* is fully Able to hold the flying birds up, we should, by analogy, acknowledge that He has the Power to uphold the heaven and the earth. In this way, we use the tangible phenomena to recognise the facts which are beyond our sensory perception.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Surely, Allah upholds the heavens and the earth lest they come to naught; and if they should come to naught, there is none who can uphold them after Him; surely, He is the Forbearing, the Forgiving.' (*Fatir:* 41), He *the Almighty* reassures us that the heavens and the earth are maintained in a wondrous and amazing state of stability. If Allah *Glorified is He* destined them to cease to exist, no one can safeguard them against disappearance, for they are maintained only by His Omnipotence.

Allah *Glorified is He* upholds the heavens and the earth so that they achieve their appointed function. Further, He *the Almighty* has wonderfully laid down the rules of gravity that protect the cosmos against disorder. We should note that gravity had existed before being discovered lately. Thus, upholding the heaven and the earth totally depends on Allah's Omnipotence. Despite the absence of any pillar that supports the heaven, it cannot fall on the earth, as it is upheld by His Omnipotence.

In this vein, He *the Almighty* says: '…and never are We heedless of creation.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 17) So, Allah *Glorified is He* is Fully Aware of the heaven and He holds it. Holding the birds up in the sky is material evidence that He *the Almighty* keeps the heaven from falling on the earth.

As Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who holds the heavens, the earth and the birds, He deserves to be described as 'the Lord of Mercy' in His saying here: '…it is only the Lord of Mercy who holds them up…' (*al-Mulk:* 19).

The Arabic word *Ar-Rahman* (the Lord of Mercy) is an intensive form of the Divine Attribute of Mercy; it is the exaggeration of 'being Merciful'. The same is true for the Divine Name *Rahim* (the Giver of Mercy). Allah *the Almighty* is the Lord of Mercy in the worldly life and the Giver of Mercy in the Hereafter.

'The Lord of Mercy' is a Divine Name that indicates that Allah's Mercy includes all the creation and that He bestows all the blessings. His Attribute of Mercy is meant for softening the hearts of the human beings. Allah *Glorified is He* does not say that the sky is held by the Omnipotent or the Almighty, though these Divine Actions of holding the sky from falling down on earth and holding the birds up in the sky are more understandable, from a superficial viewpoint, to be done by the Divine Attributes of Omnipotence and Almightiness. After all, He *the Almighty* holds them by His Omnipotence and Mightiness. These two Divine Names, i.e. *the Almighty* and the Omnipotent are two of the causes of Mercy. Allah *Glorified is He* bestows His Mercy upon His servants even by these two Attributes. He is the Most Merciful and His Mercy includes everything. Thus, all the affairs of the creation are managed within the scope of Mercy.

Allah *Glorified is He* is All Merciful towards the believer and the disbeliever, for He created both. Therefore, He grants them blessings out of His Mercy and not due to what they actually deserve. For example, the sun rises on both the believers and disbelievers; it does not reflect its rays on the believers and block them from the disbelievers. Further, the sky rains on those who worship Him *the Almighty* and those who worship the idols. Moreover, both of those who testify that there is no god but Allah and those who deny this testimony can breathe fresh air.

Thus, out of His Mercy to all His creatures in the worldly life, Allah *the Almighty* bestows His Blessings on them. Further, His Lordship over both the obedient and the disobedient people and His Acceptance of their repentance are forms of Mercy.

He *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question, saying: '…He watches over everything.' (*al-Mulk:* 19) You should beware of thinking that there is anything that can be concealed from Allah *Glorified is He* or that anyone can deceive Him, for He watches over and knows everything – not only the things that we reveal but also the things that we conceal inside ourselves and hide them from others. Thus, He *the Almighty* hears and watches over us and we are under His protection.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* saying: ‘Build the Ark under Our [watchful] eyes and with Our Inspiration. Do not plead with me for those who have done evil– they will be drowned.’ (*Hud:* 37) His saying: ‘…Our [watchful] eyes…’ (*Hud:* 37) means that he *peace be upon him* is under Allah’s complete care and perfect protection.

Allah says:

أَمَّنْ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى هُوَ جُندٌ لَّكُمْ يَنصُرُكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ۚ إِنِ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ إِلَّا فِى غُرُورٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

What force can help you if the Lord of Mercy does not?
The disbelievers are truly deluded [20]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 20)

The Arabic word *jund* (force) is a singular form, but it indicates a plural form. Its original linguistic meaning refers to the hard, solid, and strong land. Since forces are supposed to be strong and powerful, they are called ‘*jund*’. Although it is a singular form, it refers to a tribe or a group of people, that is, it is a collective noun.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* asks the disbelievers to tell Him what force can help them if He wanted to harm them. Who can protect them against His Will?! Here, the expression: ‘What force…’ (*al-Mulk:* 20), is a reprimand and a criticism in the form of interrogation.

None of these statues and idols that the disbelievers worship can preserve and save them from Allah’s Punishment, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Do they have gods who can defend them against Us? Their gods have no power to help themselves, nor can they be protected from Us.’(1) (*al-Anbiya’:* 43) These false gods cannot protect themselves, so how can they protect and save their worshippers from Allah’s punishment if it befalls them?

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(1) The Arabic word *yushabun* (be protected from Us) means that there is no one or friend who can save them from Allah’s Punishment. In his lexicon, Ibn Mandhur says, ‘The root of the word ‘*sahib*’ means to save and protect, as in the verse reading: ‘…nor can they be protected from Us.’ (*al-Anbiya’*: 43) It is said in Arabic ‘*Sahebak Allah*’ which means ‘may Allah protect you’. *See Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 1/369; and Ibn Mandhur, Lisan Al-’Arab.*

As for His saying: '…nor can they be protected from Us.' (*al-Anbiya': 43*), it means that these disbelievers have no friends to protect them from the punishment. Thus, as they are not the allies of Allah *the Almighty* He will not save them from the punishment, nor will anyone be able to do so.

So, His saying: 'What force…' (*al-Mulk:* 20), is a rhetoric question directed to the disbelievers to criticise and threaten them, and to prove that their allegations are groundless. No force can save them if He *the Almighty* wants to punish them, for there is no protector, saviour or supporter but Him *the Almighty*. No one can save or support the disbelievers if they persist in opposing the Divine Way of Guidance. As Allah *Glorified is He* abandons such disbelievers, no one can save them, given the fact that there is no saviour or supporter but Him *the Almighty*.

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Ibrahim (Abraham) said to them, "You have chosen idols(1) instead of Allah but your love for them will only last for the present life: on the Day of Resurrection, you will disown and reject one another. Hell will be your home and no one will help you."' (*al-'Ankabut:* 25) Thus, the disbelievers have no Protector from among the idols that they worship instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. After all, they are asking for the help of rocks and idols which cannot speak or answer them.

In the same vein, He *the Almighty* says: 'I will make the disbelievers suffer severely in this world and the next; no one will help them.' (*Al-'Imran:* 56) This verse asserts the same idea, i.e. no one of the disbelievers can find a helper because there is no supporter whatsoever to someone defeated and punished by Him *the Almighty*.

The wrongdoers will have no one to save them from Allah's punishment; no one will offer help or intercession to them. So, no one will say, 'There is a person who is being punished, let us help him'. Thus, no one will support them or help them escape the punishment.

The same meaning is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And halt them for questioning: "Why do you not support each other now?" —no indeed! They will be in complete submission on that Day.' (*as-Saffat:* 24-26) Where will the disbelievers' powerful helpers be to save them at that time?! The aim of this question is to ridicule and criticise them; it is as if Allah *the Almighty* asks them, 'Why are you not defending each other as you used to do in the worldly life'?! The followers from among the disbelievers used to help their masters who, in turn, were collecting, supporting, and stimulating their followers. As there is no one to defend or support them, they will be in complete surrender, defeatism, humiliation, and submissiveness. They have no power or argument to defend themselves and they are submissively and humbly waiting for Allah's Judgment.

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(1) The Arabic word *awthan* means idols. The singular of this word is *wathan* (idol) and its root is *wathana* which means to stay and rest in a place. See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 2/320.*

Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: '…can help you…' (*al-Mulk:* 20). The Arabic word *al-nasir* (helper) refers to the one who defends somebody with his power and ability. Therefore, it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is asking them, 'Where are your helpers who can defend you against Allah?! Who can save you if I wanted to punish you'?! Indeed, there will be no force or support to save them.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…what force…' (*al-Mulk:* 20), is put in a way that draws the attention of the disbelievers because He *the Almighty* is warning, threatening and alerting them. So, the Arabic particle '*ha*' which is used for drawing attention, is suitably used in this context to intensify the tone of warning and to draw more attention to the situation they are involved in.

The Arabic word *nusra* (help) has two meanings; it denotes that a person cannot be defeated or that he can have a power which defends and helps him. But the idols worshipped by these disbelievers instead of Allah *the Almighty* will offer them no support. After all, they are asking for help from stones and idols which neither can speak nor respond to them.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they will have no one but Him to protect them and no one to intercede— so that they may beware.' (*al-An'am:* 51) The Arabic word *wali* (guardian) refers to the one who protects another when facing a problem. The greatest problem that a disbeliever faces will be in the Hereafter because no one will protect him from Allah's Punishment. As for His saying: '…and no one to intercede…' (*al-An'am:* 51), it means that there will be no one to intercede and ask forgiveness for him from the One Who has the Power to save him, i.e. Allah *the Almighty*. When someone loves another and cannot help him, he seeks help from someone else who can help the one he loves. Even this option will not be available for those who do not learn the lesson, remember Allah *Glorified is He* or follow the Straight Path.

In the verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* says: '…if the Lord of Mercy does not?' (*al-Mulk:* 20) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* makes mention of His Attribute of Mercy and being the Lord of Mercy. He *the Almighty* does not say, 'If Allah does not'; rather, He says: '…if the Lord of Mercy does not?' (*al-Mulk:* 20) This is a reminder for all His servants that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Most Merciful. So, if they are abandoned by their supporters, He is there to protect and help them, out of His Mercy, if they believed in Him. Allah *Glorified is He* wants His servants to be believers not disbelievers, for He will have no benefit from punishing them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Why should Allah make you suffer torment if you are thankful and believe in Him? Allah always rewards gratitude and He knows everything.' (*an-Nisa':* 147)

Allah *the Almighty* then concludes the verse in question, saying: '…the disbelievers are truly deluded.' (*al-Mulk:* 20) Some people may be deluded by the vain comforts of the worldly life and think that they are safeguarded against Allah's punishment and that they will not meet Him.

There are two diacritical marks for the Arabic word *ghurour* (be deluded); one with a 'u' (*ghurour*), and another with an 'a' (*gharour*). The one with a 'u' means to see something as if it is a truth, but in reality, it is an illusion. As for the one with an 'a', it refers to the one who practices such deception. That is why Satan is called '*Al-Gharour*' (the deceiver) as he beautifies for the human being the untrue things and affects him in the same way the mirage affects the thirsty who mistakenly thinks the refraction of sunrays as water. Allah *Glorified is He* says about this state: '…like a mirage in a desert: the thirsty person thinks there will be water but, when he gets there, he finds nothing...' (*an-Nur:* 39).

Similarly, Satan beautifies a false thing to the human being and makes him falsely think it will delight him, but when he is involved with this thing, he discovers it is not a reality; rather, it is delusion. So, 'being deluded' means to desire something that cannot be reached or achieved. When we say to somebody, Allah forbids, 'You are deceived', we mean that he is following the wrong path that will not get him to the desired target.

There are other verses in the Quran stating the same meaning. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘People! Allah’s Promise is true, so do not let the present life deceive you. Do not let the Deceiver deceive you about Allah.’ (*Fatir:* 5), and ‘Bear in mind that the present life is just a game, a diversion, an attraction, a cause of boasting among you, of rivalry in wealth and children. It is like plants that spring up after the rain: their growth at first delights the sowers, but then you see them wither away, turn yellow, and become stubble. There is terrible punishment in the next life as well as forgiveness and approval from Allah; the life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.’ (*al-Hadid:* 20)

When we describe a person as *ghirr* (inexperienced), this means that he does things without having previous experience about them, so he does not reap a benefit from them. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* describes Satan as the ‘Deceiver’ because he deceives the humans by illusory things that will not really happen.

Delusion leads the human being to vainly waste his lifetime because he deviated from the Right Path, and the serious consequences of this action will extend to the Hereafter. In the same vein, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…the lies they have invented have deluded them in their own religion.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 24) Those disbelievers become totally dominated by delusion; meanwhile, they are fully enjoying the blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* granted to them. So, they suddenly face His punishment because they consented to the promises of Satan which are nothing but vain promises, a fact which is crystal clear in the verse reading: ‘…Satan promises them nothing but delusion.’ (*al-Isra’:* 64)

Allah *Glorified is He* warns us so that we will not be deluded by this worldly life, for the one who does not follow the Divine Way of Guidance will be indulged in the sea of delusion and arrogance. Therefore, the Arabic word *ghurour* (delusion) means to be deluded so that you separate the blessings you have from the One Who granted them to you, that is, Allah *the Almighty* and attribute these blessing to yourself, as in the case of Qarun who was beguiled by his wealth and knowledge.

In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* uses the linguistic style of ‘*enna*’ then ‘*ella*’ (Truly nothing but) to assert the idea that the disbelievers are truly having nothing but delusion and their state does not imply any other interpretation.

They are actually deluding themselves by a fleeting worldly life and unreal gods which can neither benefit nor harm them.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Satan promises them nothing but delusion.' (*al-Isra': *64), we should consider that Satan cannot deceive anyone by his promises except those who are in delusion and heedlessness. Thus, the act of deluding someone means that the falsehood is beautified for him to look like the truth.

In fact, no one can deceive another person and persuade him that the falsehood is the truth unless he has a limited understanding and an absent mind. But if he became aware, he would be able to distinguish the truth from the falsehood. So, only the heedless person can be deceived.

A verse of poetry(1) explains the meaning of being in delusion. A poet was talking to his beloved and stating how she was neglecting(2) him, so he said, 'Nothing deluded you into thinking that I am going to forgive you but the fact, which you are fully sure of, that your love overwhelms me and whatever you say my heart obeys.'

In brief, to delude someone is to make him full of delusion so that he accepts things and involves in acts in the light of such delusions.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَمَّنۡ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِي يَرۡزُقُكُمۡ إِنۡ أَمۡسَكَ رِزۡقَهُۥۚ بَل لَّجُّواْ فِي عُتُوّٖ وَنُفُورٍ ﴿٢١﴾

Who can provide for you if He withholds His provision?
Yet they persist in their insolence and their avoidance
of the Truth [21] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 21)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is asking the disbelievers, 'who can feed, provide you with water and provide you with sustenance if I withhold My Provision?!

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(1) The poet is Imru` Al-Qays ibn Hajar ibn Al-Harith Al-Kindi, one of the most famous Arab poets. He is from Yemen and was born in *Najd* in 130 before *Hijra*. His father was the king of *Asd* and *Ghatafan*. His mother's brother was Al-Muhalhel, a famous poet. His uncle taught him poetry in his early childhood, and he composed it at that early age. He was known as 'the aimless king' because his life was not stable, and 'the ulcerous [king]' because of the illness he suffered from before his death. He died in 80 before *Hijra* at the age of 50.

(2) These lines of poetry are part of the *Mu`allaqa* of Imru` Al-Qays.

Who else can provide for you?! Can any of those false gods provide for you if I withhold My Provision'?

As a matter of fact, no one gives, withholds, creates, or gives provision and help but Allah *the Almighty*. Allah *Glorified is He* gives the human beings the benefits of the worldly life and the means of getting His Provision. For example, He provides them with the rains, but if He *the Almighty* wills, He can stop the wind from blowing or makes water sink deep and disappears in the earth, as He *the Almighty* says at the end of *al-Mulk:* 'Say, "Just think; if all your water were to sink deep into the earth who could give you flowing water in its place?"' (*al-Mulk:* 30)

The Arabic word *amsak* (to withhold) indicates a state of close connection. If someone is connected to something, it means that he upholds it. The derivatives of this word include 'to catch, to keep holding and to stay connected'. The verb 'to hold fast' is also one of its derivatives which intensifies the meaning of the word, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…but as for those who hold fast to the Scripture…' (*al-A'raf:* 170).

Regarding His saying: '…if He withholds His Provision…' (*al-Mulk:* 21), we should note that the Provision here is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He*. In the Quran, we notice that the word 'provision' is ascribed two times to Allah *the Almighty* and two times to the human being, as in His saying in the chapter of *at-Talaq:* '…and let the wealthy man spend according to his wealth. But let him whose provision is restricted...(1)' (*at-Talaq:* 7); and the chapter of *al-Fajr:* '…but when He tries him through the restriction of his provision…' (*al-Fajr:* 16).

The two times in which the provision is ascribed to Allah *Glorified is He* are mentioned in His saying in the chapter of *al-Mulk:* 'It is He who has made the earth manageable for you—travel its regions; eat His provision…' (*al-Mulk:* 15), and 'Who can provide for you if He withholds His Provision?' (*al-Mulk:* 21) It is He *the Almighty* Who provides with sustenance. Ascribing the provision to Him *the Almighty* suits the context of the chapter of *al-Mulk* which begins with His saying: ‘Exalted is He who holds all control in His Hands…’ (*al-Mulk:* 1). He *the Almighty* controls and has Power over everything.

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(1) If Allah *Glorified is He* restricted the provision by His Will, it means that He made it limited to the necessary needs with no surplus. The same meaning is mentioned in His saying in the chapter of *al-Fajr:* '…through the restriction of his provision…' (*al-Fajr:* 16). See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 2/102.*

When the issue of provision is discussed, many people mistakenly think that provision is only to have money. But this is untrue, for the provision is everything that can be of a benefit; power, knowledge, wisdom, modesty and different forms of provision and so is everything that helps in the development of life.

Likewise, the rain and the plants that grow therefrom are forms of provision, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…Who spread out the earth for you and built the sky; who sent water down from it and with that water produced fruits as a provision for you. Do not, knowing this, set up rivals to Allah.’ (*al-Baqara:* 22) So, it is a provision for us that the rain falls so that the plants and the fruits grow. Thus, the provision is what can benefit the human being and not what he earns. Money is one of the forms of provision and so are the health, children, food, Allah’s Blessing and all His Graces.

Allah *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that the provision is sent to us from above, saying: ‘…Who sent water down from the sky and with that water produced fruits as a provision for you...’ (*al-Baqara:* 22), and ‘In the sky is your provision and all that you are promised.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 22)

Allah *Glorified is He* in the verse under discussion says: ‘Who can provide for you if He withholds His Provision? Yet they persist in their insolence and their avoidance of the Truth.’ (*al-Mulk:* 21). Some scholars say that ‘provision’ refers to the rain. So, it is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘Who will provide you with rain if Allah withholds the water of the sky from you’? Some people mistakenly say that rain pours as a normal result of the natural laws of the universe. So, Allah *the Almighty* draws our attention to the incorrectness of this conception by the fact that there come times of draught where no rain pours, even a drop. In this way, we come to know that rain does not fall because of the natural laws, but rather due to the Will of the Creator of the universe Who laid down its laws. If the natural laws act by themselves in the case of the fall of the rain, for example, who stopped its fall during the seasons of dryness? In fact, Allah’s Will is above these laws; if He *the Almighty* wants, He will stop them from acting. Thus, everything in the universe is attributed to Allah

Glorified is He; He is the One Who gives, withholds, and makes some creatures subservient to others.

At the time of our first creation, He *the Almighty* did not govern us with one rule, i.e. He did not make all things obligatory on us. We are only compelled in the sense that our will and acts do not interfere in the matters that affect the essential movement of life, i.e. He did not make the sun, the moon, the winds, and rain under our control.

All these matters are under Allah's Control. This is because they are brought to existence before the human being could have a life and a will. They were created to pave the way for the life that the human being was going to be granted. If Allah *Glorified is He* had left all these matters under the human being's control, their creation would have been delayed until the will, power, and knowledge were granted to the human being.

Out of Allah's Wisdom, He created tunnels for water under the ground so that the very hot countries can reach groundwater and so that the water spread on wide areas are protected from evaporation. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Allah sends water down from the sky, guides it along to form springs in the earth…' (*az-Zumar:* 21).

Allah *the Almighty* hides some amount of water under the ground for the sake of preserving the life of the human being. In hot countries, we can also find salt on the surface of the soil which is clear evidence that Allah *Glorified is He* has laid down the rule of distillation of sweet-water so that it becomes drinkable and ready to be used for cultivation.

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who sends water down from the sky, and no creature has any role in this process; water has been always evaporating without the human being's awareness of this fact, which was discovered a few centuries ago. Now, we know how clouds are formed and then the rain falls. As the human being has nothing to do with this process, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Have you [Prophet] not considered how Allah sends water down from the sky…?' (*al-Hajj:* 63)

Did the disbelievers receive Allah's Blessings in the universe by faith, or by an obstinate and arrogant refusal to believe? The answer is provided in

His saying: '…yet they persist in their insolence and their avoidance of the Truth.' (*al-Mulk:* 21)

The Arabic word *bal* (yet) is used for negating what comes before it and affirms what comes after it. This means that they did not believe or follow the Right Path. They were expected to follow that Path after knowing about the messages of the prophets, yet they rejected it and followed the path of denial and persistence on avoiding the Truth. So, the Arabic particle *bal* (yet) is used for negating what is said before it and confirming the new speech which is said after it.

With regard, to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…yet they persist…' (*al-Mulk:* 21), it means that they persistently continued in their insolence and avoidance of belief and refused to follow other than this wrong path. They neither consider nor think wisely; rather, they insist on their transgression and persist in staying away from faith. The Arabic word *lajju* (entering persistently) means deeply involved in sins; they involved in this wrongdoing regardless of the clear proofs that called them to stay away from it. They continued in their transgression, lies, and error. Thus, they insisted on their insolence and refusal of the Truth.

So, regarding His saying: '…yet they persist in their insolence and their avoidance of the Truth.' (*al-Mulk:* 21), the Arabic word *'utaww* (insolence) means arrogance and refusal. Here, it means that the disbelievers refused, disobeyed, and avoided the Truth. This is the utmost level of corruptness. This word means to exaggerate in transgression, challenge, and exceeding of limits. The insolent transgressor is the one who reached the extreme level of aggression such as the tyrant. The more people fear him, the more he becomes confident and powerful.

'Utaww also means disbelief, transgression, tyranny, and gross corruption. In this regard Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Those who do not fear to meet Us say, "Why are the angels not sent down to us?" or "Why can we not see our Lord?" They are too proud of themselves and too insolent.' (*al-Furqan:* 21) They are too arrogant and try to give themselves a value above what they deserve, neglecting the fact that every human being is of a specific value.

Nufour (avoidance) means to disbelieve and to arrogantly avoid believing and following the Truth and the Path of Faith. So, *utaww* (insolence) means to insist on disbelief, while *nufour* (avoidance) means to avoid the Truth. Thus, the disbelievers' arrogant persistence led them to avoid and disbelieve in the Truth.

Does a person shun the Truth and refuse to believe in Allah *the Almighty*? The answer is provided in His saying: 'Whenever Allah is mentioned on His Own, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with aversion, but they rejoice when gods other than Him are mentioned.' (*az-Zumar:* 45) His saying: '…shrink with aversion…' (*az-Zumar:* 45) means that their hearts turn away. When anyone feels unpleasant things, the feelings of annoyance appear on his face. Afterwards, the feeling of rejection overwhelms him and then he turns away from that thing. Similarly, when Allah *Glorified is He* is mentioned, the disbelievers' souls shrink and turn away from believing in His Oneness. Shrinkage of hearts is a hidden feeling, but it appears on the face due to the soul agitation.

Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'We have explained things in various ways (1) in this Quran so that such people might take notice, but it has only turned them further away.' (*al-Isra':* 41) Instead of returning to the Right Path, the disbelievers persistently continued in their rejection and avoidance of the Truth. But, why did they refuse the Message of Truth? This is because it came with certain principles and teachings that run counter to their interests and give rise to their fear and annoyance, so they turn away in fear and rejection.

Nufour (avoidance) is to keep yourself away from something because you hate it. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Yet when they are told to bow down before the Lord of Mercy, they say, "What is the Lord of Mercy? Should we bow down before anything you command?" and they turn even further away.' (*al-Furqan:* 60)

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an image for their avoidance of the Truth, shunning belief and neglecting the Divine Warning, saying: ‘What is the matter with them? Why do they turn away from the warning, like frightened zebras (1) fleeing from a lion (2)?’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 49-51) They should not have turned away from the Reminder, but they turned away violently, not in normal reasonable attitude, just like the attitude of zebras when they encounter a sudden attack of a lion.

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(1) *Sarraffna* (clarified in many ways) here means that Allah *the Almighty* has provided explanations in various types of speech, i.e. telling stories and lessons from the past nations to be learned, giving examples, using techniques such as imperative, prohibition, giving of advice and reproach. Allah *Glorified is He* has given us examples for everything.

They behave haphazardly without thinking about reasons for persistence in disbelief. This is not the attitude of the sane people; they are like the zebras who are escaping from the lions fearfully and panicky. They have no purpose but to flee. Similarly, those disbelievers escape aimlessly from the Message, and continue in their wrong way with no guidance.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَفَمَن يَمۡشِي مُكِبًّا عَلَىٰ وَجۡهِهِۦٓ أَهۡدَىٰٓ أَمَّن يَمۡشِي سَوِيًّا عَلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ٢٢

Who is better guided: someone who falls on his face,
or someone who walks steadily on a straight path? [22]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 22)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* draws a comparison between two types of people. First, those who walk and then fall on their faces for they turned away from the Path of the Truth and chose the way of wrongfulness and deviation instead; second, those who follow the Straight Path. Allah *the Almighty* makes this comparison in the form of interrogation, saying: ‘Who is better guided: someone who falls on his face, or someone who walks steadily on a straight path?’ (*al-Mulk:* 22) Which one of the two is better guided and following the Right Path? To be truly guided, one must follow Allah’s Way of Guidance. It is the Straight Path that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified for us in his saying, ‘None of you [truly] believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought.’(1)

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(1) *Humur* (zebras) is the plural of zebra; it refers to zebras because Allah *the Almighty* follows this verse by saying: ‘Fleeing from a lion.’ (*al-Mudaththir:* 51) So, Allah *Glorified is He* is describing wild life. But the donkey is mentioned in other verses, as in His saying: ‘…are like donkeys carrying books…’ (*al-Jumu’a:* 5); and ‘…for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of donkeys.’ (*Luqman:* 19).

(2) *Qaswara* means a lion. This word has other meanings according to Ibn Mandhur. He said, ‘Ibn Al-A`rabi and Ibn Al-Athir say that *qaswara* means hunting archers.’ So, it may mean in this verse that the zebras fled from the hunters and their arrows. See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 2/115;* Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan Al-`Arab, the root q-s-r.*

As for the ways and the approaches leading to wrongfulness and error, they are numerous; there are thousands of them. This is clear in the verse where Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘This is My Path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it…’ (*al-An‘am:* 153). When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* read this verse, he drew, for his companions, a straight line surrounded by zigzag lines, and then he pointed to the straight one and said, ‘This is what I am upon and my companions.’(2)

Thus, the path towards guidance is only one, but misguidance has thousands of doctrines and approaches. If we look to those who are following the path of misguidance, we will find that they have various ideologies and every one of them has his own inclinations. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Anyone Allah guides is truly guided, and you will find no protector other than Him for anyone He leaves astray. On the Day of Resurrection We shall gather them, lying on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf. Hell will be their Home. Whenever the Fire goes down (3), We shall make it blaze more fiercely for them.’ (*al-Isra’:* 97)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by Ibn Abu `Asim and Al-Hasan ibn Sufyan. Al-Albani Allah rest his soul said that its chain of narrations is weak; the narrators are all trusted, except Nu`aym ibn Hammad for he frequently erred. See Ibn Abu `Asim, As-Sunna, Hadith no. 15; Al-Albani, Dhilal Al-Janna Fi Takhrij As-Sunna, 2/12; and Al-Hasan ibn Sufyan, Al-Arb`in, 1/65.*

(2) *In his Musnad, Imam Ahmad narrates this Hadith on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud and Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah. In his Sunnan, Ibn Maja narrates it on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah who said, ‘We were with Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him then he drew a line with his hands, then he drew two other lines to the left, and two to the right. Then he put his hand on the middle line and said that this is the way to Allah. Then he recited the verse: ‘This is My Path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it…’ (al-An‘am: 153). As for the Hadith: ‘This is what I am upon and my companions’ it was narrated by `Abdullah ibn `Umar that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘What befell the children of Israel will befall my ummah, step by step. Indeed, the children of Israel split into seventy-two sects, and my ummah will split into seventy-three sects. All of them are in fire except one sect. It is what I am upon and my companions.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 4142 and 15277; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 11; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2641.*

(3) *In his Tafsir, Mujahid says, ‘Whenever the Fire goes down’ means every time the fire fades away.’ In his Tafsir, Muqatil ibn Sulaiman says, ‘This happens when the Fire=*

Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* said that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘People will be gathered in three classes on the Day of Resurrection: A class walking, a class riding and a class upon their faces.’ It was said, ‘O Messenger of Allah! How will they walk upon their faces?’ He said, ‘Indeed the One Who made them walk upon their feet is Able to make them walk upon their faces. Indeed, they will try to protect their faces from every bump and thorn.’(1)

What is strange about the fact that the disbelievers will walk upon their faces?! We can already see that creatures have different kinds of movement, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘And Allah created each animal out of [its own] fluid: some of them crawl on their bellies, some walk on two legs and some on four. Allah creates whatever He wills; Allah has Power over everything.’ (*an-Nur:* 45) Can we not see how the snakes move fast on their bellies? The Creator of snakes is fully Able to make those who went astray walk on their bellies. This matter depends on Allah’s Omnipotence Who wills to humiliate and degrade the disbelievers. Such degradation and humiliation do not stop at that extent, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘…We shall gather them, lying on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf…’ (*al-Isra’:* 97). This is a continuation of the methods of humiliation. In addition to walking on their faces blindly with no guidance, the disbelievers are deaf and dumb; they can neither hear any call nor say anything.

These are the descriptions of disbelievers in the worldly life too, i.e. they lay on their faces following the path of wrongfulness with no guidance; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah is mocking them, and allowing them more slack to wander blindly in their insolence.’ (*al-Baqara:* 15) Here, wandering blindly refers to the blindness of insight. ‘To wander blindly’ means that the disbelievers become unguided. They are wandering blindly in a material sense, for they

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= *totally burns their bodies and nothing remains but their bones and they turn into coal. Then the Fire fades away.’ See Mujahid, Tafsir, 1/442; and Muqatil, Tafsir, 2/552.*

(1) *In his Musnad, Imam Ahmed narrates this Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayra and also Anas ibn Malik in a summarised form. The core of its meaning is narrated by Muslim as follows: ‘A man came to Prophet Muhammad and asked him, ‘O Messenger of Allah! How will the disbelievers walk upon their faces on the day of Resurrection?’ See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8647 and 12708; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2806.*

have no sight; they are morally unguided, losing the insight that guides them to the way of morality and the Divine Path.

Wandering blindly also means to be hesitant and perplexed, i.e. the disbelievers are going in their wrongfulness hesitantly with no reason or insight; they are confused and unable to make the right choices; they are perplexed and blind to righteousness and the Right Path; they cannot distinguish the good from the evil; and they do not know where to go!

Allah *the Almighty* says about them: ‘Deaf, dumb (and) blind, so they will not turn back.’ (*al-Baqara:* 18) Their means of perception do not work properly. So, they cannot realise the signs of Allah *Glorified is He* to reach the absolute faith. Further, they do not listen to the Quran or understand its verses. This is because all the doors towards apprehension are closed in front of them.

They are not only deaf and dumb, but they also turn away from guidance, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘You [Prophet] cannot make the dead hear and you cannot make the deaf hear your call when they turn their backs and leave.’ (*ar-Rum:* 52) As they turn their backs, they become with no means for receiving guidance and having perception. There is no hope for guiding them as they are deaf, dumb and, due to turning their backs, blind. So, blindness hinders the way towards guidance, particularly if the blind insisted on being so, i.e. he continues in his way of wrongfulness and disbelief. His heart is blinded, thus follows his desires without any guidance from Allah *Glorified is He*. He is completely blind, that on the Day of Judgment, he cannot see what is before him, or what is on his right or left side. This is because such a disbeliever ‘…falls on his face…’ (*al-Mulk:* 22). This means that he walks with a lowered head. This indicates that the disbelievers eagerly committed sins in the worldly life, so they will be resurrected on their faces. In this regard, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘How will the disbelievers walk upon their faces?’ he said, ‘Indeed the One Who made them walk upon their feet, is Able to make them walk upon their faces on the Day of Resurrection.’(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 13392; see also Abd ibn Hamid, Musnad, Hadith no. 1181; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 7323; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2806.*

The disbelievers walk aimlessly in the darkness, with no insight; they cannot see the way of guidance. They have neither insight nor sight and they cannot see on their right or left sides.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…falls on his face…' (*al-Mulk:* 22), portrays a retrogression and decline of the normal creation of the human being, given the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* has created him: '…in the finest state.' (*at-Tin:* 4) Every living creature is created with its face facing the ground, except for the human being, for He *the Almighty* has created him on an upright status, i.e. he walks on his feet and eats by his hands.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that disbelievers are not like the cattle which just eat and drink only, but, they are also even worse, as the cattle are performing their due function in life, while those disbelievers are not, i.e. they do not worship Allah *the Almighty*. This fact is clearly mentioned in His saying: 'We have created many jinn and people who are destined for hell, with hearts they do not use for comprehension, eyes they do not use for sight, ears they do not use for hearing. They are like cattle, no, even further astray: these are the ones who are entirely heedless.' (*al-A'raf:* 179) Cattle do not go astray as they are bounded by their instincts and do not have the freedom of choice. But as for the disbelievers from among the jinn and mankind, they do not give Allah *Glorified is He* His due Esteem, while cattle, the inanimate objects and the plants do, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…there is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise...' (*al-Isra':* 44).

The disbelievers of Quraysh asked some of the rabbis about who is better guided; is it they or Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Allah *the Almighty* makes mention of this incident, saying: '[Prophet], have you considered those who claim purity for themselves? No! Allah purifies whomever He wills: no one will be wronged by as much as the husk of a date stone. See how they invent lies about Allah, this in itself is a flagrant sin! Do you not see how those given a share of the Scripture, [evidently] now believe in idols and evil powers? They say of the disbelievers, "They are more rightly guided than the believers."' (*an-Nisa':* 49-51) Some of Quraysh's leaders said to the Jew scholars, 'You are the People of the Book and knowledge, give us your opinion about us and about Muhammad.' They said, 'Who are you and who Muhammad is?' They said, 'We slaughter dromedaries (1), provide water with milk, release captives, maintain the bonds of kinship, provide water for pilgrims while Muhammad severs the bonds of kinship.' The rabbis said, 'You are better guided than him.'(2)

The Jews said that the idolaters are better guided than Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers. They said so even though their Books told them that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would be sent with the final Divine Message. They even were saying to the disbelievers of Medina, 'There is a prophet to be sent and we will follow him. We will fight with him and kill you as `Ad and Iram have been killed.'(3)

The argument in question raised in the verse under discussion: 'Who is better guided: someone who falls on his face, or someone who walks steadily on a straight path?' (*al-Mulk:* 22), and will remain until the Day of Resurrection. Who is better guided?! The one who rebels against and disobeys his Creator and walks with his face down to ground as if he falls on it, or he who walks steadily on a straight path? Are they equal?!

The word Sawiyya (walks steadily) means that the body stands upright with no curvature. Here, Allah *the Almighty* describes the one who follows the Path of Faith as 'walking steadily'. Sometimes He *the Almighty* describes the Path itself as 'even', as in His saying: '…so follow me: I will guide you to an even path.' (*Maryam:* 43) An even path is a straight path which easily leads you to your target in the shortest possible time. It is a path with no curves, so it is the closest to your target because the curved path takes a longer time to deliver you to the desired target.

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(1) *Kawma* (dromedary) refers to a type of camels with a very big and high hump. *See Al-Qasim ibn Salam, Gharib Al-Hadith, 3/84; and Az-Zamakhshari, Al-Fa`iq Fi Gharib Al-Hadith Wa Al-Athar, 1/388.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tabari and As-Suyuti who ascribes it to At-Tabarani and Al-Bayhaqi in Dala`il An-Nubuwwa on the authority of `Ikrima from Ibn `Abbas. See At-Tabari, Jame` Al-Bayan, p. 9789; and As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 2/562.*

(3) *In his Tafsir, At-Tabari narrates this narration when he was giving the explanation of the verse: 'When a Scripture came to them from Allah confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers…' (al-Baqara: 89). See At-Tabari, Jame` Al-Bayan, 2/333.*

What is meant by a 'path'? It is a way leading to a destination. A straight path is the shortest way to reach a destination as the straight line is the shortest between two points. Accordingly, if you want to go to a place, the shortest road to take is the straight un-crooked one. Deviation from a straight path may not be noticeable at the beginning, but it ultimately leads to a wide divergence from the desired destination.

We can take the railway tracks as an example. If we watch a train when it starts to change its direction, we will find that it deviates only few millimetres at the very beginning. The deviation at the beginning of the shunting point is too small, but it gets wider as the train continues its track. Ultimately, we find that the end of the road is tens and may be hundreds of kilometres away from the beginning. Regarding the Way of Guidance, any deviation, regardless how much it is simple, turns you greatly away from the Straight Path. The even path is a straight path which leads you to the target with the least effort and in the shortest time.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلسَّمْعَ وَٱلْأَبْصَٰرَ وَٱلْأَفْـِٔدَةَ ۖ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Say [Prophet], 'It is He who brought you into being, He who endowed you with hearing, sight, and understanding – what small thanks you give!' [23] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 23)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to state that it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who brought us into existence. He *the Almighty* does not mention here what we are created from, but He mentions this point in other verses, as in His saying: 'It is He who first produced you from a single soul, then gave you a place to stay [in life] and a resting place [after death]...' (*al-An'am:* 98); 'It was He who brought you into being from the earth and made you inhabit it…' (*Hud:* 61); and '…just as He produced you from the offspring of other people' (*al-An'am:* 133). To bring something into being means to initiate its creation with no other helping means, that is, to create it without making use of something else. That is why it is not said about the one who makes an invention that he is a creator because he makes use of certain things to make his invention. He may use a material extracted from mountains, depending meanwhile on the precedent experiences. By contrast, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who creates things out of nothing. So, there are two types of bringing something non-existent into being: to create something by using existing beings or out of nothing.

The latter type, i.e. 'bringing something out of nothing' is only attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* and it clearly manifests the Divine Will. He *the Almighty* brings the human being into being through sexual intercourse between a man and a woman.

If we returned to the first creation of the human being, i.e. the creation of Adam *peace be upon him* we find that he was created out of the same substance of the earth, which in turn is created by Allah *the Almighty*. The semen of a man and the ovum of a woman are formed from blood which is an extract of the food coming from the earth. So, whether we attribute the creation of the human being to the bringing of Adam into being out of the earth or just to the normal process of the creation of his offspring, both eventually are attributed to Allah's Will.

Bringing something into being is a process of construction. Allah, the Creator, says that we are created from dust, mud, dark mud and dried clay like an earthenware. Water is added to the dust and it turns into mud. The mud is left until its colour changes and it becomes dried clay. Then, it becomes stiffer and turns into dark mud. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* moulded it and breathed from His Spirit into it, and then it became a human being. Lastly, death time comes and destroys life. Destruction of anything means the opposite of its construction.

To construct a building, you start from down to up, but it is destroyed from up to down. Also, if you are heading to a place, the last point you reach is the first point you start from on your way back. For example, if you are travelling to Alexandria, the last place you reached is the first place you will start from in your way back.

The first thing that goes out of our bodies at the moment of death is the Spirit, which is the last thing breathed into it. Then the body toughens and becomes like dark mud, then it rots and becomes like clay, then water vaporises and it turns into dust. Thus, according to the life stages that Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified for us, death stages are the reverse to those of life.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us a description for the stages of creating the human being inside his mother's womb, saying: 'We created man from an essence of clay, then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a safe place, then We made that drop into a clinging form, and We made that form into a lump of flesh, and We made that lump into bones, and We clothed those bones with flesh, and later We made him into other forms glory be to Allah, the best of creators!' (*al-Mu'minun:* 12-14) He *the Almighty* creates the human being inside his mother's womb in phases and stages during which he depends on his mother. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* puts him in another form and state of creation after he is born and granted a chance for another new life in which he does not depend on any one. In other words, the human being depends on his mother as long as he is in her womb, and then He *the Almighty* turns him into an independent creature. During the delivery process, the infant is head is directed downwards and it is the first thing that appears of him. Afterwards, he begins to breath. At this moment, he is separated from his mother and gains his own self. This way of delivering the baby is a Mercy from Allah *the Almighty* because even if the rest of his body is obstructed for a while in the womb, he will still have a chance to breathe and there will be no risk to suffer from asphyxiation while dealing with the rest of the body.

The foetus through all such phases—being a drop of fluid, a clinging form, a lump of flesh, bones and then clothing those bones with flesh—is still dependant on his mother as it is fed from her. When it is born by the Will of Allah *the Almighty* it is separated from its mother and begins to manage its life on its own.

Allah *Glorified is He* has created us out of nothing and moulded us in an upright structure and in the best stature, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Who created [all things] in due proportion; who determined their destinies and guided them.' (*al-A'la:* 2-3) This moulding was done at the beginning to the first man who was created directly from clay. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…when I have fashioned him and breathed My Spirit into him, bow down before him.' (*al-Hijr:* 29) He *the Almighty* further explains this fact in another verse, saying: '…Who gave everything its perfect form. He first created man from clay, then made his descendants from an extract of underrated[1] fluid. Then He moulded him; He breathed from His Spirit into him; He gave you hearing, sight, and minds. How seldom you are grateful!' (*as-Sajda:* 7-9)

Adam *peace be upon him* had passed through such a process of perfect forming which is mentioned in the last verse, i.e. the clay was moulded and shaped in the form of a man and then the Spirit was breathed into him. Similarly, He *the Almighty* perfects the formation of Adam's descendants who pass through certain stages, including being a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh and finally Allah *Glorified is He* breathes from His Spirit into them.

After He *the Almighty* brings the human being into existence and creates him from his father's semen and his mother's ovum, Allah *Glorified is He* gives him hearing, sight, and mind. The Arabic verb *ja`al* (gave) differs from the verbs 'to create' and 'to bring into being'. Creation is to bring something into being out of nothing. But *ja`al* linguistically means 'to make' or 'to direct'. For example, the Divine Act of creating the sun and the moon differs from making the sun a source of light, and the moon for reflecting that light.

Human beings, on their part, can make a pot or any other earthenware from clay. Also, we can use cotton for making cloth. However, these materials are not of our creation.

As for Allah *the Almighty* He has brought Adam out of nothing, and has created the materials from which he was created, i.e. water and dust which turned into clay. Then He *the Almighty* endowed him with hearing and sight to perform his mission. Thus, *al-ja`l* (to give /make) means to direct the creature towards its mission.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It is Allah Who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78) Those three things, i.e. the hearing, the sight, and the mind are the means and the senses needed for

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(1) *Mahin* (underrated) means something which is fiddling and of no value; it also means weak. The semen of the male is weak that anything can affect the sperms contained in it and they become unable to fertilise the female ovum. Allah *the Almighty* reminds the human being that he is created of such semen so that he may not become arrogant. See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 2/243.*

perception and for gaining knowledge. The master of those senses is the eyes. You can hear someone's experience about something, but when you experience it yourself, you find it different. That is why it is said, 'What is seen is more certain than what is heard'.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions first the hearing and the sight for they are the basic two means of perception. Then He mentions the 'mind' which is related to the perception of the abstract conceptions, emotions, etc. The two senses of perception, hearing and sight, are the ones which enable the human being to gain experience.

So, the means of perception are hearing, sight, and mind. What the eye witnesses represents the human being's own experience, but what he hears represents the experience of others. Therefore, the experience gained through the sense of hearing is much broader than that gained by the eyes.

The sense of hearing is the first means of perception that the human being is endowed with when he is born. If we look to a newborn baby, we find that he is not affected when something comes close to his eyes because he cannot see well. This may last for ten days, and then the process of sight begins. However, if that baby heard a sound beside him, he makes a reaction. Thus, hearing is the first sense with which Allah *the Almighty* endows the human being, then comes the sense of sight, then comes the 'mind'.

Al-Ja`l (giving/making) here means that Allah *Glorified is He* has allocated some of the human being's cells to form the eyes, some others to form the ears and the tongue. He *the Almighty* has set the tasks of these senses. The ears begin performing their task upon delivery, while the eyes begin after a while; the hearing first, then the sight. So, through hearing and sight, knowledge is gained, and intellectual information is constituted.

For example, when a child gets close to a fire, he is warned against touching it so that he may not be burnt. But he may not believe that and get attracted by its light. When he touches it, he gets burnt, and after that there is no need to remind him that he may get burnt by fire, for he has developed an intellectual experience. Thus, hearing came in the first place, then sight, then the mind at last. The human being's means of perceiving knowledge are the senses of hearing, sight, taste, touch, and smell. Through these five senses, he can perceive knowledge after he was born without having any knowledge.

Here arises a question, which is, ‘Why is the word hearing mentioned in the singular form, while the words ‘sight’ and ‘mind’ are mentioned in the plural in Allah’s saying: ‘…Hearing, sight and minds…’ (*al-Mulk:* 23)? We can say that the ears receive various sounds at the same time, but the scope of our vision is limited. When we do not need to see something, we can easily turn our eyes away, but you cannot prevent our ears from receiving sounds from everywhere. Therefore, the hearing came in the singular form, while the sight came in the plural one. Every person may see something different from the other, but the ears hear all sounds whether we are asleep or awake. Therefore, hearing is the main sense for calling or awaking someone.

Hearing and sight are the masters of the senses. In fact, the miraculous signs in the universe need the eyes to see them, and the messages of the prophets need ears to hear them. `Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* drew our attention to some of the wonders relating to the creation of the human being, saying, ‘The human being is a wonderful creature; he sees through the layers of fat (the eyes), speaks through a lump of flesh (the tongue), hears through a bone (the ears) and breathes through a hole (the nose).’ Someone added, ‘Smell through a cartilage (the nose), touch through skin and thought by dough (the brain).’ When the human being is born, his brain is like a piece of dough receiving information from the universe. These pieces of information will be stored to be the base for constituting the intellectual abilities after that.

When the scholars were considering the meanings of words, they concluded a maxim: ‘If some items of the same category are spoken about differently, there must be a reason for making this difference.’ Here, the sense of hearing is one of the means of perception, and so is the sight. So, why does Allah *Glorified is He* talk about hearing in the singular form and about sight in the plural form? Why does not He *the Almighty* use one form for both?

The Speaker here is Allah *the Almighty* and certainly every word He says has a profound wisdom and is perfectly chosen. As a matter of fact, we hear sounds in every place around us. On the contrary, the eyes see only in one direction; if we need to look to the right, we turn our eyes to the right side, and if we need to see what is behind our backs, we change our position. So, the ears hear everything and we do not have a control or a choice to prevent our ears from hearing. However, the sight needs several processes so that we can see what we want, and we can control it by turning our eyes away or closing them.

The human being will be held accountable for what he hears by his ears, sees by his eyes and believes in by his heart, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Surely, ears, eyes and heart, you will be questioned about all these.’ (*al-Isra’:* 36) Every Muslim should know that he will be questioned on the Day of Resurrection about his hearing, sight, heart, and tongue. He should not be careless about perfecting his words and deeds so that he does not fear either in the worldly life or in the Hereafter.

Everyone is individually responsible for his hearing, sight, tongue and all the rest of his senses. He will be questioned about his own hearing, sight and heart, and not that of other people. The one who protects his tongue from saying evil and indecent words keeps his dignity and gains the respect of others, as they will value his exquisite speech. We should consider that all of one’s organs will be witnesses on what he has done, including the sins he has committed and the corruption he has caused in the worldly life, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…their ears, eyes and skins will, when they reach it, testify against them for their misdeeds. They will say to their skins, ‘Why did you testify against us?’ and their skins will reply, “Allah who gave speech to everything, has given us speech…”’ (*Fussilat:* 20-21). Therefore, the feet, the skin, and the other organs of the body will be witnesses on the Day of Judgment. In the worldly life, they are under our control, i.e. we can order our hand, saying, ‘Do this!’, our feet, ‘Go to this place!’ and our tongues, ‘Insult this person!’

Allah *the Almighty* subjected the body organs to their owner’s will in the worldly life. But, will we have control on them on the Day of Resurrection? No, they will be out of our control, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘They will say to their skins, “Why did you testify against us?” and their skins will reply, “Allah, who gave speech to everything, has given us speech…”’ (*Fussilat:* 21). So, the organs of the human being’s body, including the hands, the feet and the skin, will speak on the Day of Resurrection. Do we consider what will they say in the Hereafter? All these organs will speak to establish the proof against those sinners. These organs were the means they used to commit their crimes. That is to say that they stole by their hands; uttered false statements by their tongues; headed towards sins with their legs; and these crimes were determined by their hearts.

As a matter of fact, the human being is composed of certain organs with specific systems that altogether constitute the human being. The whole body is managed by the mind. It orders the hands either to steal or to pat on an orphan; the eyes to either look at the beauty in the universe and to contemplate the events occurring around or to look at the unlawful. Similarly, the hands can be used either for hitting and attacking or for offering help and giving charity to the needy. The legs can walk either to the mosques or to the public houses.

The organs of the human being and his abilities are subjected to his will. He can order his tongue to say that there is no god but Allah, or to say that there is no god at all or that Allah is the third of three. The tongue obeys him and does not violate the orders. Allah *Glorified is He* has granted the human being this freedom and guaranteed for him the freedom of choice only because He *the Almighty* will hold him accountable on the Day of Resurrection: did he seek the good that Allah *Glorified is He* has guided him to, or the evil from which he was ordered to refrain?

One’s control on his organs will come to an end on the Day of Resurrection when Allah *Glorified is He* calls for His creatures and says: ‘…Who has control today? Allah, the One, the All Powerful.’ (*Ghafir:* 16) The organs will testify against their owners and speak as if they will be speaking tongues, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘On the Day when their own tongues, hands, and feet will testify against them about what they have done.’ (*an-Nur:* 24)

The organs become free of the constraints of the human being’s will, and now they can complain to Allah *the Almighty* and say the truth they could not utter before due to being under the human being’s control. With regard to His saying: ‘…Allah, Who gave speech to everything, has given us speech…’ (*Fussilat:* 21), it means that Allah *Glorified is He* has made for everything in the universe its unique way of speech, as He *the Almighty* tells us about the ant which said: '…Ants! Go into your homes…' (*an-Naml:* 18); and the hoopoe which said: '…I have learned something you did not know: I come to you from Sheba with firm news.' (*an-Naml:* 22)

The organs itself have their own life and speech that we cannot comprehend, for their lives are different from ours. Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who created the hearing, the sight, the heart, and the tongue for us. That is why He *the Almighty* says in the verse in question: 'Say [Prophet], "It is He Who brought you into being, He who gave you hearing, sight and minds– what small thanks you give!"' (*al-Mulk:* 23) We can thank Him *Glorified is He* for endowing us with these organs, whether our hearing, sight or tongues, by not using them for committing sins.

As for the tongue, we have to hold it from saying evil and rude words. We talk to people by using the ability of speaking that Allah *the Almighty* has granted to our tongues, and if He wanted, He would have made us dumb and speechless. We, therefore, have to thank Him *Glorified is He* and give Him His due Praise.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* clearly tells us that we rarely thank Him for His Blessings. But in another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us of the Gifts He granted to us, so that we may give Him His due Praise, saying: 'It is Allah Who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds so that you might be thankful.' (*an-Nahl:* 78)

The expression 'so that you might be thankful' means that if the orders are obeyed, a great reward will be granted. The normally expected act when a blessing is received is to give thanks. Thus, when we thank Allah *Glorified is He* for a blessing, we expect another blessing that cannot be attained except by giving thanks.

As we have said before, the hearing, the sight, and the minds are the means of perception. Allah *Glorified is He* explains to us that He has created such means of perception so that we might be thankful as we notice their impacts on ourselves, and how they help us to perceive the matters.

Giving thanks means the giving of praise to the giver of a blessing by the one who received it. As for His saying: '…what small thanks you give!', it demonstrates that there are different types of people who give thanks; some people thank Allah for all His Blessings in general, others thank Him for every blessing, and some others give Him special thanks, not only for every blessing, but for the detail of every single blessing.

Before eating, the Muslim should say, ‘In the name of Allah’ and after finishing his meal, he should say, ‘All praise is due to Allah’. Someone may say, ‘In the Name of Allah’ with every morsel he has, and may say, ‘All Praise is due to Allah’ with every morsel of food he masticates and swallows, thanking Allah *the Almighty* because it did not stick in his throat.

Similarly, when we drink water, we should drink it in three portions, saying, ‘In the Name of Allah’ before we drink each one, and we should say, ‘All Praise is due to Allah’ after finishing each. Who does this is not expected to commit sins as long as the benefit of this sip of water remains in his body because he said before taking it, ‘In the Name of Allah’, which will protect him from committing sins. If we ever contemplated every single blessing, we will find that it contains many other blessings.

When we do not thank Allah *the Almighty* for His Blessings, we lessen the number of blessings that we might get. By contrast, if we thank Him *Glorified is He* we will have more blessings, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘…if you are thankful, I will give you more…’ (*Ibrahim:* 7). So, it is an act of foolishness not to thank Allah *the Almighty*.

As a matter of fact, the thanks are mainly given when getting a blessing. The means of perception, including the hearing, the sight, and the mind, are of His Blessings for which we should thank Him. Through these means, we are able to acquire perceptual knowledge after we were having no knowledge at all. Therefore, thanks are due to Allah *the Almighty* for endowing us with these means.

Allah *Glorified is He* did not oblige to thank Him, but He left this issue for our volition. Whenever we hear a sound, see a beautiful scene, or smell a nice smell, we should thank Him for endowing us with ears, eyes, and noses, respectively, to perceive such things. All these blessings require that we thank Allah, the All Giver.

We should look at the blessings we have and consider those who are deprived of them. We should also make a comparison between their state and ours, and how they are deprived of enjoying the blessings which we are enjoying.

Regarding Allah’s saying: ‘…what small thanks you give!’ (*al-Mulk:* 23), some scholars say that ‘the small thanks’ refers to the act of not giving thanks at all. But this interpretation is incorrect, for He *the Almighty* says that His servants do thank Him, but they give little thanks, while Allah *Glorified is He* wants them to thank Him endlessly for every single blessing they are endowed with.

When we see the blind who are deprived of the blessing of sight blundering in the street, we should thank Allah *the Almighty* that we are enjoying this blessing. In fact, we may not notice such blessings except when we see those who are deprived of them.

In order to keep a blessing, we should keep remembering of Allah *the Almighty* and if we want to preserve it, we should not forget that Allah *Glorified is He* is the Giver of that blessing and He is the Only One Who is Fully Able to keep and preserve it. As a matter of fact, the human being is not deprived of a blessing except when he fails to remember its Giver and neglects thankfulness for it.

So, the first act of wisdom regarding the blessings is to thank Allah *Glorified is He* as the fruit of these thanks returns to the one who gives them. The believers' thanks to Him *the Almighty* should be endless. To give thanks for the blessings of having a tongue and the ability to speak, we should refrain and protect our tongues from insulting and offending people. It is good to know that He *the Almighty* has made the teeth and lips like doors to our tongue, so why do we unreasonably open them?

In this connection, it was narrated by `Amr ibn Dinar that a man was talking in the presence of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and was extremely expatiating. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'How many doors are before your tongue?' He said, 'My teeth and lips.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Are they not enough to stop you from talking?'(1)

We should either say what is good, or keep silent. In this regard, Luqman *peace be upon him* said, 'Silence is a form of wisdom, yet few people practice it.’(1) Further, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘He who truly believes in Allah and the Last Day should either utter good words or better keep silence.’(2)

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(1) *In his book, Al-Ghazali narrates this Hadith on the authority of `Amr ibn Dinar who said, 'A man was talking in the presence of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings upon him and extremely elaborated. So, he peace and blessings upon him said, 'How many barriers before your tongue?' He said, 'My lips and teeth.' He peace and blessings upon him said, 'Are they not enough to stop you from talking?' Al-Hafizh Al-Iraqi said it was narrated by Ibn Abu Ad-Dunya in this way without mentioning the Companion from whom it was transmitted, and its narrators are trusted. See Al-Ghazali, Ihya` `Ulum Ad-Din.*

The best form of silence is to be like the servants of the Lord of Mercy about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…who, when the foolish address them, reply, “Peace”’ (*al-Furqan:* 63). The foolish is the silly person who speaks carelessly and irrationally and does not understand the principles of morality and good manners.

If a person foolishly talked to you, you should never answer him back in the same foolish manner. Rather, you should just admonish him gently and say: ‘…peace…’ (*al-Furqan:* 63), to make him feel the difference between both of you. Imam Ash-Shafi`i(3) said good words in this sense:

If a foolish man speaks, answer him nothing. Silence is better than answering.

If you retaliated, he would be pleased; and if not, out of anger, he could be dead.

If this foolish person exceeded the limits and his transgression intensified, you should stop such transgression and retaliate equally because when you treated him kindly, he did not decline. Contrarily, he regarded your kindness as weakness, and so you should show him the difference between being weak and being kind.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti attributes this narration to Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal Allah rest his soul who narrated that Abu Najih said, ‘Luqman peace be upon him said, ‘Silence is a form of wisdom, yet few people practice it.’ Al-Maydani said in Al-Amthal, that the Arabic word hukm means wisdom as Allah the Almighty says about Prophet `Isa (Jesus): ‘...while he was still a boy, We granted him wisdom.’ (Maryam: 12). It means that keeping silent is a form of wisdom, but few who do this. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 6/519*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in the chapter of ‘Encouragement to honour one’s neighbour’. The rest of the Hadith is: ‘And he who believes in Allah and the Last Day should treat his neighbour with kindness and he who believes in Allah and the Last Day should show hospitality to his guest.’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6475, 6138, 6136 and 6018; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 74/47 and 75/47*

(3) Mohammed ibn Idris Al-Hashimi Al-Qurashi, Abu ‘Abdullah. He is one of the four prominent Sunni scholars. He was born in 150 A.H. He visited Baghdad twice, and came to Egypt in 199 A.H. at the age of 49, and died there in 204 A.H. at the age of 54. He was a distinguished poet and linguist, and an authority on Arab history, Islamic Jurisprudence and Hadith. He wrote *Al-Umm, Ar-Risala* and *Musnad*, etc.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ هُوَ ٱلَّذِى ذَرَأَكُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Say, 'It is He who scattered you throughout the earth,
He to whom you will be gathered' [24]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 24)

As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who scattered and spread us throughout the earth to inhabit it in full. We sometimes wonder why there are some people insisting on living in mountains and desolate bare deserts, accepting no other alternatives. They face hardships and difficulties to maintain their lives there, to the extent that you may say, 'Why do not they leave this place and go to another fertile one?' This is because Allah *Glorified is He* has distributed equally His Blessings all over the earth. In other words, every vertical piece of land has as much resources as the other pieces have.

We have seen the example of Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and how their people endured the poor state that Allah *Glorified is He* has destined for such desert countries which were bare lands. In Yemen, for example, people suffered a lot after it was totally drowned by the flood of the dam. People of those countries narrated how much they suffered and how much life was hard. But their patience has borne fruits; these mountains and deserts became the richest countries in the world. They accepted Allah's Predestination and that is why He has rewarded them for their forbearance for the boiling hot temperature of the desert that blessing, i.e. oil without which those who are living in comfort in the worldly life would have died of cold.

Allah *Glorified is He* has scattered and spread out His creatures all over the earth for a profound wisdom He intended. *Dhara`* (scattered) means that He *the Almighty* created, spread out and scattered people all over the earth. He granted His creatures the ability to reproduce by themselves, whether when the females become pregnant through the males— in the case of the human beings, animals and plants—or by hatching in the case of the birds.

The verb *dhara`* (scattered) differs from creating in an absolute sense. It is the type of creation in which the creature is granted the ability to reproduce by itself. Allah *the Almighty* has created Adam *peace be upon him* first, then He created his descendants from him. They are consequently able to reproduce by themselves when the two spouses have sexual intercourse, a fact which is clearly manifested in His saying: ‘People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1). Allah *Glorified is He* has created from Adam and Hawwa` (Eve). Then, from both of them, He *the Almighty* spread many people who, in their turn, produced even more people.

Whenever a new group is brought into life, the number of the human beings grows. If we compared a population of any country one century ago to its population now, we will find the former too much fewer. For example, Egypt’s population was estimated maximally five million people one century ago; two centuries before, it was fewer, and so on and so forth. Thus, as long as we are heading to the future, the number of the people in the world is increasing as Allah *Glorified is He* spreads from the males and the females more men and women who will reproduce larger numbers.

We explained that the verb ‘to scatter’ means to spread out, but we notice here in the last verse that Allah *the Almighty* mentions ‘men’ first, saying: ‘…spread countless men and women far and wide...’ (*an-Nisa’:* 1). This means that ‘men’ are the ones who are responsible for exerting effort and spreading out throughout the earth. They are addressed in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…travel its regions; eat His provision.’ (*al-Mulk:* 15) Women, on the other hand, should stay in their houses to manage their affairs and to make them a place of tranquillity. This is the basic job of the woman, while the man is required to deal with the outer world. However, He *the Almighty* does not say ‘countless men’ only, but rather, He includes women by using the conjunction ‘and’. Women are the counterpart of men(1), yet they are not the ones who are asked to spread out in the earth.(2)

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(1) `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, ‘Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about a person who found moisture (on his body or clothes) after having a wet dream. He replied, “He should take a bath.” He was asked about a person who remembered that he had a wet dream but did not find moisture. He replied, “A bath is not necessary for him.” Umm Salama then asked, “Is washing necessary for a woman if she sees that (in her dream)?” He replied, “Yes. Women are counterpart of men.”’ See Ahmad*, Musnad, Hadith no. 26195*

(2) Sheikh Ash-Sha`rawi *Allah rest his soul* here means that women are not required to face the hardships and difficulties of the outer world, and it is the man’s job to keep women safe and secure. (The translator)

Those who are scattered throughout the earth are two types: those who have power to achieve their interest on their own, and those who are weak and cannot manage their own needs alone, i.e. women and orphans.

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* portrays for us how such spreading on the earth ought to be, saying: ‘Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity…’ (*ar-Rum:* 21). Allah *Glorified is He* originally created Adam *peace be upon him* from clay, which is dust mixed with water. How such clay turned into a human being of flesh and blood who has the ability to reproduce by its own? Allah *Glorified is He* puts this fact in His saying: ‘One of His signs is that He created you from dust and– lo and behold!– you became human and scattered far and wide.’ (*ar-Rum:* 20) He *the Almighty* created Adam *peace be upon him* from dust and then his descendants grew rapidly and spread out the earth. That is why the particle ‘*idha*’ (lo and behold), which indicates a sudden occurrence of something, is used in the aforementioned verse.

All the human beings should spread out throughout the earth and make use of Allah’s Blessings which are scattered throughout it. To spread something is to make it scattered throughout a space. This is the opposite of folding something which entails gathering it in a limited space. Thus, the space in which something is gathered is narrow, while the space available for a scattered thing is wide.

So, the human beings should spread throughout and inhabit all parts of the earth. Allah *Glorified is He* has ordered His believing servants to disperse in the land with the aim of seeking provision. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…disperse in the land and seek out Allah’s bounty…’ (*al-Jumu‘a:* 10). We disperse in the land to seek Allah’s Provision in a place which is uninhabited or whose resources are not exploited yet. ‘Spreading out throughout the earth’ does not only mean to be just distributed on various parts, but here it means to work, exert effort, and extract the benefits contained in it. He *the Almighty* has equally distributed such benefits and provisions all over the earth.

The earth continuously gives us some of its blessings that Allah *Glorified is He* hid in it. At the early ages, we have known nothing but agriculture, but later, with the advancement of science and discoveries and the development of the human being's tools, we discovered minerals, oil, and other treasuries hidden in the earth.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question, saying: '…He to whom you will be gathered.' (*al-Mulk:* 24) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us to beware of thinking that, after He has scattered us on the earth and we inhabited all of it, we may escape from Him or that He would not be Able to gather us again. Contrarily, as He scattered us for a reason, He will, due to His Profound Wisdom, gather us, and no one can go beyond His Control.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who is fully Able to resurrect and gather us, and no one will go against His Will, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and all the living creatures He has scattered throughout them: He has the power to gather them all together whenever He will.' (*ash-Shura:* 29)

Al-Hashr (gathering) means to gather and assemble. The Day of Gathering is the Day when all people, from the time of Adam *peace be upon him* till the Day of Judgement will be gathered in one place and for one purpose. If we are complaining of the crowdedness of the earth, while we are only one of the generations, can we imagine the situation when all the beings throughout the whole ages till the Day of Judgement will be gathered?!

In this vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah will gather all beings and say: "O My servants, prepare your arguments to facilitate your responds. You are going to be assembled, called to account and held responsible for your deeds. O My angels, tell my servants to stand in rows and on the tip of their toes because they are going to be called to account."'(1)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti attributes this Hadith to Ibn Manda in his book, At-Tawhid. Mu`adh ibn Jabal narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will call and say, "O My servants, I am Allah, there is no god but Me, the Most Merciful, the Most Decisive of Judges and the Swiftest of Reckoners...' See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 5/400.*

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا ٱلْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ٢٥

They say, ‘If what you say is true, when will this promise be fulfilled?’ [25] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 25)

The disbelievers reject the fact that Allah *the Almighty* will gather and assemble them, after they have become dust, on the Day of Resurrection. They also reject the fact that they will be held accountable for their deeds. Such denial, rejection, and sarcasm are the approach of the disbelievers and atheists throughout all ages and places. Nevertheless, Allah’s Promise is true and will be fulfilled. They ask sarcastically, ‘When will this promise of punishment be fulfilled’?

Asking, in such sarcastic manner, about the time of the fulfilment of this promise, using the word ‘when’, means that they have the feeling that such a promise will not be fulfilled. They disbelieve in the veracity of the Last Day when they will for sure stand before Allah *the Almighty* and will be punished for their disbelief by the hellfire which will burn their skins away, then they will be replaced with new skins.

Those who do not believe in the Day of Resurrection and the Hereafter will say: ‘If what you say is true, when will this promise be fulfilled?’ (*al-Mulk:* 25) The promise here refers to the coming of the Day of Resurrection. They called what Allah *Glorified is He* has told them about the Resurrection a ‘promise’, while it is a ‘threat’.

There is a difference between ‘promising’ and ‘threatening’; the former is used for expressing something good, while the latter expresses something bad. Though the disbelievers of Mecca were a people of eloquence, Allah *the Almighty* hindered their tongue from speaking well, and they said: ‘When will this promise be fulfilled?’ (*an-Naml:* 71), though it is a ‘threat’ for them. In fact, threating the disbelievers is simultaneously a promise for the believers.

Indeed, the promise of Allah *Glorified is He* will be definitely fulfilled, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘What you are promised is sure to come, and you cannot escape.’ (*al-An‘am:* 134) When He *the Almighty* makes a promise, it will surely be fulfilled, and if He makes threats against something, they will surely be carried out. As we have said before, a ‘promise’, unlike a ‘threat’, entails something good.

What is awkward about their question is that they say: ‘…if what you say is true.’ (*al-Mulk:* 25) They forgot that breaking promises or the inability to carry out a threat is only expected from the creatures. It is an act of those who are subject to change and may change their minds so that they are no longer expected to fulfil their promises. They may have given a promise thinking that they are able to fulfil it, and then it gets out of their hand, as they cannot control all what is necessary for fulfilling the promise.

However, if the One Who gave the promise is the Omnipotent and there is no other god to stand against His promises or threats, then His promises will definitely be fulfilled and His threats will be certainly carried out. Hence, when Allah *the Almighty* sets a rule, the believers must take it as an absolute fact because there are no gods besides Him to change this rule, and Allah *Glorified is He* is not prone to change.

Let us give an example to illustrate this point; He *the Almighty* says: ‘May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: he will burn in the Flaming Fire and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a palm-fibre rope around her neck.’ (*al-Masad:* 1-5)

This threat against Abu Lahab and his wife could have been willingly avoided on their part, yet they insisted and did not believe in Allah *Glorified is He*. The previous verses explain that every Muslim should not deal with this issue doubtfully and think that Abu Lahab or his wife would have repented and converted to Islam like other disbelievers who converted to Islam, such as Hind bint `Utba, and Abu Sufyan.

Allah *Glorified is He* surely knows to what choice Abu Lahab and his wife would incline, and both had the freedom of choice. There is no other god to change or modify what He *the Almighty* ruled concerning this matter. Some may mistakenly think that Allah *Glorified is He* will fulfil His promises, yet they can escape from Him. But He tells them that His promises will be fulfilled and they cannot escape from Him. No one can prevent Him *Glorified is He* from fulfilling His promises or carrying out His threats, and thus no one can escape from either of them. We cannot escape from Allah *the Almighty* or be out of His control, for He always prevails in His purpose.

When Allah *Glorified is He* makes a threat, He is fully Able to carry it out, and no one can escape from Him. His promises are also absolute and can never be broken. As the human being is subject to change, he is expected to break his promise. For example, someone may, when the time of fulfilling his promise falls due, finds himself practically or psychologically unable to fulfil it.

Conversely, when Allah *Glorified is He* gives a promise, it will inevitably be fulfilled because there is no other power to prevent Him from that. He *the Almighty* is the One Who controls all the creatures that He made subject to change, while He is Unchangeable. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘He is Allah: there is no god but Him. He will gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection, about which there is no doubt. Whose word can be truer than Allah’s?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 87) The verb ‘gather’ here means that Allah *Glorified is He* will bring us all together out of graves and gather us before Him. It also may mean that He *the Almighty* will resurrect and call us for account on the Day of Resurrection.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا ٱلْعِلْمُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَإِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

Say, ‘God alone has knowledge of this:
my only duty is to give clear warning’ [26]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 26)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* instructs Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: ‘Allah Alone has knowledge of this…’ (*al-Mulk:* 26). Yet, in another verse, He *the Almighty* tells him to say: ‘Say, “You have an appointment for a Day which you cannot put off or bring forward, even by a single moment.’ (*Saba’:* 30) Thus, only Allah *Glorified is He* knows the time when the Day of Judgment comes. That is why when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘When will the Hour be?’ he answered, ‘The one who is asked about it does not know more than the one who is asking.’(1)

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(1) This is the Hadith of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* in which he asked about faith, Islam and *ihsan* (the highest rank of Islam), then he asked about the time of the Hour.=

Elsewhere in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Knowledge of the Hour [of Resurrection] belongs to Allah…’ (*Luqman:* 34). This interrogation about the Hour is related to the Unseen which no one has knowledge about except Him *the Almighty*. Therefore, the disbelievers’ question is useless. That is why when one of the Companions asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Last Hour, he answered him, ‘What have you prepared for it?’(1) In this way, he *peace and blessings be upon him* drew this Companion’s attention to the point that he should ask and care about.

The disbelievers do not believe that there will be a Day of Judgement, a point which is crystal clear in Allah’s saying: ‘Still, the disbelievers say, “The Last Hour will never come upon us.” Say, “Yes, by my Lord, [it will], by Him who knows the unseen! Not even the weight of a speck of dust in the heavens or earth escapes His knowledge…”’(2) (*Saba’:* 3). Allah *the Almighty* is the only One Who has the Knowledge of the Last Hour. The Last Hour does not only mean the Day of Resurrection, but it also means the last hour of the life of every one of us. When someone dies, his last hour begins. We have no control over the Hour. When it comes suddenly, it will be disastrous, deafening, reverberating, and shaking. So, we should beware of being seized suddenly by the Hour while we are unaware of and unprepared for it.

In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘People ask you about the Hour. Say, “Allah alone has knowledge of it.” How could you [Prophet] know? The Hour may well be near.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 63) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had been asked about the Last Hour many times for two reasons. First, the

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= It is a long Hadith. See Al-Bukhari, *Sahih, Hadith no. 50 and 4777;* see also Muslim, *Sahih, Hadith no. 8, 9, and10.*

(1) Anas ibn Malik said, ‘While me and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were going out of the mosque, we met a man at the door of the mosque. He said, ‘O Prophet Muhammad! When will the Last Hour be?’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘What have you prepared for it?’ The man said, ‘I have not prepared for it much of prayers or fast or alms, but I love Allah and His Messenger.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘You will be with those whom you love.’ See Al-Bukhari, *Sahih, Hadith no. 7153;* and Muslim, *Sahih, Hadith no. 2639.*

(2) The expression ‘*Adhab Al-Amr*’ (became hidden) means it is far, hidden and hard to find. Here, in this noble verse, it means that nothing is hidden, far or escapes Allah’s Knowledge. He knows all the minute and huge things and matters. See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim, 2/18.*

people of the Book challenged him *peace and blessings be upon him* as they have some knowledge from their Prophets and Books. They wanted to ask him about some matters that they thought he was unaware of to put him in an embarrassing situation. They knew that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is illiterate; he could neither read nor write, and he never had a teacher. But Allah *the Almighty* has revealed the answer to him. Once he said the right answer, they felt extremely gloomy, and tried to find any other question to prove to themselves that he is ignorant.

Second, a Jew asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Last Hour as in the chapter of *al-Ahzab:* 'People ask you about the Hour…' (*al-Ahzab:* 63) because they deny it. For them, it is better that this Day will not come so that they will not be held accountable for the grievous deeds they had committed in the worldly life, i.e. wrongfulness, disbelief, immorality, blood shedding and backbiting.

The matter of the Day of Resurrection and Reckoning is naturally clear. Only those who transgress against themselves deny that Day, for they fear the punishment that will be waiting for them on that Day, and they have nothing to do but to deny the reality of its coming. As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'People ask you about the Hour…' (*al-Ahzab:* 63), it means that they ask, 'Does it exist or not'? If they answered affirmatively, they will say: '…if what you say is true, bring us the punishment you threaten.' (*al-A'raf:* 70) But the answer of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was: 'Allah Alone has knowledge of this…' (*al-Mulk:* 26). Then he followed it by saying: '…my only duty is to give clear warning.' (*al-Mulk:* 26) It was his mission to warn the people and make this warning clear. His duty was to warn them and to convey the Message to them.

Nadheer (a warner) is the one who brings the bad tidings about something that will happen in the future. The noble verse here only talks about 'warning' because it addresses the people of wrongfulness and denial, so, the warning is more suitable than talking about glad tidings.

In other verses, Allah *the Almighty* describes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as both a bringer of good tidings and a warner, saying: 'Worship no one but Allah. I am sent to you from Him to warn and to give good news.' (*Hud:* 2) The warner is the one who warns about something bad which may happen so that there will be a chance to avoid the deeds leading to it. By contrast, the bringer of good tidings is the one who tells about the good which will happen if the Way of Guidance is followed.

Both the acts of warning and bringing good tidings are related to things that have not happened yet. Giving warning entails giving an alarm and it is also a form of teaching. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is described in the Quran by both descriptions, as a warner and a bringer of good tidings.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* delivers to us such warning through the Revelation of Allah *the Almighty* Who says: 'Use the Quran to warn those who fear being gathered before their Lord.' (*al-An'am:* 51)

So, He *the Almighty* commands him to use this revelation, the Quran, to warn those who fear to stand before Him *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment. As we said before, the word 'to warn' means to tell about something horrible that may happen before its occurrence, so that it can be avoided. In this sense, the Quran is a warning for the disbelievers. All the Messengers of Allah *the Almighty* are warners and bringers of good tidings, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'We send Messengers only to give good news and to warn…' (*al-An'am:* 48).

The mission of the Messengers is to warn and bring good news. So, we should not take them to a further level or rank and ask them to perform miracles or do certain actions that are beyond their control. Indeed, everything is under the Control of Allah *the Almighty* Alone. The purpose of giving warnings and good news is to make people remember that there is a Fire and a Paradise. That is why we find that every messenger tells those who believe from his people that they will go to the paradise, while those who disbelieve will be thrown into the fire.

The two acts of giving warn and good news make no ground for those who may argue. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they were Messengers bearing good news and warning, so that mankind would have no excuse before Allah, once the Messengers had been sent…' (*an-Nisa':* 165). So, the people will have no ground to argue or excuse before Him *Glorified is He* after the sending of messengers. No one has an excuse after being informed.

Therefore, when the people of the hell are admitted into the fire, Allah *the Almighty* says to them: '…were you not sent your own messengers to recite the revelations of your Lord to you…' (*az-Zumar:* 71). Now they have no justification for their disbelief as Allah *Glorified is He* has sent them Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, with the true Message, to lead them to the way of righteousness and its reward, i.e. to be admitted into the paradise, and to warn them against evil and its punishment, i.e. going to the hellfire.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهُ زُلْفَةً سِيٓـَٔتْ وُجُوهُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟
وَقِيلَ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى كُنتُم بِهِۦ تَدَّعُونَ ٢٧

When they see it close at hand, the disbelievers' faces will be gloomy, and it will be said, 'This is what you were calling for'[27] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 27)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* describes the disbelievers' reaction. When they see the approach of the Day of Reckoning that Allah *Glorified is He* has promised, their faces become gloomy because of the torture, humiliation, degradation and pain they will be suffering from. He *the Almighty* mentions the face in particular because their reactions appear on their faces; when they see what they are warned against, the feelings of sadness and worry appear on their faces.

In another noble verse, Allah *Glorified is He* talks about those darkened faces, saying: 'On the Day when some faces brighten and others darken…' (*Al-'Imran:* 106). It is known that the human being's deep feelings and inner thoughts are reflected on his attitude and face complexion. The face of anyone who sees his position in the hellfire will be definitely gloomy. They may have been seen with brightened faces in the worldly life, but on the Day of Resurrection they will be seen with a dusty dark face veiled in blackness. Their faces become black and they look here and there in panic, trying to find something that may ease their worries or soothes them. Unfortunately, they will find nothing but more fear and panic. Their eyes are humbled in humiliation as there is no escape or refuge for them. Allah *the Almighty* describes their condition in various positions in the Quran, saying: 'And their eyes will be downcast…’ (*al-Qalam:* 43); ‘hearts will tremble and eyes will be downcast.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 8-9), and ‘Have you heard tell [Prophet] about the Overwhelming Event? On that Day, there will be downcast faces, toiling and weary, as they enter the blazing fire and are forced to drink from a boiling spring, with no food for them except bitter dry thorns that neither nourish nor satisfy hunger.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 1-7)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…And it will be said, “This is what you were calling for.”’ (*al-Mulk:* 27), it is a rebuke for their denial of the Day of Reckoning, or for their request to see the Promise of Allah *the Almighty* when they said: ‘…when will this promise be fulfilled?’ (*al-Mulk:* 25) On the Day of Resurrection, it will be said to them, ‘This is the Promise of Allah that you were calling for and alleging that it will not come. Now you see it so close to you’.

In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* uses three verbs, ‘to see’, ‘to be gloomy’ and ‘it will be said’. In the Arabic text, they are put in the past tense while the verse is talking about something that will happen in the future, that is, on the Day of Resurrection. Such linguistic technique in Arabic is used for affirmation. It is as if He *the Almighty* is telling us that such future incidents will undoubtedly occur so that they can be regarded as if they have already happened. What is considered future for us is, according to the Knowledge of Allah, a past as Allah *Glorified is He* knows all what will happen in the future. He knows everything at one time, not through a gradual process. Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَهْلَكَنِيَ ٱللَّهُ وَمَن مَّعِيَ أَوْ رَحِمَنَا
فَمَن يُجِيرُ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٨﴾

Say, ‘Just think – regardless of whether God destroys me and my followers or has mercy on us – who will protect the disbelievers from an agonizing torment?’ [28]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 28)

Allah *the Almighty* uses this expression: ‘Say, “Just think…”’ (*al-Mulk:* 28), in many verses, For example, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, “Just think, if Allah were to cast perpetual(1) night over you until the Day of Resurrection…”’ (*al-Qasas:* 71); ‘Say [Prophet], “Think: if Allah were to take away your hearing and your sight and seal up your hearts…”’ (*al-An‘am:* 46) and ‘Say, “You think: if the punishment of Allah should come to you, by surprise or openly…”’ (*al-An‘am:* 46). In the last verse, the Arabic text uses two signs referring to the second person which is a linguistic technique used to draw the attention to something. In another time, one pronoun only is used to refer to the second person to give the following meaning: ‘You tell me and provide me with certain knowledge that proves this issue’. When Allah *the Almighty* shows His Blessings to His creatures, He asks: ‘Tell Me what you could do if…?’ Such a question is meant to make them confess the truth.

Regarding the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Regardless of whether Allah destroys me…’ (*al-Mulk:* 28), destruction is the opposite of life. When we say that something is destroyed, we mean it has no life, as destruction means death. It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says to them, ‘What will you do if Allah causes death for me and my followers or bestows His Mercy and extends our life time?’ The disbelievers were wishing death to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Muslims, so He *the Almighty* ordered him to say to them, ‘Whether Allah causes death for me and my followers, or bestows His Mercy on us, still this will not, under any circumstances, save you from His Torment’.

So, if Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers are not fully sure whether He *the Almighty* will shower His Mercy on them or destroy them, so imagine what will be the case with those who disbelieved? Who can save them from Allah’s torment? Do they think that the idols will save them?

No one can save or protect them but Allah *the Almighty* a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Say, ‘Who holds control of everything in His hand? Who protects, while there is no protection against Him, if you know [so much]?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88) The protection implies three elements: a protector who accepts to protect and defend someone; the weak one who asks for protection; and the strong who wants to tyrannise.

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(1) *Sarmad* (Perpetual) means a lasting period of time, whether night or day. Perpetual night is the very long night. It also means continuous with no interruptions. Abu `Ubayda says that anything that lasts with no interruptions, be it the life, prosperity, distress, or calamity is described as perpetual. See Ibn Mandhur*, Lisan Al-’Arab, the root Sarmad;* see *also* Abu `Ubayda, *Majaz Al-Quran, 2/109.*

Allah *Glorified is He* protects who asks for His Protection and helps the one who seeks refuge with Him. When someone wants to protect another from a powerful enemy, he should have the power to do so. So, who could protect the disbelievers if Allah *Glorified is He* wants to torment them?

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…who will protect the disbelievers from an agonizing torment?' (*al-Mulk:* 28) So, who will safeguard them against the very painful torment? When we need to evaluate an action, it should be evaluated according to its doer. This is because the doer, whether weak or strong, affects the action and determines its effect on the object who is the recipient of the action. Thus, if Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who is going to punish, so the Punishment must be extremely painful.

If such action of torment is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* Who has the absolute Power and Omnipotence to do so, it will, then, be intolerable torment. The wrongdoers will find neither helper nor intercessor to save them from such torment. No one will come and say, 'There is a person in torment, let us help him'.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قُلْ هُوَ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ ءَامَنَّا بِهِۦ وَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا ۖ فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ هُوَ فِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

Say, 'He is the Lord of Mercy; we believe in Him; we put our trust in Him. You will come to know in time who is in obvious error'[29] (The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 29)

The Divine Name 'Lord of Mercy' indicates an intensive form of Mercy. Allah *the Almighty* is the Lord of Mercy in the worldly life and the Giver of Mercy in the Hereafter. Due to His Lordship over all His creatures, Allah *Glorified is He* shows His Mercy to all of them. He gives the sinners a respite to repent, and opens the doors of repentance for whoever returns to Him. In this verse, He *the Almighty* mentions His Name the 'Lord of Mercy' to remind the people about the Bounties He bestowed on them. They should have appreciated these Bounties that they received without any effort on their part.

So, the Divine Name ‘the Lord of Mercy’ entails giving all bounties and bringing up His creatures. Being created, raised up, and given all the necessities of life are enough reasons for worshipping Him *the Almighty* Alone without any partners. Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen for Himself the Name ‘the Lord of Mercy’ because His Mercy encompasses all the aspects of worship. He has sent down His Way of Guidance to adjust the humans’ life and make them lead their lives happily. In fact, His Mercy is the main wisdom behind His Legislations. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘It is the Lord of Mercy. Who taught the Quran.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 1-2) The Quran was revealed to adjust, control, and reform the humans’ life. It provides you with peace in your relationship with Allah, with yourself, and with other people. Thus, it is a form of Mercy bestowed by Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* showers anyone He likes with His Mercy. As for the disbelievers, they will not receive His Mercy as none will save them of His Punishment. The Divine Name ‘the Lord of Mercy’ is mentioned here to reassure the sinners who have committed great sins, and to remind them that their Lord is the Most Merciful. If they repented, He will accept their repentance and fulfil that with which He has promised them. Thus, all the affairs of the creation are managed within the scope of Mercy, and that is why we ought to obey and submit to Him.

As for His saying: ‘…We believed in Him...’ (*al-Mulk:* 29), the verb ‘to believe’ means to acknowledge and accept something. In this regard, the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* said to their father: ‘…you will not believe us even if we were truthful.’ (*Yusuf:* 17) If the Arabic verb *amana* (to believe) is followed by the letter *ba`*, it means to have faith; if it is yet followed by the letter *lam*, it means to believe what someone says. Further, if it is followed by another letter, it means to give protection, as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘So let them serve the Lord of this House. Who feeds them against hunger and gives them security against fear.’ (*Quraysh:* 3-4)

Moreover, the Arabic verb *amana* (to believe) could mean to trust someone with something, as in Allah’s saying: ‘He said: “I cannot trust in you with respect to him, except as I trusted in you with respect to his brother before…”’ (*Yusuf:* 64). So, this verb could mean to believe in something, to believe what someone says, to give protection and reassurance or to keep a trust and pay it back. The last meaning is mentioned in Allah's saying: '…and among them there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a *dinar* he shall not pay it back to you except so long as you remain firm in demanding it…' (*Al-'Imran:* 75).

So, as for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…we believe in Him…' (*al-Mulk:* 29), it means that the believers say that they have believed in Him *the Almighty,* while the people of Mecca disbelieved in Him and in His Bounties and associated false deities with Him. Not only do the believers believe in Him, but they also put their trust in Him. They rely upon no one other than Him *Glorified is He*. The true meaning of reliance is to work with your body and to rely on Him *the Almighty* with your heart. The one who works without reliance is faced with frustration.

The believers rely upon Allah *the Almighty* to put them under His care. They do not rely on somebody who may die tomorrow; rather, they rely on the Ever-living Who never dies *the Almighty* Who can never be defeated, and the All Powerful Who can never be conquered. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And rely upon the Exalted in Might, the Merciful.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 217). His Power and Mercy is for our interest. So, we must rely on the One Who loves us and appreciate our deeds. He commands us, saying: 'And rely on Allah; and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.' (*al-Ahzab:* 3)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us an example of reliance by the birds, saying, 'If you all depend on Allah with due reliance, He would certainly give you provision as He gives it to birds who go forth hungry in the morning and return with a full belly at dusk.'(1) The birds go out of their nests searching for food; they go forth hungry in the morning, and return back with full bellies. They followed the ways of getting food and thus gain Allah's Provision.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. At-Tirmidhi rated this Hadith as a good, authentic one. See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2344; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4164; and Ahmed, Musnad, Hadith no. 205, 307 and 373.*

So, if you relied on Allah *the Almighty* you should follow the ways that Allah *Glorified is He* has shown to you. If you did not find a means of gaining your provision, you should not lose hope because your Lord has Power over any means, for He is actually the Creator of the means.

As for themeaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…you will come to know in time who is in obvious error' (*al-Mulk:* 29), the same meaning is mentioned in another verse reading: '…you will come to know who is the follower of the even path and who goes aright.' (*Ta Ha:* 135) This knowledge will be revealed on the Last Day, when the people go to either the Paradise or the Hell. There, they will know who was really following the Right Path; however, this knowledge then will be of no use to the disbelievers, for it will be too late. The Day of Judgment is the time for account, not that of doing deeds.

Dalal (error) in this verse means to take the wrong way that does not make you reach your destination. The word has different meanings; it could mean to vanish, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And they say: "What! When we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be in a new creation?" Nay! They are disbelievers in the meeting of their Lord.' (*as-Sajda:* 10) It also means to be unable to reach the truth, as Allah *Glorified is He* describes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he refused to worship idols and kept searching for the Right Path till He *the Almighty* guided him by the Revelation, saying: 'Did He not find you lost and guide you?' (*ad-Duha:* 7) He was searching for the truth till the great Favour of Allah *the Almighty* came to him by revealing His Way of Guidance to him.

The third meaning of 'error' is to know the truth then drift away from it, as in Allah's saying: 'A faction of the people of the Scripture wish they could mislead you. But they do not mislead except themselves, and they perceive [it] not.' (*Al-'Imran:* 69)

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question, saying: '…in obvious error.' (*al-Mulk:* 29) The disbelievers are in 'clear error' that is apparent to them; it takes them away from the truth and surrounds them inescapably.

Allah *the Almighty* consequently says:

قُلْ أَرَءَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَآؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَن يَأْتِيكُم بِمَآءٍ مَّعِينٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

Say, 'Just think: if all your water were to sink deep into the earth who could give you flowing water in its place?' [30]
(The Quran, *al-Mulk:* 30)

Allah *Glorified is He* stores some of the water for us underground. This is not meant to hide the existing water, but rather that we find it when we miss it on the surface of the earth. The underground water solves many problems, for the ground safeguards it against evaporation and does not make us in need to build dams to save the sweet water.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave us an example of that saying, 'The similitude of guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is like a rain which has fallen on some ground. A fertile part of earth has absorbed water and brought forth much grass and herbs. Another part, which is solid, held the water and Allah benefits men thereby. They drank and gave others to drink, and used it for irrigation. But some of it has fallen on a portion of sandy land which neither retains the water nor produces herbage. This is the similitude of guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me.'(1)

These are three kinds of earth that are given as an example of the people's level of benefiting from knowledge. The first one holds water and gives out plants. The second one keeps the water for the benefit of the people. Someone may ask, 'What is the benefit of the third one that neither keeps water nor brings forth planets? Why was it created then'? It is in fact beneficial as it leads the water to where it will settle underground. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* also says: '…and sent down water from the sky and given you drink from it. And you are not its retainers.' (*al-Hijr:* 22); and 'Say, "Just think: if all your water were to sink deep into the earth who could give you flowing water in its place?"' (*al-Mulk:* 30) Thus, if we reflect on this kind of earth, we will find that it also has a role, as He *the Almighty* has never created something without a purpose.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash`ari Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 79; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2282.*

In the same way, the people make benefit of knowledge. The fruits of knowledge could appear on some people very quickly, but regarding other people they are postponed to the following generations. Then, you should not think that the underground sweet water mixes with the salty water, for this does not happen. The sweet water runs into special tunnels; you can find it even under the Gulf salty water! This is one of the Wonders of Allah's creation that clearly shows His Great Power. Further, there is a barrier between the salty water and the sweet one above the ground, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'He has made the two seas to flow freely (so that) they meet: between them is a barrier which they cannot pass.' (*ar-Rahman:* 19-20) Likewise, there is also a barrier between the salty underground water and the sweet one.

Allah *Glorified is He* has made the earth suitable for us, and laid down the necessary laws for achieving that purpose. The places with no much rain have underground water to be used at the time of need. It is stored underground in order not to be evaporated by the sun.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Say, "Just think: if all your water were to sink deep into the earth who could give you flowing water in its place?"' (*al-Mulk:* 30), one may ask, 'Can the water sink deep into the earth'? In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Or its waters should sink down into the ground so that you are unable to find it.' (*al-Kahf:* 41) The disbelievers are unable to see Allah's signs on the earth, and they are unable to attain to His Guidance. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* describes them saying: 'And the parable of those who disbelieve is as the parable of one who calls out to that which hears no more than a call and a cry; deaf, dumb (and) blind, so they do not understand.' (*al-Baqara:* 171) Their ears refused to hear the beneficial knowledge, so they are like the deaf. In fact, the deaf person is better than the one who can hear but cannot understand. The deaf, dumb, or mad persons are excused, but these people are not.

You start to think after the faculty of hearing and the rest of senses play their role. The human being is originally a sensory constitution, i.e. he sees, hears and tastes first, and then starts to think. Those disbelievers hear with their ears, but they do not understand what they hear. Allah *Glorified is He* describes them, saying: '...So what is [the matter] with those people that they can hardly understand any statement.' (*an-Nisa':* 78) This means that they cannot even come close to understanding. Thinking necessarily leads to understanding and that is why it is very strange that they cannot understand what they see every day. He *the Almighty* has created for them all what they can live with, and has given them intelligence to make use of in gaining their sustenance.

In the same vein, He *the Almighty* says: 'And We send down water from the cloud according to a measure, then We cause it to settle in the earth, and most surely, We are able to carry it away.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 18) We take our needs from the rainwater and the rest sinks into the earth to be stored until we need it. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the cloud, then makes it go along in the earth in springs…' (*az-Zumar:* 21). One of the wonders of Allah's Omnipotence is that the salty and sweet water flow in different tunnels so that they do not mix together.

The underground water is stored in natural tanks to be used if we lost sweet water or missed the rain. Allah *Glorified is He* also reminds us about His Ability to deprive us from this bounty, saying: '…and most surely We are able to carry it away.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 18) So, we should use water in the right way in order not to lose it.

Regarding Allah's saying: 'Say, "Just think: if all your water were to sink deep into the earth who could give you flowing water in its place?"' (*al-Mulk:* 30), the flowing water is the running water that is easy to be reached. If your water was to become sunken into the earth, who can bring it back to you?

In this verse, there is wisdom behind saying 'your water'. Although the water is attributed to the people, they cannot control it. Only Allah is fully Able to bring it, as everything is under His Control *Glorified is He*. If the disbelievers know this, why do they associate partners with Him? Allah *Glorified is He* is asking them and He knows their answer. They would say that none can bring it back to us except Him *the Almighty*. So, why do they worship others who cannot bring the water to them?

Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to do anything; He is Able to create and destroy, to give life and cause death, to honour and degrade people, to withhold and grant abundance, and to cause benefit and harm. He is Omnipotent over all things.

Allah *the Almighty* reminds us that He is fully Able to deprive us from the bounty of water to take care of and use it in a way that does not destroy it. We should ask the One Who controls the entire universe and supplicate to Him. When you have no means, ask the One Who owns all the means. If you relied on Him and followed all the means that He has given to you, He will always be with you; He will help you get what you want after being hindered by the earthly means.

Allah *the Almighty* has sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with guidance and knowledge. Some people accept this knowledge and benefit themselves and others. This kind of people are like the earth that holds water of rain and brought thus forth much grass and plants on which animals and people feed. Other people keep guidance and knowledge for others to benefit from, like the earth that keeps the rainwater for people to drink, cultivate, and from which to feed animals. The third kind of people is those who do not accept guidance or knowledge that came with him *peace and blessings be upon him*. This kind is like the earth that neither keeps water nor brings forth plants. It does not make benefit of the rain that falls on it, and thus the rainwater went in underground routes.

Human beings, in general, are losers, but who will be saved from the loss? Allah *Glorified is He* gives us the answer, saying: ‘Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.’ (*al-’Asr:* 3) So, the belief and good deeds are the way of being saved from loss. No disbeliever will be saved from Allah’s Punishment. His Mercy and Favour are the way to salvation and the paradise. None will be saved without them i.e. His Mercy and Favour. To be saved from the fire, you should repent to Allah *the Almighty* reform what has been corrupted, keep on His Way, and be sincere to Him.

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EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (26)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful, the
Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (26)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY

الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد (26)

the chapter of

al-Qalam

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Qalam* (1):

نٓۚ وَٱلۡقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسۡطُرُونَ ١

***Nun,* By the pen! By all they write! [1]**
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 1)

Islam puts the pen, the inkwell, reading and writing in a high position, as Allah *the Almighty* has named this chapter in question *al-Qalam* (The Pen) and it is also named ‘Nun’ which means the inkwell that was used in writing. The first thing that was created is the pen, and then Allah *the Almighty* ordered it to write everything that will happen in the world till the Day of Judgment in the Preserved Tablet. So, the pen has written everything that would happen till the Day of Judgment, including the actions, the provisions and the appointed times of death.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The first thing Allah created was the pen. He said to it, ‘Write.’ It asked, ‘What should I write, my Lord?’ He said, ‘Write what was decreed about everything till the Last Hour comes.’(2) This is what is meant by His saying: ‘*Nun*. By the pen! By all they write!’ (*al-Qalam:* 1)

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(1) The chapter of *al-Qalam* is number 68 in the Quranic order and it was revealed in Mecca. All its verses are clear, including no abrogating or abrogated verses. It is also named ‘*Nun*’ because it starts with the same word. It was the second chapter to be revealed in Mecca and the number of its verses is 52. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-`Alaq*. Thus, the time of its revelation was between the beginning of the revelation and the migration to Abyssinia.

(2) This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Qiryabi, Al-Qadar, 1/29; and Al-Ajurri, Ash-Shari`a, Hadith no. 179.

Allah *the Almighty* has written what the people will do because He knows it even before it is done, for He is the Omniscient. He knows what will happen in His Universe even before it occurs. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement; this is written in the Divine ordinance.' (*al-Isra': 58*) Thus, everything is written and recorded in the Preserved Tablet.

As for the saying of Allah '*Nun'* (*al-Qalam:* 1), we know that the Arabic letters are twenty-eight. In the Quran, half of them exist in the form of discrete letters at the beginning of some chapters. Some chapters begin with one of those letters, like the letter *Qaf* in Allah's saying: *'Qaf.* By the honoured Quran' (*Qaf:* 1); the letter Sad in His saying: 'Sad. By the Quran containing a reminder' (*Sad:* 1); and the letter *Nun* here in the verse in question: '*Nun*. By the pen! By all they write!' (*al-Qalam:* 1)

Some chapters yet begin with two of these letters, like His saying: '*Ha Mim*.' (*al-Jathiya:* 1); some others begin with three letters as in His saying: '*Alif, Lam Mim*.' (*al-Baqara:* 1); some begin with four letters: '*Alif, Lam, Mim Sad.'* (*al-A'raf:* 1); and some begin with five letters: '*Kaf, Ha, Ya, `Ayn Sad*.' (*Maryam:* 1).

We notice that the letter in the chapters that start with one letter is not considered a verse. The two or more letters are sometimes considered a verse, as in Allah's saying: *'`Ayn Sin Qaf*.' (*ash-Shura:* 2); '*Ta Ha'* (*Ta Ha:* 1); '*Ya Sin'* (*Ya Sin:* 1); *'Kaf, Ha, Ya, `Ayn Sad'* (*Maryam:* 1) and '*Alif, Lam, Mim Sad'* (*al-A'raf:* 1) However, these letters constitute only part of a verse in His saying: *'Alif, Lam, Mim Ra*. These are the verses of the Book…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 1) and *'Ta Sin'*. These are the verses of the Quran and the Book…' (*an-Naml:* 1).

These discrete letters are pronounced by their names, not their sounds as in other words. They may refer to a name, like in *Ta-ha*, which is said to be one of Prophet Muhammad's names.(1) The letter *Nun* may also refer to the

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(1) There is no authentic Hadith proving that *Ta Ha* is one of Prophet Muhammad's names, but this was only mentioned in some books of *Tafsir*.

Whale, as in His saying: ‘And remember the man with the whale, when he went off angrily…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 87); and *Qaf* may refer to a name of a mountain.

One of the miraculous aspects of the Quran is that it consists of the same letters and words of the normal speech. That is why Allah *the Almighty* often says after these discrete letters: ‘These are the verses of the clear Book.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 2), and ‘These are the verses of the Quran and the Book that makes (things) clear.’ (*an-Naml:* 1) This means that the Quran consists of these discrete letters and their likes. Each of these letters has secrets that we have not reached yet. All the previous interpretations of these letters are just humble trials. He *the Almighty* mentions them many times throughout the Quran to remind us always about them.

When we want to recite these letters correctly, we must read them separately. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I do not say *Alif Lam Mim* is one letter; rather, *Alif* is one letter, *Lam* is one letter and *Mim* is one letter.’(1) To emphasise this meaning, these letters must be recited separately.

These letters are the main components of the words of the Quran. Let us give an example for this; if you have some textile workers and you want to know the most skilful one among them, you must give them the same material. It is not accepted to give someone of them cotton, the other wool and the third silk, that is to say that it is not accepted to give them different materials. Silk, for example, will be naturally softer. If you really want to know the most skilful one, give them all the same material. In the same sense, the Quran is miraculous because it is formed from the same letters that they use; however, they could not meet its challenge. The Quran used their letters and words, and put them in such an eloquent way that they could not bring even one chapter like it.

The Quran was revealed in Arabic and challenged the Arabs who were then the people of eloquence and magnificent ways of expression and styles. It was revealed among the people of Quraysh whose dialect enjoyed all the accents of the Arabic tribes. There were among them very strong disbelievers, but none of them asked about the meaning of '*Alif Lam Mim'* or '*Ha Mim'*. If they had found that these discrete letters give them a chance to attack the Quran, they would have never missed this opportunity. But in fact, they have never asked about them which proves that they understood these letters and knew that they have a meaning. At least, they considered them letters for attracting attention, like what they were using in their poetry and speech.

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(1) This Hadith is narrated on the authority of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud *Allah be pleased with him.* See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2910; and Ibn Al-Mubarak, Az-Zuhd, Hadith no. 808.

Some scholars have said that the letter *Nun* at the beginning of this verse refers to the whale. That is why Prophet Yunus (Jonah) was named *Dhan-Nun* (The man of the whale) in Allah's saying: 'And remember the man with the whale, when he went off angrily…' (*al-Anbiya':* 87).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…By the Pen…' (*al-Qalam:* 1). Here, He *the Almighty* swears by the pen, as He swears by whatever He wants about whatever He wants. The oath is used to emphasise something because someone has doubts about it. Allah *Glorified is He* has taken oaths by many things in the Quran. He swears by the figs, the olives, the Quran etc.

In some verses, the word *La* (no) precedes the oath, as in Allah's saying: 'Nay! I swear by this city. And you shall be made free from obligation in this city—And the begetter and whom he begot. Certainly, We have created man to be in distress.' (*al-Balad:* 1-4), the word 'nay' refutes their allegation, and then comes the oath to emphasise the issue that He states. It means that the disbelievers have no right to deny it.

So, Allah *Glorified is He* swears by whatever He likes about whatever He wants. He has sworn by the sun, by the places of the stars, and with the falling star. He is fully Aware of His creatures; none knows the greatness of a creature better than the One Who created it. He *the Almighty* knows the purpose for which He created these creatures. However, He ordered us not to take oaths except by Him.

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* swears an Oath to emphasise the meaning. In this regard, one of the righteous people said, 'Who provoked the Anger of the Most Gracious and made Him take an Oath'. He *the Almighty* does not swear except to stress a great matter. The human beings take an oath to emphasise the truthfulness of their speech. By contrast, Allah *Glorified is He* is the All Truthful, and He does not need any Oath to fulfil His Promises. So, what if He takes an Oath?

Thus, He *the Almighty* swears here by the pen by which we write. That is why he said afterwards: '…and all what they write.' (*al-Qalam:* 1) *Al-Qalam* (pen) also means a 'lot' which people use to cast lots if they differed about something. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: '…when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Mary in his charge…' (*Al-'Imran:* 44). It is also mentioned in the Quran in the plural form, as in His saying: 'And were every tree that is in the earth (made into) pens and the sea (to supply it with ink), with seven more seas to increase it, the words of Allah would not come to an end...' (*Luqman:* 27). In the past, pens were made from the branches of trees, not from the plants that do not have trunks.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and all what they write.' (*al-Qalam:* 1) Some scholars said that this refers to what the angels write of the deeds of the humans. Others said it is what He *the Almighty* prescribed for the benefit and the interest of His creatures.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the angels write our deeds, as He says: 'And most surely there are keepers over you; Honourable recorders. They know what you do.' (*al-Infitar:* 10-12); '…surely Our messengers write down what you plan.' (*Yunus:* 21), and 'Or do they think that We do not hear what they conceal and their secret discourses? Aye! And Our messengers with them write down.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 80) Thus, the angels record all what the humans do; they then keep that in books that Allah *Glorified is He* keeps in a way that is unknown to us. On the Day of Judgment, it will be said to the human being: 'Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day.' (*al-Isra':* 14)

The writing of the angels is not in the way we are familiar with; it even records the voice and every breath. On the Last Day, everyone will find what he has done, and will read his book by himself, in order not to have any argument. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And the Book shall be placed, then you will see the guilty fearing from what is in it, and they will say: "Ah! Woe to us! What a book is this! It does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them (all); and what they had done they shall find present (there); and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone."' (*al-Kahf:* 49)

The angels write both the good and the bad deeds. The pronoun in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…what they write.' (*al-Mulk:* 1), refers to the angels. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When it is Friday, the angels stand at the gate of the mosque and keep on writing the names of the persons coming to the mosque in succession according to their arrivals. The example of the one who enters the mosque in the earliest hour is that of one offering a camel (in sacrifice). The one coming next is like one offering a cow, and then a ram, and then a chicken and then an egg respectively. When the Imam comes out (for the Friday Prayer) they (i.e. angels) fold their papers and listen to the *khutba* (preacher sermon).'(1)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَآ أَنتَ بِنِعۡمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجۡنُونٖ ٢

Your Lord's grace does not make you
[Prophet] a madman[2] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 2)

The mad person is the one whose mind is out of order. Unlike the sane person, he does consider things purposelessly; his speech is inharmonious; his deeds are not straight; and he has no restrictions as to what he takes or leaves. He has lost the intellectual balance by which he chooses from among the alternatives. For this reason, he is exempted from the religious obligations. In other words, as the insane person does not have the ability to choose, Allah *the Almighty* exempts him from these religious obligations.

Now, let us compare the insane person with the sane one; the highest stage that the sane person can reach is to say what he wants without being accounted or objected to. In fact, the insane person reaches this stage; none objects to his words and if he makes something wrong, none holds him accountable. Similarly, he will not be accounted on the Day of Judgment.

Thus, the insane person's deeds are not balanced and his intellect is not controlling him. His mind has no ability to realise or choose from among the alternatives. He does whatever comes into his mind without thinking. That is why we do not account him for his actions, even if he hits or insults someone. All what we do is to smile and ask Allah *the Almighty* to keep us safe from that which has afflicted him.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 10568; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 929; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 5862*

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* categorically refute the claim that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is mad. Allah's Favour here means the Book and the Wisdom that was revealed to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is the Right Path that he, by Allah's Favour, was guided to after being lost, searching for guidance. The one who is guided by the favour of Allah *the Almighty* is not mad by any means.

The mad person acts without logic; he laughs, cries and hits the people unreasonably. So, have you, O people of Quraysh, seen Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* doing any of such actions?

Moreover, the favour of Allah *the Almighty* upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* is not magic as some of them claimed, for he does not force them to believe by using such alleged magic. Further, the Quran is not the words of a soothsayer, as he *peace and blessings be upon him* was brought up among his people, and they all knew that he is truthful and honest, and that none has taught him. Besides, the words of the soothsayers have special tones and characteristics which are different from that of the Quran.

The people of Quraysh knew that the Quran could not be the words of a mad person because the speech of such a person is harmonious. Have they seen anything that shows that Prophet Muhammad's deeds are inharmonious? Of course not!

The mad person has lost the intellectual balance by which he chooses among the alternatives. Then how could they say that Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon him* is mad although he has lived among them? They knew that he has never lost his intellectual balance; they named him the Truthful and the Honest; they even kept their valuable things with him, although they disbelieved in him.(1)

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(1) *Ibn Ishaq said that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him told his cousin `Ali that he would migrate to Medina, and ordered him to remain in Mecca to return the trusts to their owners. Everyone had a precious thing was keeping it with Prophet Muhammad because of what was known of his honesty and truthfulness. `Ali remained for three days in Mecca to return the trusts and then he migrated to Medina. See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 1/485 and As-Suhayli, Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf, 4/153*

They have wronged him *peace and blessings be upon him* when they brought illogical accusations against him. Allah *the Almighty* has advised those who accuse him, saying: 'Say, "I only advise you of one [thing] - that you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought." There is not in your companion any madness. He is only a Warner to you before a severe punishment.' (*Saba':* 46)

Each two of them should sit together and think: is Muhammad mad or sane?! All of them will then realise, out of their experience, that he is the most honest person; otherwise they would not have called him 'the Honest' even before the coming of the Revelation. Further, it is inconceivable that the Revelation affected him or made him lose his intellectual balance.

Thus, Prophet Muhammad's behaviour has nothing to do with madness, for the mad person does not know what he does and his actions are unreasonable. We cannot accuse such a mad person of anything like lying because his means of making choices is not working and his actions are inharmonious. For example, he may smile to you and hit you at the same time, and he may give you something then spit in your face. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* advises those who accused Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of madness to consider the matter wisely to come to the fact that he cannot be mad by any means.

Madness entails that the person acts unwisely and aimlessly without considering the consequences of his actions. As for the sane person, he organises his actions wisely and examines them carefully. His intellect leads him to the good actions, and he treats the people in a harmonious, right way. So, did any of the disbelievers find any unreasonable behaviour on the part of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? No, they did not.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* advises them to stand for Him in pairs and individually and to study Prophet Muhammad's behaviours. Then, they will find that his behaviour is logical and even built on perfect manners. It is far more different from the behaviour of a madman who has no restrictions that control his unreasonable actions.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not the only one to be accused of madness; many Prophets before him were accused of madness as well, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Thus there did not come to those before them a Messenger but they said: “A magician or a mad man.”’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 52) That is, previous messengers were also accused of magic, despite the fact that these two characteristics cannot be found in a prophet because he is an example in his behaviour. There was no sign that indicates that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was a madman or a magician. Moreover, madness contradicts with magic; how could they accuse him with both?

Besides being mad, they also accused him of being a soothsayer, but He *the Almighty* refutes their allegations, saying: ‘Therefore continue to remind, for by the grace of your Lord, you are not a soothsayer or a madman.’ (*at-Tur:* 29). In the chapter of *as-Saffat*, they accused him of being a mad poet, saying: ‘…What! Shall we indeed give up our gods for the sake of a mad poet?’ (*as-Saffat:* 36). How could he organise the ideas and the verses of the poetry while being mad?! The problem then lies in their illogical thinking.

Allah *Glorified is He* relieves Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: ‘We know that you, [O Muhammad], are saddened by what they say. And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.’ (*al-An’am:* 33). In addition to relieving him, He *the Almighty* gives him *peace and blessings be upon him* the examples of the previous Prophets in order that he does not feel sad for the disbelievers’ accusations and disbelief. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to him, ‘I know that you feel sad because of their disbelief and accusing you of being a poet, a magician, a madman, a liar and a soothsayer. Do not be sad, O Muhammad! You are innocent from what they say, and they know that you are truthful and honest, but they are jealous of what Allah has given you’. They disbelieve in the Quran because it orders them to abandon the false deities they worship, and to devote themselves to worshipping Allah, Alone.

Then Allah *the Almighty* relieves Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from this sadness, saying:

وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجۡرًا غَيۡرَ مَمۡنُونٖ ۝٣

You will have a never-ending reward [3]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 3)

Allah *the Almighty* has prepared Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for carrying out the Message with steadfastness, and promised him with everlasting reward. This means that the reward of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is neither interrupted nor limited. He will have a great and unlimited reward for his patience for the disbelievers' harm.

This reward is a favour from Allah *Glorified is He*; it far exceeds the reward of the deed itself. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None amongst you can get into paradise by virtue of his deeds alone.' They asked Allah's Messenger, 'Not even you?' Thereupon he said, 'Not even I, but that Allah should wrap me in His Grace and Mercy.'(1) In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: '…and if not for the favour of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have been among the losers.' (*al-Baqara:* 64) Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* gives you more than what you deserve. All your good deeds do not fulfil the due right of one of Allah's Graces upon you. So, you should not depend on your deeds, for you will not enter paradise except by Allah's favour.

Even the martyrs who sacrificed their lives, which is the most precious thing they have, for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* will enter the paradise by His favour, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His Grace and they rejoice for the sake of those who, (being left) behind them, have not yet joined them, that they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.' (*Al-'Imran:* 170) If this is the case with the martyrs who are in the highest level of the paradise, what about those who are lower in rank than them?!

Thus, Allah's Favour encompasses all the people, as He says: '…most surely Allah is Gracious to people, but most people are not grateful.' (*al-Baqara:* 243).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5673 and 6463; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2186.*

That is why we ask Him *the Almighty* to treat us with His favour rather than His Justice, and with His Goodness rather than the Balance. That is because our deeds are not enough to make us enter the paradise and His Justice may ruin us. So, we should look forward to His Favour and Grace.

However, Allah's favour is conditional on doing good deeds. When you make a good deed, your Lord doubles its reward for you many times. So, we will only be saved by His Mercy and Favour. The true believer does not feel arrogant for his good deeds; rather, he feels happy for Allah's Favour and Mercy. It is as if he is saying to his Lord, 'I am not relying on my deeds, but on Your Mercy and Favour. The acts of worship that you ordered me to do is nothing, if compared to Your favours upon me. They cannot fulfil You Right upon me. If you admit me into the paradise, this is a great Favour from You'. Thus, if we think wisely, we will come to the fact that the reward in the Hereafter is a mere favour of Allah *Glorified is He* and thus the person should only be happy when he is included among those who receive His Favour and Mercy.

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the reward of his patience for conveying the Message and enduring the disbelievers' harms is guaranteed. That is why He says: 'You will have a never-ending reward.' (*al-Qalam:* 3) He *the Almighty* emphasises this fact by using two particles, namely; *inna* and *a-lam* (indeed).

Prophet Muhammad's everlasting reward includes the lasting blessing of Allah upon him, and the supplication of the angels and the believers for him. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe! Call for (Divine) blessings on him and salute him with a (becoming) salutation.' (*al-Ahzab:* 56). Allah's Blessing for him *peace and blessings be upon him* is a comprehensive and all-inclusive. It suffices that He *the Almighty* has made him the last Prophet.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* describes Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

Truly you have a strong character [4]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 4)

The disbelievers of Mecca were accusing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of being mad. However, does a madman have great morals?! Allah *the Almighty* has created and endowed him *peace and blessings be upon him* with great morals. Further, Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared him to receive the Message with steadfastness, and promised him to have an uninterrupted reward.

Having a great moral character means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* understands and reacts to the ongoing actions in the perfect way, and none can do this except a sane person. The disbelievers of Mecca all agreed that his morals are great, then how can they accuse him of being mad?! How can an insane person have an appropriate, good behaviour? This shows that all their accusations came out of their insistence on disbelief, and are not based on tangible proofs. They attested to the opposite of what they accused him. All the prophets faced the same accusation from their people who wanted to refute the veracity the Message of Truth with which the Prophets came.

Having great morals means that Prophet Muhammad's behaviour is controlled with values and that he naturally behaves in a moral manner. When you describe someone of being benevolent, you mean that benevolence is part of his character; he gives charities very easily. If the disbelievers examined Prophet Muhammad's behaviour singly and in pairs, they would find that it is based on a perfect moral character that cannot for sure be attributed to a madman.

The morals are the characteristics that qualify the human being to live peacefully in a sound community. When one's morals are sound, this means that his criterion of judgment is sound as well. That is why Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned the intellect and the morals together, saying: 'Your Lord's Grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman: you will have a never-ending reward, truly you have a great moral character.' (*al-Qalam:* 2-4) When someone has good morals, this means that he has some characteristics such as honesty and truthfulness that keep him on the right, moral way. The intellect puts these morals in their right positions according to the situation, which may need strength, softness, and wisdom.

A madman cannot have good morals because he has no ability to choose from among the alternatives. That is why Allah *the Almighty* does not put him into account for his actions, or do the people do so. He cannot choose the right action in each situation. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has refuted the claim that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is mad, and approved that he has great morals.

We do not hold the mad person accountable for his action even if they are rude ones. Someone may ask, ‘How does Allah deprive someone of the intellect by which He has honoured the human beings?’ To recognise the Divine Justice and Wisdom in this matter, we should draw a comparison between the sane and the insane people. The sane person is accounted for every action he does, whatever minor it is. The greatest rank that he can reach in the worldly life is to do whatever he wants without hearing objections from here and there. Do you not see that the insane person enjoys the same rank? He says and does whatever he likes without being asked in this worldly life or in the Hereafter. Is this not a sufficient compensation for him? So, we should not look at what was taken from him, but rather try to see the merits that he was given in this worldly life and in the Hereafter.

The mad person neither thinks about his actions nor chooses from among the alternatives, for he has no control over his will and behaviour. Did the disbelievers recognise any of the characteristics of insanity in Prophet Muhammad’s behaviour? Allah *Glorified is He* has refuted their claim, saying: ‘Nun. By the pen! By all they write! Your Lord’s Grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman: you will have a never-ending reward—truly you have a strong character—and soon you will see, as will they.’ (*al-Qalam:* 1-5)

A madman cannot have good manners because they only stem from the balanced faculties that make the person incline towards goodness. So, how can Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* be mad, while he was of great moral character? Did they notice any of the characteristics of madness in his behaviour? Further, if he was mad, how could they entrust him with the most precious things they owned? How could they call him ‘the Truthful’ and ‘the Honest’? They did so because they knew his great morals which are firm and well established. They should have judged him according to his morals without considering the Message that he came with because morality has only one criterion. Could any of them accuse him of a bad moral? Of course not! If so, they should not have questioned his intellect as well because the intellect is the criterion and the essence of morality. Thus, Prophet Muhammad’s great morals are the most compelling evidence of his sanity.

Apart from the behaviour of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an insane person cannot speak or act reasonably. As the disbelievers of Mecca were well aware of his good manners, truthfulness and honesty, how could they accuse him of insanity? Having a good moral character makes the person incline to goodness and rectifies his behaviour. So, how can he *peace and blessings be upon him* be of a great moral character and simultaneously insane? This is sheer contradiction.

When `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was asked about the morals of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* she said, ‘His morals were those of the Quran, have you not read in the Quran: ‘Truly you are of a great moral character.’ (*al-Qalam:* 4)?(1) This is how she *Allah be pleased with her* described him. As for Khadija, she described him *peace and blessings be upon him* and his morals at the beginning of Revelation. She encouraged and supported him, saying ‘Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously, and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones.’(2) How would Allah *Glorified is He* disgrace him with all these good attributes?

His wife, Khadija, believed in him *peace and blessings be upon him* before hearing one verse of the Quran, and so did his friend Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* and the early believers. This is because they depended on his previous history before being a prophet. They knew for sure that the one who does not lie about the people can never lie about his Lord. Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* believed in Messenger Muhammad's prophethood as soon as he heard about it. He also unhesitatingly believed in his Night Journey. When he was asked about this, he said, 'We believe him in a greater matter, that is, the Revelation, so how can we not believe him in other matters? If he said it, he is truthful.'(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 24601; Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 308; Khalq Af'al Al-'Ibad, 1/87.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘A’isha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3; see also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 160.*

It is thus crystal clear that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had great morals that made the people believe him in all what he says. He said about himself, 'My Lord has taught me good manners properly.'(2) Thus, he has reached the peak of good manners because he was brought up and educated by his Lord, Allah *Glorified is He*.

One of his attributes was that he used to sit with his Companions and look at all of them equally. He never gave any of them more attention than the other. By so doing, no one of them would think that he *peace and blessings be upon him* favoured him over the others. He used to sit with the righteous people whom he knew that they would not exploit such a status to have authority over the people. When he shook hands with anyone, he used not to pull his hand till the other one does.(3) This is one of the great morals that Allah *Glorified is He* has taught him.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to sit where he finds an empty place, and so did his Companions. None of them sat beside him all the way so that none could think that these companions have higher positions than the others. All of them were equal.

In addition, 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* described Prophet Muhammad's morals in the gatherings, saying, 'When he visited people, he used to sit where he finds a place. He used to sit on ground and eat on ground. He sometimes milked the sheep. He accepted the invitations of the kings.'(1) How great these morals are! He *peace and blessings be upon him* used to sit in any place. In this way, he gave his Companions the best example that makes them meet different people every time they sit with him. Through these gatherings and encountering different believers daily, they integrated with each other as a faithful community.

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(1) *This narration is authenticated by Al-Hakim, and Adh-Dhahabi agreed with him. See Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, 3/62.*

(2) *In his book, As-Suyuti ascribes this Hadith to Ibn As-Sam`ani in his book Adab Al-Imla` on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud. Al-Albani graded it as weak. See Al-Albani, Da`if Al-Jame`, Hadith no. 249.*

(3) *A Hadith to this effect is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3716; and Ibn Al-Mubarak, Az-Zuhd, Hadith no. 392.*

Look how humble he *peace and blessings be upon him* was! Despite his prophethood and messenger-ship, He used to carry his own things by himself. If any of his companions offered to carry it, he would refuse and say, 'The owner should carry his own things.'(2) This shows how humble and far removed from arrogance he was.

In this connection, Anas ibn Malik, who enjoyed serving Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I have served Prophet Muhammad for ten years, he has never asked me why did I do this or did not do that.'(3)

Moreover, Zayd ibn Haritha was greatly affected with Prophet Muhammad's good manners to the extent that he refused to leave him in order to return back to his family. He was one of the people of Banu Kalb and the thieves kidnaped and sold him as a slave. Hakim ibn Hizam bought him for Khadija, the wife of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and she gifted him to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to serve him. One day, one of his people saw him in the streets of Mecca and told his family. Zayd's father went quickly to Mecca searching for his son till he found him. He told him *peace and blessings be upon him* the story of Zayd and asked him to let him return to his people. He *peace and blessings be upon him* loved Zayd very much, but he gave him the freedom to choose between him and his family. He said to his father, 'Give him the choice; if he chooses, you take him, but if he chooses to stay with me, I will be like his father.' Zayd replied, 'I can never choose anyone other than the Messenger of Allah.'(1) This choice was out of what he had seen of Prophet Muhammad's good manners about which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So, pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter…' (*Al-'Imran:* 159).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 1239: and see also Al-Bayhaqi, Shu`ab Al-Iman, Hadith no.7843.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. In his book, Al-Haythami said, 'This Hadith is narrated by Abu Ya`la and At-Tabarani. Its chain of narrators contains Yousef ibn Zeyad Al-Basiri who is a weak narrator.' In his book, Al-`Ajluni said, 'This Hadith is narrated by Al-Qadi `Ayyad in Ash-Shifa` without mentioning any chain of narrators. It is a weak Hadith, but Ibn Al-Jawzi went too far and graded it as fabricated. See Al-Haythami, Majma` Az-Zawa'id, 5/122; and Al-`Ajluni, Kashf Al-Khafa`, 2/25*

(3) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 13021 and13034; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 6386 and 7122; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 2893 and 2894; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 8383.*

His nature was suitable for his mission, as it helped him face his people's refusal to believe in Islam and his prophethood. Although such a refusal can provoke anyone's anger he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not become angry because of the nature of his character which made him deal mercifully with his *ummah*.

Allah *Glorified is He* softened Prophet Muhammad's heart towards his *ummah*, which caused him a great deal of grieve reminding him about his merciful nature and kind heart, and urging him to keep this nature and not to act against it. Thus, He *the Almighty* endowed him *peace and blessings be upon him* with the mercy that suits his task and ordered him to forgive his *ummah* and be lenient with them.

The mercy in his heart is what attracted the hearts of the believers to him. This is besides his great manners, humbleness, kind smile, supporting look and considering their conditions. Out of his great moral character, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* shakes hands with someone, he does not pull his hand until the other person does so. All these great morals made him overlook their faults because he is their teacher. This requires not being angry at all their faults.

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(1) *See Ibn Hajar, Al-Isaba Fi Tamyiz As-Sahaba, Biography no. 2884.*

Due to the mercy that Allah *the Almighty* conferred on him *peace and blessings be upon him* he was lenient towards the people and that is why they loved and followed him. If he had not been merciful, all the people would have dispersed from around him.

All of Prophet Muhammad's actions prove that mercifulness is one of his natural characteristics. One of the situations that show his mercy and forgiveness is the way he treated the people of Mecca when he opened it. When those who harmed became under his control, he forgave them. He said to them, 'O people of Quraysh! What do you think I am about to do with you?' They said, 'We think you will treat us well, you are a noble brother, the son of a noble brother.' He said, 'Then go; you are free.'(1) He did so even though they arrogantly and stubbornly rejected the Truth and forced him to leave Mecca, the most beloved city to his heart. On that day, he entered the city as a triumphant and was able to eliminate them all. However, he was not sent to do so, but rather to relieve and honour them.

Out of his great morals, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them, 'Go, you are free!' What a great merciful and lenient person he is! It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who bestowed this mercy and leniency on him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Would such a great Prophet be rejected and denied! Despite the fierce enmity and aggressiveness showed by the disbelievers of Mecca towards him and their continuous endeavours to harm him, he *peace and blessings be upon him* used to invoke Allah *the Almighty* to guide them, saying, 'O Allah, guide my people, for they do not know!'(2) He also used to say, ‘I hope that Allah will let them beget children who will worship Allah Alone, and will worship none besides Him.’(1) This actually has come to pass and most of his people were guided to belief.

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(1) *See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 2/412; As-Suhayli, Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf, 27/232; and Ibn Sayyid, `Uyun Al-Athar, 2/266.*

(2) *During the Battle of Uhud, Prophet Muhammad's teeth were broken and his face was hurt. This was very difficult for the prophet's companions, so they said, 'O Prophet Muhammad, would you not invoke Allah to destroy them?' He replied, 'I was not sent to curse people, but as a mercy. O Allah, guide my people for they do not know.' This Hadith is narrated by Al-Bayhaqi in Shu`ab Al-Iman in the same wording on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Ubaid. Al-Bayhaqi commented, 'It is a mursal Hadith (The name of the Companion is not mentioned in the chain of narrators).' He narrated another short narration which he attributed to Prophet Muhammad through an uninterrupted chain of narrators on the authority of Sahl ibn Sa`d, stating, 'O Allah, guide my people for they do not know!' See Manahil As-Safa Fi Takhrij Ahadith Ash-Shif'a, 1/60.*

The people of Mecca were well acquainted with Prophet Muhammad’s moral character and behaviour. Although they had bitterly fought him and tortured the earlier Muslims, he used to recommend his followers to maintain good relationships with their disbelieving relatives and to treat them well, regardless of their disbelief in Allah *the Almighty*.

Let us offer an example in this regard; although the mother of Asma` bint Abu Bakr, whose name was Qatila,(2) was still a disbeliever, Asma` *Allah be pleased with her* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* whether she was permitted to give her some money for food. She said to him *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘My mother has come to me and she desires to receive a reward from me. Shall I keep good relations with her?’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Yes, keep good relations with her.’(3)

Such are the lofty morals preached by Islam. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to abide by this high moral standard even in his dealings with the disbelievers. Moreover, He ordered the Muslims to follow the same manner in dealing with their disbelieving parents who try their best to convert their Muslim children to disbelief again.

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(1) *When Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him went to At-Ta`if and called them to embrace Islam, they rejected his call, harshly responded to him and threw stones at him to the extent that his feet were severely injured. Being overwhelmed with excessive sorrow, he departed and proceeded on, and could not relax till he found himself at Qarn Ath-Th`alib. The angel of the mountains called him saying, ‘Allah has heard your people’s saying to you, and what they have replied back to you. If you like, I will let Al-Akhshabayn (i.e. two mountains) fall on them.’ He peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘No, but I will wait, hoping that Allah will let them beget children who will worship Allah Alone.’ See As-Suhayli, Al-Huda Wa Ar-Rashad, 5/90.*

(2) *She is Qatila bint `Abd Al-`Uzza ibn `Amir ibn Lu`ay. She was a woman from the tribe of Quraysh. She was the wife of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq and the mother of `Aisha bint Abu Bakr and Mohamad ibn Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr divorced her before the advent of Islam. Once she brought presents to her daughter, but the latter refused to accept them as the former was still a disbeliever. Afterwards, she embraced Islam and migrated to Medina.*

(3) *See Abu Dawud Al-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no.1748; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 26945 and 26939; As-Shafi`i, As-Sunnan Al-Ma`thura, Hadith no. 529; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu’jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 203 and 342; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2620; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no.1003.*

Having observed his morals and lofty character, `Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said about Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘His character was (an application of the morals of) the Quran.’ `Aisha used to feel jealous of the late Khadija, Prophet Muhammad’s first wife. One day, Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, went to her father while she was very angry. He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to her, ‘O my beloved daughter, what makes you angry?’ She replied, `Aisha said to me, ‘The Messenger of Allah married your mother after she had been previously married, but I was the only virgin among all his wives.’ He *peace and blessings be upon him* said to Fatima, ‘Should she say this again, say to her, ‘But my mother married Allah’s Messenger while he was still a virgin and you married him while he was previously married.’(1) This was his prophetic comment. `Aisha never said this again.

Out of his lofty character, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to his Companions, ‘None of my Companions should convey to me anything regarding another one because I desire to meet every one of you with a clean heart.’(2) This means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not want to develop a feeling of hatred or enmity towards any one so that he could deal with all people fairly and generously to an extent which may lead a sinner or disobedient person to return in repentance to Allah *Glorified is He* and follow the Straight Path.

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(1) *`Aisha used to feel jealous of Khadija even though Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him married `Aisha after the death of Khadija. Muslim narrates, in the chapter of the Merits of Khadija, that `Aisha said to Prophet Muhammad, ‘What makes you remember an old woman amongst the old women of Quraysh, an old woman (with a toothless mouth) of red gums who died long ago, and in whose place Allah has given you somebody better than her?’ The colour of Prophet Muhammad’s face changed and scolded `Aisha, saying, ‘By Allah, Allah did not grant me any one better than her; she believed in me while people disbelieved in me, believed me while people belied me, supported me with her money while people prevented me and Allah granted me children through her alone.’ See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2437*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas`ud Allah be pleased with him. The completion of the narration states, ‘The Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him was brought some wealth, so he distributed it. Then I came across two men that were sitting saying: “By Allah! Muhammad did not intend the pleasure of Allah in his distribution, and nor the abode of the Hereafter.” So, I spread this when I heard them, and I went to the Messenger of Allah peace and blessings be upon him and I informed him. So, his face became red and he said, “Do not bother me with this, for indeed Musa (Moses) was afflicted by more than this and he was patient.’ See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 3759; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 2038; Al-Bayhaqi, Shu`ab Al-Iman, Hadith no.10597 and 10598; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4860; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3898; and Al-Bayhaqi As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 16675.*

Further, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to take care of all the matters. He used to command his Companions to be kind to their neighbours. In this regard, he said, ‘The neighbours are of three kinds: the neighbour who has only one right, the right of this one is the lowest, a neighbour who has two rights and a neighbour who has three rights, and the right of this kind is the ultimate. As for the neighbour who has a right, he is the polytheist neighbour to whom you have no kinship. The neighbour who has two rights is the Muslim neighbour as he has a right as a Muslim and another right as a neighbour. The neighbour who has three rights is the Muslim neighbour to whom you have a kinship. So, he has a right as a Muslim, a right as a neighbour, and a right as a relative.’(1) In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And serve Allah and do not associate anything with Him and be good to the parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbour of (your) kin and the alien neighbour, and the companion in a journey…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 36).

In the same vein, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Jibril (Gabriel) kept on recommending me about treating the neighbours in a kind and polite manner so much so that I thought that he would confer on them a share of inheritance.’(2) He *peace and blessings be upon him* was very keen that the Muslims cooperate with each other and deal with each other according to the high moral standard. He once said to Abu Dharr *Allah be pleased with him* ‘Abu Dharr! If you cook some stew, make a lot of it, and divide it among your neighbours.’(3)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of `Amr ibn Al-`As Allah be pleased with him. See Al- Khara`iti, Makarim Al-Akhlaq, Hadith no. 247; At-Tabarani, Musnad Ash-Shamiyyin, Hadith no. 2430; and Al-Bayhaqi in Shu`ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 9113.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of `Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6014 and 6015; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2625; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 24260 and 26013.*

(3) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2625; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3262; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 21428.*

This was Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; a man of a great moral character. He was a real application of the morals preached by the Quran. He is the best example of the true believer whom he *peace and blessings be upon him* described in one of his statements, saying, ‘The believer is like a bee which eats that which is pure and wholesome and lies that which is pure and wholesome.’(1) He was a practical implementation of the teachings of the Quran and the Way of Guidance which Allah *the Almighty* has revealed to him. Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the role model that we should follow.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَسَتُبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥﴾ بِأَييِّكُمُ ٱلْمَفْتُونُ ﴿٦﴾ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦ
وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٧﴾ فَلَا تُطِعِ ٱلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٨﴾ وَدُّوا۟ لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ ﴿٩﴾

And soon you will see, as will they [5] Which of you is afflicted with madness [6] Your Lord knows best who strays from His path and who is rightly guided [7] So do not yield to those who deny the truth [8] They want you to compromise with them and then they will compromise with you [9] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 5 - 9)

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘You, Muhammad, and the people of Quraysh will see the recompense of those people who claim that you are insane when they will be defeated at the Battle of Badr. You as well as the people in Mecca will see those people, who levelled this accusation against you, in a state of humiliation, while you will be in a state of triumph and greatness. This is their recompense in the worldly life’.

Yet, some scholars state that the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And soon you will see, as they will’ (*al-Qalam:* 5) refers to the state of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment when they see the punishment prepared for them. In the same vein, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Tomorrow shall they know who the liar is, the insolent one.’ (*al-Qamar:* 26) Here is an important linguistic note; in Arabic, when we want to refer to the near future, we add the prefix *sin* to the verb, but to refer to the distant or remote future, we use the particle *sawfa*. In the verse in question and in the aforementioned verse, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the prefix *sin* to refer to what will happen to the disbelievers.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority ‘Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As Allah be pleased with them both. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 6872; Al-Bayhaqi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 5382; and Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 253.*

Accordingly, the meaning of the verse in question can refer to both meanings, i.e. the disbelievers will see the recompense of their misdeeds both in the worldly life and in the Hereafter. Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘…they who act unjustly shall know to what final place of turning they shall turn back.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 227) Allah *Glorified is He* states that the disbelievers will come to know on the Day of Judgement that the insane person is one from among them, not Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or any of his Companions.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And soon you will see, as will they’ (*al-Qalam:* 5), it is associated with the interrogative sentence which comes after it, that is: ‘Which of you is afflicted with madness.’ (*al-Qalam:* 6) The Arabic verb *absara* (saw) signifies either sight or knowledge. Thus, the meaning of the verse is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as well as the people of Quraysh will come to know who was really inflicted with madness and was in clear error. This will take place when truth shall be clearly distinguished from falsehood on the Day of Judgment.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Which of you is afflicted with madness’ (*al-Qalam:* 6), we should note that the word *bi-ayyikom* (which of you) could be used without the preposition *ba`* in a context other than the Quran. Therefore, the people who are not versed in the rhetoric of the Arabic language may ask, ‘Why is this preposition mentioned’? Some others may mistakenly say that it is superfluous. Those people should beware of saying that the Quran contains even one superfluous letter because this indicates that the meaning of the Quranic sentence can be completed without any need for some letters. This is completely untrue, for there is no superfluous letter in the Quran. Instead, in such a case, you should say, ‘I do not understand the reason of the existence of this letter’. The early Arabs heard Prophet Muhammad *peace and* *blessings be upon him* reciting this very verse and none of them argued that the usage of the preposition *ba`* in this context is incorrect. Should it have been mistakenly used, they would have publicly declared it as the Quran challenged them to bring forth even one mistake or even one verse similar to it. Their failure to meet this challenge proves that the style of the Quran is completely consistent with the language of the early Arabs.

So, regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Which of you is afflicted with madness' (*al-Qalam:* 6), the Arabic letter *ba`* in the word *bi-ayyikom* (Which of you) signifies an additional meaning. That is to say that it plays a linguistic role in asking them, 'Who among you is overwhelmed with madness or deviation'? Some scholars say that *maftun* (the deviant) refers to Satan because he leads anyone under his control to deviation and madness.

In this vein, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that the one who is touched by Satan is driven to insanity, as He *the Almighty* says: 'But those who take usury will rise up on the Day of Resurrection like someone tormented by Satan's touch…' (*al-Baqara:* 275). *At-Takhabbut* means to walk unsteadily and to move in an uncontrolled way. Accordingly, the verse signifies that Satan may touch a person in a way that corrupts the soundness his faculties which work together to make one's body behave in the correct manner. When Satan touches someone and corrupts his faculties, his psychological faculties get affected and disharmonised and thus his movements become disorganised or uncontrollable. In this way, we find that the proposition *ba`* in the verse under discussion is not superfluous. Unlike the human speech which can contain superfluous words or letter, Allah's Words or Speech can never include any superfluous letter or word. In fact, each word in the Quran is stated to communicate a certain meaning and should any letter be omitted from its place, the meaning would become incomplete. As it is He *the Almighty* Who revealed the Quran to communicate a certain Message, the linguistic style He uses must deliver this Message completely and perfectly.

Some scholars opine that the preposition *ba`* means 'in' and accordingly the meaning is as follows: 'In your opinion, which of the two parties (Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, and the then disbelievers of Quraysh) includes the one who is afflicted with madness?'

We should also note that Allah *Glorified is He* doubled the letter *ya`* in the same word. This signifies that the disbelievers of Mecca at that time reached the ultimate level of transgression. Therefore, they were the real insane people. This is because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who has the perfect standards of morals, cannot be described with insanity. Accordingly, whoever accuses him of insanity is the one who is really insane.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Your Lord knows best who strays from His path and who is rightly guided.’ (*al-Qalam:* 7) It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who really knows the reality of these disbelievers as well as that of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers. The former group are polytheists who had gone astray and were overwhelmed by Satan, while the latter group are the believers who were guided to the Truth.

So, it is as if He *the Almighty* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, ‘I know about those who have gone astray such as the disbelievers of Quraysh who deviated from Allah’s Religion and the Path of Guidance. Likewise, I am fully Aware of those who have been guided and followed the Truth’. Allah *Glorified is He* is Omniscient; He is fully Aware of the believers and the disbelievers and the rightly guided and the misguided ones.

Those who have gone astray are the people who deviated from Allah’s Way of Guidance and followed other paths which led them astray. They deviated in this worldly life and became the followers of Satan. Thus, they are far away from the true Religion and the Straight Path. In fact, Islam is all about following Allah’s Path as it is the only the true path which leads to the desired objective. All other paths shall not lead you to the desired objective as they run counter to the Way of Guidance which He *the Almighty* has clarified to us. Allah *Glorified is He* specified a certain path, i.e. His commands and legislations, so if we followed it, we will attain His Pleasure and Reward.

The Arabic word *as-sabeel* (path) signifies a material meaning. Yet, Allah *Glorified is He* uses it here to signify a creedal and an abstract meaning. So, He *the Almighty* clarifies this abstract meaning by means of the material sense of this word. At a crossroads, if someone deviates from his road even one inch, he will keep moving away from his intended destination. He keeps moving away from his destination as long as he walks in that direction.

Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to follow His Straight Path and not to follow other paths, saying: ‘And (know) that this is My Path, the right one therefore follow it, and follow not (other) ways, for they will lead you away from His Way…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 153).

Allah *Glorified is He* guides the people to the Truth and Guidance by the Quran, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘O followers of the Book! Indeed Our Apostle has come to you making clear to you much of what you concealed of the Book and passing over much; indeed, there has come to you light and a clear Book from Allah. With it Allah guides him who will follow His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by His will and guides them to the right path.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 16) This verse indicates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a light and that the Quran explains the Truth and shows the Way of Guidance. He *the Almighty* guides those who obey Him and follow His legislations to the way of peace. This verse also indicates that following him *peace and blessings be upon him* who received the clear Book, is in itself an indication of Allah’s pleasure which is shown to those who follow and obey Him. Moreover, He *the Almighty* rewards such people by guiding them to the way of peace which are so many. They include one’s peace of mind, one’s peace with his own family, community, world, and universe, and more importantly with Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, He *the Almighty* warns Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* against obeying those misguided and disbelieving people, saying: ‘So do not yield to those who deny the truth.’ (*al-Qalam:* 7) The disbelievers of Quraysh were calling him *peace and blessings be upon him* to follow their religion. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* ordered him to hold fast to His Religion, Islam, and not to obey those who deny His Oneness.

The people who denied Allah’s verses are the disbelievers and the polytheists and all those who deny and fight Islam. Denial in this case is an act of rebellion on the part of the denier who opposes Allah’s Message and strives to destroy it and stop its spread.

This state of denial is preceded by a stage in which the hearts of those people get filled with deviation. Therefore, they declared that they deny the prophethood of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and accused him of lying about conveying a Message from Allah *the Almighty* and that he contrived the Quran. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* ordered him *peace and blessings be upon him* not to follow them or respond to their wishes, saying: 'And thus have We revealed it, a true judgment in Arabic, and if you follow their low desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you shall not have against Allah any guardian or a protector.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 37)

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* ordered him *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to them: '…I do not follow your low desires. For then indeed I should have gone astray and I should not be of those who go aright.' (*al-An'am:* 56). Here, He *the Almighty* says to him *peace and blessings be upon him* that his mission is only to convey the Message to those polytheists and not to follow their wishes which shall lead him to deviation. Whoever follows such whims and wishes will surely go astray and deviate from the Path of the guided people. Therefore, He *the Almighty* prompts him *peace and blessings be upon him* to publicly declare that he does not follow their desires so that they should know that there is no room for any compromise with them in the matter of truth and falsehood.

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* warns Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'They want you to compromise with them and then they will compromise with you.' (*al-Qalam:* 9) He *the Almighty* warns him *peace and blessings be upon him* against being deceived by those people or making compromises with them, as they suggested that they would worship Allah with him for a year and he would worship their gods for a year. (1) Allah *Glorified is He* rejected this matter altogether and revealed His saying: 'Say: "O disbelievers! I do not worship that which you worship. Nor do you worship Him Whom I worship. Nor am I going to worship that which you worship.' (*al-Kafirun:* 1-4)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, At-Tabari relates on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that the people of Quraysh said to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him 'We are going to suggest only one thing to you which will be of benefit to us.' He replied, 'What is it?' They said, 'You will worship our gods (al-Lat and al-`Uza) for one year and we will worship your god for one year.' He peace and blessings be upon him said, 'I will wait until Allah reveals something [in this regard].' Afterwards, the chapter of al-Kafirun was revealed.' See, At-Tabari, Jame` Al-Bayan, 24/662.*

This is a categorical rejection of this compromise about mutual worshipping. We know that worship is an inward creed related to the heart and cannot be compromised. Therefore, severance of relationship with the disbelievers and total rejection of this compromise is an obligation. It is not a political matter; rather, it is a Divine Order prescribed by Allah Alone.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And surely, they had purposed to turn you away from that which We have revealed to you, that you should forge against Us other than that, and then they would certainly have taken you for a friend.' (*al-Isra':* 73) So, they made many malicious suggestions to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to divert him from the Divine Message. Once they proposed that he *peace and blessings be upon him* leave them to worship their false gods and they would give him what is consecrated to these gods. At another time, they prevented him *peace and blessings be upon him* from approaching the Black Stone until he glorified their gods first. They wanted to equalise between belief and disbelief in Islam. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* made a final Judgment of categorical rejection of all such suggestions as the issue of belief and disbelief cannot be compromised

In this regard, severance of relations and the categorical rejection is different from the political severance of relations between two countries which may resume their relations again. Rather, severance of relations with the disbelievers here is categorical and permanent. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to them, 'Do not ever think that your proposals and suggestion in this regard may be reconsidered at a later time'. To underline this fact, Allah *Glorified is He* asserts His Rejection of their suggestion many times in the chapter of *al-Kafirun* to the extent that some people, who read the Quran without deep understanding or contemplation, thought that a repetition. However, the different forms of negation in that chapter mean that we, the Muslims, do not accept to worship the disbelievers' gods in the present time. Likewise, in the future, nothing shall oblige us to reconsider this decision or make compromises.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'They want you to compromise with them and then they will compromise with you' (*al-Qalam:* 9) refers to the convictions. When someone has a conviction about something, all his faculties act accordingly. Therefore, as they suggested that Prophet Muhammad *peace* *and blessings be upon him* worship their false gods and they worship Allah, they will not then have sincere belief in his religion. After all, this runs counter to their convictions. Allah *Glorified is He* told him *peace and blessings be upon him* that, as he would reject the suggestion of those disbelievers, they would always reject his call to serve their ends. Therefore, he should always beware of them.

Allah *the Almighty* also told him *peace and blessings be upon him* that Allah *Glorified is He* would expose all their plots and secrets so that he would be knowledgeable of all their actions and not to incline to have compromises with them or expect that they would have a sincere belief in his Message. Their only wish was that they turn him *peace and blessings be upon him* from belief in Allah *the Almighty* into disbelief.

Their only aim was that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would accept their suggestion of mutual worship of their false gods along with Allah *Glorified is He*. They spared no effort to urge him *peace and blessings be upon him* to abandon his call to Islam; they offered him wealth, authority and all kinds of temptations. Categorically rejecting all these proposals, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said his well-known statement, ‘By Allah, should they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand to abandon this matter (Islam), I shall not abandon it until Allah makes it predominant or I die in this cause.’(1)

They sent a delegation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him, ‘We came to you so that we would be free from blame. You have brought about an innovative matter which has never appeared among your people; you cursed our gods, despised our minds, and insulted our religions. If you seek money, we would give you until you become the wealthiest among us and if you want authority, we would make you our leader or king.' He *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, 'By Allah, I do not seek any of what you are saying but Allah have sent me with the truth. It is either that you obey me, or I shall wait until Allah gives me victory over you.'

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(1) *Abu Taleb was sent to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said to him, ‘O my nephew, your people came to me and said to me such and such. So, protect me and yourself and do not overburden me with something I cannot tolerate.’ Prophet Muhammad felt that his uncle would stop supporting him and therefore he said to him, ‘O uncle! By Allah, should they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand to abandon this matter (Islam), I shall not abandon it until Allah makes it predominant or I die in this cause.’ Then, Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was about to cry and he headed to leave. At this point, Abu Taleb called upon him and said to him, ‘O my nephew, come to me.’ When he peace and blessings be upon him returned to him, Abu Taleb said, ‘O my nephew, go and preach whatever you want for by Allah I shall never fail to support you.’ See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 2/187.*

The disbelievers of Mecca made this attempt secretly hoping that they might come to a compromise with him *peace and blessings be upon him*. As they were his opponents, they thought that it would be difficult for him to respond to their proposals. Therefore, they decided to send him someone towards whom he *peace and blessings be upon him* showed respect and reverence. They went to his uncle Abu Taleb, and asked him to talk to him on their behalf. After Abu Taleb talked to him, he *peace and blessings be upon him* categorically rejected their proposals and said his well-known statement, 'O uncle, By Allah, should they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand to abandon this matter (Islam), I shall not abandon it until Allah makes it predominant or I die in this cause.'

All their attempts did not divert Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from striving hard for disseminating Allah's Religion. Their attempts did not stop even when he migrated to Medina. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And that you should judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their low desires, and be cautious of them, lest they seduce you from part of what Allah has revealed to you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 49). Some disbelievers tried to deceive him *peace and blessings be upon him* to issue some rulings in their favour. They said that they would accept Islam if such rulings were issued. But Allah *Glorified is He* warned him, against their plot, saying: '…and be cautious of them, lest they seduce you from part of what Allah has revealed to you…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 49). *Al-Hadhar* (caution) signifies one's cautiousness and fear of what may harm him, even if it may bring about some benefit. The one who wants to harm another may present him the harmful matter in a good way to beautify it in his eyes so that he sees it. Therefore, caution means being watchful against anyone who purposes to harm/her you by something while he tries to persuade you that it is beneficial.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا تُطِعۡ كُلَّ حَلَّافٖ مَّهِينٍ ١٠

Do not yield to any contemptible swearer [10]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 10)

Halif/yahlif means to swear or take an oath. When we contemplate on the Quran, we find that *halif* is always stated to refer to false swearing while the word *qasam* (an oath) refers to both the honest and false swear. For example, Allah *the Almighty* states: '…This is the atonement for breaking your oath…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89). As there is expiation for one's oath, this means that he has broken it.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says here: 'Do not yield to any contemptible swearer.' (*al-Qalam:* 10) The swearer meant in this verse used to take many false oaths. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the hypocrites: 'They swear to you by Allah that they might please you…' (*at-Tawba:* 62). They used their false swearing as a means to please the believers so that they feel assured towards them. Then He *the Almighty* asserts the fact that: '…Allah, as well as His Messenger, has a greater right that they should please Him…' (*at-Tawba:* 62). On the other hand, the true believer takes oaths to please Allah *the Almighty* Alone because one may deceive some people for a while and circumvent man-made laws, but Allah *Glorified is He* cannot be deceived and His punishment cannot be avoided.

It is noteworthy that *yahlifun* (to swear) occurs in the chapter of *at-Tawba* more than any other Quranic chapter. It only occurs once in the chapters of *al-Ma'ida* and *an-Nisa`* and three times in the chapter of *al-Mujadala*.

This word occurs in the chapter of *at-Tawba* seven times. Therefore, some call it 'the chapter of *yahlif* (to swear)(1) because this word is mentioned in this chapter more than all the rest of the Quranic chapters.

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(1) This word occurs in the chapter of *at-Tawba* in the following verses: 'They swear to you by Allah that they might please you and, Allah, as well as His Messenger, has a greater right that they should please Him, if they are believers.' (*at-Tawba:* 62); 'They swear by Allah that they did not speak, and certainly they did speak, the word of =

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to obey the one who frequently swears. It is said that the one intended here was Al-Akhnas ibn Shurayq(1), but some others state that it refers to Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira or Al-Aswad ibn ‘Abd Yaghuth. Yet, this verse is not intended to refer to a specific person. Instead, it generally refers to anyone who frequently swears.

Such a person is described as ‘*maheen*’ (degraded) and it refers here to the one who is of a poor discretion. The person should keep his oath, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and keep your oath…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 89). Moreover, the early Arabs used to praise the one who did not frequently swear.

The wisdom behind Allah’s order to people not to frequently swear by Him is that when one swears to all matters, taking oaths becomes an easy matter to him and thus he may swear to false matters. The Quran used to expose those who falsely take oaths and prohibits them from making such oaths, saying: ‘…Say: “Swear not…”’ (*an-Nur:* 53). No one can be prevented from taking an oath, especially when one swears to do a good thing. But those people used to break their oaths and, therefore, their oaths would be worth nothing, as they had taken them insincerely.

As Allah *Glorified is He* ordered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to obey the one who frequently took oaths, He ordered him to disobey other categories of people such as the disbelievers, the hypocrites and those who are unmindful of the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* as He says: ‘And be not compliant to the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and disregard their annoying talk…’ (*al-Ahzab:* 48); ‘O Prophet! be careful of

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= unbelief, and disbelieved after their Islam, and they had determined upon what they have not been able to effect…’ (*at-Tawba:* 74) and ‘They will swear to you that you may be pleased with them; but if you are pleased with them, yet surely Allah is not pleased with the transgressing people.’ (*at-Tawba:* 96)

(1) *Al-Akhnas ibn Shurayq Ath-Thaqafi embraced Islam on the day of the liberation of Mecca. He participated in the Battle of Hunayn and was given a share of the spoils. He died in the beginning of the caliphate of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab. In his book, Ibn Hajar says that his name was `Ubbay and was nicknamed as Al-Akhnas (lit. the retreating one) because he ordered his people to return and not to participate in the Battle of Badr when the news came that Abu Sufyan saved the caravan. See Ibn Sa`d, At-Tabaqat Al-Kubra, 1/293; and Ibn Hajar, Al-Isaba, 1/192.*

(your duty to) Allah and do not comply with (the wishes of) the disbelievers and the hypocrites; surely Allah is Knowing, Wise.' (*al-Ahzab:* 1) and: '…and do not follow him whose heart We have made unmindful to Our remembrance, and he follows his low desires and his case is one in which due bounds are exceeded.' (*al-Kahf:* 28)

Obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* means to follow His commands and refrain from His prohibitions. The last verse denotes that the disbelievers asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to gather them with the poor people in one place. However, He *the Almighty* wanted him to honour those poor people by prohibiting him from driving them away. This is the lofty way of honouring those who constantly remember Him *Glorified is He* as they were the early believers and the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The reason of the Divine Order that the one shall not follow the people who are unmindful of the remembrance of Allah *the Almighty* is that they lead him astray from Him *Glorified is He* and His Religion. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And if you obey most of those in the earth, they will lead you astray from Allah's way…' (*al-An'am:* 116). Those people follow their own desires and as long as one is preoccupied with his own desires, he neglects Allah's Commands. The true believer is the one whose own desire is consistent with His commands and Legislation and never deviates from His Way of Guidance.

In the same vein, Allah *Glorified is He*: 'So do not follow the disbelievers, and strive against them a mighty striving with it.' (*al-Furqan:* 52) Here, He *the Almighty* orders Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to obey them should they offer him kingship, wealth, or leadership and to be sure that what Allah *Glorified is He* prepares for him is certainly better than that. This does not mean that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was obeying the disbelievers. Actually, this resembles His order to the believers to believe in Him, saying: 'O you who believe! Believe in Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 136). So, He *the Almighty* orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* to refrain from following anyone who offers him money for renouncing his religion such as Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira who was a degraded and feeble trader. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* commands him, saying: '…and obey not from among them a sinner or an ungrateful one.' (*al-Insan:* 24)

Allah *the Almighty* describes this one who frequently makes oaths as being backbiter and slander-monger, saying:

هَمَّازٍ مَّشَّآءِۭ بِنَمِيمٍ ﴿١١﴾

To any backbiter, slander-monger [11]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 11)

Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: 'Woe to every slanderer, defamer.' (*al-Humaza:* 1) *Al-Humaza* (a slanderer) refers to anyone who mocks at people, even by a gesture. For example, he may encounter a lame person and mocks at him by imitating his way of walking or by ridiculing him. As for *al-hamaz* (backbiter), it refers to the person who back bites people and defames their honour. These characteristics could be a sign of disbelief. The backbiter is imaged in Islam as if he is eating the corpse of his fellow Muslim.

Therefore, the Arabic word *al-humaza* signifies that one backbites and ridicules others in public, while the word *al-lumaza* means to ridicule people by imitating their way of walking or making sounds with his voice or any other movement to make people laugh.

For instance, when there is a group of people together and someone furtively tries to mock another by winking or whispering or any other way, provided that he refers to the slandered one's defect stealthily without most people noticing it. So, *al-lumaza* (scorners) are those who frequently slander others in their presence openly and blatantly, whereas *al-humaza* (backbiters) are the weak ones who defame people stealthily.

Both Arabic words used in the verse for 'slandering' and 'backbiting' are exaggeration patterns indicating doing something excessively. Backbiting signifies frequent defamation of people and implies the weakness of the backbiter; otherwise he would do this action openly. Some hypocrites used to backbite Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* mock the legislation of the alms and blame the rich who exert themselves to get money then give it to the poor who make no effort, as stated in Allah's saying:

'And of them there are those who blame you with respect to the alms; so if they are given from it they are pleased, and if they are not given from it, lo! they are full of rage.' (*at-Tawba:* 58) So, did they criticise the legislation itself? Or did they criticise Allah *Glorified is He* for urging people to give charity? Or did they vilify giving a varying amount on money to the poor? They used to defame all or most of these issues.

Further, the backbiter is the one who defames people verbally and the scorner is the one who defame them by action. Not only does such a person meant in the verse defame, mock and slander, but he also goes about with malicious gossip. Going about with malicious gossip always takes the side of evil and denotes spreading calumnies between people to harm and arouse hostilities between them. They conceal the good deeds of people and expose their evil ones to the extent that they tell lies about them if they cannot get to know their evils deeds.

Mashsha` (going about with malicious gossip) comes in the form of an exaggeration pattern to affirm that such an atrocious trait is deeply instilled in such a person that he habitually and excessively intends to spread hatred among people and sour their relations by gossip and telling lies. Thus, such a slander-monger causes discord between people. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said 'A *qattat* (slanderer or bearer of false tales) shall not enter Paradise.'(1) *Qattat* refers to the one who overhears people's talk and carries it to others to spread animosity and spoil their relations.

Further, Ibn `Abbas narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed by two graves and said, 'Both of them (the persons in these graves) are being tortured, and they are not being tortured for a major sin. One of them used not to save himself from being soiled with his urine, and the other one used to go about with calumnies.'(2)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 23247 and 23305; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 60656; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 170.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority Ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him. In his Mustakhraj, Abu `Uwana narrated this Hadith with the addition, 'He then took a green leaf of a date-palm tree split it into two pieces and fixed one on each grave. The people said, 'O Allah's Messenger! Why have you done so?' He replied, 'I hope that their* =

Further, Asma` bint Yazid ibn As-Sakan narrated that he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Shall I not inform you of the worst amongst you? It is those who: go forth as tale-bearers (those who indulge in gossip); cause separation amongst people who love one another and make excuses for sins (which they commit).'(1) Causing discord between people and spoiling their relations are deemed as dangerous matters. Moreover, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Shall I not inform you of what is more virtuous than the rank of fasting, prayer and charity?' They said, 'But of course!' He said, 'Making peace between each other, for indeed spoiling relations with each other is the *haliqa* (razor). I do not tell you that it shaves the hair, but it shaves away the religion.'(2)

Allah *Glorified is He* describes this act as devilish, a fact which is crystal clear in his saying: 'Satan only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 91). The Arabic verse is worded in such a way to indicate that the one who indulges in gossip causes separation between two people who are firmly united and having a close relation.

Allah then says:

مَّنَّاعٍ لِّلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿١٢﴾

Or hinderer of good, to anyone who is sinful,
aggressive [12] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 12)

The chiefs of Quraysh used to hinder the people from doing good deeds and having faith in Allah *the Almighty*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Have you considered him who calls the judgment a lie? That is the one who

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= *punishment may be lessened till they (the leaf) become dry.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1361 and 218; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 4140; Ibn Abu Shayba, Musannaf, Hadith no. 12045; 'Abd Ar-Razzaq, Musannaf, Hadith no. 6753; and Abu `Uwana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 495.*

(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Asma` bint Yazid ibn As-Sakan Allah be pleased with her. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 5092 and 27599; Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Maghribi, Hadith no. 323; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 423; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu`ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 10596*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Ad-Darda` Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 5092; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2509.*

treats the orphan with harshness. And he does not urge (others) to feed the poor. So, woe to the praying ones who are unmindful of their prayers, who do (good) to be seen, and withhold the necessities of life!' (*al-Ma'un:* 1-7) Allah *Glorified is He* points out that among the necessaries of life that should not be withheld are the container used for kneading dough, sifter, etc. which a poor person may not possess, so he borrows them from his neighbour. Hence, the forbidder of good is stingy in giving away money or charity. Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, who was a rich man and had ten sons to whom he used to say, 'Whoever accepts Islam among you, I shall deprive him of my bounty.'(1) That is why He *the Almighty* says: 'Just because he has wealth and sons.' (*al-Qalam:* 14) He is very cautious to forbid others and even himself from doing any good deed and that is why he stood against the Call of Faith and withheld his money from the needy.

He did not only prevent the good from others, but he also took it unlawfully by theft, bribe, seizure, extortion, and deception. By so doing, he commits transgression in all its forms, and therefore he is an extravagant sinner. He is not considered so only due to his misdeeds and injustice, but also because of his insistence on wronging himself without desisting from it or being reproached by an admonition from His Lord *Glorified is He*. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'Forbidder of good, exceeder of limits, doubter.' (*Qaf:* 25) This suggests that he doubts the Day of Judgment, for if he had believed in the Reckoning and Recompense, he would not have prevented himself and his family from doing good deeds nor would he have resisted faith and giving Allah's Rights. Being a sinner, a doubter fears to get exposed, as the traditional proverb goes: 'A doubter is about to say take me.' This is because he perpetrated evil, thereby he is a sinner.

Allah says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Az-Zamakhshari said that Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira Al-Makhzumi had ten sons and said to them, 'Whoever accepts Islam among you, I shall deprive him of my bounty.' See Az-Zamakhshari, Al-Kash-shaf, 4/587.*

عُتُلِّۭ بَعۡدَ ذَٰلِكَ زَنِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾

Coarse, and on top of all that, an imposter [13]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 13)

`Utul (coarse), which originally connotes pushing fiercely and violently, refers to the treacherous ill-speaking person who is intensely stubborn in his disbelief and vehemently contentious. This linguistic meaning is mentioned is the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Seize him, then drag him down into the middle of the Hell.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 47) Here, this word means to forcibly drag the disbeliever on his face into the middle of hellfire. This ignoble baseborn pretender is known by his evil as a sheep is known by its notable sign which usually hangs on its neck. In this regard, Zayd ibn Aslam, narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The heaven weeps over a person whom Allah has given strength, wealth and enlarged his stomach, but he does injustice to people; such is the ignoble baseborn pretender.'(1) *Zanim* (baseborn pretender) refers to one stuck with people, while he is not one of them; whose father is not known and his mother is a prostitute thereby attributed to someone other than his father and adopted by his people.

This does not mean, however, that everyone walking around with gossips is a fatherless baseborn pretender, since the context of the verse is about a specific person with such characteristics and therefore it is added: '…and on top of all that...' (*al-Qalam:* 13). This means that this description is added to the previous descriptions. Such a person with theses consecutive characteristics, each is worse than the others, is a habitual swearer who knows himself to be neither honest nor trustworthy, thereby is typically characterised as mean and debased even if he has power, wealth or beauty. He prevents the good from himself and from others as well; transgresses the limits of truth, justice, and fairness; and indulges in sins, prohibitions, and forbidden matters. He is described as cruel, harsh, despised; and marked by his evil, wickedness and enjoying the spread of hatred between people. The one going around with gossip is a double-faced, dissembler, slanderer, and fully busy with finding faults in others, concealing the good, exposing the evil, telling lies and spreading rumours. Besides all this, he is a baseborn pretender of the lowest people; on looking into his reality, you find him having unknown father, attributed to a people to whom he does not belong as if all of his vicious traits emanate from his debased origin.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, At-Tabari narrates this Hadith on the authority of Zayd ibn Aslam through a mursal Hadith (The Companion name is not mentioned). In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir states that this Hadith is narrated through two mursal chains of narrators and was also narrated by many scholars, including Mujahid, `Ikrima, Al-Hasan and Qatada. See At-Tabari, Jame` Al-Bayan, 23/536; and Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 8/211.*

Allah says:

أَن كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

Just because he has wealth and sons [14]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 14)

In this verse, it is noted that his origin has nothing to do with the wealth and sons that Allah *the Almighty* granted him, and this concept is affirmed by His saying: ‘So [Muhammad] leave them for a while steeped [in their ignorance]. Do they reckon that, by giving them wealth and sons, We race to give them good things? They really have no idea!’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 54-56) Do they think that what is extended to them of wealth and children is good for them? Contrarily, it is but a respite for them so that they may indulge more in committing sins. Therefore, we should not obey such a person even if he has wealth and children. It is said that Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira is intended here as he had a garden in At-Ta`if and twelve sons. However, his wealth and children did not separate him from his debased origin, and thus his traits came in conformity with such origin. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘My *ummah* will remain well so long as illegitimate birth is not prevalent among them; should it happen, Allah would inflict a punishment upon them.’(1) `Ikrima even said, ‘Prevalence of illegitimate births causes drought.’(2) After Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira had been given wealth and children in abundance, and yet desiring for more, Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed and deprived him of all that, leaving him penniless. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Leave Me and him whom I created alone. And gave him vast riches, and sons dwelling in his presence. And I adjusted affairs for him adjustably. And yet he desires that I should add more! By no means! Surely, he offers opposition to Our communications.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 11-15)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Maymuna Allah be pleased with her. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 26830; Al-Bukhari, At-Tarikh Al-Kabir, 1/138; Abu Ya`la, Musnad, Hadith no. 7091; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 24/55*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Al-Qurtubi attributes this narration to `Ikrima. See Al-Qurtubi, Jame` Ahkam Al-Quran, 18/235.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِذَا تُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡهِ ءَايَٰتُنَا قَالَ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ ١٥

When our revelations are recited to him, he says, ‘These are just ancient fables’ [15] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 15)

Aya (a sign or a verse) refers to the marvellous wonders capturing one’s attention like the universal signs which include the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the mountains, the seas, etc. Being beyond the ability of humans, such wonderful phenomena were created by Allah *the Almighty* as a sign of His Omnipotence as well as to serve mankind.

Ayat could also refer to the miracles of the Prophets. When Allah *Glorified is He* sends a messenger or a prophet to his people, Allah *Glorified is He* breaks the laws of nature for him to prove his prophethood to his people. Such miracles were intended for the people who witnessed them with the aim of establishing faith in the hearts of the believers in times of difficulties; when they see a proof for the truthfulness of their Messenger, this helps them strengthen their belief.

Further, the word *ayat* refers to the verses of the Glorious Quran; the miraculous Speech of Allah *Glorified is He* which verifies the prophethood of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* until the Day of Judgment. In the Quran, He *the Almighty* also mentions His miracles concerning the creation of the human being, the heavens, the earth, etc.

Accordingly, *aya* (sign) signifies a marvelous wonder, the miracles of the prophets attesting to their truthfulness and the verses of the Glorious Quran. The miracles with which Allah *Glorified is He* supported Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* are clear before the disbelievers and need no evidence. Even though he *peace and blessings be upon him* was unlettered, he brought this miraculous Quran from Allah *the Almighty* both in wording and meaning which is a clear self-evidenced miracle.

Furthermore, he *peace and blessings be upon him* prophesised through the divinely revealed Quran about the result of a war which was yet to take place nine years later. Besides, he exposed what was concealed within the hearts of the hypocrites and the disbelievers, predicated some future events, and stated some cosmic laws. Further, the Quran contained all types of scientific, cosmic, and universal miracles. These are all clear signs with which the Quran challenged the disbelievers. They were clear enough that no one rejected them except he who desired to go beyond the path of Allah *Glorified is He* and follow his whims. The signs of the universe, the Glorious Quran and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* need but an unbiased mind to come to the conclusion that the Quran, being full of linguistic and scientific miracles, was revealed from Allah *Glorified is He* and will remain a miracle for every coming generation.

The disbelievers do not believe in Allah's signs, even if they are conspicuously clear and even if they come on their request, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And those who have no knowledge say: "Why does not Allah speak to us or a sign come to us?" Even thus said those before them, the like of what they say, "Their hearts are all alike." Indeed, We have made the communications clear for a people who are sure.' (*al-Baqara:* 118) The Glorious Quran was revealed to challenge them regarding to the future events and the mysteries of the human soul. Had the disbelievers used their minds, it would have sufficed them to reach the truth, but they, out of obstinacy, rejected every sign coming to them and demanded another one.

Moreover, the signs brought forth to the disbelievers increased their obstinacy and disbelief. Whenever they demanded a sign, they rejected it and grew in their rejection and stubbornness, even if they knew for certain that such signs were sent down from Allah *Glorified is He* and that it is the mission of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to deliver them, as stated in His saying: 'Even as We have sent among you a Messenger from among you who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know.' (*al-Baqara:* 151) We should note that the signs are of two types: seen and read ones. The visual signs encompass the whole universe and explain the verses of the Quran, which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited. The verses of the Quran filled the people with wonder, so they were supported by the signs in the universe. He *peace and blessings be upon him* came with recited verses to attract people's attention to the observed signs. Through provoking wonder at the precision of the creation of the universe, the people attain to belief in its Creator.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not recite the Quran to draw people's admiration only; rather, he had a spiritual mission, namely, drawing the attention of everyone listening to the Quran to the creation of this astoundingly beautiful universe which comprises marvellous signs. Upon believing in its Creator, he *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys to them the Way of Guidance which best suits the beauty of the universe. Furthermore, He *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent to recite Allah's verses to the people to purify them, increase their purity and decency, and teach them the Book and the wisdom. The Revelation used to be sent down to him *peace and blessings be upon him* with some verses and in some occasions with two or three *rub`* (quarters). When the revelation departed, he *peace and blessings be upon him* used to recite what was revealed to him to his Companions so that they would record and recite it in exactly the same way they heard it. Some of them memorised the whole Quran by heart, for they were the *ummah* of narration and strong memory.

In the verse in question, the Arabic verb *tala/yatlu* (to recite) is used in the passive form because the reciter in this case, i.e. Prophet Muhammad, is well known and the focal point here is what the disbeliever would do when Allah's verses are recited to him. Many disbelievers described Allah's verses as: '…ancient fables.' (*al-Qalam:* 15) Among such disbelievers was An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, the ally of Banu Abu Ad-Dar, who used to frequently visit Al-Hira to listen to the rhymed prose and speech of its people. When he came to Mecca and heard the Quran and the speech of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, 'We have heard indeed; if we pleased, we could say the like of it ;(1) this is nothing but the stories of the ancients.' He also said, 'This is but the rhymed prose of the people of Al-Hira.'

Likewise, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira was among the disbelievers who labelled the Quran as 'ancient fables'. He also used to mock Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that is why the following verses were revealed about him: 'When our revelations are recited to him, he says, "These are just ancient fables." We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 15-16)

Al-Walid was a man of wealth, power, and children, but he turned away and scoffed at the Quran, thereby Allah *Glorified is He* inflicted him with an exemplar punishment. *Asatir* (fables) means something composed of wonders and magical events. Descripting the Quran as 'ancient fables' is a sign of the disbelievers' failure; after they labelled it once as magic, another time as soothsaying, they now call it 'ancient fables'!

Being the people of eloquence and rhetoric, they perceived the greatness of the Quran, and were fascinated by its eloquent styles, and yet they described it as 'ancient fables'. As they mistakenly thought that the Quranic orders were difficult for them, they were not willing to abide by it. Thus, the fables signify the legends and myths such as 'One Thousand and One Nights', 'The Iliad' and other books of legends. Some people contend that *asatir* (legends) has two singular forms, but the meaning is the same in either case. The legends refer to the fabricated speech which has no origin, but not to the speech which did not take place at its specified time, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And those who disbelieve say: "This is nothing but a lie which he has forged, and other people have helped him at it"; so indeed they have done injustice and (uttered) a falsehood. And they say: "The stories of the ancients—he has got them written; so these are read out to him morning and evening."' (*al-Furqan:* 4-5)

So, the disbelievers alleged that the Quran comprised the legends and the stories of the ancients which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had them written, that is, he ordered someone to write them. Out of their hesitation and confusion, they levelled such accusations against him

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(1) *See Ath-Tha`alibi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 4/350.*

peace and blessings be upon him while he was unlettered, and claimed that such legends were read out to him morning and evening so that he could memorise them. Baffled by their negligence, they accused him *peace and blessings be upon him* of learning from a man in Mecca, whereas the Quran makes it clear that the man whom they regarded as his teacher was a foreigner, not an Arab. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…the tongue of him whom they reproach is barbarous, and this is a clear Arabic tongue.' (*an-Nahl:* 103) Out of their arrogance, they did not believe in the Hereafter.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when it is said to them, what is it that your Lord has revealed? They say: "Stories of the ancients."' (*an-Nahl:* 24) It is surprising, though, that they did not deny Allah's Existence and Lordship; when asked What your Lord has revealed, they answered: 'Stories of the ancients.' (*an-Nahl:* 24) Their answer described what was revealed but did not deny the Revelation. Had they been consistent with themselves, they would have rejected Allah's Divinity and the Revelation as well. As for the pious believers, when they were asked this question: 'What your Lord has revealed?' (*an-Nahl:* 30), they answered: 'Good…' (*an-Nahl:* 30). This reveals the difference between the believers and the disbelievers. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called upon his people to believe in Allah, the One, Who revealed to him Guidance in a miraculous Book, his news spread all over the Arabian Peninsula, and every tribe sent an envoy to find out more about him *peace and blessings be upon him*. To divert people away from him, the disbelievers of Quraysh divided themselves into four groups to stand at the four entrances of Mecca. Whenever asked by the tribes' envoys, 'What has Your Lord, Who sent you a Messenger, said?' they answer, 'He (Prophet Muhammad) is but a liar and a fabricator', with the aim of turning the envoys of the tribes away from him.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of what the disbelievers said to the envoys who came to find out about him and how they gave them misleading answers. Giving the same answer on the four entrances of Mecca indicates that it is previously prepared and agreed upon by those who stood on such entrances to hinder the envoys from listening to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. They drew a parallel between the Divine Revelation and what was related to them of the stories of the former people by An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, which are similar to the stories of `Antra and Abu Zayd Al-Hilali related nowadays.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* threatens anyone uttering such saying about the Quran, saying:

سَنَسِمُهُۥ عَلَى ٱلْخُرْطُومِ ﴿١٦﴾

We shall brand him on the snout! [16]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 16)

Branding him on the snout means to be hit by the sword on his nose, leaving a mark on top of it. This mark was found on the nose of Al-Walid after he was hit at the Battle of Badr. Allah *Glorified is He* communicated this prophecy through Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* at an earlier time and it came true later on. When this prophecy was fulfilled, those who believed in Allah *the Almighty* and the Quran became more affirmed about the truthfulness of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in everything he said and more willing to trust what is told to them of the matters of this worldly life and the Hereafter.

Similarly, on hearing the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs' (*al-Qamar:* 45), `Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Which host shall be routed (1) while we cannot protect ourselves?' He also commented in the same way regarding Allah's saying: 'We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 16) Then, the Battle of Badr took place assuring him of the truthfulness of this prophecy. Surprisingly, this verse was revealed at a time when the Muslims could hardly defend themselves. That is why there was no possibility of such expectation, for their predicament at that time inspired no hope of victory. However, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who declared it. So, they did witness Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira marked on his nose after he was struck on it. This is because the One Who foretold that is the Omnipotent and no force can hinder the fulfilment of what He had prophesised.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, 'Abd Ar-Raziq relates that `Umar Allah be pleased with him said, 'When this verse: "Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs." (al-Qamar: 45), was revealed, I kept wondering which assembly was this. I realised what it meant as Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was reciting it on the Battle of Badr, while putting on his armour.' In other books of exegesis, `Umar Allah be pleased with him is narrated to have said, 'When the verse: "Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they shall turn (their) backs." (al-Qamar: 45), was revealed, I did not know its interpretation until the day when the Battle of Badr took place as I saw Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him reciting it.' See 'Abd Ar-Raziq, Tafsir, 3069.*

When the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 16) was revealed about , some Muslims wondered, 'How could we get to him?' Then, the Battle of Badr came and they saw his nose struck by the sword and scarred with a mark. Who had foreseen this future incident? It is Allah *the Almighty* not Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If you reflect upon these issues, you will conclude that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was only a communicator of the Quran, which is revealed from Allah *Glorified is He* Who is fully Aware of the past, the present and the future, for He is the Owner of time.

Thus, the Quranic verse: 'We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 16), was sent down at the time of the Muslim's weakness, prophesising the branding of Al-Mughira's nose which is the sign of his pride and arrogance. Then the Battle of Badr took place so that the Muslims could see the fulfilment of the prophecy. Likewise, every issue brought forth by Allah *the Almighty* is truthful. Indeed, the Quran is a challenging Divine Speech and its recitation is an act of worship.

Allah *Glorified is He* said that about one of the masters of Quraysh when the Muslims were unable to defend themselves and even had to migrate to Abyssinia to protect themselves from the oppression of those masters, and every believer was seeking someone to protect him. At the Battle of Badr, though, this master's nose was branded and Allah's saying: 'We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 16) came true. So, who decides on whom would be killed or survive even before fighting takes place? It is Allah *the Almighty* Who knows what will happen in the future.

Astoundingly, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* specified the places where some masters of Quraysh were killed, and it is by Allah's Will that what happened was exactly as what he *peace and blessings be upon him* had foretold before the battle took place, saying, ‘This will be the place of the falling of so and so.’(1) They even brought the head of Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and found the mark scarring his nose. So, who is it that controls death? It is only Allah *Glorified is He* Who informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of such news.

Moreover, they did not distinguish Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira from the other killed people except with this mark on his nose. It is worth noting that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic prefix ‘*sin*’ to refer to the future instead of the particle ‘*sawfa*, ’ because the latter means that the action will happen in the distant future, whereas the prefix ‘*sin*’ indicates that it will happen soon in the near future. The semantic distinction between *sawfa* and the prefix *sin* is made clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Leave them that they may eat and enjoy themselves and (that) hope may beguile them, for they will soon know.’ (*al-Hijr:* 3) ‘But there came after them an evil generation, who neglected prayers and followed and sensual desires, so they will meet perdition’ (*Maryam:* 59) and ‘…you cannot (bear to) see Me but look at the mountain, if it remains firm in its place, then will you see Me…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 143). In these verses, the particle *sawfa* is used to denote that there is a longer time before the action takes place or that the interval between the two incidents is extended. By contrast, using the prefix *sin* connotes that the interval between two incidents is short, thereby it will happen soon, as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘The fools among the people will say…’ (*al-Baqara:* 142). So, when you say to someone, ‘If you visit me, I will treat you generously’, this means that you treat him in that way shortly after his arrival if the prefix *sin* is used. But if the particle *sawfa* is used, this means that your generosity will take a longer time to be shown.

Regarding the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘We shall brand him on the snout!’ (*al-Qalam:* 16), the prefix *sin* (shall) imply that the punishment is soon to be inflicted on him. His punishment was branding his nose so as to be a permanent mark and feature of him, lucidly clear to one and all. The nose represents the face which is the most honourable organ of a human, and even when someone finds an arrogant proud person, he says, ‘I want to break his nose’, i.e. to put an end to his arrogance and pride.

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(1) Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘The Messenger of Allah showed us the day before where the disbelievers would fall. He said, “This is the place where so-and-so will fall tomorrow, if Allah wills.” By the One Who sent him with the truth! They did not miss those places, then they were placed in a well.’ See Ahmad, *Musnad*, Hadith no. 182, 13296 and 13703; Al-Bazzar, *Musnad*, Hadith no. 222; Ibn Hibban, *Sahih*, Hadith no. 6498; and Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi, *Musnad*, Hadith no. 40.

The snout could allude to the human being’s nose, and thus the verse refers to what happened to Al-Walid at the Battle of Badr, whereas others maintain that this punishment will be in the Hereafter where he will be tortured in the hellfire with a fire placed on his nose.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا بَلَوۡنَٰهُمۡ كَمَا بَلَوۡنَآ أَصۡحَٰبَ ٱلۡجَنَّةِ إِذۡ أَقۡسَمُواْ لَيَصۡرِمُنَّهَا مُصۡبِحِينَ ١٧

We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning [17] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 17)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* relates to us the story of the brothers who had a garden, and once they prevented the rights of the poor, the needy and the orphans, He *the Almighty* destroyed the fruits of their garden and burnt its trees. Allah *Glorified is He* punished them for their injustice. However, would not we find a person who has not wronged himself, and yet was afflicted by a calamity? We can see that in our daily life and if this person be patient and thankful, He *the Almighty* will grant him a reward from Him. Allah *Glorified is He* may destroy the money of someone because he has earned it unlawfully due to negligence. Regarding the believer, the calamity either brings a reward or purifies one’s money. As for the disbeliever who does spend out for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* he will get no rewards and no one can guarantee the permanency of the bounties he has.

Additionally, if you analyse any of the favours in which you play a role to bring it about, you will find that even your role is accredited to and gifted from Allah *Glorified is He*. Even after the plants grow and yield, you cannot feel secure that they will not be affected by blight or stricken by calamity, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘If We pleased, We should have certainly made it broken down into pieces, then would you begin to lament: "Surely we are burdened with debt: Nay! we are deprived."' (*al-Waqi'a:* 65-67)

As a matter of fact, the people can be tried with blessings as well as with misfortunes. It is not the 'trial' itself that arouse fear, but rather, the result of that trial, for if you overcome the tests and the trials successfully, it will be good for you; otherwise you will encounter the bad consequences of failing the test. The trials represent the criteria for choosing the good or the evil and are regarded as a favour from Allah *the Almighty*. So, testing people is not evil in itself, but the evil is to fail in the test. Every trial or calamity is regarded as a test, and no one can claim that the tests are evil except from the perspective of the one who could not bear the burden of striving to achieve success. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And as for man, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honour and makes him lead an easy life, he says: "My Lord honours me." But when He tries him (differently), then straitens to him his means of subsistence, he says: "My Lord has disgraced me."' (*al-Fajr:* 15-16) So, neither wealth is a sign of dignity, nor is poverty a sign of humiliation. But when does wealth become a sign of dignity? Such is the case when the person is guided to give away its dues to the needy. On the other hand, if he does not give its dues, it will be a source of humiliation and abasement. In this case, being a poor person is better than being rich.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* states that neither having money is a sign of dignity nor is poverty is a sign of humiliation. Allah *Glorified is He* provides a proof for this fact, saying: 'Nay! But you do not honor the orphan. Nor do you urge one another to feed the poor. And you eat away the heritage, devouring (everything) indiscriminately.' (*al-Fajr:* 17-19) How could wealth be a sign of dignity when you do not honour the orphan? Indeed, wealth in this case is a burden. Similarly, how could strip you of such a wealth, with which you do not honour the orphan, be a sign of humiliation? In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* purifies you from this humiliation and relieved you of the responsibility of wealth. Consequently, neither wealth is a sign of dignity, nor is poverty a sign of humiliation.

Even if someone does not possess money to give it out charitably, should he not then spur the wealthy to do so? Such a person is even stingy in giving advice, as he does not encourage other people to feed the poor. How could he then claim that wealth is a sign of dignity and poverty is a sign of humiliation?

As we had previously said, the trials are not evil by definition, but so are the bad results thereof. This is because the trials are regarded as tests which one may overcome successfully while another fails in them. Further, the people can be tried with the blessings or misfortunes so that Allah *Glorified is He* sees who is patient and who is not.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘We have tried them…’ (*al-Qalam:* 17), Allah *Glorified is He* states that He tried the people of Mecca with hunger and tested the polytheists of Quraysh when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* invoked Him against them, saying: ‘O Allah! Be hard on the tribe of Mudar and let them suffer from famine years like that of the time of Yusuf (Yusuf (Joseph)).’(1)

So, regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden…’ (*al-Qalam:* 17), they were tried as a punishment for them. Similarly, He *the Almighty* says: ‘The likeness of what they spend in the life of this world is as the likeness of wind in which is intense cold (that) smites the seed produce of a people who have done injustice to their souls and destroys it; and Allah is not unjust to them, but they are unjust to themselves.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 117) *Al-Janna* (the garden) refers to the garden that they owned. It is derived from the word *al-jann* (veil), and it signifies a grove planted with trees that if one were to walk through it, he would be veiled by its trees, unlike the groves with short flowers that only give a beautiful sight to behold. Bu contrast, the garden is characterised by tall bushy trees that hide one from sight and it also has everything to suffice your need so that you do not turn to another. When one is deprived of something, he looks for what meets his need, but the one who has what suffices him is not in need of others. Thus, *al-janna* (garden) denotes veiling and coverage. Further, one of its derivatives is insanity, for it covers to the mind. Additionally, when this word collocates with the word ‘night’, it means that the night is beginning to fall so that you cannot see others nor be seen. Such are the implications of ‘garden’, whose derivatives denote veil and coverage.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him said, ‘When Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him finished recitation in the fajr prayer and raised his head from (bowing), he used to say: “Sami`a Allahu Liman Hamidah, Rabbana Wa Laka Al-Hamd.” He would, then, invoke Allah saying: “O Allah! Save Al-Walid ibn Al-Walid and Salama ibn Hisham ... O Allah! Be hard on the tribe of Mudar and let them suffer from famine years like that of the time of Yusuf (Yusuf (Joseph)).”’ See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 804, 106 and 2932; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 294 and 295.*

A garden is a place filled with plants, fruits, and tall bushy trees with abundant twisted branches which cover the one entering into it and satisfies him so that he is not in need of other places. It has all the necessities of life; food, fruit, grass, water, greenery, joy, etc.

The owners of the garden inherited it from their father who used to give away in charity a portion of everything it produces to the needy at the time of harvest. However, his sons said that their money was little and their children were many, and thus they could not give in charity as their father did. Then, they decided to deprive the poor of their charity, thereby suffer the consequence of their misdeed, which is mentioned in the Quran.

They swore to harvest the fruits of their palm trees without the poor noticing it, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning.’ (*al-Qalam:* 17) So, they agreed to do that in the morning, but they did not say, ‘If Allah wills’, therefore Allah *Glorified is He* destroyed their garden, while they were asleep. In the morning, they went to their garden, saying: ‘Make sure no poor person enters the garden today!’ (*al-Qalam:* 24)

Thus, they blocked their way of obtaining Allah’s Bounty when they deprived the poor. Then Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘But when they saw the garden, they said, “We must have lost our way! No–we are ruined!”’ (*al-Qalam:* 26-27) Afterwards, they realised their fault and came to their senses, saying: ‘But maybe our Lord will give us something better in its place: we truly turn to Him in hope.’ (*al-Qalam:* 32)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَا يَسْتَثْنُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

And made no allowance [for the Will of God] [18] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 18)

When they were planning to harvest their garden, they did not say, ‘If Allah wills’. Therefore, beware of saying that you are going to do something without relating it to Allah’s Will because you cannot guarantee your life or the fulfillment of your promise. After all, nothing can happen without His Will, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And do not say of anything: “Surely, I will do it tomorrow.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 23)

As a matter of fact, the human being controls neither the time nor the place of an action. He even does not guarantee the presence of the means to do what he wants. All such elements; the action, its doer, time, place and cause are only controlled by Allah *Glorified is He*. Hence, one should shield himself against telling lies or venturing by following His saying: ‘and do not say of anything: “Surely I will do it tomorrow.” Unless Allah pleases…’ (*al-Kahf:* 23-24). In this way, he keeps away from being a liar because he will not do something unless He *the Almighty* wills.

Further, you cannot guarantee that you will be alive to do something in the future. In fact, the human being does not control the action, its time, place, and cause. Further, he does not have the ability to do it. Out of courtesy, you need to say, ‘If Allah wills’, and if it did not happen, you would say, ‘I said, “If Allah wills”, but He did not will it to happen’, thereby evading blame and telling lies.

Some scholars, though, contend that the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And made no allowance [for the Will of Allah].’ (*al-Qalam:* 18), means that they would leave nothing of the fruits of their garden trees, i.e. they will not set aside some portion of the harvest to give away to the poor and the needy, as their father used to do.

Allah *Glorified is He* prescribes the *zakat* as a fixed portion of the rich’s property for the needy and the poor, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘And those in whose wealth there is a fixed portion, for him who begs and for him who is denied (good).’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 24-25) Giving alms, nevertheless, is not limited when it comes to the property of the doer of good. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And in their property was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied (good).’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19) The person should not make the benefit of his money confined to himself; rather, the poor and the needy have a share in it. After giving their rights, he can make use of his property. Allah *Glorified is He* does not specify the right in the last verse as fixed, but leaves it unspecified, for only the *zakat* is prescribed as a fixed portion, while the one seeking the rank of the *ihsan* (excellence in faith) gives away of his money to the poor and the needy more than what is prescribed on him. As the Legislator *Glorified is He* ensures this right to the poor, He protects the poor and the rich all the same. He specified the prescribed alms in case of *zakat* in order that no one gives less than what is prescribed.

Some jurists argued that since the *zakat* is the right of the poor in the money of the rich, then if a rich person withholds it from the poor, his hand should be cut off because he has taken the right of the poor. The rich person is responsible for the right of the poor, and this is in the interest of poor. If the rich person does not give him his right on the due date, and then the money gets destroyed, then the rich person guarantees the right of the poor. So, the rich person is a guardian of the poor’s right and should treat him as he likes to be treated. He should not look down on the poor, thereby depriving him of his right.

The owners of the garden devised a plot, but they were overwhelmed by it, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…and the evil plans shall not beset any save the authors of it…’ (*Fatir:* 43). Anyone devising evil plans tries to conceal his intentions, so he may show his love while disguising hatred. Harbouring bad intentions is one of the elements of evil planning and needs skill and experience. However, it can be exposed by insight and intuition. Allah *Glorified is He* inflicts His punishment on those who devise evil plans.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَآئِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَآئِمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

A disaster from your Lord struck the garden
as they slept [19] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 19)

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* punished the owners of the garden by sending a disaster on their garden, encompassing every part of it, and burning its trees.

Such a disaster was sent by His command at night. Allah *Glorified is He* sent on their garden a chastisement from the heaven which burnt it completely, leaving it as black as the dark night.

Allah says:

فَأَصْبَحَتْ كَالصَّرِيمِ ﴿٢٠﴾

And by morning it was stripped bare, a desolate land [20] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 20)

Sareem refers to the black dust. So, their garden became as black as the dark night. Its fruits were destroyed as though they were cut and reaped. Its owners swore that they would harvest its fruits before the poor coming in the morning to ask for charity. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to them, ‘You wanted to reap it and harvest its fruits to keep them for yourselves only, and consequently We destroyed it in order that you do not benefit from it. This is a punishment for your evil plans’.

Allah says:

فَتَنَادَوْا مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿٢١﴾ أَنِ اغْدُوا عَلَىٰ حَرْثِكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ صَارِمِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

Still they called each other at daybreak [21] Go early to your field if you wish to gather all its fruits [22] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 21-22)

In the morning, they called out to each other to go early to reap the fruits, saying: ‘Go early to your field if you wish to gather all its fruits.’ (*al-Qalam:* 22) They were unaware of the fact that their garden was burnt and their fruits were destroyed. They attributed the crops to themselves, saying: ‘Go early to your field...’ (*al-Qalam:* 22). The word ‘field’ here refers to the plants, cultivation, and the cultivated land.

In this vein, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us, saying: ‘Have you considered what you sow? Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the causers of growth? If We pleased, We should have certainly made it broken down into pieces, then would you begin to lament: “Surely we are burdened with debt:

Nay! we are deprived.'" (*al-Waqi'a:* 63-67); and '…as the likeness of wind in which is intense cold (that) smites the seed produce of a people who have done injustice to their souls and destroys it; and Allah is not unjust to them, but they are unjust to themselves.' (*Al-'Imran:* 117) Thus, even after the plants grow and flower, one cannot ensure that no blight or calamity would affect them. Hence one should not be proud of his deeds, and if farming is his job, he should not forget that He *the Almighty* is All Powerful over all things. The owners of the garden called one another in the morning to go early to reap the fruits, as was agreed upon, to keep the harvest for themselves. So, they were resolved and decisive in their plan.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱنطَلَقُواْ وَهُمۡ يَتَخَٰفَتُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ أَن لَّا يَدۡخُلَنَّهَا ٱلۡيَوۡمَ عَلَيۡكُم مِّسۡكِينٞ ﴿٢٤﴾

And went off, whispering [23] Make sure no poor person enters the garden today! [24] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 23-24)

Intalaq (to go off) connotes determination and will power to do something, which, in this case, aimed at preventing the good from the poor people. This is similar to the person described previously as: 'Hinderer of good…' (*al-Qalam:* 12). They decided to commit a misdeed and did not want to be noticed. That is why, after calling one another, they lowered their voices as they were setting out. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '...whispering.' (*al-Qalam:* 23), is an adverbial clause describing their condition as they were going out. They walked in the darkness whispering to one another in lower voices so as not to be heard or noticed.

The Arabic letter '*waw*' of plurality is employed to denote consensus of opinion regarding their plan, and that no one of them was so good as to draw back; rather, all the verbs relating their story connote their determination, resolve and insistence. So, they unanimously agreed to cut their crops hastily and secretly in order not to give anything to the poor. Not only did they decide to deprive the poor of their right in the crops and the fruits, but they also determined to prevent them even from entering the garden, a fact which is clear in their saying: 'Make sure no poor person enters the garden today!' (*al-Qalam:* 24)

They would prevent the poor even from entering the garden even if they had to use force, apart from expelling, scolding, closing doors and using every means to drive them out. Affirming their speech, the letter *nun* is used to imply that affirmation in the phrase: ‘Make sure no poor person enters…’ (*al-Qalam:* 24).

The poor used to enter this garden to take their share as the father of its owners had never prevented them. But the sons were stingy, preventing the good, as their hearts absorbed the love of the worldly life, thereby denying the rights of the others. They prevented the poor people even though they knew how needy they were that they labelled them ‘poor’, hence admitting that they were in dire need and abject poverty.

Allah says:

وَغَدَوۡاْ عَلَىٰ حَرۡدٖ قَٰدِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

They left early, bent on their purpose [25]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 25)

This verse indicates that they had a settled purpose and determination to prevent and withhold. When *hard* collocates with the word ‘year’ it means that it is a dry one, and when it collocates with the ‘she-camel’, it means that it does not give milk. They purposefully contrived their plan and agreed to undertake it unjustly with malice aforethought. It indicates that they were not mindful of Allah *the Almighty* during the time of devising their plans, agreeing to it, sleeping, waking up in the morning and setting out. They were focusing on achieving what they agreed to, and went together with the intention of preventing the poor from entering their garden by all possible means. Paying no heed to Allah *Glorified is He* they did not realise that as they planned, He *the Almighty* also planned, and He is the best of planners, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And they planned and Allah (also) planned, and Allah is the best of planners.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 54)

Thus, if they planned and plotted, He *the Almighty* has another plan to teach them a lesson so that they would not consider themselves able to do everything. In the same vein, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…until when the earth puts on its golden raiment and it becomes garnished, and its people think that they have power over it, Our command comes to it, by night or by day, so We render it as reaped seed; produce, as though it had not been in existence yesterday…' (*Yunus:* 24). Much to their fallacy, some people are deluded to think that they are able to devise plans and plots, neglecting the fact that over them is an Ever-Watchful God Who is not overtaken by slumber or sleep.

He says:

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا لَضَآلُّونَ ﴿٢٦﴾ بَلۡ نَحۡنُ مَحۡرُومُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

But when they saw the garden, they said, 'We must have lost our way! [26] No – we are ruined! [27]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 26 - 27)

They agreed to cut the crops of their garden in the morning, and did not say, 'If Allah wills', so He *the Almighty* destroyed it, while they were asleep. That morning, they set out to their garden whispering to one another: 'Make sure no poor person enters the garden today!' (*al-Qalam:* 24) When they deprived the poor, they blocked their way of obtaining the Bounty of Allah *Glorified is He*. At this point, He *the Almighty* says: 'But when they saw the garden, they said, "We must have lost our way! No–we are ruined!"' (*al-Qalam:* 26-27) Then, they realised their fault and came to their senses, saying: 'But maybe our Lord will give us something better in its place: we truly turn to Him in hope.' (*al-Qalam:* 32)

Standing before their garden in the morning and seeing its burnt fruits, crops and trees, they thought they had lost the way to their garden, and therefore some of them said, 'We are lost, this is not our garden.' They left it the day before rich with fruits and that day they found debris, black burnt trees and fruits which they wanted to cut in the early morning so as not to give the poor their rights in the harvest which they used to take at the time of their father.

They found it burnt, nothing was left, and it was as black as night, turned into ashes, thereby doubting it to be their garden of yesterday with its greenery and rich fruits. They thought they lost their way to it and that it was not their garden, but one of them said, 'No–we are ruined!' (*al-Qalam:* 27) He ensured that it was actually their garden, and they were not lost; rather, that was the reality before them. They lost their garden owing to their evil intentions to deprive the poor of their right.

Hence, we should not take great pride in our achievements in the worldly life, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Have you considered what you sow? Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the causers of growth? If We pleased, We should have certainly made it broken down into pieces, then would you begin to lament: “Surely we are burdened with debt: Nay! we are deprived.”’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 63-67) We do not set beside the seed we plant in the field, pulling it to grow daily. All what you do is to plough the land and cultivate the seeds. Even after the plants grow and flower, one cannot ensure that no blight or calamity would affect them, as stated in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘If We pleased, We should have certainly made it broken down into pieces, then would you begin to lament: “Surely we are burdened with debt: Nay! we are deprived.”’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 65-67)

The deprived person is the one whose plants, fruits or the offspring of his cattle get destroyed, and hence becomes entitled to a right from any Muslim not afflicted by such calamity. Here is a surprising note; those people became poor and the *zakat* became entitled to them after they were once wealthy by having their garden. They were too rich to ask the people and were themselves required to give the *zakat*.

They became poor and worthy of people’s empathy, for they denied the poor their rights in their crops, *zakat* and harvest. So, what should they expect after becoming poor? They were heedless of the wisdom behind the *zakat* and giving the poor of what Allah *the Almighty* gave them. When a weak person finds himself in a society joined in solidarity and the wealthy gives him of his money, he cannot envy such rich people. In the countryside, we find that when the buffalo or any of the animals producing milk, walks around in the neighbourhood, everyone used to ask Allah to bestow blessings upon it. This is because its owner gives away of its milk and butter to his neighbours. Its owner did not have to tie, feed, or worry about it, and whatever it produces was to be distributed among family and relatives. In such a cooperative society, the poor people are helped and supported, and that is why they do not envy the rich ones; rather, they say, ‘Their good reaches out to us’.

In addition, the one giving charity feels assured that should he get infirm one day, he would find someone to care for him, given the fact that the ability is changeable and one may be strong today and weak tomorrow. For this reason, we advise those who rise to high ranks of wealth or power to beware when the blessings are perfected for them. This is because when you reach the utmost rank of wealth, influence, health and children, your status is likely to change, and since blessings has been perfected for and reached its utmost, then they are likely to be downgraded. As someone reaches the top, being in a changeable status, he then has to go down, as a poet put it: 'Whenever something is complete, it is likely to show imperfection; thus, expect it to lack it if it is said to be perfect.'

The bounties of life, including money and wealth, are gained through the movement in life which necessitates the person to have power. But when he lacks such power, how could he subsist? Allah *Glorified is He* ensures his provision through the one who has the ability to earn his provision. He *the Almighty* made the ability one of the fleeting gains in life. Accordingly, one may be able today and unable tomorrow. That being the case, when the able person receives His command to spend on the unable people, he has to realise that his ability is one of the fleeting gains of life, and that he is prone to be unable later, saying to himself, 'When I am unable, I will find someone to support me'. Is this not true insurance? It is the insurance of the believer who gives away when he has the financial ability so that Allah *Glorified is He* relieves him from the burden of asking people should he become unable. So, he would find people providing for him if confronted straitened circumstances.

In the blink of an eye, the owners of the garden became poor and deprived, in need of *zakat*, charity, and help. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And in their property was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied (good).' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19); and 'And those in whose wealth there is a fixed portion. For him who begs and for him who is denied (good)' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24-25). Allah *Glorified is He* is Self-Sufficient, above any need for the richest among His servants, as He states: '…Allah is Self-sufficient, Forbearing.' (*al-Baqara:* 263) This is a warning to the wealthy who deprives the poor, as though it is said to him, 'You prevented none but yourself from Allah's rewards'. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the rich, saying: 'Behold! you are those who are called upon to spend in Allah's way, but among you are those who are stingy, and whoever is stingy is stingy against his own soul; and Allah is Self-sufficient and you have need (of Him), and if you turn back He will bring in your place another people, then they will not be like you.' (*Muhammad:* 38) He *the Almighty* is the Self-Sufficient with His Absolute Omnipotence; He has the Power to bring in the place of the stingy another people who give abundantly of what He *the Almighty* provides for them. Accordingly, the one who is stingy in giving only prevents himself from His Mercy.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told Anas *Allah be pleased with him*, 'Woe to the rich from the poor on the Day of Judgment. They will say, "O Allah! They prevented us from our rights You prescribed on them", and Allah will reply, "By My Power and Majesty I will bring you closer and drive them far away." Then, he *peace and blessings be upon him* recited this verse: 'And in their property, was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied (good)' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19).

Further, a man from the people of Yamama had a property which was destroyed by flood, to that one of Prophet Muhammad's Companions said, 'This is the deprived, give him a portion of your charity.' The deprived is opposite to the one given abundant provision. The owners of the garden were deprived of benefitting from the fruit of their effort and hard labour because they wanted to cut the crops without giving the poor their rights. Hence, they were turned from richness to poverty and became deprived people deserving charity and *zakat* on account of their evil intentions.

At that moment, the brothers began to blame one another to evade responsibility for what happened to them. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُل لَّكُمْ لَوْلَا تُسَبِّحُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

The wisest of them said, 'Did I not say to you, "Will you not glorify God?"' [28] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 28)

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The most moderate of them…' (*al-Qalam:* 28), it indicates that there were two parties; one party, then the moderate (being in the middle), then the other party. This is because moderation denotes being in the middle of something. To identify the moderate, one needs to recognise both parties first, and then he can determine the moderate as being in the middle of them. It is always the halfway point between two opposing parties, and this means that the other two parties are even since being in the middle necessitates that the distance between both parties and the middle is equal. In fact, moderation is the best policy. The end of both parties is defined from the halfway point being a separator between them; on its right is a party and on its left is the other party. Thus, the exact central point is usually regarded as the middle.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The most moderate of them said…' means that after observing what happened to their garden, fruits and crops, the brothers were of different opinions. They were of one opinion when they devised their plan to cut the fruits and crops in the early morning before the coming of the poor in order not to give them anything. That is why He *the Almighty* says: 'We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning and made no allowance [for the Will of Allah].' (*al-Qalam:* 17-18) and then He says: 'Still they called each other at daybreak, "Go early to your field if you wish to gather all its fruits", and went off, whispering, "Make sure no poor person enters the garden today!"— they left early, bent on their purpose.' (*al-Qalam:* 21-25) Then came the moment when they had different opinions. They wondered whether this was really their garden or they lost their way to it, but some of them knew for certain that it was theirs, and firmly recognised that Allah *the Almighty* deprived them of its fruits. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'But when they saw the garden, they said, "We must have lost our way! No–we are ruined!"' (*al-Qalam:* 26-27) Those of the first opinion stating that they did not follow the right way to their garden and that the garden was not theirs, whereas those of the other opinion maintained that they were prevented and deprived of it. Yet the most moderate of them tried to inspire hope in Allah's Mercy, saying: 'Did I not tell you to glorify Allah?' (*al-Qalam:* 28) He *the Almighty* describes this opinion as: 'The most moderate of them…' (*al-Qalam:* 28) to manifest that He *the Almighty* did not shut the door of mercy on them.

The most moderate of them opined that their problem lay in not glorifying Allah *the Almighty* and not saying Allah willing, but this opinion does not denote disagreement with his brothers over preventing the poor from their fruits. It is rather a comment on the significance of relating their plan to Allah's Will such as when someone tells another to say, 'Allah willing'. Even a thief, in his way to commit theft, would ask Allah *the Almighty* to facilitate it for him, saying, 'O Allah! We put our trust in You, cover us so as not get exposed!' What he said is not a sign of his absolute goodness; rather, it is a sign of underestimating Allah's Greatness and Omnipotence. Yet, it may also be taken as a sign of not totally heedlessness of Allah *Glorified is He* as he, i.e. the most moderate among them was neither completely hostile to the poor nor was he deceiving himself saying, 'We lost the way to our garden for this is not ours'. They also did not lose hope in Allah's Mercy, and realised that they should have said 'Allah willing', and that Allah *Glorified is He* did not utterly deprive them of the good, as there was another chance to make up for their loss in the following year. Accordingly, after much debate they said together: 'but maybe our Lord will give us something better in its place: we truly turn to Him in hope.' (*al-Qalam:* 32)

Here, arises a question, which is, 'Those people were afflicted by blight due to their evil intention and wronging themselves, so are the people who have good intentions and do not wrong themselves saved from such calamities'? We say, 'No, everyone is prone to calamities, as He *the Almighty*: "The likeness of what they spend in the life of this world is as the likeness of wind in which is intense cold (that) smites the seed produce of a people who have done injustice to their souls and destroys it; and Allah is not unjust to them, but they are unjust to themselves." (*Al-'Imran:* 117) Those who do injustice to themselves are afflicted by calamities as a punishment for them.

The owners of the garden were afflicted with such a punishment, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning and made no allowance [for the Will of Allah] a disaster from your Lord struck the garden as they slept and by morning it was stripped bare, a desolate land.' (*al-Qalam:* 17-20) Allah *Glorified is He* punished them for their injustice, but could not we find a person who does not do injustice to himself and yet his plants get destroyed? We see it often in our daily life, and should such a person be patient, he would receive his reward from Allah *the Almighty*. With such a calamity, Allah *Glorified is He* may destroy the money that you earned unlawfully due to negligence. So, regarding the believer, the calamity either brings reward or purifies one's money. To think that you can guarantee the permanency of what you have of bounties is great injustice you commit against yourself, for none can guarantee that for himself or for the others.

Thus, the owner of the two gardens said: 'And he entered his garden while he was unjust to himself. He said: "I do not think that this will ever perish."' (*al-Kahf:* 35) It was not merely by entering his garden that he was unjust to himself, since it was his own and he was entitled to enter it whenever he liked. Rather, the act of injustice here refers to what he thought as he was entering the garden; i.e. superiority with his richness and arrogance with Allah's Blessings, thereby thinking that such blessings and delight would never end or perish.

Lawla (why do you not) signifies exhortation, i.e. the wisest one of the brothers said, 'Did I not tell you to glorify Allah?', This implies that he stimulated them to glorify Him *the Almighty*, and to say 'Allah willing' if they intended to carry out their plan, but they did not listen to him. So, his advice was not effective and he even followed their evil plans. Additionally, the word *lawla* implies that they did not glorify Him *the Almighty* nor did they say, 'Allah willing'. Therefore, they did not get what they wanted and did not achieve their objective. *Lawla* means that two things did not happen; one being absent due to the absence of the other, For instance, we say, 'If Zayd were present, I would come to you.' This means that Zayd was not present and as a result the speaker would not go to the addressee. So, it indicates the absence of something as a result of something else being absent.

When *lawla* is followed by a verb, it suggests exhortation, as in Allah's saying: 'Why did the believing men and the believing women, when you heard it, not think well of their own people, and say: "This is an evident falsehood? Why did they not bring four witnesses of it?"' (*an-Nur:* 12-13) If it is followed by a nominal statement, it means the absence of something due to the presence of something else; for instance, we say, ‘Were it not for Zayd, I would come to you’. Accordingly, the speaker would not come because Zayd is present. It may also refer to the absence of something as a result of something else being absent. Yet, when followed by a verb, it suggests exhortation.

The most moderate of them said: ‘Did I not tell you to glorify Allah?’ (*al-Qalam:* 28) He said that they should have related their oath to Allah’s Will, saying, ‘If Allah wills’. That is why they should have glorified Allah *the Almighty* and felt remorseful for what they did.

Allah says:

قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَٰنَ رَبِّنَآ إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

They said, ‘Glory be to God, Our Lord! Truly, we were doing wrong!’ [29] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 29)

They acknowledged what the most moderate of them said to be true, especially that their garden was burnt and their crops of the year were destroyed. Further, thinking that it was not their garden and that they lost their way to it did not avail them to evade the reality. Hence, they said along with their brother ‘Glory is to our Lord’, exalting Him to have done injustice to them, and admitting their wrongdoing thereby deserving whatever happened to them. ‘Glory is to Allah’ represents exaltation to Him *the Almighty* that He is far above any of the attributes of imperfection since Allah *Glorified is He* has all the Attributes of Perfection and His Actions are perfect. Allah *Glorified is He* does not do injustice to anyone, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘Surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 40); ‘…and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants.’ (*Fussilat:* 46) and ‘This is for what your own hands have sent before and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 182) What happens to the people is the consequence of their evil deeds and sins. Allah *Glorified is He* does not permit Himself nor His servants to be unjust, as Allah *Glorified is He* says in a Qudsi Hadith: ‘O My slaves! I have made oppression unlawful for Myself and I have made it unlawful among you, so do not oppress one another.’ When you cause harm to others, this is called ‘evil’ and it is an act of injustice to them, while causing harm to yourself is called self-injustice.

It refers to the evil that affects oneself only. It also refers to committing a bad deed and enjoying it for a moment without recalling its ensuing severe punishment in this worldly life and the Hereafter. It is the owners of the garden who were unjust to themselves as a consequence to what they perpetrated, as stated in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and We did them no injustice, but they were unjust to themselves.' (*an-Nahl:* 118)

They admitted their fault and said, 'Surely we were unjust to ourselves because we did not glorify Allah as he ordered us, and we did not exalt Him from imperfection nor did we refer to His Will in what we were going to do. We did injustice to ourselves by preventing the poor from their right'. Interestingly, they said, 'Glory be to Our Lord...' (*an-Naba':* 29), instead of saying 'Glory is to Allah'. They referred to His Lordship rather than His Divinity in pursuit of His Provision. A devout worshipper once said, 'I do not address Allah as being His servant, but as Being My Lord, which renders me comfortable because He is the Lord of the worlds, and the one having a father caring for him has no worries, so what about the one having the Lord of the world's supporting and caring for him?'

Allah says:

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَلَٰوَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ قَالُوا۟ يَٰوَيْلَنَآ إِنَّا كُنَّا طَٰغِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

And then they turned to each other in mutual reproach [30]
They said, 'Alas for us! We have done terrible wrong [31]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 30 - 31)

They blamed each other for their negligence, not referring to Allah's Will in their oath and insisting on preventing the poor from their garden. They mutually accused one another of being the cause of what happened and the one to be blamed, shifting the responsibility onto each other. All of them involved in this plan in one way or another; some drew up the plan, some accepted it, some gave advice and warning and then withdrew and some were silent and content. They entered discussions and debates, levelling accusations against one another; one said to another, 'You threatened us with poverty', a second one said, 'You tempted me to collect money' and a third one said, 'You seduced me into withholding charity from the poor and the needy who deserve it'.

The brothers or the people in every community always tend to have different opinions, some towards the right, others towards the left, and yet the others are in the middle. This happened with the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *peace be upon him* when they decided to get rid of him because their father loved him more than all of them. So, they had different opinions over how to do that. Some of them suggested killing him, then, to be less evil; they thought of casting him out to another land that he may be killed unintentionally. Afterwards they decided, making it less evil again, to throw him into the well so that he may be picked up by some travellers. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* relates that they said: 'Slay Yusuf (Joseph) or cast him (forth) into some land so that your father's regard may be exclusively for you, and after that you may be a righteous people. A speaker from among them said: "Do not slay Yusuf (Joseph), and cast him down into the bottom of the well if you must do (it) (so that) some of the travellers may pick him up."' (*Yusuf:* 9-10) We find that one of them rejected the suggestion of killing and suggested throwing him into the bottom of the well instead. Further, it is worth noting that the holder of this opinion was not violent or aggressive towards his brothers' suggestion to kill Yusuf (Joseph) or cast him out to another land. Rather, to diffuse their anger, he tried to persuade them not to kill him. So, he did not say, 'Do not kill him'. Instead, he said, '…do not kill Yusuf (Joseph)…' (*Yusuf:* 10). Through mentioning his name, he tried to excite sympathy for their brother so that they may go back on their plan.

Back to the verse under discussion; the owners of the garden confessed their bad deeds and admitted what they caused to themselves inasmuch as they invoked Allah *the Almighty* against themselves saying, '…woe to us.' (*al-Qalam:* 31) This is like the case of the criminal who, filled with remorse, regretfully says, 'I am guilty, I deserve to go to prison'. This is a condition of being conscience-stricken and a representation of self-criticism. The word 'woe' is used to indicate intense regret for one's negligence of the punishment. In this case, it signifies intense regret at the sight of their destroyed garden, for being in a difficult predicament as there was no way of getting back their fruits which were burnt and turned into debris and ashes. In such situation, they could do nothing but regret, thereby reprimanding themselves and deeming them worthy of punishment. The expression 'Woe to us', is an invocation of punishment, as one says, ‘Alas, how miserable I am!’ or ‘How afflicted I am!’ With such saying one does not call upon misery or affliction, since he only calls upon what makes him happy. They feel intense regret and great grief for what they did and realised that they deserve what happened to them, thereby blaming themselves. The word ‘woe’ denotes rapid destruction invoked upon themselves, but does anyone seek destruction to be inflicted on him? We say, ‘Yes, when someone perpetrates evil and recognises its bad consequences and encounters the bitter fact, he inclines to torturing himself. Do you not hear someone saying, “I deserve to be punished, this is my recompense?” He says so to blame himself and rebuke it for involving him in a predicament’. They attributed the ‘woe’ to themselves, despite being outside of them; i.e. a punishment inflicted on them, as evidence of being the cause for what happened to them and of being liable to it for good.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘They said, “Alas for us! We have done terrible wrong.”’ (*al-Qalam:* 31) They stated that they went beyond the limits of Allah *Glorified is He* as they prevented the right of the poor and did not refer to Allah’s Will in their planning nor did they glorify Him, the Giver of all Blessings. They said, ‘Our forefathers did not defy Allah with His Blessings; rather, they were thankful and gave the poor their right, and as a result He kept bestowing His Blessings on them and gave them in abundance. As for us, we denied His Favours and did not spare a portion for the poor. Therefore, such was our recompense; that fire destroyed all that we have’.

Allah *Glorified is He* made a reference to the human beings’ transgression against His Blessings, saying: ‘Nay! Man is most surely inordinate because he sees himself free from want.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) For example, the person ploughs his land and when it produces crops, he thinks he had made it subservient to him and to his rules so as to produce whatever he likes. The human being thinks that he made everything submissive to him, while it is He *the Almighty* Who made everything subservient to serve him, and established the rules and the regulations. Throughout your life, you have no control over the world; everything changes around you without you having a hand in it. In the beginning of your life, you need your father and even when you grow up and become able to do certain actions, you cannot make this period of youth and strength permanent. As you advance into old age, you need someone to support and help you even with the simplest things such as food and drink. Hence, from your early childhood until old age you are in need for others. Even in your youth you may get affected by a disease leaving you disabled. If you have true will and power, why do you not drive such disease away from you? Indeed, you cannot.

Allah *Glorified is He* created these variable conditions of the human being to put an end to his arrogance and so that he comes to know that he is strong and able only because He *the Almighty* made the laws of the universe subservient to him. In this way, we acknowledge that all of us are in need of Him, the Omnipotent, the Self-Sufficient. He brings about change, but He is Unchangeable; causes death but is Ever Existing; and ordains weakness after strength, while He is the All Powerful. Further, what is with the people comes to an end, whereas what is with Him is enduring and never runs out. He *the Almighty* is the Lord in the heavens and in the earth. Thus, you have no right to allege that you have submitted the universe with your powers because you cannot even keep to one condition.

Naturally, when the human being finds that he has enough bounties in this worldly life, he may fall in transgression, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Nay! Man is most surely inordinate because he sees himself free from want.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) One may transgress the limits and behave arrogantly with the people and even with his Lord because he has wealth. In fact, nothing but true faith could get the person out of these situations. Without following His Way of Guidance, the person gets drowned in the sea of arrogance and doubt. On the other hand, living in the light of Allah’s Way teaches the person how to observe Him in all conditions. Therefore, if He *the Almighty* bestows upon him wealth, he gives away to the needy.

The worldly means of sustenance may deceive the human being when they respond to him; when he farms the land and it produces fruits, he may be deluded into thinking that these means respond to his power and will. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds him, saying: ‘Nay! Man is most surely inordinate because he sees himself free from want.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) It is obligatory to thank Him *the Almighty* for His Blessings and direct them to the good ways. In this way, the person will be successful; otherwise, he will fail the exam. Allah

Glorified is He made it clear that the means have no effect except with His permission; one may plough, plant seeds, irrigates, looks after his plants, and when they are about to ripen, a heat wave or heavy rain may destroy them. The human being is only humiliated when he suffers of an affliction. Conversely, he increases in inordinacy when the blessings are perfected for him. If he is prevented from such blessings, his pride will fade away.

In fact, anyone showing off his strength may hope one day to be able to take some steps, but he may not be able to do that. So, the human being is not to be contended except with what he has intrinsically, not with what is granted to him, and thus he should not be arrogant. Allah, the Giver of Blessings, may withhold His Blessings; for example, He may deprive the human being of health, wealth, and authority. We always see the healthy people becoming ill, the rich getting poor, and the powerful being stripped of their authority. Thus, there is no need for conceit as it is He *the Almighty* Who grants you everything and you have nothing of your own, thereby the incentive for pride is lacking. Given that everything the human being has is a gift from the great Giver *Glorified is He* then He may divest him of His Gifts, and should this happen, he would come to his senses. So, one should not be conceited so as not to easily give in to depravity.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* relates that they said:

عَسَىٰ رَبُّنَآ أَن يُبْدِلَنَا خَيْرًا مِّنْهَآ إِنَّآ إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا رَٰغِبُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

But maybe our Lord will give us something better
in its place: we truly turn to Him in hope [32]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 32)

When you desire something you love very much, you should follow the way leading you to obtain it. However, some people may desire something, but they do not actually pursue the means to get access to it. This is what happened in the story of the owners of the garden. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who swore that they would harvest its fruits in the morning and made no allowance [for the Will of Allah]; a disaster from your Lord struck the garden as they slept and by morning it was stripped bare, a desolate land.'

(*al-Qalam:* 17-20) They agreed to cut the crops of their garden in the morning and did not say ‘Allah willing’. Therefore, He *the Almighty* destroyed it while they were asleep. In the morning, they set out to their garden saying that no poor should enter it. In this way, they deprived themselves as they deprived the poor, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘But when they saw the garden, they said, “We must have lost our way! No–we are ruined!”’ (*al-Qalam:* 26-27) Then they came to their senses and realised their fault; they asked Him *Glorified is He* to give them a better one, saying: ‘But maybe our Lord will give us something better in its place: we truly turn to Him in hope.’ (*al-Qalam:* 32)

They are desirous of the way that gets them closer to Allah *Glorified is He* as it is not a matter of love only. That is to say that it is not enough to say, ‘I love Allah’, for, in fact, true love stimulates you to strive and exert yourself to follow His Way. Accordingly, to prove your love for Him *the Almighty,* you should be desirous of following His Guidance.

`Aya (maybe) is used generally to mean that one wishes or hopes for something to happen, but it may happen or not. It has stronger connotations when uttered by the person himself; for instance, he may say, ‘I wish I could bring you good’. But it is less strong when it comes from third person, even though the person who made that promise cannot ensure his power or presence so as to bring good to the one he addressed. If someone says, ‘I hope Allah grants you happiness’, it indicates the highest degree of hope, still the speaker cannot be sure that Allah *Glorified is He* will respond to him, as this is subject to His Will. According to His Will, He *the Almighty* may respond to the person or not; the matter is not depending on the will of the one who wishes or for the one wished.

Similarly, the owners of the garden wish that Allah *Glorified is He* gives them a garden better than the one which was destroyed on account of their evil intentions, saying: ‘But maybe our Lord will give us something better in its place: we truly turn to Him in hope.’ (*al-Qalam:* 32) He *the Almighty* may or may not respond to their wishing, as inferred from the word ‘maybe’ which is followed by something we wish for. Knowing that their repentance was sincere and their confession to sins was faithful, Allah *Glorified is He* granted them a better garden. In this connection, 'Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said, 'I was informed that the owners of the garden were sincere and Allah knew they were truthful. Hence He granted them another garden called *Al-Hayawan*; a mule could only bear a bunch of its grapes.'

The scholars disagree over whether Allah *Glorified is He* changed the condition of their own garden which they owned and turned its debris and destruction into greenery and bloom, or He gave them instead a totally different garden in a different place. The scholars stated that the owners of the gardens were from Yemen which is filled with gardens and groves.

In this vein, He *the Almighty* tells us of the story of the kingdom of Sheba which was in Yemen, saying: 'certainly there was a sign for Saba' in their abode; two gardens on the right and the left; eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him: a good land and a Forgiving Lord!' (*Saba':* 15) In the kingdom of Sheba, they used to have gardens on their right and on their left, yet they were not grateful to Allah *Glorified is He* for what He granted them of good land and forgiveness, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'But they turned aside, so We sent upon them a torrent of which the rush could not be withstood, and in place of their two gardens We gave to them two gardens yielding bitter fruit and (growing) tamarisk and a few lote-trees.' (*Saba':* 16) Allah *Glorified is He* conferred His Blessings on the people of Sheba, but they were not thankful for Him, and that is why they were punished.

They used to brag about their dam which retained the water of rain, and on which they depended for water supply throughout the year. However, this very dam was the disaster that destructed their planting. The dwellings of the people of Sheba represented a sign of Allah's Omnipotence; two beautiful gardens on the right and on the left so that they may eat and thank Him for His Provision and Blessings. Nonetheless, they turned away from giving thanks for the abundant provision granted to them, and consequently He *the Almighty* sent upon them the flood of the dam that was destructed by virtue of one of the lowest and the weakest animals, that is, the rats which made a hole in the dam. Thus, it was destructed and the flood drowned their property and engulfed their houses.

As for the owners of the garden in the chapter in question, they inherited goodness from their father, and thus they admitted their sins and returning to Allah *the Almighty* in repentance, hoping that it would be accepted. That is why they said: '…we truly turn to Him in hope.' (*al-Qalam:* 32) It should be noted that they repetitively affirmed Allah's Lordship, saying: 'Glory be to Allah, Our Lord!' (*al-Qalam:* 29); and 'But maybe our Lord will give us something better in its place: we truly turn to Him in hope.' (*at-Tariq:* 32) This suggests that they were desirous and hopeful of His favour, for He is their Lord. If the word *raghib* (desirous of) is followed by the preposition *`ann,* it means that the person abandons something, and if used in the passive form followed by the preposition 'to', it means to pursue something. Being desirous toward Him *Glorified is He* they should not have separated giving in this worldly life from being rewarded in the Hereafter. After all, the worldly life is not everything and so long as the person desires Allah's reward, He will give him everlasting, boundless bliss in the Hereafter.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَذَٰلِكَ ٱلْعَذَابُ ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Such is the punishment [in this life], but greater
still is the punishment in the Hereafter, if only
they knew [33] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 33)

The words 'such' here is a reference to the chastisement of the people of the garden in this worldly life; they saw their burnt garden and lost their fruits. It is as if He *the Almighty* says, 'As We did to the owners of the garden, the same will be the case of whoever disobeys My Orders and disbelieves in My messengers. With such worldly chastisement We have punished the one who said that the Quran is nothing but legends of the former peoples'. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Just because he has wealth and sons, when our revelations are recited to him, he says, "These are just ancient fables." We shall brand him on the snout!' (*al-Qalam:* 14-16) It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the story of the owners of the garden to respond to those who disbelieved in the Quran and rejected to believe that it is a Divine Revelation. Such a person was given wealth and children, and yet he did not believe in Him *the Almighty* just like the owners of the garden who were given ripe fruits and beautiful garden, but were deprived of it on account of disobedience and willingness to prevent the rights of Allah.

Such will be the chastisement to be inflicted on the people of Quraysh. It is said that Quraysh suffered from drought which endured for seven years that they saw smoke, out of extreme hunger, and had to eat the skins of dead animals. Allah *Glorified is He* introduces the story of the owners of the garden with the verse: 'We have tried them as We tried the owners of a certain garden…' (*al-Qalam:* 17). This means that He *the Almighty* tried the people of Quraysh as He tried the owners of the garden. Allah *Glorified is He* only gives them wealth and children to test them. However, they used His Blessings to transgress against Him, and to turn people away from His Guidance. Accordingly, their chastisement is similar to that of the owners of the garden, and let it be known that the chastisement of the Hereafter is greater, as He *the Almighty* says: '…but greater still is the punishment in the Hereafter, if only they knew.' (*al-Qalam:* 33)

So, the disbelievers should not think that the worldly chastisement will evade them the chastisement of the Hereafter because the former may affect both the believer and the disbeliever, but the greater punishment of the Hereafter will afflict the disbelievers only. The chastisement in the Hereafter has different attributes, which includes being great, disgraceful, painful and lasting. A great chastisement is inflicted either by 'means' or by the causer. The worldly chastisement is always inflicted by 'means,' which could be a stick, a whip, or an insult, all of which are different in strength. However, the chastisement in the Hereafter is inflicted by Allah, the Omnipotent. Therefore, if we compare the worldly chastisement to that of the Hereafter, we will surely find that the latter is the greatest of all.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Then it shall be said to those who were unjust: Taste abiding chastisement…' (*Yunus:* 52), Allah *Glorified is He* describes the chastisement in the Hereafter as 'abiding ' meaning that it never ends, whilst chastisement in this worldly life, however humiliating and degrading, is temporary and even petty when compared to the everlasting chastisement of the Hereafter. Thus, the chastisement in the Hereafter is far greater than that in the worldly one, which can never in any way be similar to that of the former, however severe and cruel it is.

In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* calls the Day of Judgment 'a dreadful day', saying: '…What suffering will come to those who obscure the truth when a dreadful Day arrives!' (*Maryam:* 38) The punishment on the Day of Resurrection is witnessed by all people. On the contrary, the chastisement in this worldly life is only witnessed by the present contemporaries, but not by the predecessors or the successors. Moreover, anyone evading the punishment in this worldly life can never escape it in the Hereafter.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…If they only know' (*al-Qalam:* 32) Allah *Glorified is He* affirms their ignorance and negates their knowledge, given the fact that knowledge which the person does not apply and benefit from is pointless. So, it is as though they knew nothing. Elsewhere, He *the Almighty* say: '…most people do not know. They know the outward of this world's life…' (*ar-Rum:* 6-7). Allah *Glorified is He* negates that they have true knowledge even though He affirms that they know what is apparent of the worldly life, i.e. the marital worldly knowledge. However, the verse under discussion: '…If they only know' (*al-Qalam:* 32) carries the meaning of negation, that is, they do not know, or wishing, that is, they had better know this reality of this worldly life and the Hereafter. Had they known it, they would have followed the Guidance of their Lord to get the everlasting reward and they would have followed the Path of Faith instead of that of disbelief.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّٰتِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ ﴿٣٤﴾

There will be Gardens of bliss for those who are mindful of God [34] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 34)

`Ittiqa (guarding against/shielding) means to be cautious and refrain from evil, as stated in His saying: 'O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones.' (*at-Tahrim:* 6) Here, it means to shield ourselves from the fire and be careful of not falling into it by committing what provokes Allah's Anger. Hence, one should keep himself away from hellfire by abstaining from disobedience and by doing good deeds.

Taqwa (piety or fear of Allah) is one of the wonders of the Quran since it collocates with 'Allah' and the 'hellfire'. But if we look closely, we will find that the meaning is the same because with the word ‘hellfire’, it means to draw a barrier between yourself and the hellfire to protect yourself from it. However, when it collocates with the word ‘Allah’, it does not mean to draw a barrier between yourself and Him because a believer is always under His care. Rather, it means to shield yourself from His Attributes of Majesty and their effects, such as the Avenger, the Compeller, and the Subduer. Piety suggests warding off something harmful for you. So, the true piety is that which takes you away from disbelief which admits you to hellfire, rids you of niggardliness and prevents you from committing disobedience. The pious people are those who love to fear Him *Glorified is He* by keeping away from disbelief. Such are the believers of the higher rank.

Thus, piety implies keeping away from an unbearable evil. Similarly, as cannot bear Allah’s Wrath or Mightiness, you should shield yourselves from His Attributes of Majesty and their effects – one of which is hellfire. The basis of piety and fear of Allah *the Almighty* is being mindful of the Day of Resurrection. The pious believer is the one who controls his conduct and refrains from disobedience and following his whims. Piety also indicates evading the troubles and the problems of the worldly life by adhering to the Divine Way of Guidance. Only then one would keep away from troubles. As for the one who turns away from piety, he will lead a miserable life, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life…’ (*Ta Ha:* 124).

After clarifying what happened to the owners of the garden and how it was burnt and destroyed on account of their determination to prevent the rights of the poor and the needy, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about the pious servants and what He prepared for them. Owing to their lack of faith, piety, and fear of Allah, Who watches over them, the owners of the garden feared that the owners of rights, i.e. the poor and the needy may see or know what they were plotting. They whispered and lowered their voices, deciding that no poor was to be allowed to enter their garden. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Still they called each other at daybreak, “Go early to your field if you wish to gather all its fruits,” and went off, whispering, “Make sure no poor person enters the garden today!”’ They feared the people instead of Allah *the Almighty* and were careful not to let anyone see them.

Further, in the verse under discussion, the letter *Nun* of emphasis is used to reassure the pious of their reward which is with their Lord, the Disposer of affairs. It is noteworthy that His saying: '…with their Lord…' (*al-Qalam:* 34) denotes that their reward will never be lost for it is with their Lord Who nourishes and sustains them. On the contrary, when your recompense, for example, is with a human being like you, he may devour it. The true believer considers this matter with certainty, for he knows for sure that his reward is with his Lord Who nourishes him and takes upon Himself to raise him to the required level of perfection. This Quranic phrase: 'with their Lord' (*al-Qalam:* 34) is mentioned in many verses, such as His saying: '…and give good news to those who believe that theirs is a footing of firmness with their Lord…' (*Yunus:* 2); 'Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 62); '(as for) those who spend their property in the way of Allah, then do not follow up what they have spent with reproach or injury, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 262) and '(as for) those who spend their property by night and by day, secretly and openly, they shall have their reward from their Lord and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.' (*al-Baqara:* 274)

Those who believe and give away in charity shall have their reward with their Lord since they fear Him *the Almighty,* believe in Him, and spend out of what He granted them, being absolutely certain that He watches over them. As for those who deprived the poor and the needy of their rights and plotted to cut the fruits of their garden in secret, in the absence of those entitled to these rights, they have little faith as they mistakenly think that He *the Almighty* does not watch them.

This Quranic phrase: 'with their Lord' (*al-Qalam:* 34) is not limited to the believers, for He *the Almighty* is the Lord of all, the believers and disbelievers, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And could you but see when the guilty shall hang down their heads before their Lord…' (*as-Sajda:* 12). Thus, He *the Almighty* is the Lord of the disbelievers as well since how could it be that

He leaves them without care or provision after He had brought them into existence. On the Day of Resurrection, they will stand before Him whether they like it or not.

Thus, their reward of the pious people is with Allah *the Almighty* so what did He, the Supreme Lord, prepare for them? Allah *Glorified is He* prepared for them the eternal Gardens of Delight in which neither they die nor the Gardens come to an end. They are not like the garden which was burnt and turned into ashes.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the reward for belief and good deeds, saying: '…so those who believe and do good will be in gardens of bliss.' (*al-Hajj:* 56) So, there are many Gardens of everlasting bliss and delight which cannot cease to exist. These Gardens include the following: the Garden of *Al-Firdaws*, the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Bliss, the Garden of Eternity, and the Garden of the Abode of Peace and the Garden of Refuge. There is also the Garden of *`Illyyun* which is the best of Gardens, and the greatest bliss in it is to see Allah *Glorified is He*.

These gardens are conferred out of Allah's favour, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and fountains. Taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that, the doers of good.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16); and 'Say: "Shall I tell you what is better than these? For those who guard (against evil) are gardens with their Lord, beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and pure mates and Allah's pleasure; and Allah sees the servants."' (*Al-'Imran:* 15) The gardens in the Hereafter are those of delight and bliss, where a believer can find whatever he desires or comes to his mind and even what does not come to mind.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* points out that He prepared these gardens for those who are: 'The patient, and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend (benevolently) and those who ask forgiveness in the morning times.' (*Al-'Imran:* 17) Such are the attributes of the pious, to whom He *the Almighty* prepared the Gardens. These gardens are graced with rivers and purified mates. Further, the Pleasure of Allah *the Almighty* is the greatest of these blisses.

Giving away in charity is one of the attributes of the pious people to whom Allah *Glorified is He* has prepared gardens graced which rivers flow.

Giving out in charity is meant to protect the weak people whom He created for a certain purpose. Spending out is not taking from others, but a handling which is made clear when considering the fact that whatever is additional to your needs is not yours except with your extra movement in life.

Pursuing the means of sustenance in life requires a mind to plan, limbs to act upon the intellectual plan, and the means by which the plan is undertaken. These means include, for example, a plot to be planted or a machine to be manufactured. In fact, the human being has no role in having these blessings; his mind and energy are gifts from Allah *the Almighty* as we can find someone deprived of the mind which makes plans, and another deprived of the energy which undertakes the plan, and a third deprived of the means helping him to implement his plan. Hence, none of these things are of his own making, for they all are gifts from Him *the Almighty*.

The true believer should trade with Allah *Glorified is He* through giving the rights of the weak. Such right is not taken by Him *the Almighty,* but rather, He made it the right of one's the weak brother, and should the rich person be in a similar circumstance, he would be entitled to it. Spending in the Way of Allah, prevented by the owners of the garden, is one of the attributes of the pious since it provides protection for the weak.

Bliss and delight in the paradise is beyond imagination, it is befitting Allah's Perfection, Beauty, and Omnipotence. In this worldly, life the delight enjoyed by the human being is proportional to his perception of delight. For instance, a mayor of some village may want to build a guesthouse, room for the telephone and a terrace; this is considered a delight from his perspective, but how could it be from the perspective of the Creator, Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, the Gardens of Delight are abiding; you never die therein nor do they perish.

The pious believers will abide eternally in the Gardens of Delight. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the people who enjoyed some delight in their life due to His Favours upon them, but they also witnessed some people losing favours and others leaving them by death. Hence, He *the Almighty* reassures the pious people that they will abide eternally in the Garden of the Delight which never ceases to exist nor are they driven away from it. The garden, in the absolute sense, refers to the paradise in the Hereafter, whilst a garden in this world is liable to get destroyed or to have its trees and plants dried, fallen or burnt–the same as what happened to the owners of the garden. By contrast, the Garden of the Hereafter has everlasting fruits.

This worldly life with whatever it has of delight is proportional to the human being's potentials and perspective, and such delight is threatened by two things. First, the person dies and leaves it, which frequently happens; second, the delight may run out or come to an end. Thus, the true delight is the great attainment, that is, the everlasting, endless, uninterrupted delight of the paradise. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'How many of the gardens and fountains have they left! And cornfields and noble places! And goodly things wherein they rejoiced, Thus (it was), and We gave them as a heritage to another people. So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-29) Those people were granted many blessings; gardens, fountains, cornfields, and goodly things wherein they rejoiced. However, this was temporal and therefore they left it and departed this life. Then it became the heritage of other people. This is not the true delight, for the true one is only that of the Hereafter which is eternal and abiding.

Additionally, the word 'gardens' signifies the place laid out with a variety of plants and fruits adorning it. The derivatives of this Arabic word denote covering and veiling. Thus, the garden is the place laid out with plants, fruits, and trees with twisted branches and sprigs so that it veils anyone entering it and hides him from sight. It would not make him in need for others.

In the garden, there are all the constituents of life: food, fruits, grass, water, greenery, joy, and everything else, such as the perfect house which includes all the facilities that meet all your needs so that you do not need anything else. Here arises a question, which is, 'Why is it that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the word 'gardens' in the plural, despite using it in the singular in other verses, and yet in some other verses it is used in the dual form?' Mentioning it in the plural does not mean that every believer will enter all of them, but rather, every believer will enter one of these gardens according to his good deeds and his level of faith and obedience.

It is worth noting that a dweller of a higher Garden will not be envied by a dweller of a lower Garden, nor will the dweller of the highest Garden take pride in it. Rather, everyone feels happy for the rank of the other, as we may find a student, out of purity of soul, feels happy for his successful colleague who, in turn, does not take pride in his success. If this could happen in this worldly life, so what about the Hereafter, where Allah roots out whatever rancour in their breasts? In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And We will root out whatever of rancour is in their breasts— (they shall be) as brethren, on raised couches, face to face.’ (*al-Hijr:* 47) Undoubtedly, every one of the dwellers of the Garden feels happy for his rank and for those of higher ranks because he will have abundant good from the dweller of the higher rank when he comes to visit him.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two gardens.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 46), He *the Almighty* states that everyone with a higher rank will get two Gardens; one for his own and another for honouring those lower than him in rank, as if it is prepared for hosting those whom he likes. Thus, the dwellers of the Garden will feel happy for those above them because they will obtain good from them. Thus, there is no rancour, envy, or jealousy among them.

In this connection, it was narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said once to his Companions while they were sitting with him, ‘A man from the dwellers of paradise will appear before you.’ Then a man, known by the Companions, entered, but they wanted to know for which deed he deserved this good news of paradise from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, they asked him about that deed to act upon it and be promised of paradise. The man replied, ‘I pray as you pray, fast as you fast and give *zakat* in the same way, except that I do not envy anyone because of the good that Allah has given them.’ On hearing that, they went to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and told him what the man said, so he said, ‘Is there other reason why paradise is preferred to this worldly life?’ This is further stated in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in the midst of gardens and fountains. Enter them in peace, secure. And We will root out whatever of rancour is in their breasts— (they shall be) as brethren, on raised couches, face to face.’ (*al-Hijr:* 45-47)

Furthermore, we should know that Allah *Glorified is He* did not create the Gardens for the believers only, nor did He create the hellfire for the disbelievers only; rather, He *the Almighty* created a place in the paradise and in the hellfire for every one of His creation until the Day of Judgment, and. Accordingly, when the Garden is occupied by its dwellers, some other Gardens will be vacant because those for whom it was created entered the hellfire. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* gives them to the believers, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And this is the garden which you are given as an inheritance on account of what you did.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 72)

So, following Allah's Guidance causes one to rejoice at the delight of these Gardens, and gives him eternal life and abiding bliss. These Gardens are not prepared according to people's abilities, but in proportion to the Omnipotence of Allah *Glorified is He*. Given the fact that His Blessings in the worldly life are uncountable, so what about thinking of His Blessings in the Hereafter?

Further, He *the Almighty* says: 'They have therein what they wish and with Us is more yet.' (*Qaf:* 35) Thus, in the Garden, not only will you get what you want or wish once it comes to your mind, but you will be given more than that, i.e. the delight that you did not know before. In fact, the delight in this worldly life is proportional to people's abilities, whilst in the Hereafter it is proportional to Allah's Omnipotence. What entitles you to the delight of the Hereafter is doing good deeds and following Allah's Way of Guidance. Even though this may be physically and mentally burdensome, it is temporal, for in the end you will rejoice at everlasting enjoyment and bliss in the Gardens of Eternity.

There is the ultimate goodness, that is, you are born, grow up, graduate at university, hold eminent posts, then enters paradise where nothing is left but eternity in the delight.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَفَنَجۡعَلُ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ كَٱلۡمُجۡرِمِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾ مَا لَكُمۡ كَيۡفَ تَحۡكُمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Should We treat those who submit to Us as We treat those who do evil? [35] What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge? [36] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 35 - 36)

In these two verses, there is a rhetorical question the answer to which is known to be ‘No, they should not be treated equally’, as the Muslims who submit to Allah *the Almighty* are not like the guilty. How could the believer who submits himself to Him and follows His Guidance and law be treated as he who defies against His Guidance, rejects it, disobeys, and disbelieves in Him? Certainly, they cannot be equal. In addition, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us many examples of things which are unequal, for equality is sometimes unfair, and Allah *Glorified is He* is far from being unfair.

In this connection, He *the Almighty* say: ‘Have you not considered how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word (being) like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in heaven, yielding its fruit in every season by the permission of its Lord? And Allah sets forth parables for men that they may be mindful.’ (*Ibrahim:* 24-25) He *the Almighty* gives us the two parts of the parable, being ‘good word’ and ‘evil word’, and the Quranic context leaves us to decide for ourselves. It is as if He states that they are not equal, but leaves it to us to utter the ruling with our own mouths.

Similarly, He says: ‘Allah sets forth a parable: (consider) a slave, the property of another, (who) has no power over anything, and one whom We have granted from Ourselves a goodly sustenance so he spends from it secretly and openly; are the two alike? (All) praise is due to Allah! Nay, most of them do not know.’ (*an-Nahl:* 75) Here, one may ask, ‘There are two parts of the parable, why then does Allah say “are they alike” in the plural form, not in the dual form’? We say that the parable, even if each of its parties is singular, applies to many, being common among the slaves and among the masters of good provision as well. So He *the Almighty* uses the plural to generalise the parable.

In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Is he then who is a believer like him who is a transgressor? They are not equal.’ (*as-Sajda:* 18) The words ‘believer’ and ‘transgressor’ are in the singular form, but Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, 'They are not equal', in the dual form, but instead uses the plural form because He does not speak about specific individuals, but rather about the people in general. The verse might have been revealed regarding specific individuals, yet the generality of the wording, not its specific cause of revelation, is to be considered. Consequently, the context considers the specific cause regarding 'the believer' and 'the transgressor', and considers the generality of the issue when the plural is used 'they are not equal'. As the believer and the transgressor are not alike, the slave, who has no power over anything, cannot be held equal to the one who is free and to whom Allah *the Almighty* grants a goodly sustenance so he spends from it secretly and openly. In the same way, a believer is not equal to the evildoers.

Now, it can be observed that Allah *Glorified is He* compares the Muslim to the evildoers and the believer to the transgressor since the believer is the one who believes firmly with his heart whilst the transgressor is the one whose limbs transgress Allah's Guidance. He does not believe firmly with his heart, and thereby he is opposite to the believer. As for the Muslim, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A Muslim is the one from whose tongue, and hands the Muslims are safe'. So, Islam is related to controlling one's limbs, including his hands and tongue with which he should not harm others going about with gossip, backbiting, insulting, oppressing or helping the oppressors. Similarly, he should not harm others with his hands by hitting, killing, taking bribes, helping oppressors. Harming others with hands or tongue represents a crime punishable by a prescribed punishment or *ta`zir* (the punishment administrated at the discretion of the judge).

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and the Book shall be placed, then you will see the guilty fearing from what is in it, and they will say: "Ah! Woe to us! What a book this is! It does not omit a small one nor a great one, but numbers them (all)"; and what they had done they shall find present (there); and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone.' (*al-Kahf:* 49) Here, we find that the crimes of these guilty people are recorded by the Angels in specific records and books, and everyone will read it by himself. They thought that nothing was recorded against them and that they will not be punished, owing to their confused faith in the Hereafter and the Day of

Judgment. These criminals may control people's lives and spread mischief in the land, and no one can stand in their way. Such criminals should heed the following Threat of Allah *the Almighty*: '…There shall befall those who are guilty humiliation from Allah and severe chastisement because of what they planned.' (*al-An'am:* 124)

As a matter of fact, the believers are the opposite of the criminals. So, if the way of the criminals is made clear to us, we can distinguish it from the way of the believers. As Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that the way of the criminals ends with cursing and expulsion from His Mercy, then we get to know, by contrast, that the way of the believers is that of Mercy and honour. Regarding the criminals, He *the Almighty* says: '…and His punishment cannot be averted from the guilty people.' (*al-An'am:* 147)

The criminals are also those who disbelieve in Allah's verses, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Surely (as for) those who reject Our communications and turn away from them haughtily, the doors of heaven shall not be opened for them, nor shall they enter the garden until the camel pass through the eye of the needle; and thus do We reward the guilty.' (*al-A'raf:* 40) Therefore, they deserve this punishment as a result of their misdeeds. They will not enter the paradise, and so they are deprived of the good. Moreover, they enter the hellfire. Therefore, there are two punishments for them: being deprived of the good which is entering paradise, and bringing about harm on themselves by entering the hellfire. So, Allah *Glorified is He* deprived them of the delight owing to their disobedience and disbelief, and admitted them to hellfire as another punishment. Being guilty, they were forbidden to enter the paradise, and their injustice proved them worthy of entering the hellfire and being encompassed by it. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'They shall have a bed of hell-fire and from above them coverings (of it); and thus do We reward the unjust.' (*al-A'raf:* 41)

Thus, injustice is related to committing crimes, and it may be a kind of crimes, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'And certainly We did destroy generations before you when they were unjust, and their apostles had come to them with clear arguments, and they would not believe; thus do We recompense the guilty people.' (*Yunus:* 13)

Thus, the criminal may commit a major sin, i.e. disbelief in Allah *the Almighty* which is meant in His saying: ‘And you will see the guilty on that day linked together in chains.’ (*Ibrahim:* 49) Therefore, you find all criminals gathered together and fettered in shackles which are the chains bounding one’s legs.

There are those whose legs are fettered in shackles, and others bound with chains around their hands and their necks as well. Every group of the criminals committing the same crime will be linked together by one rope, due to the sympathy and affection towards each other in the worldly life.

The criminal is also the one evading the Truth. In this sense, the crime means abandoning the truth for supporting falsehood. The criminals will be distinguished on the Day of Resurrection with their blue faces, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…and We will gather the guilty, blue-eyed, on that Day.’ (*Ta Ha:* 102) The blueness will be the colour of their faces, as you may see someone in blue face because he was inflicted with something. Some scholars explain that the last verse refers to their blindness as the blue water which affects the eyes and causes blindness. Additionally, it is known that blueness of the body only results from strong hits and bruises stimulating harmful interactions under the skin so that it turns blue.

Further, the blue colour indicates ugliness and intimidation. For that reason, the soldiers used to cover their faces in blue to frighten and horrify their enemies in the Middle Ages. Moreover, the people take it as the colour of Satan.

Another sign of the criminals on the Day of Judgment is hanging down their heads, as Allah says: ‘and could you but see when the guilty shall hang down their heads before their Lord: “Our Lord! we have seen and we have heard, therefore send us back, we will do good; surely (now) we are certain.”’ (*as-Sajda:* 12) ‘Hanging down the head’ is a reference to their evil destination. Hence, the one should keep away from disobedience, for whoever is arrogant and raises his head in pride in this worldly life, will, out of humiliation, hang it down on the Day of Resurrection. Besides, Allah *Glorified is He* will inflict on every disobedient in the Hereafter a punishment similar to the crime he used to commit. This is an additional meaning of the expression ‘Hanging down the head’. So, those criminals who are hanging down their heads in humility and remorse used to commit crimes in the worldly life shamelessly and blatantly.

In this worldly life, the criminals commit their crimes stealthily and manipulate justice to avert the punishment of the man-made laws. If such people were not to be punished in the Hereafter, they would be the winners, and in this way, we would encourage every vicious outlaw. But if the criminal believes that there a Lord observing him, he will recognise that even if he escapes the judgment and punishment on the earth, he will not escape them on the Day of Judgment. In this way, he adheres to the right way. The criminal who lives among us is not only known by his household but also by the people living in the same street and district. Has he ever gone to the grocery to buy something and the grocery refused to buy to him and boycotted him? Or has he greeted someone but did not respond to him? Accordingly, the whole society bears responsibility and is even more evil than the criminal himself. Besides, the crime spread in the society when the people feared the criminals, and flattered them excessively to avoid their danger. Why then should the criminal not increase in committing crimes if this is the case? For this reason, the Most Wise Lawgiver makes the family, not only the murderer, responsible for paying the blood money in case of involuntary manslaughter. Every member of the family is held responsible since they are in charge of disciplining their children and scolding the ill-mannered one. In this way, the society regains its balance.

Regarding the verse under discussion: ‘Should We treat those who submit to Us as We treat those who do evil? What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge?’ (*al-Qalam:* 35-36), Allah *Glorified is He* employs a rhetorical question to condemn treating those who submit themselves in the same way as those who are guilty. In another topic, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Has He chosen daughters in preference to sons? What is the matter with you? How is it that you judge?’ (*as-Saffat:* 153-154) He *the Almighty* states that He has not chosen daughters in preference to sons, and then rebukes them for lack of fair judgment. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…How is it that you judge?’ (*Yunus:* 35) It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying, ‘What happened to your minds? How is it that you judge’! Once you hear ‘how is it’ you should know that it expresses a surprising incident which a sound mind does not think it may happen. This is clear in the verse under discussion: ‘…On what basis do you judge?’ (*al-Qalam:* 36) Surprisingly, they treat those who submit themselves as those who are guilty, which should have never happened.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَمۡ لَكُمۡ كِتَٰبٞ فِيهِ تَدۡرُسُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾ إِنَّ لَكُمۡ فِيهِ لَمَا تَخَيَّرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

Do you have a Scripture that tells you [37]
that you will be granted whatever you choose? [38]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 37 - 38)

How do the disbelievers say that both the Muslims and the criminals are equal? In the previous verse, Allah *the Almighty* says about them: 'What is [wrong] with you? How do you make judgment?' (*al-Qalam:* 36) Allah *Glorified is He* discusses the matter with them to prove that they are following their whims, not thinking logically. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* is asking them: 'Or do you have a Scripture in which you learn?' (*al-Qalam:* 37) It is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘Have you made this judgment after reading a Book that equalises between the criminal and the Muslim, the good and the bad, the corrupter and reformer? Has Allah revealed to you a Book that says that both the criminals and the Muslims are equal? Do you have a Book that states this injustice?'

In comparison to the believers at the early time of Islam, the disbelieving masters of the Quraysh were wealthy and powerful. As this was their condition in the worldly life, they mistakenly said, 'If we are to be resurrected as Muhammad and his followers claim, our condition in the so-called Hereafter would be as good as in this worldly life. Additionally, the conditions of Muhammad's followers would not be better than us; in the best case for them, they would be like us!' So, Allah *the Almighty* replies to them: 'Should We treat those who submit to Us as We treat those who do evil? [35] What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge? [36]' (*al-Qalam:* 35-36) How can Allah *Glorified is He* equalise between the believers and the disbelievers? How dare they think that Allah *the Almighty* is unfair? He is indeed Fair, for He *Glorified is He* will never equalise between the two parties.

In the same vein, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Not equal are the blind and the seeing, [19] nor is the darkness and the light, [20] nor are the shade and the heat, [21] And not equal are the living and the dead…[22]' (*Fatir:* 19-22); He *the Almighty* also addresses Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'Say, 'Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you.' So fear Allah, O you of understanding, that you may be successful ' (*al-Ma'ida:* 100). Thus, the evil and the good are not equal by any means; this is an unquestionable fact – just as the blind and the seeing, and darkness and light are not equal.

Allah *Glorified is He* always gives us examples of well-established facts accepted by even the enemies of Islam. They know that the blind and the seeing, the shade and the heat and the darkness and the light are not equal. This Quranic style is noticed in many verses; for example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And is one who was dead and We gave him life and made for him light by which to walk among the people like one who is in darkness, never to emerge therefrom?' (*al-An'am:* 122) Logically, the answer to this question, for sure, is that they are not equal.

As a matter of fact, Islam is based on justice and fulfilling the rights of everyone. That is why everyone is regarded according to his or her rightful rank. Not equalising between the believers who do not go out for *Jihad* without acceptable excuse and those who fight in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* with their wealth and lives is a case in point. How can they be equal? That is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home), except those who are disabled, and those who strive hard and fight in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives,' (*an-Nisa':* 95).

When this verse was firstly revealed, Prophet Muhammad ordered Zayd ibn Thabit *may Allah be pleased with him* one of the scribes of the Quran, to write: 'Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home) and those who strive hard and fight in the cause of Allah…' Thereupon, Ibn Umm Maktum *may Allah be pleased with him* who was blind, asked, 'How about those who cannot fight, O Messenger Muhammad?' This question proves his religious awareness; he thought that if this verse remained as such, he will not be equal to the believers who strive in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* even though he was blind. That is why he asked about those who cannot fight. At this moment, the revelation descended on Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. Afterwards, he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said to Zayd, 'Write: "Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home), except those who are disabled, and those who strive hard and fight in the cause of Allah…" (*an-Nisa':* 95). That is to say that this exception was revealed to reassure Ibn Umm Maktum and those who are unable to fight concerning this point.

Someone may ask, 'Was the revelation of the verse in its last form depending on Ibn Umm Maktum's comment?' In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to teach every believer when he or she hears a verse to contemplate and see how it is related to him or her. In this case, Ibn Umm Maktum teaches us how to discern our position in every verse we hear. He pondered on the aforementioned verse to see his position, and that is exactly what Allah *the Almighty* wants us to do. Then, Zayd ibn Thabit wrote the verse in its last form.

So, regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home), except those who are disabled, and those who strive hard and fight in the cause of Allah, ' (*an-Nisa':* 95) it means that the two groups are not equal by any means. Here arises a question, which is, 'Was any sane person in the time of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* thinking that the two groups are equal?' Of course not, but He *the Almighty* wants to state this fact by His Own saying.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* rebuts the point that the disbelievers might have read this equalisation between the Muslims and the criminals in any of His Books. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Or have We given them a book before the Quran to which they are adhering?' (*az-Zukhruf:* 21)

Now, why did the disbelievers equalise between the Muslims and the criminals? Were they told that by a Prophet?! Did they study and memorise a Divine Book that states that the obedient and the disobedient are both equal?!

Studying means to try to understand a text using your intellect; it is a necessary process for comprehending a text. It entails giving and taking information, exactly as when two persons exchange information together, i.e. every one of them says what s/he knows so that they can extract the rules from the text.

So, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Do you have a Scripture that tells you [37] that you will be granted whatever you choose?[38]' (*al-Qalam:* 37-38) embodies the following question addressed to the disbelievers, 'Do you have a Divine Book that you read, study, then extract and choose rulings from it?' The Arabic verb *Takhayyarun* (to choose) means to pick the best of something, as if you sift it. There is a letter omitted from the beginning of this verb to show their keenness on selecting in the perfect way.

To sum up, in these two verses, Allah *the Almighty* asks the disbelievers, 'How can you make such a judgment?! Have your lost your mind? Or have you received a Divine Book that gives you the freedom to choose and judge by your own?'

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

أَمۡ لَكُمۡ أَيۡمَٰنٌ عَلَيۡنَا بَٰلِغَةٌ إِلَىٰ يَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ إِنَّ لَكُمۡ لَمَا تَحۡكُمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

Have you received from Us solemn oaths, binding to the
Day of Resurrection, that you will get whatever you
yourselves decide? [39] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 39)

The Arabic word *Yamin* (an oath) literally means 'the right hand'. In the past, when two persons took oaths, every one of them used to shake the right hand of the other; that is why the oath is called *Yameen* (the right hand). This Arabic word also denotes cooperation, that is, the people gather together and agree to do something. Further, this word refers to the 'covenant', as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And in case they breach their oaths after their covenant, and discredit your religion…' (*at-Tawba:* 12). The oaths or covenants should be fulfilled, or else they will be useless. That is to say that the one who frequently breaks his/her oaths renders his/her oaths untrustworthy.

So, the word 'oath' refers to the covenant in the saying Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Have you received from Us solemn oaths…' (*al-Qalam:* 39). It is as if He *the Almighty* asks the disbelievers, 'Are We bound by solemn oath that would never end till the Day of Resurrection to not punish you? Did We take an oath to admit you into the paradise? Did you receive from us a solemn oath to have all what you want, to not be held accountable for your crimes in this worldly life and to get more than the reward of the believers in the Hereafter?!'

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

سَلْهُمْ أَيُّهُم بِذَٰلِكَ زَعِيمٌ (٤٠)

Ask them [Prophet] which of them will
guarantee this [40] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 40)

He *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to ask the disbelievers, 'Which one of you guarantees that the criminals will be treated like the Muslims or that they will be saved from the punishment of Allah on the Day of Judgment? Which one among you, Oh people of Quraysh, guarantees that they will get the same reward of the believers?'

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the guardianship of Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* over Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her*: 'Then, her Lord graciously accepted her with fair acceptance, and caused her to grow a fair growth, and He made Zechariah her guardian…' (*Al-'Imran:* 37). The word guardianship here means to take responsibility for all the matters pertinent to bringing her up. In our daily life, the guarantor refers to the sponsor. Zakaryya (Zechariah) *peace be upon him* was the sponsor of Maryam (Mary) *may Allah be pleased with her* and was responsible for providing her with food and drink.

Thus, no one of the disbelievers can affirm that they have received a covenant from Allah *the Almighty* that they will have what they decide. So, what is the matter with them? On what basis do they judge?

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…which of them…' (*al-Qalam:* 40) is really a miraculous expression; Allah *Glorified is He* puts the responsibility over their shoulders. Who among them will guarantee the fulfilment of that judgment which they issued? He *the Almighty* knows best that none of them will do so. Therefore, if none of them dare to announce that s/he guarantees their judgment, then why are they acting arrogantly against their Lord? Why do they falsely say about Him *Glorified is He* what they do not know?!

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says about the Jews: 'And they have said, 'The Fire will never touch us except a (few) numbered days.' Say, 'Have you taken to yourselves in the Providence of Allah a Covenant? So, Allah will never fail in His Covenant, or do you say against Allah that which you do not know?' (*al-Baqara:* 80) Thus, He *Glorified is He* advises the people of Mecca not to follow the example of the Jews.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَآءُ فَلْيَأْتُوا۟ بِشُرَكَآئِهِمْ إِن كَانُوا۟ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

Do they have 'partners' [besides God]? Let them produce their 'partners', if what they say is true [41] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 41)

Allah *Glorified is He* draws their attention by offering a number of questions. First, He *the Almighty* logically asks them: 'Should We treat those who submit to Us as We treat those who do evil? [35] What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge? [36]' (*al-Qalam:* 35-36) Then, Allah *Glorified is He* asks them if they had based their judgment on a Divine Book, saying: 'Do you have a Scripture that tells you [37] that you will be granted whatever you choose?[38]' (*al-Qalam:* 37-38) Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* discusses the matter of receiving oaths from Him, saying: 'Have you received from Us solemn oaths, binding to the Day of Resurrection, that you will get whatever you yourselves decide?' (*al-Qalam:* 39) It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* asks them, 'Have you been given covenants from Allah by which you guarantee being equalised with the believers and being admitted into the Paradise?!'

Now, Allah *the Almighty* asks them about their partners, 'Do they have partners in what they say and claim?' If so, then let them call their partners to witness for them if they are really truthful. So, let them call these witnesses to testify that the believers and the disbelievers will be equal in the Hereafter. This Quranic style aims at refuting their claims, that is, they ought not to say so. That is why He *Glorified is He* challenges them saying: '…if what they say is true ' (*al-Qalam:* 41).

The truth is the opposite of falsehood, and both of them could be relative. Unlike the falsehood, the truth means that your words are consistent with the reality. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* wants them to prove that their words are harmonious with the reality. If they could not, this means that they are liars. They must bring a proof for the truthfulness of what they say. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…produce your proof, if you are truthful ' (*al-Baqara:* 111). Allah *the Almighty* asks them to produce their proof if they are certain of what they say, for He *Glorified is He* knows for sure that they are liars.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says:

يَوۡمَ يُكۡشَفُ عَن سَاقٖ وَيُدۡعَوۡنَ إِلَى ٱلسُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسۡتَطِيعُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

On the Day when matters become dire, they will be invited to prostrate themselves but will be prevented from doing so [42] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 42)

As for His saying: 'On the Day when matters become dire…' (*al-Qalam:* 42), it expresses the horror on the Day of Judgment when those who refused to prostrate, worship and obey Allah *the Almighty* in this worldly life will be called to prostrate. On that day they will not be able to do so. In this regard, 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him* says, 'A great matter will be revealed on that Day; the Arabs were saying that the war uncovered its shin when it becomes fierce.' So, this expression signifies the horror and the hardness of that Day. This time will be the most difficult hour on the Day of Judgment. All the people will be fearfully waiting for what will happen to them. The hardness of that Day, including the Gathering, the Account, and the Scale, will be revealed to them. So, the Arabs used to describe the war as having revealed its shin when the fighting escalates and becomes very fierce and hard. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* describes the horror of that Day with something that the people of Mecca were familiar with.'

The Arabic word *Saq* (shin) could mean the origin of something like the trunk of the tree. In this sense, the origin and reality of everything will be revealed before everyone on that Day. It is mentioned here as indefinite to show how great and horrific it is.

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the horror of that Day, saying: 'O mankind, fear your Lord. Indeed, the earthquake of the [final] Hour is a terrible thing. [1] On the Day you will see it, every suckling female will get distracted away from whatever she has suckled, and every pregnant female will abort her pregnancy, and you see mankind drunken, and in no way are they drunken, but the torment of Allah is strict. [2]' (*al-Hajj:* 1-2) And 'So, in case you disbelieve, how will you protect yourselves against a Day that will make the newborn hoary-headed?' (*al-Muzzammil:* 17) He *Glorified is He* describes the earthquake on that Day as 'great'. It is not 'great' according to our human standards, but rather the One Who is describing it as 'great' is Allah *the Almighty*. So, imagine how great it will be!

The horror of that Day will make every suckling female get distracted away from whatever she is suckling; she will get away from her main job because of the horror she will see. For example, when a servant sees a great and venerable person, he drops whatever in his hands. This distraction happens unintentionally, for the one may be distracted away from something s/he is attached to, either emotionally or instinctively. So, look how the suckling female will be distracted away from her baby and get away from him or her; how great is the horror that stops both her maternal emotion and instinct!

Further, Allah *the Almighty* gives us another picture of the Day of Judgment, saying: 'On the Day when a person will flee from his brother, and his mother, and his father, and his wife and his children,' (*'Abasa:* 34-36). Every person will have his or her own concern that makes them distracted away from knowing or thinking of the destiny of their brother, relatives, mother, father, wife, and children. The horror is much greater than thinking of others; everyone wants to save themselves.

Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* says about the coming of the Hour: '…and you see mankind drunken, and in no way are they drunken, but the torment of Allah is strict ' (*al-Hajj:* 2). The people will be moving randomly as if they are affected by wine that makes them sway to the right and to the left, and fall on the ground. This is how they will be on the Day of Judgment because of the horror and terror of that Day. This will be their state even before they see the punishment, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and you see mankind drunken, and in no way are they drunken but the torment of Allah is strict, ' (*al-Hajj:* 2). So, this is only the beginning of the Day that makes them lose their balance.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…they will be invited to prostrate themselves but will be prevented from doing so' (*al-Qalam:* 42). Allah *Glorified is He* will distinguish the believers from the hypocrites by prostration. They are described in this worldly life as: 'And when it is said to them, 'Bow [in prayer], ' they do not bow,' (*al-Mursalat:* 48) 'And when the Quran is recited to them, they do not prostrate [to Allah] ' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 21). In this worldly life, they did not respond to the call of belief; they did not bow to Allah *Glorified is He* except to be seen and heard of by the people; and they did not prostrate except when being forced to. They were not affected by Allah's Verses when being recited; rather, they were blind and deaf to them.

That is why they will not be able to prostrate on that Day. The following statement of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* gives us a picture of what will happen on that Day: 'In the Day of Judgment, every people will go to what they worshiped in this life except those who worship Allah. They will then be asked, "What are you waiting for?" They will say, "We have not seen our Lord whom we were worshipping." They will be asked, "Will you know your Lord if you see Him?" They will say, "Yes." They will be asked, "How will you know Him and you have never seen Him before?" They will say, "He does not resemble anything." The cover then will be revealed, and they will see Allah and prostrate to Him. A group of people who have like cow horns in their backs will try to prostrate, but they cannot. About them Allah says: "On the Day when matters become dire, they will be invited to prostrate themselves but will be prevented from doing so" (*al-Qalam:* 42).

Prostration is a sign of submission and worshipful servitude, as you put the most honourable part of your body, your face, on the ground five times a day as a sign of submission to Allah *Glorified is He*. So, prostration is the peak of submission to your Lord.

Prostration reminds the human being that he or she is a vicegerent on the earth. All the creatures that glorified Allah *the Almighty* are made subservient to him or her. Thus, even the human being who is served by all these creatures –animals, plants, and inanimate objects –is putting his or her face on the earth in prostration as a sign of submission to his or her Lord.

Therefore, prostration is the sign of submission to Allah *the Almighty* as you put the highest part of your body, 'the head', at the level of the lowest part of it, 'the foot'. In our colloquial sayings, one may say to the other, 'Do not raise your head over me', i.e. do not be arrogant. This is because ‘raising the head’ means arrogance, while lowering it down by bowing and prostrating is an act of submission. In fact, prostrating to and worshipping Allah *Glorified is He* is a high form of honour because it protects you from prostrating or being a slave to any of His creation.

But those disbelievers did not submit to Allah *Glorified is He* in this worldly life. They neither bowed nor prostrated and they did not give up their arrogance. That is why they, on the Day of Judgment, will not be able to prostrate, as their backs will be pliable.

Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* gave us an example for this when he saw a man eating with his left hand. He ordered him to eat with his right hand, but the man said, 'I cannot!' So, he *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Let this be right.' Since then he could not use his right hand anymore.' He became unable to use his right hand because he arrogantly refused to obey Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and submit to his order.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives more description of the condition of those people, saying:

خَٰشِعَةً أَبۡصَٰرُهُمۡ تَرۡهَقُهُمۡ ذِلَّةٞۖ وَقَدۡ كَانُواْ يُدۡعَوۡنَ إِلَى ٱلسُّجُودِ وَهُمۡ سَٰلِمُونَ ٤٣

And their eyes will be downcast and they will be overwhelmed with shame: they were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe [but refused] [43]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 43)

Out of horror, the disbelievers' eyes will be looking here and there. They will be looking everywhere for what may give them assurance or calm, but they will not find anything other than overwhelming horror. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Hearts on that day shall palpitate, [8] Their eyes cast down [9]' (*an-Nazi‘at:* 8-9). At the end, their eyes will be cast down, knowing that there is no way out, for only those who did righteous deeds will be saved. This is similar to the clever student who trusts him or herself and his or her knowledge, and looks forward to answering the exam. On the other hand, the one who did not study will be confused.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…they will be overwhelmed with shame…' (*al-Qalam:* 43). On the Day of Judgment, their eyes will be cast down in humbleness because fear will be surrounding them from all sides. The Arabic word *Al-Khushu'* (humbleness) is a description related to the heart. It is found either inside the prayer or outside it and is used with the humans and other things, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And all voices will be humbled for the Most Beneficent, and nothing shall you hear but a whisper, ' (*Ta Ha:* 108) and '… their eyes will be downcast and they will be overwhelmed with shame, ' (*al-Qalam:* 43). Here, Allah *the Almighty* describes the voices as being humble. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* describes the faces as humble, saying: '[Some] faces, that Day, will be humbled, ' (*al-Ghashiya:* 2).

On the Day of Judgment, the criminals will stand humbly in strict lines. Allah *the Almighty* describes them in this situation, saying: 'On that Day they shall follow the inviter, there is no crookedness in him, and the voices shall be low before the Beneficent so that you shall not hear aught but a soft sound, ' (*Ta Ha:* 108). They will follow the orders in humbleness and will not speak except by whispering to each other.

In our daily life, it is known that the noise in big gatherings cannot be controlled. How about the Gathering on that Day in which all the creatures from Adam *peace be upon him* till the last infant will all be gathered? However, all voices will be humble, a fact which is crystal clear in His Saying: '…and the voices shall be low before the Beneficent so that you shall not hear aught but a soft sound, ' (*Ta Ha:* 108). What happened to these voices that used to be loud before? Due to the greatness of the horror, the situation is different. No one dares to raise his/her voice in such a situation; everyone will be thinking of him or herself and of what will happen to him or her. They will not speak except in whisper, asking what is happening.

Furthermore, their eyes will be humble. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* describes the eyes, saying: 'And you will see them being exposed to the fire, humbled from humiliation, looking from [behind] a covert glance, ' (*ash-Shura:* 45). They are humble to the extent that they cannot even look directly, but rather with stealthy glance. That is why when someone tells lies to you, you ask him or her to look directly at your eyes because this eye contact reveals the truth. The truthful one looks confidently, while the other's eyes will try to hide from the light of the truth which will reveal its falsehood.

The faces of the disbelievers will be covered with sadness and blackness. By contrast, the believers' faces will be white after getting up from prostration. As the disbelievers did not prostrate in the worldly life, they will not be able to prostrate in the Hereafter, and that is why their faces will turn black out of sorrow. They will bitterly regret not prostrating to Allah *the Almighty* in their lives, and for being arrogant over it.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* concludes the verse in question, saying: '…they were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe [but refused], ' (*al-Qalam:* 43). When Allah *Glorified is He* calls them to prostrate on the Day of Judgment, it is not as a form of worship; rather, it is meant to rebuke them for not prostrating in their worldly life. They will not be able to prostrate there because they were arrogant to prostrate in their lives. So, in the Hereafter, the disbelievers: '…will be invited to prostrate themselves but will be prevented from doing so, ' (*al-Qalam:* 42) whereas in the worldly life: '…they were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe [but refused] ' (*al-Qalam:* 43).

Qatada said, 'I was told that on the Day of Judgment the believers will be ordered to prostrate, and there will be a hypocrite between every two believers. The believers will be able to prostrate, while the hypocrites will not; their backs will not be pliable, and the prostration of the believers will be a kind of rebuke for them.'

The Arabic word *Salimun* (safe) shows that nothing prevented the disbelievers from prostration in their lives, as they were safe and healthy. On the Day of Judgment, however, they will be called to prostrate, while being afraid of their inevitable end. In the worldly life, they heard the caller to prayer saying, 'Come to success, ' but they did not answer the call, although they were healthy. Ka'b Al-Ahbar said, 'By Allah, this verse was not revealed except in reference to those who were not attending the Congregational Prayer.' Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَذَرْنِي وَمَن يُكَذِّبُ بِهَٰذَا ٱلْحَدِيثِ ۖ سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُم مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

So [Prophet] leave those who reject this revelation to Me: We shall lead them on, step by step, in ways beyond their knowledge [44] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 44)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* is addressing Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and his *ummah*, saying: 'So [Prophet] leave those who reject this revelation to Me…' (*al-Qalam:* 44). In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'And leave Me and the rejecters, the possessors of ease and plenty, and respite them a little' (*al-Muzzammil:* 12). This means that He *the Almighty* will punish them Himself. Another possible interpretation is to let them, O Prophet Muhammad, do whatever they like of misdeeds so that they shall deserve the punishment. So, the Arabic verb '*Dhar*' means ' leave'. It is mentioned in some other verses as in His saying: 'And leave Me with [the matter of] the deniers, those of ease, [in life]' (*al-Muzzammil:* 11). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Leave them to Allah; He is the One Who will punish them, and Who knows how long the punishment should be postponed.'

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to leave those deniers and not to care about them, for they will return to Him *the Almighty*. This is due to the fact that Prophet Muhammad's role is confined to conveying the Message to them, and then leaving them to Allah *Glorified is He*. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* should not be affected with their denial, or worried about their planning against him.

In this verse, the Noble Quran is described as 'discourse'. Similarly, He *the Almighty* says in another verse: 'Allah has sent down fairest discourse as a Book, of similar signs (and) oft repeated…' (*az-Zumar:* 23). Indeed, it is the best discourse because it is Allah's Speech which is one of His Attributes. It is the perfect Book which includes the best stories, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'We relate to you, [O Muhammad], the best of stories in what We have revealed to you of this Quran…' (*Yusuf:* 3).

Denying the Noble Quran entails rejecting Allah's signs and verses and denying the truth. The disbelievers are of many kinds; first, some of them believe in neither a God nor a Messenger. Second, some believe in a God and reject the Messenger. Third, some believe in a God and one of His Messengers, but reject what was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*.

Rejecting the Truth is unacceptable and it is the first step towards disobedience. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And no sign comes to them from the signs of their Lord except that they turn away therefrom.[4] For they had denied the truth when it came to them, but there is going to reach them the news of what they used to ridicule [5]' (*al-An'am:* 4-5).

As a matter of fact, all the Prophets were faced with the rejection of their people. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And if they deny you, [O Muhammad] - so, before them, did the people of Noah and 'Ad and Thamud deny [their Prophets] ' (*al-Hajj:* 42). It is as if He *Glorified is He* says, 'If the people of Mecca denied you, O Muhammad, and rejected your Message, remember that you are not an exception; many Prophets before you were rejected as well. But what was the result of their denial? Did Allah leave the disbeliever or seize them with severe punishment? So do not be sad, for their destiny will be like that of the previous nations.'

The previous nations rejected the Messages and were persistent in their disbelief. So, the people of Mecca have been given the warning against the same punishment of the previous nations. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if you [people] deny [the Message] - already nations before you have denied. And there is not upon the Messenger except [the duty of] clear notification ' (*al-'Ankabut:* 18). As the disbelievers of Mecca were not the first nation to disbelieve, they must remember what happened to the disbelievers before them and avoid being exposed to the same punishment that had inflicted upon them.

Sometimes, the rejection happens intentionally, as in the case of the people of the Pharaoh. Allah *Glorified is He* sent upon them diseases, lesions and minor punishment, so that they believe and return to Him. Although they were sure that those signs are from Him *the Almighty* they refused to believe in them. That is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'And they rejected them, while their [inner] selves were convinced thereof, out of injustice and haughtiness. So, see how the end of the corrupters was (*an-Naml:* 14).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us how He will punish those disbelievers, saying: '…We shall lead them on, step by step, in ways beyond their knowledge,' (*al-Qalam:* 44). If you draw someone to something, you lead him/her gradually to unintentionally admit what he or she did. This is like when the prosecutor interrogates the criminal till he or she leads him or her to a confession.

From this Arabic word '*Istidraj*' the word '*Daraj*' (stairs) is derived. The stairs also give the meaning of gradualism, as in going up and down. It is impossible to go to the fifth floor, for example, directly by one step. Going up must be done step by step according to the normal movement of the human being. Similarly, the disbelievers are taken step by step. They are given one grace after another to be a proof against them. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So when they forgot that by which they had been reminded, We opened to them the doors of every [good] thing until, when they rejoiced in that which they were given, We seized them suddenly…' (*al-An'am:* 44).

When He *the Almighty* wants to punish someone for his or her crimes against other people in this worldly life, Allah *Glorified is He* does not punish him or her directly once the first crime is committed, as the punishment then will be light. Rather, He gives him or her time to indulge more in his or her misdeeds so that his or her punishment becomes great.

When a person tries to gradually draw another one, the latter may intelligently notice the trap he or she would fall in. But if the One Who is drawing is Allah *the All Powerful* the other one will never find a way to escape.

The reason why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…in ways beyond their knowledge.' (*al-Qalam:* 44) is because the humans know the ways of drawing one another gradually. This Arabic word '*Istidraj*' (drawing gradually) is also called '*Imla*' (extending time). In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And already were [other] messengers ridiculed before you, and I extended the time of those who disbelieved; then I seized them, and how [terrible] was My Penalty, ' (*ar-Ra'd:* 32). So, *Imla*' means to reprieve; it does not mean to waive the punishment completely. It means to delay it till many other sins are committed. This is like when someone makes a mistake and you leave him or her till he or she makes the second and the third, then you punish him or her in a way he or she cannot expect. If that is what happens in our worldly life, what would you think of Allah's Infinite Power? Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…We shall lead them on, step by step, in ways beyond their knowledge,' (*al-Qalam:* 44); and: '…let not the disbelievers think that Our Postponing of their punishment is good for them. We postpone the punishment only so that they may increase in sinfulness. And for them is a disgracing torment, ' (*Al-'Imran:* 178). This is like when someone sets a trap for his or her enemy.

The beginning of the process of 'drawing' is to open for them the doors of good things, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'So when they forgot that by which they had been reminded, We opened to them the doors of every [good] thing until, when they rejoiced in that which they were given, We seized them suddenly, and they were [then] in despair,' (*al-An'am:* 44). So, Allah *Glorified is He* did not hastily punish them, but rather, He left them till they transgressed in sinning. When they rejoiced in what they were given of wealth, graces, and large numbers of people, the punishment befell them. When the politicians want to destroy their opponents, they let them gain high ranks and remain patient until the enemies' evil behaviour is revealed before the people.

Hence, Allah *Glorified is He* gives them time to take, build, enjoy, and rejoice at what they have taken. Then He opens the doors of everything against them. Opening doors 'against' them is different from opening the doors 'for' them. The former means to drag someone to a humiliating punishment, but to open 'for' him or her means to provide him or her with benefit. The second expression is used in His saying to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Surely We have given you an evident conquest' (*al-Fath:* 1).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأُمۡلِي لَهُمۡۚ إِنَّ كَيۡدِي مَتِينٌ ﴿٤٥﴾

I will allow them more time, for My plan is
powerful [45] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 45)

The Arabic word *Al-Imla'* means to postpone and delay, Allah *the Almighty* does not punish the disbelievers immediately; rather, He gives them more time, and then punishes them severely. Do not think that the one who holds his or her enemy and raises him or her up is just joking! He or she raises him or her to throw them from a higher level so that they would suffer more. So, opening the doors of good for the disbelievers and the hypocrites is not for their benefit; rather, it is against them. That is why they should not be happy with that. However, when He *the Almighty* provides abundantly for them, they become more arrogant, and this will be the reason for their punishment.

When the corruptors do more evils in society, the good people tend to do more good. At that time, you hear the people saying, 'If it was not for belief, people would kill each other.' Then, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies that as He gradually draws and postpones punishment of the disbelievers, they should know that His Plotting is powerful. Plotting here means to take them from where they do not know. It is a hidden process that harms the one who is exposed because they cannot protect themselves from it. If the humans can plot against one another secretly, what about it when Allah *the Almighty* does? Can anyone reveal His Plotting? This is the intended meaning of His saying: 'My plan is powerful, ' (*al-Qalam:* 45). The Arabic word *Mateen* means strong and powerful; it is derived from the word *Matn* (back). The back consists of a backbone and vertebras surrounded by muscles. If the backbone had consisted of bone only, it would have been broken if anything was carried on it. So, out of His Mercy, those bones are surrounded with two big muscles.

You should beware of thinking that Allah *Glorified is He* is unaware of what the wrongdoers do, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'And never think that Allah is unaware of what the wrongdoers do. He only delays them for a Day when eyes will stare [in horror] ' (*Ibrahim:* 42). In the worldly life, the people witness the crimes of the wrongdoers and whisper to each other, 'Has the injustice of this wrongdoer been forgotten?' Those who ask should remember this verse: 'I will allow them more time, for My Plan is powerful,' (*al-Qalam:* 45). Thus, He *the Almighty* is fully Aware of what they do, but He only delays their punishment, as He also says: '…so I prolonged enjoyment for the disbelievers; then I seized them, and how [terrible] was My Reproach, ' (*al-Hajj:* 44).

The disbelievers continuously plan against the believers and their religion by all means, as they will never leave them with their belief. They exert their utmost efforts to corrupt their good conditions by means of deception. Some may corrupt your life without deception, but others prefer to use deception because they do not dare to face you. So if you catch one of them, he or she says, 'I do not know.'

In this vein, we know that the plot of Satan is weak, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…surely the plotting of Satan has (always) been weak ' (*an-Nisa':* 76). This is because he has no power to force us to do something, and he does not have a sound argument with which to convince you. Rather, he just deceives the person to obey him. In fact, the one who resorts to deception is weak.

Plotting requires hidden planning. The Arabic word *Makr* (plotting) originally refers to the branches of the tree when twinned together till you do not know to which branch certain leaves belong. Then this word was used to refer to the hidden planning. The human being can plan secretly against someone like them, but you cannot do this against Allah *the Almighty* as He says: 'Allah is quicker to plan…' (*Yunus:* 21). Undoubtedly, Allah's Planning is more powerful than any human planning, as the latter may be revealed, but how can anyone know anything about Allah's Planning? This is impossible. Moreover, the human planning is new, whilst He *Glorified is He* knows everything before it occurs, and plans eternally for everything. That is why His Reply on their planning is swift.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* also describes His planning, saying: 'I will allow them more time, for My Plan is powerful, ' (*al-Qalam:* 45). So His plan is strong and no one can avoid it. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed, they are planning a plan, [15] But I am planning a plan. [16] So allow time for the disbelievers. Leave them awhile. So allow time for the disbelievers. Leave them awhile, [17]' (*at-Tariq:* 15-17). So, His planning can never be overcome or be revealed; that is why He says: 'But they plan, and Allah plans. And Allah is the Best of planners, ' (*al-Anfal:* 30).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَمۡ تَسۡـَٔلُهُمۡ أَجۡرٗا فَهُم مِّن مَّغۡرَمٖ مُّثۡقَلُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Do you demand some reward from them that would burden them with debt? [46] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 46)

Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* does not ask his people to pay him in return for guidance because he will get his reward from Allah *Glorified is He*. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says to him: 'And you do not ask of them for it any payment. It is not except a reminder to the worlds,' (*Yusuf:* 104) and 'Say, 'Whatever payment I might have asked of you - it is yours. My payment is only from Allah, ' (*Saba':* 47). By so doing, he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* seeks the higher reward. Instead of being paid by someone with a limited ability of paying, he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* wants to be paid by the One Whose Power is infinite. It is He *the Almighty* who appointed him as a Prophet to call to His Way of Guidance. Hence, no one can reward Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* except Allah *the Almighty*.

Thus, it is crystal clear that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is not asking his people to pay for him, as he will take his reward from Allah *the Almighty* Who clarified this fact in the Noble Quran and he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* himself told them that. That is why the verse under discussion comes in the form of a question: 'Do you demand some reward from them that would burden them with debt?' (*al-Qalam:* 46) Should he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* ask them for a payment they cannot pay? He does not.

Now, should they have paid for him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*? When someone does you a favour, you ought to pay him or her. So, it is as if Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is saying here, 'I am doing you a favour that you should pay me for, but, out of my kindness, I do not want to be paid.'

The payment is something that is paid in return for work. It differs according to the difficulty of this work, how long it lasts, the skill of the worker and the dangers surrounding this work. Thus, the paid amount depends on the time, the effort, the difficulty, the dangers and the skill. If this is the case, we should think of Prophet Muhammad's mission and how beneficial it is! Look how the way of life that he is sent with brings easiness for us and our communities. It maintains your good relationship with your Lord, and protects you from the evils of your souls and of all that of the people.

Hence, Prophet Muhammad's mission was great and required extraordinary effort; if the people wanted to pay for it, they would in fact need to pay a lot! Imagine for example how much will you pay for someone to guard you at night. The Divine Way of Guidance which he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* came with protects you, your property, your dignity, and everything you have. It protects you not only from a certain group of people, but also from all people. This protection is not only in this worldly life but also in the Hereafter where there will be everlasting protection. Now, try to guess; how much should you pay for such a protection?! However, he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* does not want to be paid not because he is indifferent to the reward, but because human beings cannot estimate the value of his mission or pay for it. Only his Lord Who sent him knows best how great it is. Thus, whatever the human beings pay for it is little.

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* does not want the people at his time to pay for him so that they can calm down and be relaxed. They should not be worried of being burdened by any payment. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* will take his reward from Allah *Glorified is He* Who says in this regard: '…my reward is only from Allah, and I have been commanded to be of the Muslims,' (*Yunus:* 72); 'And I do not ask you for it any payment…' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 109) and 'Say, 'I do not ask of you for it any payment - only that whoever wills might take to his Lord a way ' (*al-Furqan:* 57). With regard to His saying in the last verse: '…take to his Lord a way, ' (*al-Furqan:* 57), it means to pursue His reward by doing the righteous deeds like fighting for His sake, giving charity, etc. Thus, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* works hard so that you can get Allah's Reward and exerts effort for benefitting others.

Allah says:

أَمۡ عِندَهُمُ ٱلۡغَيۡبُ فَهُمۡ يَكۡتُبُونَ (٤٧)

Do they have knowledge of the unseen that enables them to write it down? [47] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 47)

Do the disbelievers have the knowledge of the unseen so that they write it for the people and tell them about it?! Do they have the knowledge recorded in the Preserved Tablet from which they know what will happen in the future and hence write it down and argue with Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* over it? Do they have the knowledge of the unseen that obliged them to disobey him?

The Preserved Tablet is where the future incidents are written. It is unseen because what is written in it is unseen to the people. So how can they write down from it the judgment they made following their whims. This is a rhetorical question because no one in the heavens or the earth knows the unseen except Allah *the Almighty*. Do they claim that they have the knowledge of the unseen and that they write for the people therefrom whatever they like? They know for sure that they do not know the unseen and have no ability over it. They cannot write anything in the Preserved Tablet.

What is the answer to these two questions: 'Do you demand some reward from them that would burden them with debt? [46] Do they have knowledge of the unseen that enables them to write it down? [47]' (*al-Qalam:* 46-47) The answer of both questions is 'No'. So, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* did not ask them to pay for him, and they have no knowledge of the unseen. If he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* does not know the unseen, how about those who are less than him? Allah *the Almighty* ordered him to make this clear, saying: 'Say, [O Muhammad], 'I do not tell you that I have the depositories [containing the provision] of Allah or that I know the unseen...' (*al-An'am:* 50). Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says about the disbelievers: 'Do they have knowledge of the unseen that enables them to write it down?' (*al-Qalam:* 47) The answer is 'No'.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* commands him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* saying:

فَٱصۡبِرۡ لِحُكۡمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُن كَصَاحِبِ ٱلۡحُوتِ إِذۡ نَادَىٰ وَهُوَ مَكۡظُومٞ ﴿٤٨﴾

Wait patiently [Prophet] for your Lord's Judgment:
do not be like the man in the whale who called
out in distress [48] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 48)

This verse aims at strengthening and relieving Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that they have disbelieved in Him, and rejected Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and the light that has been revealed to him. He *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* may hope that Allah *Glorified is He* punishes them, but Allah *the Almighty* has specified time for everything. He has created the heavens and the earth in six Days. In our daily life, we say to the one who is always in hurry, 'Allah has created heavens, and the earth in six Days, so do not be in a hurry.'

Allah *the Almighty* has been able to create them in a moment, but He has ordered them to 'Be!' and then left them to be formed in six Days. The reason behind this may be to teach us to be patient and not to rush to do things. So, Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient and not to be sad, for the Day when those deniers will be punished for their bad deeds will undoubtedly come.

Patience may be easy in some situations and difficult in others, and thus requires more effort. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* sometimes commands us to be patient, while some other times to be extremely patient. So, what should Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* be patient about? He should patiently endure the disbelievers' accusations of being a sorcerer, a poet, a soothsayer, a madman, etc. Furthermore, they described the Noble Quran as a mixture of false dreams and tales of the ancients. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient towards all of that because each of those accusations include the proof of their falsehood. So, he is commanded to leave them, to keep steadfast in his way and be patient towards their hatred, obstinacy, and enmity. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* as well as his Companions are ordered to be patient for all of that because at the end, they will be the winners. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says:

'So be patient. Indeed, the promise of Allah is truth. And let them not disquiet you who are not certain [in faith], ' (*ar-Rum:* 60). The disbelievers should not make him lose patience or provoke him.

So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Wait patiently [Prophet] for your Lord's Judgment...' (*al-Qalam:* 48), it is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Be patient, O Muhammad, till the Decision of your Lord for you and for them occurs, and do not let their rejection and harm prevent you from delivering the Message. Wait for the Judgment of your Lord which is coming for sure, for there is a piece of wisdom behind delaying your triumph over them. Just deliver the Message and bear their harm and the delaying of victory.'

Not only does Allah *Glorified is He* order Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient about what He ordered him to do, but He also gives him an example with one of the previous Prophets. This is meant for him and his *ummah* to learn a lesson from. So, He *the Almighty* says: '…do not be like the man in the whale who called out in distress, ' (*al-Qalam:* 48). Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded not to be like Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *peace be upon him* who was impatient with his people. He is also called *Dha Nun,* which means the companion of the Whale. Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'and [mention] the man of the whale, when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darkness, 'There is no deity except You; Exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers ' (*al-Anbiya':* 87).So, the name of Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* is attached to the whale that swallowed him after he left his people in anger because of their disbelief. He ought to endure their harm. Undoubtedly, rejecting the Divine Message is very painful and hard, but the Prophet should be ready to endure the hardness of delivering the Message.

We know that Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was sad and angry because his people rejected the Divine Message. But when they saw clouds and storms in the sky, they thought that this is the beginning of Allah's Punishment for them. Thereupon, they ran away to the wise people among them who said that this is the beginning of the punishment and that they should obey and believe in Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* because he is a Messenger sent by Allah *the Almighty*. By so doing, the punishment will be waived.

All the people then believed in Allah *the Almighty* and went to Prophet Jonah *Allah's peace be upon him* to seek his satisfaction after he returned from his trial of being swallowed by the Whale. After he was satisfied with them, they began to look into the sins they have committed to the extent that one might destroy the wall of his house because he had stolen one of its bricks from his neighbour.

Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* left his people angrily and rode a ship. Afterwards, this ship was exposed to a storm and was about to sink. The passengers threw all their goods in the sea, but this did not work. At last, they agreed to throw one of them in the sea, and thus cast lots. The one who was chosen was Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him*. This story is mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And Jonah was most surely of the Messengers. [139] When he ran away to a ship completely laden, [140] So he shared (with them), but was of those who are cast off. [141] So the fish swallowed him while he did that for which he blamed himself [142] But had it not been that he was of those who glorify (Us), [143] He would certainly have tarried in its belly to the day when they are raised, [144]' (*as-Saffat:* 139-144).

So Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* lost the lottery and was chosen to be thrown in the sea, and the whale swallowed him, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'So the fish swallowed him while he did that for which he blamed himself, ' (*as-Saffat:* 142). It is as if He *the Almighty* said to him, 'It was not right to leave your people for being harmed by them; you ought to be patient and to endure that for the sake of Allah in order that you could deliver the Message.' It is known that you only blame the one whom you love and care for. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* blamed him *Allah's peace be upon him* for something that is not supposed to be done by a Prophet. In fact, blame could be a token of love.

Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* could do nothing but pray to Allah *Glorified is He* when he was inside the whale, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…do not be like the man in the whale who called out in distress ' (*al-Qalam:* 48). The hidden prayer is the best form of supplication which is similar to that of Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *Allah's peace be upon him* about his supplication, Allah *the Almighty* says: '*Kaf Ha Ya Ain Sad.* [1] A mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zechariah. [2] When he called upon his Lord in a low voice, [3]' (*Maryam:* 1-3).

The Arabic word *Kazhm* means to repress something. It originally means to tie the goatskin after filling it with water, thus it seems full as if it is going to explode. This is like the case of the angry person as their blood fills their veins as if they are going to explode. For example, the one who hates to have daughters, if he has a daughter his face turns to black as if he is going to explode out of anger. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when a daughter is announced to one of them his face becomes black and he is full of wrath. [58] He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which is announced to him. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now surely evil is what they judge [59]' (*an-Nahl:* 58-59).

Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* faced many difficulties on the way of calling to Allah *the Almighty*; his people rejected and harmed him. He went to a city called At-Ta'if to call its people to Allah *Glorified is He,* but they were more cruel to him than the people of Mecca. He returned back dismissed and bleeding, invoking his Lord, 'O Allah, I appeal to You for the weakness in my strength, and my limited power, and the treatment of contempt and humiliation from people. You are the most Merciful of all the merciful ones. You are the Lord of the oppressed, and You are my Lord. Under whose care are You leaving me? To an enemy oppressing me? Or to a friend You have given control of my affair? If You are not Angry with me, I will forever be content. However, Your Blessing is vastly important for me. I seek refuge with the Glory of Your Light by which the heavens and the earth are lit, that Your Anger does not befall on me, nor Your Displeasure descends on me. To you is the supplication until you are pleased, and there is no control or power except by you.'

Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was in trouble, so he invoked his Lord to ask for support. Was he not pelted by stones in

At-Ta'if till his feet were bleeding? Did the people of Mecca not put the intestines of a camel on his back while he was praying? Were his teeth not broken and his face bleeding during the Battle of Uhud? In fact, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was painfully harmed by his people's sayings and deeds. On top of that, his wife was falsely accused of a shameful deed that she had never committed.

So, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to him, 'O Muhammad, do not be like Jonah, the companion of the whale, as he went away angrily and was not patient towards his disbelieving people, and called his Lord at the peak of his anger against them.'

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَّوْلَآ أَن تَدَٰرَكَهُۥ نِعْمَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ لَنُبِذَ بِٱلْعَرَآءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

If his Lord's grace had not reached him, he would have been left, abandoned and blameworthy, on the barren shore [49] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 49)

If it was not for the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty* Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* would have been thrown in a land bereft of plants. Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was deeply sad because of being thrown into the sea and swallowed by the whale and living inside its belly.

Being swallowed by the whale is a blessing in itself. If the whale did not swallow him, he would have been lost in the sea and could not have been able to go out of it. But Allah *Glorified is He* showered him with His Mercy, and made the conditions inside the belly of the whale suitable for remaining alive. Moreover, out of His Mercy, he was thrown into a land while being patient, not being blameworthy, or else he would have been thrown out of Allah's Mercy. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Then We cast him on to the vacant surface of the earth while he was sick. [145] And We caused to grow up for him a gourd plant, [146]' (*as-Saffat:* 145-146).

Being thrown in an empty land was a Divine Decree, and nobody can escape from their fate. If the human being accepts what Allah *the Almighty* has chosen for them, they will be rewarded and helped to overcome their difficult conditions. But if he does not accept His Predestination, it will, nevertheless, come to pass and He *the Almighty* will be angry with them, and will never help them overcome it. If they were sincere in accepting Allah's Decree, they will feel Allah's Kindness and Help. His Kindness protects them from what they fear, and His Help facilitates the Decree regarding them.

Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was thrown in an empty land, but Allah *the Almighty* created a tree of gourds for him. In this vein, Abu Hurayra *may Allah be pleased with him* said that Prophet Yunus (Jonah) was thrown in an empty land, and Allah *Glorified is He* made for him a tree of gourds. Allah *Glorified is He* sent some animals to eat from the plants and then go and feed him with their milk in the mornings and the afternoons, till he restored his health.

When Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was showered with the Mercy of Allah *the Almighty* he was chosen to be one of the righteous Prophets, as He *Glorified is He* says:

فَٱجۡتَبَٰهُ رَبُّهُۥ فَجَعَلَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

But his Lord chose him and made him one of the Righteous [50] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 50)

Allah *the Almighty* has chosen Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* after undergoing all these trials. This selection is the greatest grace in life. Being chosen after passing throw a trial is a common incident that all the chosen Prophets went through. For example, Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen Adam *Allah's peace be upon him* to be a Prophet after passing through a trial, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…and Adam disobeyed his Lord, so his life became evil (to him). [121] Then his Lord chose him, so He turned to him and guided (him), [122]' (*Ta Ha:* 121-122). Such a trial proves that they are suitable for the prophetic mission and are able to shoulder the responsibility and fulfil what Allah *Glorified is He* wants from them.

We have spoken about the trial of Prophet Yunus (Johan) *Allah's peace be upon him* but Adam *Allah's peace be upon him* went through a similar trial before becoming a Prophet. Many people think that Adam's disobedience was after becoming a Prophet, and thus they ask, 'how can he disobey Allah although he is a Prophet?' We say that this happened before being a Prophet; he was still a normal human being. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and Adam disobeyed his Lord, so his life became evil (to him). [121] Then his Lord chose him, so He turned to him and guided (him), [122]' (*Ta Ha:* 121-122). Hence, the selection came after committing the sin, and so was the case with Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him*. He was chosen after the trial of going away angrily from his people; the trial of what happened in the ship and being thrown into the sea and swallowed by the whale; and the trial of being thrown by the whale on a barren shore.

The One Who has chosen Prophet Yunus (Jonah) *Allah's peace be upon him* is 'his Lord' Whose Mercy outweighs His Harshness. Out of His Lordship, Allah *Glorified is He* gives respite to the sinners and opens the doors of repentance to whoever returns to Him. It is the Lordship of the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful Who does not treat His creatures unkindly.

Allah *Glorified is He* has chosen Prophet Yunus (Jonah), the companion of the whale, and made him one of the righteous people. Here comes a question, 'What is the good deed that made them deserve the rank of righteousness? We say in our daily life, for example, 'This person is good, this one is good for kingship.' When the good person sees something good, they leave it as it is or makes it better. But the bad one corrupts the good thing and does not do good deeds.

Allah *the Almighty* has mentioned Prophet Yunus (Johan) *Allah's peace be upon him* among a group of righteous Prophets, saying: 'Such was the argument We gave to Abraham against his people– We raise in rank whoever We will– your Lord is all wise, all knowing. [83] We gave him Isaac and Jacob, each of whom We guided, as We had guided Noah before, and among his descendants were David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron– in this way We reward those who do good– [84] Zechariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah– every one of them was righteous– [85] Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot. We favoured each one of them over other people, [86] (*al-An'am:* 83-86). Prophethood and righteousness are Mercy from Allah *the Almighty* that He bestows on His Prophets. That is why He, says about Prophet Lut (Lot)

Allah's peace be upon him: 'And We admitted him to Our Mercy, truly, he was of the righteous, ' (*al-Anbiya': 75*).

وَإِن يَكَادُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَٰرِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُواْ ٱلذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُۥ لَمَجْنُونٌ ﴿٥١﴾

The disbelievers almost strike you down with their looks
when they hear the Quran. They say, 'He must be mad!' [51]
(The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 51)

The disbelievers were mocking and making fun of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. They had a fierce enmity towards him, and they used to give him looks of pure hatred. When he read the Noble Quran, they were looking at him with enmity as if they would strike him down with their gazes.

The Arabic word '*Zalaq*' means to fall. You sometimes find that the one who dislikes another gives them a look of hatred, wishing to strike them down with their eyes. It is said, 'He eats him with his eyes!'

Some scholars have said that the Arabic word '*Izlaaq*' refers to the harm that is caused by the enviers' eyes. In the past, when the Arabs wanted to harm someone, they bring a man and deprive him of food for two or three days. Then, they make the sheep and camels pass in front of him. When he looks at them and says, 'I have never seen such beautiful animals, ' some of them would be found dead after a while. Similarly, the disbelievers tried to strike Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* down with their looks and brought that man to do the same thing. By observing the two opinions, you feel that the first opinion is closer to the truth because the envier looks with admiration, while the verse indicates that they look with hatred and enmity.

The disbelievers hated to hear about the Noble Quran, the one to whom it was revealed and the One Who has sent it down to him. That is why their evil gazes were directed to him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* when he was reading the Noble Quran, as He *the Almighty* says: 'The disbelievers almost strike you down with their looks when they hear the Quran…' (*al-Qalam:* 51).

The Arabic word *Dhikr* (Reminder) refers to the Noble Quran. This point is mentioned in many verses of the Quran, as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*:

'Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian,' (*al-Hijr:* 9) '…and We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them, and that haply they may reflect, ' (*an-Nahl:* 44) and 'This We recite to you of the communications and the wise reminder ' (*Al-'Imran:* 58).

Allah *Glorified is He* says to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*: 'And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 44). The Noble Quran is a great honour for him and his *ummah*; it will keep their remembrance till the Day of Judgment. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: 'We have certainly sent down to you a Book in which is your mention. Then will you not reason?' (*al-Anbiya':* 10) So, the Noble Quran is an honour and remembrance for them. It is also a record for their history. As a matter of fact, the dignity of the *ummah* is derived from the Quran and its remembrance, and it will remain forever, for Allah *Glorified is He* says: '*S-a-d*, I swear by the Quran, full of admonition, ' (*Sad:* 1).

When the disbelievers of Mecca heard the Noble Quran, they did not speak badly about it; rather, they insulted the one who was reciting it, i.e. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and accused him of being mad. This shows how stupid they are. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'And they say: O you to whom the Reminder has been revealed! you are most surely insane ' (*al-Hijr:* 6). Claiming this reveals how stupid they were! If they admitted that the Noble Quran was revealed to him, how could they then accuse him of being mad? They admitted that the Quran was revealed to him and that it is not his own words. So, how could he be mad? This shows that they were liars and stupid. How can he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* be insane while none of the unreasonable actions of the insane people appeared on him? The mad person behaves without logic; they cry, laugh, and hit other people purposelessly. Undoubtedly, Prophet Muhammad's actions are in line with the reason and logic.

At the beginning of this chapter, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* refutes this allegation, saying: 'By the pen! By all they write! [1] Your Lord's grace does not make you [Prophet] a madman: [2] you will have a never-ending reward—[3] truly you have a strong character, [4]' (*al-Hijr:* 6). Then, He

Glorified is He concludes the chapter with refuting the same accusation, saying: 'The disbelievers almost strike you down with their looks when they hear the Reminder. They say, ‘He must be mad!’ (*al-Qalam:* 51).

Allah then adds:

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

But truly it is nothing other than a Reminder
for all peoples [52] (The Quran, *al-Qalam:* 52)

The style here is called *Qasr;* it consists of a negation 'it is nothing' followed by an exception 'other than'. This style is frequent in the Noble Quran; for example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And you do not ask them for a reward for this; it is nothing but a reminder for all mankind ' (*Yusuf:* 104). The word 'reminder' makes you feel that the sound human natural disposition should have made the people keep remembering Allah *the Almighty*. However, out of the distracting incidents, He *Glorified is He* has revealed the Noble Quran as a reminder.

The word *Al-'alamin* (worlds) is the plural of the word *'Alam* (the world). The worlds are everything other than Allah *Glorified is He*. There are: the world of the Angels, the world of the jinn, the world of the humans, the world of the animals, the world of the plants and the inanimate objects. Some of these worlds have no Messengers because they do not have the freedom of choice.

the chapter of

al-Haqqa

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Haqqa*(1):

ٱلۡحَآقَّةُ ﴿١﴾ مَا ٱلۡحَآقَّةُ ﴿٢﴾ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلۡحَآقَّةُ ﴿٣﴾

The Inevitable Hour! [1] What is the Inevitable Hour? [2]
What will explain to you what the Inevitable Hour is? [3]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 1-3)

The Arabic word *al-Haqqa* (the inevitable Hour) refers to the Day of Judgment. It is the reality about which there is no doubt. It is one of the names of the Last Day. It is the Day of the inevitable Event after which there is no event; the Day of the deafening Blast that deafens the ears that were incurious about it in this worldly life; the Day of the overwhelming Calamity; and the Day of Recompense and Judgment.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And We certainly sent into every nation a Messenger, [saying], 'Worship Allah and avoid the false deities.' And among them were those whom Allah guided, and among them were those upon whom straying was [deservedly] decreed…' (*an-Nahl:* 36). The Arabic word *Haqqat* (decreed) in this verse means they fairly deserved their punishment due to their misdeeds.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And when We decide to destroy a town, We (first) send a definite order (to obey Allah and be righteous) to those among them who are given the good things of this life. Then, they transgress therein, and thus the word (of torment) is justified against it (them),' (*al-Isra':* 16).

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(1) This chapter of *al-Haqqa* was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *al-Mulk* and before that of *al-Ma'arij.* It consists of 52 verses and is the chapter number 77 with regard to the arrangement of the Meccan chapters in Mecca. According to the Quranic order, it is the chapter number 69. In his 'Ulum Al-Quran, Abu Qasim says, 'All its verses are clear, containing no abrogating or abrogated verses.' See Abu Qasim, *'Ulum Al-Quran, 1/18.*

The punishment was justified against them, for the one who commits a sin deserves a punishment. Similarly, Allah's Decree has become justified against the disbelievers because of their ongoing disobedience and disbelief.

Al-Haqqa (The inevitable Hour) is the time when the deserved punishment for the disbelievers’ misdeeds and the deserved reward for the believers' good deeds become due. It is the reality that must be believed in, for all its events are real and will inevitably occur.

Then the question comes: 'What is the inevitable Hour?' (*al-Haqqa:* 2) The question in this verse shows how great and mighty it is. It is the time when everyone will get what he deserves. It urges the listener to exert his/her utmost efforts to reach to its reality. Then, Allah *the Almighty* says that no one knows how great and terrible the Hour is. None can reach its reality either by knowledge or imagination. It is beyond imagination.

The Arabic word *Idrak* (realisation) means to know everything about something. You see the sun, for example, but you cannot claim that you know everything about it. In fact, realising the existence of something is different from knowing everything about how it exists. There are many things that exist in this worldly life and fulfil their functions, but we do not realise the reality of their existence. This does not mean, however, that they do not exist.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the previous nations saying:

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ وَعَادٌۢ بِٱلْقَارِعَةِ ﴿٤﴾

The people of Thamud and 'Ad denied that the crashing blow would come [4] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 4)

The people of Thamud asked Prophet Saleh *Allah’s peace be upon him* to bring them a she-camel out of the rock as a sign of his truthfulness. But after this miracle occurred, they disbelieved in it and that is why Allah *Glorified is He* punished them severely. He *Glorified is He* has shown them the Right Path, but they chose the wrong path of disbelief. They disbelieved in Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *Allah’s peace be upon him* and killed the she-camel. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way, but they chose error above guidance…' (*Fussilat:* 17).

Allah *Glorified is He* has told us the stories of the previous Prophets with their people and how they disbelieved in them and thus were seized with punishment. He *Glorified is He* makes mention of the stories of Prophet Nuh (Noah), Prophet Hud (Eber), Prophet Saleh (Shelah), Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) and Prophet Lut (Lot) *Allah's Peace be upon them* with their people.

The remnants of the cities of the people of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *Allah's peace be upon him* are still there in Saudi Arabia. The people of Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *Allah's peace be upon him* used to carve their homes inside the mountains. Allah *Glorified is He* says about their civilisation: 'And [with] Thamud, who carved out the rocks in the valley?' (*al-Fajr:* 9)

All the previous nations used to deny the Message, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Like the striving of the people of Pharaoh and those before them; they rejected Our communications, so Allah destroyed them on account of their faults; and Allah is severe in requiting (evil)' (*Al-'Imran:* 11). They used to disbelieve in the Message, and thus they deserved Allah's Punishment. Further, He *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* that he should not be sad because of his people's disbelief, as many Prophets before him were denied. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: 'But if they reject you, so indeed were rejected before you Messengers who came with clear arguments and scriptures and the illuminating book,' (*Al-'Imran:* 184).

Allah *Glorified is He* gathered in many verses between the people of 'Ad and the people of Thamud; for example, He *the Almighty* says: 'But if they turn aside, then say: I have warned you of a scourge like the scourge of 'Ad and Thamud,' (*Fussilat:* 13). The people of 'Ad denied their Messenger, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They said: O Hud! You have not brought to us any clear argument and we are not going to desert our gods for your word, and we are not believers in you,' (*Hud:* 53).

'Ad and Thamud denied the Messengers and the miracles that were sent to them. They also disbelieved in the Crashing Blow, as mentioned in this verse. So what does the Arabic word *Qari'a* (Crashing Blow) mean? It means to strongly strike something which is quiet and motionless. From this word, the word *Qar' Al-Bab* (pounding on the door) is derived. There is difference between 'knocking' on the door and 'pounding' on it.

The Crushing Blow pounds on the hearts, the ears, and other senses. It strikes their hearts with its horror and terror. It also strikes Allah's enemies with punishment and overwhelms their hearts with fear. Thus, the people of ‘Ad and the people of Thamud denied the Day of Judgment, the Resurrection, and the Gathering.

When you reflect on this chapter, you find something wonderful; it starts with: 'The Inevitable Hour! [1] What is the Inevitable Hour? [2] What will explain to you what the Inevitable Hour is? [3]' (*al-Haqqa:* 1-3) However, when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the denial of ‘Ad and Thamud, He does not say that they denied the Inevitable Hour. Rather, He says that they denied the Crushing Blow. So, He *Glorified is He* mentioned another name of the Day of Judgment to gather the two meanings which describe the Day of Judgment as the inevitable Hour and the Crushing Blow. That is the Day when the deserved recompense of both the believers and the disbelievers will be due. Moreover, that Day will strike the hearts and the whole universe with horror.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَأُهْلِكُوا۟ بِٱلطَّاغِيَةِ ﴿٥﴾

Thamud was destroyed by a deafening blast [5]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions first the disbelief of the people of ‘Ad and the people of Thamud in the Last Day, saying: 'The people of Thamud and ‘Ad denied that the crashing blow would come,' (*al-Haqqa:* 4).Their crime is the same, but their punishment is different. He *the Almighty* mentioned first some details about the punishment of Thamud. In this verse, He *Glorified is He* says that they were punished with the deafening blast. Another verse states that they were punished by a violent storm: '…on whom We sent down a violent storm…' (*al-’Ankabut:* 40), or they were punished by an earthquake. This punishment affected them and kept them on their positions; standing, sitting, or lying down. Yet, He *the Almighty* states that they were also punished by a blast: 'If they turn away, say, ‘I have warned you about a blast like the one which struck ‘Ad and Thamud,' (*Fussilat:* 13). All those four terms give the meaning of the overwhelming event and the inescapable punishment to the extent that they fell on their knees and faces motionlessly.

Allah *Glorified is He* has described their condition after sending the Blast that struck them with terror as: '…We released a single mighty blast against them and they ended up like a fence maker's dry sticks…' (*al-Qamar:* 31). They became like the dry branches of a tree after being smashed. The farmer uses these branches to make a fence to surround their sheep. Ultimately, they become dry, fall on the ground and the sheep smash them.

The Arabic word *Taghiya* means what trespasses the limits. So, the blast with which the people of Thamud were punished exceeded the limits that the human being can bear.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَأُهْلِكُوا۟ بِرِيحٍ صَرْصَرٍ عَاتِيَةٍ ﴿٦﴾

'Ad was destroyed by a furious wind [6]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 6)

The Arabic word *Sarsar* means the strong and cold wind that has strong voice. It was also mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…as the likeness of wind in which is intense cold…' (*Al-'Imran:* 117). The wind spreads the cold and makes it stronger. If it is not for the wind, the cold will remain in one area without being spread out. The wind moves the cold from one area to another, and causes more harm. It also may be disastrous.

The wind that is described as *'Sarsar'* is a cold, violent wind that has a strong sound. We know in our villages that the hoarfrost may destroy some plants. Thus, the *Sarsar* is harmful wind.

The people of 'Ad were arrogant towards Prophet Hud (Eber) *Allah's peace be upon him* and those who believed in him. They felt that they were the strongest people and thus denied the signs of Allah *the Almighty*. So, what was their destiny? Allah *Glorified is He* has sent on them wind with strong sound during some horrible days to make them taste the humiliating torture. Allah *Glorified is He* says about the people of 'Ad*:* 'As for 'Ad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said, 'Who is greater than us in strength?'

Did they not consider that Allah who created them was greater than them in strength? But they were rejecting Our signs. So We sent upon them a screaming wind during days of misfortune to make them taste the punishment of disgrace in the worldly life; but the punishment of the Hereafter is more disgracing, and they will not be helped,’ (*Fussilat:* 16). The days are described to be that of misfortune. Thus, the wind was violent and evil, bereft of any good at all. That is why He *the Almighty* says afterwards:

سَخَّرَهَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَبْعَ لَيَالٍ وَثَمَٰنِيَةَ أَيَّامٍ حُسُومًا فَتَرَى
ٱلْقَوْمَ فِيهَا صَرْعَىٰ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ خَاوِيَةٍ ﴿٧﴾

That God let loose against them for seven consecutive nights, eight consecutive days, so that you could have seen its people lying dead like hollow palm-trunks [7] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 7)

Allah *the Almighty* says about this violent wind: '…Nay! It is what you sought to hasten on, a blast of wind in which is a painful punishment, [24] Destroying everything by the command of its Lord… [25]' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24-25). The Arabic word *Ar-Rih* (the blast of wind) expresses the destructive power of the air because when the wind blows powerfully from one direction, it becomes destructive. But if it is faced with another wind, balance is achieved.

That is why this word is only used in the Noble Quran to refer to destruction. But when Allah *the Almighty* speaks about the useful wind, He uses the word *Riah* (winds). This is because when the winds blow from different directions, the balance in this life is achieved. When He *the Almighty* wants the wind to be destructive, He makes it blow from one direction. The wind then will not be faced with another one from the opposite direction and that is why its power will be destructive.

This violent and destructive wind that left nothing behind was sent to destroy the people of ‘Ad. It lasted for seven successive nights and eight successive days, without stopping. Allah *Glorified is He* describes this wind as *Husuman*, that is, it did not leave anything behind. Everything had completely come to an end.

It was narrated that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The wind that was sent over the people of 'Ad has got out from a place at the size of a ring. It passed by the Bedouin in the desert, it carried them together with their animals and property. It made them hang between the heavens and the earth. When the people of the city saw this strong wind, they thought that it is coming with rain. At this point, the Bedouin and their animals were thrown over them.'

Allah *Glorified is He* describes this wind as '*Husuma*' because it killed and destroyed them all. The word *Hasm* means cutting down. It was narrated that an old woman entered a place to escape from this wind, but the wind followed her and killed her in the eighth day. Afterwards, the torture stopped.

As the violent wind lasted unremittingly for seven successive nights and eight successive days, He *the Almighty* describes it in another verse, saying: ''Ad treated (the truth) as a lie, so how (great) was My Punishment and My warning! [18] Surely We sent on them a tornado in a day of bitter ill-luck, [19]' (*al-Qamar:* 19). It is as if the eight days with their seven nights are like one day, as the torture was continuous without stopping. They are like one horrible destructive day that lasted till it destroyed them all.

The wind was strong to that it was throwing them away together with their belongings, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Tearing men away as if they were the trunks of palm-trees torn up,' (*al-Qamar:* 20). It was uprooting them from their places and houses and throwing them away, just like the palm tree when being uprooted.

So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…so you would see the people therein fallen as if they were hollow trunks of palm trees,' (*al-Haqqa:* 7), the word 'see' is miraculous. It makes the listener or the reader feels as if looking at the punishment that fell upon those people and watching what happens to them.

Not only does Allah *Glorified is He* address Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* but also everyone who reads the Noble Quran. This style is used in His saying: 'And the Book shall be placed, then you will see the guilty fearing from what is in it, and they will say: Ah! Woe to us! What a book is this! It does not omit a small one or a great one…' (*al-Kahf:* 49).

There you see the people of ‘Ad in the seven consecutive nights and the eight consecutive days killed and thrown as if they were hollow trunks of palm trees thrown everywhere. None of them or of their offspring were left behind.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَهَلْ تَرَىٰ لَهُم مِّنۢ بَاقِيَةٍ ﴿٨﴾

Can you see any trace of them now? [8]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 8)

Allah *Glorified is He* is still addressing Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*. He *the Almighty* reveals to him the scene of this destructive storm and its impact on the people of ‘Ad. They were lying dead, just like the hollow trunks of palm trees. Can anyone see any remnants of them?! The wind of *Dabur* (1) destroyed them all. He *the Almighty* says about the punishment of the previous nations: ‘And how many have We destroyed before them of generations? Do you perceive of them anyone or hear from them a sound?’ (*Maryam:* 98) You can say nothing but to answer, 'No, I cannot perceive of them anyone, neither can I hear from them a sound!'

It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying, 'O Muhammad, can you find any remains of the people of ‘Ad? Is there one soul remaining? None of them or of their offspring were left.' In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Destroying everything by the command of its Lord, so they became such that naught could be seen except their houses...' (*al-Ahqaf:* 25) and 'So We delivered him and those with him by mercy from Us, and We cut off the last of those who rejected Our communications and were not believers,’ (*al-A‘raf:* 72). According to the last verse, the believers were the only survivors. Further, Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I was granted victory with *As-Saba*(2) and the nation of ‘Ad was destroyed by *Ad-Dabur* (westerly wind).'

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) A wind that blows from the west towards the east.

(2) A gentle wind which blows from the east

وَجَآءَ فِرۡعَوۡنُ وَمَن قَبۡلَهُۥ وَٱلۡمُؤۡتَفِكَٰتُ بِٱلۡخَاطِئَةِ ۝٩

Pharaoh, too, and those before him, and the ruined cities: these people committed grave sins [9] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 9)

Allah *Glorified is He* starts the stories of the previous nations with mentioning the people of Thamud and the people of 'Ad. They all were destroyed long time ago, and none of their offspring remained, though their power was great.

Pharaoh, the nations before him and the people of the ruined cities committed grave sins. The Arabic word *Al-Mu'tafikat* (the ruined cities) refers to the villages of people of Prophet Lut (Lot) *Allah's peace be upon him*. It means something that is turned up side down. Their villages were turned up side down, a fact with is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And the overthrown cities did He overthrow, [53] So there covered them that which covered [54]' (*an-Najm:* 53-54).

The Arabic word *Ifk* (falsehood) means also to turn something away from its reality, as the people of Prophet Hud (Eber) *Allah's peace be upon him* said to him: 'Have you come to us to turn us away from our gods; then bring us what you threaten us with, if you are of the truthful ones,' (*al-Ahqaf:* 23). Thus, those villages were turned up-side-down, as He *the Almighty* says: 'So when Our Decree came to pass, We turned them upside down and rained down upon them stones, of what had been decreed, one after another' (*Hud:* 82). They were five villages: Sadum, Dadoma, Da'ghuh, 'Amura, and Qutm. All of them were turned upside down completely.

Thus, the verse means that Pharaoh of Egypt, the nations before him, and the people of Lut (Lot) committed the grave sin. What was that sin? It is the greatest sin ever, i.e. disbelief. It also refers to other grave sins; the people of Thamud killed the she-camel, the people of 'Ad denied their Prophet Hud (Eber) *Allah's peace be upon him* ; Pharaoh disbelieved and claimed divinity and the people of Lut (Lot) *Allah's peace be upon him* committed the obscenity that no one had committed before them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَعَصَوْا۟ رَسُولَ رَبِّهِمْ فَأَخَذَهُمْ أَخْذَةً رَّابِيَةً ﴿١٠﴾

And disobeyed the messenger of their Lord, so He seized them with an ever- tightening grip [10] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 10)

Each of these people disobeyed the Messenger of Allah who was sent to them. For example, the people of Pharaoh disobeyed Prophet Musa (Moses) *Allah's peace be upon him*; the people of Thamud disobeyed Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *Allah's peace be upon him*; and the people of Prophet Lut (Lot) disobeyed him *Allah's peace be upon him*.

Someone may ask, 'Why did He say in this verse that they disobeyed the 'Messenger', not 'Messengers'? This is because all the Messengers were sent with one Message, that is, to believe in Allah as one God and Lord, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And certainly We raised in every nation a Messenger saying: Serve Allah and shun the false deities. So there were some of them whom Allah guided and there were others against whom error was due; therefore travel in the land, then see what was the end of the rejecters,' (*an-Nahl:* 36). The verse in question may also mean that they disbelieved in the Message of their Lord.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…so He seized them with an ever-tightening grip,' (*al-Haqqa:* 10). They were taken severely, with more power than the nations before them. That is why it was an excessive punishment. It was named *Rabiya* (excessive) because it increased and escalated by itself.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا لَمَّا طَغَا ٱلْمَآءُ حَمَلْنَٰكُمْ فِى ٱلْجَارِيَةِ ﴿١١﴾

But when the Flood rose high, We saved you in the floating ship [11] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 11)

The Arabic verb *Tagha* means to trespass limits. Allah *the Almighty* has made limits that should be observed for everything in this universe. If you followed the way that He *Glorified is He* directed you towards, your life will be ideal. When something trespasses limits, it causes corruption in the worldly life, even if it is the water from which everything was created. Water is the main cause of life. However, if the water trespasses its limits, it floods and destroys everything. That is why He *the Almighty* says: 'But when the Flood rose high, We saved you in the floating ship,' (*al-Haqqa:* 11).

When the water trespasses the limits, this entails its refusal to be subject to the human being, for it does not serve us except by Allah's Order. The creatures, in fact, do not serve you because of yourself. If so, why can you not control them when they exceed the limits?

The water may overflow, the wind may turn into a storm, the earth may quake and the volcanoes may erupt. All of that is meant for the human being to realise that we cannot control the universe that we live in.

The water overflow is expressed in the Noble Quran with the word 'flood'. Water is the main cause for life, but it may also be a cause of destruction. The creatures do not act by themselves; rather, it is the Creator Who directs them. He *Glorified is He* punishes with water as He punishes with fire, though they are the opposite of each other. None can do this except the One Who created them *Glorified is He*.

The stories of the drowning of the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* and the people of Sheba made the Arabs afraid of water. If they needed water, they would go far away to fill their goatskins. That is because they knew the inescapable danger of the flood.

The flood means that the water exceeds the needs of the people and turns from being a cause of life into a cause of death. Allah *the Almighty* reminds all people about His Grace, saying: 'But when the Flood rose high, We saved you in the floating ship' (*al-Haqqa:* 11). In this case, the water went far more than quenching thirst, to become destructive.

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* and the flood: '[So it was], until when Our Command came and the oven overflowed, We said, 'Load upon the ship of each [creature] two mates and your family, except those about whom the word has preceded, and [include] whoever has believed.' But none had believed with him, except a few' (*Hud:* 40). He *Allah's peace be upon him* was ordered to carry a male and female of each plant and the animal to maintain life after being saved from the flood. Allah *Glorified is He* has kept the life on earth by saving everything that is needed for life on the ark. The Arabic word *Jariya* in this verse means the ship. The plural of this word is *Jawary* (ships), as mentioned in His saying: 'And His are the ships reared aloft in the sea like mountains,' (*ar-Rahman:* 24). It was named *Al-Jariya* because it runs into the sea. The ark of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was a titanic one; it carried a male and a female from all creatures so that the life on earth would be maintained.

Allah *Glorified is He* has mentioned the ships as one of His signs, saying: 'Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits men…' (*al-Baqara:* 164). But how do the ships that run into the sea be one of Allah's signs? The human being knows that the buoyant nature of the water is what makes the ships able to sail above it. Before inventing the steam motors, the wind was the only thing that moved the ships, that is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'If He willed, He could still the wind, and they would remain motionless on its surface…' (*ash-Shura:* 23). If it was not for the wind, the ship would stay motionless. This was before the invention of the steam motors.

If Allah *Glorified is He* wills, He can stop the power that moves anything. The ship needs the wind to move, if it was not running into the river. The water of the river runs from the outflow to the inflow. If we want the ship to move in the opposite direction, we need the wind.

Allah *Glorified is He* has subjugated ships to the people to facilitate their travels and interests, as He *the Almighty* says: '…and He has made the ships subservient to you, that they might run their course in the sea by His command, and He has made the rivers subservient to you,' (*Ibrahim:* 32).

Someone may say, 'We do not need the wind now for moving the ships, for now they move by machines and motors.' To reply to this, we say that the wind here has a broader meaning. It does not mean the power that pushes the ships above water; rather, it means the power by which it moves, whether it is wind, steam, electricity, etc.

The word 'you' in the verse in question refers to the ancestors who were carried with Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* on the Ark. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has carried people's ancestors in the ship.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses those to whom the Noble Quran was revealed, telling them that He saved their ancestors, i.e. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* and the believers with him. Those who were addressed by this verse are their offspring. Hence, carrying the ancestors is considered carrying for their offspring as well. This is a Favour from Him *the Almighty* because they were the reason for their birth.

Hence, the pronoun in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…We saved you…' (*al-Haqqa:* 11) refers to the ancestors, i.e. Prophet Nuh (Noah) and those who believed with him. In fact, everyone on the earth is the offspring of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* and his three children who were with him in the ship. If the ship mentioned here refers to any ship, the pronoun 'you' in the verse then will refer to everyone.

If you reflect on the word *Al-Jariya* (the running ship), you find that the Ark of Noah was named *Al-Fulk* (ship) while it was being made, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And make the ark before Our eyes and (according to) Our revelation…' (*Hud:* 37). After being made, He *the Almighty* named it *Safina* (ark), saying: 'So We delivered him and the inmates of the ark…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 15). When it became ready for running into the sea, He named it *Al-Jariya* (the floating ship), saying: '…We saved you in the floating ship' (*al-Haqqa:* 11).

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

لِنَجْعَلَهَا لَكُمْ تَذْكِرَةً وَتَعِيَهَآ أُذُنٌ وَٰعِيَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾

Making that event a reminder for you:
attentive ears may take heed [12]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 12)

Allah *Glorified is He* saved the Ark of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* to make it a reminder, a sign and an instruction. He *the Almighty* says: 'Surely this is a reminder, so whoever pleases takes to his Lord a way' (*al-Insan:* 29). So, the annihilation of the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* is an admonition for the people. We should remember their story and avoid being like them. Besides, we should heed this with attentive ears.

The attentive ear is that which keeps the instruction that it hears. Qatada ibn An-Nu'man *may Allah be pleased with him* said that the conscious ear is an ear that listens, understands and takes heed.

The one who has a conscious ear safeguards themselves from the punishment of the previous people by keeping away from sins. Their ear listens and their heart becomes aware and works according to what they knew. Consequently, they will be saved.

The ear also keeps what it perceives to be a lesson whose benefit will come later. It is described to be conscious although consciousness is related to the heart. That is meant to express how attentive it is. It may be also because the ear transfers what it hears to the heart that then becomes conscious of it.

Consciousness means to keep something inside your mind or heart, and to make use of what you have heard by working according to it. So, the conscious ear understands and benefits from what it has heard.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي ٱلصُّورِ نَفْخَةٌ وَٰحِدَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾

When the Trumpet is sounded a single time [13]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 13)

This verse turns our attention to the Last Day and its horrors, as the chapter starts with the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The Inevitable Hour! [1] What is the Inevitable Hour? [2] What will explain to you what the Inevitable Hour is? [3]' (*al-Haqqa:* 1-3) The chapter starts with speaking about the Last Day, then the worldly punishment that inflicted those who rejected it, let alone the punishment that is waiting for them in the Hereafter. They were denying the Day of Judgment, but they will find themselves facing its obvious reality. It will be a surprise for them although they were warned by their Messengers against it.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When the Trumpet is sounded...' (*al-Haqqa:* 13), it starts with the Arabic word *Fa-Idha* (when) which expresses the suddenness. Blowing the Horn is a sign for the beginning of something.

With the first Blow, all living things will die; and with the second blow, all the dead will be resurrected.

The second blow is a call for all the creatures to come out of their graves, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'On the day when He will call you forth, then shall you obey Him, giving Him praise, and you will think that you tarried but a little (while)' (*al-Isra':* 52). When Allah *Glorified is He* calls them, they will get up with obedience and submission. None will be arrogant or lazy. That was in this worldly life, not in the Hereafter. This will happen after the second Blow. The first one stuns everything, while the second is the blow of resurrection. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And the trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are in the earth shall swoon, except such as Allah please; then it shall be blown again, then lo! They shall stand up awaiting, ' (*az-Zumar:* 68). The one who will blow the Horn is the Angel Israfil.

Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* once said to his Companions, 'When Allah has created heavens and earth, He has created *As-Sur* (the horn) and given it to Israfil. Since then, Israfil is putting it on his mouth, and looking to the Throne of Allah, waiting for His Order.' Abu Hurayra asked Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* 'What is *As-Sur*?' He said, 'It is the Horn.' He *Allah be pleased with him* asked, 'How does it look?' He *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By the One that my soul is in His Hands, it is really great.' The circle that is put on the mouth is as wide as the heavens and earth. Allah will order Israfil to blow in the horn three times; the first one is the blow of horror, the second one is the blow of death, and the third one is the blow of Resurrection.'

When the disbelievers are taken by surprise with the blow of the horn and the Hour in which they were disbelieving, they will be speechless. That is out of surprise when they see what they had disbelieved in happening before their eyes.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَحُمِلَتِ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَٱلۡجِبَالُ فَدُكَّتَا دَكَّةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗ ﴿١٤﴾

When the earth and its mountains are raised high and then crushed with a single blow [14]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 14)

The earth will be carried with all that is on it; its water, trees, and all other objects. The mountains will also be carried up from their places and crushed on earth. Hence, both will be crushed. The earth will be at one level, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Nay! When the earth is made to crumble to pieces,' (*al-Fajr:* 21).

Allah *the Almighty* has given us an example of this crushing in this worldly life, saying: '…but when his Lord manifested His glory to the mountain He made it crumble and Moses fell down in a swoon…' (*al-A'raf:* 143).

Allah *Glorified is He* reminds us with the collapse of the mountain when Musa (Moses) *Allah's peace be upon him* asked to see Him *the Almighty*. When Allah *Glorified is He* appeared to the mountain, it fell down and turned to dust out of fear of Him. Similarly, the mountains and earth will be crushed and will turn to dust. Despite the hardness, strength, and stability of the mountain, it turned to dust. The Arabic word *Dakka* means to press the top of something to make it at the level of another thing lower than it. The righteous king Dhu Al-Qarnayn built a dam composed of iron and copper, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Bring me blocks of iron; until when he had filled up the space between the two mountain sides, he said: Blow, until when he had made it (as) fire, he said: Bring me molten brass which I may pour over it,' (*al-Kahf:* 96). It is a hard and high barrier made of molten iron and copper. Dhu Al-Qarnayn described it as a mercy, saying: 'This is a mercy from my Lord…' (*al-Kahf:* 98). So, no one should think that the hardness of that barrier is eternal; it will only remain in this worldly life. When the Last Hour is due, He *the Almighty* will make it at one level with the earth. That is for its people not to be arrogant or oppress others after being oppressed before by Gog and Magog.

Thus, not only will the mountains that consist of rocks, fall, but also the barriers that are made of iron and steel, as if they are made of paper. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…' for the saying of Allah, the blow,' (*al-Haqqa:* 14), it means that the earth and mountains will be crushed with a single movement; it will be one thing. It is not important to know how this will happen. It will inevitably happen, whether you believed or not. Whether this will happen by the great earthquake on the Last Day, or by the violent wind that is strong enough to carry the earth and mountains, or by one of the Angels, there is no difference as the ultimate result is one. These are all Allah's Soldiers.

Someone may ask, 'Will the mountains be crushed or blasted or be like carded wool or dispersing dust or mirage, for the Noble Quran mentions all of these descriptions?' All these are different cases for the mountains. They will be first crushed, then be like carded wool, as He *the Almighty* says: 'The day on which men shall be as scattered moths, [4] And the mountains shall be as loosened wool, [5]' (*al-Qari`a:* 4-5). After being crushed, they will be on the earth like the carded wool, and then they will be like the dispersing dust when the wind disperses their dust everywhere. After this, the wind will take the dust away, as He *the Almighty* says: 'When the earth shall be shaken with a (severe) shaking, [4] And the mountains shall be made to crumble with (an awful) crumbling, [5] So that they shall be as scattered dust, [6]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 4-6).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَيَوۡمَئِذٖ وَقَعَتِ ٱلۡوَاقِعَةُ ﴿١٥﴾ وَٱنشَقَّتِ ٱلسَّمَآءُ فَهِيَ يَوۡمَئِذٖ وَاهِيَةٞ ﴿١٦﴾

On that Day the Great Event will come to pass [15]
The sky will be torn apart on that Day, it will be so frail [16]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 15 - 16)

The Arabic word *Waqa'at* (the event) is used literally to express that something fell from a high place, and no one can stop it. This word is used when speaking about some great events. For example, Allah says: 'And when the word befalls them, We will bring forth for them a creature from the earth speaking to them, [saying] that the people were, of Our verses, not certain [in faith],' (*an-Naml:* 82). The word 'befall' here is not a normal falling; rather, it means returning to Allah *the Almighty*. It shows that they will suffer from problems and hardships.

The Arabic word *Waqa'* (to befall) in the Quran always comes when speaking about hardships, except in the following verse: '…and whoever emigrates for the cause of Allah will find on the earth many [alternative] locations and abundance. And whoever leaves his home as an emigrant to Allah and His Messenger and then death overtakes him - his reward has already become incumbent upon Allah…' (*an-Nisa':* 100). The meaning here is that Allah *Glorified is He* makes their reward an obligation on Himself.

Hence, the Arabic word *Waqea'at* is used with the inevitable events and it is one of the names of the Last Day. The Last Day has many names; each one of them shows one side of this great and horrible Day. It is named the Catastrophe, the Reality, the Striking Calamity, the Deafening Blast, and the Event. The Last Day gathers all these descriptions at the same time. It will occur certainly, and when it does, nobody can deny it, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'There is no belying its coming to pass,' (*al-Waqi'a:* 2).

After Allah *Glorified is He* mentions what will happen on the earth on that horrible Day, saying: '…when the earth and its mountains are raised high and then crushed with a single blow,' (*al-Haqqa:* 14), He mentions here what will happen to the sky as well. By contemplating, you find that His saying: 'On that Day the Great Event will come to pass,' (*al-Haqqa:* 15), came after mentioning the earth and before mentioning the sky. It is in the middle between them. It is as if He *the Almighty* is putting the human being between them. The earth that they live on will be destroyed, and its mountains will crash. So, they should not think that there is a way out for them because even the sky above them will split and turn to pieces. Can you imagine anything more?

The sky will not split by itself; rather, it is out of its submission to Allah's Order, as He *the Almighty* says: 'When the heaven bursts asunder, [1] And obeys its Lord and it must [2]' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2). As soon as the sky listens to His Order, it obeys directly and bursts asunder. Then the time of the Account comes. As soon as the sky splits, the sun is wrapped up and the stars fall. Not only does the sky listen to Allah's Order, but it also fulfils it quickly, without delay. So, His Order is directly fulfilled.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…it will be so frail' (*al-Haqqa:* 16), it means that the sky on that Day will be weak and split, as the Arabic word *Wahiya* means weak.

After being very firm, the sky will become weak. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the strength of the creation of the sky, saying: 'Are you the harder to create or the heaven? He made it. [27] He raised high its height, then put it into a right good state, [28]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 27-28); 'I swear by the heaven full of ways' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47); 'And the heaven, We raised it high with power, and most surely We are the makers of things ample' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 7). Its atoms are joined together, that is why you find it strong and firm. This strong building will be weak on the Last Day. It will have sides and edges. That is why He *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلۡمَلَكُ عَلَىٰٓ أَرۡجَآئِهَاۚ وَيَحۡمِلُ عَرۡشَ رَبِّكَ فَوۡقَهُمۡ يَوۡمَئِذٖ ثَمَٰنِيَةٞ ١٧

The angels will be on all sides of it and, on that
Day, eight of them will bear the throne of your Lord
above them [17] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 17)

The Angels will be at the edges and sides of the sky. When the Day of Judgment comes, Allah *Glorified is He* will order the lower sky to split; the Angels will be at its edges, then they descend to the earth and surround all what is on it.

However, some scholars said that the pronoun in His saying: '…on all sides of it...' (*al-Haqqa:* 17) refers to the earth. They surmise that Allah *Glorified is He* will order the Angels of the lower heaven to stand in lines on the edges of the earth, and then He orders the Angels of the second heaven to stand after them, and so on. Everyone from the jinn and mankind will find the earth surrounded.

He *the Almighty* then says: '…eight of them will bear the Throne of your Lord above them,' (*al-Haqqa:* 17). The Arabic word *'Arsh* (Throne) is used also to refer to the thrones of kings in this worldly life. Allah's Throne is mentioned in the Noble Quran in many verses, as in His saying: '…and His Dominion (Throne) (extends) on the water…' (*Hud:* 7); '…glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute (to Him),' (*al-Anbiya':* 22); and 'So exalted be Allah, the True King; no god is there but He, the Lord of the honorable Throne,' (*al-Mu'minun:* 116). Here, the Throne of Allah *the Almighty* is a sign that the matter has been settled and the whole universe is under His Control; nothing can disobey His Order.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes His Throne as great. When you hear about a great throne, you think of those great thrones that we see in this worldly life, like the throne of the Queen of Sheba which the hoopoe bird described, saying: '…she has a great throne,' (*al-Mu'minun:* 27). It is great according to the human standards. As for the Throne of Allah, it is beyond what humans can imagine; nothing resembles it. He *the Almighty* describes it, saying: '…and He is the Lord of the honorable Throne,' (*at-Tawba:* 129). Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I asked Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* about the Chair, and he said, 'O Abu Dharr, the seven heavens and the seven earths compared to the Chair are no more than a ring thrown into a vast desert. And the favour of the Throne upon the Chair is like the favour of the desert upon this ring.'

The Arabic word '*Arsh* (Throne) entails the meaning of highness, that is why it refers sometimes to the ceiling and to the bed as well. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And he raised his parents upon the throne…' (*Yusuf:* 100).

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَوۡمَئِذٖ تُعۡرَضُونَ لَا تَخۡفَىٰ مِنكُمۡ خَافِيَةٞ ﴿١٨﴾

On that Day you will be brought to judgment and
none of your secrets will remain hidden [18]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 18)

Nothing is hidden from Allah *Glorified is He* as He says in another verse: 'They conceal [their evil intentions and deeds] from the people, but they cannot conceal [them] from Allah, and He is with them [in His knowledge] when they spend the night in such as He does not accept of speech. And ever is Allah, of what they do, encompassing,' (*an-Nisa':* 108). The Arabic word *Muhit* (encompassing) means to encompass something so that it cannot escape in either the present or the future. In this sense, Allah's Knowledge encompasses everything; nothing is concealed from Him *Glorified is He*. Allah *the Almighty* is not distracted by a specific sound or sight from knowing the rest of the sounds and sights, for His sight and knowledge are All-Encompassing and Subtle. That is why the reward He gives goes in accordance with this subtle Knowledge.

Hence, you should never overlook the fact that your Lord is seeing and observing you and that nothing of what you do is concealed from Him.

Allah *Glorified is He* has told us about being presented before Him, saying: 'And they will be presented before your Lord in rows, [and He will say], ‘You have certainly come to Us just as We created you the first time. But you claimed that We would never make for you an appointment,’ (*al-Kahf:* 48). Presentation means to display all the items of the presented subject in an organised way. This is like the soldiers who display themselves to the leader in a military show, so that s/he can see every one of them standing in lines.

We will be presented in front of Allah *the Almighty* in a systematic way; no one can hide or escape. Every line will not hide the one that follows it, so all of them are apparent. We will return to Him *the Almighty* naked as we were first created; we will have nothing even to cover ourselves with, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'And they will be presented before your Lord in rows, [and He will say], ‘You have certainly come to Us just as We created you the first time…' (*al-Kahf:* 48). Every secret will be revealed then, for nothing is concealed from Him *the Almighty*.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَٰبَهُۥ بِيَمِينِهِۦ فَيَقُولُ هَآؤُمُ ٱقْرَءُوا۟ كِتَٰبِيَهْ ﴿١٩﴾
إِنِّى ظَنَنتُ أَنِّى مُلَٰقٍ حِسَابِيَهْ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَهُوَ فِى عِيشَةٍ رَّاضِيَةٍ ﴿٢١﴾
فِى جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ ﴿٢٢﴾ قُطُوفُهَا دَانِيَةٌ ﴿٢٣﴾
كُلُوا۟ وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ هَنِيٓـًٔۢا بِمَآ أَسْلَفْتُمْ فِى ٱلْأَيَّامِ ٱلْخَالِيَةِ ﴿٢٤﴾

Anyone who is given his Record in his right hand will say, ‘Here is my Record, read it [19] I knew I would meet my Reckoning’ [20] and so he will have a pleasant life [21] in a lofty Garden [22] with clustered fruit within his reach [23] It will be said, ‘Eat and drink to your heart’s content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by’ [24] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 19 - 24)

Allah *the Almighty* is Supreme and All Powerful over all things. He will give every one of us his/her own record on the Day of Judgment. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: 'The Day every soul will find what it has done of good present [before it] and what it has done of evil, it will wish that between itself and that [evil] was a great distance…' (*Al-'Imran:* 30). He *Glorified is He* does not hold the people accountable except for their deeds written in their record which they will read themselves to be a proof against them.

The recording is not as what we imagine, for even the voices and breaths are recorded. On the Day of Judgment, everyone will find that all that they did is written and they will be ordered to read it themselves, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day,' (*al-Isra':* 14). This shows that when the human being sees what was written in their record, they will recognise all of it. In our worldly life, some people record everything against their enemies so that none can deny it when they read it. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* leaves the account of everyone to themselves. Everything is recorded, and one's record will come to them on that Day and they will be the reckoner against themselves. Everything done in this worldly life is preserved, for the Angels are writing down all of our deeds, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And most surely there are keepers over you [10] Honorable recorders, [11] They know what you do [12]' (*al-Infitar:* 10-11).

Some people deny the possibility of writing and recording the deeds. For those people we say, 'Look at what the human mind invented today; the people now can record pictures, voices, fingerprints, etc. These are the human abilities, what do you think then of the infinite Ability of the Creator?!'

The record in which your deeds are recorded is yours; that is why Allah *the Almighty* says here: 'Anyone who is given his Record in his right hand…' (*al-Haqqa:* 19). Taking the Record with the right hand is a glad tiding that the person will be saved from the hell and will have an easy Account. Their face will become bright. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these shall read their book; and they shall not be dealt with a whit unjustly,' (*al-Isra':* 71). After receiving this glad tiding, they will hasten to read their Record and then show it to the people and take pride in it. This is the reward of the one who followed Allah's Way of Guidance and did not blindly follow the paths of error. They will proudly show the people their Record because it contains nothing of which they are ashamed. This is like the case of the student who shows their high marks to the people.

One the other hand, the one who is given their Record in their left hand will say: ‘If only I had never been given any Record [25] and knew nothing of my Reckoning. [26] How I wish death had been the end of me. [27] My wealth has been no use to me, [28] and my power has vanished, [29]’ (*al-Haqqa:* 25-29). Hence, we should be careful in order not to be in that critical situation on the Day of Judgment. We will be faced with a Book that records everything, however small it is. This is a reminder for us while we still have time, so we should repent to Allah *the Almighty* and maintain our relationship with Him.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…Here is my Record, read it,’ (*al-Haqqa:* 19), the last word of this verse ends with the Arabic letter *Ha'*, which is called *Ha' As-Sakt* (stopping). It shows the hardness of that Day, for even the happy person stops at the end of every sentence to take breath. So, what about the other miserable people?

Then Allah *Glorified is He* relates that the one who is given his/her Record in his/her right hand will say: 'I knew I would meet my Reckoning,’ (*al-Haqqa:* 20). The Arabic word *Zhann* here means that they were certain, it does not mean to doubt the Reckoning, or else they would not be a believer, nor will they take their Record with their right hand. They were sure that they will be accounted, and will find their reward on the Day of Judgment. In this vein, He *the Almighty* says: 'Who know that they shall meet their Lord and that they shall return to Him’ (*al-Baqara:* 46). This verse shows that even if the one is not completely certain about meeting their Lord, they should adhere to His Way of Guidance and do righteous deeds. So, what if they are completely certain about that?

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The chiefs of those who disbelieved from among his people said: Most surely we see you in folly, and most surely we think you to be of the liars,’ (*al-A‘raf:* 66). So, the Arabic word *Zhann* can mean certainty, as in the verse in which He *the Almighty* speaks about the criminals, saying: 'And the criminals will see the Fire and will be certain that they are to fall therein. And they will not find from it a way elsewhere’ (*al-Kahf:* 53).

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And so he will have a pleasant life,' (*al-Haqqa:* 23). They will live a satisfactory life. They will never be dissatisfied in it. This is because in paradise there is no death, poverty, illness, fear, or madness. They will be safe from any fear or poverty. Not only will they be satisfied, but paradise will also be satisfied with them and yearn for the admittance of its dwellers. It is the pleasure that makes the faces bright, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '(Some) faces on that day shall be bright, [22] Looking to their Lord, [23]' (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23); and 'You will recognise in their faces the brightness of bliss' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 24). The happiness appears on their faces and features and everyone can see it.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about the place of this pleasant life, saying: 'In a lofty Garden' (*al-Haqqa:* 22). The word *Janna* (Garden) entails the meaning of covering. It is a Garden with high trees that cover whoever walks among them. It is unlike the gardens with short flowers that only give pleasure to the eyes. It has high, dense trees that cover the people with their shadows and fruits. This Garden is sufficient for anyone, as they will not need anything else. The one who suffers insufficiency looks forward to what makes them self-sufficient, but the one who is self-sufficient is not in need of anything else.

In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: '(Other) faces on that day shall be happy, [8] Well-pleased because of their striving, [9] In a lofty Garden [10]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 8-10). It is high in status, and high in its degrees. It is mentioned sometimes in plural 'Gardens' because it has many different levels. There are the Garden of *Al-Firdaws,* the Garden of *Eden,* the Garden of the Bliss, the Garden of *Eternity*, the Garden of Peace, the Garden of Refuge, and the Garden of *'Illyyun,* which is the highest one.

Then Allah *the Almighty* describes this lofty Garden, saying: 'with clustered fruit within his reach,' (*al-Haqqa:* 23). He *Glorified is He* makes the fruits near to His servant in order not to make them tired. Elsewhere He says: 'And close down upon them (shall be) its shadows and its fruits shall be made near (to them), being easy to reach,' (*al-Insan:* 14). The fruits will descend to where they are and they can easily reach it, whether standing, sitting, or lying down. They descend to them regardless of their position. In this vein, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The Paradise was presented in front of me, if I stretched my hand, I could reach its fruits.' That is because they are near to the believers, whatever was their position. Further, Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'One can reach the fruits while lying down.' Qatada also said, 'Neither thorns nor far distance prevent them from reaching to the fruits.' Thus, if they want to eat from the fruits, they descend down till they eat as much as they like. It reaches to their mouth directly if they like.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'It will be said, 'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by' (*al-Haqqa:* 24). The beginning of this verse was repeated in many verses, as in His saying: 'Eat and drink of the provisions of Allah and do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief,' (*al-Baqara:* 60) and '… eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn…' (*al-Baqara:* 187). These two verses speak about this worldly life. The first one orders us to eat and drink without corrupting the earth. So, eating and drinking is conditioned by not causing corruption. The second one speaks about the time for eating and drinking before Fasting: '…and eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn…' (*al-Baqara:* 187).

As for the verse under discussion, it speaks about the Hereafter. Eating and drinking there are unconditional. If the worship was difficult for you, you should remember the easiness and the good reward you will get in the Hereafter. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by,' (*al-Haqqa:* 24). The verse mentions both the deed and its reward. The deed is the good actions in this worldly life, and the reward is the eating and drinking to the heart's content in the paradise. The Day of Judgment is the time for the reward that will be ever lasting. It is a reward for what they have done. They have been exposed to oppression and torture for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* and thus their reward is to have ever lasting happiness in the Hereafter.

The food and drink are delicious and satisfying while eating. The food in this worldly life may be delicious, but may cause health problems. By contrast, in the paradise, they will not fear any illness or harm from food. They will eat and drink even without urination of defecation. Moreover, they will eat from the fruits of paradise, and drink from its rivers and springs. Besides, they will drink unaltered water, purified honey, and milk whose taste never changes.

Allah *the Almighty* describes for us the drink of the people of paradise and even the pots and cups in which it is served, saying: 'Trays of gold and cups will be passed round them, (there will be) therein all that the one's inner-selves could desire, all that the eyes could delight in, and you will abide therein,' (*az-Zukhruf:* 71); and 'They will be served by immortal boys, [17] With cups, and jugs, and a glass from the flowing wine[18], Wherefrom they will get neither any aching of the head, nor any intoxication, [19]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 17-19). They will not exert any effort; these things will be passed around to them. The drink is poured from jugs into cups, and the food is served in trays of gold. It is the utmost welfare. They are not just filling their stomachs; the mere sight of these is an enjoyment. What do you think then of the taste? They will eat whatever they desire. This is like when a dear guest visits you and you ask him/her, 'What do you like to eat?' This is because you want to serve them the best food their soul desires. The believers will receive such a great reward for what they have done in the previous days of good deeds, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: There shall every soul become acquainted with what it sent before…' (*Yunus:* 30); and 'Eat and drink pleasantly for what you did' (*at-Tur:* 91). In this connection, Qatada said, 'Your current days will go, but they lead to everlasting days, so work hard and do good during these days as much as you can.'

Then Allah *the Glorified and Exalted* tells us about the other party who is given their Record in their left hand, saying:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَٰبَهُۥ بِشِمَالِهِۦ فَيَقُولُ يَٰلَيْتَنِى لَمْ أُوتَ كِتَٰبِيَهْ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَلَمْ أَدْرِ مَا حِسَابِيَهْ ﴿٢٦﴾
يَٰلَيْتَهَا كَانَتِ ٱلْقَاضِيَةَ ﴿٢٧﴾ مَآ أَغْنَىٰ عَنِّى مَالِيَهْ ﴿٢٨﴾ هَلَكَ عَنِّى سُلْطَٰنِيَهْ ﴿٢٩﴾

But anyone who is given his Record in his left hand will say, 'If only I had never been given any Record [25] and knew nothing of my Reckoning [26] How I wish death had been the end of me [27] My wealth has been no use to me [28] and my power has vanished [29] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 25 - 29)

The one who is given his Record in their left hand is the opposite of the one who takes it with their right hand. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And as to him who is given his book behind his back [10] He shall call for perdition, [11]' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 10-11) 'And the Book shall be placed, then you will see the guilty fearing from what is in it, and they will say: Ah! Woe to us! What a book is this! It does not omit a small one or a great one, but numbers them (all); and what they had done they shall find present (there); and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone' (*al-Kahf:* 49).

The one who will take their record with their right hand will be happy and proud to show it to the people because they have nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, the one who will take it with their left hand will be ashamed of what was written in it. Everything he did will be written, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'On the Day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time…' (*Al-'Imran:* 30). The will hope to be as far as possible from their bad deeds and will be trembling with fear. He *the Almighty* shows them how the scene will be and warns them when they still have time to rectify their actions. On that Day, their hearts will be struck with fear, then they will say in despair: '…Woe to us…' (*al-Kahf:* 49).

Allah *Glorified is He* then relates that such a miserable person will say: 'How I wish death had been the end of me' (*al-Haqqa:* 27). They wish to die or that there is no Resurrection after death. They wish that they were not resurrected to see their evil deeds in front of them. Thus, the worst thing they hated in this worldly life, i.e. death will be their most desired wish because it will save them from facing their punishment for their bad deeds.

In the chapter of *az-Zukhruf*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they will cry: 'O Malik (Keeper of Hell)! Let your Lord make an end of us.' He will say: 'Surely you shall abide forever,' (*az-Zukhruf:* 77). The people of hell will ask for death to get rid of their eternal punishment. They will wish to die first when they receive their Records in order not to suffer the consequences of their bad deeds, but this does not work. They will ask for death again after being thrown into hell, but this will not work either. How can they die then? The death will be brought in a place between the Paradise and Hell, in the form of ram, and will be slaughtered in front of them all, and it will be said, 'O people of Paradise, eternity for you, and no death. O people of Hell, eternity for you and no death.' Their hope will be shattered. The disbelievers wished to die to be relieved from their punishment, but He *the Almighty* puts an end to their hopes by causing death itself to come to an end. Thus, no one will die, for death is dead.

As for their saying: 'My wealth has been no use to me,' (*al-Haqqa:* 28) it means that their great wealth will not avail them, or lessen some of their torture. It will be of no use as it will not make them exempted from suffering the consequences of their evil deeds. That is because they did not fulfil the right of Allah *Glorified is He* regarding it nor made use of it to establish good relations with their relatives. On the Day of Judgment, even if they offers it as a ransom, it will not be accepted, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Surely, those who disbelieve and die while they are unbelievers, the earth full of gold shall not be accepted from one of them, though he should offer to ransom himself with it…' (*Al-'Imran:* 91). Thus, He *the Almighty* will not accept their ransom, even if they offered the whole earth full of gold as a ransom. However, they will not find that gold because on that Day they will have nothing. In another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: 'And if those who did wrong had all that is in the earth entirely and the like of it with it, they would [attempt to] ransom themselves thereby from the worst of the punishment on the Day of Resurrection. And there will appear to them from Allah that which they had not taken into account' (*az-Zumar:* 47). They will say, 'Take from us all what we own and let us be saved,' but this will not be accepted.

Allah *the Almighty* then relates that they will say: 'And my power has vanished' (*al-Haqqa:* 29). The authority is the power that forces the person to do something. It is either the power of convincing or the power of forcing. Thus, there are two kinds of authority; convincing authority and forcing authority. The difference between them is that the former persuades you to do something, and, consequently, you become convinced of what you do. As for the forcing one, it forces you to do something without being convinced. Further, the forcing authority affects the body, while the convincing authority affects the mind and thoughts. So, the force can control the body, but it can never control the heart. You can force somebody to prostrate unwillingly; but by convincing, he will do this willingly.

Both meanings are possible in the verse in question. It could mean that their convincing argument in the worldly life has vanished, or their authority and power over people had gone and they became humiliated and despised. Now, they are alone, without excuses or power.

When we ponder over the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'But anyone who is given his Record in his left hand…' (*al-Haqqa:* 25), along with His saying: 'And as to him who is given his book behind his back,' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 10) we find something wonderful; how can this happen? Some scholars tried to understand this. Some of them said, 'They will put their left hand behind their back while receiving their record, while their right hand will be tied to their neck'.

Some others held that those who will take their Records with the left hand are the believers who had committed great sins; while those who will take the Records behind their backs are the disbelievers because the verses continue: 'He shall call for perdition, [11] And enter into burning fire. [12] Surely he was (erstwhile) joyful among his followers. [13] Surely he thought that he would never return, [14]' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 11-14). This is because they do not want to see their horrible misdeeds when they are given their Records. In this way the two verses are reconciled.

With regard to the verses: 'But anyone who is given his Record in his left hand will say, 'If only I had never been given any Record [25] and knew nothing of my Reckoning. [26] How I wish death had been the end of me. [27] My wealth has been no use to me, [28] and my power has vanished, [29]' (*al-Haqqa:* 25-29) you can feel the sad tone that shows their great sadness and regret. Nothing will stop this sad tone except the following Supreme, horrible Order:

خُذُوهُ فَغُلُّوهُ ﴿٣٠﴾ ثُمَّ ٱلْجَحِيمَ صَلُّوهُ ﴿٣١﴾
ثُمَّ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ ذَرْعُهَا سَبْعُونَ ذِرَاعًا فَٱسْلُكُوهُ ﴿٣٢﴾

Take him, put a collar on him [30] lead him to burn in the blazing Fire [31] and [bind him] in a chain seventy metres long [32] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 30 - 32)

How horrible this situation is! Allah *the Almighty* will order the Angels to tie their hands or feet into their neck, then to drag them on their face. When they hear the Order, seventy thousand Angels will hasten to implement it. They will be tied by the heavy chains. How horrible this end is! After long waiting for Account, and for reading the Record which includes the misdeeds of disbelief and disobedience, Allah *the Almighty* issues this horrible verdict against them. They will hear it themselves, and see the Angels who hasten to implement it. The shackle is a piece of iron that gathers the hands to the neck to make them unable to move. This is another form of humiliation for them. In this connection He *the Almighty* says: 'These are they who disbelieve in their Lord, and these have chains on their necks, and they are the inmates of the fire; in it they shall abide,' (*ar-Ra'd:* 5). As for the word *Asfad*, it means the shackles of feet.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Lead him to burn in the blazing Fire,' (*al-Haqqa:* 31) it means to drive them to the hellfire to taste its torture. The same meaning is repeated in His saying: 'Save him who will go to Hell,' (*as-Saffat:* 16) and 'None shall enter it but the most unhappy' (*al-A'la:* 15). The Arabic word *Al-Jahim* (hell) means the great fire. They were arrogant in front of people before, as they said that they lost their authority. On the Day of Judgment, they will be driven to the greatest fire so that their punishment will be from the same kind as their sin.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And [bind him] in a chain seventy metres long' (*al-Haqqa:* 32). The chain consists of regular rings and its length is seventy cubits. Every cubit consists of seventy *Ba's* which is longer than the distance between Mecca and *Kufa*. The chain will be entered into their vent and come out from their nose so that they will not be able to stand on their feet. The chains are mentioned in many verses, as in His saying: 'Surely We have prepared for the unbelievers chains and shackles and a burning Fire,' (*al-Insan:* 4); and 'When the fetters and the chains shall be on their necks; they shall be dragged,' (*Ghafir:* 71).

Everything that is continuing after in a systematic way is said to be *Musalsal* (chained). The chain will surround their body from all sides so that they can never move, as if they are inside it.

إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَلَا يَحُضُّ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ ٱلْمِسْكِينِ ﴿٣٤﴾

He would not believe in Almighty God [33]
he never encouraged feeding the hungry [34]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 33 - 34)

Such a disbeliever who will be given their Record in their left hand did not believe in the Oneness and the Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He*. He *the Almighty* does not wrong them, for they are punished because of their disbelief. He *Glorified is He* made injustice forbidden for Himself. It is as if He says to the keepers of hell, 'Take them to the hell as a recompense for their disbelief in Allah in the worldly life.'

These are the reasons for His Judgment, and the reasons are always mentioned after the judgment. For instance, when a judge delivers a verdict, there must be reasons for such a verdict, which represent the legal justifications for the punishment or innocence. A judge states that whereas such and such happened, then under the provisions of article such and such of such and such law, the verdict is such and such, i.e. whereas such and such happened, or did not happen, then such and such is the verdict. Hence, the reasons or the grounds of a verdict signify the judge's justifications for issuing it.

Now, regarding the one who is given their Record in their left hand, the reasons for chastising them is their disbelief in the Oneness and the Greatness of Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, they are punished in this way on account of their disbelief in Him *Glorified is He* in the worldly life.

However, why does Allah *Glorified is He* use His Most Beautiful Name ‘the Almighty’? Allah *Glorified is He* is the Almighty, and owing to His Almightiness, He bestowed some of His Attributes on His Creation. For example, the strong person has the power to help the weak, but Allah *Glorified is He* has the absolute Mighty Power. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* grants His Creation out of His Wisdom, His Withholding, His Expansion and His Richness, but all the Beautiful Attributes belong to Him and are granted to us from Him. Unlike the human beings, His Attributes are intrinsic and eternal.

Out of His Greatness, all Grandeur belongs to Him. Knowing this, the people will not be arrogant to one another, and only the one who neglects this fact acts arrogantly. On the contrary, the one evoking the Greatness and Grandeur of Allah *the Almighty* is always humble and humiliates themselves at His Grandeur and feels ashamed of behaving arrogantly with other people. Had the disbelievers recalled the Greatness of their Lord, they would have believed in Him, His Oneness, His Right to be worshipped Alone and His Guidance to be followed. Their problem lies in their disbelief in Allah *the Almighty* and in His Existence. Even if they claimed they are Muslims, you find that they displease Him on account of disregarding His Greatness. Additionally, they do not have sympathy for the poor and the needy around them, just as they does not call the Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He*. The verse in question states: 'He never encouraged feeding the hungry,' (*al-Haqqa:* 34); and in another verse, He *the Almighty* describes such a people as: 'Nay! But you do not honor the orphan, [17] Nor do you urge one another to feed the poor, [18]' (*al-Bayyina:* 17-18). Neglecting the rights of the weak in one's money brings forth evil and bad consequences. On hearing that, the rich knew what they should do. Some people, however, said, 'We do not possess money to feed the poor.' It is as though the following verse specifically addresses them: 'Nor do you urge one another to feed the poor,' (*al-Bayyina:* 18). It shows them the way of giving, i.e. by urging others to give the poor. Thus, the one who does not have enough money to give the poor should urge the rich to give them. In fact, 'urging' contributes to this act of giving.

The heart of the one who does not believe in Allah *the Almighty* is dead, ruined, barren and devoid of faith and light. Further, it has no mercy towards the people, especially the poor people who are in a dire need for mercy. They neither pay attention to the needy people nor urge others to feed them, even though this is a social duty that the believers are commanded to do. Thus, abstaining from urging and exhorting one another to feed the poor is deemed evil and abhorrent. If the disbeliever had believed in Allah *the Almighty* recalled His Greatness, accepted Recompense as true, and had the reality of belief established in their heart, they would not have treated the orphan with harshness or disinclined to urge others to feed the poor.

The reality of belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Recompense is not mere lip service. Rather it changes one's heart, stimulating the person to do good to their fellow humans who are in need of care and protection. This inspires us to believe undoubtedly that feeding or urging others to feed the poor and caring for the needy are intimately related to belief in Allah, the Great, and certainty of His Oneness. They even forget that, in order that their money does not turn into a nemesis, they should feed the poor people or urge one another to feed them, since how could such money be blessed when it brings about evil on its owner.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَيْسَ لَهُ ٱلْيَوْمَ هَٰهُنَا حَمِيمٌ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَلَا طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ غِسْلِينٍ ﴿٣٦﴾
لَّا يَأْكُلُهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱلْخَٰطِـُٔونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

So today he has no real friend here [35] and the only food he has is the filth [36] that only sinners eat [37]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 35 - 37)

Such a disbeliever neither believes in Allah *the Almighty* in the worldly life, nor do they urge others to feed the poor. They abandoned the people and did not help them at the time of their need. As they disbelieved in Him *the Almighty* how could they then find a helper? On the Day of Judgment, they will neither find Him *Glorified is He* on their side, nor will the people help them, even their own limbs will abandon them and bear witness against them. In the Hereafter, they will not be protected from Allah's punishment by even their intimate friend to whom they used to show affection and care and whom they protected from whatever affliction they had in the worldly life. So, they will have no friend to save them or experience the chastisement on their behalf. Therefore, they will have no good friend or relative to intercede for or benefit them, for on that Day a relative will flee from their own relative and the lover will flee from their beloved.

Even if they had a friend who used to help them and stand on their side in the worldly life, they will abandon them and be their enemies, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The friends shall on that day be enemies one to another, except those who guard (against evil),' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67). On the other hand, the righteous people spur one another to obedience and you find one of them saying to another, 'You used to encourage me to obey Allah, and you guided and reminded me when I was negligent.' So, love grows between them, whereas the disbelievers curse each other for deluding one another. When they meet, those who were friends for the sake of Allah *the Almighty* rejoice at each other, as they protected one another from disobedience. By contrast, the disbelievers who used to commit disobedience together curse each other. On the Day of Resurrection, they will find no one to rescue them from Allah's Chastisement, given that a relative will flee from their own relative and the lover will flee from their beloved.

Not only will they be deprived of friends and supporters, but they will also be deprived of food, except for 'the filth', as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And the only food he has is the filth,' (*al-Haqqa:* 36). The Arabic word *Al-Ghisleen* (filth) signifies the bloody rotten discharge of foul scum and filthy pus exuding from the bodies of the people of hell. They will have nothing else to feed on but this repugnant rotten waste. In this way, they will be afflicted by two calamities: having no helper and feeding on the bloody rotten discharge of foul scum and filthy pus exuding from their bodies, which is the worst and the filthiest food. Ibn 'Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Filth is what exudes from their veins and what melts from their bodies.'(1) Further, Ibn 'Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him* disclosed how appalling their food is, saying: 'Were a drop of this filth to fall on earth, it would spoil people's life.'(2)

In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They shall have no food but of thorns [6] Which will neither fatten nor avail against hunger, [7]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 6-7). In the hellfire, there are trees similar to the thorns; they are more bitter than aloe and more rotten than a corpse. This is the most evil and the most repugnant food. Moreover, when they have to eat it, it chokes them, as stated in His saying: 'Surely, with Us are heavy fetters and a flaming Fire, [12] And food that chokes and a painful punishment, [13]' (*al-Muzzammil:* 12-13). Hence, whether this food is filth, thorn or *Zaqqum*, it can barely be swallowed; it chokes and blocks their throats. This is because such food is extremely repulsive and revolting, even to the animals, so how can a human being eat it? Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘That only sinners eat,’ (*al-Haqqa:* 37). This food is especially prepared for and restricted to the sinners who used to commit sins intentionally. Those who deliberately commit sins and acts of disobedience will not be showered with Allah’s Mercy and Forgiveness because they used to commit such misdeeds openly and blatantly. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Every one of my followers will be forgiven except those who expose (openly) their wrongdoings.’(1) The wrongdoers are also those who disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* and ascribed partners to Him.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Samarqandi relates this narration on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See As-Samarqandi, Bahr Al-'Ulum, 3/491.*

(2) *In his Tafsir, Al-Wahidi narrates this narration on the authority of Mujahid ibn Jabr. See Al-Wahidi An-Naysaburi, Al-Wasit Fi Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Majid, 4/348.*

The Arabic word *Khahti’* (wrongdoer) is an active participle of the verb ‘to do wrong’ which means to do something wrong deliberately, whereas the *Mukhti’* (mistaken) is the one who intends to do the good but does evil unintentionally. This can be inferred from the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and there is no blame on you concerning that in which you made a mistake…' (*al-Ahzab:* 5). This verse shows that there is no blame on one concerning that in which they made a mistake unintentionally, while their true intention was to do good. However, the wrongdoers rebel against Allah *Glorified is He,* reject His Way of Guidance and place obstacles in the way of applying His *Shari’a*. Therefore, they turn away from Truth. He *Glorified is He* describes those rebellious people, saying: 'Pharaoh, too, and those before him, and the ruined cities: these people committed grave sins’ (*al-Haqqa:* 9). This means that they committed sins and acts of disobedience or that they were evil.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *In his book, Al-Bazzar (d. 292) narrates this Hadith on the authority of Abu Hurayra with the ending: '...and an example of such disclosure is one who commits a sin in secret, then publicises it.' It is also narrated by Al-Khara’iti on the authority of Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him with a slightly different wording. See Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8096; and Al-Khara'iti, Makarim Al-Akhlaq, Hadith no. 403.*

فَلَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِمَا تُبۡصِرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾ وَمَا لَا تُبۡصِرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

So I swear by what you can see [38]
and by what you cannot see [39]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 38 - 39)

Allah *Glorified is He* swears by the seen as well as the unseen things which are veiled from us. Allah *Glorified is He* swears by that which we can see of His excellent and perfect creation as an evidence of His Absolute Omnipotence, Greatness and Perfection. The Arabic word *La* (no) in this verse does not denote negation; rather, it affirms the oath. That this fact is so lucidly clear that it needs no oath, but if He *the Almighty* were to take an oath, He would swear by such and such. The oath here encompasses what we see and what we do not see. What we can see refers to the worldly life, while what we cannot see refers to the Hereafter. It could also mean all what is visible and invisible in the heavens and the earth. Another possible interpretation is that the seen things refer to the physical beings and the unseen ones refer to the spirits. Further, what we can see may refer to the human beings and what we do not see are the Jinn and the Angels. Allah states:

إِنَّهُۥ لَقَوۡلُ رَسُولٖ كَرِيمٖ ﴿٤٠﴾ وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوۡلِ شَاعِرٖۚ قَلِيلٗا مَّا تُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾
وَلَا بِقَوۡلِ كَاهِنٖۚ قَلِيلٗا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

This [Quran] is the speech of an honoured messenger [40]
not the words of a poet – how little you believe! [41]
nor the words of a soothsayer – how little you reflect! [42]
(The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 40 - 42)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'This [Quran] is the speech of an honoured messenger,' (*al-Haqqa:* 40), is mentioned twice in the Quran: in the chapter in question, referring to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and in the chapter of *at-Takwir*: 'This is the speech of a noble messenger, [19] who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne [20] he is obeyed there and worthy of trust, [21]' (*at-Takwir:* 19-21) in which the word 'messenger' refers to the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *Allah's peace be upon him*. Thus, the Messenger is sometimes from mankind, and at other times from the Angels, and in both cases his duty is but to clearly convey the Message, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…and nothing rests on the Messenger but clear delivering (of the Message)' (*an-Nur:* 54). Neither did the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *Allah's peace be upon him* nor Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* contrive the Quran. Rather, it was revealed from Allah *the Almighty* with truth, without their interfering in it. So, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* recited and conveyed the Quran from Allah *the Almighty* but has absolutely no hand in it.

Hence, this Quran is the Divine Speech brought by a messenger honoured by Allah, i.e. Jibril (Gabriel). However, when it is said that it is the word of an honoured Messenger, then it refers to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. The honoured messenger is the one worthy of regard with Allah *the Almighty*. His saying: 'This [Quran] is the speech of an honoured Messenger,' (*al-Haqqa:* 40) represents a response to the oath in His saying: 'So I swear by what you can see [38] and by what you cannot see [39]' (*al-Haqqa:* 38-39).

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Not the words of a poet…' (*al-Jathiya:* 41), they claimed that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was a poet. Had such a claim been leveled by others who do not know him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* or by those who are not acquainted with eloquence and rhetoric, it would have been acceptable, given that the people of Mecca knew poetry, prose, oratory and writing. This is why we find some of them, with a fairly pure nature, saying that it can never be the word of a poet. Surprisingly, the disbelievers of Mecca accused him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* of being a poet, for they were people of eloquence, oratory and rhetoric. They were highly experienced in distinguishing the good styles with rhythmic patterns that they used to assign markets solely for poetry, such as Dhu Al-Majaz, Dhu Al-Majanna and 'Ukazh, and hung the best of their poems on the curtains of *Ka'ba*, yet they could not distinguish between poetry and the Quranic style!

In fact, they knew the difference very well, but they labeled him as a poet for a certain purpose stated in the following verse: 'Or do they say: A poet, we wait for him the evil accidents of time,' (*al-Jathiya:* 30). With 'poetry', they meant the sweet words which attract attention and arouse emotions. Allah

Glorified is He decided on this matter, saying: 'And We have not taught him poetry, nor is it meet for him; it is nothing but a reminder and a plain Quran,' (*Ya Sin:* 69). He *Glorified is He* did not teach Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* poetry, nor should he have learnt it. But what is the reason for this? This is because the Arabs know that the best of poetry is the most filled with lies. So, He *the Almighty* wants to inform the people that even though he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is not experienced in rhetoric and literary styles, he surprises the entire world with the best of all rhetorical styles, declaring it to be from Allah *Glorified is He*.

Further, he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* lived among them for a long period, but no one had ever heard him composing poetry. Therefore, everything he brought was revealed from Allah *the Almighty* and should not be attributed to him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*.

Regarding His saying: 'And We have not taught him poetry, nor is it meet for him; it is nothing but a reminder and a plain Quran,' (*Ya Sin:* 69) it means that learning poetry is not befitting for him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* though he was qualified to do so, and Allah *Glorified is He* could have taught him poetry and rhetoric styles. For this reason, when some people alleged that the Quran is Prophet Muhammad's own words, Allah *Glorified is He* tells him to reply to them, saying: 'Indeed I have lived a lifetime among you before it; do you not then understand?' (*Yunus:* 16) He *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* lived among the people of Mecca for forty years during which he did not compose a single verse of poetry.

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* did not want him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to be a poet. In this regard, we should note that there is a distinction between negating one's ability to do a certain action and negating the fact that it is befitting for them. When Allah *Glorified is He* affirms that he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is not a poet and is not intended to be so, one may think that he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* cannot compose poetry due to lacking the required tools, such as the linguistic skills, sensibility, etc. However, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* can compose it, but it is not befitting for him to do so. As poetry is based on imagination, Allah *Glorified is He* kept him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* from it in order for people not to think that what was revealed to him was merely poetic imaginations. Yet, his nature was not too respectable to compose it; rather, he was extremely delicate and sensitive.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…how little you believe,' (*al-Haqqa:* 41), it means that they did not believe at all, for this style is used in Arabic to indicate that something does not happen at all. Another possible interpretation is that they swiftly go back to disbelief after embracing Islam. Little do they believe in the Quran and its Divine Authorship! The Arabic particle *Ma* in the verse is, perhaps, used to utterly negate their faith. However, it may be a verbal noun describing their faith as little.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Nor the words of a soothsayer– how little you reflect!' (*al-Haqqa:* 42) The Quran is neither the words of a poet nor that of a soothsayer. This is because the devils inspire the soothsayers to be evil and misleading, whilst Allah *the Almighty* has purified and guarded the Quran against soothsaying. So, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is neither a soothsayer, nor is the Quran inspired from soothsaying. A soothsayer is the one who forges lies and alleges that he can foresee the future. It is the astrologer who tells the people about certain things which are mostly untrue and claims to be able to guide the people to their lost properties and unseen things; they are paid for that. They claim to be informed by the Jinn, and may resort to astrology, the zodiac or astronomical calculations.

The Glorious Quran has nothing to do with soothsaying composed in a rhymed prose which the people of Mecca were familiar with. We should also note that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* forbade such rhymed prose.(1) 'Utba ibn Rabi'a *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'By Allah, I heard the soothsaying, poetry and eloquent speeches, but found nothing comparable to the Quran.' In addition, Allah *the Almighty* states in another verse: 'Therefore continue to remind, for by the grace of your Lord, you are not a soothsayer or a madman' (*at-Tur:* 29). So, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* has nothing to do with soothsaying, which entails fortune-telling and claiming to know the unseen. It used to allure people with the little of truth and the much of falsehood which they forged to mislead them thereby. They were highly influential and the people used to consult them in all their religious and mundane affairs.

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(1) Saj' Al-Kuhhan refers to highly structured and alliterated styles of language intended to attract attention. *See Al-Qamus Al-Fiqhi, 1/326.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…how little you reflect,' (*al-Haqqa:* 42), it means that they hardly mind or receive admonition. This Quranic phrase is mentioned in many verses in the Quran. For example, He *the Almighty* says: 'Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord and do not follow guardians besides Him, how little do you mind,' (*al-A'raf:* 3); and 'Or, Who answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and He will make you successors in the earth. Is there a god with Allah? Little is it that you mind!' (*an-Naml:* 62) If they thought and reflected, they would know that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is neither a poet nor a soothsayer, and that what he brought from Allah *the Almighty* is not poetry nor the rhymed prose of the soothsayers, but rather, it is as what Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards:

تَنزِيلٌ مِّن رَّبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

This [Quran] is a message sent down from the Lord
of the Worlds [43] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 43)

In fact, the Quran is a revelation from the Almighty, the All Wise. 'Sending down' here denotes consecutive revelation of parts of the Quran. This is because it was sent down in its entirety to the lower heaven, and then was revealed gradually by the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) *Allah's peace be upon him* to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* revealed it consecutively, verse after verse, so that one of its noble verses may be received by a pure heart, and then instills belief in it. Not only the Quran but also all the previous Scripture were revealed from Allah, the Lord of the worlds. These previous Scriptures brought forth the laws of a specific Messenger, but they were not the miracles attesting to the truth of what they communicated from Allah *the Almighty*. By contrast, the Quran is the Way of Guidance as well as the miracle of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. All the Arabic derivatives of the word 'sending down' suggest that it came from a higher to a lower place, as though you receive something from a higher authority, and that is why no one should seek any other authority.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'This [Quran] is a message sent down from the Lord of the Worlds,' (*al-Haqqa:* 43). As Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of the worlds, the entire universe belongs to Him and nothing goes beyond His Control, so let the people be assured in this worldly life that their Lord has not created them in vain, nor has He left them without aim, since He sent down to them a guidance to lead them to the Path of Truth.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَلَوۡ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيۡنَا بَعۡضَ ٱلۡأَقَاوِيلِ ﴿٤٤﴾ لَأَخَذۡنَا مِنۡهُ بِٱلۡيَمِينِ ﴿٤٥﴾
ثُمَّ لَقَطَعۡنَا مِنۡهُ ٱلۡوَتِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ فَمَا مِنكُم مِّنۡ أَحَدٍ عَنۡهُ حَٰجِزِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

If [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us [44]
We would certainly have seized his right hand [45]
and cut off his lifeblood [46] and none of you could have
defended him [47] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 44 - 47)

This is a threat and a warning to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. Had the Quran been made up by him, he would not have included this verse. Yet, it is a revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* and he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* did not conceal a single letter thereof, as it is sent down from the Lord of the Worlds. He *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* was endowed with absolute honesty and truthfulness, and that is why he did not conceal anything of the revelation. His people should have thought of this aspect of his character and reflected upon his truthfulness when he told them about personal matters which they did not know. Is this not a conclusive proof of his truthfulness?

Therefore, be assured that the Book within your hands is the Words of Allah *the Almighty* revealed from the Preserved Tablet which Allah *Glorified is He* describes as: '…a book that is protected [78] None shall touch it save the purified ones, [79]' (*at-Talaq:* 78-79). Then, the Trustworthy Spirit, i.e. Jibril (Gabriel), brought it down. As he is trustworthy, he made no changes in it.

Afterwards, it was brought down upon the heart of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* about whom, He *Glorified is He* says here: 'If [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us, [44] We would certainly have seized his right hand [45]' (*al-Haqqa:* 44-45).

Hence, the Quran is guarded in the Preserved Tablet, was preserved through the honesty of the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *Allah's peace be upon him* who brought it down from heaven, and through Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*. So, no one has the right to question the authenticity of the Quran because it has been divinely preserved in all possible ways. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* could have concealed the verses wherein Allah *the Almighty* admonishes him, such as His saying: 'O Prophet! Why do you forbid (yourself) that which Allah has made lawful for you; you seek to please your wives; and Allah is All Forgiving, All Merciful,' (*at-Tahrim:* 1) and 'Allah pardon you! Why did you give them leave…' (*at-Tawba:* 43). Nevertheless, he was honest in communicating what was revealed to him. Thus, the Quran we have today is the same as it was revealed from Allah *the Almighty* and not a single letter of it has been changed. It will remain preserved under Allah's Care until the Day of Judgment.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'If [the Prophet] had attributed some fabrication to Us,' (*al-Haqqa:* 44), 'to fabricate' means for him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to bring something from his own accord which was not revealed to him, nor was he permitted to communicate, something which never happened. Had he made up a single word from himself which was not revealed to him, Allah *the Almighty* would have seized him by the Right Hand, i.e. with Power and Might, as the 'right hand' for Arabs is stronger than the left one. However, both of the Hands of my Lord are Right and Blessed, but He gave this symbol to help us understand the meaning. 'Fabrications' refer to the forged lies which cannot be anything more than untruthful sayings. In the chapter of *at-Tur,* Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Or do they say: He has forged it. Nay! They do not believe' (*at-Tur:* 33).

The disbelievers accused Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* of forging and making up the Quran. But if he had forged it, why did they not bring an announcement like it? If it were poetry, then they were more knowledgeable and experienced in composing it, and if it were soothsaying, then they knew it as well! Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* challenges them, saying: 'Then let them bring an announcement like it if they are truthful' (*at-Tur:* 34). They should know then that he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* cannot make up anything that was not revealed to him in the Quran; otherwise Allah *Glorified is He* would have rightfully taken him with power and might, that is, taking revenge from him.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And cut off his lifeblood,' (*al-Haqqa:* 46) it means that no one would be able to defend Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* should He *the Almighty* want to seize him with power or cut off his lifeblood because this is not within the ability of anyone. One may ask, 'Why is it that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'None of you…' (*al-Haqqa:* 47), in the singular, then follows it by the plural form: '…could have defended him,' (*al-Haqqa:* 47)? We answer, 'He *the Almighty* says: '…could have defended him,' (*al-Haqqa:* 47) in the plural form because it is a description of 'none,' considering the general meaning, that is, if there are many individuals, since 'none' in Arabic refers to singular, dual and plural.' In fact, there is no one, however powerful or mighty they are, that could have withheld or prevented Him *the Almighty* from punishing him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* if he had forged anything in the Quran. The word 'none' here indicates affirmation, i.e. not any one person, whoever they are.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَإِنَّهُۥ لَتَذْكِرَةٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَإِنَّا لَنَعْلَمُ أَنَّ مِنكُم مُّكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾
وَإِنَّهُۥ لَحَسْرَةٌ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَحَقُّ ٱلْيَقِينِ ﴿٥١﴾

This [Quran] is a reminder for those who are aware of God [48] We know that some of you consider it to be lies [49] this will be a source of bitter regret for the disbelievers [50] but it is in fact the certain Truth [51] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 48 - 51)

The Noble Quran is neither poetry nor the words of soothsaying; it is rather: '…a message sent down from the Lord of the Worlds' (*al-Haqqa:* 43). It was not revealed purposelessly or just for recitation or narratives; rather, it is surely a reminder. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'This [Quran] is a reminder for those who are aware of Allah' (*al-Haqqa:* 48). 'Nay! It is surely an admonition. [54] So whoever pleases may mind it, [55]' (*al-Muddaththir:* 54-55) and 'We have not revealed the Quran to you that you may be unsuccessful. [2] Nay, it is a reminder to him who fears [3]' (*Ta Ha:* 2-3).

This guides us to the purpose and wisdom behind the revelation of the Quran. Allah *Glorified is He* did not send it down to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to distress him; rather, He revealed it as a reminder and admonition for those are fearful and mindful of Him *Glorified is He*. Hence, the Quran is a reminder for the pious people. He *Glorified is He* affirms this fact using the particle *Inna* and the letter *Lam*, both of which denote emphatic affirmation. It is a reminder for the pious people who stand in awe of their Lord and fear His chastisement. Whether it is a glad tiding or a warning, the admonition affects them and they respond to it; that is why He *the Almighty* says: 'And continue to remind, for surely the reminder profits the believers' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 55). Reminders and admonitions remind the pious people who safeguard themselves against His punishment by observing the obligations and abstaining from the prohibitions. Thus, they protect themselves from Allah's punishment by being obedient to Him.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We know that some of you consider it to be lies,' (*al-Haqqa:* 49). Allah *Glorified is He* uses again the particle *Inna* and the letter *lam*, both of which denote emphatic affirmation. He *the Almighty* does not only know those who disbelieve publicly and blatantly, but also those who harbour disbelief and rejection secretly in their hearts. They disbelieved in Allah *Glorified is He* and in the Hereafter; otherwise they would have believed and followed Allah's Guidance. This is a threat and a warning to the disbelievers that He *Glorified is He* knows those who reject the Quran despite being miraculous, calling it poetry, soothsaying and legends of the former peoples; such are the ones who lie about Him *the Almighty*. Some scholars maintain that the phrase '…some of you…' (*al-Haqqa:* 49), in the verse under discussion: 'We know that some of you consider it to be lies,' (*al-Haqqa:* 49), refers to the Muslims, suggesting that those rejecters were among them, namely, the hypocrites. However, the chapter of *al-Haqqa* was revealed before *Hijra*, and there were no hypocrites at that time. Thus, the phrase: '…some of you…' (*al-Haqqa:* 49) does not imply that they were among the believers or the pious, but it refers to the people of Mecca.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'This will be a source of bitter regret for the disbelievers,' (*al-Haqqa:* 50) the word 'this' refers to their disbelief inferred from the previous verse. However, the demonstrative pronoun 'this' in His saying: 'This [Quran] is a reminder for those who are aware of Allah,' (*al-Haqqa:* 48) refers to the Quran revealed to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* from Allah, the Lord of the worlds. In the verse in question, He *the Almighty* uses the same linguistic tools for emphatic affirmation. 'Regret' signifies pain in one's heart that one only feels when a misfortune, from which there is no deliverance, befalls him/her, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'And those who followed shall say: Had there been for us a return, then we would renounce them as they have renounced us. Thus will Allah show them their deeds to be intense regret to them, and they shall not come forth from the Fire,' (*al-Baqara:* 67).

The one who loses his/her worldly life and the Hereafter by disbelieving in Allah *the Almighty* and rejecting Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and the Noble Quran, lives in grief and pain for what they have lost in the worldly life. Moreover, on seeing the punishment in the Hereafter, it will be their greatest grief and their bitterest regret, but it will be too late for them to repent. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* states: 'They are losers indeed who reject the meeting of Allah; until when the hour comes upon them all of a sudden they shall say: O our grief for our neglecting it! And they shall bear their burdens on their backs; now surely evil is that which they bear' (*al-A'raf:* 31). Unable to stifle their grief, they say, 'O our grief for our negligence, heedlessness and extravagance in our affairs.' Therefore, disbelief in Allah *Glorified is He* and the Quran, revealed to Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* will be a source of bitter regret to the disbelievers because they will find what they rejected right before their eyes, and He *the Almighty* will punish them for their rejection and disbelief.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'But it is in fact the certain Truth' (*al-Haqqa:* 51). The certain Truth will come to pass when the disbeliever enters the hellfire and feels its heat, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones, [92] He shall have an entertainment of boiling water, [93] And burning in Hell. [94] Most surely this is the certain Truth. [95] Therefore glorify the name of your Lord, the Great [96]' (*at-Talaq:* 92-96). Additionally, we have the 'certain knowledge', i.e. perceiving the abstract image of hellfire, and the 'eye of certainty' in the Hereafter when we pass on the *Sirat* (bridge set over hellfire) and see hellfire with our own eyes. As for the ‘certain truth’, it comes when the disbelievers are thrown into hellfire, experience it and taste its heat and flames. The ‘certain truth’ is that which entertains no doubt. The word 'certain' is a modifier of the word 'truth' and denotes emphatic affirmation. There is no doubt that the Quran is revealed from Allah *the Almighty*; this is certainly true.

At the end of the chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَسَبِّحۡ بِٱسۡمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلۡعَظِيمِ ﴿٥٢﴾

So [Prophet] glorify the name of your Lord,
the Almighty [52] (The Quran, *al-Haqqa:* 52)

Glorify and highly exalt Him *the Almighty* above having a partner in the affairs of creation and for being the Great in His Omnipotence, His Mercy, His Wisdom, His Self-subsistence, His Rewards and His Recompense.

the chapter of

al-Ma'arij

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Ma'arij* (1).

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

سَأَلَ سَآئِلُۢ بِعَذَابٖ وَاقِعٖ ۝١ لِّلۡكَٰفِرِينَ لَيۡسَ لَهُۥ دَافِعٞ ۝٢

A man [mockingly] demanded the punishment [1]
It will fall on the disbelievers — none can deflect it [2]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 1-2)

An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith, one of the disbelievers of Mecca, demanded that a chastisement befall him and his people. When Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* warned them against Allah's punishment, he, i.e. An-Nadr ibn Al-Harith said with ridicule and mockery: 'O Allah! If this is the truth from You, then rain upon us stones from heaven or inflict on us a painful punishment' (*al-Anfal:* 32). Completely failing and incapacitated, they said, 'If the Quran is the truth from you, then rain upon us stones from heaven or inflict on us a painful punishment.' Is this demand not a clear proof of their stupidity?! Had they had good understanding, logic and intellect, they would have asked for guidance, instead of foolishly invoking death and punishment. Such is the supplication of a brainless, for if they had reason, they would have said, 'O Lord, if this is the truth from You, then guide us to it or let us believe in it.' Due to their excessive grudge and misguidance, they wished for punishment rather than belief in the Truth, and this reveals how brainless they are. Had Allah *Glorified is He* responded to their supplication, it would have brought about bad consequences. Among those who uttered this supplication were: Al-'As ibn Wa'il As-Sahmi, Al-Aswad ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib and Al-Aswad ibn ‘Abd Yahud. They were firstly confused when they accused him *Allah’s peace be upon him* of being a sorcerer, and again when they said that the Quran is mere poetry, whereas it is not. Additionally, they tried to accuse him *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* of insanity to discredit the Quran, and thereby reject it. Moreover, they accused him of being a soothsayer, but this was also of no avail. Consequently, with disturbed minds, they invoked Allah *the Almighty* to inflict His Chastisement upon them, saying: ‘O our Lord! Hasten on to us our portion before the Day of Reckoning,’ (*Sad:* 16). This portion is the recompense for the deeds, i.e. they said with ridicule and mockery, ‘O our Lord! Hasten on to us our portion of chastisement with which you threaten us, and do not defer it until the Day of Reckoning.’

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(1) The chapter of *al-Ma'arij* is the seventieth, according to the order of the chapters in the *Mushaf*, with 44 verses. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-Haqqa* in Mecca, and thereby it is agreed on that it is a Meccan chapter. See Al-Qurtubi*, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 18/278.*

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘It will fall on the disbelievers– none can deflect it,’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 1) it means that a chastisement will inevitably befall them. It is a punishment which is especially prepared for the disbelievers, and will not affect the believers. The letter *lam* prefixed to the Arabic word *Kafirin* (disbelievers) conveys the meaning of the preposition ‘on’ which denotes that the chastisement will be inflicted on the disbelievers. Further, no one will be able to prevent or ward it off, and no one from them will avert it.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ذِى ٱلْمَعَارِجِ ﴿٣﴾ تَعْرُجُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ
وَٱلرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِى يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُۥ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ ﴿٤﴾

From God, the Lord of the Ways of Ascent [3] by which the angels and the Spirit ascend to Him, on a Day whose length is fifty thousand years [4] (The Quran, *al-Ma’arij:* 3 - 4)

This chastisement is to be inflicted on the disbelievers by Allah, the Lord of the Ways of Ascent, which are the stairways through which the Angels rise from one heaven to another. So, they are ascents through which the Angels move between the heavens. This is like the verse wherein Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…and the stairs by which they ascend,’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 33). His saying here: ‘From Allah, the Lord of the Ways of Ascent, [3] by which the Angels and the Spirit ascend to Him...[4]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 3-4), arouses fear and awe in the hearts of the disbelievers, since all the creatures are under His Control, and among these creatures are the Angels who ascend to Him by the Ways of Ascent.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and the Spirit…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 4) refers to the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *Allah's peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions him specifically after the Angels because mentioning the specific after the general gives it more significance and distinction.

We should note that the Angels ascend to Him *Glorified is He* in the same way as the souls of the humans ascend to Him at the time of death. The pronoun *Ha'* (Him) suffixed to the Arabic word *Ilayhi* (to Him) refers to Allah *Glorified is He*. Some exegetes, however, believe this pronoun refers to the place where none has dominion except Him *the Almighty* so He made their ascension to this place as if it is ascension to Him. Similarly, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *Allah's peace be upon him* said: 'I will go [where I am ordered by] my Lord' (*as-Saffat:* 99); this means that he *Allah's peace be upon him* will go to the place ordained by his Lord.

To know what is intended by the word 'Day' in the verse: 'By which the Angels and the Spirit ascend to Him, on a Day whose length is fifty thousand years,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 4), we should pay attention to the other verse where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And they ask you to hasten on the punishment, and Allah will by no means fail in His promise, and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of what you can number' (*al-Hajj:* 47). He *Glorified is He* is the Creator of time, therefore He can create a day with a span of only one hour, a day with a span of twenty four hours such as the days of this worldly life, a day with a span of a thousand years, a day with a span of fifty thousand years and a day with a span of million years because everything is subject to Allah's Will. Time is multiple and variable, and differs according to the unit of measurement, and changes from one planet to another. Thus, what Allah *the Almighty* reveals about time in the Quran suggests difference rather than contradiction.

When speaking of ascension, Allah *Glorified is He* explains that it is on a Day whose measure is fifty thousand years, but He *Glorified is He* may shorten this period to a Day whose measure is a thousand years, as in His saying: 'He regulates the affair from the heaven to the earth; then shall it ascend to Him in a day the measure of which is a thousand years of what you count,' (*as-Sajda:* 5).

This is because the time on the Day of Judgment slows down so that the disbelievers find it extremely prolonged and fatiguing, to the extent that they wish to leave it even if they would go to hellfire.

Similarly, living in luxury shortens time that one feels it passing in the blink of an eye. When asked about the span of the Day in the verse: 'To Him ascend the angels and the Spirit in a day the measure of which is fifty thousand years,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 4) Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By Him in Whose Hand my soul is! It is lightened to the believer until it becomes shorter than the time during which he used to perform prescribed prayer in the worldly life.'(1)

As for the believer, the Day of Judgment is lighter than performing a prescribed prayer in the worldly life, as if it is a quarter of an hour. By contrast, it is as fifty thousand years for the disbeliever. One may ask, 'Do the Angels need fifty thousand years to ascend to their Lord?' Scholars said that this period of time is considered one day according to the Angelic counting, whereas it is as long as fifty thousand years of what we count. In other words, it takes the humans fifty thousand years to do what the Angels do in one day.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

فَٱصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُۥ بَعِيدًا ﴿٦﴾ وَنَرَىٰهُ قَرِيبًا ﴿٧﴾

So be patient, [Prophet], as befits you [5]
The disbelievers think it is distant [6]
but We know it to be close [7]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 5 - 7)

Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to be graciously patient and endure what the disbelievers inflict on him of harm, and not to let it divert or inhibit him from conveying the

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir narrates it from the narration of Imam Ahmad on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri as well. In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti attributes it to Ahmad, Abu Y'ala, Ibn Jarir, Ibn Hibban and Al-Baihaqi in Al-Ba'th Wa An-Nushur, all on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri. See Ath-Tha'labi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 10/36; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim, 6/107; and As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 8/280.*

Message of his Lord. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to him, 'Be patient, as befits you; do not rush or hasten. You should also endure their mocking and stubborn demand of the chastisement which will for sure befall them.' Their demand indicates that they deem the Day of Judgment and the punishment befalling them therein far-fetched. Hence, He *the Almighty* says: 'It will fall on the disbelievers--none can deflect it,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 2).

It is He *the Almighty* Who will inflict them with this chastisement on a severe Day prolonged to the disbelievers. 'Gracious patience' is also mentioned when speaking of Prophet Jacob *Allah's peace be upon him* as he said to his sons: 'Nay, your souls have made the matter light for you, but patience is good…' (*Yusuf:* 18). However, patience is always painful, so how could it be good? It is so when it is devoid of complaining and impatience. There is also gracious avoidance which entails no backbiting, gossip or dispute, as stated in Allah's saying: 'And bear patiently what they say and avoid them with a becoming avoidance,' (*al-Muddaththir:* 10).

Allah *Glorified is He* orders Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* to be patient with his people in many verses, as in His saying: 'Bear then patiently what they say, and glorify your Lord by the praising of Him before the rising of the sun and before its setting…' (*Ta Ha:* 130); and 'Bear patiently what they say, and remember Our servant David, the possessor of power; surely he was frequent returning (to Allah)' (*Sad:* 17). He *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* is ordered to be patient and to glorify Allah *Glorified is He* as though his exaltation and glorification of Allah *the Almighty* make his patience gracious because when he glorifies Allah *Glorified is He,* he does not regard their rejection and false accusations, but only considers Allah, thereby glorifying and exalting Him.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks of the Day of Judgment and the punishment befalling the disbelievers, which they mockingly demanded and could not wait for because they thought it to be far off. This does not mean that they believe it will happen in the distant future; rather, they deemed it implausible and unlikely to take place. So, the verse indicates their disbelief and outright rejection from the outset. Accordingly, He *the Almighty* says: 'The disbelievers think it is distant, [6] but We know it to be close, [7]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 6-7). It will happen and take place without doubt. They deem it unbelievable, whilst He *the Almighty* sees it impending, and therefore it is soon to come. On the other hand, those who reject it find it as far as possible, but the true believers should firmly believe it will be near.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* tells us of the horrors of the Day of Judgment, stating:

يَوْمَ تَكُونُ ٱلسَّمَآءُ كَٱلْمُهْلِ ﴿٨﴾ وَتَكُونُ ٱلْجِبَالُ كَٱلْعِهْنِ ﴿٩﴾
وَلَا يَسْـَٔلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾

On a Day when the heavens will be like molten brass [8] and the mountains like tufts of wool [9] when no friend will ask about his friend [10] (The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 8 - 10)

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'On a Day when the heavens will be like molten brass,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 8), it means that, on the Day of Judgment, the heaven will burst and split asunder, with its colour changing from blue to red. The Arabic word *Al-Muhl* (molten brass) refers to the murky oil at the bottom of its container, or the molten metal such as copper, lead and iron. The Quran affirms that these major universal events will occur on that Day extending for fifty thousand years. Due to these events, the settings of the planets, stars and galaxies as well as their rings will be displaced.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And the mountains like tufts of wool, (*al-Ma'arij:* 9) it means that the mountains will be like carded wool, as stated in His saying: 'And the mountains shall be as loosened wool' (*al-Qari`a:* 5). They will be blasted and scattered as carded wool. After being hard and mighty, they will turn into this condition on the Day of Judgment, as though they have not existed.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When no friend will ask about his friend,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 10), it means that one will have no friends or relatives to defend or feel sorry for them. Rather, they will flee and turn away from them, being defenceless themselves. Everyone will be only concerned with them; no one will ask about their friend or relative, even if they see them in the worst condition. They cannot even utter a single word to ask about their conditions owing to the horror and severity of that Day. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

يُبَصَّرُونَهُمْ ۚ يَوَدُّ ٱلْمُجْرِمُ لَوْ يَفْتَدِى مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍۭ بِبَنِيهِ ﴿١١﴾
وَصَٰحِبَتِهِۦ وَأَخِيهِ ﴿١٢﴾ وَفَصِيلَتِهِ ٱلَّتِى تُـْٔوِيهِ ﴿١٣﴾ وَمَن فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنجِيهِ ﴿١٤﴾

Even when they are within sight of one another. The guilty person will wish he could save himself from the suffering of that Day by sacrificing his sons [11] his spouse, his brother [12] the kinsfolk who gave him shelter [13] and everyone on earth, if it could save him [14] (The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 11-14)

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Even when they are within sight of one another…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 11), it means that they see and know each other, but for being occupied with themselves they do not ask about each other because they find this pointless. This is the case with the unjust transgressing sinner who went beyond the limits, disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* and was too proud to worship Him. Therefore, He *the Almighty* says '…the guilty person will wish he could save himself from the suffering of that Day by sacrificing his sons. [11] His spouse, his brother, [12] the kinsfolk who gave him shelter, [13] and everyone on earth, if it could save him [14]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 11). As they were a polytheist and guilty, they want to be delivered from Allah's punishment inflicted on them, to the extent that they wish to be ransomed by their own children, whom they invoked Allah *the Almighty* to give in the worldly life, or by their spouse who shared their life, and even by their brother, family, relatives, kin and whoever is on earth entirely. They are willing to sacrifice everyone else so that they could redeem themselves from Allah's chastisement. They desire that they could own and have them under their control so as to offer them as a sacrifice for themselves, thinking that in doing so, they will be saved from the punishment. However, Allah *Glorified is He* shatters the hope of the disbelievers, polytheists, oppressors and the guilty regarding escaping His punishment by offering sacrifices, as He *Glorified is He* states in another verse: 'Surely, those who disbelieve and die while they are unbelievers, the earth full of gold shall not be accepted from one of them, though he should offer to ransom himself with it, these it is who shall have a painful chastisement, and they shall have no helpers' (*Al-'Imran:* 91).

Likewise, He *the Almighty* says in this chapter:

كَلَّآ إِنَّهَا لَظَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾ نَزَّاعَةً لِّلشَّوَىٰ ﴿١٦﴾ تَدْعُواْ مَنْ أَدْبَرَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٧﴾ وَجَمَعَ فَأَوْعَىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

But no! There is a raging flame [15] that strips away the skin [16] and it will claim everyone who rejects the truth, turns away [17] amasses wealth and hoards it [18] (The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 15-18)

This is truth uttered through the verse: 'But no! There is a raging flame,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 15). Thus, the possibility of their salvation is a false assumption; no way could they possibly escape punishment. In answer to the supplicant's demand for punishment, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'But no! There is a raging flame,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 15). The Arabic word *Kalla* (But no) indicates deterrence and reproof to the guilty or the disbeliever that they should not wish for it; the sacrifice will neither avail nor redeem them from the chastisement. It is hellfire with its blazing flames 'that strips away the skin,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 16). It chastises and tortures the disbelievers and the sinners severely and mercilessly. It scalds them with its flames and blazes so that they burn in it. Further, He *the Almighty* says: '(As for) those who disbelieve in Our communications, We shall make them enter fire; so oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement; surely Allah is Mighty, Wise,' (*an-Nisa':* 56).

The Arabic word *Lazha* (flaming Fire) is one of the names of the hellfire, which has flames set ablaze. Allah *the Almighty* describes it elsewhere, saying: 'Walk on to the covering having three branches, [30] neither having the coolness of the shade nor availing against the flame [31]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 56). These branches of hellfire signify the flames that, as it burns fiercely, it gets divided into three branches, As for His saying: 'That strips away the skin,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 16), it means that the hellfire takes away the limbs such as the hands and legs leaving no flesh or skin without burning it. The Arabic word *Shawa* refers to the limbs such as hands, legs, finger tips and head skin. It is the most severe punishment, with flames melting the head and the flesh of the legs, whereas their heart is alive, feeling the pain and torment. Their head, skin and limbs are melted by the blazing flames in hellfire while they are alive, feeling that painful punishment.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says about the hellfire: 'And it will claim everyone who rejects the truth, turns away, [17] amasses wealth and hoards it' (*al-Ma'arij:* 17-18). This is a further report about hellfire; in addition to having blazing flames, it invites those who turned away from the Truth and obedience. Its invitation is metaphorical, as in His saying: 'Until the war lays down its burden' (*Muhammad:* 4). It is not the war which shall lay down its burden in reality, but the warriors who fight in it.

Likewise, hellfire invites the disbelievers and the guilty who attempted to flee from it. Further, it claims the rich who used to hoard gold and silver and did not spend it in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* preventing the right of the poor. Some scholars are of the opinion that hellfire invites and calls those who rejected belief and truth with their own names, saying, 'Come to me O disbeliever. Come to me O hypocrite!'

Ibn 'Abbas *may Allah be pleased with him* said, 'It calls the disbelievers and the hypocrites pronouncing their own names with a fluent tongue, then picks them up just as a bird picks up a food-grain.'(1) So, who are those who will be called and invited by hellfire? It calls upon: '…everyone who rejects the truth' (*al-Ma'arij:* 17-18). It calls those who turned their back on faith and disbelieved in the Prophets' call to worship Allah *the Almighty* Alone. Further, it invites and calls whosoever turned their back on truth, rejected obedience to Him and went away from belief in the Scriptures and the Prophets.

On what then did they spend their time in the worldly life? They rejected the truth because they preferred the worldly life to the Hereafter; therefore they: 'amasses wealth and hoards it' (*al-Ma'arij:* 18). In addition to their disbelief, transgression and hypocrisy, they collect money from all possible sources, and then hoard it. While doing so, they earn money through lawful and unlawful means, and do not give Allah's Right in it. He *Glorified is He* states elsewhere: 'Who amasses wealth and considers it a provision (against mishap); [2] He thinks that his wealth will make him immortal [3]' (*al-Humaza:* 2-3). Their money and wealth made them transgress that they looked with contempt and disdain to the poor, thinking that their wealth will grant them immorality. However, their money will not avail them, nor will hoarding wealth deliver them from the punishment, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Nay! He shall most certainly be hurled into the crushing disaster, [4] And what will make you realize what the crushing disaster is? [5] It is the fire kindled by Allah, [6] which rises above the hearts. [7] Surely it shall be closed over upon them, [8] In extended columns [9]' (*al-Humaza:* 4-9). Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

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(1) *This narration is from Al-Khazen. In his Tafsir, Ibn Abu Hatim narrates that Qatada narrated, through a Mursal narration, that Ka'b used to say, 'Some of the fire will come out in the shape of a long neck on the Day of Judgment. It will say, 'I have been left in charge of three: the honoured and the noble, every obstinate oppressor and everyone who called upon a deity besides Allah, then it picks them up just as a bird picks up a food-grain.' Al-Khazen, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 4/341; and Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir, 17774.*

إِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا ﴿١٩﴾ إِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ جَزُوعٗا ﴿٢٠﴾
وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلۡخَيۡرُ مَنُوعًا ﴿٢١﴾

Man was truly created anxious [19] he is fretful when misfortune touches him [20] but tight-fisted when good fortune comes his way [21] (The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 19 - 21)

The Arabic word *Hal'u* (anxious) is an exaggeration form indicating intense caution and lack of patience; therefore the human being is bored and volatile, seeking only their whims and lusts. It also denotes impatience when affected by evil or fear of something. In addition to their anxiety and greed, they are miserly and stingy; when Allah *the Almighty* provides them with wealth, they withhold it. If they are short of money and suffer from poverty, they become impatient. When they obtain money and wealth, they withhold it and become miserly in spending out in the Way of Allah. Further, they do not give the right of the poor.

'Man' here refers to the human beings in general, and in reference to their attributes, Allah *the Almighty* states in another verse: 'And if We make man taste mercy from Us, then take it off from him, most surely he is despairing, ungrateful,' (*Hud:* 9). When He *Glorified is He* wills to bestow a blessing on the human being and then it is taken away from them, they become worried, disappointed, exasperated and impatient. However little the blessing is, it appeals to the human being, but if it is withdrawn from them, they become despairing and ungrateful. This despairing ungrateful person is the same one who is excessively anxious, impatient and miserly. All these attributes are referring to the one who is intensely impatient and niggardly, vehement in their disbelief in Allah *the Almighty* and despairing of His Mercy and Blessings.

Reflecting on this verse, we will find that the word *Massahu* (to touch him) is used, whereas in the chapter of *Hud* the word *Adhaqna* (to make him taste) is used. ‘To taste something’ means to perceive its flavour, not to eat it. When you buy fruits, the buyer may ask you to taste one to perceive its flavour. Tasting something could be by letting your tongue touch it to test its quality. This is the meaning of touching, i.e. getting closer to something gradually to touch it. This perception may last for only one second.

This impatient person, lacking faith which could have provided them with tranquility, peace of mind and acceptance of the inconstancy of life, becomes swiftly impatient, anxious and frightened at the very moment they get afflicted by poverty, need, calamity or evil. Moreover, when they are granted a blessing, whether small or great, they deny Allah’s Favour and Provision, withholding the good that has from people. Therefore, they do not give Allah’s Right upon them because they do not believe in Him.For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states in the following verses:

إِلَّا ٱلۡمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٢٢﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمۡ دَآئِمُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾
وَٱلَّذِينَ فِيٓ أَمۡوَٰلِهِمۡ حَقّٞ مَّعۡلُومٞ ﴿٢٤﴾ لِّلسَّآئِلِ وَٱلۡمَحۡرُومِ ﴿٢٥﴾

Not so those who pray [22] and are constant in their prayers [23]
who give a due share of their wealth [24] to beggars and the
deprived [25] (The Quran, *al-Ma’arij:* 22-25)

In the aforementioned three verses, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Man was truly created anxious: [19] he is fretful when misfortune touches him, [20] but tight-fisted when good fortune comes his way [21]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 19-21). However, He *Glorified is He* makes an exception here saying: ‘Not so those who pray’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 22). When we read the Noble Quran carefully, we find that every account about the human being, as isolated from Allah’s Guidance, denotes evil, as in His saying: ‘I swear by the time, [1] Most surely man is in loss [2]’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-2). The human beings, generally, are in loss. So, who among them will be delivered from loss? Here comes the answer: ‘Except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience' (*al-'Asr:* 3). Every Quranic account of the human being, in the absolute sense, speaks about and warns against the evil aspect, yet what is it that saves them? It is Allah's Way of Guidance.

He *Glorified is He* lays down His Guidance starting from His saying: 'Not so those who pray,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 22) until the verse reading: 'And are steadfast in their prayers' (*al-Ma'arij:* 34). The first element of this Divine Guidance is: 'Not so those who pray [22] and are constant in their prayers [23]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 22-23). Observing the prayer that He *the Almighty* made obligatory comes first. Prayer only emanates from belief in Him, Messenger Muhammad and His Book. Therefore, there was no need to mention faith. Besides, He *Glorified is He* specifies the elements of the applicable Way of Guidance, whereas faith is a doctrinal matter that should do with the heart.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Not so those who pray [22] and are constant in their prayers, [23]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 22-23) refers to those who observe prayer in its prescribed times, leaving no prescribed prayer at night or at daytime; rather, they perform it once it is called for. Further, they perform it duly and rightfully, not turning to the right or to the left; they do not turn their faces from the direction of the prayer. They are constant in their rayer, and establish it carefully without wasting or getting distracted from it. This constancy depicts stability and continuity, as their prayer is not interrupted by squandering or negligence. In this regard, we should note that the acts most pleasing to Allah *Glorified is He* were the most regular, constant ones, given the fact that constancy indicates stability in one's relation with Him *Glorified is He*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us another attribute and pillar of His Guidance, stating: 'Who give a due share of their wealth' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24). Allah *Glorified is He* speaks here of the believers who believed in Him and His Book, and thus He says: '…a due share…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24). This due share in the wealth of the believers is the *zakat*. As regards *Ihsan* which signifies a higher rank than faith, this share is not specified, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And in their property was a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied (good)' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 19). Thus, with regard to those who reached the rank of *Ihsan,* it is in the interest of the poor that there is no specific portion to be paid out. This is because a believer, who reached the rank of faith, may give away according to or a bit more than the specified portion of the *zakat*. However, there is no limit to what they give in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* if they have reached the rank of *Ihsan.*

Allah *Glorified is He* wants to unleash people's faithful potentials, so whoever gives in abundance, they will have their reward with Him *the Almighty*. If we contemplate His saying: '…of their wealth,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 23) we will find it wondrous; Allah *Glorified is He* attributes wealth to the people, whilst He is the Owner of wealth and gives it to anyone He wills. That is why Allah *the Almighty* has the right to prescribe a fixed portion in it. Likewise, He *Glorified is He*, says: 'Take alms out of their property, you would cleanse them and purify them thereby, and pray for them; surely your prayer is a relief to them; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing' (*at-Tawba:* 103). The phrase 'their wealth,' with the third person pronoun, is mentioned thirty-one times in the Quran, whereas the word 'your wealth,' with the second person pronoun, is mentioned fourteen times. This is to mean that the ownership of the wealth is attributed to them, for the mere fact that He *Glorified is He* states so, but it is not theirs in reality because Allah *Glorified is He* can take it away if He wills and they will have no means to prevent that.

Given that wealth belongs to Allah *the Almighty* in reality, then He has the right to prescribe a due share in it. But does the 'due share' in this verse refer to the prescribed *zakat* with its fixed portions? We say, 'No, because this verse was revealed in Mecca, whereas the *zakat* was prescribed in Medina.' Accordingly, what is intended here is the specific portion the believers obligated upon themselves to draw near to Allah *Glorified is He*. It is something that a person obligates upon themselves, to give in the Way of Allah at certain times as a recommended action. Consequently, He *the Almighty* does not mention here those who deserve the *zakat*, who are mentioned in His saying: 'Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the officials (appointed) over them, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth) and the (ransoming of) captives and those in debts and in the way of Allah and the wayfarer; an ordinance from Allah; and Allah is knowing, Wise' (*at-Tawba:* 60). Thus, the *zakat* was made obligatory in Medina after the state of Islam was established and gained strength. Following that, some receivers of *zakat*, other than the poor and the needy, were specified including the officials appointed over it, and those whose hearts are made to incline to truth, the ransoming of captives, those in debts and in the Way of Allah.

As for the due share in the chapter of *al-Ma'arij*, it was prescribed by the person upon themselves out of feeling sympathy and compassion to the poor. So, they allocate a portion of their money to benefit them and satisfy their need.

When Ibn 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* was asked as to whether it is the *zakat* which is intended in this verse: 'Who give a due share of their wealth [24] to beggars and the deprived, [25]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24-25) he answered, 'You have other obligations than it.' Ibn 'Abbas, the scholar of the *ummah* and the interpreter of the Noble Quran, said, 'It is a right other than the *zakat* with which one maintains good relations with kin, generously serves a guest, bears people's burden or helps one who is deprived.' For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Who give a due share of their wealth [24] to beggars and the deprived [25]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 24-25).

Two categories of people deserve this right: the beggars and the deprived. The beggar is the one who begs people, whereas the deprived is the one who is poor yet abstains from begging to the extent that people think them to be rich. Thereby, they do not give them despite their dire financial need. Allah *Glorified is He* recommends giving the beggar, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And as for him who asks, do not chide (him),' (*ad-Duha:* 10).

Other denotations were inferred from the word 'the deprived', apart from the poor who abstains from begging. Some scholars suggest that 'the deprived' is the one whose wealth does not grow, their business remains slack or perishes or they do not earn what meets their needs. So, they live in straits and are not able to earn in the way that makes their life better. Others said that 'the deprived' is the one whose wealth is perished; their plants and fruits are destroyed with blight or calamity; their cattle and birds catch a fatal disease; or their car by which they earn a living gets stolen. In other words, they had a blessing of which they were deprived on account of a calamity affecting it. In the same vein, upon seeing it burnt, the owners of the garden said: 'We must have lost our way! [26] No– we are ruined! [27]' (*al-Haqqa:* 27) One may ask, ‘Does the phrase ‘their wealth,’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 24) refer to money, gold or silver only? We say, ‘No, the wealth can be in the form of plants, cattle or food, i.e. it is everything that could be a medium of exchange, but we use the word to refer to something which could be used to obtain any property, i.e. money.’ This is the common use of the word, but the original meaning encompasses everything that could be used as a medium of exchange.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions other attributes of those whom He excepted from the punishment, stating:

وَٱلَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بِيَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَٱلَّذِينَ هُم مِّنۡ عَذَابِ رَبِّهِم مُّشۡفِقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾
إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّهِمۡ غَيۡرُ مَأۡمُونٖ ﴿٢٨﴾

Who believe in the Day of Judgment [26]
and fear the punishment of their Lord [27]
none may feel wholly secure from it [28]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’arij:* 26 - 28)

Belief in the Day of Judgment is the cornerstone of religion, given the fact that the one who does not believe in it does whatever they like, bearing in mind that there will be no Hereafter, or Reckoning. So, what should they be afraid of then? Why should they restrict their freedom in life? Religion, with its entire acts of obedience and guidance, is based on the concept of Reckoning in the Hereafter, and the belief that we will stand before Allah *Glorified is He* one Day so that Allah *Glorified is He* will punish the disobedient and reward the obedient. This is the criteria of our faithful conduct.

If there were no Judgment Day, the unjust people would be the most fortunate ones. Given the fact that they caused mischief in the land, they may escape the punishment in this worldly life. However, they will not escape Allah’s Justice. The Day of Judgment is the Day of Recompense for acts of obedience and disobedience. In the verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* does not say: ‘Those who believe in the Judgment Day,’ but rather states: ‘Who accept the truth of the Judgment Day’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 26). This means that they firmly and wholeheartedly believe in it; this is a higher rank than mere belief. Further, Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Faith is what takes root in the heart and shows in one’s actions.’(1) They confirm their belief by their deeds, exert themselves and spend their money on the beggars and the deprived, hoping to get the reward in the Hereafter.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Those who accept the truth of the Judgment Day,’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 26) means that they wholeheartedly believe in the Last Day, Reckoning and Recompense, and then they do good hoping for rewards and fearing punishment. Even though belief with one’s heart and declaration to it with their tongue delivers them from eternally abiding in hellfire, their belief must be confirmed by deeds. In fact, the believer gradually gets firmer in their belief until they become one of the truthful. Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* is a case in point; he used to deeply believe in everything Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said. The disbelievers said to him, ‘Your friend (i.e. Prophet Muhammad) claims that he went to the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque and came back in one night, whereas we travel long distances taking months to reach it.’ Thereupon, Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘If he has said it, then he has spoken the truth.’(2) His sole reason for belief was the mere fact that ‘Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said that.’ This is the true believer, whenever he *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* uttered a word, Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* hastened to believe in it and did not wait for revelation to come down confirming what he said. Once he *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* declared that he was a Messenger, Abu Bakr *may Allah be pleased with him* believed and affirmed what he said, and thereby was a firm believer in the truth.

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(1) Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, 'Faith is not by wishful thinking nor by appearance, it is what takes root in the heart and shows in one's actions.' See Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitab Al-Iman, 1/230.*

(2) 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, ‘When Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* was taken by night to the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque, he awoke and spoke to the people about it. Some of those who had faith in him and believed him renounced it. They sought Abu Bakr and said, 'Have you heard your friend’s claim that he was taken by night to the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque?' Abu Bakr said, 'Did he say that?' They said 'Yes.' Abu Bakr said, 'If he has said it, then he has spoken the truth.' They said, 'Do you believe he went by night to *Al-Aqsa* Mosque and he returned before morning?' He said, 'Yes. Indeed, I believe him for what is even more astonishing than that. I believe he has received news from Heaven for everything he does.' For this reason, Abu Bakr was named 'the truthful.' Al-Hakim graded this Hadith as authentic. See Al-Bayhaqi, *Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 2/361;* and Al-Hakim, *Mustadrak, 3/62.*

Accepting the truth of the Judgment Day comes as a result of the following attribute: 'And fear the punishment of their Lord,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 27). In spite of establishing prayer constantly and paying a fixed portion from their wealth for the beggars and the deprived, and despite their fervent belief in the Last Day, they are fearful of Allah's Chastisement.

The believers fear and stand in awe of Allah *the Almighty*. Moreover, the Arabic word *Ishfaq* (fear), as mentioned in the verse, denotes that fearing Him is accompanied by caution and awe. Likewise, the believers' fear of the Hour is accompanied by caution that it may come before being fully prepared for it in a way that makes them happy with His Reward when they meet with Him.

They are fearful of Allah's Punishment, and the reason is declared in His saying: 'None may feel wholly secure from it' (*al-Ma'arij:* 28). No one can say for sure that they fulfilled their obligations perfectly or abstained from prohibitions completely, for they must have had shortcomings in either aspect. Moreover, no one feels wholly secure from His punishment except those who are deluded by wishful thinking that their deeds will rescue them, whilst Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'None amongst you will enter paradise because of his deeds alone. They said, 'Allah's Messenger, not even you?' Thereupon he said, 'Not even I.'(1) The human being's sins in this worldly life are many; they may be unjust when they judge, have bad thoughts of people, tell lies and stray from truth if they are called for witness and backbite others.

As a matter of fact, no one among us can attribute perfection to themselves, even those who exert themselves in obedience do not reach perfection, given the fact that perfection belongs to Allah *Glorified is He* Alone. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'All the sons of Adam are sinners, but the best of sinners are those who repent often.'(2)

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(1) Abu Hurayra *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Observe moderation in deeds (and if it is not possible, try to be near moderation) and understand that none amongst you can attain salvation because of his deeds alone. They said. 'Allah's Messenger, not even you?' Thereupon he said, 'Not even I, but that Allah should wrap me in His Mercy and Grace.' See Al-Bukhari, *Sahih, Hadith no. 43 and 1151;* Muslim, *Sahih, Hadith no. 785;* Ibn Maja, *Sunnan, Hadith no. 4238;* and At-Tirmidhi, *Sunnan, Hadith no. 3037.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4251; Abu Mohamed Al-Kashi, Al-Muntakhab, Hadith no. 1197; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 7236; and Ar-Ruyani, Musnad, Hadith no. 1366.*

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* states: ‘But none feels secure from Allah’s Plan except the people who shall perish’ (*al-A‘raf:* 99). ‘To feel secure’ is to be assured of an issue in a way which does not arouse fear or troubles. The one who feels secure of Allah’s Plan is the loser. In addition, one should not feel secure of the punishment in hellfire, which is why they should not underestimate the matter since no one can guarantee anything.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies another attribute, stating:

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ لِفُرُوجِهِمۡ حَٰفِظُونَ (٢٩) إِلَّا عَلَىٰٓ أَزۡوَٰجِهِمۡ أَوۡ مَا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُهُمۡ
فَإِنَّهُمۡ غَيۡرُ مَلُومِينَ (٣٠) فَمَنِ ٱبۡتَغَىٰ وَرَآءَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡعَادُونَ (٣١)

Who guard their chastity [29] from all but their spouses or their slave-girls — there is no blame attached to [relations with] these [30] but those whose desires exceed this limit are truly transgressors [31] (The Quran, *al-Ma’arij:* 29 - 31)

Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to keep our private parts to the purpose for which they are created, and one is supposed to adhere only to what He *the Almighty* made lawful in this regard. He *Glorified is He* does not want a man and a woman to be together except in accordance with His Guidance and *Shari'a* because He is the Creator of mankind, and He knows best what reforms them. They should be together according to His *Shari'a* openly and overtly, and not to meet secretly in the darkness of sin to commit the forbidden matter (i.e. adultery) causing confusion of lineage and dissolution of the society.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Who guard their chastity,’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 29) the Arabic word *Hafizhun* indicates guarding and protection, and it comes in the form of the active participle which denotes constancy and continuity. To find out the distinctive denotation of this form of the word, we should look into the verse related to prayer in which He *Glorified is He* states: ‘And are steadfast in their prayers’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 34). In this verse, another form of this word is used but is less in denoting constancy and continuity since one may perform prayers but defer them from due time or may not pray in the mosque sometimes due to emergent circumstances. However, guarding and protecting private parts from committing indecent crimes, like adultery, must be a constant attribute, however alluring the temptations is. This is because it is a matter that should do with people's honor, and hence this guarding of the private parts shall include everyone except for two categories of women, mentioned in His saying: 'From all but their spouses or their slave-girls—there is no blame attached to [relations with] these' (*al-Ma'arij:* 30-31). This verse means that the command of guarding the private parts does not include the wives made lawful in marriage. This entails the prohibition of temporary marriage, for in this case the woman is neither a wife nor a slave-girl.

Here arises a question, which is 'Why does Allah *Glorified is He* use the preposition *'Ala* (on) instead of *'An* (from), although *'An* is more appropriate for the general meaning of the verse?' We say, 'The preposition *'Ala* here conveys the meaning of *'An*, and it is possibly related to an omitted part that befits the general meaning.'

Two exceptions are made here: the wives and the slave-girls. Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Guard your private parts except from your wife.'(1) It is obligatory that one must guard his private parts except from his wife and slave girl, and it is not allowed to take in marriage two sisters or a woman and her paternal or maternal aunt simultaneously. This verse and its counterpart in the chapter of *al-Mu'minun* are concerned with men, for women are not allowed to have sexual relationships with their male slaves. It happened at the time of 'Umar *may Allah be pleased with him* that a woman had intimacy with her male slave. When this was mentioned to 'Umar, he asked her, 'Why did you do it?' She answered, 'I thought that I am allowed to do it the same as men with their slave girls.' Whereupon, he consulted with the Companions of Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* who said, 'She interpreted the Book of Allah in the wrong way, thereby no prescribed punishment is to be inflicted upon her.' This is because wrong interpretation waives the punishment. Consequently, 'Umar *may Allah be*

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Bahz ibn Hakim who said that his father told him on the authority of his grandfather that he said to Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him 'O Messenger of Allah, from whom should we conceal our private parts and to whom can we show? He replied, 'Conceal your private parts except from your wife and slave-girls.' See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4017; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1920; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 20034 and 20040.*

pleased with him forbade her from marrying a freeman and ordered the slave not to approach her.

Thus, one is ordered to guard his chastity, apart from his wife (or wives) and slave-girls who were made lawful. Yet, slavery no longer exists since there is no slavery anymore, unlike the case before the advent of Islam. Hence, this is a suspended ruling having no sphere of application. There is a distinction, however, between suspending a ruling due to the absence of its sphere of application and abolishing a ruling. The ruling related to slave girls is not abolished; it is present, but its subject is absent; thus it comes into effect once its subject exists in practice. Some people attempt to arouse doubts about Islam and the Quran, saying: 'If Islam really wanted to free the human being from slavery and bondage, why does the Quran mention slavery in some verses and does not abrogate them as was the case with other verses addressing other issues?' We say, 'Islam fought slavery and bondage and came to free slaves by laying down the rulings of expiation for committing sins by way of freeing slaves. For instance, a slave must be freed as expiation for killing a believer by mistake, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave, and blood-money should be paid to his people…' (*an-Nisa':* 92).

Breaking a deliberate oath can be expiated by freeing a slave, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…so its expiation is the feeding of ten poor men out of the middling (food) you feed your families with, or their clothing, or the freeing of a neck…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 89). Likewise, freeing a slave is one of the means of expiation for someone who says to his wife, 'You are as forbidden to me as (the back of) my mother,' as He *Glorified is He* states: 'And (as for) those who put away their wives by likening their backs to the backs of their mothers then would recall what they said, they should free a captive before they touch each other...' (*al-Mujadala:* 3).

Accordingly, Islam handled the issue of slavery and bondage, even by the permissibility of having slave-girls, as it was a solution to the phenomenon of bondage, for it honours the women who used to be taken as captives in wars. Before the advent of Islam, the captive women had no rights and were taken by the victorious warriors who did whatever they liked to them, such as raping or even gang raping and then killing them in the end. In Islam, however, a woman taken as a captive during wars used to be entrusted to someone to provide food, drink and attire for her in return for her service to him. If she conceived after intimacy with him, she would become a mother of a son, and would be freed for giving birth to him. For this reason, he had to make sure at first that she had not been pregnant.

Taking women as captives were subject to the law of the warriors at that time, so *Shari'a* Law was laid down to confront this deep-rooted tradition. It may be enforced at other times which we do not know, therefore there must be a law regulating this matter. This shows the greatness of the Noble Quran and its eternity until the Hour is established. Accordingly, the way Islam addresses slavery should be regarded as one of its merits, not the other way around.

Back to the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…there is no blame attached to [relations with] these' (*al-Ma'arij:* 30). This means that they are not to be blamed for not guarding their private parts with their wives and slave-girls, but they are to be blamed in other cases. In addition, mentioning the word denoting pudendum at the beginning of the verse indicates that such blame is to be placed on that person who has anal intercourse with his wife; not in the normal place created and prepared for intercourse and giving birth to children. However, they are not blameworthy or sinners for doing what Allah *the Almighty* made lawful. Rather, they are blamed for transgressing the limits and committing what is forbidden.

Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* states in the following verse: 'But those whose desires exceed this limit are truly transgressors' (*al-Ma'arij:* 31). The Arabic word *Ibtagha* (to desire) has the meaning of seeking something persistently, and this is possibly because it goes beyond the normal limits. In this case, such a people are striving to commit what He *the Almighty* made unlawful by seducing a woman who is neither his wife nor a slave girl. The Arabic word *Wara'* (beyond) is used in the Quran with different meanings; however, it here means 'beyond,' with a more profound denotation. Although a man may have a wife or wives and slave-girls under his possession, he may seek what is beyond that, i.e. goes after what is made forbidden despite having what is made lawful. Likewise, he may have anal intercourse with his wife though it is not the organ prepared for that matter. So, the word *Wara'* (beyond) has two meanings here: 'beyond' and 'above.' Describing those seeking what is beyond the limits, He *Glorified is He* states: 'But those whose desires exceed this limit are truly transgressors' (*al-Ma'arij:* 31). This means that these are the adulterers who transgress the limits of what He *the Almighty* permitted or forbade and who turn from the lawful matters to the unlawful ones.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ لِأَمَٰنَٰتِهِمۡ وَعَهۡدِهِمۡ رَٰعُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Who are faithful to their trusts and
their pledges [32] (The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 32)

Trust represents whatever you are entrusted with, and the first thing you were entrusted with is the covenant of faith taken upon you, while you were in Adam's back. One should be faithful to the trust belonging to Allah *Glorified is He* as well as to those belonging to the people that should be paid back to their owners perfectly and faithfully. As for the word *'Ahd* (pledge), it refers to what the human being takes upon themselves to do, and is obligatory on them to fulfil so long as it is not an act of disobedience. This is because when you make a covenant with someone, their activities in life depend on fulfilling your promise to them. If you break your covenant and promise to them, you free yourself and behave as you please while restraining them, wasting their interests and spoiling their day, and hence Islam affirms that one should keep their promise.

Trust also denotes what you are entrusted with regarding people's rights, which you have to pay back, but you can deny having it if you wish. For example, one might say, 'I entrusted so and so with a trust.' But if there is a check or witnesses to it, then it is not called 'trust.' On this basis, 'trust' means to put something into the care of someone and leave their conscience determines whether to acknowledge it on your demand or to deny it. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and man has turned unfaithful to it; surely he is unjust, ignorant,' (*al-Ahzab:* 72) and 'Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to their owners…' (*an-Nisa':* 58). Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Pay the trust to him who deposited it with you, and do not betray him who betrays you.'(1)

Paying the trusts back to their owners is one of the best acts of obedience that brings one closer to Allah *the Almighty*. Therefore, one should keep the trusts and protect them until they give them back to their owners. Further, they must not contrive a plot to appropriate them or consume them unjustly. Such plots corrupt the covenants and trusts, and in this way no one will trust another regarding deposits, promises and covenants, leading to the disturbance of the society and the lack of confidence among its members. It is noted that He *Glorified is He* attributes the trusts and covenants to those entrusted with them, stating: 'Who are faithful to their trusts and their pledges' (*al-Ma'arij:* 32). This means that so long as the person takes the responsibility for bearing a trust, then they are bound to pay it back completely undiminished when requested or becomes due. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* says to them, 'It is your duty to fulfill them even if there is no proof or document obliging you to do so.' Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* describes them as keepers of His Covenant and of people's trusts, fulfilling their covenants and appropriating nothing of the people's rights.

If we reflect on this verse: 'Who are faithful to their trusts and their pledges,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 32), and the preceding ones: 'Who guard their chastity [29] from all but their spouses or their slave-girls–there is no blame attached to [relations with] these, [30] but those whose desires exceed this limit are truly transgressors, [31]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 29-31) we can find them intimately related since the private parts, the covenants and the trusts should be properly kept guarded, and anyone who does not keep the trusts and the covenants is as guilty as the one who does not guard their private parts. Furthermore, whoever seeks the illicit sexual intercourse is a transgressor as is the one betraying trusts and breaking covenants and promises.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3535; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 9002; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 3595; and Al-Hakim, Mustadrak Hadith no. 2296.*

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُم بِشَهَٰدَٰتِهِمۡ قَآئِمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Who give honest testimony [33]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 33)

The verses clarifying Allah's Way of Guidance begin with those who are constant in their prayer, those pious people who neglect no prescribed prayer but rather offer supererogatory prayers and night prayers. Further, they observe all the acts of worship which show that they reached the rank of *Ihsan.* They also feel sympathetic and affectionate towards the poor and the needy beggars and the deprived people by giving them charity and allocating a portion of their wealth to them, only out of fearing Allah *the Almighty* keeping away from hellfire and being fearful of His Chastisement. They also guard their private parts, preserve their chastity, shun the forbidden matters, and keep their private parts except from their wives and slave girls-under their possession. In addition, they protect the property entrusted to them and fulfil the covenants they take upon themselves.

Such attributes turn one into a sincere worshipper, having the feature of the true believers. But what is more important is the practical application of Allah's Guidance, namely, saying the truth and bearing witness to it, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Who give honest testimony' (*al-Ma'arij:* 33). Bearing witness entails getting engaged in society to see and know what happens. As for giving witness, it means to tell what you have seen. The judge asks the witnesses because they saw the incident while it occurred, so they relate what they have witnessed. In fact, when someone gives testimony on an incident they witnessed, it is as though they let the people who did not see it witness what happened. But the one giving false testimony changes the reality of the situation despite the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'You who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness of Allah's sake, though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; if he be rich or poor, Allah is nearer to them both in compassion; therefore do not follow (your) low desires, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allah is aware of what you do' (*an-Nisa':* 135).

When you give honest and just testimonies, no unjust person will go to excess in their injustice, for what encourages them to go too far in their injustice is those who manipulate justice, conceal their defects and deceive the people. If one finds those who guide them to the way of justice, they will not commit injustice. However, the unjust one likes those who conceal and give false testimony about their crimes. This unjust person says to themselves, 'So and so committed the same crime with impunity.'

Thus, false testimonies lead to disturbance in society, but if the people in society give upright and just testimonies, everyone will be deterred from committing injustice, and the unjust ones will be punished and made an example for others to be deterred as well. A believer is required to stand out firmly for Allah *the Almighty* by reforming themselves, and they are also required to give just and upright testimonies to reform others. Allah *Glorified is He* orders us to establish testimonies exceedingly, i.e. we should leave no chance of giving upright and just testimonies so that everyone takes their rights. By so doing, the strong will not oppress the weak as they will be supported by people's just testimonies.

To establish testimony means to bear witness to the truth with no transgression or injustice, and to deliver it properly and justly. Just testimony requires two things: first, the presence of the witness at the time the incident occurred; second, delivering the testimony truly and honestly. Accordingly, no one should give witness to something they did not witness or attend, but if someone saw something, they should relate it truly and honestly without changing it; for the false testimony causes the rightful owner to lose their right and interest. Moreover, no one should refrain from it if called for witness, for the heart of the one who conceals it is surely sinful. Thus, if you are called as a witness, you should give it truly and honestly in such a way that pleases Allah *Glorified is He*.

As a matter of fact, giving false testimonies is one of the main reasons of corruption in all societies, because it makes the people worried about their rights. It incorporates the causes of doing injustice and destroys the value of truth in society. Additionally, giving false testimonies changes the reality and harms the society since it causes the rights to be taken from their rightful owners and be given to others, leading to disturbance of the proceedings of life and rendering the people insecure of the fruit of their effort. Thus, this hinders the people from working and striving, considering that it, i.e. work will be in vain due to false testimonies. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Should I not inform you about the most grievous of the grave sins? They are associating partners with Allah, disobedience to parents and false testimony. He was reclining, then he sat up, and repeated it so many times that we wished that he should become silent.’(1)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

وَٱلَّذِينَ هُمۡ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمۡ يُحَافِظُونَ ٣٤

And are steadfast in their prayers [34]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’arij:* 34)

The verses speaking of Allah’s Guidance start with mentioning prayer: ‘Not so those who pray [22] and are constant in their prayers, [23]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 22-23) and end with prayer as well: ‘And are steadfast in their prayers’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 34). This is meant to highlight its significance as a declaration of faith performed five times a day. Through prayer, which is the foundation and cornerstone of religion, we leave everything in this worldly life and direct ourselves to Allah *the Almighty*. It is the main pillar of Islam, comprising all other pillars and represents a permanent loyalty of worship to Him *Glorified is He*. It grants assurance to the believers, and constitutes a token of humiliation to Him *Glorified is He*. Further, it makes the believer in conformity with His Way of Guidance, and prevents them from transgressing and defying Him. On the other hand, neglecting prayer signifies defiance against the declaration of worship and loyalty to Him *the Almighty*.

‘To be steadfast’ in prayer means to perform it at its due time; to perfect ablution, bowing down and prostration; to fulfil its conditions and complete its obligatory and recommended acts. This is different from being constant in prayer which means not to neglect it until its due time passes, as mentioned in the Hadith wherein Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘When you see a man frequenting the mosque, testify that he is a believer.’(2)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 20385; Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 15; and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 3629.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 802; Al-Haythami, Mawarid Ath-Tham’an, Hadith no. 310; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu’ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 2680 and also As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 4988.*

Allah states:

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ فِي جَنَّٰتٖ مُّكۡرَمُونَ ٣٥

They will be honoured in Gardens of bliss [35]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 35)

The pronoun 'they' here refers to the believers who are constant in their prayer, give charity, accept the truth of the Judgment Day, fear Allah's chastisement, guard their private parts except in the case of their wives or slave-girls, fulfil their trusts and covenants, give upright testimonies and keep guard of their prayer. All those believers '…will be honoured in Gardens of bliss' (*al-Ma'arij:* 35). Allah's saying: '…in Gardens…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 35) is a predicate informing that they will be in Gardens, and '…honoured…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 35) is a second predicate. But it may be that His saying: '…in Gardens…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 35) is an adverb of place for the word 'honoured,' denoting that the place where they are honoured will be the Gardens of Bliss and the word 'honoured' is the predicate. In this way, the verse would mean that they will be honoured in Gardens. The word 'honoured' is mentioned thrice in the Quran; on one occasion it refers to the Angels, as Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him. Nay! They are honoured servants [26] They do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His commandment do they act [27]' (*al-Anbiya':* 26-27). This means that the Angels are honoured for the purity of their worship to their Lord, their sincerity and absolute obedience to Him.

The word 'honoured' is also mentioned twice to refer to those whom He *the Almighty* deservedly honoured, as He *the Almighty* states: 'Save the servants of Allah, the purified ones. [41] For them is a known sustenance, [42] Fruits, and they shall be highly honoured, [42] In gardens of pleasure, [43]' (*as-Saffat:* 40-43); and 'They will be honoured in Gardens of bliss' (*al-Ma'arij:* 35). Is there more honour for the believers than resembling the Angels in that they are honoured with their faces full of radiance of pleasure, where no blackness or humiliation will cover them?!

Allah *Glorified is He* expounds on the aspects of honouring and rewarding, saying: 'On thrones, facing each other. [44] A bowl shall be made to go round them from water running out of springs, [45] White, delicious to those who drink. [46] There shall be no trouble in it, nor shall they be exhausted therewith. [47] And with them shall be those who restrain the eyes, having beautiful eyes. [48] As if they were eggs carefully protected, [49]' (*as-Saffat:* 44-49). Honouring them is not confined to this, it rather extends to encompass 'bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.'(1)

Not only will the believer be equal to the Angels if they conform to the Guidance of their Lord, but they may also be better than them. This is because they, i.e. the Angels are made subservient, whilst the human being is endowed with the freedom of choice, so they will be better than the Angels if they prefer to keep to the Divine Way of Guidance. Consequently, the believers will have an honourable entrance into paradise wherein an honourable reward has been prepared for them. The honourable entrance should be befitting to the one who grants it; how could it be then when it is granted by Allah *the Almighty*? Allah *Glorified is He* is All Generous in His Rewards, and it is He, the Generous Lord, Who prepared it. Moreover, describing the reward itself as honourable and generous indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* honoured it Himself that it becomes honoured. The reward and high rank in paradise are confined to the followers of His Way of Guidance. So, what about those who disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and the Quran? The answer is given in the following saying of Allah *the Almighty*

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra who narrated that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him said, 'He who would get into paradise (would be made to enjoy such an everlasting) bliss that he would neither become destitute, nor would his clothes wear out, nor his youth would decline. There will be bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.' See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8827; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 369; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 200.*

فَمَالِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ قِبَلَكَ مُهْطِعِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾ عَنِ ٱلْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ ٱلشِّمَالِ عِزِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

What is wrong with the disbelievers? Why do they rush to peer at you [Prophet] [36] from right and left, in crowds? [37] (The Quran, *al-Ma’arij:* 36 - 37)

The Arabic word *Muhtia‘* refers to the one who hastens exceedingly that their neck seems longer than normal, so the word signifies a tall person. The general meaning would be that the disbelievers hastened away from Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and turned their backs on his call in rejection and denial. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘What is then the matter with them that they turn away from the admonition?’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 49)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* gives us an account of how the disbelievers were dealing with Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*. This verse was revealed concerning a group of them who used to gather around him *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* listen to his speech, and then mock and call him a liar. So, in the two verses in question, He *the Almighty* describes their deeds and position regarding Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*. Those disbelievers turned away from Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and yet used to gather around him in circles and separate groups, not facing him, but rather some sitting on his right, while others on his left. All what they did was to stretch their necks towards Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* to mock and scoff at him instead of listening to him. It is as if they were saying, ‘What does this man say?’ They did not hasten to listen to what he *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said, nor did they rush to follow guidance, but it was only to look in surprise and then turn away in separate groups on his right and left hands.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

أَيَطْمَعُ كُلُّ ٱمْرِيٍٕ مِّنْهُمْ أَن يُدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيمٍ ﴿٣٨﴾
كَلَّآ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَٰهُم مِّمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

Does every one of them expect to enter a Garden of bliss? [38]
No! We created them from the substance they know [39]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 38 - 39)

Every one of the disbelievers falsely hopes that they will be admitted to the paradise at the end. However, how could it happen when they did not believe in Allah *the Almighty,* Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and the Noble Quran? Further, they did not abide by the Divine Way of Guidance, for they rejected and defied Allah's Commands. What is it then they hope for? In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* states: '(This) shall not be in accordance with your vain desires nor in accordance with the vain desires of the followers of the Book; whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it, and besides Allah he will find for himself neither a guardian nor a helper' (*an-Nisa':* 123). Vain desires signify the human being's ambition to have something joyful but without pursuing it. In the case of the disbelievers, what good deeds and faith did they offer to have the paradise as their reward?

The Arabic word *Tama'* (wished) means to expect to have something transcending, even the vain desires, as in the case of the one about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Leave Me and him whom I created alone, [11] And give him vast riches, [12] And sons dwelling in his presence, [13] And I adjusted affairs for him adjustably; [14] And yet he desires that I should add more! [15]' (*al-Muddaththir:* 11-15) Allah *Glorified is He* gave him everything; after creating him lonely and penniless; He *Glorified is He* granted him abundant wealth and as many children as he wanted. They used to attend the gatherings of his people with him and to run his business. Despite all these bounties, he desired for more blessings, power and wealth.

One hoping for something necessarily needs to have qualifications to gain it, for how could they desire or wish for something without employing the means to obtain it or having what makes them worthy of it? Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the hopes of some believers, stating that they used to say: 'Surely, we hope that our Lord will forgive us our wrongs' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 51). They further clarify the reason for such hope as to be: '…because we are the first of the believers' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 51). As for those who were obstinate and persisted in their disbelief, they vainly desire to be admitted to the Garden of Bliss. It is noteworthy that the Arabic verb *Yudkhal* (to be admitted into) in the verse under discussion is used in the passive form to indicate that they knew for sure that they did not offer anything rendering them worthy of entering paradise, so they want someone to let them enter it.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'No! We created them from the substance they know' (*al-Ma'arij:* 39). So, the disbelievers mocked at Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* and scoffed at the Quran saying mockingly that if there were a paradise, they would enter it along with those who believed. No, they should have no hope to enter the paradise since they will have no share in it, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Surely (as for) those who reject Our Communications and turn away from them haughtily, the doors of heaven shall not be opened for them, nor shall they enter the garden until the camel pass through the eye of the needle; and thus do We reward the guilty' (*al-A'raf:* 40). Therefore, what is it that they mock and scoff at when they were created from what they know, i.e. from contemptible water, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'Was he not a small seed in the seminal elements' (*al-Qiyama:* 37)? Further, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* spat in his palm and said, 'Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Do you think you can escape from My Punishment, O son of Adam, when I have created you from something like this?'(1)

Furthermore, Allah *Glorified is He* states: 'Did We not create you from contemptible water?' (*al-Insan:* 20) As they know what they were created from, there is no way of denying the Creator who created them, as Qatada said regarding this verse, ‘You were created from filth, O son of Adam, so fear Allah.’(1) Man is created from contemptible water, so why do they then behave arrogantly and turn away from Guidance? Further, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Were they created from nothing or are they the creators of themselves’ (*at-Tur:* 35). Neither could they say that they were created out of nothing, nor would they say that they are the creators of themselves. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* poses a third question for them, saying: ‘Have you considered the seed? [58] Is it you that created it or are we the creators? [59]’ (*at-Talaq:* 58-59) They could not also claim to be the creators of that.

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(1) *Al-Baghawi narrated through the chain of narrators of Ath-Tha'labi on the authority of Yusr ibn Jahhash who narrated that Prophet Muhammad Allah's peace and blessings be upon him spat in his palm then pointed to it with his finger and said, 'Allah Glorified is He says, 'Do you think you can escape from My Punishment, O son of Adam, when I have created you from something like this, and when I have fashioned you perfectly and made you complete, you walk wearing your two garments and the earth makes a sound (beneath your feet). You collected money but do not give away in the Way of Allah; then when your soul reaches the throat, you say, 'I want to give in charity, ' but it is too late for charity. See Al-Khazen, Tafsir, 4/342; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2707; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 17842.*

How could the disbelievers claim that they will enter the Garden of Bliss, that they will surpass the true believers and that they will be gathered with them in paradise? In this way, they, in fact, do not show respect to Allah *the Almighty* accusing Him of injustice, for how can He *the Almighty* assemble them as well as the believers in paradise while they are not equal?

Then, He *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِرَبِّ ٱلۡمَشَٰرِقِ وَٱلۡمَغَٰرِبِ إِنَّا لَقَٰدِرُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾
عَلَىٰٓ أَن نُّبَدِّلَ خَيۡرٗا مِّنۡهُمۡ وَمَا نَحۡنُ بِمَسۡبُوقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

And, by the Lord of every sunrise and sunset, We have the power [40] to substitute for them others better than they are – nothing can prevent Us from doing this [41]
(The Quran, *al-Ma’arij:* 40 - 41)

Every place on the earth has a sunrise and a sunset; when the sun rises in a place, it sets in another and vice versa. So with every sunrise, there is sunset and accordingly there are two sunrises and two sunsets. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He is Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two settings’ (*ar-Rahman:* 17). Furthermore, the sunrise and the sunset differ from one day to another, and there is a sunrise and a sunset every second. Hence, He *Glorified is He* swears with Himself as Being the Lord of every sunrise and sunset, as they differ over the year.

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(1) *This narration is narrated on the authority of Bishr ibn Yazid, who narrated it from Sai'd. See ‘Abd Ar-Razzaq, Tafsir, 3332; At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 23/621; and Al-Karmani, Gharai'b At-Tafsir, 2/1245.*

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And, by the Lord of every sunrise and sunset, We have the power,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 40) is a reference to the different settings of the sun and its daily motion in addition to the benefits of the sunrise and sunset to mankind and the living beings. Some scholars expanded on this issue; Al Baghawi(1), for example, said, 'Allah *Glorified is He* added that He created three hundred and sixty skylights in the East and sixty skylights in the West which is the number of days a year. The sun rises and sets in each skylight on a particular day and does not rise or set from this skylight until it is the same day of the following year. This refers to the sunrises and sunsets.'(2)

With regard to His saying: 'And, by the Lord of every sunrise and sunset, We have the power,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 40) there are emphatic linguistic devices employed to further affirm the meaning. Here, the pronoun 'We' refers to Allah *Glorified is He* and indicates His Greatness. The general meaning of the verse is that He *the Almighty* is fully Able to destroy them and bring forth people who are better, more obedient and more pleasing to Him than them.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We have the power [40] to substitute for them others better than they are, [41]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 40-41) it gives rise to a question, which is, 'Did Allah *Glorified is He* bring people better than them?' Some Scholars state that He *the Almighty* substituted for them *Al-Ansar* (The Helpers) and *Al-Muhajirin* (The Emigrants), and others maintain that He *Glorified is He* replaced some of the disbelievers by turning them into believers. However, the other scholars hold that Allah *the Almighty* did not bring others instead of them, as this only happens by way of destruction. It was just a threat for them to believe.

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(1) *Al Baghawi is Abu Mohamed Al-Husayn ibn Mas'ud Al-Farra' or Ibn Al-Farra'. He was dubbed Muhyi As-Sunnah (the one reviving the Sunna). He was a jurist, a Hadith scholar and an exegete. He was attributed to Bagha, a village in Khurasan located between Herat and Marw. He was born in 436 A.H. and passed away in 510 A.H. at the age of 74. His books include At-Tahdhib in Shaf'i Fiqh, Sharh As-Sunna in Hadith and Lubab At-Ta'wil Fi Ma'ani At-Tanzil in Quranic exegesis. See Az-Zirikli, Al-A'lam, 2/259.*

(2) *See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 23/283; see also Ath-Th'alabi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 8/139; and Al-Baghawi, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 4/26.*

Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* threatens those who turn away from giving in charity, saying: '…and if you turn back He will bring in your place another people, then they will not be like you' (*Muhammad:* 38). He *Glorified is He* is Self-sufficient and has Absolute Omnipotence to replace those miserly people with others who are generous in giving out in His Way out of what He provided for them. As a matter of fact, the one refraining from giving only deprives themselves of mercy. Moreover, the one committing apostasy will be replaced, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'O you who believe! Whoever from among you turns back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people, He shall love them and they shall love Him, lowly before the believers, mighty against the unbelievers…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 54). Thus, those who renounce Islam will be replaced by good people unlike them.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the one withholding money from charity or the apostate will be destroyed; rather, they may have more wealth, power, publicity and followers. Replacement here means that they were expulsed from Allah's Mercy and there is no hope that they will return to the Way of Guidance. This is like the case of someone you advised many times, but they insist on seeking the wrong path. So, someone else says to you, 'Leave them alone.' 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As *may Allah be pleased with him* narrated that he heard Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'If you see my *ummah* were afraid to confront an oppressor and tell him, 'You are an oppressor', then it is finished.'(1)

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…nothing can prevent Us from doing this,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 41) it means that He *Glorified is He* could be neither unable nor overpowered, for nothing He wants shall be unfulfilled, nor can anyone be protected from Him. Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to replace the disbelievers with others unlike them. No one can go beyond His Will or prevent it from pursuing its aim since He *Glorified is He* is the Lord of every sunrise and sunset. This is not only confined to the earth on which we live, as it represents only one of nine planets in the solar system, and there are millions of other solar systems in the galaxies of this vast cosmos. Every solar system has a sun rising and setting, and Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of the entire universe, not only the Lord our planet and solar system. Accordingly, He is the Omnipotent Whom nothing can overcome and: '…the Lord of every sunrise and sunset…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 41). Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As may Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 6521 and 67842; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 2374 and 2375; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 14314 and 14351.*

فَذَرۡهُمۡ يَخُوضُواْ وَيَلۡعَبُواْ حَتَّىٰ يُلَٰقُواْ يَوۡمَهُمُ ٱلَّذِى يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

So leave them to wallow in idle talk, until they
come face to face with their promised Day [42]
(The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 42)

This verse conveys an order to leave them alone, and the Arabic verb *Dhar* (to leave) is used in the present form, and was used in the past form only once in the Hadith wherein Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Leave the Yemenis so long as they leave you.' *Da'* (leave) is another verb with the same meaning, and it is alleged that the Arabs neglected the past form of this verb as well as the verb *Dhar* except in the verse reading: 'Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased' (*ad-Duha:* 3). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to Prophet Muhammad, 'Leave them to Me so that I punish them and do what I please with them.' The meaning could be to let them do whatever they like to deserve the punishment and have the chastisement inflicted on them.

Regarding His saying: 'So leave them to wallow in idle talk…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 42) the Arabic word *Yakhud* (to wallow) gives a clear physical meaning because it literally means to get into a liquid, such as getting into water or mud. This word gives the feeling of entering deep water which covers what is beneath the feet of the one entering it so that they do not know where their feet are taking him, and they may fall into a hole. By contrast, the way of the one who is not walking in water is clear before them and they know where to step, without getting any harm.

The Arabic word *Tal'abu* means to engage in something useless. So the disbelievers' efforts cannot stand in the face of the Call to Islam since it is going on in its way and they will never overcome it. This is because all what they do is idle talks and amusement that have no effect in reality; it is only a matter of amusement. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'What! Do the people of the towns feel secure from Our Punishment coming to them in the morning while they play?' (*al-A'raf:* 98) Their daytime is marked with futile, profitless motion that is none but a play in this worldly life and their night is marked with lacking motion or indulging into obscenity, depravity and perversion. In fact, anyone not following Allah's Way of Guidance spends their night asleep, distracted or committing acts of disobedience, and gets involved in play during their daytime. So, He *Glorified is He* states: 'What! Do the people of the towns feel secure from Our Punishment coming to them in the morning while they play?' (*al-A'raf:* 98) This means that they neither pay attention to Him nor show regard for Him. They did that intentionally, recommending and even urging one another to do it.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: '…until they come face to face with their promised Day' (*al-Ma'arij:* 42). This means to leave them in their amusement, negligence and blindness until they encounter the promised Judgment Day. We can note that He *Glorified is He* says: '…come face to face with…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 42) which means that it is they who seek to see that Day despite their hatred, denial and running away from it. In addition, in His saying: '…with their promised Day,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 42), we note that the Day is attributed to them. So, they cannot escape or flee from it; it is waiting for them to be punished for their disbelief, and they inevitably will come to their destination. They were warned by all the Prophets of that Day of Reckoning and Recompense. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

يَوۡمَ يَخۡرُجُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡأَجۡدَاثِ سِرَاعٗا كَأَنَّهُمۡ إِلَىٰ نُصُبٖ يُوفِضُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
خَٰشِعَةً أَبۡصَٰرُهُمۡ تَرۡهَقُهُمۡ ذِلَّةٞۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلۡيَوۡمُ ٱلَّذِى كَانُواْ يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

**The Day they will rush out of their graves as if rallying to a flag [43]
eyes downcast and covered in shame: that is the Day of which they
were warned [44] (The Quran, *al-Ma'arij:* 43 - 44)**

What will occur on that promised Day against which they are warned? Allah *the Almighty* provides the answer, saying: 'The Day they will rush out of their graves' (*al-Ma'arij:* 43). In this Day, the trumpet will be blown for the second time so that all people come out of their graves. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: 'And the trumpet shall be blown, when lo! From their graves they shall hasten on to their Lord' (*Ya Sin:* 51). Consider how magnificent the Quranic description of that scene is, as stated: 'And the trumpet shall be blown, when lo! From their graves they shall hasten on to their Lord. [51] They shall say: O woe to us! Who has raised us up from our sleeping-place? This is what the Beneficent promised and the Messenger told the truth. [52] There would be naught but a single cry, when lo! They shall all be brought before Us [53]' (*Ya Sin:* 51-53). This is the truth which the disbelievers always belied until they died and were buried with the certainty that they would not be raised. They believed that there would be no Day when they shall raise up from their graves and get back to life again. Then, all of a sudden, their graves are laid open to find themselves alive against their will, and they will start screaming and invoking woe against themselves, since it is vividly clear that they were in falsehood. Once they say: 'O woe to us! Who has raised us up from our sleeping-place?' (*Ya Sin:* 52) Allah *the Almighty* or the Angels reply to them, saying: '…this is what the Beneficent Allah promised and the Messengers told the truth' (*Ya Sin:* 52).

You can observe how great the might of bringing them forth against their will is by reflecting on His saying: 'There would be naught but a single cry, when lo! They shall all be brought before Us' (*Ya Sin:* 53). The verb 'be brought' is used in the passive form to indicate that they will be forced to be present and to stand before Allah *Glorified is He* and no one will escape since He *the Almighty* says: '…they shall all be brought before Us' (*Ya Sin:* 53). Allah *Glorified is He* describes their coming forth from graves as unraveling cloth because they come out very swiftly.

Then, He *Glorified is He* adds another account to make the description clearer, stating: '…as if rallying to a flag,' (*al-Ma'arij:* 43). The Arabic word *Nusub* refers to something erected, and it occurs in the Quran as singular and as plural. It originally signifies stones erected around the *Ka'ba* where the polytheists used to slaughter animals as sacrifices to their false gods. So, it refers to an erected flag to which the worshippers hasten. This is like their hastening and coming forth from graves, which entails their worry and concern regarding their final destination. But do they hasten on happily and cheerfully with delighted faces that they will meet with their Lord in Whom they believed?! No, they were not among the believers; rather, they disbelieved in Him *Glorified is He* rejected His commands and denied and rebelled against His Way of Guidance. Furthermore, they stood against the believers, and killed the prophets and their heirs, i.e. scholars and callers to Allah *the Almighty*. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The scholars are the heirs of the Prophets.'

At the outset, they come out terrified with their eyes growing wild out of fear and turning to discover the place around them, still not believing that they were raised from their graves. They are in a horrible situation; billions of corpses come out from graves and no one knows what their destination will be. Such are the moments regarding which Allah *Glorified is He* states: '…they fear a day, in which the hearts and eyes shall turn about' (*an-Nur:* 37). This indicates that their hearts tremble with fear, disturbed beats and high pounding. Similarly, their eyes turn around here and there, seeing the horror which frightens them so that they overturn seeking something that gives assurance or relieves the pain they experience. But they will even undergo more grievous and dreadful horror when they get assured of their fateful destination.

Then, you find them humiliated and disgraced, and here comes their description in His saying: 'Eyes downcast and covered in shame…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 43-44). The disbelievers' eyes are downcast in humiliation since there is no escape or way out for them. Further, shame and ignominy will cover their faces when they become assured of the punishment befalling them. Allah *Glorified is He* says about these people: 'These are they who have lost their souls, and what they forged is gone from them' (*Hud:* 21).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* ends the chapter of *al-Ma'arij* with His saying: '…that is the Day of which they were warned' (*al-Ma'arij:* 44). He *the Almighty* repeats that the Day of Judgment is the one against which they were warned by His Prophets, from Adam *Allah's peace be upon him* until Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* the last of the Messengers. Consequently, the disbelievers have no excuse since they were warned against that Day and that situation, but they did not respond to such threats, nor did they believe in the Divine Revelation, thereby they wronged themselves. Here, they are now on the Day of Judgment encountering what they used to deny and reject.

the chapter of

Nuh

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Nuh*(1).

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

إِنَّآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِۦٓ أَنۡ أَنذِرۡ قَوۡمَكَ
مِن قَبۡلِ أَن يَأۡتِيَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ١

We sent Noah to his people: ‘Warn your people, before a painful punishment comes to them’ [1]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 1)

The story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah’s peace be upon him* is mentioned frequently in the Quran, as is the case with the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *Allah’s peace be upon him*. Astonishingly, the scenes of this story occur in many Quranic chapters, whereas the chapter under discussion, named after Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah’s peace be upon him* does not contain many of the main incidents of the story; rather, it deals with other scenes. It is mainly concerned with his persistence on calling his people, and that he did not fall short in admonishing them day and night, in secret and in public. However, whenever Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah’s peace be upon him* admonishes them, they turned away from him. The story of the Ark and the flood are not mentioned in this chapter as well, though they are the main incidents in his story. Likewise, his story with his son which is mentioned in the chapter of *Hud* is not related here.

Accordingly, every scene of the story is placed for a certain purpose, and thus we find that the chapter of *Nuh* does not encompass important elements of the story which are explained in the chapters of *Hud* and *al-A'raf.* Allah

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(1) The chapter of *Nuh* is the seventy-first according to the order of chapters in the *Mushaf*, and it was revealed in Mecca, i.e. before *Hijra,* and contains no abrogated or abrogating verses. It is composed of 28 verses, and it was revealed after the chapter of *an-Nahl* and before the chapter of *Ibrahim*.

Glorified is He ends the chapter of *al-Ma'arij*, which precedes the chapter of *Nuh* under discussion, affirming that He *Glorified is He* has threatened and warned the people against the Day of Judgment, and that it will undoubtedly come. Given that warning, He *Glorified is He* introduces this chapter with an example of such warning, conveyed by one of His Prophets and Messengers, i.e. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him*. Thereby, He *the Almighty* dedicates a chapter for him *Allah's peace be upon him*.

Allah *Glorified is He* commences this chapter by emphasising the fact that He sent Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* to his people to warn and alert them before a painful chastisement befell them. This punishment could be the flood that occurred in this worldly life, or it is possibly the punishment of the Judgment Day on which all people will be assembled. Regarding His saying: 'We sent Noah to his people…' (*Nuh:* 1) it indicates that the Message of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was directed only to his people, as were the Messages of other Prophets, like Ibrahim (Abraham) Lut (Lot), Shu'aib (Jethro) and Saleh (Shelah) *Allah's peace be upon them*. All these Messages were meant to be practiced at particular times until the Noble Quran comes to encompass the comprehensive Guidance of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Monotheism was revealed to Prophet Nuh (Noah) and all Prophets, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Noah and the prophets after him, to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon– to David We gave the book [of Psalms] ' (*an-Nisa':* 163).

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Warn your people, before a painful punishment comes to them,' (*Nuh:* 1) it means that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was commanded to warn his people and alert them before a painful torment would be inflicted upon them; either it is an immediate one such as the flood which afflicted them, or a deferred one, which is the chastisement of the Hereafter inflicted upon those who die without repenting from disbelief and returning to Allah *the Almighty*. However, why is he ordered 'to warn' them in this verse? We say that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* lived among his people for nine hundred and fifty years calling them to Allah *the Almighty* until he came to a dead-end, and there were only thirteen men and a woman who believed in him after these long years. His people reached the pinnacle of denial, rejection, obstinacy and misguidance in such a way that makes warning the most befitting term to summarise his Message.

He even went so far as to invoke Allah *the Almighty* against his people, as mentioned at the end of this chapter, saying: 'Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth ' (*Nuh:* 26). Thus, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* invoked Him *the Almighty* to destroy the disbelievers completely. The most acceptable view is that the painful chastisement here refers to the flood and drowning water because He *the Almighty* used the phrase 'come to them', which properly refers to the flood. But when speaking of the punishment of the Judgment Day, He *the Almighty* states in the chapter of *al-Ma'arij*: 'So leave them to wallow in idle talk until they come face to face with their promised Day' (*al-Ma'arij:* 42). The disbelievers will 'encounter' the chastisement of the Hereafter; it will not 'come to them', whilst the flood comes to them, enters their houses and drowns them and their lands, taking down whatever comes in its way of their cattle and wealth except what Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* took with him on the board of the Ark. It is a painful punishment for them, as it caused them to lose everything; their souls, wealth, children, cattle and land.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ إِنِّي لَكُمۡ نَذِيرٞ مُّبِينٌ ۝٢ أَنِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱتَّقُوهُ وَأَطِيعُونِ ۝٣

And so he said, 'My people, I am here to warn you plainly [2]
Serve God, be mindful of Him and obey me [3]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 2-3)

Allah *Glorified is He* assigned Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* to communicate the Message and to warn his people, so he called them, as did other Prophets, saying, 'O my people.' The Arabic word *Qawm* (people) refers to a particular community and conveys the meaning of standing which is the most active condition of the human being. 'People,' as used in the verse, refers to a group of persons, especially men because they take upon themselves to perform tasks, and whenever this word is mentioned in the Quran, it signifies a group of persons bound together. It also signifies men in particular because they are the ones receiving the Message at first hand, unlike women who stay at home and the Message passes to them from a father, a brother or a husband.

Further, it is stated in the Quran: ‘O you who believe! Let not to a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them,’ (*al-Hujurat:* 11). In the verse in question, the women are not included under the word ‘people’, since it refers to those confronting any Messenger and who cause troubles, reject the Message and typically wage war against the Prophet and his followers.

Addressing his people, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah’s peace be upon him* said: ‘My people, I am here to warn you plainly. [2] Serve Allah, be mindful of Him and obey me,’ (*Nuh:* 2-3). He started with giving a warning, whereas in the chapter of *al-A'raf* he started with the objectives of his Message then warned them, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Certainly We sent Noah to his people, so he said: O my people! Serve Allah, you have no god other than Him; surely I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous day, ' (*al-A‘raf:* 59).

Thus, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah’s peace be upon him* wanted to draw the attention of his people to the significance of what he delivers to them, saying: ‘My people, I am here to warn you plainly’ (*Nuh:* 2). According to one of the recitations of this verse in question, the letter *Hamza* has the diacritical mark *Kasra* and in another recitation it has *Fatha;* in the recitation where the *Kasra* is used the meaning is that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah’s peace be upon him* came with the Message and communicated it to his people, saying: ‘My people, I am here to warn you plainly’ (*Nuh:* 2). However, in the recitation where the *Fatha* is used, the meaning is that the content of the Message is that he is a plain warner to them, as though the first recitation implies a narration of how he conveyed the Message, but the second defines its content, namely, that he was a plain warner to them.

We have previously explained that a warner tells of something evil whose time has not come yet so that the listener gets ready for it. It is directed to the disobedient or the disbeliever, while a believer is given good news to get prepared for it and receive it with a reassured soul. Then, Allah *the Almighty* relates that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* said to his people: 'Serve Allah, be mindful of Him and obey me' (*Nuh:* 2). Thus, his Message comprised three issues: offering worship to Allah, piety and obeying His Commands. The command of offering worship to Allah *the Almighty* follows the explanatory particle *Anna* as in His saying: 'We revealed to the mother of Moses…' (*al-Qasas:* 7). But what is it that which was revealed? It is: '…suckle him…' (*al-Qasas:* 7).

Worship signifies obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* by performing what He commands and abstaining from what He prohibits. So, it means abiding by His Commands. Hence, if someone claims divinity without having a way of worship, we will ask him, 'How could we worship you? Where is your way of guidance? What are your commands and what are your prohibitions?' The people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* used to worship idols instead of Allah *Glorified is He*. The names of these idols were: Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq and Nasr, who had been righteous people, but when they died, people made idols of them to remember their righteousness whenever they saw them. Yet, with the progress of the times, they worshiped them instead of Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, the Message of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was to: 'Serve Allah, be mindful of Him and obey me' (*Nuh:* 3). This means to worship Him *the Almighty* Alone, not to associate partners to Him and to fear Him and His punishment; this is the meaning of piety. Accordingly, he *Allah's peace be upon him* said to them: '…be mindful of Him...' (*Nuh:* 3). This entails fearing Him *the Almighty* avoiding His punishment and recompense and taking faith as a protection and salvation from His chastisement. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* then said: '…and obey me,' (*Nuh:* 3). He did not say 'obey Him,' since their obedience to him *Allah's peace be upon him* is obedience to Allah *the Almighty*. So, he said 'obey me' because he warned them against Allah's Punishment and wished them all the good. That is why they should obey him in order that Allah's Punishment would not befall them.

All the Prophets addressed their people with the same speech; for example, Prophet Hud (Eber) *Allah's peace be upon him* said to his people: 'Surely I am a faithful apostle to you; [107] Therefore guard against (the punishment of)

Allah and obey me [108]' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 107-108). Prophet Saleh (Shelah) said the same to his people, as did Prophet Lut (Lot) and Prophet Shu'aib (Jethro) *Allah's peace be upon them all*.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* states:

يَغْفِرْ لَكُم مِّن ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرْكُمْ إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّىۚ إِنَّ
أَجَلَ ٱللَّهِ إِذَا جَآءَ لَا يُؤَخَّرُۚ لَوْ كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

He will forgive you your sins and spare you until your appointed time — when God's appointed time arrives it cannot be postponed. If only you understood! [4]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 4)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He will forgive you your sins…' (*Nuh:* 4) is the result and the fruit of worshipping Him Alone, observing piety and obedience to Him. This verse, with this word order, is repeated in other verses, as in His saying: 'Their Messenger said: Is there doubt about Allah, the Maker of the heavens and the earth? He invites you to forgive you your faults and to respite you till an appointed term ' (*ar-Ra'd:* 10). Addressing the disbelievers, Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, 'forgive your sins,' whilst He addresses the believers, saying: 'O you who believe! Shall I lead you to a merchandise which may deliver you from a painful chastisement?[10] You shall believe in Allah and His Messenger, and struggle hard in Allah's way with your property and your lives; that is better for you, did you but know?[11] He will forgive you your faults… [12]' (*as-Saff:* 10-12). So, He *Glorified is He* addresses the believers in a way which is different from that of the disbelievers.

Regarding His saying: '…and spare you until your appointed time…' (*Nuh:* 4), the appointed time refers to the Judgment Day which indicates the end of this worldly life and the beginning of the Hereafter. So, He *the Almighty* then says: '…when Allah's appointed time arrives, it cannot be postponed. If only you understood!' (*Nuh:* 4) This fact is affirmed by the particle *Inna* of emphasis. The Arabic word *Ajal* (appointed time) is mentioned in many verses, as in His saying: 'And for every nation there is a doom, so when their doom is come, they shall not remain behind the least while, nor shall they go before, ' (*al-A'raf:* 34); and '…when Allah's appointed time arrives, it cannot be postponed…' (*Nuh:* 4). However, the two appointed times are different regarding man's presence in this worldly life; the first appointed time refers to the end of one's life while the second refers to bringing one to life again to meet with Allah *the Almighty* in the Hereafter. So, they are somehow related.

The term appointed by Allah *the Almighty* be it that which ends life or brings it back, could not be postponed from its due time. So, the term appointed by Allah is recorded in the Preserved Tablet and will not be delayed if its due time comes, that is, none can defer it. As for His saying: '…if only you understand' (*Nuh:* 4), it means 'if they could know how regretful they would be when their term is over, they would believe and hasten on to worship Allah *the Almighty* and observe piety and obedience to Him.'

Due to his people's rejection, Prophet Noah *Allah's peace be upon him* directed his speech to Allah *Glorified is He* saying:

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا ﴿٥﴾ فَلَمْ يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَاءِيَ إِلَّا فِرَارًا ﴿٦﴾

He said, 'My Lord, I have called my people night and day [5]
but the more I call them, the further they run away [6]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 5 - 6)

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* constantly admonished his people day and night, and was not neglectful in that. He did not conceal guidance and advice from them, but they did not respond, so here he invokes his Lord, saying, 'I have conveyed the Message and I directed myself to You and I am clear of that which they do. I have invited them night and day to monotheism and to worship You and warned them against Your Might and Power.'

Then, Allah *the Almighty* relates that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* said: 'But the more I call them, the further they run away, ' (*Nuh:* 6). Allah *Glorified is He* uses the letter *Fa'* indicating consecutiveness and insistence, for Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* kept calling his people night and day, in secret and in public for about a thousand years, but they used to turn away from faith. Hence, He *Glorified is He* employs the letter *Fa'* denoting consecutiveness, whereas his nine hundred and fifty years of consecutive admonition increased them but in disbelief, obstinacy and turning away from faith.

Allah *Glorified is He* then states:

وَإِنِّي كُلَّمَا دَعَوْتُهُمْ لِتَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوٓا۟ أَصَٰبِعَهُمْ فِىٓ ءَاذَانِهِمْ
وَٱسْتَغْشَوْا۟ ثِيَابَهُمْ وَأَصَرُّوا۟ وَٱسْتَكْبَرُوا۟ ٱسْتِكْبَارًا ٧

Every time I call them, so that You may forgive them, they thrust their fingers into their ears, cover their heads with their garments, persist in their rejection, and grow more insolent and arrogant [7] (The Quran, *Nuh:* 7)

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* continues complaining to his Lord that whenever he called his people to worship and fear Him *the Almighty* Alone, they used to respond in a way indicating the intensity of their rejection of his call and insistence on disbelief. He *the Almighty* says that: '…they thrust their fingers into their ears…' (*Nuh:* 7). It is axiomatically known that the whole finger cannot enter one's ears, but it is only the fingertip which blocks the auditory opening. The Quran described it by way of exaggeration to reveal their evil and bad attitude towards Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him*. Every one of them wanted to put their whole finger in their ears in order to block out any call. This is a proof of their hatred and a testimony against them since they do not understand that their hearts may soften if they listen to him. This is always the case with the people of falsehood; they do not like to listen to the truth, and the first thing they would do is to block their ears from hearing it or to prevent the people of truth from disseminating their Message or even to kill them.

It once happened that the people of Quraysh urged one another not to listen to the Quran, saying: 'Do not listen to this Quran and make noise therein, perhaps you may overcome' (*Fussilat:* 26). They did so because they believed that if the Quran reached one's ears, it might influence them. So, if the Quran was false, why then did they fear hearing it? Putting their fingers in their ears was not enough! Therefore, they also '…cover their heads with their garments, persist in their rejection, and grow more insolent and arrogant' (*Nuh:* 7). Not only did they want to ignore Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace be upon him* by blocking their ears, but also by not seeing him. So, they '…thrust their fingers into their ears…' (*Nuh:* 7) so as not to listen to him; and they: '…cover their heads with their garments…' (*Nuh:* 7) so as not to see him.

Allah *Glorified is He* depicts an image related to this context to clarify how the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* turned away from his admonition and rejected it, using the word 'their fingers' to imply their rejection and how it was unreasonably exaggerated in their attempt to put their whole fingers into their ears. In addition to this outright rejection by means of blocking their ears, Allah *Glorified is He* shows their rejection to see while talking to them, saying: '…cover their heads with their garments…' (*Nuh:* 7). Yet, they insisted on their rejection to his call as stated: '…and grow more insolent and arrogant ' (*Nuh:* 7). Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* used to come to their idols at night and shout at the top of his voice saying, 'There is no god but Allah and I am Noah His Messenger ' so that their idols got inverted so they would beat him fiercely and step on his belly until blood came out of his nose and ears.(1)

When one of them was about to die, they would instruct their children and take a covenant upon them not to believe in Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* saying, 'O my son, look at this man, my father carried me to him and warned me against believing in him so beware of him not to let you renounce your belief, for he is a magician and a liar.' This happened consecutively over the centuries, for every generation would instruct the following one not to believe in him and to beware of him; grandfathers instructing fathers who in turn instruct their sons and so on. They did insist on their disbelief despite the earnest attempts made by Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* to urge them to believe or even to give themselves a chance to listen to him. However, they: '…grow more insolent and arrogant' (*Nuh:* 7). So, they deserved Allah's chastisement because they denied, were obstinate and took pride in their sins. With such pride they wanted to flee from the commitment to the Guidance brought forth by Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him*. The Arabic word *Takabar* (grow more arrogant) indicates that this arrogance was extrinsic; it would swiftly vanish and go away. They were not only proud but they were also excessively arrogant. Thus, this arrogance exceeded the limits and imagination, and thereby they deserved a punishment not inflicted on anyone before or after them, i.e. the flood. Further, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* stayed among them for nine hundred and fifty years calling them to Allah *the Almighty,* and yet they did not believe. Accordingly, they were worthy of his invocation to eradicate and wipe them out, and He *Glorified is He* responded to his invocation.

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(1) *See Shihab Ad-Din An-Nuwayri, Nihayat Al-'Arab Fi Funun Al-Adab, 13/44-45.*

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* only invited them to worship Allah *the Almighty* Alone, to forgive them, saying: 'Every time I call them so that You may forgive them…' (*Nuh:* 7). He did not invite them to do him a personal benefit, but only to be forgiven for their disbelief and denial. In this way, their belief would be for their own good, as they receive Allah's Forgiveness and Mercy, evade His punishment and get many of His Blessings bestowed on the believers.

Allah *Glorified is He* states:

ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جِهَارًا ﴿٨﴾ ثُمَّ إِنِّي أَعْلَنتُ لَهُمْ وَأَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْرَارًا ﴿٩﴾
فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا ﴿١٠﴾

I have tried calling them openly [8] I have tried preaching to them in public and speaking to them in private [9] I said, "Ask forgiveness of your Lord: He is ever forgiving [10]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 8 - 10)

Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* clears himself of committing shortcomings in calling his people or of having neglected what Allah *the Almighty* commanded him to convey. So, despite their rejection and putting their fingers in their ears so that they do not hear him and covering themselves with their garments so as not to watch him, and in spite of their excessive insolence and arrogance, he went on with his calling, as he says: 'I have tried calling them openly,' (*Nuh:* 8). This shows that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* invited them publicly in their markets and roads, not fearing their mockery or aggression. The word 'openly' means calling and announcing to them loudly and clearly to the top of his voice, not lowering it or murmuring. Rather, he was shouting with the warnings supposed to be delivered to them, given the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* sent him *Allah's peace be upon him* to warn his people and he declared this Message and delivered it to them loudly and publicly. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'We sent Noah to his people: 'Warn your people, before a painful punishment comes to them' (*Nuh:* 1).

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'I have tried preaching to them in public and speaking to them in private. 'Then surely I spoke to them in public and I spoke to them in secret' (*Nuh:* 9), it shows that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* tried with them all possible means and ways of calling the notable people publicly and the individuals secretly. The Arabic word *Israr* (in secret) is a verbal noun indicating emphasis, and the Arabic word *Lahum* (to them) draws our attention to the fact that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* desired and was very cautious that his people would believe. So, this word is repeated to denote his insistence on attracting them to belief, for he had them in mind all the time. Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* even went beyond that as to wish for them to be forgiven, so he enticed them to ask Allah *Glorified is He* for forgiveness. But how could it happen when they did not believe in Him *the Almighty* as the only God worthy of worship, and ascribed to him idols which neither benefit nor harm, and which neither hear nor see?

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'I said, 'Ask forgiveness of your Lord: He is ever forgiving,' (*Nuh:* 10) it shows how merciful Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* was towards his people, as he encouraged them to ask for forgiveness, which signifies repentance and admitting one's bad deeds. If Allah *Glorified is He* did not legislate repentance and forgiveness, the one who committed a sin would get expelled from His Mercy. So, what would the attitude of such a sinner in the society be? They would inflict all evil on the society out of losing hope in themselves and then they become more aggressive and increases in committing sins and evil deeds. Thus, forgiveness represents confession of one's sins and shortcomings, and the moment you ask for forgiveness from Him *Glorified is He,* this expresses your declaration of faith and acknowledgement that His obligations are the true ones. Having asked for forgiveness, the repentant should never commit the sin again, and should be cautious to keep away from acts of disobedience and sins. We should consider that we ask for forgiveness from ‘our Lord’ Who created and brought us into and He nourishes us with His Provision and Care. Therefore, if you ask Him for forgiveness, He will not let you down.

Regarding His saying: '…He is ever forgiving, ' (*Nuh:* 10) the Arabic word for *Ghaffar* (ever forgiving) represents the highest form of exaggeration, for it is mentioned in the active participle form elsewhere in His saying: 'The Forgiver of the faults and the Acceptor of repentance…' (*Ghafir:* 3). Allah’s most beautiful Attributes include both forms, namely *Ghafir* (Forgiver) and *Ghafour* (forgiving). The exaggerated form may also be used to denote the recurrence of the act, i.e. Allah *Glorified is He* forgives His servants many times for their numerous sins. So, Allah *the Almighty* is Forgiver in the case of one sin, and He is permanently Ever-Forgiving at all times and for all sins, however many they are. In Arabic, the verse: '…He is ever forgiving, ' (*Nuh:* 10) is put in the past tense to indicate that He is most Forgiving even before there was anyone in need of forgiveness since Allah *Glorified is He* is not confined to the boundaries of time. So, no one should mistakenly think that the past tense is employed to indicate that it happened in the past and no longer in the present.

Allah states:

يُرْسِلِ ٱلسَّمَآءَ عَلَيْكُم مِّدْرَارًا ⑪
وَيُمْدِدْكُم بِأَمْوَٰلٍ وَبَنِينَ وَيَجْعَل لَّكُمْ جَنَّٰتٍ وَيَجْعَل لَّكُمْ أَنْهَٰرًا ⑫

He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you [11]
He will give you wealth and sons; He will provide you with
gardens and rivers [12] (The Quran, *Nuh:* 11-12)

In fact, asking for forgiveness and repentance to Allah *the Almighty* opens the doors of heaven with rain, as He says here: ‘He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you’ (*Nuh:* 11). This means that despite their disbelief in Him *Glorified is He* He will not deprive them of His Bestowal of Lordship especially if they ask for forgiveness and repentance. The Arabic word *Irsal* (sending) denotes that sending down the rain from heaven is constant, whereas ‘sending down,’ as mentioned in other verses, indicates that rain would fall only once. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* states: '…We send down pure water from the cloud ' (*al-Furqan:* 48). This is because rain does not fall all the time, whereas sending implies continuity. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* states: 'And We send the winds fertilizing…' (*al-Hijr:* 22). So when continuity is intended, He *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic word *Irsal* 'sending,' and the evidence is that as He describes the coming of the flood, stating: 'Therefore We sent upon them the flood…' (*al-A'raf:* 133).

In this vein, when Prophet Hud (Eber) *Allah's peace be upon him* wanted to encourage the people of 'Ad, to ask for forgiveness, repent and renounce disbelief and disobedience, he said to them: 'And, O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him; He will send on you clouds pouring down abundance of rain…' (*Hud:* 52). Allah *Glorified is He* makes sending rain dependent on their asking for forgiveness, and this is also the case with the people of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'I said, 'Ask forgiveness of your Lord: He is ever forgiving. [10] He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you [11]' (*Nuh:* 10-11). Someone may ask, 'How can asking forgiveness be related to a universal phenomenon such as rain?' We say, 'The universe has a Sovereign Who possesses everything in it, its inanimate things, plants and animals. He, the Omnipotent, is fully Able to change the nature of the created beings. For example, if there is a cloud and it is likely to rain, He *the Almighty* can prevent its falling, as He *Glorified is He* states elsewhere: 'So when they saw it as a cloud appearing in the sky advancing towards their valleys, they said: This is a cloud which will give us rain. Nay! It is what you sought to hasten on, a blast of wind in which is a painful punishment ' (*al-Ahqaf:* 24). Therefore, we should not think that things occur randomly; rather, there is a Lord Who manages the affairs of everything and Who orders that a thing should or should not happen. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* may order the sky to withhold its rain so that land gets dry and barren with no plants in it, and in turn there will be no animals, and consequently mankind will find no plant or meat to consume.

In the verse in question, the abundant rain is that which pours down in abundance without causing harm, as it may fall in a way that causes damage and destruction, whereas the 'abundant rain' here does not harm. Rather, it brings about benefits. When the rain falls in such benefitting and continuous way, the land will be full of greenery and befitting for living and will increase our power.

In fact, water is the most essential element for people's lives and strength, and thereby Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'He will give you wealth and sons; He will provide you with gardens and rivers' (*Nuh:* 12). Here, four things, which constitute a source of power, come down from heaven following asking for forgiveness and repentance: wealth, children, gardens and rivers. Provisions are one of Allah's Blessings, along with bringing us into existence and enjoining obligations. Thus, if you love Him *the Almighty* for His Blessings of bringing us into existence and granting us provisions, you should also love Him for the Blessing of enjoining obligations. In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* is fully Able to bring into existence and to provide, and He brought the people into existence and gave them the provision of wealth and children which keep increasing.

Regarding His saying: '…He will provide you with gardens and rivers,' (*Nuh:* 12) this verse has unlimited meanings since it is Divinely structured by the most Wise, the Omniscient with such beauty and eloquence that if one ponders over it, they will conclude that it can never be produced or imitated by a human being. Here, arises a question which is, 'Why does Allah *Glorified is He* mention the rivers before the gardens, in spite of the latter being a cause to the former?' We say, 'The answer to this question reveals the greatness of the Quranic structure. In the preceding verse, Allah *the Almighty* states: 'He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you' (*Nuh:* 11). So it is more suitable to mention the gardens after it which grow naturally on rain water.'

Allah *Glorified is He* says about the heavens: 'Who created the seven heavens one `above another; you see no incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent; then look again, can you see any disorder?' (*al-Mulk:* 3) The word 'heaven' generally refers to whatever covers you; however, does heaven signify the sun, the moon or the stars, all of which is over us? Or does it refer to the planets? This is all untrue, for the planets were made to adorn the heaven, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Surely, We have adorned the nearest heaven with an adornment, the stars ' (*as-Saffat:* 6). Allah *Glorified is He* also created the sun to enlighten the earth at daytime, and the moon to do the same at night when it is full, i.e. in the middle of the lunar month. As for the stars, they are also made to adorn the heaven and to serve as landmarks guiding people in deserts and seas, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And He it is Who has made the stars for you that you might follow the right way thereby in the darkness of the land and the sea….' (*al-An'am:* 97) Accordingly, the heaven is much greater than all these celestial bodies. He *the Almighty* does not tell us that He created only one heaven, but rather seven heavens, each of which is above the other. In the creation of the heavens, there is greatness in making, fashioning and maintenance as befits Allah's Omnipotence. He created them one above another, as He says in another verse: 'That you shall most certainly enter one state after another ' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 19). This may also mean that they are made into identical states above one another.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says:

مَّا لَكُمۡ لَا تَرۡجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارٗا ﴿١٣﴾ وَقَدۡ خَلَقَكُمۡ أَطۡوَارًا ﴿١٤﴾
أَلَمۡ تَرَوۡاْ كَيۡفَ خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ سَبۡعَ سَمَٰوَٰتٖ طِبَاقٗا ﴿١٥﴾
وَجَعَلَ ٱلۡقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُورٗا وَجَعَلَ ٱلشَّمۡسَ سِرَاجٗا ﴿١٦﴾

What is the matter with you? Why will you not fear God's majesty [13] When He has created you stage by stage? [14] Have you ever wondered how God created seven heavens, one above the other [15] Placed the moon as a light in them and the sun as a lamp [16] (The Quran, *Nuh:* 13 - 16)

Here, Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* draws the attention of his people to contemplate what is in the heavens, saying about his Lord: '[He] placed the moon as a light in them and the sun as a lamp' (*Nuh:* 16). Prophet Nuh (Noah) *Allah's peace be upon him* draws their attention to the moon and the sun. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the moon first, then the sun, but reverses their order in the chapter of *Yunus*, saying: 'He it is who made the sun a shining brightness and the moon a light…' (*Yunus:* 5). The sun is referred to as a lamp and a shining light, whilst in both chapters the moon is depicted as a light. The difference between light and lamp lies in the fact that a lamp produces heat and warmth, so you may need a shade to protect you from its heat. But for a light, one needs no such shade because it does not emanate heat, which is only produced when the source of the light is self-lightened such as the sun. Concerning the moon, its light is not intrinsic, as it is mere reflection of the sun rays, as when you direct light on a mirror, it reflects it back. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the sun as a lamp which gives light and heat such as the lamp which we turn on to give self-produced heat and light.

Allah states:

وَٱللَّهُ أَنۢبَتَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ نَبَاتٗا ﴿١٧﴾ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُكُمۡ فِيهَا وَيُخۡرِجُكُمۡ إِخۡرَاجٗا ﴿١٨﴾
وَٱللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ بِسَاطٗا ﴿١٩﴾ لِّتَسۡلُكُواْ مِنۡهَا سُبُلٗا فِجَاجٗا ﴿٢٠﴾

God made you spring forth from the earth like a plant [17]
how He will return you into it and then bring you out again [18]
and how He has spread the Earth out for you [19] to walk along
its spacious paths? [20] (The Quran, *Nuh:* 17-20)

Regarding His saying: ‘How Allah made you spring forth from the earth like a plant,’ (*Nuh:* 17), it explains the process of planting. The land produces plants, but is not in itself the cause of it. Allah *Glorified is He* may use the verb form and then use the verbal noun form intending the name of it. The phrase ‘made you spring forth’ denotes that He brings plants for us out of the land. Planting may be used with the meaning of bringing into being, as in His saying: 'And He it is Who has brought you into being from a single soul…' (*al-An‘am:* 98). Bringing into being means to create something without help or using other created objects, as stated in His saying: '…He brought you into being from the earth, and made you dwell in it…' (*Hud:* 61).

Allah *the Almighty* brings the human beings into existence through sexual intercourse between the husband and the wife. However, if we trace this creation back to its primary beginning, i.e. Adam, we will find that He *Glorified is He* created him out of the same substance of the earth which is also one of His creatures. The husband's semen and the wife's ovum are composed of the extract of blood produced from the food which in turn comes from the earth. Hence, everything is traced back to the earth whether you refer to the creation of Adam from the earth or the reproduction of the human beings.

The confirmed fact that Allah *the Almighty* originates the human being from the earth points to the unity of the origins of life on the earth and shows that the creation of the human being is like that of the plant. It starts as a seed sowed in the soil and then irrigated, and it needs light, heat and the nutrient that passes from the ground to the leaves through the roots and stems. Thus, the human being consists of the original elements of earth and feeds on them to grow. In this sense, s/he is regarded as a plant.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘How He will return you into it and then bring you out again.’ (*Nuh:* 18) As we were created from the earth, we will return into it when we die. The dead person's body blends with the earth and its atoms merge with those of the earth. So, no one should question the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* will resurrect the human beings, as their atoms exist in the earth. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Did We fail in the first creation? But they are in confusion over a new creation.’ (*Qaf:* 15) Thus, He *the Almighty* mentions the first creation as evidence for the possibility of the second creation, i.e. the Resurrection after death. Hence, if you wonder at the fact that you will be raised from the dead, you should call to mind that He *Glorified is He* has originated your bodily parts, atoms and specifications in the first creation out of nothing. So, if He *the Almighty* has created you out of nothing, how can He be unable to re-create you out of something?

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘How He will return you into it and then bring you out again’ (*Nuh:* 18) means that He *Glorified is He* returns the human beings into the earth—from which they were created and in which their bodies decay. Afterwards, He *Glorified is He* brings them out of the earth and resurrect them. He *the Almighty* emphasizes this fact with the verbal noun *Ikhraja* (bringing out), that is, He will undoubtedly resurrect the people buried in the earth ‘And how He has spread the Earth out for you [19] to walk along its spacious paths’ (*Nuh:* 19-20).

Here, Allah *the Almighty* describes the earth as an expanse or a well-prepared bed. Similarly, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘[He] who made for you the earth a bed [spread out]’ (*al-Baqara:* 22); and ‘[It is He] who has made for you the earth as a bed [spread out]’ (*Ta Ha:* 53). Here *the Almighty* reminds the people of Nuh (Noah) about His Favours and Blessings upon them and all other creatures. Allah *Glorified is He* spread out the earth for them so that they settle on it and exploit its leveled ways. This is meant for the benefit of all the creation. If the earth were not so, the people would not meet their needs or make use of it. As it is leveled land, we can travel from a place to another. If the earth was not flattened or paved, the human beings could not live on it comfortably and easily; the life would be difficult as is the case with mountain dwellers. For this reason, the great majority of people live in the leveled land like the valleys and around the rivers. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* reminds the people of Nuh about leveling and facilitating the earth as a Blessing in order that they move freely and easily. That is why He *the Almighty* then says: ‘To walk along its spacious paths’ (*Nuh:* 20). Out of His Grace and Wisdom, Allah *the Almighty* made for us pathways on the earth to follow and tread through. If mountains were mere blocks filling the earth, the earth would not be suitable for living and movement. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And We placed within the earth firmly set mountains, lest it should shift with them, and We made therein [mountain] passes [as] roads that they might be guided.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 31) Here, 'the spacious paths' refer to the wide paths and roadways. In the aforementioned verse, the adverb 'therein' refers to the earth or the mountains because both contain pathways through which the people walk. These pathways exist in mountains in the shape of defiles.

In fact, the wording of the Quran is precise and marvelous; it here says: ‘To walk along…?’ (*Nuh:* 20), employing the preposition *Min* (along) instead of *Fi* (in). This is because using the preposition 'in' connotes entering deep inside the earth, while the preposition 'along' connotes taking roads and routes on the surface of the earth which may be tortuous. However, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the preposition 'in' in His saying: ‘It is He] who has made for you the earth as a bed [spread out] and inserted therein for your roadways.’ (*Ta Ha:* 53) These roadways are well-prepared and leveled so that we can smoothly and easily reach our destinations.

The verb *Salak* (walk through) can be transitive, as when it is said, 'So-and-so followed the road.' Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘[And asking them], 'What put you into *Saqar*?’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 42) And ‘Insert your hand into the opening of your garment.’ (*al-Qasas:* 32) The earth contains wide pathways and thus one of the early Arabs described the universe, saying, ‘A sky with stars and an earth with pathways.’ The Arabic word *Fijaj* (wide pathways) is also mentioned in His saying: ‘And proclaims to the people the *Hajj* [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass.’ (*al-Hajj:* 27) The Arabic word *Fajj* (a path) refers to a road that is as wide as what we now call 'an expressway'. In the previous verse, it means that the pilgrims come from all directions and places. This word also refers to the mountain passes and pathways.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says about Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him*:

قَالَ نُوحٞ رَّبِّ إِنَّهُمۡ عَصَوۡنِي وَٱتَّبَعُواْ مَن لَّمۡ يَزِدۡهُ مَالُهُۥ وَوَلَدُهُۥٓ إِلَّا خَسَارٗا ٢١

Noah said, ‘My Lord, they have disobeyed me and followed those whose riches and children only increase their ruin [21]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 21)

Here, Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* addresses His Lord and tells Him that his people disobeyed him, though he *peace be upon him* knows for certain that Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of what he and his people do even before being sent as a Prophet. He *peace be upon him* was sent to a people who worshipped idols like Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq and Nasr besides Allah *Glorified is He*. As long as he *peace be upon him* is sent by his Lord as a Prophet, he is to inform Him of the outcome of his Message to clear himself of falling short in fulfill his responsibility for notifying his people. He said, 'My Lord! I have imparted your Message.' Regarding the Message that Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* was assigned to deliver to his people, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And We had certainly sent Nuh to his people, and he said, “O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him; then will you not fear Him?”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 23) The people of Nuh rejected his Call and saw him as a mere human who craved leadership and mastery, a fact which is clear in His saying: ‘But the eminent among those who disbelieved from his people said, “This is not but a man like yourselves who wishes to take precedence over you.”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 24)

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Nuh said, “My Lord, they have disobeyed me and followed those whose riches and children only increase their ruin.”’

(*Nuh:* 21) means that Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* states that his people disobeyed him and denied his Call to the right Guidance and Monotheism. Further, the riffraff and the weak followed their leaders and chieftains who possessed wealth and had a lot of children, which made them powerful and influential enough to stand in the way of his Call.

Allah *the Almighty* endowed them with wealth and children, yet their disbelief, wealth and children made them increase in their error and loss in this worldly life and led to their ruin in the Hereafter. As for the weak and riffraff, they followed in the footsteps of their leaders who were deluded by their wealth and children, and that is why they increased their loss in the Hereafter. Being short-sighted, the riffraff followed the wealthy and influential leaders and were dazzled by power and wealth. In fact, this is a common phenomenon, as He *the Almighty* says about Qarun: 'Indeed, Qarun was from the people of Musa, but he tyrannized them. And We gave him of treasures whose keys would burden a band of strong men; thereupon his people said to him, "Do not exult. Indeed, Allah does not like the exultant."' (*al-Qasas:* 76)

However, Qarun did not listen to his people's advice and was beguiled by his wealth and Allah's Favours. Thereupon, He *the Almighty* says: 'So he came out before his people in his adornment. Those who desired the worldly life said, 'Oh, would that we had like what was given to Qarun. Indeed, he is one of great fortune.' (*al-Qasas:* 79) Those who craved the worldly life are those who: '…followed those whose riches and children only increase their ruin.' (*Nuh:* 21)

Both the misleading leaders of the people of Nuh and their followers were drowned by the flood. As regards Qarun, Allah *Glorified is He* caused the ground to swallow him along with his mansion. None backed him or protected him against Allah's Punishment, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And those who had wished for his position the previous day began to say, "Oh, how Allah extends provision to whom He wills of His servants and restricts it! If not that Allah had conferred favor on us, He would have caused it to swallow us. Oh, how the disbelievers do not succeed!' (*al-Qasas:* 82) Those who worship deities besides Allah *Glorified is He* reaped nothing but loss and this is the greatest disappointment for them. Their disbelief and denial lead to loss which begins suddenly when the Day of Judgment comes.

The disbelievers among the people of Nuh lost in this worldly life as they were drowned by the flood and will surely lose in the Hereafter as they will go to hell. This loss is irreparable and eternal as there is no room for repentance in its wake.

Allah *the Almighty* clarifies for us what the misguiding leaders, who led their followers astray, did, saying:

وَمَكَرُوا۟ مَكْرًا كُبَّارًا ﴿٢٢﴾ وَقَالُوا۟ لَا تَذَرُنَّ ءَالِهَتَكُمْ وَلَا تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا
وَلَا سُوَاعًا وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا ﴿٢٣﴾

Who have made a grand plan [22] saying, “Do not renounce your gods! Do not renounce Wadd, Suwa′, Yaghuth, Ya′uq, or Nasr!” [23] (The Quran, *Nuh:* 22 - 23)

The Arabic word *Makr* (plotting) originally refers to the trees whose small trunks and branches mix together that no one can distinguish each tree. Likewise, to plot means to scheme against your opponent secretly. A person who prevaricates is the one who makes an artifice. If plotting is not for the purpose of harm, it is called a trick, ploy, and stratagem and so on. If it is for the purpose of harm, it is called an evil plot. Plotting is based on premeditation and needs intelligence and experience. Thus, plotting is a token of weakness as the powerful person prefers confrontation to scheming.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And they had planned their plan, but with Allah is [recorded] their plan, even if their plan had been [sufficient] to do away with the mountains.’ (*Ibrahim:* 46) The wrongdoers' plot which is powerful and intense enough to demolish the mountains, fails when it is faced by Allah's Plan Who protects His Prophets and righteous servants. He *Glorified is He* discloses the wrongdoers' plots by which they tried to confront the Religion.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* describes their plotting as immense, and this means that it was great and extraordinary. The plotting was massive because the disbelievers among the people of Nuh plotted to put an end to Allah's Call, to hinder it and to tempt others into disbelief and error. Their plotting to resist the Call of Allah could be verbal or practical and individual or collective. In our modern life, we notice that the mass media are involved in this immense conspiracy to turn people away from Allah's Call by all possible means, making the believers confused about their Religion.

The people of Nuh used to take their young children to him and warn them, saying, 'Beware of following this man, for he is deviant and deceptive.' This was part of their schemes against Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* who spent nine centuries and a half preaching to his people. However, the successive generations throughout this period of time were in the habit of advising one anther not to believe in him and his Message.

Allah *Glorified is He* refers to the fact that the people of Nuh used to advise one another not to renounce their idolatry, saying: '… "Do not renounce your gods! Do not renounce Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq, or Nasr!"' (*Nuh:* 23) They advised one another not to abandon their deities and to keep on worshipping them. Here, the word 'gods' refers to their idols whose names were Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq and Nasr. These names belong to some righteous men who had followers. When these righteous men died, their followers said, 'If we sculpt statues for them, this will be better for our worship.' They indeed carved sculptures of these righteous men, and after these followers died and others came, the Satan suggested to them, 'They [your ancestors] worshipped them [these idols] and invoked them for rain.' In this respect, Qatada ibn An-Nu'man points out that the names 'Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq and Nasr' belonged to the idols that the people of Nuh worshipped. Afterwards, the early Arabs worshipped them; Wadd was the idol of Kalb tribe at Dumat Al-Jandal, Suwa' was worshipped by Hudhayl tribe, Yaghuth was worshipped by Banu Ghutayf, Ya'uq was worshipped by Hamadan tribe and Nasr was worshipped by Dhu Al-Kala' at Hemyar.

The disbelievers among all the nations invited their followers to the worship of their alleged deities, be they idols, humans or planets. This was common among all peoples, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And the eminent among them went forth, [saying], "Continue, and be patient over [the defense of] your gods. Indeed, this is a thing intended."' (*Sad:* 6) Here, patience is blameworthy because it is a kind of persistence in polytheism and disbelief. Therefore, He *the Almighty* warns them, saying: 'So [even] if they are patient, the Fire is a residence for them.' (*Fussilat:* 24) So, if the disbelievers persist in idolatry, hell will be their eternal abode.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَقَدۡ أَضَلُّواْ كَثِيرٗاۖ وَلَا تَزِدِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَٰلٗا ٢٤

They have led many astray. Lord, bring nothing
but destruction down on the evildoers! [24]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 24)

The idols and false gods have led a lot of people astray and they made wrongdoers increase in error because they wronged themselves by powerless idols that neither hear nor see. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Lord, bring nothing but destruction down on the evildoers!' (*Nuh:* 24) mighty have been said by Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* himself as the verb '*Tazid* ' (increase) is an imperfect tense in the jussive mood. So, he *peace be upon him* invoked his Lord to increase his people in error and loss, as they were wrongdoers and transgressors.

Their idols, made out of stones or wood, led them astray because of their thoughtlessness. This also happened in the case of the people of Ibrahim who said about the idols: 'My Lord, indeed they have led astray many among the people.' (*Ibrahim:* 36) We should note that He *the Almighty* says here in the chapter of *Nuh:* 'They have led many astray…' (*Nuh:* 24) and says in the chapter of Ibrahim: '…indeed they have led astray many…' (*Ibrahim:* 36), using the feminine plural pronoun.. The subject pronoun in the verse in question may refer to the leaders and eminent people who misled a lot of people. However, it may also refer to the idols, but this requires, saying, '*Adlalna*, i.e. the form of the verb should be consistent with the feminine plural pronoun. Nevertheless, the idols did not do so in reality, for it was the dignitaries and the leaders who mislead many people. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And how many a city was insolent toward the command of its Lord...' (*at-Talaq:* 8). Here, the actions of the city dwellers are attributed to the city itself.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'They have led many astray…' (*Nuh:* 24), it means that the leaders and eminent people led a lot of people astray to the extent that only a few people believed in Nuh *peace be upon him* throughout nine centuries, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…but none had believed with him, except a few.’ (*Hud:* 40) Hence, on the day when the people of Nuh were drowned, only eighty believers (1) were on board the ship with him. This was after nine centuries he *peace be upon him* spent inviting his people to belief. Undoubtedly, some people believed in him and died during this long period before the coming of the flood.

Concerning the reason behind inflicting punishment on the people of Nuh, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مِّمَّا خَطِيٓـَٔـٰتِهِمۡ أُغۡرِقُواْ فَأُدۡخِلُواْ نَارٗا فَلَمۡ يَجِدُواْ
لَهُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَنصَارٗا ٢٥

They were drowned and sent to Hell for their evildoings:
they found no one to help them against God [25]
(The Quran, *Nuh:* 25)

The people of Nuh were drowned on account of their sins and disbelief. Here, the Quran joins the suffix *Ma* to the preposition *Min* (for) because the Arabs use it to speak about a result of an action, as in their words, 'Wherever you are, I will be; wherever you sit, I will sit.'

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…and sent to Hell for their evildoings...’ (*Nuh:* 25), it means that the people of Nuh were thrown into the fire in the Hereafter. Their bodies decayed and vanished in the wake of drowning, while their spirits went to hell. Further, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…they found no one to help them against Allah.’ (*Nuh:* 25) Thus, they did not find supporters to protect them from drowning and entering hell in the Hereafter. Their idols proved unable to prevent Allah's Punishment.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Ibn Abu Hatim narrates on the authority of Zayd ibn Aslam that eighty believers were aboard the ship with Nuh on the day when his people were drowned. Ka'ab Al-Ahbar is narrated to have said, 'Believers were at this time seventy two. Allah caused rain to fall heavily from the sky and the earth burst with springs.' See Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir, 10878 and 10879.*

وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَّبِّ لَا تَذَرْ عَلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ دَيَّارًا ﴿٢٦﴾
إِنَّكَ إِن تَذَرْهُمْ يُضِلُّوا۟ عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوٓا۟ إِلَّا فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا ﴿٢٧﴾

And Noah said, 'Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth – [26] if you leave them they will lead Your servants astray and beget only sinners and disbelievers [27] (The Quran, *Nuh:* 26 - 27)

Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* reached the utmost degree in his Call to his people, as He *the Almighty* says: 'He said, "My Lord, I have called my people night and day, [5] but the more I call them, the further they run away: [6] every time I call them, so that You may forgive them, they thrust their fingers into their ears, cover their heads with their garments, persist in their rejection, and grow more insolent and arrogant. [7] I have tried calling them openly. [8] I have tried preaching to them in public and speaking to them in private. [9]"' (*Nuh:* 5-9) He *peace be upon him* spared no effort in calling his people to belief and guidance. However, they stubbornly and strongly disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* and in what he *peace be upon him* came with. He *peace be upon him* invoked Him *Glorified is He* against his people after he exerted his strenuous efforts and they unbearably harmed and derided him. The grandfathers among his people advised the fathers not to believe in him and so did the fathers with the sons.

It is not only Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* who invoked Allah *Glorified is He* against his people, but Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* also invoked Him against Pharaoh and his people, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And Musa said, "Our Lord, indeed You have given Pharaoh and his establishment splendor and wealth in the worldly life, our Lord, that they may lead [men] astray from Your way. Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the painful punishment."' (*Yunus:* 88)

The Arabic word *Tams* (obliteration) means to remove the physical characteristics of something, as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…before We obliterate faces and turn them toward their backs.' (*an-Nisa':* 47)

Obliteration here means removing the facial features making it one piece without a forehead, eyebrows, eyes, nose, lips or chin. As for the obliteration of wealth, it means changing its substance. Those who owned ingots of gold found that they turned into pieces of stone; and those who owned precious stones such as diamonds found they became pieces of glass. Hence, wealth was a means of misguidance for them. Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* invoked Allah *the Almighty* to harden the heart of Pharaoh and his people so that they would not abandon disbelief or become believers till they experienced the painful punishment.

Likewise, Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* invoked Allah *the Almighty* against his people not to leave one of the disbelievers walking on the earth, saying: ‘Lord, do not leave any of the disbelievers on the earth.’ (*Nuh:* 26) The Arabic word *Dayyar* refers to the man who walks about a lot and a house dweller. So, he *peace be upon him* invoked Him *the Almighty* to destroy every house dweller of the disbelievers on the earth. Thus, all of the disbelievers among his people were destroyed.

Then Allah *the Almighty* relates that Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* said: ‘If you leave them they will lead Your servants astray and beget only sinners and disbelievers.’ (*Nuh:* 27) It is as if he *peace be upon him* said, 'If You leave those disbelievers who deviated from the Right Path and rejected the True Call, they will lead astray Your servants whom You guided to belief, and have children who will be transgressors and disbelievers.' In this regard, the fathers used to take their children to Prophet Nuh *peace be upon him* and say to them, 'Beware of this man. He is a liar. My father warned me against him.' Thus, the fathers died while they were disbelievers and their young children followed their advice.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *Nuh* with the supplication of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* which reads:

رَّبِّ ٱغْفِرْ لِى وَلِوَٰلِدَىَّ وَلِمَن دَخَلَ بَيْتِىَ مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ وَلَا تَزِدِ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبَارًۢا ﴿٢٨﴾

Lord, forgive me, my parents, and whoever enters my house as a believer. Forgive believing men and women but bring nothing but ruin down on the evildoers! [28] (The Quran, *Nuh:* 28)

This verse refers to what is specific and what is general. How often are parents included in this verse? They are included in Allah's saying: '…forgive me and my parents…' (*Nuh:* 28); '…and whoever enters my house as a believer…' (*Nuh:* 28); and '…believing men and women...' (*Nuh:* 28). So, they are included three times in this verse because this is suitable for their position. Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* made a similar supplication saying: 'Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers the Day the account is established.' (*Ibrahim:* 41) We note that asking for forgiveness includes the parents and the believers.

As we know, the human being's original existence is traced back to Adam while his/her direct existence is attributed to his/her parents. As the parents are the cause of one's coming into being in this life, one should invoke Allah *Glorified is He* to forgive them. The same is true in case they are one's direct role models. Further, one should invoke Him *the Almighty* to pardon the believers because they are his/her coreligionists and good exemplars. They enjoined each other to follow the truth and to be patient. Nuh *peace be upon him* used to supplicate, 'My Lord! Pardon me, efface my sins and forgive my parents.'

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and whoever enters my house as a believer. Forgive believing men and women…' (*Nuh:* 28) refers to those who enter Prophet Nuh's house of worship as a worshipper and also the believing men and believing women. After he *peace be upon him* invoked Him *Glorified is He* to forgive him, his parents, those who entered his house as believers and all the believers, males and females, he invoked Him *the Almighty* saying: '…bring nothing but ruin down on the evildoers!' (*Nuh:* 28) The Arabic word *Tabara* (ruin) refers to all the different kinds of destruction and punishment befalling those who disbelieved in the Messengers. In the case of the people of Nuh, they were destroyed by the flood.

the chapter of

al-Jinn

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Jinn*[1] (Demons).

قُلۡ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ أَنَّهُ ٱسۡتَمَعَ نَفَرٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡجِنِّ فَقَالُوٓاْ إِنَّا سَمِعۡنَا قُرۡءَانًا عَجَبٗا ﴿١﴾
يَهۡدِيٓ إِلَى ٱلرُّشۡدِ فَـَٔامَنَّا بِهِۦۖ وَلَن نُّشۡرِكَ بِرَبِّنَآ أَحَدٗا ﴿٢﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘It has been revealed to me that a group of jinn once listened in and said, “We have heard a wondrous Quran [1] that gives guidance to the right path, and we have come to believe it – We shall never set up partners with our Lord [2]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 1-2)

Allah *the Almighty* revealed a whole chapter of the Quran and called it the chapter of *al-Jinn*. He *Glorified is He* also mentioned the Angels in a chapter called *Fatir*. Some scholars even call it the chapter of *al-Mala'ika*, as it starts with: ‘[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Creator of the heavens and the earth, [who] made the angels messengers having wings, two or three or four. He increases in creation what He wills. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.’ (*Fatir:* 1)

The creatures of Allah *the Almighty* who are destined to dwell on the earth and in the heavens are the humans, the Jinn and Angels. Each type of these

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(1) The chapter of *al-Jinn* is the seventy second chapter according to the order of the Noble Quran; it consists of 28 verses. In his book, Abu Qasim Hibat Allah writes, 'This chapter was revealed in Mecca and it contains neither abrogating verses nor abrogated ones. It is called the chapter of *al-Jinn* because it talks about the Jinn. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-A'raf* when Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* returned from At-Ta'if, in the tenth year of his mission. This was before the Night Journey and the *Hijra*.' See Qasim Hibat Allah, *An-Nasikh Wa Al-Mansukh, 1/185.*

creatures has characteristics and features that distinguish it from other types. The humans are visible to the Jinn and the Angels, while the humans cannot see them. Regarding the Jinn, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Indeed, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 27) By contrast, the Jinn are invisible to us. From the Arabic word *Jinn*, the word *Janna* (Garden) is derived. This is because it makes a person invisible to others by means of its trees and allows him/her to enjoy its pleasures freely.

The Jinn are characterised by nimbleness and swiftness and are divided into believers and disbelievers; the believers among them are divided into obedient and disobedient. As for the disbelievers among them, they are the devils who rebel against Allah's Way of Guidance. Anyone who rebels against this Divine Way is called a devil, be he of the Jinn or the humans. The Jinn, as a community, are required to adopt the same Divine Messages sent to the humans. There are no Prophets or Messengers who were sent from among the Jinn, and they are divided into Muslims and disbelievers.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Say [Prophet], “It has been revealed to me…’ (*al-Jinn:* 1) is directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon him*. The Divine Revelations which he *peace be upon him* used to receive came through the Archangel Gabriel, the Trustee of the Divine Revelations. Whenever it came to him *peace be upon him* he would suffer greatly to the point that he sweated profusely on cold nights.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Say [Prophet], “It has been revealed to me that a group of jinn once listened in…’ (*al-Jinn:* 1), the verb 'to listen' refers to hearing attentively. As for the verb 'to hear' refers to perceiving a sound by chance. For example, while you are walking, you can hear a lot of speech whether it matters to you or not. Unlike eyelids, there is no covering on the ears to impede your hearing. So you hear anything reaching your ears unwillingly. By contrast, the verb 'to listen' means to pay attention to what you hear and the speaker has the option between speaking on and stopping speaking. The same verb connotes preparing one's bodily parts and senses for hearing. Even if one hears with his/her ears, there are other senses that can be distracted from attention. We use the eyes to see, the nose to smell and the tongues to speak. So one should employ all of his/her senses to hear carefully, understand what she/he hears and carry out what s/he is ordered to do. For example, if you speak to your friend and find him/her paying no attention to you, you say to him/her, 'It seems that you are not with me.' This is because such a person's organs are distracted from hearing you. When a company of the Jinn heard Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* reciting the Quran, they dedicated their hearing and all their senses to listening to his recitation.

The whole account is as follows: 'Once Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a group of his Companions headed for the market of 'Ukazh, after the devils had been prevented from listening secretly to the heavenly Revelations and shooting stars had been set against them. The devils returned to their leaders and told them that they could not listen to the heavenly Revelations and shooting stars attacked them. The leaders said to them, 'What prevented you from listening secretly to the heavenly Revelations was a serious thing that happened. Go everywhere and find out what kept you away from the heavenly revelations.' These devils indeed set out for Tuhama and found Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* leading his Companions in Dawn Prayer and heard him reciting some Quranic verses. The devils listened carefully to the Quran and said to one another, 'This is what prevented us from listening to the Divine Revelations.' Ongoing back to their leaders, they said: ‘We have heard a wondrous Quran, [2] that gives guidance to the right path, and we have come to believe it—We shall never set up partners with our Lord. [3]’ (*al-Jinn:* 1-2) Thereupon, Allah revealed to him *peace and blessings be upon him* the verse reading: ‘Say [Prophet], “It has been revealed to me that a group of jinn once listened in and said…’ (*al-Jinn:* 1)(1). The aforementioned Hadith shows clearly the difference between 'hearing' and 'listening'; when the Jinn heard the Quran, they listened to it attentively. In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed [to you].’ (*Ta Ha:* 13) This is a Divine Command directed to Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* to receive the Revelations with all his senses.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 2271; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 773 and 4921; Abu 'Awana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 3794; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no.12449; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no.3068.*

The Arabic word *Nafar* (a group) refers to a group of people whose number ranges from three to nine, and in the verse in question the jinn were nine. Whatever their number, they listened attentively to the Quran directly from Messenger Muhammad's mouth. As soon as they returned to their tribes, they said to them: ‘We have heard a wondrous Quran.’ (*al-Jinn:* 1) Someone may ask, 'Why did the jinn not say, 'We listened?' The answer is that the verb 'heard' and the phrase 'wondrous Quran' that follows it gives the meaning of listening, since they realised that what they heard was a Book revealed to a Messenger who came after Musa *peace be upon him*. What is more, they describe the Quran as 'wondrous' and this adjective occurs in a number of verses, as the following ones: ‘Have the people been amazed that We revealed [revelation] to a man from among them, [saying], “Warn mankind…’ (*Yunus:* 2); ‘Or have you thought that the companions of the cave and the inscription were, among Our signs, a wonder?’ (*al-Kahf:* 9); and ‘And it took its course into the sea amazingly.’ (*al-Kahf:* 63)

Some scholars said that amazement is a mental state that happens to a person when s/he does not know what the reason for something. A thing that evokes astonishment is called 'a wonder' while a thing that is extraordinary is said to be 'bizarre and weird.' The wondrous thing is that which is too fantastic for a person to grasp, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And [mention, O Muhammad], when We directed to you a few of the jinn, listening to the Quran. And when they attended it, they said, “Listen quietly.” And when it was concluded, they went back to their people as warners. They said, “O our people, indeed we have heard a [recited] Book revealed after Musa confirming what was before it which guides to the truth and to a straight path.”’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 29-30) With regard to the Quran, it is wondrous because it is noble and matchless regarding its eloquence, veracity, and unique style and composition.

As for His saying: ‘That gives guidance to the right path, and we have come to believe it—We shall never set up partners with our Lord’ (*al-Jinn:* 2), the Right Path is the way to Salvation. In fact, the Quran guides to Salvation while error leads to destruction. Shedding more light on the Right Path and error, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘I will turn away from my signs those who are arrogant upon the earth without right; and if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it. And if they see the way of consciousness, they will not adopt it as a way; but if they see the way of error, they will adopt it as a way. That is because they have denied our signs and they were heedless of them.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 146)

The arrogant people do not like adopting the Right Path because it constrains their physical pleasures and personal inclinations and prohibits the misdeeds. As they were enslaved by their physical pleasures, they cannot curb them. As for the erroneous way, it gives free rein to their pleasures and desires. The Quran leads to the Right Path and whoever believes in it becomes rightly guided. On the other hand, those who deny it fall prey to error. Anyone who judges according to it is fair in his/her judgment; any haughty tyrant who renounces it will be annihilated by Allah *Glorified is He*; and anyone who seeks guidance in another source will be misguided. Further, it is the firm Rope of Allah, the clear Light and the wise Remembrance. People's whims cannot distort it; it does not lead to contradictory opinions; the scholars never get bored with it; it does not become dull from reciting it repetitively; and its wonders do not come to an end. Whoever learns it is successful; whoever speaks according to it is truthful; whoever acts upon it is rewarded; and whoever calls to it is guided to the Straight Path.(1)

The jinn believed in the Right Path and thus they said: ‘…We shall never set up partners with our Lord.’ (*al-Jinn:* 2) They understood from their listening to the Quran that the prerequisite of their belief was monotheism, which is the common denominator of all the heavenly Messages. In this verse, the Arabic word *Ahada* (anyone) leaves no room for polytheism and it alludes to the Christ, the son of Mary. They said: ‘O our people, indeed we have heard a [recited] Book revealed after Musa…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 29) because Prophet

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(1) 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'I heard Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'Indeed there comes a *Fitnah*' So I said, 'What is the way out from it, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'Allah's Book. In it is news for what happened before you, and information about what comes after you, and the judgment for what happens between you. It is the Criterion (between right and wrong) without jest. Whoever among the oppressive abandons it, Allah crushes him, and whoever seeks guidance from other than it, then Allah leaves him to stray. See Al-Bizzar, *Musnad, Hadith no. 836.*

Musa *peace be upon him* came with a Divine Law while Prophet ‘Isa *peace be upon him* came without a Divine Law to be followed. Some Christians worship Prophet ‘Isa as a god apart from Allah *the Almighty*; others worship him along with Allah; and some others claim that ‘Isa is the third of three. Thus, the jinn declare they do not set up any partner with Allah *Glorified is He* and hold Him in great awe, saying:

وَأَنَّهُۥ تَعَٰلَىٰ جَدُّ رَبِّنَا مَا ٱتَّخَذَ صَٰحِبَةً وَلَا وَلَدًا ٣

And that He — exalted be the glory of our Lord! — has neither spouse nor child [3] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 3)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And that He—exalted be the glory of our Lord...’ (*al-Jinn:* 3) is attributed to the Divine Revelations if the particle *Anna* (that) is considered. According to another recitation, this saying is attributed to the Jinn as they exalt and glorify Allah *Glorified is He*. To Him belong the Grandeur, Majesty, Command and Power. How can a person allege that He *Glorified is He* has a wife and children? Indeed, He *the Almighty* did not choose from His creatures a wife or a child. He also reassures us, saying: ‘And that He—exalted be the glory of our Lord!—has neither spouse nor child.’ (*al-Jinn:* 3) It is as if He is saying, 'Be reassured that your Lord has neither a wife that influences Him nor a child to be favoured by Him. The wife and children can be a point of weakness that affects the legislation. Hence all the creatures are equal in the sight of Allah *Glorified is He* and they all are His servants; He does not unjustly favour someone over another.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* relates that the jinn said:

وَأَنَّهُۥ كَانَ يَقُولُ سَفِيهُنَا عَلَى ٱللَّهِ شَطَطًا ٤

Outrageous things have been said about God by the foolish among us [4] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 4)

The foolish one of the jinn is the Satan who objected to the Command of Allah *Glorified is He* and disobeyed His Order to prostrate himself to Adam. In this regard, Satan said: ‘…should I prostrate to one you created from clay?’ (*al-Isra’:* 61) Satan considered his view to be better than Allah's and thus

Satan is considered a foolish. But this does not mean that he is the only foolish one, for he is a symbol of every fool who disobeys Allah's Commands, and does not hold Him in due awe. Thus, this bad trait is attributed to anyone who acts foolishly, and that is why some scholars said this attribute refers to the disbelieving jinn.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Outrageous things have been said about Allah by the foolish among us.’ (*al-Jinn:* 4), the Arabic word *Shatat* (outrageous) means transgressing the limits in a statement. It primarily means overstepping the proper limits, but it here denotes a statement that contradicts truth and exceeds the bounds of right.

وَأَنَّا ظَنَنَّآ أَن لَّن تَقُولَ ٱلْإِنسُ وَٱلْجِنُّ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا ٥
وَأَنَّهُۥ كَانَ رِجَالٌ مِّنَ ٱلْإِنسِ يَعُوذُونَ بِرِجَالٍ مِّنَ ٱلْجِنِّ فَزَادُوهُمْ رَهَقًا ٦

Although we had thought that no man or jinn would [dare to] tell a lie about Him [5] Men have sought refuge with the jinn in the past, but they only misguided them further [6]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 5 - 6)

Here, the verb 'thought' means to doubt. So, these groups of Jinn had doubted the fact that mankind and the jinn would dare to tell lies and baseless allegation about Allah *the Almighty*. When they ascertained that this allegation was false, they feared that they should hold it and that the Right Path would be ambiguous to them. Thus, they wandered through the earth in the hope of finding the one who could guide them to the Right Path. Then, they found Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and heard him reciting the Quran. According to the verse in question, this group of jinn had believed that Allah *the Almighty* had a wife and children as they heard other jinn and humans claim that. They had deemed this true till they discovered that this allegation was unfounded and those who made such an allegation were untruthful, whereupon they dissociated themselves from them. This proves that the jinn were polytheists till the moment they listened to Messenger Muhammad's recitation.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Men have sought refuge with the jinn in the past, but they only misguided them further.’ (*al-Jinn:* 6) In fact, those who exploit the jinn suffer from burdens and distress. He *the Almighty* tells us that the devils have close contact with a lot of humans. The men intended in this verse are the sorcerers who seek the jinn's help to break spells and bewitch their opponents. Such people live miserably all their lifetimes. It is true that the sorcerers are able to bewitch other humans, but this overtires them. They die poverty-stricken and unsightly and their children are spoiled. This is because such people exploited a special chance to do much harm to other people unjustifiably. Their facial features carry the marks of sins and anger and they provoke the aversion of anyone who sees them. They lead uncomfortable lives, for even if they earn a lot of money, they live as beggars. Eventually, they die as disbelievers and deprive themselves of Allah's Mercy. As regards their children, they suffer misfortune in their lives.

The Arabic word *Ar-Rahq* denotes 'aberration, error and guilt'. So, the male jinn made male humans increase in sin and error. It is worth noting that Allah *the Almighty* refers to the jinn as men as He does to humankind. This suggests that there are men among the jinn and that they reproduce as the humans do.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَأَنَّهُمْ ظَنُّوا۟ كَمَا ظَنَنتُمْ أَن لَّن يَبْعَثَ ٱللَّهُ أَحَدًا ﴿٧﴾ وَأَنَّا لَمَسْنَا ٱلسَّمَآءَ
فَوَجَدْنَٰهَا مُلِئَتْ حَرَسًا شَدِيدًا وَشُهُبًا ﴿٨﴾ وَأَنَّا كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْهَا مَقَٰعِدَ
لِلسَّمْعِ ۖ فَمَن يَسْتَمِعِ ٱلْـَٔانَ يَجِدْ لَهُۥ شِهَابًا رَّصَدًا ﴿٩﴾

They thought, as you did, that God would never raise anyone from the dead [7] We tried to reach heaven, but discovered it to be full of stern guards and shooting stars [8] we used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him [9]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 7 - 9)

The jinn used to think that there would be no Messenger after Jesus, the son of Mary, and so did the humans. Both believed that Allah *Glorified is He* would not send a Messenger to His creatures to invite them to monotheism. He *the Almighty* makes this clear in His saying: ‘And they wonder that there has come to them a warner from among themselves. And the disbelievers say, “This is a magician and a liar. [4] Has he made the gods [only] one God? Indeed, this is a curious thing.” [5] And the eminent among them went forth, [saying], “Continue, and be patient over [the defense of] your gods. Indeed, this is a thing intended. [6] We have not heard of this in the latest religion. This is not but a fabrication. [7] Has the message been revealed to him out of [all of] us?” Rather, they are in doubt about my message. Rather, they have not yet tasted my punishment. [8]’ (*Sad:* 4-8)

The disbelievers of Quraysh found Jews claiming that ‘Uzayr (Ezra) is the son of Allah and the Christians alleging that ‘Isa is the son of Allah and that Allah is the third of three. Moreover, the disbelievers of Mecca said, 'We have never heard of monotheism in the latest faiths.' Some of the jinn imitated the Jews; others followed the example of the Christians; and some others were idolaters as the disbelievers of Mecca. They held the belief that Allah *Glorified is He* would not send a Messenger to demolish all these fallacies, saying: ‘…Allah would never send anyone [as a messenger].’ (*al-Jinn:* 7)

The Jinn go on to say: ‘We tried to reach heaven, but discovered it to be full of stern guards and shooting stars.’ (*al-Jinn:* 8) Before revealing the Quran, the devils used to listen secretly to the news of the heavens. But after sending Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon him* as a Prophet, the devils were deterred from doing this. Thereupon, they concluded that a new Prophet would be sent. The devils were prevented from reaching the news of the heavens because Allah *Glorified is He* did not will them to insert their fallacies into His Way of Guidance. We should ponder on the accurate Quranic expression that reads: ‘We tried to reach heaven…’ (*al-Jinn:* 8). This indicates that the jinn tried to ascend to the nearest sky to the degree that it was very close to them as if they were about to touch it.

The Arabic word *Al-Lams* (Touching) is also used to denote searching for something or trying to reach something. The devils tried to reach the sky to listen secretly to the news, commands and Divine Revelations coming down from it in addition to any future events, but they failed. They say: ‘We tried to reach heaven, but discovered it to be full of stern guards and shooting stars.’ (*al-Jinn:* 8)

Thus, the Jinn tried to eavesdrop on the news of the heaven, but they: '…discovered it to be full of stern guards and shooting stars.' (*al-Jinn:* 8) The stern guards are from the Angels who guard the sky from all directions. They prevent the jinn from reaching any spot of the sky or even approaching it. So the sky is guarded against the jinn and devils so that they cannot listen secretly to the Quranic verses being sent down upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Not only is the sky guarded, but it is also full of shooting stars that are known as meteors. So, the jinn found the sky filled with strong Angels and burning meteors that lie in wait for any devil or jinn coming near the sky. These falling, burning stars burn the devils whenever they seek to eavesdrop on whatever comes down from the heaven. Concerning the sky, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And we have protected it from every devil expelled [from the mercy of Allah]; except one who steals a hearing and is pursued by a clear burning flame.' (*al-Hijr:* 17-18)

Before the emergence of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the rebellious jinn used to eavesdrop on the Divine Revelations descending upon the previous Prophets. After the advent of Prophet Muhammad's Message, things became different, for Allah *the Almighty* willed that the sky should be guarded and that penetrating, burning stars should pursue any devil wanting to approach the sky. The Arabic word *Ash-Shihab* (burning flame) refers to something like a piece of coal that is ablaze.

Allah *the Almighty* then relates that the Jinn said: 'We used to sit in places there, listening, but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him.' (*al-Jinn:* 9) The devils had certain positions to sit therein for eavesdropping on what came down from the heaven. They used to pick up some words from heavenly Revelations and add to them hundreds of lies of their own accord. However, When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent with the Message of Islam, the jinn were expelled from these positions. Concerning these jinn and devils who had certain positions for eavesdropping, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Indeed they, from [its] hearing, are removed.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 212) So, they are banned from eavesdropping by means of shooting stars and meteors. Further, they were prevented from eavesdropping on the Divine Revelations and the Angels' discussions on the future events that would take place on the earth like the cases of death and the rainfalls.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…but anyone trying to listen now will find a shooting star lying in wait for him.' (*al-Jinn:* 9) According to this verse, some of the jinn tried to eavesdrop on the heavenly realm, but they were confronted with meteors and flaming stars. So, the devils' attempted secret listening to the heavenly news was a kind of eavesdropping and snatches, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Except one who snatches [some words] by theft, but they are pursued by a burning flame, piercing [in brightness].' (*as-Saffat:* 10)

Even if the rebellious jinn should manage to snatch some pieces of the heavenly news, they cannot flee with them and communicate them to their allies. This is because: '…they are pursued by a burning flame, piercing [in brightness].' (*as-Saffat:* 10) This means that the flaming stars pounce upon these devils and pierce through space till they hit their targets as quickly and accurately as possible.

Someone may ask, 'Why are the devils not banned from eavesdropping from the beginning?' The scholars say that there is a distinction between preventing the jinn from eavesdropping from the start and letting them snatch some heavenly news without fleeing with and benefitting from them. Allah *Glorified is He* enables them to eavesdrop on some pieces of heavenly news, but meteors attack them immediately from all directions, leading to their distress and sorrow. They suffer unbearably from eavesdropping and they get bitterly sorry for not taking advantage of what they heard.

Allah says:

وَأَنَّا لَا نَدْرِىٓ أَشَرٌّ أُرِيدَ بِمَن فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ أَمْ أَرَادَ بِهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ رَشَدًا ﴿١٠﴾
وَأَنَّا مِنَّا ٱلصَّٰلِحُونَ وَمِنَّا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ كُنَّا طَرَآئِقَ قِدَدًا ﴿١١﴾

[so now] we do not know whether those who live on earth
are due for misfortune, or whether their Lord intends to
guide them [10] Some of us are righteous and others less so:
we follow different paths [11] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 10 - 11)

The two abovementioned verses are among the words said by the jinn. They do not know why the sky is guarded by powerful Angels and why the meteors prevent them from listening secretly to the heavenly Revelations. They wondered, 'Is this something evil for the dwellers of the earth so that they will not know what happens on the earth? Or does Allah will them to be rightly guided?' The devils were confused as they were kept from eavesdropping. Thus, they did not know whether what was sent down from the heaven was good or bad. They do not know the rationale behind guarding the sky and whether this is bad or good for mankind. Evil here can be a punishment inflicted upon the inhabitants of the earth.

As for the Right Guidance here, it refers to sending Prophets from among the humans to guide them to the Truth. But is this evil based on what comes down from the sky or its results? They know that whoever believes in the Messenger and seeks Guidance from him will be on the Right Path. While whoever despise the Messenger and rejects his Guidance will be severely punished. The jinn are undecided whether or not to believe in the Prophet. They describe themselves, saying: ‘Some of us are righteous and others less so: we follow different paths.’ (*al-Jinn:* 11) As the jinn were hesitant about believing or denying Prophets, they divided: some of them became believers and others split into groups and sects.

Like mankind, there are believers, sinners and pious worshippers among the jinn. Among them are also good individuals who promote righteousness and virtue and those who are righteous but do not encourage others to follow virtue. As regards the rebels among the jinn, they are the devils and demons.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…we follow different paths’ (*al-Jinn:* 11), it means that they belong to different and various faiths. Among them are the believers, disbelievers, Jews and Christians. The Arabic word *Tara'iq* means a way or a school of thought. As for the Arabic word *Qidad*, it refers to varieties and different classes. Thus, the jinn were of different classes and groups. In this regard, As Suddi said, 'The jinn are like you [humans]; among them are the Qadaris, Murji'ites, Rafidis and Shiites.'(1) This proves that there are among the jinn those who practice reasoning regarding the Quranic verses as well as those who are unable to understand the allegorical verses of the Quran. Thus, they are different sects.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Wahidi attributed this narration to Al-Hasan Al-Basri. See Ath-Tha'labi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 10/51; and Al-Wahidi, Al-Wasit Fi Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Majid, 4/266.*

وَأَنَّا ظَنَنَّآ أَن لَّن نُّعۡجِزَ ٱللَّهَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَلَن نُّعۡجِزَهُۥ هَرَبٗا ١٢

We know we can never frustrate God on earth; we can never escape Him [12] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 12)

The jinn express their certainty and conviction that they can never frustrate Allah on earth. The Arabic word *Mu'jiz* (an imitable thing) refers to that which proves the defeat of one's opponent. To say 'I did something unrivaled to so-and-so' means that so-and-so was unable to do something like it. The jinn believe firmly that they cannot escape from Allah's Punishment and that they are not beyond His Power. What gives the same meaning is the verse reading: ‘Never think that the disbelievers are causing failure [to Allah] upon the earth…’ (*an-Nur:* 57). The jinn are not able to slip from the reach of Allah *the Almighty*; if He wills to punish them anywhere and anytime, He is fully Able to do so without any impediments or obstacles.

The jinn say: ‘We know we can never frustrate Allah on earth...’ (*al-Jinn:* 12). They acknowledge that they are powerless to protect themselves against the His punishment whether they inhabit the depths of the earth or its surface.

وَأَنَّا لَمَّا سَمِعۡنَا ٱلۡهُدَىٰٓ ءَامَنَّا بِهِۦۖ فَمَن يُؤۡمِنۢ بِرَبِّهِۦ فَلَا يَخَافُ بَخۡسٗا وَلَا رَهَقٗا ١٣

When we heard the guidance we came to believe: whoever believes in his Lord need fear no loss nor injustice [13] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 13)

The word 'guidance' here refers to the Quran that the jinn listened to carefully. They regard it as such because it directs to the Right Path. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘And what prevented the people from believing when guidance came to them except that they said, “Has Allah sent a human messenger?”’ (*al-Isra’:* 94) Guidance means showing the road that leads to your intended destination. For example, the road signs show travelers their roads and help them reach their destinations. Describing the Quran, He *the Almighty* says: ‘This is the Book about which there is no doubt, guidance for those conscious of Allah.’ (*al-Baqara:* 2) Undoubtedly, the Glorious Quran is the Right Path of Allah which embodies the spiritual Guidance for those who desire to safeguard themselves from His punishment. It is worth noting that instead of saying 'and when we heard the Quran, ' the Jinn say: ‘When we heard the guidance...’ (*al-Jinn:* 13) describing it directly as such and using the definite article 'the' which distinguishes the Quran from other sacred Books.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…whoever believes in his Lord need fear no loss, nor injustice.’ (*al-Jinn:* 13) Believing in the Quran means that one believes in the Divine Guidance, and this, at the same time, entails one's belief in the One Who revealed the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Your belief in your Lord brings good results, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘…whoever believes in his Lord need fear no loss, nor injustice.’ (*al-Jinn:* 13) The human being fears being deprived of his/her due and being put to burden and hardship. So if one desires not to expose him/herself to either case, s/he must believe in Allah *Glorified is He*.

So, what do the Arabic words *Al-Bakhs* (loss) and *Al-Rahaq* (injustice) mean here? *Al-Bakhs* means depriving a person of his/her rights or giving him/her less than his/her due. Concerning Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) *Allah’s Peace be upon him* Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they sold him for a reduced price - a few *dirhams* - and they were, concerning him, of those content with little.’ (*Yusuf:* 20); ‘And do not deprive people of their due.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 183) Depriving others of their due is a sinful act and so is denying someone else's whole right or handling it without his/her permission or in a way unacceptable to him/her.

As a matter of fact, Allah *Glorified is He* does not deprive people of their due in any way as He says: ‘But he who does of righteous deeds while he is a believer - he will neither fear injustice nor deprivation.’ (*Ta Ha:* 112) As for the Arabic word *Al-Hadm* (deprivation), it means diminishing reward and good recompense. The wronged person is s/he who is subjected to this action. He *Glorified is He* never wrongs anyone even by a hair's breadth as He says: ‘Indeed, Allah does not do injustice, [even] as much as an atom's weight;

while if there is a good deed, He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward.’ (*an-Nisa’:* 40)

As regards *Ar-Rahq*, it is here a type of punishment. A person who believes in Allah *the Almighty* does not fear to be deprived of his/her reward for good deeds wholly or partly. Likewise, s/he does not fear to be overburdened with others' sins and errors.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَأَنَّا مِنَّا ٱلْمُسْلِمُونَ وَمِنَّا ٱلْقَـٰسِطُونَ ۖ فَمَنْ أَسْلَمَ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ تَحَرَّوْا۟ رَشَدًا ﴿١٤﴾
وَأَمَّا ٱلْقَـٰسِطُونَ فَكَانُوا۟ لِجَهَنَّمَ حَطَبًا ﴿١٥﴾

Some of us submit to Him and others go the wrong way:
those who submit to God have found wise guidance [14]
but those who go wrong will be fuel for Hellfire [15]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 14 - 15)

The first of the two aforementioned verses indicates that among the jinn are those who are believers and those who are disbelievers. Allah *the Almighty* says about those who go wrong: ‘[they] will be fuel for Hellfire.’ (*al-Jinn:* 15) So, the unjust people, who deny others their rights, will go to the fire. Here, those who go wrong are the opposites of the Muslims. They wrong themselves by deviating from the worship of Allah *the Almighty* the Right Path and Islam. By contrast, the Muslims are those who submit to Allah *Glorified is He* by obedience to Him.

So, His saying: ‘…those who submit to Allah have found wise guidance.’ (*al-Jinn:* 14) means that those who submit and yield to Allah *the Almighty* by obedience seek the Right Path and aspire to reward. As for the unjust: ‘…[they] will be fuel for Hellfire.’ (*al-Jinn:* 15) The unjust are designed as the firewood of hell so that a believer considers their position and enjoys the bliss in paradise more strongly. For example, a healthy person enjoys his/her well-being more and more when s/he sees someone else who is ill.

وَأَلَّوِ ٱسۡتَقَٰمُواْ عَلَى ٱلطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسۡقَيۡنَٰهُم مَّآءً غَدَقٗا ١٦
لِّنَفۡتِنَهُمۡ فِيهِۚ وَمَن يُعۡرِضۡ عَن ذِكۡرِ رَبِّهِۦ يَسۡلُكۡهُ عَذَابٗا صَعَدٗا ١٧

If they had taken to the right way, We would have given them abundant water to drink [16] a test for them — but anyone who turns away from his Lord's Revelation will be sent by Him to spiraling torment [17] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 16 - 17)

Allah *Glorified is He* then directs His Discourse to the disbelievers of Mecca, saying: 'If they had taken to the right way, We would have given them abundant water to drink.' (*al-Jinn:* 16) If the disbelievers of Mecca became believers and followed the Right Path, He *Glorified is He* would confer upon them abundant sustenance.

Al-Hanifiyya is the Straight Path about which Allah says: 'Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the polytheists.' (*Al-'Imran:* 67) What makes a person who follows the Right Path deviate from it and thus distress him/herself? If a person intends to achieve the desired goal directly, s/he must be on the Right Path. As for a person who strays from that Path, s/he does not reach the desired end. As regards a person who adopts the Right Path and the ordained Way, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Then We put you, [O Muhammad], on an ordained way concerning the matter [of religion]; so follow it and do not follow the inclinations of those who do not know.' (*al-Jathiya:* 18)

In the verse in question, the 'abundant water' denotes rain or the great property, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'A test for them —but anyone who turns away from his Lord's Revelation will be sent by Him to spiraling torment.' (*al-Jinn:* 17) He *Glorified is He* grants the people abundant sustenance to test. In this respect 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* says, 'There are trials and temptations wherever water and wealth exist.'(1) So, the material possessions are but trials and tests. If one is enslaved and seduced by his wealth, high rank or women, he will surely lose and bring down upon himself sheer evil.

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(1) *See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 23/663; Ath-Tha'labi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 10/53; Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 19/18.*

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…but anyone who turns away from his Lord's Revelation will be sent by Him to spiraling torment.' (*al-Jinn:* 17) In the previous verse, He *Glorified is He* says: 'If they had taken to the right way, We would have given them abundant water to drink.' (*al-Jinn:* 16) This is the reward obtainable by those who believe and adopt Allah's Way of Guidance. As for those who reject and turn away from it, He *Glorified is He* will place them into intense, escalating and permanent punishment. He *the Almighty* gives us an example of this intense, unbearable punishment, saying: 'I will cover him with arduous torment.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 17) This verse means He *the Almighty* will force him/her to climb a burning rock with holes that emit blazing wind that make his/her flesh fall off his/her body.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* reminds us about a fact that we must keep in mind, saying:

وَأَنَّ ٱلۡمَسَٰجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدۡعُواْ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ أَحَدٗا ١٨

Places of worship are for God alone –
so do not pray to anyone other than God [18]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 18)

The Arabic word *Al-Masjid* (the house of worship) is the place designed for worshipping and prostrating to Allah *the Almighty* Alone. So when you enter the mosque for the purpose of worship, you get nearer to Allah *Glorified is He* to invoke Him and be under His Care. So, the worshipper should not enter to it while concerning about the worldly matters. One of the Companions of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'We used to forget about our mundane matters the moment we took off our shoes and immediately before entering the mosque.' One should forget about his/her standing when s/he enters the mosque and take into account the extent of his/her belief in Allah *Glorified is He*. Further, one should show his/her devotion and submission towards Him and sit at an unoccupied spot. The worshipper should not pass through the people. Moreover, the one should intend to perform *I'tikaf* at the mosque and should not converse about any worldly matters.

The mosques are the places where the Divine Blessings shower the worshippers and whoever wants to receive Spiritual Light should go there.

One should go to the mosque to perform the prayer and meet his/her Lord and that is why we should not talk about our mundane matters in the mosque. Are the long hours of discussing the mundane affairs outside the mosque not enough so that we cannot dedicate some numbered minutes for our prayer in the mosques?! Thus, we should not drag our worldly affairs into the mosque. Although the whole earth is suitable for performing prayer, when you enter the mosque, you awaken your devotion to Allah *the Almighty* and dedicate all your actions and feelings to Him Alone.

The mosques are for Allah *the Almighty* Who says: '…so do not pray to anyone other than Allah.' (*al-Jinn:* 18) To pray here means to worship.(1) So you must not worship anyone besides Him *Glorified is He*; rather, we should worship Him Alone. Some exegetes state that the mosques refer to the seven bodily parts on which a person prostrates him/herself to Him *the Almighty*: the forehead, the nose, the hands, the knees. These bodily parts are created for Him *Glorified is He*. So, we must not prostrate upon them to anyone other than Him.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is narrated to have said, 'I was ordered to prostrate myself with seven bodily parts: the forehead, the nose, the hands and the knees.'(2) In fact, the Arabic word '*masjid'* may refer to the places designed for prayer or the bodily parts used for prostration. Concerning the mosques, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayer and give *zakat* and do not fear except Allah, for it is expected that those will be of the [rightly] guided.' (*at-Tawba:* 18) His saying: '…and do not fear except Allah…' (*at-Tawba:* 18) indicates that discussing the matters that concern the Muslims and criticising things far removed from the Way of Allah in the mosques do not contradict with the fact that the mosques are intended for worship. So, His saying: '…and do not fear except Allah…' (*at-Tawba:* 18) refers to those who fear none except for Him *Glorified is He,* speak the truth in public, fulfill the requirements of their belief in Allah *the Almighty* and in the Day of Judgment and worship Him Alone. In fact, believing in Him *Glorified is He* entails fearing Him.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of An-Nu'man ibn Bashir Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 18352 and 18386; 'Abdullah ibn Al-Mubarak, Az-Zuhd Wa Ar-Raqa'q, Hadith no.1298; and Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no. 838.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 2777; Abu 'Awana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 1867; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 812; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 230.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَنَّهُۥ لَمَّا قَامَ عَبۡدُ ٱللَّهِ يَدۡعُوهُ كَادُواْ يَكُونُونَ عَلَيۡهِ لِبَدٗا ﴿١٩﴾

Yet when God's Servant stood up to pray to Him,
they pressed in on him [19] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 19)

When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was performing prayer and reciting the Quran, the jinn gathered to listen to the Quran. Here, 'Allah's Servant' refers to him *peace and blessings be upon him* when he was praying and reciting the Quran at a place called Nakhla, between Mecca and At-Ta'if. Due to their great admiration for the Quranic verses, the jinn overlaid one another to the degree that they were about to fall over him *peace and blessings be upon him*. They swarmed in order to listen to the Quran and formed into a compacted mass. The Arabs call the locusts that overlay one another '*Lubda*, ' that is, an overlapping swarm of locusts. This word also refers to the matted hair.

قُلۡ إِنَّمَآ أَدۡعُواْ رَبِّي وَلَآ أُشۡرِكُ بِهِۦٓ أَحَدٗا ﴿٢٠﴾ قُلۡ إِنِّي لَآ أَمۡلِكُ لَكُمۡ ضَرّٗا وَلَا رَشَدٗا ﴿٢١﴾
قُلۡ إِنِّي لَن يُجِيرَنِي مِنَ ٱللَّهِ أَحَدٞ وَلَنۡ أَجِدَ مِن دُونِهِۦ مُلۡتَحَدًا ﴿٢٢﴾

Say, 'I pray to my Lord alone; I set up no partner with
Him.' [20] Say, 'I have no control over any harm or good
that may befall you.' [21] Say, 'No one can protect me from
God: I have no refuge except in Him' [22]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 20 - 22)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* orders Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say: 'I pray to my Lord alone; I set up no partner with Him.' (*al-Jinn:* 20) The jinn searched for the true heavenly Message and found the sky filled with strong guards of the Angels. Thus, approaching the sky became destructive for them. So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* announces to them his Message clearly and openly: 'I pray to my Lord alone;

I set up no partner with Him.' (*al-Jinn:* 20) This verse means that he worships Allah *Glorified is He* Alone, and this is the Message of monotheism. Nothing should be worshipped besides Him, be it idols, humans, stars or animals, for Allah *Glorified is He* is the only One God.

On the other hand, some exegetes hold the view that the three verses in question respond to the disbelievers of Mecca when they asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to renounce his Call. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* replied to them by the saying of Allah: 'I pray to my Lord alone; I set up no partner with Him.' (*al-Jinn:* 20)(1)

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I have no control over any harm or good that may befall you.' (*al-Jinn:* 21) In the chapter in question, we note that He *the Almighty* repeats the word *'Rashad'* (the Right Path) four times. We find this in the verses reading: 'That gives guidance to the right path…[2]' (*al-Jinn:* 2); '…or whether their Lord intends to guide them' (*al-Jinn:* 10); '…have found wise guidance' (*al-Jinn:* 14); and 'I have no control over any harm or good that may befall you.' (*al-Jinn:* 21) Someone may ask, 'Why does He *Glorified is He* not say, "Say, Indeed, I do not possess for you [the power of] harm or benefit"?' The jinn who listened to the Quran and said: 'We have heard a wondrous Quran, [1] that gives guidance to the right path… [2]' (*al-Jinn:* 2) did not strive after any worldly benefits. Rather, they sought the Spiritual Guidance and the Right Path. The word 'guidance' is contrary to the word 'error'.

If we say the same verses in question refer to the disbelievers of Mecca, then Allah *Glorified is He* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to say to the polytheists of the Arabs, 'I am in no position to cause you any harm regarding your religion or worldly life or bring you benefit as it is Allah Alone who is in position to do all that.'

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Say, "No one can protect me from Allah."' (*al-Jinn:* 22) None gives protection except Him *Glorified is He* and no one can be helped against Him. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Say, [O

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(1) *See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil Fi Ma'ani At-Tanzil, 4/352; Al-Baghawi, Tafsir, 5/163; and Ash-Shawkani, Fath Al-Qadir, 5/371.*

Muhammad], "Have you considered: whether Allah should cause my death and those with me or have mercy upon us, who can protect the disbelievers from a painful punishment?"' (*al-Mulk:* 28) and 'Say, "In whose hand is the realm of all things - and He protects while none can protect against Him - if you should know?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 88)

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* relates that Satan said to the disbelievers: '…and indeed, I am your protector.' (*al-Anfal:* 48) A person seeks the protection of someone else who is powerful only when s/he is unable to protect him/herself.

It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If I swerve from what Allah sent to me, none can protect me against Him and prevent His punishment. Then he said: 'I have no refuge except in Him.' (*al-Kahf:* 27) The Arabic word '*Multahada*' (refuge) is mentioned twice in the Quran. It occurs in the aforementioned verse and in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no changer of His words, and never will you find in other than Him a refuge.' (*al-Kahf:* 27) It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I will not find any refuge in other than Allah if I do not follow what I came with. It is also said that the word *'Multahad'* means a passageway that looks like a vault. The same word is derived from *'Lahd'* which is a rectangular crevice on the side of a grave facing the *Qibla* in which a dead person is buried.

إِلَّا بَلَٰغًا مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرِسَٰلَٰتِهِۦۚ وَمَن يَعْصِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَإِنَّ لَهُۥ
نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾

I only deliver [what I receive] from God – only His messages.' Whoever disobeys God and His Messenger will have Hell's Fire as his permanent home [23]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 23)

What safeguards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the Punishment of Allah is only conveying the Message revealed to him. That is all what he should do; he is no in the position to harm or bring benefit to his people, for Guidance and misguidance depends on Allah *the Almighty* Alone.

Some exegetes say that the Arabic word *Ella* consists of two particles: *En* and *la* (unless). Thus, the meaning is that none can protect him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* against Allah *Glorified is He* if he does not impart His Messages. He *peace and blessings be upon him* is responsible for delivering the Divine Messenge. So, when the disbelievers of Mecca tried to make a compromise with him, he said to his paternal uncle Abu Taleb, 'My uncle, by Allah, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left one (as a compromise) to renounce such a matter, I would never waive it till Allah has made it predominate or caused me to perish in its cause.'(1)

Allah *the Almighty* mentions the word 'message' in the plural form, as in His saying in which He praises those who convey His Messages: ‘Those who deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and do not fear anyone but Allah; and Allah is sufficient to take account’ (*al-Ahzab:* 39); ‘And he turned away from them and said, “O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you the messages of my Lord and advised you.”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 93) The plural word 'messages' denotes the commands, prohibitions, laws and obligations which constitute the Divine Message.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger will have Hell’s Fire as his permanent home.’ (*al-Jinn:* 23) Disobedience here does not denote committing sins. It means the lack of belief in Allah, His Scriptures, Messages and Prophets. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was narrated to have said, 'All [the members of] my *ummah* except for those who refuse.' The Companions asked, 'Who will refuse, Allah's Messenger?' He said, 'Whoever obeys me will enter paradise, while those who disobey me will refuse.'(2)

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(1) *See Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 1/266; Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, Hadith no. 66; As-Suhayli, Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf, 3/10; and Ibn Sayyid An-Nas, 'Uyun Al-Athar, 1/118.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7280; and Al-Muhallib, Al-Mukhtasar Al-Sahih, Hadith no. 7280.*

Therefore, whoever disobeys Allah *Glorified is He* and Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* concerning monotheism: '…will have Hell's Fire as his permanent home.' (*al-Jinn:* 23) This means that those who disobey Him regarding His commands and prohibitions, and disbelieve in Him and in Messenger Muhammad and deny His Messages will abide in hell forever.

In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Indeed, those who disbelieve and die, while they are disbelievers - upon them will be the curse of Allah and of the angels and the people, all together. They will abide eternally therein. The punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved.' (*al-Baqara:* 161-162)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* talks about the disbelievers' punishment in hell. This very punishment is eternal and unceasing. Eternal residence in hell is emphasized only in the verse reading: 'Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger will have Hell's Fire as his permanent home.' (*al-Jinn:* 23). The adjective 'permanent' gives more meaning than the verb 'abide'. The Quran is the literal Words of Allah *Glorified is He* and every Word therein is exact and meaningful; there is no redundancy or repetition what so ever in the Quran. Thus, the adjective 'permanent' means that abiding in hell is endless.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا رَأَوۡاْ مَا يُوعَدُونَ فَسَيَعۡلَمُونَ مَنۡ أَضۡعَفُ نَاصِرٗا وَأَقَلُّ عَدَدٗا ٢٤

When they are confronted by what they have been warned about, they will realize who has the weaker protector and the smaller number [24] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 24)

Allah *Glorified is He* asserts in this verse that the disbelievers will see hell. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'And the criminals will see the Fire and will be certain that they are to fall therein.' (*al-Kahf:* 53) However, in another verse He *the Almighty* says: '…and we will gather them on the Day of Resurrection [fallen] on their faces – blind.' (*al-Isra':* 97) The one who ponders on these verses finds that blindness occurs once the disbelievers are resurrected from their graves so that they will be humiliated and confused. Afterwards, they regain their eyesight to experience the forms of punishment ordained for them. Thus, He *the Almighty* humiliates the disbelievers in the case of their eyesight and blindness. He *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '…until, when they see that which they were promised - either punishment [in this world] or the Hour [of resurrection] - they will come to know who is worst in position and weaker in soldiers.' (*Maryam:* 75)

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* warns the disbelievers against hellfire. When He *the Almighty* makes a threat, He is fully Able to carry it out and nothing can impede its fulfillment, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'Indeed, what you are promised is coming, and you will not cause failure [to Allah].' (*al-An'am:* 134) Thus, none is able to prevent Him *Glorified is He* from fulfilling His Promise or carrying out His threat. No one can overpower Him, for He is the Omnipotent.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…they will realize who has the weaker protector and the smaller number' (*al-Jinn:* 24), it means that they will know who has the weaker helpers; are they the disbelievers of Mecca or the believers? Further, the smaller number means that they have no supporters in the Hereafter. It is worth mentioning that the polytheists used to taunt Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers with the lack of helpers and their small number. So, He *the Almighty* says: '…they will realize who has the weaker protector and the smaller number.' (*al-Jinn:* 24) This is an explicit threat aimed at those who know about the Message of Islam and reject it.

The polytheists compare their might with that of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and rely upon it greatly. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Close friends, that Day, will be enemies to each other, except for the righteous.' (*az-Zukhruf:* 67) So, on the Day of Judgment, the close friends will be enemies to one another and dissociate from one another except for the righteous. In the same connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '[And they should consider that] when those who have been followed disassociate themselves from those who followed [them], and they [all] see the punishment, and cut off from them are the ties [of relationship], [166] Those who followed will say, "If only we had another turn [at worldly life] so we could disassociate ourselves from them as they have disassociated themselves from us.” Thus will Allah show them their deeds as regrets upon them. And they are never to emerge from the Fire. [167]’ (*al-Baqara:* 166-167)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

قُلْ إِنْ أَدْرِيٓ أَقَرِيبٌ مَّا تُوعَدُونَ أَمْ يَجْعَلُ لَهُۥ رَبِّيٓ أَمَدًا ﴿٢٥﴾

Say, ‘I do not know whether what you have been warned about is near, or whether a distant time has been appointed for it by my Lord’ [25] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 25)

Here, the Arabic particle en denotes negation, so the meaning is that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not know whether the eternal punishment against which Allah *the Almighty* warns is imminent or distant.

With regard to His saying: ‘…or whether a distant time has been appointed for it by my Lord’ (*al-Jinn:* 25), the Arabic word *Amad* means a distant time. It occurs in the Quran four times, as in the verse reading: ‘…and a long period passed over them, so their hearts hardened’ (*al-Hadid:* 16); and ‘On the Day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 30).

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

عَٰلِمُ ٱلْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَىٰ غَيْبِهِۦٓ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٦﴾

**He is the One who knows what is hidden [26]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 26)**

The unseen is all that is known by Allah *Glorified is He* Alone. He is the Knower of the unseen and He only informs those whom He selects from mankind about it. In this vein, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them except Him. And He knows what is on the land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but that He knows it. And no grain is there within the darkness of the earth and no moist or dry [thing] but that it is [written] in a clear record.’ (*al-An‘am:* 59)

Allah *Glorified is He* does not grant the key of the unseen to any of His creatures. The absolute unseen is what all creatures do not know. As regards the mysteries of the universe, they are not classified as unseen because even if they are hidden from some people, they are known to others. The saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: '…and He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] unseen to anyone' (*al-Jinn:* 26) means that He *Glorified is He* does not let any of His creatures know about the unseen. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: '…and when she informed [another] of it and Allah showed it to him, he made known part of it and ignored a part.' (*at-Tahrim:* 3) This verse means that He *the Almighty* informed Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that Hafsa *Allah be pleased with her* told 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* about the secret which he confided to her.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* excepts specific creatures of His from not knowing the unseen, saying:

إِلَّا مَنِ ٱرۡتَضَىٰ مِن رَّسُولٖ فَإِنَّهُۥ يَسۡلُكُ مِنۢ بَيۡنِ يَدَيۡهِ وَمِنۡ خَلۡفِهِۦ رَصَدٗا ﴿٢٧﴾

He does not disclose it except to a messenger of His choosing.
He sends watchers to go in front and behind [27]
(The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 27)

According to this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* excludes His selected Messengers from not knowing some unseen matters. They did not know about the unseen by themselves; rather, He *the Almighty* informed them of special, unseen things which could function as miracles for them and their followers. So, He *the Almighty* allows His Prophets to know about some unseen things and preserve them with Angels who, in turn, protect these unseen matters from devilish whispers and confusions.

Allah *the Almighty* protects the heavenly Revelations He sends down upon His Prophets from the jinn for two reasons: to prevent the jinn from eavesdropping on the Divine Revelations and conveying them to soothsayers, and to enable the Prophets to communicate these Revelations to people free from the satanic tampering and confusion.

Thus, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is informed about the unseen, but not a knower of the unseen, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Say, [O Muhammad], “I do not tell you that I have the depositories [containing the provision] of Allah or that I know the unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel. I only follow what is revealed to me.”’ (*al-An‘am:* 50) So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* disproves his knowledge of the unseen.

Someone may ask, 'What about the future matters and events that he *peace and blessings be upon him* told us about?' The answer is that this is not a form of knowing the unseen, as it is He *the Almighty* Who told him *peace and blessings be upon him* about these future events. An example of this is His saying: ‘That is from the news of the unseen which We reveal to you, [O Muhammad]. And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Mary. Nor were you with them when they disputed.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 44) Hence, it is He *Glorified is He* Who informed him *peace and blessings be upon him* of these stories which were among the unseen. This constitutes a penetration into the knowledge of the past. As regards future events, they are hidden from you through the barrier of the future.

Allah *Glorified is He* endows some of His creatures with knowledge about some unseen things. The Quran contains a lot of unseen things that later came true. He *the Almighty* bestowed upon Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* some of the unseen knowledge and specified those who could learn about some unseen things, saying: ‘He does not disclose it except to a messenger of His choosing…’ (*al-Jinn:* 27).

However, this blessing is not exclusive to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because he is a role model and whoever imitates him will have some of these Divine blessings. When the people notice this, they will know that when a person models him/herself on him *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* grants him/her special endowments.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them except Him...’ (*al-An‘am:* 59). He *Glorified is He* did not give the keys of the unseen to anyone. As for the pious people, they receive their special endowments from Him, but they do not have the keys of the unseen.

Although Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* told us about unseen things, we should not say that he knows the unseen because it is Allah *the Almighty* who informed him about the unseen things. So, no one knows the unseen of his/her own accord.

As for the absolute unseen is what is known by Allah *Glorified is He* Alone. In this regard, once Messenger of Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about the appointed time of the Hour, he said, 'The one who is asked about it has no idea like the enquirer.'(1)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…He sends watchers to go in front and behind him.' (*al-Jinn:* 27) He *Glorified is He* protected Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the jinn's attempted eavesdropping on the Divine Revelations. The object pronoun 'him' here refers to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Now, why does He *Glorified is He* mention the front and back directions in particular? The answer is that mentioning some of these directions implies the remaining ones. It is said that whenever He *the Almighty* sent a Prophet, Satan used to come to that Prophet in the form of an Angel to make some satanic suggestions to him, whereupon He *Glorified is He* sent a group of the Angels as guards to protect that Prophet from devils and the jinn. Allah *Glorified is He* is in charge of preserving the Quran by guarding the sky with the Angels who used to deter devils from listening secretly to the Divine Revelations.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *al-Jinn*, saying:

لِّيَعْلَمَ أَن قَدْ أَبْلَغُوا۟ رِسَـٰلَـٰتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَحَاطَ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ وَأَحْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ عَدَدًۢا ﴿٢٨﴾

To ensure that each of His messengers delivers his Lord's message: He knows all about them, and He takes account of everything [28] (The Quran, *al-Jinn:* 28)

This verse means that sending watchers is in order for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to know that the previous Prophets communicated the Messages of their Lord and that Jibril (Gabriel) conveyed to him the

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 50 and 4777; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 8, 9 and 10.*

Messages of his Lord as well. But for the guarding Angels, who repelled devils and jinn, they would divulge the Divine Revelations to the soothsayers, and there would be no distinction between them and the Prophets. In this way, the Prophets would not have the advantage of miracles and none would accept their Calls. Thus, the heavenly Messages were conveyed and protected against additions and decreases.

The verse in question is interpreted in many ways. It is said that it means that in order for Satan to know that the Prophets conveyed Allah's Messages protected from his whispers and the insertions of the jinn. Further, the attempts at eavesdropping failed as Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…He knows all about them…' (*al-Jinn:* 28). The jinn have no way out to escape from Allah *the Almighty*. This Attribute of All-encompassing requires Allah's Knowledge and Control over the jinn and devils.

He *the Almighty* knows best all the affairs of the Prophets and nothing concerning them is hidden from Him. His Knowledge encompasses all what is related to the Prophets, Angels and all the creatures. It encompasses the Ordinances and Laws with which the Prophets came with.

As for His saying: '…and He takes account of everything.' (*al-Jinn:* 28), it means that Allah *the Almighty* has enumerated His creatures and knows what He has created. His Knowledge covers even the weights of atoms and mustards and everything is enumerated by Him.

The Arabic word '*Adada*' is put in the accusative as a circumstantial expression or as a cognate accusative. Hence, nothing is hidden from Allah, be it much, little, big or small. He *the Almighty* knows the numbers of the drops of water, grains of sand, tree leaves and the foam of seas. At this point, the chapter of *al-Jinn* comes to an end. It shakes feelings and hearts and talks about the invisible world. We do not care much about the realm of Angels as we can feel secure regarding them. By contrast, we are apprehensive about the world of the jinn. As the chapter illustrates, the jinn search for the True Religion and find it in the Quran which they listen to directly from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They immediately become Preachers for their fellow jinn.

the chapter of

al-Muzzammil

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Muzzammil* (1).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلۡمُزَّمِّلُ ﴿١﴾ قُمِ ٱلَّيۡلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلٗا ﴿٢﴾
نِّصۡفَهُۥٓ أَوِ ٱنقُصۡ مِنۡهُ قَلِيلًا ﴿٣﴾ أَوۡ زِدۡ عَلَيۡهِ وَرَتِّلِ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ تَرۡتِيلًا ﴿٤﴾

You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak! [1] stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it [2] half, or a little less [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly [4] (The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 1 - 4)

Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to get him nearer to Him. A worshipper should stand before Him *Glorified is He* and invoke Him humbly and submissively. But here it is He *the Almighty* Who orders him *peace and blessings be upon him* to spend some period of the night performing acts of worship. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And from [part of] the night, pray with it as additional [worship] for you; it is expected that your Lord will resurrect you to a praised station.’ (*al-Isra’:* 79)

The Arabic word *Hujud* means 'sleep', and the verb *'Tahajad'* means to stay awake at night. The obligation of performing the late-night acts of worship is peculiar to the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* but it is not a religious obligation imposed on the *ummah*. Though this peculiarity concerning him is regarded as an additional religious duty imposed upon him, he had the option of performing it at any time during the night. What is important is that he performs this act of worship.

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(1) The chapter of *al-Muzzammil* is the chapter seventy three according to the order of the *Mushaf* and it was revealed in Mecca. According to Ibn 'Abbas and 'Ata', the last verse of this chapter was revealed in Medina. Its verses number 20, and it was revealed after the chapter of *al-Qalam.*

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And those who spend [part of] the night to their Lord prostrating and standing [in prayer].’ (*al-Furqan:* 64) When a person takes refuge in his/her house after a day of hard work and remembers the bestowals of Allah *Glorified is He* upon him/her, s/he turns to Him by giving Him due thanks and prostrating in prayer during the night.

It does not mean that one must spend the whole night performing acts of worship. Rather, one should devote part of the night to the acts of worship when s/he has enough energy to perform them. In this regard, Ibn 'Abbas is narrated to have said, 'Whoever observes two units of prayer or more after the Evening Prayer is like the one who has spent the night prostrating to Allah in prayer.' Allah *the Almighty* wills you to praise and glorify Him before you sleep and contemplate His Favours upon you, thereby you thank Him.

The Arabic word *Al-Muzzammil* refers to the one who wraps himself in clothing. In this regard, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wrapped himself in clothing and said, 'Wrap me,' when he met Jibril (Gabriel) for the first time.(1) The word *'Al muzzammil'* also refers to the one who carries the banner of Prophethood. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'You, who carry the responsibility of the Islamic Call, fulfill it, for it is a great matter.' He *the Almighty* does not address him *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* here saying, 'O Prophet!' because the address in the verse in question was at the start of the Divine Revelations. Afterwards, he was addressed as a Prophet and a Messenger.

Concerning the reason behind the revelation of this chapter in question, it is related that the people of Quraysh met at their gathering place to plot against Messenger Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him*. He heard of their plot and grieved greatly. Then he wrapped himself up with a sheet and slept, whereupon Gabriel came to him with the saying of Allah: ‘You

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(1) *Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah Allah be pleased with him narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'While I was walking down, I heard a voice coming from the horizon, whereupon I raised my head upwards and noticed the Angel who came to me in the cave of Hira’ sitting on a throne between the heaven and the earth. I was so frightened and returned home saying, 'Wrap me up! Wrap me up.' They covered me with a sheet.' See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 4/355; Ibn Al-Jawzi, Zad Al-Masir, 4/352; and At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 23/400.*

[Prophet], enfolded in your cloak! [1] Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, [2] half, or a little less, [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly. [4]' (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-4) It is as if He *the Almighty* says to him, 'Do not grieve. You will find solace in your spiritual closeness to Me. Rise and perform prayer to eliminate your sorrow and troubles.'

Therefore, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to say to Bilal, 'Soothe us with it [prayer].' He *peace and blessings be upon him* always found comfort in prayer which used to relieve him of his worries and hardships. Due to his indescribable love for Allah, obedience and devotions became desirable and favourable for him. Those who perform prayer lovingly and with pleasure get rid of their concerns and problems. To have a strong affection for your religious obligations, means that you have tasted the pleasure of your obedience.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak! [1] Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, [2]' (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-2). Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was in the habit of offering late-night supererogatory prayers to the point that his feet were swollen. When he was asked why he was doing this though Allah *Glorified is He* forgave him his past and future sins completely, he accounted for this saying, 'Should I not be a grateful servant?'

So, He *the Almighty* asked him to spend part of the night performing prayer and other acts of worship. It is as if He *Glorified is He* said to him *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Leave your bed and your wrapping. Rise, stand before Me, spend two thirds of the night offering supererogatory prayer and sleep for the remaining third.' Here arises a question, which is, 'Is this directive aimed at the Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* alone? Or does it include the Muslim *Ummah* as well?' The directive includes the *ummah* as well.

'Aisha was narrated to have said, 'I used to make a mat for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order for him to observe prayer on it during the night. This became on people's lips. People gathered at Messenger Muhammad's house and he got out angrily to meet them. He was merciful towards them and feared that late-night prayer should be prescribed upon them. He said, 'People, do of the acts of worship according to your abilities. Allah never gets weary of reward so that you feel bored with good deeds. The best deeds are those which last longer.' At this moment, Allah *the Almighty* revealed the verses reading: ‘You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak! [1] Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, [2] half, or a little less, [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly. [4]’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-4) People were in the habit of performing night prayer to the degree that a man used to tie a rope and take hold of it. They continued this way for eight months. As people were sincere in their pursuit to gain the pleasure of Allah, He had Mercy on them, kept obligatory prayers mandatory and made late-night prayer optional.'(1)

He *the Almighty* then says: ‘Half, or a little less, [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly. [4]’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 3-4) He *Glorified is He* orders Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to perform supererogatory prayer for half the night, for one third of it or for two thirds of it. So, He *the Almighty* grants him *peace and blessings be upon him* three options: performing night prayer for half the night, doing so for one third of it or for two thirds of it. He *peace and blessings be upon him* had the choice of adopting either of these options.

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and a group of Muslims used to offer late-night prayer according to these options. This caused them some difficulty to the point that a Muslim sometimes were not aware of how many units of prayer he observed or how much time remained of the night period. They used to spend the whole night performing optional prayer till Allah *Glorified is He* facilitated this act of worship at the end of the chapter in question. Once 'Aisha was asked about Messenger Muhammad's late-night prayer, she said, 'Do you not recite the chapter reading: ‘You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak!’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 1)? The enquirer replied, 'Yes.' 'Aisha said, 'Allah imposed night-late prayer at the beginning of this chapter. Messenger Muhammad and his Companions kept offering late-night prayer [according to the chapter] for a whole year. At the conclusion, this act of worship was reduced and late-night prayer became voluntary.'(2)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir, 19010; At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 23/359; and Al-Qasimi, Mahasin At-Ta'wil, 9/345.*

(2) *See Al-Wahid, At-Tafsir Al-Wasit, 1250; Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 19/34; As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Mathur, 8/312; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 24269; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 746.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…recite the Quran slowly and distinctly.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 4), it is a command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to spend the night performing acts of worship and reciting the Quran slowly and distinctly. It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying to him, 'Have presence of mind and heart while you are performing prayer and reciting the Quran. Meditate on the truths and meanings of the Quran. Reflect over the promises of reward and paradise made to the believers, the warning against the hell and the bad destination directed to the disbelievers and the stories of the previous Prophets and nations.' So, the purpose of the slow, measured recitation of the Quran is the presence of mind and heart at the recitation of the Quran.

When 'Anas ibn Malik *Allah be pleased with him* was asked, 'How did Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recite the Quran?' he said, 'He used to elongate the sounds.' Then 'Anas recited [elongating the sounds] Allah's saying: 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.' (*al-Fatiha:* 1)(1)

The Quran is not only revealed to be recited, but it is also revealed to endure and remain till the Day of Judgment. It was also revealed so that we understand and comply with its rules, and fulfill our duties towards Allah *the Almighty* and people's duties and rights. The Quran is revealed in order for us to act according to it, heed its warnings, learn its lessons and follow its dos and donots. All of this materializes by contemplating and reciting it in a measured, rhythmic manner. We should recite it leisurely and articulate the sounds distinctly so that listeners can enumerate these sounds. The slow, modulated recitation of the Quran is a must. It is sinful for a person to desist from it.

So, contemplating the Quran is realized by reciting it leisurely and rhythmically. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Then do they not reflect upon the Quran, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?' (*Muhammad:* 24) '[This is] a blessed Book which we have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded.' (*Sad:* 29) Therefore, one must comprehend and reflect on the Quran.

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no.13050; Al-Bukhari, Khalq Af'al Al-'Ibad, 1/73; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 852; Al Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan As-Saghir, Hadith no. 978; and Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5046.*

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

إِنَّا سَنُلۡقِي عَلَيۡكَ قَوۡلٗا ثَقِيلًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ ٱلَّيۡلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطۡـٔٗا وَأَقۡوَمُ قِيلًا ﴿٦﴾
إِنَّ لَكَ فِي ٱلنَّهَارِ سَبۡحٗا طَوِيلٗا ﴿٧﴾

We shall send a momentous message down to you [5] Night prayer makes a deeper impression and sharpens words [6] you are kept busy for long periods of the day [7]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 5 - 7)

Allah *Glorified is He* prepared Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for this major mission, namely, bearing the Message of Islam. He *the Almighty* readied him for carrying the banner of Islam by the performance of late-night optional prayer and spiritual closeness. Spending part of the night in optional prayer provided him *peace and blessings be upon him* with the necessary energy to shoulder his great responsibility, namely, the Divine Way of Guidance and notifying people about it. The phrase 'a momentous message' refers to the Divine Revelations. He *Glorified is He* does not say, 'We will reveal to you a momentous message'; rather, He says: ‘We will send…’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 5) because the verb 'sent' matches the word 'momentous message' and connotes hardship and strength.

Receiving the Divine Revelations was so difficult for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Sometimes his forehead sweated profusely owing to his reactions.(1) Once the revelation departs, these symptoms end. One of the Companions related that he once was sitting beside Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and placing his knee over his. Thereupon, the Divine Revelations came down upon him *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Companion felt as if his knee was as heavy as a mountain. Even when the Divine Revelations came while he *peace and blessings be upon him* was riding his camel, the camel would kneel down.(2)

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(1) *'Aisha was narrated to have said, 'Sometimes I noticed [divine revelations] being sent down upon him (Messenger Muhammad) while his forehead was sweating heavily.' See Al-Jawhari, Sharh Al-Muwat', Hadith no. 743; Al-Baghawi, Sharh As-Sunna, 3737.*

(2) *Asma' Bint Yazid was narrated to have said, 'While I was holding the rein of Al-'Adba, the she-camel of Messenger Muhammad, the chapter of al-Ma'ida was revealed to him all at once. It was so unbearable for the she-camel that its neck was about to bruise.' See Ahmad, Musnad, 6/455; and Ibn Rahawayh, Musnad, Hadith no. 2298.*

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to get so exhausted after receiving the Divine Revelations. So when he received it for the first time, he returned quickly to Lady Khadija and said to her, 'Wrap me up. Wrap me up,' as if he had a fever.

Since The Divine Revelations were exhausting and difficult for him *peace and blessings be upon him* they stop temporarily in order for him to have some rest and regain his energy. After he became relaxed and found pleasure in the Divine Revelations he received, he longed for more fresh Divine Revelations.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Did we not expand for you, [O Muhammad], your breast? And we removed from you your burden which had weighed upon your back.’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1-3) The word 'burden' here refers to the burden which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to bear when he received the Divine Revelations. He *Glorified is He* willed to drive away this burden and to comfort him *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, the Divine Revelations stopped temporarily till his nerves were calmed. Afterwards, he used to long for more fresh Divine Revelations after he found solace and pleasure in what he received. Your yearning for something makes you overlook any difficulties in the way of getting it.

The fact that Divine Revelations ceased for some time prompted the polytheists to say, 'Muhammad has been abandoned by his Lord.' So, in the case of the intermission of the Revelation, the polytheists recognized that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had a God while in case of receiving it they claimed that he was a liar and a poet. Thereupon the chapter of *ad-Duha* was revealed. It reads: ‘By the morning brightness [1] and [by] the night when it covers with darkness, [2] Your Lord has not taken leave of you, [O Muhammad], nor has He detested [you]. [3] And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life]. [4] And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied. [5]’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-5)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life]’ (*ad-Duha:* 4) could mean that the resumption of the Divine Revelations will be better than their beginning. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'This is because you received them for the first time and was exhausted and overburdened by them. Afterwards you will call for and wait for them longingly. You will be ready for receiving them and able to endure them.' So, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* received Divine Revelations again, his forehead did not sweat profusely as it happened the first time because his longing for them overcame fatigue and stress. The saying of Allah: ‘We shall send a momentous message down to you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 5) indicates that the Divine Revelations which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received need his strenuous efforts to notify, teach and put them into practice. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* describes the Day of Judgment, saying: ‘Indeed, these [disbelievers] love the immediate and leave behind them a grave Day.’ (*al-Insan:* 27) The Day of Judgment will be a serious Day on grounds of the tremendous events that will occur on it.

Muslim exegetes have other views concerning the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘…a momentous message...’ (*ad-Duha:* 5). They said it is heavy because it contains religious obligations and rules. It is heavy in the Balance on the Day of Resurrection. It is imposing, sublime and sober, not mentioning the trivial matters.

He *the Almighty* then says: ‘Night prayer makes a deeper impression and sharpens words.’ (*ad-Duha:* 6) Here, He *the Almighty* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to supplicate to Him to receive His Blessings and Mercy at the time when people sleep and rest. Unlike the one who does not wake up to perform late-night prayer, whoever stays awake during the night and imitates him *peace and blessings be upon him* will receive His Blessings and Mercy. So, late-night prayer epitomizes strength of faith and spiritual energy. As Prophet Muhammad's task surpassed all people's tasks, his portion of worship in the late-night prayer was greater. As his burdens were numerous, he was always in dire need for Allah's Help and Care.

The phrase *Nash'at Al-Layl* denotes the night period. Each hour of the night is called *Nashi'a* (an ensuing hour) as it ensues from the one preceding it. Any optional prayer a person performs after the Evening Prayer is called *Nash'at Al-Layl*, that is, the prayer observed during the night.'(1) This phrase is said to refer to the person who performs optional prayer during the night because s/he does so at any time during the night. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* gives such a person three options, saying: ‘You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak! [1] Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, [2] half, or a little less, [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly. [4]’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-4) So the person can choose the optimal and more suitable time to observe late-night prayer. Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Night prayer makes a deeper impression…’ (*ad-Duha:* 6). Unlike the daytime, the night period is an opportune time to offer optional prayer and invoking Allah *Glorified is He*. At night, the hearts become purer and serener enough to understand and contemplate the Quran and so are other senses like hearing and eyesight. The Arabic word *Wat'* may mean onerous, burdensome, arduous and so on. In this sense, the late-night prayer is tiring as the night is a time of repose for people.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Mujahid ibn Jabr relates that Al-Hasan said, 'Any optional prayer a person performs after the Evening Prayer is called Nash'at Al-Layl.' See Mujahid, Tafsir, 1/679.*

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…and sharpens words.’ (*ad-Duha:* 6) means that reciting the Quran in a measured, rhythmic way during the night is better and more effective because of the quietness and silence at that time. Besides, you recite the Quran in a correct way and away from the prying eyes of other people, which helps you avoid showing off.

When you invoke Allah *the Almighty* and recite the Quran during the night, you do so effectively and emotionally as it is calm and there is nothing that occupies you. So any act of worship you perform during the night is more energetic, more sincere and more prosperous than any other act of worship you observe in the daytime. As regards daytime, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘You are kept busy for long periods of the day.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 7)

Daytime is a long period when you can meet your needs and do your daily routines. The Arabic word *Sabh* primarily denotes running and rotation. It also means swimming, sleep, lying down and stretching. So, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘You are kept busy for long periods of the day’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 7) means that the person has a protracted daytime period in which s/he can take some rest or sleep. So, s/he should assign the night period to the voluntary acts of worship.

The main daytime task of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* included conveying the Divine Message, teaching Muslims and fighting against the enemies. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* prepared him for receiving the imposing Words and carrying the tremendous burden, namely, performing the late-night prayer and carrying his mission in the daytime. So, with regard to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the daytime should be dedicated to doing the daily routines, but a great part of the night should be dedicated to prayer, the praising of Allah *the Almighty* and the measured recitation of the Quran.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

وَٱذۡكُرِ ٱسۡمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلۡ إِلَيۡهِ تَبۡتِيلٗا ﴿٨﴾
رَّبُّ ٱلۡمَشۡرِقِ وَٱلۡمَغۡرِبِ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَٱتَّخِذۡهُ وَكِيلٗا ﴿٩﴾

So celebrate the name of your Lord and devote yourself wholeheartedly to Him [8] He is Lord of the east and west, there is no god but Him, so take Him as your Protector [9]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 8 - 9)

Here, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to glorify and praise his Lord Who legislated for you and helped you. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says, ‘And remember your Lord within yourself in humility and in fear…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 205); and ‘…remember Allah with much remembrance.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 41) There is a difference between Allah’s saying: ‘And remember your Lord much’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 41) and ‘remember Allah with much remembrance.’ The imperative 'remember Allah' denotes religious obligations because He *the Almighty* is the only God whose Commands and Prohibitions are to be followed. As regards the imperative 'And remember your Lord', it reminds a person about the innumerable favours and bestowals which He *Glorified is He* confers upon him/her. So, everyone should glorify Him, for even if you do not love Him through your religious obligations, you have loved Him for His favours bestowed on you.

Glorifying Allah *the Almighty* is in two ways: glorify Him with humility and in awe. This is because you can remember someone else haughtily, but when it comes to Him *the Almighty* you have to glorify Him as a Creator and Benefactor with submission to His Lordship. Second, we should glorify Him with awe because the more humility you show towards Him, the more honourable you will become. Thus, slavery to anyone other than Him *the Almighty* is detestable by the humans because it connotes enslavement and subjugation. Also a person who enslaves others is loathed because subjugating others is unfair and cruel. A slave's benefits go to his human master while slavery to Allah *the Almighty* enables you to get favours from Him. Therefore, when you perform late-night prayer, glorify your Lord and Creator and stand before Him humbly, sincerely and submissively.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and devote yourself wholeheartedly to Him.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 8) The Arabic word *At-Tabatul* means abstention from physical pleasures and seeking the favours of Allah. So, one should sincerely and devotedly worship Him *the Almighty* without paying attention to the mundane affairs. Therefore, the word *Tabatul* primarily means dedication and refrainment. In this sense, Maryam (Mary) is called *Al-Batul*, that is, 'the one who dedicated herself to Allah.'

So, Allah's saying: '…and devote yourself wholeheartedly to Him.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 8) is a command to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to devote himself to the worship of Allah through abstention from physical gratifications. So, it seems that devotion follows abstention from physical pleasures, which needs self-restrain and self-discipline.

The Arabic word *Tabtil* (devotion) is a verbal noun put in the place of the verbal noun *Tabattul* (abstention). One devotes him/herself to Allah *the Almighty* when s/he has a thorough grasp of the fact that He *Glorified is He* is the Lord of the heavens and earth and He is the Owner of everything. Thus, He says afterwards: 'He is Lord of the east and west, there is no god but Him, so take Him as your Protector.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 9)

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of the east and west. The recent scientific advancements help us understand the abovementioned verse more profoundly. As we know, every place on the earth has an east and west. We also know that when the sun rises in an area, it sets in another and vice versa. Each sunrise is followed by sunset and each sunset is accompanied by sunrise. Thus, we have two sunrises and two sunsets. More interestingly, every day, the sun has a rise and setting that differ incessantly. In addition, a sunrise and sunset take place in every moment.

Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord of the east and west and the Lord of night and day. This fact suits the previous verses reading: ‘Night prayer makes a deeper impression and sharpens words−[6] you are kept busy for long periods of the day [7]’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 6-7). In fact, sunrise and sunset have specific functions in the universe and they are the cause of the existence of the night and day. He *the Almighty* prescribed special tasks in the daytime that differ from that of the nighttime. So, we must act according to the Will of Allah *the Almighty* in this regard.

The verse reading: ‘He is Lord of the east and west...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 9) recognizes the Lordship of Allah *Glorified is He*. Then comes His saying: ‘…there is no god but Him...' (*al-Muzzammil:* 9) to confirm His Oneness. There is no deity worthy of worship but Him. He is the Only God who deserves Lordship, Godhood and devoted worship. So, we should devote ourselves to Him entirely.

As Allah *the Almighty* is the Lord of sunrise and sunset which control the lives of the people and He is the Only One God who is worthy of worship, you have no choice but to take Him as a protector, as He says: ‘…so take Him as your Protector.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 9) ‘And rely upon Allah. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs.' (*an-Nisa’:* 81) Whatever capabilities and means you have, they are nothing if compared with that of Allah *the Almighty*. So you must rely upon Him *Glorified is He* Alone and take Him as a protector. By doing so, you should not be worried because He *the Almighty* protects you. So, you should leave the worldly life and: ‘…celebrate the name of your Lord and devote yourself wholeheartedly to Him.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 8) He *the Almighty* is the best Disposer of affairs. He is the Lord, the provider and the protector of all creatures, so you should take Him as your protector. You should rely upon Him *Glorified is He* Alone, and when you find yourself unable to accomplish something yourself, the Lord of the east and the west acts on your behalf.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱصۡبِرۡ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَٱهۡجُرۡهُمۡ هَجۡرٗا جَمِيلٗا ﴿١٠﴾

Patiently endure what they say, ignore them politely [10] (The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 10)

Allah *Glorified is He* prepares Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* for a great mission, namely, inviting his people to the embracement of Islam. He *the Almighty* knows that they will do much harm to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and thus He wills to prepare him Himself.

The Messenger is required to be a servant of Allah *the Almighty* Alone and to worship Him only. He is required to stay awake at night to perform prayer and invoke Him while other people are sleeping. Further, he is obliged to glorify his Lord and devote himself entirely to Him, recognizing that He is the Lord of the east and west and that there is no god but Him. Moreover, he *peace and blessings be upon him* and his *ummah* must rely upon Him as a disposer of their affairs.

Since Allah *Glorified is He* knows that the Messenger Muhammad's people will reject his Call as did the previous nations, He says to him: ‘Patienly endure...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 10). He *peace and blessings be upon him* should endure their disbelief and offenses. So, when the Muslims were limited in number and powerless, they were ordered to be patient and tolerant. However, when they became powerful, they were commanded to fight and resist aggression. But the permission of fight does not abrogate the command of pardon and forgiveness. Rather, it is based on the principle that rulings can change according to their changing rationales. A ruling depends upon the presence and absence of its rationale.

So, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to endure the disbelief of his people and their allegation that he is a sorcerer, poet, madman and soothsayer. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And indeed, they do not call you untruthful, but it is the verses of Allah that the wrongdoers reject.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33) As his people deny that he is a Prophet sent from Allah *the Almighty* and that he receives the Divine Revelations, the previous Prophets met the same fate. This is supported by the verse reading: ‘Then if they deny you, [O Muhammad] - so were messengers denied before you, who brought clear proofs and written ordinances and the enlightening Scripture.' (*Al-'Imran:* 184)

The previous Prophets came to their peoples with miracles and sacred Books that proved their truthfulness, yet these peoples denied all of this and persisted in their disbelief and denial. Hence, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to be patient and not to be sad because of their allegations, slander and ridicule. Further, he is commanded to go on preaching to them and not to stop that whatever happens. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly were Messengers denied before you, but they were patient over [the effects of] denial, and they were harmed until Our victory came to them. And none can alter the words of Allah. And there has certainly come to you some information about the [previous] Messengers.' (*al-An'am:* 34) The previous Prophets who were sent to specific peoples and in definite periods of time were received with denial and disbelief. As Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the final Messenger whom Allah sent to all mankind and for all times, he will be confronted with the same denial and disbelief. Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* should be patient as He *the Almighty* chooses him to fulfill this huge mission and knows well that he is competent to carry it out. His people made serious accusations against him such as their allegation that he was a sorcerer, a soothsayer, a madman, a poet or a liar. He should not pay heed to these allegations.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…ignore them politely.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 10) It is as if He *Glorified is He* says to him, 'If patience is hard on you, let it be gracious and let your avoidance of them be harmless.' The Arabic word *Hajr* means avoidance and separation. It connotes one's dislike for what causes severance of good relations between Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his people. It also means that a person passes from a place to another and from a state to another. But here Allah *the Almighty* describes avoidance as 'polite', i.e. he should separate himself from them in a peaceful and harmless way despite their persecutions and harassments.

So, the polite avoidance which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to adopt as a policy towards his people at the start of the Islamic Call means to continue being tolerant towards them, not to invoke Allah against them and to persist in preaching them. The books of Prophet Muhammad's biography assert that he *peace and blessings be upon him* suffered at the hands of his people, yet he said, 'O Allah! Guide my people [to the right path], for they do not know [the consequences of their error].'(1)

It is narrated that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and said to him, 'Allah has heard what your people said to you and their response. He has sent you the Angel of Mountains who waits for you to order him to punish them as you like.' The Angel of Mountains called and greeted me and then said, 'Muhammad, Allah has heard the words of your people. I am the Angel of Mountains. Your Lord has sent me in order that you command me to do whatever you like. If you would like me to make the two mountains collapse over them, I will do so.' Thereupon he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'No, I hope that Allah will beget from them those who worship Allah and set up no partner with Him.'(2)

This stance is a remarkable token of Messenger Muhammad's mercy towards his people and the whole world, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 107) His people need his perfect manners, unbounded modesty, lovely behaviour, warm smiles and comforting looks. He *peace and blessings be upon him* should overlook the mistakes of his opponents and not to let himself be provoked by their foolish behaviours.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was deeply affected by the disbelief of his people as he strained every nerve to guide them to the straightway. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says to him: ‘So do not let yourself perish over them in regret. Indeed, Allah knows of what they do.’ (*Fatir:* 8)

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(1) *After Messenger Muhammad's right lower front tooth was broken and had a face wound at the battle of Uhud, the Companions were outraged and said, 'What about invoking Allah against them [the disbelievers of Mecca]?' Thereupon, Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'I am not sent so as to curse others, but I am sent as a Caller and mercy. O Allah! Guide my people, for they do not know.' See Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no.1375.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Fakahi, Akhbar Makka, 2634; Ibn Khuzayma, At-Tawhid, 1/110; Abu 'Awana, Al-Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 6902; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no.8902.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَذَرۡنِي وَٱلۡمُكَذِّبِينَ أُوْلِي ٱلنَّعۡمَةِ وَمَهِّلۡهُمۡ قَلِيلًا ﴿١١﴾

And leave to Me those who deny the truth and live in luxury. Bear with them for a little while [11]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 11)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to leave the disbelievers of Mecca to Allah *the Almighty*. It is up to Him to punish them. It is He *the Almighty* Who know the deadline set for respiting and the appointed time for punishment. In a similar verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Let them eat and enjoy themselves and be diverted by [false] hope, for they are going to know.’ (*al-Hijr:* 3) The present form of the imperative *dhar* (leave) is *Yadhar* (to leave). Another verb that is used in the same way is *Da'* (leave), but it is said that Arabs no longer use the past form of both of these verbs except in one of the recitation of the verse reading: ‘Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor has He become displeased.’ (*ad-Duha:* 3)

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And leave to Me those who deny the truth and live in luxury. Bear with them for a little while’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 11) means that it is up to Him *the Almighty* to deal with the disbelievers who lead a life of ease. Very often those who live in luxury and comfort pose a big obstacle in the way of the Islamic Call and the implementation of *Shari'a*. But what is the reason for this? This is because the Way of Allah places restrictions on their immoral lifestyles, and thus they fight relentlessly the preachers and those who call for adherence to the religious teachings. Those who lead comfortable lives are always engaged in disbelief and preventing other people from following Allah's Path. This is corroborated by His saying: ‘And thus We have placed within every city the greatest of its criminals to conspire therein…’ (*al-An‘am:* 123).

Crime sometimes motivates a person to appropriate everything. That is why the powerful, habitual criminals try hard to inflict harm and commit immoralities. Furthermore, they diffuse vices throughout society simply because they cannot live except in milieu of corruption, bribery and wrongdoing. In this respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And We did not send into a city any warner except that its affluent said, “Indeed we, in that with which you were sent, are disbelievers.”’ (*Saba’:* 24)

Exegetes hold three different views regarding the meaning of: ‘… [those who] live in luxury…’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 11). It may refer to the people of Quraysh who vowed to feed the fighters who took part in the battle of Badr; the children of Al-Mughira ibn 'Abdullah; or the notables of the people of Quraysh who used to deride Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Those disbelievers who live luxuriously and disbelieve in the Prophets are the sinful people who commit all forms of corruption. Allah *Glorified is He* threatens them saying: ‘And leave to Me those who deny the truth and live in luxury. Bear with them for a little while.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 11) This is a fateful, strong threat made against the affluent elite of the people of Quraysh. This is because the opulent elite were behind the frenzied, deviant campaign that was waged against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Call.

He *the Almighty* says here: ‘…Bear with them for a little while.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 11) Respiting the disbelievers does not mean neglecting and ignoring them. It means that He *the Almighty* gives some time to them and suddenly inflicts the Punishment on them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And for how many a city did I prolong enjoyment while it was committing wrong. Then I seized it, and to Me is the [final] destination.’ (*al-Hajj:* 48) Thus, He *Glorified is He* respites disbelievers and then punishes them. The verb 'seized' in the last verse suits Allah's Power, Might and Avenge. Imagine how grave the Avenge of Allah is. Also, the same verb 'seized' connotes severity, vehemence and subdual. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘But those who deny Our signs - We will progressively lead them [to destruction] from where they do not know. [182] And I will give them time. Indeed, my plan is firm. [183]’ (*al-A‘raf:* 182-183) The Arabic word *Al-Imla'* means 'respiting' and this indicates that He *Glorified is He* does not punish the wicked people once they commit a sin. We see them cause a great deal of mischief and depravity in society and He *the Almighty* gives them time to be involved in more wrongdoing. Thus, the moment He decrees that they should be punished, they face an exemplary punishment.

Concerning the saying of Allah: '…Bear with them for a little while' (*al-Muzzammil:* 11), some exegetes say that the respite mentioned here expired at the Battle of Badr because some of the eminent disbelievers of Mecca lived for a short time after this threat and were killed in this battle. Other exegetes state that the disbelievers' respite lasts throughout their lifetime because it is too little, just like an hour of the daytime, if compared with the Day of Judgment. This interpretation is well-founded as Allah *the Almighty* says afterwards:

إِنَّ لَدَيْنَآ أَنكَالًا وَجَحِيمًا ﴿١٢﴾ وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٣﴾

We have fetters, a blazing fire [12] food that chokes,
and agonizing torment in store for them [13]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 12 - 13)

Although Allah *the Almighty* granted disbelievers respite in this worldly life and then inflicted upon them punishment, like that which they faced at the battle of Badr, the severest punishment awaits them in the Hereafter in return for their denial of the Prophets and their Messages.

Here, He *the Almighty* shows to us the forms of punishment He prepared for disbelievers, saying: 'We have fetters…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 12). These fetters are the big, heavy shackles that keep tight. The shackles and fetters are a form of psychological punishment and humiliation for the shackled person. Those who disbelieved in Allah's verses stood in the way of His Religion and combated believers were given respite in the worldly life. But in the Hereafter, they are shackled and chained. They cannot free or save themselves. Hence, He *the Almighty* points out that those chained in hell used to live in ease and comfort in worldly life. But they will be dragged with shackles and chains as a punishment for them.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'We have fetters, a blazing fire.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 12) The Arabic word *Al-Jahim* is one of the names of hell. It is derived from the word *Al-Jumuh* (excessiveness) and refers to the fire which is extremely flaming that it devoured anything it reached. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But those who disbelieve and deny Our signs - those are the companions of Hellfire.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 10) The moment we read this verse we get very shocked by this kind of company that all of us hate. Company here means that the disbelievers and hell cannot separate from each other.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'We have… food that chokes.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 13) Food is among the things that Allah prepared for disbelievers, but it is food that chokes them. Such food is not easy to swallow or force out like *Az-Zaqqum* and *Ad-Dari'* (a poisonous, thorny plant). This food fills with thorns that stick to the throat and are difficult to swallow because it is bitter, rotten and not tasty. Its eater can neither swallow it nor spit it out; rather, it sticks to the throat.

The Followers and the generation that came after them used to be scared of such verses. Khalid ibn Hasan Al-Hajari said, 'One day Al-Hasan was fasting. When the food was brought for him to break his fast, he remembered the verse reading: 'We have fetters, a blazing fire, [12] food that chokes, and agonizing torment in store for them.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 12-13) Thereupon, he withdrew his hand from the food and said, 'Take this food away.' The food was removed and the next day he fasted on. When the food was brought for him and he remembered the same two verses, he refused to eat. On the third day the son of Al-Hasan went to Thabit Al-Banani, Yazid Ad-Dabbi, Yahya Al-Bakka' and others. He said, 'Save my father. He did not eat for three days. Whenever we brought him the food, he remembered the verse reading: 'We have fetters, a blazing fire.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 12) and refused to eat.' They went to him and forced him to drink a mouthful of *Sawiq* (a food made out of fine wheat flour).'(1)

Allah *the Almighty* mentions three types of the food of the dwellers of hell: *Az-Zaqqum, Ad-Dari'* and *Ghislin* (The discharge of wounds). *Az-Zaqqum* is a tree that springs out of the bottom of hell. To illustrate its nature, He *the Almighty* says: 'Is Paradise a better accommodation or the tree of *zaqqum*? [62] Indeed, We have made it a torment for the wrongdoers. [63] Indeed, it is a tree issuing from the bottom of the Hellfire, [64] Its emerging fruit as if it was heads of the devils. [65]' (*as-Saffat:* 62-65); and 'Indeed, the tree of *zaqqum* [43] is food for the sinful. [44] Like murky oil, it boils within bellies [45] Like the boiling of scalding water. [46]' (*ad-Dukhan:* 43-46) So it is the food that the disbelievers eat and suffer from at the same time in hell. It is a form of torment designed for the sinful and disbelievers. As regards *Ad-Dar'*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'For them there will be no food except from a poisonous, thorny plant.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 6) It is a thorny, sessile plant which the people of Quraysh used to call it *Shabraq*. When it turned yellow, they called it *Dari'*. It is the worst and most hideous food. Concerning it, Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* says, '*Ad-Dari'* is a thorny plant in hell; it is more bitter than cactuses, smellier than carrion and hotter than fire.'(1) It is food, but it does not serve its purpose; that is why Allah *the Almighty* says about it: 'Which neither nourishes nor avails against hunger.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 7) One who eats this food finds it unsavory, and thus s/he remains hungry and has no choice but to eat *Az-zaqqum* or *Ad-Dari'*. As for *Ghislin*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Therefore he has not here today a true friend, [35] nor any food except refuse [36]' (*al-Haqqa:* 35-36). It is the puss that comes out of the dwellers of hell. It looks as if it is the wash liquid of their wounds. It is also said that *Ghislin* is a tree from which the denizens of hell eat. In this respect, Ibn 'Abbas says, 'If a drop of *Ghislin* fell over the earth, it would spoil the lives of the people.'(2)

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(1) *See Ath-Tha'labi, Al-Kash Wa Al-Bayan, 10/64; Al-Wahidi, At-Tafsir Al-Wasit, 4/376; Az-Zamakhshari, Al-Kash-shaf, 4/641; and Al-Maraghi, Tafsir, 29/117.*

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and agonizing torment in store for them.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 13) So, He *the Almighty* prepared fetters, burning fire, and food that makes its eaters choke. What is more, He aggravates the disbelievers' suffering by a painful punishment. So, all the aforementioned forms of punishment have nothing to do with their painful, unburnable punishment. Hence, He *the Almighty* will inflict upon the disbelievers punishment that is painful, hideous and humiliating. Sometimes a person who receives painful punishment shrieks in agony. At times there are those who try to endure pains just because their conceit prevents them from screaming. In this case, their punishment will be debasing. The word agonizing means 'painful, aching, tormenting and grievous.'

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(1) *See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, (4/420), Ath-Tha'labi, Al-Kash Wa Al-Bayan, 10/188; Al-Wahidi, At-Tafsir Al-Wasit, 1337; and Siraj Ad-Din Ad-Diimashqi, Al-Lubab Fi 'Ulum Al-Kitab, 20/294.*

(2) *See 'Abdullah ibn Wahb, Tafsir Al-Quran, 99.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَوۡمَ تَرۡجُفُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ وَٱلۡجِبَالُ وَكَانَتِ ٱلۡجِبَالُ كَثِيبٗا مَّهِيلًا ﴿١٤﴾

On the Day when the earth and the mountains will shake.
The mountains will become a heap of loose sand [14]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 14)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘On the Day when the earth and the mountains will shake...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 14) means that the earth will quake, as in His saying: ‘On the Day the blast [of the Horn] will convulse [creation] [6], there will follow it the subsequent [one]. Hearts that Day will tremble [7]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6-7). So, His saying: ‘On the Day when the earth...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 14) refers to the first Blast into the Horn while the second one is meant in His saying: ‘There will follow it the subsequent [one].’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 7) So, the earth we live on will quake so violently on the Day of Resurrection, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake. [1] And the earth discharges its burdens [2]' (*az-Zalzala:* 1-2); and 'Indeed, the convulsion of the [final] Hour is a terrible thing.' (*al-Hajj:* 1) The convulsion means the intense earthquake that displaces things. He *the Almighty* uses the word *Rajj* (a violent jolt) to refer to the violent shaking of the earth.

This quake that will take place on the Day of Judgment is not like the earthquakes that destroy buildings or annihilates complete villages in this worldly life. Earthquakes that we see are but a minimized picture of what will happen in the Hereafter and draw our attention to the major quake that will take place.

This quake is not general. It is exclusive to the earth by the command of Allah *the Almighty*. So, He describes the convulsion of the Day of Resurrection as 'a terrible thing'. It will be a terrible quake according to His Standard, not our human standards. The horribleness of this quake is unimaginable. The earth shakes with everything on it, including mountains which He *the Almighty* created to make the earth steady. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And He has cast into the earth firmly set mountains, lest it shift with you...’ (*an-Nahl:* 15). He *Glorified is He* placed mountains on the earth so that it would not shake. If the earth were created immovable, there would be no need for firmly set mountains to keep it motionless. But the earth is movable and is prone to shake violently.

On the Day of Judgment, everything will differ. Mountains will be blown up, whereupon the earth will quake. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the mountains side by side with the earth and their disappearance means that they will not perform its function of stabilizing the earth.

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…the mountains will become a heap of loose sand.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 14) So, the mountains which contain solid rocks will turn into shifting sand. They will become loose sand dunes. Although mountains are the steadiest and hardest objects in this worldly life, they will change into moving sand. In another verse, He *Glorified is He* tells us that mountains will turn into '…dispersed dust' (*al-Furqan:* 23); and '…wool which fluffed up.' (*al-Qari`a:* 5) These are the stages of the disappearance of mountains; they first are blown up and turn into shifting sand, then resemble fluffed up wool and then turn into dispersed dust. If this is the state of the mountains on the Day of Judgment, what about the humans who are powerless? What will happen to them?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّآ أَرۡسَلۡنَآ إِلَيۡكُمۡ رَسُولٗا شَٰهِدًا عَلَيۡكُمۡ كَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَآ إِلَىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنَ رَسُولٗا ﴿١٥﴾

We have sent a messenger to you [people] to be your witness, just as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh [15]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 15)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* addresses the people of Mecca who disbelieved in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did great harm to him and turned others away from following his Message. He *the Almighty* says to them: 'We have sent a Messenger to you [people]...' (*al-Muzzammil:* 15). He *Glorified is He* sent him *peace and blessings be upon him* to convey the heavenly Way of Guidance to them and sent down upon him the Quran, His inimitable Words.

Although he *peace and blessings be upon him* was illiterate, they asked him about specific events that occurred in the past. Thereupon, he *peace and blessings be upon him* received the Revelations that included the details about these events. As for the Quran, it challenges mankind regarding the future events and the secrets of the human soul. This would be enough for them to believe if they employed their intellectual capabilities properly. But they remained obstinate, and whenever they received a clear sign, they denied it and blatantly asked for another.

Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Indeed, We have sent you, [O Muhammad], with the truth as a bringer of good tidings and a warner, and you will not be asked about the companions of Hellfire.’ (*al-Baqara:* 119) So, he was sent by Allah *the Almighty* with the truth that remains unchanged. Out of His Mercy, He *Glorified is He* sends Messengers to help the people know the Right Path from the wrong one. He *the Almighty* also says: ‘There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful.’ (*at-Tawba:* 128) Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* loves his *ummah* and it pains him to see it suffering. He was always concerned about it.

Here in the chapter in question, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions another characteristic of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that is, he is a witness upon the people. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘O Prophet, indeed We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And one who invites to Allah, by His permission, and an illuminating lamp.’ (*al-Ahzab:* 45) It is as if He *Glorified is He* says, 'We sent you, Muhammad, as a witness over your *ummah* and the previous Prophets to testify that they delivered their Messages.'

He *peace and blessings be upon him* will bear witness that he conveyed to the people the Message of Allah, whereupon some of them believed and some other disbelievers. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is also described as a witness in the verse reading: ‘…and in this [revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people.’ (*al-Hajj:* 78) It is as if each one of the Muslim *Ummah* is a caller and a messenger. As he *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* will testify that he communicated the Message of Islam, each Caller will do the same. Hence, the aforementioned verse highlights Messenger Muhammad's testimony and that of the Muslim *Ummah.*

He *peace and blessings be upon him* will attest to what the disbelievers of Mecca said and what they did to him and his Companions. This includes their harm, barring the people from adopting the Way of Allah and their attempted assassination of him.

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was not the first Messenger to be disbelieved and opposed by his people. Allah *Glorified is He* sent him to the people as a Messenger as He sent to Pharaoh a Messenger. He *the Almighty* sent Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* as a Prophet to the Pharaoh of ancient Egypt. Here arises a question, which is, 'Why does Allah mention Pharaoh and Prophet Musa in particular?' This is because Pharaoh disdained Musa on the grounds that he was brought up at his palace. Would it make sense for Pharaoh to follow his fosterling? So, he said to Musa *peace be upon him*: ‘Did we not raise you among us as a child, and you remained among us for years of your life?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 18) Pharaoh reminds Musa *peace be upon him* of bringing him up at his palace. However, he *peace be upon him* did not flatter Pharaoh regarding the truth because it was Allah *the Almighty* who took care of him, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘…and I cast down upon you love from Me, and that you might be brought up before My eyes.’ (*Ta Ha:* 39)

The fact that Pharaoh brought up Musa *Allah's peace be upon him* was worthless in the balance of truth. Despite that, he blamed him *peace be upon him* for taking a hostile stand towards him. So, he *peace be upon him* replied to him: ‘And is this a favour of which you remind me - that you have enslaved the Children of Israel?’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 22) It is as if he *peace be upon him* said to him, 'Do you remind me of a favour that means nothing, compared with your enslaving and persecuting of the Children of Israel and killing their sons?'

Likewise, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was rejected by his people on the basis that they envied him his receiving of the Divine Revelations while he was, from their own point of view, not one of their dignitaries. So, they argued: ‘And they said, “Why was this Quran not sent down upon a great man from [one of] the two cities?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) They meant Al Walid ibn Al Mughira or 'Urwa ibn Mas'ud Ath-Thaqafi. So, Allah *Glorified is He* replies to them: ‘Do they distribute the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank]...’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 32).

Allah *Glorified is He* delivered, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the conspiracies of the disbelievers by ordering him to immigrate to Medina. Similarly, He *the Almighty* Allah rescued Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* from Pharaoh who led a huge army to capture him and his followers. Thereupon, He *the Almighty* split the sea in order for Musa *peace be upon him* and his followers to cross it then let it close in on Pharaoh and his soldiers and then drowned them. This represented a crushing defeat against the disbelievers and the tyrants. Likewise, at the battle of Badr, the disbelievers of Quraysh suffered a disastrous defeat that humiliated the leaders and notables of Mecca.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَعَصَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ ٱلرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَٰهُ أَخْذًا وَبِيلًا ﴿١٦﴾

But Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger and so We
inflicted a heavy punishment on him [16]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 16)

Allah *the Almighty* warns the disbelievers of Mecca against the bad consequences of their disbelief in this worldly life. He quotes the example of Pharaoh who opposed and disbelieved in Prophet Musa and his brother Harun (Aaron) *peace be upon them*.

The word 'Pharaoh' is a proper noun that refers to a title of a position of authority. Each ruler of the ancient Egypt was called a Pharaoh. Besides, we learn from history that dynasties succeeded one another and among them were the kings and top officials who oppressed the believers. Each Pharaonic successor used to mistreat the believers more ferociously than his predecessor. Allah *Glorified is He* sent Musa and Harun p*eace be upon them* to Pharaoh and said to them: ‘Go, both of you, to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed. [43] And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah]. [44]’ (*Ta Ha:* 43-44) ‘So go to him and say, “Indeed, we are Messengers of your Lord, so send with us the Children of Israel and do not torment them. We have come to you with a sign from your Lord. And peace will be upon he who follows the guidance. [47] Indeed, it has been revealed to us that the punishment will be upon whoever denies and turns away. [48]’ (*Ta Ha:* 47-48)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِن كَفَرْتُمْ يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ ٱلْوِلْدَٰنَ شِيبًا ﴿١٧﴾

So if you disbelieve, how can you guard yourselves against a Day that will turn children's hair grey [17] (The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 17)

We must take our proper precautions of the Day of Resurrection because it is a mighty Day as He *the Almighty* says: 'O mankind, fear your Lord. Indeed, the convulsion of the [final] Hour is a terrible thing. On the Day you see it every nursing mother will be distracted from that [child] she was nursing, and every pregnant woman will abort her pregnancy, and you will see the people [appearing] intoxicated while they are not intoxicated; but the punishment of Allah is severe.' (*al-Hajj:* 1-2)

How can the disbelievers protect themselves against such a terrible Day which is sure to come, while they persist in their disbelief in Allah *the Almighty* Messenger Muhammad and the Quran? How will they safeguard themselves from the punishment of this Day? In fact, the disbelievers do not dread this Day as they deny it altogether. If they believed in it, they would fear its horrible events and punishment and thus avoid sins.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes this Day, saying: '…a Day that will turn children's hair grey.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 17) Grey hair often exists in old people, not in young children. The grave and terrifying events of this very Day will make young children white-haired.

This day will make young children go grey the moment Adam is ordered to bring forth the group of (the denizens of) hell. He (Adam) will say, 'Who are the denizens of Hell?' It will be said, 'They are out of every thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine.'(1) He (Prophet Muhammad) said, 'It is at this juncture that every child would become white-haired and every pregnant woman would abort and you would see people in a state of intoxication, and they would not be in fact intoxicated but grievous will be the torment of Allah.'

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(1) *Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him narrated that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him said, 'Allah Glorified is He would say, 'O Adam!' and he would say, 'At Your service, at Your Beck and Call, O Lord, and the good is in Your Hand.' Allah would say, 'Bring forth the group of (the denizens of) Fire.' He (Adam) would say, 'Who are the denizens of Hell?' It would be said, 'They are out of every thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine.' He (Prophet Muhammad) said, 'It is at this juncture that every*=

Allah *the Almighty* says: '…a Day that will turn children's hair grey.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 17) The Arabic word *Shiban* (white-haired people) is the plural of *Shai'b* (a grey-haired person). Young children do not turn grey on that Day because of old age. Grey hair appears in this worldly life at old age, as Prophet Zakaryya (Zechariah) *Allah be pleased with him* said: 'My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened, and my head has filled with white.' (*Maryam:* 4) The white hair of Prophet Zakaryya *peace be upon him* was due to his old age and weakness. He *Glorified is He* also says: 'Allah is the one who created you from weakness, then made after weakness strength, then made after strength weakness and white hair. He creates what He wills, and He is the Knowing, the Competent.' (*ar-Rum:* 54) Hence, white grey is a stage of the age of a person in this worldly life. Any person's life goes through these stages: weakness, youthful vigor and weakness caused by old age.

On the Day of Judgment, however, grey hair is not an effect of old age. Rather, young children will go grey despite their young age.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

ٱلسَّمَآءُ مُنفَطِرٌۢ بِهِۦ ۚ كَانَ وَعْدُهُۥ مَفْعُولًا ﴿١٨﴾

A Day when the sky will be torn apart?
God's promise will certainly be fulfilled [18]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 18)

The sky, in spite of its tremendousness, will split and crack on the Day of Judgment. So, what do we think will happen to other creatures? Allah *Glorified is He*

= *child would become white-haired and every pregnant woman would abort and you would see people in a state of intoxication, and they would not be in fact intoxicated but grievous will be the torment of Allah.' He (the narrator) said, 'This had a very depressing effect upon them (upon the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad) and they said, 'Messenger of Allah, who amongst us would be (that unfortunate) person (who would be doomed to Hell)?' He said, 'Good tidings for you, Gog and Magog would be those thousands (who would be the denizens of Hell) and a person (selected for Paradise) would be amongst you.' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3348 and 6530; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 379.*

informs us that on this horrible Day the sky will split into small parts and stars will fall down.

In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘When the sky breaks apart…’ (*al-Infitar:* 1). Despite its sturdiness, the sky will fall into small pieces. Here, He *the Almighty* says: ‘A Day when the sky will be torn apart’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 18). This verse means that the sky will break apart by Allah's Command. We note that He *the Almighty* uses a masculine form to refer to the splitting of the sky. This is despite the fact that the word sky in Arabic grammar is a figuratively feminine noun. It is put in the masculine form on grounds of the meaning, for it denotes a ceiling as in the His saying: ‘And We made the sky a protected ceiling...’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 32).

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* points to the split of the sky in His saying: ‘And [mention] the Day when the heaven will split open with [emerging] clouds, and the Angels will be sent down in successive descent.’ (*al-Furqan:* 25) Some exegetes say that the sky will split open with emerging clouds and the Angels will descend from its cracks. The clouds are also mentioned in the verse reading: ‘They do not wait aught but that Allah should come to them in the shadows of the clouds along with the angels, and the matter has (already) been decided…’ (*al-Baqara:* 210).

The Arabic word *Al-Infitar* (being torn apart) means disordered splitting. With regard to Allah’s saying: ‘Day when the sky will be torn apart...’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 18), it means that the sky will break apart on the Day of Resurrection by Allah's Command. As for His saying: ‘…Allah's Promise will certainly be fulfilled’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 18), it means that His Promise will inevitably come to pass as He is the Omnipotent Who has all the Attributes of Grandeur and Perfection, and He always fulfills His Promises.

Unlike Allah's Promises and Threats, people's promises and threats may not be fulfilled. You may promise someone something good, but you may find yourself unable to keep your promise. Likewise, you may make a threat against somebody, but you are unable to carry it out. As far as Allah *the Almighty* is concerned, nothing hinders the fulfillment of His Promises or Threats. His Promises are definitely fulfilled, while He may not carry out His Threat out of His Benevolence and Grace, unless it has something to do with polytheism.

إِنَّ هَٰذِهِۦ تَذۡكِرَةٞۖ فَمَن شَآءَ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِۦ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٩﴾

This is a reminder. Let whoever wishes take the way to his Lord [19] (The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 19)

This verse occurs literally in the chapter in question and the chapter of *al-Insan,* verse number 29. Both come after referring to the terrible Day of Judgment. Here in the chapter of *al-Muzzammil,* Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So if you disbelieve, how can you guard yourselves against a Day that will turn children’s hair grey, [17] a Day when the sky will be torn apart? Allah's Promise will certainly be fulfilled.’ (*al-Jinn:* 17-18) In the chapter of *al-Insan* He *the Almighty* says: ‘Indeed, these [disbelievers] love the immediate and leave behind them a grave Day. [27] We have created them and strengthened their forms, and when We will, We can change their likenesses with [complete] alteration. [28]’ (*al-Insan:* 27-28) This is a reminder offered to the people so that they will consider Allah’s sayings, fear Him, keep away from wrongdoing and protect themselves against His wrath and punishment.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘This is a reminder. Let whoever wishes take the way to his Lord’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 19) serves as a reminder of the Day of Judgment and its related events. Whoever desires to be saved on the Day of Judgment must take a Path to His Lord through belief and obedience. It is worth mentioning here that the Qadaris quote this verse to back up their belief that everything is based on man's free will and choice. But in the chapter of *al-Insan,* Allah *the Almighty* associates the will of the man with His Divine Will, saying: ‘And you will not do except that Allah wills.’ (*al-Insan:* 30) One's will entirely depends upon the Will of Allah *the Almighty* for all matters are referred to Him. Whatever a person does, it is done by His Will. This does not mean the absence of the human being's free will. Whoever desires to follow a Path to Allah and enjoy what He *the Almighty* promises him/her in the Hereafter should adhere to obedience and acts of worship. At this point, a person will gain His Mercy and Reward. But if a person does not take a way towards Him and disobeys Him, s/he will inevitably be punished.

The aforementioned verses contain the forms of guidance and right direction. So, whoever wills to believe and follow a path towards Allah's Pleasure and

Mercy must put the content of these verses into practice. The path is the way leading to the desired destination. In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘I will turn away from My signs those who are arrogant upon the earth without right; and if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it. And if they see the way of consciousness, they will not adopt it as a way; but if they see the way of error, they will adopt it as a way. That is because they have denied Our signs and they were heedless of them.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 146)

The Way of Righteousness and Guidance controls and suppresses the physical pleasures and personal inclinations and helps one to shun wrongdoing. But those who are wrongdoers are not able to curb their physical pleasures, as they are enslaved by them. As for the way of error, it gives free rein to physical pleasures. This happens when a person deprives him/herself of belief, which in fact drives him/her to forgo something in return for more precious and greater things.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* concludes the chapter of *al-Muzzammil*, saying:

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعۡلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدۡنَىٰ مِن ثُلُثَيِ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَنِصۡفَهُۥ وَثُلُثَهُۥ وَطَآئِفَةٞ مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ مَعَكَۚ
وَٱللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ ٱلَّيۡلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَۚ عَلِمَ أَن لَّن تُحۡصُوهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيۡكُمۡۖ فَٱقۡرَءُواْ مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ
ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِۚ عَلِمَ أَن سَيَكُونُ مِنكُم مَّرۡضَىٰ وَءَاخَرُونَ يَضۡرِبُونَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ يَبۡتَغُونَ مِن
فَضۡلِ ٱللَّهِ وَءَاخَرُونَ يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِۖ فَٱقۡرَءُواْ مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنۡهُۚ وَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ
وَءَاتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَأَقۡرِضُواْ ٱللَّهَ قَرۡضًا حَسَنٗاۚ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُواْ لِأَنفُسِكُم مِّنۡ خَيۡرٖ تَجِدُوهُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ
هُوَ خَيۡرٗا وَأَعۡظَمَ أَجۡرٗاۚ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرُواْ ٱللَّهَۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٞ رَّحِيمُۢ ﴿٢٠﴾

[Prophet], your Lord is well aware that you sometimes spend nearly two-thirds of the night at prayer — sometimes half, sometimes a third — as do some of your followers. God determines the division of night and day. He knows that you will not be able to keep a measure of it and He has relented towards all of you, so recite as much of the Quran as is easy for you. He knows that some of you will be sick, some of you travelling through the land seeking God’s bounty, some of you fighting in God’s way: recite as much as is easy for you, keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and make

God a good loan. Whatever good you store up for yourselves will be improved and increased for you. Ask God for His forgiveness, He is most forgiving, most merciful [20]
(The Quran, *al-Muzzammil:* 20)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* regarding late-night prayer. The law of reform that He *Glorified is He* set for the lives of the people is based on two foundations: travelling through the land to satisfy our daily needs and fighting for the purpose of the survival of the Call and the Way of Allah *the Almighty*. The first foundation is related to our material needs while the second one is connected with values and virtues.

If the Muslim *Ummah* neglects or desists from either of these two foundations, it will endanger itself and become a coveted object of its enemies. That is why we see that underdeveloped countries are poor and live on the aids of rich countries. This is because such underdeveloped countries did not seek to extract the favour and bounties of Allah *Glorified is He* and desisted from constructing and exploiting the earth.

At the beginning of Islam, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and believers used to spend half the night performing supererogatory prayer before the five daily prayers were prescribed by Allah. They continued offering late-night prayer for a whole year, which caused them great hardship. Finally, He *Glorified is He* waived this religious obligation. At the beginning of the chapter in question, He *the Almighty* says: 'You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak! [1] Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, [2] half, or a little less, [3] or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly.' [4] (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-4) This obligation was too hard for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and believers to observe. Thus, He *the Almighty* lighten this obligation in the last verse of the same chapter, saying: '[Prophet], your Lord is well aware that you sometimes spend nearly two-thirds of the night at prayer–sometimes half, sometimes a third–as do some of your followers...' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20)

Allah *Glorified is He* knows that they would not be able to keep up the late-night prayer. So, He *the Almighty* relented towards all of them, that is, He pardoned and relieved them by commanding them only to recite as much of the Quran as is easy for them. He *Glorified is He* has not prescribed for them a special time or measure of the late-night prayer; rather, He *the Almighty* made it according to one's capacity.

The period between the revelation of the first part of the chapter of *al-Muzzammil* and the last part thereof was one year. During that period the five daily prayers and the *zakat* were prescribed. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* commands the believers in the verse in question, saying: '…keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20).

The style of the Quran is miraculous, He *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic word *Adna* (nearly) three times with the two-thirds, the half and the third of the night. Here, it means that a worshipper should perform the acts of worship during nearly the third, the half or the two-thirds of the night according to his/her ability to pray or recite the Quran during that time.

Allah *Glorified is He* says here: '…Allah determines the division of night and day…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). This means that He *the Almighty* knows their measures, parts and hours. Thus, nothing of what the people do escapes His Knowledge; He *the Almighty* knows how much time they spend at night praying or reciting the Quran as well as the time they spend sleeping during that time.

In fact no one but Allah *Glorified is He* is able to determine the division of day and night, to know their hours and to organize them. For this reason, the subject 'Allah' here is fore grounded in the Quranic arrangement of the words to indicate that the determination of the division of the day and night is confined to Him *Glorified is He*.

He *Glorified is He* then says: '…He knows that you will not be able to keep a measure of it and He has relented towards all of you…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20) He *the Almighty* knows that the believers will not be able to keep a measure of the night or to spend half, third or two-thirds thereof praying or reciting the Quran. One of them used to pray the whole night lest he cannot perfectly fulfill Allah's Command related to performing the late-night prayer.

Here, the Arabic word *Al-Ihsa'* refers to the ability to do something and to adhere to it. For example, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If a Muslim persists in two actions, he will enter the Garden. They are easy, but those who do them are few. That you say "*Allahu Akbar*" (Allah is the greatest) ten times, "*Al-hamdu lillah*" (All praise is due to Allah) ten times, and "*Subhana'llah*" (Exalted is Allah) ten times after every rayer.' He also said in a Hadith regarding the lofty Names of Allah, 'Allah has ninety-nine Names, i.e. one-hundred minus one, and whoever knows them will go to paradise.'

Linguistically, the Arabic word *Al-Ihsa'* has two meanings: first, to have comprehensive knowledge of the number and measure of something, as in Allah's saying: '…He has taken account of everything.' (*al-Jinn:* 28); second, to have the ability to do something, as in His saying here: '…He knows that you will not be able to keep a measure of it…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). This means that the Muslims would not be able to continue performing the late-night prayer. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* says: '…He has relented towards all of you…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). He *the Almighty* pardoned them by directing their attention towards the obligatory acts of worship and relieving them from doing this supererogatory act, i.e. performing the late-night prayer. They were given the option to do or not to do that.

The Arabic word *Taba* (to relent) has many meanings here. It means that Allah *Glorified is He* has pardoned the believers, which indicates that some of them had left some of what they had been commanded to do. It also means that He *Glorified is He* has relented towards them by not obligating the late-night prayer on them, as they were unable to perform them steadfastly. The Arabic word *Tawba* (repentance) originally means to return. They had been commanded to keep account of the time of the late-night acts of worship through measuring and inquiring into them. Then, Allah *Glorified is He* relieved them because He *the Almighty* knows that they would not be able to keep the measure properly as they had been commanded.

Then, He *Glorified is He* says: '…so recite as much of the Quran as is easy for you…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). This means that they should recite of Quran during the late-night Prayer according to their abilities. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* has given them the choice to pray optionally at the night whenever they want, without considering certain times or parts thereof. This was a form of alleviation for them because they had been keeping up the late-night prayer for one year that their feet and shins swelled.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…He knows that some of you will be sick, some of you travelling through the land seeking Allah's bounty, some of you fighting in Allah's way…' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). So, three kinds of people were the reason for that alleviation: the sick people, those who travel through the land seeking their livelihood out of Allah's Bounty and those who fight in His Way. The sick person cannot perform late-night prayer so Allah *Glorified is He* relieved him/her because of his/her weakness and inability. He *the Almighty* knows that some of the Muslims would have illnesses that make them too weak to pray at night.

Other people were unable to do so for setting out for trade and moving through the lands for gaining provision. It may be hard for them to pray at night as this will make it difficult for them to seek their provision and livelihood by traveling through the land during the daytime. The Arabic word *Al-Darb* (hitting) means to place one of the limbs on something violently and powerfully. Using this word to refer to seeking provision indicates that life is all about moving and interacting. Allah *Glorified is He* has placed all the provision of the people in the earth. So, when they want to extract its bounties, they should provoke it by ploughing it then sowing the seeds and irrigating it. Thus, every movement in the pursuit of seeking provision needs strength and toil. As long as seeking the provision requires traveling through the land, then it needs determination and strength. That is why it is said, 'The earth likes whoever ploughs it.' Therefore, the more powerful the movement of the person in the land is, the more it gives him/her of its bounties.

Those who fight in the Way of Allah *Glorified is He* are the third kind of people who were the reason for the abrogation of the ruling that obligates performing late-night prayer for specific times – the half, the third and the two-thirds of the night. This is because fighting entails suffering, hardship, lying in wait and expecting the enemy's attack. Accordingly, performing the late-night prayer could be a hardship and a burden over the fighters who guard the borderlines of Islamic territories. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* has made the matter easier for them by commanding them to pray at night what they can easily offer.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* commands them to do what He has already obligated on them, saying: '…keep up prayer, give prescribed alms…' (*al-Jinn:* 20). He *the Almighty* has combined between prayer and the prescribed alms in many verses of the Quran. Prayer is the Islamic pillar that can never be waived. So, the person should pay attention to his/her Lord's Call for Prayer when the muedhin loudly says, '*Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the greatest).' This is an invitation to come to Him *the Almighty* at a specific time to stand before Him, in His Presence, and receive His Support.

Making mention of the command of keeping up prayer and giving the prescribed alms after mentioning traveling through the land for seeking Allah's Bounties and fighting in His Way indicates that they should praise Him *Glorified is He* for the bounties and the provision that He has bestowed on them. This also indicates that they should give the prescribed alms out of what He *the Almighty* has bestowed of them to purify their property and spread among the members of the society the virtues of solidarity, cooperation and benevolence towards the poor. Fighting in His Way also requires equipping the fighters with ammunition and weapons. Further, the fighters need to be close to Him *Glorified is He* by keeping up the prayer.

After commanding them to pay the prescribed alms, Allah *Glorified is He* commands them, saying: '…and make Allah a good loan...' (*al-Muzzammil:* 20). The loan is something other than the prescribed or optional alms; your expenditure in His Way is not limited to what He *Glorified is He* prescribed on you or what you optionally give as a charity. Rather He *the Almighty* also commands you to make Him a good loan. Undoubtedly, He *Glorified is He* does not need any loan from you, for your loan in reality goes to the needy. Although the loan goes to such needy people and not to Allah *the Almighty* He commands you to give the loan to Him. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Who is it that will offer of Allah a goodly gift, so He will multiply it to him manifold, and Allah straitens and amplifies, and you shall be returned to Him.' (*al-Baqara:* 245)

Linguistically, the Arabic word *Al-Qard* (loan) means to bite something with the canine tooth, alluding to holding strictly to something. This indicates that Allah *Glorified is He* measures the reward in proportion to the difficulty of giving a loan. It is a sum of money you give while expecting to take it back. He *the Almighty* reassures the giver of the loan that He will accept and repay it for you. This reward will not be in proportion to the loan; rather, it will be in a profitable and multiplied form. The original money is preserved and invested to be increased many times according to Allah's Measure, not that of the human beings'.

You will lose nothing of what you store up with Allah *Glorified is He* for yourself. The believer should be contented with the fact that his/her movement in life is considered and He *Glorified is He* will reward him/her for it. Everything you do according to His Way of Guidance will be rewarded. However, this reward is not equal to the good deed; rather, it is multiplied many times. He *Glorified is He* says in another verse: '…what you have runs out but [what] He has endures.' (*an-Nahl:* 96) This verse shows that what He *the Almighty* possesses lasts forever, as His Treasuries are full and never run out. What He *Glorified is He* has is not trivial; it is a great Reward.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Ask Allah for His forgiveness, He is most forgiving, most merciful.' (*al-Jinn:* 20) He *the Almighty* knows that the children of Adam cannot preserve His Rights as they should be preserved. Inevitably, they will fall short in certain obligations. Thus, He, their Creator, has commanded the believers to ask Him for forgiveness that they may have their sins wiped out. Showing His Mercy and Forgiveness for them indicates that they have committed sins, but He was All-Merciful and All-Forgiving to them when they asked Him for forgiveness. He is All-Merciful towards them as He *the Almighty* does not hastily punish them out of His Compassion for them and desiring that they repent to Him. Thus, He *Glorified is He* is All-Forgiving and All-Merciful even toward the one who falls short and commits sins so that s/he may attain to faith and make up what s/he has lost.

Allah *the Almighty* forgives what the servant has done if the latter tries to make amendments. Further, He *Glorified is He* is All-Forgiving and All-Merciful even before the existence of anyone. The Attributes of Mercy and Forgiveness in their absolute sense belong only to Him *Glorified is He*. They are clearly manifested in accepting the repentance of the offender and having mercy towards his/her victim. He *Glorified is He* has the Absolute Power to forgive and to show Mercy, so beware of saying that so and so does not deserve His Forgiveness and Mercy, for He is the Owner of the heavens and the earth Who gives the human beings what they deserve according to the right of showing mercy to His creation that He obligated on Himself.

the chapter of

al-Muddaththir

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Muddaththir* (1).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلۡمُدَّثِّرُ (١) قُمۡ فَأَنذِرۡ (٢) وَرَبَّكَ فَكَبِّرۡ (٣) وَثِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرۡ (٤)
وَٱلرُّجۡزَ فَٱهۡجُرۡ (٥) وَلَا تَمۡنُن تَسۡتَكۡثِرُ (٦) وَلِرَبِّكَ فَٱصۡبِرۡ (٧)

You, wrapped in your cloak [1] arise and give warning! [2]
Proclaim the greatness of your Lord [3] cleanse yourself [4]
keep away from all filth [5] do not be overwhelmed and
weaken [6] be steadfast in your Lord's cause [7]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 1-7)

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'You, wrapped in your cloak' (*al-Muddaththir:* 1), and in the previous chapter of *al-Muzzammil*, He *Glorified is He* addresses him, saying: 'You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak!' (*al-Muzzammil:* 1) When he *peace and blessings be upon him* was taking about the time of revelation, he said, 'While I was walking, I heard a voice from the sky. I looked up towards the sky, and behold! I saw the same Angel who came to me in the Cave of Hira', sitting on a chair between the sky and the earth, I was so terrified by him that I fell down on the ground. Then I went to my wife and said, 'Wrap me in garments! Wrap me in garments!' They wrapped me, and then Allah has revealed: ‘You, wrapped in your cloak, [1] arise and give warning! [2] Proclaim the greatness of your Lord; [3] cleanse yourself. [4]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 1-4)

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(1) The chapter of *al-Muddaththir* is number 74 in the order of the noble *Mushaf*. The number of its verses is 56. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *al-Muzzammil.* It is a clear chapter and the claim that the verse: 'Leave Me to deal with the one I created helpless.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 11) is abrogated by the verse of the sword is false as this verse in question bears a warning for Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira and so there is no reason for abrogation. Further, Al-Walid perished before the revelation of the verse of the sword.

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘You, wrapped in your cloak during his sleep.’ The Arabic word *Al-Muddaththir* is the one who wraps himself in his cloak when he sleeps, and *Addethar* is the cloak that the person wears on *Ash-She’ar*, which is the garment worn next to the skin of the body. Being wrapped in the cloak could be taken literally, that is, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was wrapped in his cloak and blanket. The verse, however, may have another interpretation; wrapping is not meant to be with a material cloak, but with an abstract one, namely, the cloak of Prophethood and Mission. So, the verse means that he is endowed with great knowledge, noble conduct and complete mercy. He is commanded to arise with determination and steadfastness from his bed to do the mission that Allah *Glorified is He* has sent him to accomplish. The Arabic word *Qiyam* (Arising) could be used for standing with earnestness and determination or just arising to be upright.

Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to give a warning to the people of Mecca about His punishment and how it befell the previous peoples and how powerful His revenge would be if they did not believe. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* commanded him, saying: ‘And warn your nearest kinsfolk.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 214) After he *peace and blessings be upon him* used to be occupied with worshipping Him *Glorified is He* in the cave of Hira’ for many nights, he was commanded to arise and proclaim warning. This command was an instruction for him to end his worship in the cave of Hira’ and to fulfill the Mission which was assigned to him, namely, warning and conveying the Message.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Proclaim the greatness of your Lord.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 3) He *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to proclaim the greatness of his Lord over what the idolaters were saying about Him. He is commanded not to be worried about the oppression and tyranny of the disbelievers of Mecca, for He *Glorified is He* is the All Great. Therefore, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* got up from his bed, he said, ‘Allah is the All Great!’ So, Khadija also proclaimed the

Greatness of Allah *Glorified is He* and knew that he *peace and blessings be upon him* had received the Revelation.(1)

Surely, what is meant by glorifying Allah *the Almighty* is not just proclaiming His Greatness by the tongue; rather, glorifying and exalting Him should also be by the heart, for His Greatness in the heart of the believers is greater than anything or anyone. For this reason, *Allah Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest) is the slogan for calling to prayer and starting it. Therefore, you should proclaim His Greatness and make Him greater that anything prone to change. He *Glorified is He* is Greater than any person and that is why you should proclaim His Greatness by prioritizing His commands and prohibitions over any other command or prohibition. By so doing, you will strengthen yourself by His Power which He only gives to those who sincerely worship Him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘Cleanse yourself.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 4) ‘To cleanse your garment’ means to purify it from dirties and impurities. This does not mean that the garment of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was dirty or impure, for he is a good person from a good lineage. The intended meaning is not to wear a too long garment out of pride like what the leaders of Quraysh used to do. Rather, he should cut its end to avoid the impurities of the ground. Therefore, you should purify yourself, your deeds by sincerity, you are thinking by having good thoughts and your heart by eliminating any feeling of animosity and envy. Thus, what is meant is purifying the soul, the garment and the body. At that time, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was about to call for the Message of Monotheism which requires the purity of the heart from polytheism and the purity of the soul from the impurities. The Arabs used to describe the one who is honest in his dealing, saying: ‘He has a pure garment.’ We also describe the modest person, saying: ‘He has a pure garment, not touched by any impurity.’

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Keep away from all filth.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 4) This means to abandon all the sins and the misdeeds in order to be saved from the punishment.(1) He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘We sent them a punishment from heaven for their wrongdoing.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 162) Thus, the command in this verse means to keep away from the idols. Even if the addressee here is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, the command is for all Muslims to avoid the worship of idols as in the saying of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon Him*: ‘I will leave you, and the idols that you worship besides Allah.’ (*Maryam:* 48) The Arabic word *Al-‘I’tizal* means to leave your companions seeking better ones. He *peace be upon him* did not leave them for seeking provision or abundant livelihood, but rather for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* and the religious principle for which he was calling.

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(1) *See Muqatil ibn Sulayman, Tafsir, 4/490; Al-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghayb, 30/697; Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 19/62; Abu As-So'ud, Irshad Al-'Uqul, 9/54; and Ibn 'Agina, Al-Bahr Al-Madid, 7/172.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And do not confer favor to acquire more.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 5) This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is forbidden from asking for more than what he was given. In other words, he should not give something to be rewarded with something better. So the person should not give some of his/her money hoping to get more from the pleasures of the worldly life; rather, s/he should seek the reward of the Hereafter. Therefore, you should not give something with the intention to be given more; you should spend money charitably for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* – not to get the pleasures of the worldly life or more than what you have been given.

This command is different from Allah’s saying to Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him*: ‘This is our gift, so give or withhold as you wish without account.’ (*Sad:* 39) Here, He *Glorified is He* tells him *peace be upon him* to give or withhold as he wished without being held accountable for what he has given or withheld. In this verse of the chapter of *Sad*, He *Glorified is He* talks about giving and bestowing with abundance, given the fact that He *the Almighty* gave Sulaiman *peace be upon him* a dominion that He has not given to anyone else.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* arose to warn his people and persisted in avoiding the worship of idols and deities, he was faced with stubbornness, rejection, harming, mocking and many attempts of humiliation. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* advised him to be steadfast in His cause. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* should be patient regarding His commands and prohibitions to get His Reward. He should also endure patiently the harm he gets, as he has shouldered the responsibility for a great Mission which requires him to endure people's attacks on the Call of Allah *Glorified is He*. Moreover, he *peace and blessings be upon him* should endure their harming without retaliating against them as He *Glorified is He* is All Sufficient for him as against them. This command indicates that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was about to face very difficult events in which he would be confronted by his people's harming and rejection.

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(1) *‘Rigs’ is the punishment or the plague. Ibn 'Abbas said that any reference to Rigs in the Book of Allah means the punishment. See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 2/118; and Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir, 592.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا نُقِرَ فِي ٱلنَّاقُورِ ﴿٨﴾ فَذَٰلِكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ ﴿٩﴾ عَلَى ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ ﴿١٠﴾

When the Trumpet sounds [8] that will be a Day of anguish for the disbelievers [9] They will have no ease [10] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 8 - 10)

The Arabic word *An-Naqur* is the Trumpet in which Israfil will blow. He will blow twice and what is meant in this verse is the second Blow. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'How can I be comfortable when the one with the horn is holding it to his lip, his ears listening for when he will be ordered to blow, so he can blow.' It was as if that was very hard upon the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, so he said to them, 'Say: "Allah is sufficient for us and what a good Protector He is, and upon Allah we rely."'(1)

The Arabic word *Naqar* means to blow the Trumpet. This verse affects the emotions and the hearts as when Zurara ibn Abu 'Awfa prayed with this saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When the Trumpet sounds.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 8), he fell down unconscious.(2) Allah *Glorified is He* informs the people about the matters of the Hereafter by using what they see in this worldly life as they used to blow the trumpet in their travels and wars. Blowing the Trumpet causes fear and panic as if it is saying to the dead people, ‘Arise from your death for the time of Resurrection and Account has come.’ He *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘His Word is the truth and all control on the Day the Trumpet is blown belongs to Him.’ (*al-An‘am:* 73)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased be upon him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 3008, 11039 and 19345; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2431 and 3243; and Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4273.*

(2) *See At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 445.*

Blowing the Trumpet signifies the coming of something; after the first Blow, all the living creatures die; and after the second Blow, all the dead creatures rise from their death. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘The Trumpet will be sounded, and everyone in the heavens and earth will fall down senseless except those Allah spares. It will be sounded once again and they will be on their feet, looking on.’ (*az-Zumar:* 68)

Blowing the Trumpet is a great and fearful call for the dead to get out of their graves as He *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: ‘It will be the Day when He calls you, and you answer by praising Him, and you think you have stayed [on earth] only a little while.’ (*al-Isra’:* 52) His saying: ‘…when Allah calls you…’ (*al-Isra’:* 52) refers to the time of the second Blow when He *Glorified is He* commands the people to get out of the graves. Thereupon, they will praise Him, as a sign of obeying His Command and submitting to Him without disdain, negligence or arrogance.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It will be a Day of anguish.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 9) The Day of the Blow, which is the Day of Judgment, is very hard and difficult. Describing that Day as a difficult one does not mean that it is so for all people; it is hard for a group of people and easy for others. He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘They will have no ease.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 10) It will not be an easy Day for the disbelievers, for the punishment will befall them, and that is why it was called a difficult Day. Although it is hard for a group of people, it is easy for others. Part of its hardness, nevertheless, befalls all the creatures and all the people, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘You will think people are drunk when they are not, so severe will be Allah’s Torment.’ (*Ta Ha:* 2) The word ‘people’ here includes everyone. Afterwards, the believers will be relieved from the hardships by receiving Allah’s Glad Tidings and Bounties. Then, the hardships remain for the rest of the people of the hellfire. So, the Day of blowing the Trumpet will be difficult for the disbelievers but yet easy for the believers – as easy for the believer as the shortest of his/her prayers. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The Day of Judgment will be made easy for the believer until it becomes easier than one of his prescribed prayers in the worldly life.’(1)

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا ﴿١١﴾ وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُۥ مَالًا مَّمْدُودًا ﴿١٢﴾
وَبَنِينَ شُهُودًا ﴿١٣﴾ وَمَهَّدتُّ لَهُۥ تَمْهِيدًا ﴿١٤﴾ ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ ﴿١٥﴾

[Prophet], leave Me to deal with the one I created helpless [11]
then gave vast wealth [12] and sons by his side [13]
making everything easy for him [14] yet he still hopes I will
give him more [15] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 11-15)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Leave Me, Prophet Muhammad, to deal with the one I have created in the womb of his mother alone without having any property or children. Leave him to Me and I am Sufficient for you as against him.’ This verse was revealed in reference to Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira(2) who was tilted the ‘unrivalled’ among his people. So, it is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘Leave Me alone, Prophet Muhammad, with the one whom I have created alone without any partner as I have created everything Alone. I will punish him on the Day of Judgment Alone just as I have created him Alone.’ This is a frightening and fearful threat. It is as if He *the Almighty* also says, ‘After I have created him, I have not left him in this life without care; rather, I have supported him with provision.’ That is why He *Glorified is He* says about him: ‘Then give vast wealth.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 12)

All the blessings, pertinent to the bestowals of Allah’s Lordship, are bestowed on all His creatures as He is the Lord of all, the obedient and the disobedient alike. He *the Almighty* has created all the creation, believers and disbelievers, and so long as He has created them and brought them into existence, He was not to abandon them. He *Glorified is He* has created the human being and made other creatures subjected to him/her. He *the Almighty* has not created the universe for the believers only; rather, for the believers and the disbelievers. This is because He *the Almighty* confers two kinds of bestowals on them: the bestowal of Lordship and that of Divinity. The bestowal of His Lordship is for all people, as He *the Almighty* is the Lord Who brought both the believer and the disbeliever into the universe and subjected all the means of sustenance to them. The sun, for instance, rises on the believer and the disbeliever. Such bestowals can be given to all the human beings, the believers and the disbelievers alike. As for the bestowal of Divinity, it is represented in ‘do and ‘do not’, that is, following the commandments and refraining from the Prohibitions. It is restricted to the followers of His Way of Guidance.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 11717; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 7334; Abu Ya'la, Musnad, Hadith no. 1290; and Al-Baghawi, Sharh As-Sunna, Hadith no. 4318.*

(2) Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira is one of the leaders of Quraysh in the pre-Islamic era. He is the father of Khalid ibn Al-Walid. The people of Quraysh called him 'the unrivalled' in Mecca. He was one or the richest of the people of Mecca whose trade was equal to one hundred camels.

With regard to the verses under discussion, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira was the person whom Allah *Glorified is He* created and gave a vast wealth that never runs out, as some forms of his wealth always support the other. He had farming lands, milking cattle, trade and a garden whose fruits never end in either the winter or the summer. The Arabic phrase *Mal Manduda* (vast wealth) is similar to Allah’s saying: ‘With spreading shade.’ (*al-Hashr:* 30) This means that the shade never ceases. In this connection, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There is a tree in paradise (which is so big and huge that) if a rider travels in its shade for one hundred years, he would not be able to cross it.’(1) It has a lasting shade that never ends when the sun sets, as is the case with the shade we have in the worldly life.

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has bestowed on Al-Walid a vast wealth that continuously increases. That is why it was uncountable and its profits do not stop. All what has a value is considered a property which is divided into two kinds, as follows: what can be used directly like food, drinks, clothes, etc. The one who has any of these makes use of them directly. The second kind of property is the money which ca not be of direct benefit; rather, the person uses it to bring what is directly useful. Thus, the property is divided into a direct and indirect provision.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Sahl Ibn Sa'd As-Sa'idi Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3251, 3252 and 4881; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 3837.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says that not only has He given Al-Walid vast wealth but also sons. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And sons by his side.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 13); and ‘Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life.’ (*al-Kahf:* 46) He *the Almighty* gave Al-Walid a vast wealth that never runs out and also ten sons who stood by his side and were present with him in the gatherings. The Arabic phrase *Banina Shouhuda* (sons by his side) means that they never become absent in a trade or any other activity because they had abundant wealth in Mecca, so he was not obliged to disperse his sons in the lands to accumulate and gather wealth. Rather, he easily gained wealth without any toil and without undergoing the means of accumulating it. Thus, He *Glorified is He* has made Al-Walid enjoy seeing his sons by his side, given the fact that the father’s enjoyment of seeing his children around him is incomparable with anything, especially if they are men who provide him with support.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘I have made everything easy for him.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 14) This means that He *Glorified is He* has provided Al-Walid with abundant provision and a long lifetime. Moreover He *the Almighty* has provided him with a supreme power and mastery over his people. Thus, He *Glorified is He* has made the ways easy for him to lead a luxurious life by giving him the wealth and the power apparently manifested in his ten sons so that he could manage his affairs. His sons were with him wherever he went and they were an adornment for him in the gatherings and a support for him in managing his affairs.

Allah *Glorified is He* shows His Bounty on His servants, saying: ‘And it is Allah Who has given you spouses from amongst yourselves and through them He has given you children and grandchildren and provided you with good things.’ (*an-Nahl:* 72) The children are the first circle for the continuation of life and the grandchildren are the second circle. For this reason, many people among us love the male children who will be a continuation for the lineage of their fathers.

Despite all of that – the vast wealth, the sons by his side, the empowerment, the power and dignity – he still longs for more, as Allah *Glorified is He* says:

'Yet he still hopes I will give him more.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 14) Al-Walid hopes for more wealth, sons and empowerment even though He *Glorified is He* has given him a wealth more than what He *the Almighty* has given to any one of Quraysh, to the extent that he used to say, 'If I distributed my wealth among the tribe of Quraysh, it would not run out as long as I am alive, so how can you, Muhammad, promise me to be inflicted with poverty?' So, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'By Allah, the One Who has given you that wealth can take it back.' This statement affected the heart of Al-Walid, so he decided to count all his wealth; he counted the gold, the silver, the gardens and slaves that he possessed.(1) Despite all that wealth, he still hopes to get more property, sons, power and dignity. But He *Glorified is He* shatters his hope, saying:

كَلَّآ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ لِءَايَٰتِنَا عَنِيدًا ١٦ سَأُرۡهِقُهُۥ صَعُودًا ١٧

No! He has been stubbornly hostile to Our revelation [16]
I will inflict a spiraling torment on him [17]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 16 - 17)

Allah *Glorified is He* has decisively ended the hope of Al-Walid who rejected His Verses and underestimated His Bounties. He will not be given more wealth or sons over what He *the Almighty* had previously given him. After the revelation of this verse, Al-Walid's position deteriorated as his wealth started to decrease, and he lost his power and authority with the death of some of his sons and the conversion of two of them to Islam, namely, Khalid and Hisham. Thus, his wealth and sons decreased after the revelation of this verse until he perished.

Allah *Glorified is He* uses the particle *Kalla* (No) which decisively indicates that Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, who was stubbornly hostile to His Revelation, was not an ordinary denier of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Quran. He was not just like any disbeliever who rejects the faith; rather, he was stubbornly hostile to His Revelation. He persistently rejected all the signs of monotheism, Allah's Power, the Resurrection and Prophethood. Some scholars hold that Al-Walid's stubborn disbelief was due to the fact that he did not believe in the truth of Resurrection or that the Quran is a Divine Revelation, not a fabrication of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Here, the Arabic word *'Anida* (stubborn) gives us the indication that the disbelief of Al-Walid was just out of stubbornness, which confirms Allah's saying: 'We know indeed that what they say certainly grieves you, but surely they do not call you a liar; but the unjust deny the communications of Allah.' (*al-An'am:* 33)

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(1) *See Muqatil ibn Sulaiman, Tafsir, 4/838.*

The disbelievers knew for certain that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* never tells lies, as they used to call him the truthful and the honest. Undoubtedly, they recognized his truthfulness and the veracity of his Message. However, their whims and desires enticed them to persist in going astray in order that they could cling to the temporal power of this worldly life. In this vein, we find that he *peace and blessings be upon him* left 'Ali *Allah be pleased with him* in Mecca to return the properties that they entrusted to him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The Arabic word *Al-Juhud* (Rejection) means that the tongue refuses to utter the word of truth. Allah *Glorified is He* knows eternally that some of them inwardly are certain about the truth of the Faith, but they rejected it outwardly. They acknowledged the truth of the Faith but stubbornly and arrogantly rejected it. Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira himself said about the Quran, 'It indeed overflows with sweet clarity; it is fruitful at its lowest and prodigious at its highest, and it is not the words of the humans.'(1) Thus, he was stubbornly hostile to Allah's signs.

The Arabic word *'Ayat* (signs) refers to the proof of one's truthfulness. Allah *Glorified is He* will not give Al-Walid more than which He has already given him; rather, what he possesses will decrease, for He *Glorified is He* will seize what He has previously given him. Accordingly, some of his sons died, his wealth decreased and he lost his power and position.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* has promised Al-Walid to be inflicted with a spiraling torment, as He says: 'I will inflict a spiraling torment on him.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 17) This means that He *the Almighty* will inflict him with a severe punishment with no relaxation. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* described this punishment saying, ‘As-Sa’ud is a mountain in the hellfire which the disbeliever climbs for seventy years and then falls from it for another seventy years. He remains forever in that state.(1) Abu Sa’id Al-Khudari *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘As-Sa’ud is a rock in the hellfire. When they put their hands on it, they melt, and when they take them off, they return as normal. Also, if they put their feet, they melt, and if they take them off, they return as normal.’ In another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘But anyone who turns away from his Lord’s Revelation will be sent by Him to spiraling torment.’ (*al-Jinn:* 17) The disbelievers will suffer the torment of climbing a mountain of fire that they barely can climb with great difficultly. When they reach its summit, they fall from it. This punishment recurs eternally and there is no relaxation or relief from it.

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Al-I'tiqad Wa Al-Hidaya, 1/268; Al-Tha'libi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 6/38; Al-Baghawi, Tafsir, 1264; and Al-Maraghi, Tafsir, 14/130.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّهُۥ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ ﴿١٨﴾ فَقُتِلَ كَيۡفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٩﴾ ثُمَّ قُتِلَ كَيۡفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿٢٠﴾
ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ﴿٢١﴾ ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَبَسَرَ ﴿٢٢﴾ ثُمَّ أَدۡبَرَ وَٱسۡتَكۡبَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾

He planned and plotted [18] devilishly he plotted! [19]
ferociously he plotted! [20] and looked [21] and frowned and
scowled [22] and turned away and behaved arrogantly [23]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 18 - 23)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘He planned and plotted’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 18), this means that Al-Walid thought, reflected and pondered upon the matter and then arranged and prepared a speech in his mind. This refers to an incident when He *Glorified is He* revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* His saying: ‘*Ha Mim*. [1] This Scripture is sent down from Allah the Almighty the All Knowing [2] ... to Him is the ultimate return. [3]’ (*Ghafir:* 1-3) When he *peace and blessings be upon him* stood to pray in the mosque, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira was close to him listening to his recitation. He *peace and blessings be upon him* knew that Al-Walid was listening, so he repeated the aforementioned verses. Thereupon, Al-Walid went to the gathering of his people, Banu Makhzum, and said, ‘By Allah, I listened to a speech from Muhammad that is neither the word of mankind nor the jinn. It overflows with sweet clarity; it is fruitful at its lowest and prodigious at its highest.’ After he went to his home, the people of Quraysh said, ‘By Allah Al-Walid converted to Islam and all the people of Quraysh will do the same.’ He went to the gathering of his people and said, ‘You claim that Muhammad is a madman, but have you ever seen him seized by a bout of madness?’ They answered, ‘No.’ Then he said, ‘You claim that Muhammad is a soothsayer, but have you even seen him soothsaying?’ They replied, ‘No, by Allah.’ Then he asked them, ‘You claim that he is a liar, but has he ever lied to you about anything?’ They answered, ‘No, by Allah.’ In passing, we should note that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* because of his truthfulness, was called the honest among them, even before the advent of his Prophethood.(1) The people of Quraysh asked, ‘So what is he?’ Al-Walid thought deeply and this incident is referred to in these verses under discussion: ‘He planned and plotted– [18] devilishly he plotted! [19] Ferociously he plotted!— [20] and looked [21] and frowned and scowled. [22]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 18-22)

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(1) *In his Tafsir, Al-Khazin ascribes this narration to At-Tirmidhi in a Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Al-Khudari Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 4/364.*

Their allegations that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a madman, a soothsayer or a poet have been proven to be false, so Al-Walid kept thinking deeply and planned and plotted devilishly. He thought about the Quran that Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and planned what to say about him *peace and blessings be upon him*. As for His saying: ‘Ferociously he plotted’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 20), it means that he, i.e. Al-Walid was cursed and deprived of Allah’s Mercy because of what he thought about him *peace and blessings be upon him* and what he has plotted.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And looked [21] and frowned and scowled 22]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 21-22), it means that Al-Walid was thinking deeply until his heart became so straitened that he frowned and scowled. After thinking, planning, pondering, frowning and scowling, he said: ‘This is just old sorcery.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 24) This was the outcome of his thinking! Then, He *the Almighty* says about him: ‘He turned away and behaved arrogantly.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 23) He arrogantly refused and rejected the Faith and considered himself a great person, while he did not have the qualities of greatness. He behaved arrogantly by attributing to himself abilities greater than his real ones, for everyone has limited abilities.

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(1) *See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 4/364; Ath-Tha'libi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 10/73; Al-Baghawi, Tafsir, 2293; Ibn 'Agina, Al-Bahr Al-Madid, 7/176; and Al-Maraghi, Tafsir, 29/1309.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَقَالَ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحْرٌ يُؤْثَرُ ﴿٢٤﴾ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا قَوْلُ ٱلْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٥﴾

And said, ‘This is just old sorcery [24] just the talk of a mortal! [25] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 24 -25)

Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira ultimately concluded, after deep thinking, that the Quran is just a matter of sorcery. He thought that what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said and recited is only old sorcery that he related from someone else. Allah *Glorified is He* inserts the cohesive tie *Fa’* before the verb *Qal* (said) in order for us to know that when Al-Walid turned away and behaved arrogantly, he immediately mentioned this misconception, that is, the Quran is sorcery which separates between the husband and his wife, the father and his son and the two brothers.

Claiming that the Quran is old sorcery means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* took it from someone before him. This could have another interpretation, which is that the Quran influences the people with its sweetness as if it is sorcery, thus shows falsehood in the form of truth. Thus, all the disbelievers of Mecca called him *peace and blessings be upon him* a sorcerer, which was very severe to him. They did not find any argument against the Quran so they called him *peace and blessings be upon him* a sorcerer. But does the bewitched have any will against the sorcerer? That is to say that if he *peace and blessings be upon him* was a sorcerer, why did not he bewitch all the people of Quryash?! Their persistence in a state of stubborn disbelief is evidence that he is not a sorcerer and that their claim is false. If what he *peace and blessings be upon him* brought was sorcery and he was a sorcerer who bewitched the slaves and the weak people and made them convert to Islam by his sorcery, then why did he not bewitch those who rejected Islam as well?!

Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira did not only describe the Quran as sorcery, but he also said: ‘Just the talk of the mortal.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 25) The mortal that he means here is Yasar Abu Fukayh. Al-Walid claimed that Yasar brought and dictated the Quran to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from Musaylama Al-Kadhdhab. But the disbelievers forget, or claimed to forget, that if the Quran was the speech of the mortal, they could bring something similar to it! So, why were they unable to do that?!

Allah *Glorified is He* challenged them to bring something similar to the Quran, or ten of its verses, saying: ‘Bring then ten chapters forged, like unto it.’ (*Hud:* 13) When they failed, He challenged them to bring only one chapter thereof. Accordingly, He *Glorified is He* reduced the difficulty of the challenge, saying: ‘…then produce a chapter like it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 23). Then He *Glorified is He* conclusively and decisively settled the matter, saying: ‘Say, “Even if all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Quran, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other.’ (*al-Isra’:* 88) Thus, how can they say that the Quran is the talk of the mortal?!

Allah says:

سَأُصۡلِيهِ سَقَرَ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا سَقَرُ ﴿٢٧﴾ لَا تُبۡقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ ﴿٢٨﴾
لَوَّاحَةٞ لِّلۡبَشَرِ ﴿٢٩﴾ عَلَيۡهَا تِسۡعَةَ عَشَرَ ﴿٣٠﴾

I will throw him into the scorching Fire [26] What will explain to you what the scorching Fire is? [27] It spares nothing and leaves nothing [28] it scorches the flesh of humans [29] there are nineteen in charge of it [30]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 26 - 30)

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘I will throw him into the scorching Fire.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 26) This means that He *the Almighty* will throw Al-Walid in one of the gates of the hellfire called *Saqar*. It can also be one of its various levels. He *the Almighty* says about this fire: ‘And neither you nor what you worship can lure away from Allah [162] any except those who will burn in Hell [163]’ (*as-Saffat:* 161-162); and ‘Therefore I warn you of the fire that flames [14] in which none but the wicked one will burn. [15]’ (*al-Layl:* 14-15)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘What will explain to you what the scorching Fire is?’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 27) It is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘How can you know, O Prophet Muhammad, what *Saqar* is,’ that is, how great its difficulty, hardship and earnestness are! The Arabic word *Saqar* comes from the root *Saqarat* which refers to the sun when it burns the skin of someone’s face.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says about *Saqar*: ‘It spares nothing and leaves nothing.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 28) It does not leave anyone who deserves the punishment except that it seizes him/her and leaves nothing of the flesh until it burns and ruins it. It neither leaves those who are inside it to live peacefully nor to die; rather, whenever their bodies are burned, they will be renewed and returned back.

The fire of *Saqar* also scorches the flesh, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘It scorches the flesh of humans.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 29) It burns the skins of the tortured people and blackens their colour. It scorches the skin and leaves it blacker than the darkness of the night.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘There are nineteen in charge of it.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 30) There are nineteen Angels, Malik and eighteen other Angels, who are in charge of the Fire of *Saqar;* they are its keepers. It has been narrated that Ibn ‘Abbas, the interpreter of the Quran, said that the keepers of the hellfire have a countless number of assistants. He also said that six of these keepers lead the disbelievers to the hellfire and another six beat them with iron whips and fire. Malik is the greatest keeper who orders them according to what Allah *Glorified is He* commands him.(1) He *Glorified is He* describes these Angels in another verse as: ‘Stern and strong angels who never disobey Allah’s Commands to them, but do as they are ordered.’ (*at-Tahrim:* 6) Thus, they are very stern, powerful and strong over the people of the hellfire. One of these Angels can throw with one push seventy thousands to the hellfire from among those whom He *Glorified is He* has not shown Mercy.

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(1) *See Al-Maturidi, Tafsir, 10/313; An-Nasafi, Madarik At-Tanzil, 3/565; and Ibn 'Agina, Al-Bahr Al-Madid Fi Tafsir Al-Quran, 7/179.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَآ أَصْحَـٰبَ ٱلنَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَـٰٓئِكَةًۙ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ
ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ وَيَزْدَادَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِيمَـٰنًاۙ وَلَا يَرْتَابَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَۙ
وَلِيَقُولَ ٱلَّذِينَ فِى قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَٱلْكَـٰفِرُونَ مَاذَآ أَرَادَ ٱللَّهُ بِهَـٰذَا مَثَلًاۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُضِلُّ ٱللَّهُ مَن يَشَآءُ
وَيَهْدِى مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَۚ وَمَا هِىَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَىٰ لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣١﴾

none other than angels appointed by Us to guard Hellfire–and We have made their number a test for the disbelievers. So those who have been given the Scripture will be certain and those who believe will have their faith increased: neither those who have been given the Scripture nor the believers will have any doubts, but the sick at heart and the disbelievers will say, 'What could God mean by this description?' God leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will – no one knows your Lord's forces except Him – this [description] is a warning to mortals [31] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 31)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'None other than angels appointed by us to guard Hellfire.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31) The companion is the one who has affection towards his companion, and loves to sit and spend his best times with him. Here, the companions of the hellfire are not meant for those who are tortured in it; rather, it refers to its nineteen keepers because they never leave it unguarded. He *Glorified is He* attributes the hellfire to them as if they are its owners who are entitled to choose who goes to the hellfire.

Some of the people of the hellfire will beg *Malik*, its keeper, saying: 'Ask your Lord to lessen our suffering for one day.' (*Ghafir:* 49) Those who are being punished in the hellfire will ask its keepers to call Him *Glorified is He* for them to lessen the suffering for one day, but it will be said to them: 'Did your messengers not come to you with clear evidence of the truth?' They will say, 'Yes they did,' and the keeper will say, 'you can plead, then, but the pleas of disbelievers will always be in vain.' (*Ghafir:* 50) Thus, He *Glorified is He* has appointed Angels, not human beings, to guard the hellfire. As the keepers are not from the species of the tortured, they will show no kindness or mercy towards them.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '…and We have made their number a test for the disbelievers. So those who have been given the Scripture will be certain and those who believe will have their faith increased…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). He *Glorified is He* has not made the number of the keepers of the hellfire, which is very few in the disbelievers' opinion, except as a test and a trial to lead them astray, as they said, 'How can this few number torture all those who are in the hellfire?!' Even Abu Jahl said, 'Muhammad has only nineteen soldiers! Can each ten of you not defeat one of them?' Then he called the tribe of Quraysh and mocked at Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'O people of Quraysh, Muhammad claims that the soldiers of Allah who will torture and imprison you in the hellfire are nineteen and you are more in number. So, can each one hundred among you not defeat one of them?!'(1) Thereupon, He *Glorified is He* revealed His saying: 'None other than angels appointed by us to guard Hellfire and we have made their number a test for the disbelievers.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31) The number of the Angels was a test that led them astray because they did not believe in Allah's Power and Greatness. On the contrary, the one, who truly believed, reflected on His signs and thus increased in Faith.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '…So those who have been given the Scripture will be certain…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). The people of the Book who converted to Islam are certain about their belief because they found in their Book that *Malik* is the master of the other eighteen Angels guarding hellfire. So, it has become clear to them that what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said comes from a Divine Revelation. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and those who believe will have their faith increased…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31), it means that they will increase in their belief in Allah *Glorified is He* and what He has revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The people of the Book will have their original faith and belief increased when they find that what he *peace and blessings be upon him* told them about the number of the keepers of the hellfire is in conformity with their Book.

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(1) *This narration is narrated by Ibn Abu Hatim on the authority of Mohamed Ibn Ishaq. See Ibn Abu Hatim, Tafsir, p. 15196; see also Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 1/313; and As-Suhayli, Al-Rawd Al-Unuf, 3/106.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…neither those who have been given the Scripture nor the believers will have any doubts.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31) The place of doubt is the heart as He *Glorified is He* says in another verse about the hypocrites: '…and their hearts are in doubt, so in their doubt do they waver...' (*at-Tawba:* 45). Their faith wavers between the mind and the heart. The Arabic word *Al-'irtiyab* does not mean just having doubt, but it is a doubt with an accusation: '…but the sick at heart and the disbelievers will say, "What could Allah mean by this description?"' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31)

Actually, those who are sick at heart have weak faith; they are Muslims in the time of ease but renege in the time of hardship. They are not hypocrites, but they are weak in their faith as Allah *Glorified is He* makes a distinction between them, saying: 'The hypocrites and those who have sickness in their hearts said, "These people [the believers] must be deluded by their religion."' (*al-Anfal:* 49) Further, He *Glorified is He* differentiates here between those who are sick at heart and the disbelievers, even they both said, 'What could Allah *Glorified is He* mean by this description?' This saying is similar to their words in the following verse: 'Allah does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or larger: the believers know it is the truth from their Lord, but the disbelievers say, 'What does Allah mean by such a comparison?' Through it He makes many go astray and leads many to the right path. But it is only the rebels He makes go astray.' (*al-Baqara:* 26) The disbelievers deny the parable and thereby increased their error, while the believers believed in the parable and recognised that it is the truth.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…Allah leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). He *the Almighty* has shown us the Way of Guidance and the way of error. Thus, one can choose either ways: to believe and receive the Guidance, or to follow the way of disbelief and wrongdoing, and thus deprives him/her of the Guidance. If someone argues with you and said that He *Glorified is He* says: '…Allah leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will…' (*al-Muddaththir:* 31), you should say, 'Allah *Glorified is He* has explained the way of those He wills to be guided and the way of those whom He leaves astray. Therefore, it is up to the person to follow either of the two ways.'

We have said previously that there are two kinds of Guidance. The first is common for all the people while the second is especially for the believers, which Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies in His saying: ‘Allah has increased the guidance of those who follow the right path, and given them their awareness [of Him].’ (*Muhammad:* 15) This means that He *Glorified is He* will help the believers to follow His Way of Guidance as He makes it easy for them to obey Him and make it difficult for them to disobey. If the believer adhered to His Way of Guidance and obeyed Him *the Almighty,* He will expand his/her heart and make the obedience dearer to his/her heart, and thus s/he will increase his/her obedience. Besides, when s/he is about to commit a misdeed, He *Glorified is He* will cause him/her to dislike it and to be difficult for him/her until s/he abandons that sin.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…No one knows your Lord’s Forces except Him…’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31). So, you should not only rely on your power and measure how proportional it is to your enemy. You should leave these measures and just do your best in pursuing the means and the worldly causes and then leave the matter for the heavenly causes. It is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘The least Force of your Lord, O Muhammad, is to strike panic into your enemies’ hearts, which is sufficient for you.’ It is narrated that during one of the Islamic battles, the smell of the Muslims’ mouths changed and they felt a bitter taste due to the long period of fighting. So, they cleaned their teeth and purified their mouths with their *Siwaks*. Upon seeing them doing so, the disbelievers said, ‘They are sharpening their teeth to eat us.’ Thus, He *Glorified is He* stuck panic in their hearts from an unexpected source.

Then, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…this is a warning to mortals.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 31) The administrative pronoun here refers to the fire, that is, it is a warning for the mortals and an admonition to the people. The fire of *Saqar* is referred to in His saying: ‘I will throw him into the scorching Fire. [26] What will explain to you what the scorching Fire is? [27]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 26-27) It is the fire guarded by nineteen stern and powerful Angels whose number is a test for the disbelievers. The disbelievers, the people of the Book, the believers and those who are sick at heart all differed about this fire. Every group has a different stance about it and about the number of the Angels guarding it.

Some exegetes, however, maintained that it is the Quran here which is meant to be the warning and the admonition for the people, not the fire. The context, nevertheless, gives precedence to the view that it is the fire which is the warning for the people.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَلَّا وَٱلْقَمَرِ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَٱلَّيْلِ إِذْ أَدْبَرَ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَٱلصُّبْحِ إِذَآ أَسْفَرَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Yes — by the moon! [32] By the departing
night! [33] By the shining dawn! [34]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 32-34)

Allah *Glorified is He* says that the disbelievers mistakenly think that they can defeat the Angels of the Fire, for they, being deceived by their ignorance, think that the number of these Angels is only nineteen. They forget that these Angels are just the keepers of the hellfire who control it. They are not of the guards of the hellfire who are numbered in thousands and who get the orders from the nineteen keepers. All of them do what they are ordered and they never disobey Him *the Almighty* or favour anyone. So no one will escape the punishment ordained by Him *Glorified is He*.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* swears by the moon, the night and the morning, saying: ‘No — by the moon! [32] By the departing night! [33] By the shining dawn!’ [34] (*al-Muddaththir:* 32-34) It is He *the Almighty* Who created these creatures and they belong to Him. So, He *the Almighty* swears by whatever He wants about whatever He wants. He once swears, saying: ‘By the morning brightness [1] and by the night when it grows still. [2]’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-2) Further, He *the Almighty* swears by the wind, the brightness of morning, the night and the Angels; He *Glorified is He* even swears by the life of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘By your life [Prophet], they wandered on in their wild intoxication.’ (*al-Hijr:* 72) Moreover, He *the Almighty* swears by the star when it sets. He *the Almighty* is the Great Creator Who knows best what He has created and how great His creation is. He *the Almighty* also knows the function of every creature He has created. He commanded us, however, not to swear except by Him because we are ignorant about the complete truth of the things.

In these verses, Allah *Glorified is He* swears by what is watched by the people like the moon and the night. After the night, the day comes, but He *Glorified is He* swears by the early time of the day, the dawn because it has some features not shared by other times of the daytime. Allah *Glorified is He* swears in another verse, saying: ‘By the dawn that softly breathes.’ (*at-Takwir:* 18) Here, He *the Almighty* swears by the shining dawn. The shining of the dawn comes after the end and the departure of the night. The Arabic word *Isfar* refers to the time when the light appears after the darkness of the night. It is used to refer to the woman who unveils her face. When the dawn shines with light, you find serenity and fresh air. In another verse, He *Glorified is He* metaphorically portrays the dawn as having a breath like the human beings, saying: ‘By the dawn that softly breathes.’ (*at-Takwir:* 18) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Pray the dawn for its reward is great.’ This means to pray the dawn until the light appears in the sky. *Al-‘isfar* of the dawn, therefore, is its shining.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّهَا لَإِحْدَى ٱلْكُبَرِ ﴿٣٥﴾ نَذِيرًا لِّلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣٦﴾
لِمَن شَآءَ مِنكُمْ أَن يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ ﴿٣٧﴾

It is one of the mightiest things [35] a warning to all mortals [36] to those of you who choose to go ahead and those who lag behind [37]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 35 - 37)

The Arabic word *Al-Kubar* (the mighty) is the plural of *Kubra,* as is clear in the saying of Allah: ‘A revelation from the One Who created the earth and the high heaven.’ (*Ta Ha:* 5) In this verse, we find the word *Al-‘Ula* (high) which is the plural of *U‘lia.* Thus, the fire of *Saqar* is one of the mightiest punishments. The torment in the hellfire has many forms and *Saqar* (The scorching Fire) is one of the seven levels that the hellfire has. These levels are The Hell, the flaming Fire, the Crusher, the Burning Fire, the Scorching Fire, the Hellfire and the Abyss. The saying of Allah: ‘It is one of the mightiest things…’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 35) is the predicate of His Swear: ‘By the moon.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 32)

Allah *the Almighty* says about the hellfire that it is: ‘A warning to all mortals.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 36) In this regard, Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, ‘Allah has never warned by something more difficult than the hellfire.’(1) The mention of the hellfire here alludes to its levels, punishment, keepers and guards; all of these are a warning for the mortals. Some scholars interpret this verse as referring to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as He *Glorified is He* commands him at the beginning of this chapter, saying: ‘Arise and proclaim warning.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 2) It is as if He *the Almighty* says to him, ‘You, Prophet Muhammad, is the warner for the humans against Allah’s Punishment, which is the burning fire.’ Thus, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is a warner for all people.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘To those of you who choose to go ahead and those who lag behind.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 37) The one has the choice to go ahead, by excelling someone else in doing good deeds and obeying Allah’s Commands, or to lag behind. Going ahead or lagging behind can be pertinent to the matter of obedience and disobedience, the good and the evil or entering the paradise and the hellfire. This is similar to His saying: ‘Say, “Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so.”’ (*al-Kahf:* 29) You have the choice to believe or disbelieve, but the benefit of belief will be for you. Indeed, He *Glorified is He* neither benefits from one’s belief nor is harmed by his/her disbelief.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍۭ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾ إِلَّآ أَصْحَٰبَ ٱلْيَمِينِ ﴿٣٩﴾
فِى جَنَّٰتٍ يَتَسَآءَلُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ عَنِ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

Every soul is held in pledge for its deeds [38]
but the Companions of the Right will stay [39]
in Gardens and ask [40] about the guilty [41]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 38 - 41)

All the souls of the disbelievers are held in the fire wherein they will be punished for their misdeeds. Every disbeliever is imprisoned in the hellfire for his/her sins. Linguistically, the Arabic word *Al-Rahn* (Pledge) refers to the fixation, continuation and holding of something. Thus, they are held in the fire for their misdeeds and sins as every soul will be held accountable for its deeds on the Day of Judgment. Everyone is held in pledge for his/her deeds, and no one bears the sins of anyone else, whether a father or a son. The human being will only have the reward of what s/he has done of god deeds. Thus, the disbelievers will be imprisoned eternally in the Fire of *Saqar* and no intercession will be useful for them. Everyone will be concerned with him/herself and the consequences of his/her deeds. Everyone has the choice to go forward or lag behind, to dignify his/her soul or to humiliate it, for the soul is held in pledge for its deeds.

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(1) *See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 4/366.*

Allah *Glorified is He* excludes the Companions of the Right from those imprisoned in the hellfire for their misdeeds and sins, saying: ‘But the Companions of the Right…’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 39). They, i.e. the Companions of the Right will not be imprisoned for their sins in the hellfire, as He *Glorified is He* will forgive their sins. They released themselves by their good deeds as when the mortgagor releases his/her mortgage by repaying what s/he has borrowed. The Companions of the Right are those ‘…given their Records with their right hands.’ (*al-Haqqa:* 19) Thus, He *Glorified is He* has excluded them from those held in prison in the hellfire, which is why ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* thought that the Companions of the Right are the children of the Muslims.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘[They] will stay in Gardens and ask [40] about the guilty. [41]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 40-41) The Companions of the Right will ask about the guilty people whom they saw in the worldly life and suffered their criminality and wrongdoing, or they will ask about their sinful companions’ destination. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘They will turn to one another with questions: [50] one will say, “I had a close companion [51] on earth who used to ask me, ‘Do you really believe [52] that after we die and become dust and bone, we shall be brought for judgment?’ [53] Then he will say, ‘Shall we look for him?”’ [54] He will look down and see him in the midst of the Fire [55]’ (*as-Saffat:* 50-55) meaning that they, i.e. the Companions of the Right used to turn to one another to ask about this sinful person’s destination, and they will find him/her in the midst of the fire in the Hereafter.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

مَا سَلَكَكُمۡ فِي سَقَرَ ﴿٤٢﴾ قَالُواْ لَمۡ نَكُ مِنَ ٱلۡمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَلَمۡ نَكُ نُطۡعِمُ ٱلۡمِسۡكِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾
وَكُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ ٱلۡخَآئِضِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ وَكُنَّا نُكَذِّبُ بِيَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ﴿٤٦﴾ حَتَّىٰٓ أَتَىٰنَا ٱلۡيَقِينُ ﴿٤٧﴾

'What drove you to the Scorching Fire?' [42] [they will ask] and they will answer, 'We did not pray [43] we did not feed the poor [44] we indulged with others [in mocking the believers] [45] we denied the Day of Judgment [46] until the Certain End came upon us [47] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 42 - 47)

The Companions of the Right will reproachfully ask the guilty, 'What drove you to the Scorching Fire?' (*al-Muddaththir:* 42) They asked them about the reason for entering the Fire of *Saqar* which is one of the levels of the hellfire. They will answer, 'We did not pray.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 43) This entails that they were disbelievers. Someone may ask, 'How can they pray while they are disbelievers?!' Their saying that they did not pray is meant to be a confession that they are disbelievers, not praying to Allah *Glorified is He*. Driving them into the Fire of *Saqar* means casting them into it like when the thread passes through the eye of the needle. Thus, the disbelievers admit that they were not praying to Him *Glorified is He* in the worldly life.

Allah *the Almighty* then relates that the guilty will say: 'We did not feed the poor.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 44) They will also admit that they did not feed the needy or give charity to the poor. But does refraining from giving charity alone entail getting into the Fire of *Saqar*? Of course not! They neither believed in the prayer nor performed it, and they neither believed in the prescribed alms nor in the right of the needy in their properties. So, they did not give the prescribed alms to them.

The guilty will also say: 'We indulged with others in mocking the believers.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 45) They used to indulge in falsehood with those who mocked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Muslims and the Quran. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'As He has already revealed to you [believers] in the Scripture, if you hear people denying and ridiculing Allah's revelation, do not sit with them unless they start to talk of other things, or else you yourselves will become like them: Allah will gather all the hypocrites and the disbelievers together into the hell.' (*an-Nisa':* 140) The Arabic word *Nakhud* (to indulge) gives a clear allegorical meaning, as the root of the word *Khawd* (indulgence) means to dip into a liquid such as water or mud. When you go through a liquid, it does not disperse and let the way open for you to go; rather, once you walk into it, the liquid mixes once again and it will be impossible to have a clear way for yourself. Here, this word means to indulge in falsehood or fruitless talk. Indulging in such talks makes you unable to distinguish between the good and the bad matters, as is the case with indulging in falsehood or aimless playing. Those guilty people used to indulge with others in mocking the Messengers, the Books of Allah and the believers, and that is why they deserved being punished in the Fire of *Saqar*.

The guilty people will also say: ‘We denied the Day of Judgment.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 46) They denied the Day of Recompense when the people will be held accountable and get rewarded or punished for their deeds. They did not believe in the reward, the punishment or the Account until the certain end came upon them. Moreover, they did not try to repent or to seek and follow the truth. Instead, they denied what the Messengers came with from Allah *Glorified is He* and stubbornly kept on disbelieving until death seized them.

The Arabic word *Al-Yaqin* (certainty) is the fixed matter that is firmly rooted in the reality so that it is not open for change or reconsideration. In fact, nothing is more certain in the reality than death which everyone sees and recognizes. The people may disagree about the Existence of Allah *Glorified is He,* but they cannot disagree about the inevitability of the human being’s death. Thus, those guilty people did not pray or give the prescribed alms yet kept on disbelieving and denying the Day of Judgment until death suddenly overtook them before repenting to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Subsequently, He *Glorified is He* says:

فَمَا تَنفَعُهُمْ شَفَٰعَةُ ٱلشَّٰفِعِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾ فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ ٱلتَّذْكِرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

No intercessor’s plea will benefit them now [48] What is the matter with them? Why do they turn away from the warning [49] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 48 - 49)

The Intercession of any intercessor will not be useful for the guilty people. The Arabic word *Al-Shafe’un* (The intercessors) is the plural of *Shafe’* or

Shafi' (Intercessor). In this vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Guard yourselves against a Day when no soul will stand in place of another, no Intercession will be accepted for it, nor any ransom; nor will they be helped.’ (*al-Baqara:* 48) And ‘Beware of a Day when no soul can stand in for another. No compensation will be accepted from it, nor Intercession will be of use to it, nor will anyone be helped.’ (*al-Baqara:* 123) The intercession requires the presence of an intercessor, someone to intercede with, another one to be interceded on behalf and the subject of the intercession. These are the four elements in that process of intercession. The one interceded with is Allah *Glorified is He* and the subject of the intercession is the sins. He *Glorified is He* does not accept the intercession from anyone, for He accepts it from the one He approves his/her speech, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘That Day, intercession will be useless except from those to whom the Lord of Mercy has granted permission and whose words He approves.’ (*Ta Ha:* 109)

As for His saying: ‘What is the matter with them? Why do they turn away from the warning?’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 49), it is similar to the verse reading: ‘So why do they not believe?’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 20) Logically, they should have believed instead of rejecting the admonition. They should have dealt with the matter wisely by giving prevalence to what they should do. But their poor thinking about the consequences of their deeds indicates that they are unwise people. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘We have given them Our signs, but they turned their back.’ (*al-Hijr:* 81) They arrogantly rejected Allah’s Way of Guidance with which the Messengers came. Here, the Arabic word *Al-I‘rad* means to turn your back on something, get away from it and not to move forward towards it. If they have moved forward to faith, they would have found that good for them.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُّسْتَنفِرَةٌ ﴿٥٠﴾ فَرَّتْ مِن قَسْوَرَةٍ ﴿٥١﴾

Like frightened asses [50] fleeing from a lion? [51]
(The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 50 - 51)

Here, the plural of the Arabic word *Hemar* (Ass) is *Humur* (Asses). In this verse, they are described as frightened asses escaping from the powerful hunters. The Arabs called all what is big and powerful *Qaswara;* it can also refer to the lion from which the frightened asses try to escape. Thus, the asses are either escaping from the archers and the hunters or from a lion. How fast they will then run to escape! Therefore, you should be wondering how those guilty people are fleeing from following the Call, the Religion and the Messengers of Allah *Glorified is He* as if they were asses fleeing from the hunters in the wild land.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ ٱمْرِيٍٕ مِّنْهُمْ أَن يُؤْتَىٰ صُحُفًا مُّنَشَّرَةً ﴿٥٢﴾
كَلَّا ۖ بَل لَّا يَخَافُونَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةَ ﴿٥٣﴾

Each one of them demands that a scripture be sent down to him and unrolled before his very eyes [52] No! Truly they have no fear of the life to come [53] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 52 - 53)

Every one of those disbelievers and polytheists asked for unrolled Scripture from Allah *Glorified is He* to be beside him/her when s/he gets up in the morning. That is to say that they demanded to be sent a scripture that states that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the Messenger of Allah whom they should follow. They used to say, ‘When a man of the children of Israel sins, he finds his sins and its expiation written beside him in the morning. So, can you [Muhammad] show us the like of these signs if you are truly a Messenger as you claim?!’ Gabriel said, ‘If you [Muhammad] wanted, we could have done to them like what we have done to the Children of Israel, and charged them with what we have charged the Children of Israel.’ But he *peace and blessings be upon him* disliked that.(1) Surprisingly, they demanded the revelation of a special Scripture to each one of them, to command them to believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* while they do not believe in Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *See Muqatil ibn Sulaiman, Tafsir, 4/500; Al-Khazin, Lubad At-Tanzil, 4/268; and Al-Baghawi, Tafsir, 5/180.*

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: ‘No! Truly they have no fear of the life to come.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 3) As far as the disbelievers are concerned, they do not really want a Scripture or scrolls to be sent down, for if they were sent down to them, they would not believe, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Even if We had sent down to you [Prophet] a book inscribed on parchment, and they had touched it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still say, ‘This is nothing but blatant sorcery.’ (*al-An‘am:* 7) So, they, under no circumstances, will believe. These are just lame excuses which they make, so that they do not believe. Even if what they demanded was fulfilled, they would not also believe because they want to flee from the Resurrection, the Account and the Last Day. They do not want to adhere to any Way of Guidance, commands or prohibitions.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَلَّآ إِنَّهُۥ تَذۡكِرَةٞ (٥٤) فَمَن شَآءَ ذَكَرَهُۥ (٥٥)
وَمَا يَذۡكُرُونَ إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُۚ هُوَ أَهۡلُ ٱلتَّقۡوَىٰ وَأَهۡلُ ٱلۡمَغۡفِرَةِ (٥٦)

But truly this is a reminder [54] Let whoever wishes to take heed do so [55] they will only take heed if God so wishes. He is the Lord who should be heeded, the Lord of forgiveness [56] (The Quran, *al-Muddaththir:* 54 - 56)

In the texts of the Quran, you find something wonderful; for example, two similar texts differ in meaning according to the context of each. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘But truly this is a reminder. Let whoever wishes to take heed do so.’ In another verse, He says: ‘No indeed! This [Quran] is a lesson from which those who wish to be taught should learn.’ (*’Abasa:* 11, 12) And ‘This is a reminder. Let whoever wishes, take the way to his Lord.’ (*al-Insan:* 29) This is one kind of similarity between the verses of the Quran and that is why He *Glorified is He* says: ‘When We have recited it, repeat the recitation.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 18) Therefore, the similarity between the verses is not just a matter of fixed forms or mechanical processes, for it is the words of the All Wise Lord. The Quran is a reminder and a great admonition. It is not old sorcery or the talk of the mortals, as the disbelievers claim; rather, it is a reminder from Him *Glorified is He* for His Creation.

He *the Almighty* says: ‘Let whoever wishes to take heed do so.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 55) The one who wishes to be admonished will be rewarded for his/her action. So you should comply with Allah’s Commands and Prohibitions, which are found in His Book. No one is prevented from or forced to do anything, for the human being has free will. So anyone who is heedless of the admonition is responsible for the consequences of his/her action as s/he preferred something over the Quran and turned away from its admonition.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘they will only take heed if Allah so wishes. He is the Lord who should be heeded, the Lord of forgiveness.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 56) If He *Glorified is He* wishes guidance for them, they will take heed and be admonished, for no one is able to do anything except with Allah’s Predestination and with the power He bestowed on him/her. He *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *al-Muddaththir* by praising Himself, for He deserves to be held in awe by His servants. They should fear His punishment, believe in Him and obey Him as He is fully able to forgive their previous disbelief and sins. Anas ibn Malik narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said regarding this verse, ‘Allah *Glorified is He* said, ‘I deserve to be held in awe and I will forgive whoever fears Me provided that s/he does not associate any deity with Me.’(1)

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 12442 and 13349; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4399; Ibn Abu 'Uasim, As-Sunna, Hadith no. 969; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 8515; and Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 3867.*

the chapter of

al-Qiyama

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of al-Qiyama (1) (The Final Judgment Day).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِيَوۡمِ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ ١ وَلَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِٱلنَّفۡسِ ٱللَّوَّامَةِ ٢

By the Day of Resurrection [1]
and by the self-reproaching soul! [2]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 1-2)

Here, He *Glorified is He* literally says ‘I do not swear’ as He wants to make it clear that the disbelievers have no right to deny the Day of Resurrection; so it is not proper that He swears in order to affirm this reality, but if He were to swear, He would swear by so and so. Thus, the meaning of ‘I do not swear’ is that the matter is very plain and clear that He *the Almighty* is not in need to swear, but if He were to swear, He would swear by the Day of Resurrection. He *Glorified is He* only swears by something great, given the fact that the person swears by what s/he appreciates. So, what do you think about the greatness of the Day of Resurrection if the One Who swears by it is Allah *Glorified is He* Himself?!

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* swears another time by the self-reproaching soul which stimulates the person, by virtue of its goodness, to do good after committing something evil. It whispers to the person when s/he commits something wrong, saying, ‘Allah has not commanded you to do that.’ Thereupon, s/he returns to the right course by repenting and seeking His Forgiveness.

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(1) *The chapter of al-Qiyama* is number 75 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-Qari'a* and before *al-Humaza*. Its order according to the revelation is 30. It was revealed in Mecca, i.e. before the *Hijra*, and its verses are 40.

The person may commit a sin, but his/her soul regains its awareness of Allah's Way of Guidance because s/he has the cell of faithful immunity inside him/her. He *Glorified is He* has divided the human souls into three kinds: self-reproaching, evil-inciting and the peaceful soul. The mission of the self-reproaching soul is to confront what the evil soul commands the human being to do. But if the self-reproaching soul does not do its part, the evil soul will keep on inciting evil and nothing will deter it.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَيَحْسَبُ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ أَلَّن نَّجْمَعَ عِظَامَهُۥ ﴿٣﴾ بَلَىٰ قَٰدِرِينَ عَلَىٰٓ أَن نُّسَوِّىَ بَنَانَهُۥ ﴿٤﴾

Does man think We shall not put his bones back together? [3] In fact, We can reshape his very fingertips [4] (The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 3 - 4)

Does the disbeliever think that Allah *Glorified is He* will not put his/her bones back together even after they disjoined each other, decayed and mixed with dust which the wind blows far away?! The Arabic verb *Hasiba* (to think) is in the present form and indicates something that will happen in the future. It here refers to the Second Blow in the Trumpet. This verb is mentioned in the past tense in His saying: ‘Do people think they will be left alone after saying ‘We believe’ without being put to the test?’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 2) So, do the people think that they can just say, ‘We believe’ without being tested? In fact, they have already been put to the test.

Al-Akhnas ibn Shurayq Al-Thaqafi said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ‘O Muhammad, tell me about the Day of Resurrection and how it will be like.’ When he *peace and blessings be upon him* told him, 'Uday ibn Rabi'a, the ally of Banu Zuhrah and the relative of Al-Akhnas said: ‘Even if I saw that Day, I would believe neither in you nor in your Message. How can Allah put the bones back together?!’ Thereupon Allah *Glorified is He* revealed His saying: ‘Does man think We shall not put his bones back together? [3] In fact, We can reshape his very fingertips. [4]’ (*al-Qiyama:* 3-4) He *Glorified is He* is fully Able to put the bones back together and to shape them as He has formed them in the first time. Moreover, He is fully Able to do what is greater than this, namely, to reshape people's very fingertips.

However, some of the exegetes said that the Arabic word '*Nusawwi'* means flattening the fingers with the palm until they become like the hoof of the camel so that such a person who denied resurrection cannot make use of his/her hands for the rest of his/her life. Qatada said, 'If Allah has willed, He could have made his fingers like the hoof of the cow or the cattle. So he would not be able to eat except with his mouth like the rest of the cattle. This is a punishment for denying the Resurrecting.' He *Glorified is He* has made the fingers of the human beings separated, so that s/he can eat with his/her hand and be able to withhold or stretch it as s/he wishes.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

بَلۡ يُرِيدُ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ لِيَفۡجُرَ أَمَامَهُۥ (٥) يَسۡـَٔلُ أَيَّانَ يَوۡمُ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ (٦)

Yet man wants to deny what is ahead of him [5]
he says, 'So, when will this Day of Resurrection be?' [6]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 5 - 6)

This person who denied and disbelieved in the Resurrection wants no one to command him/her to do the right and not to do the wrong. S/he just wants to freely disobey Allah *the Almighty* and to commit sins and terrible misdeeds. However, if s/he believed in the Resurrection, s/he would be obliged obey Him *Glorified is He*. S/he commits the sin and delays the repentance daily, saying, 'I will repent tomorrow,' but s/he never does that. His/her soul does not let him/her repent until s/he dies while committing the evil deeds. S/he stubbornly keeps on sinning and transgressing without being deterred; rather, s/he always seeks the worldly life and forgets death. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says, 'Do not pay heed to the words of someone who denies the Resurrection as s/he only does so in order to live in this worldly life without a Way of Guidance prescribing what to do and what not to do.' In the same vein, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He asks, "When will this Day of Resurrection be?"' (*al-Qiyama:* 6); and: 'They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, "When will it happen?"' (*al-A'raf:* 187) This disbelieving person asks about the time of the Day of Resurrection with a tone of denial.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا بَرِقَ ٱلۡبَصَرُ ﴿٧﴾ وَخَسَفَ ٱلۡقَمَرُ ﴿٨﴾ وَجُمِعَ ٱلشَّمۡسُ وَٱلۡقَمَرُ ﴿٩﴾
يَقُولُ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ يَوۡمَئِذٍ أَيۡنَ ٱلۡمَفَرُّ ﴿١٠﴾

When eyes are dazzled [7] and the moon eclipsed [8]
when the sun and the moon are brought together [9]
on that Day man will say, 'Where can I escape?' [10]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 7-10)

In this worldly life, the disbeliever questions the coming of the Day of Resurrection, but in the Hereafter, when the Day of Resurrection overtakes him/her, s/he will come to know for certain that s/he has wasted his/her lifetime in denying the Truth. When his/her eyes are dazzled due to the hardship of the Day of Resurrection, s/he will know that s/he has made a fatal mistake.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When the eyes are dazzled.' (*al-Qiyama:* 7), it means when his/her eyes are widely-opened for being dazzled with panic, shock and fear from what s/he sees. This is similar to His saying: 'He only gives them respite until a Day when their eyes will stare in terror' (*Ibrahim:* 42), and 'When the True Promise draws near, the disbelievers' eyes will stare in terror' (*al-Anbiya':* 97) meaning that their eyes will stare in terror without turning right or left for the calamities they are watching. When someone gets into a panic and fear, you see how his/her facial expressions change. Thus, on the Day of Resurrection, fear will overwhelm the people that they do not turn away from that frightening scene.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'And the moon eclipsed.' (*al-Qiyama:* 7-10) A lunar eclipse takes place and the moon's light goes out. When the moon eclipses, it loses its light and the darkness befalls. Here, the verb 'eclipse' is used in the passive voice. The sun and the moon will be brought together when they lose their lights and He *Glorified is He* will make them shrouded in darkness. Therefore, the sun will join the moon, after being separated from each other, and the precise system of the universe will consequently collapse.

In the midst of all this – the eclipse of the moon, the shrouded sun, the universal darkness and the unlimited panic – you will find the arrogant and haughty person saying, 'Where can I escape?' (*al-Qiyama:* 10) Can you imagine how fearful and frightened s/he is?! S/he cannot return to the worldly life, nor does s/he have any refuge, friend or helper. S/he feels that s/he is besieged, so s/he will say: ‘Where can I escape?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 10) Such a people, mentioned in the chapter of *al-Muddaththir,* used to flee from the admonition and the reminding in this worldly life, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Why do they turn away from the warning, [49] like frightened asses [50] fleeing from a lion? [51]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 49-51) In the chapter under discussion, when they face the event of the Day of Judgment and become certain about its truth which they refused to admit, they will say, ‘Where can We escape?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 10) He *Glorified is He* decisively ends their hope of finding a way out, saying: ‘Where will they go?’ (*at-Takwir:* 26)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَلَّا لَا وَزَرَ ﴿١١﴾ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ ٱلْمُسْتَقَرُّ ﴿١٢﴾

Truly, there is no refuge [11] they will all
return to your Lord on that Day [12]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 11-12)

When Allah *Glorified is He* wants to frighten the people from the Hereafter, He says: ‘Truly, there is no refuge: [11] they will all return to your Lord on that Day. [12]’ (*al-Qiyama:* 11-12) On that Day, there is no refuge or helper except Him *Glorified is He*. As for the disbelievers, He *the Almighty* states that there is no helper or supporter for them. They will all return to Him in the Hereafter which will last forever. The Arabic word *Al-Mustaqar* (return) is the place wherein you stay. In fact, the ultimate stay, returning and destination will be in the Hereafter. Therefore, the return of all the creatures will be to Him *the Almighty*. In this connection, ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud said, ‘To Allah is the return and the destination.’ They will return to their Lord to stay eternally in either the Paradise or the Hellfire.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يُنَبَّؤُا۟ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ يَوْمَئِذٍۭ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ ﴿١٣﴾ بَلِ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِۦ بَصِيرَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾
وَلَوْ أَلْقَىٰ مَعَاذِيرَهُۥ ﴿١٥﴾

On that Day, man will be told what he put first and what he put last [13] Truly, man is a clear witness against himself [14] Despite all the excuses he may put forward [15] (The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 13 - 15)

On the Day of Resurrection, when the sun and the moon will be brought together and shrouded, the human being will be informed about what s/he has put first and what s/he has put last. This is similar to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We shall bring out a record for each of them, which they will find spread wide open, [13] Read your record. Today your own soul is enough to calculate your account. [14]' (*al-Isra':* 13-14) The human being will be told about what s/he has done of good and bad deeds as well as his/her good or bad practices that the people followed after his/her death. Allah *Glorified is He* will inform him/her about the good deeds s/he has done and also about what s/he has not done.

Then He *the Almighty* says: 'Truly, man is a clear witness against himself. [15]' (*al-Qiyama:* 14) There are witnesses against the human within him/herself; they actually witness and watch what s/he does. These witnesses are his/her hearing, sight and limbs. The word *Basira* (witness) implicitly indicates that the human being is a clear witness against him/herself, as you see nothing better than yourself. This confirms His saying: 'Today your own soul is enough to calculate your account.' (*al-Isra':* 14) This means that your soul is enough to witness against you. He *Glorified is He* has made a clear witness within the human against him/herself as when you say to someone, 'You are the evidence against yourself.'

He *the Almighty* says: 'Truly, man is a clear witness against himself, [14] despite all the excuses he may put forward [15]' (*al-Qiyama:* 14-15). Even if the human being puts forward all the excuses and argued for him/herself, this will not benefit him/her as a witness from within him/herself bore witness against him/her. Allah *Glorified is He* clarifies some of their excuses, saying: 'By Allah, our Lord, we have not set up partners beside Him' (*al-An'am:* 23), and 'On the Day Allah raises them all from the dead, they will swear before Him as they swear before you now.' (*al-Mujadala:* 18)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِۦ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِۦٓ ﴿١٦﴾ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُۥ وَقُرْءَانَهُۥ ﴿١٧﴾
فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَٰهُ فَٱتَّبِعْ قُرْءَانَهُۥ ﴿١٨﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُۥ ﴿١٩﴾

[Prophet], do not rush your tongue in an attempt to hasten [your memorization of] the Revelation [16] We shall make sure of its safe collection and recitation [17] When We have recited it, repeat the recitation [18] And We shall make it clear [19] (The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 16 - 19)

Allah *Glorified is He* reassures Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the Quran will be preserved because when the revelation was sent down to him, he used to repeat it word for word, lest he forgets anything thereof. For instance, when the saying of Allah: ‘Say [Prophet], ‘It has been revealed to me…’ (*al-Jinn:* 1) was revealed to him, he used to repeat that inwardly after Gabriel lest he forgets it. This was out of his carefulness and eagerness to preserve the Quran. Accordingly, He *Glorified is He* prohibits him from rushing, saying: ‘[Prophet], do not rush to recite before the revelation is fully complete.’ (*Ta Ha:* 114) This means that he should not rush or pre-occupy himself with repeating and rehearsing for nothing of what he is assigned to memorise will escape his memory. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘[Prophet], We shall teach you [the Quran] and you will not forget.’ (*al-A‘la:* 6) In the verse under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* prohibits him *peace and blessings be upon him* from rushing to recite it, that is, when Jibril (Gabriel) completes the recitation of the verses, he *peace and blessings be upon him* can recite them as he wishes.

Some quarters or even complete chapter used to be sent down all at once to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. When the revelation departs him, he repeats them exactly as they have been revealed. If the chapter is completely revealed all at once, it would be easier than being revealed in separated verses. One of the wonders of the Quran is that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was able to repeat the recitation of a whole chapter dictated to him, while no one of us can repeat his verbatim words after talking for five minutes, for instance. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* reassures him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will not forget anything from the Quran. He should wait until the recitation of the verse ends, and then he can repeat it without missing one letter.

He *the Almighty* says: ‘We shall make sure of its safe collection and recitation. [17] When We have recited it, repeat the recitation.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 17-18) He *the Almighty* causes the Quran to be collected in Prophet Muhammad's chest that he forgets nothing from it. Afterwards, he *peace and blessings be upon him* should apply its commands and prohibitions. He should listen first and then recite it as Gabriel dictated to him. Then, it is upon Him *Glorified is He* to clarify, explain and interpret it. It is as if He *the Almighty* says: ‘After you, Prophet Muhammad, memorise and recite it as We have taught you, We will explain and clarify its meaning and interpretation. We will illustrate the lawful and the unlawful that the Quran contains.’

He *Glorified is He* addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in another verse, saying: ‘We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them...’ (*an-Nahl:* 44). Thus, He *Glorified is He* has clarified the Quran to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and he, in his turn, clarified it to the people. So, it is upon Him *the Almighty* to make clear what is lawful and unlawful and to illustrate the Quranic injunctions and rulings. The Arabic word *'Alayna* (upon us) gives the indication that He *Glorified is He* has obliged Himself to collect the Quran in Prophet Muhammad's chest and to clarify its general rulings, be they obligatory acts, norms or Islamic Pillars.

Subsequently, He *Glorified is He* says:

كَلَّا بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ ٱلْعَاجِلَةَ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَتَذَرُونَ ٱلْآخِرَةَ ﴿٢١﴾

Truly you [people] love this fleeting world [20]
and neglect the life to come [21]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 20 - 21)

The people love the fleeting worldly life, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘If anyone desires [only] the fleeting life, We speed up whatever We will in it, for whoever We wish; in the end We have prepared hell for him in which to burn, disgraced and rejected.’ (*al-Isra’:* 18)

And if '…anyone strives for the rewards of this world, We will give him some of them. If anyone strives for the rewards of the Hereafter, We will give him some of them: We will reward the grateful.' (*Al-'Imran:* 145) Thus, the one who wants the rewards of this worldly life gets the reward of his/her work even if s/he is a disbeliever. The disbelievers take the rewards of the fleeting worldly life, while the believers receive the endless reward of the Hereafter.

The reward of the fleeting world is its bounties, pleasures, gratifications, luxury and prosperity. So whoever wants the reward of this fleeting world, Allah *Glorified is He* will give him/her such pleasures. They love the fleeting world, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do you [Believers] prefer this world to the life to come?' (*at-Tawba:* 38) and 'Those who love this world's life more than the Hereafter...' (*Ibrahim:* 3). The Arabic word *Istahabba* (preferred) means that their love for the worldly life transcended the natural limit. However, if someone loves it because it helps him/her to achieve the religious duties and to get the reward of the Hereafter, this will benefit him/her in the Hereafter. This is a pursuit of the worldly life for the sake of the Hereafter.

In the verse under discussion, we do not find those who love the worldly life for the sake of the Hereafter; rather, we find those who prefer the worldly life to the Hereafter. They hasten to achieve the worldly pleasures by every possible way, even if it is unlawful. They turn others from Allah's Way and do not adhere to it, mistakenly thinking that there is no accountability in the Hereafter. For this reason, they neglect the Hereafter; they do not believe in its truth and thus abandon working for its sake. Instead, they, as most of the people do, prefer the worldly life to the Hereafter. This verse addresses the disbelievers for they were working for the sake of the worldly life and not for the Hereafter. Their violent love for the fleeting worldly life stimulated them to deny the Day of Resurrection and disbelieve in what Allah *Glorified is He* has revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They are going astray in this worldly life and are distracted from the Hereafter.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ ﴿٢٢﴾ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

On that Day there will be radiant faces [22]
looking towards their Lord [23]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 22-23)

The Arabic word *Al-Nadara* means beauty, whiteness and radiance. On the Day of Judgment, the believers' faces will be as bright as light. Their faces will be beautiful and manifest their happiness due to the pleasure they enjoy in the Hereafter. This word also means smoothness and exultation. Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* describes their faces as radiant with happiness out of what He has bestowed on them, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 24) In this regard, Al-Suddi said, ‘When the people of the paradise are admitted to it, they will find a tree by its door. The trunk of the tree is two fountains. When they drink from one of them, the hatred will be taken away from their chests; this is the Pure Drink. When they bathe by the other fountain, the radiance of bliss will appear on their faces so they will never become ugly.’(1) Thus, the radiance of the bliss will be on their skins and they will enjoy various kinds of pleasure.

With these radiant faces, they will look towards their Lord Who has bestowed His Blessings on them, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘On that Day there will be radiant faces, [22] looking towards their Lord. [23]’ (*al-Qiyama:* 22-23) The measures on the Day of Resurrection are different from that we have in this worldly life. In this life, your laws and body cannot make it possible for you to see Allah *Glorified is He*. In the Hereafter, however, your constitution and body will make it possible for you to see Him *Glorified is He*. This is the utmost bliss in the Hereafter. In this worldly life, you live with Allah's Omnipotence, but in the Hereafter, the believers will lead the life of the one who looks towards Him *Glorified is He*.

The believer will enjoy the greatest pleasure of Allah *Glorified is He* that is, seeing his/her Lord. Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, ‘Allah will beautify the faces that look at Him. These faces must become radiant while they are looking to their Lord *Glorified is He*.'(1) This is the greatest Pleasure that He *Glorified is He* bestows on them. However, the believers' sight cannot encompass Him because He is the Greatest Who encompasses them, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision. He is the All Subtle, the All Aware.' (*al-An'am:* 103) Besides, Prophet Muhammad said, 'You will see your Lord with your eyes as you see the moon.'(2)

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(1) *See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 2/201; and Al-Baghawi, Tafsir, 3/230.*

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَاسِرَةٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ تَظُنُّ أَن يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

And on that Day there will be the sad and despairing faces [24] of those who realize that a great calamity is about to befall them [25] (The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 24 - 25)

While the faces of the believers will be radiant and smooth, expressing the bliss of the paradise, the disbelievers' faces will be frown, sad and black. They are devoid of any trace of bliss or happiness. Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse about Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira: 'and frowned and scowled.' (*al-Muddaththir:* 22) The verb *Basara* means that his face frowned and scowled for the concerns he has. Therefore, the disbelievers' faces will be frowned, despairing, dark and dust-stained as stated in His words: 'but some faces will be dust-stained [40] and covered in darkness: [41] those are the disbelievers, the licentious. [42]' (*'Abasa:* 40-42) So, their faces will be dust-stained and covered in darkness. The Arabic word *Al-Qatar* is the air full with the smoke of roasted meat. A good smell may waft from it, but it blackens the colour of the one who exposes him/herself to it.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Those who realize that a great calamity is about to befall them.' (*al-Qiyama:* 25) At that time, the disbelievers will have certitude that a great punishment will befall them. As for the Arabic word

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(1) *See Mujahid ibn Jabr, Tafsir, 687; Al-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 34/72; and Al-Baghawi, Tafsir, 8/284.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Jarir ibn 'Abdullah Al-Bajli. See Al-Humaydi, Musnad, Hadith no. 817; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 19190; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 177; and Abu 'Uwana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 1112.*

Al-Faqira, it refers to the great calamity and the serious matter. It is said that it refers to entering the fire, or it means that their faces will not see Allah *Glorified is He*. Other exegetes interpreted it as the kinds of punishments they will suffer in the fire. Al-Kalbi said, '*Al-Faqira* is that the faces will be prevented from seeing their Lord and will not look at Him.'(1)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

كَلَّآ إِذَا بَلَغَتِ ٱلتَّرَاقِىَ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَقِيلَ مَنْۜ رَاقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾ وَظَنَّ أَنَّهُ ٱلْفِرَاقُ ﴿٢٨﴾

Truly, when the soul reaches the collarbone [26]
when it is said, 'Could any charm-healer save him
now?' [27] when he knows it is the final parting [28]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 26 - 28)

The Arabic word *Al-Taraqi* refers to the bones between the air gap of the collar and the neck wherein the sound is produced. These verses refer to the state when the Spirit comes up to the throat. The veins of the neck are also called *At-Taraqi*. So, reaching *Al-Taraqi* is the time when the soul reaches the collarbone which is at the front of the throat above the chest. The soul ascends to it at the time when the death rattle happens. The Spirit of the human being is taken from the feet's toes, then from the ankles, then the two legs and thereupon the shins cool down after the Spirit goes through them up to the thighs and then up to the collarbone. Thereupon, death rattle is heard and it only takes moments until s/he dies. The sight will follow the Spirit after its departure.

Meanwhile, the dying person's family members are around him. They will mistakenly think they can save his/her life and say to each other, 'Could any charm-healer save him now?' (*al-Qiyama:* 29) Some will say, 'Call a physician to treat him/her and save him/her from what befell him/her.' They called for the healers, but they can do nothing for him/her against Allah's Decree. It is said that the Angels who witness the death of someone say to each other, 'Who will ascend with his/her Spirit when it comes out?' Then, either the Angels of mercy or punishment ascends with it.

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(1) *Al-Sa'ib, like Al-Kalbi, said that the word Faqira means that the faces of the disbelievers will be prevented from seeing their Lord. See Ar-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghaib, 30/733.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘When he knows it is the final parting.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 28) The dying person knows for sure that it is the time of his/her departure when s/he leaves his/her children, friends and those who love him/her. Further, s/he leaves what s/he has earned in his/her worldly life, be it money or real estate. At this point, death is certain. Death entails leaving the worldly life, the property, the family and the children.

When s/he becomes certain that inevitably s/he will leave the worldly life and die, the doctor can do nothing for him/her. At that time, s/he despairs of the worldly life and its people; s/he is about to depart from this life and to pay farewell to his family and friends. Afterwards, s/he moves to the world of graves. S/he leaves everything s/he kept in his/her worldly life, including his/her position, prestigious life, car, spouse, children, family and beloved ones. In other words, s/he will leave the worldly life and all what it has. It is the moment of departure when the human being's life and story on earth, with all its events, end. It is a moment in which the eyes of the true lovers shed tears for the one who suffers the agony of death. On the contrary, it is a moment when his/her enemies, who dislike him/her and wish him/her death, are happy.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلۡتَفَّتِ ٱلسَّاقُ بِٱلسَّاقِ ﴿٢٩﴾ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوۡمَئِذٍ ٱلۡمَسَاقُ ﴿٣٠﴾

When his legs are brought together [29] on that
day he will be driven towards your Lord [30]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 29 - 30)

The one who ponders over these verses and thinks about this moment of death finds that this human being leaves the worldly life with all what it has to go to another life where s/he does not know what will happen to him/her. The person performing the ritual bathing to the dead person turns him/her to the right or the left. In order to avoid the falling of the dead person's legs, s/he puts the right leg over the left and brings the two legs together. Some interpreted this verse to refer to the state when the hardship of the death comes together with that of the Hereafter, as the day of one's death is the last day in his/her worldly life and the first in the Hereafter. It is said, ‘No person dies except that his/her legs are brought together because of the hardship of the death s/he is suffering from.’ Thus, the hardships and the agony of the death are combined with that of the Day of Judgment. S/he moves from the calamity of death into another one in the Hereafter if s/he was not an obedient believer in Allah *Glorified is He*. Expressing the difficulty of something, the Arab people used the idiom *'Ala Saq* which is used in the verse under discussion. Similarly, ‘to express the difficulty of the war’, the Arabs said, ‘The war among us was fierce.’ The hardship of departing the worldly life itself is compounded with the hardship of leaving the household, the children, the property and the position. When someone dies, his/her legs become rigid and stick to each other.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘On that day he will be driven towards your Lord.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 30) On the Day of Judgment, the slaves will return to Allah *Glorified is He* and will be driven towards Him in order that He judges between them. So, no one should think that s/he will return to anyone else. The Angels will drive his/her spirit to where He *Glorified is He* has ordered them, either to the paradise or the hellfire. When you find the Arabic word *Yawma'idhin* (On that day), you should know that there is an ellipsis which is more than one sentence; it is: when the Day of Judgment comes, they will be driven to their destination.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَلَا صَدَّقَ وَلَا صَلَّىٰ ﴿٣١﴾ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿٣٢﴾ ثُمَّ ذَهَبَ إِلَىٰٓ أَهْلِهِۦ يَتَمَطَّىٰٓ ﴿٣٣﴾

He neither believed nor prayed [31] but denied
the truth and turned away [32] walking back to
his people with a conceited swagger [33]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 31- 33)

Some people of Quraysh did not believe in Allah *Glorified is He,* but rather rejected the Faith and denied Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is what the leaders of the tribes of Quraysh, like Abu Jahl, Abu Lahb and Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, had done. Accordingly, the exegetes maintained that this verse refers to Abu Jahl and other disbelieving leaders of Quraysh. These scholars said, ‘Abu Jahl neither believed in the Quran nor prayed to Allah *Glorified is He*. He believed neither in what has come from Allah nor in the truthfulness of Messenger Muhammad.'(1)

However, neither Abu Jahl nor Al-Walid is meant by this verse, but rather the human beings in general, as the beginning of the chapter confirms: 'Does man think We shall not put his bones back together?' (*al-Qiyama:* 3) Thus, the word 'man' here is a generic, used to refer to all people. Such people did not believe in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Quran or the Resurrection. Further, they did not pray but rather denied the truth and turned away from obedience.

The Arabic word *Saddaq* (to believe) can mean *Tasadaqa* (To give alms) which is the root of *sadaqa* (charity). So the meaning could be that such people did not give alms to the poor and did not feed the needy. They did not worship Allah *Glorified is He* by doing any good deed, but rather denied the Resurrection, the Quran and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Further, they turned away from them.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: 'Walking back to his people with a conceited swagger.' (*al-Qiyama:* 33) Such a disbeliever walked back to his/her people with a conceited swagger and strut. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'The hostility would provoke between my *ummah* if they walked with strut and served the children of the Persian and the Romans.'

Thus, after his/her denial, s/he turned away and walked with a swagger, strut and arrogance. The Arabic word *Yatamatta* means stretching the back; the word *Al-Matiyya* refers to the camels which can be ridden upon. This word wonderfully indicates the relation between the sound of the letters and the image that Allah *Glorified is He* wants to portray. We can imagine the image of the one who stretches his/her muscles by considering the strength of the letter *Ta'* followed by letter *Alif* with its long sound. It exemplifies the stretching of the limbs with swagger and strut.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *See Muqatil ibn Sulaiman, Tafsir, 4/513.*

أَوْلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوْلَىٰ ﴿٣٤﴾ ثُمَّ أَوْلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوْلَىٰ ﴿٣٥﴾

Closer and closer it comes to you [34] Closer and closer still [35] (The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 34 - 35)

The cause of the revelation of this verse is that Abu Jahl threatened to kill Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, ‘Go away from me, for neither you nor your Lord can do anything to do. The people of Quraysh know that I am the most honourable and respected person. So how can you threaten me, Ibn Abu Kabsha, [Prophet Muhammad]?’ Afterwards, Abu Jahl went to his home and Allah *Glorified is He* has referred to this incident, saying: ‘He walked back to his people with a conceited swagger. [33] Closer and closer it comes to you. [34] Closer and closer still. [35]’ (*al-Ahzab*: 33-35) Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* seized him by the throat and hit him on his chest and said, ‘Closer and closer it comes to you; Closer and closer still.’ This statement is said to the one who is about to be inflicted with a calamity or has already been inflicted with it. Subsequently, Abu Jahl said, ‘How can Muhammad threaten me even though no one living between the two mountains of Mecca is more honourable and respected than me?!' Accordingly, He *Glorified is He* revealed His saying: ‘Taste this, you powerful, respected man!’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 49)

Someone may ask, ‘Why does Allah *Glorified is He* repeat the verse: “Closer and closer it comes?” (*al-Qiyama:* 34)’ The answer is that the punishment could be twice; one in the worldly life by getting killed and cursed and the other when he dies. There will be a punishment for him when he is resurrected and when he enters the hellfire. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the cohesive tie *thumma* (Then) to indicate that there is a long period between the two punishments. The Arabic particle *Fa'*, on the contrary, indicates that the second action shortly follows the first. An example for the usage of the cohesive tie *thumma* (Then) is found in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘Even if they come out to fight you, they will soon turn tail; then they will get no help.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 111) When we look closely to the literal understanding of this verse, someone may think that it should be formed in a different way; that is to say that after they turn tail, they will get no help. If the particle *Al-Fa'* were used, this would indicate that they will not defeat the Muslims at the early time of the Message. But using the cohesive tie *thumma* in the verse means that they will not defeat the believers even if they prepared an army once again after a while for another battle. Thus, the particle *thumma*, unlike *Al-Fa'*, is used to connect two actions separated by a long period of time. An illustrative example for *Al-Fa'* is the saying of Allah: ‘Then He causes him to die and be buried.’ (*’Abasa:* 21) Thus, if there is a long period between the two actions, the particle *thumma* is used, but if the second action shortly takes place after the first, the particle *Fa*' is used. Thus, Abu Jahl will suffer two punishments, one in this worldly life and another in the Hereafter.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَيَحْسَبُ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ أَن يُتْرَكَ سُدًى ﴿٣٦﴾

Does man think he will be left alone? [36]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 36)

Does this disbelieving person think that Allah *Glorified is He* has created him/her in vain, and will leave him/her without holding him/her accountable and punishing him/her?! Indeed, every action the human being does in this worldly life is recorded and s/he will be held accountable for it on the Day of Judgment. Thus, no one should think that s/he will escape from Allah *the Almighty,* or His punishment in the Hereafter. No one should mistakenly think s/he will be left alone, for He *the Almighty* says: ‘Did you think We have created you in vain, and that you would not be brought back to Us?’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 115)

Had Allah *the Almighty* left us without any account, the deviant people who availed themselves of the gratifications of this worldly life would be more fortunate than those who adhered to the Straight Path. Everything is created for a purpose, not in vain. The Arabic word *Al-'Abath* (Vain) is the purposeless and fruitless action; people say to the one who is doing something fruitless, ‘What are you doing?' The opposite of the Arabic word *Al-'Abath* (vain) is purposefulness. Thus, He *the Almighty* negates the purposelessness of creation because He has created the creatures for a planned objective, and laid down for them the Law they should follow to reach that objective. No one other than the Creator should set that Law. Thus, He *Glorified is He* has not created the human being to be left alone without being commanded, prohibited, assigned with religious obligations in this worldly life, and held accountable in the Hereafter. Some scholars interpreted this verse, saying, 'Does the human being think that s/he will be left in his/her grave forever and will not be resurrected?' No one thinks so except the disbeliever who does not believe in the Resurrection after death, the Account, the Reward, the Paradise and the Hellfire.'

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ يَكُ نُطْفَةً مِّن مَّنِيٍّ يُمْنَىٰ ﴿٣٧﴾ ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ ﴿٣٨﴾
فَجَعَلَ مِنْهُ ٱلزَّوْجَيْنِ ٱلذَّكَرَ وَٱلْأُنثَىٰٓ ﴿٣٩﴾

Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm [37] which became
a clinging form, which God shaped in due proportion [38]
fashioning from it the two sexes, male and female? [39]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 37 - 39)

The Arabic word *An-Nutfa* (sperm-drop) originally means the drop of sweet water and the quintessence of something. The process of burning and destructive metabolism happens continuously in the body, leading to the discharge of wastes. Thus, the urine, the excrement, the sweat, the tears and the wax of the ears are the wastes caused by the burning of the food inside the body so that it can extract its nourishment and turn it into the blood. Out of this extraction, the sperm-drop, by which the pregnancy happens and the fetus is formed, is taken. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* has clarified and purified the sperm because it will be the essence of the most honourable creature, the human being. He *the Almighty* has created Adam from clay and made his descendants from the sperm he placed in Eve. In this way, all the human beings were produced. It is as though everyone of us has an iota from his/her greatest father, Adam. This iota is in the sperm which descended to the person through his/her father and it is the purest thing that lies in the man.

The sperm, lying in the semen, is the essence of man's creation, and that is why He *the Almighty* says: 'Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm?' (*al-Qiyama:* 37) *An-Nutfa* is the sperm which joins the female ovum in the womb to produce the *Al-'Alaqa* (the clinging form). As a matter of fact, one drop of the man's semen may contain enough sperms to create millions of people. The eye cannot see one sperm due to its extreme subtlety. Allah *Glorified is He* wills that only the strongest sperm joins the ovum to emphasize the fact that the most suitable shall remain. Thus, if the sperm carries the genetic qualities of a female, the fetus will be a female. Similarly, if the genetic qualities are that of a male, the foetus will be a male. The scientists call the sperm the XXY. The sperm of the man carries the qualities of both the male and the female. In another verse, He *the Almighty* describes the sperm as a spurting fluid: ‘Man should reflect on what he was created from. [5] He is created from spurting fluid, [6] then he emerges from between the backbone and breastbone.’ (*at-Tariq:* 5-7)

Was this denier of Allah's Omnipotence to resurrect the dead not a drop of sperm in a man's backbone?! S/he was just an underrated sperm that the man puts in his wife’s vulva, such as the water that he discharges when he urinates. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* describes the sperm as: ‘Underrated fluid.’ (*al-Mursalat:* 20) Despite that, the human being, honoured by Allah, is brought to existence by it. Creating the human being from the sperm spurted in the woman's womb indicates his/her lower status as s/he was created from the impure sperm discharged from the same source of the urine. Thus, it is not proper for him/her to rebel against obedience to Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Which became a clinging form, which Allah shaped in due proportion.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 38) The very Arabic word *Al-'Alaqa* (clinging form) indicates its mission which is to cling to the uterine wall as modern science has confirmed. He *Glorified is He* also says: ‘…We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made (in) the lump of flesh bones…’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 14). The scientists say that the sperm turns into a clinging form after forty days. They call this clinging form ‘zaygote’ which refers to the fertilized ovum that starts to take its nourishment from it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘…which Allah shaped in due proportion.’ (*al-Qiyama:* 38) This means that He *Glorified is He* has created, shaped and proportioned the human being. Then He has blown the Spirit into him/her, perfected his/her limbs and made him/her able to listen, see and speak. He *the Almighty* also made him/her symmetric and upright. Thus, He *the Almighty* made him/her a human being who can walk, move, speak, hear, see and think after s/he was just a fluid in his/her father and mother, and then became a clinging form that sticks to the uterine wall, and then s/he became a piece of flesh. Afterwards, He *Glorified is He* shaped his/her limbs in his/her mother's womb and brought him/her into life.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says that He fashions from the sperm the two sexes, male and female. *Al-Zawjayn* here means the two sexes, as the woman can bear a male or a female only, two males and one female, two females and one male or other than that according to Allah's Decree.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَيۡسَ ذَٰلِكَ بِقَٰدِرٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يُحۡـِۧيَ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

Does He who can do this not have the power
to bring the dead back to life? [40]
(The Quran, *al-Qiyama:* 40)

This chapter is called *al-Qiyama* (The Resurrection) and it revolves around proving the Resurrection and the Judgment Day. It started with: ‘By the Day of Resurrection [1] and by the self-reproaching soul! [2] Does man think We shall not put his bones back together? [3]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 1-3)

Then, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the events of the Day of Judgment: ‘When eyes are dazzled and the moon eclipsed, when the sun and the moon are brought together.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 7-9) Then the chapter clarifies that the one who neither believed nor prayed will inevitably die, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Truly, when the soul reaches the collarbone; when it is said, ‘Could any charm-healer save him now?’ When he knows it is the final parting, when his legs are brought together.’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 26-29)

Further, this chapter tells us that the human being should beware of thinking that Allah *Glorified is He* has created him/her in vain and that He will leave him/her alone without commanding, prohibiting, rewarding or punishing?. Then it directs our attention to the fact that the human being was only a sperm that one's father placed in his/her mother's womb, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm which became a clinging form, which Allah shaped in due proportion, fashioning from it the two sexes, male and female?' (*al-Muddaththir:* 37-39) For this reason, one should not disdain the command of his/her Lord. Then He *the Almighty* concludes the chapter, saying: 'Does He who can do this not have the power to bring the dead back to life?' (*al-Muddaththir:* 40)

Those who deny the Resurrection said: 'What? When we have disappeared into the earth, shall we really be created anew?' (*as-Sajda:* 10) They do not believe that the One Who formed them in the first time is fully able to bring them back. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Does He Who can do this not have the power to bring the dead back to life?' (*al-Muddaththir:* 40).

the chapter of

al-Insan

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Insan* (1).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَلۡ أَتَىٰ عَلَى ٱلۡإِنسَٰنِ حِينٞ مِّنَ ٱلدَّهۡرِ لَمۡ يَكُن شَيۡـٔٗا مَّذۡكُورًا ١

Was there not a period of time when man was nothing to speak of? [1] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 1)

Allah *the Almighty* has created the universe, its worlds and all what it contains. He mentions in detail all these worlds, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘We have missed nothing out of the Book.’ (*al-An‘am:* 38) As He *the Almighty* mentions the man in this chapter and even names it *al-Insan* (man), He mentions the jinn in another chapter and calls it *al-Jinn* (Jinn). Further, He *Glorified is He* mentions the Angels in the chapter of *Fatir* wherein He *the Almighty* says: ‘Praise be to Allah, Creator of the heavens and earth, who made angels messengers with two, three, four [pairs of] wings. He adds to creation as He wills: Allah has power over everything.’ (*Fatir:* 1)

As He *the Almighty* mentions these three worlds – mankind, the jinn and the angels– He mentions what is in the universe wherein the human being lives, including the earth, the heaven, the mountains and the rivers. For example, He *the Almighty* mentions the sun, the moon and the stars and dedicated complete chapters to speak about, *ash-Shams* (The sun), *al-Qamar* (The moon) and *an-Najm* (The star), respectively.

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(1) The chapter of *al-Insan* is called *Ad-Dahr* (Time) for it is mentioned in this chapter: ‘Was there not a period of time when man was nothing to speak of?' (*al-Qiyama:* 1) Some scholars held that it was revealed in Mecca (i.e. before *Hijra*), while others maintained it was revealed in Medina (after *Hijra*). The number of its verses is 31. It was also called the chapter of *Hal Ata*. In his *A‘lam Ad-Din,* As-Sakhawi said that there are no abrogated verses in it; it was revealed after the chapter of *al-Qiyama* and before that of *al-Mursalat*. *See As-Sakhawi, Jamal Al-Qurra' Wa Kamal Al-'Ighra', 1/492.*

He *Glorified is He* dedicated a complete chapter to speak about man, to give us an account about him/her from his/her origin and beginning up to his/her ultimate destination. This chapter tells us about that creature whom He *Glorified is He* has created to be His Vicegerent on earth and whom He has placed in a universe prepared for him/her. He *the Almighty* had prepared for the human beings the requirements of life even before the creation of Adam, the first man ever; He had prepared for them the earth, the heaven, the water, the air, and the provisions hidden and stored in the earth that never end until the Day of Judgment. He *Glorified is He* has created these blessings, and then the human being came to a perfectly and completely prepared universe which has all the requirements for his/her living and continuation.

In this vein, there is no distinction between the believer and the disbeliever because the latter exactly as the former is created by Allah *Glorified is He*; He *Glorified is He* has brought him/her to the world after preparing their places therein. Thus, before the creation of the human being, He *Glorified is He* had prepared for him/her the universe wherein s/he will live. He *the Almighty* has prepared the earth, the sun, the moon, the heaven, the planets and the stars, and then the human being came to the universe to find everything prepared and subjected to serve him/her. That is why you will find no species that refuse to serve the human being. The land, for example, does not refuse to grow crops if it was farmed, nor do the animals refuse to serve man.

Allah *Glorified is He* has created the heavens and earth for us and decreed the provisions before creating us. If you reflect on your creation, you find that the macrocosm is reduced in you, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And in yourselves too, do you not see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) One should ponder on his/her life as a fetus in the womb of his/her mother wherein He *the Almighty* has prepared his/her special life for him/her. He *the Almighty* has prepared for him/her the umbilical cord which supports him/her with nourishment from the sustenance that his/her mother eats and thus turns into blood full of all the required nutritional elements. During that time, the fetus is not in need to seek provision or to chew and swallow the food; rather, it receives its nourishment through the umbilical cord.

Even after it comes into existence, a new world, which Allah *the Almighty* has prepared for it, receives it with happiness. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* has brought the human being to the earth which He has prepared before man's getting down to it. He *the Almighty* has prepared rivers of sweat water sprung out from beneath the mountains and the valleys where the human beings live. Also, He *the Almighty* has prepared fruits and crops and taught him/her how to make use of what surrounds him/her.

Further, Allah *Glorified is He* has created things which benefit the human being without being subjected to him/her. These Blessings are provided by Allah *Glorified is He* for him/her effortlessly. One of His Blessings for which He *the Almighty* should be praised is that He *Glorified is He* had bestowed His Blessings on the human being before his/her existence, given that these blessings were already existent when the human being was created. Before the creation of Adam, the father of all the humans, the paradise was already created, so he lived therein without tiredness or misery. He found what he eats, drinks, enjoys and keeps his life already existent and prepared before him. Afterwards, when Adam and Eve got down to the earth, the blessings preceded them, so they found what they eat, drink and keep their lives. If the blessings had not preceded man's existence and were created after him, he would have perished while waiting for their coming.

Thus, the universe existed before man's existence, when he was nothing to speak of. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* asks a question while knowing that neither the believer nor the disbeliever can answer except in the affirmative form. Yes, there was a period of time when the human being was nothing to speak of. Allah *Glorified is He* does not only say: ‘Was there not a period of time when man was nothing?’ (*al-Insan:* 1) but rather adds: ‘…nothing to speak of?’ (*al-Insan:* 1) This is because the human being was something, yet a valueless thing; he was a mixture of dust and water. Although He *Glorified is He* has created the first man, Adam, from water and dust which turned into clay, He has created his descendants from underrated fluid, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘He has begun the creation of man from clay.’ (*as-Sajda:* 6) Afterwards, He *the Almighty* brought Adam's descendants into being through reproduction and multiplication. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then He made his progeny of an extract of water held in light estimation.’ (*as-Sajda:* 8) Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* has created the human from clay; then He *Glorified is He* prescribed marriage for the reproduction of the man and the woman.

Allah *Glorified is He* has created Adam from the best elements and kinds of clay which are the quintessence of mud. If you hold a handful of mud and pressed it with your fingers, the quintessence, which is the best kind of clay, escapes and only the remnants of sand and rough objects remain. Allah *Glorified is He* created man's descendants from the sperm of the man and the ovum of the woman, which later forms the clinging form. This sperm is the underrated fluid that the man spurts from his sexual organ into that of his wife. So how can a man created by such process be arrogant?!

Some scholars maintain that the word ‘man’ in the verse in question refers to Adam *peace be upon him*. Accordingly, the verse in question means that a period of time has come when Adam was nothing spoken of. This period was forty years when he was in the form of clay. Anas ibn Malik narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘When Allah fashioned Adam in paradise, He left him for a period of time He determined. Then Satan kept roaming round and looking at him. When he found him hollow from within, he recognized that he can easily be seduced.' Some scholars narrated that Adam remained as mud for forty years and then remained as altered clay for another forty years and then became clay like that used for pottery for another forty years. Thus, He has completed his creation in one hundred and twenty years. He remained during that period as a creature that was unspoken of, that is, his name and purpose were unknown. Only Allah *Glorified is He* knows the purpose of the human being's creation.

The Arabic word *Al-Dahr* (The long period of time) attracts our attention and indicates that Adam remained as clay for a long time that can really reach one hundred and twenty years. One of the names of this chapter is *Al-Dahr* (Time) and also *Hal Ata*. Adam was not something spoken of either in the heavens or the earth. He was thrown out clay before blowing the Spirit into him.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَّبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَٰهُ سَمِيعًۢا بَصِيرًا ٢

We created man from a drop of mingled fluid to put
him to the test; We gave him hearing and sight [2]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 2)

When Allah *the Almighty* takes about an action that needs all His Prefect Attributes, He uses the pronoun ‘We’. So, when He *the Almighty* uses the pronoun ‘We’ concerning any action He has done, we should understand that this action was not undertaken by only His Power, Knowledge, Wisdom or Mercy; rather, such Action is undertaken with all His Perfect Attributes. The use of the pronoun ‘We’ attracts our attention to this fact to clarify the perfectness of His Attributes, as the person may be powerful but lacks knowledge or vice versa. Also, someone may be knowledgeable but lacks the attribute of wisdom. Thus, the integration of the attributes is required. Every Action done by Allah *Glorified is He* entails a set of Attributes: the Knowledge, the Will, the Power, the Wisdom, Withholding, Giving, Honoring, Humiliating, Subjecting and Mercy. Here, He *the Almighty* glorifies Himself because He brought the universe into existence and sustains it, which required a set of Perfect Attributes. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* uses the pronoun ‘We’.

Allah *the Almighty* has created the human beings, who are the descendants of Adam, from a drop of the male's semen which is combined with that of the female in the womb of the female. Man's sperm is thick and white as they form the muscles, bones and power. The water of the woman, however, is fine and yellow and forms the flesh, the blood, the hair and nails. Both of the two fluids are combined together. Some maintained that the word *Amshaj* are the veins which exist within the sperm. *Al-Mashj* also means mixing the two fluids of the man and woman to form the clinging form.

Allah *the Almighty* has created the human from a sperm which is the mixture of the semen of the man and the woman in order to test and examine him/her afterwards when s/he attains puberty. *'Amshaj* may refer to the formation of the fetus from the semen of the male and the ovum of the female after fertilization. It may also refer to the genes that lie in the sperm which carry the distinguishing characteristic of the human species in general and the genetic characteristics of the family of the fetus in particular. These mixed genetic characteristics are what make the human being distinguished in his/her conduct, behavior and way of thinking. His/her reaction gathers between the sadness and happiness, laughing and crying, and sanity and insanity.

Although Allah *the Almighty* starts the chapter in question with focusing on a material matter, He then turns our attention to the spiritual side. He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Was there not a period of time when man was nothing to speak of.’ (*al-Insan:* 1) He begins with the material matter of creating the human being of a drop of mingled fluid; the fluids of the man and woman mingle to be a clinging form which follows certain stages until the human being is totally formed. Allah, however, says afterwards: ‘We created man from a drop of mingled fluid to put him to the test…' (*al-Insan:* 2). Thus, after discussing a materialistic matter related to the creation, He *the Almighty* draws our attention to a spiritual matter, that is, examination and testing. He *the Almighty* has not created the human being vainly, purposelessly or for amusement; rather, He brought him/her into existence to be put to test when s/he is prepared for it.

As Allah *the Almighty* puts him/her to test, He gives him/her the hearing and sight. Thus, the human is put to test after being given the means to perceive the material things. The most important of these perceptive means are hearing and seeing. He *Glorified is He* shows His Favour on the human being who was dust mixed with water and then became clay and remain in that state for a long time during which he was not something spoken of. He *Glorified is He* has bestowed His Favour on this new creature by giving him/her some of His Attributes: The Hearing and Seeing. Had not He *Glorified is He* willed to give him/her the hearing and sight, s/he would have remained deaf and blind clay, not perceiving anything around him/her. S/he would have been a valueless thing which never becomes valuable. By giving Adam the hearing and sight, He *Glorified is He* has taught him all the names and made him able to hear and see. Thus, Adam and Eve realized each other's existence and from them all the human beings came into existence. This is the story of the man who was nothing spoken of.

By using the hearing and sight, the information is acquired and stored in the human being's mind. His/her means of perceiving knowledge are the hearing, sight, tasting, touching and smelling. They give knowledge to the one who was ignorant, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘It is Allah who has brought you out of your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing, and has given you hearing and sight and minds so that you might be thankful.*’* (*an-Nahl:* 78) In fact, the ear, the eye and all the organs are means of perception. Everyone has numerous faculties, be they perceptive or psychical ones. The perceptive faculties are that which perceive the sensuous matters, like the hearing, sight, smelling and tasting. All of these are means for sensuous perception by which the abstract notions are formed to become, in their turn, creeds. The means of perception receive the pieces information given by the sensuous world and then store them in the mind of the human being so that s/he behaves accordingly. The perceived information constitutes what s/he knows.

Allah *the Almighty* has given the human being the hearing and the sight and has not left them to be guided or misguided, to believe or disbelieve, or to know his/her Lord or not, as He *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَٰهُ ٱلسَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا ﴿٣﴾

We guided him to the right path, whether he was grateful or not [3] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 3)

The Arabic word *Al-Sabil* means the way and path. The Straight Path of Allah *Glorified is He* is to worship Him Alone. He *the Almighty* guides the people to that Straight Path, saying: ‘This is My Path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it —‘This is what He commands you to do, so that you may refrain from wrongdoing.’ (*al-An‘am:* 153)

As long as there is a path for every aim, then we should define that aim first. Defining the aim leads to clarifying its path before the person who follows it, to reach his/her aim. The Path of Allah *Glorified is He* is the Straight One. Any curved path lengthens the distance for the person, as the straight line is the shortest one to reach the destination. The word ‘Way’ and ‘Path’ are sensuous objects which we see and perceive, and He *Glorified is He* uses them to clarify the abstract creeds. When there is a cross road and you want to reach a certain destination, but deviated by one millimeter from the beginning of the road, you will go far away from that destination; the more you walk, the wider the distance becomes. He *Glorified is He* has only one Way of Guidance and whoever deviates from it will be the loser as He *the Almighty* says about him/her: '…We shall leave him on his chosen path and burn him in Hell.' (*an-Nisa':* 115) For this reason, 'going astray' means to take a path that does not lead to the aim and takes you far away from it.

The Guidance in this verse means guiding the human being to the path leading to the paradise. It is not the guidance of support as Allah *Glorified is He* says afterwards: '…whether he was grateful or not...' (*al-Insan:* 3). He *Glorified is He* has bestowed His Blessings on the human being by creating them out of nothing and preparing the universe to receive them. He *the Almighty* also prepared the means of provision that are beyond our control. All of these blessings deserve out gratefulness and thankfulness. Out of His Mercy upon us, He *Glorified is He* has made thanking Him simply done by uttering two words: *Al-Hamdu Lillah* (All Praise be to Allah). Even teaching us this formula is one of the manifestations of His Mercy, for if He had not specified the formula of praising Him, it would have been difficult for the people to find a suitable formula to praise Him for His Divine Perfection. Even if some people are eloquent and have the ability of expression, they will not be able to find the formula of praising, which suits the Supremacy of the All Giver Who deserves to be praised for both His Giving and Depriving. Also, His Existence and His Entity deserve our praising. Expressing one's gratitude to Him *Glorified is He* takes away his/her conceit and thus s/he cannot be deluded by the worldly means. Moreover, the servant of Allah *Glorified is He* should thank Him for the Blessings of teaching him/her and putting him/her to trial.

The believers knew that Allah *Glorified is He* deserves their thankfulness for His Blessings. He *Glorified is He* links between thankfulness and belief, saying: 'Why should He make you suffer torment if you are thankful and believe in Him?' (*an-Nisa':* 147) So what is the relation between thankfulness and belief? To answer this question, we should know first what Thankfulness means. It signifies expressing gratitude to the Giver by the one who received His Blessings. It is to say to someone who has done you a favour, 'Thank you'. As for belief, it is to have certitude that He *Glorified is He* is One God. He *the Almighty* shows the human being the Straight Path, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘We guided him to the right path, whether he was grateful or not.’ (*al-Insan:* 3) Thus, if the human being believes that He *Glorified is He* guides him/her to the Right Way, and so s/he believes in His Books and Messengers, then s/he has thanked Him *Glorified is He* for His Blessings. Thankfulness comes first and then belief follows as the former is a general gratefulness and the latter is a particular one. Thankfulness is relating to the blessings, while belief is relating to the Entity that gives the blessings. Thus, the human should believe in and thank the Giver of the Blessings.

If the people had understood that, they would have thanked the Prophets and Messengers for the Way of Guidance that they conveyed from Allah *Glorified is He* as it guides them to manage their worldly life perfectly and, more importantly, guides them to the paradise. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions disbelief as the opposite of Thankfulness, saying: ‘If you are thankful, I will give you more, but if you are thankless, My punishment is terrible indeed.’ (*Ibrahim:* 7) He *Glorified is He* wills to give the people the choice to thank Him or not; He has not coerced them to express gratitude to Him.

He *the Almighty* describes Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* saying: ‘…he was of the thankful servants.' (*al-Isra’:* 3) The Arabic word *Shakur* (Thankful) indicates hyperbola. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* does not use the word *Shakir* as it means thanking for only one time, but *Shakur* refers to the one who habitually and continuously thanks Him *Glorified is He*. As there are grateful people, there are also ungrateful ones. The Arabic word *Kafur* (ungrateful) also expresses hyperbola because such ungrateful people disbelieved and incited other people to disbelieve. Further, they always show ungratefulness.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّآ أَعۡتَدۡنَا لِلۡكَٰفِرِينَ سَلَٰسِلَاْ وَأَغۡلَٰلٗا وَسَعِيرًا ﴿٤﴾

We have prepared chains, iron collars, and blazing Fire for the disbelievers, but [4] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 4)

Allah *the Almighty* has already prepared the paradise and it is already existent. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said when he was talking about the paradise, ' The paradise was presented to me and I stretched my hand to pick some of its fruits.' So, it is already existent and is not under preparation. It is He *the Almighty* Who has prepared it with His Power and Omnipotence. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘We have prepared a Fire for the wrongdoers that will envelop them from all sides.’ (*al-Kahf:* 29) So, the matter has been previously settled as the Paradise and Hellfire are already prepared; they will be prepared in the future. This is the Preparation of the Omnipotent, Wise Lord. He has prepared the paradise to include all the believers and also prepared the hellfire to include all the disbelieving people. If some of the people believed and others disbelieved, the believers spared their room in the hellfire and the disbeliever spared their room in the paradise.

Allah *the Almighty* mentions some details about what He has prepared for the disbelievers, saying: ‘We have prepared chains, iron collars and blazing fire for the disbelievers.’ (*al-Insan:* 4) He *Glorified is He* clarifies here three means of punishing the disbelievers and the wrongdoers: the chains, iron collars and blazing fire. They will be tied up by chains in the hellfire and their hands will be tied to their necks. They will be driven to the hellfire with the chains in their hands and they will be tied up with iron collars.

The Arabic word *As-Salasil* (Chains) is the plural of *Silsila* which is a series of metal rings joined together. As for *Al-Aghlal*, it is the plural of *Ghil* which is the iron collar that brings the hands and the neck together to impede the movement. One side of the iron collar is tied to the hand and another one is tied to the neck to impede the movement of the hand as a kind of additional humiliation. As for *Al-Asfad* (fetters), it is the plural of *Safad*, as in Allah’s saying: ‘You [Prophet] will see the guilty on that Day, bound together in fetters.’ (*Ibrahim:* 49) It is the fetter that is put around the feet like the anklet. So, fetters will be put around their feet, and their hands and necks will be tied up with chains. Thus, the disbelievers will be punished by fetters, chains, shackles and iron collars in the blazing and burning Fire. *As-Sa'eer* is the name of the blazing fire that burns all what is thrown into it.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the opposite of disbelievers who are the believers in Allah, His Books and Messengers. He *Glorified is He* describes them as the righteous and mentions what He has prepared for them, saying:

إِنَّ ٱلْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِن كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا ٥

The righteous will have a drink mixed with *kafur* [5]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 5)

The righteous people are the opposite of the transgressors as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The good will live in bliss, [13] and the wicked will burn in the Fire. [14]’ (*al-Infitar:* 13-14) Just as Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the punishment of the wicked, He clarifies the happy destination and the reward of those who are pleased with their faith. Combining the two opposites increases the believer's happiness and the disbeliever's sorrow and grief. The righteous are the Prophets and the true believers who obey their Lord by doing the obligations and avoiding the prohibitions.

The reward of those righteous, pious believers is to have drinks mixed with *Kafur*, which is the name of a fountain in the paradise. In fact, paradise only shares the names of the things with the worldly life. Even if the fountain were really of camphor, it is not like the camphor of the worldly life; rather, it is a sweet one. The Arabic word *Al-Ka's* means a cup filled with a drink. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the cups and how it is filled with a drink mixed with *Kafur* without specifying the drink itself, as He says: ‘The righteous will have a drink mixed with kafur.’ (*al-Insan:* 5) Afterwards, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And they will be given a drink infused with ginger.’ (*al-Insan:* 17) Every cup mentioned in the Quran is that of wine, but the wine in the paradise will not intoxicate the minds and has no bad effects like the wine of this worldly life, as He *the Almighty* says about it: ‘…a delight for those who drink it.’ (*as-Saffat:* 46) It will be sweet like *Kafur* or bitter like ginger. A container of a drink only called *Ka's* (cup) when it is filled otherwise it is called a glass or pitcher.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ ٱللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا ﴿٦﴾

A spring for God's servants, which flows abundantly
at their wish [6] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 6)

Some scholars said that His saying: 'A spring for Allah's servants…' (*al-Insan:* 6) means that the righteous people drink from the spring of *Kafur* in the paradise. In the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin*, Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'A spring from which those brought near will drink.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 28) There is secret in using the Arabic preposition *Ba'* (By) instead of *Min* (From) as Allah *Glorified is He* could have said that His servants drink from, not by, that spring. In the previous verse, He *Glorified is He* says that the righteous people drink from a cup, but when He mentions the spring, He says that they drink by it. This could mean that they drink the wine mixed with *Kafur*, whether its substance or fragrance. Some other scholars said that *Ba'* is added to the object pronoun so the meaning is that the servants of Allah *Glorified is He* will drink 'from' that spring.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes those who drink from that spring mixed with *Kafur* as His servants, saying: '…a spring for Allah's servants…' (*al-Insan:* 6). So, who Are Allah's servants? They are those who submitted their choice and will to the Will of their Lord; they sacrificed their choices to achieve the obligation that He *the Almighty* wants from them. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* differentiates between the word *Al-'Ibad* (servants) and *Al-'Abid* (slaves), saying: 'The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, 'Peace'; [63] those who spend the night bowed down or standing, worshipping their Lord, [64] who plead, 'Our Lord, turn away from us the suffering of Hell, for it is a dreadful torment to suffer! [65]' (*al-Furqan:* 63-65)

In these verses, Allah *the Almighty* gives the descriptions of the believers and called them 'servants', but when He talks about all the human beings in general, He uses the word 'slaves'. There is a difference between the slaves and the servants as the former submit to Allah *Glorified is He* in any element of their lives and cannot enforce their choice against what He *Glorified is He* forcibly decrees on them. As for the servants, they are those who submit their right to choose and are satisfied with what He *Glorified is He* has commanded them to do or not to do. Thus, the slaves are subjected to Him *Glorified is He* in what He decrees on them, but the servants are those who are satisfied with what He *Glorified is He* decrees and their choice complies with what He *the Almighty* is pleased with. They willingly submit themselves to Him *Glorified is He,* while the slaves are subservient to Him forcibly.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘A spring for Allah's servants, which flows abundantly at their wish.’ (*al-Insan:* 6) This verse describes what the righteous people who drink from that spring do. They spring it out easily wherever they wish in their dwellings. Some narration state that this spring is in Messenger Muhammad's dwelling in the paradise and it springs out to the dwellings of the Prophets.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* describes His servants, saying:

يُوفُونَ بِٱلنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُۥ مُسْتَطِيرًا ﴿٧﴾

They fulfil their vows; they fear a day of
widespread woes[7] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 7)

The Arabic word *Al-Nadhr* (vow) means to obligate yourself to do some acts of worship that are beyond the obligatory ones prescribed by Allah *the Almighty*. For example, if you vowed to pray a certain number of units of prayer, then it is a vow to do something subcategorized under what He *Glorified is He* has legislated, given the fact that He *Glorified is He* has legislated prayer and made it obligatory five times a day. When you vow to do more than what is obligatory, this is what is called *Al-Nadhr*. It is a proof that the worshipper has loved and felt the sweetness of the worship. It proves that s/he almost recognizes the greatness of His Lord and that He *the Almighty* deserves to be worshipped by more than what He has obligated.

Allah *Glorified is He* shows His Mercy towards us through what He has obligated on us, for if He had obligated us to worship Him as He deserves, no one would have been able to fulfil this obligation. Therefore, when the believing servant vows to obey Allah, s/he obligates him/herself to do more than the obligatory acts of worship. You have the choice to take that vow or not, but if you take it, you should keep it, as it is you who obligated it on yourself. In this regard, the pious people say to the one who breaks his/her vow, 'Have you tried your Lord and found Him unworthy of your love to Him?' No one dares to do that because He *Glorified is He* deserves the strongest of our love. Thus, it is better for the person to think deeply before taking a vow.

Those righteous believers necessarily fulfil their vows that they have obliged themselves to do. The formula of the vow is to say, 'For the sake of Allah, I oblige myself to give charity, pray, fast, perform the minor or major pilgrimage or any other act of worship on condition that Allah, for example, heals my patient or that my absent relative returns.' But if s/he vowed to do a sin, s/he should not fulfil this vow. 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The one who vows to obey Allah should fulfil his vow.'(1) As fulfilling the vow is obligatory, the person should fulfil it on behalf of his father or mother if they died before fulfilling it. In this regard, Ibn 'Abbas narrated that Sa'd ibn 'Ubada asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about a vow that his mother took, but then died before fulfilling it. He ordered him to fulfil it on her behalf.(2)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They fulfil their vows; they fear a day of widespread woes.’ (*al-Insan:* 7) The believing servants of Allah fear this great Day and they firmly believe that it will come. As Allah *the Almighty* mentions the fear and sorrow of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment, He also mentions the fear of the believers. The difference is that the believers fear the Day of Judgment, while they are still in the worldly life, doing good deeds and fearing that He *the Almighty* will not accept their good deeds or their repentance from the sins. On the contrary, the disbelievers are heedless of the Hereafter and when they realize the reality of the punishment, they will be struck with panic and fear. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘You will see the evildoers fearful because of what they have done: punishment is bound to fall on them’ (*ash-Shura:* 22). They will be fearful when they see the punishment with their eyes, but the believers are fearful in the worldly life, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘When we were still with our families on earth we used to live in fear.’ (*at-Tur:* 22) The believers fear a Day of widespread woes that spread like the fire and the light of the day when it spread in the sky.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 24075; and Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2636.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 3506; Abu 'Uwana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 5831; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 5372 and 5375; Abu Ya'la, Musnad, Hadith no. 2383; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6959; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1638.*

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Neither the *Adhan* of Bilal nor the whiteness (of the pillar) of dawn should make you think that the Dawn has come. It is not the whiteness of the true dawn, but that of the false one which is vertical like a pillar. You can eat food till the streaks of whiteness spread like it.' The difference between the true and the false dawn is that the false one's whiteness appears in the horizon but then fades away. Then, the true dawn appears and spread in the horizon.

On the Day of Judgment, the fear will overwhelm the people of the heavens and earth. It spreads in the heavens which will be ripped apart. The stars will be scattered, the Angels will be in a panic, the sun and the moon will be shrouded in darkness, the mountains will be torn apart, the water will go down and everything on earth – including the mountains, the buildings and trees – will be destroyed. Thus, the woe of that Day will spread to include the heavens and earth.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيُطْعِمُونَ ٱلطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِۦ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا ﴿٨﴾

They give food to the poor, the orphan, and
the captive, though they love it themselves [8]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 8)

Thus, the servants of Allah *Glorified is He* used to fulfil their vows perfectly without any falling short and to give the food, though they love it themselves, to the poor, the orphan and the captive. Despite their love for his/her food, property and provision earned by the sweat of his/her brow, the righteous servant gives them in charity for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He*. He *Glorified is He* describes *Al-Birr* (Goodness), saying: 'Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage…' (*al-Baqara:* 177). This verse means that Goodness does not mean to dispute about changing the *Qibla;* there should be no problem with the matter of changing the *Qibla* to the direction of the *Ka'ba*, the Sacred House, the east or the west. The true Goodness is to believe in Allah, the Last Day, the Angels, the Scripture, and the Prophets; all of these are creedal issues.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* follows them by mentioning practical Commands related to people's life and the society they live in, saying: '…who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it.' (*al-Baqara:* 177) Giving wealth entails spending in many ways; it can be optional charity, prescribed alms or a good loan. The Arabic expression *'Ala Hubihi* (however much he cherishes it) can have many meanings. We can understand it to mean giving the wealth that s/he loves or that s/he gives it because s/he loves to give the part of the wealth he cherishes to apply the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'None of you will attain true piety unless you give out of what you cherish.' (*Al-'Imran:* 92) We can elevate the meaning to be giving away the wealth because s/he loves and is satisfied with giving away of his/her wealth, as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'None of you will attain true piety unless you give out of what you cherish.' (*Al-'Imran:* 92)

The servants of Allah *the Almighty* give food to the poor, the orphan and the captive. These are the three kinds of people that He *Glorified is He* mentions out of caring for them. This is due to the fact that they are the weakest kinds of people and need food and help more than others. As for the poor, s/he is not the one who does not possess anything at all to sustain his/her life, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'The boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea.' (*al-Kahf:* 79) He *the Almighty* tells us that the poor person has some possessions, but does not have all what suffices him/her. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* has prescribed a rightful share in the *zakat* for both the needy and the poor.

The Arabic word *miskeen* (the poor) refers to any needy person. The wayfarer, for example, is considered a needy person because he is a stranger and may not have a provision to sustain his life. In his country, he might have been rich, but the distance he travelled separated him from his property and possessions. Besides, his money could be stolen during his travel, and therefore, he needs people's help. Such a person becomes similar to the needy and the poor who deserve charity.

You should beware of saying that you have nothing to do with the needy. You should know that being in need is something circumstantial and may happen to you as well. So, you should not think you will always give the needy; rather, you should think you may be inflicted with a calamity that makes you in need of people's charity. Taking care of those who are weak and unable to work—who are not lazy and do not taking begging as a job —is the responsibility for believers as Allah *Glorified is He* makes the strong person responsible for and required to help the weak one.

The righteous also give food to an orphan who lost his father who was responsible for his maintenance and protection. He becomes broken-hearted because he lost his father and became without a helper. If members of a Muslim society take care of an orphan as his father, no one will be anxious about his children if he were to die and leave them. The care of the society for an orphan guarantees that his rights are protected. If an orphan is rich, some people will lust for his property as he is not strong enough to protect it. Furthermore, the social solidarity eliminates the grudge between members of a society and makes every father reassured about his children.

An orphan who possesses property should have an executor to manage his affairs. Allah *the Exalted* commands us to give of the wealth we love to orphans themselves and not to anyone related to them. This is because there could be some orphans who do not have property that necessitates guardianship. Therefore, to have the qualities of the righteous, we should give of our wealth to the orphans or to their executors to spend on them.

The matter of giving wealth to an orphan is not only related to his need for sustenance, for he also needs to be compensated through the religious solidarity for the loss of his father. This solidarity will prevent him from harboring a grudge against children whose fathers are still alive. When an orphan finds that all believers treat him like his father, he will experience the solidarity that compensates him for the lost fatherly kindness. Moreover, he will not give looks of hate to his peers whose fathers are still alive. Thus, solidarity eliminates the grudge and envy from his heart.

So, you should feed an orphan and preserve his property if it is entrusted to you. You should not consume it, for the one who consumes the property of an orphan is as if he fills his belly with fire. That is to say that what he has consumed will lead him to the fire. This punishment could happen in the worldly life because the one who consumes the properties of orphans could be inflicted with diseases in his belly that burn his bowels. As for the Day of Judgment, believers will see the traces of consuming the properties of orphans on their consumers, given that smoke will come out of their mouths.

Those who fear to die and leave helpless offspring should be benevolent to orphans. If an orphan is dealt with benevolently in a paternalistic and religious atmosphere, anyone of us will not be anxious about leaving his little child if he were to die. Furthermore, since he will realize that the society is full of goodness, he will receive Allah's Decree, namely death with a satisfied heart and without any anxiety. Hence, He *the Most High* says: 'Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if they were to die, show the same concern [for orphans]; let them be mindful of Allah and speak out for justice.' (*an-Nisa':* 9)

Thus, if one sees the members of the society taking care of other people's orphans, he will be reassured that they will take care of his children if he were to die. Such a person will not preoccupy himself with thinking about the matter of death. On the other hand, if someone sees a neglected orphan, he will cling to the means of life and desire to bring the whole worldly pleasures to his child. So, one should work for the sake of his children by giving for the sake of Allah *the Exalted* what he wants to save for them, for the Creator is more worthy of trust than the created beings.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions that righteous people give food to the captive. The captive's movement is restricted after being taken captive in a war which entails fighting and confronting the enemy. In a battle, each one of the two camps wants to kill his enemy. It is as though Allah *Glorified is He* wants to protect the people from the truculence of their souls during the fight. This is why He *the Most High* commands believers to take their enemies captives and not to kill them except in the case of necessity. This is in the interest of believers because they will take the ransom from captives. Moreover, this is one of the His merciful Legislations, for if taking captives had not been permissible, each of the two fighters would have had to kill his enemy in the battle. Therefore, Allah *Glorified is He* commands believers to take captives unless their existence constitutes a danger to a believers' life.

Anyone who criticizes Islam for the issue of the captives should know that the one taken captive in a battle could have been killed after being seized by believers if the Divine Legislation had not intervened to make a captive a slave to a believer. It prevented bloodshed and achieved a benefit for a believer when the family of a captive pays his ransom or when the captive serves him. Allah *Glorified is He* prevented believers from shedding the blood of captives or humiliating them. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Your slaves are your brothers. Allah has placed them under your authority. He who has his brother under him should feed him from whatever he eats, dress him with whatever he wears and do not burden them (assign burdensome task to them) beyond their capacity, and if you burden them. Then help them.'(1) How kindly Islam deals with the captive! It prevented shedding his blood, honored him as a brother, respected his humanity and treated him well. Furthermore, Islam opened the doors of releasing a captive. If there is only one way for having slaves in Islam, there are many ways for freeing them. For example, expiation for one's sins is one way of freeing slaves. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ ٱللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنكُمْ جَزَآءً وَلَا شُكُورًا ﴿٩﴾

saying, 'We feed you for the sake of God alone:
We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you [9]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 9)

Those who give food to the poor, the orphans and the captives did not say, 'We feed you for the sake of Allah alone. We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you' (*al-Insan:* 9) when they did such charitable acts. Rather, Allah *the Exalted* knows what is in their hearts, so He praises them for their sincerity and good intentions. That is why He *the Most High* mentions their good deeds.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 530; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 1661; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 21432; and Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Adab, Hadith no. 52.*

Righteous people have given the food while knowing that those who received such charity can neither recompense nor thank them, for they will not be able to repay what they have given them. It is said that the verse under discussion was revealed in reference to a man from *Al-'Ansar* called Abu Ad-Dehdah. He was fasting on one day and when the time of breakfast came, a poor person, an orphan and a captive came to him. Thereupon, he fed them three loaves and only one loaf was left for him and his household.

Giving food should be for the sake of pleasing Allah *Glorified is He*. For this reason, we should put the sincerity first before doing any action. Two people may do the same action before people, yet one of them is rewarded while the other is punished, given the fact that what is important is to do the action sincerely for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He*. Someone may say, 'Sincerity lies in the heart, and as long as the person does not hurt anyone or commit evil deeds, it is not necessary for him to pray.' We reply, 'The matter is not all about intentions, for actions are necessary as well. In this connection, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Actions are but by intentions.'(1) Thus, the good intentions should be accompanied by righteous actions.

The benefit of one's intention is confined to him, whereas the benefit of his good actions extends to people. Let us offer an example to illustrate this point; if you intend to give alms and you actually do so, the poor will benefit from your money. However, if you do not have the intention to do something good, yet you do it for seeking reputation or for pleasing someone, the poor will benefit from your money, but you will not get the reward of giving alms. Allah *the Almighty* wants your action to be accompanied by sincere intention. A good action is an activity in life, and intention is the criterion for being given and deprived of the reward thereof.

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(1) *This hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1; Al-Bayhaqi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 181 and 1013; and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4227.*

Sincerity means to purify the creedal issues and the outward actions from what corrupts and renders them insincere and imperfect. Sincerity is an inward action. However hard the person tries to be sincere in his actions and do them for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* he should not be reassured that they will not be stained with showing off and reputation. Prophet Muhammad, the infallible, said, 'O Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for every action I have done for Your sake, but something else mixed with it.'(1) An accepted good deed is what is done sincerely for the sake of Allah *the Exalted* and its reward is in proportion to the degree of sincerity.

Righteous people seek neither recompense nor thanks from those whom they have given food. The Arabic word *Al-Mujaza* is the recompense for what they have given, whereas *Ash-Shukr* (thanks) means to be praised for that. Thus, a righteous people seek neither the need's recompense in the worldly life nor their reward in the Hereafter. *Ash-Shukur* (thanks) is an infinitive like *Al-Qu'ud* (sitting), *Ad-Dukhul* (entering) and *Al-Khuruj* (getting out). Thus, the righteous people seek neither the needy's recompense nor their thanks to them before the people.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِن رَّبِّنَا يَوۡمًا عَبُوسًا قَمۡطَرِيرًا ﴿١٠﴾

We fear the Day of our Lord — a woefully grim Day [10] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 10)

Thus, righteous servants give food to a poor person, an orphan and a captive for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* and not to be recompensed, praised or thanked. In fact, they only do that for Allah's Pleasure and fearing a Day of woeful grim.

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(1) *Ibn 'Umar narrated that Prophet Muhammad used to say to them, 'O, my Companions, what prevents you from having your sins forgiven by uttering simple words?' They asked, 'O, Messenger of Allah, what are these words?' He replied, 'Say like the words of my brother, Al-Khidr.' We asked, 'What did he say?' He replied, 'He used to say, "O, Allah, I seek Your Forgiveness for the sin from which I repented to You, but I then returned to it. I also seek Your Forgiveness for what I have dedicated to You, but I did not fulfill it."' See Ad-Daylami, Kanz Al-'Umal, 2/701.*

On that Day, disbelievers will frown and scowl due to the hardship they suffer; they will be neither happy nor delighted. Their faces will be darkened as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the Day of Resurrection, you [Prophet] will see those who told lies against Allah with darkened faces. Is there not ample punishment for the arrogant in Hell?' (*az-Zumar:* 60) In addition to their blackened faces, disbelievers will frown out of anger. Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'On that Day, a disbeliever will frown until something like the pitch flows (1) from between his eyes.' Frowning can be attributed to the Day itself; it will frown like the man because it is a grim and pitch dark Day. Allah *Glorified is He* describes it according to the hardship that people suffer.

So, righteous people fear the punishment on a Day when the faces of disbelievers will frown because of its hardship and prolonged calamities. The Arabic word *Al-Qamtarir* (distressfulness) refers to what is hard and difficult. Therefore, the calamities of disbelievers on that Day will be very difficult and lingering. For them, it is a long woeful Day. They will show their frowns with their lips, forehead and eyebrows.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَوَقَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّىٰهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا ١١

So God will save them from the woes of that
Day, give them radiance and gladness [11]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 11)

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* will save righteous people from the Day of woeful grim about which they are fearful and anxious. He *the Most High* will keep them safe from its difficulty and guard them against its woes. They used to invoke Him *the Almighty* to save them from the punishment, the woe, the long standing and the Account of that Day. They said in the worldly life, 'Our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose—You are far above that!—so protect us from the torment of the Fire.' (*Al-'Imran:* 191) They invoked Him to deliver them from the torment of the fire and when they endured patiently, gave alms, devoted themselves to the worship and spent in His Way, they deserved to be safeguarded from that fire and from a woefully grim Day.

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(1) *See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 23/547; Ath-Tha'libi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 10/97; and Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 19/125.*

The demonstrative pronoun 'that' in the verse in question refers to the Day mentioned in two previous verses where Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'They fulfil their vows; they fear a day of widespread woes' (*al-Insan:* 7), and 'We fear the Day of our Lord—a woefully grim Day.' (*al-Insan:* 10) If we ponder on the verse under discussion, we find that the word 'Day' in employed the singular form. So, how long is that Day? He *the Most High* provides the answer, by saying: 'By which the angels and the Spirit ascend to Him, on a Day whose length is fifty thousand years.' (*al-Ma'arij:* 4) He *the Almighty* is the Creator of time, so He can create a day whose span is one hour or twenty-four hours like the days of our worldly life. Furthermore, He can create a day whose span is one thousand, fifty thousand and one million years, as all of that is subjected to His Will.

The times are numerous and vary according to the reckoning and the planets. Thus, in one verse Allah *Glorified is He* states that the Day of Judgment is one thousand years: 'He runs everything, from the heavens to the earth, and everything will ascend to Him in the end, on a Day that will measure a thousand years in your reckoning.' (*as-Sajda:* 5); or it is fifty thousand years: 'By which the angels and the Spirit ascend to Him, on a Day whose length is fifty thousand years.' (*al-Ma'arij:* 4) Therefore, that Day is different from our days as He *the Almighty* measures the days of this worldly life and the Day of the Hereafter differently.

The Day on which the people will be judged is long and difficult, but Allah *Glorified is He* will save the righteous people from that woeful, difficult Day and will give them radiance and gladness, a fact which is ever so clear in His saying: 'So Allah will save them from the woes of that Day, give them radiance and gladness.' (*al-Insan:* 11)

The Arabic word *laqqahum* (give them) originally entails an encounter between two people, but it is used metaphorically to give the meaning of receiving good or evil. The righteous will be given radiance in their faces and gladness in their hearts. Instead of the frown and sadness of the transgressors, Allah *the Almighty* will give them radiance and gladness. Thus, radiance will be in the face of the righteous, while the faces of disbelievers will be sad and despairing, a fact which is quite clear in His saying: 'On that Day there will be radiant faces.' (*al-Qiyama:* 22), and 'on that Day there will be the sad and despairing faces.' (*al-Qiyama:* 24)

As a matter of fact, what is inside the soul appears on the body. A black man, for example, may have a radiant face which manifests gladness, illumination, brightness and charisma. On the contrary, a man may have a white face, yet his soul is dark. Gladness means the satisfaction of the heart when the faculties are satisfied and the soul is peaceful. In fact, one's reactions and feelings appear on his face. So, if he is sad, the frown and the signs of sadness appear on his face. Likewise, if he feels happy, the gladness and happiness appear on his face. So, the face reflects the sentiments of the soul whether they are stemming from happiness, gladness and brightness or stemming from unhappiness, resulting in a frown and scowl. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَجَزَىٰهُم بِمَا صَبَرُوا۟ جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا ﴿١٢﴾

And reward them, for their steadfastness,
with a Garden and silken robes [12]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 12)

The righteous will receive their reward from Allah *the Most High* with a Garden and silken robes. Therefore, the subject of the Arabic verb *jaza* (to reward) is Allah *the Almighty*. He rewards them for their steadfastness in obedience and keeping away from disobedience. Thus, they are rewarded with a Garden to dwell in and silken robes to wear and spread out.

When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked about steadfastness, he replied, 'Steadfastness is of four kinds: steadfastness at the first stroke of a calamity, steadfastness in regard to performing an obligatory act, steadfastness in regard to avoiding a prohibition of Allah and steadfastness in regard to an affliction.'(1)

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(1) *See Ath-Tha'bibi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 10/97; Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 19/136; and Az-Zuhayli, At-Tafsir Al-Munir, 29/293.*

Allah *Glorified is He* rewards them with a Garden which has all what they desire of food and drinks that their eyes have never seen and their ears have never heard. He *the Most High* informs us about the drinks of the people of the paradise by saying: 'The righteous will have a drink mixed with *kafur*.' (*al-Insan:* 5) He *the Almighty* mentions afterwards another mixed drink, saying: 'And they will be given a drink infused with ginger.' (*al-Insan:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions one kind of the robes of the people of the Garden, namely silken robes. He *the Almighty* particularly mentions silken robes because He talks about their steadfastness, which includes their steadfastness regarding prohibitions. One of these prohibitions is wearing the silken robes with regard to the Muslim men who follow Prophet Muhammad's saying, 'Whoever wears silk (clothes) in this life will not wear them in the Hereafter.' Thus, steadfastness in abstaining from wearing silken robes in the worldly life is rewarded with wearing them in paradise.

Wearing silken clothes manifests the pleasure and the luxurious life that the dwellers of paradise lead, given that silk is the smoothest kind of textiles. In the chapter of *al-Hajj*, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… there they will have silken garments ...' (*al-Hajj:* 23). They did not wear the silk clothes in this worldly life, so they wear it in the Hereafter. This is because they adhered to the Limits that Allah *Glorified is He* has set and to the order of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said, 'Do not drink in silver or gold utensils, and do not eat in plates of such metals, for such things are for them (disbelievers) in this worldly life and for you in the Hereafter.'(1) Since righteous believers did not wear silk in this worldly life, they were rewarded with silken robes in paradise.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Hudhayfa ibn Al-Yaman Allah be pleased with him. See Abu 'Uwana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 8446; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5426; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2067 and 2069.*

مُّتَّكِـِٔينَ فِيهَا عَلَى ٱلۡأَرَآئِكِۖ لَا يَرَوۡنَ فِيهَا شَمۡسٗا وَلَا زَمۡهَرِيرٗا ﴿١٣﴾

They will sit on couches, feeling neither scorching heat nor biting cold [13] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 13)

The Arabic word *Al-'Ittika'* means to sit relaxingly. As for the couches, they are the beds adorned with some ornaments like, for instance, the mosquito net. In order to understand the meaning *Al-'Ittika'* and how it indicates luxury and pleasure, we should consider the case of someone who stands for a long time without rest. You will see him disturbed and bothered. For this reason, sitting on couches is one of the manifestations of luxury and pleasure in both this worldly life and the Hereafter, as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* regarding Zulaykha, the governor's wife: 'She prepared a banquet for them.' (*Yusuf:* 13). Thus, sitting on couches is one of the means of relaxation.

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the couches of the people of paradise in another verse by saying: 'So today [the Day of Judgment] believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around. Have disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-36) Believers will sit and rest on the couches of paradise while waiting to see the destination of disbelievers. They will ask, 'Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 35) In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* describes how they are occupied by saying: 'The people of paradise today are happily occupied—they and their spouses—seated on couches in the shade. There they have fruit and whatever they ask for. "Peace", a word from the Lord of Mercy.' (*Ya Sin:* 55-58) This is the pleasure that the Lord of Might has promised the pious for their steadfastness. So, the Arabic word *Al-'Areeka* refers to a bed located in a tent and covered with clothes brocaded with pearls and rubies. Therefore, the righteous will be rewarded with a Garden that contains their food and drinks. Furthermore, they will wear the smoothest, silken robes. Moreover, they will have high tents with curtains inside which they sit on couches.

The bliss of paradise is not only confined to the aforementioned pleasures as they will also feel neither scorching heat nor biting cold. It is Allah *Glorified is He* Who has prepared their homes so that they live luxuriously, feeling neither heat nor cold. They will not feel a scorching sun whose heat hurts them and makes them sweat. Therefore, they will be neither harmed by the heat of the sun nor the biting cold which would force them to leave their couches to enter their homes. Rather, they will be sitting on such couches without being bothered by anything.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will sit on couches, feeling neither scorching heat nor biting cold.' (*al-Insan:* 13) The one who ponders on this verse finds something wonderful. Does feeling no scorching sun mean that there is no sun at all in paradise? Or is there a sun whose heat does not hurt whoever exposes himself to it? Some scholars said that paradise is illuminated without a sun or a moon so they interpreted the word *Zamharira* as referring to the moon and so did Az-Zamakhshari. The verse can either mean that they will not feel a scorching sun or that they will have no suns at all, as paradise is self-illuminated and needs neither a sun nor a moon that used to illuminate the worldly life.

When we put this verse side by side with Allah's saying in another verse, 'But the companions in the Garden will have a better home on that Day and a fairer place to rest,' (*al-Furqan:* 24) we should ask, 'How is there a *qaylola* (resting time) in paradise, while there is no heat, cold or moon?' The Arabic word *Al-Maqil* is the time of resting when the weather is very hot. Thus, how could there be a resting time in paradise, while there is no heat? We reply to this question by stating that the Arabic word *Al-Qayloola* means the time of rest as Allah *Glorified is He* has made it one of the times for which the permission to come in must be sought. He *the Most High* says: '… and when you lay your garments aside in the midday heat …' (*an-Nur:* 58). So, the children are commanded to ask for permission at that time because it is one of the times of privacy, resting and relaxation. It is a special time when you lay your garments and free yourself from formalities.

Regarding paradise, there is neither scorching heat nor biting cold. Its shady branches spread above its people. For this reason.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَدَانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلَالُهَا وَذُلِّلَتْ قُطُوفُهَا تَذْلِيلًا ﴿١٤﴾

With shady [branches] spread above them and clusters of fruit hanging close at hand [14]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 14)

Allah *Glorified is He* rewards believers for their steadfastness with a Garden whose shades spread over them. They will feel neither scorching heat nor biting cold. The branches of the trees of paradise are so close to their people that their shades cover them. This proves that there is a sun in paradise which only illuminates it, as He removes its heat so that no one in paradise feels it.

The Arabic word *Az-Zhill* (shade) originally means to be covered from the sun. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… We shall admit them into cool refreshing shade.' (*an-Nisa':* 57) Therefore, the heat and the hot simooms cannot penetrate that shade which protects from both heat and winds. This means that the trees of the Garden have piled up branches that no heat or simooms can pass through.

The one who reflects on this verse will realize the meaning of the previous verse where Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will sit on couches, feeling neither scorching heat nor biting cold.' (*al-Insan:* 13) This verse made some scholars maintain that there is no sun or moon in paradise. The one who reflects on these two verses and puts them side by side with the saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'We shall admit them into cool refreshing shade' (*an-Nisa':* 57), will realize that the people of paradise will neither see the sun nor feel its effect. They will enjoy the cool refreshing shade of the trees' branches and leaves that cover them from the sun as if it is not existent. The cool refreshing shade does not leave a space or a hole through which hot or cold air can pass to the one who sits under it.

The shady trees of paradise do not only shade from the sun, but they are also fruitful. So, they do not force the one sitting on the couches to exert any effort to get fruits from other trees. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '… clusters of fruit hanging close at hand.' (*al-Insan:* 13) He *the Almighty* wants to relieve His believing servant who was steadfast in his faith in the worldly life in spite of all the hardships and the temptation to commit sins.

Besides, He wants to give rest to him for his steadfastness in obedience and refraining from disobedience. Thus, the servant will receive a doubled reward.

Even after mentioning all these kinds of pleasure in the previous verses, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions another kind of pleasure appreciated by anyone thinks deeply about it. He makes fruit closer to a believer so that he does not feel tired while trying to get them, as He *the Almighty* says: 'With clustered fruit within his reach' (*al-Haqqa:* 23) and 'Clusters of fruit hanging close at hand.' (*al-Insan:* 13) These verses mean that the clusters of fruit hang near them. The fruit will descend to wherever a believer is, whether he is standing or sitting, as the fruit is at hand. Furthermore, if he were lying, the clusters of fruit will get closer to him so that he can eat at any time or position. The Arabic word *Al-Edna'* (closeness) means to make something closer to another, as in the verse where He *the Almighty* describes of the fruit of paradise by saying: 'With clustered fruit within his reach.' (*al-Haqqa:* 23) Thus, the fruits are closer to the people of paradise, and they can easily pick them.

Allah *the Almighty* mentions that the closeness is confined to the shades of the trees, while the subjecting is related to the clusters of fruit as if they are subservient to a believer by saying, 'Pick us.' It is as though he lives between the fruit and finds them at hand at all times. It is worth mentioning that the fragrance of these fruits is incomparable with that of the worldly life.

There is another meaning we can comprehend from the word *dhullilat* (to be subjected); it is as if the fruit gets closer and hang in subjection, waiting for the moment when a believer stretches his hand to pick them. Allah *the Exalted* subjects the fruit to His believing servant as if He says to them, 'You are specially prepared for My servant.' Thus, they keep hanging in subjection, waiting for the one who believed in Him and strove in His Way to pick them. Therefore, paradise as well as its fruit longs for believers.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* directs our attention to another kind of pleasure in paradise by saying:

وَيُطَافُ عَلَيْهِم بِـَٔانِيَةٍ مِّن فِضَّةٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ كَانَتْ قَوَارِيرَا۠ (١٥)
قَوَارِيرَا۠ مِن فِضَّةٍ قَدَّرُوهَا تَقْدِيرًا (١٦)

**They will be served with silver plates [15]
and gleaming silver goblets according to their
fancy [16] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 15 - 16)**

These verses mention other pleasures and gratifications of paradise. Allah *the Almighty* will not abandon the believers; rather, He *the Almighty* provides them with everlasting youths to serve them with silver plates and goblets. They are filled with drinks that delight the eyes, the tongues and the mouths. The vessels in which the drinks are served are goblets and cups without handles to hold them with because believers will not need them. A person in this worldly life needs the handle to avoid the heat of the hot drinks. In paradise, nevertheless, they will not find what bothers them or anything to take precaution against. Therefore, goblets and cups are without handles in paradise.

Interestingly, these goblets gather between two qualities; they are made of silver, yet they are as pure as glass that one can see the drink in the goblet if it is far away from him. So, while the goblets of the worldly life are made of glass, which is made of sand, the goblets of paradise are made of silver. However, they are as pure as glass, and this is why one should not fear that they will break or harm him. Thus, the jugs and the goblets are pure and transparent even though they are made of silver. However, is there a difference between the jugs and the goblets? We say, 'Yes, the jugs are large containers of the drinks which are poured into the goblets.' Allah *Glorified is He* makes a distinction between them by saying: 'They will be served with silver jugs and gleaming silver goblets according to their fancy.' (*al-Insan:* 15-16)

However, does this mean that the jugs are made of silver so they are not transparent, while the goblets are as pure and transparent as glass through which one can see the drink inside them? This is something possible, and accordingly, only the goblets are similar to glass in its transparency even though they are made of silver. If we reflected on that matter, we will realize a beautiful meaning. When one sees the jug which is not transparent, he will long to know what kind of drink it contains and when it is poured into the transparent goblet, he will be much happier. Even the structure of these verses is exciting as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will be served with silver plates and gleaming silver goblets according to their fancy.' (*al-Insan:* 15-16) Thus, one will be much surprised about goblets of glass made of silver and not of sand.

Furthermore, one will also wonder that those who pour the drink in his own goblet will pour an amount exactly in proportion to what he needs to quench his thirst. The drink in the goblet will neither be less than one's need, so he would not ask for more, nor will it be more than his need so that he would be puzzled where to put the remnants of the drink. How did the one who pour the drink know exactly one's need? Did they measure the goblets or the drinks in the goblets? If they measured the goblets, this means that everyone has a special goblet or goblets according to what quenches his thirst. However, if the drinks are measured, this means that they will be poured into the goblet in proportion to what quenches one's thirst and satisfy his need. Interestingly, the one who pours the drink knows exactly the measure that quenches the thirst of everyone in paradise. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* spoke the truth when he narrated in a Sacred Hadith that the Lord of Might said, 'I have prepared for My pious worshipers such things as no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of and nobody has ever thought of.'(1)

So, what are the kinds of drink that the jugs and the goblets contain? Allah *Glorified is He* provides the answer in the following verses by saying:

وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنجَبِيلًا ﴿١٧﴾ عَيْنًا فِيهَا تُسَمَّىٰ سَلْسَبِيلًا ﴿١٨﴾

And they will be given a drink infused with ginger [17]
from a spring called *Salsabil* [18]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 17-18)

We notice that Allah *the Almighty* also uses the passive voice in this verse. He *the Most High* says in a previous verse that the fruits will be made near to the dwellers of the paradise, while He could have said that He made the fruits near to them. This is to say that He could have used the active voice instead of the passive one. He also says: 'They will be served with silver plates' (*al-Insan:* 15); 'And they will be given a drink ...' (*al-Insan:* 17). In the verse under discussion, He *the Almighty* could have used the active voice saying that He gives them a drink. However, He wants to say to the human being by whose name this chapter is titled that paradise is different from the worldly life in which he has endured patiently its sufferings and hardships. The worldly life was tiring for him because it confronted him for his steadfastness in belief and obedience to Allah *Glorified is He*. So, He has prepared paradise to serve such a human being and subjected it completely to do what he desires even before he asks for it. Thus, the good human being should not be concerned about or grieve for what he suffers in this worldly life as the outcome is for the righteous.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3244; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2824.*

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the human being according to his desires and hopes. If he desires an eternal life of pleasure, he should only believe in and obey Him and be steadfast in obedience and in refraining from disobedience. Accordingly, He *the Most High* will reward him for his steadfastness with a blissful life in paradise in which everything obeys his commands.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'They will be given a drink infused with ginger.' (*al-Insan:* 17) Thus, the people of paradise will not prepare what they desire by themselves; rather, the drinks will be prepared and given to them without any intervention on their part. In this verse, it is not important to know the one who serves the drinks to them but to know what they are drinking. For this reason, He *the Almighty* uses the passive voice by saying: 'They will be given a drink infused with ginger.' (*al-Insan:* 17)

They will be given a drink infused with ginger. Any goblet in the Quran refers to that of wine. However, it is not like the wine in this worldly life which intoxicates the minds and makes the person unconscious about what he is doing. The wine in the Hereafter will be infused with many things, and this verse mentions that it is infused with ginger. Another verse in this chapter states that it is mixed with *Kafur*: 'The righteous will have a drink mixed with *kafur*.' (*al-Insan:* 5) The tastes of these drinks in paradise are different, and the flavours are numerous even if the drink is the same. The wine will be infused with only little ginger because everyone knows the bitterness of ginger in this worldly life. However, ginger in the Hereafter is different.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'from a spring called *Salsabil*.' (*al-Insan:* 18) The drink will be from a spring in paradise called *Salsabil*. This drink will be infused with ginger. Ibn Al-A'rabi said, 'I did not hear the word *Salsabil* except in the Quran. It is a spring from which this drink easily spurts, and it will flow in a riverbed without banks.' The word *As-Salsabil* means the good taste and delicious flavour. Its drink moves smoothly and easily to the pharynx, and both the pharynx and the tongue will find its taste sweet. The sweet water of this spring will easily flow to believers' perpetual Gardens. Thus, the word *Salsabil* could be the name of that spring or a description of its water. Some scholars maintained that the word *Salsabil* is not one word; rather, it is a sentence consisted of two words: *sal* (ask) and *sabil* (way). The first word *sal* is an imperative means to ask. The subject of the verb is implicit and it could be the pronoun 'you' or Muhammad. The second word *sabil* is the object.

وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وِلۡدَٰنٞ مُّخَلَّدُونَ إِذَا رَأَيۡتَهُمۡ حَسِبۡتَهُمۡ لُؤۡلُؤٗا مَّنثُورٗا ١٩

Everlasting youths will attend them — if you could see them, you would think they were scattered pearls [19] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 19)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the active voice by saying: 'Everlasting youths will attend them ...' (*al-Insan:* 19). In a previous verse, He *the Almighty* tells us about the drinks that will be served for the righteous people, but here He tells us those who serve and attend them with the jugs by saying: 'Everlasting youths will attend them ...' (*al-Insan:* 19). These everlasting youths never age or grow old, for they will remain in the same state without changing or aging. They all have the same age. We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says they are *wildan* (young boys), but He says in another verse: 'The Day [of Judgment] will turn children’s hair grey.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 17) It is known that going grey due to the calamities of the Day of Judgment will not only inflict young boys but also young girls. The Arabic word *Al-Wildan* refers to those who are close to the time of their delivery, namely the one who was born recently. This word includes boys and girls, a male and a female.

Likewise, in the verses discussing the rules of inheritance, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Parents inherit a sixth each if the deceased leaves children; if he leaves no children and his parents are his sole heirs, his mother has a third.' (*an-Nisa':* 11) Although the meaning of 'youths' may include a male and a female, another verse limits its meaning to the boys: 'Devoted boys like hidden pearls wait on them.' (*at-Tur:* 24) Therefore, the word 'youths' in the verse under discussion refers only to boys, given that only the boy is called *'ghulam'.*

Allah *Glorified is He* describes these youths as everlasting even though immortality is not a special quality for them as all the people of paradise are immortal, and they neither go grey nor age. For this reason, some exegetes said that *mukhalladun* in His saying: 'Everlasting youths will attend them ...' (*al-Insan:* 19) means that they wear earrings or wristlets as a manifestation of pleasure and luxury. The Arab people call the earing which is worn in the ears *Qirt or kildah* (earing). So, according to this interpretation, He says that these youths are wearing earrings.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '… if you could see them [the youths], you would think they were scattered pearls.' (*al-Insan:* 19) This verse is one of the wonders of the Quran. The scattered pearls are the hidden pearls with which Allah *Glorified is He* describes the boys, saying: 'Devoted boys like hidden pearls wait on them.' (*at-Tur:* 17) The hidden pearls are those concealed and preserved in a certain place. Allah *the Exalted* even describes the beautiful-eyed maidens in paradise as 'Beautiful companions like hidden pearls.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 22-23) They are like the pearls preserved in the seashell so no one can take them. In this regard, Ibn Jubayr said, 'Nothing but the beautiful, expensive and precious things are preserved, hidden and saved.' That is why the pearls are preserved and not touch by any trifler.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'Devoted boys like hidden pearls wait on them' (*at-Tur:* 17), and 'Everlasting youths will attend them ...' (*al-Insan:* 19) emphasizes the fact that the boys serving the people of paradise are exclusive to them. They do not generally serve everyone there. Thus, every one of the people of paradise has serving boys exclusive to him. Besides, there are boys who generally serve food and drinks.

If we understand this matter, we can realize the difference between the boys mentioned in the chapter of *at-Tur* and the youths mentioned in the chapter of *al-Insan*. In the chapter of *at-Tur*, Allah *the Almighty* describes them by saying: 'Like hidden pearls.' (*at-Tur:* 24). However, here in the chapter of *al-Insan*, He says: 'If you could see them, you would think they were scattered pearls.' (*al-Insan:* 19) The scattered pearls shine everywhere as if these youths are serving generally, so they are scattered everywhere. The verse of the chapter of *at-Tur* gives a familial atmosphere for those youths, and that is why they are hidden and preserved. He *the Most High* says: 'They are comfortably seated on couches arranged in rows; ‘We pair them with beautiful-eyed maidens. We unite believers with their offspring who followed them in faith.’(*at-Tur:* 20-21) As long as He mentions the beautiful-eyed maidens and that the offspring of believers will follow them, then it is a familial atmosphere that requires private boys for each family. The matter here in the chapter of *al-Insan*, however, is different. The verses are talking about the public gatherings of believers where boys will be waiting on in a general manner like the endlessly scattered pearls. For this reason, they are not exclusive to anyone.

You can see the verses from another angle; there is no discrepancy between the hidden and the scattered pearls. We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says in the verse under discussion: 'If you could see them, you would think they were scattered pearls.' (*al-Insan:* 19) According to another interpretation, it is as if He *the Almighty* commands you to see the view of the people of paradise while they are enjoying its pleasures. One would see believers sitting and resting on their couches in high tents. Furthermore, he would see them living under shady trees with fruits hanging near, from which they eat as they desire. A believer will have his offspring and beautiful-eyed maidens with him. Furthermore, boys or youths will wait on him with kinds of drinks and food. If you could look at these high tents, which are exclusive to believers, you will imagine that these youths who are waiting on them are like the scattered, shining pearls. One would see their shining, brightness and illumination while each one, in reality, is hidden in the tent, serving one of the believers. So, He *the Almighty* says: 'If you could see them, you would think they were scattered pearls.' (*al-Insan:* 19) In reality, they are hidden pearls.

One may ask, 'Why does Allah *Glorified is He* especially mention pearls.' This is because the pearl is precious and clear like the rubies and corals in their brightness and preciousness. Since pearls have a white colour, He *the Most High* describes these youths and boys as pearls for the whiteness of their faces.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٢٠﴾

And if you were to look around, you would see bliss and great wealth [20] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 20)

As a matter of fact, the pleasure in this worldly life is proportional to the abilities of the people. On the contrary, the pleasure in the Hereafter is proportional to the Omnipotence of Allah *Glorified is He*. In other words, the measures in this life are different from those in the life of the Hereafter. In this worldly life, one cannot see Allah *the Exalted* with his constitution and body. In the Hereafter, however, one's constitution and body will make it possible for him to see Allah *the Almighty*. This is the climax of pleasure in the Hereafter. In this worldly life, you are living in the traces of Allah's Omnipotence, but in the Hereafter you will enjoy seeing Him.

There are many kinds of pleasures and gratifications in this worldly life, but they are limited and come to an end as a person will not also live forever to enjoy them. His potentialities to enjoy the worldly pleasures are limited. By contrast, the potentialities of the pleasure of the Hereafter are proportional to the Omnipotence of the Creator Who provides by His absolute Power and vast Mercy. The pleasure in the Hereafter is endless; no one can prevent or stop. On one hand, the pleasure of the worldly life is imperfect as the changing circumstances of this life will inevitably disturb a person. On the other hand, the reward of those believing in Allah *Glorified is He* is the everlasting pleasure and the great reward.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Their Lord gives them the good news of His Mercy and Pleasure, Gardens where they will have lasting bliss.' (*at-Tawba:* 21) *Ar-Ridwan* (Pleasure) is a reward greater than any other bliss the people of paradise will have. However, why is the 'lasting bliss' mentioned after the Gardens? Does the bliss not exist in the Gardens? The Garden was only brought into existence to be the blissful reward of a human being. Its pleasure is eternal and everlasting, so it does not come to an end. Furthermore, one will not stop enjoying that pleasure by perishing or death. It is as if the bliss in paradise is greater than one's ability. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And if you were to look around, you would see bliss and great wealth.' (*al-Insan:* 20) This means that if you were to see what is there in paradise, you would see bliss and great wealth.

Arabs sometimes omit the relative pronouns like 'which', 'that', 'who' and 'what' and only mention their relative clauses. The saying of Allah *Glorified is He* 'This is where you and I part company' (*al-Kahf:* 78), is a case in point. This verse means that this is the departure which is between them. Another illustrative example is His saying: 'All the bonds between you have been severed.' (*al-An'am:* 94) This verse shows that all that which bonds between them have been severed. Thus, it is as if He *the Almighty* says in the verse in question, 'If you, Prophet Muhammad, were to see and glance what righteous people have been given of bliss in paradise, you would see pleasure and great dominion.'

This verse mentions the bliss and then the great dominion. Thus, bliss is something other than a great dominion. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us about that bliss by saying: 'And reward them, for their steadfastness, with a Garden and silken robes. They will sit on couches, feeling neither scorching heat nor biting cold, with shady [branches] spread above them and clusters of fruit hanging close at hand. They will be served with silver plates and gleaming silver goblets according to their fancy, and they will be given a drink infused with ginger from a spring called *Salsabil*. Everlasting youths will attend them—if you could see them, you would think they were scattered pearls.' (*al-Insan:* 12-19) All of these are the elements of bliss which the righteous will enjoy. It is the everlasting and eternal bliss that never ends, never changes or ceases to exist. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the word 'bliss' as an indefinite noun because this bliss is innumerable and countless and no one except Him knows it. How can we know it, while within each kind of bliss there are many forms of pleasures?

What is more than all this bliss? Allah *Glorified is He* then mentions the great dominion which is to own all this bliss forever. Neither one's life nor his bliss will come to an end. We should note that there is a difference between

Al-Maalik (owner) and *Al-Malik* (king). An owner is the one who possesses a garment, a house, etc., but a king owns and controls owners and their possessions. Thus, the real bliss lies in having a dominion. If we ponder on that issue, we understand Allah’s saying: 'And if you were to look around, you would see bliss and great wealth.' (*al-Insan:* 20) Thus, if one is deprived of having a dominion in this worldly life, he will have it in the Hereafter. One will have the dominion over the pleasures around him and also over the boys, youths and beautiful-eyed maidens.

So, a believer will have dominion in paradise. Someone may live amidst pleasure, abundant provision and luxury, but he does not have dominion over those who serve him. In paradise, however, the righteous will have a dominion, high position and power to the extent that angels will seek their permission to come into their places to greet them. How great this bounty is! Al-Kalbi said, 'The great dominion means that one of angels comes as a messenger from Allah with a bounty like clothes, food and drinks to one of the righteous. The angel seeks his permission to come into his home that Allah has prepared for him.' Is there a greater bliss and dominion than that? The Arabic word *Al-Mulk* (dominion) may also refer to the vastness of the dominion of every pious and righteous believer inside paradise as it was narrated that the lowest of the people of paradise in position will explore his dominion in one thousand-year journey.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

عَٰلِيَهُمْ ثِيَابُ سُندُسٍ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ ۖ وَحُلُّوٓا۟ أَسَاوِرَ
مِن فِضَّةٍ وَسَقَىٰهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا ﴿٢١﴾

They will wear garments of green silk and brocade;
they will be adorned with silver bracelets; their Lord will
give them a pure drink [21] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 21)

The word *'Allyahum* indicates highness and supremacy as the garments of the faithful are that of richness, dignity, supremacy, glory and splendour. Whether the splendid garments are those of the people of paradise themselves or of those who serve them, these garments are included in the great dominion. Some scholars maintained that the word *'Allyahum* means that the garments are on their bodies and touch them, but this is not necessarily applicable. Let us ponder on Allah's sayings: 'Do they not see the birds above them spreading their wings? (*al-Mulk:* 19); and 'We made the mountain tower high above them.' (*an-Nisa':* 154) So, the word *fawqahum* (above them*)* does not entail touching; rather, it means highness. The letter *Alif* in the word *'Allyahum* gives an additional meaning of supremacy. It is an adverb for the place covered with garments, curtains and robes. Some other scholars maintained that the word *'Allyahum* is an adverb modifying the word 'youths'. So, the garments of green silk and brocade are theirs. It indicates the great dominion whether it is an adverbial modifier for the word youths, the people of paradise or a description of the silk garments which are placed on their tents and couches.

The Arabic word *As-Sundus* (silk) is the fine, smooth silk, while *Al-Istabraq* (brocade) is the thick and rough kind of silk. *As-Sundus* may be weaved with golden threads. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions both smooth and rough silk by saying: 'They will sit on beds upholstered with brocade, the fruit of both gardens within easy reach.' (*ar-Rahman:* 54) Thus, as the inner covering of the beds are of brocade, the couches on which the people of paradise recline is covered with fine silk.

The first part of this verse discusses the garments of the people of paradise, so what about their adornments? Allah *Glorified is He* says: '… they will be adorned with silver bracelets.' (*al-Insan:* 21) 'There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold (*al-Kahf:* 31), and '… they shall be made to wear therein bracelets of gold and pearls, and their dress therein shall be silk.' (*Fatir:* 33) Thus, the bracelets are either of gold, silver or pearls. We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* uses the passive voice by saying: '… they will be adorned …' (*al-Insan:* 21) in the three verses of the chapters of *al-Insan, al-Kahf* and *Fatir*. This means that the people of paradise will not adorn themselves; rather, others will adorn them after they wear the garments themselves. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'There they will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade.' (*al-Kahf:* 31) He uses the active voice because the action of wearing their garments is attributed to them.

The bracelets are worn around the wrist. The adornment is an extra pleasure that the people of paradise enjoy. An example of the adornments in this worldly life is the man who prepares his daughter for her marriage. He brings the requirements of life and then brings some luxuries and adornments like the carpets, the chandeliers, etc.

After the righteous wear their garments and are adorned with bracelets of gold, silver and pearls, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions their drinks, saying: '…Their Lord will give them a pure drink.' (*al-Insan:* 21) He *the Most High* immediately gives them their drinks. Since it is He Who gives them this drink, it deserves to be described as a pure one. Unlike the wine of the worldly life, the wine of paradise is free from all impurities, and neither touched by hands nor defiled by legs. Out of the purity of that drink, it does not turn into impure urine; rather, it comes out of their bodies as perspiration.

When Suhayl ibn ‘Abdullah was praying *Al-'Isha'* Prayer, he recited the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Their Lord will give them a pure drink.' (*al-Insan:* 21) He kept moving his mouth as if he was sucking something. When he finished his prayer, he was asked, 'Were you drinking or reciting?' He replied, 'By Allah, if I did not find the sweetness of the drink when I recite the verse mentioning it, I would not have recited it.'

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ هَٰذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَآءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُم مَّشْكُورًا ﴿٢٢﴾

[It will be said], ‘This is your reward.
Your endeavours are appreciated’ [22]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 22)

The reward of the righteous is the unlimited bliss and the great dominion for what they have done in days gone by. When one does an act of obedience, it could be difficult for him. Thus, one should remember the recompense he gets for such good deeds, namely the eternal relaxation and the good reward. He *the Almighty* says: 'This is the way Allah rewards the righteous people.' (*an-Nahl:* 31) It is an everlasting and eternal reward for believers who suffered in the cause of their faith and were oppressed and tortured. So, they deserve Allah's eternal happiness in the Hereafter. They also deserve to be thanked by Him, as He *the Almighty* says to them: 'Your endeavours are appreciated.' (*al-Insan:* 22) This is Allah's discourse to those who deserved His reward and recompense. The endeavour is the movement leading to the objective. Every creature in the universe has a distinctive endeavour, as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The ways you take differs greatly.' (*al-Layl:* 4) So, people's endeavours are different because everyone has his mission, way and movement.

We should note that the endeavour can be praiseworthy or blameworthy. An example of the blameworthy one is that mentioned in Allah’s saying: 'Who could be more wicked than those who prohibit the mention of Allah’s Name in His places of worship and strive to have them deserted?' (*al-Baqara:* 114) This verse shows that it is a blameworthy endeavour to prevent the mention of Allah *the Exalted* in His mosques and to strive to have it deserted in every possible way. These ways of destroying the mosques include taking some procedures to make them deserted by its people by the following: neglecting them, setting restriction on those who come to them, striving to destroy and burn them and making them purposeless and without any relation to the people.

Another example of a blameworthy endeavour is found in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'When he leaves, he sets out to spread corruption in the land, destroying crops and livestock. Allah does not like corruption.' (*al-Baqara:* 205) Therefore, his movement, endeavour, effort and time were aimed at causing mischief in the land and destroying crops and livestock.

As for the praiseworthy endeavour, whose goodness cannot be denied, it is like the endeavour of a father to feed and maintain his children. Likewise, it is a praiseworthy endeavour to seek the Hereafter and not the worldly life, taking the latter a means to get the reward in the former. The worldly life with all its endeavours, tiredness and effort is not the objective after which a person should strive. Rather, a person should strive to get the pleasure in the Hereafter which is far more superior to the worldly life.

One has the choice to go to the house of worship or to go to the gatherings of drinking intoxication and corruption as Allah *Glorified is He* has made a human being's limbs subjected to His Will in this worldly life. They do not disobey him regarding something good or evil. He has the choice to transgress or to spend money on the needy.

Thus, seeking the Hereafter is an endeavour and whoever strives after it will have his endeavour appreciated. Regarding this, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If anyone desires the life to come and strives after it as he should, as a true believer, his striving will be thanked.' (*al-Isra':* 19) It is known than thanking Allah *the Almighty* entails getting more blessings, as He says: 'If you are thankful, I will give you more.' (*Ibrahim:* 7) So, what do you think if the One Who thanks the servant for his obedience is Allah *the Almighty*?

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* directs our attention to the Quran by saying:

إِنَّا نَحۡنُ نَزَّلۡنَا عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ تَنزِيلٗا ٢٣
فَٱصۡبِرۡ لِحُكۡمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُطِعۡ مِنۡهُمۡ ءَاثِمًا أَوۡ كَفُورٗا ٢٤

We Our self have sent down this Quran to you [Prophet] in gradual revelation [23] Await your Lord's Judgment with patience; do not yield to any of these sinners or disbelievers [24]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 23-24)

In this verse, Allah *the Exalted* talks about an action that requires His perfect Attributes. Similarly, He *the Almighty* says: 'We have sent down the Quran, and We will guard it.' (*al-Hijr:* 9) However, when He speaks only about His Divinity or worshipping Him alone, He uses the singular pronoun as in His saying: 'I am Allah; there is no god but Me. So worship Me.' (*Ta Ha:* 14) The revelation of the Quran was not undertaken by only Allah's Omnipotence, Knowledge, Wisdom or Mercy; rather, this Action was done by all His perfect Attributes. Thus, the revelation of the Quran is a great action because it is sent down with Allah's Attributes of Wisdom, Knowledge, Sight, Lordship, Withholding and Giving.

The Arabic word *nazzalna* indicates the continuous and successive revelation of the Quran. It was revealed at once from the Preserved Tablet and then revealed gradually according to incidents. Accordingly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is a recitation that We have revealed in parts so that you can recite it to people at intervals; We have sent it down little by little' (*al-Isra':* 106) and 'We gave it to you in gradual revelation.' (*al-Furqan:* 32) The Quran was revealed in parts and gradually; it is a set of verses used to be revealed successively. This gradual way of revelation made it easy for the companions to memorise, understand and apply the Quranic verses.

In the same respect, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'The disbelievers said, "Why was the Quran not sent down to him all at once?" We sent it in this way to strengthen your heart [Prophet]; we gave it to you in gradual revelation.' (*al-Furqan:* 32) He *the Almighty* has revealed the Quran in this way in order to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that of believers. If it were revealed at once, it would only bear a fixed set of obligations despite the fact that the events of the Call of Islam are numerous and believers need to have their heart strengthened at all times. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* revealed the Quran gradually to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that of believers.

Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by saying: 'Await your Lord's Judgment with patience …' (*al-Insan:* 24). Everyone adheres to the Quran will inevitably be inflicted with calamities that require great patience. He *the Almighty* commands him *peace and blessings be upon him* to be steadfast regarding His Decree of revealing the Quran to him. This Command indicates that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will be inflicted with what requires steadfastness and patience.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* prohibits Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from yielding to any of disbelievers and sinners, saying: '…do not yield to any of these sinners or disbelievers.' (*al-Insan:* 24) 'Utba ibn Rabe'a and Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira both said to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'If you have done that (calling to Islam) for gaining women and wealth, then abjure this matter.' 'Utba then said, 'I will give you (Muhammad) my daughter in marriage without a bride-gift.' Al-Walid also said, 'If you abjured such matter, I will give you money from my wealth till you are satisfied.' Thereupon, Allah *Glorified is He* revealed the verse under discussion.

Although Allah's Prohibitions of yielding to sinners and disbelievers was revealed in reference to the disbelievers of Mecca, the verse is not exclusive to them. We have to consider the generality of the wording and not the specificity of the cause of revelation. Even if the address is directed towards

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the *ummah* (the followers of Islam) is included in this address. So, all the Muslims should not yield to any sinner or disbeliever.

A sinner is a disobedient person who commits sins and misdeeds. This does not necessarily mean that he is a disbeliever. As for a disbeliever, he is a sinful one who commits the major sin of disbelieving as well as the minor sins and misdeeds. This disbeliever has no discipline to control his behaviour as he does not believe in any Book, any Messenger or in the Day of Judgment. If he does not believe in these issues, why should he adhere to the Straight Path? Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* makes a distinction in the verse in question between a sinner and a disbeliever with the particle 'or', i.e. one should not obey a sinner or a disbeliever whether singly or in pairs.

The Arabic word *Al-Kafur* (disbeliever) expresses hyperbola and refers to the stern kind of disbelief. Such a disbeliever stubbornly adheres to his disbelief; he denies and rejects anything related to faith. He stubbornly disbelieves, calls other people to disbelief and bars them from the Way of Allah *Glorified is He*. A normal disbeliever is one who disbelieves but neither calls others to disbelief nor bars them from the Way of Allah *Glorified is He*. He may disbelieve in something and believe in another, but a stern disbeliever is the one whose disbelief transcends the limits.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱذۡكُرِ ٱسۡمَ رَبِّكَ بُكۡرَةٗ وَأَصِيلٗا ﴿٢٥﴾

Remember the name of your Lord at dawn and in the evening [25] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 25)

Remembering Allah *Glorified is He* means glorifying and exalting Him, as He *the Almighty* says: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High* Who created [all things] in due proportion, Who determined their destinies and guided them.' (*al-A'la:* 1-3) How does a human being, who is a master in this universe, not glorify Him *Glorified is He* while all other created beings in the universe do so? He should be ashamed that all the created beings in the universe glorify Him, while he does not. So, he should add his glorification of

Allah *Glorified is He* to that of all these created beings. One should remember his Lord so that He *the Almighty* remembers him in the exalted assembly of angels, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'So remember Me; I will remember you.' (*al-Baqara:* 152)

Thus, Allah *Glorified is He* wants His servants to remember Him often, and the more they remember and thank Him, the more He thanks them and gives them of His Bounties. He *the Most High* says in a Sacred Hadith: 'I am as my slave expects me to be, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me inwardly, I will remember him inwardly, and if he remembers Me in an assembly, I will remember him in a better assembly (i.e., in the assembly of angels).'

So, the meaning of His saying: 'And remember the name of your Lord …' (*al-Insan:* 25) is that one should remember Him for everything: His Bounties, Bestowals, covering up one's faults, Mercy and accepting repentance. This verse is a reminder about the Creator's Bounties bestowed on us. He *the Almighty* raises you up and gives you of His innumerable and countless Blessings. Therefore, you should remember the Name of your Lord, for if you do not love Him for His religious Obligations, you have already loved Him for the bounties He has given you.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And remember the name of your Lord at dawn and in the evening.' (*al-Insan:* 25) In another verse, He *the Most High* says: 'Believers, remember Allah often and glorify Him morning and evening.' (*al-Ahzab:* 41-42) It is as though He wants us to remember and glorify Him by uttering His Name during the night, at the beginning of the day and at its end.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمِنَ ٱلَّيْلِ فَٱسْجُدْ لَهُۥ وَسَبِّحْهُ لَيْلًا طَوِيلًا ﴿٢٦﴾

Bow down before Him, and glorify Him at length by night [26] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 26)

Allah *the Exalted* does not want to overburden believers by assigning to them what they cannot bear. Thus, He *the Almighty* does not command them to spend all the night worshipping, bowing and prostrating to Him. Rather, He commands them to spend only some part of the night praying to Him. In another verse, He says: 'And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra offering of your own.' (*al-Isra':* 79) Thus, He does not command believers to pray all the night, and He *the Almighty* even does not command Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to do so. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'You [Prophet], enfolded in your cloak! Stay up throughout the night, all but a small part of it, half, or a little less, or a little more; recite the Quran slowly and distinctly.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 1-4) In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* commands him to pray throughout the night except for a small part thereof.

Bowing down to Allah *the Almighty* is the sign of submission and servitude to Him because you put the most honourable part of your body, namely your face, on the ground. This is a manifestation of your submission and humbleness. Thus, bowing down is the ultimate sign of submission, and it is an honour for a believer by which he elevates his position. Such a believer does not bow down to his peer or another creature; rather, he bows down to his Creator *the Almighty*.

Then, Allah *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: '... and glorify Him at length by night.' (*al-Insan:* 26) Glorification means to exalt Him over what does not befit Him. Therefore, glorification should be a continuous action that never ceases. You find something wonderful in this verse. In the beginning of this verse, He commands believers to bow down and pray to Him only a part of the night, not all of it. However, when He commands them to glorify Him, He *the Almighty* says: 'And glorify Him at length by night.' (*al-Insan:* 26) Thus, one's glorification should not cease.

In fact, the entire universe is glorifying Allah *the Exalted* so you should not delay reaching the procession of the glorifiers. The chapter we are discussing is called *al-Insan* (man). It clarifies the way of a human being's success in the Hereafter. He *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'Celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise. Glorify Him at night and at the fading of the stars.' (*at-Tur:* 48-49) This is a command to keep glorifying Him until one rises to pray at night, saying, '*Subhan Allah* (Glory is to Allah), *Al-Hamdu lillah* (Praise is to Allah) and *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest).'

When Lady 'Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* was asked about the words by which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would begin his supererogatory prayer at night, she replied, 'You ask me about a thing of which no one asked me before you. When he stood up, he uttered the *Takbir* (Allah is the Greatest) ten times, and uttered 'Praise be to Allah' ten times, and uttered 'Glory be to Allah' ten times, and uttered 'There is no god but Allah' ten times, and sought forgiveness ten times and said, 'O Allah, forgive me, guide me, give me sustenance and keep me well.' He sought refuge in Allah from the hardship of standing before Allah on the Day of Judgment.'

After doing so, one should '… glorify Him at night and at the fading of the stars.' (*at-Tur:* 49) So it should be a lasting and continuous glorification you utter with your tongue until the stars fade away, the night ends and the signs of the dawn come. Afterwards, you pray the dawn prayer and remember and praise Allah *the Exalted* until sunrise.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ يُحِبُّونَ ٱلۡعَاجِلَةَ وَيَذَرُونَ وَرَآءَهُمۡ يَوۡمٗا ثَقِيلٗا ﴿٢٧﴾

These people love the fleeting life. They put
aside [all thoughts of] a Heavy Day [27]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 27)

The demonstrative pronoun 'these' in this verse refers to disbelievers about whom Allah *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of this chapter: 'We guided him to the right path, whether he was grateful or not. We have prepared chains, iron collars, and blazing Fire for the disbelievers.' (*al-Insan:* 3-4) We notice that He *the Most High* does not mention them after the fourth verse. Instead, He *the Almighty* mentions the righteous people's deeds and their reward. Then, in the verse number twenty-four, He *the Almighty* says: 'Await your Lord's Judgment with patience; do not yield to any of these sinners or disbelievers.' (*al-Insan:* 24) Thus, the word 'these' in the verse in question refers to either sinners or disbelievers.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes these disbelievers and sinners by saying: 'These people love the fleeting life.' (*al-Insan:* 27) He *the Almighty* describes the worldly life as fleeting because its pleasure is fleeting and short. These disbelievers love and strive for this fleeting worldly life that will come to an end instead of striving after the Hereafter. Therefore, a human being should not only think about his fleeting life in this world and its desires, but he should also prepare himself for the coming events of the Hereafter. If one loves the fleeting worldly life and does not think about the life to come, he does a great wrong to himself. What is the benefit of a fleeting and limited pleasure if compared with the unlimited punishment in the Hereafter? The problem does not lie in those who want to enjoy this worldly life lawfully; rather, it lies in those who want to enjoy it unlawfully. They love the fleeting pleasure and forget about the life to come. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Seek the life to come by means of what Allah has granted you, but do not neglect your rightful share in this world.' (*al-Qasas:* 77)

Allah *Glorified is He* gives you innumerable blessings and provides you according to your share in this worldly life. So, if you seek this worldly life by what He *the Almighty* has provided you, this provision will run out. However, if you take it with you to the Hereafter, it will last as an eternal pleasure that never ceases to exist. When you love, embrace and cling to the pleasure of this worldly life, you should know that your pleasure will not last forever. Either you will leave it when you depart the whole worldly life or it will cease, rendering you a needy person. If you love and adore the wealth, for instance, and you want to have it forever, you should take it with you to the eternal life to be a lasting pleasure that never departs you. So, you should hastily try to make it precede you to the Hereafter.

Although Allah *Glorified is He* advises us to seek the Hereafter, this does not mean that we neglect our shares in this worldly life. Your share in this life constitutes the good deeds that will benefit you in the Hereafter. It is as if your share in this worldly life benefits your share in the Hereafter. In other words, one's worldly life serves his life to come.

The problem is that disbelievers, transgressors and evildoers mistakenly think that there is no punishment or Account. They do not think about Allah's Punishment and that is why you find them putting aside and neglecting to think of a heavy, difficult Day. They do not believe in that Day and are not concern about its coming; they totally neglect it. The Day of Judgment is very heavy upon disbelievers. It is the Day when they will be gathered to stand for the Account. Polytheists love living for a long time in the worldly life while neglecting to work for the Hereafter to be saved from the punishment. Therefore, they neither believe nor work for the Day of Judgment.

Someone may ask, 'Why does Allah say that disbelievers put behind them the Day of Judgment, while it will come in the future?' Some scholars said that they put aside working for that heavy Day and neglect to do good deeds for the Hereafter. The Arabic word *wara* means the hardship which occurs in the past or the future. The Day of Judgment is pursuing them even if they lived for a long time. They neglect that Day and do not work for it, whereas it pursues them, and they will not escape from it. It will inevitably seize them when they find it before them to be held accountable and punished.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

نَّحۡنُ خَلَقۡنَٰهُمۡ وَشَدَدۡنَآ أَسۡرَهُمۡۖ وَإِذَا شِئۡنَا بَدَّلۡنَآ أَمۡثَٰلَهُمۡ تَبۡدِيلًا ﴿٢٨﴾

Yet We created them; We strengthened their constitution;
if We please, We can replace such people completely [28]
(The Quran, *al-Insan:* 28)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the manifestations of His Omnipotence to disbelievers and deniers by saying: 'Yet, We created them; We strengthened their constitution ...' (*al-Insan:* 28). Their strong joints and power are included in their strengthened constitution. He *the Most High* has created them precisely and has given them the senses of sight, hearing, taste and smell. He *the Almighty* has enabled them to move their hands and legs and given them living hearts and working systems inside their bodies. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* has given them skin that enables them to feel and nerves that transmit the feeling of desire or pain to the mind. Then, it perceives all that and orders the limbs to do certain actions. Allah *Glorified is He* has strengthened their joints with nerves, veins and skin so that their joints are not harmed during movement. Moreover, He *the Almighty* has strengthened their private parts so that their excrement and urine do not flow except when they want to relieve themselves or when they are inflicted with a disease.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: '… if We please, We can replace such people completely.' (*al-Insan:* 28) If He *the Exalted* pleases, He can cause disbelievers to perish and replace them with other people who would be different in their deeds. They would not neglect the Day of Judgment and would work for it.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ هَٰذِهِۦ تَذۡكِرَةٞۖ فَمَن شَآءَ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِۦ سَبِيلٗا ﴿٢٩﴾

This is a reminder. Let whoever wishes, take the way to his Lord [29] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 29)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent down the Quran to you but as a reminder for those who hold Allah in awe.' (*Ta Ha:* 2-3). Thus, He has sent down the Quran as a reminder to those who fear Him out of glorifying Him.

In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: '… Let whoever wishes take the way to his Lord' (*al-Insan:* 29). This verse means that whoever wants to benefit from that reminder should take a way that leads him to his objective, namely receiving guidance through the verses of the Quran. Defining the objective is meant to clarify the way before a human being to take the right way leading to the objective. When you ponder on this verse, you find that He *the Exalted* mentions 'the way' as an indefinite pronoun because the ways of goodness are numerous like praying, fasting, paying the prescribed alms or helping the needy. As long as you have followed the Way of belief in Allah *the Almighty* and Prophet Muhammad, you should take the way of goodness and obedience. In fact, the Way of Allah *the Most High* is safer and easier than the ways leading to the punishment of the hellfire.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَمَا تَشَآءُونَ إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمٗا ﴿٣٠﴾

But you will only wish to do so if God wills – God is all knowing, all wise [30] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 30)

As Allah *Glorified is He* affirms the free will of a human being, saying: 'Let whoever wishes take the way to his Lord.' (*al-Insan:* 29) He *the Almighty* affirms in this verse that human will is dependent on His Divine Will. So, if

He *the Most High* does not will something to happen, we cannot will it, as He *the Almighty* says: 'But you will only wish to do so if Allah wills …' (*al-Insan:* 30). Therefore, no one can go against His Will, and every action belongs to Him as He *the Almighty* is the Creator of people's will. Only what Allah *Glorified is He* wishes takes place in the universe. Thus, a disbeliever's choice to disbelieve was not made against Allah's Will, for He *the Almighty* has created this choice for him.

In fact, a human being is coerced to do certain actions and free in others. So, neither the poor can become rich, nor the sick can be healed except by Allah's Will. Also, the weak cannot become stronger against His Will. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Do not say of anything, "I will do that tomorrow", without adding, "Allah willing."' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24) So, you should beware of saying, 'I will do something', without referring it to the Will of Allah *the Exalted* as you do nothing except by His Will. Thus, you should not promise someone except with saying, 'Allah willing.'

Allah *the Almighty* affirms that He is eternally All Knowing, All Wise. He is unchangeable, and as long as He is All Knowing and All Wise from eternity, He will remain so forever. If any of His Attributes was preceded by the linking verb 'to be' in the past form was, you should not think that it is a description of something happened in the past; rather, we should say that He was and still is All Knowing and All Wise. This is because He *the Almighty* is All Knowing from eternity before the existence of something to be known. Likewise, He *the Exalted* is All Wise before the existence of anything needing Wisdom. A wise person is necessarily knowledgeable; otherwise, how can he wisely manage what he does not know?

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter by saying:

يُدْخِلُ مَن يَشَآءُ فِى رَحْمَتِهِۦ ۚ وَٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًۢا ﴿٣١﴾

He admits whoever He will into His Mercy
and has prepared a painful torment for the
disbelievers [31] (The Quran, *al-Insan:* 31)

Allah *Glorified is He* admits whomever He wishes into His Mercy, which is His Religion or His paradise. Embracing His religion entails getting His paradise according to His Will. Thus, there is no contradiction between interpreting His Mercy here as embracing His religion or entering His paradise. Believers enter paradise only by His Mercy and Will, not only by their deeds. Thus, entering paradise is due to His Benevolence and Grace, not due to believers' deeds.

The matter is dependent on the Will of Allah *Glorified is He*. He *the Most High* has not wished to admit to His Mercy the one whom He knows he would choose the way of misguidance. On the contrary, He *the Almighty* has wished to admit to His Mercy whom He knows would choose the Way of Guidance.

Allah *Glorified is He* says: '…and has prepared a painful torment for disbelievers.' (*al-Insan:* 31) He *the Almighty* has prepared a painful and severe punishment in the hellfire for those who wronged themselves by their disbelief and polytheism. He *the Almighty* details this punishment in the verses of the chapter of *al-Insan*. It is He Who has prepared a painful punishment for them. Every action derives its strength from that of its doer. Therefore, if an act of punishing is attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* with His absolute Power and Omnipotence, then the punishment will be unbearable and the wrongdoer will not find a deterrent against it.

the chapter of

al-Mursalat

In the Name of God,(1) the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Mursalat.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلۡمُرۡسَلَٰتِ عُرۡفٗا ﴿١﴾ فَٱلۡعَٰصِفَٰتِ عَصۡفٗا ﴿٢﴾ وَٱلنَّٰشِرَٰتِ نَشۡرٗا ﴿٣﴾
فَٱلۡفَٰرِقَٰتِ فَرۡقٗا ﴿٤﴾ فَٱلۡمُلۡقِيَٰتِ ذِكۡرًا ﴿٥﴾ عُذۡرًا أَوۡ نُذۡرًا ﴿٦﴾

By the [winds] sent forth in swift succession [1]
violently storming [2] scattering far and wide [3]
separating forcefully [4] delivering a reminder [5]
as a proof or a warning [6] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 1-6)

In this verse, Allah *Glorified is He* swears by the wind, saying: 'By the [winds] sent forth in swift succession' (*al-Mursalat:* 1). He *the Almighty* sends it successively like the mane of the horse. Sometimes it is sent as a mercy to bring about prosperity and welfare to the people, as He *the Most High* says: 'It is Allah Who sends the winds, bearing good news of His coming Grace, and when they have gathered up the heavy (2) clouds, We drive them to a dead land where We cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops.' (*al-A'raf:* 57) This is the wind which comes with prosperity and good news about Allah's Grace.

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(1) The Islamic conception of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish conception of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or God of only Muslims, it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

(2) The Arabic word *Ath-Thiqal* means the clouds full with abundant water. We find their colour grey because of the water they carry. See *Al-Qamus Al-Qawim 1/108.*

As for the wind coming with evil, Allah *the Almighty* describes them as violent storms which blow very strongly and violently. These storms are not like the light and gentle winds; rather, they are strong ones beating what confronts them. We see the like of these storms in desert roads. When a storm blows there, it covers the roads with sands and impedes the transportation until this layer of sand is removed from the road. If it blows on an ocean, it causes a tsunami in which the waves get very high, and the storm beats the big ships. Subsequently, ports are closed, and the movement of the ships and hunting are prevented.

Allah *Glorified is He* also swears by saying: 'scattering far and wide' (*al-Mursalat:* 3). It is a wind that spreads the heavy clouds to bring rain. Scattering is the opposite of folding. Some recited the word *nashran* (far and wide) as *bishra* (good news). Their argument is that the winds bear the good news as in the saying of Allah: 'Another of His signs is that He sends out the winds bearing good news.' (*ar-Rum:* 46) Thus, the winds bring the glad tiding of the falling of the rain.

The winds of mercy are of three kinds: first, the one that scatters the wind far and wide; second, the wind that bears good news; third, the wind of mercy that blows to everything in the world.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'separating forcefully' (*al-Mursalat:* 4). These winds forcefully disperse the clouds so each part goes to a different side of the horizon. Thus, these storms are very strong that they uproot trees and destroy homes. Meanwhile, people feel great awe in their hearts and take refuge with Allah *Glorified is He*. As this storm made them remember Him, then it is as if they have delivered a reminder to the hearts.

Therefore, winds illustrate the bounties of Allah *Glorified is He*. They drive these bounties, presented in the clouds carrying water to a people whose land had dried. Thereupon, they cause welfare and prosperity, and thus, they remember the Grace of Allah bestowed on them. In this regard, He *the Most High* says: 'It is Allah Who sends the winds, bearing good news of His coming Grace, and when they have gathered up the heavy clouds, We drive them to a dead land where We cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops.' (*al-A'raf:* 57)

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* mentions some descriptions in the verses of *al-Mursalat* that can be an argument for those who maintained that these verses refer to the wind. These descriptive words are sending which refers to the wind: bearing good news, according to one of the recitations, along with calling for reflection and delivering a reminder. Thus, wind affects the one who reflects on it as a sign of Allah *Glorified is He* and thereupon he mentions and praises Him for His Grace.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'as a proof or a warning.' (*al-Mursalat:* 6) Thus, these winds are a form of Allah's establishment of argument against the people. The Arabic word *'izar* means wiping out the faults. Its root comes from giving excuses in order to be free from a sin as in Allah's saying: 'They said, "In order to be free from your Lord's blame."' (*al-A'raf:* 164) Here, the callers admonished them in order to be free from Allah's blame after they had delivered the Message. Then, no one has an excuse that it had not reached him. These winds are sent as a warning and a proof as the reminder includes both of them.

We have contextualized these verses as descriptions for the winds sent by Allah *Glorified is He*. This is because they are beating violating, scattering and dispersing the clouds in every direction to reach far countries. Also, they remind about the graces and the calamities ordained by Him *the Most High*. If the wind is a good one, it blows with graces, but if it is an evil one, it blows with calamities.

Although all these descriptions are related to the wind, some scholars interpret all these verses differently as referring to angels. Other scholars maintained that some verses refer to the wind and the rest of them refer to angels. Some other scholars also said that these verses refer to prophets. Some others still believed that they refer to the Quran as its verses which are sent down successively and violently strike the hearts with its reminder. It also spreads the light of guidance and knowledge to the hearts of believers. Furthermore, the verses of the Quran differentiate between the truth and falsehood. Moreover, they deliver faith, light and love of obedience to the heart of the believers as a proof and argument against Allah's servants.

After these verses by which Allah *the Almighty* swears, He mentions what He swears about by saying:

إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَٰقِعٌ ﴿٧﴾

What you are promised will come to pass [7]
(The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 7)

Allah *Glorified is He* says in another verse: 'What you are promised is sure to come …' (*al- An'am:* 134). What He promises to come to pass will inevitably happen and be a reality. It will take place in the real world, and people will see it themselves. Moreover, in another verse, He *Glorified is He* says: 'What you [people] are promised is true.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 5) Thus, what He has promised the people is true and will occur. Whether He *the Almighty* swears by the wind, prophets, Quran or angels, swearing by all of these verses indicates the mightiness of the Day of Judgment about which He has sworn. We should take into account that He only swears by what is great about something great.

The Arabic word *waqi'* (will come to pass) has a strong impact on the ears and the hearts and causes the hearts to tremble. For this reason, the Day of Judgment is called *Al-Waqi'a* (The coming Hour), which is also the name of one of the Quranic chapters. Al-Hasan Al-Basri stated, 'When 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab *Allah be pleased with him* recited: '[Prophet] your Lord's punishment is coming—it cannot be put off.' (*at-Tur:* 7-8), he fell ill for twenty days during which the visitors came to see him.(1)

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

فَإِذَا ٱلنُّجُومُ طُمِسَتۡ ﴿٨﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلسَّمَآءُ فُرِجَتۡ ﴿٩﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡجِبَالُ نُسِفَتۡ ﴿١٠﴾

When the stars are dimmed [8] and the sky is torn apart [9]
when the mountains are turned to dust [10]
(The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 8 - 10)

The first thing that happens of the events of the Day of Judgment is the dimming of the stars which adorn and illuminate the sky. Then, the world will darken and be in a pitch of darkness. Dimming of the stars means that their light and illumination ceased to exist. When someone wants to strike fear in the hearts of people, he makes the place dark so that they cannot see what is around them. This would be difficult for them as they do not know where to go. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'If it had been Our Will, We could have taken away their sight. They would have struggled to find the way, but how could they have seen.' (*Ya Sin:* 66) So, the first thing that will happen to them is that Allah *Glorified is He* will take away their sight so they will not see anything. Afterwards, they will struggle to find the way like blind people who collide with each other and do not know where to go. Thus, the dimming of the stars is the first scene of the Day of Judgment when the sky and the earth will be in a pitch of darkness.

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(1) *See Ibn 'Atyya Al-Andalusi, Al-Muharir Al-Wajiz Fi Tafsir Al-Kitab Al-'Aziz,1/38; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azhim,7/430; and Ath-Tha'alibi, Al-Jawahir Al-Hisan,1/130.*

As for the sky, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and the sky is torn apart' (*al-Mursalat:* 9). This means that the sky will split apart. Another possible interpretation is that the sky will be opened for the coming down of angels. This second meaning is referred to in the next chapter *an-Naba'*, where He *the Almighty* says: 'The sky will open up like wide portals.' (*an-Naba':* 19) Thus, the opening up of the sky is meant for the coming down of angels for the Account. They will go down and surround the earth which will be turned into another earth. So, when the sky is torn apart, angels will surround the earth from all its sides, a fact which is quite clear in His saying: 'On that Day the Great Event will come to pass. The sky will be torn apart on that Day, it will be so frail. The angels will be on all sides of it and, on that Day.' (*al-Haqqa:* 15-17)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'when the mountains are turned to dust.' (*al-Mursalat:* 10) We notice that He *the Almighty* mentions the mountains which are the most powerful and firm manifestations in the world. Otherwise, there are many other powerful and firm things like high buildings and skyscrapers. Therefore, if He will turn the mountains to dust and will eliminate them from the surface of the earth, other things will necessarily be eliminated. A human being looks at the mountains with awe and magnification out of their power and firmness. People also talk about the power, the height and the firmness of the Alps, the Himalaya, Atlas and Taurus.

These mountains will turn into dust and the earth we are living on will be destabilized. So what will human beings do? Where will they go? The sky above us will be torn apart and opened up for angels to get down in order to fulfil the Promise and the Warning of Allah *Glorified is He*. Now, how can a human bring disbelieve? The mountains will turn to dust and will be like the tufts of wool. They will be like scattered grains of dust that the winds blow.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَإِذَا ٱلرُّسُلُ أُقِّتَتۡ ١١ لِأَيِّ يَوۡمٍ أُجِّلَتۡ ١٢
لِيَوۡمِ ٱلۡفَصۡلِ ١٣ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا يَوۡمُ ٱلۡفَصۡلِ ١٤

And the messengers given their appointed time [11]
for what Day has all this been set? [12]
The Day of Decision [13] What will explain to you what the
Day of Decision is? [14] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 11-14)

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And the messengers given their appointed time.' (*al-Mursalat:* 11) Messengers will be given an appointed time that no one knows except Allah *Glorified is He*. It is the appointment of Resurrection, the Gathering, the Account and the Punishment. The Arabic word *Uqqitat* is derived from *Al-Miqat* (appointment) and *Waqt* (time). In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Say [Prophet], "The earliest and latest generations will all be gathered on a predetermined Day."' (*al-Waqi'a:* 49-50) Thus, all the earliest and latest generations will be gathered on the Day of Judgment.

Whoever ponders on the Quran will find wonders. In the verse of the chapter of *al-Waqi'a*, Allah *Glorified is He* talks about the Day of Judgment by saying: 'The earliest and latest generations will all be gathered on a predetermined Day.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 49-50) However, regarding the gathering of the sorcerers of Pharaoh, He *Glorified is He* says: 'The sorcerers were [to be] assembled at the appointed time on a certain day.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 38) In the first verse, He says: *'Ila Miqat'* (on a predetermined Day) but in the second He says: *'Limiqat'* (to the appointed time). Regarding the assembly of the sorcerers of Pharaoh, He *the Exalted* uses the proposition *Al-Lam* (at) to indicate that the assembly will take place shortly. As for the Day of Judgment—promised to come from the beginning of the creation—He *the Almighty* uses the preposition *Ila* (to) which indicates that it will take a long time to happen. In fact, the increase in the wording entails an increase in the meaning. Although the Day of

Judgment will happen after a long time, it will inevitably come to pass, as He *the Almighty* says: 'What you are promised will come to pass.' (*al-Mursalat:* 7)

Then Allah *Glorified is He* asks a question that He certainly knows its answer: 'for what Day has all this been set?' (*al-Mursalat:* 12) This is a question about the time until which the Day of Judgment or the Hour has been postponed. It is meant to show the greatness of that Day in which the judgment and the reward will take place. The Day in this verse refers to the appointed time.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'The Day of Decision.' (*al-Mursalat:* 13) This is the Day on which He *the Almighty* will judge between the differing and disputing people. He is fully able to judge fairly between them. When will this time of Decision or Judgment happen? Is it in this worldly life? No. This is because the worldly life is not prepared for the Account, Recompense and Judging on the issues of faith. The Judgment between the people will be on the Day of Resurrection which all the people will attend.

In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences.' (*al-Baqara:* 113) Thus, it is Allah *the Exalted* Who will judge between the people. He *the Almighty* does not have any interest or desire to incline towards a certain person in His Judgment. In fact, the judgment between people should be devoid of any inclination. The fair judgment is to stand in the middle without any inclination or prejudice.

Allah *Glorified is He* emphasizes the greatness of the Day of Judgment by saying: 'What will explain to you what the Day of Decision is?' (*al-Mursalat:* 14) One does not really comprehend the might and the calamities of the Day of Judgment. How could he know the mightiness of that Day while it is incomparable in its difficulty and greatness? Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the most honourable creature, but he does not fully comprehend the difficulties of that Day. He *peace and blessings be upon him* does not know the details of its hardships even if he knows them in general.

Subsequently, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [15] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 15)

This verse is mentioned ten times in this chapter, starting from this verse in question. This entire chapter is a strong warning and threat to deniers of the Day of Judgment. The Arabic word *wayl* (woe) means the perdition and punishment. It is also used when human beings show regret for neglecting the punishment as in Allah's saying: 'They said, "Woe to us! What a record this is! It does not leave any deed, small or large, unaccounted for!"' (*al-Kahf:* 49) and 'Woe to us! We were not aware of this at all. We were wrong.' (*al-Anbiya':* 97) These woes express their regret when they see the punishment. It is said that *Al-Wayl* is a valley in the hellfire in which human being falls for forty years—we take refuge with Allah *Glorified is He*.

When you see the word *yawma'idhin* (on that Day), you should know that it compensates for an omitted phrase which is the following: when the Day of Judgment comes. On that Day, 'those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Prophet will wish that the earth could swallow them up; they will not be able to hide anything from Allah.' (*an-Nisa':* 42) Thus, it is a mighty Day when everyone will stand before the Lord of the Worlds. Allah *Glorified is He* calls that Day a dreadful Day, saying: 'What suffering will come to those who obscure the truth when a dreadful Day arrives! (*Maryam:* 37)

It will be witnessed by all people unlike the punishment in this worldly life, which is only seen by those who are present, and no one from the earlier or later generations witnesses it. The punishment of the Hereafter, on the contrary, will be the dreadful scene seen by all people. Allah *Glorified is He* says about those who denied the truth: 'But if he is one of those who denied the truth and went astray, he will be welcomed with scalding water. He will burn in Hell. This is the certain truth.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 92-95)

Every denier who is going astray will be inflicted with scalding water, be burnt in the Hell and suffer its punishment; this is the certain truth. When they suffer the punishment for their denial of the truth, they will say: 'If only we could be sent back, we would not reject the revelations of our Lord, but be amongst the believers.' (*al-A'raf:* 27)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ نُهْلِكِ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ ثُمَّ نُتْبِعُهُمُ ٱلْآخِرِينَ ﴿١٧﴾
كَذَٰلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

Did We not destroy the first [of them]? [16]
We shall make the last follow them [17] this is how We deal
with the guilty. [18] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied
the truth! [19] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 16 - 19)

The Arabic word *Al-Awalun* (the early generations) are the previous nations that denied Allah's Faith, the Books and the Messengers. In this verse, He *the Most High* asks the people of Mecca who did not believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Did we not destroy the first [of them]?' They had known about the punishment of the previous nations and what happened to them because of their denial and disbelief in the truth. He *the Almighty* has destroyed them after denying His messengers: some by the shriek, causing the land to swallow them or defaming them. The early generations are the people of Nuh (Noah), 'Ad and Thamud who are the ancient nations. As for the latter nations, they are the people of Pharaoh, Lut (Lot) and others who are closer to the time of Prophet Muhammad's Mission.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'this is how We deal with the guilty.' (*al-Mursalat:* 18) He *the Most High* could inflict the same punishment on the disbelievers of Quraysh who denied Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* disbelieved in Allah *Glorified is He* and barred others from believing in Him. Their disbelief and denial of the truth are the major crimes they committed besides other minor legal and religious crimes. As long as one disbelieves and denies Allah's Way of Guidance, you can expect that he will do all the major sins like murder, adultery and theft. So, he leads his life to satisfy his desires and lusts. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* warns such disbelievers and wrongdoers against the woes by saying 'Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth!' (*al-Mursalat:* 19)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds them that He has created and brought them into existence by saying:

أَلَمۡ نَخۡلُقكُّم مِّن مَّآءٖ مَّهِينٖ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَجَعَلۡنَٰهُ فِي قَرَارٖ مَّكِينٍ ﴿٢١﴾ إِلَىٰ قَدَرٖ مَّعۡلُومٖ ﴿٢٢﴾
فَقَدَرۡنَا فَنِعۡمَ ٱلۡقَٰدِرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَيۡلٞ يَوۡمَئِذٖ لِّلۡمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Did We not make you from an underrated fluid [20] which We housed in a safe lodging [21] for a determined period? [22] We determine [it]: how excellently We determine! [23] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [24] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 20 - 24)

Why does the person disbelieve and behave arrogantly with Allah *Glorified is He*? Why does he deny His messengers, while He has created him from underrated fluid? Here, He describes the fluid by which He has created human beings as underrated because it flows in the channel of the urine and goes to the same end if it was not placed in the womb. The sperm is also described as weak. Despite the weakness of the origin of a human being, He has given him the hearing, sight, mind and ability to think. He *the Almighty* has strengthened him, his muscles, nerves and bones. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Yet, We created them. We strengthened their constitution; if We please, We can replace such people completely.' (*al-Insan:* 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'which We housed in a safe lodging.' (*al-Mursalat:* 21) He *the Almighty* has housed this underrated fluid, which is the sperm, in a safe lodging by paving a way for it to get to the womb. This realizes His Will to create a human being. He *Glorified is He* calls the womb 'safe lodging' because the sperm of the man stays therein for nine months or less after the fertilization of the ovum. It is a safe lodging that He *Glorified is He* has made suitable for the dwelling of the sperm in order to be a clinging form and then a piece of flesh which later becomes bones garmented with flesh. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* will make him into another form by giving him the hearing and sight. Thus, the sperm is preserved in a lodging place which is the womb that Allah *Glorified is He* created in a special form and protected by the bones of the pelvic. This made it suitable to receive the sperm and preserve it.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'for a determined period' (*al-Mursalat:* 22). The sperm stays in the womb for a determined period which is the period of pregnancy when a woman bears her fetus in her womb. It is a well-known period after which a woman delivers a baby at the time determined by Allah *Glorified is He*. In this verse, the Arabic word *Al-Qadr* is the place and time appointed to something.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'We determine [it]: how excellently We determine!' (*al-Mursalat:* 23) He *the Almighty* is fully able to create a human being perfectly. He has made him upright, not walking on four legs like cattle. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* has made His creation suitable for living in any environment as you can see one living in a hut, a tent, a cave or even a skyscraper. Some recited the word *qadarna* (to be able to) as *qaddarna* (to determine), as in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'We have determined phases for the moon until finally it becomes like an old date-stalk.' (*Ya Sin:* 39) Some other scholars preferred the recitation of *qadarna* as Allah *Glorified is He* then says '*Na'ma Al-Qadirun'* (How Powerful we are) and does not say *Al-Muqadirun.* Both of these interpretations are possible because the One Who is fully able to create something in good form is truly great in His Power, Determination and Knowledge.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Woe on that Day to those who denied the truth!' (*al-Mursalat:* 24) If He *the Almighty* is eternally able to create a human being from an underrated, weak fluid—which He houses, when it spurts out of the man, in a safe lodging until a time determined by Him—why do disbelievers deny the truth?

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds them about the earth they are living on by saying:

أَلَمۡ نَجۡعَلِ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ كِفَاتًا ﴿٢٥﴾ أَحۡيَآءٗ وَأَمۡوَٰتٗا ﴿٢٦﴾ وَجَعَلۡنَا فِيهَا رَوَٰسِيَ
شَٰمِخَٰتٖ وَأَسۡقَيۡنَٰكُم مَّآءٗ فُرَاتٗا ﴿٢٧﴾ وَيۡلٞ يَوۡمَئِذٖ لِّلۡمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

Did We not make the earth a home [25] for the living and the dead? [26] Did We not place firm, lofty mountains on it and provide you with sweet water? [27] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [28] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 25 - 28)

Allah *Glorified is He* has assigned the earth to contain and include people whether they are alive or dead. It contains living beings when they live on its surface, and it contains the dead in its belly. The one who ponders the meaning of the word *kaft* (to contain) will find it wonderful. The workers use the bricks to build their homes. They stick bricks together with cement and use trees to make the roofs of their homes. All these materials come from the earth.

In this verse, we can note a point alluding to the gravity of the earth. The earth includes human beings and does not leave them. It is as if they are connected to it; if they fall down, it will embrace them, and they never get out of it. The earth also contains the dead in their graves and does not abandon them except on the Day of Resurrection as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When graves turn inside out' (*al-Infitar:* 4) and 'Does he not know that when the contents of graves burst forth?' (*al-'Adiyat:* 9)

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Did We not place firm, lofty mountains on it [the earth]?' (*al-Mursalat:* 27). He *the Almighty* has preserved the earth for created beings by placing mountains that stabilize it and do not make it shake or shift with them. Regarding this, He *the Almighty* says: 'He has made mountains stand firm on the earth to prevent it shaking under you.' (*an-Nahl:* 15) If the earth had been created in a firm form, we would not have needed firm mountains to stabilize it. However, the earth was created as moveable being which is exposed to shaking. So, if the mountains had not existed, the earth would not have lasted.

The Arabic word *Al-Shamikhat* refers to the high, lofty mountains. Every high thing is called *shamikh* (lofty). We notice that Allah *the Exalted* describes mountains with one of their descriptions, namely their loftiness. Thus, while any human being is created from the sperm of the man which is placed in the woman's womb, He has created the mountains which are bigger, higher and loftier than him. They have been created in order that human beings live on the stable earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: '… and provide you with sweet water?' (*al-Mursalat:* 27) This verse raises a question, which is, 'Why does Allah *Glorified is He* mention the sweet water after the mountains?' The reason is that the heavy rains fall on the summits of the high, lofty mountains and then descend on the surface of the earth to flow in the rivers. All the rivers come through this way. The Nile River, for example, comes from the summits of the mountains of Abyssinia from which water descends and gathers together to form the Nile River. The Arabic word *Al-Furat* refers to the sweet and palatable water that man, cattle and plants use to quench their thirst. He *Glorified is He* says about such water: 'The two bodies of water are not alike: one is palatable, sweet and pleasant to drink, while the other salty and bitter.' (*Fatir:* 12) Someone may ask, 'Are there sweet water or rivers in the Arabian Peninsula?' Of course not! However, they are around the Arabian Peninsula in Iraq, Syria and Egypt. The people of Mecca knew these rivers, but they were bringing the water from wells.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth!' (*al-Mursalat:* 28) Are disbelievers still denying, disbelieving and rejecting the truth? One should know that the earth will turn into another earth, the mountains will turn to dust and the sweet and palatable water will become salty and bitter. Thus, He *the Almighty* says: 'Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth!' (*al-Mursalat:* 28)

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

ٱنطَلِقُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ مَا كُنتُم بِهِۦ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ ٱنطَلِقُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ ظِلٍّ ذِى ثَلَـٰثِ شُعَبٍ ﴿٣٠﴾
لَّا ظَلِيلٍ وَلَا يُغْنِى مِنَ ٱللَّهَبِ ﴿٣١﴾ إِنَّهَا تَرْمِى بِشَرَرٍ كَٱلْقَصْرِ ﴿٣٢﴾
كَأَنَّهُۥ جِمَـٰلَتٌ صُفْرٌ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

They will be told, ‘Go to that which you used to deny! [29] Go to a shadow of smoke!’ It rises in three columns; [30] no shade does it give, nor relief from the flame; [31] it shoots out sparks as large as tree- trunks [32] and as bright as copper. [33] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [34] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 29 - 34)

Despite disbelievers' denial of the Resurrection, the Account and the Punishment, they will face them as a reality and a truth; their denial will not negate that truth. Allah *the Almighty* has warned them and affirmed this matter to them, but they did not believe in it. On the Day of Judgment, they will face what they used to deny and mistakenly think it will not come to pass. Regarding this, He *the Almighty* says: 'They will be told, "Go to that which you used to deny!'" (*al-Mursalat:* 29) They will rush out of their graves, as He *the Almighty* says: 'On the Day when the earth will be torn apart, letting them rush out.' (*Qaf:* 44) So, they will be commanded to go to what they used to deny. The Arabic word *Al-'Intilaq* in this verse means to run fast like when the horse is released from its bond.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: 'Go to a shadow of smoke!' (*al-Mursalat:* 30) This is a command for disbelievers to go to a shadow of black smoke and burning fire. When the smoke of hellfire grows up, it will be divided into three columns. They will be commanded to go to one of them until the end of the Account. On the contrary, the righteous will be under the shade of Allah's Throne. It has been said that a spark will get out of the fire and will be divided into three columns: one before the disbelievers, the second on their right and the third on their left.

It is the scorching and hot shadow of smoke. It is called a shadow sarcastically because 'no shade does it give, nor relief from the flame.' (*al-Mursalat:* 31) It is not a real shadow as it neither protects from the heat of the fire nor relieves from its flame. On the other hand, Allah *the Almighty* gives the people of paradise a cool and refreshing shadow. It is not a normal shadow; rather, it covers those who sit under it from the sun, the air, the heat and cold. By contrast, the shade in hellfire is not shady as it does not relieve from the flames. This is why the heat of the fire will reach the faces of disbelievers and burn them. Thus, what do we think about their sufferings in the fire when they are cast into it?

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'The Fire shoots out sparks as large as tree trunks.' (*al-Mursalat:* 32) Let us imagine that situation when a denier will see the fire burning and sparkling to the extent that some parts thereof are burning the others. He will be standing in the shade that he mistakenly thinks will protect from the flames. Then the fire will shoot out sparks which strike those waiting to be thrown into it. These sparks will be as large as the trees trunks. It is a mighty spark like the palace in its greatness and big size. What is meant here by the Arabic word *Al-Qasr* is the trunks of the trees that exist in the desert. When winter comes, the branches of these trees are cut, and their trunks remain. They will look like the camel when it sits in the desert. The verse could possibly refer to the well-known great palaces.

The fire shoots out sparks as bright as copper as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and as bright as copper.' (*al-Mursalat:* 33) The sparks will be like the big yellow camels scattered in the desert. Some interpreted *Sufr* as black, but the sparks are yellow like the pieces of copper that spark when they are burnt. However, some maintained that due to the blackness and darkness of the fire, its sparks will be black and yellowish.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth!' (*al-Mursalat:* 34) Whatever the colour of the spark is, it is a burning flame. So why do disbelievers deny the truth and land themselves in trouble? Why are they exposing themselves to be thrown into this bottomless valley in the fire called *Wayl*?

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذَا يَوْمُ لَا يَنطِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَلَا يُؤْذَنُ لَهُمْ فَيَعْتَذِرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

On that Day they will be speechless, [35] and they will be given no chance to offer any excuses. [36] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [37] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 35 - 37)

On that mighty Day, they will recognize that they had denied the truth in the worldly life. This is why they will not say anything beneficial to them. Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* will not grant them the permission to offer any excuses or apologies. They will be unable to say anything to help them regarding the punishment waiting for them. They will not say anything that benefits them in their difficult position; rather, they will only blame each other and disown themselves from the rest. However, this will not be useful.

In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself.' (*an-Nahl:* 111) He *the Almighty* also says in another position: 'And halt them for questioning.' (*as-Saffat:* 24) Some people may mistakenly think that these verses are contradictory as there are verses which show that they will be allowed to speak, and others negate their ability to speak. We should understand that the kind of speech that wicked people will be unable to speak is the beneficial one. Some of them will utter sophistic and useless speech like blaming each other. He *Glorified is He* mentions some of their useless speech in His saying: 'The disbelievers will say, "Our Lord, show us the jinns and men who misled us, and we shall trample them underfoot so that they may be amongst the lowest of the low."' (*Fussilat:* 29) This kind of speech is of no avail for the one who utters it. Thus, the forbidden speech for the wicked is the beneficial speech.

Moreover, the conditions on the Day of Judgment are different. Sometimes they can speak, and other times they become speechless. Therefore, in the verses under discussion, disbelievers become speechless after the sentence was issued against them. They are not in the position of the accountability where they are allowed to speak; rather, they are being gathered to be cast into the fire. So, what would they say? The matter has been settled, and they will not be given the permission to offer any excuse or apology, for this will not benefit them. They have said everything when they were held accountable. Thus, when the sentence that they are the people of the fire is issued, no speech or apology will be allowed.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

هَٰذَا يَوْمُ ٱلْفَصْلِ ۖ جَمَعْنَٰكُمْ وَٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾ فَإِن كَانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ فَكِيدُونِ ﴿٣٩﴾
وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

[They will be told], 'This is the Day of Decision: We have gathered you and earlier generations. [38] If you have any plots against Me, try them now' [39] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [40] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 38 - 40)

The Day of Judgment is the Day that Allah *Glorified is He* has appointed for the Resurrection, Gathering and Account. It is the Day on which wrongdoers will be recompensed for their disbelief and denial of Allah's messengers and Books. He *Glorified is He* says about this Day: 'And the messengers given their appointed time, for what Day has all this been set? The Day of Decision.' (*al-Mursalat:* 11-13) In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'This is the Day of Decision. We have gathered you and earlier generations.' (*al-Mursalat:* 38) The Arabic word *Al-Hashr* means gathering disbelievers along with the very early generations. No one will be absent from amongst them as He *Glorified is He* promised to bring them all on the Day that they used to deny and disbelieve in.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'If you have any plots against Me, try them now.' (*al-Mursalat:* 39) If disbelievers schemed against righteous believers and harmed them, let them try all their schemes against Allah *Glorified is He* on the Day of Judgment. If they have a plan to save themselves from His punishment, let them try it, for all their schemes will fail. Thus, they will surrender and become speechless.

Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* describes the reward that the people will get if they believe, have piety and do not deny the truth.

إِنَّ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ فِى ظِلَـٰلٍ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿٤١﴾ وَفَوَٰكِهَ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾
كُلُوا۟ وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ هَنِيٓـًٔۢا بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

**But those who took heed of God will enjoy cool shade,
springs, [41] and any fruit they desire; [42] [they will be
told], 'Eat and drink to your hearts' content as a reward for
your deeds [43] this is how We reward those who do
good'[44] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 41 - 44)**

Allah *Glorified is He* has given the human being the choice between the opposite stances: belief or disbelief, piety or transgression, guidance or misguidance, pleasure or punishment and Paradise or Hellfire. For this reason, He *the Almighty* mentions the punishment and the recompense of disbelievers and deniers, and then He mentions the reward of the pious who believed in the truth. He says that those who take heed of Him will enjoy cool shade and springs. They will have leafy shades in beautiful Gardens, unlike the shadows of the smoke that do not relieve from the flame of the fire. They will not only have shades in paradise but also springs, rivers and pleasures. These springs, from which the water flows, are not wells; rather, they are holes like the fountains from which the water springs forth. This is more delightful for them.

We call the streams in which the water of the springs used to flow *Majra Al-'Uyun.* In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Be mindful of Him Who has provided you with everything you know. He has given you livestock, sons, gardens and springs.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 132-134) Thus, even though the people of 'Ad used to have flowing springs, they were buried under the ground.

The righteous will also have any fruit they desire. Allah *the Exalted* does not give them any kind of food or drink; rather, He *the Almighty* bestows upon them the fruits that they desire. They will be given the fruits that delight them, fearing no harms from eating them. They will have all kind of fruits which He *the Most High* describes as: 'And abundant fruit, neither intercepted nor forbidden.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 32-33) He *the Almighty* negates all the defects of the worldly fruits from that of paradise. The fruits in this worldly life come only at a certain season and are forbidden until you pay their price. Furthermore, unlike the fruits of paradise, the fruits of this worldly life have many defects.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'they will be told, "Eat and drink to your hearts' content as a reward for your deeds."' (*al-Mursalat:* 43) In this verse, there are actions along with their recompense. The actions here are the righteous deeds that pious believers had done in the days gone by. The recompense is the reward of having good food and drinks in the Hereafter. This verse is similar to His saying: 'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by.' (*al-Haqqa:* 24) The reason for their pleasure is that they suffered and were oppressed and tortured many times in the worldly life. Thus, the reward for their torture in the worldly life is to be delighted in the Hereafter. They will eat and drink to their hearts' content without being harmed or resorting to the medicine of digestion. The food and drinks are delicious, and they will enjoy it. They will get all that reward because of what they have done in the worldly life.

The Arabic word *'amila* (to do) is different from *sana'* and *fa'ala* though they all can mean doing something. The Arabic word *Al-'Amal* includes the action of the limbs like the hand, the leg, the eye, etc. It also includes the action of the heart like belief, sincerity and tolerance. Thus, they will be rewarded for all what they have done. No one should think that his reward will be only for the actions of his heart, for He *the Exalted* will also reward him in the Hereafter for the actions of his limbs. Such people will be told to: 'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you used to do.' (*al-Mursalat:* 43)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'This is how We reward those who do good.' (*al-Mursalat:* 44) So, if someone does good deeds and believes in Allah, His Books and messengers, Allah will reward him benevolently. This reward includes the best shades, springs and fruits as well as delightful food and drink.

The verses then direct our attention to what is waiting for the deniers of truth. Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ كُلُوا وَتَمَتَّعُوا قَلِيلًا إِنَّكُم مُّجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾
وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [45] [You may] eat and enjoy yourselves for a short while, evildoers that you are. [46] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [47] (The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 45 - 47)

Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that the deniers of truth eat and enjoy themselves in this worldly life until the end of their lifetime. They have disbelieved in Him and denied His messengers, the Resurrection, Paradise and Hellfire. He *the Most High* nevertheless, is their Creator Who has not deprived them of the Bestowal of His Lordship. Despite their disbelief, He *the Almighty* took it upon Himself to provide them with sustenance in the worldly life.

Disbelievers eat and drink in this worldly life like the cattle as Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Disbelievers may take their fill of pleasure in this world, and eat as cattle do, but the Fire will be their home.' (*Muhammad:* 12) Their pleasures and gratifications in this worldly life are little, and they will leave it by death or when the pleasure runs out. Thereupon, they will become poor, weak and ill after being rich, strong and healthy.

Allah *Glorified is He* describes them as evildoers. In fact, He has assigned to every heavenly Message an enemy which is the evildoers. He *the Almighty* does not intervene until the evildoing becomes irresistible. Likewise, He *the Exalted* has assigned to every prophet an enemy, namely evildoers who seduce the people. The weak incline towards them, mistakenly thinking that these evildoers will be the victorious. They do not know that evildoers' apparent victory is temporal because they will be inflicted with a woe on the Day of

Resurrection. Since they used to deny that Day, they will be punished for their denial. Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱرْكَعُوا۟ لَا يَرْكَعُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾
فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍۭ بَعْدَهُۥ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

When they are told, 'Bow down in prayer,' they do not do so [48]
Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [49]
In what revelation, after this, will they believe? [50]
(The Quran, *al-Mursalat:* 48 - 50)

Disbelievers were evildoers and deviated from the Path of Islam and Faith. When they were ordered to bow down in prayer to Allah *the Almighty* they refused to bow down to their Creator Who has bestowed His Grace upon them. In fact, prayer is the sign of submission and humbleness to Him *the Exalted*. However, some scholars like Ibn 'Abbas said, '[Ordering them to bow down] will be said on the Day of Judgment when they are called to bow down, but they would not be able' to do so. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'They will be invited to prostrate themselves but will be prevented from doing so, and their eyes will be downcast and they will be overwhelmed with shame; they were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe [but refused].' (*al-Qalam:* 42-43) So, if disbelievers who denied the truth refuse to prostrate, bow, pray and worship Him *the Almighty* then 'Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth!' (*al-Mursalat:* 49)

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'In what revelation, after this, will they believe?' (*al-Mursalat:* 50) The Arabic word *ba'dahu* (after it) refers to the Quran, the Book of Allah. Therefore, in what revelation after the Quran and its verses will they believe? This is similar to His saying: 'If they deny Allah and His revelations, what Message will they believe in?' (*al-Jathiya:* 6) In this respect, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited: "In what revelation, after this, will they believe?' (*al-Mursalat:* 50), he said, 'I believed in Allah and what He has sent down.'(1)

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(1) *See Abd Ar-Raziq, Tafsir, 3654; and At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 24/536.*

There is no revelation more truthful and eloquent than the Quran, the last Revelation. Thus, believing in the Quran is the last chance they have. They should believe in it before the coming of the Day of Resurrection that they had denied and disbelieved in. If they believed, they should do the actions that save them from the mighty Day of Judgment. For this reason, it is suitable that the chapter of *an-Naba'* follows the chapter in question. He *Glorified is He* says: 'In the name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy and the Giver of Mercy. What are they asking about? The momentous announcement about which they differ, they will find out. In the end they will find out' (*an-Naba':* 1-5).

the chapter of

an-Naba'

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *an-Naba'* (1).

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

عَمَّ يَتَسَآءَلُونَ ١ عَنِ ٱلنَّبَإِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ٢ ٱلَّذِى هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ ٣

What are they asking about? [1] The momentous announcement [2] about which they [3]
(The Quran, *an-Naba':* 1-3)

We are meeting today to derive some lessons from the Quran and to explain some of my reflections on *Juz' 'Amma*. I invoke Allah *the Almighty* to make you attentive to these reflections and to bestow success on us in everything we do or abstain from. My brothers have suggested dedicating our reflections today to interpreting *Juz' 'Amma*, the last *Juz'* in the Quran. It is an acceptable suggestion because this *Juz'* includes the short chapters that people repeatedly recite in their prayers. Moreover, many people start their memorization of the glorious Quran with these chapters. Thus, if we explain our reflections on this *Juz'*, we will, undoubtedly, be shedding light on all the objectives of the Quran.

Allah *the Almighty* has ordered His Words in the Quran and made *Juz' 'Amma* the last one in order that the last part of the Quran would pay the listener and the reader's attention to all the Islamic fundamental creeds, rules and objectives.

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(1) The chapter of *an-Naba'* is the chapter number 78 in the Quranic order. It was revealed in Mecca. Its verses are 40 in number. Its main topic is the Resurrection on the Day of Judgment and it is the last chapter to be revealed in Mecca before the *Hijra*, as Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* migrated on the day following its revelation. It is a clear chapter, containing no abrogating or abrogated verses. Some scholars called it the chapter of *at-Tasau'l*. It is also called *'Amma* and *al-Mu'sirat*. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-Mursalat*.

There is a semantic and contextual correlation between the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'What are they asking about?' (*an-Naba': 1*) in this chapter in question and the chapter of *al-Mursalat,* which precedes it and which starts with the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*, 'By the [winds] sent forth in swift succession, [1] violently storming, [2] scattering far and wide, [3] separating forcefully, [4] delivering a reminder, [5] as a proof or a warning: [6] what you are promised will come to pass. [7]' (*al-Mursalat:* 1-7) It is crystal clear from these verses, that this chapter of *al-Mursalat* begins with many Divine Oaths regarding the coming of the Last Day that the polytheists disbelieved in. In response, He *the Almighty* clearly states: 'What you are promised will come to pass.' (*al-Mursalat:* 7)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions, also in the chapter of *al-Mursalat,* the signs of the coming of the Day of Judgment, saying: 'When the stars are dimmed [8] and the sky is torn apart, [9] when the mountains are turned to dust [10] and the messengers given their appointed time —[11] for what Day has all this been set? [12] The Day of Decision. [13] What will explain to you what the Day of Decision is? [14] Woe, on that Day, to those who denied the truth! [15]' (*al-Mursalat:* 8-15) It is natural then that the chapter following *al-Mursalat* should explain the Day of Decision. It is the momentous, mighty event that we should be heedful of and prepared for.

Furthermore, we should reflect on the consistency between the styles of both chapters. For example, the exclamatory interrogation indicates hyperbole in both the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'What will explain to you what the Day of Decision is?' (*al-Mursalat:* 15); and 'What are they asking about? [1] The momentous announcement. [2]' (*an-Naba':* 1-2)

When He *the Almighty* says to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'What will explain to you what the Day of Decision is?' (*al-Mursalat:* 15), He *Glorified is He* explains to him *peace and blessings be upon him* that he has no knowledge of that Day because he had not yet received any revelation about it; however, he would later receive some revelations in that regard. So, when He *the Almighty* says to him *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'What will explain to you what the Day of Decision is?' (*al-Mursalat:* 15), this indicates that He *the Almighty* would explain to him *peace and blessings be upon him* the matter in a coming revelation.

Another aspect of harmony between the chapter of *al-Mursalat* and that of *an-Naba'* is that both chapters discuss universal matters and some phenomena relating to the human being. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Did We not destroy the first [of them]?' (*al-Mursalat:* 16); 'Did We not make you from an underrated fluid.' (*al-Mursalat:* 20); 'Did We not make the earth a home' (*al-Mursalat:* 25) and 'Did We not make the earth smooth, [6] and make the mountains to keep it stable? [7]' (*an-Naba':* 6-7) Thus, the two chapters share the same context.

Moreover, we find a wonderful harmony between the chapter of *al-Mursalat* and the chapter of *al-Insan*, which is also called *Ad-Dahr* (the Time). Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Was there not a period of time when man was nothing to speak of?' (*al-Insan:* 1) The chapter of *Ad-Dahr* mentions in detail many kinds of pleasures that the righteous people will enjoy in the paradise. By contrast, it does not expound on the punishment of the disbelievers; it makes only a passing reference, stating: 'We have prepared chains, iron collars, and blazing fire for the disbelievers.' (*al-Insan:* 4) Afterwards, He *the Almighty* mentions the kinds of pleasures awaiting the believers, saying: 'The righteous will have a drink mixed with *Kafur*.' (*al-Insan:* 5) By contrast, the chapter of *al-Mursalat* makes mention of many kinds of punishments that He *the Almighty* has prepared for the disbelievers in the Hereafter. With regard to the reward of the righteous people, it mentions only one kind of the pleasures that they will enjoy, stating: 'But those who took heed of Allah will enjoy cool shade, springs.' (*al-Insan:* 41) The chapter of *al-Mursalat* is followed by the chapter of *an-Naba'* that mentions in detail the recompense of both the believers and the disbelievers, as we will see.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'What are they asking about?' (*an-Naba':* 1) This question indicates that what they are asking about is a great and mighty event. That is why He *the Almighty* then says: 'The momentous announcement.' (*an-Naba':* 2) This quick answer means that the matter about which the disbelievers ask and are doubtful is: 'The momentous announcement.' (*an-Naba':* 2) We should note that the Arabic word *an-Naba'* (announcement) is different from *Al-Khabar* (a piece of news) because the former refers to only the important news. Besides, this announcement is described here as 'momentous'. As human beings, we describe things as 'great' according to our understanding of greatness. So what would we think about an announcement described by Allah *the Almighty* as 'momentous'?! This description is in proportion to His Divine Omniscience.

Allah *the Almighty* expresses the greatness of the Day of Judgment by using the Arabic particle *Ma;* by calling it 'announcement', not an ordinary piece of news; and by describing it as 'momentous'. There is no doubt that all the objectives of the religion depend on believing in that Day because it is the ultimate destination where we will find the outcome of our deeds. It is the Day on which every human being will be held accountable for everything s/he has done, be it good or evil. Thus, it is the greatest event in the life of the human being. That is why it is not acceptable that s/he forgets that Day or be heedless of it. This explains the reason why the question in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'What are they asking about?' (*an-Naba':* 1) carries the meaning of condemnation. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says, 'The matter of the Day of Judgment is so clear that no one should ask about it or question its coming, for all the rational and logic proofs confirm it.'

The problem lies in the disbelievers' way of thinking; they wanted to discuss secondary creedal issues, while no wise person would do that before discussing the main pillar of the Islamic creed, that is, belief in Allah *the Almighty*. That is to say that we did not believe in the Day of Judgment and then believed in Allah *the Almighty*; rather, our belief in Him *Glorified is He* came first. Consequently, when He *the Almighty* told us about the Day of Judgment, we believed in it. Thus, the discussion should not be about the coming of the Day of Judgment and whether it is possible or not. Rather, it should be about the main pillar of the Islamic creed, that is, belief in Allah *the Almighty*. If one believes in Him *Glorified is He* s/he should believe in what He says; however, it is not important to believe in what He *the Almighty* says if the person does not believe in Him *Glorified is He* in the first place.

Moreover, belief in the Angels, the Heavenly-revealed Books, the Messengers, the Last Day and the Pre-destination, be it good or evil, entails having faith in unseen matters. No one can believe in them unless a truthful person tells him/her about them. So, if one's mind does not comprehend the reality of the Day of Judgment, this does not mean that it will not come to pass.

In the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him,* we have explained the difference between the occurrence of an event and how it will take place. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And when Ibrahim said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead," He said, "Do you not believe, then?" "Yes," said Ibrahim, "but just to put my heart at rest…' (*al-Baqara:* 260). He *peace be upon him* does not question Allah's Ability to give life to the dead, as he *peace be upon him* firmly believes in that. Rather, he asks about the way of giving life to the dead. That is why he *peace be upon him* did not say, 'My Lord, do you give life to the dead?!' but rather said: 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead…' (*al-Baqara:* 260).

When Allah *Glorified is He* asks Ibrahim *peace be upon him*: '…Do you not believe, then?' (*al-Baqara:* 60), he said, '…Yes…' (*al-Baqara:* 60). As a religious obligation, every servant of Allah is required to give this answer. That is to say, we all should believe that He *the Almighty* gives life to the dead. As for the way of bringing the dead back to life, the servant is not required to know it. After all, you may make use of something without comprehending its reality and essence. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; the illiterate, the Bedouin and the farmer may benefit from electricity without comprehending its reality.

The Arabic verb *Tasa'la* (asked one another) is different from the verb *Yas'alu*, which means that only one party poses the questions. As for the verb *Tasa'la,* it means that two parties of the conversation exchange questions. It was the deniers of the Resurrection who posed the following questions: 'When will this threat come about, if you are truthful' (*Yunus:* 48), and 'What! Does he threaten you that when you are dead and become dust and bones that you shall then be brought forth?' (*al-Mu'minun:* 35) The disbelievers exchanged these questions among themselves or posed them to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers.

When we say, ''Amr and Zayd asked each other,' this means that both of them participate in the action. However, we call one of them a subject and the other an object, even though both of them can be simultaneously called a subject and an object. For example, a poet said,

The snakes made peace with his foot;
They bite it not, nor does it trample over them.

The snakes and the foot are both the subject and the object. The Arabic word *Hayyat* (snakes) is in the nominative state because it is considered the subject whose object is the word *Qadam* (foot). The meaning is that the snakes did not bite the foot, nor did the foot trample on them.

Undoubtedly, the disbelievers' questions about the momentous announcement were a means to express their rejection to the Day of Judgment and to make it an object of ridicule. Every one of them posed a question indicating his/her disbelief in that Day. Here arises a question, which is, 'If all of them actually disbelieve in the Day of Resurrection, why does the Quran state that they differ about it?!' This difference is recorded in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'About which they differ.' (*an-Naba':* 3) So, what is the aspect of their difference if they all deny the Resurrection?! Scholars said that they differed with respect to the degree of their disbelief in the Day of Judgment- some categorically denied it; others doubted it; and still some others were ambivalent about it. Another possible interpretation is that the different stance was between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the believers on one side and the disbelievers on the other side; the former group believes in the Resurrection, while the latter denies it.

Allah *the Almighty* then responds to the disbelievers' questions, saying:

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾ ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥﴾

They will find out [4] In the end they will find out [5]
(The Quran, *an-Naba':* 4 - 5)

The Arabic word *Kalla* (Nay) is a particle used for reproaching. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to the disbelievers, 'Watch your words and stop denying the clear truth. Your denial will be of no avail, and it is better for you to refrain from it.' In fact, the disbelievers do believe in the main pillar of faith, that is, they acknowledge that Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say: Allah…’ (*Luqman:* 25); and ‘And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say: Allah…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87). If this is the case, how do they deny a secondary creedal matter, i.e. the Resurrection?!

Moreover, the Quran records the disbelievers’ belief that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger sent by Allah *the Almighty*. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘We know indeed that what they say certainly grieves you, but surely they do not call you a liar; but the unjust deny the communications of Allah.’ (*al-An‘am:* 33) They alleged that the Quran is sorcery, poetry or soothsaying; however, they contradicted themselves, saying: ‘…Why was this Quran not revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) Thus, the disbelievers recognized that the Quran is flawless, but they objected that it was revealed to a poor man, not to a man of importance in Mecca and Medina.

Likewise, they made contradictory statements, saying: ‘…If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country…’ (*al-Qasas:* 57). So, they acknowledged that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with guidance, but they feared that the people would sweep them from their land. Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* responds to their statement with simple words: ‘…Have we not established for them a safe sanctuary to which are brought the fruits of all things as provision from Us?’ (*al-Qasas:* 57)

The disbelievers are doubtful and ambivalent about the Day of Judgment, which is an unsound action on their part. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They will find out.’ (*an-Naba’:* 4) This verse means that on the Day of Judgment the disbelievers will know for sure that they were mistaken, as all the facts will be clear to them. With regard to the repetition in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘They will find out. [4] In the end they will find out. [5]’ (*an-Naba’:* 4-5), the exegetes state that it is meant for emphasis. However, I firmly believe that there is no repetition in the verses, as the ‘literal emphasis’ usually comes without a conjunction separating the two statements. As for the two verses in question, they are separated by the Arabic conjunction *Thumma,* and thus the two statements imply that there are two ways by which the disbelievers will find out the truth that they rejected.

We have explained that there are three ranks of knowledge: the certain knowledge, the eye of certainty and the true certainty. One has certain knowledge of something when a truthful person tells him/her about it. When s/he sees it with his/her eyes, this is called the eye of certainty; and when s/he interacts with it, this is called the true certainty. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; our knowledge about paradise is now at the rank of certain knowledge; when we see it, this will be the eye of certainty; and when we enter it and taste its pleasures, it becomes the true certainty. The second and the third ranks are mentioned in the chapter of *at-Takathur* wherein Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Striving for more distracts you [1] until you go into your graves. [2]No indeed! You will come to know. No indeed! In the end you will come to know. [4] No indeed! If only you knew for certain. [5] You will most definitely see Hellfire, [6] you will see it with the eye of certainty. [7] On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures. [8]' (*at-Takathur:* 1-8) As for the rank of the true certainty, it is mentioned in His saying: 'And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones, [92] He shall have an entertainment of boiling water, [93] And burning in hell. [94] Most surely this is the true certainty. [95]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 92-95) The last verse mentions the rank of the true certainty because such evil people, described in these verses, have already been thrown in the hell and tasted its burning fire.

Thus, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'They will find out. [4] In the end they will find out [5]' (*an-Naba':* 4-5) means that the disbelievers will find out that the Resurrection, which they denied, is true while they are still in the worldly life. They will realise this fact in stages. The first stage is when the agonies of death overtake them at the dying moment, when they are about to move to the Hereafter that they denied. During these difficult times, a part of the truth will be unveiled to them. That is why He *the Almighty* says: 'You paid no attention to this [Day]; but today We have removed your veil and your sight is sharp.' (*Qaf:* 22) This verse means that what was invisible to the person became visible. At the moment of death, some of the affairs of the heavenly world appear to the dying person. The traces of seeing such affairs appear on the dying person's face. Some people, at the time of death, see some kinds of the pleasures of the paradise, while others see the punishment of the hellfire. It is claimed that these affairs are fictitious, but this is not right, for the facial expressions of the dying person indicate what s/he really sees. This is the first stage in which the deniers of the Day of Judgment will realize the truth. After being resurrected in the Hereafter, they reach the rank of the true certainty.

Another possible interpretation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘They will find out. [4] In the end they will find out [5]’ (*an-Naba’:* 4-5) is that the believer and the disbeliever hold different stances on Resurrection, and thus both of them will find out his/her position in the Hereafter and that of the other party. When we compare between their positions, we will find that the disbeliever experiences deep regret, while the believer is filled with great happiness. The disbeliever suffers the painful punishment and his/her suffering increases when s/he sees the believer enjoying the pleasures of the paradise. Conversely, when the believer sees the disbeliever suffering the punishment in the Hereafter, his/her happiness for being saved from such a punishment increases

The Quranic context then turns our attention from the momentous announcement to some universals signs. A quick thinking about this fact may conclude that talking about these signs takes us away from the momentous announcement. However, when we reflect on these universal signs which call for belief in the Creator *Glorified is He* and what He *the Almighty* told us about, we, consequently, believe in the momentous announcement. Thus, the Quranic context here does not take us away from the main topic of the chapter, that is, the momentous announcement, for the universal signs constitute the proof of its coming.

As a matter of fact, the unseen issues are naturally controversial. So, how does Allah *the Almighty* present such issues? He *the Almighty* brings an indisputable issue and uses it as a basis for proving the controversial one. This is a common way in the glorious Quran. We have previously given an example by the issue of life and how it has begun when He *Glorified is He* brought the creation into existence. Unquestionably, we have not seen that matter, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls; nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders.' (*al-Kahf:* 51) Indeed, no one has seen that event, and we came to know about it through what Allah *Glorified is He* had told us. In fact, the human mind stands disabled before this matter, for there is no empirical evidence to prove it. One should not follow the ignorant people who overburden their minds to think about this matter which is beyond reason. Such people should have listened attentively to the Words of Allah *the Almighty* that tell them how the creation was brought into existence.

Allah *the Almighty* did not make us witness the creation, but He *Glorified is He* made us witness the matter of death. In this way, He *the Almighty* uses a tangible proof to substantiate the truthfulness of an unseen matter. It is well known that death is antithetical to life and that destruction is antithetical to construction. What has been constructed firstly will be the last thing to be destructed, and what has been constructed lastly will be the first thing to be destructed.

The last stage in the creation of the human being was breathing the Spirit into him. As we see in our worldly life, this will be the first thing to be destructed. Afterwards, the body stiffens, changes, goes rotten, decomposes and then turns into dust. So, when Allah *the Almighty* tells us that He *Glorified is He* created man out of dust, an altered black mud and clay like that of pottery, and then breathed the Spirit into him, we have, on the basis of the process of destruction of life that we witness, to believe in that. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'Exalted is He who holds all control in His hands; who has power over all things; [1] who created death and life...[2]' (*al-Mulk:* 1-2). He *Glorified is He* mentions death first because it is the perceivable sign that guides us to believe in the unseen matter of creation. Likewise, He *the Almighty* speaks in the chapter in question about the momentous announcement, which is unseen to us. Therefore, He *Glorified is He* mentions some perceivable universal signs as a proof of the unseen matters.

Consequently, He *the Almighty* says:

أَلَمۡ نَجۡعَلِ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ مِهَٰدٗا ﴿٦﴾ وَٱلۡجِبَالَ أَوۡتَادٗا ﴿٧﴾ وَخَلَقۡنَٰكُمۡ أَزۡوَٰجٗا ﴿٨﴾
وَجَعَلۡنَا نَوۡمَكُمۡ سُبَاتٗا ﴿٩﴾ وَجَعَلۡنَا ٱلَّيۡلَ لِبَاسٗا ﴿١٠﴾ وَجَعَلۡنَا ٱلنَّهَارَ مَعَاشٗا ﴿١١﴾

Did We not make the earth smooth [6] and make the mountains to keep it stable? [7] Did We not create you in pairs [8] give you sleep for rest [9] the night as a cover [10] and the day for your livelihood? [11] (The Quran, *an-Naba’:* 6 - 11)

In these verses in question, Allah *the Almighty* makes mention of tangible matters in the universe that are related to the human being and his/her livelihood on the earth. ‘Making the earth smooth’ means that it is even and prepared for living on it, like a bed prepared for a baby. Afterwards, the verses mention the loftiness of the mountains. It is as if their loftiness completes the smoothness of the earth, given the fact that they, i.e. mountains stabilize the earth.

The Arabic word *Awtad* (stakes) indicates that the earth continuously moves, and that the mountains were created only to stabilize it. This is supported by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* after mentioning the earth, said: ‘And the mountains as stakes?’ (*an-Naba’:* 7); ‘And He has cast great mountains in the earth lest it might be convulsed with you…’ (*an-Nahl:* 15). If the earth had been created in a motionless state, there would have been no need for mountains. The earth, however, is prone to convulse and shake.

In the verse in question, Allah *Glorified is He* gives the Arabs an example from their surroundings, as they used to live in tents, which need stakes to stabilize them. Therefore, the Arab person who receives the Quran is familiar with the similitude mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And the mountains as stakes’ (*an-Naba’:* 7). Here, the mountains are described as stakes despite the fact that the former is lofty and great, while the latter is small and low. In the same connection, one of the proverbs of the Arabs reads, ‘So-and-so is lower (in rank) than a stake.’ Here arises a question: ‘Why does He *Glorified is He* liken a great thing to a small one, while it should be the other way around?!’ This similitude draws our attention to the reality of the stakes used to stabilize a tent. So, the question to be asked here is: ‘Were the mountains created to stabilize the earth or to fasten something on it?’ The stakes cannot stabilize the tent on their own, which is why the tent poles are also needed to fulfil this task. Likewise, the mountains do not stabilize the earth on their own. So, what is the thing that the mountains fasten on the earth and helps, in turn, to stabilize the earth thereby? In order to have a complete similitude between the mountains and the stakes, we should search in the universe for something comparable to the tent poles. The scientific advancement made it easy to find out that thing. The findings of modern sciences concluded that the atmosphere, which surrounds the earth, is the first component needed for sustaining the life on the surface of the earth. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says about the earth: 'Say, 'Travel through the land…' (*al-An'am:* 11). He *Glorified is He* does not say, 'Travel on the land.' This is due to the fact that the atmosphere in which we live, and the airplanes fly is a complementary part of the earth. In actuality, if this atmosphere had not encompassed the earth and protected it from the harmful rays, the living beings would have perished.

Now, what is that force which makes this aeriform mass attached to the earth? There must be a force that attracts the air to the earth. So, what is that force? It is the force of gravity; the mass of the earth attracts the mass of the air. The bigger the mass of the earth is, the stronger it attracts the air to it. Thus, the massive mass of the mountains increases the gravity of the earth which, in turn, increases the force of attracting the atmosphere. Thus, we can say that 'gravity' is comparable to the tent poles, yet it is an invisible force. In this way, drawing a similitude between the mountains and the stakes is understandable. Moreover, this helps us understand the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'It is Allah who raised up the heavens with no visible supports…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 2).

The Quran did not discuss these scientific matters in details because it was revealed among an illiterate people. Their culture did not enable them to comprehend such matters. The Quran, however, calls for the intellectual activity and the scientific research. This is due to the fact that to whatever extent the human mind advances, the Book of Allah will be in line with it; the Quran will neither contradict nor hinder the sound mind. We have said that the bestowals of the Quran will extend to the coming of the Hour. This explains why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not interpret the Quran, because his interpretation, if done, would not have been in line with the intellectual abilities of the people who witnessed its revelation. Such an interpretation would have also fixed the understanding of the Quran at a certain level that accepts no additional contributions and prevents the minds from engaging in a deeper understanding of the Quran. If this had happened, the validity of the Quran for every place and time would have been lost. As for the necessary Quranic rulings, Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* explained them because every Muslim from his *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* time up to the coming of the Hour needs them. The universal signs which are subjected to the mental activity and deduction were generally discussed in the Quran in order that every people would make use of them according to the scientific development it has achieved. Thus, the Quran explains everything and its reader benefits from it according to his/her intellectual abilities.

There is another remark in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Did We not make the earth smooth?' (*an-Naba':* 6) In this aforementioned verse, the negative interrogation is employed instead of the normal declarative sentence, that is, we made the earth smooth. This is due to the fact that confirming the facts with the negative interrogation is more eloquent than using a declarative sentence. It is as if He *the Almighty* entrusted the answer to that question to us because the correct answer undoubtedly affirms that it is He *the Almighty* Who made the earth smooth. This style is employed because He *the Almighty* wants to say to the people, 'If you acknowledge that it is Me Who made the earth smooth, why do you not believe in Me?!'

Moreover, the negative interrogation in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Did We not make the earth smooth?' (*an-Naba':* 6) is meaningful; if the interrogation is employed, the question may carry the answer to the questioned person. For example, when you say to a child, 'I gave you such and such, did I not?' you implicitly tell him/her to answer affirmatively. By contrast, when you say to him/her, 'I did not give you such and such,' and s/he answers affirmatively. In such a way, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants us to answer affirmatively by employing the negative interrogation. When He *the Almighty* says: 'Did We not make the earth smooth, [6] and make the mountains to keep it stable? [7]' (*an-Naba':* 6-7), He *Glorified is He* tells us that it would have been reasonably acceptable to deny the Resurrection if He *the Almighty* had not actually made such great actions. However, as He *Glorified is He* had already made them, provided us with the necessary elements of life and showed us the signs of His Creative Power, we must believe in His Omnipotence, All-Profound Wisdom and Infinite Mercy. In other words, as He *the Almighty* is Omnipotent, All-Wise and All-Merciful, we should believe everything He *Glorified is He* tells us about.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Did We not create you in pairs?’ (*an-Naba’:* 8), it means that He *Glorified is He* has created us as males and females so that each two spouses would feel mutual kindness, tranquility and mercy to each other. This is a miraculous aspect of the creation. Surprisingly, some philosophers claim that man was created by chance. Monnet, the French philosopher, refuted their claim, saying, ‘They were heedless of the fact that the routine is one of the antitheses of chance.’ In other words, it is not a coincidence to daily meet someone at the same time and place. This encounter depends on one’s daily routine, while chance depends on the law of possibility. Some scholars opine that the ratio of the possibility of the creation by chance is one to two hundred million. For example, the ratio of the possibility that a random usage of a typewriter composes a book of verses written by Shakespeare is one to two hundred million. Monnet added, ‘The claim that the universe was created by chance is impossible. If chance created man, it would be inconceivable that the same chance created a female, sharing the same genus and differing in the gender in a way that if they have sexual intercourse with each other, they produce another male or female. Chance cannot do that.’

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Did We not create you in pairs?’ (*an-Naba’:* 8) indicates that the creation came into existence purposefully and precisely. So, we thank Monnet for drawing our attention to one of the verses of the Quran, which is: ‘And one of His Signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them…’ (*ar-Rum:* 21).

After Allah *Glorified is He* had created the earth and prepared it for the life of the human beings, He *Glorified is He* created them all from a male and a female. He *the Almighty* made the human being reproducible in order to settle in the earth and reform it. This life needs some basic elements in order to be sustained. These elements are explained in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*:

'Did we not give you sleep for rest, [9] the night as a cover, [10] and the day for your livelihood? [11]' (*an-Naba':* 9-11) People's bodies restore their energy after working hard through restful sleep. Sleeping should be during the night because it covers the people with its darkness. By contrast, the daytime is the time of working and seeking provision. Therefore, the basic elements of life are not food and drink, as some people wrongly think. Rather, sleep for resting is the first basic element of life.

In fact, sleeping puzzled the scientists and the philosophers; they could not recognize its reality or cause. How does it overtake the human being? Why cannot s/he resist it? The scientists carried out many experiments in this regard. They concluded that sleeping is a self-deterrent for the human being. This is due to the fact that the human being may work hard until s/he gets tired and try, though, to bear this tiredness to continue work until s/he uses up all his/her energy. Sleep, however, overtakes him/her after s/he gets tired. Sleeping is important to such a person to regain his/her energy and continue his/her work with more power. Thus, sleeping is a restful process. If we get tired out of work and did not sleep for a couple of hours to regain our energy, we would not be able to continue our work. Consequently, sleeping is one of Allah's signs in the creation of the human being. It is also one of His great Blessings as it is a necessary daily process. That is why He *the Almighty* says about sleeping: 'And one of His signs is your sleeping by night and (by) day…' (*ar-Rum:* 23); and 'Say: Tell me, if Allah were to make the night to continue incessantly on you till the day of resurrection, who is the god besides Allah that could bring you light? Do you not then hear? [71] Say: Tell me, if Allah were to make the day to continue incessantly on you till the day of resurrection, who is the god besides Allah that could bring you the night in which you take rest? Do you not then see? [72]' (*al-Qasas:* 71-72)

Sleeping is called *Subat* (disconnection) because it disconnects the sleeping person from the course of life. Allah *the Almighty* also considers sleeping a kind of death, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die [He takes] during their sleep.' (*az-Zumar:* 42) The disconnection with the worldly life during sleep ends after waking up. In the case of death, however, one's connection to the worldly life ends permanently. Losing our consciousness during sleeping is one of Allah’s Bounties. When someone suffers the pain of a wound, s/he does not feel such a pain during his/her sleep; but once s/he wakes up, s/he feels it again. So, it is the soul that feels the pain and not the wounded organ. Thus, sleep is a manifestation of Allah’s Mercy towards us.

As one loses his/her own consciousness during sleep, s/he may move in a way or another. That is why Allah *the Almighty* covered us during sleep with the darkness of the night. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Did We not make the night as a cover?’ (*an-Naba’:* 10) So, sleeping is covered by the darkness of the night. As for the daytime, it is dedicated to seeking livelihood, as He *the Almighty* says afterwards: ‘[Did We not make the day for your livelihood?’ (*an-Naba’:* 11) Therefore, the day is the time of movement and activity after having a restful sleep at night.

No one has ever opposed the facts that Allah *the Almighty* presents in the verses under discussion. Thus, as no one has claimed that s/he is the owner of the bestowals mentioned in these verses, it is a well-established fact that He *Glorified is He* is the Owner of these bestowals and bounties. This categorically refutes the divinity of any deity except Allah *the Almighty*. This is due to the fact that He *the Almighty* is the One Who created the creatures and made the earth smooth and the mountains as stakes. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* created us in pairs and gave us sleep for rest, the night as a cover and the day for our livelihood. If a deity, other than Allah *the Almighty* did all of these actions, would s/he let someone else claim these actions?! Would s/he keep silent to such claims?! Would s/he not defend him/herself?! We have previously explained that the action is attributed to the one who claims it if no one else opposed that. As Allah *the Almighty* told us that He *Glorified is He* has done all the aforementioned actions and no one objected to that, then He *the Almighty* must have been the true God, and we must totally accept His Truthful Words.

In the verses in question, Allah *the Almighty* gives us tangible examples of some phenomena which are unquestionably attributed to Him. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says to us, ‘If We had not given you such and such blessings, it would have been reasonable that you do not believe Me, but We have already given you such blessings which confirms our Omniscience and Infinite Mercy towards you. The creation of these blessings is unprecedented. Thus, when

We tell you about the Last Day, the Recompense and the Resurrection, you should believe Us especially so because the Resurrection is easier than the creation.' In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And it is He who begins creation; then He repeats it, and that is [even] easier for Him…' (*ar-Rum:* 27).

Had there been no Last Day, standing for the Account and Recompense, the sinful and lustful people- who wronged other people, appropriated their properties and violated their honour- would have been fortunate. Likewise, the loss would have been for the obedient, righteous people- who followed the Straight Path in the worldly life- if that had been the case. This case is logically and reasonably, let alone religiously and legally, unacceptable. Even if there had not been a Day of Judgment and Allah *the Almighty* had not told us about it, the just and wise people would have called for its implementation in this worldly life. How would the people be left without returning to a destination where the good people are rewarded for their good deeds and the evil ones are punished for their misdeeds?

It is noted that the chapter under discussion presented one of the ways of proving the truth which can be established by either a proof, or a testimony or an oath. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'The burden of proof is upon the plaintiff and the taking of oath is upon the defendant.'(1) Allah *Glorified is He* claimed the creation of all the creatures and provided the proof in His saying: 'Did We not make the earth smooth, [6] And the mountains as stakes? [7] Did We not create you in pairs, [8] give you sleep for rest, [9] the night as a cover, [10] and the day for your livelihood? [11]' (*an-Naba':* 6-11) These verses produce the proof that He *Glorified is He* is the Creator Who fashioned the creatures wonderfully with His Power and organized them wisely so that every creature perfectly accomplishes its function for which it was created.

He *the Almighty* also proved this fact by bearing witness to it, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge - [that He is] maintaining [creation] in justice…' (*Al-'Imran:* 28). Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* proved it by taking an oath, saying: 'Then by the Lord of the heaven and earth, indeed, it is truth - just as [sure as] it is that you are speaking.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 23) Thus, He *Glorified is He* used all the ways of proving the truthfulness of His Divinity. So, is there an excuse for anyone who denies this fact?

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As Allah be pleased with them. See Ibn Muqri' Al-Asbahani, Mu'jam, Hadith no. 616; and Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan As-Sughra, Hadith no. 3103. It is also narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas and Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with them. See Al-Bayhaqi, Ma'rifat As-Sunnan, Hadith no. 20253; and Ad-Daraqutni, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3190.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَبَنَيۡنَا فَوۡقَكُمۡ سَبۡعٗا شِدَادٗا ﴿١٢﴾ وَجَعَلۡنَا سِرَاجٗا وَهَّاجٗا ﴿١٣﴾ وَأَنزَلۡنَا مِنَ
ٱلۡمُعۡصِرَٰتِ مَآءٗ ثَجَّاجٗا ﴿١٤﴾ لِّنُخۡرِجَ بِهِۦ حَبّٗا وَنَبَاتٗا ﴿١٥﴾ وَجَنَّٰتٍ أَلۡفَافًا ﴿١٦﴾

Did We not build seven strong [heavens] above you [12]
and make a blazing lamp? [13] Did We not send water
pouring down from the clouds [14] to bring forth with it
grain, plants [15] and luxuriant gardens? [16]
(The Quran, *an-Naba':* 12 - 16)

So many verses of the Quran indicate clearly that the 'seven strong' are nothing but the seven heavens which are created as layers, one upon the other. In fact, people cannot comprehend or realize the essence of the heaven and its massive body. Some people, however, tried to express the meaning of the heaven with perceivable qualities, especially after the emergence of many impressive scientific theories.

Those who sincerely wanted to draw the religion of Islam closer to the realities of life tried hard to make the religious matters, especially the unseen ones, easily perceivable by the people. In the modern age, Sheikh Mohamed 'Abdu(1) *may Allah be merciful to him* was a prominent example of such people. He was the leader of the rationalistic school of thought which tried to draw the unseen matters of the religion closer to people's minds. This shows their zealousness for Allah's Religion. The harm of this approach, however, overweighs its benefit. This is due to the fact that the unseen matters should be believed in as such; it is not necessary to fully comprehend them.

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(1) *Imam Mohamed 'Abdu ibn Hasan Khayr Allah, belonging to At-Turkumani, was the Mufti of Egypt and one of the figures of reform and renewal in Islam. He was born in Shanra, one of the villages of Al-Gharbiyya governorate, in 1849. He grew up in Mahillat Nasr in Al-Buhyra governorate. He supported the' Urabi Revolution and died in 1905 at the age of 56.*

We have said that there is a main pillar of faith, which is to believe in Allah *the Almighty*. If we willingly believed in Him *the Almighty* we had consequently to believe in everything He *Glorified is He* tells us about the unseen matters, be it reasonable or beyond our reason. Besides, the tangible matters, which we perceive, confirm the truthfulness of the unseen matters. A lot of things were unperceivable by our means of perception, but, with the scientific advancement, we became able to perceive them. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; in the past, the human being did not know about or see the microbes and some other tangible matters like the stars. However, with the scientific development and the invention of the microscope and the telescope, we could see them. Thus, if some matters are unperceivable to your means of perception, this does not necessarily mean that they do not exist. So, the mind should not hesitate to believe in the unseen matters especially so because it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who told us about them. Moreover, science keeps unveiling what was previously unperceivable. Thus, we should use the tangible matters as a proof of the unseen ones.

Furthermore, believing in the unseen as such is one of the distinctive qualities of the believer, as Allah *the Almighty* describes the believers, saying: 'Who believe in the unseen…' (*al-Baqara:* 3). After all, believing in the perceived matters is not a privilege, for both the believers and the disbelievers are equal in this regard. It is normal to believe in the perceivable matters that convince the mind and are perceived by the means of perception.

When the rationalists saw that the essence of the heavens is not subjected to perception or experiment, they hold that 'the heaven' refers to everything over you. Accordingly, the planets, the stars, the sun and the moon constitute the heaven. During their time, only seven planets were discovered, so they claimed that these planets are the seven heavens. Afterwards, it was discovered that the planets are more than seven. When Imam Mohamed 'Abdu interpreted the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And [by] the earth and He who spread it.' (*ash-Shams:* 5); and 'Did We not build seven strong [heavens] above you?' (*an-Naba':* 12), he said, 'To build means to make something firm and solid.'

In the process of construction, for example, we put a brick on another and use cement to stick them together. So, how can we imagine the construction of the heaven if it consists of the planets, the starts, the sun and the moon? Mohamed ‘Abdu answered, ‘Allah made these heavenly bodies solid that they do not fall on each other or run off their orbit. They are controlled by the law of gravity discovered by Newton in the seventh century. The Quran is compatible with the scientific facts and does not contradict them.’

However, we say to Imam Mohamed ‘Abdu, ‘The Quran should not be interpreted as separate verses; rather, its verses explain each other.’ For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘When the stars are dimmed [8] and the sky is torn apart. [9]’ (*al-Mursalat:* 8-9), these verses show that the heaven is not the stars. Moreover, in the chapter of *al-Infitar*, He *the Almighty* says: ‘When the sky breaks apart [1] and when the stars fall, scattering. [2]’ (*al-Infitar:* 1-2) It is thus crystal clear that the heaven is different from the planets. Likewise, the heaven is not the sun or the moon, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘Do you not consider how Allah has created seven heavens in layers [15] And made the moon therein a [reflected] light and made the sun a burning lamp? [16]’ (*Nuh:* 15-16) Therefore, the Quran precisely mentions these heavenly bodies and makes it clear that they are different from the heaven and its body. This fact is amply illustrated by mentioning the heaven along with these heavenly bodies.

Furthermore, the Quran distinguished between the star and the planet; the former’s light is intrinsic, while the latter’s light is derived from an external source. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Indeed, We have adorned the nearest heaven with an adornment of stars.’ (*as-Saffat:* 6); ‘And We have certainly beautified the nearest heaven with lamps…’ (*al-Mulk:* 5). Both the stars and the lamps are the adornment of the heaven, but they are not the heaven itself. Now, is there anything other than the sun, the moon, the stars and the seven planets in the heaven? Yes, of course. The scientists have discovered other planets in our galaxy, like Neptune and Pluto.

Therefore, we can note that Imam Mohamed ‘Abdu, with his rationalistic school of thought, imagined that the whole universe is confined to the solar system. However, this solar system is a tiny thing in the creation of Allah

Glorified is He. In this regard, scientists believe that the sun light takes eight light minutes to reach the earth. Sirius, which gives light and heat estimated by twenty-six-fold that of the sun, is fourteen light years away from the earth. Thus, how can we confine Allah's vast universe to that which we perceive of it? We should not say that the earth is the centre of the universe, as the Greek did. The earth is so tiny to be the center of a universe about which He *the Almighty* says: 'And the heaven, We raised it high with power, and most surely We are the makers of things ample.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47)

Therefore, the universe is so massive that no one can fully conceive it. As for those who claim that the heaven is the sun, the moon and the stars, and that gravity holds its structure, we advise them to reflect on the Quran and the way it expresses the construction of the heaven. When Allah *the Almighty* talks about the heaven, He *Glorified is He* uses the Arabic word *Bina'* (construction), whereas the word *Bunyan* (building) is used for the constructions established on the earth. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: 'they said: Build for him a furnace, then cast him into the burning fire.' (*as-Saffat:* 97); 'Is he, therefore, better who lays his foundation on fear of Allah and (His) good pleasure, or he who lays his foundation on the edge of a cracking hollowed bank, so it broke down with him into the fire of hell...' (*at-Tawba:* 109); and 'The building which they have built will ever continue to be a source of disquiet in their hearts…' (*at-Tawba:* 110). In the verse in question, He *the Almighty* says: 'Did We not build seven strong [heavens] above you.' (*an-Naba':* 12) There is a great difference between the process of building on the earth and building of the heaven. Unlike the heaven, we build on the earth by sticking bricks together and we can still be able to distinguish each one from the other. With regard to the creation of the heaven, He *the Almighty* says: '…then look again, can you see any disorder?' (*al-Mulk:* 3) This verse means that there are no flaws in the heaven because it is a solid, precise construction that no one sees any cracks in it. Afterwards, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Then turn back the eye again and again; your look shall come back to you confused while it is fatigued.' (*al-Mulk:* 4) This clearly indicates that the sight cannot penetrate into the heaven; when we look at it, we see it one solid construction. By contrast, one can see something like stains in the sun and the moon.

Moreover, how can we accept the rationalistic school's interpretation of Allah's saying: '…seven strong [heavens]' (*an-Naba':* 12) as referring to the planets, the stars, the sun and the moon? This is totally unacceptable, especially if we referred to the Night Journey and Ascension, which we firmly believe in. We know that the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) ascended along with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to the nearest heaven. When he requested for the gate to be opened, it was opened. They kept ascending until they reached the seventh heaven. Thus, these seven heavens are different from the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars.

We agree with the rationalistic school on the fact that Islam does not contradict science, yet, what kind of science does Islam not oppose? It is the correct science that mounts to/tells the truth. After all, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who revealed the Quran and created the universe. So, how can there be a contradiction between them? The problem is with some people who hastily connect the new scientific theories with the unseen matters mentioned in the Quran before even studying and examining the veracity of such theories. Indeed, such people are sincere in their endeavour to serve Allah's Religion, but their hasty actions may prove harmful to the Islamic *Da'awa* (Call).

It is not important to rationalize all the religious matters so that the human mind fully understands them. What is really important is that the religion raises the mind to its proper level. As we have said previously, the unseen matters should be believed in as it is; it is not important to know their essence; they are beneficial to us even if we do not fully comprehend them.

Furthermore, what would the mind of the twentieth century leave for the mind of the thirtieth or the fortieth century to discover? So, we should not hastily follow the scientific theories or overstep the natural development of the human mind. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* does not bestow the secrets of the universe on us all at once; everyday He *Glorified is He* gives us some of such bestowals and unveils to us some of the secrets. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'We will soon show them Our signs in the universe and in their own souls until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth…' (*Fussilat:* 53). New signs will be unveiled until the Day of Judgment. This is one of Allah's Universal Laws. There is no need for hastiness to convince the contemporary minds that the Quran is compatible with the scientific theories. What would we do if we connected the Quran with a scientific theory, claiming that the Quran discovered it first, and then we find out that the theory is wrong? There are many incidents in which scientists prove some theories wrong after being thought correct.

To recap, the seven strong heavens are in layers over us. The heaven is not the planets, nor the stars, nor the sun nor the moon; all of these bodies are different from the lower heaven and have nothing to do with it. When we find out the distance between the earth and the lower heaven, we then might think of knowing and realizing its reality.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'And make a blazing lamp?' (*an-Naba':* 13) He *Glorified is He* tells us about the sun, the blazing lamp, which illuminates the earth. The Arabic word *Wahhaj* (blazing) refers to the bright thing that twinkles and is full of heat. Thus, the sun intrinsically gives us light and heat. That is why its light has bright rays, while the light of the moon is pure. This is due to the fact that the light of the moon is extrinsic; it is derived from the sun and that it is why it is a pure, tranquil light. Thus, the sun gives us both light and heat.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Did We not send water pouring down from the clouds?' (*an-Naba':* 14), the Arabic word *Al-Mu'sirat* refers to the clouds which pour down abundant water. When we reflect on the relation between the blazing lamp, the sun, and the falling of water from the clouds, we firmly believe that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who revealed these verses. He *Glorified is He* created the universe and organized its affairs perfectly on the basis of the cause and the effect law. We have explained this relation, saying, 'The heat of the sun makes the sea water evaporate forming thereby clouds filled with fresh water which will later fall on a certain country to be used for drinking and irrigation.' In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: '…then send down water from the cloud so We give it to you to drink of…' (*al-Hijr:* 22).

Linguistically, the Arabic word *Al-Mu'sirat* (clouds) refers to the girl that has just begun her first menstruation period, so she can give birth to children. In this regard, a poet said,

I was protected from my fears

By disguising among three young girls (two full breasted female companions and one adult female)

Likewise, a cloud is called *Mu'sir* if it is filled with fresh water. Then, its water pours down once it passes over a cool area, especially over the summits of the lofty mountains which are extremely cold. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'Did We not make the earth a home [25] for the living and the dead? [26] Did We not place firm, lofty mountains on it and provide you with sweet water? [27]' (*al-Mursalat:* 25-27) Thus, the sweat water is connected, with regard to its fall, with lofty mountains. A scientist called vit Jim produced an Encyclopedia on the Snow Line in which he discussed the places where the snow remains during the whole year. He noted that this line starts from the equator up to the tropic of Cancer and ends with the equator and the sea level. He found out that the highest summit in the equatorial region is 16 to 17 thousand feet (from the sea level); 13 thousand feet in the tropic of Cancer at 23°, 6 thousand feet at latitude 50; 4 thousand feet at latitude 60; and at latitude 70, the snow line reaches the sea level. Thus, the further the snow line is from the hot regions, the lower it gets. We know that the summits of the mountains are covered with snow in sub-zero temperatures. Once it is above zero by a quarter or a half of a degree, the snow melts and descends down from the mountains.

As for the wind, it passes by the snow line region and drops the water it carries at zero degrees therein. Afterwards, it blows on the other regions without water. This means that the regions not belonging to the snow line receive no rain.

Allah *the Almighty* explains this process of sending down the rain, saying: 'Do you not see that Allah drives along the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up so that you see the rain coming forth from their midst?...' (*an-Nur:* 43) We may ask, 'Do all the clouds carry water?' Scientist replied, 'No,' because the clouds need positive and negative electric charges. When they meet together, they produce rain. We used to interpret the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And We send the winds fertilizing…' (*al-Hijr:* 22), saying that the winds are used in fertilizing the plants. With the advancement of science, however, we discovered that the winds fertilize each other.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* describes the function of rain, which is poured down abundantly, saying: ‘To bring forth with it grain, plants, [15] and luxuriant gardens [16]’ (*an-Naba’:* 15-16), we should ponder on how these verses are precisely expressed. This precision can only be attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* Who is fully Aware of His creation. The grain is the source out of which the plants grow, whereas the latter forms the gardens. Thus, He *the Almighty* advises those who want to see His signs in the creation, saying: ‘Say: Travel in the earth, then see…’ (*an-Naml:* 69). ‘The earth’ here refers to the lands which are farmed by Allah’s Power, without any human intervention. The true nature of these lands remains as long as they are away from the human intervention. In such lands, one finds many of Allah’s signs in creation, including: trees, plants and fruits. Who planted them? The human being makes use of what s/he had seen in nature by growing the like of these plants and trees.

Thus, the grains give us the plants and trees, and when the trees grow in size and in number, they constitute the luxuriant gardens the branches of which intermingle due to the fertility of the soil. In Arabic, it is called *Janna* (a garden) because it covers the one walking inside it.

After telling us about some of the manifestations of Allah’s Power, Wisdom and Creativity, the Quran draws our attention to the main topic and objective of the chapter, that is, the Day of Judgment or the momentous announcement that the disbelievers deny and differ about.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّ يَوۡمَ ٱلۡفَصۡلِ كَانَ مِيقَٰتٗا ﴿١٧﴾ يَوۡمَ يُنفَخُ فِي ٱلصُّورِ فَتَأۡتُونَ أَفۡوَاجٗا ﴿١٨﴾
وَفُتِحَتِ ٱلسَّمَآءُ فَكَانَتۡ أَبۡوَٰبٗا ﴿١٩﴾ وَسُيِّرَتِ ٱلۡجِبَالُ فَكَانَتۡ سَرَابًا ﴿٢٠﴾

A time has been appointed for the Day of Decision: [17]
a Day when the Trumpet will sound and you will come
forward in crowds [18] when the sky will open up like wide
portals [19] when the mountains will vanish like a mirage [20]
(The Quran, *an-Naba’:* 17 - 20)

Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the Day of Decision after the perceivable universal signs to say to the disbelievers, ‘You should not have denied the

Day of Judgment after witnessing these universal signs which you clearly acknowledge that they are attributed to Allah Alone. How will you then meet Him *Glorified is He* on that Day of Decision? What will you say to Him *the Almighty* after denying and opposing His Way of Guidance?'

The Day of Judgment is called 'the Day of Decision' because Allah *the Almighty* judges among His servants on it. This word 'decision' indicates that the two parties are disputing about certain issues. In the worldly life, the people differ about the truth and the falsehood; some people are wrongdoers, while others are wronged. Everyone is fully convinced of his/her point of view and argues for it until Allah *Glorified is He* judges between the people on the Day of Judgment, for all the disputing people will be gathered together before Him *the Almighty*.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'A time has been appointed…' (*an-Naba':* 17) means that the time of the Day of Judgment is precisely set; it will neither come earlier or later. Being an appointed time, it is clear why Allah *Glorified is He* does not respond to the calls of those who want Him *the Almighty* to bring it earlier than its due time. Such people asked: 'When will this threat come about, if you are truthful?' (*Yunus:* 48) He *the Almighty* is not subjected to the will of His creation because He *Glorified is He* is Unchangeable; no one can reject His Command or repel His Decree. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* is not subjected to the hastiness that overtakes the human beings because they are imperfect, with limited intellectual abilities. By contrast, He *Glorified is He* is Perfect; His Anger with the disbelievers and the disobedient people does not make Him hasten to hold them accountable before the due time set for that.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'A Day when the Trumpet will sound and you will come forward in crowds.' (*an-Naba':* 18) This is because the Day of Judgment starts with blowing the Trumpet. This verb *Yunfakhu* (to be blown) is in the passive voice; it does not show the one who will blow the Trumpet. Scholars believe that Israfil will blow the Trumpet for the first time to resurrect the people, and that he will do it again to gather them (for accountability).

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…you will come forward in crowds.' (*an-Naba':* 18) means that the people will come in groups according to their religious state in the worldly life, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying:

'(And remember) the Day when We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imam…' (*al-Isra': 71*). Thus, there will be a leader for those who devoured usury, the adulterous, those who devour what is unlawful, etc. The people with similar sins will be gathered together.

With regard to the saying of Allah: 'A Day when the Trumpet will sound and you will come forward in crowds' (*an-Naba': 18*), there is a Hadith(1) narrated by Ibn Mardawayh on the authority of Mu'adh ibn Jabal *Allah be pleased with him* in which he, i.e. *Mu'adh* asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about this verse, whereupon he said, 'You have asked about a great matter. After looking at the sky, he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah *Glorified is He* distinguished ten kinds of people from the Muslim *Ummah* and changed their images; some would be in the images of apes, while others would be in the images of pigs. Some would hang down their heads with their legs over their heads; they would be dragged on their heads. Some people would be blind, deaf or dumb. Some others would chew their tongues which would hang down to their chests; the pus would issue from their mouth like saliva, which would disgust the gathered people. The hands and legs of some others would be cut off. Some others would be crucified on trunks of fire. Others' smell would be worse than that of a corpse, disgusting all the people. Another kind of people would wear cloaks made of pitch, attaching to their bodies.'

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* then explained these kinds of people. As for those who have the image of apes, they are the backbiters who go about with calumnies among the people to arouse hostilities. With regard to those in the images of pigs, they are the ones who devour what is unlawful and earn their provision illegally. As for those who will hang down their heads with their legs over their heads and who will be dragged on their heads, they are the ones who devour usury. As for the blind people, they are the unjust rulers. As for the deaf people who do not have a sound mentality, they are the conceited people who boast about their deeds. We said that some people will chew their tongues and the pus will issue from their mouth as saliva; those are the evil scholars who say what they do not do. As for those whose hands and legs are cut off, they are the ones who harm their neighbours. With regard to those who will be crucified on trunks of fire, they are the ones who expose other people to the ruler. As for those whose smell is worse than that of the corpse, they are the followers of their whims and lusts. With regard to the people who will wear cloaks made of pitch, attaching to their bodies, they are the self-conceited and arrogant people.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Mu'adh ibn Jabal Allah be pleased with him. In his Tafsir, As-Suyuti attributes it to Ibn Mardawayh while Ath-Tha'labi attributes it to Ibn Fanjawayh on the authority of Al-Bara' ibn A'zib. See As-Suyuti, Ad-Durr Al-Manthur, 8/393; Ath-Tha'labi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 10/115; and Az-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshaf, 4/687.*

This is how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* interpreted the word *Afwaj* (in crowds). However, scholars who scrutinize the authenticity of the Hadiths opine that the context indicates that the Hadith is about those who deny the Resurrection, yet the text of the Hadith refers to a group of the Muslims, which is why Ibn Hajar said, ‘I think this Hadith is not quoted in the right context or it is fabricated.’

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When the sky will open up like wide portals’ (*an-Naba’:* 19), we said that the heaven is constructed perfectly; one cannot see any flaws or cracks in its construction. By contrast, in the Hereafter, the heaven will be torn apart and will open up like wide portals, after being a perfect construction.

Both the heaven and the earth will be affected by the coming of the Hereafter, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘On the day when the earth shall be changed into a different earth and the heavens (as well)…’ (*Ibrahim:* 48). Thus, the earth and the heaven of this worldly life are qualified for humans’ living, but the earth and the heaven of the Hereafter are undoubtedly different. The earth in the worldly life depends on causes and effects, whereas that of the Hereafter depends on the Ultimate Causer *Glorified is He* Alone.

Allah *the Almighty* explained the meaning of His saying: ‘When the sky will open up like wide portals.’ (*an-Naba’:* 19) in other verses, saying: ‘When the heaven becomes cleft asunder’ (*al-Infitar:* 1); and ‘On the Day when the heaven shall move from side to side.’ (*at-Tur:* 9) All of this leads to the perishing of the worldly heaven so that the new heaven of the Hereafter replaces it.

Allah *the Almighty* then adds: 'When the mountains will vanish like a mirage.' (*an-Naba':* 20) This is another scene on the Day of Judgment. The mountains which are the most firm and solid phenomena will vanish on the Day of Judgment. They will crack, break up and vanish like a mirage.

The topic of the destruction of the mountains was discussed at length in the Quran. The state of the mountains is mentioned in twenty-nine verses in twenty-nine chapters of the Quran, like the verse in question. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *at-Takwir:* 'When the sun is covered, [1] And when the stars darken, [2] And when the mountains are made to pass away. [3]' (*at-Takwir:* 1-3) In the chapter of *al-Kahf*, He *the Almighty* says: 'And the day on which We will cause the mountains to pass away…' (*al-Kahf:* 47); in the chapter of *at-Tur*: 'On the Day when the heaven shall move from side to side [9] And the mountains shall pass away passing away (altogether) [10]' (*at-Tur:* 9-10); and in the chapter in question: 'When the mountains will vanish like a mirage.' (*an-Naba':* 20) These are four positions mentioning the removal of the mountains, but three of them do not mention what happens to them afterwards. In the chapter in question, however, He *the Almighty* says: 'When the mountains will vanish like a mirage.' (*an-Naba':* 20) Thus, the mountains will be like a mirage. First, they will move and turn into very tiny fragments. For this reason, He *the Almighty* says: 'When the mountains are turned to dust.' (*al-Mursalat:* 10) This verse means that they will no longer exist.

In the chapter of *al-Muzzammil*, Allah *the Almighty* gives us another picture of the destruction of the mountains; they are described as heaps of sand: 'On the day when the earth and the mountains shall quake and the mountains shall become (as) heaps of sand let loose.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 14) The Arabic word *Katheeb* refers to the fine sand which broke up after being solid. This is one of the stages of the destruction of the mountains where they will turn into heaps of sand. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Waqi'a*: 'When the earth shall be shaken with a (severe) shaking, [4] And the mountains shall be made to crumble with (an awful) crumbling, [5] So that they shall be as scattered dust. [6]' (*al-Waqi'a:* 4-6) These aforementioned verses collectively tell us that the removal of the mountains is synonymous with its vanishing. Ultimately, they will cease to exist.

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Ma‘arij*: ‘On the day when the heaven shall be as molten copper [8] And the mountains shall be as tufts of wool. [9]’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 8-9); and in the chapter of *al-Qari‘a,* He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And the mountains shall be as loosened wool.’ (*al-Qari`a:* 5) Thus, the mountains will vanish, and then break up and turn into heaps of sand. Afterwards, they will turn into a mirage and then totally vanish, for there is no function for them anymore. Their function was to stabilize the earth, but in the Hereafter the earth has changed into another one.

Then Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا ﴿٢١﴾ لِّلطَّٰغِينَ مَـَٔابًا ﴿٢٢﴾ لَّٰبِثِينَ فِيهَآ أَحْقَابًا ﴿٢٣﴾
لَّا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا ﴿٢٤﴾ إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا ﴿٢٥﴾ جَزَآءً وِفَاقًا ﴿٢٦﴾

Hell lies in wait [21] a home for oppressors [22] to stay in for a long, long time [23] where they will taste no coolness nor drink [24] except one that is scalding and dark [25] a fitting requital [26] (The Quran, *an-Naba’:* 21-26)

These verses mention the ultimate destination of the deniers of Resurrection: ‘Hell lies in wait.’ (*an-Naba’:* 21) First, Allah *the Almighty* threatens them, saying: ‘They will find out. [4] In the end they will find out. [5]’ (*an-Naba’:* 4-5) Then, He *Glorified is He* asserted that the Day they denied will come to pass, saying: ‘A time has been appointed for the Day of Decision.’ (*an-Naba’:* 17) Afterwards, He *the Almighty* gives them some descriptions of what will happen in the universe on the Day of Judgment including the collapse of many universal phenomena. So, what then? It is the Recompense according to the deeds, be they good or evil.

Now, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the punishment awaiting the disbelievers and the deniers who oppose His Way of Guidance. Then He *Glorified is He* shows us the reward of the pious believers, saying: ‘For those who were aware of Allah there is supreme fulfilment.’ (*an-Naba’:* 31) In this way, He *the Almighty* gives us a complete account about the destination of both groups in order that we might draw an effective comparison between them.

Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Hell lies in wait.’ (*an-Naba’:* 21) This means that the hellfire expects and lies in wait for the disbelievers to grab them inside it. So, it is not heedless of them; rather, it yearns for them, like a person lying in wait to seize his/her opponent. Elsewhere in the Quran, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Almost bursting for fury…’ (*al-Mulk:* 8). So, the fire is filled with anger against the disbelievers. Not only the hellfire but also the whole universe hates the disbelievers who violate Allah’s Way of Guidance. All the creatures yearn for a chance to revenge against the disbelievers. For this reason, the hellfire calls for more of them to be burned inside it, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘On the day that We will say to hell: Are you filled up? And it will say: Are there any more?’ (*Qaf:* 30) With regard to the attitude of the inanimate objects towards the disbelievers, He *the Almighty* says: ‘So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 29) This is due to the fact that the whole universe is subjected to Allah *the Almighty* and glorifies Him. It fulfils its function as prescribed by Him *the Almighty* and feels angry at the human being if s/he violates the Divine Way of Guidance. In the same connection, we mentioned the Sacred Hadith which reads, ‘The oceans say, ‘My Lord, give me the permission to drown the son of Adam.’ The earth says, ‘My Lord, give me the permission to swallow the son of Adam…’. Thus, the whole universe, including the heaven and the earth, is angry at the man who violates Allah’s Way of Guidance. Surprisingly, the human being is the only creature that may disobey Him *the Almighty*. The human beings are divided into believers and disbelievers; obedient people and disobedient ones. It suffices here to cite the following verse: ‘Do you not see that Allah is He, Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18). This means that the creatures mentioned in the previous verse unanimously worship Allah *the Almighty*. As for the human being, the master of the universe, s/he breaks this rule, as is clear in the saying of Allah: ‘…and many of the people; and many there are against whom chastisement has become necessary…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18).

Thus, the hellfire is correctly acting when it lies in wait for the disbelievers and yearns to punish them. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘A home for oppressors.’

(*an-Naba':* 22) This means that the hellfire is the ultimate destination of the oppressors. How evil that destination is!

The Arabic word *Ma'aba* (returning home) implies that someone will return to a place after leaving it. Here arises a question, which is, 'How can the hellfire be the *Ma'ab* (home) of the disbelievers while they had not been thrown into it before?!' Scholars opine that the human being during his/her presence in the worldly life enjoys freedom of choice between two states of subjection; the first one is that s/he was created out of nothing and then given the ability to choose. Accordingly, the disbelievers will be forced to dwell in the hellfire. In other words, they will have no choice to decide on this matter, exactly as they had no choice to decide on the time of their birth or death or their morals, etc.

Moreover, the last destination of the disbelievers will grow worse because it is permanent and endless, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'To stay in for a long, long time.' (*an-Naba':* 23) The singular form of the Arabic word *Ahqaba* is *Hiqba*, which, according to the exegetes of the Quran, refers to a period of time estimated by eighty years. As these periods of time are eternally consecutive, then the disbelievers will dwell in the hellfire forever. With regard to the disbelievers, staying for a long, long time in the hellfire does not indicate that they will get out after the end of that time. In fact, their stay in it is endless, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: '…they will abide therein forever.' (*al-Jinn:* 23)

Here arises a question, which is, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* say that the disbelievers will stay for a long time in the hellfire, while they will abide eternally therein?!' Some scholars opine that He *the Almighty* wants to add another kind of punishment for the disbelievers. After torturing them for a particular period of time, He *Glorified is He* will command the Angels to get them out of the hellfire and to take them to the direction of the paradise, a matter that will consequently raise the disbelievers' hopes to be, at least, saved from the hellfire. However, the Angels will be commanded to take them back to the hellfire, which will humiliate and torture the disbelievers' souls because it shatters all their hopes of salvation. Furthermore, it increases the amount of punishment which they already suffer from, for if the torment were continuous, it would be easier. A poet(1) once portrayed shattering one’s hope, saying,

Like a rainy cloud (that) appears to a thirsty people
But once they see it, it vanishes

Another poet (2) also says,

Now I have become deprived of Layla
As if I was holding water with my fingers

Shattering the hopes along with its consequent disappointment is a kind of punishment still employed even in today’s prisons. For example, the jailer makes the prisoner grow thirsty, and when the former draws water nigh to the latter’s mouth, s/he spills it before allowing him/her to drink. In this way, the jailer gives the prisoner the hope of quenching his/her thirst, but then shatters that hope completely. This punishment tortures the soul; after being in a state of happiness, the prisoner turns into the antithetical state.

In this connection, there are many descriptions of the punishment prepared for the disbelievers. It is described as great, severe, painful, humiliating, and so on. Every kind of these punishments is prepared for a particular group of sinful people. May Allah *the Almighty* protect us from His punishment and from the evil of His servants!

The verses continue to describe the hellfire and its punishment. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Where they will taste neither coolness nor drink [24] except one that is scalding and dark. [25]’ (*an-Naba’:* 24-25) These verses clearly show another kind of punishment for the disbelievers; Allah *the Almighty* actually mocks at them, for they will taste no coolness in the hellfire, and thus its heat will not be dissipated, nor will they have any drink by which they could quench their thirst.

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(1) He is Kuthayyir A‘zza Al-Khuza‘i, Abu Sakhr. He was a poet of the people of Medina, but stayed for a long time in Egypt. He was extremely short and ugly. Using poetry, he was the best defender of Islam at his time, which is why people preferred no other poet to him in this regard. He died in Medina in 105 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, *Al-A‘lam, 5/219.*

(2) Majnun Layla is Qays ibn Al-Mulawwah Al-‘Amiri; he was from Najd. He was not mad but was called so for his overwhelming love for Layla Bint Sa‘d. They grew up together, and when she became mature, her father prevented him from seeing her. So, Qays became deeply sad; he used to be seen sometimes in Ash-Sham and other times in Najd until he was found dead among some stones. His body was taken to his people in 68 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, *Al-A‘lam, 5/208.*

The word ‘except’ raises the hope of the disbelievers. They will wrongly think that what follows is good for them. However, it is followed by nothing but another kind of more painful punishment: ‘Except one that is scalding and dark.’ (*an-Naba’:* 25) The Arabic word *Hamima* refers to the extremely hot water. As for the Arabic word ‘*Ghassaq’,* it is the pus issued from the bodies of people of hellfire. This is actually the drink they will get in the hellfire. For this reason, some Companions of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* believe that this verse is the most difficult one in the Book of Allah.(1) As such, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Where they will taste neither coolness nor drink [24] except one that is scalding and dark. [25]’ (*an-Naba’:* 24-25) tells us about some kinds of punishment prepared for the disbelievers. The word ‘except’ could indicate that there is a hope of alleviation for the disbelievers; however, the punishment that follows it is severer than what precedes it.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘A fitting requital’ (*an-Naba’:* 26), it means that He *the Almighty* neither wronged the disbelievers nor exceeded the fitting requital. Thus, their punishment is in proportion to their crimes, sins and violations of His Way of Guidance. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and We did them no injustice, but they were unjust to themselves.’ (*an-Nahl:* 118)

By contrast, He *Glorified is He* says afterwards about the reward of the righteous people: ‘A reward from your Lord, a fitting gift.’ (*an-Naba’:* 36) Therefore, the reward of the righteous people is not in proportion to their deeds; rather, it is greatly increased out of Allah’s Benevolence. On the other hand, the punishment for an evil deed is in proportion to it, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘And the recompense of evil is punishment like it, but whoever forgives and amends, he shall have his reward from Allah…’ (*ash-Shura:* 40). So, concluding the verses in question with His saying: ‘A fitting requital’ (*an-Naba’:* 26) prevents the foolish sympathy that overtakes some people when they listen to the verses describing the punishment of the oppressors. Out of this so-called sympathy, some even go far to describe Allah’s Requital as severe, not fitting the disbeliever’s crimes. As such, it is as if He *Glorified is He* responds to those people, saying, ‘There is no severity, injustice or transgression in the requital prepared for the disbelievers. This is the punishment they deserve for their evil deeds and crimes.’ Afterwards, He *the Almighty* mentions the reasons why the people should believe that His Requital is fair and befitting, saying:

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(1) *In their books of Tafsir, Al-Khazin and Ath-Tha‘labi mention that the severest verse in the Quran is the saying of Allah the Almighty: ‘Taste this: all you will get from Us is more torment.’ (an-Naba’: 30) This is according to a Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Barza Al-‘Aslami. See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta’wil, 2/263; Ath-Tha’labi, Al-Kash Wa Al-Bayan, 10/117; Al-Qurtubi, Jame‘ Ahkam Al-Quran;19/182 and Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Quran Al-‘Azhim, 8/311.*

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا ﴿٢٧﴾ وَكَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا كِذَّابًا ﴿٢٨﴾
وَكُلَّ شَىْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَٰهُ كِتَٰبًا ﴿٢٩﴾ فَذُوقُوا۟ فَلَن نَّزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا ﴿٣٠﴾

For they did not fear a reckoning [27] and they rejected Our messages as lies [28] We have recorded every- thing in a Record [29] ‘Taste this: all you will get from Us is more torment’ [30] (The Quran, *an-Naba’:* 27-30)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘For they did not fear a reckoning.’ (*an-Naba’:* 27), it means that the disbelievers did not believe in the Day of Judgment or the Reckoning. Another possible interpretation is that they believe in Allah *the Almighty,* but they deny the Resurrection and are heedless of the Reckoning.

In fact, all kinds of corruption in the worldly life stem from denying the Day of Judgment and not fearing the Reckoning. What do we expect of some people who do not believe in the Hereafter and the Reckoning, and do not expect any requital for their misdeeds? The one who does not fear the Day of Reckoning follows his/her whims and lusts; s/he transgresses against other people. Thus, belief in the Day of Reckoning does not only guarantee a sound religiosity and good life in the Hereafter but also a good worldly life. Mohamed Iqbal spoke the truth when he said,

Neither there is safety if faith is lost
Nor (is there) a good life in the absence of religion

Thus, the one who expects no requital for his/her actions violates any religious or moral standards. This leads to endless corruption, starting with the corruption of the Creed down to even the simplest deeds. On the other hand, if the members of the society believe in the Reckoning and the Recompense, their righteousness will lead to the reformation of the society and its members. This righteousness stems from believing that everyone will be held accountable before his/her Lord and Creator Who is Ever-Watchful over him/her. He *the Almighty* knows everything; not an atom's weight within the heavens or the earth is absent from Him.

We have previously said that Allah *the Almighty* prescribed deterring factors within the Islamic society in order to prevent the committing of crimes. One of these factors is embodied in the obligation of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Another factor is the ruler whom Allah *the Almighty* established in this position to implement His Laws and Legally-Prescribed Punishments. In this way, the good people will be rewarded and the wrongdoers will be punished. Another deterring factor is the self-reproaching soul, which rebukes its owner for committing sins, and takes him/her back to the Straight Path.

Now, what would we do if the society is corrupt, having no sound creed and abdicating its responsibility for preventing the crimes? What would we do if the society stopped enjoining what is right and prohibiting what is wrong? How can we deal with the corrupt ruler who is heedless of implementing Allah’s Laws and punishing the criminals? Further, how can we reform someone who has lost his/her conscience and his/her soul incites him/her to commit evil?

Scholars opine that the Quran did not neglect the above-mentioned deterring factors. In fact, the religion of Islam paid a great attention to them. However, these factors may suffer corruption, to the extent that the criminal may circumvent the ruler’s punishment and the earthly laws. If this happened, there remains the last factor which encompasses all the previous ones; it is the belief that Allah *the Almighty* is Ever-Watchful over man and that He *Glorified is He* will hold him/her accountable for his/her actions; there will be a reward for the good actions and a punishment for the evil ones. Thus, if the earthly justice was blind to the sinful, the heavenly justice always extends to him/her.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and they rejected Our Messages as lies' (*an-Naba':* 28) emphasizes the disbelievers' rejection of the Divine verses and messages. The word *Kidhdhaba* (rejection) according to the dialect of the people of Yemen is a verbal noun. For example, when a Yemeni asked about the pilgrimage rites, he said, 'Is it better to shave my hair or to shorten it (*Al-Qisar*)(1)?' In some standard Quranic recitations, the word *Kidh-dhaba* is recited as *Kedhaba,* which also means rejection, and *Kudhdhaba*, which is the plural of a liar.

The verse in question indicates the marvelousness of the Quranic style and its supreme eloquence. If we say, 'A person charged so and so with telling lies,' this means that the two people may be liars. That is because the one who calls the other person a liar may be truthful or not. As for the disbelievers, they rejected Allah's Messages as lies, so they, unquestionably, are liars. The style of this verse indicates that those who belied His Verses are the liars. Thus, He *the Almighty* states that their rejection of His Verses as lies is not based on the reality, given that His Verses cannot be belied. They belied the Quran despite the fact that falsehood does not come to it from before it nor from behind it. Further, they belied Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* while he is absolutely truthful. Their rejection, however, is blameworthy as they have no right to do it.

The style employed in the verse in question is called *Al-Ihtikak*. It means that one element in each of two sentences is omitted because another element in the other sentence refers to it. In this verse, the second element of the first sentence and the first element of the second sentence were omitted. This is similar to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Indeed there was a sign for you in the two hosts (which) met together in encounter; one party fighting in the way of Allah and the other unbelieving…' (*Al-'Imran:* 13). This verse means that there are two parties: a believing party fighting in the Way of Allah and a disbelieving one fighting in the way of the Satan. The phrase 'in the way of Allah' indicates the omitted phrase, that is, ‘in the way of the Satan’, while the phrase ‘disbelieving party’ indicates the ‘believing party,’ which is also omitted. This is a concise style that depends on the intelligence of the listener. It provokes the mind to understand the meaning and attracts the attention of the reader.

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(1) Instead of saying *At-Taqsir,* he said *Al-Qisar*

Another example is found in His saying: ‘Or do they say: He has forged it? Say: If I have forged it, on me is my guilt, and I am clear of that of which you are guilty.’ (*Hud:* 35) Here, Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* to say to the disbelievers, ‘If I forged the Quran, then this guilt is on me alone and you are innocent. By contrast, if it is revealed from Allah, then you will bear the consequences of your guilt and I am innocent.’ Thus, the elements of both the two sentences indicate the omitted ones in both of them. Likewise, in the verse in question, the verb is mentioned and the verbal noun is omitted in the first sentence. Conversely, the verb is omitted in the second sentence, while the verbal noun is mentioned.

We have explained that ‘telling lies’ means that one’s statement is not consistent with the reality. In fact, one says something only after thinking about it. If his/her statement is about something that has already happened, then this is called a statement; but if it has not taken place yet, this is called a request. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; when someone says, ‘Zayd is hard-working,’ this is called a statement. If there is really someone called Zayd who is hard-working, then the statement is true. However, if there is no one called Zayd or he is not hard-working, then the statement is false.

In this connection, some people could not fully comprehend Allah’s saying: ‘When the hypocrites come to you, they say: We bear witness that you are most surely Allah's Messenger; and Allah knows that you are most surely His Messenger, and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are surely liars.’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1) Such people asked, ‘Why did Allah call the hypocrites liars, while they had said to Prophet Muhammad, ‘We bear witness that you are Allah’s Messenger.’?’ In other words, the hypocrites’ statement is consistent with the reality, so why does He *the Almighty* call them liars? In fact, describing them as liars is not because they said, ‘…We bear witness that you are most surely Allah's Messenger...’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1); rather, it is because they said, ‘…We bear witness…’ (*al-Munafiqun:* 1). They bore witness with their tongues what their hearts did not believe in. Thus, they are liars with regard to the sincerity of their witness, as it is not consistent with reality and their belief in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'We have recorded everything in a Record.' (*an-Naba':* 29) As a matter of fact, everything happening in the universe is recorded including people's sayings, deeds and behaviours. The Arabic verb *Ahsa* means to know something and enumerate it, not only by committing it to memory but also to writing. Thus, He *the Almighty* emphasizes the fact that everything is recorded in a book.

The verse in question confirms that He *the Almighty* does not only know what would happen, but He *Glorified is He* also wrote it down. So, His Enumeration of everything, which leaves nothing at all, be it small or great, is recorded and written down. Why? This is because the record will serve as an argument against the people on the Day of Judgment. It is the Day on which everyone will take his/her record, and it will be said to him/her: 'Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day.' (*an-Nahl:* 14)

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Taste this: all you will get from Us is more torment.' (*an-Naba':* 30) It is noted here that He *Glorified is He* talks about the disbelievers who deny the Day of Reckoning. The one who ponders on the style of the previous verses will find out that they employ the third person style: 'Hell lies in wait, [21] a home for oppressors [22] to stay in for a long, long time, [23] where they will taste no coolness nor drink. [24]' (*an-Naba':* 21-24) This style was expected to continue in the verse under discussion, i.e. He *the Almighty* could have said, 'They will taste.' However, He *Glorified is He* changes the manner of address to the second person pronoun, saying: 'Taste this...' (*an-Naba':* 30). The second person style means that someone talks to attentive addressees. In the previous verses, unseen matters were discussed; that is why the third person style was employed. Here, He *the Almighty* wants the second person style to clearly illustrate the intended meaning. As some people deny the Hereafter because it is unseen, He *Glorified is He* wants to portray it as a factual reality confronting the deniers. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to them, 'You will be taken by surprise when I address you, saying: "Taste this…" (*an-Naba':* 30). The unseen matter has become a reality.'

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…all you will get from Us is more torment' (*an-Naba':* 30) shatters the disbelievers' hope of Allah's Mercy after yearning for alleviating the punishment. When they listen to the Arabic word *Illa* (except) which is a particle of exception, they look forward to alleviating the punishment. The word '…torment' (*an-Naba':* 30), however, strikes their ears and dash their hopes. This strongly and severely humiliates them, as we have explained in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Where they will taste neither coolness nor drink [24] except one that is scalding and dark. [25]' (*an-Naba':* 24-25)

The Quranic context talks about the deniers of the Resurrection and Reckoning, and makes mention of the punishment they deserve. In the subsequent verses, He *the Almighty* adds a new kind of punishment for them by mentioning the endless pleasures of their antithetical party, i.e. the righteous people, saying:

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا (٣١) حَدَآئِقَ وَأَعْنَٰبًا (٣٢) وَكَوَاعِبَ أَتْرَابًا (٣٣) وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا (٣٤)
لَّا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَّٰبًا (٣٥) جَزَآءً مِّن رَّبِّكَ عَطَآءً حِسَابًا (٣٦)

For those who were aware of God there is supreme fulfilment:
[31] private gardens, vineyards [32] nubile, well-matched
companions [33] and an overflowing cup [34] There they will
hear no vain or lying talk [35] a reward from your Lord, a
fitting gift [36] (The Quran, *an-Naba':* 31 - 36)

In fact, drawing comparisons are one of the features of the Quranic style. It clarifies a certain meaning by giving its opposite, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The good will live in bliss, [13] and the wicked will burn in the Fire. [14]' (*al-Infitar:* 13-14) This is also intended to spite the disbelievers; in addition to their punishment, their regret increases after seeing the people of the paradise enjoying its pleasures.

The righteous people are the ones who abide by Allah's Way of Guidance, obeying His Orders and refraining from His Prohibitions. The phrase 'supreme fulfilment' has many meanings, as follows: it could mean 'success,' that is, the believer's fulfilment of his/her good objective and achieving of what s/he hopes for; it could also mean to be saved from harm and dangers. In the

Hereafter, ‘the supreme fulfilment’ refers to both success and salvation because the believer hopes to be saved from the hellfire and to be admitted into the paradise. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And there is not one of you but shall come to it; this is an unavoidable decree of your Lord. [71] And We will deliver those who guarded (against evil), and We will leave the unjust therein on their knees. [72]’ (*Maryam:* 71-72); and ‘Then whoever is removed far away from the fire and is made to enter the garden he indeed has attained the object.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185) Thus, there are two stages of success: to be saved from the hellfire and to be admitted into the paradise. As a matter of fact, to be saved from the hellfire alone is a sufficient success. So, what would we think of entering the Paradise after being removed far away from the hellfire?! This is indeed the greatest success. It is the ultimate objective that every believer aspires to attain.

In this connection, the Arabs called the perilous desert a *Mafaza* (salvation); hoping, by this naming, to be saved from its dangers, including the beasts, lions and the deadly drought and famine. The desert was so called as a way of raising hope of salvation from the dangers facing those who walk through it.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* gives us descriptions and examples of the paradise’s pleasures, saying: ‘Private gardens, vineyards.’ (*an-Naba’:* 32) He *Glorified is He* tells us about the paradise according to our familiarity with the gardens in the worldly life. Otherwise, the paradise is an unseen matter. He *the Almighty* says about it elsewhere: ‘So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did.’ (*as-Sajda:* 17) In the same connection, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There will be bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.’ If the paradise is described as such, then there is no doubt that the words of people’s languages in the worldly life cannot describe what is in it. This is due to the fact that using a word for describing something always follows the existence of such a thing. In other words, the meaning shall exist first, that is, before the people form the word that refers to it. So, if no one has ever seen, heard or perceived the pleasures of the paradise, how can there be words describing them?! It is thus clear that there is no word or vocabulary in the various languages of mankind that can describe what is in the paradise. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* addresses us according to our intellectual abilities and by the language we understand.

He *the Almighty* explains this fact in His saying: ‘A likeness of the Garden which the righteous are promised…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 35). He *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘The Garden which the righteous are promised,’ but rather, He *the Almighty* tells that He is just giving us a likeness of that Garden. So, when we read that the paradise contains rivers of water, milk and honey as well as private gardens and vineyards, we consider them as familiar descriptions, but yet we should take into account that we know nothing about its reality.

The word ‘gardens’ is the plural of a garden which is the orchard surrounded by a wall, which indicates its privacy. Thus, the pleasure of having privacy exists in the paradise. In more than one place, the Quran refers to such privacy. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Private gardens…’ (*an-Naba’:* 32); ‘Pure ones confined to the pavilions.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 72); and ‘Man has not touched them before them nor jinni.’ (*ar-Rahman:* 74) Thus, Allah’s Bounties are so great because He *Glorified is He* protects the believer’s privacy in the paradise.

Allah *the Almighty* then mentions the most gratifying thing in the gardens, saying: ‘Private gardens, vineyards.’ (*an-Naba’:* 32) As we have just said, it is not right to compare the pleasures of the Hereafter with that of the worldly life because they only share names like grapes and wine, but they are completely different. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and they shall be given the like of it…’ (*al-Baqara:* 25). Whenever the people of the paradise are given something of the bounties in the paradise with which they were familiar in the worldly life, they will say: ‘…This is what was given to us before…’ (*al-Baqara:* 25). They would think that what they are given in the paradise is similar to what is in the worldly life, but this is not true. Here arises a question, which is, ‘What is the reason for making the pleasurable food of the Hereafter similar in the form to that of the worldly life?’ Some scholars opine that being familiar with something encourages the person to have it. For example, if you travelled to a place where you found a certain kind of fruit unknown to you and which does not exist in your surroundings, would you accept having it or not?! Thus, the pleasures of the Hereafter are given in the similar form to that of the worldly life, in order to be familiar to the people of the paradise. This actually encourages them to unhesitatingly have it as the soul desires it and does not find it repulsive.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Nubile, well-matched companions.' (*an-Naba':* 33) The beautiful companions, who are the women of the paradise, are the most delighting pleasure in the paradise. He *the Almighty* describes them as 'nubile' which is the attribute of the woman when her breasts grow and become voluptuous, that is, they have not yet gone limp. The breasts take that shape only in the time of youth and it is the best period in the women's lifetime.

With regard to His saying: '…well-matched companions' (*an-Naba':* 33), the word *Atrab* (well-matched) is the plural of *Tirb* which refers to someone equal in age to someone else. So, the beautiful companions share the same qualities and age of their husbands, in order to prevent them from looking for a woman beyond them. Strangely enough, some people mistakenly believe that there is similarity between the sexual gratification in the paradise and that in the worldly life. They are consequently repulsed by it and find it dirty. We say to such people, 'Why do we try to escape from the reality or be ashamed of it, given that sexual gratification is the nature that Allah *the Almighty* instilled in us? Is this matter not one of the most delightful pleasures in life?' As a matter of fact, such people do not consider the gratification of the sexual process itself, but rather, its disturbing consequences. In actuality, sexual intercourse is unquestionably desired. As for what the person finds repulsive in it, Allah *the Almighty* will remove it in the paradise so that one would have pure enjoyment, free from the disturbances of the worldly life. Likewise, He *the Almighty* will remove from the wine of the paradise the disturbances of its counterpart of the worldly life. Thus, we must not compare the pleasure of the Hereafter to that of the worldly life because they are totally different. Surprisingly, such people who object to the existence of sexual gratification in the paradise are the most salacious people.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And an overflowing cup.' (*an-Naba':* 34), it refers to the pure cups which are consecutively given to the people of the paradise and which will be filled with the wine of the paradise. Elsewhere, He *the Almighty* says: 'The righteous will have a drink mixed with *Kafur*.' (*al-Insan:* 5); and 'And they will be given a drink infused with ginger.' (*al-Insan:* 17) Thus, there are different kinds of drinks in the paradise.

We should reflect on the precision and the marvelousness of the Quranic style; He *the Almighty* wants to distinguish between the wine of the worldly life and that of the Hereafter. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says, after mentioning the ‘cup’ which refers to the wine of the Hereafter: ‘There they will hear no vain or lying talk.’ (*an-Naba’:* 35) This is due to the fact that the wine of the Hereafter does not intoxicate the mind or make its drinker talk vainly. On the contrary, wine in the worldly life is one of the causes of losing consciousness, which in turn leads to vain and lying talks and inappropriate behaviour.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘There they will hear no vain or lying talk.’ (*an-Naba’:* 35) indicates that they, i.e. the dwellers of the paradise will neither utter nor hear vain or lying talk in the paradise. This means that the gathering of the believers in the paradise will be purely enjoyable; they will not be disturbed by hearing one’s mockery or vain talk. Further, as no one will speak vainly or mockingly, they will not be harmed by anyone objecting to their talk, as it is free from vanity and mockery. Allah *Glorified is He* tells us that when a group of the believers will have a drink together in the Hereafter, their gathering will be totally different from that of worldly life. This is because He *the Almighty* purifies the former from all the disturbances of the latter.

The verses in question, which make mention of the righteous people’s pleasures, are concluded by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘A reward from your Lord, a fitting gift.’ (*an-Naba’:* 36) On the other hand, He *the Almighty* says about the requital of the disbelievers: ‘A fitting requital.’ (*an-Naba’:* 26) Thus, the disbelievers’ recompense is in proportion to their guilt; it is neither an unjust nor an exaggerated requital. By contrast, the reward of the believers is not befitting their good deeds; rather, it is an increased one. Thus, the ‘reward’ is the recompense for their good deeds, and the ‘gift’ is a free, extra reward.

In fact, both the reward and the gift will be offered based on a reckoning. The Arabic word *Hisaba* (an accurate reckoning) in the verse entails that the reward shall be in proportion to the good deed. However, when we explore the meanings of the word *Hisab* (reckoning) in the Quran, we find that it has other linguistic connotations; it could mean counting, enumeration, holding someone accountable and sufficiency. An example of the last meaning is when someone says, ‘He showered me with his gifts until I said, ‘That is enough.’

Allah says:

رَّبِّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا بَيۡنَهُمَا ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِۖ لَا يَمۡلِكُونَ مِنۡهُ خِطَابٗا ﴿٣٧﴾

From the Lord of the heavens and earth and everything between, the Lord of Mercy. They will have no authority from Him to speak [37] (The Quran, *an-Naba’:* 37)

It is as if He *the Almighty* says to us, ‘How cannot I give that generous reward while I am the Lord of the heaven and the earth, and I hold sway over the universe?’ He *Glorified is He* decrees a fitting requital for the disbelievers and, by His Grace, gives the believers a generous reward and gifts beyond what they deserve. Further, He *Glorified is He* gives His servant until s/he says, ‘My Lord, that is enough.’ No Power is over His Power; thus, no power can prevent or stop His Bestowals and Benevolence, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘He cannot be questioned concerning what He does and they shall be questioned.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 23) The human being is held accountable for his/her actions, and calculates what s/he gives because the money at his/her disposal decreases. By contrast, Allah’s Bestowal does not decrease what He *the Almighty* possesses; that is why He *Glorified is He* gives without account.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* mentions an Attribute which befits His Continuous Bestowals, saying: ‘…the Lord of Mercy…’ (*an-Naba’:* 37). He *Glorified is He* is the All-Merciful when He *the Almighty* gives, withholds or measures. As we have said before, the human being lives between two states of subjection, one before his/her creation and the other is in the Hereafter. That is why He *the Almighty* then says: ‘…They will have no authority from Him to speak.’ (*an-Naba’:* 37) This means that they will not be able to speak in the Hereafter except with His Permission. In fact, people live in the worldly life according to the causal factors created by Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why these factors may distract him/her from Allah, the Ultimate Causer. This is because pursuing these casual factors is necessary to gain their effects. For this reason, one may wrongly think that the causal factors are what really give him/her. On the other hand, the causal factors will be eliminated in the Hereafter and Allah, the Ultimate Causer, will bestow His Gifts on the people directly without any intermediary. Thus, the gifts in the Hereafter will entirely depend on His Direct Power; no one would possess anything and no one would speak except with His Permission.

Allah says:

يَوۡمَ يَقُومُ ٱلرُّوحُ وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ صَفّٗاۖ لَّا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ
إِلَّا مَنۡ أَذِنَ لَهُ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابٗا ٣٨

On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, they will not speak except for those to whom the Lord of Mercy gives permission, who will say only what is right [38]
(The Quran, *an-Naba':* 38)

The word 'Day' here refers to the Day of Judgment. As for the word 'Spirit', it refers to the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. The Spirit and the Angels will stand in rows without speaking; they will not ask Allah *the Almighty* to increase someone's reward or to waive someone else's punishment. He *the Almighty* then says: '…they will not speak except for those to whom the Lord of Mercy gives permission...' (*an-Naba':* 38). Giving permission here is for the sake of allowing the Angels to speak and to intercede. This will be the condition of the honoured Angels who do not disobey Allah's Commands and who do what they are ordered. They will stand in one row, and out of holding Allah *the Almighty* in awe, no one of them will speak. This is because they are obedient by nature and did not commit any violation. Despite that, they respectably stand in awe of Him *Glorified is He* that no one will speak or intercede except those given the permission to do that by Him *the Almighty*. It is important to note that He *the Almighty* does not grant such permission except to those from whom He *the Almighty* would approve and accept the intercession.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and say only what is right' (*an-Naba':* 38), it entails that the one interceded on his/her behalf is a monotheist. In the worldly life, the Angels only said what is right. So, is it conceivable that they will say what is not right in the Hereafter? 'Speaking rightly' means that the speech is consistent with the right and the reality. This is because He *Glorified is He* does not grant the permission to intercede except for those whose intercession is accepted. Thus, granting someone the permission to intercede is just a declaration of accepting his/her intercession. That is why some people asked, 'What, then, is the benefit of intercession?' We say, 'Intercession is a way of honouring the intercessor and showering Mercy on the one interceded on his/her behalf.'

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْيَوْمُ ٱلْحَقُّ فَمَن شَآءَ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِۦ مَـَٔابًا ﴿٣٩﴾

That is the Day of Truth. So whoever wishes to
do so should take the path that leads to his Lord [39]
(The Quran, *an-Naba':* 39)

Here, the demonstrative pronoun 'that' refers to the Day of Judgment. It is the Day of Truth that will undoubtedly come to pass; it is not stained by falsehood. In the worldly life in which both truth and falsehood exist, the human beings are given freedom of choice and casual factors. Every human being has the choice to reform or cause corruption. Unlike the worldly life, on the Day of Judgment, there is no place except for the Truth.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'So whoever wishes to do so should take the path that leads to his Lord' (*an-Naba':* 39), it tells plainly that the facts have been presented to the people. He *the Almighty* tells us about the state of the disbelievers and the deniers of the Day of Judgment, and clarifies for us the punishment awaiting them. Further, He *the Almighty* illustrates the position of the believers and the pleasures and success that they will enjoy in paradise. Thus, everyone must choose for him/herself. Allah's saying: 'So whoever wishes to do so should take the path that leads to his Lord.' (*an-Naba':* 39) means that the one who wishes to achieve success and be saved should take a way leading to Him *the Almighty*. S/he should regard and pre-occupy him/herself with thinking about his/her return to his/her Lord in the Hereafter.

Afterward, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّآ أَنذَرۡنَٰكُمۡ عَذَابٗا قَرِيبٗا يَوۡمَ يَنظُرُ ٱلۡمَرۡءُ مَا قَدَّمَتۡ يَدَاهُ
وَيَقُولُ ٱلۡكَافِرُ يَٰلَيۡتَنِي كُنتُ تُرَٰبَۢا ٤٠

We have warned you of imminent torment, on the Day when every person will see what their own hands have sent ahead for them, when the disbeliever will say, 'If only I were dust!' [40]
(The Quran, *an-Naba':* 40)

This verse clearly tells that Allah *the Almighty* has threatened the people with an imminent torment. In fact, this punishment is described as such based on the rule that states that 'everything happening in the future is imminent,' a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'On the Day they see it, it will seem they lingered [in this life] an evening [at most,] or its morning.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46) This is the case if we interpret the verse as referring to the torment of the Day of Judgment; although it is distant, it is imminent!

Another possible interpretation is that the torment here refers to that of the grave, as the disbeliever sees his/her place in the hellfire after his/her death. His/her evil deeds will be presented to him/her, and s/he will remain in that torment until the coming of the Hour. In fact, there are many verses indicating this meaning; Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And surely those who are unjust shall have a punishment besides that (in the world), but most of them do not know.' (*at-Tur:* 47) Thus, they will have a punishment lesser than that of the Hereafter. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: 'The fire; they shall be brought before it (every) morning and evening and on the day when the hour shall come to pass: Make Pharaoh's people enter the severest chastisement.' (*Ghafir:* 46) The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…on the Day when every person will see what their own hands have sent ahead for them…' (*an-Naba':* 40) goes hand in hand with His saying: 'On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time…' (*Al-'Imran:* 30).

He *the Almighty* concludes the chapter in question, saying: '…when the disbeliever will say, 'If only I were dust!' (*an-Naba':* 40) This verse means that when the disbeliever sees the punishment, s/he wishes to be dust, that is, not to be created as a human being but rather remains as dust which is the origin of the human being. In other words, the disbeliever, upon seeing the punishment of the Hereafter, wishes to be an inanimate object which has no free choice and is not charged with any religious obligations. It could be that the word 'dust' is used as the opposite of 'fire' out of which Satan, who is the source of temptation and aberrance, was created. He boasted about the fact that he was created out of fire, while Adam was created out of dust. So, the disbeliever's saying: 'If only I were dust!' (*an-Naba':* 40) signifies that s/he wished that s/he had not been arrogant like Satan who tempted him/her. S/he wishes to be dust instead of being severely punished. But these are just wishes that do not benefit their owner:

Are the wishes beneficial in any way?!
If only youth can be sold so that I buy it!

the chapter of

an-Nazi'at

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *an-Nazi'at.*

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَٱلنَّٰزِعَٰتِ غَرۡقٗا ١ وَٱلنَّٰشِطَٰتِ نَشۡطٗا ٢ وَٱلسَّٰبِحَٰتِ سَبۡحٗا ٣
فَٱلسَّٰبِقَٰتِ سَبۡقٗا ٤ فَٱلۡمُدَبِّرَٰتِ أَمۡرٗا ٥

By the forceful chargers [1] raring to go, [2]
sweeping ahead at full stretch [3] overtaking
swiftly [4] to bring the matter to an end [5]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi'at:* 1-5)

The chapter of *an-Nazi'at,* which is also called *As-Sahir'a* or *At-Tamma*, starts with a Divine Oath: 'By the forceful chargers.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 1) In order to confirm the truthfulness of the Resurrection, the chapter of *an-Naba'* serves as a testimony while the chapter of *an-Nazi'at*, using the oath, asserts the reality of the Resurrection. Thus, this reality has not been only confirmed by a testimony but also by an oath. When Allah *the Almighty* takes a Divine Oath, saying: 'By the forceful chargers' (*an-Nazi'at:* 1), He *Glorified is He* thereby wants to confirm the reality of the Resurrection as well as its introductory incidents. The chapter of *an-Naba'* discusses the Day of Decision and affirms its coming as an unquestionable reality. That chapter, however, does not discuss the introductory incidents that precede the Resurrection on the Day of Judgment. That is why the chapter in question comes to tell us about these incidents and the mighty alteration of the heaven and the earth that would happen along with that Day.(1)

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(1) The chapter of *an-Nazi'at* is the chapter number 79 in the Quranic order. It was revealed in Mecca and its verses, which are 46, are clear, including no abrogating or abrogated verses. It was revealed after the chapter of *an-Naba'* and before that of *al-Infitar*. No=

Thus, there is harmony in placing the chapter of *an-Nazi'at* after that of *an-Naba'* in which Allah *the Almighty* says: 'A time has been appointed for the Day of Decision.' (*an-Naba':* 17); and which is concluded with His saying: 'We have warned you of imminent torment, on the Day when every person will see what their own hands have sent ahead for them, when the disbeliever will say, "If only I were dust!"' (*an-Naba':* 40) Then comes the chapter of *an-Nazi'at* to tell us about the great and mighty events of the Day of Judgement: 'On the Day when the blast reverberates [6] and the second blast follows. [7]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 6-7)

In the chapter in question, we experience one of the stylistic features of the Glorious Quran, namely: - the 'oath,' which means to swear. Here, the Oath is taken by Allah *the Almighty*. The necessary elements of an oath include the one who takes it, something to be sworn by and the subject of the oath, which is the matter for which someone swears. These necessary elements also include the formula of the oath and the reason for taking it. Here, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who takes an oath about confirming the coming of Day of Judgment and its mighty incidents. What is sworn by is mentioned after the Arabic letter *Waw* (by). This Oath is directed to the deniers of the Day of Judgment whose denial is the reason for taking it. We should talk about all the elements of the oath, one by one. First, the reason for making an oath about something is to assert it so that the addressee believes it and eliminates his/her doubts about it.

The oath is of two kinds: to take an oath about something that has already happened before swearing or about something that would happen after taking the oath. The example of the former is to say, 'By Allah, I have done such and such;' and the example of the latter is to say, 'By Allah, I will do such and such.' So, every kind of them has a reason for taking it. When one swears about something in the past, s/he wants to confirm to a doubtful person that it has already happened. The way of taking such an oath is to swear by a great, awe-inspiring, mighty and overwhelming thing whose punishment for a false

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= other chapter in the Quran is introduced or concluded in the way of this chapter. Besides, no other chapter shares the same number of verses; it was revealed a short time before the *Hijra* and after the Night Journey.

oath is fearful. Likewise, when you swear to do something in the future, you intend to commit yourself to doing it. Such a commitment stems from abiding yourself by a great oath that you fear to break.

If this is the case when the people swear, so how can we understand an Oath taken by Allah *the Almighty* according to either of its kinds? What we have mentioned with regard to the two kinds of oath cannot be attributed to Him *Glorified is He*. So, we have to search for the reason that befits His Names and Attributes, so that we could distinguish His Oath from people's ones. When I swear by Allah to do something, I fear to break the oath because this may incur His punishment upon me. By contrast, when He *Glorified is He* swears by one of His creatures, we cannot describe Him as fearing the power of that creature.

When we reflect on this matter and explore the oaths mentioned in the Quran, we find that He *the Almighty* swears by creatures regarded great by people. Some people may even seek their protection when they see their beneficial effects in their lives. These creatures may attract the people by their intrinsic greatness. Let us give an example to illustrate this point; those who worship the sun on grounds that it is of great benefit and good effect on their life glorified it as an intrinsic object, not paying attention to the fact that it was created by Allah *the Almighty*. In other words, they do not glorify the One Who created and subjected the sun to serve them; rather, they do glorify the created object. By doing so, it is clear that such minds search for the direct causal factors, paying no attention to the Ultimate Causer of everything. Thus, these causal factors tempted and led them astray. Likewise, some people went astray by worshipping the Angels for they reflected on their greatness and not that of their Creator.

When Allah *the Almighty* swears by some objects because they are regarded great by the addressees, He *the Almighty* in actuality, does so in order to direct their attention to the fact that these objects indicate the greatness of their Creator Himself. Yet, He *the Almighty* afterwards mentions something by means of which He proves people's cause of temptation of such an object futile, such as the states of change, alteration and destruction to which these objects might be subjected. For example, when He *the Almighty* swears by the sun, saying: ‘By the sun and its brightness.’ (*ash-Shams:* 1), He *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the great, mighty creation of the sun. Then He *the Almighty* says at the end of His Oath: ‘And [by] the night when it covers it.’ (*ash-Shams:* 4) This means that in spite of the greatness of the sun, it is covered by the night to the extent that we see no trace for it. In fact, the God that deserves to be worshiped should not be unveiled or absent, as Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* said when he looked at the sun: ‘…This is my Lord…’ (*al-An‘am:* 76); but when it set, he *peace be upon him* said: ‘…I like not those that disappear.’ (*al-An‘am:* 76) Likewise, He *the Almighty* swears by the Angels, saying: ‘By those [angels] lined up in rows [1] And those who drive [the clouds] [2] And those who recite the message. [3]’ (*as-Saffat:* 1-3) These qualities of the Angels may tempt some people to worship them, as the latter frequently, as clearly mentioned in the Quran, remember Allah *the Almighty* and exalt Him. That is why He *the Almighty* then says: ‘Indeed, your God is One.’ (*as-Saffat:* 4)

Also, Allah *the Almighty* swears by some objects because people no longer pay attention to their benefits out of the fact that they get used to seeing them, which is why He *the Almighty* wants to draw our attention back to reflect on them and be heedful of their benefits. In other words, as long as He *Glorified is He* swears by these objects, their position must be so great but we are heedless of it. For example, He *the Almighty* says: ‘By the fig and the olive [1] And [by] Mount Sinai [2] And [by] this secure city [Mecca], [3] We have certainly created man in the best of stature. [4]’ (*at-Tin:* 1-4)

Thus, we must differentiate between the reason why people take either of the two kinds of oath and the reason why Allah *the Almighty* takes it. As for Allah *the Almighty* He *Glorified is He* either wants to underestimate a great object so that it does not tempt the people, or to direct people’s attention to the benefits of an object that they consider trivial.

The one who reflects on Allah’s Oaths finds that He *the Almighty* sometimes swears by His Being and His Lordship, saying: ‘And they ask you: Is that true? Say: Aye! By my Lord!’ (*Yunus:* 53); ‘Say: Aye! By my Lord! You shall most certainly be raised…’ (*at-Taghabun:* 7); ‘So by your Lord! We will most certainly gather them together and the *Shayateen…*' (*Maryam:* 68); and 'But nay! I swear by the Lord of the Easts and the Wests…' (*al-Ma'arij:* 40).

He *the Almighty* other times swears by the inanimate objects, by the plants, or by the Angels. As for the reason for the Divine Oath, it is sometimes taken to affirm the reality of something, as in the case when He *the Almighty* wants to affirm His Divinity and Oneness: 'Your God is One.' (*as-Saffat:* 4) Likewise, He *the Almighty* swears to affirm the veracity of the Quran, saying: 'And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth! It is most surely the truth, just as you do speak.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 23) Further, He *Glorified is He* swears to prove the truthfulness of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in his conveyance of the Message on His behalf. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'Ya Sin. [1] I swear by the Quran full of wisdom [2] Most surely you are one of the Messengers. [3]' (*Ya Sin:* 1-3)

Allah *the Almighty* also swears to shed light on matters relating to people who act haughtily and arrogantly on grounds that all the other creatures are subjected to them. This actually tempts people and causes arrogance to infiltrate into their souls, to the effect that it becomes an intrinsic quality of them. Consequently, they would wrongly think that they have intrinsically existed in the universe. Addressing such deviation of mankind, Allah *Glorified is He* swears, saying: 'I swear by the time, [1] Most surely man is in loss, [2] Except those who believe…' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3). These verses of the chapter of *al-'Asr* refer to all mankind, exactly as in His saying: 'Nay! Man is most surely inordinate, [6] because he sees himself free from want. [7]' (*at-Tin:* 6-7) These verses also refer to people who are inordinate because of not abiding by Allah's Way of Guidance. As for the one who adheres to it, s/he is protected from being inordinate. In fact, we see many people who, despite being rich, are modest and abiding by Allah's Way of Guidance. Whenever such people's properties increase, they remember the Giver of blessings and, consequently, eliminate the impulses of haughtiness and arrogance. Such people acknowledge that they are Allah's servants, and that He *the Almighty* is the One Who bestows bounties on them. Further, they know that their existence and power in the universe are not intrinsic; rather, He *the Almighty* appoints them as vicegerent to benefit from the blessings bestowed on them. They fully recognize that these blessings are borrowed items which would be eventually returned to their Owner. That is why He *the Almighty* makes an exception in the same chapter of *al-'Asr*, saying: 'Except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.' (*al-'Asr:* 3)

In the chapter in question, *an-Nazi'at*, Allah *Glorified is He* swears by many of ambiguous creatures. This is actually one of the objectives of the Quran, that is, to provoke the minds of people to find out many possible meanings for them. This makes us think about the meaning of *an-Nazi'at, an-Nashitat* and *as-Sabihat,* which would be interpreted differently, leading thus to a greater benefit. Thus, every unclear or ambiguous object in the Quran is made as such for certain Divine Wisdom. As for the clear objects in the Quran, they can be interpreted in one way. On the other hand, He *the Almighty* means to make some objects in the Quran unclear or ambiguous in order that we would find many possible meanings for them.

We have explained this fact in our interpretation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty* about the tree of *Az-Zaqum*: 'Its produce is as it were the heads of the devils.' (*as-Saffat:* 65) This tree, which exists in the hellfire, is still unseen to us; we believe in its existence only because He *the Almighty* told us about it. Drawing similitudes entails that we should liken/understand an unknown object to/in the light of a well-known one. So, how does He *Glorified is He* liken an unknown object, the tree of *Az-Zaqum*, to another unknown object, the heads of the devils?! This question is only raised by people with surficial knowledge of the different styles of the Arabic language. By contrast, if we carefully examine the matter, we will find that there are Divine Wisdom and rhetoric secrets behind it, as the Quran is Allah's Absolutely Precise Words. Thus, the mind must deeply think about it to try to deduce such secrets according to its ability.

If Allah *the Almighty* had defined the reality of the tree of *Az-Zaqum*, He *Glorified is He* would have limited the aspect of its ugliness and awfulness to one known thing. However, He *the Almighty* wants to make the aspects of awfulness vague, so that we would give full rein to our minds to imagine such awfulness in different forms and shapes. Undoubtedly, people vary in their imagination of ugliness and awfulness; what you consider awful may not be viewed so by someone else. That is why it is said, ‘What you consider ugly could be seen beautiful by someone else.’

Back to the chapter in question, Allah *the Almighty* swears, saying: ‘By the forceful chargers.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 1) Scholars opine that the ‘chargers’ are the Angels who seize the spirits of the disbelievers at the time of death. So, the intended meaning is that the Angels forcefully and painfully take the disbelievers’ spirits, as when a person takes a thorny branch out of the wet wool.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Raring to go.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 2), they believe that it refers to those Angels who gently take the believers’ spirits. As for the word *Nashta* (raring), it is used colloquially to refer to the knot that can be easily untied by pulling one of its sides. It is not tied in a way that makes its untying difficult. Likewise, the Angels handle the spirits of the believers gently and softly; they, i.e. the believers’ spirits get out as a drop of water dropping from the mouth of the water carrier.

In such a way, death is easy for the believer and hard for the disbeliever. This is because the disbeliever’s fortune is limited to the worldly life because s/he has no share in the pleasure of the Hereafter, as s/he does not believe in it. S/he regards the worldly life as his/her greatest, final opportunity. On the contrary, the believer believes in the Hereafter and works to get the pleasure therein. S/he regards the worldly life as trivial if compared to the Hereafter. Thus, s/he does good in the short period of this fleeting worldly life, yearning thereby to get the pleasure of the everlasting paradise.

For this reason, the dying disbeliever fears death and clings to the worldly life. So, the spirit is taken from him/her forcefully. As for the believer, s/he is looking forward to meeting with His Lord, as s/he believes that death is not his/her last destination; rather, it is none but a gate to a blissful, eternal life. Therefore, s/he may yearn for death and wish for it in order to see the pleasures awaiting him/her. That is why his/her spirit gets out easily and gently. By contrast, the disbeliever’s spirit is taking forcefully, which entails his/her resistance to death. Such resistance, however, is in vain.

As for the meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Sweeping ahead at full stretch.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 3), exegetes of the Quran opine that it refers to those Angels who sweep in Allah’s universe to fulfil certain missions. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘For his sake there are angels following one another, before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah's Commandment…’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 11). Another possible interpretation for this verse in question may also be that the Angels will take out the spirit and thus sweep ahead to return it to the place prepared for it by Allah *the Almighty*.

With regard to His saying: ‘Overtaking swiftly.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 4), it means that the Angels swiftly obey Allah’s Orders because they, by nature, do not disobey Him *the Almighty*; rather, they do what they are commanded. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘To regulate the affair.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 4), it means that every Angel is charged with one of the important affairs of the universe: one is charged with the revelation; another with taking the spirits out; a third with people’s provision and so on. This is how the universe is managed. Thus, He *Glorified is He* takes these Oaths by these various creatures in their various states, to prove for us that Resurrection, Reckoning and Recompense on the Day of Judgment are perfectly true.

Some other scholars yet believe that the word *an-Nazi‘at,* in the first verse, might refer to the planets and the starts, whereas the word *Gharqa* might refer to the fact of exerting great effort while doing a particular work. This is because the planets run in their orbits regularly and continuously, moving from one constellation to another. This linguistic meaning is, in actuality, corroborated with the Arab saying, ‘*Naz‘at Al-Khayl’* or ‘The horses galloped.’

These scholars also believe that Allah’s saying: ‘Raring to go’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 2) refers to the planets and the stars which get out from one constellation to another. Arabs say, ‘*Nashata Ad-Dalwu,*’ meaning that it was taken out of the well.’ Likewise, the stars get out of one constellation to get into another. Further, they believe that the saying of Allah: ‘sweeping ahead at full stretch.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 3) refers also to the planets and the stars which float in the space; they cite in support of their point the saying of Allah: ‘…They all float, each in an orbit.’ (*Ya Sin:* 40) As for His saying: ‘Overtaking swiftly’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 4), they hold the position that the stars and the planets do not have identical speed, which is why some of them run faster than the others according to the orbit they are travelling in. Thus, we find that the time span of the day differs from one planet to another. For example, the span of the day in our planet is 24 hours; another planet's day is like a month, while a third is 17 days or one year of ours.

But, if we accept the above-mentioned explanation, there will still be a problem concerning the interpretation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'To regulate the affair.' (*an- Nazi'at:* 5) That is to say that if He *the Almighty* in this chapter under discussion, is swearing an Oath by the stars, then how can we understand the regulation of the affairs by the stars?! Answering this question, scholars believe that one aspect of regulation is clear in the fact that the creation of a particular object in a particular form by Allah is a reason for the existence of another. For example, fire is the cause of burning and water is the cause of quenching thirst.

Likewise, the planets and the stars are the cause of bringing and regulating some objects through the characteristics that Allah *the Almighty* placed in them. If one asked, 'What are the things regulated by the planets and the stars?!', we say to him/her, 'You asked this question because you understood that the word 'affair' here is an object and that the planets regulate the affairs without receiving a Divine Order. However, the correct meaning is that the planets and the stars regulate the affairs based on Allah's Order; they are forced by Him *the Almighty* to fulfil this task.'

Regulation is of two kinds, as follows: regulating the affairs of the worldly life and regulating those of religion. So, if the planets and the stars are subjected to regulate the affairs, then how can we understand their regulation for the worldly life and the religion?! Scholars say, 'Does not the sun show us the day and the year? Does not the moon clarify the lunar months and define them for us? Are not the days and the months the times in which the acts of worship are performed? In fact, we know the times of the five daily prayers through the movement of the sun. As for the times of performing pilgrimage, fasting or paying *zakat*, they all are defined by the movement of the moon. This is how the sun and the moon regulate our religious affairs.

As for the mundane affairs, the sun gives us light which helps us carry out our tasks during the daytime. In addition, it gives us heat and warmth, and makes the water evaporate. This in turn leads to the falling of the rain later on. Moreover, when the sun sets, the tranquil night comes, allowing us to have rest and recreation. Thus, by Allah's Command, the sun and the moon regulate not only the religious affairs but also the mundane ones of mankind. The problem lies in thinking about the causal factors and forgetting the Ultimate Causer *Glorified is He*.

There is another possible interpretation for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the forceful chargers.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 1); it could refer to the groups of believers that are fighting in the cause of Allah. They pull the bow forcefully to make the shots of the arrows stronger. The meaning is thus that those believing fighters pull their bows back to the maximal possible way without causing them to break.

As for His saying: 'Raring to go.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 2), it, according to this opinion, refers to the arrows that move fast towards the enemy once they are shot. With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'sweeping ahead at full stretch.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 3), some scholars explain it as referring to horses, which were the main animals used in the battles of the past. According to this opinion, the verse means that they, i.e. horses run steadily and fast. Their movement is smooth and does not bother the rider. In other words, the rider does not feel unsteadily at the time of their running or stopping. By contrast, today's car driver feels that the car slightly shakes when it starts to move or stops.

As for the Arabic word *As-Sabihat* in the fourth verse, it is derived from the word *Sabh* (swimming), because horses' movement is smooth and continuous. That is why a poet (1) once praised his horse and said:

From time to time I feel happy by

A horse whose swimming fast is self-evident

This means that the horse does not run but swims smoothly, continuously and restfully; it is a linguistic metaphor.

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(1) *Abu At-Tayyib Al-Mutanabi is Ahmad ibn Al-Husayn Al-Kindi, the wise poet. He is one of the honourable people in the Arabic literature. He was born in Kinda and grew up in Ash-Sham. He claimed Prophethood in Badiyat As-Samawa. He was killed in An-Nu'maniyya in 353 A.H.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Overtaking swiftly.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 4), it means that the fighters who are riding these horses are racing to reach to the enemy first. As for His saying: ‘To regulate the affair.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 5), it means that the horses were created for a certain purpose and are thus one of the reasons for regulating the affairs. They do not however regulate the affairs by themselves; rather, they serve as a means of regulating some affairs, like fighting in the cause of Allah. They are thus regulating that affair by the Command of their Lord.

Thus, using ambiguous creatures to take oaths by is intentionally intended by Allah *the Almighty* in the Quranic style, so as to enable us have various possible interpretations, exactly as is the case with the different explanations given to the previous verses of this chapter in question.

He *the Almighty* then says:

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ ٱلرَّاجِفَةُ ﴿٦﴾ تَتْبَعُهَا ٱلرَّادِفَةُ ﴿٧﴾
قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ ﴿٨﴾ أَبْصَـٰرُهَا خَـٰشِعَةٌ ﴿٩﴾

On the Day when the blast reverberates [6] and the second blast follows [7] hearts will tremble [8] and eyes will be downcast [9] (The Quran, *an-Nazi‘at:* 6 - 9)

We notice that Allah *the Almighty* takes Oaths by five objects of His Creatures. Linguistically, the oath entails mentioning the subject about which it is taken. Logically, the context of these verses mentioned after the previous, various oaths should have referred to that subject, which is confirming the fact that the people will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment. However, He *Glorified is He* leaves the subject of the Oaths and says: ‘Day when the blast reverberates.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6)

Here, we stress that the Quranic style should be considered collectively, not to examine someone individually and away from the others. One of these styles is ‘to omit an element which is mentioned in other verses’. For example, He *the Almighty* says with regard to an Oath about the Day of Judgment: ‘I swear by the wind that scatters far and wide, [1] Then those clouds bearing the load (of minute things in space). [2] Then those (ships) that glide easily, [3] Then those (angels who) distribute blessings by Our Command; [4] What you are threatened with is most surely true, [5] And the judgment must most surely come about. [6]' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1-6) Here, He *the Almighty* mentions the Oath along with its subject to assert that the Day of Judgment is absolutely true and thus will come for sure to pass. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Mursalat:* 'By the [winds] sent forth in swift succession, [1] violently storming, [2] scattering far and wide, [3] separating forcefully, [4] delivering a reminder, [5] as a proof or a warning: [6] what you are promised will come to pass. [7]' (*al-Mursalat:* 1-7) Here, the Oaths as well as its subject are also mentioned to prove the coming of the Day of Resurrection.

Thus, when Allah *the Almighty* addresses the same topic in other verses, it is acceptable that He *the Almighty* might omit the subject of the Oath, depending on mentioning it in other verses. This is a kind of rhetorical discourse that takes the intelligence of the listener and the addressee into consideration. For example, He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Baqara*: '(All) people are a single nation; so Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people in that in which they differed…' (*al-Baqara:* 213). When the Quran mentions some issues which have previously discussed, it omits some details already mentioned previously in other places. As for this verse of *al-Baqara*, the mind should carefully reflect on it, wondering, 'If the people were a single nation, why would Allah *the Almighty* send Prophets? How would the Prophets judge between the people in what they differed in while they were one nation? Are they thus one nation or different ones?!' Apparently, it seems that there is a contradiction in the verse. But, what is the reason for thinking that the verse is self-contradictory? We say that the person who wrongly thinks that the verse is self-contradictory considered it alone, without regarding the other similar verses in the Quran. If s/he had a general overview, s/he would have found out that the Quranic style is absolutely accurate and precise. Indeed, there can be no contradiction in the Quran. The aforementioned verse is similar to the saying of Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *Yunus*: 'And people were naught but a single nation, but then they disagreed; and had not a word already gone forth from your Lord, the matter would have certainly been decided between them in respect of that concerning which they disagree.' (*Yunus:* 19)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…so Allah raised prophets…' (*al-Baqara:* 213) is thus not related to His saying: '(All) people are a single nation; so Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed …' (*al-Baqara:* 213); rather, it is related to an omitted sentence, which is mentioned in the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *Yunu*s.

This verse made some 'Comparative Religion' scholars claim, 'Originally, people were polytheists, but when the intellectual abilities developed, they inclined to monotheism.' This opinion is based on the assumption that the Creator of mankind did not guide them after bringing them into existence. This theory contradicts the religious and the Islamic principle that the Quran plainly clarifies in Allah's saying to Adam, the first human being ever: '…So there will surely come to you guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy; [123] And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life…[124]' (*Ta Ha:* 124). Thus, He *the Almighty* created the mankind and did not leave them without guidance; rather, He *Glorified is He* bestowed His Way of Guidance on them, so that they could run their affairs correctly. If any violation of that Way of Guidance were committed, this would constitute a difference between the people charged with religious obligation after being united. Thus, the verse of the chapter of *Yunus* clarifies the meaning: 'And people were naught but a single nation, but then they disagreed...' (*Yunus:* 19). This verse means that the people differed when they forgot or violated Allah's Way of Guidance. Thus, they were a single nation, but when they differed by violating the Way of Guidance, Allah *the Almighty* out of Mercy, sent Messengers to return them back to the Right Path and the Way of Guidance which unite them.

Therefore, when we read Allah's Book, we must have a comprehensive overview that connects the similar verses together. This is because the verses complete and clarify each other, giving us a clear picture and accurate analysis of a certain issue. As for the one who heedlessly takes a verse and leaves another, s/he may misunderstand the true meaning of the verse.

Accordingly, the saying of Allah *the Almighty* after the Oath: ‘On the Day when the blast reverberates.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6) indicates that: ‘On the Day when the blast reverberates.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6) is a time frame in which the Resurrection takes place. It is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘You will surely be resurrected on the Day when the blast reverberates.’ Thus, we understand that His saying: ‘On the Day when the blast reverberates.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6) clarifies the time frame which requires the existence of an event happening during that time. The other similar verses on that topic fully clarify that the event is the Resurrection.

Even if someone does not find similar verses clarifying the omitted element here, or read only the chapter in question, Allah *the Almighty* does not leave him/her without some indications of this omitted element. When He *the Almighty* says: ‘On the Day when the blast reverberates [6] and the second blast follows, [7] hearts will tremble [8] and eyes will be downcast. [9] They say, “What? Shall we be brought back to life, [10] after we have turned into decayed bones?” [11] And they say, “Such a return is impossible!” [12]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6-12), He *Glorified is He* clearly talks about the Resurrection. Thus, the context itself indicates the omitted subject of the Oath. It is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘By the forceful chargers … you will surely be resurrected on the Day when the blast reverberates.’

Here, we notice that the chapter of *an-Nazi‘at* discusses details about the Day of Resurrection more than the chapter of *an-Naba’*, mentioning in details what the latter discusses briefly. In the chapter of *an-Naba’*, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘A time has been appointed for the Day of Decision.’ (*an-Naba’:* 17) Then, the chapter of *an-Nazi‘at* explains the incidents of that Day. It starts with the mighty universal events and the alteration of the state of the universe. These mighty events, which are seen by people, affect their souls. This effect is manifested in the fear cast in people’s hearts and in the humbleness and the astonishment of their eyes.

With regard to what would happen in the universe, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘On the Day when the blast reverberates [6] and the second blast follows, [7]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6-7); and with regard to what would happen to only the disbelieving souls, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Hearts will tremble [8] and eyes will be downcast. [9] They say, ‘What? Shall we be brought back to life, [10]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 8-10).

The meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘On the Day when the blast reverberate.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 6) is that the earth would violently shake with all what is on it, as in His saying: ‘On the day when the earth and the mountains shall quake and the mountains shall become (as) heaps of sand let loose.’ (*al-Muzzammil:* 14); and ‘And the mountains shall be made to crumble with (an awful) crumbling.’ (*at-Talaq:* 4) As a matter of fact, the earth does not shake by itself; rather, it is shaken; this linguistic style used in the formation of this verse in question is actually none but that of the Arabs before the revelation of the Quran. Similar to this is also the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘So he shall be in a life of pleasure’ (*al-Haqqa:* 21), which means that the believer is pleasured with that life. This is a metaphorical expression; it is as if the life is so pleasing that such pleasure extends to it. As such, the life itself would then love and be pleased with the believer. Here, love and pleasure are mutual, and that is this relation is viewed as the strongest one ever. By contrast, in the one-sided love, one loves what does not love him/her. Indeed, this is a kind of misery, as the poet said,

You are the beloved, but I seek Allah’s
Protection from being an unloved lover

Likewise, the earth would be violently shaken by Allah’s Omnipotence to the extent that it itself would be the cause of shaking. It is as if He *the Almighty* gives it an intrinsic power to shake itself. He *the Almighty* then says: ‘And the second blast follows.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 7) The heaven follows the earth because the latter was created first. Likewise, after the alteration happens to the earth on the Day of Judgment, another alteration will happen to the heaven. It will be torn apart and split open. Further, the stars will be shrouded in darkness, and so on. Some scholars say that the Arabic word *Rajifa* refers to the first blow in the Trumpet, while the word *Radifa* refers to the second one. When the earth shakes and the heaven follows it, the deniers of the Resurrection will find out the truth. This happens when they witness the preliminary incidents of the Day of Judgment and come to know the calamities of that Day which they used to deny. How awful their situation would be!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Hearts will tremble.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 8), it means that the disbelievers’ hearts will be confused and in a state of panic. This is because they recalled their denial and disbelief in Allah’s Way of Guidance in the worldly life. Following the tremble of the disbelievers’ hearts, the eyes will be also affected, as He *the Almighty* says next: ‘And eyes will be downcast.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 9) As a matter of fact, fear in the hearts of people might not be obvious to everyone, because its degree differs from one person to another. By contrast, all people are equal with regard to sight; it is the means by which the truth is realized, for by a single look, one can realize whether a person loves, hates, admires, or degrades him/her. Thus, a single look can reveal what the soul conceals; that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘He knows the stealthy looks…’ (*Ghafir:* 19). Even in the case of the doctors who want to check the soundness of the human blood vessels; they analyze that of the eye because it is the best way to know the real physical state of the patient.

Further, we only know the fear of the disbeliever’s heart through their eyes, because such fear causes the eyes to be humble and downcast - after being bright in the worldly life, rejecting Allah’s Way of Guidance. Now, the truth has been unveiled and they will suffer the calamities and the hardships of the Day of Judgment. The situation does not allow the person to deceive him/herself, for the event is mighty, and fear is coercive.

When we reflect on the Quranic expression: ‘And eyes will be downcast.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 9), we find that the eyes are attributed to the trembling hearts and not to the people. This is due to the fact that when the hearts tremble and be in a state of panic, their states extend to the other organs of body. Thus, it is as if all the organs tremble and in a state in panic, not the heart alone.

That is why that the old poets considered the heart the home of feelings, sensations and sentiments. It is the organ that is affected by the closeness, remoteness or abandonment of the beloved one. The verses of poetry are filled with these meanings. The poet Majnun Layla once said,

The state of my heart when it was said that

Layala Al-A‘miryya would travel

Is like a bird trapped in web, and has

No way out; for the wing has stuck

Another poet was more eloquent when he said,

My thoughts about you provoke my love

That I feel them creeping into my heart

All the organs of mind do love you

It is as though they are created as hearts

We have said that Allah *the Almighty* takes all the previous Oaths to confirm to the deniers of the Resurrection that it is true. Their denial is represented in the following three statements:

يَقُولُونَ أَءِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي ٱلْحَافِرَةِ ﴿١٠﴾ أَءِذَا كُنَّا عِظَٰمًا نَّخِرَةً ﴿١١﴾
قَالُواْ تِلْكَ إِذًا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾

They say, 'What? shall we be brought back to life [10]
after we have turned into decayed bones?' and they say [11]
'Such a return is impossible!' [12]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi'at:* 10 - 12)

Their first utterance is a denial interrogation; they deny the Resurrection and deem it unlikely to happen. The meaning of the Arabic word *Hafira* becomes clear when we cite the following Arabic saying: '*Raja' Fulan fi Hafiratih'* or 'So and so return to his first home.' It thus refers to the way on which someone walks; a person may dig a tunnel or pave a way lower than the ground. This is called *Al-Madaq,* which is a way below the level of the ground and which will turn, later on, into something like a channel. Thus, the meaning is that the deniers of the Resurrection will say, 'Will we return to life once again?!'

In their second utterance, they, i.e. the deniers try to find a proof to justify their denial of the Resurrection, saying: 'After we have turned into decayed bones?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 11) 'The decayed bones' are the fragile ones that break up when someone touches them. They are in the form of a skeleton, but if someone moves it, the bones break up. As for the Arabic word *Nakhira* (hallow), it means that the inside of the bones are empty because their marrow has decayed. Thus, the deniers will say, 'How can Allah bring these decayed bones back to life?!' The bones are called *Nakhira* (hallow) because when the wind blows on it, they produce a sound like snoring.

The deniers' saying: '…then would be a return occasioning loss.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 12) means that if the Resurrection is true, they will lose if brought back to life. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…a return occasioning loss!' (*an-Nazi'at:* 12) is similar to His saying: '…so their transaction shall bring no gain.' (*al-Baqara:* 12) In fact, it is the traders who gain the profits and not the transaction itself. But as the profit is brought through the transaction, it was attributed to it. Likewise, the 'loss' is attributed to the 'Return' because it is the place of their apparent loss and their awful destination.

Allah *the Almighty* then responds to their statements that they uttered out of denial and mockery of the Resurrection; He *the Almighty* says:

فَإِنَّمَا هِىَ زَجْرَةٌ وَٰحِدَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾ فَإِذَا هُم بِٱلسَّاهِرَةِ ﴿١٤﴾

But all it will take is a single blast [13]
and they will be back above ground [14]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi'at:* 13 - 14)

It is as if He *the Almighty* says to the deniers, 'You measure the matters according to your human measures, and thus wrongly think that Allah's Actions and Power are like yours. However, this is untrue. What is difficult for you is easy for Him *the Almighty*. It is impossible that you can bring the decayed bones back to life because this is beyond your ability, but it is easy for Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, you must measure the action according to the power of its doer.' People perform their actions through certain processes, whereas He *the Almighty* do whatever He wants through uttering, 'Be' and it is. Thus, raising all the people from death needs no more than one blast: 'But all it will take is a single blast.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 13) This blast is effortless and does not take time.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And they will be back above ground.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 14), it means that the people will rise from their grave up to the ground. The Arabic word *As-Sahir'a* refers to the ground where all the people are gathered. It is a white, even ground with only one colour, unlike the ground of the worldly life which Allah *the Almighty* made colourful according to the elements forming it. Its colours include the red, the yellow, the brown, the muddy and the sandy. It contains all the necessary elements of life: '…and in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] extremely black.' (*Fatir:* 27) In the Hereafter, however, life does not depend on the causal factors but rather on the Ultimate Causer. It is said that the ground in the Hereafter is called *As-Sahir'a* because the people staying on it stay up and do not sleep. How can someone seeing the calamities of the Hereafter sleep?! Thus, there is a difference between the earth of the worldly life and that of the Hereafter. Before ending our interpretation of the verse in question, we should discuss the opinion of some philosophers who deny the Resurrection and deem it materialistically impossible. Their strongest argument in this regard has to do with the materialistic elements forming the human body. They say, 'When the human being dies, his/her elements decay and go in the earth. Then it can be a part of another person's elements. If there is Resurrection, to which one of them will the elements go, the first or the second? If they go to one of them, they will be missing from the other.' This is the strongest argument they have. In response to this argument, we say, 'You do not pay attention to how these elements form the human body. The elements themselves are like the raw materials. When Allah *the Almighty* created the human being, He *Glorified is He* formed him from 16 elements. All the human beings are formed from these elements. When someone dies, these elements decay, go in the earth and become part of its elements. With regard to the general formation of the human beings, their elements are the same, but they differ in the proportion of the element, which could be 67% in someone and 67.1% in another. The difference in the characters does not stem from the difference in the elements forming the human being, for they are one. But the reason of difference is the proportion of the element in each character. When the precise proportions of the elements are known, no two people would share the same proportion, as they differ among the people. Difference in the fingerprints is a case in point. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'We know what the earth diminishes of them, and with Us is a retaining record.' (*Qaf:* 4) He *the Almighty* knows every atom in these proportions and He *Glorified is He* is fully Able to return the same elemental proportion of someone that formed him/her in the worldly life. When these elements are proportionally formed, they produce the same person, which is not difficult anyway for Allah *the Almighty*.

You should reflect on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘We know...’ (*Qaf:* 4) because it affirms that He *the Almighty* possesses the precise Omniscience. Moreover, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and with Us is a retaining record.’ (*Qaf:* 4) This verse signifies that there is a record for everything. This response is enough to refute the philosophers’ claim.

Allah *Glorified is He* addresses us in this matter according to our intellectual abilities, saying: ‘And He it is Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is easy to Him…’ (*ar-Rum:* 27). We should not say that something is easier for Him *the Almighty* than another. However, the verse is formulated in a way suitable for the human understanding and way of expressing this meaning.

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘But all it will take is a single blast.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 13) means that this action is effortless and easy for Him *Glorified is He* as it needs no practice or process. As for His saying: ‘And they will be back above ground.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 14), it means that a single blast of the Angel Israfil will bring the people out of the ground to its surface.

Afterwards, the Quranic context directs our attention to the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* in order to give us a brief account of his story and a general idea about the Quranic stories. They are not just a historical narrative; rather, they illustrate the lessons and the morals that can be deduced from the incidents. So, the focus is not on the incidents themselves. This is the general feature of the Quranic stories. For example, with regard to the birth of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the Quran did not tell anything about the day or the time of his birth or the name of his father. It, however, mentions the great events that had an effect on his Call and on those around him. Even in literature, we study the literary structure of the story: the plot and the conclusion. The great events, which form the plot and solve it, also have some lessons besides their excitement.

The account mentioned in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* is required by the context of this chapter.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

هَلۡ أَتَىٰكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰٓ (١٥) إِذۡ نَادَىٰهُ رَبُّهُۥ بِٱلۡوَادِ ٱلۡمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى (١٦) ٱذۡهَبۡ إِلَىٰ فِرۡعَوۡنَ إِنَّهُۥ
طَغَىٰ (١٧) فَقُلۡ هَل لَّكَ إِلَىٰٓ أَن تَزَكَّىٰ (١٨) وَأَهۡدِيَكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخۡشَىٰ (١٩) فَأَرَىٰهُ ٱلۡأٓيَةَ
ٱلۡكُبۡرَىٰ (٢٠) فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَىٰ (٢١) ثُمَّ أَدۡبَرَ يَسۡعَىٰ (٢٢) فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَىٰ (٢٣) فَقَالَ أَنَا۠
رَبُّكُمُ ٱلۡأَعۡلَىٰ (٢٤) فَأَخَذَهُ ٱللَّهُ نَكَالَ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ وَٱلۡأُولَىٰٓ (٢٥) إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبۡرَةٗ لِّمَن يَخۡشَىٰٓ (٢٦)

Have you [Prophet] heard the story of Moses? [15] His Lord called out to him in the sacred valley of Tuwa: [16] 'Go to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds, [17] and ask him, "Do you want to purify yourself [of sin]? [18] Do you want me to guide you to your Lord, so that you may hold Him in awe?"' [19] Moses showed him the great sign, [20] but he denied it and refused [the faith] [21] He turned away and hastily [22] gathered his people, proclaiming [23] 'I am your supreme lord, [24] so God condemned him to punishment in the life to come as well as in this life: [25] there truly is a lesson in this for anyone who stands in awe of God [26]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi'at:* 15 - 26)

We should ponder over the gentleness and the fineness of the question: 'Have you [Prophet] heard the story of Musa?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 15) Here, Allah *the Almighty* wants to address Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Undoubtedly, He *the Almighty* had told him about the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*. Therefore, he *peace and blessings be upon him* knows it well. However, He *Glorified is He* wants to offer solace to him, so He *Glorified is He* mentions this account in the present context. So, what is the context here?

The disbelievers denied the Resurrection and belied, mocked and deeply hurt Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is why the revelation frequently was sent down to offer solace to him and to alleviate his grief, a point which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.' (*al-Kahf:* 6) Out of his mercy to mankind, he *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted all of them to believe, attain to guidance and taste the sweetness of faith and obedience. In actuality, he *peace and blessings be upon him* knew perfectly well the limits of his responsibility; his mission was confined to only delivering the Message. Yet, out of his carefulness for his *ummah*, he overburdened himself to save them from the punishment. This is how he *peace and blessings be upon him* treated the people. The disbelievers, on the other hand, excessively harmed and persecuted him along with his Companions.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* mentions a brief account of the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* and the punishment that befell Pharaoh, in order to tell the disbelievers that His punishment and Requital would not necessarily be postponed until the Hereafter. In the case of Pharaoh, the punishment was imminent; it afflicted the deniers in their worldly life. This fact is not a theoretical one, for it is a reality confirmed by the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) with Pharaoh. Therefore, in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Have you [Prophet] heard the story of Musa?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 15) He *the Almighty* wants to say, 'Have you, Prophet Muhammad, heard about what happened between Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh? Did not the deniers of the Truth know the awful end of their predecessors, like Pharaoh?'

Pharaoh's excessive transgression reached the maximum level because he said: 'I am your supreme lord.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 24); and '…I do not know of any god for you besides myself…' (*al-Qasas:* 38). Despite his transgression and tyranny, he could not defeat Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* or stop his Call. This is due to the fact that the laws of granting victory to the Messengers and defeating their enemies, however tyrannical and oppressive they are, are well-established Divine Laws. Thus, if Pharaoh was inflicted with a punishment, the disbelievers at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were also prone to this punishment. After all, their power was even less than that of Pharaoh. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly Our Word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the apostles: [171] Most surely they shall be the assisted ones [172] And most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones. [173]' (*as-Saffat:* 171-173)

Consequently, through mentioning the story of Prophet Musa (Moses), Allah *the Almighty* cast horror in the hearts of the deniers by telling them about the fate of their tyrannical predecessors. Moreover, this story offers solace and tranquility to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his

Companions through affirming the fact that they would be ultimately victorious. That is why Allah *the Almighty* addresses him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'So be patient, [Prophet], as were those of determination(1) among the Messengers…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 35). It is as if He *the Almighty* was saying to him, 'Do not despair because of the disbelievers' evil deeds and do not be deceived by their stubbornness, for the ultimate victory is for you.'

So, the verse: 'Have you [Prophet] heard the story of Musa?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 15) has two purposes: threatening the disbelievers on one hand, and raising the hope of the believers on the other. This double-purpose style is frequent used in the Glorious Quran. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says about the Jews and their killing of their Prophets: 'And when it is said to them, Believe in what Allah has revealed, they say: We believe in that which was revealed to us; and they deny what is besides that, while it is the truth verifying that which they have. Say: Why then did you kill Allah's Prophets before if you were indeed believers?' (*al-Baqara:* 91)

You should ponder how Allah *the Almighty* establishes the argument against the Jews, refuting and exposing their lies when they said: '…We believe in that which was revealed to us…' (*al-Baqara:* 91). It is as if He *the Almighty* says to them, 'If We conceded that you believe in the Torah, is there a text therein allowing you to kill the Prophets? Thus, you neither believe in the Torah nor in any other Book. If you did not believe in what has been revealed to you, would We expect that you believe in what has been revealed afterwards?!'

The point here lies in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…before…' (*al-Baqara:* 91); it has two meanings. However, a quick overview of this style may conclude that the word 'before' is unnecessary, adding no new meaning. But the one who reflects deeply on that word finds that it has two indications: one is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the second to the disbelievers from among the Jews who deny his Call. As their predecessors were in the habit of killing the Prophets, what does prevent the Jews of Medina from thinking about killing Prophet Muhammad

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(1) The Arabic word *Al-'Azm* means to determine to do something and pursue the means of doing and fulfilling it. The people of determination from among the Messenger are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them*.

peace and blessings be upon him? Thus, the word: '…before…' (*al-Baqara:* 91) shatters their hope of killing him *peace and blessings be upon him*. It tells them that their transgression against the Prophets was possible only in the past, but now they cannot harm him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Despite the fact that the Jews understood this Quranic style, they vainly tried to kill him *peace and blessings be upon him* because He *the Almighty* prevented them from causing any harm to him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*.

Moreover, the word: '…before…' (*al-Baqara:* 91) brings peace and tranquility to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is because he knows that the predecessors of the Jews in Medina are the killers of the Prophets and they might think about killing him like other Prophets before him. Thus, this Quranic style constitutes a disappointment for the Jews, and an encouragement and raising his *peace and blessings be upon him* spirit in confrontation with the enemy of his Call.

The brief account of the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* correlates the requirements of the context. It does not mention the details of what happened in the Sacred Valley, as illustrated in other verses. The verse only reads: 'Have you [Prophet] heard the story of Musa?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 15) Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'His Lord called out to him in the sacred valley of Tuwa: [16] "Go to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds. [17]"' (*an-Nazi'at:* 16-17) As long as Pharaoh, the ruler, has exceeded all bounties, a new Messenger must be sent to deter him.

We have previously said that Allah *the Almighty* established some deterring factors in the society to deter the tyrants in the case of violating the Divine Way of Guidance. These factors include an inner deterrent, which is the self-reproaching soul and the living conscience, and a societal deterrent, which is enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. But when the society becomes corrupt and abdicates its responsibility, He *the Almighty* must intervene by sending a new Messenger. This is what happened in the story in question; Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was sent to take Pharaoh back to the Divine Way of Guidance.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…he has exceeded all bounds. [17]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 16) indicates that Pharaoh, through his injustice and tyranny, has overstepped the bounds. Such transgression, supposedly, should be confronted with proportional violence and power to deter and stop it at the appropriate limits. However, the Divine Message confronted such excessive transgression with leniency and gentleness. He *the Almighty* says: ‘And ask him, ‘Do you want to purify yourself [of sin]?’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 18) We should reflect on such a gentle offer and kind persuasion. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* does not command Pharaoh; rather, he offers the Message to him. This is due to the fact that he is addressing Pharaoh who is excessively tyrannical and oppressive to the extent that he said to his people, ‘I am your supreme lord.’ Thus, commanding him to accept the Message is not befitting, for he did not get used to being commanded. On the contrary, he was the one who orders and prohibits and his people were obedient to him.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us one of the etiquettes of delivering the Call to Him *Glorified is He*; He *the Almighty* commands us to confront transgression with gentleness, as He *Glorified is He* says in another verse: ‘Then speak to him a gentle word haply he may mind or fear.’ (*al-Hajj:* 44) Winning over the heart of a tyrannical person could only be through gentleness, persuasion, wisdom and beautiful preaching. Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* was not sent to punish Pharaoh for his excessive transgression; rather, he was sent to guide him to the Straight Path and the Right Way. If he, i.e. Prophet Musa (Moses) had been sent to punish Pharaoh, he would have confronted his transgression with a deterring power.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Do you want to purify yourself [of sin]?’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 18), it means that Pharaoh should be purified from the filth of transgression, claiming divinity, torturing the children of Israel, killing their sons, and letting their females live. Prophet Musa (Musa) *peace be upon him* did not command him but rather offered this matter to him; he asked him whether he loved to purify himself!

Then Allah *the Almighty* relates that Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* said: ‘Do you want me to guide you to your Lord, so that you may hold Him in awe?’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 19) He *peace be upon him* offered Pharaoh guidance because the latter went astray from the Straight Path by saying to his people, ‘I am your supreme lord.’ Further, he led the people astray; that is why Moses *Allah’s peace be upon him* wanted to guide him to the Way of Allah, his true Lord.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…so that you may hold Him in awe?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 19), it indicates that the required fear of Him *the Almighty* naturally follows guidance. Guidance leads the person to fully recognize Allah's Greatness and due Position. Consequently, s/he recognizes his/her humility and humbleness to Him *the Almighty*. The one who recognizes the Greatness of his/her Lord can never become arrogant. That is why He *the Almighty* says: '…Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge.' (*Fatir:* 28) This is due to the fact that the scholars know about Allah more than the rest of the people.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'Musa showed him the great sign.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 20), it means that Pharaoh did not accept the first offer, i.e. he refused to believe in Allah *the Almighty*. This situation required a proof of Musa's (Moses) truthfulness on his Call. The great sign(1) that he showed to Pharaoh was the staff which turned into a snake, snatching the sorcerer's witchcraft. However, after seeing this sign, Pharaoh: '…denied it and refused [the faith]. [21] He turned away... [22]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 21-22). Now, the question to be asked is 'Did he turn away out of fearing the snake or for devising the plot of gathering the sorcerers?'

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[He] gathered his people, proclaiming, [23] 'I am your supreme lord [24]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 23-24), it means that Pharaoh gathered every learned sorcerer. In fact, he committed two major sins: a sin with regard to the Messenger: 'But he denied it and refused [the faith]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 21); and another sin when he went far to claim divinity, saying to his people: 'I am your supreme lord.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 24) When his transgression reached that maximum limit, his punishment and requital were that: 'Allah condemned him to punishment in the life to come as well as in this life.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 25)

Some scholars opine that the previous verse refers to the Divine Punishment that afflicted Pharaoh, maintaining meanwhile that he deserved it for committing two sins: claiming divinity, which constitutes transgression against the Position of Divinity, and denying the Messenger. This means that Allah *the Almighty* did not wrong Pharaoh, for there is a punishment suitable for each of his two major sins. In the worldly life, he, i.e. Pharaoh was punished by drowning; and afterwards: 'The Fire; they shall be brought before it (every) morning and evening and on the day when the hour shall come to pass: Make Pharaoh's people enter the severest chastisement.' (*Ghafir:* 64)

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(1) *A'ta'* said that the great sign is the 'staff' while *Al-Kalbi* and *Muqatil* held that it is the 'hand' because it is more wonderful and greater than the staff. Mujahid, however, maintained that the great sign is both the staff and the hand. See *Al-Naysaburi, At-Tafsir Al-Basit, 23/188; and also Mujahid, Tafsir, 1/703.*

Other scholars maintain yet that the verse in question refers to the punishment that will afflict Pharaoh both in the Hereafter and the worldly life. According to this interpretation, transgressing against the Position of Divinity and denying the Messenger are considered one crime; the latter is sub-categorized under the former. This is similar to the case of a thief who steals and then kills someone. In this case, s/he must be killed because the major crime, whose punishment is execution, encompasses the minor one, which is theft. We notice here that Pharaoh transgressed against the Position of Divinity two times on two stages. The first one is when he addressed his people - whom he bluffed, and they obeyed him - saying: 'I do not know of any god for you besides myself.' (*al-Qasas:* 38) However, when he stood before the Messenger in the position of challenge, he claimed plainly: 'I am your supreme lord.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 24) It could be that he did not utter this statement except before those who worshipped him, believing that he was a god.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'There truly is a lesson in this for anyone who stands in awe of Allah.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 26), it means that the present story offers a lesson and an admonition for those who fear Allah *the Almighty* who hold Him in awe, who estimate Him with the estimation that is due to Him, who fear the consequences of their actions and who take lessons from the fate of their predecessors.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* addresses the tribe of Quraysh whose members belied Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. He *the Almighty* admonishes them by mentioning the present story in which the fate of the denier of the Messenger was highlighted. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to them, 'O people who belied Prophet Muhammad, disbelieved in his Call and claimed that the Book with which he was sent is sorcery and soothsaying, take admonition from the story of Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh. The latter was stronger and more civilized than you, but his fate, as you know, was terrible. Thus, you should shun confronting Messenger Muhammad, for you can neither defeat him nor stop his Call.’ The verses shatter the disbelievers of Mecca’s hopes because they put them between two positions: either to believe in Prophet Muhammad and his Call or to be seized by a Mighty, Powerful God, like the fate of the previous disbelievers. They will certainly not be able to escape from this fate.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ءَأَنتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمِ ٱلسَّمَآءُ ۚ بَنَىٰهَا ﴿٢٧﴾ رَفَعَ سَمْكَهَا فَسَوَّىٰهَا ﴿٢٨﴾ وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ
ضُحَىٰهَا ﴿٢٩﴾ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ دَحَىٰهَآ ﴿٣٠﴾ أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَآءَهَا وَمَرْعَىٰهَا ﴿٣١﴾
وَٱلْجِبَالَ أَرْسَىٰهَا ﴿٣٢﴾ مَتَـٰعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَـٰمِكُمْ ﴿٣٣﴾

Which is harder to create: you people or the sky that
He built [27] raising it high and perfecting it [28]
giving darkness to its night and bringing out its morning
brightness [29] and the earth, too, He spread out [30]
bringing waters and pastures out of it [31] and setting firm
mountains [in it] [32] for you and your animals to enjoy?[33]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi‘at:* 27 - 33)

We notice here that Allah *the Almighty* turns the deniers’ attention from the field of the Call, which they rejected and resisted, to the universal phenomena that the human being can do nothing but to believe in their existence and thereby fully recognize Allah’s Power manifested in their creation. He *the Almighty* knows that the disbelievers’ answer to the question: ‘Which is harder to create: you people or the sky that He built?’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 27) must be according to His Will. In another verse, He *Glorified is He* explains this matter, saying: ‘Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the men, but most people do not know.’ (*Ghafir:* 57) Thus, the questioned person can say nothing but that the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind. For this reason, He *the Almighty* wants to establish the argument against the deniers of the Resurrection: ‘And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten? [78] Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognizant of all creation. [79] He Who has made for you the fire (to burn) from the green tree, so that with it you kindle (fire). [80] Is He Who created the heavens and the earth not able to create the like of them? Yea! And He is the Creator (of all), the Knower.' (*Ya Sin:* 78-81)

The creation of the heavens and the earth, with all their marvelous phenomena and signs, is greater than the creation of mankind. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who created the heavens and the earth and did not feel tired for their creation; He *Glorified is He* built the precise structure of the sky and raised it without supports; He *the Almighty* spread out the earth in the way that suits people's interests and livelihood. This marvelous creation required Omnipotence, Wisdom and Omniscience. So, is Allah, the All-Powerful Creator, not fully Able to create mankind?! That is why He *Glorified is He* asks the disbelievers while knowing that their answer will be certainly according to His Will: 'Which is harder to create: you people or the sky that He built?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 27) However great their stubbornness is, they will not say but that the creation of the sky is harder and greater than the creation of the human being.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Raising it high and perfecting it.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 28), the Arabic word *As-Samk* refers to the height dimension. So, the verse means that He *Glorified is He* raised the sky too high. 'Perfecting the sky' means to make it even that there are no separations or cracks between its bricks. In our buildings, by contrast, the bricks are separated by a substance like the concrete that sticks the bricks together. With regard to the sky, its structure is absolutely perfect, precise, smooth and even. Further, there are no gaps between its parts: 'You shall not see therein any crookedness or unevenness.' (*al-Hajj:* 107)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Giving darkness to its night and bringing out its morning brightness.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 29), it means that He *Glorified is He* made the night dark and the day bright. In fact, the verse in question mentions one of the phenomena necessary for people's life. Time is divided into day, the time of work and seeking provision, and night, the time of sleep and rest. As a matter of fact, people's life cannot be sound without the alternation of the day and night. If one of them lasted forever, people's life would be ruined.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says about the earth: 'And the earth, He expanded it after that.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 30) This verse means that He *the Almighty* spread out the earth and widened it to be suitable for human life. So, what is the meaning of: '… after that' (*an-Nazi'at:* 30)? Does it refer to lateness in time or mention? Lateness in time means that the first incident took place before the second one. By contrast, the lateness of mention does not necessarily mean that the thing mentioned first had happened before the second. Thus, the sky is mentioned before the earth here, but this does not refer to the lateness of the creation of the earth. This style is used for the purpose of showing favours; it is as if He *the Almighty* directs our attention to His Greater signs in the sky, and then mentions His Signs in the earth. This does not mean that the creation of the sky preceded that of the earth.

Allah *Glorified is He* explains this matter, saying: 'Say: What! Do you indeed disbelieve in Him Who created the earth in two periods, and do you set up equals with Him? That is the Lord of the Worlds. [9] And He made in it mountains above its surface and He blessed therein and made therein its foods, in four periods: alike for the seekers. [10] Then He directed Himself to the heaven and it is a vapour, so He said to it and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly. They both said: We come willingly. [11] So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods…' (*Fussilat:* 9-12). These verses show us that the sky was created after the earth. Thus, the creation of the former was later in time, but mentioned first in the chapter in question. Another possible interpretation is that we should differentiate between the creation of the body of something and preparing it for its function. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* created the body of the earth and then that of the sky. Then He *the Almighty* spread the earth and prepared it for the human life. This is proven by the subsequent verse: 'Bringing waters and pastures out of it.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 31) The elements mentioned in this verse guarantee the sustenance of life.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And setting firm mountains [in it].' (*an-Nazi'at:* 32), it means that He *Glorified is He* established the mountains on the surface of the earth like the stakes, which are used in putting up the tents. The verse that we yet should deeply reflect on is His saying: ‘For you and your animals to enjoy?’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 33) Here arises a question, which is, ‘What is the relation between people’s life and enjoyment on the earth and the creation of the mountains?’ We have previously explained that the mountains are the stores of fertilization and provisions on the earth. The aerial and erosion factors break up the outer layer of the stones and then the rains drive them to the valleys and waterbeds, renewing thereby the soil fertility.

Out of Allah’s Wisdom, He *the Almighty* made the mountains of hard stones so that they would give us a measure of fertility every year. If they were fragile, they would break up within some years and, consequently, their fertilizing elements would come to an end. Thus, the pleasure of the worldly life comes from the earth that He *Glorified is He* spread out and brought water and pastures out of it. Then, He *the Almighty* established the mountains on it to give it the elements of fertilization and growth. In this way, the sustenance and enjoyment of life are achieved. We have witnessed this phenomenon in the degree of our soil fertility; after the building of the High Dam, the mud settled before the Dam, depriving the agricultural land thereby of the alluvial mud that water used to carry from Abyssinian mountains. Now, water is deprived of these fertilizing elements.

Afterwards, the Quranic context directs our attention once again to the matter of affirming the Resurrection. This is due to the fact that when this matter becomes clear in one’s mind, s/he will attain to faith in Allah, the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad and the Last Day. Consequently, s/he gets closer to Allah *the Almighty* out of love, or out of fear of that Day. It is as if the well-established belief in the Day of Resurrection strengthens one’s belief in all the matters of faith.

He *the Almighty* subsequently says:

فَإِذَا جَآءَتِ ٱلطَّآمَّةُ ٱلۡكُبۡرَىٰ ﴿٣٤﴾ يَوۡمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَبُرِّزَتِ ٱلۡجَحِيمُ
لِمَن يَرَىٰ ﴿٣٦﴾ فَأَمَّا مَن طَغَىٰ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَءَاثَرَ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا ﴿٣٨﴾ فَإِنَّ ٱلۡجَحِيمَ هِيَ ٱلۡمَأۡوَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾
وَأَمَّا مَنۡ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِۦ وَنَهَى ٱلنَّفۡسَ عَنِ ٱلۡهَوَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾ فَإِنَّ ٱلۡجَنَّةَ هِيَ ٱلۡمَأۡوَىٰ ﴿٤١﴾

When the great overwhelming event arrives [34] on the Day that man remembers what he has done [35] and Hell is there for all to see [36] for anyone who has transgressed [37] and preferred the present life [38] Hell will be home [39] for anyone who feared the meeting with his Lord and restrained himself from base desires [40] Paradise will be home [41]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi'at:* 34 - 41)

The Arabic word *At-Tamma* is one of the names of the Day of Judgment. It means the thing that overwhelms and covers something else. Thus, it refers to the terrifying, momentous event that causes mankind to forget what happen before it, considering thereby everything else trivial.

Then Allah *the Almighty* shows what happens to the human beings on the Day of Judgment, saying: 'On the Day that man remembers what he has done.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 35) This verse means that on the Day of the overwhelming event, the human being remembers what s/he has done in the worldly life. When that Day overwhelms him/her with its events and calamities, s/he recalls the memories of his/her life. The disbeliever will remember his/her denial of the Messengers, violation of Allah's Way of Guidance, opposing the righteous believers, committing sins and transgressing against him/herself. When the Day of Judgment and its calamities take him/her by surprise, s/he will see the realities previously affirmed by his/her Lord's Way of Guidance and which s/he denied or forgot in the worldly life: '…Allah has recorded it while they have forgotten it.' (*al-Mujadala:* 6) On the Day of Judgment, '…man remembers what he has done.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 35)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And Hell is there for all to see.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 36) This verse means that the Hell will be apparent for the beholders who used to deny it and to belie the Messengers' accounts about it. Now, they have witnessed it and seen it with their naked eyes. It will be apparent to anyone who can see, including the good and the evil, the believers and the disbelievers, the obedient and the disobedient. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And there is not one of you but shall come to it; this is an unavoidable decree of your Lord.’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 71) Undoubtedly, the believers’ sight of the hell and the punishment prepared for the disbelievers is a kind of pleasure. This is because when they see the Hell, they praise Allah *the Almighty* for saving them from its punishment and for admitting them into the Paradise, which is another kind of pleasure. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘…Then whoever is removed far away from the fire and is made to enter the garden he indeed has attained the object…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 185).

The verses then explain the recompense of the deeds: ‘For anyone who has transgressed [37] and preferred the present life [38] Hell will be home. [39]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 37-39) Thus, the one who oversteps the limits through disobedience and prefers the worldly life to the Hereafter will be thrown into the hell. The verses afterwards shed light on the opposite party: ‘For anyone who feared the meeting with his Lord and restrained himself from base desires, [40] Paradise will be home. [41]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 40-41) This comparison between the recompenses of the two parties clarifies the meaning, for the matters are clarified by their antitheses. If we ponder on this comparison, that is, between the antithetical recompenses, we find it harmonious. There are two parties and each one of them has two qualities. The first one transgressed and preferred the worldly life, while the second feared the meeting with his Lord and restrained the self from base desires. Therefore, the recompense is according to the deed; the first one’s home is the Hellfire while the second one’s home is the Paradise.

Transgression means to overstep the limits, be excessively unjust and follow the base desires of the soul. It stems from corrupt thoughts and unsound mental abilities, for only the weak people transgress and act haughtily against those with less power. S/he thinks that the power s/he has is intrinsic and forgets that s/he is a very weak creature; that his/her power is given by Allah *the Almighty*; and that s/he may lose it and become, once again, a weak, despised person. By contrast, the believer, who believes in Allah and knows His Due Position, feels humble and does not dare to wrong other people. S/he does not dare to overstep the limits in any religious matter because s/he knows for certain that there is a supreme, great Power Ever-Watching over him/her and will hold him/her accountable for his/her deeds; s/he knows fully well that

Allah’s Punishment is unbearable and that s/he cannot endure the fate waiting for the transgressors. That is why such people are humble, shunning arrogance, haughtiness and self-conceit.

Thus, it is one’s mind and thought that direct him/her to either of the two behaviours. The faithful people’s slogan is always, ‘Allah elevates the one who is humble to Him.’ This is because the true believer’s attitude with his/her Lord is disciplined; s/he respects Him according to His Due Position and Greatness. Consequently, his/her behaviour with the entire universe is disciplined. That is why He *the Almighty* grants such people riches, prestigious rank, awe-inspiring position among the people, as they are trustworthy with regard to such power, sovereignty, position and authority; they do not exploit them to achieve their own interest. The more Allah *the Almighty* gives them, the more they act humbly and recognize His Greatness and Almightiness as well as their weakness, imperfection and humility. How can such a people thus transgress or behave haughtily?! Furthermore, He *Glorified is He* bestows His Blessings on such a people because He *the Almighty* fully knows that they will use them appropriately.

The harmony in the afore-mentioned comparison lies in the existence of two descriptions: transgression, which indicates the corruption of the intellectual ability, and preferring the worldly life to the Hereafter by following the base desires during one’s life in the former, which indicates the corruption of the physical ability. Those two abilities, the intellectual and the physical ones, are corrupt because one preferred the fleeting worldly life with its adornments to the Hereafter with its endless pleasure. By contrast, fearing the meeting of Allah *the Almighty* indicates the soundness of the intellectual ability, and restraining from the base desires indicates the soundness of the physical ability. Thus, we are in the presence of a wonderful harmony in the Quranic style. Then, the recompense comes in accordance with the action; in the first case, it is the punishment for the disbelievers: ‘Hell will be home.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 39); while it is the reward for the believers in the second: ‘Paradise will be home.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 41) The wise person should consider his/her position and pay attention to his/her intellectual and physical abilities so that s/he would hold his/her Lord in awe and recognize His Greatness.

Then, He *the Almighty* says:

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلسَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَىٰهَا ﴿٤٢﴾

They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, saying, ‘When will it arrive?’[42] (The Quran, *an-Nazi‘at:* 42)

When we explore the word ‘ask’ in the Book of Allah *the Almighty* we find that answers to questions start with the word, ‘Say.’ For example, He *the Almighty* says: ‘They ask you (O Muhammad) concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: “In them is a great sin…’ (*al-Baqara:* 219); ‘…And they ask you what they ought to spend. Say: ‘That which is beyond your needs…’ (*al-Baqara:* 219); and ‘They ask you as to what they should spend. Say: Whatever wealth you spend…’ (*al-Baqara:* 215). Thus, all the answers to the questions starting with ‘they ask you’ are introduced by the Arabic word *Qul* ‘say,’ except in one verse in which the Arabic prefix *Fa’* was added to the word *Qul* (say). This verse is the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And they ask you about the mountains. So, say: My Lord will carry them away from the roots.’ (*Ta Ha:* 105) If the question is about some incidents that have already happened, the word *Qul* (Say) is employed, but if the incident has not happened yet, the answer about it is introduced by the word *Fa-qul* (So say). Therefore, there is a difference between answering a question about an incident that has already happened and another that has not yet taken place. On the other hand, when He *the Almighty* says: ‘And when My servants ask you [Prophet] concerning Me…’ (*al-Baqara:* 186), He *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘Say, ‘He is very near.’ This is because the word ‘say’ makes His Nearness long while He *the Almighty* wants to make the answer to the question extremely direct, without an intermediary. In other words, He *Glorified is He* made the answer direct to His servants, though the one who would deliver the answer to them was Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* which clearly indicates that man needs no medium to reach his/her Lord.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, saying, ‘When will it arrive?’ [42], but how can you tell [them that]? [43] Its time is known only to your Lord; [44] you are only sent to warn those who fear it. [45]’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 42-45) In answer to the question about the Hour, He *the Almighty* directs His Speech to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; He *Glorified is He* does not command him, saying, 'say.' The questioners in the verse under discussion are different from those who posed the question in the aforementioned verse. He *the Almighty* says about the question of the latter group: 'And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me…' (*al-Baqara:* 186). There is a story behind this question; they asked Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* 'Is your Lord Near that we can invoke Him secretly or Far that we should call Him out loud?'(1)

Other questions were posed to him *peace and blessings be upon him* by those who were yearning to apply the religious obligations so that their worship become in the best possible form. Such people wanted to build their lives according to the Islamic System. The questions of those people include: 'They ask you as to what they should spend. Say: Whatever wealth you spend, it is for the parents and the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, and whatever good you do, Allah surely knows it.' (*al-Baqara:* 125) This question about the way of spending money was posed by 'Amr ibn Al-Jamuh(2) who was an old man. He said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I have got too much money, so what should I give as charity and on whom should I spend?'(3) He was not asking for himself alone but rather on behalf of other believers. Then, the answer was general, not especially given to the questioner, for it included all the believers. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: ‘They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it. Say: Fighting in it is a grave matter, and hindering (men) from Allah's Way and denying Him…’ (*al-Baqara:* 217).

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(1) In his *Tafsir, At-Tabari* says, 'Some people said that this verse was sent down in reference to a questioner who asked Prophet Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him:* ' O Muhammad, is your Lord Near that we can invoke Him secretly or Far that we should call Him out loud?' Then Allah *the Almighty* revealed: 'And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me…' (*al-Baqara:* 186). *See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 3/480.*

(2) He is 'Amr ibn Al-Jamuh ibn Zayd ibn Haram Al-Ansari As-Sulami, a Companion. In the pre-Islamic period, he was one of the chiefs and dignitaries of Bani Salama, and worshipped a wooden idol in his home. He is the last one to declare his Islam from among the *Ansar*. In his regard, a Prophetic Hadith directed to Banu Salama reads, 'Your master is Al-Ja'd 'Amr ibn Al-Jamuh.' He was martyred at the battle of *Uhud* in 3 A.H. His son, Mu'adh ibn 'Amr witnessed the pledge of allegiance at Al-A'qaba, and the battle of Badr, and was one of those who cooperated to kill Abu Jahl at that battle by cutting his head. He died in 25 A.H.

(3) *See Muqatil ibn Sulayman, Tafsir, 1/183.*

In the verse under discussion, the question is about the Hour; the questioned is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and the questioners are the Jews who asked him about the Hour, the Spirit and Dhu Al-Qarnayn. His answer was in conformity with their Torah. The cause of posing these questions is that they wrongly thought that what he *peace and blessings be upon him* said was idol, vain talk, not revealed from Allah *the Almighty*. However, when his answer was in conformity with the Torah, they came to know that he did not speak out of his own accord.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-A‘raf*: ‘They ask you about the hour, when will be its taking place? Say: The knowledge of it is only with my Lord; none but He shall manifest it at its time; it will be momentous in the heavens and the earth; it will not come on you but of a sudden. They ask you as if you were solicitous about it. Say: Its knowledge is only with Allah, but most people do not know.’ (*al-A‘raf:* 187) Thus, the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah *the Almighty* and no one except Him will manifest it at the time of the Day of Judgment. The Arabic particle *Lam* (at) here is called *Lam At-Tawqit* (a particle of time), as in His saying: ‘Keep up prayer from the declining of the sun…’ (*al-Isra’:* 78). As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…it will be momentous in the heavens and the earth; it will not come on you but of a sudden…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 187), it affirms the fact that no one knows the time of the Hour except Allah *Glorified is He*; the people of the heavens and the earth do not know it at all.

All the people of the earth will be terrified by what happened when the Hour comes. Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* has illustrated the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…it will not come on you but of a sudden…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 187). He *peace and blessings be upon him* tells us about the state of the people before the Hour overtakes them, saying, ‘The Hour will overtake the people while the man is fixing his sink, watering his cattle, preparing his goods for the market or weighing something by the scale.'(1) This strikes fear in the hearts of the people.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…it will be momentous in the heavens and the earth; it will not come on you but of a sudden…' (*al-A'raf:* 187) indicates that the reality of the situation of the Day of Judgment is unbearable and beyond the human capacity. Therefore, the Hour comes suddenly without any expectations or preparations. As for His saying: '…They ask you as if you were solicitous about it...' (*al-A'raf:* 187), the Arabic word *Al-Hafyy* refers to the one who eagerly asks about something, as in the case of the student who does not understand a lesson and thus keeps asking until s/he comprehends it. This word refers to the one who searches for an answer to a question until s/he finds it. So, s/he knows a certain matter because of asking eagerly and continuously about it.

The Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* came to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the image of a man dressed in extremely white clothes and with very black hair. No traces of journeying were visible on him. He asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* about the Hour, saying, 'Inform me about the Hour.' He, i.e. Prophet Muhammad consequently said, 'About that the one questioned knows no more than the questioner.' So, he said, 'Well, inform me about its signs.' He said, 'They are that the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress and that you will see the barefooted ones, the naked, the destitute, the herdsmen of the sheep (competing with each other) in raising lofty buildings.'(2)

In our age, the word 'hour' is a unit used for defining and measuring the time. It is well-known that the day is 24 hours and that the minute and the second are less than the hour, while the day is longer than it. In the future, the human beings may invent machines to measure the parts of the second. The Hour also refers to the coming of the Day of Judgment, for it is the Hour when all the creatures are gathered.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. Its essential meaning is found in both Al-Bukhari and Muslim. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6506; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2654; and At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 10479.*

(2) *This is a part of a long Hadith narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah's peace be upon him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1948; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 9501.*

With regard to the people, time is divided into three phases: their lifetime on the worldly life, which is the first phase; the time from their death until the coming of the Hour, which is the life of *Al-Barzkh*; and the time after their Resurrection, which lasts forever. Contrary to the wishes and deceptive hopes, the Hour will inevitably take place; it will come once Allah *the Almighty* commands it saying, 'Be,' and it is!' In our language, no word can describe the imminent coming of the Hour better than 'Be.' In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Surely, the hour is coming - I am about to make it manifest - so that every soul may be rewarded as it strives.' (*Ta Ha:* 15) The Hour is of two kinds: a special Hour for everyone, which is one's lifetime whose end is unknown to us, and a general Hour for the whole universe, which is the major Hour.

The disbelievers asked about the time of the coming of the Hour, saying: 'When will it arrive?' (*an-Nazi'at:* 42) It is as if they said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'O Muhammad, you claim that the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment are true. Tell us when they will happen to prove your truthfulness to us.' The Arabic word *Al-Irsa*' means to establish something, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And setting firm mountains [in it]' (*an-Nazi'at:* 32). This verse means that He *Glorified is He* established firm the mountains on the earth. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: '…in the name of Allah be its sailing and its anchoring…' (*Hud:* 41). This verse shows that Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* sought Allah's Help for the sailing of the Ark and for its anchoring.

Ibn 'Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Jabal ibn Abu Qushayr and Shamul ibn Zayd said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'O Muhammad, if you are a Prophet, tell us when the Hour will arrive, for we know its time.'(1) Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: 'They ask you about the hour, when will be its taking place? … but most people do not know.' (*al-A'raf:* 187) The Hour is like the ship that anchors after sailing; its coming is similar to the anchor of the ship. It is also similar to the establishment of justice or truth.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 2/278; and also At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 15463.*

فِيمَ أَنتَ مِن ذِكْرَىٰهَآ ﴿٤٣﴾

But how can you tell [them that]? [43]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi‘at:* 43)

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘O Muhammad, you have nothing to do with the Hour; you do not know the time of its coming because this knowledge is only with your Lord. We did not tell you about its time, so from what source other than Me can you know it? We have confined the knowledge thereof to Us, not telling it to anyone. Thus, leave this matter to Us, for its coming is known only by Us.’ In this connection, ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her* said, ‘Prophet Muhammad used to mention the Hour frequently until this verse was revealed.’(1)

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ مُنتَهَىٰهَآ ﴿٤٤﴾

Its time is known only to your Lord [44]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi‘at:* 44)

The matter of the Hour is only known to Allah *Glorified is He*; no one else knows when it will come to pass. How can they ask about its time while He *the Almighty* did not tell it to any Prophet or Angel? Thus, its knowledge is only with Him *Glorified is He*. Here, the Arabic word *Muntaha* means the end or the highest level of something, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘At the farthest lote-tree.’ (*an-Najm:* 14) This verse means that He *the Almighty* made reaching the lote-tree the highest level of closeness and honour. Thus, the time of the Hour is only known to Him *the Almighty*.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

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(1) *See Mohamed Makki Al-Qurtubi, Al-Hidaya Ila Bulugh An-Nihaya, 12/8046; At-Tabari, Jame‘ Al-Bayan, 24/213.*

إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مُنذِرُ مَن يَخۡشَىٰهَا ﴿٤٥﴾

You are only sent to warn those who fear it [45]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi'at:* 45)

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to warn the disbelievers against the coming of the Hour; however, they did not believe. So, He *Glorified is He* says about them: '*Qaf*. I swear by the glorious Quran (that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah) [1] Nay! They wonder that there has come to them a warner from among themselves, so the unbelievers say: This is a wonderful thing. [2]' (*Qaf:* 1-2)

He *peace be upon him* is only a warner and a giver of glad tiding, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '(Muhammad), you are only a warner. For every nation there is a guide.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 7); '*Alif Lam Ra* (This is) a Book, whose verses are made decisive, then are they made plain, from the Wise, All-aware: [1] That you shall not serve (any) but Allah; surely I am a warner for you from Him and a giver of good news. [2]' (*Hud:* 1-2); and 'So flee to Allah. Indeed, I am to you from Him a clear warner.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 50) He *peace and blessings be upon him* brought the good news, but when the disbelievers kept on their rejection, they deserved nothing but to be warned.

One may wonder why Allah *Glorified is He* confined those addressed by Prophet Muhammad's warning to those who fear the Hour, saying: 'You are only sent to warn those who fear it.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 43) This is because as long as they fear it, how can we understand the fact that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is a warner to them? In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'I am not except a warner and a bringer of good tidings to a people who believe.' (*al-A'raf:* 188) The addressees here are the believers because they benefit from the warnings and the glad tidings. By contrast, the disbelievers and the deniers of the Day of Judgment do not pay heed to Prophet Muhammad's warning; rather, they reject it and stubbornly keep on their denial.

The warner is the one who tells about an evil matter whose time has not yet arrived so that there would be an opportunity to do something to evade such evil. As a matter of fact, warning is a kind of frightening and education;

Prophet Muhammad *peace be upon him* is a warner by the clear Quran. One should fear Allah *the Almighty* and His Attributes of Majesty. Moreover, one should fear his/her evil fate on the Day of Judgment because this makes him/her abide by Allah's Way of Guidance.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوٓا۟ إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحَىٰهَا ﴿٤٦﴾

On the Day they see it, it will seem they lingered [in this life] an evening [at most,] or its morning [46]
(The Quran, *an-Nazi'at:* 46)

We know that the dead do not feel the length of the time before the coming of the Hour. This is due to the fact that such length is only felt by those experiencing the time of the events. For example, the sleeper does not know how many hours s/he slept because s/he was unconscious. The verse that makes it clear for us that our predecessors do not feel the passing of the time is the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: 'On the Day they see it, it will seem they lingered [in this life] an evening [at most,] or its morning.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 46) Here, He *the Almighty* talks about the people of the grave; when they realize that the Hour has taken place and that they got out of their graves, they think that they remained in their graves for a short time, namely an evening or one morning, that is, only few hours. This is despite the fact that we think they remained for a very long time in their graves. This is because the length of the time is only measured by realizing the events that took place within it. Therefore, it, i.e. the length of the time is not considered if its events are not experienced. This is the case with the sleeper who cannot define how long s/he has been sleeping except according to the normal time that the people spend sleeping. That is why the people of the Cave, who slept for three hundred and nine years, said: '…We have tarried for a day or a part of a day…' (*al-Kahf:* 19).

In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: '…and the matter of the hour is but as the twinkling of an eye or it is higher still; surely Allah has power over all things.' (*an-Naml:* 77) Thus, if the time of the matter of the Hour is compared to Allah's Omnipotence, it is like the twinkling of an eye or it is higher still.

This is just an example to make the matter easier to understand. Otherwise, His Omnipotence does not need time to fulfil an action. In the same connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'He will say: How many years did you tarry in the earth? [112] They will say: We tarried a day or part of a day, but ask those who keep account. [113]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 112-113). In actuality, such people had no consciousness to count the days, so they referred the matter to those who keep account.

Out of Allah's Wisdom, He *the Almighty* concealed the minor Hour, that is, the time of everyone's death. He *the Almighty* also concealed the major Hour of the whole universe, but both of them will inevitably come to pass. The individual's Hour is his/her death, and the Hour of the universe is the coming of the Day of Judgment, Resurrection, Account and Recompense, be it a reward or punishment.

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REFLECTIONS

EL SHA'RAWY
الشعراوي

خواطر

المجلد [27]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of God,
the Most Merciful, the
Dispenser of Mercy.

vol. (27)

REFLECTIONS

EL SHA’RAWY

الشعراوى

خواطر

المجلد (27)

the chapter of

'Abasa

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *'Abasa*(1) follows that of *an-Nazi'at*. The harmony in this order lies in that Allah *the Almighty* talks at the end of the chapter of *an-Nazi'at* about the Hour and the people's question of its time. Then, He *Glorified is He* clarifies that its time is unseen – it is only known by Him *Glorified is He*. The mission of Messenger Muhammad is not to tell his people about the time of the Hour; rather, his mission is to warn them against it. At the beginning of the chapter of *'Abasa*, He *the Almighty* mentions the story of Prophet Muhammad's preoccupation with calling the dignitaries of his people to Islam, and neglecting the blind man. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to him, 'Giving warning to those who do not fear the Hour is in vain; you only warn those who fear it.' Now, we have two cases: one who takes heed of the warning given to him/her, and another who neglects it and does not benefit from it. The chapter in question presents an example of both cases.

We should clarify the fact that the Quran is a reminder, a miracle, a Book of admonition and a Way of Guidance. It includes Allah's Instructions to His servants who believed in Him and in Prophet Muhammad who delivered the Message on His Behalf. As a miracle, the Quran is an argument against all people, but the people differ over accepting it. Those who accept its argument accept its Way of Guidance as well. Being sent down from Allah *the Almighty* does not necessarily mean that everyone listening to it will believe in it and take heed of its admonitions and wisdom. As we have previously explained, accepting the Quran depends on the process of the action and the possibility of being affected by it. One action could produce different effects according to the recipients of the action. He *the Almighty* illustrates this fact in His saying: ‘and if We had made it a Quran in a foreign tongue, they would certainly have said: Why have not its communications been made clear? What! a foreign (tongue) and an Arabian! Say: It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing; and (as for) those who do not believe, there is a heaviness in their ears and it is obscure to them…’ (*Fussilat:* 44).

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(1) '*Abasa* is the chapter number 80 in the Quranic order. Its verses are 42 and it is unanimously maintained that it was revealed in Mecca. It was revealed after the chapter of *an-Najm* and before that of *al-Qadr*. So, it is number 23 in the order of revelation. *See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 30/40; and Al-Baghawi, Ma'alim At-Tanzil, 4/446.*

The Quran is one, but its effect differs according to the listeners. Those who listened to the Quran from Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon him* and went out, saying: ‘…what he said just now…’ (*Muhammad:* 16) did not pay attention to the greatness of the Quran. Further, they were not affected by its wonderful verses because they did not receive it appropriately. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: ‘You are only sent to warn those who fear it.’ (*an-Nazi‘at:* 45) This means that the one who does not fear the Hour does not benefit from the warning. This does not signify the corruption of the warner or the warning, for corruption lies in the recipient of the warning. In the chapter of ‘*Abasa*, Allah *the Almighty* presents the case of those who fear the Hour and those who do not.

The chapter of ‘*Abasa* is also called *As-Sakhkha* (deafening Blast), which is one of the names of the Hour. This is because it is the only chapter where this terrifying term is mentioned. Other scholars call it the chapter of *al-A‘ma* (the blind), who is ‘Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum(1) about whom some verses were revealed. We have said that the word *Sura* (chapter) is derived from *As-Sur,* which is the wall surrounding and protecting something. It is as if the Quran is a group of gardens including the creedal issues, the principles and the etiquettes. Every chapter of the Quran is a garden. When you explore it, you find that it is independent of the other gardens. Thus, the chapter of *‘Abasa* is one of the gardens which has its distinctive features. The first thing we see in that chapter is the story of ‘Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum about whom the first verses were revealed:

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(1) Ibn Umm Maktum is 'Amr ibn Qays ibn Za’ida ibn Al-Asm. He was a brave, blind Companion who declared his Islam in Mecca and immigrated to Medina after the battle of Badr. He worked as a caller to prayer for Messenger Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* and the latter used to appoint him as his deputy to lead the prayer. He witnessed the battle of Al-Qadisiyya and died a short time before the death of ‘Umar in 23 A.H. See Az-Zirikli, *Al-A‘lam, 5/83.*

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّىٰٓ (١) أَن جَآءَهُ ٱلۡأَعۡمَىٰ (٢) وَمَا يُدۡرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُۥ يَزَّكَّىٰٓ (٣) أَوۡ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنفَعَهُ
ٱلذِّكۡرَىٰٓ (٤) أَمَّا مَنِ ٱسۡتَغۡنَىٰ (٥) فَأَنتَ لَهُۥ تَصَدَّىٰ (٦) وَمَا عَلَيۡكَ أَلَّا يَزَّكَّىٰ (٧)
وَأَمَّا مَن جَآءَكَ يَسۡعَىٰ (٨) وَهُوَ يَخۡشَىٰ (٩) فَأَنتَ عَنۡهُ تَلَهَّىٰ (١٠)

He frowned and turned away [1] when the blind man came to him — [2] for all you know, he might have grown in spirit [3] or taken note of something useful to him [4] For the self-satisfied one [5] you go out of your way — [6] though you are not to be blamed for his lack of spiritual growth — [7] but from the one who has come to you full of eagerness [8] and awe [9] you allow yourself to be distracted [10]
(The Quran, *'Abasa:* 1-10)

This is a real story that took place during the time the Quran was being revealed. Taking the facts into consideration when the verses of the Quran were revealed has always been a way of strengthening matters of Belief in the hearts of the believers. The Creed and legal rulings were not sent down all at once; rather, these facts, which required a Divine Law and the sending down of revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* were taken into account. Sending down a revelation bearing a ruling about an incident that had just happened strengthened the hearts of the believers and linked the rulings with their actual incidents. This is due to the fact that actual realities are always present in the mind because they easily stay in one’s memory.

This is one of the reasons why the Quran was revealed gradually, according to incidents and circumstances that happened. It could have been revealed all at once, as the disbelievers wanted, but Allah’s answer to them indicates that it was revealed both gradually and all at once. It was revealed all at once from the Preserved Tablet to the lower heaven, and then it descended gradually according to the incidents and the factual realities, to strengthen the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to offer him solace and alleviate from him the hardships of the Call and the difficulties of the Message.

We have said that if the Quran had been revealed to Prophet Muhammad's heart all at once, it will have strengthened his heart only once. However, it was revealed gradually; whenever a calamity befell him *peace and blessings be upon him* or his Companions, a portion of the Quran used to descend to strengthen and encourage them to keep on the Right Path. Furthermore, it gave them hope of achieving victory and making Allah's Word the uppermost. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And those who disbelieve say, "Why has the Quran not been revealed to him all at once?" Thus [is it revealed] that We may strengthen your heart by it, and We have rehearsed it [to you] in slow, well-arranged stages [gradually]' (*al-Furqan:* 32). This verse shows that the Quran was not revealed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* all at once but rather gradually. This enabled the Companions to recite, memorise and practically apply the verses of the Quran (into their daily life). Moreover, this allowed them to reflect on its meaning and understand its rulings and objectives.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they do not come to you with an argument except that We bring you the Truth and the best explanation' (*al-Furqan:* 33). This verse means that whenever the people differed over a matter or spoke about it, the Quran used to descend with a ruling to be applied concerning it. However, if it had been revealed all at once, it will not have given them the chance to make suggestions or ask about the ruling of a certain matter, as all the rulings will have been revealed. Therefore, the gradual revelation of the Quran provides this kind of usefulness, i.e., being revealed in response to people's questions and realities. The Quran is keen on presenting a kind of revelation that attracts people by making them refer to it when new incidents or issues arise. That is why the sentence, 'They ask you' is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran.

If the Quran had been revealed all at once, there will have been no room for questions. This indicates that those who believed in Allah as their Lord, in Muhammad as a Messenger and in the Quran as a miracle and a Way of Guidance built their new life of faith correctly and in accordance with the teachings and instructions of Islam. This is because they did not wait for the revelation to come down with verses on rulings about what to do; rather, it was they who asked Allah *the Almighty* to send down the rulings that will govern their lives. This proves their love for Allah's Way of Guidance and the life of faith. They wanted their behaviours to be in conformity with Allah's Will and the will of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

We say that a real story connects people to the ruling sent down about it. Consequently, the ruling remains as long as people remember its story and the reason behind it. The first part of the chapter in question is revealed in reference to a story whose heroes are Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* his Companion, 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, and a group of the chiefs of Quraysh. 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum was blind and was one of the relatives of Khadija *Allah be pleased with her.* He was her cousin. He believed in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and came to him to ask about some religious matters, saying, 'O Messenger of Allah, recite the Quran to me and teach me some of what Allah has taught you'. (1) This statement shows that he came willingly and lovingly to receive Allah's Way of Guidance; otherwise, he could have kept silent until the revelation came down.

However, when he made this request to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him,* the Prophet was busy talking to a group of the leaders of the disbelievers in Mecca: Shayba ibn Rabi'a, 'Utba ibn Rabi'a, Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira, 'Umayya ibn Khalaf, Abu Jahl and Al-'Abbas. They were the masters of Quraysh and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* wished that they believed. If they believed, this will at least spare the believers from enduring hardships when those people stop their persecution, stubbornness and confrontation with the Islamic Call. If they had believed, most of the people of Mecca will have consequently believed, especially those who feared their power. In this way, the power of the people that used to confront Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will become a power serving Allah's Religion. This is how Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* considered the matter of calling the chiefs of Quraysh to faith. This was his own endeavour and his vision concerning the interest of the Islamic Call: making Allah's Word uppermost by guiding those people to faith. Attempting to persuade them to believe in Allah, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proceeded to talk to them. This required much effort and entailed great hardship. That is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* chose the hard way for the sake of the Call.

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(1) *It is narrated that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him was talking to 'Utba ibn Rabi'a, Abu Jahl ibn Hisham and Al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd Al-Muttalib to whom he frequently used to talk, hoping that they might believe. Meanwhile, a blind man called 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him. 'Abdullah kept asking him to recite a verse of the Quran, saying, "O Messenger of Allah, teach me some of what Allah has taught you". Prophet Muhammad turned to him and frowned at his face. The Prophet did not like to talk to him [at that time] and turned his attention to the chiefs of Quraysh. Consequently, the verse in question was revealed'. See At-Tabari, Jame' Al-Bayan, 43/103.*

As for 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, he was already a believer. This means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not neglect him because he despised him; rather, he *peace and blessings be upon him* considered priorities and what the situation required. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* always overburdened himself for the sake of the Call. Undoubtedly, talking to Ibn Umm Maktum was easier for him than talking to the leaders of the disbelievers. Therefore, when Allah *the Almighty* reproached Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* such a reproach was not for a shortcoming committed in delivering the Message, but rather for overburdening himself with hardships beyond the requirements of the Message. That is, this reproach was for Prophet Muhammad's interest and not against him *peace and blessings be upon him*. This is how we should understand such a reproach, not according to the limited understanding of some people.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He [Prophet Muhammad] frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him—but how could you know that he might grow in purity' (*'Abasa:* 1-3) means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* frowned and grimaced when 'Abdullah came to him. Then he *peace and blessings be upon him* turned his face away from him. Afterwards Allah *the Almighty* said to Prophet Muhammad, 'Muhammad, what will make you perceive that he might grow spiritually because of the knowledge that you will give to him?! This knowledge will cause his faith to increase'.

As such, it is clear that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* left the easy task and preferred the harder matter to the easier one. The Quran makes use of this incident to affirm a religious principle, that is, the task of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was confined only to conveying the Message on behalf of Allah *the Almighty*. This fact is crystal clear in His saying: '[O Prophet Muhammad] warn them: your only task is to remind' (*al-Ghashiya:* 21), and: '…your duty is only to deliver the clear Message' (*an-Nahl:* 82). These verses show that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should not wear himself out or overburden himself beyond his capacity or beyond the requirements of the Divine Way of Guidance.

In fact, the key to understanding the reproach in this story is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Though you are not to be blamed if he does not grow in purity' (*'Abasa:* 7). We notice that the Quranic expression: 'He [Prophet Muhammad] frowned and turned away' (*'Abasa:* 1) is a courteous way of addressing Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. His Lord does not address him saying, 'You have frowned and turned away', using the second person; rather, Allah *the Almighty* addresses him *peace and blessings be upon him* in the third person. In other words, Allah *Glorified is He* does not confront Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* by using the second person. This makes us understand that the chapter under discussion presents an example of Prophet Muhammad's devotion to the Call. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* directs our attention to Prophet Muhammad's zealousness in conveying Allah's Religion and how he preferred the hard way to the easy one, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying: 'As for the one who regards himself self-sufficient, you [Prophet Muhammad] go out of your way for him' (*'Abasa:* 6-7). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gave all his attention to calling the ones who regarded themselves self-sufficient and who thought they were not in need of the Call. Calling those leaders of the disbelievers of Quraysh actually needed more effort and resulted in much resistance on their part. Thus, we must reflect on how courteous Allah's Address to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was.

The chapter in question mentions the incident, Prophet Muhammad's reaction and the Divine Rule concerning that reaction. Furthermore, it clarifies the principle of how one should call to Islam and the reasons for prescribing that way. After this, it turns our attention to man, who is the recipient of the Divine Way of Guidance and the Islamic Call. Subsequently, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'May man be slain! How ungrateful he is!' (*'Abasa:* 17-18) Calling for man to be slain indicates that his evil actually went beyond the limits. Allah *the Almighty* wonders about man's ungratefulness after being given the blessings that should have resulted in him having Belief. However, he was ungrateful with regard to the blessings and disbelieved in the Giver of these blessings.

Next, the chapter in question goes on to mention the origin of man and how Allah *Glorified is He* created him out of nothing, bestowed His Blessings on him when he was in need, and facilitated the ways needed to sustain his life. After this, it clarifies that the one who does not believe in Allah *the Almighty* – Who is the One Who created him and bestowed His Blessings on him–out of love, will believe in Him out of fear of the Deafening Blast that will strike the ears with its calamities, warning the heedless people; but when it is too late. This is followed by Allah *the Almighty* telling us the outcome of this, saying: 'On that Day some faces will be beaming, laughing and rejoicing. But some faces will be dust-stained and covered in darkness' (*'Abasa:* 38-41). From this sequence in the chapter in question, a real, meaningful story is related; whenever we mention it, we remember the rulings related to it.

Back to the verses in question, the word '…frowned…' (*'Abasa:* 1) is synonymous with the word 'grimaced'. 'Frown' is an instinctive, spontaneous movement that the mind has no control over. For example, when you say, 'If so-and-so comes, I will frown at him', you cannot actually make this movement properly, which is why it will appear as an affectation. That is, frowning is a spontaneous movement that only happens when the situation requires it. This movement cannot be made deliberately; rather, the person finds that he is forced to make it, instinctively. In other words, it is a reaction to feelings, not an affectation.

As for the verb: '…turned away…' (*'Abasa:* 1), it indicates a deliberate movement. Clearly, the 'frowning' was forced on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; it was an instinctive movement. The cause of this movement is that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was preoccupied, in his opinion, with more important matters. On the contrary, the verb: '…turned away…' (*'Abasa:* 1) indicates that the action was done deliberately.

Let us ponder over the Quranic description of blindness, which is hated by people and hurts the blind. Despite this, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'When the blind man came to him [Prophet Muhammad]' (*'Abasa:* 2). The Quranic context is keen on mentioning this description of Ibn Umm Maktum in order to tell us that all the circumstances required that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should pay attention to him and not turn away from him. Allah *the Almighty* explains Ibn Umm Maktum's situation later, saying: 'But as for the one who has come to you striving earnestly and with fear [in his heart], from him you allow yourself to be distracted' (*'Abasa:* 8-10).

We should reflect on the accuracy of the Quranic style in portraying the events: the blind man is full of eagerness and fear. But what does he fear? The word 'fear' here enriches the meaning because it is general as we are not told what he fears. The fact that the blind man was walking fast indicates his love for Allah's Way of Guidance. He wanted to increase his knowledge as the more knowledgeable the person has, the more his behaviour becomes disciplined according to Allah's Way of Guidance. This means that such a blind man wanted to regulate his behaviour according to the Divine Way of Guidance. This is despite the fact that he was blind, feeling his way, and had an excuse not to search for answers. Indicating this state, Allah does not use an object with the verb *'yakhsha'* (to fear) because this omission gives a richer meaning and is a richer style. This illustrates how we can understand extra details from the Quran and how it contains abundant meanings. When we read the word: 'fear' (*'Abasa:* 10), we think about various meanings: he fears he will fall into a hole while walking quickly, and he will collide into something or meet with the leader of Quraysh, his enemies who persecuted the believers and tortured them. Above all, he holds Allah *the Almighty* in fear.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'All the matters required that you should pay attention to that believing blind man, who did not need great effort or cause you any hardship. So, how could you turn away from him and pay attention to the tiring, stubborn disbelievers?! How could you be keen on talking to them?! How could you prefer the hard way to the easy way?' Undoubtedly, Prophet Muhammad's action stems from his zealousness and devotion to Allah's Religion; that is why his Lord frequently says to him *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'You may kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this Message' (*al-Kahf:* 6).

It is as if the verses were revealed to modify Prophet Muhammad's attitude so that he *peace and blessings be upon him* will stand in a position of honour while calling others to the religion; he should neither deceive anyone nor overburden himself with hardships, for Islam will be victorious with or without the leaders of Quraysh. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should welcome those who willingly embrace Islam and pay no attention to those who turn away from it. If the matter of loss and gain is considered, the disbelievers are the ones who are the losers because they deprive themselves of abundant good by turning away from Allah's Religion.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'From him you allow yourself to be distracted (*talahha*)' (*'Abasa:* 8-10), the Arabic word *'lahw'* (distraction), from which the word '*talahha*' (be distracted) comes, carries a significant meaning. There is a difference between *'al-lahw'* (distraction) and *'al-la'ib'* (playing). The latter means to preoccupy yourself with something which is not needed; you do it for no particular reason. However, it does not turn your attention from something required from you. As for 'distraction', it means to preoccupy yourself with something that is not needed and which distracts you from what is required from you. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* 'Your endeavour to guide the disbelieving leaders of Quraysh is useless and in vain. It distracts you from what is useful, that is, preoccupying yourself with calling those who will accept your Call'.

If we explore the history of these disbelieving leaders, we find that all of them died in a state of disbelief, except for Al-'Abbas, Prophet Muhammad's uncle. In this regard, we know that he was one of those who used to defend Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and one of the supporters of his Call. If we think carefully about his behaviour, we can conclude that he was a Muslim who concealed his Islam to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from the disbelievers' plots. In fact, as they respected the position of Abu Taleb and Al-'Abbas, the disbelievers did not dare attack Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In order to prove this point, we should refer to the second pledge of allegiance of Al-'Aqaba in which the *Ansar* pledged to protect Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* when he immigrated to Medina.

Al-'Abbas said to them, 'You know that Muhammad is under the protection and the honour of his family. We have protected him from those who share with us the same opinion about him. So, he is under the honour of his people and the protection of his country. However, he insisted on joining you and immigrating to your country. Consequently, if you see that you can keep your pledge to Muhammad concerning what you agreed with him, and that you will protect him from his adversaries, it is as you wish and you bear the consequences. However, if you see that you will give him up and let him down after he immigrates to you, leave him now'. The *Ansar* said, 'We listen to what you have said. O Muhammad, Messenger of Allah, speak and set whatever conditions you want for yourself and your Lord'. The statement of Al-'Abbas can never be made by a disbeliever; he wanted to ensure that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be fully protected and his Call supported. It is thus crystal clear that his behaviour was that of a faithful Muslim.

The story of the chapter of *'Abasa*, is that the heavenly revelation was sent down to correct our understanding of some earthly principles. It came down with these verses to tell us: 'Do not rely too much on the people's chiefs, dignitaries and prestigious figures. Those people cannot endure the hardship of changing the status quo and establishing the principles and the values in the society. This is the mission of the ordinary people who form the broader foundation of the society'. When the Islamic Religion was sent down, only the poor and the oppressed people undertook the mission of supporting it. As for the oppressors, the Divine Way of Guidance wanted to eliminate their arrogance and tyranny. As a result, they neither bore the burden of supporting the Call, nor were they expected to bear it. The Divine Way of Guidance neither respected nor honoured them. This is because it is a disciplined Way that depends on the efforts and the sacrifices of those who love Islam and whose hearts are secure in Belief. Islam does not achieve victory except by such people who sacrifice their souls and properties for its sake, however poor or weak they may be. After a short time, those disbelieving leaders of Quraysh were killed by those weak and poor Muslims as well as by the young Muslim boys who formed the new generation of faithful believers. Moreover, if Islam had been taken up by the chiefs and the dignitaries, some people may have said, ‘Islam became victorious because it received the support of the powerful and rich’.

This is a recurrent Divine Law in all the heavenly Messages: the Calls were established by the efforts of the weak and poor, a fact which is clear in the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah): ‘…and we do not see any have followed you but those who are the meanest of us and of immature judgment…’ (*Hud:* 27). This fact refutes the claim of those who say that Islam was spread by force and the sword. How could this be the case?! The history of Islam shows that the early Muslims were weak, poor or slaves.

The greatness of the Islamic Call lies in that it began in Mecca, which was–at that time–a country of disbelief and the home of the powerful disbelieving people and masters whom the Muslims could have never confronted alone, let alone pull the rug (of power) from under their feet. Furthermore, the greatness of Islam is clearly manifested in the fact that it did not actually achieve victory in Mecca–it was just declared and announced therein to these chiefs, oppressors and powerful people that there is no god but Allah. However, it was not supported by such people; rather, it achieved true victory in a remote place, Medina. We have previously explained this matter, saying, ‘The Quran affirms the fact that believing in Prophet Muhammad is how followers, protectors and loyal people were gathered. As for the tribal loyalty, it was useless to him concerning calling others to Allah’. In fact, tribal loyalty always stood against his Call. Thus, Islam achieved victory by the efforts of the weak.

If we considered the sword, we will find that it was in the hands of the enemies of the Call. Afterwards, when the Muslims grew stronger, they carried it to make Allah’s Word uppermost and to establish the principles of Islam. Islam was not spread by the sword. This is due to the fact that it is a religion that has to be embraced willingly by the heart and cannot be forced on anyone. Thus, Islam spread through good examples and excellent patterns. It came to offer the people values and principles that reform their affairs. This is why many of them hastily and eagerly embraced it. Before engaging in calling others to Islam, Muslims had already convinced other people of Islam by upholding moral principles and conduct that were expressed by their actions before their sayings. These Muslims became an example that was imitated in the whole world. Consequently, the people embraced Allah's Religion in crowds because of the good examples, not the sword.

The Quran states here that the heavenly Law is different from the earthly one. The earthly as well as the heavenly law require the callers to try to attract the powerful people. However, the point of difference lies in the kind of power that both laws call for. The earthly law asks the people to attract the materialistically powerful people, while the heavenly law wants to attract those who have the power of faith. If the latter power is sound and pursues the right way, it excels the material power.

Now, let us reflect on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'But how do you know? Perhaps he will have been purified (*yazzakka*), or be reminded, and this reminder will have benefitted him' (*'Abasa:* 3-4). The Arabic verb *'yazzakka'* (to be purified) means to be purified of filth and impurities, be they material or spiritual. This indicates that 'Abdullah had some impurities from which he wanted to purify himself, given the fact that he and the believers were new Muslims at that time; they had just left their state of disbelief in the pre-Islamic era. Moreover, there were many kinds of impurities that they could not overcome even after embracing Allah's Religion. With regards to such people, a simple reminder is enough to take them back to the Right Way.

In this connection, we have come to know that even among the idol worshippers, there were some people who felt repulsive about this idol worship, considering it unnatural and inappropriate. Some of them even travelled through different lands searching for the correct religion. Clearly, the seeds of goodness exist in the human being because of the natural disposition that Allah *the Almighty* has placed in His slaves. We see that the people who witnessed the pre-Islamic era and adopted Islam were of two kinds: some of them knew the impurity of the pre-Islamic era and sought to be purified from it, and another group also knew these impurities but needed a reminder to take them back to the Right Path.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'As for the one who regards himself self-sufficient (*istaghna*)' (*'Abasa:* 5), it refers to those who do not live by Allah's Way of Guidance and wrongly think that their prestigious positions, mastery, high rank and power are enough for them. The Arabic word *'istaghna'* (self-sufficient) entails the existence of people who regard themselves self-sufficient, who are the disbelieving leaders of Quraysh; the *'mustaghna 'anhu'* (the thing that they thought they were not in need of) was Allah's Way of Guidance; and *'mustaghna bihi'* (the thing on which they depended) was their mastery, position and prestigious rank that made them feel self-sufficient.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'You go out of your way (*tasadda*) for him' (*'Abasa:* 6), the Arabic word *'tasadda'* means to pay great attention to someone or something, just like the thirsty person eagerly goes to water. This indicates eagerness and keenness on doing that action. The word *'tasadda'* is mentioned in the example, '*Dari sadda dar fulan* (My house is opposite so-and-so's house'. This word can also refer to confronting and resisting the enemy. Therefore, there are various meanings understood from this Quranic word as it is Allah *the Almighty* Who revealed it. That is, He *Glorified is He* gives abundant meanings using only a few words.

It is clear that the chapter in question established the principle that served Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Call. This principle states that reliance concerning the affairs of the Call should not be on the chiefs, the rich people and the possessors of material power; rather it should be on those who possess the characteristics of commitment to that Call, however oppressed they may be. As a matter of fact, the chiefs and the dignitaries are always those harmed most by the reformative Calls because those Calls eliminate their mastery, undermine their haughtiness, and equate them with the common folk. Furthermore, Islam does not benefit from people's Belief in it; in fact, it is they who benefit by such a Belief, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'They think that they have done a favour to you by becoming Muslims. Say, "Do not count your Islam as a favour to me: rather Allah has conferred a favour on you by guiding you to the faith, if you are truthful"' (*al-Hujurat:* 17).

The Lord, *the Most High*, then says:

كَلَّآ إِنَّهَا تَذۡكِرَةٞ ﴿١١﴾ فَمَن شَآءَ ذَكَرَهُۥ ﴿١٢﴾ فِي صُحُفٖ مُّكَرَّمَةٖ ﴿١٣﴾
مَّرۡفُوعَةٖ مُّطَهَّرَةِۭ ﴿١٤﴾ بِأَيۡدِي سَفَرَةٖ ﴿١٥﴾ كِرَامِۭ بَرَرَةٖ ﴿١٦﴾

No indeed! This [Quran] is a lesson [11]
from which those who wish to be taught should learn [12]
[written] on honoured [13] exalted, pure pages [14]
by the hands of [15] noble and virtuous scribes [16]
(The Quran, *‘Abasa:* 11-16)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘No indeed!’ (*’Abasa:* 11) signifies the end of the aforementioned story, or it is employed to notify Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he should not repeat his attitude towards the blind man.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…This is a lesson’ (*’Abasa:* 11) turns our attention to the essence and the main source of the Divine Way of Guidance and the Islamic Call, namely the Quran. The demonstrative pronoun ‘this’ could refer to Prophet Muhammad’s Call–the Way of Guidance that he came with–or the Quran. It is a lesson and a reminder for the heedless person who forgets his origin and the natural disposition that Allah *the Almighty* has placed inside him. This natural disposition, upon which the Lord *the Most High* has created people, is represented in the original covenant that He *Glorified is He* took from the people in *‘a‘lam azhzharr’* (the time when all mankind was still in the back of Adam). In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them testify concerning their own souls, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes! We do testify”. Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “Surely we were heedless of this”. Or you should say, “Our fathers before us associated others (with Allah), and we were their descendants after them…”’ (*al-A‘raf:* 172-173).

Thus, this covenant is broken either through forgetfulness or by imitating the traditions by which the person is surrounded. Undoubtedly, forgetfulness happens first, producing a generation that forgets the natural disposition and diverts from it until it reaches the stage of polytheism. Then a new generation comes and imitates these in their polytheism. Afterwards, the new Way of Guidance comes to eliminate people's forgetfulness and the blind imitation of their predecessors, taking them back to the Right Path. Next the Lord *the Almighty* says: 'Therefore let those, who will, remember it' (*'Abasa:* 12). The one who wishes to be taught the lesson should learn the Quran, act upon it and memorize its verses. If a verse refers to the Way of Guidance, then learning the lesson entails following that Divine Guidance.

After that, the context in these verses of the Quran directs our attention to the characteristics of the Quran, which is a mighty Book and a reminder for us. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* describes it, saying: '[Written] on honoured, exalted, pure pages. [Written] by the hands of scribes, noble and virtuous' (*'Abasa:* 13-16). These verses mean that we must feel reassured and put our full confidence in the Quran, the Book that contains the Way of Guidance for our lives. This is due to the fact that it is a mighty Book; falsehood will never come to it from before it or from behind it: it is a revelation from the All-Wise, the Praised One. This Book is described as being '[Written] on honoured, exalted, pure pages' (*'Abasa:* 13-14). It is written on honoured pages because it was sent down from the heaven after being copied from the Preserved Tablet. Its pages are exalted in position and elevated in rank. They are also pure pages that no impure person will touch, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'None touch it except the purified' (*al-Waqi'a:* 79).

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[Written] by the hands of scribes, noble and virtuous' (*'Abasa:* 15-16), it refers to the angels who wrote down the Quran or copied it from the Preserved Tablet. They transmitted the Quran from Allah *Glorified is He* to the people. Moreover, they are described as noble and virtuous because they are obedient by nature and cannot commit any sin, a fact which is clear in Allah's saying: '…honoured slaves' (*al-Anbiya':* 26), and: '…They do not disobey Allah in what He commands, and do as they are commanded' (*at-Tahrim:* 6).

We should reflect on the factors provided to protect the Quran: it is honoured in itself, exalted in position and in rank; purified, no one except the purified ones will touch it, and honoured because virtuous Angels are in charge of it. These descriptions make us feel totally reassured about the

Way of Guidance and put our full trust in it. This is due to the fact that all the factors needed to preserve the Quran were provided, unlike the other heavenly Books.

The problem with the Books that were revealed before the Quran, that is the Torah and the Gospel, is that they suffered alteration, change and distortion. This is due to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* charged the people of these Books with their preservation, but they failed to fulfil this mission. The first crime committed by those people against their Books is that they forgot part of it. Those who did not forget it concealed some of it, and those who did not conceal it distorted and altered it with their tongues while reciting it. Such distortion was not enough for them, for they added fabrications to their Books, saying that these fabrications were revealed from Allah *the Almighty*. By contrast, the Lord *Glorified is He* Himself undertook to protect the Quran, and did not charge anyone with this mission. This fact is clear in His saying: 'Surely, We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely guard it [from corruption]' (*al-Hijr:* 9).

If the Quran was: '[Written] by the hands of scribes, noble and virtuous' (*'Abasa:* 15-16) from among the angels in the heaven, it has the same position on earth. That is to say that it is served by a group of people who love it, give it all what they have, are entrusted with it, transmit it honestly, scrutinize the correctness of its copies and write beneficial books for the sake of serving it. This is manifested in the accuracy of its recitation, style, exegeses, and explanation of its rulings and the printing of its copies. Many people are honoured by serving the Quran, and even some non-Muslims have played a role in serving it. All these facts are reasons why one should feel reassured about it and put his trust in it as his Way of Guidance that regulates life and reforms both the worldly life and the Hereafter alike. That is why the verses subsequently state that there is no excuse for disbelieving in that Book or turning away from the Way of Guidance, saying:

قُتِلَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ مَآ أَكۡفَرَهُۥ ﴿١٧﴾ مِنۡ أَيِّ شَيۡءٍ خَلَقَهُۥ ﴿١٨﴾ مِن نُّطۡفَةٍ خَلَقَهُۥ فَقَدَّرَهُۥ ﴿١٩﴾
ثُمَّ ٱلسَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُۥ ﴿٢٠﴾ ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُۥ فَأَقۡبَرَهُۥ ﴿٢١﴾ ثُمَّ إِذَا شَآءَ أَنشَرَهُۥ ﴿٢٢﴾

Woe to man! How ungrateful he is! [17] From what thing does God create him? [18] He creates him from a droplet, He proportions him [19] He makes the way easy for him [20] then He causes him to die and be buried [21] When He wills, He will raise him up again [22] (The Quran, *'Abasa:* 17 - 22)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'May man be slain...' (*'Abasa:* 17) constitutes a supplication against the disbelievers. The context here is about the disbeliever who disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* despite all the clear reasons that call one to have faith in the Lord, *Glorified is He*. Therefore, His saying: 'May man be slain…' (*'Abasa:* 17) means that 'a curse or a punishment (will be given) to the disbeliever'. With regards to His saying: '…How ungrateful he is!' (*'Abasa:* 17), the Arabic particle *'ma'* (how) carries the meaning of a condemnatory interrogation and being amazed about man's ungratefulness and disbelief.

In this regard, it is narrated that the daughter of Abu Al-Aswad Ad-Du'ali(1) once looked to the sky and saw the stars twinkling. And that is why she said, '*Ma ahsana as-sama'u* (What makes the sky beautiful)?' Her father replied, 'It is the stars'. She said, 'My father, I did not mean to pose a question; I was just wondering about the beauty of the sky'. He said, 'Then say, "*Ma ahsana as-sama'a* (How beautiful the sky is!)"'.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…How ungrateful he is!' (*'Abasa:* 17) carries the meaning of wonderment and amazement because it entails that something contrary to reason and logic had happened. In actuality, all people, depending on sound logic and reason, should become believers. And that is why it is astonishing that one disbelieves after seeing Allah's signs and Verses. That is why Allah *the Almighty* addresses such people in the chapter of *al-Baqara*, saying: 'How do you deny Allah, [seeing that] you were dead and He gave you life? Again He will cause you to die and again bring you to life; then you shall be brought back to Him' (*al-Baqara:* 28).

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(1) He is Mazhlum ibn 'Amr ibn Sufyan Ad-Du'ali. He was born one year before the *Hijra* and died in 69 A.H. He is the founding father of the science of *Al-Nahw* (Arabic grammar) and was considered one of the jurists, the dignitaries, the emirs, the poets, the horsemen, and the Tabi'un (Followers). He was known for giving quick answers. He settled in *Al-Basra* during the caliphate of 'Umar and was its emir during the reign of 'Ali. He was the first one to add the 'dots' to the words in the copies of the Quran. See Az-Zirikli*, Al-A'lam, 3/236.*

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…How ungrateful he is!' (*'Abasa:* 17) indicates that their disbelief is a strange matter because the argument for it is baseless. Even if we considered this Divine Saying as an interrogation, then it carries the meaning of condemnation. Let us reflect on the precision of the Quranic style in His saying: 'May man be slain!' (*'Abasa:* 17) The Arabic verb *'qutila'* (be slain) is in the passive voice and its subject is not defined. Definitely, there is a difference between slaying and death; the latter is a natural end of life, for all of us will die, but not all of us will be slain. It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying, 'This disbelieving man deserves to be slain because his crime should be punished by death'. One of the severest supplications is to invoke Allah *the Almighty* to cause someone to die; so what about the one supplicated against to be slain?!

The word '…man…' (*'Abasa:* 17), which refers to all human beings, provides the reason for Allah's saying: 'May man be slain!' (*'Abasa:* 17) This is because the Quran frequently describes man as committing evil or having bad qualities, as in Allah's saying: 'Surely man is created with a restless, impatient temperament' (*al-Ma'arij:* 19), and: 'I swear by time, most surely man is in loss' (*al-'Asr:* 1-2) as well as: 'And man prays for evil as he ought to pray for good, and man is ever hasty' (*an-Nahl:* 11), and: 'Certainly, We have created man in [a life of] trail and distress' (*al-Balad:* 4). No one is saved from this evil except those whom Allah *the Almighty* has exempted. The meaning of the verses is that the normal human being, who is not protected by the Divine Way of Guidance, inevitably has a hasty temperament and is in loss. The exception is however mentioned in His saying: 'Surely man is created with a restless, impatient temperament. Being greatly grieved when evil afflicts him and niggardly when good befalls him. Except those who pray' (*al-Ma'arij:* 19-22), and: 'I swear by time, most surely man is in loss. Except those who believe and do good, and enjoin on each other [to follow] the truth, and enjoin on each other [to be] patient' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3).

These verses indicate that the natural constitution of the human being is only different from animals because he has been honoured with the mind. However, he will be lower in rank than the animals if he does not use that mind, which Allah *the Almighty* has given him, appropriately or if he gives full rein to his desires and lusts without being deterred by a religion or a Way of Guidance. Thus, His saying: 'May man be slain!' (*'Abasa:* 17) refers to the disbeliever who became one of the wrongdoers by accepting the bestowals from Allah due to His Lordship and leaving the consequences of Allah's Divinity. As he accepted this low position for himself, he deserved to be supplicated against with this invocation of being slain.

Next, the verses remind this disbelieving man about the origin of his creation, saying: 'From what thing did He (Allah) create him? From a sperm-drop He created him, then proportioned him' (*'Abasa:* 18-19). The 'drop' here refers to the semen that carries the sperm, which, in turn, produces man. This sperm-drop is trivial and valueless, but the haughty, arrogant man was created from it. If he carefully reflects on his origin, he will never behave arrogantly. Allah's Powers miraculously turns this underrated fluid to a great, symmetrical creature. As for His saying: '…then proportioned him' (*'Abasa,* 19), it means that Allah *the Almighty* proportioned the creation of man precisely and perfectly. The precision and perfectness in the creation are manifested in the tiny things that the eye cannot perceive and also the enormous bodies that cannot be encompassed by the naked eye–as they say, 'From the atom to the galaxy'.

Thus, *'an-nutfa'* (a sperm-drop) refers to the sperm that lives in the semen. It is so small and subtle that half of the tailor's thimble can contain enough sperms to create all the people living in the world. From this tiny microbe, the human being, who is a marvelous, symmetrical and beautiful creation, comes into existence. Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'From a sperm-drop He created him, then proportioned him' (*'Abasa:* 18-19). The Lord *Glorified is He* proportioned man's characteristics, shape, colour, desires, emotions and every organ and atom in his body. He *Glorified is He* Who wonderfully created man from this underrated sperm, also marvelously perfected the creation of the enormous bodies including the heavens, the earth, the stars, the orbits and the galaxies with all their great, abundant creatures. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the men, but most people do not know’ (*Ghafir:* 57).

Out of Allah’s Favour on us, He *Glorified is He* tells us about the origin of our creation. The Lord *the Almighty* poses the question and answers it Himself, saying: ‘From what thing did He (Allah) create him? From a sperm-drop He created him, then proportioned him’ (*’Abasa:* 18-19). If He *the Almighty* had not told us about the fact that man is created from a sperm-drop, we might not have known the origin of our creation. This is because the sexual intercourse that produces the sperm-drop is itself a lustful act; it is produced naturally and man might not pay attention to what it forms.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘He makes the way easy for him’ (*’Abasa:* 20). This is another blessing that Allah *Glorified is He* bestowed on the human being after the blessing of creating him out of nothing. After creating man from a sperm-drop, Allah *the Almighty* did not leave him without a purpose; rather, He *the Almighty* created him out of nothing and provided him for him to be able to meet his needs. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* facilitated his way to live in the worldly life due to His bestowals and the necessary elements of life that the Lord, the Ever-Watchful, has provided him with. Clearly, we cannot do without His Bestowals and without Him watching over us. In the chapter of *al-Waqi‘a*, Allah *the Almighty* tells us first about the matter of creation, saying: ‘We have created you, why do you not then admit the Truth? Have you considered the seed?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 57-58) After that, He *the Almighty* shows His Favour on us as He provides us with the essential elements of life that ensure man’s sustenance, saying: ‘Have you considered what you sow?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 63), as well as: ‘Have you considered the water which you drink?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 68), and: ‘Have you considered the fire which you ignite?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 71) These three elements, i.e. the plants, water and fire, are essential to man’s life and sustenance.

We have previously discussed the different meanings that are illustrated in these verses of the chapter of *al-Waqi‘a*, but here we should direct our attention to Allah’s saying: ‘Have you considered the fire which you ignite?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 71) in which Allah *the Almighty* does not mention what eliminates the fire. By contrast, He *the Almighty* mentions what eliminates the plants, saying: ‘If We pleased, We could have certainly made it broken down into pieces…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 71), and the water, saying: 'If We pleased, We could have made it salty…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 70). But Allah *the Almighty* does not say about the fire, 'If We please, We could have made it cool'. Rather, He *Glorified is He* left it without being corrupted by anything to remind us about the fire in the Hereafter.

If we ponder on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He makes the way easy for him' (*'Abasa:* 20), we find that He *the Almighty* does not say, 'He makes his way easy for him'. There is a great difference between the two expressions. Using the undefined word 'way' denotes generality; the good and evil ways are sub-categorized under it. Thus, the human being can take either the way of goodness or the way of evil. Allah *Glorified is He* has given him a mind to distinguish between matters and choose the best choice. For example, the tongue that pronounces 'there is no god but Allah' can also say, 'There is no god'. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Carry on doing good deeds. Everyone will find it easy to do such deeds (as will lead him to his destined place) for which he has been created'.(1) After making the way easy for man, there is no excuse for his violation of Allah's Way of Guidance, for Allah *the Almighty* made the good way (as He uses a definite article on the noun 'way') easy for him, but he opted for the evil way.

If Allah *the Almighty* had said, 'He makes his way easy for him', everyone will have had his own way. So, if he were to do evil, he will say, 'This is my way that Allah has made easy for me'. Thus, doing all kinds of deeds is made easy for us; we have the privilege to choose whatever we want from them, and we have the absolute freedom to do or not do them. One should not say, 'This one is forced to do good and that one is forced to do evil', for all of us can freely do both of them, and can opt for one of them. Even one single person can be obedient by doing a good deed or disobedient by doing an evil one. We invoke Allah *the Almighty* to make us among the good people who love goodness and do good deeds.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated by At-Tayalisi and Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of 'Umran ibn Husayn Allah be pleased with him. Its essential meaning is narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Maja on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb Allah be pleased with him. See At-Tayalisi, Musnad, Hadith no. 881; Al-Bayhaqi, Al-'Itiqad, 1/146 and Al-Qada' Wa Al-Qadr, 1/124; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4949; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2647; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2136; and Ibn Majah, Sunnan, Hadith no. 78.*

Moreover, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He makes the way easy for him' (*'Abasa:* 20) tells us that He *Glorified is He* appointed man as His vicegerent in the earth to establish His Way of Guidance and to worship Him as He ought to be worshipped. Allah *the Almighty* made this easy for man and gave him the ability to do it by granting him the faculties and the necessary abilities to be able to undertake the religious obligations. Thus, if Allah *Glorified is He* charges you with something, you should know that it is within your capacity and power, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty [which is] beyond its ability…' (*al-Baqara:* 286).

So, one should not say that this religious obligation is within my capacity but that one is beyond it; rather, he should consider what Allah *the Almighty* has imposed on him. If Allah *Glorified is He* has charged you with a duty, you should know that it is within your capacity, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Does He not know Who created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware' (*al-Mulk:* 14). Therefore, one should not consider his ideas of his capacity the standard for accepting religious obligations. Rather, he should first accept the religious obligations and then proceed to apply them in order to be closer to Allah *the Almighty* the One Who knows best our capacities and powers. If one loses some of his faculties and abilities, the religious obligations carried out by him are waived from him, as he becomes unable to do them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Then He causes him to die and be buried' (*'Abasa:* 21). When we ponder over the linguistic root of the word 'death', we find something amazing that no other word shares. The verb 'to die' can be a transitive or intransitive, and the recipient of this action can be its subject or object, despite the fact that the subject of the verb cannot be its object. That is, we can say concerning this verb, 'So-and-so died', or 'Allah caused so-and-so to die'.

Death means the separation of the spirit from the body; it is also called *'al-wafa'* (taking the soul), as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah takes (*yatawaffa*) the souls at the time of their death...' (*az-Zumar:* 42). The word 'spirit' or the word 'body', when alone, is not synonymous with the word 'soul', as the soul is formed from both the spirit and the body. When Allah *the Almighty* wants to destruct the human structure, He *Glorified is He* separates the spirit from the body. After this separation, death takes place.

Taking the spirit is attributed at times to Allah *the Almighty* as in His saying: ‘Allah takes the souls at the time of their death...’ (*az-Zumar:* 42); other times to the angel charged with taking the spirits, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Say, “The Angel of death who is given charge of you shall cause you to die…”’ (*as-Sajda:* 11); and a third time to the angels who are the soldiers of the Angel of Death: ‘…Our Messengers cause him to die…’ (*al-An‘am:* 6). The action is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* because the command is, first and foremost, issued from Him: to the Angel of Death who is the recipient of the command and who, in turn, gives it to the angels charged with this mission. Thus, there is a role played by anyone to whom this action is attributed.

We know that the subject is the doer of the action or the one described by it. When we say, ‘So-and-so died’, did he cause himself to die? Or is it Allah *the Almighty* Who caused him to die? As long as the person is described by the action of death, it is linguistically correct to call him ‘a subject’. However, he, in reality, is not the subject, Allah is. By contrast, if the word ‘suicide’ is used and a person commits suicide, then the person is the subject because he killed himself. Similarly, we can say, ‘So-and-so killed so-and-so’, which is a third possibility. Thus, we find that ending one’s life can be done through three means: death, killing or suicide. Death is the natural end of life which happens without any human intervention. As for suicide, it means that one hastens to end his life by killing himself. In fact, this is the prescribed time of his death, but he wanted to hastily end his life, and, consequently, fell into one of the prohibited matters that Allah *the Almighty* has forbidden. This is also the case when someone kills another; he killed him at the appointed time of his death, but the murderer wanted to hasten the victim’s demise.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Then He causes him to die and be buried’ (*’Abasa:* 21) is mentioned in the context of showing Allah’s favours on the people, which include: ‘From what thing does Allah create him? He creates him from a sperm-drop, He proportions him, He makes the way easy for him’ (*’Abasa:* 18-20). These favours also include: ‘Then He causes him to die and be buried’ (*’Abasa:* 21). Yet, the question to be asked here is, ‘Are death and burial blessings?!’ Yes, of course, because death deters the human being from sinning as it reverts him to his original state. The human being who was created from an underrated, impure sperm-drop may behave haughtily, arrogantly and tyrannically, considering himself invincible. He may also be self-deceived, thinking that his power is an intrinsic, lasting one. So, death eliminates all his delusions. It is as if Allah, the Creator, is saying to him, ‘I have created you and given you this power by which you acted haughtily against my slaves. However, you will not go beyond My Control, for you will die at the appointed time that I have set for your death. After that, you will return to Me in the Hereafter as you will not be able to circumvent My Punishment, either in the worldly life or in the Hereafter’.

As a matter of fact, bestowing blessings can be fulfilled either through giving or depriving. Allah *the Almighty* purposefully mentions the two kinds in the verses under discussion. It is as if He *the Almighty* is saying to man, ‘It is Me Who has given you all these blessings. So, if you do not believe in and worship Me out of desiring My Reward or out of love to be close to Me, you should worship Me out of awe for Me’.

Furthermore, one of Allah’s Blessings on His slaves is that He *Glorified is He* prescribed the law of burying the dead people in the graves. With regard to His saying: ‘Then He causes him to die and be buried’ (*’Abasa:* 21), the burial means to put the deceased person inside the grave and to cover his body with dust as a way of honouring him through this burial in the ground, as this is a suitable place for him. That is why we say, ‘Burying the deceased person is a way of honouring him’. If he were not buried, he will be like the rest of the animals which are left dead on the ground until their corpses decay and rot, or are eaten by the dogs and beasts.

You should reflect on the precision of the Quranic style in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Then He [Allah] causes him to die and be buried’ (*’Abasa:* 21). The verb *‘aqbarah’* (to cause someone to be buried) is used instead of the verb *‘qabarah’* (to bury) because the one who undertakes the action of burying the dead is the human being, for it is a responsibility due on him. As for Allah *the Almighty* He causes the person to die and shows the people how to bury him. That is, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who causes someone to die and commands the people to bury him.

It is well known that the matter of burial is discussed in the chapter of *al-Ma'ida* in the story of the two sons of Adam. One of them killed the other, and when he saw his body motionless, not speaking or responding to him, he did not know what to do–given that it was the first murder in the history of man. Meanwhile, Allah *the Almighty* sent him what taught him the law of burial. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Then Allah sent a crow digging up the earth so that he might show him how he should cover the naked dead corpse (*saw'a*) of his brother...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 31). The Arabic word *‘saw'a'* (naked dead corpse) linguistically refers to the private parts; however, it refers to the whole body after its demise. We should notice that the human being was taught by a bird; this means the high genus can learn from the low one.

Before leaving this story, we should reflect on the dialogue between Qabil (Cain) and Habil (Abel) when they made two offerings to Allah: one offering was accepted and the other was rejected. Cain said: ‘I will most certainly slay you…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 27), but his brother replied: ‘…Allah only accepts from those who guard (against evil). If you will stretch forth your hand towards me to slay me, I am not one to stretch forth my hand towards you to slay you. Surely I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds. Surely, I wish [to warn you] that you will bear the sin (1) committed by me [if I fight you] and your own sin, and so you will be one of the inmates of the fire. For this is the recompense of the unjust’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 27-29).

In these verses, we notice the determination of the killer, represented in his saying: ‘I will most certainly slay you…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 27). His statement contains many different types of stresses, signifying his determination and how he wanted to rush to kill his brother. Despite that, his brother does not confront him with any physical action to defend himself. This could be regarded as a negative attitude. We expected that the verses will teach us how to defend ourselves against any offence. However, they teach us how to defend ourselves through dialogue, reason, trying to soften the heart of the offender and reminding him about the supreme Power that should be taken into account. This is the required positive attitude, not active physical effort. That is why the offended one says to his offending brother: ‘If you will stretch forth your hand towards me to slay me, I am not one to stretch forth my hand towards you to slay you...’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 28). He was trying to soften the heart of his brother, to convince him to renounce violence and follow another way to settle the matter. Then, he says to him: ‘…I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 28). He is reminding him about Allah *the Almighty* and His Supreme Power. If the offended one fears Allah *the Almighty* the offender should fear Him more. Next, he reminds him about the consequences and the recompense, saying, ‘You and I have a Lord to Whom we will be returned and in front of whom we will be fairly held accountable. Therefore, do not be one of the wrongdoers who will be punished by the hellfire. My fear of this awful fate prevents me from confronting you in the same way, trying to kill you as you are trying to kill me. Moreover: “…I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds” (*al-Ma‘ida:* 28).

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(1) ‘Bearing the sin’ means to be forcefully burdened by the crime that he cannot avert. Ibn ‘Abbas, Al-Hasan, Qatada and Ibn Mas‘ud opined that it means to be burdened with the sin of killing him and what sin he committed before the killing. See Al-Farahidi, *Al-A‘yn, 8/413; and Al-Wahidi, At-Tafsir Al-Basit, 7/338.*

Back to the verse under discussion; Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘When He wills, He will raise him up again’ (*’Abasa:* 28). This verse means that Allah *the Almighty* will resurrect man after he was buried in the dust. Thus, burial in the grave is not the last destination or the last connection of man to existence. He will return to have another life in the Hereafter. We note here that Allah *the Almighty* does not mention His Will in the previous verses. However, He *Glorified is He* mentions it here, saying: ‘When He wills, He will raise him up again’ (*’Abasa:* 28). The Will here is not related to the human beings but rather to the time that Allah *the Almighty* has appointed for the Hour in order for it to remain a hidden, unseen secret, known only to Him *the Almighty*.

The Lord *the Almighty* then says:

كَلَّا لَمَّا يَقْضِ مَآ أَمَرَهُۥ ﴿٢٣﴾ فَلْيَنظُرِ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ إِلَىٰ طَعَامِهِۦٓ ﴿٢٤﴾ أَنَّا صَبَبْنَا ٱلْمَآءَ صَبًّا ﴿٢٥﴾
ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا ٱلْأَرْضَ شَقًّا ﴿٢٦﴾ فَأَنۢبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا ﴿٢٧﴾ وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا ﴿٢٨﴾ وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا ﴿٢٩﴾
وَحَدَآئِقَ غُلْبًا ﴿٣٠﴾ وَفَٰكِهَةً وَأَبًّا ﴿٣١﴾ مَّتَٰعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَٰمِكُمْ ﴿٣٢﴾

Yet man does not fulfil God's commands [23] Let man consider
the food he eats! [24] We pour down abundant water [25]
and cause the soil to split open [26] We make grain grow [27]
and vines, fresh vegetation, [28] olive trees, date palms [29]
luscious gardens [30] fruits, and fodder [31] all for you and
your livestock to enjoy [32] (The Quran, *'Abasa:* 23 - 32)

The Arabic particle *'kalla'* at the very beginning of these verses indicates rebuke and determent. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to the disbelieving man, 'Stop your disbelief in Allah Who has granted you all the blessings you enjoy. You should not have disbelieved in your Lord after you had been introduced to faith through persuasion and also intimidation'.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…man has not fulfilled Allah's Commands [yet]' (*'Abasa:* 23), it means that man inevitably has shortcomings in fulfilling his Lord and Creator's Rights and in doing the required good deeds. This is a rebuke for the one who did not believe in his Lord; he neither considered His Graces, Blessings and convincing arguments, nor did he regard His Severe Torment and Might. Thus, he did not believe in Him *the Almighty* neither out of hope nor out of fear.

Out of Allah's Mercy towards mankind, the Quranic style of negation here employs the particle *'lamma'* and not *'lam'* because the latter negates the past and the present, including the time the statement itself is uttered. As for *'lamma'*, it denotes the possibility of the occurrence of action in the future. That is, out of His Kindness towards human beings, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…man has not fulfilled Allah's Commands [yet]' (*'Abasa:* 23). This verse means that man, up to the moment of this rebuke, did not fulfil Allah's Commands, but he is expected to fulfil them in the future. This style does not block the way before man; rather, it leaves the door open so that he makes amends, obviates his shortcomings and reforms his affairs. Up to now, he still did not fulfil Allah's Command, but in the future, he will fulfil it. This is the meaning of His saying: '…man has not fulfilled Allah's Commands [yet]' (*'Abasa:* 23). For example, we can say, 'Our garden has not (*lamma*) yielded fruit yet, even though the other gardens have already yielded fruit'. This means that the garden will bear fruit in the future.

The verses have told us about the origin of the man and some of Allah's Blessings on him, including creating him from nothing and providing him with sustenance to meet his needs. Despite that, he did not believe in his Lord *the Almighty* due to hope or fear. After mentioning the origin of human life, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the essential elements for the sustenance of that life, saying: 'Let man consider the food he eats!' (*'Abasa:* 24)

The Lord *the Most High* wants to attract man's attention to the source of his energy and sustenance of life and to his Lord's Power and Ever-Watchfulness. Allah *Glorified is He* is in charge of providing him in all the stages of his existence. Allah *the Almighty* gave him life and then provided him with what ensures the sustenance of his life. Afterwards, the Lord *the Almighty* clarifies to man how his food comes to him and the stages that this food takes until it reaches him, saying: 'We pour down abundant water' (*'Abasa:* 25). The verb 'pour down' indicates the abundance of water that falls down from the sky when the Lord *the Almighty* drives that abundant water towards us, with force. That is why the verb 'pour down' is mentioned in particular here. The water in His saying: 'We pour down abundant water' (*'Abasa:* 25) could refer to that water which is found on the surface of the earth and the evaporation of which causes the fall of rain.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'And cause the soil to split open' (*'Abasa:* 26). 'To split open the soil' is one of Allah's signs as it prepares the growth of the shoot and allows it to emerge into the air. If we carefully examine the shoot, we find it is a leaf or a tiny bud, but it splits open the hard surface of the soil to emerge from it. We may also see that the tiny leaf has some dust on it that it carries upwards. This phenomenon takes place due to Allah's Omnipotence, Ever-Watchfulness over His creatures and some of His Power which He endowed in this seed. Besides, cleaving the soil is necessary for it to become fertile and to prepare it for agriculture. For this reason, the farmer ploughs the land, may be many times in some cases. Why is this? This is because ploughing turns over the soil and makes the air penetrate into the outer layers, making it soft and exposing it to sun rays. All these factors help in the process of fertilizing the soil and help the shoot to emerge from the earth, making the plants stronger. The agricultural soil should be neither too muddy that it does not let the plants spread properly, nor too sandy causing the water to drain fast through it. As a matter of fact, ploughing and cleaving the soil make it reach this optimal state.

After the fall of the water and the splitting of the earth by the Power of their Creator, the role of the plants comes: ‘We make grain grow’ (*’Abasa:* 27). Planting the earth is a process of creation in which Allah *the Almighty* creates the plants from the grains. This process is full of signs and mysteries. The grain consists of two cotyledons and when it is put in water, it grows in size and splits into two halves. Afterwards, a part of it goes downwards to form the root while the bud goes upwards to form the stalk. The grain remains the source of nourishment for those two parts until the stalk gets stronger and becomes able to take in its nourishment from the elements of the soil. Next, the two cotyledons develop to become the first two leaves in the stalk. In every part of the process of germination, there is a manifestation of Allah’s Divine Wisdom, Omnipotence, Regulation, Omniscience and Mercy.

He *the Almighty* starts the growth of the plants from the grain to indicate its importance, given the fact that it constitutes the main source of man’s nourishment. It is the essential component of his food, and anything else is considered an additional luxury. After this, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Vines, fresh vegetation, olive trees, date palms, luscious gardens, fruits and fodder’ (*’Abasa:* 28-31). The grain, which is the origin from which the plant comes, includes wheat, rice, corn, beans, lentil, and kidney beans and so on. In the order of importance, grape comes next because it can serve as an essential food, like wheat, and it is a fruit.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…fresh vegetation’ (*’Abasa:* 28) refers to the moist plants that the human being can eat, like radish, rocket and parsley, etc. With regards to: ‘Olive trees, date palms’ (*’Abasa:* 29), the olive is a rich source of oil and fatty substances while the date palms are rich in sugary substances. In this way, Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, has provided man with all the elements necessary for his nourishment through the agricultural lands that produce plants with Allah's Power. As for His saying: 'Luscious gardens (*ghulba*)' (*'Abasa:* 30), it refers to the gardens which are filled with giant, tall trees. The Arabic word *'ghulba'* implies the vastness of these gardens. Thus, the essential elements of life are not confined to food and drink, for the sustenance of life also requires woods because 'wood' is used in many industries that are necessary for human life. And finally with regards to His saying: 'Fruits and fodder' (*'Abasa:* 31), the fruit is the tasty and sweet food while the fodder refers to the grassy field where cattle pasture. Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'All for you and your livestock to enjoy' (*'Abasa:* 32). The human beings themselves enjoy the aforementioned blessings. Even what the cattle eat is ultimately an enjoyment for man, as he eats the cattle.

There is a story with Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* behind the word *'abb'* (fodder). He held a prominent position concerning his understanding of the Book of Allah and knowing its different meanings. Despite that, when he was asked about the meaning of Allah's saying: 'Fruits and fodder (*'abba*)' (*'Abasa:* 31), he said, 'How could the earth carry me and the heaven cover me if I gave an opinion about the Book of Allah without knowledge?'(1) It is as if he did not know the meaning of the word *'abb'* (fodder), so he showed objectivity and scientific credibility by not uttering anything he did not know. Eventhough he was Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* he did not disdain to say, 'I do not know'. Likewise, when 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* was asked about the meaning of the word *'abb',* he did not answer. Then he shook the staff he was holding, saying, 'O 'Umar, you have delved into an unnecessary matter. What problem can happen if you do not know the meaning of the word *'abb'*?'(2) This is how those prominent figures taught us scientific credibility by not speaking about Allah's Religion without knowledge. They also gave us a lesson in being humble with regards to knowledge because arrogance incites the person to lie or to speak about Allah's Religion without knowledge in order to hide his ignorance. By contrast, despite the high rank of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, they did not disdain to say, ‘We do not know’. That is why scholars say, ‘The one who says, “I do not know”, has actually given the answer’. Why is this case? This is because this answer directs the questioner to another source from which to ask and learn. But if he is given a wrong answer, the answerer bears the responsibility of the wrong that the questioner commits because the latter thinks that the answer is correct. In this way, the truth is lost and ideas become confused. Furthermore, what is wrong if Abu Bakr and ‘Umar said that they did not know the meaning of the word *‘abb’*? After all, it is a word mentioned in the context of Allah showing His Favours on His slaves. This means it is one of His Blessings, even if we do not know its exact essence. Do we know all the different kinds of plants?! Moreover, does one’s benefit from something depend on knowing its name or what it is like?! In fact, not knowing the name of a certain plant does not prevent us from making use of it.

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(1) *See Al-Khazin, Lubab At-Ta'wil, 1/6, 4/396.*

(2) *See Al-Baghawi, Ma'alim At-Tanzil, 5/212.*

After discussing the creation of man, his origin, the essential elements of life and some of Allah’s Blessings on him, the verses turn our attention to the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

فَإِذَا جَآءَتِ ٱلصَّآخَّةُ (٣٣) يَوۡمَ يَفِرُّ ٱلۡمَرۡءُ مِنۡ أَخِيهِ (٣٤) وَأُمِّهِۦ وَأَبِيهِ (٣٥)
وَصَٰحِبَتِهِۦ وَبَنِيهِ (٣٦) لِكُلِّ ٱمۡرِيٕٖ مِّنۡهُمۡ يَوۡمَئِذٖ شَأۡنٞ يُغۡنِيهِ (٣٧)

When the Deafening Blast comes [33] the Day man will
flee from his own brother [34] his mother, his father [35]
his wife, his children [36] each of them will be absorbed
in concerns of their own on that Day [37]
(The Quran, *‘Abasa:* 33 - 37)

The Deafening Blast is one of the names of the Day of Judgment. The Arabic word *‘as-sakhkha’* (Deafening Blast) refers to the disturbing sound that strikes the ears, like the rock that breaks the head and causes blood to flow. It is as if the people were deaf in their worldly life, but the Deafening Blast comes to force them to hear. After this, no one can be heedless of it or preoccupied with something else. No ear can be protected from hearing that sound. Some people used to hear the call to prayer, but they did not answer it out of heedlessness or laziness. Now, they will forcibly hear the deafening, disturbing Blast that will make them feel anxious. The word *'as-sakhkha'* itself is disturbing and frightening. Some scholars say that this disturbing sound is the event that will turn the whole world upside down.

On that Day: '…man will flee from his own brother' (*'Abasa:* 34). This is because he is preoccupied with himself, wanting to be saved from the calamities he sees. There is no longer any room for emotions, brotherhood, loyalty, love and sacrifice. On that Day, everyone will be selfish, caring only about himself and being the first of his brothers to flee from each other.

But we should ponder over this order in the Quran: 'His mother, his father, his wife, his children: Each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that Day' (*'Abasa:* 35-37). One may ask, 'Does Allah *the Almighty* order them in decreasing or increasing order with regard to importance?' Scholars say that the order is both decreasing and increasing. That is, starting with the one who had the most rights, which the person tended not to fulfil in this life, or starting with the ones who the person used to help less, ending with the ones the person used to help more, in this life but cannot help in the next life.

The word 'brother' here indicates generality, including your physical brother or the one you consider your brother, but he is not your physical one. In fact, everyone has a brother of either kind in the worldly life. As for the father, one may live in the worldly life without a father, as one's father may die while he is still in his mother's womb. Likewise, the mother may die while giving birth to him and, consequently, he does not see her. Similarly, man may die without having a wife or children. As for brotherhood, it is necessary for anyone in the worldly life. In the light of these considerations, we can understand the order of the relatives in the verses under discussion. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The Day man will flee from his own brother' (*'Abasa:* 34) because the brotherhood relationship is the most common one; it is the most inevitable relationship for all of us.

Then He *the Almighty* mentions: 'His mother' (*'Abasa:* 34) because she is the direct cause of one's existence. She also should be mentioned first due to her rank and role in educating the children. Furthermore, her efforts in educating and raising the children are required during their young childhood, and that is why the young boys and girls do not realise her role or even pay heed to it. On the contrary, they see the father's role, which starts when they become older, greater than the mother's because his role is more prominent at that time. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered us three times to treat our mother well, saying, 'Your mother, again your mother, again your mother, and then your father'.(1) In the same connection, when the Quran commands us to treat the parents well, it mentions the reason why the mother should be treated well, but it does not mention that of the father. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years…' (*Luqman:* 14). That is, Allah *the Almighty* reminds us about the role of the mother which the children did not realize, and left the role of the father because it is well-known to them and, therefore, there is no need to remind them about it. That is why the verse in question mentions the mother first, saying: 'His mother, his father' (*'Abasa:* 35). Then the verses mention the wife before the children, saying: 'His wife, his children' (*'Abasa:* 35-37). This is because the wife comes before the children, as she is the cause of their existence.

We may ask why the people flee from each other. There are many reasons, but the verse mentions the most important one, saying: 'Each of them will be absorbed in concerns of their own on that Day' (*'Abasa:* 37). Everyone is concerned about himself because the people are now being taken to account, which is an adequate reason for one to be preoccupied and not care about anyone else. Everyone will be astonished and searching for a way to be saved from this difficult situation. So his concerns are enough for him; he cannot care about anyone else. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* briefly portrayed this situation when he said to ‘Aisha *Allah be pleased with her:* ‘The people will be gathered on the Day of Resurrection bare-foot, naked and uncircumcised, just as they were created’. Being amazed, she said, Allah's Messenger, will the male and the female be together on that Day and will they be looking at one another?’ Upon this Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘‘Aisha, the matter will be too serious for them to look to one another’. (1)

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(1) *Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him narrated that a person came to Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him and said, 'O Allah's Messenger, who among the people is most deserving of fine treatment from my hand?' He replied, 'Your mother'. He said, 'Then who (is the next one)?' Prophet Muhammad said, 'Again it is your mother (who deserves the best treatment from you)'. The man said, 'Then who (is the next one)?' He (the Prophet) said, 'Again, it is your mother'. He (then) said, 'Then who?' Thereupon Prophet Muhammad said, 'Then it is your father'. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 5971; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2548.*

Moreover, the people will flee from one another due to the rights and duties they did not fulfil between them. For example, one will flee from his brother because he tempted him, led him astray, fell short in his rights and did not fulfil his duties. Similarly, the child will flee from his parents because he fell short with regards to his good treatment with them. Conversely, the parents will flee from their children because they fell short in educating them. Similarly, the husband will flee from his wife because he neglected her rights, maintained her unlawfully or incited her to disobey Allah *the Almighty*. Fleeing is natural on the Day of Judgment, as the people are being taken to account and recompensed, and rights are being given to their owners. Furthermore, it is the Day of Retribution, on which the people are either plaintiffs or defendants.

After the people have been judged, the result will be:

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾ ضَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ ﴿٣٩﴾
وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ ﴿٤٠﴾ تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ ﴿٤١﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَفَرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ ﴿٤٢﴾

On that Day some faces will be beaming [38] laughing, and rejoicing [39] but some faces will be dust-stained [40] and covered in darkness [41] those are the disbelievers, the licentious [42] (The Quran, *‘Abasa:* 38 - 42)

The context of these verses is about the Account. After Allah *the Almighty* judges between the people, they will be in two states–being divided into two groups. The faces of the believers will be beaming, bright and full of happiness.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6527.*

That is to say that when the one who believes in Allah, Prophet Muhammad and the Quran sees the Day of Judgment and the Account, he will remember his belief in the unseen which he had adopted in the worldly life. Now, the unseen in which he had believed has come to pass. He believed in the truthfulness of the Day of Judgment, the Account and paradise. Therefore, when he sees them in the reality, he will be happy, hoping to be admitted into paradise. It is his belief in Allah *the Almighty* and him following Prophet Muhammad's Way of Guidance that saved him from the punishment in the Hellfire and caused him to be admitted into Paradise.

On the contrary, the other group, which is made-up of the disbelieving wrongdoers who resisted Allah's Way of Guidance and the truthful Call, will be in the opposite state. This is because they now realize the truthfulness of the unseen in which they disbelieved when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them about it, as they belied him. They will be taken by surprise when they realize the truthfulness of the Resurrection and the Account; that is why their faces will be: '…dust-stained, and covered in darkness' (*'Abasa:* 40-41). Their faces will show the manifestations of sadness, and they will be dark and covered with dust out of the difficulty and hardships they will experience at that time.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the chapter in question, saying: 'Those are the disbelievers, the wicked ones' (*'Abasa:* 42). That is, the people who have such an evil fate are the disbelievers and the wicked people. Describing them as such signifies that Allah *the Almighty* did not wrong them, for He *Glorified is He* punished them fairly, as His punishment fits the crime.

the chapter of

at-Takwir

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *at-Takwir* [1]

إِذَا ٱلشَّمۡسُ كُوِّرَتۡ ﴿١﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلنُّجُومُ ٱنكَدَرَتۡ ﴿٢﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتۡ ﴿٣﴾
وَإِذَا ٱلۡعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتۡ ﴿٤﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتۡ ﴿٥﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتۡ ﴿٦﴾
وَإِذَا ٱلنُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتۡ ﴿٧﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡمَوۡءُۥدَةُ سُئِلَتۡ ﴿٨﴾ بِأَيِّ ذَنۢبٖ قُتِلَتۡ ﴿٩﴾ وَإِذَا
ٱلصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتۡ ﴿١٠﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلسَّمَآءُ كُشِطَتۡ ﴿١١﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتۡ ﴿١٢﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡجَنَّةُ
أُزۡلِفَتۡ ﴿١٣﴾ عَلِمَتۡ نَفۡسٞ مَّآ أَحۡضَرَتۡ ﴿١٤﴾

When the sun is shrouded in darkness [1] when the stars are dimmed [2] when the mountains are set in motion [3] when pregnant camels are abandoned [4] when wild beasts are herded together [5] when the seas boil over [6] when souls are sorted into classes [7] when the baby girl buried alive is asked [8] for what sin she was killed [9] when the records of deeds are spread open [10] when the sky is stripped away [11] when Hell is made to blaze [12] and Paradise brought near [13] then every soul will know what it has brought about [14] (The Quran, *at-Takwir:* 1-14)

Like all the chapters of the Quran, the chapter of *at-Takwir* has its special aims and indications. If we review the objectives of the verses of this noble chapter, we find that they are related to the calamities of the Day of Judgment and the revelation being sent down from Allah (God) (1) *the Almighty*. The latter objective highlights the necessity for the existence of a selected angelic Messenger to receive the revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* and conveys it to a selected human Messenger. This objective also includes illustrating people's stance on the revelation. After this, the chapter in question affirms the belief with regards to Allah's Will and its relation to man's will. These are the objectives of this chapter.

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[1] The chapter of *at-Takwir* is number 81 in the order of the Quran. It consists of 29 verses and was revealed after the chapter of *al-Masad* and before that of *al-A'la*. Therefore, it is the sixth chapter to be revealed.

As for the linguistic style of this chapter, which expressed these objectives, it is divided into two kinds. First, a conditional in which the conditional particle *'idha'* ('when' or 'if'), which signifies something will truly happen, is employed and then followed by the result of that condition. The second style is an oath and its complement. However, the complement of the oath here is affirmed because, although the oath is stated as a negative form, it is followed by its complement.

If we review the first style, that is the conditional, we find it is used in twelve statements that talk about the events of the Day of Judgment. The conditional particle *'idha'* ('when' or 'if') is employed because it indicates the inevitable occurrence of all these events. Despite the many different conditions, the result of all of them is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Then every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]' (*at-Takwir:* 14). This verse means that when all the events mentioned in the verses take place, every unveiled matter will be revealed to mankind. He will know all what he had brought forward for presentation on that Day. We notice that the twelve conditional clauses mention various incidents and mighty events; some related to the heaven and some to the earth. The former includes the sun and the stars while the latter includes the mountains and the seas. On the earth there are the wild beasts, domestic animals, the pregnant camels in particular, and the baby girl who was buried alive and who will be asked for what sin she was killed. Furthermore, the events include some incidents related to Paradise, Hellfire and the Records of man's deeds.

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(1) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. But the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

Therefore, the various events of the conditional clauses portray the mighty change that will inflict the normal, organized existence and the universe which we are familiar with. We are used to seeing the sun, the stars, the seas, the cattle and the beasts all carrying out their function and role in life as usual. This familiarity makes the human being frequently forget the seriousness of these phenomena in the universe, remembering them only when they break their normal regularity.

Examples of these phenomena are clear in the human being. He has senses, biological systems and organs that function normally although he is unconscious about them. They carry out their functions perfectly without any intervention on his part, to the extent that one hardly notices that these biological systems are functioning inside his body. However, when one of these systems does not work properly, he starts to notice their existence and Allah's Blessings on him. Thus, normalcy leads to heedlessness. That is why some of the scholars say, 'The people closest to Allah *the Almighty* are those who suffer chronic diseases'. The disease reminds them about Allah's Blessings, and when the treatments and the medicines upset them, they seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty* saying, 'O my Lord, provide me with a cure'. Even the word 'Ow!', which is an instinctive word that the patient utters spontaneously, could be considered a short form of the word 'Allah'. It is as if he is seeking refuge with Allah, his Creator, when he utters it as an expression of pain. This is because it is Allah *the Almighty* Who had bestowed the blessing of having this biological system, and thus He *Glorified is He* is fully Able to reform it, remove its problem and cure it.

What we have said about the blessings bestowed on the human being is applicable to the blessings in the universe surrounding us; we are heedless of the blessings of the sun and the stars, for example. Out of their normalcy and un-changeability, we hardly remember the fact that they are blessings. Rain is a case in point. It is one of Allah's Great Blessings He bestows on us. We only realize its importance when the sky stops raining for a long period of time. This affects the grass, pastures and the growth of the plants.

Consequently, we notice the importance of rain and invoke Allah *the Almighty* to send it down. As such, the unbroken continuity of the blessing reduces man's ability to appreciate its value. Furthermore, the abnormal occurrences that happen to the self or the universe surrounding us serve as a reminder of the Creator, the Bestower of blessings.

These occurrences that remind us show us that the general system of the universe has to have some abnormalities. For example, in a village of ten thousand inhabitants, all the people could be healthy and well except two or three individuals; they could have one eye, be lame or have one arm. The existence of abnormalities and exceptions from the normal, sound state indicates that the creation was not brought into existence automatically or mechanically; there was no identical pattern for the creatures. Rather, the creatures are a manifestation of Allah's Full Ability to create without any preceding pattern, for He *Glorified is He* is the Creator, the Omnipotent, the All-Wise Who controls everything. This shows us that Allah *the Almighty* brought the creatures into existence for a Divine Objective.

The issue of abnormality is clearly manifested in the difference between the computer and the human mind. Some people say, 'Unlike the human mind, the computer does not err'. Yes, indeed, but this is one of the advantages of the human mind, not the computer, as it seems to some people. The computer does not make errors because it is mechanical and has no free choice, given the fact that it follows instructions laid down by another (man). By contrast, the human mind has the privilege of choosing, preferring and comparing between matters to reach the truth by itself. That is why it is prone to err, but it has the ability to identify the error and correct it. This is proof it has an innate disposition and that it actually exists as an independent entity.

Likewise, if the laws and elements in the universe had been static and unchanging, people will have said that they were mechanical. We see that the abnormality and exception prove that its creation is not mechanical; rather, it is created and preserved by Allah's Omnipotence and Ever-Watchfulness. Allah *Glorified is He* sets the laws in His universe, but He is beyond them. This means He *the Almighty* can effectuate these laws or break them. This is a very important matter in Belief.

Furthermore, the malfunctions and the abnormalities of the creatures are beneficial in the sense that they remind us about Allah, the Bestower of all Blessings. For example, when we see a blind man feeling his way, we remember the blessing of sight; when we see a lame person, we remember the blessing of having sound legs, and so on. That is, all these malfunctions and defects are means of showing His Blessings to their recipients who are heedless of them. This fact refutes the claim of those who make hasty conclusions about some phenomena in Allah's creation and allege that there is no aspect of wisdom or benefit in the existence of these defects and abnormalities. One may ask, 'What is the sin of those disabled people who are the means of clarifying Allah's Blessings to others?' We say, 'Allah *the Almighty* tests them through these defects and made them means of clarification of His Blessings, but He has recompensed them for these disabilities with what makes them at equal footing with the healthy, sound people, or even better. The blind person who lost the sense of sight may be endowed with a sound and attentive mind that make up for the loss of his sight. That is why we find that the blind are intelligent; they have bright minds and clear consciousness, due to losing their sense of sight. This is due to the fact that the phenomena of sight distract man and reduce his concentration. In his expression of this meaning, a poet said,

I was born blind and, therefore, smart
So I hoped to become a home of knowledge.
To my eye, the insight of my heart became a source
Of knowledge that collects what the people neglect

That is why it is said that 'every disabled person is endowed with something in which he excels the people without disabilities'. Moreover, disability can result in amiability and prowess. This was the case with the German man who had one leg which was shorter than the other; therefore, he was prevented from joining the army and doing military service. He was sad for not being able to defend his country and as a result he decided to serve his country in another field where he could excel other people. Indeed, he excelled in the field of communications and achieved what the people without disabilities could not do. Furthermore, he was one of the reasons why Germany regained its strong position after the Second World War. Clearly, his disability was a strong motive towards excellence.

Likewise, some people criticize the matter of creation when they see an insane person, for example. The insane person is deprived of the blessing of the mind by which Allah *the Almighty* distinguished the human beings from other genera. Such critics wrongly think that there is no wisdom or privilege in depriving the person of a mind. However, when we ponder over the state of the insane person, we find that Allah *the Almighty* has provided him with blessings through this deprivation. But how is this? Scholars say that the mind is a means for choosing different alternatives, some being good and reformative and others evil and corruptive. The mind sometimes opts for the good and sometimes the evil. As for the insane person, his values are static; have we ever seen any insane person commit suicide, adultery or theft? Never, for only a sane people commit these crimes.

Let us compare between the sane and the insane person with regard to saying the truth or attesting to it. In such a situation, the sane person regards many considerations that may force him to falsify the truth or conceal his testimony. By contrast, the insane person speaks only the truth and never avoids it. He neither unlawfully favours anyone over another nor fears anyone when he tells the truth. In other words, he does not consider the consequences of speaking the truth. That is why it is said, ‘Take wisdom from the tongues of the insane people’. We may ask why. This is because they lack the mind that makes them consider their words and beat about the bush.

Moreover, the insane person is not held accountable for his deeds, neither by the people in the worldly life or the Creator in the Hereafter. His Creator who deprived him of the privilege of the mind compensates him with what the sane people desire. This means that the Lord *the Almighty* gives him one of His Attributes, namely not being questioned for his deeds. If the sane people carefully considered this blessing, they will wish to be insane.

The chapter of *at-Takwir* proves that the wonderful creation was not created mechanically. It is neither an automatic, static creation, nor is it attributed to anyone except its Creator, Who brought it into existence without any previous pattern. The phenomena in the universe which we appreciate and are familiar with throughout the different centuries and generations are regarded as static, permanent and stable. However, a day will come when these phenomena will be destructed and turn into fragments; they will be changed by the commands of their Creator. Thus, although they seem permanent and stable, they will ultimately cease to exist, for Allah *the Almighty* is the only One Who is Everlasting and Unchangeable.

The sun, which is a mighty, great creature, will be: '…shrouded in darkness' (*at-Takwir:* 1). This means that it will be rolled up and thrown into the space. As for the stars, they will: '…fall, losing their luster' (*at-Takwir:* 2). This signifies that they will be scattered and fall down. As such, all the elements of the universe will be subjected to a mighty change. This calls the sane man to believe that that there is an everlasting, permanent and great Power behind the creation of the universe, because the universe is changeable. The sane person is the one who does not depend on the phenomena of the universe which are seemingly static and permanent, for, in fact, they are fleeting and will cease. Thus, he should depend on the Lord and the Creator of these phenomena.

It is as if the reality of these phenomena clarifies to us and attracts our attention to the fact that man's actions are not objectives in themselves; rather, they are means leading to ends. The human being does not proceed energetically and actively to fulfil any action except when it is important to him and he feels desirous of it. The human being regards the world and universe wherein he lives as an aim in itself, as he considers it static and stable. However, he should not cling to the world or be tempted by it because it will ultimately come to an end. Hence, he should not depend on his actions and thoughts on a fleeting world; rather, one should depend on the One Who lasts eternally and will never cease to exist, namely Allah, the Creator and the Regulator of the universe. Allah *Glorified is He* is the only Independent, Everlasting God. Everything else depends on Him and lasts only according to His Will.

The Lord *the Most High* starts this chapter in this way to show us that if we consider the world and the phenomena of the universe as our ultimate aim, they will be inflicted with a mighty and frightening annihilation. Clearly, we should seek refuge with, cling to and search for the real aim of our existence.

We should ask about Allah’s Rules and the means that lead us to Him *Glorified is He*. In such a case, man’s movements will be directed towards this original, everlasting aim; he will seek it eagerly and energetically because it is the refuge and the last, sole hope of salvation from the calamities and the mighty destruction of the universe that will leave nothing. The means leading to this aim is Allah’s Way of Guidance, which was sent down to us through a Messenger from among the angels to a human Messenger, who delivered the Message on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He*.

After this, the verses confirm apparently contradicting issues, but they, in reality, are harmonious: the slave’s free will and its relation to Allah’s Will. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says at the end of the chapter: ‘But you will only wish to do so by the will of Allah…’ (*at-Takwir:* 29).

Let us now explain the subjects of the conditional clauses at the beginning of the chapter: ‘When the sun is shrouded in darkness, when the stars fall, losing their luster, when the mountains are set in motion, when pregnant camels are abandoned, when wild beasts are herded together, when the seas are made to boil over, when souls are sorted into groups [like with like], when the baby girl buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed, when the records of deeds are spread open, when the sky is stripped away, when Hell is made to blaze and when Paradise is brought near, then every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]’ (*at-Takwir:* 1-14). We say that the condition enables the result to be fulfilled. For example, if one says to his child, ‘If you study, you will succeed’, the result will happen if the condition is fulfilled. But if we scrutinize this matter, we find that in reality the condition is met when one knows its outcome. But how is this? In order for the child to study, he should be encouraged to study and persuaded to try to succeed by comprehending the outcome: the happiness and fruit of achieving success, and also by recognizing the consequences of failure. Thus, knowledge of the result and the development of its idea motivate the student to fulfil the condition. In such a way it is as if the condition is between two results: the result after being persuaded and the clear result of the condition. That is to say that knowing the result of studying is a motivation to study, and succeeding due to studying is the clear outcome.

Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘When the sun is shrouded in darkness…then every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]’ (*at-Takwir:* 1-14). As such, it is as if the knowledge of the soul is the motive behind the mighty events. This is because if the universe remained stable and static, life will remain as usual and normal–there will be no difference between the follower of the Way of Guidance and the one who violates it. Therefore, His saying: ‘Then every soul will know what it has brought forward’ (*at-Takwir:* 14) is the result of all the conditional clauses. This means that when all the conditions are met and their events take place, every soul will know what it has brought forward (for presentation).

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When the sun is shrouded in darkness, when the stars fall, losing their luster, when the mountains are set in motion, when pregnant camels are abandoned…’ (*at-Takwir:* 1-4) to the end of the conditional clauses is meant to make it easy for us to understand these mighty events according to our intellectual ability. However, we, in reality, cannot imagine the true state of these events as they are beyond our imagination. Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about them using matters and ideas that are familiar to us. For example, when the Lord *the Almighty* says: ‘When the sun is shrouded in darkness’ (*at-Takwir:* 1), there is no other expression that can give us a better portrayal of this event. The expression used here serves as a proximate portrayal of the real event.

The meaning of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘… shrouded in darkness’ (*at-Takwir:* 1) is that the sun will be rolled up to be like a ball. However, we may think this is not new to us, as we see the sun in that shape. But scholars say that we do not really see the sun; rather, we see its bright rays which seem like a ball. By contrast, in the Hereafter, the sun will be destructed, thrown away and shrouded in darkness. This is a terrifying, mighty event; can you imagine the world without sun rays, heat and warmth. You should also ponder on the rolled up object; ‘rolling something up’ linguistically indicates that it will soon come to an end and stop its function. For example, one may say, ‘*Tawayt ath-thawb* (I rolled up the cloak)’, which means that he took off his cloak and put it aside, as its function has ended. We also say, ‘*Tawayt al-kitab* (I rolled up or closed the book)’, meaning that I have finished reading it. Such things, the cloak and the book, do their function only when they are spread out. When they have fulfilled their function, they are rolled up and closed. By contrast, there are other objects that only fulfil their function when they are joined together, like the scissors; they do not work when they are open.

Likewise, when the sun is rolled up and shrouded in darkness, this indicates the end of its function and when it will cease to be. This is due to the fact that the new existence that follows that mighty event needs neither its light nor its heat. It is the existence in the Hereafter that depends on the Ultimate Causer and not causal factors, a fact which is clear in the Lord's saying: 'On the day when the earth shall be changed into a different earth, and the heavens (as well)…' (*Ibrahim:* 48). Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* says about the Hereafter: 'And the earth shall beam with the light of its Lord…' (*az-Zumar:* 69). At that time, the earth will be illuminated with the Lord's light.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When the stars fall, losing their lustre' (*at-Takwir:* 2), it means that the stars will scatter and fall down. As for His saying: 'When the mountains are set in motion' (*at-Takwir:* 3), it refers to the time when the mountains will move and be removed from their places, a fact which is clear in the Lord's saying: 'When the mountains will vanish like a mirage' (*an-Naba':* 20).

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When pregnant camels (*al-i'shar*) are abandoned' (*at-Takwir:* 4), the Arabic word *'i'shar'* refers to the pregnant she-camels which have reached ten months of pregnancy and are about to give birth. The she-camels, especially pregnant ones, used to be the most precious property of the Arabs and the most important object for the Bedouin. This is because they give birth to new camels, produce milk and so on. That is why the Arab used to like this kind of property and nothing could distract him from taking care of it. However, when the calamities of the Day of Judgment take place, these calamities will distract him from the most important type of property he has, that is they will make him abandon his pregnant she-camels. Some scholars say that the Arabic word *'al-'ishar'* refers to the clouds that carry rain water, which in turn causes the plants and the pastures to grow, and the earth to flourish. Thus, when the Day of Judgment comes and the order of the universe collapses, there will be no need for that rain.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When wild beasts are herded together’ (*at-Takwir:* 5), the word ‘beast’ refers to the wild, intrinsically undomesticated animals. Their wildness is a natural quality that Allah *Glorified is He* instilled in them. The man may tame a lion to use it in the circus. Apparently, he tames and domesticates it, but it still remains a wild lion. As such, this domestication is apparent and temporary, as it neither changes the nature of the animal nor makes its state of being domesticated extend to other people. That is to say that the wild animal is only tamed with regard to its trainer, but it is still wild to other people. Some other animals, including all their genera and families, are by nature domesticated with all people.

The one who ponders on the issue of domesticated animals finds that the wild ones constitute a minority when compared to the rest of the animals and the cattle on earth. It is as if their wildness and their not being subjected by man are an exception to the rule that ‘livestock serves man’. This exception must be for a Divine Wisdom, including that man fully recognizes Allah’s Power and will not be deceived by the subjection of most animals to his service and benefit. In this way, he will not forget the Bestower of these blessings while paying attention to them. Allah *the Almighty* made the large camel subservient to man, and made riding it easy for even a small boy. On the contrary, one cannot domesticate a snake or even a flea. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* is saying to us, ‘If We had not subjected most of the animals to you, you will not have been able to domesticate any of them by yourselves’. That is why Allah *the Almighty* shows His favours on us, saying: ‘Do they not see that We have created cattle for them, out of what Our hands have wrought, so they are their masters? And We have subjected them to them, so some of them they have to ride and some of them they eat’ (*Ya Sin:* 71-72).

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When wild beasts are herded together’ (*at-Takwir:* 5), it refers to the time when the beasts are gathered. Normally, they do not come together with human beings. The beasts and the human beings both stay away from each other. As we fear such beasts, we can never be in one place with them. Even some of the beasts flee from other beasts, they chase the one who fears them, which is the meaning of wildness. But the situation will be completely different in the Hereafter, for the mighty events of the Day of Judgment will astonish them. This will result in the beasts herding together after being scattered and coming together after mutual repugnance. They will be gathered in the same place with the human beings, as the situation on the Day of Judgment is that of humility, humbleness and submission–not that of wildness in which the strong eat the weak. The sane person should unbridle the rein of his imagination to realize the extent of the panic and imagine the calamitous situation, which confuses even the wild beasts, making them forsake their wild nature.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When the seas are made to boil over’ (*at-Takwir:* 6), the Arabic word *‘sujjirat’* (boil over) bears three meanings. The first means that the sea will turn into a blazing fire, as it is said, ‘*Sujjirat al-furn* (the fire was set alight in the oven)’. The other possible meanings for this word are ‘to be full of something’ or ‘to be preserved’. We can ask: which of these three meanings is the most suitable one to convey Allah’s Intention? The closer meaning, the one which changes the normal state of the water, is that the sea water, which we use to quench fire, will itself turn into a blazing fire. Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: ‘When the seas are made to burst forth and explode’ (*al-Infitar:* 3). Modern science has used the term ‘explosion’ to refer to the atomic explosion, that is, the fragmentation of its components producing a destructive, mighty explosion. Likewise, if the molecules of water, that is oxygen and hydrogen, are separated, the seas turn into a blazing fire. As we have said previously, Allah *the Almighty* portrays the events according to our intellectual ability and the understanding that our mind can accept. Without this type of portrayal, the matter is beyond imagination.

After this, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘When souls are sorted into groups [like with like]’ (*at-Takwir:* 7). The ancient philosophers could not, and even up till now cannot, define the word ‘soul’. They could not understand its true meaning but rather uttered some idle talk about it. Only the Glorious Quran defined for us the meaning of the ‘soul’, that is, the mixture between the spirit and that of the body. Once they are mixed, they produce the soul. Thus, it is not formed when one of them is apart from the other. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says about the meaning of life: ‘Allah takes the souls at the time of their death...’ (*az-Zumar:* 42). This verse means that the Lord *Glorified is He* separates the spirit from the body to cause the person to die. This indicates that the soul is formed by these two elements, the spirit and the body.

With regards to Allah's saying: 'When souls are sorted into groups [like with like]' (*at-Takwir:* 7), the Arabic word *'zuwijat'* (sorted into groups), according to some scholars, means that after the separation of the spirit and the body, the former will return to the latter once again on the Day of Judgment. According to this meaning, the verse refers to the gathering of the spirit with the body. Another possible interpretation is that the word means that all the souls will be joined into groups; every soul will join another one. This meaning is explained in the following verses: 'And you shall be three groups (*azwajan*). Then (as to) the companions of the right hand; how happy are the companions of the right hand! And (as to) the companions of the left hand; how wretched are the companions of the left hand! And the foremost are the foremost. These are they who are nearest (to Allah)' (*al-Waqi'a:* 7-11), where the word '*azwajan*' (groups) is derived from the word '*zuwijat*' (sorted into groups). Thus, the meaning of Allah's saying: 'When souls are sorted into groups' (*at-Takwir:* 7) is that all the similar groups will be gathered together. The people will be divided into groups; that is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: '(Remember) the day when We will call every people with their Imam…' (*al-Isra':* 71).

Another possible interpretation is that every soul will be joined to its deeds; every human being will be united with his deeds, as the deed leaves him after he does it. This deed produces an effect which ceases to exist in some actions and lasts in other ones. Afterwards, the effects that last either eventually leave the man or he leaves them when he dies.

The human being usually thinks that his action, either good or evil, end after he finishes doing it, but one's action, in reality, does not separate from him, for it and its effect always accompanies him. And on the Day of Judgment, the souls will be gathered together with their deeds, that is, everyone will be united with all his actions. The person will find all the deeds that he has done in this worldly life, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Then every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]' (*at-Takwir:* 14), and: 'On the day every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there was a long duration of time…' (*Al-'Imran:* 30).

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When the baby girl buried alive (*al-maw’uda*) is asked, for what sin she was killed’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 30), the Arabic word *‘al-maw’uda’* refers to the baby girl that some people used to bury alive in the pre-Islamic era. We should ponder on the beauty of the expression relating the matter of burying the baby girls alive. Who should be asked about this crime?! Is it the murdered or the murderer?! The expression here describes the brutality and the heinousness of this crime because the father abuses his daughter while he was the cause of her existence. In fact, such a father and all the people came into existence through the like of that female. Thus, killing the girl indicates hardheartedness and callousness. How can such a father reject his daughter whom he brought into existence after enjoying sexual intercourse?! What is the shame in her existence while her father was born by a similar female?! If his mother had been buried alive by his grandfather, he will not have come into existence. After his mother had given birth to him, he searched for the like of this female to marry and enjoy. Furthermore, he wanted to have an offspring from her. Thus, such a father has committed a heinous crime that is not expected from him, in particular, as there is no single justification or reason for committing that crime. What has this poor baby girl done for living underground to be better for her than living on the surface of the earth?!

Logically and emotionally speaking, this action is a heinous crime because such a father buries his own daughter, not that of another person. That is why Allah *the Almighty* expresses this matter using a condemnatory, reproaching style; instead of asking the father who killed, the killed girl herself is asked, ‘What have you done? What is the crime that you have committed whereby your father killed you?’ This is the strongest style of rebuke and reproach for the father who committed this crime against his own child. Moreover, the style recalls the painful image of the father who buries his own baby girl in order for us to imagine that horrible scene before our eyes.

This style is similar to what the Quran relates about Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), as a response to those who said about him, ‘He is the Son of God or the third person of three’. This is idle talk that the Christians falsified about Allah *the Almighty* and Prophet ‘Isa *peace be upon him*. Allah *Glorified is He* does not ask them about this; rather He *the Almighty* asks Prophet 'Isa, saying: ‘And when Allah will say, “O ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Mariam (Mary), did you say to men, ‘Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah’…”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 116). This question about that crime is posed to Prophet ‘Isa, even though he did not commit it. This question should be posed to those who committed that crime.

To continue, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When the records of deeds are spread open (*nushirat*)’ (*at-Takwir:* 10), the word ‘records’ refers to books of the actions in which all the slaves’ deeds are written down. ‘Spread open’ here means that the records will be given to their owner and will be opened after being rolled up. The Arabic word *‘nashr’* (spread open), from which the word ‘*nushirat*’ is derived, has many meanings: it means that the records will fly to their respective owners for them to read what they have brought forward. Another possible meaning is that the records used to be rolled up and will be opened for their owners for them to read their deeds. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And the record [of deeds] will be placed [open], and you will see the criminals fearful of what is in it. They will say, "Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great but it takes account of it?" And they will find what they did present [before them]. And your Lord does injustice to no one’ (*al-Kahf:* 49).

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When the sky is stripped away (*koshitat*)’ (*at-Takwir:* 11), the Arabic word *‘al-kasht’*, from which the word ‘*kushitat*’ (stripped away) is derived, refers to removing and stripping something, as when we skin a goat by stripping its skin off its body. Stripping away the sky is a mighty event that goes beyond all imagination. This is due to the fact that we do not know the size of the sky. The case is even more unimaginable for the destruction of the structure of the sky and its alteration to another one? Is this not a terrifying event?!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘When Hell is made to blaze’ (*at-Takwir:* 12), it means that hell is blazing to the extent that some part of it eats the rest out of the extreme heat and its waiting and yearning for its dwellers. And as for His saying: ‘And when Paradise is brought near’ (*at-Takwir:* 13), it means that paradise will be prepared and brought near to those who will enter it. These scenes of Hell and Paradise are seen before the Account.

After all this event, the result comes: ‘Then every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]’ (*at-Takwir:* 14). Every one of us will see his place in Paradise and in Hell. This sight is called the eye of certainty which is mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Striving for more distracts you, until you go into your graves. No indeed! You will come to know. No indeed! In the end you will come to know. No indeed! If only you knew for certain; you will most definitely see hellfire, you will see it with the eye of certainty. On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures’ (*at-Takathur:* 1-8).

The first stage of knowledge is certain knowledge, which is the mental picture that we took from the truthful news that we heard and believed in. This mental knowledge is elevated to the stage of the eye of certainty when we see the realization of this mental picture; when it becomes a real event perceived by the eye. This stage is more certain than the first one. The true certainty, which is the third stage, comes when we interact and engage with this reality, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Then why do you not, if you are not to be recompensed, bring it [the soul] back, if you are truthful? And if the deceased was one of those who will be brought near [to Allah for having walked aright], then [for him is] rest and bounty and a garden of pleasure. And if he was of the companions of the right, then [the angels will say], "Peace for you; [you are] from the companions of the right". But if he was of the deniers [who were] astray, then [for him is] a welcome of scalding water, and burning in Hellfire. Indeed, this is the true certainty. So exalt the name of your Lord, the Most Great’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 86-96).

There is a difference between these stages; certain knowledge, which is the first stage, refers to the mental picture that still cannot be elevated to the level of facts. As for the eye of certainty, the second stage, it is general knowledge of the truth which is gained through the sense of sight. The true certainty is the third stage in which the truth and its meanings are actually experienced in detail. Accordingly, what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has told us in the worldly life about Paradise and Hell concern the stage of certain knowledge. When the Day of Judgment comes, we will see the reality of Paradise and Hell with our naked eyes, which is the stage of the eye of certainty. The third stage, the true certainty, takes place after Allah

Glorified is He has judged between the people, and thus the dwellers of paradise and those of Hell are admitted into their respective places.

In the next life: ‘Every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]’ (*at-Takwir:* 14). This verse shows that everyone will come to know what he has done in the worldly life. The one who ponders on this verse finds that the verb ‘brought forward’ is attributed to the ‘soul’, it is the subject of the verb although it should be the object. This is because the soul cannot do any action or pursue any means in the Hereafter, for it will have no choice in what will happen to it. However, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to tell us that the soul plays a part in that matter because the deeds which will be brought forward are the actions done in the worldly life. Therefore when He *the Almighty* brings forward the actions of the soul on the Day of Judgment, it is as though the soul is the one which has brought them forward. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘Every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]’ (*at-Takwir:* 14). This matter gives us a picture about the Hour, affirming that the action therein can be attributed to its real doer or to the object that participated in and experienced it. As such, we conclude that the action can be attributed to both of them.

We have clarified this matter in the explanation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed (*kutiba*) for you...’ (*al-Baqara:* 183). Here, the passive voice of the verb ‘*kutiba*’ (is prescribed) is employed instead of the active voice ‘*katabtu’* (I have prescribed). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* did not prescribe fasting alone; rather, the slave participated in that action when he willingly believed in the Lord *Glorified is He* and obeyed His Commands. It is as though he entered into a covenant with Allah *Glorified is He* as a party, and participated in writing this covenant. This matter is proven by the fact that Allah *the Almighty* did not prescribe fasting on all the people but rather only on those who entered into a covenant of faith with Him *the Almighty*. Those people are the ones addressed in His saying: ‘…fasting is prescribed for you...’ (*al-Baqara:* 183). Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘Every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]’ (*at-Takwir:* 14). This is because He *Glorified is He* does not bring forward something irrelevant to the soul; rather He *the Almighty* brings forward its actions and their consequences. This is how the soul participates in the action of bringing forward the deeds.

But what is the kind of knowledge that the soul will realize on that Day: ‘Every soul will know what it has brought forward’ (*at-Takwir:* 14). Scholars hold the position that this knowledge will be the eye of certainty. As for the believer, he believed in the news about that Day and acted upon the Divine Teachings and Instructions in the worldly life. Now, he sees his actions and their reward with an eye of certainty after having mental pictures of them in this life. Likewise, the disbeliever sees his actions and their punishment. He is a wretched person because he did not believe in the news about that Day when it reached him through Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, he did not benefit from that news and, therefore, became a loser on the Day of Judgment. Such a loss is the greatest form of loss, as his worldly life will not avail him at all. From this we understand that after being obscure and hidden, the actions will be totally clear and apparent; no one will be able to deny or disclaim them.

Thus, the conditional style and its result convey the first objective of this chapter, that is, describing the mightiness and the greatness of the destination that all the people will ultimately reach, with their deeds being brought forward for them (for presentation). This style teaches us that the sound way to motivate someone to reach an aim is to establish the reality and importance of this aim in his soul. This is because the soul does not eagerly pursue the means to reach an aim unless it perceives the importance of this aim. As long as the result here is: ‘Every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]’ (*at-Takwir:* 14), the verses present the context in a manner that makes the soul pursue the means of reaching that aim and makes the hardship of obedience and the difficulties of the acts of worship easy for it.

Then the context, after expressing the greatness of the destination under discussion when all deeds will be brought forward, directs our attention to the second purpose of the chapter, saying, ‘Do not be deceived by the stability and the normalcy of the universe, for a Day will come when it will collapse and totally alter, resulting in all the phenomena of the universe being destroyed’. The purpose of showing the greatness of the destination in the last objective is to encourage us to prepare ourselves for this destination by relying on the suitable means that guarantee our salvation from all the calamities of that Day of Judgment. As a matter of fact, the only means of salvation is represented in following Allah's Way of Guidance, which reached us through the revelation that a chosen angelic Messenger transmitted to a chosen human Messenger. The latter then conveyed that Way of Guidance to us because we cannot receive it directly from Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* takes the subsequent oath, saying:

فَلَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِٱلۡخُنَّسِ ﴿١٥﴾ ٱلۡجَوَارِ ٱلۡكُنَّسِ ﴿١٦﴾ وَٱلَّيۡلِ إِذَا عَسۡعَسَ ﴿١٧﴾
وَٱلصُّبۡحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ ﴿١٨﴾ إِنَّهُۥ لَقَوۡلُ رَسُولٖ كَرِيمٖ ﴿١٩﴾ ذِى قُوَّةٍ عِندَ ذِى ٱلۡعَرۡشِ مَكِينٖ ﴿٢٠﴾
مُّطَاعٖ ثَمَّ أَمِينٖ ﴿٢١﴾ وَمَا صَاحِبُكُم بِمَجۡنُونٖ ﴿٢٢﴾

I swear by the planets [15] that recede, move, and hide [16] by the night that descends [17] by the dawn that softly breathes [18] this is the speech of a noble messenger [19] who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne [20] he is obeyed there and worthy of trust [21] Your companion is not mad [22] (The Quran, *at-Takwir:* 15 - 22)

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'I do not [need to] swear…' (*at-Takwir:* 15), we find that the oath is negated but its complement is mentioned: 'Truly this is the speech of a generous, noble Messenger' (*at-Takwir:* 19). That is, the complement of the oath is affirmed even though the oath is negated; how can this be?! Scholars hold the position that the negated oath here means the oath has already been affirmed. In other words, the saying 'I do not swear', means 'I swear'. This is because Allah *the Almighty* does not take an oath the same way we do, as He *Glorified is He* swears in whatever way He wants. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'By the mount, and [by] a Book inscribed' (*at-Tur:* 1-2). Here, He *Glorified is He* does not literally say, 'I swear by the mount'.

Likewise, Allah's saying here: 'I do not [need to] swear…' (*at-Takwir:* 15) means that He *the Almighty* has taken an oath, and the complement of the oath is mentioned. If the oath had not been intended, He *the Almighty* will not have mentioned its complement. In fact, the intended meaning here is that Allah *the Almighty* did not have to take an oath to affirm this particular complement because it is such a clear and well-known fact that it does not need an oath to affirm it. In general, the oath implies that the speaker recognizes that the addressee is ambivalent about the truthfulness of a given subject and doubtful about it. The normal speech does not need any oath to affirm it, as when one says, ‘So-and-so visited me yesterday’. But if the speaker finds that the addressee denies or is doubtful about what he hears, the speaker will take an oath that suits the addressee’s degree of denial and doubt. This will eliminate his doubt or denial, as it is known that the oath is the strongest proof.

In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* has clarified to us all the matters in the most persuasive ways, and His Way of Guidance came with all the clear proofs. The oath has been only used concerning matters that required it. In fact Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things?’ (*Fussilat:* 53) This verse means that it should have been sufficient for the people to believe Allah *the Almighty* when He *Glorified is He* says to them, ‘I have done such-and-such’. But they regarded this report an insufficient proof and were ambivalent about accepting it, and as a result He *the Almighty* takes oaths so that no one has an excuse to belie the reports.

To conclude, the matter about which Allah *the Almighty* swears, saying: ‘I do not [need to] swear by…’ (*at-Takwir:* 15) does not actually need an oath because it is totally clear and obvious. If the mind carefully ponders on it, it will believe that it is true. That is why Allah *the Almighty* does not really need to swear to affirm it; but when He *Glorified is He* swears in this regard, He swears by the planets that recede, move and hide.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…the planets that recede [after appearing] (*al-khunnas*), run their course and [then] set and hide (*al-kunnas*)…’ (*at-Takwir:* 15-16), the Arabic word *‘al-khunnas’* (recede) refers to the planets that move in the sky; sometimes they appear to the people on the horizon and sometimes they disappear. As for the Arabic words *‘al-jawari al-kunnas’* (run their courses and then set and hide), scholars have opined that they refer to the stars that appear at night and move from one place to another. They sometimes appear and sometimes disappear, but they do truly exist. The word *‘al-kunnas’* (set and hide) is derived from the word *‘kinas azh-zhaby’*, that is, the home of the gazelle.

The intended meaning of the verses in question is that the movement of the planets and the stars in the sky dictates that if some of them appear, the rest disappear. For example, when the sun rises, the moon and the stars disappear, but they still really do exist even if we cannot perceive them with our senses. If we carefully reflect on the Quranic way of expressing the meaning intended by Allah *the Almighty* we find it alludes to the fact that man's perception is not the criterion for perceiving realities, for one may not perceive something before him. This means the human being should not depend on his perception to realize the surrounding facts and realities. Furthermore, if a truthful person tells him about some facts, he should believe him; he should not dare to belie him just because he cannot perceive such facts with his senses. Moreover, man should realize that his abilities are limited, and that his senses cannot encompass all the creatures in the tangible universe. If this is the case, then what should we think about the spiritual beings?

Let us give an example to illustrate this fact; the spirit is placed inside the human being and it is the secret of his life and the cause of his movement. But can he perceive it by any of his faculties? Does he know exactly where it exists? Thus, when he is told that there is an Omnipotent God Who has created and regulated this universe and sent Messengers with a revelation that contains the Way of Guidance, he should believe this and control his actions with this Omnipotent God.

We notice here another aspect of the precision of the expression in the Quran: Allah *the Almighty* swears by the stars that recede, move and hide in order to confirm the truthfulness of the revelation that the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be on him* who was entrusted with the revelation, brought down to the heart of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was, in his turn, trustworthy in conveying it to the people. There is an obvious relation between the stars in the heaven and the revelation, for the stars guide the people in the darkness of the night, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and by the stars they are guided' (*an-Nahl:* 16). Likewise, the revelation is a spiritual guidance by which the people leave the darkness of polytheism and disbelief and enter into the light of Monotheism and Belief. Thus, there is a direct relation between the complement of the oath, that is affirming the truthfulness of the revelation, and the object by which He *the Almighty* swears, that is the stars.

Allah *the Almighty* continues to take other oaths, saying: ‘And by the night that moves [close], and by the dawn that breathes softly’ (*at-Takwir:* 17-18). These verses refer to the night when it comes with its darkness and the dawn when it comes with its light and brightness. The previous verses mention many oaths. We may ask what they all refer to. The answer is provided in His saying: ‘Truly this is the speech of a generous, noble Messenger’ (*at-Takwir:* 19). This is the second purpose of the chapter in question and the means that lead to the praiseworthy objective, namely Allah’s Way of Guidance which came to us through the revelation in order that we live happily in the worldly life and be saved and prosperous in the Hereafter.

The human mind can neither guide itself to the Way of Guidance nor establish the like of its rulings. This is because its only ability of understanding with regards to the religion and matters of Belief is to believe in the existence of a Supreme Power for this universe. However, it cannot know by itself the reality of this Power, what this Power wants from us (His Rules), the reward for obeying it and the consequences of disobeying it. It is enough for the mind to believe in the main pillar of faith, that is, the existence of that Power, which is Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, we cannot know the Power that regulates the universe except when this Power expresses itself, saying, ‘I am so-and-so and what I want from you is such-and-such’. The Way of Guidance must come from on high in order to guarantee our success with regards to our deeds when we reach our final destination and stand humbly before that Power.

Allah *the Almighty* prescribed the Way of Guidance that regulates our lives. Man will ultimately reach the praiseworthy, beloved destination if he believes that Allah, the Supreme Power, is his Creator Who created the universe without any previous pattern, and set the rules that preserve man in order for him to become upright and fulfil his obligations. Consequently, he must accept that Divine Way of Guidance and reject everyone else; this is an unquestionable matter–no one except the Creator sets the rules for His creation. For this reason, all the defects that appear in the universe stem from violating Allah’s Way of Guidance or following another man-made way of life. People are all equal, so how can some of them set rules for all the others?

As such, it has been logically concluded that our Creator is the One Who should set the rules to preserve us. This is due to the fact that the one who set rules should meet certain conditions, which include his comprehensive knowledge of the details of the object ruled, that is, the human being. Furthermore, he should act wisely and have no interest or whims with regards to the people for whom he sets the rules. These conditions, and others, are only satisfied by Allah *the Almighty*.

Now, if we accepted that Allah *Glorified is He* sets our rules, how can He *the Almighty* deliver His Way of Guidance and Rules to us? He *the Almighty* does not address everyone directly and that is why an intermediary must exist to receive the revelation from the Lord *Glorified is He* and deliver it to the people; the human being cannot receive revelation directly from Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, the human being, by nature, cannot contact the Supreme Power directly. Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* chose a Messenger from among the angels and another from among human beings to serve as intermediaries. The angelic Messenger receives the revelation from Allah *Glorified is He* and delivers it to the human Messenger, who in turn conveys it to the human beings. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah chooses Messengers from among the Angels and from among men…' (*al-Hajj:* 75).

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* reassures us about the authenticity of the Way of Guidance that comes from Him *Glorified is He* for He *the Almighty* ensures all the means of protecting it by choosing an honoured, virtuous and truthful angel who is obedient by nature, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…they [angels] do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). Moreover, the authenticity of the Way of Guidance is ensured by Him choosing an honoured Messenger from among human beings, namely Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. His people knew his ancestors and the minor details of his life, and easily recognised his truthfulness and honesty, even before he bore the responsibility of conveying Allah's Way of Guidance and Message to them. Before being a Prophet, the people of Mecca used to entrust Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with their properties and call him, 'the truthful, honest one'. Furthermore, he was one of them, not a stranger, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Certainly, a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him; he is deeply concerned for you, and gentle and merciful to the believers' (*at-Tawba:* 128).

To recap, the second purpose of the story in this chapter is to confirm the authenticity of the revelation coming from Allah *the Almighty*. It is emphasized by the oath which affirms this fact to the addressees. When Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel), the chosen Messenger who was entrusted with the revelation, He *the Almighty* mentions some of this angel's illustrative qualities, as we cannot see him. He says: 'Truly this is the speech of a generous, noble Messenger, who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne. He is obeyed there and worthy of trust' (*at-Takwir:* 19-21). These qualities are especially mentioned to clear the selected Angelic Messenger of any charge of corrupting the Books that preceded the Quran. In fact, it is the human beings who corrupted them through distortion, concealment and alteration in a form of additions and omissions.

From this we see that Allah *the Almighty* wanted the Islamic Way of Guidance to be different from all the previous ways which suffered corruption. In order that it does not suffer the same fate, He *the Almighty* ensured the authenticity of the revelation, saying: 'Truly this is the speech of a generous, noble Messenger, who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne. He is obeyed there and worthy of trust' (*at-Takwir:* 19-21). Here, the word 'speech' refers to the Quran, while the word 'Messenger' refers to Archangel Jibril *peace be upon him* who has a great position with Allah *the Almighty* and is obeyed in the supreme assembly of the angels.

By contrast, Allah *the Almighty* does not mention the qualities of the chosen Messenger from among human beings, that is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Rather, He *the Almighty* only reminds the Prophet's people about his companionship, saying: 'Your companion is not mad' (*at-Takwir:* 22). The companionship clearly indicates closeness and affinity. They have known Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* since his childhood, and they recognized his truthfulness and honesty. In fact, the honest person is beyond suspicion. For this reason they do not need any illustrative qualities to know Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; all what is needed is to refute any accusation levelled against him: 'Your companion is not mad' (*at-Takwir:* 22).

Thus, the oath serves as a confirmation of the authenticity of the revelation coming from Allah *Glorified is He* and the honesty and veracity of the Angelic

Messenger and the human one in conveying it–both were intermediaries between Allah *the Almighty* and His slaves. The negated oath, which is used in an earlier verse, lays more emphasis on the complement than a normal oath.

Before leaving our discussion about taking an oath by the planets that recede, move and hide, we should notice a subtle Divine Indication: the stars and the planets appear alternately, none of them are permanently in the sky. That is to say that when the sun appears, the stars disappear. We may ask where they go. They remain in the sky but the intense light of the sun makes them unperceivable to our eyes. That is why a poet says,

Intense clarity may lead to obscurity.

As such, the disappearance of the stars results from the intense light of the sun. For example, one may look for his glasses in a particular place while they are already right before him.

Moreover, we notice a subtle relation between the oath: ‘I do not [need to] swear by the planets that recede [after appearing], run their course, and [then] set and hide, and by the night that moves [close], and by the dawn that breathes softly’ (*at-Takwir:* 15-18) and the Message of Islam. When the principles of the previous Messages disappeared, ignorance prevailed on the earth. It is as if the night of ignorance ended when the dawn of Islam breathed. If we ponder on His saying: ‘And by the night that moves [close]’ (*at-Takwir:* 17), we find that it alludes to the fact that the stars and the planets refer to the heavenly Messages. The stars and the planets are means of tangible guidance and the Messages are means of spiritual guidance. The Arabic word *‘‘as‘as’* (moves) expresses this meaning. It is formed from two similar syllables *‘‘as’* and *‘‘as’*. This word refers to walking in the darkness without any guidance; such a walker feels his way because he cannot see before him. We also notice that the Quranic expression attributes the moving to the night and not to the people, which is more eloquent. It is as if it is the night which feels its way in the darkness and not the people. If this is the case, what do you think about those living in that night? Undoubtedly, they collide here and there. The Quran expresses this meaning, saying: ‘Or like utter darkness in the deep sea: there covers it a wave above which is another wave, above which is a cloud, (layers of) utter darkness one above another–when he holds out his hand, he is almost unable to see it. And to whomsoever Allah does not give light, he has no light' (*an-Nur:* 40). How overwhelming this accumulating darkness is! It does not enable the man to see his own hand which is close to him and whose position he knows. If he cannot see it, then what about the other remote objects? This is how the ignorant people are wandering blindly in their ignorance.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And by the dawn that breathes softly' (*at-Takwir:* 18). The dawn time is full of activity and energy; it is as if it ends the burden of the night that wears the night out. It is as though the night compresses the breath and the dawn refreshes and returns it. This phenomenon is proven by the abundance of carbon dioxide in the air at night and the abundance of oxygen during the day, as a result of the process of photosynthesis.

All these are indications and allusions to the heavenly Messages, including that of Islam and the Messages that preceded it. The darkness refers to ignorance and the dawn refers to the coming of Islam with its light that filled the hearts through the coming of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the Way of Guidance that caused the dawn of humanity to breathe.

Furthermore, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* does not swear here about the main pillar of faith, that is, His Existence as the Supreme Power that created the universe. This is despite the fact that it is He *Glorified is He* Who has revealed the Quran to the chosen Angelic Messenger. This is due to the fact that the matter of His Existence is unquestionable because it is entirely consistent with man's pure nature. The controversy may arise over the intermediaries that deliver the Message on Allah's behalf, and not over His Existence. That is why He *the Almighty* mentions the following as the complement of the oath: 'Truly this is the speech of a generous, noble Messenger' (*at-Takwir:* 19). This verse means that the Quran is the speech that the Archangel Jibril delivered intact to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

In this connection, we should note that the Quran is sometimes attributed to Allah *the Almighty* the Archangel Jibril or Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the Lord *the Most High* says: '[That] indeed, the Quran is the word of a generous, noble Messenger. And it is not the word of a poet' (*al-Haqqa:* 40-41). Scholars have explained that matter, saying, 'The action of revelation takes many stages; it is sometimes attributed to its origin, to the first intermediary, which is the trustworthy angel, or to the other intermediary, which is the trustworthy human being, namely Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*'.

We have explained this matter in our discussion of the action of taking the spirit. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who possesses that spirit and commands the angel to take it because He *the Almighty* does not undertake that action by Himself. Rather, it is the Angel of death who is charged with fulfilling this command and who takes the spirit. Moreover, that angel has followers and assistants. Thus, there are three stages in that action which is ultimately attributed to Allah's Command. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Allah takes the souls at the time of their death…' (*az-Zumar:* 42), and: 'Say, "The Angel of death appointed over you will take you"' (*as-Sajda:* 11), and: '…when death comes to one of you, Our Messengers take him…' (*al-An'am:* 61).

This matter is applicable to the Quran; it is Allah's Speech which the Lord *the Almighty* said, which is why it is attributed in reality to Him *Glorified is He*. It is also attributed to the Archangel Jibril because he is the first one to receive and convey it. For this reason it is also his speech. Furthermore, it is Prophet Muhammad's speech because he is the first human to receive it from the Archangel Jibril and convey it to the people.

If we carefully reflect on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Truly this is the speech of a generous, noble Messenger' (*at-Takwir:* 19), we find that the word 'Messenger' refers to the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. A messenger is an intermediary between the sender and the recipient. The recipient has nothing to do with choosing the messenger; rather, it is the sender who chooses him. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…Allah is Most Knowing of where He places His Message…' (*al-An'am:* 124).

As long as the Messenger is chosen by his Lord, it could have been enough that Allah *the Almighty* describes him as a Messenger from Him *the Almighty* in order that we recognize his truthfulness. However, Allah *Glorified is He* adds: '…a generous, noble Messenger' (*at-Takwir:* 19). This is due to the fact that the description of generosity in our human mind is a quality that makes the person give benevolently beyond what is required. That is, we should not say that the one who fulfils Allah's Right and that of the people is 'generous', for the one who possesses this quality of generosity should do more than that by offering supererogatory acts of worship, beyond what is obligatory. This quality indicates that the generous one loves the prescribed obligations and even does more supererogatory acts of worship. In fact, if he did not love giving people, he will not spend more than what is required.

In this connection, after receiving the religious obligations from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* a man said, 'By Allah, I will do neither more nor less [than this]'. Thereupon, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'He will be successful if he speaks the truth'.(1) Such a person does not deserve to be described as 'generous', because he will not do more than what is obligatory.

On the contrary, the generous one considers even giving the apple of his eye. This is similar to the case of Prophet Muhammad who was chosen by Allah *the Almighty* to bear the responsibility of delivering the Divine Way of Guidance to the people; he loves his mission and yearns to fulfil it perfectly.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne' (*at-Takwir:* 20), it means that Jibril is not only generous and noble, but also strong. That is, in addition to the quality of generosity and nobility, he has power and high rank. When Allah *Glorified is He* describes one of His creatures as strong, this description is according to His Measure, and not the human one. In addition to all these qualities, he, that is Jibril, is described as being held in honour and high rank with Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *Talha ibn 'Ubaydullah narrated that a man from Najd with unkempt hair came to Prophet Muhammad and we heard his loud voice but could not understand what he was saying till he came near, and then we came to know that he was asking about Islam. Allah's Messenger said, 'You have to offer prayers perfectly five times in a day and night (24 hours)'. The man asked, 'Are there any more (Prayers)?' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'No, but if you want to offer supererogatory Prayers (you can)'. Allah's Messenger further said to him, 'You have to observe Fast during the month of Ramadan'. The man asked, 'Is there any more fasting?' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'No, but if you want to observe the supererogatory fasts (you can)'. Then Allah's Messenger further said to him, 'You have to pay the zakat (obligatory charity)'. The man asked, 'Is there anything other than zakat for me to pay?' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'No, unless you want to give alms of your own'. And then the man retreated, saying, 'By Allah! I will neither do less nor more than this'. Allah's Messenger said, 'If what he said is true, he will be successful (i.e. he will be granted Paradise)'. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 46; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 8/11.*

Furthermore, he is described as being '… obeyed there and worthy of trust' (*at-Takwir:* 21). This means that Archangel Jibril *peace be upon him* is obeyed by the angels in their supreme assembly. The angels in general '…do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded' (*at-Tahrim:* 6). Their obedience to their leader is a part of their obedience to Allah *Glorified is He*. Not one of them fails to do his mission.

With regards to these qualities, there is a difference between the exegetes over the one described with them. Are they attributed to the chosen angelic Messenger or the chosen human one, that is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Those who attribute them to Archangel Jibril substantiate their argument by the fact that He *the Almighty* says after this: 'Your companion is not mad' (*at-Takwir:* 22). Furthermore, they say that Archangel Jibril is described with many qualities while Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is described by only a few. This proves Jibril's superiority and high rank.

Other scholars maintain that all the qualities are attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and that he is superior with Allah *the Almighty* to Archangel Jibril *peace be upon him*. They support their argument by the fact that the chosen human Messenger is better than the angelic one because the latter, unlike the former, is obedient by nature.

Actually, we do not need to delve into this matter, as Allah *the Almighty* does not want us to make this comparison. This is because it is neither an essential nor a complementary part of the Creed, and the One Who knows such superiority and possesses its reward is Allah *Glorified is He*. As we do not possess the reward to give to the more superior one, what is the benefit of attributing superiority here?

The courteous way of talking about this issue is to discuss it generally, not specifically. For example, if we talk together about the scholars, we can say, 'So-and-so is the most knowledgeable scholar among his people', but we should not say, ‘He is more knowledgeable than so-and-so’. This is because specifying this point is difficult for the one who is inferior. Moreover, I think that in the Quran Allah *the Almighty* was respectful towards Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as He does not state that Archangel Jibril is superior to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. This issue does not need to be researched and has nothing to do with objectivity. Even if we assume this is the case, there is no need to draw any comparison between Jibril and Prophet Muhammad.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Nobody has the right to say that I am better than Yunus ibn Matta’.(1) Does this mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is not better than Yunus ibn Matta? We have said that attributing superiority to someone in a general manner is better than specifying it. That is why we say, ‘Prophet Muhammad is the best Messenger’, but we do not say, ‘He is better than Yunus ibn Matta’. This is because this expression attributes inferiority to Yunus. This does not fit the position of a Messenger sent by Allah *the Almighty* especially since generalizing the speech delivers the same intended meaning. Thus, there is no need for a specified comparison. In other words, we should not say, ‘Muhammad is better than ‘Isa (Jesus) or Musa (Moses) *peace be upon them*’, because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prohibited that comparison.

That is, we should refer to the general superiority in order to not lower a person by stating he is inferior in comparison to another. The reason is that gathering a person with other people, when comparing, makes the person easily accept a general comparison, as when we say, ‘So-and-so is the most knowledgeable one among his people’. In this sentence, we confirmed his superiority in knowledge but did not lower anyone by specifying him as the inferior party of the two.

Scholars do not actually need to delve into the issue of comparing between Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and Archangel Jibril *peace be upon him*. This is due to the fact that the purpose of the verses is to reassure us that the authenticity of the Divine Way of Guidance that they conveyed is guaranteed by all the means that preserve its veracity and soundness. This is because it is the speech of a generous, noble Messenger who possesses great strength and is held in honour by the Lord of the Throne. The description of ‘being held in honour’ removes all kinds of defects from him. Therefore, how perfect his trustworthiness is!

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3395 and 3413; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2377.*

Although the scholars disagreed about the attribution of the previous qualities, they have agreed that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Your companion is not mad’ (*at-Takwir:* 22) is attributed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It indicates that his truthfulness is recognized by his people. That is why they should trust his honesty in conveying the Message, as they have already acknowledged his honesty through their long experience of dealing with him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

These qualities can never be attributed to a mad person; that is why Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Qalam*: ‘Noon. I swear by the pen and what the angels write. By the grace of your Lord you are not mad. And most surely you shall have a reward never to be cut off. And most surely you are [a man] of great moral character’ (*al-Qalam:* 1-4). The great moral character refutes any accusation against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, his people’s claims that he is a sorcerer, a poet, a madman or a soothsayer are all rejected, as they used to call him before his Prophethood, ‘The truthful, honest person’. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* refused his people’s offerings of kingship, sovereignty and wealth that they made in their attempt to tempt him to renounce his Message. Clearly, the claim that he is a madman was a collective demagogy on the part of his people who had no proof to substantiate their claims.

We have previously illustrated the danger of blindly following the group in terms of their thinking and behaviour when we said that Allah *the Almighty* teaches us how to think, stating, ‘Say, “I only advise you of one [thing]–that you stand, for Allah’s sake, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually, and then think. Your companion is not possessed…”’ (*Saba’:* 46). He *Glorified is He* teaches us how to discuss our issues, to conduct a constructive dialogue, and to make the speaker be held accountable for his words.

Consequently, if the people of Mecca had sat in pairs or individually to think about the quality of madness and being possessed, they will have found out that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is far removed from any madness. This is also applicable to the other qualities they accused him of, like being a poet, a sorcerer and a soothsayer. The accusations against him *peace and blessings be upon him* were easily refuted, but the disbelievers of Mecca were stubborn and obstinate, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘And they say, “If we follow the guidance with you, we will be forcibly uprooted from our land…”’ (*al-Qasas:* 57), and: ‘And when they said, “O Allah! If this is the Truth from You, then rain upon us stones from heaven or inflict on us a painful punishment”’ (*al-Anfal:* 32).

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

وَلَقَدْ رَءَاهُ بِٱلْأُفُقِ ٱلْمُبِينِ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى ٱلْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾
وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَٰنٍ رَّجِيمٍ ﴿٢٥﴾ فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

He did see him on the clear horizon [23] He does not withhold what is revealed to him from beyond [24] This is not the word of an outcast devil [25] So where are you [people] going? [26] (The Quran, *at-Takwir:* 23 - 26)

When Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And without doubt he saw him on the clear horizon’ (*at-Takwir:* 23), He *Glorified is He* affirms that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had actually seen the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) on the supreme horizon, that is the high heavens, during the Night Journey and Ascension.

With regards to the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘He does not withhold (*daneen*) what is revealed to him of the unseen’ (*at-Takwir:* 24), there are two standard ways of recitation for the word *‘daneen’*; it is recited as *‘dhaneen’* and *‘daneen’*, and both of them give a beneficial meaning. This verse means that as long as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was a companion of his people and they knew him to be an honest and truthful person, not one who was mad, then he is beyond suspicion. It is not expected that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* concealed, denied or withheld any part of the Divine Way of Guidance.

The other possible interpretation, if the word *'dhaneen'* is considered, is that the revelation is neither a delusion nor Prophet Muhammad's speech to himself, as some people claim, saying, 'The revelation is a mental image that Muhammad imagines and then utters to himself'. In other words, they claim that he *peace and blessings be upon him* suffers a dual personality, one of Muhammad and another of Jibril. This accusation is refuted by the first verse revealed in the Quran: 'Read in the name of your Lord Who created' (*al-'Alaq:* 1). This verse entails two separate personalities: one that commands and one that is commanded. The first, consistent with his capacity, commands the second to read, while the second, also consistent with his ability and the causal factors of one that has never recited before, cannot recite. These two personalities cannot merge into one personality at the same time.

Thus, the truth is the revelation came down to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* through Archangel Jibril *peace be upon him*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And without doubt he saw him on the clear horizon' (*at-Takwir:* 23). This affirms the reality of the encounter that happened between them. Furthermore, the verse affirms that the revelation is not Prophet Muhammad's speech to himself. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* see Archangel Jibril in his real image despite Jibril usually being unseen and Prophet Muhammad usually not being able to see an angel due to the Prophet being a human. However, this was meant to refute the claim that the revelation is just speech which Prophet Muhammad said to himself.

Seeing Angel Jibril *peace be upon him* in his real form made the Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* fully realise that he was before another separate power that has a distinctive form. With regards to this, we know that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw Jibril in different images, but saw him in his real form only twice. The first time took place on the Night Journey and Ascension at the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary. The other time was on earth. Concerning this, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And he certainly saw him in another descent. At the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary' (*an-Najm:* 13-14).

The Lord *Glorified is He* made Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* see Jibril in his real form so that he recognizes the source from which he will receive the revelation. This assured Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that the revelation was neither a delusion nor just speech or thoughts to himself, but rather a revelation brought down by a separate power with a distinctive form, namely the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* realized this fact, he felt assured that what was descending on him was revelation.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘This is not the word of an outcast devil’ (*at-Takwir:* 25), it refutes the possibility that the revelation was the word of a cursed devil. This is because there were some occasions when the devils used to eavesdrop(1) on the heaven and then convey what they had heard to their followers from among evil human beings, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…surely the devils suggest to their friends that they should contend with you; and if you obey them, you shall most surely be polytheists’ (*al-An‘am:* 121). Thus, this possibility was imprinted on people’s minds. Moreover, the revelation that was sent down on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* condemns Satan as an enemy. This is why that revelation can never come from the devils, as they cannot declare war against themselves. Clearly, if the revelation were the word of a devil, it will, at least, avert talking about our enmity towards Satan. However, as the revelation talks badly about Satan, as declared plainly in many verses, then: ‘This is not the word of an outcast devil’ (*at-Takwir:* 25).

After this, Allah *the Almighty* poses the following question: ‘So where are you [people] going?’ (*at-Takwir:* 26) After confirming the authenticity of the revelation, Allah *Glorified is He* shows the people the precautionary measures that guarantee their safety. Allah *the Almighty* restricts the means of safety and salvation, saying to them, ‘There is no way for you except to follow your Lord and Creator’s Way of Guidance. And the only way to follow is to believe Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in what he conveys from Jibril, who received the revelation from Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, do not try to take another way, for there is no other way you can follow to be saved'.

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(1) *A Hadith to that effect is narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him. It reads, ‘The devils used to eavesdrop on the heaven and when one of them came with a word of truth, he used to add seventy lies to it with which he earned the hearts of the people’. This Hadith has been authenticated by Al-Hakim and Adh-Dhaabi agreed with him about its authenticity. See Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 3050; and Al-Bayhaqi, Ma‘rifat As-Sunna Wa Al-‘Athar, Hadith no. 20867.*

That is, His saying: 'So where are you [people] going?' (*at-Takwir:* 26) means that there is only one way they can follow to be saved. This expression is said only about the person whose ways of reaching his destination are blocked except for one. It is as if there is only one answer to that question: 'We have no other way'. Allah *the Almighty* does not affirm this fact using the imperative form, but rather by using a question containing a fact that can only be affirmed by the one addressed. The answer to that question serves as an argument against the people.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ (٢٧) لِمَن شَآءَ مِنكُمْ أَن يَسْتَقِيمَ (٢٨)
وَمَا تَشَآءُونَ إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ (٢٩)

This is a message for all people [27] for those who wish to take the straight path [28] But you will only wish to do so by the will of God, the Lord of all people [29]
(The Quran, *at-Takwir:* 27 - 29)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'This is a reminder for all people' (*at-Takwir:* 27) means that the Quran is nothing but a reminder for all the people and creatures. The word 'reminder' directs our attention to our past and pure nature on which we were created. This is because this word in question means that man used to remember something but then forgot it; this matter is the Divine Way of Guidance. The Quran reminds us about it because man originally received Allah's Way of Guidance at the time of Adam. We have explained this fact which is found in His saying: 'And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them testify concerning their own souls, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes! We do testify". Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Surely, we were heedless of this". Or you should say, "Only our fathers before us associated others (with Allah), and we were their descendants after them: Will you then destroy us for what the followers of falsehood did?' (*al-A'raf:* 172-173)

This is man's natural disposition: man is religious by nature and faith is an innate inclination in him. However, as time passes, people forget this original nature and abandon this innateness. Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* sends Messengers to remind them about their pure nature and take them back to the Divine Way of Guidance. Here, we should refer to the fact that some people have a superficial overview about the Quran. Such people ask, 'As long as the people have given that testimony and acknowledged that matter, how did they differ afterwards? How did they divert from Allah's Way of Guidance?' We say, 'This is because Allah *Glorified is He* made them bear witness that He is their Lord, and they acknowledged that fact. He did not make them bear witness to His Divinity. This is due to the fact that His Lordship is not questioned, it affects everyone and, therefore, no one denies it'.

But after acknowledging that fact and recognizing that Allah is their Lord and Creator, Who is in charge of managing their affairs, providing them with sustenance and educating them, the people should have not glorified any other object of worship. Furthermore, they should have neither diverted from His Way of Guidance nor obeyed anyone else. This is because it is foolish to believe in the Lord but obey someone else. Thus, the difference over Allah's Divinity between the people stemmed from the fact that they did not bear witness to His Divinity but rather to His Lordship.

As long as faith is natural and well-established in the soul, it should have been transmitted from the predecessors to the successive generations, as many affairs of life have come to us through our forefathers. For example, they transmitted the way of kneading wheat and what is needed for this, including wheat, water and yeast. Also, they conveyed the way of baking it in the oven, what we should do if the dough does not rise and so on. Hence, why were the religion and the Way of Guidance not transmitted to us throughout the generations like these affairs of life? The reason is that the Way of Guidance constrains man's life and his desires, and the soul finds these constraints repulsive and thus tries to overstep them. At that point, forgetfulness about the religious requirements and the Way of Guidance take place.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…to whoever among you who wills to take the straight path' (*at-Takwir:* 28), it denotes that this 'reminder' does not avail anyone except the seekers of the Straight Path who are ready to bear its difficulties. This means that it is the people who should seek and ask for the reminder, not the other way around. They should believe that it is the way of reformation for their worldly life and their salvation in the Hereafter.

That is why we have said that the Quran is one, but its recipients are different, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Say, “It is to those who believe a guidance and a healing; but (as for) those who do not believe, there is a deafness in their ears and it is obscure to them…’ (*Fussilat:* 44). This means the matter is all about being ready to listen and wanting to accept; that is why Allah *the Almighty* attributes a special will to the people, saying: ‘…to whoever among you who wills to take the straight path’ (*at-Takwir:* 28). In fact, the Quran does not force the people to believe in it; rather, it is a Way of Guidance that offers itself to people’s hearts. If it is received with a pure intention and a readiness to listen, it enters the heart; otherwise, it is rejected.

In the same connection, we have seen that many non-Muslim scholars, philosophers and geniuses embraced Islam when they read the Quran and found therein the truth that they were searching for. It is a reminder for the seekers of the Straight Path. Such people will inevitably find this path in the Quran. By contrast, the heedless one who receives the Quran without being ready to listen and with being heedful will not benefit from it.

How strange man’s attitude towards Allah’s Religion is! When he suffers any pain in his body, he goes to the doctor and takes the medicine and analgesics to get rid of the pain. Moreover, he is keen on not missing any benefit or material gain in his worldly life. But on the other hand, he is heedless about the religious affairs and misses the prayer frequently without suffering any spiritual pain. Why do the worldly interests preoccupy us and distract us from pursuing the Way of happiness in the Hereafter? For example, we are concerned about students and provide them with private tuition, and exert great efforts for them to earn high marks and join good colleges. Meanwhile, we do not ask them if they are constant in their prayers.

What is the reason for this? It is because we do not want to comply with Allah’s Way of Guidance or constrain ourselves by its rulings. In fact, the one who wants something will seek the means of obtaining it, as the soul tries to get what it desires. By contrast, if one wants to neglect something or forget about it, he will just find some excuses and pretexts for such negligence. Imagine, for example, that the Ministry of Supply announced that it will change the ration cards; all the people will queue up before the windows of the offices affiliated to that Ministry.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘But you will not will to do so except by the will of Allah, the Lord of all the people’ (*at-Takwir:* 29), it proves that man’s will is not independent, for it is subjected to Allah’s Will and stems from it. Therefore, the slave should not wish something except if it is in accordance with Allah’s Will. That is why the verse is concluded with His saying: ‘…the Lord of all the people’ (*at-Takwir:* 29). Allah *Glorified is He* is man’s Lord, Creator, Provider, Educator and Protector. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* is in full charge of all man’s affairs. Thus one’s will is subjected to that of Allah *the Almighty*. This is a fact and the true meaning of the verse.

If man ponders on his life, he finds himself free to act as he wants for some matters and coerced for some others. Likewise, there are matters known to him and others not apparent to him. Similarly, one’s will is neither absolute nor limited. But why did Allah *the Almighty* make it that way? Scholars believe that this means that absolute Power belongs to Him *the Almighty* and not to the human being; Allah *Glorified is He* limits his will in matters in which he has no freedom to choose, but these matters are not part of the religious obligations. As for matters related to the religious obligations, like prayer, *zakat*, fasting and pilgrimage, they, out of Allah’s Justice, do not fall under the category of limited freedom. Thus, man has freedom to do or not to do them.

In fact, Allah’s Attributes have a particular scope in which they are applied with regards to human beings and the universe. His Attributes of Being Irresistible, and His Attributes of Mercy, Omnipotence and Justice are a case in point. If the Attribute of Omnipotence were applied on all the creatures, it will prevent the Attribute of Justice from fulfilling its part. That is, if one says that Allah *the Almighty* forced him to abandon prayer, he will refute His Attribute of Justice.

When we review the verses of the Glorious Quran related to the matter of Allah’s Will and its relation to man’s will, we find that they state two meanings; every one of them refers to a particular part of the will. For example, He *the Almighty* says: '…Allah makes Whom He pleases err and guides aright Whom He pleases…' (*Fatir:* 8), as well as: '…so let him who pleases believe, and let him who pleases disbelieve…' (*al-Kahf:* 29), and in this verse: '…to whoever among you who wills to take the straight path. But you will not will to do so except by the will of Allah, the Lord of all the people' (*at-Takwir:* 28-29).

Clearly, Allah *Glorified is He* has a Will and the human being also has a will, and they are not, in reality, contradictory. When we find a verse talking about man's free will, we should look for the verse that denotes that his will is restricted, resulting in the latter refuting the absoluteness of the former. Allah *the Almighty* makes the human being coerced and subjected in some matters to His Supreme Will that allows no other will. However, he has a freedom of choice and a free will in other matters that originally stem from His Will; if He *the Almighty* had willed, He could have made the human being totally coerced, without any freedom of choice or free will at all. However, according to His Will, He *Glorified is He* made him able to do or not to do the religious obligations. Does man like this fact or not? It depends if he has Belief or not.

the chapter of

al-Infitar

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Infitar*(1)

إِذَا ٱلسَّمَآءُ ٱنفَطَرَتۡ ﴿١﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡكَوَاكِبُ ٱنتَثَرَتۡ ﴿٢﴾ وَإِذَا ٱلۡبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتۡ ﴿٣﴾
وَإِذَا ٱلۡقُبُورُ بُعۡثِرَتۡ ﴿٤﴾ عَلِمَتۡ نَفۡسٞ مَّا قَدَّمَتۡ وَأَخَّرَتۡ ﴿٥﴾

When the sky is torn apart [1] when the stars are scattered [2] when the seas burst forth [3] when graves turn inside out [4] each soul will know what it has done and what it has left undone [5] (The Quran, *al-Infitar:* 1-5)

Allah (God)(2) *the Almighty* uses the root '*f*', '*t*', '*r*' to refer to both a constructed or a destructed object. The example of the former is His saying: '…the Originator (*fatir*) of the heavens and the earth…' (*Fatir:* 1), using the word '*fatir*' (originator) which is derived from the root '*f*', '*t*', '*r*'. This verse means that Allah *Glorified is He* has precisely and powerfully created the heavens and the earth without any previous pattern. By contrast, Allah *the Almighty* mentions something that is destructed in this verse under discussion, saying: 'When the sky breaks apart *(anfatarat)'* (*al-Infitar:* 1). He *Glorified is He* warns the people against the mightiest calamity that will cause the sky to break apart and the planets to fall down. At that time, they will stop doing their functions because Allah *the Almighty* removes what used to make them sound.

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(1) The chapter of *al-Infitar,* counting 19 verses, is number 82 in the order of the Quran. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *al-Inshiqaq* and before that of *ar-Rum*.

(2) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

The Arabic word *'al-infitar'*, which is derived from the word '*anfatarat*', means to break apart and crack; a meaning which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[And] who created seven heavens in layers. You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency. So return [your] vision [to the sky]; do you see any cracks (*futoor*)?' (*al-Mulk:* 3) Out of His Perfect Omnipotence, Allah *the Almighty* gives the creatures the power they need to fulfil their function. But although He *Glorified is He* endows them with that power, no one should think that any creature can go beyond the Creator's Omnipotence. The Lord *Glorified is He* created the heavens and the earth wonderfully, perfectly and precisely. Moreover, He *the Almighty* is fully Able to tear them apart, rendering them unsound, at any time He wants. Likewise, the Lord *Glorified is He* is fully Able to cause the sun to be shrouded in darkness, the stars to become dimmed and the mountains to be removed.

One scholar once said, 'I did not understand the meaning of the word *'fatar'* ('to originate' or 'to create') except when a Bedouin said to me, 'So-and-so claims the ownership of a well that I *'fatartuha'* (originally dug)'. Thus, describing Allah *Glorified is He* as the Originator of the heavens and the earth means that He *the Almighty* created them without any previous pattern.

With regards to breaking the sky apart, Allah *the Almighty* mentions this fact in the Quran in a number of verses: 'When the sky breaks apart' (*al-Infitar:* 1), and: 'When the sky splits apart' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1). It does not break apart or split apart due to its own volition; rather, it does so in accordance with its Lord's Command. For this reason, He *the Almighty* says: 'When the sky splits apart, obeying its Lord as it rightly must' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2). These two verses clearly show that once the sky hears Allah's Command to split apart, it immediately obeys that command. This incident will take place on the Day of Judgment. These verses indicate that the sky obeys that command immediately after hearing it, as it heeds the command of its Lord Who created it. It does not only hear the command but also carries it out upon its issuance without any delay whatsoever. The human beings can obey or disobey Allah's Commands, while the sky obeys them as soon as they are given.

The sky breaks apart only because of a momentous matter, that is, the mighty events of the Day of Judgment and the end of the worldly life. The breaking apart of the sky is mentioned in regard to another mighty matter about which Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘They say, “The Beneficent Allah has taken (to Himself) a son”. Certainly you have made an abominable assertion. At it the heavens almost break apart (*yatafatarna*), the earth splits apart, and the mountains fall down in pieces, that they ascribe a son to the Most Gracious. And it is not worthy of the Most Gracious that He should take (for Himself) a son. There is no one in the heavens and the earth but will come to the Most Gracious as a slave’ (*Maryam:* 88-93).

This shows us the hideous crime of those who ascribe a son to Allah *the Almighty*. Its heinousness is so serious that the sky, out of great fear of this claim, may almost break apart and fall into tiny pieces.

Allah *the Almighty* then says in the verse under discussion: ‘When the stars scatter’ (*al-Infitar:* 2). He *the Almighty* refers to the stars which are worshiped by some people, to tell those worshippers that their objects of worship will become disordered and that they will leave their orbits that they used to float in. Those worshippers will be unable to see these stars anymore because they will disappear after the sky breaks apart. If these stars had been able to benefit anyone, they will have been benefited themselves by remaining in their orbits. If such worshippers carefully reflected on this matter, they will start to ask themselves, ‘Who placed the stars in their orbits?!’

The word ‘planet’ refers to a celestial body whose light is derived from another source, that is the sun. This means when the sun sets, we do not see the planets. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about Ibrahim (Abraham): ‘And thus did We show Ibrahim (Abraham) the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who are sure. So when the night over-shadowed him, he saw a star; he said, “Is this my Lord?” But when it set, he said, “I do not love those that set”. Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, “Is this my Lord?” And when it set, he said, “Unless my Lord guides me, I will certainly be [among] those who are astray”. Then when he saw the sun rising, he said, “Is this my Lord? Is this the greatest [of all]?” But when it set, he said, “O my people! Surely, I am clear of what you set up (with Allah)”’ (*al-An‘am:* 75-78).

These verses definitely prove that all the stars–even the sun–will ultimately come to an end. Prophet Ibrahim made his people logically conclude that worshipping the stars is not sound. In other words, he used logic to prove his argument that the stars cannot be deities.

Scattering is the antithesis of collecting, as when one throws an object on the ground and it breaks into scattered fragments. Therefore, the stars will be scattered, leaving their celestial positions and leaving their orbits. After the law of gravity, upon which the work of the entire solar system is based, ceases to function properly, the stars will move disorderly in space.

The saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘When the seas are made to burst forth’ (*al-Infitar:* 3), is similar to His saying: ‘When the seas are made to boil over’ (*at-Takwir:* 3). These are future signs that will happen on the Day of Judgment. The seas will burst forth and become one sea, so the sweet water will mix with the salty one. This is because linguistically, the word ‘sea’ refers to a massive quantity of water, be it sweet or salty, collected in one place. Another possible meaning is that the sea water will cease to exist, so the seas will dry up. Some scholars, like Al-Kalbi, held the position that the verse means that the seas’ water will overflow. So their water will spread over the surface of the earth, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘When the seas are made to boil over’ (*at-Takwir:* 3). The overflowing or boiling seas are those whose water will cease to exist on the Day of Judgment, rendering the seas empty of water.

With regards to the saying of Allah: ‘When graves are turned upside down’ (*al-Infitar:* 3), it means that the graves will be laid open and their contents will be scattered. So they will turn upside down and the dead people will come out of them. At that time, they will hastily come out of their graves, a fact which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘The day on which they shall come forth from their graves in haste, as if they were rushing to a goal’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 43). In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…when lo! From their graves they shall rush forth to their Lord’ (*Ya Sin:* 51).

They will come forth out of their graves hastily, like scattered locusts, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Their eyes cast down, going forth from their graves as if they were scattered locusts’ (*al-Qamar:* 7). They will come out, saying: ‘…O woe to us! Who has raised us up from our sleeping-place?’ (*Ya Sin:* 52)

They wrongly thought that the grave was their final resting place and that there is neither Resurrection nor Account. But lo! They will come out of their graves and fully realize the reality of the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment that they used to belie and deny in the worldly life. At that difficult time, they will say: '…This is what the Most Gracious promised and the apostles told the truth' (*Ya Sin:* 52). Surprisingly, they, at that particular time, mention Allah *the Almighty* by His Name: the Most Gracious; it is as if they invoke Him for Mercy because they came to know for sure that nothing but His Mercy will save them on that Day. If Allah *Glorified is He* deals with them according to His Due Right of Divinity, He will punish them because they did not bring forward any good deeds for their salvation in the Hereafter. Rather, they disbelieved and committed sins and evil deeds.

For this reason, the Lord *the Almighty* then says: 'Each soul will know what it has done and what it has left undone' (*al-Infitar:* 5). This verse means that every person will know the good and the evil deeds that he has done, as well as the good deeds that he left undone or delayed to later. That is when the sky will break apart, the stars will be scattered, the seas will burst forth and the graves will turn upside down; every soul will know the good, righteous deeds and the evil, bad ones that it has done.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: 'And the Book [of deeds] shall be placed. Then you will see the guilty in great terror because of what is in it; they will say, "Ah! Woe to us! What a book is this! It does not omit anything small or great but it takes account of it (all)". And what they had done they shall find present (there); and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone' (*al-Kahf:* 49).

By reading its book of record, the soul will realize that everything, be it small or great, good or bad, is recorded therein. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and We will bring forth to him on the Resurrection Day a book which he will find wide open. [It will be said to him], "Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day"' (*al-Isra':* 13-14). This means that every human being will find his deeds recorded and written down in a book. At that time, denial and disputation are useless, for one's book of deeds is an argument against him. Moreover, Allah *the Almighty* says:

‘On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 30).

Next, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ ٱلْكَرِيمِ ﴿٦﴾ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّىٰكَ
فَعَدَلَكَ ﴿٧﴾ فِىٓ أَىِّ صُورَةٍ مَّا شَآءَ رَكَّبَكَ ﴿٨﴾

Mankind, what has lured you away from God [6]
your generous Lord, who created you, shaped you,
proportioned you [7] in whatever form He chose [8]
(The Quran, *al-Infitar:* 6 - 8)

These verses refer to man’s heedlessness of the Day of Judgment and his ignorance of the preliminary measures that he should take in preparation for that Day–the most important of which is having piety. As a matter of fact, Allah *the Almighty* expresses this meaning using one word, namely ‘*al-ghurur*’ (allurement and deception), saying: ‘O man, what has lured you away from Allah, your generous Lord’ (*al-Infitar:* 6). The question here carries the meaning of amazement and is also a reproach directed at the man who dares to violate Allah’s due Position by rebelling against Him and committing sins while Allah *the Almighty* is his Generous Lord Who should not be disobeyed.

Allah *the Almighty* addresses man by his quality of being a human, saying ‘O man...’ (*al-Infitar:* 6). This quality alludes that man’s humanity should have deterred him against being deceived and self-conceited, because the only quality that distinguishes man from animals is the mind, which is the means of thought, reflection and deduction. If he had employed his mind and respected the fact that he is a human, he will not have been allured and deceived by anything. Furthermore, nothing will have distracted him from his Lord. Deception denotes the deceived person’s heedlessness of his true position with regards to the objects by which he is deceived. Moreover, he should not have forgotten his weakness and need for the Power of his Lord Who created him; however, he was allured away from Him. If he wants to be self-conceited, he should be conceited about something intrinsic within himself, not by something he was a given. Worse still, he has been deceived concerning his Lord. As we have said, Lordship is a quality of bestowing, gifting and giving without waiting for anything in return. Consequently, how indecent it is to be deceived concerning the Lord!

This is why Allah *the Almighty* uses the condemnatory question: ‘O man, what has lured you away from Allah, your generous Lord?’ (*al-Infitar:* 6), which expresses amazement and is also a reproach. What incited man to be deceived concerning Allah *the Almighty*?! It could be justifiable that he be deceived concerning anything except Allah, the All-Generous, Who bestowed His Blessings on him. Therefore, there is no single justification for falling into that prohibited matter.

Allah *Glorified is He* uses the Attribute: ‘…Generous Lord’ (*al-Infitar:* 6) to clarify that man has been deceived concerning something precious that should not be dealt with in that way. If it had been a trivial thing, we could have said that man’s soul incited him to be deceived. All the proofs thus clearly state that such a deceived one is heedless of his state of being a humane and his Lord’s Due Position.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* enumerates some of His Blessings and manifestations of His Generosity, saying: ‘Who created you, shaped you, proportioned you…’ (*al-Infitar:* 7). This verse mentions three stages in the creation of man: bringing into existence, fashioning and proportioning. No one doubts these stages when he looks at his shape, constitution and uprightness. Allah *the Almighty* did not make man move on his belly like snakes, or on four feet like the cattle; rather, He *the Almighty* made him symmetrical and upright.

This is in relation to just the outer form of man’s body, not to mention the proportionality and the symmetry of the subtle biological systems inside his body. Scientists keep discovering new wonders and secrets related to the creation and origination of these systems. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says after this: ‘He constituted you in whatever form He chose’ (*al-Infitar:* 8). This verse means that Allah *the Almighty* made man in the best form and the most wonderful image.

Then the Lord *the Most High* says:

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالدِّينِ ﴿٩﴾ وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ ﴿١٠﴾
كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ ﴿١١﴾ يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

Yet you still take the Judgment to be a lie [9] Over you stand [10] watchers, noble recorders [11] who know what you do [12] (The Quran, *al-Infitar:* 9 - 12)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* tells us that He wants to forgive such a man because He *Glorified is He* is the Benevolent and the Bestower of all Blessings. For this reason He *the Almighty* has the right to forgive whomever He chooses because man's sin in this world is one of the means of educating him. As Allah *Glorified is He* is the Lord Who gives, bestows and is in charge of man's education, then He *the Almighty* says: 'Yet you still take the Judgment to be a lie!' (*al-Infitar:* 9) Here, the Arabic word *'kalla'*, which comes at the beginning of the verse, is a particle denoting determent and reproach for what precedes it, that is, man's deception concerning his Lord. It shows that such a deception should not have taken place.

The verses clarify the reason for this reproach, that is, man being deceived concerning Allah *the Almighty* while He *Glorified is He* has endowed him with qualities that protect him from falling into sin. How can this deception happen concerning Allah, the Lord, the Creator, the Fashioner, the Giver and the Most Generous?! Thus, mans should not have dared to be deceived concerning his Lord *Glorified is He*. Furthermore, when Allah *the Almighty* reproaches His slave for this deception, He *the Almighty* fulfils man's right to be advised, educated and guided. However, man may be deterred by this reproach or not–that is another question.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in another verse: 'But man exceeds all bounds, when he thinks he is self-sufficient' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7). Indeed, one of man's qualities entails overstepping the limits and transgressing, especially because he mistakenly thinks that what he possesses is sufficient for him. Consequently, he becomes self-conceited, thinking that he is a natural part of this universe. Yet, he did not witness Allah's Creative Power when He *Glorified is He* created, fashioned and provided him. Accordingly, he wrongly thought that these matters are normal facts of nature, and, therefore, was allured away from Allah *the Almighty* by these causal factors. In other words, being deceived by these causal factors means that he was distracted from the Ultimate Causer, that is Allah *Glorified is He*.

As such, in the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* deters the people against this deception and self-conceitedness, but most people are actually undeterred in this regard. For this reason, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘And certainly some narratives have come to them that contain a deterrent: A far-reaching wisdom–but warnings do not avail [them]’ (*al-Qamar:* 4-5). After this reproach, Allah *the Almighty* says in the verse under discussion: ‘Yet you still take the Judgment to be a lie!’ (*al-Infitar:* 9) The Arabic word ‘*bal’*, which comes near the beginning of this verse, is a particle that denotes leaving what was mentioned before it and paying attention to what follows it. The meaning is thus that beside the point that most people are undeterred and keep on rejecting Belief in Allah *the Almighty,* they are also heedless of the signs manifested in the Universe and the signs found inside them. If they had reflected on these signs, they will have never belied the Day of Resurrection and the Account.

We notice here that the Quranic style first addresses the human being in the singular, but then the address is directed in the plural, the pronoun ‘you’ being in the plural in the verse: ‘Yet you still take the Judgment to be a lie!’ (*al-Infitar:* 9) Scholars have said, ‘This is due to the fact that the word ‘man’ is a genus encompassing all his species. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying, “O all human beings”. That is, the singular form, man, in this context denotes plural’. That is why the verses then use the plural form of ‘you’, reading: ‘Yet you still take the Judgment to be a lie!’ (*al-Infitar:* 9) This style is also used in the chapter of *al-‘Asr* where Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘I swear by time, most surely man is in loss’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-2). Then He *Glorified is He* makes the exception, saying: ‘Except those who believe…’ (*al-’Asr:* 3). In this chapter the plural form ‘those who believe’ was excluded from the singular form ‘man’. The rule of exception states that the excepted objects should be fewer than the general ones from which they were excluded. However, the word ‘man’ denotes all mankind, even if it is singular.

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Yet you still take the Judgment to be a lie!’ (*al-Infitar:* 9) reminds all the people that they neither complied by being deterred from being deceived nor stopped their evil deeds. This is because they belied the Day of Account and Recompense, which is the cause of every sin, heedlessness, violation of the Divine Way of Guidance and being unprepared for this Day's imminent coming. If they had believed in that Day, they will not have violated the Way of Guidance and followed another man-made path. That is why we have said that Belief depends mainly on two pillars: the supreme pillar of believing in Allah *the Almighty* and belief in the Last Day. In other words, it depends on belief in the Supreme Creator and also the final destination of all.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Over you stand watchers' (*al-Infitar:* 10). As denial of the Day of Recompense or being doubtful about it is the cause of heedlessness and violating Allah's Way of Guidance, Allah *Glorified is He* reminds people that He records all their deeds. Allah *the Almighty* causes their deeds to be written down in order to hold them to account on the Day of Judgment when every soul will be recompensed for its deeds. In order for Allah *Glorified is He* to establish the argument against the people, the deeds that they are held accountable for must be recorded in order for their doers to read them. Here, Allah *the Almighty* wants to affirm this fact, saying: 'Over you stand watchers, noble recorders' (*al-Infitar:* 10-11). These verses refer to the angels who record the slaves' deeds and write them down.

Concerning this, Allah *the Almighty* also says: 'He utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand' (*Qaf:* 18). The deeds are recorded because the people, with regard to documentation, only depend on and have confidence in recorded matters, which avert any doubt, heedlessness or forgetfulness. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to the people, 'As documentation is familiar to you in the worldly life, I have documented and recorded your deeds'.

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* uses the effect, that is, the angels' recording of deeds, as a proof for the cause, that is, the existence of the Day of Judgment. This is because the first unseen matter, that is the angels' recording of deeds, has come to pass, while the second unseen matter, that is the Day of Judgment, has not come to pass yet. The first matter is a reality but we neither see it nor know how it is carried out or by what means it is done.

Being unknowledgeable about these details is not harmful to us; what is important is that this unseen matter is real and happens right now, even if it is unperceivable to us and beyond our intellectual abilities. We have previously explained that there is a difference between the existence of an object and our perception of it; the perception of something is not proof of its existence, for we do not perceive many things that exist. Moreover, if something is unperceivable, this does not mean it does not exist, as many objects used to be unperceivable but recently they became perceivable when Allah *the Almighty* willed to reveal them through scientific advancement. When the minds were employed, these unperceivable things became visible; thus, they already existed even if we did not use to see them.

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* has placed in the unseen tangible matters in our worldly life as proof of His Truthfulness in His News about the unseen Hereafter. When He *the Almighty* tells us something, we must believe Him. In fact, all the scientific discoveries serve as a form of reassurance for the mind in order for it to accept the reality of unseen matters. If one ponders on his mind, with its limited size, he finds that it can recall a situation, a sentence or a word that was issued tens of years ago. It can recall them because they are stored inside him. When they are recalled, it is as if they are happening at the moment. But how can the human mind store all these details? Moreover, how does it recall them? It is a wondrous matter that one's mind records his deeds. This is more amazing than the fact that two angels are recording them.

We have also said that Belief is irrelevant to tangible matters, for they are not the field of Belief. That is to say that one does not say, 'I believe I am sitting or talking to you'. This is because these matters are tangible and have nothing to do with Belief. In fact, Belief is related to the unseen matters that are beyond our perception but about which Allah *the Almighty* has told us. For example, we say, 'We believe in the truthfulness of the Account, the Recompense, Hell and Paradise'.

As such, with regards to unseen matters that Allah *Glorified is He* has told us about, it is enough to think about them but not try to imagine them. That is why the scholars say, 'How much the minds are astray depends on the extent of their imagination'. In the same connection, we have previously explained that the philosophers went astray only when they transcended reasoning to imagination. The ancient philosophers reflected on matter and found that it could not be self-existent, which is why they firmly believed that there should be someone behind it. Although this is enough reasoning, they brought troubles on themselves and the people by trying to imagine metaphysical ideas. If they had confined themselves to the stage of reasoning, their problem will have been solved.

In the chapter under discussion Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that the matter of recording the deeds is not purposeless; rather, it is purposeful as man’s deeds are written down with meticulous accuracy, carefulness and honesty. He *the Almighty* guaranteed such honesty by charging angels with this mission. They are described as being watchful, noble recorders who know what we do. Consequently, their documentation of people’s deeds must be accurate and identical to what they have done. After this recording of the deeds, there will be the Account, Recompense, Reward and Punishment for them. As the Lord *the Almighty* does not wrong His slaves even by as much as an atom’s weight, He *Glorified is He* assigned the recording of the deeds to the angels who are not prone to error, forgetfulness, inattention or heedlessness.

These four qualities of the recorders are meaningful; they are watchful over the deeds and write them down. Furthermore, they are noble, which entails being pleased about good and disturbed by evil. This means their nature fits the mission they were charged with. Once they see the slave has done a good deed, they hastily write it down, as they like these kind of deeds. Likewise, when they see a bad deed, they hastily record it because they hate it and feel sad it was committed. We can see there is a mission and an inner preparation for fulfilling it. These angels have a limited mission and are naturally prepared to fulfil it perfectly. In fact, one does not perfectly fulfil a mission without a spiritual preparation for it. Were the angels naturally unprepared for that mission, their standards will have been different.

We should reflect on the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…recorders’ (*al-Infitar:* 11). They are not only noble watchers but also recorders; they do not only memories the deeds but also corroborate their memorization by recording. Such memorization will be employed when the angels bear witness concerning the people’s deeds. As for the recording, it will be an argument against the doer of the deeds on a Day when these records will be spread open and it will be said: ‘Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this Day’ (*al-Isra’:* 14). To conclude, the deeds are memorized by the angels and recorded in the books or records.

Likewise, we have said that the Quran is called by this name because it is recited; it is a verbal noun of the word *‘qara’’* (to read). In order to be preserved, the Quran should not only be preserved by being written down but also by being recited. For example, the letters *‘alif’*, *‘lam’* and *‘mim’* should be read separately in the chapter of *al-Baqara* but jointly as the word ‘*alm*’ in the chapter of *ash-Sharh* wherein Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Did We not (*alam*) relieve your heart for you [Prophet]?’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1) If the matter of preservation only concerned the Quran being written down, the pronunciation of these two words will be similar.

Out of Allah’s Mercy on us, He *Glorified is He* made the recorder of the good deeds the master of the recorder of the evil ones in order that man be given a chance to repent and return to the Right Way. This is due to the fact that Allah *Glorified is He* does not search for our faults but rather for our good deeds.

Concerning this, it is reported that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Whosoever intended to perform a good deed but did not do it, Allah writes it down with Himself as a complete good deed. And if he intended to perform it and then performed it, then Allah writes it down with Himself as ten good deeds up to seven hundred, or up to many times multiplied. And if he intended to perform an evil deed but did not do it, Allah writes it down with Himself as a complete good deed. And if he intended to perform it [i.e., the evil deed] and then performed it, Allah writes it down as one evil deed’. (1) Clearly, the action with Allah *the Almighty* depends on the intention of the heart. Man’s heart is even given a chance to change and intend to do a good deed instead of the evil one. As for the one who insists on doing an evil deed that he has intended, it is written down as one evil deed.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 649; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 207/131.*

The one who intends to do an evil action but then shuns it is not equal to the one who did not think about doing it in the first place. This is because the one who thinks about an evil deed and did not do it, after wanting to do it, has abided by the restrictions of the religious laws, as they deterred him and helped him overcome the evil temptations within his soul. Undoubtedly, this is superior to the one who was unaware and was not provoked by these evil temptations in the first place.

Therefore Allah *the Almighty* wants to clarify to us that our deeds are recorded to deter us against doing evil deeds and to take account thereby of the Day of Recompense. If we said to someone, 'We will record all your deeds and then show them to the people', he will be ashamed to do any indecent action. How much more if the indecent actions are watched by noble angels who are harmed by any bad deed? Consequently, when Allah *the Almighty* addresses us, saying: 'Over you stand watchers, noble recorders who know what you do' (*al-Infitar:* 10-12), He *Glorified is He* draws our attention to the fact that we were not created in vain and we will not be left to wander purposelessly in life.

In the chapter of *Qaf*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And certainly, We created man and We know what his mind suggests to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein; When the two receivers (angels) receive [his actions], one sitting on the right and one on the left. Not a word does he utter but there is next to him a vigilant guardian' (*Qaf:* 16-18). In these verses, the two angels who are sitting on the right and on the left are described as *'q'aeed'* (sitting) and not *'q'aid',* because the latter means that the person may stand at any time, but the former is a permanent quality of sitting, like *'raheem'* (merciful) and '*kareem'* (generous). Thus, the angel accompanies man all the time and never leaves him or is never inattentive to his actions except when man uses the bathroom, has sexual intercourse or takes a ritual bath. In other words, he leaves man only when the private parts are unveiled. However, their work of recording man's deeds and watching over him does not stop.

As we have previously said, the adjective '*q'aeed'* is similar to '*muq'ad',* which is used to describe a paralysed person who cannot stand. This means that the angel is especially prepared to accompany the man all the time. It is as if the angel has no control over his limbs and organs. As he never leaves the man–except in the aforementioned three times–and his work does not stop even during these times, then the fourth quality of these angels is: ‘Who know what you do’ (*al-Infitar:* 12). Thus, they know fully well all the people’s deeds, even if they left them temporarily in order not to see their private parts.

After this, Allah *Glorified is He* says:

إِنَّ ٱلۡأَبۡرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٖ (١٣) وَإِنَّ ٱلۡفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٖ (١٤) يَصۡلَوۡنَهَا يَوۡمَ ٱلدِّينِ (١٥)
وَمَا هُمۡ عَنۡهَا بِغَآئِبِينَ (١٦) وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا يَوۡمُ ٱلدِّينِ (١٧) ثُمَّ مَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا يَوۡمُ ٱلدِّينِ (١٨)
يَوۡمَ لَا تَمۡلِكُ نَفۡسٞ لِّنَفۡسٖ شَيۡـٔٗاۖ وَٱلۡأَمۡرُ يَوۡمَئِذٖ لِّلَّهِ (١٩)

The good will live in bliss [13] and the wicked will burn in the Fire [14] They will enter it on the Day of Judgment [15] and they will find no escape[16] What will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is [17] Yes! What will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is [18] The Day when no soul will be able to do anything for another; on that Day, command will belong to God [19] (The Quran, *al-Infitar:* 13 - 19)

After Allah *the Almighty* confirms the matter of recording and numerating people’s deeds, He *the Almighty* gives a general Ruling with regards to the recorded deeds, that is, the people will ultimately be held accountable and recompensed according to their deeds recorded by the angels, be they good or evil. Clearly, recording the deeds is not in vain or without a purpose; rather, it has a purpose and an objective, namely being held accountable for them. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘On the day that every soul shall find present what it has done of good and what it has done of evil, it shall wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long duration of time…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 30).

This final destination is prepared for the people according to their position; concerning the righteous people, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The righteous (*al-abrar*) will live in bliss’ (*al-Infitar:* 13). By contrast, the evil ones’ destination is as follows: ‘And the wicked will burn in the Fire’ (*al-Infitar:* 14). Here, the verse is emphasized by many affirmative particles, like *‘inna’* and *‘al-lam’*. This eliminates the doubts of those who are skeptical of that destination.

The word *'al-bir'* (righteousness), from which the word '*al-abrar*' (righteous) is derived, is a general description that encompasses all good traits, a meaning which is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…but righteousness (*bir*) is this, that one should guard (against evil)…' (*al-Baqara:* 189). Here, the word *'bir'* (righteousness) is defined briefly yet comprehensively. It is clarified in detail in Allah's saying: 'It is not righteousness (*bir*) that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness (*bir*) is this, that one should believe in Allah and the last day and the Angels and the Book and the Prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him (Allah) to the near of kin, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarer, the beggars and for (the emancipation of) captives, and keep up prayer and pay the *zakat* (alms); and to fulfil one's promise when they make a promise, and to be patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflicts–these are they who are true (to themselves) and these are they who guard (against evil)' (*al-Baqara:* 177).

This verse tells us that righteousness is not a mere formality but rather it has a form and content. For example, when we read: '…surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 45), no one should say, 'What if I do not do indecent acts or evil ones, should I pray? In other words, as long as the ultimate objective of the prayer has been achieved, what is the importance of preserving it?' We say, 'You have to make a difference between the interdependent form and the content, for establishing prayer, which is the form, and achieving its objectives, which is the content, are both important'.

Allah *the Almighty* responds to such people by explaining the kinds of righteousness, saying: 'It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this, that one should believe in Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 177). So, there are many kinds of righteousness, and they all are based on both the form and the content, starting with the important matters of Belief: 'It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Book and the Prophets…' (*al-Baqara:* 177). All these are unseen matters related to the creed.

If one says that the Book and the Prophets are tangible, we should say to him, 'No, faith in them depends on believing in unseen matters, even if the

Book and the Prophets are tangible. For example, we did not see Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* when he was sent with the revelation to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this sense, the Book and the Prophets are also unseen to us'.

Then righteousness is mentioned in the practical behaviours, starting with wealth and its role in the life of the society based on faith: '…and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarer, the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives…' (*al-Baqara:* 177). It is as if expending wealth in good ways is an important basic matter in the believer's behaviour. Before mentioning prayer and charity, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the matter of spending generally on the near of kin, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarer, the beggars and for the emancipation of captives. As the *zakat* is mentioned after giving from one's wealth, it refers to the optional, supererogatory alms that are subcategorized under the stage of *Ihsan* (Goodness). Wealth is mentioned here first because it is an essential element in our life, a means of enjoyment and insurance for the continuity of life. However, the wealthy person has a chance to make a deal with Allah *the Almighty* by giving from of his wealth in charity.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* stipulates the condition of spending out of love for Him, saying: '…and give away wealth out of love for Him…' (*al-Baqara:* 177). The one who likes money only gives it out freely because Allah's Reward is more desirable to him than his money. This is with regards to the charitable alms, so what about the prescribed alms? Being charitable and benevolent indicates that the servant loved the religious obligations so much that he has elevated from the stage of Belief to that of Goodness by obliging himself to do supererogatory good deeds beyond the religious obligations.

We have discussed this matter in our explanation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Surely those who guard (against evil) shall be in gardens and fountains taking what their Lord gives them; surely they were before that doers of good' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 15-16). After this, Allah *the Almighty* mentions some good deeds which are neither obligatory nor part of Belief; they are subcategorized under the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And whoever volunteers excess–it is better for him...' (*al-Baqara:* 184).

The Lord *Glorified is He* then mentions some of the good people's qualities, saying: 'They used to sleep but little in the night. And in the early dawn they [were found] praying for forgiveness. And in their property was a portion for the beggar and the deprived' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-19). Allah *Glorified is He* does not say here 'a prescribed due' when referring to giving alms, indicating that the money they spend is the supererogatory alms, not the prescribed one.

Returning to the chapter under discussion, the Arabic word *'al-jaheem'* ('the fire' or 'hell') is derived from the word *'jahama'*, which refers to the blazing fire. That is why we say, '*juhmat al-ghadab* (The fierceness of anger)'; we also say, '*Fulan jahamahu al-ghadab* (So-and-so seethed with anger)' which means that anger turned his face red due to the heat of the body.

The Quranic expression does not only mention the aforementioned affirmative particles to confirm and stress that the final destination of the wicked people is the fire; rather, it adds another statement: 'They will enter it on the Day of Judgment' (*al-Infitar:* 15). This verse means that the wicked people will enter the hell and suffer its extreme heat on the Day of Judgment.

If we review the verb *'yassla'* (to enter), we find it is used to refer to a painful, torturing fire, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'As they enter (*tassla*) the blazing Fire' (*al-Ghashiya:* 4). Yet, when speaking about the beneficial fire that is considered one of Allah's Blessings, the verb *'yastali'* (to warm oneself by the fire) is used, as in His saying: 'When Moses said to his family, "Surely I see fire; I will bring to you from it some news, or I will bring to you a burning firebrand so that you may warm yourselves (*tastaloon*)"' (*an-Naml:* 7).

After confirming the fact that the final destination of the wicked people is hell, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they will find no escape' (*al-Infitar:* 16). This verse shows that after they enter hell, neither will they leave it or will it leave them; they will abide therein eternally. Death is not decreed for them so they may die, nor will its torment be lightened for them.

Next, the Lord *Glorified is He* says: What will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is? [17] Yes! What will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is? [18] The Day when no soul will be able to do anything for another; on that Day, the command will belong to Allah [19] (*al-Infitar:* 17-19)

The context here concerns the Day of Judgment when the good people will enter blissful Paradise, and the wicked people will be thrown into hell. Allah *the Almighty* wants to show us the greatness of that Day, which we do not see, saying: ‘What will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is?’ (*al-Infitar:* 17) This form of question gives hope that the reality of that Day will be known for sure in the future. The Lord *the Almighty* affirms this meaning, saying: ‘Yes! What will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is?’ (*al-Infitar:* 18) It is as if there are some stages of realization here.

Then He *the Almighty* gives us some idea about that Day, saying: ‘The Day when no soul will be able to do anything for another; on that Day, the command will belong to Allah’ (*al-Infitar:* 19). It is as if Allah *the Almighty* makes us realize it right now; it is though there are two kinds of realization: one through reporting and another when it actually happens. The first kind is referred to in His saying: ‘What will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is?’ (*al-Infitar:* 17) This is because the reality of the Day of Judgment will only be known when it actually takes place. In fact, the words cannot express what it really is like because they are limited and cannot express the true meaning in this regard. We have previously explained that the language consists of words that express certain meanings. The existence of the meaning always precedes the word expressing it. As the matters of the Day of Judgment are unseen and we have no true meanings of them, then there are no words to express their true reality. For this reason there are no words to express the unseen matters, which is why they will remain as such until we witness the Day of Judgment. At that time, these matters will be unveiled and we will see their reality.

Then the context clarifies to us one of the features of that Day, which is a crucial issue in the life of man: ‘The Day when no soul will be able to do anything for another; on that Day, the command will belong to Allah’ (*al-Infitar:* 19). So, this Day is distinguished by two matters: first, no soul will be able to do anything for another, and second, the command will entirely belong to Allah *the Almighty*.

This is because Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator Who created the human being and subjected the whole universe to him. Furthermore, He *the Almighty* gives him the means of thought, power and energy that make him interact with the universe according to causes and effects. When he pays attention to these causal factors and becomes heedless of the Ultimate Causer, he wrongly thinks that the rain is caused by clouds and the fertility of the soil causes the plants to grow, etc. As for the true believer, he does not suffer this heedlessness as he deals with the universe as having causal factors which are set by an Ultimate Causer; he sees Allah's Power manifested in everything in the universe.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The Day when no soul will be able to do anything for another...' (*al-Infitar:* 19), it means that in the worldly life the souls can avail others; this is a fact, but this will not be the case on the Day of Judgment. In the worldly life, do we not regard the minister, the director, the emir, the marshal and the intercessors as apparently being able to control affairs? The child sees his father providing him with food, drink, clothes and all the requirements of life. As he sees no one else providing him, he wrongly thinks that his father has power to manage affairs. However, when the child grows up, the facts of faith manifest themselves to him.

On the contrary, there is no room for such causal factors on the Day of Judgment; all of them will come to an end and only the Ultimate Causer will remain. One's fate in the Hereafter does not depend on a minister or a director, as they will all be humble before Allah, they will not be able to do anything for themselves, let alone other people. Therefore, in the Hereafter, the child and his parent will mutually neglect each other. Moreover, unlike the worldly life, there will be no supporter, helper, friend or intercessor, as Allah *the Almighty* says here: 'The Day when no soul will be able to do anything for another...' (*al-Infitar:* 19).

Indeed, even in the worldly life the command belongs to Allah *the Almighty*. However, when the souls were diverted and became heedless, they started to depend on the apparent causes of matters. By contrast, the command in the Hereafter, whether apparent or hidden, belongs totally to Allah *Glorified is He*. This matter of Belief is only recognized by the people of firm faith who always think about Allah *Glorified is He* and never become heedless of Him.

This meaning is clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Then every soul will know what it has brought forward [for presentation]' (*at-Takwir:* 14). All the human souls will be considered as one on that Day in the sense that all of them will be equal with regards to their submission to Allah's Command. The souls differed in the worldly life with regards to the causal factors, the rank of knowledge, the level of education, whims, lusts and desires. In the Hereafter, all of these differences will come to an end, for all the people must be equal, like one soul that can neither bring benefit nor cause harm: '…on that Day, the command will belong to Allah' (*al-Infitar:* 19).

the chapter of

al-Mutaffifin

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* (1)

وَيۡلٞ لِّلۡمُطَفِّفِينَ ﴿١﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا ٱكۡتَالُواْ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ يَسۡتَوۡفُونَ ﴿٢﴾
وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمۡ أَو وَّزَنُوهُمۡ يُخۡسِرُونَ ﴿٣﴾ أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَنَّهُم مَّبۡعُوثُونَ ﴿٤﴾
لِيَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٖ ﴿٥﴾ يَوۡمَ يَقُومُ ٱلنَّاسُ لِرَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٦﴾

Woe to those who give short measure [1] who demand of other people full measure for themselves [2] but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others [3] Do these people not realize that they will be raised up [4] on a mighty Day [5] a Day when everyone will stand before the Lord of the Worlds [6]
(The Quran, *al-Mutaffifin:* 1-6)

The chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* is in harmony with the context of the chapter that precedes it and is in line with the chapter that follows it with regards to the common purpose of the *Juz'* of *'Amma* (30th Section of the Quran), that is, affirming the matter of Resurrection and the Last Day which is stated repetitively throughout the whole *Juz'* (section).

The matter of Resurrection is held in that important position because it is the last pillar of Belief that happens, along with Belief in Allah (God)(2)

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(1) The chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* is chapter number 83 in the order of the Quran. Scholars differ over whether it was the last chapter to be revealed in Mecca, or the first one to be revealed in Medina. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-'Ankabut* and before *al-Baqara*. It consists of 36 verses. See As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan Fi 'Ulum Al-Quran, 1/41.*

(2) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. However, the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We=

the Almighty and then in what He *Glorified is He* has told us in this regard, including the unseen matters like the angels, the Messengers, the Divine Decree, Predestination and the Last Day. Furthermore, the Last Day is the Day when the believer receives the reward of his Belief. Consequently, the one who does not believe in Allah *the Almighty* out of love should do so out of fear.

The two chapters of *at-Takwir* and *al-Infitar* reading: 'When the sun is shrouded in darkness' (*at-Takwir:* 1) and 'When the sky breaks apart' (*al-Infitar:* 1), respectively, highlight the introductory events of the Day of Resurrection. They both mention many introductory events and calamities that will happen on the Day of Judgment. Then Allah *the Almighty* tells us in the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* about that mighty Day when all the people will stand before the Lord of the worlds. After this, He *Glorified is He* mentions the final end that will come to pass after these introductory events. After standing before Allah *the Almighty* being held accountable and receiving the recompense according to the deeds recorded in the books, we will go to either Paradise or Hell.

There is another harmonious aspect between the chapter that preceded *al-Mutaffifin* and that which follows it. The chapter of *al-Infitar*, which is the previous chapter, makes mention of the recorders who write the deeds: 'Over you stand watchers, noble recorders who know what you do' (*al-Infitar:* 10-12). As for the chapter in question: *al-Mutaffifin*, it also sheds light on these written books: 'No indeed! The list of the wicked is in *Sijjin*' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 7) and: 'No indeed! The list of the truly good is in *Illiyyin*' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 18). Then Allah *the Almighty* in the chapter of *al-Inshiqaq,* tells us about the inevitable result and the final destination: 'Whoever is given his record in his right hand' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 7), and: 'But whoever is given his record from behind his back' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 10).

Thus, these three chapters give us the full picture when we put them together. However, the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* also mentions a matter related to the human code of ethics, not just issues concerned with Belief. This is

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= prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

because the chapter in question was the last one to be revealed in Mecca[1] and the Meccan chapters were concerned mostly with matters of Belief. But it also discusses a complementary matter related to actions carried out in life, behaviour and transactions that is, giving short measure. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Woe to those who give short measure, [those] who demand of other people full measure for themselves, but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1-6) This matter organizes the transactions and preserves people’s rights. Discussing such matters is one of the features of the verses revealed in Medina where Islam established itself and the Muslims formed a state that had its own foundations, sovereignty and law.

Thus, talking about the codes of behaviour and the transactions in Mecca was purposeful. It is as if the Lord *the Almighty* directs our attention to an important matter–after providing the believers with the power of Belief in the Meccan revelation. He *Glorified is He* wanted to say to us, ‘The creeds are not required in themselves and the matter of Belief is not all about pronouncing the Word of Monotheism and embracing Islam by pronouncing the two testimonies of faith. Rather, behind Belief there are behaviours and acts that elevate the believer to the utmost level of human perfection.

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* has created the creatures according to two kinds: coerced creatures that have no free choice. This kind includes all the created beings except for the Jinn and human beings. This kind can choose nothing but what is prescribed for it in order to achieve its function in the universe. All the manifestations of beauty are found in this kind, including harmony, compliance, rights, justice and reform. As for the second kind, which has a free choice, it includes man. For this reason, corruption takes place in the universe when man intervenes with his opinion, ignorance or man-made laws that are very different from Allah’s Law. This meaning is clear in His Saying: ‘Do you not see that Allah is He Whom obeys whoever

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(1) As-Suyuti maintained that the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* was the first chapter to be revealed in Medina. However, Abu ‘Amr said that it was the last chapter to be revealed in Mecca. See As-Suyuti*, Al-Itqan Fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran, 1/41; Al-Fara’, Ma‘ani Al-Quran, 3/245; and Abu ‘Amr Ad-Dani, Al-Bayan Fi ‘Ad Aay Al-Quran*

is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth…' (*al-Hajj:* 18). This refers to the angels and the unseen objects, as Allah *the Almighty* then mentions man, saying: '….and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many of the people–and many there are against whom chastisement has become necessary. And whomsoever Allah abases, there is none who can make him honourable; surely Allah does what He pleases' (*al-Hajj:* 18).

Thus, all the species bow down obeying and submitting to Allah *the Almighty* except for the human being. Many people bow down, but many others commit sins and that is why they will be punished. We may ask why man acts anomalously, contrary to all the other the created beings. This is because he has thoughts and whims which incite him to violate his Lord's Way of Guidance. In fact, the whims often incite the person to satisfy his fleeting desires and make him forget about the ultimate recompense.

Allah *Glorified is He* calls the Law by which He has created the creatures 'a balance', saying: 'And the heaven, He raised it high, and He made the balance, that you may not be inordinate in respect of the measure. And keep up the balance with equity and do not make the measure deficient' (*ar-Rahman:* 7-9). He *the Almighty* warns us against transgressing the balance and commands us to keep it. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to us, 'If you want your life to be stable and your affairs to be as sound as that of the heavens and the earth, then accept the Balance of truth that came to you from Allah *Glorified is He*. However, if you violated this Balance, your life will become corrupt'.

The chapter of *al-Mutafiffin* affirms the importance of both the material balance that weighs the tangible matters, and the spiritual balance that prescribes the fulfilment of rights and duties in every aspect of life. This importance is manifested in the fact that man naturally needs other people because his/her lifetime in this worldly life is limited, and s/he thus cannot learn everything to satisfy his/her unending requirements. So, s/he cannot meet them alone, given the fact that one can neither do everything for him/herself nor satisfy all his/her needs apart from other people. That is why everyone dedicates him/herself to mastering and excelling at a certain job, leaving the other jobs for other people to master. Consequently, people need to barter, buy, sell and engage in various transactions. Further, they need a means to help them fulfil their rights and duties and to weigh the matters up justly and fairly.

Thus, the balance should be one and the same for all people; it should be used when one gives to the people and takes from them without any variation or difference in the balance used in both transactions. However, when a person changes the balance, taking a full measure and giving a short one, then s/he oversteps the boundaries, transgresses and deals unjustly with the people. The consequence of this action is the corruption of people's activities in life. Likewise, in the spiritual matters, one should fulfil his/her duties before asking the people to fulfil theirs. The chapter in question talks about giving full measure in the material aspects according to the right balance that sustains the material life.

The word 'Woe' means perdition or punishment, yet it, in this context, refers to the encompassing punishment that surrounds man from all directions. Such a punishment gathers between the tangible pain and the non-tangible one, including distress and grief. The tangible punishment may be endurable, but when the spiritual one – including the heart's distress and the soul's pain – is added, the punishment overwhelms the person from all the directions.

For this reason, scholars opine that the 'Woe' here refers to a Valley in the hell; it is extremely hot that the hell itself complains about its heat. Further, some say that the word 'Woe' means perdition, an encompassing evil or a painful punishment. So, this word connotes all these meanings. It is possible that all of them will be realized in this valley of the hell. The one thrown in this valley will lose all the hopes of salvation or the mitigation of the punishment. So, we should ponder on how the chapter is started with this strong threat that gathers all kinds of punishment. We would expect that this punishment is prepared for those who commit major crimes like murder or adultery; however, it is prepared for a crime that people might consider trivial.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Woe to those who give short measure.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1) The word *Mutaffifin* (those who give short measure) is derived from the word *Taffa,* which means that something increases a little bit. It is the case when the measure is filled and one adds a small amount of something beyond the right amount. This addition falls from the balance. Thus, *At-Tatfif* is the small, unlawful increment in the measure against which Allah *the Almighty* gives a terrifying warning and a strong threat. Thus, this small increment is not trivial with Allah *the Almighty* even if it is regarded so by the human beings. This is because the one who dares to unlawfully take a small thing may dare to take a great one. Further, the small quantities become great when they are added to each other. In fact, the base soul lusts for wealth and high position through the small properties that they unlawfully appropriate from the people.

Then, the chapter tells us about the characteristics of *al-Mutafiffin*, saying: ‘Who demand of other people full measure for themselves.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 2) Here, the Quran portrays to us one prevailing feature of the people’s societal status at the time of revelation. Some people used to misuse their prestigious rank and high position – which they gained through their wealth – in their tribes to control people’s provision and exploit their need. The Quran expresses this matter, saying: ‘Who demand of other people full measure for themselves.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 2) This verse indicates that those people took more than their rights and ruthlessly exploited people’s need - instead of fulfilling their due rights without any increment. In doing so, they exploited their mastery and sovereignty. Their terrifying power frightens their givers so they could do nothing but to give them more than the due measure. In this way, the transaction becomes detrimental to the givers instead of being beneficial. So, the verse means that *al-Mutafiffin* are those who take more than the just measure.

On the other hand, they: ‘…give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 3) The expression of the verse indicates that *al-Mutafiffin* used to control the economy and dominate the transactions, be they buyers or sellers. They take an excessive measure from the people and give them a short one, which leads to people’s financial loss. This shows us how the powerful people used to appropriate the common people’s rights - those who strive to earn a living. The masters seize the fruit of their toil and impoverished them. The working class is the one that farms, harvests and produces, but then gives the harvest to those powerful, exploiting masters. Then, the working people beg for food every day.

As the status of the people had been awful to that extent, the Meccan verses dealt with it, despite the fact that the main focus in that period was on the creedal matters and establishing them in the hearts of the people before talking about the practical way of Guidance and Behaviour. This grim reality was one of the social features in the tribe of Quraysh which used to make two journeys: one in the winter and another in the summer. The masters of Quraysh had full control over the common people's affairs and provision and no one of the latter dared to resist this reality.

It is as if the Quranic context takes advantage of talking about the Last Day to remind the people that such an awful societal status does not befit a society whose members believe in Allah *the Almighty* and the Last Day. If you take a reflective look at the verses in question: 'Who demand of other people full measure for themselves, but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others!' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 2-3) you find that the powerful people take with the measure but give the people with both the weight and measure, which is another trick to take an excessive amount of something because the measure is not so accurate and allows the person to take more than the due quantity. As it is controlled by the movement of the hand, it can be easily manipulated through many tricks, like putting the hand beside or over the measure. Many sellers do the like of these tricks. As for the weight, it is accurate and cannot easily be manipulated.

Fulfilment of rights here has a broad meaning; it is not confined to buying, selling, measuring and weighing. It transcends these meanings to include all the matters of life and every right and duty. Thus, the hired one, the worker, the employee, the director and the minister all should completely do their jobs as long as they are paid for them. If we want our material, economic, educational, spiritual and social life to be stable, we should apply the true balance and give and take by the same balance. By contrast, if we give short measure and take an excessive one, a gap will appear in the society and unsolvable problems will emerge.

When we carefully reflect on the word ‘Woe…’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1), we find that this punishment, which we have previously described, befalls those who have two qualities: taking with excessive measure and giving with a short one. So, that punishment is incurred for having both these two qualities. Further, when the scholars discuss the meaning of the word ‘woe,’ some of them say that it is a statement made by Allah *the Almighty* while others hold the position that it is a kind of supplication. We say, ‘It is Allah Who revealed this verse and that is why the word ‘woe’ is both a statement and a supplication.’ That is to say that He *Glorified is He* tells us at the beginning of this chapter that a ‘woe’ will be the final destination for those who give short measure and take an excessive one. Further, this word serves as a supplication to cause the ‘woe’ to befall them. This is because ‘supplicating’ means that someone invokes Allah *the Almighty* to cause the punishment, for example, to fall on his/her enemy. In this case, one invokes the One Who is fully Able to punish his/her enemy because s/he cannot do that by him/herself.

So, if the One Who is making the supplication is Allah *the Almighty* then He *Glorified is He* is fully Able to punish them; it suffices that He *the Almighty* says: ‘Woe to those who give short measure.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 1) As it is He *the Almighty* Who utters that ‘supplication,’ it will inevitably come to pass, as He *the Almighty* is Omnipotent. Thus, the word ‘woe’ serves as a statement and a supplication.

Then the context directs our attention to the Last Day, saying: ‘Do these people not realize that they will be raised up on a mighty Day, a Day when everyone will stand before the Lord of the Worlds?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 4-6) These verses are presented in the condemnatory interrogation style to blame them for their denial of the final destination and the Last Day. They also express astonishment about their action. The Arabic word *yazhun* ‘realize’ is used instead of ‘firmly believe’ in His saying: ‘Do these people not realize that they will be raised up …’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 4) This is because ‘firm belief’ in the Last Day is not a condition to be deterred against evil actions, for a mere realization about it is enough, even if this realization did not reach the rank of certitude. For example, one may say, ‘Do not take this road because it is too dangerous.’ Evading the probable danger here makes the person regard it as a certain danger, so what would we think if the coming of the Last Day is not probable but rather certain? Even if it is only considered probable, should not the person prepare him/herself for it?!

Those who give short measure were deceived by the imminent gain and paid no attention to the deferred punishment. The wise person doesn't consider the imminent, fleeting benefit of something, rather, s/he considers that benefit along with its recompense. In fact, not all the worldly benefits are considered so with regard to the Hereafter, for the worldly benefit could incur a punishment in the Hereafter. Thus, if those people had rightly considered this matter, they would not have given short measures and weights.

Further, the Arabic verb *yazhun* (to realize) is used because the disbelievers were always talking about the Last Day as a passing thought, not a reality, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And when it was said, Surely the promise of Allah is true and as for the hour, there is no doubt about it, you said: We do not know what the hour is; we do not think (that it will come to pass) save a passing thought, and we are not at all sure.' (*al-Jathiya:* 32)

The demonstrative pronoun in His saying: 'Do these people not realize that they will be raised up …' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 4) refers to a certain people distinguished by doing something. It is as if those people have been distinguished by the act of giving short measure, which consequently became one of their inherent, distinctive qualities.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* describes the Day of Judgment, saying: '…they will be raised up on a mighty Day.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 4-5) It is described as 'mighty' in comparison with the worldly life, as it is eternal and blissful for the believers. We have previously drawn this comparison from many angles. With regard to the human being, his/her worldly life is confined to his/her lifetime; one has nothing to do with its duration from the time of Adam until the Day of Judgment. Further, one's lifetime is not ensured and his/her pleasure and luxury are in proportion to his/her physical and financial abilities. Moreover, the person will untimely pass away.

By contrast, life in the Hereafter is ensured and eternal; one's pleasure does not pass by, nor does s/he leave it. Besides, one's ability to enjoy the pleasures is in proportion to Allah's Power. These are some of the aspects of the superiority of the Hereafter to the underrated worldly life. So, when we make this comparison, the superiority and greatness of the Hereafter become apparent, as it is the real, eternal life that merits our striving for it. As for the worldly life, it is a fake adornment, a deception and a fleeting pleasure, however great it may be considered.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…a Day when everyone will stand before the Lord of the Worlds,' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 6) there is another aspect of the greatness of that Day. In our daily life, we stand before the dignitaries, like the judge, the ruler, the director, the minister, the rich and the powerful. There are some reasons for standing, even unwillingly, before them. On the contrary, in the Hereafter, all the people will stand before Allah *the Almighty* not before anyone else, as all of them will be in a humble position before Him *Glorified is He*. So, all the people will be equal in this respect because the Hereafter does not depend on the causal factors, but rather on the Ultimate Causer - this is what we should fear, care for and take into account.

The words: '… stand before …' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 6) indicate the state of panic on the Day of Judgment, for all the people will stand suddenly out of fear and awe. This could be similar to a case in the worldly life when a president or a dignitary enters upon us and thus all the people will stand fast even if they are sitting relaxingly. The words 'stand before' also tell us that the people in their normal lives are in different states, doing what they want; some people sleep, others sit, and so on. However, on the Day of Judgment, all mankind will stand fast, waiting for what is going to happen. That is why scholars opine that the hardship and the difficulty of this situation will make the people wish to leave it even if they go to the Hell. They will remain standing however long the period of standing lasts. Out of the calamities they are watching, no one can sit or think about having a rest.

Despite this hardship, there is a sign of hope in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the Lord of the Worlds?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 6) Standing will be before the Lord Who sustains all the creatures, created out of nothing, and provides the creatures with care, education and sustenance to meet their needs. The Attribute of Lordship is closer to Mercy and Compassion, for the people are His creation and He *the Almighty* is All-Merciful and All-Compassionate towards them. The Attribute ‘The Lord of the worlds’ means that the person stands before the One Who fully knows him/her and nothing of his/her affairs, be they trivial or great, is hidden from Him. He *Glorified is He* is man’s Creator Who is in charge of sustaining and educating him/her. Further, He *the Almighty* prepares him/her educationally and religiously to stand in a state of honour on the Day of Judgment, not in that of disgrace.

Thus, in that situation, there is no possibility of circumvention, denial or rejection, as the man is standing before the One Who knows the secret and what is even more hidden than it. He *the Almighty* recorded all man’s actions and movements after sending Messengers and clarifying the lawful and the unlawful matters. Accordingly, there is no argument or excuse for anyone. Thus, the matter of the Day of Judgment is extremely serious:

The matter is hard, so work earnestly
Prepare yourselves for it and be ready

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كَلَّآ إِنَّ كِتَٰبَ ٱلْفُجَّارِ لَفِى سِجِّينٍ (٧) وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ (٨) كِتَٰبٌ مَّرْقُومٌ (٩)

No indeed! The list of the wicked is in Sijjin [7] what will explain to you what Sijjin is? [8] a clearly numbered list [9] (The Quran, *al-Mutaffifin:* 7-9)

We have explained before that Allah *the Almighty* tells us previously about the recorders. Now, He *the Almighty* tells us about what is recorded, which is the books of the wicked and those of the good people. The Arabic word *Kalla* (No indeed) carries the meaning of reproach and condemnation for the matter mentioned in His saying: ‘Do these people not realize that they will be raised up.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 5) It is as if He *the Almighty* says, ‘Do not pay attention to those who deny the Day of Judgment.’

One should take heed of the fact that: ‘The list of the wicked is in Sijjin.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 7) They are called ‘wicked’ because they transgressed the bounds of obedience and violated the religious obligations. The list here refers to their records of deeds which are in *Sijjin*. Allah *the Almighty* then tells us about the meaning of *Sijjin* because it is unseen, saying: ‘What will explain to you what *Sijjin* is?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 8) This means that we have no ability to know the meaning of *Sijjin*, so our knowledge of it depends on what He *the Almighty* tells us about it. This is because its subtleness and greatness are unseen and beyond the intellectual abilities.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says about *Sijjin*: ‘…a clearly numbered list.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 9) The Arabic word *Marqum* means that it is written in a way like engraving on the stones. This clearly indicates that the deeds are recorded in a way like the indelible engraving inscription, which proves that it is a well-documented book whose content cannot be deleted. Another possible interpretation is that the word *Marqum* means that the book is known to be the book of the wicked, and its owner’s wickedness is marked by it. When s/he sees it, s/he knows that it is the book of the wicked because it is marked by the wicked people’s awful, terrible features and signs. Thus, the accuracy and the documentation of the book negate any possibility of falsification, additions and omissions. This is due to the fact that it is recorded by watchful, noble Angels who know what the people do.

The word *Sijjin* is derived from *As-Sijn*, which is the place wherein man is imprisoned. So, it is as if the book is imprisoned to be kept intact. Or, it is sealed so that no one can open it or alter its content. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘What will explain to you what *Sijjin* is?’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 8) This means that no one can tell us about it except Him *the Almighty*. The verb *Adrak* (to realize) is mentioned in the past form in the verse in question to indicate that He *the Almighty* would explain to him *peace and blessings be upon him* about *Sijjin* in the future. By contrast, if the verb is mentioned in the present form, it negates the possibility of realization in both the past and the future.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَيۡلٞ يَوۡمَئِذٖ لِّلۡمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٠) ٱلَّذِينَ يُكَذِّبُونَ بِيَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ (١١)
وَمَا يُكَذِّبُ بِهِۦٓ إِلَّا كُلُّ مُعۡتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ (١٢) إِذَا تُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡهِ ءَايَٰتُنَا قَالَ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلۡأَوَّلِينَ (١٣)

Woe on that day to the deniers [10] those who deny the Day of Judgment [11] Only the evil aggressor denies it [12] when Our revelations are recited to him, he says, 'Ancient fables!' [13] (The Quran, *al-Mutaffifin:* 10 - 13)

The deniers deserve the same 'woe' that befalls those who give short measure. The Day referred to in His saying: '…on that day to the deniers.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 10) is the Day of Judgment. Denial, as we have said, is a saying contrary to the reality. In addition, it falsifies the facts. The utmost degree of denial is disbelieving in the main pillars of faith, including belief in Allah *the Almighty* and the Last Day. Thus, denial of any mundane matter in life is not comparable to denying the Last Day; that is why it is especially mentioned here in the verse: 'Those who deny the Day of Judgment!' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 11) In fact, no one dares to commit this crime except: '…the evil aggressor…' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 12).

Thus, the deniers deserved to be described by the following two qualities: evil and aggression. As for the aggressor, it is the one who dares to falsify the truth. So, s/he goes beyond the limits in his/her aggression to the extent that s/he violates Allah's Religion and Law. As for the second description, namely evil, it expresses hyperbole, that is, s/he is not an ordinary bad person, rather, s/he is so evil that s/he dares to commit sins, keeps on doing them and gets familiar with them until this evil quality becomes one of his/her inherent qualities.

Afterwards, that evil denier is described as: '…when Our Revelations are recited to him, he says, "Ancient fables!"' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 13) So, if we wanted to remind such people about the Day of Judgment and its calamities in order to be deterred, s/he instead would belie the verses and negate the whole Quran, saying about it, 'Ancient fables.' The Quranic expression, 'Ancient fables,' refers to the predecessors' stories and false accounts that had been recorded in their books. The idea of negating the text clearly indicates that such a person is totally unable to bear the responsibility for the religious obligations, or to comply with them. So s/he lies to him/herself and tries to convince him/herself that the Day of Judgment is not real. Further, s/he gives him/herself the hope in the non-existence of that Day. Otherwise, how can s/he believe in it while being an evil aggressor, transgressor against him/herself and violator of the bounds? Thus, all what s/he can do is to contradict and deceive him/herself by denying absolutely the certain coming of the Day of Judgment, as there is no fortune or good share for him/her on that Day. Rather, it is the woe and the great, severe, humiliating punishments that will be waiting for him/her. That is why Allah *the Almighty* exposes such people, saying afterwards:

كَلَّا ۖ بَلْ ۜ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾ كَلَّآ إِنَّهُمْ عَن رَّبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّمَحْجُوبُونَ ﴿١٥﴾
ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُوا۟ ٱلْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٦﴾ ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى كُنتُم بِهِۦ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

No indeed! Their hearts are encrusted with what they have done [14] No indeed! On that Day they will be screened off from their Lord [15] they will burn in Hell [16] and they will be told, 'This is what you called a lie' [17]
(The Quran, *al-Mutaffifin:* 14 - 17)

The reason for their denial is the encrustation that overwhelmed their hearts and put off the light of Guidance therein. The sins and evil deeds accumulated on their hearts, causing the insight to be obliterated and the heart to become blind. Consequently, the heart was unable to recognise what is good or reject what is evil. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* portrayed this state in a Prophetic Hadith narrated on the authority of Hudhyfa ibn Al-Yaman, saying: 'Temptations will be presented to men's hearts as a reed mat is woven stick by stick and any heart which is impregnated by them will have a black mark put into it, but any heart which rejects them will have a white mark put in it. The result is that there will become two types of hearts: one white like a white stone which will not be harmed by any turmoil or temptation, so long as the heavens and the earth endure; and the other black and dust-coloured like a vessel which is upset, not recognizing what is good or rejecting what is abominable, but being impregnated with passion.'(1)

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 231/144; Ibn Manda, Kitab Al-Iman, 1/468; and Al-Baghawi, Sharh As-Sunna, Hadith no. 4218.*

Heedlessness is the essential cause of the heart's encrustation, as those people commit the sins and the evil deeds and pay no attention to their consequences. These actions accumulate on the heart and lead to its darkness. They further veil the light of faith from penetrating into it. So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Their hearts are encrusted with what they have done' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 14) means that their hearts were piled with sins and evil deeds that they could do nothing but to belie the Day of Judgment. This is because if they did not belie it, they would lose the enjoyment of their pleasures in the worldly life as they would have to think about facing that painful, awful destination. As they tried to unveil this horrible fact and to remove it from their thinking, they could do nothing but to deny the Day of Judgment.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'No indeed! On that Day they will be screened off from their Lord' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 15) means that they will be barred from their Lord on that Day because their hearts were unveiled from Him *Glorified is He* in the worldly life due to committing sins and evil deeds. Therefore, as their hearts are unveiled from Him in the worldly life, they would be screened off Him on the Day of Judgment, given that the heart is the home of belief and certitude in Allah *the Almighty*.

'Screening off' is a kind of spiritual and psychological punishment that pains the soul, not the body. This is because such people did not experience the state of being close to Allah *the Almighty* in the worldly life. If they had feelings, sensations and high spiritual rank, the sins would not bar them from having a close relation with Him *Glorified is He*.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…they will burn in Hell,' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 16) means that the deniers will justly and fairly suffer the extreme heat of the Hell when they enter it. So, the punishment is not only psychological but also physical. With regard to His saying: '…and they will be told, "This is what you called a lie."' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 17) signifies that in the Hereafter they will be told, 'This is the punishment that you used to deny in the worldly life.' This is a way of rebuking and reproaching them. It is like when you say to a negligent student who fails the exam, 'Your failure is the consequence of your negligence of your lessons and absence from the classes.' This makes him/her recall the causes that landed him/her in that embarrassing situation.

Thus, there are three calamitous situations that the deniers of the Day of Judgment suffer: being screened off Allah *the Almighty*; burning in the hell; and showing them the consequences of their denial as a way of reproach. This will gather together the spiritual, psychological and the material, physical pain, making the punishment severer and more painful.

The chapter in question discusses the situation of those who give short measure and its effect on their book which is in *Sijjin*. Then, it mentions the situation of the evil aggressors who deny the Day of Judgment and their punishment. Now, Allah *the Almighty* presents the antithetical situation of the good people whose books are in *Illyyin*, saying:

كَلَّآ إِنَّ كِتَٰبَ ٱلۡأَبۡرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيِّينَ (١٨) وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا عِلِّيُّونَ (١٩) كِتَٰبٞ مَّرۡقُومٞ (٢٠)
يَشۡهَدُهُ ٱلۡمُقَرَّبُونَ (٢١) إِنَّ ٱلۡأَبۡرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ (٢٢) عَلَى ٱلۡأَرَآئِكِ يَنظُرُونَ (٢٣) تَعۡرِفُ فِي
وُجُوهِهِمۡ نَضۡرَةَ ٱلنَّعِيمِ (٢٤) يُسۡقَوۡنَ مِن رَّحِيقٖ مَّخۡتُومٍ (٢٥) خِتَٰمُهُۥ مِسۡكٞۚ وَفِي
ذَٰلِكَ فَلۡيَتَنَافَسِ ٱلۡمُتَنَٰفِسُونَ (٢٦) وَمِزَاجُهُۥ مِن تَسۡنِيمٍ (٢٧)
عَيۡنٗا يَشۡرَبُ بِهَا ٱلۡمُقَرَّبُونَ (٢٨)

No indeed! The list of the truly good is in Illiyyin [18] what will explain to you what Illiyyin is? [19] a clearly written list [20] witnessed by those brought near [21] The truly good will live in bliss [22] seated on couches, gazing around [23] You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss [24] They will be served a sealed nectar [25] its seal [perfumed with] a fragrant herb — let those who strive, strive for this [26] mixed with the water of Tasnim [27] a spring from which those brought near will drink [28] (The Quran, *al-Mutaffifin:* 18 - 28)

In these verses in question, drawing a comparison between the good and the evil people is further illustrated. This is because mentioning the two opposite groups together makes the difference clearer and more obvious. After telling us about the wicked people's book, which is in *Sijjin*, He *the Almighty* mentions the good people's book. It is thus clear that it is up to the man to choose his/her book.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'No indeed! The list of the truly good is in *Illiyyin*,' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 18) the good people here are those who possess all the traits of goodness and righteousness. As for their book, which is in *Illiyyin*, it is the record of their deeds. The word *Illiyyin* denotes highness, loftiness and supremacy. This position of highness is under the Throne of the Lord of Mercy. As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…what will explain to you what *Illiyyin* is?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 19) it means that this high position is beyond any intellectual imaginations. No one except Him *Glorified is He* can tell us about that high position because highness has some limited connotations in the human language. So, we should not perceive that high position according to our limited language, for its reality is beyond imagination. In other words, the position that Allah *the Almighty* has told us about is an unseen matter and its reality and meaning are beyond the expression of the human language. However, He *the Almighty* addresses us in the way that we can understand and by the language we use. Therefore, the book of the truly good is in a high position beyond our perception.

We notice that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…a clearly written list...' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 20) is used to describe both the book of the good and that of the wicked, as both kinds of books are accurately recorded, written down and documented. Further, both of them are undeletable, unchangeable and recording every small and great matter. These descriptions pain the wicked people and increase their regret and sadness. On the other hand, they delight the good people and increase their happiness and gladness. So, the descriptions of the two books are the same, but their effect changes according to the recipient of the book.

As the book of the good people is bright and honourable, the Angels of the heavens eagerly proceed to witness it, as He *the Almighty* says here: 'witnessed by those brought near.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 21) This verse shows that the Angels who are in the high position (*Illiyyin*) witness the book of good deeds, including acts of worship offered to Allah *the Almighty* because all its content is delightful.

These acts of obedience are not found in the books of the wicked people, as they are books of disobedience, evil and wickedness. So, how can the

Angels witness them? That is why the context mentions the two following verses successively: '…a clearly numbered list. Woe on that day to the deniers.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 9-10) The wicked people's books are sources of disgrace and humiliation; their owners themselves feel ashamed at them and wish that they do not see them. In this regard, the Quran relates that those people will say: '…O would that my book had never been given me: And I had not known what my account was' (*al-Haqqa:* 25-26).

So, the saying of Allah, Almighty: '…witnessed by those brought near' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 21) indicates that all the creatures in the universe harmoniously obey and worship Allah *the Almighty* and submit to Him *Glorified is He*. Even the inanimate objects are in a perfect harmony with the rest of the universal creatures as they obey Him *the Almighty* and never disobey Him or violate His Way of Guidance. This fact is substantiated by His saying: 'How many of the gardens and fountains have they left! And cornfields and noble places! And goodly things wherein they rejoiced; Thus (it was), and We gave them as a heritage to another people. So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them, nor were they respited.' (*ad-Dukhan:* 25-29)

Weeping is one of the loftiest emotions and feelings that distinguish the human being from other creatures. So, what if the inanimate objects expressed these emotions? Not weeping for the death of the disbeliever alludes to the fact that the heaven and the earth weep for the death of the believer. In this connection, it is reported that 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'When the believer dies, two spots weep for his/her departure: a spot on the earth and a spot in the heaven. The spot of the earth is the place of his prostration and the spot of the heaven is the place of the ascension of his/her deeds.'(1)

One of the meanings of the saying of Allah, Almighty: '…witnessed by those brought near' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 21) is that the Angels witness the recording and the writing down of the books of deeds. Another possible meaning is that they witness in favour of the good people. So, the deeds are documented through the witness along with the documentation.

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(1) *In his Tafsir, As-Samarqandi relates that Ibn 'Abbas said, 'For every believer there is a door in the heaven through which his/her deeds ascends and down from which his/her provision descends. So, when s/he dies, his/her door of the heaven and spots of the earth weep for his/her death.' See As-Samarqandi, Bahr Al-'Ulum, 3/571.*

Afterwards, the verses tell us about the reward and the final destination of the good people, saying: ‘The truly good will live in bliss.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 22) The bliss is a name that encompasses all the pleasures that the human being enjoys and elevates him/her to the state of satisfaction, not needing any other kind of pleasures. The bliss in that sense is best applicable to the pleasures in the Hereafter – not that of the worldly life.

We have previously explained the difference between the pleasure of the worldly life and that of the Hereafter and concluded that the pleasure in the latter is the real, pure one, as it is entirely free from all the disturbances of the pleasure in the worldly life. The Quran briefly expresses this meaning in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew.’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…seated on couches, gazing around…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) it is meant to show some of the signs of pleasure in the Hereafter. The first of these pleasures is that the good people sit on couches, gazing around. The utmost endeavour of the exegetes in interpreting the meaning of ‘couches’ here is to say, ‘The couches are the beds on which a transparent mosquito net is put.’ This is the meaning of ‘couches’ in the human language. However, the paradise is unseen to our eyes and unperceivable by our minds. That is why there is no word in the language that could describe it, given that the word is only used after the existence of the meaning it conveys.

That is why when the Quran says: ‘A parable of the garden which those guarding (against evil) are promised…’ (*Muhammad:* 15), it states that it just gives a ‘parable’ of the paradise rather than describing its reality, as Allah *the Almighty* says about it: ‘So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did.’ (*as-Sajda:* 17) As no soul knows the pleasures therein, then the language cannot express them. As for the images that the Quran portrays for the paradise, they are meant to make it easy for us to understand these pleasures – through likening its pleasures to that of the worldly life.

Let us give an example to further illustrate this point; the Arabs used to live on dates, milk and water – these were the basic elements of their sustenance. Now, the taste of the milk may change and the taste of the water may be altered. Despite that, they used to drink them. That is why Allah *the Almighty* describes the pleasure in the Hereafter, saying: '…herein are rivers of water that does not alter, and rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change, and rivers of drink delicious to those who drink, and rivers of honey clarified…' (*Muhammad:* 15).

The difference between the pleasure of the Hereafter and that of the worldly life is that the former is purified from all the impurities and the disturbances of that of the latter, which disturbs the one who wants to enjoy them. People's perception of the pleasure differs according to their nature and the environment wherein they live. Sitting on a comfortable couch was the Arab's climax of luxury, especially if there is a transparent mosquito net on it. When s/he was to set relaxingly to set the fire and roast the meat, the mosquitos and other insects frequently used to disturb his/her sitting. Thus, the couches with a mosquito net were the utmost pleasure for an Arab, even if this may not be the case for the urban people.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…gazing around...' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 23) it gives us a glimpse about another kind of pleasure in the Hereafter. In the worldly life, the one who sits on a couch may be deprived of enjoying the beautiful view because s/he is preoccupied with some concerns. On the contrary, the people in paradise are not distracted from enjoying its pleasures by any concerns. So, they look at unlimited beauty that the eyes cannot be distracted from. That is why He *the Almighty* says afterwards: 'You will recognise on their faces the radiance of bliss.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 24)

So, the effects of bliss appear on the faces of the people of paradise. These effects are clearly apparent in the manifestations of happiness, delight, gladness and contentment. In fact, face is the mirror that expresses the true, inner feelings of the human soul. When one looks at the faces of those blessed people – we invoke Allah *the Almighty* to make us among them – s/he fully recognises that they are happy and delighted people, as their faces clearly show the signs and the manifestations of bliss.

Moreover, He *the Almighty* says: ‘They will be served a sealed nectar, its seal [perfumed with] a fragrant herb.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 25-26) If we ponder on His saying: ‘They will be served a sealed nectar...’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 25) we find that He *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘They drink a sealed nectar,’ because some youths serve it to them, a fact which is deduced from His saying: ‘Round about them shall go youths never altering in age, With goblets and ewers and a cup of pure drink.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 17-18)

The nectar is the purified drink which is clarified of any impurity, and, here, it refers to wine. The sealing of that nectar indicates that no one has ever touched it, signifying its complete, perfect preservation. It is wonderful that the seal of that drink has no tops like the bottles we are familiar with; rather, its top and seal are perfumed with a fragrant herb. With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Its seal [perfumed with] a fragrant herb,’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26) the nectar is at the optimal level of purification and is preserved until its owner removes the seal by him/herself. Further, its top is perfumed with a fragrant herb.

Then the context refers to the ultimate objective and purpose for the existence of this reward, saying: ‘…let those who strive, strive for this.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 26) This verse means that the people should strive to reach that pleasure, which the previous verses illustrated. This is the true objective after which the people should strive, instead of striving for giving short measure or collecting the fleeting properties of the worldly life. So, the true field of striving is doing the righteous deeds that will ultimately allow us to get the pleasure of the Hereafter. This is the happy, delightful objective. This command of striving for the bliss of paradise comes after presenting two bargains: the bargain of the wicked people which is failing, losing, degrading and disgracing; and the bargain of the good people which, by contrast, is profitable and delightful. Allah *the Almighty* mentions the bargain of the good after that of the wicked, so that its effect on the soul motivates us to follow the good people’s way and to yearn to reach the delightful objective.

The Arabic word *al-Munafasa* means to strive to get a precious object and to reach it before other people; so, it entails effort and seriousness. It requires that the people should spare no effort to be one of the righteous or to be like them, without harming anyone. Here, we note that there is a difference between *Ghibta* (to wish to have the like of someone’s blessings without wishing that s/he loses them) and envy. Striving should not be based on foolish hope without working and pursuing the means of reaching the objective, as is the case of some foolish people who have no ambition and make no endeavour.

We have to differentiate between racing for the affairs of the worldly life and that of the Hereafter. Racing for a worldly pleasure entails striving for a limited object; if one obtained it, the others will be deprived of it and vice versa. By contrast, racing for the pleasures of the Hereafter constitutes striving for unending bliss, and all the racers are winners in that race. All of them have a share in the pleasures, as one’s share does not decrease or prevent the other’s share. This is because they all get their reward from a Treasury that does not run out, as Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘What is with you passes away and what is with Allah is enduring…’ (*an-Nahl:* 96).

Then, the verses describe the sealed nectar once again, saying: ‘…mixed with the water of *Tasnim*.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 27) The Arabic word *Mizaj* refers to what is added to a drink. The Quran here addresses the Arab according to the language and the traditions they were familiar with. Those who used to drink wine were of two kinds: one drinks to lose his/her consciousness and another for delight without losing consciousness. So, the matter depends on the psychological state of the drinker. For example, if s/he has concerns and wants to forget about them, s/he would ask the barman to bring the wine unmixed. But if s/he drinks for delight, s/he asks the barman to mix it with water, as water reduces its bitterness so that it does not make the drinker lose his/her consciousness. In this connection, the Arab poets expatiate in describing wine. For example, Hassan ibn Thabit said,

I refused the drink you gave me as it is mixed

with water; I feel sad, so bring it unmixed

Both are taken from grapes, but give me

the one with the bitterest taste.

These verses of poetry describe the one who wants the wine unmixed to make him/her lose consciousness. This is the description of wine in the worldly life. As for wine in the Hereafter, it is mixed with *Tasnim*, which is a lofty drink. This clearly indicates that wine in the Hereafter is mixed, even though: '…There shall be no trouble in it…' (*al-Waqi'a:* 47). It neither affects the mind nor intoxicates it.

The word *Tasnim* is derived from the words *Sinam*, which is the top part of anything like the hump of the camel, a meaning which is crystal clear in the Prophetic Hadith which reads: 'The head of the matter is Islam, its pillar is the prayer and its peak is *jihad*.'(1) So, the intended meaning of this verse is that wine in the Hereafter is mixed with the loftiest drink in paradise. Then Allah *the Almighty* explains the meaning of *Tasnim*, saying: '…a spring from which those brought near will drink.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 28) It is a spring that gushes forth from the top part of paradise. We know for sure that water springs come from beneath the earth, and we drink from it with cups and goblets. As for the spring in paradise, it gushes forth from on high and we do not drink from it but rather by it. It is as if the goblets are the spring itself. This is an amazing image that we are unable to perceive, as it is far beyond our imagination and factual realities. However, we have the rule that facilitates the acceptance of the unseen matters, which is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did.' (*as-Sajda:* 17)

Another possible interpretation for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…a spring from which those brought near will drink' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 28) is that the people of paradise are not drinking to quench their thirst but rather to enjoy themselves. This is due to the fact that they neither eat out of hunger nor drink out of thirst; rather, they eat and drink for mere delight and pleasure.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Mu'adh ibn Jabal Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 6/220; 'Abd ibn Humayd, Musnad, Hadith no. 112; At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2616; Ibn Abu Usama, Zawaid Musnad Al-Harith, Hadith no. 12.*

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ أَجۡرَمُواْ كَانُواْ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ يَضۡحَكُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ وَإِذَا مَرُّواْ بِهِمۡ يَتَغَامَزُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾
وَإِذَا ٱنقَلَبُوٓاْ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهِمُ ٱنقَلَبُواْ فَكِهِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ وَإِذَا رَأَوۡهُمۡ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ لَضَآلُّونَ ﴿٣٢﴾
وَمَآ أُرۡسِلُواْ عَلَيۡهِمۡ حَٰفِظِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾ فَٱلۡيَوۡمَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مِنَ ٱلۡكُفَّارِ يَضۡحَكُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ عَلَى ٱلۡأَرَآئِكِ
يَنظُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ هَلۡ ثُوِّبَ ٱلۡكُفَّارُ مَا كَانُواْ يَفۡعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

The wicked used to laugh at the believers [29] they would wink at one another when the believers passed by them [30] joke about them when they got back to their own people [31] and say, when they saw them, ‘These people are misguided’ [32] though they were not sent to be their keepers [33] so today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers [34] as they sit on couches, gazing around [35] Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds? [36]
(The Quran, *al-Mutaffifin:* 29 - 36)

In the very beginning of this chapter in question, Allah *Glorified is He* presents to us a kind of material pain in the issue of giving short measure and weight as well as the domination of the dignitaries and the powerful people over the weak one with regard to the latter’s provisions and livelihood. Now, at the end of the chapter, He *Glorified is He* gives us another picture about the psychological, spiritual pain. In this picture, we have the disbelievers with their power, domination, honour and conceitedness on one side, and the weak, poor and impoverished believers - who could not defend themselves or confront the disbelievers’ harm - on the other side. The disbelievers, falsely, were the uppermost, while the believers were oppressed. The one who has the uppermost always despises the one lower than him/her. When falsehood gains power, we always see it boasting about itself before the truth.

The verse in question portrays an accurate picture for us, allowing us to perceive even the wink of the eye: ‘The wicked used to laugh at the believers—they would wink at one another when the believers pass by them.’ (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29-30) This means that the disbelievers used to mock and make fun of the believers. We notice here that the Quranic style draws a comparison between the wicked and the believers in order to recognize that disbelief constitutes the major crime and the high treason.

Employing the past form ‘used to’ indicates that the statement is about past occurrences, signifying that mocking the believers that happened in the past would not happen to them in the future. If He *the Almighty* had said, ‘The wicked laughed at the believers,’ this would have meant that they would keep laughing at the believers even in the future. That is why the expression ‘used to’ is employed here, as it denotes that the past action will not continue to occur in the future. This was a glad tiding for the believers about the end of the disbelievers’ mockery and that they would be guided to the Faith and the Right Way. At that point, they would not laugh at the believers, as they themselves would be believers.

We also notice that the verb ‘laugh at’ is employed in the present form along with the expression ‘used to.’ That present form is used to recall the act of mockery and its psychological pain - as if it is happening to the believers right now. He *the Almighty* wants us to perceive that action as happening before us, not as a mere statement.

Laughter is a feeling whose reality cannot be described. Even with the scientific advancements we have witnessed, we do not know the organ or the psychological state that makes man laugh. That is why it is one of the matters that is especially attributed to Allah *the Almighty* as He partly veiled it by the Unseen so that no one knows except Him *Glorified is He*. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And that He it is Who makes (men) laugh and makes (them) weep; And that He it is Who causes death and gives life.’ (*an-Najm:* 43-44) Further, laughter is one of the distinctive features of the human being, to the extent that the philosophers distinguished him/her from other animals, saying, ‘Man is a laughing animal.’ This special feature of laughter means that the human mind cannot reach the level of knowing its reality or nature.

The Arabic language has encompassed these facts and used two verbs to describe laughter: *Dahika* and *Tadahak*. The latter refers to the one whose laughter is a matter of affectation, that is, it is neither natural nor spontaneous. Such a person laughs only with his/her outer organs that s/he can control, but in reality s/he is not laughing. An example for this is found in the poetry of 'Umar ibn Rabi'a:

They affected laughter after saying to her

You are beautiful in the eye of your lover

When Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the laughter of the disbelievers, He *Glorified is He* does not say that they brought it about, because they did not pretend to laugh. In fact, they were really laughing at the believers, and their feelings and sensations towards them were real. It is as if the disbelievers' mockery and ridicule were an inherent quality in them. The only reason for that is the encrustation of their hearts which rendered it blind to the truth.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'They would wink at one another when the believers passed by them.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 30) The wink is the action of the eye which is done stealthily by the eyelid. One shows this mocking wink to his/her friend and hides it from the mocked enemy; otherwise, it is an apparent movement. That is why when He *Glorified is He* portrays the action of laughter on the part of the disbelievers, He *the Almighty* made it absolute while the action of wink is restricted to the time when the believers pass by them. They wink to each other stealthily to not allow the believer to see them. It is as if the Quranic style clarifies two pictures of mockery: one was unperceivable to the believers, which is the disbelievers' laughter at them in their gatherings and meetings. The second was perceivable to them: when they passed by the disbelievers, the latter winked at one another. It is as if the believers became an object of mockery and ridicule.

The exegetes discuss the reference of the pronoun in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…passed by them.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 30) They say that the proof is in the previous verse: 'The wicked used to laugh at the believers.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 29) The wicked are those who laughed and the believers were the object of that laughter. So, with regard to His saying: '…passed by them,' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 30) this action is attributed to the wicked people, that is, they pass by the believers. In other words, those who laughed are the ones who passed by, as He *the Almighty* says afterwards: '[They] joke about them when they got back to their own people.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31) However, this does not negate the possibility that it is the believers who pass by the disbelievers; the reference of the pronoun makes both of the two interpretations possible. Anyway, it is the disbelievers who mocked the believers.

The verses here differentiate between those who fall in sin and evil but then regret their actions, and the one who keeps on following falsehood and boasting about his/her sin. Here, after the wicked made fun of the believers and harmed them in various ways, they: '…joke about them when they got back to their own people.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31) So, when they return to their own people, they boast about their actions of ridiculing and mocking fun of the believers. According to another standard mode of recitation, the word *Fkihin* is recited as *Fakihin*, which means that the wicked feel happy and glad, saying, 'We have done such and such to the believers today.'

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and say, when they saw them, "These people are misguided,"' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 32) the closer meaning to the context of the verses is that the wicked people accuse the believers of being misguided. In the disbelievers' eye, they have been misguided because they abandoned the religion of their fathers and forefathers. With regard to His saying: …though they were not sent to be their keepers,' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 33) it means that the wicked are not the keepers of the believers, nor are they in charge of recording their deeds. The opposite meaning could be that the believers were sent as keepers for the disbelievers to record their deeds or declare them as misguided because they deny the Call in the first place.

Then, at the end of the chapter, the context draws our attention to the oppressed believers that the disbelievers made fun of. It offers them solace, condolence and alleviation for the ridicule and the mockery they suffered, saying: '…so today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34) The word 'today' here refers to the Day of Judgment when all the people will stand before the Lord of the Worlds. Thus, the recompense fits the deed. As the disbelievers laughed at the believers in the worldly life, the believers will laugh at them in the Hereafter, but there is a great difference between the essence of the two actions at that time. Laughing in the worldly life is fleeting, temporal and circumstantial, whereas the one who laughs in the Hereafter enjoys it eternally, as the Hereafter is the everlasting life. That is why it is said, 'The one who laughs last, laughs longest.' Indeed, the believers will laugh at the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment when they will dwell in the blissful paradise, while the disbelievers are thrown into the blazing Hellfire, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '…so today the believers are laughing at the disbelievers as they sit on couches, gazing around.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 34-35) So, they, i.e. the believers will look at the pleasures in the paradise, and they will also enjoy seeing Allah's Countenance.

When Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?!' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36) it is as if He *the Almighty* wants to show the contentment of the believers, saying to them, 'Have We not now punished the disbelievers for their sins?' This offers them solace and elevates their position and rank with Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if He *Glorified is He* mentions the deeds of the disbelievers in this chapter to reassure the believers who are exposed to mockery in all times and places, saying to them, 'Remain steadfast in following the true Path and be reassured of Allah's support for you, as you are under His care and sight.' This reassurance is sufficient for the believers.

Before leaving this chapter, we should mention a stylistic hint which is the accurate expression in His saying: 'Have the disbelievers [not] been repaid for their deeds?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 36) This expression itself mocks at the disbelievers and reproaches them. The Arabic verb *Yuthib* (to reward) is used here. It is as if He *the Almighty* says, 'Could We not reward the disbelievers for their actions?' So, the verb 'to reward' is used instead of 'to punish' to make fun of them, as in His saying: '…so give them the [good] news of a painful torment.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 24)

This manner of expression is called 'shattering the hope', that is, after someone hopes to get something, s/he gets depressed for being deprived of it. This is a kind of punishment in itself; that is why they use it in prisons. The jailers prevent the imprisoned from water until s/he becomes very thirsty. Then they approach with a cup of water for him/her, but then spill it. This expression is also used in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and if they cry for water, they shall be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces…' (*al-Kahf:* 29). We seek refuge in Him *the Almighty* from His Wrath, Punishment and His servant's evil deeds.

the chapter of

al-Inshiqaq

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Inshiqaq*(1)

إِذَا ٱلسَّمَآءُ ٱنشَقَّتۡ ١ وَأَذِنَتۡ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتۡ ٢

When the sky is ripped apart [1] obeying its Lord
as it rightly must [2] (The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 1-2)

The context of the chapter of *al-Inshiqaq* is in harmony with the previous chapters. The chapter of *al-Infitar* talks about the noble Angels who write down the deeds of people. Then, the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* discusses the written object, that is, the book of the wicked, which is in *Sijjin*, and the book of the good, which is in *Illiyyin*. Here, in the chapter of *al-Inshiqaq*, another account about the documentation of the deeds is added. It tells that the good people's book will be given in the right hand and its owner will receive an easy reckoning. Moreover, the wicked people's book will be given in the left hand or from behind the back, and his/her owner will be recompensed severely. Thus, if we carefully ponder on all the chapters of the Quran, we find that they are in harmony with each other.

The chapter of *al-Inshiqaq* agrees with that of *at-Takwir* and *al-Infitar* in starting with conditional clauses. What is new here is that there is no apparent result for these conditional clauses. In the chapter of *at-Takwir*, the result of the conditional clauses is: '…then every soul will know what it has brought about,' (*at-Takwir:* 14) and in the chapter of *al-Infitar*, it is: '…each soul will know what it has done and what it has left undone.' (*al-Infitar:* 5) By contrast, in the chapter in question there is no result for the conditional phrases. Why? Scholars say that we do by those results mentioned in the chapters of *at-Takwir* and *al-Infitar.* In other words, the results mentioned in the previous similar chapters make it unnecessary to repeat them in the chapter in question. This is one of the stylistic features of the Quranic manner of expression that gives the mind the chance to reflect and ponder on the meaning. Then, the mind can deduce it by itself and proceed eagerly to recite the Quran. Thus, this expression provokes the mind to think, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '(All) people are a single nation; so Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people in that in which they differed…' (*al-Baqara:* 213)

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(1) The chapter of *al-Inshiqaq* is number 84 in the Quranic order. It consists of 25 verses, and it is unanimously agreed upon, according to Al-Qurtubi, that it was revealed in Mecca. It was revealed after the chapter of *al-Mutaffifin* and before that of *at-Tin*. See Al-Qurtubi*, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 19/267*; As-Suyuti*, Al-Itqan Fi 'Ulum Al-Quran, 1/223.*

The reflecting reader should ask, 'If the people were a single nation and there were no differences between them, then why did Allah send the Prophets?! Why does He say: "…in that in which they differed…"? (*al-Baqara:* 213) As a matter of fact, the sentence: '…so Allah raised prophets…' (*al-Baqara:* 213) is not related to His saying: '(All) people are a single nation …' (*al-Baqara:* 213). Rather, it is related to an omitted sentence, which is, 'They differed after being one nation.' This omission is understood from the subsequent sentence: '…in that in which they differed…' (*al-Baqara:* 213). So, this sentence makes the meaning clearer even though there is an omitted sentence.

Likewise, the conditional clauses in the chapters of *al-Takwir* and *al-Infitar* give a complete picture of the events of the Day of Judgment and the mighty alteration that will take place in the whole universe. As these two chapters mention the result of the conditional clauses, we can employ our minds to apply this result to the conditional clauses in the chapter in question. As there are many possible interpretations, understanding the meaning will be clearer. If the result were mentioned, the perceptions of the meaning would be defined and narrow, whereas vagueness provokes many perceptions.

We can also consider the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'You humans…' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 6) and the subsequent verses the result of the conditional clauses. That is to say, 'When the sky is ripped apart…the believer will be given his/her book in his/her right hand and will have an easy reckoning, and the disbeliever will be given his/her book from behind and will have a severe reckoning.'

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When the sky is ripped apart.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 1), the ripping apart is also mentioned in His saying: 'And on the day when the heaven shall burst asunder with the clouds…' (*al-Furqan:* 25). So, we believe in this universal fact that will come to pass on the Day of Judgment. We have nothing to do with how this would happen; we should only firmly believe that the sky will break its monotony and be altered to something we are not familiar with. Further, the whole universe will break its monotony and order that we know.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says about the sky: '…obeying its Lord as it rightly must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2) This verse means that the sky listened and obeyed its Lord's Command. So, the sky is described here as having an attentive ear. With regard to listening and obeying the Divine Commands, the creatures are of two kinds: the first one listens and has the choice to obey or disobey; the other kind listens but has no free will to disobey. The sky belongs to the latter kind, as it has no freedom of choice; once it listens to the command of its Lord, it unquestioningly obeys it. It immediately obeys the command of its Lord, Who is fully Able to effectuate His command, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…so He said to it and to the earth: Come both, willingly or unwillingly. They both said: We come willingly.' (*Fussilat:* 11) This is because the sky and the earth are subjected to the command of their Creator.

That is why He *the Almighty* says here: '…as it rightly must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 2) This means that the sky should listen and heed Allah's Command, as it rightly must obey and submit to Him, *Glorified is He*. This is because it, by the nature of its creation, is subjected and compliant with His commands. When He *the Almighty* commands it to be ripped apart, it will obey immediately.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَإِذَا ٱلْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ ﴿٣﴾ وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ ﴿٤﴾ وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ ﴿٥﴾

When the earth is levelled out [3] casts out its contents, and becomes empty [4] obeying its Lord as it rightly must [5]
(The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 3 - 5)

After telling us about the manifestations of the alteration of the universal order in the sky, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the alteration of the earthly order. He *the Almighty* created the earth and made it even to be suitable for man's life on it, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: '…and the earth, too, He spread out.' (*an-Nazi'at:* 30) However, in the Hereafter, it will become suitable for the Gathering, so it will be vast to encompass all the creatures that will be gathered. Consequently, He *the Almighty* says: '…when the earth is levelled out.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 3) It is as if the earth will be pulled from its sides to extend after the removal of the mountains and hills. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And the mountains shall be as loosened wool.' (*al-Qari`a:* 5) He *the Almighty* further illustrates this meaning, saying: 'Then leave it a plain, smooth level, You shall not see therein any crookedness or unevenness.' (*Ta Ha:* 106-107)

Scholars say that after the earth extends, it hardly encompasses the gathered people who would stand in a state of crowdedness, as the place is still narrow. It seems that this state is intended because standing on the Day of Judgment is not meant to be restful, but rather difficult. If one wanted to sit, s/he would not be able to do so except with the permission of Allah *the Almighty*.

With regard to the saying of Allah, *Glorified is He*: '…casts out its contents…' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 4) it means that the earth will cast out the dead people inside it, or the treasure, blessings and secrets inside it. His saying: '…and becomes empty.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 4) affirms that the earth will cast out all its contents, leaving nothing inside it, however little it might be. This is quite similar to the case when a policeman searches a person and s/he empties his/her pockets before starting the search. This means that the searched person has nothing to hide.

As the sky obeys and submits to its Creator, the earth does the same, as He *the Almighty* says: '…obeying its Lord as it rightly must.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 5) This verse conveys the same meaning we have discussed previously. The earth rightly must listen and obey. Another possible interpretation is that He *the Almighty* will make it obedient through the power of submission and subjection that He *the Almighty* placed in it.

Afterwards, the context addresses all human beings and his/her genus whom Allah *the Almighty* honoured. He *the Almighty* subjected all that is in the universe to humans and made them His Vicegerent on earth. So, He *the Almighty* subsequently says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَٰقِيهِ ﴿٦﴾ فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِىَ كِتَٰبَهُۥ بِيَمِينِهِۦ ﴿٧﴾
فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسَبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا ﴿٨﴾ وَيَنقَلِبُ إِلَىٰٓ أَهْلِهِۦ مَسْرُورًا ﴿٩﴾ وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِىَ كِتَٰبَهُۥ وَرَآءَ
ظَهْرِهِۦ ﴿١٠﴾ فَسَوْفَ يَدْعُوا۟ ثُبُورًا ﴿١١﴾ وَيَصْلَىٰ سَعِيرًا ﴿١٢﴾ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فِىٓ أَهْلِهِۦ مَسْرُورًا ﴿١٣﴾

You humans, toiling laboriously towards your Lord, will meet Him [6] whoever is given his record in his right hand [7] will have an easy reckoning [8] and return to his people well pleased [9] but whoever is given his record from behind his back [10] will cry out for destruction [11] he will burn in the blazing Fire [12] He used to live among his people well pleased [13] (The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 6 - 13)

In the chapter of *al-Infitar*, we have previously talked about the breaking apart of the sky, the scattering of the stars, the boiling up of the seas and the turning of the graves inside out. Man is addressed by Allah's saying: 'Mankind, what has lured you away from Allah?' (*al-Infitar:* 6); and His saying: '…you humans, toiling laboriously towards your Lord, will meet Him.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 6) He *the Almighty* addresses man because s/he is the center and the objective of the universe. In both the above verses, the Attribute of Lordship is mentioned along with addressing all the humanity. It is as if He *the Almighty* wants to be lenient to His servants, so He *Glorified is He* addresses them gently, saying: '…you humans, toiling laboriously towards your Lord, will meet Him.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 6)

'Toiling' means to strive and spare no effort to reach the objective. Such toil is also accompanied with hardship to the extent that it leaves a noticeable effect on the person because of tiredness and stress. For example, blue-collar workers may have tough hands or bent backs as a result of carrying heavy objects. It is as if they overburden themselves to earn a living. That is why when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* held the hand of one of his Companions and found it rough, he said, 'Allah and His Messenger love this hand.' Why? This is because its owner seeks a lawful provision and is keen on gaining it. In this regard, a poet said,

My lifetime is like two hours; I toil in one
to seek provision, and I would die in the second

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* addresses all people, be they believers or disbelievers, saying, 'You will inevitably reach by your deeds to one single objective. You are heading towards your Lord from the day of your birth until the time of your death.' Man's property in that journey is the good deeds with which s/he would meet with his/her Lord. One will be held accountable for his/her actions and that is why s/he should pay heed to his/her actions. This fact is applicable to all people and it determines all the secondary actions.

The verses then show us that the objective divides the people according to their toiling into striving for Allah *the Almighty* by doing good deeds sincerely for His Sake in order to be saved in the Hereafter; and toiling towards Him by evil deeds and striving after the worldly life, preferring the fleeting life to the everlasting one. So, the verses read: '…whoever is given his record in his right hand will have an easy reckoning and return to his people well pleased.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 7-9) These verses refer to the people of obedience who are given their record in their right hand. They will have an easy reckoning and return happily to their people.

By contrast, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…but whoever is given his record from behind his back will cry out for destruction—he will burn in the blazing Fire.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 10-12) These verses show the fate of the people of disbelief and disobedience. They will cry out for woe and destruction to befall them in order to be relieved from the punishment, as they will enter the hellfire and suffer its extreme heat. Afterwards, the verses mention the reason for their awful fate, saying: 'He used to live among his people well pleased. He thought he would never return [to his Lord].' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 13-14) They wrongly thought during the worldly life that they would not return to Allah *the Almighty* or that they would be held accountable for their deeds. Thus, their woeful destination in the deep bottom of the hell is the outcome of their wrongful thinking. Another possible interpretation is that they thought they will not return to the state they had in the worldly life where they enjoyed many pleasures.

The one who ponders on these verses finds that they give us a picture of the absolute Divine Justice. Logically, all the people should be held accountable. Even if the person reaches a lofty rank in righteousness, there are still some deeds in his/her record about which s/he should be questioned. However, it is man's toil and striving that determine the way of his/her reckoning, be it easy or difficult. Some people's reckoning will be confined to presenting the deeds in order to recognize them and compare them to Allah's Graces on him/her. He *the Almighty* would say to him/her, 'My servant, you have done such and such, while I have bestowed such and such on you.' In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to 'Aisha, 'This means only the presentation of the accounts, but whoever will be argued with about his account will certainly be punished.' Thus, we should only fear being questioned about our deeds during the reckoning. As for the presentation of the deeds, it is a way of manifesting Allah's favour on us, like when He *the Almighty* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'Allah pardon you! Why did you give them leave…' (*at-Tawba:* 43) This is the easy reckoning whose signs start when one is given his/her record in the right hand. That is why the right hand is always the sign of goodness and peace.

The opposite picture is that of the disbelievers who violate Allah's Way of Guidance. They will also be reckoned with justly but with difficulty. The Quran expresses that the severity and hardship of the reckoning will reach the extent that the one reckoned in this way will cry out for destruction and woe to fall on him/her in order to alleviate the punishment s/he suffers. It is as if s/he says, 'My woe, befall on me for this is your time to come.' A poet has expressed this meaning perfectly, saying,

How terrible it is to regard death as the cure
For your illness, and death as your dearest wish

Man does not wish for death except when his/her situation is worse than death. Moreover, the Quran portrays this meaning in His saying: '…On the Day when every person will see what their own hands have sent ahead for them, when the disbeliever will say, "If only I were dust!"'(*an-Naba':* 40)

The sign of this shameful fate is that the record is given to its owner from behind the back. In another verse, it is clearly stated that s/he is given it in the left hand. These two pictures express the disgrace and the shame of the one whom the Angel gives their record in the left hand, which is an evil omen, or from behind the back. This is because the Angel does not want to see the ugly face of that person or s/he may be embarrassed from the Angel, so s/he takes the book from behind the back.

We notice that the verses talk about the gladness of the people of faith at their record which they are given in the right hand. Further, they feel happy for having an easy reckoning that ultimately leads them to the blissful paradise – this is the true happiness in the Hereafter. Then the verses talk about the happiness of the people of falsehood in the worldly life. Let them feel happy as much as possible as they can, for there is no share for them in the happiness of the Hereafter. Here, we should draw a comparison between the happiness of the disbelievers in the worldly life and that of the believers in the Hereafter. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'They joke about them when they got back to their own people.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 31) This means that the disbelievers make fun of the believers in the worldly life. By contrast, the believer, who is given his/her book in the right hand, will be happy and return to his people well pleased. Thus, there is a far greater difference between the happiness of the disbelievers and that of the believers.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّهُۥ ظَنَّ أَن لَّن يَحُورَ ﴿١٤﴾ بَلَىٰٓ إِنَّ رَبَّهُۥ كَانَ بِهِۦ بَصِيرًا ﴿١٥﴾ فَلَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِٱلشَّفَقِ ﴿١٦﴾
وَٱلَّيۡلِ وَمَا وَسَقَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَٱلۡقَمَرِ إِذَا ٱتَّسَقَ ﴿١٨﴾ لَتَرۡكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَن طَبَقٖ ﴿١٩﴾

He thought he would never return [to his Lord] [14] indeed he will! His Lord was watching him [15] I swear by the glow of sunset [16] by the night and what it covers [17] by the full moon [18] you will progress from stage to stage [19]
(The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 14 - 19)

The ranks of realizing the matters are as follows: knowledge, imitation, ignorance, doubt, conjecture and delusion. Knowledge is the highest rank among them all. The people of the Book differed after the coming of the knowledge to them. Allah *the Almighty* does not say that they differed because they were at the rank of imitation, conjecture, delusion, ignorance or doubt. Rather, He *the Almighty* says that they differed after being given the knowledge, the highest rank of realization. Conjecture is delusional; so, He *Glorified is He* reminds them that it is not right to think that living in the worldly life is better for them. This thought is a mere guessing and conjecture that does not reach the level of certitude.

Allah *the Almighty* gives us a practical example of delusional conjecture, saying in the chapter of *al-Fajr*: '[The nature of] man is that, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, "My Lord has honoured me," but when He tries him through the restriction of his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me."' (*al-Fajr:* 16) The man who thinks that richness is an honour and impoverishment and restriction of the provision are humiliation does not realize the fact which is found in His saying: 'Nay...' (*al-Fajr:* 17). This means that man's conjecture is not true, for being wealthy is not a sign of being honoured and being poor is not a sign of being humiliated. Both of these conjectures are wrong.

This is also the case with the one who: '…thought he would never return [to his Lord].' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 14) S/he thinks s/he will not return to Allah *the Almighty* and will not be resurrected after death. This one who was given his/her record from behind the back wrongly thought that s/he would not be returned to Him *the Almighty* and would not be resurrected after death. That is why s/he had not paid heed to the seriousness of committing sins. S/he was neither hoping for a reward nor fearing a punishment.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Indeed he will! His Lord was watching him.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 15) The Arabic particle *Bala* means 'yes', but it is used with the negative sentences. Here, it negates the conjecture that man will not return to Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, s/he will return to Him *Glorified is He*. So, the particle '*Bala*' negates the truthfulness of man's conjecture. Unlike the particle *Na'am* (yes), the particle *Bala* is used with the negative sentences. For example, He *the Almighty* says: 'And they say: None shall enter the garden (or paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful. Yes! Whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others) he has his reward from his Lord...' (*al-Baqara:* 111-112). So, the particle *Bala* (yes) means that their statement is totally wrong. Likewise, it is used in the verse in question to negate man's conjecture that: '…he would never return [to his Lord].' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 14) So, man's conjecture is wrong for s/he will for sure be returned along with all the people to Allah *the Almighty* whether they believed or disbelieved in the Resurrection.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Indeed he will! His Lord was watching him.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 15) He *Glorified is He* chooses the Attribute of Lordship, even though the context here befits that of Divinity with its Omnipotence that compels all the people to return back and be resurrected. The Attribute of Lordship is used instead of that of Divinity even in the case of returning of the denier of the Resurrection. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to him/her, 'O heedless man, I am Your Lord and Creator Who provides for you. Despite your denial, I am still your Lord Who can make you repent your disbelief, denial and rejection.'

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…Indeed he will! His Lord was watching him,' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 15) it means that man's Lord is watching him/her; He fully knows his/her affairs and nothing is hidden from Him *Glorified is He*. That is why s/he can never find a place to escape or hide from Him *the Almighty* as: '…Allah sees the servants.' (*Al-'Imran:* 15) So, He *Glorified is He* is watching all man's movements. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: '…Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer.' (*an-Nisa':* 1) The observer is the one who looks intentionally at something. In this sense, Allah *the Almighty* is not only seeing but also observing us.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: 'I swear by the glow of sunset...' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 16). In the verses in question, He *the Almighty* wants to affirm a fact that does not need an Oath to affirm, as it is perfectly obvious and clear. However, were He *the Almighty* to swear about it, He *Glorified is He* would swear by the glow of sunset. The Arabic word *Ash-Shafaq* refers to the redness that remains on the horizon after the sunset, or it is the whiteness that follows that redness. However, Mujahid says that it refers to all the daytime. So, it is possible that He *the Almighty* swears by all the daytime through mentioning one part of it. The one who reflects on the glow of the sunset along with the previous opinions of the exegetes will find the true picture of *Ash-Shafaq*. It gathers between the effect of the daytime, which is light, and the effect of the sun, which is the redness.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…by the night and what it covers.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 17) This Divine Oath by the night is mentioned in many verses of the Quran, as in His saying: 'By the enshrouding night.' (*al-Layl:* 1) In fact, there is a chapter in the Quran called *al-Layl* (the Night), while there is no chapter by the name 'the day.' This is because the night is the time when the worshippers offer their acts of worship to Allah *the Almighty*. When the night covers the world with its darkness, tranquility subsequently comes. In other verses, He *the Almighty* swears by the night, saying: '…and by the night when it grows still,' (*ad-Duha:* 2); and '…by the passing night.' (*al-Fajr:* 4) The night covers the world as it moves slowly and tranquilly, spreading its darkness that shrouds the lightness of the day bit by bit.

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* describes the night by another feature, apart from moving slowly and shrouding the world, which is: '…by the night and what it covers.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 17) So, what is the meaning of *Wasaq*? It refers to what the night encircles, covers and encompasses; it shrouded all what was in the daytime. That is because when the night comes, everything returns to its home. It covers the trees, the mountains, the seas and the whole earth with its darkness. During night, Allah's creatures gather together after being scattered during the daytime. The word *Wasaq* connotes gathering and that is why the large amount of food that can be measured or weighed or put in a container is called *Wasaq*.

So, as Allah *the Almighty* swears by the glow of the sunset, which is a part of the day close to the coming of the night, He *the Almighty* swears by the night. Then He *Glorified is He* swears by the most important phenomenon in the night, which is the moon, saying: '…by the full moon.' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 18) The Arabic word *Al-Itisaq* is the time when the moon is full in the sky. This particular period of time is called the 'white days'; it occurs when the sky becomes bright with the white light of the moon. This takes place on the thirteenth, the fourteenth and the fifteenth days of the lunar month. So *Al-Itisaq* is the time when the moon is full, but Al-Hassan Al-Basri holds the position that it refers to its light when the reflection of the sunlight makes it full of light.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘You will progress from stage to stage,’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 19) the Arabic preposition *A‘n* means ‘after’, a meaning which is also clear in His saying: ‘[Allah] said, “After a little, they will surely become regretful.”’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 40) So, the verse in question refers to the progression from one heaven to another. Some scholars maintain that this verse refers to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that is, he would progress from one heaven to another, which has already happened in the Night Journey and Ascension. Some say it refers to the ranks of getting closer to Allah *the Almighty*. So, the meaning could be that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would progress from a condition, rank or hardship to another.

Then Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَمَا لَهُمۡ لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَإِذَا قُرِئَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانُ لَا يَسۡجُدُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

So why do they not believe [20] Why, when the Quran is read to them, do they not prostrate themselves [to God] [21] (1)
(The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 20 - 21)

The interrogation here carries the meaning of condemnation and reproach. This is a common style in the Quran. When one hears, ‘Why do you not do such and such?’ it means that the addressee should do it and that it is astonishing that s/he does not. This condemnatory manner of expression is only used when someone does something s/he should not do or leave a necessary action undone. Such styles mean that the believer should not receive the obligatory action according to his/her standard of what to do and what not to do.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘So why do they not believe?’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 20) is a condemnation and reproach for not believing in Allah, His Book, Messenger, Resurrection, Reckoning, paradise and hell. The word *Iman* means to believe in something, a meaning which is crystal clear in His saying: ‘…and you will not believe us though we are truthful.’ (*Yusuf:* 17) This is the statement of Jacob’s sons to their father.

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(1) When a Muslim reads yasjudoon (prostrate), s/he, immediately prostrate and say (subhan Rabia Al-'ala) three times and finish it as finishing any prayer.

As for His *Glorified is He* saying, ‘Why, when the Quran is read to them, do they not prostrate themselves [to Allah]?’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 21), prostration is a sign of glorification. So, the disbelievers neither glorify the Quran nor give it its due rank, which would lead to the firm belief in the One Who revealed it, that is, Allah *Glorified is He*; the one to whom it was revealed, that is, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and the one who brought it down from Allah *the Almighty* that is, the Archangel Gabriel *peace be upon him*.

To read the Quran means to recite it, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘And it is a Quran which We have revealed in portions so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees, and We have revealed it, revealing in portions.’ (*al-Isra’:* 106) It was revealed in portions, one verse after another; however, it is astonishing that: ‘…when the Quran is read to them, they not prostrate themselves [to Allah].’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 21) Prostration is the utmost degree of submission to Allah *the Almighty*. So, when a verse requiring prostration comes, we must hastily prostrate to Him the Almighty.

It is as if the prostration of recitation constitutes a momentous affair and a great secret. The verses of prostration have spiritual power and blessings that remind us about Him the Almighty. The prostration in this verse is one among many others in the Quran. Some scholars maintain that prostration here refers to Prayer as it is part of it. So, the meaning is that they do not offer prayer.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘No! The disbelievers reject the Quran.’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 22) It means that the disbelievers deny the Quran and do not believe in it. This is because they neither glorify it nor prostrate to the One Who revealed it down, as they consider it the fables of the ancients which were dictated to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or it is he who produced the Quran - but how come?! He *peace and blessings be upon him* was well known to them; they knew fully well that he composed neither poetry nor prose.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

بَلِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ يُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

No! The disbelievers reject the Quran [22]
(The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 22)

The word ‘No’ here negates what was stated before it and affirms what is mentioned after it. That is to say that it is not possible that the disbelievers prostrate to Allah *the Almighty* when the Quran is recited to them, as they disbelieve in it in the first place. This denial is a kind of stubborn rejection on the part of the disbeliever, and means the rejection of an action or a saying. So, they did not only disbelieve in the Quran and the Messenger, but also denied and turned away from them.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Allah knows best what they keep hidden inside,’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 23) the expression ‘Allah knows best’ is mentioned in many verses, including: ‘O you who believe! When believing women come to you flying, then examine them; Allah knows best their faith…’ (*al-Mumtahana:* 10); ‘And Allah best knows your enemies…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 45); ‘And when they come to you, they say: We believe; and indeed they come in with unbelief and indeed they go forth with it; and Allah knows best what they concealed.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 61); ‘Allah best knows where He places His message…’ (*al-An‘am:* 124); ‘Say: Allah knows best how long they remained; to Him are (known) the unseen things of the heavens and the earth…’ (*al-Kahf:* 26); ‘…nor do I say about those whom your eyes hold in mean estimation (that) Allah will never grant them (any) good-- Allah knows best what is in their souls - for the most surely I should be of the unjust.’ (*Hud:* 31); and ‘…if they contend with you, say: Allah best knows what you do.’ (*al-Hajj:* 68)

So, Allah *the Almighty* knows best the faith of the heart and what the man conceals in it. Further, He *Glorified is He* knows best man’s actions and the apparent and the hidden actions of the disbelievers. The formula ‘to know best’ is in the superlative form. It means that He *the Almighty* knows the reality of all affairs better than the people, as He perfectly well knows their real state and not their apparent form, which some people still may not see.

Therefore, He *Glorified is He* subsequently says:

وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا يُوعُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

God knows best what they keep hidden inside [23]
(The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 23)

This verse signifies that He *the Almighty* fully well knows what the disbelievers conceal deep inside their souls. The Arabic word *Wi'aa'* refers to the container that includes some material objects like liquids and clothes. It is mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'So he began with their *(Aw'iatihem)* sacks before the sack of his brother, then he brought it out from his brother's sack…' (*Yusuf*: 76). The container could also be spiritual, like the heart which is the container of the sentiments and intentions. So, His saying: 'Allah knows best what they keep hidden inside,' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 23) means that He *Glorified is He* knows what the disbelievers hide in their hearts.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَبَشِّرۡهُم بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

So give them news of a painful torment [24]
(The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 24)

Why does Allah *the Almighty* give them the glad tidings of a painful punishment? Do the glad tidings not mean to tell someone good news about something that may happen? Yes, giving glad tidings is related to the good, delightful news, like telling the believers that they will go to the paradise. When the soul of the disbeliever hears the words, 'give the glad tidings,' it expects to hear good news and thus becomes delighted to hear something good. So, when it is said: '…so give them news of a painful torment,' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 24) a sudden, painful depression overwhelms that soul. The words 'give them the good news' raises the disbelievers' hopes, but the words 'painful punishment' shatter that hope, which increases the severity of their calamity.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍۭ ﴿٢٥﴾

But those who believe and do good deeds will have a never-ending reward [25] (The Quran, *al-Inshiqaq:* 25)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* excludes the believers who do good deeds from those punished by a painful torment. The activities of life must be in harmony with the Islamic Way of Guidance. However, when these activities deviate from that Way of Guidance, then faith alone does not serve the religious cause. That is why the good deeds must be prescribed along with the belief. The good deeds are those complying with the Straight Path and the Way of Guidance. The opposite of these good deeds are the corrupt ones. The minimum degree of goodness and righteousness is to leave what is good as it is or to increase its goodness.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'But those who believe and do good deeds will have a never-ending reward,' (*al-Inshiqaq:* 25) means that the believers' reward is neither ending nor reduced. As Allah *the Almighty* gives them their reward without measure, the reward will not end, but rather will be eternal and everlasting. They deserve this reward which is given without measure. If a believer is in the habit of doing a certain act of worship, but then an illness forces him/her to stop it, then the reward of that act of worship will continue to be given to him/her.

the chapter of

al-Buruj

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Buruj*(1)

وَٱلسَّمَآءِ ذَاتِ ٱلۡبُرُوجِ ١ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡمَوۡعُودِ ٢ وَشَاهِدٖ وَمَشۡهُودٖ ٣

By the sky with its towering constellations [1]
by the promised Day [2] by the Witness and that which
is witnessed [3] (The Quran, *al-Buruj:* 1-3)

The chapter of *al-Buruj*, like many other chapters in this *Juz'* (part), starts with an Oath. Allah *the Almighty* takes an Oath by the sky and its towering constellations, which have an effect on the universal order and the laws of existence. This is an Oath taken by a tangible matter, but His saying: '…by the promised Day,' (*al-Buruj:* 2) constitutes an Oath by an unseen matter, which is the Day of Judgment. It is as if He *the Almighty* proves the unseen matter by the greatness and the marvelousness of the tangible creature. Then He *the Almighty* swears, saying: '…by the witness and that which is witnessed.' (*al-Buruj:* 3) The Arabic word *Shahid* 'witness' here refers to Friday, while *Mash-hud* 'the witnessed' refers to the day of *'Arafa*, which is witnessed by the people and the Angels.

Afterwards, the subject of these Oaths is mentioned in order that Allah *the Almighty* would relate to us one of the incidents of the conflict between belief and disbelief or the truth and falsehood. So, He *the Almighty* says:

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Buruj* is number 85 in the Quranic order. It consists of 22 verses and it is unanimously agreed upon that it was revealed in Mecca. It was revealed after the chapter of *Ash-Shams* and before that of *At-Tin*. See As-Suyuti*, Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum Al-Quran, 1/36.*

قُتِلَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡأُخۡدُودِ ﴿٤﴾ ٱلنَّارِ ذَاتِ ٱلۡوَقُودِ ﴿٥﴾ إِذۡ هُمۡ عَلَيۡهَا قُعُودٞ ﴿٦﴾ وَهُمۡ عَلَىٰ مَا
يَفۡعَلُونَ بِٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ شُهُودٞ ﴿٧﴾ وَمَا نَقَمُواْ مِنۡهُمۡ إِلَّآ أَن يُؤۡمِنُواْ بِٱللَّهِ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡحَمِيدِ ﴿٨﴾
ٱلَّذِي لَهُۥ مُلۡكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٩﴾

Damned were the makers of the trench [4] the makers of the fuel-stoked fire! [5] They sat down [6] to watch what they were doing to the believers [7] Their only grievance against them was their faith in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy [8] to whom all control over the heavens and earth belongs: God is witness over all things [9] (The Quran, *al-Buruj:* 4 - 9)

The story of *Ashab Al-'Ukhdud* (the makers of the trench) is a well-known one that took place in the past. It portrays a conflict between the truth and falsehood. The trench was a great hole that the disbelievers dug for the believers. Allah *the Almighty* clarifies its meaning and essence, saying: 'the makers of the fuel-stoked fire!' (*al-Buruj:* 5) The disbelievers set the fire in that trench and threw the believers into it, while the rest of the disbelievers were watching: 'They sat down to watch what they were doing to the believers.' (*al-Buruj:* 6-7)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* wants to illustrate the principles of conflict between belief and disbelief. Belief is always firm in the heart of the believers, while disbelief is always deceived by its power and the weakness of the believers. The attitude of the tyrannical disbelievers towards the believers is not reasonable as violates the pure nature, let alone the religion and its laws.

We have explained the cases of conflict and the expected outcome of every case. In fact, the conflict between the truth and falsehood does not last long, because the power and the firmness of belief will shortly defeat falsehood. The second case is when the conflict is between two truths, but this case never exists in the reality, as the truth is one. Thus, there is no case in which two truths are in conflict with each other. So, there could be a conflict between two powers and we wrongly conclude, from the first observation, that both of them are right. However, a deep reflection of the matter will show us that one of them is on the false side. The last case is when there is a conflict between two falsehoods, like most of the conflicts we witness in our age. Such conflicts remain for a long time and have a destructive and calamitous effect on the countries and the peoples. That is because none of the conflicting forces deserves Allah's Support, as both of them are holding a false stance.

Afterwards, the verses tell us about the stubbornness and obstinacy of disbelief, reading: 'Their only grievance against them was their faith in Allah, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy.' (*al-Buruj:* 8) Faith is the believer's crime in the eye of the disbelievers. All what they hated and condemned is only the believer's faith in Allah *the Almighty*. The recompense of that crime, in their opinion, was to throw the believers into the trench. This is the feature of disbelief which is deceived by its power in comparison with the oppressed believers.

Allah *the Almighty* portrays this incident by a well-known rhetoric style, which is, to affirm the praising of an object by a seemingly blameworthy quality. The word 'grievances' gives a negative connotation, so we expect the mention of a blameworthy quality after it. However, the context then mentions a praiseworthy one, which is: '…their faith in Allah, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy.' (*al-Buruj:* 8) It is the case when you say, for example, 'So and so is free from all the bad traits, except that s/he is generous.' In this way, his/her generosity is affirmed, as the listener expects a blameworthy trait but suddenly finds it praiseworthy. A colloquial proverb also conveys this meaning: 'They did not find any defect in the roses, so they said, "They have red leaves."' Does this redness constitute a defect? Of course not! Further, an Arab poet expresses that particular meaning, saying,

They are free of bad traits, but their swords

Are blunt out to fighting strong armies

Moreover, this style is used many times in the Quran, as in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Say: O followers of the Book! Do you find fault with us (for aught) except that we believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed before, and that most of you are transgressors?' (*al-Ma'ida:* 59) The meaning is thus that the believers' faith in Allah *the Almighty* is not a fault that incurs any punishment. If the People of the Book hate the fact that the believers believe in Allah, then the fault is in the former, not the latter. So, this style is a kind of wise argument that allows a space for the two parties to understand each other. It is as if He *the Almighty* says gently to the people of the Book, ‘The fault is yours and the corruption is in your nature and standards.’ Likewise, He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘…and they did not find fault except because Allah and His Messenger enriched them out of His grace…’ (*at-Tawba:* 74).

So, with regard to the verse in question, the meaning is that the disbelieving makers of the trench hated something naturally lovable, that is, belief in Allah *the Almighty*. This indicates the corrupted mentality of the one who issued such a ruling, as he considered the good value abominable. It is as if the Quran refers to the fact that if the disbelievers reviewed all the qualities, ethics and behaviours of the believers, whom they burned, they would not find anything detestable. So, how could they throw them into the fire?! However, the tyrannical disbelief is keen on preserving its oppression, power and tyranny. It does not like to see anyone worshipping anything else, as it finds this abominable.

In the disbeliever’s point of view, the believers who worship Allah *the Almighty* Alone are sinful and guilty. Even their being a people of reform, principles, ethics and good treatment do not waive their punishment. On the contrary, you see such tyrannical people overlooking all the bad traits of those who worship them, abandoning meanwhile the worship of the One, Single God. This meaning is expressed in the following line of poetry:

The faults are unperceivable to the content eye
But the discontent eye exposes the hidden faults

Most of the rulers’ corruption stems from this matter. S/he considers his/her retinues and close people trustworthy and righteous, even if they were corrupt people, aggressors and thieves. All their faults are overlooked because they deal hypocritically with their master and almost offer their worship to him/her. As for the opposing people, they are labelled as extremists and corrupt even if they were righteous and have moral characters. This is the incorrect balance of many rulers.

Then, Allah *the Almighty* mentions two of His Attributes, saying: ‘…the Mighty, the Praiseworthy.’ (*al-Buruj:* 8) So, the believers, whom the disbelievers hated their belief, seek refuge with Allah *the Almighty* the Invincible and the

Praiseworthy. Praiseworthiness indicates that He *the Almighty* is All-Benevolent and deserves to be praised for bestowing His Blessings. So, the Almightiness represents the intimidating aspect and Praiseworthiness represents the persuasive one. Everyone should choose for him/herself the aspect that suits him/her to thereby follow the Way of Allah *the Almighty*.

So, the verse in question signifies that the oppressed believers, whom the disbelievers condemned for their faith, do not seek refuge in a weak resort but rather in a Powerful, Almighty Lord Who holds sway on the whole universe and Who encompasses all the goodness under His Control. Thus, the believers are following the Right Way and the Straight Path leading to the praiseworthy destination and objective. That is because they worshipped the true God Who Alone deserves to be worshipped.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the Mighty, the Praiseworthy' (*al-Buruj:* 8) is not a statement without a proof, as He *Glorified is He* then says: '…to whom all control over the heavens and earth belongs: Allah is witness over all things.' (*al-Buruj:* 9) His Almightiness and Invincibility are really and clearly witnessed in the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Both the believer and the disbeliever attest to it; if man has a free will in some matters, s/he is subjected to Him *the Almighty* in some others. No one can do that except the Lord of the heavens and the earth.

We should ponder the beautiful way of expression in His saying: '…Allah is witness over all things.' (*al-Buruj:* 9) This is an independent sentence and the Name 'Allah' is employed instead of the subject pronoun 'He' so that there would be no need for a reference for the pronoun. In other words, He *the Almighty* does not say, 'He is witness over all things.' He *the Almighty* mentions His Majestic Name 'Allah' with regard to the action of witnessing over all things, alluding to what has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: '[They] watch what they were doing to the believers.' (*al-Buruj:* 7) It is as if He *Glorified is He* is saying, 'O tyrannical disbelievers, pay attention that as you have watched the believers when you threw them in the trench, I witness over all what you have done.'

The adjective *Shahid* (witness), unlike *Shahid,* expresses hyperbole as it has two meanings. It could mean that He *the Almighty* witnesses everything and nothing is hidden from Him *Glorified is He*. The second meaning is that He *Glorified is He* is the Witness for the wrongdoers who have no witnesses. So, He *the Almighty* is the Witness of those who were wronged secretly and there is no witness or proof to substantiate the wrongdoing they suffered. Consequently, the wrongdoers should pay attention that their hidden wrongdoing that the people did not see is watched by Allah *the Almighty* from Whom nothing is hidden.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* shows the punishment of the first group, who are the disbelieving makers of the trench, saying:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا۟ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا۟ فَلَهُمْ
عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ ٱلْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٠﴾

For those who persecute believing men and women,
and do not repent afterwards, there will be the torment
of Hell and burning [10] (The Quran, *al-Buruj:* 10)

We notice here that Allah *the Almighty* treats the people as their Lord Who does not have any hostility against His disbelieving servant. If s/he repented, He *Glorified is He* would accept his/her repentance, as if there is nothing happened before. So, He *the Almighty* does not have a bitter enmity against His servant, like that of the people against each other. Some people would not forgive or forget even one offence, no matter how the offender tries to correct his/her mistake. By contrast, Allah *the Almighty* does not react to the actions in the way we do, for He *the Almighty* is the Creator of the actions and everything else. He *Glorified is He* neither gets benefit from an act of obedience nor is harmed by an act of disobedience. He just wants His creatures to be in the best state.

Out of His Mercy towards His servants, He *Glorified is He* accepts their repentance. If that door of repentance was closed, people would keep on committing evil deeds and lose hope in salvation. Consequently, He *the Almighty* shatters the hope of both the disbelievers and the tyrants in receiving His Mercy. So, He *Glorified is He* opened the gate of repentance for them even after persecuting the believing men and women. This is because He does not want the disbeliever to keep on his/her disbelief, nor does He want the tyrant to persist in his/her tyranny. This is due to the fact that repentance wipes out the actions done before it. That is why when the people said to 'Umar, ‘This is Wahshiy (who killed *Hamza*, Prophet Muhammad’s uncle),’ he replied, ‘What is the problem with him after being guided to Faith.’

We should reflect on the accuracy of the Quranic way of expression and its suitability for the context in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…there will be the torment of hell and burning.’ (*al-Buruj:* 10) The Arabic word *Al-Hariq* (burning) is one of the kinds of punishment in the hell, but it is especially mentioned in this context by way of comparison with: ‘…the fuel-stoked fire.’ (*al-Buruj:* 5) The makers of the trench set the fire in the trench and threw the believers into it, which is why the burning torment that these disbelievers suffer is the just recompense for their action, as the punishment fits the crime.

Another possible explanation for mentioning the ‘torment of burning’ in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…there will be the torment of hell and burning…’ (*al-Buruj:* 10) is that the hell has many kinds of punishments apart from burning by the fire, like the extreme cold. So, it is as if He *the Almighty* gathered many kinds of punishments for them. Or, we can say that there is a punishment for disbelief and another severer one for the disbelievers who persisted in their disbelief and persecuted the believing men and women. This is because the one who only disbelieved and the one who disbelieved and persecuted the believing men and women on account of their religion are not equal. For the first group, there is the torment of hell as recompense for their disbelief; and for the second group, there is the torment of the hell and the burning as recompense for persecuting the believing men and women.

As the verses in question were revealed in reference to the makers of the trench, He *the Almighty* told us that they did not repent to Him. In other words, they died in a state of disbelief. It is as if the verses were alluding to the disbelieving people who lived at the time of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, the principle mentioned in His saying: ‘For those who persecute believing men and women, and do not repent afterwards, there will be the torment of hell and burning...’ (*al-Buruj:* 10) is a general issue of faith which is applicable to every time and place.

Afterwards, Allah mentions the opposite recompense, saying:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّٰتٌ تَجْرِى
مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْكَبِيرُ ﴿١١﴾

But for those who believe and do good deeds there will be Gardens graced with flowing streams: that is the great triumph [11] (The Quran, *al-Buruj:* 11)

Allah *Glorified is He* describes the believers' reward as a 'great triumph.' This is because when there is a conflict between truth and falsehood or between two falsehoods, we have two results: the first is when the two powers are equal and no one of them achieves victory in the conflict – there is neither a victorious nor a defeated party. The second case is when one of the two powers achieves victory, so we have a victorious party and a defeated one.

The easiest result of a battle is when it is fluctuating, that is, there is no winner or loser. This is due to the fact that when a party is defeated, it loses the goodness of victory and suffers the humiliation of defeat.

Those who believe and do good deeds will achieve a great triumph. First, they will be removed away from the Fire and be saved from its torment. Were this salvation be their only reward, it would be enough. So, how great their triumph will be if they are admitted to paradise after being removed away from the Fire! Afterwards, they take their positions in paradise in proportion to the severity of the persecution they suffered on account of their religion. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…that is the great triumph.' (*al-Buruj:* 11) So, we have a 'great triumph' and the 'greater triumph,' as He *Glorified is He* says elsewhere: '…and best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure; that is the grand achievement.' (*at-Tawba:* 72)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّ بَطۡشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ يُبۡدِئُ وَيُعِيدُ ﴿١٣﴾ وَهُوَ ٱلۡغَفُورُ ٱلۡوَدُودُ ﴿١٤﴾
ذُو ٱلۡعَرۡشِ ٱلۡمَجِيدُ ﴿١٥﴾ فَعَّالٞ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾

[Prophet], your Lord's punishment is truly stern [12] it is He who brings people to life, and will restore them to life again [13] and He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Loving [14] The Glorious Lord of the Throne [15] He does whatever He will [16] (The Quran, *al-Buruj:* 12-16)

These verses tell us about a general, lasting fact, that is, Allah *the Almighty* sternly punishes the disbelievers in all times and places. The story of the Makers of the Trench is a case in point. It is clear here that the address is directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Consequently, the stern punishment, referred to in this verse in question, serves as a threat for the disobedient disbelievers who lived at the time of his *peace and blessings be upon him* *Da'wah*. Here, the Arabic word *Batsh* means to seize violently and sternly. The pronoun in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…your Lord…' (*al-Buruj:* 12) refers to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is thus clear that the threat is directed to those who oppose his Call and persecute the believers by torturing them and mocking them.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* reminds us about the grounds for afflicting His stern punishment on those disbelievers, saying: '…it is He who brings people to life, and will restore them to life again.' (*al-Buruj:* 13) The two edges of existence, which are bringing to life and resurrection, are fully controlled by Allah *the Almighty* Alone, without any partner. His punishment is stern because He *Glorified is He* possesses the absolute Power that no other power equates or overcomes. Thus, no one can prevent His stern punishment or even support someone else against it, for He *the Almighty* seizes sternly. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* protects while none can protect against Him.

The verse in question, according to Muslim scholars, refers to the topic of bringing to life and Resurrection. Another possible interpretation is that Allah *the Almighty* repeats the punishment that He *Glorified is He* inflicted on a certain previous nation by way of punishing another one. That is to say that as long as His *Glorified is He* punishment for the disbelieving previous nations was stern, then His for the disbelievers who witnessed the Call of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, would also be stern.

A third possible interpretation is that Allah *the Almighty* causes the whole universe to experience progressive and regressive circulations. This is observed in the circulation of all the beings in the universe, as in the case of water. The amount of water that He *the Almighty* created in the world is the same; it neither increases nor decreases. However, it experiences a circulation where it decreases in some areas and increases in others.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Loving...' (*al-Buruj:* 14), it means that He *the Almighty* is the Most Forgiving for the sinners and the Most Loving for the obedient servants. Both these Divine Attributes make man strongly believe in that God and greatly love that belief.

The Attribute 'Most Forgiving,' unlike 'Forgiving,' expresses hyperbole and intensiveness; however, we should correctly understand the meaning of hyperbole with regard to the Attributes of Allah *the Almighty*. This is because hyperbole is mainly related to the created beings whose attributes fluctuate between strength and weakness. In other words, due to the undeniable fact that the human being's attributes are fluctuating, hyperbole is thus utilized in order to express their strength. On the contrary, Allah's Attributes are unchangeable. So, when we say that the Attribute 'Most Forgiving' expresses hyperbole, this does not mean that His *Glorified is He* Attributes are fluctuating, for all of them are always perfect. Rather, the difference between the Forgiving and the Most Forgiving is only that the effect of the latter is greater on those who are the recipient of the bestowals of that Attribute.

In the same connection, some people argue over the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants.' (*Fussilat:* 46) It is well-known that the intensified attribute affirms the basic meaning of that attribute. For example, if we say, 'So and so is an authority,' this means that s/he is basically knowledgeable. By contrast, when we negate the intensified attribute, its basic meaning is not necessarily negated. For instance, if we say, 'So and so is not an authority,' this does not necessarily mean that s/he is not knowledgeable.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants...' (*Fussilat:* 46) if we negate the intensified attribute of injustice, does this mean that He *Glorified is He* is unjust – Allah forbid?! In order to clarify this point, we should state that this is a wrong understanding that stems from attributing the intensiveness to Allah's Attribute of not being unjust. In reality, however, the object of intensification is related to the recipient of this Attribute. What does this mean? If we reflect on the verse: '…and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants...' (*Fussilat:* 46) we find that He *the Almighty* does not say that He is not the least unjust to the 'servant', but rather to the 'servants', in the plural form. If He *the Almighty* had said that He is not unjust to the servant, then the attribute of injustice could have been attributed to Him. However, the verse is talking about all the servants. The aspect of the intensiveness in any attribute is either related to its strength or the multiplicity of its occurrences to the recipient.

Let us give an example to further illustrate this fact; if we say that so and so is gluttonous -which is the intensified attribute of 'eater' - then this action of eating could be intensive in itself, that is, s/he eats the meals suitable to ten people; or s/he eats moderately, but many times every day. In this sense, we can understand that if the act of injustice takes place, it will be in proportion to the strength of the unjust person, as the weak one never acts unjustly. So, were He *Glorified is He* to act unjustly, His injustice would be strong and powerful. In the same sense, we should understand His intensified Attributes of Gratefulness, accepting the repentance and patience; they are intensified with regard to the creatures who receive the bestowals of these Attributes. As for the Attributes themselves, they are absolutely perfect and unchangeable.

The root of the Arabic word *Ghafr* (Forgiving) means to conceal; one of its derivatives, *Maghfar,* refers to the clothes that the knight wears to protect himself from the strikes of his enemy. Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* forgives the sin and conceals it so that the one who commits it averts being exposed before the people. That is why the Islamic Law prohibits us from seeking to expose other people's faults. As for the Attribute 'Most Forgiving,' it is related to the Recompense in the Hereafter. It entails pardoning those who repented of their sins, as well as those who committed sins but did not repent. If they are monotheists and meet with Allah *the Almighty* without believing in any partner with Him, then they will receive an intensive Forgiveness. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Say: O my servants! Who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether...’ (*az-Zumar:* 53).

Those who commit the major sin of polytheism are excluded from receiving Allah’s Forgiveness. That is why when Ibn 'Abbas recited this verse, he said, ‘Polytheism is an exception here.’ Why? This, in actuality, prevents its contradiction to Allah’s saying: ‘Surely, Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases…’ (*an-Nisa’:* 48). This prevents the contradiction of the Quranic texts. In fact, we can understand that polytheism is excluded even without referring to the other verse, for His saying: ‘Say: O my servants! Who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether...’ (*az-Zumar:* 53) carries the meaning of excluding polytheism, as the words ‘My servants’ connote sincerity and worshipping Him *the Almighty* Alone. To those who acted extravagantly against their own souls, it is said: ‘…do not despair of the Mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether...’ (*az-Zumar:* 53). The disbeliever or the polytheist is not called ‘a sinner,’ for s/he is outside the fold of Islam. The sinner, on the other hand, believes in the Islamic precepts and principles, but violates some of them, whereas the disbeliever and the polytheist do not believe in them at all.

As for the Divine Attribute ‘Most Loving’, it denotes intensive kindness and affection with the beloved one. The morphological scale ‘*Fa'ul’* can be used as an object like *Rasul* (messenger), which means ‘someone sent.’ Further, it can be used as a subject like *Wadud* (loving), which means to show affection towards the beloved one. This word can also be an object, that is, the love is shown to Allah *the Almighty* by His servant who loves Him. So, the affection is reciprocal between Him *Glorified is He* and His servant. Out of His Benevolence and Generosity, He *the Almighty* shows love towards His servant. Another servant may seek love with Him *Glorified is He* until He *the Almighty* shows love towards him/her. Such a servant pursues that objective and spares no effort to reach it. Here, we should differentiate between two cases: a man who keeps knocking on the door until it is opened to him/her, and the one who is actually invited by the owner of the house to get in.

So, there are two cases for having love and affection with Allah *the Almighty* and receiving His Benevolence. The first case is a manifestation of His Benevolence, which makes the servant attain to obedience to Him *Glorified is He*. The second case is when the servant exerts his/her utmost effort and attains to His Benevolence through his/her obedience to Him *Glorified is He*. One can take either way to attain to Allah's Pleasure - this is what we should care about. Out of His Lovingness, He *the Almighty* instills the love of the ones whom He loves into the hearts of the creatures, a fact which is affirmed by the following Prophetic Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad states: 'When Allah loves a slave, He calls out Gabriel and says: "I love so-and-so; so love him." Then Gabriel loves him. After that he (Gabriel) announces to the inhabitants of the heavens that Allah loves so-and-so; so love him; and the inhabitants of the heavens (the angels) also love him and then make people on earth love him.'(1)

Then Allah *the Almighty* mentions some of His Attributes that proves His stern punishment, saying: 'The Glorious Lord of the Throne.' (*al-Buruj:* 15) The words 'the Throne, the Chair, the Balance and the Preserved Tablet' are unseen objects. They were reported to us through a truthful conveyer and that is why we firmly believe in them. We do not believe in them just because we heard about them, but rather because they were conveyed to us through a truthful person who conveyed them from Allah *the Almighty*. After believing in these unseen objects, the mind should not delve into thinking about their reality because they are beyond the human intellectual abilities and perceptions. For example, when He *Glorified is He* tells us that He has a Throne, we must believe in its existence without thinking about its reality or quality. As He *the Almighty* did not reveal that knowledge to us, we should say, 'Allah knows best.' When we say that the Queen of Sheba had a throne, can we negate the fact of its existence just because we did not see it? Thus, perceiving an object is not a condition to believe in its existence.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 7625; and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8392.*

The matter is all about our trust in the truthfulness of the conveyer. So, if the unseen object is comparable to something tangible we have in the worldly life, we should perceive the unseen one in the light of our knowledge of the tangible one. Further, when the like of Allah’s Attributes are found in the created beings, we must attribute them to Him *Glorified is He* in the sense that befits Him and attribute them to the created beings in the sense that befits them – in the light of His saying: ‘Nothing is like Him…’ (*ash-Shura:* 11).

If we are still unable, despite scientific advancements, to know the reality of some tangible objects in our lives, like electricity, how can we hope to know the reality of unseen matters related to Allah *the Almighty*? If one’s mind is unable to realize the essence of these objects, then this inability itself serves as the best answer for one’s inquiry in this regard, as these matters are beyond perception and mental realization. We have previously said that ‘the inability to realize something is a matter of realization in itself’. For example, if a father gives his child a test beyond his/her level, like that given in the faculty of engineering, the child will realize that s/he cannot answer the test because it depends on knowing information unavailable to him/her in the secondary school. So, s/he is truthful when s/he says, ‘I cannot answer it.’ Another pupil may try hard to answer that test, which is beyond his/her level, and stay up to suppose some answers. However, s/he ultimately does not achieve his/her objective. This indicates that the first pupil is smarter than the second and that the inability to realize something is a matter of realization in itself.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘…the Glorious…’ (*al-Buruj:* 15), it is one of His Names and Attributes, which means the Ample-Giving whose Bestowal is bountiful enough to meet all the requirements of existence. This Attribute calls for magnifying and exalting Him *the Almighty*.

He *the Almighty* then says: ‘He does whatever He will.’ (*al-Buruj:* 16) If He *the Almighty* is fully Able to do whatever He wants, why does He allow the disbelievers to persecute those who believe in Him and His Messengers?! How would this happen while it is against His Will? In fact, He *the Almighty* wants to guide all the people, but the nature of the conflict between the Messengers and their people entails the existence of believers and disbelievers. The human being has an aspect of evil, especially when s/he does not abide by Allah's Way of Guidance. When we review the stories of the Messengers, we find that Prophet Solomon *peace be upon him* was a powerful king, along with being a Prophet. Did we know about any conflict between him and his people? No; he had no opponents because he possessed the kingship and the power that could deter any opponent. Consequently, no one dared to rebel against him, even Balqis, the Queen of Sheba – who also possessed kingship and power – came to him obediently, believing in Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

By contrast, if the Messenger is not supported by the power of kingship, his Call necessarily experiences some ups and downs with respect to his conflict with his opponents. Despite that, the Divine Law states that the ultimate outcome is the victory and the triumph of the Call of Allah. The basics of the Call prescribe that we should clarify to those who want to embrace the religion of Islam that the outcome of this action is not always loveable with respect to the harm that s/he may suffer, including humiliation, beating and being forced into exile. So, s/he should bear the responsibility of that action, for the religion is not always victorious with mundane gains and booties. Rather, its real reward is in the Hereafter. All of this prepares and qualifies the person before embracing Islam.

For this reason, Islam in the Meccan period paid the believers' attention to the reward of the Hereafter. For example, when *Al-Ansar* asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'What is our reward if we fulfil our covenant?' He said, 'Your reward will be the paradise.' He did not tell them that they would defeat their enemy and conquest their territories. This is because the Meccan period was mainly one of preparation and education to compare between the worldly pleasure and that of the Hereafter. This does not mean that the believers will remain in a state of oppression and will get their reward only in the Hereafter; rather, they have a share in the pleasure of worldly life. We should note that Allah *the Almighty* does not grant victory to the believers for the effort they exert, but rather because they have a Message to deliver to the people.

Even when the tyrannical, persecuting and disbelieving group defeats the weak, persecuted and believing one, there exists an important victory for the believing group, namely: its victory over the persecution itself. Some of the oppressed Muslims' salvation from persecution was conditional on uttering a word of disbelief, but they did not utter it. This is in itself a victory far more important than that of the oppressive, tyrannical power of disbelief. Moreover, the oppressed believers' victory over the persecution produces powerful followers that would take up the banner of the Call and strive for its sake. It is an adequate honour for the oppressed people that they were killed on account of upholding a principle, which would be established in the souls of their successors.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

هَلْ أَتَىٰكَ حَدِيثُ ٱلْجُنُودِ ﴿١٧﴾ فِرْعَوْنَ وَثَمُودَ ﴿١٨﴾ بَلِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ فِى تَكْذِيبٍ ﴿١٩﴾
وَٱللَّهُ مِن وَرَآئِهِم مُّحِيطٌۢ ﴿٢٠﴾ بَلْ هُوَ قُرْءَانٌ مَّجِيدٌ ﴿٢١﴾ فِى لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍۭ ﴿٢٢﴾

Have you [not] heard the stories of the forces [17]
of Pharaoh and Thamud? [18] Yet still the disbelievers persist
in denial [19] God surrounds them all [20] This is truly a
glorious Quran [21] [written] on a preserved Tablet [22]
(The Quran, *al-Buruj:* 17 - 22)

The address here is directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The word 'stories' indicates that this account was common to the people and known through the books of history that recorded it. In other words, it is not a new report or a novel account coming from Allah *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* clarifies the word 'forces' as referring to the people of Pharaoh and the people of Thamud - the people of Prophet Saleh *peace be upon him*. We notice the accuracy of the Quranic manner of expression in referring to the tribe of Thamud, like Pharaoh, by the singular form. This indicates that the whole tribe collectively agreed on their enmity towards their Messenger and opposing his Call and Message. This unanimity did not exist in the people of Pharaoh. It was Pharaoh who led them to have enmity towards their Messenger, after claiming his divinity as a god besides Allah *the Almighty*. Consequently, they believed and obeyed him. That is why only Pharaoh is mentioned in the verse as he was their leader and took upon himself the greater part of enmity towards the Messenger and the Call.

Here, the Arabic word *Junud* (soldiers) is the plural of a soldier, which refers to the person who prepares himself for fighting and sacrifice. The interrogation in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Have you [not] heard the stories of the forces?’ (*al-Buruj:* 17) could carry the affirmative meaning, that is, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* had already heard about the stories of these forces. Further, it could connote the negation, that is, he *peace and blessings be upon him* had not heard their stories. In this case, it is the first time for him to hear about their stories.

When Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*, saying: ‘Have you [not] heard…’ (*al-Buruj:* 17), then it is He *the Almighty* Who tells him about their stories. We notice that despite the disbelievers’ keenness on denying Messenger Muhammad’s Call, they did not question these stories or the fate of the denying nations before them. They accepted what was mentioned in the Quran without denial, despite their eagerness to oppose the Call in every possible way. This clearly indicates that they received part of these stories from the People of the Book or the storytellers during their journeys in which they passed by the cities of Saleh and their remnants. So, these stories were known to them.

Allah *the Almighty* gives an example for the disbelievers of Mecca by two previous denying nations that had great history and civilizations. He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Fajr*: ‘… and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excesses in their lands, and spread corruption there: Your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them. Your Lord is always watchful.’ (*al-Fajr:* 9-14) So, He *the Almighty* is always Watchful over all the disbelieving nations like that of Thamud and Pharaoh. The disbelieving people of Quraysh, who denied Messenger Muhammad’s Call, are weak in comparison with these previous nations. Despite their civilization and advancement, He *Glorified is He* seized them with punishment; therefore, can He not seize the disbelievers of Quraysh in the same way, given that they are weaker than these nations?!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Yet still the disbelievers persist in denial...’ (*al-Buruj:* 19) it means that the disbelievers from among Prophet Muhammad’s people are like the deniers before them. Such people deny the Calls of the Messengers at all times and places. They have one objective: to find an argument or excuse to justify their opposing attitude against the call, for if they believed in it, they would have to comply with its commands.

With regard to His saying: ‘Allah surrounds them all...’ (*al-Buruj:* 20) those disbelievers turned their back to Allah *the Almighty* while He *Glorified is He* surrounds them all. They wrongly thought they had escaped from Him, but He *the Almighty* says: ‘…and We are not to be overcome.’ (*al-Ma’arij:* 14)

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: ‘This is truly a glorious Quran [written] on a preserved Tablet.’ (*al-Buruj:* 21-22) These verses indicate that the disbelievers denied the content of the Quran and the fact that it was revealed from Allah *the Almighty*. So, He *the Almighty* affirms that the Quran is truthful in what it conveys and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is truthful in conveying the Message on behalf of Allah *Glorified is He*. Further, the Quran is distinguished from the other Books by the fact that it is perfectly preserved: ‘Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian.’ (*al-Hijr:* 9)

If we carefully reflect on His saying: ‘This is truly a glorious Quran [written] on a preserved Tablet...’ (*al-Buruj:* 21-22) we find that the adjective ‘preserved’ is describing the Tablet and not the Quran. So if the Tablet that contains the Quran is preserved, so what would we think about the preservation of the Quran itself? This actually reassures Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the future of his Call and the future of the eternal Book that he came with. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to him, ‘O Muhammad, do not feel sad and be patient about the denial of your people, for the Book with which you were sent is eternal and preserved from any distortion, whether in the high Assembly or on the earth.’

the chapter of

at-Tariq

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *at-Tariq*[1]

وَٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلطَّارِقِ ﴿١﴾ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلطَّارِقُ ﴿٢﴾
ٱلنَّجۡمُ ٱلثَّاقِبُ ﴿٣﴾ إِن كُلُّ نَفۡسٖ لَّمَّا عَلَيۡهَا حَافِظٞ ﴿٤﴾

By the sky and the night-comer [1] What will explain to you what the night-comer is? [2] The piercing star [3] there is a watcher over every soul [4] (The Quran, *at-Tariq:* 1- 4)

Many previous chapters directed man's attention to the manifestations of Allah's Power in the universe, to the well-established universal signs and to the mighty alteration and destruction that would befall these signs, as well as the whole universe. These universal signs are clearly mentioned in some chapters like *ash-Shams, al-Infitar, al-Buruj* and the chapter in question, *at-Tariq*. As Allah *the Almighty* swears in the chapter of *al-Buruj*, saying: 'By the sky and with towering constellations.' (*al-Buruj:* 1) He *Glorified is He* swears here, saying: 'By the sky and the night-comer.' (*at-Tariq:* 1)

We have said that the word *Sama'* (sky) generally refers to what is over and shadowing you. As for the constructed sky, it is the one that Allah *the Almighty* created without supports to be the canopy of the whole earth. When the

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(1) The chapter of *At-Tariq*, counting 17 verses, is number 87 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Balad* and before the chapter of *Al-Qamar*. Some scholars say that the verse: '[Prophet], let the disbelievers be, let them be for a while...' (*at-Tariq:* 17) is abrogated by the verse of the sword, but this is an unsound opinion, for every verse has its own field and time of application.

scholars talk about the sky, they only consider its highness. Whenever the human mind discovers a new celestial body, it assumes it is the sky. For example, in this age, when the planets going around the sun were discovered, some scholars said, ‘The seven heavens are the seven planets moving around the sun.’ At that time, only seven planets were discovered. Afterwards, however, these scholars’ opinion was refuted when many other planets were discovered. Now, ten planets have been discovered. In reality, all the planets, stars, and orbits are under the lower heaven; that is to say that it, i.e. the sky, is far above these bodies. It is as if those who adopted the previous theory did not reflect on the saying of Allah *the Almighty* about the stars: ‘Surely, We have adorned the nearest heaven with an adornment, the stars.’ (*as-Saffat:* 6) As for the lower heaven, it is preserved and well-established above the stars. He *the Almighty* constructed it perfectly and precisely. We do not know the reality of that construction, and if He *Glorified is He* had willed to reveal that knowledge, He would have told us about it. However, He *the Almighty* kept this matter unseen, beyond our perceptions and experimental sciences. It suffices that we recall the connotations of the word ‘heaven’ when we hear it.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘By the sky and the night-comer...’ (*at-Tariq:* 1) it gives us a picture of a phenomenon we have not really known about its reality. He *the Almighty* defines it to us by its traces and function in the existence. So, it is adequate for the servant who is charged with religious obligations to reflect on the effects of these phenomena, even if s/he does not know their realities. We have said before that making use of something is not conditional on knowing its reality or formation. For example, we make use of the sun without knowing its reality. Likewise, He *the Almighty* pays our attention to the fact that the ‘night-comer’ is a beneficial universal sign.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* clarifies the meaning of the ‘night-comer,’ saying: ‘What will explain to you what the night-comer is? The piercing star.’ (*at-Tariq:* 2-3) If He *Glorified is He* had not clarified it to us, we would not have known anything about it because the human mind only recognises its effects. The night-comer (*Tariq*) is the piercing star. The Arabic word ‘*Tariq’* is an active participle meaning to strike powerfully to produce a sound. One of its derivatives is *Al-Mutraqa* (hammer) that the blacksmith uses. Another derivative is *At-Tareeq*, which is the paved way that we take and walk on by our feet. Linguistically, this word used to refer to the one who takes a way, but it then especially referred to the one who walks at night. As night is the time of tranquillity when the activities decrease and the noise abates, then any movement in that tranquillity is called *Tariq*. When the night-comer finds the doors usually closed, s/he knocks on it to seek permission to get in. In the daytime, however, there is no need for knocking, for the doors are usually open.

Afterwards, the meaning of this word extended to include all that happens to the human being, be it tangible or intangible, like delusion and imagination. That is why it is said, 'We seek refuge in Allah from the coming (*Tariq*) of the concerns.' These are the evil thoughts that change man's good mood, as it is difficult for him/her to eliminate them. Were they tangible, s/he could eliminate them. The spiritual concern, on the contrary, penetrates into the person unconsciously, so it is the worst kind of feelings that overwhelm the person. This is because s/he cannot protect him/herself from it by closing the door or pushing it away, for example.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The piercing star...' (*at-Tariq:* 3) it means that this star pierces darkness with its light. This is one of Allah's signs because He wants to show us how He, the Creator, cares about the created beings. He *the Almighty* made the sun shining at the daytime and the moon lighting up at night. Further, He *Glorified is He* made the stars signs to guide those who are forced to walk or work at night, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And landmarks; and by the stars they find the right way.' (*an-Nahl:* 16) So, the night-comer is the star that pierces the darkness of the night with light. Light is something visible, so why does the Quran call it '*Tariq'* which is something audible? We say that the word *Tariq* is general, referring to what is coming even if it is a mental delusion, imagination or something unheard.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'The piercing star...' (*at-Tariq:* 3) indicates that if the light of that star did not come, the darkness of the night would be incomprehensive, which makes moving at night impossible. This shows the importance of that piercing star and Allah's Care for us during the night and the day.

Afterwards, the subject of the Oath is mentioned: '…there is a watcher over every soul.'(*at-Tariq:* 4) So, what is the relation between the piercing star, by which it is sworn, and the subject of that Oath? We say that the Arabic word *Hafizh* (keeper or watcher) here either connotes the keepers' love and care for the protected ones; or it means the watcher that always keeps an eye on the person. If we consider the first meaning, we find that Allah's saying: 'For his sake there are angels following one another, before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah's Commandment…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 11) means that guarding the human being is a command issued by Allah *the Almighty*. This is due to the fact that s/he experiences many calamities that his/her power cannot prevent and his/her acumen cannot avert. When s/he is saved from such calamities, s/he says that this was a Divine predestination and s/he was saved only by Allah's Will. So, there are Angels in charge of protecting man from the events that are beyond his/her capacity.

If we yet consider the second meaning, which is watchfulness, then it is corroborated with His saying: 'Over you stand watchers, noble recorders.' (*al-Infitar:* 10-11) Thus, His saying: '…there is a watcher over every soul...' (*at-Tariq:* 4) clearly shows man his/her rights and duties. Accordingly, His *Glorified is He* saying: 'Over you stand watchers…' (*al-Infitar:* 10) if the first meaning is considered, signifies that there are keepers for the human beings and recording watchers over them.

Further, in His saying: '…there is a watcher over every soul...' (*at-Tariq:* 4) the Arabic particle *In* is synonymous with the negative particle *Ma*, as in His saying: '…their mothers are no (*In*) others than those who gave them birth…' (*al-Mujadala:* 2). As for the particle *Lamma*, it has many usages in the Arabic language. For example, it negates the verb in the past tense, like *Lam.* However, its negation extends to the present and thus carries the possibility and the expectation of the occurrence of the negated action in the future, as in His saying: 'The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You do not believe but say, We submit; and faith has not yet (*Lamma*) entered into your hearts…' (*al-Hujurat:* 14). This clearly means that Faith has not yet entered into their hearts at the time of revealing this verse, but it is expected that it will enter into them in the future. For example, one may say, 'Our garden has not yielded fruits yet, though all the rest of the gardens have already yielded fruits.' So, this particle changes the meaning of a verb from the present tense to the past.

There is another usage for the particle *Lamma*, which is to denote that the existence of something is conditional on the existence of another, a meaning which is deduced from His saying: 'So when fear had gone away from Ibrahim and good news came to him, he began to plead with Us for Lot's people.' (*Hud:* 74) Likewise, we say, 'When so and so came, we made such and such.' Here, the action of 'making' is conditional on that of 'coming'. The third usage of the particle *Lamma* is to be used as a particle of exception, which is the usage employed in the verse in question. So, the meaning of the verse is that there is no soul except that there is a watcher over it; no one is excluded from having that watcher.

We should reflect on the accurate manner of expression that generalises the watchfulness over all the souls. Despite the fact that the word 'soul' here indicates the generality by itself, it, i.e. the generality was further emphasised by the word 'all', which denotes comprehensiveness. So, no soul is free from being watched by Allah *the Almighty* as all the creatures are under His Observation; and also by the Angels whom He *Glorified is He* charged with recording the deeds of the people and watching them.

Here, there is harmony between Allah's words: 'The piercing star...' (*at-Tariq:* 2-3) and His saying: '…there is a watcher over every soul.' (*at-Tariq:* 4) It is as if the watcher sees everything of man's actions and is ever-watchful over him/her like the piercing star which pierces the darkness, penetrates into the subtle objects and reveals its hidden matters. So, there is an obvious aspect of harmony between the verses as He *the Almighty* then says: 'On the Day when secrets are laid bare.' (*at-Tariq:* 9) This means that the hidden matters will be revealed on the Day of Judgment.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention from a universal sign, which is: 'By the sky and the night-comer...' (*at-Tariq:* 1) to a psychological sign in His saying: '…there is a watcher over every soul.' (*at-Tariq:* 4) He *the Almighty* subjected this universal sign to serve the interest of the human being. In return for this bestowal, s/he should bear the responsibility for something, which is being watched over and held accountable. This is because He *the Almighty* did not create man in vain and does not leave him/her to wander purposelessly. In fact, s/he has a mission and an objective in his/her life, namely: to pursue the way of getting close to Him *Glorified is He*.

For this reason, the subsequent verses direct him/her to the universal signs related to his/her creation. Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَلْيَنظُرِ ٱلْإِنسَـٰنُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ ﴿٥﴾ خُلِقَ مِن مَّآءٍ دَافِقٍ ﴿٦﴾ يَخْرُجُ مِنۢ بَيْنِ ٱلصُّلْبِ وَٱلتَّرَآئِبِ ﴿٧﴾
إِنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ رَجْعِهِۦ لَقَادِرٌ ﴿٨﴾ يَوْمَ تُبْلَى ٱلسَّرَآئِرُ ﴿٩﴾ فَمَا لَهُۥ مِن قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Man should reflect on what he was created from [5] He is created from spurting fluid [6] then he emerges from between the backbone and breastbone [7] God is certainly able to bring him back to life [8] On the Day when secrets are laid bare [9] he will have no power and no one to help him [10] (The Quran, *at-Tariq:* 5 - 10)

We can notice harmony between these verses and those in the very beginning of the chapter in question. That is to say that His *Glorified is He* saying: 'By the sky and the night-comer—What will explain to you what the night-comer is?' (*at-Tariq:* 1-2) is in harmony with His saying: 'Man should reflect on what he was created from. He is created from spurting fluid.' (*at-Tariq:* 5-6) Further, His saying: '…there is a watcher over every soul...' (*at-Tariq:* 4) is in harmony with His saying: 'Allah is certainly able to bring him back to life. On the Day when secrets are laid bare he will have no power and no one to help him.' (*at-Tariq:* 5-10)

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Man should reflect on what he was created from...' (*at-Tariq:* 5) we know that the creation of man is a factual reality that no one doubts. S/he is required to reflect on his/her creation and ponder on his/her image, constitution and perfection of his/her creation, given that s/he is a master in this universe and is distinguished from all the other genera in the existence. All these genera serve him/her, as Allah *the Almighty* has granted him/her a successive privilege. We have explained before that the plants are superior to the inanimate objects, but inferior to the animals. Man in his/her turn is superior to the animal, as s/he is distinguished by the mind and the thought. So, s/he has the loftiest rank in existence and is a master in the universe.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* calls man to reflect on the matter of his/her creation through the mind and thought that He *Glorified is He* gifted to him/her. In fact, reflecting on the Quran does not mean to look at it, but rather to think about it and ponder on its premises that lead to the truth. We know for sure that the scientific experiment starts with observation, and then the experiment is conducted according to the observation in order to reach the scientific fact. Thus, deep reflection, not the superficial one, is essential for reaching the truth.

After calling upon man to reflect on his/her creation, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about how He created us, saying: 'He is created from spurting fluid, then he emerges from between the backbone and breastbone.' (*at-Tariq:* 6-7) These verses bear a fact that modern science has proven, that is, man's creation comes from spurting fluid that emerges from between man's backbone and woman's breastbone. The fluid is described as 'spurting,' which means that it is naturally and unwillingly discharged. No one can prevent it because it is spurting by nature. If man reached the highest sexual state, that fluid spurts and cannot be prevented. This is the only state when that fluid is described as 'spurting,' otherwise is it calm.

The address in these verses is directed to mankind who was created from spurting fluid. So, what about Adam *peace be upon him* who was created from dust? Scholars say that Allah *the Almighty* wants to direct man's attention to the origin of his/her existence because s/he was ignorant about it. As for Adam, he witnessed how he was formed by Allah's Hand and saw the breathing of the Spirit into him, i.e. he had an idea about his creation. By contrast, his offspring does not know anything about the nature of their creation.

Creation means to bring something into existence out of nothing. It can be absolutely non-existent or existent in a form that does not seem to be the ultimate perfect form of the man. For example, if we consider the material from which man is created, we find that man's sperm mixes with the ovum, producing a cell that splits wonderfully, even though it has no mind or will.

This information is provided by embryologists. Allah *the Almighty* accurately directs this cell to its right way. One of its parts forms the bones; another forms the muscles, the organs, etc. This cell can never do that except if there is a Powerful, Wise Creator Who organises everything and guides every cell to its function in forming the human being, the marvellous creation. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: '…He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal).' (*Ta Ha:* 50)

Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the matter of creation in order to refute the idea that man's creation always depends on casual factors, that is, the spurting fluid that emerges from between the backbone and the breastbone. Undoubtedly, this is the common way of man's creation. However, He *the Almighty* is fully Able to create without any causal factors, spurting fluid, backbone or breastbone, given that He *Glorified is He* created Adam, our original father, out of nothing. In addition, He *Glorified is He* created by all the possible ways of creation. Adam was created without a father and a mother while the overwhelming majority of the people were created with a father and a mother. Further, Prophet Jesus *peace be upon him* was created by a mother without a father, and Eve was created by a father without a mother. Moreover, there could be a father and a mother, but they do not bring children to birth. So, this matter does not depend on the causal factors, but rather on the Power of the Ultimate Cause Who says: 'Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons. Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren.' (*ash-Shura:* 49-50) He *the Almighty* mentions the barrenness even with the existence of the causal factors of bringing children to birth.

Elsewhere, He *the Almighty* describes the spurting fluid, saying: '…underrated water.' (*al-Mursalat:* 20) It is a valueless, underrated fluid that cannot form anything by itself. It is Allah's Omnipotence that gives it that vitality and the miraculous, wonderful movement. If we refer to the lower genus, we find that the process of man's creation is similar to that of the animal; it is created from spurting fluid that emerges from between the backbone and the breastbone to produce an insensible animal. To reiterate, the matter of creation does not depend on the spurting fluid that emerges from between the backbone and the breastbone; rather, is it all about the Will and the Power of the Creator and the Originator of the universe.

The man who was formed in a beautiful image and given many faculties should have asked about his/her origin and whether this origin negates his/her human privileges. S/he should know that a Powerful Creator and Originator is the reason behind the creation of the honoured man from an underrated fluid; otherwise, the animal is produced in the same way, yet it remains an animal. That is why we do not say that the animal has a Spirit, but rather grows bigger. For this reason, scholars opine that the fetus in its mother's womb is not considered a human being except after the passage of 120 days. Before that time, it is viewed as animally growing. In this connection, it is narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* says: 'The creation of you (humans) is gathered in the form of semen in the womb of your mother for 40 days, then it becomes a clinging thing in similar (period), then it becomes a lump of flesh like that, then Allah sends an angel who breathes the life into it.'(1)

Does this growth not mean that the foetus has a Spirit before 120 days? Scholars hold the position that this is called 'the animal growth' and not the human Spirit that is breathed into the foetus after 120 days. As for the animal growth, it is similar to the plant growth when one seeds the earth with grains and irrigates it to produce, by Allah's Grace. Likewise, the sperm has the potentiality of the animal outgrowth and when it is mixed with the ovum, this animal outgrowth plays its part. Afterwards, the human Spirit is breathed into the foetus. For this reason, scholars permit abortion before the elapse of 120 days of pregnancy, as the human Spirit, before that time, does not really exist. It is true the foetus in this case can grow to be a human being, but it has not reached that time yet.

Some researchers misunderstood the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He is created from spurting fluid, then he emerges from between the backbone and breastbone.' (*at-Tariq:* 6-7) They wrongly thought that man's sperm, which exists in the semen and is produced by sexual intercourse, is similar to woman's fluid that also comes out by that process. This is not true because the woman's fluid has nothing to do with the creation of the human being, as s/he is created by man's sperm and woman's ovum. They mix in a time irrelevant to that of the sexual intercourse. The pregnancy takes place when there is an encounter between the sperm and the ovum. Thus, the spurting fluid is related to the man, while woman's fluid is in the ovum.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3332 and 6594.*

In this connection, some Orientalist researchers raised some misconceptions about Allah's Words. We should note here that they have evil intentions and plot against Islam. After they authenticate a Hadith, they criticise its textual soundness, making some people wrongly think they are serving Islam and its sacred texts. This is counter to the reality, for they actually care for authenticating the Hadiths to show that there is a contradiction between the Quran and the authentic *Sunna*. However, their endeavour is fruitless and in vain. Their objective is not to authenticate Messenger Muhammad's Hadiths, but to claim the existence of contradictions between the sacred texts.

They discussed the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: 'As for the child, if the man's discharge proceeds the woman's discharge, the child attracts the similarity to the man, and if the woman's discharge proceeds the man's, then the child attracts the similarity to the woman.'(1) A superficial view of this Hadith finds it contradictory to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'He is created from spurting fluid, then he emerges from between the backbone and breastbone.' (*at-Tariq:* 6-7) This view concludes that this Hadith contradicts the modern science that has proven that the ovum plays no part in determining masculinity or the femininity of the fetus and that man's fluid controls that matter. Such people understood that fluid carrying the masculine quality as coming from man and the feminine one as coming from the woman. However, the one who ponders carefully on the Hadith finds the key to refuting this misconception in the words, 'If …proceeds. …' The act of proceeding indicates that the fluids start racing from the same point and towards one direction. This confirms the fact that the masculine and the feminine sperm come out of the same source, namely: - the man. The word ‘to proceed’ would not have been used if the fluids are coming from two different sources. Thus, it is man’s sperm that carries the masculine or feminine quality. As for the ovum, its role is to receive the sperm. So, we should carefully read the words of the Hadith and pay attention to these misconceptions in order to refute them. Another narration of the Hadith uses the word *Ghalab* instead of *Sabaqa* (to proceed), but these words are synonymous.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3938; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 12970; and 'Abd ibn Humayd, Musnad, Hadith no. 1387.*

Afterwards, the context of the verses tells us about another kind of creation, stating: ‘Allah is certainly able to bring him back to life. On the Day when secrets are laid bare.’ (*at-Tariq:* 8-9) The context here is about Resurrection on the Day of Judgment. As Allah *the Almighty* affirms the greatness of man’s formation, faculties and privileges, despite being created from underrated fluid, which plainly indicates His Care for him/her and entails that s/he should do something in return. We have previously said that there is a duty in return for every right. Allah has given man some blessings and in return he should carry out certain tasks. Further, we have said that the chapter in question gathers the two edges of man’s life before the Hereafter: bringing him/her into existence to the worldly life and resurrecting him/her in the Hereafter. In fact, one’s worldly life is short, as it is presented in his/her fleeting lifetime in it. It is not an end, but rather a means to reach a greater and everlasting end. If the Creator cares for the created beings in the worldly life in the way we have described, so what about His care for them in the Hereafter?

That is why Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention from the first creation to the Resurrection. It is as if man has nothing to do with the stage of the worldly life, or s/he was not created for its sake. S/he should live in it in order to be delighted by his/her Creators’ Care and Love through following his/her Way of Guidance. We have previously explained that the logic and reason, let alone faith and religious law, firmly believe in the existence of another life other than the fleeting, short, worldly life. Otherwise, how would the believer and the disbeliever, the wrongdoer and the wronged one, and the righteous and the corrupt have the same fate? That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Does man think that he will be left neglected?’ (*al-Qiyama:* 36) Then He *the Almighty* reminds the man about his/her origin, saying: ‘Had he not been a sperm from semen emitted? Then he was a clinging clot, and [Allah] created [his form] and proportioned [him] And made of him two mates, the male and the female.' (*al-Qiyama:* 37-39)

Thus, the creation and origination are not meant for the worldly life, but rather for a greater and everlasting objective. In fact, the worldly life is just a bridge for reaching the Hereafter. As there is a watcher over everyone, man should consider the worldly life as a farm whose fruits yield in the Hereafter, which is greater and everlasting. Otherwise, what is the importance of the watcher if the worldly life was created purposelessly and is left neglected? Thus, the existence of the watcher that records the deeds indicates the existence of the Reckoning, as He *the Almighty* says here: 'Allah is certainly able to bring him back to life; on the Day when secrets are laid bare.' (*at-Tariq:* 8-9) So, the One Who will hold us accountable on the Day of Judgment is Omniscient and All-Seeing. He *Glorified is He* neither becomes inattentive nor sleeps. Further, not an atom's weight of our deeds is hidden from Him *Glorified is He*.

As for Allah's saying: 'On the Day when secrets are laid bare,' (*at-Tariq:* 8-9) it means that the hidden matters and secrets of the soul will be exposed. So, if these hidden matters will be revealed, then what about the apparent ones? With regard to His saying: '…he will have no power and no one to help him,' (*at-Tariq:* 10) it means that man will have no power on the Day of Judgment. He *the Almighty* says about having power: 'And prepare against them whatever you are able of power…' (*al-Anfal:* 60). So, on the Day of Resurrection, man will have no power, as s/he will be deprived of wealth, high position, friends, and authority. Further, s/he does not have any helper to support or guard him/her. Thus, s/he loses hope to find a supporter or protector to defend him/her, as He *the Almighty* says: '…then you would not have found any helper against Us.' (*al-Isra':* 75) S/he will not find anyone to defend or support him/her as it is He *the Almighty* Who gives support to the man. So, how can s/he find a supporter other than Him *the Almighty*?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَٱلسَّمَآءِ ذَاتِ ٱلرَّجۡعِ ﴿١١﴾ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ ذَاتِ ٱلصَّدۡعِ ﴿١٢﴾
إِنَّهُۥ لَقَوۡلٞ فَصۡلٞ ﴿١٣﴾ وَمَا هُوَ بِٱلۡهَزۡلِ ﴿١٤﴾

By the sky and its recurring rain [11] by the earth that cracks open! [12] This is truly a decisive statement [13] it is not something to be taken lightly [14]
(The Quran, *at-Tariq:* 11-14)

After talking about bringing man back to life, saying: ‘Allah is certainly able to bring him back to life.’ (*at-Tariq:* 8) He *the Almighty* supports this fact by making mention of the perceived universal signs in the heavens and the earth. This is because the disbelievers of Mecca who lived at the time of the revelation questioned the matter of Resurrection and bringing the people back to life after death. Consequently, He *the Almighty* says: ‘By the sky and its recurring rain, by the earth that cracks open!’ (*at-Tariq:* 11-12) These verses use the surrounding phenomena to prove that the matter of Resurrection after death is possible and even easy. Resurrecting people on the Day of Judgment is comparable to the circulation of the water in the universe.

So, His saying: ‘By the sky and its recurring rain,’ (*at-Tariq:* 11) refers, according to scholars, to the recurrence of the rain. It is one of the manifestations of the circulation of water in the universe. The evaporation of seawater forms the clouds in the sky and then the rain falls. That is why the rain is called *Raj'* (recurring), as it returns once again. We only benefit from water when it falls down from the sky to the earth. In this case, it will be sweet water, which is suitable for drinking and irrigating the crops. The one who can cause the rain to recur is fully Able to resurrect the human being, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Allah is certainly able to bring him back to life.’ (*at-Tariq:* 8) For that reason, we read in the chapter of *adh-Dhariyat*: ‘I swear by the wind that scatters far and wide, Then those clouds bearing the load (of minute things in space). Then those (ships) that glide easily, Then those (angels who) distribute blessings by Our Command; What you are threatened with is most surely true, And the judgment must most surely come about.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 1-6)

Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* uses the entire circulation of the water in the universe as a proof for the facts mentioned in His saying: ‘What you are threatened with is most surely true, And the judgment must most surely come about.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 5-6) These verses affirm that the Day of Judgment is true, and it will for sure come to pass. Someone may ask, 'Why is water circulation especially mentioned? Scholars say that this is because all its stages are perceived by all the people. Even the cup of water that a person drinks could have been drunk millions of times. This is due to the fact that the water that Allah *Glorified is He* created in the universe neither increases nor decreases. It just circulates in the way we know.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…by the earth that cracks open!' (*at-Tariq:* 12) it means that the earth splits open so that the plants come out of it. So it is as if His saying: 'By the sky and its recurring rain, by the earth that cracks open!' (*at-Tariq:* 11-12) is another form of creation. This is because the rain is similar to the spurting fluid, and the earth that cracks open is like the womb that receives that fluid. Thus, the entire life is a set of harmonious laws that are controlled by one law applicable to all the created beings, be they heavenly or earthly.

After the creation comes the role of Allah's Ever-Watchfulness and sustaining Power that provide the created beings with continuous Care and Protection.

The mission does end at the stage of creation, as Allah *the Almighty* continues to provide sustenance for the created beings. The One Who gives life sustains it as well. He *Glorified is He* gives life through the spurting fluid that emerges from between the backbone and the breastbone. Further, He *the Almighty* sustains life through the means mentioned in His saying: 'By the sky and its recurring rain, by the earth that cracks open.' (*at-Tariq:* 11-12)

In order to direct our attention from the matter of creation and the universal signs to the Quran, He *the Almighty* says: 'This is truly a decisive statement.' (*at-Tariq:* 13) This signifies that the Quran judges between the disputing parties. Further, it provides the decisive statement in all the issues it discusses. This verse indicates that disputation would arise among the Muslims themselves or between them and other groups. The decisive statement with regard to these disputations would be the Book of Allah, as the disputing parties need a third one to judge between them. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* alludes to the fact that His universe would always have some upright people with a sound natural disposition who can adjudicate these disputations. So, the words 'decisive statement' indicate the existence of disputation between two parties. Consequently, He *the Almighty* either decides in favour of one of them or shows that both of them are wrong.

For this reason, we clarified that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And thus We have made you a medium (just) nation that you may be the bearers of witness to the people and (that) the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you…' (*al-Baqara:* 143) is an honour for this *ummah*. This is because He *the Almighty* sent Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* revealed the Quran to him and made him bear witness that he had conveyed Allah's Way of Guidance to the *ummah*. Further, the Muslims are witnesses against the rest of the nations because He *the Almighty* sent the Quran to them. Witnessing against them means that these nations are on the wrong path; otherwise, we would be witnesses in their favour. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says to the believers, 'You have been raised during a corrupt time, for both of the disputing parties are wrong. So, I did not select a witness belonging to either of them, but rather, I selected the believing group to bear witness that both of them are wrong.'

So, the Quran '…is truly a decisive statement.' (*at-Tariq:* 13) It is the criterion for the ethical matters. It was sent down while all the people were in error. The people of Mecca were idolatrous and the people of the Book abandoned their Books by either distorting or concealing them. With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'It is not something to be taken lightly,' (*at-Tariq:* 14) 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'In the Book of Allah is news for what happened before you, and information about what comes after you, and judgment for what happens between you. It is the criterion (between right and wrong) without jest. Whoever among the oppressive abandons it, Allah crushes him, and whoever seeks guidance from other than it, then Allah leaves him to stray.' So, the Quran should not be taken as a game or jest, as it was sent down with the truth and not falsehood. Accordingly, it should be held in awe in people's chest and be glorified in their hearts, as the one who recites or listens to it will have a lofty rank.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا ﴿١٥﴾ وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا ﴿١٦﴾ فَمَهِّلِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ أَمْهِلْهُمْ رُوَيْدًۢا ﴿١٧﴾

They plot and scheme [15] but so do I [16] [Prophet], let the disbelievers be, let them be for a while [17]
(The Quran, *at-Tariq:* 15 - 17)

The meaning of these verses is that Allah *the Almighty* schemes and plots against the disbelievers of Mecca because they were plotting against Islam and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This Quranic manner of expression is called '*Al-Mushakala,*' as in His saying: '…And they planned a plan, and We planned a plan while they perceived not.' (*an-Naml:* 50) This manner of expression means to mention a word expressing a linguistic meaning that does not collocate with the next word. We have explained this matter in a poet's saying,

In a clear morning, my fellows intended to have breakfast
And sent their messenger specially to me
The asked, 'What should we cook for you?'
I said, 'Cook me a cloak and a shirt'

The meaning is that those people invited the poet to have breakfast with them, but he was in dire need for clothes, not for food. So he said, 'Cook me a cloak and a shirt.' He did not say, 'Sew a cloak and a shirt for me.' This is because the word 'cook' was mentioned before these words. This is the meaning of *Al-Mushakala*. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: 'And the recompense of evil is punishment (literally, evil) like it…' (*ash-Shura:* 40). It is known that the recompense of an evil deed is a punishment. It is just called 'evil' because it is mentioned next to the word 'evil,' which is mentioned first.

Now, how can we understand the attribute of scheming and plotting when they are attributed to Allah *the Almighty*: '…and they devised plans and Allah too had arranged a plan; and Allah is the best of planners.' (*al-Anfal:* 30) Plotting and scheming mean to harm your enemy through trickery because you cannot confront him/her face to face. Plotting indicates the inability of the plotter, for if s/he had the power to confront his/enemy, s/he would do so. That is why plotting and scheming are the attributes of the weak people, as the poet says, It is weak, but when it gets a chance,

It kills; this is the power of the weak

When a weak person has an opportunity, s/he seizes it and never misses it, as s/he knows it will come only once. By contrast, the strong one may pardon his/her enemy because s/he can get another chance to harm him/her if s/he wants. Thus, scheming, plotting and planning are self-evidence for the weakness of the one who devises them. Such a person can only defeat his/her enemy through trickery and plotting. Scheming depends on the position of the schemer and whether or not it is known by the one against whom it is schemed. If someone is plotting against someone else while the latter knows about that plot, then it is useless, as s/he knows the plotter's limited power.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'And they planned a plan, and We planned a plan while they perceived not.' (*an-Naml:* 50) This verse means that the disbelievers' scheme against Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* but He *the Almighty* is fully Aware of their scheme as well as their actions. However, His Scheming against them is different as they are neither aware of that scheme nor even able to avert it. Elsewhere, He *the Almighty* says: 'And when those who disbelieved devised plans against you that they might confine you or slay you or drive you away; and they devised plans and Allah too had arranged a plan; and Allah is the best of planners.' (*al-Anfal:* 30) Indeed, Allah *the Almighty* is the best of planners because His plotting is hidden from His enemies and no one can take precaution against it.

Therefore, the disbelievers are scheming against the Call because they cannot confront it face to face, but Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of their scheme. If He *the Almighty* attributes scheming and plotting to Himself, we cannot use them as Lofty Names for Him. That is to say that we should not say, 'Allah is the Schemer and the Plotter.' Rather, we should stop at the limits of what He *the Almighty* told us about Himself. This is because these attributes are employed in the context of the manner of expression called *Al-Mushakala*. Further, plotting and scheming mean to hide something that the plotter thinks s/he has hidden from the one s/he is scheming against. It is impermissible to attribute this meaning to Allah *the Almighty*.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: '[Prophet], let the disbelievers be, let them be for a while.' (*at-Tariq:* 17) This verse tells Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that s/he should not eagerly wait for the punishment to hastily befall the disbelievers. After all, it will inevitably come to pass. If Allah *the Almighty* willed, He would seize them immediately. However, He *Glorified is He* wants to respite the disbelievers to purify the believing group through testing the firmness of their faith, so that only the strong believers, who can bear the hardship of the Call, remain steadfast in following the religion. So, the address here is directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in order to strengthen his heart. It is as if his Lord says to him, 'O Muhammad, I have not sent you to be sacrificed, for I will never forsake you. Indeed, the ultimate outcome is your victory and the prevailing of your Call.'

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[Prophet], let the disbelievers be, let them be for a while,' (*at-Tariq:* 17) means that it is not He *the Almighty* but rather Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who gives them respite for a little while according to the requirements of his then situation. If we review the history of the Call, we find that this respite did not last long; it was just meant to educate the forces of the call to patiently endure the hardship. This respite did not last long, for Allah's Victory and the Opening came to pass soon after that. Consequently, the people embraced Allah's Religion in crowds.

the chapter of

al-A'la

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-A'la*[1]

سَبِّحِ ٱسۡمَ رَبِّكَ ٱلۡأَعۡلَى ﴿١﴾ ٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ ﴿٢﴾ وَٱلَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ ﴿٣﴾
وَٱلَّذِيٓ أَخۡرَجَ ٱلۡمَرۡعَىٰ ﴿٤﴾ فَجَعَلَهُۥ غُثَآءً أَحۡوَىٰ ﴿٥﴾

[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord the Most High [1]
who created [all things] in due proportion [2]
who determined their destinies and guided them [3]
who brought out the green pasture [4] then made it dark
debris [5] (The Quran, *al-A'la:* 1-5)

The context of the chapter of *al-A'la* is in harmony with that of *at-Tariq*. The latter discusses the matter of creation, stating: 'Man should reflect on what he was created from. He is created from spurting fluid, then he emerges from between the backbone and breastbone…' (*at-Tariq:* 5-7). Afterwards, it discusses Allah's sustaining of the creatures through providing them with all the blessings that guarantee their survival, as in His saying: 'By the sky and its recurring rain, by the earth that cracks open!' (*at-Tariq:* 11-12) The chapter of *al-A'la* explains the same topics with more details.

This chapter is called *al-A'la* (the Most High) because this description is mentioned as grounds for glorifying Allah *the Almighty*: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord the Most High.' (*al-A'la:* 1) According to some narrations recorded by Imam Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Abu Dawud and Al-Bayhaqi, this chapter was beloved to the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It was the most beloved one from among the chapters that start with glorification of Allah *the Almighty* like His saying: 'Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night…' (*al-Isra':* 1); and 'Whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of Allah...' (*al-Hadid:* 1). That is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* was keen on reciting it in the Friday Prayers and in the Prayer of the two *Eids*. If Friday coincided with the day of the *Eid*, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would recite it in both occasions. That is to say that he recited it in the morning during the *Eid* Prayer and at noon during the Friday Prayer. This clearly indicates that it has some reassuring remarks. So, what are these remarks?

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[1] The chapter of *Al-A'la,* counting 19 verses, is number 87 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *At-Takwir* and before that of *Al-Layl*. In his *Tafsir, As-Sam'ani* mentions that *Ad-Dahhak* held the position that it was revealed in Medina. However, the first opinion, being revealed in Mecca, is the most preponderant one. See As-Sam'ani*, Tafsir, 6/206.*

The first remark is that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was unlettered living among an illiterate *ummah*. When the revelation descends on him for the first time commanding him to recite, he said, 'I cannot read.' This is the natural response of the human being. However, the revelation commands him another time to read, and he gives the same response. Then the command is repeated for the third time. So, there is a dialogue between a commander and someone unable to obey the command. This is logically accepted because the command is issued from on high. Further, his response is also logical because he *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* negates his ability to read according to his human nature. He did not have the means of reading, for he learned reading neither by himself nor by a teacher.

So, what is the indication of this command? It refutes the claim of those who say that he *peace and blessings be upon him* is the author of the Quran, alleging that it is his luminous, pure thoughts. If this were the case, he would not negate his ability to read. This dialogue proves that we have two persons: a heavenly person issuing a command to read and a commanded person receiving that command. Out of His Omnipotence, Allah *the Almighty* Commands by whatever He wants. Out of his human inability, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* acknowledges that he cannot obey the command. So, both of the two parties are acting in accordance with their true position. Now, how can the reconciliation be achieved in that situation?! The weaker party cannot solve this matter but rather the stronger one can, as He can bestow on the weaker the ability to obey the Command.

Likewise, the chapter of *al-A'la* begins with the command: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*.' (*al-A'la:* 1) Allah *the Almighty* issues this command to the addressee, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and all his followers. The word 'glorify' means to exalt Him *the Almighty* and to categorically declare that there is no one comparable to Him in any aspect. This eliminates any delusion of similarity between the Creator and the created beings. For example, the attribute of existence is shared by Him *Glorified is He* and His creatures. So, one should negate the similarity between them and declare Allah's Existence far exalted over the creatures' existence. This is because they are not equal, for the creatures' existence came out of nothing and will ultimately be nothing. By contrast, Allah's Existence has not come out of nothing and will never turn to be nothing. Thus, as the attribute of existence is shared by the Creator and the created beings, we must hold Him *Glorified is He* far removed from being similar in this Attribute to His creatures.

We notice that when the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High…*' (*al-A'la:* 1) was revealed, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said: 'Use it when prostrating yourself.'(1) That is why we say in our prostration to Allah *the Almighty* 'Glory be to my Lord, the Most High.' If we strictly followed the wording of the verse, we should say, 'Glory be the Name of my Lord, the Most High.' However, when the verse: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord the Most High...' (*al-A'la:* 1) was revealed, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Glory be to my Lord, the Most High.'

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of U'qba ibn A'mir Al-Jahni, who said, 'When the saying of Allah: 'Glorify the name of your mighty Lord.' (al-Waqi'a: 74) was revealed, Messenger of Allah said: 'Use it when bowing, and when His saying: 'Glorify the name of your Lord the Most High.' (al-A'la: 1) was revealed, he said: Use it when prostrating yourself.' See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 17414; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 887; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 869; and Ad-Darimi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1344.*

The Attribute ‘Most High’ constitutes the grounds for glorifying Allah *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* then mentions the grounds for being ‘Most High’, saying: ‘…who created [all things] in due proportion.’ (*al-A‘la:* 2) The Attribute ‘Most High’ is in the superlative form, as He *the Almighty* describes some of His creatures as ‘high,’ saying to Satan: ‘Are you proud or are you of the exalted ones?’ (*Sad:* 75) Here, He *the Almighty* asked Satan about the reason why he did not prostrate to Adam. After all, he is not of the exalted Angels who were not commanded to prostrate. These Angels are the worshipping Angels who have nothing to do with Adam. They are solely occupied with worshipping Allah *the Almighty*.’ So, His being *the Most High* is the reason for glorifying Him *Glorified is He*.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘…who created [all things] in due proportion, (*al-A‘la:* 2) it constitutes the reason for His being ‘Most High.’ That is to say that He *Glorified is He* is Most High because He created. That is why He is Higher than His created beings, as they are the effect of His creative Power. As the created being is created by being affected positively by the creative Power, then the negative affection of this Power entails the non-existence of the created being.

With regard to Allah’s saying: ‘… in due proportion…’ (*al-A‘la:* 2) it means that He *Glorified is He* did not create the creature in any form or image! Rather, He *Glorified is He* created wonderful creatures and formed their images perfectly without any previous pattern. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…who created [all things] in due proportion; who determined their destinies and guided them...’ (*al-A‘la:* 1-2); and ‘You will not see any flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates’ (*al-Mulk:* 3). Thus, He *the Almighty* created everything with a precise account and measure that determines the genus, the kind, the character, the age and the shape. Afterwards, He *the Almighty* determined the destiny of the creatures and guided them to it.

When we reflect on the universe, we find wonders. The human being employs his/her mind to make use of the universal phenomena. This made him/her think that s/he is superior to all the universal creatures. However, the mind is not always right, because it frequently makes mistakes when it contradicts one’s whims. That is why it is said, ‘Whims are the flaws of the mind.' This is because they, i.e. whims, adorn the wrong actions and incite the person to do them. So, the flaw is not in one's mind, but rather in his/her corrupt whims. This is the case with the human being.

If we carefully examine the other genera, we find that the plants come from the grains, which have the potentiality of germination, but cannot yet do that by themselves. Consequently, if the suitable land was prepared, the grains will grow; otherwise, they remain in their form. We should reflect on Allah's Omnipotence and Wisdom which are manifested in the germination of plants after seeding the soils and irrigating them. After the grain splits into two halves, a root stems from it and goes downward while a tiny bud goes upward. The root nourishment depends on the two cotyledons until it becomes strong enough to take in its nourishment from the soil. So, the grain has a potential power that sustains it until the root can take in the nourishment itself. Those who are heedless of Allah's Power in this process believe in the distinctive capillary feature in the process of taking in the nourishment. However, the capillary tube absorbs all the substances without distinguishing between the elements. As for the plant, it takes in only the elements it needs. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And in the earth there are tracts side by side and gardens of grapes and corn and palm trees having one root and (others) having distinct roots-- they are watered with one water, and We make some of them excel others in fruit; most surely there are signs in this for a people who understand.' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4)

He *the Almighty* mentions the water because it dissolves all the elements, saying: '…they are watered with one water, and We make some of them excel others in fruit…' (*ar-Ra'd:* 4) So, who inspired the plant to take in special elements? It is Allah *the Almighty*: 'Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal).' (*Ta Ha:* 50) Afterwards, the scientists believed in the selective quality of the plant, which means that it chooses its elements from among many alternatives. That process entails the existence of a mind, so does the plant have a mind to think and choose? The scientists should not beat around the bushes and should just declare that this process is done by Allah's Power, not by the selective nourishment. It is His Power that inspired the plant to take in the beneficial elements and to leave the harmful ones. This process is undertaken with extreme accuracy that even the thinking minds cannot do.

The thinking person may take a harmful food to see how it tastes. Further, if man is offered food after being full, s/he accepts it. On the contrary, the animal does not eat even one morsel after being satisfied however one tries to feed it. That is why we say to man, who is deceived by his/her mind and wrongly thinks that it distinguishes him/her from the rest of the creatures, ‘Pay attention to the fact that Allah *the Almighty* gave to the inferior genera some features that your mind does not have.’

One of the wonders of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘…who determined their destinies and guided them...’ (*al-A‘la:* 3) is manifested in the tree that is deprived of water. When the soil gets dry, the tree preserves the most important elements at the expense of other secondary elements. So, it seeks the means of sustenance and clings to them until the last moment. In this case, we see its leaves falling so that the nourishment is saved for the trunk and the branches. Then the tree sacrifices the branches to save the trunk. Lastly, the trunk is sacrificed for the sake of the root. As long as the root remains sound, it can regain its power and starts the process of germination.

This process is also manifested in the human being when his/her mind does not intervene in the matter of nourishment. This is because Allah *the Almighty* does not deprive him/her of the bestowals of His being the One Who determines the destinies and guides him/her in the matter beyond his/her intervention. For example, when s/he reaches the stage of growth, all his/her nourishment is directed to the process of building the body. At that stage, the nourishment getting into the body is more than the discharged waste. This nourishment makes up the energy that the body uses during its movement. Then it is used in building the muscles and the cells. Finally, the extra nourishment is stored in the form of fats.

If one is deprived of sustenance and food, the body starts to feed itself through the stored fats. It is wonderful that the fats are one substance, but when they dissolve to nourish the body, they turn to be the various elements that the body needs. This is one of the miracles of creation. Then, if the fats are used up, the nourishment depends on the muscles and then on the bones.

It is as if the body sacrifices everything to ensure the survival of the mind, just as the tree sacrifices all its parts to save the root. These processes take place in man's body while s/he is unaware of them. S/he does not intervene in them with his/her mind; rather, they are carried out according to the Law of the One Who created everything in due proportion, determined the destinies and guided the creatures.

The Quran makes this process a universal fact, for it says in the story of Prophet Zechariah *peace be upon him* who invokes his Lord: 'My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened…' (*Maryam:* 4). The weak bones indicate that he was on the brink of death, as he no longer has any stored sustenance in his body. In the same connection, an Arab proverb reads: 'We underwent a famine that dissolved the fats, another one eliminated the flesh and a third destroyed the bones.' This signifies that the Arabs in the past were knowledgeable about this fact. It is also manifested in the one who seeks food but does not find it until the time of his/her meal passes. S/he feels as if s/he is satisfied and has eaten something already. In fact, s/he has already eaten because his/her body was nourished by the elements that Allah *the Almighty* stored in his/her body.

Modern science has shown us many of the facts that prove Allah's miraculous sign in His creation. For example, the head of the Academy of Science in New York authored a book which is generally centered on Allah's saying: '…who created [all things] in due proportion; who determined their destinies and guided them.' (*al-A'la:* 2-3) Sheikh Sayyed Qutb quoted complete chapters in his book *Fi Zhilal Al-Quran* from that book. All of the facts mentioned in it invite man to believe in Allah, the Omnipotent God. It is mentioned, for example, that sea serpents do not reproduce or carry out the process of fertilisation except in one place in the world. When it reaches the age of fertilisation, it goes to Bermuda. In one place all the sea serpents of the world gather. After the process of fertilisation, the male sea serpent dies and the female goes to its mates' home along with its offspring after giving birth to them. So, how do they know the home of their father? How do they travel that long distance? Wonderfully, one does not find an American sea serpent in the European waters or vice versa.

Further, the wonders of creation include the kingdom of the bees and ants. If we considered the accurate architectural measures, we see that the bee's hive is so precisely and accurately built. Besides its being built proportionally, the worker-bees, the males and the queen have special rooms. Each one of them has its special food suitable for its mission.

As for the ants, if one put a piece of a date or fish in a place, s/he finds that the ants gather around it after a while, without doing anything but observing it. Afterwards, another larger group comes and takes it to the hole. The scientists observe that if we count the ants carrying a quarter of a gram piece, we find they are doubled when the piece weighs half a gram.

We should ponder on the falcon whose power of sight is stronger than the telescope; and the hoopoe's sight of what is beneath the ground. We do not find it eats from the surface of the earth; rather, it pecks on the ground to gets its food out of it. Further, in the story of Prophet Solomon and the hoopoe, there is an indication that it was aware of the issue of kingship and faith. Its awareness may surpass that of the understanding people. With regard to the issue of kingship, it addresses King Solomon, saying: 'I comprehend that which you do not comprehend and I have brought to you a sure information from Sheba. Surely I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given abundance and she has a mighty throne.' (*an-Naml:* 22-23) Further, it addresses him with regard to the issue of Faith, saying: '…found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah, and the Satan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them and thus turned them from the way, so they do not go aright.' (*an-Naml:* 24)

Now, we should ponder on the accuracy of the Quranic manner of expression and the hoopoe's eloquence when it utters according to its knowledge, saying: 'That they do not make obeisance to Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth…' (*an-Naml:* 25). What attracts the hoopoe's attention from among the manifestations of Allah's Power is that He *the Almighty* brings forth what is hidden. Likewise, it brings forth its sustenance from what is hidden in the earth. It knows that mere bringing forth of what is hidden is one of Allah's Signs that prove His Omnipotence. So, the hoopoe talks about the phenomenon that is related to it; in its viewpoint, the reason for prostrating to Allah *the Almighty* is that He brings forth what is hidden in the earth.

This should direct the reasonable man's attention to the fact that s/he has two ways in his/her striving to get closer to Allah *the Almighty*. S/he should worship and love Him *the Almighty* because He deserves that or because of His Blessings and Favours bestowed on him/her. All of the previous phenomena are signs of Allah's wonderful creatures which He created in due proportion. Then He determined their destinies and guided them. The reasonable person should reflect on them so that his/her mind does not deceive him/her. If one's mind does not guide him/her to Faith, then s/he is inferior to the rest of the creatures.

Allah *the Almighty* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his *ummah* to glorify Him, saying: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord *the Most High*.' (*al-A'la:* 1) His saying: 'Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night…' (*al-Isra':* 1) proves that He *the Almighty* has been glorified since eternity before creating the glorifying beings. In other words, glorification and exaltation are affirmed for Him *the Almighty* even before the existence of the glorifying creatures. Consequently, our glorification for Him *Glorified is He* is not beneficial to Him but rather for us. The root of the word *Sabbaha* (to glorify) is mentioned in the Quran in the past form, as in His saying: 'Whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of Allah...' (*al-Hadid:* 1). Thus, the eternal glorification of Allah *the Almighty* is confirmed and it is common in all the places of the universe and at all times, in the past, the present and the future. It is done by all the creatures; all of them glorify and exalt Him, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification...' (*al-Isra':* 44).

We have previously explained that His saying: '…but you do not understand their glorification...' (*al-Isra':* 44) indicates that all the creatures really glorify Him with their special languages; not by indication as some scholars hold. Every genus has a language by which it glorified Allah *the Almighty*. These languages are known to only those on whom He *Glorified is He* bestowed the knowledge of these languages, as in the case of Prophet David *peace be upon him*. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: '…and We made the mountains, and the birds to celebrate Our praise with David; and We were the doers.' (*al-Baqara:* 79); and '…O mountains! sing praises with him, and the birds…' (*Saba':* 10) So, the mountains are glorifying Allah *the Almighty* with David and anyone else. However, He *the Almighty* gave David *peace be upon him* the privilege of understanding the language of these inanimate objects. So, his glorifications corresponded to that of the mountains and birds, as if they are one team singing one ode.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* taught Prophet Solomon *peace be upon him* the language of the ants and the birds. He talked to them and understood their saying. Thus, all the creatures glorify Allah *the Almighty*; even if we cannot understand the language they use to do that. Further, the scholars say that one of Prophet Muhammad's miracles is the glorification of the pebbles in his hand. The correct way to refer to this miracle is saying, 'Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard the glorification of the pebbles in his hand.' This is because the pebbles are glorifying whether they are in his hand or in the hand of Abu Jahl, the enemy of Islam. The privilege in the case of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is that he heard that glorification.

Moreover, one day he, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went out and found some people stopping their riding animals and talking while they were still mounted on their backs. So he said to them, 'You should either use them for travel or dismount and sit down.' This means that they should not use the riding animals as a sitting place because they glorify Allah *the Almighty* more than them. Further, these animals were not created in order to be used as chairs, as He says: 'And they carry your heavy loads to regions which you could not reach but with distress of the souls…' (*an-Nahl:* 7).

Therefore, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[Prophet], glorify the name of your Lord the Most High...' (*al-A'la:* 1) means that the human being should be in harmony with the universal creatures and should not be an exception to these creatures that represent one glorifying organisation. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was only sent to return the human beings to this universal harmony. It is inconceivable that the greatest blessing that man was endowed with, which is the mind, diverts him/her from glorifying Allah *the Almighty* and, therefore, s/he becomes anomalous, unlike the rest of the creatures.

We notice that the rest of the chapter in question constitutes the grounds for glorifying Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Glorify Allah because He has done great Actions, such as creating the creatures in due proportion, determining their destinies, and facilitating the matter of receiving and memorising the revelation for Messenger Muhammad.’ Afterwards, the chapter puts forward some basic principles. It deals with the matter of Creed in His saying: ‘Prosperous are those who purify themselves.’ (*al-A‘la:* 14); the matter of what the tongue utters: ‘Remember the name of their Lord...’ (*al-A‘la:* 15); and the practical behaviour: ‘…and pray.’ (*al-A‘la:* 15) Prayer is a model example for the ritual acts, as it gathers all the kinds of the acts of worship.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

سَنُقْرِئُكَ فَلَا تَنسَىٰٓ (٦) إِلَّا مَا شَآءَ ٱللَّهُۚ إِنَّهُۥ يَعْلَمُ ٱلْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَىٰ (٧) وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ
(٨) فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ ٱلذِّكْرَىٰ (٩) سَيَذَّكَّرُ مَن يَخْشَىٰ (١٠) وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا ٱلْأَشْقَى (١١)
ٱلَّذِى يَصْلَى ٱلنَّارَ ٱلْكُبْرَىٰ (١٢) ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَىٰ (١٣) قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّىٰ (١٤)
وَذَكَرَ ٱسْمَ رَبِّهِۦ فَصَلَّىٰ (١٥) بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَا (١٦) وَٱلْءَاخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰٓ (١٧)
إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَفِى ٱلصُّحُفِ ٱلْأُولَىٰ (١٨) صُحُفِ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ (١٩)

[Prophet], We shall teach you [the Quran] and you will not forget [6] unless God wishes; He knows both what is open and what is hidden [7] We shall show you the easy way [8] So remind, if reminding will help [9] Those who stand in awe of God will heed the reminder [10] but it will be ignored by the most wicked [11] who will enter the Great Fire [12] where they will neither die nor live [13] Prosperous are those who purify themselves [14] remember the name of their Lord, and pray [15] Yet you [people] prefer the life of this world [16] even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting [17] All this is in the earlier scriptures [18] the scriptures of Abraham and Moses[19] (The Quran, *al-A‘la:* 6 - 19)

As a matter of fact, the state of the human soul is prone to change. In some cases, one may forget some religious instruction. However, Allah *the Almighty* promises Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that he will not forget the revelation, as He *the Almighty* says: '[Prophet], We shall teach you [the Quran] and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6) If this was the case with him *peace and blessings be upon him* how can we understand Allah's saying: '…and if the Satan causes you to forget, then do not sit after recollection with the unjust people...' (*al-An'am:* 68)? We should understand this verse as an instruction for his *ummah*. When a command is sent down from heaven, he *peace and blessings be upon him* should be the first one to apply it. So, if he was addressed: '…and if the Satan causes you to forget...' (*al-An'am:* 68) then when everyone else forgets, s/he should use Allah's cure for forgetfulness, that is, to not sit with those who enter into false discourses about Allah's Verses. S/he should leave them and turn away from them.

The revelation used to descend on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with a chapter of the Quran. After the departure of the revelation, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would recite the chapter to his Companions. Those who could memorise or write it down used to do that. Afterwards, he *peace and blessings be upon him* prays and recites the chapter as it was written down. He recites every portion of the Quran in its right place in accordance with what he has dictated to the Companions. How could he *peace and blessings be upon him* be able to memorise the Quran perfectly in that way? This happened because He *the Almighty* says to him: '[Prophet], We shall teach you [the Quran] and you will not forget.' (*al-A'la:* 6) This is why he *peace and blessings be upon him* was memorising what was revealed to him. He used to dictate it to the Companions and recite it in the prayers. Despite the similar verses in the Quran, he *peace and blessings be upon him* has never made a mistake in his recitation of the Quran from memory. It is Allah's Will to reveal the Quran to him *peace and blessings be upon him* and to reassure him that he would memorise it and would not forget the position of every one of its verses.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…unless Allah wishes; He knows both what is open and what is hidden.' (*al-A'la:* 7) So, His decisive Will decreed that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would not forget anything of the Quran. He *Glorified is He* knows what is apparent and what is hidden.

Further, He *the Almighty* is fully Aware of the secrets and what is even more hidden than the secret. The open talk is to make the listeners hear what you say. As for the private talk, it means to confide something to someone because you do not want it to be spread among the people.

He *the Almighty* then says: ‘We shall show you the easy way.’ (*al-A‘la:* 8) This verse signifies that He *Glorified is He* facilitates all Messenger Muhammad’s matters, including the good deeds leading to the paradise and receiving, memorising and applying the revelation. So, He *the Almighty* makes the way of doing good deeds and reaching the paradise easy for him. The good deeds are called the ‘easy way’ because their outcome is easiness and facilitation. Further, He *the Almighty* made the religion, which is the pure monotheism, easy for him. So, He *the Almighty* facilitates the religious Laws that the Quran contains, calling for doing righteous deeds that lead to the paradise.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘So remind, if reminding will help.’ (*al-A‘la:* 9) This verse constitutes a command to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remind the people through the Quran. This reminder, however, may not be beneficial to the one who neither believes in the Quran nor wants to embrace Islam. By contrast, the believer benefits from the reminder of the Quran because it is the useful reminder in which the righteous people find peace and tranquillity. The Quran decisively states: ‘…surely the reminder profits the believers.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 55)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘Those who stand in awe of Allah will heed the reminder, but it will be ignored by the most wicked.’ (*al-A‘la:* 10-11) These verses show that the one who benefits from the reminder is s/he who fears Allah, His Majestic Attributes, Punishment, Wrath and Fire.

As for the most wicked who disbelieve in the religion and in Allah *the Almighty* s/he does not hope for the Reckoning, the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment. Such a person does not benefit from the reminder but rather turns away from it: ‘…but it will be ignored by the most wicked.’ (*al-A‘la:* 11) S/he is described as the ‘most wicked’, in the superlative form. The wicked one is s/he who commits sins, despite his/her faith. As for the most wicked, it is s/he who does not believe in the first place; s/he denies Faith and belies Messenger Muhammad and the Quran. He *the Almighty* then describes this most wicked one, saying: '…who will enter the Great Fire, where they will neither die nor live.' (*al-A'la:* 12-13)

This means that the most wicked will suffer the extreme heat of the Fire after being thrown into it. It is the Fire of hell and the Blazing Fire. The word *Yasla* (to enter the fire) means to enter the blazing fire and to taste its heat. This verb is mentioned in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Again We do certainly know best those who deserve most to be burned therein.' (*Maryam:* 70) As for the verb *Astala,* it means to seek a piece of fire for warming, as in His saying: 'So that you may warm yourselves.' (*an-Naml:* 7)

The most wicked people will suffer the Great Fire which is terribly blazing, as it is greater and hotter than that of the worldly life. The fire of the worldly life is not that of a match, a candle, or an oven, but rather, it could be that of the great furnace that melts the iron and its heat reaches 3000 degrees. So, if this is the fire in the worldly life, so what would we think about the fire in the Hereafter? The greatest punishment in that fire is that the most wicked people will neither die nor live because they disbelieve in Allah *the Almighty* and belie His Books and Messengers. Thus, they are the guilty people, as He *the Almighty* says: 'Whoever comes to his Lord (being) guilty, for him is surely hell; he shall not die therein, nor shall he live.' (*Ta Ha:* 74) There is a stage between life and death in which the punished guilty one neither dies to alleviate the punishment nor lives a good life devoid of punishment. They will stay forever in the hellfire in that stage where they neither die nor live.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Prosperous are those who purify themselves, remember the name of their Lord, and pray.' (*al-A'la:* 14-15) The Arabic word *Aflah* (to prosper) has a tangible meaning related to the life of the created beings. It is the main reason for the sustenance of life. It refers to the one who cleaves the earth and seeds it. Afterwards, s/he irrigates it until it yields crops. The word *Aflah* is used to refer to the state of yielding a good harvest. As for the prosperity meant in the verse, it is the outcome of guidance that the believers followed and abided by. Allah's saying: 'Prosperous are those who purify themselves...' (*al-A'la:* 14) is similar to His saying: '…and this is the reward of him who has purified himself.' (*Ta Ha:* 76) The word *zakat* refers to purity and growth. Purity means that the object is pure in itself. As for growth, it means that the object increases to be bigger than its present form.

As for His saying: ‘remember the name of their Lord, and pray.’ (*al-A‘la:* 15) Remembering Allah *the Almighty* includes declaring His Oneness, invoking Him and inviting to Him. Praying here refers to offering the five daily prayers and praising, glorifying and invoking Him *Glorified is He* during them.

Some scholars interpret these verses as referring to *Zakat Al-Fitr*: ‘Prosperous are those who purify themselves, remember the name of their Lord, and pray.’ (*al-A‘la:* 14-15) *Zakat Al-Fitr* is obligatory on the Muslims. One should give out the required *zakat* for his dependents before offering *Eid* Prayer. Then s/he: …remember the name of their Lord…’ (*al-A‘la:* 15). This verse refers to *Eid* Prayer, which is similar to His saying: ‘Therefore pray to your Lord and make a sacrifice.’ (*al-Kawthar:* 2) This verse signifies the time of the greater *Eid*. The Muslims should first pray and then sacrifice. That is why the Imam of the *Eid* Prayer should offer it early so that the people can dedicate themselves to offering their sacrifice. On the contrary, the Imam on *Eid Al-Fitr* should delay the prayer so that the one who does not give out *Zakat Al-fitr* can have a chance do that. In this regard, it is reported on the authority of 'Amr ibn ‘Awf that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to command the believers to give out *Zakat Al-Fitr* before offering *Eid* Prayer and he would recite Allah’s saying: ‘Prosperous are those who purify themselves, remember the name of their Lord, and pray.’ (*al-A‘la:* 14-15)

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Yet you [people] prefer the life of this world, even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting…’ (*al-A‘la:* 16-17) it is as if He *the Almighty* says to the people, ‘You prefer the worldly life with its hardships to the Hereafter while the latter is better and more lasting.’ In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And whatever things you have been given are only a provision of this world's life and its adornment, and whatever is with Allah is better and more lasting; do you not then understand?’ (*al-Qasas:* 60) If the wise person compared the worldly life to the Hereafter, s/he would choose the Hereafter. That is why

He *the Almighty* concludes the previous verse, saying: '…do you not then understand?' (*al-Qasas:* 60)

Then Allah *the Almighty* concludes the chapter in question, saying: 'All this is in the earlier scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.' (*al-A'la:* 18-19) These two verses mean that Allah *the Almighty* did not charge this *ummah* with something other than what the previous nations were charged with. In fact, the Creed is the essence of the religious obligations that accompanied the life from the time of Adam. Here, He *the Almighty* sends Messengers to remind the heedless people throughout that long duration of the worldly life. He *the Almighty* refers to this fact by saying: 'All this is in the earlier scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.' (*al-A'la:* 18-19)

We should clarify that the early Scriptures are not confined to Abraham's and Moses' Scriptures, as there are other revealed Scriptures. These Scriptures include what was revealed to Shayth (son of Adam) and Idris (Enoch). It is known that the Scriptures are different from the four heavenly Books, which are the Torah, the Gospel, the Quran, and the Psalms. His saying: 'All this is in the earlier scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses' (*al-A'la:* 18-19) confirms a creedal fact that does not change and is common among the Messengers. It is true that the religious laws change according to the nations, the environments, the new life issues and the mental advancement. This is the field of differences among the Messages, that is, man's movement in life. As for the creedal matters and the ritual relationship between Allah *the Almighty* and His servants, they are common among all the Messages.

The books of Hadith narrate that Abu Dharr asked Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the content of the early Scriptures. He told him that they contained examples and admonitions related to the spiritual state and not to the laws that govern the movements in life. Abu Dharr asked him *peace and blessings be upon him* to give him some example of these admonitions. So, he said, 'One of the revelations is addressed to the kings: O haughty kings who oppress the tested ones, I have not sent you to accumulate the properties of the worldly life but to respond to the call of the wronged people on My behalf, for I do not reject it even from a disbeliever.' Another admonition is: 'The wise person who is not mad should divide his time in the worldly life into three parts: he invokes his Lord in one part, holds himself accountable in the second, and lawfully satisfies his needs in the third part. In the last part he should say, 'This part is devoted to the other parts, as I should prepare my heart during this time for the other parts. ' These Scriptures also include: 'The wise person should have three matters: a craft he learns to sustain himself, preparation for the Day of Judgment and lawful pleasure.' This is the Way of Guidance that the believer should abide by to be exempted from those described in His saying: 'Yet you [people] prefer the life of this world.' (*al-A'la:* 16)

In this connection, when one of the righteous people was asked about his way of life, he said, 'I have known that I cannot escape from Allah's sight for even a blink of an eye, so I felt shy to disobey Him. I also have known that my provision will not pass me by, so I felt content with it. Further, I have known that I am in debt and no one will repay my debt on my behalf, so I preoccupied myself with it. Finally, I have known that my time of death is proceeding to me, so I prepared myself for it.' Another righteous one said, 'Devote your worship to the One you cannot dispense with. Devote your thankfulness to the one who never stops bestowing His Blessings on you. Devote your submission to the One against His Kingdom and Sovereignty you cannot rebel.'

Thus, the earlier Scriptures were faithful admonitions that educate the human being, reform his/her behaviour and make him/her undertake his/her mission in life in accordance with Allah's Commands and Prohibitions and in accordance with the principle: 'So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant at what He has given you…' (*al-Hadid:* 23). Man should remain steadfast and firm; the events should not shake him/her, as a poet says:

Be a steadfast man like a firm molar
That chews everything, be it sweet or sour

the chapter of

al-Gashiya

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Ghashiya* (1)

هَلۡ أَتَىٰكَ حَدِيثُ ٱلۡغَٰشِيَةِ ۝١

Have you heard tell [Prophet]
about the Overwhelming Event? [1]
(The Quran, *al-Ghashiya:* 1)

The one who reflects on the context of the chapter of *al-A'la* finds it in a clear harmony with that of *al-Ghashiya*. The chapter of *al-A'la* talks about the most wicked, the one who purifies him/herself and the recompense of each, stating: '…but it will be ignored by the most wicked, who will enter the Great Fire, where they will neither die nor live. Prosperous are those who purify themselves, remember the name of their Lord, and pray.' (*al-A'la:* 11-15) So, that chapter mentions the most wicked disbelievers and the punishment waiting for him/her; and the believer who purifies him/herself and the good reward waiting for him/her.

Afterwards, the chapter of *al-Ghashiya* confirms this meaning and emphasises it, saying: 'On that Day, there will be downcast faces.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 2); and 'On that Day there will also be faces radiant with bliss.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 8) Further, the chapter of *al-A'la* talks about the reminder, saying: 'So remind, if reminding will help.' (*al-A'la:* 9); and the chapter of *al-Ghashiya* defines

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Ghashiya,* counting 26 verses, is number 88 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Adh-Dhariyat* and before that of *Al-Kahf.* So, it is number 67 in the order of revelation. A Hadith narrated on the authority of An-Nu'man ibn Bashir confers that Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to recite this chapter and that of *Al-A'la* during the Eid and Friday Prayer.

Messenger Muhammad's mission with regard to reminding the people, stating: 'So [Prophet] warn them: your only task is to give warning, you are not there to control them.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 211-22)

The mission of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is to remind the people, but he is not responsible for the outcome of this reminding. This serves as alleviation for him because s/he used to overburden himself for the sake of His Call and reminding the people about it. He was about to perish because of that. Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* says to him: 'Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement.' (*al-Kahf:* 6) This matter also alleviates Messenger Muhammad's followers and those who bear the responsibility for the Call after him. They should only remind the people. After that, the recipient of the Call can either believe or disbelieve according to his/her free will. This is because the Callers have no control over the people.

Further, the chapter of *al-A'la* discusses the way of prosperity in His saying: 'Prosperous are those who purify themselves.' (*al-A'la:* 14) This way is divided into three parts: the belief, the utterance and the practice. One should purify him/herself and his/her Creed from polytheism; this is the creedal side. As for the tongue, its role is to faithfully: '…remember the name of their Lord…' (*al-A'la:* 15) As for His saying: '…and pray...' (*al-A'la:* 15) it represents the practical side of the prosperous Way. It is as if the chapter summarises the three sides of Islam: the belief in the heart, the utterance of the tongue and application of the limbs.

The chapter of *al-Ghashiya* mentions the opposite way that the people set for themselves. It is a tiring way for the one who follows it. It is recognised by all the people, even the atheists among them, that man measures the objective and the fruit of his/her activity before pursuing that objective. That objective must make up the hardship of reaching it. Moreover, the pleasure and the rest that s/he gets must overweigh the effort exerted for their sake. If the fruit is equal to the effort, then it is useless. So, the wise person pursues the objective that gives him/her more than the effort exerted to attain to it.

As for the deeds of the wicked people, they are in vain, a fact which is crystal clear in His Saying: 'on that Day, there will be downcast faces, [2] toiling and weary [3] as they enter the blazing Fire. [4]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 2-4) this is actually the consequence of their misdeeds, which are none but an unprofitable bargain and fruitless endeavour. If those with downcast faces are striving and toiling and yet receive no reward, then they will be truly losers. So, what would it be like if they will also enter the blazing fire after their toiling?! As a matter of fact, the intellectual foundation of those people's work is wrong and manifests improper understanding of life. Thus, one of Allah's Blessings is that He *the Almighty* set an objective for mankind, affirming to them that firm adherence to it will for sure lead them to easiness, pleasure and enjoyment. The chapter of *al-Ghashiya* tells us about all these purposes. As usual, when the Quran presents an unseen matter, it affirms it with a similar, tangible one.

The chapter of *al-Ghashiya* starts with the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Have you heard tell [Prophet] about the Overwhelming Event?' (*al-Ghashiya:* 1) Here, the Questioner is Allah *the Almighty*; the questioned one is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*; and the question is about *al-Ghashiya* (The Overwhelming Event), which is one of the names of the Day of Judgment. He *Glorified is He* is far removed from posing a question to seek understanding something, for He only questions about something to affirm its reality. This is due to the fact that if someone affirms the reality of the subject of the question by him/herself, this constitutes a statement. However, if s/he asks about that subject, then the answer constitutes a confirmation on the part of the questioned person concerning the reality of that subject.

This manner of expression is also used when Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet].' (*ash-Sharh:* 1) Instead of telling him *peace and blessings be upon him* that He *the Almighty* relieved his heart for him, He *the Almighty* makes him acknowledge this fact and say: 'Yes, my Lord, You relieved my heart for me.' So, the question here is confirmatory, as it makes him *peace and blessings be upon him* fully recognize what He *the Almighty* has done to him. If He *Glorified is He* had put forward this fact in a statement, some people might have questioned its trueness. That is why the question was posed to the one for whom the heart was relieved in order that his affirmative answer would confirm this fact. Thus, the benefit of using a question instead of a statement in this context is to plainly affirm the topic in question. Further, in the aforementioned verse, there is another aspect of rhetoric, that is, the interrogation is posed in the negative form: ‘Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet].’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1) He *the Almighty* did not say, ‘Did We relieve your heart for you?’ It is true that both formulas almost bear the same meaning, but the negative one negates any allusion to the right answer.

So, the Saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Have you heard tell [Prophet] about the Overwhelming Event?’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 1) is a way of showing the greatness of the subject of question because it is the momentous event that man should carefully reflect on and pay full attention to. Once Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard: ‘Have you heard tell [Prophet] about the Overwhelming Event?’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 1), he knew that he should be attentive to the answer that Allah *the Almighty* would provide about that event. The answer is then provided directly:

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَٰشِعَةٌ ﴿٢﴾ عَامِلَةٌ نَّاصِبَةٌ ﴿٣﴾ تَصْلَىٰ نَارًا حَامِيَةً ﴿٤﴾
تُسْقَىٰ مِنْ عَيْنٍ ءَانِيَةٍ ﴿٥﴾ لَّيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِن ضَرِيعٍ ﴿٦﴾
لَّا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِن جُوعٍ ﴿٧﴾

On that Day, there will be downcast faces [2] toiling and weary [3] as they enter the blazing Fire [4] and are forced to drink from a boiling spring [5] with no food for them except bitter dry thorns [6] that neither nourish nor satisfy hunger [7] (The Quran, *al-Ghashiya:* 2-7)

Allah *the Almighty* defines the Overwhelming Event through its calamities. It is the disaster that strikes the people and overwhelms them with its calamities. They will find no way out and nowhere to escape because that Event encompasses them from all directions. The meaning of ‘overwhelming’ is clearly mentioned in His saying: ‘…and over them coverings (of hell-fire)…’ (*al-A‘raf:* 41); His saying about Pharaoh and his forces when the sea surrounded them: ‘…but the sea-water completely overwhelmed them and covered them up.’ (*Ta Ha:* 78); ‘And when a wave like mountains covers them they call upon Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience…' (*Luqman:* 32); and: 'Or like utter darkness in the deep sea: there covers it a wave above which is another wave, above which is a cloud…' (*an-Nur:* 40). So, the overwhelming matter refers to the disaster and the calamity that surrounds the person and overwhelm him/her from all directions, so that s/he finds no salvation or way out. The word '*al-Ghashiya*' is mentioned in this chapter and in that of *Yusuf* wherein Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do they then feel secure that there may come to them an extensive chastisement from Allah or (that) the hour may come to them suddenly while they do not perceive?' (*Yusuf:* 107) The books of Hadith report that when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* passed by a woman reciting: 'Have you heard tell [Prophet] about the Overwhelming Event?' (*al-Ghashiya:* 1), he said, 'Yes, the news of the Overwhelming Event has come to me.'

Allah *the Almighty* then gives us some pictures of the calamities of the Day of Judgment, saying: 'On that Day, there will be downcast faces.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 2) This means that on the Overwhelming Day some faces will be humble and humiliated because they did not humble themselves willingly towards Allah *the Almighty* in the worldly life. Now, in the Hereafter, they will be forcibly humble and downcast, as they were stripped of all the means of making choices. All the movement will be conditional on Allah's Will; He *Glorified is He* says: '…To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all).' (*Ghafir:* 16) The faces which refused to surrender themselves to Allah *the Almighty* in the worldly life will be forced to do that on the Day of Judgment.

Then Allah *Glorified is He* describes these faces as: 'toiling and weary.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 3) This shows that these people worked hard and strived painstakingly yet they did not consider the right objective of their toil. In the worldly life, they did not pursue the beneficial, positive and faithful work whose good reward is greater than any worldly hardship many times. As long as they did not consider the right objective, their toil and work were catastrophically detrimental to them. Instead of bringing about a good reward, the punishment was the recompense of that toil.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'as they enter the blazing Fire.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 3), it is the recompense of the one who strives after his/her interest, that of his/her children, his/her position and his/her prestigious rank. This is actually a foolish endeavour in life, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere about such people: ‘And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust.’ (*al-Furqan:* 23) Why? This is because they worked for the sake of an objective other than Allah’s Pleasure and were heedless of Him *Glorified is He*. In fact, every worker demands the recompense of his/her work from the one s/he is working for. So, how can the one who worked for anyone other than Allah *the Almighty* demand his/her recompense from Him *Glorified is He*? That is why a Hadith in this regard reads: ‘…You did but do so that it might be said [of you…and so it was said.’[1] This meaning is also clarified in His saying: ‘The parable of those who disbelieve in their Lord: their actions are like ashes on which the wind blows hard on a stormy day; they shall not have power over anything out of what they have earned…’ (*Ibrahim:* 18); and ‘And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full…’ (*an-Nur:* 39). In the Hereafter, when these people ask for the recompense of their deeds, it will be said to them: ‘…You did away with your good things in your life of the world and you enjoyed them for a while…’ (*al-Ahqaf:* 20).

These verses portray how foolish these people’s deeds were in the worldly life. If the recompense were only doing away with their deeds as scattered floating dust, it would be easy to some extent. However, their deeds incur punishment on them: ‘as they enter the blazing Fire.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 3) The water that puts out the fire and reduces its heat will increase the heat of the fire on the Day of Judgment. Then Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘and are forced to drink from a boiling spring.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 5) So, the water spring from which they are forced to drink is terribly hot, as He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘…and if they cry for water, they shall be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces; evil the drink and ill the resting-place.’ (*al-Kahf:* 29)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 152/1905; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8277; An-Nasa’i, As-Sunnan Al-Kurbra, Hadith no. 4330; and Abu U‘wana, Musnad, Hadith no. 7885.*

As for their food, it is not cooler than their drink, for He *the Almighty* then says: ‘with no food for them except bitter dry thorns.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 6) *Ad-Dari‘* is a thorny, green plant known to the Arabs. It is then described as: ‘neither nourish nor satisfy hunger.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 7) Similarly, Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘Surely the tree of the *Zaqqum,* [43] Is the food of the sinful [44] Like dregs of oil; it shall boil in (their) bellies, [45] Like the boiling of hot water. [46]’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 43-46) This is their food which differs according to the severity of the punishment. As there are ranks of pleasure according to the degree of belief, there are also levels of torment according to the degree of disbelief. The chapter in question starts with mentioning the recompense of the disbelievers because it is more suitable for the context of the Overwhelming Event. So, talking about the reward of faith was mentioned after the disbelievers’ punishment.

The verses under discussion portray the faces of the disobedient and the disbelieving people, telling how their toil and weariness in the worldly life led to perishing and loss. Further, these faces will be downcast and humiliated. They will be toiling and weary, dragging chains and shackles in the valleys of the hell. So, these faces will gather between the hardship of tiredness and that of pain. It is important to note that when the Quran describes the punishment for us, it does so according to the meanings available in the language, the addressees’ ability to understand the perceptions and the human intellectual abilities. As for the reality of pleasure and punishment, it is beyond the human perception. This is due to the fact that the language consists of words used to convey certain meanings, which must exist first. So, if the paradise and hell are unseen and unknown to us, then there are no words to express their reality. That is why there is a Hadith about the pleasures of the paradise, reading: ‘Such things as no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of, and nobody has ever thought of.’(1)

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(1) Prophet Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah said, 'I have prepared for My pious worshipers such things as no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of, and nobody has ever thought of.’ And that is testified to in Allah's Book: 'No soul knows what is kept hidden (in reserve) for them of joy as a reward for what they used to do.' (*as-Sajda:* 17) This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, *Sahih,* Hadith no. 4779; Muslim, *Sahih*, Hadith no. 2/2824.

Then the context of the chapter directs our attention to the opposite position of the believers about whom Allah *the Almighty* says:

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاعِمَةٌ ﴿٨﴾ لِّسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ ﴿٩﴾ فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ ﴿١٠﴾
لَّا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لَٰغِيَةً ﴿١١﴾ فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾ فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَّرْفُوعَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾
وَأَكْوَابٌ مَّوْضُوعَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾ وَنَمَارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ ﴿١٥﴾ وَزَرَابِيُّ مَبْثُوثَةٌ ﴿١٦﴾

On that Day there will also be faces radiant with bliss [8]
well pleased with their labour [9] in a lofty garden [10]
where they will hear no idle talk [11] with a flowing spring [12]
raised couches [13] goblets placed before them [14]
cushions set in rows [15] and carpets spread [16]
(The Quran, *al-Ghashiya:* 8 - 16)

We should compare these radiant faces to the downcast, humiliated and humble ones which are anxious about the punishment they will suffer. As for the faces of the believers, they are radiant with bliss. They are filled with joy, happiness and brightness. In fact, their faces are indescribable. However, we see similar descriptions in the worldly life for the radiant, happy faces which are attractive and bright. They indicate the contentment of the souls of such people, and the peace, faith, tranquility and serenity that they enjoy.

So, with regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'On that Day there will also be faces radiant with bliss, [8] well pleased with their labour [9]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 8-9), it means that on the Day of Judgment some faces will be blessed. They will be content with their labour because they have seen its fruit and happy outcome. This is the opposite position of the toiling, weary faces that '…enter the blazing Fire.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 4) Both of the two groups toiled, but the difference between the outcomes of their labour is far great. How blissful is the one whose labour leads him/her to the paradise and its pleasures; and how wretched is the one whose labour leads him/her to the blazing fire! The wise person seriously considers the consequences of any action before s/he proceeds to do it, and considers also the ultimate destination before starting his/her journey. The people with radiant faces did not reach the good objective except through obedience and following the true Way of Guidance.

As for the people with downcast faces, they acted foolishly and considered the affairs with narrow, temporal view. So, they were content with their fleeting, underrated pleasure in the worldly life instead of the eternal, everlasting pleasure in the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '… in a lofty garden, [10] where they will hear no idle talk. [11]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 10-11) The garden is high in position and in rank; that is why the people will hear no idle talk in it. The word *Laghiyah* refers to the false, valueless talk. This description alludes to the fact that the cause of the corruption that the world suffers from is none but the falsehood which brought about anxiety, confusion, fear, hatred, enmity and hostility. We suffer falsehood with regard to creed, thought, words and labour. That is why the paradise is far removed from having any kind of falsehood. This is because it is the home of the righteous people's bliss; they enjoy its tranquility, quietness, peace and stability. When falsehood has existed in our life, we have witnessed the opposite of the previous qualities. Nowadays, the society is suffering from the noise and the clamour of life. Further, its members, after enjoying peace and stability, now suffer from anxiety and fear.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* describes the people of the paradise and the reason for their success, saying: 'Successful indeed are the believers, [1] Who are humble in their prayers, [2] And who keep aloof from what is vain. [3]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1-3) It is as if the cause of the corruption of people's lives is the different kinds of falsehood, including that of thought, creed, word and labour. That is why the absence of idle talk is considered one of the pleasures of the paradise. This is because the worldly life is governed by the causal factors and man's freedom of choice, while s/he is governed in the Hereafter by the Ultimate Causer *Glorified is He*. Consequently, the idle talk that some people use to gain profits and fruits effortlessly will not happen in the Hereafter. In the Hereafter, the people of the paradise have whatever they want once they think about it; it needs neither labour nor trickery. There will be no mutual appropriation or transgression with regard to the rights. As there is no false, idle talk, then the people of the paradise enjoy absolute safety, serenity and quietness.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the material sustenance of the human being, saying: '… with a flowing spring…' (*al-Ghashiya:* 12). As a matter of fact, having a water spring was the ultimate pleasure of the Arab person in the past. It was sufficient for him/her to have a well, so what would we think if s/he will effortlessly have a flowing water spring in the paradise? This matter indicates that the bounties of the paradise are not limited to providing the basic needs, for there is also a source of pleasure and delight. The flow of the water is the result of the abundance of the spring. This reassures the people of the paradise that water will never cease to exist and will ceaselessly overflow, so that they can take what they need from it. For example, there is a difference between the one who, due to the scarcity of water, makes ablution with the water of a small container and the one who makes it with the water of a tap or river. Thus, the flowing spring reassures us about the source of life. Further, the mere existence of water in a place is a manifestation of Allah's Graces. For instance, the people who live in palaces are keen on having a fountain, as the sight of the water delights the soul.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'raised couches, [13] goblets placed before them, [14] cushions set in rows, [15] and carpets spread. [16]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 13-16) These are some of the pleasures of the paradise. The 'raised couches' is one of the best kinds of pleasure for the Arabs in the past. That is because they used to sleep on the ground and get disturbed by the pebbles that affect their sides and the insects that sting them. Further, the people of the paradise will have goblets filled with drink. They are placed before them so that they exert no effort to have them. As for the cushions which are set in rows, the people of the paradise will lean on them to have rest. With regard to the carpets which are spread, they are very luxurious. All of these pleasures were related to the Arabs who were the first people to be addressed by these verses. We have previously said that the pleasure is measured according to the environment and the situation of the one who receives it. It should befit his/her abilities and conceptions about pleasure. The previous descriptions neither limit nor define the reality of pleasure in the paradise. They just make it easy for us to understand a glimpse of that reality.

Then the verses direct out attention to the tangible world and invite us to think and reflect on Allah's creatures. He *the Almighty* says:

أَفَلَا يَنظُرُونَ إِلَى ٱلْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ ﴿١٧﴾ وَإِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ ﴿١٨﴾
وَإِلَى ٱلْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ ﴿١٩﴾ وَإِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ ﴿٢٠﴾

Do the disbelievers not see how rain clouds are formed [17]
how the heavens are lifted [18] how the mountains are raised
high [19] how the earth is spread out? [20]
(The Quran, *al-Ghashiya:* 17 - 20)

Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention from the unseen realm of the paradise and hell to the perceived, tangible world. The scene herein is related to the life of the Bedouin Arab who prefers the camels to all the rest of properties. So, He *the Almighty* calls the people to carefully reflect on the creation of the camel as it has many wonders and signs that certainly merit close reflection. This is also the case with the rest of the universal signs that He *Glorified is He* then mentions: 'how the heavens are lifted, [18] how the mountains are raised high, [19] how the earth is spread out? [20] (*al-Ghashiya:* 18-20) All these phenomena are known to the Bedouin Arab living in the desert. His/her lifestyle necessitates moving and travelling which requires the existence of camels to carry the heavy luggage and seek a new pasture. In the desert, the Arabs see nothing but a flat earth, high heaven and well established, lofty mountains. The Quran addresses the Arabs by the language they understand and by the signs of Allah's Omnipotence that they see around them. His omnipotence is clearly manifested in the creation of the camels, their power, shapes, forms and suitability for the desert life. As all the manifestations of the camel are signs of the Creator's Omnipotence, He *the Almighty* calls us to reflect on its creation.

Let us look at the camels' hoofs, for example; why are they different from that of the donkeys and the horses? Further, the camel was created to carry heavy objects and to travel long distances that is why it is called 'the ship of the desert.' It is also big in size and heavy in weight. So, the camel's hoofs are suitable for its function; are not they similar to the car tires that man has made to reduce the car's friction with the earth? Despite the unevenness and the difficulty of crossing the desert, the camels can travel through it smoothly that the travelers do not feel any disturbances. The height of the camel itself is a sign because it is walking in the desert which is full of sand and dust. This height makes the rider above the level of the dust which the camel hoofs provoke. Imagine if there is a flock of camels or goats walking together, how great the dust they provoke would be! Despite that, the rider of the camel is not affected by that dust as s/he is riding on its high back. Likewise, there are signs in the camel's ear, eye and stomach. Its endurance of hunger and thirst for days are also other signs. Each of these is one of the wonders of creation that shows the Omnipotence of the Creator. That is why He *the Almighty* encourages us to reflect on His creation, as it clearly shows His Omnipotence, Will and Wisdom.

Despite the aforementioned signs of the camel, including its big size and power, a child can ride it and play with it. This is the utmost sign of making it subservient to the human being. Is not it a wonder of creation that man can make the camel kneel down to load the luggage onto it? If it remained standing, it would be difficult for us to load them onto its back. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* makes it able to carry these loads even if they are heavy without refusing to do so. It is an example of patience and endurance; that is why it is said about the long journeys, 'We use the camels to reach them.'

Moreover, the camel has sensations and feels about its owner and finds harmony with him/her. For example, it walks fast when it hears the sound of the chanting driver. It is as if it understands the song and feels it. In this connection, it is narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'O Anjasha! Drive slowly (the camels) with the glass vessels (women)!'(1) He was driving the camels very fast, so their riders were hurt. Besides, the camel is useful in many things; we eat its meat, drink the milk of the she-camel, use its fur and make tents from its skin. Even its urine is used as medicine for some illnesses, as some scholars say. It is as if it provides the essential requirements of life.

When Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to the natural signs around us, He pays our heed to our mission in life. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says to the reasonable, discerning man, ‘Your activity in life should be positive, beneficial, and fruitful. It should be similar to the movement of the camel in the desert; the earth that split out to allow the plant to grow; the sky from which the rain descends; and the mountains when they break up to give us fertility and growth.’ It is as though these four signs are one correlated and interdependent system. After telling us about the unseen matter of the downcast faces and the radiant ones and also the four tangible signs, the verses of this chapter say to man, ‘Pay attention to your role in life, for you were not created in vain, and are not left neglected.’ Allah *the Almighty* then says:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6149; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 70/2323.*

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ﴿٢١﴾ لَّسْتَ عَلَيْهِم بِمُصَيْطِرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾
إِلَّا مَن تَوَلَّىٰ وَكَفَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾ فَيُعَذِّبُهُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْعَذَابَ ٱلْأَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٤﴾
إِنَّ إِلَيْنَآ إِيَابَهُمْ ﴿٢٥﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُم ﴿٢٦﴾

So [Prophet] warn them: your only task is to give warning [21] you are not there to control them [22] As for those who turn away and disbelieve [23] God will inflict the greatest torment upon them [24] It is to Us they will return [25] and then it is for Us to call them to account [26] (The Quran, *al-Ghashiya:* 21 - 26)

The address here is directed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. His Lord *Glorified is He* says to him: ‘So [Prophet] warn them: your only task is to give warning.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 21) This verse defines his *peace and blessings be upon him* mission; he is only required to remind the people and is not thus responsible for the outcome of this reminding. In other words, he is not responsible for people’s belief or disbelief after delivering the Message to them. Elsewhere, his Lord says to him: ‘So remind, if reminding will help.’ (*al-A‘la:* 9); and ‘Nothing is (incumbent) on the Messenger but to deliver (the message)…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 99). This serves as alleviation for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says to him: ‘you are not there to control them.’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 22) This verse means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* should not use the power to coerce the people to believe, as this is not his mission. Similarly, He *the Almighty* says: '…and you are not one to compel them…' (*Qaf:* 45). He *the Almighty* does not want His servant to forcibly, but rather willingly, come to Him. As we have said, 'He *the Almighty* wants the hearts, not the bodies.' This is because He *Glorified is He* is Self-Sufficient and does not need His creation. If He wished to make them all believe, He would create them with the quality of the Angels who do not disobey His command and do as they are commanded. This proves that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* does not bring anything from his own self, for all what he conveys is a revelation from Allah *the Almighty*.

As for His saying: 'As for those who turn away and disbelieve…' (*al-Ghashiya:* 23), it shows that the disbelievers are excluded from His Saying: 'you are not there to control them.' (*al-Ghashiya:* 22) This eliminates the idea that the opponent of Messenger Muhammad and the true Way of Guidance can escape from the Divine Justice or Allah's Control. So, He *Glorified is He* reminds the disbelievers about the consequences of the misdeeds, saying: 'As for those who turn away and disbelieve, [23] Allah will inflict the greatest torment upon them. [24]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 23-24) Thus, the matter will not end with the coming of the death, for there is another eternal life: 'It is to Us they will return, [25] and then it is for Us to call them to account. [26]' (*al-Ghashiya:* 25-26) They will return to Allah *the Almighty* in the Hereafter, as He will for sure hold them accountable for their misdeeds.

We invoke Allah *the Almighty* to make us from the people with radiant faces; not to be distracted from the beneficial labour in life by the vain one; and to make us successful in everything we do or abstain from.

the chapter of

al-Fajr

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Al-Fajr*(1) (The Dawn)

وَٱلۡفَجۡرِ (١) وَلَيَالٍ عَشۡرٖ (٢) وَٱلشَّفۡعِ وَٱلۡوَتۡرِ (٣)
وَٱلَّيۡلِ إِذَا يَسۡرِ (٤) هَلۡ فِي ذَٰلِكَ قَسَمٞ لِّذِي حِجۡرٍ (٥)

By the Daybreak [1] by the Ten Nights [2]
by the even and the odd [3] by the passing night—[4]
is this oath strong enough for a rational person? [5]
(The Quran, *al-Fajr:* 1-5)

The previous chapter *al-Ghashiya* starts with the following interesting question: 'Have you heard tell [Prophet] about the Overwhelming Event?' (*al-Ghashiya:* 1) This actually prepares the minds to receive the news about the wondrous subject of the question. Out of Allah's Benevolence, He tells us about the Overwhelming Event and its first manifestation that brings people's measures' upside down. The deeds of those who toiled and worked hard in the field of falsehood and error were the cause of their hardships and their admittance into the hellfire. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the antithetical position of the people with radiant faces. He *Glorified is He* presents these pictures so that we accept His Way of Guidance in life, exactly like the trader who plans to gain profits from his/her trade and not to lose anything from it. According to the scale of the trade, one should sell by more than what s/he has bought and take more than what s/he gives; otherwise, the bargain is unprofitable and the trade perishes.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Fajr*, counting 20 verses and 129 words, is number 89 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Layl* and before that of *Ad-Duha*. These three consecutive chapters are entitled with the names of three times: the night, the daybreak and the morning brightness.

The chapter of *al-Ghashiya* is concluded with the following fact: ‘It is to Us they will return, [25] and then it is for Us to call them to account. [26]’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 25-26) Here, it is clearly stated that as long as He *Glorified is He* is the One Who created people Alone, their returning and the account are exclusive only for Him *the Almighty* without any partner. In other words, they will not return to anyone but Him *Glorified is He* and will not be held accountable except by Him. When, He *the Almighty* promises the people of faith with good reward and threatens the people of disbelief with evil punishment, His Promise and Threat will inevitably come to pass. This is because He *the Almighty* is the Omnipotent that no one can prevent from doing what He wants.

Now, the chapter of *al-Fajr* starts with the following Oaths: ‘By the Daybreak, [1] by the Ten Nights, [2] by the even and the odd, [3] by the passing night —[4]’ (*al-Fajr:* 1-4) We have previously said that Allah *the Almighty* can swear by whatever He wants about anything. As for us, we must not swear except by Him *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* swears by *al-Fajr* (The daybreak) which linguistically means the wide hole. We use this word to refer to the daylight that breaks the darkness of the night. It is as if the daylight was veiled by the darkness of the night and then the daybreak penetrates into it widely and plainly. That is why it is called ‘daybreak’. In fact, anyone who violates the true Way of Guidance is called *Al-Fajr* (transgressor); it is as if s/he breaks the Legislation and the Way of Guidance. The one who ponders on the movement of the day and night takes the dawn that breaks the darkness of the night as a proof of the changeability of the universe. It is constantly changing, and that is why there must exist Unchangeable One Who causes this change. That alteration is not simple; rather, it takes place between two extremes, the day and night, that only the Omnipotent Creator of the universe can bring about. So, the verse in question directs our attention to the necessity of reflection on the signs and creation and how Allah’s Power wonderfully brought them into existence.

The word ‘daybreak’ indicates that the dawn gets the world out of its quietness to a beneficial, fruitful movement in the daylight. That is why the daybreak is one of Allah’s signs that certainly merit being sworn by. In fact, Allah *the Almighty* does not swear except by the great, mighty things. The importance of the daybreak does not reduce that of the night, for each of them carry out its function that Allah *the Almighty* prescribed. That is why He *the Almighty* says: 'By the enshrouding night, [1] by the radiant day, [2] by His creation of male and female! [3] The ways you take differ greatly. [4]' (*al-Layl:* 1-4) He *Glorified is He* presents these signs together to tell us that they are not contradictory but rather complementary – they are interdependent and fulfil a specific function in life. The need of the night for the day is similar to the need of the male to the female and vice versa. This represents the harmony that connects the universal phenomena together.

It is not in the interest of the man or the universe that either of the day or night lasts forever; or that either the male or the female acts discriminately against each other. This is contrary to the nature that Allah *the Almighty* placed in His creation. For this reason, He *Glorified is He* says: 'Say: Tell me, if Allah were to make the night to continue incessantly on you till the day of resurrection, who is the god besides Allah that could bring you light? Do you not then hear? [71] Say: Tell me, if Allah were to make the day to continue incessantly on you till the day of resurrection, who is the god besides Allah that could bring you the night in which you take rest? Do you not then see? [72]' (*al-Qasas:* 71-72) Thus, the opposite universal phenomena, like the day and night, are not contradictory but rather complementary and collaborating. Each phenomenon carries out a specific function that the opposite one cannot do.

Finally, we notice harmony and correlation between the chapter of *Al-Ghashiya* and *Al-Fajr*. The former chapter talks about the Overwhelming Event which is the calamity that surrounds the people and encompasses them with its disasters. No one can escape from such a calamity. Here, in the chapter of *Al-Fajr*, Allah *the Almighty* swears by the daybreak. It is as if the two chapters are opposite to each other in the sense we have explained.

The daybreak that Allah *the Almighty* swears by is not only related to the emergence of light that breaks darkness and removes the night; is it also related to a ritual act, that is, the Prayer by which the believer starts his/her day, stands before his/her Lord and receives his/her provision from Him *Glorified is He*. This is because He *the Almighty* says afterwards: 'by the Ten

Nights, [2] by the even and the odd. [3]' (*al-Bayyina:* 2-3) So, He *the Almighty* swears by *Al-Fajr* which could refer to the time of the daybreak or *Al-Fajr* Prayer. This prayer is one of the most important acts of worship because it is offered at the beginning of our labour in life and by which we receive the Help of Allah *the Almighty* Who is the Creator of this life. Further, the daybreak is the most enjoyable time for sleep. Consequently, offering prayer at that time is the most difficult act of worship for the hypocrites, as it makes them wake up and deprives them of the enjoyment of rest and sleep. Talking about *Al-Fajr* Prayer after the Overwhelming Event is meaningful. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to us, 'Pay attention to the fact that the one who keeps up *Al-Fajr* Prayer will be saved from the Overwhelming Event.'

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* swears by the Ten Nights. The exegetes hold many views about the meaning of the Ten Nights, including the first ten nights of *Al-Muharram* or *Dhu Al-Hijja* or the last ten nights of *Ramadan.* However, the preponderant view is what was narrated on the authority of Jabir, *Allah be pleased with him*, that they are the first ten nights of *Dhu Al-Hijja.* Here arises a question, which is, 'Why do the Ten Nights of *Dhu Al-Hijja* merit a high rank that Allah *the Almighty* swears by them?' Scholars say that this is due to the fact that it is during these days that the believer totally completes and perfects his/her Lord's Way of Guidance and the religious obligations imposed on him/her. This is because s/he performs pilgrimage which is the last among the five Pillars of Islam. In these nights, the people gather from everywhere to perform pilgrimage. It is as if this gathering completes the Pillars of Islam.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* swears by the even and the odd prayers, saying: 'by the even and the odd.' (*al-Fajr:* 3) Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* clarified that the prayer is either even or odd. For example, the Noon Prayer is even because it consists of four units of prayer while *Al-Maghrib* is odd because it consists of three units. He *the Almighty* then says: 'by the passing night.' (*al-Fajr:* 4) Here, He *Glorified is He* swears by the night, which is one of the signs of creation that passes.

The chapter in question starts with these Oaths, so where is the subject of these Oaths? The oath is used to affirm its subject, that is, Allah *the Almighty* takes Oaths to confirm the truthfulness of a particular subject. Now, what is the subject here? What is mentioned after the Oath is His saying: ‘Is this oath strong enough for a rational person?’ (*al-Fajr:* 4) Obviously, this is a question and not the subject of the Oath. Some scholars say that we can deduce the subject from the previous saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘It is to Us they will return, [25] and then it is for Us to call them to account. [26]’ (*al-Ghashiya:* 25-26) So, the affirmed subject would be: the people will be resurrected - as returning to Him *Glorified is He* signifies the Resurrection. Another possible interpretation is to consider the verse mentioned after the Oaths a proof of the subject of the Oaths but not the subject itself. That is to say that His saying: ‘Is this oath strong enough for a rational person?’ (*al-Fajr:* 4) is a confirmatory interrogation which proves the issue in question. This manner is stronger than presenting the issue in a statement. He *the Almighty* is fully sure that the answer of the rational, pure person must be in harmony with His Will. S/he must affirm that these Oaths are enough for a rational person. The interrogation makes the addressee affirm the issue instead of being told about it, which places more emphasis on the issue in question. In this way, we conclude the subject of the Oath through the confirmatory interrogation.

Let us discuss the last Oath which is found in His saying: ‘by the passing night.’ (*al-Fajr:* 4) Does the night pass or is it caused to pass? It is known that the night is caused to pass, but the Quranic manner of expression personified the night, making it an animate object because it has a destination to reach and a function to fulfil. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘by the passing night.’ (*al-Fajr:* 4) Likewise, He *the Almighty* says elsewhere: ‘And the night when it departs, [33] And the daybreak when it shines. [34]’ (*al-Muddaththir:* 33-34); and ‘And the morning when it brightens.’ (*at-Takwir:* 18) Thus, the Quran makes these creatures animate beings. It is as if the night moves to reach its destination and that is why the action is attributed to it. So, the night is personified through changing it from the abstract meaning to the tangible one, and even to be a living being. In fact, all of Allah’s creatures have a life that befits them and complies with the law of their creation.

So, when we read: ‘Is this oath strong enough for a rational person?’ (*al-Fajr:* 4), we say, ‘Yes, our Lord, the things that you have sworn by are enough to convince the discerning and reasonable people.' The Arabic word *Al-Hijr* refers to the mind because it prevents the person from doing anything wrong or evil. The Arabic word *Al-'Aql* (mind) refers to the rope by which the camel is tied up so that it does not escape. Likewise, the mind constrains man's movement to be only directed to the good actions, which would lead to happiness and achieving benefits. Similarly, the word *An-Nuha* refers to the mind because it forbids the person from following the base desires which Allah *the Almighty* placed in the human being. They need a reasonable mind to constrain them and deal with them moderately. Otherwise, they will be harmful to the person. We should compare the human desire for food or sexual intercourse to that of the animal. The animal stops its desire at their due limits and never exceeds them. By contrast, the human being, who is endowed with the mind, unleashes his/her desires and transcends the prescribed limits.

Thus, Allah *the Almighty* placed the mind in the human being to constrain him/her from following his/her desires, to prevent his/her from transgression in this regard and to elevate his/her desires to the level intended by his/her Creator. In this way, the mind is useful for implementing the legislations and the laws that Allah *the Almighty* imposes on the honoured human being. The instinct of loving food is prescribed to ensure the sustenance of life and the instinct of sexual intercourse is prescribed to ensure the sustenance of the species. Further, the instinct of curiosity makes the person search and investigate, and so on. If these instincts transcended their limits, they will be detrimental to the human being.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَلَمۡ تَرَ كَيۡفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ ﴿٦﴾ إِرَمَ ذَاتِ ٱلۡعِمَادِ ﴿٧﴾ ٱلَّتِي لَمۡ يُخۡلَقۡ مِثۡلُهَا فِي
ٱلۡبِلَٰدِ ﴿٨﴾ وَثَمُودَ ٱلَّذِينَ جَابُواْ ٱلصَّخۡرَ بِٱلۡوَادِ ﴿٩﴾ وَفِرۡعَوۡنَ ذِي ٱلۡأَوۡتَادِ ﴿١٠﴾
ٱلَّذِينَ طَغَوۡاْ فِي ٱلۡبِلَٰدِ ﴿١١﴾ فَأَكۡثَرُواْ فِيهَا ٱلۡفَسَادَ ﴿١٢﴾ فَصَبَّ عَلَيۡهِمۡ رَبُّكَ
سَوۡطَ عَذَابٍ ﴿١٣﴾ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِٱلۡمِرۡصَادِ ﴿١٤﴾

Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with
[the people] of 'Ad [6] of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars [7]
whose like has never been made in any land [8]
and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley [9]

and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? [10] All of them
committed excesses in their lands [11] and spread corruption
there [12] your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on
them [13] Your Lord is always watchful [14]
(The Quran, *al-Fajr:* 6 - 14)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* relates to us a brief account of the previous nations that He seized with punishment and destruction. This is because He *the Almighty* has talked to us about the Overwhelming Event and its calamities that surround the people and encompass them that no one can find any way out. When will this Overwhelming Event take place? It will take place in the Hereafter. So, what about those who do not believe in it and consider it unlikely? Consequently, there should be a kind of hasty punishment in the worldly life before that of the Hereafter in order to deter such people. This guarantees that their tyranny will not prevail and their corruption will not spread among the people and will not overwhelm the countries. The verses in question mention some examples of the nations that He *the Almighty* punished in the worldly life, including ‘Ad, Thamud and Pharaoh.

Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of ‘Ad.’ (*al-Fajr:* 6) The people of ‘Ad are figures with well-known history among the various civilizations. They had well-known architectural and civilizational achievements. However, this did not protect them from Allah’s Punishment. After He *the Almighty* seized them, they were totally destroyed and no trace was found for them. His saying: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of ‘Ad.’ (*al-Fajr:* 6) means that this news is already known to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and also those who were living at the time of revealing these verses. Their history was widespread among the travelers. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered ...’ (*al-Fajr:* 6) If that news had been unknown to the people, they would have said that they did not know what happened to the people of ‘Ad. The destruction that afflicted the people of ‘Ad is well-known, and has really happened. The people can make sure of that through examining the remnants of these people. If we consider the punishment that befalls those who violate Allah’s Way of Guidance, we find it assuring the fact that we must believe in Allah’s Promise and Threat. Thus, the one who violates Allah’s Way of Guidance must suffer a worldly punishment before that of the Hereafter, so that the people do not think that the punishment will come only in the Hereafter. It is wise that the transgressors who violate Allah’s Way of guidance should be punished in the worldly life and not be left until the Hereafter. They should be made an example for the people. So, the one, who does not believe in Allah’s unseen Promise and Threat just because He told us about them, should believe in them on account of the factual reality that attests to him/her.

We have previously discussed the interpretation of His saying: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered ...’ (*al-Fajr:* 6). Scholars interpret it as, ‘Have you not know?’ If this were the case, why does He *the Almighty* say, ‘*Alam Tara* (Have you not seen)?’ This is because He *the Almighty* wants to affirm this news to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to direct our attention to the fact that when He *the Almighty* says something, we must be certain that it is totally true as if we had seen it with our eyes, not heard it with our ears. Moreover, what He *the Almighty* tells us is more truthful than what we see with our eyes because they can deceive us while He *the Almighty* never does so. Likewise, in every matter He *the Almighty* wants to confirm, He always says: ‘Have you [Prophet] seen ...’ (*al-Fajr:* 6), as in His saying: ‘Do you not see that Allah is He, Whom obeys whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18). We do not witness how these objects prostrate to Allah *the Almighty,* but His Report is more authentic than what our eyes perceive. So, what He *Glorified is He* tells us about the unseen matters should be elevated to the level of what the eye perceives, as it is the means of having certitude.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of ‘Ad, [6] of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, [7] whose like has never been made in any land, [8]’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-8) He *Glorified is He* gives us a picture of the level of civilisation, architecture and power that the people of ‘Ad reached. They were unmatchable among all the ancient nations. As for His saying: ‘and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley.’ (*al-Fajr:* 9), it means that they, i.e. the people of Thamud cut the rocks and hewed into them, making houses and palaces inside the mountains. We have already seen this description in the city of Petra in Jordon. It is an example of the architectural advancement that today's modern science and new machines failed to match. Then He *the Almighty* says: 'and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? [10] All of them committed excesses in their lands. [11]' (*al-Fajr:* 10-11)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the flaws of those nations. He *Glorified is He* does not condemn them for their construction, building and unmatchable civilization but rather for their transgression and haughtiness on account of their material advancement. Further, He *the Almighty* does not condemn them for the material advancement or activity in life, but rather for their transgression in their activities. The human being is free to pursue the means of advancement and development and to find out the secrets of existence that bring about luxury, blessings and prosperity within the limits of what Allah *the Almighty* made lawful. However, one should beware of transgression in the blessings, the high rank, the property, etc. This is because transgression inevitably leads to corruption: 'All of them committed excesses in their lands, [11] and spread corruption there: [12]' (*al-Fajr:* 11-12) As Allah *the Almighty* is displeased with corruption, He *Glorified is He* must put an end to it so that it does not spread in the universe. Consequently, He *Glorified is He* seizes the transgressors with Power and Might.

So, He *the Almighty* says: 'your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them. [13] Your Lord is always watchful. [14] (*al-Fajr:* 13-14) This means that He *Glorified is He* watches over their actions and will hold them accountable for them. This is because He *the Almighty* is fully Aware of everything and nothing is hidden from Him; not absent from Him is an atom's weight within the heavens or within the earth. Here, we notice that the Quran presents the following meaning plainly: 'All of them committed excesses in their lands, [11] and spread corruption there: [12]' (*al-Fajr:* 11-12). It makes a connection between corruption and transgression. The word 'transgression' means to exceed the reasonable limits. All the matters have a due measure, and when there is excessiveness in these measures, transgression takes place, as the people would consequently dispute over their rights. Thus, excessiveness in one party necessitates decrease in the other. There is no wrongdoer without a wronged one, nor is there a haughty person without a humiliated one. Transgression entails that the person wants to use his/her privileges wrongly. Naturally, there are strong people and weak ones. According to the Islamic Way of Guidance, the strong, the rich and the knowledgeable must help the weak, the poor and the ignorant, respectively. Thus, the privileged person should not deprive the unprivileged one of the bounties that He *the Almighty* bestowed on him/her. The opposite, wrong way is that the privileged one appropriates the unprivileged person's labour, so that the strong grow in power and the weak grow in weakness; the rich grow in wealth and the poor in poverty. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…so those who are made to excel do not give away their sustenance to those whom their right hands possess so that they should be equal therein…' (*an-Nahl:* 71).

In fact, transgression is a compound form of corruption. This is because if the weak were left without help, this would be considered transgression and injustice. So, what would we think if the transgressors use the weak person's labour to grow in power?! So, when transgression prevails, Allah *the Almighty* intervenes to stop it. On the individual level, He *the Almighty* is Patient with His servants as long as they have the self-reproaching soul and the self-deterrent against corruption and misdeeds. Further, He *Glorified is He* is Patient with the society as long as it automatically reforms its members through enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. So, when there is no deterrent on the individual and the social level, what should we do? Shall we leave transgression and corruption to prevail? No, Allah *the Almighty* must intervene with a deterring punishment, as the transgressors are devoid of any deterrent. This is what happened with the nations that He *the Almighty* annihilated and seized with Might and Power through the flood that drowned them, the Blast that destructed them or the stones that fell on them from the sky like rain.

We notice in the Messages before Islam that the Messenger was responsible for calling his people to faith but he is not responsible for punishing those who oppose his Message, for Allah *the Almighty* takes upon Himself to punish them. This was the Divine Law in all the previous Messages from the time of Adam. It is only changed after the coming of the Message of Islam. This is because He *the Almighty* sent Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as the last Prophet to overwhelm all the religions. He *peace and blessings be upon him* entrusted his followers to reform those who violate Allah's Way of Guidance on earth. Consequently, striving in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* is an obligation and a special characteristic of Muslims that never ceases to exist. That is why one of the privileges of this *ummah* is the existence of good people who reform the deviant people at all times. In this regard, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'A group among my *ummah* will continue to follow the truth and prevail, and those who oppose them will not be able to harm them, until the Hour is established.' Messenger Muhammad's followers are extension for His Message and are entrusted with the Call after him. They are required to take up the banner of striving in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* and to reform those who deviate from the Divine Way of Guidance. This striving should be in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* to make His Word uppermost, without committing any act of injustice or transgression. For this reason, we find that He *the Almighty* charged this *ummah* with what He had charged Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'And thus We have made you a medium (just) nation that you may be the bearers of witness to the people and (that) the Apostle may be a bearer of witness to you…' (*al-Baqara:* 143). As he *peace and blessings be upon him* bears witness that he delivers the Message to us and guides us to the Right Path, those who believe in him are required to bear witness that they have delivered the Way of Guidance to the people and made them abide by it.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Your Lord is always watchful.' (*al-Fajr:* 14), it means that He *the Almighty* knows fully well all the peoples' movements and watches over them. Consequently, He will not let them violate His Way of Guidance. All their movements are reckoned and He *the Almighty* will punish them in the worldly life, if He wills, or defer the punishment until the Hereafter. The people of 'Ad lived in Al-Ahqaf, as He *the Almighty* says: 'And mention the brother of 'Ad; when he warned his people in the sandy plains…' (*al-Ahqaf:* 21) The Messenger sent to them was Hud *peace be upon him*. Al-Ahqaf is located in the south of the Arabian Peninsula between Aden and Hadramaut. Their civilization has been destructed totally, so we have not seen any of its remnants. Scholars opine that this is because it is a sandy area where sand storms can cover a complete caravan. That is why there is no trace of them. As for Thamud, they are the people of Prophet Saleh and their remnants are still existent. Likewise, the powerful Pharaoh's traces are still apparent in the Pyramids, the temples and so on. As the Quran tells us about Iram, the city of lofty pillars, this clearly means that it already existed in such an unmatchable description. The Quran addresses those who witnessed its revelation according to the knowledge they had about the civilization of 'Ad. In fact, the utter truthfulness of the Quran in telling about things we have witnessed is a conclusive proof of its utter truthfulness in telling about what we have not seen.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* corrects the wrong scale that the people use when they receive His commands concerning the creatures. He *the Almighty* says to them, 'You are wrongly measuring the matters and I want to put your scale right in order that your activity in life be upon guidance. This is because the wrong scale leads to turmoil and confusion in people's activity in life.'

Allah *the Almighty* subsequently says:

فَأَمَّا ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ إِذَا مَا ٱبْتَلَىٰهُ رَبُّهُۥ فَأَكْرَمَهُۥ وَنَعَّمَهُۥ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّىٓ أَكْرَمَنِ ﴿١٥﴾
وَأَمَّآ إِذَا مَا ٱبْتَلَىٰهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُۥ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّىٓ أَهَٰنَنِ ﴿١٦﴾ كَلَّا ۖ بَل لَّا تُكْرِمُونَ
ٱلْيَتِيمَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَلَا تَحَٰٓضُّونَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ ٱلْمِسْكِينِ ﴿١٨﴾ وَتَأْكُلُونَ ٱلتُّرَاثَ
أَكْلًا لَّمًّا ﴿١٩﴾ وَتُحِبُّونَ ٱلْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا ﴿٢٠﴾

[The nature of] man is that, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, 'My Lord has honoured me' [15] but when He tries him through the restriction of his provision, he says, 'My Lord has humiliated me' [16] No indeed! You [people] do not honour orphans [17] you do not urge one another to feed the poor [18] you consume inheritance greedily [19] and you love wealth with a passion [20] (The Quran, *al-Fajr:* 15 - 20)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* mentions two cases in life: the person whom He *Glorified is He* has provided abundantly, and thus s/he thinks this is good to him/her, saying, 'My Lord has honoured me.' The second case is of the one whom Allah *the Almighty* restricted his/her provision, for s/he consequently thinks this is evil for him/her, saying thereby, ‘My Lord has humiliated me.’ He *Glorified is He* therefore corrects these misconceptions, saying, ‘Giving abundant provision or increasing the wealth of someone is not a proof of honouring, nor is restricting the provision is a proof of humiliating. This wrong thought brings about confusion between the test and the result.’ They are indeed different, for giving wealth and providing abundantly constitute a test. This is also the case with restricting the provision and having little money. Both of these cases are equal to each other, for they both are none but mere tests; no one excels the other except after finding out the result of the exam of each one. In other words, being honoured or humiliated is up to the person and depends on his/her success in the test. When we reflect on the Quranic manner of expression, we find that both cases are none but a test; He *the Almighty* tests His servant by either the abundant provision and wealth or the restriction of the provision and having little money. Further, He *Glorified is He* corrects the misconception of both parties. His saying: ‘No indeed!’ (*al-Fajr:* 16) means that the understanding of both parties are wrong, for neither the abundant provision is a sign of honour nor the restricted one is a sign of humiliation.

Afterwards, the context proves the truthfulness of this Divine Rule through mentioning some ways of spending, saying: ‘You [people] do not honour orphans, [17] you do not urge one another to feed the poor [18]’ (*al-Fajr:* 17-18). In fact, money has two sides in our life, namely: - how it is gained and how it is spent. Here, we find that the Quranic context skips talking about the way of gaining money to talk about the way of spending it because it is more important in this particular context. It is as if He *the Almighty* addresses the one who wrongly thinks that having an abundant wealth is a sign of honour, saying, ‘Have you fulfilled the due right in your wealth? Have you honoured the orphans and fed the poor?’ He *the Almighty* mentions two cases of misery and hardship that the rich people are required to eliminate. It is as if He *Glorified is He* says to the servant, ‘How can the wealth you have be a sign of honour while you have not rightly spent it? In reality, it is not a sign of honour but rather a test for you. The real honour is to pass the test through spending on the orphans and the poor.’

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions another defect of wealth, saying: ‘you consume inheritance greedily.’ (*al-Fajr:* 19) Consuming inheritance is a prevailing defect in our societies. How can we say that the wealth of person who collected money from consuming inheritance is a sign of honour?! On the contrary, it is a test and a proof of humiliation because s/he collected it unlawfully from ill-gotten sources. We cannot expect that such a person will spend his/her money in a lawful way.

As for the one who was deprived of money and thought that Allah *the Almighty* had humiliated him/her, s/he should consider the situation of the one who collected his/her money unlawfully and thus bore its consequences. S/he should carefully read Allah's saying: '…they shall have that whereof they were niggardly made to cleave to their necks on the Resurrection Day…' (*Al-'Imran:* 180); and 'On the day when it shall be heated in the fire of hell, then their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it; this is what you hoarded up for yourselves, therefore taste what you hoarded.' (*at-Tawba:* 35)

In this case, the one who was deprived of money is better than the one who failed the exam of gaining and spending it lawfully. He *the Almighty* does not deprive the person of money to humiliate him/her, for this deprivation in itself could be an honour and Mercy. Man should only reflect on the cases of the rich people around him/her. S/he will find that many of them failed in the test of having wealth; they neither gained nor spent it lawfully. This definitively proves the truthfulness of what Allah *the Almighty* says. We should only correct our viewpoint about wealth on the basis of what He *the Almighty* told us, so that our activity in life would be based on guidance. Furthermore, this makes us respect Allah's Predestination and Distribution of His Bestowals among His creatures.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'and you love wealth with a passion.' (*al-Fajr:* 20) Our passionate love for wealth is a factual reality, for this love is instilled in the human being; it even constitutes part of his/her natural instinct. That is why we find that wealth is the main interest of the people and the criterion for comparison. They say, 'This is rich and that is poor,' but they rarely think about other blessings. In fact, morals, obedience, happiness, good health, safety and children are all blessings among many others. So, we should not concentrate on the blessing of wealth and neglect other blessings.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كَلَّآ إِذَا دُكَّتِ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ دَكّٗا دَكّٗا ﴿٢١﴾ وَجَآءَ رَبُّكَ وَٱلۡمَلَكُ صَفّٗا صَفّٗا ﴿٢٢﴾
وَجِاْيٓءَ يَوۡمَئِذِۭ بِجَهَنَّمَۚ يَوۡمَئِذٖ يَتَذَكَّرُ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ وَأَنَّىٰ لَهُ ٱلذِّكۡرَىٰ ﴿٢٣﴾

No indeed! When the earth is pounded to dust, pounded and pounded [21] when your Lord comes with the angels, rank upon rank [22] when Hell is that Day brought near – on that Day man will take heed, but what good will that be to him then? [23] (The Quran, *al-Fajr:* 21- 23)

The Arabic word *Dakka* means to pound something to be flat like something lower than it. This meaning is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…then will you see Me; but when his Lord manifested His Glory to the mountain He made it crumble…' (*al-A'raf:* 143). The mountain is supposed to be firm, strong and stable. If it should remain in place, then Moses would see Allah *the Almighty*. However, when He *Glorified is He* manifested His Glory to it, He made it crumble and Moses *Allah's peace be upon him* fell unconscious. So, the meaning of His saying: 'When the earth is pounded to dust, pounded and pounded.' (*al-Fajr:* 21) is that the earth will totally break up and turn to dust. Likewise, He *the Almighty* says: '…but when the promise of my Lord comes to pass He will make it level with the ground, and the promise of my Lord is ever true.' (*al-Kahf:* 98) So, when Allah's Promise about the Hereafter and the Resurrection comes to pass, He *the Almighty* will level the barrier of Dhu Al-Qarnayn with the ground. The word '*Dakka*' serves as an emphasis on the same word mentioned before it. It confirms the action of pounding the earth and indicates the power of pounding and breaking it up.

As for Allah's saying: 'when your Lord comes with the angels, rank upon rank.' (*al-Fajr:* 22), it means that the Angels will stand in ordered rows, behind each other. This sight is beyond the human perception. The coming of Allah *the Almighty* should be considered in the light of His saying: '…nothing is like Him…' (*ash-Shura:* 11). It is not similar to the coming of the human beings and the other creatures. Further, His Hearing and Life are different from His creatures' hearing and life. This is due to the fact that His Attributes and Actions are not similar to that of the created beings. We should not only negate the similarity between His Essence and that of the people but also negate this similarity in the Attributes and Actions. If the act of coming in our human perception entails leaving a place to go to another, then this coming could not be attributed to Him *the Almighty*. He *the Almighty* is Present somewhere but not absent from anywhere. This is the manifestation of His Glory and Greatness.

He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘When hell is that Day brought near– on that Day man will take heed, but what good will that be to him then?’ (*al-Fajr:* 23) The hell will be brought near on the Day of Judgment, being dragged by seventy thousand bridles. Seventy thousand Angels are in charge of pulling every bridle. They drag the hell until it stands on the left side of the Throne. When this verse was revealed, the colour of Messenger Muhammad’s face changed and he heavily sweated that the Companions felt sorrow for him. Some of them went to ‘Ali *Allah be pleased with him* and said, ‘O ‘Ali, something serious had happened and we realised its effect on the Prophet of Allah.’ ‘Ali went to him, embraced him from behind and kissed him between his eyes. He then said, ‘O Prophet of Allah, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you! What has happened today? What has changed your condition? He *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Gabriel has come and recited this verse to me: ‘When hell is that Day brought near…’ (*al-Fajr:* 23). I asked him how it would be drawn near. He said, ‘Seventy thousand Angels will drag it by seventy thousand bridles. It will deviate for a moment and if it would not be controlled, it would have burnt all the gathered people.’

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘…on that Day man will take heed, but what good will that be to him then?’ (*al-Fajr:* 23) At that time, man will fully realize the truth and take heed of what s/he sees – but it is too late. That is why He *the Almighty* says afterwards: ‘but what good will that be to him then?’ (*al-Fajr:* 23) The time of taking heed has gone and it is useless in the Hereafter, the Home of Recompense. At that time, man will remember what s/he had done or left undone. S/he will fully realize that s/he will be held accountable for the rights s/he has unlawfully consumed, the money s/he has hoarded and the food of which he has deprived the poor and the orphans. However, what is the benefit of that realization at that time? What is the fruit of repentance after it is too late?

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

يَقُولُ يَٰلَيۡتَنِي قَدَّمۡتُ لِحَيَاتِي ﴿٢٤﴾

He will say, ‘Would that I had provided for
this life to come!’ [24] (The Quran, *al-Fajr:* 24)

Such a person wishes that s/he had provided anything for the Hereafter, which is the real life. He wishes that s/he had put forward good deeds and righteous actions and that s/he had strived in his/her fleeting life for the everlasting one. The Arabic particle ‘*Layt’* denotes wishing for something beloved yet unattainable. S/he describes his/her eager wish through calling it, but it would never answer. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And this life of the world is nothing but a sport and a play; and as for the next abode, that most surely is the life-- did they but know!’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 64) The Hereafter is the one that deserves to be described as ‘a life’ because it is eternal and everlasting. By contrast, the worldly life is a transitory one and we should work in it for the sake of the Hereafter.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَيَوۡمَئِذٖ لَّا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُۥٓ أَحَدٞ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَثَاقَهُۥٓ أَحَدٞ ﴿٢٦﴾

On that Day, no one will punish as He punishes [25]
and no one will bind as He binds [26]
(The Quran, *al-Fajr:* 25 - 26)

On the Day of Judgment, no one of the created beings will afflict the punishment of Allah *the Almighty* as He *Glorified is He* is the Only One Who is entitled to do so. Likewise, in the worldly life, no one should punish with His *Glorified is He* punishment. The ‘bind’ is what is used to tie someone up. As no one will punish as Allah *the Almighty* punishes, no one will bind as He binds. On that Day, the people will not witness a punishment more severe than that befalling the wrongdoers. Further, they will not see the like of the tight bond with which He *the Almighty* bonds them. Consequently, the people of error will find no way out to escape.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the chapter of *al-Fajr* with talking about the peaceful soul in order to reassure the believers, saying:

يَـٰٓأَيَّتُهَا ٱلنَّفْسُ ٱلْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾ ٱرْجِعِىٓ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً ﴿٢٨﴾
فَٱدْخُلِى فِى عِبَـٰدِى ﴿٢٩﴾ وَٱدْخُلِى جَنَّتِى ﴿٣٠﴾

'[But] you, soul at peace [27] return to your Lord well pleased and well pleasing [28] go in among My servants [29] and into My Garden' [30] (The Quran, *al-Fajr:* 27 - 30)

The peaceful soul is the one that finds assurance and peace in Allah's Way of Guidance. If this soul exists along with the self-reproaching soul in a society, then it will be a good, peaceful one. This is because the peaceful one commands the person to do acts of obedience while the self-reproaching one rebukes him/her for committing sins and evil deeds. The peaceful soul is excessively content to the extent that this contentment extends to the life it leads. It is as if that life loves and is content with the one with the peaceful soul. This soul is not anxious either in the good or the bad times; it is always content with Allah's Predestination. At the time of easiness, it is thankful to Allah *the Almighty* and at the time of distress, it is patient and content. Affluence does not incite it to act haughtily or violate the Straight Path, nor does poverty make it discontent. The peaceful soul is the one which is sure it will not be punished. It will return to its Lord's Benevolence and Reward that He has prepared for it.

So, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Go in among My servants; [29] and into My Garden. [30]' (*al-Fajr:* 29-30) It will go among the righteous servants. In this regard, 'Amr ibn Al-'As says, 'When a believer dies, two Angels will be sent to him/her with a curio from the paradise, and will say to him/her, 'Come out, O peaceful soul as well pleased and well pleasing. Come out praiseworthy and receive glad tidings of mercy and fragrance and a Lord Who is not angry. It will then come out as the best fragrance of musk on the surface of the earth.' So, the peaceful soul is tranquil; it is not provoked by fear or sadness. It is peaceful through remembering, obeying, and fearing Allah *the Almighty*. It will return to its Lord to receive its promised reward. As it will be pleased with what it is given, He *the Almighty* is pleased with it. It will be among the righteous servants who no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. It will enter Allah's Paradise that He prepared for the righteous servants. In that paradise there are bounties that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard and no human heart has ever perceived.

the chapter of

al-Balad

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Balad*(1) (The City)

لَآ أُقۡسِمُ بِهَٰذَا ٱلۡبَلَدِ ﴿١﴾ وَأَنتَ حِلُّۢ بِهَٰذَا ٱلۡبَلَدِ ﴿٢﴾ وَوَالِدٖ وَمَا وَلَدَ ﴿٣﴾

I swear by this city —[1] and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city —[2] [I swear] by parent and offspring [3] (The Quran, *al-Balad:* 1- 3)

The Oath is employed to affirm the meaning. In this connection, one of the righteous people said, ‘Who have invoked Allah’s Wrath to the extent that He takes an Oath.’ He *the Almighty* may swear by Himself or one of His creatures. Further, He may employ a negated Oath, as in His saying: ‘I swear by this city.*’* (*al-Balad:* 1); and ‘But nay! I swear by the falling of stars; [75] and most surely it is a very great oath if you only knew; [76]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 75-76). Therefore, He *Glorified is He* swears by Himself to affirm the subject of the Oath. In the judiciary field, affirming a subject could be through an oath. If someone takes an oath, no one can belie him/her. Further, He *the Almighty* swears by the fig, the olives, the Wise Quran and so on.

Here, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘I swear by this city —[1] and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city—[2] [I swear] by parent and offspring. [3]

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Balad,* counting 20 verses and 82 words, is number 90 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Qaf* and before that of *At-Tariq*. So, it is number 35 in the order of the revelation. It is called *Al-Balad* because this word in mentioned in the first verse; and also *Al-‘Aqaba* because this word is mentioned in His saying: ‘Yet he has not attempted the steep path.’ (*al-Balad:* 11)

(*al-Balad:* 1-3) Amazingly, the subject of the Oath is mentioned: ‘that We have created man for toil and trial.’ (*al-Balad:* 4) One may ask, ‘How does He *the Almighty* negate the fact that He is taking Oaths here and then mentions a subject for these Oaths?’ We say that this indicates that the people should not have denied the subject of the Oaths, and He should not have taken Oaths to affirm it. However, if He were to swear, He would swear by the aforementioned Oaths.

Mecca has become a city by Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham) invocation. Mecca and the area surrounding it were an abandoned, barren place, bereft of plants, water and people. This is how Prophet Ibrahim described it, saying: ‘O our Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Your Sacred House…’ (*Ibrahim:* 37). It was an uncultivable land. No human being could plant it. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And when Abraham said: My Lord, make it a secure town and provide its people with fruits…’ (*al-Baqara:* 136) He *peace be upon him* asked to make that place a city and to make it secure. The word *Balad* refers to the city. When there is a place with no building, it cannot be easily distinguished. However, when the buildings are constructed in it, they will make it distinguished from the surrounding flat earth. The Quran uses some terms to describe places like village, country and city. *Al-Balad* refers to the big city that has all man’s needs that s/he does not find in other cities. Ibrahim’s invocation was: ‘…therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful.’ (*Ibrahim:* 37) The people loved to come to Mecca with all kinds of provisions and fruits. They came to the city that had no fruits to be considered a big city; however, it became a big, secure city.

So, Allah’s Oath: ‘I swear by this.’ [3] (*al-Balad:* 1) reminds the people of Mecca about the condition of their city when Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* came to it with his wife, Hajar, and baby Ismail (Ishmael). At that time, Mecca was not a city, or even anything. So, Allah *the Almighty* reminds the people of Mecca about His Blessings on them, while they deny and disbelieve in the Message and bar from the Way of Allah *the Almighty*. If they did not believe in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* out of fear of losing their power and prestigious rank, they should remember that their Lord had given a great position for their city after being a barren desert.

Then He *the Almighty* says: ‘and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city.’ (*al-Balad:* 2) This means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* lives in that city. Some scholars say that the Arabic word *Hill* could mean ‘lawful’. So, the meaning would be that it is lawful to him *peace and blessings be upon him* to fight in that city, while this was declared unlawful before him. In this regard, he *peace and blessings be upon him* says, ‘Fighting in Mecca is unlawful. It was made sacred by Allah the day He created the heavens and the Earth. Fighting therein was not permitted for any one before me or after me rather it was permitted for me for a short part of a day.’ Other scholars hold the position that the word *Hill* means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* stays in Mecca. This is an addition to the inviolability and the honour of Mecca. Those who hold the first view say that this chapter was revealed in Medina after the year of Opening Mecca. Those who opt for the second one say that it was revealed in Mecca.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘[I swear] by parent and offspring. (*al-Balad:* 3), it refers to Adam *peace be upon him* and his offspring until the coming of the Hour. This means that He *Glorified is He* swears by the human beings from the time of Adam to the coming of the Hour. Some scholars, however, opine that the particle *Ma* is a negative one here. So, the meaning is that He *Glorified is He* also swears by the sterile person who does not have children. Now, why does He *the Almighty* swear by Adam and his offspring after swearing by Mecca which had become a city due to Ibrahim’s (Abraham) invocation?! This city has become the Mother of the cities because it has been inhabited by many people and offspring. It is as if He *the Almighty* shows His Favour on the people of Mecca, telling them that their city has become so due to His *Glorified is He* Blessings on them.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَقَدۡ خَلَقۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ فِي كَبَدٍ ٤ أَيَحۡسَبُ أَن لَّن يَقۡدِرَ عَلَيۡهِ أَحَدٞ ٥
يَقُولُ أَهۡلَكۡتُ مَالٗا لُّبَدًا ٦ أَيَحۡسَبُ أَن لَّمۡ يَرَهُۥٓ أَحَدٌ ٧

That We have created man for toil and trial [4] Does he think that no one will have power over him? [5] ‘I have squandered great wealth,’ he says [6] Does he think no one observes him? [7] (The Quran, *al-Balad:* 4 - 7)

Allah *the Almighty* tells us in many verses about the human being. Some verses talk about his/her material creation, like His saying: ‘And certainly did We create man from an extract of clay.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 12); ‘And We did certainly create man out of clay from an altered black mud.’ (*al-Hijr:* 26); and ‘We create man in the finest state.’ (*at-Tin:* 4) Here, He *the Almighty* says: ‘that We have created man for toil and trial.’ (*al-Balad:* 4) This verse refers to the creation of man as to his/her mission on the earth. S/he faces the calamities of the worldly life and the hardships of the Hereafter. S/he is always at difficult times. The worldly life is the home of hardship, toil and distress, while the paradise is the home of everlasting rest and blessings.

Some scholars maintain that the word *Kabad* means that Allah *the Almighty* created the human being in an upright state. Most of what He *the Almighty* has created walks on four feet or on its belly, etc. By contrast, the human being walks upright on two feet. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And Allah has created from water every living creature: so of them is that which walks upon its belly, and of them is that which walks upon two feet, and of them is that which walks upon four; Allah creates what He pleases; surely Allah has power over all things.’ (*an-Nur:* 45) The Arabic word *Daab-ba* refers to anything walking on the earth. Some creatures walk on their bellies like the creeping creatures; some on two feet like the gorilla and the kangaroo; others on four feet like most of the animals and the cattle. These are just examples of how some creatures walk, for some other creatures walk on forty-four feet. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘…He creates what you do not know.’ (*an-Nahl:* 8) Man is the only creature that originally walks upright on two feet. As for the animals that walk on two feet, they do not remain as such for a long time, as they return to their normal state, waking on four feet.

Now, does man think that no one has power over him/her after Allah *the Almighty* has created him/her in that way, honored him/her and perfected his/her creation to be the best among the creatures?! So, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Does he think that no one will have power over him?’ (*al-Balad:* 5) The problem with man is that s/he does not know his/her true position and thus have many delusions, including that no one has power over him/her and that his/her property is enough to save him/her despite his/her transgression and injustice. S/he wrongly thinks that no one will overcome him/her, for s/he is deceived by his/her power, boosting about his/her high position and rank, allured and proud of his/herself. Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘I have squandered great wealth,’ he says.’ (*al-Balad:* 6) The property signifies any valuable thing and it is not confined to money. Rather, everything that the person has and can be measured by money is called a ‘property’. Thus, the land, the estate, the cattle, the gardens and the palm trees are all considered a property. The Arabic expression ‘*Al-Mal Al-lubad’* refers to the great, accumulated amount of money, which denotes its abundance. There are many narrations regarding the reason for the revelation of this verse, including that it is revealed in reference to Abu Jahl, Al-Hakam ibn Hisham, or Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira. Such people spend a lot of money on their enmity for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*. They allotted money for those who kill him and spent money on the battle of Badr, Uhud and Al-Khandaq. So, did what they spent benefit them? In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely those who disbelieve spend their wealth to hinder (people) from the way of Allah; so they shall spend it, then it shall be to them an intense regret, then they shall be overcome; and those who disbelieve shall be driven together to hell.’ (*al-Anfal:* 36) Such people disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* and spent their money to bar from His Way. However, they did not achieve their purpose and their endeavour was fruitless. It is as if He *the Almighty* encourages the disbelievers to keep on spending money against the Islamic Faith so that they lose all of it. Consequently, they will grieve for that loss and regret spending it. Ultimately, they will be overcome by Allah *the Almighty*.

He *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Does he think no one observes him?’ (*al-Balad:* 70) Does this person who is deceived by his/her power and property think that no one observes him/her when s/he bars from the Way of Allah *the Almighty* through his/her high position, power, authority, property and family bonds? Does s/he think that Allah *the Almighty* does not see his/her actions, observe his/her misdeeds and watch him/her while spending money to bar from His Way and fight the people of faith?

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions some of His Blessings, saying:

أَلَمْ نَجْعَل لَّهُۥ عَيْنَيْنِ ﴿٨﴾ وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ ﴿٩﴾ وَهَدَيْنَٰهُ ٱلنَّجْدَيْنِ ﴿١٠﴾

Did We not give him eyes [8] a tongue, lips [9]
and point out to him the two clear ways [of good and evil]? [10]
(The Quran, *al-Balad:* 8 - 10)

These verses include some of the apparent Blessings that man cannot deny. He *the Almighty* mentions the eyes which refer to the sense of sight and the tongue and the lips which are essential for the sense of speaking. He *Glorified is He* made the human being able to see and speak. Here, the sense of hearing is not mentioned despite the fact that it is mentioned many times along with that of sight. However, the context here mentions the sense of speaking because such man said: 'I have squandered great wealth.' (*al-Balad:* 6) How does He *the Almighty* give him/her a tongue and lips and then s/he utters such words?!

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'and point out to him the two clear ways [of good and evil]?' (*al-Balad:* 10) When, He *the Almighty* created man, He showed him/her the Way of Guidance, which is the general direction (guidance) to all people. The Arabic word *Najd* refers to the way going upward. It also refers to the high spots on the earth. In this connection, Al-Hassan Al-Basri narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There are two ways; so why do you prefer the evil one to the good one?' So, the meaning of the verse is that He *Glorified is He* showed man the good way to follow and the evil one to refrain from.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* mentions some of His Blessings:

فَلَا ٱقۡتَحَمَ ٱلۡعَقَبَةَ ﴿١١﴾ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلۡعَقَبَةُ ﴿١٢﴾ فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾ أَوۡ إِطۡعَٰمٞ فِي يَوۡمٖ
ذِي مَسۡغَبَةٖ ﴿١٤﴾ يَتِيمٗا ذَا مَقۡرَبَةٍ ﴿١٥﴾ أَوۡ مِسۡكِينٗا ذَا مَتۡرَبَةٖ ﴿١٦﴾

Yet he has not attempted the steep path [11] What will explain
to you what the steep path is? [12] It is to free a slave [13]
to feed at a time of hunger [14] an orphaned relative [15]
or a poor person in distress [16]
(The Quran, *al-Balad:* 11 - 16)

Linguistically, the Arabic word *Raqaba* refers to the origin of the neck. It also refers to the human being because man's life can be controlled by holding his/her neck. This can lead to his/her death if one presses tightly on the neck. That is why the word *Raqaba* refers to the whole human being. In this regard, the Quran says: 'What will explain to you what the steep path is? [12] It is to free a slave. [13]' (*al-Balad:* 12-13) Here, that word refers to releasing the captured people and the slaves. The good people can buy the slaves and then free them or even participate in this good deed. This was a way of ending slavery. In this process, there were two ways of freeing the slave, which are emancipation and contracting. The first case is when the master of a loyal slave – who served him for a long time - decides to free him after his death. Here, the emancipation is conditional on the death of the master. After he dies, the slave becomes free, not owned by the heirs. The second way is that the master concludes a contract with the slave to free him after paying 100 pounds, for example. The slave can freely seek his provision and pursue the means to gain the required sum of money. After giving it to the master, he becomes free. In the latter case, the good people should help the slave to get the sum of money which he needs to free himself.

In fact, Islam prescribes many ways for freeing slaves by making it, for example, expiation for great sins that can only be forgiven through freeing a slave. Moreover, it prescribes a great reward for the one who frees a slave for the sake of Allah *the Almighty*. Further, freeing slaves and captives is one of the eight ways of spending the *zakat*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the officials (appointed) over them, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth) and the (ransoming of) captives and those in debts and in the way of Allah and the wayfarer; an ordinance from Allah; and Allah is knowing, Wise.' (*at-Tawba:* 60) In this connection, we should state that Islam did initiate, impose or encourage slavery. In fact, it came while slavery was widespread and slaves were having no rights at all. It came to gradually end slavery and abolish the bondage through eliminating its sources. Thus, it has made freeing slave expiation for some sins and one of the ways of spending the *zakat*. This is due to the fact that the sources of slavery were various and bondage was prevailing in the world. So, Islam has not depended on the master's wish to free the slave; rather, it prescribes many ways for freeing them. For example, some sins are only forgiven by freeing a slave. Further, the one who takes an oath and wants to break it should free a slave. Besides, if the person wants to increase his/her reward, s/he can voluntarily free a slave.

Freeing slaves is described as the 'steep path' that the human being should attempt. The sins of the person are like mountains and if s/he frees a slave, they will thus melt and go away. The one who commits sins and seeks Allah's Forgiveness and frees a slave will have his/her sins wiped out. Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'What will explain to you what the steep path is?' (*al-Balad:* 12) This verse magnifies the rank, the seriousness and the position of the freeing slaves. One can attempt the steep path with his/her sins which are like the mountain by freeing a slave. In other words, s/he can have all of these sins forgiven by freeing a slave.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'It is to free a slave, [13] to feed at a time of hunger [14] an orphaned relative [15] or a poor person in distress. [16]' (*al-Balad:* 13-16) These verses mean that the person can attempt the steep path by also feeding a needy person at time of hunger, an orphaned relative or a poor person who is in a dire need. If the person has no orphaned relative, s/he should feed an orphan who is not a relative. Some people commit many sins that became like a steep path that may deprive them of paradise. For such people, Allah *the Almighty* opens the way of salvation and goodness through freeing a captured person or a slave; alleviating a wronged person; feeding the people at time of famine when there is a dire need for food; or feeding one's orphaned relative or distressed poor person. It is as if He *the Almighty* wants the person to do an effective work in his/her society to attempt the steep path of sins and to take all the good paths.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَتَوَاصَوۡاْ بِٱلصَّبۡرِ وَتَوَاصَوۡاْ بِٱلۡمَرۡحَمَةِ ﴿١٧﴾
أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡمَيۡمَنَةِ ﴿١٨﴾

And to be one of those who believe and urge one another to steadfastness and compassion [17] Those who do this will be on the right-hand side [18] (The Quran, *al-Balad:* 17 - 18)

Allah *the Almighty* wants the person who takes all the good ways to attempt the steep path that blocks his/her way to the paradise to do more than that. S/he should elevate his/herself in the levels of Faith and be a better Muslim. S/he is required to join those who believe and who are the majority of the society. S/he should be part of the Muslim society who believes in Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This society has distinctive features, which are: '…urge one another to steadfastness and compassion.' (*al-Balad:* 17) Similarly, in the chapter of *Al-'Asr*, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'By the declining day, [1] man is [deep] in loss, [2] except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness. [3]' (*al-'Asr:* 1-3) The way to be exempted from the deep loss is to believe, do good deeds, urge the people to the truth and steadfastness. In the chapter in question, He *the Almighty* adds: '…urge one another to…compassion.' (*al-Balad:* 17)

The Arabic word '*At-Tawasi*' means to urge someone at one time and to be urged at another. When the one is strong, s/he should urge the weak and vice versa. The chapter of *Al-'Asr* urges to truth and steadfastness. We only urge each other to steadfastness only after urging to truth that we all accept. Afterwards, we urge each other to be steadfast in following the truth, its hardships and difficulties. Here, in the chapter of *Al-Balad*, there is urging to steadfastness and then to compassion. It is as if the chapter of *Al-Balad* completes that of *Al-'Asr*. If we are following the truth, we should urge each other to be steadfast in following it, because steadfastness is a difficult matter and is related to hardships. Following the truth is burdensome and we may differ about it, so we need for what is more than urging each other to truth and steadfastness, which is, the compassion.

This means to have compassion among ourselves and to show it to the people. In this regard, it is reported that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Allah will show mercy to a person who shows mercy to other people.’ He also said, ‘Mercy is only removed from the one who is destined for wretchedness.’ This compassion towards the people entails satisfying their needs, educating the ignorant and helping them to fulfil all their mundane and religious interest. ‘Urging for compassion’ means to spread its spirit in the society, to be merciful to each other, especially when we differ, to wish for goodness for each other and not to forget the graciousness between ourselves.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Those who do this will be on the right-hand side.’ (*al-Balad:* 18), there is a difference between the people on the right-hand side and the Forerunners, as He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *Al-Waqi‘a*: ‘And the forerunners, the forerunners – [10] Those are the ones brought near [to Allah] [11] In the Gardens of Pleasure, [12]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 10-12) Afterwards, He *Glorified is He* defines them, saying: ‘A [large] company of the former peoples [13] And a few of the later peoples. [14]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 13-15) As for the rank of the people on the right-hand side, He *the Almighty* says: ‘The companions of the right - what are the companions of the right?’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 27); and ‘And if he was of the companions of the right, [90] Then [the angels will say], ‘Peace for you; [you are] from the companions of the right. [91]’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 91) The people on the right-hand side are the ones who are given their books in their right hands. They were blessed in the worldly life and spent their lifetime in obeying Allah *the Almighty*. Thus, they deserved to be given their books in their right hands.

Allah *the Almighty* concludes this chapter saying:

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَـٰبُ ٱلْمَشْـَٔمَةِ ﴿١٩﴾ عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّؤْصَدَةٌۢ ﴿٢٠﴾

But those who disbelieve in Our revelations will be on the left-hand side [19] and the Fire will close in on them [20]
(The Quran, *al-Balad:* 19 - 20)

As for those who disbelieve in Allah’s Verses, they will be on the left-hand side; they will be given their books in their left hands. They are the wretched people who wronged themselves because they committed the major wrongdoing, that is, disbelief in Allah *the Almighty* His Books and Revelations. Their misdeeds and major sins encompass them from all directions. As for His saying: ‘and the Fire will close in on them.’ (*al-Balad:* 20), it means that the fire will enclose them and its doors will not be opened for them. Allah *the Almighty* made it encompass them eternally; there is no light, way out or exit. They are locked forever in the fire, and its doors will never be opened for them.

the chapter of

ash-Shams

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *ash-Shams* (1) (The Sun).

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱلشَّمۡسِ وَضُحَىٰهَا ﴿١﴾ وَٱلۡقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَىٰهَا ﴿٢﴾
وَٱلنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّىٰهَا ﴿٣﴾ وَٱلَّيۡلِ إِذَا يَغۡشَىٰهَا ﴿٤﴾

**By the sun in its morning brightness [1]
and by the moon as it follows it [2] by the day
as it displays the sun's glory [3] and by the night as it
conceals it [4] (The Quran, *ash-Shams*: 1-4)**

Allah *the Almighty* swears by the sun and its light which covers the worldly life and penetrates the darkness of the night when the sun rises. This is one of Allah's universal signs that are mentioned 32 times in the Quran as a proof of the greatness of His creation and an argument against the disputatious people. For example, He *the Almighty* relates the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) with An-Namrud, saying: 'Ibrahim said, "Indeed, Allah brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So the disbeliever was overwhelmed [by astonishment], and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.' (*al-Baqara:* 258)

Allah *the Almighty* made the sun a shining lamp which contains light, warmth, and heat. It is an essential source of life for the creatures living on the earth. It is the largest lamp in the world that provides us with light. At the same time, it provides us with warmth according to a precise, Divine Measure. Before it rises on our country, it has risen on other countries and provided them with its light and warmth. As it rises over us, it will set to rise over other counties. It will do the same function every day until the time of the Hour approaches. When Allah *the Almighty* causes the universal system to be disordered, the sun will rise from the west.

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(1) The chapter of *Ash-Shams*, counting 15 verses and 54 words, is number 91 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Qadr* and before that of *Al-Buruj*. It is number 26 in the order of the Quranic revelation.

Some people worshipped the sun and prostrated to it, being heedless that it is a created being and not the Creator. They should have worshipped Allah *the Almighty* Who created the sun, instead. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘And of His signs are the night and day and the sun and moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship.’ (*Fussilat:* 37) The word ‘sign’ refers to the wonderful matters that attract the attention and make the person stand before it lengthily to ponder on its wonders.

Allah *the Almighty* does not only swear by the sun but also by one of its times when it is in the sky, that is, the morning. He *the Almighty* says: ‘By the sun in its morning brightness.’ (*ash-Shams:* 1) The morning is the time of movement and toil when the sun is overhead, in its way to sunset after passing the meridian. It is the first part of the day. So Allah *the Almighty* swears by a universal phenomenon that the people witness. He *Glorified is He* created the day and made the morning the most important time of activity, movement and seeking provision. It is the time of the events that the people witness. For this reason, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him* chooses that time to be the appointment to face the Pharaoh of Egypt, saying: ‘…Your appointment is the day of the Festival and let the people be gathered together in the early forenoon.’ (*Ta Ha:* 59) He *peace be upon him* chose the forenoon for gathering the people so that the place would be clear. So, he accepted the challenge and chose the clearest time of the day to be the time of the confrontation because it would be the most crowded time in the festival. He did not make that appointment at the early time of the morning to make sure that all the people had already left their houses. Further, he neither chose the noon because the heat might prevent the people from coming, and nor did he choose the evening so that the people were not prevented by the darkness from gathering and having a clear sight.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘and by the moon as it follows it.’ (*ash-Shams:* 2), the moon is another sign of Allah’s universal signs. As the sun lightens our day, the moon lightens our night when the sun sets and rises in other counties. The sun and the moon are made subservient to the human being to be able to live on the earth. No one of Allah’s creatures can attribute these signs to him/herself or to anyone else. No one will claim, until the Hour is established, that s/he raised the sky without pillars or created the sun and the moon and subjected them to serve the human being.

As for His saying: ‘…as it follows it.’ (*ash-Shams:* 2), it means that the moon appears after the sun. The intended meaning is that the light of the moon appears after the sun’s shining brightness disappears. This is due to the fact that the moon is always existent but its light disappears during the existence of the sun’s shining brightness. The moon’s light is derived from the sun’s shining brightness. So it not intrinsic as it is derived from the sun rays that reflect on it, like the mirror that reflects the light. There is a difference between the sun and the moon with regard to their light. The former provides a shining brightness and the latter provides light. The shining brightness produces warmth and heat, whereas the light does not produce heat. That is why man does not need to be covered from its light, which is not the case with the sun. According to Al-Farra’, the verse means that the moon derives its light from the sun.

With regard to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘by the day as it displays the sun’s glory.’ (*ash-Shams:* 3), the Arabic word *At-Tagliya* means to display and reveal. This happens when the day comes. Here, the action is attributed to the day but could be also attributed to Allah *the Almighty* that is, He displays the sun’s glory. Further, the day eliminates the darkness of the night. So, the object pronoun in the verse refers to the darkness of the night. The sun of the day eliminates the darkness and displays the creatures on the earth. The day has well known effects on the human being. S/he may forget the beauty of the day and its effects due to its monotony. However, mentioning the day in the verse in question directs man’s attention to reflect on it, as it is a great phenomenon.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘and by the night as it conceals it.’ (*ash-Shams:* 4) When the night comes, quietness prevails. The night conceals the earth, the worldly life and the day by its darkness. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* says: '…He throws the veil of night over the day, which it pursues incessantly…' (*al-A'raf:* 54). Man should not think that there is a contradiction between the night that conceals the perceived objects and the day that displays them, for they are complementary. Man's activity during the day comes from having rest during the night; and the activity during the day necessitates having rest during the night.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱلسَّمَآءِ وَمَا بَنَىٰهَا ٥ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَىٰهَا ٦

By the sky and how He built it [5] and by the earth and how He spread it [6] (The Quran, *ash-Shams*: 5 - 6)

'Building' signifies firmness and cohesion. The sky is a strong, cohesive canopy, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And the heaven, We raised it high with power, and most surely We are the makers of things ample.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 47) It is a lofty building raised by Allah *the Almighty* Who says: 'And the heaven, He raised it high, and He made the balance.' (*ar-Rahman:* 7) Although it is far high over the people, it does not fall on them because it was built perfectly with Allah's perfect Power. The heaven and the earth are the places where we all live; the earth carries us and the sky is over us. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'I swear by the heaven full of ways.' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 7) This verse means that the sky was created precisely that its unperceivable atoms are connected to each other; that is why we see it smooth.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'and by the earth and how He spread it. [6]' (*ash-Shams:* 6) This means that He *Glorified is He* spread the earth from all its directions. Here, He *the Almighty* swears by the earth and the One Who created and spread it. The Arabic word *Bast* means to spread something, as in Allah's saying: 'And the earth, We have made it plain and cast in it mountains and We have made to grow therein of all beautiful kinds.' (*Qaf:* 57) This does not mean that the earth is spread out before the man. The well-established universal fact is that the earth is spherical. So, the right way of understanding the meaning of His saying: 'And the earth, We have made it plain…' (*Qaf:* 57) is that when we stand somewhere, we find the earth, which means that it has no end or edges. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* spread out the earth before the human being so that wherever s/he goes, s/he finds a part of the earth. This is only possible when it is spherical. So, spreading the earth refers to the natural extension of any place in the earth through which we travel. Were the earth squared, rectangular or triangular, we would find an end and an edge for it. Further, we would fall if we reached its edge. However, if we walked in a straight line, we would return to the same spot where we have started. This is due to the fact that the curve of the earth is made precisely and accurately that the eye cannot perceive it, and thus see it straight. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘By the sky and how He built it [5] and by the earth and how He spread it. [6]’ (*ash-Shams:* 5-6) In fact, He *the Almighty* is the Originator of the heaven and the earth and the One Who created them wonderfully without any previous pattern.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the soul of the human being who lives on that earth and under that sky, saying:

وَنَفۡسٖ وَمَا سَوَّىٰهَا (٧) فَأَلۡهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقۡوَىٰهَا (٨)
قَدۡ أَفۡلَحَ مَن زَكَّىٰهَا (٩) وَقَدۡ خَابَ مَن دَسَّىٰهَا (١٠)

By the soul and how He formed it [7] and inspired it [to
know] its own rebellion and piety! [8] The one who purifies
his soul succeeds [9] and the one who corrupts it fails [10]
(The Quran, *ash-Shams*: 7 - 10)

As Allah *the Almighty* perfected the creation of the heaven and the earth, He *Glorified is He* perfected man’s creation and formed him/her in the best image, shape and measure. Further, He *the Almighty* perfected the creation of man’s soul and made it able to do good or evil. The word ‘soul’ could refer to the human being. So, the meaning of the verse would be that He *Glorified is He* formed man’s hands, feet, eyes and ears. In the chapter of *Al-Balad*, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Did We not give him eyes, [8] a tongue, lips, [9] and point out to him the two clear ways [of good and evil]? [10]’ (*al-Balad:* 8-10) Here, He *the Almighty* says: ‘By the soul and how He formed it [7] and inspired it [to know] its own rebellion and piety! [8]' (*ash-Shams:* 7-8) The Arabic word *An-Najdayn* refers to the way of good and piety, and the way of evil and rebellion. He *Glorified is He* has given the man various means of perception like the hearing, the sight and the heart. Further, He has shown him/her the good and evil ways. Now, we have the choice to take either the way of piety or that of rebellion. Moreover, He *the Almighty* has given man the mind that distinguishes between both ways and that can realise the consequences of taking each one.

Piety means to fear Allah *the Almighty* and refrain from what incurs His punishment or provokes His Majestic Attributes like Compelling, Power, Overwhelming and Revenge. It means to fear Him *the Almighty* in everything we do or abstain from.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'The one who purifies his soul succeeds.' (*ash-Shams:* 9) When He *Glorified is He* talks about Faith, its outcome and fruit, He mentions *Al-Falah* 'success' as the outcome of that Faith. The root of the Arabic word *Falah* has a tangible meaning. All what the earth produces needs *Filaha* (farming) and the farmer is called *Fallah*. Allah *the Almighty* wished to call the good outcome of faith '*Falah'* (success), as He says here: 'The one who purifies his soul succeeds.' (*ash-Shams:* 9) 'To purify the soul' means to cleanse it from the impurities and to clarify it from the sins and misdeeds. The Arabic word *zakat* (purity) also means growth. So, the person should increase and elevate the traits of goodness within his/herself. In order to purify his/her soul and increase its goodness, one should preserve his/her luminous faculties through eating what is lawful. Besides, s/he should become accustomed to doing the acts of obedience to maintain these faithful faculties.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'and the one who corrupts it fails.' (*ash-Shams:* 10) In this regard, failure means to overburden oneself due to following the way of rebellion and evil. This is similar to His saying: 'and he who forges (a lie) indeed fails to attain (his desire).' (*Ta Ha:* 61); and 'and he who bears iniquity is indeed a failure.' (*Ta Ha:* 111) Such a person loses and fails because s/he does not follow Allah's Way of Guidance; rather, s/he forges lies and wrongs him/herself, let alone doing injustice to other people.

As for the Arabic word *Dassa*, it means to hide something inside another. It refers here to the act of corrupting the soul. The same word is used in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…or bury it (alive) in the dust?' (*an-Nahl:* 59)

This means to hide it alive in the dust. Likewise, the one who corrupts his/her soul, hides and buries it inside sins, evil deeds, whims, and errors. S/he corrupts his/her soul through misguiding, tempting, and discouraging it from becoming obedient, successful and righteous. Thus, such a person is in deep loss and failure.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* tells us about the people of Thamud as an example of those who misguided themselves and led themselves to perdition when they disobeyed Allah *the Almighty* and the Messenger sent to them. He *Glorified is He* says:

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَىٰهَآ ﴿١١﴾ إِذِ ٱنۢبَعَثَ أَشْقَىٰهَا ﴿١٢﴾
فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ نَاقَةَ ٱللَّهِ وَسُقْيَٰهَا ﴿١٣﴾ فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا
فَدَمْدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُم بِذَنۢبِهِمْ فَسَوَّىٰهَا ﴿١٤﴾ وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَٰهَا ﴿١٥﴾

In their arrogant cruelty, the people of Thamud called [their messenger] a liar [11] when the most wicked man among them rose [against him] [12] The messenger of God said to them, '[Leave] God's camel to drink' [13] but they called him a liar and hamstrung her. Their Lord destroyed them for their crime and levelled them [14] He did not hesitate to punish them [15] (The Quran, *ash-Shams*: 11-15)

Allah *Glorified is He* guided the people of Thamud to the way of piety, good, righteousness and success. However, they preferred error to guidance, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: 'And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way, but they chose error above guidance, so there overtook them the scourge of an abasing chastisement for what they earned.' (*Fussilat:* 17) Some people do not opt for the way of guidance by the free choice that He *the Almighty* has given to man. Likewise, He *the Almighty* directed the people of Thamud to the Way of Guidance but they preferred and followed the way of error and disobedience.

The Call of Prophet Saleh (shelah) *peace be upon him* was similar to the Calls of all the Messengers, a fact which is deduced from Allah's saying: 'And to Thamud (We sent) their brother Saleh. He said: O my people! Serve

Allah, you have no god other than Him…' (*al-A'raf:* 73). The miracle that proved his truthfulness was the she-camel that his people asked to be brought forth from a specific rock. They stipulated that it should be pregnant. When Allah *the Almighty* brought it forth, Prophet Saleh (shelah) *peace and blessings be upon him* said to them: '…clear proof indeed has come to you from your Lord; this is (as) Allah's she-camel for you-- a sign, therefore leave her alone to pasture on Allah's earth, and do not touch her with any harm, otherwise painful chastisement will overtake you.' (*al-A'raf:* 73) Allah *the Almighty* sent this she-camel for the interest of the people of Thamud; it provided them with unmatchable milk in return for drinking one full day from their well. They would then drink the next day. In this way, they had both milk and water. However, they disbelieved in Allah *the Almighty* and in Prophet Saleh (shelah) and were ungrateful for Allah's Blessings. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: 'He said: This is a she-camel; she shall have her portion of water, and you have your portion of water on an appointed time.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 155)

For this reason, He *the Almighty* says here: 'In their arrogant cruelty, the people of Thamud called [their Messenger] a liar.' (*ash-Shams:* 11) The people of Thamud belied their Prophet, exactly like the people of 'Ad, Lut, Shu'aib (Jethro), Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham) and Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon them all*. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And if they deny you, [O Muhammad] - so, before them, did the people of Noah and 'Ad and Thamud deny [their prophets], [42] And the people of Abraham and the people of Lot [43] And the inhabitants of Midyan … [44]' (*al-Hajj:* 42-44). The people of Thamud did not only disbelieve but also transcended all the limits. Further, they did not only deny the Messenger but also slaughtered the she-camel that was providing them with milk and was beneficial for them. What harm would come upon them if they left it and its calf?! It is as if their arrogant cruelty, as Mujahid holds, is their act of disobedience.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'When the wicked man among them rose [against him].' (*ash-Shams:* 12) This verse refers to the nine people who were the most wicked and cruel disbelievers and deniers among the people of Thamud. Allah *the Almighty* says about those wicked people who dared to slaughter the she-camel: 'And there were in the city nine persons who made mischief in the land and did not act aright.' (*an-Naml:* 48) They were people of sheer corruption, doing no act of reform. On the contrary, whenever they were given something good, they corrupted it because they persisted in making mischief. In fact, some people benefit from corruption and oppose for its sake the people of reform and goodness, as they put an end to their corruption. For example, we find those people who benefit from corruption hate the one who abides by the religious teachings and the moral principles. Such corrupt people are the only group that rose against Messengers and their followers.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'The Messenger of Allah said to them, '[Leave] Allah's camel to drink.' (*ash-Shams:* 13) Here, Prophet Saleh (Shelah) warns his people against doing any harm to the she-camel. After all, it is the miracle that they asked for. It is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* and that is why it has a great rank, exactly as we say, 'Allah's Book and Allah's House.' Thus, they should have respected this fact and held the she-camel in its due position. We notice that the word *Naqa* (she-camel) is in the accusative form. So, it is as if Prophet Saleh (shelah) said to them, 'Beware of doing any harm to Allah's she-camel or preventing it from drinking. This is Allah's Rule and only the rebellious people violate it.' Elsewhere, he *peace be upon him* said: 'And, O my people! This will be (as) Allah's she-camel for you, a sign; therefore, leave her to pasture on Allah's earth and do not touch her with evil, for then a near chastisement will overtake you.' (*Hud:* 64) However, his people belied the fact that if they harmed the she-camel or prevented it from drinking, they would be overtaken by a painful punishment.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'But they called him a liar and hamstrung her. Their Lord destroyed them for their crime and levelled them.' (*ash-Shams:* 14) They dared to slaughter the she-camel itself. The verb referring to slaughtering the she-camel is in the plural form. So, did all the people of the tribe participate in that crime? No, only Qidar ibn Salif slaughtered it. However, it is as if all of them committed that crime when they unanimously approved and supported it after being asked about their opinion. Due to their unanimous approval, Qidar killed it. The word *A'qar* means to strike the legs of the she-camel to be slaughtered after falling on the earth. Only an experienced butcher can do that act; that is why Allah *the Almighty* says: '…so he took (the sword) and slew (her).' (*al-Qamar:* 29)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…Their Lord destroyed them for their crime and levelled them.' (*ash-Shams:* 14) He *the Almighty* seized them with an earthquake. So, the punishment overwhelmed them and totally annihilated them. Allah *Glorified is He* punished them for the crimes they had committed, like denying the Messenger sent to them. He *the Almighty* does not do the least act of injustice against His servants. As He *Glorified is He* does not wrong anyone, He *the Almighty* says: '…therefore taste the chastisement for what you earned.' (*al-A'raf:* 39) Punishing those criminals is not an act of injustice on the part of Allah *the Almighty* on account of His Compelling Power over His servants. Rather, it is the fair rule issued on grounds of their crimes and misdeeds.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and levelled them.' (*ash-Shams:* 14) means that the earthquake overtook them, and the punishment included the young and the old, all shared the same punishment. Some scholars opine that this part of the verse means levelling their houses with their graves that they dug inside their houses. They mummified themselves when they became sure about their perishing. He *Glorified is He* tells us about the punishment of the people of Thamud, saying: 'Then as to Thamud, they were destroyed by an excessively severe punishment.' (*al-Haqqa:* 5); and 'And the rumbling overtook those who were unjust, so they became motionless bodies in their abodes, [67] As though they had never dwelt in them; now surely did Thamud disbelieve in their Lord; now surely, away with Thamud. [68]' (*Hud:* 67-68) Their punishment is once called 'the excessively severe punishment' because they: 'In their arrogant cruelty, the people of Thamud called [their Messenger] a liar.' (*ash-Shams:* 11) So, their punishment that overtook them was excessively destructive. This punishment is also called 'the Rumbling' and also 'the Earthquake', as in His saying: 'Then the earthquake overtook them, so they became motionless bodies in their abode.' (*al-A'raf:* 78) Further it is called 'the Scourge,' as in His saying: 'but if they turn aside, then say: I have warned you of a scourge like the scourge of 'Ad and Thamud.' (*Fussilat:* 13) These are four kinds of punishments; that is why He *the Almighty* says: '…and levelled them.' (*ash-Shams:* 14) It is a destructive, rumbling and scourging punishment. Consequently, every one of the people of Thamud perished in the state it overtook him/her. It is an overwhelming punishment that struck their hearts and paralysed their limbs, as He *the Almighty* says: '…so they became motionless bodies in their abode.' (*al-A'raf:* 78)

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'He did not hesitate to punish them.' (*ash-Shams:* 15) Scholars hold two different views about this verse. First, the subject of the verb *Yakhaf* (to fear or hesitate) is attributed to Allah *the Almighty*. Accordingly, the meaning is that no one can adjust His Decision or repel His Decree. He *the Almighty* fears no one when He sends the punishment on the deniers who rebel against Him. This is a severe threat for the disbelievers of Mecca. He *Glorified is He* does not fear the outcome of the punishment befalling the disbelievers. So, the people should fear Him and hold Him in awe. The second view is that the subject of the verb is attributed to the slaughterer of the she-camel. He slaughtered it without fearing the consequences of his heinous crime against Allah's she-camel. Further, he has insisted on committing this crime out of denying Prophet Saleh (Shelah) *peace be upon him*. As his people approved that action, they deserved the punishment that has befallen them.

the chapter of

al-Layl

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Layl* (1) (The Night).

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱلَّيۡلِ إِذَا يَغۡشَىٰ ١ وَٱلنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ ٢
وَمَا خَلَقَ ٱلذَّكَرَ وَٱلۡأُنثَىٰٓ ٣ إِنَّ سَعۡيَكُمۡ لَشَتَّىٰ ٤

By the enshrouding night [1] by the radiant day [2]
by His creation of male and female! [3] The ways you take
differ greatly [4] (The Quran, *al-Layl:* 1-4)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* swears by the night and the day, which are the greatest perceivable signs that no one can deny. They, along with the sun and the moon, are correlated signs; the day is the result of the sunrise and the night is the result of the sunset. He *Glorified is He* uses the night in the first verse as a subject of causing darkness, while the night itself is the object of another subject, which is the sunset. Likewise, the day that displays the earth with its light is the result of the sunrise. The night is related to tranquillity and rest, whereas the day is related to movement and activity. As Allah *Glorified is He* made the day the time of labour, He *Glorified is He* made the night the time of tranquillity, sleep, rest and quietness. The rest at night ensures working during the day, as the human being sleeps during the quiet night to resume his/her work during the day. Thus, the day and night are complementary rather than contradictory.

In this Chapter, the night is mentioned before the day, for each one of them has a function. The function of the day cannot be carried out unless that of the night is duly carried out. In other words, working at the day requires the existence of the night, as these great blessings are equal and mutually support each other. In this regard, man is similar to the machine that should be switched off so that it is not prematurely ruined. The machine that works three shifts, 24 hours a day with non-stop, will be damaged quicker than the machine that works two shifts. Further, the one working only one shift will live the longest among them.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Layl*, counting 21 verses and 91 words, is number 92 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-'Ala* and before that of *Al-Fajr*.

This is a manifestation of Allah's Mercy, as He *Glorified is He* says: 'And out of His Mercy He has made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of His grace…' (*al-Qasas:* 73). This verse means that we should rest at night and seek Allah's Graces and Provision during the day. He *the Almighty* gathers between the day and night and mentions the function of both of them to clarify their correlation and complementarity. If one does not have rest at night and sleep for a while, s/he will not be able to seek Allah's Graces and the means of substance during the day.

Allah *the Almighty* says: 'By the enshrouding night, [1] by the radiant day. [2]' (*al-Layl:* 1-2) He *the Almighty* swears by the night as it enshrouds the horizon and all what is between the heaven and the earth with its darkness, causing the day to fade away. Afterwards, He *Glorified is He* swears by the day when it appears in the universe with its light that causes the darkness of the night to go away. That light reveals what the night conceals with its darkness like the objects, the road, etc.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* swears, saying: 'by His creation of male and female!' (*al-Layl:* 3) He *Glorified is He* takes an Oath by Himself as the Creator of male and female. In fact, mankind is divided into males and females, who both have common functions and qualities. They are the opposite of each other but one should not think they are contradictory, for Allah *the Almighty* made them complementary to ensure the success of life. If the two genders contradicted each other, the life will be ruined. As the day and the night have specific functions, the male and the female have specific functions. If the functions were altered or mixed with each other, this will cause corruption. It is as if the male and the female are like the night and the day; they are complementary and mutually cooperative. We should not take them as enemies but rather recognize the complementary aspect between them. Therefore, as we should not consider the day and the night contradictory to each other, we should not do the same with regard to the male and the female.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘The ways you take differ greatly.’ (*al-Layl:* 4) This verse shows that each one has a specific function and objective in life. Everyone takes the way that leads him/her to that objective. Our movements during the night and the day are different, just like the function of the male and the female. If the functions are mixed and we messed the system of life up, it will collapse and we will suffer the bad consequences of this action until we find a solution after the escalation of the problem. We have called for woman’s work but for half of the working hour (of the man) to spare a period of time, to take care of her home; or she should dedicate her life for taking care of the home if she has enough income or if her husband can meet all the needs of the familial life. However, no one considered that call until we suffered the hardship of these experiences.

The problem lies in shifting the function of a certain object to another, whether in relation to the time or the human being. Every creature in the universe has a special function and endeavour that no other creature shares. The function of the day and night are complementary, and not contradictory. Likewise, the male and the female are created differently so that their functions complete each other instead of contradicting each other.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَىٰ وَٱتَّقَىٰ ﴿٥﴾ وَصَدَّقَ بِٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٦﴾ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُۥ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ ﴿٧﴾ وَأَمَّا مَنۢ بَخِلَ
وَٱسْتَغْنَىٰ ﴿٨﴾ وَكَذَّبَ بِٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٩﴾ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُۥ لِلْعُسْرَىٰ ﴿١٠﴾ وَمَا يُغْنِى عَنْهُ مَالُهُۥٓ إِذَا تَرَدَّىٰٓ ﴿١١﴾

There is the one who gives, who is mindful of God, [5] who testifies to goodness —[6] We shall smooth his way towards ease [7] There is the one who is miserly, who is self-satisfied, [8] who denies goodness —[9] We shall smooth his way towards hardship [10] and his wealth will not help him as he falls [11] (The Quran, *al-Layl:* 5 - 11)

As for the one who gives out charity and shuns disobedience of his/her Lord out of fearing Him, s/he will have his/her way to easiness smoothed for him/her. Here, spending money in charitable ways is mentioned along with having piety. Such a good believer spends his/her money for the sake of Islam through freeing the captives and the tortured believers. This is similar to the case of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq who spent some of his money to free Bilal ibn Rabah, who was suffering torture to be forced to renounce Islam. Abu Bakr bought him from 'Umayya ibn Khalaf and then emancipated him.

So, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘There is the one who gives, who is mindful of Allah, [5] who testifies to goodness—[6] We shall smooth his way towards ease. [7]’ (*al-Layl:* 5-7) refers to the one who gives out the due money and fears of being disobedient and ungrateful, or it refers to the one who embraced monotheism, rejected polytheism, shunned ungratefulness and believed in Allah’s Promise. To such a person: ‘We shall smooth his way towards ease. [7]’ (*al-Layl:* 7) This means that Allah *the Almighty* will make the religious actions easy for him/her, as He *Glorified is He* opens his/her heart for monotheism and Islam, and makes following them an easy matter for him/her.

As for His saying: ‘who testifies to goodness.’ (*al-Layl:* 6), it means that s/he believes in Allah’s Promise for the pious people, namely: - entering the paradise. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women gardens, beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode; and best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure; that is the grand achievement.’ (*at-Tawba:* 72) Allah *the Almighty* promises those who abide by His Way of Guidance that they will have the paradise, the blissful life and goodness. The promise means to give someone the glad tidings about something good that will take place in the future.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘For those who do good is good (reward) and more (than this)…’ (*at-Tawba:* 26). The good reward here means that they will have the recompense for their good deeds doubled many times. As for what is more than this reward, it is gazing at Allah *the Almighty*. This is the unmatchable addition. So, the good reward is the paradise and the addition is gazing at the Bestower of the Blessings *Glorified is He*.

Back to the verse in question, the word ‘goodness’ refers to what is added to the due reward of the pious person. With regard to His saying:

'We shall smooth his way towards ease.' (*al-Layl:* 7), it means that Allah *the Almighty* makes the good actions of such a person easy for him/her due to His pleasure with him/her. These good actions include spending money charitably in the good ways and doing acts of obedience to Him *the Almighty*. He *Glorified is He* will facilitate the good deeds that s/he intended to do to the extent that obedience becomes the easiest matter for him/her. In the verse in question, the word 'easiness' refers to the delightful state in both the worldly life and the Hereafter.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'There is the one who is miserly, who is self-satisfied.' (*al-Layl:* 8), it refers to the one who, out of misery, did not give alms and charities, being indifferent to Allah's Reward. So, out of misery, s/he did not give alms. In addition, out of fake self-satisfaction, s/he was indifferent to Allah *the Almighty*. Consequently, s/he did not fear Him *the Almighty* which is why He *Glorified is He* satisfied him/her with the worldly pleasures at the expense of that of the paradise. His/her evil deed of denying the goodness is added to his/her misery and being indifferent to Allah *the Almighty* and His Reward. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says about the niggardly who does not spend out of the money that He *the Almighty* has given him/her and, therefore, s/he does not pay the *zakat* or give alms to the poor and the needy: 'Behold! You are those who are called upon to spend in Allah's Way, but among you are those who are niggardly, and whoever is niggardly is niggardly against his own soul; and Allah is Self-Sufficient and you have need (of Him)…' (*Muhammad:* 38). Due to His Omnipotence, He *the Almighty* does not need the money that such people give as charity or *zakat.* The one who withholds his/her money is only depriving him/herself of the Divine Bestowals. Let the one who is indifferent to the paradise disobey Allah *the Almighty* for s/he will abide eternally in the hell.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'who denies goodness.' (*al-Layl:* 9), it means that such a person disbelieves in the fact that there is no god but Allah, and denies His promised paradise and reward. So, the one who is niggardly against his/her soul by not giving out money, indifferent to his/her Lord and His Guidance and denying His Call and Religion- for such a person: 'We shall smooth his way towards hardship.' (*al-Layl:* 10)

By contrast, He *the Almighty* says about the pious people: ‘We shall smooth his way towards ease.’ (*al-Layl:* 7) So, in both cases the human being will have his/her way smoothed for him/her, whether s/he believes or denies goodness. Allah *the Almighty* draws the good and the evil ways to the human being and gives him/her many chances to follow the way of guidance. However, if s/he is a disbeliever, indifferent to Allah’s Reward, miserly as to giving out money and a niggardly against his/her soul, He *the Almighty* will smooth this way for him/her. He *the Almighty* facilitates for him/her the actions of the people of hell, humiliates him/her and makes obedience difficult for him/her. Thus, the way of disobedience and evil will be smoothed for him/her.

In this connection, it is reported that ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb said, ‘While we were in a funeral procession in Baqi‘ Al-Gharqad, Allah’s Messenger and sat down, and we sat around him. He had a small stick in his hand and he bent his head and started scraping the ground with it. He then said, ‘There is none among you, and no created soul but has his place written for him either in paradise or in the Hell-Fire, and also has his happy or miserable fate (in the Hereafter) written for him.’ A man said, ‘O Allah's Messenger! Shall we depend upon what is written for us and give up doing (good) deeds? For whoever among us is destined to be fortunate (in the Hereafter), will join the fortunate peoples and whoever among us is destined to be miserable will do such deeds as are characteristic of the people who are destined to misery.’ Prophet Muhammad said, ‘Those who are destined to be happy (in the Hereafter) will find it easy and pleasant to do the deeds characteristic of those destined to happiness, while those who are to be among the miserable (in the Hereafter), will find it easy to do the deeds characteristic of those destined to misery.’(1)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘and his wealth will not help him as he falls.’ (*al-Layl:* 11) This means that his/her wealth will not benefit him/her, for s/he will fall into the fire. The Arabic word *At-Taraddi* means to fall in an abyss. This word is used to refer to the animal that falls from a mountain or in a well, as in His saying: '…or by a head-long fall…' (*al-Ma'ida:* 11). So, when such a person falls into the Fire, his/her wealth will be of no avail for him/her; it will not save him/her from the abyss into which s/he has fallen. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And as for him who is given his book in his left hand he shall say: O would that my book had never been given me: [25] And I had not known what my account was: [26] O would that it had made an end (of me): [27] My wealth has availed me nothing: [28]' (*al-Haqqa:* 25-28) Further, He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *al-Masad:* 'Perdition overtake both hands of Abu Lahab, and he will perish. [1] His wealth and what he earns will not avail him. [2]' (*an-Nasr:* 1-2)

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(1) *See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 6/2647; and Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4969.*

The disbelievers and the hypocrites may wrongly think that they will be saved by seeking their children's support, paying their wealth as a ransom or having friends or intercessors. In fact, the wealth and children will avail no one on the Day of Judgment. No one can buy a room for him/herself in the paradise by his/her wealth, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '(As for) those who disbelieve, surely neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them in the least against Allah, and these it is who are the fuel of the Fire.' (*Al-'Imran:* 10) So, nothing will avail or safeguard the disbelievers and the hypocrites against the fire of the hell, including wealth, children, spouse, brother or family. No one on earth will save them, a fact which is deduced from His saying: 'The guilty one would fain redeem himself from the chastisement of that day by (sacrificing) his children, [11]And his wife and his brother [12] And the nearest of his kinsfolk who gave him shelter, [13] And all those that are in the earth, (wishing) then (that) this might deliver him.[14]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 11-14) Allah *the Almighty* then shatters the disbeliever's and the denier's hope, saying: 'By no means! Surely it is a flaming fire [15] Dragging by the head. [16]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 15-16)

He *the Almighty* then says:

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾ وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَىٰ ﴿١٣﴾ فَأَنذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلَظَّىٰ ﴿١٤﴾
لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى ﴿١٥﴾ الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٦﴾

Our part is to provide guidance —[12] this world and the next belong to Us —[13] so I warn you about the raging Fire [14] in which none but the most wicked one will burn [15] who denied [the truth], and turned away [16]
(The Quran, *al-Layl:* 12 - 16)

As for His saying: ‘Our part is to provide guidance.’ (*al-Layl:* 12), it means that Allah *the Almighty* has shown man the way of guidance when He created him/her. In this connection, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘and point out to him the two clear ways [of good and evil]?’ (*ash-Shams:* 10) So, He *the Almighty* pointed out to the man the way of Truth and that of falsehood. Guidance means to direct someone to the way leading to his/her objective. This entails the existence of a guide, a guided person and a desirable objective. That is why the misguided is the one who lost the Right Way, followed another false way and strayed far away from the Way of Guidance and Allah’s Religion. So, He *the Almighty* states that it is His part to guide us to the Truth. Further, He *Glorified is He* informs the people that their ultimate return will be to Him. As long as this is the case, the people should choose the right way and shun the evil one.

Afterwards, He *the Almighty* says: ‘this world and the next belong to Us.’ (*al-Layl:* 13) So, if the worldly life and the Hereafter belong to Him *Glorified is He* where will the disbelievers escape? The Kingdom of the heaven and the earth belongs to Him and that is why He *Glorified is He* bestows His Blessings on whomever He wishes from among His creatures. He *the Almighty* has a full control over both lives and can smooth the person to the way of ease or hardship. For this reason, the people have no right to seek refuge in another deity whether it is an idol, a person, a planet, the sun, or any other creature. This is due to the fact that these deities have no control over anything in both the worldly life and the Hereafter.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘so I warn you about the raging Fire.’ (*al-Layl:* 4) The raging of the fire indicates that it is terribly blazing and burning to the extent that it breaks the bones of the one who is thrown into it. So, the people should beware of doing any action that leads them to that burning, blazing fire. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'By no means! Surely it is a flaming fire [15] Dragging by the head, [16] It shall claim him who turned and fled (from truth), [17] And amasses (wealth) then shuts it up. [18]' (*al-Ma'arij:* 15-18) This fire roasts the bones, breaks them up and dislocates them along with the joints. It knows its people who denied, rejected and turned away from faith.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'in which none but the most wicked one will burn.' (*al-Layl:* 15) This means that the one who turned away and disbelieved in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is the only person who eternally suffers the hardship and the heat of that fire. He *Glorified is He* does not say, 'but the wicked', otherwise the believers who commit the major sins would be included in the verse, as the *Mu'tazilites* believe. On the contrary, the verse includes only the 'most wicked' people, that is, the disbelievers, the deniers and the rejecters of Faith. The Arabic word *As-Saliyy* means dwelling eternally in the fire, not just entering it for a short time. If the believers who commit the major sins enter the fire, that will be for a short time as a recompense for their sins. However, neither will they be at the level of the disbelievers nor will they abide therein eternally. They will get out after repaying for their sins.

Allah *the Almighty* clarifies who are the 'most wicked people,' saying: 'who denied [the truth], and turned away. [16]' (*al-Layl:* 16) Such a person denied what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* came with, turned his/her back on him and turned away from believing in Him. S/he denied monotheism, turned away from Faith and obedience to Allah and was fully controlled by the Satan.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا ٱلْأَتْقَى ﴿١٧﴾ ٱلَّذِى يُؤْتِى مَالَهُۥ يَتَزَكَّىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

The most pious one will be spared this —[17]
who gives his wealth away as self-purification [18]
(The Quran, *al-Layl:* 17-18)

As for the one who will be saved from the raging fire, s/he is the most pious person, who fears Allah the most. Neither will s/he approach the fire, nor will it come near him/her. S/he will spare the fire as s/he has shunned disobedience and feared Allah *the Almighty* and the fire. That is why s/he will be saved from it and it will never touch him with its blazing and raging fire. Now who is the most pious? It is the one who: ‘gives his wealth away as self-purification.’ (*al-Layl:* 18) S/he easily gives away his/her money without account as alms to the poor and the needy. Some scholars hold that the most pious in this verse refers to Abu Bakr, as he gave away his wealth and left nothing for himself. When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him, ‘What have you saved for yourself?’ he replied, ‘Allah and His Messenger.’ However, the verse is generally applicable, for the consideration is not for the verse’s specific cause of revelation, but rather for the generality of its meaning. Thus, any most pious person will spare the fire.

If we reflect on the verses in question, we find them making a comparison between the ultimate fate of a polytheist and that of a believer. They describe the former as the most wicked who will enter the raging fire, as if it was specially created for him/her. The latter is described as the most pious who will be saved, as if the paradise was created especially for him/her. The most wicked could be Abu Jahl or 'Umayya ibn Khalaf and the most pious could be Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِندَهُۥ مِن نِّعۡمَةٖ تُجۡزَىٰٓ ١٩ إِلَّا ٱبۡتِغَآءَ وَجۡهِ رَبِّهِ ٱلۡأَعۡلَىٰ ٢٠
وَلَسَوۡفَ يَرۡضَىٰ ٢١

Not to return a favour to anyone [19] but for the sake of his
Lord the Most High —[20] and he will be well pleased [21]
(The Quran, *al-Layl:* 19 - 21)

Abu Bark As-Siddiq, for example, will be rewarded because he was a pious person and gave away his wealth in the interest of the Muslims. His first act of self-purification is emancipating Bilal ibn Rabah after buying him. Bilal had been suffering a severe torture in the terribly hot sun. Further, a stone had been put on his chest. Abu Bakr did not buy and emancipate him to return a favour to Bilal or anyone else, as the polytheist falsely claimed, saying, 'Abu Bakr did not do that except because Bilal had done a favour to him.' That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Not to return a favour to anyone.' (*al-Layl:* 19) This shows that Abu Bakr did not do that to return a favour to Bilal but rather for the sake of Allah.

In fact, he has done so '…for the sake of his Lord *the Most High*.' (*al-Layl:* 20) The ultimate objective of Faith and every good deed is Allah's Pleasure and Mercy. That is why He *Glorified is He* says: 'And among men is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 207); and 'And the parable of those who spend their property to seek the pleasure of Allah…' (*al-Baqara:* 265). Seeking Allah's pleasure in every action is only possible if the human being purified his/her soul from showing off and seeking good reputation and being mentioned by the people. Such actions render the good deeds null and void. The word *Wajh* in this verse refers to Allah's pleasure and it could refer to His *Glorified is He* Essence. Such a pious person is only doing the good deeds for seeking the Pleasure of His Lord *the Most High*.

Allah *the Almighty* describes Himself as *the Most High* because His Attributes are Exalted and Unmatchable. He is the Most Powerful, the Invincible, whether with regard to the intellectual argument or the tangible power. He *Glorified is He* is the Most High, the Great Who is far Exalted over His creatures. That is why His servant '…will be well pleased.' (*al-Layl:* 21) He

Glorified is He makes the servant who follows His Way of Guidance well pleased and, consequently, gives him/her more. So, the meaning of Allah's Pleasure with His servants is to give them what is beyond the necessary elements, as He *Glorified is He* is All-Grateful, All Knowing.

The one who reflects on His saying: '…will be well pleased.' (*al-Layl:* 21) finds that the subject of the verb 'to be pleased' could be attributed to Allah *the Almighty* as He is well pleaded with His pious servants who do good deeds for only His sake. Further, the subject could be attributed to the servant, that is, s/he is well pleased with His Lord's reward. S/he will receive the full reward that makes him/her content. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And (as for) the foremost, the first of the *Muhajirun* and the *Ansar,* and those who followed them in goodness, Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them forever; that is, the mighty achievement. [100]' (*at-Tawba:* 100) He *the Almighty* is well pleased with them and gives them the reward that makes them filled with contentment and happiness.

the chapter of

ad-Duha

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *ad-Duha*(1) (The morn).

وَٱلضُّحَىٰ ١ وَٱلَّيۡلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ ٢ مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ ٣
وَلَلۡأٓخِرَةُ خَيۡرٞ لَّكَ مِنَ ٱلۡأُولَىٰ ٤ وَلَسَوۡفَ يُعۡطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرۡضَىٰٓ ٥

By the morning brightness [1] and by the night when it grows still [2] your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate you [3] and the future will be better for you than the past [4] your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied [5] (The Quran, *ad-Duha*: 1-5)

The morning brightness is the time of working, toil and exerting efforts, while the night is the time of tranquility. Both of them are necessary; the night and the day are two complementary universal signs – they are not contradictory. His saying: ‘and by the night when it grows still.’ (*ad-Duha:* 2) refers to the time when the night shrouds the world with its long period of darkness, covering the night as the cloak covers the man. This verse refers to the tranquil night when its darkness grows still.

Now, what is the subject of the Oath taken by the morning brightness and the night? It is His saying: ‘your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate you.’ (*ad-Duha:* 3) This context of the verse is related to the intermission of the revelation from Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings*

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(1) The chapter of *Ad-Duha*, counting 11 verses and 40 words, is number 93 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Fajr* and before that of *Ash-Sharh*. It is the tenth chapter to be revealed.

be upon him. It is as if the night represents the tranquil, long period that, whatever long it lasts, will be followed by the daybreak, sunrise, morning brightness and then rising of the sun to the middle of the sky.

Out of Allah's Mercy, He caused the revelation to intermit for a period of time in order that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* longs for its coming due to the sweetness of what had already been revealed to him. His yearning for its coming makes him ready to face the hardships of the Call. When the revelation intermitted, his enemies said, 'Muhammad's Lord has abandoned and forsaken him.'(1) They did not remember that he has a Lord except in this matter, after accusing him of telling lies. They were not smart enough to express their point in a way that does not contradict their previous opinions.

Being fully Aware of Messenger Muhammad's tiredness due to receiving the revelation, Allah *the Almighty* intermitted it so that the sweetness of what had been revealed to him remains and the tiredness thereof goes away. In this way, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would yearn for the coming of the revelation. Thus, the intermission of the revelation was intentionally meant in order that he *peace and blessings be upon him* longs for receiving it. This fact should direct our attention to reflect on His saying: 'and the future will be better for you than the past.' (*ad-Duha:* 4) This means that what would be revealed after the intermission of the revelation would fill him *peace and blessings be upon him* with happiness. After the chapter of *ad-Duha*, Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *ash-Sharh*: 'Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet], [1] and remove the burden [2] that weighed so heavily on your back, [3] and raise your reputation high? [4]' (*ash-Sharh:* 1-4) Therefore, the disbelievers should not think that Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him. In fact, the revelation would be resumed so that he *peace and blessings be upon him* would receive more than what had been sent down before. It is as if He *Glorified is He* clarifies that the morning is the time of toil while the night is the time of tranquility. Likewise, the intermission of the revelation is like the tranquility of the night after which new revelation will be sent down, so that he *peace and blessings be upon him* could resume his activity in the Call. Thus, the intermission of the revelation was meant to help him renew his vitality.

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(1) *It is narrated that Jundub ibn 'Abdullah said, 'Once Allah's Messenger became sick and could not offer his night prayer (Tahajjud) for two or three nights. Then a lady (the wife of Abu Lahab) came and said, "O Muhammad! I think that your Satan has forsaken you, for I have not seen him with you for two or three nights!" On that Allah revealed: By the morning brightness [1] and by the night when it grows still, [2] your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate you, [3] and the future will be better for you than the past.' (Ad-Duha: 1-3) See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1125, 4950 and 4983; and also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 114/1797.*

Allah *the Almighty* swears by the morning brightness that He has not forsaken Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Through the intermission of the revelation, He *Glorified is He* has willed to bestow more energy and power on him so that he could increase his activity and effort. This is how He *the Almighty* helped him in his mission. Accordingly, the intermission of the revelation and its resumption represent a complete process like that made by the darkness and the light, and the day and the night. It is like the night in the sense that the people dedicate its time for resting due to their toil during the day.

We notice the preciseness of the miraculous Quranic manner of expression in His saying: 'your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate you.' (*ad-Duha:* 3) The Arabic verb *Wadda'a* (to forsake) is directed to Messenger Muhammad in the second person, because this verb refers to abandoning those whom one loves or hates. As for the verb *Qala* (to hate), it is not directed to him in the second person pronoun, because it is only used with the people whom the person hates. Thus, Allah *the Almighty* abstains from directing the verb to him even though it is negated.

The meaning of His saying: 'and the future will be better for you than the past.' (*ad-Duha:* 4) is that the latter period of sending down the revelation is better for him than the former one. This is because the latter period would be longer in time and the revelation would be received without difficulties and hardships. Indeed, during that period, the majority of the Quran was easily sent down to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. His enemies rejoiced over him when the revelation was intermitted, saying, 'Muhammad's Lord has forsaken him.' How come they remember that he has a Lord only during this time of intermission?! Did not they say, 'He is a liar and a sorcerer?' Now, they say he has a Lord as they wrongly think He has forsaken him. These disbelievers did not understand that his Lord intermitted the revelation for supreme Wisdom. He *peace and blessings be upon him* should have a psychological rest after the chemical changes that his bodily constitution experienced. This would renew his energy and make him yearn for meeting the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) once again. Yearning for someone makes the hardships of reaching it seem easy, as the hardships of the way do not prevent the lover from reaching the one s/he loves.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied.’ (*ad-Duha:* 5) Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* would be deeply sad if one of his *ummah* did not embrace Islam and remained in the state of disbelief. This is why He *the Almighty* says to him *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘To make them walk in the right way is not incumbent on you, but Allah guides aright whom He pleases…’ (*al-Baqara:* 272). When His saying: ‘your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied.’ (*ad-Duha:* 5) was revealed, he *peace and blessings be upon him* seized the opportunity and invoked his Lord, saying, ‘I will not be satisfied if one of my *ummah* is in the Fire.’ So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was fully busy with the affairs of his *ummah*, and that is why Allah *the Almighty* describes him, saying: ‘Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers (he is) compassionate.’ (*at-Tawba:* 128) He never forgot his *ummah* in any matter. Consequently, He *Glorified is He* reassures him about his *ummah,* saying, ‘Indeed, We will please you with regard to your *ummah* and will never displease you with them.’

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَلَمۡ يَجِدۡكَ يَتِيمٗا فَـَٔاوَىٰ ⑥ وَوَجَدَكَ ضَآلّٗا فَهَدَىٰ ⑦
وَوَجَدَكَ عَآئِلٗا فَأَغۡنَىٰ ⑧

Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you? [6] Did He not find you lost and guide you? [7] Did He not find you in need and make you self- sufficient? [8] (The Quran, *ad-Duha*: 6 - 8)

Allah *the Almighty* addresses Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you?’ (*ad-Duha:* 6)

When he *peace and blessings be upon him* reads this verse, he answers, ‘Yes, my Lord, You found me an orphan and sheltered me.’ This style is called the participation of the commanded person in the rationale of the command, which is the most rhetoric kind of command. He *peace and blessings be upon him* became an orphan after the death of his parents, ‘Abdullah and Amina. He was then sheltered by ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, his grandfather, and then Abu Taleb, his uncle. Allah *the Almighty* gave him shelter in the house of his uncle to be not in need for meeting the requirements of livelihood which may ruin the orphan’s affairs. In this way, he was (morally) educated, protected from all harms and provided with bounties and goodness.

In fact, being an orphan is one of the manifestations of weakness. The orphan is the one whose father dies before s/he attains maturity and puberty. As s/he has lost his/her father and no one cares for him/her, s/he will grieve and be deeply sad when s/he sees other children’s fathers expressing their kindness to them. S/he may hate the Predestination that deprived him/her of his/her father. So, Allah *the Almighty* gave Messenger Muhammad, who lost his parents, shelter in the house of his grandfather, ‘Abd Al-Muttalib, and then in the house of his uncle, Abu Taleb.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Did He not find you lost and guide you?’ (*ad-Duha:* 7) Misguidance could refer to not reaching the truth, as He *the Almighty* describes Messenger Muhammad here when he shunned idolatry and kept searching for the Way of Guidance. So, the verse means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* did not appreciate worshipping idols which was prevailing among the people of Quraysh. He kept searching for the Right Way until Allah *the Almighty* guided him through revealing the Straight Path to him. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was lost, seeking the truth, until the perfect Blessing, prophethood, was given to him. He was lost in the sense of lacking the Right Way and yearning for knowing and following it.

As a matter of fact, the human being could be ambivalent about the way s/he should take. In the case of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah alleviated him by guiding him to the Straight Path. Thus, the word ‘lost’ does not mean deviation from the Straight Path; rather, it means that before the coming of the revelation to him, he did not know which way to take. He *peace and blessings be upon him* denounced idolatry followed by most of the dignitaries and the intellectual people among his people, because it is not consistent with reason and the pure nature. So, he was ambivalent about the falsehood that his people practiced and the truth for which he had no proof.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says: ‘Did He not find you in need and make you self-sufficient?’ (*ad-Duha:* 8) Being in need means that the person is poor. So, did He *Glorified is He* make him self-sufficient through wealth? No; He *Glorified is He* made Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* self-sufficient through the bounties of the Hereafter that he was shown. Accordingly, the meaning is that He *the Almighty* filled his heart with Faith and that is why he did not yearn for the pleasures of the worldly life and did allow it to control him. Further, He *Glorified is He* made him self-sufficient in the material life through not being dependent on anyone in his provision, as he worked as a trader with the wealth of Khadija.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَأَمَّا ٱلۡيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقۡهَرۡ ﴿٩﴾ وَأَمَّا ٱلسَّآئِلَ فَلَا تَنۡهَرۡ ﴿١٠﴾ وَأَمَّا بِنِعۡمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثۡ ﴿١١﴾

So do not be harsh with the orphan [9] and do not chide the one who asks for help [10] talk about the blessings of your Lord [11] (The Quran, *ad-Duha*: 9 - 11)

Harshness denotes domination over the bodies, not the hearts. As the orphan is naturally weak due to the loss of his/her father, one should not be harsh to him/her and should not compel him/her by force. Here, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to not wrong the orphan or appropriate his/her wealth and right. After all, he was an orphan himself; that is why he should neither frown at the orphans nor treat them harshly for whatever they do. So, the orphans should not be treated as slaves. In this connection, Messenger Muhammad, who was an orphan and was commanded to treat them well, says, ‘The one who wipes on the head of an orphan for the sake of Allah only gets ten good deeds for every hair his hand touches. The one who treats the male or the female orphan kindly will be with me like these two in the Garden, indicating his middle and index fingers.’

As for His saying: 'and do not chide the one who asks for help.' (*ad-Duha:* 10), it means that he *peace and blessings be upon him* should not chide or reproach the one who asks him for food or money, given that he himself had been poor and needy. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* should either feed the one who begs him or to gently and leniently refuse that without harming him/her. However, the word *Sa'l* does not necessarily refer only to the beggars. It is not confined to the material side, for it can refer to seeking knowledge, as some scholars maintain. In this regard, Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, '[This verse] is not about the beggar who comes to your house but rather about the seeker of knowledge.'(1) As Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* was given knowledge, he should not chide the one who seeks that knowledge until he understands the question and until the seeker of knowledge understands the answer. The Companions complied with this commanded to the extent that Abu Ad-Darda' used to say to the seekers of knowledge, 'Welcome! You are the lovers of Messenger Muhammad.'(2)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'talk about the blessings of your Lord.' (*ad-Duha:* 11) Allah's Blessings are countless and innumerable; the Quran, Knowledge, wealth and provision are some of these Blessings. In this connection, Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'When Allah *the Almighty* bestows a blessing on His servant, He loves to see the effect of this blessing on him/her.'(3) In the same connection, Al-Husayn ibn 'Ali said, '[The blessing meant in this verse] is the righteous deed that a person does and then tells the trustworthy people about it so that they imitate and apply it.'(4) Taking about Allah's Blessing should be through mentioning and thanking Him for them. So, one should thank and praise Him *Glorified is He* for these Blessings when s/he talks about them.

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(1) *See Al-Wahidi, At-Tafsir Al-Basit, 24/116; Ath-Tha'labi, Al-Kashf wa Al-Bayan, 10/230; Al-Baghawi, Ma'alim At-Tanzil, 4/500; and Ibn 'Atiyya, Al-Muharir Al-Wajiz, 5/495.*

(2) *See As-Sam'ani, Tafsir, 6/346; Al-Qurtubi, Jame' Ahkam Al-Quran, 20/101; and ibn Al-A'rabi, Ahkam Al-Quran, 4/410.*

(3) *See Al-Quda'i, Musnad Ash-Shihab, Hadith no. 1102.*

(4) *See Mujahid, Tafsir, 1/735.*

the chapter of

ash-Sharh

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *ash-Sharh* (1).

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ ﴿١﴾ وَوَضَعْنَا عَنكَ وِزْرَكَ ﴿٢﴾
ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ ﴿٣﴾ وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ ﴿٤﴾

Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet] [1]
and remove the burden [2] that weighed so heavily on
your back [3] and raise your reputation high? [4]
(The Quran, *ash-Sharh*: 1-4)

The word *Alam* (Did We not) is not pronounced like the disjointed letters *Alif-Lam-Mim* in the chapter of *al-Baqara* in which we pronounce the name of these letters. By contrast, in the chapter in question, we pronounce the sounds of these letters. This is also the case in His saying: ‘Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1) The difference in pronunciation is due to the fact that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* heard them as such from the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel). Learning the Quran depends of listening, for it is not allowed for someone to recite it except after listening to it so that one can differentiate between the pronunciations of the words that are written with the same letters, as in the aforementioned case.

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(1) The chapter of *Ash-Sharh*, counting 8 verses and 27 words, is number 94 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Ad-Duha*, which precedes it in the order of the *Mushaf*. It completes the chapter of *Ad-Duha* to state that Allah *the Almighty* did not forsake or hate Messenger Muhammad *Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him,* but rather, He *the Almighty* relieved his heart for him, removed his burden and raised his reputation high.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet].’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1) constitutes a confirmatory interrogation meant for extracting the answer from the questioned person. The question needs an answer, and if the speaker gives the answer, then it could be questionable. However, if the addressee gives that answer, this represents his/her confirmation for the statement of the speaker. One may ask, ‘Why does not Allah say, “Did we relieve your heart for you?”’ He *the Almighty* does not employ that formula in order that the question does not allude to the answer. That is why a negative interrogation is employed here. He *the Almighty* relieved the heart of Messenger Muhammad, making it the place where the divine secrets and knowledge descend. This is his reward for fulfilling his mission.

He *peace and blessings be upon him* used to suffer the process of receiving the revelation because it was hard to him. However, when he became familiar with it and enjoyed the sweetness of receiving it, he forgot all the hardships. That is why when the revelation intermitted, she longed for its coming, even though it had been burdensome and tiring. So, Allah *the Almighty* wanted that the sweetness of what had been revealed to him remains, that his soul comes down and relax and that he longs for the coming of the revelation. Accordingly, when the revelation descends, he receives it eagerly, not paying attention to its hardships. He *peace and blessings be upon him* has a selected spiritual energy. The intermission of the revelation was meant in order that he get used to the difficulties accompanying the coming down of the Archangel. This ensures the elimination of the hardships and that the sweetness of what has been revealed remains.

Relieving the heart means that Allah *the Almighty* eliminates what pre-occupies Messenger Muhammad’s heart, preventing him from realizing the truth. It also means to fill his heart with wisdom and knowledge so that he knows the reality of the matters, like the fact that the worldly life is fleeting and the Hereafter is everlasting. So, he preferred the everlasting life to the fleeting one. In this regard, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was asked, ‘Can the heart be relieved?’ Upon answering affirmatively, the people asked him, ‘Are there distinctive signs for that?’ He said, ‘Yes; they are shunning the deceiving life, paying attention to the eternal one and preparing for death before it takes place.'(1)

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'and remove the burden.' (*ash-Sharh:* 2) The burden here is that which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was bearing when the revelation descends on him. He *the Almighty* removed that burden, making it so light and easy. Allah *peace and blessings be upon him* used to hear the sound of ringing of the bell when the revelation would come. Afterwards, he sweats profusely and the weight of his body increases to the extent that if he was mounting a riding animal, it would be overburdened by his weight that its belly almost touches the ground. Further, if he *peace and blessings be upon him* was putting his knee on that of one of his Companions during the revelation, that Companion would be overburdened as Prophet Muhammad's knee grew in weight. In this verse, it is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to him, 'We have alleviated for you the burden of the Prophethood, the Message and the other affairs you are bearing.' He *Glorified is He* then says: 'that weighed so heavily on your back.' (*ash-Sharh:* 3) This verse expresses the hardship and the heaviness of the revelation on him *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*.

Here, arises a question, which is, 'Why does Allah *the Almighty* mention the back specially?' When something heavy is carried on the back, it produces a low sound. Some scholars maintain that the burden in this verse refers to the sins and the misdeeds that Allah *the Almighty* has forgiven him. However, what are the sins that he *peace and blessings be upon him* has committed, given that he has not prostrated to an idol, taken omens, buried a baby girl or treated a servant harshly. Thus, the burden here does not refer to the sins, but rather to the hardships of the revelation and its difficulties that used to affect Messenger Muhammad's body causing him to sweat, shiver and fall unconscious. The Arabic word *Naqid* refers to collapsing and falling, a meaning which is clear in His saying: '…Then they found in it a wall which was on the point of falling, so he put it into a right state…' (*al-Kahf:* 77). This means that the wall was about to fall and collapse. The 'back' is specially mentioned here because it bears most of the burdens. So, if the burden of the revelation was a tangible one, the sound of the overburdened back would be heard. Bearing the sins is mentioned in His saying: '…and they shall bear their burdens on their backs; now surely evil is that which they bear.' (*al-An'am:* 31) Normally, the heavy burdens are carried on the back and that is why it is specially mentioned. Similarly, earning is attributed to the hands, even though one can earn money through carrying objects on the back or shoulder.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn Masu'd Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Al-Mubarak, Ar-Raqa'q, Hadith no. 315, Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 7863; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 10068.*

As we have said, it is not befitting to attribute committing sins to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In fact, the burden that has been removed from him is the hardships and the difficulties of revelation that were so heavy on his back that they were about to break it. The Companions who sit with him *peace and blessings be upon him* used to recognise the effect of the revelation on him. Besides, they used to hear a sound like the buzzing of the bees when the Quran was being revealed to him. The revelation was a burdensome for him, as it is manifested in the fact that if he puts his thigh on one of his Companions during receiving the revelation, the latter feels that his thigh is as heavy as a mountain. Further, if the revelation descends while he is mounting his riding animal, it becomes overburdened and forcibly sits down. This fact is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Surely We will make to light upon you a weighty Word.' (*al-Muzzammil:* 5) This hardship was only removed after the intermission of the revelation, which causes him to eagerly yearn and waits for its coming. After the resumption of the revelation, the following saying of Allah *the Almighty* was revealed: 'Did We not relieve your heart for you [Prophet], [1] and remove the burden [2] that weighed so heavily on your back, [3] and raise your reputation high? [4] (*ash-Sharh:* 1-4) These verses show that after the resumption of the revelation, he *peace and blessings be upon him* would undergo none of the hardships that he used to suffer.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'and raise your reputation high?' (*ash-Sharh:* 4) This matter is manifested in the fact that when He *the Almighty* is mentioned, he *peace and blessings be upon him* is also mentioned; as in the call to prayer, its establishing, *At-Tashahud* during the prayer, on Friday, on the pulpit, on the *Eid* of Breaking the Fasting, on the *Eid* of Sacrifice, on the Day of *'Arafat*, the three days of *Tashriq*, throwing pebbles, on the mount on As-Safa and Al-Marwa, etc.

Raising Prophet Muhammad’s reputation high could mean that it is obligatory that one believes in and obeys him in order to be a true believer in and obedient to Allah *the Almighty*. The mention of his name has spread to corners of the world. The one who ponders on this verse finds it amazing that the whole chapter was revealed in Mecca at the early time of revelation. In this verse, Allah *the Almighty* rules that Muhammad’s reputation is raised high even before his Message overwhelms the rest of the religions and faiths. Through his Prophethood, his reputation was raised high. Further, his name is mentioned along with Allah’s Name in the calling for prayer which was legislated in Medina after building the Mosque. So, the whole chapter gives the glad tidings that Islam would be victorious.

As Allah *the Almighty* raised his reputation high, He *Glorified is He* raised the reputation of his people through the Quran in which He *the Almighty* says: ‘And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 44). This verse means that the Quran is a great honour for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and His *ummah*, as it gives them a high reputation until the Day of Judgment. Likewise, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Certainly We have revealed to you a Book in which is your good remembrance…’ (*al-Anbiya’:* 10). This verse shows that the Arabs’ honor, high reputation and history stem from the great rank and honor of the Quran, as He *Glorified is He* says: ‘*Sad*, I swear by the Quran, full of admonition.’ (*Sad:* 1) It is the Quran that gave the Arabs a great honor and reputation among the nations and removed their ignorance and low position. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ مَعَ ٱلْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٦﴾

So truly where there is hardship there is also ease [5]
truly where there is hardship there is also ease [6]
(The Quran, *ash-Sharh*: 5 - 6)

Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said about this verse, ‘One type of hardship will not overwhelm two types of ease.’(1) This indicates that the hardship mentioned in this verse is one even though it is repeated, as it is definite. As the word ease is indefinite, its repetition indicates that it is numerous. Allah *the Almighty* emphasizes His saying with the particle *Inn,* saying: ‘So truly where there is hardship there is also ease; [5] truly where there is hardship there is also ease. [6]’ (*ash-Sharh:* 5-6) Further, the particle *Ma‘a* (with) is used to allude that ease does not come after the hardship but rather accompanies it. The hardship itself contains an aspect ease and it may prevent a greater hardship. So, ease could be in the heart of hardship and the hardship could be the true ease. This reassures anyone undergoing a hardship or a difficult time that however hard his/her the hardship is, the way out is near and it not difficult for Allah *the Almighty*. The more the situation straitens and gets dark, the faster the light that eliminates that darkness comes. In this regard, Ibn Mas‘ud said, ‘Even if the hardship is in a hole, the ease will pursue it until it gets that hardship out. Indeed, a hardship will not overwhelm two types of ease.’ One may ask, ‘Hardship and ease are antithetical, so how can there be ease with the hardship?’ The particle *Ma‘a* here indicates that ease comes quickly after the hardship as if they are accompanying each other. This particle could mean that the ease is mixed with the hardship, not meaning that they are accompanying or following each other.

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(1) *See Al-Bayhaqi, Shu‘ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 9541.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَإِذَا فَرَغۡتَ فَٱنصَبۡ ﴿٧﴾ وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَٱرۡغَب ﴿٨﴾

The moment you are freed [of one task] work on [7]
and turn to your Lord for everything [8]
(The Quran, *ash-Sharh*: 7 - 8)

The Arabic word *Nasb* means tiredness and the word *Faragh* means finishing a task to carry out another. This verse is open to many interpretations and views. Now, what should Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* be freed of? What is the task that he should work on? Some scholars say that when he finishes the obligatory prayer, he should do extra acts of worship like offering supererogatory prayers, remembering Allah and invoking Him. However, prayer was not prescribed at the time of revealing this chapter, as it was prescribed during the Night Journey and Ascension, in the latest part of the Meccan period before immigrating to Medina. Some other scholars say that when he *peace and blessings be upon him* is freed of fighting in the way of Allah, he should dedicate himself to other acts of worship like thanking Allah *the Almighty*. However, fighting had not been prescribed yet, for it was prescribed in the Medinan period. So, both of the previous views are incorrect.

Allah *the Almighty* charged Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with delivering the Message to his kinfolk, then to the people of Mecca, to the surrounding countries and to the whole world. For the sake of delivering this Message, he endured many hardships that distracted him from the rites that he used to practice at the cave of Hira'. When Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) was sent down with the revelation to him, he became pre-occupied with calling to Allah and delivering the Message. He *peace and blessings be upon him* underwent great hardship and difficulties in calling the people and Allah's instructions for Him were: 'So do not be harsh with the orphan [9] and do not chide the one who asks for help; [10] talk about the blessings of your Lord. [11]' (*ad-Duha:* 9-11) As, he *peace and blessings be upon him* was an orphan, he should not treat the orphans harshly, nor should he ignore a seeking of knowledge or a beggar. Further, he should tell the people about Allah's Way of Guidance and the Blessings of the Quran. As he would experience many hardships, he should know that: 'So truly where there is hardship there is also ease; [5] truly where there is hardship there is also ease. [6]' (*ash-Sharh:* 5-6) He *peace and blessings be upon him* relieved his heart for him, removed his burden and raised his reputation high. If he is freed of all of that, he should work on, dedicating himself to worshipping Allah *the Almighty*. One who cannot stand during prayer, s/he can pray while sitting or lying down. As standing is more tiring, He *Glorified is He* says: 'The moment you are freed [of one task] work on.' (*ash-Sharh:* 7)

Messenger Muhammad *Allah's peace and blessings be upon him*, used to offer *Qiyam Al-Layl* until his feet swell. When the Mother of the believers 'Aisha asked him, 'Why do you do this, while you have been forgiven of your former and latter sins?' he said, 'Should I not be a grateful slave of Allah?' The one who wants to achieve the supreme traits of dealing kindly with the orphan, encouraging people to feed the needy, attempting the steep way through emancipating the slaves, urging one another to steadfastness and compassion and talking about Allah’s Blessings - such person should pre-occupy him/herself with worship after being freed of the worldly affairs.

Tiredness during performing the acts of worship is not meant for itself, for the reason for them is: ‘and turn to your Lord for everything.’ (*ash-Sharh:* 8) This shows that the person should devout his/her intention to Allah *the Almighty* and proceeds to lovingly worship Him. S/he should be eager in his/her invocation and supplications. With regard to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the grounds for seeking to be close to Allah through worshipping him and seeking his reward are that He *the Almighty* relieved his heart with the light of the Message, removed the burdens of the revelation and alleviated its hardships and difficulties. Moreover, He *Glorified is He* safeguarded him against committing sins, strengthened him to bear the harm of the people, protected him from them and raised his reputation high in the worlds.

the chapter of

at-Tin

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *at-Tin* (1) (The Fig).

وَٱلتِّينِ وَٱلزَّيْتُونِ ﴿١﴾ وَطُورِ سِينِينَ ﴿٢﴾ وَهَٰذَا ٱلْبَلَدِ ٱلْأَمِينِ ﴿٣﴾

By the fig, by the olive [1] by Mount Sinai [2]
by this safe town [3] (The Quran, *at-Tin*: 1-3)

Allah *the Almighty* set a special order for the Quran. We find six consecutive chapters starting with an Oath, which are chapter of *Al-Fajr:* ‘By the Daybreak, [1] by the Ten Nights, [2] by the even and the odd, [3] by the passing night. [4]’ (*al-Fajr:* 1-4); *Al-Balad:* ‘I swear by this city —[1] and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city—[2] [I swear] by parent and offspring. [3]’ (*al-Balad:* 1-3); *ash-Shams*: ‘By the sun in its morning brightness [1] and by the moon as it follows it, [2] by the day as it displays the sun’s glory [3] and by the night as it conceals it, [4] by the sky and how He built it [5] and by the earth and how He spread it, [6] by the soul and how He formed it. [7]’ (*ash-Shams:* 1-7); *al-Layl*: ‘By the enshrouding night, [1] by the radiant day [2]’ (*al-Layl:* 1-2); and *Ad-Duha*: ‘By the morning brightness [1] and by the night when it grows still. [2]’ (*ad-Duha:* 1-2) The chapter of *ash-Sharh* follows these six chapters, but is it not starting with an Oath? It is as if it completes this set of chapters.

Afterwards, the chapter in question, *at-Tin*, starts with an Oath: ‘By the fig, by the olive, [1] by Mount Sinai, [2] by this safe town. [3] (*at-Tin:* 1-3)

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(1) The chapter of *At-Tin*, counting 8 verses and 34 words, is number 95 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Buruj* and before that of *Quraysh*.

Here, Allah *the Almighty* swears by four things: two plants, the fig and olive; a mountain, which is Mount Sinai on which Allah *the Almighty* conversed with Prophet Musa (Moses); and a town which He made safe, namely the Mecca.

He *the Almighty* swears by two trees, saying: ‘By the fig, by the olive.’ (*at-Tin:* 1) Out of their great benefits, Allah *the Almighty* specially mentions them, apart from the rest of the trees. He *Glorified is He* mentions the olive in many places in the Quran along with other plants, trees and palm trees, as in His saying: ‘He causes to grow for you thereby herbage, and the olives, and the palm trees, and the grapes, and of all the fruits; most surely there is a sign in this for a people who reflect.’ (*an-Nahl:* 11) Then, He *the Almighty* specially speaks about the olive tree and its origin, saying: ‘And a tree that grows out of Mount Sinai which produces oil and a condiment for those who eat.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 20) This tree produces oil which is also used as condiment eaten with bread. This is one of the most delicious kinds of food among those who grow olive trees in Sinai and Ash-Sham.

Further, Allah *the Almighty* sets the parable of His Light, saying: ‘Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not-- light upon light-- Allah guides to His light whom He pleases…’ (*an-Nur:* 35). This is a lofty way of lighting the lamp by an extraordinary olive tree: ‘…neither eastern nor western…’ (*an-Nur:* 34). The lighting oil, which reaches the climax of purity, stems from a blessed olive-tree: ‘…the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touches it not…’ (*an-Nur:* 35). So, everything is self-lit. The oil is blessed and has no impurities; that is why it has a bright light. Moreover, we find it giving light by itself without being touch by the fire. It is light upon a light, including no spots of darkness. This is how Allah *the Almighty* gives light to the vast universe; there is no one dark spot therein, for everything is overwhelmed with His Light.

So, the tree is neither eastern nor western; it is not eastern because it is western and vice versa. It is eastern and western at the same time. How is this? The scholars say that this is because when the tree is in the east, the west is shrouded in darkness, and when it is in the west, the east is shrouded in darkness as well. Accordingly, such a tree experiences periods of darkness and light. As for the tree mentioned in the aforementioned verse, it is neither eastern nor western; it is simultaneously eastern and western, not deprived of light. Here, taking an Oath by the fig and the olive is not simply because they are useful plants; rather, they remind the people about the place where Musa (Moses) *peace and blessings be upon him* received his Message and about Mount Sinai in which the Torah was sent down on him.

Then Allah *the Almighty* reminds us about Messenger Muhammad's Message when He swears, saying: 'by this safe town.' (*at-Tin:* 3) So, the oaths here are not merely taken by some trees as some people with surficial thinking maintain. They allude to the events that happened near these trees. They are not high trees to cover the events and the people rather they are medium in height. The Oaths here are taken by trees growing in that blessed spot of Sinai, even though they grow in other places like the mountains of *Ash-Sham*, Palestine, Jordon, etc. Despite that, He *the Almighty* defines the spot, saying: 'By the Mount of Sinai.' (*at-Tin:* 2)

Further, He *the Almighty* says to the Jews from among the people of the Book: 'And when We took a promise from you and lifted the mountain over you…' (*al-Baqara:* 63). He *the Almighty* lifted over them the mountain that exists in Sinai, saying to them, 'Accept the religious obligations otherwise We will smash you with the mountain.' In another verse, He *the Almighty* says about the same event: 'And when We shook the mountain over them as if it were a covering overhead and they thought that it was going to fall down upon them: Take hold of what We have given you with firmness…' (*al-A'raf:* 171). The Jews did not accept Allah's Way of Guidance except after the mountain was lifted over them.

The Mount Sinai is the mountain on which He *the Almighty* spoke to Musa (Moses); it is a blessed mountain and is filled with trees. Some scholars maintain that the word *Sinin* refers to the place where the mountain is located. In another verse, He *the Almighty* says: 'And a tree that grows out of Mount Sinai which produces oil and a condiment for those who eat.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 20) Regardless of whether the word *Sinin* is a description of the mountain or an indication to its place, it is a blessed mountain located in a blessed area. Some exegetes, like Qatada, hold that *at-Tin* is the mountain where Damascus is located and Az-Zaytun is the mountain where the Sacred House in Palestine is located. As for Mount Sinai, it is a blessed, beautiful mountain in Ash-Sham. However, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And a tree that grows out of Mount Sinai...’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 20) conclusively states that the intended mountain is that of At-Tur in Sinai.

As for the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘by this safe town.’ (*at-Tin:* 3), it is an indication to Mecca which is the safe town which He *the Almighty* made secure due to Ibrahim’s (Abraham) supplication. So, as *at-Tin* is a mountain in Damascus; Az-Zaytun is a mountain in the Sacred House that represents the Message of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) and the Mount Sinai represents the Message of Musa (Moses), then the last Message is in the safe town of Mecca where the final Messenger was sent and the Message descended. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And when Ibrahim said: My Lord, make it a secure town…’ (*al-Baqara:* 126). Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* invoked Allah for safety and security twice; one in his saying: ‘My Lord, make it a secure town…’ (*al-Baqara:* 126) He *peace be upon him* invoked Him *the Almighty* to make Mecca a secure town that has all the requirements of life. This is a general supplication for safety.

The second invocation is found in Allah’s saying: ‘My Lord! Make this city secure…’ (*Ibrahim:* 35). After Mecca has become safe, he invokes Him *Glorified is He* for more safety. This is a special safety, making it inviolable town where every man, animal, plant and even inanimate object is secured. He *Glorified is He* describes the Sacred House in Mecca, saying: ‘In it are clear signs, the standing place of Ibrahim, and whoever enters it shall be secure…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 97). So, in Mecca, every scared person who enters it feels secure. Further, He *the Almighty* relates that the people of Mecca said: ‘…If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country…’ (*al-Qasas:* 57). However, He *the Almighty* then says to them: ‘…What! have We not settled them in a safe, sacred territory to which fruits of every kind shall be drawn? a sustenance from Us; but most of them do not know.’ (*al-Qasas:* 57) Safety is attributed to the one who lives in that place, but Allah *the Almighty* attributes it to the place itself. Thus, everything in that place is secure; the killer cannot be retaliated, the animals are not provoked or harmed, the plants are not cut and even the stone is secure in Mecca.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* shows His Grace on the people of Quraysh, saying: ‘who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear.’ (*Quraysh*: 4) Here, He *the Almighty* clarifies that He provided them with all the fruits and grant them safety to ward off fear. This ensured that their caravans travel securely to the north and the south. So, He *the Almighty* bestowed abundant Blessings on them like providing them with food, warding off fear and harm and sustaining their mastery and high rank through serving the *Ka‘ba*. He *the Almighty* made it a safe place for all the people. Safety and reassurance here include many things. He *the Almighty* made them feel safe from all kinds of fear like that of darkness, enemies and the dangers of the roads.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ فِىٓ أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَٰهُ أَسْفَلَ سَٰفِلِينَ ﴿٥﴾

We create man in the finest state [4] then reduce him to the lowest of the low [5] (The Quran, *at-Tin*: 4 - 5)

The Wise Quran is revealed from the Great Creator to the human being whom Allah *the Almighty* created along with all other creatures. Man’s creation should be one of the important topics that the Quran discusses, as s/he is the object of the Message. It should discuss man’s creation, fashioning, his/her last destination in the Hereafter and Monotheism. That is why He *the Almighty* says: ‘And certainly We created man of an extract of clay.’ (*al-Mu’minun:* 12); and ‘…certainly We created man of clay that gives forth sound, of black mud fashioned in shape.’ (*al-Hijr:* 26) These verses talk about the material formation and creation of the human being and the stages of that creation: ‘And certainly We created man of clay that gives forth sound, of black mud fashioned in shape.’ (*al-Hijr:* 26); and ‘And certainly We created man of an extract of clay, [12] Then We made him a small seed in a firm resting-place, [13] Then We made the seed a clot, then We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made (in) the lump of flesh bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation, so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators. [14]' (*al-Mu'minun:* 12-14)

Man was created and formed from clay according to the shape that Allah *the Almighty* willed. Afterwards, this process was not repeated in the creation of all the human being. He *the Almighty* made their reproduction through: 'Then We made him a small seed in a firm resting-place.' (*al-Mu'minun:* 13) He *Glorified is He* made the human being comes from a sperm in the back of the man which he places in the womb of the women. He *the Almighty* made the womb the resting-place where the sperm settles firmly, as it clings to the uterine wall. Then He *the Almighty* changes the form of the sperm, making it grow into a clinging form, a lump of flesh and then bones garmented with flesh to grow into another creation. This is about the material creation of man.

As for his/her creation amidst the hardships and difficulties of the worldly life and his/her endeavour therein, Allah *the Almighty* says 'that We have created man for toil and trial.' (*al-Balad:* 4) Here, He *the Almighty* says: 'We create man in the finest state.' (*at-Tin:* 4) This verse could either refer to the material or the spiritual creation of man. The Originator perfected his/her creation in an upright form, the finest state and the most beautiful shape. This is because He *the Almighty* perfected his/her creation and He is the best of creators, creating out of nothing. Creating could be attributed to the people who share this attribute. However, when they create anything, it remains in the same state and does not grow, as in the case of the one who makes a glass cup out of sand. It remains in the same form; we cannot bring a male and a female cup to produce small cups. However, Allah *the Almighty* gives His creatures the secret of life to be able to reproduce and grow. Thus, He *the Almighty* is the best of creators.

Allah *Glorified is He* does not strip the people of the attribute of creativity, providing or mercy, for they play part in some actions that befit their abilities as created servants - not to mention that their abilities are conferred on them by Him *the Almighty*. As for His Attributes, they are absolute and infinite in their aspect of Majesty, Perfection and Beauty, as He *the Almighty* says: 'nothing like a likeness of Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.' (*ash-Shura:* 11); and: 'O man! What has beguiled you from your Lord, the Gracious One, [6] Who created you, then made you complete, then made you symmetrical? [7] Into whatever form He pleased He constituted you. [8]' (*al-Infitar:* 6-8) Creating man in the finest state means forming him/her symmetrically in the suitable shape. So, the meaning of His saying: '…in the finest state.' (*at-Tin:* 4) is that He *the Almighty* perfected the creation of man; He shaped him/her in the best beautiful image, walking upright on two feet, unlike the animals that walk on four feet.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'then reduce him to the lowest of the low.' (*at-Tin:* 5) This means that man moves from one state to another until s/he ages, reaching the worst part of lifetime when s/he suffers weakness, senility, bending of the back and the absence of mind. His saying: 'We create man in the finest state [4] then reduce him to the lowest of the low. [5]' (*at-Tin:* 4-5) is the subject of the Oaths in His saying: 'By the fig, by the olive, [1] by Mount Sinai, [2] by this safe town. [3]' (*at-Tin:* 1-3)

Here arises a question, which is, 'Are the Angels not created in the finest state as well, while they are more beautiful than the human beings?' The Angels are created in the finest form according to what befits their creation and functions. The human beings are also created in the finest state if compared with the lower creatures. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'then reduce him to the lowest of the low.' (*at-Tin:* 5) is open to many meanings. The one who reflects on this verse may wonder, 'Does the believer not age and suffer the symptoms of senility? Does this mean that the believer is reduced to the lowest of the low even though Allah *the Almighty* exempted those who believe and do good?' Another possible interpretation is that the finest state does not refer to the perfection of man's image and form, for there are creatures more beautiful and wonderful than him/her. Rather, it means that s/he was created while having the best value, mind, creed, nature and instinct. As for reduction to the lowest of the low, it is confined to the disbelievers, as the believers are exempted.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ۝٦

except those who believe and do good deeds — [6]
(The Quran, *at-Tin*: 6)

Faith means that one's life is in harmony with what is in his/her heart according to Allah's Will and the Faith-based system. So, the good deeds stem from Faith. The saying of Allah, *the Almighty*: 'By the declining day, [1] man is [deep] in loss. [2]' (*al-'Asr:* 1-2) is similar to His saying here: 'then reduce him to the lowest of the low.' (*at-Tin:* 5) Both of the two verses are followed with His saying: 'Except those who believe and do good deeds…' (*at-Tin:* 6). Those who believe and do good deeds gather between Faith and the good deeds, the belief and the behaviour. Those people will have a good reward and recompense, as He *the Almighty* says: '…so goodly is the reward of the workers.' (*az-Zumar:* 74) Their reward is described here as unfailing because it is ceaseless and eternal.

The believer should make sure that his/her movement in life will yield reward from Allah *the Almighty*. For example, when s/he offers prayer, gives prescribed or optional alms, fasts, or performs Pilgrimage, s/he gets a reward. Every action s/he does in compliance with the Divine Way of Guidance will be recompensed with a reward doubled many times. His Bestowals in the Hereafter are different from the fleeting ones in the worldly life, for they are eternal and everlasting. So, the believer should be worried, for his/her reward is with his/her Lord Who says: 'Yes! Whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others) he has his reward from his Lord…' (*al-Baqara:* 112). As s/he gets his/her reward from his/her Lord, the believer should not be anxious, thinking that it may be forgotten or skipped. It is a reward with the One Who owns the worldly life and the Hereafter; He owns the possessors and their possessions. Further, the reward that those who believe and do righteous deeds get is unfailing and complete. When a believer ages and becomes sick, his/her good deeds that s/he used to do during his/her youth will continue to be recorded without any reduction.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِٱلدِّينِ (٧) أَلَيْسَ ٱللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمِ ٱلْحَٰكِمِينَ (٨)

They will have an unfailing reward. After this, what makes you [man] deny the Judgment? [7] Is God not the most decisive of judges? [8] (The Quran, *at-Tin*: 7 - 8)

Here, the address is directed to the man about whom Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘We create man in the finest state.’ (*at-Tin:* 4) He *Glorified is He* created man perfectly in the finest state and image. Further, He *the Almighty* sent many Messages to guide him/her like the Messages revealed in At-Tur Mountain in Sinai and in the secure town of Mecca in which the Sacred House is located. So, how can s/he deny the Day of Judgment after the verses and signs are clarified for him/her. The word *Din* (religion) here is definite, referring to the religion of Islam, as He *the Almighty* says: ‘Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 19). So, what makes man deny the religion of Islam?

Further, the word *Din* could refer to the Day of Judgment and also the law, as in His saying: ‘…it was not (lawful) that he should take his brother under the king's law unless Allah pleased…’ (*Yusuf:* 76). This means that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) would not be able to take his brother according to the law of the king that was ruling Egypt. So, what makes man deny the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment? Allah’s Decree about the Day of Judgment is certainly true, for if there is no Resurrection, the creation would be in vain and purposeless. So, the Day of Judgment strikes a balance in the whole existence and ensures the sustenance of the right in Allah’s universe, protecting the weak and the wronged people. The existence of the Hereafter and the Recompense prevented the worldly life from turning into a lawless world where the strong attacks the weak and the wrongdoer harms the wronged one. That situation was also prevented by people’s recognition that Allah *the Almighty* is the Sovereign of the Day of Judgment and will hold them accountable.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: ‘Is Allah not the most decisive of judges.’ (*at-Tin:* 8) The word *Alaysa* (is not) is a negative interrogation. In answer to that interrogation, we should say, ‘*Bala* (yes).’ In this way we affirm that no one is more decisive in judgment than Allah *the Almighty*. This style is also employed in His saying: ‘…Is not this the truth?...’ (*al-An‘am:* 30) He *the Almighty* does not ask about the truthfulness of this fact, but rather affirms such truthfulness. He willed that they themselves affirm this fact, saying, ‘Yes,’ as their denial is useless in their situation. So, the particle *Bala* affirms a negative interrogation. He *the Almighty* is the most decisive of judges. If there is a plural description in which He *the Almighty* includes some of His servants, then it is attributed to them. With regard to Him *the Almighty* this Attribute is infinite, whereas people’s attributes are changeable, fluctuating between strength and weakness.

So, His saying: ‘Is Allah not the most decisive of judges.’ (*at-Tin:* 8) means that He *Glorified is He* is the fairest of the just ones and the best One to judge. He judges between the believers and the deniers. Further, He *Glorified is He* is the most decisive of judges in everything He creates. This indicates His Omniscience, Wisdom and Majesty. Some scholars claim that this verse is abrogated by the following verse: ‘So when the sacred months have passed away, then slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captives and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush, then if they repent and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, leave their way free to them; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.’ (*at-Tawba:* 5) However, there is no contradiction between the two verses, for He *the Almighty* is the most decisive of judges from eternity and forever, before the existence of judges and judged people. Further, not every verse held to be abrogated by some scholars is really abrogated. In fact, most of the verses that these scholars claim it is abrogated by the aforementioned verse of the chapter of *at-Tawba*, which they call the verse of the sword, are not really abrogated if we reflected deeply on them. All these scholars’ claims in this regard are refuted. When Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to recite: ‘Is Allah not the most decisive of judges’ (*at-Tin:* 8), he would say, ‘Of course, and I am a witness to that.’

the chapter of

al-'Alaq

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-‘Alaq* (1) (Clinging Form):

ٱقۡرَأۡ بِٱسۡمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ (١) خَلَقَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مِنۡ عَلَقٍ (٢)
ٱقۡرَأۡ وَرَبُّكَ ٱلۡأَكۡرَمُ (٣) ٱلَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِٱلۡقَلَمِ (٤) عَلَّمَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مَا لَمۡ يَعۡلَمۡ (٥)

Read! In the name of your Lord who created [1] He created man from a clinging form [2] Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One [3] who taught by [means of] the pen [4] who taught man what he did not know [5] (The Quran, *al-‘Alaq*: 1-5)

These verses are the first Quranic ones to be revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Although he was an illiterate Prophet, he is commanded in the first verse to read: ‘Read! In the name of your Lord who created’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 1) so, such reading is special, unlike the human being’s reading that depends on learning. He *peace and blessings be upon him* would read according to the Will of the Ultimate Causer that does not need the causal factors, for He *the Almighty* is the Creator of everything including the casual factors themselves.

The first thing that directs our attention in the creation of man is the clinging form: ‘He created man from a clinging form.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 2) This is the first stage of man’s creation through reproduction. The origin of man was water, dust, mud and clay. So, why does the Quranic context skip talking about that origin even though it is more indicative of Allah's Perfect Omnipotence? The scholars say that He *the Almighty* addresses the people by the way they understand and the process of reproduction that they witness. The overwhelming majority of the people did not witness the original creation of man from mud. On the contrary, they witness the process of reproduction through the sexual intercourse between a male and a female, making the sperm moves from men's back to woman's wombs. This perceivable process has been proven by the empirical sciences. By contrast, the first process of creation is beyond the empirical sciences and if He *the Almighty* had not told us about it, we would not have known anything about it. This proves that the experiment is related to the tangible matters that can be subjected to the empirical sciences. As for the unseen matters, they are not subjected to such sciences and could be only known through Allah's Report. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'I did not make them witnesses of the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor of the creation of their own souls; nor could I take those who lead (others) astray for aiders.' (*al-Kahf:* 51)

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(1) The chapter of *Al-‘Alaq*, counting 19 verses and 72 words, is number 96 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca and is the first chapter to be revealed.

This verse refers to the original creation. As for the creation through reproduction, it is subjected to the empirical sciences. We can prove the truthfulness of the Quran with regard to the reproduction of the human beings. It states that the human being develops through many stages that start with the sperm and end with the complete creation of man. Allah *the Almighty* told us about this scientific fact before any scientist discovers it after the modern scientific advancement.

In the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One.' (*al-'Alaq:* 3) an intensified attribute of bountifulness is used. It is as if the bountiful teaches the one how to read through the causal factors. The Most Bountiful, however, is the One Who teaches him how to read without these causal factors. So, the Divine Attribute of Bountifulness is clear in the matter of reading. As for writing, He *the Almighty* says: 'who taught by [means of] the pen, [4] who taught man what he did not know. [5]' (*al-'Alaq:* 4-5) Here, the word 'man' refers to mankind in general and also the first human being, Adam. We have said that all the human knowledge is governed by premises leading to unquestionable conclusion hidden in the perceivable universe. We substantiate this fact by the series of the geometrical theories whose proof depends on a previous theory. We say, for example, that the theory number 90 is substantiated by number 80 or 70 and so on. When we reach theory number one, we find that it is self-evident, all the people unanimously agree to it. Thus, the most complicated scientific theories are based on self-evident ones.

When Allah *the Almighty* taught man what he did not know, He *Glorified is He* left some basic, self-evident facts that the human mind can realize through reflection. For this reason, reflection on the universal phenomena is obligatory and heedlessness and turning away from these signs are prohibited. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it.' (*Yusuf:* 105) Every sign of creation in Allah's universe could lead to a theoretical conclusion if we reflected on it. This fact is evident in the human history of inventions and discoveries. The scientists who contributed to the welfare of the humanity reached the most complicated and important theories through attentive reflection.

Let us give an example to illustrate this matter; the theory of gravity and its sequential developments that served humanity was just a simple observation of Newton when he saw an apple falling on the earth. We all see the like of this scene. He, however, reflected on this movement and tried to conclude its reasons, wondering, 'Why did not it fall to the right or the left or go upwards?' Afterwards, he discovered the law of gravity that became one of the most important scientific facts. Thus, the most complicated theories are based on simple observation. For this reason, we find that the empirical science is based on observation and the experiment to reach the theory and them the scientific fact.

So, Allah *the Almighty*: 'who taught man what he did not know.' (*al-'Alaq:* 5) He *the Almighty* taught him/her through placing the knowledge within the universe so that the thinking minds can reach it. This is due to the fact that science is an interaction between the human mind and the material world. The subject of this interaction is the mind and its object is the matter. Thus, the universal phenomenon is the raw material of science. This is what He *the Almighty* taught the human being.

If we pondered on the learning human being, we find that the means of having knowledge are the same means of perception that He *Glorified is He* created. The first means is the hearing because it is the most important means of perception and learning, given that the human being listens first and then utters what he had listened. For this reason, He *the Almighty* says: ‘And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers-- you did not know anything-- and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks.’ (*an-Nahl:* 78) As He *the Almighty* told us that man was brought forth from the womb of his/her mother while not knowing anything, then the means of knowledge and learning are the senses mentioned in the verse. Concluding the verse with taking about thanking Him alludes that the outcome of having hearing, sight, and heart necessitates thanking Him. This is because these senses lead to the knowledge that makes man happy and his/her affairs easy.

The one who reflects on these three senses finds that Allah *the Almighty* mentions them according to the natural order of their function in the body and importance as means of perception. Hearing and sight are the means of perceiving the tangible matters, which are the first things that man realises and learns. Afterwards, man learns, through the heart, the mental and abstract matters. The heart leads the person to the unquestionable principles and creeds that remain in his/her soul. We have previously clarified that hearing is the first sense to function after one’s birth, as it starts automatically at that time. As for sight, it functions after three to ten days. Hearing is the sense that accompanies man all the time. Unlike the sense of sight, it does not stop during sleep, for it is the way of waking a sleeper up. Through hearing one can speak, as what has been heard by the ear is imitated by the tongue. Thus, the one who does not hear does not speak. For this reason, He *the Almighty* mentions two qualities of the disbelievers, saying: ‘…deaf and dumb…’ (*al-Baqara:* 18). Therefore, deafness leads to dumbness.

With regard to the first human being, Adam, he received knowledge from Allah *the Almighty* through hearing first, a fact which is deduced from His saying: ‘And He taught Adam all the names…’ (*al-Baqara:* 31). When we follow the series of knowledge, we find one is taught by his/her father who was taught by his father and so on. When we reach in this series to Adam, we find that is it Allah *the Almighty* Who taught him. This is the meaning of His: ‘who taught man what he did not know.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 5)

Another possible interpretation is that He *Glorified is He* taught him through placing what helps him to have knowledge in the universe if he used his mind and intellectual abilities. The first human being does not have any of these abilities as he lacks the language that transmits knowledge. Thus, he should learn the language first. Allah *the Almighty* taught Adam the names of everything in the existence. Now, what is the reason for that? This is because the scholars divide the speech into nouns, verbs and prepositions. They define the noun as the word that has an independent meaning and time is not part of it. As for the verb, it is a word that has an independent meaning and time is part of it. With regard to the proposition, they define it as a word that does not have an independent meaning. It has a meaning only when it is mentioned along with another element and time is not part of it.

When we look at these kinds of speech, we find the noun is the most important kind and the origin of meanings. This is because the proposition is subordinate to it and the verb's root is a noun, for we use the noun of that verb to refer to it. For this reason, when we want to teach the children, we teach them the noun first and then the actions, the verbs and the prepositions. Thus, learning is based on knowing the names, as their meanings include the verb, the preposition and the letters.

Thus, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And He taught Adam all the names…' (*al-Baqara:* 31) indicates that He *Glorified is He* taught him what allows him to express himself and understand. This is why He *the Almighty* says in the chapter of *ar-Rahman*: 'He created man, [3] taught him the mode of expression. [4]' (*ar-Rahman*: 3-4) this means that He *the Almighty* taught him the understandable language he should use to express himself. In order that two people understand each other, they should be well aware of the meanings of the words. That is why the Arab person does not know or understand the English language and vice versa. Some people do not even some subtle meanings in their mother language.

After Adam was taught the name of everything, Allah *the Almighty* commanded him to teach his children: 'He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names…' (*al-Baqara:* 33). In this verse, we find that the 'O' is a proposition for calling; Adam is a noun; and 'inform' is an imperative. It is as if He *the Almighty* sets the rule that the people should follow to learn the language. This matter solved a problem in the science of the language. Some people argued, 'If Allah *the Almighty* taught Adam all the names and he in his turn taught his children, the words of the language should not have increased more than what Adam was taught. Despite that, we find that the academies of the language endorse new words and add them to the language, like the names of the new discoveries and inventions.' We say that the existence of new words in the language proves that it is man-made and not divinely ordained. The people agree to use certain words like the sky, the earth, and the lamp, for example, to refer to certain meanings. However, this agreement needs mutual understanding through using a common language.

So, we ultimately would conclude that a Power has taught us. This directs our attention once again to His saying: 'And He taught Adam all the names…' (*al-Baqara:* 31). This is because the Creator provided the man with all the means of perception and their functions when He created him. He *the Almighty* enabled the eye to see, the ear to hear, the nose to smell, the skin to touch and the means of tasting to taste. Now, what is the function of the tongue? It is to utter the words. So, we should say that He *the Almighty* enabled the tongue to utter the words. These words form the language that the people use to understand each other. Further, they add the new words that match the new developments of life. Thus, we can say that the language was divinely ordained first and then became a man-made one.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كَلَّآ إِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ لَيَطۡغَىٰٓ ٦ أَن رَّءَاهُ ٱسۡتَغۡنَىٰٓ ٧ إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ٱلرُّجۡعَىٰٓ ٨

But man exceeds all bounds [6] when he thinks he is self-sufficient [7] [Prophet], all will return to your Lord [8] (The Quran, *al-'Alaq*: 6 - 8)

The Arabic word *Kalla* (Nay) is mentioned thirty-three times in the Quran, starting with the chapter of *Maryam*. It is a particle denoting reproach and determent. So, when one finds this particle, s/he should know that it is preceded by statements for which one should be reproached and against which s/he should be deterred. The clearest example to understand it is the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘[The nature of] man is that, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, ‘My Lord has honoured me,’ [15] but when He tries him through the restriction of his provision, he says, ‘My Lord has humiliated me.’ [16]’ (*al-Fajr:* 15-16) This is what man wrongly thinks; that is why Allah *the Almighty* reproaches him/her saying, ‘No indeed!...’ (*al-Fajr:* 17) This means that the abundance of provision and wealth is not a sign of hounouring and the restriction of provision and poverty are not a sign of humiliation. Both of the two cases constitute a test and a trial and the honour is the reward of the one who passes the test in either case.

Back to the verses in question, He *the Almighty* says: ‘But man exceeds all bounds [6] when he thinks he is self-sufficient. [7]’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) Here, we do not find anything for which someone should be reproached. In this case, the scholars say that the word *Kalla* means ‘indeed’. It is as if the verses confirm a factual reality: ‘But man exceeds all bounds [6] when he thinks he is self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) They also say that the object of reproach and determent could be deduced from the context, as in the chapter of *al-Fajr* or in His saying here: ‘But man exceeds all bounds.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6) According to this interpretation, the particle *Kalla* is employed for reproach and determent against man’s reaction to the blessings mentioned at the beginning of the chapter: ‘Read! In the name of your Lord who created: [1] He created man from a clinging form. [2] Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One [3] who taught by [means of] the pen, [4] who taught man what he did not know. [5]’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 1-5) These blessings entail thanking Allah *the Almighty* for them. However, man did not thank Him and that is why s/he is reproached for that action because it does not befit these blessings. He *the Almighty* gives his/her the blessings so that s/he thanks Him but s/he does not.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘But man exceeds all bounds [6] when he thinks he is self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) clarifies a factual reality and a nature in the human being. S/he exceeds the bounds when s/he thinks s/he is self-sufficient by his/her wealth, knowledge, etc. The meaning is that the human beings were allured by science away from Allah *the Almighty*. The more we advance in science the more we are allured by our intellectual abilities and, therefore, we go far away from Allah *Glorified is He* and His Way of Guidance. It is noticeable that the scientifically advanced countries held sway over the sciences and the inventions, considering only the power of the mind. They no longer recognize or consider Allah's Omnipotence that created this universe.

Before the scientific revolution, the role of the mind was limited and it did not intervene greatly in people's lives. At that time, if water were cut off, the people could do nothing but to invoke Allah *the Almighty* for it. So, man was connected to his/her Lord. Now, when water is cut off, we do not invoke him *the Almighty* but rather search for the causal factors like a malfunction in the motor, the water tubing, the pipes, etc. No one pays attention to invoking Him *Glorified is He*. Thus, the more the mind holds sway over the human affairs, the more man goes far away from his/her Lord.

Naturally, man exceeds the limits when s/he thinks s/he is self-sufficient. This is the general rule from which no one is exempted except those protected by Allah *the Almighty*. Such people attribute the blessings they have to the Bestower of the Blessings, as in the story of Dawud (David) and Sulaiman (Solomon): 'certainly We gave knowledge to Dawud and Sulaiman, and they both said: Praise be to Allah, Who has made us to excel many of His believing servants.' (*an-Naml:* 14) In the same connection, Sulaiman (Solomon) *peace be upon him* said: '…My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favour which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents…' (*an-Naml:* 19) He *peace be upon him* did not exceed the limits and was not allured by the rank of Prophethood, kingship, power and authority that no one else was given.

Further, in the chapter of *al-Kahf*, Allah *the Almighty* sets the parable of two people; one exceeds the limits on account of the blessings he has and, therefore, acts ungratefully to their Bestower. As for the second man, He *the Almighty* protects him and thus he attributes the blessings to their Bestower and shows gratitude to Him. In this regard, He *the Almighty* says: 'And set forth to them a parable of two men; for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, and We surrounded them both with palms, and in the midst of them We made cornfields. [32]… I do not think that this will ever perish [35] And I do not think the hour will come, and even if I am returned to my Lord I will most certainly find a returning place better than this. [36]' (*al-Kahf:* 32, 35-36) His friend said to him: '…Do you disbelieve in Him Who created you from dust, then from a small seed, then He made you a perfect man? [37] But as for me, He, Allah, is my Lord, and I do not associate anyone with my Lord. [38] And wherefore did you not say when you entered your garden: It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power save in Allah? If you consider me to be inferior to you in wealth and children: [39] Then maybe my Lord will give me what is better…[40]' (*al-Kahf:* 37-40). He teaches his friend that the blessing should not distract him from the Bestower *Glorified is He*.

Thus, the flaw of the man is that the blessing makes him/her exceeds the limits and boasts about his/herself. S/he remains for a long time without having intimacy with his/her Lord. In the Book of Allah, there are many examples portraying the condition of those people. For example, He *the Almighty* relates that Qarun said: 'I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have…' (*al-Qasas:* 78).

Further, He *the Almighty* tells us that man generally is fluctuating and ambivalent. When the cause of his/her haughtiness ends and one finds him/herself in a difficult time, s/he seeks refuge with Allah *the Almighty*. This is because s/he may deceive all the people but not him/herself. However, if Allah *the Almighty* relieved him/her from his calamity, s/he would return to his/her transgression. In this connection, He *the Almighty* says: 'And when affliction touches a man, he calls on Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove his affliction from him, he passes on as though he had never called on Us on account of an affliction that touched him…' (*Yunus*: 12); and 'And when distress afflicts a man he calls upon his Lord turning to Him frequently; then when He makes him possess a favour from Him, he forgets that for which he called upon Him before, and sets up rivals to Allah…' (*az-Zumar:* 8). The word 'rivals' here refers to man's mind, acumen, smartness and intelligence. Moreover, He *the Almighty* says: 'So when harm afflicts a man he calls upon Us; then, when We give him a favour from Us, he says: I have been given it only by means of knowledge. Nay, it is a trial, but most of them do not know. [49] Those before them did say it indeed, but what they earned availed them not. [50]' (*az-Zumar:* 49-50)

When we review the stories of the Glorious Quran, we find that exceeding the limits was the reason why Allah *the Almighty* destroyed the previous nations that had great civilisations. In this regard, He *Glorified is He* says: ‘Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of 'Ad, [6] of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, [7] whose like has never been made in any land, [8] and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, [9] and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? [10] All of them committed excesses in their lands, [11] and spread corruption there: [12] Your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them. [13] Your Lord is always watchful. [14]’ (*al-Fajr:* 6-14)

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Do you build on every height a monument? Vain is it that you do. And you make strong fortresses that perhaps you may. And when you lay hands (on men) you lay hands (like) tyrants.’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 128-130) All these examples are categorised under His saying, ‘But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) These civilisations were devoid of values and not connected to Allah *the Almighty*. Rather, they were governed by deception and haughtiness and connected to the human abilities which are changeable. That is why the condition of those people changed and their civilisations perished. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘So each We punished for his sin…’ (*al-’Ankabut:* 40).

Allah *Glorified is He* then says, ‘[Prophet], to your Lord, all will return.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 8) This verse denotes that those who exceed the bounds should not think they escaped from Him, due to their fake self-sufficiency. However long their transgression remains, they inevitably will return to Allah *Glorified is He*. The prepositional phrase ‘to your Lord’ is foregrounded to indicate that they will return to Him, Alone. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who created them and to Whom is their inescapable return. This return entails holding them accountable and their going to either paradise or Hellfire. So, we should pay attention to the fact that the good that leads to the Hellfire is not really good and the evil that leads to the paradise is not really evil.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

أَرَءَيْتَ ٱلَّذِى يَنْهَىٰ ﴿٩﴾ عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّىٰٓ ﴿١٠﴾ أَرَءَيْتَ إِن كَانَ عَلَى ٱلْهُدَىٰٓ ﴿١١﴾
أَوْ أَمَرَ بِٱلتَّقْوَىٰٓ ﴿١٢﴾ أَرَءَيْتَ إِن كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰٓ ﴿١٣﴾ أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَرَىٰ ﴿١٤﴾

Have you seen the man who forbids [9] [Our] servant to pray? [10] Have you seen whether he is rightly guided [11] or encourages true piety? [12] Have you seen whether he denies the truth and turns away from it? [13] Does he not realize that God sees all? [14] (The Quran, *al-‘Alaq*: 9 - 14)

When you read ‘Have you seen?’ you should realise that it is followed by a wondrous matter. As we colloquially say, ‘Have you seen what so and so did’? This indicates that he has done something unusual. The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Have you seen the man who forbids [Our] servant to pray?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 9-10), is preceded by His saying, ‘But man exceeds all bounds when he thinks he is self-sufficient.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 6-7) It is as if the former saying is the grounds for ruling that man exceeds the bounds. These verses were revealed in reference to Abu Jahl who forbade Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from offering prayer and warned him against offering it.(1) This is the highest level of exceeding the bounds on the part of Abu Jahl. He is free to disobey Messenger Muhammad’s command to offer prayer but he overstepped the limits by forbidding someone else from offering it. Moreover, he does not forbid a normal person but rather Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was charged with calling the people and urging them to offer prayer. Thus, exceeding the bounds in this incident is multifaceted. That is why the Quran considers this incident a wondrous matter that should not happen to the Caller to Islam *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The address in these verses in directed at one time to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to Abu Jahl in another time. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* judges between two disputing parties. Allah *Glorified is He* addresses him *peace and blessings be upon him* in the way that befits him, saying, ‘Have you seen the man who forbids [Our] servant to pray?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 9-10) These verses were revealed after the incident of forbidding him *peace and blessings be upon him* from offering prayer. Abu Jahl went to carry out his threat of trampling on Messenger Muhammad’s head while he was praying. Suddenly, he was taken back and returned when he saw some of Allah’s forces. The people asked him, ‘What is the matter with you?’ He said, ‘I found a trench between me and him, and saw creatures with wings that would seize me if I approached him.’ When this incident was reported to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he said, ‘By Allah, if he had proceeded, the stern Angels would have seized him.’(1)

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(1) In this regard, Qatada narrated that Abu Jahl said, ‘If I see Muhammad offering prayer, I will trample on his neck.’ Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘There is a Pharaoh for every nation, and Abu Jahl is the Pharaoh of this nation.’ See *At-Tabari, Jame` Al-Bayan, 24/534.*

This incident has already happened. Even though the Quran relates it after its occurrence, it does not employ a past verb but rather uses the verb ‘to forbid’ in the present form. This is meant in order that we recall the incident as if we are watching it. Afterwards, the address is directed to the forbidder, Abu Jahl: ‘Have you seen whether he is rightly guided, or encourages true piety?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 11-12) Then it is directed to Messenger Muhammad: ‘Have you seen whether he denies the truth and turns away from it? Does he not realise that Allah sees all?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 14)

Another possible interpretation is that the address in all the verses in directed to Abu Jahl. Now, how can we attribute to him the descriptions in Allah’s saying, ‘Have you seen whether he is rightly guided, or encourages true piety? Have you seen whether he denies the truth and turns away from it?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 11-13) The scholars say that Abu Jahl claimed he is rightly guided but in reality, he denied Messenger Muhammad’s call and turned away from guidance. So, the first two verses refer to his claims and the third one refers to the reality of his situation.

Regarding His saying, ‘Have you seen the man who forbids [Our] servant to pray?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 10-11), there are many wonderful incidents related to it. It is narrated that when 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* was waiting for the *Eid* Prayer, he saw some people praying. When some of his Companions asked him, ‘Should you not forbid them from doing that (praying before the due time)?’ he replied, ‘I will not forbid them from offering prayer. I will just tell them that Messenger Muhammad did not offer prayer at that time, lest I would be addressed by the verse: ‘Have you seen the man who forbids [Our] servant to pray?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 10-11)[1] Now, are these verses specially referring to the incident of Abu Jahl with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* or are they generally applicable to anyone forbidding prayer? The maxim here is that the consideration is given to the generality of the wording and not the specificity of the cause of revelation. Accordingly, anyone who forbids, prevents or distracts the people from prayer is addressed by the verses.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8831; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 9775; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 6571; Abu Ya`la, Musnad, Hadith no. 6207; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 38/2797.*

The verses in question are concluded by the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Does he not realise that Allah sees all?’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 14) As Allah *the Almighty* sees everything, He does not need any proof or witness. A witness can be voluntarily offered, as in His saying, ‘And they shall say to their skins, “Why have you borne witness against us?”’ (*Fussilat*: 21)

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كَلَّا لَئِن لَّمۡ يَنتَهِ لَنَسۡفَعَۢا بِٱلنَّاصِيَةِ ﴿١٥﴾ نَاصِيَةٖ كَٰذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٖ ﴿١٦﴾
فَلۡيَدۡعُ نَادِيَهُۥ ﴿١٧﴾ سَنَدۡعُ ٱلزَّبَانِيَةَ ﴿١٨﴾ كَلَّا لَا تُطِعۡهُ وَٱسۡجُدۡ وَٱقۡتَرِب ﴿١٩﴾

No! If he does not stop, We shall drag him by his forehead — [15] his lying, sinful forehead [16] Let him summon his comrades [17] We shall summon the guards of Hell [18] No! Do not obey him [Prophet]: bow down in worship and draw close [19] (The Quran, *al-‘Alaq*: 15 -19)

His saying ‘No!’ represents a reproach and determent against Abu Jahl’s action of denying the truth and forbidding Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* from offering prayer. So, His saying, ‘… If he does not stop, We shall drag him by his forehead.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 15) means that if he did not stop his evil deeds, Allah *Glorified is He* would drag him by the forehead as

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(1) *See Ar-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghayb, 32/222; Gharai`b Al-Quran, 6/532; and Al-Maraghi, Tafsir, 30/203.*

a mark of humiliation and disgrace. He had a forelock which he used to comb and perfume. So, Allah *the Almighty* decreed that he would be dragged by his forelock that he boasted about. His forehead is metaphorically described as: ‘his lying, sinful forehead.’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 16). As it is Allah *the Almighty* Who threatens him, His Threat will inevitably come to pass. Were this not the case, some people would doubt His Words. In reality, Abu Jahl did not stop his harm to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and kept on denying the Message. Thus, his fall was at the Battle of Badr.

The books of Messenger Muhammad’s biography record that when the chapter of *Ar-Rahman* was revealed, he *peace and blessings be upon him* said to his companions, ‘Who among you can recite it to the people of Quraysh?’(1) `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud stood up and took it upon himself to fulfil this task. He was very thin and had a small body. So, he *peace and blessings be upon him* kept silent and repeated the question. When `Abdullah said to him, ‘O Messenger of Allah, I can carry out this task’, he approved that. There is Divine Wisdom in the fact that the thinnest and the smallest one among the Companions carried out this mission. He proved that even though he has a thin body, he held a firm belief. He went to the people of Quraysh in the place of their gathering and recited the chapter of *ar-Rahman* to them, enduring beating and insults. Abu Jahl severely harmed him and slapped him, cutting his ear and causing him to bleed. When he returned to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in that condition, he, i.e. Messenger Muhammad felt deeply sad for him. Thereupon, Archangel Gabriel came to him smiling. He *peace and blessings be upon him* asked him, ‘My brother Gabriel, what makes you laugh?’ He said, ‘You will come to know.’

After the revelation of ‘… If he does not stop, We shall drag him by his forehead’ (*al-‘Alaq:* 15), Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was waiting for what would happen to Abu Jahl. That is why he is the only disbeliever about whom he *peace and blessings be upon him* said at the Battle of Badr, 'Look for Abu Jahl.'(1) This is because Allah *the Almighty* promised, as Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* reported, to take revenge against him. Indeed, Ibn Mas`ud found him in his last breath after he was struck by two young boys. Ibn Mas`ud stood on his chest to finish him but his sword did not cut. So, Abu Jahl gave him his sword to finish him and relieve him of the pain. Amazingly, Abu Jahl said to him in this situation, while Ibn Mas`ud was standing on his chest, 'O shepherd, you have climbed a difficult spot.' Thereupon, Ibn Mas`ud finished him, separating his head from his body. He wanted to take his head to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. So, he pierced the ear and tied it with a rope, dragging the head to him *peace and blessings be upon him*. When he *peace and blessings be upon him* saw this, he said, 'An ear for an ear and the head is an addition.'(2)

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(1) *It is narrated that Az-Zubayr said, ‘The first one to recite the Quran openly after Messenger Muhammad was `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud. The Companions of Messenger Muhammad said, ‘By Allah, the people of Quraysh have never listened to the Quran openly. Who can recite it to them openly?’ Ibn Mas`ud said, ‘I can do that.’ See Ahmad, Fada`il As-Sahaba, 1535; Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 1/314; and As-Suhayli, Ar-Rawd Al-Unuf, 3/108.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'Let him summon his comrades; We shall summon the guards of Hell.' (*al-'Alaq:* 17-18), the word 'comrades' refers to Abu Jahl's family, kinfolk and children in their big number he used to take pride during his dispute with Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Abu Jahl said to him, 'How do you threaten me while I am the richest person in this valley and has the biggest number of children.' So, Allah *the Almighty* responded to him, saying, 'Let him summon his comrades; We shall summon the guards of Hell.' (*al-'Alaq:* 17-18) Allah *the Almighty* will summon the Angels of Punishment who are in charge of dragging him to the hellfire. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says to Abu Jahl, 'You will come to know who really have a great power and stronger forces.'

Allah *the Almighty* concludes the chapter with His saying, 'No! Do not obey him [Prophet]: bow down in worship and draw close.' (*al-'Alaq:* 19) Here, Allah *the Almighty* commands Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* not to obey Abu Jahl's prohibition of prayer and to offer it. The best part of the prayer and the nearest to Allah *the Almighty* is prostration, as he *peace and blessings be upon him* said ‘A slave becomes nearest to his Lord when he is in prostration.’(1) Abu Jahl wanted him *peace and blessings be upon him* to go far away from Allah while Allah *the Almighty* wanted him to draw close.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 3962 and 4020; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 18165.*

(2) *It is narrated that Abu Jahl told Ibn Mas`ud, 'O shepherd, you have climbed a difficult spot.' Ibn Mas`ud then cut his head and brought it to Messenger Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him saying, 'O, Messenger Muhammad, this is the head of Allah's enemy.' See Al-Waqidi, Al-Maghazi, 1/90; and Ibn Hisham, As-Sira An-Nabawiyya, 1/636.*

The prayer represents a presence before Allah, and prostration gives the servant the rank of closeness. This is enough honour and position for the sake of which all the hardships are considered easy. As prayer has this high position and rank, Allah *the Almighty* prescribed it on Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the most honourable place, namely the seventh heaven during the Night Journey and Ascension.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 215/482; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 9461; Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 1524 and 8958; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 1928.*

the chapter of

al-Qadr

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Qadr* (1) (The Glory).

إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ فِي لَيۡلَةِ ٱلۡقَدۡرِ ١ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا لَيۡلَةُ ٱلۡقَدۡرِ ٢

We sent it down on the Night of Glory [1]
What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is? [2]
(The Quran, *al-Qadr:* 1 - 2)

First, we notice the harmonious relationship between the context of the chapter of *al-Qadr* and *al-`Alaq*. As a matter of fact, the order of the chapters in the *Mushaf* is different from that of revelation, as the Quran was revealed according to the incidents that require certain rulings. The relationship between the revealed verses and the incident connected to them is understandable; when an incident takes place, its ruling is revealed. This is more confirmatory to the ruling; it takes a firm position in the soul as it requires that ruling and is prepared to receive it. If the ruling is prescribed without any need for it, man may forget the application of that ruling when there is a need for it. However, when the revelation of the ruling follows the existence of the need directly, it is established in the heart, as the soul direly needs it.

The Quran has a special order according to its preservation in the Preserved Tablet. There is a harmonious relationship between the verses and the chapters in the order of revelation. Now, is this relationship not found in the order of the *Mushaf*? No; there is a harmonious relationship between the verses and the chapters even if they are located in a place inconsistent with their order of revelation. Thus, there is a harmonious relationship between the chapters and the verses with regard to their written order in the *Mushaf* as well as in their order of revelation. If we look at the chapter of *al-Qadr*, we find that its order is after *al-`Alaq*. This is because the chapter of *al-`Alaq* did not define what should be read. What was required at the time of revealing it was affecting the ability to read for the illiterate person, i.e. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. That is why the object of reading was skipped and he was only commanded to read: ‘Read! In the name of your Lord who created’ (*ash-Sharh:* 1).

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Qadr* consists of five verses, 30 words and 114 letters. It is the 97th chapter in the order of *Al-Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *`Abasa* and before that of *Ash-Shams*.

Now, what should he read? Evidently, he should read the Quran. For this reason, we find that Allah *the Almighty* does not say in the chapter of *al-Qadr,* ‘We sent down the Quran on the night of Glory’, as a new statement. Rather, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘We sent it down on the Night of Glory’ (*al-Qadr:* 1) employing the third person to refer to the Quran. The third person, as we have said, requires a reference. So, what is commanded to be read is known, that is, the Quran. Therefore, there is a clear harmonious relationship between the chapter of *al-`Alaq* and *al-Qadr*; they share the same context.

Allah *the Almighty* starts the chapter of *al-Qadr* with His saying, ‘We sent it down ...’ (*al-Qadr:* 1). Allah *Glorified is He* does not say, ‘I sent it down’, but rather employs the plural pronoun that indicates glorification. When we review the usage of this plural pronoun in the Book of Allah, we find that it is used in the actions that require a set of Allah’s Attributes of Majesty and Beauty. For example, when Allah *the Almighty* creates something, some Attributes are used like Omniscience, Omnipotence, Wisdom, etc. These numerous Attributes cooperate, with their Majesty and Beauty, to create that thing. In the like of these actions, Allah *the Almighty* uses the plural pronoun ‘We’.

By contrast, when Allah *Glorified is He* talks about Himself to make His servants return to Him, He does not say, ‘We are Allah’. Rather, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Surely, I am Allah, there is no god but I…’ (*al-Hajj:* 14). Here, He uses a singular pronoun to command His servants to worship Him. On the other hand, when He shows His Blessings, He uses the plural pronoun because the Blessings are numerous and require the cooperation of many Attributes, as we have said. For this reason, if we review the Quran in the light of this remark, we find that the pronoun is singular in the case of talking about His Oneness but plural in the case of showing His Blessings on us. In the latter case, He would say, ‘We decreed and We sent down’.

If we carefully reflect on His saying, ‘We sent it down ...’ (*al-Qadr:* 1), we find that the root *nazal* regarding the Quran has many derivatives like *nazala* (to descend), *naz-zala* (to reveal), *unzila* (to be sent down), *nuz-zila* (to be revealed) and *tatanazzal* (to gradually descend). We notice in these derivatives that the intransitive verb ‘*nazala*’ (to descend) is attributed to the Quran and to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And with truth have We revealed it, and with truth did it come…’ (*al-Hijr:* 105), and ‘The Faithful Spirit has descended with it.’ (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193) The first verse refers to the Quran and the second refers to Archangel Gabriel. In the first verse, Allah *the Almighty* does not mention the one who brought the Quran down, but in the second verse Allah *Glorified is He* mentions that person, namely Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. Consequently, this means that the Quran descended with Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. In this sense, we can say that the Quran was revealed with and without an intermediary. The rhetorical indication in this fact is that the situation will not differ if the Quran descended by itself or through an intermediary. That is to say, that as the one who brought it down is a Faithful Spirit who can never alter it, then it is as if the Quran descended by itself. So, in the process of revealing the Quran, it was not altered as though it descended by itself without an intermediary. Thus, the two aforementioned verses denote the same meaning but we deduce from them that the matter is the same whether the Quran was revealed by itself or through an intermediary. This is because the Spirit that brought it down is faithful, changing nothing in its content. After all, he did not voluntarily bring it down, for he was commanded by Allah *the Almighty*.

One of the derivatives is the verb *naz-zala* (to reveal), which is employed in His saying, ‘He has revealed to you the Book with truth …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 3). Here, the verb is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* and the Quran is the object of the verb. Further, another verse shows the difference between the revelation of the Quran and that of the previous Books, which is His saying, ‘And it is a

Quran which We have revealed in portions so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees, and We have revealed it, revealing in portions.' (*al-Isra':* 106) The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…by slow degrees…' (*al-Isra':* 106), proves that the Quran was revealed in portions. Whenever an incident arises, its ruling is revealed. That is why Allah *the Almighty* relates that the disbelievers said, '… Why has not the Quran been revealed to him all at once?' (*al-Furqan:* 32) This means that the previous Books were revealed at once. By contrast, the Quran was revealed in portions according to the incidents to strengthen the heart of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If it had been revealed at once, his heart would have been strengthened only one time. As he will confront many incidents during his call, his heart should be frequently strengthened: '… Thus, that We may strengthen your heart by it and We have arranged it well in arranging.' (*al-Furqan:* 32) Therefore, regarding the way of revelation, the Quran is different from the previous Books.

The Quran is a Book whose recitation is an act of worship and it is easy for the tongues to recite every portion thereof: '… and We have arranged it well in arranging. And they shall not bring to you any argument, but We have brought to you (one) with truth and best in significance.' (*al-Furqan:* 32-33) As they shall not bring any argument except that the Quran brings the truth about it, then it is as if their arguments are one of the reasons why the Quran is revealed. If it had been revealed at once, how would the people ask about something and the Quran clarifies it to them? How would they ask about their problems that the Quran descends to solve? Thus, the ruling about a certain matter should not descend until the people ask about it.

As for the derivative *naz-zala* it is a transitive verb denoting the repetition of the action of sending down the Quran. The root *anzala* is another transitive verb but it was only attributed to Allah *the Almighty* directly. It is not attributed to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. This indicates that *anzala* is the root from which the derivatives *naz-zala* and *nazala* were derived. This root also indicates the original revelation of the Quran, transmitting it from the unseen world to the seen one.

The Quran is an eternal Attribute of Allah *the Almighty* and was in the unseen world. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* willed to bring it out to the seen world, as the unseen world could be witnessed by some creatures but not others. When Allah *the Almighty* commanded the pen to write in the Preserved Tablet, He brought the Quran out of the unseen world to the seen one. Consequently, it became seen to the Scribing Angels but unseen to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. Afterwards, the Scribing Angels brought it down to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* making it perceivable to him but it was still unseen to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. After Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* brought it down to Messenger Muhammad's heart, it became seen to him but unseen to the human beings. Finally, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed it to his *ummah,* it became absolutely perceivable in the seen world.

Thus, there are stages in the revelation of the Quran. When Allah *the Almighty* uses the verb *anzala* (to reveal), He refers to the original revelation from the unseen world to the seen one according to the aforementioned stages. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And when it is said to them, "Come to what Allah has revealed (*anzala*) and to the Messenger", they say, "That on which we found our fathers is sufficient for us…"' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104). Here the action of revealing the Quran is connected with the last stage of conveying it to the seen world through Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Consequently, we should accept the Quran as if it was revealed directly from Allah *the Almighty* without an intermediary. We should recognise that when we listen to the Quran, we are listening to Allah *the Almighty* speak - we should disregard all the intermediaries. We should not say it the Quran that Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* or the Scribing Angels had sent down; rather, we should say it is Allah *the Almighty* Who originally sent it down. That is why the people who taste the sweetness of the Quran do not say, 'We recite the Quran'; rather, they say, 'We listen to the Quran'. This means that they are in fact listening to Allah *the Almighty* speak.

In this connection, Ja`far As-Sadiq(1) *Allah be pleased with him* was the most knowledgeable person of his time about the secrets of the Quran. He prescribed the spiritual cure for the human soul when it is afflicted by anxiety or fear, for example. Fear is to be scared from something known while anxiety is to fear something unknown. He said, ‘I’m surprised that the fearful person does not seek refuge in Allah’s saying, “… Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector.” for I listened to Allah *the Almighty* say afterwards: “So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) Grace, no evil touched them …”’ Ja`far did not say, ‘I recited’, but rather, ‘I listened to Allah say.’

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(1) Ja`far As-Sadiq is Ja`far ibn Mohammed, Al-Baqir, ibn `Ali, Zayn Al-`Abidin, Abu 'Abdullah. He was one of the prominent followers from whom Abu Hanifa and Malik received knowledge. He was born in 80 A.H. and died in 148 A. H. when he was 68 years old.

He then added, ‘I am surprised that the grieved person does not seek refuge in Allah’s saying, “… There is no god but Thou, Glory be to Thee; surely, I am of those who make themselves to suffer loss.” for I listened to Allah say afterwards: “So We responded to him and delivered him from the grief and thus do We deliver the believers.”’

He then said, ‘I am surprised that the one against whom the plots have been devised does not seek refuge in Allah’s saying, “… I entrust my affair to Allah; Surely Allah sees the servants.” for I listened to Allah say afterwards: “So Allah protected him from the evil (consequences) of what they planned….”’

Furthermore, he said, ‘I am surprised that the one who seeks the worldly life and its adornment does not seek refuge in Allah’s saying, “… It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power save in Allah …” for I listened to Allah say afterwards: “…If you consider me to be inferior to you in wealth and children, then maybe my Lord will give me what is better than your garden….”’

Before we leave our discussion of this point, we should notice one of the wonderful remarks of the Quran. We should first reflect on the indications of the following two verses which are close in meaning: ‘And when it is said to them, “Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger”, they say, “That on which we found our fathers is sufficient for us…”’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104), and, ‘And when it is said to them, “Follow what Allah has revealed”, they say, “Nay! We follow what we found our fathers upon …”’ (*al-Baqara:* 170). We find that the first verse indicates that those disbelieving people are more stubborn in rejecting the true Way of Guidance than the people in the second verse. This is because they said that following their fathers was sufficient for them, blocking all the means of allowing guidance to enter their hearts. This meaning is not mentioned in the second verse, giving hope that they may be guided.

Further, if we reflected on the conclusion of each of the two verses, we find that it befits the meaning of each verse. As the first verse talks about a strongly denying people, it is concluded with His saying, 'What! Even though their fathers knew nothing and did not follow the right way.' (*al-Ma'ida:* 104) By contrast, the second verse is concluded with His saying, '… What! and though their fathers had no sense at all, nor did they follow the right way.' (*al-Baqara:* 170) When they claimed that following their fathers is sufficient for them, Allah *the Almighty* negated that they have any knowledge. The knowledge one has is more than what he perceives through his mind. One can know what he does not perceive with his mind when someone else tells them about it. So, one's source of knowledge is what he perceives with his mind in addition to what he knows through people's reasoning. Negating knowledge in the first verse includes what they could know by themselves and from other people.

Back to the chapter in question! Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty* 'We sent it down on the Night of Glory …' (*al-Qadr:* 1), the Arabic word *qadr* (glory) has a specific linguistic connotation. However, this general linguistic connotation does not fulfil its due meaning and position meant by Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is?' (*al-Qadr:* 2) The addressee here is Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who is the most knowledgeable person about the language. So, this indicates that the position of this night is beyond the human perception. If Allah *the Almighty* did not show us its position, we would not come to know it through our intellectual abilities. Thus, the word *qadr* bears a meaning beyond its linguistic connotations. Regarding its linguistic connotation, it is known to the Arabs who listen to the Quran, that is, to the Night of Glory, that the Night is the night of greatness, honour, and high rank. We should not stop at these meanings, for this night has additional meanings, Quranic illuminations and Divine Lights transcending the linguistic connotation.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is?' (*al-Qadr:* 2) This means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should receive the knowledge about this night from Allah *the Almighty* as He knows what we do not perceive concerning it. The style

‘What will explain’, which is used in this verse, is only employed regarding the matters that the addressee cannot perceive through his mind or language. We have previously clarified that the style ‘What will explain’ is different from ‘what will make you comprehend’. The former means that Allah *the Almighty* would explain to Messenger Muhammad the reality of a given matter, while the latter means that Allah *the Almighty* would not explain a certain matter to him. So, when Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘… what will make you comprehend that the hour may be nigh.’ (*al-Ahzab*: 63), this negates that Allah *the Almighty* will make him comprehend the time of the Hour either in the present or the future. This matter remains unseen, as one of Allah’s secrets.

Allah *Glorified is He* says:

لَيۡلَةُ ٱلۡقَدۡرِ خَيۡرٞ مِّنۡ أَلۡفِ شَهۡرٖ ٣

The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months [3] (The Quran, *al-Qadr:* 3)

It is well known that the calendar of the day depends on the movement of the sun and the calendar of the month depends on the movement of the moon. Therefore, the twelve circulations of the moon constitute one year. Accordingly, we can understand His saying, ‘The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months. (*al-Qadr:* 3) in the light of His saying, ‘The month of *Ramadan* is that in which the Quran was revealed …’ (*al-Baqara:* 185). We can define the position of the Night of Glory according to the number of the months. The one thousand months include eighty-three months of *Ramadan*. Thus, the meaning is that this Night is better than one thousand months not including the Night of Glory. We must exclude the Nights of Glory occurring in these one thousand months; otherwise, one object would be better than a group like it. So, the meaning is that the Night of Glory is better than one thousand months including no Nights of Glory.

Now, why does Allah *the Almighty* choose the number one thousand? The scholars say that this number was the biggest one known to the Arabs at the time of revelation. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘… every one of them loves that he should be granted a life of a thousand years …’

(*al-Baqara:* 96). I think you are aware of the story of the daughter of Kisra when the Muslims liberated Al-Mada`in of Persia. One of the Companions wanted his share in the spoil to be marrying the daughter of Kisra. When that was reported to her, she said, ‘Where is that man who wants to marry me?’ When she saw him, she said, ‘I want to ransom myself. How much money do you want?’ He said, ‘One thousand *Dinars.’* The people asked him, ‘Why did not you ask for more, for she can pay one hundred thousand *Dinars*?’ He replied, ‘By Allah, if I knew a number bigger than one thousand, I would say it.’

Other scholars hold that the chapter in question was revealed in Medina and the number ‘one thousand’ denotes a factual reality. It is reported that Al-Hassan ibn `Ali said, ‘Allah’s Messenger *peace and blessings be upon him* said while he was on the pulpit, ‘It was shown to me that the reign of the Umayyad dynasty will last for a long time. When I doubted this matter, Allah *the Almighty* revealed to me: ‘We sent it down on the Night of Glory. What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is? The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months.’ (*al-Qadr:* 1-3) This is how long the Umayyad rule will remain (one thousand months).’

Further, some scholars hold that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that some of the children of Israel kept obeying Allah *the Almighty* for eighty years. As the lifetimes of the people in his *ummah* are shorter than eighty years, Allah *the Almighty* gave him this privilege, that is, one Night is better than eighty years. Thus, the Night of Glory is an honour for Messenger Muhammad and a compensation for his *ummah*.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

تَنَزَّلُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَٱلرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ ﴿٤﴾

On that night the angels and the Spirit descend again and again with their Lord’s permission on every task [4] (The Quran, *al-Qadr:* 4)

The Arabic origin of the word *tanazzal* (to descend) is *tatanazzal*, the letter *ta`* is omitted to make the word easier to be pronounced. That is why it is said:

The word that starts with two ta` letters can be shortened to

one ta` as in 'Tanazzal Al-Mala`ka' (The Angels descend)

In the verse in question, the word 'Spirit' refers to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. Regarding Allah's saying, '… with their Lord's permission on every task.' (*al-Qadr:* 4), do the angels descend with the Quran or with every task? The verse includes both of them; in that night, the Quran descends and all the matters are ordained. The angels mentioned in this verse are charged with revealing the Quran and carrying out other tasks ordained by Allah *the Almighty*. Elsewhere, Allah *the Almighty* says about these angels: 'Then those who regulate the affair.' (*an-Nazi'at*: 5)

We have previously concluded that that the root *nazala* (to send the Quran down) has many derivatives. Most of them can be attributed to Allah *the Almighty* as well as the intermediary that brought it down, namely Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. The only exception is the derivative *anzala* (to send down); it can only be attributed to Allah *Glorified is He* Alone. Consequently, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'We sent it down on the Night of Glory.' (*al-Qadr:* 1)

Through what has been revealed to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* Allah *the Almighty* clarifies that He created the time and the place and then made sometimes and places better than others. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* made some human beings, for whom the place and time were created, excel more than others. The selection of some of His people is a Grace that Allah *the Almighty* confers on anyone He chooses. Allah *the Almighty* knows best with whom to place His Message, a fact which is clear in His saying, 'Allah chooses Messengers from among the angels and from among the men ...' (*al-Hajj:* 75), and 'Surely Allah chose Adam and Nuh (Noah) and the descendants of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the descendants of Imran above the nations.' (*Al-'Imran:* 32)

Preferring a certain time on account of a certain event that can happen at any time gives rise to the following common question: 'Why is this time specially preferred and selected'? The reason for preferring a certain time is that Allah *the Almighty* wills so, because the periods of time themselves are similar and are not the criterion for preference. Thus, it is Allah *Glorified is He*

Who prefers sometimes to other according to His Will, which is the criterion for preference. Likewise, the reason for preferring some places to others is not intrinsic in the preferred places. Rather, it is Allah *the Almighty* Who prefers certain places to others. In this sense, Allah *the Almighty* preferred the hour of prayer to the rest of the hours; the hour of accepting the invocation on Friday to the rest of the hours of that day; the Friday to the rest of days of the week; the Night of Glory to the rest of the nights; and the month of *Ramadan* to the rest of the months.

The saying of Allah, Almighty, 'We sent it down on the Night of Glory.' (*al-Qadr:* 1), indicates that this night has a great position and a high rank. Further, it indicates that its high rank is not only due to the revelation of the Quran in it, for it is eternally great due to the ordainment of every matter therein. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'Therein (that night) is decreed every matter of ordainments.' (*ad-Dukhan*: 4) The matters are decreed in that Night before and after the revelation of the Quran. So, Allah *the Almighty* chose to reveal the Quran, the great criterion, in the night when every matter is decreed. This is because it has a great position even before its revelation in it.

Some scholars say that it was given that high rank due to the revelation of the Quran in it. However, we say that the highness of the rank of that night increased after its revelation in it. This means that this night will remain forever greater and loftier than other nights. All the nights will remain inferior to it, as it is the Night of Criterion and Wisdom when the Quran was revealed from the unseen world to the first stage of the seen world. Afterwards, the Quran descended in the same night to the lower heaven, as the Scribing Angels brought down to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* the verses to be revealed every year.

This does not mean that the beginning of its revelation to us was on the Night of Glory, as some scholars hold, saying, 'As the Quran was sent down on the Night of Glory, then the first verse to be revealed to Messenger Muhammad was also on the Night of Glory.' We say, 'No; it suffices that the portion including this verse was revealed on the Night of Glory.' Thus, this Night witnessed all the stages of revealing the Quran from the unseen world to the seen one. Its revelation to the seen world took some stages; it was revealed to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* and then to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this sense, the greatness and honour of the Night of Glory are multifaceted.

Here, arises a question, which is, ‘Why was the Quran revealed in the night and not in the day’? The scholars say that this is because night is the time of tranquillity and quietness while the day is the time of activity and noise, distracting people’s attention and scattering their faculties. As for the night, it the time of lucidity when the faculties are collected and the hearts are clear. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Surely the rising by night is the firmest way to tread and the best corrective of speech.’ (*al-Muzzammil*: 6) This is because the souls with clear minds are readier to receive knowledge as they are not distracted by anything. Further, the night is the time of retreat which is the cause of lucidity. When the people gather, their thoughts intermingle and they mutually transmit their ideas. As for the retreat, it is the time when man can think clearly and consider his situation.

Moreover, if we reflect on the nature of Allah’s creation of the night and the day, we find that the night is the result of a negative action. That is to say that the day is the result of sunrise while the day is the result of sunset, which a negative action is leading to the coming of the night. As for the day, it is the result of a positive action that is, causing the sun to rise. Now, what is the difference between the positive and the negative action? The negative action entails that the object returns to its nature. For example, if the lamp does not exist, the darkness shrouds the place. Thus, the darkness required the existence of a lighting day that befits the activity of life and pursuing the means of sustenance.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* praises the people who offer voluntary late night prayers because the night is the best time for retreat. Allah *the Almighty* praises the good people, saying, ‘They used to sleep but little of the night, and in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 17-18), besides, worshipping Allah *the Almighty* at night is far removed from showing off and considering the people. For the aforementioned reasons, Allah *the Almighty* chose the night to send down His Way of Guidance therein, away from the noise of the life and its clamour. If we are seeking to know the wisdom and the rationale behind choosing the night, we should know that the mere Divine Will is the suitable wisdom and rationale. Despite that, we may search for some other reasons to satisfy the need of the curious human soul.

Regarding the saying of Allah *the Almighty*, 'On that night the angels and the Spirit descend again and again with their Lord's permission on every task.' (*al-Qadr:* 4), the conjunction 'and' entails that the angels are different from the Spirit. However, some scholars say that the Spirit is specific and the angels are general, as in His saying, 'My Lord, forgive me and my parents and whoever enters my house a believer and the believing men and believing women.' (*Nuh:* 28) Another view is that the 'Spirit' is different from the angels because it has a distinctive, additional feature. The angels who descend are those who regulate the affairs and take care of people's interests. We have previously explained that the angels are divided into many kinds. Some of them are the exalted ones who do nothing but glorify Allah *the Almighty* and have nothing to do with the creation. As for those who regulate the affairs, they are the ones charged with fulfilling the interests of the people. Further, some scholars say that the word 'angels' is general referring to all the angels. As for the Spirit, it is a kind of the angels who watch over the other angels in the way the recording angels watch over us and record our deeds. Another opinion is that the Spirit here refers to Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him* as in Allah's saying, 'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 193)

Regarding His saying, '… on every task.' (*al-Qadr:* 4), it means that the angels and the Spirit descend to fulfil the task related to everything that sustains the universal order. This universal order needs some tasks related, for example, to the rains which bring about the provisions. Other matters are related to the wars, calamities, disasters and death, which are the task of `Izra`il. Thus, each of the regulating angels has a task to carry out on the earth. His saying, 'On that night the angels and the Spirit descend again and again with their Lord's permission on every task.' (*al-Qadr:* 4) means that the decrees of giving life, causing death and the occurrence of calamities, good events and evil ones are issued in that Night. All the matters, be they good or evil, are decreed in the Night of Glory.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* says,

سَلَٰمٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطۡلَعِ ٱلۡفَجۡرِ ۝٥

[there is] peace that night until
the break of dawn [5] (The Quran, *al-Qadr:* 5)

Dividing the Divine Decrees into good and evil is a wrong understanding on the part of the human being. The apparent evil decrees are Allah's Will and if we looked at their ultimate outcomes, we find them good ones. This is applicable to even the calamities and war that we consider evil. The right scale for such events is His saying, '… And if it were not for Allah checking [some] people by means of others, the Earth would have been corrupted …' (*al-Baqara:* 251). Even wars are considered means leading to peace. That is why the 'Prince of Poets', Ahmed Shawqi, praised Messenger Muhammad, saying,

The just war is your law
As a drug taken from a deadly poison

Checking some people by means of others maintains the balance of life. One force deters another to not allow it to terrify the people and make mischief. The word 'peace' in the verse in question is a comprehensive term. Its general meaning is safety, stability, serenity, and tranquillity. The peace of the human being should be with his Lord regarding creed, with himself and his faculties and with the society where he lives.

Further, peace may come from an unexpected source. For example, the person may get sick and wrongly thinks that his illness is a calamity and evil. In reality, however, it is good for him because it purifies him from the sins. Thus, one should not consider the events from the angle that satisfies his soul, for behind these events there is supreme wisdom intended by Allah *the Almighty*. Furthermore, the calamity inflicting someone else could be the cause of your reform. Thus, there are facets of goodness behind all the Divine Decrees.

In the factual reality, we have undergone difficult events that turned out to be Divine Graces. We see no aspect of goodness or peace in the drought, for example. In reality, however, it is a cure that prevents the people from exceeding the limits and turning away from Allah *the Almighty* Who created them and provides them with sustenance. When drought befalls a certain people, it makes them return to Him *the Almighty* and shun their deception by their power or the nature that follows their wishes. In this connection, a leader of a country said, ‘Now, we have built the dam and you, people, can irrigate your lands, whether the rain falls or not.’ Likewise, the flood may cause drowning and destruction. Thus, we must understand that the universe is not running according to people’s whims and desires, for Allah *the Almighty* manages the affairs of His creatures. The calamities and the difficult events could be intended to direct people’s attention to Allah *Glorified is He* so that they return to Him on the individual and the societal level.

So, His saying, ‘[there is] peace that night until the break of dawn.’ (*al-Qadr:* 5) means that all His Decrees are peaceful, even if we consider them otherwise. Our role is to search for the good aspects in the events however evil they seem to be. For example, when someone is inflicted with an illness, he should not consider the harm thereof but the outcome of that illness, that is, purifying them from the sins, having the misdeeds forgiven and elevating his spiritual rank. Therefore, there are many aspects of wisdom in the Decrees that Allah *the Almighty* issues and we should deduce these aspects.

In the chapter of *Al-`Imran*, Allah *Glorified is He* deals with this issue, saying, ‘Say: “O Allah, Master of the Kingdom! You give the kingdom to whomsoever You please and take away the kingdom from whomsoever You please, and You exalt whom You please and abase whom You please in Your hand is the good …”’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). We think that giving the kingdom to whomever He pleases and exalting whomever He pleases are good while taking away the kingdom from whomever He pleases and abasing whomever He pleases are evil. However, Allah *the Almighty* corrects our misconception, saying, ‘… in Your hand is the good …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 26). This means that goodness exists in all the four cases; giving the kingdom and taking it away are good, and exalting and abasing are also good. All the decreed events are good, whether we liked them or not. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says in a Divine Hadith: ‘By My Mighty and Majesty, if I will goodness for My servant, I will not cause them to leave the worldly life until I recompense them for his sins through an illness afflicting his body, a decrease in his wealth and a loss in his children. If some sins still remain, the calamity of death will be heavy on him until he comes to me free of sins as if he was born anew.' Thus, all the decrees that the angels descend with are really good, regardless of our view about them. In all cases, they are peaceful.

Another possible interpretation is that His saying, '[There is] peace that night until the break of dawn.' (*al-Qadr:* 5) means that the angels descend to salute the believers. Revealing the Quran is a great honour for Messenger Muhammad's Message. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* benevolently bestowed the Night of Glory, which is better than one thousand months, on this *ummah* as a great honour for them. The people who love each other salute each other on the happy occasions. That is why it is said that the angels descend in that Night under the leadership of Jibril (Gabriel) *peace be upon him*. He distributes them on all corners of the world. There is no house where a believing man or woman dwells except that the Angels enter it to salute the believers.

the chapter of

al-Bayyina

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Bayyina* (1):

لَمۡ يَكُنِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ مِنۡ أَهۡلِ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ
مُنفَكِّينَ حَتَّىٰ تَأۡتِيَهُمُ ٱلۡبَيِّنَةُ ١

Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters were not about to change their ways until they were sent clear evidence [1] (The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 1)

The clear evidence is the evident, powerful proof that depends on the natural predisposition. Such evidence is a gift that Allah *the Almighty* gives to the thinking mind in order to be guided to the fact that behind the creation of the universe there is a Creator Who regulates its affairs. So, the clear evidence is the natural belief which is instilled in the essence of the created beings. The clear proofs are the evident matters that conclusively end all the disputes over certain issues. They are not open to disputations because their arguments are clear, evident, and unquestionable. They could be the miracles that prove the truthfulness of the Messengers or the clear verses containing the obvious rulings that regulate people's activities in life and ensure their happiness. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Certainly We have revealed clear verses…' (*an-Nur:* 46). This verse means that the clear verses govern people's activity in life so that everyone carries out their mission, and the activities become cooperative not contradictory. The problem with people's activity is that some of them construct while the rest destruct.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Bayyina* consists of eight verses, and is 98th chapter in the order of the *Mushaf*. It is also called the chapter of '*Lam Yakun*'. Most of the narrations state that it was revealed in Medina, but some narrations state that it was revealed in Mecca.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters were not about to change their ways ...' (*al-Bayyina:* 1). Allah *Glorified is He* does not mention the ways they were not about to change. This is because they are known from the context. That is to say that those who disbelieve among the people of the Book and the idolaters were not about to change their ways of disbelief until they were sent clear evidence. The people of the Book are the followers of Musa (Moses) and `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon them*. The Torah was revealed to the former and the Gospel was revealed to the latter. They are not all the same, for some of them believed in the message of Musa (Moses) as it was revealed, calling for unifying Allah *the Almighty*. Likewise, some of them believed in the message of `Isa (Jesus) which states that he is a Messenger of Allah *the Almighty*. In fact, all the messengers from *Nuh* (Noah) to Messenger Muhammad *peace be upon them* call for monotheism.

As for the disbelievers among the people of the Book, they are the ones who went astray and diverted from the way of monotheism that affirms that there is no god but Allah. Allah *the Almighty* mentions those people along with polytheistic idolaters like the Arabs who ascribed gods to Him *the Almighty*. The word *kufr* means to conceal the truth; so the disbelievers concealed belief in Allah *the Almighty* and Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

The problem with the people of the Book is that they refused to believe in Messenger Muhammad's Message, a fact which is clear in His saying, 'And when it is said to them, "Believe in what Allah has revealed", they say, "We believe in that which was revealed to us"; and they deny what is besides that…' (*al-Baqara:* 91). They deny the Quran and Messenger Muhammad, saying, 'We only believe in the Torah', others, 'We only believe in the Gospel'. They disbelieve in what has been revealed after their Books, concealing it as if it was not revealed. In fact, when they disbelieve in the Quran, they disbelieve in the Torah and Gospel because the Quran affirms what has been revealed in these Books. In reality, they are liars, for they are disbelievers by nature.

Some scholars say that disbelief is the synonym of atheism and denying Allah's Existence. Evidently, atheism is a kind of disbelief, but it is not the only one. Someone may ask, ‘How do you say that the Jew and the Christian are disbelievers while they believe in Allah’s Existence and in a heavenly Book?’ As a matter of fact, disbelief is not confined to atheism, for it also includes the one who does not believe in the final Messenger, i.e. Messenger Muhammad and the Quran. It also includes those who say that `Isa (Jesus) is Allah, the Son of Allah or the third in a trinity. This fact is affirmed explicitly in Quranic texts.

The clear evidence has been given many times to the people of the Book and the polytheists, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Ask the Israelites how many a clear sign We have given them; and whoever changes the favour of Allah after it has come to him, then surely Allah is severe in requiting (evil).’ (*al-Baqara:* 211) Even the polytheists refused to leave the religion of their fathers, a fact which is clear in His saying, ‘And when it is said to them, “Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger”, they say, “That on which we found our fathers is sufficient for us.” What! Even though their fathers knew nothing and did not follow the right way.’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 104) The Arabic word *munfakkin* in the verse in question means that the people of the Book and the idolaters were not about to leave and abandon their disbelief and polytheism. They will keep on following their evil ways.

رَسُولٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ يَتۡلُواْ صُحُفٗا مُّطَهَّرَةٗ ٢

A messenger from God, reading out pages
[blessed with] purity [2] (The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 2)

The clear evidence is ‘A messenger from Allah…’ (*al-Bayyina:* 2). The messenger needs a proof, for no one can claim to be a messenger without a proof or a confirmation from Allah *the Almighty*. The messenger must put forward a miracle to prove that he is really a messenger sent from Allah *Glorified is He*. The miraculous sign, as we know, is the wonderful matter that breaks the law of the nature to confirm the truthfulness of a messenger in what he conveys from Him. So, the clear evidence is what proves to the people of the Book and the idolatrous that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is a Messenger sent to them. Some scholars hold that the word *munfakkin* means that they will abandon their disbelief. Accordingly, the clear evidence is Messenger Muhammad because he came with the proof of his truthfulness and is the criterion for truth and falsehood. Other scholars maintain that the word *munfakkin* means that they will not leave the worldly life until the punishment befalls them openly. Accordingly, the clear evidence would refer to the punishment, and His saying, ‘A messenger from Allah, reading out pages [blessed with] purity.’ (*al-Bayyina:* 2), would be the beginning of a new statement that is not related to the previous verse.

As for His saying, ‘… reading out pages [blessed with] purity.’ (*al-Bayyina:* 2), it means that part of the mission of the messenger is to recite to us what has been revealed of Allah’s Book. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Even as We have sent among you an Apostle from among you who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know.’ (*al-Baqara:* 151) and ‘Certainly Allah conferred a benefit upon the believers when He raised among them a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His communications …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 164). He *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the wonderful verses of the Quran to them. These recited verses direct people’s attention to the universal signs. He does not recite the verses so that the people appreciate them, for his mission is to direct the attention of everyone listening to the Quran to the One Who created the marvellous, beautiful universe.

There is a difference between reciting the Quran and teaching it. Recitation means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited the Quran to them. As for teaching it, it means that they recite the Quran and be taught what they have not learned about it. The recitation is synonymous with reading. As for learning the Quran, it entails knowing the meaning of the verses and the rulings they contain. When Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Say, “Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you …”’ (*al-An‘am:* 151), this means that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has nothing to do with making things lawful or unlawful. He is just a reciter for what Allah *Glorified is He* made unlawful and he does not have the right to change or alter anything in Quran. That is why the aforementioned verse is concluded with His saying, ‘… this He has enjoined you with …’ (*al-An‘am:* 151). So, it is Allah *the Almighty* who commands the people.

With regard to His saying, '… [blessed with] purity.' (*al-Bayyina:* 2), the Quran is described as pages like the Book of Musa (Moses) *peace be upon him*: 'Or, has he not been informed of what is in the scriptures of Musa (Moses)?' (*an-Najm:* 36) We also know that there are scriptures for Shayt and Idris (Enoch) *peace be upon them* as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Has not there come to them a clear evidence of what is in the previous books?' (*Ta Ha:* 133) Further, Allah *the Almighty* told us that Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) had scriptures: 'Most surely this is in the earlier scriptures. The scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses).' (*al-A'la:* 18-19)

The difference between the scriptures of Musa (Moses) and Ibrahim (Abraham) and that of Muhammad is that the former are not the miracles of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) or Musa (Moses). As for the Scripture of Muhammad, the Quran, it is his miracle. It is a miraculous Book challenging the eloquent people of Quraysh to bring about the like of one of its verses. The pages are the material on which the Book is written. So, the meaning is that the messenger recites what is written on the pages. Afterwards, the pages are described as pure. They are free from additions, omissions, fabrications and falsehood, for all of them are true. They are far removed from being defamed for they are mentioned with the best qualities and praised in the perfect way. This purity stems from their purity in the Preserved Tablet, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'So let him who pleases mind it. In honoured books, exalted, purified.' (*'Abasa:* 12-14) They are books of high positions and are cleansed of all the impurities and filth. The disobedient people's hands do not touch them, for only the purified one touches them. When Allah *the Almighty* describes the pages as purified, He in reality describes what is written on them as purified from all the impurities. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فِيهَا كُتُبٌ قَيِّمَةٌ ٣

Containing true scriptures [3]
(The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 3)

The purified pages contain rightful, true scriptures. They are neither crocked nor contradictory; rather, they distinguish the truth from falsehood. They are wise scriptures guiding to right way and righteousness. The religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* is described as ‘the right religion’ in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Say, “Surely, (as for) me, my Lord has guided me to the right path; (to) a most right religion, the faith of Ibrahim (Abraham) the upright one …”’ (*al-An‘am:* 161). The Arabic word *qayyim* means to fulfil a matter in the way that reforms it. Likewise, the religion reforms people’s activities in life through prescribing certain values. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… That is the correct religion …’ (*at-Tawba:* 36). This means that the religion of Islam regulates our lives correctly and dominates the previous heavenly messages. Similarly, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘… this is the right religion but most people do not know.’ (*Yusuf:* 40) This means that Islam is the right religion.

The scriptures mentioned in the verse in question are right and fair. In the story of the hired person, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘No doubt I will judge between you according to Allah's Laws.’(1) These purified pages contain Allah’s fair, valuable, and right rulings that are far removed from injustice. These rulings are included in Allah’s Book.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَةُ ﴿٤﴾

[Yet] those who were given the Scripture became divided
only after they were sent [such] clear evidence [4]
(The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 4)

Those who were given the Scripture are mentioned in many verses like His saying, ‘…and those to whom the Book had been given did not show opposition but after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves; and whoever disbelieves in the communications of Allah then surely Allah is quick in reckoning.' (*Al-'Imran:* 19) The division of the people of the Book refers to their difference after knowledge had come to them. They did not differ due to imitation, conjecture, ignorance, or doubt.

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(1) *Abu Hurayra and Zayd ibn Khalid Al-Juhani narrated: ‘A Bedouin came and said, “O Allah's Messenger! Judge between us according to Allah’s Laws.” His opponent got up and said, “He is right. Judge between us according to Allah's Laws.” The Bedouin said, “My son was a labourer working for this man, and he committed illegal sexual intercourse with his wife. The people told me that my son should be stoned to death; so, in lieu of that, I paid a ransom of one hundred sheep and a slave girl to save my son. Then I asked the learned scholars who said, ‘Your son has to be lashed one-hundred lashes and has to be exiled for one year.’” The Prophet said, “No doubt I will judge between you according to Allah's Laws. The slave-girl and the sheep are to go back to you, and your son will get a hundred lashes and one year exile.” He then addressed somebody, “O Unais! Go to the wife of this (man) and stone her to death.” So, Unais went and stoned her to death.’ See Malik, Muwatta`, Hadith no. 695.*

Here, they differed and were divided after the coming of the clear evidence which proves the truthfulness of the Messenger. So, His saying, '…those who were given the Scripture …' (*al-Bayyina:* 4), refers to the people to whom the Way of Guidance has been revealed. They were given the Scripture and comprehended its content including the glad tidings about the coming of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They neither abided by the rulings of their Scripture nor believed in the final Scripture. The Jews used to pray for victory over the Arabs through the final Messenger. So, they knew that Allah *the Almighty* would send him *peace and blessings be upon him*. Out of envy from themselves, they disbelieved in him because he was an Arab Messenger.

Therefore, Prophet Muhammad's Message was not surprising for the people of the Book; on the contrary, they were waiting for its coming. They used to affirm that they would believe in it, as their Scriptures imposed on them. However, they refused to believe and denied the Message after its coming. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And when there came to them a Book from Allah verifying that which they have, and a foretime they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieve, but when there came to them (Prophet) that which they did not recognise, they disbelieved in him; so Allah's curse is on the disbelievers.' (*al-Baqara:* 89) The rabbis recognised the truthfulness of the Message and used to pray for victory against the people of Medina through Messenger Muhammad, saying, 'The time of the coming of a Message is soon. We will believe in him and kill you like the people of `Ad and Iram.' Instead of being the first people to believe in him, they were the first people to disbelieve in him, a fact which is clear in His saying, 'And believe in what I have revealed, verifying that which is with you, and be not the first to deny it, neither take a mean price in exchange for My communications; and Me, Me alone should you fear.' (*al-Baqara:* 41)

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* '[Yet] those who were given the Scripture became divided only after they were sent [such] clear evidence' (*al-Bayyina:* 4) alludes to the fact that they were united, unanimously affirming that they would believe in the Messenger mentioned in their Books. However, when he *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent, they divided and differed. Some of the Jews like ‘Abdullah ibn Salam and the Christians like Bahira Ar-Rahib believed in him. However, many of the people of the Book did not believe and became divided after the Messenger came from another people, namely the Arabs.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَمَآ أُمِرُوٓاْ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ ٱلدِّينَ حُنَفَآءَ وَيُقِيمُواْ
ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَيُؤْتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ دِينُ ٱلْقَيِّمَةِ ﴿٥﴾

Though all they are ordered to do is worship God alone, sincerely devoting their religion to Him as people of true faith, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, for that is the true religion [5] (The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 5)

Allah *Glorified is He* did not order the people of the Book except to do what the peoples before them were ordered to do, that is, to worship Him *the Almighty* Alone. In the Torah and the Gospel, they were commanded to sincerely devote their worship to Him, Alone. In this regard, `Isa (Jesus) *peace be upon him* said, ‘I did not say to them aught save what You did enjoin me with: That serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord …’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 117). This is the mission of all the messengers, as Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And certainly We raised in every nation a Messenger saying, “Serve Allah and shun Satan…”’ (*an-Nahl:* 36).

Worship means to abide by doing the orders and to abstain from doing the prohibitions. In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And I have not created the jinn and man except that they should worship Me.’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56) So, the reason for creating the human beings and the Jinn is worshipping Allah *the Almighty*. Worship is not confined to sitting in the mosque and glorifying Allah *Glorified is He*. Rather, it is a way of Guidance for the whole life – at home, work and seeking provision. If Allah *the Almighty* had wanted His servants to offer prayer and glorify Him only, He would not have given them free will. Rather, He would have compelled them to worship Him like the rest of the creatures.

As for His saying, '… sincerely devoting their religion to Him as people of true faith …' (*al-Bayyina:* 5), it is a command to all the people to worship Allah *the Almighty* sincerely devoting their religion to Him. Linguistically, the word *ikhlas* (sincerity) means to clear something from the impurities. With regard the creed and the good deeds, the impurities corrupt their perfection and sincerity. Sincerity is the action of the heart in which it acknowledges that the person worships Allah *the Almighty* Alone without any partner. One may say, 'Sincerity is the action of the heart, and as the person does not hurt anyone or do misdeeds, then it is not necessary for them to pray due to his sincere intention'. We say, 'The matter is not all about intentions, for the actions are also important.' Allah *the Almighty* says in a Divine Hadith, 'Sincerity is one of My secrets that I placed in the hearts of the servants I love.' The actions may apparently seem similar but they vary according to the sincerity in doing them. Some people are totally sincere while other people are less in their sincerity. The matter of sincerity is not governed by any law, for it is defined according to Allah's Knowledge about His servant's hearts.

The people should worship Him sincerely '… as people of true faith …' (*al-Bayyina:* 5). The Arabic word *hunafa`* is derived from their saying '*Hanaf Ar-Rijl*' (The crookedness of the leg). Likewise, it is said, 'This object is *hanif* (not straight).' This description does not mean that those sincere people are crocked; rather, they are straight and upright. That is why Allah *the Almighty* described Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace and blessings be upon him* saying, 'but he was (an) upright (man) …' (*Al-'Imran:* 67). This means that he did not worship idols. So, the word *hunafa`* means to abide by Allah's commands and to do them sincerely.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '… keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms …' (*al-Bayyina:* 5). They are upright in their creed and sincerity to Allah *the Almighty*. Further, they abide by His commands, whether they related to the rituals or the transactions. Prayer is the main act of worship and paying the prescribed alms is the sign of social solidarity. Its due amount is 2.5% of the rich people's wealth that they pay to the poor in order that they satisfy their needs. It is stipulated that the wealth reaches a minimum amount of money and that one year passes after it reaches that amount. If these conditions are not met, then it is not obligatory to pay *zakat*.

Prayer means to submit, obey, and supplicate to Allah *the Almighty*. As for the word *zakat,* it means purification of the soul and growth. *Zakat* was prescribed after Messenger Muhammad's immigration to Medina. This does not mean that before the immigration there was not charitable giving of alms. This has already happened before immigration. So, the people are commanded to bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah. Further, they are commanded to offer the prescribed prayers, to pay the charitable and the prescribed alms.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '… for that is the true religion.' (*al-Bayyina:* 5) This is the true, correct and upright religion that the upright *ummah* should embrace. The religion includes the actions and the sayings. For example, declaring that there is no god but Allah is a saying and offering prayer and paying the prescribed alms are actions. Further, sincerity is the action of the heart which is necessary for the sayings and the deeds in order to be correct and acceptable by Allah *Glorified is He*.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ فِى نَارِ
جَهَنَّمَ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ ٱلْبَرِيَّةِ ٦

Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book
and the idolaters will have the Fire of Hell, there to remain.
They are the worst of creation [6] (The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 6)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* mentions the fate of the disbelievers among the people of the Book and the idolaters. The people of the Book disbelieved in Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Book that was revealed to him, concealing the truth, though he is mentioned in their Books. As for the idolaters, they are the ones who associated other deities with Allah *the Almighty* and disbelieved in Him. They concealed the truth that all the messengers came with, that is, there is no god worthy of worship but Allah, Alone without any partner. Both groups, the disbelievers among the people of the Book and the idolaters: '… will have the Fire of hell, there to remain ...' (*al-Bayyina:* 6). The hardship of dwelling eternally in the fire of hell is far more difficult than suffering the fire in the worldly life. The fire of hell is their painful fate which will be their last destination due to their disbelief and denial of the truth.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '… They are the worst of creation.' (*al-Bayyina:* 6) They are the evillest of creation. By contrast, the believers are described as 'good' in the following Hadith: 'A strong believer is better and dearer to Allah than a weak one, and both are good.' So, the two previous disbelieving groups are the worst and most wicked of creation on the earth. They are the evilest creatures that Allah *the Almighty* created.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمۡ خَيۡرُ ٱلۡبَرِيَّةِ ٧

Those who believe and do good deeds are
the best of creation [7] (The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 7)

Here, Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the second kind of creation. The first kind was: 'Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters …' (*al-Bayyina:* 6); their fate will be '… the Fire of hell, there to remain …' (*al-Bayyina:* 6). As for those who believe in Allah and Messenger Muhammad and do good deeds, they are the best of creation. They deserved this rank due to their belief and good deeds, not their wealth, prestigious position and power. In this regard, Abu Hurayra narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Shall I tell you about the best of creation?' They said, 'Yes, Allah's Messenger.' He said, 'The one who holds the rein of his horse in the way of Allah. Whenever there is a frightful cry for fight, he mounts his horse. Shall I tell you about the best of creation?' They said, 'Yes, Allah's Messenger.' He said, 'A man having some sheep, offering prayer and paying the prescribed alms.' Shall I tell you about the worst of creation?' They said, 'Yes.' He said, 'The one who is asked by Allah, but does not give.'(1)

One may ask, 'Are the believers who do good deeds better than the angels, given that the latter are part of the creation?' In this connection, `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As said, 'By Allah, Allah prefers the believer to some of His angels who worship Him.’(1) Further, it is narrated that when Al-Hasan Al-Basri was asked about Allah’s saying, ‘Those who believe and do good deeds are the best of creation.’ (*al-Bayyina:* 7), about whether or not they are better than the angels, he said, ‘Woe to you, how can the angels be equal to those who believe and do good deeds?’

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 9142.*

جَزَآؤُهُمۡ عِندَ رَبِّهِمۡ جَنَّٰتُ عَدۡنٖ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَآ أَبَدٗاۖ
رَّضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنۡهُمۡ وَرَضُواْ عَنۡهُۚ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَنۡ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُۥ ٨

Their reward with their Lord is everlasting Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay forever. God is well pleased with them and they with Him. All this is for those who stand in awe of their Lord [8]
(The Quran, *al-Bayyina:* 8)

This is the reward of the best of creation who believe and do good deeds. In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, ‘(As for) these , their reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and excellent is the reward of the labourers.’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 136) They will be fully recompensed for their good deeds. As they are the best of creation due to their belief and good deeds, their reward is unfailing and eternal. Their reward is: ‘… with their Lord …’ (*al-Bayyina:* 8). It is not given by another god or lord; rather, it is reserved for them with their Lord Who says, ‘… and give good tidings to those who believe that they will have a [firm] precedence of honour with their Lord …’ (*Yunus:* 2).

The expression ‘… with their Lord …’ (*Yunus:* 2), is remarkable. When your reward is with someone like you, he may not fulfil it for you. As for your reward which is with the Lord Who is charged with your sustenance, it will never be lost. So, regarding the reward and firm precedence of honour about which the believers are given the glad tidings, they are with the supreme Lord. Now, what is the reward that the believers are promised? It is: ‘… everlasting Gardens ...’ (*al-Bayyina:* 8). Moreover, they will get: ‘… best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure …’ (*at-Tawba:* 72).

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(1) *See As-Samarqandi, Bahr Al-`Ulum, 3/603.*

The everlasting Gardens are the abode where the believers will stay eternally and forever. The worldly life is not the everlasting abode, for we inevitably will leave it. By contrast, the everlasting Gardens are eternal; they never end or cease to exist. Allah *the Almighty* then says '… graced with flowing streams, where they will stay forever…' (*al-Bayyina:* 8). Allah *Glorified is He* gives another picture of the flowing streams and their sources. The sources of these flowing streams are beneath the Gardens themselves. The rivers are not coming from a remote distance so that they may be cut; rather, they are coming forth from beneath the Garden. This is the unmatchable bliss.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '… Allah is well pleased with them and they with Him …' (*al-Bayyina:* 8). In another verse, Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'And (as for) the foremost, the first of the *Muhajireen* and the *Ansar*, and those who followed them in goodness, Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him …' (*at-Tawba:* 100). One may ask, 'The believers' pleasure is understandable, as they are rewarded with the paradise. So, how can Allah's servant be pleased with Him?' We say that when the believing servants see the reward prepared for them in the Hereafter, they will be filled with contentment, saying, '(All) praise is due to Allah, Who has made good to us His promise, and He has made us inherit the land; we may abide in the garden where we please …' (*az-Zumar:* 74).

Pleasure means to fulfil your loveable hope. The human being does not become content until he achieves the objective that he wants and hopes for. For example, when one says to his friend, 'Are you pleased now?' he might not have reached the level of pleasure yet. But when he achieves what he wants, he says, 'Thank Allah I am well pleased.' If he received graces beyond his expectations, he will show much pleasure. Thus, pleasure has many stages. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in a Divine Hadith that Messenger Muhammad reported, that: 'Allah will say to the inhabitants of paradise: "Are you pleased?" They will reply: "Why should we not be pleased, O Lord, when You have given us what You have not given to any of Your creatures?" Allah will say, "Shall I not give you something better than that?" They will ask, "O Allah! What can be better than that?" Allah will say, "I shall bestow

My Pleasure upon you and I shall never be displeased with you.”’[1] This is the highest level of pleasure, that is, the reward depends on mutual pleasure between the rewarded person and the One Who gives the reward. This is one of Allah’s manifestations of Benevolence.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes this verse and this chapter by defining the owner of this great reward, which is the Gardens graced with flowing streams where they will stay forever, and Allah is well pleased with them and they with Him. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… All this is for those who stand in awe of their Lord.’ (*al-Bayyina:* 8) The believer fears only Allah *Glorified is He* and fears no human being. This is because he knows that all the Power belongs to Him *the Almighty* Alone. *Al-Khashya* means to fear Allah and hold Him in awe. One may fear something but he does not hold it in awe, but rather hates and looks down on it. By contrast, out of Allah’s Greatness, He is feared and held in awe. This is due to our love, glorification, and exaltation of Him *the Almighty*. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… their Lord.’ (*al-Bayyina:* 8) instead of ‘Allah’ or ‘the God, The word ‘Lord’ reminds the believer that even though he holds Him in awe, he should not be frightened, for He is he Lord and will never abandon them.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri Allah be pleased with him. See `Abdullah ibn Al-Mubarak, Az-Zuhd Wa Ar-Raqa`q, 3/129; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 11835; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6549 and 7518; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 9/2829.*

the chapter of

az-Zalzala

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *az-Zalzala*(1).

إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ ٱلْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا ١

When the earth is shaken violently in its [last] quaking [1]
(The Quran, *az-Zalzala:* 1)

An earthquake is the violent movement that removes the objects from their places. Allah *the Almighty* talks about this frequent natural phenomenon, saying, 'When the earth shall be shaken with a (severe) shaking, and the mountains shall be made to crumble with (an awful) crumbling, so that they shall be as scattered dust.' (*al-Waqi'a:* 4-6) The earthquake meant in the chapter in question is not similar to the earthquakes that we see them destroying the houses and the cities. They are just universal signs proving the truthfulness of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in what he conveys from Allah *the Almighty*.

As a universal phenomenon and sign, an earthquake pays our attention to the Mighty Earthquake that will occur in the Hereafter. The earthquakes in this worldly life are a minimised picture of what will happen in the Hereafter. This shuns our deception by the mastery over the universe, which is a privilege granted by Allah *the Almighty*. When the earthquake of *Aghadir* took place, the people noticed that the animal were provoked some minutes prior to the coming of the earthquake. Some of these animals went into the wilderness. How could they have this sense while we think they are insensible animals? This incident contains a remark for the human being who is a master in this universe. If Allah *the Almighty* has not made them a master in this universe, he would not be able to make the animals subservient to them.

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(1) The chapter of *Az-Zalzala*, consists of eight verses and 36 words. It is the 99th chapter in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Medina, but some narrations state that it was revealed in Mecca. It was revealed after the chapter of *An-Nisa`* and before that of *Al-Hadid*.

The earthquake meant in this chapter is not a general one but rather a specific one attributed to the earth. Allah *the Almighty* commands the earth to quake. On the Day of Judgment, this earthquake will be mighty, a fact which is clear in His saying, ‘O people! Guard against (the punishment from) your Lord; surely the violence of the hour is a grievous thing.’ (*al-Hajj:* 1) One should unleash his imagination to realise the grievousness and the mighty of that earthquake which is described as such by Allah *the Almighty*. A normal earthquake is just a minimised picture of last earthquake and what will happen in the Hereafter. The earthquakes we witness indicate Allah’s Power over the earthquake of the Hereafter and that the earth does not sustain itself. Rather, it is Allah *Glorified is He* Who sustains it. Consequently, when He wants it to quake, it will obey the command.

Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘When the earth is shaken violently in its [last] quaking.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 1) The earthquakes in the worldly life stop after a while, whereas the earthquake of the Hereafter will remain and its violent shaking will last until it destroys the mountains, the cities, the buildings, the trees and so on. It is the mighty, violent shake that destroys the buildings and everything on the earth.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

(وَأَخْرَجَتِ ٱلْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا ﴿٢﴾)

When the earth throws out its burdens [2]
(The Quran, *az-Zalzala:* 2)

All the volcanoes, the precious materials and the wonderful objects beneath the earth are categories under this verse. The burdens of the earth could refer to the graves from which the people, the animals, the minerals, and the treasures are brought forth. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And casts forth what is in it and becomes empty.’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 4) This verse means that the earth casts forth the dead people and all what was buried in it like the treasures. It will bring out these objects to its surface.

وَقَالَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ مَا لَهَا ﴿٣﴾ يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا ﴿٤﴾ بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا ﴿٥﴾

When man cries, ‘What is happening to it?’ [3]
on that Day, it will tell all [4] because your Lord will
inspire it [to do so] [5] (The Quran, *az-Zalzala:* 3 - 5)

At the time of the earthquake, the person who did not believe in the Hereafter, the Resurrection and the Reckoning will wonder, ‘What is happening to the earth? Why is it shaking in this violent way?’ These questions indicate his foolishness and senselessness. He was foolish in the worldly life when he denied the Day of Judgment. Likewise, he acts foolishly in the Hereafter, saying - when what he has denied takes place - ‘What is happening to the earth?’

In the verse in question, the word ‘man’ is a genus referring to both the believer and the disbeliever. This indicates that the earthquake is one of the signs of the Hour. This is because when it takes place, not a lot of people realise it is the final quake. The people ask each other to be certain about this fact. Some scholars say that the word ‘man’ refers to only the disbeliever, for the believer knows that earthquake and does not ask about it. As for the disbeliever, he asks about it because he has disbelieved in it and the Resurrection.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘on that Day, it will tell all.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 4) In this regard Abu Hurayra narrated that Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Do you know what its information is?’ they said, ‘Allah and His Messenger know best.’ He said, ‘Indeed its information is that it will testify against every servant, male and female. It will say that he did such and such, on such and such a day.’(1) The earth tells what has been done on it, be it good or evil. It will say about the believer, ‘On my surface, he declared Allah’s Oneness, offered prayer, fasted, performed the minor and the major pilgrimage, strived in Allah’s Cause and obeyed his Lord.’ Thereupon, the believer will be filled with joy. As for the disbelievers, the earth will say about them, ‘On my surface, he disbelieved, committed adultery, theft, drank wine, etc.’

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. In his Sunnan, At-Tirmidhi grades it as good Hadith. In his Mustadrak, Al-Hakim says it is authentic according to the conditions stipulated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim. In his Talkhis, Adh-Dhahabi agrees with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8867; Ibn*=

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘because your Lord will inspire it [to do so].’ (*az-Zalzala:* 5) Allah *the Almighty* secretly informs the earth because no one hears Him while He is inspiring it. Further, Allah *the Almighty* inspires the bees, the angels, and the Prophets. This inspiration to the earth, the bees, Musa’s (Moses’s) mother and the apostles of `Isa (Jesus) should not be considered in the light of the technical definition of this term. It is an inspiration according to the linguistic meaning, that is, to inform secretly. If Allah *the Almighty* inspires the earth to bring forth its treasures and quake, so what do we think about His inspiration to other creatures? Everything in the universe runs by Allah’s command. Allah *Glorified is He* inspires the earth secretly, and it understands Him in a way unknown to us. Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* inspires the animals, a fact which is clear in His saying, ‘And your Lord revealed to the bee …’ (*an-Nahl:* 68). The bee understands Allah’s inspiration through the instinct He instilled in it.

Allah *Glorified is He* then says:

يَوۡمَئِذٖ يَصۡدُرُ ٱلنَّاسُ أَشۡتَاتٗا لِّيُرَوۡاْ أَعۡمَٰلَهُمۡ ٦

On that Day, people will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds [6] (The Quran, *az-Zalzala:* 6)

The people’s coming forward is related to the Day of Judgment. After the Reckoning and the Presentation of the deeds, the people will be divided; the people of faith will be separate from the rest of the people. Further, every group following a certain religion will be separated from the rest. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… at that time they shall become separated one from the other.’ (*ar-Rum:* 14) and ‘… on that day they shall become

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= *Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 7360; Al-Hakim, Mustadrak, Hadith no. 3012 and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2429.*

separated.' (*ar-Rum:* 43) The people will come forward in separate groups and parties: '… a party shall be in the garden and (another) party in the burning Fire.' (*ash-Shura:* 7) The will come forth from their graves to be held accountable and see the books of their deeds. They will see the deeds that they have done in the worldly life. Consequently, the people will go forward to see the punishment or the reward that has been prepared for them and take their position.

His saying, '… in separate groups …' (*az-Zalzala:* 6), means that they have been scattered and will not be gathered together once again. Everyone will experience their own fate and go either to paradise or the hellfire. The Arabic verb of the word *ash-tata* (in separate group) refers to the separation of the people. This word has been mentioned in another verse with the same meaning, that is, 'in separate groups'. Allah *the Almighty* says, 'It is no sin in you that you eat together or separately.' (*an-Nur:* 61) This verse allows them to eat together because they used to eat only separately. Further, this word refers to the groups that never gather together. One of the groups will be given their books in the right hand and go to paradise. By contrast, the other group will be given their books in the left hand and go the hellfire. It is also said in Arabic, '*Shattan bayn filan wa fulan* (So and so is greatly different from so and so)'.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, '… to be shown their deeds.' (*az-Zalzala:* 6) This means that the people will go forward to see the recompense of their deeds, be they good or evil. They will review their good and evil deeds that they have done. The deeds themselves are unperceivable yet what refers to them is perceivable, that is, the books of deeds in which all the actions are recorded. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and We will bring forth to him on the resurrection day a book which he will find wide open. Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day.' (*al-Isra':* 13-14)

Everyone will read his book by himself. Allah *Glorified is He* does not hold the people accountable according to what He says they have done but rather what is recorded in their books. They will read their books themselves and these records will constitute an argument against them. Further, writing down the deeds is not in the way we think, for it includes the recordation of the sounds and breaths. On the Day of Judgment, man will find his deeds recorded in a book. We can have audio-visual recording in the worldly life, so what do we think about Allah’s recording for us. Everyone will see the audio-visual recording of his deeds in a way that does not enable them to deny anything. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to every servant, ‘I will not hold you accountable; rather, I will let you hold yourself accountable’.

فَمَن يَعۡمَلۡ مِثۡقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيۡرٗا يَرَهُۥ ٧
وَمَن يَعۡمَلۡ مِثۡقَالَ ذَرَّةٖ شَرّٗا يَرَهُۥ ٨

Whoever has done an atom’s-weight of good will see it [7]
but whoever has done an atom’s-weight of evil will see that [8]
(The Quran, *az-Zalzala:* 7 - 8)

The weight is the measure of gravity of an object. When an object is light, it falls slowly. As for a heavy object, it falls fast because gravity pulls it strongly. The measure we have in this verse is the weight of an atom. So, what is the atom? There are different views. It could mean the head of the ant that is barely seen by the eye or the ant itself. When Ibn 'Abbas was asked about it, he held some dust and threw it. When the dust flew in the air, he said, ‘Every grain of this dust is called an atom.’ This is what we call *haba`* (scattered dust). So, the atom is a grain of dust. When Allah *the Almighty* says that He does not do an atom’s weight of injustice, this is meant to show that He categorically negates being unfair in any matter.

The atom may get bigger or smaller. This does not mean that it is the least weight in general, for scientists divided the atom into electrons and ions, positive and negative. This does not contradict the Quran in anything, for Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… And there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor anything less than that nor greater ...’ (*at-Tawba:* 61). This verse mentions what is less than the atom. So, this verse affirms that there exist what is smaller than the atom, and what is even smaller than that. So, there are three stages. As the scientists divided the atom, we say the Quran mentions what is smaller than the atom. If they even divided one division of the atom, we say that the Quran also mentions what is far less than what is smaller than an atom. This is due to the fact that every small thing should be preceded by an even smaller thing. Thus, if they will divide a division of an atom, the Quran also covers this matter and precedes the scientists' minds.

The two verses in question make a comparison between good and evil. The human being should distinguish the good because it is useful and beneficial form evil because it is harmful and awful. The word 'good' is sometimes used to refer having the quality of goodness but in different degrees, as in the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra that Messenger Muhammad, said, 'A strong believer is better and dearer to Allah than a weak one, and both are good.'(1) All the believers who have strong or weak faith are good. However, there are many degrees of goodness. Even though both are good, the stronger believers are better than the weak ones. In the verses in question, the description of deeds as good is employed as the opposite of the evil deeds. They are antithetical to each other.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 34/2664; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 79 and 4168; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 5722; Al-Bayhaqi, Shu`ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 191; and An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 10383.*

the chapter of

al-'Adiyat

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-'Adiyat*[1] :

وَٱلْعَٰدِيَٰتِ ضَبْحًا ۝١

By the charging steeds that pant [1]
(The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 1)

Allah *the Almighty* swears by whatever He wants about anything He wishes. Here, Allah *the Almighty* swears by one of His creatures that fulfil a function for the people, which are: '… the charging steeds that pant.' (*al-'Adiyat:* 1) The steeds here refer to the horses used in fighting in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* or in doing another act of worship. In this regard, some exegetes say that these steeds refer to the processions of pilgrims. We have previously said that an oath is used to affirm its subject that some people question its truthfulness. The subject of the oath here is three issues: 'man is ungrateful to his Lord—and He is witness to this —he is truly excessive in his love of wealth.' (*al-'Adiyat:* 6-8)

The man who is described with the previous three qualities is he who violates Allah's Way of Guidance that should govern his activities in life. As for the man who abides by Allah's Way of Guidance, he is exempted from the previous qualities. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Man is [deep] in loss.'

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(1) The chapter of *Al-'Adiyat*, consists of 11 verses and 40 words. It is the 100th in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-'Asr* and before that of *Al-Kawthar*. Al-Bazzar, Ibn Abu Hatim and Al-Hakim narrated that ibn 'Abbas said, 'Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* dispatched steeds, but for one month no news about that had come. Thereupon, this chapter was revealed.'

(*al-'Asr:* 2) This verse refers to mankind in general. Then Allah *the Almighty* says, 'except for those who believe, do good deeds…' (*al-'Asr:* 3). Thus, following Allah's Way of Guidance through believing, doing good deeds and urging to steadfastness and truth is the way of salvation from loss.

We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *az-Zalzala* with His saying, 'On that Day, people will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds: whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that.' (*az-Zalzala:* 6-8) We have said that Allah *the Almighty* speaks in these verses about witnessing the deeds and not the recompense: 'whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that.' (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8) Seeing the book of deeds is different from being recompensed for them. When the person reads his book of records, the book will be an argument against them. This is because one may not be fully certain about what was written about them by the recorders, thinking that they may add or omit something. But when he sees what is written in his book of deeds, he will remember them and be certain that nothing has been recorded in it except what he has already done. This is the meaning of: '… to be shown their deeds.' (*az-Zalzala:* 6) This is meant in order that the people make sure that what their books contain is their deeds without adding evil deeds or omitting good deeds.

In the chapter of *al-'Adiyat*, which follows that of *Az-Zalzala*, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Their Lord will be fully aware of them all?' (*al-'Adiyat:* 11) Thus, in the chapter in question, Allah *Glorified is He* does not talk about the recompense. In the chapter of *Az-Zalzala*, Allah *the Almighty* speaks about being shown the deeds and here Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'By the charging steeds that pant and strike sparks with their hooves, who make dawn raids, raising a cloud of dust, and plunging into the midst of the enemy, man is ungrateful to his Lord— and He is witness to this —he is truly excessive in his love of wealth. Does he not know that when the contents of graves burst forth, when the secrets of hearts are uncovered, on that Day, their Lord will be fully aware of them all?' (*al-'Adiyat:* 1-11) It is as if the previous chapter clarifies the man will see the book of his deeds and make sure that what is recorded is consistent with what he has done. As for the chapter in question, it directs our attention to another aspect, that is, Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of our deeds.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*, ‘By the charging steeds that pant.’ (*al-'Adiyat:* 1), refers to the steeds used in fighting the enemies in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* during battle. They pant due to galloping, producing a sound different from the neigh. The word *Al-'Adiyat* also refers to the camels that go from 'Arafa to Al-Muzhdalafa and from the latter to *Mena* during pilgrimage. So, this word refers to the camels when they walk fast at a dark night in the uneven valleys. Allah *the Almighty* swears here by the steeds in the battlefield or the camels in the blessed places where the pilgrims perform the rituals of the pilgrimage.

We should reflect on these two views because the exegetes differed as to whether this chapter was revealed in Mecca or in Medina. If it was revealed in Mecca, the view that holds that the verse refers to the battling steeds is not correct. This is because fighting in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* was only prescribed after immigration from Mecca to Medina. Further, if we hold that the chapter was revealed in Mecca, then the word '*Adiyat* does not refer to the camels of the pilgrimage, for it was only prescribed in the ninth year after immigration – after the treaty of *Al-Hudaybiyya*. The obligation of pilgrimage was revealed in the chapter of *Al-'Imran* which was revealed in Medina. Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘… and pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men for the sake of Allah, (upon) everyone who is able to undertake the journey to it…’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 97). Therefore, the preponderant view is that the chapter in question was revealed in Medina.

فَٱلۡمُورِيَٰتِ قَدۡحٗا ٢

And strike sparks with their hooves [2]
(The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 2)

Out of the fast galloping of the steeds, their hooves strike sparks when they clash with the stones. If we clash two stones together, they will produce fire. So, this verse refers to the steeds that strike sparks with their hooves.

Other views maintain that it refers to people's plots, tongues or the camels that strike the pebbles with their hooves. The Oath in this verse is related to all the objects that strike sparks whether they are the steeds, the camels, the tongue – that strikes the sparks of truth, logic, and wisdom – or the men who set fire after the end of the war.

فَٱلۡمُغِيرَٰتِ صُبۡحٗا ﴿٣﴾

Who make dawn raids [3]
(The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 3)

The Arabic word *ighara* refers to the time of dawn. As for *al-ghara,* it refers to the raid carried out against the enemies as well as the steeds used in this action. It refers to attacking the enemies suddenly to crush them violently and powerfully. Afterwards, the raiding army retreats. This is more harmful to the enemies special when the raid is carried out at the time of the dawn, the first part of the day. It causes a state of panic and anxiety. Providing us with safety and serenity is one Allah's Blessings, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And Allah sets forth a parable: (Consider) a town safe and secure …' (*an-Nahl:* 112). That town was secured against the raids which are usually carried out at the time of the dawn when the enemy might be sleeping and not prepared to confront the raiding army.

The leaders of war still prefer morning attacks to surprise the enemy. This is a general that breaking is considered a way of trickery in the war, which is the case in Octobers war in 1973. The Egyptian army successfully surprised its enemy by starting the attack at noon because it changed the usual time for attack, that is, the morning time. Causing harm to the enemies due to morning attacks is alluded to in the Quran where Allah *the Almighty* says, 'surely their appointed time is the morning; is not the morning nigh?' (*Hud:* 81) It is as if the morning is the time when the punishment befalls the people of Lut (Lot), causing them to perish. It is a severer punishment because the dawn is the time of tranquillity and rest.

فَأَثَرۡنَ بِهِۦ نَقۡعٗا ﴿٤﴾

Raising a cloud of dust [4]
(The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 4)

The galloping steeds provoke dust in the battlefield with their hooves, causing the sight to be almost impossible. The steeds and the camels raise a cloud of dust with their hooves when they pass by a place full of dust.

فَوَسَطۡنَ بِهِۦ جَمۡعًا ﴿٥﴾

And plunging into the midst of the enemy [5]
(The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 5)

The galloping steeds plunge into the midst of the fighters. This proves that they succeeded in their raiding in the morning, penetrating the first lines of the enemy's defence. The word *jam`* refers to the group of fighters or steeds, as Allah *the Almighty* says, '(As for) those of you who turned back on the day when the two armies met, only the Satan sought to cause them to make a slip-on account of some deeds they had done …' (*Al-'Imran:* 155). In this verse, the two armies are that of the believers, who follow Allah's Way of Guidance, and the disbelievers, who violate it and fight the believers.

إِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ لِرَبِّهِۦ لَكَنُودٞ ﴿٦﴾

Man is ungrateful to his Lord [6]
(The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 6)

Here, Allah *the Almighty* describes man as ungrateful because he does not remember that the first task of his mind is to know his limits. The word *kanud* refers to the disbeliever who is ungrateful to Allah's Blessings. Consequently, he does not give out of his provision, beats his slave and makes him starve, eats alone, does not give his people at the time of calamities and forbids common kindness. It is said that this verse was revealed in reference to Qart ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl Al-Qurashi, who gathered all the previous bad qualities.

So, the word *kanud* refers to the person who breaks the promise, tells lies and follows his whims. Allah *the Almighty* rules that the human species is described with these qualities. Such a person declares his displeasure with Allah's predestination and criticizes Him for the calamities befalling them yet he forgets His Blessings. Goodness is not expected from such a person; he benefits neither himself nor other people like the barren land.

وَإِنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ ﴿٧﴾ وَإِنَّهُۥ لِحُبِّ ٱلْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿٨﴾

And He is witness to this —[7] he is truly excessive in his love of wealth [8] (The Quran, *al-`Adiyat:* 7-8)

The pronoun in the first verse refers to Allah *the Almighty*; He is Witness to man's ungratefulness and disbelief. In fact, Allah *Glorified is He* is Witness to everything. The witness is the one who sees an incident and cannot play any part to change its events. Allah *the Almighty* is Ever-Watchful and always witnesses everything. This means that He sees the actions and holds the people accountable for them. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Say, "What thing is the weightiest in testimony?" Say, "Allah is witness between you and me …"' (*al-An'am:* 19). Allah *the Almighty* is the Witness, the Ruler, and the Executer. His Testimony is truthful, His Rule is fair and He does not do injustice to His servants even as much as an atom's weight.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, 'he is truly excessive in his love of wealth.' (*al-'Adiyat:* 7-8) As a matter of fact, the human being loves wealth greatly. Further, he loves to have an abundance of every good thing. That is why Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'If there were one valley of gold for the son of Adam, he would long for another one. If there were two valleys of gold for the son of Adam, he would long for a third one. His mouth will not be filled but with dust, and Allah returns to him who repents.'(1)

As man loves wealth, he withholds it and stingily refuses to pay the due right of Allah and the poor. Thus, he is stingy, not spending his money in the rightful ways. The word *khayr* (goodness) is used to refer to wealth in the saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Bequest is prescribed for you when death approaches one of you, if he leaves behind wealth for parents and near relatives …’ (*al-Baqara:* 180). Wealth refers to what is valuable. However, we wrongly confined wealth to refer to money. This is because we use money to buy everything. However, the original meaning of wealth refers to anything valuable. One’s wealth could be the result of his endeavour in life or that of his father or grandfather.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of `Abdullah ibn `Abbas Allah be pleased with him and on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him in different wordings. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6436 and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 116/1048.*

Allah *the Almighty* makes spending in the Way of Allah *the Almighty* one of the kinds of righteousness, saying, ‘… but righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and give away wealth out of love…’ (*al-Baqara:* 177). Giving away wealth out of love could mean that he does so despite his passionate love for it. When one gives away his wealth, he either attains to the rank of removing it from his ownership or eliminating its love from the heart. In another verse, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And they give food out of love…’ (*al-Insan:* 8). They love wealth too much, but the quality of benevolence and generosity overweigh their love for wealth.

أَفَلَا يَعۡلَمُ إِذَا بُعۡثِرَ مَا فِي ٱلۡقُبُورِ ﴿٩﴾ وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿١٠﴾

Does he not know that when the contents of graves burst forth [9] when the secrets of hearts are uncovered, on that Day [10] (The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 9 - 10)

Here, the addressee is the man who is allured by his wealth, prestigious position, and power. Does this ungrateful disbeliever not know that there is a time when the contents of the graves burst forth? What are the contents of the graves? They include the tombs, coffins and the broken-up bones that will burst forth when the earthquakes takes place. The contents of the graves will come forth on the mighty Day of Gathering and Resurrection. The dead people will be resurrected to go forward for the mighty Gathering and Standing for the Account. Does this man not know Allah’s Omnipotence, Sovereignty and Wisdom in creation? Does he not realise that Allah *Glorified is He* will resurrect the dead people in their graves? Does the stingy person not realise that Allah *the Almighty* is fully-Aware of them? Allah *Glorified is He* will raise them from the dead to be presented for the Account.

If we reflect on the word *bu`thir* (burst forth), we find a wonderful remark as Allah *the Almighty* does not say '*bui`tha*' (to be resurrected), As a matter of fact, an increase in the wording entails an increase in the meaning. The word *bu`thir* has an additional 'r'. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* says to them, 'Do not think the graves will remain as they are after being closed up, that is, they cannot be opened, split or burst forth. Indeed, they will be split open and burst forth so that the dead people therein are resurrected on a Day they belied and disbelieved in'.

As for His saying, 'when the secrets of hearts are uncovered.' (*al-'Adiyat:* 10), the word *tahsil* means to collect, reveal and make a distinction between good and evil in one's heart. Nothing will be concealed of his deeds and secrets, however subtle and tiny it is. In this regard, a poet once said,

On one Day, everyone will realise the outcome of his endeavour

When the secrets and the deeds are manifested before Allah

Allah *the Almighty* knows what is in the chests, be it good or evil. The intentions of the hearts are the criterion for accepting the deeds or rejecting them, as Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Actions are only done with intentions, and every man shall have what he intended.'(1) So, rewarding or punishing the people after uncovering their deeds depends on the intention and the certitude of the heart. That is why Allah *the Almighty* concludes the chapter in question with His saying,

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(1) *This Hadith is marrated on the authority of `Umar ibn Al-Khattab Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2201; Ibn Al-Mubarak, Az-Zuhd, 1/62; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4227; and Al-Humaydi, Musnad, Hadith no. 28.*

إِنَّ رَبَّهُم بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

their Lord will be fully aware of them all? [11]
(The Quran, *al-'Adiyat:* 11)

Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of the souls and their intentions. Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of the intention of any action, be it good or evil, a fact which is clear in His saying, 'If you give alms openly, it is well, and if you hide it and give it to the poor, it is better for you; and this will do away with some of your evil deeds; and Allah is aware of what you do.' (*al-Baqara:* 270) Allah *Glorified is He* is fully Aware of the intention of the one who gives away alms openly or secretly and will reward the servant accordingly. This fact makes the hearts shiver out of fear and awe. The human being may deceive the people through, for example, circumventing paying taxes. He makes one register for the right profits and another for wrong loss. In this way, he averts paying taxes even though he owns wealth.

Man should know that Allah *the Almighty* is fully Aware of his deeds and intentions. He fully knows our intentions in what we do or from which we abstain. The fully Aware knows the details of everything and nothing is hidden from Allah *Glorified is He*. Thus, the people should not deceive themselves, thinking that what they have concealed from other people could be hidden from Allah *Glorified is He*. Indeed, nothing is hidden from Him.

the chapter of

al-Qari'a

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Qari'a*[1] .

ٱلْقَارِعَةُ ﴿١﴾ مَا ٱلْقَارِعَةُ ﴿٢﴾ وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلْقَارِعَةُ ﴿٣﴾

The Crashing Blow! [1] What is the Crashing Blow? [2]
What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is? [3]
(The Quran, *al-Qari`a*: 1-3)

The chapter of *al-Qari`a* has a harmonious relationship with the previous chapter. In the chapter of *al-`Adiyat*, Allah *the Almighty* swears by one of His creatures, saying, ‘By the charging steeds that pant.’ (*al-’Adiyat:* 1) The steeds could be used in either fighting in the cause of Allah *the Almighty* or any other act of worship. We have interpreted it as the steeds used in the processions of the pilgrims. The oath is used to affirm its subject which is usually controversial. In that chapter, the subject is three issues mentioned in His saying, ‘man is ungrateful to his Lord—and He is witness to this—he is truly excessive in his love of wealth.’ (*al-’Adiyat:* 6-8) The man who is described with the previous three qualities is he who violates Allah’s Way of Guidance. As for the man who abides by Allah’s Way of Guidance, he is exempted from the previous qualities. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘By the declining Day. Man is [deep] in loss.’ (*al-’Asr:* 1-2) The second verse refers to mankind in general. Then Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘except for those who believe, do good deeds …’ (*al-’Asr:* 3).

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Qari`a*, consists of 11 verses. It is the 101st chapter in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Qiyama* and before that of *Quraysh*.

Allah *Glorified is He* concludes the chapter of *az-Zalzala* with His saying, ‘whoever has done an atom’s-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom’s-weight of evil will see that.’ (*az-Zalzala:* 7-8) We have said that Allah *the Almighty* speaks in these verses about witnessing the deeds, not the recompense for them. Seeing the book of deeds is different from being recompensed for them. Allah *Glorified is He* shows the person his book of deeds to be an argument against them. This is because one may not be fully certain about what was written about them by the recorders, thinking that they may add or omit something. But when he sees what is written in his book of deeds, he will remember them and be certain that nothing has been recorded except his deeds without adding evil deeds or omitting good ones.

In the chapter of *Al-`Adiyat*, which follows that of *Az-Zalzala*, we notice that Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘their Lord will be fully aware of them all’ (*al-’Adiyat:* 11). Thus, Allah’s Knowledge and Awareness of the people are added in this chapter to the documentation and recordation of the deeds. So, Allah *Glorified is He* is Witness to the people and fully Aware of their deeds. In this way, the servant should be reassured about Allah’s Absolute Justice with which He will hold the people accountable on the Day of Judgment.

Now, in the chapter of *al-Qari`a*, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘The Crashing Blow! What is the Crashing Blow? What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is? … the one whose good deeds are heavy on the scales will have a pleasant life, but the one whose good deeds are light [8] will have the Bottomless Pit for his home — what will explain to you what that is? A blazing fire!’ (*al-Qari`a:* 1-3, 6-11) Here, Allah *Glorified is He* speaks about another stage of reckoning before the Recompense for their deeds. There are some stages of reckoning. Everyone’s book of deeds is given to them to make sure it is identical to what he has done in the worldly life. Then he is called for to be held accountable before Allah *the Almighty*.

The account here does not refer to the Recompense but rather to the clarification and the presentation of the deeds. Afterwards, the deeds are weighed to be followed by the recompense and then going to paradise or hell. The chapter touches on the third stage of Reckoning which is the Balance, starting with the following question: ‘The Crashing Blow! What is the

Crashing Blow? What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 1-3) Allah *the Almighty* repeated 'the Crashing Blow' three times. This is because the first time is vague, stimulating the man to ask, 'What is the Crashing Blow?' (*al-Qari`a:* 2) So, the Crashing Blow is an ambiguous term and that is why one should ask about it. Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 3) This means that the answer is only with Allah *Glorified is He*.

Therefore, the first mention of the Crashing Blow is vague: 'The Crashing Blow!' (*al-Qari`a:* 1) It is followed by its intensification, 'What is the Crashing Blow?' (*al-Qari`a:* 2), and then a clarification of its great position: 'What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 3) How is it not possible to know the meaning of the Crashing Blow while it is an Arabic term directed to the Arabs who are well aware of their language, its meanings and linguistic features? How could there exist an undefined Arabic word to the extent that there is no answer to our question about it? The scholars say that this is because the language consists of words that express certain meanings. The meaning should exist first before the word used to express it. That word should be understandable to the speakers and the addressee as referring to that specific meaning. This is because the people agreed to use certain words to convey certain meanings in order to express themselves and their needs. So, how did the meaning of the term 'Crashing Blow' become vague that we need to ask about its meaning?

It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* wants to differentiate between the linguistic meaning and the technical one. The linguistic meaning of a word could be used to express a technical one that becomes the common meaning of that word when it is uttered – not the linguistic one. For example, the word *nahw* (grammar) linguistically means direction; one says, '*Sirtu nahwa kadha* (I walked in such and such direction).' Afterwards, the scholars of linguistics used this term to refer to the rules of grammar, calling it '*`ilm an-nahw*'. Now, when we utter this term, we only think about this technical meaning, not the linguistic one. Likewise, the word *Hajj* (Pilgrimage) has a linguistic and technical meaning. Linguistically, it means heading towards a great place. Technically, it means heading towards Allah's Sacred House in a defined time to perform certain rituals. This is also the case with the word *fiqh* (Jurisprudence).

It is as if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘The Crashing Blow! What is the Crashing Blow? What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?’ (*al-Qari`a:* 1-3) in order to show us that the meaning of the Crashing Blow is not that which the people understand from the linguistic meaning of the term. That is to say that it does not refer to the obvious meaning of the word that is, clashing to rough objects together to produce a disturbing sound. Rather, the Crashing Blow meant here is only known to Allah *the Almighty*. It is one of the names of the mighty, horrible Day of Judgment which is an unseen matter, known only to Allah *Glorified is He*.

That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says about the Crashing Blow: ‘What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?’ (*al-Qari`a:* 3) This means that no one can tell us about it except Him *the Almighty*. Thus, we should not understand this term in the light of the linguistic meaning, for it has a technical, broader meaning that is unknown to us. Allah *the Almighty* calls the Day of Judgment the ‘Crashing Blow’, the ‘Deafening Blow, the ‘Inevitable Hour’ and the ‘Overwhelming Event’. Each of these names has a meaning that we will see on that Day, but it is unseen to us now. That is why we cannot set some words to express these meanings because the existence of the meaning should precede that of the word expressing it. If these meaning are unseen, how can we set some words to express them?

Allah *the Almighty* addresses us regarding the unseen matters through the understandable discourse and through the words that make the meanings closer to our perception. Here, Allah *Glorified is He* does not intend the linguistic meaning of the term ‘Crashing Blow,’ but rather, the technical meaning, namely the Day of Judgment. As it is unseen to us, we should ask about it because its meaning is vague.

So, Allah *the Almighty* makes understanding the unseen matters easier to us through using the words we are familiar with. That is why when He, talks about the paradise, Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘A likeness of the garden which the righteous are promised …’ (*ar-Ra‘d:* 15). The descriptions mentioned in the previous verse do not really portray paradise. Rather, they portray the likeness of paradise because it is unseen to us and only Allah *the Almighty* knows its reality. Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* expressed this fact in his saying, 'There will be bounties which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human heart has ever perceived.'(1) We notice that he *peace and blessings be upon him* mentions the senses of perception according to their natural order. The eye's sight is not broader than the ear's hearing. Further, the perception of the heart is broader than the ear. So, we should reflect on how he *peace and blessings be upon him* ordered the senses in an elevating way. After all, he does not speak out of his desires.

So, if the paradise is described as such, then how can the words describe it? This is not possible because it has not been seen by an eye, heard by an ear or perceived by a heart. The Quran says about it, 'So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did.' (*as-Sajda:* 17)

So, When Allah *the Almighty* says, 'The Crashing Blow! What is the Crashing Blow?' (*al-Qari`a:* 1-2) He does not refer to the linguistic meaning of the Crashing Blow, but rather, the technical one. The Day of Judgment strikes everything, causing the people to be astonished and in a state of panic; the sky to split and be torn apart; the earth and the mountains to crumble; the Sun to be shrouded in darkness; the stars to be dimmed and the seas to boil up and burst forth. Thus, we use a broader sense of the technical meaning of the Crashing Blow instead of the narrow linguistic one; that is why Allah *the Almighty* repeats its mention, saying, 'The Crashing Blow! What is the Crashing Blow? What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 1-3) This is meant to portray the mightiness and the grievousness of that Day.

His saying, 'What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 3) negates having knowledge about the Crashing Blow in the past. This means that Allah *the Almighty* would provide Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with knowledge about it in the future. However, if the verb is mentioned in the present form, this means that he neither was given knowledge about something in the past nor would be given in the future. Thus, if the verb *yadri* (to know) is used in the past form, then Allah *the Almighty* would provide him with knowledge, which is not the case if the verb was in the present form. For example, the present form is employed in His saying, '… and what will make you comprehend that the hour may be nigh.' (*al-Ahzab:* 63) The matter of the Hour in known only to Allah *the Almighty* and will remain unseen until its establishment.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Sahl ibn Sa`d As-Sa`idi. See Ibn Abu Shayba, Musnad, Hadith no. 93; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 22826; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 5/2825.*

Further, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'And what would make you know that he would purify himself.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 3) No one should sanctify anyone else, for Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I do not sanctify anyone before Allah.'(1) In a third position in the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says, '… and what shall make you know that haply the hour be nigh?' (*ash-Shura:* 17)

As for the past form of the verb *yadri* (to know), it is mentioned thirteen times in the Quran: 'And what would make you realize what the sure calamity is!' (*al-Qalam:* 3); 'What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 3); 'will have the Bottomless Pit for his home — what will explain to you what that is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 9-10); 'And what will make you realize what hell is?' (*al-Muddaththir:* 27); 'And what will make you comprehend what the day of decision is?' (*al-Mursalat:* 14); 'And what will make you realize what the Day of Judgment is?' (*al-Infitar:* 17); 'And what will make you know what the *sijjin* is? (*al-Mutaffifin:* 8) 'And what will make you know what the highest *Illiyyin* is?' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 19) 'And what will make you comprehend what the uphill road is?' (*al-Balad:* 12) 'And what will make you comprehend what the grand night is?' (*al-Qadr:* 2) and '…what will make you realize what the Crashing disaster is?' (*al-Humaza:* 5) We should not understand the matters mentioned in these thirteen positions according to their linguistic meaning, for their intended meaning is only known to Allah *the Almighty*. No words in the language can express them because they are unseen. Allah *the Almighty* addresses us by the language we understand.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Bakr Allah be pleased with him. He said, 'A man praised another man in the presence of the Messenger of Allah. The Messenger of Allah said: "Woe to you, you have cut the neck of your companion", several times. Then he said: "If anyone of you praises his brother, let him say, 'I think he is like this, but I do not sanctify anyone before Allah.'"' See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 65/3000.*

In order to differentiate between the past form of the verb 'to know' and the present form, we must clarify that life is an interaction between the man, the time and the place. The time veils the past and the future and the place veils the man from the present. For example, there are certain events occurring now in Mecca. What makes us unable to know them? It is the barrier of the place. Further, what makes me ignorant about what had happened here last year? It is the barrier of time which also veils what will happen here tomorrow. So, the barrier of the time veils the past and the future and the barrier of the place veils the present. These barriers are applicable to man's limited knowledge; they prevent them from knowing what he wants.

By contrast, the time and the place are two of Allah's creatures. His Omniscience is eternal and existent before the creation of the time and place. So, the effects of the time and places are not applicable to what preceded their creation. Thus, His saying, 'What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?' (*al-Qari`a:* 3) indicates that an event will take place in the future which is only known and controlled by Allah *Glorified is He*. No one knows that except Him because the time does not hinder His Knowledge.

We have touched on this matter in our interpretation of the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'And do not say of anything: Surely I will do it tomorrow.' (*al-Kahf:* 23) This is because 'tomorrow' is a future time which is veiled by the barrier of the future. So, one should not decide to do something in the future except with adding: 'If Allah wills.' (*al-Kahf:* 24) The event or the action needs many elements: the doer, the object, the time, the place, the cause and the power that executes it. The human being possesses none of these elements. So, how can he say he will do an action without connecting it to the Will of Allah Who possesses all the causal factors?

يَوۡمَ يَكُونُ ٱلنَّاسُ كَٱلۡفَرَاشِ ٱلۡمَبۡثُوثِ ۝٤
وَتَكُونُ ٱلۡجِبَالُ كَٱلۡعِهۡنِ ٱلۡمَنفُوشِ ۝٥

On a Day when people will be like scattered moths [4]
and the mountains like tufts of wool [5]
(The Quran, *al-Qari`a*: 4 - 5)

The Crashing Blow will take place on a Day when the people will be like scattered moths. They will be in a state of panic, surging over each other, as they do not know where to go shortly after getting out of their graves. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Does he not know that when the contents of graves burst forth.' (*al-'Adiyat:* 9) and 'The day on which they shall come forth from their graves in haste, as if they were hastening on to a goal' (*al-Ma'arij:* 43). They will hastily come forth from their graves like the scattered moths. When they head towards the Gathering, they become like scattered locusts, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Their eyes cast down, going forth from their graves as if they were scattered locusts.' (*al-Qamar:* 7)

Allah *the Almighty* chooses the moths in the verse in question because they have fragile wings that can be smashed between one's fingers. This is the state of the dead people when they come out of their graves. They will be in the weakest of their states, totally confused and surging over each other like the flying moths. As for the locusts, they fly orderly in swarms.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* describes the state of what is stronger than man, namely the mountains, saying, 'and the mountains like tufts of wool.' (*al-Qari`a:* 5) In man's point of view, the mountains are the strongest phenomena when they turn to be like tufts of wool on the Day of Judgment. They will break up to tiny grains that the air scatters. Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَأَمَّا مَن ثَقُلَتۡ مَوَٰزِينُهُۥ ۝٦ فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٖ رَّاضِيَةٖ ۝٧

The one whose good deeds are heavy on the scales [6]
will have a pleasant life [7] (The Quran, *al-Qari`a*: 6 -7)

Allah's Account is very precise and fair. The one whose good deeds are heavy on the scales are the successful one who obtains paradise. As for those who followed Satan and their whims, the scales of their evil deeds are heavy. Consequently, they are the people of hell. Thus, the verses compare two kinds of people: The ones whose good deeds are heavy on the scales and the ones whose scales of evil deeds are heavy. The scales are heavy by doing good deeds and light by doing evil ones. Logically, there are three cases when there is a scale: one side is heavy, the other is light, or they are equal. The latter case is not mentioned in this chapter. The one whose good deeds overweigh the evil ones will go to paradise to have: '… a pleasant life.' (*al-Qari`a:* 7)

As the scales of the deeds are described as light and heavy, then this means that the deeds will have a mass with a weight. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says, '… to be shown their deeds.' (*az-Zalzala:* 6) This is even though what will be shown is the recompense of the deeds. We notice that Allah *Glorified is He* says, 'scales' (*al-Qari`a:* 6) in the plural form instead of 'a scale' in the singular one. Why? This is because every kind of deed may have a special scale. For example, the prayer, spending wealth and pilgrimage will have a special scale, which will be accounted together.

Allah *the Almighty* then says 'will have a pleasant life.' (*al-Qari`a:* 7) The exegetes say that this means that the one who leads that life is well pleased with it. However, Allah *the Almighty* describes life itself as well pleased, though this description is only attributed to the sensible beings. So, according to the standards of our language, we say that the life is pleasant. However, Allah *the Almighty* substitutes the common way of expression in the human language with a manner of expression befitting the Eloquence of His Speech and the greatness of His Blessings and Favours on us.

We notice here the precedence of the miraculous Quranic style over the human one. The people in the worldly life love the blessings and the causes of happiness. However, the fear of losing them disturbs the people. This makes the person enjoys the present causes of happiness while worrying about the future - whether his happy condition will remain or not. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* wants to say to us, 'The anxiety of the one having blessings in the worldly life will not exist in the Hereafter'. This is because the Blessings in the Hereafter are related to the person and cannot leave them, as they are subjected to them. Besides, they accompany the person eternally out of being well pleased with them. The one who is well pleased with something loves it and never leaves it. Thus, one should be reassured that the pleasure of the paradise will eternally accompany them; it never ceases to exist and one will never leave it.

The man will hold sway over his blissful life. In the worldly life, one’s freedom is constrained according to Allah’s Way of Guidance. By contrast, he has an unlimited freedom to enjoy the pleasures of the paradise once he thinks about one of them. This blissful life is stable and eternal because it is well pleased with accompanying the person. This is the difference between the blessings in the worldly life and in the Hereafter. In the former, the blessings may accompany the person while hating him. If Allah *Glorified is He* had not made them subservient to that person, they would not have stayed with them. He may eat a morsel while it is cursing them. This is because these inanimate objects are fulfilling their functions in life, even if man did not fulfil his. The blessings are displeased with such a person and yearn for leaving them.

In this connection, we have mentioned that 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb *Allah be pleased with him* said after reading: ‘So the heaven and the earth did not weep for them.’ (*ad-Dukhan:* 29) ‘Indeed, the heaven and the earth weep and feel happy.’ As Allah *the Almighty* affirmed that the heavens and the earth did not weep for the people of Pharaoh, then this means that they weep for the departure of the believers. `Ali added, ‘When the son of Adam dies, one spot on the earth and another in the heaven weep for them. As for the spot on earth, it is the place of his prostration to Allah. As for the spot in the heaven, it is the place of the rising of his deeds.’

As for the exegetes who interpret His saying ‘*radiya*’ (well pleased) with regard to life as *mardiyya* (pleasant), they did not reach part of the meaning that Allah *the Almighty* intended in the Quran. Further, their interpretation reduces Allah’s Eloquent Speech to be consistent with human language. These exegetes should delve deeply into the meanings of the Quran to deduce more of its lofty rhetoric and arts of eloquence.

Contrary to those who will have a pleasant life, Allah *the Almighty* then says:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَٰزِينُهُۥ ﴿٨﴾ فَأُمُّهُۥ هَاوِيَةٌ ﴿٩﴾
وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا هِيَهْ ﴿١٠﴾ نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌۢ ﴿١١﴾

But the one whose good deeds are light [8] will have the
Bottomless Pit for his home —[9] what will explain to you
what that is?— [10] a blazing fire [11]
(The Quran, *al-Qari`a*: 8 - 11)

In these verses, there is another miraculous expression; the one whose good deeds are light and his evil deeds overweigh the good ones will have ‘…a Bottomless Pit for his home.’ (*al-Qari`a:* 10) The Arabic word *um-muhu* refers to his destination and ultimate return to which he will go, like the baby who returns to his mother’s bosom. The ‘Bottomless Pit’ (*al-Qari`a:* 10), is one of the names of hell into which its people are thrown. Then Allah *the Almighty* magnifies the mightiness of the Bottomless Pit, saying, ‘what will explain to you what that is?’ (*al-Qari`a:* 10) Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of the chapter, ‘What will explain to you what the Crashing Blow is?’ (*al-Qari`a:* 3)

Here, the word is used to express a meaning broader than its linguistic one. So, we should not interpret the Bottomless Pit according to the meanings we are familiar with. As He *the Almighty* says, ‘what will explain to you what that is?’ (*al-Qari`a:* 10), then Allah *the Almighty* must intend a meaning beyond our human perception.

After saying, ‘what will explain to you what that is?’ (*al-Qari`a:* 10), Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘a blazing fire.’ (*al-Qari`a:* 11) The greatness of this style is manifested in the fact that the first part of the expression is hopeful while the latter is panicking. This is a psychosocial punishment that Allah *the Almighty* intends. This style is recurrent in the Quran, as He *the Almighty*, says, ‘… then give them the news of a painful punishment.’ (*al-Inshiqaq:* 24) and ‘… And if they cry for water, they shall be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces …’ (*al-Kahf:* 29). The first part of the verses is hopeful while the latter is panicking and disappointing. If the verse were frightening from its beginning, it would not produce that effect, that is, disappointment after hoping for goodness. A poet expressed this meaning, saying,

As a rainy cloud reached a thirsty people
But once they saw it, it vanished.

In the chapter in question, Allah *the Almighty* says, '… will have a Bottomless Pit for his home.' (*al-Qari`a:* 9) The word *um-muhu* (literally, his mother) is used instead of saying, 'His recompense or destination is a Bottomless Pit'. The mother is the source of kindness, compassion and good treatment. So, mentioning this word is a hopeful start. Then Allah *the Almighty* reveals the intended meaning and concludes the expression by stating that his mother is the blazing fire. This is more painful and severer than the direct expression. We seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from His punishment and disappointment after hope.

Further, this expression indicates that the fire longs for its people and yearns for meeting them like a mother looking forward to embracing her child. Moreover, this expression alludes that the punished person did not take care of his mother in the worldly life and did not appreciate that great blessing that Allah *the Almighty* granted them when He instilled kindness, compassion, dedication, gentleness and benevolence in his mother. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* reminds them about this blessing to which he did not pay heed in the worldly life. In the Hereafter, the blazing fire will embrace them like a mother, saying, '…Are there any more?' (*Qaf:* 30) Thus, the Quranic expression: '… will have a Bottomless Pit for his home.' (*al-Qari`a:* 10), is a precise manner of expression containing many meanings related to the human soul and we should deduce them.

The verses are drawing a clear comparison between the one with heavy scales of good deeds and the one with light ones; and between the pleasant life and the blazing fire. This declarative comparison is about unseen matter meant to give the believer two blessings. The first is that he knows his high rank and position in the Hereafter including Allah's Pleasure with them and the pleasure of the blessings with them. The second blessing is to know the fate of the stubborn disbelievers, which will be the blazing fire. Thus, the believer realizes two blessings: his blissful fate and Allah's retaliation against his disbelieving opponent.

Further, the comparison pains the disbeliever in two facets: his knowledge about his evil fate in the Hereafter and the punishment waiting for him; and his knowledge about the blissful fate of his believing opponent. Thus, this manner of expression is used many times in the Quran, as it affirms the meanings intended by Allah *the Almighty*.

the chapter of

at-Takathur

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful,
the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of at-Takathur (1):

أَلۡهَىٰكُمُ ٱلتَّكَاثُرُ (١) حَتَّىٰ زُرۡتُمُ ٱلۡمَقَابِرَ (٢)

Striving for more distracts you [1] until you go into your graves [2] (The Quran, *at-Takathur*: 1-2)

In the previous chapter, Allah *the Almighty* describes the Crashing Blow and what will happen on the Day of Judgment, including the event of scaling the deeds precisely, accurately and fairly. Afterwards, everyone receives the recompense of his deeds; the believer will have a pleasant life and the disbeliever will have a Bottomless Pit for his home. Accordingly, the wise person should receive the matters with their due carefulness and should not be preoccupied with the useless ones. He should not be distracted from the great matters by the trivial ones; from the pleasure of the Hereafter by his possessions in the worldly life, and from what is required from them by thinking about his fate. However, man is naturally heedless about these admonitions.

Thus, the chapter of *at-Takathur* followed that of *al-Qari`a* to say to us: ‘Striving for more distracts you.’ (*at-Takathur:* 1) This means that striving for more wealth and other worldly matters distracted the people from the scales of the Account and the inevitable end waiting for you. The actions that make the good deeds light in the scales distracted the people from that which make them heavy. This is heedlessness on the part of the human being. In fact, it constitutes foolishness, deception and negligence of Allah’s commands while he should seek his benefits and regains his heedfulness before the death suddenly seizes them.

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(1) The chapter of *At-Takathur* consists of eight verses. It is the 102nd chapter in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca in reference to *Banu 'Abd Manaf* and *Banu Sahm*. They competed with each other in the number of dignitaries and masters. *Banu 'Abd Manaf* outnumbered *Banu Sahm*. Then they suggested counting their dead people. When they visited the graveyard, they counted the dead people and *Banu Sahm* outnumbered *Banu 'Abd Manaf* because their number in the pre-Islamic era was bigger. See Al-Wahidi, *Asbab An-Nuzul, 1/490.*

This fact is not theoretical for it is a factual reality that makes the chapter relevant to the reality and the daily life’s situations. The historians affirm that the people of 'Abd Manaf competed with the people of Sahm for worldly increase. The Arabic word *takathur* indicates the participation of two parties in the action of competing. This is similar to the example when we say, ‘The two parties fought each other’. In this case, each of the parties is a subject and an object at the same time. Further, when we say ‘Zayd and 'Amr quarrelled with each other’, the quarrel is undertaken by both parties but one of them was considered the subject and the other the object. Likewise, the act of competing entails the participation of two parties. So, it is common that only one subject is mentioned with the verb denoting participation of more than one party. For instance, we may say ‘*Takathur al-qawm* (The people competed with each other for having more.)’

The saying of Allah *the Almighty* ‘Striving for more distracts you’ (*at-Takathur:* 1) means that competing for increase in the worldly possession distracted the people from competing for doing good deeds for the Hereafter. The people may compete in how much wealth and possessions they have. One of them says, ‘My wealth, children, and forefathers are more than yours.’ Each one competes with other people, claiming to be worthier. Another possible interpretation is that some people strive and attempt to achieve such supremacy over other people.

According to the first interpretation, the wealth, which is the object of the competition, exists; and according to the second one, it is not. That is why they are required to strive to obtain it first and then boast about having it. In fact, the lifetimes may be spent in such endeavour without reaching the objective. However, Allah *the Almighty* intends the general meaning of competition in increase; He does not say that the people are distracting by competing for their possessions or having more.

Distraction entails the existence of something occupying man's thought. It diverts the person from the required functions by unrequired ones. Playing is close to distraction in meaning for it means being occupied with trivial matters yet at not the expense of the important matters. When Allah *the Almighty* touches on the matter of distraction in the Quran, He mentions it after playing, as in His saying, 'Know that this world's life is only a play and a distraction …' (*al-Hadid:* 20); except in one position where distraction precedes playing: 'And this life of the world is nothing but a distraction and a play, and as for the next abode, that most surely is the life - did they but know!' (*al-'Ankabut:* 64)

This is because man passes certain stages in his life. Before reaching puberty, playing does not distract them from the required obligations because he is still irresponsible for fulfilling the religious obligations. As one starts his life without any religious obligations, he plays at that stage. Despite that, Allah *the Almighty* does not say, 'you played', but rather, '… distracted you.' (*at-Takathur:* 1) This is because playing does not affect the religious obligations. As for distraction, it is forbidden because it diverts the person from the religious obligation by trivial matters. As for playing, it is permissible because it entertains the soul and gives it rest so that it does not feel bored. An example of this is playing on the *Eid* day. Further, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* watched the Abyssinians while they were playing and 'Aisha was behind him watching also.(1) Besides, on one *Eid,* Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* entered Messenger Muhammad's house and found two slave girls singing. Thereupon, he said, 'What! (The playing of) this wind instrument of Satan in the house of the Messenger of Allah!' Upon this, the Messenger of Allah said: 'Abu Bakr, let them play on, we are having an *Eid* day.'(2) These matters are lawful as long as they did not distract the person from the acts of obedience, and they should be in the time of *Eid.*

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 949; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 19/892.*

(2) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 949.*

One is free to do or not the do the permissible acts like eating. However, on the *Eid* of Breakfast is it obligatory to break fasting and it is unlawful to fast. The One who has forbidden you from eating during the day of *Ramadan* and rewarded you for fasting obligates you to break the fasting on the day of the *Eid* and allows you to play. One is rewarded for such actions. In conclusion, the meaning of His saying, ‘Striving for more distracts you.’ (*at-Takathur:* 1) is that the unnecessary, useless matters distracted the people from the necessary, useful ones.

Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘until you go into your graves.’ (*at-Takathur:* 2) The competition in increase between the people of 'Abd Manaf and Sahm led them to compete in the number of their dead people, They went to the graveyard to take pride in its people. This is because the people of 'Abd Manaf outnumber the people of Sahm. So, the latter said, ‘By Allah, our men have been annihilated by wars, so let us compete in both the number of the living and dead people.’ So, His saying, ‘until you go into your graves’ (*at-Takathur:* 2), means that the people persisted in their heedlessness and distraction from the required obligations until they reached to this low rank of boasting about the number of the dead people, saying, ‘The one in this grave belongs to us.’ So, they visited the graves in order to know which party has a greater number of dead people.

Another possible interpretation is that this verse means that competing for the worldly increase distracted the people until their end came when death seized them suddenly. If they regained their heedfulness, it will be too late, for their lifetime has come and there is no returning back after death. Thus, both the interpretation is correct. We notice here that when an Arab person with good understanding of the Quranic indications and allusions listened to this chapter, he said, ‘By the Lord of the *Kaba*, He announced people’s death to them. By Allah, the Hour will be established when: ‘Striving for more distracts you until you go into your graves.’ (*at-Takathur:* 1-2) The matter is thus settled.

We understand from His saying, ‘until you go into your graves.’ (*at-Takathur:* 2) that, according to the first interpretation, they went to the graves to compete in the number of their dead people. The period they spend doing this action is short because it is the period of visiting the graves after which they returned. According to the second meaning, competing distracted the people until death seized them suddenly.

Death is not the end of the created beings because it is followed by Resurrection, Account and another life. The time of staying in the graves is comparable to that of visitation because the visitor is not like the inhabitant. We have said that what distracts man from the required functions is heedlessness about the outcome of doing the evil deeds and abstaining from the good ones. If one recalls the recompense for each of these acts, he will not dare to commit the evil deeds and neglect the good ones. If we brought about the greatest illegal pleasure and told someone that we will throw them in a fire burning before them if he does it, he will not do it to avert risking his life. Now, why does he not fear or be deterred if he was threatened by Allah's fire? The scholars said that the in the first case the image of the pleasure and its punishment is present and this strongly affects the soul. By contrast, the Fire in the Hereafter is unseen and deferred. So, the recompense in the Hereafter is unclear and does not have a strong effect on the soul due to its heedlessness. If man really recalled the punishment of the Hereafter, his joints would be displaced out of fearing Allah's Punishment.

Thus, the matter is all about certitude regarding the recompense. In this regard, when Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Harith ibn Malik about his state, he said, 'I become a true believer in Allah.' When he asked him about the proof of his faith, he said, 'I become indifferent to the worldly life so that everything is equal to me. It is as if I am looking to the people of paradise enjoying their pleasures and at the people of hell being punished.' In this way, he has elevated his certitude to the level of seeing the unseen matters as if they are before him. The one who recalls the image of the recompense in this way can never neglect Allah's Way of Guidance. In the same connection, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* portrayed people's states regarding the death, saying, 'I did not see a certain matter closer to doubt and further from certitude than death.' All the people are certain they will die, as the factual reality affirms; but heedlessness makes them in a state similar to doubt about it.

Now, what makes man distracted and heedless of the required obligations? We say that the news reported to us take three forms: a mental picture reaching to the level of certain knowledge, then elevates to the eye of certainty when one sees it, and, finally, it becomes the true certainty when he interacts with it. Regarding death, we reached the level of the true certainty. Despite that, man is still distracted from it to avert thinking about the recompense, the Paradise and the hell because they are still at the level of the certain knowledge. That is why the Quran treats this spiritual illness when Allah *the Almighty* says,

كَلَّا سَوۡفَ تَعۡلَمُونَ (٣) ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوۡفَ تَعۡلَمُونَ (٤) كَلَّا لَوۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ عِلۡمَ
ٱلۡيَقِينِ (٥) لَتَرَوُنَّ ٱلۡجَحِيمَ (٦) ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيۡنَ ٱلۡيَقِينِ (٧)
ثُمَّ لَتُسۡـَٔلُنَّ يَوۡمَئِذٍ عَنِ ٱلنَّعِيمِ (٨)

No indeed! You will come to know [3] No indeed! In the end you will come to know [4] No indeed! If only you knew for certain [5] You will most definitely see hellfire [6] you will see it with the eye of certainty [7] On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures [8] (The Quran, *at-Takathur*: 3-8)

The Arabic word *kalla* is a particle indicating reproach and determent. This means that the action of competing in increase that reached to visiting the graves is wrong and unreasonable to the sensible person who thinks wisely about the matters. Such an action displeases Allah *the Almighty* and is detrimental to the one who does it. When He *the Almighty* says, '… You will come to know' (*at-Takathur:* 3), it is as if He is addressing some people who are doubtful about the level of certain knowledge. He does not only affirm the certain knowledge but also the eye of certainty, as paradise and hell will be presented to the people in their graves without entering them. Afterwards, when the Day of Judgment comes, and the people of the paradise and hell enter their respective places, they will reach the level of the true certainty: 'You will see it with the eye of certainty.' (*at-Takathur:* 7)

The usage of the particle *sawf* indicates two levels; the first one will take a period in the future and the second one will take a longer time, which is the eye of certainty. The people are different as to receiving the news from Allah *the Almighty*. Some of them consider it a mental picture that could be true or false. Others are firm believers, believing in the truthfulness of the news and reaching the level of the true certainty once they read the verse. This is because they have confidence in what Allah *the Almighty* tells them.

The people will see hell with their eyes on the Day of Judgment; this is level of the eye of certainty to be followed by the true certainty, as in His saying, ‘And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones, he shall have an entertainment of boiling water. And burning in hell, most surely this is a certain truth. Therefore, glorify the name of your Lord, the Great.’ (*al-Waqi‘a:* 92-95), unlike the disbeliever, the believer is exempted from experiencing the hellfire as a true certainty. The disbelievers have been told about it but they have not believed in the Last Day. If they had believed in the Day of Judgment, they would have only seen the punishment with the eye of certainty. If they had accepted the certain knowledge from Allah *the Almighty* about the hell and its punishment, they would have believed in it as if they saw it. This is because Allah *the Almighty* conveys the true image of the hell, which is the level of true knowledge. In the Hereafter, they will see the hell itself, which is the level of the eye of certainty. As for the real experience of hell, it is when they pass across the bridge set over it.

Out of Allah’s Mercy, Benevolence and Generosity, the believers have nothing to do with hell after crossing the bridge set over it and will be saved. That is why Allah *the Almighty* then says, ‘On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.’ (*at-Takathur:* 8). The due right of the Blessings is to thank the One who bestows them. This exempts the person from being asked about it on the Day of Judgment. Allah *the Almighty* will question the people on whom the blessings have been conferred about them. In this regard, 'Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr said, ‘When the verse “On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.” was revealed, the Companions said to Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* “O Allah’s Messenger, which pleasures will we be asked about, for we only have dates and water?” He said, “Indeed, this will really happen.”’

The pleasures include the soundness of the body, hearing, and sight. Allah *the Almighty* will ask His servants on the Day of Judgment about how they used them, though He knows best. Mujahid said that the pleasures in the verses refer to all the enjoyments of the worldly life. The following question will be the first to be posed to the man on the Day of Judgment, ‘Have We not made your body well and provided you with cool water?

the chapter of

al-'Asr

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-'Asr*⁽¹⁾ (The Sun).

Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَٱلۡعَصۡرِ ١

By the declining day [1] (The Quran, *al-'Asr*: 1)

At the end of the chapter of *at-Takathur*, Allah *the Almighty* intends to deter us against competing in worldly, fleeting increase, whose ultimate benefit is confined to the worldly life. The worldly life is not the last stage of one's life, so Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to compete in the eternal bliss and pleasure of the paradise instead of competing in the worldly increase. That is why He concludes the previous chapter, saying, 'On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.' (*at-Takathur:* 8) The people will be held accountable for the pleasures they enjoyed. After the Account, their deeds will be weighed and then they will be recompensed. Afterwards, one goes either to paradise or Hell. Thus, the wise person should take precaution by not competing except in something useful leading to the eternal goodness and bliss in the everlasting life. Such a person does not compete except in the matters that will make his scales of good deeds heavy on the Day of meeting with Allah *the Almighty*. When he will be asked about the pleasures, he will find the right answer to that question.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-'Asr* consists of three verses and 14 words. It is the 103rd chapter in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was the 12th chapter to be revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Ash-Sharh* and before *Al-'Adiyat*. See As-Suyuti*, Al-Itqan Fi 'Ulum Al-Quran, 1/40.*

Allah *the Almighty* has clarified for the human being one Straight Path leading directly to the objective. The straight path is the shortest between two points. Thus, if one wants to reach Allah's pleasure and the blessings of the paradise, he should follow the Divine Way of Guidance. It is the Straight Path that leads the person to the desirable destination without effort and tiredness. This is the only Path that leads to the blissful end and makes the scale of the good deeds heavy. Accordingly, the people are divided into two groups: one successful group that follows Allah's Way of Guidance, and another losing group that does not follow it. Therefore, the chapter of *Al-'Asr* was revealed to clarify this matter.

Allah *the Almighty* says, 'By the declining day.' (*al-'Asr:* 1) Allah *Glorified is He* swears by the declining day, as He takes an oath by whatever He wants about whatever He wishes. After all, He is the only Creator of everything and, therefore, knows the created beings and their secrets. As for the human beings, they are unaware of the greatness and the seriousness of certain creatures out of ignorance about them. In the Quran, the oath is either affirmative, as in His saying here: 'By the declining day.' (*al-'Asr:* 1), or negative, as in His saying, 'I swear not by Day of Resurrection.' (*al-Qiyama:* 1) Both styles lead to the same objective that is, affirming the subject of the oath. The difference is that Allah *the Almighty* employs the affirmative Oath to eliminate a misconception. As for the negative Oath, the matter related to it is clear and does not need an affirmation to eliminate a misconception, as in His saying, 'I swear not by Day of Resurrection.' (*al-Qiyama:* 1) This means that the matter is so obvious that it does not need an Oath. But if Allah *the Almighty* were to take an Oath about it, He would swear by such and such.

Let us give an example to illustrate this point; when the person feels ill, he goes to the doctor to prescribe some medicine after diagnosing them. Taking the medicine that eliminates the illness is an affirmation of the patient that he is ill. Likewise, when Allah *the Almighty* swears about an issue affirmatively, He refutes any misconception regarding it. However, when the doctor tells the person that he is not inflicted with any illness and needs no medicine, then this eliminates the possibility of being ill. One can be certain about his good health through his natural instinct without even seeing a doctor. Likewise, when Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘I swear not …’ (*al-Qiyama:* 1), this means that there is no misconception about the subject of the oath. However, if Allah *Glorified is He* employs an affirmative oath, then this is a confirmation of the existence of a misconception that needs to be refuted.

His saying ‘By the declining day’ (*al-'Asr:* 1), is an oath that affirms its subject, which is: ‘man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth and urge one another to steadfastness.’ (*al-'Asr:* 2-3) Now, what is the relation between the declining day and the subject of the oath? The scholars say that the declining day is an introduction to the ruling that man is deep in loss except those who believe and do good deeds. Or, it is a cause mentioned before the effect.

So, what is the meaning of the word *'asr*? Its technical meaning is the act of worship called the afternoon prayer. This is the first meaning that comes to our mind when we hear this word. It is also the period between the noon and the sunset or a defined period of time that has a special feature. In the latter sense, it refers to the whole day or night, as the former has the distinctive feature of lightness and the latter is distinguished by darkness. Further, it refers to a longer period of time like weeks, months and years according to the specific features, descriptions and conditions that distinguish it from other periods, as we say, ‘The pre-Islamic, the early Islamic, the Umayyad and the Abbasid, the present and the atom age.’

So, which of these meanings of the Arabic word *'asr* does Allah *the Almighty* employ as an oath? If we considered the first technical meaning, the afternoon prayer, we find that the scholars say that Allah’s saying, ‘Attend constantly to prayers and to the middle prayer and stand up truly obedient to Allah.’ (*al-Baqara:* 238), refers to the afternoon prayer – this is the preponderant view. Some other scholars say it is the noon, the sunset or the evening prayer. So, the meaning is common among all the prayers. Why? The scholars say that an object is described as ‘middle’ if it is between two ends. When the ends are defined, the middle is clarified. The first prayer to be obligated on us is the noon prayer, then the afternoon, the sunset, the evening and the dawn prayer. Therefore, the middle between these prayers is the sunset one. It is preceded by the noon and the afternoon prayer and followed by the evening and the dawn prayer.

The scholars who maintain that the middle prayer is the noon one considered that the day is the time of toil and work, which is the time that man cares about. As for the night, it is the time of rest and sleep. As for those who hold it is the afternoon prayer, they regarded the Hadith in which Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, '(Let) Allah fill their (i.e. the disbelievers') houses and graves with fire just as they have prevented us from offering the middle prayer (i.e. afternoon prayer) till the sun had set.'(1) Further, these scholars say that the afternoon prayer is the middle one when we consider the times of the prayers, not how they were prescribed. It is preceded by the dawn and the noon prayer during the day and followed by the sunset and the evening during the night.

Further, the scholars who maintain it is the sunset prayer considered the number of the units of the prayers. The dawn prayer is two units, the noon, afternoon and the evening are four units. As the sunset prayer is three units, it is the middle between the two and the four units required in other prayers. Some scholars opine that it is the evening prayer because it is the middle between two prayers that cannot be shortened during travel, that is, the dawn and the sunset prayer. Other scholars still maintain it is the dawn prayer because it is between two open prayers – in which the Imam recites openly, the sunset and the evening prayer –and two secret ones, the noon and the afternoon prayer. Another stronger reason is that the dawn prayer is middle between the night and day. The noon and the afternoon prayers are offered during the day and the sunset and evening prayers are offered at night. The dawn prayer is between the nigh, as it is offered before sunrise, and the day, as it is offered after the daybreak.

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to make the meaning of the middle prayer vague so that the command of observing it includes all the prayers. This is beneficial to us, as it encourages us to observe them all, thinking that each of them is the middle prayer. Further, when Allah *Glorified is He* commands to preserve it, He says, ‘Attend constantly to prayers and to the middle prayer and stand up truly obedient to Allah.’ (*al-Baqara:* 238) He generally commands us to keep up all the prayers and then specified the middle one. Thus, we should observe them all. Making the middle prayer vague is similar to the case of the Night of Glory. It is intended so that the benefit becomes common in all the nights. Further, the hour of accepting the invocation during Friday is vague, as this encourages the servant to invoke Allah at all times. This is beneficial to the servant, as it makes him connected all the time with his Lord.

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2931, 4111 and 6396; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 203/627.*

Allah *the Almighty* takes an oath by the declining day, intending the specific time of offering the afternoon prayer, as it is offered at the last part of the day. At that time, man may be fully busy with finishing his work and thus distracted from that prayer. The declining day is also the time of man’s daily outcome of deeds – whether he spent his time doing what is beneficial and good for them or wasted it. Thus, the afternoon is the time of the daily account for the deeds and that is why it is suitable that Allah *Glorified is He* swears by it. It is the time when we should hold ourselves accountable for our daily deeds. It is the time of joy and success for the one who has done good deeds; and the time of regret for the one who has fallen short in doing good, beneficial deeds.

This is the interpretation of the verse even if the word *'asr* refers to the day or the night, as the poet said,

The day and night do not last long
If one seeks to reach his objective during them

At the end of the day, we should account the deeds we have done and those we left undone. Further, we can use the word *'asr* to refer to a longer period of time, like many years. Man lives many ages in his lifetime. Each age has a beginning and end. During its period, many events took place like the civilizations that were established and then perished. The person is required to reflect on these events. The civilizations that flourished were established because they had the causal factors of flourishing. As for the collapsing civilizations, they are the ones that abandoned these factors. Further, the causes of destruction inflicted them as a result of their people’s heedlessness of the causes of sustaining their civilization. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* swears by the declining day in order to show us the importance of reading history and reflecting on the current affairs and reality. Then Allah *Glorified is He* give us the effective prescription for the sustenance of the nations and their advancement and flourishing, saying:

إِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ لَفِي خُسۡرٍ ٢ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ
ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَتَوَاصَوۡاْ بِٱلۡحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوۡاْ بِٱلصَّبۡرِ ٣

Man is [deep] in loss [2] except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness [3] (The Quran, *al-'Asr*: 2-3)

In these two verses, Allah *the Almighty* summarizes the general principle for the sustenance of the nations and the civilizations. If we review history in the light of this principle, we will find it is true. We have here three conditions that should be met in order that the societies prevail and flourish. If one of these conditions were not met, the whole society would lag behind. The first one is the firm belief, the second is the good deeds and the third is urging each other to truth and steadfastness.

The general principle which is the subject of Divine Oath is: ‘Man is [deep] in loss.’ (*al-'Asr:* 2) The word ‘man’ here is a general word referring in the Quran to either a person or a group. The loss is a general ruling from which no one is exempted except those who fulfil three conditions:

The first condition is belief, which is a creedal matter and a principle that should be firm in the soul and the consciousness. As it is firmly established in the heart, we call it a creed. We have clarified that the creed is related to the unseen matters, not the tangible matters or man’s opinion or thought. For example, one should not say, ‘I believe I see you in front of me’, rather one should believe in Allah, His Angels, Books, Messengers, the Last Day and Predestination, be it good or evil. All these matters are unseen like the matters of the Hereafter, including the Recompense, paradise, Hell, the Balance and the Bridge. We believe in these matters because Allah *the Almighty* has told us about them.

Belief in the unseen matters distinguishes the believer from the disbeliever. As for the tangible matters are perceivable, all the people believe in them. The disbeliever only believes in what he sees and perceives. By contrast, the believer has a different balance by which he weighs the matters up, namely the creed. If something is beyond the human perception, this does not mean it is non-existent, a fact which is crystal clear in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 21) We believe that the soul consists of a body and a matter taken from the earthly elements. Besides that, the soul contains the secret that the Creator instilled in it, that is, the Spirit that gives us life. Although is it beyond the human senses, we believe in it because Allah *the Almighty* told us that it is existent even if we cannot perceive it.

If we are unable to perceive a simple creature, how can we hope to perceive the great Creator? Thus, out of His Greatness, He is unseen to us and our senses cannot perceive Allah *Glorified is He*. Should we be able to perceive Him, it is not befitting that He is a God. Thus, the creed is only related to the unseen matters starting with belief in Allah. This is the essential pillar of faith that man can attain to through his mind. After believing in the Existence of the One, the Single and the Self-Sufficient God, one should believe in His Majestic and Beautiful Attributes, including His Omnipotence, Ever-Watchfulness and Wisdom. At the end of the day, we will all return to Allah *Glorified is He*. Afterwards, we believe in the rest of the unseen matters that Allah *the Almighty* has told us about, like the existence of the Angels, the Books, the Messengers, etc.

Therefore, the creed is of two kinds: the original, basic belief which is to have faith in Allah *the Almighty*. The second kind is based on the original belief, that is, what Allah *the Almighty* has told us. We should believe in the matters He tells us whether they are related to the unseen world or the seen one. Consequently, the person should accept Allah’s Way of Guidance and follow it, making it the only source for what he does or abstains from. It should be the source of help and power by which one confront the difficulties in life, as one cannot face them with his limited power. Accordingly, he should face them with the power of faith and confidence in the true God in whom he believes. However, the difficulties of life are severe, the believer will overcome them.

That is why Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out and will provide for him from where he does not expect.’ (*at-Talaq:* 2-3) The causal factors cease to exist, betray and deceive the person. Thus, the only Supporter is the Ultimate Causer. So, faith enriches the soul. According to one’s faith, he recognizes that the universe, including the inanimate objects, the plants and the animals, are subjected to serve him, whether he can control these creatures or not. One should rest, reassured as the universe will not rebel against him because it is created for man and he owns it on account of Allah’s vicegerency that was granted to him. One should be confident that the universe will not rebel against his vicegerency. This is another privilege for man besides Allah’s honouring him by making him a human being.

Faith also entails that the man recognizes that all the people are servants to Allah *the Almighty* like them – all worshipping the only One God. None of them is His son, and none of this has a genealogical relation with Him. All human beings are equal and nothing makes some of them excel others except piety and righteous deeds. All the creatures participate in worshipping Allah *the Almighty* Who has no wife or child. Accordingly, all the believers have one Way of Guidance. None of them consider themselves superior to the other. They are all servants to Him *the Almighty* and free in their actions. No one of them should had grudge against another one because Allah *Glorified is He* provides all of them with sustenance. In this way, the brotherhood and cooperation between the Muslims in one society prevail, as it is governed by one Way of Guidance. In this regard, Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘A Muslim is a Muslim’s brother. He does not wrong, desert or despise him.’(1) And‘ the relationship of the believer with another believer is like (the bricks of) a building, each strengthens the other.’(2)

Thus, belief in Allah as the ultimate source of Power and Provision Who will hold the person accountable makes the man reassured in his life. He takes pride in it and does not submit before its hardships or feels weak. This is because he has a Lord in Whom he believes and upon Whom he relies regarding alleviating his hardship and making his matters easy. Further, as we believed in Allah and accepted Him as our Lord, Creator and Provider, we should not follow any way in life except His. This is because the man-made way leads to various paths according to people's whims. As for Allah's Way of Guidance, it is a comprehensive Way that eliminates the whims of the souls and makes all the people equal. It should be followed because it achieves safety and security on the individual and the social level. This is because every individual believes that he will be held accountable and recompensed by Allah *the Almighty* Alone, not by anyone else.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 2442 and 6951; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 58/2580.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn Abu Musa Al-'Ash`ari Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 481, 2446 and 6026; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 65/2585.*

As one believes in Allah *the Almighty* he is not a double-faced person. He does not deal with the people hypocritically or deceives them. This is because he believes in Allah's saying, 'He knows the stealthy looks and that which the breasts conceal.' (*Ghafir:* 19) He regards Allah *Glorified is He* in his deeds and not the people. This is the most important condition for the advancement of the societies.

The worldly life is not the last stage in one's life, for there is another eternal life to come. The people will be returned to Allah *the Almighty* to be recompensed for their deeds. Indeed, the worldly life is only a bridge for reaching the Hereafter. Holding that belief, the believer will receive the events in his life with a content soul which is reassured about Allah's Predestination and Decree. He will not be sad if something bad afflicted them and will not be deceived by the bounties given to them. He knows that the bounties and the calamities constitute a test from Him *the Almighty*. Thus, he does not feel anxious when a hardship befalls him because he has a Lord Who creates and provides and is fully able to alleviate his hardship for him.

These distinctive features of the believer are conditional on the perfection of belief because Allah *the Almighty* says, '… and you shall have the upper hand if you are believers.' (*Al-'Imran:* 139) The believer has the upper hand because his connection with Allah *Glorified is He* is strong. If he loses one pillar of belief, he will descend to a lower position and become weak. In this connection, the people of Musa (Moses) said to him: '… Most surely we are being overtaken.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 61) They feared that Pharaoh and his hosts would overtake them. Thereupon, Prophet Musa (Moses) *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'By no means; surely my Lord is with me: He will give me a way out.' (*ash-Shu'ara':* 62) He regarded his belief and spoke with full confidence that Allah *the Almighty* would grant him victory.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention form belief and the theoretical creeds to the practical application through the good deeds. His saying, 'except for those who believe, do good deeds (*al-'Asr:* 3), makes the good deeds a condition for the correctness of belief, So, after discussing the first condition, belief, we are now touching on the second one, the good deeds. The first good deeds are the act of worships that Allah *the Almighty* has prescribed, even if we do not see their imminent benefits. Afterwards, Allah *Glorified is He* has set the laws of transactions between the individuals and the groups. These laws organize people's activities and the relations between the members of the societies.

In atheist countries, these Divine Laws are called systems. Even if the fact of Allah's Existence is absent, certain systems must exist. However, we must differentiate between the Islamic transactions and the man-made systems. The Islamic transactions are acts of worship that Allah *the Almighty* has prescribed to organize people's activities in the Muslim society. As for the man-made systems, the religious law should accept what is in the interest of the people and reject the unsound systems that do not befit a Muslim society. The religious law may modify some of these systems to make them suitable to the Muslim society.

In this connection, we find that Islam accepted some systems that preceded it, prohibited others and modified the rest because they are man-made laws. As for what Allah *the Almighty* has prescribed, it should be fully accepted without doubt or thought. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who commands the people to worship Him in certain ways and no one has the right to worship them is a way Allah *Glorified is He* did not legislate. One can do extra acts of worships if they are sub-categorized under the legislated ones. For example, one can pay 5% of his wealth as prescribed alms instead of 2.5%. Further, he may fast on Mondays and Thursdays besides the obligatory fasting of *Ramadan*.

Thus, the good deeds are the actions that Allah *the Almighty* prescribed for His servants as acts of worship or transactions in order to maintain the soundness of their activities in life, whether these transactions were initiatively prescribed or accepted or modified from man-made systems. We should reflect on the different transactions in the world and compare the Islamic Laws that Allah *the Almighty* legislated to the similar man-made laws regarding the family, the politics or the economy. We will find that the reality compelled the lawmakers to get closer to the Islamic Laws or imitate it totally in some laws. For example, the communistic and capitalistic systems had to abandon some of the theories they believed in, resorting to solutions consistent with the Islamic thought. Likewise, the issues of life and organizing the family life compelled them to introduce the Islamic divorce system, after attacking and rejecting it for a long time. This is because Islamic Laws are comprehensive and general; it is a supreme Law that encompasses all the conditions and the situations.

As for the acts of worship, it is beyond the realm of thought because Allah *the Almighty* has commanded us to do them as such. Thus, we must comply with this command out of our confidence in the Lawgiver. It makes us execute the commands without seeking to know their reasons. About eating pork, Allah *the Almighty* has forbidden us from eating it. To do a good deed in this case, one should abstain from it even if he does not know the reason behind its prohibition. If we waited until we discover the reason, we would have suspended this good deed for fourteen centuries until the present time when we scientifically discovered the harms of pork. Thus, our confidence in the Wisdom the Lawgiver made us apply the ruling without any disputation. In fact, belief entails accepting the commands and the prohibitions with obedience and submission. Afterwards, the development of life will uncover the reason for prescribing them. However, we should not waste our energy searching for the reasons. Otherwise, one would renege the original reason that is, belief in Allah *the Almighty*.

If one believes and do good deeds, heedlessness may block his way to his desirable objective. Thus, there should be a third element, which is: ‘urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness.’ (*al-'Asr:* 3) The soul naturally is prone to be heedless of Allah’s Way of Guidance. Further, the impulses and the whims may overwhelm it, distracting it from the Right

Way. Thus, it needs what eliminates its heedlessness and makes it regain its heedfulness and return to the right way.

The Arabic word *tawasau* (to urge one another) indicates the participation of the members of the society in this action. Each member of the society is at one time urging and at another time urged. All members of the society reciprocally urge the ones who are inflicted with heedlessness among them. It is a collective mission for all the members of the society. Afterwards, some obstacles that need steadfastness will face us. Consequently, we must urge each other to be steadfast. If we gather these three elements, we complete Allah's Way of Guidance through believing, doing good deeds, whether they are acts of worship or transactions. If we follow that by urging each other to truth and steadfastness, we will succeed and be exempted from those who are in deep loss. However, if we neglected these principles, we are included in the fold of loss.

The Arabic word *tawasi* indicates exerting effort in advising and helping the one who needs advice. This ensures the desirable outcome of the advice that makes the advised one clings to the truth and the faithful principle that he was heedless of. Urging each other is the third principle of the successful Call. Naturally, the principles constrain one's freedom and activity while he wants to be absolutely free to satisfy his desires. However, the religious obligations and the principles constrain his activities in life. Indeed, this needs urging one another to steadfastness so that we mutually help one another to obey Allah *the Almighty*.

We have previously said that if the human being recalls the reward of the obedience, its hardship will be considered easy. The problem with the deeds is that we consider their hardship apart from their reward, making us regard the obedience as a heavy burden. After being inflicted with heedlessness after another, our hearts will be veiled from light and insight. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Nay! Rather, what they used to do has become like rust upon their hearts.' (*al-Mutaffifin:* 14) The heart will not recognize what is good or reject what is abominable. If this behaviour spread in the society, it will collapse and be corrupt. Consequently, we should recognize the importance of urging to truth and steadfastness in the society and the importance of the collective responsibility and taking care of other people's safety to avert their falling in temptations.

The word *tawasa* means to give advice and not an order. The advice carries the meanings of gentleness and leniency in asking for something. As it is offered to the person that one loves, it will tend to be acceptable and obeyed. Urging those whom we love is related to many matters like treating the people well and working hard. As for urging to the truth, it means urging them to abide by Allah's Way of Guidance because it is the absolute truth.

When we review the word *tawasa* in the Quran*,* we find it is used regarding Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) where Allah *the Almighty* says, 'and the same did Ibrahim (Abraham) enjoin on his sons and (so did) Ya'qub (Jacob). O my sons! Surely Allah has chosen for you (this) faith, therefore die not unless you are Muslims.' (*al-Baqara:* 132) The time of giving advice is long but it might be short when one is about to die, as in the advice of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob) *peace be upon him* while he was dying. He was keen on giving advice to his children. In this regard Allah *the Almighty* says, 'Nay! were you witnesses when death visited Ya'qub (Jacob), when he said to his sons, "What will you serve after me?"' (*al-Baqara:* 133)

The most important thing that Ya`qub (Jacob) *peace and blessings be upon him* wanted to be reassured about before departing the worldly life is the Way of Guidance that his sons would follow. He did not pay attention to their mundane conditions like provision and wealth. Rather, he said: '… "What will you serve after me?" They said, "We will serve your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismail (Ishmael) and Ya'qub (Jacob), one God only, and to Him do we submit."' (*al-Baqara:* 132) Allah *the Almighty* presents the advice of the father to the sons because it is the most truthful and sincere advice, as the father can never deceive his sons. Rather, he gives them the outcome of his experience and leads then to the right way that reforms their affairs.

In this connection, Luqman said to his son: 'And when Luqman said to his son while he admonished him, "O my son! do not associate aught with Allah; most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity … O my son! keep up prayer and enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these acts require courage."' (*Luqman:* 13, 17) This is an example of urging to truth which is the desirable Way that the adviser had experienced and wants his son, the most beloved one to him, to abide by it.

Urging to truth and steadfastness has many incidents in the Islamic history. In the era of the rightly guided Caliphs, we saw Abu Bakr and 'Umar advising their subjects on the first day of their reign. Their reign after the death of Messenger Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* made the people fear the position of the caliphate. This could lead the people to forsake their rights or be heedless of the Muslims affairs. Both were keen on raising the subjects' awareness of their rights, encouraging them to ask for them and to hold the Caliph accountable after observing his actions and orders. The subjects would accept the right decision and reject the wrong ones, criticizing the Caliphs for their mistakes.

In this connection, Abu Bakr said, 'I have been appointed as your Caliph, but I am not the best among you. So, if my actions are good, then help me; but if they are bad, then correct me. Obey me as long as I obey Allah regarding you. If I disobey Him, you are not required to obey me.' Likewise, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab said, 'what would you do if I diverted from the right way.' One man stood up and said, 'If we witness any diversion in you, we will reform you with our swords.' 'Umar laughed and said, 'Praise is due to Allah because he made among Muhammad's *ummah* those who reform 'Umar's diversion with their swords.'

Furthermore, the Caliphs throughout the Islamic ages were keen on advising the governors before sending them to the place of their governorship, providing them with the principles of dealing with the subjects. This is meant in order that the governorship does not make them acts tyrannically, appropriating the subjects' rights and wronging them. In this regard 'Ali ibn Abu Taleb advised Malik ibn Al-Ashtar, who was appointed as the governor of Egypt, saying, 'you should know, Malik that I have charged you with a country where just and unjust states had been established. The people will observe your affair like the governors before you and will say about you what you had said about them. The affairs of the governors are known by what the subjects say about them. Make the good deeds the most beloved thing you own and be merciful, kind and benevolent towards the subjects. Do not be like a wild lion appropriating their rights. They are either your brothers in faith or counterparts in creation. They are prone to make many mistakes and are overwhelmed with problems. They do certain actions deliberately or unintentionally. So, pardon them and forgive their mistakes inasmuch as you want Allah to pardon and forgive you. You have the upper hand over them and the Caliph is over you and Allah is watchful over the one who appointed you.' Thus, the Caliphs were keen on advising the governors because the subjects will be good if the governors are good. That is why Al-Hasan Al-Basri used to say, 'If I had one acceptable supplication with Allah, I would dedicate it to the governor.' When he was asked about that, he said, 'This is because his righteousness reforms many people.'

Besides they are many incidents in the Islamic history of urging for steadfastness. This is because the advice is often confronted and its giver is harmed, as in the case of Sa`id ibn Al-Musayyib, Sa`id ibn Jubayr, Al-Imam Malik, Ash-Shafi`i, Ahmad and Abu Hanifa. All these scholars were tested on account of their religion, but they were steadfast and spoke the truth. They urged to truth and were steadfast in it. The tyranny, authority and power did not divert them, nor did the worldly life and its adornments allure them.

I think you are aware of the trial of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal in the matter of the creation of the Quran during the reign of Al-Ma`mun and Al-Mu`tasim. He was steadfast in following the truth and held that the Quran is not created, despite being imprisoned and tortured. Most of the scholars in his time took the side of the state and believed in the creation of the Quran. This is an example of urging to truth and steadfastness.

If the principles of the chapter of *al-'Asr* are applied to the ages throughout history, we will find them true. The nations and the civilizations that adopted these principles and met the conditions were successful and flourishing. When they did not fulfil one of the principles they deteriorated and perished. For example, Allah *the Almighty* says regarding the story of the people of Saba`: 'Certainly there was a sign for Saba` in their abode; two gardens on the right and the left; eat of the sustenance of your Lord and give thanks to Him: a good land and a Forgiving Lord! But they turned aside, so We sent upon them a torrent of which the rush could not be withstood, and in place of their two gardens We gave to them two gardens yielding bitter fruit and (growing) tamarisk and a few lote-trees. This We requited them with because they disbelieved; and We do not punish any but the ungrateful.' (*Saba':* 15-17) This civilization reached the climax of development and attracted people's attention. Now, what made it collapse? This is because it did not abide by the factors of sustenance, which are the firm creed, the good deeds and urging to truth and steadfastness. This is also the case with the civilisation of the Pharaohs, the people of `Ad, Thamud, Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot). In the present age, the Muslims are backward because they abandoned these factors and were heedless of them. That is why the enemies seized them from every direction.

the chapter of

al-Humaza

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Humaza* (1) :

وَيۡلٞ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٖ لُّمَزَةٍ ١ ٱلَّذِى جَمَعَ مَالٗا وَعَدَّدَهُۥ ٢
يَحۡسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُۥٓ أَخۡلَدَهُۥ ٣

Woe to every fault-finding backbiter [1] who amasses riches, counting them over [2] thinking they will make him live for ever [3] (The Quran, *al-Humaza*: 1-3)

This chapter directs our attention to wealth which is one of the blessings of life and is highly regarded in the worldly life. This chapter indicates that wealth may change its owner and alter his criterion for the affairs. As he acts arrogantly with the people, he wrongly assesses them. As he has wealth, he admires the wealthy people and holds them in a high position, even if they are the wicked people. By contrast, he despises the poor even if they are righteous and pious.

Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to this matter, saying, 'Woe to every fault-finding backbiter.*'* (*al-Humaza:* 1) The word 'woe' is like the term 'the Crashing Blow'; it has a linguistic and a technical meaning. Linguistically, it means perdition and technically it refers to a valley in hell.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Humaza* consists of nine verses. It is the 104th chapter in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Qiyama* and before that of *Al-Mursalat*. It is the 30th chapter in the order of revelation. It is one of three chapters beginning with a supplication against the wicked people along with *Al-Mutaffifin* and *Al-Masad*.

From its extreme heat, hell itself seeks refuge. We consider both meanings here because Allah *the Almighty* is threatening in this verse and thus His Threat is true and will inevitably come to pass. This is because He is Omnipotent and has the Power to execute His Threat, for no one can prevent it.

The one who listens to this Threat should recall its image as if it is happening before his eye. If a normal person threatened someone else, the latter might not take heed of that threat because the former does not possess the power to carry out his threat. He neither possesses the causal factor not guarantees he will live to carry out his threat. If he lived, he cannot be sure of the sustenance of power that enables them to do that action. Further, his threatened opponent may grow in power and become stronger than the one who threatened them. Accordingly, the latter will not be able to execute his threat. He would have no causal factor for doing that action.

By contrast, if Allah *the Almighty* says, ‘Woe to every fault-finding backbiter.’ (*al-Humaza:* 1), the threat will inevitably come to pass and no one of the fault-finding backbiters will escape from this fate. After all, no one can rebel against Allah’s Kingdom and Sovereignty. His saying, ‘… fault-finding backbiter’ (*al-Humaza:* 1), includes intensified attributes. The words *humaza* and *lumaza* refer to the one who finds faults in someone else’s creation, character, social status behaviours, etc. The difference between *humaza* (fault-finding) and *lumaza* (backbiter) is that the former refers to the one who defames the people openly while the latter refers to the one who slanders them stealthily through a gesture with the eye or the tongue or through imitating someone else’s movement to make fun of them. The two descriptions indicate that the person does this inappropriate behaviour often to the extent that it became one of his inherent qualities.

The fault-finding backbiter is described as: ‘who amasses riches, counting them over.’ (*al-Humaza:* 2) This description provides us with the grounds for his inappropriate behaviour. His wealth made him descend to that low position of defaming the people and slandering them. His saying, ‘…counting them over’ (*al-Humaza:* 2) means that he is preoccupied with counting his wealth. From time to time, he gets it out, counts it, and returns it once again, as the stingy people who hoard wealth do. He is allured by wealth, thinking that he is superior to all the people. That is why he proceeded to make fun of the people and slander them.

The scholars discuss the matter of whether the verses are revealed in reference to a specific person or are they a general principle. Those who hold they were revealed in reference to a specific person said that he is Abu Lahab. Other scholars say that the verses are general. It is not important to know the person regarding whom it was revealed. What is important is that the ruling of the verses is applicable to all those who have the same qualities. If a person were specified, he would be an example for that ruling. There are certain rulings which depend on a general description and others depending on specific persons. The difference between the two cases is that the ruling in the former case is applicable to all the individuals who share the same descriptions. It is not confined to a certain person. As for the ruling depending on specific person, the ruling is only applicable to them and is not recurrent. So, the threat and the condemnation in the verses are not related to a specific person but rather they are generally applicable. The one who has these descriptions is included in this threat. Thus, the ruling is not confined to one specific person due to a certain incident.

In this regard, we find some exegetes exerted a great effort in searching for the names of the People of the Cave and their number – to the extent that they tried to know the name of their dog, the time and the place of the story. In this way, they were distracted from the objective of the story and introduced the Israelites narrations in it. If it had been mentioned in detail, this would have affected the context of the story. This is because if Allah *the Almighty* had willed to mention these details, He would have done so. Instead, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to give us an example of the faithful youths who were small in number. Despite that, they did not pay heed to the dangers and sacrificed themselves for the sake of their principles and creed. It is not important to know the characters, their time and place. If these details were defined, some people would say that they did such and such for special nature and no one can imitate them. If the time were defined, they would say this was possible because their time allowed it.

Thus, wisdom entails the mention of the story as a general one applicable to all times, places and groups of youths who sacrifice themselves for the sake of their creed. Allah *the Almighty* says, '… surely they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance. And We strengthened their hearts with patience, when they stood up and said, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth; we will by no means call upon any god besides Him, for then indeed we should have said an extravagant thing."' (*al-Kahf:* 13-14)

Further, if there is a cause of revelation for a story, you should not think that the cause is the reason why the story was revealed. In fact, the cause is just a suitable start for the revelation. This is similar to the case when a circumstantial incident takes place and makes us set a law for it. In this case, the law is not specific to this incident but rather it is generally applicable to all the similar incidents.

In the chapter in question, His saying, 'Woe to every fault-finding backbiter' (*al-Humaza:* 1), indicates generality, as the scholars say, 'The consideration is given to the generality of the wordings and not the specificity of the cause'. Thus, the ruling in the verse is applicable to the person who is the cause of the incident as well as to all those who have these qualities.

As for His saying, 'thinking they will make him live forever.' (*al-Humaza:* 3), this means that he wrongly thinks his wealth will give them immortality. This is contrary to the factual reality, as we witness cases of death and know for sure we will die. It is possible that the intended meaning is that abundant wealth became one of his inherent, established qualities.

It is well known that wealth is something circumstantial; one gains it at times and loses it at other times. This is the problem with wealth, that is, one cannot guarantee that he will possess it forever. As for the person mentioned in the verses in question, he thinks that his wealth will not leave him in any way. Accordingly, his wealth hardens his heart further, and makes him more niggardly. As a matter of fact, spending some of the wealth softens the heart. One should take into account that having wealth is not permanent. Consequently, he should spend some of what he possesses to later find someone to give him should he become in need. Hence, the verses deter and reproach the person who is allured by his wealth.

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

كَلَّاۖ لَيُنۢبَذَنَّ فِي ٱلۡحُطَمَةِ ﴿٤﴾ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلۡحُطَمَةُ ﴿٥﴾
نَارُ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡمُوقَدَةُ ﴿٦﴾ ٱلَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى ٱلۡأَفۡـِٔدَةِ ﴿٧﴾
إِنَّهَا عَلَيۡهِم مُّؤۡصَدَةٞ ﴿٨﴾ فِي عَمَدٖ مُّمَدَّدَةِۭ ﴿٩﴾

No indeed! He will be thrust into the Crusher! [4]
What will explain to you what the Crusher is? [5] It is God's
Fire, made to blaze [6] which rises over people's hearts [7]
It closes in on them [8] in towering columns [9]
(The Quran, *al-Humaza*: 4 - 9)

These verses contain two expressions which are frequently used in the Quran, that is, 'By no means!' and 'What will explain to you?' Actually, this is the last position in the Quran where they were mentioned. The Arabic word *'kalla'* (by no means) deters the person who thinks that his wealth will give him immortality. This is because wealth is a fleeting, ceasing pleasure; even if it chooses to remain with its owner, the owner himself will leave it when he dies. That is why it is said to the man who amassed an abundant wealth, 'Have you amassed the lifetime required to spend all that wealth?' How can wealth make him immortal while it is fleeting and circumstantial?!

The context of the verses befits the beginning of the chapter with His saying: 'Woe…' (*al-Humaza:* 1). We interpret it as a Threat from Allah *the Almighty* Who is fully Able to undertake His Threat as His slaves are under His Full Control. Here, He *Glorified is He* says: '…He will be thrust (*yunbadhann*) into the Crusher!' (*al-Humaza:* 4) The word *'nabdha'*, from which the word '*yunbadhanna*' (thrust) comes, means 'to throw something in a way that shows how underrated and valueless it is'. The one who slanders and mocks people due to looking down on them will be recompensed with a befitting punishment. He will be thrust into the Crusher in a humiliating and degrading way. If only he had just been deprived of the pleasures of paradise and having intimacy with his Lord; however, he will be thrown into the Crusher that smashes all that is thrown into it. As he exceeded the limits, throwing words that mocked the people and slandered them, his bones will be severely crushed. The Crusher is also the befitting punishment for the one who collected and hoarded wealth and stingily refused to spend it. Moreover, out of the severity of the punishment of woe, it is mentioned in the chapter in question before the sin incurring it is actually mentioned.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘What will explain to you what the Crusher is?’ (*al-Humaza:* 5), the question indicates that the word ‘Crusher’ should not be regarded in the light of its linguistic meaning of smashing something. In fact Allah *the Almighty* uses it to refer to a meaning beyond human perception. Then He *Glorified is He* clarifies its meaning, saying: ‘It is the Fire of Allah, kindled [to blaze]’ (*al-Humaza:* 6). The fire here is not attributed to a human being but rather to Allah *the Almighty*. The measure of the fire and its blazing are suitable to the One Who lights it. If the fire is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* how great it will be! We seek refuge in Allah from His punishment and the evil of His slaves. In this connection, we remember the story in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* supplicated against 'Utayba ibn Abu Lahb, saying, ‘May one of Allah’s dogs devour him’.(1) What was that dog? It was a lion that seized him while he was among the people. Allah’s dog cannot be anything but a lion.

Likewise, Allah’s Fire is so powerful that no one can extinguish or prevent it or save anyone who has been thrown into it. Furthermore, it is made to blaze and is ready to burn. The word ‘fire’ adequately indicates that the fire is blazing, and this fact was further emphasized by His saying: ‘…kindled [to blaze]’ (*al-Humaza:* 6).This means that it is blazing very strongly.

As for His saying: ‘…which rises over people’s hearts’ (*al-Humaza:* 7), it means that the fire will keep burning and crashing them until it reaches their hearts. It makes them suffer to a similar amount the people they slandered and defamed suffered. The heart is mentioned here because it is the home of the intentions of deeds. All the organs follow what the heart wishes. As the hearts of those wicked people are the source of their misdeeds, the fire rises over them and penetrates inside them.

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(1) 'Utayba ibn Abu Lahab divorced Umm Kulthum, Prophet Muhammad’s daughter. He came to the Prophet and said, ‘I disbelieved in your religion and divorced your daughter. There is no mutual love between us’. Then he attacked Prophet Muhammad and tore his shirt. Thereupon, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘I invoke Allah to dispatch a dog against him’. This Hadith is narrated by Al-Haythami who attributed it to At-Tabarani through a loose (*Mursal*) chain of narrators, saying, ‘One of the narrators is Zuhayr ibn Al-A‘la’, who is a weak narrator’. It was also narrated by Al-Hakim on the authority of Abu ‘Aqrab. He graded this Hadith as authentic while Ibn Hajar graded it as good. See Al-Bayhaqi, *Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 2/338-229; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 2/539; and Ibn Hajar, Fath Al-Bari, 4/39.*

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'It closes in on them' (*al-Humaza:* 9).This means that the doors of the fire will be locked up and that is why no one thinks of escaping from it. Just as this wicked person hoarded his wealth and put it inside a safe, the fire will close in on him. And just as he, due to his wealth, hoped to live for a long time, the columns of fire that close in on him are long and towering. The Lord *Glorified is He* then says: '…in towering columns' (*al-Humaza:* 9).The meaning is that they will be tied up in columns or that the fire is locked up with long, massive columns for no one to be able to escape or find a way out. This actually shatters the disbelievers' hope of salvation.

Clearly, the punishment is the consequence of the crime; every type of crime is punished with a suitable type of punishment. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and Allah was not unjust to them, but they were unjust to themselves' (*an-Nahl:* 33). We invoke Allah to purify our tongues and hearts, to protect our limbs and to safeguard us from the characteristics that incur that punishment in order for us to become worthy of His Love, Mercy, Pleasure and paradise.

the chapter of

al-Fil

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Fil* (1) (The Elephant).

We notice that the chapter of *al-Humaza* talks about the unseen punishment in the hereafter waiting for the fault-finding backbiters. The unseen matters are actually non-tangible and people accept them as news from Allah(2) *the Almighty*. Some people may doubt their occurrence. Thus, the chapter of *al-Fil* here gives us a different example of punishment. It is a factual, real and tangible punishment. Allah *Glorified is He* punishes and takes revenge against His enemies in the worldly life as a hasty punishment that precedes the deferred punishment of the Hereafter. It is as if He *the Almighty* says to us, 'Consider the tangible, perceivable punishment as a proof of the truthfulness of the unseen punishment I have told you about. The One Who inflicted the army of the elephant with a worldly, tangible punishment is fully Able to punish them with an unseen punishment in the Hereafter'. Thus, the Lord *the Almighty* directs our attention from the unseen punishment mentioned in the chapter of *al-Humaza* to the tangible punishment in the chapter of *al-Fil*, in order for the tangible one to substantiate the truthfulness of the unseen one.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Fil*, counting 5 verses and 23 words, is number 105 in the order of the *Mushaf* (the written copy of the Quran). It is chapter number nineteen to be revealed in Mecca, after the chapter of *Al-Kafirun* and before that of *Al-Falaq*.

(2) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. But the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

The tangible punishment also proves that Allah *the Almighty* possesses the universe and holds sway over it. He commands anything to be and it is.

The Lord *Glorified is He* says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَٰبِ ٱلْفِيلِ ﴿١﴾
أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِى تَضْلِيلٍ ﴿٢﴾

Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? [1] Did He not utterly confound their plans? [2] (The Quran, *al-Fil*: 1-2)

The story of the army of the elephant is a real story that some people of Mecca witnessed with their eyes while others witnessed its traces. In this incident, Allah *the Almighty* caused some events beyond human nature and causal factors to take place. These events were only the outcome of Allah's Omnipotence.

With regards to Allah's saying: 'Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? (*al-Fil:* 1), the address is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying to him *peace and blessings be upon him*, 'How can Allah's Threat to punish the disbelievers in the Hereafter be unreal while He inflicted a similar punishment on some people in the worldly life?' This is the harmonious relationship between the chapter of *al-Humaza* and *al-Fil*.

We notice that the chapter in question starts with the word *'alam'* (did you not?). The letters of this Arabic word are the same as the letters *'a'–'l'–'m'* in the chapter of *al-Baqara,* yet they are pronounced differently. In this chapter, we pronounce this word as '*alam',* but in the chapter of *al-Baqara* we read it as *'alif'–'lam'–'mim'*. How does the way or recitation differ while the letters are the same? Scholars say that reciting the Quran is different from reading any other book; its reading is divinely-ordained. One should know first how to read it in compliance to this distinctive feature. This is due to the fact that the distinctive features of the Quran are multifaceted.

The first distinctive feature is the way of receiving and learning the recitation of the Quran. One reads any other book in any state one is in, yet he is required to be in a state of ritual purity when learning the Quran. Why is this?! Because this actually cultivates the manners and trains the soul, a state that man cannot reach except after performing ablution. The second feature is the special way of writing the Quran, as it is not totally consistent with the rules of inscription. For example, we find that the first Arabic word of the expression 'In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' is written as *'bism'* (In the Name), without the letter '*alif*', although the letter *'alif'* is usually inserted after the letter *'ba''*. This word is actually written with an '*alif*' in His saying: 'Read! In the Name (*bism*) of your Lord Who created' (*al-'Alaq:* 1). We may ask why it is omitted in the first case and added in the second. Some scholars say that the Arabs at the time of revelation were not aware of the rules of writing. Consequently, they wrote this word as it was ordained. Moreover, if they wrongly omitted the *'alif'* in the first case, they will not have added it in the second!

As such, this clearly indicates that the inscription of the Quran is divinely ordained. If it was not divinely ordained and the word *'bism'* was written wrongly, it will have been written in the same way in all cases. That is, it was written in a different way to indicate that the inscription of the Quran is divinely ordained.

But, who is the one who dictated the Quran in this way? It is well known that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received the Quran from the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) and conveyed it to the Companions, saying to them, 'Write the verses in such-and-such a manner'. We may ask what made the Companions write the word *'bism'* in different ways. Accordingly, it must be the orders of the one who dictated it, that is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This fact is also proven by reviewing how the word *'tabarak'* (blessed) and *'banat'* (daughters) are written in the Quran. In some cases the *'alif'* is omitted, and in other cases it is added. If the matter were due to writing these words wrongly, that error will have been repeated in all the cases in the Quran, which is not the case.

With regards to Allah's saying: 'Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?' (*al-Fil:* 1), the letter *'hamza'* (do) conveys a question, as when one says, 'Is Zayd standing?' or 'Have you not travelled yet?', both of which start with a '*hamza*'. As for the

Arabic word *'lam'* (not), which is a particle of negation, it changes the meaning of a verb written in the present form to be in the past. For example, when one says, ‘Mohamed did not write’, the word ‘write’, which is written in the present form in this sentence, denotes the meaning ‘wrote’ because the particle *'lam'* (did not) preceded it. To conclude, the letter *'hamza'* denotes a question and *'lam'* denotes a negation. The question here is in the negative form. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is asking about a negated matter. This is because when one says, ‘Did Mohamed write?’ with the verb after the question word, he, in actuality, is asking whether he wrote or not. But if one says, ‘Was it Mohamed who wrote?’, this is a question about the doer of the action, who could be Mohamed, Ibrahim, etc., and accordingly the subject of the question is mentioned directly after the question word.

As such, the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see…’ (*al-Fil:* 1) negates that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw what happened to the army of the elephant. But why is Allah *the Almighty* asking about this negated action?! Supposing that it was not negated, the implied meaning will be that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saw how his Lord dealt with the army of the elephant. The event in question is seeing what Allah *the Almighty* did to the army of the elephant. But did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* see that action? No, he did not.

However, is the question here about a negated or affirmed event? Scholars hold the position that the particle indicating a question, *'hamza'*, is sometimes used to affirm a meaning. It is known that the speaker’s statement could be true or false. Consequently, he engages the addressee in affirming the meaning by using a confirmatory question, saying, for example, ‘Did I treat you well?’ It is as if the speaker is trying to affirm the fact of treating the addressee well through the latter’s confirmation. One does not ask such a question unless he is fully sure the answer will be in his favour. The addressee’s confirmation constitutes a stronger proof than the speaker’s statement.

As a matter of fact, the question may allude to the correct answer. For example, when we talk to a child, we find him answering according to the last thing he heard because it is that particular part that actually remains in his mind. For example, when one says to him, ‘I did not beat you, son, or did I?’

he will say, ‘You did’. But if the person said to him, ‘Did I or did I not beat you?’ he will say, ‘You did not’. This illustrates that one can confirm what he wants to say by making the addressee answer the question himself.

When Allah *the Almighty* wants to affirm a fact, He does not use the affirmative form of the question, but rather the negative one. This is due to His *Glorified is He* Absolute Confidence that everyone will answer affirmatively. Here, He says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1). The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* will naturally say, ‘Yes, I did see that’. Yet, if Allah *Glorified is He* had ever used the affirmative form saying, ‘Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?’ this might indeed have alluded to the answer.

However, the case in this verse is similar to when one says to you, ‘You have abandoned me and have never given me anything or treated me well’. You will then reply, ‘Have I not given you such-and-such and backed you in such-and-such a time?’ As such, you employ a negative question out of confidence that the answer will be in the affirmative. You did not actually allude to the answer you want but to its opposite. This is intentionally meant because it affirms the matter more strongly. It is as if the matter is so obvious that the addressee cannot deny it. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*: ‘Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant?’ (*al-Fil:* 1)

The letter *‘hamza’* could convey the meaning of denial. For example, when a student falsely claims to his father that the teacher beat him, the teacher will say, ‘Did I beat you?’ using a ‘*hamza*’, as a way of denying the action. Likewise, if we consider the *‘hamza’* in the verse as meaning denial, it thus refutes the negation of the action. This consequently constitutes a confirmation of the action. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* is saying, ‘You have seen how Allah dealt with the army of the elephant’. This eloquent style has been employed many times in the Quran, as in Allah’s saying: ‘Do you not see that to Allah prostrate all things that are in the heavens and that are in the earth…’ (*al-Hajj:* 18).

Scholars say that the expression ‘Do you not see?’ means ‘Do you not know?’ We may ask why the former expression was employed instead of the latter. Offering an answer to this question, they believe that the first means of receiving knowledge are the senses that perceive tangible matters, which are sources of concrete information. The mind then perceives the abstract ones.

Allah *the Almighty* refers to this fact, saying: ‘And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers–when you did not know anything–and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts...’ (*an-Nahl:* 78). Allah *the Almighty* shows His Favours on us as He brought us forth from the wombs of our mothers while we did not know anything. The Lord *the Most High* does not say here that He provided us with knowledge but rather He mentions the means of learning. Afterwards, He says: ‘…that you may give thanks’ (*an-Nahl:* 78). This is because having knowledge after being ignorant is a blessing for which we should thank Allah *Glorified is He*. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* taught us through means of knowledge that positively respond to the development of the mind. There are different sources for obtaining knowledge; sometimes it is acquired through heavenly inspiration when acquired through knowing the interpretation of dreams, or deducing information through what we see and hear from others.

The natural order of the senses is as follows: the hearing, the sight and the heart. This is the reasonable order that corresponds to the function of the organs. The first sense to function in the human body is hearing. Then it is followed by sight and reasoning, respectively. Additionally, hearing is the first means of receiving knowledge, as one listens first and then reads.

However, with regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see…’ (*al-Fil:* 1), Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the matter of sight because hearing depends mainly on what other people tell us. As for sight, it is a personal experience and facts gained through sight are more certain than those gained from hearing. The report perceived through hearing could be true or false. By contrast, seeing an incident is a personal experience. That is why it is said, ‘There is no doubt about what the eye sees’. Consequently, His saying: ‘Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see…’ (*al-Fil:* 1) means that the knowledge that Allah *the Almighty* conveys to you, O Prophet Muhammad, should be, though it is unseen, regarded as being as certain as what one sees with his eyes. In this regard, one Hadith reads: ‘It is to worship Allah as if you are seeing Him; and although you do not see Him, He sees you'.[1] Likewise, the Lord *the Almighty* says: '…Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things?' (*Fussilat:* 53) To continue, one should totally accept what Allah *the Almighty* tells him as an absolute truth which is comparable to what the person actually sees, and even more truthful. This is because the eye may deceive the person while Allah's News is not deceptive at all.

Furthermore, we should carefully reflect on the precision of using the interrogative particle 'how' in His saying: '…how your Lord dealt with …' (*al-Fil:* 1). Allah *the Almighty* does not say, '…what your Lord did to the army of the elephant. …' This indicates that Allah's treatment of those people was not an ordinary one. It is a special action that no one can do except Him *the Almighty*. It is as if He directs our attention to the nature and essence of His Actions. In fact, some actions depend on causal factors that Allah *Glorified is He* created to bring about some effects. These effects are ultimately attributed to Allah because He is the Creator of their causal factors. Some people may wrongly think that the causal factors act by themselves; that is, they say that fire burns and water quenches thirst by themselves.

Moreover, Allah *Glorified is He* may bring about an action without its causal factors, laws or normal ways. Such an action is attributed directly to Him *the Almighty*. This is why His Lofty Names include the First, the Last, the Ascendant (over all creatures) and the Knower of hidden matters. Hence, when one sees a cause leading to an effect, he should recognise that the One Who created that cause is Allah *Glorified is He*. Allah's Power is manifested in both the causal factors that one sees and even those one does not see.

With regards to the army of the elephant, Allah *Glorified is He* could have defeated them and safeguard His Sacred House using the physical power of Quraysh, like any battle between two groups of humans. He needed only to strengthen the people of Quraysh for them to be able to defeat their enemies. However, He *the Almighty* willed to repel the army of the elephant's attack with His Power, not the power of Quraysh. He wanted to repel them with a

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(1) *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 50 and 4777; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 5/9 and 7/10.*

matter beyond human laws and causal factors. Clearly, the amazement is not about the action itself but rather by how it came to pass.

We notice in the verse in question that Allah *Glorified is He* mentions the Attribute of Lordship, saying: '…how your Lord…' (*al-Fil:* 1). This is because Lordship is the Attribute of giving, caring, educating, developing and supporting on the part of the educator until the educated person becomes perfectly developed and has reached a state of readiness. The One Who carried out what happened to the army of the elephant is Prophet Muhammad's Lord, Who is in charge of all affairs. As Allah *the Almighty* defended His House and repelled its enemy, He is thus fully Able to defend and support Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* can provide him using causal factors and human laws or using means beyond that. We have to consider what Allah *the Almighty* did to the army of the elephant in the light of His Power and Laws, not in the light of human laws and power. Indeed, every action is measured according to the one who performs it.

Human actions depend on causes and effects, premises and conclusions, and means and ends. By contrast, Allah's Actions do not depend on these matters. For this reason we should not interpret His Actions in the light of human actions. This is our response to the rationalist school that interprets Allah's Actions according to human thought and laws. The modern Age of Renaissance witnessed the emergence of Sheikh Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghany and Mohamed 'Abdo. They noticed that many people denied unseen matters and wanted to subject them to human laws, especially the mathematical minds that only accept conclusive information. They wanted to separate the Messages from the One Who sent them and to measure matters of the unseen according to human laws.

With respect to Allah's saying: 'Did He not utterly confound their plans?' (*al-Humaza:* 2), the negative interrogation here is the strongest way of confirming the truth. The Arabic word *'al-kayd'* (plans) refers to plotting against an enemy to defeat him. It is done by a weak opponent who is unable to confront his enemy and defeat him openly. This means plotting is a sign of weakness and cowardice, not a sign of power or bravery. May Allah be Merciful to Al-'Aqqad who addressed this topic in his response to one of the feminist writers who advocated women's rights. He said that women have a great power as Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Surely, it is a guile of you women; surely your guile is great' (*Yusuf:* 28). By contrast, He *the Almighty* says about Satan: '…surely the strategy of Satan is weak' (*an-Nisa':* 76).

Al-'Aqqad said that plotting is not a sign of power but rather a sign of weakness because the one who resorts to it is unable to confront his enemy; that is to say that he distrusts his power. Out of his weakness, he never misses an opportunity to destroy his enemy because he cannot guarantee another opportunity to do that. As for the strong person, he may skip a chance of destroying his enemy because he is absolutely sure that he will seize him another time. That is why one of the poets said:

It is weak, but when it has an opportunity,

It kills; this is the nature of the weak

As for Allah's saying: '…confound their plans?' (*al-Fil:* 2), it means that the army of the elephant's plan was thwarted and in vain. This is because their plan was not perceived by the people of Quraysh but by Allah *the Almighty* the Supreme Power that fully knew their plan and plot. With regards to the people of Quraysh, they did not know that plan. By contrast, the army of the elephant's plot was exposed and revealed by Allah *the Almighty*. For this reason, their plan was fruitless, valueless and in vain.

In fact, Allah *the Almighty* does not leave His slaves to face the enemy's plans alone, a fact which is clearly mentioned in His saying: 'Surely they will plot a scheme, and I (too) will plan a scheme' (*at-Tariq:* 15-16). The Lord *the Almighty* will not forsake His slaves; rather, He will confound the plans of their enemies. Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And they planned and Allah (also) planned…' (*Al-'Imran:* 54), and: 'Surely the hypocrites strive to deceive Allah, but it is He Who causes them to be deceived [by their own traps]…' (*an-Nisa':* 142). The plotters here are deceived by their power and are heedless of the Supreme Power that stands on the side of the ones they plotted against.

The Lord *the Most High* then says:

وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ ﴿٣﴾ تَرْمِيهِم بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ ﴿٤﴾

He sent ranks of birds against them [3] pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay [4] (The Quran, *al-Fil*: 3-4)

Allah *the Almighty* sent many ranks of birds, one after another, carrying pellets of hard-baked clay with which the army of the elephant was destined to be punished. Sheikh Mohamed 'Abdo interpreted Allah's saying: '…pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay' (*al-Fil:* 4) to mean that the birds carried microbes on their legs. Yet, we say, 'Do we study the Messages considering them to be the brilliant work of a human?' No, we study them as Messages sent and supported by Allah *the Almighty*. This does not mean that they are beyond human perception for the mind to reject them. However, the mind is not the criterion for accepting them. Suppose that we wanted to take the mind as a criterion, which mind will we choose?! Moreover, if the action is attributed to Allah *the Almighty* why should we intervene in it with our minds?

If we interpret the pellets of hard-baked clay as microbes, then they are like the insect that causes malaria. This is actually a normal action which is different from the Divine Intervention and the incident of destroying the army of the elephant. This form does not befit the momentousness of that incident at all. Such rationalists landed themselves in a problem in their attempt to find a solution to rationalize the unseen matters to the people who do not believe in them.

Likewise, the rationalists landed themselves in a problem when they tried to refute the claims of the Westerners who said that Islam was spread by the sword. Their enthusiasm in responding to the enemies of Islam led to many unnecessary mistakes. What actually disturbed the Western colonizers was the call for Jihad in the Islamic territories. Consequently, they spread the misconception that Islam was spread by the sword. We could have easily responded to them saying, 'Did the early Muslims who presumptively carried the sword to spread Islam embrace it by the sword?'

Nevertheless, we should return to the original state concerning this matter. At the beginning of the Call, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was weak and his followers were a group who were oppressed; so the sword was not used except to repel an attack and to defend the Muslims. However, the majority of the Muslims misunderstood this truth, thinking that Islam is not concerned with life and its difficulties, and cannot use the sword or power except when it is attacked. This is a wrong perception aiming to plot against Islam to confine it to self-defense; if no one attacked us, we will stand still, not taking one step forward and not beginning a war. In this way, we devoid the religion from the basic mission that Allah *the Almighty* intended, that is, to enjoin good, prohibit evil and fight all kinds of tyranny. Accordingly, in this way Islam lost its positive outlook and contribution to life.

Similarly, in Prophet Muhammad's biography, there are many unseen matters that the abstract human mind has difficulty in accepting. Consequently, some people have denied the authenticity of some incidents, while some others interpreted them rationally to please those who do not believe in the unseen. Some writers claimed that Prophet Muhammad's life was devoid of miracles and even modified Prophet Muhammad's description to reach the conclusion that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was a just a normal human being. In this regard, Mr. Hakal says in his book about Prophet Muhammad's biography, 'I will disregard the miracles that happened to Prophet Muhammad. I will skip these unseen matters and search for his character as a genius'. In their viewpoint, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is just one man among many geniuses. We certainly do not want Muhammad, the genius, but rather Muhammad, the Messenger and the Prophet of Allah. This is sufficient for us. This is because when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is described as a leader and genius, he is considered a normal man with high human abilities. However, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* received special abilities from Allah *Glorified is He*. Such people should not deceive the readers with charming words, for all the descriptions they can attribute to him are lower than that of messengership and prophethood.

Let us review Sheikh Mohamed 'Abdo's interpretation of 'the pellets of hard-baked clay' as microbes with which the ranks of birds pelted the army of the elephant. We say that this incident has been historically documented and all the people agreed that it happened in the Year of the Elephant in which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was born. He was sent as a Messenger forty years later. When the chapter in question was revealed, some of the people of Mecca who received it from Prophet Muhammad were from fifty to one hundred and twenty years old. This means that the average age of those people when the incident occurred was between eleven to eighty years. All those people heard about the incident or even saw it with their naked eyes. That is why when Allah's saying: 'Do you [O Prophet Muhammad] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? Did He not utterly confound their plans? He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay: He made them [like] chewed-up chaff' (*al-Fil:* 1-5) was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, no one among the people of Mecca, who fully knew the meanings and the indications of the Quranic words, belied this incident. This proves that the incident came to pass according to Allah's Description. Thus, the Quranic descriptions of the ranks of birds, the pellets of hard-baked clay, and the chewed-up chaff were all witnessed by the people of Mecca.

Here arises the following question, which is, 'Were the people of Mecca aware of the microbes?!' No, because we discovered the microbes only in the seventeenth century. Also, it is well known that the microbe that afflicts the human has a period of incubation only after which its symptoms appear on the sick person. This period of incubation can take one week or more. Afterwards, the person dies, rots and decays, reaching the level of chewed-up chaff. Clearly, the matter needs a long time, but the Quran employs the particle *'fa''* which denotes that the second action followed soon after the first. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay: He made them [like] chewed-up chaff' (*al-Fil:* 4-5). Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* employs that particle in His saying: 'Then [later] He causes him to die, then [soon after] (*fa'*) [He, Allah] assigns to him a grave' (*'Abasa:* 21).

The verses in question mean that as soon as the birds pelted them with the pellets of hard-baked clay, they became like chewed-up chaff. This action is only possible through unseen Power that transcends human ability. Therefore, explaining these verses in question in the light of microbes is untrue and inconsistent with Allah's Book. Moreover, how did the microbe, as they say, choose the army of the elephant but not touch the people of Mecca? It is thus crystal clear that it was not a microbe that afflicted them.

The problem is that such people want to subject the story in question to the human laws and causal factors in order for it not to contain any aspect of the unseen. Why is this? By way of pleasing those who do not believe in the unseen. But what is the benefit of tarnishing the story if the people targeted do not essentially believe in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? Do you think that they will deny his messengership and still believe in the secondary details about his religion?!

As a matter of fact, we do not first consider the details of the religion related to the creed, the obligations, the rulings and legislations and then believe in Muhammad and His Lord after being convinced about these details. Rather, we first believe in Allah *the Almighty* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and then accept the matters of the creed, the legislations and the rulings. As such, one should not employ his mind in the details of the religion, except to believe in the One and only God Who is not controlled by rules. Furthermore, the only thing in which one should employ his mind in this regard is whether a given message is from Allah *the Almighty* or not. If it was sent down from Allah, we must accept it totally, without any hesitation.

Allah *Glorified is He* gives us examples of that using the elements of the tangible universe. He does not make the mind deduce all the secrets of the universe at once. Rather, He *Glorified is He* bit by bit, shows the human mind the secrets that suit its ability to perceive. In fact, the mind cannot perceive all the realities at once, but rather on a gradual basis. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘We will soon show them Our Signs in the Universe and in their own souls until it will become quite clear to them that it is the Truth…’ (*Fussilat:* 53). As the verb in the aforementioned verse is in the future tense, this means that some signs are still hidden. Also, if the mind was able, by itself, to perceive them all at once, it will have perceived them once the mind existed. In addition, all the various phenomena of the universe will have to always be unchanging.

However, Allah’s Wisdom necessitates that some signs be revealed and others concealed for the next generations. Some unseen matters will be tangible tomorrow through the premises and the conclusions that Allah *the Almighty* has placed in the universe. This is the way of deducing unknown matters. The conclusion which was the result of given premises will be the premises of another conclusion, and so on. Ideas and thought will accordingly develop.

Allah *the Almighty* may reveal one of the secrets of His universe to the slaves even though they do not reach it according to deductive premises; they might find it out accidentally. It has become clear that the secrets of the universe are revealed either through the employment of the mind that reaches the conclusions through their premises or by an accident that Allah *the Almighty* ordains. Such secrets are temporarily unseen because they, when discovered, will become clear to the people.

As for the absolute unseen, no one knows it except Allah *the Almighty* because it does not depend on premises. In the Quran, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and they cannot comprehend anything of His Knowledge except what He pleases…' (*al-Baqara:* 255). In this verse, comprehension of the unseen is attributed to the people, but it is restricted to Allah's Will. Consequently, this verse refers to the temporarily unseen. As for the absolute unseen, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'The Knower of the unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a Messenger…' (*al-Jinn:* 26-27).

Allah *the Almighty* then says:

فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ ﴿٥﴾

He made them [like] cropped stubble [5]
(The Quran, *al-Fil*: 5)

The chaff here is what the cattle eat and trample over, or it is the dry, crumbled leaves that fall from a tree. Allah *the Almighty* made the army of the elephant like chewed-up chaff that the cattle eat and discharge as dung. Derivatives of the word *'a'sf'* (chaff) are mentioned in other verses as a description of destructive storms, as in Allah's saying: '…a violent wind (*a'asf*) overtakes them…' (*Yunus:* 22). It is a violent, destructive storm. Thus, Abraha, his soldiers and retinues became like chewed-up chaff, that is, the stiff pieces of straw that the wind scatters.

the chapter of

Quraysh

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *Quraysh*(1):

لِإِيلَٰفِ قُرَيۡشٍ ١ إِۦلَٰفِهِمۡ رِحۡلَةَ ٱلشِّتَآءِ وَٱلصَّيۡفِ ٢ فَلۡيَعۡبُدُواْ رَبَّ
هَٰذَا ٱلۡبَيۡتِ ٣ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَطۡعَمَهُم مِّن جُوعٖ وَءَامَنَهُم مِّنۡ خَوۡفِۭ ٤

[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure [1] secure in their winter and summer journeys [2] So let them worship the Lord of this House [3] who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear [4]
(The Quran, *Quraysh:* 1-4)

Undoubtedly, there is a clear harmonious relationship between the chapter of *al-Fil* and the chapter of *Quraysh*. Allah (God)(2) *the Almighty* destroyed the army of the elephant to: '…make the Quraysh feel secure' (*Quraysh:* 1). This means that the army was destroyed in order for the people of Quraysh to feel secure during the winter journey to Ash-Sham and the summer journey to

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(1) The chapter of *Quraysh*, counting 4 verses and 17 words, is number 106 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *At-Tin* and before that of *Al-Qari'a*. 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b considered it along with the chapter of *Al-Fil* as one chapter and that is why he *Allah be pleased with him* did not separate them by saying *Al-Basmala* (in the Name of Allah).

(2) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. But the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

Yemen. It is not necessary that two chapters should be revealed consecutively to be harmoniously related, for one of them may be sent down a long time after the other. However, the order of the *Mushaf* (the written copy of the Quran) placed it in this position in the final order that Allah *the Almighty* prescribed. There is a difference between the final order of the Quran and the order of revelation. This is because the descending of revelation was connected to the factual realities and the incidents of the Call. However, the Quran written in the Preserved Tablet has another order. This means the verses have an order of revelation and another one for the written text, which is arranged according to the Preserved Tablet.

We have given an example for this, saying: when someone wants to design a villa, he imagines the position of the rooms and the furniture. He designs the building in his mind and then in reality. However, the required pieces of furniture are brought in a different order. He may buy a living room and then a dining room, etc. Likewise, the Quran we have is the final order which fully corresponds to the Preserved Tablet.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure' (*Quraysh:* 1), the particle '*lam'* (to) signifies that what precedes this is the cause of what follows it. Allah *the Almighty* destroyed Abraha and his soldiers to preserve the high rank and awe-inspiring position of the people of Quryash among the Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula, which also guaranteed the stability of their trade to As-Sham in the winter and to Yemen in the summer. The position of Quraysh will have been lost if Abraha had been left to destroy the *Ka'ba*. After all, the reason of the people of Mecca's position and high rank among the Arabs was the existence of the Sacred House to which the people from all the corners of the peninsula come to perform pilgrimage. Under the care and the service of Quraysh, the tribes used to gather at the Sacred House.

When the people of Quraysh used to travel in their commercial journeys, they were under the protection and care of these tribes and their caravans were safeguarded from theft and robbery. The existence of Quraysh near the Sacred House gave them a high position among the Arabs. The tribe of Quraysh used to live in Mecca, which was a valley bereft of plants, provision and livelihood except through trade. Thus, the two chapters are closely connected: ‘He [Allah] made them [like] chewed-up chaff’ (*al-Fil:* 5), and: ‘[Allah did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure’ (*Quraysh:* 1).

However, Allah’s saying: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, and security to ward off fear’ (*Quraysh:* 3-4) indicates that the destruction of Abraha and his army was basically meant to protect Allah’s Sacred House which lead to Quraysh*’s* security during the winter and summer journeys. Consequently, they were provided with sustenance that warded off hunger and with security that dispelled fear.

This means the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House’ (*Quraysh:* 3) indicates that they owe Allah *Glorified is He* and His House a favour, which is why they should return it by worshipping Him, the Lord of the House, the main establisher of their safety and happiness. This means that Allah’s saying: ‘[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure’ (*Quraysh:* 1) is both related to the story of the army of the elephant and Allah’s saying: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House’ (*Quraysh:* 3).

If we carefully reflect on Allah’s saying: ‘…Who provides them with food to ward off hunger, and security to ward off fear’ (*Quraysh:* 4), we find it revolves around the necessary elements of life. Man cannot live without food that satisfies his hunger, as it is one of the basics of life. Security and the absence of fear are not less important than food. Fear stems from anxiety that a blessing may be removed, or a calamity may befall the person. Clearly, one of the greatest blessings for man is that Allah *the Almighty* guarantees that He provides him with food to ward off hunger and safety to dispel fear. This is corroborated by Prophet Muhammad’s saying: ‘Whosoever begins the day feeling secure in his family, with good health and possessing provision for his day is as though he possessed the whole world’.(1)

If we review the history of Mecca since its very beginning, we find that this blessing is the answer to the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Ubayd ibn Mihsin Al-Ansari Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Hadith no. 300.*

peace be upon him when he invoked Allah, saying: ‘And when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, “My Lord, make it a secure town and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the last day…”’ (*al-Baqara:* 126).

Naturally, the outcome of providing Quraysh with food to ward off hunger and safety to ward off fear, and to ensure security during the winter and summer journeys should consequently be to worship Allah *the Almighty* a fact which is clear in His saying in the chapter in question: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House’ (*Quraysh:* 3). This is because worship is the original mission for which they lived in that barren valley which was bereft of plants. That is why one of Ibrahim’s invocations was: ‘O our Lord! Surely, I have settled some of my offspring in a valley without any cultivation, near Your Sacred House that they may, O our Lord, establish the prayer; therefore, make the hearts of some people yearn towards them…’ (*Ibrahim:* 37). Prophet Ibrahim *peace be upon him* did not settle a part of his offspring near the Sacred House except for the people to establish prayer therein.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘So let them worship...’ (*Quraysh:* 3), we find that the word ‘worship’ can carry various meanings according to the various contexts in which it is used. It means to know Allah *the Almighty* and therefore to obey and submit to Him. One should recognize Him as the only God, the Omnipotent, the Wise, the provider and the Everlasting One. We actually should submit to the One Who has such Attributes. The one who interprets worship as knowing Allah *the Almighty* depends on the fact that knowledge is the way that leads to the objective, which is to obey Allah *Glorified is He*. Some other scholars hold that worship is submission, for knowledge without submission to Allah is meaningless. In actuality, obedience and following the Way of Guidance come after submission, for some people may submit but not follow the Way of Guidance.

That is why the scholars interpret Allah’s saying: ‘And I have not created jinn and men except that they should serve Me’ (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56) as follows: Allah *Glorified is He* created them to know Him *the Almighty*. But were people created to only serve this purpose?! If this was the case, seeking knowledge may defer people’s application of Allah’s Commands. That is why we believe that ‘to worship’ means to submit and follow the Way of

Guidance, especially because the people addressed here did not submit or follow the Divine Way of Guidance.

When we discuss a verse, we should search for those verses that are associated with it in the rest of the Quran. If we ask whether Allah's saying: 'And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56) is unique in the Quran, we will find the answer is no, because Allah *the Almighty* says elsewhere: '…though all they are ordered to do is worship Allah alone, sincerely devoting their religion to Him…' (*al-Bayyina:* 5). From this we see that 'worship' means to submit and obey. Obedience is only possible when a Messenger is sent with a Way of Guidance that he should explain, call the people to follow and apply before them. If this was not the case and worship was possible straight after the creation, there will have been no need for Messengers. To conclude, His saying: 'And I have not created jinn and men except that they should serve Me' (*adh-Dhariyat:* 56) refers to worship by carrying out religious obligations conveyed by a Messenger. Afterwards, some people will obey while others disobey.

If we reflect on the meaning of worship in His saying: 'So let them worship the Lord of this House' (*Quraysh:* 3), we find that Allah *Glorified is He* connects 'worship' to the reason why Prophet Ibrahim came with his offspring to Mecca. This is because the original reason was '…that they may establish the prayer …' (*Ibrahim:* 37). It is as if prayer is the center of worship. Nevertheless, we should take into account that worship has a broad, middle and a narrow meaning. The narrow one is knowledge while the middle is carrying out the prescribed rites and acts of worship by which we become closer to Allah *the Almighty* like prayer, fasting, giving obligatory alms and pilgrimage. Scholars refer to the rest of the way of life as 'the transactions', which are also part of the Divine Way of Guidance. As a matter of fact, if we follow that Way in all our transactions, we will consequently fulfil the broad, comprehensive meaning of worship.

Yet, we stress here that this division is only a form of classification, for Islam never differentiates between the acts of worship and the transactions except with regards to the one to whom these actions are directed. As for the acts of worship, they constitute a relationship between the slave and his Lord, while the transactions constitute a relationship between a human being and his fellow human being. In fact, the laws laid down by Allah *the Almighty* along with the rulings that govern the activities of the Muslim society with regards to the family, politics, governorship, ethics, economy, etc. all come from the same source.

To continue, if we say that prayer is what is intended by ‘worship’ in His saying: ‘So let them worship the Lord of this House’ (*Quraysh:* 3), this is possible because it has aspects related and connected to all acts of worship and transactions. Prayer is indeed worship in the general and comprehensive sense of the word, that is, submission to Allah, following His Way of Guidance and shunning any man-made ways. With regards to the various acts of worship, they are explicitly defined in His Way of Guidance, and thus no one can add anything to or even omit anything from them.

As for transactions, Allah *the Almighty* allowed the human mind to have a role therein and to set the laws that suit the environment and the age in the light of the general principles that do not violate the spirit and the objectives of the Divine Way of Guidance. In this connection, the disbelievers before Islam had their own laws and systems that governed their transactions, family life, trade and economy. This is because these systems are necessary for life. By contrast, no one dares to change the ruling of the acts of worship. For example, no one said to another, ‘Pray to Me’, and no one sought to have a close relationship with someone else by offering prayer or fast to him. This is because worship is only defined and ordained by virtue of Allah’s Way of Guidance.

Prayer has a primary role in Islam, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Prayer constitutes the pillar of the religion’. This is because it gathers both the acts of worship and transactions. How is this possible?! Scholars say that the prescribed rulings of transactions have a relationship with one’s surrounding society on one hand, and also the broader one, this is, all the Muslims in general, on the other. These transactions have to be conducted under the leadership of someone who rules the people, guides them, implements Allah’s Rulings and Prescribed Punishments, repels the wrongdoings to help the wronged and returns the rights to their owners. Likewise, prayer teaches us to have a leader to follow, and it thus has an aspect of governorship.

Additionally, prayer is distinguished from the rest of the acts of worship by the fact that it was prescribed on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* directly from Allah *the Almighty*. As for the rest of the acts of worship, they were prescribed through the one trusted with the revelation, that is, the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel), who acted as an intermediary between Allah and Prophet Muhammad. This actually indicates the importance and the high rank of prayer in the religion of Islam. With regards to the place of its prescription, it was given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the Presence of His Lord, a place where no one else can reach. The Muslims have been granted this rank of closeness to Allah *the Almighty* when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveyed Allah's Salutation to his followers. Accordingly, they, that is the Muslims, attained the rank of closeness with which Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was honoured. For this reason, his Lord said to him: '… [O Prophet Muhammad] bow down in worship and draw close' (*al-'Alaq:* 19); just as he *peace and blessings be upon him* drew close to his Lord during the Night Journey and Ascension, we can also draw close to Him *Glorified is He* and be in His presence through prayer.

We have previously clarified that prayer includes all the Pillars of Islam. As for the two Testimonies of Islam, they are obligatory one time at least in the Muslim's lifetime. During prayer, one pronounces these testimonies many times. Likewise, there is an aspect of *zakat* (Almsgiving) in the prayer. Having wealth to pay the *zakat* depends on working which, in turn, depends on time. Prayer takes some of one's time. This means, when a person sacrifices part of his time to offer prayer, it is as if he pays *zakat.*

Furthermore, there is an aspect of fasting in the prayer, as one abstains from all that breaks the Fast and even from some actions which are lawful during fasting. Moreover, there is an aspect of pilgrimage during prayer, as the one who offers it stands in the direction of Allah's Sacred House and recalls it to mind as if it is before him. These are the aspects that Prayer shares with the rest of the acts of worship.

But how does prayer share some aspects of transactions? Scholars say that when the Mue'dhdhin calls for prayer, we see the people of faith who respect Allah's Obligations leave the mundane affairs and eagerly go to offer prayer and answer Allah's Call. The president and the subjects, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak are all equal in answering Allah's Call and in standing before Him *the Almighty* in one row. One stands in any space which is empty; we see the minister, his doorman and chauffeur all stand side-by-side in one row. The doorman may go to the mosque before the minister and sit in a better place. This eliminates the self-conceitedness, arrogance and division into castes. All are equal with regards to worshipping Allah *the Almighty*. This bridges the gaps between the castes and raises the position of the poor and the weak. This encourages other members of the society to provide them with a respectable life that Allah *the Almighty* wishes for them. When the principle of equality prevails in the society, the people will be reassured about their wealth and the honour of their family. This consequently results in maintaining harmony between the different members of the society and also leads to welfare, prosperity, safety and security.

Besides, prayer teaches us how to choose the Imam and those who represent us and speak on our behalf. It teaches us the conditions of governorship, not everyone is allowed to be the Imam of the prayer. The worshippers should accept and be pleased with the Imam whom they follow. This is why it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah curses the one who leads a people while they dislike him'.(1) Moreover, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* has set for us the standards for choosing the Imam of the prayer to be as follows: the first choice is the one who has memorized the Book of Allah, but if two people are equal in this aspect, then the one who is more knowledgeable about the Prophet Muhammad's *Sunnah* should be chosen and given precedence.(2)

When the Imam stands before the people, he should look at them and say, 'Keep your rows straight (during prayer in congregation), for keeping the rows straight is part of the perfection of the prayer'. (3) After this, the people should not say, '*Allahu Akbar*' (Allah is the Greatest) until the Imam himself says it. Likewise, they should not bow until he bows, and when he recites the Quran, they should listen to it attentively. This is a matter of willful obedience and compliance to the Imam because the people are the ones who choose him and accepted his leadership of the prayer.

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(1) *A Hadith to that effect was narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 6707.*

(2) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 20685; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 585; and An-Nasa'i, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no. 866.*

(3) *This Hadith was narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 723; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 124/433.*

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Let those be nearest to me who are mature and endowed with understanding (of the religion)'.(1) This actually refers to those people who should stand behind the Imam in the first row. In reality, this is not an honour for those people, but this is justifiable because of the Imam's need for them as he is prone to error and forgetfulness, which is why those who can help him and correct his mistakes should stand behind him in the first row, Besides, if the Imam has to leave the prayer for a certain excuse, he will be able to find someone to end the prayer as an Imam. Thus, the people who are mature and endowed with an understanding of the religion have a function in the prayer.

An incident in this regard happened when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* prayed two units of prayer instead of four. One of the Companions asked him, 'O Messenger of Allah, has the prayer been shortened or did you forget?' He asked, 'Is what Dhu Al-Yadain says true?' They said, 'Yes'. Consequently he *peace and blessings be upon him* went forward and performed two other units of prayer and said the *Salam*, then he prostrated twice thereby carrying out the prostrations of forgetfulness'.(2) This clearly shows the high rank which has been given to *Imama* (leadership in the prayer), and the obligation of following the Imam and to comply with him, except in the case of necessity in order to preserve the prayer. The people who are endowed with an understanding of the religion have no role to perform except when the Imam makes a mistake in prayer. In such a case, they should not follow him and should notify and correct him.

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(1) *This Hadith was narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 4373; Ad-Darimi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1303; and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 228.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7250; Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 79/573, and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 16708.*

If we review the verses on obedience in the Book of Allah, we find that the Lord *the Almighty* says: '…obey Allah and obey the Messenger…' (*an-Nisa':* 59), and: 'Obey Allah and the Messenger…' (*Al-'Imran:* 32), as well as: 'Obey the Messenger…' (*at-Taghabun:* 12), and: '…obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.…' (*an-Nisa':* 59). In this regard, we should notice that the imperative order 'obey' is not repeated in the last verse for the people in authority. That is to say that Allah *the Almighty* does not say, 'and obey those in authority among you'. This means that the people in authority and the rulers are not obeyed for their positions; rather, obeying them stems mainly from our obedience to Allah *Glorified is He* and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If they disobey Allah and His Messenger, the people are not required to obey them.

In this way, prayer gives us general principles related to the matter of governorship and the public authority in the Muslim society, which are ways of reforming the affairs of the people and the country. If the ruler is good, the subjects will also be good. The Imam should not be blindly obeyed in everything but rather obeyed within the limits of the religious laws and the Islamic system.

We should take into account that the role of mature people who are endowed with an understanding of the religion is not restricted to prayer. The ruler who is in charge of the affairs of the Muslims should select his retinues, assistants and ministers from among the mature people who are endowed with an understanding of the religion. They should be people who are pious and well-versed in religious knowledge and jurisprudence. Furthermore, they should be well aware of the condition of the people and the relations of the nation with other countries, because they will be the counselors of the ruler. They should prioritize Allah's Pleasure over that of the ruler. This is a difficult matter that needs power, a strong personality, firm belief and no fear of blame from anyone.

In this regard, one of the righteous people said, 'Devote your observation to the One Who is Ever-Watchful over you; devote you thanks to the One Whose Blessings ceaselessly come to you; devote your worship to the One you cannot dispense with; and devote your submission to the One against His Kingdom and Sovereignty you cannot rebel'.

It has become clear that prayer in this sense includes all the religious obligations, acts of worships and transactions. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The precepts of Islam will be abandoned one by one. The first will be the governorship and the last will be the prayer’.(1) This means that the first aspect of Allah’s Way of Guidance that will be violated is governorship, in particularly when the rulers govern by other than what Allah *the Almighty* has revealed. And the last precept of Islam to be abandoned will be the prayer.

If we carefully reflect on the prayer, we will find it to be one of the necessary elements in the Muslim society. This is because life is full of various incidents, problems and concerns. The people differ as to how they solve these problems and overcome these concerns. Prayer is the best treatment in these cases. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* gives us an example in this regard. When a matter distressed him, he used to offer prayer.(2) Whenever the causal factors and the events closed in on him, the first thing to think about was praying to his Lord, Whose Control nothing on the earth or in the heaven can escape. This indicates that prayer is a refuge from all calamities and concerns. There is a difference between the one who invokes, calls, and seeks refuge in his Lord and Creator and the one who drinks alcohol to forget about his concerns. Afterwards, the concerns will remain and will be compounded with the consequences of that major sin and disobedience to Allah *Glorified is He*.

Allah *the Almighty* endowed us with minds in order to face and find solutions for the momentous events and difficult problems–not to escape them by intoxicating the mind. In fact, when a concern lingers, its difficulty increases, just like yeast. The unsolved problem escalates and becomes complicated. Surprisingly, while the person suffering a problem needs intellectual abilities beyond his own abilities to solve the problem, he intoxicates his mind, wrongly thinking that this will end the problem. If he remembered that he has a Lord Who is in charge of him and takes care of him, he will seek refuge in Him. After all, Allah *the Almighty* is the Creator of the human beings and will not abandon them. Imagine a machine checked five times a day by its maker; will it suffer any malfunction, damage or defect?!

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Umama Al-Bahili Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 22160; and Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 7022.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Hudhayfa Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, 5/288; and Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1319.*

That is why when the concerned person offers prayer and seeks refuge in His Lord, he ends the prayer feeling calm and serene. What has happened to him? No one knows the details but undoubtedly it is not a physical surgery but rather a psychological healing carried out by the Creator Who knows how to treat the beings He created. He *the Almighty* cures him in an unknown way and provides him with the required elements to solve his problems. Furthermore, the Lord *the Almighty* makes him content and reassured when dealing with the events. Contentment and reassurance reform one's thoughts and allow him to find a way out of his straitened situation relying on causal factors. If his problem is beyond these causal factors, it will be solved by a means other than them. As Allah *the Almighty* is unseen, the way He cures is also unseen and we should not hope to know how it works in reality.

There is another privilege of prayer which is not shared by any other act of worship. Allah *the Almighty* gives the keys to this act of worship to the slave. When he wants to meet with his Lord, he can freely choose the time, the place, the subject of meeting and the time it ends. One should only make ablution, direct himself to the *Qibla* (the *Ka'ba* in Mecca) and make *Takbir* (by saying, 'Allah is the Greatest'). Undoubtedly, there is a great difference between this meeting and our meetings with an official, president or ruler. How did the slave obtain this high rank? How did he earn the authority to control the elements of the meeting in the aforementioned way?! It is due to his slavery to Allah *the Almighty* directing his worship towards the Lord out of faith in and submission to Him *Glorified is He*. The Lord *the Almighty* granted His slave this mastery; man started as a slave and ended up as a master. The poet speaks the truth when he expressed this meaning, saying,

It is a sufficient honour for me to be a slave
Without any appointment, my Lord welcomes me
He is in His Supreme Position,
but I meet Him whenever and wherever I wish

How great the Lord Who grants this mastery to His slave is! To be sure that the slave has all the keys to prayer, you should read the following Sacred Hadith in which Prophet Muhammad related that Allah says, ‘I am just as My slave thinks I am (that is, I am able to do for him what he thinks I can do for him) and I am with him if He remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I, too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than them; and if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running’. (1)

Surprisingly, some people do not deal with Allah *Glorified is He* seriously in the way they handle the simplest things in their lives and even their games. For example, we find that the time of the football match is set many weeks prior to its occurrence. All the people organize their times and prepare themselves to attend that match. Some people may even cancel some meetings and skip some responsibilities to spare time for the match. We are right to ask here, ‘Why do we not do this with regards to prayer? Why do we not organize our time to be able to offer the prayers in their due times?!’

In a football match, we find the referee holding his whistle and subjecting all the players to his orders. Even if he makes a wrong decision, no one can object to him. How did we change a serious matter into a game and a game into a serious matter? How did we take heed of the rules of football and forget Allah’s Way of Guidance? We invoke Allah for Pardon, to keep us in a good state and to return us to His Religion in a good way. Indeed, He is fully Able to do that and is in charge of it.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 7405; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 2/2675.*

the chapter of

al-Ma'un

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Ma‘un*(1):

أَرَءَيْتَ ٱلَّذِى يُكَذِّبُ بِٱلدِّينِ ١
فَذَٰلِكَ ٱلَّذِى يَدُعُّ ٱلْيَتِيمَ ٢

[Prophet], have you considered the person who denies the Judgment? [1] It is he who pushes aside the orphan [2] (The Quran, *al-Ma‘un*: 1-2)

The expression ‘have you considered’ could be taken literally, that is, ‘Have you [Prophet Muhammad] seen the one who denies the Judgment?’ The cause of revelation of these verses has to do with a specific incident when Abu Lahab struck an orphan and broke his hand. Other scholars believe that they might have been revealed in reference to Al-‘As ibn Wa’il or another disbeliever. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* could have seen this incident.(2)

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(1) The chapter of *al-Ma‘un* counting 7 verses and 25 words is number 107 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *At-Takathur* and before that of *Al-Kafirun* in reference to *Al-‘As ibn Wa’il.* See As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan Fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran, 1/196.*

(2) With regards to the cause of revelation of this chapter, Muqatil and Al-Kalbi hold that it was revealed in reference to Al-‘As ibn Wa’il Ash-Sahmi. Ibn Juraij narrated that Abu Sufyan ibn Harb used to slaughter two camels every week. When an orphan came to him asking for something, he hit him with a stick. Thereupon, Allah *the Almighty* revealed His saying: ‘Have you [O Prophet Muhammad] considered the person who denies the Judgment? It is he who pushes aside the orphan’ (*al-Ma’un:* 1-2). See Al-Wahidi, *Asbab An-Nuzul, 1/645.*

The Arabic letter *'hamza'* (have) in the Lord's saying: 'Have you [O Prophet Muhammad] considered…' (*al-Ma'un:* 1) is a particle of interrogation. One of the Quranic manners of expression is to mention a statement in the form of a question. This is because Allah (God)(1) *the Almighty* wants the addressee to engage in the talk. This style is common in teaching. Instead of giving the lesson in the form of statements, the teacher gives it in the form of questions posed to the students to attract their attention. This makes them partake in deducing the information. His saying: 'Have you [O Prophet Muhammad] considered…' (*al-Ma'un:* 1) could mean, 'Have you any idea?' or 'Tell me', as when one says, 'Have you any idea what happened to so-and-so?' This is actually meant in order for the listener to tell the speaker about what happened.

However, Allah *the Almighty* then offers the answer to the question, saying: 'It is he who pushes aside the orphan' (*al-Ma'un:* 2). It is as if the answer cannot be provided by human beings, and consequently He *Glorified is He* should tell us about it. This is because when we listen to the question: 'Have you considered [O Prophet Muhammad] the person who denies the Judgment?' (*al-Ma'un:* 1-2), we might understand that the one who denies the Judgment is he who does not believe in what Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has come with. However, Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us about something we may not be aware of: denying the Day of Judgment does not necessarily mean disbelieving in the Islamic Call altogether. The denier could be a believer in the Call but does not follow its Way of Guidance by obeying the commands and abstaining from the prohibitions. It is as though such a person believes with his tongue but not with his heart, or his heart is not connected to his limbs as he does not practically apply his Belief. In fact, the practical application of Belief is the criterion for true Belief because it is easy to believe but difficult to apply that Belief practically in real life.

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(1) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. But the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

In our lives, we believe in many issues but our actions prove that we are not certain about them, as in the case of death. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'There is no certainty that is mixed with doubt more than death'. Indeed, there is no doubt about death; however, man lives his life as if he will never die. Heedlessness overwhelms him until he totally forgets about complying with Allah's Way of Guidance and applying it.

Allah *Glorified is He* says here: 'Have you [O Prophet Muhammad] considered the person who denies the Judgment? It is he who pushes aside the orphan' (*al-Ma'un:* 1-2). Allah *the Almighty* answers the question Himself, affirming that even though such a person believes in the Islamic Call, his behaviour clearly indicates his weak Belief and doubt. This is the result of being heedless about the Way of Guidance due to being forgetful of the reward. If he recalled the pleasure and the reward of the good deeds, he will not fall short in doing them. Likewise, if he recalled the punishment for disobedience, he will not dare to commit any bad deed.

In this connection, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* asked Haritha: 'Haritha how is the state of your faith?' He said, 'I have become a true believer in Allah'. He described his faith as being true, which is a great matter. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* thus wanted to direct his attention to the seriousness of this answer and to the fact that the words should not be uttered without proof, saying, 'Every true matter has a proof. So, what is the proof of your true faith?' Haritha said, 'I have become indifferent to the worldly life, and its precious and trivial objects are the same for me. It is as if I am looking to the people of paradise enjoying its pleasures, and the people of hell being punished therein'. Thus, the unseen matters are no longer mere reports but rather a factual reality that this Companion actually experiences. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'You have known the way, so adhere firmly to it'.(1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Al-Harith ibn Malik Al-Ansari Allah be pleased him. See Ibn Abu Shayba, Musannaf, Hadith no. 30425; U'bd ibn Humayd, Musnad, Hadith no. 444 and 445; At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 3367; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu'ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 10107.*

Thus, the one who denies the Day of Judgment in this chapter is a believer who has faith in only the essence of the religion but does not implement it in practice. One of the descriptions of such a person is that he: '…pushes aside the orphan' (*al-Ma'un:* 2). The word *'yadu''* (pushes aside) indicates the severity and heinousness of his action. It means to push someone aside powerfully and violently. He did not repel the orphan verbally, but he repelled him by perpetuating a humiliating and painful action, though the orphan is weak and helpless. Generally, weakness is the result of the absence of the power to undertake an action or the inability to make use of energy. For example, the old person does not have the power to undertake some actions but he has a thinking mind that he can use to fulfil his purposes. As for the orphan, he possesses neither; he lacks the power and enough mental ability as he is still young. This is because he is not a mature person. That is why the scholars defined the orphan as the one whose father dies, while he has not yet reached puberty. This description is no longer applicable to him once he attains puberty.

For this reason, the matter of pushing the orphan aside is heinous and cruel, given that he is in a dire need for someone to embrace him, treat him kindly and take care of him. Furthermore, the orphan was brought into existence as one of Allah's created beings. As a result, Allah *Glorified is He* is the One Who provides him with sustenance and care during this state, be he a believer or a disbeliever. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* provides all the people with the physical means of sustenance and guarantees them for everybody.

As such, when someone takes care of a weak orphan, he thus fulfils the mission that Allah *the Almighty* wanted for him. It is true that Allah *the Almighty* is Fully Able to make the orphan self-sufficient and to provide him with a better sustenance. However, He *the Almighty* wants to see how the people show kindness to and cooperate with each other. The Lord *Glorified is He* tests some people by means of others because He *Glorified is He* wants to see the strong slaves treat the weak kindly. That is why He calls spending in His Way a '*qard*' (gift), saying: 'Who is it that will offer to Allah a goodly gift (*qard*) so He will multiply it for him many times…' (*al-Baqara:* 245).

When one gives the poor and the orphans, he offers Allah a gift, as He *the Almighty* is the One Who is in charge of providing the slaves, not you. But when the members of the society treat the orphans harshly and do not provide them with sustenance, Allah's hidden Ways of provision come into existence, providing the orphans with their needs from an unexpected source, Out of His Benevolence, Allah *Glorified is He* made our care for the orphans a means of ensuring the safety of our children after our demise. In the early age of one's lifetime, the person is preoccupied with himself–it is the most precious thing he has. If Allah *the Almighty* grants him offspring, his care will be then concentrated on them. He becomes anxious about their future and therefore collects wealth to guarantee it.

In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* shows us Divine Justice, saying, 'If one takes care of an orphan, a weak or a needy one, I will help his children after his death and will make someone take care of them'. In this regard, Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'And let those [disposing of the estate] have the same fear they will have if they left behind them weakly offspring; let them be careful of (their duty to) Allah, and let them speak appropriate words' (*an-Nisa':* 9). Thus, if one wants to be assured about the life of his children after his demise, this does not depend on a house to build, or a big amount of money to put in the bank, or to insure their life in such-and-such a company. Rather, one must depend on the Divine Insurance with Allah *the Almighty* Who is the Best Protector, a fact which is crystal clear in His saying: '…but Allah is the Best of protectors, and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful' (*Yusuf:* 64).

In the same connection, Allah *the Almighty* shows us a real incident of this Divine Insurance for the children. In the chapter of *al-Kahf*, He *the Almighty* says in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) with the righteous man: 'And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them, and their father was a righteous man; so your Lord desired that they should attain their maturity and take out their treasure–a mercy from your Lord…' (*al-Kahf:* 82). Allah *the Almighty* provided the two orphans the means to preserve their treasure due to their father's righteousness. In other words, the righteousness of the father helped his children because the Lord *the Most High* took care of his young children and prepared the causal factors that preserved their treasure through an unexpected source.

Some people may wrongly think that the matter of pushing the orphan aside is normal and not harmful. However, Allah *the Almighty* directs our attention to the seriousness and the grievousness of this action. This is because the most important thing in the life of man is to preserve his life through food and drink. The first aspect of honouring the orphan is to provide him with the basic elements of life until he reaches puberty. As for the one who pushes the orphan aside, he is a stingy person and devoid of goodness. In this connection, a proverb reads, ‘So-and-so has been lost like an orphan sitting at a stingy people’s dining table’. After this, the chapter directs our attention to another manifestation of transgression against the rights of the orphans and the needy. Allah *the Almighty* says:

وَلَا يَحُضُّ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ ٱلۡمِسۡكِينِ ٣

And does not urge others to feed the needy [3]
(The Quran, *al-Ma‘un*: 3)

Another quality of the one who denies the Day of Judgment is that he does not urge others to feed the needy. In the first incident, he pushes the orphan aside; that is to say that he does not just rebuke him when he rejects to give him what he wants. However, he transgresses against him physically, indicating that he hates the orphans and dislikes giving them anything. If one cannot give an orphan or the needy what they need, he should at least urge other people to give to them. One should at least guide them to some people who can give them. Being unable to give does not exempt you from the responsibility. If one cannot give to them, he should convince the rich people to do that.

The Quran offers an example of that in the matter of striving in the cause of Allah, which says: ‘It shall be no crime for the weak, nor for the sick, nor for those who do not find what they should spend (to stay behind), so long as they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger; there is no way (of blame) against the doers of good…’ (*at-Tawba:* 91). The one who cannot participate in fighting in the Way of Allah should strive with his tongue to urge the capable people to participate in fighting. The matter does not actually end at this point, for Allah *the Almighty* then refers to the emotional effort, saying: ‘Nor [is there blame] on those who came to you that you might carry them, when you said, “I cannot find that on which to carry you”; they went back while their eyes overflowed with tears on account of grief because they did not find anything they could spend’ (*at-Tawba:* 92). Thus, there are three stages in striving in the Way of Allah: to do that by oneself, one’s tongue or one’s emotions.

After the Quran tells us about the economic and social acts of worship, it directs our attention to a ritual act of worship, which is prayer.

Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَوَيْلٌ لِّلْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ هُمْ عَن صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ ﴿٥﴾
ٱلَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَآءُونَ ﴿٦﴾ وَيَمْنَعُونَ ٱلْمَاعُونَ ﴿٧﴾

So woe to those who pray [4] but are heedless of their prayer [5] those who are all show [6] and forbid common kindnesses[7] (The Quran, *al-Ma‘un*: 4 - 7)

The word ‘woe’ here is a threat directed to some of those who actually engage in offering prayer and who are the minority of people who believe in Allah and His Messenger Muhammad and perform acts of worship and other rituals. However, their prayer is defective, as it is not offered in the perfect way required by Allah *the Almighty*. That is why the scholars differentiate between the one who offers the prayer perfectly in compliance with Allah’s Command and the one who performs it outwardly, just imitating its movements. Truly, the difference between the two is like the difference between the form and the content.

Prayer has outer movements and an inward content in the hearts. This matter is explained in a prophetic Hadith when someone prayed outwardly in front of Prophet Muhammad by imitating the movement of Prayer. The Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, ‘Go and offer prayer, for you have not offered it’. He repeated it three times. Why is this? Because when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saw the movements of that man, he recognized that he was not offering prayer in the required way. This clearly indicates that he lacked the state of closeness to Allah and the required humbleness in the Lord’s Presence. After the third time, the man said to Prophet Muhammad, ‘By Allah, I cannot do any better than that; O Messenger of Allah, teach me’.(1)

In the chapter in question, Allah *the Almighty* threatens those who are heedless of their prayers because prayer is the pillar of the religion. If we carefully reflect on the prescribed prayers, we find them taking one hour out of twenty four hours a day. In other words, one can spend twenty-three hours in mundane affairs and one hour with Allah *the Almighty*. Logically, it is impermissible that mundane affairs consume this hour, causing heedlessness that leads directly to ‘woe’. To conclude, the saying of Allah *Glorified is He*: ‘…but are heedless of their prayer’ (*al-Ma‘un:* 5) refers to the people who offer prayer outwardly and formally without taking its inward aspects and its content into account. By doing so, they, in fact, deprive themselves of the humbleness gained by being in front of Allah, the energy obtained from faith and the Divine provisions that the worshippers are granted from their Lord *the Most High* while observing prayers.

Out of His *Glorified is He* Mercy towards His slaves, Allah *the Almighty* prescribes ‘the woe’ to those who are heedless about the prayer, not those who are heedless while offering it. That is why, when a Bedouin listened to this verse, he said, ‘All Praise is due to Allah, as He says that they are heedless of the prayer and not heedless in it’. This is because all the people may be heedless in their prayer, even the people who are humble and who fully recognize the true right of the prayer and offer it in the best way, considering it the apple of their eyes. So what should we think about the laymen who may not perform it very well?!

Undoubtedly, Satan tries to divert the human being during the prayer as Satan is in conflict with the children of Adam and even swore to tempt them and to corrupt their acts of obedience. When Allah *the Almighty* cursed him and deprived him of His Mercy until the Day of Judgment, Allah states Satan saying: ‘By Your Might, I will surely mislead them all, except Your chosen slaves among them’ (*Sad:* 82-83). This is the oath of someone who knows Allah’s Attributes and their functions perfectly. He swore by Allah’s Might, which entails His Self-Sufficiency, concerning the human beings obeying or disobeying. This is because their obedience does not avail Him, nor does their disobedience harm Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why Satan did not say, 'By Your Omnipotence and Mercy'. Additionally, if Allah *the Almighty* wants to guide any human being, Satan can never misguide him, as Satan said: '…except Your chosen slaves among them' (*Sad:* 83).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 757, 793, 6251 and 6667; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 45/397.*

Satan also threatened the human beings, saying: '…I will surely sit in wait for them on Your Straight Path' (*al-A'raf:* 16). He sits in wait for us in the mosque to divert us from the Straight Path. Furthermore, he lies in wait for us in every act of worship we do. However, he does not lie in wait at the bars, for the people who go there are not in need of his tempting or seduction.

Clearly, heedlessness necessarily happens to the person while offering prayer; this is normal and does not affect the soundness of the prayer. In fact, it is a good token of faith. What is important is not to submit to Satan and his whispers by seeking refuge in Allah *the Almighty* from him. In this connection, remember the story of Abu Hanifa when a man came to him and said, 'O Imam, I have hidden my money in a place and forgot where it is'. Abu Hanifa laughed and said, 'This matter has nothing to do with knowledge, but I will do what I can. Go and perform the late night prayer, for Allah may guide you to where your money is'. The man stood before his Lord and Satan came to corrupt his prayer, whispering to him the place of the money. The man came to Abu Hanifa to tell him what happened. Thereupon he, that is Abu Hanifa, said, 'I knew he will not let you complete your prayers at night with your Lord'.

From the above we learn that the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'So woe to those who pray but are heedless of their prayer' (*al-Ma'un:* 4-5) directs man's attention to the fact that prayer is a time one is close to Allah *the Almighty*. Consequently, he must derive benefit from it by shunning any vanity or falsehood during it. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Successful indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers and who keep aloof from what is vain' (*al-Mu'minun:* 1-3). This means any thought about anything but Allah during prayer is considered vain. After all, there is ample time for discussing mundane affairs after offering the prayers.

Next, the verses mention other descriptions of those ones who offer such a prayer, which are: '…those who [want nothing but] to be seen, and refuse common kindnesses' (*al-Ma'un:* 6-7). The one who wants to be seen perfects the prayer formally, but does not perfect its content. Such a person wants to join the group of Muslims and enjoy Islamic rights in the society, although he is not a true believer. He takes into consideration how people observe him instead of regarding Allah's Ever-watchfulness over what he does. In other words, he loves to be seen by the people when he does good deeds. He loves to be praised by them; if this was not the case, he will have hidden his deeds.

His saying: '…and refuse common kindnesses' (*al-Ma'un:* 7) mentions another physical description which is related to pushing the orphan aside. It is as if the practical acts of the religious Way of Guidance become clearly manifested in physical matters. This is because the soul loves money by nature and is keen on collecting it. If one sacrifices his wealth to carry out Allah's Obligations, then he is following the true Way of Guidance. By contrast, if one is not ready to sacrifice his wealth, he should check his faith because this means he does not closely follow the Way of Guidance.

In the case of giving the orphans and the needy, the person gives out of his money, but in the case of common kindness and assistance, one voluntarily gives what has been bought by money. For example, when one lends a small gadget to his neighbour, the neighbour can return it after he makes use of it. The one who withholds such small acts of kindness is stingier than the one who pushes the orphan aside. The Arabic word *'al-ma'un'* (small kindness) refers to the kitchenware that can be borrowed because they are not found in every house. Some of these instruments are only needed once a year, and that is why the poor people do not buy them but rather borrow them.

If we reflect on this chapter, we find it contains economic principles that sustain the continuity of life in the universe. It also refers to the spiritual part of humbleness in the prayer and closeness to Allah *the Almighty*. If these two aspects are maintained, they will reform the society and the life, as well as the ruler and the subjects. This is because they will all recognize that they worship one God. This clearly shows the harmonious relationship between the chapter of *al-Ma'un* and that of Quraysh. The latter concluded with His saying: '…Who provides them with food to ward off hunger, and security to ward off fear' (*Quraysh:* 4).

We must always remember this truth: Allah provides us with food to ward off hunger and safety to ward off fear. As one enjoys His Blessings, he should not withhold them from the orphan, the needy and the poor. One should do what Allah loves in order to receive what he loves; if he gives out wealth, Allah *the Almighty* will provide him with more wealth. For this reason, the two chapters refer to opposite positions. There is a comparison between Allah’s Generosity that provides us with food to ward off hunger and safety to ward off fear, and between the rude, unacceptable condition of the one who pushes the orphan aside, does not urge others to feed the needy, shows off when performing good deeds and forbids common kindness.

The chapter of *al-Kawthar*, which mentions another comparison, follows the chapter in question. The stinginess of the one who pushes the orphan aside and does not urge others to feed the needy is compared to Allah’s saying: ‘We have truly given *Al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]’ (*al-Kawthar:* 1). This verse refers to abundant goodness. In comparison to those who show off, sincerity is mentioned in His saying: ‘…so pray to your Lord and make your sacrifice to Him Alone’ (*al-Kawthar:* 2). In the chapter in question, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…so woe to those who pray but are heedless of their prayer’ (*al-Ma‘un:* 4-5) while He says in the next chapter: ‘…so pray to your Lord ...’ (*al-Kawthar:* 2). The former case refers to the prayer offered formally, while the latter verse refers to the prayer offered sincerely and perfectly. The objects are clarified by their opposites and the wise person should reflect on these comparisons.

We can say that Allah’s saying: ‘…so pray to your Lord’ (*al-Kawthar:* 2) is the opposite of: ‘So woe to those who pray’ (*al-Ma‘un:* 4), and: ‘…to your Lord ...’ (*al-Kawthar:* 2) is the opposite of ‘…those who [want nothing but] to be seen’ (*al-Ma‘un:* 6). When Allah *the Almighty* commands Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to offer prayer, this means that it should be done perfectly in the best possible way.

Moreover, we notice the similarity between the chapter of *al-Ma‘un* and *al-Kawthar* as they both talk about a spiritual matter, which is prayer, and a material, economic aspect, which is spending. We invoke Allah *Glorified is He* to direct us to the Right Path, to guide us towards Him and His pleasure as honoured slaves, and not make His Obligations heavy on us, Amen!

the chapter of

al-Kawthar

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Kawthar* (1):

إِنَّآ أَعۡطَيۡنَٰكَ ٱلۡكَوۡثَرَ ١

We have truly given abundance to you [Prophet] [1]
(The Quran, *al-Kawthar:* 1)

The relation between the chapter of *al-Ma'un* and that of *al-Kawthar* is one of comparison. In the former chapter, the Quran talks about the one who denies the Judgment, pushes the orphan aside and does not urge others to feed the needy. Moreover, it talks about showing off and stinginess to the extent of withholding even kitchenware. By contrast, the chapter of *al-Kawthar* mentions sincerity in worship as the opposite of showing off and giving wealth as the opposite of stinginess and withholding the small kindnesses.

In the chapter in question, Allah (God) (2) *the Almighty* wants to correct the earthly standards, replacing them by the heavenly ones, and people's standards, replacing them by the right ones, because the former standards are various and contradictory. As for the standard of the Truth, it is only one which has a single way of Guidance that has no contradictions at all. People’s standards are deduced from their abilities, smartness and awareness about matters. Yet, as they differ due to their different whims, Allah *the Almighty* wanted to return us to His Standard and Way of Guidance.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Kawthar,* counting 3 verses and 10 words, is number 108 in the order of the *Mushaf* (the written copy of the Quran) and is the shortest chapter in the Quran. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-'Adiyat;* it refers to Al-'As ibn Wa'il who described Prophet Muhammad's lineage, after the death of his son, 'Abdullah, as cut off.

(2) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. But the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

The cause of revelation of this chapter is clarified through our awareness of the nature of Arab life in the pre-Islamic era. One of the aspects of their life was taking pride in sons and abundant offspring. They regarded the son a natural extension of the family after the death of its older members. That is why they used to say, ‘The one who does not have a son will not be remembered’. This shows they cared about the lineages and even memorized them by heart. When Prophet Muhammad’s sons died, the disbelievers wrongly rejoiced at his lineage being cut off. In their opinion, if his sons had not died, they will have taken up the banner of his Call after his death. Accordingly, when his sons died, the disbelievers said, ‘Leave him [Prophet Muhammad] as his lineage is cut off; his mention will end with his death and his Call will cease to exist’.

This happened in the Meccan era of the Call. When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* immigrated to Medina, Allah *the Almighty* granted him Ibrahim, his son from Mariya. In this way, Allah *the Almighty* refuted the claim of the disbelievers. However, when Ibrahim died, they repeated their claim. That is why some exegetes hold that the chapter of *al-Kawthar* was revealed twice, once in Mecca and once in Medina, following the disbelievers’ statements at each time.

Allah *the Almighty* wanted to correct the misunderstanding of those people and to eliminate their ignorant standards. The correct standard in this regard is clearly manifested in the fact that the lineage of the Messengers and Prophets is not their sons but rather the believing followers of their Call who take up its banner and sacrifice their lives for it. This is the lineage endorsed by Allah *the Almighty*. Although Prophet Muhammad’s biological lineage was cut off by the death of his sons, his lineage is continuous through a countless number of his followers who conveyed his Call and obeyed his commands during and after his death, and who will continue to do so even up to the coming of the Hour. In this regard, I appreciate the statement of one of the Orientalists who said, ‘I am amazed by Muhammad; he still rules millions of people while he is dead in his grave’. This is the real mention that never ends. The stubborn disbelievers in Prophet Muhammad’s Call should consider the fact that their sons–whom they considered an extension to their mention–abandoned and disowned them. Their sons believed in Prophet Muhammad and obeyed him, sacrificing their souls and wealth for his Call. Furthermore, they considered their disbelieving fathers their enemies. Therefore, the chapter of *al-Kawthar* corrects the earthly standards, replacing them with the heavenly ones.

The Quran actually addresses this matter in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), *peace be upon him*. Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And [remember] when his Lord tried Ibrahim (Abraham) with certain words, which he fulfilled. He [Allah] said, “Surely, I will make you an Imam of men”. Ibrahim said, “And of my offspring?” He said, “My covenant does not include the unjust”’ (*al-Baqara:* 124). The unjust people can never be Imams or good examples for others to follow, even if they belong to the lineage of the Messengers and the Prophets. Indeed, the true offspring is that of faith.

Likewise, the Quran discusses this matter in the story of Prophet Nuh (Noah) *peace be upon him* and his son. Allah relates: ‘And Nuh (Noah) called out to his son, who stood aloof, “O my son! Embark with us and do not [stay] with the unbelievers”. He said, “I will betake myself to a mountain that shall protect me from the water”. Nuh (Noah) said, “There is no protector today from Allah's punishment except for those on whom He has mercy”…’ (*Hud:* 42-43). Being the son of Prophet Nuh did not even protect him, and a wave intervened between them, making him one of those who drowned. Afterwards, Prophet Nuh invoked his Lord: ‘My Lord! Surely, my son is of my family, and Your Promise is surely true…’ (*Hud:* 45). The promise here is about saving his family. However, Allah *the Almighty* corrects Nuh’s standards in judging the matter, saying: ‘O Nuh (Noah)! Surely he is not of your family; surely he is (the doer of) other than good deeds…’ (*Hud:* 46). Allah *Glorified is He* set right the human standard and affirmed that the sonship on the part of the Prophets is that of obedience and faith, and not that of lineage.

According to this standard, Prophet Muhammad's offspring are countless; his mention will remain forever and his name will continue to be repeated to the end of time. It is sufficient for him that his name is said alongside Allah's Name. Every mue'dhdhin calling for prayer says, 'I bear witness that there is no god but Allah. I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. O you who say that Muhammad's lineage is cut off, is there a mention better than this one?! It is these disbelievers whose lineage has been cut off. The chapter in question mentions the high rank of Prophet Muhammad in the Hereafter. We have fully recognized this fact in the worldly life as an unseen matter which has been reported to us. When the Hereafter comes, all what has been reported to us will become a reality.

In this chapter, Allah *Glorified is He* wants to offer solace to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and to alleviate the effect of the disbelievers' statement. That is why He *the Almighty* addresses the Prophet, saying: 'We have truly given *al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*al-Kawthar:* 1). The One Who gives here is Allah *the Almighty* the one given that reward is Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and the reward is *al-Kawthar* (a river in paradise). The word *al-Kawthar* means an abundant goodness that is great and encompasses all aspects of abundance, like wealth, power, health, children, etc.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'We have truly given *al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*al-Kawthar:* 1) means that Allah *the Almighty* has given Prophet Muhammad abundant goodness and even more. This includes all the abundant kinds of graces and what is even more. For this reason, it is narrated that Anas *Allah be pleased with him* said about Prophet Muhammad, 'One day the Messenger of Allah was sitting among us and then he dozed off. He then raised his head, smiling. We said, "What makes you smile?" He *peace and blessings be upon him* said, "A chapter has just been revealed to me", and then he recited: "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. We have truly given al-Kawthar to you [O Prophet Muhammad]" (*al-Kawthar:* 1). Then Prophet Muhammad explained, "Do you know what al-Kawthar is?" We said, "Allah and His Messenger know best". He said, "It is a river in paradise which my Lord has given me. Its water is whiter than milk and its taste is better than honey… the one who drinks from it will never be thirsty again"'.(1)

However, Muslim scholars differ as to the meaning of *al-Kawthar* as follows: Ibn 'Abbas said, 'It is a river in paradise'. Based on this opinion, it is as if *al-Kawthar* is an abundant, great object and the river is part of it. But why did Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* interpret *al-Kawthar* as a river? This is because the people might have interpreted it as prophethood, the Quran being given to him or even the high rank he was given by his name being mentioned in the two Testimonies of Faith. All these meanings were already known to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Consequently, he interpreted *al-Kawthar* as a river because it is the new meaning that was unknown to him, since it was an unseen matter. That is, he did not interpret it as a tangible matter but as an unseen one that he perceived through revelation.

The word *Kawthar* may not mean what is additional to abundant goodness but rather refers to gathering all the aspects of this abundant goodness. In this sense, it refers to prophethood, the Revelation, the Quran, raising Prophet Muhammad's reputation and increasing the number of his followers who mention his name and draw close to Allah by invoking blessings upon him. This word actually bears all these meanings, which are known to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Besides, he added the meaning that was reported to him from Allah *the Almighty* that is, *al-Kawthar* is a river in paradise. He was keen on clarifying this new meaning by asking the Companions, 'Do you know what *al-Kawthar* is?' He wanted to clarify its meaning as intended in the chapter in question because it is different from the linguistic meaning which was known to them. For this reason, he said, 'It is a river in paradise which Allah *Glorified is He* has given me'.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. In the Hadith the Prophet Muhammad said, 'It (Al-Kawthar) is a river which my Lord has promised me, and there is an abundance of good in it. It is a cistern and my people will come to it on the Day of Resurrection. The [number of] tumblers there will be equal to the number of stars. A slave will be turned away from (among the people gathered there). Upon this I will say, "My Lord, he is one of my people," and He (the Lord) will say, You do not know that he created new things (innovations in Islam) after you"'. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 53/400.*

In the verse in question, Allah *the Almighty* wants to confirm the matter of giving Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that abundant reward. That is why He does not say, '*Al-Kawthar* was given to you [O Prophet Muhammad]', but rather: 'We have truly given *al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*al-Kawthar:* 1). The Doer of the action was stressed to confirm the action. When you find that the plural pronoun 'We' is used to refer to Allah *the Almighty* you should know fully well that it is followed by a great, mighty action, as this pronoun of glorification should be naturally followed by a great matter. His saying: 'We have truly given...' (*al-Kawthar:* 1) indicates clearly that this reward is proportional to the Giver, and His Omnipotence and Power over His Kingdom.

For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says about the Quran: 'Surely, We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian' (*al-Hijr:* 9). The pronoun of glorification (We) is mentioned twice in this verse to indicate a great action that requires many Divine Attributes, like Power, Wisdom, Might, Giving and Withholding. That is, the pronoun 'We' gathers all the Attributes that the action needs. Allah *the Almighty* possesses all the Attributes of Perfection. By contrast, when He *Glorified is He* talks about monotheism or worship, He employs a singular pronoun, saying, for example: 'Surely I am Allah, there is no god but I, therefore serve Me …' (*Ta Ha:* 14). Here, He does not say, 'We are Allah', because He *the Almighty* is referring to something concerning His Essence, which is One, and thus the singular pronoun is appropriate.

In the verse in question, Allah's saying: 'We have truly given...' (*al-Kawthar:* 1) indicates that this Bestowal from Him is eternal, everlasting and ceaseless, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'What is with you passes away and what is with Allah is enduring…' (*an-Nahl:* 96). The Lord *the Almighty* does not give from a limited amount that can run out and come to an end; rather, His Treasuries are full and everlasting. This is because Allah *the Almighty* is the Everlasting and the Provider of sustenance. This means His Bestowal is abundant and unfailing; it is neither cut off nor exhaustible.

Next, Allah *the Almighty* says:

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَٱنْحَرْ ﴿٢﴾

So pray to your Lord and make your sacrifice to Him alone [2] (The Quran, *al-Kawthar:* 2)

Using the imperative form, after Allah's saying: 'We have truly given *al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*al-Kawthar:* 1), is natural in this context. As a matter of fact, the process of the Divine Bestowal on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* entails a Giver, a person who is given and a reward. The Giver is Allah *the Almighty* the one who is given is Prophet Muhammad, and the reward is abundant good. The Grace of Allah *the Almighty* suits His Unlimited Giving. As such, it is an endless, unfailing Giving. It derived its abundance and comprehensiveness from the Giver *Glorified is He*. Hence, the Bestowal here is proportional to the Giver.

Due to these abundant, great blessings, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So pray to your Lord and make your sacrifice to Him Alone' (*al-Kawthar:* 2). This command is related to fulfilling the due right of the Giver and then spending from the abundant good. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has been commanded to carry out such actions as a result of these blessings which were given to him; he should mention the blessings of the Giver *Glorified is He* devote his worship to Him and draw close to Him. Consequently, with regards to Allah's saying: 'So pray to your Lord...' (*al-Kawthar:* 2), it means that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* should at least be connected to the Giver by offering prayer and thanks to Him due to His Blessings.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and make your sacrifice to Him Alone' (*al-Kawthar:* 2), sacrifice is a way of spending from what the Giver has given Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…and give them from the wealth of Allah which He has given you…' (*an-Nur:* 33), and: '…do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you…' (*al-Qasas:* 77). That is, just as the Lord *Glorified is He* has given you, extend your bestowals to other people.

Giving from the bestowals related to what the soul deeply loves and tends to stingily refuse to give is very heavy on the soul. It is easy for the person to help the people with his knowledge, effort or time. However, it is difficult for him to spend from his wealth, as the soul loves money deeply and clings to it. Furthermore, when a scholar answers a question, his knowledge does not decrease; rather, it increases and becomes firmer. By answering the questions, the scholar takes a high position with Allah and in the people's eyes yet without losing anything, for his knowledge remains.

On the contrary, the one who gives from his money transmits part of his wealth to the given person, and that is why spending is a heavy matter on the soul. No one can do that except the people of faith and piety who have a strong relationship with Allah and put their trust in Him, firmly believing that He is the Original Giver. Consequently, the believer gives out of reassurance about the recompense of the Giver Who provides endlessly. He is connected to the Giver who bestows in proportion to His Abilities, and he waits for Allah's Bestowal that befits His Abilities.

In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Allah helps His slave as long as he helps his brother'.(1) Moreover, righteous people have said, 'I made the people become used to receiving my bestowals and Allah made me become used to receiving His Bestowals. And I do not want to stop what I usually give to the people so that Allah will not withhold what He usually gives to me'.

Scholars hold two views about this verse in question. Some of them opine that it is a general verse referring to prayer and slaughtering the animal in general. Some others maintain that it is revealed specifically in reference to the *Eid* Prayer and the sacrificing of *Al-Udhiya* (sacrificial animal). The latter opinion limits the application of the command in the verse while it is actually general. Prophet Muhammad's relationship with Allah is not only based on carrying out the Divine Obligations; rather, he *peace and blessings be upon him* reached the highest rank of closeness to Allah. Prophet Muhammad has a high rank as a Messenger who delivers a Message to the people and as a Prophet who has special privileges granted by Allah *Glorified is He*.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 7427, 7701, 7942, 10496 and 10667; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 225; Abu Dawud, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4946 and At-Tirmidhi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 1425, 1930 and 2945.*

The follower of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* can worship Allah *the Almighty* through the prescribed obligations and then voluntarily offer additional acts of worship. These acts of worship are more expected from Prophet Muhammad himself. Allah *the Almighty* prescribed two kinds of worship on him *peace and blessings be upon him*. The first kind is shared by all his followers, which is embedded in the Message he was commanded to convey to the people. The other kind of worship was special for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* himself as a Prophet. It consisted of the religious obligations he was commanded to carry out himself without conveying them to his followers. An example of this is his saying, 'Should I not be a thankful slave of Allah)?'(1)

In the chapter under discussion, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'So pray to your Lord and make your sacrifice to Him Alone' (*al-Kawthar:* 2). This verse refers to offering prayer and sacrificing in general. As Allah *the Almighty* has given Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* an abundant, unlimited reward, we should not limit the application of the commands to a specific prayer and sacrifice.

We have previously said that *al-Kawthar* also means the prophethood, messengership and the Quran. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not preserve this reward for himself but rather has given it to his followers. Indeed, he gave a share of every honour which Allah *the Almighty* granted to him to his followers. Consequently, it is not befitting here to limit the broad meaning that Allah *the Almighty* intends as a general, abundant reward befitting the abundant provision. As the abundant reward is comprehensive, the prayer should be offered frequently whenever one's soul inclines to offer it, be it obligatory or supererogatory.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and make your sacrifice to Him Alone' (*al-Kawthar:* 2), it means to do the act of Sacrifice whenever one has the ability to do it, be it in the prescribed time of *Udhiya* or any other time. This ensures that the required acts of worships suit the given bestowals. As *al-Kawthar* is as an abundant, endless good, the prayer should also be offered frequently in order that one has a continuous relationship with Allah *the Almighty*.

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(1) *Al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba narrated that Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings be upon him used to offer night prayers till his feet became swollen. Somebody said to him, 'Allah has forgiven you your faults of the past and those that will follow'. On that he said, 'Should I not be a thankful slave [of Allah]?' See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 1130, 4836 and 6471; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 79/2819.*

After this, the Lord *the Most High* says:

إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ ٱلۡأَبۡتَرُ ۝٣

It is the one who hates you who has been cut off [3]
(The Quran, *al-Kawthar:* 3)

The verse means that the lineage of the one who hates Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be cut off. We have talked about the cause of revelation of this chapter. It was revealed to correct the human standard by endorsing Allah’s Standard, that is, the real mention is not maintained by the lineage but rather by the person’s lofty reputation and actions. In this sense, Prophet Muhammad’s lineage is not cut off because he will be continuously mentioned among his followers. The one who accused him of this description is the one whose lineage will be cut off.

Prophet Muhammad’s mention has remained on his followers’ tongues and in their hearts, even after his death–in every call to Prayer and in every moment his name is mentioned. Whenever we mention his name or one of his rulings, we say, ‘Peace and blessings be upon him’. How can his lineage be cut off?! The mention of any disbeliever only lasts as long as their children remember him in the worldly life. As for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* he will continue to be mentioned until the coming of the Hour and even to the Hereafter. Moreover, his mention will be raised on the Day of Judgment over all the humanity, from Adam to the coming of the Hour. All the Prophets will refuse to intercede on behalf of the people, except Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. This means his mention will transcend his followers to include the people before him and after him.

We notice that the Quran responds to the one who accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* of this description in a special manner. It does not state, ‘Muhammad has not been cut off’; rather it says:

‘We have truly given *al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]’ (*al-Kawthar:* 1). The one given the *al-Kawthar* can never be cut off. It is enough compensation that he *peace and blessings be upon him* was given that reward in return for the disbelievers’ description of him with this quality.

Moreover, Allah’s expression transcended this point to include another aspect, that is, the opponent who slandered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and harboured hatred and grudge against him. Allah *Glorified is He* responds to him, saying: ‘It is the one who hates you who has been cut off’ (*al-Kawthar:* 3). The Lord *Glorified is He* describes such a slanderer with that of which he falsely accused Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Thus, there is a double benefit here, which is refuting the accusation against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and describing his slanderer himself with that quality.

Let us reflect on the Quranic expression: ‘It is the one who hates you …’ (*al-Kawthar:* 3). Such a person hated Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a person, not because of the Way of Guidance or the Call with which the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* was sent. That is why the disbelievers said: ‘And they say, “Why was this Quran not revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?”’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 31) They hated Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a person. We may ask why. This is because the Quran overwhelmed them with its argument and proof. They failed to defame it by saying it is poetry, sorcery, soothsaying, etc. After they could not find any fault in the Quran, they accused and slandered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. For this reason, they fully recognized that the Quran was sent down by Allah, which is why they, as clearly mentioned in the Quran, said: ‘If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country…’ (*al-Qasas:* 57).

Their hatred and grudge against Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* proved that their views were contradictory. Before being sent as a Messenger, they loved Prophet Muhammad and called him, ‘the truthful, honest person’. They entrusted their wealth to him and highly respected him. However, after the coming of the Message, they harboured grudge and hatred against him.

When the Quran addresses Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘It is the one who hates you who has been cut off’ (*al-Kawthar:* 3), it responds to the disbelievers with what they accused the Prophet of; the children they took pride in and regarded as an extension of their mention in the worldly life will rebel against them and pledge loyalty to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. Their love for Prophet Muhammad will raise his mention, and not that of their disbelieving fathers.

This is what really took place as many of their sons, like Khalid, ‘Amr and ‘Ikrima, embraced Islam. Khalid did not take pride in Al-Walid, and ‘Ikrima did not take pride in Abu Jahl. That is to say that they did not take pride in their fathers and lineages. Rather, they took pride in and were loyal to Islam and to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is as if their real fathers did not belong to their lineage or even play a part in their lives.

The books of history relate that when ‘Ikrima was fighting with Khalid ibn Al-Walid in the battle of Al-Yarmuk, he was stabbed. When he lay on his deathbed, he was only pre-occupied with Prophet Muhammad and if the Prophet was pleased with him. He said to Khalid, ‘Do you think my way of death makes Prophet Muhammad pleased with me?’ Where, then, is the mention of his father, Abu Jahl? Who, then, is the one whose lineage has been cut off?!

The ruling in Allah’s saying: ‘It is the one who hates you who has been cut off’ (*al-Kawthar:* 3) is applicable in any situation as long as its cause exists. Anyone who hates Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will be cut off. This ruling is not confined to the cause of revelation of these verses. Rather, it is general, as consideration is given to the generality of the wordings and not the specificity of the cause of revelation.

But what if the one who hated Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* embraced Islam, became a good Muslim, and loved the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him*? Scholars say that the existence and the absence of the ruling depend on its cause. Thus, the description of being cut off is eliminated for such a person as his hatred for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* has ceased to exist. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘Embracing Islam cancels what precedes it’.(1)

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(1) *See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 17813 and 17827; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan Al-Kubra, Hadith no., 18290, and Dala’il An-Nubuwwa, 4/343.*

However, the verses apparently indicate that those persons referred to who slandered Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will die in a state of disbelief. The description in the verses in question will not be negated from them. It is as if the verses allude to this fact. This is what actually happened in reality. The disbelievers like Al-Aswad ibn Al-Muttalib, Umayya ibn Khalaf, Al-‘As ibn Wa’il and Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughira died in a state of disbelief.

the chapter of

al-Kafirun

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Kafirun*⁽¹⁾:

قُلْ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ ﴿١﴾ لَآ أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾
وَلَآ أَنتُمْ عَٰبِدُونَ مَآ أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَآ أَنَا۠ عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدتُّمْ ﴿٤﴾
وَلَآ أَنتُمْ عَٰبِدُونَ مَآ أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِىَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

Say [Prophet], 'Disbelievers [1] I do not worship what you worship [2] you do not worship what I worship [3] I will never worship what you worship [4] you will never worship what I worship [5] you have your religion and I have mine [6]
(The Quran, *al-Kafirun:* 1- 6)

We have concluded from the chapter of *Al-Kawthar* that the people are of two kinds: those who are cut off from Allah (God)(2) in the worldly life and the Hereafter and those who are connected to Him *Glorified is He* in both of them. These are antithetical types which cannot have the same way in

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Kafirun*, counting 6 verses and 27 words, is number 109 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Ma'un* and before that of *Al-Fil*. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said that the one who reads this chapter is similar to the one who reads one-quarter of the Quran. See At-Tabarani, *Al-Mu'jam As-Saghir, Hadith no. 165.*

(2) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. But the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

their lives, creed, rituals, worship and approach, followed when interpreting events or principles.

Next, the chapter of *Al-Kafirun* clarifies the distinction between both types and separates them. This is what is diplomatically called ‘cutting the relations’, meaning that there is no room for reconciliation or concessions. However, cutting the diplomatic relations could be temporary due to a current situation that might foster a good relation later on. In the future, some developments may lead to re-establishing diplomatic relations. This is due to the fact that people’s conditions are always changing because they cannot control events. In other words, their thoughts change because they do not know future events. As for Prophet Muhammad, he is connected with Allah *the Almighty* and this enabled him to be steadfast concerning his actions and principles. For example, when Prophet Muhammad conveys a matter to do with the creed, he cannot change it because it has come from Allah *the Almighty* and not from him *peace and blessings be upon him*.

It is as if the matter of reconciliation with the disbelievers has been decisively rejected and is not negotiable, either in the present or in the future. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says here: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “O Disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship”’ (*al-Kafirun:* 1-2). We are fully aware of the fact that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* holds the opposite stance of the disbelievers; he will not worship what they worship either in the present or the future. Scholars say that the cause of the revelation of this chapter is that the disbelievers offered for them to worship Allah for one year and for Prophet Muhammad to worship their idols for another year, or for the Prophet to prostrate to their idols in return for them prostrating to Allah. That is to say that they wanted to divide the worship according to the time, or the time according to the worship.

The matter is related to worship, which is the essence of matters in the creed and is thus not prone to change, unlike some other religious legislations. This is due to the fact that all the Messages from Adam to Prophet Muhammad unanimously agree about worshipping Allah *the Almighty* Alone, without any partner. This fact never changes according to the change of conditions, situations or legislations. It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is saying to the disbelievers, ‘The matter is not negotiable, for I did not initiate my worship of Allah by myself, my ideas and ways. By contrast, you invented the worship of idols by yourselves. As such, my soul took no part in initiating my worship of Allah while your souls play a part in your worship of idols. Moreover, did I worship your false deities before being sent as a Messenger in order for you to hope I will worship them now after being sent to you with a Way of Guidance based on worshipping Allah Alone without no partner?! Accordingly, the disagreement is not between you and me but rather between you and Allah, for I am only a conveyer of His Message. If you want to negotiate this matter, do that with the One Who has this right. I do not have the right to set the rulings of worship as you have set the rulings for worshipping idols. You are free to change your falsehood, but I am not free to change my worship, as I am a conveyer of a Message on behalf of Allah’.

For this reason, the Quran employs the imperative, ‘say’, to clearly indicate that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* firmly adheres to the exact saying of Allah *the Almighty* when conveying the Message. If the Quran had said, ‘Disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship’, then this will also mean that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* conveys this Message from Allah *the Almighty*. However, the imperative ‘say’ is used to signify that this ruling is not that of Prophet Muhammad; rather, he conveys it from Allah *the Almighty*.

Furthermore, the disbelievers’ negotiating with him *peace and blessings be upon him* over worshipping their idols for one year and Allah for another is unacceptable. This is because they were fully aware of Allah’s Divinity, as the Quran relates: ‘And if you should ask them who created them, they will certainly say, “Allah”…’ (*az-Zukhruf:* 87), and: ‘And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say, “Allah”…’ (*Luqman:* 25). This means they fully recognized the true God, but Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not recognize the divinity of their idols. As the two stances are not equal, how can negotiation be possible?!

We should note the structure used in Allah’s saying: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “O (*ya*) Disbelievers”’ (*al-Kafirun:* 1). Calling someone using the Arabic particle *‘ya’* (O!) could be used as a form of respect or to humiliate the person. This is because this particle is used to call a person who is far away. It is used as a form of respect for the one having a high rank, and to humiliate the one who is distant from Allah *the Almighty*. For example, when Allah *the Almighty* addresses Prophet Muhammad, saying, ‘O Messenger’, or ‘O Prophet’, this indicates his lofty rank. As for Allah’s saying: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “O Disbelievers”’ (*al-Kafirun:* 1), this is a form of humiliation due to them being far away from Allah *the Almighty*.

Allah’s saying: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “O Disbelievers”’ (*al-Kafirun:* 1) is a way of attracting their attention, because Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* went to their gathering and wanted to declare he had severed relations with them. Prophet Muhammad called them in order that they will pay attention to him. Then he *peace and blessings be upon him* labelled them with the awful description, ‘disbelievers’. He did not say, ‘Those who disbelieve’, as they were not believers earlier. That is, their disbelief is an inherent description of them.

The word ‘disbelief’ alludes to the natural disposition of Belief because the former means to cover and conceal something. It is as if disbelief conceals the obvious Belief. The human being is a believer by nature, but disbelief may inflict him and conceal his belief. As disbelief came after Belief, then the disbelievers changed the Way of the Messengers that naturally corresponds to the natural disposition.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘I do not worship what you worship. You do not worship what I worship’ (*al-Kafirun:* 2-3), it means that in the present time there is no way of reconciliation from both sides. This is because their perception of divinity is totally different from that of Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. While his way of guidance is from Allah, they set a way for themselves. This situation is not reconcilable because this requires that both parties change their stance. This is only possible between the people; however, with regards to Allah’s Way of Guidance, Allah *the Almighty* is Unchangeable. It is the human beings who should change for the sake of Allah *Glorified is He* and not vice versa.

As for Allah’s saying: ‘I will never worship what you worship. You will never worship what I worship’ (*al-Kafirun:* 4-5), it refers to future time. Thus, there is no hope for resuming negotiations, for the severing of relations is continuous, both in the present and the future. Negating that they have Belief, even in the future, alludes that they will not believe and will die in a state of disbelief. That is why the chapter in question is concluded with Allah's saying: 'You have your religion and I have mine' (*al-Kafirun:* 6), which clearly indicates that the two parties will never reconcile concerning the issue of worship.

However, the difference referred to in the Lord's saying: 'You have your religion and I have mine' (*al-Kafirun:* 6) is confined to those who negotiated with Prophet Muhammad from the disbelievers, apart from the other disbelievers and their offspring. That is why this chapter was followed by that of *An-Nasr* to give the glad tiding that the people will embrace Allah's Religion in crowds, including even the disbelievers' children and grandchildren. This means that disbelief will come to an end and will not continue to confront the camp of Belief all the time. Indeed, a time will come when the religion will be one–for Allah *the Almighty* Alone. This is because Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'When Allah's Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*an-Nasr:* 1) in order to give us the glad tiding and reassure the believers' hearts that the ultimate outcome will be the victory of the true religion; and the historical events proved this fact.

the chapter of

an-Nasr

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *an-Nasr*(1):

إِذَا جَآءَ نَصۡرُ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡفَتۡحُ ﴿١﴾ وَرَأَيۡتَ ٱلنَّاسَ يَدۡخُلُونَ فِي
دِينِ ٱللَّهِ أَفۡوَاجٗا ﴿٢﴾ فَسَبِّحۡ بِحَمۡدِ رَبِّكَ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡهُۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ تَوَّابَۢا ﴿٣﴾

When God's help comes and He opens up your way [Prophet] [1] when you see people embracing God's faith in crowds [2] celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance [3] (The Quran, *an-Nasr*: 1 - 3)

The chapter of *An-Nasr* is harmoniously related to the end of the chapter of *Al-Kafirun*. When Allah (God)(2) *the Almighty* says: 'You have your religion and I have mine' (*al-Kafirun:* 6), this constitutes a final severing of relations with the disbelievers. However, we should not think that the condition will remain like that, that is, with a disbelieving group who has cut themselves off from Allah and a believing one connected with Him *Glorified is He*. The chapter of *An-Nasr* tells us that Allah's Religion will be victorious and the people will embrace His religion in crowds. Ultimately, the disbelieving camp will come to an end.

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(1) The chapter of *An-Nasr*, counting 3 verses and 19 words, is number 110 in the order of the *Mushaf.* It was revealed in Medina after the chapter of *At-Tawba*. It was revealed after the Liberation of Mecca.

(2) The Islamic concept of 'Allah' is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of 'God'. But the word 'Allah' does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use 'Allah' rather than 'God' as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

Allah *the Almighty* ordered the chapters of the Quran logically, in order for them to harmoniously correlate with each other. Every chapter is harmonious with the one before it. The Lord *Glorified is He* says at the beginning of this chapter: 'When Allah's Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad], and when you see people embracing Allah's Religion in crowds' (*an-Nasr:* 1-2). This is a glad tiding for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* during the most difficult times of the Call when his followers were being severely prosecuted by the disbelievers. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* unveiled the unseen for him and showed him the imminent victory of his followers. Then He *Glorified is He* commands Prophet Muhammad to praise Him *Glorified is He* and seek His Forgiveness as a way of thanking Him for granting victory to this religion and making its word uppermost.

We know that the prophecies and the glad tidings tell us about future events. Information about the unseen is frequently mentioned in the Book of Allah. We have said that the Unseen has three aspects: one related to the place, another to the past and a third to the future. These factors prevent the human being from knowing the unseen. As for the Creator, these factors are not applicable to Him, for nothing is hidden from Him at any place or time.

The Quran discusses the issue of the past when it addresses Prophet Muhammad, saying: 'And you did not recite before this any book, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand, for then could those who say untrue things have doubted' (*al-'Ankabut:* 48). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* did not previously know about the events that happened earlier; he neither heard nor read a book about them. Accordingly, his knowledge about these past events comes from Allah *the Almighty*.

That is why the phrase: 'you were not' has been repeated in the Quran to emphasise this matter, as in His saying: 'And you were not on the western side when We revealed to Musa (Moses) the commandment, and you were not among the witnesses' (*al-Qasas:* 44), as well as: '…and you were not dwelling among the people of Midyan…' (*al-Qasas:* 45), and: '…and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Mariam (Mary)…' (*Al-'Imran:* 44). Thus, the knowledge received from Allah *the Almighty* unveiled one side of the unseen that the people of falsehood could never doubt when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* told them about it. This is because they knew for sure that he could not read or write and that no one could tell him about these events. Accordingly, it was clear that his only source was Allah *the Almighty*.

Likewise, Allah *Glorified is He* removed the veil of place and informed Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about some unseen matters, as in His saying: 'Have you not seen those who are forbidden secret counsels but then return to what they were forbidden. And they hold secret counsels to [commit] sin, revolt, and disobedience to the Messenger [Muhammad]. And when they come to you they greet you with a greeting with which Allah does not greet you, and they say in themselves, "Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?"...' (*al-Mujadala:* 8) This verse discusses a matter in the present that was veiled from Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* with the veil of place, for how could he know their private talks and their inward speech?! However, Allah *the Almighty* told the Prophet about that. This is an uncovering of the veil of place that veils and covers present events.

As for the veil of the future, the future events are uncontrollable. This is because their events depend on many elements that control them, like the doer, the object of the action, the cause and the effective power. In reality, man does not possess or guarantee any of these elements. Therefore, how can he guarantee all of them in order for the event he prophesised to come to pass? The Quran teaches us to be courteous when we speak about the future and even sets the precautionary measure that protects us from telling lies, saying: 'And never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow", except [when adding], "If Allah wills"…' (*al-Kahf:* 23-24). Adding Allah's Will is a way of referring all the elements of the events to the One Who possesses them. The future with regards to Allah *Glorified is He* is like the past. This means that if Allah *the Almighty* tells us about a future event, it will inevitably come to pass, as if it has already happened. An example of this is the use of the past tense in His saying about the Day of Judgment: 'Allah's Commandment has come, therefore do not desire to hasten it…' (*al-Isra':* 1).

In the chapter of *An-Nasr*, Allah *the Almighty* tells Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* about the future of his Call, affirming its victory and that it will become established and be triumphant–after the oppression, persecution and besiege of the believers. During that straitened state, they had almost lost hope of victory. However, out of the overwhelming darkness comes the light of the daybreak; the revelation descends on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: 'When Allah's Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad], and when you see people embracing Allah's Religion in crowds, exalt and praise your Lord and plead to Him for forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance' (*an-Nasr:* 1-3).

Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* will never risk his Call by prophesizing some events that will not come to pass. He did not prophesise the victory of his Call except when he became sure about this reality through revelation. In other words, it is the revelation that assured Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* that his Call will eventually be victorious. We know for certain that no power can oppose Allah *Glorified is He* or even repel the action He wills. When Allah's saying: 'When Allah's Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*an-Nasr:* 1) was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, it became part of the Quran which is recited and reading it became an act of worship. It is as if Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recorded this prophecy for himself only because he was absolutely sure it will come to pass; if it did not come to pass, the Caller and the Call will both come to an end.

The saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When Allah's Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*an-Nasr:* 1) is one of the signs of prophethood because it was revealed before the realization of victory and the Opening of the gates of Mecca. This chapter has a hidden and apparent meaning. We want to know the meaning of *'nasr'* (victory), *'fath'* (opening the city gates), *'tasbih'* (glorification), *'tahmad'* (praising), *'istighfar'* (seeking forgiveness) and *'tawba'* (repentance). We want to know the apparent and the hidden meaning of this chapter.

We say that 'victory' indicates there was fighting between two groups in a battle whose outcome is the victory of one group and the defeat of the other.

As for *'al-fath'* (opening of the gates), it refers to people embracing Islam without any fighting happening. That is, the verse gives Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* the glad tidings of both victory and the opening of the gates. The former indicates power and the latter indicates peace. One may say, 'The opponents of Prophet Muhammad accepted the status quo and had they confronted him, they will have defeated him'. To conclude, the Divine Wisdom entailed giving two kinds of support for Prophet Muhammad's Call, one in times of peace and another in times of war.

For this reason, if we review the history of the Islamic Call, we find that it spread all over the world in a way unmatchable by any other call throughout history. This spread entailed two aspects: the military power of the liberators, and the principles and values that attracted the people to Allah's Religion. They considered the Call a way of salvation from their corrupt state. Even the Arab tribes surrounding Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula were waiting for the end of the conflict between Quraysh and Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. They said, 'Let us wait; if Quraysh defeats him, they will stop him on our behalf. But if he becomes victorious, we will follow his Call for in such a case it is the Truth'. After the victory of Prophet Muhammad, they hastily embraced Allah's Religion in crowds. Before that, they were disunited. To conclude, the victory is related to the battlefield while the opening of the gates is related to people embracing Islam without any fighting happening.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and when you see people embracing Allah's Religion in crowds, exalt and praise your Lord and plead to Him for His Forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance' (*an-Nasr:* 2-3). In this regard, Aisha narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to frequently say near the end of his life, 'Allah is Perfect and His is the praise. I seek Allah's Forgiveness and I turn to Him in repentance'. Telling about the reason why he frequently said this statement, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'My Lord has told me that I will see a sign among my followers. He commanded me to exalt and praise Him and to plead to Him for Forgiveness when I see it. I have already seen it'. He then recited: 'When Allah's Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*an-Nasr:* 1).

Exalting Allah *the Almighty* means holding Him far above the attributes that do not befit Him, which are the fluctuating attributes of the created beings. As for praising Him, it means to mention His Attributes of Perfection and Benevolence. That is, exalting means negating flaws, while praising means affirming the Attributes of Perfection.

With regards to Allah's saying: 'Exalt and praise your Lord' (*an-Nasr:* 2), the formula of praising Him is not set by human beings. This is because praising Allah *the Almighty* requires awareness of His Attributes, in order to be able to praise Him using appropriate descriptions of Him. Praising also entails using the manner of expressions that befits this matter. But who can fully comprehend the excellence of Allah's Attributes? If one were able to comprehend them, will he be able to use the manner of expression befitting the praise of the Lord of Might and Majesty?! Of course, no one can do that. Thus, out of Allah's Mercy, He taught us how to praise Him, which is to say, 'All Praise is due to Allah'. In other words, Allah *the Almighty* taught us how to praise Him and did not let our different ways of expression and abilities in using the language dictate how to praise Him *Glorified is He*. If this was not the case, what sin will the illiterate person or the child have committed to not be able to express his praise of Allah *the Almighty*? By Allah teaching us how to praise Him, the eloquent people have no privilege over other people with regards to praising the Lord *the Most High* because He has set the formula for all people.

Therefore, His saying: 'Exalt and praise your Lord…' (*an-Nasr:* 3) means that we should praise Him using the expression He has prescribed. That is why Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to invoke Allah saying, 'I cannot enumerate Your Praises for You are as You have praised Yourself'.(1) Another possible interpretation is that we should praise Him along with exalting Him.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…and plead to Him for Forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance' (*an-Nasr:* 3). It is known that the reason for the command should suit the command itself, which is why the statement in question should have been as follows, ‘Ask His Forgiveness because He is All-Forgiving’, or, ‘Repent to Him because He accepts repentance’. However, the verse was not revealed in this way. We may ask why. Scholars say that this a rhetoric style in which two subjects are mentioned, each one of them having two elements. The context mentions one element of each subject and omits its opposite, as in His saying: ‘Indeed, there was a sign for you in the two hosts which met together [in combat]: one party fighting in the way of Allah and the other unbelieving …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 13).

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Malik, Muwat', Hadith no. 620; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 24312; and Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3841.*

The implicit meaning of the verse is that there is one party fighting in the Way of Allah and another fighting in the way of Satan. Moreover, we have a believing party and a disbelieving one. The Quranic context omitted the attribute ‘believing’ from the first party, only mentioning that it ‘fights in the Way of Allah’. However, it mentioned the attribute ‘unbelieving’ and omitted ‘fighting in the way of Satan’ for the second party. Every mentioned element indicates the omitted one. The attribute ‘unbelieving’ indicates the omission of ‘believing’, and ‘in the Way of Allah’ indicates ‘in the way of Satan’.

Likewise, His saying: ‘…and plead to Him for Forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance’ (*an-Nasr:* 3) implicitly means, ‘Plead to Him for Forgiveness because He is All-Forgiving’, and, ‘Repent to Him because He *the Almighty* accepts repentance’. The elements that are mentioned indicate the omitted ones. This style is called *‘ihtibak’*. One statement refers to both repentance and pleading for forgiveness. The difference between repentance and seeking forgiveness is that the latter is related to a sin committed by the person and for which he asks his Lord for forgiveness. As for repentance, it means to return to one’s Lord with the determination not to return to the acts of disobedience.

But what is the relationship between the conditional clause and the main clause in His saying: ‘When Allah’s Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad], and when you see people embracing Allah’s Religion in crowds, exalt and praise your Lord and plead to Him for Forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance’ (*an-Nasr:* 1-3)? The entire chapter consists of a conditional clause and its result. When Allah’s Help leading to victory comes and He opens up the gates of Mecca for you, O Prophet Muhammad, and you see people embracing Allah's Religion in crowds, then exalt and praise your Lord. This is because the believer recognizes Allah's Favours and Attributes blessings to Him *Glorified is He* Alone, not to himself. A person is actually like a farmer who brings the grains, puts them in the soil and irrigates them–all of these elements are created by Allah. Then, he takes care of the plants with his effort, firmly believing that they were granted to him by Allah; he does not forget the One Who subjected all these elements to him. When he proceeds to work, he says, 'In the Name of Allah'. This entails that he does not depend on his power or knowledge, but rather on Allah's Omnipotence which subjected these elements to him.

This is the believer's way concerning his activities in life. Beware of attributing any success to yourself, your power and skills; rather, you should thank Allah and praise Him for granting you that success. When one appreciates the fruit of his work, he should say, 'It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power save with Allah'. In this way, the believer is connected to his Lord at the beginning and at the end of the work. That is why it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad said, 'Every action that is not started by saying, "In the Name of Allah", is cut off' (1). It means that that action will be devoid of any blessing. As for the one who takes pride in his power, skill and knowledge, he is like Qarun, who Allah states saying: 'I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have…' (*al-Qasas:* 78).

Allah *the Almighty* refers to these matters in the chapter in question, commanding Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to remember his Lord by praising and exalting Him, and to ask Him *the Almighty* for forgiveness when he sees the fruit of being granted success, victory and the opening of the city gates. The human soul cannot guarantee that it will not be inflicted with heedlessness and bad thoughts that entail seeking forgiveness. This is the case with Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* when he was deceived by the large number of the Muslim army at the battle of uhud and said, 'We will not be defeated today due to our small number'. However, they suffered a defeat at the hands of the disbelievers.

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(1) *While discussing this Hadith, Ahmad ibn Hanbal said that one of the narrators is a very weak narrator. In one narration, the chain of narrators is interrupted, and a Hadith with an interrupted chain is one of the categories of weak Hadiths. But the meaning of the Hadith is acceptable and applicable. See https://islamqa.info/en/146079.*

That is, Allah's saying: 'Exalt and praise your Lord…' (*an-Nasr:* 3) means to elevate Him *Glorified is He* as He is too great to have any peer. He is the real Doer of all actions. One's role is to be a causal factor by which the actions are brought about. For example, if a soldier said, 'I killed so-and-so', we find that he did not do that in reality because it is the sword, for example, that killed that person. The soldier attributed this action to himself because the sword was the instrument he used to carry out the action. Likewise, the human being is like an instrument controlled by Allah *the Almighty*. That is why Allah *Glorified is He* says: 'It is not you who slew them, but it was Allah Who slew them, and you did not strike when you struck (the enemy), but it was Allah Who struck…' (*al-Anfal:* 17), and: 'Fight them, Allah will punish them with your hands …' (*at-Tawba:* 14).

To sum up, the meaning of the verse is that we should seek Allah's Forgiveness for evil thoughts, like thinking we have a role to play in any action. With regards to Prophet Muhammad, the meaning could be that he should seek His Forgiveness due to the thought that might have come to him before liberating Mecca concerning the delay of the victory while the believers were on the right path. Likewise, 'Umar *Allah be pleased with him* said, 'Why should we put a blot upon our religion?' This was an objection to the Divine Way. That is why Abu Bakr said to him, 'You should follow him (Prophet Muhammad) 'Umar because he is Allah's Messenger'. Seeking forgiveness does not necessarily entail committing sins for which one seeks Allah's pardon. It is required for the like of these thoughts, as in the case mentioned in His saying: '…that even the Messenger [Muhammad] and those who believed with him cried, "When will the help of Allah come?"...' (*al-Baqara:* 214) This statement indicates that their souls had become straitened and they wanted victory to come soon. Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Until when the Messengers despaired [of their people] and realized that they had been dismissed as liars…' (*Yusuf:* 110). They should seek Allah's Forgiveness for such thoughts.

Another possible interpretation is that seeking forgiveness is meant to elevate the rank of Prophet Muhammad. There is a verse in the Quran that refers to this elevation in ranks of faith, which is His saying: ‘On those who believe and do good there is no blame for what they eat when they are careful (of their duty) and believe and do good deeds, then (*thumma*) they are careful (of their duty) and believe, then (*thumma)* they are careful (of their duty) and do good (to others)…’ (*al-Ma‘ida:* 93). Using the conjunction *‘thumma’* (then) refers to an elevation from one rank to another. It is as if the believer is always elevating in the ranks of faith; whenever he reaches one rank, he looks forward to another, considering the previous one a shortcoming and a sin. This means seeking forgiveness in the verse refers to elevating ranks, as the good deeds of the righteous people are considered the misdeeds of the people who draw close to Allah *the Almighty*.

There is a very important point which we can learn from this verse; if Allah *the Almighty* directs an address to Prophet Muhammad, but it is not logically acceptable for it to be directed to him *peace and blessings be upon him* it means it is directed to the believers, as in His saying: ‘O Prophet [Muhammad]! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah and do not comply with (the wishes of) the unbelievers and the hypocrites; surely Allah is All Knowing, All-Wise. And follow what is revealed to you from your Lord; surely Allah is Aware of what you (people) do’ (*al-Ahzab:* 1-2). The Quran gives us principles and rulings in a form of an address to Prophet Muhammad who conveys the Message on behalf of Allah. If the address were only directed to him, the previous verse will have been concluded with Allah’s saying, ‘of what you (O Prophet) do’, using the singular form of the verb, and not with His saying: ‘…Allah is Aware of what you (people) do’ (*al-Ahzab:* 2), using the plural form.

This is the apparent meaning of the chapter of *An-Nasr* that all the readers of the Quran can easily understand. However, there is a hidden meaning for this chapter to which its words implicitly allude. The deduction of that meaning needs deep reflection; in fact Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Do they not then meditate on the Quran?’ (*an-Nisa’:* 82) Meditation entails delving into the apparent words to attain new meanings, instead of focusing only on the apparent ones. One should care fully reflect on the verses from all angles to deduce their hidden meanings. In this regard, Ibn Masu‘d *Allah be pleased with him* said, ‘Ponder deeply on the Quran to extract its meanings’. (1) This means that we should reflect on its different styles to be fully able to derive new meanings, just as we extract treasures from the earth.

In this connection, Imam Al-Bukhari recorded that Ibn ‘Abbas *Allah be pleased with him* and his father, said, ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab used to make me sit with the elderly men who fought in the Battle of Badr. Some of them were uncomfortable with that (as he, that is Ibn ‘Abbas, was young at the time) and they said to ‘Umar, “Why do you bring this boy to sit with us while he is like our sons?” One day, ‘Umar *Allah be pleased with him* called me and made me sit in the gathering of those people; and I think that he called me just to teach them. ‘Umar then asked them, “What do you say about the interpretation of the saying of Allah: ‘When Allah’s Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]’ (*an-Nasr:* 1). Some of them said, “We are ordered to praise Allah and ask His Forgiveness when His Help and Conquest come to us”. Some others kept quiet and did not say anything. On that, ‘Umar asked me, “Do you say the same, O Ibn ‘Abbas?” I replied, “No”. He asked, “What do you say then?” I replied, “That is the sign of the death of Allah’s Messenger (Muhammad) of which Allah informed him. Allah said: ‘When Allah’s Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]’ (*an-Nasr:* 1). The victory and the opening of the gates of Mecca indicate the end of Prophet Muhammad’s mission and the completion of the religion. Nothing remains for him except going to the Hereafter, which is better for him than this worldly life”. With that ‘Umar said, “I do not know anything about it other than what you have said”’. (2)

This is what really happened. When this chapter was revealed, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* summoned Fatima *Allah be pleased with her*. He secretly told her something that made her weep and then something else that made her laugh. Afterwards, Umm Salama said, ‘When Prophet Muhammad died, I asked Fatima about what he had told her secretly. She said, “He told me that Allah’s saying: ‘When Allah’s Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammed]' (*an-Nasr:* 1) declares the end of his lifetime, so I wept. Then he told me that from among his family, I will be the first to join him, so I laughed"'.(1) We understand from Fatima's laughter that death is not something evil, as we wrongly think. It does not make us non-existent, but rather, it is the gate to an eternal, greater life. Once the slave dies, he meets the people he loved and to whom he was close. Moreover, he finds the introductory recompense of being shown his reward in the grave until the Day of Judgment takes place when he will receive his actual, everlasting reward.

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(1) *See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Kabir, p. 8666; and Ahmad, Az-Zuhd, 229/854.*

(2) *See Al-Maturidi, Ta’wilat Ahl As-Sunna, 1/210.*

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(1) A'isha *Allah be pleased with her* said, 'During his last illness, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called his daughter Fatima and told her a secret because of which she started weeping. Then he called her and told her another secret, and she started laughing. When I asked her about that, she replied, "Prophet Muhammad told me that he will die as he was fatally ill, and so I wept. But then he secretly told me that from among his family, I will be the first to join him, and so I laughed"'. *See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4433; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 6954; and Al-Baghawi, Sharh As-Sunnan, Hadith no. 3959.*

the chapter of

al-Masad

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Masad* (1):

تَبَّتۡ يَدَآ أَبِي لَهَبٖ وَتَبَّ ١ مَآ أَغۡنَىٰ عَنۡهُ مَالُهُۥ وَمَا كَسَبَ ٢

May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined
too! [1] Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him [2]
(The Quran, *al-Masad*: 1-2)

The Quran continues to penetrate the veil of the future. It talks in the chapter of *Al-Kawthar* about *Al-Kawthar* that Allah (God)(2) *the Almighty* has given to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. It is concluded by declaring that the one who hates him, that is Prophet Muhammad, is cut off. After this, it tells us about the victory that was granted to the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* in the worldly life: ‘When Allah’s Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]’ (*an-Nasr:* 1).

It is expected that the Quran then gives us another example of the one who hates Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. The example that was chosen from among those who expressed their absolute hatred for Prophet Muhammad and his Call this time was one of his kinsfolk and family. This clearly indicates that the religious relationships are not based on kinship and genealogical relations. The religion cannot be established through nationalism and tribal loyalty. Having sonship and kinship relationships with the Prophets and Messengers depends on believing in their Call, as the stories of the son of Nuh (Noah), the wife of Lut (Lot) and the wife of Pharaoh definitively proved. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'Salman belongs to us, the household of the Prophet'.(1)

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Masad*, counting 5 verses and 29 words, is number 111 in the order of the *Mushaf* (the written copy of the Quran). It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *al-Muddaththir* and before that of *At-Takwir*. See As-Suyuti*, Al-Itqan Fi ‘Ulum Al-Quran. 1/24.*

(2) The Islamic concept of ‘Allah’ is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of ‘God’. But the word ‘Allah’ does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use ‘Allah’ rather than ‘God’ as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

Therefore, the Quran chooses Abu Lahab, Prophet Muhammad's uncle, to be an example of those who hate him *peace and blessings be upon him* and his Call. The verses revealed about him, that is Abu Lahab, became an ever-lasting part of the Quran that the people recite day and night and will continue to recite until the coming of the Day of Judgment. These verses constitute a promise of punishment and perdition for him.

The Quran penetrates the veil of the future when it gives the news about Abu Lahab's ultimate fate in the Hereafter while he was still alive in the worldly life. It gives this prophecy about him while he was in the stage of free choice and was able to repent from his stubborn disbelief.

Informing about future events could be related to a result of power or knowledge. But what is the difference between these two? A result of power is manifested in the case when one controls another one's food because he imprisoned him somewhere and gave him only one kind of food, for example. In actuality, it is through this power and domination over that imprisoned person that he can say that he will not eat except that kind of food tomorrow. This is an example of a result of power.

A result of knowledge, on the other hand, is manifested in the case when one leaves a person to freely eat any kind of food but knows for sure what he will eat, saying, 'He will eat such-and-such tomorrow'. This prophecy is based on knowledge that he will not choose anything except that kind of food. The prophecy, based on knowledge, is related to the actions that the power does not compel someone to do. This knowledge penetrates the veil of the future and is only attributed to Allah *the Almighty*. This is the case in the story of Abu Lahab; the Quran penetrates the veil of the future, declaring that he and his wife will die in a state of disbelief and will eternally burn in the flaming fire of Hell.

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(1) *See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 6040; and Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 6539 and 6541.*

It is important here to note that Abu Lahab was one of many opponents of the Call at that time. Although most of them later believed and became good Muslims, he remained a disbeliever and died in such a state. Some of these opponents, like ‘Umar ibn Al-Kattab, Khalid ibn Al-Walid and ‘Amr ibn Al-‘As, became Muslim leaders when their hearts inclined to Islam and declared their Belief in Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him*.

But why does the Quran specifically give the aforementioned prophecy about Abu Lahab while he was only one of these many opponents?! Although he heard and understood that prophecy, he kept on disbelieving and was not deterred against disbelief. Had he pronounced the two Testimonies of faith or hypocritically embraced Islam, he will have put Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* in a difficult situation and accused the Quran of telling lies. However, this prophecy is based on Allah’s Omniscience and the absolutism of His Power and Knowledge that penetrate all veils. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* informed us about the ultimate fate of Abu Lahab and his wife apart from the rest of the people.

The books of Prophet Muhammad’s biography relate that Abu Lahab opposed him from the very beginning of the Call when Allah *the Almighty* commanded the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* saying: ‘And warn your nearest kinsmen’ (*ash-Shu'ara’:* 214). Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ascended As-Safa and called out, ‘O people! Come at once!’ Consequently, the Quraysh gathered before him. He said, ‘Do you think that if I informed you that the enemy was preparing to attack you in the evening or in the morning, will you believe me?’ They said, ‘Yes. You have never told us lies’. He said, ‘Then, I am a warner for you of the coming of a severe punishment’. To this Abu Lahab replied, ‘Is it for this that you gathered us? May you perish?’(1) Due to this statement, the chapter in question was revealed in reference to him.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas in Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 4770 and 4971; and also Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 355/208.*

Moreover, Abu Lahab used to track Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessing be upon him* whenever he presented himself to the Arab tribes to call them to believe in Allah's Religion. He, that is Abu Lahab, used to belie the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* before these tribes. In this regard, Rabi'a ibn 'Ubaid said, 'I was a young man with my father when I saw Prophet Muhammad presenting Islam to the tribes while he was being tracked by a tall, handsome man with a forelock. Prophet Muhammad used to stop to talk to the tribe, saying, "O tribe of so-and-so, I am Allah's Messenger to you all. I command you to worship Allah and not to associate anyone with Him. I want you to support and protect me, as you protect yourself, in order that I deliver what I was sent with to you". When Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* ended his statement, the man tracking him used to say, "O tribe of so-and-so, this man came to make you abandon your worship of al-Lat and al-'Uzza and your allies from the jinn from Banu Malik ibn Aqish. He wants you to follow his innovation and errors, do not listen to or obey him". I asked my father, "Who is that man?' he said, 'He is his [Prophet Muhammad's] uncle"'.

By this we see that Abu Lahab exceeded all the limits in his disbelief; he was not satisfied with only his disbelief and that of his wife, rather, he barred the people from following Allah's Religion and opposed the Call of Prophet Muhammad. When the believers were boycotted and Banu Hashim was besieged in Shai'b Abu Taleb, no one belonging to Banu Hashim supported the boycott except Abu Lahab, who pledged to stand on the side of Quraysh in their boycott and blockade of Banu Hashim.

The chapter of *al-Masad* handles this situation and gives the aforementioned prophecy about Abu Lahab and his wife, stating: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he too be ruined!' (*al-Masad:* 1) The Arabic word *'tabb',* which the word '*tabbat*' (to be ruined) comes from, refers to ruin, destruction and perdition. The 'hands' here indicate the whole body because most of the actions are done with the hands. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'This is because of the [unrighteous deeds] which your own hands have sent before you…' (*Al-'Imran:* 182).

In the chapter under discussion, Allah *Glorified is He* rebuts Abu Lahab's supplication to ruin Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. If Abu

Lahab had been able to ruin the Messenger, he will have done this. He only harbours hatred for the Truth and can do nothing but supplicate. Such a supplication indicates that he can neither harm Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* nor ruin him. Amazingly, he, that is Abu Lahab*,* invokes Prophet Muhammad's Lord to ruin the Prophet. In fact, the truth overwhelms Abu Lahab and makes him contradict himself. It is a contradiction between careful consideration and whims; between reason and senselessness. Therefore, his supplication against Prophet Muhammad is regarded as lies, idle talk and meaningless speech.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he too be ruined!' (*al-Masad:* 1), the Speaker is Allah Who is fully Able to execute His Prophecy. No one can repel His Decree or modify His Prophecy. Accordingly, the One Who has the Absolute Power to ruin and destruct is He Who says: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he too be ruined!' (*al-Masad:* 1) Allah *Glorified is He* has given that Prophecy and is fully Able to execute it. That is why this Prophecy has been recorded in the Quran whose recitation is an act of worship and which will continue to be recited until the Day of Judgment.

We should not understand 'the ruin' in the verse in question as a supplication against Abu Lahab. Abu Lahab considered it to be the case, but with regards to Allah, it is a prophecy and decree that will inevitably be executed. After all, a supplication may or may not be answered, but this decree is a reality as Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'May he too be ruined!' (*al-Masad:* 1) with the verb in the past tense to indicate its realisation, even in the worldly life.

Despite his prestigious position, high rank and power among his people in the worldly life, Abu Lahab suffered a humiliating death that was unexpected for even a man with the lowest rank in the Meccan community. It is documented that he suffered an infectious disease called Al-'Adsa that made the people feel repulsed by him and not approach him. He remained in that state for three days until he died. The people could not wrap him with a shroud, so they dug a hole for him and used sticks to push his body into it. Afterwards, they covered the hole with pebbles that they threw from a far distance. This humiliating way of burial affirms Allah's saying: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he too be ruined!' (*al-Masad:* 1) Thus, this Divine Decree was applicable in the worldly life before the Hereafter.(1)

In this connection, we should relate the story of 'Utba and 'Utayba, the two sons of Abu Lahab, who married Prophet Muhammad's two daughters, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum, before the Prophet became a Messenger. Abu Lahab said to his sons, 'You do not belong to me if you do not divorce Muhammad's daughters'. Thereupon, 'Utba divorced Ruqayya, but 'Utayba said, 'I will not divorce her (Umm Kulthum) until I harm her'. He passed by Prophet Muhammad and said to him, 'I have divorced my wife', spitting in his direction. Thereupon, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* supplicated against him, saying, 'May one of Allah's dogs devour you'.(2)

When Abu Lahab and his son, 'Utayba, set out on a commercial journey to Ash-Sham, they wanted to sleep during the night. Abu Lahab knew the place they had chosen was a home for lions. Consequently, he feared the realization of Prophet Muhammad's supplication against his son. He said to the people, 'Help me to avert Muhammad's supplication'. So they surrounded his son to protect him. Despite that, a lion came and seized him from their midst, and Prophet Muhammad's supplication was truly fulfilled. Naturally, Allah's dog must be a lion, at least; if a simple object is attributed to Him *Glorified is He,* it becomes great.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…neither his wealth nor his gains will help him' (*al-Masad:* 2), the ruin of Abu Lahab also extends to his wealth and gains. This is because they were the source of his haughtiness to the extent that he said, ‘By Allah, if what my nephew says is true, I will ransom myself with my wealth and children’. Hence, Allah *the Almighty* rebuts his statement by emphasizing that his wealth and children will neither avail him nor repel His Punishment.

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(1) *See At-Tha'labi, Al-Kashf Wa Al-Bayan, 4/335; see also Siraj Ad-Din Ad-Dimashqi, Al-Lubab Fi 'Ulum Al-Kitab; and Al-Alusi, Ruh Al-Ma'ani, 10/534.*

(2) 'Utayba ibn Abu Lahab divorced Umm Kulthum, Prophet Muhammad's daughter, and went to the Prophet, saying, 'I have disbelieved in your religion and divorced you daughter. There is no mutual love between us'. Then he attacked Prophet Muhammad and tore his shirt. Thereupon, the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I invoke Allah to dispatch a dog against him'. This Hadith is narrated by Al-Haythami who attributed it to At-Tabarani through a loose (*Mursal*) chain of narrators, saying, 'One of the narrators is Zuhayr ibn Al-A'la', who is a weak narrator'. It was also narrated by Al-Hakim on the authority of Abu 'Aqrab. He graded this Hadith as authentic, while Ibn Hajar graded it as good. *See Al-Bayhaqi, Dala'il An-Nubuwwa, 2/338-229; Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, 2/539;* and Ibn Hajar, *Fath Al-Bari, 4/39.*

Scholars hold two views about this verse. The first is that the wealth refers to the original property that man possesses or the inheritance which one gets after the death of particular members of his family. This is actually the origin from which the gains mainly stem, exactly like the trees that bear fruit or the animals that breed. The other view is that the gains here refer to his children, as Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The best (most pure) food that a man eats is that which he has earned himself, and his child (and his child's wealth) is part of his earning’.(1)

Other scholars opine that Abu Lahab had done a favour to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* before being selected as a Messenger and similarly he did a favour to Quraysh. He said, ‘My favour on Muhammad will help me if he defeated Quraysh. As for my favour on Quraysh, it will be beneficial if they defeat him’. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘…neither his wealth nor his gains will help him’ (*al-Masad:* 2).

This decree concerning Abu Lahab was a future event in the worldly life, a present event and also a past one that we related. The people transmitted it according to what Allah *the Almighty* had informed them about that tyrannical disbeliever. Next, the verses direct our attention to the Divine Punishment prepared for this man in the Hereafter:

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of ‘Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 22, 24, 24957 and 25845; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 2137; and An-Nasa’i, Sunnan .*

سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ ﴿٣﴾ وَٱمْرَأَتُهُۥ حَمَّالَةَ ٱلْحَطَبِ ﴿٤﴾
فِى جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍۭ ﴿٥﴾

He will burn in the Flaming Fire [3] and so will his
wife, the firewood-carrier [4] with a palm-fibre rope
around her neck [5] (The Quran, *al-Masad*: 3-5)

These verses discuss unseen matters that will be seen only in the Hereafter. Allah *the Almighty* proves the truthfulness of these unseen matters using the tangible ones we see in the worldly life. With regards to the Hereafter, Allah also says: '…Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a Witness over all things?' (Fussilat: 53) It is an adequate proof of the truthfulness of a report that Allah *the Almighty* is the One Who conveys it.

The Arabic prefix of the letter '*sin'* (will), which indicates the future and is used here before the verb 'burn', is employed in discussing the future events of the Hereafter: 'He will burn in the Flaming Fire' (*al-Masad:* 3), This event will remain a future one until the establishment of the Hour. Out of Allah's Wisdom, He *the Almighty* mentions the perceivable, tangible matters first in order to constitute a proof of the unseen ones.

Then the context of the verses turns our attention to the wife of Abu Lahab, who is Arwa Bint Harb ibn 'Umayya, the sister of Abu Sufyan. She held a high rank among her people and played a role in confronting the Islamic Call and harming Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*. She did not depend in standing against Prophet Muhammad and his Call just on the efforts of her husband and brother, who were two of the dignitaries. She did not want Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* to take their position, and therefore harboured envy and grudge against him. For this reason, after the verses tell us about the fate of Abu Lahab, they tell us about the fate of his wife who took part in harming Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* stating: '…and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a tightly twisted rope of palm-fiber around her neck' (*al-Masad:* 4-5).

Scholars interpret this verse to literally mean that Abu Lahab's wife used to carry firewood and throw it in Prophet Muhammad's way to hurt him. That firewood must have been a thorny one that she had selected to harm him *peace* *and blessings be upon him*. It is important to know that Abu Lahab was Prophet Muhammad's neighbour.

Another possible interpretation is that the 'firewood' metaphorically refers to calumny. This is because Arwa used to go about spreading calumnies among the people to rouse hostilities between them. That was the 'firewood' by which she burned herself and the people around her. She was also infamous for being envious. In fact, calumny and envy are two of the most serious causes of provoking hostility among the people. The literal and the metaphorical meaning of 'firewood-carrier' are both acceptable.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…with a tightly twisted rope of palm-fiber around her neck (*jeed*)' (*al-Masad:* 5), the Arabic word *'jeed'* refers to the neck and the place of the necklace. The Arabs use this word to praise others and describe beauty, as a poet once said,

Her neck (jeed) is of a moderate height

It is full of jewelry and necklaces

As for the neck of Abu Lahab's wife, it will be decorated with a rope of palm-fiber; it is a rough fiber which will be tied firmly around her neck. The fiber of the palm-tree is naturally rough and it will be tightly woven to become a rope tied around the neck. You should ponder on that humiliating and degrading fate after the great honour and high rank she held among her people. It is as if her punishment suits her crime; the rope with which she used to tie a pack of firewood will be tied tightly around her neck.

Moreover, there is a harmonious relationship between the meanings and the words used to describe them. This actually enhances the portrayal of the fate of these two examples of Prophet Muhammad's enemies. For example, the word *'lahab'* (flame) corresponds to the name 'Abu Lahab', which has become the name of 'Abd Al-'Uzza because he had a red face that looked like a flaming fire. His punishment was not different from that portrayal: 'He will burn in the Flaming Fire' (*al-Masad:* 3). This is not a coincidence; it is rather preciseness in the portrayal of the meaning, for it is Allah *the Almighty* Who is speaking.

Likewise, the Quran says about the firewood-carrier's punishment: '…with a tightly twisted rope of palm-fiber around her neck' (*al-Masad:* 5).

The word *'tabb'* (perish) means cutting off with force, like the strength and might by which the rope of the palm-fiber is woven Thus, the sentences and the words are miraculously, eloquently, rhetorically and harmoniously related to the meaning they convey. Glorified is the One to Whom these words belong. We seek refuge in Him *Glorified is He* from His punishment, torment and the evil of His slaves!

the chapter of

al-Ikhlas

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Ikhlas* (1):

قُلْ هُوَ ٱللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ١ ٱللَّهُ ٱلصَّمَدُ ٢
لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ٣ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌۢ ٤

Say, 'He is God the One [1] God the eternal [2] He begot no one nor was He begotten [3] No one is comparable to Him' [4] (The Quran, *al-Ikhlas*: 1-4)

We have noticed that the chapters of the Quran are harmoniously related to each other; every chapter is coherently related to the one following it. For example, the chapter of *Al-Ma'un* gives us an example of withholding common kindness: '…those who [want nothing but] to be seen and forbid common kindnesses' (*al-Ma'un:* 6-7). After it, the chapter of *Al-Kawthar* gives us an example of unlimited giving: 'We have given *Al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*al-Kafirun:* 1). It concludes by mentioning the punishment of the one who hates Prophet Muhammad, stating: 'It is the one who hates you who has been cut off' (*al-Kafirun:* 3).

The word *al-Kawthar* gathers all the aspect of goodness and proves that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who was given *Al-Kawthar*, has come with a Way of Guidance from Allah *the Almighty*. This is because *Al-Kawthar* is an unfailing bestowal in both the worldly life and the Hereafter. It can also carry the meanings of a river in paradise, prophethood, wisdom, the Quran, Belief and Islam. The river of paradise is only a part of *Al-Kawthar*.

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Ikhlas*, counting 4 verses, is number 112 in the order of the *Mushaf*. It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *An-Nas* and before that of *An-Najm*. It has about 20 different names and it was narrated that its recitation equals the recitation of one-third of the Quran.

As the context of the chapter of *Al-Kawthar* is about the Way of Guidance and the one who hates Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* it is expected that the Quran then makes a distinction between the two camps: the believing one that supports Prophet Muhammad and the disbelieving one that hates him *peace and blessings be upon him* and the Divine Way of Guidance. For this reason, the chapter of *Al-Kafirun* follows *Al-Kawthar* to make such distinction and severe the relations between the two groups. The differences between them cannot be reconciled, either in the present or in the future. The chapter concludes with Allah's saying: 'You have your religion and I have mine' (*an-Nasr:* 6). This verse means that Prophet Muhammad and his Companions are on one side, following one religion, and those who hate him and disbelieve in his Call are on another side, following their false religion.

This clearly shows that this condition of the force of disbelief confronting that of Belief will not continue, for the Truth will triumph and defeat falsehood. That is why the chapter of *An-Nasr* followed *Al-Kafirun* to define and highlight the end of falsehood: 'When Allah's Help [leading to victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] your [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*an-Nasr:* 1). After this, the chapter of *Al-Masad* gives us an example of ruin that suits Allah's saying: 'It is the one who hates you who has been cut off' (*al-Kafirun:* 3). Likewise, the victory in His saying: 'When Allah's Help [leading victory] comes and He opens up [the gates of Mecca for] you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*an-Nasr:* 1) is in keeping with His saying: 'We have given *Al-Kawthar* to you [O Prophet Muhammad]' (*al-Kafirun:* 1).

Furthermore, we notice that the chapter of *al-Kafirun*, which was concluded with His saying: 'You have your religion and I have mine' (*an-Nasr:* 6) is associated with the chapter of *al-Ikhlas*, though it does not follow it directly. Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* used to recite the chapter of *Al-Kafirun* in the first unit and *al-Ikhlas* in the second unit of the two recommended units of prayer during the time of *Al-Fajr;*(1) in the two recommended units of prayer after the Sunset Prayer; in the Sunset Prayer on Friday night;(1) and in the Dawn Prayer of the traveler. This is because these two chapters represent true, pure monotheism by negating Divinity from anyone other than Allah *the Almighty* and ascribing it to Him *Glorified is He Alone*. His saying: ‘I do not worship what you worship’ (*al-Kafirun:* 1) negates the Divinity of any other false deity; and His saying: ‘Say, “He is Allah, the One”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1) affirms Allah’s Divinity.

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(1) *A Hadith to that effect is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 98/726; Abu 'Uwana, Mustakhraj, Hadith no. 2163; and Al-Hakim, Al-Mustadrak, Hadith no. 1645.*

Monotheism is all about negation and affirmation. The statement of monotheism contains negation in the phrase ‘there is no god’, and an affirmation in the phrase ‘but Allah’. Affirmation only comes after negation, as the legal maxim states that warding off harm takes precedence over bringing about benefit. If we reflect on the phenomenon of negation and affirmation or matters being positive and negative, we find it common throughout the physical world. For example, the light powered by electricity needs positive and negative elements. Likewise, all the atoms in existence do not fulfil their function except through this phenomenon.

The statement of monotheism ‘there is no god but Allah’ contains many secrets and spiritual mysteries that can be uncovered by the people who are knowledgeable of Allah. One of them used to invoke Allah to remain alive until he finishes saying the statement of monotheism, out of fear of dying after pronouncing the phrase ‘there is no god’. This shows how careful they were about that statement and also their fear of sudden death. One of them said, ‘The worship starts with saying that there is no god but Allah’. This is the general starting point for all people. After being elevated in the ranks of Belief, one will only say, ‘but Allah’, as in His saying: ‘…Say, “Allah”, then leave them sporting in their vain discourses’ (*al-An‘am:* 91). This means that the one who reaches a lofty rank in Belief does not need to negate the Divinity of any other god. This is because he cannot imagine at all that there is a partner with Him, so why should he say, ‘There is no god but Allah’? This is true in the sense that it is wrong to negate a flaw about someone that can never have such an error. For example, it is wrong to say about a pious person, 'He does not drink wine', for although the action is negated, this statement alludes that he may drink it.

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(1) *A Hadith to that effect is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn Samura Allah be pleased with him. See Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 1841; Al-Bayhaqi, As-Sunnan As-Sughra, Hadith no. 640; and Al-Baghawi, Sharh As-Sunna, 3/81.*

The chapter of *Al-Masad* is placed between *Al-Kafirun* and *Al-Ikhlas* because it is related to the chapter of *al-Ikhlas,* and there is also another harmonious relationship between them in Allah's saying: 'May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he too be ruined!' (*al-Masad:* 1). Linguistically, this verse constitutes a supplication. A supplicant naturally invokes the one who can answer his supplication. This is the case with human beings. As for Allah *the Almighty* such expressions are not supplications, but rather statements from Him Who taught us how to invoke Him *Glorified is He*. As Allah *the Almighty* decreed to ruin Abu Lahab, this will inevitably come to pass; He says: '…May he too be ruined!' (*al-Masad:* 1) This affirms that the Decree has been executed. Moreover, the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas* follows *Al-Masad* to emphasise this fact: 'Say, "He is Allah, the One"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). The One Who decreed this and made that declaration has no partner and no one can repel His Decree or dispute over it. That is, the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas* affirms that the decree concerning Abu Lahab is irrevocable.

The chapter of *Al-Ikhlas* has many honours, one of which is the multiplicity of its names, like *Al-Ikhlas* (Sincerity)*, Al-Iman* (Belief)*, Bara'a* (Freedom)*, At-Tawhid* (Monotheism)*, At-Tafrid* (Unique)*, Al-Mubara'a* (Proclamation of Innocence)*, Al-Mu'arrifa* (the Knowledge of Allah)*, Al-Asas* (the Essence and Foundation)*, Al-Mu'awwidha* (the chapter of Refuge)*, Al-Jamal* (Beauty)*, An-Naja* (Salvation)*, Al-Wilaya* (Authority and Protection)*, At-Tajrid* (Being Free from Anything Else)*, An-Nisba* (Ascsociation or Connection with Allah) and *Nur Al-Quran* (the Light of the Quran). Each of these names indicates a special meaning. (1)

Purity and sincerity indicate the existence of matters that are intermingled, and as a result each one should be separated from the others. That is to say that the matter of Divinity has incorporated even false deities, so the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas* (Purity) came to purify this matter and to attribute it only to Allah, the true God. When one is able to distinguish the true God, he can also make a distinction between good and evil, and Truth and falsehood. Accordingly, he purifies his conscious from all the false deities in order to be preoccupied with only the true Deity.

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(1) It was called *Al-Asas* (the Essence or Foundation) because it includes the idea of monotheism and the essence of the religion. It is called *Al-Ikhlas* (Purity) because it describes Divinity in a pure way, or because its reciter declares his Belief in monotheism. It is called *Mu'arrifa* (Knowledge) because one's knowledge of Allah will not be perfect without knowing this chapter. It is called *Al-Muqashqashah* (the Cure) because it cures the heart from hypocrisy.

Monotheism saves the human being from the confusion of polytheism that does not benefit him but rather causes him harm. This is because once a man associates a false deity with the true God, the latter will forsake him. Allah *the Almighty* says: 'I am the One Who is most free from a need for partners'.(1) And when one associates anything with Him, Allah *Glorified is He* leaves the polytheist to the false deity and deprives him of His Bounties.

Monotheism, purity and sincerity in worship guide man to a beneficial objective. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says in a Sacred Hadith, 'Sincerity is one of the secrets I instilled in the hearts of those I love. Neither an Angel watches it to record it nor a sent Prophet'.(2) Sincerity purifies monotheism from even the illusion of the created causal factors. That is why the corruption of monotheism on the part of many people following a religion other than Islam stemmed mainly from being allured by some causal factors. They wrongly thought they have a power, yet they were heedless of the fact that these causal factors and their power were originally created by Allah *the Almighty*. Consequently, they were allured away from the Creator of the causal factors by the power of these factors.

It is as if the disbeliever is insincere in his worship of Allah *the Almighty* when he thinks that the causal factors are acting by themselves. He should have considered that they, that is the casual factors, are means of receiving bounties from Allah *the Almighty*. These bounties could have been given without these factors, as pursuing these factors to reach an objective could have been fruitless. Were these causal factors beneficial by themselves, this will have meant that Allah *the Almighty* placed them in the universe to act by themselves. This idea is one of the flaws of philosophical research. This will have meant that Allah *the Almighty* practiced His Sovereignty in His Kingdom only once and then left the causal factors to work automatically. To rebut this view, we say, ‘If that were true, the causal factors will not make any error because the result will be automatic, but we see that the causal factors do not necessarily guarantee the existence of their expected effects. Furthermore, the effects may be brought about without their causal factors. This is the case with the miracles that Allah *the Almighty* performed for Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*’. Thus, the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas* clarifies the pure creed.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 46/2985; Ibn Maja, Sunnan, Hadith no. 4202; and Al-Bazzar, Musnad, Hadith no. 8301.*

(2) *See Ibn Al-Jawzi, Al-Musalsalat, 1/12; and Abu Al-Muhasin At-Tarabulsi, Al-Lu'lu' Al-Marsu', Hadith no. 240.*

It is also called *Al-Asas* (the Essence and Foundation), for it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The seven Heavens and the seven earths were established on the basis of: “Say, ‘He is Allah, the One’”’ (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). This means that this statement is the essence upon which the heavens and the earth were constructed. How is that the case?! The scholars say that this fact is alluded to in His saying: ‘If there had been in them (the heavens and earth) any gods besides Allah, they will both have certainly been in a state of disorder…’ (*al-Anbiya':* 22). As the heavens and the earth were not ruined, this conclusively proves that there is no god with Allah *the Almighty*. Had this creed been false, the heavens and the earth will not have been established. In this connection, Allah *Glorified is He* says: ‘Surely, Allah sustains the heavens and the earth lest they cease [to function]; and if they should cease [to function], there is none who can sustain them after Him…’ (*Fatir:* 41).

Scholars opine that His *Glorified is He* saying: ‘If there had been in them (the heavens and earth) any gods besides Allah, they will both have certainly been in a state of disorder …’ (*al-Anbiya':* 22) constitutes a proof for monotheism as the absence of disorder negates the existence of multiple deities. Allah *the Almighty* does not present this fact using Aristotelian logic; rather, Allah *Glorified is He* just mentions one issue and lets the listener deduce the conclusion himself, without Him explaining the matter in depth.

Allah’s saying: ‘If there had been in them (the heavens and earth) any gods besides Allah, they will both have certainly been in a state of disorder…’

(*al-Anbiya':* 22) clearly indicates that He *the Almighty* is certain that everyone listening will affirm the absence of disorder. Allah *Glorified is He* mentions this issue leaving the listener to deduce the conclusion. The only reply the listener can say is, ‘As the universe is precisely ordered and runs according to an accurate, unchanging calculation and system, then there is no disorder in it. Consequently, the multiplicity of deities is not possible due to the absence of disorder’.

Finally, we should say that the issue: ‘If there had been in them (the heavens and earth) any gods besides Allah, they will both have certainly been in a state of disorder…’ (*al-Anbiya':* 22) may need further illustration to explain its proof clearly. In order to clarify this, we should mention that the philosophers and theologians have discussed the terms ‘antithetical’ and ‘opposite’. The one who looks at these terms may think at first glance that they are synonymous. However, deep reflection on them shows that they are not, for each of them has a distinct meaning. The two antithetical matters are neither present nor absent at the same time. That is to say that only one of them must exist. For example, either motionlessness or motion can be attributed to any object, and thus they cannot be both attributed to one thing at the same time, calling it simultaneously moving and motionless. Moreover, they cannot be negated at the same time, calling a thing neither motionless nor moving. Thus, one of these descriptions must exist and when it is present, its antithetical must be absent.

As for two opposite objects, they cannot be present at the same time but may be both absent, just as whiteness and blackness. They, like the antithetical objects, cannot exist at the same time but they may be absent, unlike the antithetical ones. The white and black may be absent because the red, for example, exists. Thus, antithetical objects are related to the matters that have no third possibility, and opposite objects are about objects that have more than two choices.

We want to explain the proof of interdependent absence using the aforementioned theory to serve the interpretation of the chapter in question, *Al-Asas*. If there were multiple deities, they will either agree or disagree with each other. In the case of disagreement, one god may want to create something moving and another want it to be motionless. As we have said, ‘An object cannot be moving and motionless at the same time. Only one case must exist'. Only one of the two gods' opinions will prevail, for the antithetical wills cannot exist at the same time. But the one whose will has been overwhelmed cannot be a true god. The basic maxim is that the two antithetical objects can never exist together. As the will of one of them was overwhelmed, this affirms his disability and, therefore, negates his attribute of Divinity. On the other hand, if they agreed to divide the attributes, the powers and the different aspects of Divinity among themselves, this proves these presumptive gods' inability with regards to the aspect of Divinity they abandoned. Thus, the idea of polytheism is incorrect, whether the deities agree or disagree with each other.

The issue of proving the Oneness of Allah was the main concern of the religions, not the issue of His Existence. This is due to the fact that the human beings naturally believe in His Existence. That is why the Quran does not talk in length about proving Allah's Existence; Its main concern revolved around Allah's saying: 'Is there a god with Allah?' (*an-Naml:* 60) The disbelievers fully recognised Allah's Existence and His creation of everything, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'And if you should ask them who created them, they will certainly say, "Allah"…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 87), and: 'And if you ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth, and subjected the sun and the moon [to the Creator's Law], they will certainly say, "Allah"…' (*al-'Ankabut:* 61). Thus, the Existence of a Creator for the universe is self-evident; that is why the Quran presents it in one statement, saying: 'Or were they created from nothing, or were they themselves the creators?' (*at-Tur:* 35)

As for calling the chapter in question '*Al-Iman*' (Belief), this is because Belief is the source of reassurance and peace, as all the derivatives of the root *'a'-'m'-'n'* signify reassurance and peace, like *'al-amn'* (safety), *'al-amana'* (honesty), *'al-amin'* (the honest) and *'al-mu'minun'* (the believers). Belief refers to the faith a heart has in something. After being reassured, the matter does not entail the realm of reason, research and discussion. This is because the heart had previously reflected on it, and then believed in it and became reassured about it.

For this reason, the chapter of *Al-Iman* refers to the peace and reassurance that one gets when he devotes his worship to the only true God Who possesses the Power, Sovereignty and Ability to harm or benefit. Such a person does not think of worshipping false deities that neither harm nor benefit. Moreover, they cannot avail him against Allah *the Almighty* at all. One finds reassurance in believing in the One God that has no partner to oppose, Who is the Self-Sufficient that all the creatures need and to Whom the whole universe is fully subjected.

We have previously presented the issue of Belief and reassurance in the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) *peace be upon him* in the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: 'When Ibrahim (Abraham) said, "My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead", He said, "Why?! Do you not believe?" He [Ibrahim] said, "Yes, but that my heart may be at ease"…' (*al-Baqara:* 260). The word 'Yes' indicates that Ibrahim *peace be upon him* has truly believed. Then he said, '…but that my heart may be at ease …' (*al-Baqara:* 260). Thus, what is required is the reassurance of the heart. But how does he affirm Belief and then ask for reassurance?! The scholars say that this is because the question is not about Allah's Ability to resurrect the dead but rather 'how' He *the Almighty* resurrects them. Ibrahim *peace be upon him* did not say, 'Do you give life to the dead?' Rather, he said, '…show me how You give life to the dead…' (*al-Baqara:* 260). As he asks about the way of doing that action, he must firmly believe in it. This is what is required from the believer, that is, firm Belief in Allah's Absolute Ability to resurrect the dead. As for knowing the way of doing this, it is not required.

It is as if Allah's saying: '…Why?! Do you not believe?' and Ibrahim's reply: 'Yes' (*al-Baqara:* 260) directs our attention to the fact that knowing the way how Allah's Actions are done is not part of Belief, for this knowledge is confined to Allah *Glorified is He*. That is why the Lord *the Almighty* gave Ibrahim *peace be upon him* a practical answer, not just a verbal one, by giving life to the birds with Ibrahim *peace be upon him* actually taking part in this. In fact, he played the main part as it was he *peace be upon him* who cut the birds and then called them to come to him flying. This is the intended point of this lesson, for if it had been Allah Who called them, it will be a simple, normal matter. What is special is that it was Ibrahim who called them, that is, Allah *the Almighty* had given him the ability to do this.

Therefore, the required Belief is that which leads to peace and reassurance about a matter of Belief, like the Resurrection. It is not necessary, however, that the believer knows how this action is done. It is enough that such actions are attributed to Allah *the Almighty*. If our minds cannot imagine the ways of some actions of the created beings are performed, how can we imagine the way Allah *the Almighty* performs some Actions?!

For example, we do not perceive the way the sorcerer bewitches someone. Even the sorcerer himself who bewitches the people cannot explain that process. Therefore, if the ways some amazing human actions are performed are unknown, then how more so for the ways the Actions of Allah by which He *Glorified is He* practices His Sovereignty in the universe are performed?! As the human mind is unable to understand that way, the answer to Prophet Ibrahim was practical, not verbal.

When Belief exists and leads to the reassurance of the heart, the human being pursues the activities of life with all the energy that Allah *the Almighty* may give him. This is because life is changeable and full of opposite states: strength and weakness, richness and poverty, ability and disability, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, happiness and sadness, and joyful and painful events. The believer should be supported by strong Belief that Allah *the Almighty* is the true God Who has full control over everything. All the creatures in the universe are the effects of Allah’s Creative Power. He *the Almighty* is the Real Doer of everything and the One Who truly manages the affairs of the universe.

If such firm Belief does not exist in man’s heart, he will not live a happy, stable life, and will be crushed by the calamitous events of life. However, if he considers these events as due to Allah’s Predestination, he will fully recognise that they are carried out based on the Truth and also equality between all mankind, as He *the Almighty* regards them all as equals. The strong does not excel the weak and the rich does not excel the poor. The events of life, even what he may regard as evil, do not shake such a believer. This is because he believes that it is Allah *the Almighty* Who created him and caused these events to happen to him.

The Creator wants to reform His creation, not to corrupt it. The events that man sees as evil bear hidden aspects of goodness and wisdom. One considers them evil while Allah *the Almighty* has planned for good to come from them. When one holds that Belief and leads his life accordingly, he has a peaceful soul and conscious. As he fears and hopes for the pleasure of no one but Allah *the Almighty* the events do not cause him to panic. Furthermore, the members of the society wherein this creed prevails live and work together efficiently and as equals; Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘So that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor exult over what comes to you…’ (*al-Hadid:* 23).

Such firm established Belief only exists after having knowledge about Allah’s Way of Guidance. As for the basic Belief in the Existence of Allah Himself Who created the universe and has all the Attributes of Perfection, such Belief necessarily precedes knowledge of Allah’s Path for us in life. After believing in Him as the Creator and the true Doer, one should learn His Way of Guidance that governs one’s way in life. Thus, the knowledge that follows the basic Belief in the Existence of Allah is that related to the Divine Way of Guidance. As for what precedes this basic Belief, it is the knowledge related to believing in the Existence of Allah. Indeed, one does not have Belief before he has knowledge. For this reason, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge …’ (*Al-‘Imran:* 18). He *Glorified is He* does not mention those who believe as Belief does not affirm Allah’s Oneness except after the person has knowledge about this fact.

Some people say, ‘Belief precedes knowledge for we do not need knowledge to believe, but we need Belief to have knowledge about Him’. We say to such people that they are partly right and partly wrong. It is necessary to have deductive knowledge to reach the basic Belief in the Existence of Allah *the Almighty*. After believing in Him, He *Glorified is He* gives the believer some knowledge without the believer expending any effort on his part. This is because the ultimate level of knowledge which one reaches using his mind is none but the realisation of the apparent phenomena of the worldly life. As for the hidden secrets of the universe, he is not able to learn anything about them. One’s knowledge is confined to his experience in life. However, Allah *the Almighty* teaches the believer about matters beyond one’s perception and empirical sciences. Thus, one is in need for Belief in Allah to realise some of the hidden knowledge.

Furthermore, one needs Belief to know about the reward that Allah *the Almighty* preserves for him in the eternal life of the Hereafter. Indeed, who is able to accept the belief that the fleeting worldly life is the end of one's life? After all, one's lifetime is fleeting: some moments from birth to death. And how can the creatures that were made subservient to such a man be sometimes in a better state than him?! Clearly, one must believe in the existence of an eternal life and that the worldly life is just a fleeting one wherein he should strive for the eternal one. For these reasons, the chapter in question is called *al-Iman*.

As for the reason of calling the chapter of *al-Ikhlas* '*Bara'a*' (Freedom), this point has been made clear by Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* who said about it, 'It entails freedom from polytheism'.(1) Thus, it entails freedom from the fire; the two meanings are correlated. It is narrated that Abu Hurayra said, 'I came back (from a journey) with Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he heard a man reciting: "Say, 'He is Allah, the One'" (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). The Messenger of Allah then said, "It is guaranteed". We asked him, "What, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Paradise"'. He meant the reciter had been spared from the Fire only because he had purified himself from polytheism. (2)

Furthermore, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* once dispatched a group of soldiers. The Imam who led them in prayer always concluded his recitation with the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas*: 'Say, "He is Allah, the One"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). Upon their return to Medina, they mentioned this to Prophet Muhammad, who said, 'Ask him why he does this?' He was asked and he said, 'This chapter contains the Attributes of Allah, the Gracious, and I love to recite it'. Prophet Muhammad then told them, 'Tell him that Allah loves him'.(3) In another narration, it is narrated that the Prophet *peace and blessings be upon him* said to him, 'Your love for it admitted you into paradise'.(4)

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(1) *This Hadith was related in reference to the chapter of al-Kafirun.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Malik, Muwatta', Hadith no.709/228; and Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 8011.*

(3) *A Hadith to that effect was narrated on the authority of 'Aisha Allah be pleased with her. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no.7375; and Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 263/813.*

(4) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Malik Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 12432 and 12512; Ad-Darimi, Sunnan, Hadith no. 3478; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 792; and Abu Ya'la Al-Mawsili, Musnad, Hadith no. 3336.*

Additionally, Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah *Allah be pleased with him* narrated that Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, ‘The one who does the following three good actions will enter paradise from any door he wishes and marry who he wishes of the women with beautiful eyes in paradise: the one who forgives his killer, repays the unrecorded debt (that the owner of the money has no proof of it or witnesses) and reads: “Say, ‘He is Allah, the One’” (*al-Ikhlas:* 1) ten times after each prayer’. Abu Bakr, who was a merciful man, said to Prophet Muhammad, ‘Or one of these good deeds, O Messenger of Allah?’ He said, ‘Yes, or one of them’.(1) This means that the one who does only one of these three good deeds will receive the reward mentioned in the Hadith.

Besides, when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was told about a man who always concluded his recitations in the prayer with the chapter of *al-Ikhlas*, he said, ‘By the One in Whose Hand my soul is! It is equivalent to one-third of the Quran’. (2)

Furthermore, it is narrated that U‘qba ibn ‘Amir said he met Prophet Muhammad and was the first one to offer greetings, taking him by the hand. He said to the Prophet, ‘O Messenger of Allah! What is the means to salvation?’ Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* replied, ‘That you control your tongue, keep to your house, and weep over your sins’. ‘Uqba said that he met Prophet Muhammad once again and [this time] the Prophet was the first to offer greetings, taking ‘Uqba by the hand and saying, ‘O ‘Uqba, shall I tell you the best three chapters that have been revealed in the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms and the Glorious Quran?’ ‘Uqba said, ‘Of course, Messenger of Allah, may I be sacrificed for you!’ Prophet Muhammad said, ‘They are: “Say, ‘He is Allah, the One’” (*al-Ikhlas:* 1), and: “Say [O Prophet Muhammad], ‘I seek refuge with the Lord of the daybreak’” (*al-Falaq:* 1), and: “Say, ‘I seek refuge with the Lord of people'" (*an-Nas:* 1), reciting all of them completely'. He then told 'Uqba, 'O 'Uqba, do not sleep any night without reciting them'. 'Uqba related that by Allah, he did not forget them since the time Prophet Muhammad commanded him not to forget to recite them before sleeping at night. Then he met Prophet Muhammad and was the first to offer greetings, taking him by the hand. 'Uqba said, 'O Messenger of Allah! What are the best deeds?' He told him, 'Strengthening the ties of kinship, giving those who withheld from you and forgiving the one who wronged you'. (1)

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah Allah be pleased with him. See At-Tabarani, Al-Mu‘jam Al-Awsat, Hadith no. 3361; and Abu Nu‘aim, Hilyat Al-Awliya’, Hadith no. 6/243.*

(2) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa‘id Al-Khudari Allah be pleased with him. See Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Hadith no. 6634 and 7374; Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 11306 and 11392; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, Hadith no. 791; and Al-Bayhaqi, Shu‘ab Al-Iman, Hadith no. 2301.*

Some of the names of the chapter in question are *At-Tajrid*, *At-Tawhid* and *At-Tafrid*. All these words bear one meaning that is monotheism. *At-Tajrid* means to purify the essence of something from what may mix with it. We have stated that associating deities with Allah corrupts monotheism, as Allah *the Almighty* says, 'I am the One Who is the most free of the need for partners'. Some people mistakenly think that there are other deities with Allah *Glorified is He*. However, the true God is One and has no partner to seek help from him. Let the one who associates partners with Him go to that partner. *At-Tawhid* and *At-Tafrid*, like *At-Tajrid,* means to clear something from the impurities that may mix with it.

However, the word *Tawhid* (Oneness) adds a new meaning. For example, when one refers to '*Wahat Al-Qawl*' (one word), this means that he chose one from many opinions, not that he formed one opinion from many views. Similarly, this chapter is like one considering many partners and then choosing only one. That is why the chapter of *al-Ikhlas* rebuts the creed of trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost) which merges these persons and makes them one.

In reality, monotheism does not mean that the monotheist forms one entity from many partners. Rather, it means to bear witness that Allah is One. However, unifying Allah is not the result of those who believe in Allah's Oneness, because Allah *the Almighty* is One, whether the people believed Him as being One or not. This is also because Allah *Glorified is He* is One, whether the person attested to this fact or not. Therefore, when one pronounces the testimony of Belief, he speaks the truth. This is because Allah *the Almighty* was not many beings that became one entity; rather, He is One.

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(1) *This Hadith is narrated on the authority of 'Uqba ibn 'Amir Allah be pleased with him. See Ahmad, Musnad, Hadith no. 17334; and At-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, Hadith no. 742.*

Allah *Glorified is He* was the first to mention this fact saying: 'Allah bears witness that there is no god but He …' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). This is a testimony of His Essence of Himself, whether the human being attested to that or not. Then Allah says: '… and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge' (*Al-'Imran:* 18). The angels attested to His Oneness as a testimony of a witness who has seen with his eyes, and the people of knowledge attested according to their knowledge of Allah *the Almighty*.

It is remarkable that the verse does not mention the people who believe but rather the people who have knowledge. This is due to the fact that Belief stems from knowledge; after perceiving it one can believe. As for those who say, 'I believe I know Allah', we say to them that there is a difference between knowing Allah and to know about Him. Knowing Allah *the Almighty* is related to His Essence. As for knowing about Him, this is related to His Way of Guidance which was conveyed by Prophet Muhammad. Thus, faith lies between two stages of knowledge: to know that He is the One God, which makes you believe in Him, and as a result, receive knowledge about His Way of Guidance. With regards to the discussion about whether Belief preceded Islam or vice versa, we say that this is an unnecessary disagreement because we have to consider different aspects for this question. In actuality, some sort of knowledge is perceived before having Belief and another is perceived after it.

Knowledge is the proof of Belief because the former is a mental process of research and deduction. This process brings about a firm creed that settles in the conscious and the heart and is then never subjected again to disputation. It becomes unquestionable. Such a creed is the Belief in which the soul finds peace. Thus, the first knowledge is related to finding the proofs of Allah's Oneness that lead to believe in Him *Glorified is He* as the only God. At this point, the role of the mind ends with regards to the creed; it must submit to Allah's saying and not question the revelation that comes through a Messenger. Its role will be used in documenting the sacred texts and making sure they have come from Allah *the Almighty*. But if one becomes certain that a given text has come from Him *the Almighty* he has to accept it without any discussion or hesitation. The sacred texts should be the primary source of his knowledge. Afterwards, the mind may discuss some religious matters that are open to discussion. The sound mind that does not follow whims can reach the rationales and the objectives of the religious laws by itself.

This was the case with ‘Umar ibn Al-Kattab *Allah be pleased with him*. There were times when the Quran descended on Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* as a confirmation and a support for ‘Umar’s opinion. If one asks, ‘Why were there no times when the Quran was revealed to affirm Prophet Muhammad’s opinions, although he is closer to Allah?’ We say that Allah *the Almighty* wanted to show us that the sound mind whose nature is pure and which thinks clearly can come to a conclusion that agrees with the Way of Guidance itself.

The knowledge we derive from the Way of Guidance is of two kinds. The first one concerns the unseen matters related to Allah *the Almighty* whose rationales and reasons we should not ask about. The second kind concerns the laws that organize the activities of life. We can freely think about them and compare these laws to other laws. When we draw a comparison between the Divine Laws and the man-made ones, we will find that the former excel the latter in ensuring the interests of the people. This is proven by the fact that many people have resorted to modifying man-made laws or changing them to be closer to Allah’s Laws. This obviously indicates that the human laws were made by people whose ability to think is limited, as they considered some aspects and forgot others. Afterwards, the events of life revealed the defects of these laws. By contrast, the Divine Law is prescribed by Allah from Whom nothing is hidden and Who is fully Aware of people’s actions and conditions. When He *the Almighty* sets the Laws, no one can modify or correct them.

With regards to the unseen matters and the acts of worship whose rationales are hidden, we should seek to find out the wisdom and the rationale behind them to the best of our abilities, but we will not be able to realize all of them. Their wisdom is fully known by Allah *the Almighty* who prescribed them. As the religious obligations are divinely prescribed, their wisdom is unlimited due to the Absolute Perfection of Allah *the Almighty*. If the human mind realized some of the aspects of this wisdom, there are still many other aspects hidden from it. We believe in these aspects of wisdom that we did not realize as they are known to Him *the Almighty*.

Belief entails believing in something and acting upon it just because it has come from Allah *the Almighty* and not due to the rationale behind it. This is the lofty rank of Belief that Abu Bakr *Allah be pleased with him* reached. He used to receive the commands from Prophet Muhammad, saying, 'If he [Prophet Muhammad] has said this, then he is truthful', without any discussion or search for the rationale behind the commands. The only rationale for accepting the religious obligations is that Allah *the Almighty* commands the believer to do them. For example, some people think that the rationale of ablution is personal hygiene, but it is broader than that. This is because if we do not find water, we can prepare ourselves for prayer by wiping over our faces and hands with dust. Clearly, the matter is not just about personal hygiene, but rather about following what Allah *the Almighty* prescribed as a way of preparing ourselves to stand before Him *Glorified is He* in prayer.

The chapter under discussion is also called '*Al-Jamal*' (Beauty). Beauty is something relative, and thus people differ as to its definition. But we can say it means the symmetry of the formation of something that satisfies and pleases the person with a sound nature. It means that every matter is consistent with the aspect of its beauty; the beauty of silk is its smoothness, the bat is to be rough, the eye is to be big, the mouth is to be narrow. Therefore, beauty refers to the harmony between the initial circumstances and the conclusion, the harmony between the object and its function, not with what the soul desires.

This is because it, that is the soul, may desire something harmful. Furthermore, it may desire what is not beautiful. For example, we all hope our children will be successful, but beauty means that the hard-working student succeeds and the lazy one fails. The one who considers beauty should take an account of the initial circumstances and the conclusions, not regard one side apart from the others. Consequently, lust recompensed by painful punishment; negligence that leads to success; and hard-work that leads to failure cannot be classified as 'beauty'.

This is also the case with the beauty in this chapter. Man is able to see that people's lives vary in many ways: health, wealth, children, authority, high rank, power and knowledge. One should have the firm creed that these differences are Allah's Bounties. He is a Just Lord Who distributes His Bounties among His slaves fairly, as He regards them equally. Without this creed, man will receive the events that he considers evil with discontent, objecting to Allah's Decree and Predestination. This feeling is enough to ruin man's life and relations with other people. He will be envious, harbouring a grudge against those who excelled him. But if he understood that the Lord's Bounties are distributed equally among the people, he will not grudge anyone and the poor will not give a look of hatred to the rich. Out of Allah's Wisdom, He made such variance between the people and bestowed His Bounties on them equally.

This variance leads to the reformation of the universe, as Allah *the Almighty* does not want identical human beings; rather, He wants ones that have to integrate with each other, which ensures cooperation and intermingling between them. This variance in giving is the main reason behind people's need that connects them to each other. In this sense, variance is one of the aspects of beauty in Allah's creation. In this connection, the Lord *the Almighty* says: 'Do they distribute the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service…' (*az-Zukhruf:* 32). We have said that the verse does not define the ones who are raised and those over whom they were raised. That is because each one of us excels in one aspect and is excelled in another, as the people receive equal bestowals from Allah.

Consequently, man should receive Allah's Distribution of blessings with contentment and submission, acting politely with Allah, the Bestower of the Blessings. In this connection, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Nay! Man does transgress all bounds because he sees himself [as being] free from want' (*al-'Alaq:* 6-7). Not needing other people could make the person exceed the limits. One should consider how he needs the people, in what way he suffers disability and weakness. In this connection, one of the people of knowledge was asked, 'Why is it that man is the only one who acts haughtily?' He said that this is because the other creatures only experience Allah's Attribute of Compelling Power and Mightiness. They were created with the command, 'Be', and have no free choice. By contrast, man experiences Allah's Attributes of Kindness, Mercy and Benevolence, and does not experience His Compelling Power and Mightiness. Had he witnessed this Might, he will not have acted haughtily. What incited him to act haughtily is that he thought he was great, but if he had recalled his Lord's Greatness, he will not have acted haughtily.

The beauty in the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas* stems from the fact that Allah *the Almighty* is One God for all people and creatures. He is the God of the rich and the poor. He bestows His Bounties equally to all people and has one scale which is based on His Wisdom and Ever-Watchfulness. When the human beings believe in that, they will have a pleasant life.

In the chapter of *Az-Zumar*, Allah *the Almighty* explains to us the beauty we see in the chapter of Beauty saying: 'Allah sets forth an example: a man belonging to (several) partners who differ with each other, and a man belonging entirely to one master. Are the two alike in comparison?' (*az-Zumar:* 29) Is a slave owned by one master equal to the one owned by many differing partners?! The beautiful situation is to be owned by one God. The example here is amply clear and precisely expresses the meaning of beauty in Allah's creation.

The chapter in question is also called '*Al-Ma'rifa*' (Knowledge) because monotheism and affirming Allah's Oneness represent the essence of knowledge. After firm belief in this creed, one receives the Way of Guidance that organises his activities in life. It is a comprehensive Way that cannot be modified.

Moreover, it is called *Al-Mu'awwidha* (the chapter of Refuge) because it is placed next to *Al-Mu'awwidhatayn*: 'Say [O Prophet Muhammad], "I seek refuge with the Lord of the daybreak"' (*al-Falaq:* 1) and: 'Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord of people"' (*an-Nas:* 1). It is as if the chapter in question is considered the third of these two chapters. Seeking refuge entails the existence of something we seek refuge from and a power in which we seek refuge. It is as though this chapter tells us what we should seek refuge in, which is the One God, regardless of those who seek refuge in their false deities. That is, these chapters direct our attention to the true God we should seek refuge in to be protected from harm.

Furthermore, it is called *Al-Muqashqisha* (the Cure), which refers to curing the ill body. When the body is unsymmetrically constituted, it is inflicted with diseases. Likewise, man's creed suffers diseases when it is inflicted with misconceptions and misunderstandings of the One God Who created everything that exists. Similarly, the state of existence is interpreted in the light of the created beings; the disorder of their creed leads to corrupt behaviour and, therefore, the corruption and the collapse of the society.

Moreover, this chapter is called *An-Naja* (Salvation), which means being saved from the fire. It is said that monotheism is one of the doors of paradise. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* called this chapter *An-Nisba* (Association) due to the people of Quraysh asking about this. It is narrated that the cause of its revelation is that Quraysh sent 'Amir ibn Tofayl to ask Prophet Muhammad about the Deity he worships. He said to him, 'O Muhammad, you have rebelled against us [causing disunity among us], assaulted our deities, despised our way of thinking and abandoned the religion of your fathers and forefathers. If you are poor, we will make you rich; if you are sick or bewitched, we will cure you; and if you desire any woman, we will give her to you', whereupon Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* said, 'I am not poor, bewitched or desirous of any woman. Rather, I am Allah's Messenger who was sent to free you from worshipping idols and to call you to worship Allah instead'.(1)

As they used to worship deities made of rocks or trees, he asked Prophet Muhammad about the nature of his God, or he said, 'Enumerate the genealogy of your Lord', just as the Arabs used to ascribe the son to his father. Thereupon, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* recited: 'Say, "He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Self-Sufficient. He begot no one nor was He born. And no one is comparable to Him"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4). Thus, he negated the two ends of the genealogical connection that they were familiar with, which is one's father and one's son.

The Arabs used to name their children and often ascribed the newborn child to his father, saying, for example, 'Mohamed, the son of so-and-so'. It is true that we are Allah’s creation, but He made us nations and tribes to know each other. One of the means of knowing each other is to have distinctive names. For example, if a father has three sons, will he give them the same name?! As the people are many, distinctive names must also be many to be able to know each other. His saying: ‘O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another…’ (*al-Hujurat:* 13) does not refer to the distinction between one group of people and another, or one tribe and another. In fact, getting to know each other through the names is related to the individuals to be able to ascribe the action to its doer, knowing the good to reward them and the bad to punish them. In this way, no one is recompensed for another person’s fault.

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(1) *See Ar-Razi, Mafatih Al-Ghaib, 32/356; and Al-Mawardi, Tafsir, 6/370.*

After this, Allah *the Almighty* shows the criterion for preference among people: ‘…Indeed, the most noble of you in the Sight of Allah are those of you who are the most mindful of Him...’ (*al-Hujurat:* 13). Therefore, the son is attributed to his father to be known by him because he has no other distinctive description except his father. In some cases the son becomes more well-known than his father, and as a result the father is known by his son, being called, ‘Mohammed, the father of so-and-so’. In this regard, a poet said,

They said, ‘Abu As-Saqr belongs to the tribe of Shayban’,
but I say, ‘No, it is Shayban that belong to him’
How many a father is honoured by a son of high rank,
as 'Adnan was honoured by Allah’s Messenger [Muhammad]

The chapter under discussion is also called *Nur al-Quran* (The Light of the Quran). The Quran itself is light, so this chapter is light upon light. We do not see light itself, but we use it to see objects. To be able to see light, we should bring a stronger light to distinguish a source of light with another source. Thus, the Quran is the light that sets for you the luminous way by which one walks upon guidance and insight. Similarly, the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas* is called *Nur Al-Quran* because it teaches us the creed by which we take the way of guidance, illuminating that way for us.

Moreover, it is called *Al-Walaya* (Invincible Protection), as in Allah’s saying: ‘In that situation, the only invincible protection (*al-walaya*) comes from Allah, Alone' (*al-Kahf:* 44). Allah, the true God, is in charge of the believer and grants victory to the one who needs it. In the affairs of life, one should depend on Him *Glorified is He* and not seek anyone else's support, for all matters are fully controlled by Him Alone: '…such as have no power either for good or harm for themselves?' (*ar-Ra'd:* 16)

Now, let us focus on explaining the meanings of the verses. The chapter starts with the command 'say', followed by the third person pronoun 'He', then the majestic Name 'Allah', and lastly five descriptions of Him: '…the One; Allah, the Self-Sufficient. He begot no one nor was He born. And no one is comparable to Him' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1-4). Thus, there are eight points in the chapter we will discuss and explain.

First, the command 'say' here is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and he delivered it to us as it is. He did not imitate the people's way of conveying reports by focusing on the content and not the form, or the meanings and not the words. He adhered in his conveyance to the words verbatim; he did not say to the people, 'He is Allah, the One', but rather: 'Say, "He is Allah, the One"' (*al-Ikhlas:* 1). It is as if he is saying to the people, 'Do not blame me for I am only a conveyer of the Message which I received from Allah. This is the command I was ordered to convey to you. I have no intervention in it.'

Thus, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* received and conveyed the words of the Quran verbatim, and not its meanings. The verses in which the command, 'say' is used include: 'Say, "O Disbelievers…"' (*al-Kafirun:* 1), and: 'They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say, "In both of them there is a great sin…"' (*al-Baqara:* 219), as well as: 'And they ask you about menstruation. Say, "It is a discomfort…"' (*al-Baqara:* 222), and also: 'They ask you concerning the new moon. Say, "They are times appointed for (the benefit of) men, and (for) the Pilgrimage"…' (*al-Baqara:* 189), and: '…And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say, "What you can spare"…' (*al-Baqara:* 219).

In one position where the expression 'they ask you' is employed, the particle *'fa''* is used with it, which is His saying: 'And they ask you about the mountains. Then (*fa'*) say, "My Lord will carry them away from the roots"'

(*Ta Ha:* 105). The scholars say that the question here indicates that the people will ask Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* in the future about the mountains. This is one example of the miracles written in the Quran. It informs us that the people will ask him in the future. The opponents of the Call could have abstained from posing this question to accuse the Quran of telling lies. However, they could not act differently from what Allah ordained for them; they actually asked about the mountains some time after this verse was revealed.

Continuing with the chapter under discussion, the third person pronoun 'he' refers to someone who is absent. As we know, pronouns are divided into first, second and third person. That is, we have three cases. The first person is known because a person can say, for example, 'I did such-and-such', and the people will not ask him, 'Who are you?' because he is present before their eyes. Likewise, the second person is addressed in the speech and is also present. We cannot ask him, 'Who are you?'

As for the third person 'he', it bears a vague reference and needs clarification, which is called the reference of the pronoun. Consequently, this pronoun is only used when there is a previously mentioned reference for it. For example, one can say, 'I met Zayd and treated him generously'. Here, the pronoun 'him' refers to Zayd. We have previously clarified that the pronoun either indicates all it refers to, as in the previous example, a part of it or something equivalent to it. An example of something equivalent is when one says, 'I gave a *dirham* and a half as charity', (lit. 'a *dirham* and a half of it'). After I gave the one *dirham* as charity, I cannot give half of it as charity as the *dirham* has already been given out. Clearly, the pronoun 'it' (in the literal translation) does not refer to half the *dirham* mentioned here but an equivalent amount. And the pronoun indicates part of the reference in Allah's saying: '…and no elderly person has his life lengthened nor is anything diminished of his life, but it is all in a book; surely this is easy to Allah' (*Fatir:* 11). The pronoun 'his' does not refer to the man, but to part of him. How is this?

The scholars say that the person has already lived say one hundred years. But how can this elapsed part of his lifetime be diminished? This is impossible. Clearly, the pronoun refers to a part of one's lifetime. The reference can consist of many parts. His saying: '…and no elderly person has his life lengthened...' (*Fatir:* 11) does not refer to the whole lifetime but to what remains of it. It is as we have two parts of man's lifetime: his lifetime that has elapsed and lifetime to come. The pronoun refers to the remaining part of his lifetime.

The pronoun 'he' in the chapter in question is a third person pronoun and must have a previously mentioned reference. But where is its reference? One may ask about the one to whom this pronoun refers. The scholars say that the only reference is the believers' faith and certitude that it refers to Allah *the Almighty*. It is as if reality and the truth state that this pronoun refers to Him *Glorified is He*. This is why the pronoun is the strongest kind of the defining elements. However, after the majestic Name 'Allah', it became even more definite.

Furthermore, Allah *the Almighty* is unseen yet He reaches the rank of being present through His effects on the created beings. When one says 'He' with regards to Allah, he declares that He is One. As we have said concerning monotheism, Allah *the Almighty* is One, whether we declare that fact or not. However, the third person indicates that Allah *the Almighty* is unseen. We may ask why? This is because He is the Light by which we perceive the objects yet He Himself is unperceivable. We cannot perceive Him unless a stronger light makes Him visible. However, this is not possible because there is no light greater than His? For this reason, we cannot see Him.

Were Allah *the Almighty* perceivable, He will not deserve to be worshipped. This is because perception is a kind of encompassing, like perceiving the answer to a geometrical question. Likewise, if Allah *the Almighty* is perceivable, He will be encompassed, which is impossible for Him. Thus, due to Allah's Greatness, He is unseen: 'No vision can comprehend Him, but He comprehends (all) vision; and He is the Most Subtle, the All-Aware…' (*al-An'am:* 103).

That is why it is said, 'Being unable to realize something is a realization in itself'. We have clarified this matter saying that if we ask a secondary school student to answer a mathematical equation beyond what he has studied, he will say, 'I cannot solve it'. Why is this?

This is because he did not study the theories that lead to the answer. For this reason he does not have the key to answer that question and, therefore, he acknowledges at the beginning he cannot answer it. Another student may try hard but fail to answer the question. This means that acknowledging one's disability to realize the answer is a realization in itself. Likewise, acknowledging that Allah *the Almighty* is unperceivable is a realization. The pronoun 'He' indicates that Allah *the Almighty* is unseen but the effects of His Power and creation are apparent. His Essence is unperceivable but the traces of His Attributes are manifested in the universe.

Allah *the Almighty* then says: 'Allah, the Self-Sufficient' (*al-Ikhlas:* 2). The Arabic word '*As-Samad'* (Self-Sufficient) has two meanings. The first one is the matter that has neither a body nor an essence. The second meaning is the master who is asked to meet any need. Allah *the Almighty* is the One that the people invoke to meet their needs and He is the Master Who has perfect Sovereignty.

As for His saying: 'He begot no one nor was He born' (*al-Ikhlas:* 3), it is similar to His saying: '…far be it from His [Allah's] Glory that He should have a son…' (*an-Nisa':* 171). Allah *the Almighty* is far removed from having a son. Consequently, how can the people claim He has a son? All praise is to Allah Who has not taken a son. The son is sought to be an extension of the mention of his father whose life is not guaranteed. He bears the name of his father after his death and inherits his property. Moreover, having a son is meant for the sustenance of the species, which does not depend on having only one son.

Allah *the Almighty* does not need to beget a son, nor does He need a wife to give birth to such a son. This is because the one who needs a son is imperfect and needs him to rectify this imperfection. Allah *Glorified is He* is far removed over imperfection and having a son, as He says: 'Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth! How could He have a son when He has no consort, and He (Himself) created everything, and He is the Knower of all things' (*al-An'am:* 101). How can Allah have a son while He has created the heavens and the earth wonderfully without any previous pattern? Why does He *the Almighty* need a son?

As for His saying: 'And no one is comparable to Him' (*al-Ikhlas:* 4), it means that no one is equivalent, a rival or comparable to Allah *the Almighty*. No one is similar to Him, for He is incomparable in His Essence, Attributes of

Perfection and Actions, a fact which is clear in His saying: '…nothing is like Him' (*ash-Shura:* 11), and: '…therefore do not set up rivals to Allah while you know' (*al-Baqara:* 22). The rival is the one who is comparable to another. Any reasonable person negates anyone's comparability to Allah, for nothing is similar to Him. His is One in His Power, Omnipotence, Creation and Essence. There is neither a rival to nor a partner with Him.

The absence of any rival and peer to Allah *the Almighty* is in the interest of life in the universe. This is because this fact means that all the people will be under His Control and Justice. Hence, negating the presence of any rival to Allah *Glorified is He* is in the interest of the human being.

the chapter of

al-Falaq

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *al-Falaq* (1):

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ ٱلْفَلَقِ ﴿١﴾ مِن شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴿٢﴾
وَمِن شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ ﴿٣﴾ وَمِن شَرِّ ٱلنَّفَّٰثَٰتِ فِى ٱلْعُقَدِ ﴿٤﴾
وَمِن شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ ﴿٥﴾

Say [Prophet], ‘I seek refuge with the Lord of daybreak [1] against the harm in what He has created [2] the harm in the night when darkness gathers [3] the harm in witches when they blow on knots [4] the harm in the envier when he envies’ [5] (The Quran, *al-Falaq:* 1-5)

The saying of Allah (God) (2) *the Almighty*: ‘I seek refuge with…’ (*al-Falaq:* 1) means that one seeks the protection of Allah *Glorified is He*. It entails someone seeking refuge, someone against whom it is sought, and someone with whom it is sought. Here, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* is commanded to seek refuge with the Lord of the daybreak against four things, which are: '…from the harm of whatever He has created, from the harm of darkness as it gathers, from the harm of those who blow on knots, and from the harm of the envier when he envies' (*al-Falaq:* 1-5).

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(1) The chapter of *Al-Falaq*, counting 5 verses and 23 words, is number 113 in the order of *Al-Mushaf* (the written copy of the Quran). It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Fil*. This chapter, along with that of *An-Nas,* are called *Al-Mu‘awwidhatayn* (two chapters of refuge).

(2) The Islamic concept of ‘Allah’ is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of ‘God’. But the word ‘Allah’ does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use ‘Allah’ rather than ‘God’ as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the Lord of the daybreak' (*al-Falaq:* 1), the Lord *Glorified is He* mentions the reasons that encourage the person to seek refuge with Him, as He is the Lord of the daybreak. The Arabic word *'al-falaq'* (daybreak) could refer to the morning brightness that penetrates darkness. Light is a means of guidance by which one takes the right path. This word could also refer to what splits open thereby coming to life, as in His saying: 'Surely, Allah causes the grain and the stone to germinate (*faliq*)…' (*al-An'am:* 95), which uses the word '*faliq*' (germinate), which is derived from the word '*al-falaq*'. In this sense, Allah *the Almighty* is the Lord of all existence, the One Who wonderfully created and spread out all the creatures. According to either meaning, Allah *the Almighty* deserves that we seek refuge with Him.

Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us the things we should seek refuge against; the first one is mentioned in His saying: '…from the harm of whatever He has created' (*al-Falaq:* 1). This indicates that certain aspects of some of Allah's creatures are evil. That is, the created beings are not purely good or evil; rather, they have some aspects of good and other ones of evil. This is why the Lord *Glorified is He* instructs us to seek refuge with Him against the evil aspects of the creatures for only the good ones to be left.

For example, if we consider the cattle and the animals that Allah *the Almighty* made subservient to man, like the camel, we find the little child can ride them. On the contrary, men run away from a small snake. This is only because the former, unlike the latter, was subjected to man. This proves that it is not man who subjected the camel with his power, for had Allah *the Almighty* not made it subservient to the human beings, they will have neither been able to benefit from it nor been able to control it.

Thus, the matter is not all about the creation of these animals, for that was followed by subjecting them to serve the human being. That is why Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Do they not see that We have created for them of what Our Hands have created, the cattle so that they are their owners. And We have subdued them to their [use] so that some of them they have for riding and some they eat' (*Ya Sin:* 72). The scholars say that the possession of the cattle depends not only on the creation but also on subjecting them to human beings; if the possession had depended only on the creation, man could have domesticated all creatures and made use of them.

The one who reflects on Allah's creatures finds good and evil aspects in them. For example, the snake's poison is deadly for someone but a cure for others. The snake manifests its evil side when we try to make it do other than what it was created for. Furthermore, the matter of evil is not all about transgression, for Allah *the Almighty* has placed signs in His creation to make human beings feel their need for Him and feel they can never dispense with Him, however powerful the person may be. Consequently, Allah *Glorified is He* made some of His creatures not prone to domestication in order to cause fear and disturbance for the human being to remind him of his Lord, depending on and invoking Him to be safe from such creatures. Therefore, Allah *the Almighty* teaches us to seek refuge with Him by saying: 'I seek refuge with the Lord of the daybreak from the harm of whatever He has created' (*al-Falaq:* 1-2) only because He is fully Able to protect us from all harms and evil.

As for His saying: '…from the harm of darkness as it gathers' (*al-Falaq:* 3), this verse refers to the night that shrouds the world with darkness. As it covers everything with its darkness, the human being cannot take any precaution against dangerous situations, like confronting a wild beast or an enemy lying in wait. All such dangers are clear during the day. This means Allah's saying: '…from the harm of darkness as it gathers' (*al-Falaq:* 3) signifies seeking refuge against dangers that the human being cannot avert in the darkness of the night. Although such dangers are subcategorized under His saying: '…from the harm of whatever He has created' (*al-Falaq:* 2), they were mentioned to be specifically highlighted.

Let us reflect on the meaning of the Arabic word *'ghasiq'* (darkness) and *'waqab'* (gathers), for every word has a basic root. The root of the word *'ghasiq'* refers to what spurts forth. As for *'waqab',* it refers to a hole in a rock in the mountain caused by the rain. This is only possible when rain falls abundantly and continuously. The rain is formed by the clouds that gather.

The human being is familiar with the darkness of the night, but he does not think that the clouds that gather together during the day, causing darkness, to be similar to that of night. Afterwards, the rain falls. What is remarkable is the darkness that happens during the day, not the night. It is as if the clouds shroud the world in darkness when the rain falls abundantly, causing holes in the rocks of the mountains.

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…the harm of those who blow on knots' (*al-Falaq:* 4), the word *'an-naffathat'* ([the souls] who blow) alludes to the female or male witches. The rationalists denied two matters mentioned in Allah's saying: '…from the harm of those who blow on knots, and from the harm of the envier when he envies' (*al-Falaq:* 4-5). They denied that sorcery and envy can physically affect anything, claiming that they are irrational. The rationalistic school had goodwill at the beginning of the contemporary age of scientific advancement. This is because the Muslims in the East were connected to the renaissance of the West which allured some people with its scientific advancement.

Islam discussed some unseen matters that are beyond the perception of the human mind, and the rationalists wanted to make these creedal matters understandable and consistent with empirical science and the world we see with our eyes. Consequently, they interpreted these matters to comply with modern science. They wanted to highlight that all the matters of the Islamic religion are subject to the empirical science and experimentation. But if the creedal matters were like this, they will not need a Messenger or any Belief in a God.

However, should all the matters be subject to empirical science? For example, there is no difference between electricity in America and Russia. That is to say that the matter which is subject to empirical science and experimentation is not open to disputation. But, as long as one believes in the One God and His Attributes, he should not rely on his mind with regards to accepting all that Allah created; some of the creatures are unperceivable to us and the mind affirms their existence through Belief. However, the mind itself can be used to affirm this matter referring to the advancement of science. This is because there were many unperceivable matters in the past that were not subject to empirical science and the human mind. Afterwards, Allah *the Almighty* revealed them to be perceivable and subject to empirical science, as in the case of electricity, microbes, etc. In the past, no one believed in the existence of such creatures.

Consequently, why should the matters that were previously unseen not be considered a proof that the mind is not a suitable criterion for deciding what exists and what does not exist? If one is consistent with his thought, he will recognize that many perceivable matters used to be considered unseen and if one had been told about them before, he will not have believed in them. Clearly, the mind is not a criterion for understanding matters beyond its ability. With regards to religious matters, the aim is to make sure whether a certain matter has been conveyed from Allah *the Almighty* or not. If it has come from Him, one should directly believe in it without questioning how it happened, given that he has previously believed in Allah *the Almighty*.

We have previously clarified that unseen matters are of two kinds. The first one is temporal and certain circumstances lead to its detection when Allah *the Almighty* wants to reveal it. Consequently, we find out about it through a new invention, discovery or accident. The second kind is the absolute unseen that no one knows except Allah and for which no circumstances can happen that will lead to its detection. With regards to the first kind, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And they will never compass anything of His Knowledge except that which He wills…’ (*al-Baqara:* 255). The knowledge could be perceived by the people according to Allah’s Will. With regards to the second kind, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘The Knower of the unseen! He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him Whom He chooses as a Messenger …’ (*al-Jinn:* 26-27). Here, the human beings have nothing to do with this kind of unseen, as there is no way to know it; yet Allah *the Almighty* may benevolently give some matters thereof to some people He is pleased with.

Therefore, we say to those who deny sorcery that their denial contradicts the Quran and the authentic Hadiths. Their view is incorrect because no personal reasoning is acceptable when a sacred text handling the issue exists. Instead, intelligent minds should be busy trying to make *Al-‘Ilm Al-Barzakhi* (knowledge of unclear matters) more understandable for the person in the street. If there is no sorcery, how can we interpret the verses related to it? In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* says: ‘And they followed what the devils chanted of sorcery in the reign of Sulaiman (Solomon), and Sulaiman (Solomon) was not an unbeliever, but the devils disbelieved: they taught men sorcery. And that was sent down to the two angels in Babel, Harut and Marut, yet these two taught no man until they had said, “Surely we are only a trial, therefore do not disbelieve”. Yet, even then men learned from these two magic to sow discord between a man and his wife; but they cannot hurt anyone with it except with Allah's Permission, and they learned what harmed them and did not profit them. And certainly they knew that he who bought it [magic] will have no share of good in the Hereafter. Evil was the price for which they sold their souls, if they only knew’ (*al-Baqara:* 102).

It seems as though there is a bargain and gaining profits from it depends on learning something from one higher in rank. Allah *the Almighty* wants to direct our attention to the issue of the jinn whose nature is different from that of human beings. Unlike the jinn, the human being cannot penetrate through a wall and has limited abilities with regards to place and time. As for the jinn, it can penetrate and flow in man like the blood in the veins. Who gave him such abilities? It is his Creator Who fashioned him like this, out of fire.

In addition, the human being was created from mud and has a density, but the devil is transparent like fire. They are different concerning what they are formed from. However Allah *the Almighty* wants to tell us that the element of creation does not restrict the created beings, as He *the Almighty* can give the lower privileges that are given to the uppermost, even if the causal factors are taken into account.

For example, in the story of Prophet Sulaiman *peace be upon him* Allah relates him as saying: ‘He said, “O chiefs! Which of you can bring to me her [the Queen of Sheba’s] throne before they come to me in submission?”’ (*an-Naml:* 38) Thereupon, one of the jinn presented the first offer. He was a clever jinni, not a stupid one. Both kinds exist among the jinn, as in the case of human beings. That is, the one who spoke was not a normal human being or jinni, and he was not a clever human being either. Rather, the one who spoke was a skilful jinni because the required mission was great: ‘…O chiefs! Which of you can bring to me her throne before they come to me in submission?’ (*an-Naml:* 38)

This means that the Queen of Sheba, Balqis, had already set out from Yemen on her way to Sulaiman. Clearly, the time left to take the throne and deliver it to Sulaiman was short, needing a highly skilled one to do it. That is why when the jinni spoke, he defined the time he needed, saying: ‘One audacious among the jinn said, “I will bring it to you before you rise up from your place”…’ (*an-Naml:* 39). As for the human being who had knowledge of the Book, he defined a shorter time that suited his abilities: ‘One who had knowledge of the Book said, “I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye”…’ (*an-Naml:* 40).

Here, the power of the knowledgeable human being was greater than that of the jinni. This story shows that the jinni did not derive his skill from what he was created from, but rather it was a gift from the Creator Who gives it to whomever He wishes; however, Allah *the Almighty* is fully Able to give the weaker, the human being, a better skill than that of the stronger, the jinn. This fact is clear in His saying: ‘And they followed what the devils chanted of sorcery in the reign of Sulaiman (Solomon), and Sulaiman (Solomon) was not an unbeliever, but the devils disbelieved; they taught men sorcery. And that was sent down to the two angels in Babel, Harut and Marut ...’ (*al-Baqara:* 102). That is, the angels taught the jinn who in turn taught human beings. We should consider the idea of having equal opportunities and means when discussing this point. What makes the human beings lead their life dealing well with others is the existence of a Supreme Power that makes them behaviour well If someone beats another, a stronger one will do the same to the former. Thus, having equal opportunities and means maintains balance in the society. For example, we are sitting here without any firearms, so if someone enters having a gun, he will defeat us with his power. However, if he knew we all have guns, he will not dare to attack us. This illustrates that transgression stems from the inequality of opportunities or means. If the people have equal opportunities and means, all the lives of those in the society will be similar, without any transgression.

As for jinn, Allah *the Almighty* made them stronger than us, but He said to us, ‘Due to My Power, I can give you a power greater than that of the jinn, enabling you to control them. However, pay attention that this is not in your interest, for such power will make you stronger than other human beings, causing disorder in society and the absence of equal opportunities and means. This will result in transgression and the overstepping of limits'.

We have previously clarified that man can bear a trust but falls short in fulfilling it. For example, a man buys a gun and says he will only use it in the case of self-defence or against thieves. However, he may undergo a situation that makes him shoot someone due to lack of self-control and his feelings overwhelming him.

Likewise, Allah *the Almighty* says: '…yet these two taught no man until they had said, "Surely we are only a trial, therefore do not disbelieve"' (*al-Baqara:* 102). They were a trial because they will teach the person what makes him stronger than his fellow human beings, causing him to transgress against them. Some people say, 'Teach me sorcery and I will use it to do good'. In fact, all those who sought to learn sorcery said this. However, after learning it, they used it to harm the people and to do evil deeds.

On the other hand, if a person learned sorcery and possessed the power that enabled him to do many things, will this change the predestination Allah arranged for the people? That is why we find the sorcerers poor and distressed, even their facial features are ugly as if they are like the jinn. They die while not possessing even a garment and they are afflicted in their health, children, etc. This is despite them learning sorcery to be rich and honoured; they became poor and humiliated. The Quran directs our attention to this fact, saying: 'Indeed, there were certain men from mankind who took refuge with certain males from the jinn, but they increased them in fear and transgression' (*al-Jinn:* 6).

If the deniers of sorcery reflected on this matter, they will find it happens in reality. Allah *the Almighty* may give some people the ability to subject the jinn that have the ability to take different shapes. One of them may go to a beautiful woman while taking an ugly shape of her husband, causing hatred between them. This is one of the ways of separating between the husband and his wife. Thus, there is no argument from those who deny sorcery, for the factual reality affirms it.

The human being can subject the jinn through certain ways. Due to Allah's Mercy towards man, He made the power of the jinni limited. The image he takes restricts him. That is to say that if he appeared in the form of a man or an animal and was killed, he actually dies because the image restricts him. This is how Allah *the Almighty* limited the jinn's power and transgression against the human beings. If this was not the case, they will have disturbed our life and struck fear into our hearts.

For this reason, the jinni does not confront someone who understands the reality of jinn and how to deal with them. He fears him and does not take any shape before him. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* caught a very wicked one among the jinn who appeared in a form of a man. He intended to tie him to one of the pillars of the mosque in order that the boys of Medina play with him. However, he remembered the supplication of his brother Sulaiman (Solomon) which Allah relates: 'My Lord, forgive me, and give me a kingdom which will not belong to anyone after me…' (*Sad:* 35).(1) To sum up, the jinni is restricted by the image he takes and when the human being pays attention to that fact, the jinni runs away. That is why he is described as 'the slinking whisperer'. It is Allah *the Almighty* Who controls his power.

Furthermore, sorcery does not change realities, a fact which is clear in the story of Prophet Musa (Moses) with the sorcerers. The Quran describes their sorcery, saying: '…they bewitched the people's eyes and terrified them, and produced great sorcery' (*al-A'raf:* 116). That is, sorcery deludes the beholder but does not change the action itself. The Lord *the Most High* says: '…it seemed to him on account of their magic as if they were running' (*Ta Ha:* 66).

When Allah *the Almighty* wanted to train Prophet Musa *peace be upon him* to confront Pharaoh and his sorcerers, He *the Almighty* showed him the matter of the staff: '"And what is that in your right hand, O Musa (Moses)?" He [Musa] said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep and I have therein other uses". He [Allah] said, "Throw it down, O Musa (Moses)". So he threw it down, and thereupon it was a snake, moving swiftly' (*Ta Ha:* 17-20). This is a miracle and not sorcery. As the staff turned into a real snake, it frightened Musa and the sorcerers. They submitted to Musa once they saw this miracle, saying: ‘We believe in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses)’ (*al-Hajj:* 70).

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(1) *A Hadith to that effect is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra Allah be pleased with him. See Muslim, Sahih, Hadith no. 39/541.*

Aaron was mentioned first here to indicate that the miracle was not performed by Musa’s power nor was it related to the challenge between him and the sorcerers. Rather, it was a real miracle only performed by a Power beyond that of Musa. That is why they declared their faith, saying: ‘We believe in the Lord of Harun (Aaron) and Musa (Moses)’ (*al-Hajj:* 70).

In this connection, we should discuss the incident when Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* was bewitched by Lubayd ibn Al-A‘sam. This incident is accepted because it was mentioned in *Sahih* Al-Bukhari.(1) However, the rationalists say that this matter casts doubt on the truthfulness of what Prophet Muhammad has come with. We say that doubt is possible when sorcery changes the nature of the mind, as his mission was based on the mind. However, sorcery does not affect the mind; rather it affects the outer phenomena. That is why 'Aisha said, ‘He began to think that he was doing something which he was not actually doing’.

But why did this happen to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*? The scholars say that the disbelievers’ confrontation was of two kinds. The first one was open and the second was hidden. The strong one confronts his enemy while the weak one plots secretly. Allah *the Almighty* tells us that the power by which the disbelievers confronted Prophet Muhammad as well as their hidden plots will not grant them victory. This is because Allah *the Almighty* told him the matter of sorcery, guided him to the cure and exposed the disbelievers' plot. Their sorcery had to affect him and his body for them to be able to see and make sure that their sorcery had inflicted him. However, Prophet Muhammad's mind remained conscious and sound. This narration affirms that he was bewitched.

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(1) 'Aisha said, ‘Magic was worked on Prophet Muhammad so that he began to think that he was doing something which he was not actually doing. One day he invoked (Allah) for a long period of time, and then said, “I feel that Allah has inspired me how to cure myself. Two persons came to me (in my dream) and sat, one by my head and the other by my feet. One of them asked the other, ‘What does this man suffer from?’ The other replied, 'He has been bewitched’. The first asked, 'Who has bewitched him?' The other replied, 'Lubayd ibn Al-A‘sam'. The first one asked, 'What material did he use?' The other replied, 'A comb, the hair gathered on it, and the outer skin of the pollen of the male date-palm'. The first asked, 'Where are those things?' The other replied, 'They are in the well of Dharwan'”. Consequently, Prophet Muhammad went out towards the well and then returned, saying to me on his return, “Its date-palms (the date-palms near the well) are like the heads of the devils”. I asked, “Did you take out those things with which the magic was worked?” He said, “No, for I have been cured by Allah and I am afraid that this action may spread evil amongst the people”. Later on the well was filled up with earth’. See Al-Bukhari*, Sahih, Hadith no. 3268, 5763, 5766 and 6391;* and Muslim, *Sahih, Hadith no. 43/2189.*

As for the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: '…and from the harm of the envier when he envies' (*al-Falaq:* 5), it affirms the reality of envy which means to wish for the removal of a blessing bestowed on the envied person. It is caused physically with the glance of the eye. It is as if Allah *Glorified is He* has given some people a weapon like a gun, rifle and a sword to use against anyone they wanted.

But what prevents man from transgressing against other people with these weapons? The scholars say it is one's Belief in Allah and following the Way of Guidance. Likewise, the envier has the weapon of envy and can use it if he wants. However, is envy related to the will of the envier or does it have a compelling force? When man envies a person who has been blessed, he does this willingly. This is because the envier has weak faith, for if he understood the reality of how Allah bestows His Blessings, he will not grudge anyone who has blessings.

In fact, the envier objects to Allah, the Bestower of Blessings. The envier is only deterred by returning to Allah's Way of Guidance. Therefore, the envier does the act of envy intentionally. That is why we are commanded when we see a blessing belonging to us or other people to say, 'In the Name of Allah. It is as Allah has pleased, there is no power save from Allah'. When this statement is made, no one will be harmed and the person will be neither envied nor be an envier. As for the one who wants to envy, he holds grudges against other people and wishes for their blessings to be removed. He directs his envious eye and causes harm because he could not stop himself from using that weapon to harm the people.

As such, the matter of envy has two elements; the natural power of the envier and the intention to use that power or not. It is like the one who carries a gun; he does not use it except when he intends to. If one asked about the wisdom behind giving that weapon if it harms the people and leads to transgression against them, we say, ‘This is a trial for the person’. Allah *the Almighty* checks some people by means of others. Moreover, since the Lord taught us how to seek refuge with Him from such objects, these objects must have aspects of harm and evil, whether we realise them or not. The matter of envy is hidden, subtle and beyond our perception. That is why we can only take refuge with Allah *the Almighty* from it.

As one says, ‘I seek refuge with the Lord of the daybreak and the harm of the people’, this alludes to the fact that only Allah *the Almighty* can save us from such matters. Were they to constitute material dangers, man could prevent them by himself. However, as Allah *the Almighty* teaches us to seek refuge against them, being protected from them is beyond the ability of the human beings. That is why Allah talks in this chapter about darkness that hides objects. Afterwards, He *the Almighty* speaks in the chapter of *An-Nas* about satanic whispers and trickery that incite the soul to do evil. We invoke Allah to benefit us by the chapter of *Al-Ikhlas*, to protect us from calamities with the phrase: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “I seek refuge with the Lord of the daybreak”’ (*al-Falaq:* 1), and to protect us from the evil of ourselves and Satan with the phrase: ‘Say [O Prophet], “I seek refuge with the Lord of people”’ (*an-Nas:* 1).

the chapter of

an-Nas

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Dispenser of Mercy

The chapter of *an-Nas* (1):

قُلۡ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ ٱلنَّاسِ (١) مَلِكِ ٱلنَّاسِ (٢) إِلَٰهِ ٱلنَّاسِ (٣)
مِن شَرِّ ٱلۡوَسۡوَاسِ ٱلۡخَنَّاسِ (٤) ٱلَّذِي يُوَسۡوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ
ٱلنَّاسِ (٥) مِنَ ٱلۡجِنَّةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ (٦)

Say, ‘I seek refuge with the Lord of people [1]
the controller of people [2] the God of people [3]
against the harm of the slinking whisperer — [4]
who whispers into the hearts of people — [5] whether they
be jinn or people’ [6] (The Quran, *an-Nas*: 1-6)

The people are the species descending from Adam until the coming of the Hour. The orientalists have discussed the repetition of the word ‘people’ to cast doubt on the Quran. They said that this word is unnecessarily repeated here. The most important chapter they have discussed is that of *An-Nas* where Allah (God) (2) *the Almighty* says: ‘Say, “I seek refuge with the Lord of people, the King [and Ruler] of people, the God of people, from the harm of the slinking whisperer, who whispers into the hearts of people, whether they be jinn or people”’(*an-Nas:* 1-5).

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(1) The chapter of *An-Nas*, counting 6 verses and 20 words, is number 114 and the last chapter in the order of *Al-Mushaf.* It was revealed in Mecca after the chapter of *Al-Falaq*.

(2) The Islamic concept of ‘Allah’ is not the same as the Christian and Jewish concept of ‘God’. But the word ‘Allah’ does not refer to a tribal god or the God of only Muslims; it refers to the Creator of the whole world, the One God (who has no son). We prefer, however, to use ‘Allah’ rather than ‘God’ as it has a unique character: it cannot be used to refer to any false gods and does not have any derivatives like goddess, gods, etc. It is a unique word used solely to describe the One God of this universe.

These orientalists thought that the word ‘people’ has the same meaning in each verse. As they lacked the natural ability to understand the Arabic language, they did not pay attention to the fact that this word has a different meaning in each verse. This is because Allah *the Almighty* wanted each word in the Quran to express an appropriate meaning. The word ‘people’ is general when it is related to a general rule. However, it has a specific meaning in other places in the Quran, as in His saying: ‘Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace?’(*an-Nisa’:* 54)

Allah *the Almighty* says in the chapter in question: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “I seek refuge with the Lord of people”’ (*an-Nas:* 1).This is a declaration of His Lordship over all the people. He is the Lord Who brought all the creatures into existence and no one can rebel against Him, as He is: ‘…the King [and Ruler]of people’ (*an-Nas:* 2). Allah *the Almighty* controls the people; He allows them to have a choice in some actions but strips this permission from them in other actions. The Lord *Glorified is He* does not compel the people to believe, but nothing will avail them except Belief. It is clear that Allah *the Almighty* made them free in matters related to the religious obligations but coerced in other matters.

For this reason, there is a difference between His saying: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “I seek refuge with the Lord of people”’ (*an-Nas:* 1), and: ‘…the King [and Ruler] of people’ (*an-Nas:* 2). The first verse refers to the people being provided by the Lord and the second refers to them being controlled by Allah *the Almighty*. No one can rebel against Allah concerning matters for which they are coerced.

In the third verse: ‘…the God of people’ (*an-Nas:* 3), the word ‘people’ affirms that Allah *the Almighty* is the God Who is truly worthy of worship. He is the One Who protects man from which is mentioned in the fourth verse: ‘…from the harm of the slinking whisperer’ (*an-Nas:* 4), and in the fifth verse: ‘…who whispers into the hearts of people’ (*an-Nas:* 5). The slinking whisperer is the one who incites the human being to do evil deeds by whispering in his ear. He is slinking because he runs away when he hears one say, ‘I seek refuge with Allah against the cursed Satan’. He whispers into the hearts of the people.

We find that the word ‘people’ in this chapter refers to those who are provided and controlled by Allah, Whom they worship. They are the ones to whom Satan whispers. The one who whispers could be from the jinn or from the people. As such, there is no repetition here, for the meaning of the word ‘people’ suits the position where it is mentioned.

Seeking refuge means asking for Allah’s Protection. A person does not seek refuge and protection except from the One Who is more powerful than the one who wants to harm him. When one recalls the meaning of seeking refuge and faithfully seeks the protection of the One who created the human beings and Satan, then Satan will run away as he knows you have sought refuge with the Powerful Creator. Allah *the Almighty* listens to the one who seeks refuge with Him and knows his sincerity in asking for it. As one seeks refuge against something he fears, this indicates that he is too weak to confront such an enemy.

If Satan has some keys to tempt the human soul due to the power given to him, then no power will be able to confront him except that of Allah *Glorified is He* Who created the human being and also Satan. Consequently, a person should seek refuge in Allah, as no one except Allah can protect the person from Satan. After all, Satan is in a continuous conflict with the human beings and will continue to be in a continuous conflict until the Hour is established.

With regards to the saying of Allah *the Almighty*: ‘Say [O Prophet Muhammad], “I seek refuge with the Lord of people”’ (*an-Nas:* 1), the address is directed to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him* and his followers. We are commanded to seek the protection of the Lord of the people Who is also: ‘…the King [and Ruler] of people’(*an-Nas:* 2) and ‘…the God of people’ (*an-Nas:* 3). Satan shivers when a person seeks such refuge. When the believer repeats these frequently, Satan recognizes that such a worshipper will never be diverted from being obedient to being disobedient.

We seek refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan who is described as: ‘…the slinking whisperer’ (*an-Nas:* 4). Allah *the Almighty* describes Satan as the slinking whisperer who whispers into people's hearts. However, when Allah *the Almighty* is mentioned, he retreats. Satan controls the human being when he is not connected to the Lord. By contrast, when one is connected to the Lord and seeks refuge with Him, Satan retreats and abstains from whispering. He disappears when Allah is mentioned, but when he sees you are weak and heedless, he plays tricks and whispers to you. In such a case, you become an easily hunted prey for him.

The Satanic whispers are the charming words that tempt the person. The word *'waswasa'* (whispers) refers to the sound of the ringing of gold and jewelry, which are tempting like the whispers of Satan. That is, it refers to the sound of jewelry that attracts the ears and tempts a person to look at them. It is as if Allah *the Almighty* warns us against Satan saying that he will get to us by tempting and alluring us. If one becomes heedless of Allah, Satan will attack and whisper to him. However, Satan retreats when Allah *the Almighty* is mentioned, as he is powerless and will not challenge the Lord *the Most High*. Satan's conflict is with the people to make them forget Allah *Glorified is He* and turn away from Him.

In this regard, Allah *the Almighty* relates that Satan said: 'He said, "As You have caused me to remain disappointed, I will certainly lie in wait for them on Your Straight path. Then I will certainly come to them from before them and from behind them, and from their right-hand side and from their left-hand side; and You shall not find in most of them gratitude [for your Mercies]"' (*al-A'raf:* 16-17). Satan only lies in wait on the Straight Path, for the one who chose the way of disobedience does not need a devil as he himself is a devil. In other words, Satan does not go to the bar but rather stands in front of the mosque. He comes to the man when he is offering prayer to His Lord and tries to distract him in every possible way.

Therefore, if an evil suggestion from Satan inflicts you, seek refuge with Allah *the Almighty* Who says: 'And if an evil suggestion from Satan afflicts you, seek refuge in Allah; surely, He is All-Hearing, All Knowing' (*al-A'raf:* 200). When you seek refuge in Allah *the Almighty* Satan recognizes you are aware of him. In fact, he does not whisper to man until he knows he is heedless.

The objective of Satan's whisperings is to misguide the human being and divert him from the Straight Way. He takes you to a way that does not lead to Allah's Forgiveness and paradise. He tempts you, if you are obedient, through the door of obedience to make you fall into disobedience. For example, when you want to pay alms to someone, he says to you, 'Does this person deserve charity?', 'The amount of money you will pay is very large', 'Your children are more worthy of such money', or 'Keep that money with you and increase it to be more beneficial to the poor when you give it'. But when your wealth increases, you will find another pretext to prevent you from giving charity.

Satan: '…whispers into the hearts of people' (*an-Nas:* 5). This means that he secretly whispers into people's hearts, minds and souls; his whisper is not open like the speech of the people. That is why Allah *the Almighty* then says: '…whether they be jinn or people' (*an-Nas:* 6). Both the jinn and the people whisper. In fact, the jinn's whisper is all about beautifying evil deeds. As for people's whispers, they are more powerful because the human whisperer joins you in committing the beautified action, pushing you into doing it and alluring you to participate in the sins and the misdeeds with him.

The Arabic word *'jinn'* originally refers to hiddenness and concealment. The jinn are unperceivable to human beings yet they see human beings, a fact which is clear in His saying: 'He [the jinn] surely sees you, he as well as his host, from whence you cannot see them' (*al-A'raf:* 27). The jinn are concealed from us and are light and quick, for the substance they are made from is lighter than that of man. Each species derives its characteristics from the basic elements from which it is created. The human beings are created from mud, the jinn from fire.

The jinn are divided into believers and disbelievers, obedient and disobedient. The rebellious ones among them are the devils. In fact, anyone who rebels against Allah's Way of Guidance is a devil, whether he is a human being or jinni. The nature of the jinn is similar to that of the people; the disobedient jinni is like the disobedient human being. Both species have devils; in fact, the devils of human beings are more powerful. The human devil may be inside the man; it is the soul that incites one to do evil. However, there is a difference between Satanic allurement and that of the soul. If one persists to commit an act of disobedience, he should know that this is due to his evil soul. It wants the person to remain disobedient to satisfy its desires which are many. For example, the soul attacks the one who loves money through his wealth, one who loves to have intimate relation through women, or one who loves to be praised through people hypocritically praising him.

As for Satan, he does not insist on one particular act of disobedience; he just wants you to be in a state of disobedience. If he sees that you have abstained from one act of disobedience, he incites you to abstain from another. The human devils oppose the religion, the Way of Guidance and the believers. They desire that indecency be spread among the believers and hate Allah's rituals and Words. They hate the Truth and the people of the Truth, and cannot bear those who command them to do good and forbid them from evil. Consequently, they enjoin evil and forbid good for the number of human devils to increase. For example, the employee who takes bribery does not like to see an honest employee working with him. He plots against him to get rid of him or whispers to him, encouraging him to take bribery like him. This ensures that he keeps receiving bribery, embezzling money and fabricating the tax record.

At the end of the chapter, we should ask why the last word in the Quran is 'people'. This is because they are the ones addressed by the Quran, for they are the object of all the Messages of the Prophets, from Adam, the first human being, to Prophet Muhammad *peace and blessings be upon him*.

After the chapter of *An-Nas*, the chapter of *Al-Baqara* begins by talking about the Quran being sent to the people to guide them to faith, as Allah *the Almighty* says: '*Alif Lam Mim.* This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of Allah' (*al-Baqara:* 1-2).

After this, the Quran speaks about the different kinds of the people, dividing them into three kinds: believers, disbelievers and hypocrites. As for the believers, Allah *the Almighty* says: 'Those who believe in the unseen, are steadfast in the prayer, and spend from what We have provided for them; and those who believe in the revelation sent down to you [Muhammad] and in what was sent before you, and have firm faith in the Hereafter. Such people are following their Lord's Guidance and it is they who will prosper' (*al-Baqara:* 3-5). The second kind are the disbelievers: ‘As for those who disbelieve, it makes no difference whether you warn them or you do not warn them; they will not believe’ (*al-Baqara:* 6). The third kind are the hypocrites: ‘some people say, “We believe in Allah and the Last Day”, when really they do not believe’ (*al-Baqara:* 8).

So, the *Mushaf* (the written copy of the Quran) ends with the word ‘people’ and begins with ‘the Book’, which is followed by discussing the different kinds of people and their differences with regards to this Book believing in the Book; disbelieving in it or showing Belief that does not really exist in the heart. This is a manifestation of the miraculous manner of expression in the Quran that neither ends nor becomes dull or monotonous.

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